

## The trilogy of Thai contemporary art: Thai fried rice noodles, jungle shaman and cartoon hollow man

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今年2月刚落下帷幕的第四届曼谷艺术双年展 (Bangkok Art Biennale)，以万物有灵论、生态政治学和超自然神秘主义为主题，既迎合了当下国际艺术的潮流，又紧紧围绕着泰国本土文化的在地性与特殊性，不禁引发了我们对艺术与自然、社会、文化之间复杂关系的深刻思考。

本期“观点”栏目特邀资深策展人、艺术评论人魏星，通过对三位在各自的时代和维度都极具代表性的泰国艺术家的深入分析，揭示了泰国当代艺术的特点：它既是对泰国独特文化的坚守，也是对全球化语境下文化多样性的探索。

These three Thai artists from different eras not only have a global vision, but their works also show the unique imprint of national culture. They vividly portray and present Thailand's society, history and current life from different angles and in their own distinctive artistic language and style, giving us a glimpse of a rich and diverse country that is integrated into the wave of globalization, and is shrouded in the heavy color of tradition and history.



Artist Ricky Tiravani  
Rirkrit Tiravanija

The picture is provided by the artist and Zhuna Gallery.

Ricky Tirawani is the most internationally renowned contemporary artist in Thailand. He was born in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, in 1961 (his father was a Thai diplomat), and then received a systematic art education in Canada and the United States, including the Banff Art Center, the Ontario College of the Arts, and the Chicago Academy of Art.

His international life and educational background has given him a broad vision and a diverse way of thinking; and his Asian cultural bloodline has enabled him to break new ground and stand alone on the mainstream Western art stage, and knock on the door of the Western art hall with marginal and differentiated cultural elements.



"Rikili Tiravani: Store" exhibition site  
Zhuona Hong Kong 2023

The picture is provided by the artist and Zhuna Gallery.

His artistic creation covers many fields such as behavior, installation, painting and image, and he is best known for his series of "untitled" behavior plans – that is, cooking traditional Thai food in the art space and breaking the boundary between art and life by sharing delicious food with the audience in the art space.

Ricky repeatedly emphasized that all his artistic creations were about

people as the subject, how people gather and how they communicate. For him, this is not a simple conceptual preaching or rhetoric, but a warm and vivid physical experience embodied through specific behaviors and senses.



Ricky Tilavani  
 Untitled 2010 (Tofu Brain) Variable Size  
 Pots, cooking utensils, bowls, spoons,  
 Tofu brain raw materials, tables, chairs  
 Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center



Ricky Tilavani  
 Untitled 2010 (Milk Powder Mercedes)  
 520.6x187x147cm  
 Milk powder, gypsum  
 Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

He turned the opening day of the gallery or art gallery exhibition into a happy time to share Thai cuisine. Curry and other unique spices from tropical Asia stimulate people's taste and smell, and also open up the space of desire for people to communicate with each other.

In 2012, he fried Thai Kuitiao again at MoMA in New York, so the corner of the world's top art gallery was filled with the strong fragrance of chili and curry, becoming a temporary Thai kitchen (this scene was first launched by him at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York in 1990. An art project called "Thai Fried Rice Noodles").



Ricky's solo exhibition "Don't do it" exhibition site  
Contemporary Tang Art Center, Beijing, 2010  
Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

Ricky's works focus on the communication patterns and states between different cultures in the context of globalization, and promote his cross-cultural and transnational interpersonal experiments by implanting foreign cultural symbols and lifestyles in the context of heterogeneous cultures. His creations especially emphasize the participation and interaction of people, as well as the participation in the art space scene. The clues of situationalism connect his works, which are full of metaphors and refers to real politics.

Ricky's art is committed to breaking the landscape hegemony of capitalism, but in the end, his works still become an integral part of the capitalist cultural landscape. Here we seem to realize that art transcends reality, but the universal gravity of reality will still pull art back to the ground of reality. This is an eternal paradox, and it is this paradox that constantly promotes our thought, cognition and aesthetics.





Artist Apichabon Weerashagu Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

Apichatpong Weerasethakul was born in Bangkok, Thailand in 1970 and grew up in Kong King Province in northeast of Thailand. He is an independent director and producer in Thailand. He majored in architecture at Kong University in Thailand and then studied at the Chicago Institute of Art in the United States. , obtained a master's degree in film.

In 1993, Apitchabang directed his first short film Bullet. In 2002, he won the "A Concern" Unit Award at the 55th Cannes International Film Festival for his feature-length drama film "Blessing". In 2004, the feature film Tropical Disease, directed by the screenwriter, won the Jury Award for the Main Competition Unit of the 57th Cannes International Film Festival. In 2005, Apatha was awarded the Silpatorn Award by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand. In 2006, the self-writted and self-directed feature film Love Syndrome was nominated for the Golden Lion Award in the main competition unit of the 63rd Venice International Film Festival.



