

vwfa

GUJRANWALA گوجرانوالہ
M-799, 80

PLACES OF REBIRTH

navin rawanchaikul

It's

unclear but I was told that my great-grandfather came from a village in Sialkot. He went to Thailand via Burma more than a century ago, and together with his wife and a son, they settled the "place of rebirth" for the "Rawal" family in Thailand


who is navin?

Places of Rebirth by Thai artist Navin Rawanchaikul at Valentine Willie Fine Art Singapore represents an important period of self-reflection on a career that has spanned nearly twenty years. The need for stillness is rare for an artist constantly on the move and well known for his love of travel and dramatic story telling. Fuelled by a never-ending journey of research and archiving around culture, identity, and the role of art in the community, Rawanchaikul's constant activity is an attempt to develop his ongoing curiosities and dilemmas. Mixing autobiography with social histories these various currents of inquiry have created a rich and textured practice saturated with information, colourful forms and participatory strategies. As such, the artist's multiple realities and lifestyles have characteristically functioned at a frenetic pace. It feels appropriate therefore that this story teller/cultural archivist now needs a moment to pause and consider the whirlwind tour of his own life. However, far from a departure point, *Places of Rebirth* introduces new and familiar audiences to a focused presentation of his signature style from recent bodies of works.

Navin Rawanchaikul has a complex practice that explores epic story telling and self-realisation through moments of transit and change between the local and global. Born in Chiang Mai, Thailand, his Hindu/Punjabi heritage cast him both as an insider and outsider negotiating his position as a 'khaek': a derogatory term often used to denote Indians and Arabs; literally meaning guest or stranger in Thai. This constant process of 'othering' by his own Thai community and pigeon holing by the international art world into Thai, Indian and even Japanese categories (after his marriage to a Japanese curator and subsequent 2nd home in Fukuoka) led to a deep seated need to regain control of his identity, especially after success on the international circuit. This urgency formed the foundation for many of his collaborative projects such as *Taxi Gallery*, *Super(m)art*, *Fly with Me to Another World*, *Navin's Sala* and *Navin Party*. By asking the question 'who am I?' Rawanchaikul explores and exploits his own image to bring people together and inspire meaningful dialogues on the nature of art and society.

Much of his practice celebrates and parodies personal and national identity, whether Thai, Indian or various international communities, including the art world itself. They are adventurous tales of human emotion and narrative that often begin with intimate moments from the artist's real life that transform into spectacular fantasy. *Navins of Bollywood* is a combination of a movie poster painting by a group of Mumbai's last movie billboard painters, a Bollywood style musical adventure starring the artist himself and, a fourteen panel story board about the film all made during a trip to the Subcontinent. Referencing Rawanchaikul's South Asian appearance and constant misrecognition as an Indian, the film narrates the founding of the 'Navin Party': an organisation made up of 'Navins' from around the world led by the artist himself. It begins with Rawanchaikul, lonely and detached from the world, who soon discovers a letter by a mysterious figure from India also called Navin. This leads him on an adventure to Mumbai where he encounters numerous Navins, including his guru Navin Mahaprabhu who reveals to the artist his purpose in life: to build a global community of Navins past and present. This marks the founding of the Navin Party and its subsequent media: *The Navinist* and www.navinparty.com. The accompanying storyboard and movie painting situate the humorous film within a more nostalgic sense of place and considered narrative construction, whilst also introducing audiences to Rawanchaikul's now iconic movie poster works. The purpose of the painted movie poster, still prevalent across India and Pakistan, is to





portray the melodramas of Bollywood; of love, hate, betrayal, adventure and comedy. It is a highly recognisable and popular art form accessible to the masses but often dismissed as kitsch due to a lack of sophistication in execution. However its popular appeal and sequencing of multiple tableaux is ideal for Rawanchaikul's own brand of Technicolor theatre. His projects are often about his identity, and the people he meets in Thailand and abroad through research, residencies and exhibitions. He then documents these moments via a cinematic visual diary whose scenes unfold over movie poster paintings, films, objects and text. By recognising and quoting the characters he encounters, as well as working with different people to produce his work, the artist becomes the orchestrator and participant in multiple experiences and fantasies. This highlights some of the most enduring and important facets to his practice: accessibility, community and collaboration.

