

# FATE VS LUCK

New York art exhibition examines contemporary Thai history, and asks viewers to decide what is real

STORY: ARIANE KUPFERMAN-SUTTHAVONG



Untitled (Reminiscence Of The 1932 Plaque) by Thasnai Sethaseree.

In troubled times, what is it that we turn to? Is it faith? Superstition? Some of us will embark on a spiritual path, finding comfort or anguish in a never-ending quest, while others may rely on their Cartesian, scientific mind to get through. Some of us may leave it to luck to do its magic, tossing a coin and seeing on which side it lands.

All options are viable, and that's about the only certitude this exhibition will offer you.

In "Heads Or Tails? Uncertainties And Tensions In Contemporary Thailand", nothing is what it seems at first glance, as six influential Thai artists challenge reality in an attempt to make sense of a rapidly changing socio-political context.

The exhibition, on display at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Chelsea and Madison Avenue in New York until Nov 4, began as a conversation between curator Loredana Paracciani and the artists on the events that occurred in Thailand in the past year. It spans a vast gamut of Thai socio-political history, with artwork touching on the 1932 Revolution to reflections on the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej last year.

"The exhibition isn't so much about the king's passing as it is about what has followed," says Paracciani.

Through painting and sculpture, each artist individually explores this tumult — decades of political tensions that became crystallised after the 2014 military coup. King Bhumibol's death again threw away all conceptions that had begun to form in the past few years.

Although clearly anchored in a Thai context, their works — characterised collectively by the investigation of dual narratives — find resonance at the global level. How does one land on their feet in quicksand?

"Usual suspects" Thasnai Sethaseree and Mit Jai Inn — as the curator playfully calls them — have long been offering social commentary through their respective artistic practices.

Their latest series of works further examine dual facets of reality, inviting viewers to scratch beneath the surface and cross physical boundaries to see what lies beneath or on the other side.

Mit Jai Inn's double-sided canvases present a colourful outlook and a much darker perspective, depending on where one chooses to stand. The Chiang Mai-based artist offers viewers the

RIGHT  
Angkrit  
Ajchariyasophon's  
Cards Series.

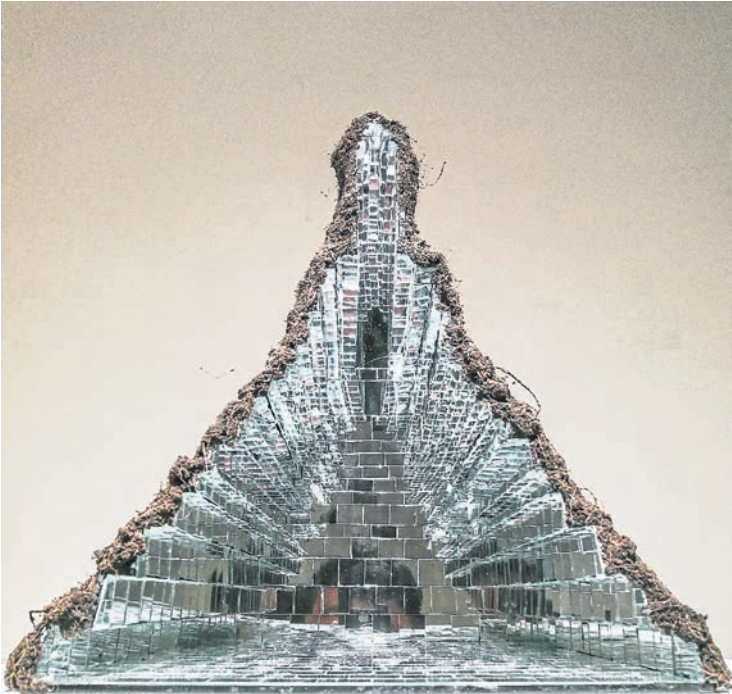


PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUNDARAM TAGORE GALLERY

BELOW  
Double Heads  
and Nangkwak,  
paintings by  
Tawan Wattuya.



An engraving  
on a brass  
plate showing  
the tweaking  
of the Earth's  
proportions by  
Tawatchai  
Puntusawasdi.



Form Of Belief III  
(Complexity Of  
Emptiness) by  
Sanitas Pradittasnee  
features traditional  
mirrors and soil.

choice many of us are denied in our everyday lives — but only if we dare to challenge our original conceptions and cross the physical partition created by the hanging canvas. The regimented, coloured stripes reveal a more sombre side, albeit instinctual and organic.

Similarly, Thasnai's practice of multilayered collages and paintings toy with viewers' perceptions and alternative readings of the works.

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A triptych of sorts, Thasnai's three paintings examine some of the darkest hours of Thai history with apparent embellishments referencing the state-sanctioned rewriting of historical events.

All three works are untitled but between brackets are the incidents they refer to — again,

leaving viewers with the choice, to either gaze at the seemingly innocent paintings or face the horror beneath them.

The first event is the Oct 6, 1976, massacre of students at Thammasat University at the hands of right-wing militias, a continuation of Thasnai's previous set of works on the slaughter.

His second instalment deals with the 2010 crackdown on red shirt protesters, a bloodbath that left over 100 people dead following protests in the heart of Bangkok. Several Thai artists have examined this incident, often pointing to the "whitewashing" of the horrific clampdown by the government. Here, the artist paints it over in blue, in stark contrast to the red of the blood and the colour of the so-called "red shirts" who died.

