

Thiep



Tháp 10

SERENITY AND LIGHT
SPIRIT OF HEAVEN & EARTH



Thép Thavonsouk

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHY (2014)

As a young boy of four, Thép began drawing and sketching. In the early 1950's his father travelled frequently to Paris. He would return to Laos with presents for his young son. One of the presents was a box of watercolour paints. As a young boy Thép would twist open the tubes of paint and smell them. To this day he still recalls that miraculous moment when his father watched him begin painting with brilliant colours for the first time. The paint box, a gift from his father, was a memory box like "la madeleine" was for Marcel Proust in Remembrance of Things Past (A la recherche du temps perdu).

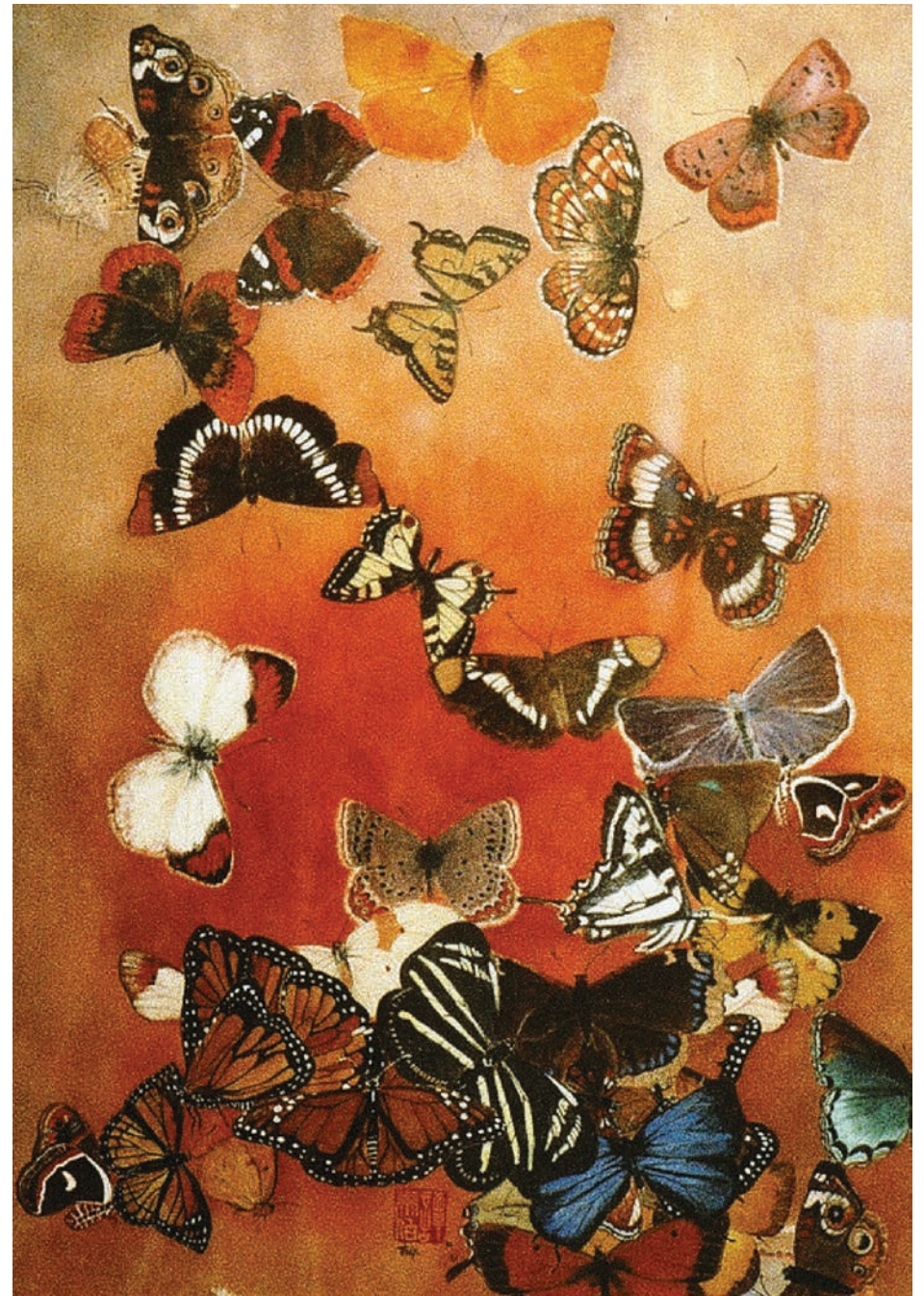
In the early 60's at the Lyceé de Vientiane in Laos, the French artist/teacher Marc Leguay took Thép under his wing and introduced him to live drawing. Monsieur Leguay also introduced him to the French Impressionists – Monet, Cézanne, Pissaro and the Spanish greats: Picasso, Dali and Miro.

