



## Jakkai Siributr: Strange Land

**NOTHING IS QUITE AS IT APPEARS** in *Strange Land*, in which Thai artist Jakkai Siributr for the first time fuses two previously distinct directions in his work: cartoonish, autobiographical acrylics on canvas and geometric abstractions based on Log Cabin quilts, machine pieced of specially woven Thai silks. The effect is stunning—combining prayer cloth, graffiti, and palimpsest. This exhibit of fourteen constructed fabric wall hangings at the National Arts Club (October 4–22, 2005) was his second New York annual.

What may elude a Western eye is Siributr's intense self-questioning and mordant humor. Instead of trendy sunglasses' frames, the rings around his goggle-eyed persona represent dark circles wrought by late-night philosophizing. Dogs appear in various guises: as beloved pets, in *8 Dogs*, but also as victims. Thais revere elephants (which transported kings for four hundred years) but denigrate dogs. *57 Days*, the short gestation period between going into heat and breeding a litter, addresses the proliferation of wild street curs, while *The Road to Laos* alludes to the illegal border trade in northern Thailand, where rural people barter dog meat for necessities like plastic buckets.

This clash between the Buddhist ideal of causing no harm and the exigencies of economic instability mirrors the artist's personal struggle to reconcile spiritual teachings with modern daily life. For example, he places himself at the center of *Adoration*, composed of letters in Bali Sanskrit that most Thais cannot read but know by rote. The out-of-kilter grid breaks the harmony of meditative chanting, as if gone stale.

ABOVE LEFT: *8 Dogs*. ABOVE RIGHT: *Drinks Party*. Both works: 2005; Thai silk, commercial fabric, acrylic, charcoal; 60" x 50". Courtesy of H Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

On a more mundane level, *Almighty Baht* tracks the fluctuating value of the precipitously devalued *baht* to the dollar; the featureless mice in *Drinks Party* parody social climbers; and *Hearsay* shows birds with speech bubbles gossiping in treetops. A 1960s children's book that Siributr found at a flea market inspired the playful choice of animal characters in these visual parables of urban society.

Adding to the aesthetic excitement is Siributr's recent embrace of cheap, gaudy over-the-counter fabric, surfaces bristling with loose threads, pleats, basted stitches, sharp slashes (reverse appliqué), and paint brushed and streaked in transgressive gestures. He transforms the territory opened up by Lucas Samaras, Michael Olszewski, and various quilt makers into a compelling Thai expression.

Trained at Indiana University and Philadelphia College of Textiles & Science, Siributr returned to his native Bangkok a decade ago to pioneer classes in fiber art. This exhibit placed him in the international ranks of contemporary artists. ●

To see more work by Siributr, visit the H Gallery website at [www.hgallerybkk.com](http://www.hgallerybkk.com).

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