

PINAREE SANPITAK

“Art is a vehicle for one person’s search for the truth.” This must be one of the most complete descriptions of contemporary art, and in the case of Pinaree Sanpitak, the truth refers to her female identity within Thai society today.

Born in 1961 in Bangkok, she did not study at Silpakorn University like most artists, but was instead trained at the School of Fine Arts and Design of the University of Tsukuba in Ibarki, Japan.

In her solo exhibition in 1988, Pinaree stated: “The various styles of these works represent the various sets of circumstance, experience, thought, mood and feeling. Each tells its own story, and every “reader” or viewer is free to bring his own approach and interpretation.”

Pinaree’s five year sojourn in Japan had a distinct impact on her art, technically as well as visually. Delicate touches in compositions using collage, layering and wrapping paper show an enormous interest in textural surface and illusion. For instance, in *NEW YEARS TAMAGO*, 1988, shiny gold paper contrasts strongly with soft tissue, revealing hazy forms of branches, eggs and wall rubbings as if floating against flat, painterly fields.

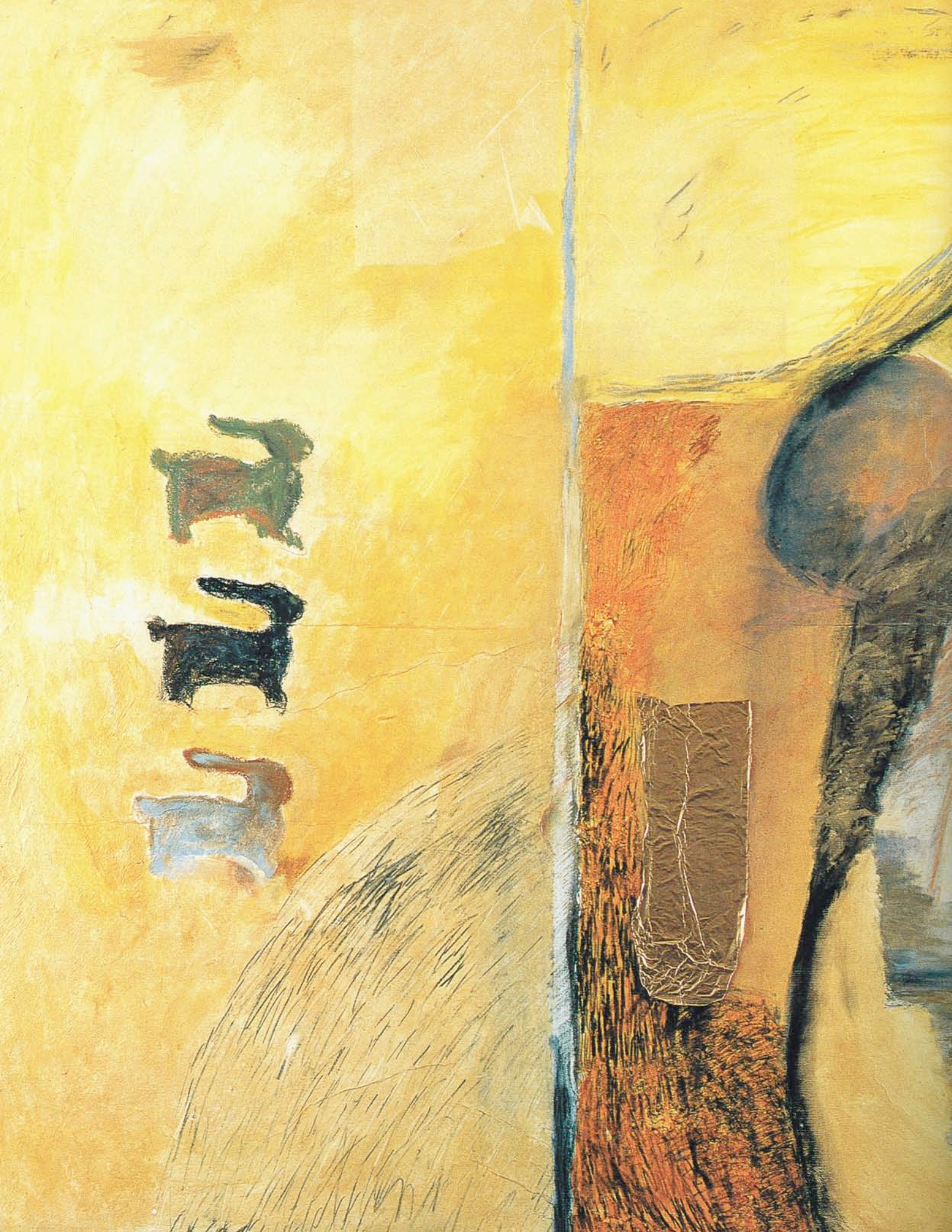
Luring the viewer with glimpses of evocative images, she often uses signs and symbols which have both a visible and invisible content. The egg, symbol of fertility, or parts of the female anatomy such as the torso, womb, face, and arm are simultaneously concealed and revealed in order to confront society’s perception of women as passive and men as creative.

