

# Other Possible Worlds

Other Possible worlds

Contemporary art from Thailand

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## Contemporary Art from Thailand

Presented by 16albermarle Project Space, Delmar Gallery and  
Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Chulalongkorn University

### Curators

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**DELMAR GALLERY**



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Sompote Ang  
Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
45 x 35 cm

# Foreword

*Other Possible Worlds* is the second national survey exhibition I've presented since engaging with southeast Asian contemporary art in 2013. The first was *Termasuk: Contemporary art from Indonesia*, at Darren Knight Gallery in early 2019. The success of *Termasuk* convinced me that Australian art audiences would be interested in the art of the region if a way could be found to present it. We opened 16albermarle Project Space in October 2019 to do just this, with a broader cultural agenda of connecting Australians with the countries of the region through art.

The idea of each survey exhibition is to present a curated selection of work from one country, by a range of younger and mid-career artists whose work would not otherwise be accessible in Australia. We try to ensure a balance of age, gender, ethnicities, localities, media and approaches, and to select artists whose work Australian audiences will be able to find ways into – recognising the importance of educational material and public programs to assist in this process.

*Other Possible Worlds* is a selective and subjective take on Thai contemporary art. It's the culmination of seven years research and travel, beginning with a first visit to Bangkok in 2014 and two days fighting through the local traffic to visit commercial galleries. In 2016-2018 came longer stays of several weeks when, now familiar with the MRT in Bangkok, I met gallerists, curators and collectors, and visited many artists, galleries and private and university museums in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

The turning point was finding a local curator in late 2019. Haisang Javanalikhikara was the sixth Thai curator I spoke with, and I'm very glad I persisted. She has been not only a pleasure to work with, but someone on a similar wavelength in terms of art and artists and with an understanding of the challenges of curating an exhibition of Thai art for a non-Thai audience. Our research trip in January 2020 involved 10 days traversing Thailand end-to-end in a mini-bus. By the end of it we knew we could work together to present a stimulating and unexpected exhibition.

Unexpected is the key word. As another Thai curator commented on our approach – "it's not the usual suspects". He went on to say that no Thai curator would curate an exhibition like this. And that's really the heart of it. It's not about reputation or received wisdom. It's about bringing fresh eyes, seeing as much art as possible and being alert for the interesting or different or unexpected. From March 2020 the pandemic intervened and the show finished up happening two years later than planned. But in the interim

we presented two smaller Thai exhibitions – *Visions of Light*, a survey of conceptual approaches to drawing and *Pieces from Berlin: Bussaraporn Thongchai*.

The exhibition's format and theme came from discussions as we worked to short-list 12 artists. From the outset we knew it would combine historical works seen over several years with new works viewed on our research trip or commissioned from it. Deciding on the title was also a turning point. *Other Possible Worlds* rang true for a country which has had many different realities over recent decades. In addition, it could accommodate the historical works and those which looked forward.

Pulling together this exhibition has been a large undertaking for a project space. Besides extensive research and study, it required sympathetic collaborators and partners, in Thailand and Australia. I'd like to thank Dean Bussakorn Binson of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University for approving Haisang's involvement and agreeing to partner on the exhibition. I look forward to further collaborations. Also in Thailand I'd like to acknowledge the excellent work of Iyada Mooksadee, project manager, and Noona Ajjana, translator.

In Sydney, thanks are due to Catherine Benz at Delmar Gallery for offering to collaborate, presenting such a stylish exhibition and managing the public programs. At 16albermarle, staff contributed above and beyond what could be expected – gallery manager Tommy Carman, in-house curator Mila Feng, Thai liaison Parita Nobthai and graphic design intern Josephine Kumiawan. I must also acknowledge installer Mary-Anne Cornford, who took on the challenges presented to provide us with what she always does – a superb looking exhibition. Thanks also to Sineenart Meena, who interned on our previous Thai exhibitions and the development of this one, but had to step back due to pressure of work. Finally, thanks to Luise Guest for her involvement and encouragement, not to mention superb wall texts.

Others who have provided invaluable support include James Wise, former Australian Ambassador to Thailand, whose advice was crucial and whose catalogue essay is a must-read for those wanting insights into Thai politics. Thai/Australian artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt and her partner Professor John Clark were also unfailingly supportive and encouraging. Finally, those who took part in public programs – the visiting artists and curator and locals Jasmin Stephens, John Clark and Matt Cox.



Curators Haisang Javanalikhikara and John Cruthers with Mariem Thidarat Chantachua outside her studio in Bangkok in early 2020.

To conclude I'd like to outline what we hope exhibitions like this will achieve. In my first meeting with James Wise, he acknowledged the value of *Other Possible Worlds* but was quick to point out what we were up against: in his experience most Australians were diffident, uncertain or fearful about the countries of the region and often not willing to engage with them. Our challenge was to win them over, using art.

I find this reluctance to engage surprising given my experiences in the region and the invariably friendly and courteous responses I've had. People are uniformly pleased to see us and delighted in our interest in their country and their art.

I don't think this diffidence stops with ordinary Australians. People in government and in art museums and other sectors, whose job it should be to engage with these countries and build bilateral relationships, have performed very poorly. Whether through a failure of vision, leadership or commitment our lack of engagement has sent an unmistakable message that we do not value these countries nor have an interest in their societies and cultures.

And yet as the world shrinks, we must recognise and accept that Australia and the countries of the region are not just close neighbours but increasingly family. What binds us together is more important than what separates us. It behoves us to reach out to them much more effectively and generously, and contemporary art can be a democratic and effective conduit. We hope *Other Possible Worlds* provides opportunities for Australian audiences to learn more about Thailand, its history and the challenges it faces, and to engage more meaningfully with it, as a nation and one on one.

John Cruthers

# Other Possible Worlds

## Haisang Javanalikhikara

To the eyes of foreigners, Thailand's art and cultural heritage have distinctive characteristics, so that sometimes 'being Thai' or 'Thainess' is defined by certain visual appearances. But the grandness of a temple or the exoticness of tropical landscapes and forests among other things are only mere representations of Thailand. Thailand's local narrative comes from influences all over the world. Growing up, I was always taught that "Thailand hasn't been colonised like neighbouring countries". Maybe this statement was valid in the early days of Thailand, and of course useful as propaganda for nationalism. Nevertheless, in the present day the idea of being colonised or not is obsolete. In fact, the notion is somewhat Westernised in itself because it has largely placed the invasion of the West, or not, as the central differentiation between countries. Equally though, Thai people are conscious of the impact of imported ideas on traditional values and institutions, including politics.

Thailand has been Americanised in terms of culture, and the younger generation has been influenced by Korean pop culture. And while about 70% of Thai people have Chinese inheritance, there are many other significant ethnic groups, for example the Karen, Hmong and Malayu. Through the multicultural direction of Thai culture, many people have started to search for their roots and explore localised ways of living. As a result, people have begun to question their place - although the sense of belonging and identity of the Thai people has been in debate for some time. Be that as it may, we may need to define alternative ideas of history. Each region and cultural sensitivity has its own story to tell, and that is how Thai contemporary art is presenting right now.

Going back to modern Thai art, like almost everywhere, art in Thailand was first funded and produced to serve monarchies, bureaucrats and governmental institutions. But very early in the 20th century, Thai monarchs began to invite creative practitioners such as artists and architects to work on projects in order for the country to fit into a global context to some extent. Some time later, the first formal art education was introduced by an Italian artist, Corrado Feroci, later famously known as Silpa Bhirasri. Artistic practice during this period mainly followed the path set by Bhirasri. Having said that, since the institution he founded - now known as Silpakorn University - was opened, artists began to acknowledge the idea of practicing art with a focus on Thailand and its people, as Thai modern and contemporary art.

In the present day, the contemporary art scene in Thailand is active and growing. Thai contemporary art has become

vibrant in the past three to four decades, again with Western influences, but in radical sorts of ways. Since the late 1970s, especially in the 1980s and 90s, artists went abroad and returned to Thailand to express their creativity through the more experimental forms of art they brought back, and through applying alternative media to present their artistic practices. Recently the Thai contemporary art scene has developed quickly. Artists have started to receive international exposure through involvement in recognised global projects.

Within Thailand itself, this vivacity has happened in Bangkok since the 1980s and sprang up in Chiang Mai in the 1990s - so much so that these two cities were the only significant hubs of contemporary art for some time. But in the last two decades, the art scene has expanded to other big cities in the country. The circle of Thai art has welcomed more and more practitioners - curators, gallerists and collectors along with other supporting roles such as project managers, conservators, educators and administrators. In general, Thai people have become more interested in art and culture, regardless of whether it is past, modern or contemporary. Younger generations have paid more attention to Thai history, especially alternative histories which have often been explored in art and culture. People spend their spare time viewing art exhibitions or attending art and craft workshops.

As it develops, the Thai art scene is becoming more open for young artists. Senior artists have taken mentorship roles and several projects have facilitated the development and maturing of young artists. In terms of infrastructure, many new art spaces and institutions - private, commercial and experimental - have opened to support artists, as well as events like art fairs and Biennales. In addition, the range of careers available in the Thai art world has expanded as higher education in art has evolved. The Thai art ecosystem has become more balanced and subtle, and the public has responded with growing curiosity to understand artists' creativity of communication. For policymakers in government institutions the uptake has been slower, with limited resources and understanding of contemporary art.

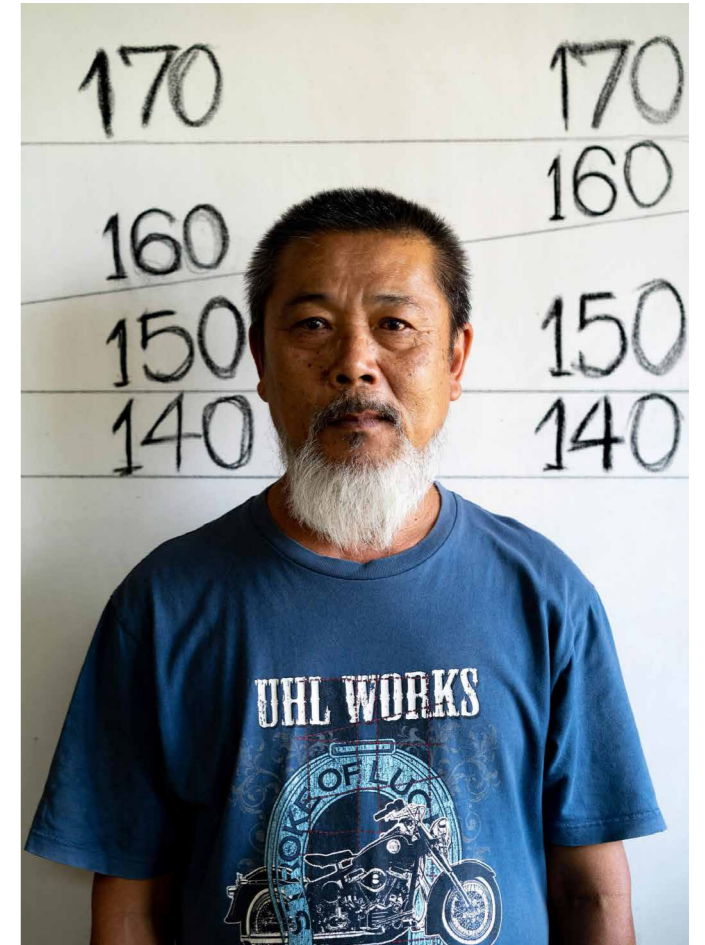
The most recent social issues Thai contemporary art has dealt with include urbanization, environmental issues, corruption, inequality and the resulting high levels of disadvantage, and the political rights and duties of Thai people. Artists have enthusiastically engaged in debates around these issues. From the military crackdown in 2010 to the 2014 military coup, and intensified by the passing of King Rama IX in 2016, Thailand has been facing issues of hidden social unrest. The country's narrative since these events includes the 2019 general election, regarded

as the least democratic in Thai history due to procedural irregularities, the massive wave of protests by young people in 2020-21 and the rise of COVID as a major influence on Thai society. Even though the socio-political situation is not straightforward, young Thai artists have sophisticated and capable ways of expressing their views towards the national context. They have also explored the issues of identity and belonging that face the Thai people now, conceptualised and presented in various media.

In its more traditional form Thai art has been employed as a tool of propaganda, as in many nations. However, with the passing of time the government seems to have forgotten the power of creativity and neglected non-traditional art and culture altogether. Meanwhile, contemporary artists have become more engaged in questioning their artistic practice to explore their ideas and communicate the current situation to society.

*Other Possible Worlds* investigates pressing social and political issues at home, as reflected in artworks made from 2010 to the present by 12 artists. Many of the exhibition's artists have used intimate narratives in their work to infer bigger issues, responding to questions of Thai identity in unique ways by utilising appropriate materials for their subject. The exhibition includes mainly the younger and middle generation of artists who direct their practice to the situations around them, close to home, but to be understood as touching on the broader situation. Reflecting Thai art, the exhibition includes works in diverse media - painting, sculpture, photography, installation, neon, video, embroidery, prints and works on paper - and from many parts of Thailand.

Thailand is a country where most citizens are sensitive to symbolic and intangible representations. Knowing this sensitivity, some artists apply specific depictions to express their ideas. At first glance, naive countryside paintings by Sompote Ang appear to be soothing depictions of everyday life in his village. But looked at more closely, his works describe the inequality and hardship people are experiencing. Fifteen paintings made in 2020 and 2022 are like a journal of the artist's thoughts and feelings towards the current situation in Thailand. Ang lives in the countryside of Ratchaburi province, only two hours drive from Bangkok, but in some way the Thailand he depicts seems further away than that. Paintings from 2020 were first seen in the exhibition *Unknown*, just weeks before the Coronavirus hit Thailand. They related very much to capitalism and its effect on rural lives, but were also gently humorous in their depiction of the pride and prejudice of country people. Works from 2022 were commissioned for *Other Possible Worlds* and engage with its themes. Knowing the works were to be exhibited in Australia, Ang made paintings that were more revealing and pointed, referencing the King in a way he may not have done if the works were to be shown in Thailand.



Sompote Ang

The Thai flag is considered a sacred and untouchable symbol, along with the colours of the flag. *Dark hope 2021* by Imhathai Suwatthanasilp is a version of the flag woven with long black hair, and with the same colour coordination and pattern as the original. The use of hair makes the colour darker and more gloomy, covering the liveliness of the flag-like piece of cloth. It also seems like the hair grows from the fabric, looking peculiar. The unnatural look of the work questions the representation of both body and nation together. The title *Dark Hope* suggests a dimming of what the flag represents. The artist said about this work that "I think it would be nice if the hope of democracy can grow up as well as the hair". In 2022 the artist was commissioned to make another series for the exhibition *Ash flowers*. With the government's poor performance on environmental issues, Thailand, especially Bangkok and the northern part of Thailand where Suwatthanasilp lives, regularly face dangerous levels of air pollution from pesticides, burning and other human activities. Surrounded by beautiful and peaceful countryside, the air is badly polluted by ashes that fall regularly from burning. The artist selects tiny dead insects, plants and weeds that grow in the ash and illustrates them in the life-size hair sculpture she is well-known for.



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp  
Ash flowers 2022 in progress

Another artist whose work reflects on the authority of the government is Surajate Tongchua. *Other Possible Worlds* includes four works from his series *PRICELESS*, applying basic techniques like collage and papier-mâché to create relatable 2D and 3D artworks. The series began in 2014, the year marking the military coup led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Commander of the Royal Thai Army. Tongchua was deeply disappointed about the event. He contemplated the situation he was in and realised from that moment on that all the tax and other governmental fees he paid would be passed onto the unelected military government. So he collected all the paperwork, invoices, receipts etc relating to the government fees he paid and experimented on them, shredding the documents and collaging them into artworks. The act of de-materialising the representation of economical means i.e. the bills, and putting them back together, stands for the circulation of money that is useless, 'priceless'.

The 2014 Thai coup d'état influenced not only Surajate Tongchua. Another artist who responded directly to the event is Suebsang Sangwachirapiban. His works comment on governmental campaigns and constitutional revisions that in some way lead to general false beliefs. Two text works, *#Smile\_State\_1* and *#Smile\_State\_2* were made to be taken as inspiration as well as misapprehension. When the military took over, one of their first propaganda approaches was a campaign making out Thailand to be the best in everything, to promote nationalism and unity. At the beginning, the military government 'promised' to bring 'peace' to the country after the political conflict.

They broadcast the prime minister's speeches on live television, wanting to brainwash citizens to follow rather than unite. Sangwachirapiban's works hence use texts as follows: *#Smile\_State\_1* reads 'Thailand is number ๑' (๑ = 1) and *#Smile\_State\_2* (2016) reads 'The Kingdom of Buddhism', reflecting false-hope and falsehood with the lack of understanding the government tried to put forward.

Skepticism and lack of trust in the Thai military accelerated after the 2010 Thai military crackdown. The event culminated in a protest in which people were killed or went missing, whilst no such reports featured in mainstream media, which reported the army used baton rounds to take down the protest. Works by Som Supaparinya and Tada Hengsapkul disclose this event in sophisticated ways. *They said they didn't use live rounds 2010* by Hengsapkul is a set of four photographs taken by the artist at the scene of the protest. The artist knew for a fact that at least 99 people lost their lives during the event, so he found proof and recorded it by taking photos of bullet holes in the area. Supaparinya didn't visit the site; rather, she reacted to the event spontaneously during her travel from Bangkok to Chiang Mai on the night train. Seeing the lights passing outside while having emotions of despair in her mind, the artist connected her feeling, her surrounding and that historical moment together. She recorded lights through the window and rotated the captured movement to have them appear visually as a meteor shower. The artist added the sound of spent cartridges dropping onto concrete and the occasional gunshot to suggest the shootings. *Shooting stars 2010* simply signifies all the stars/people who were shot down and fell.

For *Other Possible Worlds*, Supaparinya and Hengsapkul each show an additional work with glimpses of the events of 2010, expanded in different contexts. *Paradise of the blind* by Supaparinya was first shown in 2016 at the Reading Room, Bangkok, and has been remade for this exhibition. The work is a site-specific installation, consisting of banned books from all over the world, shredded copied pages of those books, bullet cases hanging from the ceiling, as well as library cards with catalogue information related to these books including locations and the reasons they were prohibited. The list of books is very surprising and in this iteration more children books are added to emphasise how bizarre censorship can be, acknowledging "knowledge is power". Hengsapkul's work from 2017, *The shards would shatter at touch* is a deep portrayal of suppression and censorship. In this interactive installation, Hengsapkul selected 49 political prisoners or governmental personnel who are believed to be missing or killed. He printed portraits of these people onto thermochromic pigment sheets which appear to be mere black sheets. Once a sheet is pressed to the chest of a viewer and subject to body heat, the

image of the subject appears, then gradually disappears. Audiences can also read about each person on the wall-text, strengthening the connection between the viewer and the particular individual. Both works were visited by the authorities when first exhibited in Thailand.

