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**ASIAN ART**

**NOW**

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Chinese women who gained prominence in the Asian art world of the 1990s. Speaking about her art in an interview, Lin said: 'I have always been interested in women and the feminine; all of my work is closely linked to my own life.'<sup>21</sup> Her installation *Bound and Unbound* (1995–97) contained household objects wrapped in cotton thread with the assistance of female friends and family as symbols of women's domestic labour. The artwork, which took more than two years to complete, featured a video image of a pair of scissors projected onto a screen made from cotton thread, suggesting impending liberation.

Performance has been an extremely popular medium for artists to question the status and perception of women in society. Indian Sonia Khurana's (b. 1968) mock-tragic performance video *Bird* (2000) shows the artist, naked and overweight, trying to fly, as a Sisyphean allegory for the aspirations in India for women's rights, which are constantly defeated. Indonesian artist **Arahmaiani** (b. 1961) has used performance to agitate for the rights of women in her own culture as well as elsewhere. Nudity is a common element, as in



**Arahmaiani** *Offerings from A–Z* 1996  
Installation view: Pha Daeng Cemetery, Chiang Mai, Thailand  
Performance

*Dayang Sumbi Refuses Status Quo* (1999), in which the artist partially undressed and then asked the audience to come forward and write or draw on her exposed arms and chest. It was intended as a feminist statement: 'I grew up in a community/society where exposed flesh (especially nudity) was taboo.... In other words, there is strict control over the body and its activities, particularly the body of a woman and her sexuality.'<sup>22</sup> In her performance *Offerings from A–Z* (1996) – a work she had to perform in Thailand because she feared the repercussions of performing it in Indonesia – the artist lay on a gravestone in a Buddhist crematorium next to a bloody cloth lying in a bowl. The performance protested the banning of women from temples and cemeteries during their menstrual cycle because of the belief that they are unclean.

The art historian Caroline Turner has pointed to the 'immense contribution' of women artists in Asia; indeed, in some countries the art world is overwhelmingly female.<sup>23</sup> Thai women artists have been especially active, focusing on social oppression and the status of women. Thai performance artist **Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook** (b. 1957) deals with death and dying to examine the respect – or lack of it – accorded to women in Thai culture. As she has said: 'Most women fall into the trap set up for them by society. Thai women are closed, blocked and oppressed by moralizing social norms.'<sup>24</sup> For a series of contemplative video performances, the artist sat and read aloud or chanted to shrouded female corpses in a morgue, and for *I'm living* (2002) she arranged clothing on the dead body of a girl, also in the morgue. Trauma and play converge in these strange but beautiful and tender videos which trigger thoughts of loss and vulnerability. The artist is fully aware of and manipulating our emotions through subject, form, mood and colour.

Stereotypical female social roles are the subject of photographic series by numerous Asian artists, both men and women, including Japanese Mariko Mori, Yanagi Miwa (b. 1967) and **Tomoko Sawada** (b. 1977), Indian **Pushpamala N.** (b. 1956) and Thai Michael Shaowanasai (b. 1964). Sawada's series of small black-and-white photographs *ID 400* (1998–2001) show the artist dressed as stereotypes of women in Japanese society; she took the shots in a photo booth in a parking lot





at a Kobe subway stop, where she used the public restroom to change her disguises. For another series, *OMIAI*♥ (2001), she dressed up as different women and had her photograph taken in the style of *omiai* portraits – pictures of marriageable women or men, which in Japan are commonly sent to prospective spouses and their families for review. Similarly, *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs* (2002–4), shows Pushpamala posed against a studio backdrop as various women in Indian history and mythology, ranging from goddesses to beauties to criminals, all regarded as ‘native types’ in the national imagination. The artist’s guises were inspired by sources as diverse as sixteenth-century miniature paintings, calendar art and modern newspaper photographs, and the series was made in collaboration with the photographer Clare Arni (b. 1962). The artists have said: “The project ironically comments on the colonial obsession with classification as well as the Indian nationalist ideal of “Unity in Diversity”.”<sup>25</sup>



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook *Reading for female corpse* 1997  
Photograph, 7 x 10 cm (2 7/8 x 3 7/8 in.)

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook *I'm living* 2002  
DVD