



Natee Utarit

DREAMS, HOPE AND PERFECTION

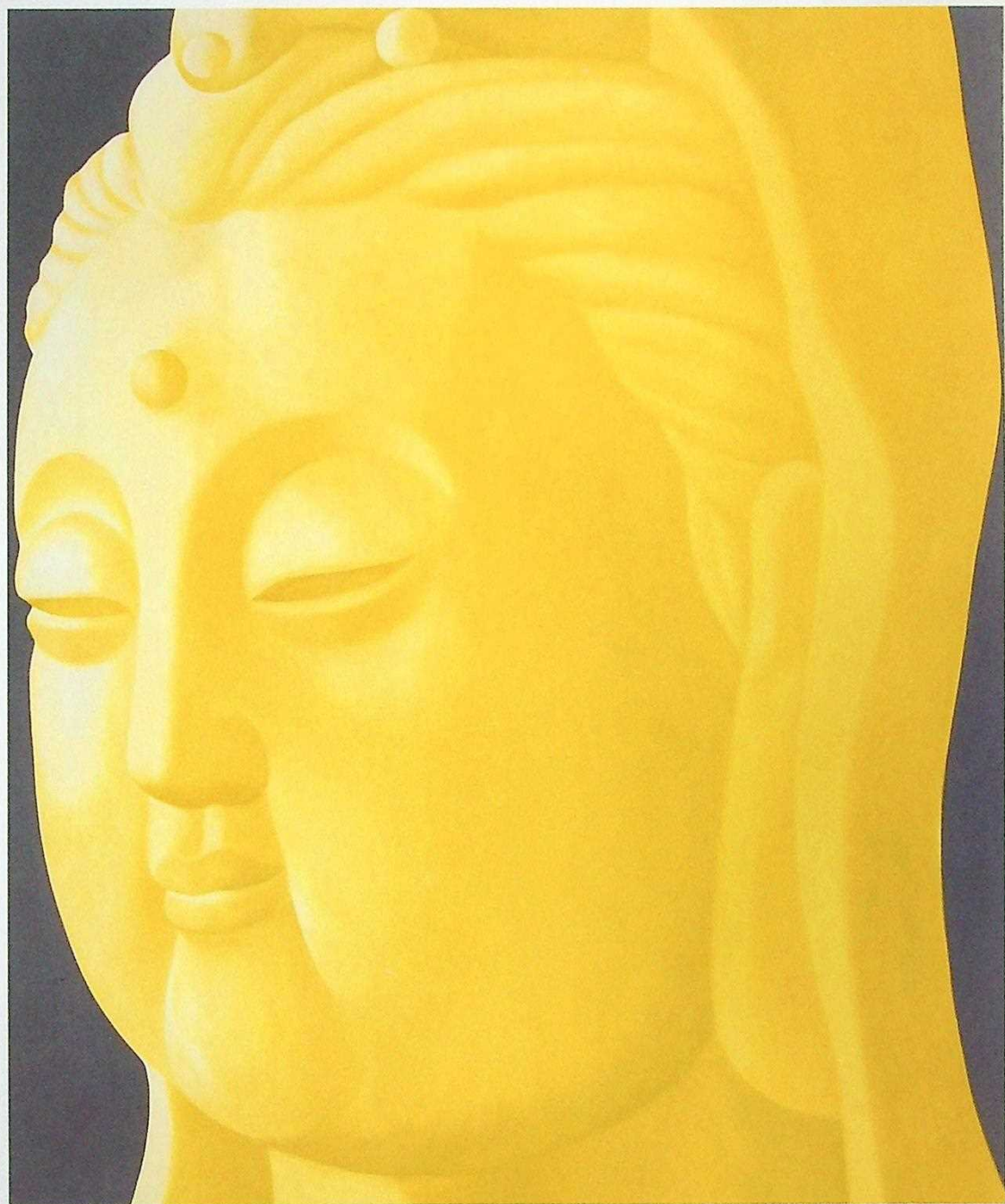
Natee Utarit

DREAMS, HOPE AND PERFECTION

new paintings and prints

monday

2008
Oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm



velvet lamb

2008
Oil on canvas
120 x 105 cm





dream, hope, perfection

2008
Oil on canvas
104 x 122 cm x 3





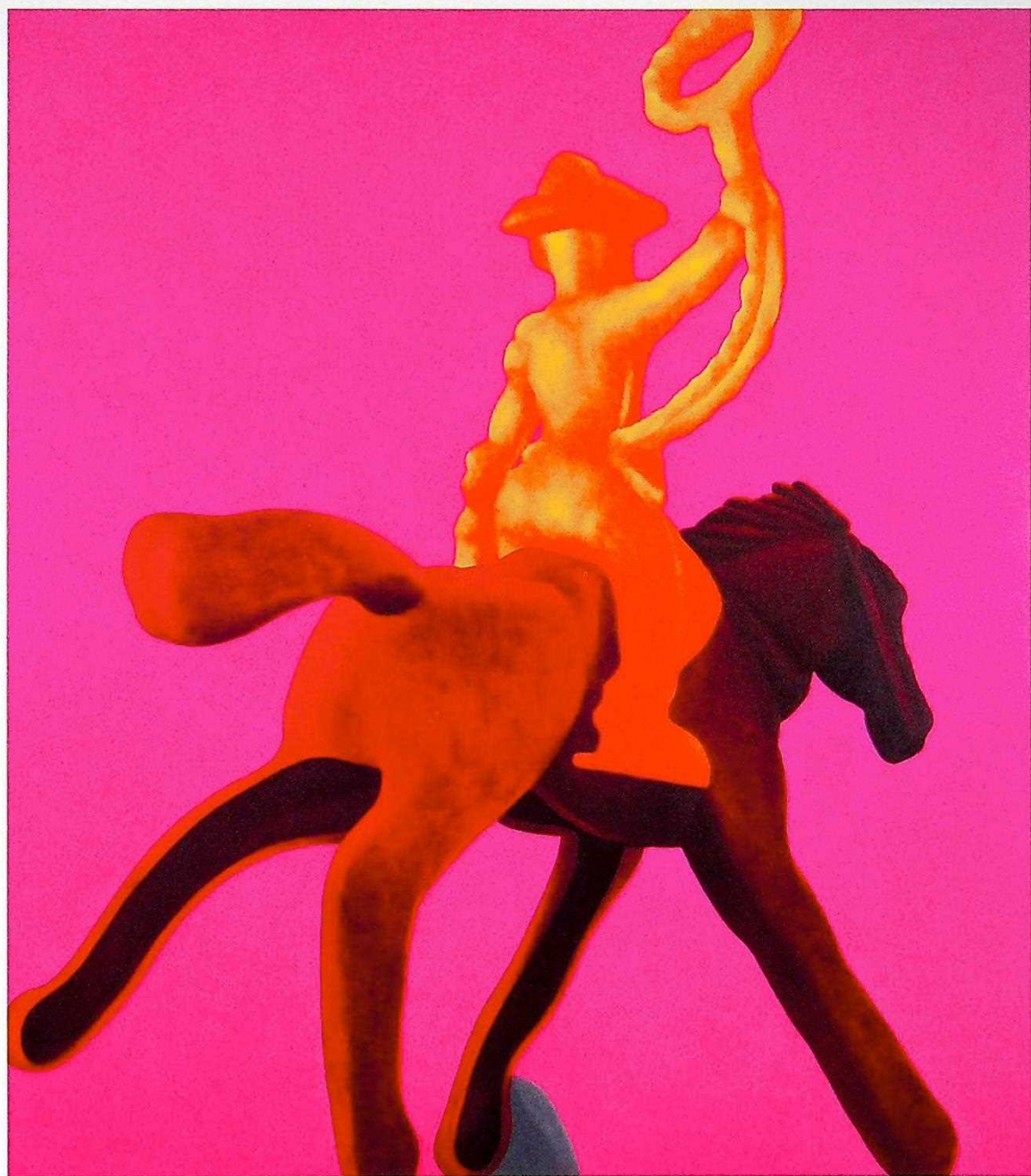
the american

2008
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm



viva colonialism

2008
Oil on canvas
120 x 105 cm



the ball of greed and illusion 1

2008
Oil on canvas
180 x 160 cm



the ball of greed and illusion 2

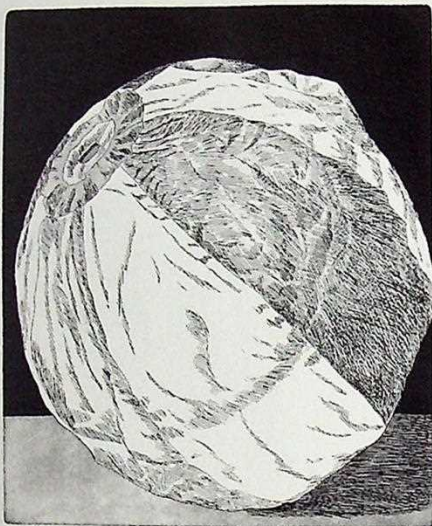
2008
Oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm



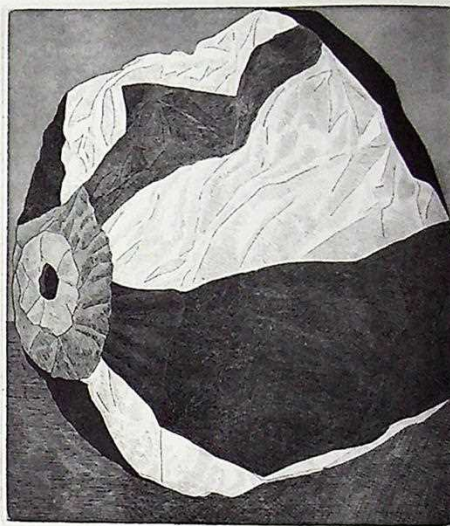
the ball of greed and illusion 3

2008
Oil on canvas
170 x 140 cm





Paper Ball
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 17.8 x 14.7 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



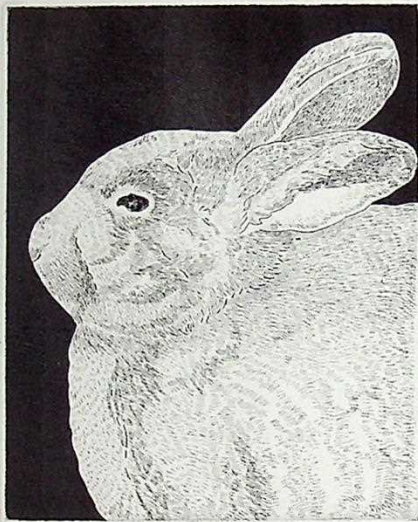
Paper Ball 2
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 20.7 x 18.2 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