Censorship prevents people from receiving and expressing thoughts, opinions and other information circulating in our surroundings. The concept of 'hearing the unheard' as a result became interesting to Thai contemporary artists. Piyarat Piyapongwiwat has always been interested in people whose voices are quieter than others. In 2015 she did a residency in Pattaya, which some people call a 'city of sin'. It is a tourist city, famous for beautiful beaches and night life. The artist researched the community, focusing on people who drive the economy and turn out to be immigrants from other provinces or countries. They get small incomes, of which some has to be spent on bribing the authorities. Piyapongwiwat interviewed them - people important to the tourist ecosystem of Pattaya, but to whom no one listened. The artworks from her residency were first shown in 2015 as part of the exhibition *messages from nowhere to nowhere* at Lyla Gallery, Chiang Mai. *Other Possible Worlds* includes two works from that project - texts from unheard voices amplified through Piyapongwiwat's artistic practice. *Can you sing the national anthem?* is a work using neon to symbolize the nightlife and asking questions that immigrants from other countries are known to be asked by the authorities. By not being able to sing the national anthem, the assumption is you are not Thai and, as a result, most of the time you are discriminated against. *messages from nowhere to nowhere* is a video documentation and an artwork in itself, initially projected onto the sides of buildings on the streets of Pattaya. Texts in this work are drawn from local peoples' opinions of the problems of this country which are very relatable to people all over the country.



Thailand is facing issues of illegal immigration, not only migrants to Thailand, but also Thai people going all over the world. There is a phrase that 'Thailand is a livable country if you are rich', which is somehow true. Nonetheless, even though Thailand is one of the wealthiest countries in the region, many Thai people seek opportunities for better lives elsewhere. Many women go abroad to work with minimum pay in exchange for a basic standard of living, agreeing to work in what they hope will be a more decent place. Some are lucky, some are not. Bussaraporn Thongchai's art is known to be feminist but she does not use such terms in her work. She believes her work is just what it is. Earlier in her career, most of her works were drawings and paintings about herself and her experiences. But in 2015, Thongchai moved to Berlin and started to work as a language mediator at Ban Ying women's shelter, which served women from southeast Asia, Africa and eastern Europe who have been human trafficked as victims of the sex trade. As a result her art moved towards her experiences with others, regardless of medium. The *Dialogue* series, started in 2019 and added to in 2022, are collage works drawing on court transcripts revealing the difficult and traumatic experiences these women have faced. Thongchai collages different scripts to record, change and combine the different stories to have an infinite number of interpretations.

Kasarin Himacharoen is a young illustrator who expresses her womanhood in whimsical visual presentations. Be that as it may, the concepts in her works are not as light and fun and they seem, usually dealing with the difficulties of being a woman. Himacharoen works in many mediums - drawings, prints, sculptures, NFTs, along with merchandise. For *Other Possible Worlds* she was commissioned to make two series of new prints; *Sexual harassment* and *Sex delight*. The two sets of prints are in direct contrast to each other. The titles of both series are straightforward to what each represents. In *Sexual harassment*, the artist shares parts of her unpleasant experiences as a younger person. The print technique she decided for this series - embossing - and the negative colouring, imprinting a colour as background and figure as colourless, heighten the traumas that abuse can impress on us. *Sex delight* on the other hand is revealing and playful. This series of silkscreens is bigger than her other print series because the works aim to be confronting. Looking like semi-optical art, *Sex delight* is not fearful or insecure but rather empowering to women everywhere. Having these two series of works together, audiences understand the variety everyone has in their own lives and experiences.

Bussaraporn Thongchai  
In Saudi Arabia 2022  
collage on paper  
28.2 x 19.5 cm

As mentioned earlier, Thailand comprises various nationalities and ethnic minorities. Some artists share their experiences being themselves as Thai. Busui Ajaw is an Akha ethnic minority artist, living in Chiang Rai in northern Thailand. Drawing on her difficult upbringing, her painterly works usually portray the darker sides of humanity. The intensity of the images she paints comes genuinely from herself. As a self-taught artist, every brushstroke conveys feelings she has in her mind. For *Other Possible Worlds*, Ajaw produced a series of five new works illustrating The Five Precepts in Buddhism; no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech and no intoxicants. This series comes as a surprise given the artist was not brought up a Buddhist. But although the paintings are different from the artist's usual subjects, the cores of her practice are still present - costumes that represent her people as well as ugly truths and grotesque people.



Kusofiyah Nibuesa  
work in progress

Although Thailand refers itself as a Buddhist country, most people support freedom of belief. Other religions and their customs can be practiced openly. *Other Possible Worlds* includes two Muslim artists from different regions in Thailand - Mariem Thidarat Chantachua from Bangkok and Kusofiyah Nibuesa from Pattani. Pattani is a province which is understood by people who do not live there as a red zone with civil wars and terrorism, leading to negative stereotype towards the Muslim community in the southern whole life. Of course there have been issues, but not as severe as the media presents them to be. To counter that, the artist presents her community as she experiences it, the simplicity. In her works, she uses real people as models and

everyday scenes as settings of her works. She investigates them with found materials combined with wooden relief sculpture, showing the pleasant market scenes with Islamic and southern aspects. The way she uses her materials communicates that every object has a story and a history in itself, united together by their surroundings.

Being a Muslim in the city, especially Bangkok, is completely different; the closeness of community, the sense of belonging is more complicated. Knowing the artist's background, the dark embroidered artworks by Chantachua at first seem to be focused on religion and feature Islamic architecture. However, in fact the patterns she applies in her works are combination of other Asian patterns; Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Indian and so on. In addition, the context of her work is not exclusively to present certain beliefs but all things around her regardless. A crafty medium such as embroidery also relates to the general concept of her practice. Chantachua was trained as a painter but at one point in life, when she faced emotional challenge, she began to sew as a therapeutic practice. Each thread connecting to one another also represent people and everything around her coming together into her works. She applies pastel coloured threads on black textile, indicating light in the dark; peace and hope.

The title *Other Possible Worlds* comes from the statement "I believe in other possible worlds" – the title of a 1987 text painting by Elizabeth Newman, a Melbourne artist. In the painting, this sentence is advocating hope for the future, a better world, a glimpse of utopia. This exhibition employs that phrase as a title partly to evoke a similar interpretation. At first we thought of it as meaning only a better future for all. But as the ideas of exhibition have developed, in some senses 'other possible worlds' can also mean a customised world for each of its citizens.

# Thailand: Different or Unique?

James Wise

Countries differ from each other. Thailand is different. But is Thailand unique? This question has vexed scholars of Thai history and politics. One frustrated professor is reported to have said, “What damn good is this country—you can’t compare it with anything!”.

## Facts and alternative facts

At the heart of Thailand’s arguable uniqueness lies the fact that Thailand, unlike its neighbours, was not colonised. But was Thailand’s non-colonisation really a ‘fact’? Or, more correctly, was it a ‘semi-fact’, ‘crypto-fact’, ‘quasi-fact’, or even an ‘alternative fact’? Certainly, Thailand wasn’t directly colonised, but many scholars have concluded that it was indirectly colonised, or semi-colonised, or partially colonised, or crypto-colonised.

Although Thailand—or Siam, as it was then called—avoided direct colonisation in the nineteenth century, it felt compelled to enter treaties of extraterritoriality with foreign powers. These ‘unequal treaties’ dictated the level of taxes on foreign trade and forced Thailand to replicate Western legal codes and processes.

In addition, beyond the fetters of these treaties, some Thais found the values of the West alluring as well as threatening. The West and modernity had become synonymous. Thais sought to emulate the West in many fields, including sporadically in governance and politics. These Thais were attracted to principles underpinning Western liberal democratic systems: equality, individual rights, elections, and the rule of law.

In 1932, some of them staged a coup that signalled the end of absolute monarchy and the start of Thailand’s experimentation with more open forms of government.

Traditional political authority in Thailand was therefore challenged and re-shaped in all sorts of ways by external forces. Importantly, though, during the so-called colonial period of southeast Asian history, Thais were able to control the nature and the pace of change more easily than directly colonised peoples could.

As a result, the organising principles of Western liberal democratic systems did not replace traditional Thai mores and methods, especially hierarchy, patron-client relationships and the dominance of personal connections in political life. Nor were these principles as appealing as

nationalism, which the traditional elite deployed to consolidate its power. In other words, wherever Thailand’s experience with colonial powers might sit on the spectrum between direct colonisation and non-colonisation, there is no denying that traditional political authority retained legitimacy. In contrast, in neighbouring countries, colonial powers displaced the people and institutions that traditionally had exercised political authority.

## Coups, constitutions, commotion

Although Thailand escaped direct colonisation, since the events of 1932—a coup or a revolution, depending on your perspective—the country has had 12 successful coups (and nine additional coup attempts) and 17 constitutions (and many interim constitutions). The 2014 coup won’t be Thailand’s last coup and the 2017 Constitution won’t be Thailand’s last constitution.

In addition, Thailand has experienced large-scale public protests in 1973, 1976, 1992, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2020-21, usually violently suppressed. Following each of these episodes, and in response to electoral setbacks, Thailand’s traditional political authority has re-grouped and then found or created enough political space in which to reassert itself.

By any measure, Thailand’s modern political history, like its ‘colonial’ history, is different, perhaps unique.

## Democracy and the rule of law

In response to the disarray of Thai politics, outsiders, especially those familiar with the Western political tradition, tend to assume that Thailand should be, or should want to be, on a trajectory to be more democratic, Western, or modern. “When is Thailand going to be like us?” they ask, “Or more like us?”

Foreigners are not alone in asking when Thailand will be more democratic. Many Thais also want this. Other Thais, though, argue that their country is doing well enough, and being truer to itself, without becoming more democratic—or by moving in this general direction at a slower pace.

The other common refrain—from Westerners and Thais alike—is that the ‘rule of law’ should be observed more rigorously in Thailand. Often, they mean law and order (especially an ‘order’ that favours their interests) rather than



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp  
*Dark hope* 2021  
human hair, sewing thread  
61.5 x 93 cm



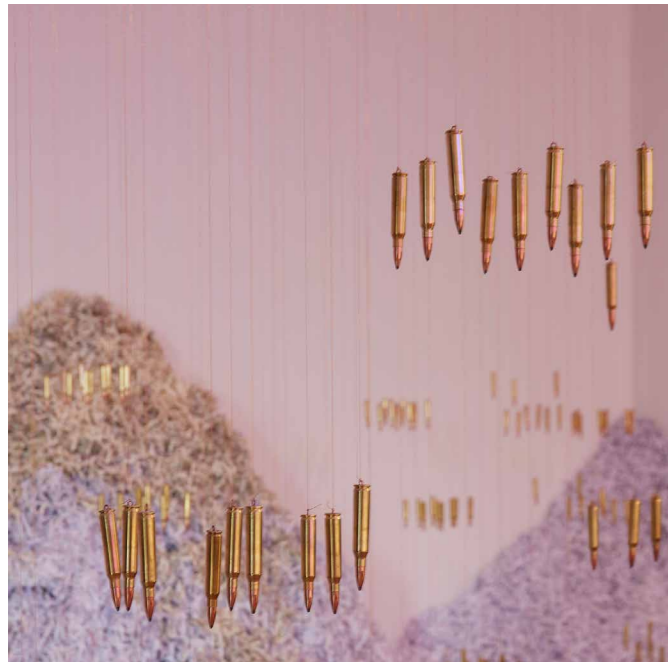
the rule of law, which requires a truly independent judiciary.

Yet even when Westerners and Thais agree that the rule of law is a worthy goal, they may be agreeing to quite different things.

Underlying Western law is the idea that individuals have a right to life, liberty and property. Westerners tend to think that a society without laws would be disordered and conflict-ridden.

In contrast, in pre-modern Thailand the purpose of the law was to preserve cosmic harmony; it was not a man-made response to worldly disorder. The law therefore reflected duties, not rights; the community, not the individual; hierarchy, not equality; and negotiation and compromise, not the debate and winner-takes-all approach that tends to characterise Western law and judicial processes.

The cultural roots of Western law and traditional Thai law are deep and different.



Som Supaparinya  
*Paradise of the blind* 2022 (detail)  
shredded paper, bullet casings, banned books  
dimensions variable

### Co-existing legitimacies

Because Thailand was not directly colonised, and because the rule of law can be interpreted differently there, Thai politics can be easier to understand if we view Thailand as the site of both a traditional political legitimacy and a modern political legitimacy.

These legitimacies co-exist rather than compete. Competition can create an impression of well-defined competitors, one of whom will eventually be victor, and the other vanquished. But there will be no V-Day on which one defeats the other. This contest will proceed slowly, unevenly, and sometimes erratically, for many decades.

Traditionally, political order was built around hierarchy, with the king at its apex. Because Siam was not directly colonised, hierarchy and monarchy are still tightly woven into the fabric of Thailand. Many Thais, including the king himself, believe that at times the king should play a direct political role.

Many Thais are also comfortable with the idea that Thailand as a nation and Thais as individuals would be better protected if 'good people' rather than elected people governed. They believe in a moral hierarchy, within which power relations are determined between patrons and clients on a personal basis.

In their view, differences of view and disputes are best mediated and arbitrated by the king, his representatives (appointed or self-appointed), or the military, not in independent courts of law or legislatures or through fresh elections.

Because Siam was influenced by the West, many other Thais now resist this traditional hierarchy because it conflicts with the idea of equality that underpins electoral democracy and the rule of law.

They want to, and believe they have a right to, participate in politics. They believe that governments should consult the governed and be open to challenges from the governed. They argue that elected rather than appointed governments can better protect the nation and individual Thais, and that all Thais should be equally subject to the law.

Sovereignty, they say, belongs to the people; the parliament, government and judiciary should exercise power on behalf of the people without undue influence from the military or monarchy. When disputes arise, they are best mediated in an elected legislature or, if need be, by the electorate through an election or referendum. Or disputes should be arbitrated by an independent judiciary.

The preceding paragraphs over-simplify Thailand's political landscape, but they say enough to give an idea of the defining values of each legitimacy. They co-exist and will continue to co-exist within the thinking and values of each Thai engaged in politics—and in the political movements and parties, as well as the institutions, that they support.

### Unequal contest

Undoubtedly, the contest between these two conceptions of legitimacy is unequal. Advocates of the traditional legitimacy have usually been able to rely on the coercive power of the military, which has usually gained the endorsement of the monarch.

Yet, when elections are held, participation rates and results suggest that most Thais now favour a more democratic political system. And some formal features of a democracy now either exist or, during periods of military rule, are recognised as norms to which the country should return, for example, a constitution, elections and greater freedom of expression.

The political culture of Thailand now says politics should be more participatory, governments should be more consultative, constitutions and the law should play a bigger role, checks and balances should exist, individual rights should be protected and public opinion should be heeded.

### Freedom of expression

Because adherents of the traditional legitimacy long for a society that is harmonious and ordered, they are wary of differences of opinion. So, they exploit their ascendancy to try to muzzle questioning NGOs, public intellectuals, journalists and artists.

Yet purported supporters of a more democratic Thailand have not always upheld freedom of expression. Leaders of elected governments have variously tried to intimidate and silence individuals, organisations and media outlets that embarrassed or questioned them.

In recent years, military governments and military-backed governments have used sweeping laws on defamation, sedition and lèse majesté to turn critics into criminals. Others have been charged with 'computer crimes', which can be as simple as a mildly irreverent social media post.

In the absence of freedom of expression, imagining other possible worlds is hard.

But, if more Thais are to participate more fully—and without fear—in the public life of their nation, imagining other possible worlds is essential.



Tada Hengsapkul

# Bussaraporn Thongchai

Bussaraporn Thongchai is a contemporary artist who works primarily in drawing and painting. She was born the youngest of four daughters in 1985 and raised in Isan, the north-eastern region of Thailand bordered by the Mekong River. She studied a Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts at Silpakorn University in Bangkok (2004-2013).

In her early exhibitions she criticized the patriarchy through the observation of her father's power and violence, and the consequences for family members as well as the moral paradox in her family. Later she explored the complexity of her relationships with her father and ex-boyfriends. Her exhibitions were successful but attracted controversy due to her open treatment of sexuality.

In 2015 Bussaraporn relocated from Bangkok to Berlin and began working in the Ban Ying shelter, a refuge for women from Africa, southeast Asia and Eastern Europe who were victims of human trafficking. Her experiences there as a language mediator influenced her thinking and her art. Her focus broadened from a more personal interest in gender, sexuality and relationships to a concern for the migrant women and a desire to use her art to make their plight better known. The first work from Ban Ying was *Pieces from Berlin*, a series of drawings inspired by the lives of the women and presented in Bangkok in 2018.

In 2019 Bussaraporn began a second series drawing on her work at Ban Ying. *Dialogue* was a conceptual and text-based body of work that came out of time spent with her clients in court, listening to proceedings and examining the documents afterwards. She describes her working process –

*Combining experience of a language mediator with experience in ordering aesthetic principles for art practice, I made collages from documents about migrant women... that were pending destruction after the retention period had expired. The sensitive personal data in the documents were removed, whereas other contextual data were brought together and reorganized in the form of short conversations. I meanwhile found myself carrying messages from one world to another.... However, in the context of art I left the messages unclear and incomplete by shortening and expanding them using various pieces of the documents from both recognizable and unrecognizable sources.*

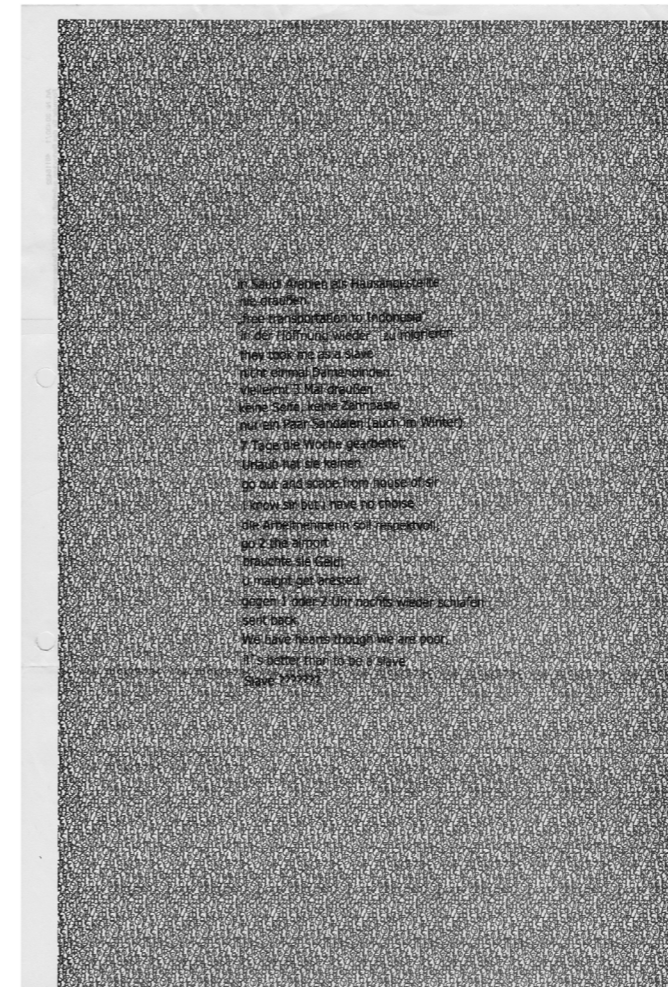
The works drew on Bussaraporn's previous practice of working onto found paper. In this case the paper is in the form of transcripts and documents recording the voices of the women in interviews. It is as if parts of the women themselves are being incorporated into the work. But her intention is not to present information or summarise – more to capture the fleeting sense of these women and their identities as homeless and therefore in the eyes of the law insubstantial.

