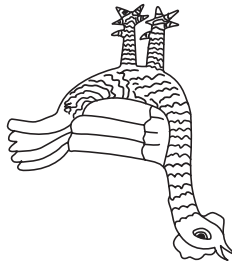


Southeast Asia Performance Art Symposium  
7th Asiatopia Performance Art Festival  
24-27 November, 2005, Bangkok



This Festival is dedicated to all chickens and birds, died of Avian Flu in Asia and the rest of the world. Since 2003 more than 60 people have been infected and died, in S.E. Asia.



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## THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION



DMPSON




CONCRETE HOUSE



มูลนิธิวัฒนธรรมแห่งกรุงเทพมหานคร  
Bangkok Art & Culture Centre





## I n t r o d u c t i o n

Performance art in Southeast Asia reveals unique characteristics. In most cases the art form has developed within the democratic and civil movements in each country. It is also rooted in historical factors and conditions which relate to local rituals, feudal systems, inter-continental trade, religious development and especially the influence of colonialism. However, the post-Indochina war period marks an important milestone for the new socio-cultural dimension - when national identity, political independence and democracy have been important agendas for most Southeast Asian nations.

Since its beginning in 1988, Asiatopia Performance Art Festival has brought together over 250 international artists to share and exchange artistic ideas on a practical level. For this 7th Asiatopia Festival we decided to organize a symposium alongside the art action. Through performances and dialogue we hope to build greater understanding of performance art in the region and strengthen an ongoing network with cooperation among artist groups and festivals. In moving towards this goal, we are very encouraged by the active responses from friends and colleagues in Asia.

This three-day gathering will encourage discussion and exchange focusing on current practice, historical evolution and the future of performance art in Southeast Asia. Performance action by artists from Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam are of course at the heart of it all.

One important development of this 7th Asiatopia Performance Art Festival is a partnership between the Bangkok Art & Culture

Center (BACC) Project and Concrete House, the original organizer. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration was our first supporter since Asiatopia's conception and is still today one of our strong supporters.

I would like to thank The Rockefeller Foundation for recognizing the opportunities and supporting these events. With their support we have been able to conduct research on the development of performance art in Thailand and to organize this regional symposium.

Many thanks to other important local supporters of Asiatopia including the Office Of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, BACC Project and EMPOWER Foundation. This support makes us feel 'mee kam lung jai' - encouraged. Chang Beer and other cultural institutions and art schools have also generously given their support and for this we are most grateful.

I also would like to thank The Jim Thompson House for hosting a Welcome Party for artists and speakers and The Queen's Gallery for hosting the Southeast Asia Performance Art Symposium this year.

Kind thanks and appreciation to my artist colleagues and friends who have helped to pull this symposium together - Mideo Cruz, Iwan Wijono, Paisan Plienbangchang, Thanom Chapakdee, Thanavi Chotpradit, Khiruddin Hori, Mongkol Plienbangchang, Virginia Henderson and the staff of the secretariat office of BACC Project. I also would like to thank all the artists and participants in this symposium and Asiatopia Festival this year.

Chumpon Apisuk  
Nonthaburi,  
November 2005

**Bangkok Governor's Welcome Speech  
to participants of  
Southeast Asia Performance Art Symposium and  
7<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia Performance Art Festival  
24 November 2005, The Jim Thompson House, Bangkok**

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Distinguished guests, artists and participants of the regional symposium,

On behalf of the people of Bangkok I am delighted to welcome you all to our city. I am also honored to have this opportunity to speak with leaders of the regional art community.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) has collaborated with and supported the Asiatopia festival since its inception seven years ago and we are proud of this continued joint effort.

The BMA currently has a clear vision and policy to promote and support art and cultural activities in the city. These are not only activities that the BMA organizes in its own capacity, but also through supporting several local and international art festivals, such as the Bangkok Theatre Festival, the Experimental Film Festival and Asiatopia Festival, to name just a few. The BMA is committed to support approximately ten more art festivals this year through until March 2006.

One of the concrete advancements of our art and culture policy is the building of the city's first contemporary art center, which has already begun and will be ready to open to the public in 2007. The Bangkok Art and Culture Center will be unique and highlight art relating to all aspects of life and everyday culture, without discrimination. As well as a venue for new ideas, this Bangkok Art and Culture Center will support and revitalize the many old artisan communities which have been neglected during the rush for development and commercialization.

For the success of this art and culture policy, Bangkok people are thankful to the dynamic art community and many of its leaders are here tonight. They have led a long campaign to build a vibrant art scene in Bangkok and have enriched our art and cultural lives today.

I am taking the time to share with you these domestic developments because, first of all I feel proud and grateful for the passion and high spirits of all the artists, many of whom I have just come to know. I admire their vision, dedication and their selflessness. Secondly, I would like to reconfirm the BMA's commitment to supporting art and cultural activities so that we can bring life back to Bangkok.

I believe that art can stimulate people to think, to experiment, to express and to be eager to learn. Art is wisdom which enhances science - not opposing it but giving balance to our knowledge, practice and learning experiences. For this reason I hope to see more exciting art projects in Bangkok and support you all in your efforts.

May I congratulate the organiser of Asiatopia Festival and the Southeast Asia Performance Art Symposium and I wish you all a successful and enriching gathering. Thank you very much.

Apirak Kosayodhin

Governor of the Bangkok Metropolitan  
Authority (BMA)

November 2005

คำกล่าวต้อนรับศิลปินและผู้เข้าร่วมสัมมนา  
เทศกาลศิลปะแสดงสดนานาชาติเอเชียโตเปีย  
การสัมมนาระดับภูมิภาคศิลปะแสดงสดในเอเชียอาคเนย์  
24 พ.ย. 2548 บ้านจิม ทอมป์สัน, กรุงเทพฯ

ท่านผู้มีเกียรติ ผู้เข้าร่วมประชุม และศิลปิน  
ทุกท่าน, ในนามของชาวกรุงเทพมหานครขอต้อนรับ  
ผู้เข้าร่วมสัมมนาศิลปะแสดงสดเอเชียอาคเนย์  
และศิลปินเอเชียโตเปียทุกท่าน

ผมรู้สึกเป็นเกียรติที่ได้มาพบกับผู้นำด้าน  
ศิลปะจากนานาชาติ และกรุงเทพมหานคร  
ก็รู้สึกยินดีมาก ที่เราได้ร่วมงานกับเทศกาล  
เอเชียโตเปียมาถึงครั้งที่เจ็ดแล้ว

ในทศวรรษนี้ กรุงเทพมหานคร ได้มีนโยบาย  
ที่ชัดเจนมากขึ้นในการส่งเสริมกิจกรรมศิลปะ  
วัฒนธรรม นอกเหนือจากกิจกรรมที่กทม.ทำเอง  
แล้วเรายังได้สนับสนุนเทศกาลศิลปะที่สำคัญ ๆ  
หลายเทศกาล ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเทศกาลละครกรุงเทพ  
หรือเทศกาลเอเชียโตเปีย และยังมีเทศกาลระดับ  
นานาชาติอีกนับ 10 เทศกาล ที่จะไปจนถึงเดือน  
มีนาคมปีหน้า ด้วยเหตุนี้ผมจึงหวังว่าจะมีโอกาส  
พบทุกท่านอีกในเทศกาลต่าง ๆ ในกรุงเทพฯ

ความก้าวหน้า ที่สำคัญอีกอย่างหนึ่งของ  
การดำเนินนโยบายศิลปวัฒนธรรมของกทม. คือ  
การก่อสร้างหอศิลป์ร่วมสมัยแห่งแรกของกรุงเทพฯ  
ที่จะเสร็จในต้นปี 2007 นี้ ซึ่งเป็นการดำเนินงาน  
ตามนโยบาย พันชีวิตศิลปวัฒนธรรมให้กับกรุงเทพฯ  
ให้เชื่อมต่อให้ได้กับอดีตที่เราเคยมี ย่านศิลปะ  
ชุมชนศิลปะ หลายแห่ง ที่ถูกปล่อยให้วิถีชีวิต  
ทางการค้า และความบันเทิง มีบทบาทมากเกินไป  
ในเวลา

ความสำเร็จในการผลักดันนโยบาย เหล่านี้  
กรุงเทพมหานครรู้สึกขอบคุณบรรดาศิลปิน และ  
หลายท่านที่อยู่ที่นี่ ที่ได้รวบรวมพลังศิลปิน  
อันมหาศาล ต่อสู้ ผลักดัน อย่างยาวนานหลายปี  
จนทำให้ กทม.ดำเนินการด้านศิลปวัฒนธรรมขึ้นมา  
จนได้ในเวลานี้

ผมใช้เวลาเล่าเรื่องราวเหล่านี้ให้ทุกท่านฟัง  
เพราะประการแรก ผมรู้สึกชื่นชม กับความเอาใจ  
เอาใจ ของบรรดาศิลปินทั้งหลาย เทศกาลศิลปะ  
นานาชาติเหล่านี้ ได้จัดมากอนหน้าที่ กทม. จะรู้จัก  
และให้ความสนใจ ศิลปะร่วมสมัย และอีกประการ  
หนึ่ง ผมเล่าเพื่อต้องการจะยืนยัน ถึงความตั้งใจจริง  
ของสำนักงานกรุงเทพมหานคร ที่จะส่งเสริมและ  
สนับสนุน กิจกรรมศิลปะวัฒนธรรม เพื่อสร้าง  
กรุงเทพฯที่มีชีวิต ตามที่กล่าวมาแล้ว

ผมเชื่อว่าศิลปะ จะทำให้คนกล้าคิด กล้าเรียนรู้  
และกล้าแสดงออก ศิลปะเป็นปัญญาที่อยู่เคียงข้าง  
วิทยาศาสตร์ ด้วยเหตุนี้ เราจึงต้องการเห็นโครงการ  
ศิลปะที่ดี ๆ เช่นนี้อีกมาก เกิดขึ้นในกรุงเทพฯ  
เพื่อสร้างความสมดุลในการเรียนรู้ของพวกเรา

ผมขอแสดงความยินดีกับผู้จัด เทศกาลเอเชีย  
โตเปีย และขออวยพรให้ทุกท่านประสบความสำเร็จ  
ในการประชุม และในการแสดงครั้งนี้ ขอคุณครับ

อภิรักษ์ โกษะโยธิน  
ผู้ว่าราชการ กรุงเทพมหานครฯ  
พฤศจิกายน 2548



## R a t i o n a l e

Performance art is a recognized and valuable art form for social questioning and is part of the process of social change. In its various contexts, performance art reflects and interacts with political change.

More than ever before, performance art practice has enjoyed a tide of growing visibility within the various facets of contemporary art in Southeast Asia. This is due to pockets of individuals who work together to organize performance art festivals in their own lands and infrastructures. Close geographical proximity creates opportunities and attendances of performance artists at these regional festivals are now significantly higher. This breakthrough has grown to serve new impulses in the development of performance art practice.

Though the art form has been practiced over the last few decades, performance art, or Live Art as some call it, remains a conceptual platform in visual arts expression for the sheer reason that it is not easy to put this art form in a box. Its unpredictable nature and defiance of aesthetic form challenge the familiar appeal to embrace or access it, even within and by the art community itself.

These are exciting times, for the nature of performance art is continually undergoing creative shifts as performance artists experiment in making and experiencing performances. Technology, for instance, with virtual online performance art, allows greater accessibility and a challenge and re-thinking of the term "Performance as Live Art". Beside the use of the body, performance artists today use other media, such as photography, Internet and text, as part of their extensions in performance art practice.

This symposium will investigate the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of performance art and consider its role and contribution to change in Southeast Asia. It will identify and highlight the key challenges and opportunities arising as performance artists and organizations collaborate and network.

### Aims

The three-day gathering aims to:

- explore the development of performance art in the region
- investigate how performance artists respond to political, social economic changes
- promote dialogue and find common ground and ways for performance artists to collaborate in the future
- document and archive the developments of performance art in Southeast Asia.

### Welcome Artists and Opening

The Welcome Artists Party on the evening of 24 November is hosted at The Jim Thompson House. The Southeast Asia Performance Art Symposium will be officially opened by the Governor of Bangkok, Apirak Kosayodhin.

### Key Themes

The symposium sessions will focus discussions around key themes:

**25 November - Forces of Change**

**26 November - Context and Communication**

**27 November - Creative Space**

### 25 November - Forces of Change

The Keynote Speech by Dr Apinan Poshyananda, Director General, Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, Thailand on "Strengthening Regional Artistic Community" will be followed by sessions on "Political Context in Southeast Asia" and "Critical Art in Southeast Asia". Performance art's involvement in the democratic process, anti-war, anti-fascism and civil rights movements will be explored. Local and global constraints will also be discussed including the impact of taboos and censorship. The ways performance art can creatively express voices for freedom and against corrupted power will be investigated. Movements from colonialism to globalization around the region will be discussed in the context of tradition, culture and change. Views of traditional, modern and post-modern elements in performance art may inform this session.

### 26 November - Context and Communication

Sessions on "Traditions and Trends", "Practically Under Pressure" and "Genderly Undermind" will open discussions on expression, the 'body' and 'tools/materials' used by performance artists to communicate. Women artists will be highlighted along with gay and lesbian art. Commonalities of practice and themes will be explored and the ways performance artists communicate and work with each other and the public in various contexts will be investigated. Discussion will also consider at how communities

and institutions grow and change. A session on "Taking Performance Art Forward" will open ideas enhancing regional communication and collaboration.

### **Process**

**Performances** will be incorporated into the discussion program after lunch on all three days (25-27 November) and in the evenings from 7-10 pm at Santi Chaiprakarn Park on Phra Athit Rd there will be **Asiatopia performances**.

Rather than formal presentations, symposium guest speakers will engage in **facilitated dialogues** and there will be opportunities for full group involvement in discussions around key questions. Participants will also break into groups for more **in-depth discussions with report-backs**.

The **'Creative Space' on 27 November** will provide opportunities for spontaneous performances interpreting and reflecting on the discussion themes of the symposium, with videos from SEA countries and **networking sessions**.

**An exhibit of performance art materials** (photos, posters, reviews, etc) will be gathered from participants and on display at the Queens Gallery.

A **Statement of Practice** will be drafted and following discussion and feedback, endorsed by participants on Day Three of the symposium.

