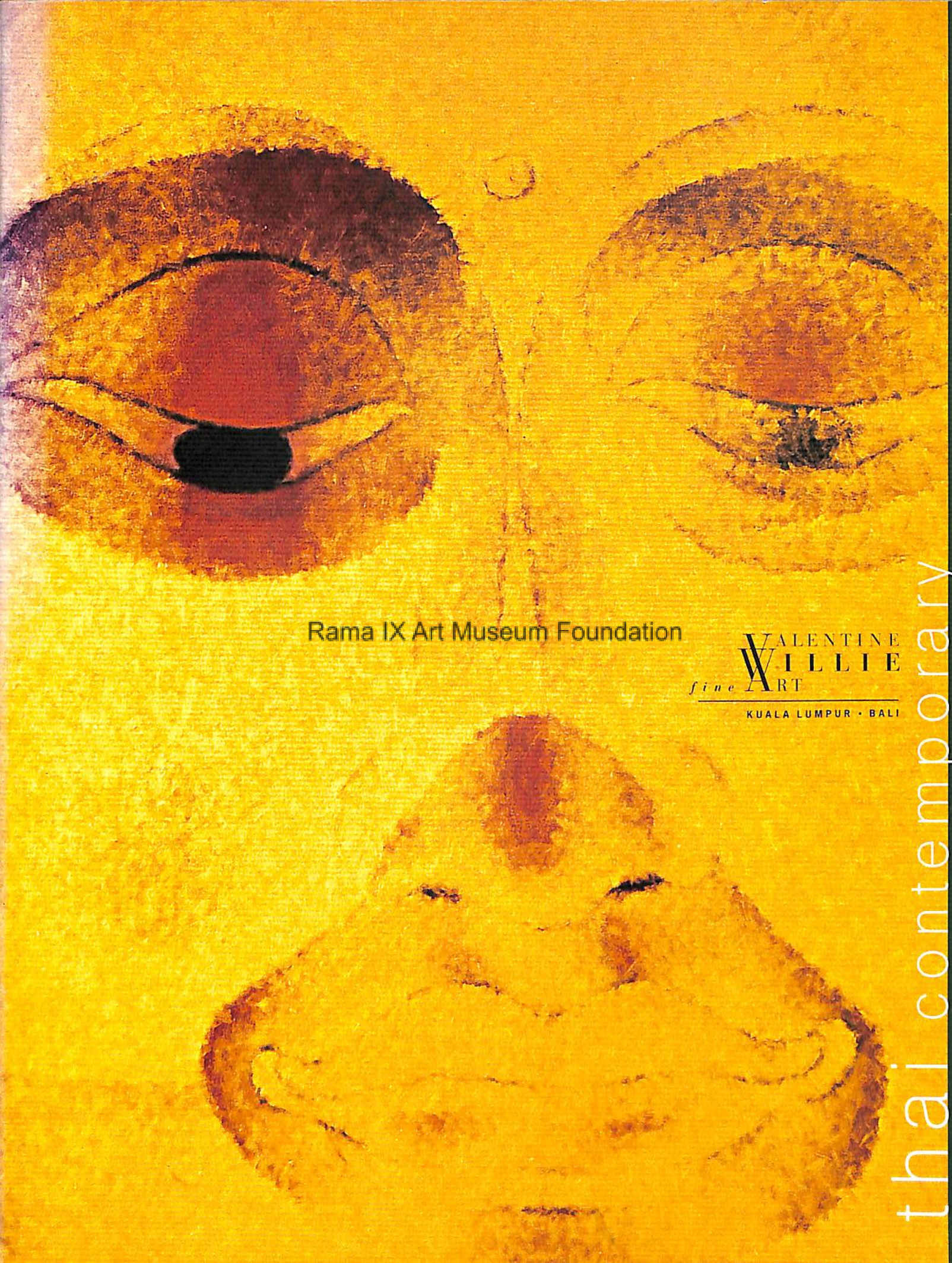


Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

VALENTINE WILLIE
fine ART
KUALA LUMPUR • BALI

thai contemporary

Kamin Lertchaiprasert Natee Utarit Niti Wattuya Pinaree Sanpitak Surojana Sethabutra Vasan Sitthiket

glimpses into thai contemporary

Kamin Lertchaiprasert Natee Utarit Niti Wattuya Pinaree Sanpitak Surojana Sethabutra Vasan Sitthiket

cover:
Niti Wattuya
Buddha Image No.4
2000
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 120 cm