She acknowledges her own role in the process –

*I do not deny the fact there are clashes of voices and negotiations in the dialogues. Some words are missing, oppressed or fall into the hole of conversation. There are also untranslated and untranslatable voices. Nevertheless, I do hope the voices will be heard... and I want the audience to be aware of my peculiarity as the author who projects another voice as well. I might be a storyteller who reflects the truth well, and yet at the same time a writer who seems deceitful. In a discursive field between the voices in the forms of words, stories, conversations, official documents and legal texts, it would be a great opportunity for us to explore the language and conversation gaps. Listen to voices in the holes silently and be aware of the voice sources carefully.*

In German and full of fractured sentences, shifts of typefaces and fragmented stories, Thongchai's collages physically correspond to the experiences of the myriad women she has worked with. But read in translation in English, the re-assembled voices speak eloquently of the powerlessness, suffering and exploitation that is so often the lot of women trying to escape desperate lives.

John Cruthers



in Saudi Arabia as Domestic Worker  
never go outside  
"free transportation to Indonesia"  
hoping to migrate again  
they took me as a slave  
not even a sanitary napkin  
maybe 3 times outside  
no soap, no toothpaste  
just a few sandals (even in winter)  
worked 7 days a week  
she has no vacation  
go out and escape from House of Sir  
I know Sir but I have no choice  
the worker should be respectful  
go to the airport  
she needs money  
you might get arrested  
sleep again around 1 or 2 am in the morning  
sent back  
We have hearts though we are poor,  
it's better than to be a slave  
Slave ??????

Bussaraporn Thongchai  
*In Saudi Arabia 2022*  
collage on paper  
28.2 x 19.5 cm

Accidentally being a language mediator both inside and outside the women's shelter home in Berlin has surrounded my life with words and stories from unknown women who inevitably become acquaintances. Whether those words and stories were in written or spoken forms, I perceived them as 'voices.' Sometimes while I was skimming through the documents, I felt as if I was hearing voices of people from different locations with different tones, volumes and intensities. Also, when I was listening to stories of people sitting in front for interpreters, I felt as if I was hearing voices that did not emit from the conversation but were something between the lines, in the gaps, in the pauses, in the holes of communication and in the efforts to communicate.

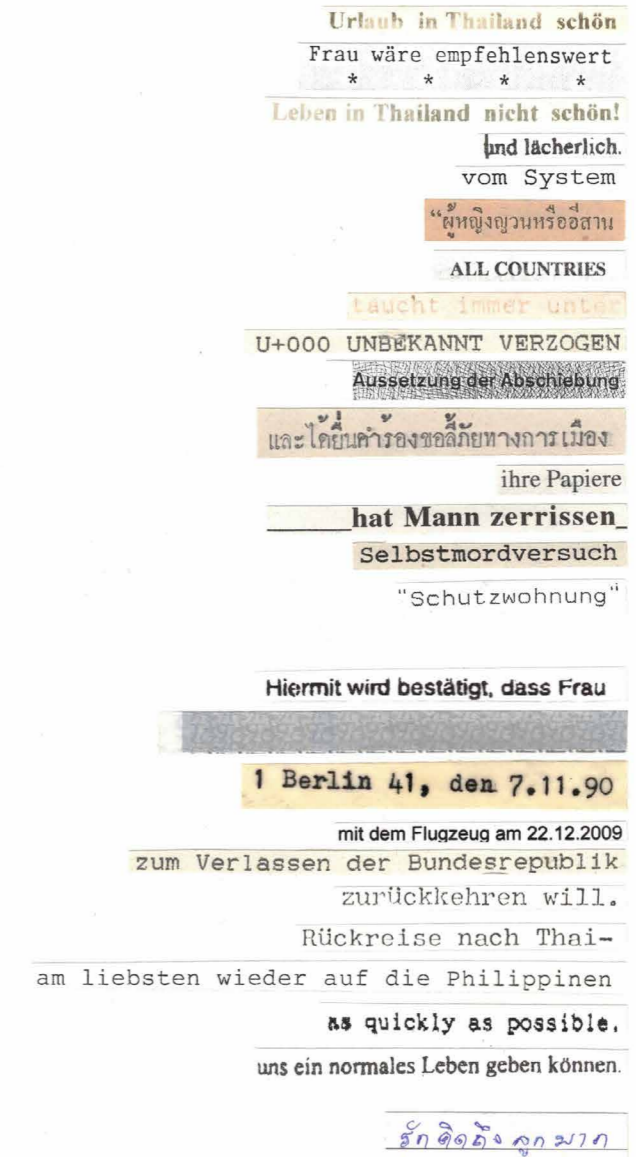
In the work *Dialogue*, I did not focus on forming dialogues, but tried to make holes of the voices in the dialogues. In the midst of the indentation and absence of the texts; the existence without the origin, the beginning and the end; the inconsistency and unreasonableness of the parties in the dialogues; the unusual interference of background in some pieces; and the detachment and rearrangement of the texts together with their image transformation, regardless of whether you are a native or a foreign speaker in the languages, I am trying to figure out whether we read the dialogue by applying our familiar logic and consciousness or not, how and in what manner; which concept we use in response to the formation and existence of the awkward truths as well as to the lies that may have been composed in the anonymous stories; and when facing the holes in the dialogues, we choose to jump over, step back, fill in the missing words, make the holes deeper, or how we pay attention to them.

Combining experience of a language mediator with experience in ordering aesthetic principles for art practice, I made collages from documents about migrant women in Germany that were pending destruction after the retention period had expired. The sensitive personal data in the documents were removed, whereas other contextual data were brought together and reorganized in the form of short conversations. I meanwhile found myself carrying messages from one world to another, not different from being a language mediator. However, in the context of art, I left the messages unclear and incomplete by shortening and expanding them using various pieces of the documents from both recognizable and unrecognizable sources.

I do not deny the fact that there are clashes of voices and negotiations in the dialogues. Some words are missing, oppressed, or fall into the hole of conversation. There are also untranslated and untranslatable voices. Nevertheless, I do hope that the voices will be heard by the audience, and I want the audience to be aware of my peculiarity as the author who projects another voice as well. I might be a storyteller who reflects the truth well, and yet at the same time a writer who seems deceitful. In a discursive field between the voices in the forms of words, stories, conversations, official documents, legal texts, etc., it would be a great opportunity for us to explore the language and conversation gaps. Listen to voices in the holes silently and be aware of the voice sources carefully.

\*At the end of this work, all remaining pieces of the documents are destroyed without making any copies.

Bussaraporn Thongchai



Bussaraporn Thongchai  
*Dialogue VII 2022* (detail)  
 collage on paper  
 2 pieces, 28.2 x 21 cm each

# Busui Ajaw

A self-taught artist based in Chiang Rai, Busui Ajaw is an upcoming painter and sculptor who has exhibited widely in the last five years. Early in her career, Ajaw's work was shown within the Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai artistic communities, in northern Thailand. From 2018, her work began to appear more widely in the Thai art scene, coming to the attention of fellow artists, curators and collectors. Her breakthrough came with her participation in the Singapore Biennale 2019. Her suite of large paintings accompanied by an installation of carved wooden figurative sculptures provided her first international recognition.

Ajaw's subjects come from her experiences as a woman together with her heritage as a member of the Akha ethnic minority. As a child she was interested in drawing and painting. In her teenage years she began to explore her inner-self in her paintings, intimately and excessively. Everything in Ajaw's artistic practice comes from her own life experience. She was born in a small village in Myanmar in 1986, but due to a military invasion her family fled to Thailand. Her experiences since childhood have been of moving from place to place, insecure and homeless, at the mercy of others and very aware of the imperfections of human beings and nature. Her works often deal with life and death, the good and the ugly. The aesthetics of her work tends toward toward the grotesque, because she considers there are flaws in everything and she has more energy to express her understanding of things from that part of herself.

It could be said that Ajaw's visual communication comes from two main influences. First, her father, who is a wood sculptor making figurative sculptures and small statues of humans, animals and beyond. The craftsmanship in his work is unique in its expression of his feelings and emotions. Second is the fact that her indigenous hill tribe doesn't have a written culture. Stories of her roots, her culture, her traditions and the legends of her people are transmitted by word of mouth. Her grandmother told her stories that were passed down from person to person over generations. But every story is also altered according to who tells it. Listening to these stories and their retelling groomed her to be imaginative and assisted her mind to illustrate things in an inventive or eccentric way.

The five paintings in *Other Possible Worlds* represent The Five Precepts in Buddhism: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech and no intoxicants. Ajaw extends these concepts and notes that -

1. No killing - all beings are precious.
2. No stealing - everyone loves their belongings, one should keep one's hands out of what is not theirs.
3. No sexual misconduct - everyone cherishes their offsprings and spouses, one should respect that.
4. No false speech - lies destroy everything.
5. No intoxicants - drugs and alcohol can make sane people insane.

The works communicate their ideas directly, illustrating each precept with characters and situations from her own people, often in traditional dress. The everyday human failings Ajaw depicts touch the viewer at a profound level. She trusts that good art needs to come from what's inside its creative producer. What we see before us, the gruesome and shocking images, are bridges connecting the artist's mind and experiences to our internal, restricted selves.

Haisang Javanalikhikara



Busui Ajaw  
*Panatipata Weramani (Do not kill) 2022*  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm



Busui Ajaw  
*Musavada Weramani (Do not lie)* 2022  
 acrylic on canvas  
 120 x 100 cm

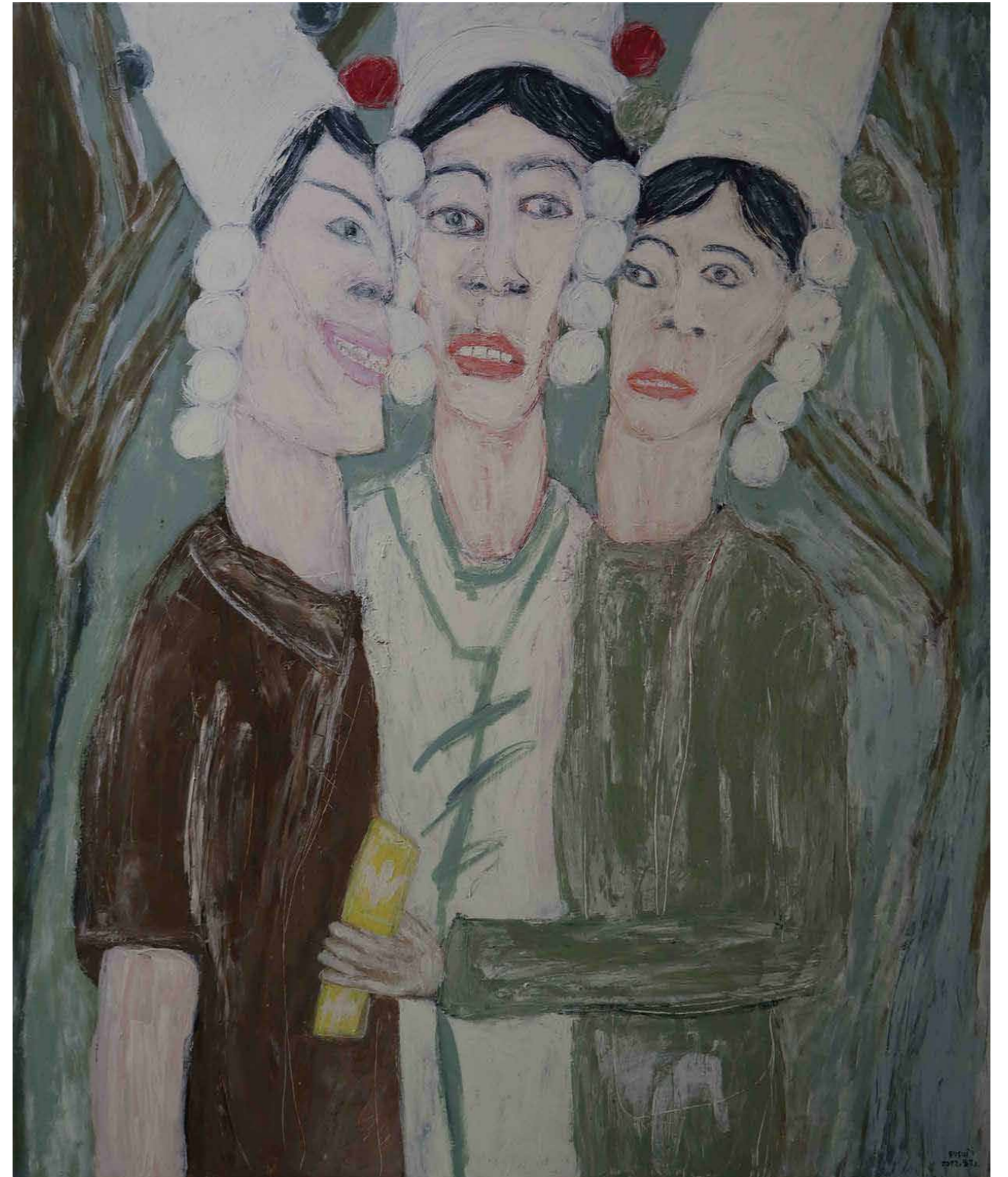


Busui Ajaw  
*Surameraya Matchapamatatthana Weramani (Do not drink alcohol)* 2022  
 acrylic on canvas  
 120 x 100 cm

My practice relates to my unique upbringing. I come from the Akha ethnic group, a nomadic people from the highlands of mainland southeast Asia, and my father is a wood carver and sculptor. I received my basic education from non-governmental organisations and missionaries, but learned about my people from stories that my grandmother would tell me. These stories would be passed down from elders to young ones around the bonfire.

Coming from an oral culture, the practice of image-making was something that was initially foreign to me. However, over time it has become a medium which I call my own, and my paintings present a worldview which combines the richness of my culture with a sharp eye for capturing contemporary events and values.

Busui Ajaw



Busui Ajaw  
*Atinna Tana Veramane (Do not steal)* 2022  
 acrylic on canvas  
 120 x 100 cm

# Imhathai Suwatthanasilp

A visit to the studio of artist Imhathai Suwatthanasilp is a memorable experience. She works in a long wooden building on stilts over a rice field in Lumphong, in northern Thailand. The building has many doors and windows which are nearly always open so that the sun, warm air and insects can move through the space.

Up until 2018, Imhathai lived and worked in a small house on the crowded outskirts of Bangkok. She was born there in 1981, and received a Bachelor's degree in Thai Arts and her Master's degree in Thai Arts, both from Silpakorn University. In 2006, she won a scholarship to study at the Exchange Program at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, France, and later a scholarship from the Government of Italy to study the Marble Carving Program at Florence, Italy.

But by 2018 she was concerned about pollution levels in Bangkok and their effect on her health. She had previously purchased a plot of land in Lumphong and moved that year, building her studio in the field, with a pond at one end full of fish and a burgeoning vegetable garden with chickens and geese.

Living so close to nature led to a corresponding change of focus in Imhathai's work. Since her first solo show in 2008, she developed a signature mode of production using human hair, often her own, which she had woven, crocheted, embroidered or laced into quiet, intimate two and three-dimensional works that reflected on the nature of familial ties, domestic life, the female body and feminine identity.

The rice field brought the natural world into her work. She spent hours exploring the fields, the countryside and the cycle of the seasons, noticing the teeming life, but also becoming aware of the problematic farming practices of the local farmers. She made the work *Ash flowers* to address the issues -

*My art studio is in the middle of a rice field. A lot of the time I see ashes fly in the sky and drop down as if they were black snow. If we look back to the beginning of the story, we find the connection between the problems of inequality and the government's policies which benefit the capitalist. The farmers cannot do anything with the price of rice even though they have to bear high expenses each and every season. Therefore, to minimize the cost of land clearing, they burn the rice field and any unwanted wastes, also using herbicides for the fastest and cheapest results.*

She photographed the ash flowers and other organic forms and wove versions of them in human hair sourced from a Thai donor, pinned in white acrylic display cases redolent of natural history specimens. The tiny, vulnerable objects ask us to consider the environmental and human costs of these practices.

Imhathai's second work is *Dark hope*, a version of the tri-colour Thai flag woven in human hair. It is a profoundly disturbing and disquieting object, at once the symbol of Thai nationhood, but also standing for the contested nature of current Thai society which is the unifying theme of *Other Possible Worlds*. The country's lese majeste laws would make it difficult to exhibit this work in Thailand, so we are pleased to be able to include it in the exhibition.

John Cruthers



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp's studio in a rice field under construction, 2018



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp's studio, 2020



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp  
source materials for *Ash flowers* 2022



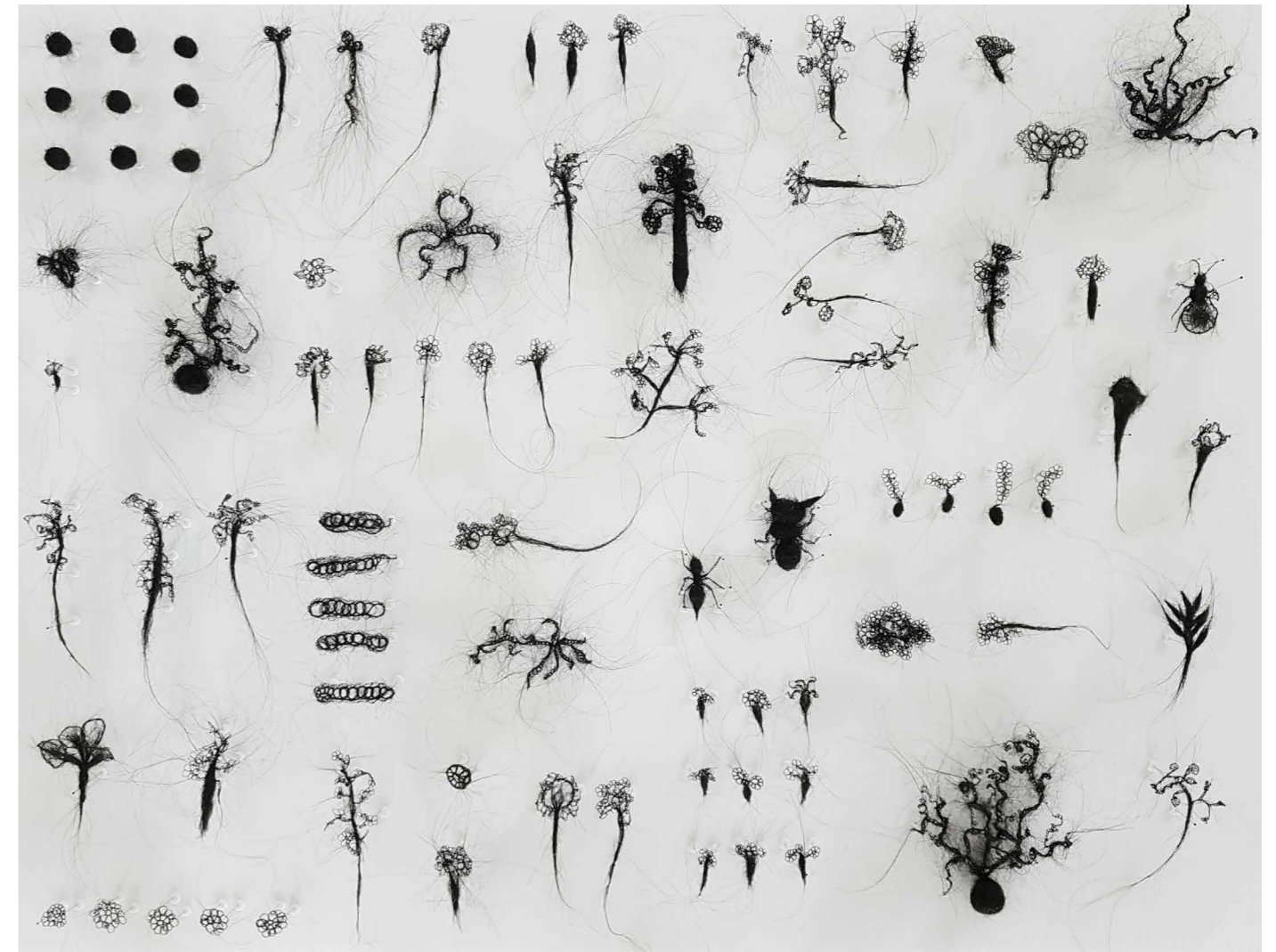
Imhathai Suwatthanasilp  
source materials for *Ash flowers* 2022

### *Ash flowers* 2022

My art studio is in the middle of a rice field. A lot of the time I see ashes fly in the sky and drop down as if they were black snow. If we look back to the beginning of the story, we find the connection between the problems of inequality and the government's policies which benefit the capitalist. The farmers cannot do anything with the price of rice even though they have to bear high expenses each and every season. Therefore, to minimize the cost of land clearing, they burn the rice field and any unwanted wastes, also using herbicides for the fastest and cheapest results.

