



deserted & embraced

site/concept-specific works by

Suthee Eur-Siripornrit

Kosit Juntaratip

Patipan Nagwiroj

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook

Navin Rawanchaikul

Sutthirat Supaparinya

Rirkrit Tiravanija

Yuvanuj Vongsayan

conceptualized and curated by

Helen Michaelsen

"deserted & embraced"

Railway Hotel, Chiang Mai
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"deserted & embraced - revisited"

Goethe Institut Bangkok
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Die Wirklichkeit als eine Form der Illusion anzuerkennen
und die Illusion als eine Form der Wirklichkeit
ist gleichermassen notwendig
und gleichermassen nutzlos.

*Fernando Pessoa, Das Buch der Unruhe

At the beginning was the idea ...

The idea of an idea turned into a desire, the desire to create a triangle of exchange, "a magic triangle", consisting of a site, a concept, and works of art - all three equally important, connected by cogent interrelations. Then, the idea slowly evolved into the actual exhibition project 'deserted & embraced'.

Towards realisation, finding the right site became the first prerequisite. Previously untouched as an art venue, the desired site had to be an abandoned place evoking its own stories and memories. It turned out to be the former Railway Hotel in Chiang Mai, deserted since a number of years and the interior now almost completely looted and destroyed. And yet - this deserted place is unique with its embracing atmosphere. Despite its imposed incomplete state, the building seems complete in its quietness and contentedness. Being abandoned also implies being left alone from interference, thus prolonging the waning spirit of the past.

The site's inherently present concept inevitably disclosed itself: 'deserted & embraced'. Once the spirals of deserted & embraced start to spin, a web of meanings comes into being. Drawn together as a pair, the spirals of deserted & embraced can - at moments - merely circle around meeting and parting. But neither solely simple nor solely complex and depending on chosen or assigned perspectives, "deserting/deserted" implies to let go, to leave/to be left, to finish (off), to destroy/to be destroyed, to change, to end, to die, to retreat, to get ready for a new beginning, whereas "embracing/embraced" implies to care for, to caress/to be caressed, to conquer/to be conquered, to set up, to establish, to get to know, to win over, to create, to be curious, to get involved.

As essential human sentiments deserting/deserted and embracing/embraced are deeply ingrained into all parts of life.

We desert to embrace, we embrace to desert...

We desert, we embrace, we embrace, we desert...

We are embraced to be deserted, we are deserted to be embraced...

We are embraced, we are deserted, we are deserted, we are embraced...

Expressed in real actions and reactions or encountered as a memory, as a fragrance, as thoughts, as emotions, deserting and embracing happens all the time: between humans, between humans and animals, between humans and objects, between humans and spaces.

Being a maze, embracing does not necessarily have to be somebody or something new, but can also contain going back to somebody or something we already know, somebody or something we are familiar with, somebody or something we have deserted before. Intertwined in a non-linear manner, the deserting/deserted-and-embracing/embraced-pattern does not provide a fixed structure of first we embrace and then we desert, but reveals that the two can co-exist at the same time, can even occur simultaneously, that while we embrace, we already ignite the notion of deserting.

There is no logical sequence to it, when, how. All we know is it happens over and over again. Perceiving time as being finite, it amounts to all aspects that define life, the process, the energy in being, the refusal of finality - which is not the same thing as the refusal of completeness.

Completing "the magic triangle" eight artists, Suthee Eur-Siripornrit, Kosit Juntaratip, Patipan Nagwiroj, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Navin Rawanchaikul, Sutthirat Supaparinya, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Yuwanuj Vongsayan, were invited to engage both with the concept 'deserted & embraced' and with the site, the former Railway Hotel in Chiang Mai.

This quest led to personal history and memory evoked by the reciprocal interventions of the site and the concept, led to reclaiming and thus embracing traces from the past at the actual deserted site, led to the use of the general idea of what a hotel represents.

Suthee approached 'deserted & embraced' by creating an environment of a dark room as a threefold invitation: to experience that imagination takes in the world of sense experiences, to experience reality as continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible, and to experience a spatial moment as being sensuous as well as aesthetic and as being visceral as well as intellectual.

Kosit chose a documentary version of his life as it was lived at that moment of time. Due to his imminent departure to Germany, his life was about to change. As a symbolic farewell to his family, he invited his family and served them a Dim Sum lunch in one of the hotel rooms. The luncheon finished off with taking a photographic family portrait. In the late afternoon he arranged for a "tea ceremony" on the outside staircase at the side of the building. Seated at different floors levels, his immediate family and his close friends shared private moments with him and towards the end each of them received a farewell present.

