



By [Monrueedee Jansuttipan](#) | May 23, 2016

What inspired you to create the exhibition?

It started when I undertook an artist residency program in Taiwan back in 2013. My Taiwanese friend told me her country no longer banned any books. This stuck with me until I did another artist-in-residence program in Wellington, New Zealand, last October. I spent most of my time there in the public library searching for books that were banned in Oceania before expanding to other continents. My research finally became “Steal This Book,” an art exhibition about books that were banned. I took the name from a book by 60s’ American political activist Abbie Hoffman, which was banned in Canada and the US. When I was asked to join Reading Room’s Sleepover project, I decided to polish it up with more books that were banned around ASEAN, including ***Paradise of the Blind***, a novel that was banned in Vietnam. I also used this book as the name of the exhibition as I feel it suits our country’s situation where people try to ignore crucial situations in order to stay happy.

How do you feel about police and soldiers showing up to your event?

I’m not so worried, as I only picked books that aren’t banned in Thailand. But they were really curious about one particular book that I exhibit, ***Chom Na Sakdina Thai [The Face of Thai Feudalism]***, which was written by the late democracy leader Chit Phumisak in 1957 and banned for a time in 1977. It seems they didn’t do their homework, though, as they kept asking me to explain the story of this book. I told them I don’t need to, because it’s sold everywhere. It’s even in the government’s list of 100 good books that Thais should read.

Everything went smooth after that?

Yes, they stopped bothering me after that. Actually, I faced some issues even before the exhibition took place. I tried to buy used shotgun cartridges to put in the exhibition but no one would sell to me in large numbers, even the shooting ranges. I tried to hire metalsmiths to make them for me, but they all rejected. Luckily, I finally found out you can buy them from the Royal Thai Army Ordnance Department. That was such a surprise for me.

It seems that more and more art exhibitions are coming under government surveillance. How do you feel about this?

Before now, the government may have not thought that art can really impact society. But we are seeing artists collaborate with more people in different professions, such as activists and musicians. As the art circles grow wider and wider, we might see the government become even more concerned. Still, our situation is much better than in neighboring countries like Myanmar and Laos, where all artists need to propose their work one month in advance in order to get permission. This might be the first time we get a taste of what our neighbors have become accustomed to.

What’s next for you?

As I’m working with Chiang Mai Art Conversation [CAC] group, we’re now teaming up with The Japan Foundation Asia Center to found the Asian Culture Station in Chiang Mai within a few months. You can get updates at CAC’s Facebook page [\[www.fb.com/cmartconversation\]](http://www.fb.com/cmartconversation).