I present these problems through *Ash flowers*. I explored the area around my studio for more than two years, collecting samples of plants which still remained from the burning and use of weed killer. (After I bought the land in 2015, there was neither burning nor chemical substances being used in the area anymore. As a result, many plants grew as they should in their natural ecosystem.) The exploration made me realize that most of the weeds could be consumed as nutritious foods and their flowers could be herbal medicines, but unfortunately they are not wanted and end up being destroyed. I took pictures of them as references and inspiration to create artwork from hair, which was sourced from a Thai donor. The black objects with organic forms were set neatly into white acrylic boxes to stimulate in audiences ideas about the problems we are all facing.

Imhathai Suwatthanasilp



Imhathai Suwatthanasilp  
*Ash flowers* 2022 (detail)  
human hair, sewing thread, glue  
70 x 270 x 12 cm

# Kasarin Himacharoen

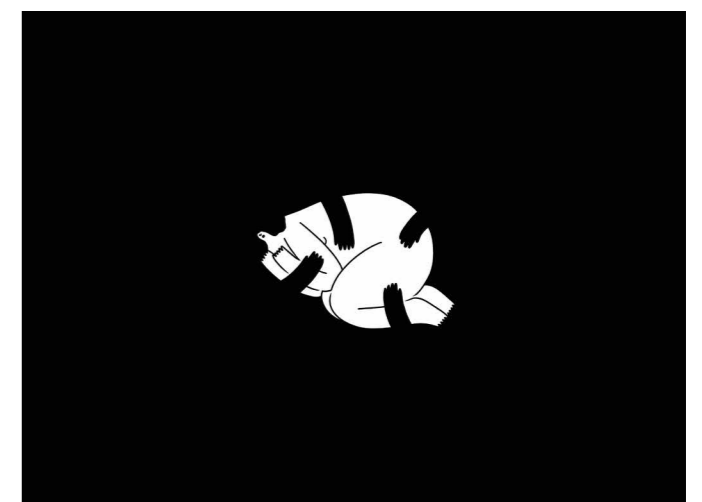
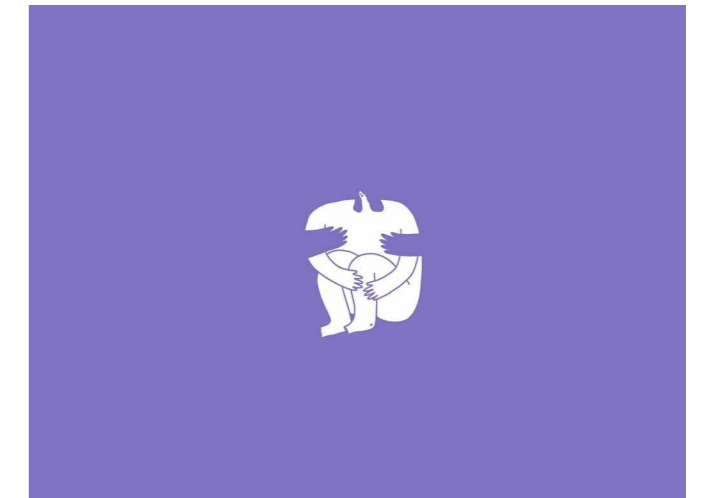
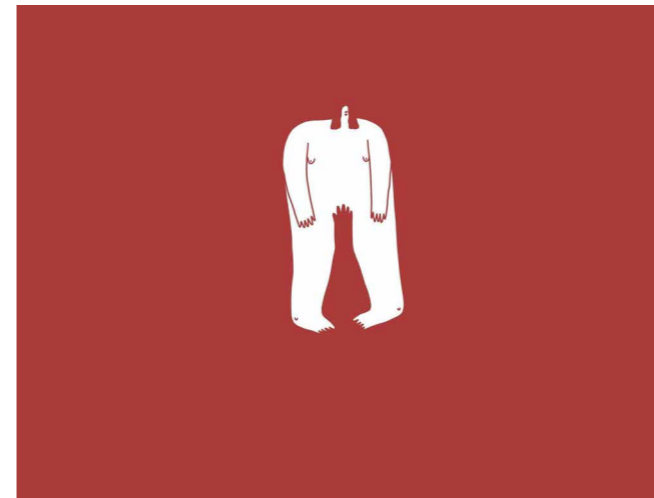
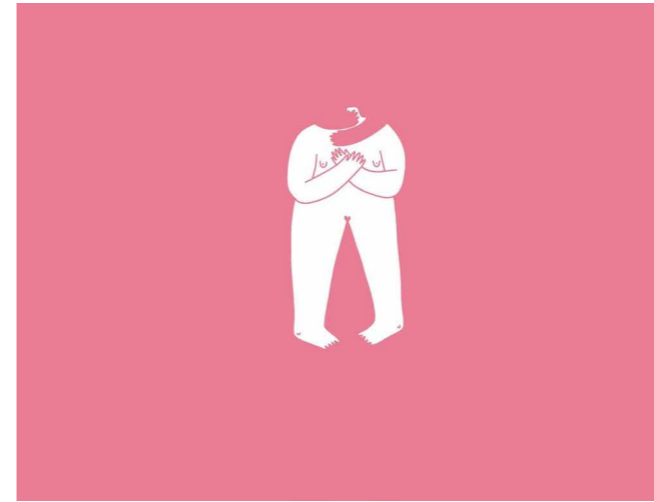
Born in 1989, Kasarin Himacharoen is a Thai female artist who is passionate about freedom of thought and expression. Growing up in a supportive family, she was encouraged to pursue her dream. Kasarin graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from the School of Architecture, Art and Design at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. After her graduation in 2013, she worked as a freelance illustrator for two years, a sale coordinator of a trading business for one year and then as an assistant to a stencil artist for one year. She is currently working as a freelance artist.

Kasarin is jolly and cheerful. She likes to learn new things and explore fresh perspectives, and enjoys experimenting with different painting, printmaking, sculpture and mixed media techniques to portray her liberal attitudes towards femininity and sexuality. This is a subject that very few women in Thai society dare to speak out about. Believing in freedom, Kasarin regards sexuality as an everyday subject that no woman should feel guilty about or ashamed to discuss.

For *Other Possible Worlds*, Kasarin provides us with two series of new artworks - *Sex delight* and *Sexual harassment*. Through the fascinating kaleidoscope of women's bodies, *Sex delight* reflects joy, pleasure and imagination beyond expectation that people can experience when having sex. For the artist, sexual activity allows people to discover other sides of themselves, and only those involved in the same activity know what they can discover together.

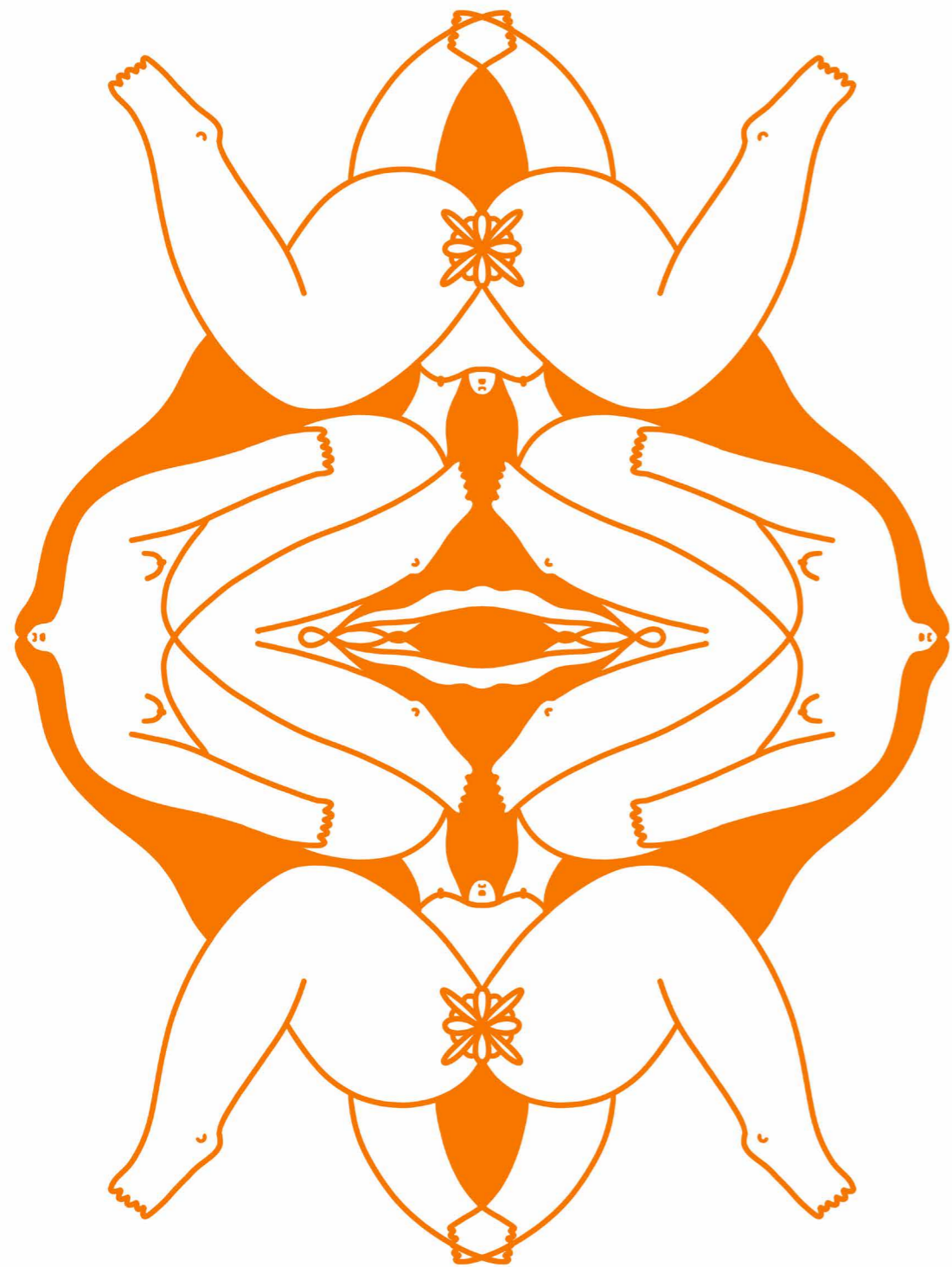
Despite the use of simple lines and vibrant colors displaying Kasarin's personal style, *Sexual harassment* deals with an opposite and negative aspect of sex. As another woman who has experienced sexual harassment, small handprints on women's bodies in this series depict chronic psychological pain and other mental health issues experienced by victims of sexual harassment. Even though a sexual relationship is a highly private and individual matter for many, Kasarin is one among an increasing number of assertive women who challenge the social norm by expressing her sexual experience, either the enjoyable feeling of having sex or the suffering of being harassed. She does emphasize that consensual sex is certainly more enjoyable than the non-consensual variety.

Iyada Mooksadee

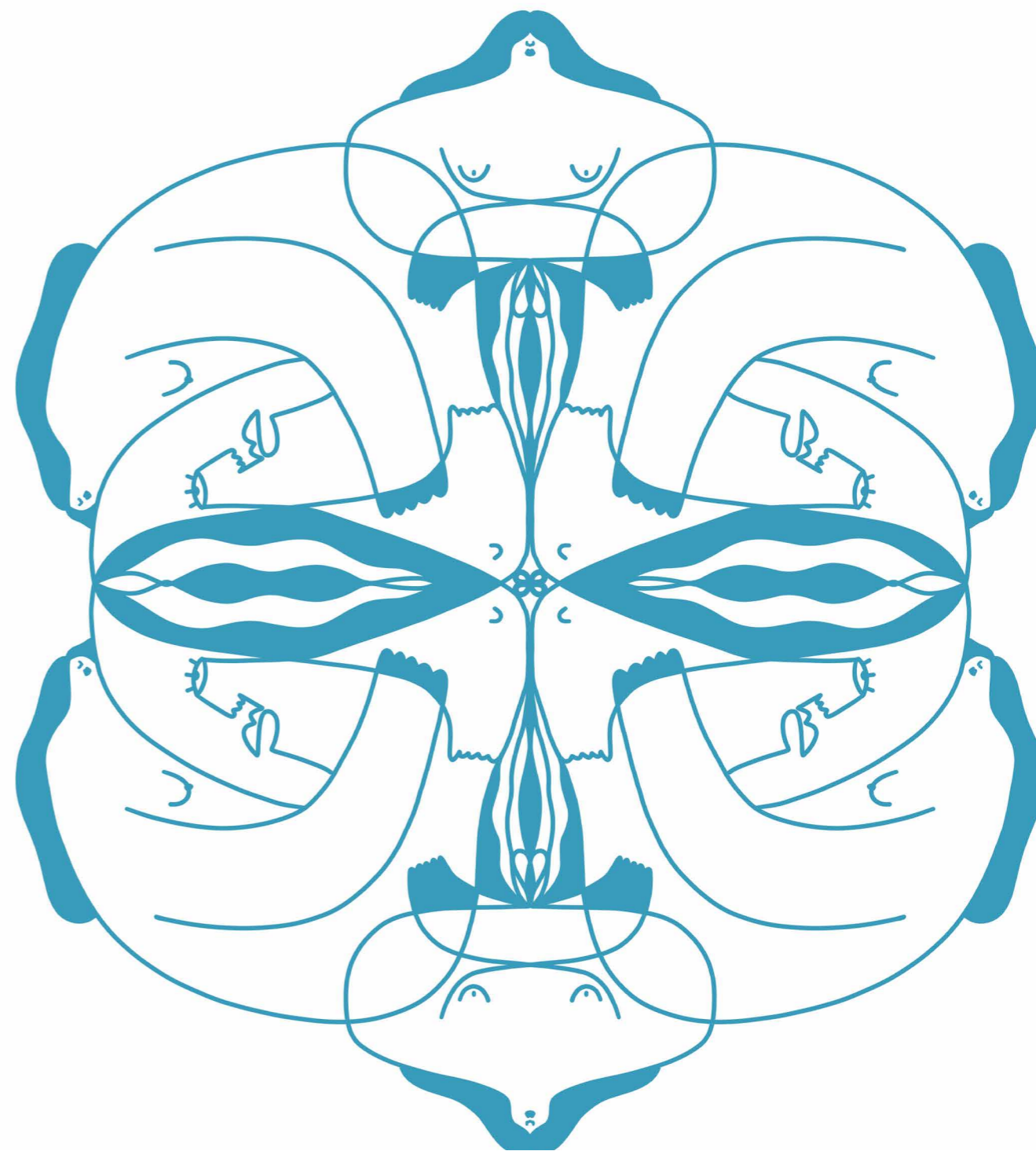


Kasarin Himachareon  
*Sexual harassment* series 2022  
screenprint on embossed paper  
edition of 10  
12 pieces, 30 x 40 cm each





Kasarin Himacharoen  
*Sex delight* 2022  
screenprint  
60 x 40 cm  
edition of 10



Kasarin Himacharoen  
*Sex delight* 2022  
screenprint  
60 x 40 cm  
edition of 10

# Kusofiyah Nibuesa

As a member of the Muslimah Collective, Kusofiyah Nibuesa works towards celebrating the extraordinary in the ordinary lives of Thai-Muslim communities in the southern part of Thailand, her home. The Collective draws together the shared experiences of female Muslim artists in the area including the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and nearby Songkhla. Muslimah Collective tells stories about the daily lives of Muslim women and families in connection to culture and society. Each artist expresses their womanhood; the struggle and the happiness in their own context and narrative.

Born in 1992, Nibuesa graduated BFA from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Prince of Songkla University and MFA from the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University. She's well-recognised as an upcoming artist and her work has been included in national and international exhibitions including The 6th Young Artists Talent Selection by the Royal Thai Consulate-General, Los Angeles (2015), Bangkok Art Biennale (2018) and Biennale Jogja XV Equator 5 (2019).

Many of Nibuesa's artistic subjects come from her attachment to the rural area she grew up in. The natural environment of hills, fields and sea and the beauty of nature are part of the richness of her hometown, Pattani, a town that has gone through so much. Nibuesa loved going to the market with her mother when she was young. She remembers lots of bits and bobs, fruit and vegetables, fabrics and clothing, and the many people she met, people from different roots and heritages: Thai-Buddhist, Thai-Malay and Thai-Chinese. Her childhood experiences were full of joy and granted her creativity and a natural understanding of art. Instinctively she began by looking at her own culture and how she fitted into it and her surroundings. Nibuesa studies and acknowledges her life and emotions, then translates them into her artworks in a sophisticated way.

Multiculturalism is one of Nibuesa's interests. In Thailand, Pattani is identified as a red zone city, meaning an area of conflict. It is often said by people from other parts of the country that there are civil wars and cultural disputes regularly in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, that bombings and shootings occur more frequently than in other parts. However, day-to-day living there is still simple and in some ways more peaceful than in big cities. Nibuesa identifies herself as Thai-Malay, like many Muslim citizens in her community. She portrays her way of life proudly in her works. She sees the beauty of her neighbourhood and seeks to present it in her artworks. Her basic technique is printmaking, combined with materials such as paper, wood and sometimes Islamic textiles to create something between 2D and 3D assemblages or relief works. The process of physically making her work materially echoes the meaning she intends them to convey - to rebuild through symbols and images the absolute faith and belief she feels in her culture and its value. She believes there is good flowing inside everyone, as well as on the surface.

Three individual works, *Deep south market 2* 2022, *Multicultural* 2021 and *Deep south market* 2016, integrate into one installation for *Other Possible Worlds*. Their combination strengthens the concept of the unity of different groups in her community. Although fabricated at different times, they blend together smoothly. Nibuesa's works are pure self-portraits of her community. She surveys and photographs all her subjects, incorporates elements of herself in them and presents the resulting portraits in the most honest way.

