

**The Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine:  
Victor Tardieu and French Art Between the Wars**

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THESIS

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## SUMMARY

The thesis examines Victor Tardieu, the director of the *École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine* (EBAI) in the colonial cultural context of the interwar era in France. The EBAI, founded in 1924 was a School of Fine Arts following the curriculum of the *École des Beaux-Arts de Paris* transposed in colonial Hanoi. Despite its manifest colonial background, the current research published on the EBAI does not fully address the ideology behind the creation of such a school in Indochina and its role in French colonial and colonial art discourse.

I argue that the art produced by the EBAI was strongly influenced by Tardieu, whose conception of art reflected France's colonial civilizing mission, the academism of the School of Fine Arts, and nationalistic nostalgia for a French art, which was expressed at that time notably through landscape painting. In order to reveal Tardieu's preeminent role at the EBAI and his Beaux-Arts inspired mindset, I used Tardieu's letters and writing, accessible through the *fonds* Victor Tardieu. For Tardieu, adopting the Paris School of Fine Arts' structure would inscribe Annamite art into the tradition of a grand French art. Tardieu's "grand French art" reflected an outdated vision at odds with modernist trends in Paris. Tardieu's outdated vision, however, corresponded to a return to a less abstract mode of expression in France, a rejection of cubism and a return to landscape painting during the interwar period.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Angkor Wat pavilion at the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris* in 1931, a life-size reproduction of the Cambodian temple, was the “pearl” of the Exposition, its beautiful façade promising a majestic representation of the French colonial empire. Behind the grandiose exterior, the building’s modern interior, hidden by faux-antique walls, displayed a pedagogic exhibition on education in Indochina (Figure 1), one floor of which was dedicated to the artworks of the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine* (EBAI) and French painters in Indochina. Art critic Adolphe Tabarant, in his review of the exhibition on September 1, 1931, described in laudatory terms the works of the Indochinese students: “Serait-il excessif d’estimer que ces maîtres sont souvent dépassés par leurs élèves? [...] Au près de cet art indigène, une exposition de l’art français d’inspiration indochinoise permet d’établir des comparaisons qui peuvent quelques fois ne pas être flatteuses pour nos artistes” [“Would it be excessive to think that the students often surpass the masters? [...] Next to the indigenous art, an exhibition of French art inspired by Indochina enables us to establish some comparisons that are not flattering for the French artists”].<sup>1</sup> The art critic concluded that “indigenous” artists were as capable as the most talented French artists.

The view expressed by Tabarant might at first appear startling. In an exhibition notorious for promoting the superiority of French culture, how could a critic describe paintings created by the “indigenous” students as of better quality than their French masters? The comment, however, illustrated the recuperation of the art produced by the EBAI as an example of the benevolent

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<sup>1</sup> Adolphe Tabarant, “Au Temple d’Angkor,” *Oeuvre*, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1931. Fonds Victor Tardieu, Box 125/08, the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art, Paris, my translation.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicola Cooper’s “Disturbing the Colonial Order” in *France and Indochina: cultural representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 89. She notes the association made in mainland France between

mission of France in the colonies. The civilizing mission undertaken by France justified the violence of the colonial encounter; the French government promulgated calm and solidarity to propitiate the general anxiety. Following the excruciating violence of World War I and France's difficult recovery from the conflict, the mainland population was questioning its colonial empire. The French population perceived the colonies as sources of dismay and death rather than opportunity and did not wholly support France's colonial policy, especially in distant lands such as Asia.<sup>2</sup> The French government tried to reverse the population's vision of the colonial empire by using strategies of cultural propaganda. The cultural propaganda strategy reached its apex with the Colonial Exposition in 1931.

The Exposition's purpose was to familiarize the mainland population with the colonial empire. As the minister of the colonies Paul Reynaud declared in his inaugural speech: "Le but essentiel de l'exposition est de donner aux français conscience de leur empire [...] Il faut que chacun d'entre nous se sente citoyen de la plus grande France" ["The essential goal of the exhibition is to give to the French population awareness of their empire. Each and every one must feel as a citizen of the Greater France"].<sup>3</sup> The French government recognized the political and economical importance of its empire; the concern of losing France's international status inclined French politics to rely on the population of *la plus grande France*. Raoul Girardet in *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* describes the "tenacious anxiety" in interwar France of the loss of its super power status.<sup>4</sup> Having been devastated by the war, the hexagon alone

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<sup>2</sup> See Nicola Cooper's "Disturbing the Colonial Order" in *France and Indochina: cultural representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 89. She notes the association made in mainland France between Indochina and death.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris : Éditions de la table ronde, 1972), 125, my translation.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 126.

could not compete with other international powers without the demographic and economic help of the colonies. As Maurice Reclus wrote in the newspaper *le Temps* in 1931: “Sans l’empire, nous nous acheminerions vers une inévitable déchéance [...] C’est son empire qui la tient à bout de bras, la garde des dangers du présent et lui assure l’avenir [...] En renonçant à son statut impérial ou ce qui revient au même en ne cherchant pas à l’organiser et à le consolider, la France loin de retrouver dans ce repliement des forces nouvelles, perdrait au contraire les forces qui lui restent” [“Without the empire, we would head towards an inevitable degeneration [...] It is its empire that carries France single handedly, protects it from the present dangers and assures its future [...] By renouncing its imperial status or similarly by neither seeking to organize nor consolidate it, France, far from finding new strengths in withdrawing, would in fact lose its remaining strengths”].<sup>5</sup> This concern was common among French officials, and the exhibition needed to help the mainland population see the value of the colonial enterprise for it to prosper efficiently.

A similar disquietude lay in the arts of the period. The French Academy saw in International Modernism a threat to its traditions. In such a context, art from *la plus grande France*, produced in the nation’s artistic tradition and guided by mainland academic painters, was an antidote to French unease. In 1932, Camille Mauclair, a known nationalistic art critic, encouraged looking at works by EBAI’s students to find “rest, calm, beauty, and reverie” against the “aggressive inanities” of the avant-garde.<sup>6</sup> The artworks from the students of the EBAI, as

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Raoul Girardet, *L’idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris : Editions de la table ronde, 1972), 126, my translation.

<sup>6</sup> Article by Camille Mauclair in *Le Figaro* in 1932 speaking of an exhibition by the EBAI’s students: “Dans une rue où s’étalent des niaiseries agressives, entrez un instant à l’agence de l’Indochine, vous y trouverez, repos, calme, beauté et motifs de songe.” Fonds Victor Tardieu, Box 125/08. Camille Mauclair was an art critic known for his distaste of the *École de Paris*; he notably wrote a book against modern art called *La Farce de l’art vivant, II. Les Métèques contre l’art Français* in 1930.

well as the paintings by French artists in Indochina, offered scenes far from the violence of colonization. In contrast to post-revolutionary paintings produced during the first French colonial empire, which depicted slavery, cannibalism, massacre, death, and “violent colonial contact” as described by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby in her book *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*, art from the colonies during the interwar era reflected the fabricated peace of the Third Republic’s second colonial empire.<sup>7</sup> The framing of the art from the colonies as serene and on par with their French counterpart mirrored the Third Republic’s colonial discourse, defining its colonial enterprise as one of solidarity. As the prime minister of France, one time governor of Indochina, and a colonial pundit, Albert Sarraut, explained in his 1931 book, *Grandeur and servitudes coloniales*, French colonization had evolved from an initially brutal desire to conquer and subjugate other countries into a purely altruistic venture. For Sarraut, the Third Republic changed a cruel encounter to a nonviolent one: “Dès lors dans l’action coloniale ainsi comprise, il n’y plus comme au début, “droit du plus fort” mais bien “droit du plus fort à aider le plus faible,” ce qui paraît vraiment le droit le plus noble” [“Thus in the colonial action, there is no “right of the strongest” anymore, as it was at the beginning, but instead there is a “right of the strongest to help the weak,” which truly seems to be the noblest right”].<sup>8</sup>

Apprehensions produced by the war’s aftermath grew in the wake of anticolonial revolts, which began in the interwar era. Since 1925, terrorist acts were carried out in Indochina, culminating three months prior to the opening of the exhibition with the bloody Yen Bai mutiny

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the somatic and violent aspects of paintings by Delacroix during the first French colonial empire, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Albert Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitudes coloniales* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1931), my translation.

on February 10, 1930 that killed several French officers.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Indochinese militants were present at the exhibition and tried to convince the native participants to go on strike, alongside the Counter-Colonial Exposition, which was exposing the savagery of the French Empire. The anxiety of a French colonial empire, simultaneously at its apex and on the verge of disintegration, is apparent in the conception by Victor Tardieu (1870–1937) of the EBAI.

The EBAI, established October 27, 1924 in Hanoi by Tardieu, a French painter, and Nguyen Nam Son, an Indochinese painter, was the only “official” art academy of French colonial Indochina.<sup>10</sup> Tardieu, the school’s director from its creation until his death in 1937, arrived in Indochina in 1920 as the recipient of the *Prix de l’Indochine*, a travel grant that allowed painters to visit Indochina and bring back to France artworks that depicted the colony. Instead of returning to France, Tardieu stayed in Indochina and founded the EBAI. The school’s name was adapted from the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts) in Paris and set out, according to Tardieu, to create an “authentic Annamite” art.”<sup>11</sup> This paradoxical situation mirrored France’s colonial “*mission civilisatrice*.”

Jules Ferry, the principal actor of the Third Republic’s colonial expansion, pushed colonization in Asia against the popular consensus and under the pretense that France’s duty was

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<sup>9</sup> The Vietnamese nationalist movement VNQDD attacked a French garrison post at Yen Bai (not far from Hanoi) killed French soldiers in the hope of an uprising of the Vietnamese population. Colonial authorities were shocked and threatened by this bloody event resulting in the capture and killing of a large number of nationalists to end future uprisings.

<sup>10</sup> Other art schools prefigured the EBAI with notably Gia Dinh School in Saigon where decorative arts were taught, but the EBAI is the most documented art schools of the colonial period, and was the only one that taught art and not only crafts. The lack of documentation leaves the study of other art schools difficult.

<sup>11</sup> “Annam,” and “Annamite,” were respectively the names given to a region and population that is now comprised in Vietnam. The colony of Indochina was composed of five protectorates: Tonkin, in what is now Northern Vietnam, Annam, at the Center, Cochinchina, in the South, Laos and Cambodia. It was common, however, to refer to all Vietnamese as “Annamites.”

to enlighten “inferior” populations.<sup>12</sup> In reality, the Indochinese Union, proclaimed in 1887, was conquered in order to compete with England’s colonial power in Asia and to escape from the financial crisis that hit France at the end of the nineteenth century. Situated between India and China, as suggested in the name “Indo-China,” the French territory unified different countries that correspond to present Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Indochina was strategically conquered to reduce England’s influence in Asia, to access raw materials and the Chinese market, and to expand externally France’s capitalist economy.<sup>13</sup> By establishing Indochina, France’s Third Republic was asserting its geopolitical power, against England, to remain the greatest nation in Europe and to preserve its prestige on the international stage. In order to justify its colonial hegemony and to embellish its belligerent roots, France’s Third Republic introduced the concept of a *mission civilisatrice*:

Ils ont tenté de reconfigurer les cultures et les patrimoines locaux dans la perspective de la "mission civilisatrice", se posant en protecteurs de chefs d'œuvre en péril [...] en défenseurs de traditions orales menacées, en promoteurs d'un artisanat local en voie d'extinction [...] Les milieux coloniaux ont ainsi tenté de définir un projet de nature culturelle: faire émerger des formes de patrimoine, de savoir et de savoir-faire, d'expressions artistiques qui devaient prendre sens et cohérence dans le cadre d'une nouvelle identité impériale de la France.

They tried to reconfigure cultures and local heritage from the perspective of a “civilizing mission,” presenting themselves as protectors of artworks at risk [...] defenders of threatened oral traditions, promoters of the endangered local craftsmanship [...] the colonial milieu thus tried to define a cultural project: to instill notions of local heritage, of knowledge and know-how, of artistic expressions that were to be realized and attain

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<sup>12</sup> Jules Ferry in *Les fondements de la politique coloniale* in 28 juillet 1885 declared “ [...] je soutiens que les nations européennes s'acquittent avec largeur, avec grandeur et honnêteté, de ce devoir supérieur de civilisation.”

<sup>13</sup> On the history on the French colonial Indochina and its economic roots, see Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: an Ambiguous colonization, 1858-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 14.

coherence in a framework of a new French imperial identity.<sup>14</sup>

France's mission was not to plunder foreign countries but rather to help the indigenous population in preserving its art and culture. The creation of the EBAI was part of the civilizing mission, which was highlighted in Tardieu's writing:

Depuis notre arrivée l'influence de l'art chinois s'efface de jours en jours [...] Façonnant leur mentalité sur la nôtre, ou tout au moins s'y efforçant, ils en viennent nécessairement à imiter les formes décoratives occidentales. Dépourvus d'éducation artistique, de direction, ayant perdu la foi en leurs anciens maîtres, ils croient bien faire en méprisant leurs traditions ancestrales soit que les jetant délibérément par-dessus bord, ils se lancent dans de désastreux pastiches, soit que, les accommodant maladroitement avec les exemples occidentaux, ils inventent une sorte de style composite dont les échantillons déplorables se voient un peu partout: vitrines étagères en forme de pagode, buffets Henri II décorés de dragons, guéridons Louis-Philippe invraisemblables, etc. Ne nous devons-nous pas à nous-mêmes de faire cesser ces pitoyables errements d'une race excellemment douée et dont nous sommes dans une certaine mesure responsables.

