

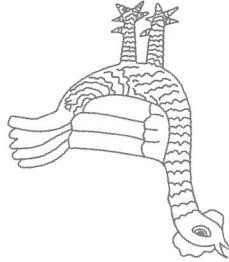


This Festival is dedicated to all chickens and birds, died of Avian Flu in Asia and the rest of the world. Since 2003 more than 60 people have been infected and died, in S.E. Asia.

7th ASIATOPIA, 2005 and First S.E Asia Performance Art Symposium (SEPAS) 24 - 27 November 2005 Bangkok, Thailand

- (Myanmar) Chit Ko Ko (Myanmar), Girdhaya Gawwawong (Thailand)
- (Korea) Kyeongruddin Hoi (Singapore), Jeho Bitancer (Philippines), Jitima Praisawek (Thailand)
- (Singapore) Ly Daravuth (Cambodia), Lyn Chairote Lu (Singapore), Michael Sinowenataai (Thailand)
- (Indonesia) Noppawan Siryethai (Indonesia), Padungak, Kotichasompong (Thailand), Patsani Pienbangnang (Thailand)
- Ray Langenbach (Malaysia), Rich Streitmatter-Tran (Vietnam), Roohi Tanedo (Philippines), Thanavi Chaipradit (Thailand)
- Thain El Chow (Myanmar), Tran Luong (Vietnam), Wawan Christian (Indonesia), Wichukorn Tangpaiboon (Thailand)
- Ahilen Zh (Taiwan), Apinan Poshyananda (Thailand), Bui Cong Khanh (Vietnam)
- He Chengyao (China), Heu Hikeyat (Indonesia), Hong Oeang (Korea), Kai Lam (Singapore), Kaori Haba (Japan), Kang Seung-Sook (Thailand), Kraisak Choonhavan (Thailand), Mideo Cruz (Philippines), Mimi Fedmi (Thailand)
- Kosri Jantraip (Thailand), Michael Sinowenataai (Thailand), Mideo Cruz (Thailand), Reque De Loyola (Philippines)
- Wawan Christian (Indonesia), Wichukorn Tangpaiboon (Thailand)

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



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dedicated to all the chickens
and birds that have died of Avian
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THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION



JIM THOMPSON



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 Ad-

ministration 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, Art and Culture Foundation of Bangkok 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

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

ท่านผู้มีเกียรติ ผู้เข้าร่วมประชุม และศิลปินทุกท่าน ในนามของชาวกรุงเทพมหานครขอต้อนรับผู้เข้าร่วมสัมมนาศิลปะแสดงสดเอเชียอาคเนย์และศิลปินเอเชียโตเปียทุกท่าน

ผมรู้สึกเป็นเกียรติที่ได้มาพบกับผู้นำด้านศิลปะจากนานาชาติ และกรุงเทพมหานคร ก็รู้สึกยินดีมาก ที่เราได้ร่วมงานกับเทศกาลเอเชียโตเปียมาถึงครั้งที่เจ็ดแล้ว

ในทศวรรษนี้ กรุงเทพมหานครฯ ได้มีนโยบายที่ชัดเจนมากขึ้นในการส่งเสริมกิจกรรมศิลปะวัฒนธรรม นอกเหนือจากกิจกรรมที่กทม.ทำเองแล้วเรายังได้สนับสนุนเทศกาลศิลปะที่สำคัญๆ หลายเทศกาล ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเทศกาลละครกรุงเทพหรือเทศกาลเอเชียโตเปีย และยังมีเทศกาลระดับนานาชาติอีกนับ 10 เทศกาล ที่จะไปจนถึงเดือนมีนาคมปีหน้า ด้วยเหตุนี้ผมจึงหวังว่าจะได้มีโอกาสพบพวกท่านอีกในเทศกาลต่างๆ ในกรุงเทพฯ

ความก้าวหน้าที่สำคัญอีกอย่างหนึ่งของการดำเนินนโยบายศิลปะวัฒนธรรมของ กทม. คือการก่อสร้างหอศิลปะร่วมสมัยแห่งแรกของกรุงเทพฯ ที่จะเสร็จในต้นปี 2007 นี้ ซึ่งเป็นการดำเนินงานตามนโยบายฟื้นฟูชีวิตศิลปะวัฒนธรรมให้กับกรุงเทพฯ ให้เชื่อมต่อให้ได้กับอดีตที่เราเคยมีย่านศิลปะชุมชนศิลปะหลายแห่ง ที่ถูกปล่อยให้วิถีชีวิตทางการค้า และความบันเทิงมีบทบาทมากเกินไปในเวลา

ความสำเร็จในการผลักดันนโยบายเหล่านี้ กรุงเทพมหานครรู้สึกขอบคุณบรรดาศิลปิน และหลายท่านก็อยู่ในที่นี้ ที่ได้รวบรวมพลังศิลปินอันมหาศาล ต่อสู้ ผลักดัน อย่างยาวนานหลายปี จนทำให้ กทม. ดำเนินการด้านศิลปะวัฒนธรรมขึ้นมาจนได้ในเวลานี้

ผมใช้เวลาเล่าเรื่องราวเหล่านี้ให้ทุกท่านฟัง เพราะประการแรก ผมรู้สึกชื่นชมกับความเอาใจริงเอาจังของบรรดาศิลปินทั้งหลาย เทศกาลศิลปะนานาชาติเหล่านี้ได้จัดมาก่อนหน้าที่ กทม. จะรู้จักและให้ความสนใจศิลปะร่วมสมัย และอีกประการหนึ่ง ผมเล่าเพื่อต้องการจะยืนยันถึงความตั้งใจจริงของสำนักงานกรุงเทพมหานคร ที่จะส่งเสริมและสนับสนุน กิจกรรมศิลปะวัฒนธรรม เพื่อสร้างกรุงเทพฯ ที่มีชีวิต ตามที่กล่าวมาแล้ว

ผมเชื่อว่าศิลปะจะทำให้คนกล้าคิด กล้าเรียนรู้ และกล้าแสดงออก ศิลปะเป็นปัญญาที่อยู่เคียงข้างวิทยาศาสตร์ ด้วยเหตุนี้ เราจึงต้องการเห็นโครงการศิลปะที่ดีๆ เช่นนี้อีกมาก เกิดขึ้นในกรุงเทพฯ เพื่อสร้างความสมดุลในการเรียนรู้ของพวกเขา

ผมขอแสดงความยินดีกับผู้จัดเทศกาลเอเชียโตเปีย และขออวยพรให้ทุกท่านประสบความสำเร็จในการประชุม และในการแสดงครั้งนี้ ขอขอบคุณครับ

อภิรักษ์ โกษะโยธิน
ผู้ว่าราชการ กรุงเทพมหานครฯ
พฤศจิกายน 2548

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



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 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 organizer of the 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

Rationale

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". Besides 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 24 November is hosted at The Jim Thompson House. There 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

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25 November - Forces of Change

The Keynote Speech by Prof. 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 postmodern 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 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 are **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 exhibition of performance art materials (photos, posters, reviews, etc) will be gathered from participants and on display at the Queen's Gallery.

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

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

Program

Thursday 24 November 2005 Welcome Artists Party

18:30 *Jim Thompson House, Soi Kasemsan 2, Bangkok*

Guest of Honour: Apirak Kosayodhin, Governor of Bangkok

<i>Friday 25 November 2005 Forces of Change</i> <i>Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd</i>		
10:00	Opening jam and registration – Welcome by Chumpon Apisuk	
10:30	Keynote speech	<i>Strengthening Regional Artistic Community</i> Prof Dr Apinan Poshyananda, Director General, Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, Thailand
11:00	Dialogue	<i>Political Context in Southeast Asia</i> Senator Kraisaik Choonhavan & Lee Weng Choy
12:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
13:00	Performance	Wawan Christiawan, Chaw Ei Thien
14:00	Dialogue	<i>Critical Art in Southeast Asia</i> Eileen Legaspi Ramirez, Heru Hikayat & Ray Langenbach
15:30	<i>Break</i>	
16:00	Dialogue	<i>Artists in Action (Performance Art Statement draft)</i> Iwan Wijono, Khairuddin Hori, Mideo Cruz & Paisan Plienbangchang
17:00	Wrap Up Day One of Symposium	
19:00- 22:00	<i>ASIATOPIA Performances at Santi Chaiprakarn Park, Phra Athit Rd</i> Hong O-Bong (Korea), Ahlien Z H (Taiwan), Witchukorn Tangpaiboon (Thailand), Kaori Haba (Japan) Thein Ei Chaw (Myanmar), Padungsak Kotchasumrong (Thailand) Bui Cong Khanh (Vietnam)	

<i>Saturday 26 November 2005 Context and Communication Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd</i>	
10:00	Welcome to Day Two
10:15	Dialogue <i>Traditions and Trends</i> Gridthiya Gaweewong, Iwan Wijono & Ly Daravuth
11:00	<i>Break</i>
11:15	Dialogue <i>Practically Under Pressure</i> Koh Siu Lan, Thanom Chapakdee & Tran Leung
12:15	<i>Lunch</i>
13:00	Performance He Chengyao, Khairuddin Hori
13:30	Dialogue <i>Genderly Undermind</i> Michael Shaowanasai, Rochit Tanedo & Thanavi Chotpradit
15:00	<i>Break</i>
15:30	Dialogue <i>Taking Performance Art Forward – What's Next?</i> Chumpon Apisuk, Iwan Wijono, Hong O-Bong, Khairuddin Hori
17:00	Wrap Up Day Two of Symposium
19:00- 22:00	<i>ASIATOPIA Performances at Santi Chaiprakam Park, Phra Athit Rd</i> 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)

<i>Sunday, 27 November 2005 Creative Space Queens Gallery, Rachadamnern Rd</i>	
10:00	Welcome to Day Three Review of Day One and Day Two Lee Weng Choy, Ray Lagenbach & Thanavi Chotpradit
11:00	<i>Revisit Performance Art Statement</i> – discussion and endorsement Iwan Wijono, Khairuddin Hori, Mideo Cruz & Paisan Plienbangchang
12:00	<i>Lunch</i>
13:00	Videos, performances and discussions
15:00	Networking Session
16:00	Wrap Up Day Three of Symposium
19:00- 22:00	<i>ASIATOPIA Performances at Santi Chaiprakam Park, Phra Athit Rd</i> Raquel De Loyola (Philippines), Jittima Pholsawake (Thailand) Kai Lam (Singapore), Mimi Fadmi (Indonesia) Kosit Jantratip (Thailand)

22:00 onwards
Concrete House

Going Home Party

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 NO.1, 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.



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•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@coolyork.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.



PHILIPPINES

• **Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez** (Manila)
eileenlegaspi.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.



• **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.



• **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.



• Lee Weng Choy (Singapore)
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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 (Singapore)
lululotte@gmail.com
 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.
 (Taipei/Kaoshiung)
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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 PerformanceArtFestivalinTaipei.



THAILAND

• Apinan Poshyananda (Bangkok)
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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 (Bangkok)
gg@project304.org
 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.



• Jittima Phosawek (Bangkok)
acep1@yahoo.com
 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.



• Kraisaak Choonhavan (Bangkok)
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 Chairman of the Thai Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee and a keen art supporter, Senator Kraisaak is passionate about human rights and artistic freedom.