**Program**  
**Thursday 24 November 2005 Welcome Artists Party**  
**18:30 Jim Thompson House, Soi Kasemsan 2, Rama 1 Road, Bangkok**  
**Guest of Honour: Apirak Kosayothin, Governor of Bangkok**

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**Friday 25 November 2005 Forces of Change**  
**Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd**

10:00 Opening jam and registration -  
 Welcome by Chumpon Apisuk

10:30 Keynote speech  
*Strengthening Regional Artistic Community* Dr Apinan Poshyananda,  
 Director General,  
 Office of Contemporary Art and  
 Culture, Ministry of Culture, Thailand

11:00 Dialogue Political Context in  
 Southeast Asia Senator Kraissak  
 Choonhavan & Lee Weng Choy

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Performance  
 Wawan Christiawan, Chaw Ei Thien

14:00 Dialogue  
 Critical Art in Southeast Asia  
 Eileen Legaspi Ramirez, Heru  
 Hikayat & Ray Langenbach

15:30 Break

16:00 Dialogue  
 Artists in Action (Performance Art  
 Statement draft)  
 Iwan Wijono, Khairuddin Hori,  
 Mideo Cruz & Paisan Plienbangchang

17:00 Wrap Up Day One of Symposium

19:00-22:00 ASIATOPIA Performances at  
 Santi Chaiprakarn Park, Phra Athit Rd

Practically Under Pressure  
 Koh Siu Lan, Thanom Chapakdee &  
 Tran Leung

12:15 Lunch

13:00 Performance  
 He Chengyao, Khairuddin Hori

13:30 Dialogue  
 Genderly Undermind  
 Michael Shaowanasai, Rochit Tanedo  
 & Thanavi Chotpradit

15:00 Break

15:30 Dialogue  
 Taking Performance Art Forward -  
 What's Next?  
 Chumpon Apisuk, Iwan Wijono, Hong  
 O-Bong, Khairuddin Hori

17:00 Wrap Up Day Two of Symposium

19:00-22:00 ASIATOPIA Performances at  
 Santi Chaiprakarn Park, Phra Athit Rd

**Sunday, 27 November 2005 Creative Space**  
**Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd**

10:00 Welcome to Day Three  
 Review of Day One and Day Two  
 Lee Weng Choy, Ray Lagenbach &  
 Thanavi Chotpradit

11:00 Revisit Performance Art Statement -  
 discussion and endorsement Iwan  
 Wijono, Khairuddin  
 Hori, Mideo Cruz & Paisan  
 Plienbangchang

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Videos, performances and discussions

15:00 Networking Session

16:00 Wrap Up Day Three of Symposium

19:00-22:00 ASIATOPIA Performances at  
 Santi Chaiprakarn Park, Phra Athit Rd  
 onwards

22:00 Going Home Party Concrete House

**Saturday 26 November 2005 Context and  
 Communication**  
**Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd**

10:00 Welcome to Day Two

10:15 Dialogue  
 Traditions and Trends  
 Gridthiya Gaweewong, Iwan Wijono &  
 Ly Daravuth

11:00 Break

11:15 Dialogue

7<sup>th</sup> ASIATOPIA Performance Art Festival  
Santi Chaiprakarn Park, Phra Athit Road, Bangkok  
25-27 November 2005

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Program

**Friday 25 November, 7 - 10 pm**

Hong O-Bong (Korea)  
Ahlien Zh (Taiwan)  
Witchukorn Tangpaiboon (Thailand)  
Kaori Haba (Japan)  
Thein Ei Chaw (Myanmar)  
Padungsak Kotchasomrong (Thailand)  
Bui Cong Khanh (Vietnam)

**Saturday 26 November, 7 - 10 pm**

Paisan Plienbangchang (Thailand)  
Lynn Charlotte Lu (Singapore)  
Chit Ko Ko (Myanmar)  
Rich Streitmatter-Tran (Vietnam)  
Gang Suon-Suk (Korea)  
Jeho Bitancor (Philippines)  
Nopawan Sirivejkul (Thailand)

**Sunday 27 November, 7 - 10 pm**

Raquel De Loyola (Philippines)  
Jittima Pholsawake (Thailand)  
Kai Lam (Singapore)  
Mimi Fadmi (Indonesia)  
Kosit Jantratip (Thailand)

## Participants

### CAMBODIA

- **Daravuth Ly** (Phnom Penh)  
*reyum@camnet.com.kh*

A graduate in cultural anthropology and visual arts at La Sorbonne, France, Daravuth returned to Cambodia in 1995. Presently, he is the director of Reyum Institute, a non-profit organization that provides a forum for research and promotion of traditional and contemporary Cambodian arts and culture. Daravuth is also a lecturer at the Faculty of Archeology of the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh.



### CHINA

- **He Cheng Yao** (Beijing)  
*chengyao126@hotmail.com*

Graduated from the Sichuan Art Academy in 1989, Cheng Yao has exhibited her works both locally and internationally. Provocative with a social edge, she belongs to the younger generation of performance artists in China.



### HONG KONG

- **Koh Siu Lan** (Hong Kong)  
*slk@kadoorie.com*

Trained in sociology and development, Siu Lan is actively involved with community and women's development in Southern China and Hong Kong. She also organized the performance art project. "Hong Kong on the Move" in October 2005.



### INDONESIA

- **Heru Hikayat** (Bandung)  
*setiaphari@yahoo.com*

An independent curator/writer since 1999, Heru co-founded Bandung Performance Art Community. His articles on performance art include On Margin and The Protest, both in 2004. His last curatorial project was "Watching Me Watching You Watching Me"; Prilla Tania video performance, ROOM NO1, Bandung, Indonesia.



- **Iwan Wijono** (Jogjakarta)  
*iw.wij@lycos.com*

No stranger to the performance art circuit, Iwan has participated in many international festivals and is presently the director of the Performance Klub, an organization to critique and develop performance art in Indonesia. He also works internationally on workshops, festivals, seminars, radio talk shows and publications.



- **Mimi Fadmi** (Bandung)  
*fadmi@artlover.com*

Mimi has been doing performance art since 2000. Most of her works deal with issues surrounding sexuality in the Islamic society of Indonesia. She currently lives and works in Bandung, Indonesia.



• **Wawan Christiawan**

(Bandung)

*christiawanid@yahoo.com*

A new media artist, Christiawan has developed his practice in Bandung for more than 15 years. His works include web art and live art, and he terms his performances "Action Poetry".



• **Kang Seong Sook** (Seoul)

A founding member of BIPAF, a local performance art festival, Seong Sook focuses on environmental issues in his performances. Presently, she is also an art lecturer in the local art institute. This year's Asiatopia is her debut performance in international festivals.



**JAPAN**

• **Kaori Haba** (Nagoya)

*kaori\_artplus@mac.com*

Since 1999, Kaori has been actively performing, both in Japan and abroad. She is also the director of Art-Plus-jp, a non-profit organization which creates art activities for communities in Nagano. These include annual performance workshops by overseas artists.



**MALAYSIA**

• **Ray Langenbach**

(Kuala Lumpur)

*exray@pd.jaring.my*

Based in Southeast Asia for more than a decade, Ray has exhibited at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Singapore Art Museum, Balai Seni Lukis Negara Malaysia, Whitney Museum of Art (New York), Artspace (Sydney) and many others. He also served as Singapore Editorial Consultant for World Art and currently serves on the Board of FOCAS (Forum on Contemporary Art & Culture) journal. Many of his writings have appeared in local and international publications.



**KOREA**

• **Hong O-Bong**

(Bucheon-city)

*odpaf@yahoo.co.kr*

A veteran in the performance art circuit, O-Bong's performances mostly deal with the inter-relationship between nature and society. He is presently a lecturer at Chungbuk University, and the director of BIPAF & KIPAF,



**MYANMAR**

• **Chit Ko Ko** (Sagaing)

*artist@cool.york.com*

One of a small growing community of performance artists in Myanmar, Ko Ko has actively promoted the art form, despite stringent laws and obvious constraints.



- **Thein Ei Chaw** (Myanmar)  
*chaw\_e@yahoo.com*

An active performance artist, Chaw Ei also runs the Sunflower Gallery in Rangoon with her father. She has taught private art classes for children, art therapy to the mentally ill and worked as a magazine editor. Chaw Ei belongs to a new rising generation of Burmese artists who have been also making inroads to many overseas exhibitions and festivals since the beginning of 2000.



- **Raquel De Loyola** (Manila)  
*eatempire@gmail.com*

Raquel's works primarily address issues of women, identity, colonization, migration, displacements, capitalism and globalization. She explores the innovation of established discipline, such as with soft sculpture, music and movement. Raquel is also active with the New World Disorder Network and Tupada.



## PHILIPPINES

- **Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez** (Manila)

*eileen.legaspi.ramirez@gmail.com*  
Eileen is the curatorial consultant of Lopez Memorial Museum and managing editor of Pananaw: Philippine Journal of Visual Arts. She is a faculty member of the University of the Philippines Department of Art Studies.



- **Jeho Bitancor** (Manila)  
*jehobit@yahoo.com*

Presently a creative consultant at Caritas Manila and Creative Collective Center, Jeho's artistic practices include painting, poetry, installation art and performances. As well as being active in his own country, Jeho has also exhibited frequently across USA.



- **Mideo Cruz** (Manila)  
*info@mideo.tk*

Mideo is an interdisciplinary artist-organizer who is identified with UGAT Lahi's portable murals and effigies in the 90s and later as convener of the multi-media event, Tupada. Now he is busy doing projects with the international artists' network New World Disorder and frequently invited for his ingenious actions around the globe. He is also a recipient of the 2003 Cultural Center of the Philippines award.



- **Rochit Tanedo** (Manila)  
*ccci@indanet.com*

As Executive Director of Creative Collective Center which she co- founded with colleagues from the media in 1986, Rochit envisions a society that is informed, aware and conversing, preferably through the arts, which she sees as a language that liberates and aims to transform. She curated and managed the "Who Owns Women's Bodies" exhibition which has visited fourteen destinations during 2000-2005. Currently she is producing a musical on HIV and AIDS.



## SINGAPORE

- **Kai Lam** (Singapore)  
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Active as an artist and an organizer of performance art events, Kai has traveled extensively to international performance art festivals. His works are a social commentary and creative response to urban pluralistic society.



- **Khairuddin Hori** (Singapore)  
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Khairuddin has explores and presents concepts through various media, including performance art, painting, sculpture, installation and theatre. Throughout his artistic undertakings, he maintains a constant drive for experimentation and the visceral. Since 1995, he has been active both in Singapore and abroad.



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Weng Choy is an art critic and artistic co-director of The Substation. He has written widely on contemporary art and Singapore, including essays on "Authenticity, Reflexivity and Spectacle; or, the Rise of New Asia is not the End of the World"; "Just What Is it that Makes the Term Global-Local So Widely Cited, Yet so Annoying?" and "Biennale Time and the Spectres of Exhibition".



• **Lynn Charlotte Lu**

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Lynn is an installation/performance artist and currently a PhD candidate at Musashino Art University in Tokyo. Her research investigates the true nature of reality, as accessed through the physical body via exploration of spiritual traditions from various cultures and eras.



**TAIWAN**

• **Ahlien Z.H.**

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Straddling both Taipei and Kaoshiung, Ahlien has worked as a street photographer, literary illustrator, chief editor of graphic design and designer/manager of fine arts material for various newspapers and magazines. In 2003, he founded Test Motion Taiwan International Performance Art Festival in Taipei.



**THAILAND**

• **Apinan Poshyananda**

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Prof. Dr Apinan is the Director-General, Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture. He has published and curated exhibitions on Asian Art in Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and South America. For his contribution to cultural exchange between Thailand and the Nordic countries, he was bestowed by King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden the rank of Knight, First Class, the Royal Order of the Polar Star.



• **Gridthiya Gaweewong**

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A founding member and co-director of project 304, Gridthiya has also worked as a visiting curator at the Chiang Mai University Art Museum. Currently an independent curator, her projects this year include, Interweaving Culture, Jim Thompson House Museum, Shadows and Spaces, House of World Cultures, Berlin, Bangkok Bangkok and the forthcoming 4th Bangkok Independent Film Festival.

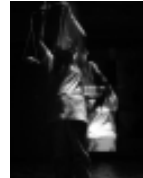


• **Jittma Phosawek**

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Jittima has been consistently contributing to the performance art scene since 1995. She is the director of "Art Culture and Environment" and last year organized the "Salaween Project" Artists Exchange program between Thai-Burma. Currently, she is also the director of a community research into the lives of the Andaman sea gypsies.



• **Kraisak Choonhavan**

(Bangkok)

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Chairman of the Thai Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee and a keen art supporter, Senator Kraisak is passionate about human rights and artistic freedom.



• **Kosit Juntaratip**

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A multimedia/performance artist, Kosit had been actively involved in many art projects in Chiang Mai in the 90s before leaving for further studies in Cologne, Germany. Since 2004, he has been a Lecturer of Media Art at the Media Arts and Design, Chiang Mai University. His recent solo exhibition, Kiss, was held at Bangkok University Gallery.



• **Michael Shaowanasai**

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Michael is an interdisciplinary artist whose projects range from performance, photography, film and video etc. A co-founder of independent art organization, project 304, Michael was also the organizer of the country's first Gay and Lesbian Film and Video festival in 2002. In 2003, he was invited to represent Thailand in the prestigious Venice Biennale.

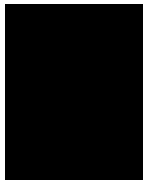


• **Mongkol Plienbangchang**

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A performance artist since 1995, Mongkol's performances have always been very intense, addressing the Thai political sphere with critical ideas. He has done more than 50 performances for many festivals, both locally and around Asia.



• **Nopawan Sirivejkul**

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Whether it's photography, video or in performances, Nopawan focuses mainly on gender issues, particularly on women and minority groups. She is also a radio programmer for Art & Culture and has been the manager of Asiatopia since 2000.



• **Padungsak**

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As the Director of Studio Xang, Chiang Mai, Padungsak champions initiatives which combine art, education, and activism. He is also a practicing artist and painting instructor at Chiang Mai University. As a performance artist, he has performed and exhibited frequently, both domestically and internationally. His artistic concerns revolve around issues of freedom and human rights.



• **Paisan Plienbangchang**

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Paisan is a well-known figure in the performance art scene both in Thailand and international arena. He has done more than 100 performances since 1993 and is interested in criticism of consumerism and attitudes in modern society.



• **Thanavi Chotpradit**

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Graduated in Art History (2nd Hons) from Silpakom University in 2002, Thanavi started writing on contemporary art for many magazines and catalogues. She has also worked in research/curatorial section for about art related activities (aara) from 2002 to 2004. Her recent project was "Observing ASIATOPIA (1998 to 2004)," the paper on ASIATOPIA International Performance Art Festival in Bangkok.



• **Thanom Chapakdee**

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Currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Thanom is also a renowned art critic in his own right. He is also the co-editor of Art World magazine and author of "The Critical idea of Contemporary Artists in Thailand."



• **Witchukorn Tangpaiboon**

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Witchukorn started performances in 1999 and his works are concerned about urban city life and its shortcomings. He has traveled extensively to regional performance festivals and is currently undertaking collaborative research with four other artists in Southern Thailand about "Sea Gypsies".



**VIETNAM**

• **Bui Cong Khanh** (Hoi An)  
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A young, upcoming performance artist in his country, Cong Khanh has organized performance activities in his hometown. In recent years, he has also traveled to many regional performance festivals.



• **Rich Streitmatter-Tran**  
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Graduated in the Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM) at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, Rich is an Asia Pacific correspondent for the Madrid-based bilingual arts magazine Art.Es and was awarded the 2005 Martell Contemporary Asian Art Research Grant for his project, "Mediating the Mekong". He is also a founding member of the Saigon-based art collective, ProjectOne, established in 2003.



• **Tran Luong** (Hanoi)  
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A founder of Hanoi Contemporary Art Center and director from 2000-2003, Tran Luong is also an accomplished performance artist and curator.

His curatorial projects include Mao Khe-Coal Mine Workshops and Exhibition in 2001 and Green, Red, Yellow in 2003. He has also conducted workshops on visual, performance and new-media in Hanoi.





# Observing ASIATOPIA (1998-2004) Performance Art in Thailand and Southeast Asia

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Observing ASIATOPIA (1998-2004)

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## Writer's Note

The Asiatopia performance art festival in Bangkok has been an annual event since 1998. Organized by Concrete House, this extraordinary gathering encourages the performance art network within Southeast Asia and opens doors to all international performance artists.

This text, *Observing Asiatopia* (1998-2004), is the first step in documenting the evolution of performance art in Southeast Asia. It is an attempt to locate and understand performance art; to observe the positions and situations of performance art, with a particular focus on performance art in Thailand.

Performance art belongs to a specific time and place. For the purposes of this document, Asiatopia's performances have been 'observed' both in real time/space and through video recordings. Experiencing performance art via these different media does have consequences; surely the impact of watching a performance in a screen can not be compared to the 'buzz' of an actual performance. There are, however, some advantages in viewing a number of recorded performances at one time. It is possible to observe certain styles and subjects that occur repeatedly; some patterns begin to emerge, and popularity that may not be able to be observed in the actual performance during the festival, since they were separated by

other fractions of time containing other events. The themes in this text are diffused from the repeating patterns observed in the performances.