Since our arrival the influence of Chinese art has been fading from day to day [...] Adapting their mentalities to ours, or at least trying to, they necessarily succeed in imitating Western decorative forms. Without artistic education, without direction, having lost faith in their ancient masters, they believe they are doing well by despising their ancestral traditions either by jettisoning them deliberately by doing disastrous pastiches or accommodating local traditions awkwardly with western examples. They invent a sort of composite style, of which deplorable samples are seen almost everywhere: cabinets with a pagoda shape, Henry II style buffet decorated with dragons, implausible Louis-Philippe pedestal table, etc. Ought we not to stop these pitiable misguided ways of an excellently gifted race, and of whom we are in a certain way responsible.<sup>15</sup>

Tardieu and the colonial pundits could not accept a “composite style,” a pejorative “mixed-race” art (*art metis*) replacing a pure traditional local art. French colonial officials aspired to save a traditional art in keeping with their vision of the colonized countries, conserving the “otherness” and exotic appeal of art from the colonies. Tardieu deplored the

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<sup>14</sup> Sophie Dulucq, Colette Zytnicki, “La colonisation culturelle dans l'Empire français: entre visées éducatives et projets muséographiques (XIXe-XXe siècles),” *Outre-Mers*, 356-357, 2007, 10, my translation.

<sup>15</sup> Victor Tardieu, “Sur l'enseignement des Beaux-Arts en Indochine et la création d'une école centrale de dessin à Hanoi” altered and published in *Trois Écoles d'Art de l'Indochine, fascicule de l'Indochine française de l'Exposition coloniale de Paris*, 1931.

decadence of local artistic productions; for him, a School of Fine Arts could educate the population and teach the French academic model. Government officials in Indochina perceived the creation of a School of Fine Arts as the fulfillment of France's role as an educator. Indeed, "the French influence could only be nefarious when it was not guiding the indigenous population."<sup>16</sup> In a letter accompanying the decree approving the creation of the school, the Director of Public Instruction in Indochina Blanchard de la Brosse wrote:

On ne saurait méconnaître l'intérêt de faire prendre aux annamites l'importance de ne pas abandonner leur art traditionnel, tout en s'inspirant des besoins nouveaux, de diriger leurs efforts et de les instruire avec les grandes lois générales de l'esthétique qui sont les mêmes sous toutes les latitudes. La France sera alors fidèle à son rôle de grande éducatrice, dans tous les domaines, des peuples dont elle contrôle ou dirige l'éducation et elle accomplira de la sorte en Indochine, dans l'ordre intellectuel comme dans l'ordre économique une œuvre d'une portée incontestable.

One could not be unaware of the advantage to make Annamite understand the importance of not abandoning their traditional art, while being inspired by new demands, to direct their efforts and instruct them with the general law of the aesthetics, which are the same at all latitudes. France will then be loyal to its role of great educator, in all fields, of the people whom it controls and in this manner, it will accomplish in Indochina a work of an unquestionable significance of an intellectual order as well as of an economic order.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that the EBAI was part of a colonial apparatus difficult to ignore, the creation of the school itself needing the approval of the French officials in Indochina. France's civilizing mission was part of a specific colonial discourse, and may be understood in light of Edward Said's seminal account in *Orientalism*. Noting the categories of a European 'us' that existed in distinction to the non-Western "Other," Said argues that "the major component in European culture is precisely what made culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non European peoples and

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<sup>16</sup> Dao Dang-Vy, "Enquête sur la jeunesse annamite" in *La patrie Annamite*, November 14, 1936. "L'influence française n'était néfaste que quand elle ne guidait pas." Fonds Victor Tardieu, Box 125/08.

<sup>17</sup> *ARRETE précédé d'un rapport de présentation portant création à Hanoi d'une "École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine."* October 27 1924, ANOM, FM – AGEFOM//911, my translation.

cultures.”<sup>18</sup> Creating a School of Fine Arts in order to renovate local art was part of the cultural discourse on French art as a superior, mature authority over Annamite art. Moreover, Linda Nochlin specifically highlights orientalist painting’s lack “of a sense of history,” its timelessness and picturesque qualities as well as the absence of representation of the Westerner.<sup>19</sup> Almost one century later, the waning orientalism gave place to colonial art keeping some of its characteristics found in paintings created by Tardieu, Joseph Inguimberty, and the French painters at the EBAI. The current research published on the EBAI, however, does not fully address the school’s larger role in French colonial and colonial art discourse or the ideology behind the creation of a School of Fine Arts in Indochina.

Nadine André-Pallois’ book *L’Indochine: un lieu d’échange culturel? Les Peintres Français et Indochinois (fin XIXe-XXe siècle)*, questions the notion of propaganda and the limitations of understanding an art produced during the colonial era only as an element of colonial propaganda. Instead, the scholar contends that a cultural exchange took place between French and Vietnamese painters and that it would be restrictive to analyze the French painters as “propagandistic colonizers.”<sup>20</sup> Neither Vietnamese nor French paintings ever depicted the violence of colonization, but instead purposefully portrayed “landscapes of harmony.”<sup>21</sup> By defining art by French painters as “harmonious,” André-Pallois and the current research published on the EBAI avoid taking into account the colonial context in which these artworks

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<sup>18</sup> Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Book, 1994), 7.

<sup>19</sup> See Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on the Nineteenth Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Nadine André-Pallois, *Indochine: un Lieu d’Échange Culturel? Les Peintres Français et Indochinois (fin XIXe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Presses de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1997), 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Du fleuve Rouge au Mékong: visions du Viêt Nam* (Paris: Musée Cernuschi: Editions Findakly, 2012), 39.

were created.

In contrast, one of the few critical books on French Indochina, Panivong Norindr's *Phantasmatic Indochina*, argues that "Indochina is a concept at the intersection of myth and phantasm" and that "Indochina became, for the French, a space of cultural production. While ostensibly fulfilling their mandate to civilize backward nations, the French produced a coherent image of Indochina to sustain the myth of its colonial edification."<sup>22</sup> Focusing on the "exchange" between French artists and local artists, between Asian art and European art, the literature on the EBAI appears indifferent to the cultural frame in which the EBAI was created. Art produced in the colonies by colonial painters or indigenous painters was sold in salons and exhibited in colonial fairs in mainland France; it was designed to appeal to the colonial gaze and to an idealized and timeless vision of the colonies.

Colonial pundits categorized and promoted Indochina as being the most civilized of the colonies for tourist and economic purposes. The government officials needed the mainland population to perceive the remote colony—located far from France and being the second most economically profitable colony after Algeria—in a positive light. The poet and diplomat Paul Claudel described Indochina in his writing as a "kingdom at peace where all outside noises come to expire," noting that, "never in Indochina has the collaboration between the indigenous and European populations been more intimate and peaceful."<sup>23</sup> The idealized depiction of Indochina with "landscapes of harmony" corresponded notably to the Third Republic's discourse. The art produced at the EBAI reflected a sense of quietness cultivated by the French Government to demonstrate the 'altruistic nature' of its colonial enterprise. The need to protect and restore an

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<sup>22</sup> Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film and Literature* (Durham: Duke, 1996), 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

endangered Annamite art from French modernization was part of the civilizing mission. To guide the creation of a pure Annamite art reflected the framing of Indochina as a rural colony in harmony with nature, a timeless exotic “other” that should be preserved from the modern and urbanized France.

Moreover, following the violence of World War I, protecting and repairing French “fertility” was a priority for the population and for the artists. A nationalistic desire to return to “mother earth” was guiding artists toward landscape painting and toward the construction of a genealogy of French art. A pure Annamite art unspoiled by French modern art corresponded to the desire to see in Indochina a paradise untouched by European modernization and urbanization that could redeem the destroyed material and artistic landscape of France. Framing Indochina as a pure and idyllic colony could help the mainland population see in the colonies a cure to war and to some degree, in the artistic circle, an antidote to international modern art. The art representing Indochina thus bore the imperative of conveying its peaceful nature to the mainland population.

The aim of this thesis is then to place the EBAI and its director’s work within the colonial cultural context of the interwar era in France. I argue that the art produced by the EBAI was strongly influenced by Tardieu, whose conception of art reflected France’s colonial civilizing mission, the academism of the School of Fine Arts, a nationalistic nostalgia for a French art, and was part of the French colonial apparatus.

The chapter “The French Academic Tradition at The *École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine*” will examine Tardieu’s academism and the French academic model, which inspired Tardieu’s view of art, tainted with nostalgic undertones, and his role at the EBAI. In order to reveal Tardieu’s preeminent role at the EBAI and his Beaux-Arts inspired mindset, I will use

Tardieu's letters and writing, accessible through the *fonds* Victor Tardieu. The archives prove to be substantial in showing the ideology behind the creation of the EBAI and the relationship between the Western "master" and his Vietnamese students. Through letters and articles, Tardieu appears as a paternal figure; the letters oftentimes refer to him as a "master" and a "father." The "father-son" or the "master-pupil relationship" was not only characteristic of the colonial setting, but also part of the training at the School of Fine Arts in Paris.<sup>24</sup> The curriculum of the EBAI followed the curriculum in Paris, making Annamite art the representative of French art in Asia. For Tardieu, adopting the Paris School of Fine Arts' curricular structure would inscribe Annamite art into the tradition of a grand French art. Tardieu's "grand French art" reflected an outdated vision at odds with modernist trends in Paris. Tardieu's outdated vision, however, corresponded to a return to a less abstract mode of expression in France, a rejection of cubism and a return to landscape painting during the interwar period.

As a consequence, chapter III "Landscape, Nature and Apprehending Indochina" will investigate landscapes painted by French teachers at the EBAI. Nature was at the center of what Tardieu considered to be the soul of Annamite art. Tardieu rarely painted in Indochina due to his absorbing work as a director. Few of Tardieu's works are available; however, Joseph Inguimberty, a French artist who came to teach at the EBAI, painted landscapes frequently. He exhibited landscape paintings in 1929, in the exhibition *Paysages et Figures du Delta Tonkinois* in Hanoi. In fact, landscapes between the two wars regained popularity in mainland France; they became symbols of the grandeur of France. As Romy Golan observes, the interwar years in France were marked "by a profound crisis of confidence" which affected modern artists and led them to turn away from the avant-garde toward rustic subjects and landscape painting.

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<sup>24</sup> Nora Taylor in *Painters in Hanoi: An ethnography of Vietnamese Art* (Honolulu: Hawai'i Press, 2004), rightly defines the relationship between Tardieu and his students as of a master and pupil.

Golan notes that in 1923 landscape paintings prevailed in Salon exhibitions. After the war there was a “notion of an interrupted genealogy in the recent history of French art, a broken link with nature in need of restoration, (that) would rally artists and critics alike in the 1920s. The resurgence of landscape painting was but the most literal and immediate of its manifestation.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, exotic landscapes erase colonial industrialization from representation and evoke a timeless indigenous colony. Indeed, landscapes are “bound up with the discourse of imperialism”<sup>26</sup> as W.J.T Mitchell argues in *Landscape and power*: “landscape is not a genre but a medium, landscape is a medium of exchange [...] Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture.”<sup>27</sup> Landscape paintings formed part of the colonial art economy.

Chapter IV “*Prix de l’indochine*, Tardieu and Artistic Propaganda” will explore the colonial propaganda used by Tardieu behind the creation of the EBAI. Tardieu explained frequently, in his writings, the advantages of art’s use as propaganda and the usefulness of the paintings and decorative arts for a tourist economy. Tardieu described the project of reinvigorating Annamite art as economically profitable for the French government, which could then export better quality art and craft productions. Objects from Asia were popular in Europe and in France; the primary goal of the school was to improve the quality of the Annamite artistic production to sell it as the equal of Chinese and Japanese art and as the representative of French taste in Asia. In order to do so, Tardieu used the *Prix de l’Indochine* awarded by the *Société Coloniale des Artistes Français* (SCAF) as a structural part of the school. The award permitted French painters to spend two years in Indochina, one year travelling for their own practice and

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<sup>25</sup> Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>26</sup> W.J.T Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

the second year teaching at the school. Qualified French painters would teach painting to the local students to improve their skills and make the local art exportable to France. In the meantime, Tardieu used his extensive connections in political and artistic circles to promote and integrate the EBAI in the colonial apparatus and to exhibit its art in Salons and the various colonial exhibitions of the time. Indeed, the interwar French government tried to resuscitate the concept of colonialism and to revive the nineteenth-century vogue for orientalism through the creation of colonial art schools and exhibitions of colonial art, which was promoted at the Exposition in 1931.

## II. THE FRENCH ACADEMIC TRADITION AT THE *ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE L'INDOCHINE*

When one thinks of the artistic scene of the twenties and thirties in France, the names Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, Francis Picabia and other avant-garde artists come to mind. In Indochina, however, the academic tradition of the School of Fine Arts persisted and Victor Tardieu was a guardian of this institution. This chapter discusses how, by creating a School of Fine Arts in Hanoi, Tardieu was integrating the local art into the academic French tradition in order to save a French patriarchy threatened by the avant-garde.

Tardieu initially began his artistic training at the School of Fine Arts in Lyon—the city of his birth—before moving in 1889 to study at the School of Fine Arts in Paris under the direction of Léon Bonnat (1833-1922). Bonnat was a *chef d'atelier* at the establishment for thirty years and he became the School of Fine Arts' director in 1905. Reformed in 1863, during the interwar period the institution was still following the curriculum created sixty years before, defined as “academic.” For Monique Segré, academic art was a mastered science, made up of an extensive knowledge of anatomy, accompanied by a mastery of drawing techniques in quest of an “ideal beauty.”<sup>28</sup> Academic art offered a rationalized and a rather stagnant approach to art. In addition, Albert Boime indicates that academic art was already a pejorative term in the nineteenth century and this pejorative connotation continued into the twentieth century with the emergence of the avant-garde.

