



sleeping sickness, 2012 © gb agency, Paris - Photo: Pratchaya Phinthong

sleeping sickness

PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG

As part of *Les Prairies*, 3rd edition of Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art (15 September - 9 December 2012)

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Exhibition
13 September - 9 December 2012

—
Opening
Thursday 13 September 2012, 6:30pm
at La Criée

—
Meeting with Pratchaya Phinthong
Saturday 15 September 2012, 5:30pm
at La Criée

—
Guided tours
Thursday 4 October 2012, 5:30pm
at La Criée
Thursday 15 November 2012, 5:30pm
at La Criée

—
Curated and produced by
La Criée centre for contemporary arts,
Rennes / Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of
Contemporary Art

—
Partnership
gb agency, Paris

LES
ATELIERS
BIENNALE
D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN
DE
RENNES

Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art was created on the initiative of the Norac group partron, with the support of French Ministry of Culture and Communication - Direction of Cultural Affairs of Brittany), and local authorities (City of Rennes, General Council of Ille-et-Vilaine, Regional Council of Brittany). Entitled *The Prairies*, the third edition takes place in eight exhibition spaces: NewWay Mabilais, FRAC Bretagne, La Criée Centre for contemporary arts, Rennes' Museum of Fine Arts, Phakt Colombier Cultural Center, 40mcube, art & essai Gallery, Cabinet du livre d'artiste

Press release

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Les Prairies, the 3rd edition of Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art, focuses on the many embodiments of that all-conquering legend, the pioneer. The aim is to scrutinise the contradictory aspects of an ambiguous figure from the American pioneer to today's global migrant. To mark the occasion La Criée centre for contemporary arts receives Thai artist Pratchaya Phinthong for a new exhibition, *sleeping sickness*.

The 3rd edition of Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art spotlights the figure of the pioneer. The word's etymology conjures up personal characteristics and a portrait that has lost nothing of its contemporary relevance: of a trailblazer who lays the groundwork for projects and buildings; of a «displaced» person constantly on the move, interacting with surroundings he transforms according to his needs or his vision of the world. This definition fits closely with the approach taken by Pratchaya Phinthong, artist, traveller, and groundbreaker for complex social, economic and geopolitical situations. Engaging with a global trade system, his work sets out to reveal the different reality strata that system is made of. In most cases his creations involve a research process culminating formally in a poetic, imaginative space. To cite one example, his project *Give more than you take* (2010) – shown successively at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Brétigny, at GAMEC in Bergamo, and on an Internet site – takes us to the heart of the atrocious human and economic situation of Thai workers in Lapland.

As one of the guests at *Documenta 13* in Kassel (2012), Pratchaya Phinthong undertook a three-continent – Europe, Asia, Africa – project on sleeping sickness, a fatal disease mainly affecting people in sub-Saharan Africa. After a residency in Africa that gave him first-hand contact with the context, he chose to begin this processual

piece at *Documenta* by exhibiting a pair of disease-carrying flies, a fertile female and a sterile male, side by side under glass on a marble slab.

In Rennes he is presenting *sleeping sickness*, which offers a prototype of an ecological trap designed in dialogue with researchers and scientists. Facing the trap, which looks like a small tent made of blue fabric, a monitor broadcasts the sound track of a sleeping sickness awareness documentary, to which the artist has added the script in the form of subtitles on a black background. As the images have been removed from the film, only a drawing by Thai illustrator Vichai Malikul provides an actual representation of the illness and, more precisely, of the insect that transmits it. At the same time as this new work goes on show, 500 blue tents made by a Thai company will be set up in Zambia, Ethiopia and Tanzania as a grassroots test of the effectiveness of the new trap. Throughout the Biennial in Rennes the local people will be invited to send in images of the traps in their actual context, for display at La Criée.

With *sleeping sickness*, Pratchaya Phinthong is presenting the outcome of a research and creation process that conjures up a different reality and takes an artistic venture into the social welfare domain of the countries concerned.

Visuals for the press

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sleeping sickness, 2012

Installation - Couple of tsetse flies presented on a marble block under glass, on a plinth
© Pratchaya Phinthong - Courtesy gb agency, Paris



sleeping sickness, 2012

© gb agency, Paris - Photo: Pratchaya Phinthong

Visuals for the press

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sleeping sickness, 2012
© gb agency, Paris - Photo: Pratchaya Phinthong



An Average Thai Berry Ricker's Income, 2010
Framed Swedish notes and coins
47,1 x 76,6 cm
© Pratchaya Phinthong - Courtesy gb agency, Paris

Visuals for the press

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My Brain or my Stomach, 2008

Two copies of the book «Existentialism» by John Macquarrie (1976), two panes of Plexiglas, 21 x 24,5 x 1 cm

Private collection, Paris - Courtesy gb agency, Paris



Demonstration, 2008

Performance

© Pratchaya Phinthong - Courtesy gb agency, Paris

Works exhibited

sleeping sickness

Pratchaya Phinthong

Prototype trap

2012

blue fabric, 120 x 120 x 120 cm

© Pratchaya Phinthong

Production: La Criée centre for contemporary arts, Rennes

Images of the tsetse flies traps distributed in Zambia, Ethiopia and Tanzania, sent by local people.

