

Araya Rasdjarmreansook

syntynyt 1957 Tradissa, Thaimaassa.

Asuu ja työskentelee Chiang Maissa, Thaimaassa.

Araya Rasdjarmreansookin tuotanto koostuu performansseihin pohjaavista videoteoksista sekä -installaatioista, joissa ihmisyyden, elämän kiertokulku ja erilaiset kohtalot kietoutuvat runolliseen kuvamaailmaan. Keskeisin aiheista on kuolema, jota taiteilija käsittelee vailla länsimaisen yhteiskunnan pelonsekaista klinisyyttä. Suru, murhe ja yksinäisyys teoksissa pohjaavat taiteilijan varhaislapsuuden menetyksiin, jotka hän kietoo rauhallisen lohduttavaan, mutta voimakkaaseen kuvamaailmaan.

Teoksissaan Rasdjarmreansook tuo oman kuolevaisuutemme lähelle. Hän tasapainottelee kuoleman ja elämän reunamilla, tuoden esille maailman, jossa kuolema ei välttämättä merkitse olemassaolon loppua. Taiteilija käy vuoropuhelua sielujen ja henkimaailman kanssa lukiessaan vanhaa thaimaalaista tekstiä yksinäisyydessä kuolleille ihmisille teoksessaan *Reading for the Corpse* (1997-1998). Videossaan *I'm Living* (2002) hän pukee kuolleelle naiselle vaatekertoja, kunnioittaen vanhojen hautajaisrituaalien sekä yksinäisen ihmisen muistoa, toimien sekä ystävänä että seremoniallisena matkaan lähettäjänä.

Araya Rasdjarmreansook on opiskellut kuvataidetta Bangkokin Silpakorn -yliopistossa sekä Braunschweigissa, Saksassa. Hän on pitänyt monia yksityisnäyttelyitä vuodesta 1987 alkaen mm. Bangkokissa, San Antoniossa ja Tukholmassa sekä osallistunut lukuisiin kansainvälisiin ryhmänäyttelyihin vuoden 1981 jälkeen. Teoksia on ollut esillä mm. Helsingissä Kiasman *Ars 01* -näyttelyssä vuonna 2001, Pittsburghissa 2004, Lontoossa 2005, ja Istanbulin biennaalissa 2003 sekä Venetsian biennaalissa 2006.

Satu Metsola

Araya Rasdjarmreansook

born in 1957 in Trad, Thailand.

Lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Araya Rasdjarmreansook makes performance videos and installations, in which humanity, the cycle of life and different fates intertwine into a poetic visual world. Her principal theme is death, which she examines without the fearful detachment that is typical of Western attitudes. The sorrow, grief and loneliness of her works are inspired by losses the artist suffered in her early childhood, and she wraps them in a calm and consoling but powerful visuality.

Rasdjarmreansook's works remind us of our own mortality. She balances precariously between life and death to present a world where death does not necessarily mean the end of existence. In *Reading for the Corpse* (1997-1998), she engages in dialogue with souls and the spirit world by reading an old Thai text to people who have died alone and abandoned. In the video *I'm Living* (2002), she dresses a dead woman in various outfits, respectful of ancient burial rituals and the memory of the lonely person, acting as a friend and a ceremonial dispatcher.

Araya Rasdjarmreansook has studied art at the Silpakorn University in Bangkok and in Braunschweig, Germany. She has held several solo exhibitions since 1987, including in Bangkok, San Antonio and Stockholm, and participated in numerous international group exhibitions since 1981. Her works have been shown at, for example, Kiasma's *Ars 01* exhibition in Helsinki in 2001, and in Pittsburgh in 2004, in London in 2005 and at the Istanbul Biennial in 2003 and the Venice Biennial in 2006.

Satu Metsola



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Lament, 2000

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: I'm Living, 2002



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: I'm Living, 2002

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Feces, Life, Love, Lust, 2006





Mae Maha Chamrern

- the woman who does not fit the mould

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The word *Mae* in the Thai language, apart from meaning "Mother," is also used as a suffix in front of a female name or as a courtesy title to the names of female goddesses, such as *Mae Khong Kha* – The River Goddess; *Mae Posop* – The Rice Goddess; or *Mae Thoranee* – The Earth Mother.

Maha means "Great."

Chamrern means "Growth."

From the three meanings in the above-mentioned, it seems that the combined word *Mae-Maha-Chamrern* should denote an auspicious meaning. However, the word *Mae Maha Chamrern* is, in reality, usually used as a sarcastic remark to call a woman who "grows in a way that is not an established, socially acceptable path."