Six of Thailand's most exciting and respected artists - Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Natee Utarit, Niti Wattuya, Pinaree Sanpitak, Surojana Sethabutra and Vasan Sitthiket make up *Thai Contemporary*. The selected works represent an aspect of the nation's social and political zeitgeist. Like many ASEAN countries, Thailand is fighting to stay afloat in the face of overpowering currents of rapid urbanization, the ailing economy and ongoing socio-political scandals and upheavals. As such, the contemporary art of Thailand has facets that can be baffling and intriguing from an outsider's viewpoint.

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

In translating foreign languages, what matters is for the essence of the message to be conveyed although its precise cultural significance and structure may seem ambiguous. Similarly, Thai art resonates with silent strength while its social and cultural context may not seem immediately clear. The traditional values and contemporary realities which we share in Southeast Asia are a key to a further, heightened sensitivity we feel in each other's work.

What makes Thai art distinctive is its poise. As Thai culture and tradition are deeply rooted in the Buddhist religion, the manner in which its artists balance underlying anguish and turmoil with control and elusion sets them apart. One of Thailand's most beloved artists, the late Montien Boonma's work is the personification of Buddhist teaching of endurance and strength through restraint. His sculptures and installations, quietly elegant and beautiful while appearing withdrawn and evasive, belie an intense emotional turbulence and suffering brought about by the loss of his wife.

In different ways, this ethos can be seen practiced by **Niti Wattuya** and **Natee Utarit**. The beautifully stained gold of Niti Wattuya's arresting *Buddha Image series* (2001) forms a loaded message as he combines the sacred image and colour with its modern day signifier for greed and materialism. The beauty of the tranquil faces seduces, while criticizing the erosion of values and moral corruption in Thai society in its obsessive quest for material wealth and success.

Meanwhile, in Natee Utarit's reinterpretation of Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* as a series of the same name (2001), the artist furthers his exploration into the idea of "paintings as objects." By treating his work as a "conduit between seen and unseen realities", the works, seemingly distant and devoid of personal emotion, are

RAMA IX ART MUSEUM FOUNDATION

deeply evocative and powerful, compelling us to form an intimate narrative or "mental image of reality"[i]. Having examined the changing realities and ideals in the history of European landscape painting, this series begins a dialogue with classical and Romantic allegory. Natee is one of Thailand's most challenging painters from her emerging contemporary generation, and certainly one of her most enigmatic.

The key role **Kamin Lertchaiprasert** and **Vasan Sitthiket** have played in redefining the development of Thai contemporary art has earned them numerous accolades and international recognition. Noted for the controversial themes they have boldly addressed at a time when most artists were concerned with 'bank art'[ii], these artists have been applauded for providing Thai art with an alternative voice, one that closely reflects the reality of their times.

Notorious for his outspoken comments on political discontent and the degeneration of traditional values in Thai society, Vasan is an active artist-poet as well as a social and political activist. A crusader for the agrarian cause, *Comes from earth, Lives on earth and Returns to earth* from his *Farmers* are *Farmers* (1998) series, brings to our attention the plight of the farmers, where urban migration and rapid technological development have almost rendered their existence obsolete. The seven portraits, representing the days of the week, made with acrylic and clay from Nonsawang village in Khon Kaen - once a thriving rice village - pay homage to the "backbone of the Thai nation", a reminder to all of the significance of the farmers and rice in their life and history.

Kamin's *Thai Painting* (1991) refers to the Thai alphabet and motifs relating to cultural roots. The letters of the alphabet are reinterpreted in such a way that speech sounds and images form chains of association in the viewer's mind[iii]. Working in a wide range of media such as etching, painting, photography and with installation arts; his art is closely related to his lived experience. Drawing on personal history, ideas and beliefs, his identity as a Thai of Chinese parentage adds further complexity to his work. His latest series *The Ordinary Man Is A Buddha. Passion Is Bodhi (The Wisdom Of Enlightenment)* (2001) is inspired by the teachings of Voi Lang. The photo silk screened series depicts the artist seeking a dialogue with Buddha at four different stages of his life using mural paintings in the Grand Palace. So profoundly affected by the philosophy of Buddhism, this series aptly reflects the artist's ongoing search for answers and solace through religion in the contemporary world.

