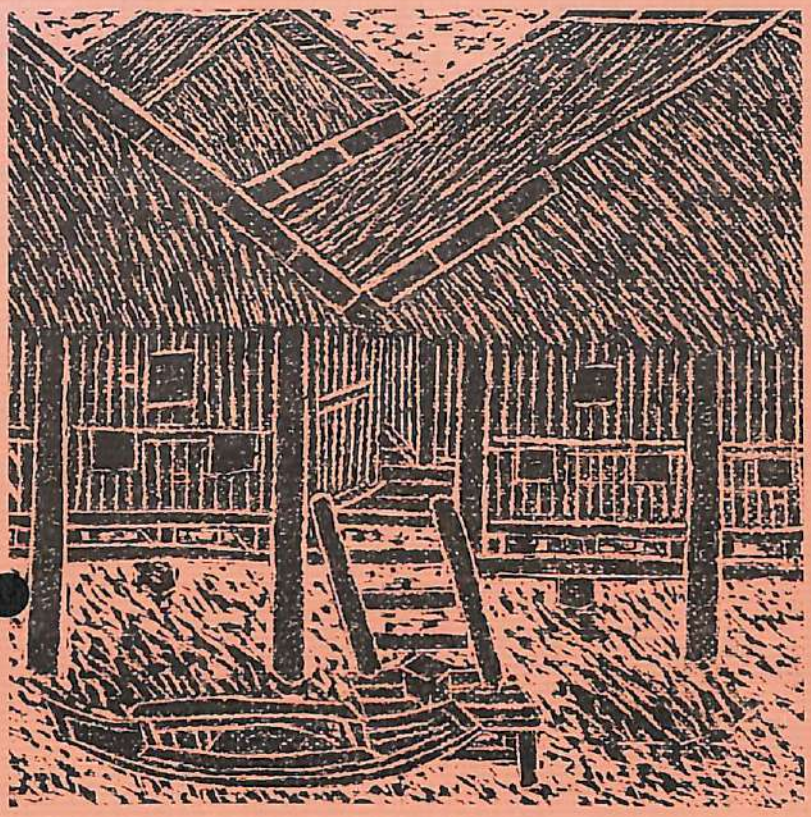
DAMRONG WONG - UPARAJ



30 YEARS OF PRINTMAKING

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

30 ปีของภาพพิมพ์ ของ ดำรง วงศ์อุปราช

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A BRITISH COUNCIL EXHIBITION

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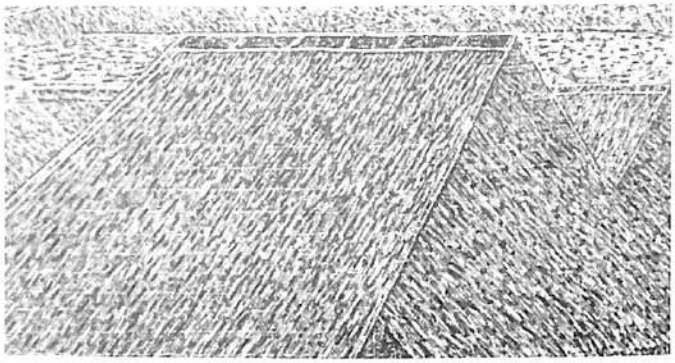

(Lino - block print, 1990)

30 YEARS OF PRINTMAKING

1960 - 1962

Under Professor Silpa Bhirasri's guidance at Silpakorn University Damrong produced some wood-block prints in black and white and two-colours. At that time was accepted in the field of painting as a gold medal awardee of the National Exhibition of Art. It's hard to classify his work in this period exactly; it was realistic in technique but romantic and surrealistic in expression. It's quite clear that his work was more imaginative and related to the past rather than the present and future. Most of the themes and subjects for his prints echoed his paintings of this time, and were deeply inspired by eastern philosophy. Human beings played a very small part in his works. While his contemporaries followed the current trends in contemporary art, he pursued his own individualistic way. He sent none of his prints of this period to art exhibitions because he was mainly a serious painter; printmaking was his second outlet.

