

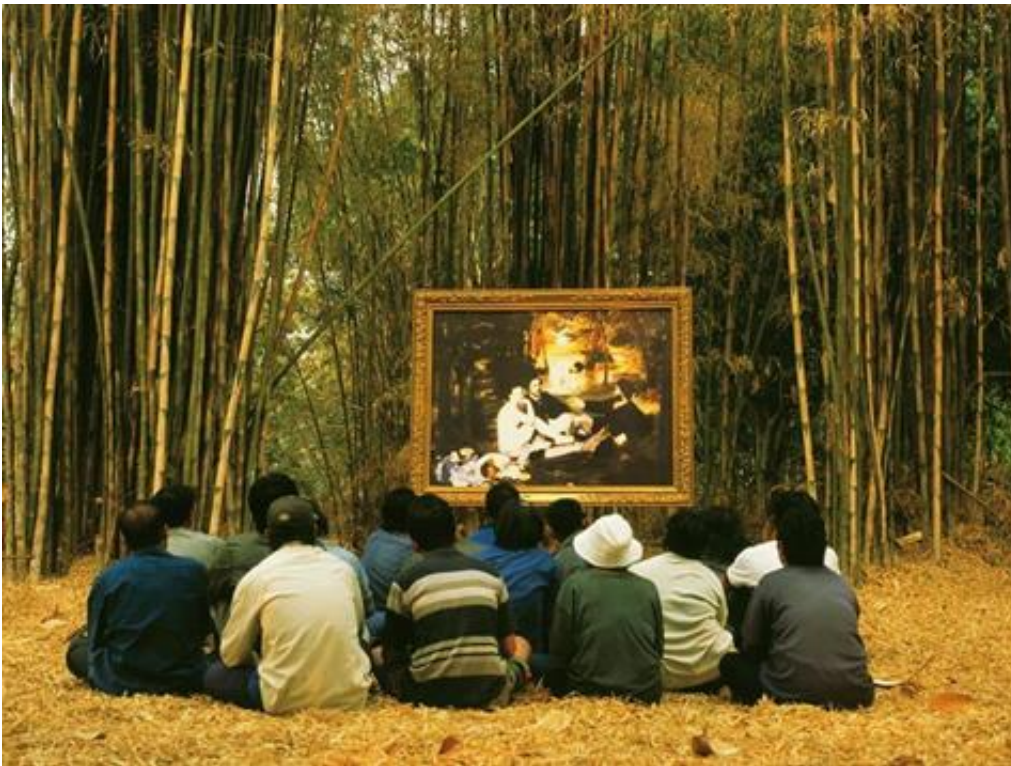
## Thai artist's overdue moment in the Australian sun

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**GINA FAIRLEY**

THURSDAY 27 MARCH, 2014

For all the talk of the Asian century most Australians have never heard of celebrated Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook.



*One of Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's iconic works on show at the University of Sydney art gallery.*

Among almost 100 international artists at the Biennale of Sydney, only two or three are from Asian countries.

But the lack of neighbourhood representation is balanced by an unusually deep look at one of Thailand's most successful artists, a multimedia experimenter whose work has rarely been seen in Australia.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, is described as one of Thailand's foremost contemporary artists and a leading voice within the Southeast Asian Art environment. His work is explored in two exhibitions - *Storytellers of the Town* at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and *The Village and Elsewhere* at the University Art Gallery, University of Sydney.

Co-curated by John Clark and Clare Veal, internationally respected art historians and Thai scholars, these two exhibitions span performance, video installation, photography and text, fields that Rasdjarmrearnsook has embraced to express the 'fundamental aspects of life and death, collective experiences of history and fate, and notions of the female and its constructed role within the context of contemporary Thai society', said 4A Director Aaron Seeto.

Seeto said, 'This solo exhibition at 4A spans about twenty years of Araya's practice...This is an extraordinary opportunity to see works from this internationally acclaimed artist who has rarely been shown in Australia.'



*Image courtesy the artist and 4A*

Walking into the gallery at street level piles in a corner is an avalanche of corn husks and a bed frame in the installation *Has Girl Lost her Memory* (1994), in which she 'oscillates between a rejection of and respect for the gendered roles inhabited by women in Thailand.'



*Image courtesy the artist and 4A*

Moving upstairs one encounters two somewhat haunting introspective works; the three-channel floating video installation *Great Time Message, Storytellers of the Town, The Insane* (2006).



*Image courtesy the artist and 4A*

In *The Class* (2005) the artist is shown directing a tutorial to a classroom of six corpses, which are shrouded in white sheets and arranged side-by-side on silver morgue trays.



Exhibition curators John Clark and Clare Veal say, '*Storytellers of the Town* includes works which represent the artist's intimate and confronting meditations on the limits of the mind and body, and the artist's own attempts to find a language to represent her experience as a woman; a Thai person; a daughter and granddaughter; a teacher and as an individual who has experienced extreme loss through the deaths of those close to her.'

What is most exciting at 4A is the presentation of the single-channel work *Some unexpected events sometimes bring momentary happiness. Afterwards, regret rises in our memory even for bygone hardships* (2009) – while the title almost covers it – this video has been projected onto the floor of a darkened room, the walls lined with black PVC, disorientating, strangely seductive and utilitarian. The work features dogs who are also victim. It is very powerful both in presentation and content.

Across town, the university's gallery has a suite of early print works not previously exhibited outside Thailand, as well as recent photographs and two video works from Rasdjarmrearnsook's celebrated, *The Two Planets Series*.



*Village and Elsewhere: Thai Villagers and Gentileschi's Judith and Holofernes*, Jeff Koons 2011, still from single channel video. Courtesy University of Sydney Art Collection

Her early work challenges recent notions of non-hand-produced visual images, while her video work from the late-1990s challenges ideas about the body and Buddhist notion of mortality, as well as more recently questions of what constitutes art in relation to a popular audience.

The exhibitions will combine and tour to the ANU Drill Hall Gallery in Canberra, opening 3 July.

***Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Storytellers of the Town***

**14 March – 10 May 2014**

**4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (<http://WWW.4A.COM.AU>)**

**181-187 Hay Street, Haymarket, Sydney.**

***Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: The Village and Elsewhere***

**17 March – 3 May 2014**

**University Art Gallery (<http://www.sydney.edu.au/museums>)**

**War Memorial Arch The Quadrangle, University of Sydney.**

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gina Fairley is arHub's journalist for Visual Arts.