

Sutee Kunavichayanont

Inflated Nostalgia

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Atelier FRANK & LEE



FORMAL CUES AND HISTORICAL CLUES IN THE ART OF SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT

by Iola Lenzi

A recurring theme in contemporary Southeast Asian artistic expression is the measuring of identity - national and personal - in the context of radical social change brought about by 20th century modernisation. The evaluation of the social and cultural costs of industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation is another. Thai artists, never burdened by the colonial legacy shared by their counterparts in neighbouring Southeast Asia, tend to examine the impact of these developments through a prism tinged with the memory of Thailand's own profoundly rooted traditions. The Thai monarchy and Thai Buddhism (1), with their icons evoking history and culture, figure prominently and act as ultimate symbols of nation. Though long used as tools of nationalist propaganda (2), in the hands of some of the country's contemporary practitioners, aspects of Buddhism, as well as history, have become part of a new expressive vernacular as both formal and conceptual sources. Recycled, symbols and tenets of Thailand's oldest traditions, with their rich associations, transcend their original purpose, and distorted beyond the constricts of literal reference, collaborate to expose and question social malaise of all types.

In the course of the last decade, the art of Sutee Kunavichayanont has gradually turned from the examination of personal identity to questions of cultural identity. In exploring the role Thai political and social history play in shaping contemporary culture, the artist addresses a variety of issues. His concern with Thailand's perception of its place in the world figures prominently. The re-assignment of Thai culture as commodity, questions of ethnic

homogeneity, the effects of centralism on rural populations, lack of confidence that fuels 'new exoticism' and consumerism, and the superficiality, hypocrisy and alienation that permeate contemporary culture are also confronted and pondered. Unlike fellow-artist Vasan Sitthiket, who graphically depicts encounters with the everyday and the social to tackle these issues, Sutee chooses pared down, sculptural icons worked in a variety of media. Their message is no less powerful for their oblique and elliptical delivery: his works, though formally reductive, weave layers of meaning, to be read on many levels. The artist seeks to engage Thai and non-Thai alike, drawing his viewer into a forum of ideas, that though based on Thai reality, resonate in a non-Thai context.

But if the viewer is captivated by the artist's playful sense of irony, he is also seduced by his pieces' formal qualities. Material, line, proportion, colour, craftsmanship all come together to constitute an aesthetically successful whole: unctuously textured molded latex bearing traces of the hand that worked the clay form; crisply outlined curves of 'The Eternal Banality' figures; sensual folds and flaps of the deflated inflatables; naturalistic carving of rough wooden desks; the impact of the immoderate use of gold on "*The Eternal Banality 1*", perfectly calibrated to evoke both splendour and kitsch. Clearly, the object can still matter in contemporary practice and the pleasure of the visual remains real.

Cerebral as Sutee's works tend to be, their formal elegance lends weight to their message. The artist, who underwent art training in Bangkok, has no interest in making decorative art; yet neither does he pointedly repudiate the influence of Thailand's strong tradition of decorative practice that has permeated religious and court art through the centuries.

And though far from deliberately nurturing the decorative aspect of his production, he uses materials as cultural and historical cues to great effect, albeit with distortion, touching the viewer on a visceral level. Gold leaf is exploited for its sacred, Buddhist connotations; latex and silicone, used in his 'Depletion-Inflation' and 'Siamese Breath' cycles refer to the rubber trade that contributed to industrialising large swathes of rural Southeast Asia early last century and thus played a role in propelling the region into modernity; wood carving of the desk installations alludes to an increasingly obsolete craft tradition. Sutee is not alone in his use of material as cultural prompt and indeed, the phenomenon has been much discussed in the context of Southeast Asian installation where the introduction of the indigenous craft-object is seen as viable currency in the creation of a local vernacular (3). His appropriation is seldom direct however, usually relying on reference rather than integrating the utilitarian object in its original form as do artists Montien Boonma or Indonesia's Nindityo Adipurnomo for example(4).

The formal rigour and visual simplicity that characterise the artist's work give his oeuvre its aesthetic power. Many pieces embody a 'meditative quality' that acts as a necessary counterweight to the ironic, sobering and sometimes radical countenance of his commentary. In pieces such as "*The Eternal Banality 1*", social relationships, hierarchies, national dignity, and the validity of ritual are questioned. One of three figures in the seminal 'Eternal Banality' cycle (5), the kneeling gold woman serves as a cryptic allegory telling the story of the nation's identity crisis. Her smooth, perfect, gilded surface, ambiguous smile, demure *wai* and monotonous, rhythmic bowing -triggered by the viewer's mere proximity- revealing a hollow core, denote the superficial nature of Thailand's relationship with the world and its indulgence of the outsider's fascination with surface exoticism. A metaphor for what the artist perceives as the servile 'flexibility' of Thailand's response to extraneous cultural domination, the piece suggests that external friction is mirrored within Thai society itself where tensions between social strata as well as urban/rural disparities are rampant. Representing a submissive female, "*The Eternal Banality 1*" can also be construed as a critical response to the social paradigms that condone the acceptance of women as commodities. Finally, the piece underscores the transformation of significant ritual into mindless conformity.



The Eternal Banality 1
fibreglass, gold leaves, motor, motion sensor - 45 x 60 x 120 cm - 1997-8

Yet despite raising the prickliest of issues, the gold lady makes her point without aggression. Is her expression meditative or ironic? Is her smile artificial-saccharine-sweet, or rather, knowing and benign, that of an 18th century Thai Buddha? Are her *wai* and bowing sincere or mocking? Does the work's richly gilded surface refer to the gilding used on the temple Buddhas of Thailand's past, or rather the decadence and obscenity of contemporary ostentation? The audience is left to decide and though sharp in its implied multi-faceted criticism, the piece nonetheless possesses a lyricism derived from its visual ambiguity.

The 2000 installation "*History Class (Thanon Ratchadamnoen)*", a series of 14 wooden school desks carved with Thai-captioned episodes from Thai history and originally installed on Bangkok's Thanon Ratchadamnoen at the foot of the capital's Democracy Monument, takes the issue of Thailand's cultural dislocation further. Commissioned to produce "*History Class*" to commemorate the centenary of the socialist leader Pridi Bhanomyong who was instrumental in Thailand's transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932 - also a significant date in art historical terms as this event is widely held as heralding the beginning of modern art in Thailand (6)-, Sutee seeks, amongst other things, to recall the importance of the reformer who, due to his supposed communist leanings, is not given his full due in Thai history books.



History Class (Thanon Ratchadamnoen)
installed at the foot of Bangkok's Democracy Monument

The piece goes further and with illustrations and quotes, charts modern Thai political history from the first pro-constitutional stirrings of the late 19th century, through Japanese WWII occupation, to the coups and bloody massacres of the 1970's to early 1990's.