During the nineteenth century...the term academic implied a philosophical rationale and attached itself to a special way of drawing the live model. Gradually the label ‘academic’ assumed a pejorative connotation as a result of the doctrinal use of these poses that bordered on banality, but also the rigid and tedious manner of preparing the pupil in the private ateliers [...] In any case, this elementary instruction had a single aim; to assist the

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<sup>28</sup> Monique Segré, *L'art comme institution: l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19ème-20ème siècle* (Cachan: Editions de l'ENS-Cachan, 1993), 112.

pupil in reproducing the model before him.[...] Once grounded in the basic technique, the pupil's vision was established; only with difficulty was it modified thereafter.<sup>29</sup>

The curriculum of the School, created in 1863, was dedicated to the traditional teaching of painting, sculpture, architecture, intaglio, medals engraving and engraved gems. The establishment had ateliers for each of the six disciplines taught. In addition to the ateliers, the school offered courses in art history and aesthetics, anatomy, perspective, elementary mathematics, descriptive geometry, geology, physics and chemistry, history and archeology.<sup>30</sup> Anatomy and perspective were the curriculum's foundations aside from drawing. Students had to learn how to draw from nature, models, and the Antique before being able to paint. After having learned how to draw, students, under the direction of a *chef d'atelier*, could learn painting. The *chef d'atelier*, as the name indicates, was the head of the atelier, stereotypically an authoritative figure whose mission was to diligently correct his students' mistakes. The students often admired their *chef d'atelier*, even though there was little dialogue between them; his role was to be strict and to teach students how to acquire a perfect mastery of the techniques along with a rigorous discipline.<sup>31</sup> In addition to drawing techniques, students were taught moral values, such as hard work, reason, honesty, and humility.

Being an old institution, the School of Fine Arts was the safeguard of moral values and ideals held dear by the French bourgeoisie. As Segré writes, "the academic artist presents a

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<sup>29</sup> Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the 19th Century* (New Heaven: Yale Univ Press, Reprint edition, 1986), 19.

<sup>30</sup> See "Décret impérial sur l'organisation de l'École impériale et spéciale des Beaux-Arts de Paris, du 13/11/1863," published in the *Bulletin des lois de l'Empire français*, XIe série, 2e semestre de 1863, partie principale, t. XXII, pp. 607-611.

<sup>31</sup> Monique Segré, *L'art comme institution: l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 19ème-20ème siècle*, 112.

protected world, idyllic, full of purity, innocence and chastity.”<sup>32</sup> For the school, vulgarity and a lack of control were the worst mistakes that an artist could commit. Artists were in constant pursuit of an ideal that could only be attained by being diligent in one’s work and mastering anatomy, perspective, science, and all the precepts taught at the school. Bonnat, in his role as *chef d’atelier*, school director, and artist was representative of the establishment’s artistic customs and characteristic of a “stiff” bourgeois society, protective of moral virtues and traditions.<sup>33</sup> The school director was the official portraitist of the Third Republic; in 1922 the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* described him as “the painter-laureate with the right to paint all the presidents of the Republic” as well as “all the celebrities in the world in politics, art, science and letters.”<sup>34</sup> He realized numerous portraits of important French figures, such as Adolph Thiers and Victor Hugo, represented realistically in accordance with his knowledge of anatomy. He was known to be extremely meticulous, taking the exact measures of his models.

In line with his position as a director, Bonnat was a fervent champion of the traditional French art taught at the school. In 1916, in an article in English, the school’s director, writing about the future of French art, hoped for a return to French art and a dismissal of modernist paintings. He wrote: “In any case, at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, which the cubists and the futurists wish to ignore, we have always ignored cubism and futurism, and our students have never seemed to show the slight desire to make their acquaintance, no more than the art nouveau

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Fae Brauer, “One Friday at the French Artists’ Salon: Pompiers and Official Artists at the Coup de Cubisme” in *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-Garde: defining modern and traditional in France, 1900-1960*, ed. Adamson Natalie and Toby Norris (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 69.

and the ‘modern style’.”<sup>35</sup> He thought the value of the school’s education was “not only in artistic but [...] in the moral sense also, of our *École des Beaux-Arts*.”<sup>36</sup> The director detested cubism and hoped that the end of the war would allow a return to French art. The return to French art was, for Bonnat, an academic art in the Beaux-Art tradition and free from abstraction and modernist trends.

Bonnat’s position was purposively prevalent in Paris, as he was not only the director of the School of Fine Arts but he was also an Academician, the honorary president of the *Société des Artistes Français*, the longest-serving member of the *Conseil Supérieur des Beaux-Arts* and the president, for twenty years, of the *Conseil Supérieur des Musées Nationaux*. Bonnat was, effectively, one of most influential people in the French art world and was portrayed as the embodiment of official painting, playing “the role of an august official authority.”<sup>37</sup> For modern artists, Bonnat was the personification of an academic art promulgated by the State.<sup>38</sup> Bonnat’s hegemony and view on art represented a significant part of the artistic French scene at the time, as the interwar period would welcome a more conservative view of art.

Tardieu, as seen in his writings and as his role of the EBAI’s director, was evidently influenced by his academic education and by the teaching of Bonnat. Following in the steps of his master, Tardieu perceived his work in Indochina as a mission to save Annamite art and perpetuate moral values and traditions that may have been in perdition in mainland France. Tardieu’s mission was to improve the qualities of Annamite art, elevate it as equal to Chinese art

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<sup>35</sup> Léon Bonnat, “The future of French Art” in *The American Magazine of Art*, 1916, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Fae Brauer, “One Friday at the French Artists’ Salon: Pompiers and Official Artists at the Coup de Cubisme,” 72.

<sup>38</sup> See Fae Brauer, 73.

and Japanese art and integrate it into the French art tradition: “l’Indochine doit être en orient le représentant du gout français” [“Indochina needs to be the representative of French taste in the Orient”].<sup>39</sup>

Tardieu arrived in Indochina in 1920 after having won the *Prix de l’Indochine*. The painter could not secure any commissions and struggled to sell his art in Paris after World War I; his meeting with Sarraut would encourage him to leave for Indochina.<sup>40</sup> He first received an official commission by Indochina’s governor Maurice Long to decorate the University of Hanoi with a mural painting, *La France Apportant à sa Colonie les Bienfaits de la Civilisation* (*France Bringing to its Colony the Benefits of Civilization*), portraying the founders of the University: notably Sarraut and Long (Figure 2). Having completed the mural and after his meeting with the painter Nam Son, Tardieu decided to stay in Hanoi. Several sources have portrayed Nam Son as suggesting the idea to Tardieu of an art school that would teach Western techniques.<sup>41</sup> Tardieu developed the idea into a more ambitious project: creating an “official” School of Fine Arts in Hanoi that would be completely integrated into the colonial infrastructure. In *Un art vietnamien: penser d’autres modernités*, Pierre Paliard sees in Tardieu’s adventure in Indochina a way to give a new start to his career, knowing that the “European modernist combat was not his own.”<sup>42</sup>

Tardieu’s disdain of modern art is visible through his writings, his letters, and the

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<sup>39</sup> *Premier stade fondement d’un musée d’art occidental” Rapport de Victor Tardieu [au Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine], sur la création d’un musée d’art occidental à Hanoi, 1923-1926, 7 p., ANOM, INDO - GGI - //51039.*

<sup>40</sup> See Alix Turolla-Tardieu, *Hanoi dans la vie de Victor et Jean Tardieu*. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/01.

<sup>41</sup> Corinne de Ménonville notably suggests that Nam Son had the idea of the school in *Paris, Hanoi, Saigon: l’Aventure de l’Art Moderne au Viet Nam*, (Paris: Pavillion des Arts, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Paliard, *Un art vietnamien: penser d’autres modernités* (Paris, l’Harmattan, 2014), 72.

school's curriculum. Indeed, Tardieu chose not to include any of the latest trends in painting in the school's curriculum. It is important to highlight that this was not the case in every colonial School of Fine Arts; some teachers were more inclined toward cubism and familiarized the students with modernist trends, as pointed out by Véronique Bodlenner.<sup>43</sup> In Madagascar for example, art exhibitions showcased the avant-garde. In 1923, an art fair in Tananarive displayed, among others, Braque, Derain, Matisse, Picasso, and Vlaminck.<sup>44</sup> In Hanoi, such exhibitions did not exist. Akin to his teacher's loathing of modern art, Tardieu, in his role in Indochina, decided to perpetuate the curriculum of the School of Fine Arts. Tardieu was perpetuating the education he received; similar to Bonnat he was safeguarding the Beaux-Arts tradition. The choice of founding a School of Fine Arts was for Tardieu a means to accomplish his mission in Indochina. For the director, only an adaptation of the Beaux-Arts tradition to the local environment could succeed in elevating Annamite art and integrating it into the French tradition.

The curriculum of the EBAI followed the Paris School of Fine Arts' curriculum with courses on anatomy and perspective (Figure 3); the students could draw from nature only in the second year and not in the first. In addition to courses that could have been taught in Paris, local decorative arts were instructed along with studying from nude models (Figure 4); local students drew from nature as well. To fit in with the local culture the "study of plants" was integrated into the curriculum.<sup>45</sup> In a letter to Tardieu, Nam Son listed art history courses: "Histoire de l'art,

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<sup>43</sup> See Véronique Bodlenner with her unpublished master's thesis untitled *Les Écoles des Beaux-Arts coloniales: Étude de la peinture dans son rapport au modèle occidental dans les colonies françaises en Algérie, à Madagascar et en Indochine*, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Véronique Bodlenner: Hemerson Andrianetrazafy, *La peinture malgache des origines à 1940*, (Antananarivo: Foi et justice, 1991), 50.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on the curriculum, see Exposition Coloniale Internationale Paris 1931, *Trois écoles d'art de l'Indochine: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1931).

1ère année: art chinois, son histoire, sa technique, ses divisions, son expansion; philosophie et religion dans l'art. Art chinois par rapport à l'occident. Ce qu'Annam doit à la Chine, 2ème année rapide exposé des arts extrême orientaux nés de la Chine: Corée, Japon [...] Vues sur l'art en France, sa personnalité, ses filiations, les religions et philosophies qui l'inspirent" ["History of art. first year: Chinese art, its history, its technique, its divisions, its expansion; philosophy and religion. Chinese art in relation with the Western world. What Annamite art owes to Chinese art. Second year: quick exposé of other Eastern Asian arts born from Chinese art: Korean and Japanese art [...] Views on art in France, its personality, its filiations, the religions and philosophies that inspire it"].<sup>46</sup> These terminologies reflected how French scholars perceived Asian art at that time; Chinese art was claimed to have fathered the other arts of the continent, and Annamite art owed much to Chinese art. Along with Western and Chinese art history, the French painters introduced perspective and oil painting. As with the Paris School of Fine Arts, students in order to be accepted had to pass an exam; Europeans were exempt from it.

The school's demographic in the first five years was composed of a majority of students from Hanoi and its surroundings (forty students), with only a few students from Cochinchina (eight students), one from Cambodia and one from Laos.<sup>47</sup> The few rare Europeans that followed courses were considered *étudiants libres*. The majority of the EBAI's students were male. Most of the teachers were French with the exception of Nguyen Nam Son, Georges Khanh and Nguyen Phan Chanh. Nam Son had collaborated with Tardieu in the creation of the EBAI and was his right-hand man. After mandatory training in the Paris School of Fine Arts, Nguyen Nam

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<sup>46</sup> Nam Son uses these terminologies in a letter to Tardieu written on April 18, 1932. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

<sup>47</sup> See Exposition Coloniale Internationale Paris 1931, *Trois écoles d'art de l'Indochine: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1931). 18.

Son taught decorative arts and the school's preparatory class. Georges Khanh and Nguyen Phan Chanh instructed sculpture and decorative arts. Frenchmen always taught painting, perspective, anatomy, the fundamentals, and most of the French teachers who would teach painting won the *Prix de l'Indochine*.

The school's primary goal being the renovation of the arts and crafts production in Indochina, the students were taught to create Annamite art that would be "authentic" by using local media, including silk and lacquer. At the suggestion of Tardieu, students painted on silk rather than canvas. Tardieu, by guiding the local students towards their traditions and suggesting them to use local media rather than copying Western examples, would renovate Annamite art and make it "authentic." Likewise, Joseph Inguimberty, recruited by Tardieu, created a course on using lacquer as an artistic medium.

Tardieu, following the writing of the famous scholar Raphael Petrucci, defined Chinese art and thus Annamite art as dedicated to nature. The EBAI's curriculum was modified to include study from nature so as to reflect Chinese art: "Dans ce pays où manquent les Musées, on sera conduit dans les études, à diminuer la part ordinaire de la tradition, mais celle de l'étude de la nature en deviendra d'autant plus grande et les artistes tireront le plus grand profit du pittoresque de la vie annamite: scènes de la rue, cérémonies, nus de l'atelier ou de la rizière, costumes" ["In this country where the museums are missing, the part dedicated to tradition is diminished but the study of nature would have an even bigger part and the artists would benefit tremendously from the picturesque of the Annamite life: scenes from the street, ceremonies, nudes in the atelier or rice fields, costumes"].<sup>48</sup> Nature and working from nature was accentuated to fit in with what was supposed to be the soul of Annamite art. For Tardieu, in his words, Vietnamese art had to

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<sup>48</sup> *Arrêté de fondation de l'École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine, précédé d'un rapport de présentation*, 27/10/1924, 12 p., ANOM, FM – AGEFOM//911, my translation.

emulate Chinese art and to dissociate itself from the Mediterranean influence (“the intrusion of Mediterranean art into the sino-annamite aesthetic”). The association of the two aesthetics would create a hybrid style, which was unacceptable for Tardieu. Nature was what differentiated the “sino-annamite aesthetic” from the Mediterranean aesthetic.

