

Planting the Seeds: Sharing Art and Knowledge

Faculty of Painting
Sculpture and
Graphic Arts

Selected writing of
Somporn Rodboon,
1987 — 2014



Edited by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham

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The compiling a book of knowledge and honoring
Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon: an alumnus,
former faculty member, and internationally renowned curator.

Supported by the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts,
Silpakorn University

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In honor of Somporn Rodboon

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF THE
FACULTY OF PAINTING, SCULPTURE,
AND GRAPHIC ARTS,
SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY

On the occasion of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts at Silpakorn University compiling a book of knowledge and honoring Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon, an alumnus, former faculty member, and internationally renowned curator, we extend our congratulations on the creation of this invaluable book. We sincerely thank everyone involved in driving this project to completion, resulting in a significant repository of contemporary art knowledge that will benefit the public widely.

Special thanks to Kasamaponn Saengsuratham, the curator and editor of this book, the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, art collectors, galleries, and private sector entities that supported the initiative. Additionally, we appreciate the management of various publications, books and magazines, for permitting the use of articles in this project. Our gratitude extends to the faculty and staff of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts as well as the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre for their collaborative efforts in every aspect of this work.

Most importantly, we profoundly thank Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon for her kindness in allowing the Faculty of Painting to undertake this project, along with providing guidance, encouragement, and numerous suggestions that have led to the successful completion of the project.

Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon is a highly esteemed senior figure in Thailand's contemporary art scene. She has been a foundational pillar in the art community, a dedicated teacher and scholar with exceptional knowledge and capabilities. Her contributions have not only paved the way for future artists but have also advanced the knowledge and development of Thai contemporary art on both national and international levels. Due to her recognized works and abilities, Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon was awarded

an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in Art Theory by Silpakorn University in 2012.

Throughout her tenure as a faculty member at the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, and the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, as well as after her retirement, Assoc. Prof. Somporn Rodboon has played a continuous and significant role in fostering collaboration between the Thai contemporary art scene and various cultural organizations, both domestically and internationally. She has been pivotal in bringing Thai artists' work to the international stage and has engaged in curatorial activities, provided consultancy to art organizations, delivered public lectures, and written numerous articles. In essence, she has laid the groundwork for the advancement and global recognition of Thai contemporary art.

In this endeavor, the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts has collected articles by Assistant Professor Somporn Rodboon from various sources such as magazines, books, and exhibition catalogs to create a digital database. Additionally, a selection of these articles has been compiled into a bilingual book in Thai and English, available in both print and digital formats, to serve as a valuable resource for those interested in researching the foundations and history of Thai contemporary art on both national and international scales. As the oldest art faculty in Thailand, we hope this book project will contribute valuable knowledge for academic research and a deeper understanding of the roots and history of Thai contemporary art.

Assistant Professor Vichaya Mukdamanee, D.Phil.
Dean of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts,
Silpakorn University

IN THE WEAVE OF POLLEN AND LEAF

The starting point of this book comes from a research project aimed at compiling knowledge and honoring Assoc. Prof. Somporn Rodboon, a distinguished alumnus, former faculty member, and internationally renowned curator. Initially funded by the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts at Silpakorn University, the project sought to gather Ajarn Somporn's writings for publication. Upon conducting research, I discovered a substantial number of written works dating from 1977 onwards. This led to the decision to develop a database based on this research project. Subsequently, the project received additional financial support from private art institutions such as galleries and art collectors. The book launch event was also supported by the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre.

This project extends its branches of knowledge to align with Ajarn Somporn's artistic practice. It has been supported and collaborated upon by many individuals and organizations. The work, though mainly carried out by one main editor, the journey to completing this book involved significant assistance from various organizations and individuals. Their collective efforts were crucial throughout the process, from research, scanning documents creating the database to gathering articles, translating, and organizing the symposium and workshop. I am deeply grateful to everyone

who contributed to the success of this project.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Vichaya Mukdamanee, Dean of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, for entrusting me with this research project and supporting various aspects. I also extend my gratitude to Araya Lertkitanan for handling publication permissions and related matters, and to the faculty staff for their invaluable support in completing this project.

I appreciate the libraries and their staff, including the National Library of Thailand, Wang Thapra Library, Silpakorn University, Pridi Banomyong Library, Thammasat University, Chulalongkorn University Library, the Reading Room, and the Faculty of Fine Arts Library, Chiang Mai University, for their invaluable assistance with research and information retrieval. Special thanks to Prapan Jangkitchai for compiling the academic and artistic activities of Ajarn Somporn. I also appreciate Kornkanok Wongsuwan and Nirada Keereewong for their efforts in collecting, scanning documents, and organizing the inventory of Ajarn Somporn's writings.

Additionally thanks to Noppadol Aekphachaisawat and the Wang Thapra Library at Silpakorn University for their guidance on copyright issues related to database production and publication. My appreciation also extends to Kornkanok Wongsuwan for managing permission requests and organizing the article inventory. I am grateful to the organizations, publishers, and artists who contributed to the database process. Special thanks go to the technology team: Thoranin Duangsin, IT Specialist at the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, for his work on the project, and Warute Udomrat for organizing and presenting the data on the website.

For the book publication, I am thankful for the support from friends and colleagues, especially Natmaytee Saiyawej, who served as the copy editor and has been an invaluable

behind-the-scenes partner and dear friend. From the beginning, Natmaytee collaborated closely with me, including brainstorming all the titles for the flower garden concept. Furthermore, I am deeply grateful to Piriypa Putsongkram, who greatly contributed to translating Thai and English articles. English proofreading was done by Natchanan Klahan, Thai proofreading by Supattarinee Sornpradit, and a list of writings was proofread by Sorawit Pakdeeasa. Weera Saengsit provided the English translation of the list of writings and bibliography, and Deddeaw Laosinchai handled the book layout.

In addition, I would like to thank Setapa Prommolmard, the trusted graphic designer for the project, for designing the key visuals, including the book cover, posters, and other promotional materials. Thanks also to Karin Mongkonphan for the photographs of Ajarn Somporn, and to Waiting You Curator Lab for their encouragement and support.

For the organization and preparation of the symposium and workshop, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Bangkok Art and Culture Center. I am deeply grateful to Narongsak Nilkhet for his trust, valuable advice, and unwavering support. Special thanks to Adulaya Hoontrakul for her insightful recommendations, and to Vorachat Vadabukkana for her assistance with the seminar arrangements. I also appreciate the contributions of all team members not specifically mentioned here. Lastly, a warm thank you to “Loading” for being a place to ease my mind.

I would like to thank all the speakers for kindly joining the seminar and sharing valuable experiences, especially T.K. Sabapathy, Ushiroshoji Masahiro, and Pamela N. Corey, who shared their experiences in advancing the concept of “South-east Asian Modern Art” in the international art scene and laying the groundwork for regional art. My thanks also extend to emerging curators Kittima Chareeprasit, Pongsakorn

Yananissorn, and Amanda Ariawan for their insights into contemporary curatorial practices. I am also grateful to Chitti Kasemkitvatana and Bangkok Kunsthalle, as well as Stefano Rabolli Pansera, Mark Chearavanont, Gemmica Sinthawalai, and the BACC team for their collaborative effort in organizing the workshop to “nurture” the next generation of curators.

Most importantly, I express utmost gratitude to Ajarn Somporn for trusting me with the role of editor and for allowing me to curate her collection of writings. I deeply appreciate her patience and understanding throughout the past year, despite my frequent inquiries. Our conversations over meals and coffee provided insights into her working methods but also offered invaluable advice on life and work, for which I am profoundly grateful.

The research project’s process is akin to cultivating knowledge, starting with a review of Ajarn Somporn’s writings and art practices and extending to a symposium aimed at disseminating knowledge to the public. In conclusion, as the editor, I sincerely hope that *Planting Seeds: Sharing Art and Education, Selected Writings of Somporn Rodboon 1987-2014*, along with the symposium and workshop *Flourishing Narratives: Honoring the Works of Somporn Rodboon in Art Education and Curatorial Practices in Thailand Since the 1980s*, will contribute to sowing the seeds and nurturing the growth of art and curatorial practices.

Ratchadamneon and Maerim
Kasamaponn Saengsuratham

EDITORIAL NOTES

Since the original articles come from various publications, including exhibition catalogs, newspapers, journals, or magazines from 1995 to 2014, there are notable differences in language styles. Therefore, the editorial team diligently corrected any errors and standardized the formatting while endeavoring to maintain the integrity of the original paragraphs, resulting in varying paragraph lengths. Exceptions were made for exceptionally long paragraphs, which were shortened.

For revised articles, a note is included below. Translations into Thai and English closely follow Ajarn Somporn Rodboon's original language, aiming to retain as much of it as possible.

All articles selected for this book and those in the database have been granted permission for publication by the respective authors and publishers. Unfortunately, all accompanying images had to be omitted due to copyright restrictions.

The bibliography of Ajarn Somporn Rodboon's works at the end of the book was compiled by the research team based on available writings from 1980 to 2018. These are categorized into journal articles, book chapters, exhibition catalogs, unpublished papers, and books. However, it is important to note that this bibliography does not encompass all of Ajarn Somporn's writings or fully represent her complete body of work.

Editorial Team
Kasamaponn Saengsuratham
Natmaytee Saiyawej

SOMPORN RODBOON:
THE SOWER OF ART SEEDS
KASAMAPONN SAENGSRATHAM¹

¹ I would like to express my deep gratitude to Ajarn Somporn Rodboon for her kindness and support. Additionally, I extend my thanks to Narongsak Nilkhet and Natmaytee Saiyawej for their careful review of the Thai version, and to Piriya Putsongkram for the English version.

I first became acquainted with Ajarn Somporn Rodboon (hereafter referred to as Ajarn Somporn) through the article “History of Modern Art in Thailand” from the exhibition catalog *Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand*, which I found by chance on the bookshelf of Pridi Banomyong Library, Thammasat University.² This encounter sparked my interest in the comparative study of Southeast Asia art (the article is also included in this book). Many years later, when I began working as a curator and conducting research on modern and contemporary art in Thailand, I had the opportunity to consult and seek advice from Ajarn Somporn on several occasions. Eventually, Ajarn Somporn allowed me to undertake a research project to compile her writings. Throughout this time, although I had never studied directly under Ajarn Somporn, her writings served as a vast classroom, aligning with Ajarn Somporn’s habit of referring to herself as a “teacher.”³

This article is part of a project honoring and celebrating alumni and former professors of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts at Silpakorn University (hereafter referred to as the Faculty of Fine Arts). Ajarn Somporn completed her studies in printmaking at the Faculty of Fine Arts and earned a master’s degree in Art Education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, USA. After completing her studies, Ajarn Somporn returned to become a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts around 1978. Subsequently, she moved to teach at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University and also served as a visiting professor at various educational institutions.

Ajarn Somporn is often mentioned as a pioneer and one of the first in various roles in Thailand’s art scene. She was the first Thai female curator and played a key role in organizing and creating exhibitions, nationally and

2 Due to Thammasat University’s emphasis on social sciences and humanities, its library collection in the arts category is relatively smaller compared to that of Silpakorn University, which offers direct instruction in arts, art history, and art theory.

3 In Thai culture, “teacher” or “kru” derives from the Pali term “kuru,” meaning “heavy,” symbolizing their painstaking role in imparting knowledge. The teacher is often compared to a ferryman who guides passengers, representing students, to the shore of knowledge.

internationally. She was instrumental in starting international art exhibitions in Thailand and helped establish the Art Theory Department in 1987. Ajarn Somporn also contributed significantly to numerous international art festivals, such as the *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* in 1993 and 1996, the *Fukuoka Triennale* in 2002, and served on acquisition committees for institutions like the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan, the National Art Gallery Singapore.

Notably, in Thailand writing about art, whether academic, documentary, or in the form of reviews and art critiques, often prioritizes artists and artworks rather than focusing on the roles of individuals behind exhibitions. This includes project managers, exhibition installers, designers, graphic designers, and curators.⁴ Art awards primarily center on artists, although curators or academics may also play a crucial role in shaping writings and exhibitions for artists.⁵ From this perspective, writings about the Thai art world often reflect the viewpoints of academics or curators as well.

This article explores Ajarn Somporn's writings from 1977 to 2017, reflecting on her thoughts and practices through various types of writing in both Thai and English. These include articles in journals or magazines, essays in exhibition catalogs, book chapters, and entire books. The analysis employs comparative methods and examines the socio-political context in Thailand and the Southeast Asian art world. It focuses on selected writings included in this book and from the research project's database.⁶ Additionally, it features my dialogues with Ajarn Somporn to examine how academic and social contexts influence her thoughts.

Throughout our time working together, our conversations often revolved around Ajarn Somporn's nurturing of her small garden of flowers,

4 The study on curatorial practices in Thailand, see Flores (2008) and Worathep Akkabootara et al., (2015).

5 It is interesting to note that in 2021, Ark Fongsmut was honored with the Silpathorn Award as a curator, marking the first time this award was given to a curator since its inception in 2004. Organized by the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, this award recognizes contemporary Thai artists aged 30 to 50 who have made consistent creative contributions.

6 See the database at sompornrodboon.su.ac.th.

which bloomed in rotation throughout the year. The white orchids, in particular, always greeted me with their blossoms. This imagery inspires me to metaphorically compare her role as a teacher to that of an orchid⁷ and her professional life to that of a “sower” of seeds of artistic knowledge in Thailand. This includes imparting knowledge of history, theory, and concepts, as well as active participation in art activities such as curatorial practice, workshops, and international collaboration networks. Most importantly, her published writings significantly contribute to spreading knowledge and advancing the field of art, allowing it to flourish and extend its branches endlessly.

This article is divided into three parts. Firstly, *Cultivate the Seeds in Art* examines Ajarn Somporn’s writings in the Thai language, focusing on art movements from the Western art world and aesthetics, published in Thai journals and articles in national art exhibition catalogs between the 1980s and 2010s. I employ textual analysis to reflect her thoughts and convey the infusion of new art movements from the Western into the Thai art world.

The second part, *Sowing the Seeds of Thai Art History*, explores the conditions and dynamics within the global art world, particularly in Southeast Asia. It aims to analyze Ajarn Somporn’s writings in English-language publications from the 1990s to the early 2000s. This section examines how the global art landscape in Southeast Asia influences her representation of Thai art narratives for an international audience. It also reflects on artistic debates surrounding notions of universality and critiques of Eurocentric perspectives in the art discourse.

The third part, *Blooming the Curatorial Practice and Women’s Issues*, employs textual analysis within an academic framework to explore the formation of artistic collaborations in Southeast Asia within the global art world context. This section also examines Ajarn Somporn’s proposal that the works of Thai female artists should be analyzed within Thailand’s socio-cultural context.

7 Orchids, Thailand’s traditional flower for Teachers’ Day, symbolize the continuous care and dedication that teachers provide to their students, akin to the nurturing required for orchids.

CULTIVATE THE SEEDS IN ART

This section analyzes Ajarn Somporn's contributions to Thai-language magazines and journals for the public, as well as articles in national art exhibition catalogs, within the context of Thai social history and the Thai art world. Her work in public print media spans two main categories of magazines. Initially, from the 1980s to the 1990s, she primarily authored art columns in monthly travel and tourism magazines. Later, between 1995 and 1996, Ajarn Somporn contributed articles to the "Art World" column in the *Art and Culture* magazine.⁸ Additionally, during the 1990s, there was a significant increase in monthly art publications⁹, such as *Art Record* (1994–2001), *art4d* (1995–present), and *Fine Art Magazine*¹⁰ (2002–present), where Ajarn Somporn occasionally published articles. Her writings were prominent across these magazines, and she continued to contribute to *Fine Art Magazine* from 2007 to 2013.

Please note that my research has limitations due to the closure of several magazines and journals from 1977 to 1987. All original issues are from remaining copies in the National Library of Thailand, with the number of articles unknown. Research for journals after 1990 was conducted at the Thapra Library, Silpakorn University, and the Pridi Banomyong Library, Thammasat University. The forthcoming details in this article are based on the main research project, which covers only part of Ajarn Somporn Rodboon's written works.

8 Founded in 1979 by historian and archaeologist Sujit Wongthes, *The Art and Culture* magazine continues to operate today, with a focus on Thai art and culture.

9 The first art magazine in Thailand, *Art World* (โลกศิลปะ in Thai), debuted in 1979. It was founded by Wirun Tangcharoen, an art academic who had authored several art books, and co-edited by Amnat Yensabai. At that time, both were faculty members at Srinakharinwirot University, which was seen as an art institution juxtaposed against the dominant and influential Silpakorn University. (see Saengsuratham, 2012; Chapakdee, 2014). The latest issue found was in 1992; the end date is unknown.

10 *Fine Art Magazine* began in 2002 as a monthly publication. It later transitioned to a quarterly magazine and is now published as an annual book.

During the 1980s, Thailand's media industry grew substantially with the opening of bookstores nationwide.¹¹ This expansion reached its peak during the golden age of Thai magazines in that decade (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014, 221–223). It was noted that magazines featuring art columns or articles from the 1980s to the 1990s often appeared in publications focused on home decoration and travel. This growth was driven by economic expansion, real estate development, new home construction, and notably, the rise of the middle class in Thai society. Moreover, the Thai government's "Amazing Thailand" campaign, launched in 1987, played a crucial role in fostering tourism domestically and internationally (see for discussion of cultural tourism in Thailand, Champa, 2002).

The oldest travel magazine in Thailand, *Osotho*, which focuses on domestic tourism, was launched in 1960 and continues to this day. Emerging during the Cold War era, it reflects the country's efforts in modernization and infrastructure development, including the construction of new highways connecting various regions and provinces. Additionally, the growth of the middle class since the late 1970s up to the globalization era has significantly contributed to the expansion of the foreign tourism industry. These magazines are typically owned by tourism businesses and companies, with advertisements focusing on international travel and airlines. For example, *Travel Around The World* magazine was established in 1982, followed by *Globetrotter*, owned by SIAM SPORTS PUBLISHING LTD., in 1983.

My research found that Ajarn Somporn's earliest writings were in *Ban* magazine from 1980 to 1983, totaling 7 articles, and in *TokTaeng* magazine from 1980 to 1984, totaling 10 articles. Interestingly, both are decoration magazines focusing on Western art influences such as Piet Mondrian (1980), Churchill (1985), Picasso (1985), and Robert Rauschenberg (1986). The magazine in which Ajarn Somporn contributed the most is *Globetrotter*,¹²

11 The situation has changed significantly from the present. According to data from 2015 to 2017, at least 36 print media outlets, including publishers and bookstores, have gradually closed down. Source: The Bangkok TCIJ

12 *Globetrotter* launched in March 1983. Information regarding its cessation is unavailable. According to my research, Ajarn Somporn's contributions began from the seventh issue onwards.

with 55 monthly articles from 1983 to 1989, primarily covering foreign tourism.

The articles in *Globetrotter* not only discuss artworks or provide art techniques and forms but often include information about where these artworks are currently exhibited or are part of museum collections. This serves to showcase art as an integral part of cultural tourism, such as articles “Thai Paintings in the British Museum” (1984), “Paintings in the Collection of the British Royal Family” (1984), “Paintings in the National Museum, London” (1984), “Paintings in the Louvre Museum” (1985), and “Tour of the Museum of Modern Art New York” (1985)

Furthermore, I discovered numerous art-related writings in Thai journals and magazines during the 1980s. For instance, No Na Paknam and Pishnu Supanimit had regular columns in various publications such as *Sarakadee* magazine, while Srifa contributed regularly to the *Bangkok Post Publishing* during the same period. In this context, Davisakd Puaksom, a prominent Southeast Asian historian whom I consulted during my research at the National Library, commented, “*These writers approach their work with seriousness.*” Their backgrounds as university professors or scholars¹³ indicate their commitment to disseminating knowledge widely to the public, often presenting their content in a formal yet accessible language.

Ajarn Somporn’s writings share similar characteristics. She describes her writing style as “*I write simply because I want readers to understand easily.*” At the same time, she integrates knowledge and raises theoretical points without excessively using elaborate language or art jargon. This approach stemmed from the lack of established translations for technical terms or methods during that period. Therefore, Ajarn Somporn primarily used English loanwords instead of translating them into Thai, as she saw that the original meaning could not be preserved accurately.

If we examine Ajarn Somporn’s writings from 1977 to 1997, they primarily focus on art theoretical frameworks and introduce new ideas and techniques in Thai society, such as “Conceptual Art” (1991), “Computer Art” (1992), and “Subway Art” (1992). Importantly, she consistently cited

13 Scholars who have authored articles in journals and newspapers, including Kasian Tejapira and notably the late Nidhi Eoseewong, who is widely regarded as a public intellectual.

references from recently published books, usually within a decade of their publication. Ajarn Somporn always emphasized the importance of consistent referencing, a practice she adhered to throughout her career.

Ajarn Somporn's writing style typically begins with an introduction to the meaning of ideas or forms, often using closely related terms in the English language. Following this, she clarifies the historical background of those ideas. In the case of art forms, she describes their overall characteristics. When discussing critically analyzed concepts, she outlines the controversies that arise. Ajarn Somporn often advises me, saying, *"We need to understand the historical origins of these ideas first to comprehend their forms or subsequent developments."* For example, in the article "Subway Art" (1992), Ajarn Somporn explains that this type of art originated from paintings on train cars and public spaces, eventually gaining acceptance in the international art community. Subsequently, she provides examples of artworks by foreign artists working in similar practices. Towards the end of some articles, she not only summarizes the discussed concepts or forms but also often compares them with the situation or opinions in the Thai art world.

To explain new or controversial art forms, Ajarn Somporn often uses simple language and compares them with other forms to enhance comprehension, similar to teaching students with gentle guidance. In her article "Computer Art" (1992), she discusses the use of computers in creating artwork, leading to broader debates on whether it qualifies as art.

"Some art critics still do not recognize computer art as true art because it is created using various mechanical devices. Computers are merely a medium for conveying an artist's ideas into images and forms. The true creation of art lies in the mind and thoughts of the artist, not in the computer...Computer artists are by no means different from other artists. The main distinction lies in the fact that they use modern tools to explore new ideas more extensively."

At the same time, she questions narrow-mindedness or resistance to new things, such as in her discussion of "Conceptual Art" (1991): "This art

form is not well-known or widely accepted in the Thai art scene because some individuals are unfamiliar with the global paradigm shift and contemporary art. They still adhere to the conventions of traditional arts from the past.”

Moreover, Ajarn Somporn’s writings on art theories and concepts in the Thai language also aim to inspire readers to perceive changes in artistic thinking and continuously embrace new ideas. This is evident in discussions regarding the categories of the National Art Competition, titled the *National Art Exhibition*, which began in 1949. Initially, the categories were painting, sculpture, and printmaking. The “mixed media” category was later added, starting from the 27th competition in 1981, and currently, as of the 59th competition in 2023, only four categories remain.¹⁴ In the article “Mixed Media Art” (1991), Ajarn Somporn discussed this issue, stating:

“Therefore, in the future, it will be important to reconsider whether the genre of mixed media art will continue to be relevant or if it should be replaced by a more suitable overarching term that better encompasses emerging art forms.”

In summary, Ajarn Somporn’s articles in travel and home decoration magazines reflect the expansion of middle-class perspectives and attitudes towards cultural tourism in Thai society during its early stages. The content and writing style often involve showcasing artworks from museums abroad and imparting knowledge about international artworks and artists to the public. Meanwhile, articles published in National Art Exhibition catalogs typically engage directly with students or individuals within the art community.

From 1980 to 2013, Ajarn Somporn’s articles reflected her role as a “teacher,” aiming to introduce new art concepts to her students, directly to her disciples, and to the broader Thai-speaking public. Her writings on the evolution of Western art movements in Thai society and the Thai art

¹⁴ In the Thai language world, searching for the term “mixed media art” (ศิลปะสื่อผสม: in Thai) in various search programs remains popular to this day. Much of the content often comes from this article by Ajarn Somporn, whether cited or not.

world often start by introducing vocabulary and tracing the development of ideas. This method is crucial for comprehending art, regardless of its form or movement. In this context, Ajarn Somporn's perspective on art appears hybrid and dynamic, conveyed in an accessible tone that encourages readers to embrace new art forms without bias.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF THAI ART HISTORY

This section examines the writings or articles in English by Ajarn Somporn, which the writer perceives to have distinct characteristics compared to those in Thai, particularly in content and objectives. It is observed that Ajarn Somporn's English writings from the late 1970s to the late 1990s primarily consist of articles in exhibition catalogs or art festivals abroad, including events held in Thailand but supported by foreign organizations. The content here discusses Ajarn Somporn's articles found in exhibition catalogs or English-language books as the primary source. The discussion centers on these writings and their role in the Thai and Southeast Asian art landscape, particularly highlighting her involvement in various art activities and exhibitions.

Many studies on art in Southeast Asia suggest that the emergence of modern art in the region, including Asia as a whole, reflects significant changes in the international art scene (Kee, 2011; Chiu & Benjamin, 2011). The rise of post-colonial perspectives and the decentralization of Western art during the 1990s facilitated the global spread of biennials beyond their Western origins in Europe and America, leading to the emergence of new art centers like Singapore, Shanghai, and Delhi (Green and Gardner, 2016, 5–7). Furthermore, modern and contemporary art from non-Western countries has increasingly gained visibility in the West. For instance, exhibitions of Thai art such as *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand* in 1992, curated by American anthropologist Herbert P. Phillips, showcased Thai art in Thailand and the United States. Another significant exhibition was *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* in 1997 at the Asia Society in New York, curated by Apinan Poshyananda.

The concept of a single, Eurocentric history has come under

increasing scrutiny by art historians (Clark, 1993, 1998; Elkins, 2006) and anthropologists and cultural studies scholars (Shoat & Stam, 1998; Errington, 2006; Zijlmans & Wilfried, 2008). A central question raised by these scholars challenges universalism in art discourse and advocates for the concept of “other modernities” to expand our understanding of art history beyond Eurocentrism.¹⁵ This approach seeks to foster a more inclusive perspective of global art history, acknowledging its diversity and rejecting the notion of a singular center.

The effort to establish modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art is driven by international art interests, exemplified by institutions such as the Fukuoka Art Museum, founded in 1979, the Singapore Art Museum in 1996, and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in 2000. The inauguration of the National Gallery Singapore in 2015 solidified its role as a hub for modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. These museums play a crucial role through their collections, exhibitions, and organization of art festivals and exhibitions focused on Southeast Asian art.

In the early stages, art exhibitions and festivals held in Japan did not specifically focus on “Southeast Asia” but rather encompassed the broader continent of Asia. For example, the *Contemporary Asian Art Show* at the Fukuoka Art Museum in 1980¹⁶ primarily aimed to gather countries across Asia. It continued with its second edition in 1984 and third in 1989, marking the museum’s 10th anniversary, which was co-curated by Ajarn Somporn.¹⁷ Another significant exhibition was *Narrative Visions in Contemporary*

15 Apinan Poshyananda’s dissertation on *Modern Art in Thailand*, first published in 1992 by Oxford University Press, is considered a pioneering study of modern art in a non-Western region and is recognized as one of the earliest works in English-language academic literature (Elkins, 2006).

