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**mixing things**

THROUGH THE CREATIVE WORK OF SIX EMERGING TALENTS, **STIRLING SILLIPHANT** INVESTIGATES WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A YOUNG THAI ARTIST TODAY. PORTRAITS BY **CEDRIC ARNOLD**



Archives

THE ESPRESSO MACHINES at Chiang Mai's 94 Co?ee are running full throttle when Angkrit Ajchariyasophon pulls up to our 9am appointment in a pick-up truck. I don't often associate conceptual artists with pick-ups - or morning meetings, for that matter - but just a few minutes into my conversation with Angkrit, it's obvious why he needs one. Loaded with sculptures that he aims to sell at the Night Bazaar after our meeting, the truck will get Angkrit back to his job managing his family's restaurant in Chiang Rai, 180km away.

That Angkrit's vehicle is as indispensable a tool as any element of his mixed palate says a lot about Thai artists of this generation, for whom balancing busy day-to-day schedules is the norm, for most emerging local artists are also full-time university lecturers or curators, or making money on the side selling T-shirts and stage-dressing events.

This multi-tasking is matched by an eagerness to engage new media. From Angkrit's "role-playing", to the "sound installations" of Sutthirat Supapariya and 3-D putty paintings of Yuree Kensaku, contemporary Thai art - and its creators - are a mixed bag of forms and ideas. As Bangkok curator Thanavi Chotpradit explains, the new generation "are multi-disciplinary, can experiment and don't stick with one media - they're playful and more flexible".

Non-traditional media has a particularly warm glow to this group, often labelled "New Media" artists, a sub-genre of contemporary art defined by its willingness to incorporate non-traditional media such as video, digital and web.



"Young artists increasingly work on non-object-based art - not just because it's convenient (cheap, easy to carry or send), but it's also something about their mentalities," explains Thanavi.

It could well be a reflection of how vastly different a cultural landscape these artists - who had come of age during the 1990s - grew up in, as compared to their predecessors, the Thai modernists and neo-traditionalists.

It is certainly no surprise that such a wired, image-saturated place as Bangkok would produce creative minds fascinated by digital imaging, gadgetry and cyberspace.

However, one also has to look to the creative ferment in smaller cities like Chiang



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Mai, where a robust New Media department thrives at the city's university.

In the works of the six artists profiled here, one finds an ongoing dialogue with what it means to an artist; specifically, what it means to be a *young, thai* artist practising in the early 21st century.

Read on to discover their range of fascinating creations.

คุณอังกฤษ อัจฉริยะโสภณ ใช้รศบิกอัฟคูใจของเขาในการทำงานหลายอย่างไปพร้อมๆกัน แม่จะดูขัดตากับความเขินศิลปินไปบ้าง แต่ก็เหมาะสมกับตารางเวลาที่อัดแน่นของเขาในแต่ละวัน เขาต้องเตรียมขนรูปปั้นเพื่อนำไปขายที่ไนท์ บาซาร์ และเตรียมตัวเดินทางกลับไปดูแลร้านอาหารที่เชียงใหม่ อันเป็นอาชีพที่นอกเหนือไปจากการเป็นอาจารย์มหาวิทยาลัย ศิลปินรุ่นใหม่ไม่น่าจะยึดติดอยู่กับสิ่งใดสิ่งหนึ่ง แต่คอยชวนช่วยหาประสบการณ์กับสิ่งอื่นๆด้วย และวันนี้ศิลปินรุ่นใหม่ 6 ท่าน จะมาเปิดเผยเรื่องราวของพวกเขาให้เราฟัง

### A MAN OF MANY HATS

**Name:** Angkrit Ajchariyasophon

**Born:** 1976, Chiang Rai

What kind of hat does the perfect gentleman wear? Many, in the case of Angkrit: sculptor, painter, restaurant manager and face-reader. At *Platform*, an exhibit of emerging Thai artists held in Bangkok late last year, Angkrit dressed up and posed as classical 19th century *English Gentleman* to comment not only on Thailand's relationship with the West, but on the Thai arts market.