The 'borders' of this text could be seen as both limited and unlimited at the same time. Like the Asiatopia festival itself, this research focuses on performance art in the Southeast Asia region, yet 'the Welcome mat is out' to other performance artists in other continents. Giving local examples, making references to contemporary artists in other parts of the world, and drawing on art history are approaches used in the crafting of this text. Asiatopia is the case study and though attempts have been made to be as inclusive and representational as possible, not all aspects of the Asiatopia performance art festival could be covered.

This text is just the beginning - the result of the observations collected and presented from the writer's point of views together with the connection from other exterior factors.

Therefore *Observing Asiatopia* (1998-2004) is both looking outside, and looking back inside-from Asiatopia to something else, and from something else to Asiatopia.

Thanavi Chotpradit  
Bangkok  
22 January 2005

## Localization: The co-inherent character of Southeast Asia

Further India, Little China, Indo China, etc; there were so many words created for calling the lands in this region. In the past each of the names was given according to the distinctive characters of each area; especially in the distinctive character of culture, such as Indo China-the land where Indian and Chinese cultures are blended together. The word "Southeast Asia" was actually new word created during the World War II, when the Allies force came into this area and set up the commanding centre. The word was created according to its geographical condition, since it's the independent land locating in between South Asia (India), and East Asia (China)<sup>1</sup>

To defy all aspects of "Southeast Asia" can not be done by trying to find its cultural unity; because Southeast Asia consists of many races and various cultures. However; the unity of this region exists on its ability of "localization". It is the ability in adapting something from different cultures, and chooses to accept, adapt and change them into something of its own, affected by both the geographical factors such as the location of the community, and by other cultural factors.



The fact that this area locates in between India and China, the lands where old, ancient civilizations originated, and it is also

under the influence of the monsoon, which did not only make this area become so fertile, but also create such a perfect condition for the area to be the ship route. All the ships that had to wait for the monsoon in order to sail on had to stop at ports, which later had developed themselves into Maritime States. For being the passing route, this area had become the meeting point of people from different places. People began to have cultural interaction; they learnt about each other, sometimes the ships stopped for a long time that marriages between visitors and locals happened, led to the creation of multicultural community. (This was the reason why Maritime State grew faster than the state located in land, for it had less opportunity to interact and contact with other cultures, but the disadvantage of Maritime State was that once the trade route changed, the states would suddenly died of) When we look into the details, these cultures didn't seem to have any unity, but once we look at them in the larger scale, we will find that the unity exists in their ability of adaptation-it's the unity lies in the variety.

There were sayings that Southeast Asia was full with Indian civilization. The acceptance of Indian civilization did not start and end in a short period of time, but took thousands of years. In the early stage, only the merchants and monks traveled here for trade

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<sup>1</sup> Originally used was "South East Asia" , then it was changed into "Southeast Asia" in order for the meaning to give the impression of the independent piece of land based on its geographical location. However; it was the "independence" defined by the Western, and it was the western that came into this region to establish the military commanding centre, therefore; "independence" also contains the meaning of not owned by anyone, and that could be the implication that the person who gave the definition could earn the right in taking over this area, by combining with the aspect of self-superior.



and religious propagation. It's assumed that the first actual interaction took place in the early B.C., due to the expanding trade, together with the progress in the sailing technology. Another factor was the declination of caste system of Buddhism. Originally, Indian merchants despised traveling abroad, because they had to travel with another caste (sailors), but after Buddhism became popular in India, the merchants started to convert to Buddhism. (The merchants do not like Brahman because they are exploitative, since Brahman is the mouth of God, people need them in order to conduct rituals, and as we all know that these rituals cost a lot of money. Therefore; the rise of Buddhism was in a way, the reaction against the power of Brahman and caste system) Moreover; monks could travel, so the relationship was not only about trade, but it also created the perception of the existence of other places, which would finally lead to the expanding, and borrowing of one another's cultures.

The widespread acceptance of Indian culture in this region was not only in the aspect that the locals were only the receiver, or forced to accept, but a part of it happened because the locals themselves seek for it. The monks from this region also travel to India by the support of their kings. The results from seeing different culture and the progressive civilization of India made the ruler class want to accept those higher culture in order to fulfill their needs. Therefore; we can see that the most distinctive acceptance of Indian culture was politics. The fact that this area consisted of many small communities with so many varieties, it is important to find the way to integrate the varieties into one united community under one ruler. This was the time when Indian beliefs and rituals played their parts as the link that drawn and blended in the local beliefs together as one.

But then again, the acceptance of Indian culture was not something like making the exact copy from the original. Each local was different in its own way, but they did share one similar process in order to fit the already existed attitudes and values-the process of "localization". This is why we can see ghosts, ancestors, and natural spirits being worshiped along with the arrival of new religious. Languages and "arts" have also been through certain adaptations, and formed their own specific characters. Society and the way of lives became more complicated, so the founding of a state under the accepting process of the influence of Indian civilization was originated from the need and desire of the locals themselves. The Indian beliefs had gradually blended in, and finally deeply become a part of each society in the region of Southeast Asia, by considering most to the profits, and advantages of people who used them. What was considered to be the profitability, it would be chosen to practice. Therefore; Southeast Asia is not the twin of India, but it's something more like a creation than just a copy.

No cultures are pure from any exterior influences. The thing we call culture changes all the time; once an interaction occurs, it is both the given and taken, and it is the same with Southeast Asia. It has been for thousands of years that we have taken different kinds of cultures, and blended them in together; from India (Buddhism, Brahms, Islamic), China, and other societies in the same region. However; the fact that we have never felt that these cultures are something that do not "belong to us" is probably because the period of time when the acceptance took place had passed for a long time, and what we have taken had already founded itself before we were born, so we felt (naturally) that these things have already

existed, and they are “a part of” Southeast Asia’s society, not something that came from “outside”.

Nevertheless; with the same question, if the target is pointed at Western cultures, the answer, or our perception toward this question will suddenly be different. Why is that?

The answer is probably because the method of the arrival of Western culture was different; for it came in the form of colonialism. Moreover; the time of its arrival was very fast and sudden, unlike the gradually arrival of ancient Indian culture. The foundation requires time and acceptance through the selected process by the owner of the culture itself. However; almost every country in Southeast Asia were colonized by the Western great power countries, the result was that the expanding of Western culture gave the impression of unwillingness, including the re-construction of the society by using Western’s standards and methods, which was not something that originated from the need of the locals themselves, and they could hardly choose what was right for their cultures, because the context of the creation of Western culture was completely different from Southeast Asia. The consequence was that, every country fought their ways out from being colonized.

In these days, Western culture has already found their way in, and existed in this region; the days of being colonized (in old ways) had gone by. However; the present day’s condition which is sometimes called “culturally colonized” was, somehow origi-

nated from different causes comparing to what happened before. It is interesting thing to notice that, the way in accepting Western culture these days has the similar method with what had happened when we started to accept Indian culture in the old days-basing on the need and desire of the locals themselves.

In this case, we are not forced to accept anymore. As the center of the new world order, there are more civilized cultures that we are willing to accept in order to develop ourselves. It is the same perception we had towards India and China in the old days. (In this case we will not discuss if it’s REALLY better or not) The example, such as in the case of Thailand, which there was an interesting analysis said that, the “Modernization” of Siam started in the reign of King Rama 4 did not happen only for the reason in trying to protect the country from colonialism, but it was also the attempt in trying to be “Modern/modern” in the same time.<sup>2</sup> The word “civilization” rooted from the words “civilize/civilized” is something based on the Western’s standard. How do we know for a fact that what it is to be considered as civilized? (developed, modern) It is by comparing with the western’s standard. Therefore; if we do not want to be left out, or outdated, we will have to adapt ourselves according to that standard. It is the attempt of trying to catch up with the world, and adapt our identity. This is something that we are still doing today, in every country, not only in Siam or Thailand. It is certain that in order to accept those cultures, there has to be some sort of selected, adapted, re-interpreted process to go through, and for that matter, it does

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<sup>2</sup> Thongchai Winichakul. *“In what condition called civilized? When Siamese upper class people in the time of King Prajulajomgloa the Great seek for their status through domestic and international journeys and museums”* **Political Science Journal**. year 24 issue2 (2546), P. 1-66.

not always mean that underneath the western skin, there has to be the flesh of western inside. This half blood condition appears in every dimension of life, and was created from certain abilities that have become our own specific character and qualification. We are able to choose, and pick out things, then adapt them into something of our own with-

out any doubt or hesitation. By the process of localization, it is allowed for cultures to exchange, and blend in, especially when considering that we are living in the time of the highly active communication, which is erasing every border existed; what is "real", and what is "fake" might not be the most important question anymore.

## Arts and Politics: Do miracles really exist?

One of the most contemporary issues is the relationship between arts and politics. How arts and politics are related to each other is the issue that has been discussed for a long period of time. Some says that art has to be separated from politics, while some says that art has to be related to politics, as one part of the society (because art is a part of the society). The discussions might not need to have any definite conclusions; the time of conflict between art for art's sake and art for life/society in Thailand had passed. These days both sides have their own paths and there is no need to try to make everyone become 'the same' they may be different in their principal, but they are all united under the shadow of 'arts.

In the part of performance art, it seems 80 percent of the artists create their works under the topics related to social and political matters. This is the issues that can not be overlooked, and has to be discussed, nevertheless; it is not the discussion made to separate, or point out that "art for life/society" is more valuable than "art for art's

sake", because ultimately, we may not be able to completely separate these two things from each other. In the cultural aspect, the study should be focused on the differences in terms of patterns and forms, more than in the aspect of hierarchy, which can be interpreted as social class discrimination that will lead us to nothing but conflict and controversy.

### **The shifting between Arts and politics: Whose tool does it belong to?**

One surprising thing about the relationship between arts and politics is that we usually see arts relating to politics as something that are created by people in order to express their thoughts against the power of the government. It is a part of the tool used in the fighting for something such as freedom, equality, and democracy for instance. Is it possible that this concept is the inheritance of the phenomenon called "coup d'etat" that happened for the first time in France 1789-the incident that had become the role model for many countries to follow?

Even though; in these days, only few people have actually realized in this beginning, but the relationship between arts and politics existed in different forms, long before what happened in France in 1789. The Western and Eastern ancient states all used arts as a tool in the founding of their Empires, the control over people, norms, beliefs, and traditions were all created and spread out by the use of arts as one important tool. State and hierocracy are the two binary of power combined, and together they create something for the existence of the society.

In the case of the Eastern world, especially in Southeast Asia where Indian civilization has been localized; Buddhism and Hinduism beliefs has enormous influences in the structure of the society. Fine Arts (Even though; in that time, there was no such word created. The word "Arts" was used to call mural paintings, Buddha images, Buddha statues, temples, palaces, Dhevalai, etc, although the meaning of the word stands for completely different concepts. In fact, this is what happened all over the world, not the special phenomenon that happened only in this region) was something physically touchable. The concept of Mount Meru, a Brahmanic cosmological thought (which absorbed into Theravada) was something used to specify the structure of the city including the relationship between each city. These ancient states planned their cities' structure according to Mount Meru, which is the underlaid rings that their significances are considered according to their positions from the center of the ring.(the further the ring is from the center, the less important that ring is) The center of Mount Meru is considered as

the capital city; the copy of this cosmological belief is itself has many layers under laid, not only in architectures, but also in murals paintings, which have the structure conveying the hierarchical significance according to the existed classes in the society-social organizing.<sup>3</sup>



*Thai mural painting from Nai Rong Temple, Bangkok. The king (noble man) looks different from the ordinary people.*

Professor Frank Reynolds from the University of Chicago once gave the opinion that the works of arts in the early Rattanakosin Era convey such an interesting political message. He gave the example in the case of the Emerald Buddha that it was the result of the victory of Thai over Laos. Taking away the sacred Buddha was like taking away the Empire's symbol. Therefore; the Emerald Buddha has become the sacred image of Thai Empire instead; the tool used in the founding of power of the new dynasty-Ckakkri Dynasty with the capital city in Bangkok, while the Ramayana mural painting at the Emerald Temple is about Narain (the Rama of Hinduism)'s reincarnation; the

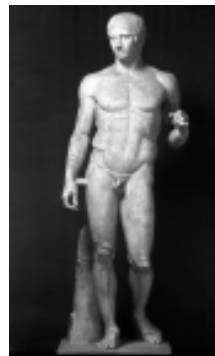
<sup>3</sup>Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool. **The Language of Thai Painting: A Study of Painting Codes and Social Cultural Meaning of Buddhist Painting in Early Rattanakosin.** Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute. Thammasat University, 1993.

story of the man who conquered the Ravana of the Ramayana (Tossagan god)—another race. (the same as the victory of the Aryan over the Milaca in India, the place where the story of Ramayana Epic was originated) This can be considered as something that helped emphasize the dynasty's charisma, by having the Emerald temple as the national sacred sanctuary, and the Emerald Buddha placed on the center, surrounded by the story about Ramayana in which perfectly symbolizes the two binary of power between the state and the hierarchy.<sup>4</sup>

This is why the perspective of people in the old days was deeply combined with religion; this perspective was expressed through architectures and objects. Therefore; arts is a series of symbols conveying the society's structure by the consent of the state. In this sense, it means that the state has eventually depended on arts as a tool in founding itself together with organizing the relationship of people in the society.

In the Western world itself, the power of arts has been recognized ever since in the Greek era, otherwise; Plato (427-347 B.C.) who diminishes the status of arts to the third copy of reality wouldn't be intimidated by the power of arts and poetry. Plato sees arts and poetry as something so powerful that can draw people into, but because he values "reason" more than "emotion"; sees the significance of "public" more than "personal", and as the philosopher who wrote a book about politics, he sees arts as something that can lead people's minds to

chaos. Therefore; in those days, it was important to control arts in order for it to cooperate with the state. The good state is the justice state, and moralistic people are rational people (ARETE); arts has to eventually allow for this to happen, because arts is a copy, therefore; it has to copy great things. This is why Plato's concept towards the world of forms led Greek Arts to the style of that can still be seen today—the sculptures of ideal men and women. (referring to gods and goddesses of another world) The role of arts is to be the link that will lead people to virtue, and peaceful society.<sup>5</sup>



*Polykleitos, Doryphoros, c.450-440 B.C. Marble, 212 cm. high. Museo Archaeologico, Naples*

The value of arts is not what within arts itself, but it's something that has the political purpose as the main composition. From this beginning, even though; it exists in different forms, we can somehow still see that arts and politics are the two things related, and has become a part of the governing tool of

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<sup>4</sup>Chetana Nagavajara. "Arts Leading Each Other in Thai Culture" **Silp Song Thang**. Bangkok: Kombang Publishing, 2003. P. 57-58.

<sup>5</sup>U-thong Kowinta. **Plato and Nietzsche's Opinions toward Aesthetics (lecture)**. Knowledge Installation Project. Beyond Paradise: Nordic Artists Travel East. The National Gallery, Bangkok. 28th February 2003.

the rulers. We can not say that arts is the only social mechanism that keeps the society moving, but still, the concept of arts having to have the political functions, roles in educating, and leading people (the concept has finally become one of the criterions in valuing a piece of art) can be traced back to the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), one of Plato's successors with his famous work "Poetics". During the time called "Neo-Classic" in France in the late 18th century was the time of the coming back of the style of Greek and Roman. Originally, "Classic" was something highly considered, and related to the upper class people, however; in that moment, the rich luxurious Rococo style was very popular among French upper class people,



*Jean-Honore Fragonard, The Swing, 1767, Oil on Canvas, 64 x 81 cm. The Wallace Collection, London*

therefore; the middle class people who were stepping up to their roles in the society had to find something that was opposite to "classic". It finally became the issue of people

reacting against the magniloquent of the monarchy<sup>6</sup>, and seeking for something with completely different forms and subjects.