Haisang Javanalikhikara



Kusofiyah Nibuesa  
Source image for *The cart* 2021

Kusofiyah Nibuesa  
*The cart* 2021  
assembled cut paper  
120 x 98 cm



Overleaf:  
Kusofiyah Nibuesa  
*Deep south market 2* 2022  
assembled cut paper  
160 x 156 cm

*Deep south market* 2016  
assembled cut paper  
135 x 110 cm

*Multicultural* 2021  
assembled cut paper  
120 x 240 cm



# Mariem Thidarat Chantachua

One of the youngest artists in the exhibition, Mariem Thidarat Chantachua was born into a Muslim family in Bangkok in 1991. This is unusual given that Thailand's sizeable Muslim community, the country's largest religious minority, is mainly concentrated in four southern provinces near the Malaysian border.

Mariem studied at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, beginning with foundational studies in Thai arts and traditional painting before moving onto Western art. As an undergraduate she made a personal study of Islamic painting traditions by viewing artworks online and reading books. Later she met a senior who had graduated in Islamic arts in Malaysia and worked at the Institute of Islamic Arts in Bangkok, where she learnt about Islamic geometric design.

Mariem began to use thread and stitching to draw while an undergraduate. What drew her to it was her childhood experience using her mother's stitching materials. Her family was poor and Mariem had to repair her old clothes and school uniforms. For her, hand stitching also represents a bond with her mother. She uses threads to symbolize unity and harmony in Islam - a single thread is weak and fragile but it becomes stronger when woven with others. She believes she drew closer to Islam and became a better Muslim when exploring new ways of creating her artworks. It led her to wear the hijab daily and perform prayers five times a day.

Around this time she began to explore geometric patterns in her work to avoid using human and animal figures, as representing figures is not supported by Islamic teachings. Instead she became interested in architectural forms and interior spaces in which Islamic geometric patterns often appeared, such as architectural sites and religious places. She also draws on patterns that reflect other Asian cultures.

To create a work, Mariem uses computer graphics to prepare an initial draft. She often uses images of Islamic sites such as prayer rooms and mosques as the background. She then adds other visual elements and finishes with Islamic patterns to play with perspective. The final draft is enlarged to actual size and printed onto white paper. To begin the stitching process, she lays the final draft on paper onto black fabric and uses a basic basting technique to stitch and create the design and patterns. She is always excited when removing the white paper because she stitches on the paper without knowing what the completed work will look like on the black fabric. She mainly uses black polyester fabric, like that used to make abaya dresses for Muslim women. As for stitching, she uses crochet thread because it is more durable and available in a variety of colours.

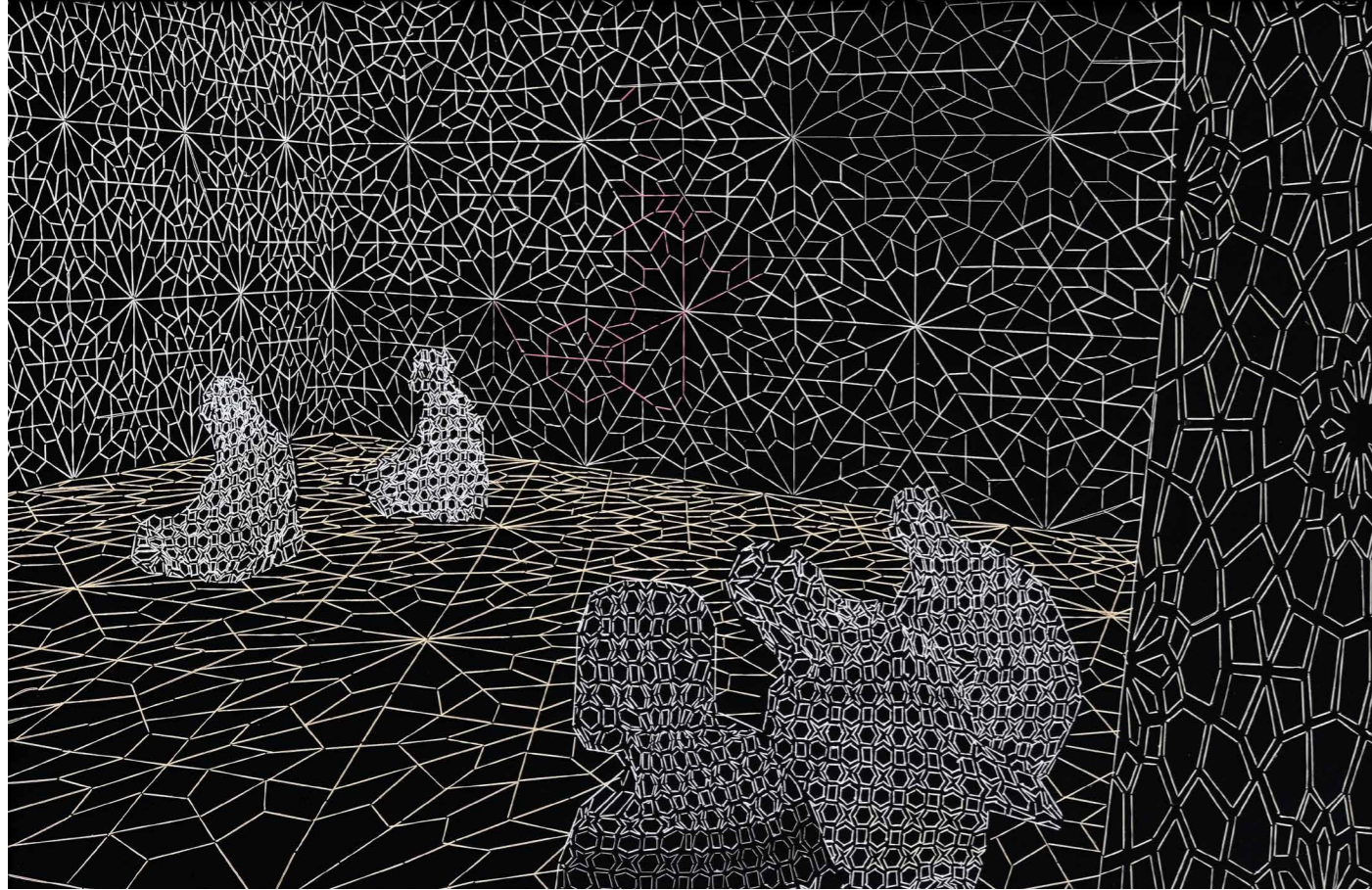
For Mariem, her faith in Islam has been a defining element in her life and her art. When she was a student, her family was dealing with debts and financial problems, so she had to work hard to pay her own tuition fees. At her lowest point when she thought her dream of being an artist might shatter, she prayed and asked Allah for help. She also changed her method of drawing to stitching and avoided using animal figures. In her prayers, she cried and asked God to lead her to success if she was on the right path. Finally, after graduation, she had opportunities to display her works in many exhibitions. She won awards, visited other countries and her works sold readily. She believes this is how God helped her.

The works in *Other Possible Worlds* relate to the diversity of Muslim communities in different places, her inner emotions being a Muslim and her different feelings before and after getting closer to Islam. *Serene* and *Untitled 3* display the serenity of Muslims at prayer. *Dimension of faith 2* is developed from the walkway to the minaret (the tower with a balcony from which muezzin calls Muslims to prayer) at the 300-year-old Talo Mano Mosque in Narathiwat Province, a province where the majority are Muslim. *Untitled 4* expresses her peculiar feelings when she began to explore the wide world - she was moving forward but didn't know what she was finding or what to discover. Seeing different forms of faith or practices among Muslims in different places, she didn't know whether what they did was right or wrong, good or bad. But she was certain they shared the same goal.

John Cruthers



Thidarat Chantachua  
*Dimensions of faith 2* 2017  
embroidery and acrylic on fabric  
111 x 164 cm



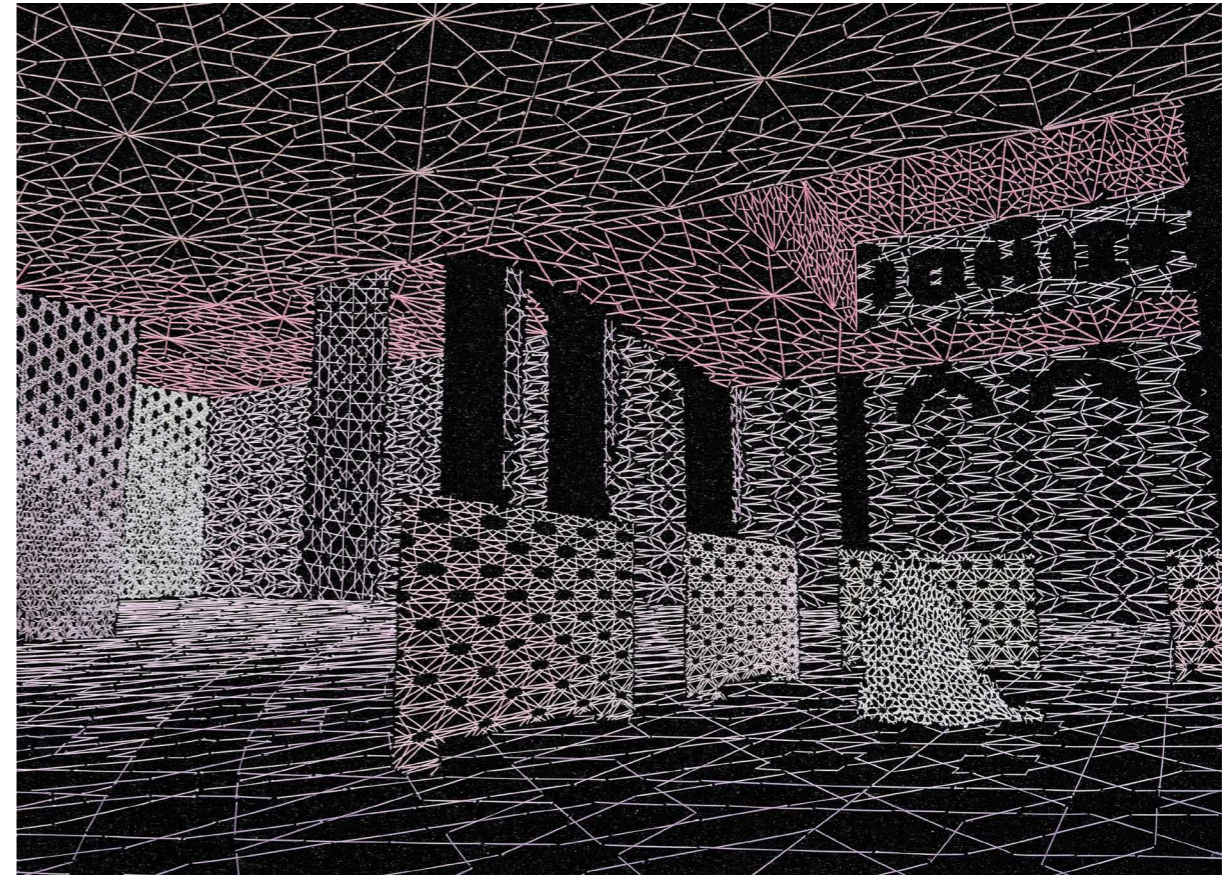
Thidarat Chantachua  
*Serene* 2016  
 embroidery on fabric  
 112 x 174 cm

My art is about the relationship between people and religion. I use different colours and sizes of thread to create dimensions of space. The thick, light-coloured thread gives the highlight effect of the works, and the thread that is darker creates shadows. The threads are small and fragile, but when they are together, they become strong and beautiful. I paint randomly from the sensitive soul. Sewing carefully helps me concentrate and leads to a peace of mind. In this way it is similar to prayer.

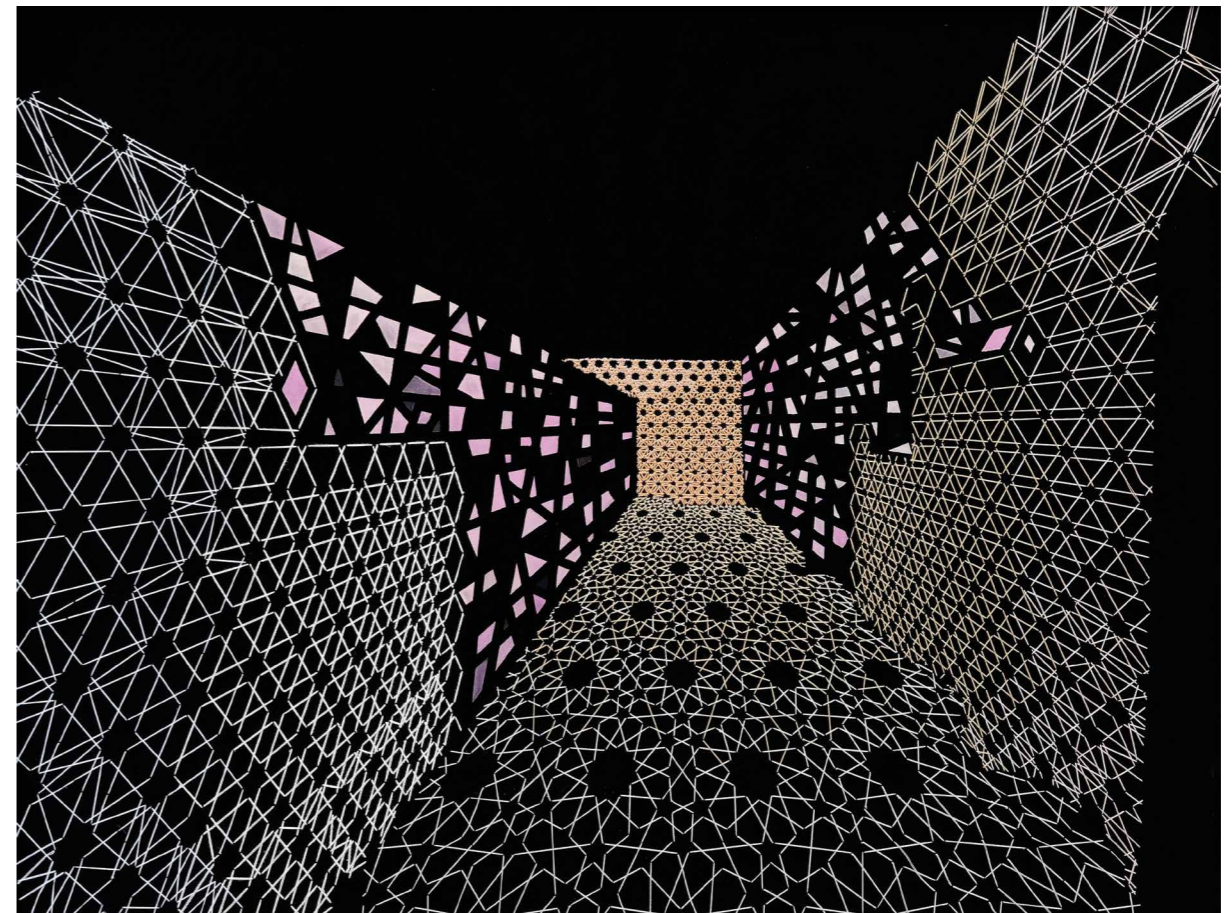
I create my work from the racial and religious differences that occurred to me while I travelled to various countries with different rules. My work communicates how culture overlaps issues of space and humanity, using mixed media painting techniques with embroidery inspired by my religion's architecture and community space. The patterns used in my paintings are like drawings that lead to the knowledge of the root of a culture that has been lost.

My work has developed to explore the root issues facing immigrant and displaced people through the various media of art.

Mariem Thidarat Chantachua



Thidarat Chantachua  
*Untitled 3* 2017  
 embroidery on fabric  
 123 x 165 cm



Thidarat Chantachua  
*Untitled 4* 2017  
 embroidery and acrylic on fabric  
 117 x 154 cm

# Piyarat Piyapongwiwat

Born in 1977 in Prae, Thailand, Piyarat studied Fine Arts in Montpellier, France and Communications in Melbourne, Australia. Her work invariably engages with her own interests, which include science, humanities, social science, political philosophy and contemporary issues such as gender, sub-cultures, cultural exchange and globalization.

The project *messages from nowhere to nowhere* was initiated and executed in Pattaya city and surrounds in Chonburi province, where Piyarat spent three months as an artist at Thaillywood Artist Residency in 2015. Thaillywood is on the outskirts of Pattaya, a coastal city famous as a centre of tourism and well known for its sex industry.

In this project Piyarat worked in the field of global cultural flows in the age of globalization. The idea of 'translocality' was taken from the 1996 collection of essays *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* by leading contemporary anthropologist and cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai.

Piyarat has written: *In the age of globalization, technology and mobility are increasing, which has caused many borders to be blurred. Appadurai proposes that the movement or the flow of people, money, communication, technology and ideas between cultures is increasingly significant. 'Non-places' like tourist sites, free trade areas, border zones, refugee camps, migrant hostels and so on bring local cultures into the realm of translocal cultures.*

She chose to work on this subject in Pattaya city where a tourist zone may be described as a kind of 'translocality', even when the city lies nominally within the jurisdiction of a nation-state. Comprising people from many backgrounds, ethnicities and races, Pattaya is a city with a high rate of migration.

To begin the project, Piyarat collected conversations from residents living in the area. In a later essay on the project, writer Warathep Akkabootara described the voices as "(belonging) to housekeepers, gardeners, Burmese, Khmer, tourists, bar owners, sex workers, umbrella rental service workers on the beach, procurers in bars who arrange foreigners to go 'shooting'."

Piyarat then re-created and echoed these 'meaningless' and 'unheard' voices. Their dissatisfactions and disappointments are implied through the messages, with issues ranging from poor living conditions to the political situation. The owners of the messages were mostly people who migrated to Pattaya, giving reasons ranging from economic factors to simply a matter of choice. The messages themselves resonated not only with Pattaya city society, but also society at large in Thailand.

These stories were then represented in a series of messages on video projected onto the walls and facades of buildings and locations in urban areas where people passed by - both in Pattaya and at other locations. The messages drew the audiences' attention and provoked in viewers mutual empathy to these 'unheard' and 'unwanted' voices.

Piyarat also selected three sentences from the residents and re-created each as a neon artwork – *Can you sing the national anthem?*, *Why don't we make prostitution legal?* and *Hope for a better future*. She selected neon tubes as a medium in order to represent the nightlife for which Pattaya is famous.

*messages from nowhere to nowhere* was first exhibited at Lyla Gallery, Chiang Mai in October-November 2015. In 2017 it was exhibited on the Southeast Asian platform at Art Stage Singapore, installed adjacent to a series by Philippines photographer MM Yu which charted the rapid urbanization on the streets of Manila city and the resulting effect on the urban poor.

By collecting and articulating these messages, Piyarat was acting as a mouthpiece to amplify the thoughts and desires of ordinary citizens, the small people from 'nowhere' with no power to articulate their concerns or have their voices heard. This is a consistent role taken by Thai artists and one that in this case has produced a work which, while produced from compassion, creates growing awareness and anger in the viewer towards the marginalization of poorer people in Thailand and the failure of the government to address their concerns and improve their lives.

