ALMINE RECH

Mai-Thu

Biography

MAI TRUNG THU, known by his artist name MAI-THU, was born on November 10, 1906 in the village of Rho-Nha in the province of Kien-An (near Haiphong) in Northern Vietnam.

He attended secondary school at the Lycée Français in Hanoi, and then, from 1925 to 1930, was part of the first class of students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the then capital of Tonkin.

1931 – 1937

He taught drawing at the Lycée Français in Hue and mastered the doc-huyen, the traditional Vietnamese monochord instrument, through acquaintance with the many musicians who were in the former imperial city at that time. He requested to be sent to France for the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in 1937.

1938 – 1940

He participated in the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne and became known for playing the doc-huyen through radio shows and concerts.

1940 – 1942

He enlisted in the army and was demobilized in Mâcon in 1941, staying there for some time.
After meeting the influential Combaud family, he produced several portraits of Mâcon society and also decorated a chapel in the Eglise Saint-Pierre in Mâcon that was dedicated to the soldiers who lost their lives in World War I. He also showed his artwork in Vichy (Galerie Lorenceau) and Lyon (Galerie Bellecour)

1942

Invited by the governor of Algeria with his friend LE PHO, he showed his work at Galerie Romanet in Algiers

1943 – 1944

Mai-Thu settled permanently in Paris and showed his work on Rue de la Boétie (Galerie Hessel) and on the Champs Elysées (Madagascar pavilion)

1946

As part of a group of amateur filmmakers living in France, he made a film reporting on the Fontainebleau Conference during President Ho Chi Minh's visit to Paris.

1947 – 1948

Exhibition on Rue de la Paix (Galerie d'Art Français).

1948 – 1949

Produced a documentary film on the "Silk Painting" technique that was shown several times at the Cité Universitaire and the Musée de l'Homme.

1952 – 1957

Several exhibitions (Galerie Conti, Galerie de l'Institut on Rue de Seine, Galerie Marforen in Faubourg Saint Honoré) established his reputation. Then Mai-Thu met Jean François Apesteguy, who became his exclusive artistic director, leading his art to be recognized through regular themed exhibitions and to be acquired by major French and international collections.

1954

AI-THU met painter and silk decorator Jeanne SINERAY, known as SAO. A daughter was born to them in 1956. His wife's support was beneficial to him in all respects, especially in regards to his art.

1958 – 1959

Exhibition at Galerie Pro Arte on Rue de Miromesnil, then in Deauville where MAI-THU, until his death and afterwards, would have work regularly shown in J.F. Apesteguy's personal gallery.

1960

First exhibition at Galerie du Péristyle (Salle Gaveau, Rue de la Boétie) with J.F. Apesteguy. The same year, Mai-Thu, who was still a masterful doc-huyen player, received the Grand Prix du Disque with Professor Tran Van Khé, a renowned musicologist, for a recording of traditional Vietnamese music.

1960 – 1965

Collaboration with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) for its "Helping Unfortunate Children" campaign and printing of several greeting cards in several languages.
With his friend, poet Phan Vam Ky, he illustrated a collection of "Poems on Silk" with original paintings and varnish, which were acquired by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

1962

In his film "Fort du Fou," set during the Indochina War, filmmaker Léo Jouannon gave Mai-Thu the role of a Catholic priest. The film came out in 1963.

1963

At the Galerie du Péristyle, with J.F. Apesteguy, Mai-Thu had his first large-scale thematic exhibition, "The Children of MAI-THU." It was a huge success, and many reproductions on paper (Bristol) and silk (satin) were produced around the world.

1965

Mai-Thu's work was regularly shown at Galerie "Angle du Faubourg" by J.F. Apesteguy on Rue du Faubourg St Honoré.

1968

The thematic exhibition "Women as Seen by Mai-Thu" at Galerie Cardo Matignon (Avenue Matignon) was a extremely successful despite sociopolitical turmoil in France.

1971

"Children and Family" exhibition at Galerie Doucet (Place Beauveau), then a first trip back to Vietnam in 1973.

1974 – 1975

The exhibition "The World of Mai-Thu" took place at Galerie Vendôme on Rue de la Paix. Then a second trip in 1975 during the fall of Saigon leading to the unification of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
Galerie Vendôme showed Mai-Thu's work again in 1975 for a retrospective including other painters.

December 1979 – January 1980

The exhibition “The Poetic World of Mai-Thu” at Galerie Vendôme showed a final explosion of colors, humanity, and gentleness, before the artist’s death on October 10, 1980.

He was buried in the Vanves cemetery in the Hauts-de-Seine department. An exhibition titled “One Hundred Small Paintings” was being prepared.
His remains stayed at the Vanves cemetery until 2019. On February 20, 2019 his ashes were transferred to the family plot in Rho Nha, in Kien An province in Vietnam.
Mai-Thu is now at rest with his family.