The aesthetics of Neo-Classic can be summed up by the words of the German art historian, Johann Joachim Winckelmann- "Noble Simplicity and Calm Rander". Nobility (more than Rococo) in terms of subject is about the practicing of something (thought to be) Greek.<sup>7</sup> Therefore; Greek sculptures influenced both in the forms of arts, and social beliefs; including the ideals of human spirits-morality, brave, sacrifice, pride, and the efficiency of the Spartan and Roman Empires' politics. This is the reason why arts gives the implication of thoughts, and lessons as an example of exemplum. One of the leading artists of Neo-Classic-Jacques - Louis David created the painting "The Death of Socrates" (1787)



*Jacques-Louis David, The Death of Socrates, 1782, Oil on Canvas, 130 x 196 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*

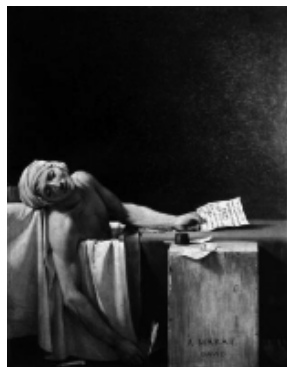
because Socrates' mortality was one example of an individual who sacrificed his life

<sup>6</sup> The meaning of "Classic" is, therefore; something indefinite, but relative. It occurred from the comparing to what existed earlier-negative. This is why the meaning of the word when used in different times (Greek, Roman, Renaissance, Neo-Classic until present day) does not give out the exact same meaning, but depend on the surrounded contexts.

<sup>7</sup> Greek is something chosen by the later generation; it's the imagination about what "Greek" was like. The myth of "being Greek" has become the criterion of all virtues, even though; in reality Greek also has many other dimensions.

for his principle. The painting shows the image of Socrates holding a cup of poison in his hand, while he's talking to his successors; looking so calm, even though; he's dying. As we all know, Socrates who had so many students was forced to accept the charge of disturbing peacefulness of the society. The state gave him a deal that he could get away with the accusation, if he accepted that what he had done was a mistake, but Socrates held on to his belief, and chose to drink the poison instead. The result was the end of his mortal life, but the immortality of his teachings has lived on. His story has pointed out the attempt of an ordinary individual who was trying to be a part of political matters, but was destroyed by the power of the state. Therefore; it is no surprise why David who was one of the members of the political movement group (the Jacobin) created this painting.

Later, the contemporary political events during that time had become David's subjects in creating his paintings. They strongly conveyed his political beliefs, such as the painting "The Death of Marat" (1793),



Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 128 cm. Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

one of the leader of the Jacobin who was assassinated in a bath tub. David composed Marat's gesture referring to Jesus-the sacred mortality of the sacrificed; the common man hero who sacrificed his life for his belief, same as Socrates. The subject of heroic tragedy is also considered as Greek style.

In France 1789, there was the rise of people against the monarchy, with the determination to change the society into democratic society (as Roman). It was the result of people resented in the luxurious, lavish lifestyle of the French dynasty of that time, while the working class people were taken advantage of, together with the increasing role of the middle class people in the society, led to the successful people revolution, which had set the example for many countries to follow later. The motto "*Freedom, Equality, Fraternity*" was spread out all over. It was the time called "*Enlightenment*" (the Age of Enlightenment), the reaching of enlightenment contained the aspect of enlighten thoughts that came with rationality of science, and replacing religious obsession. It was the deliberation of people, in order for them to have privileges, and freedom in many ways, especially in the political participation.

"*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*" became the declaration of political principal appearing in every area, including the regime of arts. As we can see, Eugène Delacroix created the painting "Liberty Leading the People" in 1830 as the memory of the revolution, by personifying liberty as a topless maiden holding French flag leading the people, and from his personal memo, this message was found— "...even though; I wasn't a part of the fighting for my country, at least I will paint for my country..." (during the incident, Delacroix was not in France).



*Eugène Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People, 1830, Oil on Canvas, 260 x 325 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris*

We can say that this was the time when arts and people truly stood together. But arts involving politics has to be only about arts involving people's revolution? If not, it means that there are other kind of relationships between arts and politics. As a matter of fact, arts have always been related to politics, depending only on which side it stands for. Why do we think of arts with the political purpose only in the aspect of arts and revolution? On the other hand, arts used by the empowered people/state are also directly involving with politics, or when we talk about propaganda, it's all about politics. There are so many examples in the using of arts as state's propaganda.

One of the most interesting artists in the history of arts and politics is David. As mentioned earlier that David joined the Jacobin, which turned France into Republic. His works were the conveyance of his political beliefs, but when Napoleon founded himself, and started the consul system, (and later became the Emperor) David became Napoleon's favorite painter, and had created many paintings to honor Napoleon. The style

of Classic swung back to be the subject matter about the upper class people, having Napoleon compared himself to the Roman Emperor. (for being the great warrior, Napoleon admires the Romans more than Greeks) The painting "Napoleon at St. Bernard Pass" (1801)



*Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon at St. Bernard Pass, 1802, Oil on Canvas, 245 x 231 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*

was the attempt of creating himself the right to become the Emperor, the same as many great kings in the past. St. Bernard pass is the historical significance area, because it's a rough ruthless pass to Austria, both of the Roman Generals-Hannibal and King Charlemagne had been through this pass, their names were carved on the ground, (the names do not appear in the actual scenery, but appears in the painting) therefore; this painting contains the symbolical significance that Napoleon is as great as these two great warriors.

The ideal of this painting is also revealed by the fact that Napoleon was actually raiding a mule when he passed St. Bernard pass, not a horse as shown in the painting.<sup>8</sup> It can be said that David's works of art in the later

<sup>8</sup> In this case, it clearly shows that we can not depend on arts as the exact historical information indicator, as what usually been said that arts is the "reflection" of the society as if that arts is the historical illustration. Because, inside the artists' minds, during the creation of their works, are different factors and conditions. These hidden contexts (the order of the person who hires the artists, and the relationship that they have with each other, including the ideals of the person who hires, or of the artists themselves, etc.) have the effect on the "fact" of a story told in a painting. Therefore; the consideration of arts as the reflection of the society should not overlook the mentioned aspects.

period of time had switched side to the dictator instead, so David is the artist full of uncertainty. It was clearly that the changes of the political conditions effected the creation of his works.

Other well known examples of arts used as state's propaganda are the arts of the Stalin in Italy, and the Nazi in German. The forms of Realism were used, because they were easy accessed, and easy to be used as the stimulator.



*The propaganda poster of the Nazi*

The rise of Abstract was, therefore; stopped during the World War I, because it was seen as deterioration.



*Piet Mondrian, Opposition of Lines: Red and Yellow, c.1917, 24 x 32 inch.*


The works in the heroic style created in order to rouse people was called "Social Realism", emphasizing on the figure; both in

paintings and posters were the images of serious looking soldiers. The rise of dictatorship was in consequence, the coming back of the realism style; on the other hand, what happened after the victory of the United States was also the end of Realism. The United States who won the war has eventually become the center of arts, moreover; many European artists evacuated to the United States during the war. The Abstract has made its come back as the works of arts of the free world. (or maybe this is the reason we usually see the word "freedom" together with works in the abstract style) In this sense, arts was also used for the political purpose, only that it changed side to the free world instead. Since then, it seems like Realism has become the minor trend, while the United States as the center of the new world order tried to get rid of the influence of the European arts, in which the United States had been in the position of the follower for a long time. The accomplishment was reached after the arrival of Jackson Pollock, and the American Abstract Expressionism.



*Jackson Pollock and the Action Painting (Photography by Hans Namuth, 1950)*

We can observe from the passed history that arts and politics has always been related, because arts involves directly with the authoritative relationship between differ-



ent groups of people (in another word-class), and it is a part of the creation and indication of the perception of people in the society. If we carefully consider, all forms of arts always contain certain implications of authoritative relationship, so it's not only just the state's propaganda, and the stimulating works from the people that relate to politics, but other forms of creations also contain the implication of this subject matter as well. However; we can not say that arts itself creates and indicates the perceptions of people in the society, because on the other hand; the society itself, creates and indicates the perception of arts, too. What is what, and will it be accepted? The judge is the society, both the arts society, and the society in general. (even though; these two societies might disagree) It's the process of selecting and estimating, so there's nothing, not involving with power, therefore; if we are going to talk about the word "power" with the meaning in the larger aspect than the state, we might be able to say that there are no places that freed from the existence of power.

### Myths

Myth means the conveying of meaning by cultural beliefs which are perfectly covered into something that appears to be acknowledged as natural; to be seen as "truth". It is with the familiarity, which leads us to think that this thing has already "existed", and "natural", without noticing that it is in fact, the composition of cultures. Myth does not occur vaguely without any roots; it is the social and cultural output of a group or class of people, or many groups and

classes of people, by strongly relating itself to politics, economics, and society as the historical context indicating its own existence. We can say that it's a certain limitation of ideas, or concepts, implanted in our instinct, affecting the way we see, and perceive things. Myth does not refer only to verbal language or alphabets, but also refer to all objects and phenomenon that convey certain meanings. The conditions, in which myths are created, are from the process that the society and culture give out meanings and values (both good and bad) to something, and turn it into "truth". Myth is, therefore; a delusion, but it's a delusion thought to be "truth". In this sense, Roland Barthes' "myth" is very close to Michel Foucault's "discourse".<sup>9</sup> Even this writing itself, is also something like a discourse, trying to find some space for arts as the selected history.

We can find myth unavoidably appears in everywhere, and we may say that myth occurs when people step in, in order to perceive it, and start to create the meaning for it. In the part about arts, it's apparently that there has been the use of myth in the working process. It happens as if it's the underlaying of the society's myths (toward objects and phenomenon), in order for them to finally become arts' myths. The process in conveying meanings in the works of arts is done firstly, by an artist (the first creator) chooses to use "sign" in conveying the meaning of his/her works; the acknowledged, well known signs are chosen, adapted, modified, and given new meanings by creating the logical aspects for themselves. They can be something closely related to, or go beyond their point of origins.

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<sup>9</sup>In the most short and comprehensive term, a discourse is the authorized words or writing, created by the noble intellectuals from every field of knowledge, given, spread out to the society. (according to Foucault's thought; knowledge is power) A discourse is like the frame we have toward our perceptions of what happens in the society.

The creation of the artist, who is an individual living in a society, is, therefore; unavoidably related to the social concepts in which, without a doubt, affect the artist's artistic concepts as well (both positively and negatively).

As mentioned earlier, the concept of Arts for society/people (Arts for life's sake) itself is considered a myth, which indicates the limitation of aspects of an artist's way of working, and his/her perspective towards the world (including the perspective he/she has towards himself). Since when have we considered arts as something powerful? Plato? Even though; he had pointed out pretty negative aspects about arts, but the status of arts and artists have just been lifted up in the Renaissance, when the promotion of painting as a part of Liberal Arts was the liberation from the concept of the craftsmanship in the Middle Age. On the contrary, the artists (painters) were the intellectuals, and arts (painting) was the intellectual creation of the noble thoughts. Until in the 19<sup>th</sup> century-the Age of Romanticism, the myth about artists became the matter of the special individuals with the glorified genius and intelligence quality, and arts was the revelation of life, human spirits, and the world. Therefore; the artists-the creators of arts, who have the special perceptions, were able to see nature's great power, and its relationship with human beings. The following psychoanalytic discourse of Sigmund Freud in the 20<sup>th</sup> century confirmed the myth of the artist as

the special individual, by indicating that the creations of an artist occur from the artist's psychological dilemma. Freud's suggestion has opened us to the world of subconscious-the place where arts is originated.<sup>10</sup>

The belief in the "extraordinary" of artists has inherited until the present time, and it has taken artists to the position of the leader of the society, by creating the works of arts containing subject matters that reflect, or criticize all aspect of the society, especially in the political aspect.<sup>11</sup> From the myth of saying that artists are people with special vision, the status of artists has been lifted up to something that can be compared to god (apotheosis of the arts), however; in the negative aspect, the society's perception towards artists can also be about the craziness as well. The work of these artists are various, from the revelation of the dark side of the society, criticizing and suggesting the solutions. (the solution may reach the level of something very idealistic) Arts is, therefore; functioning from revealing the chosen facts, to giving out the opinions (of the selector-the artist), and purposing the solutions, most likely to be the stimulation in the creation of reflecting the "truth". (as the artists usually claim) Therefore; be aware that the images you see in the mirror might be something "twisted" by the artist's perspective as a big influential factor, and as a result; the meanings conveyed are discourses, not the empirical reality.

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<sup>10</sup>Noppom Prachakul. **Discourses in Contemporary arts (lecture)**, Plan B. Publishing. 5th December 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Nowadays, the issue about the genius of artists is crushed by the concept of intertextuality, concerning the ideas of taking everything that already existed, and blending them into one efficient story. Intertextuality is, therefore; counterbalancing with the structuralism study, which prefer only in the interpretation of the text without considering anything else; if should, it suppose to have the interaction with the exteriors-contexts. However; many writings claiming themselves for being Postmodernism, which is usually the grabbing, and mixing of everything under the excuse of "context", disappointingly often overlook the text itself.

Even though; arts for society/people is just a myth, in which we should no longer naively consider as the "truth" anymore, however; that myth has pointed out certain social conscious, and functioning roles of artists in the present society. We might not be able to say that, practically, arts will be the hand that's going to change the world to nobility, but it's functioning as a warning, and a reminder that brings people to the certain level of realization. As the Indonesian artist, Iwan Wijono once said *"I don't believe that art can change political situations, but art can make people think"*.<sup>12</sup>

**Political matter: context: the cause of the appearances of others**

If we are going to consider that a concept (or myth) is what indicates the creating process of an artist, we couldn't help finding out, which phenomenon in the society is the influential factor allowing for that concept to happen. In the case of Thailand, the concept about the obligation of arts to politics has founded itself by the discourse about "Arts for life, Arts for people" by Jitr Bhumisak (1930-19), the Left thinker who was assassinated by the government while he was hiding in the forest with the Thai Communist Party. During the time of his life, was the time when Thailand was ruled by the dictatorship government. The situation of that time was under the intense controversy between the government and the university students and avant-garde intellectuals. People who had given out the political opinions, or involving in the political move-

ments before the coup d'etat in 1958 were later, arrested after the coup had accomplished. Moreover; the revolutionary committee had the order in shutting down some newspaper, and magazines that reported and presented the news criticizing the government, or published the socialism literatures. They also declared the list of books classified as "contraband", in which the person who owned it would be convicted as committing the crime for being a communist. (the fear for communism of Thai Government was the result of the backing up of the United States during the Cold War) The government authority controlled the freedom of the medias and the intellectuals, which meant that the intellectuals' ideas were limited from any acknowledgement of the public; even the writers had to censor themselves for the sake of their own security, some had to change their story into other kinds of subject matters, in which would not be banned from the government. These censoring operations were executed continuingly from the government of Marshall Plag Phibulsongkram in the late of 1940s to the early of 1950s.

It was during this time that there were many creations of writing influenced by the Socialism. In arts, there was the occurrence of the concept "Arts for life's sake" by Jitr Bhumisak, the significant intellectual of that time. Bhumisak's writing suggested that arts has to contain the subject matter about the reflections of people's lives that were oppressed in the society, people who were taken advantage of by the dictatorship gov-

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interaction with the exteriors-contexts. However; many writings claiming themselves for being Postmodernism, which is usually the grabbing, and mixing of everything under the excuse of "context", disappointingly often overlook the text itself.