• Kosit Juntaratip (Chiang Mai)
kosit@mediaartdesign.org
 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
(Bangkok)

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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
(Bangkok)

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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
(Bangkok)

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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

Kochasumrong (Chiang Mai)

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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
(Bangkok)

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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
(Bangkok)

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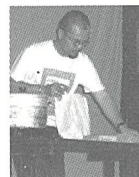
Graduated in Art History (2nd Hons) from Silpakorn University in 2002, Thanavi started writing on contemporary art for many magazines and catalogues. She has also worked in research/curatorial section for about art related activities (aara) from 2002 to 2004. Her recent project was "Observing ASIATOPIA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



• Thanom Chapakdee
(Bangkok)

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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
(Bangkok)

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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.



• **Tran Luong**
(Hanoi)

tranluong60@yahoo.com

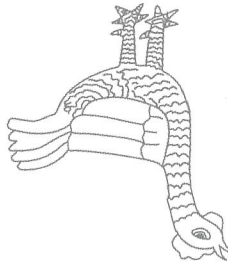
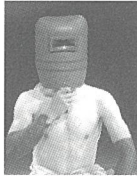
A founder of Hanoi Contemporary Art Center and director from 2000-2003, Tran Luong is also an accomplished performance artist and curator. His curatorial projects include Mao Khe-Coal Mine Workshops and Exhibition in 2001 and Green, Red, Yellow in 2003. He has also conducted workshops on visual, performance and new-media in Hanoi.



• **Rich Streitmatter-Tran**
(Ho Chi Minh City)

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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.



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

Thanavi Chotpradit

Translator: Tanakanya Changchaitum

Sirintra Boonyobhas



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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 of 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

Further India, Little China, Indo-China ... so many words were created for referring to the lands in this region. In the past, each of the names was given according to the distinctive character of an area; especially of culture, for example Indo China — the land where Indian and Chinese cultures are blended together. The word “Southeast Asia” was actually a new word created during World War II, when the Allied forces came into this area and set up command centers. The word was created according to its geographical condition, an independent land located in between South Asia (India), and East Asia (China) ¹

Defining 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 with its ability for “localization”. It is the ability for adapting things from different cultures and choosing to accept or 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.

Southeast Asia is located between India and China, lands where ancient civilizations originated and under the influence of the monsoons which make this area so fertile. There are also perfect conditions for the area to

be a major shipping route. All the ships that had to wait for the monsoon in order to sail on had to stop at ports, which later developed into maritime states. As a shipping route, this area became a meeting point of people from different places who began to have cultural interaction and learnt about each other. Sometimes the ships stopped for long enough that marriages between visitors and locals happened, leading to the creation of multicultural communities. This is a reason why maritime states grew faster than states located on mainlands which offered less opportunity to interact and contact with other cultures. The disadvantage of a maritime state was that when the trade route changed, the state suddenly died out. When we look at the details, these cultures didn't seem to have any unity, but as we look from a broader perspective, we can find that a unity exists in the ability for adaptation—it is the unity which lies in variety.

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 and religious propagation. It is assumed that the first actual interaction took place in the early B.C., due to the expanding trade, together with the progress in tsailing technology. Another factor was the decline of the caste system in Buddhism. Originally, Indian merchants

¹ 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 “independence” defined by the Western that came into this region to establish military commanding centers, therefore; “independence” also contains the meaning of not being owned by anyone, and that could be imply the person who gave the definition could earn the right in taking over this area, by combining with the aspect of self-superior.

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despised traveling abroad, because they had to travel with members of another caste (sailors), but as Buddhism became popular in India, the merchants started to convert to Buddhism. The rise of Buddhism was, in a way, a reaction against the power of Brahmins and the caste system. Moreover, monks could travel, so the relationship was not only about trade, but it also about creating the perception of the existence of other places, which would finally lead to the expanding, and 'borrowing' of cultures.

The widespread acceptance of Indian culture in this region was not only in the aspect that the locals were only receivers or forced to accept it, but partly because the locals themselves sought it. With the support of their kings, monks from this region also traveled to India. The results from seeing a different culture and the progressive civilization of India made ruling classes want to accept the 'higher' culture, in order to fulfill their needs. Therefore, we can see that the most distinctive reason for acceptance of Indian culture was political. Because this region consisted of many small communities with so much variety, it was important to find a way to integrate the varieties into one united community under one ruler. At that time Indian beliefs and rituals played their part as the link that drew together and blended local beliefs as one.

At the same time, the acceptance of Indian culture was not just making an exact copy from the original. Each locality was different in its own way, but they shared one similar process in order to 'fit' the already existing attitudes and values—the process of "localization". This is why we can see ghosts, ancestors and natural spirits being worshipped along with the arrival of new religions. Languages and arts have also been through certain adaptations, and formed their own specific characters. Societies and the ways of life 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 gradually blended in and became a deep part of each society in the region of Southeast Asia, according to what was considered most profitable and advantageous by the people who used them. What was considered to be the profitable would be chosen to be practiced. Therefore, Southeast Asia is not a twin or copy of India, but something more like a creation.

No culture is pure, devoid of any exterior influences. The thing we call culture changes all the time; once an interaction occurs, it is both the given and taken. It is the same with Southeast Asia. For thousands of years, we have taken different aspects of cultures; from India (for example, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Islam), China, and other societies in the same region and blended them together. However, the fact that we have never felt that these cultures were something that do not "belong" to us is probably because of the long period of time when the acceptance took place. What we have taken had already founded itself before we were born, so we felt (naturally) that these things have already and always existed, and they are "a part of" Southeast Asia's society, not something from 'outside'.

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

The answer is probably because of the different way of the arrival of Western culture; for it came in the form of colonialism. Moreover, the speed of its arrival was swift and sudden, unlike the gradual 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 was colonized at some time by Western powers. The result was that the expansion of Western culture gave the impression of unwillingness, including the re-construction of societies using Western standards and methods, which was not something that had originated from the needs of locals themselves. They could hardly choose what was right for their cultures because the context of the creation of Western culture was completely different from that in Southeast Asia. The consequence was that all countries sought to fight their way out from being colonized.

Today Western culture has already found its way in and clearly exists in Southeast Asia. The days of being colonized (in old ways) have passed but the present day condition, which is sometimes called being “culturally colonized”, originates from different causes. It is interesting thing to notice, however, that the way of accepting Western culture these days has similar modes to what happened when we started to accept Indian culture in the old days—based on the need and desire of locals themselves.

In this case, we are not ‘forced’ to accept anymore. As the center of the new world order, more civilized cultures are willing to accept westernization in order to ‘develop’. 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). In the case of Thailand, Thongchai Winichakul’s interesting

analysis says that the “modernization” of Siam which started in the reign of King Rama 4 did not happen only for the reason to protect the country from colonialism, but it was also an attempt to try to be “modern” at the same time.² The word “civilization”, rooted in the words “civilize/civilized”, is something based on Western standards. How do we know what it is to be considered as civilized (developed, modern)? It is by comparing with western standards. Therefore, if we do not want to be left out or outdated, we have to adapt ourselves according to that standard. In the attempt to catch up with the world we feel a need to adapt our identity. This is still happening 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 selection, adaptation or re-interpretation process to go through. It does not always mean that underneath a western skin there has to be the flesh of a ‘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, to select and adapt things into something of our own, without any doubt or hesitation. The process of localization allows cultures to exchange and blend. This is especially relevant when we consider that we are living in a time of highly active communication which is erasing every existing border. What is “real” and what is “fake” might not be the most important questions anymore.

² 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 issue 2 (2546), P. 1-66.

Arts and Politics: Do miracles really exist?

How arts and politics are related to each other is an issue that has been discussed for a long time and is still today one of most burning contemporary relevance. Some say that art has to be separated from politics while others declare that art must be related to politics, because art is a part of society. These 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 has passed. These days both sides have found their own paths and there is no real need to try to make everyone 'the same'. They may be different in their principles, but they are united under the umbrella of art.

In performance art, it seems 80 percent of performance artists create works related to social and political matters. These issues cannot be overlooked and have to be discussed. Nevertheless, it is not a discussion 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. From a cultural perspective, this study should be focused on the differences in terms of patterns and forms, rather 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 art and politics is that we

usually see art relating to politics as something created by people in order to express their thoughts against the power of the government. Art is used as a tool in the fight for something, for example, freedom, equality and democracy. Is it possible that this concept is the inherence of the phenomenon of "coup d'etat", for example that which happened in France in 1789? Has this incident become the role model for many countries to follow? Nevertheless, the relationship between arts and politics existed in different forms long before the revolution happened in France in 1789. Ancient Western and Eastern states all used arts as a tool in the founding of their empires. Control over people, norms, beliefs and traditions was created and maintained through the use of arts as one important tool.

In the case of the Eastern world, especially in Southeast Asia where Indian civilization has been localized, Brahman, Hindu and Buddhist beliefs have had enormous influences in the structure of societies. These ancient states planned their city structures according to the concept of Mount Meru, a Brahmanic cosmological thought (which was absorbed into Theravada Buddhism) used to specify the structure of a city, including the relationship between cities. In this system, layers of rings indicate significance, according position in relation to the center. The center of Mount Meru is considered as the capital city and the copy of this cosmological belief itself has many layers under laid, not only in architecture but also in murals paintings, which have the structure

conveying the hierarchical significance according to the existing classes in society—social organizing.³



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 works of arts in the early Rattanakosin era convey such an interesting political message. He gives the example of the case of the Emerald Buddha as being a result of the victory by Thailand over Laos. Taking the sacred Buddha was taking away the empire's symbol. Therefore, the Emerald Buddha has become the sacred image of the Thai empire; a tool used in the founding of power of the new Chakri Dynasty with the capital city in Bangkok. The Ramayana mural painting surrounding the Emerald Buddha Temple concerns the reincarnation of Narai (Rama in Hinduism) and is the story of a man's struggle to conquer the evil god Ravana (Tossagan). This is related to the victory of the

Aryan over the Milaca in India, where Ramayana epic originated. The Ramayana mural can be considered as something that helped to emphasize the dynasty's charisma. The Emerald Temple as the national sacred sanctuary with the Emerald Buddha placed at the center, surrounded by the story about Ramayana, perfectly symbolizes the two binary of powers of the state and the hierocracy.⁴

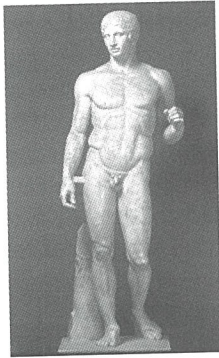
For this reason, perspectives of people in the old days were deeply combined with religion and this perspective was expressed through architectures and objects. Therefore, art is a series of symbols conveying the society's structure, by the consent of the state. In this sense, the state has eventually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

In the Western world, we can see that the power of arts has been recognized ever since 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 powerful that can draw people in, but because he values "reason" more than "emotion", he sees the significance of "public" more than "personal". As a 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 arts to cooperate with the state. In Plato's view, a good state is a just

³ Paritta Chalermkow 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.