This focus on looking toward nature and the emphasis on the “picturesque of the Annamite life,” rather than Greco-Roman antiquity, might appear progressive. Tardieu’s adaptation of the Paris curriculum to a more locally focused curriculum, however, reflected his desire to protect a pure Annamite art from the intrusion of Mediterranean art, in order to avoid an *art metis*. This “intrusion of Mediterranean art” could also be interpreted as the intrusion of modern art, Tardieu deliberately guided his students towards Chinese art rather than European contemporary trends. Furthermore, it corresponded to the colonial policy of association that had been implemented in favor of assimilation. This policy led to the drive to teaching native language and local history in Franco-Indochinese and French schools. From the perspective of the colonial administration, the association policy allowed for a better collaboration between the French and the local population.

Tardieu’s traditional conception of art was the quest for beauty that could be found in Europe and in Asia. He wrote: “Mais l’Art n’a de raison d’être que dès qu’il traduit l’inexprimable, et la pensée philosophique la plus élevée, si elle n’est traduite en beauté restera nulle et incomprise. C’est là que se trouve la parfaite analogie entre l’œuvre des artistes extrême-orientaux et celle des artistes occidentaux, car si le point de départ est différent, le résultat est identique” [“But Art’s only raison d’être is when it can translate the inexpressible, and the most elevated philosophical thought, if not translated in beauty, will become non-existent and ill appreciated. It is here that we find the perfect analogy between the Far Eastern Asian artists’

artwork and the Westerners' artwork, even if the starting point is different, the result is the same"].<sup>49</sup> For the French painter, the quest for beauty was what united East Asian artists and Western artists; in his academic and Eurocentric vision the laws of aesthetics were the same worldwide. His vision would deeply influence the EBAI's students.

Reading the letters between Tardieu and his students, it is troubling to discover Tardieu's exact terms emanating from Nam Son's writing. The latter wrote for example in a letter in 1931: "Il faut être de plus en plus chinois, c'est à dire extrême-oriental [...] nous vous comprenons très bien et nous ne faisons plus que du lavis et de l'aquarelle" ["We have to be more and more Chinese, that is to say far eastern, [...] we understand you very well and we are only doing wash drawing and watercolors"].<sup>50</sup> In a letter from April 26, 1933, Nam Son wrote: "Je suis heureux de voir que mes camarades comprennent l'intérêt qu'ils ont en ne faisant rien que de la peinture sur soie" ["I am glad to see that my comrades understand the benefit of only painting on silk"].<sup>51</sup> Six years after the creation of the school, Nam Son still needed Tardieu's judgment to make decisions as seen in the following passage: "Comme notre jugement présente encore beaucoup de lacunes, pour les œuvres qui bénéficient de notre hésitation, nous avons pris la décision de vous les envoyer afin de les soumettre à votre sélection et votre regard éclairé" ["As our judgment is still lacking, for the artworks that we are hesitating on, we have decided to send them to you in order to submit them to your selection and your enlightened view"].<sup>52</sup> Tardieu was perceived as a loving and enlightened paternal figure. A student wrote emphatically on 5

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<sup>49</sup> *Lettre de Victor Tardieu au Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine au sujet de la lettre de M. Silice*, November 28, 1924, ANOM, INDO-GGI-//51039, my translation.

<sup>50</sup> Nam Son, Letter to Tardieu, 1931. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

<sup>51</sup> Nam Son, Letter to Tardieu, April 26, 1933. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

<sup>52</sup> Nam Son, Letter to Tardieu, October 11, 1931. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

July, 1933: “Une année passée avec vous suffit pour connaître le but profond de l’art, vous me faites comprendre ce que c’est l’art, le grand art, l’art éternel, immuable et combien un travail sérieux et assidu peut mener loin! L’idée de ne pouvoir pas vous voir tous les jours me serre le cœur! Mais ce qui me console un peu, c’est l’engagement formel que je fais de bien travailler pour mériter la place que vous me réservez dans votre cœur” [“A year spent with you is enough to know art’s deep meaning, You make me understand what art is, the grand art, the eternal art, unalterable, and how a serious and assiduous work can bring one far! The idea not to see you everyday is upsetting! But what cheers me a little, is the formal pledge that I take to work well and to deserve the place in your heart”].<sup>53</sup> As this letter indicates, EBAI students generally admired Tardieu, his vision was not questioned, and contrary to the violent anticolonial wave in Indochina in the thirties, the EBAI’s students did not actively contest French authority. The letters thanked Tardieu for taking care of Annamite art like a father—“pour guider encore longtemps vos petits enfants dans la voie glorieuse que vous leur avez tracé. Je ne doute pas de votre bonté mille fois paternelle” [“to guide for a long time your little children in the glorious path that you have traced. I do not doubt your paternal kindness”].<sup>54</sup>

Ngoc depicts the strict environment imposed by Tardieu, which was typical of the education received in a School of Fine Arts.

Il est vrai que pendant votre absence nous travaillons un peu plus librement sans avoir à nous attendre à des “vous dessinez comme un cochon” et des “je vais vous foutre à la porte” qui nous coupe l’appétit pour quelques bonnes journées—mais cher maître nous commençons à éprouver—comme ces enfants qui ne savent plus à quel jeu jouer encore pour attendre le retour de leur papa [...] Je sais bien que je dois travailler—me donner beaucoup de peine pour reconquérir votre estime mais cher maitre travailler... avec vos “vous n’êtes qu’un fumiste” souligné d’un “je vous le dis sans plaisanterie” ce serait

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<sup>53</sup> Nguyen Tuong Lan, Letter to Tardieu, July 5, 1933. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

<sup>54</sup> Nguyen Van Thieu, Letter to Tardieu, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935, Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

entreprendre un travail d'hercule. Rassurez-vous cher maitre. Dites-vous qu'avec votre paternelle bonté vous n'aurez jamais à supporter une ingratitude de notre part [...] Nous n'oublierons jamais ces douces heures de travail guidé par votre paternel dévouement. Nous n'oublierons jamais cette idée que vous avez suggéré pour nous préserver de l'influence de l'art méditerranéen [...] Très cher maitre, nous vénérons en vous ce français qui sais nous aimer sincèrement sans distinction aucune—et paternellement pour l'amour du prochain et de l'art.

It is true that during your absence we work a bit more freely without waiting for a “you draw like a pig” and “I’m going to get you fired” that cut our appetite for a few good days – but dear master we are beginning to experience—like children who do not know what game to play waiting the return of their daddy [...] I know very well that I have to work—to put in a lot of efforts to recover your esteem but dear master to work with your “you are just a slacker” stressed by “I am not joking” would be one Herculean task. Be reassured dear master, with your paternal goodness you will never experience our ungratefulness [...] We will never forget these sweet hours of work guided by your paternal devotion. We will never forget this idea that you have suggested to preserve ourselves from the influence of Mediterranean art [...] Very dear master, we admire in you this Frenchman who knows how to love us sincerely without distinctions—and paternally in the love of the neighbor and in the love of art.<sup>55</sup>

The letters demonstrate the assimilation of Tardieu’s thinking by his students. The strict and caring personality of the director led the students to venerate their director, to perceive him as the renewer and protector of Annamite art. In addition to the director’s personality, the French government, by creating the EBAI, was developing an artistic elite, a local bourgeoisie who could not easily rebel against the French cultural project. Sarraut, in *Grandeur et Servitudes Coloniales*, explained that education created an “indigenous” elite that would collaborate with the French government: “L’instruction, en effet, a d’abord pour résultat d’améliorer largement la valeur de la production coloniale en multipliant, dans la foule des travailleurs indigènes, la qualité d’intelligences...et dresser les élites de collaborateurs” [“Education, in fact, first has for results to largely improve the value of the colonial production in multiplying, in the mass of indigenous workers, the quality of the intelligence...and train elites of collaborators”].<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Trinh Huu Ngoc, Letter to Tardieu, August 2, 1935. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/06, my translation.

<sup>56</sup> Sarraut, *Grandeur et Servitudes Coloniales*, 95.

According to Sarraut, an “indigenous” elite would then serve as intermediary between the French colonial and the “indigenous” population to diffuse “avec la conscience la plus claire des bienfaits de notre civilisation, les raisons profondes de la servir et de la défendre” [“with the clearest conscience the benefits of our civilization, the profound reasons to serve it and to defend it”].<sup>57</sup>

In the case of the EBAI, Tardieu’s understanding of art is not contested and is assimilated by his devoted students. It appears that communist and anti French tracts were brought at least on one occasion to the EBAI, and the students dismissed them right away.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever the political ideas of the young graduates (many of them are nationalist, a few are Marxists) their work is a reflection of the developing urban bourgeoisie to which they belong and of which they give a flattering image [...] nothing evokes the raging political struggles of the thirties. Of course, there is censorship in Indochina. Still, the visual arts do not convey the equivalent of the insidious undermining process present in the work of writers or journalists satirizing or criticizing the colonial domination.<sup>59</sup>

Contrary to writers and journalists, EBAI’s student were not rebelling or criticizing the French colonizer. In general, EBAI’s students were sons of educated families, part of a cultural elite, which did not seem to challenge the colonial authority. Tardieu’s vision did not appear to be questioned.

Finally, in addition to the school, Tardieu wanted to create a museum of Western art to educate the population and to exhibit French taste in Asia. He wrote in a report: “Maintenant que l’Indochine a pris en Extrême-Orient une place importante et que les résultats déjà obtenus au point de vue économique et politique justifient les espoir que nous avons conçus ne faut-il pas

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>58</sup> The accident was told by a journalist Jean Joly in “Les belles réalisations Françaises L’école des Beaux-arts” in *L’Avenir du Tonkin*, 10226, May 21 1930. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/08.

<sup>59</sup> Lachowsky, Michèle and Benzakin, Joel, *Vietnam: Plastic Arts from 1925 to Our Time*, 19.

nous appliquer à développer son influence morale sur cette région du Pacifique qui préoccupe tous les esprits (propagande des idées) ” [“Now that Indochina has taken an important place in the Far-East and the political and economic results justify the hopes that we had, should we not develop its moral influence on this region (propaganda of ideas)”].<sup>60</sup> In his museum, Tardieu wanted to show a chronological progression of French art, which was the convention at that time. In the museum of Western art, Tardieu wanted to include works by Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Titian, Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Rembrandt, and Velasquez. Jean Clouet would represent the French school of the sixteenth century and Nicholas Poussin and Hyacinthe Rigaud, the seventeenth century. Tardieu explained that the museum should insist on the eighteenth century where the French school became free of all influences, developed its own style, and became the source of inspiration for other countries. The museum would display works by Antoine Watteau, François Boucher, Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, Jacques-Louis David, Pierre Paul Prud'hon, Eugène Delacroix, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. This enumeration of artists corresponded to a genealogy that was also claimed by modern artists at that time.

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<sup>60</sup> *Rapport de Victor Tardieu [au Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine], sur la création d'un musée d'art occidental à Hanoï, 1923-1926, 7 p., ANOM, INDO - GGI - //51039, my translation.*

### III. LANDSCAPE, NATURE AND APPREHENDING INDOCHINA

Tardieu's conservative and nationalistic view of art reflected the artistic climate of the period. In order to mend a territory destroyed by World War I, artists turned to nature and to a glorification of the French land, rendering landscape painting a favorite mode of expression. This chapter discusses how the increasing popularity of landscape painting in France between the wars was reflected at the EBAI, notably with the work of Joseph Inguimberty. Landscape painting at the EBAI inscribed itself in the colonial discourse of apprehending the colony's geography and the nationalistic discourse of exalting the fertility of the French soil.

The French territory had been deeply wounded by World War I: most of the battles had taken place on French ground and villages and cities had been destroyed. Following the traumatic war, a return to "mother earth" and to regionalism was at its apex. After the war, artists, pioneers of cubism, and abstract painters would create mostly figurative and naturalistic paintings. Interwar artistic activity in France would later be defined as a *rappel à l'ordre* (call to order) by scholars. Golan explains: "As a result, instead of the *tabula rasa* predicated by high modernism [...] we find a collective ethos driven toward the restoration of what had been *before* the war: a world stilled, and a vision infused – from the paintings of ex-fauves and cubists-turned-naturalists, to those of the so called *naïfs*, all the way to the surrealists – by nostalgia and memory."<sup>61</sup> The nostalgia for antebellum France was experienced simultaneously by modern artists and academic artists and took the singular shape of landscape painting.

Landscapists participated in the exaltation of the French soil. As Golan argues, "the landscape's mapping of the external world participated in a specific regionalist ideology that

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<sup>61</sup> Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars*, ix.

linked France's cultural vitality to the strength of its rootedness in the soil."<sup>62</sup> To go back to "mother earth" and to protect and repair the French "fertility" was a priority for the population and for the artists. Landscape painting, as Golan writes, "ultimately contributed both to the glorification of those closest to the soil – the French peasantry – and to the denigration of all things urban and industrial, and thereby modern and foreign."<sup>63</sup> Artists looked back to their French roots to "restore a broken link with nature"; painters went back to the countryside and painted landscapes in the fashion of the Barbizon school.

Artists of the interwar era were looking to be part of a genealogy, representative of a grand French artistic tradition that had been broken by the war. Indeed, the French cultural ambiance was one of obsession with creating a French art history lineage and Corot became the center of attention. Emulating the school of Barbizon, landscape painting became a national phenomenon. In *L'art et ses institutions en France: de la Révolution à nos jours* Gérard Monnier indicates that landscape painting dominated national artistic practices and replaced the painted portrait during the interwar era. Monnier adds that the practice of landscape painting became "the essential operating presence of the Beaux-Arts in the departments"<sup>64</sup> and the image of the painter outside with his easel facing a picturesque site became widespread.

