

Landscape

2003

Oil, wood stain and enamel on canvas

60 x 80 cm



Venus

2003

Oil, wood stain and
enamel on canvas

140 x 100 cm

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cover

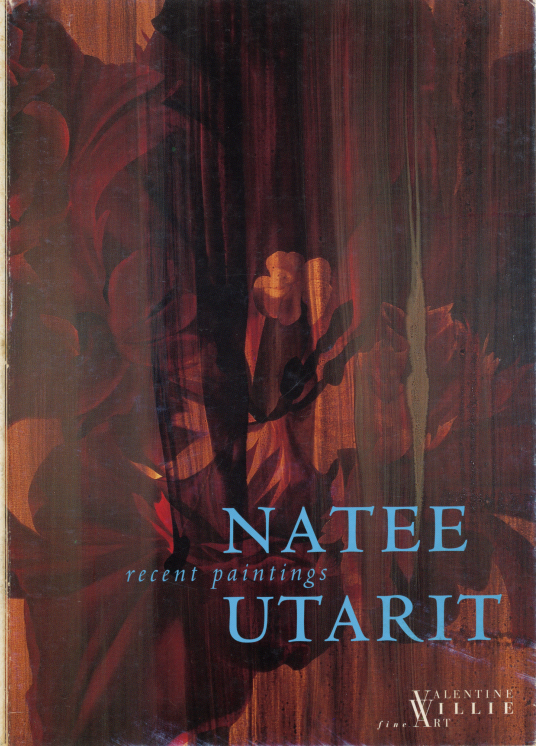
Tulip (detail)

2003

Oil, wood stain and
enamel on canvas

140 x 100 cm

Exhibition dates: 7 - 23 August 2003



NATEE
recent paintings
UTARIT

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART

NATEE recent paintings UTARIT

Natee Utarit is one of Thailand's most prodigious young artists to emerge on the contemporary Southeast Asian scene. Graduating from the College of Fine Art, Bangkok in 1987, Natee has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and held nine solo exhibitions to date.

A consummate painter, Natee's main preoccupation is to question the problematics—the physical, intellectual, emotional values—of painting.

The works in **Recent Paintings** is a continued development of Natee's **Reason and Monsters Project** (2001-), which borrows its title from Goya's etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*¹. Under this project, Natee held three separate shows in Bangkok last year: **Silent Laughing of Monsters**, Numthong Gallery (May 2002), **The Reason/Painting with Pure Reason**, Numthong Gallery (October 2002) and **Silent Laughing of Monsters/Large Scale** at The Gallery of Art and Design, Silpakorn University (November 2002).

Silent Laughing of Monsters and **Silent Laughing of Monsters/Large Scale** showed canvas works with selected details from Renaissance paintings, exquisitely rendered, but obscured by a layer of enamel or wood-stain. Beneath the translucent and sometimes even opaque surface, characters such as Sybil and Judith are viewed intimately, making them almost personal and familiar. The **Silent Laughing of Monsters** series is dominated by paintings of the figurative image, while **The Reason/Painting with Pure Reason** exhibited paintings of monochromatic blank canvases propped against the wall on a cement floor—**Tom & Jerry**² paintings, dealing with the illusion of painting.

A showing in Singapore recently, **Still Life** at Plum Blossoms Gallery, consisted of enamel or wood-stain covered photographs, taken or reproduced by the artist, of flowers and classical Greek sculptures. Several photo-prints of busts of David and Venus are covered very thinly with a fluid glaze, visible only when the strokes overlap each other. Variations of Natee's signature veil-effect over Nike of Samothrace, titled **Defeat of Victoria**, are perhaps Natee's most effective in manipulating the surface and our emotional response towards the work.

For **Recent Paintings**, the David and Venus sculptures return as paintings: portraits in oil painted onto canvas and then covered with an enamel paint or wood-stain layer which appears as a transparent gauze—when the brushstrokes of this coat overlay each other, they resemble the folds of a veil. The surface is so thin and delicate that it enhances the texture of the canvas thus giving a sense of pictorial depth to the painting as the image sits within the woven material, and not on top of it. In the large **Venus**, the goddess of love and beauty turn slightly to look over her shoulder. Her gaze is inward. She was Aphrodite. "She was Ambollogera: Postponer of Old Age. She was Epistrophia: the Heart-twister. She was Parakytousa: the Side-glimpser. She was Peitho: Persuasion. Above all she was Charidotes: the Joy-giver"³. She is gold.