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

state and moralistic people are rational people (ARETE); arts must eventually allow for this to happen because art is a copy, therefore; it has to copy great things. This is why Plato's concept of the world of forms led Greek Art to the style for which it is known today—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 a virtuous and peaceful society.⁵



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

The value of arts is not what is within art itself but something that has a 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 inter-related and have become tools for rulers to govern. We cannot say that art is the only social mechanism that keeps a society moving, but the concept of art having political functions

and roles in educating and leading people (and today this concept has finally become one of the criteria in valuing a piece of art) can also be traced back to the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), one of Plato's successors with his famous work "Poetics".

During the Neo-Classic period in France in the late 18th century, there was a revival of Greek and Roman style. At that time, Classic was highly considered and the rich, luxurious Rococo style was also very popular among the French upper-class.



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

The middle-class people who were stepping up to their roles in the society therefore had to find something that was opposite to "Classic". It became an issue of people reacting against the magniloquent of the monarchy⁶ and seeking something with completely different forms and subjects.

⁵ 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.

⁶ The meaning of "Classic" is, therefore; something indefinite, but relative. It occurred from the comparison 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 the exact same meaning, but depends on the surrounded context.

The aesthetics of “Neo-Classic” can be summed up by the words of the German art historian, Johann Jaochim Winckelmann—“Noble Simplicity and Calm Render”. Nobility (more than Rococo) is the practicing of something (thought to be) Greek.⁷ Therefore, Greek sculptures influenced both the forms of arts and social beliefs, including the ideals of human spirits—morality, bravery, sacrifice, pride and the efficiency of the Spartan and Roman Empires’ politics. This is the reason why arts give the implication of thoughts, and lessons as an example of exemplum.

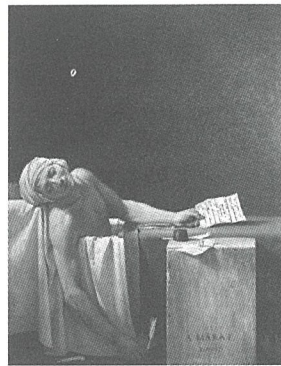
One of the leading Neo-Classic artists—Jacques Louis David created the painting “The Death of Socrates” (1787)



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 for his principle. The painting shows the image of Socrates holding a cup of poison in his hand while he is talking to his successors; looking so calm, even though he is dying. Socrates had had many students and had been forced to

accept the charge of disturbing the peace in society. The state offered 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 onto his belief and chose to drink the poison instead. The result was the end of his mortal life but the immortality of his teachings. 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 that the painter David was a member of the Jacobin political movement group and the contemporary political events during that time were subjects in his paintings which strongly conveyed his political beliefs. Another example is David’s painting “The Death of Marat” (1793), a leader of the Jacobin who was assassinated in a bath tub.



Jacques-Louis David, The Death of Marat, 1793, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 128 cm. Musee Royeaux des Beaux – Arts, Brussels

David composed Marat’s gesture by referring to Jesus—the sacred mortality of the sacrificed;

⁷ 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.

the common man hero who sacrificed his life for his belief, like as Socrates. The subject of heroic tragedy is also considered to be Greek style.

The 1789 French Revolution saw the rise of people against the monarchy, with determination to change the society into a democratic one (as Roman). People resented the luxurious, lavish lifestyle of the French dynasty of that time, while the working class people were taken advantage of. This situation, together with the increasing role of the middle class people in the society, led to the successful people's revolution which set the example for many countries to follow later. The motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" spread. This "Age of Enlightenment" reflected the desire for and appreciation of enlightened thinking that was associated with the rationality of science to replace religious obsession. It was a deliberate voice of the people calling for privileges and freedom, especially in the political participation.

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" became the declaration of political principal appearing in every area, including arts. Eug?ne Delacroix's 1830 painting "Liberty Leading the People"



Eugene Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People, 1830, Oil on Canvas, 260 x 325 cm. Musee du Louvre, Paris

is a memory of the revolution, personifying liberty as a topless maiden holding the French flag leading the people. Delacroix, who was not in

France during the incident, states in his personal memo, "...even though; I wasn't a part of the fighting for my country, at least I will paint for my country."

We can say that this was a time when arts and people truly stood together. But art involving politics has to be only about arts involving people's revolution? If not, it means that there are other kind of relationships between art and politics. Art has always been related to politics, depending only on which side it stands for. Why do we think of art with the political purpose only in the aspect of art and revolution and change? Other relationships between arts and politics can be seen in the empowered people/state political powers use of art for propaganda purposes. There are many examples to illustrate the use of arts as state propaganda.

As we have discussed, David's works were the conveyance of his political beliefs at a time when France became a Republic. However, when Napoleon established himself and started the consul system (and later became the Emperor), David became his favorite painter and was asked to create many paintings to honor him. "Classic" style stung back to be the subject matter about the upper class, with Napoleon comparing himself to the Roman Emperor. 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

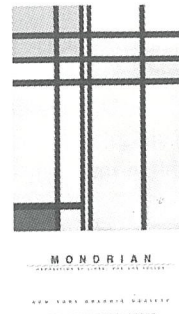
was Napoleon's attempt to portray himself as a great warrior and create himself the right to become Emperor, just as many kings had done in the past. St. Bernard Pass is a historically significant area, a rough ruthless pass to Austria. Roman Generals Hannibal and King Charlemagne had been through this pass and their names appear carved on the ground in the painting (the names do not appear in the actual scenery, but appear 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.⁸ From this it can be observed that David's later works of art switched to support a dictatorship instead, so David is an artist full of uncertainty and this is the reason why he is interesting too. Clearly the changing political conditions affected the creation of his works.

Other well known examples of arts used as state propaganda are the arts of the Stalin in Italy, and the Nazi in Germany. The forms of Realism were used because they were easy accessed and stimulating.



The propaganda poster of the Nazi

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



Social Realism works used a heroic style to rouse people, emphasizing the figure, with images in paintings and posters of serious-looking soldiers. The rise of dictatorship was in consequence, the return of the Realism. With the victory of the United States came the end of Realism and the flourishing of the United States as the center of arts as many European artists had evacuated there during the war. "Abstract"

⁸ *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.*

made its comeback as works of arts of the free world (which may be a reason why we usually see the word "freedom" together with works in the Abstract style). In this sense, arts were also used for political purposes, only this time for the promotion of the free world. Realism was revived as a minor trend while the United States as the center of the new world order tried to get rid of the influence of (and its long subjugation to) European arts. This was accomplished after the arrival of Jackson Pollock and American Abstract Expressionism.



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

We can observe from this brief trip through art history that arts and politics have always been inter-related. Art is directly involved with the authoritative relationship between different groups of people (in another word—class) and it is a part of the creation and indication of perceptions in the society. All forms of arts contain certain implications of authoritative relationships. It is not only state propaganda and stimulating art works that relate to politics, but other forms of creation also contain the implication of this subject matter. However, we cannot say that art itself creates and indicates the perceptions of people in the society, because

on the other hand, society itself, creates and indicates the perception of arts, too. What is what and will it be accepted? The judge is society - both the art society and 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 place that freed from the existence.

Myths

Myth is the conveying of meanings through cultural beliefs which are presented and appear to be acknowledged as natural and "true". Familiarity leads us to think that something has always existed and is "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. It is strongly related itself politics, economics and society as the historical context indicates its own existence. In a way, it is a certain limitation of ideas or concepts implanted in our instincts, affecting the way we see and perceive things. Not only referring to verbal language or alphabets, myth can also refer to all objects and phenomenon that convey certain meanings. The conditions in which myths are created are from a process of society and culture giving meanings and values (both good and bad) to something and turning it into a "truth". Myth is, therefore, a delusion. But it is a delusion thought to be "truth". In this sense, Roland Barthes' "myth" is very close to Michel Foucault's "discourse".⁹ Even this writing, itself,

⁹In 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.

is also something like a discourse, trying to find some space for arts in terms of a selected history.

Myths unavoidably appear everywhere, occurring when people step in to perceive and start to create meanings. Arts apparently use myth in the working process, as if the underlayers of society's myths (toward objects and phenomenon) finally become art's myths. The process of conveying meanings in works of arts is done firstly, by an artist (creator) who chooses to use signs to convey meaning in his/her works. Acknowledged or well-known signs are chosen, adapted, modified and given new meanings which can be something closely related to, or go far beyond their point of origin. As an individual living in a society, the artist and his/her creative efforts are, therefore; unavoidably related to and influenced by social concepts (both positively and negatively).

The concept of arts for society/people (or arts for life's sake) itself is considered a myth indicating 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/herself). Since when have we considered art as something powerful? Plato's time? (even though he pointed out pretty negative aspects about arts). The status of arts and artists was uplifted during the Renaissance when painting was promoted as a part of Liberal

Arts, liberating it from the Middle Age concept of the craftsmanship. On the contrary, at that time artists (painters) were the intellectuals and art (painting) was the intellectual creation of the noble thoughts. Until the 19th 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 as the revelation of life, human spirits, and the world, existed. From this perspective, artists were creators with special perceptions, able to see nature's great power and its relationship with human beings. A psychoanalytical discourse by Sigmund Freud in the 20th century confirmed the myth of the artist as a 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 the subconscious—the place where art originates.¹⁰

The belief in the "extraordinary" artist has been inherited until today, and it has taken artists to the position of leaders of society, as they create works of arts with subjects that reflect or criticize aspects of society, especially in the political realm.¹¹ From the myth saying that artists are people with special vision, the status of artists has been uplifted to something that can be compared to a god (apotheosis of the arts). On the other hand, society's perception towards artists can also be about their craziness as well.

¹⁰Nopporn Prachakul. Discourses in Contemporary arts (lecture). Plan B. Publishing. 5th December 2004.

¹¹ 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.

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The artwork themes may be various, including the revelation of the dark side of society, criticizing and suggesting solutions, which may reach the level of something very idealistic. Arts therefore, reveal chosen facts, give opinions (of the selector—the artist) and propose solutions, most likely to be the stimulation in the creation of reflecting the “truth” (as some artists usually claim...) Therefore, be aware that the images you see (in the mirror?) might be something ‘twisted’ by an artist’s perspective, as a strong influential factor, and therefore the meanings conveyed are discourses, not empirical reality.

Though ‘arts for society/people’ is a myth which we should no longer naively consider as a ‘truth’, that myth has pointed out certain social consciousness and stimulated functioning roles of artists in the present society. We might not be able to say that, practically, art will be the hand to change the world into a nobler place, but it functions as a warning and a reminder, bringing people to a certain level of realization. Indonesian artist, Iwan Wijono has commented, “I don’t believe that art can change political situations, but art can make people think”.¹²

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

If we consider that a concept (or myth) can drive the creative process of an artist, we would then need to explore which social phenomena are the influential factors that allow the concept to arise. In the case of Thailand, the concept of ‘obligation of arts to politics’ is founded in the discourse about “arts for life, arts for people” by Jitr Bhumisak (1930-1966), the Leftist thinker who was assassinated by the

government while hiding in the forest with the Thai Communist Party. During Bhumisak’s time, Thailand was ruled by a dictatorship government and there was intense controversy between the government and the university students together with avant-garde intellectuals. People who had expressed political opinions or been involved in political movements before the coup d’etat in 1958 were arrested after the coup had been accomplished. Moreover, the revolutionary committee ordered the shutting down of some newspapers and magazines that had reported news criticizing the government or published the socialist literature. A list of books classified as “contraband” was drawn up and anybody owning these texts would be convicted for committing the crime of being a communist. The Thai government’s fear of communism was a result of the support from the United States during the Cold War. The government authority controlled the freedom of the media and the ideas of intellectuals were banned from any acknowledgement in public. Writers had to censor themselves for the sake of their own security and some had to change to write on other subjects which would not be banned by the government. These censoring operations were executed continuously by the government of Marshall Plag Phibulsongkram from the late 1940s to the early 1950s.