Throughout his career Rawanchaikul has employed participatory strategies of intervention, engagement and entertainment to explore the possibility of Art and community. As both storyteller and historian he re-imagines and preserves culture and lived experience. This visualisation of oral histories also incorporates workshops, publications and documentary films to discuss the role of art, the passing of time and how people understand themselves, the past and the present. *Fly with Me to Another World* is one of Rawanchaikul's most ambitious projects and is an ongoing documentary and community-based work that honours the life of legendary senior Thai artist Inson Wongsam. In the 1960s Inson was a penniless art graduate who decided to ride a Lambretta scooter from Thailand to Europe; selling and bartering work along the way for survival. He eventually went to New York before returning to Thailand 13 years later where he would become a National Artist. Inspired by this epic journey, Rawanchaikul wanted to understand the generational differences between the roles of a Thai artist in the Sixties with that of his own career today. Producing movie poster paintings, one of which is on display in the exhibition, as well as a substantial publication comprising of old photos, news clippings and interviews about Inson's life, the project was exhibited across several international venues including Inson's hometown of Lamphun in Northern Thailand. The artist and his company Navin Production also orchestrated a year-long programme of workshops with local and international artists that culminated in a conference and publication on public art. As part of the project, Rawanchaikul also produced a fibre glass sculpture of Inson on his iconic scooter as well as a sculpture of the artist on his own scooter, signifying his love for adventure, travel and possibility. By commemorating and reactivating the past, he preserves and reactivates history for further understanding and celebration.

Visually Rawanchaikul has developed a performative style of kitsch. However it is important to acknowledge, when viewing his work, that he is not just a comic protagonist or a master of ceremonies to an excessive carnival. Audiences must instead detach themselves from his sensationalised subject matter, an intentional and challenging result of his movie poster format, to consider the very real human emotions involved in his research, especially when autobiographical in nature. The inclusion of four works in the exhibition; 3 paintings and a framed handwritten letter create this necessary space to consider the competing threads of intimacy and spectacle in his practice. *Places of Rebirth*, 2009 is inspired by the artist's first visit to Pakistan, the birthplace of his ancestors. It deals with the Hindu/Punjabi diaspora as well as the artist's cross-border, cross-cultural negotiations. Here, he shares yet another epic history through an intricate combination of text, generational images of Rawanchaikul's family and the people he encountered in Pakistan, alongside

historical images from the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. These portraits of a community's passing through time and place are bridged through the imaginary journey of a local Thai taxi (*Tuk Tuk*) transporting Rawanchaikul and his Japanese family across the famous Wagah border between India and Pakistan. Once again combining humour, fantasy and history, this narrative presents a re-reading of personal heritage while raising questions of nation and identity in today's world.

This work is then disrupted by *Mario Sisters*; an unusually muted painting of the artist's daughter Mari playing on a seesaw in front of the Gujranwala train station. Gujranwala is the city in West Punjab that is now part of Pakistan, where Rawanchaikul's mother was born and where she migrated to Thailand from, during the partition. The absence of colour and human presence is an unfamiliar site to Rawanchaikul's aesthetic and is further disturbed by the curious inclusion of a vibrantly painted Mari, seemingly oblivious to the significance of her new playground. This sense of history and anxiety is then reflected in the framed letter the artist wrote to his young daughter installed next to the painting. In neatly constructed prose, the letter was written during a trip to Nagoya, Japan, where Rawanchaikul was invited to discuss another exhibition, which resulted in the painting titled *Places of Rebirth*, 2010; which was inspired by the local textile community there. The recounting of his experiences then triggered further recollections about his family history, and explanations of the paintings he has made, including *Mario Sisters* and *Places of Rebirth*, 2009. Moments of tenderness and concern are also expressed when thinking about his daughter's future as a person of mixed Japanese and Indian heritage living in Japan, a place that still feels foreign to her father. But characteristically it ends with optimism stating that even though Japan is a new place of rebirth for him, it is also Mari's home and despite their cultural differences he believes that their dreamland is nevertheless shared. This raw confessional presents a more intimate side to the artist's work and his larger than life creativity.