Angel
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 18.3 x 15 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



The Western
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 18.5 x 14.5 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



Rabbit
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 18.3 x 15 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



Flower
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 20.2 x 18 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



Skeletal
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 18.3 x 14.5 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



Skeletal 2
2008
Etching, printed on Reina Velin paper
Image size: 18.3 x 15 cm
Paper size: 32 x 26 cm



AP 1/5

Mark York

The Flag
2008
Etching, printed on BFK paper
Image size: 20.5 x 29.4 cm
Paper size: 38 x 56 cm

Dreams, Hope and Perfection

An interview with Natee Utarit
by Beverly Yong

Beverly Yong: The paintings and prints in this exhibition are part of a larger body of works first shown in "The Amusement of Dreams, Hope and Perfection" (Chulalongkorn University Art Center, Bangkok, 2007). Could you explain how and when you came to the idea for this body of work, what inspired it?

Natee Utarit: Since 1999, I have been interested in the language of pictures and to explore the grammar of painting. Between 2000 and 2006, I was trying to find and develop ways to present my own pictorial language through many different subjects.

My last show at the Art Center presented a kind of picture I was interested in and wanted to transfer to my painting. I got some inspiration for the painting style from old prints, photographs and graphic design from the 60s and 70s. (You can find this same sensibility in my small painting series entitled "Kyotek Sae-Wu's 12 photographs during 1969-1973").

At the same time, I had also collected a lot of 1950s Thai children's text books from rare bookshops. The ideas for all my paintings from 2006 to 2007 have come from here. When I wanted to talk about social and cultural problems in Thailand, this pictorial language seemed perfect to represent my subject to the Thai audience.

