



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Preserving and Promoting the Value of Hue Folk Glass Paintings

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Nov 24, 2024	Stained glass paintings (Hue) originated from the royal court and then spread to the people. Different from other painting styles, stained glass paintings are painted in the "reverse painting" style, which is the error of drawing a negative on the back so that when looking at the front of the painting, it becomes a positive version. This style of painting makes stained glass paintings become special murals, valuable both in terms of aesthetics, art and history and culture. Stained glass paintings in Hue include both royal court paintings and folk stained glass paintings. Although the strokes, themes and origins are different, these two lines of paintings have the same techniques, drawing methods, and coloring steps, and especially carry within them unique elements of the art of the capital city of Hue, Vietnam.
Accepted: Jan 11, 2025	
Keywords	
Vietnam	
Hue City	
Folk Glass Paintings	
Cultural Heritage	
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INTRODUCTION

Hue glass paintings originated from the royal court and then spread to the people. Different from other painting styles, glass paintings are painted in the "reverse painting" style, which is a negative painting style on the back so that when looking at the front of the painting, it becomes a positive version. This style of painting has made glass paintings become special murals, valuable in terms of aesthetics, art, history and culture¹. Glass paintings in Hue include both royal glass paintings and folk glass paintings. Although the strokes, themes and origins are different, these two lines of paintings have the same techniques, drawing methods, and coloring steps, and especially both carry within themselves the unique elements of the art of the ancient capital of Hue.

Through research on the sources of documents written on the topic of glass paintings in Hue, we found that there are many works mentioning the Hue royal glass paintings, while the folk glass paintings have not been thoroughly studied, if any, they are only a few lines in the research books on Vietnamese Folk Glass Paintings, Hue Folk Paintings by author Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa. It is realized that the Hue folk glass paintings have many artistic and spiritual values and are gradually fading away because the painters are no longer around. Therefore, this paper will focus on two contents: first, a brief presentation of the folk glass paintings in Hue; second, a solution to preserve and promote the value of this painting.

SOME FEATURES OF HUE FOLK GLASS PAINTINGS

This type of folk glass painting probably appeared in the late 19th century, mainly serving the religious needs of the people. In addition, glass paintings are used to decorate houses, temples, and sometimes used as gifts for congratulation, housewarming, and weddings. Folk glass paintings were previously produced in Gia Hoi, Dia Linh, and Bao Vinh. These are places where Vietnamese-Chinese artisans lived and worked. Paintings made in Hue during this period include glass paintings and mother-of-pearl glass paintings.

Regarding the process, according to Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa, glass paintings are painted in the following steps:

Step 1: Creating a painting model – outline (this step is the most important, it creates the soul of the painting).

Step 2: Tracing (place the template under the glass and trace again) or draw the lines yourself on the glass.

Step 3: Coloring/blocking, for landscape paintings, the order of painting is foreground first, background later. If the painting process is damaged, use soft paper to wipe it off and repaint. If the paint has dried, use a razor blade to gently scrape off the damaged paint.

Step 4: If the painting has mother-of-pearl, apply a layer of transparent industrial glue to the glass surface, then place the mother-of-pearl on the glass. Some places also sprinkle silver glitter after applying the mother-of-pearl. For paintings with mother-of-pearl shells, this step will be done.

Step 5: Apply a layer of clear glue and attach the mother-of-pearl shell.

Step 6: Dry the painting (the painting is mass-produced so it needs a drying rack)¹.

Technically, stained glass painting is a type of painting painted behind a glass surface, also known as reverse painting, negative painting and viewing positive. Because it is a negative painting, the artist often has to have imagination to calculate the effect of black strokes and colored paint. This stage requires the artist to have skillful hands so that the strokes are sharp. After finishing the black outline, the artist applies gold and colored paint to the picture. Next, the artist will dry the paint. After the painting is dry, they will inlay mother-of-pearl and gold-plated paper on the back of the painting to increase the brilliance. Finally, they add a layer of paint to protect it, stick a layer of paper on the back and then place it in a wooden frame to complete the product. According to the assessment of Assoc. Prof., Dr. Phan Thanh Binh: "The technique of painting in reverse requires the artist and artisan to be extremely talented, skillful and have an extremely rich imagination to be able to perform it. Due to the complexity of the technique, the thinking about the image is very unique. The painter must imagine the other side (left side) to see through the glass (right side), requiring a combination of thinking, technique, material and reflective characteristics. Therefore, in each stroke, it is necessary to calculate whether the stroke is above or below, how thick it is, how each color block is overlapped, how to coordinate to create the effect of the view. The composition, space, and description of depth must also be the same. All of these create the unique, original and extremely delicate features of glass paintings and those are also the characteristics that no other art form in Hue has."¹