Overall, Navin Rawanchaikul's practice is a process of human connection as well as information dissemination. Driven by a sense of cultural anxiety and concern for disappearing histories, he attempts to not only locate and challenge his own identity but that of the communities he has encountered across his travels. Through varying speeds of time travel, reality and imagination, Rawanchaikul's multiple strategies of engagement and collaboration therefore construct a unique type of knowledge generation. This can take many forms; from paintings, objects, comics, magazines, publications, websites, workshops and parties, through to shared meals, ambitious plans and humorous conversations. What emerges is a multifaceted artist/entertainer/facilitator/moderator who constantly seeks reinvention or 'places of rebirth' during an ongoing journey of discovery. But amidst this interwoven world of fact and fiction, epic adventure, memorable characters and exotic locations, who exactly is Navin Rawanchaikul? What does he want to do and where is he going next? A fitting narrative cliff hanger can be taken from his beloved comic books which simply states:

"To be continued..."

January 22, 2010

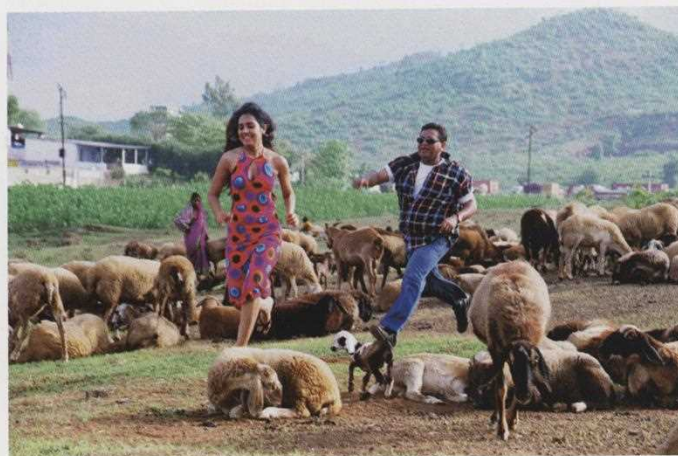
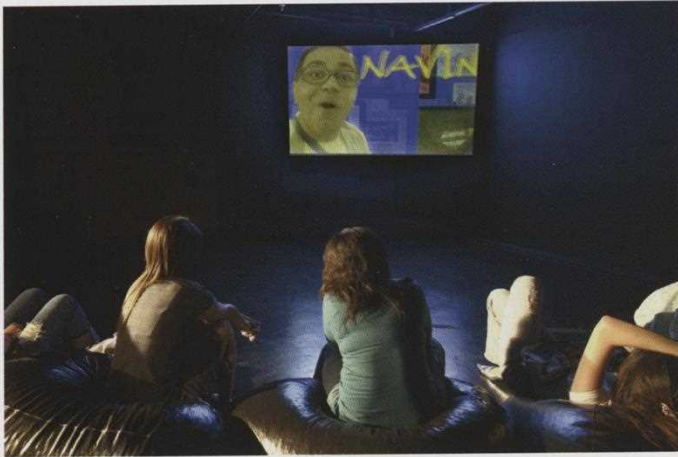
Dearest Mari,

I'm now on the train returning to Hakata. It was a short visit to Nagoya to scout on an exhibition that I'll take part this summer.

First thing I did after arriving Nagoya yesterday, I went to Nittaiji, the Buddhist temple that was built more than a century ago as a symbol of friendship between Japan and Thailand. I heard about Nittaiji long ago and know that there is a temple fair held there on the 21st of each month. It was my plan to go Nagoya on the 21st but unfortunately the fair was just like any other that we usually find at festivals, with lots of food stalls. Anyway, I got an Omamori lucky charm from Nittaiji for you. It's a blue one. A monk told me it's for wishes. I'd like to give it to you for your birthday when you turn 9 in the next few days. By the way, the number 9 in Thai means moving forward with luck so I hope this little gift with my blessing brings you luck in the future.

After visiting Nittaiji, I went to the museum for meeting and later a curator walked me to the Chojamachi area, which is one of the exhibition venues. It was a nice surprise to encounter a street full of textile stores. There is a line of signboards along this street identifying their main business as "Chojamachi Senigai", which means the textile place of Chojamachi town.