16 The exhibition commemorated the first anniversary of the museum’s opening, titled *Contemporary Asian Art Show, 1980* (which was the second edition following the first year). It showcased artworks from 13 Asian countries, including Bangladesh, China, India, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Japan, as well as 5 countries from Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

17 *The 3rd ASIAN Art Show—Symbolic Visions in Contemporary Asian Life* commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Fukuoka Art Museum. It showcased artworks from 15 countries, including Bangladesh, Brunei, China, India, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Japan, as well as 5 countries from Southeast Asia: Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

ASEAN Art in 1990.¹⁸ Later, there was an increase in exhibitions focusing on Southeast Asia, such as *Tradition, the Source of Inspiration* in 1991,¹⁹ *New Art from Southeast Asia* in 1993, and *Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia* in 1997.²⁰ Besides exhibitions, there were seminars and workshops associated with these art festivals. Exhibition catalogs or festival publications often included writings and articles reflecting collaborative efforts to review and present regional identity.²¹

It is undeniable that socio-political situations also influence artistic paradigms. Following the end of the Cold War, the spread of neoliberal political and economic systems, along with the globalization process, led to the creation of regional identities. This is reflected in the economic integration of the 1990s, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) established in 1967 and the Asia-Pacific network (Higgott, 1994; Acharya, 2013). These international relationships are also reflected in art activities, such as the establishment of supporting organizations like the Japan Foundation (1972)²², the 1st *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* in 1993 organized by the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia²³, and the

18 The exhibition *Narrative Visions in Contemporary ASEAN Art* showcased the collection of the Fukuoka Art Museum at the Japan Foundation, ASEAN Culture Center Gallery. It featured artists from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

19 The exhibition *Tradition, the Source of Inspiration* showcased works by artists from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It also included a seminar titled *ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, Workshop, and Exhibition*.

20 The exhibition *Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia* focused on the emergence of modern art in Southeast Asia, featuring works from Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

21 For example, the *Contemporary Asian Art Show, 1980* included an academic conference on the topic "What must be done for the future of Asian tradition and art which have been changed under the influence of Western art?"

22 The issue of artistic relations between Southeast Asia and Japan (see Mami, 2017, pp. 276–282). Notably, Ushiohoshi Masahiro is a key curator who studied Southeast Asian art in the 1990s, and Thailand's relations with Japan and Australia (see Poshyananda, 1992, p. 189).

23 *The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, APT* (1993) is a festival featuring artists from Asia, Australia, and the Pacific, excluding the United States. The first event included 220 artists from

ASEAN Arts Award initiated by Philip Morris in 1994.²⁴

The changing landscape of international art and inter-country collaborations, as mentioned above, has significantly increased studies on modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. This includes exploring and presenting the ontological aspects of modern and contemporary art in broader contexts, starting from the 1990s (e.g., Clark, 1998, 2008; Chiu & Genocchio, 2011; Taylor & Boreth, 2012; Turner & Antoinette, 2014). Additionally, there are studies by anthropologists and Southeast Asian scholars, mostly from American institutions, focusing on modern and contemporary art separately by country, such as Thailand (Phillips, 1992; Poshyananda, 1992; Cate, 2003), Vietnam (Taylor, 2000), and Indonesia (Holt, 1969; Wright, 1994; George, 1998, 2010).

The writings and exhibitions mentioned above share a common characteristic of rejecting the Euro-American-centric framework in art categorization and historiography. Instead, they focus on presenting the characteristics of the modern and contemporary periods in various Southeast Asian countries, each with its distinct features. This approach contrasts with earlier studies that often emphasized the richness derived solely from archaeological history. Through interdisciplinary studies involving anthropology, art history, and cultural studies, scholars from the region in the 1990s to early 2000s aimed to establish a new contemporary discourse in Southeast Asian art that diverged from Western modernism. Significant contributions to this perspective include T.K. Sabapathy's article "Developing Regionalist Perspectives in Southeast Asian Art Historiography" (1996) and Jim Supangkat's "Multiculturalism/Multimodernism" (1996).

In English-language writings, Ajarn Somporn often explains the development of art in Thailand. For instance, in the article "History of

20 countries. Its aim was to create an intellectual platform for discussion, debate, and critique from the perspective of people in the Asia-Pacific region (see Antoinette & Turner, 2014, 19–20).

24 Philip Morris, an international tobacco and cigarette manufacturing company based in the United States, founded the ASEAN Arts Award competition. This competition is aimed at artists residing in ASEAN countries and has been one of the significant art competitions for over three decades. It is supported by the ASEAN Secretary-General and more than 33 art institutions within the region.

Modern Art in Thailand” (1995), she traces the origins of modern art in Thailand from Western influences to the current situation. This includes not only discussing artworks by artists but also detailing artistic practices, along with describing the structure of Thai art, including exhibition spaces, support from governmental and private organizations, as well as current international exchanges and collaborations. On the other hand, the article “Realism in Thai Art” (2010) focuses on the depiction of realism in Thai art, a topic less explored in Thai-language writings.

The explanation of the development of Thai art often traces its early influence on Western art in the 1930s, leading to the emergence of modern art and subsequently, in the 1980s, contemporary art. However, this perspective does not imply domination or suggest that Western art forms entirely dictate Thai art. Instead, it emphasizes that Thai art integrates local identities to create a distinct artistic expression. This evolution has been intricate; globalization has introduced tensions between traditional practices and rapid modernization. These issues were significant regionally during 1990–1999 (see Acharya, 2013, 240), involving themes of internationalization, globalization, and cultural identity. Southeast Asian art exhibitions often reflect these tensions.²⁵ During this period, discussions about Thai art frequently focused on the transition from traditional Thai art to a form of Neo-Traditional Thai art (Poshyananda, 1992).²⁶ Furthermore, writings by Ajarn Somporn argued that contemporary art in Thailand has been influenced by traditional art forms and Thai culture, especially in installation art. As she stated:

“Personally, it has been fascinating for me to follow the development of installation art in Thailand. Not only are there influences from the

25 The exhibition *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* (1996) at the Singapore Art Museum, curated by T.K. Sabapathy, and the exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (1997), as well as exhibitions held at the Fukuoka Art Museum (as previously mentioned).

26 Neo-traditional Thai art refers to traditional art that incorporates Western techniques and methods into the artworks (see Cate, 2003). Interestingly, writings about contemporary art in Thailand after 2000 often separate the world of traditional art from that of contemporary art (see Saengsuratham, 2018).

*outside world, but some Thai artists are developing installation concepts inspired by Thai culture, like the traditional ceremonies and festivals...” (New Direction, New Forms, 1997)*²⁷

Once, Ajarn Somporn told the writer, *“I don’t write theoretically, I would rather explain using simple language.”* Nevertheless, Ajarn Somporn’s writings on modern and contemporary art in Thailand are part of broader discussions on the concept of “other modernities”, contributing to the development of “modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia.” This collaborative effort includes native scholars from the region²⁸, reflecting Ajarn Somporn’s remark that “the Southeast Asian circle is like a small family” (“2 Artists, 2 Curators on Contemporary Art in the International Scene,” 1998), emphasizing the significance of regional collaboration.

“I often feel that it is a great pity that Thai women artists do not know enough about the art scene and their fellow women artists in our neighboring countries. We tend to know more about the West. My hope is that this paper, in its own small way, encourages women artists of the region to come together.” (“Issues of Thai Contemporary Women Artists,” 1997)

Although the art writings of each country tend to focus on their national perspective, similar to the characteristics of nationalist history, large exhibitions and various writings that compile Southeast Asian art serve as a tool to expand the imagination of Southeast Asia as a region. This is done in the sense of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983; Acharya, 2013), built upon the idea of unity in diversity regarding artistic identities.

27 The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriya Putsongkram.

28 Apinan Poshyananda is another Thai curator and scholar who is part of this movement. He contributes through writing articles in the *Bangkok Post*, as well as participating in lectures and discussions on international art platforms.

BLOOMING THE CURATORIAL PRACTICE AND WOMEN'S ISSUE

Ajarn Somporn's most significant role is that of a "teacher," which encompasses teaching and organizing learning experiences. Ajarn Somporn is not only a classroom instructor but also actively participates in organizing exhibitions and conducting workshops to facilitate learning for students and new artists outside the institution. This section will examine Ajarn Somporn's role in curatorial practices. Additionally, it will focus on her particular interest in women's issues.

Sharing Curatorial Practice

As previously mentioned, the growth of art festivals and interest in art from Southeast Asia increased during the 1990s. These large-scale art festivals require managers and interpreters to handle a substantial amount of artwork, necessitating their presence at the same time and place. The role of exhibition makers thus becomes significantly important in this context. Within this framework, the role of the curator evolves from being a caretaker of collections to becoming a communicator and author, with the creation of exhibitions also being a creative process (O'Neill, 2012).

The term "exhibition" and even "curator" were relatively new in Thai society, gaining popularity in the early 1980s. In many original Thai-language articles, Ajarn Somporn referred to curators as "persons responsible for exhibitions" ("ผู้รับผิดชอบนิทรรศการ" in Thai), which corresponds to the meaning of a curator today. Moreover, Ajarn Somporn is probably one of the first curators in Southeast Asia and notably a female curator. The first exhibition curated by Ajarn Somporn was the printmaking exhibition of Malte Sartorius at Silpakorn University in 1988 (see the comparative table of curatorial processes in Southeast Asia in Flores, 2008, 72). With her background in printmaking and art education,²⁹ she can be considered an academic curator. This distinguishes her from earlier curators in Thailand and Indonesia

29 The curriculum for curatorial studies first emerged in 1987 at the postgraduate level at L'Ecole du Magasin in France, and later at the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) (O'Neill, 2012, 2).

who often had combined roles as artists and curators (Ibid, 73–81).

Ajarn Somporn's interest in curatorial practice probably began during her studies in the United States. Examining her writings reveals several articles on museums and art galleries that explore museum management and exhibition creation—topics that were relatively new areas of knowledge in the late 1970s to 1980s. For instance, “Modern Art Galleries in Stuttgart” (n.d., published in the *Globetrotter* around the late 1970s) and “Hara Museum” (1988). Both articles describe museum architectural design, interior planning, and management aspects, such as space utilization for various art forms, exhibition layout and circulation, collection management, artwork arrangements, and public programming. These writings could be among the earliest pieces about modern and contemporary art museum management in Thailand³⁰, distinguishing Ajarn Somporn's works from other art writings of the same period.

The curatorial practice of Ajarn Somporn, which began in the 1980s, coincided with the emerging concept of curating exhibitions as a foundational practice in the international art world (see more in O'Neill, 2012, 5). Furthermore, the globalized nature of the art world at that time is evident through Ajarn Somporn's curatorial work. Exhibitions that Ajarn Somporn curated, whether independently or as a co-curator, particularly from the 1990s to the early 2000s, often involved partnerships with international organizations. This period also aligned with Ajarn Somporn's tenure at Silpakorn University, where collaborations with entities such as the Australian Embassy focused on printmaking exchanges³¹, the Japan Foundation, and Goethe-Institut Thailand, resulting in significant exhibitions such as the *Art and Environment Exhibition* (1991)³² and *Alter*

30 Thank you, Vipash Purichanont, for the conversation and insightful observations on this topic.

31 See “Thai Australian Artistic Connections”, 2002; “The History of Art Dialogue between Australia and Thailand”, 2014.

32 *The Art and Environment* (1991, 1993, 1995) featured exhibitions and workshops organized collaboratively by Silpakorn University's Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts and the Goethe-Institut Thailand. These events were held in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The 1991 workshops were conducted with Rainer Wittenborn, and the 1993 event involved cooperation with Nikolaus Lang.

EGO: Contemporary Thai-European Art Exhibition (1999).³³

Moreover, Ajarn Somporn frequently conducted workshops alongside art exhibitions, fostering collaborations among Thai and international artists from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Asia region. She also pioneered artist residency programs between Thai and international artists at Silpakorn University (see “Visual Art Activities (1988–2000)”, 2000; “Thai Australian Artistic Connections”, 2002). These exhibitions were organized during her tenure as a professor at Silpakorn University and Chiang Mai University, featuring artists not only from these two institutions but also from various others. For Ajarn Somporn, integrating diverse art activities like lectures by international artists, artist residency programs, and workshops was essential to her teaching approach, designed to broaden the exposure of Thai artists to the international art scene.

After 2007, Ajarn Somporn’s contributions to public journals shifted, focusing more on writing exhibition catalog essays for artists and expanding her involvement in curatorial practice within Thailand. As Ajarn Somporn often remarks, *“Former students mostly come to me asking for help with their writing,”* highlighting her role as an art theory teacher. Her articles typically explore various artistic practices, covering traditional, modern, and contemporary art forms such as installation art, painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Ajarn Somporn’s writing style is distinguished by her meticulous examination and interpretation of artworks themselves, emphasizing the importance of engaging directly with the physical pieces rather than relying solely on contextual interpretations. She emphasizes the significance of experiencing the actual artwork, cautioning, *“When writing about artwork, we must see the actual piece. Photographs or printed reproductions can be misleading.”*

In curatorial practice, Ajarn Somporn’s approach is as diverse as her writing. Her exhibitions cover various genres of Thai art, including modern, neo-traditional, and contemporary art. Additionally, she has organized

33 *Alter EGO: Contemporary Thai-European Art* (1999) was a collaborative exhibition between the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts and the European Union. It was held at the Art Gallery of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, and the Gallery of Art & Designs, both at Silpakorn University.

honorary exhibitions, such as *The Art Exhibition In Remembrance of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej* in 2016.³⁴ Her extensive curatorial work has notably emphasized printmaking. Since moving to Chiang Mai, her focus has increasingly shifted to artists and exhibitions from the northern region. Ajarn Somporn maintains frequent collaborations with the Chiang Mai Art Museum,³⁵ contributing to exhibitions like *Thai Spirit Ties* in 2002³⁶ and *Time and Existence* in 2018.³⁷

Women's Issue

Throughout all of Ajarn Somporn's written works, those related to the issue of women appear to be the only type where she expresses her perspectives on womanhood, reflecting the gender roles and sexuality of women in Thai society and culture. They affirm that the issue of women in Thailand has distinct characteristics that cannot be fully understood through Western-centric frameworks. Understanding the artworks of Thai female artists must engage with the social and cultural contexts that contribute to their artistic creations. These works represent a significant aspect of the artistic identity of the artists involved.

Nora A. Taylor (2000, 12) notes that the study of contemporary art

34 *The Art Exhibition In Remembrance of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej* (2006) was held to commemorate and reflect on the great benevolence of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King Rama IX, after his passing. It took place at the National Gallery in Bangkok, featuring artworks from 20 artists nationwide.

35 It might be due to the significant contributions of the founding members of the Chiang Mai Art Museum, such as Phorchai Jaima, Songdej Thipthong, Prasong Luemuang, and Thongchai Srisukprasert, all of whom are former students of Ajarn Somporn. They graduated from the Department of Thai Art, Faculty of Painting, Silpakorn University.

36 *Thai Spirit Ties* (2002) featured artworks by 13 artists from Northern Thailand and Bangkok, exhibited at the Chiang Mai Art University Museum.

37 *Time and Existence* featured artworks by four Northern artist or Lanna artists: Songdej Thipthong, Pornchai Chaima, Lipikorn Makaew, and Arnan Ratchawang-Inn, exhibited at the Chiang Mai City Arts & Cultural Centre. All four artists are alumni of the Thai Art Department, Faculty of Painting, Silpakorn University.

has only recently become an academic discipline, resulting in relatively little scholarly interest in gender or sexual identity issues (e.g., Astri Wright, 1994). Ajarn Somporn's earliest work on female artists is "Women Artists in the Western World" (1985), which explores the history of female artists in Western art. The article discusses their roles and societal status before the 19th century, highlighting the obstacles they faced in accessing art education. Despite these challenges, these women persisted in their creative endeavors, specializing in embroidery and illustrating manuscripts within Christian religious contexts. Furthermore, Ajarn Somporn details the practices of notable female artists from the 19th century, emphasizing their artistic abilities in the concluding remarks of the article:

"...in the realm of artistic creation, if female artists devote sufficient time and effort to their work, the resulting artworks are no less significant than those created by male artists. Whether in terms of expressing thoughts, emotions, and feelings, presenting narrative forms and content, or even in the use of materials, techniques, or methods, female artists are not inferior to male artists in any way..."

Although the content does not directly mention Thai artists, it reflects perspectives on gender equality without segregation by gender. At the same time, it highlights the conditions affecting female artists, which influence their roles in the art world. Additionally, in the 1970s, while Ajarn Somporn was studying in the United States, the feminist movement was developing in Western countries. The second wave of feminism, which emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, sought to address the unequal treatment of women both at home and in society (Chiengthong, 2020, 16). These evolving perspectives may have influenced Ajarn Somporn's views.

Likewise, within the Thai academic sphere, the 1970s marked a period of growing discourse on women's rights and an expanding study of women's roles, trends that became more pronounced in the 1990s. (Saksong & Chuanchaisit, 2019, 65–66).³⁸ Furthermore, the article "A Report on

38 As reflected by the opening of women's rights education courses at the university level in 2000,

Contemporary Women's Art in Thailand" (2009) documents the movement of women artists' groups and the significant history of women's exhibitions in the 1990s-2000s,³⁹ such as the *Tradisexion* exhibition (2003), held in conjunction with International Women's Day.

Moreover, from 2003 onwards, Ajarn Somporn discusses the role of Thai female artists in her article "A Report on Contemporary Women's Art in Thailand" (2009). This article specifically explores the position of women in Thai society, tracing the history of early Thai female artists and continuing to examine the works of contemporary artists at that time. Ajarn Somporn clearly articulated a distinct viewpoint, expressing disagreement with using Western feminist ideas to overshadow discussions about the artistic styles of Thai female artists. She emphasized the importance of acknowledging their roots within Thai society and cultural contexts:

"The term 'feminism' is rootless in Thai art circles simply because it is not a Thai term and it originates from the West. Given the difference in traditional, cultural, and religious backgrounds, feminism in the Western context is certainly different from the Thai context. Many Thai women artists feel more comfortable with the concept of 'women's issues,' which relates to the reality, circumstances, and direct experiences of women in Thai society."
(*"Issues of Thai Contemporary Women Artists"*, 2003)

Ajarn Somporn often emphasizes the cultural context of Thailand, which is characterized by specific traditions and beliefs rooted in Buddhism. This cultural backdrop contributes to the unique gender identities of Thai women. She highlights that these complexities should not be overlooked when examining the artworks of Thai female artists, as she mentions:

the Chiang Mai University Women's Studies Center began offering master's degree programs in Women's Studies. Thammasat University also started offering graduate-level Women's Studies courses (Saksong, & Chuanchaisit, 2019, 66)

39 For example, exhibitions like *Creative Femininity* (1992), *Art and Reflection* by the Hers group (1992), *Woman Opportunity* (1992), and *Womanifesto I and II* (1997, 1999).

“Some women work from other cultures and incorporate both Western and non-Western ideas. Also, there is the importance of Thai culture itself to contemporary art. Thai women’s art, I consider, is more subtle than aggressive. This does not necessarily mean Thai women remain passive in society, but their work is contextualized by the importance of Buddhism in Thai culture.”
(“A Report on Contemporary Women’s Art in Thailand”, 2009)

In addition, Ajarn Somporn also supports women artist groups in the Northern region, such as the exhibition *Stories from Her* by the Kasalong Group (2009) and exhibitions for the La Femme group. This underscores that the issue of women is consistently important to Ajarn Somporn, whether through writings in both Thai and English or through organizing artist residency programs. These programs involved inviting female artists from abroad to exchange ideas with Thai artists starting in 1990. During this period, the international art scene also placed significant emphasis on gender identities and diversity.

Ajarn Somporn’s curatorial practices frequently address women’s issues, as evidenced by her writings on exhibitions, curatorial roles, and art activities. Notably, she has organized operational workshops with international participants to foster artistic exchange, showcasing her role as a connector between artworks and artists. These initiatives aim to present artists’ works to the public while highlighting her working methods and consistent support for Thai women artists.

REFLECTING ON SOMPORN’S WRITING

Reflecting on my discussions with Ajarn Somporn Rodboon about selecting articles, I often recall her remarking, *“Articles of that age might no longer be interesting today.”* This insight into Ajarn Somporn’s approach to writing made me consider how she intricately detailed the evolution of artistic ideas and practices. Her writing style seemed to guide readers through a personal exploration of artworks, emphasizing foundational concepts that evolved alongside technological advancements and shifting paradigms. Rather

than being outdated, these selected writings provide a crucial foundation for understanding contemporary art and its significance in Thailand and Southeast Asia. The critiques and debates Ajarn Somporn engaged with continue to raise important questions that remain relevant in Thai society today.

Re-reading Ajarn Somporn's articles, alongside the academic and social contexts in Thailand and Southeast Asia, reveals her perspectives and professional experiences. In her Thai writings, Ajarn Somporn cultivated knowledge of new art forms from the Western art world to share with the public, while also challenging stagnant views in the Thai art world. In her English writings, she conveyed knowledge about Thai art history to the international art community, showcasing a distinct artistic identity. Additionally, Ajarn Somporn planted the seeds of thought and understanding about curatorial practices and support for female artists.

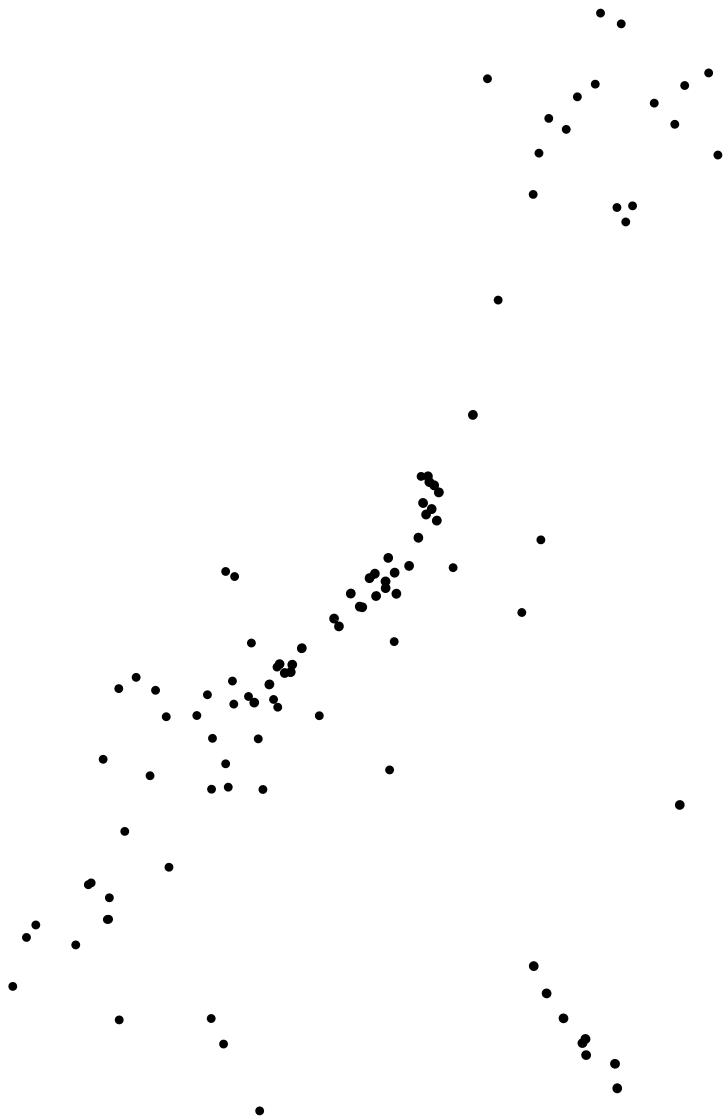
The textual analysis of Ajarn Somporn Rodboon's writings in this article represents just one facet of her professional life. Through her insightful contributions in both Thai and English, Ajarn Somporn has bridged the art world, the public, and the academic sphere. Nonetheless, these works embody her legacy as a "teacher" who nurtures her students and consistently "sows" the seeds of art knowledge.

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Selected writing of
Somporn Rodboon,
1987 — 2014



This section, originally in Thai, represents one of the most frequent types of writings by Somporn Rodboon in the Thai language since the late 1970s. The selected articles here begin in 1987, mainly consisting of writings for journals or magazines and articles for the National Art Competition. These four articles demonstrate the introduction of “new concepts and art forms” (at that time) from Western art to Thai readers. By explaining these ideas from a foundational perspective, revisiting these concepts today helps to gain a deeper insight into the art forms that were once contentious in Thai society. This is particularly relevant to contemporary art or artists whose creativity does not solely rely on artistic skills but also on new ideas and techniques that emerge from technological advancements.

Concepts and Art Movements

SUBWAY ART¹

At present, Subway Art, or the practice of painting on subway trains is not a new phenomenon in the global art scene. However, it is interesting to note that the influence of such art has reemerged and become widely prevalent in various aspects, including public paintings, commercial art projects, design works, advertising, and even personal artistic creations by some artists.

Subway Art is an art form that has evolved from drawing images or written letters (graffiti) on the walls or surfaces of various places, commonly found in public spaces. It is sometimes referred to as “Graffiti art.” Artists working in this style are known as “Graffiti artists,” although they often identify themselves as “writers.”

The Subway Art movement began to take shape in New York City around 1960 onwards. While artists may draw inspiration from general graffiti, their works often have distinctive features that set them apart from ordinary graffiti. Unlike typical graffiti, which often involved written names or images as delinquent behavior in public spaces, the group of artists who painted on subway trains in New York City had specific intentions to create remarkably interesting images. These artists faced numerous challenges and obstacles before having the opportunity to produce their works. They could only work after sunset, amidst darkness, and entailed the risk of apprehension by authorities.

Furthermore, Subway artists had to sneak out from their parents and compete with their opponents. The competition among these artists involves showcasing their abilities by painting over others’ work to render them meaningless or putting a cross mark over existing pieces to symbolize their victory. While some images on the subway trains endured for a long time, others were destroyed for various reasons. The drawings of these

¹ This article was initially published in the magazine *Globetrotter* in 1987, 4(48), (pp. 62–66), and was later included in the catalog of the *9th Art Exhibition by Members of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University* (pp. 41–44) in 1992. The original text is in Thai and was translated into English by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

artists possessed a unique characteristic that set them apart from other art forms because they gained widespread visibility from the public daily. Each day, the subway trains made multiple trips throughout the city, covering almost every direction.

The key element in the artwork of these artists is lettering. Each artist has distinct patterns or styles that convey their unique identities. Their lettering involves creative design, research, experimentation, and exploration of techniques that align with their expressive needs. Artists often start with rough sketches or outlines before experimenting with size and color. Due to the need for rapid execution, they commonly use spray paint cans. This technique is quick and easy, providing immediate results.

In its early stages, painting on subway cars began with small areas and gradually expanded to the entire exterior, from top to bottom. Artists often referred to this style of writing as “Top-to-Bottom.” The spray-painted letters featured vibrant and eye-catching colors. Initially, the letters were mostly two-dimensional and flat, but over time, there was a creative development to give them volume, showing three-dimensional qualities. The composition sometimes included cartoons or symbols, illustrating the writer’s distinctive style. The overall images reflected a thoughtful design process. Three-dimensional lettering gained prominence in the mid-1970s, contributing to an exciting and dynamic visual experience. Each artwork showcased different levels of the artist’s skill, conveying something specific to the viewer.

Subway artists often opted to paint older train models, typically those manufactured around the 1950s, particularly on the exterior walls of both sides of the trains. The flat surfaces make it easy to create artwork. The popular train lines that became a showcase for the skills were the Number 5 Lexington Avenue Express and the Number 2 train that runs from the Bronx to Brooklyn. The work of each individual or group that appeared on these subway cars would then be transformed into mobile art. Before artists start painting, they must gather information about each train line, such as which station it will stop at and where it will be parked when not in operation. They would carefully study and plan their escape routes before covertly leaving their artwork on the train cars. These artists possess exceptionally sharp

eyes and agility, enabling them to evade apprehension by authorities.

