

Art in Review

Jakkai Siributr

'Transient Shelter'

Tyler Rollins Fine Art
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

Apart from shows like the gorgeous solo by the Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Le that closed last week at P.P.O.W., little contemporary art from Southeast Asia finds its way to Chelsea. And we'd see almost none at all there were it not for Tyler Rollins, who consistently highlights the region, as he does in the current Jakkai Siributr exhibition.

Mr. Jakkai, who was born in Bangkok in 1969, studied art in the United States and now lives in his home country, Thailand. He is best known for his work in textiles, and the centerpiece of this show is a display of 10 elaborately embroidered versions of uniform jackets worn by Thai civil servants, the police and upper-level military personnel. Along the gallery walls are self-portrait photographs of the artist dressed in the jackets. Prototypes for the photographs are images found in memorial books traditionally published on the occasion of high-status funerals, with the deceased shown wearing emblems of his political and social rank. Because Mr. Jakkai's family has connections to Thai royalty, several of the photographs are based on funerary portraits of his ancestors.

What distinguishes the uniforms in the show from the real things is their decoration. In place of official sashes, badges and medals, they are bedecked with Buddhist charms, bow-tied ribbons, invented insignia and folk amulets, such as a necklace of wood good-luck phalluses, all of which turn the jackets into highly eccentric, not to say cartoonish, riffs on power couture.

Mr. Jakkai's work has a distinctly Buddhist subtext. The exhibition title suggests that earthly trappings of prestige are merely envelopes for emptiness. And the show itself, organized by Iola Lenzi, a curator based in Singapore, includes a video of a single uniform adrift on moving water, as if on the sea of karma, with the sound of cremation fires crackling in the background. But it doesn't take familiarity with Buddhism or Thai culture to grasp the basic idea here: that in the end, all hierarchical human power is ultimately reduced to the shared rank of dust to dust.

HOLLAND COTTER



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART

A 2014 police uniform, embellished with objects by the Thai artist Jakkai Siributr, in his "Transient Shelter" exhibition.