

Ernst & Young Asean Art Outreach

Strange Dreams

Presented by **Phạm Huy Thông**



About Phạm Huy Thông

Phạm Huy Thông was born in Hanoi, Vietnam in 1981. From teaching art at a local university to designing books, Thông has come a long way. Today, he is one of Vietnam's most promising and exciting artists. Thông has always taken a critical eye to his surroundings; his astute observations and clever interpretations ring clear in his art works.

As an artist, Thông considers his nation, redrawing its history. He uses iconic images of Vietnam from the wars and historical turning points, and places them in a new context, rife with meaning. Thông's painting series *Đồng Bào* (2009-2010) refers to the creation myth of the Vietnamese people and literally means 'from the same womb'. Born from the union of the dragon, Lạc Long Quân, and the fairy, Âu Cơ, all Vietnamese came from the same mother, the same womb. The artist says the story contains a message of unity which reminds Vietnamese that they are blood brothers and sisters and that they should always love, take good care of and respect each other. So why, in recent history, has there been so much strife, so many divisions? Thông asks this question, and paints it. He does not presume to provide an answer, which lies in the future. And so perhaps these paintings will urge more questions. In most of his paintings, he's been using crimson background as if the scene is still taking place in Âu Cơ's womb, and Vietnamese are symbolized as babies linked each other by an umbilical cord.

Starting from late 2010, Phạm Huy Thông began to build up his body of work a brand new painting series call *Hands*. As an active social critic, Thông's art work is the vehicle with which he delivers his message:

As people living in society, we always have to act under social norms and conventions. We have to go to funerals in dark suits with sad faces, or go to weddings with big smiles regardless of whether we are actually happy or depressed. In our aim to be accepted by our 'community', we have to hide our true emotions, and find a different way to express ourselves. Under the rule of our social norms and conventions, personal identity disappears.

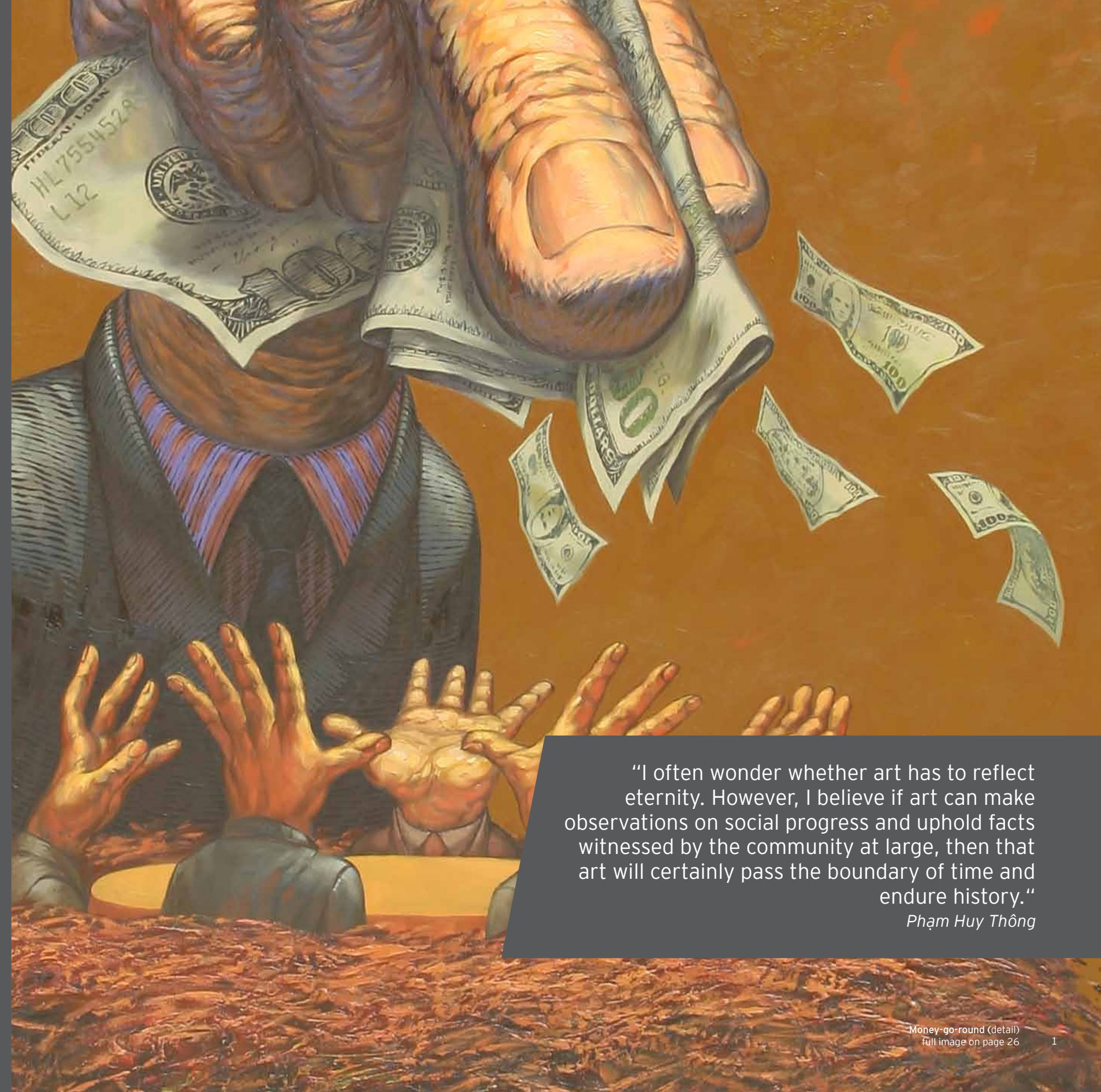
So in this series, Thông does not want to portray any particular person. People in the paintings are hiding their identities as well as their thinking. Thông removes his subject's heads and replaces those heads with hands. Hands have the ability to depict a wide variety of human emotions such as anger, power, fear, happiness etc. The people in Thông's *Hands* series look very alive, active and sly even though the viewer cannot be sure of their identities.

Thông finds Vietnam, with all of its intricacies and changes, a fertile environment for an artist's thoughts to grow. He is constantly challenged and inspired by his countrymen, and seeks to challenge his society with openness and questioning. It is this tireless attitude in looking at history, and ultimately to the future that we find so inspiring. We can look forward to young artists to bring new ideas to the fore. The son of journalists and intellectuals, Phạm Huy Thông has poised himself as a leader for the next generation of critical thinkers, who may use art as their platform for change.