Prominent Thai female artist **Pinaree Sanpitak** explores the identity and subject of a woman's body. In *Womanly Bodies* (1999), a series of geometrical prints where breasts, the womb, and the female torso have been reduced and minimalised to their basic primeval geometrical outline. They resemble and allude to the metaphor of a vessel. By appearing abstract and hollow, these minimal female forms question the symbol of fertility and maternity.

The existence of craft has maintained a strong presence in the Thai cultural landscape. An unique ability to bridge the gap between contemporary art and craft is beautifully epitomized in **Surojana Sethabutra**'s vessels. As Thailand' s only active female ceramicist, her Thai and American training sees marriage between fine traditional craftsmanship and current artistic concepts. Through her innovative use of materials and forms, her work highlights two prevailing elements in Thai art making - gentleness and resilience.

Adeline Ooi, *Curator*

i Natee Utarit, Artist Statement, 2001.

ii Apinan Poshyananda, Behind Thai Smiles, Art and Asia Pacific, sample issue 1993, pg 40. It is a term coined by the author to describe the decorative and propaganda works to promote cultural homogeneity which dominated commercial galleries and national art competitions organised by local banking corporation during the economic boom.

iii Thai alphabets are phonetic symbols distinguished from those that are ideographic or pictorial. In Thai children's books, precise images and rhymes are fixed for each letter. By relating those speech sounds and images, Kamin has reinterpreted fourty-four Thai letters so that they refer to the primordial experience of children when they begin to read and write.

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

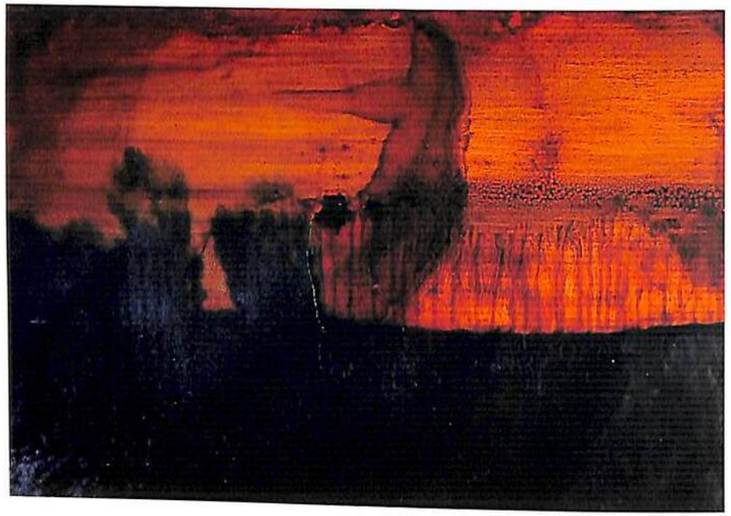
The Ordinary Man is a Buddha. Passion is Bodhi
(The Wisdom of Enlightenment)
2001
Photo silkscreen on paper (2nd in edition of 10)
100 x 70 cm (series of 5)

The ordinary man is a Buddha. Passion is bodhi (the wisdom of enlightenment). The foolish thought flowing through one's mind makes people ordinary men. When thought becomes free of foolishness, followed by vividness, one becomes a Buddha. The thought that flows through the mind, which attaches it to emotion, is passion. The thought which comes afterwards, to release one's mind from attachment, is bodhi.

Bangkok X Art Museum Foundation

Glory of Love
1986
Acrylic and oil on board
180 x 366 cm (triptych)

Celebrate to Truth and Nothing
2001
Oil on canvas
200 x 220 cm



The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters Series No. 1
2001
Oil and enamel on canvas
44 x 63 cm

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters Series No. 3
2001
Oil and enamel on canvas
64 x 64 cm