During this time, there were many pieces of writing influenced by Socialism. The concept of “Arts for life’s sake” proposed by Jitr Bhumisak suggests that art has to contain subject matter that reflects people’s lives, as they were being oppressed and taken advantage of by the dictatorship government. Bhumisak asserted that artists should create works of art to serve the benefits of people rather than the benefits of

¹² Iwan Wijono. Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19th November 2004.

the ruling class or investors. Students cultivated the idea that the purpose of their education was to practice knowledge in order to serve other people, not themselves. Arts and poetry for life played a very important part in creating this realization. Interestingly, as a result of the government's censorship, publishing and writing activities become popular again. The banned published works were kept in the houses of the writers, some in the Thammasat University library, some in publishing houses or used books stores and during the 1960s these were passed around and spread among a certain group of people during 1960s. These writings were like awakening inscriptions which enormously influenced the people's revolutionary incidents on 14th October 1973 and 6th October 1976.¹³



The revolution on Rachadamnern Rd.

According to the political situation of that time, it is no surprise that Bhumisak set such a high criteria for arts. As a Leftist intellectual who studied Marxism, the opposition of imperialism and feudalist investors was at the

core of his beliefs. Socialism was his choice as a way to fight the dictatorship authority of the military government. Art as something involved with temples and palaces (the upper classes) was challenged by another form of art—art for life's sake/ art for society, which is something completely different both in subjects and forms. Bhumisak said that the arts of the upper classes, belonging to an elite group of people; were too complex and beyond the understanding of ordinary people. Bhumisak had always fought for the equality of social classes and declared that the best art is art with the forms that can be comprehended by the public, containing valuable subject matters for mankind, and having the ability in induce 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.”¹⁴ (Translated from Thai to English by Tanakanya Changchaitum)

We can call this as the manifesto spoke very clearly about what arts should be and what the function of an artist is. The idea that arts should not be separated from ordinary

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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

people, and that artists have to work in order to serve that function, created the paradox as to whether artists are just ordinary people or more special than others. This writing shows that the power of arts is something that can lead mankind to nobility; by criticizing society, arts will be the voice of morality, holding onto great ideals. The brave artists will be the shining light that will lead the way to...enlightenment ?

Bhumisak's writings became popular and were spread out again after his death and the popularity of the study of his and other writings continued during the 1960s. The coup by the revolutionary committee in 1958 caused an awakening of the lives and works of Leftist writers which strongly influenced the intellectual movement that will lead to the 14th October 1973 incident. The reincarnation of the government's undesirable discourses and the situation during the government of Marshall Sarit Thanarat and Marshall Thanom Kittikachon was similar to the political conditions during the creation of those writings (the period of Marshall Plag Phiboonsongkram). Students and intellectuals in this period felt that the lives and works of the earlier avant-gardes were something mysterious and intriguing. It became popular to revive those writings and study them, which later had led to the creation of a discourse about their own political identity.¹⁵ Bhumisak's "Arts for life, Arts for people" discourse spread and the phrase "Arts for life's sake" was widely discussed in many student and intellectual journals. These discussions were direct criticisms of the school of "Arts for Arts' sake" and promoted the binary of opposition between the two beliefs. Bhumisak's initial concept

became concrete principles —passionate 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 art does not mean to produce such a low careless, slapdash works. On the contrary, it means the use of arts to arouse people, so that they can wake up and see through the objective reality of life. Arouse them to find the way to change all the ugliness of life towards nobility! Reflecting the creative reality; use your art as a spear and a torch; be the spear, pointing toward enemies of the people—the enemy who drags people's lives to ugliness...be the torch, and successfully lead 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 at the nobility of life.

....this is how arts should serve people."¹⁶ (Translated from Thai to English by Tanakanya Changchaitum)

"Bhumisak's aesthetics" obviously revealed the Marxist concept that lies within and his works themselves constantly referred to Russian intellectual Leo Tolstoy and his book "What is Art?" For Bhumisak, good arts mean arts functioning as a tool in political proclamation; a belief resulted from the social conditions of the time. Before the October 14th incident, a similar

¹⁵ Prajak Kongkeerati. (Ibid). P. 223-225.

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

political atmosphere brought back popularity in Bhumisak's works. There was a birth of a new generation of writers, such as those under the name "Crescent Moon Group". Visual artists whose works related to social criticism, such as the "Dhamma Group" and Chang Tang included students from many arts colleges. These people had stepped into the political movements of the day, together with people from various other parts of the society, leading to the people's marches on 14th October 1973 and 6th October 1976.

During that period, performance art as it is today did not yet exist in Thai society, but certain performance activities were used to communicate issues and predicted that soon this art form would play a role in political matters. The incident of the two Provincial Electricity Authority officials in Nakhon Prathom province who were hanged in public by the police



The victims of the dictatorship.

for putting up announcements protesting Marshall Tanom's secret return to Thailand as a monk was discussed at Lan Pho in Thammasat University. A reenactment of the hanging incident was performed by student members of the Performing Art and Drama Club.¹⁷



The performance (?) of the students in Thammasat University

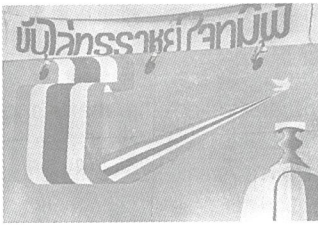
Other performances included the reading of poetry while marching together with protestors and people dressing to mock the United States (for example, as the Statue of Liberty) and people dressing in dirty outfits holding guns.¹⁸

¹⁷Later, 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 16th October 1976.

¹⁸ Chumpol Apisuk. Concrete House. Nonthaburi. 11th November 2004.



However, the roles and ideas of visual artists and art students were mostly expressed through paintings and posters. They also created signs and announcements for the protestors.



“Thailand Artists Aid”, which organized many political and social activities during 1974-1976, was founded.

The spread of the revolutionary movement mirrored the Age of Revolution and the models of the French Revolution in 1789 and Russian Revolution in 1917—opening with Liberalism and ending with Socialism. This trend was a response from people who longed for change. In other parts of the world during the decade of 1960-1970, student movements shared many similar ideas, perceptions and practices; they read the same books, worshiped

the same heroes. The student movement had therefore become an essential social and political power.¹⁹

The Indonesian case is similar to that of Thailand. During the time of Suharto’s dictatorship government, there was an announcement which declared the propagation of Socialism as an illegitimate act. Suspects were arrested and the writings of Leftist intellectuals were banned, as in Thailand. But the harder the Indonesian government tried to shut them up, the louder the people spoke. Being “banned” made writings more attractive and interesting. By the end of Suharto’s time, such writings were awakened and had become popular among many readers again.

Protests in Indonesia were led by farmers, working class people, students, intellectuals and in some cases were from the Golka Party itself. Indonesia seemed to be made up of knitted threads of protests; student protests usually concerned political liberation and supported the voice of those less advantaged, especially the farmers, similar to the student activism in Thailand. Artists were also involved in the political protests. In 1991 the government banned “Power Inheritance” by the Theatre Koma, because it was considered to be a mockery of the president. Playwriter Ratna Riantiarno was again censored when she composed another play called “Opera Kacoo”, a socially sarcastic story about the difficult life in city ghettos. The police also banned poet Rendra from reading his poetry, leading to a proclamation from 50 artists about the right and freedom to express ideas.²⁰

¹⁹ Chanvit Kasetsiri. “6th October and Its Status in Political History” From 14th to 6th October. Bangkok: Thammasat University Publishing, 1999. P. 165-178.

²⁰ Vittaya Sucharithanarugse. “Indonesia after the Cold War” Southeast Asia: Politics and Administration after the Cold War. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Publishing, 2003. P. 64-67.

There were also certain controversies about “Arts for Arts’ sake” or “Arts for politics” during the time of Suharto’s government. General understanding about arts was limited to the “decorative objects”. However in 1970, the New Art Movement was founded to protest against the state’s arts (paintings and sculptures). Most of the students were from Bandung and Yogyakarta and were expelled from schools (which were owned by the state), but the fighting about artistic expression continued. In the decade of 1990, performance art began to play its part in protest against Suharto’s government.²¹ This birth of performance art in Indonesia was, therefore, a reaction against the state’s authority, both in the part involving art itself (arts approved by the state) and with dictatorship politics. This assembly included performance art by Indonesian students who become a part of the protest march. The similarity between the actual performance and the march activities (for example, the burning of an effigy of Suharto) makes it difficult to separate the work of art (created for the protest) from the actual protesting. Many artists in this field also played roles as serious political activists.

Though the political situations highly influenced the creations by many Indonesian artists (performance artists and others), some works of art continued to be created entirely free of political subject matter. The common perception or Indonesian arts is, however, that they have always been closely connected with the social and political situation in the country. The image of Indonesian arts in the eyes of the contemporary art world is often one of something “chosen” and “presented” in a certain way, and eventually it has become almost a stereotype—the myth of Indonesian arts.²²

Similar to Thailand and Indonesia, the Philippines has struggled with abuses of political power and dictatorships. Street theatre was a part of the protest against the Marcos dictatorship²³ and the main origin of performance art in the Philippines can be found in the political movements and protests. Initially perhaps not entirely about performance art as it is known today in the region, expressions of protest through plays, drama or the use of the body already existed.

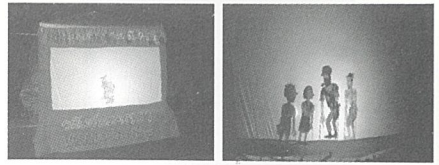
²¹ Iwan Wijono. *Concrete House, Nonhaburi*. 18th November 2004.

²² *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 portrayer, 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”*

²³ Mideo M. Cruz. *Western Minds in the Eastern Hemisphere (lecture)*. *Concrete House, Nonhaburi*. 18th November 2004.

Nevertheless, shouldn't performance art have or be something different from a general protest performance, (though there may be many similarities between the two)? Some artists involved in political movements during that time have "chosen" to use performance art as a way of supporting the continuity of political plays created in the early period. In some cases it is the inheritance of forms which have been adapted until finally becoming the actual performance art. Such artists include Chumpon Apisuk, Surapol Panyavacheera, the Bangladesh Band, to name a few.

After Thailand's 6th October 1976 incident, the intellectuals and the Leftist artists started to come out from the forest. Chumpon Apisuk organized the "Sa-mai Stage" at The Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art and political plays made their comeback. This was the beginning of performance art, by the attempt to spread knowledge of this kind of art. Apisuk later moved his base to the Concrete House and has organized Asiatopia Performance art Festival since its beginning in 1999. Many performance artists are people who once played key roles in the protests in the past and are still committed to the obligation to criticize the political situations of their countries. This is why performance art at the present time continues its original idealistic beliefs, adapted to the contemporary political situations. For example, Vasan Sitthiket from Thailand performed a shadow play about 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. Certainly not by coincidence, for this work at this time Sitthiket chose to express his ideas through the form of the shadow play, Southern Thailand's performing art.