2012

Documents

Production of 500 traps: La Criée centre for contemporary arts, Rennes

Pratchaya Phinthong

Tsetse Eradication Campaign

2012

Video, 24'50'' PAL

Script of a health campaign about sleeping sickness

© Pratchaya Phinthong

Production: Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art

Vichai Malikul

...

2012

drawing, 25,4 cm x 29,2 cm

© Vichai Malikul, Washington D.C / Courtesy Vichai Malikul and Pratchaya Phinthong

Production: Les Ateliers de Rennes - Biennial of Contemporary Art

Biography

Pratchaya Phinthong

Born in 1974

Lives and works in Bangkok (Thailand)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2012

- gb agency, Paris, France
- *sleeping sickness*, La Criée centre d'art contemporain, Rennes, France

2011

- *Give More Than You Take*, GAMeC, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo, Italy

2010

- *The News of the Day, the Problem of the Hours*, University Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Give More Than You Take*, CAC Centre d'art contemporain, Brétigny, France

2009

- *What I learned, I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed*, gb agency, Paris, France

2007

- *if i dig a very deep hole*, gb agency, Paris, France

2005

- *Missing Objects*, Chula Art Museum, Bangkok, Thailand

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GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2012

- *Documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany
- *From an Object's Point of View*, Murray Guy, New York, USA
- *Yoko Ono, Grapefruit*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
- *RetroVer-spective*, VER Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Explorateurs*, Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix des Sables d'Olonne, France
- *Le Mont Fuji n'existe pas*, Le Plateau, Frac Ile-de-France, Paris, France
- *It is what it is. Or is it?*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, USA
- *How to make - Ideen Notationen, Materialisierungen*, Kunsthhaus Dresden, Germany
- *Städtische Galerie für Gegenwartskunst*, Dresden, Germany

2012

- *You are not alone*, Art Aids, BACC Bangkok, Thailand
- *APT7, 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery
- *Gallery of Modern Art*, Brisbane, Australia
- *The Generational*, New Museum Triennial, New York, USA

2011

- *Le Sentiment des choses*, Le Plateau, Frac Ile-de-France, Paris, France
- *Painting...EXPANDED*, Espacio 1414, Porto Rico
- *Until it Makes Sense*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France
- *3 Young Contemporaries: Itineraries*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- gb agency, Art 42 Galleries, Basel, Switzerland
- *How to Work (More for) Less*, Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland.
- *Papier avec lune*, Le Quartier, Quimper, France
- *This is not a Fairly Tale*, Prasarnmirt University Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand

- *Independent*, gb agency, New York, USA

- *Geste serpentine et autres prophéties*, Frac Lorraine, Metz, France

- *How to Work*, Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland

2010

- *Fiac*, Grand Palais, Paris, France
- *Sunday*, gb agency, Ambika 3, London, UK
- *L'exposition lunatique*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France
- *The Living Currency*, Museum of Modern Art, Varsovie, Pologne ; 6th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany
- *Permanent Mimesis, an Exhibition on Realism and Simulation*, GAM, Turin, Italy
- *La Panique du noyau*, ESAB, Brest, France
- *Fair Use: Information Piracy and Creative Commons in Contemporary Art and Design*, Columbia College Glass Curtain Gallery, Chicago, USA

Biography

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GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2009

- *Nord, Nord-Ouest*, gb agency, Paris, France
- *Paper Works*, NICC, Antwerp, Belgium
- *Paper Exhibition*, Artists Space, New York, USA
- *Some Rooms*, Osage Gallery, Hong Kong

2008

- *As Yet Unnamed*, About Cafe, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Reversibility*, The Fair Gallery, Frieze Art Fair, Londres, UK
- 6th Busan Biennale, Busan, South Korea
- *Art Aids*, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

2007

- *The more things change...*, The 5th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival (BEFF 5), Bangkok, Thailand
- *Eternal Frame, Imagining a future at the end of the world*, RedCat gallery, Los Angeles, USA

2006

- *Melting place*, Bangkok University Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Belief*, Singapore Biennial, Singapore
- *Platform*, Queen's gallery, Bangkok, Thailand

2005

- *Petites Compositions entre amis, Séquence 3*, gb agency, Paris, France
- *Just do it*, Lentos Museum, Linz, Autriche