Thông has done four solo exhibitions. His work also has been exhibited worldwide including many museum shows such as in National Art Gallery (Malaysia), The University City Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (China), Singapore Art Museum, Villa Fridheim Museum, Krødsherad (Norway), Kyoto City International Exchange Hall, Japan Foundation Forum (Tokyo), Sapporo Miyanomori Museum (Japan), Hanggaram Museum (Korea). Thông has also done many artist residencies. The most significant ones being: *Goyang National Art Studio*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, S.Korea (2011), *Rimbun Dahan Artist-in-Residence Program*, Kuang, Selangor, Malaysia (2010), *Witness Collection and Asiarta Foundation Artist-in-Residence*, Bangkok, Thailand (2008 & 2007).

Betty Bui
Bui Gallery

Đồng Bào series is represented by Bui Gallery



"I often wonder whether art has to reflect eternity. However, I believe if art can make observations on social progress and uphold facts witnessed by the community at large, then that art will certainly pass the boundary of time and endure history."

Phạm Huy Thông



Foreword	
Ong Yew Huat	3
Eerie Dreams	4
Artworks	10
Index of artworks	28
Biography	30

Foreword, Ong Yew Huat

DRAFT

We are pleased to bring you the tenth series of the Ernst & Young Asean Art Outreach program. In this series, we present Vietnamese artist Phạm Huy Thông's "Strange Dreams", a collection of Thông's highly iconic paintings which portrays his commitment to social commentary. His works encapsulate a political agenda by utilizing an ability to communicate through his artistic activity in the manner of 'artivism' (combination of "art" and "activism").

Ernst & Young launched the Asean Art Outreach program four years ago, providing gallery space within the office to showcase the artistic talents in the region, with the aim to promote these talents and at the same time, providing a platform for our clients, our people, and the public to appreciate the vibrant art scene here in Southeast Asia. These series of exhibitions are held once every four months to feature different artists from the Asean region and have since included artists from Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Proceeds from the sale of works will not only help the artists. A portion will be set aside to benefit charitable causes as part of Ernst & Young's corporate social responsibility program. Through our established position in the business community and our efforts in this outreach program, we hope to bring art closer to our network of clients and friends as well as connect us to business and government leaders in our communities.

I hope you will enjoy Thông's works as much as we did in bringing this exhibition to you.

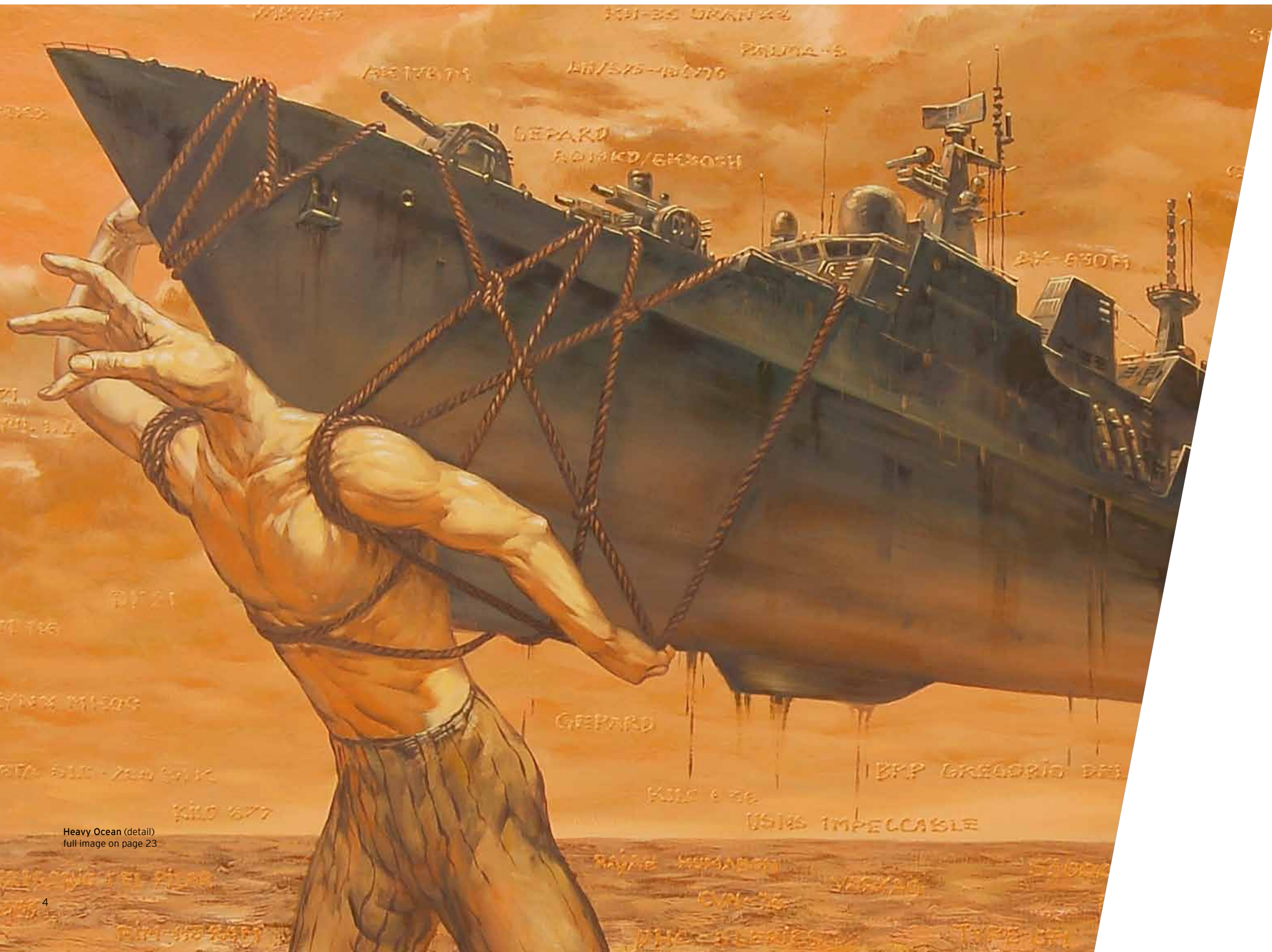
Yew Huat
Ong Yew Huat
 Executive Chairman

The write-ups on the artists expressed in this catalog are that of the writer's own views and do not necessarily reflect the views of members of the global Ernst & Young organization. Published in conjunction with the exhibition Strange Dreams.