<sup>12</sup>Iwan Wijono. Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19th November 2004.

ernment. The artists had to create their works in order to serve the benefits of people more than the benefits of the ruler class or investors; students were cultivated the idea in the purpose of their education that they had to practice all knowledge in order to serve people, not themselves. Arts and poetry for life played a very important part in creating this realization, but the interesting point was that, it was from the government's censorship that had made the censored publishing, and activities become popular again in the later period of time. Because all the banned publishing were kept in the house of writers, some were in Thammasat University's library, some were in publishing houses, or used books stores, and they were spread out among the certain group of people during 1960s. These writings were like the awakening inscriptions, which enormously influenced the people revolution incident on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 including the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 incident.<sup>13</sup>



*The revolution on Rachadamnern Rd.*

From the political situation of that time, it was no surprise why Bhumisak set such a high criterion for arts. As the Left thinker who studied Marxism, the opposing of imperial-

ism, and feudalist investors were the core of his belief; Socialism, in that time was the choice for him in order to fight the dictating authority of the military government. Arts, which used to be something involving with temples and palaces (the upper class people) was challenged by another form of arts-arts for life's sake, arts for society, which is something completely different both in subjects and forms. Bhumisak said that the arts of the upper class people were the belonging of specific group of people; it was something too sublime and complex beyond the understanding of ordinary people. Bhumisak who had always fought for the inequality of classes in the society, of course, said that the superior arts is the arts with the forms that can be comprehended by the public, containing valuable subject matters for mankind, and having the ability in inducing people to virtue and nobility.

*"Isn't now the time when we can all be united, for the opening of the new era of Arts, so that it can keep on moving to the right path? Isn't now the time for all artists to finally turn away from the belief of "Arts for Arts' sake"? Please turn, all honorable artists, to the belief that Art should serve the life of the public, by becoming the great role model, and bright leading torch that will lead the lives of all human beings to the glorified nobility, that is 'Arts for lifes'sake."<sup>14</sup> (Translated from Thai to English by Tanakanya Changchaitum)*

We can call this as the manifesto that spoke out very clearly of what arts should be, and what is the function of an artists. In the

<sup>13</sup> Prajak Kongkeerati. "Politics of the Memories of Military Dictatorship (2501-2516 B.E.): Destruction/Nostalgia and Political Inspirations" Political Science Journal. Year 24. Issue 2 (2003), P. 206-296.

<sup>14</sup> Teepagorn (Jitr Bhumisak's pen name). *"What it is to be called as Arts? The Nobility Coming From its Sacred Complexity, or Something else" Arts for Life, Arts for People*. Bangkok: Srimueng Publishing, 1974, P. 41

aspect of Arts should not be separated from ordinary people, and artists have to work in order to serve that function, has created the paradox that, whether the artists are just ordinary people, or someone more special than others. Because, from this writing, it shows that the power of arts is something that can lead mankind to nobility by criticizing the society-arts will be the voice of morality, holding on to great ideals-the brave of the artists will be the shining light that will lead the way - enlightenment !?!

Bhumisak's writings became popular, and were spread out again after his death, together with the popularity in the study of other writings created during that same period of time. It was until 1960s. After the coup by the revolutionary committee in 1958 that the awakening of the lives and works of the Left writers was highly influenced the intellectual movements that will lead to the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 incident. It was the reincarnation of the government's undesirable discourses, and the situation of that time (the government of Marshall Sarit Thanarat and Mrshall Thanom Kittikachon) was accidentally similar to the political condition during the creation of those writings (Marshall Plag Phiboonsongkram). Students and intellectuals in this period of time all felt that the lives and works of the earlier avant-gardes were something mysterious and intriguing. It became popular to bring back those writings, and studied them, in which later had led to the creation of the discourse about their own political identity.<sup>15</sup> In the part of arts, it was Bhumisak's "Arts for life, Arts for people" that spread out; the phrase "Arts for life's sake" was wildly discussed among

many student and intellectual journals. The discussions were offensive and direct criticisms against the school of "Arts for Arts' sake", and had become the two binary of opposition between 2 beliefs. Bhumisak kept reminding this concept, and it started to become the concrete principles and regulations-passionately and stimulating.

*"If you are a humanist, please turn, come back from the deluded, selfish world, and start serving people with your arts! To serve people's lives with Arts does not mean to produce such a low careless, slapdash works. On the contrary, it means the using of arts to arouse people, for that they can wake up, and see through the objective reality of life. Arousing them to find the way to change all the ugliness of life to nobility! Reflecting the creative reality; use your arts as the spear and torch; be the spear, pointing toward people's enemy-the enemy who drag people's lives to ugliness...be the torch, and successfully leading the long march of people to great nobility...reveal this for everyone to see:*

1. *The ugliness of the actual life.*
  2. *The beginning of the ugliness of life.*
  3. *The solution in turning that ugliness into nobility.*
  4. *The example of the arriving nobility of life. ....this is how arts should serve people.*<sup>16</sup>
- (Translated from Thai to English by Tanakanya Changchaitum)

"Bhumisak's aesthetics" obviously revealed the Marxism concept that lies within, and in his works themselves, constantly referred to Leo Tolstoy-the Russian intellectual who wrote the book "What is Art?". For

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<sup>15</sup> Prajak Kongkeerati. (Ibid). P. 223-225.

<sup>16</sup> Teepagorn (Jitr Bhumisak's pen name). "Is There Such Thing as Pure Arts". Ibid. P. 87-88.

Bhumisak, good arts, therefore; means arts functioning as a tool in political proclamation; it was the belief resulted from the social condition surroundings at the time. When time had passed to the period before the October, 14<sup>th</sup> incident, the similar political atmosphere had brought back such popularity in Bhumisak's works, in which had eventually turned in to some sort of the inscriptions for many artists and activists. It was the birth of the new generation writers under the name of the "Crescent Moon Group", or many visual artists whose works contained the subjects of social criticism, such as "Dhamma Group", or Chang Tang, including the students from many arts colleges. These people had stepped in, and involved with many political movements together with people from various parts of the society, led to the people's march in 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. During that period of time, Performance art did not exist in Thai society yet, but there were certain activities that seemed to be some sort of a prediction that someday, this form of art would eventually have the role in the political matters. The activity was acting, or at least if we wouldn't call it as some sort of drama; we could consider it as the expression of thoughts through acting, which is something closely similar to the Performance art of the present time. The incident of two officers of the Provincial Electricity Authority in Nakhon Prathom province, who were killed, and hanged in public by the policemen,



*The victims of the dictatorship.*

while they were putting out the announcement protesting Marshall Tanom for his secretly coming back to Thailand, becoming monk, was the subject being discussed at Lan Pho in Thammasat University. There was the reenactment of the hanging incident by the students who were the members of the Performing Art and Drama Club.<sup>17</sup>



*The performance (?) of the students in Thammasat University*

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<sup>17</sup>Later, the student who performed in this reenactment, Mr. Anan Buahapakdi was convicted for committing lese majesty of the Thai Crown Prince, however; there were some people questioning Dao Siam Newspaper that they had done something with the picture, so the image turned out to be pretty similar to the image of the Crown Prince. There were continually broadcastings of this hoax by Amour Radio Transmitting Station of Thai Royal Army, which led to the massacre at Thammasat University on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1976.

Moreover; there were the performances composed with poetry reading marching together with the protestors, including people dressing in the mockery of the United States (for example dressing as the Statue of Liberty), people dressing in dirty outfits holding guns in their hands.<sup>18</sup>



However; the role of visual artists, and visual art students were mostly expressed through paintings and posters; they also created signs, and announcements for the protestors.



his urge led to the founding of "Thailand Artists Aid", which had organized many political and social activities during the time of 1974-1976.

The spreading trend about the revolution was the result of what happened in the Age of Revolution with the role model like

French revolution in 1789, and Russian revolution in 1917-opening with the Liberalism, and ending with the Socialism. This trend was responded from people who longed for the change in other part of the world, especially in the decade of 1960-1970, which was the period of time when the student movements from all over the world had shared many similarities in ideas, perceptions, and practices; they read the same books, worshiped the same heroes; the movement of the student, had therefore; became the essential social and political power<sup>19</sup> The Indonesian case of study is pretty similar to Thailand. During the time of Suharto's dictatorship government, there was the announcement said that the Socialism propagation was the illegitimate act. The suspected citizens were arrested, and the writings of the Left intellectuals were banned, the same as what happened in Thailand. But harder the government had tried to shut them up, the louder they spoke. The quality of being "banned" had made these writings become more attractive, and interesting; finally after the end of Suharto's government, these writings were awakened, and became popular among many readers again.

The protests occurred in Indonesia were from the farmers, working class people, students, intellectuals, and in some cases were from the Golka Party itself. It seemed that Indonesia was made of the knitted thread of protests; student's protests were usually involving with political liberation, and being the voice for those who were less advantage, especially the farmers, same as the

<sup>18</sup>Chumpol Apisuk. Concrete House. Nontaburi. 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

<sup>19</sup>Chanvit Kasetsiri. "6<sup>th</sup> October and Its Status in Political History" **From 14<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> October**. Bangkok: Thammasat University Publishing, 1999. P. 165-178.

student activism in Thailand. The political protests were also done by artists; in 1991 the government banned "Power Inheritance" by the Theatre Koma, because the government thought of it as the mockery of the president; the play writer, Ratna Riantiano was also censored when she composed another play called "Opera Kacoa", which was the social sarcastic story about the difficult life in city ghetto. The police also banned the poet, Rendra from reading his poetry; led to the proclamation of the right and freedom in expressing the ideas from 50 artists.<sup>20</sup>

There were also certain controversies about "Arts for Arts' sake" or "Arts for politics" during the time of Suharto's government. The understanding about arts was limited to the "decorative objects", until the decade of 1970, there was an activism called New Art Movement founded in order to protest against the state's arts (paintings and sculptures). Most of the students were from Bandung and Yogyakarta, and were expelled from schools (schools were owned by the state), but the fighting about artistic expressions continued. In the decade of 1990, Performance art began to play its part as a protestor against Suharto's government<sup>21</sup>, according to this aspect, the birth of Performance art in Indonesia was, therefore; the reaction against the state's authority, both

in the part involving with arts itself (arts approved by the state), and in the part involving with dictatorship politics. This assembly had made the Performance art by the Indonesian students eventually, become a part of the protesting march, however; because of the similarity between the actual Performance and the march that has something like the performance (e.g. the burning of Suharto's model) that made it very difficult to separate the work of art (created for the protest) from the actual protesting, plus many artists in this field were also having the role of the serious political activist as well.

Even though; the political situations highly influenced the creations of many Indonesian artists (Performance artists and others), it doesn't mean that there were no any works of arts, entirely free from the political subject matters. However; the perceptions that most people have towards the Indonesian arts has always been about the works of arts containing social and political subject matters.

The images of Indonesian arts in the eyes of the world or in the stage of international Contemporary arts are usually something "chosen" and "presented" in a certain way, and eventually it has become some sort of the stereotype-the myth of Indonesian arts.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Vittaya Sucharitanarugse. *"Indonesia after the Cold War"* Southeast Asia: Politics and Administration after the Cold War. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Publishing, 2003. P. 64-67.

<sup>21</sup> Iwan Wijono. Concrete House, Nontaburi. 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon doesn't happen only in Indonesia, but it is the same situation that other third world countries have confronted. In exhibitions, and International Arts Festivals, the presented images of arts from these third world countries are usually done in the aspect of social and political issues portrayal, if not, the aspect of the subject matters will be about something completely different, such as the portrayal of culture and ancient traditions. This seems like a symptom of the "passion for the distant exotic lands", left from the days of Colonialism, which has become the attempt in trying to present a country's image more than an art of that country. It's a matter of consideration that, the creations and representations of this certain identity mean that all nationalities and races, which are looked at/look at themselves as the "marginal" will become more accepted, or it is just a set up "trend" ?

The same as Thailand and Indonesia, the Philippines has a very similar history. Street theatre was a part of the protesting against Marcos's dictatorship government.<sup>23</sup> The main form of origin of the Performance art in this area was, therefore; from the political movements and protests. In the early stage, it might not be entirely about "Performance art", when considering that this form of art has just recently been done in this region. However; the protesting in the form of plays and drama, or the using of body, the acting in order to convey certain meanings were something that has already existed, it's probably because, in protesting, what you have with you is your own body, and there are not many things that you can carry with you to the protest. Nevertheless; Performance art, which is a field of Visual Arts must, therefore; have something different from a general protesting performance (or whatever it is might be called), even though; there are many similarities between the two. The interesting point is that, some of the artists who involved in the political movements during that time, have "chosen" to use Performance art as the continuity of the political plays created in the early period of time. It was the inheritance in forms (which has been adapted, changed until it has finally become the actual Performance art) and the concept of anti-state authority. The artists are such as Chumpol Apisuk, Surapol Panyavacheera, the Bangladesh Band (it's probably the same in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia).

Back to Thailand once again, after the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident was over, the intellectuals, and the Left artists started to come

out from the forest. Chumpon Apisuk had organized the activity called "Sa-mai Stage" at The Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art. The political plays has finally made their come back, and it began to have the special activity for Performance Art, by the attempt in spreading out the knowledge in this kind of art. Later, Apisuk moved his operating center to the Concrete House, and it has become the first Asiatopia Performance art Festival in 1999 Even though; the time of dictatorship had passed (?), but most of the Performance artists are people who once had the roles in the protests of the old days, and in their own perspective, they are still committed to the obligation in criticizing the political situations of their countries. This is why Performance art in the present time still continues its original idealistic beliefs, with the adaptation according to the contemporary political situations. We can see Vasan Sitthiket performed a shadow play from the story of his own creation; it was the story about the relationship between the current Prime Minister Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra and the United States. It was certainly not a coincident that Sitthiket chose to use shadow play which is the Southern Thailand's performing art, to perform during this period of time.



*Vasan Sitthiket, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

<sup>23</sup> Mideo M. Cruz. **Western Minds in the Eastern Hemisphere (lecture)**. Concrete House, Nontaburi. 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

Nowadays; not only the domestic political situations are chosen as the subjects in the artists' performances, but the world current events were also highly interested. While the international politics is targeting at the United States of America, there is the using of various symbols referring to the country; these symbols were used repeatedly, and have eventually turned into some sort of patterns. Some of them are objects conveying the identity of the United States, such as the U.S. Dollar bills and coins, American flag and national anthem; others are such as the well known products and merchandises like Coca-Cola, Washington apple, and for that matter, the subjects of works have eventually combined the matter of consumerism, and cultural colonization. For example, the works of the U-Kabat Group from Thailand,



*U-Kabat Group,  
4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia,  
Santichaiprakarn  
Park, Bangkok.  
22<sup>nd</sup> November  
2002*

which was the performance of crushing apples with the Washington Apple stickers on them by a hammer, the boxing fight between 2 people wearing Bin Ladin and George W. Bush masks,



or the works of the Black Market International,



*The Black Market International, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia,  
Bangkok, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok.  
22<sup>nd</sup> November 2002*

which was the performance done by cutting the stars out of the American flag, and then pinned them down to the ground with nails.



One of the artists of the group, Roi Vaara turned his head upside down to the ground under the roaring sound of American national anthem.



The international artists also responded to the certain situation through the creation of their works. In the solo performance by Julie Andree Trambly from Canada;



*Julie Andree Trambly, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Bangkok, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok. 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2002*

the artist dyed the stars removed from the American flag into black (she is one of the artists from the Black Market International), and then painted red color on the flag by using her feet. She also put her head in a Coca-Cola tank,



and ended the show by floating herself in Chao Praya River while playing the violin as if it was a memoir song. Coca-Cola was used again by Wawan Christiawan, the artist from Indonesia, who was wearing the American flag pattern underpants,



*Wawan Christiawan, 5<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Alliance Française Bangkok. 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003*

carried with him was a bucket, while he was walking in front of the audiences. The artist had a little trick; he was wearing 2 underpants, one was the white stars on the dark blue background pattern, the other was the red and white stripes pattern. When he took off both underpants, and put them around his head; it appeared to be the American flag made from 2 underpants, then he poured Coca-Cola over his head.



