

Preface

Jane Puranananda

The James H. W. Thompson Foundation

temporary insanity aptly describes the general public's reaction to the announcement that The James H. W. Thompson Foundation planned to stage an art exhibition focusing on the female breast. After all, what does the "House on the Klong", a museum filled with Asian antiques collected by the Bangkok-based Jim Thompson, have to do with modern art and the female form? If anything, the American, who mysteriously disappeared in the jungles of Malaysia in 1967, was known for his interest in traditional arts and crafts. He is credited with helping to revive the Thai silk industry, after making careful research of old textile patterns and weaving methods.

However, a closer examination of the objectives of The James H. W. Thompson Foundation reveals that *temporary insanity*, created by the talented Thai artist, Pinaree Sanpitak, ideally conforms to the Foundation's goals to promote Thai culture. Foundation President, William J. Klausner, aptly describes the philosophy behind the Foundation as follows:

Thai identity, and the culture which imbues it, are dynamic, not static. They are constantly evolving. Articulating and extolling the past and its traditions should not be at the expense of appreciating and encouraging those emergent forms of cultural expression which find their inspiration, but not their limits, in the bedrock of traditional culture. Similarly, embracing change and innovation in Thai art forms should not entail a rejection or denial of the value of Thailand's cultural past. It has been said that "the past is the best prophet of the future." However, the past and its traditions should not control the future but rather provide a guide to the roots and meaning, the shape and pace of change.

The relationship between Pinaree and the Foundation becomes even more serendipitous when one considers that the artist has used Thai silk as the medium for most of the artwork she presents in the exhibition. How fitting that a material which has been held in such esteem in Thai culture for centuries would be given such dramatic new visual expression, one that is so divergent from its normal

use. Traditionally in Thailand most of the silk weavers are women. Yet, if these weavers, who live in rural Thailand, were to view Pinaree's work, what would they think? Would they understand that her banners and undulating forms pertain to them and have been created in empathy with them?

Pinaree speaks to the viewer in the complex context of modern psychology. Her artwork, her message, her talents, while owing much to her Asian background, are presented on a level that appeals to modern, socially conscious women, and men, everywhere. *temporary insanity* invites comparison through contrast and juxtaposition on many levels.

The newly constructed Jim Thompson Center for Textiles and the Arts, which opened in December 2003, provides a most appropriate venue for such a unique display of talent. The building, while traditional Thai in the exterior, is boldly modern in the interior. Stark gray walls offer a stunning backdrop for Pinaree's orange and yellow undulating female breast forms, and high ceilings the ideal space to display her silk banners.

The Foundation is highly honored that Pinaree agreed to be the first modern artist to display her works in the new Center. Her dedication to her art and her professionalism have made cooperating with her on this project a pleasure. The Foundation is also grateful for the enthusiasm and assistance of Gridthiya Gaweewong who oversaw the installation of Pinaree's work.

In addition, thanks must be given to both of these capable women for developing the theme and idea behind creating this catalogue. It is certainly high tribute to Pinaree's work that such an outstanding list of art scholars, historians and critics agreed to be contributors. The writings of Apinan Poshyananda, Iola Lenzi, Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Rhana Devenport and Gridthiya Gaweewong provide the threads to weave meaning and understanding into Pinaree's art.

The Foundation is fortunate that Board Member Eric Booth has had the vision to encourage and support Pinaree in creating such a colorful, meaningful and thought provoking exhibition. Special thanks must also be given to Beverly Jangkamonkulchai of The Thai Silk Company who so painstakingly coordinated the creation of this catalogue.