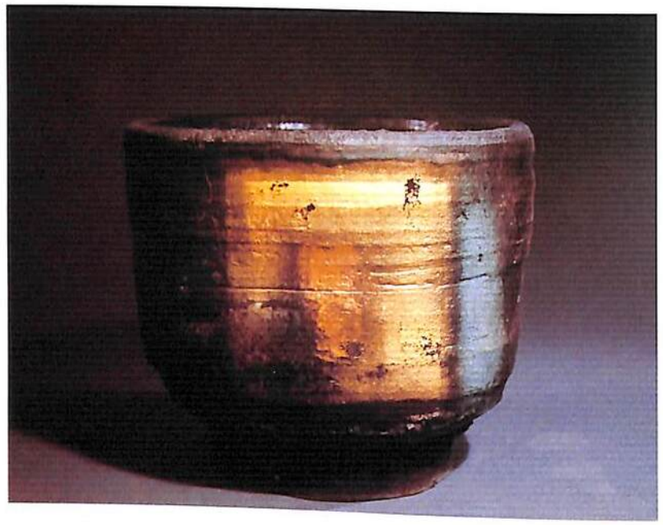
Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

Mask

I profess no religion
So, my artwork will never relate to religion.
I choose a face of Buddha like a musician chooses a guitar.
I look at his image in an artistic way.
I am interested in the shape of his perfectly created face
In an artistic theme which is calm and peaceful
It is calm and peaceful life that human wants, isn't it?
Contemporary economical science imprints that to take advantage of ...
is correct and fair
It urges people not to share love
It urges people to be selfish and never to be content
It promotes the belief of materialism
Competition is its main fool, which will have advantage on the opposition
to create conflicts,
which will further cause war and destruction
This is not what people want at all, is it?
This sad situation forces me to put a metal mask on such a peaceful face.

Buddha Image No. 5
2001
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 120 cm

Womanly Bodies
1999
Collograph
83.5 x 58.5 cm



Sermsuk Thiensoonthorn- Golden Leaf Perfume
1995
Earthenware
30 x 30 x 25 cm

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

Pinaree Sanpitak- The Egg
1995
Earthenware
60 x 60 x 20 cm

Untitled
2000
Acrylic on paper
79 x 49.5 cm

Untitled
2000
Acrylic on paper
79 x 49.5 cm

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

Comes from Earth, Lives on Earth and Returns to Earth
1998
Acrylic and clay on canvas
100 x 100 cm (series of 7)

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

Kamin Lertchaiprasert

1964 Born in Lopburi, Thailand.

Education

1981 - 87 B.F.A. (Print Making), Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000 *Medium Rare Creation Artist* project, About Studio/ About Cafe, Bangkok
Medium Rare Creation Artist project on Present Exhibitions in Rama IX Art Museum Foundation Website
Time & Experience on Present Exhibitions in Rama IX Art Museum Foundation Website and Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1999 *Anitjang Thukkhang Anata*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1997 *Normal & Nature*, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand and Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok
Retrospective Photo/Photo Etching Exhibition, About Photo Gallery, Bangkok
1995 *ABC*, British Council, Bangkok
Problem-Wisdom, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
1994 *What's in My Mind*, CON-tempus, The Bangkok Fine Arts Center, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok
1993 *Muangnging Sae Lao*, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok; The National Gallery, Bangkok and Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai
1992 *Niras Thailand*, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok; Silom Art Space, Bangkok; The Art Gallery of Faculty of Painting and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok; and CON-tempus, The Bangkok Fine Arts Center, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok
1991 *Gaw Ery Gaw Gai*, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok; and Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok
1987 *Photographs and Prints* Selected "Outstanding Young Artist of the Year" by the Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok

Selected Group Exhibitions

1998 *Portrait*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1996 *Conversing Contemporary*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Retrospective Photo/Photo Etching Exhibition, About Photo Gallery, Bangkok
1994 *Spiritual & The Social*, Nine Artists from Thailand, Indonesia and The Philippines Represented in the Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
1992 *9th Biennale of Sydney*, Sydney, Australia

Natee Utarit

1970 Born in Bangkok, Thailand

Education

1987 B.F.A. (Graphic Art), Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2001 *Views and Transference*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
2000 *Pictorial Statement*, Bangkok University Art Gallery, Bangkok
1999 *Homage to Landscape Painting*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Internal Landscape, Art Forum, Singapore
Appearance and Reality, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1998 *Internal Landscape*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1997 *Mother Figure*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1995 *Drawing and Water colors*, British Council Gallery, Bangkok
1994 *Anthropology*, The Bangkok Playhouse, Bangkok