There are other words that are used to call or refer to women, such as *Chang Thao Lang* – literally the hind foot of an elephant, which means a lady who always follows her husband's leads; *Nang Kaew* – a woman who is honored because of her traditionally approved virtues; *Mae Sri Ruean* – a woman who is a good housewife, who brings peace and goodness to the family. Those words denote the traditionally desirable qualities in women, while women who are writers and artists are usually called sarcastically as *Mae Maha Chamrern*, since they usually are outspoken, and inclined to express their opinions and criticism of the society openly and publicly through their art, and writings.

When one looks at the number of artists and writers in Thailand, one will find that there are not that many women who become writers, and there are even fewer women who become artists. Both professions open the path for women to grow in a way that does not follow the traditional Thai customs and culture.

In a film review in 2006, the author noted that ghost movies that have been very popular in the last 7 years usually have female ghosts as lead characters. The role of a female ghost opens up a path to escape from the societal oppression. The female ghost can act in whatever way she likes – a situation that rarely happens under the scrutiny of the Thai culture – especially through her use of the supernatural power as a ghost.

Writing and creating art are one of the channels through which women are able to express themselves in the way that they want, and to appear in the public space. They have been defined with a new definition, other than being a woman who follows her husband's lead; a woman with culturally defined virtues, or a perfect housewife. To be a woman artist or a writer might not give one the supernatural power possessed by a female ghost in the movies. Nevertheless, she can cause a considerable havoc through the new definition, and working processes in those roles.

The power of a woman in her creative work and the power of a female ghost in a movie are similar in the way that neither of them seeks to

conceal their ways of life that may not be all that virtuous. Nor do they seek to conceal their fighting spirits, which are unwilling to submit docilely to a difficult situation, or hide their problems in silence under the domineering shadow of cultural norms. While an art work created by a Thai woman artist mourns the end of a family relationship, a female ghost moans, and tries every possible way to regain her lost love. Many a time a female ghost appears in many forms of manifestation; makes herself become visible to the human eyes; or affects the changes in her appearances, while a number of Thai women artists appear personally in their own creations.

The "appearances" of themselves, whether by the women artists or the female ghosts, come both in the concrete and abstract spaces. They are a startling phenomenon that seems to be in sharp contrast with the normal lack of space where a woman can express the meaning of her own Self and existence.

My works on bodies, therefore, include the meanings from the surrounding social contexts.

A living woman attempts to read poetry out loud for the body of a 27 years' old woman who had committed suicide, in one of the three video installation series called *Lament* (2000).

In this work, it seems as if the living woman is trying to comfort the dead with a poem. However, the poem was actually a story of unrequited love that might have been the cause of the other woman's death.

In *I'm Living* (2002), a woman spends a long time dressing the corpses of women who died in their early thirties. It seems to convey a tender relationship between the living and the dead, if we do not step back and question ourselves, as other people might, whether the activities are actually futile and meaningless.

In *Feces Life Love Lust* (2006), a woman and her dog take a one thousand kilometers' trip together from the mountains to the sea, in search of the meaning of life. The relationship of the two, their lives and their dreams, could invoke a sense of emptiness to the audience.

Then we see still pictures of wide windows that are opened up from the inside to the outside world at every direction. A video installation entitled *Windows* (2002) comes with a mixture of the sounds of activities within the house, and those from the outside. The work is a juxtaposition of a personal space and the external environment. The window frames act as the boundary lines that divide the two worlds for the owner of the house.

In the room, pictures of three windows are screened in the walls. The projected pictures are like an attempt to create an exit in the dense walls to provide access to the outside world. On the floor, surrounded by all the windows, one sees a princess in a lavish white gown lying still on a white bedding. Her gown is rustled gently by the wind. A flock of white birds fly in to visit the princess and then depart in *Wind Princess White Birds* (2002).

In *Windows*, the personal space of a woman is confined by the windows that are open wide, marking the boundaries between the inside and the outside. Dogs' barking, the sound of a violin being played, and the sound emitting from a radio are mingled with birds' chirping noises, the sound from a distant saw mill, and the sound of thunders.

The *Wind Princess White Birds* evokes a space for a fairytale-like imagination from childhood. By the time the childhood imagination returns to an adult's mind, the princess has already passed away, mourned by all the friendly animals in the fairy tale.

It is in contrast with the story in *Feces Life Love Lust*, which tells a story of a friendship in the real world between a woman and her dog, who fail to discover the meaning of life in their journey from the mountains to the sea. They are inevitably and eventually forced to return to the empty space of daily life.

In *I'm Living*, a space of sexual innocence is displayed through certain activities. Whether they would bring a meaningful question to one's

mind, or be passed over with indifference, depends on the audience's standpoint. It is up to them to either view the work as being rational and thought provoking, or just an aimless, raving dream.

Lastly, it is a created space and moments of an emotional outburst. The woman does not have any inhibitions with her cries of sorrow into the sea of emotion.

She does this so that she can regain the strength to face the stark real world once more, that perhaps she can find some rationality to support her understanding in this seemingly incomprehensible world.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Feces, Life, Love, Lust, 2006