"If you want to be a contemporary artist, you need to become Western," he claims. Not that Angkrit thinks this is a bad thing; he just believes it is something that has been given insufficient consideration in the "conflicted" arts scene of his homeland.



The porous make-up of Thai people and Thai culture fascinates the enigmatic young artist. "We are in a period of mixed up cultural exchange," he says. "We try to be too many people - European, Japanese, Korean, European. [But] do we know exactly what is the real *farang* (foreigner), the real Japanese, the real Korean?"

Angkrit - who has buried time capsules at Chiang Mai's Wat Umong and Wat Phra Sing - has recently completed a semi-anthropological workshop in Chiang Rai which saw himself and three Japanese artists posing as a tribe that speaks its own language (a Thai-English pidgin, of course), farms its own vegetables and mints its own currency.

The actual exhibit, to take place later this year, will report to the viewers through snippets of "discoverers" and "voyagers" who journey to observe the "lost tribe". This is classic Angkrit: irreverent and brash, but with an ever-present playful element.



คุณอังกฤษกล่าวว่า หากคุณต้องการเป็นศิลปินร่วมสมัย คุณต้องทำตัวเป็นชาวตะวันตก ทั้งนี้เนื่องมาจากการผสมผสานและแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมของคนไทยกับต่างชาติ หากแต่เลือกหยิบเอาเพียงเปลือกนอก ผลงานของเขาเป็นการแสดงความเห็นเกี่ยวกับความสัมพันธ์ของไทยกับประเทศตะวันตกและตลาดศิลปะในไทยที่อิงความเป็นตะวันตกเป็นอย่างมาก

### ALL MIXED UP

**Name:** Yuree Kensaku  
**Born:** 1979, Bangkok

With her Faye Wong haircut and pixie-like demeanour, Yuree is the kind of girl you would expect to be painting panda bears and giant robots. Which is exactly what this half-Japanese, half-Thai artist does - only with a twist.

Her brightly coloured work is based in painting and illustration - oft en with a three-dimensional element - thickly layered with a multiplicity of materials: acrylic, oil, spray paint, wire, enamel, resin, pencil, stickers, epoxy putty, terracotta, and much more.



Steeped heavily in Thai pop culture - soap operas, news, superstition, wordplay, and *luuk thung* (Thai country music) - Yuree's works often dwell on lovelorn sorrow. For instance, the hyperbolic tears shed in *I Want You to Know* - in which a woman literally cries herself a river - refer to *Nam Naow*, a genre of sentimental and melodramatic film and TV in Thailand.

*Love in a Platinum Frame* consists of two figures, appearing as newlyweds, sealed in a pendant, similar to the ones used in Buddhist amulets. *Love Me at Ten O'Clock* and *Truck Driver's Sweetheart* play o? popular perceptions about *sib lor* ("10-wheel", or long-distance lorry) drivers being separated from lovers.



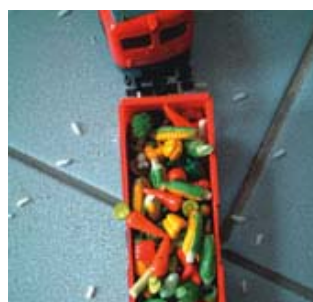
*I Dreamed I was Girded by a Big Snake* depicts a woman - snake coiled around her - made of epoxy and laid out in a "field" of terracotta mushrooms. "Th ose symbolise the male," Yuree drops coyly.