The same as Mideo M. Cruz from the Philippines, who stepped out from the shadow with the sound of stimulating music ,



*Mideo M. Cruz, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai. 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

wearing the American pattern flag pullover, which was later taken off; he shook a bottle of Coca-Cola, and opened it, letting out the pressed stream of black liquid pouring on to his naked body, in the gesture that looked like he had reached the final stage of masturbation.



Does the art for protest represent something else more than just protesting? How does the expression in political standing point have any significance for arts? Where is the space for artists in the society? These questions are still floating in the air. If "Arts for life, Arts for people" is just a

myth, where can it bring the artists to? Even though; the audacity of "Arts for life" was originated from delusions, but isn't the privilege of freedom in the ability to express our ideas and thoughts, something well deserved? It's only in the different methods. Even though; only arts can not change the society, but it is the realization of this limitation that allow us to see what human spirit is like, and what art is like. It may not naively proclaim that arts will lead mankind to the idealistic world, but still, ideal is something floating out there somewhere, as something for us to hold on to, as something that will guide us the directions. The "imagination" for equality still stands, from the revolution in 1789 until now. Iwan Wijono is still creating his work by uttering "Liberte! Liberte! Liberte!"



*Iwan Wijono, 2<sup>nd</sup> Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, Bangkok.  
21<sup>st</sup> November 1999*

### **The state and the censorship of the performance art: paranoia and misunderstanding**

Beside the fact that Performance art has been used as a tool in the protesting against the state, the state itself has had the attempt to control this field of art, and it is not only because of the fact that Performance art has challenged the state's authority in terms of political criticism, but some of the works were also convicted as pervert. In the countries where people are restrictedly controlled, the creating of Performance art has become something unbelievably difficult, and in some cases it is nearly considered illegal.

We might have to observe the state's comprehension about Performance art, which results in its decision of what is arts and what is not. The comprehension indicated by the state, therefore; affects the public's comprehension as well. In several countries in Southeast Asia, most people (in this case referring to people who are not artists, and people in the arts community) still think of arts as a piece of decorating object in a house; the accepted representation of arts (something that can be understood) are, therefore; paintings and sculptures. What is beyond this common perception, even though; can be accepted as "arts", but it is considered as something involving in the particular group of people, and go beyond ordinary people's comprehension.

From the aspect indicated by the state of "what is arts?" is the reason why, creating the works of arts in some countries is so difficult, especially in the countries with dictatorship characteristic like Indonesia or Burma. As mentioned earlier, the Indonesian

government in Suharto's period had expelled many art students who protested against "official arts". This was the reason of how the protesting against this kind of art had finally become the protesting against the state itself, for its invading in freedom of people's right in the expression of thoughts and ideas.

In the case of Burma, as we all know that under such the restricted environment, many artists whose works contain the political subject matters, has been arrested, some has turned to create their work under the "safety" subject matter. Performance Art has even less possibility to grow, especially when considering that (even though; the military government may not have any clue about it) Performance art itself was genuinely originated from protesting/rebelling. From the history of arts, the birth of Performance art was also originated from the protesting of some artists against the "institution", such as galleries and museums that has turned arts into something extremely commercialized, and the way of turning arts into something that can not be commercialized was to take the quality of being an "object" out of it. The body was considered in new aspect-as the art object. Once the body is considered as a work of art, how can we sell or buy it? (however; today's performances are recorded, and the recorded performances are purchased anyway) How can you objectify something that belongs to the specific time and place? It happened, and ended-it's something periodically belonging. The "anti-institution" has also led to the beginning of the performing in public spaces, which led to the new definitions, and perspectives of arts. Performance art is itself a rebellion to art (so some may not put the word "art" after "Performance"), containing

rebellious subject matters, therefore; for the state's common practice, which is the desire to control and regulate the social order (the social order in the eye of the state is usually referring to something cliché and modest) while Performance art is something seen as extremely bizarre, violent, or even pervert, plus some of the works also contain issues in the protesting against the state, so it's no wonder why this form of art is highly controlled by the state. The works of Burmese artists are, therefore; about the imprisoning and longing for freedom (both in the part of art itself and other things besides that). For example, the performance by Aye Ko



*Aye Ko, 2<sup>nd</sup> Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, Bangkok, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1999*

was performed by the artist wrote the word "freedom" on his naked body, kneeling in the gesture as if he was imploring for something and the performance of Aung Myint which was the praying for freedom.



*Aung Myint, 2<sup>nd</sup> Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, Bangkok, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1999*

Singapore is another interesting example revealing how intense the state controls the society. In 1994, Josef Ng did the performance by cutting his pubic hair, and put them on a piece of tofu. Whatever that performance was trying to convey, when the media published this news to the public, the state stepped in and immediately took care of it. Performance Art in Singapore was banned for 10 years, without any support from any governmental organizations (at present, Josef Ng is working and living in Thailand). Performance art can be done in the private spaces or galleries, but when it involves with public spaces, it has become

something very difficult.<sup>24</sup> It's interesting to notice that in the case of Josef Ng, the state suddenly took care of it, when the performance was reported, and published to the public. This case is similar to the control over media, which was something that the "banned publishing" had been taking care of by the dictatorship government in Thailand and Indonesia. However; when the state can not have the absolute control over the media (because the media has the right to publicize what is going on in the society), the state has chosen to control the origin of the undesirable incidents in the society instead.

The misunderstanding about arts between the state and arts society has created such a wide gap. The shock from the unfamiliar form of art leads to paranoia, and it is certain that when this is what happens to the state, most people who are under the educational frame regulated by the state, and living in the society under the control of the state, are without a doubt detached from other understanding about arts-something that keeps changing in every passing minutes.

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<sup>24</sup>Khairuddin Hori. Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19th November 2004.

## THE Body in Performance Art

Human body has just recently become the academically interested issue which mostly involvement in the field of Social Sciences and Anthropology. It's the attempt in trying to understand a body and its meaning in social sense. Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, (1926-1984) is one of the most influential academics in the intellectual and contemporary movement. One of the issues in his essay is about "power", which is something he referred to as the important component that keeps every aspects of the society moving. "Power" is; therefore, something relates to limitation of ideas and concepts of the society in each period of time. Through a "discourse" which is the words or writings that many thinkers and intellectuals in each period of time have produced, "power" has gradually become "reality" (socially). It indicates the movements and happening of the society, and even the human body is controlled by this kind of power.

Foucault suggested that, under certain notion, the human body is created as a kind of social invention. He also analyzed how the modern institutions, consisting of prison, school, hospital, factory or even army, can control and operate the human body, for example, order is one kind of body practicing. Foucault talks about it as follows:

*"...Let us take the ideal figure of the soldier as it was still seen in the early seventeenth century. To begin with, the soldier was*

*someone who could be recognized from afar... 'The signs for recognizing those most suited to this profession are a lively, alert manner, an erected head, a taut stomach, broad shoulders, long arms, strong fingers, a small belly thick thighs, slender legs and dry feet, because a man of such a figure could not fail to be agile and strong...'*

*...By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint run slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times,... turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of peasant' and give him 'the air of a soldier' (ordinance of 20 March 1764). Recruits become accustomed to 'holding their heads high and erect; to standing upright, without bending the back, to sticking out the belly, throwing out the chest and throwing back the shoulders; and, to help them acquire the habit, they are given this position while standing against a wall in such a way that the heels, the thighs, the waist and the shoulders touch it, as also do the backs of the hands, as one turns the arms outwards, without moving them away from the body...' (Excerpted by the writer)<sup>25</sup>*

From the essay, we can observe that a good soldier's bodies are transformed from his original natural figure into the body created by his practicing. The body has be-

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<sup>25</sup> Sheridan, Alan, *"Docile bodies", Discipline and Punish (translated from Michel Foucault. "Les corps dociles" Surveiller et Punir)*, New York: Pantheon Books, c.1977, P. 135 - 136.

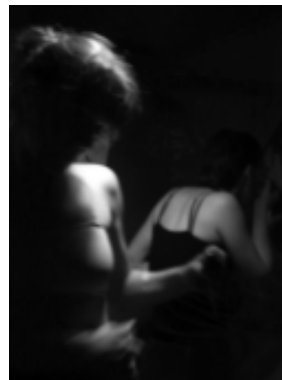
come what the Sociologist calls as “the body project” which is the project based on the idea of creating, shaping and rebuilding the body according to one’s need and desire. This desire relates to the social values, standard and notion in this period of time, such as dieting, exercise, etc. For that matter, it can be considered that everything we’ve done ever since we were born has entirely affected our bodies. The body is; therefore, more likely to be the social invention than the creation of nature. The value of consumerism society has effected how the body is taken care of. Mimi Fadmi, an Indonesian artist presented her work by wearing a black short lethal pant with booths. While listening to foreign music, the artist stood inside a huge paper bag containing many famous brand names such as Esprit, Chanel, etc. She was also showering herself with a hard brush.



*Mimi Fadmi, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2004*

Mimi’s work conveys that body is the center of human self-creation which is something that person wish to present for other people to see, such as the presenting of their good tastes by frosting their bodies with expensive products. Consequently, one’s identity is something that can be shaped and formed in whatever one wants while the standard in

creating the accepted identity is also controlled by the social standard as well. Especially, in the issue of “beauty” since a part of the consideration of a beautiful woman’s body comes from the media compelling propaganda about beauty and fashion. The perfect figure of a model has become the desirable ideal figure; as a result, a lot of women try to improve their body internally (dieting, exercise) and externally (cloths, cosmetics) in order to create the accepted identity in the perception of most people. Another work illustrated this subject matter is ‘Mirror Room’ by the Beauty Suit.



*The Beauty Suit, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai. November, 27<sup>th</sup> 2004*

All the 4 female artists were dressing and wearing make up, then kept shouting “beautiful” and “not beautiful” repeatedly as if there would be no ending. Inside to mirror room in which the artists stayed in was full with clothes, make up and other beauty products which allowed the audiences were able to see what was inside of the room since it was built to have one 1 side of mirror wall. However, the artists cannot see the audiences outside since it was a special mirror that can only be seen through on 1 side.

Therefore, all the shouting and asking question whether they were beautiful is the question that was answered and judged by others in public by being looked at, not by looking at themselves. What is more, Orlan, a French artist, she illustrated the fact that body can be changed and transformed by the advance of the present's medical technology. Her work is a project of a series of cosmetic surgeries, meticulously planned and documented aiming at the self-transformation of the artist.



*Orlan, Omnipresence (7<sup>th</sup> Surgery-Performance),  
New York, 1993*

### **Performance Art: The Using of Body as an Artistic Rebel**

The using of body in Performance Art originated from the challenge against the old system of arts, in which arts were considered as the purchasable objects (That's why sometimes we use the term "Performance" without "art" as it's the resistance to arts.) The state which the quality of arts being considered only as an object was opposed by a group of artist. They seriously questioned the arts institutions of that time of how they had turned arts into something totally commercialized in the decade of 1960. The opposition in objectifying arts was to take the quality of being an object out of it. The key

answer was to turn arts as a solely object into a human body which is something that can not be purchased or frozen in museums. From this point of view, it might be able to say that a body is somehow, can be considered as an object anyway since it can be touched, seen and put in a space. Nevertheless, it can not be kept them in any collection. Though, we can record and purchase the performances by the using of video tapes, it can not be competed with the actual performances. What the recorded performances are able to do is only to remind us of whatever happened and ended in the specific period of time. Performance Art is something always concerning with the specific period of time that can not be performed again (even the performances are performed more than once; the consequences are different anyway since each performance is effected by the surrounded contexts). The effect of this form of art is closely related to space and time, in addition it also depends on atmospheres together with the connection which happens between the audiences and the performance as well. Performance art also erases the boundary between different forms of arts, including the boundary between arts and other things as well. As we can see from the interdisciplinary quality of it, by the borrowing of Performing art, rituals, ancient traditions, religions, beliefs, music, literatures, folk songs etc.

Furthermore, Performance art has opened the new interesting issues about the new definition of arts and artists. That is, a body does not refer to something that generates arts (by a brain and 2 hands of the artist) but has become art itself; in this sense, body is an object, but it's a living object (Gilbert and George are the Performance



*Gilbert and George, The Singing Sculpture, 1971*

artists who perform in the duo performance and called themselves as the “living sculpture”). Arts and artist are now united into one, human live overlaps to arts, while in the past, the borderline of the world of arts and the real world were completely separated. For instance, painting is limited under certain frames, and those frames are what indicate the gap which separates the real world and the world of arts. Still, Performance art is not the only thing that has destroyed this boundary. The fact that this form of art has pointed out this issue more outstandingly comparing to other forms of arts is because of its own special characteristic. In addition, once arts and artist is the same thing, the consequential point is the question in whether everything that the artists do is considered as arts?

The decline of arts institutions (art museums and galleries) generates the artistic creation in public spaces such as pubs, theatres, parks, markets, streets, including protests. The involvement of Performance art with these places causes certain ambiguity for the Performance art itself. For instance, among a demonstration, we hardly sepa-

rate artist from the demonstrators. Which one is the performance by the artist (who participates in the protest)? Which one is the action of the people in the protest? How different? As a result, we went back to the same question such as, whether it is art since it is something done or created by an artist, what is the difference between artists and normal people. It is the issue discussing in chapter 1 which talks about the myth of the consideration of an artist as a special individual. Can we say that Performance Art is the pinnacle of the myth about artists since under this consideration, art and artist is considered as the same thing.

Furthermore, Performance art has also recreated the new connection between viewers and the work of art. At first arts is only a piece of object which is placed steadily while waiting for the viewers to see. The frame of a painting or the base of a sculpture is what separates the space of the viewers from the world of arts which locates in / on the sacred white wall of a museum as if it was a temple (In fact, “museum” actually means temple of muses, the 7 goddesses of arts and sciences). The restrictions and manners in appreciating the works of art emphasize the viewers to realize the separated parts of the 2 worlds. In some places, the boundary of viewers is strictly controlled by the lines indicating the separated and controlled spaces in the museums. The restrictions in seeing the works of art are lighten up by some works which allow the viewer to be a part of them, and there are even certain works of art that cannot exist without the viewers’ participations. This is how arts start to creep in to the viewers’ space comparing to before when this 2 spaces are completely separated from each other. In the case of Performance Art, the

using of body as the medium makes it even easier to create interaction with the viewers since every human being has body, so it is only up to the viewers whether they want to interact in the performance or not. Yuan Mor'O Ocampo talked to the audiences before the show by inviting and handing plastic buckets with ropes to them. The artist gave the sign for people to swing and throw the buckets together. By having the artist as a director, the audiences created their own performances.



*Yuan Mor'O Ocampo, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok, 23<sup>th</sup> November, 2003*

Montri Toemsombat let people sprayed pink color onto his body.



*Montri Toemsombat, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok, 22<sup>th</sup> November, 2002*

Thus, the role of the audiences was changed into artists painting their sculptural work (Montri's body). It also happened to Valerian Maly and Klara Schilliger, for they invited people to drink and throw up glasses with them.



*Valerian Maly and Klara Schilliger, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai, 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2004*

In Surapol Punyavachira's work, the artist pasted the white hand-shaped balloons all over his body, and then he let people pierce them with needles.



*Surapol Punyavachira, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok, 23<sup>th</sup> November, 2002*

It implied the liberation from the conventional arts (arts made by hands is endurances object that last through time). While what was left was the body of the artist which was

moving, it was this moving body that represents arts in this present time.