Introduction

temporary insanity : emotional

Gridthiya Gaweewong

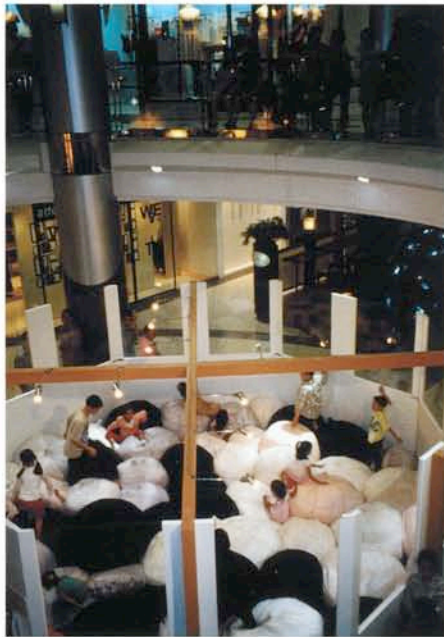
Featuring recent works by Pinaree Sanpitak, *temporary insanity* is the first contemporary art exhibition to be shown at the Art Center at Jim Thompson House. The works of Pinaree, inspired by natural forms, the female body and textile bridge the gap between the traditional and the world today. Her works explore the thin line between art and craft. They redefine the potential of textiles to be used in more abstract and challenging ways, thus expanding boundaries into contemporary art forms.

The title of this exhibition implies the artist's state of mind, and how she views the world. Rarely is one willing to admit that he or she is in a state of 'temporary insanity'. For Pinaree, this presentation of her work becomes an important confessional experience: Something that she would like to share with all of us. The exhibition features three major works, *breast stupas* (2000-2001), unthreaded silk, *vessels* (2003), cast brass with gold leaf inlay and a new interactive soft sculpture piece, *temporary insanity* (2003-2004), soft sculptures with motors, timers and sound sensor devices.

The recent sculptural works by Pinaree add a new dimension to her art. They are not merely an object (of desire and with desire), but are imbued with their own emotions. *temporary insanity* defines a shift from more formal sculpture to interactive soft sculptural work. Using silk to create a blurred form, she arrives at an image that falls somewhere between breast and ball. She hides sound detection devices inside her sculpture, which allows her audience to participate in her installation. Gradually, reacting to the sounds made by the viewer, her soft sensual forms begin to move, undulate and become active: no longer passive objects but something with a life of their own.

In the past, Pinaree Sanpitak has worked with various media: drawings, ceramics, sculptures, paintings and textiles to create abstract shapes and forms of the female body that boldly reflect feminine desire, sensuality, and sensibility. Pinaree is a well-known Bangkok-based Thai woman artist and as such, in addition to being

textile



Pinaree Sanpitak
noon-nom, 2001-2002
organza, synthetic fiber,
installation view,
Discovery Center Bangkok, August 2003
private collections
photo : Pinaree Sanpitak

known in Thailand, enjoys an international reputation. Her career began in the late 1980s, when upon returning from her studies in Japan, she launched into the art world with a beautiful photography and mixed media exhibition. At the time, there were few practicing women artists in Thailand and Southeast Asia, and even fewer who insisted upon taking on the demanding role of wife and mother alongside that of professional artist. Pinaree has managed to maintain a balance in her life, despite her many roles. Her candid and direct approach to the female state of mind, nature, desire, sensation and sensibility developed strongly during the creation of her *mother and child : a dialogue series* in 1993. Her works are autobiographical, in that she records and re-examines her own physical and emotional conditions.

Pinaree had been interested in working with fibre since 1994 and textiles since 1998. In *breast works/ untitled* (1994), she used saa (paper mulberry) fibre to create soft sculptures based on breast forms. Later in the *womanly abstract series* (1998), Pinaree incorporated her grandfather's textile collection in her painting *womanly temper* (1998). Pinaree states: "I became very interested in working with different materials since the print workshop in Darwin after APT 3 in 1999.

Pinaree Sanpitak,

vessels, 2003, cast brass with gold leaves, 120 cm in diameter, height 40 cm.
weight 58 kg./102 cm in diameter, height 38 cm. weight 40 kg.,

Pier 40, San Francisco, CA, USA,

October 2003, in collaboration with ARTSHIP,

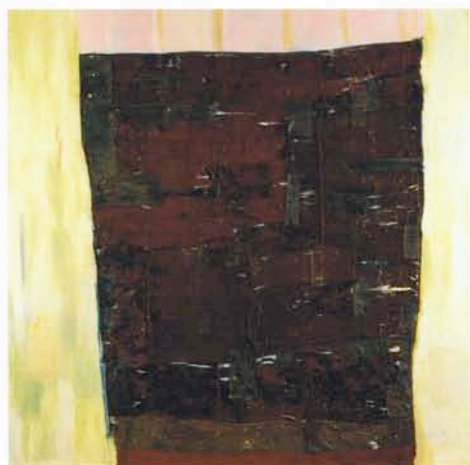
collection the artist, photo : Pinaree Sanpitak