"I believe the lives of only 2% of the hundreds of thousands of students were lost for the sake of the country..."

(from a report of a meeting held October 8, 1973 at the Interior Ministry, following a massacre to put down a demonstration asking for constitutional change)

Giving lines such as these, quoted by the artist on his work, a public airing, does not shock the Thai population because most old enough remember the bloody events that triggered them. Those in power a decade ago would have censored such unscrupulous words however, so it is testament to Thailand's political maturity that a work such as "*History Class*" should now be freely exhibited in Thailand. Indeed, many of the more violent incidents of recent history are skirted by Thai history books so in setting the historical record straight, the piece explores one of cultural dislocation's perceived causes, historical revisionism. In some ways a corollary of "invention-of-tradition", a practice known in Thailand and the wider region since the last century (7), the piece is Sutee's most culturally Thai-centric to date. In an ironic nod to 1930's state-sponsored consensus art (8), the realist style of the period is mimicked while the propagandist aims of consensus art are subverted, the artist's point being to give history back to the people from whom it has been taken, more-or-less illicitly, depending on whether one believes in the people's complicity in their own deception (9).

The piece is more than mere narrative expose however: interactive, it makes direct contact with its audience through rubbings that viewers are encouraged to make from the engravings and take home. "*History Class*" presents a subtle political message of empowerment, the piece reading as a call for Thais to write their own history, independent of state propaganda and without self-generated delusion. Its parochial aspect, both in rustic form and indigenous content, can be construed as a reaction to technology. Here once more lies power in the object, the 'craft' element of rustic wood carving constituting the main aesthetic thrust of a sophisticated piece. With this piece in particular, the artist is addressing his quest for a local visual language and like so many other regional exponents, is legitimising the blurring the line between "high" and "low" art (10). Indeed, though the overall concept may be unfamiliar, the Thai audience connects with ease to the piece thanks to its use of the recognisable technique.



History Class (Thanon Ratchadeomnoen) (detail)

October 6, 1976

"This is worse than war because the mass killing is committed only on one side"

Chavalit Vinijjakul

"Then they raped the lifeless bodies in a most grotesque and inhumane way"

Kongsak Asapak

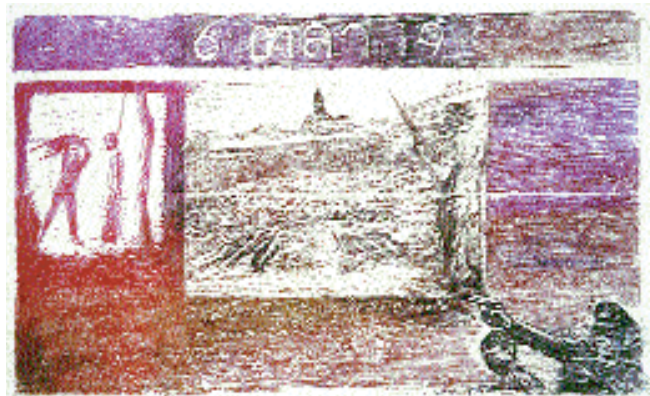
"Mr Policemen, please stop shooting us. This is a peaceful gathering, no arms. Our representatives are negotiating with the government. Please do not shed any more blood. We beg you to stop shooting."

(The pleas of students trapped inside Thammasat University, heard over the loudspeakers, directed at the police forces shooting at them.)

Chaturas, *"Is it wrong to kill the leftists or communists?"*

Kitti Vuttho, *"I believe it is the right thing to do. Even though Thais are Buddhists, we do not consider this action as murder. Anyone who is trying to destroy our nation, our religion, and our monarchy is not a good person. We must focus on the fact that we are killing demons. This is every Thai's duty."*

(Infamous words spoken by Phra Kittvuttho, a rightist monk who gave an interview to Chaturas Newspaper, published on June 29, 1976.)



rubbing on paper from the above piece

Translation of historical quotes describing the violent events of 1976, as engraved on 'desk 12' of History Class (Thanon

"History Class (White Man's Burden)", less parochial in subject matter than the first *"History Class"*, is presented as a set of independent vignettes relating to historical or anecdotal episodes recording foreign involvement in Thai history. The country's strong tradition of welcoming outside influence is looked at critically, harking back conceptually to 'The Eternal Banality' cycle. The engraved scenes, accompanied by bilingual English/Thai captions, some extracted from historic royal speeches that date back as far as 1851 and 1914, warn the Thai people of the dangers of and price paid for an undiscerning emulation of the West. In this connection, it must be noted that national introspection of this type is not new and that while Thai democracy has swung alternately from setback to advance in recent decades, reform was not a colonially-inspired import or reaction as in other regional nations but rather the fruit of internally-driven political and social improvements begun in the last decades of the nineteenth century during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and then cemented by the bloodless revolution of 1932 under King Prajadhipok (11).

"I discover you therefore you are" and other anonymous quotes play up the arrogance and ignorance that perpetuate foreign-conceived notions of Thai exoticism. Sutee is simultaneously chastising the outsider for uttering such absurdities, and his fellow countrymen for allowing the perpetuation of the myth. The process of investigating Thai history by looking at it first from the 'outside' is effective as many taboos, when raised in the guise of Thai/foreign confrontation, are made palatable. This second *"History Class"* (also produced in 2000) does not have the first installation's earnest poignancy and instead, relies on a satirical or even vitriolic tongue-in-cheek approach to narrate East-West collision in the 19th and 20th centuries. Not only is the work interactive in concrete terms -the piece was originally installed in Bangkok's Siam Square, a magnet for locals and foreigners alike, all of whom were invited to make rubbings - but it engages two cultures instead of one. On a conceptual level, the English text is an implicit calling to witness of the outside world, serving notice that Thailand has changed. Though easily appropriated by a nation-building discourse, the works, instilling a sense of alternative history, in fact seek to challenge nationalism in its use of history as a tool for manipulation.

Interactive, the two *"History Class"* installations also confront their audience and manoeuvre themselves into their consciousness on a deeper psychological plane. The object is crucial once more: how evocative and primally referential a child's well-worn wooden school-desk. The nearly Proustian prompt touches Thai and foreigner alike, at the core. The desks allude to sanitised, state-sanctioned history such as taught in grade-school, the pieces' potency in part deriving from their ambiguity of association. Recalling a deep-seated nostalgia for

childhood, they evoke innocence and the uncontested nature of grade-school teaching, while also reminding the viewer of the way in which text-book history manipulates the facts to betray childish trust. Sutee challenges the viewer to reconsider concepts of reality, truth and deception, as well as perceptions of objectivity/subjectivity.