Thép graduated with a Baccalauréat from the Lyceé and was awarded the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to study art and international relations at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York. His post graduate studies in Chinese painting were under the tutelage of Taiwanese masters Chen Ming-Shien, Tien Manh-Shih, Li Pei and also under Masayuki Miyata in Tokyo, Japan.

At the end of the 1970's, Thép quit his jobs as a French conversation teacher at the University of Lethbridge and English as a second language teacher in a high school. He dreamt of being a full time artist and playing his flute by the ocean. He decided to leave everything behind and moved to Honolulu, Hawaii. This is the birth of his artistic soul.

His apartment in Hawaii also served as his studio. He was free to paint and create at all hours, experimenting with several mediums, techniques and styles, searching for new ideas to incorporate into his art. Thép would wake up at two in the morning to paint before going to give tennis lessons at 7 a.m. His first Hawaiian exhibition was with a group of Honolulu painters who, on weekends, would come from all corners of the island to hang their paintings on barbed wire at the Honolulu Zoo fence for tourists to view and buy.

"To be an artist is to be free to create without the heavy burden of fortune or fame." His metamorphosis into a free artist encapsulated in a realistic watercolour painting of forty butterflies with the red sun blazing in the background. It was titled "Destinés à un vol libre". The sense of freedom led the artist to discover and paint Hawaiian fauna and flora, koi fish and the ocean waves for six years.





The mid 80's saw Thép mount several exhibitions in Honolulu and Maui galleries which culminated in an exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Art Museum. At this point, Thép sensed it was time to return to his home in Canada.

Back in Canada, Thép worked for a federal government agency helping immigrants from forty-one countries learn English and get back to work in their chosen professions. While working full time he still managed to create works for at least one exhibition a year. He was called upon to mount an exhibition in connection with the Grand Kabuki of Tokyo during their performances in Calgary. Thép's painting of purple chrysanthemums was chosen as a gift to the Grand Kabuki of Tokyo actor/director Senjaku Nakamura.

Having discovered butterfly's free flight in Hawaii, Thép began to express the themes of solitude and peace in his work. He began to examine and reflect deeply upon his soul essence and the world around him. Throughout his art there emerged a deep attachment to the earth and its seasons – the light, the water, the clouds, the mist and fog and the monsoon rain.