2004

- *Here and Now*, Foundation AARA, About Café, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Rendez-vous 2004*, Musée d'art contemporain, Lyon, France
- *Do you Believe in Reality*, Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan
- *We love Amerika*, Galerie Jan Winkelmann, Berlin, Germany

2003

- *On the Island...*, *The long night of the Museums*, Muenster, Germany

2002

- *Aus*, Exhibition at Frankfurt am Main, Germany

2001

- *Alien Generation 2*, Khonkaen University, Khonkaen, Thailand
- *Alien Generation*, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

2000

- *Social Grace*, Bangkok University, Bangkok, Thailand

1999

- *Grounding, Photographs by Young Emerging Artist*, About Café, Bangkok, Thailand
- *Cities On the Move, Film City project*, curator Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

1998

- *Clean up Project, with Surasi Kusolwong in Book project*, Kurusapa Building, Bangkok, Thailand

1997

- *18 Crowns*, Hamrock Café, Bangkok, Thailand

Bibliography

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CATALOGS

Pratchaya Phinthong - The News of the Day, the Problem of the Hours, Bangkok : University Gallery, 2011

How to Work (more for) Less, Bâle : Kunsthalle, 2011

Geste serpentine et autres prophéties, Metz : Frac Lorraine, 2011

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ARTICLES (selection)

Lynda Yablonsky, «The Loveable &Ungovernables'»; in *The New York Times*, 19 février 2012

Barbara Casavecchia, «Luxury consumption and low-cost production; labour, exchange, weight and money», in *Frieze Magazine*, n°143, novembre-décembre 2011

Gabriele Francesco Sassone, «Pratchaya Phinthong, Mi fido di tel!», in *Flash Art*, n° 295, juillet-août-septembre 2011

Vincenzo Latronico, «Eldorado: Pratchaya Phinthong», in *Art-Domus*, juillet 2011

Monica Lombardi, «Pratchaya Phinthong / Give More Than You Take», in *2DM / The Blogazine*, juin 2010

Alessandro Rabottini, «Where Everything Flows», in *Kaleidoscope*, novembre-décembre 2010

Raimundas Malasauskas, «Pratchaya Phinthong» in *Mousse Magazine*, novembre-décembre 2010

Alessandro Rabottini, in *Frieze Magazine*, n°128, janvier-février 2010

Vivian Rehberg, «Pratchaya Phinthong, gb agency, Paris», in *Art in America*, novembre 2009

Pierre Bal-Blanc, «Pratchaya Phinthong, gb agency, Paris», in *Flash Art International*, n°268, octobre 2009

«Les paranoïas de Pratchaya Phinthong», in *Le Journal des Arts*, n°309, septembre-octobre 2009

Dominic Eichler, «Travels with an Artist», in *Frieze Magazine*, n°116, juin-août 2008

Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy, «Pratchaya Phinthong + Danh Vo», in *Modern Painters*, décembre 2008-janvier 2009

Daniel Birnbaum, «Sampling the Globe», in *Artforum*, octobre 2004

Text :

Judha Suwanmongkol, «Sickness, phantoms, and DOG-umenta»,
in *Bangkok Post*, 6 juin 2012

Bangkok Post The world's window on Thailand

Sickness, phantoms, and DOG-umenta

FOUR THAI ARTISTS PARTICIPATE IN THE LATEST EDITION OF dOCUMENTA, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS ARTSHOWS CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE IN GERMANY

Published: 13/06/2012 at 09:52 PM

Newspaper section: [Life](#)

As if in the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the kiss of art has transformed the German town of Kassel into a living being. The dOCUMENTA (13) exhibition, orchestrated by director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, opened on June 9 and marked a return of the intellectually challenging festival that is a beacon of contemporary art which takes place once every five years.



The Importance Of Telepathy, the five-metre-tall sculpture by Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Chai Siri at dOCUMENTA (13).

This time, the show was even bigger compared to the previous editions; the baroque Karlssau park in Kassel is a new venue where small wooden houses and the latest installations by international artists play against the backdrop of a river, large trees, animals, and rows of mythological sculptures.

Four leading Thai artists have been invited to participate in the event that brings together 150 artists from 55 countries _ Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Chai Siri, and Prachaya Phinthong.

Text :

Judha Suwanmongkol, «Sickness, phantoms, and DOG-umenta»,
in *Bangkok Post*, 6 juin 2012

Each of them last week unveiled their latest works _ conceptual, teasing, provocative _ to the scrutiny of the crowd and art critics who gathered from around the world.

Representing Thailand, the quartet, luckily enough, aren't trapped in a mindset to present or interpret the so-called "Thai identity" _ that's the job of a beauty queen. Instead, Araya, Apichatpong and Prachaya invite us to break the frozen sea of perception; their depiction of what we may call "normal abnormality" touches the audience both through its objectivity and its content.