Designed and produced by:
 Ernst & Young Solutions LLP
 One Raffles Quay, North Tower, Level 18, Singapore 048583
 Phone: +65 6535 7777 Fax: +65 6532 7662

© 2012 Ernst & Young Solutions LLP. All Rights Reserved.
 Ernst & Young is a registered trademark.

Heavy traffic (detail)
 full image on page 09



Heavy Ocean (detail)
full image on page 23

Eerie Dreams

Born in 1981, Phạm Huy Thông is a post- Vietnam War baby boomer who grew up during the Doi Moi period, in an era of continual economic development. However, like most of his generation, he experienced the challenges in a socialist-oriented market economy of consumerism, greed and the uncertainty of ideals, to name a few. As an emerging artist of the new millennium, Thông missed the 1990s surge in the market for Vietnamese contemporary paintings, when artists could make a fortune almost overnight¹. Instead, as a child of journalist parents, he was exposed to flexible thinking about social issues, which appears to have benefited him later with a purposeful artistic and social curiosity far beyond most of his peers. All these influences culminated during a productive six-month residency in South Korea in 2011, at the Haslla Museum and Goyang National Art Studio, to produce the exhibition titled *Strange Dreams*.

In the last five years, Phạm Huy Thông has produced works based on particular themes: *Chairs*, *Brotherhood* and this recent theme *Hands*. The last two themes established the content of this exhibition, *Strange Dreams*. Through utilizing elements of surrealism and caricature, Thông comments on Vietnam's contemporary history. The distinctive feature of the *Brotherhood* theme portrays bizarre babies in unreal settings that pose questions about the cult of personality and the conformity of the masses². The *Hands* theme is also surrealistic and equally critical portraying characters that have lost their heads and subsequently their capacity to think, with hands inhabiting the place where their head should be. It appears that these characters have lost their identity, and through significant actions such as holding, pointing, gripping, seizing, or snatching, Thông denounces with compelling effect the greed and economic monopoly currently running through Vietnamese contemporary society. Several paintings refer to the ascendancy and power of money, but due to the absence of a 'true identity', it is not possible to isolate any individual or syndicate controlling the power.



In the painting titled *Feremod of Sephec*, Thông portrays three hands in the stele as locked; two appear to be hapless and the third (as head of the character) is an angry and challenging fist. The title inscribed above the stele is actually a re-arrangement of the phrase “Freedom of Speech”. The image of a stele mounted on the back of a carved stone turtle is a memorable image in the Literary Temple in Hanoi (as a symbol of scholarship). The fallen letters at the foot of the stele when re-assembled, form the well-known Vietnamese phrase, which translates as the fragmented dream of “Independence - Freedom - Happiness”³. *Feremod of Sephec* discloses the artist’s criticism of the “censorship, which made people lie or not tell the truth.”⁴

Three paintings in this exhibition: *A Scarify*, *Strange Dream No. 1* and *Heavy Ocean* reflect in particular ongoing tensions over the minute South China Sea islands by several Asian countries, where the Vietnamese government has pretty much played the victims role throughout. Political unease over the islands threatens Vietnam’s claims to sovereignty but the authorities remain largely silent. This has led to activists demonstrating in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, to oppose recent Chinese interventions over the issue that was quelled by the police, while the media simply mentioned “strange ship”⁵. The ambiguous term, “strange ship”, was the inspiration for the title of *Strange Dreams*.

Away from home as an artist-in-residence in South Korea, Thông’s response to the “strange ship” incident and subsequent police actions was surprise and disenchantment. He downloaded photo documents of the event from the internet, and carried out some studies toward a painted response. The ships in Thông’s paintings are seen as huge, intimidating, disgusting beasts, and highlight the need for a transparent dialogue regarding such territorial claims. His response harmonizes with a foreign journalist’s observation:

*As much respect as I had for the post war generation, its members seemed obedient to authority, almost passive in accepting the hand they had been dealt. But Western friends, who had been in Vietnam longer than I, said I had misread an important part of the culture: the Vietnamese will not be pushed around indefinitely, by foreigners or their rulers.*⁶

The Game (detail)
full image on page 10

Phạm Huy Thông does not simply make beautiful images; he poses questions and raises issues with his art. He promotes a political agenda by utilizing an ability to communicate through his artistic activity in the manner of ‘artivism’ (combination of “art” and “activism”),⁷ which was defined as:

*The artist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination. The artist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation.*⁸

Phạm Huy Thông artivism is clearly recognizable through his *Strange Dreams*, and emphasizes his commitment to social commentary.

Boitran Huynh-Beattie, PhD
Independent Curator and Art Historian, Vietnamese Art
Asialink Writing Resident, 2011

¹Philip Shenon, “Success Overnight, in a Sense: Vietnam’s Artists in Vogue”, *The New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1994, p. 15.

²*Brotherhood* series were exhibited at the Bui Gallery, Hanoi. For more information, see Joyce Fan, “Pham Huy Thong: the Dong Bao Series”, *Pham Huy Thong* (Hanoi: The Bui Gallery, 2010) pp. 9-11.

³“Independence - Freedom - Happiness” is a compulsory phrase to be the heading of every formal document and letter in Vietnam.

⁴Peter Sis, “My Life with Censorship”, *Bookbird*, 2009, v. 47, is. 3, pp. 42-45.

⁵See: “Vietnam identifying strange ship that hit Vietnamese fishing boat” on <http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-VN/61/72/182/155/160/84267/Default.aspx>

⁶David Lamb, *Vietnam Now: A Reporter Returns*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), p. 168

⁷<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artivism>

⁸M. K. Asante Jr., *It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), p. 203.