The visual sensuality, tactile primacy and mandatory interactive aspect of much of Sutee's work play an important part in drawing his audience into complex Thai social and political reality. Just as "*History Class*" pulls the viewer in with its rustic associations, so the original interactive 'Depletion-Inflation' series (1997-'98), demands audience participation to bring it to life. This blowing action goes beyond mere utilitarian device: in mimicking the prana breathing sequences fundamental to meditation in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, the artist is asserting that as well as the provocative questions put forward by his works, the latter are also designed to trigger introspection. The rubber figures embody endless life-cycles, each inhalation a life, each exhalation a death, a contemplation of the void. In this respect Sutee's vision can be compared to that of Montien Boonma. Though not akin to Montien's profoundly felt search for private spiritual solace, a personal aide on the road to renewal and cleansing, Sutee nonetheless shares Montien's vision of art as question and catharsis (12).

Thus Sutee's art, as well as posing questions, can also be read on an autobiographic level. And just as Thailand's tensions with the outside world can be transposed to an internal framework and are echoed on a national level, so the artist sees many of these issues shifted yet again from the national to the personal. The faces of his rubber figures appear to bear the artist's features. The private mirrors the social, personal identity a reflection of communal identity. The artist is looking out at the world from the piece, into himself as he creates the work in his own image. Thus fluidity of meaning echoes a work's formal plasticity, giving it life beyond its contours and a changing expression through time. It is an exceptional process that convinces the viewer of his own role and responsibility in the shaping of life and culture.

A particularly poignant work from the 1997-'98 'Depletion-Inflation' series "*The Myth from Rice Field*" depicts a life-size latex water buffalo that must be inflated by viewers pumping their breath into the piece through attached rubber hoses. In this work Sutee's pathos for the rural labourers left behind by urban material progress transpires. A typically Southeast Asian symbol of rural toil and for many, with connotations of stupidity, the artist's version of the beast, when deflated, is indeed withered, ungainly and pathetic. Inflated however, the animal regains his status and dignity.

The artist uses the piece's changing physical appearance as an allegory, playing out the dichotomy that plagues rural and urban Asia where the city is "a paradox of necessity on the one hand, and catastrophic engagement with Westernisation on the other" (13). According to the artist, the country-side is perceived by Thai city-dwellers as a rural idyll, a last preserve of 'authenticity' and a place where the collective spirit still prevails (as played out literally by the collective breath-donating effort), and the city, perceived by the rural population as providing material well-being. This nostalgia-filled fascination with the country-side harboured by middle-class urban Thais, is defined by the artist as 'new exoticism'(14). In this construct, 'new exoticism' is a home-grown version of the more familiar genre, where the disillusioned and alienated Thai urbanite is the "other" (effectively so Westernised as to take the place of the West in the 'desirer/exotic object of desire' paradigm), peering with longing to the country-side -his "roots"- which is now perceived wistfully as the "exotic object of desire". Neither city nor country-side are what they seem however, the former boasting squalid slums inhabited by poor and jobless rural Thais, the latter industrialised and polluted. This paradox is aptly reflected by the changing stature of the buffalo.

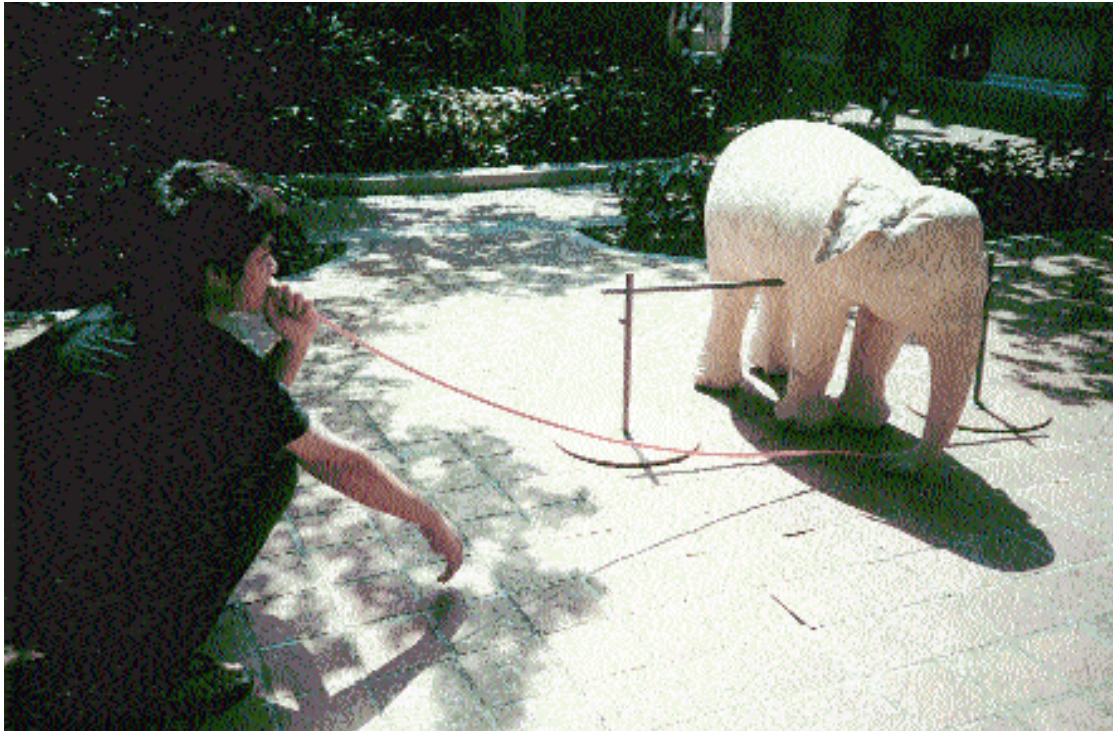


The Myth from Rice Field (Breath Donation)
 rubber, air balloon, hose - approximately 110 x 160 x 250 cm - 1998

The original 'Breath Donation' series, produced at the height of the Asian financial crisis that first sparked in Thailand, included animals, all of which represented the nation in one guise or other. The elephant -national symbol par excellence, life-line of the jungle and embodiment of faith- (15), lying flaccid on his dainty white lace pillow, waiting for audience

breath donation in order to achieve or regain his full size, aptly told the story of the country's passage from Asian Tiger to economic disaster zone. Sutee's ironic commentary described an empty shell as being all that was left of inflated expectations and alien social structures linked to an overly enthusiastic embrace of new global order, fuelled and filled with hot air in his analogy (i.e., human breath). The sub-text read as a moral tale, an indictment of Thailand's over-reliance on Western economic principles.

"Baby Elephant", produced this year, is the artist's sequel commenting on a changing economic and social landscape. The five elephants in the series are much smaller than the 'Breath Donation' beasts and therefore inflatable by a single viewer, implying their more modest, less grandiose scale is now better suited to Thai economic aspirations. More tellingly perhaps, the babies are coloured to emulate the hues of elephants depicted in traditional Buddhist mural painting: kelly green, persimmon, saffron, pointing to classical Thai culture as an antidote to the over-zealous espousal of uncharted economic and social terrain. The work is an optimistic one, proposing self-reliance and confidence as ingredients of Thai success.