Selected Group Exhibitions

2001 *Root*, Open Art Space, Bangkok
2000 *Snapshot*, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore
1999 *Beyond The Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Alter Ego, The 1st Thai - EU Art Project, The Art Gallery of The Faculty Of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University Bangkok
1998 *Portrait*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
The Art Exhibition of Vietnamese - Thai Artist, Fine Art Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi Fine Art University, Hanoi, Vietnam
Book, Kurusapa Building, Bangkok
Bangkok Art Project 1998, Public Art in Community lives across the Rattanakosin Island, Bangkok
The 3rd International Mini Print Triennial 1998, Lahti, Poland
1997 *Conversing Contemporary*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1996 *Hidden Agenda*, Project 304, Bangkok
1995 *Man and The Forest*, fundraising exhibition for The Northern Development, The Art Center, The Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
1993 *Life Now, 3 Artists Exhibition*, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok
Premio internationzionle Biella Per l'Incisione 1993, Biella, Italy
1992 *Small Work, An Art Exhibition by 56 Thai Artists*, Silom Art Space, Bangkok
The Exhibition of Prints, Canberra, Australia
The Contemporary Graphic Arts by New Artists, The National Gallery, Bangkok
1991 *The 19th International Biennial of Graphic Art 1991*, Ljubijana, Yugoslavia
The 8th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok
The 5th International Biennial Print Exhibition 1991, ROC Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan

Niti Wattuya

1944 Born in Chainat, Thailand

Education

Self - taught

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000 *Self - Portrait*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Intervened Nature, Galleriasia, Hong Kong
1999 *Golden Conquest*, Galleriasia, Hong Kong
1998 *Dark Age*, Centers for Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
1997 *Prototype of the Dark Age*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
1995 *Chao Praya*, Silom Art Space, Bangkok
1993 *Golden Worms*, Silom Art Space, Bangkok
1992 *Return of the Golden Era*, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok
1987 *Ocean Symphony*, British Council, Bangkok, Chiangmai
1986 *Existing of Splendour*, Gourmet Gallery, Bangkok
1983 *Watercolor and Drawing*, Vishual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
1981 *Chao Praya*, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok
1979 Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, USA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2000 *Kwangju Biennale 2000 Man + Space*, Kwangju, South Korea
Exhibition of Invisible Boundary Metamorphosed Asian Art, Utsunomiya Museum of Art, Japan
1999 *Love*, Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan
1998 *Self - Portrait*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Plastic (Other) Waste Project, Centers for Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University Art Gallery
World Artists for Tibet, Project 304, Bangkok
1997 *Conversing Contemporary*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Corners, Project 304, Bangkok
12th Asian International Art Exhibition, Macau
1996 *Golden Jubilee Art Exhibition: 50 years of Thai Art*, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok
1992 *Drawing Exhibition*, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok
1991 *Change and Modernism in Thai Art*, curated by Peera Ditbanjong
Canberra Contemporary Art Space, ACT, Australia
1990 - 92 *Asian Watercolor*, Hong Kong, Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan
1989 *Contemporary Thai Artists Exhibition*, Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris, France
1988 *7th White Group Exhibition*, Thailand Cultural Center, Bangkok

Selected Group Exhibitions (continued)

1987 *Aesthetics in Honor to His Majesty the King Exhibition*, Bangkok Bank Gallery, Bangkok
ASEAN Watercolor Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1984 *The Asian Arts Exhibition, 1984 Guest Artists*, British Institute of Modern, Bangkok
1983 *Contemporary Printmaking & Drawing from Thailand*, Nurnberg, Federal Republic of Germany
2nd White Group Exhibition, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok
1982 *Pacific Asia Museum*, Pasadena, USA
Art After 1932, Thammasat University, Bangkok
1st White Group Exhibition, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok
1980 *Contemporary Thai Artists Exhibtion*, M.M. Shinno Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Thai Artists in the US, College of Arts and Crafts, Bangkok
1979 Participated in Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA
1978 *Two Artists Exhibition*, British Council, Bangkok

Publications

1994 Loom Chaopraya
1990 Song of Starlight
1989 The Oriental Soul
1985 Sparks in an Era