

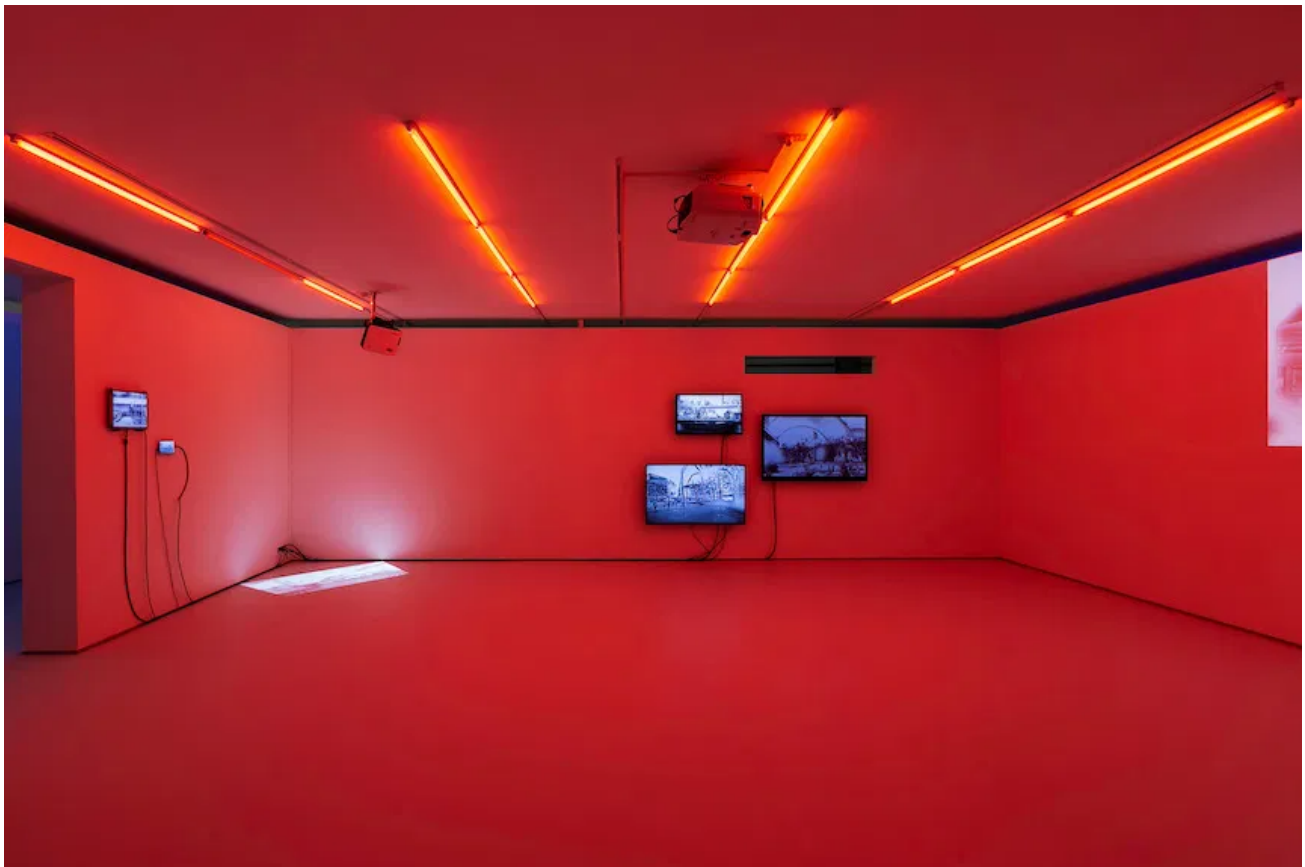
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Dispatch From Thailand: Temporal Topographies at the MAIIAM, Chiang Mai

By David Willis

November 22, 2019



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temporary exhibitions and a formidable collection of leading Thai artists, as well as prominent artists from around the region. The impressive collection continues to grow and though selected works are on display in a permanent gallery, the MAIIAM's assistant curator Kittima Chareeprasit was commissioned to curate an exhibition showcasing some new acquisitions. Bearing the full title *Temporal Topography: MAIIAM's New Acquisitions; From 2010 to Present*, the show features works from eighteen artists, organized around the concept of the landscape, understood here both literally and in a political sense.