Perhaps from that experience of working with all sorts of printing plates, metal, stone, paper... I was forming ideas for vessels and mounds. And then I was contacted by a Japanese / Chinese textile art group asking for work, re - the saa fibre from 'womanly bodies'. Then I started seriously thinking of work with actual textile. printing / collaging/ embroidery. I did lots of experiments before coming up with the unthreading technique, working first with hemp fibre (yai ganja) and local silk. I have always liked handiwork/ needlework since I was young. Then Meo (Klaomard Yipintsoi) suggested I approach Eric to use Jim Thompson's silk, which really confirmed 'breast stupas'. At the moment I'm working on a new idea for another textile piece that has not been finalised yet."

As her work evolved, audience interaction started to become an important element for Pinaree. The installation *womanly bodies* (1998), first exhibited at About Studio/About Café in 1999, was arranged in a café space amidst eclectic tables and chairs. Through the use of saa fibre, female shapes were portrayed. The bodies, in various forms, created a physical feminine landscape. Taking over both the walls and floor, it invited people in and allowed them to 'be' with her work. Pinaree has explored and extended boundaries by her use of diverse materials. Choosing to work with silk in *breast stupas* and *temporary insanity*, Pinaree deals with the idea of the sacred and the profane. Her iconic presentation of a breast as a stupa was a major challenge to male dominated Buddhism. Pinaree dared to compare female body parts to the stupa, confronting the taboo subject of the traditional role of women in Buddhism. The banners of silk in *breast stupas* reflected a mood of celebration, yet also left a meditative ambience for the viewer. They welcomed the audience, enticing it to walk through and explore. This is an important gesture for the artist: she generously allows the viewer to come inside her own body/space and investigate it thoroughly.

In *vessels*, Pinaree created brass sculptures lined with gold leaves. These works were originally intended to be installed on the deck of ARTSHIP in the port of Oakland, California, (a passenger/ cargo ship turned into an art center).



Pinaree Sanpitak,
Womanly Temper, 1998
fabric, acrylic and pastel on canvas,
192 x 192.7 cm.,
collection the artist,
photo : Aroon Permpoonsopol

In creating *vessels*, concepts of site and space became important to Pinaree. Unfortunately the art center closed, and her work was never exhibited there. Instead *vessels* was shown with other works at a Berkeley art gallery, located in a restored Victorian house. Pinaree's pieces inspired a group of San Francisco/Oakland-based performance artists, who in turn created a performance given in the Bay area using these vessels. This event invited interest in physical interaction between art and the audience. Pinaree first intentionally courted direct physical contact with the audience in her piece *noom-nom* (2001-2002). Hundreds of alluring soft, breast-shaped sculptures offered the audience an opportunity to touch, interact and linger amongst them.

Her recent installation, *temporary insanity* creates bodily spaces for people to enter. Interaction has been extended, not only by permitting the viewer to enter into the space of her work, but to also by having her work react to the viewer through sound. Audience interaction through laughter, voices, shouting or simply talking to each other creates a curious effect. In Thai such a condition is referred to with the saying 'og san kwang kwaen' or 'shaky heart and soul'. The implied meaning is that of one being in shock and out of control. Pinaree herself has experienced and been influenced by emotions that affect her gender through the natural process of aging. A woman entering the second half of her life, she encounters physical changes and emotional turbulence. As such, the work presented by Pinaree successfully reveals her true self with frank, self-critical honesty.

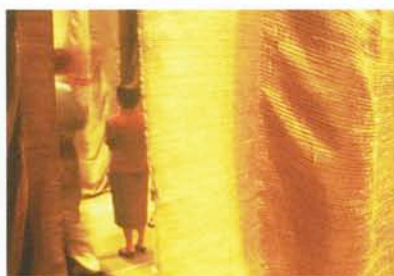
In medical terms this approaches psychosis. Dr. Aroon Shaowanasai, a leading Thai psychiatrist who has kindly contributed to the Thai edition of this catalogue, summarizes this by explaining that there are six categories: peer pressure or group psychology, acute stress disorder, brief reactive psychosis, shared psychotic disorder, hysterical reaction and substance abuse. According such a clinical approach, the state of *temporary insanity* might fit into a case of psychosis, for example, brief reactive psychosis, or even hysterical reaction. This suggests a condition, which is unbearable to oneself, an inability to deal with unexpected