Apitchabon Velashagu  
"Uncle Bumi Who Can Recall His Previous Life"  
Stills, movies, 113 minutes, 2010  
Photo Source: Artist Studio

In 2010, he won the Palme d'Or in the main competition unit of the 63rd Cannes International Film Festival for his feature-length feature film Uncle Bumi Who Can Recall His Previous Life. In 2015, he was nominated for the "A Kind of Concern" Unit Award at the 68th Cannes International Film Festival for the feature-length feature film Fantasy Dream Cemetery. In July 2021, the film "Memory" directed by the film won the Jury Award of the Main Competition Unit of the 74th Cannes International Film Festival.

If Ricky's transfer of Thai food into the space of international top art galleries is a quick and effective art strategy – similar to Huang Yongyu's East fighting the West and the West beating the East, so as to enter the mainstream Western art system to get a place – then the younger and

more local Apatcha State is even more relevant. Note the memory history of his family and local cultural beliefs and traditions, and use it to carry out a micro-scan of the society and history of northeastern Thailand.



Apitchabon Velashagu  
 "Uncle Bumi Who Can Recall His Previous Life"  
 Stills, movies, 113 minutes, 2010  
 Photo Source: Artist Studio

Tropical jungle, past life, soul and body are the main vocabulary of Apitchabang film language, and Uncle Bumi who can recall the previous life is the perfect presentation of these rhetoric and grammar. Rather than a fictional drama, it is a reproduction of the real history of his family by the artist, and hopes that through the intervention of art, he can transcend reality and death, and reunite with his loved ones in a surreal context.

As Deleze said in a speech, art can resist death. The prototype of Uncle Bumi in the play comes from his father, who also lost his life because of kidney disease. Through the shaping of a character like Uncle Bumi, Apichabang uses the local primitive belief in all things, Buddhism's view of life and death and other thoughts and emotions with the help of the mystery of the hot and humid tropical fog in the film screen. The dialogue and interaction between living beings and their families is reflected.



Apitchabon Velashagu  
 "Uncle Bumi Who Can Recall His Previous Life"  
 Stills, movies, 113 minutes, 2010  
 Photo Source: Artist Studio

In the film, reality, dreams and memories are intertwined to form a fascinating and touching surrealist world. Abitchabang once said, "I hope my movie can bring you into a dream."



Artist Gongkan  
Gongkan

Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

Born in 1989, Gongkan is undoubtedly a new human being in the E-era, that is, a generation that grew up in the era of the Internet and digital social media. They have been surrounded by the Internet and digital media since childhood. Compared with their predecessors, their spiritual world is more dependent on virtualization and digitalization, and is more inclined to non-intensive virtual interaction and socialization. Therefore, this generation is relatively more selfish, more introverted and more individualistic. They don't care about grand narratives, reject profoundness, embrace the plane, and are more sensitive, lonely and fragile in their hearts.



Gongkan "Deep" cloth acrylic  
180cmx140cm 2024

Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

From Gongkan's works of art, it can be seen that these typical characteristics of the times have also distanced himself from the social narratives in the works of his predecessor artists Ricky and Apitchabon.

His work style combines cartoon and surrealism, with both the absurdity of Rene Margarete and the warmth of Nara Michi. The huge cartoon doll in the picture seems to correspond to the artist's own inner world. The lonely boy lies on his back on the grass, raising his head slightly, and his eyes are confused. All the boys in his picture always have a small black hole in the heart.

Gongkan's works depict a self-integrated psychological world. It is quiet and comfortable, but closed and lonely, just like the psychological picture of contemporary people. They refuse to communicate with reality and prefer to immerse themselves in the virtual fantasy they create, but also reflect the mental and psychological problems of people generated by the current society dominated by digital technology, which in turn lead to human alienation.



Gongkan "Between Hollow" Exhibition Site 2024  
Bangkok Museum of Contemporary Art

As a creator of visual arts, Gongkan found his own path in the existing styles and languages, and created his own unique visual symbols and images, which fit the spirit and aesthetics of this era and created a psychological projection field.

When the viewer stops before the work, he seems to see himself from the picture, which triggers psychological sympathy. Michi Nara's cartoon little girl is a spiritual comfort created for Japanese society; and the "heart-heart-realing boy" in the Gongkan picture is also a self-healing IP created by the artist himself.





Gongkan "Co-exist" cloth acrylic  
100cm×100cm 2024

Photo Source: Contemporary Tang Art Center

In a sense, Ricky, Apitchabang and Gongkan can be regarded as three artists representing Thai contemporary art. They have made their own voices in different eras and dimensions, pushing Thai contemporary art to the international stage, and achieving great success, allowing the world to see a different Thailand.

Their works have commonalities and great differences. From the grand scenes of Ricky's works focusing on national identity, political narrative and relationship aesthetics, to the micro-narrative of Abitcha, which pays more attention to the family and history at specific levels, to the flat and personalized inner monologue of Gongkan, a structural paradigm shift of contemporary social and cultural activities can be seen.

This transfer shifts the perspective of art from the social and national levels to the relatively microscopic family narrative, and then downgrades the dimension to complete individual expression. They represent the trilogy of Thai contemporary art, which resonates and synchronizes with global artistic trends. The world seems to present a flat structure, in which we try to seek consensus and accept differences.

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