Conceptual maverick Prachaya Phinthong presents two sleeping (and hugging) tsetse flies on a white plinth underneath a thick cube glass cover _ he calls it Sleeping Sickness (2012). This is a piece with a quasi-anthropological framework based on the artist's research in Africa, particularly in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zambia. Prachaya's work is a process of experimental research which blurs the borders between art and real life.

The tsetse flies _ a species found in the Saharan Africa _ are literally sleeping as well as metaphorically referring to the "sleeping sickness", the malady caused by those slumbering insects that sometimes ravages the people of the Dark Continent.

Yet art leaves audiences alone sometimes, especially when art leaves a massive unknown/unseen experience.

Two sleeping tsetse flies give no clues, on the other hand, and they allow excessive and endless interpretation _ the work doesn't speak for itself unless it is nurtured by the text on the wall.

Is visual art not sufficient? Or can't visual language work on its own? The question of visual and textual language is still relevant, especially since most of the works are in Fridericianum Museum where most of the exhibited pieces still rely on the visitors to "read" the text more than just "see" them.

The Karlsruhe Park offers a different personality from the Fridericianum _ a grand white cube as well as a form of institutionalisation. The open space of the park stretches the possibility of art and, at the same time, requires our ability to interact with the environment as we walk around taking in the pieces.

Can the enormous white ghost titled The Importance Of Telepathy, a sculpture co-created by Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Chai Siri, take us to achieve this plain of consciousness? The 5m-high ghost figure in white contrasts with the green grass and dark forest. It attracts all passers-by _ the invisibility of phantoms has been solidified into a towering figure.

Many of Apichatpong's works _ he's best known as a film-maker with an experimental edge _ concern mythical stories and the elusive existence of spirits, which he has tried to visualise in film. He does that through sculpture this time.

"Film is transient, an illusion. The belief of phantoms I have is very concrete, so I solidified it. It may be seen as a haunting object," said Apichatpong.

It would be dull to simply see a solid and touchable ghost standing in the forest. The telepathic power of The Importance Of Telepathy extends to the surrounding 20m radius, as 150 baked-clay wind chimes are hung randomly and invisibly on nearby trees. Only their lovely sound drifting through the wind amplifies the visual impact of the white ghost we confront.

It is a paradoxical moment: people cannot see but hear visible objects, while an invisible object becomes so massively clear in front of our eyes. As well as chimes, 30 army hammocks are tied with the trees waiting to be occupied by the audience. Chai Siri added: "It's about the story of our home, so we brought the voice from there. Chimes are replicas of dolphins' bells we have at home. Army hammocks as well, we wanted to simulate a cinema atmosphere where people can dream and release their imagination."

The installation is successful in terms of visual art.

The mythical object at the heart of the Baroque Karlsruhe park is entirely amusing to people. It is also compatible with the white statues we see in the park, or the marble sculptors in the Orangerie, or even a reminiscence of the dark forest in Brothers Grimm tales _ all stories are implicitly woven together.

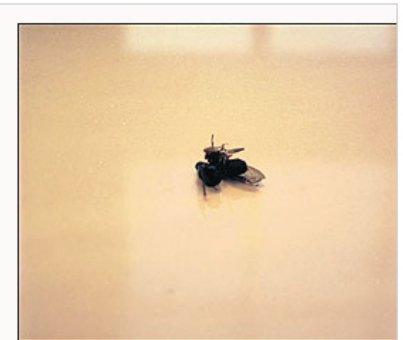
Looking beyond the artistic content, Apichatpong said: "I want people to reflect on the political atmosphere in Thailand, where things are made invisible and immaterialised. Victims of political violence abound, and we have a lot of ghosts in Thailand. We've been living with ghosts."

Not far from the phantom there's a house. The isolated structure with 3m-tall white fences under the shade of big trees is the place where Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook will be staying with her black dog, named Ngab, until the end of June.

This is Araya's exhibition, and it's called: Village and Elsewhere: In This Circumstance the Sole Object of Attention Should be the Treachery of the Moon.

The house is locked, thus people can only observe from the outside _ they curiously peer through the high fence, inside the white-haired woman and her black dog live.

Asking for donation for stray dogs in Thailand is part of this work; it is called DOG-umenta. It's a mockery of the name of the grand art festival as well as a parody of the strict



Prachaya Phinthong's work features two African flies in a glass box.

Text :

Judha Suwanmongkol, «Sickness, phantoms, and DOG-umenta»,
in *Bangkok Post*, 6 juin 2012

Asking for donation for stray dogs in Thailand is part of this work; it is called DOG-umenta. It's a mockery of the name of the grand art festival as well as a parody of the strict manner of being in the high-art status. Araya _ a lecturer at Chiang Mai University and a unique conceptual artist who once read poetry to corpses in her study of death and flesh _ is well-known as an ardent dog lover, and this time she recruits one of her pets as part of the show.