John Cruthers



Piyarat Piyapongwiwat  
*Can you sing the national  
anthem?* 2015  
neon tubes  
20 x 245 x 10 cm



Opposite:  
Piyarat Piyapongwiwat  
*messages from nowhere to nowhere* 2015 (detail)  
single channel video  
6 minutes, 17 seconds

**I WOULD LIKE THERE  
TO BE LESS BEGGARS**

**THERE IS CHILD LABOUR**

**WE CANNOT SAY  
WHAT WE WANT  
TO SAY**

**PLEASE DON'T  
ARREST US,**

**SEX WORKERS IN PUBS  
AND BARS IN THIS CITY  
DRAW A LOT OF TOURIST**

**WHY DON'T  
WE MAKE  
PROSTITUTION  
LEGAL?**

**STOP  
ENCOURAGING  
SUPERSTITION**

**WE DO NOT HAVE  
ENOUGH WATER**

# Som Supaparinya

Som Supaparinya has had two major roles in the Thai contemporary art scene. Primarily she is recognised as a visual artist, but her other great contribution is in management. She was a director of Asian Culture Station (ACS) in 2016-2019 and the founding and continuing member of Chiang Mai Art Conversation (CAC), a nonprofit artist-run initiative established in 2013. Supaparinya has been active in her artistic practice since the early 2000s and has participated in numerous projects in Thailand and abroad. Her recent works have been included in the Thailand Biennale, Korat (2021), the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2021-22), and DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program, Berlin (2021-22).

Som's is a research-driven art practice. Each work takes several months, sometimes years to research and execute. When the artist is concerned about an issue, she spends a great deal of energy studying the subject. She reads, conducts interviews, watches different media and goes to exhibitions, along with site visits. When her ideas become more solid, she plans how to fabricate her work. This process of making the actual work is more structured and organised for her; working with other people, budget and space. Supaparinya notes that when she is fascinated by something, she tirelessly shapes and reshapes her project. She keeps questioning until she understands and has answers.

One video from 2010, *Shooting stars*, and another iteration of her of 2016 installation *Paradise of the blind* are included in this exhibition. Supaparinya produced *Shooting stars* after the 2010 Thai military crackdown. In this event untold protestors were shot and killed, but people who experienced the event reported that the media didn't fully tell story as it happened. Moving images in the work were filmed by the artist from a train window when she travelled one night from Bangkok to Chiang Mai, shortly after the occurrence. Her camera recorded horizontal streams of flickering lights from small villages and stations as the train moved by. In the editing suite Supaparinya turned the footage through 90 degrees so the lights streamed vertically, having the characteristics of shooting stars. But while the images were peaceful, even serene, accompanying them was the sound of distant shooting and empty bullet casings bouncing menacingly onto concrete. For people who experienced the event as it happened, the work brings back painful memories. *Shooting stars* has been popular with Thai and international audiences, possibly owing to its creative visual abstraction and surprising use of sound.

*Paradise of the blind* was commissioned as an art project for the Bangkok library/bookshop the Reading Room. This art installation comprised bookcases filled with banned books, a paper shredder, piles of shredded paper from those books, a card index catalogue box filled with index cards and a library desk, chair and lamp. Hanging above them were hundreds of bullet casings hanging on copper threads. *Paradise of the blind* signifies the abuse of laws and regulations towards the creativity of words. When the artist planned the work she looked for bullets first, and in amazement found them in a military shop being sold as souvenirs. The books the artist showcased were not only those banned in Thailand, but also banned in many other countries for different reasons.

Before the opening, the exhibition was visited by the police. They took no action, but it was unexpected as the authorities had never taken an interest in art before. Although the work in *Other Possible Worlds* is another iteration of the work, it is similar to the 2016 version, including the location. The room this work is shown in at 16albermarle is also a library/gallery with bookcases so another edition was deliberately commissioned.

Both works indicate censorship by the media. *Shooting stars* puts forward the suppressed news of an event that happened, one the artist herself faced. The work is a metaphor and an example of how recorded images and sounds which are presented as reliable can be interpreted as totally different things. It plays with deconstructing visual language that is constructed into unconnected meanings. Meanwhile *Paradise of the blind* gathers and puts up information and objects (books) which are forbidden in various cultures and societies. This installation invites audiences to acknowledge the volume of thoughts through texts; controlled and passive means of communication.

Haisang Javanalikhikara

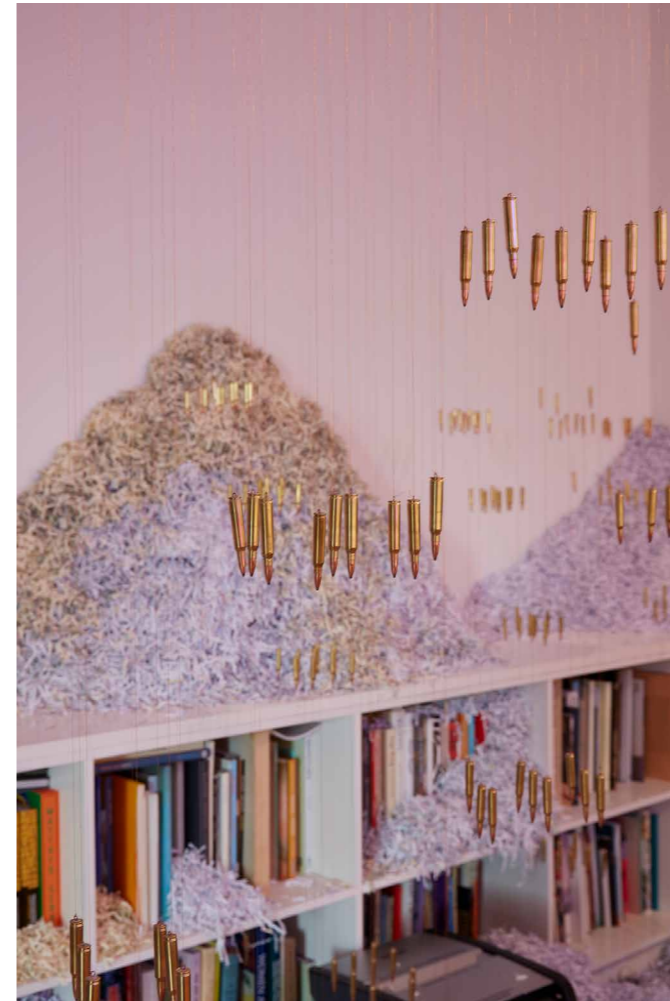


Som Supaparinya  
*Paradise of the blind* 2016-2022  
shredded paper, bullet casings, banned books  
dimensions variable

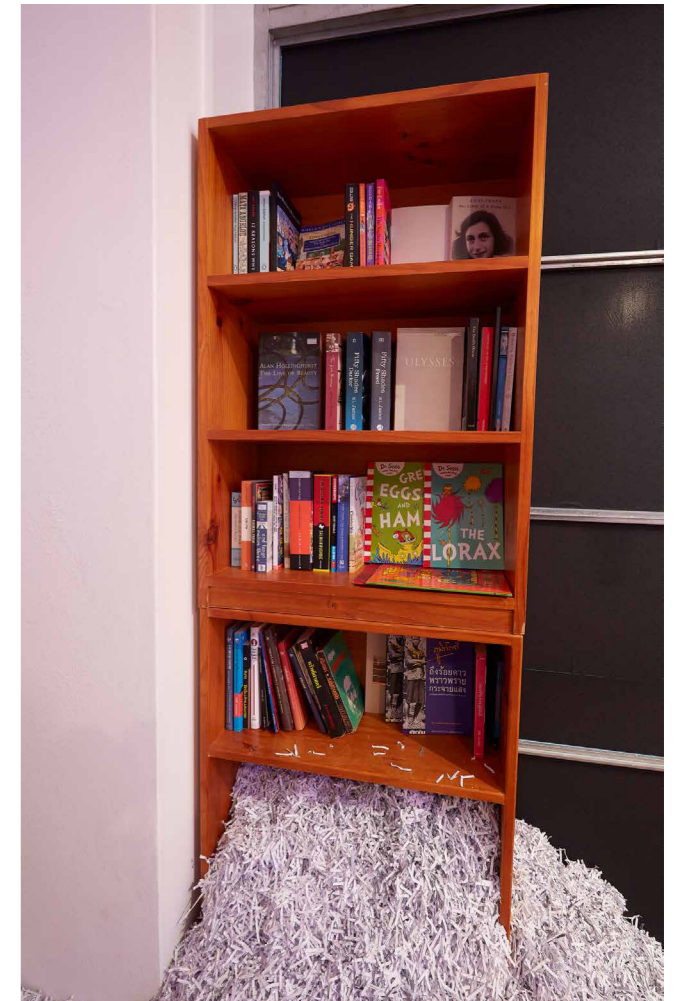




Som Supparinya  
*Shooting stars* 2010 (detail)  
single channel video  
9 min 6 sec  
edition of 5



Som Supparinya  
*Paradise of the blind* 2016-2022 (detail)  
shredded paper, bullet casings, banned books  
dimensions variable



# Sompote Ang

*I was born in 1961. My world was as large as the village where I lived. And the downtown market was the peculiar universe for me. Bright lights came on over there at night, unlike my village. In the darkness, things were less visible and unclear. When I was young, pictures could be seen only at two places in the village - movie posters on the coconut tree trunk in front of my house and scenic posters attached to the local minibus. Every time when the minibus stopped, I never got bored with watching the posters. The sights made my heart shiver and they inspired a young boy to start drawing.*

So begins the artist statement of Sompote Ang, the oldest artist in *Other Possible Worlds* and the most distant from the Thai art world, literally and figuratively. Sompote was born in Chak Yai, near Rayong 220 km southeast of Bangkok, where his mother ran the local shop. It was a small and typical Thai village. Most of the locals are fishermen and rice farmers. They survived, but life was not easy.

Inspired by those posters, Sompote left his village to study at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, Thailand's most famous art school. But the art he found there did not speak to him like the posters. And the art he made inspired by the posters and his life in the village did not impress his lecturers. On submitting such work he was advised to stick to the educated styles of work he had been taught before submitting work again. To see his work judged from an institutional perspective as nothing but decorative painting discouraged him, and for fear his art would neither belong nor be accepted as art, he gave up painting and moved back to Chak Yai.

Twenty years later, after a conversation with his friend about post-modern art, he decided to begin painting again. Encouraged by artist Mit Jai Inn, he had a solo exhibition at Angkrit Gallery in Chiang Rai in 2008 and took part in group exhibitions in Bangkok. In 2020 Mit suggested an exhibition at his Cartel Artspace in Bangkok and bought him paints.

This exhibition, titled *Unknown*, comprised about 30 small paintings in cheap oil paints on board depicting aspects of life in his village. The show mixed everyday life with fantasy scenes, such as a man and his young son sitting atop a 747 jet aircraft flying over their village. Gentle humour predominated, such as the home made 7/11 sign in front of a local shop, his village being too poor to support such an outlet, or the group of people watching their shadows projected onto an outdoor screen.

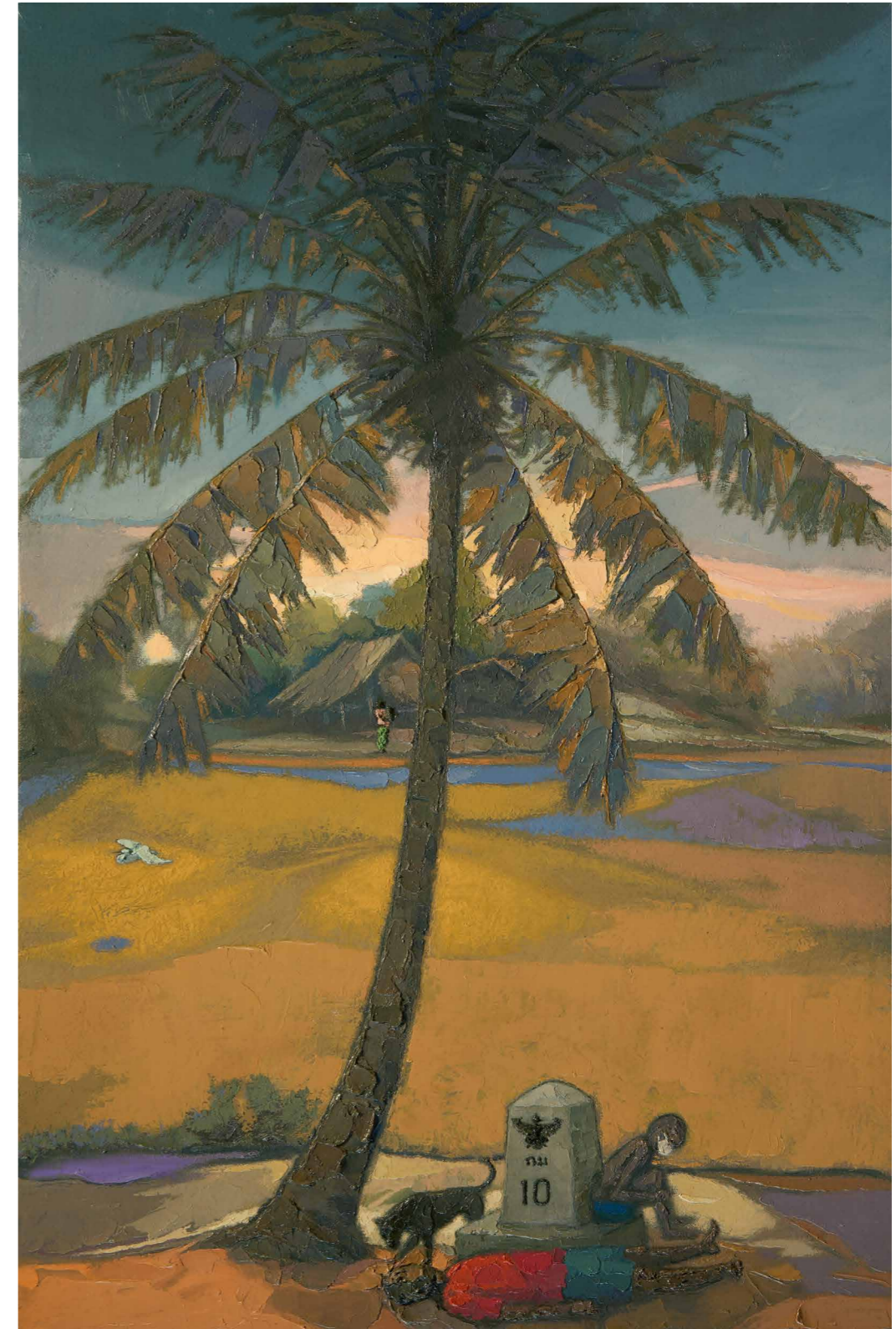
*Unknown* had a profound effect on many viewers. In its combination of humility and compassion, humour, satire and truth, the paintings spoke for people who had little in life and few opportunities to improve their lot.

Sompote has made a suite of new paintings for *Other Possible Worlds*, to be shown alongside five works from *Unknown*. In the years since his last exhibition, Covid had ravaged Thailand, a huge protest movement had swept the country and a new king had ascended the throne. The new paintings have a tougher edge. Whimsy gives way to satire in three paintings featuring playing cards depicting the King of Spades, including one in which four children stare at an overbearing, billboard-sized image of the King. In another work a boy holding the Thai flag and symbolising the nation's future rides a buffalo, heading right to left – backwards. The most moving image depicts a small boy sitting on the roadside at the 10 mile post next to the body of his father, a Covid victim.

The new works offer a broad critique of social inequality and centralised governance and the difficult lives facing rural people. The government does little for them and they have no way of interacting with it. Their chance of a better life is as distant as the jet plane flying overhead. The small boy sitting next to his dead father is a tragic comment on Covid and the government's failure to protect its own people. Only the egrets, loved local birds, offer some suggestion of beauty and hope.

*Bangkok is 220 kilometres away from my hometown but the art in Bangkok is a thousand miles away from the artform of the scenic posters attached to the minibus. A period of 20 years might be long enough to forget about the art world in Bangkok and what I learnt there. After 20 years, I work on landscape paintings again, whether they could be considered as an art form or not. With my Rayong accent, I just want to paint.*

John Cruthers



Sompote Ang  
Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
90 x 60 cm



Sompote Ang  
 Untitled 2022  
 oil on canvas  
 35 x 45 cm

I was born in 1961. My world was as large as the village where I lived. And the downtown market was a peculiar universe for me. Bright lights came on over there at night, unlike my village. In the darkness, things were less visible and unclear. When I was young, pictures could be seen only at two places in the village - movie posters on the coconut tree trunk in front of my house and scenic posters attached to the local minibus. Every time when the minibus stopped, I never got bored with watching the posters. The sights made my heart shiver and they inspired a young boy to start drawing.

In 1979, I went to Bangkok to study art. My art education began by learning how to speak Thai like people in Bangkok while trying to hide my Rayong accent. In Bangkok, I saw more pictures and I knew more artists whose names were unfamiliar to me such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso and many others.

People in Bangkok would rather talk about pure art or high art, whereas the art form of the scenic posters attached to the minibus had never been mentioned as if it was regarded as low art or even excluded from the art world. I had studied art in Bangkok for 10 years. The more I learnt the more I realized how boring the art education was. Finally, I stopped painting.

Bangkok is 220 kilometres away from my hometown, but the art in Bangkok is a thousand miles away from the art form of the scenic posters attached to the minibus. A period of 20 years might be long enough to forget about the art world in Bangkok and what I learnt there. After 20 years, I began to work on landscape paintings again, whether they could be considered as an art form or not. With my Rayong accent, I just want to paint.

Sompote Ang



Sompote Ang  
 Untitled 2022  
 oil on canvas  
 60 x 40 cm

# Suebsang Sangwachirapiban

Suebsang Sangwachirapiban, known as Kong, is currently Head of Exhibitions at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre. He graduated in painting from Chiang Mai University, following with an MA in Contemporary Art and New Media from Vincennes-Saint-Denis University in Paris in 2007. Kong wears many hats in the Thai contemporary art scene. He is an active artist and art scholar and also works as an independent curator and researcher. His experience includes a decade of guest lecturing and managing a university art centre. He was also appointed to the committee of The Institution of Health Promotion for People with Disability during 2010-2013, making him more concerned and aware of the role of art in people's development. At the same time, he developed an interest in art brut. In 2012, he was curator in residence at Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan, where his project was a series of contemporary animations around disability.

In his practice as an artist, Kong is keen on making artworks that come from his direct experiences or about subjects that interest him from anywhere in the world. He is also affected by shared behaviours, beliefs and attitudes of humanity in the 21st century and how they influence questions, doubts, skepticism or communication in culture. Most of the time when Kong creates his artworks, he does not expect any outcome as he relies on uncontrollable research, study and chance.

Although contemporary culture interests him, Kong has stated that he is "anti trendy or old school art". He believes that making art, regardless of form, is about freedom of thought and ideas. Consequently, as an artist Kong seeks new ways to produce his artworks without attaching himself to any one approach. He often tries to open up himself to express his creativity by being one 'newbie' after another. For that reason, over the last five or six years he has used different names for each different body of work he makes; Sang SANGWACHI, Sueb BANPIRA and Theodore S. SANGWACHI. Another prompt for this action is that Kong is more well-known for his scholarly work than his artistic practice; hence, when he makes works of art, he builds other personas like Second Life and Avatar, but in the art world.