Vasan Sitthiket, 6th Asiatopia, Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19th – 20th November 2004

Performance artists works today refer to not only the domestic political situations but also the world current events. Much of the material relating to international politics is targeted at the United States, with repeated use of various symbols to refer to that country which have eventually turned into some sort of patterns. For example, to convey the identity of that country US dollar bills and coins, the American flag, national anthem and other typically American products like Coca-Cola, the Washington apple are used. The subjects of works have eventually combined the issues of consumerism, and cultural colonization. For example, the performances by the U-Kabat Group from Thailand





U-Kabat Group,
4th Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok.
22nd November 2002

which featured the crushing of Washington Apple with a hammer, a boxing fight between people wearing Bin Ladin and George W. Bush masks.



Performances by Black Market International

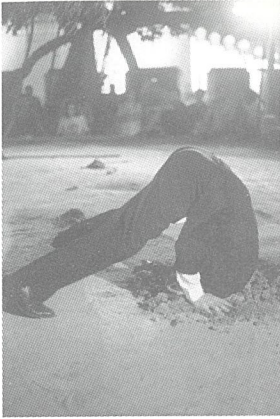


The Black Market International, 4th Asiatopia,
Bangkok, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok. 22nd
November 2002

featured the cutting out of the stars of the American flag and pinning them down to the ground with nails.



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

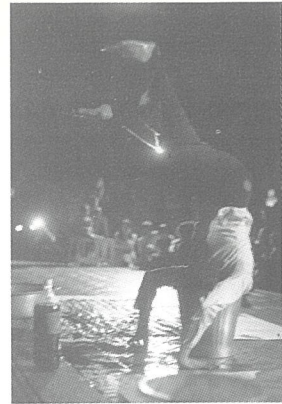


Performances by other international artists have also responded to the situations in the world arena. In her performance, Canadian artist Julie Andree Trambly from Black Market International

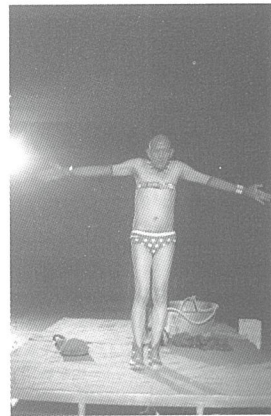


Julie Andree Trambly, 4th Asiatopia, Bangkok, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok. 23rd November 2002

dyed white stars removed from the American flag into black and then painted red on the flag using her feet. After putting her head into a Coca-Cola tank,



she floated in the Chao Praya River while playing a memoir song on the violin. Coca-Cola has also been used by Wiwan Christiawan from Indonesia, who while wearing American flag pattern underpants

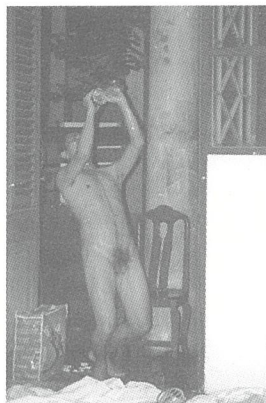


Wawan Christiawan, 5th Asiatopia, Alliance Franciase Bangkok. 14th November 2003

and carrying a bucket, walked in front of the audience. Actually wearing two pairs of underpants, one with the white stars on a dark blue background pattern, the other with red and white stripes, when Christiawan removed both pairs of underpants he put them around his head and poured Coca-Cola over his head.



wearing an American flag pullover, which he later removed as he shook a bottle of Coca-Cola and opened it, letting the pressurized stream of black liquid pour onto his naked body. This gesture suggested that he had reached the final stage of masturbation.



Similarly Mideo M. Cruz from the Philippines, he stepped out from the shadows with the sound of stimulating music,



Mideo M. Cruz, 6th Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai. 27th November 2004

Does protest art represent something more than protesting? How does the expression of a political standpoint have any significance for arts? Where is the space for artists in society? These questions are still floating in the air. If "Arts for life, Arts for people" is just a myth, to where can it bring the artists? Though the audacity of "Arts for life" originated from delusions, isn't the privilege of freedom in the ability to express our ideas and thoughts something well deserved? While arts alone may not be able to change society, it is the realization of this limitation that allows us to see what the human spirit and arts are. It may be naive to proclaim that arts will lead humans to an ideal world, but still the idea is something floating out there somewhere, as something for us to hold on to, as something that will guide us in the directions. The "imagination" for equality continues, from the revolution in 1789 until now. Iwan Wijono is still creates his work by uttering "Liberte! Liberte! Liberte!"



Iwan Wijono, 2nd Asiatopia, Saranrom Park,
Bangkok. 21st November 1999

The state and censorship of performance art: paranoia and misunderstanding

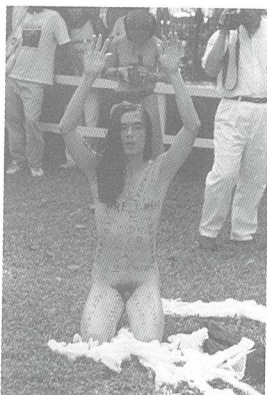
Because performance art has been used as a tool for protesting against the state and challenged authority, the state itself has attempted to control this field of art. This is not only a result of performance art's role in political criticism, but also some works have been declared perverted. In countries where people are heavily controlled, the creation of performance art has become extremely difficult and in some cases is nearly considered illegal.

The state's comprehension of performance art results in its definition about what is and what is not art. The state's understanding can affect public's comprehension as well. In most countries in Southeast Asia, many people outside the arts community still consider art as an object for decorating a house; therefore the accepted representations of arts (something that can be understood) are paintings and sculptures. Reaching beyond this common perception and popular 'acceptance' of what is 'art' is a challenge as art is considered as something involving in a particular small group of people and beyond ordinary people's comprehension.

For this reason, in some countries, creating works of arts is very difficult, especially in dictatorships, such as Burma. As mentioned earlier, during Suharto's period, the Indonesian government expelled many art students who protested against "official arts". Protesting against this kind of art finally become the protest against the state itself, for its invasion and denial of people's rights to free expression of thoughts and ideas. In the case of Burma's restricted environment, many artists whose works contain political references have been arrested, while others have turned to create 'safe' work. Under these constraints, performance art has even less possibility to grow (even though the military government may not have any clue about it).

Performance art itself has genuinely originated from protesting/rebelling. The history of arts reveals that the birth of performance art was not only concerned with protesting against state control but also the protesting by some artists against the "institution", such as galleries and museums that have turned arts into something extremely commercialized. The way to turn art into something that cannot be commercialized was to take the quality of being an "object" out of it. The body was considered a new aspect—as the art object. Once the body is considered as a work of art, how can we sell or buy it (though today's performances are recorded and the recorded performances can be purchased anyway)? How can you objectify something that belongs to a specific time and place? It happened and ended.. The "anti-institution" approach has also led to the beginning of the performances in public spaces, which has fostered new definitions and perspectives of arts. Performance art is itself a rebellion to art (so some may prefer not to put the word "art" after "performance"). It contains rebellious

subject matters, therefore; from the state's common practice, which is the desire to control and regulate social order (which in the eye of the state is usually referring to something cliché and modest), performance art is seen as bizarre, violent or even perverted. As some works also contain issues in the protesting against the state as well, it's hardly surprising that this form of art is highly controlled by the state. Works by Burmese artists have referred to imprisonment and longing for freedom. For example, in the performance by Aye Ko,



Aye Ko, 2nd Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, Bangkok, 20th November 1999

the artist wrote the word "freedom" on his naked body while kneeling as if begging and Aung Myint performance included praying for freedom.



Aung Myint, 2nd Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, Bangkok, 21st November 1999

Singapore is another interesting example revealing how intense the state can seek to control the society. In 1994, Josef Ng did a performance by cutting his pubic hair and putting 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 organization. At present, Josef Ng is working and living in Thailand. Performance art can be done in private spaces or galleries, but it is very difficult to perform in public spaces.²⁴ Ng's case is similar to the control over media and certain "publishing bans" by dictatorship governments in Thailand and Indonesia. In some cases where states cannot have the absolute control over the media (because the media has the right to publicize what is happening in society), the state has chosen to control the origin of the undesirable incidents in the society instead.

²⁴ *Khairuddin Hori. Pathumwan Intersection, Bangkok. 19th November 2004.*

Misunderstandings about performance art between the state and the art society have created a wide gap. Shock from the unfamiliar art form leads to paranoia and when this 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, become detached from other understandings about arts—something that keeps changing in every passing minute.

Body in Performance Art

The body has recently become an issue of academic interest for those in the field of Social Sciences and Anthropology, in the attempt to understand the body and its meaning in a social sense. French philosopher and influential intellectual Michel Foucault (1926-1984)'s essay about "power" makes reference to it being 'the important component that keeps every aspects of the society moving'. "Power" is, therefore, something related to the limitation of the ideas and concepts of a society in a period of time. Through discourses, "power" has gradually become (a social) "reality". It indicates the movements and happenings of a society and even the human body is controlled by this kind of power.

Foucault suggested that the human body is created as a kind of social invention and he analyzed how modern institutions, such as prisons, schools, hospitals, factories or even armies, can control and operate the human body. For example, order is one kind of body practice. Foucault explains 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 erect 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 given 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)²⁵

²⁵ 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.

From the essay, we can observe that a good soldier's body is transformed from his original natural figure into a body created by his practice. The body has become what sociologists call "the body project", based on the idea of creating, shaping and rebuilding the body according to one's needs and desires. This desire relates to social values, standards and notions in the particular period of time, such as dieting, exercise, etc. In this regard, it can be considered that everything we have done ever since our birth has entirely affected our bodies. The body is, therefore, more likely to be a social invention than a creation of nature.

The consumerist society has affected how we treat our bodies. Indonesian artist Mimi Fadmi presented her work wearing short black leather pant with boots and while listening to foreign music, the artist stood inside a huge paper bag containing many famous brand names such as Esprit, Chanel, etc. and showered herself with a hard brush.



Mimi Fadmi, 4th Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok 23 November, 2004

Mimi's work conveys that body is the center of human self-creation, something that a person wishes to present for others to see, such as the presentation of their good taste by frosting their bodies with expensive products. Consequently, one's identity is something that can be shaped and formed into whatever one wants, while the

standard in creating the accepted identity is also controlled by society as well. Especially in regards to "beauty", since a part of the consideration of a beautiful woman's body comes from the compelling media 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 (clothes, cosmetics) in order to create the accepted identity in the perception of most people. 'Mirror Room' by the Beauty Suit



The Beauty Suit, 6th Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai. November, 27 2004

illustrated this point clearly. Four female artists getting dressed and putting on make up repeatedly shouted "beautiful" and "not beautiful". Mirror room was full with clothes, make up and other beauty products and a one-way mirror along one wall allowed the audience to see inside the room but the artists could not see the audience outside. Therefore, all the artists' shouting and questions about beauty were to be answered and judged by the public looking at them, not by them looking at (seeing) themselves. 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 (7th Surgery-Performance),
New York, 1993

Performance Art: The use of body as an artistic rebel

The use of the body in performance art originated from the challenge against the old system of arts, in which arts were considered as purchasable objects. During the 1960s, art institutions were challenged by groups of artists who seriously questioned the objectification and commercialization of arts. As stated, one way to oppose the objectifying of art is to remove the 'object'. That is, to transform art (as an object) through use of the human body (not to be purchased or frozen in museums). From this point of view, it might be possible to say that a body can still be considered as an object since it can be touched, seen and put in a space. Nevertheless, it cannot be kept them in any collection. Even though we can record and purchase performances using video tapes, these are not the same as actual live performances, only a reminder, a memory of a specific time. Performance art is always concerned with the specific period of time and cannot be performed exactly again (the consequences are different as each performance is affected by the surrounded

context). The effect of performance art is closely related to space and time, and depends on atmosphere together with the connection between the audience and the performance artist. Performance art can also erase the boundaries between different art forms. Its interdisciplinary quality borrows from rituals, ancient traditions, religions, beliefs, music, literature, folk songs and contemporary stimuli.