Two boxes are placed on the front and right side of the house, and there are two video installations attached on each side of the wall. The donation is substantial so far _ the hilarious question comes when people ask if they're donating for stray dogs in general or a dog in the work of art. The question needs no exact answer, the charm when life interacts with art is that the message can be unclear yet funny.

One afternoon Araya stepped out of her white-fenced house to ask for a donation for stray dogs at Fridericianum Museum, and her action inspired mixed feelings. The purpose, however, is not at all money, but confrontation, and her act was interpreted according to individuals' perception.

"No private space entirely separates from the public one," she said.

DOCUMENTA is an event created in the post-war period of bustling modern art movements, and due to the lengthy gap between each edition _ five years _ sometimes it's referred, quite crudely, as the Olympics of Art.

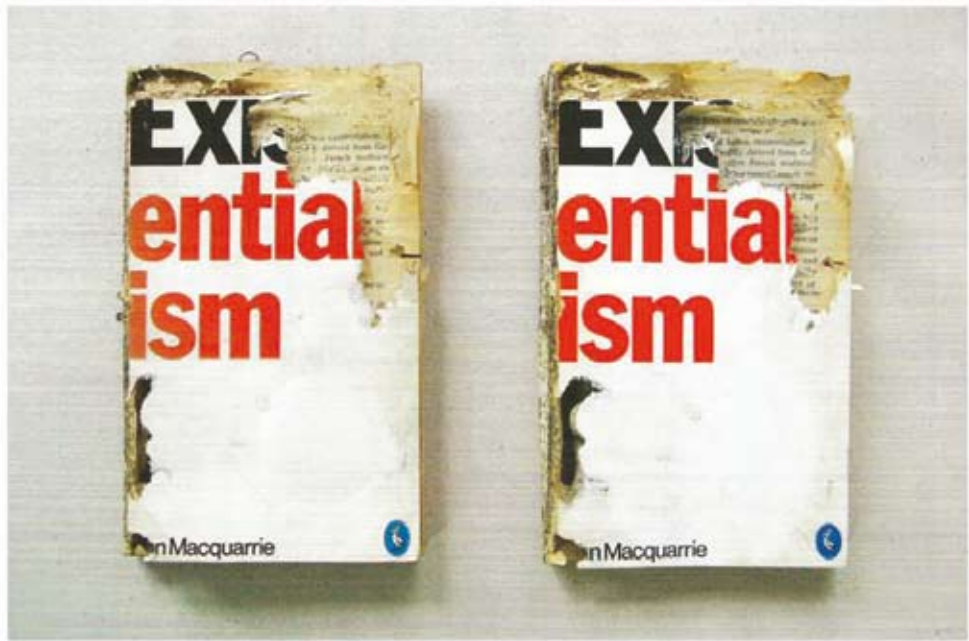
The participation of Thai artists signifies the importance of the Thai art scene in the flowing currents of the world's artistic activities, and as Apichatpong's ghost, Araya's dog and Prachaya's flies greet the international visitors, it's time to make sure that Thailand doesn't suffer from the sleeping sickness that sometimes plagues our own art world.



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's installation work is a fenced house in which the artist lives with her dog. PHOTOS: JUDHA SUWANMONGKOL

Text :

Barbara Casavecchia, «Pratchaya Phinthong : Luxury consumption and low-cost production; labour, exchange, weight and money», in *Frieze Magazine*, n°143, nov.- dec. 2011



Text :

Barbara Casavecchia, «Pratchaya Phinthong : Luxury consumption and low-cost production; labour, exchange, weight and money», in *Frieze Magazine*, n°143, nov.- dec. 2011

Pratchaya Phinthong Luxury consumption and low-cost production; labour, exchange, weight and money by Barbara Casavecchia

Pratchaya Phinthong lives and works in Bangkok, Thailand. Recent solo shows include the two-part exhibition 'give more than you take' at the Centre d'art contemporain, Brétigny, France, in 2010, and this year at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo, Italy, and 'The News of the Day, the Problem of the Hours' at the University Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand. He will have an exhibition next year at gh agency, Paris, France.

In the wake of the economic crisis and cuts to public funding, the art world is increasingly polarized between high-profile luxury consumption and low-cost intellectual production. This divergence has made the distressed relationship between art works and art jobs the focus of critical scrutiny.