Most Graffiti artists are teenagers—young people in their school years— who aspire to create artwork that will gain recognition and establish their reputation. These artists strive to make a name for themselves, taking pride when their work becomes well-known and acknowledged within the art community and among their peers. They often write their names, as well as those of friends, family members, and sometimes loved ones. Moreover, they occasionally incorporate messages that praise and celebrate individuals they hold dear such as their mothers. Often, these artists use subway trains as a medium to express their opinions and emotions through written messages related to society, politics, and various philosophical texts.

This group of Graffiti writers emphasizes the importance of seeking distinctive individual styles. They aim to avoid established art forms that were widely prevalent at the time. Instead, they select images from various available sources, such as cartoons, television, and advertisements, and combine them with new and meaningful ways to alter their meanings. The letters or images created by these artists often reflect their characteristics. On occasion, they may borrow and adapt other artists' styles to develop their unique identity.

The primary focus of these artists is the exploration of unique letterforms, finding ways to integrate them to appear harmonious. Their styles may vary, ranging from traditional and simple to exquisite and gaudy. Additionally, arrows and various shapes depicting movement and direction are incorporated alongside the letterforms. Artists working together as a group share techniques for designing styles of lettering, providing suggestions to each other for further creative actions. Consequently, each artist's lettering style is unique and continuously evolves. Some prefer straightforward and easily readable letterforms, while others prefer the complexity and intricacy of their letters that demonstrate their superior skills and abilities compared to others.

In addition to inventing their letterforms, Graffiti artists also favor writing their names in a style similar to a signature known as "tagging." Each person's signature has a unique style, serving as a true representation or symbol of the artist. Those within the Graffiti Art or Subway art community,

or individuals who frequently encounter these names, can instantly recognize and identify the artist behind the signature. To create tags, artists typically use spray paint, or at times, markers with felt tips.

In terms of technique, while Subway Art may appear rather simple at first glance, the reality is that the preparation before creating each piece can be quite significant. Artists typically sketch a preliminary drawing in advance to study shapes, lines, and colors until they are satisfied, finding ways to integrate them to appear harmonious. Additionally, documenting the work of other Graffiti artists through photographs is a common practice to study and identify areas that may have flaws and need improvement.

Once the artists are satisfied with the sketch, they proceed to the subway trains and begin the creative process by outlining the contours of the letters with spray paint in a light overall color. Afterward, they use different colors according to the design to fill in the shapes of the letters. A special technique, which is widely popular among this group of artists known as “fading,” is gradually blending two colors softly. Following this, they use darker or brighter colors to outline the edges of the letters and additional elements, emphasizing and making the shapes stand out. The process of rapidly spraying or painting to create an image requires an exceptionally high level of expertise, experience, and special skills. Painting the entire length of the train takes hours and several hours and requires dozens of spray paint cans, which are often not cheap. Thus, Subway artists need to save money to buy their colors without receiving any financial support from others.

Graffiti Art, or Subway Art, remains a subject of debate regarding whether it should be considered art or not, depending on the opinions and perspectives of each viewer. Some acknowledge it as art, while others hold a different view. Hence, finding a definitive measure for this can be challenging. Moreover, there is a considerable number of people who disagree with this form of art. For instance, in 1981, the New York City police filed charges against young Graffiti artists. They faced challenges in apprehending and pursuing these youth, who were considered delinquent by the authorities for violating the law, damaging public property, and causing disturbances in society. In the same year, police statistics indicated that they made approximately 800 arrests of these artists. However, these young artists remained

defiant, continuing to create their artwork. The events unfolded as a kind of minor clash, though not physically violent between law enforcement officers and young artists. The prohibition seems to provoke and challenge the artists to create their graffiti on parked trains during the night clandestinely, or when the area was deserted.

Nevertheless, if we are to view Subway Art or Graffiti Art from an artistic perspective, we can see that these works have significant creative, design, compositional, and expressive values. The works are filled with vibrant colors, vivacity, excitement, and inner strength, reflecting the genuine feelings and emotions of the artists. While the artworks of these artists may be perceived as valueless by certain groups of people, many artists consider their paintings on the subway trains as a form of public art. Upon closer examination, one can see that colorful drawings can bring life and vibrancy to the surroundings of the old city neighborhoods full of dilapidated buildings with perpetual dark and gloomy atmospheres. When the environment is improved, it can have a positive impact on the overall well-being of the people in the city.

Graffiti on subway trains undergoes continuous changes and lacks repetition. While some can be beautiful and captivating, those created by less skilled artists can turn into eyesores instead of enhancing the scene. The paintings may become chaotic and visually uncomfortable. This is recognized as one of the drawbacks of Subway Art or Graffiti Art, and it is considered an unlawful behavior by authorities.

Subway Art or Graffiti art is predominantly created by young people from poor families, including those who grow up in slums or minority groups living on American soil. They often face difficulties and strive to gain recognition, attention, and acceptance. These youngsters gather and form groups, appointing leaders and establishing their rules. With a strong sense of unity, they engage in collective activities. It is noteworthy that these groups are not youth gangs involved in violent clashes as some of us may have seen in the past through a movie like *West Side Story* (1961). They do not abuse substances or commit serious criminal actions that threaten society. On the contrary, they are driven by creative ideas and use art as a medium of expression.

When the authorities opposed them with force, taking stringent legal measures against Subway Art, these young artists revealed that their intention was not to be disruptive or create serious problems against society. To them, making art is an outlet for their creativity, thus deserving more support and understanding. Graffiti serves as a symbol of freedom. These young individuals find solace and pride in their creative endeavors. Once they create graffiti, they feel a sense of relaxation and pride. When their work is successful and appreciated by those who see it, it boosts their confidence.

This type of art has been criticized from various perspectives, both positive and negative. Some view it as an act indicating violence and aggression, a symbol of destruction, and an indication of a degraded culture. However, many others argue that Subway Art or Graffiti Art is a symbol of New York City, representing the life of some individuals. In American society dominated by modern civilization and technological advancement, these young artists should receive more assistance, better treatment, and compassion. Moreover, numerous galleries and art centers recognize the value of Subway Art and aim to support these artists by providing a platform for organizing exhibitions to showcase their work.

Currently, many Subway artists have garnered popularity worldwide. One of many renowned artists is the late Keith Haring whose legacy involved numerous artworks ranging from fine art to commercial art. The influence of Subway Art or Graffiti Art is not confined to New York City. This form of art has become more widely accepted on an international level. Anyone traveling to London, Amsterdam, or larger European metropolises, especially most recently in Germany, will likely encounter such artwork in galleries, museums, public spaces, and even public parks.

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MIXED MEDIA ART¹

In Thailand's contemporary art scene, the term "mixed media" has gained significant popularity. Various art experts and artists have made attempts to define and explain this term, approaching it from different perspectives. However, there still exists a struggle among those in the art community, including enthusiasts, instructors, students, and even artists themselves, to fully comprehend and conceptualize the true essence of "mixed media." Within the realm of art, the word "media" carries two distinct meanings. Firstly, it refers to the materials employed for artistic expression. Secondly, it encompasses the practices and techniques utilized in creating art. Therefore, the term "mixed media" refers to the use of a combination of materials, methods, or practices in the creative process.

In the context of using mixed media as part of artistic expression, there are no rigidly prescribed types of materials. The artists have the freedom to incorporate various natural or man-made mediums. As for "mixed media" works that primarily focus on artistic practices or methods of expression, the possibilities are boundless. Artists can choose whichever method they deem suitable, resulting in combinations, such as painting techniques and sculpture methods, photography and painting, or even sound and sculpture. However, the term "mixed media" has been widely used in the Western art scene since the 20th century.

The term "mixed media" in art does not inherently convey profound implications beyond indicating an artist's fusion of various materials, techniques, or mediums for creative expression. Some artists may choose not to explicitly employ the term "mixed media," instead articulating the specific materials or techniques utilized in their artworks. Alternative

¹ This article was first published in *The 37th National Art Exhibition Catalog* in 1991 (pp. 120–127), and later included in the book *College of Fine Arts 50th Anniversary, a collection of articles by alumni of the College of Fine Arts (now Bunditpatanasilpa Institute of Fine Arts) in 2002* (pp. 174–179). The original text is in Thai and was translated into English by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriyapa Putsongkram.

designations, such as “assorted materials,” “combine materials,” “combine painting,” “intermedia,” “multimedia,” and “mixed mediums” are adopted based on the artists’ individual preferences.

Mixed media art encompasses more than just categorization by type alone. At times, “mixed media” becomes integrated and embedded within various types of artworks. Paintings that incorporate mixed materials are known as “mixed media painting,” indicating that the artwork goes beyond traditional paint-on-canvas techniques found in pure painting. Similarly, sculptures that blend multiple materials are termed “mixed media sculpture.” Additionally, some artists use terms such as “creating environments with diverse materials” (mixed media environment) or “mixed media installation” to illustrate their use of mixed materials and techniques across different forms. This approach involves constructing shapes and spaces and creating an atmosphere within the installation area to convey distinct meanings and artistic uniqueness. Examples of this can be seen in the works of Kamol Tassananchalee and George Segal.

Upon closer examination of the historical development of concepts, forms, and methodologies in art, it becomes evident that “mixed media” is not a recent innovation but rather has a longstanding history. However, artists in the past did not formally incorporate it into their artworks as is common today. In primitive art, sculptures were often created as objects of worship or to honor the spiritual beliefs of their communities. Artists typically used various materials available to them, such as wood bark, animal bones, seashells, animal hides, and other materials, to construct three-dimensional forms. Moreover, painting techniques were sometimes blended with sculptural methods. This can be seen in the ritual masks of African tribes, which were painted, and in the mummy masks of the Inca civilization in Peru, which employed a combination of materials and painting techniques. These artworks used materials like clay, rope, and fabric-like materials to shape forms and apply paint to masks.

Apart from these examples of primitive art, the ancient Egyptians also employed mixed techniques by painting pigments on sculptures. Similarly, the Greek artistic tradition incorporated a diverse array of materials, such as ivory, gold, stone, and other components into their artworks. Even within

Thai art, the use of various materials and techniques is also discernible, evident in wood carvings on gables or pulpits which are often lacquered, gilded, gold-plated, or embellished with colored glass. Another prominent example of incorporating “mixed media” is present in Baroque art during the 17th and 18th centuries. The architectural embellishments of this epoch employed a mixture of materials and techniques, creating an optical illusion that made it challenging to distinguish between the painted and sculpted components.

In the 20th century, the utilization of mixed media significantly influenced the creative endeavors of numerous artists. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, prominent artists in the Cubist movement, are renowned for pioneering the technique of applying various two-dimensional materials on a flat surface to create works of art, a method known as “collage.” Their chosen materials often comprised items easily found near the artists themselves, such as newspapers, labels, cigarette packaging, and wallpaper. Picasso also incorporated readymade materials, like a trowel, to create a three-dimensional assemblage. Similarly, Kurt Schwitters, a German artist, engaged with materials linked to commerce and advertising, including tags, product labels, newspapers, and bottle caps. The presentation of ideas regarding the use of materials by this artist directly influences the creativity of another Dadaist artist, Marcel Duchamp. He employed found objects or readymade objects, like bicycle wheels, fixed onto a high stool, to convey a message about the loss of independence as a satirical critique of politics and war.

Christo Vladimirov Javacheff, a Bulgarian artist, dyed pieces of canvas to lend them an appearance of age and wear before wrapping them around bottles of different sizes and shapes. He then proceeded to tie ropes around these bottles. He aimed to transform the familiar into something entirely new with a different meaning. Some contemporary artists derived inspiration from primitive art, yet their intentions might have diverged significantly. While primitive art emphasized spirituality and mysticism, contemporary artists might focus on the advancement of science and modern technology. Despite the similarities in the overall format or structure of their works, the choice and utilization of materials were starkly dissimilar. For instance, figurative sculptures found in southern Congo were made

from various materials like pointed iron resembling nails, as well as wood and other materials. By contrast, contemporary artists might create sculptural works that depict an astronaut using materials that represent technological advancements.

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns are eminent contemporary artists who draw significant influence from the Dada movement in their emphasis on utilizing various materials and objects in their artistic expression. They are known for incorporating everyday objects, including readymade and found objects, into their works to reflect the ethos and values of contemporary society. Their creations have eventually become the epitome of “pop” art.

In architecture, mixed materials are deployed in Antoni Gaudi’s Church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Spain, and Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers in Los Angeles. Overall, while both architectural structures possess characteristics akin to a sculpture, their ornamentation and decoration comprise various types of materials that form elaborate patterns and vivid colors, similar to a painting. Moreover, the integration of diverse materials is so seamless that it is almost impossible to notice that these structures were not made from a single medium. Both iconic architectures not only serve to express the architects’ thoughts and aspirations but also reflect aesthetic values.

The establishment or limitation of specific forms or techniques in art, such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, or other branches, to have definite and fixed formats, was relatively outdated for artists in the present day. As long as humans continue to create and innovate, forms and techniques will inevitably evolve according to the times and circumstances. Standards from the past may not be suitable for the conditions of the modern world. Therefore, contemporary art that employs mixed materials or techniques should not pose a difficult problem as to how it should be categorized. Anyone who views or categorizes art can do so with understanding. However, when viewing artworks, we should prioritize appreciating their intrinsic value rather than attempting to classify them into specific categories. Viewers should respect and consider the intentions of the artist who created the artwork.

It is noteworthy that whenever contemporary artists from Europe and America employ the term “mixed media” to describe their works, what can be observed is their tendency to utilize both found and ready-made materials, regardless of the form or technique of their artworks. Whether the artworks are two-dimensional collage techniques, three-dimensional assemblages, or a fusion of elements from both two and three dimensions.

The genre of mixed media art is not limited to certain forms or creative practices, and the use of this term does not pose a complex issue for artists or create confusion among international art audiences. However, once artists engage with diverse materials or techniques, the application of various methods naturally ensues. They simply do not think it is necessary to label these works strictly as using mixed techniques or as an entirely separate art form. This is because when “mixed media” is applied, it is likely to be understood implicitly.

As for the question of whether artworks using mixed materials or techniques fit into a specific art category or not, let us first establish an understanding of the contemporary global landscape. Beyond the scope of the art world, various societal aspects and cultural values seem extensively intertwined. In the realm of fashion, for example, the convergence between women’s and men’s fashion, hairstyles, clothing, accessories, or footwear has become prevalent. Consequently, establishing rigid and definite guidelines is therefore challenging and may not necessarily have any significant meaning.

However, the value of mixed media art depends largely on the artist’s understanding. Combining different materials or techniques into an artwork superficially may not yield the desired effect. Artists need to have a clear concept, coupled with precise execution. Crucially, the artwork should convey meaning, reflect beauty, and embody artistic value, rather than merely assembling components without purpose. As for the categorization of art in the National Exhibition of Art, mixed media is included as one of the art types. This adjustment in art categories is made to align with the evolving creative practices of contemporary artists, reflecting an international trend. Some artists do not wish to work in the traditional genres of painting, sculpture, or printmaking. On the contrary, their focus lies in the cultivation of independent works that venture beyond the confines of these three

traditional art genres. To this end, the National Exhibition of Art Committee welcomes artists who employ varied artistic approaches while recognizing that it is far too limiting to classify works of art into merely three categories.

In addition, within the contemporary art scene, many Thai artists are increasingly exploring new artistic expressions influenced by advancements in science and technology, such as computer art and video art. These forms are categorized not as mixed media art but rather as another genre known in the West as “media art.” Therefore, in the future, it will be important to reconsider whether the genre of mixed media art will continue to be relevant or if it should be replaced by a more suitable overarching term that better encompasses emerging art forms.

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CONCEPTUAL ART¹

Currently, the value of certain types of art is determined by ideas, cognitive perception, and expression of contemporary intellect. One such example is conceptual art, which gained prominence in the mid-1960s. The term was coined by Edward Kienholz, an American Pop and Surrealist artist. Conceptual art is sometimes referred to as “idea art” or “information art” and is also related to other art types within the same overarching category, such as body art, performance art, minimal art, and land art.

Marcel Duchamp is a Dada artist renowned for his pioneering role in conceptual art. He was more interested in the ideas of the artists than the finished and tangible works. This points to the fact that conceptual art shifts the viewer’s focus from the art object to the “idea,” which is an indispensable part of the creative process. Duchamp emphasized the use of intellect in artistic expression, stating that various objects in our everyday lives, whether readymade or found objects, can be employed to create art. As a result, the original meaning of these objects is transformed, serving as a “medium” or a carrier of ideas. This does not necessarily relate to their utilitarian functions. Instead, the material becomes the “idea,” both in the artist’s conception and the viewer’s interpretation.

Moreover, Duchamp expressed the viewpoint that works of art should possess significant meaning beyond mere creation, which depends solely on the artist’s mastery as is a long-standing tradition. He argued that art should not be confined by rigid standards or fixed aesthetic preferences. The essence of an artwork lies in the intention and ideas of the artist rather than the preconceived notions of beauty based on aesthetic principles. While many globally renowned artists, such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso,

¹ This article was first published in the catalog of the *Art and Environment Exhibition* in 1991 (pp. 16–19), and was later included in the book *College of Fine Arts 50th Anniversary*, a collection of articles written by alumni of the College of Fine Arts (now Bunditpatanasilpa Institute of Fine Arts) in 2002 (pp. 174–179). The original text is in Thai and was translated into English by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriya Putsongkram.

and Piet Mondrian are known for creating art for art's sake, Duchamp, by contrast, asserted that "creating art is an expression of ideas."

It can be observed that Duchamp's ideas became prevalent in the 1950s and had a direct impact on artworks within the Neo-Dada movement, notably those of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Both artists inherited Duchamp's spirit by incorporating a diverse range of readymade materials to convey meaning and artistic ideas in their works. During the mid-1960s, the conceptual art movement further evolved and played an increasingly significant role in the global contemporary art scene.

Since conceptual art is not confined to any particular ideas, forms, or practices, it allows artists to express their ideas and individual perspectives freely. Conceptual artists give less importance to aesthetic values than to conceptual values. One crucial condition in conceptual art is that artists must align their ideas with 'knowledge' when choosing various media or materials to create their artworks.

The ideas of artists in the conceptual art group are influenced by the culture, society, and environment. They are often expressed through written proposals and may involve the use of various mediums, such as photography, documents, charts, diagrams, maps, films, videos, and, at times, non-visual media like sound or scent. Some artists even use their own or others' bodies in movement to convey their ideas. However, the most prevalent and widely popular form of conceptual art is the use of language. However, conceptual art, especially art and language, which is currently highly popular, primarily communicates ideas through language. Artists may use a single word or text—which could be descriptive or explanatory, alone or in combination with images: drawings, prints, or materials—to compose works in the form of an installation or documentary. Conceptual art is an interesting movement and can be considered a new avant-garde art form grounded in reason. However, regardless of what the reasons are for conceptualizing artworks, they must be unique to the artists themselves.

Conceptual art, which is currently widely popular in the global art scene, often takes the form of "documentary art." It is the type of art that presents educational content, using documents and information on any particular subject related to the artist's concept. This information may be

portrayed in the form of photographs' documenting processes, or it may involve descriptive text providing information about a particular thing, event, or person. Some artists may opt for alternative media instead of photographs and text, such as audio recordings, films, videos, maps, or diagrams to convey meaning and ideas.

In some instances, conceptual artists may express their ideas by using language that is integral and directly related to their artwork. Viewers are required to read these texts to gain an understanding, which can then impact their contemplation. This approach differs significantly from other art forms such as painting or sculpture. In this genre of art, instead of focusing on using their skills for creative expression, artists put a greater emphasis on the conceptual aspect. Documentary art often directs viewers to see and comprehend the reality of various things directly and straightforwardly.

Conceptual art can be expressed in the form of installation, bringing space to life through three-dimensional artworks that are not restricted to certain forms, techniques, methods, or materials. Artists may use ready-made or found materials to construct elements within the space, allowing viewers to walk in and actively engage with the artwork. Additionally, there are forms such as three-dimensional assemblages or the use of mixed media—employing at least two different types of materials or artistic practices.

The content and themes of conceptual art vary widely. Some may focus on political issues, while others may create art related to various problems and conflicts concerning the influence of the environment on humanity. Creating conceptual art requires artists to invest time and experience, as well as knowledge about the subject matter they choose for their work. Some artists spend years conducting research, gathering information, taking photographs, creating diagrams, collecting materials, interviewing relevant individuals, or undertaking any activities related to the expression of their ideas. Their work is not spontaneous, rather, it is a deliberate expression of their purposeful and rational ideas.

The work of Rainer Wittenborn, a German artist, serves as an example illustrating an opposing stance towards the use of new technologies in warfare and economic exploitation. He claimed that it has resulted in damage and destruction to the living conditions of humans, animals, and

nature—an environment crucial to our existence. He combined artistic techniques with various practices and materials that are unrelated to art to convey his thoughts, including through mass media approaches used for public relations or even cartography, to bring attention to the disastrous consequences of the Vietnam War.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Wittenborn focused his attention on the impact of bombing during the Vietnam War. He later shifted his interest towards industrial growth, which contributed to the destruction of beautiful natural environments in Canada and the Amazon rainforest, endangering the peaceful and abundant life of the indigenous people and local wildlife. Wittenborn was profoundly concerned about these issues. Hence, instead of attempting to express emotions in his art, he conveyed his observations about the threatened livelihood of local people due to technological advancement. His focus was on presenting information filled with reasons and facts, rather than creating artworks aimed at evoking a melancholic or sorrowful response.

Wittenborn compiled information through several years of research. He traveled extensively to collect data and document events, recording them in the form of photographs that serve to provide viewers with information, knowledge, and diverse perspectives. The accumulated factual information was presented as a “documentary installation,” where facts manifest themselves in a self-evident manner. The concept behind Wittenborn’s work is rooted in his interest in ecology, sometimes incorporating materials or objects related to the culture and life of the respective regions. The artist’s creations not only revealed the truth but also served as valuable historical and educational resources.

While conceptual art may be challenging to understand, it does not mean that it is entirely incomprehensible. This art form is not well-known or widely accepted in the Thai art scene because some individuals are unfamiliar with the global paradigm shift and contemporary art. They still adhere to the conventions of traditional arts from the past. However, personal preferences and tastes play a significant role in art appreciation; from an educational standpoint, learning and understanding concepts, forms, and expressions of art by various artists are of utmost importance and necessity.

COMPUTER ART¹

From the past to the present, the creation of art is a longstanding human behavior that reflects the culture of each era. Ancient humans used fingers to draw or paint on cave walls. Over time, tools and instruments for making art were developed, including chisels, pigments, brushes, pencils, and even cameras, as a result of industrial and technological advancements.

When artists aim to create art or beautiful things of value, the first consideration is the invention of tools to materialize their creativity. Recent technological innovations, particularly electronics, and computers, have become crucial tools in art production due to their ability to produce various forms and types of art, ranging from the styles of the Old Masters to modern pieces of art unlike anything ever seen before. This technological advancement creates opportunities for artists with computer knowledge and programming skills to create art without limits. The incorporation of computers into art practice represents a pivotal turning point in art history, marking an important step towards the development of new techniques and the pursuit of novelties for the art world.

Some art critics still do not recognize computer art as true art because it is created using various mechanical devices. However, in reality, a computer is no different from a paintbrush or airbrush because these tools cannot create art on their own; they rely on the artist's control. Like other art forms, computer art is a product of human intelligence that challenges artists' ability to create works that reflect their thoughts, reasoning, theories, or formulas. Computers are merely a medium for conveying an artist's ideas into images and forms. The true creation of art lies in the mind

¹ This article was first published in the catalog of the *9th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists* in 1992 (pp. 94–99), and was later included in the book *College of Fine Arts 50th Anniversary*, a collection of articles written by alumni of the College of Fine Arts (now Bunditpatanasilpa Institute of Fine Arts) in 2002 (pp. 120–123). The original text is in Thai and was translated into English by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

and thoughts of the artist, not in the computer. Art created using computer systems is categorized as scientific art. This type of creation requires the artist to have not only artistic knowledge but also a considerable amount of scientific knowledge.

Computers can create images in remarkable ways, allowing shapes to be resized by enlarging or reducing them without leaving any traces of modification. They can also animate images, providing a level of movement (animation) that is hard to achieve in traditional media. The colors in computer-generated images are often brighter and more vivid than those on canvas. The texture observed in computer art often consists of fine parallel lines or very small square dots arranged like pieces in a mosaic. Images in computer art do not quite resemble typical paintings or colored images. Computer-generated images tend to appear less smooth and less continuous compared to traditional paintings. Moreover, while computer art may not achieve the same level of detail as traditional drawings, it does not imply that it is less valuable. Some computer-generated artworks possess power and impact on viewers' thoughts, emotions, and sensations similar to traditional art.

Creating computer art is a form of creativity that is not derived from randomness or accidental occurrences. Every aspect must undergo a sequential process of thinking, planning, calculation, and data programming, involving multiple trials to achieve the artist's desired outcome. It is a scientific process, an approach that is different from traditional practices but is based on the artist's inner feelings. Computer artists are by no means different from other artists. The main distinction lies in the fact that they use modern tools to explore new ideas more extensively.

Though appearing to be easy and simple, computer art requires a considerable amount of time for program input. Successful initial program input allows artists to use the first image as a key to create subsequent images with different characteristics. If the displayed image still looks unpleasant and incomplete, adjustments can be made without the concerns faced by traditional painters who might worry about overpainting, leaving traces of corrections, or having to repaint the entire image. Another notable feature of computer art is that once an image is produced through the

printing process from a computer, each is considered an original and can be printed multiple times as long as data in the program remains intact.

Generally, the initial process of creating computer images starts with planning the desired characteristics of the output. The artists will then create a program using detailed data based on principles and methods required by the computer system. To generate images from a computer, artists may use control buttons, keyboards, electronic pens, or various tools. Likewise, the selection of colors or the determination of light and shadow can be done through functions to input data into the machine. Once the data is processed, the final image is displayed on the monitor screen. To preserve that image permanently, the artist must print it by using a printer.

Computers used for artistic creation are available in different types and specifications, depending on their intended applications. Some modern computers are equipped with microphones for voice commands as input devices. For certain types of computers, artists use electronic pens to draw on a drawing board connected to two video screens. One screen is empty, while the other contains information about colors and other elements, known as the “palette screen.” Computers can perform various tasks as programmed with complete accuracy and speed, regardless of the complexity of the program’s data.

Most of the images presented in computer art often resemble pop art because they depict familiar and well-known elements in society (popular images). Some convey the artist’s imagination or evoke thoughts and emotions related to science, while many explore the interplay of light, color, and outer space. These images, which possess aesthetic value, encompass both abstract and realistic characteristics.

In *Landscape*, Yoichiro Kawaguchi uses a relatively complex algorithm to create vivid images of landscapes composed of simple geometric shapes. The artist blends familiar shapes, such as those of mountains and the sun, with vibrant colors to provide viewers with the experience of a new world—an imaginative or dreamlike realm in another dimension, evoking a sense of strangeness often experienced in Surrealism Art. Despite the simplicity of the shapes used in the image, the colors in the artwork mostly resemble those of light refracting through prismatic glass.