Performance art has opened up new and interesting issues about the definition of arts and artists. A body does not refer to something that generates art (by a brain and two hands of the artist) but has become art itself; in this sense, body is an object, but it's a living object. For example, performance artists Gilbert and George perform as a duo and call themselves "living sculpture".



Gilbert and George, The Singing Sculpture, 1971

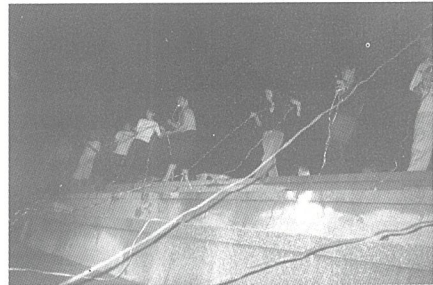
In this way art and artist are united in one, human life overlaps to art, while in the past, the border between the world of arts and the 'real' world were completely separated. Painting, for instance, is limited by frames and those frames indicate the gap which separates the 'real' world and the world of arts. Performance art is not the only movement seeking to destroy this boundary,

however it is able to highlight this issue more outstandingly compared to other forms of art because of its own special characteristics. Once art and artist are considered one and the same thing, the consequential question is whether everything that the artists do is considered art?

The decline of arts institutions (art museums and galleries) generates a movement towards artistic creation in public spaces, such as pubs, theatres, parks, markets and streets, including protests. Performance art's participation in these spaces causes certain ambiguity for the performance art itself. For instance, among a protest it is difficult to identify or separate artist from demonstrator. 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 are these different? So we return to the same questions regarding whether art is something done or created by an artist, and what is the difference between artists and normal people? Can we say that performance art is the pinnacle of the myth about artists, since under this consideration the art and the artist are considered as the same thing.

Performance art has also recreated new connections between viewers and the work of art. Before, art was simply an object placed steadily, waiting for the viewers to come and admire. The frame of a painting or the base of a sculpture is what separates the space of the viewer from the world of art, located in / on a sacred white wall of a museum as if it was a temple (Note: "museum" actually means temple of muses, the 7 goddesses of arts and sciences).

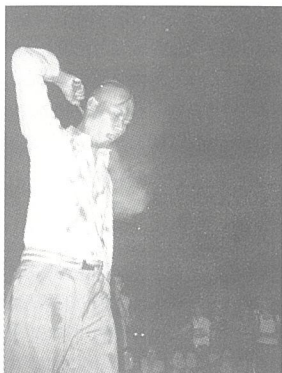
The restrictions and manners in appreciating these works of art emphasize the viewers to realize the separated parts of the two worlds. In some places, the boundary of viewers is strictly controlled by the lines indicating the separated and controlled spaces, as in museums. The restrictions in seeing the works of art are lightened up by some works which allow the viewer to be a part of them, and certain works of art cannot exist without the viewer's participation. This is how arts start to creep into and become the viewer's space. In the case of performance art, the use of body as the medium makes it even easier to create interaction with viewers since every human has a body, so it is up to viewers whether they want to interact in the performance or not. Yuan Mor'O Ocampo talked to his audience inviting them and handing them plastic buckets with ropes. This gave the sign for people to swing and throw the buckets together.



Yuan Mor'O Ocampo, 4th Asiatopia,
Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok,
23 November, 2003

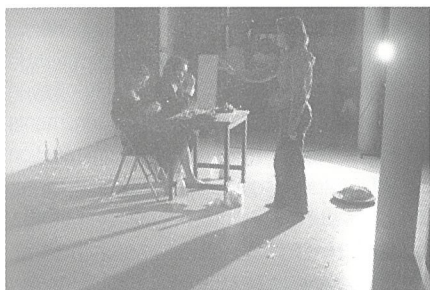
By having the artist as a 'director', the audiences create their own performances.

Montri Toemsombat allowed people to spray pink color onto his body.



Montri Toemsombat, 4th Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok, 22 November, 2002

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



Valerian Maly and Klara Schilliger, 6th Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai, 26 November, 2004

In Surapol Punyavachira's performance, the artist pasted white hand-shaped balloons all

over his body and let people pierce them with needles,



Surapol Punyavachira, 4th Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok, 23 November, 2002

implying the liberation from the conventional arts (arts made by hand which endure through time). While what was left was the body of the artist, it was this moving body that represents art in a present time.

Viewer participation turns art from an absolute object into a work requiring other external factors to fulfill its creative process. This "participation" is something similar to one of 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 as Josef Beuys (1921-1986) suggested that everybody can be an artist? The question is also, "Is this called art?" This is the effect from the relevance of art and its quality of being an "activity". The Phad-Thai (Thai fried noodle)



Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled, 2002, New York

demonstration given by Rirkrit Tiravanija is still frequently discussed as to whether it is art or not (even though in the international discussing forum, this topic is no longer considered important). Works by Yuan Mar'O Ocampo and Rirkrit also bring us to think about the difference between performance art and performing art. While performing art is something controlled by a director, in performance art the artist is the director himself/herself, both the performer and the director. The performance therefore belongs to the artist who creates it. In some cases, it is the artist who directs other people to perform (for example, Rirkrit sometimes had someone else cook Phad-Thai or other Thai food). Nevertheless, the work still belongs to the artist.

From this we can see that there are a lot of overlapping issues between these two art forms. It highlights how art has changed its definition and when it comes to certain judgments of what is or is not art, it seems to be all about the matter of 'power'. That is because once an argument takes place, it becomes something political. It is the politics in art that will fight for its own place, to find something different in 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

A popular question is "How do we create contemporary arts from our roots?" The terms "root", "preserve" and "perpetuate" have been used so many times that they are now something of a cliché. How do we explain this continuing phenomenon and what does it mean to the art society?

During this age of 'globalization', people have questioned the meaning of the word "international", which seems to have turned into an expanding western thought in every part of the world. The word "international" does not seem to have a genuine meaning; even though the past period of colonialism has ended, forms of "neo-colonialism" or "neo-imperialism" remain. This relates to the influence of western thoughts rather than possession of any piece of land. Its essential tools are economic and political ideals which have changed the social structure of Southeast Asian countries. Consequently, it fires up nationalistic thoughts in each country against this hidden power. Nationalistic talk tends to highlight certain characteristics of a nation in particular (identity) which is unavoidably followed by feelings of nostalgia. Nationalistic sentiments were fueled during the anti-colonialism reaction in 19th century. Referring to the past in our search for our own specific identity (or possibly recreating a new identity) is common practice, since whoever possessed the past can fairly exist in the present.

In art terms, original ideas from the past have often been used for artistic inspiration. But we cannot claim that this new invention is the same as the past as such a concept of "arts"

never actually existed in Thailand or other Southeast Asian societies. It was introduced into this region not so many years ago. Though distinct ancient architectures and art pieces are characterized as art (by the eyes of the people in the present time), these art forms are nothing like "arts" generated by contemporary artists as those ancient works were created under a different paradigm, with artists having different roles and positions in society, including different criteria for valuing art.

So how can we state that the creation of art today is a continuative process from the past? For the reuse of old things and ideas to create art is only a new interpretation of the originals. It is about regenerating bringing the new out of the old. Current practices of introducing traditional elements into contemporary painting, for example, may be included in this view of art. Modern artworks containing Buddhist elements can also be characterized as "art" according to the western interpretation (which has eventually expanded to "international"). Yet this kind of art is only an offspring from mutation, rather than the heir descended directly from its ancestor's flesh and blood.

This does not mean that this 'repetitive art' is not 'good enough', or that imagining we continue to have "roots" is useless. On the contrary, those works of art from each culture, with their own unique identity and character, are something totally exotic in the eyes of the western world and a source of great interest for international art festivals (as everybody wants to see something different from where they have 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 traditional works, but also norms, rituals and other cultural components are conceptual materials for inspiration. Artistic creations are all about the individuality of each artist, including what and how they will express ideas, presenting them using the international language of modern and contemporary art. In this way the works of these artists reveal more complex thinking and the art making process. This is because the art combine the (imported) international language and the original language²⁶, both in the physical components that can be observed (image, material, etc.) and in subject matter. Some subjects contain such specific characteristics that the perceptions we have towards them become specific as well. This can be seen, for example, in the case of Korean artist, Sang Jin Lee who created a performance with an image similar to the Christian crucifixion. The performance included the use of bread and blood²⁷ which clearly refer to Christianity; however, in reality, the artist used these objects as symbols of the beliefs from his own culture. The liquid which appeared to be blood was actually a reference to the traditional Chinese medicine used to cure mutes. Such misunderstandings and ambiguity from coincidental similarities is something that happens all the time in experiencing works of art. It is not about being 'wrong', for this 'confusion' can turn out to be an interesting point of view regarding a work of art's high potential for variations and multiple dimensions and interpretations. The audience is free to interpret it, according to the concept of "open work"

²⁶ *In this sense, language means any form of medium containing messages.*

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

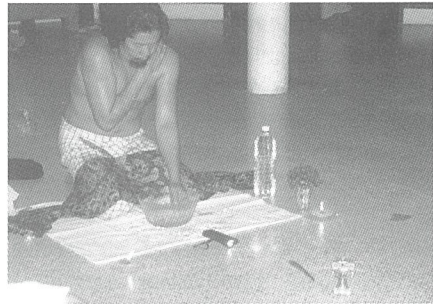
promoted by Umberto Eco. An audience's interpretation may not go too far beyond the acceptable recognition. The above incident emphasizes the fact that symbols are culturally located and require learning. Symbols contain definite meanings, but action or objects change their meaning according to the cultural surroundings. One thing may be viewed as another, depending on the 'owner' of the culture.

This is just a simple example of the bringing of local cultures to present as a work of art at the international level. The 'treasures' from the 'original' cultures have created many different and distinguished new works, and they also function as artistic options that will keep art continually moving forward. In Asiatopia itself, a number of artists choose to work in this certain direction and style, introducing references to beliefs, religion, poetry, folk music in the creation of their performances. Therefore, the body in performance art functions in this certain characteristic, as a combination of old and new. It sends messages in ways similar to other artistic objects that fit in the categorization of the reuse of old objects and subjects.

