

THAILAND'S TURN



REVIEW: THAILAND'S TURN

Thai contemporary art is in the spotlight, shining bigger and brighter than ever. Indonesia may have gathered more mainstream media coverage these past few years with listings in catalogue auction sales, but a revitalized economy, art spaces and new global ambitions launches Thailand forward with aplomb. If you're looking for the next art city destination, add Bangkok to the top of the list.

Q - What were the reactions of the New York crowd at Sundaram Tagore in an almost historic first group show in Manhattan you curated of Thai and Southeast Asian artists? **A** - The show was incredibly, and surprisingly given the fact that the artists and I are new to the NYC art scene, well received!

Judging by the opening night we had close to 400 people attending. Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Chelsea, where we held the opening event (ANTHROPOS is also presented at the Madison Gallery location), is very spacious but despite the space the gallery was packed and we had to have one person of the staff by the entrance door to prevent more people from stepping in.

I think the attraction was the novelty of the art from Thailand and Singapore, two countries in Southeast Asia not so familiar to the western audience, and the freshness of the works. All the artworks are extremely engaging aesthetically and conceptually but they are also attractive and hence easy to relate to. The show also features a variety of mediums so that too helps in terms of engaging with a larger audience.

Q - Besides Bangkok and Chiang Mai are there other cities or towns which we'll see more Thai artists from? **A** - I would say the most important art hubs in Thailand are Bangkok and Chiang Mai. There are of course artists coming from all parts of Thailand. One of the artist featured in ANTHROPOS, Chusak Sriikwan, for instance comes from Songkhla province in southern Thailand, however he moved to study in Bangkok at Silpakorn

University. His practice though is informed by the cultural legacy of his native town, that is the shadow puppet tradition particularly strong in southern Thailand.

Q - Are political messages or religious themes important to Thai artists? **A** - Of course these are very prominent themes. Buddhism is, more than a religion, a whole culture embedded in the hearts and minds of most Thais I would say in one way or the other. The current political context on the other hand is pervading all aspects of life particularly in the last few months / years.

So yes these are important elements in the artistic practice of the younger generation of Thai artists as well as the senior generation. We need to look for these themes however beyond the stereotypical imageries of lotus flowers and Thai flags. Contemporary art practice in Thailand is very sophisticated, aesthetically attractive yet conceptually layered so do not necessarily expect a literal work when it comes to religion and politics.

Q - Do you feel that Asia and Thai artists can offer something different to European art and Western art? **A** - I am not an expert in European and Western art in general so I cannot really compare the two worlds. However by attending art fairs, major art platforms and Biennales I feel the younger generation of artists worldwide is very concerned with topics close to heart.

That is for instance the social and political context we live in and themes related to identity and displacement for example as we all seem to loose our native roots in favor of being citizens of a globalized world.

On this regard there is a great book titled 'Cosmopolitanism and Culture' by Prof Papastergiadis that debates precisely the developments of a cosmopolitan culture and its impact on the new concept of 'global knowledge'. The freshness brought in by Asian and Southeast Asian artworks is in that they are locally relevant but adopt visual narratives, which can be easily relatable by the western audience.

Southeast Asian art is growing fast locally and internationally and so is the collectors' interest towards it. So I think this is the future of the arts: to hopefully go beyond geographical barriers.

Q - What type genre and ground breaking artwork can we look forward to in the future by the younger generation of Thai's who are still art school students? **A** - It is difficult to predict what type or genre of works will be developed in the future in Thailand, but if anything I am sure installation works adopting a variety of mediums will be more and more explored by the younger players.

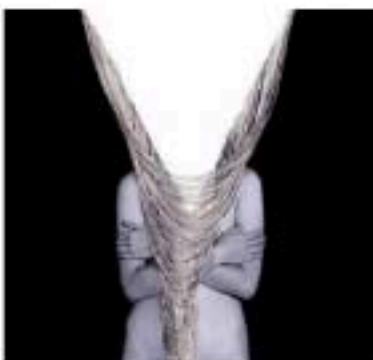
Mix media installations have always been a strong component of Southeast Asian art in general, and the use of craft based materials. That I feel will continue to develop together with new media and digital works, which may or may not be combined with mix media installations. Overall I think this is a very exciting time for contemporary art in Southeast Asia in general and Thailand in particular so I am very happy and honored to be part of it.



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Q - Our M.O.D.A. magazine theme is "Rebirth". What does "Rebirth" mean to you? **A** - Interesting that you mention 'Rebirth' as your theme. 'Rebirth' is a concept very close to Buddhist philosophy so to me it immediately relates to the idea of Karma and the perpetual cycle of life and death. I have lived in Southeast Asia for very long and I have grown closer to Buddhist predicaments so 'Rebirth' is a charged word for me, and a positive one too.

I have recently moved to London to be geographically able to facilitate a Southeast Asian discourse between East and West, so I am still discovering new key words in the western system. However judging by the response we received in New York to ANTHROPOS, which is about life and death and the short interval in between, I would say the West is indeed open to embrace Southeast Asian culture!



Page 40 **Chusok Srikwan** Man with Strength 170 x 170 cm 2014 powder

Page 43 **Chatchai Pulpia** Life in the City of Angels Warana 180 x 150 cm 2014 oil and pigments on canvas, **Kamin Lertchoprasert** Impassioned (Angia) 172 x 4 x 90 cm 2010 - 2012 wood, **Tawan Wathaya** Soapland Gela 1,00 x 3,00 m 2013 watercolor on paper, **Kamolpan Chatchai** Perjan 111 x 110 cm 2014 C-Print & Hand cut canvas