

by Patricia Malarcher

Jakkai Siributr

Almost compelling the viewer to salute, ten military-style jackets on torso mannequins dominated Jakkai Siributr's solo show *Transient Shelter* at Tyler Rollins Gallery in New York last spring. Lined up single file on a narrow pedestal, this disembodied group resembled a segment of a full dress parade. From afar, each garment appeared to be embellished with emblems of successful careers—campaign ribbons, medallions, metallic braid. Close inspection, however, revealed not decorations for valorous deeds, but junky accessories—souvenirs, mass-produced amulets, garlands laden with phallic fetishes, and crude embroidered beadwork.

Formal photographs of the artist in each outfit hung on walls parallel to the pedestals. In a possible nod to Cindy Sherman, these portraits parodied representations of actual deceased government officials printed in memorial books distributed at their cremation ceremonies in Thailand. A third component of the installation was a video showing a similar jacket, unembellished, beneath the surface of moving water. No explanation was needed to see that Siributr was commenting on the ultimate impermanence of rank and badges of identity.

Sixteen years ago, Siributr returned to his native Thailand after earning a BA in textiles

All photos courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Gallery, New York.

JAKKAI SIRIBUTR's *Transient Shelter* exhibition installation at Tyler Rollins Gallery, New York, 2014.

JAKKAI SIRIBUTR *C-7* 2014 Police uniform embellished with objects, 22" x 17" x 8", 2014.

JAKKAI SIRIBUTR *C-8* Digital print, 40" x 30", Edition of 4 + 2 APs, 2014.

JAKKAI SIRIBUTR *C-10* Military uniform embellished with objects, 22" x 17" x 8", 2014.





JAKKAI SIRIBUTR *Shroud* (Installation view) Hemp, wax, hand crochet, 79" x 79" x 63", 2011. Detail *LEFT TOP*.

and fine arts from Indiana University and an MS in printed textiles from Philadelphia University. Since then, he has focused his studio practice on critiquing what he sees as a dominance of worldly ambition over spiritual values in Thailand. "I am interested in the way Thai Buddhists shape their faith into a religion of convenience," he said. Siributr is not an outside observer. A practicing Buddhist, he is a great-grandson of King Mongkut of "The King and I" fame.

Siributr's affinity for textiles dates from his childhood in Bangkok. "I spent a lot of time in my late aunt's batik studio. . . her house functioned as an atelier and a boutique." He decided to study art in a university while attending high school in the US. "At the time, I did not plan to become an artist. I was looking for an art program that would enable me to have a career." In addition to art making, Siributr has been introducing contemporary fiber work as an academic study in Thailand. "Even though Thailand has had a rich tradition of textile art for hundreds of years, it's in the form of traditional weaving," he explained. As a lecturer for Thammasat University in Bangkok, he traveled to rural villages throughout the country. This opportunity "opened my eyes and gave me perspectives about Thailand that I had not been aware of before."

The assertive use of readymade materials in *Transient Shelter* departs from Siributr's



JAKKAI SIRIBUTR *Red Buddha* Bumper stickers, thread, crochet, 84.5" x 84.5", 2010.

previous work in which he applied his cache of textile skills in subtler ways. In an early series of fabrics lavishly embroidered with lively figures, the visual impression of mythic narrative belies the questionable antics depicted, such as benignly cartoonish animals in erotic poses. *Red Buddha* (2010), a crocheted silhouette incorporating bumper stickers, seems casually assembled and riddled with holes.

Exploring the Cosmos: The Stupa as a Buddhist Symbol, a 2012 group exhibition at the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore, examined the symbolism of the *stupa*, an architectural form used in Buddhist shrines. Siributr's contribution was *Shroud*, an air-filled pyramidal arrangement of 750 loosely knitted three-dimensional Buddha figures, each at the end of a string suspended from a metal grid.

In the words of writer Brian Curtin, recent exhibitions have brought attention to Siributr's work as "endlessly disruptive." Offending the establishment is risky, Siributr acknowledges. "Fortunately, my last three shows that contained strong criticisms of the situation in Thailand took place abroad."

Jakkai Siributr's website is www.jakkai.com. He is represented in the US by Tyler Rollins Gallery, New York; www.trfineart.com.

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