Pinaree Sanpitak,
temporary insanity 2004,
exhibition view, The Art Center at Jim Thompson House,
photo : Kornkrit Jianpinidnan

situations or transitions. However, this condition can be defined in context with the span of a human life and described as: 'One who has begun the middle of her life, or one who is in the middle of a situation, waiting for a major change'. In such cases, the individual must have strength to encounter such conditions, if not, he or she will experience 'temporary insanity.'

This *temporary insanity* catalogue features essays written by distinguished art critics, writers and specialists on women contemporary arts, particularly in the Asia - Pacific region. The focus lies with issues surrounding women artists in contemporary art, particularly in Asia. The contributors were invited to provide essays which focus on the region and cover issues related to the core theme. Pieces by Prof. Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, Ministry of Culture, Thailand; Prof. Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Mills College, Oakland, USA; Rhana Devenport, curator, Queensland Art Gallery and Iola Lenzi, Singapore based freelance curator/writer. The writings here take account of historical, political, cultural and psychoanalytical approaches and address the historical background of women artists in Thailand juxtaposed with the art world of the West and other Asian countries. It also explores the role of Asian women artists in society, highlighting the feminine and/or feminism elements in their works. Lastly, there is an in depth analysis of Pinaree's works which explores the issues of the feminine vs. feminism.

Dr. Apinan Poshyananda considers the relationship, since the Renaissance period, of women artists to the male dominant art world. He touches upon the emergence of women artists in the Asian region. He gradually unfolds his impressions of Pinaree's works, describing her as an example of a woman artist who addresses female issues without adhering to the radical feminist role (as evolved in the 1970s women liberation movement). Expanding upon Apinan's article about the role of female artists in Asia, Iola Lenzi, a Singaporean based freelance writer, focuses on Asian women artists in the contemporary art scene in Southeast Asia. She covers leading women artists from Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore whose works go beyond gender issues to address social, political and economical point of views. Prof. Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker approaches the work of Asian women artists in both Southeast Asia and India. Based on her knowledge of Indian art and her experience of viewing Pinaree's solo exhibition in Berkeley, she makes a distinctive comparison between the two. Drawing a connection between the works of Pinaree and Montien Boonma, Milford-Lutzker provides an interesting comparison of the similarity of forms developed from separate and contrasting contents and motivations. Rhana Devenport focuses exclusively on Pinaree's work throughout her career. She discusses and analyzes her interest in the form and content of body issues, the development of her career, and her agenda. Devenport investigates the relationship of Pinaree's work to western female artists like Eva Hesse and Japanese artist, Yayoi Kusama. Finally, she draws our attention to Buddhist theory.



Last but not least, as an independent curator, I am deeply honoured to work on this project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Pinaree Sanpitak for all her hard work, and for her patience in working with a super-flexible schedule. I would like to thank Eric Booth, Beverly Jangkamonkulchai and Supicha Teerasanee for all their support and patience. I would particularly like to thank the James H. W. Thompson Foundation for its enormous effort and initiative in starting this important new art center that will promote and accommodate both traditional and contemporary textile arts within the Thai and international art community. There has been a lack of public and private support for contemporary art in this country, but now we have an exceptional example of a private initiative. We hope that this Center will generate strong and dynamic energy to invigorate Bangkok and the Thai art scene.

Salute!

Edited by Jim Prevett and McArthur

Gridthiya Gawee Wong is an independent curator and a co-founder of Project 304, a non-profit art organization based in Bangkok. Her curatorial works including Alien(ger)ation (2000 - 2003 in Bangkok, Khonkaen and Chiangmai), Sorry for the Inconvenience, Bangkok and Under Construction, Tokyo, Japan (2003). Her current projects including with Mekong Laboratory, an art and cultural network among the Mekong Greater Sub-Region countries (2004-2006), preparation of Southeast Asian art show in Berlin's House of the World Culture (2005) and an exchange art exhibition between Bangkok and Barcelona (2005) to name a few.