The *Air Waves* by Mike Newman is created from simple computer-generated shapes while certain parts of the image are left without detailed elements, such as the areas depicting buildings, mountains, and a green stretch of trees, to provide a two-dimensional sensation. The pitch-black sky represents darkness during nighttime. Small, bright-colored lines are dispersed in different directions, creating a visual impact and a sense of depth. This interplay provides three-dimensional quality in an optical illusion. The blue lines resemble interconnected star-like shapes running horizontally across the upper part of the image, portraying the transmission of signals through the air in a beautiful and captivating manner.

Andrea D'Amico's artwork titled *Ice and Spice* bears a resemblance to pop art. It features images of ice cream cones, toffees, and various types of candies that are popular among children. The elements in the image are arranged to give the impression of them floating in the air or open space. The artist used vibrant and eye-catching colors, particularly red and green, to create visually appealing contrasts. It is noteworthy that the outer lines of the shapes, which are in a darker color, are not straight but wavy and curved, giving the image a dynamic and non-rigid appearance. This is a distinctive characteristic resulting from using a computer to create the image.

Another piece of computer artwork that conveys a sense of eccentricity is *Sprung* by Mike Newman. The background is black, with multicolored dots scattered throughout, resembling stars in a vast cosmic expanse. Rings of different colors overlap with shadows cast on the ground, implying that they are either floating or springing up from it. The depth or dimension in the image is created by drawing lines, which are color stripes from one corner of the image to meet the horizontal line, then extending vertically. These lines or stripes serve as the boundaries, confining the rings within a limited space. The rings, ranging in size and color, emphasize depth and distance and create an optical illusion of motion as if they were about to float forward. An intriguing element is the artist's signature, which is seamlessly integrated into the composition, resembling signatures found in hand-drawn artworks.

The final image titled *The Nature of Reflectivity* is the work of Turner Whitted, an artist and a computer science expert. In this artwork, the artist

emphasizes the shadow reflection appearing on both spherical shapes. The shadows are formed by the refraction of light as it passes through the transparent spherical shapes. Both spheres appear to be rotating in the air. As they rotate, reflections and shadows are cast on the ground and various elements in the nearby vicinity, reminiscent of a reflective surface, providing a glimpse of the reflection of the objects or another shadow. For this image, if viewers are unaware that it is computer art, they might mistake it for a photograph or a super realistic drawing where realism is exaggerated.

Nevertheless, computer art demonstrates the endless creativity of human artistic expression, transcending the confining belief and traditional notions or values that art must solely be a matter of spirituality or craftsmanship. Furthermore, computer art also proves that art and science can coexist and are fundamentally inseparable.

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Interestingly, Ajarn Somporn Rodboon has rarely written about modern and contemporary Thai art history in Thai. In contrast, most of her English writings, starting from the 1990s, focus on this subject. This period is pivotal for shaping the identity of “modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia.” Her work reflects a shared perspective among Southeast Asian scholars who have introduced these discourses to the international art scene and challenged Eurocentric viewpoints. While modern and contemporary art in Thailand has been influenced by Western aesthetics, Ajarn Somporn argues that it is also shaped by local contexts, such as Thai culture and traditions, contributing to a distinctive artistic identity. Her writings uniquely bridge the traditional art world with the modern and contemporary art worlds.

History of Thai Art

HISTORY OF MODERN ART IN THAILAND¹

ENCOUNTER WITH WESTERN INFLUENCES

The evidence of change in Thai art is clearly marked during the reign of King Rama the Fourth (King Mongkut, 1851–1868) when Thailand was making enormous efforts toward modernization in order to raise itself to a level equaling that of the technologically advanced Western countries. With great diplomatic skill and confidence, the King managed to save the country from the hegemony of expanding Western colonialism.

The Western influence on Thai art first appeared in the work of Khrua In Khong, the most celebrated monk and painter of the court of King Mongkut. Khrua In Khong was a traditional painter who, through the experience of Western prints and photographs, started to incorporate Western elements into his mural paintings. He was the first Thai person to adopt true three-dimensional perspective techniques and use “chiaroscuro” to render Western figures and buildings in his paintings. However, the murals that brought immense fame to Khrua In Khong are the depictions of Buddhist teachings in Wat Bowonniwet and Wat Boromniwat in Bangkok.

Traditional Thai art began to lose its cultural significance as a result of the Kingdom’s continued acceptance of more Western influences. King Rama the Fifth (King Chulalongkorn, 1868–1910) followed King Mongkut’s policy of modernization. King Chulalongkorn was concerned with the development of the country. He spent national revenue on public welfare. Hospitals and schools were built; roads and railways were constructed; and a water supply and electricity were installed. Moreover, Western-style palaces were built, but the Thai craftsmen in His Majesty’s service could not carry out such a task because they were not trained in Western technologies and

¹ This article was initially published in the exhibition catalog *Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand* in 1995 (pp. 243–251) by Japan Foundation Asia Center. The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham. The English version presented here has been edited to enhance clarity by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham.

methods. As a consequence, all the palaces had to be executed by imported European technicians and artists. In 1904, the first European court painter, Cesare Ferro, was commissioned to paint the King's portrait. However, it is important to note that Phra Soralaklikhit, who is best known for his academic portraiture of the Royal Family and his copy of Tiziano's *Venus of Urbino*, was the first Thai painter who was trained in Italy during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The contemporaries of Phra Soralaklikhit were Prince Naris, Luang Suwannasit, and Corrado Feroci.

The successor of King Chulalongkorn, his son, King Vajiravudh (1910–1925), tried his best to promote traditional crafts. At the same time, he sponsored the arts, and the Department of Fine Arts was founded under the King's direct supervision in 1912. The King also encouraged art training programs to be included in the school's curriculum. In 1913, Rongrian Poh-Chang (Poh-Chang School of Arts and Crafts) [now Poh-Chang Academy of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin] was officially used for the Hatthakam Ratchaburana School.

According to King Vajiravudh, "Art was part and parcel of our national life, as it expressed the individual ideas of our nation. It could not be allowed to die, for then we shall cease to be Thai." (Krairiksh & Thongchua, 1982, 19) The King was so supportive of the arts that he sponsored annual arts and crafts exhibitions. The first one was held at Suan Kulap School in 1913 and continued at different sites throughout his reign. Apart from supporting crafts, the King also wanted to revive traditional architecture for educational institutions, so Vajiravudh College and Chulalongkorn University were designed. During this reign, Somdet Chaofa Krom Phraya Narisaranuwattiwong (known as Prince Naris) was the Royal chief architect. His work included the Royal Institute Building and the Assembly Hall of Wat Benchamabophit.

As Piriya Krairiksh and Paothong Thongchua (1982, 26) described it, "Although King Vajiravudh deplored the superficial attitude of "Young Siam" to ape European manners and European ways in outward things, he continued to advance his father's program of modernization." Public and private buildings were erected in Western style by European architects, mostly Italians, and the King himself sponsored the construction by Annibale Rigotti of the two Neo-Venetian Gothic mansions, Phitsanulok House and

the Thai-Khu-Fah Building. Other notable Europeans in his service were the German architect Karl Doebling, the Italian painter Carlo Rigoli, and the sculptor Corrado Feroci. These foreign artists were employed to execute works that had not previously existed in the traditional Thai context but were required by the “modern state,” such as statues, monuments, medals, and portraiture.

The Royal support for the arts greatly diminished when King Vajiravudh passed away in 1925. The annual arts and crafts fair was no longer supported and ceased to exist. The country was then ruled by King Rama the Seventh (King Prajadhipok). The highlight of this reign was the opening of the monument of King Rama the First (Phra Phutta Yodfa Chulaloke Maharaj, 1782–1809) at the Memorial Bridge in commemoration of the 150 years of the founding of the Chakri Dynasty and of the city of Bangkok. The statue of the great King was designed by Prince Naris and was executed by Corrado Feroci. The foundries in Thailand at that time were mainly built for the casting of Buddha images and other traditional objects. The scale of these objects was modest in size compared to the casting requirements for Feroci’s large-scale statue of King Rama I. This necessitated the casting of this statue to be executed in Italy under Feroci’s supervision.

It is worth mentioning that before the arrival of Professor Silpa Bhirasri in 1923, there were already a few Italian artists officially working in Thailand. One of them was Alfonso Tonarelli, who arrived in the country during the reign of King Rama V and served as a sculptor in the architecture section of the Department of Public Works under the Ministry of Works. Although there is no recorded evidence of his works, and thus no one knows for sure as to where they are or what they were like, it is understood, however, that they appear as decorative elements on certain parts of some architectural works.

Another Italian sculptor was Rodolfo Nolli, who came to Thailand during the period of King Rama VI and worked there until 1940. [1913–1921] Nolli was an important artist who was involved in creating ornamental sculptures for Chulalongkorn University buildings, which were being constructed at that time, and where he also taught art history from 1918 to 1920. His most important work was the giant sculpture of a garuda. Generally, his works were not so well-known in Thailand perhaps because

he did not produce anything independent or stood on its own. After 1920, he left to work in Singapore, where he became recognized for the many acclaimed works he produced there.

Ercole Manfredi (1883–1973) was an Italian architect who, apart from Annibale Rigotti, was chosen and dispatched by the Italian government to work as an official in the Royal service under King Rama VI. Manfredi studied painting and architecture at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts in Turin. In December 1909, he arrived in Thailand and began working with the Department of Public Works as an architect. At that time, there was no specific Thai word for architects. Manfredi later served in the Department of Fine Arts under the Ministry of the Royal Courts. He worked in the archaeology division of the Royal Academy, taught in the Architecture Department of Chulalongkorn University, and worked as an architect on several projects. He married a Thai woman named Tongmuan and had two children. In 1943, he became a Thai citizen and changed his name to Ekkarit Manfendi. He spent 64 years of his life in Thailand and produced many works of architecture, both permanent ones and temporary ones. One of his works was the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Manfredi was an older colleague of Prof. Silpa Bhirasri and would often give him advice and assistance on various matters. It was said that Manfredi was the one who encouraged Prof. Bhirasri to take up this position in Thailand.

Along with those mentioned, there were also other Italian artists and architects working in the country during that period whose lives and works should subsequently be looked into thoroughly, as they too, had a part in contributing to the change and development which led to a new era in the history of art in Thailand.

THE BEGINNING OF MODERN ART: 1930S AND 1940S

On June 24, 1932, a group of European-trained military officers and civilians staged a coup d'état that overthrew the absolute monarchy and replaced it with a constitutional monarchy. This revolution not only signaled the beginning of modern Thai politics but also paved the way for the development of modern Thai art. As a consequence, the court was no

longer the primary patron of the arts. The Department of Fine Arts, which was once under the supervision of the King, was transferred to the Ministry of Education in 1933 under the directorship of Luang Wichit Wathakarn.

The School of Fine Arts (Rongrien Praneetsilpakam) was founded in 1933. Feroci was appointed as the principal and, together with Phra Sarotrataniman, an English-trained architect working for the Department of Fine Arts, designed the curriculum. Students were trained in painting and sculpture along the lines of European art schools. Among the instructors at the school was Phra Soralaklikhit, who was trained as a painter in Italy.

In his book on *Art Since 1932*, the artist and historian Piriya Krairiksh described the situation as such, “The organizers faced a dilemma whether to form artists capable of carrying on traditional art or to consider the request of contemporary art.” (Krairiksh & Thongchua, 1982, 27) Their solution was a practical one to enable the graduates to find work after they finished their studies, which meant training in Western art. According to Feroci, “It was not possible to go back to old forms because modern surroundings are quite different from those of the past. He, therefore, decided that it would be logical to train young Thais to start from nature, which would give them a sound foundation in their arts.” [Ibid]. He realized that it meant academic training, but as he succinctly put it, “Once the young students have finished their art training, they may express themselves better in whatever style they like because it becomes a personal matter, and each artist has the right to express themselves individually.” [Ibid]. This became the philosophy for teaching art at Silpakorn University during Feroci’s time. As for traditional arts, the students had to do research on architecture, painting, sculpture, and ornaments three hours a week, which served to “stimulate in them a subconscious relationship with the spirit of the past, which is unchanging because it represents the essential peculiarity of the Thai race.”

The first class of students graduated in 1937, many of whom worked with Feroci in modeling figures for the Victory Monument of 1941. Students trained at the School of Fine Arts were now able to execute the kinds of works required by the Thai Government, which in the past had been given to foreign artists. Among the first group of students were well-known artists such as the painter Fua Hariphitak and the sculptors Pimarn Mulpramook

and Sitthidet Sanghiran. All of the students created their work in a realistic manner, learning from nature and being inspired by Feroci's own highly academic works.

Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the Prime Minister of Thailand at the time, was very supportive of the arts and culture. He set up the National Council for Culture in 1941, which sponsored several exhibitions. He visited the School of Fine Arts in 1943 and was so impressed by the remarkable progress and success of the students that he raised the school's status to university level. Since then, the School of Fine Arts changed its name to the University of Fine Arts and is known today as Silpakorn University.

THE EMERGENCE OF ART COMPETITIONS

The 1938 Annual Constitution Fair, held in Bangkok, included art exhibitions and competitions for the first time. The inclusion of student's work from the School of Fine Arts can be credited to Feroci's initiative.

Among the art competitions held during this important period of contemporary cultural development were 'Poster Contests' sponsored by the Japanese Cultural Institute (1943) to promote the art competition. The group of artists, "Chakrawat Silpin," also held their first exhibition at the Sala Chalermkrung Theatre in 1944. The exhibits ranged from the works of students of the Fine Arts University (Silpakorn) to amateur, professional artists, commercial artists, and photographers. Artists in the groups, such as Wannasit Pukhawanit, Chamras Kietkong, Sanit Disatapundha, and Chalerm Nakiraks, executed their work in a realistic style. At the time, the public found the works too modern because they were more familiar with traditional art.

Corrado Feroci, "The Father of Thai Modern Art," became a Thai citizen and took the Thai name "Silpa Bhirasri" in 1944. During his life, he was not only engaged in promoting art within Thailand but also tried to make Thai art known abroad. In 1948, with the approval of the Thai government, he held a Thai art exhibition at the Embassy of Thailand in London. The exhibition displayed both the work of contemporary Thai artists and traditional Thai antiquities. The exhibition was highly successful in part due to Bhirasri's commitment to explaining the significance and meaning of Thai

art to the visitors at the exhibition.

After World War II, another art institution, The Arts and Crafts School, was reconstructed after being destroyed during the war. Jitr Buabusaya, who studied in Japan from 1941 to 1946, set up a new curriculum for painting and sculpture. In 1947, the school organized its first exhibition, and in the following year, a group of art instructors held the first oil painting exhibition in Thailand. Later, the group formed “The Thai Fine Arts Association.”

In 1949, Bhirasri successfully inaugurated the first annual *National Exhibition of Art*. The aims of this exhibition were to promote the advancement Thai artists had made since the establishment of the art school and also to encourage the interest of the public in modern art. The exhibits were divided into four categories: painting, sculpture, applied art, and decorative art. The works were chosen by a selection committee of important artists, and prizes were given in the form of gold, silver, and bronze medals for the work considered outstanding for each category. From 1949 onwards, the National Exhibition of Art took place annually. [Currently, it is the 68th edition, in the year 2023]

In 1953, Bhirasri was appointed the chairman of the committee of the National Art Association. This association was one of the members of the International Association of Arts, which had its headquarters in Paris. In 1954, he represented Thailand for the first time at the International Conference of Artists in Venice.

Seven years later (1960), Bhirasri represented Thailand once more at the third International Conference of Artists in Vienna, Austria. At this conference, he presented a paper on “Contemporary Art in Thailand.” His paper drew considerable interest among the important artists gathered at the conference. The paper helped to focus their attention on Thai arts, leading to the exchange of artwork between Thai and foreign artists.

Two years after Bhirasri’s death in 1962, the first International Art Exhibition was held at the National Theatre, Bangkok. In February 1965, the Silpa Bhirasri Art Center Foundation was founded to commemorate and honor Bhirasri. One of the art centers’ aims was to build and organize an art center for exhibitions of various forms of art by Thai and foreign artists. This initiative was Bhirasri’s dream when he was still alive.

STYLES OF ART FROM 1949 TO THE 1970S

In the first exhibition in 1949, Impressionist and realistic styles were dominant in painting, as can be seen in Misiem Yipintsoi's *Dreamer's Avenue*, which was awarded the first prize, and Chamras Kietkong's *Nude*, which won the second prize. In the field of sculpture, the style of Realism can be seen in the work of Sitthidet Sanghiran's *Garuda Carrying Khaki Away* and Sawaeng Songmangmee's nude sculpture, *Blossoming*. Pimarn Mulpramook's bust, *The Monk*, and Paitun Muang somboon's life-sized sculpture of a goat. All the works mentioned were awarded the second prize. Written accounts of how the first *National Exhibition of Art* was received do not seem to exist. However, the first reaction to modern art at the time came in the form of an art critique when the second *National Exhibition of Art* was organized in 1950. M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, in his paper 'Siam Rath,' commented that the works in the exhibition were the imitation of Western art, and the artists lacked personal style and individual technique. However, Bhirasri was defensive about such criticism. He explained that "what and how the contemporary artists express must be entirely left to the individual feeling and judgment of each artist. They are Thai; therefore, their art will be Thai also, even though the eyes of laymen cannot yet discern such characteristics." [see in Krairiksh & Thongchua, 1982, 31] Bhirasri also pointed out that Fua Hariphitak's style was referred to as "Impressionism." But, the word "Impressionism" should not be understood as a copy of the Western Impressionist School. "Impressionism means to express sincerely what we see and accordingly what we feel, without any intellectual speculation." [Ibid]

The style of Impressionism played an important part in the development of modern Thai art from post-World War II to 1958. The only source that could provide such information was the documents of the National Exhibition of Art. There was no permanent collection of modern Thai art for anyone to see and appreciate.

Artists who created the work in Impressionistic styles were Misiem Yipintsoi (1949, 1950, 1951), Sawasdi Tantisuk, Tawee Nandakwang, Suchow Yimtrakul (1953), Pranee Tantisuk (1954, 1955), Prayura Uluchadha (1955), Nopparat Levisith (1956), and Taveesak Senanarong (1958). All of the works

they painted were pictures of landscapes. Those who executed their work in portraiture were Chamras Kietkong and Fua Hariphitak (1950), Banchop Palawongse (1953, 1954), and San Sarakornborirak (1958). Still-life painting was represented by Boonthong Ritkirt (1950). According to Bhirasri [see in Krairiksh & Thongchua, 1982, 31], “the Impressionistic and Realistic phases were the first stage that all modern artists have passed through.”

Another important figure who painted in the French Impressionist manner was Jitr Buabusaya, who studied postgraduate courses at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. In the 1940s, Japanese artists were widely influenced by French Impressionism. Jitr was also influenced directly by French Impressionist paintings, which he saw in the galleries and museums in Japan. During his stay, country landscapes and scenes of various places in Japan were beautifully painted. Jitr’s impressionistic style can be seen in a few works that he brought back from Japan. Some of these works are paintings depicting *Ueno Park, Tokyo, and Fuji Vines Arbor*. It is very unfortunate that many of his works were destroyed during the bombing of Tokyo. As far as the written evidence shows, Jitr was probably the first Thai artist who painted in the French Impressionist style. Most of his paintings were done in the 1940s. Fua Hariphitak did not paint in the Impressionist manner until the 1950s when he went to study in Italy under a scholarship from the Italian government (1954–1956), where he saw the original works of the Impressionist masters.

Cubism in Thai modern art began in the 1950s when Fua Hariphitak went to Italy and acquired the style during his stay there. His famous paintings, *Blue-Green* (fig. 3, p. 128), painted in 1956, and *Nude*, painted in 1957, clearly reflected the influence of Picasso’s early cubist style (1907–1908).

Sawasdi Tantisuk was also inspired by this art movement. Some of the works he painted while studying in Italy, such as *Rainy Day in Bracciano* (1959), show the details of architectural elements reduced to simple geometric planes.

During this innovative period (late 1940s to 1950s), Cubism strongly impacted Thai modern artists. Some of them did not go abroad, but they were introduced to Cubism when they were students of Bhirasri at Silpakorn

University. Tawee Nandakwang's *Ayutthaya*, painted in 1948, was done in the style of Analytical Cubism. Chalood Nimsamer also experimented with this form.

Sompot Upa-In was another of Bhirasri's talented students who greatly admired Picasso's work. Analytical cubist techniques were applied in his works. One of Sompot's most important paintings, entitled *Politician* (1958), was painted in a style similar to Picasso's work completed in the 1910s.

However, Cubism was still a predominant mode in the early 60s. Artists like Anand Panin and Sawasdi Tantisuk began to move away from such style. Cubistic forms in their works were dissolved into abstract imageries. According to Anand, "The aim of abstract art was to express the inner mystery of the soul while avoiding the external tangibles as much as possible." (Ibid, 36) The early 60s were the time when figurative painting made way to non-representative and abstract expressionism, and later in the 70s, to hard-edge abstraction. Many Thai abstract painters, such as Panom Suwannat, Prawat Laochareon, and Pote Sa-Ngawong were inspired by the work of those of the New York School (1940–1970). All of them won silver medals in the 17th National Exhibition of Art in 1967.

Like Pratuang Emjaroen, another self-taught artist, Chang Se Tang, experimented with abstract art. While most of his abstract counterparts followed the West's abstract art, Chang's abstraction derived from his own Chinese roots. Chang was very much interested in nature, Chinese philosophy, and poetry. Consequently, his work was closely related to Buddhism, Zen, and Taoism. According to his son, Thip Se Tang, before his father started to paint, meditation was extremely important. Chang would contemplate and concentrate his mind in front of his canvas. His energy would flow only when his mind, hand, and brush became one. Chang's abstract paintings not only reveal the depth of his inner feelings but also create a universal language that can be seen through both powerful and sensitive usage of lines, shapes, and colors. Chang isolated himself from the art scenes and social activities by devoting his time to creating works of art. His work in the '60s was so forceful and dynamic that it could be translated into the abstract expressionist's language. The most sensitive and delicate drawings were executed between 1966 and 1967. The manipulation of dots

and lines floating in empty space reflects his inspiration from “Daogi,” a Chinese poet of the Ming Dynasty, Gao Qi.

Nevertheless, abstract art at the time was not well accepted. In order to bridge the gap between art and the public, Prayura Uluchadha began to write an art review in 1959 by using different pen names such as No Na Paknam and Lum Charoensatha.

The new artistic era initially began in 1961 when private galleries were opened. Artists such as Damrong Wong-Uparaj organized group shows with his friends. Support and interest in Thai contemporary art came from the Western community. They came to the opening of exhibitions and bought some works. Michael Smithies wrote an article, “The Bangkok art scene in the early 1960s: A personal souvenir,” in *The Journal of the Siam Society* (July 1978), describing the fact that foreigners in Bangkok were far more interested in Thai art than Thais, and the artist depended almost exclusively for his income from exhibitions for foreigners. As a consequence, a market in modern art started to gain momentum.

The opening of commercial art galleries increased. New venues for exhibitions were available for artists’ work. Places, such as the Alliance Française, the British Council, the United States Information Service, and the Goethe-Institut also provided space for art exhibitions. The first art gallery in Bangkok, Bangkapi Gallery, was opened in 1962.

Although abstract art was heavily influenced by the West in the 60s, Thai life remained an important subject for printmakers such as Inson Wongsam, Manit Poo-Aree, Prapan Srisuta, Pote Sa-Ngawong, and Prayat Pongdam. Traditional art, meanwhile, was given new life by the work of four artists: Angkarn Kalayanapongsa, Thawan Duchanee, Pratuang Emjaroen, and Pichai Nirand.

While paintings and prints were remarkably progressing, sculptures began to decline. Only Khien Yimsiri, Chamreung Vichienket, and Misiem Yipintsoi were actively producing work. Bhirasri commented on the National Exhibition of Art in 1961 that “sculptors are almost absent, the reason being, as they themselves put it, that they are too busy with official work.” (See in Krairiksh & Thongchua, 1982, 37)

Piriya Krairiksh and Paothong Thongchua once described in the

book *Art Since 1932* that “Although Thailand has been a member of the International Association of Art since 1953, that body has done little to promote Thai art internationally. It was again left to the enterprises of the artists themselves to find their own patrons.” The boom years of the early 60s saw privately sponsored exhibitions taking place in Florida and Milwaukee, U.S.A., in 1962 and at the Alpine Club Gallery, London, in 1963. Individual artists, too, began to hold their one-man shows abroad; among the best-known were Damrong Wong-Uparaj in Paris and Florence in 1963, Prapan Srisouta in Kuala Lumpur in 1962 and Sydney in 1963, and Thawan Duchanee in Kuala Lumpur in 1964.

As a result of the art boom, more artists than ever before had the opportunity to go abroad to further their studies. At the end of 1964, Prapan Srisouta went to Germany; Anan Panin went to France; Manit Poo-Aree went to Italy; and Thawan Duchanee went to the Netherlands. Others, like Euayporn Kerdchouay, were soon to leave for England and Banchong Kosalwat and Pira Pathanapiradej for the United States. Their departures and those of others brought a close, short, brilliant era in contemporary Thai art.

REVIVAL OF A CULTURAL, TRADITIONAL ART: IN THE 1940S-1970S

In the history of Thai modern art, the interest in the revival of traditional art paralleled the development of a more Western style of painting and sculpture.

During Bhirasri's time, Western influence had a strong impact on Thai art education. Although Western curriculum (concepts, techniques, and aesthetics) was introduced to Thai students, he did not fail to encourage them to study and explore the roots of Thai culture and traditional art.

In Thai society, traditional Buddhist culture is deeply rooted, and for many artists, Buddhist culture is an important source of inspiration to them in creating their art. The revival of traditional art began in the late 1940s. Khien Yimsiri (1922-1971), a student of Bhirasri, was the first to revitalize traditional art by combining it with modern art forms in sculpture.

Khien Yimsiri understood and was impressed by the graceful flow of

lines found in Thai classical art, as can be found in the Buddha images of the Sukhothai period or in those found in Sukhothai folk art, murals, and traditional art.

The bronze sculpture *Musical Rhythm* is the first sculpture that Khien Yimsiri won a gold medal at the first National Exhibition of Art in 1949. It features a flutist playing his musical instrument in a graceful manner. The beautiful flowing exterior lines of the whole form clearly mark the influence of Sukhothai Buddha images. This movement, which began by Khien Yimsiri, apparently increased in popularity toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Sculptures and paintings executed in this new traditional manner can be seen in the work of Chit Rienpracha. Unlike Khien Yimsiri's bronze sculpture, he used different materials. His sculpture was carved in wood, depicting a man playing Thai musical instruments. Prasong Patamanuj, the painter, was also among the first artists who created his work in this new style.

In the 1950s, this revival of the traditional style was followed by a new trend led by Damrong Wong-Uparaj, who depicted Thai country life. His most well-known scenes were of villages in the rural areas of Thailand. It is interesting to see his use of traditional or folk objects as well as typical architecture without the inclusion of figurative elements to reflect Thai country life. Damrong's individualistic style is deeply rooted in his native land.

Apart from Damrong's Thai life, Manit Poo-Aree also focused on this theme in his prints and paintings, and Inson Wongsam depicted scenes of country life in Northern Thailand. Bhirasri wrote, "In beholding these landscapes, we feel our spirit restored and have the illusion that we live in the very heart of Thailand and among Thai people." After viewing the work by Manit, Inson, and some other artists, Bhirasri described that "it is edifying to notice that the best of our artists remain "Thai." They express themselves with simplicity, reflecting their daily life with sincere 'freshness.'" Bhirasri did not want these artists to imitate the complexity of Western modern art but merely by doing so, he encouraged them "to preserve this naiveite of ideas and feeling." (See in Ibid, 32)

In the 1960s, artists like Pichai Nirand, Thawan Duchanee, Pratuang Emjaroen, and Angkarn Kalayanapongsa turned to Buddhist themes as

the means of expression in their art, while some other artists were with nonrepresentational and abstract expressionist styles of the West.