Gradually, the revolutionary aspect of impressionism was evaporating as the movement

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<sup>62</sup> Golan, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>64</sup> Gérard Monnier, *L'art et ses institutions en France: de la Révolution à nos jours*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 213.

was slowly being accepted as part of the French tradition.<sup>65</sup> Impressionism and post-impressionism progressively became conventional and integrated into the genealogy of French art in contrast to abstraction and cubism, which remained the enemy of the academy. Artists who studied in Schools of Fine-Arts would integrate impressionist and post-impressionist techniques, for their landscape painting and *plein-air* painting was practiced in Schools of Fine Arts.<sup>66</sup>

The regionalism, the denigration of urbanization, and the glorification of the countryside were echoed in Indochina notably by the discourse of the EBAI. The regionalism in the French colonies was seen as the natural complement to the regionalism in mainland France. Colonies constituted the Greater France and participated in the effort of reconstruction of the nation, economically, demographically, and ideologically. As Maurice Reclus wrote, after the war French colonies “carried France singlehandedly.” The lands of French colonies could be seen as a cure to France’s destroyed landscape with their luxuriant and fertile nature that brought many natural exportable goods. Moreover, Golan notes that the ideological link between the colonial and the regional was evident and enhanced in colonial exhibitions such as the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques* in 1937. The discourse of the EBAI to renovate Annamite arts and crafts, in addition to its colonialist “civilizing mission,” could fall under the same regionalist and traditionalist discourse as well. The Governor of Indochina Pierre Pasquier notably said: “France once more will follow through the nobility of its intentions and the largesse of its ideas. It will restore, instead of dissolving; and it will restore in the direction of Annamite

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<sup>65</sup> Exhibitions in state-run-space on impressionist painters were organized at the *Orangerie des tuileries*: Camille Pissarro in 1930, Claude Monet in 1931, Edouard Manet in 1932 and Auguste Renoir in 1933. See Toby Norris, *Modern Artists and the State in France Between the Two World Wars*, unpublished thesis, Chicago: Northwestern University, 2005.

<sup>66</sup> See the exhibition catalogue *French Naturalist Painters (1890-1950)*, (London: Skira, 2013), which presents the work of eight academically trained artists who painted landscapes at the interwar and were influenced by impressionism and post-impressionism.

national tradition.”<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the school’s curriculum enhanced nature as part of the local artistic tradition, which was described as being influenced by Chinese art. In order to explain to the French reader the basic principles of Chinese painting, in 1930, Nam Son published an article titled “*La peinture chinoise, technique et symbolisme: manière spéciale des Chinois d’interpréter la nature*” or in English, “Chinese painting, technique and symbolism: the special method of the Chinese of interpreting nature,” in which he outlined the fundamentals of Chinese painting and its relation to nature. He inserted passages of Chinese texts on landscape painting. Nam Son concluded his article by writing:

Souhaitons, comme nous le professons à l’école des beaux-arts de l’Indochine, le retour à la nature, source de toutes les inspirations, qui domine la peinture chinoise des belles époques, trésor de matériaux considérables, d’effets les plus pittoresques que ne saurait contenir aucun livre d’enseignement [...] “Le moment est venu, a dit PETRUCCI où une civilisation générale semble vouloir se constituer sur la terre par l’absorption des antiques dissemblances” ; il y a intérêt pour l’Europe comme pour l’extrême Asie, à étudier et à comprendre un idéal étranger; bien que la manière de s’exprimer, la technique de chacune d’elles soit différente; la source où s’abreuvent leur plus célèbres représentants est la même: *l’éternelle et inépuisable nature*.

Let us wish, as we are professing at the EBAI, for the return to nature, source of all inspirations that dominates the Chinese painting of golden eras, treasure of considerable materials, of effects of the most picturesque that could not be contained in any teaching books [...] “The moment has come, said PETRUCCI, where a general civilization wants to constitute itself by the absorption of antique differences”; there is an interest for Europe as for Far East Asia, to study and to understand a foreign ideal; even though the ways to express the technique of each of them are different; the source of their most famous representatives is the same: *the eternal and inexhaustible nature*.<sup>68</sup>

In a similar prose to Tardieu’s, quoting Petrucci in the same fashion, Nam Son described nature as the source of both European and Far East Asian art. The Indochinese nature had to inspire

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<sup>67</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's national revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 134.

<sup>68</sup> Nam Son, “La peinture chinoise, technique et symbolisme: manière spéciale des Chinois d’interpréter la nature” in *Vietnamese studies*, 2003, 79-101. 101

both the local students and their French teachers. Nature was especially important as it was, for Tardieu, what distinguished the “Sino-Annamite aesthetic” from the “Mediterranean aesthetic.” By apprehending nature and painting landscape, Annamite students would go back to their roots and French painters would penetrate the Annamite “soul.”

Tardieu was notably inspired by the local nature and wrote in letters of the importance of the sun for his painting. In 1922, he wrote: “Le soleil est un grand faiseur de miracle et ici il ne fait pas défaut” [“The sun is a great maker of miracles and here it is everywhere”].<sup>69</sup> A picture of Tardieu in his atelier, shows him surrounded by some landscape paintings (Figure 5) but Tardieu, during his time in Hanoi, rarely painted due to his position as the EBAI’s director. He only had time to paint *pochades*, quick oil sketches on board that he made on site, in the streets or in the countryside. Nature in Indochina, for the French painter, could mend the destroyed landscape of France. Indeed, Tardieu saw Indochina as a “heaven on earth [...] what a joy to be alive,” as he wrote to his wife in 1930.<sup>70</sup> Tardieu’s paintings remained rare but there was another teacher who was interested in the local landscape and painted more frequently: Inguimberty.

Inguimberty’s art focused on the Indochinese landscape and on the farmers in the rice paddies. Inguimberty was brought to the EBAI by Tardieu in 1925 to supervise the decorative arts section of the school. Inguimberty probably met Tardieu and Nam Son in Paris in 1925 at the National School of Decorative Arts. In 1910, Inguimberty had enrolled in the Marseille School of Fine Arts, whose teachers focused on Provencal landscape painting and, later on, in 1913, just before the war, he enrolled in the National School of Decorative Arts in Paris. The painter was a member of the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* and exhibited there regularly. In

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<sup>69</sup> Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/01, my translation.

<sup>70</sup> Tardieu, letter to his wife Caline in 1930: “c’est le paradis terrestre... quel bonheur que de vivre.” Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/02.

Hanoi, in 1927, Inguimberty created an atelier dedicated to the artistic potential of lacquer. When he was not teaching, the painter created large format paintings that he painted *en plein air* in the countryside. He travelled in the villages around Hanoi on his bicycle, sketching the farmers in the rice paddies. Inguimberty preferred working outside. He organized trips for his students to Ha Long Bay to encourage them to paint from nature. Even though Inguimberty was considered less strict than Tardieu in his teaching, he was conservative and an “official” artist in that he did not follow modern movements in France; he was a member of the official *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* and his work was bought and commissioned by colonial officials. Jean Cassou defined the term “official artist” as displaying a preference for landscape. “Official” art tended to integrate modern innovations only once they lost their “virulence.” It was essentially considered a “bourgeois” art.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike Tardieu, Inguimberty was able to paint regularly in addition to his teaching duties. In 1929, he exhibited thirty-one artworks, including paintings and sketches, in an exhibition titled *Paysages et figures du Delta tonkinois (Landscapes and people of the Tonkin Delta)* at *l'imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient* in Hanoi. The artworks included *Mare au soleil (Pond in sunshine)*, 1926; *Labourage (Plowing)*; *Hoa Thuong; Repiquage (Transplanting rice)*, 1929; *Rizièrre (Rice Paddy)*, 1928; *Maternité (Maternity)*, 1925; *Mare sous les bambous (Pond under bamboos)*, 1925; *Tonkin*, 1929; *Rizièrre et village (Rice field and village)*, 1928; *Mare temps gris (Pond gray weather)*; *Rizièrre après moisson (Rice paddies after monsoon)*; *Femmes assises (Seated women)*, 1928; *Bananiers (Banana trees)*, 1927; *Composition*; *Chaumière (Dwelling)*, 1927; *Moisson (Monsoon)*; *Acropole Athènes (Athenian Acropolis)*, 1924. As the list suggests, the artworks mainly depicted monsoons, ponds, and work involved on rice paddies, which

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-Garde : defining modern and traditional in France, 1900-1960*, 17.

characterized rural Indochina with the exception of one painting with the Athenian acropolis as a subject matter.<sup>72</sup>

Inguimberty's Indochinese work dealt uniquely with the rural and the mountainous region of Tonkin, avoiding the representation of the city of Hanoi where the school was established. Tonkin was the name for the French protectorate in the Northern region of Vietnam where the Red River Delta and Hanoi were situated.<sup>73</sup> Instead of the city, Inguimberty preferred the countryside and to convey its "atmosphere" with his study of ponds and rice paddies under different seasons and times. *Mare au soleil*, exhibited in 1929 in *Paysages et figures du Delta tonkinois*, is a landscape that captures the luxurious tropical Indochinese flora with the inclusion of palm trees on the left foreground. The colors are realistic and the brushstroke is heavy with an overall naturalistic rendering. Inguimberty was trying to convey accurately the light of the sun.

The exhibition in 1929 was showcased in a newspaper at the local level, where Inguimberty was described as an impressionist.

Inguimberty n'est venu chercher ici ni les succès mondains, ni les décorations, ni l'argent mais l'âme de la campagne et du campagnard tonkinois. Cette campagne terne et triste, ce paysan si humble, dans le sens étymologique du mot, c'est-à-dire si près de la terre voilà ce qui a plu à un homme de cœur. Aussi comme il l'a comprise, cette terre tonkinoise! Comme il l'a pénétrée l'âme de ces humbles paysans! Impressionniste, M. Inguimberty a le don de communiquer son impression et cette impression est d'abord celle de tous ceux qui ont su comprendre et aimer la terre tonkinoise et le peuple de ses campagnes et qui retrouvent sur ces toiles la lumière, l'atmosphère, la couleur du paysage, les gestes et la physionomie des gens dans leur vie de tous les jours.

Inguimberty did not come here to look for success, decorations or money but the soul of the countryside and of the country dweller. This lackluster and sad countryside, the peasant so humble, in the etymologic sense of the word, i.e. so close to the earth is what attracted a man of heart. And how well he understood this Tonkinese land! How well he penetrated the soul of these humble peasants! Impressionist, Mr. Inguimberty has the gift

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<sup>72</sup> Inguimberty travelled to Spain and Greece before moving to Hanoi. Perhaps the inclusion of the Athenian Acropolis was to compare the Greek landscape and the Indochinese landscape.

<sup>73</sup> Indochina was divided into five different territories: Tonkin in the North, Annam at the Center, Cochinchina in the South, Laos and Cambodia.

to communicate his impression and this impression is the one of those who have understood and loved the Tonkinese land and the people of its countryside and who rediscover on these canvases the light, the atmosphere, the color of the landscape, the gestures and the physiognomy of the people in their everyday life.<sup>74</sup>

The term “impressionist” seems misused; Inguimberty’s style was not impressionistic, but he was painting *en plein air*. The reviewer could have used the term “impressionist” to explain Inguimberty’s mastery of the Tonkinese land and his “impression” as the text was written so emphatically. The review highlighted the fact that the painter could grasp the Tonkinese land and by understanding it, he could penetrate the “soul of these humble peasants.”

The painter’s knowledge of the countryside was also emulated by Inguimberty’s friendship with Pierre Gourou. The painter collaborated with Gourou, a geographer, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Red River peasants in 1936. In his thesis, titled *Les paysans du delta tonkinois; étude de géographie humaine* and illustrated by Inguimberty, Gourou explained that the Tonkinese population was mostly made of peasants. The goal of the study was to understand the “exceptional” density of Red River region with its 430 habitants by square kilometers. Even though the population was compact, Gourou noted that: “Le delta du Tonkin avec ces 430 habitants au kilomètre carré, ne peut absolument pas être comparé aux régions d’Europe où pullule une population grouillante. Les pays européens à très forte densité sont tous des pays industriels, à grand développement urbain. Au Tonkin [...] le paysage reste rural, les habitants restent des paysans. Cette population prodigieusement dense est exclusivement campagnarde; les villes en effet n’ont pas été comprises dans le calcul de la densité moyenne de la population [...] les villes étant étonnamment médiocres” [“The Tonkinese Delta can absolutely not be compared to European regions where the population is teeming. The European countries with strong densities are all industrial, with great urban development [...] In Tonkin [...] the landscape stays

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<sup>74</sup> “L’exposition Inguimberty” in *l’éveil économique de l’Indochine*, 607, 1929, 18.

rural, the habitants stay peasants. This population, prodigiously dense, is exclusively rustic; cities, in fact, have not been taken into account in the calculation of the population density...cities are surprisingly mediocre”].<sup>75</sup>

This emphasis on the rusticity of the Tonkinese population shows the need to portray Indochina as rural, in spite of the fact that cities were booming in Tonkin, thanks to France’s politics of urbanization. Nonetheless, the geographer preferred to devote his study to Tonkinese peasants, which for him and the French colonial administrators were at the heart of the Annamite civilization, characterized by its harmonious relation to nature. Inguimberty and Gourou shared the same interest in the rural Tonkin. Gourou recalled that Inguimberty was meticulous in representing nature: “It was not enough to come across a rice plantation that formed a harmonious setting with a tree, a clump of bamboo, a path and a shelter. He had to know how the rice plantation was farmed, transplanted and harvested.”<sup>76</sup> Inguimberty participated in the rationalization and colonial possession of the Tonkinese nature. Moreover, the geographer described Inguimberty’s work as ethnographic: “Insister sur la grande valeur ethnographique de cette œuvre picturale [...] si l’on veut savoir comment le petit paysan conduit son buffle, on l’apprendra par ces œuvres mieux que par la photographie” [“To insist on the great ethnographic value of this pictorial work...if one wants to know how the small peasant conducts his buffalo, one would know better by looking at these paintings rather than photographs”].<sup>77</sup> The ethnographic aspect of Inguimberty’s painting and his “realistic” depiction of the Red River

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<sup>75</sup> Pierre Gourou, *Les paysans du delta tonkinois; étude de géographie humaine*, (Paris: EFEO, 1936), 13.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Giulia Pentscheff, *Joseph Inguimberty 1896-1971, premier catalogue de l’œuvre peinte*, 68, my translation.