คุณยูรี เคนซากุ สร้างผลงานโดยใช้วัสดุ  
 จุดขาดและสะท้อนถึงวัฒนธรรมกระแส  
 นิยมของไทย อย่างละครโทรทัศน์ ชาว  
 ความเชื่อ การเล่นคำ และเพลงลูกทุ่ง  
 ได้อย่างยอดเยี่ยม ผลงานของเธอ อาทิ  
 ล้นฝันว่าถูกงูรัด รักฉันตอนสิบโมง  
 และหวานใจสิบสอง

#### THE FUN IN FUNCTIONAL

**Name:** Porntaweesak "Tee" Rimsakul  
**Born:** 1979, Udon Thani

Exhibiting a peculiarly Thai sense of fun and play, Tee strips everyday objects of their common-sense functionality: a gas burner spouts water instead of fire in *Fountain* ; tea kettles refitted with toy horse legs dance across a gallery floor in *Dinosaur* ; a rice cooker rotates a Barbie doll in *Angel on Tour* ; and in *Pet* , cigarette boxes with wind-up strings are made to "munch at" removable organs from a medical school dummy.



By changing these objects' intended everyday purpose, Tee rejigs their meaning and transforms them into items of wonderment. "I try to make a visual language with objects," he says.

At the 2005 *Politics of Fun* exhibition in Berlin, Tee unveiled a toy train circling a table. Viewers removed and replaced an assortment of items (such as rice grains, plastic vegetables, planes) between trains and plates



 in front of them.

Tee envisioned this as a way for audiences to understand and "participate" in Thailand's trading patterns. The result - like many of his creations exhibited in Bangkok, Paris, Torino, Berlin, Barcelona, Osaka, London, and Vienna - relies very heavily on each viewer's reaction to, and interaction with the work.



คุณพรทวีศักดิ์ ริมสกุล นำของใช้ใกล้ตัว มาสร้างสรรค์งานศิลปะอันสะท้อนถึง ความสนุกสนานในแบบคนไทย โดยใช้ สิ่งของเป็นตัวสื่อภาษา ผลงานของเขา ได้ออกแสดงในเมืองใหญ่ๆทั่วโลก และ การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ชมก็ถือว่าเป็นส่วน ประกอบสำคัญในงาน

#### PIECES OF REALITY

**Name:** Prateep "Mom" Suthathongthai

**Born:** 1980, Bangkok

A photographer like few others in Thailand today, Mom creates montages of unique, sometimes overlapping, images spread across contact sheets (thumbnails of film) to form composite pictures of staggering beauty. Best described as visual tapestries created through photography and contact prints, his works are the result of a painstaking process.



"My way of manipulating images may be the way I take a particular picture on an intended frame," says Mom, who does not use any digital imaging software. Instead, he prefers to pre-script and shoot according to storyboards and outlines, then arrange the images by hand after developing them.



Shooting with a single-lens Olympus OM1, Mom's creations seem to comment on the contrasts between the traditional and the modern in Thai culture. For example, *Giant Monkey* and *Phra Nang* juxtapose figures engaged in classical Thai dance wearing traditional and modern clothes, while *Stillness of Her Reflection* - a black and white portrait of the artist's mother, gazing at her fragmented image in a mirror - almost feels like it has been lifted from a 1950s magazine.

Mom claims he wants to convey the feeling of "startling contrasts" and that, for Thai contemporary art in general, "the contrast between old and new shows the attempt to search for the identity of our culture or nation".

คุณประทีป สุธาธรไทย ช่างภาพผู้สร้างสรรค์ผลงานอันมีเอกลักษณ์ต้องใช้เวลาประณีตในการผลิตผลงานออกมาแต่ละชิ้น โดยเขาเลือกที่จะถ่ายภาพตามโครงเรื่องที่เกิดขึ้นได้มากกว่าที่จะใช้โปรแกรมคอมพิวเตอร์ตกแต่งภาพในภายหลัง ผลงานของเขาสะท้อนถึงความขัดแย้งระหว่างวัฒนธรรมไทยดั้งเดิมและวัฒนธรรมสมัยใหม่ แสดงให้เห็นถึงการหาตัวตนของวัฒนธรรมไทย

#### SENSE OF THINGS TO COME

**Name :** Sutthirat "Som" Supaparinya

**Born:** 1973, Chiang Mai

When a little rock far, far away from earth was deemed to no longer be a planet of our solar system, a Chiang Mai-based, German-educated artist, film-maker and lecturer felt "it became clear that definitions are products of scientists' imaginations". Thus, Pluto's loss of its planetary status was the inspiration behind Som's *Orbited Objects* (2006) - a tented planetarium in which



visitors observe, chart and, ultimately, claim a piece of the cosmos as their own.