Vasan Sitthiket's shadow play (6th Asiatopia, Pathumwan intersection, 19-20 November 2004) referred to earlier totally different from the traditional and conventional shadow play. The dialogue (dubbed by Sitthiket himself) about contemporary incidents and events mocked the political situation of that time in a very ironical and hilarious way. The dub was mostly improvised and many times the artist got 'lost' since he couldn't remember the script, or maybe because he was not totally comfortable communicating in English. Nevertheless, this was the charm of his shadow play; the charm of the natural imperfection. It also conveyed clearly the illusion of art, since ultimately art is not real. Interruptions during

Sitthiket's performance allowed pauses for the audience to laugh and appreciate the messages the artist was trying to communicate. Sitthiket also combined elements of performing art into his performance. Certain conditions and aspects of performance art are basically different from those in performing art, for they are two different art forms. Art which deals or plays with old subjects (eventually turned into something applied or invented from the old roots) can be considered in the same way. Therefore, if we 'measure' Sitthiket's shadow play with the same standards we apply to a conventional traditional shadow play, we might say that his shadow play performance is an offspring of the genuine traditional performing art; but this would perhaps be a misconception.

Mongkol Plienbangchang included a Northern Thai lullaby in the creation of one performance.

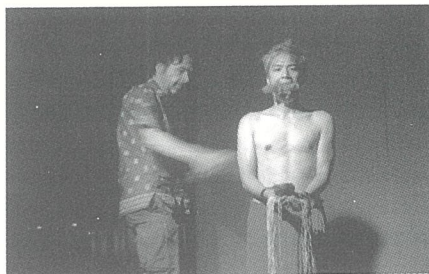


Mongkol Plienbangchang, 6th Asiatopia, Thepsiri Studio, Chiang Mai, 27 November 2004

In darkness, wearing a sarong (a piece of traditional patterned fabric used to cover the body), Plienbangchang performed as if he was taking a bath, wiping his face all white with powder. The scent of incense floated in the air along with the sound of the traditional lullaby. The idea of taking a bath as a part of a work of art draws attention to the concept of space in

performance - bringing the "personal" into the "public". Normally, activities like taking a bath and getting dressed are considered as personal rituals that people conduct with their own bodies in private. However, this performance reverses the perspective, turning "inside" to "outside", by revealing what is normally covered in front of the audience. Other aspects of this performance highlighted specific characteristics as well. In this case, the local characteristic did not only refer to Thailand but specifically to Thailand's northern provincial countryside. Plienbangchang used the Northern dialect which is different from the language used in the central part of the country (Most people understand Thai ways to be those which relate to central Thailand, particularly Bangkok). Plienbangchang's work (in the eyes of the audiences who are Bangkokians and foreigners) was; therefore, something which can be called the marginal of the marginal. The reason is that, if the western world is considered to be the centre of today's world order, certain specific cultural characteristics or the state of being a nation presented by the Asian artists are presentations of the identity of people who live on the margins. In Thailand itself, the local people who live in the different parts of the country are marginalized, compared to those in Bangkok, the 'center' of the country. They are the marginalized of the marginal who are forgotten and neglected—the outsiders who are, ironically, also considered to be the exotic and fascinating.

Religion is another familiar subject in many works of art. In his work 'Emancikazee', Singaporean-Malaysian artist, Khairuddin Hori used flagellation, a reference to the punishment for adultery under Islamic law.

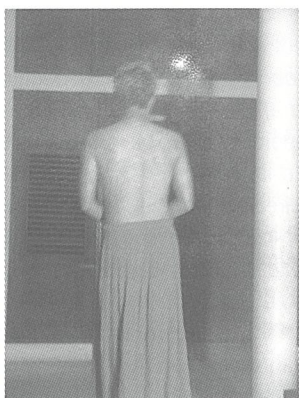


Khairuddin Hori, 6th Asiatopia, Concrete House, Bangkok, 19 November 2004

Superficially, Hori's performance might not lead the audiences to realize its reference to the Islamic law because the performance was adapted using of contemporary language. Furthermore, the method of flagellation was not self-punishment but required someone else to function as the punisher instead. Members of the audience were invited to whip the artist's back and then they would receive money and souvenirs in return. In this case, the artist used his own personal interpretation and mode of communication to change the original rule of religion into his own work of art. For this reason flagellation was used as just the beginning state of the artist's inspiration, for the work itself did not illustrate any Islamic law. Certain characteristics of theatre were also involved in this performance, such as the standing on a podium while facing towards the audience, shining light in the middle of the dark and the artist himself referring to the principles of European dramatist Antonin Artaud by saying, "In my performance I will also attempt to parallel the assent of Antonin Artaud's idea of *Theatre of Cruelty*."²⁸ The work intended to be something violent and "cruel to the audiences",

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

with the sound of the whip touching the artist's back under the dramatic atmosphere of the contrasting light and darkness. When the performance ended, the artist bent to show his back and the red marks resulting from the flagellation, letting a sickle fall out of his mouth onto the floor. In this case, the one who felt the most pain was not the artist, but the audience watching the performance—those who created the red bruises on the artist's back while his was fettered and handcuffed.



Are we still searching for originality? Why are reproduction and nostalgia part of artists' main motivation? What if that originality is not something 100 percent original, but something created from the combination of many things which form themselves into something new? For this reason, we could say that a work of art has its own originality in the state that automatically occurs together with the working process. The "choosing" of something in order to use it in a work of art implies certain perspectives of the creator — the individual's specific perceptions and perspective. As a result, in this region, many artworks are created from the integration between the Eastern way of

thinking and artistic creating methods rooted in Western civilization. It is the state of being "personal" of each artist that has made these activities autonomous from a conventional stylistic 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, 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 and reflexive dimensions. Ultimately, these works function as the presenter of an artist's personal messages, though before anything else they are personal statements about the desires of their motivated creations.

In Art History terms, originality occurs from violations and breaking of the rules. In this way, reinterpretation and redefinition happens. In terms of Visual Arts, when this kind of phenomenon happens, it is partly considered to be a criticism against the previous form of art. This not only leads to the making of art as something that goes beyond the public's understanding but also an opening up to new paradigms of art.²⁹ Take the case of Marcel Duchamp and his toilet bowl (1917), for example, where Duchamp's act has the characteristic of an art criticism rather than a work of art. Yet, in later times, it has eventually become considered a work of art (although that was never his intention). Duchamp is also considered one of the founders of contemporary art, using ready-made objects together with the "chance" principle. This declaration gave everyday objects the possibility of being considered works of art.

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

If "chance" is a matter of a perfect coincidence of various factors that can turn something ordinary into a work of art, then we may consider whether something is art may depend on context. It is the chance when time and place perfectly meet, confront and interact (including the creation by the artist). A reference based on an external factor of a work of art affects the conventional concept of originality, since 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 whatever happened will not happen again for the second time. Therefore, ultimately, it is possible to say that everything has its own originality.

As a result, picking out the past (or the present) in traditional and cultural works from different dimensions also contains a 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 say these works are "descended" in that sense. The crossing of boundaries has changed the definition of "original" used by artists and is a constant condition in contemporary art. In another aspect, what is casually called postmodernism (the creation of new things by the reuse of old things) is also related to the decline of the original existence of the conventional artistic categorization. Culture is, therefore, a fertile treasure which has been dug up in order to read, reinterpret, rebuild the context and open the door for new possibilities. These works are not only the search for a forgotten past but also the creation of a present all together...with the eyes and logics of people of the present time.

Gender and Performance art

As we consider the body as a social invention, it is therefore appropriate to discuss gender, one of the most interesting issues together with the concept of post-modernism. Feminism has stepped in, questioned and challenged the status quo, particularly in the case of patriarchal systems. Feminism says that gender is not something that occurs naturally, as Simone de Beauvoir said in *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." The term and meaning of 'gender' is specified by society, as opposed the term 'sex' which indicates biological differences. The female gender's characteristics of attitude, behavior and role were once considered as something naturally existing. However, if everything is all about culture—the creation of gender could be something created as well.

It can be said that patriarchy originated almost at the same time with the origin of the world. The Old Testament, Genesis 2: 21 states that men are the creators. God (who is also portrayed as 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 a play with words in Hebrew language, as in Hebrew the word "ishsha" (woman) comes from the word "ishah" (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

German intellectual Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) said, "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". It is this kind of challenge to beliefs about what "already existed naturally" that has opened the doors for the questioning of many accepted things since then. Postmodernism has been described as "just a footnote of Nietzsche".

Nevertheless, this writing has not set out to get immersed in metaphysics. The issue for discussion here is how gender relates to performance art.

If we are going to consider the body and gender as aspects of 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 more or less involves the matter of the "body". Once humans can realize the ability to do whatever they want with their bodies, gender can eventually be indicated differently from sex (which is naturally indicated by nature). It is expressed in works of art (which can be observed objectively), such as through gender reversal, multiple genders or in the case of feminist works, suppression under patriarchal systems.

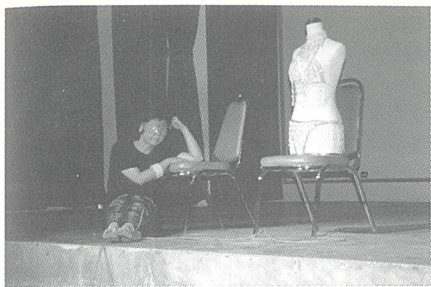
Performance art can communicate gender and feminist messages. That said, it is curious to note that most of the gay and lesbian artists in Asiatopia have chosen not convey or

focus on gender issues, in particular, in their performances. An exception is Michael Shaowanasai who used the context of Saranrom Park (a popular area for gays to meet) as an important feature in his performance.



Michael Shaowanasai, 1st Asiatopia, Saranrom Park, 25 October 1998

It is noticeable that the works in Asiatopia which contain feminist references are mostly performances by Japanese artists. (Note: nevertheless, I cannot confidently point out whether or not Japanese society is considered to have a more patriarchal society compared to other societies in Southeast Asia and analysis of this issue is not within the framework of this writing). For instance, Fumiko Takahashi's performance refers to the status of Japanese women (the view of women as the sex objects, unable to get rid of this image). To communicate, the artist covered her eyes with a piece of fabric. On her back was a model of a woman wearing shiny underwear.



Fumiko Takahashi, 4th Asiatopia, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai, 29 November 2002

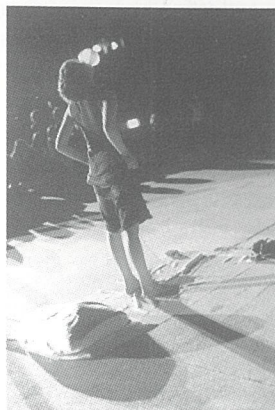
Takahashi tied her hands and feet with tape while slowly creeping around the gallery. The image of 'woman as sex object' is socially constructed and in this case refers specifically to the attitudes within a patriarchal society. It is not only men who see women as sex objects, but some women may also see themselves in that light. These thoughts are built and shaped by social constructs.

Mamiko Kawabata wrote, "I am not an artist, I am a sex worker". She invited members of the audience to dance with her and kiss her.



Mamiko Kawabata, 3rd Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn Park, Bangkok, 20 november 2000

At one point the artist placed a piece of white fabric and a white pillow on the floor and while standing above it, released some red liquid from inside her skirt.