When Damrong went to the UK on a British Council Postgraduate Scholarship to study art in 1962 he took along his prints. Therefore, some of his prints are now in private collections in the UK and Europe.

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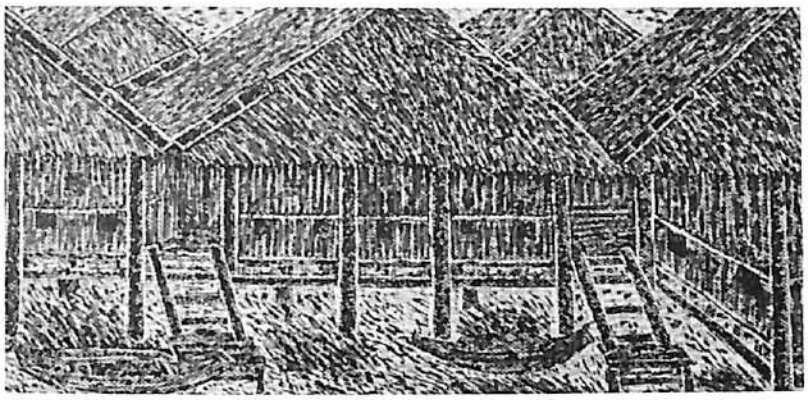
1963 - 1968

It was a period of struggle for him. After intensive study of modern art in the UK and Europe, Damrong turned to abstractionism basing his interpretation on eastern philosophy. His works were not accepted by art institutions, art circles and general public because they were ahead of their time. He earned a living by writing in newspapers and magazines and devoted his literary works to art appreciation and art education in order to help the public to understand his modern works. During 1965 - 1968 he resumed printmaking again while he taught art and the theory of art at the N E Technical Institute in Nakorn Rajsima. During this time he produced many wood-block prints in colour and in abstract form. Damrong considers his prints of this period as quite important and they have been shown at the International Biennial Exhibition of Prints at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo in 1968, the Pratt Graphic Art Center for Contemporary Print-makers in New York in 1968, in one-man shows at Gallery 20 in Bangkok in 1968 and at the Solidaridad Galleries in Manila in 1969. These abstract prints are in collections all over the world.

Damrong went to the USA to study and to work on a John D Rockefeller III Fund Fellowship in 1968 and to Europe in 1970. His work after returning from the UK and Europe showed his struggle to express in an international form his eastern philosophy and religion. In the latter part of the period his works became more symbolic and not purely abstract.

1968 - 1970

The period of his residence and work in the USA and Philadelphia and New York city where he devoted more time to painting. It can be described that he had arrived at the synthetic stage in his personal abstractionism with his ideas related to eastern philosophy such as meditation or 'samadhi'. These paintings have been shown in the Institute of Contemporary art in Philadelphia in 1969. They were not accepted in Thailand as they were too modern at that time when he returned in 1970.



(Lino - block print, 1990)

1971 - 1989

Only prints in two-colours were completed for international exhibitions of prints and art. Three prints had been shown in the International Exposition de Gravure at the Museum of History, Geneva, from December 1972 to January 1973, and two of them in an international art exhibition in Singapore. These prints are a reflection and a continuation of the meditative paintings of USA the period. During 1976-1977 the artist was awarded a Japan Foundation fellowship to reside and to work in Kyoto in Japan. After observation of Japanese traditional printmaking in Kyoto, he tried a new technique of a combination of both Japanese and his own. Damrong had produced some prints using Japanese hand-printed paper and wood, but mainly he devoted more time to painting for which he had found a new direction personally.