The Last Party (detail)
full image on page 13

Strange Dreams

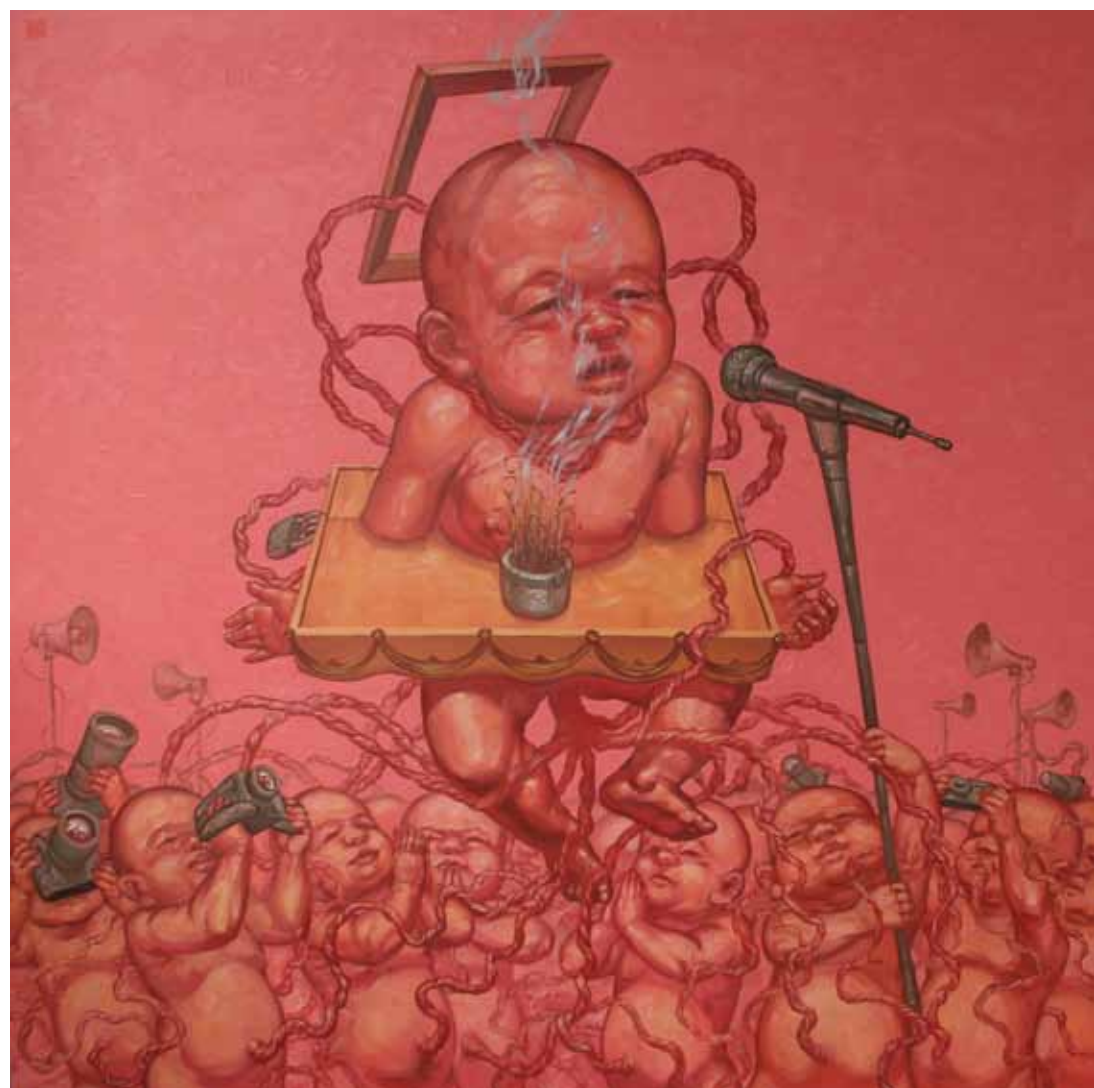
Artworks by Pham Huy Thông



001 The Game
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
120 x 190 cm



002 Heavy Traffic
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
120 x 190 cm



003 The Celebrity
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Yes, We can, Too
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
100 x 150 cm