<sup>77</sup> Pierre Gourou, “Le Delta Tonkinois vu par un peintre. Critique d’un géographe” in *Le monde colonial illustré*, 162, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1937 p12-13, my translation.

delta's peasantry were appreciated by colonial officials.

The 1929 exhibition was a success; the General government of Indochina bought several paintings and Inguimberty received official commissions for the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris. Inguimberty was commissioned to create three paintings for the 1931 Exposition at the Bois de Vincennes. The three paintings were exhibited in the Tonkin Pavilion, in a square room, behind a replica of the Balny pagoda. The compositions had been ordered to represent the Tonkinese population and region and decorate the Tonkin pavilion. The three paintings, *Travail dans les rizières* (*Work in the rice paddies*) (Figure 6), *Scène en Indochine* (*Scene in Indochina*) (Figure 8), and *Travaux de ferme au Tonkin* (*Farm works in Tonkin*) (Figure 9) are large formats; they probably covered the entirety of the walls of the room; each of them is more than two meters by three meters large.<sup>78</sup> *Farm work in Tonkin* depicts Tonkin's mountainous "high region," *Work in the rice paddies'* subject matter is a rice field in the red river delta, and *Scene in Indochina* depicts a family in the Haiphong port.

*Work in the rice paddies* is 239 cm by 388 cm (7ft. 10 in by 12ft. 8in) and is a landscape depicting laborers in the rice plantations. In the foreground, four women are at work. The women are seen walking, carrying bamboo poles; the one at the center is hunched over, her legs and left hand are in the water, she is transplanting rice.<sup>79</sup> Behind the four figures, in the middle ground of the painting, there are two women standing in the water, planting or transplanting rice, while on

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<sup>78</sup> *Travail dans les rizières* and *Scène en Indochine* are stored in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille's reserve collection in Marseille, France and *Travaux de ferme au Tonkin* is stored in the Musée du Quai Branly's reserve collection in Paris, France.

<sup>79</sup> Rice farming as defined by Gourou in *Les paysans du delta tonkinois; étude de géographie humaine* consists of different stages: planting, transplanting, and harrowing the rice corresponding to specific moment of the year. The body position of the woman at the center could indicate that she is transplanting rice.

the right, a man is harrowing rice with a buffalo.<sup>80</sup> The silhouette of a laborer and a buffalo can be seen in the background in front of a village with a traditional *Dinh* surrounded by trees and mountains, topped by a grey cloudy sky. The painting reflects a colonial vision of the landscape and its peasantry with a timeless representation of rice paddies. The four main characters are graceful women working at an unspecific time of the year. Since the tasks represented in the painting capture all stages of rice farming—transplanting, carrying, planting, and harrowing rice—it is difficult to identify whether Inguimberty is depicting harvest or cultivation. Moreover, the season is unclear as well, with the yellow and green rice plants contrasting with the deep green grass and the cloudy grey sky. No trace of western civilization is shown in the painting. The women are dressed in traditional clothing with hats and brown tunics tied with a colored sash; the village includes no western buildings, despite the fact that French schools were built in the countryside. The nature is lush, with greenery and trees depicted in the background. The buffaloes add the last touch to the exoticism and the picturesqueness of the landscape and reinforce the timeless character of the painting.

The painter plays with full and empty spaces in order to create a balanced composition; women are carrying empty and filled baskets, the flooded rice field contrasts with the fullness of the grass. The women lean left and right in harmonious balance. The curved lines of the bamboo poles and the rice paddies enhance their movements. The women's faces are not detailed and are hidden behind their hats, which are conical and flat. The women's delicate and balanced gestures, their lack of expression, completed by the curvaceous lines of the rice paddies give to the ensemble an orderly composition, erasing the pain of the labor, and emitting only harmony and calm. The four women could also be seen as symbolizing the feminized fertility of the Tonkinese land. However, contrary to the depicted calm, the conditions of work were in reality

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<sup>80</sup> The painting depicts different stages of the rice farming: planting, transplanting, and harrowing.

extremely brutal, as outlined by Gourou; the women had to carry heavy loads, and stand for ten hours in the water, attacked by leeches, under a blazing sun.

Inguimberty himself painted under a blazing sun for several hours as he sketched and painted *en plein air*. His technique was to draw first, creating sketches and studies. He drew excessively to be in control of the scene, to understand it, and once he was in control he then erased the drawing by applying colors. He painted with both a paintbrush and a knife. He probably used a knife to create solid, even, distinct colors that could be seen from a distance. He painted all of his artworks outdoors, even those with a format of three to four meters. To make his large format paintings, Inguimberty created a system of scaffolding, a technique that he saw in the studios of the designers he knew. He carried the rolled canvas to the scene he intended to paint, and brought along a scaffold, which he used as a stretcher. When he ended his work for the day, he would leave the unfinished canvas in a hut in the village of Kim Lien.<sup>81</sup> Since all his works were done outdoors, the larger the format, the more time he would spend in the countryside, absorbed by his surroundings, and the better he could understand the Tonkinese landscape. Nguyen Quang Phong, one of his students explained, that Inguimberty was “just like a Vietnamese painter who understands and loves his homeland.”<sup>82</sup> The brushstrokes are heavy with a thick and even rendition (Figure 7). By painting with thick brushstrokes and creating thick patches of color, Inguimberty reflected the heaviness of the humidity, the weight of the sun and his attachment to the Tonkinese soil.

The colors in his painting are dark, enhanced by the grey sky. Shades of greens are used for the grass and the rice plants. The village’s brown and red colors are used for the women’s

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<sup>81</sup> See Giulia Pentscheff’s Inguimberty’s catalogue, where she describes his scaffolding technique and includes pictures.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Nora Taylor in *Painters in Hanoi: An ethnography of Vietnamese Art*, 31.

traditional clothes as well. The rice paddies are of yellow, green, brown, and grey colors. The colors do not necessarily follow academic rules and tend to portray what Inguimberty saw when he was painting. Indeed, *plein air* painting became acceptable and popular in the interwar years, with traditional artists using impressionist and post-impressionist techniques with an overall naturalistic rendition. Likewise Inguimberty always painted figuratively. By depicting Indochina in a naturalistic manner, Inguimberty offered a comprehensible rationalized nature to French viewers: a nature “scientifically” analyzed, mediated by French colonialism that was exported to and exhibited in mainland France.

The other two commissioned paintings at the Exposition have more static compositions. *Scene in Indochina* is structured vertically; one sees a family seated, gathered under a tent, against a background of local rafts floating on the pink Red River. The third painting, *Farm work in Tonkin*, depicts a farm situated in the highlands using darker colors to match the mountainous region.

The three paintings, exhibited at the Exposition, contributed to the glorification of the peasants and the soil, completely erasing the industrialization of Indochina’s industrialization that accompanied France’s colonization. In 1931, the colonial government built 2.274 kilometers of railroad lines and 33.000 kilometers of roads that were traveled by 30.000 motorized vehicles. Indochina was the second most profitable French colony after Algeria, the most lucrative export being rice.<sup>83</sup> The phenomenon of industrialization initiated by French colonization impacted Hanoi as well. Hanoi, the “cultural capital” of French Indochina, was booming in the twenties, keeping the urbanization of Hanoi more pressing and in total opposition to the subject represented by EBAI’s artworks. In 1929, Hanoi had a population of 143,182 inhabitants with

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<sup>83</sup> FM - AGEFOM//533: Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris de 1931, *Section Indochinoise, rapport sur la participation de l’indochine*, 26.

4,685 French citizens and 127,910 native *Tonkinois*.<sup>84</sup> The infrastructure was created for a French population in Indochina of approximately 0.2 percent of the total population.

Neither the French painters nor the Indochinese artists captured the modernization and industrialization of Indochina, unlike the literary works of the period. French literature and French writers could sometimes condemn the violence of colonization; in 1930 Paul Monet notably exposed human trafficking in Indochina in *Les Jauniers*. Similarly, literary movements by local intellectuals were inspired by the booming urbanization and French modernity. The intellectual collective known as the Self-Reliant Literary group published satirical newspapers and even created a manifesto.<sup>85</sup> Unlike EBAI's painters, writers because they did not participate in colonial exhibitions, perhaps had more liberty of expression. In contrast, painters at the EBAI purposely portrayed a rustic Indochina that could be exhibited in colonial events. Haiphong, in *Scene in Indochina*, was, in reality, an industrial port city with maritime wharfs alongside industrial areas with warehouses and not a small port with river boats: "a city detached from its land, from its natural context, with no roots in local reality."<sup>86</sup> French artists purposively avoided a realistic depiction of the colonial experience, which was not as peaceful as represented. This was especially true in 1930 when the Yen Bai mutiny happened, not far from Hanoi.

French artists wanted to portray Indochina as a heaven on earth even though the life

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Vann, *White city on the red river: Race, power, and culture in French colonial Hanoi, 1872—1954*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California Santa Cruz, 1999.

<sup>85</sup> Martina Thucnhi Nguyen in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation *The Self-Reliant Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn): Colonial Modernism in Vietnam, 1932-1941* defines *The Self-Reliant Literary Group* as "the first Vietnamese modernists."

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Gwendolyn Wright, "Indochina: The Folly of Grandeur" in *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, (Chicago University Press, 1991, pp. 161-234), 216.

could be as difficult as in France.<sup>87</sup> They wanted to represent a peasantry close to the earth, not destroyed by the war, not spoiled by Western influences, and not disfigured by abstraction. By uniquely portraying a rustic Indochina, Inguimberty perpetuated the colonial desire for a pure, untouched tradition that would serve as a propaganda tool during colonial exhibitions and as an antidote to modern art.

Though not an awardee of the *Prix de l'Indochine*, Inguimberty participated in its goal: “Faire connaître l’Indochine à la métropole, la faire admirer, la faire aimer, attirer vers elle ceux que tente la connaissance des pays lointains” [“to make Indochina admirable, loveable, to attract those who want to know remote countries to the colony”].<sup>88</sup> Clearly, Inguimberty’s landscapes were part of the colonial art economy, “bound up with the discourse of imperialism” that had to please the colonial administration. From this perspective, Tardieu would most certainly know how to use the colonial apparatus to create the EBAI and to promote its art.

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<sup>87</sup> Tardieu in a letter to his wife, on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1924, admits that life in Indochina is as complicated as in mainland France and one as to fight as anywhere else. Tardieu was probably referring to critics and barriers he had to face in founding the EBAI. Fonds Victor Tardieu box 125/02.

<sup>88</sup> Dr de Fenis, “L’École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine” in *Extrême-Asie*, January 1926. 4, my translation.

#### IV. *PRIX DE L'INDOCHINE*, TARDIEU AND ARTISTIC PROPAGANDA

The search for ideal beauty, the depiction of a peaceful world and the creation of a pure Annamite art were supported by the geographical location of the school and its place in the colonial apparatus. This chapter demonstrates how Tardieu used the colonial system to promote the art of the EBAI by integrating the *Prix de l'Indochine* into the working structure of the EBAI, and by participating in colonial exhibitions, notably the 1931 Exposition. Tardieu's willingness to integrate Annamite art into the French tradition was consistent with the period's obsession with creating a French art history lineage devoid of abstract art and the avant-garde.

In order to start a School of Fine Arts in Indochina, Tardieu created an institution that could be inserted into the official colonial apparatus and the colonial artistic circuit. One of the most important features of the EBAI's creation was the reorganization and integration of the SCAF's *Prix de l'Indochine* as the foundation of the school's working structure. Louis Dumoulin created the SCAF on April 23 1908, with the goal, as written in article I of its status: “de réunir, en outre, des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, architectes, tous ceux qui, d’une façon générale, soit par des recherches scientifiques, soit par des travaux artistiques et littéraires ou archéologiques s’intéressent au domaine colonial français et veulent en faire connaître et rendre populaire les aspects, les mœurs, l’histoire et les richesses artistiques” [“to gather painters, sculptors, engravers, architects, everyone who, in a general way, by scientific research or by artistic, literary, archeological works is interested in the colonial field and wants to make known, popularize its aspects, mores, history and artistic wealth”].<sup>89</sup> Dominique Jarrassé in his article “*L’art colonial entre orientalisme et art primitif: Recherche d’une définition*” writes that the

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Dominique Sanchez, *La Société coloniale des artistes français puis Société des Beaux-Arts de la France d’Outre mer: répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs œuvres (1908 – 1970)*. (Dijon: L’Échelle de Jacob, 2010), IV, my translation.