#Smile\_State\_1 is a mixed media artwork comprising text reading "Thailand is number ๑" (number 1 replaced by Thai number ๑). The idea of this work goes back to the 2000s when Thai people began to pay attention to ideas of 'the most' or 'the biggest', such as found in the book *Guinness World Records*. Fast forward to 2014: when the military government took charge, they generated the idea of Thailand as a country as being 'the best' and 'the most' - as propaganda without any basis in fact or the real intention to be so.

#Smile\_State\_2 could be read as "The Kingdom of Buddhism": at the end of sentence the artist has inserted Thai language wording (Buddhism = pronunciation 'พุทธ'). This work criticises the movement to redraft the constitution in 2015-16 to make Buddhism Thailand's official religion. This act was seen by Kong as a contrary to Buddhist principles, such as living peacefully with others, especially when Thailand has religious pluralism. "The work carries out an experience of uncertainty. An air of superiority questions how important it is that we must declare what one belief?" Kong noted.

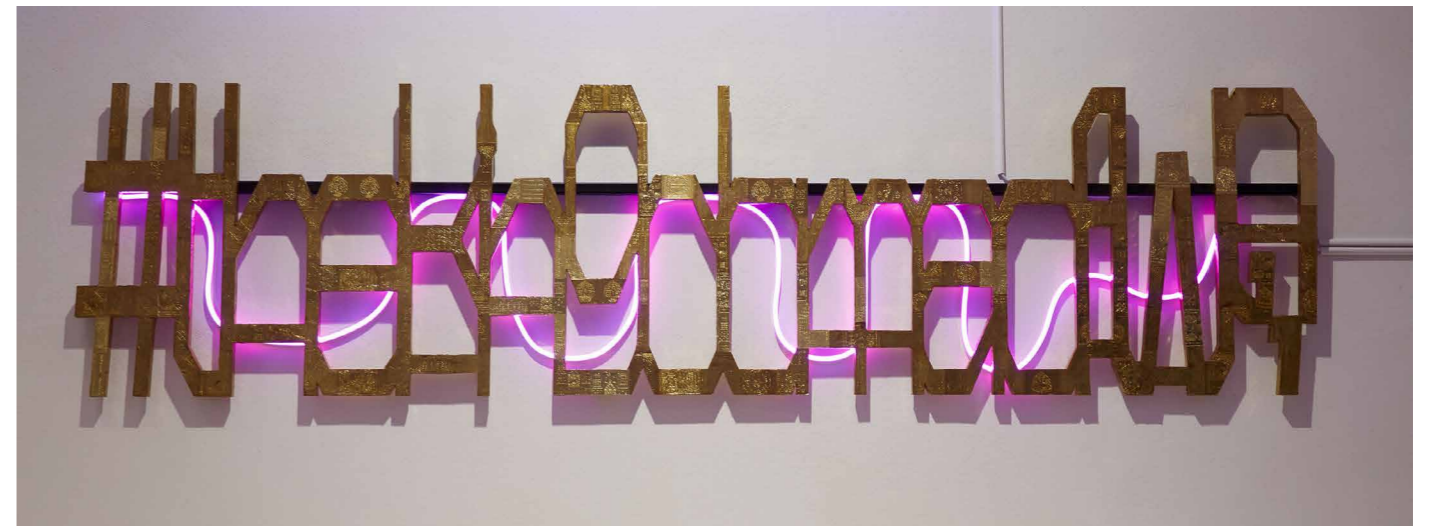
Texts on both works can be recognised as two angels; empowerment and self-delusion, depending on the audiences' personal experiences and beliefs towards talisman and supernatural concepts. The talisman material (brass metal) has historically been representative of Thainess and Buddhism, supernatural and enlightenment, credulity and reality and betterment and deterioration.

#Smile\_State\_1 and #Smile\_State\_2 were first shown in 2016 at RMA Gallery, Bangkok as part of a solo exhibition called *Periphrasis Na Ja*. In the exhibition viewers were drawn to the works because of the materials – brass and neon - and were keen to explore the ideas and meanings of the work. Having said that, the works clearly speak local narratives of Thailand and Thainess; non-Thai viewers have tended to find them difficult to relate to and hard to understand without accompanying texts.

Haisang Javanalikhikara



Suebsang Sangwachirapiban  
#Smile\_State\_1 2016  
brass sheet metal on plywood and LED  
61 x 240 cm



Suebsang Sangwachirapiban  
#Smile\_State\_2 2016  
brass sheet metal on plywood and LED  
61 x 240 cm

#Smile\_State\_1 reads "Thailand is number ๑" (the number "one" replaced by Thai number "๑"), reflecting a slogan of the "What's Thainess Values" campaign. This motto originated in the early 2000's as the *Guinness World Records* book became popular in Thailand. Suddenly, everyone competed to become number one in the world in strange categories, such as making the longest local sausage, the longest name of a city, the biggest Buddha sculpture, sleeping with 100 cobras or living with 3,200 scorpions for 32 days, and cooking 5,000 litres of Thai shrimp soup.

In 2009, SangSom, a Thai rum distillery, released an advertising campaign which gathered famous, internationally recognised people. In their ads, each presenter says that "Even if the Thai people hardly concentrate on it..., they will never lose to any nation in the world". To the present day, the military government led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha promotes the idea that Thailand is the best country in the world.

Thai scholars have discussed and argued that this is deceptive advertising. Furthermore, some scholars have raised concerns about the effects of this messaging in promoting Thailand's self-esteem, narcissism and a burgeoning super-nationalism.

#Smile\_State\_1 is drawn from these narratives of Thailand being the number one nation in the world. The statement can be read either as a sign of empowerment or as one of self-delusion. The work is constructed of recomposed letters that form a symbolic system with both line and form combined. The ambiguity and curiosity produced from the nearly indecipherable text provokes a reading of censorship or an untold narrative. Audiences perhaps imagine the self-censorship issue or untold narrative. The brass sheets (used to create Thai talismans) cover the text and represent Thai beliefs of supernatural notions.

#Smile\_State\_2 could be read as "The Kingdom of Buddhism"; at the end of sentence the artist inserted Thai wording (Buddhism = 'พุทธ'). Moreover the artist added another 'a' between 'the kingdom' and 'of' that meant viewers could not be assured of its meaning.

The motivation for this artwork was the movement to redraft the Thai constitution in 2015-16. At the time, there was a rumour the committee had decided Buddhism would become Thailand's official religion. The artist aimed to explore this situation, generating a work of art exploring what a State Religion might mean. It is ridiculous because Buddhist principles themselves suggest we should live peacefully with others, and in fact Thailand has religious pluralism. So the idea of a State Religion seems far from Buddhism principles. The work aims to produce an experience of uncertainty in the viewer by creating an air of superiority in order to question how important it is that we must declare allegiance to one belief?

In this work the talisman material (brass metal) is representative of Thainess and Buddhism, supernatural and enlightenment, credulity and reality and betterment and deterioration.

Suebsang Sangwachirapiban



#Smile\_State\_1 and #Smile\_State\_2 installed at RMA Institute, Bangkok 2016

# Surajate Tongchua

Born in Bangkok in 1986 and now based in Chiang Mai, Surajate Tongchua graduated in printmaking from Chiang Mai University. He practiced in relation to printmaking for some years after graduation, as a guest lecturer and a printer. Since 2013, his practice has become known for its application of contemporary artistic craftsmanship to the task of interlinking the socio-political with personal narratives.

*Most works of mine examine the relationship of physical space, humanity, environment and circumstance as well as incident occurring both in the past and present. They are carefully analytical and can be expressed across many kinds of media, for instance sculpture, painting, video media, art installation, dialectic and collaborative work. - Tongchua*

Tongchua is a prominent member of an artist collective called the Bubble Arts Group. Established in Chiang Mai in 2017, the Bubble Arts Group was formed by artists and creative individuals, who shared the idea that art is a part of society - if the foundations of society and its understanding create gaps between people, then creativity can play some role in filling them.

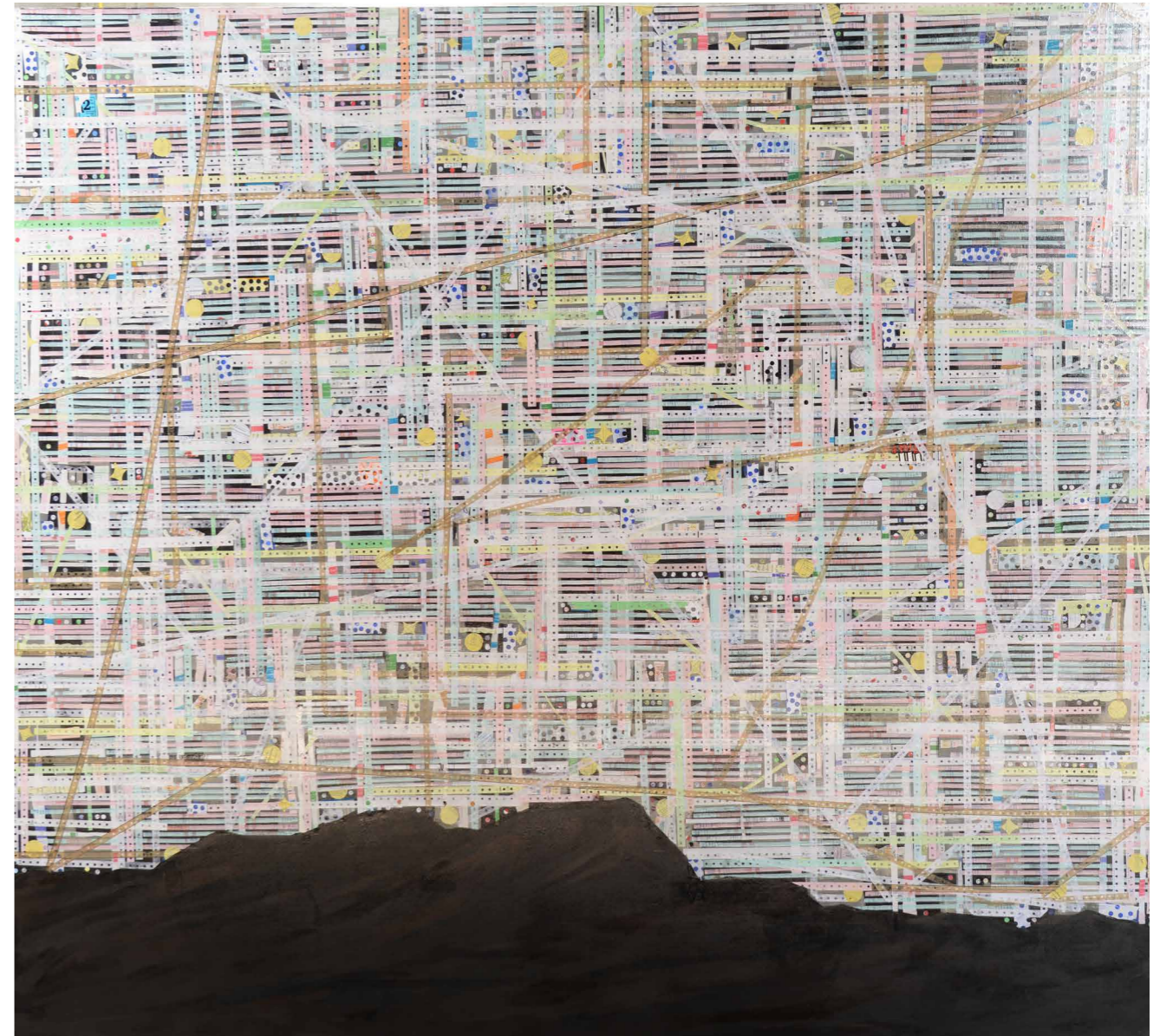
For his artistic practice, Tongchua does not rely on one particular medium, rather he seeks to match his ideas with specific found objects as well as artistic media. His working process starts in contemporary events or issues happening in society. He then focuses his interest in specific things he relates to most strongly. He shares his views with family, friends and other people who might have been affected by that issue in whatever way. When his ideas about the subject or issue become firm, he surveys and investigates the possibilities of its presentation through images, symbols and metaphors as well as materials. One of the aims of his artistic practice is to send messages and communicate his conceptions to the general public, along with motivating his audiences to respond in words or actions if they share relatable experiences.

*PRICELESS* was first shown in late 2021 at Manycuts Artspace | Ari, Bangkok, in Tongchua's solo exhibition of the same name. The series has been ongoing since 2014, starting when the military took over the Thai government. The artist disapproved of such an act happening in a democratic country. When he thought of the event and what struck him about it most directly, he thought of his family. Then he realized he himself was a TAX payer, required to pay for his country's operation to a government that was not chosen by a majority of the people. When he looked for materials with connections to these events, he thought of the bills he had been paying to the government which came in monthly, over some periods daily, and decided to make them his prime artistic medium for the project.

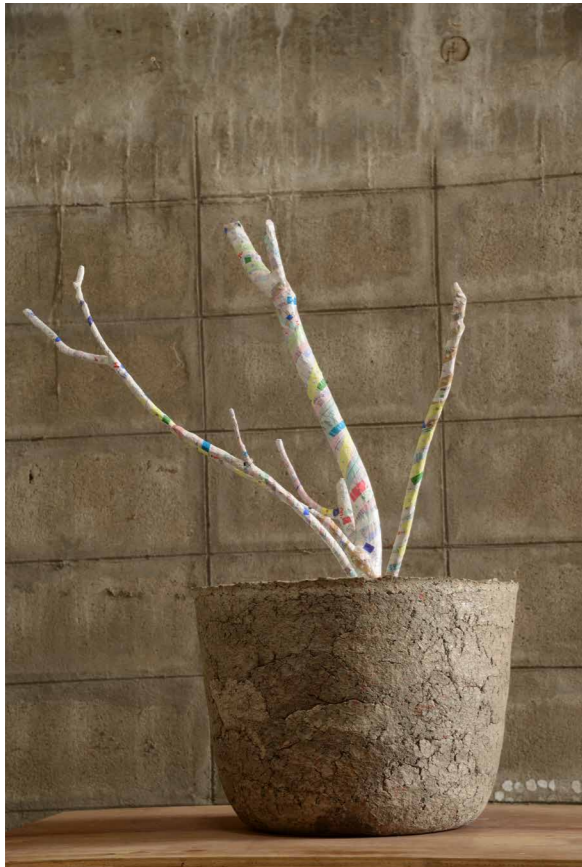
Once Tongchua had collected and preserved his and his family's government documents, he deconstructed them, 'shredding' them in order to construct artworks. From that point on, he felt the situation the Thai people were facing was abstract and so chose the style of abstraction to suggest an interpretation of his artworks. In this way the concept, the materials and the painterly style were connected. The bills themselves can be seen as just mere pieces of paper, but on the other hand the money they generate supports the economic weight of the country. Not only the materials but also the process of making *PRICELESS* itself reflected his sense of the burden of having to unwillingly fund the military government by paying their bills.

While this series of works pose questions of how the Thai people's money is spent for the country, they also introduce aspects of Tongchua to us; his everyday life and his family. The resulting paper-works can be seen as his self-portrait, being fragmented and resembled again and again as whole new abstract presentations before us.

Haisang Javanalikhikara



Surajate Tongchua  
*PRICELESS (Day:Day) No 1. 2021*  
acrylic, receipt paper on canvas  
200 x 180 cm



Surajate Tongchua  
*PRICELESS (Plant)* 2020  
 papier-mâché, receipt paper, branches  
 44 x 75 x 60 cm



Surajate Tongchua  
*PRICELESS (Tribute)* 2021  
 papier-mâché, receipt paper  
 123 x 40 x 40 cm

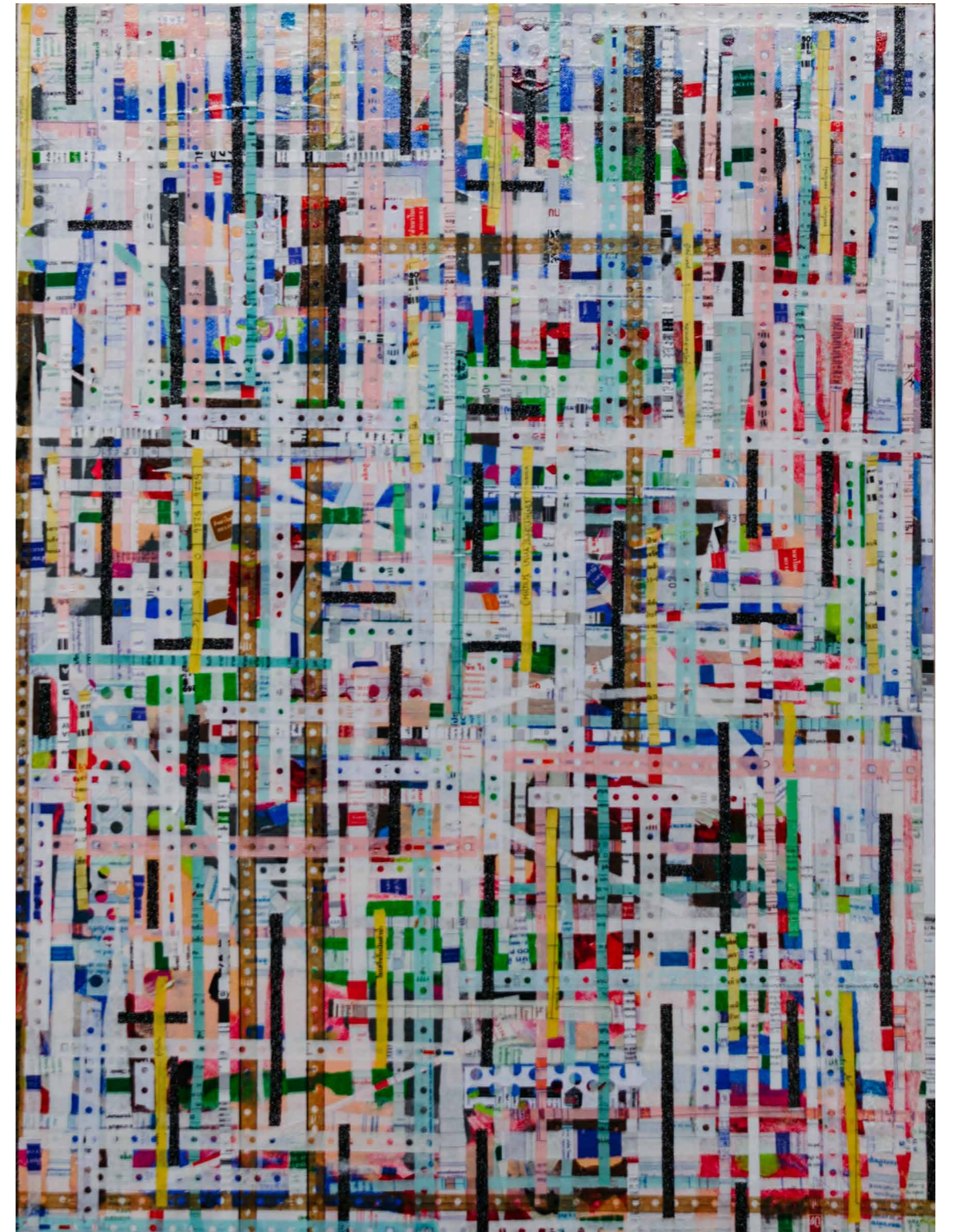
The *PRICELESS Series* is the result of a long process which commenced in May 2014. Taking seven years to complete, it was first exhibited at Manycuts Artspace | ARI. The artworks serve as a milestone from a process which begun in the year when the latest coup d'état was staged in Thailand.