005 Thich Quang Đức
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



The Last Party
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 350 cm

006

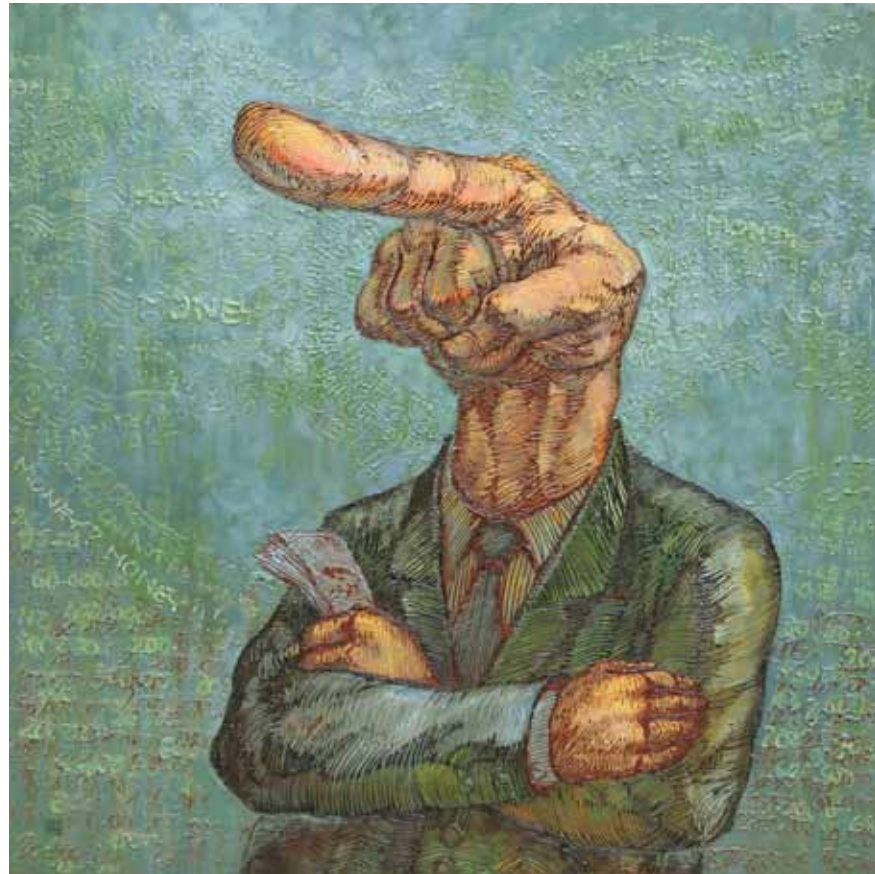


007 Playing with Kites
c. 2010,
Lithograph
30 x 30 cm
Edition of 18



Stop
c. 2009,
oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm

008

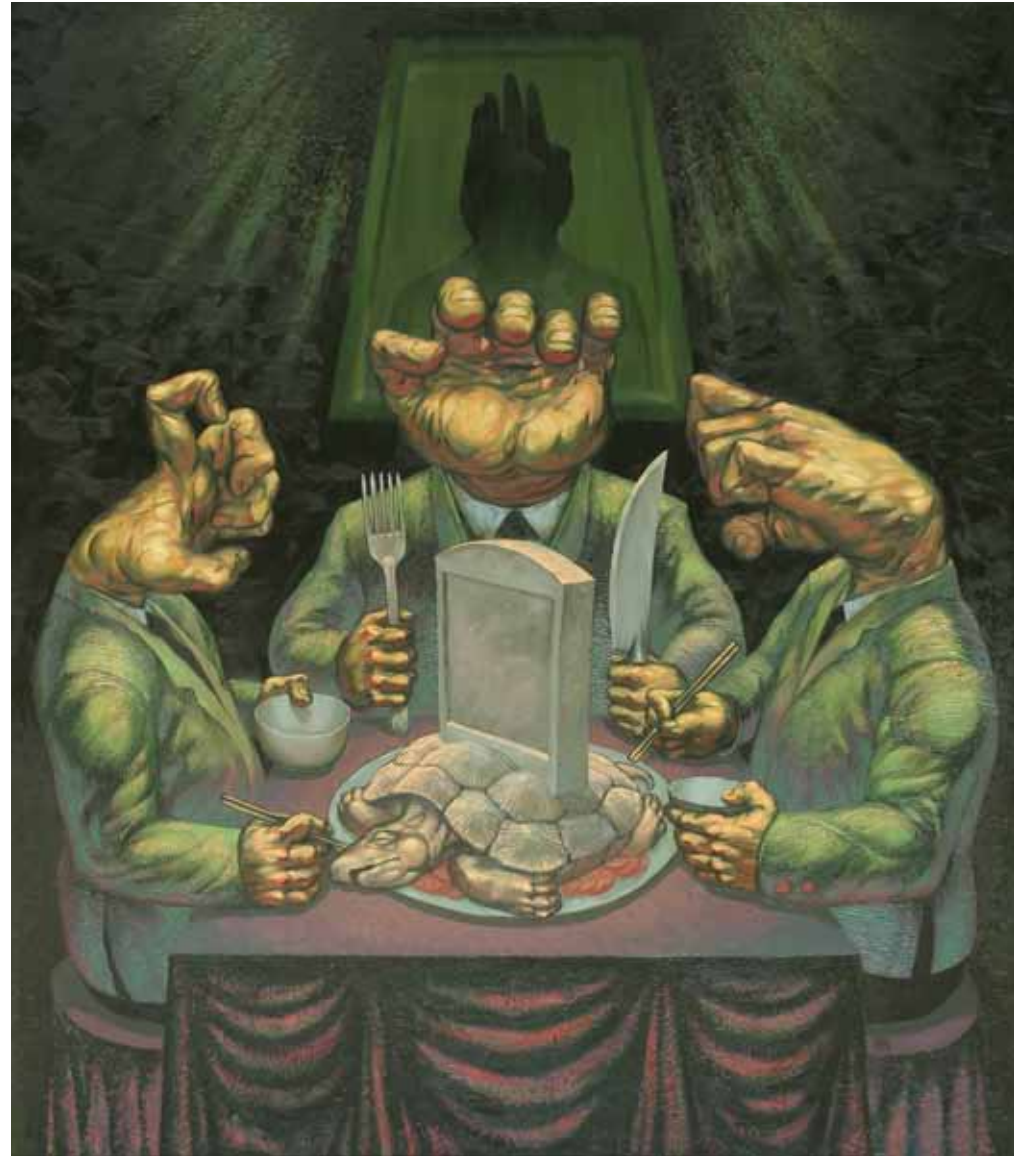


009 Money In Hand
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
122 x 122 cm

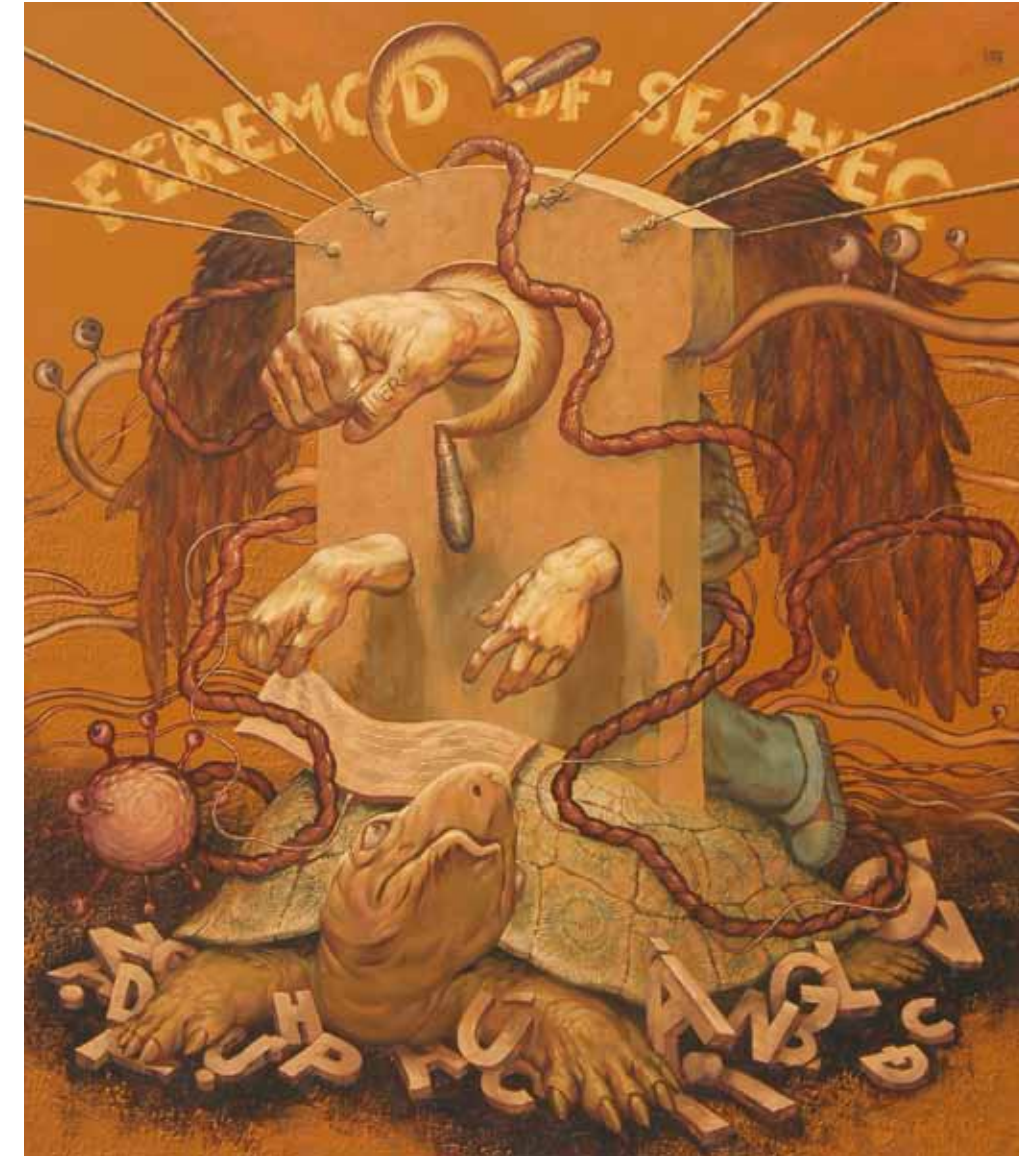


The Negotiation
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

010



011 The Eating Competition
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm



Mr. Feremod of Sephec
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm



013

A Scarify
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm



Heavy Ocean
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

014

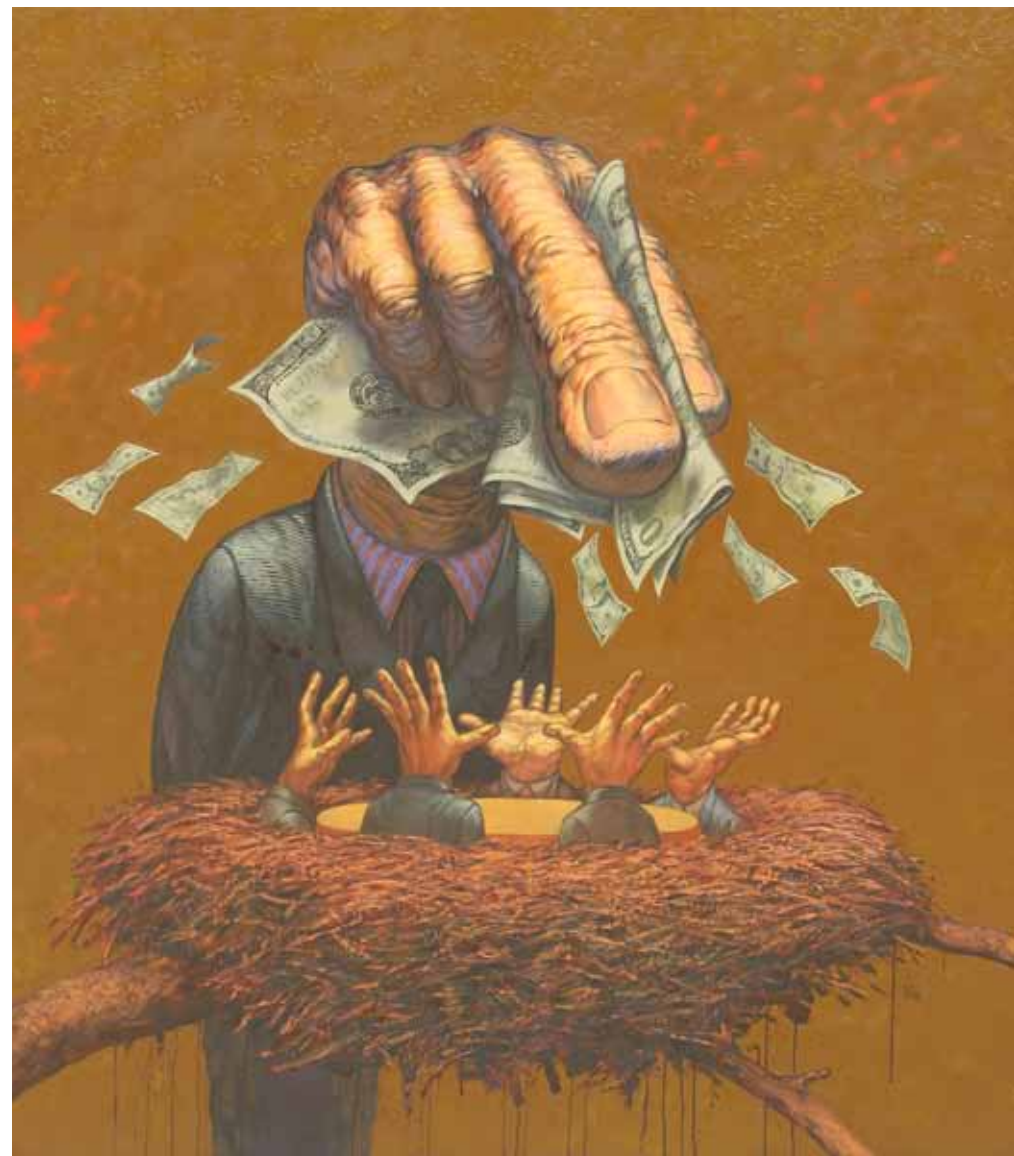


015 Strange Dream No. 01
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

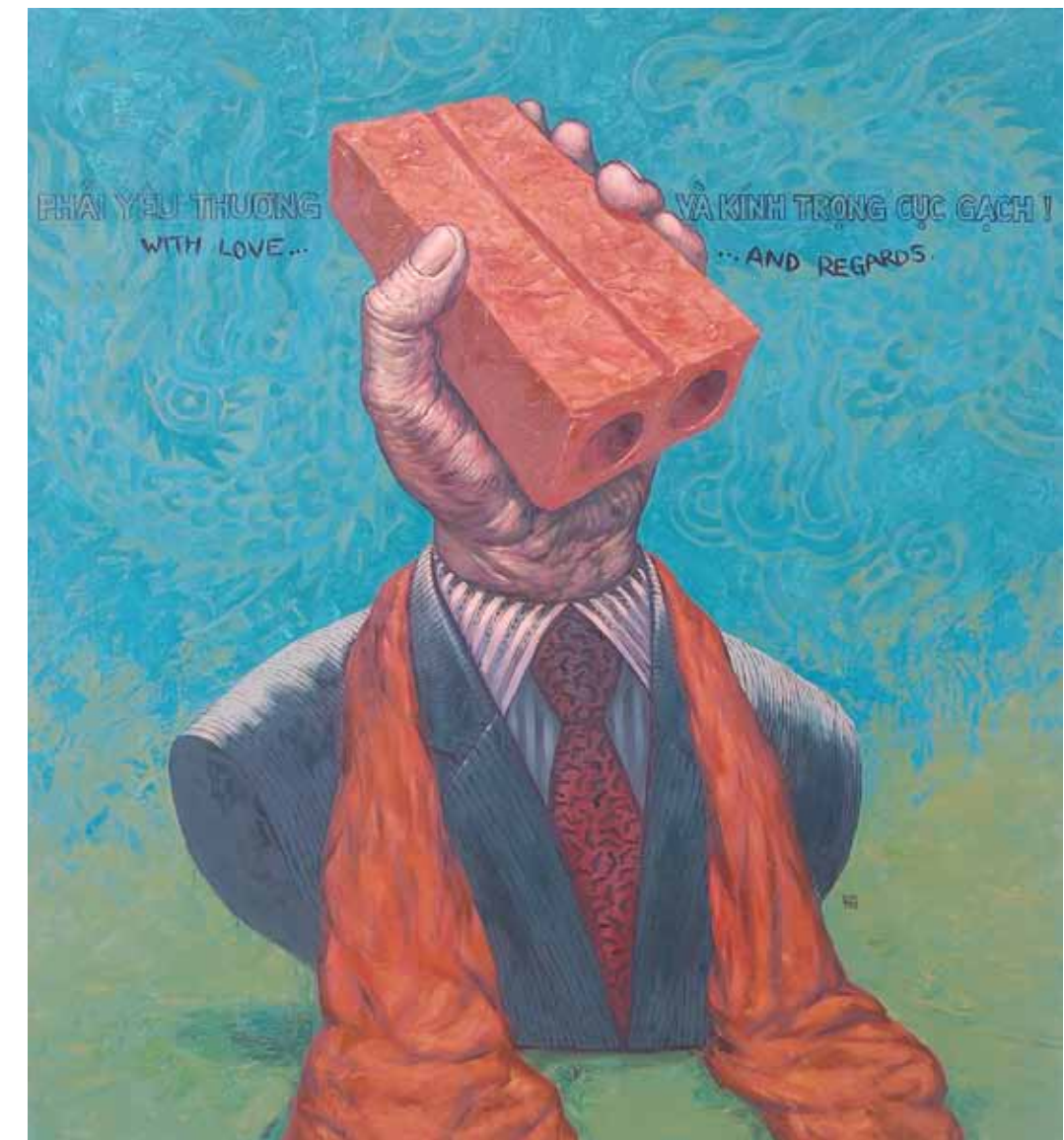


Strange Dream No. 02
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

016



017 Money-go-round
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm



With Love and Regards
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm



Above:
Yes, We can, Too (detail) full image on page 13

Index of artworks

001 The Game
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
120 x 190 cm

002 Heavy Traffic
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
120 x 190 cm

003 The Celebrity
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm

004 Yes, We can, Too
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
100 x 150 cm

005 Thích Quảng Đức
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm

006 The Last Party
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
150 x 350 cm

007 Playing with Kites
c. 2010,
Lithograph
30 x 30 cm
Edition of 18

008 Stop
c. 2009,
oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm

009 Money In Hand
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
122 x 122 cm

010 The Negotiation
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

011 The Eating Competition
c. 2010,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

012 Mr. Feremod of Sephec
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

013 A Scarify
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

014 Heavy Ocean
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

015 Strange Dreams No. 01
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

016 Strange Dreams No. 02
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
140 x 160 cm

017 Money-go-round
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

018 With Love and Regards
c. 2011,
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm



Strange Dream No. 1 (detail)
full image on page 24

Phạm Huy Thông

Present	Lives in Hanoi, Vietnam
1981	Born in Hà Tây, Vietnam Father hometown Thái Bình, Vietnam
Education	
2004	Bachelor of Fine Arts, Major in Graphic Design, Hanoi Industrial Fine Art University
Solo Exhibitions	
2010	<i>Đông Bào</i> , Bui Gallery, Hanoi (November)
	<i>Touch the Glory?</i> Performance, Temple of Literature, Hanoi (July)
2009	<i>Updated</i> , L'Espace, Hanoi (June)
2006	<i>Rain</i> , Installation exhibition, Bookworm Art Space, Hanoi
Selected Recent Exhibitions	
2011	<i>Busan World Open Festival</i> , Busan Cultural Center grand museum, Busan, Korea (October)
	<i>Haslla Art World International Residency Program Exhibition</i> , Haslla Museum, Gangneung, Korea (September)
	<i>26th Asia International Art Exhibition</i> , Hangaram Museum, Seoul Art Center (September), Joenbuk Province Art Museum, Korea (October),
	<i>Here Today, Gone Tomorrow</i> , Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia (July)
	<i>Here, There and Every Where</i> , Hamden Gallery, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA (April)
2010	<i>BC Art Gala</i> , Metropole, Hanoi (October)