Regarding the paint materials, initially, the material for painting glass was mollusk powder, a popular folk material in Hue at that time to whiten the painting; the glue could be a type of tree resin or Agao¹. The previous technique was mostly to draw with color blocking, now it is only to fill in details, characters, and landscapes. Later, the artist used Bach Tuyet paint, because it has enough colors without mixing colors, has high adhesion to the glass surface and can be kept for a long time. The

¹ Agao is a glue made from animal bones.

colors used in Hue folk glass paintings are extremely diverse and rich, with many colors such as shrimp heart, hibiscus, green, cashew red, white, lemon yellow, earth yellow, sky blue, sea blue, etc. Recently, people's taste is to have gold and silver glitter, so when the black lines of the painting are finished, the artist will apply a layer of clear glue and sprinkle glitter on the painting, let it dry and then apply other colors. Therefore, Hue folk glass paintings have bright, harmonious colors and when the viewer looks at the painting, they will see which character the painting is about.

Regarding the topic: Folk glass paintings in Hue include paintings used for decoration, congratulation and worship.

Glass paintings for decoration: With the purpose of decorating and creating highlights in the living space, Hue people often display paintings or sets of paintings of The Eight Immortals, Beautiful women, Quartet, For seasons, Twenty-four filial exemplars, Happiness-Windfall-Longevity. With paintings of Pine tree and Deer, Carp to Dragon, they are often used to congratulate, pray for luck, fortune, longevity, and peace.

Glass painting for worshipping: include paintings on the themes of Buddhism, Taoism, worship of the guardian deity, worship of Mother Goddess, worship of the dead, worship of wandering souls and exorcism.

Buddhist theme: Drawing of Buddha Shakyamuni and Bodhisattva Guanyin.

Taoist theme: Drawing of Lao Tzu and Lao Jun.

Paintings of guardian gods: Including guardian gods for men and guardian gods for women.

Paintings to worship male deities: Including Immortal gods (Tien Su), Ziwei Emperor (Tu Vi), Guan Yu (Quan Thánh đế quân), Guan Ping prince (Quan Bình Thái tử), Holy Master Tai (Cậu Tài) – Holy Master Quy (Cậu Quý)... but the most popular is Immortal gods (Tien Su). The painting depicts three male gods: Chief Male-Patron (Tiên Sư Đức Ông) (a white-bearded god, holding nothing in his hands), Kitchen god (Thổ Công) (standing on the right of Tien Su, holding a fan in his hand) and Land god (Thổ Địa) (standing on the left of Tien Su, holding a command flag with the word Thổ 土 printed on it). Guan Yu (Quan Thánh Đế Quân) is depicted in two forms, one is Guan Yu (Quan Vũ) with Guan Ping (Quan Bình) and Zhou Cang (Châu Thương), the other is 5-male generals (Ngũ Công Vương Phật) or also known as Chu Vi Ngu Ong (Guan Yu, Guan Ping, Zhou Cang, Zhang Xian and Wang Tianjun)².



Painting of Immortal gods. Photo: Huu Phuc

² These five-male generals were all famous generals who appeared during the Three Kingdoms period and were considered symbols of loyalty, so the worship of these generals also has educational significance about loyalty. When depicted in paintings, Guan Yu sits in the middle, with Guan Ping and Zhou Cang on either side. Zhang Xian stands behind Guan Ping and Wang Tianjun stands behind Zhou Cang.