My work is always constructed beginning with questions and possibilities of style. Here are some examples of questions that relate to the object and "style" in these works:

- The image of the Thai flag was a popular subject in children's books. Why?
- The Metropolitan Art Museum (Met) shopping bag is totally disconnected from the Asian art scene. There are a lot of "The Met" shops in Asia but no museum - what is the meaning of this?

By looking at such examples, I have found that many objects have their own peculiar significance. I just select such objects to use as the medium between my subject and the audience's experience.

It has often been pointed out that you work on very discrete series or "projects" in terms of subject, or even "style". Would you say that you deliberately avoid being associated with a particular style or subject? Why would this be? Would you say there are any particular ideas or concerns that bring together all these different approaches?

All my works are rooted in the same concept, presented as different variables of the possibilities of painting. I believe that there are more than 10,000 ways to paint a good image that communicates well.

A lot of people think I have many ideas but am not stable in style and concept.

In fact, there are many differences between the word "content", or "subject", and "concept". People always think that content and concept are the same thing.

The subject matter can change with time and experience. The style can change according to function. But not concept, the concept is something stable and should not change.

Glass, for example, is a stable concept, whether it has a geometric or organic form, or the fanciful shape of Micky Mouse or Winnie the Pooh. Because you know what glass is, you understand that the form of the glass is the content and the function of glass is the concept. So, we would see that function of glass never changes, unlike its form.

That is the reason why I have used a variation of styles to express my concept – it gives me flexibility.

Much of your painting, in my mind, has explored ideas about truth and beauty, but also culture and memory. Here in Kuala Lumpur, we have seen works from the Reason and Monsters project (Recent Paintings, 2003), and also the exhibition The Fragment and The Sublime (2006). Both these exhibitions held elements of still life and landscape, using Western classical imagery. For me, both series address in different ways the difficulty of beauty, and the problem of art, specifically painting, and their cultural context. How does your new body of work link to such previous projects?

My paintings from 1999 to 2006 tried to question of the truth of painting and explore some hypothesis of western aesthetics in the Thai cultural context. Since late 2006 (during the Kyotek series), I began to think back about myself in my own context with such questions in mind.

My sense of memory and the past led me to the mythification of western civilization in the Asian context, which you can see in The Fragment and The Sublime paintings (2006). Working from the same idea, I have added three new elements in the new paintings. First, a sense of the past, and childhood, in my reference to antique prints and toys; secondly, myths in Thai culture; and finally, Western influence in Thai (and world) history.

For me, these new works seem very different from previous projects in that they appear to make a statement, with a strong political undercurrent. The symbolism of the objects you choose is also much more loaded, and overt, than in earlier paintings, where we are often left guessing at the significance of the subjects depicted. Would you say this “political” element is new, and how would you describe the “politics” of your painting? How do you reconcile your concerns with truth and beauty, for example, with the political motivation of these works?

Everybody thinks that my work is heading in a political direction because one of my paintings is entitled “The Micro History of Politics”. While the term “*micro history*” comes from a text by Nietzsche, and George Orwell’s Animal Farm is an important reference for this painting, seeming to underline a political significance, the painting does not describe a political problem only. I still want the painting to talk about other relationships, besides the political, such as the conflict between myth and truth.

Another “new” aspect is the obvious “Thai-ness” in many of the works, especially in the first exhibition in Bangkok – the Thai flag, images of Buddha, Thai script, the statue of Rama IX. Previously, you have avoided such straightforward references to Thai culture. The cultural “tension” or focus has tended to be with Western culture and art history. Why this change?

I would like to think of it as a new stage of development. Every series I have made so far has referred to Western culture and imagery. I have tried to omit Thai-ness for a long time because I’ve never known what was truly Thai in the cultural sense.

What is Thai style?.....Temple?

What is a Thai symbol?.....Lotus?

These represent Thai-ness from a Western viewpoint which Thais (and Asians) have also adopted.

I have thought about this topic seriously and have tried looking back at history. The question of western aesthetics made me investigate ideas of real Thai identity, and the fake Thai identity propagated by the government. I found that the West has had a strong influence, and may have been a cause of cultural tension from a hundred years ago till the present.

Could you describe how you see and approach the cultural and artistic relationship between East and West?