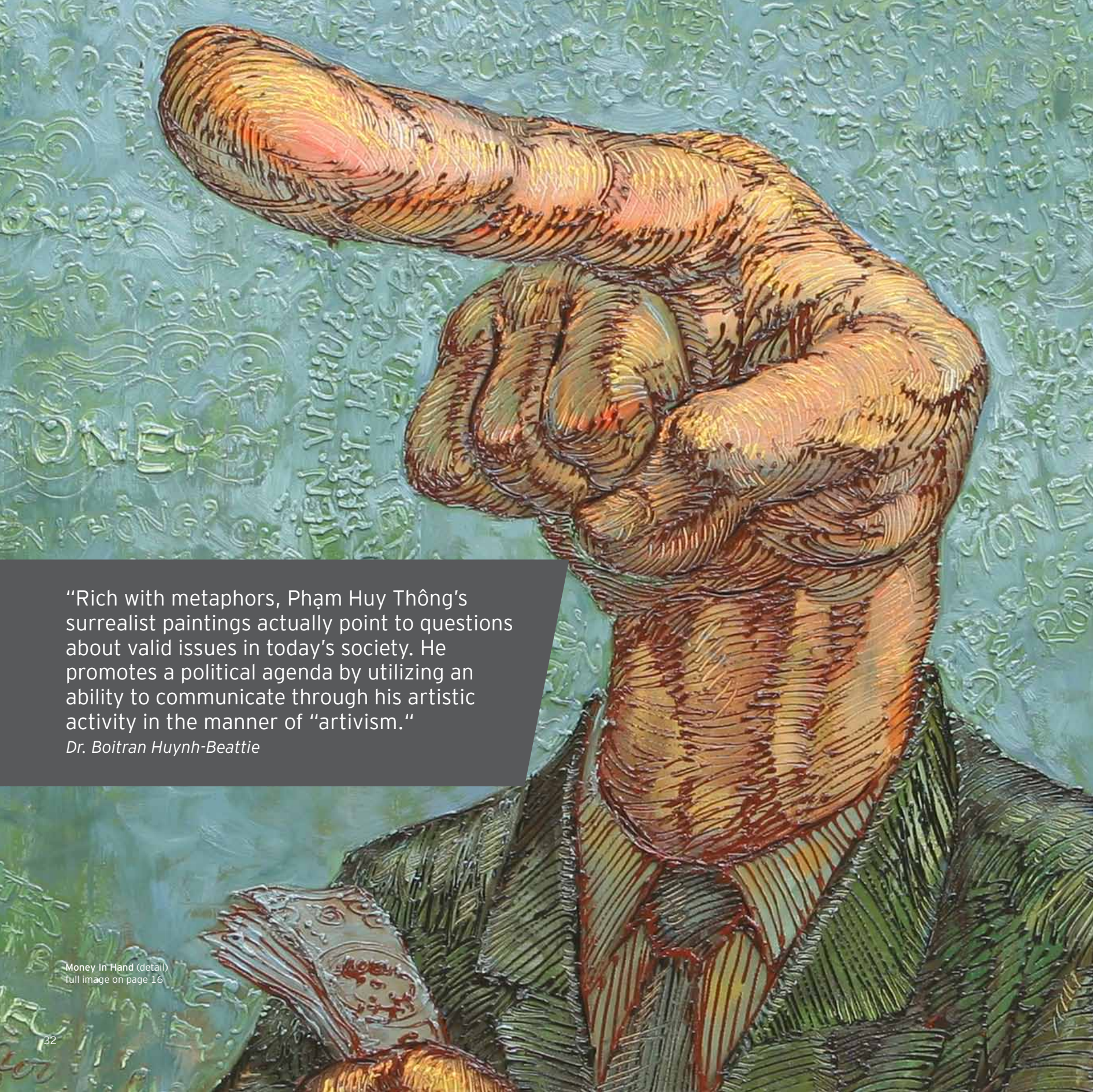
2009	<i>Asia @ Asia</i> , 24 th Asia International Art Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (November)
	<i>Portraits</i> , Hanoi Young Artist Club, Hanoi, Vietnam (June)
2008	<i>23rd Asia in Harmony</i> , Asian International Art Exhibition, The University City Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Guangdong, Guangzhou, China
	<i>Talent Prize Performance Art</i> , Van Ho Cultural Exhibition Center, Hanoi (October)
	<i>Post Doi Moi, Vietnamese Art after 1990</i> , Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (May)
	<i>Norwegian Folktale Collection</i> , illustrations exhibition, Villa Fridheim Museum, Norway
	<i>Continuation</i> , Hanoi Young Artist Club, Vietnam
2007	<i>SPACE + SPACE</i> , Maison des Arts, Hanoi, Vietnam
	<i>Print</i> , Collection of Institute of Vietnamese Contemporary Art, Hanoi, Vietnam (August), China (October)
	<i>History of BD</i> , L'Espace, Hanoi, Vietnam
	<i>Len San</i> , Hanoi Young Artist Club, Hanoi, Vietnam
2006	<i>An Appointment</i> , Lacquer Tree Gallery, Hanoi, Vietnam
2005	<i>World of lacquer painting</i> , Kyoto City International Exchange Hall, Japan Foundation Forum (Tokyo), Sapporo Miyanomori Museum, Japan
2004	<i>Ke Moi</i> , illustrations exhibition, Festival Hue, Hue ancient citadel, Vietnam
2003	<i>XYZ</i> , Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts, Hanoi, Vietnam
2001	<i>Asia Vision Art Competition</i> , Hanoi, Vietnam

Residencies & Workshops

2011	Haslla Museum International Art Residency, Gangneung, South Korea
	Goyang National Art Studio art residency program, Korean National Museum of Contemporary Art, South Korea
2010	Rimbun Dahan Artist-in-Residence Program, Kuang, Selangor, Malaysia
	Printmaking, Hanoi Young Artists club, Institute of Vietnamese Contemporary Art, Hanoi, Vietnam
2008	Witness Collection and Asiarta Foundation Artist-in-Residence, Bangkok, Thailand
2007	Witness Collection Artist-in-Residence, Bangkok, Thailand
	Printmaking, Hanoi Young Artists club, Institute of Vietnamese Contemporary Art, Hanoi, Vietnam

Collections

Witness Collection
Institute of Vietnamese Contemporary Art



“Rich with metaphors, Phạm Huy Thông’s surrealist paintings actually point to questions about valid issues in today’s society. He promotes a political agenda by utilizing an ability to communicate through his artistic activity in the manner of “artivism.”

Dr. Boitran Huynh-Beattie

Money in Hand (detail)
full image on page 16

Ernst & Young

Assurance | Tax | Transactions | Advisory

About Ernst & Young

Ernst & Young is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. Worldwide, our 152,000 people are united by our shared values and an unwavering commitment to quality. We make a difference by helping our people, our clients and our wider communities achieve their potential.

Ernst & Young refers to the global organization of member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. For more information about our organization, please visit www.ey.com

www.ey.com

© 2012 Ernst & Young Solutions LLP.
All Rights Reserved.

Ernst & Young Solutions LLP (UEN T08LL0784H) is a limited liability partnership registered in Singapore under the Limited Liability Partnerships Act (Chapter 163A).