These two readings of the theme dovetail throughout the show since issues of land use in Southeast Asia are frequently fraught with the conflicting interests of preservation and profit, as evidenced in the side-by-side works of Vietnamese artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen and Singaporean artist Charles Lim that greet the viewer near the entrance to the gallery. Nguyen's 2017 work is a *tondo* made from a crumpled, golden emergency blanket and green resin, faintly resembling mountain valleys with rivers running between them. Its title, *Nine Dragon River 2* (2017) alludes to the Mekong River which starts in China before running through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The use of the emergency blanket seems sadly prescient, since hydroelectric dams being built along the river by the Chinese are causing [catastrophic impacts](#) downstream, potentially displacing millions of people. Another issue afflicting the Mekong is that of sand dredging: a phenomenon addressed by Lim in three separate videos titled *SEA STATE 9: Proclamation (drag/pour/drop)* (2018). The artist documents barges building new islands (ultimately slated for luxury developments) with sand stolen from Singapore's less affluent neighbors Cambodia and Vietnam, where dredging is officially forbidden but continues nonetheless thanks to bribery and corruption.

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Tuan Andrew Nguyen, *Nine Dragon River 2* (2017). Image Epoxy resin and survival blanket.
Image courtesy of artist and 10 Chancery Lane Gallery.

Also near the entrance is an installation titled *Ten Places in Tokyo* (2013) by Thai artist Sutthirat Supaparinya, for which an enclosed area was specially constructed. The work features video footage of the ten locations in Tokyo that reportedly use the most electricity in the entire city, which remains reliant on nuclear power despite the Fukushima disaster of 2011. The black and white videos seem innocuous until static consumes the black spaces, echoing the way in which nuclear explosions incinerate dark colored matter faster than light. The space is also suffused with an eerie red glow, as if making visible the hidden radioactivity from Fukushima, which undoubtedly affects Tokyo, regardless of how much the

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below, *Hocus Pocus* (2011) by Thai artist Ruangsak Anuwatwimon features a bullet-riddled glass plate from a shopping mall in downtown Bangkok, salvaged from the aftermath of Thailand's most recent coup in 2014, along with a print reproducing the pattern made by the bullet holes. The perpetrators of the coup remain in power to this day, thanks in part to the tacit backing of the Thai monarchy. Nowhere is support for the monarchy more staunch than in Bangkok, where the national anthem blasts from loudspeakers twice daily, obliging citizens to stand still out of respect. This ritual is cheekily subverted by Chulayarnnon Siriphol in his video performance *Planking* (2012), also on view nearby, in which the artist can be seen lying face down on the ground in public spaces such as parks and metro stations, while everyone around him stands at attention.



Chulayarnnon Siriphol, *Planking* (2012), video still. Image courtesy of the artist.

Such conceptual artworks are counterbalanced with traditional works of sculpture and photography, such as an oblate moon titled *Super Moon 2:1* (2018) by master Thai sculptor Tawatchai Puntusawasdi, or the series of straight photographs *National Road Number 5* (2015) by Cambodian artist Lim Sokchanlina, depicting

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of Gallery Seescape, the leading commercial gallery in town), features steel wires, which the artist allowed to rust by exposing the painting to the elements. Similarly, the giant abstract triptych *Untitled* (2014) by Bangkok-based Japanese artist Soichiro Shimizu (made by engraving deeply into wooden panels) is another work indicative of the experimental tilt of the MAIIAM's progressive acquisitions program which sets it lightyears ahead of more conservative Thai art institutions like the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Bangkok. It also has a permanent collection of Thai art, but with an outmoded predilection for figurative paintings depicting hackneyed tropes of Thai iconography, such as Buddhas, lotus flowers, and topless *apsaras*.



Lim Sokchanlina, *National Road Number 5* (2015). Image courtesy of the artist.

The MAIIAM won the award of “Best New Museum of Asia Pacific” in the 2017 Leading Cultural Destination Awards and accordingly, it makes sense that the name “MAIIAM” itself can be translated as “brand new” in Thai. As evidenced by the politically conscious and formally adventurous character of the museum's new acquisitions exhibited in *Temporal Topography*, the MAIIAM represents an exemplary model for a contemporary art museum in Southeast Asia. We can only

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Temporal Topography: Maiiam's New Acquisitions; From 2010 to Present *remains on view through March 30, 2020, at gallery 1, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, 122, Moo 7 Tonpao San Kamphaeng District, Chiang Mai 50130, Thailand.*

David Willis lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand. David is a critic, curator, and art advisor, and alum of the MFA Art Writing Program at the School of Visual Arts. He has been based in Vietnam and Thailand since 2015, developing a specialization in the contemporary art of Southeast Asia.

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