Baby Elephant
silicone, hose, metal, plywood - approximately 140 x 160 x 70 cm - 2001

“*Siamese Breath*”, conceived two years after the ‘Depletion-Inflation’ series, continues its oblique commentary on nation-hood and confidence while also considering issues deriving from cultural collision and marriage. Looking this time at popular history and myth for clues to the state of Thailand’s relationship with the outside world, the artist uses the story of the 19th century conjoined twins Chang and Eng as a model (Thai twins of Chinese descent born joined at the hip, who found fame and fortune in the Unites States), examining concepts of foreignness, exoticism, acceptance and interdependence. In Sutee’s version, Chang is white and Eng yellow, the figures metaphors for Asia and the ‘white world’ of Europe and America.

The history of Chang and Eng is worth relating because according to the artist, the fame of the twins and their subsequent promotion in Europe and America, did much to enhance Thailand’s reputation as exotic in locale and custom. The reality of the twins’ existence however is that despite their handicap, they ended up leading fairly prosaic lives, marrying and having children. “*Siamese Breath*” ponders the polarisation and interdependence of the two cultures and comes to the conclusion that they are neither absolutely opposed nor exclusive. Chang and Eng can be of similar stature, depending on their respective state of inflation. To illustrate the point, Sutee puts the viewer donating his breath in control of regulating the size and rigidity of the figures, underscoring Thailand’s share of responsibility in its own exoticised and fetishised cultural identity. Indeed, pursuing this train of thought, the artist is hinting that Thais are the biggest consumers of Thai culture (16).



Siamese Breath
silicone, hose - lifesize - 2000

Just over the threshold of the Western world's new millennium, nostalgia is a vogueish topic. For Southeast Asia, a part of the world that has seen momentous social and political change in the last decades of the 20th century, nostalgia has a sharper, deeper resonance. So much has been sacrificed in the name of progress and for this huge leap of faith into modernism and globalism. In Thailand, now the leap has been made, many are taking stock and counting the costs. There is a sense of confusion, of lost innocence, and mourned past. Paradoxically, this has prompted a re-evaluation of the nation's history from outer as well as inner perspectives. The role of ritual and tradition is also being re-examined.

In all this, the art of Sutee Kunavichayanont acts as a witty, fluid yet sharply tuned barometer, measuring Thai society's every turn. His pieces are consciously Thai, speaking of Thai reality in a formally Thai vernacular. Through their visual acuteness and formal virtuosity, they bypass stale debates pitting localism against internationalism, challenging established concepts of nationalism and cultural boundaries, and taking complex issues of identity, cultural polarisation, and exotic stereotypes to a global audience, transforming the viewer from spectator to participant.

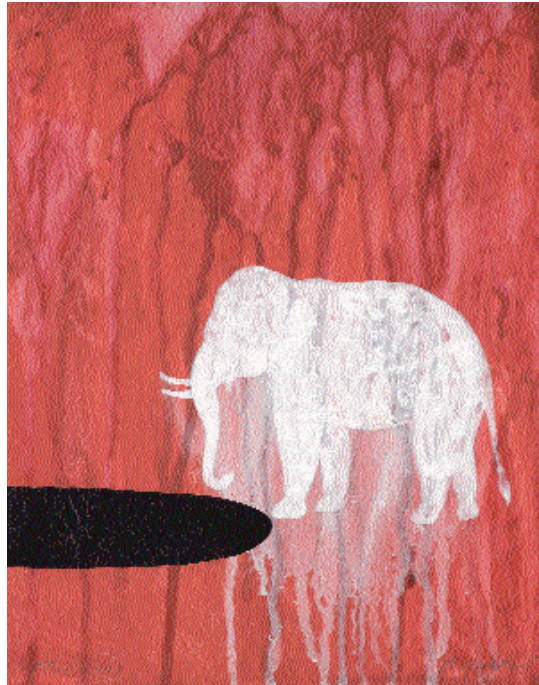
Conceptually elegant, his mainly three-dimensional pieces frame elliptical questions rather than pose definitions. His art, with its humour and depth, offers a way of deciphering the many-stranded ambiguities inherent in Thai society's entrenched codes. Examining with lucidity the cracks that disturb Thai society's pose of stability, Sutee gives dignified voice to Thailand's aspirations and concerns. Pointing to the fragility of cultural identities as a universal theme, and daring to look at Thailand's role in shaping its own destiny, with his sophisticated visual articulation of the fluctuating frame-works of Thai society, Sutee debunks the simplistic view of the country held by those asserting that a developing nation's main enemy is its political system (17).

This is demanding art that at first glance may appear somewhat moralistic. In fact, it is questioning rather than judgmental and if the viewer is willing to look, and look at looking, both as observer and participant, he will ultimately be rewarded with greater understanding of the world, Thailand, and himself.

Iola Lenzi is a Singapore-based critic and journalist specialising in Southeast Asian art; she is the Singapore correspondent for the *Asian Art Newspaper* and a regular contributor to *Art AsiaPacific*.