In a recent group show at Kunsthalle Basel entitled 'How to Work' - a title tellingly changed at the request of participating artist Adrianna Lara into 'How to Work (More) for Less' during the second phase of the exhibition - Thai artist Pratchaya Phinthong contributed a timely commentary on Fischli/Weiss's *How to Work Better* (1991). In 1990, the Swiss duo had come across a list of ten 'commandments' in both English and Thai, hung on the wall of a pottery workshop in Thailand (starting with '1: Do one thing at a time' and ending with '10: Smile'). They then reproduced the English version on the façade of an office building in Zurich. In Basel, Phinthong installed a sheet of one-way glass in the door that usually shields the

Kunsthalle's library from view from the gallery space; through the glass, visitors could peep at the original photo of the list taken by the Swiss duo. The installation was a visual reminder that what usually remains invisible in these kinds of transfers is not only the original language version, but also who produces many of the things we consume, contemporary art included.

Another work by Phinthong on show in Basel, *An Average Thai Berry Picker's Income* (2010) 2,513 Swedish krona (about £240), framed and presented in an orderly grid of notes and coins - is part of the project 'give more than you take', developed by the artist during 2010 and 2011 at the Centre d'art contemporain in Brétigny and the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bergamo. Instead of participating in a residency he had been granted in Paris, Phinthong (who graduated in 2004 from Frankfurt's Siedelschule, where he studied under Tobias Rehberger) decided to travel to northern Sweden and join a group of seasonal Thai workers hired to pick berries and paid in accordance with the amount of fruit collected. He sent a daily text message to curator Pierre Bal-Blanc in Brétigny informing him of the number of kilos he had collected and asking him 'to organize a collection of useless objects, waste, recycling or leftover items' in the exhibition space each day to match the weight of berries he had picked. After two months, this had accumulated to 549 kilos. Phinthong was paid 8,000 Swedish krona, but after deductions for petrol and food, he was left with only 2,513 krona.

While he was away, Phinthong didn't leave any instructions about how to install and display the objects. When the exhibition travelled to Bergamo, curator Alessandro Rabottini was afforded the same freedom as

Opposite page:
my brain or my stomach
2008
Two copies of the book:
Existentialism by John
Macquarrie, 1976
(front and back views)
Each: 21 x 28 cm

Below left: *Tof ter sveden
meat thung mor-chit*, 2011
549 kg of soil prepared by
Alessandro Rabottini

Below right: *Allmanarätten*
(The Right to Public Access)
2011, wooden tower
rearranged by Alessandro
Rabottini
Installation views from
'give more than you take'
GAMeC, Bergamo, 2011

Bal-Blanc. As a result, the 'translation' of the work into different visual and formal currencies produced two dissimilar equivalents: in Paris the accumulation was cool, bulky and hard-edged, while in Bergamo the use of fresh earth from an area of the museum still under construction, and the transcription of the initial email exchange in handwriting along the walls, gave the piece a softer, narrative edge. Both curators were forced to draw from their own 'aesthetic capital' and assume the less comfortable role of artistic producers vis-à-vis their audience.

Phinthong's use of money as a conceptual tool to produce art work echoes Lawrence Weiner's famous *Declaration of Intent* (1968):

- 1) The artist may construct the piece.
 - 2) The piece may be fabricated.
 - 3) The piece need not be built.
- Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

But Phinthong's approach also calls attention to the wider (dare one say) existential issues involved. Another of his pieces consists of two identical copies of Scottish philosopher John Macquarrie's book *Existentialism* (1976): one was partly eaten by termites, which Phinthong replicated in the other edition, down to every hole and ripped corner. Indeed, even in the art world, the labour involved sometimes can be reduced to the choice between - as the title of the work suggests - *my brain or my stomach* (2008).



Text :

Alessandro Rabottini, «Pratchaya Phinthong : When Everything Flows»,
in *Kaleidoscope*, November-December 2010

HIGHLIGHTS: PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG



WHEN EVERYTHING FLOWS



Embodied in the forms of travel, process, and exchange, the work of Thai artist PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG speaks eloquently to the dematerialization of human existence today. The first thing to dissolve: the artist's role and responsibility.

words by
ALESSANDRO
RABOTTINI

Text :

Alessandro Rabottini, «Pratchaya Phinthong : When Everything Flows»,
in *Kaleidoscope*, November-December 2010

HIGHLIGHTS: PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG

Pratchaya Phinthong is an alchemist of economic value and social functions. In the work of this Thai artist, born in 1974, financial fluctuations, media alarmism, and the world labor market are transferred into matter as it transforms from solid to liquid to gaseous states, and then back again. Perhaps, however, it would be better to describe Pratchaya Phinthong as a trader who operates according to a logic opposite to that of profit, and who deals in cultural and value systems, trafficking in everyday meanings, hopes, and troubles. Phinthong accepts the perpetual transformation of forms and politics, of existence and daily life, poetically transferring the metaphor of fluctuation in currency values to various areas of human action. But if we start out from the premise that economic value is the most abstract of forces known to humanity—and, at the same time, the most concrete and painfully influential—then it becomes easier to understand the dialectics of materialization and dematerialization upon which Phinthong's artistic practice is founded.



