

---

## Sculptor Le Cong Thanh

### 'An Enlightened Person' In 'The Garden Of Eden'

12/01/2016 by Tran My Hien

People call him the builder of "the Garden of Eden", a restricted area that many people hesitate to step into because they easily lose their way in it. Many artists from photographers to painters have tried to this sensitive topic and many of them have to receive 'bitter fruits' from audiences and professionals. As for sculptor Le Cong Thanh, even the most fastidious person could not find anything to criticize him.

They silently gaze at the 'Eve' statues (nude statues) exposing in the middle of daylight, being majestic between the sky and the sea, immense mountains and rivers, in order to admire amazingly, praise about those works, or at least for someone, who don't understand art very well, will look curiously and be interested in standing in front of woman's precious thing under the eyes of the sculptor's creative power.



*Sculptor Le Cong Thanh*

---

The tenement is located on the 3rd floor of the Vinh Ho collective zone, Hanoi, which is the home of old couple of pigeons, sculptor Le Cong Thanh and his wife - painter Nguyen Thi Kim Thai. It is said that his wife, female artist is one of his most devoted pupils. Even until now, though many rainy and sunny seasons, that young girl in the old days, her hair had begun to turn gray but still be a loyal small pupil sitting quietly beside her husband when he received guests.

Most of someone says that embarking on art is accepting a life of poverty. Few people admit to making art and becoming rich, except for a few rare cases in the art world. If few artists is rich, perhaps they are just more abundant than their colleagues. Fortunately, the sculptor couple has enjoyed prosperous life from their artistic talent.

He and his wife bought 4 consecutive tenements to create a space for composing and displaying works. If you visit the Sculptor's Workshop, you will be admired stone, bronze statues with different big and small cubes, all of them show a topic of the fertility beauty of women. The similarities in artworks of him and his wife, all of them honor the natural beauty of women, the performances in each works is very bold, conspicuous, and uncovering. Genitals of woman or man, sexual interaction, be dissected to the end.



Sculptor Le Cong Thanh and his wife – painter Nguyen Thi Kim Thai

---

Spectacular works show be fullness, plump, full of vitality, which pushes and pulls viewers look at them with satisfaction, longing for love, dedicating to the end. If the husband's work is a sculpture, his wife is color, shapes painting lines on canvas that cover all of walls and take people to a restricted area, a garden of Eden, valley of love, of craving, of regal beauty, causing viewers be fell into a dreamy state, enthralled, infatuated uncontrollably. Strangely, these spectacular works were created by an author who was like an 'enlightened one', or 'heavenly person', strayed down to the earth.

The story, why the couple explores the fertile beauty of woman, that is as strange as their works. First of all, let's come up with a respectable background of sculptor Le Cong Thanh: He graduated from Tô Ngọc Vân course (1955-1957) and Vietnam Fine Arts University, Faculty of Sculpture, Class I (1957-1962). Trainee at Moscow University of Arts, Soviet Union (former) (1986-1970). After graduating from Hanoi Fine Arts University, he was a lecturer in the Faculty of Sculpture, Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts, Executive Committee member, Member of Art Council, Vice President of Sculptural Association of Vietnamese Fine Arts, Course II (1983-1989).

In the course of his work, he was awarded the First-Class Labor Medal, First-Class of Resistance War against America, medal for the career of Vietnamese Literature and Arts. He diligently had produced a huge volume of works both in sculpture and painting. He has many monuments about Vietnamese soldiers and women during the resistance war against the US to save the country. Uncle Ho and child - Round Statue (1972), Granny crushed betel (1973), also in this year sculptor Le Cong Thanh erected Van Dai statue, Militia woman (1969). After the reunification, he also traveled across the country from north to south to erect statues: Uncle Ho in 1987...

But a sudden incident happened, since then, the sculptor changed his way of feeling and thinking. In 1987, while he was building a monument at Nui Thanh in Quang Nam, he fell down from an altitude of 30m. In delirium, there was a flickering voice, like the sound of the heart coming from everywhere, after a long illness, he became a different person. Wake up, he just wanted to contemplate the beauty of fertility and fullness on the female body and ready to restore and manipulate that beauty into immortality. His warm-hearted wife loves her husband so much, obeying any strange hobby of her husband.

He wandered about the streets, pop in massage parlors, karaoke, became the handsome man of girls - whose poor fate, who accidentally steps into a miserable place. He happily contemplated the beauty of nature bestowed on the young girls, or women were recovering youth. That time, he was like a little child running around, yearning for finding a source of mother's breast milk. Inspiration was here, love was here, no distance, no constraint, no high and low boundaries, no mind or feeling. All just was a love of art and a fresh beginning to come back to the "immense mother".

Beautiful women with sad fate, who seem to be at the bottom of the society, bewildered about an old man, did not understand where he came from, showing sympathy and pity for the fate of "Kieu" (a beautiful girl in legend has a sad fate). Just like that his artworks were born more and more, thick, full, plentiful, lush. Those works made the critics amazed by the art inspiration of an old man with blurred eyes, shaking hands, was very sleek, passionate, and skillful.