NOTES

- (1) D.G.E. Hall, "A History of South-East Asia", Macmillan Press, London, 1981, p. 769 for comments on Buddhism's association with nationalism in late 19th century Siam.
- (2) Apinan Poshyananda, "Contemporary Thai Art: Nationalism and Sexuality a la Thai", Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia, The Asia Society, New York, 1996, pp.102-103 for a discussion of the place of culture in Thai nationalist discourse.
- (3) Ibid, p. 108 and Jim Supangkat, "Multiculturalism/Modernism", Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia, The Asia Society, New York, 1996, pp. 80-81 for some points on the use of indigenous material and craft in Southeast Asian contemporary art.
- (4) Apinan Poshyananda, "Thai MODERNism to (post?) modernISM, 1970s and 1980s (Seeing "Yellow" from a Thai perspective", Modernity in Asian Art, edited by John Clark, Wild Peony, Australia, 1993, pp. 232-233 for a discussion of Montien Boonma's integration of found objects and indigenous materials in his installations.
- (5) Steven Pettifor, Review Section, ART AsiaPacific, issue 22, 1999, p. 88, for a brief review of 'Raindrops: Pig's Shit Running' at Bangkok's Tadu Contemporary Art, 1998 which included a discussion of works from 'The Eternal Banality' and 'Depletion-Inflation' series.
- (6) Helen Michaelson, "State Building and Thai Painting and Sculpture in the 1930s and 1840s", Modernity in Asian Art, edited by John Clark, Wild Peony, Australia, 1993, pp. 60-70 for a discussion of the role of the state in the emergence of modern art in Thailand.
- (7) Apinan Poshyananda, "The Problems of Tradition in Southeast Asian Modern Art", Visions & Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, 2000, p. 52, for comments on the invention of tradition in Southeast Asia.
- (8) Apinan Poshyananda, "Contemporary Thai Art: Nationalism and Sexuality a la Thai", Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia, The Asia Society, New York, 1996, p. 103 for reference to 1930's consensus art.
- (9) In two Bangkok interviews in November and December 2000, the artist asserts that he does and quotes Apinan Poshyananda who refers to the phenomenon as "selective Alzheimer's".
- (10) Ibid Michaelson, p. 70 for a discussion of the historic absence of differentiation of "high" and "low" art in Thailand and T.A. Heslop, "How strange the change from major to minor: hierarchies and medieval art", The Culture of Craft: Status and future, edited by Peter Dormer, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, pp. 59-60 on the rise and fall of "low" art in the Western canon.
- (11) Ibid Hall, p. 844
- (12) Other practitioners using meditation as a conceptual source for their work include Montien Boonma, Sompop Butrarat, and Kamin Lertchaiprasert.
- (13) Ahmad Mashadi, "Some Aspects of Nationalism and internationalism in Philippine Art", Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art, edited by T.K. Sabapathy, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, 1996, p.52 for parallel comments concerning the gulf separating urban and rural populations in a wider Southeast Asian context.
- (14) Interviews with the artist, November-December 2000, Bangkok
- (15) Elephants are used by other Thai practitioners in this way. See for example Jakapan Vilasineekul's "Thailand, Can You Cover a Dead Elephant With A Lotus Leaf?" exhibited in the Asia Society's 1996 New York exhibition Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia.
- (16) Ibid Poshyananda, "Contemporary Thai Art: Nationalism and Sexuality a la Thai", p. 105, on art as a commodity from the 1980's onwards.
- (17) Ibid Supangkat, p. 80 for a discussion of the rigid stereotypes that dominate the interpretation of contemporary art from developing nations.



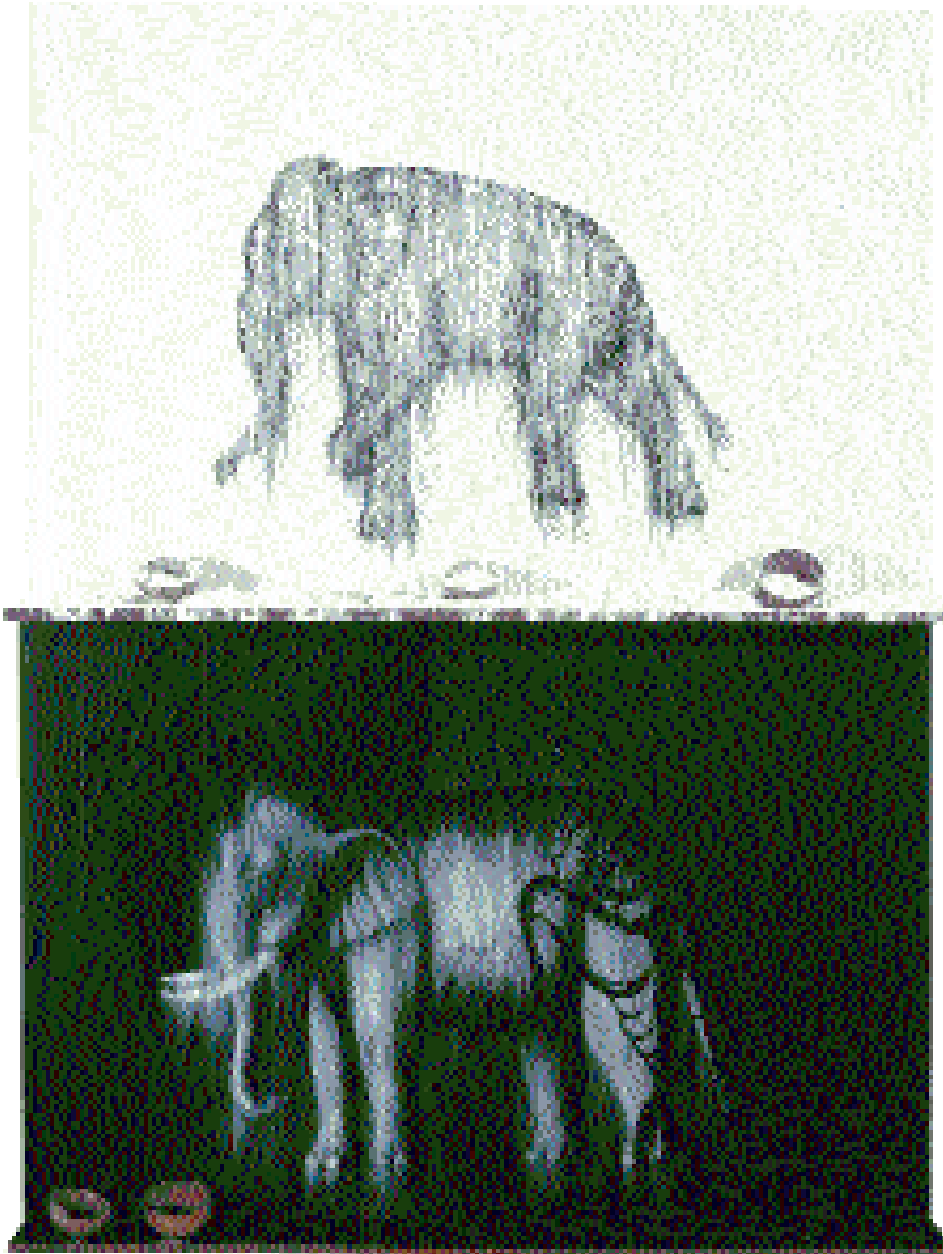
White Elephant on the Edge 1
watercolour and acrylic on canvas - 25.5 x 20.5 cm -
1999



Siamese Flag 1995 (fragment)

watercolour, paper, metal, wood, plaster - 57 x 76 x 29.5 cm - 1995

published: "SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT, works 1995-1998", Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1998,



On the Edge

pastel, graphite, gypsum, lime, coconut shell, charcoal, plywood - 240 x 180 cm - 1995

published: "SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT, works 1995-1998", Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1998, p. 58