Pichai Nirand was a powerful painter of Buddhist themes. He mainly used delicate details and religious symbols to convey a message of serenity through truth. The major themes in his work dealt with the life cycle, birth, and death. The depiction of Buddha's presence can be seen through the forms of footprints, lotus, flowers, trees of life, and the wheel of doctrine.

Thawan Duchanee was profoundly inspired by Buddhism. He is one of the revolutionary artists in the history of Buddhist art in the modern era. His fantastic human figures, strange creatures, and Buddha images are used to symbolize a message of truth, defined in Buddhism as greed, lust, worry, hatred, and violence. Buddha images are used in a very ironic way that creates a misunderstanding of being sacrilegious as well as being decadent. Thawan's work is extremely powerful and dynamic.

For Pratuang Emjareon, a highly successful self-taught artist, "Buddhism" is a medium to help human beings understand nature and lead them to the truths of life. Unlike other artists already mentioned, he never used any traditional ornamentation but only the motifs that reflect traditional culture and spirit. Pratuang stated in the catalog of the third exhibition of Dharma Group in 1976 that "Art can serve society by truthfully reflecting the different aspects of Thai life, such as religion, politics, and living conditions." The statement clearly shows that Pratuang himself is very concerned with social and political issues. Actually, Pratuang was the founder of the Dharma Group, which had its first exhibition in 1975.

"The Artist Fonts of Thailand" is another group that presents political issues. The aim of this group was to create new art and new cultural values for people at large. Exhibitions of large paintings with socialistic and political themes were launched in 1974 on Ratchadamnoen Avenue on the anniversary of the fall of the military government on October 14, 1973. Another exhibition was mounted around the Pramane Ground [Sanam Luang] to support the students' protest against the United States. The group was openly active until the military coup in October 1976.

However, in the 70s, the changes in Thai modern art clearly reflected shifts in social awareness and concern for the political unrest which marked

this turbulent decade. Some of the artists who once produced art for art's sake turned their minds toward art for society and toward a resurgence of more traditional styles in painting.

THE ART OF INSTALLATION: THE NEW MOVEMENT IN THE 1980S

Since the early 1980s, the installation has been an important movement in Thai contemporary art. Many artists, particularly the younger ones, have moved toward this new direction because they desire to do more experimental work and break away from previous conventions.

It is worth noting that the development of installation art in Thailand not only incorporated influences from the outside world namely Europe, America, and Japan, but also some Thai artists have developed installations directly from Thai culture, for example, traditional ceremonies and festivals.

Installation was first introduced to the Thai art scene by Kamol Tassananchalee, a Thai artist who resided in Los Angeles for more than two decades. In 1980, he exhibited his one-man show entitled *Ten Years of Art in the U.S. 1970–1980* at the National Gallery, Bangkok. Kamol placed a large number of colored tubes upside down into an expanse of sand which covered the gallery floor. The installation was not well received at the time because this kind of art form was very new to Thai viewers. In 1985, Kamol Phaosavasdi, who studied in the United States for a few years, made his first installation entitled *Song for the Dead Art*, exhibited at Silpa Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art. Prawat Laucharoen, another Thai artist living in New York, returned to Thailand and exhibited his work *Japanese Reverse*, the first print installation ever exhibited in this country.

It is important to note that the installation was introduced by Thai artists mainly living or studying abroad and later brought this influence back to their homeland. Nevertheless, installation was not critically recognized until 1989 when Silpakorn University, in cooperation with the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo from Japan, organized an installation exhibition entitled *Japan: The New Generation*, which featured the works of two young artists, Suzuki Junko and Miyajima Tatsuo. Through their art, ideas were expressed which formed the values of their lives and traditional culture.

They magnificently chose modern high-tech media to express their beliefs. The exhibition was a success and very well attended.

In 1989, Silpakorn University and the Goethe-Institut, Bangkok, organized an exhibition which was a documentary installation, *The James Bay Project* by Rainer Wittenborn, a well-known artist from Munich, and in 1990 and 1991, Joan Grounds and Noelene Lucas, artists from Sydney, spent time at Silpakorn University as Artists-in-Residence. During their residencies, both artists created works and exhibited them at the Silpakorn University Art Gallery. The works left a strong impact on young Thai artists who were impressed by the use of simple local materials found in Bangkok as a means to express their impression of Thai culture and their experiences in Thailand.

Among the first generation of installation artists were Jumpol Apisuk, Thammasak Booncherd, Amarit Choosuwan, Montien Boonma, and Kamol Phaosavasdi.

Since 1989, Montien Boonma, one of the most important installation artists, has set a new artistic pace for Thai contemporary art. He is initially the driving force behind Thailand's newly emerging contemporary art scene.

From his first conceptual installation exhibition, *Story from the Farm* (1989), Montien depicts, in bold design and simple materials, the charms and vitality of indigenous country life. Farm tools, straws, rice sacks, rawhide, and a water buffalo's horn are used. Another exhibition, *Thai-iahT, (Thai-Thai)* (1990), also reflects the transition from rural life to the modern era of industrial development and the 'NIC-culture.' In Montien's *Venus of Bangkok* (1991-93), found objects from the construction sites are used to portray an innocent young girl from the countryside who has migrated to Bangkok seeking a job but ends up becoming a prostitute. According to Montien, a bucket coated inside with a bright pink color is used to symbolize a young girl. Nevertheless, *Venus of Bangkok* ironically reflects Montien's social comments. His installations could well be the first step toward the identity of Thai contemporary art.

Montien has been inventive with materials that he fused freely, ranging from readymade objects, found objects, clay, natural objects, and high-tech objects. Montien did not start his spiritual works dealing with Buddhist philosophy until 1990. The *Pagodas and Alms* series were executed

in 1991 and 1992, respectively. Montien began to open up new ways for the viewers to experience his work when he participated in the *Adelaide Festival* in 1994. He created the *The Room* series, which was an installation located in natural surroundings. Viewers had to sit, stand, and lie down within the interior space and underneath the work. What they could see inside the work were question marks and exclamation marks on a piece of cloth hanging down from the top of the work. They were automatically drawn to contemplation and became aware of the need for self-realization.

Montien's recent installation has gone beyond sound and sight. He uses the pigments of primitive or traditional medicine to paint on the construction of his objects. Viewers are invited to smell the fragrance of primitive herbs. This is meant to be another means to the state of a calm mind. Montien's installations appear to be international in style but the underlying meaning derives from Buddhism and aspects of traditional culture. It is worth mentioning that in 1992, an important historical event in Thai contemporary art took place in Chiang Mai. A group of young Thai artists organized an exhibition at temples, cemeteries, private residences, public buildings, streets, rivers, canals, and open spaces around Chiang Mai city. Known as the "Chiang Mai Social Installation" Group, they also organized a second event in 1993.

These artists are interested in holding exhibitions in public places rather than in art galleries. They carefully selected pre-existing sites and locations that already possessed a sense of history and meaning. They wanted to transform the selected locations into art objects and public art centers. By staging exhibitions away from the galleries into public art centers, the city itself becomes a complex social installation.

THE SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Thai contemporary art started to flourish when the National Gallery was officially opened to the public in 1977. It aims to collect and house visual arts as well as to provide space for contemporary art exhibitions.

The task of reaching out to the public was not only the responsibility of the art institutions but also of private galleries. For example, the Visual

Dhamma Gallery opened in 1981 to promote Thai art dealing with Buddhist themes. The support of the gallery was strong and thus stimulated and encouraged the new traditional art movement.

During this time, the private sector, for example, the Bangkok Bank, the Thai Farmers Bank, and Siam Commercial Bank, also contributed their support by organizing exhibitions and competitions. Diverse exhibition themes are specially designed to honor His Majesty the King and Queen and other members of the Royal Family on different important occasions. Culture and tradition are the keys to creative stimulation.

At present, the *National Exhibition of Art* organized by Silpakorn University has been financially supported by Esso and the Standard Thailand Co., Ltd. *The Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists* organized by Silpakorn University, also involves private firms and banks who donate money for special award winners. Toshiba Thailand organizes an art competition annually. The top award winners not only receive prizes but also receive a grant from the organizer to tour art galleries and museums in Europe for a month. Giving a grant to the award winner to tour around Europe is becoming very popular. Thai Farmers Bank is also offering a similar opportunity. This incentive will give the opportunity for professional artists and young artists to be exposed to the arts of the outside world.

The Thai government has also played a crucial role in preserving and promoting traditional art and culture through art activities. A group of volunteer artists headed by Panya Vijnthanasarn and Chalermchai Kositpipat received support to paint murals for the temple “Wat Buddhapadipa” in Wimbledon, London. This project was designed and carried out from 1983 to 1987. This special task marked a culminating point for the new traditional direction of the Thai contemporary art.

What makes the mural paintings in the temple so special is that in each area, the artists tried to introduce modern-day cultural and political themes. As a result, they will function as pictorial records of our time for future generations. The artists also include “foreign elements” such as scenes of England, The Big Ben Tower, international events, and technological developments. Their intention is to represent the timeless universality of Buddhism.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES AND EXCHANGE NETWORKS

As Herbert P. Phillips describes in his book *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand* (1992), “Foreign influences have entered Thailand through at least four routes: through Thai artists who were sent overseas for more advanced training; through the continuing input from those Thai artists who remained overseas from the selective interests and pressures of foreign collectors and the participation of Thai artists in international exhibitions and exchange networks.” He also stated that, “the most overarching fact of Thai society over the past 150 years has been its active, willing and accelerating participation in an international culture. Whatever the domain of law, technology, politics, agriculture, religion, or even cuisine, the Thai have been involved in an inexorable process of adapting themselves to the practices and standards of the international world.”

In the past two decades, the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Thai contemporary artists who have been invited to take part in international art exhibitions has increased. Artists like Ithipol Tangchaloek, Montien Boonma, Kamol Paosavasdi, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Pinaree Sanpitak, Chatchai Puipia, Vasan Sitthiket, and Panya Vijinthanasarn have gained more recognition in foreign countries such as Australia, Japan, the United States, Austria, and around the ASEAN countries.

Those who stay abroad are still active and creating works of art, including Kamol Tassananchalee, who lives in Los Angeles. He founded the Thai Art Council. The aims of this council are to promote exhibitions of Thai contemporary artists in the United States and also to provide the opportunity for some of them to work and gain more artistic experiences there. Kamol returns to Thailand every five years to exhibit his work and to give lectures on his art and the contemporary art movement in the United States at universities in Bangkok and provincial towns.

The other two artists, Prawat Laochareon and Thana Lauhakaikul, who live in New York and Texas, respectively, have some influence on Thai artists. They spent less time in Bangkok. Prawat specializes in printmaking and conceptual art, while Thana is extremely interested in performances and installations. No less important than Kamol, Prawat, and Thana is Chavalit

Sermprungsuk, who has resided in Amsterdam for more than 20 years, and Somboon Huamthientong is now living in Munich, Germany. All of the artists mentioned returning to Thailand every now and again. Each time, they will bring back with them some works for the exhibitions. Evidently, Kamol and Somboon are a great source of pride to the art community. Although both of them have been living outside of the country for a period of time, they still address Thai issues or use Thai motifs and materials in their work.

In the 1990s, a number of Thai contemporary artworks were purchased by foreign private collectors, museums, and galleries. Recently, the Australia National Gallery in Canberra [now The National Gallery of Australia] purchased two prints by Kamin Lertchaiprasert. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, acquired two prints by Wijit Apichatkriengkrai. The Queensland Art Gallery acquired an installation by Montien Boonma and some drawings by Pinaree Sanpitak. Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan and National Gallery Singapore have a collection of Thai artists' works.

From the 1980s onward, there have been two main streams in Thai contemporary art; One is the universal or international style, while the other is the revival of traditional art styles. Thai contemporary artists have also reached a state of freedom in expressing their thoughts and themes. Although external influences play a significant role in the Thai art scene, many of them are still closely tied to culture and tradition. The development of Thai contemporary art undoubtedly parallels the development of the country. Obviously, present-day art reflects the preoccupation of the country's wider society: social conflicts, ecological concerns, political unrest, and searching for self-expression.

Although we cannot deny the fact that these days, intercultural development creates fewer cultural differences, many Thai artists and individuals in the art academic circle have begun to realize the importance of focusing more on contemporary art in their neighboring countries, particularly in the Southeast Asian region. It is a prime time to re-examine the history and cultural identity and explore both the similarities and diversities, as well as influences of art and culture among Asian countries.

The continuity of development of cultural exchange networks will significantly and sufficiently enhance unity and integrity in the arts and artists of all Asian countries.

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NEW DIRECTIONS, NEW FORMS¹

“Installation art is gaining more and more recognition and popularity from both artists and viewers, although some say it is a purely foreign form and alien to Thai culture. Asst. Prof. SOMPORN RODBOON from Silpakorn University argues that its evolution locally has taken place through the interaction of foreign influences and native Thai inspiration.”

Installation art—a very fashionable concept these days among the Thai art community. But what are its boundaries? How can this seemingly very foreign aesthetic be made relevant to Thailand, to reflect our experience so that local viewers identify with it and respond to it in emotional and spiritual ways?

According to Webster’s Dictionary, ‘to install’ means to establish in an indicated place, condition, or status and to set up for use or service. When the word is incorporated into the term “installation art,” its meaning shifts slightly to describe a kind of site-specific work. The whole designated area at a particular site is considered to be an artwork.

There is no exact equivalent in the Thai language for the term “installation art,” so most artists and critics refer to it using the English name. Whatever it is called, however, it is a three-dimensional art form that uses a wide range of materials of many kinds, as well as found and ready-made objects. Sometimes, sound or music and live performances are used as complementary elements in such a way that the work is not just multimedia in nature but also multidisciplinary.

Installation art has become a major art movement in Thailand. Those who created it moved in this new direction because of their willingness to experiment and break away from conventions. In learning its aesthetics

¹ This article was initially published in the newspaper, *Bangkok Post* on February 27, 1997, (p.1, 8). The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriya Putsongkram.

and methods, they have been strongly influenced by installations in the West as well as in Japan. Most of them are young artists looking for a new direction; one that allows them to step beyond the limitations outlined by the principles of the high art forms of painting, sculpture, and graphic art.

Today, those young artists have achieved a state of freedom in expressing their thoughts and themes, and the movement includes such prominent figures as Surasri Kusolwong, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Jakapan Vilaisneekul, Suthee Kunavichayanont, and many more. Through their installations, a range of concerns connected with various aspects of personal life, culture, and society are vividly expressed.

A number of interesting trends in installation art have taken root in Thailand. The first of them treats social, political, and ecological concerns; the second focuses on cultural tradition, Buddhism, and spirituality; and the third explores the search for self-expression. Most of the current group of installation artists are strongly drawn to the first category.

The reason why social activist artists favor installation art is that the materials used can convey very directly the messages they wish to express and that the sites in which the works are installed can carry powerful contextual significance. Social-themed installations are certainly communicative. They always involve the direct participation of the public. But in the days before installation art had established itself as firmly as it has today, artists had to overcome many obstacles in introducing it into the Thai art scene.

In its early years here during the 1980s, few regarded installations as viable works of art. As they are not wrenched from the void purely through human technical skills like drawing, painting, or sculpting, but can be fashioned entirely from finished or manufactured materials. Most Thai viewers of the initial Thai installations balked at accepting them as art.

Even today, when the popularity of the form is constantly increasing, few people can give an exact explanation of what installation art is. Many categorize it with the sculpture on the assumption that any three-dimensional artwork can be considered a species of sculpture. In fact, the two forms are different. A sculpture must be a finished work that can be transported, while an installation must be created at the site of the show, with its setting acting as an important part of its expressive mechanism.

Back in 1980, when the Los Angeles-based Thai artist, Kamol Tassananchalee, opened *Ten Years of Art in the US 1970–1980* an exhibition of his own installation art at the National Gallery, he placed a number of colored tubes upside down in sand spread thickly on the gallery's floor. It proved to be controversial as it was very new to Thai viewers at the time.

Five years later, USA-educated Kamol Phaosavasdi presented his first installation, *Song for the Dead Art* (1985) at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art. Prints and photocopies of Western modern art were placed on the wall, and the entire floor space was covered in iron scraps which were used as sound sculptures. A performance by the artist was also featured on its opening day to express the idea of rejecting consumerism and the traditional concept of gallery space. Once again, the response from the public was negative.

In 1987, New York-based Prawat Laucharoen visited home and brought with him his *Japanese Reverse*, the first print installation to be presented in Thailand, which he showed in both Chiang Mai and Bangkok. It featured traditional Japanese woodblocks fashioned in a way that reversed the usual process. He cut Japanese characters into the surface of a chunk of timber and hand-rubbed them onto a piece of paper.

As a matter of fact, even before the 1980s, some Thai artists had begun experimenting with outdoor installations. Amarit Choosuwan, for example, created his first installation entitled *Colour, Form, and Sea*, on Pattaya beach in 1974. Amarit placed colored plastic tubes on the beach, beginning on the shore and progressing inland. He wanted to create a contradiction between the natural environment and man-made objects, as well as to transform the beach into an art space.

As I have outlined above, installation art was introduced here by Thai artists who had lived or studied abroad and brought this influence back to their own country. Each time, their work was largely rejected by local viewers.

This art form received its first positive reception only in 1989, when Silpakorn University, in cooperation with the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Japan, organized an installation exhibition entitled *Japan: The New Generation*, which featured the works of two promising young artists: Junko Suzuki and Tatsuo Miyajima.

The work of both men was concerned with the values of traditional Japanese culture as experienced by the modern generation. Through their art, ideas were expressed, which made up the values of their own lives. The most interesting thing about their works was that they chose modern, high-tech media to express their beliefs. This exhibition was successful and well-attended.

Also in 1989, Silpakorn University and the Goethe-Institut, Bangkok, organized an exhibition and documentary installation, *The James Bay Project*, by Rainer Wittenborn, a well-known Munich artist who had been invited to the university to conduct a workshop on art and environment for young Thai artists. His work provoked strong interest among Thai viewers.

Then, in 1990 and 1991, Joan Grounds and Noelene Lucas, two women artists from Sydney, spent time at the university as artists in residence. They exposed artists there to contemporary artistic concepts in an area where relatively few Thai artists had been working.

Both created new installations and exhibited them in Bangkok. These works had a strong and lasting impact on young Thai artists, who were impressed by the use of simple local materials as a medium to express their impressions of Thai culture and their experiences in Thailand. Women artists and students in particular found their work very stimulating and inspiring.

Response to these new ideas took creative form at Silpakorn. Thammasak Booncherd produced several interesting works. One of them, installed in the park across from the Grand Palace, fashioned 20 kilograms of corn seed into the shape of a peace symbol. The golden kernels attracted flocks of birds, and soon most of them had disappeared.

In 1990, *Lines on Wall 1*, another piece by Thammasak presented at Silpakorn University also had installation-like features. It posed the question: Is the public ready for installation art? He invited the viewers to participate in his work by tearing away the newspaper in which his paintings were wrapped. After that, the papers were collected by the audience and stacked together, forming another art piece on the floor. This process helped to educate people and introduce them to this postmodern art form without their being aware of it. Thammasak's work allowed audience members the freedom to explore, and it drew them into their own imaginative world.

Since then, installation art has become increasingly popular and fashionable. Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is one of the very few Thai women artists making installations. Some of her works, such as *Three Boxes of Men and Their Reflections* and *Girl Says, There Is Always the Night Time*, both done in 1993, were displayed at the *First Asia Pacific Triennial* in 1993.

In 1994, she installed a work at a Chiang Mai cemetery, dedicated to three women who had been brutally murdered. The work evoked the victims, who included a nurse, a housewife, and a prostitute, in a way that prompted reflections on Thai society as a whole. Besides Araya, Pinaree Sanpitak, another promising woman artist, sensitively uses her installations to question her roles in society as a woman, a mother, and an artist.

Montien Boonma, Kamol Phaosavasdi, and Vichoke Mukdamanee have been active in organizing exhibitions of installations overseas. The three artists exhibited their works together with Joan Grounds and Noelene Lucas, who had been such an inspiring influence at Silpakorn, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1994. This exhibition, entitled *Thai-Australian Cultural Space*, was the result of exchange programs between Thailand and Australia that are gradually reflecting a fertile relationship between the two cultures.

Chiang Mai has become the home of an active installation art scene. A group of young Thai artists there decided several years ago to mount an art exhibition which would be held at various public spaces around the northern capital. Known as the *Chiang Mai Social Installation Group*, the project has been ongoing since its first event in 1992, with its third presentation put on display between late 1995 to early 1996. The artists' stated aim in presenting their works is to benefit the population at large.

As artists are not interested in displaying their works in galleries, the participants are determined to select pre-existing sites and locations that already possess a specific history and significance. Each artist selects a location that will become an art object and a public art center. They strongly believe that this approach will continue to change social and human roles and eventually lead the public to appreciate artworks. Moving exhibitions out of galleries and into these 'art centers,' they believe, will transform the whole city into a social installation.

The evolution of installation art locally, like other forms of modern art, has taken place through the interaction of foreign influences and native Thai inspiration. Some claim that its history is much longer than what has been summarized here and that installations have existed here for many centuries, concealed in the trappings of religious and other kinds of ritual ceremonies.

This idea can be defended in purely formal terms, but it must also be remembered that Western installation art and traditional Thai ritual are radically different in purpose and concept. To conceive of them as installations is to extend the installation aesthetic in a specifically Thai direction.

Personally, it has been fascinating for me to follow the development of installation art in Thailand. Not only are there influences from the outside world, but some Thai artists are developing installation concepts inspired by Thai culture, like the traditional ceremonies and festivals mentioned above.

In my own experience, when entering a Thai temple, I find myself moving into a spiritual space. Mural paintings and Buddha images, as well as decorative motifs adorning columns and ceilings, work effectively together. Within the temple's interior space, one can smell the incense sticks and the fragrance of flowers. The sound of bells and chanting can also be heard. It is interesting that the combination of these diverse elements creates a harmonious composition, a kind of spiritual installation which has existed in Thai culture for centuries.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THAI CONTEMPORARY ART¹

The past decade has witnessed a significant widening of artistic horizons. New approaches, values, and styles have entered the vocabulary of visual arts in Thailand. Political instability, economic downturns, social and cultural changes have had significant effects on contemporary Thai artists, especially the newer generation. Many of these artist's works turn away from external influences and focus on concerns and issues in Thai society. Some have focused their attention on reflecting on the problems, confusion, and despair that they are confronting in Thai society. There is an intensity in the expression of their art toward such situations. Artists of the younger generation today have placed their art closer to life and reality. Some of them have committed themselves to solving the problems in society, and their contribution can be seen through the artworks they produce. At present, younger artists have more freedom to touch upon sensitive issues, such as political events, widespread corruption, the decline of moral values, changing religious and cultural beliefs, as well as gender issues. Some dare to discuss problems about consumerism and over-commercialization by using religious icons. Some feedback from viewers has been negative, but the artists have no intention of insulting religious institutions. It is interesting that negative criticism has not discouraged these artists. On the contrary, they feel that they have been challenged to be more careful about how to communicate sensitive issues in their future artistic development.² The contemporary art scene in Thailand today has become vibrant, lively, and

1 The article was initially published in the exhibition catalog *Next Move: Contemporary Art from Thailand* in 2003 (pp. 46–53), edited by Binghui Huangfu, by LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

2 *Beyond the Future, The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*. (1999). Queensland Art Gallery, p. 152.

more controversial than ever before, primarily because the work by young artists has been innovative and dynamic.

In the realm of revivalism of traditional Thai art, some artists attempt to reinterpret traditional culture through concerns about ethnicity and regionalism. Such an approach can be seen in the work of Chalermchai Kositpipat, Prasong Luemuang, and Pornchai Jaima. Religious faith and spirituality have played a crucial role in some of the artist's productions. Panya Vijinthanasarn, Apichai Piromrak, and Sakarin Krue-On execute and explore the possibilities of spiritual expression through experimentation with mixed media and installation. An emerging young artist, Buncha Hnongsue, uses digital art to demonstrate his faith and belief in Buddhism. Computer-generated images of the Buddha in his work reveal another dimension of spirituality. It is worth noting that young artists of the present generation tend to look to cultural tradition as a basis for self-expression while mature artists search for peacefulness and a profound spiritual world. There are also some young artists who produce their works based on Buddhist philosophy by using Buddhist vocabulary and indigenous materials to reflect changes and conflicts in Thai society and to remind people in society of moral values and traditional rural life. Another group uses traditional motifs to represent contemporary life. The valuing of tradition and the past, as these artists' work demonstrates, is not appropriation of traditional art, nor is it about returning to the past, but rather it is about how the past lives in the present, and the variety of linkages between the past, the present, and the future.³ At the beginning of the new millennium, young artists are turning back to reexamine and reinvestigate their past history, tradition, and their own roots due to the problems and conflicts they are facing in Thai society.

Manit Sriwanichpoom's early videos and photographs, *Horror in Pink* series (1998), ironically criticized the government's tourism industry that exploited Thailand's cultural heritage. The images look rather humorous when compared to his recent series. Sriwanichpoom's current large-scale

3 Rodboon, S. (2002). *Thai Spiritual Ties*. Chotana Print Co. Ltd.

photographs in the exhibition, *From History and Memory* produced in 2001, show his poet friend, Sompong Thawee, in a pink costume standing in ironical poses between the images of the massacre of democracy protesters in 1976. The photographs strongly criticize the brutality and violence undertaken by the dictatorial rulers of the Thai government at the time. This series of works not only reveals the truth of the unfortunate incident but also evokes an awareness of freedom, perhaps through its very absence. The violence in these photographs results in a strong, almost disturbing, psychological effect.

“Nuts Society” is a unique group of young artists established in 1998. Members of the group are not identified but have been working together to bring art into people’s daily lives. According to the manifesto of the group, their concern is with the importance of the conscious behavior of people in society, for they consider the creation of art to be able to arouse and improve awareness of people in society. Their goal and mission are that art can easily be dispersed by means of everyday life in every context of society and is a valuable tool of communication. Its membership not only consists of a small group of artists who generate conscience-raising art products for consumption, but is also expanded to include anyone who is concerned about our world and attempts to act in a responsive manner. They often use words in their art to trigger reactions from the viewers. One of their projects took place at About Studio and About Café in August 2000; words, such as “responsibility,” “concern,” “unity,” and “sacrifice” were written on a variety of objects like T-shirts and bottles, like a flashing Marquee sign. Each word was precisely chosen for the reader to reflect on the relationship of the word to the object upon which it is written. Sometimes, the Nuts Society attaches Buddhist proverbs, which target the conscience of the reader or consumer. For the Nuts Society, the statements as artwork can effectively unite the separate concerns of language and art.

The problem of materialism and consumerism is also critically engaged within the work of a young artist, Bundith Phunsombutlert’s installation: *Readymade Human Products* produced in 2000. Three-dimensional plastic-wrapped products, consisting of images of various human parts of the head (such as eyes, noses, mouths, and brains), are

arranged on a sales trolley that resembles a food cart commonly used in Thailand. The segmentation of the human face and its display as a common commodity is an investigation of the extent to which our commercialized society creates a new set of values in the pattern of thoughts, personalities, as well as lifestyles of most people. In a spectacular fashion, Bundith links the worship of materialism by placing that, which supposedly can never be sold (our identity and personality), on a vehicle that sells an everyday item such as a plate of food.