Statue of 'Au Co mother' statue, overlooking the Da Nang sea gate

Many years ago, people saw the sculptor often went with a young girl, her beauty was a newly bloomed flower, and it looks so charming. The girl called him by a father lovingly and sweetly as a revitalizing pill for him. The girl was a daughter, a friend, a "nude" model for himself. Wherever he went, the girl walked alongside to pamper, take a loving care of him. Strangely, his wife, painter Kim Thai, also went with them and comforted him, absolutely no feeling jealous of the girl. It must be a person with a great heart, so his wife accepted that scene.

His wife was like a confidant, she expressed joy with the husband's stone and bronze sculptures. She also understood the sacrifice for art, to touch it, means one must cross the dark forest to reach the future light. Honestly, many painting and art photo exhibitions of famous artists on the subject of being considered "forbidden land" still make viewers not enough satisfaction. And after such a lack of enjoyment, people invited each other to come to the "garden of Eden" on the third floor of Vinh Ho collective zone of sculptor Le Cong Thanh and his wife to enjoy and admire artworks.

Fortunately, thanks to these works with high aesthetic value that brought a large amount of money for the couple, gradually, they had a saving to buy more room, expanding their personal house. Currently, in 'the garden of Eden', a statue has been remade, because the original work was purchased by former US President Bill Clinton during his visit to Vietnam in the early 2000s.

He had confided: I don't create a jokey, romantic, dull women; also I don't shape arrogant, cold women. I don't know how to speak, I can only mold. I can only use my hands to gesture, my real hands to comfort. I can only say one sentence: I am not an artist who tries to shape naked women. Thanks to woman I become an artist in the sense of doing, 'human'.

'The mind is less dull, the body becomes a young man', he said: Beautiful woman, not only beautiful in the nude. Talk about naked beauties. Those are the words of less educated children. The woman is still beautiful in the unfathomable wisdom, which even high rank people can't have.

---

Thanks for brave confidence, the different way of speaking, so the sculptor created a masterpiece for the next generation. In 2007, he went back to his hometown, Da Nang city, to make a majestic statue of white stone at very nice location, where Pham Van Dong Street meets Hoang Sa Street, at East Sea Park, overlooking the Da Nang sea gate. It is a good story that people still mention when referring to the sculptor Le Cong Thanh and the predestined relationship with the statue of Mother Au Co.

Sculptor Le Cong Thanh had long time heard about reputation of Mr. Nguyen Ba Thanh (at that time, he was a Secretary of Da Nang City Party Committee, passed away), but never met. Then, as if the sculptor had a strong urge from inside, wanted him to erect a statue of Mother Au Co in his hometown at the gate of Danang's sea.

With his confidence and temperament, he came to meet Mr. Nguyen Ba Thanh and proposed the idea to build a statue for the gate of Danang beach. Mr. Nguyen Ba Thanh looked at the strange old man but had magic attraction and agreed. Sculptor Le Cong Thanh had a suggestion that no one would be approved his design drawing. Mr. Nguyen Ba Thanh also agreed with that.

So, as schedule, more than a month after the meeting of Mr. Nguyen Ba Thanh and sculptor Le Cong Thanh, the statue was placed in the park at 00:00 p.m. on June 30, 2007, named "Au Co Mother ". The statue of Au Co Mother is highly appreciated by architects, sculptors and fine arts. The prestigious art critic Nguyen Quan has stated that Le Cong Thanh's "Au Co Mother" in Da Nang is a rare and precious exception.

The sculptor had a small and slim physique, which seemed that if he encountered a strong wind it would swept him down, but in return, he had slow and deliberate gait, along with the spirit of light eyes, although he was 86 years old, his internal force was like a big stone with strength of thousands of kilogram be vibrant in him. He, a sculptor was not easy to confine his internal resources, which was thrashing all day and night and waiting to spread, that huge flow was shown through the massive sculptures increasing in 'the garden of Eden'.

Many close friends of sculptor Le Cong Thanh and his wife still joked and called him "a heavenly person", because the way he said it and the way he felt it was very different. Although he was old, when talking to us, he still used his first name "Thanh thinks, or Thanh say, Thanh suppose ...". He also called us by our names rather than addressing uncle - grandson. We all also know that he was a strange and mysterious person, he knew about prophecy it means to look at the face, the writing of someone to predict their future destiny.

He told me: 'The writing must be clear and elegant, calamity or blessedness all come from your writing...' Sometimes I listened to him, I got goose bumps. I didn't care what it was, but when I went to him, I watched him, listened to him, it was very interesting. I told him: 'are you a heavenly man, who is left to travel on this world?'. /

Source: <http://antg.cand.com.vn/Kinh-te-Van-hoa-The-Thao/Nha-dieu-khac-Le-Cong-Thanh-Dac-dao-trong-vuon-dia-dang-419227/>

Translated by Vietnam Art House