SCAF being founded in Delacroix's atelier "son organisation au sein du plus traditionnel des Salons en dit long sur sa dimension officielle et ses options esthétiques [...] Même si les promoteurs de cet art colonial ont une ambition esthétique, il vise d'abord une fonction propagandiste ["its organization within the most traditional salon, says a lot about its official dimension and its aesthetic option [...] Even if the promoters of this colonial art have an aesthetic ambition, it aims first to serve a propagandistic function"].<sup>90</sup> Exhibiting artworks from the colonies in salons and helping the mainland population to understand the colonial field fulfilled the propagandistic function in terms consistent with the State's needs. The first SCAF's exhibition took place in 1909 at the Berheim Jeune art gallery in Paris and afterwards the Salon was moved to the prestigious *Grand Palais* under the umbrella of the *Société des Artistes Français*. In order to represent the different colonies, one of the imperatives of the SCAF was to give artists travel awards. With the help of the colonies' governors, SCAF succeeded in offering travel awards to various French colonies.

In 1909, the *Prix de l'Indochine* was created by governor Anthony Klobukowski, with an award of 3000 francs. The *Prix de l'Indochine*'s goal was to promote the distant colony. Tardieu, who was granted the award in 1920, realized that 3000 francs was not financially adequate to allow the awardee to stay more than a few months in Indochina. *Prix de l'Indochine*'s awardees typically stayed only four or five months in the colony, which was not enough to discover and absorb Indochina's nature. While he was completing his mural for the Hanoi University, Tardieu was asked to write a report on the arts in Indochina by the General Governor of Indochina, Martial Merlin. The French painter then elaborated progressively the idea of reorganizing the *Prix de l'Indochine* as the "characteristic fact" of the EBAI. Tardieu wrote: "Si véritablement on

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<sup>90</sup> Dominique Jarassé, "L'art colonial entre orientalisme et art primitif: Recherche d'une définition" in *Histoire de l'art*, 51, November 2002, 3-16, 7, my translation.

pense que la propagande par les œuvres des artistes présente quelques avantages et je suis persuadé pour ma part qu'elle en a beaucoup, surtout en ce moment où l'on songe à organiser le tourisme en Indochine, il faudrait retenir les artistes" ["If truthfully, one thinks that propaganda by artists' works presents some advantages and I am persuaded on my part that it has a lot of advantages, especially in this moment where we think to organize tourism in Indochina, we should retain artists"]<sup>91</sup>

To retain French artists in the remote colony, Tardieu restructured the *Prix de l'Indochine* to give financial stability to artists, enabling them to produce artworks that portray the colony in a favorable manner, which they would later exhibit at colonial exhibitions and at the SCAF's salon in Paris. Instead of a meager 3000 francs, Tardieu raised the award to a two-year paid journey.<sup>92</sup> The new *Prix de l'Indochine* offered a first class return trip to Indochina, a monthly salary of a 5000 francs during two years, which included one year where the artist could travel freely across the colony, and one year spent teaching at the EBAI, free first class transportation across Indochina and free housing. The awardee would live in a villa located at the EBAI comprised of a large studio and a "particularly comfortable" modern apartment. French artists would then have to teach painting only fourteen hours per week, two hours and twenty-five minutes, six mornings a week, leaving the rest of the day for their own work.<sup>93</sup> The subsequent changes brought to the *Prix* could only be attractive.

Tardieu purposively framed the *Prix*' lofty privileges as a propagandistic tool. The

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<sup>91</sup> Tardieu, *sur l'enseignement des beaux-arts en Indochine*, Victor Tardieu box 125/05.

<sup>92</sup> The 3000 francs award in 1924 is equivalent to 2694,37 euros in 2015 (conversion rate on [insee.fr](http://insee.fr)). Instead of a sole 3000 francs the new *Prix* offered a monthly stipend of 5000 francs or 4490,61 euros monthly for two years. It was a considerable increase.

<sup>93</sup> Tardieu, *Rapport L'école des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine*, 1931, 15. Tardieu describes the benefits of the *Prix de l'Indochine*. Fonds Victor Tardieu box 125/07.

director wrote in a report in 1931: “Ainsi le but de propagande que la première forme de ce prix n’avait pas pu réaliser est dès maintenant atteint. Déchargés de tout souci matériel, ayant accompli avec des avantages considérables un voyage magnifique, les titulaires du Prix de l’Indochine ne peuvent garder de la Colonie qu’un souvenir heureux et ne peuvent dans leurs œuvres qu’en parler éloquemment” [“Thus the propaganda goal of the award’s first edition, that could not have been realized, has now been attained. Unburdened of any financial worries, having accomplished a splendid journey with considerable advantages, the awardees of the *Prix de l’Indochine* can only have happy memories of the colony and speak about it eloquently in their art works”].<sup>94</sup>

Under these privileged conditions, Indochina could unequivocally appeal to French artists, motivating them to produce artworks that would depict a “peaceful” atmosphere and a “beautiful” colony. Two years of pay dedicated to travelling and only working fourteen hours per week for a year, would be attractive to many artists. Especially when the financial crisis hit Europe in 1929 and unemployment rose, winning the *Prix de l’Indochine* would have been perceived as an extraordinary opportunity, financially and culturally. The remote colony could have indeed appeared as a “heaven on earth.” For two years, it would become a refuge from distressed, traumatized France, a respite from the violence of the previous war, especially since most of the awardees (all male) had been enlisted. Enhanced by the distance of the colony from Paris (the trip to Indochina lasted four weeks by boat), the two-year sojourn could become a respite from modern art as well. Artists selected for the *Prix* were, indeed, part of the official and academic French art system and had previously won awards attributed by traditional salons before coming to Indochina.

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<sup>94</sup> Tardieu, *Rapport L’école des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine*, 1931, 16. Fonds Victor Tardieu box 125/07, my translation.

A jury composed of three members of the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, three members of each of the three French artistic societies and a delegation of the SCAF awarded the *Prix* at the end of the annual salons. The awardee then had to exhibit at the SCAF's Salon located in the *Grand Palais* under the protection of the *Société des Artistes Français*. Tardieu exhibited there in 1923. Louis Dumoulin, SCAF's Director, was connected with important political and artistic figures. Secretaries and former Secretaries of the colonies, secretaries of foreign affairs, Under Secretaries for the *Beaux-Arts*, as well as the Directors of the *Société des Artistes Français*, the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* and the *Salon d'Automne* were members of the SCAF.<sup>95</sup> Despite the surprising inclusion of the *Salon d'Automne* amongst the members, the artists selected were conventional artists who could depict the colony in a conformist way. To take an example, Raymond Virac, winner of the *Prix* in 1927, was a former student of the Paris School of Fine Arts and Evariste Jonchère, the 1932 awardee, had previously won the *Grand Prix de Rome* in 1925 and the gold medal at the *Salon des Artistes Français* in 1930.

The intricacies of the French artistic scene were well known and used formerly by Bonnat as well: "The web of interdependencies between the Academy, the official Salons, the *Conseil Supérieur de l'enseignement des Beaux-Arts*, the *Conseil des Musées Nationaux*, and the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, the *Villa Médicis* and the Under Secretariat allowed the art exhibited by academicians like Bonnat to achieve its ultimate legitimacy as "State Art."<sup>96</sup> The SCAF and Tardieu took advantage of their high ranked connections to promote their missions and to be part

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<sup>95</sup> Dominique Sanchez, in *La Société coloniale des artistes français*, explains that Dumoulin built for the SCAF an impressive patronage of 60 members being part of the high artistic and political society. The inclusion of the *Salon d'Automne* seems surprising since the SCAF was traditional and propagandistic; its inclusion was probably due to Dumoulin's large network of friendship.

<sup>96</sup> Fae Brauer, "One Friday at the French Artists' Salon: Pompiers and Official Artists at the Coup de Cubisme", 84.

of a “State Art.” Like his master, Tardieu had large connections in the official artistic and colonial milieu, he had won the *Société des Artistes Français*’ Prix national in 1902 and, in 1931, obtained the prestigious title of *Chevalier d’honneur de la Légion Française*. Tardieu knew, and was acquainted with, chief political personalities: Indochina General Governors, Paul Blanchard de la Brosse, Minister and colonial administrator, Governor General Albert Sarraut and the President of France, Paul Doumer, who visited an exhibition of the EBAI at *l’Agence Economique de l’Indochine* in Paris in 1932. The director’s friendship with high ranked personalities in Indochina was sometimes under attack in local newspapers by French journalists, portraying Tardieu as an opportunist.<sup>97</sup> Finally, having reorganized the *Prix*, in the end, Tardieu was responsible for its running; the article 3 of the EBAI’s decree specified that the director had to assure the functioning of the *Prix de l’Indochine*.

Besides the inclusion of the EBAI into the French artistic circuit, the restructuring of the *prix* fulfilled multiple goals: French artists would portray the colony in a positive manner, awardees would guide the local students by teaching the French academic tradition, which would improve the Annamite arts and crafts quality that, in the end, would compete with Japanese and Chinese art objects, inserting French taste in Asia. Tardieu worked on the assumption that since Japanese prints and art were popular in France, Indochinese artistic production could benefit from this development, and it could serve tourism in Indochina as well.

Alors que la vogue s’accroît de jour en jour en Europe et en France particulièrement, des productions artistiques extrême-orientales, ne devrions nous pas nous efforcer à mettre les œuvres de nos artisans indochinois qui ne payent des droits de douane insignifiants en état de concurrence celle d’origine chinoise ou japonaise. Il y a certes un

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<sup>97</sup> The journalist Neumann wrote an incendiary article on the front page of *La Dépêche d’Indochine. Quotidien indépendant*, “Demandera-t-on au grand conseil des explications sur l’école des beaux-arts? Un scandale entre tous” on November 22, 1933. He treats Tardieu as boot-licker who lives very comfortably while the local population is starving. He denounces the money spent on a “useless” School of Fine Arts. Fonds Victor Tardieu, box 125/08.

effort industriel considérable à faire, on l'a commencé avec activité mais comment réussir si la qualité esthétique est par trop inférieure [...] Pourquoi les artisans annamites dans la sécurité qu'il nous doivent et la richesse, qui peu à peu, s'installe dans le pays, ne deviendraient-ils pas les émules de leur proches parents les artistes japonais.

When the trend accentuates day after day in Europe and particularly in France, of far-eastern artistic productions, should we not try to allow our Indochinese artisans who pay insignificant custom taxes to be in competition with Chinese and Japanese artistic productions. There is certainly a considerable industrial effort to pursue and we have begun actively but how can we succeed if the aesthetic quality is overly inferior [...] Why the Annamite artisans, on the security they owe us and the wealth that, little by little installed itself in the country, could they not become emulators of Japanese artists, their close parents.<sup>98</sup>

Six years after the opening of the EBAI, Tardieu's proposition turned out to be valuable as Indochinese art production, exhibited and sold at the 1931 Exposition, revealed itself to be profitable. A report on the Indochinese section at the Exposition related that the overall sale of Indochinese art brought millions of *francs*, and shops and department stores proposed creating *indochinoiseries* sections in their stores akin to the ones they had created for Chinese and Japanese products.<sup>99</sup> Tardieu, as EBAI's director, was the *Délégué des arts modernes de l'Indochine* at the Exposition. He organized and was in charge of promoting Indochinese art. Consequently, in the Angkor Wat Pavilion, on the first floor, the EBAI had six rooms entirely dedicated to its art. French painters of the EBAI had commissions and decorated Indochinese pavilions. After the Exposition, starting in 1932, Tardieu and Blanchard de la Brosse organized commercial exhibitions at *l'Agence Economique de l'Indochine*, Rue de la Boétie in Paris, where a rich clientele occasionally bought artworks.

In addition to the commercial advantage of creating quality *indochinoiseries*, Tardieu, referring again to Petrucci, argued that the *Prix* would enable the cross permeation of Western

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<sup>98</sup> Tardieu, *sur l'enseignement des beaux-arts en Indochine*. Fonds Victor Tardieu box 125/05.

<sup>99</sup> FM - AGEFOM//533: Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris de 1931, *Section Indochinoise, rapport sur la participation de l'indochine*, 178-179.

and Asian art. French teachers would be inspired by a different culture and learn from Far-Eastern artistic techniques while the student would learn Western techniques: “Notre école telle qu’elle est constituée avec cette réorganisation du Prix de l’Indochine qui en est en quelque sorte la base, ne répond-elle pas de point en point à cette idée qu’exprime éloquemment Petrucci d’une interpénétration de la pensée orientale et de la pensée occidentale” [“The way our school is constituted, with the reorganization of the *Prix de l’Indochine*, which is its basis, does it not respond point by point to this idea expressed by Petrucci of a merging of Oriental and Western thinking”].<sup>100</sup>

In reality, the “merging” may have been only a mirage, as Inguimberty, who taught lacquer as an artistic medium, never used lacquer for his own personal art practice, and Tardieu rarely painted. Moreover, the merging of Western and Asian art corresponded to the Third Republic’s discourse of solidarity and of association between the colonizer and the colonized. The 1931 Exposition had to prove to the mainland population the benevolent cultural and social action of France in Indochina. The report on the participation of Indochina at the Exposition concluded:

Mais l’œuvre française en Indochine ne s’est pas bornée à exploiter le capital que représentent ses richesses naturelles. Elle s’est efforcée de mettre en valeur le capital humain que constituent ses intéressantes populations. Améliorer le statut physique et social des indigènes, développer leur valeur intellectuelle, leur donner le sens des réalités politiques, tel a été le programme dont elle a poursuivi la réalisation avec le plus grand désintéressement. Là encore, l’opinion publique devait être informé [...] Bien des esprits étaient persuadés que la France ne poursuivait en Indochine que d’étroites visées impérialistes et une unique politique de lucres [...] Ils ont pu se rendre compte au contraire que nos œuvres sociales et notre politique indigène correspondait à l’ampleur de notre effort économique.