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the contemporary art world in Thailand has shifted its interest away from the type of art that is normally shown in the exhibition spaces inside the galleries or museums. The shift is to put the works of art in alternative spaces: on the street and in other public places that allow the audience from all walks of life to have a direct experience of art as part of everyday life. As a consequence, such art, and especially public art as well as interactive art, has resulted in successful communication between audiences and artworks.

Installation art has remained a major art movement in the Thai art circle. A number of interesting trends have taken root in this kind of art form. The first trend is that of socio-political and ecological concerns; the second is the exploration and search for self-expression; and the third focuses on cultural tradition, Buddhism, and spirituality. The development of installation art in Thailand not only incorporates influence from the outside world but also has developed directly from the influence of Thai culture, for example, traditional festivals and ceremonies. Among the first generation of installation artists are Prawat Laucharoen, Chumpol Apisuk, Thammasak Buncherd, Kamol Phaosavasdi, and the late Montien Boonma whose conceptual and spiritual installations were highly influential and had a strong impact on young Thai artists in the 1990s. Montien's work deserves special attention, for he was one of the first artists to consciously incorporate indigenous materials, such as traditional medicines, herbs, and clay, into his work. His turn back to these traditional objects, however, was not a turn to traditional art, for he was seeking new ways to explore and understand Buddhism and Buddhist iconography in the form of contemporary installation art.

ART IN PUBLIC SPACE

Chiang Mai Social Installation was the first large-scale project of its kind. It took place in the city of Chiang Mai in 1992. The event was an important historical event in Thai contemporary art. A group of young Thai artists who were interested in holding exhibitions in public places rather than in art galleries organized displays at temples, cemeteries, public buildings, private residences, streets, canals, and open spaces around Chiang Mai City. Locations that already possessed history and meaning were carefully selected, and much of the city was turned into an art object and public art center. Since the second event in 1993, the participation of foreign artists from different countries has been active. The event was organized annually from the early to the mid-90s. However, due to financial problems and a lack of expertise in managing the event, the organizer of the previous *Chiang Mai Social Installation* has to struggle to keep it alive. It disappeared from the art scene for a while and has been revived since November 2002.

Another example of a large-scale communal project in Bangkok was the *Huay Kwang Mega City project* in 1996 organized by a group of leading artists. Art students were invited to join these open-air art activities. The aim of the project was to stimulate social and environmental awareness. Collaboration of work and mutual support between artists created a strong solidarity. Among the artists were prominent performance artists Chumpol Apisuk and Surapol Phanyawatchira, as well as Manit Sriwanichapoom, a well-known freelance photographer, along with Chatchai Puipia and Kamol Phaosavasdi. The project was one of the most provocative and radical.

The next major art event in a public space was the *Bangkok Art Project* organized by Silpakorn University with the cooperation and support of the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 1998. The event was launched as part of the celebration of the 13th Asian Games. The aim of the project was to bring art to people. Contemporary works of the participating artists were combined with traditional and classical Thai art and architecture around the old part of the capital city. Such a combination enabled a new meaning to the art as well as a new life to the city's environment.

After these art projects, there were several art activities of the same

nature that created an open forum for artists and the public. Interestingly, such activities have drawn tremendous public attention. The projects are not only stimulating and fun, but they also prove that art can effectively take part in serving and educating the public.

However, permanent support of contemporary art may be considered limited. The plan for building Bangkok's Contemporary Art Center has not materialized due to a problem with the decision of the present Bangkok Governor. Thai Artists Network for the planned Bangkok Contemporary Art Center led by Chumpol Apisuk worked together on the *People's Art Festival and Painting Project* to protest against the governor's cancellation of the plan. Many artists became activists because of their anger and disappointment toward the situation. It has been frustrating for Thai artists who have been longing for the city art center to support contemporary art. Again, the projects mentioned took place in public spaces in Bangkok, and the Painting Project also took place in Chiang Mai.

Performance art has been considered as a provocative form of artistic expression in the contemporary art scene in the country. A number of times performance art has been questioned whether it is art by the viewers. Performance artists in Thailand are mainly social activists. The focus of most performances is on socio-political issues. This kind of art form conveys a sense of conceptual expression and always involves fresh interaction between audiences and artists. Performance artist, Chumpol Apisuk, focuses on the sensitive issues of HIV/AIDS. Among prominent performance artists are Wasant Sitthikhet, a social activist; Surapol Phanyawatchira, the pioneer of "social message;"⁴ Michael Shaowanasai, whose work is especially related to self and homosexuality; and Montri Toemsombat whose performances are highly innovative and provocative. This young artist has a unique way of using choreographic movements as a means of expression.⁵ The costumes he produces for his performances are unusual and are essentially made from materials that are significantly related to the

4 Danutra, D. (1996). But is It Art?, in Outlook, *Bangkok Post*, Thursday, September, 19.

5 *The 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale* (1999), Fukuoka, p. 198.

contents and meanings of his work. Thailand has become an important center for performance art since 1998. Leading performance artists from different Asian countries came together for the first *Asiatopia* performance art project. The event also took place in public spaces in Bangkok and was a huge success. Audiences were given an opportunity to experience and communicate directly with the artists and their art. *Asiatopia* has been organized annually and has become a major international art event that takes place in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Chumpol Apisuk is the key person in the project.

CURRENT WAVE

Interactive art has played a crucial role in change in the contemporary Thai art scene. Rirkrit Tiravanija, a New York-based Thai artist, introduced this art form. Talks about his work given to young artists at Silpakorn University in the 90s and his collaborative works with Navin Rawanchaikul have been highly influential and have had a strong impact on young Thai artists. Interaction with audiences has stimulated creative artistic activities both in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Everyday objects and everyday life activities are enriched with new meaning in the art. Alongside these two artists, the work of Surasri Kusolwong and Sutee Kunavichayanont also employs interactivity as a medium of art.

Rawanchaikul's *Taxi Man* focuses on the interactions between individuals, participants, and the community. Part of the exhibition is devoted to the public's input in the form of postcards and messages, sometimes written in taxis themselves, or else in the art gallery, which are displayed on a wall in the art space. For the artist, mixing art with life is a paramount activity. This installation exhibition was held at About Studio/About Café in Bangkok in 2000. In this work, Navin has woven an intricate story that not only captures the viewers' imagination but also combines the real-life stories of everyday people in order to blur the boundaries between art and life.

Sutee Kunavichayanont's recent work, which includes *History Class* done in 2000, was created to commemorate the late Pridi Panomyong,

the father of Thai politics. A number of old-school desks were carved with images of important political figures and historical statements. This work has promoted linkages between art, political history, and the audience primarily through communicative and interactive processes. The viewers were invited to rub images and statements on the surface of the desk on a piece of paper with colored pencils. The viewers could create their own artwork by doing so, and at the same time, they could learn about their own political history.

Pinaree Sanpitak, an internationally-known woman artist, has recently produced an installation entitled *Noon Nom*. Hundreds of oversized cushion-like objects in the form of breasts fill the exhibition space at the Bangkok University Art Gallery. The forms of breasts are made of soft and delicate fabrics, and the setting appears very lively. The work invites viewers' interaction to touch, lean down, or lie on the work. This site-specific installation successfully arouses fantasy, imagination, and memories of happiness, warmth, and comfort. Communication between the viewers and the artist through this interactive art has been richly positive.

The late Montien Boonma was also the pioneer of interactive art. Among his interactive conceptual installations are *The Room* (1994), *Sala of Mind* (1995), *Arokayasala* (1996), *Temple of Mind* (1996–1997), and *Melting Void/ Mold of the Mind* (1998). The viewers were invited to enter the work by standing or sitting underneath the work, where they could look at and experience the sounds as well as smell the fragrance of traditional herbs. It is intended for the audience to interact with the work in a way that could lead the viewers to self-realization and a calm state of mind.

The major centers for contemporary art are now in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. However, available art galleries and exhibition spaces in both cities are still not adequate to accommodate local and international exhibitions. There are spaces in art institutions such as Silpakorn University, which now has four venues; Chulalongkorn University and Chiang Mai University, each have two exhibition spaces; Bangkok University has one, and while there is space at the National Gallery, it is always fully booked. There are also some private galleries and commercial galleries around, but some of them have already closed down because of financial problems.

It is not easy to run the art space while income is small, and the art market in Thailand seems to be constantly up and down. Gallery owners have to struggle in order to maintain their business. Due to the lack of venues to exhibit the artworks, many artists have turned to alternative art spaces such as About Studio/ About Café. Hotel lobbies, restaurants, and coffee places are popular among young artists. Spaces in foreign cultural institutions in Bangkok are also available. These include the Goethe-Institut, the Japan Foundation, and some Embassies where art activities are supported.

Spaces for “cutting edge art” are few. Concrete House in Nonthaburi run by Chumpol Apisuk has hosted different kinds of activist art activities for local and international artists. Such activities include artist’s talks, discussions, performances, and workshops. Kamin Lertchaiprasert, a Chiang Mai-based artist, has recently opened an art space called “Umong Sippadhamma,” hosting exhibitions and art activities that are radical and socio-political based. One of the major activities there was the exhibition *Art Against War* (February 2002) which many young artists including art activists participated. Talks, seminars, and discussions on different political, cultural, and social issues, at both local and global levels, have been organized regularly there.

This past decade, several Thai artists, both male and female, have gained their reputation and recognition in the international contemporary art scene. The international exchange network as well as international linkages have progressed greatly. As in most countries, the impact of international art activities has enhanced the development of contemporary Thai art and artists. Finally, it is interesting to see that this international association has not led only Thai artists to look out and follow what other artists do, but in a way, it has encouraged many Thai artists to appraise and appreciate their own culture to position their art in a local context as well as a broader international and contemporary context.

REALISM IN THAI PAINTINGS¹

In the 19th century, the emergence of realism in Thai art was evident in the work of Khrua In Khong, a monk master and court painter of King Rama the Fourth (or King Mongkut as he is popularly known, who reigned from 1851 to 1868). He played a crucial role in leading the country towards Western modernization. Influences from the West have resulted in changes in the aesthetics and styles of art, particularly in painting and sculpture.

Khrua In Khong was the first Thai to adopt the three-dimensional perspective and the use of 'chiaroscuro technique' in Thai mural paintings. He was conscious of the realities of nature. Interestingly, the Western influences observed in Khrua In Khong's paintings derive from commercial prints and photographs rather than from Western paintings. He consequently broke away from using outlines and flat colors and was conscious of the neglect of light and shadow in traditional paintings. Instead, he attempted to paint natural scenes realistically, particularly the foliage in the landscape. In addition to the invaluable contributions of Khrua In Khong to Thai art, his works are regarded as important historical records of political events, foreign affairs, culture, and the social conditions which existed during the fourth reign.²

The contact with the West also saw the development of Realist sculpture, resulting in the execution of Royal portraits. Luang Theprojana was the first Thai sculptor who attempted to model a life-size portrait of King Mongkut in 1868. At the same time, European academic art began to exert an influence on the secularization of art in the 19th century in the Kingdom of Siam (the old name for Thailand). Traditional and religious art

1 The article was initially published in the exhibition catalog *Realism in Asian Art* in 2010 (pp. 311–315), edited by Kim Inhye and Joyce Fan, by the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea. The original text is in English and Korean, and it was translated from English into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

2 Thongmitr, W. (1979). *Khrua In Kong's Westernised School of Thai Painting*. Aksorn Samphan Press, p. 127.

produced under King Chulalongkorn, a successor to King Mongkut (reign from 1868 to 1910), were then increasingly replaced by landscapes, portraits, and genre paintings.

During his reign, King Chulalongkorn made two trips to Europe in 1897 and 1907. He developed an enthusiasm for Western art and architecture and acquired European art for his personal collection. He became an important patron of the arts and encouraged court artisans such as Prince Naris to incorporate a Western approach with indigenous styles in their artistic practices. As Western-style portraits were highly appreciated by the King, Phra Soralaklikhit (1875–1958), one of the court painters who accompanied the King on one of his trips to Europe, was granted a Royal scholarship to study Western academic painting in Italy.³ Most of the artist's portrait paintings were executed in the Realist tradition.

As Western-style paintings were popular during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, it is not surprising that European architects, technicians, and artists were brought into Siam to build palaces and state buildings.⁴ In 1904, Cesare Ferro was the first foreign artist who was appointed as a court painter, and he was commissioned to paint the King's portrait from life. Buildings that were commissioned have walls and ceilings adorned with Realist paintings or were filled with Realist imagery. The impact of these European artists and architects was profound and far-reaching, that traditional mural paintings showed attempts at a Realist approach. Such can be observed in the wall paintings depicting historical events during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and his father, King Mongkut, at the Phra Thinang Songphanuat, the Royal Ordination Residence at Wat Benjamabophit built in the late 19th century. There are also Royal portraits and portraits of other nobles executed in a Realist manner.

However, in art historical terms, the breakthrough in Thai modern art occurred when Corrado Feroci (1892–1962), who took the Thai name of Silpa Bhirasri, from Italy entered the Royal Thai Government service in 1924. The

3 Suchaxaya, S. (1989). Phra Soralaklikhit. in *Perd Kru Silapa*. Muang Boran, pp. 178–193.

4 Wong-Uparaj, D. (1993). *Architect and Sculptors before Silpa Bhirasri's time*, printed transcript, January.

artworks which he produced during his lifetime in Thailand were mainly realistic sculptures. Among his outstanding commission works are a statue of King Rama the First, King Vajiravudh and soldiers around the Victory Monument, and bas-reliefs at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

As the founder of Silpakorn University established in 1943, Bhirasri introduced Western art and aesthetics to Thai students. The academic training focused on studies from nature, and students were expected to do realistic studies in both sculpture and painting. According to Bhirasri, a solid foundation must be in place before any attempts can be made to create individual artistic expression.⁵ Among Silpa's students are the well-known painter, Fua Haripitak (1910–1993), who produced Realist portraits before adopting Impressionist and Cubist styles, and sculptors, Sitthideth Sanghiran (1916–1957), and Piman Moolpramook (1912–1992), who worked in the Western academic style.

The year 1949 saw the organization of the first National Art Exhibition. The works presented in the exhibition were more prone to European art trends such as Impressionism and Cubism while there were hardly any Realist paintings. This is because many artists wanted to search for self-expression and to try new ideas and possibilities. As a consequence, Realism during this period was on a decline. However, in the 1950s, there was a revival of a Realist approach. Among such artists was a portrait painter, Chamras Khietkong (1916–1965), who was trained under Silpa Bhirasri during World War II. He worked in the oil and pastel media, and his brushwork was lively and stylized. His contemporary was Chalerm Nakirak (1917–2002) who painted landscapes and scenes of the rivers and canals. His painting, *Pak Klong* (1951) portrays the life of the Thai people living along the river. It is an important historical painting that serves as a record of the way of life at a specific place and point in time.

Modern Thai art of the 1960s and the 1970s predominantly reflected the influences of American art. Such influences were Abstract expressionism, Pop, and Minimal art. Despite this, there was a significant rebirth of Realism that resulted in a new category of portrait painting. The paintings of

5 Bhirasri, S. (1954). *Modern Art in Thailand, Thai Cultural series*. National Cultural Institute

Chakrabhand Posayakrit (b.1943), one of the prominent portrait painters during this period, demonstrate not only the likeness of the sitters but also their status, personality, and emotional state. *Seated Man*, 1974, portrays a friend in a surreal landscape where the imagery evokes both a sense of isolation and tranquility at the same time, while the sitter's facial expression reflects a moment of retrospection. The work is arresting in its details and the dramatic use of light and shadow. Without a doubt, Posayakrit's paintings have the ability to elicit imagination and emotional responses while conveying complex ideas and inspiring viewers with their aesthetics.

The emergence of Social realism began in the 1970s when Thailand struggled for democracy. Protests by left-wing parties and students in 1976 led to a massacre by the military. During this decade, a prominent group of artists "Art for Life" (1973–1976) was formed along with other anti-military government groups. They used their art to criticize the dictatorship as well as to convey messages concerning political problems, social injustice, discrimination, human rights, and poverty. The artists who were politically active at the time included Thammasak Booncherd (b.1945), Sompot Upa-In (b.1934), Lawan (Dawrai) Upa-In (b.1935), and Kamchorn Soonpongsri (b.1937).

At this point, themes of social conflicts, political unrest, breakdown of moral values in Thai society as well as resistance against Imperialism became significant for many Thai painters. Lawan (Dawrai) Upa-In was the first woman artist to be known for projecting social and political issues in her paintings. In the work entitled *Bangkok* (1976, 1981), the artist depicted scenes of suppression, such as the massacre by the military, corruption, social inequality, and poverty in the rural areas. Despite the grim outlook, she expresses her hope for the nation through the image of the cheerful children in the foreground.

The decade of the 1980s witnessed the establishment of new art forms, such as conceptual art, site-specific installation, and performance art. This was largely the result of returning artists who studied abroad in the West. At the same time, Realist paintings on varied themes were popular with well-known artists like Kiattisak Channonnart (b.1943), Surapol Saenkum (b.1955), Surasit Saokong (b.1949), and Sompop Budtarad (b.1957) exploring different approaches in their works. *Slum Life* (1982) by Surapol Saenkum

portrays the living conditions of people in the slum area of a modern city through realistic means. Household objects and parts of architectural elements metaphorically convey the social and environmental problems arising from urbanization. The absence of people, a characteristic of Surapol Saenkum's paintings, in an ironic twist, heightens the urgency of the situation.

Instead of a social commentary, *Serenity* (1989) by Surasit Saokong attempts to convey the ideas of insight and purity. The dramatic play of light and shadow creates an atmosphere of tranquility and contemplation in which a monk is seen meditating on a religious manuscript in his abode. The walls of the chamber are highly decorated in the style of Northern Thai Buddhist temples. There is again a dream-like feeling in the presented imagery that gives the painting an almost surrealist quality.

In conclusion, the reception of Realism and its impact on the development of Thai art from the 19th to 20th century can be examined in four phases. In the first phase, Thai artists were exposed to Realism through Western print brought into Siam by foreigners. This then led to the second phase where European artists were imported to work on commissions by the Royal Thai Government. Eventually, Thai artists started to embark on art studies in European academies and returned to Siam which in the third phase, impacted the art scene with a Western academic Realist approach. Finally in the last phase, through the establishment of art schools locally, realism became firmly entrenched in the development of Thai art. Although it cannot be denied that Realism in Thai art was initially influenced by the Western academic art style, in their efforts and artistic endeavors, Thai artists have come to incorporate such an approach within their social and political context. This has resulted in individual styles and artistic expressions that give a distinctive quality to Thai modern and contemporary art.

In the 1990s, a period marked by the rise of contemporary art in Thailand and Southeast Asia, the concept of “collaboration” frequently appeared in article titles. Ajarn Somporn’s writings on “International Collaborations” showcase her projects with the Australian Embassy and the Goethe-Institut Thailand. These collaborations highlight the artistic exchanges between Thai artists and their international counterparts. Many of these initiatives were part of exhibitions curated by Ajarn Somporn, demonstrating that contemporary art in Thailand has benefited from international support since its early development.

International Collaborations

VISUAL ARTS ACTIVITIES (1988–2000)¹

My official connection with the Goethe-Institut and involvement with its art activities has developed since 1988 when Professor Malte Sartorius from Braunschweig came to do a workshop in printmaking and exhibited his work at the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts at Silpakorn University. With the support of the Goethe-Institut, an exhibition of *German prints of the 1960s* was shown in the same year. In 1989, an *exhibition of Hans Richter* was shown at Silpakorn University. In 1990, a very important workshop that should be marked in Thai contemporary art history: *Art and Environment* conducted by a Munich-based artist, Rainer Wittenborn, took place at the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts. The participants of the workshop were young artists who learned a great deal from this particular workshop. They have developed their works to maturity and have become famous at both national and international levels. Among the artists from the workshop are Montien Boonma, Chatchai Puipia, Pinaree Sanpitak, Jakapan Vilasineekul, Surasri Kusolwong, and Thaiwichit Puengkasemsomboon.

The reason why this workshop was so important is that the young Thai artists learned to look and examine the environment around them and learned how to develop their ideas in their art. A year later, a follow-up project was initiated. The participating artists materialized their works and exhibited them together with the works by Wittenborn. The result of the workshop and the exhibition proved to be highly successful and was very well-received. In the following years, the workshop on *Art and Environment* continued in the same manner. The most recent one was the workshop, *Art and Environment IV*, with Jårg Geismar in Bangkok in April 1999. A group of 30 students from five different art institutions in Bangkok participated in the workshop.

1 This article was initially published in *Thai artists and the Goethe: Forty Years of Cultural Interaction* in 2000 (pp. 95–96) by Goethe-Institut Thailand. The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

From 1989 to 1997, visual art activities supported by the Goethe-Institut were very rich and active. From 1990 to 2000, important exhibitions that I coordinated included the exhibition of art posters *Peace with Nature* by Klaus Staeck (1990); *exhibition of prints by Käthe Kollwitz* (1991); *video works by Joseph Beuys* (1991); *The German Graphic Art 1950s'* (1991); an exhibition of Photograms, *Photo-montage and Photographs 1920–1939* by László Moholy-Nagy (1992); an exhibition of *Woodcut Prints by Albrecht Dürer* (1993); an exhibition of *Books and Prints by Max Ernst 1891–1976* (1994); an exhibition: *The War by Otto Dix* (1997); an exhibition of *Prints and Drawings of the Weimar Republic* (1998); and an exhibition of *Current Media Art* (2000) at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University. Occasionally, I gave some lectures on different exhibitions, such as Käthe Kollwitz, Albrecht Dürer, Otto Dix, and the Weimar Republic for the students and the public.

Important workshops that I was involved with, apart from the workshop with Rainer Wittenborn in 1990, include the workshops *Art and Environment II* with Nikolaus Lang (1993); Video and Performance workshop with Ulrike Rosenbach (1993); a workshop on exhibition and educational programs with Dr. Julia Breithaupt from the Education department of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (1993); and a workshop on exhibition design and public programs with Kai Reschke from Berlin (1999). The most recent activity at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University was a film seminar on *The German Experimental Film of the 1990s* with the German expert, Professor Gerhard Büttenbender, from the University of Braunschweig.

The activities mentioned above greatly benefit people who are concerned with the art circle in Thailand, particularly art students, art instructors, and artists. The support from the Goethe-Institut is highly appreciated, and I hope that the Goethe-Institut will continue supporting visual art activities.

THAI-AUSTRALIAN ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS¹

Initially, the artistic connections between Thailand and Australia unofficially started in 1987 when a Thai artist was invited to join the art event called 'The Artists Regional Exchange' or ARX which was held in Perth. The visit of Chumpol Apisuk to ARX in 1987 was followed up by a major new initiative by the Australian government. The objectives were firstly the identification of visual arts/crafts networks and key individuals in Southeast Asia, and secondly the development of closer connections between artists from Australia, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries. In 1988, a team that conducted the Australian government's survey of arts and crafts in Southeast Asia made a historical trip to Thailand. The survey team consisted of Neil Manton, David Williams, Tim Jacob, and Elizabeth Churcher. The team concluded in their survey that the basis of much closer contact between artists in Australia and Thailand as well as other Southeast Asian countries could be formed.

Consequently, the Australian government and art organizations have followed up the recommendation of the survey team regarding the possibility and opportunities for direct contact between artists from both countries. Some of these activities include the participation of Thai artists in ARX, when in 1989, two more artists: Thammasak Boonchert and Pinaree Sanpitak attended the event. This was followed by Kamol Phaosavasdi and Vichoke Mukdamanee who participated in 1992. In 1993, in the lead-up to ARX 3, three Australian artists: Steve Holland, Juliet Lear, and Andrew Hayim spent six weeks in Thailand working with Chumpol Apisuk, creating an archeological excavation in Chiang Mai. The project was called 'ARXEOLOGY.' The outcome of the project was later exhibited in Perth.

¹ The article was initially published in the exhibition catalog *Fusion Vision: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections* in 2002 (pp. 6-10) by the Australian Embassy in Thailand and Silpakorn University. Presented in both Thai and English, the initial edition acknowledges editing by Dr. Mike Hayes.

Other international exhibitions which Thai artists have participated in Australia include the *Sydney Biennale*. The late Montien Boonma was invited to participate in the 1990 *Sydney Biennale*. Three Thai artists: Vasan Sitthiket, Kamol Phaosavasdi, and Kamin Lertchaiprasert were also invited to participate in the same Biennale in 1992. It is worth noting that after Montien's participation in the *Sydney Biennale*, more exchange programs were set up between Chiang Mai University and Canberra School of Art. In 1989, a program between the Australia Council and Silpakorn University was initiated.

The first artist in residence from Australia was Joan Grounds who spent three months working closely with Thai artists at Silpakorn University in 1990. This was followed by Noelene Lucas. Both artists were from Sydney and were significant in introducing the art form of 'installation' to Thai academics, art students, and artists. They were also an inspiration as well as great supporters of young female artists at Silpakorn University. The residency program has continued and has taken place at universities in different parts of the country. In the 1990s, not only were there more Australian artists coming to Thailand but also more Thai artists visiting Australia for different art exchanges, such as residency programs, workshops, and participating in exhibitions for example the *Sydney Biennale* and the *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane.

The other major development in these exchanges was the establishment of 'Asialink,' an organization which develops Australia's link with Asia, and in particular focuses on artists and art organizations in the region. The residency programs under Asialink have had a significant effect. They have established close personal and professional links between artists and have provided opportunities for Australian artists to travel and work in Thailand. These links have successfully made possible further new connections, contacts, and cooperation. At the same time, there are more exchanges between universities in Thailand and Australia. Under these programs, a number of Australian artists and scholars have had the opportunity to live and work in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, and in return, more Thai artists have had the opportunity to live and work in different parts of Australia.

An example of what has been mentioned before is the organizing of

the joint exhibition entitled *Thai-Australian Cultural Space*. This project was supported by the Visual Arts/Crafts Board of the Australia Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The five artists in the show were Joan Grounds, Noelene Lucas, Montien Boonma, Kamol Phaosavasdi, and Vichoke Mukdamance. These five artists specialized in installation. The exhibition took place at the National Gallery in Bangkok in May 1993 and in Chiang Mai in October of the same year. For both exhibitions, the Australian artists went to do their works in Thailand. In March 1994, the Thai artists went to do their works for the show at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Both Thai and Australian artists developed their cross-cultural dialogue and worked in different cultural, physical, and conceptual spaces. The five artists have come to know and respect each other's works through institutional and personal contact in Australia and Thailand.

The idea of the project *Fusion Vision: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections* is to follow up the resounding success of the exhibition *Saisampan (Soul Ties): Australian and Thai Artists in Collaboration* at Chiang Mai University Art Museum in March this year. The Australian artists, namely Joan Grounds, Noelene Lucas, Wendy Teakel, and David Jensz spent a month working collaboratively with Chiang Mai artists: Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Chaiyot Chandratita, Bannarak Nakbunlung, and Peerapong Duangkaew respectively. The project was somewhat similar to the *Thai-Australian Cultural Space* in terms of exchanging cross-cultural dialogues.