In his third painting, he memorialises a commemoration plaque for the 1932 Revolution that overthrew Thailand's absolute monarchy and installed a constitutional regime. The plaque mysteriously disappeared a few months ago and was replaced with a new one celebrating the monarchy.

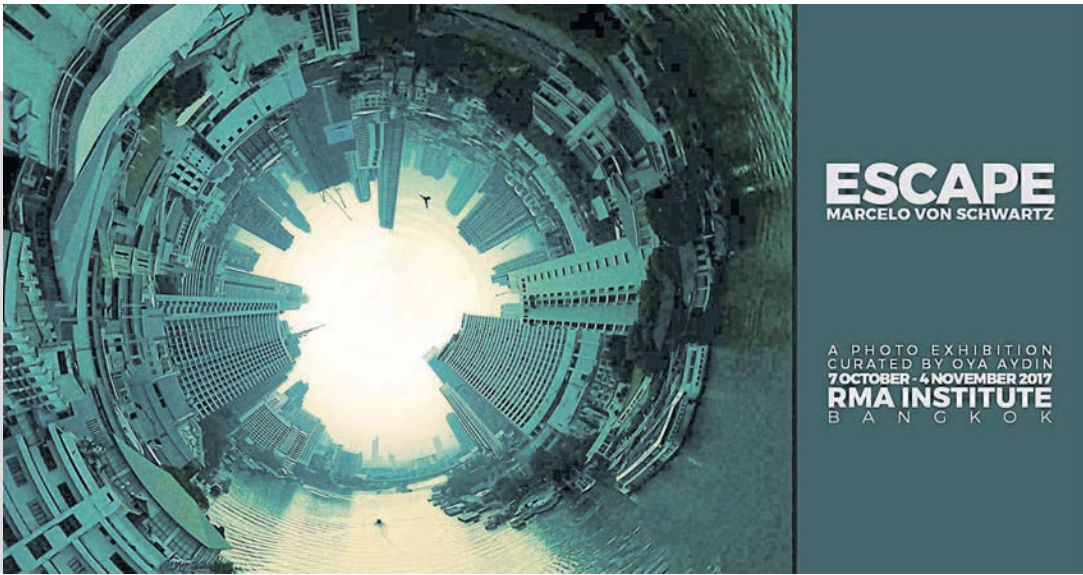
Although each artist offers strong criticism of narratives offered by the powers-that-be, their approach is deeply personal and subdued.

## ART SCENE

### Escape

RMA Institute  
238 Sai Nam Thip 2  
Sukhumvit 22  
Tuesday to Sunday, 9.30am-7pm  
Until Nov 4  
Call 02-663-0809

Marcelo Von Schwartz's photography shows non-existing spaces with objectivity, using this contradiction as an essential element in his art. In this exhibition, curated by Oya Aydin, Von Schwartz's works of imagination are in perspective with narrative architecture. The images explore photographic narrative to represent impossible spaces.



### Liquify

The Jam Factory  
Charoen Nakhon Road  
10am-8pm every day  
Until Nov 12  
Call 02-861-0950

Artist Orn Suebsanguan gazes at her own reflection as she dives down toward the bottom of a pool. The mesmerising reflection gives the impression of reality being liquefied, as if everything has dissolved into the water. Her exhibition is based on that impression.

### The King In Our Hearts

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre

Pathumwan Intersection  
Tuesday to Sunday, 10am-8pm.

Until Oct 29  
Call 02-261-5301/2

Fourteen Thai photographers remember the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej with this group exhibition, which is also part of a book project to commemorate the passing of the monarch.

Within Sight: Chinese New Painting At Post  
Financial Crisis Era  
Tang Contemporary Art

3rd floor, Golden Place Plaza  
Tuesday to Saturday, 11am-7pm

### From tomorrow until Nov 11

Curator Zhu Tong puts together paintings by young Chinese who "hold brand-new lifestyles and interpretations towards art". To the curator, they also intend to express and explore life in a more direct and cheerful way.

### Fluidity

Thavibu Art Gallery  
Jewelry Trade Center Building, Silom  
Monday to Saturday, 11am-7pm  
Until Oct 31  
Call 02-266-5454

A duo exhibition by Santi Thongsuk and Sittivut Yavichai. Santi's paintings depict the human body as an instrument,

reflecting fluidity of movement, strength, mobility and co-ordination. Sittivut's mosaic art, made up primarily of reflective coloured glass, is inspired by his deep interest in the phenomenon of light-reflection, architecture and nature.

### A Trace Of Mortality

Kathmandu Photo Gallery  
Silom Road  
Tuesday to Sunday, 11am-6pm  
Until Oct 28  
Call 02-234-6700

Eiffel Chong is Malaysia's leading contemporary photographer, and this is his first solo show in Thailand, consisting of 15 pieces from 15 years of creative production.

### Soil And Stones, Souls And Songs

Jim Thompson Art Center  
Soi Kasemsan 2  
Tuesday to Saturday, 9am-5pm  
Until Oct 30  
Call 02-216-7368

The international group exhibition is based on several intertwined, tense narratives — artistic and cultural — in the Asian sphere and beyond. The exhibition is curated by Cosmin Costinas and Inti Guerrero.

### An Artist Is Trying To Return To Being "A Writer"

100 Tonson Gallery  
Soi Tonson  
Thursday to Sunday, 11am-7pm  
Until Jan 14  
Call 02-684-1527

The show focuses on the writing and art career of Araya Ras-djarmrearnsook, one of Thailand's best-known artists and lecturers, who turns 60 this year. While her art has been known internationally for decades, Araya's writing remains obscure and mostly untranslated.