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<sup>100</sup> “Notre école telle qu’elle est constituée avec cette réorganisation du Prix de l’Indochine qui en est en quelque sorte la base, ne répond-elle pas de point en point à cette idée qu’exprime éloquemment Petrucci d’une interpénétration de la pensée orientale et de la pensée occidentale” *Lettre de Victor Tardieu au Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine au sujet de la lettre de M. Silice*, 28/11/1924, 22 p., ANOM, INDO-GGI-/51039.

But the French endeavor in Indochina is not confined solely to exploit the capital that represents Indochina's natural resources. France made an effort to bring out the human capital constituted by the colony's interesting populations. To improve the physical and social status of the natives, to develop their intellectual value, to give them the sense of political realities, this has been the program, which France pursued with the greatest disinterest. Once again, the public opinion had to be informed [...] Many minds were persuaded that France had in Indochina only imperialist aims and a unique politic of lucre [...] They were able to realize, on the contrary, that our social endeavors and politics corresponded to the extension of our economic efforts.<sup>101</sup>

In the same spirit of concealing the imperialist colonial aims, art at the Exposition had a prominent place. The SCAF and the *Société des Peintres Orientaux Français*, two rival associations, joined to promote colonial and orientalist art on a large scale, to create an imperative artistic manifestation at the Exposition. They proposed a retrospective section in the permanent museum building where masterpieces of Oriental and Colonial art would be shown, and the construction of a *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, where a modern section would display artworks by living artists working in the colonies. The living artists had to go through a selective process, and Tardieu was a jury member for admission to the modern part of the exhibition.

The retrospective section's goal was to integrate Colonial art into the French art historical canon, and retrace the exotic and colonial influence on French art. In the entry hall of the permanent museum, *L'Influence Exotique et Colonial dans l'Art Français*, reunited masterpieces were exhibited chronologically. The oldest painting was Marie-Guillemine Benoist's *Portrait d'une Négrresse*, followed by works of renowned artists such as Géricault, Paul Cézanne, Theodore Chassériau, Delacroix's *Chasse au lion*, Corot's *Femme au narguilé*, Renoir's *L'algérienne*, Paul Gauguin's *Que sommes-nous? D'où venons-nous? Où allons-nous?* alongside works by "forgotten colonial" painters, such as Prosper Marilhat, Alexandre Descamps, and

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<sup>101</sup> FM - AGEFOM//533: Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris de 1931, *Section Indochinoise, rapport sur la participation de l'indochine*, 178-179.

Ange Tissier. Avant-garde artists were not represented. Worldwide collectors lent part of their collections and the exhibition counted fifteen artworks by Renoir, Ingres' *Odalisque*, fifteen by Gauguin, and works by Cezanne, Corot and Fromentin. The Louvre, in addition, lent a series of watercolors by Delacroix and one Degas.<sup>102</sup> By integrating colonial art into the lineage of great French artists, the exhibition was an example of how art could serve and justify France's civilizing mission.

The millions of visitors entering the Exposition could associate art in the colonies with popular French artworks. They would see colonial art as part of the Grand French artistic tradition, which promoted colonial art to the rank of "veritable art." In the official guide of the Exposition, André Demaison wrote: "Vous ne manquerez pas d'être frappé par la puissance de l'idée coloniale capable d'inspirer un art puissant, d'où a disparu fort heureusement cet orientalisme de bazar qui le faisait mettre au ban de l'art véritable" ["You will be stricken by the strength of the colonial idea capable of inspiring a powerful art, from which has thankfully disappeared this bazaar orientalism excluding it from the veritable art"].<sup>103</sup> In order to ennoble colonial art, the exhibition had to include as many French masterpieces as possible with works that were not orientalist per se, such as Degas' *Le bureau de coton à la Nouvelle-Orleans*, which had "foreign" subject matter. The presence of prominent artists and renowned artworks reinforced the integration of the colonial into the French canon.

The resulting artificial association between colonial art and famous French artists was noticed by critics and the public. After seeing the exhibition, painter Fernand Sabatté exclaimed:

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<sup>102</sup> List provided in Arsene Alexandre's article, "Au musée des colonies" in *La Renaissance*, September 1931. X

<sup>103</sup> André Demaison, *A Paris en 1931. Exposition Coloniale Internationale. Guide Officiel*. (Paris : Mayeux, 1931), 187.

“Si Ingres, Delacroix, Corot ou Degas revenaient parmi nous ils seraient bien étonnés de se voir classés "peintres coloniaux" ["If Ingres, Delacroix, Corot or Degas would come back amongst us, they would be very surprised to be classified as “colonial painters”].<sup>104</sup> Jarassé notes that all artworks in the exhibition having exotic subject matters belonged to colonial art.

In addition to the retrospective exhibition, the modern section was exhibited in a different building and in a different geographical part of the Exposition. The *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, built for the occasion, promoted French artists in the colonies. The genealogy between colonial art and the French masters, however, could have been pushed further by exhibiting the modern and retrospective section together. The organizers, conceivably, might have been reserved in aligning masterpieces and unknown colonial painters together. As a reviewer of the exposition describing the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, wrote: “Peut-être encore quelques invités se sont-ils trop contentés de copier plus ou moins habilement des maîtres rencontrés tout à heure et d’autres de “bâcler” quelques vagues souvenirs colorés et lumineux” [“Perhaps some painters contented themselves a little too much to copy more or less the masters from the retrospective section and others to “botch” some vague luminous and colorful memories”].<sup>105</sup> Winners of the *Prix de l’Indochine* Jean Bouchaud and Charles Fouqueray had artworks shown at the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*. Indigenous artists were not exhibited in the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*, but only inside their respective pavilions.

Exhibiting colonial art in a flamboyant manner with its own building at the Exhibition was SCAF’s priority, propaganda being its role. For Jarassé, propaganda was intrinsic to French colonial art. Jarassé notably quotes José Melina, in 1943, who proposed a direct definition of

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<sup>104</sup> Fernand Sabaté in *L’art*, 15, September-October 1931, 84, my translation.

<sup>105</sup> “La section des beaux-arts et les petites expositions à l’exposition coloniale,” in *l’art et les artistes* 1931, 119, July 1931, pp 346-349, 349, my translation.

colonial art:

L'art colonial annexe très volontiers ce qui relève de l'orientalisme et de l'exotisme ; mais foncièrement, il est marqué d'un caractère tout autre, et il s'inspire d'un esprit différent de celui qui animait les Bougainville [...] ou les Delacroix. Il ne s'agit plus de la *découverte* de Mondes nouveaux aussi différents que possible de l'Europe, mais de l'*organisation* d'une *pénétration*, d'une *possession*, d'une *intégration* de terres et de races dans la civilisation et dans l'esthétique de notre Empire Colonial : *le génie protecteur éducateur et organisateur* de la France participe comme élément dominant et stimulant, même souvent aspirateur, à la constitution et le développement de l'Art Colonial.

Colonial art annexes willingly what falls under orientalism and exoticism but fundamentally it is marked by a completely different character and it is inspired by a spirit different from the one that animated Bougainville [...] or Delacroix. It does not concern anymore the discovery of new Worlds but the *organization of a penetration, of a possession, of an integration* of lands and races in the civilization and the aesthetic of our Colonial Empire: France's *protective, educative and organizing genius* participates as a dominant element and stimulating, even oftentimes inspiring, to the constitution and development of Colonial Art.<sup>106</sup>

The definition elaborated by Melina could correspond to the enterprise initiated by Tardieu and the artworks produced by Inguimberty. The two painters tried to rationalize, organize, and possess Annamite Art and to integrate it into a French aesthetic: a French aesthetic that was opposed to the *École de Paris*, International Modernism, and surrealism. Art from the colonies and from the indigenous artists became the last bastion of an “official” national French art at odds with modernism. Mauclair, amongst other, saw in the art of the EBAI's students an alternative, an antidote to abstraction and modern art. The colonial administrators wished that the EBAI would reveal one day a “*Puvis de la rizière*”—a Puvis de Chavannes from the rice paddies.<sup>107</sup> Paris, the “capital” of the avant-garde, in welcoming numerous foreign artists became more and more nationalistic. Exacerbated by the financial crisis, numerous painters left the

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<sup>106</sup> Dominique Jarassé, “L'art colonial entre orientalisme et art primitif: Recherche d'une définition,” 9.

<sup>107</sup> Term used in an article in *Depêche coloniale*, October 17 1933, Fonds Victor Tardieu box 125/08.

country.<sup>108</sup> In the mind of Tardieu, Indochinese art, on the contrary, would continue to support and inspire French art.

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<sup>108</sup> Sophie Kreps, “les artistes étrangers au début des années 30” in *1931: Les étrangers au temps de l'Exposition coloniale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)

## V. CONCLUSION

The EBAI, as Tardieu conceived it, lasted until 1937, the year of his death. Évariste Jonchère, his successor, turned the school towards crafts and applied arts rather than painting and sculpture. The EBAI officially closed its doors in 1945.

Tardieu's funeral in Hanoi gathered EBAI's teachers and students and the local population, mourning greatly the loss of their director. An article in the newspaper *L'Avenir du Tonkin* declared: "Victor Tardieu n'est plus, mais le souvenir du pionnier de la rénovation artistique Annamite n'est pas prêt de s'effacer" ["Victor Tardieu is no more, but the memory of the pioneer of the Annamite artistic renaissance will not fade away soon"].<sup>109</sup> The sentence illuminates how Tardieu and the EBAI have been perceived over the years. Even today, Tardieu is still defined as an enlightened figure who ignited Vietnamese art's renaissance. This definition, however, does not take into account the academic training that informed Tardieu's vision for the EBAI and deliberately avoids the colonial context of the EBAI's conception. This thesis has tried to cast a more accurate light on Tardieu and the art produced at the EBAI by placing it in the context of the interwar era in France, in the midst of a grandiloquent colonialism coupled with the rise of nationalism.

This study has attempted to show that Tardieu used his social status in the colonial and artistic French milieu to create a school that reflected his own vision and could be approved by the government officials. By doing so, he perpetuated the colonial and academic endeavor that defined the art produced at the EBAI and corresponded to the vision that France wanted at the apex of its colonial empire.

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<sup>109</sup> *La Mort de M. Victor Tardieu*, "L'Avenir du Tonkin," June 14, 1937.

The colonies, or the Greater France, were seen as France's hope to regenerate demographically and morally after the disastrous World War I: "Colonies are not anymore uniquely a source of wealth or a revenge substitute. They become a site of utopia where the French race will regenerate in a virtue and recovered fecundity."<sup>110</sup> Tardieu saw in Indochina a land that could regenerate and protect French art, as did other academic artists, the SCAF, and the French government, which allowed schools of fine arts to spread out across the empire. The numerous schools of fine arts established in various colonies corresponded to France's civilizing mission to educate the population and the hope of the Paris School of Fine Arts to disseminate and preserve the nation's artistic tradition in the face of modern art. Art from *la plus grande France* would help continue the French artistic tradition in opposition to the École de Paris.

The 1931 Exposition, the pinnacle of the Third Republic's cultural propaganda, served as the consecration and legitimation of colonial art with the exhibition *L'Influence Exotique et Colonial dans l'Art Français*. Forgotten colonial painters were exhibited alongside the most celebrated French artists of the time. Reuniting as many masterpieces as possible with loans from private and public institutions, the SCAF demonstrated that art from the colonies was part of the internationally renowned French artistic tradition, from which modern art was excluded. Thus, as highlighted by the Exposition, the Third Republic and the French academy used art from *la plus grande France* to fabricate an artistic and cultural hegemony in counteraction to modernist trends.

Tardieu's work and the artistic promises of art from and of *la plus grande France* seem to be a far cry from the art historical description of the twenties and thirties in France—art history narratives preferring to focus on the avant-gardes. This thesis, however, demonstrates that state

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<sup>110</sup> Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 138. "Les colonies se sont plus seulement une source de richesse ou un substitut de la revanche. Elles deviennent un lieu d'utopie où la race Française se régénère dans une vertu et une fécondité retrouvée."

art and colonial art promulgated by the Third Republic occupied a large place in the French art scene during the interwar era. To not take into account art from the Greater France is to write an incomplete history of the period's French artistic landscape. Numerous schools of fine arts were created in the colonies, including in Algeria, Madagascar, Morocco and Senegal, the EBAI being one of the last schools of fine of arts to be created. More research into the different colonial schools of fine arts of the French Empire--into art from and of *la plus grande France*—would provide a fuller perspective on French art in the early twentieth century.

## VI. FIGURES



Figure 1, Interior of the Angkor Wat pavilion, 1931. Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer. Author's photograph.



Figure 2, Victor Tardieu, *Décor de l'Amphithéâtre de l'Université de Hanoi*, c 1930. Bibliothèque de l'INHA, collections Jacques Doucet. Author's photograph.



Figure 3, *École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine, Anatomy Class*, c 1925. Bibliothèque de l'INHA, collections Jacques Doucet. Author's photograph.



Figure 4, *École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine, Drawing Atelier*, c 1925. Bibliothèque de l'INHA, collections Jacques Doucet. Author's photograph.



Figure 5, *Tardieu in his atelier*, c 1923. Bibliothèque de l'INHA, collections Jacques Doucet. Author's photograph.



Figure 6, Joseph Inguimberty, *Travail dans les rizières*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 239 cm x 388 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille. Author's photograph.



Figure 7, *Travail dans les rizières*, detail. Author's photograph.



Figure 8, Joseph Inguimberty, *Scène en Indochine*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 239 cm x 293 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille. Author's photograph.



Figure 9, Joseph Inguimberty, *Travaux de ferme au Tonkin*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 243 cm x 300 cm. © Musée du quai Branly.

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