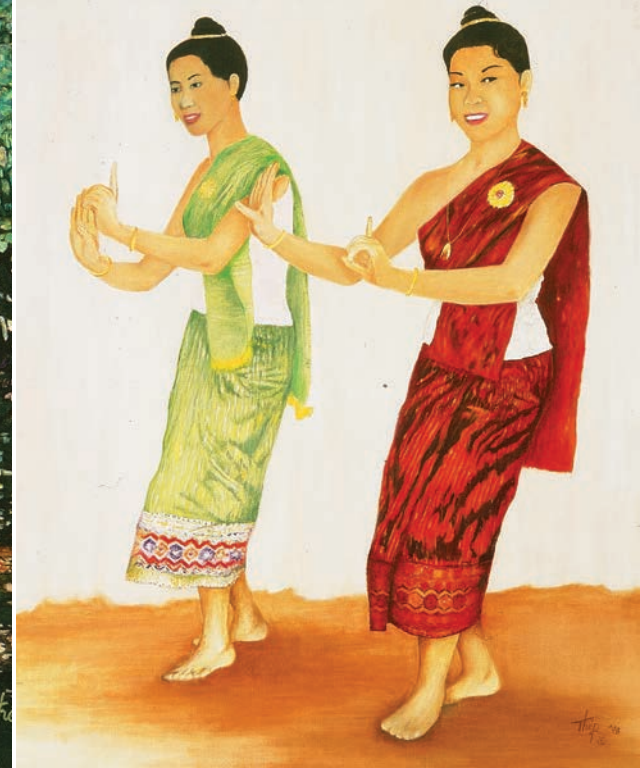
Images of aloneness and strength within a romantic, impressionistic and contemporary narrative make their appearance in Thép's oeuvres in the late 80's. In one of his works the light shines on a lonely figure in a boat, not too far from shore, his own reflection and those of the rocks and trees all melted into one another as shades of turquoise, blue and green play in the trees above, reflected in the water. "A Place for Dreams" is born. An artist is born.

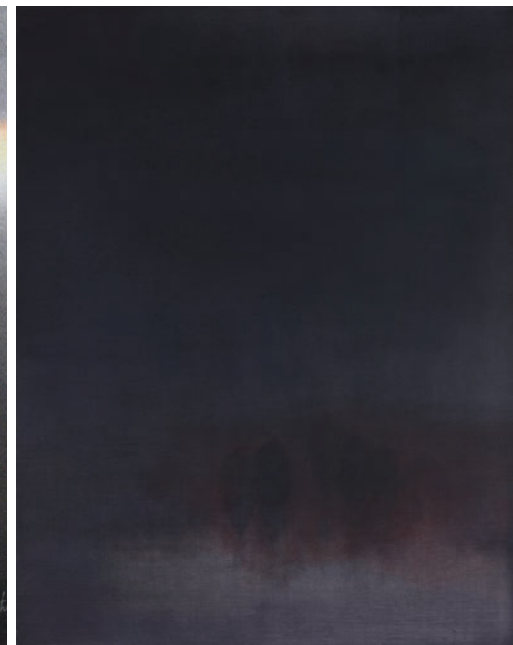
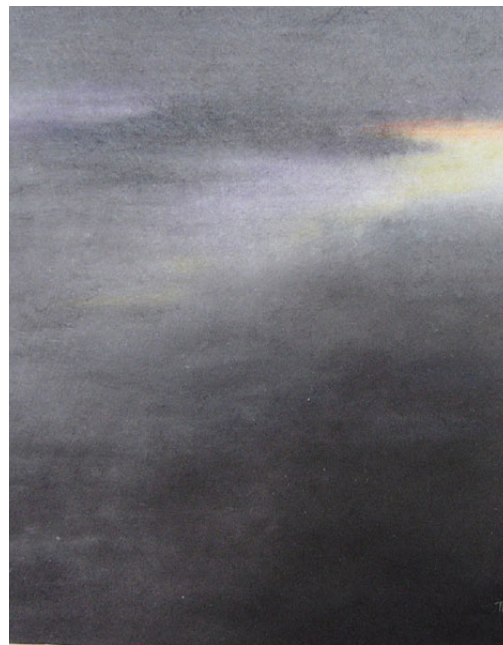
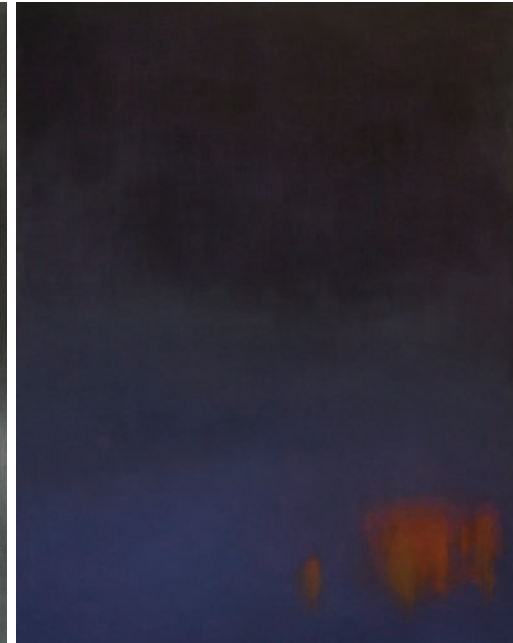
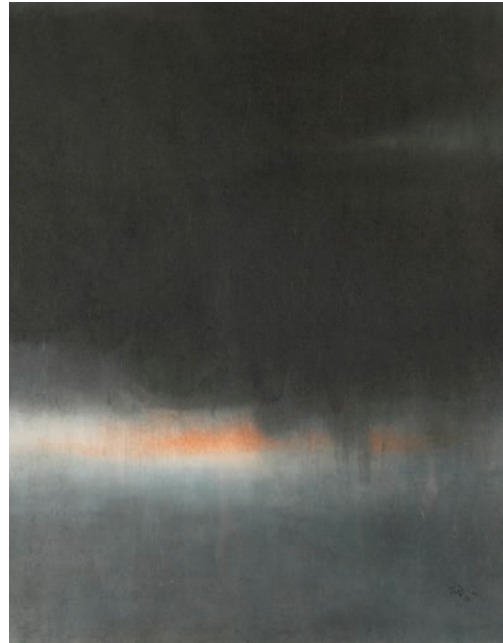