In the context of contemporary art, I believe in an intellectual foundation more than established styles from east or west. I cannot find the real border between the both of them. When we talk about the East, we usually refer to the spirit of China or Japan (how about Laos or the Philippines?). And with the West, we mean England or America only (as in the case of popular music).

I think a lot of artists try to project their national identity in their work because they think it is the one thing that makes their art relevant. I agree that it can seem important in certain contexts, like the Asian art scene now. But, in my mind, I do not like this thinking. Perhaps I am wrong, but can you imagine when western (and also Asian) curators come to my country and try to pick "Somtam" or "Tomyam" or stereotypes like that only?.....I have never liked that.

So to answer your question, I don't try to approach the East-West relationship. I let the content construct the sentences of my paintings by not trying to keep to a Thai or create a new Western sensibility.

The paintings in this particular exhibition in Kuala Lumpur seem to address a slightly different context from the first show in Bangkok. How do they differ and why? Could you tell me something about the ideas behind the different images in this particular exhibition – some have very strong titles, like Ball of Greed and Illusion, or Viva Colonialism?

In the Art Centre show, there were two parts to the exhibition space because I wanted to separate the content into two "layers". The first layer was aimed at an audience with an understanding of the Thai context and the second presented a wider range of subjects. For example The Met bag – here I'm talking about the strange condition of Asian art in the capitalistic climate of the past five years.

You mean the regional art "boom", I suppose. If I understand correctly, The Met bag can be seen to represent a situation where the desirability of an object, or the image of an object, supersedes any other prior significance. Like a glamorous paper bag that stands for "art", but whose main attraction is in the label... In Singapore and Bangkok, the public can only access The Met shop and its merchandise, but not the museum itself or its collection in New York – it seems strange to you that a museum would make such a "label" a product and export it.

Yes. In this exhibition, The Ball of Greed and Illusion addresses similar concerns. I also look at colonialism. Colonialism began in Europe. I think most people know what colonialism is. How does it operate today? Can you see the contemporary colonisation of Asian Art?



Soldier
2008
Etching, printed on BFK paper
Image size: 20 x 16 cm
Paper size: 38 x 56 cm

Artist's biography

NATEE UTARIT

b. 1970 in Bangkok, Thailand.
Lives and works in Bangkok.

Solo Exhibitions

2007

The Amusement of Dreams, Hope and Perfection, The Art Center, Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.
The Amusement of Dreams, Hope and Perfection, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

2006

Kyotek Sae-Wu's 12 photographs during 1969-1973, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
The Fragment and the Sublime, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.

2005

The Last Description of the Old Romantic, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
Ballad for Khrua Inkong, Chiang Mai University Art Museum, Chiang Mai.
New Works, The Art Gallery of the faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.

2003

Recent Paintings, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
Recent Paintings, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
Still Pictures, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore.

2002

Reason and Monsters Project
Silent laughing of monsters/Large scale, The Gallery of Art and Design, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
Painting with pure reason, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
Silent laughing of monsters, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

2001

Equivalence second dialectic, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore.
Views and Transference, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

2000

Pictorial Statement, Bangkok University Art Gallery, Bangkok.

1999

Homage to Landscape Painting, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
Internal Landscape, Art Forum, Singapore.
Appearance and Reality, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

1998

Internal Landscape, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

1997

Mother Figure, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

1995

Drawings and Watercolors, British Council Gallery, Bangkok.

1994

Anthropology, The Bangkok Playhouse, Bangkok.

Selected Exhibitions

2008

Mapping Asia, Special Project, CIGE 2008, Beijing.

2007

Diversity in print, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore.
Thai Contemporary: Charm and Chasm, Tang Gallery, Beijing.
Southeast Asian Contemporary Art, Soka Art Center, Beijing.
Asian Art Now, Soka Contemporary Space, Taipei.

2006

Signed and Dated, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.

2005

On Paintings, Bangkok University Art Gallery (Rangsit), Bangkok.
Portrait, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.

2003

Overseas, The Gallery of Art and Design, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
Next Move, Earl Lu Gallery, Lasalle-Sia College of the Art, Singapore.

2002

Fusion Vision, Thai Australian Artistic Connection, The Gallery of Art and Design, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
Developing Time, Tadu Gallery, Bangkok.