Siamese Elephant

charcoal, acrylic on canvas - 48.5 x 40.5 x 5 cm - 1996

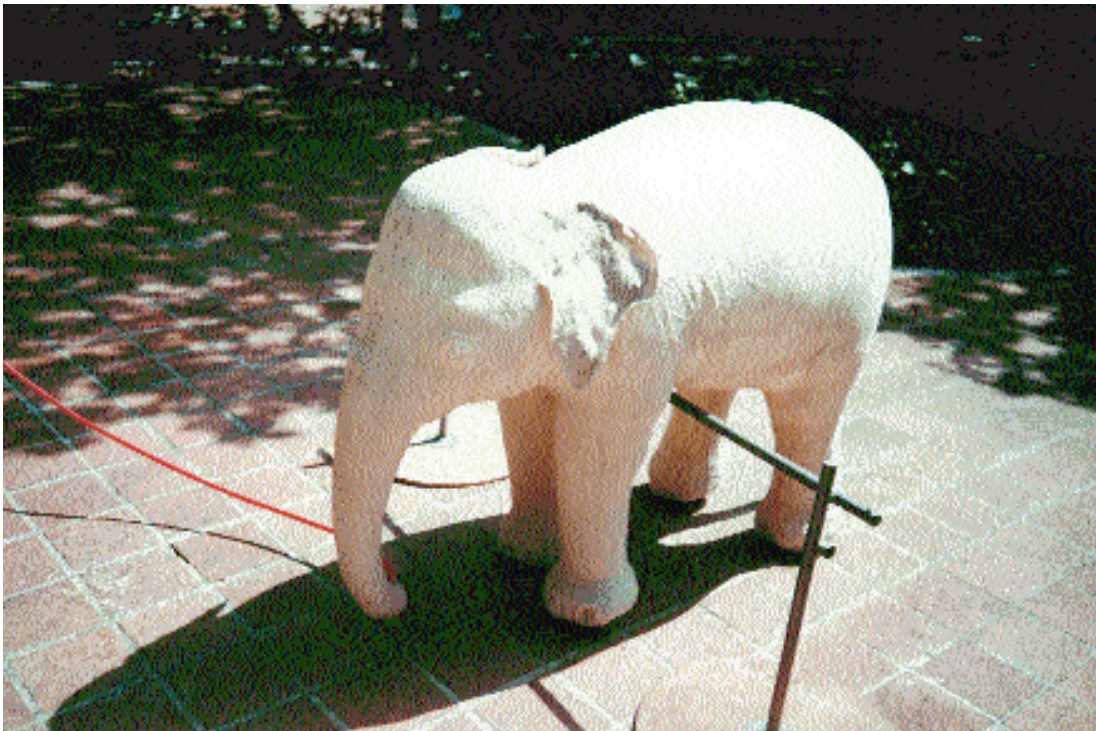
published: "Thai Vision I", Silpakorn University Art Centre, Bangkok, 1997, p.



Previously Existed 1 and Previously Existed 4

gypsum, plaster, spray paint on canvas laid down on board - 80 x 96 x 1 cm each - 1995

published: "SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT, works 1995-1998", Tadu Contemporary Art,

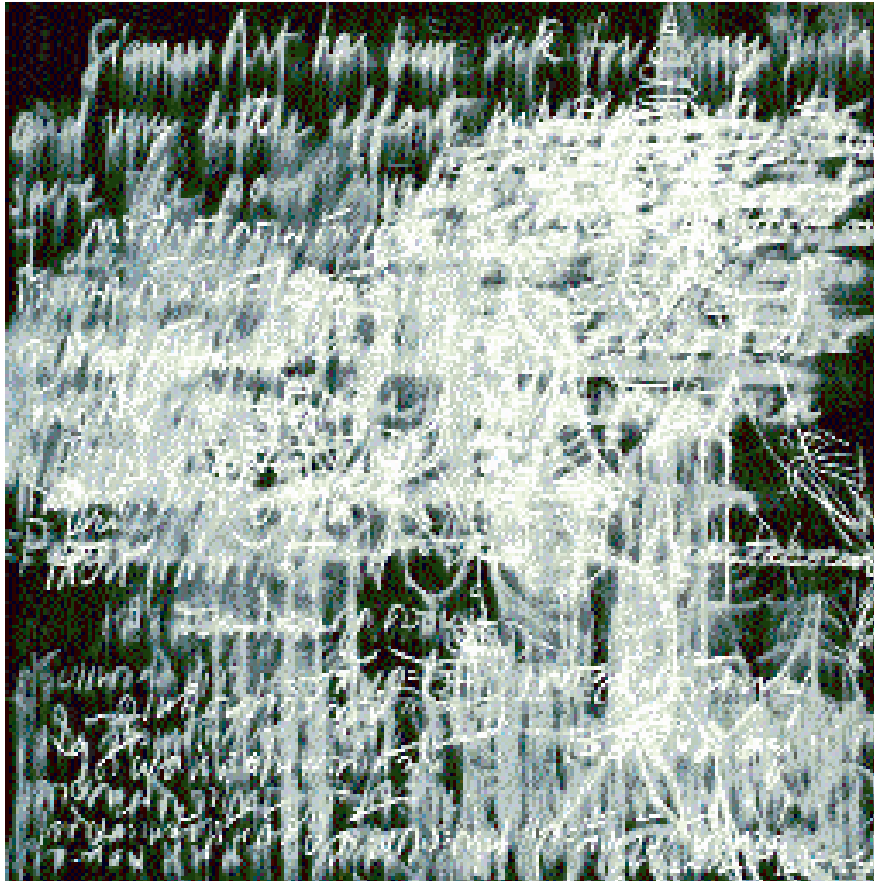


Baby Elephant
silicone, hose, metal, plywood - approximately 80 x 100 x 50 cm - 2001