Viewer's participation turns arts from the absolute object into the work requiring other external factors to fulfill its creative process. This "participation" is something similar to one of the zeitgeist, the democratic concept. The viewer's status is shifted from "receiver" to "creator" together with the artist. This raises the question and ambiguity about who is actually the artist. Would it be like what Josef Beuys (1921-1986) said that everybody can be an artist? Also, the question like "Is this called arts?" This is the effect from the relevance of arts and its quality of being an "activity". For instance, the *Phad-Thai* (Thai fried noodle) demonstrating given by Rirkrit Tiravanija



Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled*, 2002, New York

which is still one of the most highly discussed issues in Thai society of whether it's arts or not (even though in the international discussing forum, this topic is not being talked about anymore). Yuan Mar'O Ocampo's and Rirkrit's works also brought us to think about the difference between Performance art and Performing art. The difference is that Performing art is something directed by the director while in Performance art the artist is the director himself, for he is both the performer and the director. The produced work; therefore, belongs to the artist who creates


it. In some cases, it is the artist who directs other people to perform in the performance (sometimes, Rirkrit had someone else cook *Phad-Thai* or another food), but the work still belong to the artist, so we can see that there are a lot of overlapped issues between this 2 forms of art.

Somehow, this issue makes us see how arts has changed its definition, and when it comes to certain judgments of what is arts or what is not is all about the matter of 'power'. That is because once an argument takes place, it becomes the political matters. It is the politics in arts that will fight for its own place to found something in the difference form and style. Thus, these works function both as an art critic and a work of art themselves.

### Treasure from the Past: Happiness of the Present

One of the most popular question is "How do we create contemporary arts from our roots?" Many times we've heard the terms like "root", "preserve", "perpetuate" etc. used as something so cliché?. How do we explain this phenomenon, and what do they mean to arts society?

During this state of 'globalization', a lot of people have questioned the meaning of "international", which seems to have turn into another expanding western thought in every part of the world. The word "international"; therefore, does not the genuine meaning of international at all. This is because, even though, the time of Colonialism had ended, there is still something called "Neo-Colonialism" or "Imperialism". It is all about the influence of western thoughts without any possession in any piece of land. Its essential tools are economic and political ideal which



were something that had changed the social structure of Southeast Asian countries. Consequently, it lights up the thought of nationalism in each country against this hidden power. When we talk about nationalism, it means that we are talking about certain characteristic of a nation in particular (identity) which is unavoidably followed by nostalgia. As everyone knows, nationalism was also generated by the anti-Colonialism in 19<sup>th</sup> century. By referring to the past, we all have been searching for our own identity (or may be recreating the new one) since whoever possessed the past, can fairly exist in the present.

In art's term, the original ideas of the past have been raised in order to become an artist's inspiration. But we cannot claim that this new invention is the same to the past as the concept of "arts" has actually never existed in Thailand or any Southeast Asian society. It was introduced into this region not many years ago. Though, we did have our own ancient architectures and objects which are characterized as a kind of arts (by the eyes of the people in the present time), these things were nothing like "arts" generated by artists. Those ancient works were created under the different paradigm, with different role and position in the society, including different criteria in valuing their worth.

How can we state that the creation of art today is the continuative process from the past? For the reusing of old things as art is only the new interpretation toward the originals. It is all about regenerating things based on the old things. In additional, the applying on the whole practices of traditional element

into contemporary painting may be added to this kind of art practicing of the moment. The works contain Buddhism elements can also be characterized as "art" according to the western interpretation (which eventually expand to "international"). Thus, this kind of art is only the offspring from mutation rather than the heir descends from its ancestor's flesh and blood.

By saying that does not mean that art is not good enough, or imagining we have "root" to continue are useless. On the contrary, those works of art have their own unique identity with the unique character from each culture (which is something totally exotic in the eyes of the western world). That is why this kind of arts is interested among international art festivals (everybody wants to see something different from where they come from). We can say that ancient subject matters have become fabulous resources waiting to be chosen in order to create something new and inspiring.

Not only the traditional works, but there's also the using of norms, rituals and other cultural components as other conceptual materials as well. Artist's creations are all about the individuality of each artist, including how and what they will up and present by the using of international language of Modern and Contemporary Art. By the using of the international language of Modern and Contemporary Art, the works of these artists have revealed the more complicated structure of the thinking and the making process of Art. It is because art has combined the (imported) international language and the original language<sup>26</sup> together, both in the physical component that can be

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<sup>26</sup> In this sense, language means any form and kind of medium containing messages.

visually observed (image, material) and in the part of subject matter. In terms of subject matter which sometimes contain such a specific characteristic that make the perceptions we have towards them become something specific as well. In the case of the Korean artist, Sang Jin Lee created a work of performance with the image similar to the crucifixion in Christianity. The performance was including the using of bread and bloods<sup>27</sup> which are something clearly refer to Christianity; however, in reality, the artist used these objects as the symbols referring to the beliefs from his own culture. The liquid appeared to be blood was actually referred to the Chinese medicine used for the cure from mute. This misunderstanding from the coincident similarity is something that happens all the time in a work of art. Still, it is not wrong or incorrect, for it turned out to be such an interesting point of view of how a work of art has such a high potential of variations. It is the freedom of the audiences to interpret it, according to the concept of "open work" by Umberto Eco. Even so, the audiences' interpretation cannot be done uncontrollably or go too far beyond the acceptable recognition. This incident emphasized the fact that symbols are the cultural matters which require learning. There are not any symbols contain indefinite meanings, but action or object change their meaning according to cultures surrounding them. One thing can be considered another, depending on what the owner of the culture had agreed on.

This is only just a simple example of the bringing of local cultures to present as a work of art in international level. The treasures from the original cultures have created

many different distinguish new works, and they are also functioning as the artistic options that will keep art continuingly move forward. In Asiatopia itself, there are quite number of artists who choose to work in this certain direction and style. Beliefs, religious, Performing art, poetry, folk music etc. are applied in the creation of their works. Therefore, body in Performance art which functions in this certain characteristic is the combination of old things and new things. It gives out messages in the same way as other artistic objects that fit in the categorization of the reusing of old objects and subject matters.

The shadow play of Vasan Sitthiket (6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Pathumwan intersection, 19-20 November 2004) stated in chapter 1 is something totally different from the traditional and conventional shadow play. The dialogue (dubbed by Sitthiket himself) was about the contemporary incidents and events that making the mockery of the political situation of that time in the very ironical and hilarious way. The dub was mostly improvised, and there were many times that the artist got 'lost' since he couldn't remember the script, or maybe it was because he was not fluent in communicating in English. Nevertheless, this was the charm of his shadow play, for it was the charm of the imperfection. It also conveyed the illusion of art since, ultimately, art is not real. The interruption occurred during the performance had become the pause for the audiences to laugh and realize the message that the artist tried to give out. Sitthiket also combined Performing art into his work; however, certain conditions and estimations in Performance art are basically different from those in Performing art, for they are 2 differ-

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<sup>27</sup> **Performances asiatiques / Performances from Asia.** Quebec : Le Lieu. 1997.

ent forms of arts. Arts which deals or plays with old subject matters (and is eventually turned in to something applied or invented from the old roots) can be considered in the same sense as this. Therefore, if we measure Sitthiket's shadow play with the same standard we measure the actual conventional shadow play, as well as saying that his shadow play is the offspring of the genuine traditional Performing art; it would be misconception in the discussions being made on such different topics and subject matters.

Mongkol Plienbangchang used the Northern lullaby as part of the creation of his work.



*Mongkol Plienbangchang, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chaing Mai, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

In the darkness, the artist was wearing Sarong (a piece of fabric made in traditional pattern, used to cover body or sometimes used as a towel), acting like he was taking a bath, face all white with powder. It was in the darkness where the smell of incense was floating in the air along with the sound of traditional lullaby. The act of taking a bath as a part of a work of art is concerning with the method of bringing something considered as "personal" and turning it into "public". That is because, normally, the activities like taking a bath and getting dressed, putting on

powder and wearing a perfume are considered as the personal ritual that a man conducts to his own body. However, what this performance had done was to reversely turn "inside" to "outside", by revealing what is normally covered such as taking a bath and other personal activities in front of the audiences. All of other components used in this performance also contained certain specific characteristic as well. In this case, the local characteristic did not only refer to Thailand but specifically referred to Thailand' country province. In addition, Plienbangchang used the Northern dialect which is different from the language used in the central part of the country (In general understanding of most people, Thai way refers to central Thailand which particularly refers to Bangkok). Plienbangchang's work (in the eyes of the audiences who are Bangkokians and foreigners) was; therefore, something which can be called as the marginal of the marginal. The reason is that, if the western world is considered as the centre of today's world order, certain specific cultural characteristics or the state of being a nation presented by the Asian artists are the presentation of the identity of people who live on the marginal. In Thailand itself, the local people who live in the different parts of the country are considered as the marginal people as well, if comparing to Bangkok which is the centre of the country. They are the marginal of the marginal who are forgotten, neglected-the outsider, who are on the other hand, also considered as the exotic, interesting or even infatuating group of people as well.

"Religious" is another common subject matter used in creating many works of art. The work Emancikazee by Singaporean-Malays artist, Khairuddin Hori was the using of the flagellation which is a method of self-punishment.



Khairuddin Hori, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Concrete House, Bangkok, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2004


This kind of punishment is used for the adultery according to the Islamic law, and it was what Hori chose to use as a part of his work. Superficially, Hori's performance might not lead the audiences to realize its reference to the Islamic law. This is because the performance was adapted by the using of Contemporary language. Furthermore, the method of flagellation which was not self-punishment but the having of someone else functioned as the punisher instead. The audiences were invited to whip the artist on his back, and then they would receive money and souvenirs in return. In this case, the artist used his own personal interpretation and meaning conveyance to change the original rule of the religion into his own work of art. For this reason flagellation, originally according to Islamic law was used as only just the beginning state of the artist's inspiration, for the work itself did not illustrate any Islamic law. There were also certain characteristics of theatre involved in this performance, such as the standing on a podium while facing towards the audiences, shining light in the middle of the dark and the saying of the artist himself referring to the principles of Antonin Artaud, a European dramatist "*In my performance will also attempt to parallel the*

*assent of Antonin Artaud's idea of "Theatre of Cruelty."*<sup>28</sup> It was the work intended to be something violence and "cruel to the audiences", such as the sound when the whip touched the artist's back under the dramatic atmosphere of the contrast between light and darkness. When the performance ended, the artist bended his back to show the red lines occurred by the flagellation and then let the sickle out of his mouth falling to the floor. In this case, the one who felt all the pain was not the artist, but it was the audiences who were watching the performance—the same group of people who created the red bruises on the artist's back while his body was fettering by a handcuff.



Are we still searching for originality? When in this moment, reproduction and nostalgia are part of artists' main motivation. However, what if that originality is not something 100% original, but something created from the combination of many things which form themselves into something new. For this reason, we might have to say that a work of art has its own originality which is the state that automatically occurs together with the

<sup>28</sup> Mild Conflict. Asiatopia 6/2004. The 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia. An International Performance Art Festival. Bangkok-Chiang Mai. 17<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> November, 2004, P. 10.



working process. It is because the “choosing” of something in order to use them in the work implies certain perspectives of the creator himself-the individual’s specific perception and perspective. As a result, these works were created from the integration between Eastern way of thinking and artistic creating methods rooted from the Western civilization. It is the state of being “personal” of each artist that has made these activities autonomous from the conventional stylistic kind of work. It is the matter of the creations in both objectivity and subjectivity which refer to certain conditions in the definition or qualification of art. This is because, even though, a work of art states its reference to old things, same traditions or anything existed prior, those “materials” have been recreated and finally turned into the new “creations”. Therefore, the reuse of old things is composed of both referential dimension and reflexive dimension. Ultimately, these works function as the presenter of an artist’s personal messages since they are something response and fulfill the desire and motivation of people who create them before anything else.

In Art History, originality occurs from violation, breaking of rules, reinterpretation and redefinition is the issue that always happens. In terms of Visual Arts, when this kind of phenomenon happens, part of it is something considered as criticism against the previous form of arts. This not only lead to the making of arts as something that goes beyond the public’s understanding but also the opening to the new paradigm of arts as well.<sup>29</sup> Take the case of Marcel Duchamp and his toilet bowl for example (1917), the


act of Duchamp has the characteristic of an art criticism rather than a work of art. Yet, in later time, it had eventually become “art” (although, that was never his intention...). He is also considered as one of the founders of Contemporary art, by the using of the ready-made objects together with the “Chance” principle. It became the declaration which fairly gave the quality of being a work of art to objects that had never been considered as an artistic object before.

If the substance of “Chance” is the matter of the perfect coincidence of such various factors that turns something ordinary into a work of art, it means that to consider something as art is all depended on “context”. It is the chance when time and place perfectly meet, confront and interact (including the factor that this is created by an artist). A reference based on an external factor of a work of art effects the conventional concept of originality since the ready-made objects can be found and collected from pretty much everywhere. Still, it can also form another kind of originality, for the dependence on “Chance” means that whatever had happened will not happen again for the second time. Therefore, ultimately, it may be able to say that everything has its own originality.

As a result, picking out the past (or the present) both in the part about traditional and cultural works from different dimensions also contains the quality of originality as well. Since there is the process of “recreating” by the use of the specific artistic language and the personal perspective of an artist, we cannot completely call these works as something which are “descended” or any-

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<sup>29</sup> Sayan Daengklor. **Originality : Discourse on Art History and Contemporary art (lecture)**. Main course Project. Bangkok University. 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2004.



thing concerning in that sense. The crossing of boundary has changed the definition of "original" which has been used by artists, and it is the condition that can be seen in Contemporary Art constantly. In another aspect, what is casually called as Postmodernism (which is the creation of new things by the reuse of old things) is also the declination against the original existence of the conventional artistic categorization. Culture is; therefore, such a fertile, sufficient treasure which has been dug out in order to read, reinterpret, rebuild the context and open the door for new possibilities. These works are not only the searching for the forgotten past but also the creating of the present all together...with the eyes and logics of people of the present time.

### Gender and Performance art

Once we consider body in the aspect of a social invention, it is unavoidably to discuss about gender which something that has become one of the most interested issues together with the concept of Postmodernism. One of the subjects of Postmodernism-Feminism, has stepped in, questioned and challenged what was already founded, particularly in this case is Patriarchy. Feminism saying that gender is not something that occurs naturally, as what Simone de Beauvoir said in *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) "*One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.*" Gender differs from sex which is something indicated by biological differences (different kind of organs indicates the different between sex) while gender is something specified by the society. For instance, what are the female gender's characteristics in terms of attitude, behavior and role; these things were once considered as something naturally existing. However, if ev-

everything is all about the matter of culture-the creation of human, gender could be something created as well.

It can be said that Patriarchy was originated almost in the same time with the *origin of the world*. In the Old Testament, Genesis 2: 21, is the statement saying that men are the creators, God (who is also a man) created Adam (the first man of the world) then took one of his ribs and said "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*" This saying maybe from the playing with the words in Hebrew language as in Hebrew, the word "*ishsha*" which means "woman" comes from the word "*ishah*" which means "her husband".

God in Christianity is "the only truth"-the divine creator of all things. Everything is; therefore, "already existed" and "natural" by the creations of God. Consequently, when Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the great German intellectual, said that "*God is dead*", he was directly challenging all the thinking systems which had been founded ever since the arrival of Christianity, including the concept about "truth" mentioned earlier as well. It was the challenging against what was believed to be "already existed naturally" that has opened the doors to the questions of many things in the following period of time (even Foucault was quite influenced by Nietzsche). One said that Postmodernism is "*just a footnote of Nietzsche*".

Nevertheless, discussing about metaphysics is not what this writing is set out to do. The issue being talked about here is how gender involves in Performance art.

If we are going to consider body and gender in the aspect of the social creation instead of something naturally existing, we are; therefore, able to do anything with our bodies. Furthermore, if Performance art is the art of rebellion, it can also be brought to criticize the belief of Patriarchy as well. That is because, when we talk about gender, it is more or less involving the matter of "body". Once human can realize the ability to do whatever he wants with his body, gender can eventually be indicated differently from sex (which is naturally indicated by nature). It is by the expression done in the form of a work of art (which can be observed objectively), such as the reverse of gender to the opposite, multi-gender or in the case of feminism work; the expression of the gender suppressed by Patriarchy.

