



Two of Fua's paintings: Agra Fort, above, and Portrait of Madame Rienpracha.

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Born in 1910 near the banks of the Chao Phya River, in what was then the lush orchard community of Thon Buri, he had art in his blood.

His father was a court painter who served under the great master Phya Anusat Chitrakorn. Fua studied art for four years between 1932 and 1935 at Bangkok's Poh Chang School of Arts and Crafts before quitting after he found the teaching method too academic and concerned with detail that he considered unimportant.

Fua was one of the graduates from Professor Silpa's first classes at the School of Fine Arts, later known as Silpakorn University. Unfortunately, most of his works from the period of his study at the School of Fine Arts were destroyed during World War II. Among the existing work from his early period is an oil portrait of his grandmother holding a cat, titled "My Grand Mother" (1938), done with lively but tender brushstrokes.

During 1940-46, he was granted a scholarship from MR

Thanomsakdi Kridakorn to further his studies at Visva Bharati University at Santiniketan in West Bengal, India, founded by the famed educator and poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Back in Thailand, he served as a professor at Silpakorn University, and he subsequently devoted his life to restoring and painting copies of old temple murals in Ayutthaya, Sukhothai and Phetchaburi provinces.

His artistic career was at its peak when his tempera on paper "Petchaburi", and his oil on canvas "Portrait of Madame Rienpracha", won the gold medal awards at the 1st National Exhibition of Art, in 1949, and at the second exhibition in 1950.

During 1954-56, he was granted a scholarship by the Italian government to study at the Academy of Fine Art in Rome.

He began to experiment during this period, with colour, oil, chalk, tempera, coloured pencils, pen and ink. He also enjoyed the rush of impromptu, dabbling with abstract and cubist styles.

The subjects were mostly Italian landscapes, while some were nude pictures by way of a palette knife and bold brushstrokes.

His greatest contribution to Thailand came in the form of his last major project – the restoration of the Traipitaka Library of Wat Rakang Kositaram, built during the reign of King Rama I. Aiming to preserve the finest craftsmanship of artists that had been in need of renovation for almost 200 years, Fua began the painstaking effort in 1969 and even sold his own paintings to help defray the cost of restoration. It was finished just in time for the celebration of Bangkok's bicentennial in 1982.

His tireless efforts to preserve traditional Thai arts and culture won him the Ramon Magsaysay Award for public service for "a life-long profession of seeking the origins of his national artistic tradition, preserving the tradition, and through painting, restoration, writing and teaching, enlivening

it with a future", in 1983. The Thai government appointed him as cultural heritage conservator in 1990.

While he was praised for rescuing and protecting the artistic heritage of the Traipitaka Library, this painstaking project, that took more than 10 years, cost him his health. The right side of his face and his right arm were paralysed. His health worsened in late 1991 and he was admitted to Siriraj Hospital. He succumbed in October 1993 due to inflamed blood vessels of the brain.

The motto of art students at Silpakorn University, the salutation in Latin "*Ars longa, Vita brevis*" (Art is long, but life is brief), perfectly describes the life and work of Fua. "My art is inspired by passion, faith and sincerity. It's not commanded by commission. In creating art, I am guided by the quest for genuine aesthetic beauty hidden in nature," Fua once said. ■