*PRICELESS* presents economic evaluation mathematically, but also refers to the lives, opportunities, rights and freedoms that are deprived from the Thai people since the junta's regime started in 2014. I connect my personal experiences to Thai politics and its social context in order to portray the perspectives of a Thai citizen. Such personal experiences are contextually woven into collective experiences which everyone shared during the past seven years.

This series of work emerged from preserving, collecting, distributing, assembling, storytelling and revaluing uneconomic value. On the day of the coup in Thailand, I began to preserve and collect receipts of my personal and family's daily expenses. The receipts witnessing those expenses were transformed by a shredder into pieces of paper. The values, either high or low, that were once recorded into paper were all deconstructed and destroyed completely. This exhibition features two bodies of work, works on canvas and sculptures made of pages of primary school textbooks and Chinese newspapers.

When viewing the artworks, audiences could see abstract artworks, or they could see the mechanism of the huge amount of values as a part of an economic system. Not only do my artworks invite audiences to think about the economic value we and our country lost along with democracy during these times, but they also invite us to reconsider our derived costs, values, opportunities and rights, freedoms and lives that are incalculable by any economic index.

Surajate Tongchua



Surajate Tongchua  
*PRICELESS (Day:Day) No 2.* 2022  
 acrylic, receipt paper on canvas  
 80 x 60 cm

# Tada Hengsapkul

From as early as he can remember, Tada Hengsapkul has been interested in artistic practice. In his early years he drew and painted like other kids, but the turning point came when he began to take an interest in photography; the scientific beauty of it and the processing of film. Hengsapkul received his BA in Art of Photography from Pohchang Academy of Arts, Bangkok. With wit and curiosity he experimented further to present his art in engaging ways. His early works were known for nakedness of body and mind in photographic and video forms.

Later, Hengsapkul stopped attaching his practice to certain media, exploring instead the best way to communicate the essence of each work. Most of the time he works from his inner feelings and wants to share with other people - for them to see, to listen, to feel, without any rules in form and context. From his love of freedom and his experimental nature, he questions the rules of society and boundaries most people hold to. For him, art is another language and tool of communication. Hengsapkul mentioned that although he had faith and belief in art, he tried to challenge himself by ignoring his artistic practice, but each time he came back to his art more completely than before. So right now he has stopped rebelling against his art - but not to give in. His experiences have built his artistic language to become more sensitive and intense.

One installation and one series of photographs, fabricated seven years apart, feature in *Other Possible Worlds*. Immediately after the 2010 Thai military crackdown, mainstream media broadcast that in order to disband the protest around Ratchaprarop Road, the military and government used blank cartridges. This information was contradicted by an independent report Hengsapkul received. He was informed that 99 people had been killed at the event. Visiting the site seeking the truth he found various eye-level bullet holes on electricity posts, bus stops, fences and other objects in the area. He took pictures of the 'evidence' and selected four images for the work *They said they didn't use live rounds*. The installation instructions for *They said they didn't use live rounds* are quite specific - the photographs must be exhibited at eye-level where the bullet holes were found. In this way audiences will feel more strongly the losses that haven't been properly acknowledged.

*The shards would shatter at touch* is installed in a white cube space with white shelves, waist height. Placed on the shelves are 49 thermochromic pigment sheets. Audiences are invited to participate by taking one sheet and holding it tightly to their chests. Warmth from the body makes an image of a political prisoner appear on the sheet, then gradually fade. There is also a number on each sheet which corresponds to a nearby wall text with details of that prisoner. *The shards would shatter at touch* was executed in 2017, when Thai politics and everyday life was subject to severe censorship. Many political movements and activities were controlled and terminated. As an artist, Hengsapkul wanted to touch upon those feelings; being suppressed and blindfolded. The government didn't take art seriously before. He fabricated this interactive installation to send energy and messages to the artistic community as well as to general audiences. And surprise, surprise, police visited his exhibition when the work was first shown. The body embracing and the image fading create extremely powerful emotions when one interacts with the work.

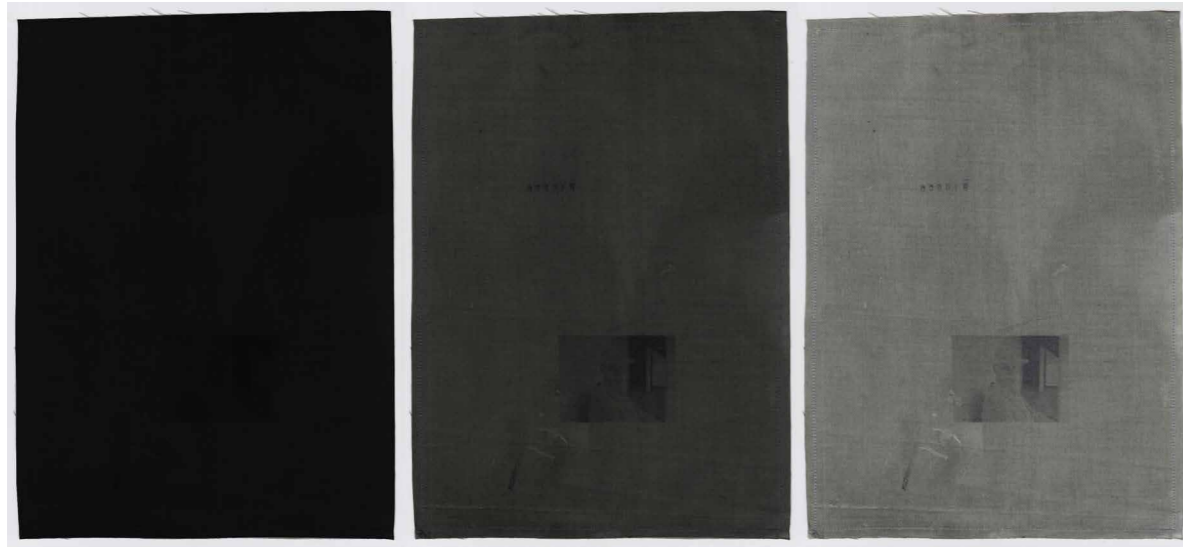
Both works speak about what the government has done to people and how they have tried to keep their actions secret; to lie, to conceal, to distort. They speak for the living and the dead. Tada concludes that "while you're viewing these works right now, I believe there are people who are surely trying to flee or to be made disappear".

Haisang Javanalikhikara



Tada Hengsapkul  
*The shards would shatter at touch* 2017 (detail)  
cotton, thermochromic pigment  
set of 49 pieces, 29.7 x 21 cm each  
edition AP 2

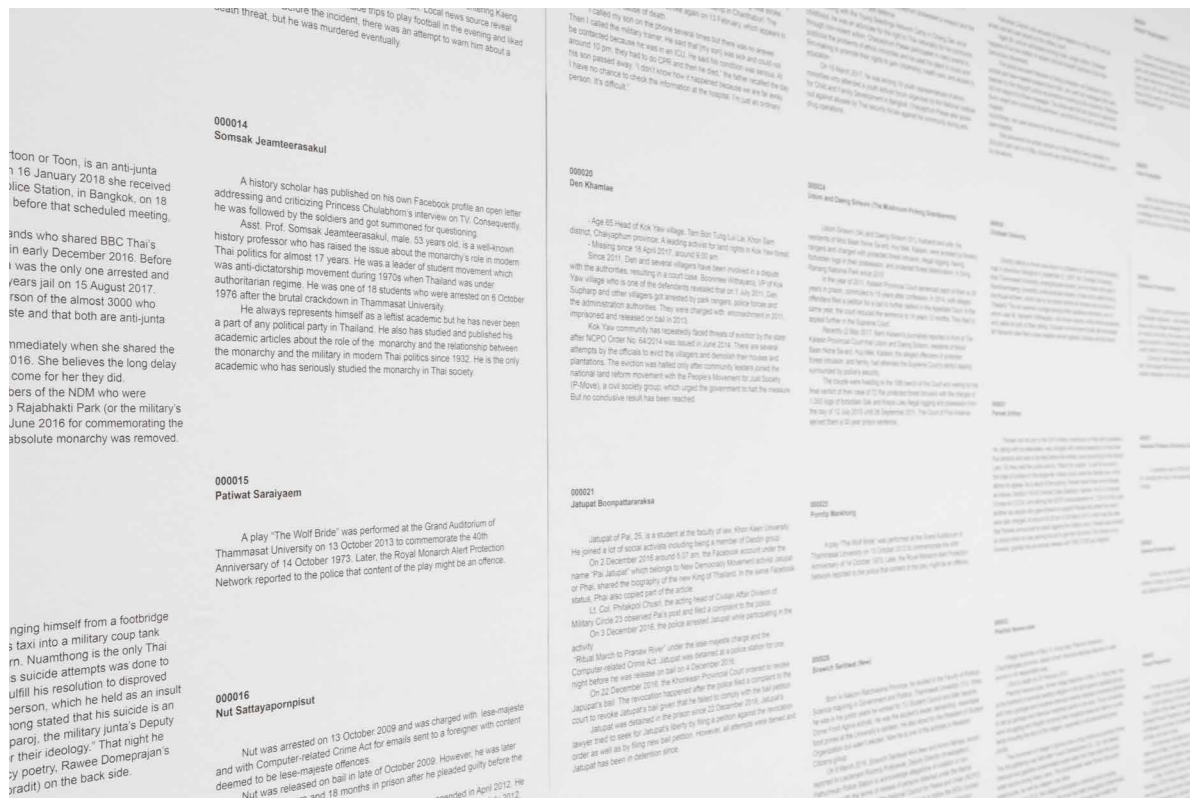




Tada Hengsapkul  
*The shards would shatter at touch 2017* (detail)  
 cotton, thermochromic pigment  
 set of 49 pieces, 29.7 x 21 cm each



Tada Hengsapkul  
*They said they didn't use live rounds 2014*  
 four digital C-prints  
 84 x 59.4 cm  
 edition of 3 + 2AP



Tada Hengsapkul  
*The shards would shatter at touch 2017* (detail)  
 cotton, thermochromic pigment  
 set of 49 pieces, 29.7 x 21 cm each

# List of works

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## Bussaraporn Thongchai

*Dialogue I (We hope)* 2019  
collage on paper  
2 pieces, 28.2 x 21 cm each

*Dialogue II (Dear friends)* 2019  
collage on paper  
2 pieces, 28.2 x 21 cm each

*Dialogue IV (As you know)* 2020  
collage on paper  
29.6 x 21 cm

*Dialogue V* 2022  
collage on paper  
2 pieces, 13 x 16 cm each

*Dialogue VI* 2022  
collage on paper  
2 pieces, 28.2 x 21 cm each

*Dialogue VII* 2022  
collage on paper  
2 pieces, 28.2 x 21 cm each

*In Saudi Arabia* 2022  
collage on paper  
28.2 x 19.5 cm

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## Busui Ajaw

*Panatipata Weramani (Do not kill)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

*Atinna Tana Veramane (Do not steal)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

*Gamesumiccha Weramani (Do not indulge in sexual misconduct)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

*Musavada Weramani (Do not lie)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

*Surameraya Matchapamatatthana Weramani (Do not drink alcohol)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

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## Imhathai Suwatthanasilp

*Ash flowers* 2022  
human hair, sewing thread, glue  
70 x 270 x 12 cm

*Dark hope* 2021  
human hair, sewing thread  
61.5 x 93 cm

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## Kasarin Himcharoen (TakTak)

*Sexual harassment* 2022  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sexual harassment* 2022  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sexual harassment* 2022  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sexual harassment 2022*  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

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ed. 1 of 10

*Sexual harassment 2022*  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sexual harassment 2022*  
screenprint on embossed paper  
30 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

*Sex delight 2022*  
screenprint on paper  
60 x 40 cm  
ed. 1 of 10

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### **Kusofiyah Nibuesa**

*Deep south market 2 2022*  
assembled cut paper  
160 x 156 cm

*Deep south market 2016*  
assembled cut paper  
135 x 110 cm

*Multicultural 2021*  
assembled cut paper  
120 x 240 cm

*The cart 2021*  
assembled cut paper  
120 x 98 cm

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### **Piyarat Piyapongwiwat**

*Can you sing the national anthem? 2015*  
neon tubes  
20 x 245 cm

*messages from nowhere to nowhere 2015*  
single channel video  
6 min 17 sec

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### **Mariem Thidarat Chantachua**

*Untitled 3 2017*  
embroidery on fabric  
123 x 165 cm

*Dimensions of faith 2 2017*  
embroidery and acrylic on fabric  
111 x 164 cm

*Untitled 4 2017*  
embroidery and acrylic on fabric  
117 x 154 cm

*Serene 2016*  
embroidery on fabric  
112 x 174 cm

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### **Som Supaparinya**

*Paradise of the blind 2016-2022*  
shredded paper, bullet casings, banned books  
dimensions variable

*Shooting stars 2010*  
single channel video  
9 min 6 secs  
edition 5

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### **Sompote Ang**

Untitled 2020  
oil on canvas  
30 x 40 cm

Untitled 2020  
oil on canvas  
40 x 35 cm

Untitled 2020  
oil on canvas  
30 x 25 cm

Untitled 2020  
oil on canvas  
35 x 45 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
50 x 70 cm

Untitled 2020  
oil on canvas  
35 x 50 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
90 x 60 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
70 x 50 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
45 x 35 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
60 x 40 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
50 x 35 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
50 x 40 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
45 x 65 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
40 x 60 cm

Untitled 2022  
oil on canvas  
45 x 30 cm

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## Suebsang Sangwachirapiban

#Smile\_State\_1 2016  
brass sheet metal on plywood and LED  
61 x 240 cm

#Smile\_State\_2 2016  
brass sheet metal on plywood and LED  
61 x 240 cm

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## Surajate Tongchua

PRICELESS (Day:Day) No. 1 2021  
receipt paper on acylic on canvas  
200 x 180 cm

PRICELESS (Day:Day) No. 2 2022  
receipt paper on acrylic on canvas  
80 x 60 cm

PRICELESS (Plant) 2020  
papier-mâché  
44 x 74.5 x 60 cm

PRICELESS (Tribute) 2021  
papier-mâché  
123 x 40 x 40 cm

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## Tada Hengsapkul

The said they didn't use live rounds 2014  
four digital C-prints  
84 x 59.4 cm  
edition of 3 + 2AP

The shards would shatter at touch 2017  
cotton, thermochromic pigment  
set of 49 pieces, 29.7 x 21 cm each  
edition AP 2



Busui Ajaw  
*Gamesmiccha Weramani (Do not indulge in sexual misconduct)* 2022  
acrylic on canvas  
120 x 100 cm

# Exhibition Personnel

## Haisang Javanalikhikara - Curator

Haisang Javanalikhikara is one of a new generation of young Thai curators. An artist's daughter, she studied media arts, contemporary art and curatorial practice in the UK. Returning to Bangkok she worked at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre while studying for her DFA from Chulalongkorn University. In 2019 she became a lecturer at Chula, where she's a director of her faculty's gallery and co-learning space CUArt4C and founder and editor-in-chief of the multimedia e-magazine Teleaesthetics (teleaesthetics.net) She has recently launched the first Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice degree offered in Thailand.

"For nearly a decade I've worked in the Thai art scene. I've seen great developments - maturing in curators, experimental spaces and artists making works in more challenging ways. So when I was approached by John Cruthers to work on an exhibition of contemporary Thai art to be shown in Sydney, I was excited and agreed straight away.

"I'm pleased to work with John as I acknowledge his commitment to southeast Asian art, which is pure and passionate. Also, I've found it thrilling to curate a Thai exhibition for a different audience. There are many Thai immigrants in Sydney, but this exhibition opens another perception of Thailand. It aims to help Australian audiences comprehend Thailand better.

"To prepare, John and I did a research trip through Thailand to meet each artist we're interested in. The exhibition comes from this work and our efforts to get the fullest understanding possible. We've gone back and forth on each artist and artwork; on how we're showing them, how they interconnect, how they represent Thailand. I'd say we're a great team as we have similar views on artworks which speak to us. A curatorial framework came naturally from our selections.

"*Other Possible Worlds* should be a revealing introduction to Thai contemporary art as well as the current situation and how it has arisen from historical events. This two-part exhibition isn't presenting one aspect of Thailand but many, balancing both admirable and critical views. It reflects local events, but I also believe international audiences can relate it to global happenings as well."

## John Cruthers - Co-curator

John Cruthers is an art adviser, curator, collector and since 2019 director of 16albermarle Project Space in Sydney. Working from 1974 with his mother Sheila Cruthers, he assembled the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. It was gifted to the University of Western Australia in 2007 and is Australia's largest stand-alone collection of women's art. In 1985 he began working with Australian private collectors. His enthusiasm for southeast Asian art was kindled in 2013. He's travelled widely in the region learning about its art and artists. He opened 16albermarle Project Space to share his passion for southeast Asian art with Australian audiences.

"In 2013 I began exploring southeast Asian art, after three decades working with Australian and Indigenous art. The art I saw was a revelation, and I've spent nine years travelling and learning about each country's art and art scene.

"My several months in Thailand have been in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. I've visited museums—public and private—university galleries, art centres and commercial galleries. But mostly I've met artists. It's enriching to hear first-hand the impetus for their work and its contribution to national debates about key issues in culture and society.

"I began collecting Thai art in 2015, with a focus on art by women. For me it's a fascinating contrast to the Australian art I grew up with. It also represents the challenge of learning about a new country and its culture. From my first purchase I've been confident other Australians would share my enthusiasm if I could find a way to introduce them to the work. Meeting Haisang has helped make this possible."

# Exhibition Partners

## Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Chulalongkorn

The exhibition *Other Possible Worlds* is a partnership between 16albermarle Project Space and the Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Chulalongkorn University. Founded in 1899 to train royal pages and civil servants, Chulalongkorn was established as a national university in 1917, making it the oldest institute of higher education in Thailand. It is a comprehensive and autonomous research university that has been voted Thailand's top university in many surveys. The new Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice is a significant commitment by the university to the contemporary art sector in Thailand, and an important stage in its professionalization.

## 16albermarle Project Space

16albermarle is a Project Space in inner-city Sydney founded to present new art from southeast Asia to Australian audiences. Director John Cruthers has travelled widely in the region learning about contemporary art. His first exhibition *Termasuk: Contemporary art from Indonesia*, featured 12 artists and ran successfully at Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney in early 2019. Since opening in October 2019, 16albermarle has presented 10 exhibitions of new contemporary art from countries including Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar. The gallery is committed to an education program including catalogues, public programs and artists' talks for every exhibition.

## Delmar Gallery

Delmar Gallery was established in 1969 and is one of Sydney's longest-running contemporary art galleries. It is part of Trinity Grammar School, an independent Anglican school for boys from Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12. The gallery serves the local community with free admission to exhibitions and associated events. Its ambitious program ranges across the spectrum of the visual arts, with curated exhibitions that engage, inspire and challenge audiences. It aims to provide rich educational experiences for students and teachers, firing imaginations and stimulating critical enquiry. It also seeks to introduce students to artists' ways of working and lay the foundation for a lifelong appreciation of the arts.

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# Other Possible Worlds

## Contemporary art from Thailand

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