

Thais take the Lion City

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WRITER: [KAONA PONGPIPAT](#)



Singapore's Art Week is over but it doesn't mean there aren't any good remnants left. The newly-opened National Gallery, for one, is hardly what one would call a remnant, with a comprehensive collection of works by Southeast Asian artists from the 19th century onwards which would take at least a day to completely take in. There are also, of course, a few major shows at the old military quarters-turned-art hub Gillman Barracks, such as Steve McCurry's iconic photography show, Yinka Shonibare's new sculptures and Joan Jonas' acclaimed "They Come To Us Without A Word" exactly as seen in last year's Venice Biennale.

Another highlight is the Prudential Eye Awards exhibition at the Marina Bay Sands' ArtScience Museum in which three Thai artists, among the 17 artists shortlisted, were featured. Cambodian artist Sareth Svay won Overall Best Emerging Artist while Thai artist Sakarin Krue-On won a Lifetime Achievement Award for Asian Contemporary Art. The award for Visual and Popular Culture went to Thai rock band Slot Machine.

The competition, and also the exhibit, is separated into five categories: digital/video; installation; painting; photography; and sculpture. In the digital/video category, we see two Thai artists -- Sutthirat Supaparinya and Anupong Charoenmitr -- who have taken up quite a space for their video projection.

Sutthirat's work, a three-channel video *When Need Moves The Earth*, is in many respects in parallel with her other piece of work, *My Grandpa's Route Has Been Forever Blocke*, shown at the Art Stage's central exhibition *Southeast Asia Forum*.

"The piece here is connected to the one at the Art Stage in a sense that it also talks about the impact of dam building for electricity," said Sutthirat. "This dam was built on a fault line which thus precipitates earthquakes which are already active."

However, in her video, the issue is deliberately not presented in an urgent way. Each channel quietly takes us through the scenery around the dam, from a view from the top, inside the structure of power plants to inside the control room. It's the "normality" she documents that ends up

stressing man's total disregard of what might be boiling underneath our Earth's surface.

In the video installation room by Anupong, the death of a pig in a slaughterhouse is given a stage-like presentation. As we look at the fallen animal breathing softly on the floor, the other screen shows us what is obviously the slaughterer, who is covered in sweat, wearing a face that is expressionless, standing from afar. Yes, this theme has been explored over and over again yet the scene of it never fails to make us start and for a moment wonder if vegetarianism might be a better idea.

Even though it's tough being in the same group as the Japanese painter Toshiyuki Konishi and the Indian painter Manish Mai, our Tawan Wattuya's watercolour strokes are always a delight to see. We saw the school student's portrait Dek Oey Dek Dee at the now defunct Toot Yung Art Center two years ago but there are two new paintings, Nang Sao Thai and Whirlpool. Typically partially-smudged, these two new ones are enigmatic. We see beauty queen crowns but we are not sure who these ladies are, just as we wonder who these historical-looking men in Whirlpool are. Are they politicians or just a bunch of strangers' faces randomly thrown together?

Prudential Eye Awards exhibition is on display until Mar 27, at ArtScience Museum, Marina Bay Sands.

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