While I know nothing about its history, this place reminds me of my childhood in Chiang Mai, where we lived above our textile store at the central market.



Navins of Bollywood

2006

high definition video (HDV)

10:34 mins (edition of 9)



NAVIN PRODUCTION
Proudly Presents...

A NAREN MOJIDRA FILM
A PROJECT BY NAVIN RAWANCHAIKUL



तबजांफद र्नी डडीपारळवे



Assoc. Producer
TYLER RUSSEL

ORIGINAL STORY BY:
NAVIN RAWANCHAIKUL & TYLER RUSSELL
WRITTEN BY:
NAREN MOJIDRA & TYLER RUSSELL

NAVIN PARTY

Navin...

Lyrics : **Rahul Seth**
Music : **Sanjay Chowdhury**
Cinematographer : **Raju Badigar**
Art Director : **Choukas Bharadwaj**
Choreographer : **Digambar Shinde**
DIRECTED & EDITED BY: **NAREN MOJIDRA**

Line Producer
MEDIA INTROSPECTIVE



Installation view at Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok

2007

Navins of Bollywood

2007

gelatin silver print, C-print and pencil on
acid-free museum board

50 x 65 cm each (set of 14 panels)
(edition of 9)

નાવિનનાં ડેઈ ઓફ ઊત્તીવનાં સમયે



*One night when I was alone
in my Chiang Mai Studio reflecting
on life...*

*looking at old family photos...
reviewing old works...*



*Basically wondering who I was
and what on earth I was doing
with my life...*



*I found a letter from someone named
Navin Sander. I had no idea who this
person might be, but being sentimental
I thought it might be a sign of something.
Another lovely Navin trying to make
contact... curious about this feeling
I tried to google my own name and
found a diversity I never would have
imagined. There were so many Navins!
So I tried to call this mystery Navin
and all I got was silence...*



*Still, there must have been
something to it...*

તકાફાંકર ં ઉગીવૃજઁ

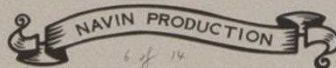
luckily, however, I did find Navin Shinde
nearby shooting of a typical Bollywood song and dance!

fake rain and all...



When I arrived the hero and heroine
were doing their dance... I stole the heroine!!

It was best time of my life!



1/9 Navins of Bollywood Diary

6 of 14

Ramit. 2007

Navins of Bollywood

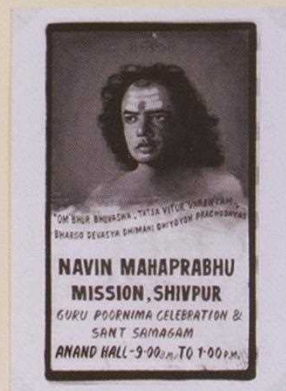
2007

gelatin silver print, C-print and pencil on
acid-free museum board

50 x 65 cm each (set of 14 panels)
(edition of 9)

When I was woken up in the morning
I saw Navin Mahaprabhu on that banner I slept on.

This was Navin Mahaprabhu.
I certainly had to meet him!



NAVIN PRODUCTION

1/2 Navins of Bollywood Diary

9 of 14

June 1, 2007

50 x 65 cm each (set of 14 panels)
(edition of 9)



Fly with Me to Another World (to be Continued...)

2008

painted fibreglass and scooter, bag and found objects

210 x 84 x 170 cm (edition of 3 + 2 AP)



Fly with Me to Another World

2000

painted fibreglass and scooter, bag and found objects

215 x 78 x 176 cm (edition of 5 + 2 AP)



Fly with Me to Another World

2008

acrylic on canvas

120 x 229 cm

On the way back from Wagah to Lahore, my friend Imran explained the meaning of the auto bike rickshaw in Punjabi, which translates as "flying to the moon". Immediately the scene of an auto rickshaw flying across the border came to my mind... along with you and your mom too... together we ride a similar auto rickshaw from Chiang Mai through India and into Pakistan, reversing the route that my ancestors took. At the Wagah border, people of both nations are having fun...