All these symbolic reflections and “dreams” advanced Thép’s desire to create with new mediums, new emotions and new narratives. He devoted two years to explore and learn about Western watercolours, papers and oil on canvas and linen. A dear friend’s large garden full of irises, lilacs, peonies and roses offered the artist the opportunity to paint a realistic collection, concentrating on images of subjects hidden in the shadows and blossoming in the light.

His splash-ink on rice paper of the 80's has now been transformed into "splash-oil" on canvas. From this new technique emerged images of dark clouds, mist and light as Thép nudged his large canvases to work with thin oil colours. The result was the first June Rain (oil), Nocturne and Light & Shadows series. His purple, blue, grey or orange atmospheric, "luministic" canvases are often anchored by the presence of saffron-robed monks.







"My feelings are leaning more and more toward the ethereal elements of no perspective, of less morphology of images yet retaining the sense of the three dimensional world. To do this I need to layer the paint very thinly and repeat this so that the work becomes translucent. It would take a lot of reflection on the part of the viewer and time for the viewer to "feel" what the painting is saying. So my work is not sentimental. I do not want my work to depict something that tells the whole story or speaks to a well-defined narrative."

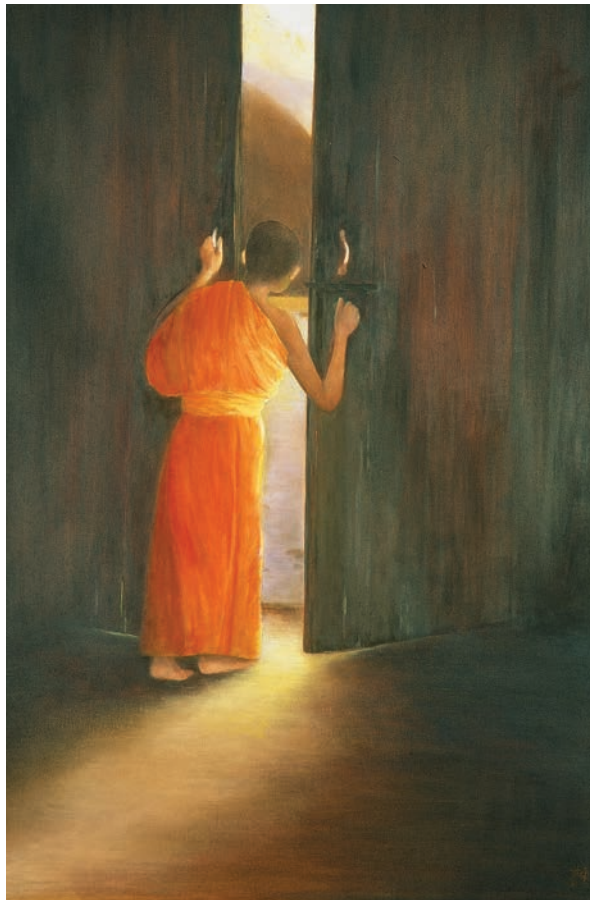


Thép's Saffron Robes Series shines the light on a field of orange – painted quite like Mark Rothko's canvases – cast a soft gaze of atmosphere around a group of monks clad in rich saffron orange robes. These figures appear at times to be gliding into the landscape or hovering just above the ground in the manner of apparitions.