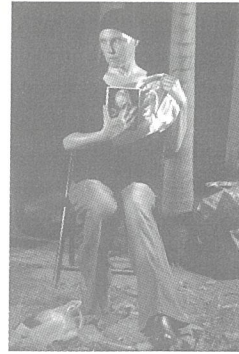


This series also related to the issue of prostitution. Some male performance artists, also create works relating to the gender issue. Japanese artist Arai Chin-ichi criticized men in his own country by telling the audience a hypothetical story (?) about a time when he was working in the less developed countries.



Arai Chin-ichi, 4th Asiatopia, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai, 29 November 2545

The Japanese men in the story (including him) were living lavish lives, paying money for a lot of women to have sex with them. His performance challenged the audience by throwing the questions at them, leaving the role of judging and estimating to the audience. Iwan Wijono has expressed his concern for the welfare of prostitutes. The male artist dressed up like a woman (as to say that he is on the same side as women) and invited prostitutes who were actually working in the area to participate in the performance by carrying signs encouraging the use of condoms.



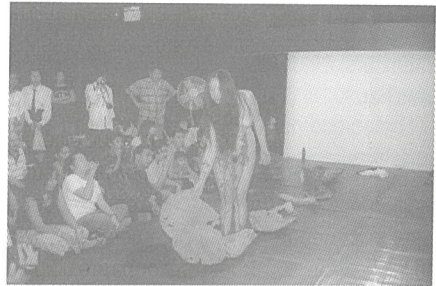
Adina Bar-on, 6th Asiatopia, Pathumwan intersection, Bangkok, 20 November 2004

or the work of He Chengyao from China are good examples. In her performance, Chengyao poured the red paint onto her own naked body and then started walking on seven lotus leaves placed on the floor, making reference to the Buddha's life story (when Buddha was born, seven lotus leaves sprung up to support his first footsteps).



Iwan Wijono, 6th Asiatopia, a beer bar at Tha-Pae Gate, Chiang Mai, 25 November 2002

The messages given by these works also convey the fact that men have and still today have higher status than women. Although the feminism movement has been active for many decades, sexual inequality still exists and it dominates the way many people think. The works mentioned above illustrate that certain social situations form selected truths. They express themselves without any serious demand or opposition against the male gender, but it is this presentation of truths that automatically implies a claim against the system. On the other hand, some performances have praised the greatness of women, such as in the ability to give birth to another life, the characteristic of maternity. The works of Adina Bar-on from Israel



He Chengyao, 5th Asiatopia, Alliance Francais, Bangkok, 15 November 2003

I interpret this as a work of art created to cherish the mother gender, someone who gives life is often forgotten (since most people tend to think more of the Buddha than his mother, Siri Mahamaya Devi). Nevertheless, without her the Buddha would have never been born. This

is not too much of an overstatement as we consider the saying *"There is usually a woman behind every man's success"*. However, it is because the woman is more often standing behind the man that people are less likely to notice her. One example of the reproving of a woman being underappreciated is found in a scene of 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, 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 has discovered that the way of dharma is the life that he wants and he is going back to the temple, leaving 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 to enlightenment because of her? Ever since Siddhattha had*

left her, would anybody think of her?" (Excerpted by the writer)

The body of a woman is considered a worldly temptation, something a man has to go beyond in order to reach the state of enlightenment Nirvana.³⁰ From this perspective the female body is significant only as the means that will lead men to the end, but not the end itself. We can see this in the case of Lama Tashi who spent three years of solitude up on the mountain practicing dharma, but still could not let go the 'worldly' thoughts until he had tried them, as well as Prince Siddhattha and Siddhartha, the hero in Hermann Hesse's novel who experiences the worldly way of life with Princess Yasothara and Gamala. The female body, therefore, implies worldly pleasure, which is both, at the same time, an obstruction and a support towards enlightenment. For princess and prostitute, there is no difference, with reference to the statement above (*"... a woman behind every man's success"*). This statement might seem to praise the female gender but in reality it is a reminder of how women are still regarded as just a 'means' (so can this statement be thought of as consolation to accept that fact as well?).

Singaporean artist Juliana Yasin's performance depicts the role of women oppressed within Islamic culture by covering her body with a black dress, holding the sign with the message *"We are never fully in control of our appearances..."*

³⁰ *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, 3rd Asiatopia, Santichaiprakarn, Bangkok, 17 November, 2000

According to some forms of Islam, women are required to cover their heads and bodies completely, as they are seen as symbols of temptation which can lead to wrong commitments. While hiding faces and figures, eyes can convey many meanings, so they too must be downcast. Women's living space is separated from men's and this implies a woman's body is something unwanted or something to be wary of.

The body in performance art communicates feminist messages and, as observed in Asiatopia, can present ideas about female gender in patriarchal societies. Through the process of selecting facts (the artist's perception and perspective), these works therefore contain certain implications of social criticism. Whatever the merit this criticism has caused to the society, it does not depend on whether it can overthrow the male gender. This is because if there is swing, the result would only be a change of power, which would continue the condition of inequality. Matriarchy is no better than patriarchy. The value of feminism is in the new perceptions and consideration towards the female body and gender, which will lead to greater equality for all. If gender is considered to be a social invention, it should be possible for us to invent a new discourse on the way we think gender relations should be.

Epilogue

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

to that novel ever since. As 'Utopia' is an idealistic place, it does not exist in reality (ou topos / no place), but is still a desirable place worth searching for. The meaning of 'Asiatopia' can be related to both 'topos' and 'ou topos' of or for 'Asia'. At the same time it can be considered both as a goal and a hope. Its goal is to create a place of and for Asia which is the hope for an idealistic state, reflected in the words of Asiatopia founder 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 what we are, what we have, or what we used

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to have and be are really something worthy. The search for the root of the past has become an overwhelming voice at the present time. Nonetheless, that attempt does not mean that the past and root we are looking for are going to be something waiting for us to discover, because what we have found is actually something recreated. The past is not what 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 fiction composed of selected and chosen stories. Just as arts have the character of a story teller (which doesn't mean that all works of art have to tell a story).

Time is something that can not be stopped or held back; it keeps moving. How can we 'capture' the present before it turns into the past, and how can we study the past in ways that help us understand how 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....*

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The revival of the past as usually seen in Southeast Asia is a part of the process of creating and searching for identity, in order to counterbalance the forces of globalization that claim 'internationality' in every corner of the world. It is 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 of a definition of contemporary arts...as something of our own.

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This phenomenon has revealed that it is the people of the present time that have chosen the stories in the past and presented them in the way they want them to be. It is certain that we can relate to the past if we want

to, but that does not mean that the results from the relationship that we have with the past will be the only direct offspring of the past itself. That is because the concept of "arts" did not originate in this area. We can say that arts that proclaim themselves alongside the ancients are somehow more likely to be the adopted children of ancient arts. This could lead us to think that throughout the thousands of years that have passed the unity of this region is still the same; even though it differs in terms of forms and appearances. This is the process of localization and of turning local into international.

The relationship between politics and performance art is something that cannot escape the attempt by people to relate them to the past. However, some of our pasts happened not too long ago. In the case of Thailand, the October 14th 1973 and the October, 6th 1976 incidents where body and action were parts of the political movement expression, have been claimed as the beginning of performance art. The concept 'Arts for life's sake' founded by Jitr Bhummisak was broadened and has survived until today. That certain concept was influential in defining the roles of artists, especially regarding their obligations to the society. Many works of performance art; therefore, contain the stories of political criticism and contemporary social issues.

This writing points out that "politics" has many various dimensions. In order to talk about arts and politics, it is important to establish 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 of focusing on the relationship between arts and politics instead of focusing only on the individual subjects themselves, which might be not enough to give a full understanding. Though many people may consider the definition of arts for politics to be

about arts for criticizing, demanding, protesting, pointing to social and political problems and suggesting solutions, this writing has explained that other kinds of arts can also contain certain political relationships, and arts themselves also have their own politics as well.

Dr. Sayan Daengklom from the Department of Art History, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University interestingly questioned whether arts with political subjects are created for the sake of politics or for the sake of arts. Because if a society's emotions and atmospheres in a certain period of time demand that arts serve, for the sake of politics, it is unavoidably that art must address political issues. The political angle of arts establishes the right of its own existence, and if so, is the sake of arts the final goal? Do politics exist for the sake of arts, or do arts exist for the sake of politics?

Daengklom's question leads to further exploration of the roles and functions of artists as well. In addition, if the obligations that have been held on to are from the accumulation of myths, then what is the possibility? This constant question does not only concern the matter of arts for politics, but it also expands to feminist works that have implications for demanding, opposing and desiring change. What is art and where does it stand are the same old questions which endure and will always keep us thinking and questioning infinitely.

This is not the only issue raised from and by Asiatopia, and the points mentioned in this writing are not all related to Asiatopia as well. This writing is the result of observing and choosing certain distinctive qualities and trying to analyze them; there are still many other interesting topics left to be discussed. The human body has such incredible potential for expressing

any number of meanings and during the six years that the Asiatopia festival and performance art has been going on we have experienced many new forms and subjects. These included different forms of violence, both in terms of subject and the way it is presented, issues relating to sexuality and certain issues on the methodology of performance art. For example, in order to stimulate interaction with the audience, some artists choose to use a mode of direct confrontation, while others opt to ignore the audience and obsess in whatever they are doing. The use of many different 'tools' and equipment can make us question the significance of the use of the body in performance art, including the repeated use of certain objects that turn into patterns and the role of sound in performance art. These and others are issues left to be discussed and analyzed in the future.

This writing has looked back in the "past" and brought back some of what has happened in that past by "writing" them down. This text serves its function both as a story telling and a story teller. Once the eyes have objectified performance art and analyzed it, a new discourse is created and waiting for someone else to continue the analysis, to expand and fulfill the history of performance art in Southeast Asia. It is because an event always precedes its definition and a discourse is always chasing after an experience. This can explain why contemporary art and its history is still a "work in process" that cannot be entirely 'covered', for it has not ended yet. Consequently, the answers to all the questions are the unfinished and our ending is unconcluded. On the other hand, there is no right answer, for there are no true facts. Answering all these questions could signify that the finish, an ending (in some cases, death). The eyes cannot see everything in every true 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 understanding perfectly conveys our situation and our position, for when we stand on the earth, we are unable to see everything that is around us. In accordance with the saying of Archimedes, "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 anyone to stand outside of the world, to open up the world or even to look around the whole world.

The fact that we are living in "contemporary" time, means any attempt to completely cover something is not possible. That is because the sense of contemporary refers to something which is not ended but still moving. The challenge of contemporary art is not only because it is hard to catch up with its changing 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 are involved with something else (but soon, what is called something else is not 'something else' anymore as it has already become art itself), especially with reference to the popularity of the interdisciplinary, certainly make any categorization even more difficult. Questions like "What is art?" and "Why is it art?" are rhetorical and still very much "contemporary". As a result, one of the obligations of art historians is to offer some ideas and explanation for such matter as the following discourse.

What are the possibilities? What is the task of artists and where is the place for arts in the society? These questions are asked repeatedly and keep us thinking; and this will probably stay that way forever. These points are explored in Asiatopia and exist everywhere in the world of arts. The questions may become clearer when the 'real' world and the worlds of arts begin to move closer to each other. This is the point where audiences play more significant

roles. Questions from audiences (who may not have any clue) keep reminding and stimulating the 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 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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