Y OF LIFE

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WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY NAVIN RAWANCHAIKUL

บทประพันธ์ กำกับ และอำนวยการสร้าง โดย นาวัน ราชวัชรชัยกุล (อานันท์)

TAXI SCOPE

CUJRANWALA CITY

REBIRTH

อนันต์ ราชวัชรชัยกุล !!!

อนันต์ ราชวัชรชัยกุล !!!

NOW SHOWING AT A THEATRE NEAR YOU

with beats of

Punjabi Bhangra music, everyone dancing and cheerfully celebrating... it's the scene of a large painting named "Places of Rebirth" that you saw at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. Remember? The thing in your hand in that painting is a traditional Bhangra bell. The sound of that bell, takes us on a journey back through history, telling us where we stand and where others have stood before. It's the place of rebirth where we are all reborn.

भारत



INDIA



TAXI

สก 639

เชียงใหม่



Punj - Aab
EXPRESS

เชียงใหม่

Mario Sisters

2008

oil on canvas

129 x 158.5 cm



Talking about a dreamland, I'd like to tell you about the painting of you playing on the seesaw. That mysterious place that you asked is the train station in Gujranwala where my mother was born. It's a city in the Punjab region of India, which now belongs to Pakistan. She was probably around the same age as you are now when her family and other Hindu-Punjabi folk had to leave their motherland as a result of the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. As I was told, they all left by train from Gujranwala, and a year later they departed by ship from Calcutta to Thailand. You know I actually made that painting before I saw the real place.

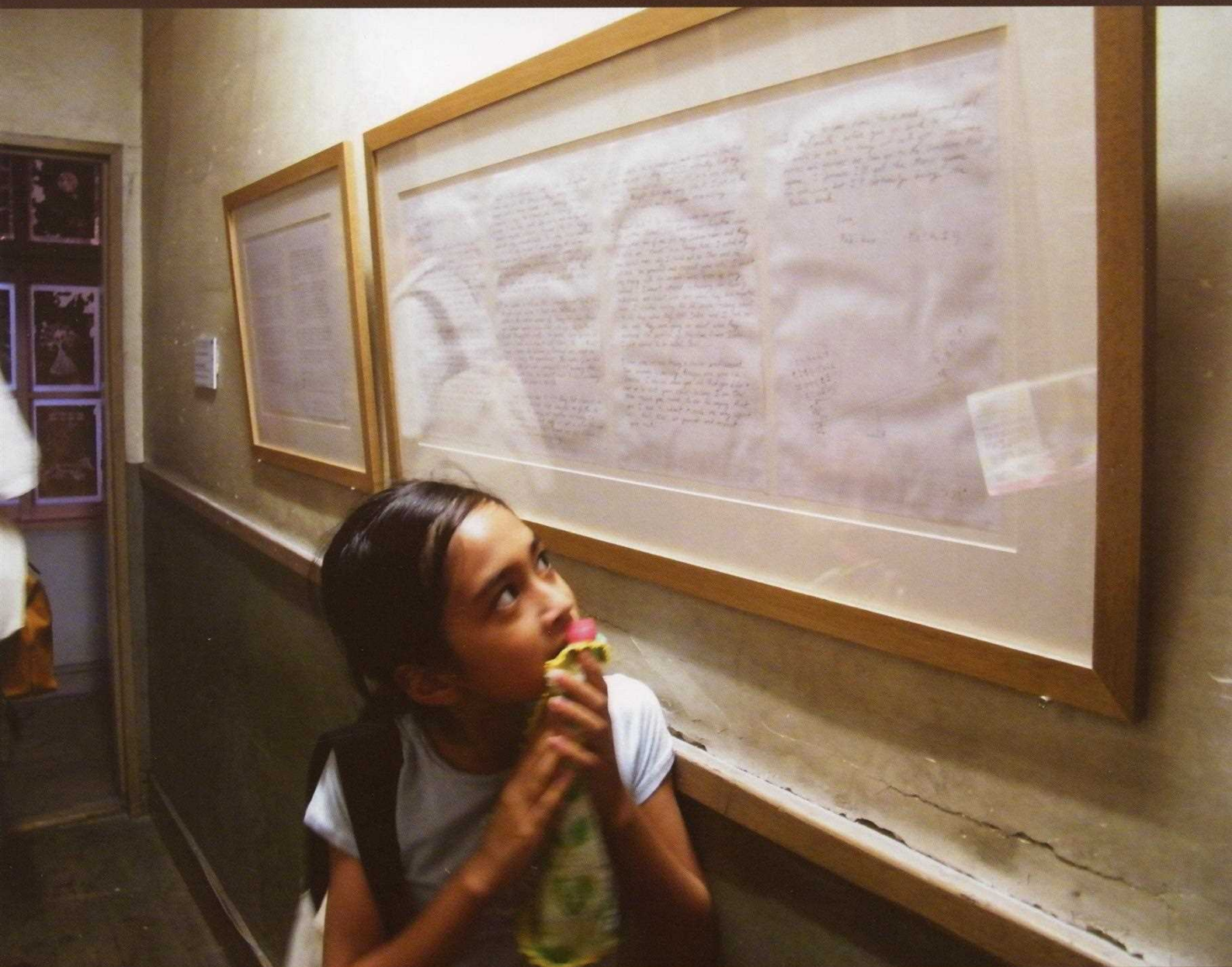
While I was researching about Gujranwala city on the internet, I came across a report saying that the city had a problem with a lack of places for kids to play, so I turned the dirt road in front of station building into a flowery field where you're playing on the seesaw with happiness. You might wonder who is on the other side of that seesaw... and why I named that painting "Mario Sisters". What is the connection with the Mario game that you like and who are the sisters? Well, Mari-chan, I already gave you some hints so it is my turn not to answer, just like when you gave me my nickname "Pak-kun" for your own reason. Mari-chan, enjoy my dreamland!