The Fusion: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections Vision exhibition consists of 19 artists from both countries. The 16 Thai artists are from Bangkok and Chiang Mai while the Australian artists are Aborigines: Rover Thomas, Jimmy Pike, and the late Jack Britten. The three artists are very well known and have high profiles in the Australian contemporary art circles. Their works are vibrant and are highly spiritual. Although they are contemporary in terms of style, they still reflect a strong sense of indigenous culture and tradition. From the curator's point of view, this will be a good opportunity for the Thai audience to experience the richness of print works by the three artists. Among the Thai artists are Panya Vijinthanasarn, Vichai Sithirat, Peerapong Duangkaew, Kamol Phaosavasdi, Vichoke Mukdamance, Pinaree Sanpitak, Amrit Chusuwan, Bannarak

Nakbunlung, Saravuth Duangjumpa, Chatchai Puipia, Chaiyot Chandratita, Yupa Changkoon, Apichai Piromrak, Jakapan Vilasineekul, Natee Utarit, and Bundith Phunsombatler.

Panya Vijnthanasarn's first involvement with Australia was to design and paint murals of the Thai Pavilion for the Expo in Brisbane in 1988, and he later migrated to Australia in 1990. Among his involvement in art activities while he was living there until 1992 was participating in the art exhibition *Change and Modernism in Thai Art* which was curated by Peera Ditbanjong at Canberra Contemporary Art space (14 March–6 April 1991). Panya has developed a unique technique in his painting by using keno cards found in Casinos in Australia. Unusual forms appear on the cards when they are heated by being pressed by an iron. He has been combining the technique on keno cards by collaging them on the painting, which creates beautiful effects in the background of his Buddha images.

Apart from participating in the ARX event in 1989, Pinaree Sanpitak also took part in the exhibition *Confess and Conceal: 11 Insights from Contemporary Australia and Southeast Asia* at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, and toured around Southeast Asia. In 1999, She was invited to participate in *Beyond The Future, the Third Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. In the same year, Pinaree took up a residency program for "Printmaking Workshop–Northern Editions" at Northern Territory University in Darwin.

Along with the late Montien Boonma and other Thai artists, Apichai Piromrak joined the exhibition of *Contemporary Thai Works on Papers* shown at the Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Arts in 1992. In 1993, joining with Montien Boonma, Vasan Sitthiket, Prasong Leumuang, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Kamol Phaosavasdi, Apichai Piromrak had his work exhibited in the *First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

In 1992, Kamol Phaosavasdi and Vichoke Mukdamanee participated in the ARX in Perth. They spent one and a half months there. Both artists spent their time thinking deeply about their response to Australia. They were very much interested in Aboriginal art and tradition. The influence of Aboriginal art was reflected in some of their artworks.

Peerapong Daungkaew took up his residency under the exchange program between Chiang Mai University and Canberra School of Art in 1992. He also had a solo exhibition there. Peerapong participated in the *Saisampan (Soul Ties): Australian and Thai Artists in Collaboration* in March this year. He collaborated with David Jensz, his former colleague at the Canberra School of Art.

Vichai Sithirat was invited as an artist in residence at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, in 1993. While he was there, he produced a beautiful Buddha image for the University. An exhibition of *Buddha Images*, Sculpture and Drawing by Vichai was organized by the University.

Chaiyot Chandratita from Chiang Mai University spent two months as an artist in residence/visiting lecturer at the School of Art, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia in 1993. He also collaborated with Noelene Lucas producing a magnificent installation for the Exhibition *Saisampan (Soul Ties): Australian and Thai Artists in Collaboration* in March 2002.

In 1996, Banarak Nakbunlung took up his residency as a visiting artist/lecturer at the Canberra School of Art and had his work exhibited in the exhibition *Contemporary Prints in Thailand with Pongdej Chaiyakut* at the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery. He also took part in the *Saisampan (Soul Ties): Australian and Thai Artists in Collaboration* project by collaborating with Wendy Teakel, his Australian counterpart, at Canberra School of Art.

Yupa Changkoon and Jakapan Vilasineekul were among other Thai artists who participated in the *Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane in 1996. Jakapan also took part in the exhibition *Tradition Tension* exhibited at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth in 1998. The work by both artists was quite sensitive in the message it conveyed to the audience.

Chatchai Puipia was invited to participate in the *Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery in 1996. His paintings of large self-portraits were one of the most striking pieces in the exhibition. They were concerned with the value and the status of people in Thai society.

Amrit Chusuwan went to Tasmania for a residency program at Launceston School of Art Tasmania University in 1997. He was invited to

exhibit his work in Kuala Lumpur, representing the Launceston School of the Art, Tasmania University in the same year. He also participated in the exhibition *No Guarantee* at Sydney University Art Gallery in 1999.

Natee Utarit had his first experience exhibiting his work with other young Thai artists at the exhibition of *Thai Contemporary Works on Papers* at the Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art in 1992. He was the youngest Thai artist to participate in the *Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* in 1999. His work in the exhibition is now in the collections of the Queensland Art Gallery.

Saravuth Duangjumba undertook his residency for the first time at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean in 1998 where he produced an interesting welded sculpture. Saravuth went back home with fond memories and was very much inspired by his Australian experience, which has also been reflected in some of his art.

Bundith Phunsombatlert joined the *Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* in Brisbane in 1999. He spent some time putting up his own work for the exhibition, had the opportunity to work with Australians, and got to know artists from other countries. It was a rich experience for him to be at APT, which enabled him to gain a more international profile.

The progress and development of coalitions and alliances among artists and art institutions from both sides have been highly successful. In order to celebrate the 12 years of this meaningful relations and connections in the field of visual arts between Thailand and Australia, the exhibition *Fusion Vision: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections* has been initiated with the support of the Australian Embassy. This exhibition will significantly widen and strengthen new vital links and networks with artistic communities in both countries.

From a curator's point of view, it has been very interesting to see how the Thai artists have developed their works through their experiences working with Australian artists and also to see how living in Australian communities has affected their work. All of the participating artists in this *Fusion Vision: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections* exhibition is enthusiastically exhibiting their works together to show their spirit and appreciation for this celebrated occasion of the 12 years of Thai and Australian artistic ties.

THE HISTORY OF PRINTMAKING DIALOGUE BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THAILAND¹

The history of art dialogue between Australia and Thailand, especially in printmaking, officially started in 1992 with the launch of *6x6 A Selection of Contemporary Australian Prints*, a touring exhibition held at Silpakorn University, Chiang Mai University, and Khon Kaen University respectively. Anne Kirker, at the time the curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the Queensland Art Gallery, came to assist with the installation of the exhibition at Silpakorn University Art Gallery. This exhibition was the culmination of support from the Australia Council for the Arts, the funding and advisory body of the Australian Federal Government responsible for arts and cultural activities, along with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Queensland Art Gallery, and Asialink.

In 1999, Pinaree Sanpitak was invited to be a printmaking artist-in-residence at Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University), collaborating with Basil Hall, a renowned Australian master printmaker. Her residency coincided with *The 3rd Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at the Queensland Art Gallery, where her installation works were also featured.

Among many significant printmaking initiatives and art activities that are relevant to this meaningful dialogue is the exhibition *Australian Prints People in Landscape*, held at Chiang Mai University Art Museum (now Chiang Mai University Art Center) in 2002. In the same year, the Australian Print Workshop (APW) from Melbourne organized an exhibition of *Australian Prints* at Khon Kaen University, with APW's Director, Anne Virgo, as the curator. Following that, Martin King, senior printer at APW, brought

¹ This article was initially published in the exhibition catalog *Interchange: a Printmaking Dialogue between Australia and Thailand*, in 2014, in both Thai and English languages by Australia Embassy Thailand and Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University. The English version presented here has been edited to enhance clarity by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriya Putsongkram.

this exhibition to Silpakorn University where he conducted a workshop with faculty members and students on printmaking. Subsequently, the exhibition was also displayed at Chiang Mai University Art Center, where Rosalind Atkins coordinated printmaking activities with students from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University.

In 2003, Wittamon Niwattichai was invited to Megalo Print Studio and Gallery in Canberra as a printmaking artist-in-residence. This initiative was funded by the Australian Capital Territory Government. Later, Niwattichai returned to Australia as a visiting artist in the Print Media and Drawing Workshop in 2008 and 2014, where she created artwork with students from the School of Art, Australian National University (ANU). The workshops were supported by the Research School of Humanities and the Arts at ANU, Canberra.

Printmaking is often regarded as part of other art forms, such as painting and sculpture, as seen in the exhibition titled *Fusion Vision: Thai - Australian Artistic Connection*, held at the Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University in 2002, with Sompon Rodboon as the curator. This activity served to commemorate 12 years of robust collaboration between Thailand and Australia in the realm of visual arts. Two years later, the Australian Embassy in Thailand organized an exhibition featuring prints by Aboriginal artists, which subsequently toured multiple venues across Thailand, with its inaugural showcase taking place at Chiang Mai University.

Kittikong Tilokwatthanai pursued his Master's degree in Printmaking at the Faculty of Art, University of New South Wales (UNSW), currently known as UNSW Art & Design. He collaborated closely with Michael Kempson, the director of Cicada Press, an institution affiliated with UNSW in Sydney focusing on printmaking education and practice. Tilokwatthanai adopted the principles of Cicada Press when establishing a printmaking studio in Chiang Mai known as "Chiang Mai Art on Paper" (CAP Studio). This studio promotes the art of printmaking in practice by working with well-known artists, while providing support and opportunities for young artists to produce prints. Furthermore, CAP Studio has engaged with international printmaking artists and institutions. It also hosted residencies for Australian artists featured in the exhibition *Interchange*, including Joshua Parry and

Ben Rak from Sydney, as well as Alex Lewis from Canberra.

In 2005, Michael Kempson traveled to deliver a lecture on Australian printmaking in support of an exhibition held at Chiang Mai University. This exhibition, titled *Thai-Australian Contemporary Prints*, featured prints by artists from Cicada Press, as well as works by faculty members and students from UNSW Art & Design and the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University. This exhibition marked the beginning of an exchange program between students from both institutions, where students would undertake short-term internships in each other's countries. In the same year, the exhibition was also showcased at COFAspace, University of New South Wales. Michael Kempson's visit to Thailand during this occasion highlighted the advent of a significant development in the relationship between art institutions in Sydney and Chiang Mai.

Another key milestone achieved was the launch of the exhibition *Gelam Nguzu Kazi - Dugong My Son: Prints from the Western Torres Strait* at the National Gallery of Thailand, Bangkok. The exhibition featured linocut prints crafted by artists from the northern region of Australia. Moreover, the event included printmaking demonstrations facilitated by Vimonmarn Khanthachavana with Australian artist, David Bosun, demonstrating linocut carving techniques.

Kade Javanalikhorn, who served as both an artist and an art instructor at Chiang Mai University, created print works at Cicada Press in 2008 and showcased them in the exhibition *Without a Word* alongside those crafted during his tenure in Australia and his previous paintings and prints made at CAP studio in Chiang Mai. Additionally, Vipoo Srivilasa, a Thai artist living in Melbourne at the time, also contributed as an artist-in-residence at Cicada Press. Notably, Srivilasa's printmaking oeuvre stood out for its distinctive conceptualization and mastery of ceramic practice, setting his works apart from his peers.

Patsy Payne from the Australian National University, Canberra, presented artworks created during her residency as an artist at the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, in the *Inside Out* exhibition at Tadu Contemporary Art Space in Bangkok. Subsequently, in 2013, Payne invited Kitikong Tilokwattanotai to participate in printmaking

activities under the Print Media and Drawing Workshop at the ANU School of Art & Design. This collaboration resulted in the strengthening of relationships and cooperation between personnel from the Australian National University and printmaking practitioners and educators from Chiang Mai University, including Kade Javanalikhorn, Rossalin Garst, Richard Garst, and Pongdej Chaiyakut. They were invited to exhibit their artworks in Canberra.

In 2011, Kitikong Tilokwattanotai, a printmaking lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Architecture, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna at the time, collaborated with Michael Kempson from the UNSW School of Art & Design to organize the *International Art on Paper Exhibition* at Chiang Mai University Art Center.

One important example of great progress in the relationship between the two countries was the invitation extended to printmaking practitioners, from both Thailand and Australia, as invited speakers at the Bridges Southern Graphics Council International Conference in March 2014 in San Francisco, USA. The presentations at this conference were a joint effort between the two countries under the theme “Songlines: Community, Connection, and Opportunity through Print in the Asia-Pacific” featuring Michael Kempson, Kitikong Tilokwattanotai, and Ben Rak, discussing the dynamic of printmaking practice in the region, with an emphasis on fostering cooperation and relationships in printmaking between Australia and Thailand. The activity received widespread interest.

The collaboration between both countries has led to an increased exchange of art exhibitions and residency programs. Such activities often involve institutional collaboration and personal networking, evolving from previous engagement efforts. Notably, many artists participating in the *Interchange* exhibition have contributed to establishing strong ties founded on the appreciation of both countries’ cultural values. It is hoped that these positive outcomes will continue to benefit the printmaking art scene of both countries in the future. A key organization to mention here is the Australian Embassy in Thailand, which consistently supports various art and cultural activities of both countries directly and indirectly.

“In the past, women were dominated by the male members of the family. However, at the same time, women also played crucial roles in Thai history...There is a saying based on this double role of women: the Thai women’s hands are at once rocking the cradle and swinging the sword. Although, in some ways, it seems that women have to be obedient and listen to the leader of the family, generally the husband or father. If we look closely, women hold high-status positions as a core or pillar in the family”

In the article “A Report on Contemporary Women’s Art in Thailand” (2000), Ajarn Somporn explains the complexity of women’s identities and positions in Thai society, which differ from Western frameworks. This emphasizes the importance of considering the unique context when interpreting the works of female artists in Thailand.

Women’s Issues

FEMALE ARTIST IN THE WESTERN WORLD¹

“Women, despite their artistic talents, were unable to extricate themselves from the daily household duties. They also lacked opportunities to pursue careers or engage in other activities outside their domestic boundaries.”

Historical records documenting the lives and achievements of female artists have been limited. This may be because female artists were often undervalued, and their contributions to society were not given much importance. The available information mainly focuses on female artists from the 16th century onwards. The reason why female artists in the past were scarce is likely because women's status should have facilitated artistic creation more. Even though women during the Renaissance and early modern periods had artistic talents, they were often unable to fully dedicate themselves to art due to the daily responsibilities they had within the household. Additionally, women during this time were often regarded as inferior to men and lacked opportunities to pursue careers or engage in other activities outside their homes. In contrast, male artists had more freedom to focus on their artistic work and explore various locations for inspiration. They had greater opportunities for creativity, gained widespread recognition, and more importantly, were consistently documented in art history.

While women artists may not have received the same level of recognition as their male counterparts, they made significant contributions in other creative fields, such as embroidery, silk weaving, and tapestry making. Tapestry making, in particular, required exceptional precision and attention to detail. Additionally, women during the Medieval and

¹ This article was initially published in the magazine *Sarakadee*, in 1985, 1 (3), (pp. 114–121) The original text is in Thai and was translated into English by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

Renaissance periods showcased their artistic talents through decorative writing and illustration in various manuscripts. These endeavors could be considered the starting point for women's advancement in the field of painting. Notably, many of these female illustrators were nuns, with some inscribing their names—and others even integrating self-portraits into the patterns as evidence.

Another interesting aspect is that daughters from noble or affluent families were often sent to receive education and training with nuns. In addition to general education, they were instructed in the copying of scriptures and the embellishment of manuscripts with decorative illustrations. This training laid the fundamental groundwork for basic drawing and painting skills for these female students. Any woman who had proficiency in this area was considered to have undergone good training and education.

In the 18th century, following the conclusion of the French Revolution, the status of women began to improve progressively. Political philosopher, Marquis De Condorcet, advocated for women who paid taxes to have equal voting rights with men. Additionally, this demand extended to equality in professions and education for women. In 1791, Olympe De Gouges, a woman who played a role in the French Revolution, proclaimed the demand for women's equal rights with men. However, the arts faced staunch opposition in this regard as many renowned art institutions refused to educate women.

Nevertheless, in the subsequent years, some leniency was granted for women to study, albeit limited to handicrafts. This became a driving force for female artists to strive to exhibit their works, both individually and in groups. Most of the artworks displayed to the public were portraits and scenes of daily life, which attracted more interest from viewers than other types of images.

"In the realm of art creation, if female artists devote sufficient time and effort to their work, their resulting pieces are comparable to those of male artists in every aspect, whether in terms of expressing thoughts, emotions, forms, narratives, content, or even in the use of materials, techniques, or methods..."

By the 19th century, although women had more opportunities to engage in art, particularly in the art education institutions of England, there were still limitations and various regulations for female students. For instance, when drawing from live models, female students were required to work in separate rooms from male students. While male students could draw nude models, female students were only allowed to draw from clothed models or were restricted to drawing only the head and face. There are many noteworthy works by female artists. The first artist worth mentioning here is the Italian painter, Giovanna Garzoni (1600–1670). Based on available evidence, Garzoni studied painting in Florence, and her artworks gained widespread recognition during her time, particularly in both Florence and Rome. Garzoni's preferred subjects included portraits, animals, flowers, trees, and fruits. One of her famous works is *Dish of Broad Beans*, which depicts a bowl of broad beans. She integrates elements of still-life painting and drawing, characteristic of artists from the Italian Renaissance period like Leonardo Da Vinci (1452–1519) and the German artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528).

Garzoni arranged the elements of her paintings simply, following the favored pattern of previous artists, which involved selecting expensive and rare subjects of the time, like tulips, or depicting edible items such as vegetables and fruits. She placed these items in containers to enhance their beauty and interest. Her paintings featured smooth outlines, and meticulous use of color and highlighted the surface of the objects. Additionally, Garzoni had a special talent for capturing intricate details, like leaf patterns, traces of insect bites, or blemishes on fruits and vegetables, closely resembling nature. Her works can be found at Palazzo Pitti in Florence, while the Accademia Di San Luca in Rome houses a collection of her paintings studying insects, fruits, and flowers from various angles, totaling 22 images.

Another remarkable female artist renowned for her exceptional skill in still-life painting during the early half of the 17th century is Louise Moillon (1610–1696), a French woman born to an artist father. Moillon displayed remarkable proficiency in depicting various types of fruits and is regarded as one of the first female artists in France up to 1650 who successfully combined still-life elements with human figures in her compositions. One

of her most significant works, *Basket of Apricots*, portrays ripe apricots arranged in a fruit basket. These apricots exhibit vibrant colors and inviting textures. Moillon adds interest to the painting by arranging leaves within the basket, positioning split apricots on each side, and adding glistening water droplets on the leaves and the table surface. The insects drinking from the water droplets near the edge of the table add an intriguing touch of vitality. The shadows in the painting are clear, and the strong contrast in the background creates depth, helping to emphasize the fruits in the basket even more prominently. Moillon's works can be found in the Louvre Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and various other collections in France and the United States.

In the 18th century, Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), a Swiss female painter, inherited her talent from her artist father. Her works stood out from her female artists of the same era by depicting historical narratives in her artworks, unlike others who focused on portraits and still life. During that time, historical narrative subjects were considered unsuitable for female artists.

“by arranging leaves within the basket, positioning split apricots on each side, glistening water droplets on the leaves and the table surface. The insects drinking from the water droplets near the edge of the table add an intriguing touch of vitality.”

To paint this style, one must avoid depicting nude figures. However, Kauffman disregarded these conventions and painted what pleased her. Having gained artistic experiences in various countries, she received training in painting techniques in Florence, where she discovered the Neoclassical style, which revitalized classical forms for a new era.

Kauffman was not limited to painting history and portraits. She also designed interior decorations in the Neoclassical architectural style, working with the renowned English architect of that era, Robert Adam. Her most famous and successful work in this regard was the design of the grand circular ceiling for the Royal Academy in England, which can now be appreciated at Burlington House. Kauffman's reputation extended beyond

England as she had significant artwork in Italy, and her works are well-known in the Scandinavian countries, Russia, and the United States.

The painting *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracch*' is one of Kauffman's most well-preserved masterpieces. She painted this piece for George Bowles of the Grove, who owned a collection of 49 of her paintings. Kauffman was particularly pleased with the composition of this painting, leading her to produce several other works in a similar style. Among these, one was created for Queen Caroline of Naples in 1785 and another for Prince Poniatowski of Poland in 1788. In this painting, a friend of Cornelia is showcasing her exquisite jewelry, yet when asked about Cornelia's possessions, rather than boasting about it, she presents her three sons and states that they were her most valuable jewels. Upon close examination of the painting, one can see that Kauffman incorporated elements of ancient Greek architecture and classicism in the attire and facial expressions of the figures. The colors are vibrant, and the composition effectively conveys the narrative, making it easily understandable.

The French female artist who was a contemporary of Kauffman was Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun (1755–1842). Known to be one of Kauffman's significant rivals, Vigée-Le Brun's works primarily consisted of portraits. She achieved success as an artist before the age of 20 and later served as a court painter for Queen Marie Antoinette. By the age of 25, according to records, she had created an estimated 800 paintings. Among her notable portraits is titled *Varvara Ivanovna Narishkine*, renowned for its delicacy and beauty. Vigée-Le Brun is known for capturing the emotions and personalities of her subjects directly. In this painting, the subject makes direct eye contact with the viewer, conveying a soft facial expression and gaze that epitomizes the gentle beauty that deeply impressed the artist.

In the 19th century, two female artists were associated with the Impressionist movement: Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), a French painter, and Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), an American artist who lived and worked in France. Both artists were friends and had their works submitted for exhibition at the Salon but were rejected because the judging committee deemed certain artists' works more worthy of display. In response to this opposition, some artists formed an independent group in protest against

the Salon's selection process. This group included Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Jean Désiré Gustave Courbet, among others. These artists exhibited their works independently, without the need for external control or judgment. When Morisot and Cassatt were invited to exhibit with this group, they readily accepted and soon gained recognition for their work. Their contributions were widely praised and celebrated.

Morisot and Cassatt preferred painting familiar female subjects, particularly mothers and children, to highlight the bond and love between them. However, there are differences in their painting styles: Cassatt's approach tends to be flatter, emphasizing outlines and shapes, while Morisot's use of color appears more natural and unrestricted. Moreover, Morisot's paintings convey a greater sense of depth compared to Cassatt's. In Impressionist paintings of people, subjects are often captured in various moments or activities, conveying spontaneity. The use of color and brushwork is freer compared to earlier styles, which require meticulous blending and matching of colors. Nevertheless, both female artists' works are captivating and charming to viewers.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), a German artist, created works in the early 20th century that differed significantly from those of previously mentioned artists. Her primary oeuvre often comprised printmaking, including etchings, lithographs, and woodcuts. The themes in Kollwitz's works revolve around ethics and humanism to reflect the suffering, pain, loss, and devastation resulting from war, struggles, and the mortality of human life. Inspired by real-life experiences, Kollwitz's works are imbued with genuine emotions and feelings from the depths of the soul. Besides being a printmaker, Kollwitz was also a prominent sculptor. Her husband was a physician who treated impoverished patients in working-class neighborhoods of Berlin. Alongside her husband, Kollwitz served as a close assistant and witnessed the suffering of patients in those areas firsthand. Therefore, her experiences were translated into artworks that profoundly moved viewers beyond expectations.

In 1919, Käthe Kollwitz was selected as the first female member of the Prussian Academy of Arts and held the position of director of printmaking for several years. She resigned from her position in 1933 due to the rise of

the Nazi regime. Kollwitz was a dedicated artist who devoted herself to serving society, using her time to assist the less fortunate. She believed that women should have roles in society beyond just taking care of their families. Kollwitz frequently exhibited her works, but eventually, they were banned by the Nazis, who labeled her as a “radical” artist. Furthermore, the content of her artworks had political impacts at the time.

Kollwitz was a devoted mother to her children. In many of her works, she portrayed the profound love that a mother has for her child and filled them with expressive depictions. In the print, *Whetting The Scythe*, which is an etching, one can see peasants in the image sharpening their scythes. This image symbolizes the hardships of life. The emphasis on light and shadow within the image helps create a tense atmosphere. The hands and faces of the peasants highlight the toil, the sweat-drenched existence endured through struggles and hardships. Kollwitz composed the image by strategically positioning the figures of the peasants and the scythe to strengthen the connection between the laborers, and the tools used to earn a living. The scythe can be understood as a significant symbol representing nurturing and preservation, simultaneously evoking thoughts of destruction. Kollwitz’s artworks often contain profound meanings related to human life.

The last artist discussed here is Marisol Escobar (1930–2016), a contemporary sculptor of Venezuelan-American descent. Marisol’s artworks often contain narratives that reflect ideas about values and societal norms, following the style of Pop artists. Her sculptures typically feature groups of people enclosed within rectangular shapes made of wood or plaster. These sculptures exhibit detailed features such as facial expressions and clothing, achieved through embellishment or the collage of photographic images. Marisol also incorporates found objects or readymade materials into her works. Her artworks often convey two main themes: evoking a sense of strange bitterness or melancholy, leaving viewers to contemplate and reflect on the issues later.

The artwork titled *The Last Supper* diverges from Marisol’s other works. Marisol drew inspiration from Leonardo Da Vinci’s wall painting and transformed the two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional sculpture. The original composition remains intact, but various elements in

the work are newly created. The figures of the disciples are concealed within wooden columns, while their heads are sculpted to appear floating. The figure of Christ, positioned centrally, is carved from a brownstone column. The composition is complex and intriguing, with each individual restricted within rectangular shapes yet appearing to be in motion. This is because Marisol employed drawing techniques to depict details of clothing, gestures, hands, arms, and facial expressions. Marisol reimagined the environment of the room, aligning her work with the deliberately created architecture. This artwork emphasizes the artist's interpretation of incorporating the master artist's drawings into her unique style, techniques, and use of materials, which are distinctive to her.

From all the examples of female artists discussed here, it is evident that, in the realm of artistic creation, if female artists devote sufficient time and effort to their work, the resulting artworks are no less significant than those created by male artists. Whether in terms of expressing thoughts, emotions, and feelings, presenting narrative forms and content, or even in the use of materials, techniques, or methods, female artists are not inferior to male artists in any way. Nowadays, female artists in the Western and Eastern hemispheres are increasingly playing more significant roles. The 20th century was a time when artists could create art freely, without any conventions to restrict their work as in the past. It is expected that in the foreseeable future, the emergence of new and unconventional art produced by female artists will capture the attention of the world more and more, and the importance of female artists' abilities will be undeniable to anyone.

ISSUES OF THAI CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS¹

From the evidence drawn from Thai art history, it is clearly marked that there was no real art form that allowed women to become independent practitioners. Young girls had their initial training in crafts, such as basket and textile weaving, traditional flower arrangement, as well as engraving fruits and vegetables at home. In order to teach their daughters more about cooking, embroidery, singing, classical music, and dancing, parents sent them to the palace or to the homes of noble families. Arts and crafts education was done through apprenticeships. Young girls and women at the time were trained to produce works that were mainly for functional purposes. The works produced were highly decorative and intricate. The stakes for Thai women in the past were dominated by men. Thai women were supposed to be obedient and to always listen to the leaders of the family, ie., the fathers and the husbands. According to a famous Thai saying, if we were all put together to make up an elephant, the men would be the front legs, and the women would be the back legs. There were no problems or battles concerning equal rights between women and men. Thai women accepted their status very well. It was part of their culture and also their nature to do so. The most liberal period was when the influence of the West played an important role in Thai society at the turn of the 20th century. The Western educational system was adopted. Women had more education and became more liberated. Art practices were thus included in schools at different levels: drawing, painting, and modeling were taught.

In 1934, Thai art education and practice underwent profound changes. Professor Silpa Bhirasri, the father of Thai modern art, founded a fine arts school, which later became Silpakorn University in 1943. Women had

¹ This article was initially published in *The 3rd ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition & Symposium on Aesthetics: A Documentation of Activities, Works & Symposium Papers* in 2003 (p. 121-123), edited by Lee Weng Choy, by the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, Singapore. The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriya Putsongkram.

opportunities for proper training at the university level. Only a few of them became professional artists.