Paintings of female guardian deities: The most popular type of worship painting is the painting of the Queen Mother of the West (Tây Cung Vương Mẫu). For Hue people, the Queen Mother of the West (Tây Cung Vương Mẫu Bốn Mạng Chúa Tiên or (Đoài Cung Thánh Mẫu) is the goddess who protects women. From the time a girl grows up until she is 60 years old, before she becomes old, she must worship her to pray for her protection, patronage and protection. The place of worship is Lady altar, placed in a high position on the left side of the house, facing the West. If you make a vow to worship, you must choose a suitable worship photo based on your age. Depending on the 12 zodiac animals, you can worship the statue (painting) in a certain style, and the number of ladies attending to her will correspond. Also because of this characteristic, the content of the worship paintings of the Lady is also drawn in many different shapes such as riding an elephant, riding a dragon, riding a phoenix, riding a carp, sitting on a throne, sitting on a lotus flower and accordingly there are the images of the mistresses as 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12. Drawing the Lady in different shapes is to distinguish between the ages, because each age will worship a separate Lady. Regarding the title Queen Mother of the West (Tây Cung Vương Mẫu) and the variation in the image in the worship of Trang Ba in Hue, according to Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa's explanation: "Although they have the same name as "Lady altar" or "Western Palace Queen Mother", in fact these are different ladies based on the signs and images in the painting. The lady riding the phoenix is Mysterious Woman of the 9 Heavens (Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ). The lady sitting on the lotus throne is Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Quan Thế Âm Bồ tát). The lady riding the fish is Goddess of Water (Bà Thủy). The lady riding the dragon could be from the water palace, the Queen Mother of the West could be the lady sitting on the throne according to the traditional image. The lady riding the elephant could be Lady Po Nagar (Thiên Y A Na) because the image of the elephant is worshiped in Indian culture in general. At first, the origin was regulated as in the Book of Dien Cam Tam The Dien Nghia, but later, perhaps due to war, due to the ups and downs in the State's policies, it faded away, no longer keeping the original as before, so now there is only one name for the patron saints: Queen Mother of the West. Based on the book Luc Thap Hoa Giap and the books of the Dharma Masters, there are up to 60 patron saints to protect the corresponding ages. We would like to list some of them as follows:

Age	Title	Name	Drawing
Giáp Tý (Wood rat)	Van Trung Tu Bi (Vân Trung Từ Bi)	Loi Minh princess	Elephants, 12 mistresses
Ất Sửu (Wood buffalo)	Tinh Tuong Hoang Nu (Tinh Tường Hoàng Nữ)	Dung Hoa princess	Phoenix, 8 mistresses
Bính Dần (Fire Tiger)	Vo Dai Troi Thuy (Võ Đại Trôi Thủy)	Liên Hoa princess	Throne, 6 mistresses
Quý Dậu (Water rooster)	Tu Vi Tinh Dau (Tử Vi Tinh Đầu)	Thai Hoa princess	Voi, 8 mistresses
Ất Hợi (Wood pig)	Thanh Tien Hoang Luan (Thánh Tiền Hoàng Luận)	Lieu Hoa princess	Phoenix, 12 mistresses
Canh Thìn (Metal dragon)	Tien Thanh Thai Tinh (Tiên Thánh Thái Tinh)	Long Nu princess	Dragon, 6 mistresses
Giáp Thân (Wood monkey)	Bach Ba Van Phuoc (Bạch Ba Vạn Phước)	Huyen Nu princess	Lotus, 8 mistresses

Topic of Mother Goddess worship: Hue is one of the localities in the Central region with the largest density of Mother Goddess shrines, with ancient temples over 100 years old, typically Hue Nam Temple. In order to meet the needs of the Holy disciples worshipping the Holy Mother and the Deities, many paintings of the Holy Mothers and deities of this belief were created, such as Holy Po Nagar (Thiên Y A Na), Holy Mother of the Forest (Thượng Ngàn Thánh Mẫu), Holy Mother of the Water

(Thuỷ Cung Thánh Mẫu), Six-holy gods (Lục Vị Tôn Ông), 5-holy ladies (Ngũ Vị Thánh Bà), 12-holy masters (Thập Nhị Thánh Cậu), 12-holy mistresses (Thập Nhị Thánh Cô), Champa God (Ông Chiêm Thành), Khuon Vien Master (Cậu Khuôn Viên),...

Topic of the dead: To worship the young dead, Hue people often set up shrines to worship the dead. They can be relatives such as blooded girls (Cô Thân Ruột or also known as Cô Nội Thân), blooded Brothers (Ông Quận), blooded Sisters (Cô Nường) and not relatives such as Lady Ngoai Canh (Cô Ngoai Cảnh), Lady Ngoai Cang (Cô Ngoai Càng).

Topic of the wandering ghost: to commemorate and express profound humanity, Hue people often build temples to worship ghosts, the dead who have no place to rely on, those who died in war, accidents, etc. To increase solemnity and dignity, Hue people worship with glass paintings depicting natural landscapes with birds and flowers.

Topic of exorcism: to protect the house from the intrusion of forces that can cause harm in each family, Hue people often hang a Bagua board in front of the door. To meet this need, artisans will draw the Bagua board on glass panels, with a red painted wooden frame or plastic material attached.