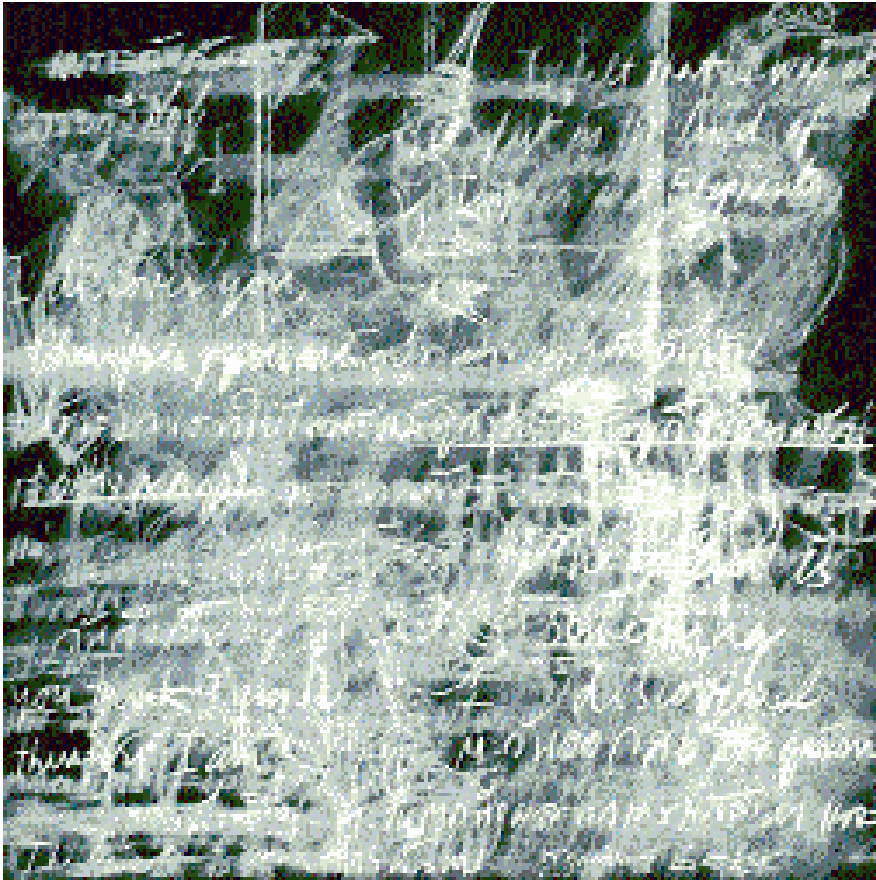


Tear-Water-Eyes 1
plywood, acrylic - 183 x 122 x 6.5 cm - 1996

published: "SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT, works 1995-1998", Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1998, p. 16



Black Board
plywood, pastel - 122 x 122 x 2.5 cm - 2001



Black Board 1
plywood, pastel - 122 x 122 x 2.5 cm - 2001



History Class (White Man's Burden) (detail)



History Class (White Man's Burden) (detail)



rubbing taken from the above desk



rubbing taken from desk from History Class (White Man's Burden)



History Class (White Man's Burden)

8 engraved wooden children's desks - dimensions variable - 2000

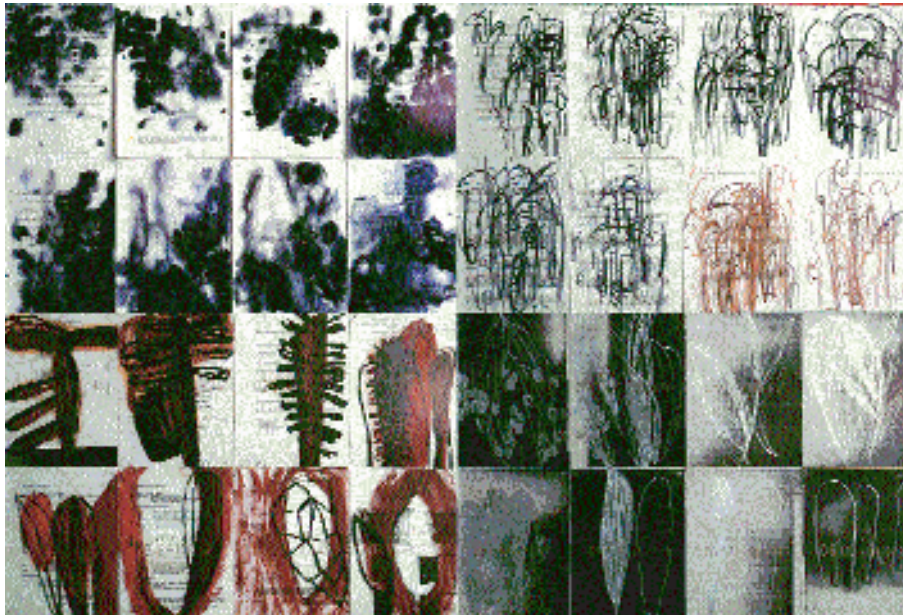
published: "EURO-VISIONS", Silpakorn University Art Galleries, Bangkok, 2000, p. 30



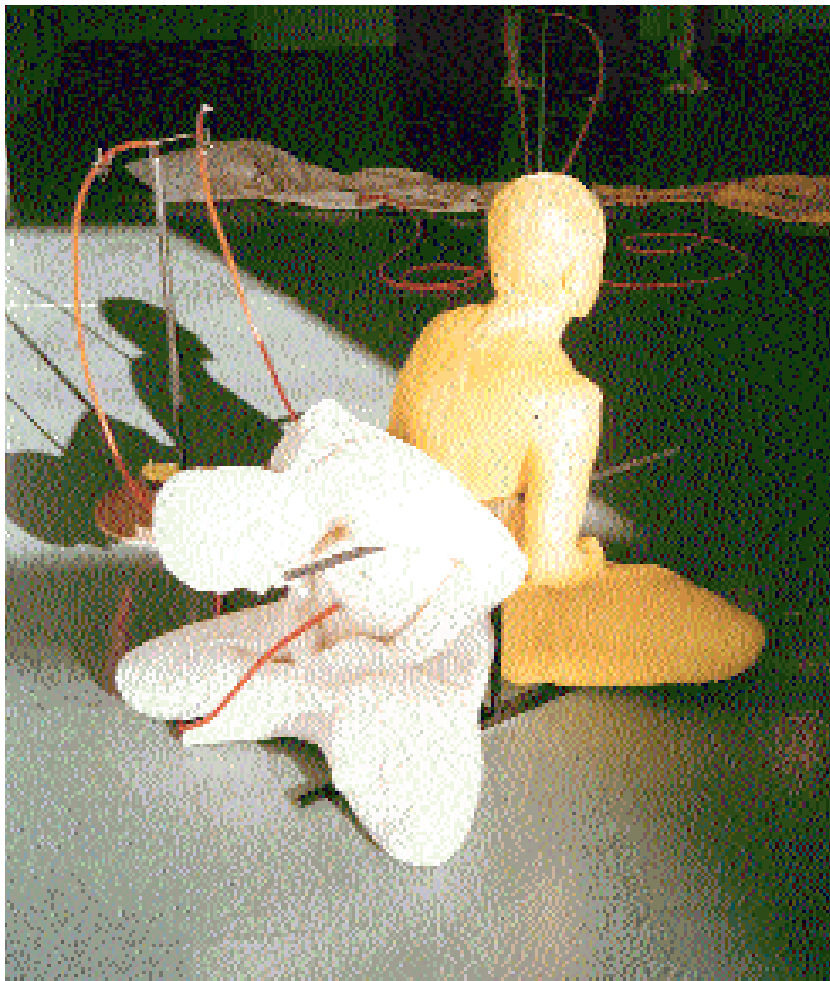
Time and Mind 1 (on the wall)

mixed techniques drawing: charcoal, pen, pencil, stencil, Chinese ink, acrylic colours, spray paint, tempera, oil pastel, bitumen on used paper (A4) - 30 x 21 cm each - 1300 pieces - 1993

published: "Flowing TIDE", Silom Art Space, Bangkok, 1994, p. 7



Time and Mind 1 (detail)



Siamese Breath
silicone, rubber hose - lifesize - 2000

published: "Asian Artists in Residence", Mattress Factory, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, 1999, p.