Professor Silpa Bhirasri successfully organized the first National Art Exhibition in 1949. The most outstanding works were given awards. Among the participants were those who have become known as the first generation of Thai women artists: M C Pilailekha Diskul and Misiem Yipintsoi. The National Art Exhibition was the only art contest in the Thai art scene at the time. Misiem Yipintsoi was the first woman artist who won three gold medals in painting in successive years (1949, 1950, and 1951). During the 1950s and 1960s, after Misiem Yipintsoi's success, more women artists subsequently achieved recognition through the National Art Contest. There were female painters such as Pranee Tantisuk and Suwanee Nandakwang. Later, after a gap of some years, more women artists were awarded. Women, such as Kanya Aengcharoenamorn (now Charoensupkul), Sriwan Janehuttakarnkit, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Rewadee Chachum, and Naiyana Chotisuk. In the 1990s, the few women who won prizes were Kanchana Damsopee, Yupha Changkoon, and Pornprom Chawwang. Apart from the women artists who were award winners, there were a few accomplished women artists who never entered any art competitions but were nevertheless enthusiastic about devoting themselves to artistic pursuits, and they experimented with new ways of creating art and depicting life in the present-day environment. Some of them are Piranee Sanitak, Nopparat Chokechaichutikul, and Phaptawan Suwanankut.

It is worth noting that between 1949 and 1995, there were more male artists participating in exhibitions than female artists. The ratio of male-to-female award winners has been very one-sided towards the males.

Questions of why there are only a handful of women artists in Thailand and what are the reasons have been raised; however, no one has yet to do any serious research about this issue.

WHY LESS WOMEN ARTISTS?

Actually, the issue of there being a small number of women artists has less to do with any 'official' discrimination against women, and more to do with

the following:

Art education and art practice for girls are often not recognized by their parents. As a consequence, many young girls have to give up the idea of being art students and their hope of becoming artists in the future.

- Some women students are very active in the arts while studying, but after they graduate, they become involved with their jobs and families. Unfortunately, many stop creating art even though some of them are talented.
- For those women who continue their art practices, they either work quietly and rarely exhibit, or they form small groups and occasionally exhibit together. Some women artists believe that in order to get accepted and be recognized in the Thai art scene, they must win a major competition, or they must exhibit in major shows. Many of them, who have never entered any competitions or never won any awards, give up their hopes and eventually become inactive. The lack of confidence creates a considerable obstacle; encouragement is generally lacking.
- The lack of financial support is also a major problem.
- In the field of print-making, for example, there is very little studio access for artists in general.

CONFUSION AMONG THAI WOMEN ARTISTS

It is only recently that the Western concept of feminism has been introduced to Thai women artists. This particular concept has been brought into the Thai art scene by a few Thai women artists who have studied abroad. The influence of feminism is also a development of the influence of the larger international scene on the various local scenes of the world. Women artists from the US, Europe, and Australia have come to Thailand and have worked closely with Thai artists.

In my opinion, the term “feminism”² is rootless in Thai art circles. The

2 The term “feminism” is rootless in Thai art circles simply because it is not a Thai term and it originates from the West. Given the difference in traditional, cultural and religious backgrounds,

meaning of it is very broad. To many people, feminism does not belong in Thai society. Particularly, in the field of art, many Thai women artists create their work without being aware of the concepts of feminism, even though Western thinking about Thai art often categorizes such work as feminist.

Feminism is more or less a trend in Thai contemporary art. There are a number of Thai women artists who trap themselves by creating art that reflects feminist theories and ideas without fully understanding what they really mean. They categorize themselves as feminists without fully examining themselves and the status of Thai women in the present society. This so-called feminist work can be characterized by a lack of individuality and originality. Generally, the feminist ideas of the West have only a superficial effect³ on Thai art practice.

Interviews with various women artists in Bangkok, whether or not they consider themselves influenced by Western feminist thought, reveal that most of them agree that, nevertheless, these women produce art primarily to reflect that it is interesting to learn about Western feminist ideology upon their lives, experiences, dreams, and their roles as women and mothers as well. Some questions have been raised: Do these women need to follow Western concepts? Do they need to modernize their works according to Western standards? Why have they not focused on sharing experiences

feminism in the Western context is certainly different from the Thai context. Many Thai women artists feel more comfortable with the concept of 'women's issues,' which relates to the reality, circumstances and direct experiences of women in Thai society. As a matter of fact, women's issues have long been used as a theme in Thai art, long before the term 'feminism' appeared.

3 It should not be misunderstood that there is a basis against the "feminism" of the West. The reason why it has had only a superficial effect on Thai art practice is because Thai women artists who produce so-called feminist work seem to adopt the attitude that they must be radical, violent, and aggressive. This particular attitude is becoming popular among younger women artists, most of whom are art students.

From my personal observation, the term "feminism" has been translated into Thai as "Silapa satree niyom," which literally means, "the appreciation of women's art." Another translation is "Silap pua sithi satree," which means "art for women's rights." There have been some doubts regarding the Thai translation - whether or not it corrupts the original meaning of the concept. In general, the translation of Western terminology into Thai is problematic; sometimes translations betray a lack of genuine understanding of the terms, resulting in misinterpretation.

with women artists from the region? Should art networks within Southeast Asian countries not be emphasized over the links with the West? Women have their own worlds, and it would be interesting for Southeast Asian women to initiate exchange programs and to work together, sharing views and experiences. I often feel that it is a great pity that Thai women artists do not know enough about the art scene and their fellow women artists in our neighboring countries. We tend to know more about the West. My hope is that this paper, in its own small way, encourages women artists of the region to come together.

A REPORT ON CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S ART IN THAILAND¹

In the past, women were dominated by the male members of the family. However, at the same time women also played crucial roles in Thai history. They fought wars as they brought up their children, ruled kingdoms, and wrote poetry. There is a saying based on this double role of women: the Thai women's hands are at once rocking the cradle and swinging the sword. This double role brings an added complexity to the position of women in society and hence to the identity of women artists in Thailand. Although, in some ways, it seems that women have to be obedient and listen to the leader of the family, generally the husband or father. If we look closely, women hold high-status positions as a core or pillar in the family. Some aspects of Thai traditional culture remain; but as I will soon elaborate, there have been significant changes as well.

In former times very few women living in the city held jobs after marriage and motherhood. Much like in Western societies, women were expected to remain at home, taking care of the children and the household duties while the husband worked. This is no longer the case, and many educated women want to make practical use of their knowledge and talents. Many women are highly successful in business, academia, journalism, music, and politics. Some women have been elected as presidents of major organizations. Particularly in politics there are a growing number of ministers and senators, and currently the election for the new mayor of Bangkok is being contested mainly between women. Thai women have played a role in politics since winning the right to vote in the first election act of 1933. However, it was not until 1948 that a woman was first elected to parliament.

1 The article was an unpublished paper for the exhibition *Text & Subtext: Contemporary Art and Asian Women* in 2009 by Earl Lu Gallery at LASALLE-SIA College, Singapore. The original text is in English and was translated into Thai by Kasamaponn Saengsuratham and Piriypa Putsongkram.

Since 1948, many women have served as MPs, and currently, a number of women provide input at the top level of national decision-making.

There is ample evidence of women's involvement and influence in the arts, which demonstrates that there is a wide acceptance of their ability in this field. Clearly, like most Western societies, the past decades have witnessed a dramatic change in women's position in society. Currently, there are more practicing women artists than ever before, more women arts administrators, and more events, exhibitions, and projects which focus on women's issues. When one talks of women artists in Thailand, it is important to recognize the contribution of many women in the art industry in general as these people support and disseminate ideas and interest in women's art. Women have played a significant role in contemporary art in Thailand. While their input was limited in the early period, there have been some important figures. One of the first and most celebrated Thai woman artists is Misiem Yipintsoi, who won three gold medals from the annual National Art Exhibition and Competition in 1950, 1951, and 1952.

Misiem chose to become an artist because her Thai culture, influenced by Buddhism, taught her to see beauty in nature and the world around her. Gifted with sensitivity and blessed with a loving family, Misiem's work captures the essence of a happy life, such as the love of a mother for a child, children's games, and the grace of dancing. Her images convey the energy of life itself. She was a strong supporter of the arts in Thailand and served two long terms as president of the International Association of Art and Thai National Committee, and a member of the Fine Arts University (Silpakorn) Council. Another early figure in women's art was Lawan Dawrai, working mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. She is renowned for projecting socio-political issues in the medium of painting. She was also recognized for her portrait paintings, which she did for members of the Royal Family and important figures in the Royal Thai Government. A contemporary of Dawrai is Sauvapa Vichienket, a sculptor incorporating traditional styles (influenced by Buddha images) with modern forms, which results in the graceful forms of semi-abstract figures. After the 1970s, Kanya Charernsupakul and Siriwan Janehattakarnkit used their art to reflect impressions and opinions towards the social conflicts and the nightlife in the city of Bangkok.

Apart from these painters, before the 1970s there were few, if any, solo exhibitions by women artists. There are many possible reasons for this lack: women were not encouraged or supported to show individually. There was little avenue for women artists to gain confidence. Some women thought that they needed more credibility through winning competitions in order first to gain recognition and acceptance from the public. Beginning in the seventies, this attitude has changed with a growing number of exhibitions and a growing confidence in women artists to exhibit, resulting in the current positive force of artwork by women today. Now Thai women are increasingly being accepted into international art exhibitions, as well as participating in the art community on an international level. Some factor contributing to this change is the increase in university art programs, which among many activities, invite artists from abroad who support and encourage local artists. Also there is an increase in the number of female art students, as it is becoming a more acceptable academic and career choice for women. Other reasons for the changes are more global, where overall changes to the structure of the economy and the social position of women have resulted in growing equality between men and women.

In the art world, there is little, if any discrimination as far as women's rights are concerned. Nowadays more women artists are involved in all forms of art. Many professional associations relating to this field have been established, with women playing a major role in all aspects of the industry; women are gallery directors, art professors, instructors, and curators. Although male artists outnumber women in Thai art circles, there is great support for women artists in the community. More galleries are open to give access to exhibition space for women artists.

A development supporting women's art in recent years is group shows put on by women artists. These group shows allow the artists to focus specifically on women's issues. The biggest exhibition so far comprised 36 contemporary artists under the title of *Creative Femininity*, held at CON-Tempus, Bangkok Fine Art Centre in 1992. The first international group exhibition of contemporary women artists was organized to honor the fifth cycle birthday of Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand in 1992. The exhibition was the initiative of the diplomatic and international community

together with Thai support. The exhibition contained examples of artistic endeavors by 82 women from 26 countries. The exhibition was held at the Cultural Center of Thailand in support of the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women in Thailand. Additionally, the exhibition aimed at supporting women in society by raising funds for the construction of an emergency home for women and a facility for caring for HIV and Aids affected women and children. This exhibition of Thai and foreign artists was a concrete symbol of sincere efforts to promote and support the works of talented female artists from all parts of the world. Finally, there is also an exhibition of amateur women painters in Thailand, which has been held annually since 1991. The objective of the group is to encourage women's creativity; profits from selling artworks go to charity.

Recently, contemporary women artists have been actively using multi-disciplinary media to engage with a number of issues around politics, gender, culture, and the environment. The move from traditional forms to multi-disciplinary work by Thai women artists has to a certain extent made the art more innovative, relevant, dynamic, and daring. Changes brought about by the modern global society have challenged women to look at alternative ways of expressing their identity and the role of women in Thai society. There is difficulty in conceptualizing the work simply as feminist, for the politics of feminism in Thailand is made complex by the pressures and conflicts of values between traditional and contemporary, western and non-western, urban and rural. Some women work from other cultures and incorporate both Western and non-Western ideas. Also, there is the importance of Thai culture itself to contemporary art. Thai women's art, I consider, is more subtle than aggressive. This does not necessarily mean Thai women remain passive in society, but their work is contextualized by the importance of Buddhism in Thai culture.

Thai women grew up being taught that self-restraint is the ultimate virtue of women. They are not encouraged to express themselves openly. According to Buddhism, one has to follow the middle path in life, that is, one should avoid taking extreme positions by way of the Dhamma. Following the middle path has a strong impact on women's behavior (and Thai society in general). Quite often there is a misconception, particularly from the West,

that Thai women are weak because they do not show anger and they are not outspoken. In a Thai context, if one is outspoken or aggressive in their demands, they will never get their demands met. Aggressive behavior is not acceptable in Thai society and is a weakness, not a strength. Western ideas of strength, based on being outspoken or aggressive, are quite opposite to Thai ideas of strength, based on self-control. This is part of the reason why there is a specific cultural identity to Thai women artists, which must be understood when considering their art works. I now want to discuss some prominent contemporary women artists who are currently producing work of great strength: Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Pinaree Sanpitak, and Phaptawan Suwanakut.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is well-known for her works dealing with issues of gender or feminine sensibilities either through figurative or abstract means. Since 1990, Araya has begun purposefully experimenting with installation works that effectively extend her interest in women's issues, problems of marginality, death, and sexuality. Currently, she has been experimenting with video installations in which we see some of her most extreme self-expression. The theme of dealing with lament and death figures in Araya's work, this theme is developed from the installation *The Dinner with Cancer* made after the death of her father from cancer in 1993. In this installation, medical equipment from her father's deathbed was secretly taken from the hospital. The idea for the installation, which displays her grief and pain, came as she was reading a book at the foot of her father's bed.

Araya's recent project *Reading for Corpses* was produced in the form of a video installation. This project involves the recording of performances of reading for corpses from 1997–1999. Her motivation for the performances was reflections on the past and the warmth of relationships with her loved ones. Araya had a strong desire to read beautifully written poems to the deceased at a hospital. It took her some time to convince a team of doctors that the project was to be done in good faith and respect for the deceased. The sound of a reading voice communicates the living to the dead. Araya says of this project: "This is performed with corpses at a certain time and place, which conveys something impossible to comprehend by reason, only

by emotion.” After being with the dead bodies through the project, Araya has realized the basic truth of life, which is death. She has decided to step out of her long years of grief to explore and appreciate new areas in her life.

Her latest installation unlocks herself from the darker work of her past. *Lament of Desire* and *At Nightfall Candles are Lighted* comprise six delicate conical mosquito nets, each of which is illuminated by different colored lights varying from violet, blue, banana leaf green, yellow, to pink. A wooden bowl resembling a bed is placed inside the net. Painted in a Northern Thai traditional style on each bowl are images of men and women sleeping or having sex. Araya sophisticatedly uses sex as her subject matter. Her new approach opposes Thai cultural values, which avoid the depiction or discussion of sexuality, for Araya’s work love scenes were deliberately and beautifully executed. To a certain extent, this installation reflects the women’s right to a sexual identity. For the installation, Araya expected the audience to look through the net, but curious viewers parted the net to find out what was going on inside. The installation ironically reflects a part of human nature – curiosity about other people’s personal affairs. It is obvious that Araya’s new work emphasizes humor on themes such as sex and social values.

The next artist whom I will look at is Pinaree Sanpitak. Pinaree’s work not only examines herself but also questions the status of women and their roles in society. Her maturity as an artist is linked to her understanding of the complexity of identity. Her life as a woman, a mother, an artist, and a human being is drawn out in her work. There are a number of dominant forms in Pinaree’s work. These have developed from egg shapes to bodies; recent works look at the breasts as a metaphor for a vessel and the breast as a similar shape to the stupa or shrine in a Buddhist temple. The meaning of the forms has gradually changed from personal feelings of being a woman to more spiritual sacred issues. Pinaree’s work operates across many oppositions, such as private and public, secret and revealed, open and closed, offering and resisting, sensitive and powerful. These oppositions meaningfully reveal some of the roles and positions women take in contemporary Thai society.

Different from Araya and Pinaree in style and presentation, Phaptawan Sawannakudt is a leading female mural artist. As a devout Buddhist, her

work incorporates traditional motifs and styles with contemporary issues focusing on class, poverty, and gender within Thai society. Among her important works, I want to look at the *Nariphan series* briefly. The painting is a metaphor in which young girls dressed in school uniforms are depicted as fruits that will be exploited and consumed by men. Phaptawan strongly criticizes the decline of moral values in Thai society in a discreet and quiet way, for the subtext of the picture is the trafficking of women which still occurs in Thailand.

There are many notable contemporary women artists and unfortunately, I do not have the time to mention many.

In the late 1990s, the “Hers Group” comprised ten young women artists who made a significant impact on the women’s art movement in Thailand. Straight away, the group gained a reputation from their first exhibition *Art and Reflection* at the National Gallery in 1998. The young women’s art movement did not really exist in the Thai contemporary art scene before this time, and the group exhibition successfully stimulated the young women’s art movement. Following another successful exhibition, these young innovative artists worked together on the exhibition *Women Opportunity* which was held at the Tadu Contemporary Art Gallery in December 1998. The content of the exhibition focused on urban environmental concerns and the cultural frame in which Thai women are currently living.

Artists among the group are On-Anong Glinsiri, Yuwana Poonwattanwit, and Doungthatai Pongprasit. Each of the artists has raised some important issues concerning gender and the challenges facing women in the changing society and culture of the global era.

There have been significant developments in artist-initiated events which have taken root and evolved not only at a national level but also at an international level. The most significant of these ventures has been *Womanifesto*, an international women’s art exchange organized in Bangkok. Women artists were a force in the organization and production of the project. The event was described as a new dimension in the contemporary art movement because it forcefully displayed crucial issues to women from a variety of cultural, ethnic, and political backgrounds. Concerns over the awareness of the changing role and status of women, their struggles,

achievements, as well as their dignity are fully expressed by both the Thai women artists and their international counterparts. Womanifesto developed from a group of six Thai female artists led by Phaptawan Suwannakudt who formed an exhibition of paintings, installations, and performance art called *Tradisexion* which examined conflicts stemming from being a woman between traditional and contemporary society. The exhibition celebrating World Women's Day was held at the Concrete House gallery. The impact of the event resulted in the initiation of the first Womanifesto exhibition, which was organized in March 1997 in conjunction with International Women's Day. The exhibition contained works from 18 artists from nine countries: Austria, India, Indonesia, Italy, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, the United States, Singapore, and Thailand.

The second Womanifesto in March 1999 addressed the pre-occupations of women as human beings and as artists with individual backgrounds. A significant part of the Second exhibition was the promotion of communication and dialogue between the artists. 15 Thai artists actively joined 13 women from Australia, Croatia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Singapore, the United States, and Vietnam. The location of the exhibition in Saranrom Park marked many differences with the first Womanifesto. The event took place in the open air and allowed the artists more freedom to create their work and express themselves in different forms, such as sculptures, installations, and performances specific to the location. *A third Womanifesto* is currently in the planning stages.

In conclusion, women's art in Thailand is continuing to grow in intensity and dynamism. There is a high level of international exchange, and Thai women artists have broadened their horizons to become recognized internationally. Furthermore, this international recognition has forced many women artists to appraise and appreciate their own culture and position their art in a local cultural context as well as a more broad, international, and contemporary context.

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 Journal
  Catalogue
 Book Chapter
  Book
 Presented paper

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-  Matisse: Drawing with Scissors. *Toktaeng [Decoration]*, 3(31), 72–78.
- 1982  Chud Roem Ton Khong Sinlapa Samai Mai Nai America [The Beginning of Modern Art in America]. *Art World*, 2(1), 58–64.
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-  Nueng Roi Pi Khong Picasso [A Hundred Years of Picasso]. *Baan [Home]*, 9(105), 91–95.
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-  Chom Ngan Pratimakam Nai Vatican [Appreciating Sculptures in the Vatican]. *Globetrotter*, 1(8), 110–114.
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-  Pratimakam Minimal [Minimalistic Sculptures]. *Baan [Home]*, 10 (109), 76–79.
-  Itthiphon Khong Anaraysin Nai Ngan Sinlapa Samai Mai [Influence of Primitive art in modern art]. *Baan [Home]*, 10 (110), 83–87.
- 1984  Phap Thai Naeo Sangsan Khong Pho So Itthi Kongkakul [Creative photographs by Asst. Prof. Itthi Kongkakul]. *Toktaeng [Decoration]*, 6 (72), 81–88.
-  Si Nai Ngan Chittrakam Samai Mai [Colors in Modern Paintings]. In *The 9th Exhibition of Works by the Department of Art Education students*. Department of Art Education, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University.
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-  Phap Khian Nai Ho Sinlapa Haeng Chat Krung London [Paintings in the National Museum, London]. *Globetrotter*, 2 (15), 114–117.
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| 2010 | <p> Contemplation – Improvisation Tang Mum Mong Song Sinlapin [Contemplation – Improvisation, Different Perspectives of Two Artists]. <i>Fine Art</i>, 7 (74), 58–61.</p> <p> Kilet Manut – Rai Khet Daen Lae Kanwela Khong Pongdej Chaikyut [Human desires – borderless and timeless by Pongdej Chaikyut]. <i>Fine Art</i>, 7 (74), 68–70.</p> <p> Kao Mai Nai Ngan Phap Phim Khongng Srijai Kuntawang [A New Step in Printmaking by Srijai Kuntawang]. <i>Fine Art</i>, 7 (64), 48–50.</p> <p> Pratimakam Khong Saovapa Vichienket [Sculptures by Saovapa Vichienket]. <i>Fine Art</i>, 7 (64), 73–75.</p> <p> Realism in Thai Painting. In K. Inhje & J. Fan. (Eds.), <i>Realism in Asian Art</i> (pp. 311–315). National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea.</p> <p> Multimedia-Multivisions. In <i>Multimedia-Multivisions</i> (pp. 4–7). ARDEL Gallery of Modern Art.</p> |

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BIOGRAPHY OF SOMPORN RODBOON



Over five decades, Somporn Rodboon has been dedicated to art education and curatorial practice. Her contributions span teaching, lecturing, and writing in Thai and English. As an Assistant Professor, she has taught art theory at leading art institutions in Thailand, such as Silpakorn University and Chiang Mai University. She also played a key role in establishing the art theory curriculum for the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts at Silpakorn University. Noteworthy examples of her curatorial work include:

2018

- Curator, *Time and Being: Art Exhibition by the Group of 4 Lanna Artists*: Songdaj Thiptong, Pornchai Jaima, Lipikorn Makaew, Arnan Ratchawang-Inn, Chiang Mai Art & Cultural Centre Chiang Mai

2016

- Curator, *The Art Exhibition in Remembrance of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej*, The National Art Gallery of Thailand, Bangkok.

2014

- Curator, *Interchange: A Printmaking Dialogue between Australia and Thailand*, PSG Art Gallery, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

2013

- Curator, *Spiritual Ties: A Tribute to Montien Boonma. Art Center*, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.
- Curator, *Life in Nature*, DOB Hualamphong Gallery, Bangkok.

2012

- Curator, *Way of Life: Nature/Culture*, Ardel Gallery Of Modern Art, Bangkok.

2010

- Curator, *Multimedia – Multivisions*, Ardel Gallery Of Modern Art, Bangkok.

2009

- Curator, *Stories from Her by Kasalong Group*, DOB Hualamphong Gallery, Bangkok.

2006

- Curator, *Diverse perspective*, PSG Art Gallery, Silpakorn University, Bangkok and Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.

2004

- Coordinator, *Contemporary Aboriginal Prints*, The Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai.

2002

- Co-curator, *The 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2002*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.
- Curator, *Soul Ties: Australian-Thai Artists in Collaboration*, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.
- Curator, *Fusion Vision: Thai-Australian Artistic Connections*, The Gallery of Art and Design, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

2000

- Curator, *Time and Being: Thai-AJAC Contemporary*

Art Exhibition 2000, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.

- Curator, *Unfinished Business*, an exhibition of installations by Australian women artists, Noelene Lucas and Debra Porch, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.
- Curator, *Home Sweet Home*, an installation art exhibition by Edouard Sautai, organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University and the French Embassy Bangkok, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.

1999

- Curator, *Alter Ego: Thai-European Union Art Project*, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
- Co-curator, *The 3rd Asia-Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art 1999*, Queensland Art Gallery, Australia.
- Member of the Curatorial Subcommittee, *The 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 1999*, Fukuoka, Japan.

1998

- Nomination committee member, *Hiroshima Art Prize 1998*, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan.
- Curator, *Master Thai Artists in Japan*, The Gallery of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, sponsored by The Japan Foundation Bangkok.

1997-1989

- Official selector representing Thailand in selecting Thai graphic artists and works for the *18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd International Biennial of Graphic Arts*, Ljubljana, Slovenia (former Yugoslavia).

1997

- Advisor and coordinator, *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*, Fukuoka Art Museum, Hiroshima Prefecture Art Museum, Shizuoka Prefecture Museum of Art, and Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, Japan.
- Consultant for the exhibition *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
- Advisor and coordinator, *Womanifesto: An International Women's Art Exchange Exhibition*, Concrete House, Nonthaburi and Bhan Chow Phraya, Bangkok.

1996

- Co-curator, *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

1995–1996

- Co-curator, *Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, The Philippines, and Thailand*, organized by The Japan Foundation, held in Tokyo, Manila, Bangkok, and Jakarta.

1995

- Curator, *Art and Environment 3*, an exhibition of installations, organized by The Goethe Institut, Bangkok, The National Gallery of Thailand, Bangkok.

1994

- Co-curator, *Thai-Australian Cultural Space*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

1993

- Curator, *Exhibition of Prints by Thai Students*, Art Gallery, University of Western Sydney Nepean, Sydney, Australia.
- Co-curator, *Thai-Australian Cultural Space*, National Gallery, Bangkok.

1992

- Curator, *Contemporary Thai Works on Paper*, Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, Australia.
- Coordinator, *First International Women's Art Exhibition in honor of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's 5th Cycle Birthday*, Thailand Cultural Center, Bangkok.

1991

- Curator, *Exhibition of Thai Contemporary Art: The Parallel Views*, Luba Bilu Gallery, Melbourne, Australia, supported by Thai International Airlines.
- Curator, *Art and Environment*, an exhibition of Thai and German artists, organized by the Goethe Institut, Art Gallery of The Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

EDITOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Kasamaponn Saengsuratham is a researcher and independent curator who employs anthropological and sociological frameworks to explore art, focusing on identity politics within the Thai and Southeast Asian context. Her research, writings, and curatorial projects emphasize how cultural diversity impacts social thought, politics, and environmental issues. She contributes to *The Canopy Project*, a database documenting the history of group art exhibitions in Thailand from 1970 to 2022.

She has co-curated exhibitions such as *PATANI/SEMASA* at MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai, and ILHAM Gallery in Kuala Lumpur (2017), *RIFTS: Thai Contemporary Artistic Practices in Transition, 1980s–2000s* at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (2019), *Eclipse* (2023), and *Country Home Sheriff* (2024) at JWD Art Space. Kasamaponn is a special lecturer at Thammasat University and a member of the curator collective Waiting You Curator Lab.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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ABOUT THE FACULTY OF PAINTING,
SCULPTURE AND GRAPHIC ARTS,
SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY

The Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts was established alongside Silpakorn University in 1943 and is the first art faculty in Thailand. The faculty provides education encompassing the theory and practice of art and culture, covering visual arts, art theory, visual arts education, and art conservation. Its mission is to produce artists, art scholars, and professionals who can apply their knowledge of art in various fields. Additionally, the faculty supports and promotes learning activities to disseminate art knowledge to the public, with the aspiration to be a model faculty for art and creativity in the country.