In patriarchal Thai society, the art scene is predictably dominated by the male gaze. By asking the right questions in the wrong place, Pinaree’s works comment on the female role in sexuality and in oppression. *BEING IMPOSED UPON*, 1987, and *SURROUNDED BY MEN*, 1991, attempt to redirect these stereotypical concepts in a mild and subtle manner. There is no evidence of anger or aggression, instead, the biological identity is emphasized by an egg embedded in the bloated belly of a pregnant woman or by areas of colour surrounded by erect phallic shapes in yellow.

Many of Pinaree’s works are aimed at dephallicising the privilege of masculine authority and the interplay between personal symbols and issues of gender is often disguised, decorated and feminized.

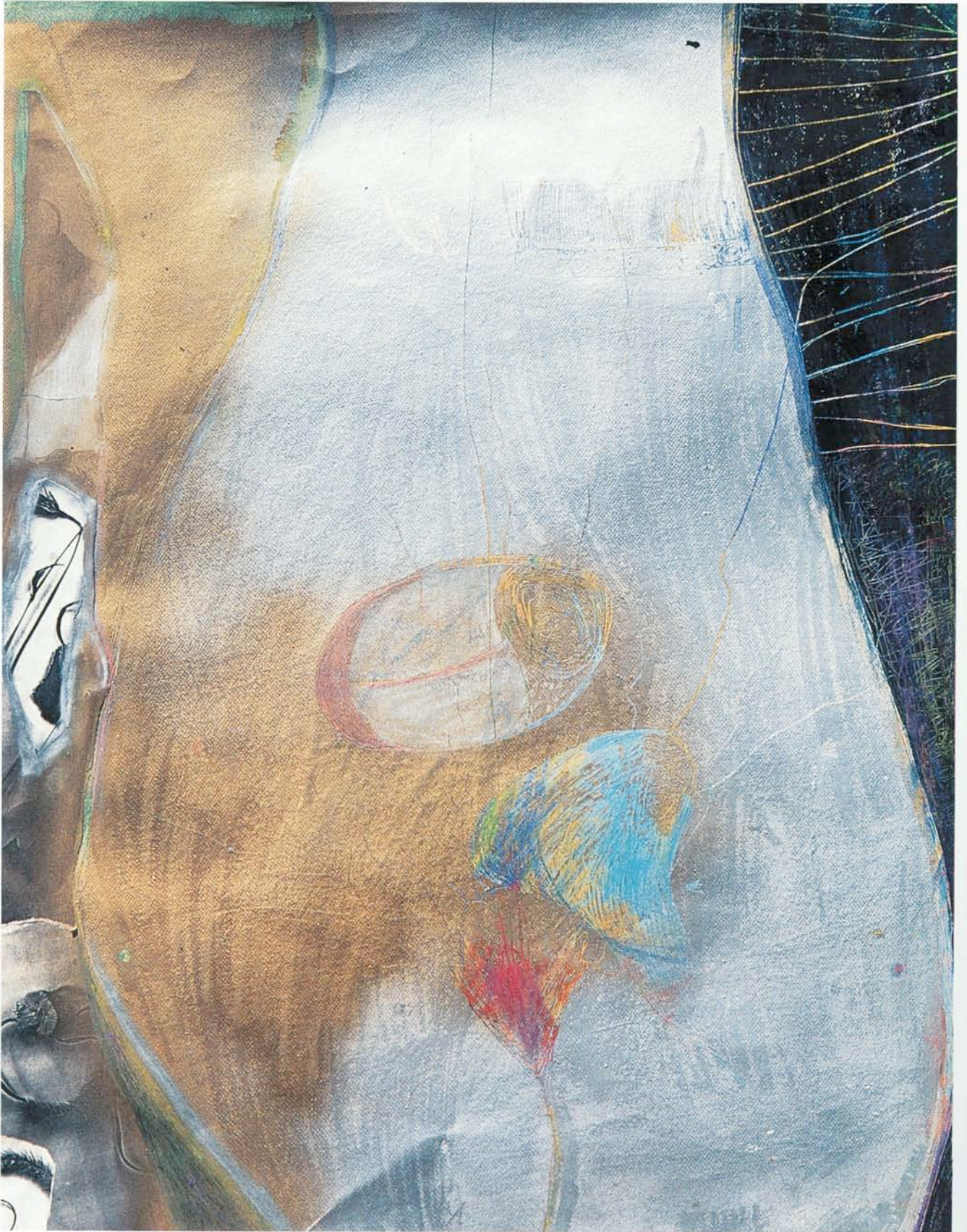
In her exhibition entitled “The Cross, The Egg, The Cow and The Squash”, these interrelated objects can be seen as personal icons used as a means of resistance to the dominant male order. She explained that these works “are mainly composed of paper - they are fragile - each possesses its individual appeal - they have their own hidden power to speak to that secret, elusive area of the heart and mind. They underline womanly potential. You are both the examiner and the examined.”