This work, and her earlier *Invisible Lines* (2004), comment on the positioning of knowledge in today's world. "Knowledge has become imagination," says Som. "That's why I ask the audience to move around the stars and make their own constellations."

The five senses fascinate Som, who has created "sound installations" - and even "smell installations" - at her exhibitions in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Ho Chi Minh City, Leipzig and other cities in Asia and Europe.

Som's *You Are There. You Are Not There* exhibit at The Jim Thompson House in Bangkok explores the unanswered questions revolving around the life and disappearance of the American silk entrepreneur, using a set of hanging "talk and listen cups" (similar to those used as makeshift telephones in children's games) into which sounds from Jim Thompson's bedroom are piped.



And while *Dotscape*, a loop of non-linear images filtered through a honeycombed grid, seems to lack any kind of narrative, *Taste of Noodles* is a straightforward documentary on Vietnamese noodle culture, with its focus on how recombining certain taste patterns make individual statements for creators and consumers.



[www.rama9art.org](http://www.rama9art.org) is Thailand's most comprehensive bilingual website on contemporary and traditional Thai art, including artists' profiles, listings of galleries and updated exhibit information. Log on to find out more.

คุณสุทธิรัตน์ ศุภปริญา กับผลงานชื่อ  
"อินวิสิเบิล ลินส์" สะท้อนถึงความรู้ที่  
กลับกลายเป็นจินตนาการทางวิทยา-  
ศาสตร์ ที่ว่าดาวพลูโตไม่เคยเป็นส่วนหนึ่ง  
ของระบบสุริยจักรวาล เป็นภัยใหญ่ขมไข  
จินตนาการของตัวเองต่อสิ่งต่างๆรอบตัว

#### BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

**Name:** Pratchaya "Toh" Phinthong  
**Born:** 1974, Bangkok

When Rirkrit Tiravanija, perhaps the best-known contemporary artist in Thailand, opened VER gallery, his choice of Pratchaya Phinthong as curator was most fitting. Like Rirkrit, Toh's works pose questions about how art can engage a wider public.



His installation at *Platform* consisted of a TV, DVD duplicator, book of DVDs, and a copy of *151 Cinema* (a reference guide to art-house movies) accompanied by the message "No Patents on Ideas" posted on the wall.



Continuing on cinema-screening-as-community-building, *Ephemeral Cinema* (2003, 2004) is an electric car equipped with speakers and projector. By day, the car was ensconced in the space of the gallery; at night, the car was driven around outside, projecting films for impromptu audiences in Bangkok and Taipei.

Turning a creative concept into artistic action, the car shows how "art" can move beyond the walls of a gallery to reach the wider, non-art consuming audience outside.

Stories and ideas play a central role in Toh's work, which interweave personal narratives with those of other people. *Floating Stories* (2001) is a sort of anthology, "montages and collages from memory", of conversations between students from across the world whom he met while studying art in Munich.

In 2004, Toh set off on an overland journey from Frankfurt to Bangkok, funded primarily by donations from friends and acquaintances. One year later, the pictures and mementos from this journey formed the basis of the *Missing Objects* exhibit at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

Like his contemporaries, Toh clearly shares a desire to examine the world - and his place in it - as a platform for his art. He says, "It's important to me, as a person, to think about living my life, think about what I am and what I should be - how to balance, and how to define art by using this and that."

A sentiment that perfectly encapsulates contemporary Thai art.

คุณปรัชญา พิณทอง ตั้งคำถามให้กับตัวเองว่าทำอะไรถึงจะ  
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ไทเป เป็นการขยายพื้นที่การแสดงผลศิลปะที่เคยอยู่แต่ในห้อง  
จัดแสดงไปสู่โลกภายนอก

#### PACES AND PLACES

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