Worshipping paintings in Lady Altar. Photo: Huu Phuc

The outstanding feature of Hue folk glass paintings is the integration of new content to suit the unique and distinct characteristics of Hue residents. Different from folk paintings in other regions, Hue glass paintings have a liberal painting technique, not constrained, not standardized as is often seen in other painting lines. Each painting is a creation of composition, color, not creating boredom. Particularly for paintings of deities in the worship of the Mother Goddess of the Four Palaces, they are all associated with natural elements, with trees, mountains and rivers. Although depicting deities from other realms such as Heaven as Third Venerable Mandarin of Heaven (Quan Đệ Tam Giám Sát Thượng Thiên) in the drawing of a male god wearing a red dragon shirt, wearing shoes, and tying a red magic rope, the background is not a curtain like the paintings of Immortal gods (Tien Su), Holy Lady Po Nagar (Thánh Mẫu Thiên Y A Na), but is painted standing next to a mound of land, with trees, flowers

and leaves. One difference between Hue folk glass paintings and other types of glass paintings in other regions is that although the gods are painted on the outside, the artist's strokes have a strong Vietnamese style. This is clearly shown in the painting of the 5-male Generals (Ngu Quan Vuong Phat), from the face to the costume, all have Vietnamese marks, no longer Chinese like the paintings in the South.

VALUE OF HUE FOLK GLASS PAINTINGS

Although it is a folk painting genre, this glass painting genre carries many values:

Spiritual value: Not only connecting the present with the past, the spiritual element plays an important role in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people in general and in Hue in particular. In the minds of the people, the supreme beings, the gods in religions and beliefs are those who have many powers and miracles to “bring many good things, happiness, peace to believers and people; at the same time, they also eliminate and drive away those who cause tragedies and suffering to people”. That is also the way for people to find happiness in their lives. At the same time, relying on the spiritual world is also considered a solid spiritual support, contributing to balancing spiritual life, and at the same time contributing significantly to the principles of conduct, promoting ethical values suitable for the new society. Thus, religion and belief are not only the spiritual support for Vietnamese people throughout the centuries but also the place to answer existential desires, for the hard-working life to be sublimated. In order to express their faith, from the city to the countryside, from the plains to the sea, everywhere, Hue people set up altars to worship the supreme beings, the gods to pray for protection, and support. To materialize the images of the supreme beings and the gods, the artisans will paint their images on glass panels to serve the worship of the people. The images of the Queen Mother of the West Palace, the Immortal gods, the Holy Mother, the Masters and the Ladies account for the largest number of the total number of paintings that have been made..

Cultural value: Hue folk glass paintings are products containing many values and clearly imbued with Hue's cultural identity. With soft, liberal lines, without any standards, the artisans create extremely vivid paintings through sophisticated and creative strokes. Unlike other localities in the country, Hue is where the custom of worshiping patron gods, the belief in worshiping the Four Palaces Mother Goddess, worshiping the souls of relatives are developed, and the worship of these gods is expressed through glass paintings. This is also the only locality in the Central region with the highest density of worshiping the Champa god and is associated with the custom of worshiping the Land, which takes place regularly in the second and eighth lunar months. The image of Champa is drawn in the form of a male god wearing black clothes, holding a blue dragon sword in his hand.



Painting of Third Mistress of landscape (on the left) and the Ninth Prince of Mountain Palace (on the right). Photo: Huu Phuc

Artistic value: Glass paintings are paintings with complex drawing techniques and glass paintings require thinking about the image and especially imagining the other side (back side), therefore, requiring a high combination of thinking and technique. From the unique materials and drawing style, along with the sophisticated content, Hue folk glass paintings have affirmed great values in terms of aesthetics and art. Each painting exudes a unique beauty hidden in it. On the other hand, paintings are used for worship, so the paintings must show the solemnity and kindness in the faces of the gods.

Historical value: In terms of enjoyment and serving spiritual needs, glass frescoes can simply express the beauty of nature, the charming landscape of Hue, the talent of the artist who painted or inlaid the paintings, the meticulousness in different color blocks. But for researchers, besides the aesthetic and artistic value, each glass painting also carries important historical data. In particular, in the frescoes about the gods in the worship of the Mother Goddess of the Four Palaces, who are national heroes with many contributions to the cause of building and defending the country, they are considered a way to educate patriotism.

HUE FOLK GLASS PAINTINGS - DIRECTIONS FOR PRESERVING AND PROMOTING VALUES

Hue folk glass paintings still exist and are present in every family and spiritual life of Hue people. Although it has a unique and distinct identity, contains many aesthetic, historical and cultural values and covers most of the ancient capital, this type of painting is facing the risk of fading away, even being lost because there is no one to continue the profession and continue painting. According to our survey, before 2021, there were three artisans in Hue who painted glass paintings, namely two sisters, Ms. Nguyen Thi Dong and Nguyen Thi Tam in Gia Hoi ward and Ms. Tran Thi Minh Phung in Bao Vinh ward, but up to now, they have all quit their jobs due to illness and changed their business direction, so this type of painting has no painters. Therefore, we boldly propose a number of solutions to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the value of folk glass paintings in the Hue region, before entering the time of "wiping out".