Patipan's photographs focused on bonding. Addressing the process of aging and of decay of this building, searching for traces as evidences of the former life and energy, highlighted its still present energy and ongoing existence. Using his photographs as "magnifying glasses" and placing them all over the building close to the actual motives, i.e. cracks in the wall, colour that peels off the wall, objects covered with a certain patina, he also accentuated that ideas of beauty are entirely dependent on ways of seeing.

Searching for a way to find a language to communicate for silence, Araya combined performances, "Rites of Passage", at a hospital in Chiang Mai with an installation at the hotel. Using her own voice while reading excerpts from traditional Thai literature to corpses, the voice became the transmitter for giving and taking, for the horizontal and the vertical, for the hidden and perhaps forbidden bonds between a living person and a dead one. The objects, black wooden chair, glass coffin, books, used in her "Rites of Passage" reappeared again at the hotel as carriers of a personal approach to the definition of space and time, both an imposed and a self-chosen one.

Navin's and Rirkrit's collaboration, consisting of three different works, engaged with the actual reality of the site, utilising the real site for the reality of their art and hence transforming it into a reality of imagination. For the first work five viewpoints were chosen at five different sites of the building of which photos were then taken. These photos served as motives for postcards that were placed in static postcard stands at those pre-chosen viewpoints. The way the postcard stands were positioned, they

"forced upon" the experience of the same viewpoint as depicted as motives on the postcards, hereby implying the notion of being simultaneously inside and outside of the picture. Re-forming fragments into new wholes, so that what has become too familiar can be actually perceived fresh again, the second work was an enlarged cut-out of the hotel front, presented as a bill board next to the hotel. Association being an essential element for establishing connections, the third work was an event at night, showing three films evolving around travelling and hotels. Embracing the site by motion, these films were projected on to front of the hotel turning parts of the hotel into a kinetic sculpture.

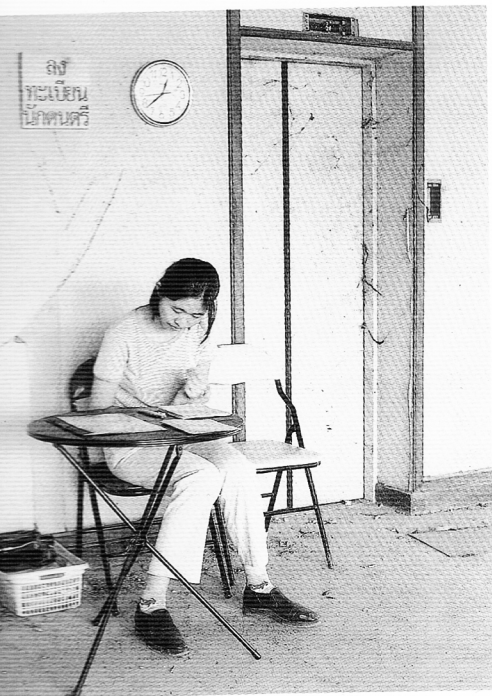
Weaving together the conceptual structure and the narrative of her work, Sutthirat's sound piece, "Sound in one minute - One person - One instrument - One room" emphasised on the intensity of the moment. Stressing the fleeting character of deserted & embraced - that like sounds, nothing can be held on to and nothing can be possessed - invited musicians performed music at one of the sixty hotel rooms just for one minute, the location for their performances being predetermined by the prior chosen time. Most of the time the musicians were invisible with only the sound being "visible", however, the sound not readily revealing its source of origin.

Yuwanuj's choice were the six square pillars surrounding the entrance area which are covered with still intact mirrors. Stressing a shared human connection with the hotel, that even in its deserted state seems to function as a social place, he covered these mirrors with stickers of graffiti writing. These marks through time were found on the walls of this building and transferred as mirror-writing on to those pillars. An embracing human gesture towards the deserted site was needed to access the mirror-writing graffiti using the mirrors of opposite pillars - despite the interference of the overlapping reflection of one's own image.

The site, the concept, the works, in being, the being of the site, of the concept, of the works have found expression in particular and yet connected ways to breathe life into the initial idea of 'deserted & embraced'.

Having hoped for encounters with one essence of "deserting/deserted & embracing/embraced" and hence with the flux of life, the concept stipulated the duration for the actual exhibition - only one single day. The participants, the works of art, the public became active players, embracing the place for a little while before deserting it again, each individually.

Helen Michaelsen





"Sound in one minute / One person / One instrument / One room"

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