



TRADITIONS

CONTEMPORARY ART

IN ASIA

TENSIONS

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GUEST CURATOR

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ESSAYS BY

Apinan Poshyananda

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In her 1995 installation *Buang* ('Trap'), **Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook** makes a visual comparison between being a woman and the process of being fixed, framed, oppressed, and blocked by social mores. Like a frail invalid or corpse, the sculpted figure of woman lies in a canoe-shaped wooden bowl (which doubles as a cradle or a coffin). Her body lacks a torso, and where one would be is nothing more than a heap of crumpled scraps of transparent material and misshapen pieces of clay, looking like the residue of something that has been gnawed by death. This morbid effect is heightened by framed etchings of skeletons that hang nearby; a bundle of sticks that have been burnt to charcoal; and two heavy logs and a large stone held precariously in mid-air by thin wires. Rasdjarmrearnsook explains that the objects relate to the situation of women in Thailand: "Most women fall into the trap set up for them by society. Thai women are closed, blocked, and oppressed by moralizing social norms. The female corpse lies in her coffin, women can't stand up because they're trapped by the double standards society places on them."¹⁰⁵

Related to *Buang* are two other installations by Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Time: Object Was Aborted* (1995) and *Prostitute's Room* (1994). These two works also focus on provocative issues for women in a sexually discriminatory culture: abortion and prostitution.¹⁰⁶ In the latter work, blood is smeared on glass bowls which are placed in a darkened tentlike enclosure. The odor of dried blood in the damp space elicits a palpable sensation of violence and compels the viewer to re-experience the brutality against the female flesh. Rasdjarmrearnsook's installations are not confined to inequalities against Thai women, however. She also addresses the growing problem of female slavery, trafficking in migrants from neighboring Burma, Laos, and Cambodia and forcing them into a modern form of slavery through prostitution. In some cases, families of these women are proud of their new earning power. Despite the risk of violence and disease, many of the girls are sold into prostitution by their parents and return home with honor. They then repeat the cycle by sending their own daughters to brothels and pimps.



25. **Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook**, *Buang* ('Trap'), 1995, detail of installation with wood, metal plates, clay, and fiberglass, H. approx. 152 cm (60 in.), courtesy of the artist.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook

Thailand



Buang (Trap), 1995

Installation with wood, metal plates, stone,
clay, and fiberglass

Approx. 500 × 800 × 450 cm

(197 × 315 × 177 in.)

Courtesy of the artist





Details of **Buang** (Trap)