ARTIST'S BIO

PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG (b. 1974) lives and works in Bangkok, Thailand. He has had two solo gallery exhibitions at gb agency, Paris, as well as a museum presentation at Chula Art Museum, Bangkok.

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG's most ambitious project to date is a solo exhibition organized in collaboration with the CAC Brétigny, where it will be held from December to February, and the GAMEC in Bergamo, where it will open next June.

In his second solo exhibition at the Parisian gallery gb agency in 2009, the artist showed two works springing from this dialectic and based on a reciprocal relationship of disappearance and accumulation. The first, titled *2017 (2009)*, was presented as a wall painting. For the piece, Phinthong downloaded a text from a website devoted to conspiracy theory, and then transferred it onto the gallery's wall using an ink that was designed to vanish over time. The words of the text oscillated between paranoid reflections, the prediction of a catastrophic future, and religious delusion, in a confused account of an imminent and inevitable end of the world resulting from a collision between the Earth and a heavenly body. Just like spoofs in the media, once their place has been taken by a more compelling, idiotic, or tragic piece of news, the text was destined to gradually disappear as the ink was gradually absorbed into the wall.

Conversely, the pile of banknotes that formed the second work on display (*What I learned I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed*, 2009) grew over the weeks. This small heap of banknotes—a floor sculpture measuring one square meter, set directly on the ground—was made by stacking wads of Zimbabwean dollars, a currency that over the years has undergone such hyperinflation that it has been shut out of the international currency market. Exchanging the sum of five thousand euros for its equivalent in Zimbabwean dollars and using them to create a minimal form out of nearly worthless paper, Phinthong erected

Text :

Alessandro Rabottini, «Pratchaya Phinthong : When Everything Flows»,
in *Kaleidoscope*, November-December 2010

HIGHLIGHTS: PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG



Give more than you take, 2010 - ongoing
All photos: Pratchaya Phinthong
Co-production: CAC Brétigny / GAMEC, Bergamo
Courtesy: the artist and gb agency, Paris

an anti-monument to financial growth, creating a black hole into which the symbolic violence and arbitrariness of value itself could be collapsed.

If capitalism has been the ideology of the endless and exponential transformation of nature and materials by humanity, today's dominant neoliberal ideology seems to have taken the boundlessness of this act of transformation into an extreme realm of abstraction and immateriality, an extra-national territory that answers only to its own laws—just as in the best tradition of abstract art—where capital is revealed for what it is: a hypertrophied and imponderable force.

Time, as the main gradient of this form of alchemy, in which politics, imagination, paradox, and reality merge, appears at the heart of the most ambitious project carried out so far by the artist, *Give more than you take* (ongoing), which will be at the center of his upcoming solo exhibition, organized in collaboration with the CAC Brétigny, where it will open in December 2010, and the GAMEC in Bergamo, to which it will travel in June 2011. Phinthong's work is generally based on the artist's personal experience of reality—in the form of travel, process, and exchange—which is then pared to the bone in a space of poetic imagination. In this project, his representation of that experience becomes more complex, embracing an extension over time that includes the process preceding the exhibition and that unfolds into the realms of global economics and everyday life. After learning from local and international media that a large number of Thai peasants travel to Sweden in the summer to pick wild berries, facing exploitative work conditions and pay so low that many do not even earn enough to pay off their original airline ticket to Sweden, the artist decided to spend a month and a half living and working alongside the workers in the Swedish part of Lapland. But what might sound like the fundamentals of an ordinary journalistic exposé instead serves as the starting point of a project that presents the exchange of money and workforce, and the market of individual stories and collective hopes, as part of a process of transformation, sublimation, and formalization. At the end of each work day, Phinthong calculated the weight of wild berries he had managed to pick. In turn, he asked the director of the CAC Brétigny, Pierre Bal-Blanc, to collect an equivalent weight in useless objects, destined to be forgotten or thrown away, and pile them in the exhibition rooms.



AUTHOR

ALESSANDRO RABOTTINI is an art critic and Chief Curator at the GAMEC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bergamo, Italy, where he recently curated solo exhibitions of works by Sterling Ruby, Tris Vonna-Michell, Victor Man, and Aaron Curry.

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Ultimately, a total of nearly six hundred kilos of castoff things accumulated. Between the two loci of the project, a dialectic was established between the functional character of individual labor, which vanishes into the vortex of profit, and the alienation of use in the form of a graveyard of objects that have lost their function. We are confronted, on the one hand, with those the dissolution of laborers' identity in work, and on the other, with a heap of things that have been saved from dissolution, in a gesture that attempts to symbolically compensate for the loss inhering in the former.

