

# A View on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thai Art

## The *CUT THRU* Exhibition

By Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani

In a time of political turmoil and cultural transition, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Thai art paradigm seems to be getting redefined by a wave of emerging younger artists. However, contemporary art from Thailand rarely features on mainstream Southeast Asian platforms, except for sporadic artists/artworks shown in broader Southeast Asian exhibitions. Therefore, together with ICAS LASALLE Singapore, I embarked on the *CUT THRU* project after extensive research on current Thai art practices.

After a year devoted to selecting the artists, artworks and planning the logistics, ICAS welcomes *CUT THRU: A View on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thai Art* in the main gallery space in the LASALLE campus from 10 January to 6 February. As the title suggests, *CUT THRU* is a gesture: slicing through vernacular culture, secular beliefs and

religion in order to access and investigate the complex and multi-layered 21<sup>st</sup> century Thai society. Going further into the observation of each work, the audience is drawn towards the stark contrast each work presents between old and new, traditional and contemporary, secular and religious. The dichotomous, 21<sup>st</sup> century Thai society is approached in different ways by the nine artists.

Tawan Wattuya's watercolours, for instance, by spotlighting iconic elements of daily life, project a vivid and witty representation of present-day Thai society caught between the licit and the illicit, the religious and the profane.



Angkrit Ajachariyasophon, 2011090, 2011, acrylic and enamel on canvas, photo courtesy of the artist

Piyatat Hemmatat's work is more idealistic. In *Apasmara*, the artist addresses an increasingly consumerist Thai society by portraying brand-name shop display windows pierced by bullet holes during the 2010 bloodshed in Bangkok.

*Re-Appearing*, a video and three-dimensional installation by Vichaya Mukdamanee, is also about materialism and consumerism. In this work Vichaya juxtaposes the locally made rattan baskets of the countryside, assembled in precarious sculptural shapes, with his video works, in which office furniture represents rural migration to the city.

Rural culture and belief systems are also addressed by artists Preeyachanok Ketsuwan and Chusak Srikwan. Through photography and leather-carving installations, respectively, Preeyachanok and Chusak revive folk beliefs and ritualistic traditions in a contemporary setting, pushing the audience to question their own acquired beliefs.

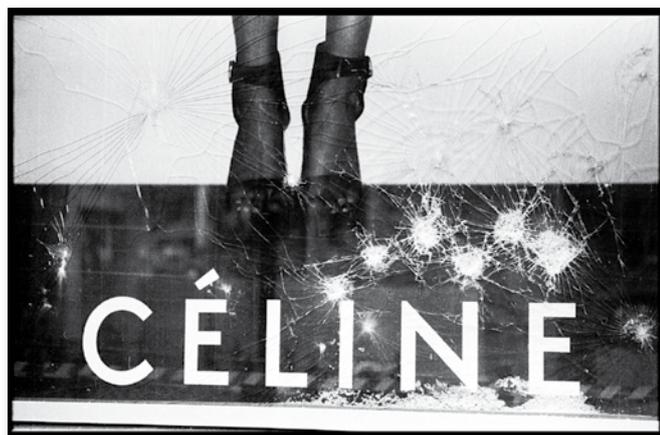
In seemingly stark contrast to the ancestral and religious is the industrial tone imbued in Angkrit Ajachariyasophon's abstract paintings. With their bright colours, these paintings evoke a sense of religious meditation in the way colour is applied on the canvas over and over again, in a seemingly ritualistic manner.



Tawan Wattuya, *Lady Boys*, 2009, watercolor on paper, photo courtesy of the artist.

Two video artists, Chulayarnnon Siriphol and Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit, frame the circular exhibition's layout with their works *A Brief History of Memory* and *Bangkok Tanks*, respectively. The two artists relate in different ways to the 2010 riots in Bangkok and the subsequent growing political awareness of today's youngsters.

In the centre of the exhibition space – the core in meaning and practical terms – is Ruangsak Anuwatwimon's *Ash Heart Project* installation. Over 100 heart-shaped sculptural pieces are suspended from the ceiling, evoking a place of reverence and primordial energy, transforming the gallery into a temple of sorts, where human lives are suspended in the dimly lit space, invoking the meaning and value of all living creatures.



Piyatat Hemmatat, *Apasmara-Céline*, 2010, Lambda print on Kodak Paper, photo courtesy of the artist

---

**Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani** has recently obtained her *Masters in Asian Art Histories*. She lives and works in Singapore.

---