This topic will be talking about the Performance art which gives out the feminism messages. This is because, even though, there are some gay and lesbian artists in Asiatopia, their work did not convey any gender issue. Except only for Michael Shaowanasai who used the context of Saranrom Park (which is the area where gay people meet) as the important feature in his work.



*Michael Shaowanasai, 1<sup>st</sup> Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1998*

It is noticeable that the works containing feminism characteristic in Asiatopia are mostly from Japanese artists (nevertheless, I cannot confidently point out that Japanese society is considered to have the most distinguish character of patriarchal society comparing to other societies in Southeast Asia or not, and to analyze this issue is not in the framework of this writing). For instance, Fumiko Takahashi presented her work by using the subject matter about the status of Japanese women who are usually considered as the sex object in the society without being able to get rid of this image. The artist covered her eyes with a piece of fabric, and on her back was a model of woman figure wearing the shiny underwear.



*Fumiko Takahashi, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Chaing Mai University Art Museum, Chaing Mai, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2002*

She also fettered her hands and feet by tape while slowly creeping around the gallery. Woman being considered as sex object is the image given by the society, and in this case, it referred to the patriarchal society in particular. Not only men who see women as sex object, but women also see themselves that way either. It is the kind of thought which has been built and shaped by the social structure.

Mamiko Kawabata also wrote in her writing, *"I am not an artist, I am a sex worker"*. The artist invited the audiences to dance with her and kiss her.



*Mamiko Kawabata, 3<sup>rd</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam Park, Bangkok, 20<sup>th</sup> november 2000*

Moreover, there was also the part when the artist used a white piece of fabric and a white pillow by placing them on the floor. While she was standing above it, the red liquid came out from the inside of her skirt and went down to that clean white fabric.



The issue of woman being considered as sex object in the series of this work was also related to the issue of prostitution as well. Even in the group male artists themselves, there are some whose works related to this certain issue. Arai Chin-ichi criticized man of his own country by telling the audiences a hypothetical story (?) about the time when he was working in the less developed countries.



*Arai Chin-ichi, 4<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Chaing Mai University Art Museum, Chaing Mai, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2545*

The Japanese men in the story (including him) were living such a lavish life by paying money for a lot of women to have sex with them. His work questioned the audiences by throwing the questions into the middle of the audiences who were watching the performance, leaving the role of judging and estimating to the audience. There was also the work of Iwan Wijono who expressed his concern about the welfare of prostitutes. The male artist was dressed up like a woman (as if he was trying to say that he's on the same side with women) and invited the prostitutes who were actually working in the area to participate in the performance, by having them carry the signs encouraging the use of condom.



*Iwan Wijono, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, a beer bar at Tha-Pae Gate, Chaing Mai, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2002*

The messages given by these works also convey the fact that men still and will always have higher status than women. Although Feminism movement has happened for many decades, the sexual inequality still exists, and it has possessed the way of thinking of most people in the society. The works mentioned earlier illustrate that certain social situation in the form of the selected truths. The works expressed themselves without any serious demand or opposition against the male gender, but it was this presentation of the truths that automatically implies the claim against the system. On the other hand, there were also some works which praise the greatness of women, such as in the aspect of the person who gives birth to another life, the characteristic of maternity. For instance, in the work of Adina Bar-on from Israel



*Adina Bar-on, 6<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Pathumwan intersection, Bangkok, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

or the work of He Chengyao from China, the artist poured the red color paint onto her own naked body and then started walking on 7 lotus leaves placed on the floor.



*He Chengyao, 5<sup>th</sup> Asiatopia, Alliance Fran?ais, Bangkok, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2003*

Her performance was referring to the Buddha's Biography in the part when he was born since he also walked on 7 lotus leaves that sprung up to support his footsteps. I would like to interpret this work as a work of art created to cherish the mother gender as someone who gives life and someone who is more likely to be forgotten since most people tend to think of the Buddha more than to think of his mother, Siri Mahamaya Devi. Nevertheless, without her, the Buddha would have never been born. It is not too much of an overstatement when consider the saying "There is usually a woman behind one man's success". However, it is because that, women usually stand behind men, nobody is much likely to notice her. The example for the reproving of a woman being underappreciated is in a scene of such clever conversation between Pema and Tashi in the film "Samsara" (Directed by Pan Nalin, 2001).



*The conversation between Pema and Tashi.*

Pema the young wife who is about to be left by her husband Tashi (the lama who left the temple for the taste of the worldly way of life) who discovered that the way of dharma is the way of life that he want, and he has to go back to the temple where he belongs by having to leave his wife and children behind. She questions "Yasothara...have you ever heard of her? Everyone knows Prince Siddhattha, Gautama, Sakyamunee. How about Yasothara? Does anybody know that the Buddha found his way of enlighten because of her? Ever since Siddhattha had left her, would anybody think of her?" (Excerpted by the writer)

The body of a woman is only considered as a worldly temptation which is something a man has to go beyond in order to reach the enlightenment state - the Nirvana.<sup>30</sup> A female body is; therefore, significant only as the means that will lead men to the ends but not the ends itself. As we can see in the case of Lama Tashi who spent 3 years of solitude up on the mountain practicing dharma, but still could not let go the

wholesome thoughts until he had tried them, as well as Prince Siddhattha and Siddhartha, the hero in Hermann Hesse's novel who had been through the worldly way of life with Princess Yasothara and Gamala. Female body; therefore, implies to worldly pleasure, which is both the obstruction and factor for enlightenment at the same time. For princess and prostitute, there are no any differences, by referring back to the statement in the prior paragraph ("There is usually a woman behind one man's success"). From this statement, it seems like the praise to female gender, but in reality, it's the reminder of how woman is still only just a means (can this statement be thought of as the consolation to accept that fact as well?).

In Singaporean artist, Juliana Yasin presented the role of woman who were oppressed under the Islamic culture. As everyone knows, Islamic woman have to cover her body from head to toe, according to the Islamic notion; woman symbolize the temptation which can lead to the wrong commitments. Women have to hide their faces and figures since their eyes can convey various meanings, they must be covered. Woman's habitat is separated from man, and from this implication, a woman's body is something unwanted. Man has to be careful with woman and her body. This is why Islamic woman have to cover her body unavoidably as what Juliana did by covering her body with a black dress, holding the sign with the message "We are never fully in control of our appearances..."

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<sup>30</sup>Actually, the Lord Buddha said that "The real defilement of a man's state of mind is the appearance, sound, smell and taste of a woman. The real defilement of a woman's state of mind is the appearance, sound, smell and taste of a man." But the fact that the Buddha himself is also a man, so his saying about the sensuality of male body seems to disappear. Yet, female body still has the characteristic of sensuality. Is this maybe because there are no priestess left anymore?



*Juliana Yasin, 3<sup>rd</sup> Asiatopia, Santichaiprakam, Bangkok, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2000*

The body in Performance Art which gives out the feminism messages observed in Asiatopia is the presentation of idea about female gender in the patriarchal society. By the using of the process of selecting fact


(an artist's perception and perspective), these works are; therefore, contain certain implication of social criticism. Whatever the merit this criticism has caused to the society, it doesn't depend on whether it can overthrow the male gender. This is because if so, the result of it would only be just the changing side of power which will continue the condition of inequality. Matriarchy is no better than Patriarchy. The value of feminism should be about the new perception and consideration towards female's body and gender which will lead to the equality in the way of life between man and woman. If gender is considered as a social invention, it would be able for us to invent the new discourse concerning with gender in the way we think it should be.

## Epilogue

Asiatopia is the combination of the words "Asia" and "topos". In Greek "topos" means 'place'; therefore the word 'Asiatopia' conveys the meaning of the attempt in trying to create a 'place' for Asia among the stream of globalization. The locals have the attempt in trying to create and present their own identities. It is the local's desire in trying to have both 'Asia's place' and 'place for Asia' which is something idealistically desired; therefore, Asiatopia can be considered in the same sense of 'utopia' as well. The meaning of the Greek word 'ou topos' which means 'no place' had formed the new meaning of 'the wonderful, virtuous, idealistic place' because of the glorious Latin novel written by Sir Thomas More in 16th century. It is the story about the imaginary island called 'Utopia' which is the state of virtue

and decency, and the word 'Utopia' has been known from that novel ever since. For the fact that 'Utopia' is such an idealistic place, it does not exist in the reality (ou topos / no place), but still is the desirable place worth in search for. The meaning of 'Asiatopia' can be both 'topos' and 'ou topos' of / for 'Asia', in the same time it can be considered both as 'goal' and 'hope' as well. Its goal is to create the place of / for Asia which is the hope for an idealistic state that reflects on the saying of the founder of Asiatopia, Chumpol Apisuk himself-"What can we do so that all the Asian artists don't have to go to Europe to see each other?"

How can we express our identity among the overflow of the unstoppable western civilization? What can we do to be able to say



that what we are, what we have, or what we used to have and be are really something worthy. The seeking for the root of the past becomes the overwhelming voice of the present time. Nonetheless, that attempt does not mean that the past and root we are looking for are going to be something that waiting for us to discover because what we have found are actually something recreated. The past is not something as it used to be. It is the eye of today that has turned, looked back and chosen, for history, including Art history is just another kind of fictions, composing of the selected and chosen stories as same as arts that has the character of a story teller (but it doesn't mean that all works of arts will have to be a story telling).

Time is something that can not be stopped or held back; it keeps moving. How can we capture "present" before it turns in to past, and how can we study the past in the way it really was.

"Present" turns into "past" in only a second  
"Future" is only a second away

Maybe past, present and future can move forward together...


The reviving of the past as usually seen in the region of Southeast Asia is a part of the process in creating/searching for its identity, in order for it to counterbalance the globalization that claims for internationality in every area of the world. It's the shouting and declaring that we have our own arts and cultures— something that has existed in our history for a long period of time, and it is believed that this realization is going to be the visionary beginning about the definition of the Contemporary arts...as something of our own.

This phenomenon has revealed that it is the people of the present time that have

chosen the stories in the past and presented in the way they want them to be. It is certain that we can relate to the past if we want to, but it doesn't mean that the results from the relationship that we have with the past will have to be only just the direct offspring of the past itself. That is because "arts" was not originated in this area. We can say that arts that proclaims itself with the ancients are somehow, more likely to be the adopted child of the ancients arts. This leads us to think that for hundreds and thousands of years that has passed by, the unity of this region is still the same; even though, it's different in terms of forms and appearances. It is the process of localization and the process of turning local into international.

As well as the relationship between politics and Performance art which is something that can not escape the attempt of people in trying to relate them to the past. However, it is the past that happened not too long ago. In the case of Thailand, the October, 16 1973 and the October, 6 1980 incident where body and action were parts of the political movement expression, were claimed as the beginning of Performance art. The concept 'Arts for life's sake' founded by Jitr Bhummisak was broadened and survived until today. That certain concept had such an influential effect in defining the roles of artists, especially in the issue about their obligation to the society. Many works of Performance art are; therefore, contain the story about political criticism and contemporary social issues.

This writing tries to point that "politics" has many various dimensions. In order to talk about arts and politics, it is important to have certain agreements about under which conditions that we can call this kind of art as arts involving with politics (Political Art). This




is, of course, the result from the focusing on the relationship between arts and politics instead of focusing only on the subject matters which might be not enough. Even though the general understanding that people have towards the definition of arts for politics are about arts for criticism, demanding, protesting, including suggesting social and political problems and solutions, the writing tries to point out that other kinds of arts can also contain certain political relationships, and arts also have its own politics as well.

Dr. Sayan Daengklom from the department of Art History, faculty of archaeology, Silpakom university interestingly questioned weather arts with political subject matters are created for the sake of politics or for the sake of arts itself. Because if the society's emotions and atmospheres in a certain period of time demanding arts to serve for the sake of politics, arts is, therefore; has to unavoidably talk about politics. For that matter, the political talking of arts is being for the right of its own existence, and if so, is the sake of arts the final goal? Does politics exist for the sake of arts, or does arts exist for the sake of politics?

Daengklom's question leads to the questioning in the roles and functions of artists as well. In addition, if the obligations that have been held on to are from myths' accumulation, then what is the possibility? This continuous question does not involve only in the matter of arts for politics, but it is also expanding to the feminism works that have the implication of demanding, opposition and desire for changes as well. What is Arts, and where does it stand are the same old questions which are still and will always keep us thinking and questioning infinitely.

This is not the only point occurring from Asiatopia, and every point mentioned in this writing are not everything of Asiatopia as well. It's the result of "observing", and choosing certain distinguish qualities of it and try to analyze them, and there are still other interesting topics left to be discussed. The human body has such an incredible potential in expressing numerous amount of meanings, as well as the time of 6 years that this event and Performance art has been going on with such various forms and subject matters. Different forms of violence both in terms of subject matters and the ways they are presented, the issue about sexuality, or certain issues in the methodology of Performance art. For example, in order to create the interaction with audiences, some artists choose to use the direct confrontation with the audiences, while some choose to neglect and obsessing in whatever they are doing without any interests in the audiences towards them. There is also the using of many tools and equipments that sometimes makes you question in the significance of the using of body in Performance art, including the repeatedly use of certain objects that turns into some sort of patterns or the role of sound in Performance art. These are the issues left to be discussed and analyzed in the up coming future.

This writing is also the looking back in the "past" and bringing back what had happened in that past by "writing" them down. This writing serves its function as both a story telling and story teller. Once the eyes has objectified Performance art in order for it to be analyzed, the new discourse is created and waiting for someone else to continue the analysis, to expand and fulfill the history of Performance art in the region of Southeast Asia. It is because an event always precedes its definition and a discourse always



chasing after experience. This explains why Contemporary art and its history is still the “work in process” that can not be entirely covered or finish for it has not ended yet. Consequently, the answers for all questions are the unfinished and unconcluded ending, on the other hand, there isn't any right answer for there isn't any truly factual answer. To answer all questions can signify that it's the finish, the ending (in some case, death). The eyes can not see everything in every truly perspective. Dr. Chetana Nagavajara once wrote that we are not in the position where we can stop the world from moving and carefully analyze it. This saying perfectly conveys our situation and our position, for when we stand on the earth, we are unable to see everything that is around. It's in accordance with the saying of Archemedes when he said that if you are able to find me a place to stand outside of the world, I'll open up the world for you to see. In this sense, it is impossible for a man to stand outside of the world so to open the world up (or even to look around the world) is impossible.

The fact that we are living in “contemporary”, the attempt in trying to completely cover something is; therefore, cannot be done. That is because the sense of contemporary refers to something which is not ended but still moving. The difficulty of Contemporary art is not only because it's hard to catch up for its consecutive change of forms, but also because we can hardly indicate or limit the definition of it, what it should or should not be. For that matter, arts that involve with something else (by then, what is called something else is not ‘something else’ anymore as it has already become arts itself), especially when the idea about interdisciplinary is becoming more popular will certainly make the categorization be done

even harder. The questions like “What is arts?” and “Why it's arts?” are the rhetorical questions which are still very much “contemporary”. As a result, one of the obligations of art historians is to create the explanation for such matter as the following discourse.

What is the possibility? What is the task of artists and where is the place for arts in the society? These are the questions repeatedly asked and kept us thinking infinitely and will probably tend to stay that way forever. These are the points which are not only occurred in Asiatopia but also existed in the world of arts. The questions can become clearer when the real world and the worlds of arts begin to move closer to each other. It's the point where “audiences” start to play more significant role. Questions from audiences (who may not have any clue) are something that keeps reminding and stimulating arts society to look back at itself and try to catch up with itself eventually.

The performance that had been done is also the past, the past can be something that ended just a few seconds ago while the present is something unstable and flowing. From the moment that something is memorized and recorded, it has become the past. It is from that past in which the present is written, for one who can realize the present is the one who can indicate the past and predict the future.

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