Compared to Natee's earlier landscapes, the five in this new series are more intimate and at the same time more generic by their economy. In each, one sees a strong horizon line and cloud formations looming over the dark ground. They are intriguing and discomforting, almost a primordial landscape. Variations are created by a play of the material using different thicknesses of enamel coating. Enamel if painted on thinly, creates a translucent effect; thickly, the media wrinkles because of its lack of pigment to

reinforce film. The wrinkling effect seems to repeat the foliage pattern of a tree in one of the landscape scenes. Three of the landscapes are very similar, differing subtly in the density and tonal values of the glaze. A black landscape provides a foil to these ambivalent compositions of earthy sepia, ochre, and umbra tones.

There seems to be an odd humor to Natee's painting of a Greek vase. They perhaps embody most explicitly Natee's questioning of artistic objectivity, clearly teasing the viewer. The frontal depiction of the vase appears flat, like a cutout and denying its mass, but the vase's reflection on the surface it sits on gives a clue to its volume. The flatness of the image rendered is most obvious in **Tulips** but the painting's surface of running dark-red stains across the canvas gives the painting its pictorial richness.

Classical beauties, biblical heroes, landscapes and vases—with or without bouquets—form the rudimentary vocabulary of classical western painting and sculpture. In the tradition of academic artistic training, painting students slavishly copied masterpieces to learn from the old masters, and studios were filled with plaster-cast copies of classical sculptures to be studied and analyzed in drawings. Natee's explicit reference to European art history is not to be mistaken for blind fervor for western culture. Natee takes on popular European icons and paintings because they represent the civilisation from which his chosen metier springs.

Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* can be interpreted in part as an expression of the artist's struggle between reason and imagination. Natee's work negotiates similar tensions, but his dilemma is a more contemporary one, concerning the validity and value of his artistic practice, and of painting itself. The purported rational ideals of western classicism are constantly played against his own emotional and intuitive responses to the canvas. The works in **Recent Paintings** pare down this discourse almost to its bare essentials, as Natee progresses in his personal quest in search of the truth in painting.

Noor Mahnun Mohamed

¹ *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* is Francisco de Goya's most famous *Los Caprichos* etching. It portrays a sleeping artist surrounded by bats, owls and a particularly menacing cat. The only calm presence is the lynx in the bottom right corner.

² "The old Tom and Jerry cartoons that are shown on TV make frequent use of a classic comic routine that (...) never fails to make people laugh. Jerry the mouse is frantically trying to escape from Tom the cat, who chases his adversary into a corner where there doesn't appear to be any way out. But then the mouse whips out a paintbrush and dashes off a picture of an open horizon with road stretching off into the distance right there on the wall. Once he's finished, he speeds down the road he's just painted. As for Tom (...) of course he's unable to pursue the mouse because by this time, the picture has stopped being an entry into another dimension" Natee Utarit, *Reason and Monsters Project*

³ Nigel Spivey, 'Understanding Greek Sculpture, Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings'

Natee Utarit was born 1970, in Bangkok, Thailand
He lives and works in Bangkok

Solo Exhibitions

- 2003 *Still Pictures*, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 *Reason and Monsters Project*
Silent Laughing of Monsters, The Gallery of Art and Design, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
The Reason / Painting with Pure Reason, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
- 2001 *Equivalence*, 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 *Drawing and Watercolors*, British Council Gallery, Bangkok
- 1994 *Anthropology*, The Bangkok Playhouse, Bangkok

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2002 *Present Perfect Print Works*, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Present Perfect, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok
Fusion Vision: Thai – Australian artistic connection, The Gallery of Art and Design Silpakorn University, Bangkok
Developing Time, Tadu Gallery, Bangkok
Painted, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2001 *ARS 01*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland
Snapshot, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Hong Kong
Thai Contemporary, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Root, Open Art Space Gallery, Bangkok
- 2000 *Snapshot*, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore
- 1999 *The Third Asia – Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
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
- 1992 *Premio internazionale Biella per l'Incisione 1993*, Biella, Italy
Small Work, An Art Exhibition by 56 Thai Artists, Silom Art Space, Bangkok
The Exhibition of Prints, Dialogue Gallery,

Bangkok
Art Thesis Exhibition by the Graduating Class of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok
The Exhibition of Prints, Canberra, Australia
The Contemporary Graphic Arts by New Artists, The National Gallery, Bangkok
1991 *The 19th International Biennial of Graphic Art 1991*, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
The Contemporary Art Competition 1991, The National Gallery, Bangkok
Small Work, Group Show by 3 Artists, The Seven Seas Gallery, Bangkok
Spiritual Sense, 2 Artists Exhibition of Prints, British Council Gallery, Bangkok
The 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, Taiwan
1990-85 *The 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
Silpakorn University, Bangkok
Bangkok University, Bangkok
British Council, Bangkok
Private Collections in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan, Australia, France