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1990

He resumed printmaking again by using linoleum-block and printing in colour. The form of these works can be termed 'symbolic' and 'individualistic' in expression and technique, which he initiated in Japan in 1977. In fact printmaking is not the artist's main work, but in this period, the artist was printmaking both as a means of extension of his painting and as a conceptual sketch for his painting. Both painting and printmaking are related to each other in symbolic forms, colour, sources and inspiration. They are not prints for printmaking sake totally. The artist still maintains his idea and creation, following eastern thought and philosophy, such as the symbol and meditation towards 'panya' in art and life. To be able to express himself freely and individually the artist prefers the liberal way more than the traditional way of printmaking.

DAMRONG WONG - UPARAJ - Biography

Damrong Wong-Uparaj was born in Thailand in 1936. After his secondary education he was awarded a Thai Government scholarship for art and crafts education for 3 years. From 1957 - 1960 he studied art at Silpakorn University under the late Professor Silpa Bhirasri where he received the BFA degree in 1962. In the same year he was awarded a British Council Postgraduate scholarship for art study in the UK where he enrolled at the Slade School of Fine Arts, University College London from 1962 - 1963. After the UK he travelled widely in France and Italy, worked as a freelance artist there, and held one-man shows in Paris and Florence. 1963-1968 was the 'struggling period' of his life as an abstract artist. He worked as an artist and writer, and taught at the NE Technical Institute in Nakorn Rajsima for 3 years. From 1968 - 1970 he was awarded a John D Rockefeller III Fund Fellowship, studying and working in the USA at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and was awarded an MFA degree in 1969. From 1969 - 1970 he worked in New York City and studied art history at Columbia University. In 1970 he travelled to Denmark and Germany at the invitation of INTERNATIONE. From 1970 - 1976 he taught at Faculty of Art Silpakorn University, Nakorn Pathom. From 1976 - 1977 he resided in Japan as a Japan Foundation Fellow. In 1978 he was awarded an Australian Cultural Award, and visited Australia. In 1979 he was invited to visit USA. He travelled, lectured and exhibited in India at the invitation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

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In 1982 he was invited to organize an art exhibition and give a lecture on Thai Contemporary Art at Pacific Museum in the USA. In 1985 he visited China. From 1982-1991 he was appointed to head a Thai delegation in the ASEAN symposium on art and aesthetics and the ASEAN meeting of the working group on visual and performing art. Damrong has exhibited his works widely and numerously in Asia, Europe and USA.

- One-man shows: Bangkapi Gallery, Bangkok; Gallerie du Passeur, Paris. Galleria Numero Florence; TOT Bangkok; USIS Chiang Mai; Gallery 20, Bangkok; Civic Centre Museum organised by the Thai Alliance of Philadelphia; Visual Art Gallery, Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, Nakorn Pathom; Allstate Savings, LA, USA; Goethe Institut, Bangkok; Solidaridad Galleries, Manila; Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.
- Two-man show: Japan Artist Association Centre, Tokyo (with Lee Gian Seng).
- Retrospective Exhibition: organised by Silpakorn University at the University Art Gallery, Bangkok 1982.
- National Art Exhibition: National Exhibition of Art, Bangkok.
- International Art Exhibition: International Biennial Exhibition of Prints, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Museum of History, Geneva; International Exhibition of Art, National Museum, Singapore; ASEAN Travelling Exhibition of Painting and Photography. Asian International Art Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur.

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AWARDS : Thai Government Scholarship; British Council Scholarship; John D Rockefeller III Fund Fellowship; INTERNATIONE, Germany; Japan Foundation Fellowship; Australia Cultural Award; Indian Council for Cultural Relations; Thai Art Council, LA, USA; 1st Prize, Gold Medal, National Exhibition of Art, Bangkok 1960; 1st Prize Suan Pakkad Palace Art Exhibition, Bangkok; 1st Prize, Painting Exhibition, Students Christian Centre, Bankgok.

At present he is an artist and an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University at Sanam Chandra Palace, Nakorn Pathom,Thailand.