But there is another form of disappearance at play here: that of the artist as a composer of forms. Phinthong asked the curators of both exhibitions to decide for themselves how to display the objects collected over many days, arranging them in the space as they wish, without consulting him. While this might appear to be an act of negation and deprecation, in actuality Phinthong is confronting us with yet another transposition: not just of materials and symbolic functions, as we have just seen, but of responsibility—from the artist to the curator—which subtracts from these objects their value as mementos, testimonies, or fetishes in order to set them free in the space of the viewer's experience.

This gesture of deferring the artist's role and responsibility is matched in the exhibitions by an additional gesture of spatial displacement and direct appropriation on the part of the artist. One night, Pratchaya Phinthong dismantled a control tower used to oversee the work of the pickers and sent it to Brétigny where, once again, the responsibility rested with Bal-Blanc to determine its place in the exhibition. The control tower, erected in Brétigny, will resemble a stage set inside of which the multitudes of anonymous workers move like the extras in an epic of invisibility, control, and possession. An epic, recorded in minimal and immaterial form through the images that appear in this report, makes up the third and last work in the exhibition, a website that will exist only in the interval between the two phases of the installation in Brétigny and GAMeC, and will vanish afterward. But, just as with the ink of the text of *2017*, which disappears from sight as it seeps into the architecture, the virtual space of this website will be inscribed in the memory of the Internet as a remnant even after it is no longer available for consultation. There it will remain, like a ghost in the search engines, in the continually rewritten memory of the world. ◇

Text :

Vivian Rehberg, «Pratchaya Phinthong»,
in *Art in America*, November 2009

INTERNATIONAL

PARIS PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG GB AGENCY

For his second solo exhibition in Paris, Thai artist Pratchaya Phinthong pursued his quest to materialize things both elu-

sive and ephemeral in three concise new works (all 2009). Sitting on the main gallery floor, *What I learned I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed* is a square, multicolor patchwork of loosely stacked bricks of Zimbabwean dollars that, from afar, is reminiscent of Minimalist sculpture. To construct this piece Phinthong set up a network of exchange between the Paris gallery and residents of Zimbabwe, to whom he sent 5,000 euros earned from the prior sale of his artworks. In return, over the duration of the show, Phinthong received random denominations of Zimbabwean currency, including single bills that are "worth" trillions of ZWD, a sum rendered meaningless by that nation's spectacular level of inflation and financial ruin. Gift-giving and mutual trust lie at the heart of this work, whose very existence depends on the goodwill of the senders and reliability of the exchange circuits arranged between the sites.

The effects of time are integral to Phinthong's process. While the stack of worthless paper accrued status as art week by week, gaining both symbolic and market value, a large circular wall text in the neighboring space, printed with black disappearing ink, faded out of view by the end of the show. Titled *2017*, this increasingly illegible work reproduced an Internet conspiracy theory, which revolves around the man-made collision of molecular particles and the imminent crash of Earth and an unnamed planet the size of the United States and China combined. The text concluded on the hopeful note that Buddha will save us.



Pratchaya Phinthong: *What I learned I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed*, 2009, Zimbabwean dollar banknotes, approx. 39 1/4 inches square; at gb agency.

In straightforward thematic relationship, four color photographs of small, gleaming fragments of meteorites nestled in dark grass were hung directly opposite the text. Shot from above and centered in the composition, the fragments' edges demarcate the ground like the borders of uncertain topographies. Cerulean skies with feathery white clouds are crisply reflected in their smooth mirrored surfaces. The unreal clarity of the reflection collapses depth and distance in these powerfully disorienting images, in which the sky seems to have fallen into a very deep hole. Phinthong's conceptual approach relies on the contemporary leit-motifs (in art as in society) of rumor, loss, secrets, social exchange, bankruptcy and doubt. Like many of his artist peers, Phinthong seems fascinated by enigmas, but he approaches his disparate subjects from a distinctively ethico-poetical stance.

—Vivian Rehberg

Visiting information

ADDRESS & OPENING HOURS

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FREE ADMISSION

from Tuesday to Friday 12noon-7pm
Saturday and Sunday 2pm-7pm
closed on Mondays and public holidays
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VISITS

INDIVIDUAL

A «visitor document» explaining the exhibition is at your disposal in the art center. Visitor assistants from La Criée are very pleased to answer to your questions and talk about exhibitions.

GROUPS

Groups are welcomed to visit La Criée either freely or with our Visitor Service professional. Only upon reservation - From Tuesday to Friday :
Children : from 10am to 12noon
Adults : from 2pm to 6pm

Information and reservation:

Visitors Service

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