The camouflaged symbols are related to self. For example, the masks of the cow refer to the sign of the year Pinaree was born. They also recall a





ABOVE: BREAST WORKS, 1994, ACRYLIC AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 100 X 100 CM. **LEFT:** MOTHER AND CHILD: ARRIVAL OF THE BUNNIES, 1993, MIXED MEDIA, 130 X 150 CM. PRIVATE COLLECTION. **OVERLEAF:** BEING IMPOSED UPON, 1987, CRAYON, INK, ACRYLIC, LACQUER, PHOTOCOPIES ON PAPER, 76.1 X 56 CM.



childhood reminiscence, when her grandfather made her a cow mask to play in a tag game. The masks not only identify the self, but represent Pinaree's place as a child within the social and sexual structures of a Thai patriarchal family.

In *THE SQUASH AND I*, 1991, she explores the interpretive possibilities of the fruits of gourd-like plants. Sometimes, drawings of these bulbous shapes are transformed to look like dark wombs enclosing an egg. At other times, they become like signs of white blobs with pointed stems which take on a phallic form. Consequently, the *I*, which refers to the artist's gender and identity, becomes veiled and disguised. By avoiding explicit differences, *THE SQUASH AND I* oscillates between masculine and feminine symbols. For Pinaree, it is not so much penis envy, but her position in the homogenous phallogocentric order, which should not be taken for granted.

Married to the artist Chatchai Puipia, Pinaree has, nevertheless, played the traditional female role to satisfy a respected family life style. However, she managed to incorporate pregnancy and childbirth into her studio work, so these events would not hamper her artistic development. "Mother and Child: A Dialogue", her solo exhibition in 1993, revolved around the themes of selfhood, motherhood and childhood. Images relating to maternal fantasies and emblems of a mother's desire take preference over her earlier interest in sexual differences and gender functions.

SECRETS BEYOND, THE EGG THAT IS ABOUT TO HATCH and *THE ARRIVAL OF THE BUNNIES* are records of the shifting moods of a woman's anticipation as the foetus inside her becomes a child awaiting birth. She wrote: "Breast works. Breasts... I feel their presence. I admire their potential. Breasts are delicate and sensitive. They are symbols of beauty. They are the baby's most important source of nutrition. They symbolize women as sex objects. They are soft and warm. They have become taboo in some cultures." By emphasizing these parts of the female body, she forces the viewer to contemplate the round forms with erect tips as if they were icons which constantly arouse curiosity and consciousness in the dominant male. Various sex myths with their origins in traditions of misogyny have discredited the breasts as objects of lust and of dark and dirty secrets. Pinaree attempts to remove the tensions and taboos around breasts by representing them in multiple configurations, such as: *BLACK BREAST, ORANGE BREAST, 24-HOUR BREAST, SWEET BREAST, PINK SPLASH* and *SHRUNK*. Most important of all, the works present a woman's view which gazes back at the spectator.

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1961 in Bangkok, Thailand, studied at the School of Fine Arts and Design, University of Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Japan

Major Exhibitions:

- 1979 Kansas City Junior Art Exhibition, Kansas City, USA
- 1984 Gakuenzai, University of Tsukuba, Japan
- 1986 Via Tsukuba (3), AXIS Gallery, Roppongi, Tokyo, Japan
- 1989 Metro Mania, Arx 1989, Australia and Regions Artist Exchange, Perth, Australia



ABOVE: THE SQUASH AND I, 1991, INK, ACRYLIC, PAPER, INSTALLATION, SIZE VARIABLE. COLLECTION OF THE CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY, BANGKOK. **LEFT:** SURROUNDED BY MEN, 1991, INK, ACRYLIC, PAPER, PHOTOGRAPHS, 70 X 70 CM.