A similar dazed feeling happened to me this evening in Nagoya when I visited a tiny pair of rooms on the second floor of an old building at Chojamachi. The building housed a number of textile stores, many of which have been abandoned. The pair of rooms must have been a living space or a meeting room for those stores, as there was some house furniture. The first thing that stunned me was the red-brown sofa. They are not identical but probably around the same age of our sofa at OK Store.



Installation view at Chojamachi Textile Association Building
Aichi Triennale, Nagoya 2010

Installation view at Chojamachi Textile Association Building
Aichi Triennale, Nagoya 2010

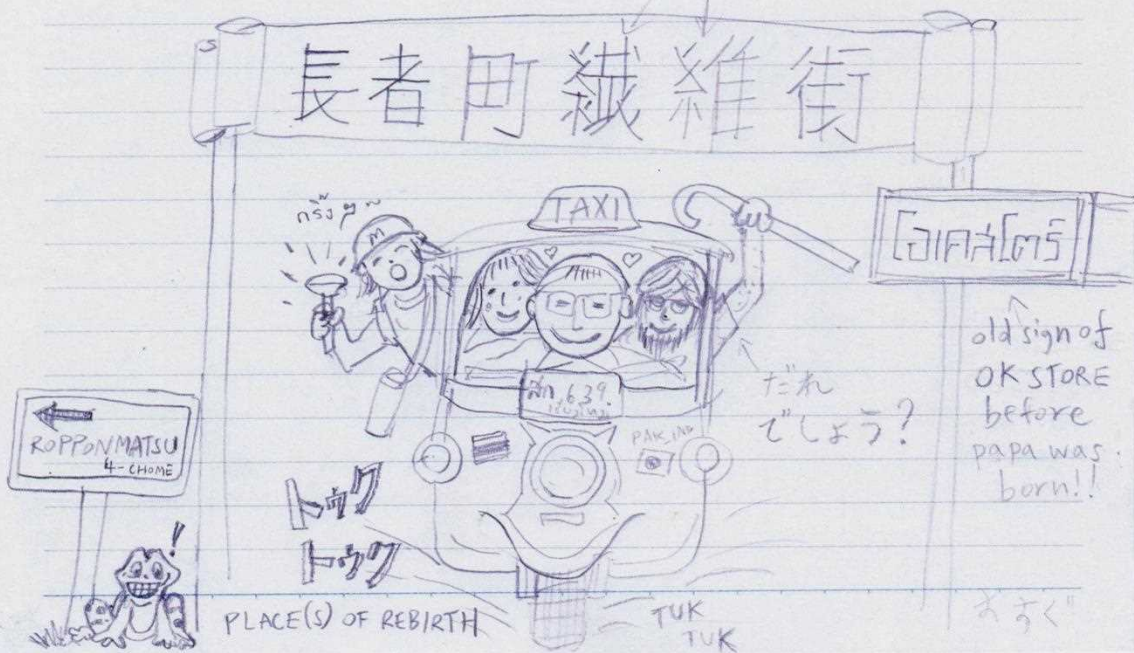


I plan to go back to Nagoya at the end of April.
It would be nice to talk to local residents and shop owners along that textile street. I heard in the past that Indian textile traders from Thailand came to Japan to buy fabrics for reselling in Thailand. I even remember some of the Japanese names of the textile brands and manufacturers that my dad used to explain to us for informing our customers. I wonder if people in Chojamachi might know some of the Indian traders and textile stores in Chiang Mai. Who know I might even find another "place of rebirth" in Nagoya. I'll certainly keep you posted and hope you and mom will have a chance to visit Chojamachi during the exhibition. Then you can see and tell me the different between that pair of rooms there and ours in Chiang Mai.

Love,

Pak-kun パックくんより

おまかし〜



Installation view at Chojamachi Textile Association Building
Aichi Triennale, Nagoya 2010





Places of Rebirth

2010

acrylic on canvas

130 x 260 cm



Taximan

2008 :: painted fibreglass :: 119 x 45 x 67 cm (edition of 10)

navin rawanchaikul

Born in 1971 in Chiang Mai, Navin Rawanchaikul is an internationally recognised Thai artist of Indian descent who has developed a unique and vast body of works that rely heavily on team spirit and collaboration. Questioning modern systems of artistic production and presentation, Rawanchaikul seeks for ways to put art in touch with the lives of everyday people. His work is often produced under the banner of Navin Production Co., Ltd.; his production company that was founded in 1994, whose first product was bottled polluted water from a canal in Chiang Mai. In 1995, he initiated his landmark project Navin Gallery Bangkok, in which an ordinary Bangkok taxicab was transformed into a mobile art gallery. Its great success prompted several versions of the Taxi Gallery around the world including Sydney, London, Bonn and New York.

