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artwise

Visual Arts 7-10



G l e n i s I s r a e l

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Pinaree Sanpitak

(b. 1961 Thai)

Frames: subjective; cultural; postmodern

Forms: painting; sculpture; installations

Conceptual framework: Sanpitak's artworks have a direct link to her personal experiences. They are also general comments on being a female.

Vocabulary

- collage:** objects or materials stuck on a surface to create an artwork
indigenous: originating from a place or country; natural to a particular place
monoprints: one-off prints
organic: based on natural forms, shapes from nature, living things

CRITICAL STUDY

Sanpitak's work is innovative and involves experimentation. In *Breast Works/Untitled*, she has used an **indigenous** material from the north of Thailand to create the sculptural pieces. The series of drawings on the wall are **monoprints** of breasts in different conditions. The shapes on the floor remind us of breasts, but also suggest ancient mountains. The repetition of shape takes away their personal nature. They are grouped together and all pointing upwards, an assembly of mothers, perhaps as if in conversation. They have become art objects, explored as shape in a variety of media. They have also been transformed into symbols, yet they are no less sensitive or beautiful than the real object. What are normally smooth and delicate are depicted as rough and irregular yet have achieved a sense of strength. Her works created at this stage were her tribute to motherhood, based on her own personal experiences at the time.

Artist's statement

*'Breasts ... I feel their presence.
I admire their potential.'*

'Breasts are delicate, sensitive and unique. They are symbols of beauty. They are the baby's most important source of nutrition. They symbolise women as sex objects. They are soft and warm. They have strength. They are victims. They have become taboo in some cultures.'

*'Breasts ...
These works might give pleasure?
convey a thought?
provoke a change in attitude?'*

(Extracts from artist's statement in Breast Works: Pinaree Sanpitak, exhibition catalogue, Silom Art Space, 1994)

HISTORICAL STUDY

Pinaree Sanpitak lives and works in Bangkok, Thailand. She spent her last year of high school as an exchange student in Kansas in the United States and at the age of 19 she went to Japan to study art and design at Tsukuba University. She stayed five years. Her interest in Japanese art and design and traditional crafts is evident in her work. In her early work, Sanpitak produced **collages** of photographs, pastel and Japanese paper. In the late 1980s she constructed her work, both two- and three-dimensional, with hand-dyed traditional Thai paper (saa paper), gold foil and fabrics.

The craft aspect of Sanpitak's art is important and is linked to her strong feminist concepts (concern with women's rights and equality). Her work focuses on female issues, on the changing roles, struggles and sense of dignity of women. She has used the physical and spiritual changes of her own body as inspiration. An example was her use of the upward curving line (reminiscent of her caesarian operation) as a substitute for a belly button in *Smiling Body* (1997).



Breast Works/Untitled 1994
17 monoprints and saa fibre sculptures, size variable
Collection: the artist

Sanpitak's work has meanings on a variety of levels. Her work refers to the female as a vessel (container), as a creator of human life. The breast is an important image or symbol in her work as seen in *Breast Works/Untitled* (1994) where it is produced in multiples. Yet she often isolates it, as an object, as in *Pink Breast* (1994), an acrylic and pastel drawing on paper. She also makes breasts a focus of a section of the female torso as in *Patched Up* (1997). This concentration on a part of the female body makes it both intimate and personal as an exploration of self-identity, yet universal as a symbol of fertility.

Sanpitak carefully chooses her colours, textures and media to convey feelings and ideas of how women are perceived and experience womanhood. She also uses **organic** forms such as the egg and squash or kiwifruit as symbols suggesting the female form and fertility.

In more recent work, such as *Womanly bodies* (1998), Sanpitak has worked on a larger scale. Her abstract forms suggest female torsos. We are reminded of traditional Thai sarongs wrapped around bodies. Once again she has used the natural saa fibre, this time combining it with rattan. The large size of the forms makes them overwhelming, but the material with its strong texture and see-through nature provides mystery.



***Womanly bodies* 1998**

Saa fibre, rattan rings, jute twine

25 pieces ranging from 180 to 264 cm in height with an average diameter of 72 cm

300 × 1050 × 850 cm (installed, variable)

Purchased 1999. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Sanpitak's art challenges, asking questions of life issues. Her experience of living and studying outside Thailand and her ongoing interest in international art events have contributed to her sense of innovation — the creating of something new. She explores a broad range of interests, forms and media in her art.

Sanpitak has exhibited in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Australia, including 'Confess and Conceal', an international touring exhibition organised by the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Third Asia Pacific Triennale in Brisbane.

Since the late 1980s, Sanpitak has become one of the most significant and dynamic artists of Thailand. She and her artist husband, Chatchai Puiapia, ran an alternative art gallery space in Thailand from 1991–95, providing inspiration and support to contemporary artists who wished to create art that was challenging. Government funding for artists is not available in Thailand, thus the conventional art market is the main exhibition venue and source of income for Thai artists.

Artist's statement

'These works are distilled from experience and emotion — an activity directly affecting me body and soul.' (Quoted in *The Cross The Egg The Cow and The Squash*, exhibition catalogue, 1991)

STUDYING ART

Critical study

Subjective frame

1. Give your opinion and feelings towards the installation *Breast Works/Untitled* (1994).

Structural frame

2. How does Sanpitak's choice of material help give meaning to her work?
3. What do breasts symbolise to this artist? Can you think of any other symbols she could have used?

Cultural frame

4. How can Pinaree Sanpitak's work be recognised as the work of a Thai woman and how can it be interpreted as reflecting universal issues or interests?

Postmodern frame

5. What is Postmodern about Sanpitak's work? What ideas or art traditions does she challenge?

MAKING ART

Create an installation (drawings and sculptural pieces or reliefs) based on a section of the human body, for example, feet, hands, knees. You may like to include humour in your work.