The Eternal Banality 1

fibreglass, gold leaves, motor, motion sensor - 120 x 60 x 45 cm - 1997-8

published: "SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT, works 1995-1998", Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1998, p. 36

CURATOR'S NOTE

With "Inflated Nostalgia", I have attempted to group pieces produced in the last five years that explore different facets of a same theme, as well as works that take Thai visual language in new directions. Some of my choices have been governed by a work's availability or the restrictions imposed by the gallery space, a converted shop-house. Despite some limitations, all my choices, I hope, convey Sutee's refined sense of the object and his appreciation of the fluid nature of its message, echoed by the work's plastic variability. In this, his art very aptly mirrors life. It is this conceptual fluidity, this openness, that, rather unassuming and refreshingly free of sensationalist intent, provokes thought and furthers the debate centering on complex issues.



Previously Existed
gypsum, plaster, spray paint, wood, glass, water - 50 x 320 x 615 cm - 1995

Those familiar with Sutee's work and past exhibitions will notice the Atelier Frank & Lee display and catalogue featuring modified previously-exhibited installations. For reference purposes, we illustrate these installations as they were originally shown in Thailand. This is indeed the case for the 1995 and 1996 works "*Previously Existed*" and "*Tear-Water-Eyes*",

both originally included in exhibitions in Bangkok, respectively “The White Elephants of Siam”, held at the Art Gallery of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts in 1995, and “Golden Jubilee Art Exhibition: 50 Years of Thai Art”, held at Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre in 1996. Characteristic of the medium, these works were site-specific and have, over time, evolved in much the same way as do living things. Both pieces represent Thailand’s emblematic white elephant,



the significance of which has been discussed above. The artist views the decay and dismemberment of the original works as contributing conceptually to their message and it is my view that aesthetically they gain in intensity for having been ‘edited’ by natural erosion worked over time. Formal fluidity, as discussed above, is a salient characteristic of Sutee’s oeuvre so it is very much in the nature of Sutee’s art to shift over time as so many of his pieces are consciously designed to do.

Iola Lenzi
January 2001

Tear - Water - Eyes
plywood, acrylic, wood log, water, motor - 60 x 122 x 224 cm -

SUTEE KUNAVICHAYANONT

Born 1965, Bangkok, Thailand

Education

1985-1989 B.F.A.(Graphic Arts), Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts,
Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

1992-1993 Master of Visual Arts, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Australia.

Present Profession

- Instructor at the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts,
Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

Solo Exhibitions

1991 - From the Outside Looking In, New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, Australia.

1993 - Void and Emptiness, First Draft(West), NSW, Australia.

- Time and Mind, Tin Sheds Gallery, NSW, Australia.

- Flowing Tide, Allen Street Gallery, NSW, Australia.

1994 - Flowing Tide, Silom Art Space, Bangkok

1995 - The White Elephants of Siam, The Art Gallery of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and
Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

1997 - The Myth of An Asian Tiger, Galerie Gauche, Ecole nationale superieure des Beaux-Arts,
Paris, France

1998 - Rain Drops-Pig's Shit Running, TADU Contemporary Art, Bangkok

1999 - Burden of Joy, Bangkok University Art Gallery, Bangkok

2000 - 4 Days, Elephant Breath Donation and History Class, Silpakorn University Art Gallery,
Bangkok

2001 - Galerie des Arts Visuels LAVAL, Quebec, Canada

- Optica, Un Centre d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, Canada

- Inflated Nostalgia, Atelier Frank & Lee, Singapore

Selected Group Exhibitions

1986,88,89 - The 3rd, 5th, 6th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists, Bangkok.

1987,89 - The 3rd, 35th National Exhibition of Art, Bangkok.

1989,90 - Contemporary Art Exhibition, Bangkok.

1990 - International Exhibition of Graphic Art, Freshen, West Germany.

- The 5th Busan Biennale, Busan, Korea

1990,95-00 - The 7th ,12th-17th Art Exhibition by the Members of the Faculty of Painting, Bangkok.

1991 - The 6th International Print Biennale, Varna'91, Bulgaria

- Figurative Colours, The Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts' Gallery, Bangkok

- 1992 - Art Works Four, Melbourne, Australia
- 1994 - 2537 ,Thailand Cultural Centre, Bangkok
- 1996 - The 3rd Art Exhibition by the Cobalt Blue Group, The National Art Gallery, Bangkok
- Golden Jubilee Art Exhibition: 50 Years of Thai Art, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center
- Into the Next Decade, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok
- 1997 - Contemporary Fine Arts Exhibition, Hanoi Fine Arts Institute and Hue College of Arts, Vietnam
- Thai Vision I, California Polytechnic State University, USA
- Artists Who Become Preservers of Western Tropical Forest, Marsi Gallery, Bangkok
- 1998 - 8 Artistes Thais à Paris, à la Maison des Arts Europe-Asie, Paris, France
- Books, Kruru Sapa Publishing House, Bangkok
- Report from the Forest 1998, National Gallery, Bangkok
- Bangkok Art Project 1998, outdoor art exhibition in Bangkok
- 1999 - Alter Ego, Thai-EU Collaborative Project, work with Danny Devos, Bangkok
- Jardins Secrets, Art dans la Ville, Saint-Etienne, France
- 26th Century, Self Examination by Cobalt Blue Group, National Gallery, Bangkok
- No Guarantee, Sydney College of the Arts Gallery, Australia
- Trace, Liverpool Biennale of Contemporary Arts, Liverpool, UK.
- 10 Asian Artists in Residence, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA
- 2000 - Thai Contemporary Art 2000, Art Centre, Silpakorn University, Bangkok
- Town Invades Forestry, the Artists Preserve Western Tropical Forest, National Gallery, Bangkok
- While You Were Sleeping, Alliance Francaise International Art School's Students and Teachers, Space Contemporary Art, Bangkok
- The Beauty of Democracy, Public Art Exhibition, 100 Years of Pridi Banomyong and Thai Society, Thanon Rachadamnoen Klang, Bangkok
- keep your distance, Tadu Contemporary Arts, Bangkok, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore, and National Gallery of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
- 5th Live Art 2000, Concrete House, Nonthaburi
- The Glocal Scents of Thailand, Edsvik konst och kultur, Sweden
- Thai Art 2000, Thai Art Foundation, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- Thai-Euro Visions, the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts Art Gallery, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Co-Project Exhibition

- 1995 - Long Table and Stairway to Heaven, Installation and Performance with Paradix K, at Kitaza, Kyoto, Japan

Collections

- Thai Farmers Bank PCL., Bangkok
- Thai Investment and Securities PCL.(TISCO), Bangkok
- LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore
- Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

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