Firstly, convince artisans to pass on their skills to the younger generation and call on the community to participate in restoring the traditional craft of making glass paintings in Hue.

Calling on artisans to open vocational training classes, training classes on painting techniques, mixing and coloring is extremely necessary in the matter of restoring and developing the craft of making glass paintings. However, the concept of "not passing on the craft to outsiders" is one of the major barriers for artisans to open classes to pass on the craft of making glass paintings to those who want to follow the profession. Therefore, authorities at all levels should have policies to treat, support and persuade artisans to pass on the craft to the community.

In case artisans in Hue do not participate in passing on the craft, cultural management agencies need to invite artisans from localities that are developing the craft of glass painting such as Binh Duong, An Giang, Soc Trang provinces to teach the craft to the younger generation in Hue. However, in order for the craft to be passed on by artisans who are not from Hue, it is necessary to help them research and approach Hue painting samples so that the restoration of paintings is not "confused" with paintings from other localities.

On the other hand, because the technique of the opposite way requires high skills and the artisan must be talented and skillful; this craft is difficult to teach to the next generation. Therefore, those who want to learn the craft of glass painting must be talented in painting or have a passion for art and love Hue culture.

Secondly, diverse designs and products of Hue folk glass paintings

Currently, Hue folk glass painting products mainly serve spiritual and worshiping needs, but have not paid any attention to other needs such as decoration and gifts. Although the spiritual needs are chosen by Hue people, those who are not interested in worshiping will not buy glass painting products sold on the market. Meanwhile, the need to enjoy art, decorate, and give gifts is becoming a developing trend in the current period. Therefore, diversifying the designs of glass painting products not only meets the tastes of the people but also contributes to increasing the income of those who make glass paintings.

Thirdly, propagate and educate people to understand the value of glass paintings and the role of inheriting and developing the craft of making Hue folk glass paintings.

Promote propaganda and education so that people understand the value of glass painting and that inheriting and developing the craft of glass painting is the task and responsibility of each individual and the Hue community in preserving and promoting the values of the famous glass painting genre of their locality. Especially for young people, when they no longer have the love and passion for traditional crafts, it is necessary to propagate to them the meaning and good purpose of the craft passing on. This not only contributes to the diversity and richness of Hue's cultural values but also creates jobs, income, and economic development for the community.

Fourth, build a brand for glass paintings to make them a tourism product of Thua Thien Hue province.

Currently, tourist destinations in Thua Thien Hue province all sell souvenirs, including products related to spiritual elements such as Buddha statues. Therefore, for spiritual tourist destinations and relics, it is possible to display additional glass paintings, instead of placing them in worship-style frames; they can be replaced with wall-mounted frames.

Fifthly, build spaces to display glass paintings in museums and regularly organize many exhibitions and seminars on Hue folk glass paintings.

Vietnam is a country with a tropical monsoon climate, with such a climate affecting the preservation of glass painting. Therefore, it is necessary to invite experts to introduce ways to preserve glass paintings in families. On the other hand, the public can admire and learn about ancient glass paintings, and it is necessary to build a space to display glass paintings in the Hue Cultural Museum. Or organize exhibitions of glass paintings during the Hue Traditional Craft Festival and organize many seminars on the issue of preserving and promoting the value of Hue folk glass paintings.

Sixthly, establish Hue Glass Painting Club

Currently, there are many clubs in many fields and art disciplines throughout Thua Thien Hue province established to create a playground, exchange and discussion among members with similar interests. It is thought that in Hue, it is also necessary to establish a Hue Stained Glass Club to gather people who are passionate about collecting glass paintings so that they have the opportunity to exchange, learn, and contribute greatly to preserving and promoting the values of glass paintings in Hue.

CONCLUSION

Despite the ups and downs of the historical flow of Vietnamese culture, until now, Hue folk glass paintings still exist with time and still try to retain the unique colors and values of this unique type of glass painting. In Hue folk glass art, not only is it aesthetic value, spiritual value, artistic value, historical value, but it also carries the spiritual value of Hue people, reflecting the thinking and artistic level of previous generations.

The issue of preserving and promoting the cultural values of glass painting and the unique painting genre in Hue is a meaningful and very necessary task. Therefore, with the efforts and cooperation of all government levels, sectors and the people of Hue themselves, it will contribute significantly to restoring the appearance of folk glass painting genre imbued with the cultural identity of the ancient capital.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are no people to acknowledge for this paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors have no conflict of interest in this study.

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