



KVT - Love is not All Pillow Talk

The Bui Gallery has mounted a very attractive exhibition of works on paper that mainly concentrates on three Vietnamese artists who were lucky enough to be in that Golden Age of contemporary Vietnamese art when it was on the verge of exploding onto the world stage....a golden age that unfortunately sort of stalled and is still waiting to get gusts of warm wind under its wings.

The exhibition's name has been deliberately purloined from Raymond Carver's 1981 short story anthology, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" and it is quite apt. Carver was the master of the sparse minimalist style. The anthology is a bare boned collection that has as its themes marriage and divorce, alcoholism, despair, and the difficulty of communication. Not that these, apart from despair and communication, are the themes of the drawings on display which are all quite powerful, bare boned and fairly minimalist soliloquies that talk about the ramifications of love. Not the fluffy notions of chic lit love, a more Freudian psychoanalytical discussion. Sort of 'for mature audiences only' stuff.

Truong Tan, now in his late 40's, was once deemed one of the enfant terrible of Vietnamese art and his lacquers and drawings are in a lot of major overseas collections. His art work has sometimes been described as celebrating homosexuality, and some of the works show hints of homoeroticism. All are works from the 1990's and the viewer can understand why he wore the label of being startlingly unconventional.

Apparently Tan refers to these pieces as comments on society and social issues in the early 1990's. It would be a stunning show if there could be a retrospective of all his best works.

Nguyen Minh Thanh was born in 1971. Much of his early work (with which I became infatuated with when I saw his work in a 1998 international group exhibition at Casula Powerhouse in Australia) were portraits prompted by childhood memories of his mother. A typical piece on exhibition in Singapore this year was superb. My all time favorite work of his remains his 1999 installation called "On The Road" at the Goethe Institute, Hanoi. This was brilliant self portraiture. His drawings at Bui were all done this year and **the female faces have that familiar remote, meditative feel to them....like wistful recollections** that can be traced back to those earlier works. His 2011 exhibition in Hue features a lot of the same wistful yearning in them.

Another of my long time favorite artists, **Nguyen Quang Huy** (also 1971) has almost been trademarked by the misty portraits, real and imaginary, of Vietnamese women, their faces often surrounded by enigmatic writing used as a graphic element. **The large, triptych drawings on display at Bui are truncated naked women with angels wings, heads minimized into large, luscious lips** and with mons pubis darkly highlighted. Outspread wings are flutteringly filled with that fathomless text. The viewer may wonder if these angels of enticement are going to enfold you in the depths of their feathers to comfort or pleasure you, or are going to soar away and leave you bereft. They are extremely sensuous and sexy but, at the same time, perplexing and even terrifying.

The grand old dame of conceptual art, Louise Borgeoise (1911-2010) has one drawing that compliments the theme of the show. It is from her torso/self portrait bronze and has been said to be 'symbolic of the concept of universal, inherent bisexuality that recurs throughout her work and is

present in the many sculptural, bisexual hybrids for which she is known'.

Not on display yet but hopefully soon are drawings by the once upon a time *enfant terrible* of the British art scene, Tracey Emin, whose **sexually confronting, confessional type art still has the ability to make a few ripples**. Interestingly she is/was Professor of Confessional Art at the European Graduate School. She talks about love in a 2011 retrospective of **her work in London**.

Ok , so once again I'm probably way off the mark with my opinions but I certainly had some interesting dialogues with the works and if I had a Carverish talent I could weave another anthology of poems or stories around them, sparse and spare and beautiful!