Embarking upon more international presentations of his work, Rawanchaikul started to engage in a process of exploring the negotiation between local circumstances and trends of globalisation. The artist is best known for dynamic art practices that involve direct public interventions, social commentary, and an innovative style of integrating community or individual experiences into eccentric fictional tales featuring recurring characters. His oeuvre has grown to encompass a broad array of media including performances, billboards, films, comics, games, merchandises and cocktails. He has even formed his own party, the Navin Party, which aims to bring together fellow Navins from different parts of the world.

In addition to a series of community-based art projects that he has continually presented in his home country, Rawanchaikul has held solo shows at prestigious institutions including New York's P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center (2001), the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2002), Jim Thompson Art Center in Bangkok (2006) and Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing (2009) amongst being included in several international art exhibitions and festivals. His works are housed in the collection of international museums and art centers including Asia Society in New York, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo per L'Arte in Italy, FRAC in France, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan, Pinchuk Art Center in Ukraine, Moderna Museet in Sweden and Inhotim in Brazil.

In 2010, Rawanchaikul awarded the national Silapathorn citation from the Thai Ministry of Culture in the respected field of Visual Arts. 2011, also marks an exciting solo presentation of Rawanchaikul's work in the Thai Pavilion for the prestigious 54th Venice Biennale.

He divides his time between his family in Fukuoka, Japan, and his hometown of Chiang Mai where Navin Production is based. More information about the artist and Navin Production: www.navinproduction.com

The trip to my ancestors' birthplace made me think about our mixed identities and I can't stop thinking about your future. Well, let me tell you again what my mom taught when I asked why we are not considered Thai, she said "be yourself and proud of your roots".

It's already more than 15 years since I settled in my "place of rebirth" in Japan, but I must say it's still new to me. Japan is your home but our dreamland is shared.

places of rebirth
navin rawanchaikul

10 march - 3 april 2011

vwfa

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