2001

Painted, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
ARS 01, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki.
Snapshot, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore.
Thai Contemporary Exhibition, Valentine Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
Root, Open Art Space, Bangkok.

2000

Snapshot, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore.

1999

The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
Alter Ego, The 1st Thai-EU Art Project, The Art Gallery of The Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University Bangkok.

1998

Portrait, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.
The Art Exhibition of Vietnamese-Thai Artist, Fine Art Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi Fine Art University, Hanoi, Vietnam.
Book, Kurusapa Building, Bangkok.
Bangkok Art Project 1998, Public Art in Community – Lives Across the Rattanakosin Island, Bangkok.
The 3rd International Mini Print Triennial 1998, Lahti, Poland.

1997

Conversing Contemporary, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok.

1996

Hidden Agenda, Project 304, Bangkok.

1995

Man and The Forest, A Fundraising Exhibition Benefit The Northern Development, The Art Center, The Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

1993

Life Now, 3 artists exhibition, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok.
Premio internazionale Biella Per l'Incisione 1993, Biella, Italy.

1992

Small Work, An Art Exhibition by 56 Thai Artists, Silom Art Space, Bangkok.
Print Exhibition, Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok.
Art Thesis Exhibition by the Graduating Class of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
Print Exhibition, Canberra.
The Contemporary Graphic Arts by New Artists, The National Gallery, Bangkok.

1991

The 19th International Biennial of Graphic Art 1991, Ljubijana, Yugoslavia.
Contemporary Art Competition 1991, The National Gallery, Bangkok.
Small Works, Group Show by 3 Artists, The Seven Seas Gallery, Bangkok.
Spiritual Sense, 2 Artists Exhibition of Prints, British Council Gallery, Bangkok.
Small Prints by 10 Artists, River City Gallery, Bangkok.
The 3rd Toshiba Art Competition, Silpakorn University art Gallery, Bangkok.
The 8th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok.
The 5th International Biennial Print Exhibition 1991, ROC Taipei Fine art Museum, Taipei.

1990-85

Contemporary Art Competition 1990, The National Gallery, Bangkok.
The 3rd, 5th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by PTT, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok.
The 3rd, 7th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok.
The 1st, 2nd Toshiba Art Competition, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok.
The Male Formy Grafiki, Polska-Lodz'89, Poland.
The 2nd, 3rd Youth Art Exhibition of Thailand.

Collections

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
 Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
 Lasalle SIA College of the Arts, Singapore
 Fine Art Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
 Canvas Foundation, Amsterdam, Netherlands
 The Metropolitan Hotel, Bangkok
 Park Nai Lert Hotel, Bangkok
 Silpakorn University, Bangkok
 Bangkok University, Bangkok
 British Council, Bangkok
 Private Collections in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, China, Japan, Australia, France, Taiwan, Indonesia, Philippines

You decided to make a series of etchings based on the paintings you have made over the past two years. You had previously studied printmaking, and also worked with printmakers during your residency at STPi in Singapore in 2006/7. What attracts you to the print medium and why did you decide to make prints for this particular body of work?

I have always loved this medium. In making paintings as well as prints, I am like a painter in 17th century, my favourite period.

The paintings have the extraordinary detachment of the still-life, and yet looking at them as a whole I feel a deep emotional charge. What emotion would you say underlies this project?

I want my paintings to have the atmosphere of a place that is difficult to determine as either dream or reality. The images do not identify time or place but they are still lit from an unknown source. Caravaggio and Vermeer used similar methods.

Where do you think this project will lead you to next?

I plan to do many things in the next year. I have many projects that I wish to do but my work is painting, in the old traditional style and medium, so it's very difficult to do it all at the same time.

Now, I'm very interested in a few books about the relationship between Siam and old France, and Siam and Europe in the 19th century. Also the great novel entitled "All quiet on the western front".....

With thanks to Numthong Sae-Tang

Exhibition dates

3 September – 27 September 2008

DESIGN
IMAYA WONG, GRAIN STUDIO

COLOUR SEPARATION
UNICO SERVICES

PRINTING
TUSEN PRINDESIGN

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ISBN 978-983-9389-26-5

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN PAINTINGS
& WORKS OF ART

Cover detail

The Ball of Greed and Illusion 1
2008
Oil on canvas
180 x 160 cm