Thép's abstractions, combined with a gentle figuration, are imbued with a lyrical transparent quality that hints at the sublime world of nature. The layering of his oils carries the imagination and the eye on a meditative quest. It is the undercurrent of feeling the need to create places for contemplation, peace and humility that defines his art.

Today, Thép's art speaks to modernity and tradition with equal dedication. His art is



informed by a deep understanding of both Asian and Western history and visual cultures. He has sought a fresh way to incorporate both of these into his work. Frequently one finds in Thép's art a feeling of softness, achieved visually through undefined edges and the merging of subjects and backgrounds into seemingly single planes of space. His shimmering landscapes possess a weightless quality that draws viewers into their mist.



Akin in spirit to the 19th century European Romantic Movement, his art may be seen as a contemporary early 21st century response to images produced by artists in the 19th century such as J. M. W. Turner, James McNeil Whistler and Caspar David Freidrich. To look at Thép's art and be lost in its simple beauty is to look into ourselves and question our place in the world.



Thep's works have been collected by corporations and individuals in five continents and are in the permanent collections of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and the Singapore Museum in Singapore.

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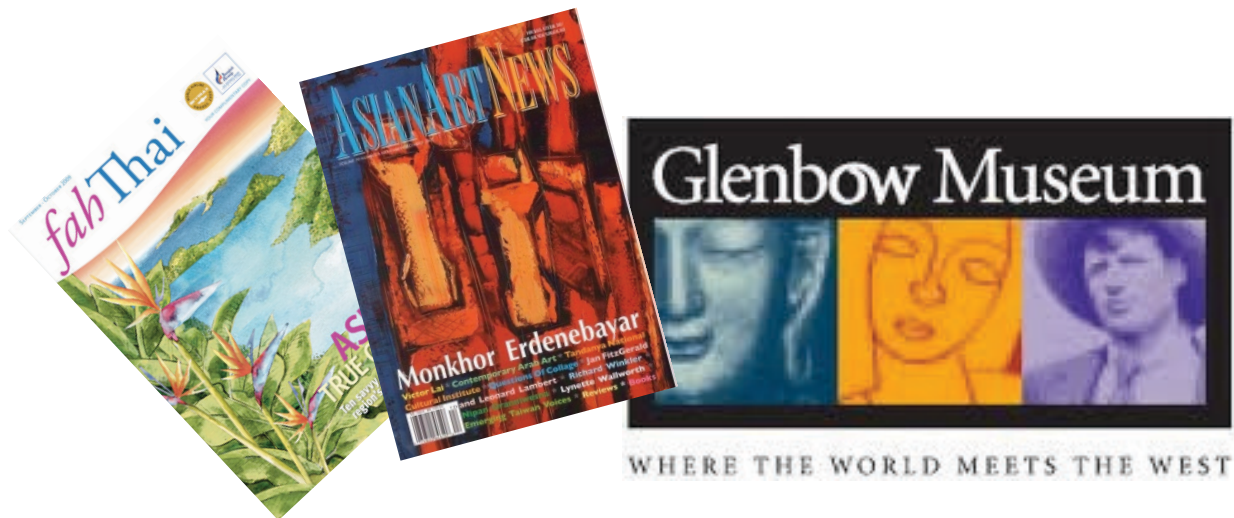
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