



ARAYA RASDJARMREARNSOOK

***Jaonua: The Nothingness (King of Meat: The Nothingness)*, 2016**

5-channel video installation

Duration 35:00 mins

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Biennale 2016 commission

In a five-channel video installation, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook consolidates various thematic interests from an illustrious career in an attempt to extract "the inseparable entanglement of things/lives/subjects". *Jaonua: The Nothingness* negotiates the expanse of time between life and death with each video providing focus to themes that have characterised her practice. Consolidated as a single work, the artist's practice of mediation between conflicting realms – of life and death; the masculine and feminine; human and animal; nurture and nature; thought and intuition; Western and Eastern philosophies – have become the focus of the work, and artfully brings to the forefront the connections between these seemingly disparate states of being.

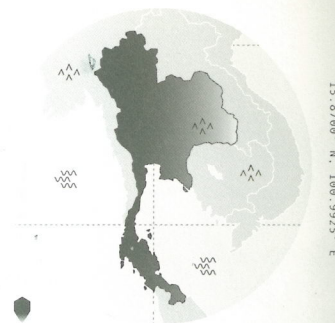
Besides drawing from Buddhist themes, the work finds parallels to philosopher's Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). As existence becomes set against the backdrop of time, the banalities of being present come under the artist's close scrutiny – and nothing is ever too far away from the denouement that death, provides. Placing nothingness as the sum totality of life's pursuits, this nihilistic stance paints a clear portrait of the Heideggarian adage on who may give access to the meaning of being: "that it can only be that being for whom the question of Being is important, the being for whom Being matters".

Perhaps then, hell is other people only if we allow them to be, and the artwork brings into examination the others whom we raise as a mirror to ourselves. Recurring images of suffering and lamentation recall the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. In this regard, consumption finds its place as a dominant theme in the work – consumption as explored through eating, sex or through the longing for a particular gaze to be cast upon us. The work shows our attraction to having our lives defined by the other, and our obsession and addiction to it – and of course its consequences.

The prevalent use of animal motifs in the work also makes clear that the others we find ourselves defined by are not only people. Araya's frequent portrayal of animals in the work dilutes humankind's prescribed definitions towards existence, and serves as a return of power to our co-inhabitants of the natural world. Furthermore, this surfaces the Buddhist belief that animals, operating on instincts alone unlike humans, hold no judgements in their gaze, and thereby calls into question our supposed superiority.

Projected on four fabric screens leading up to a projection upon a bed, the videos drive home the transient nature of our existence, while simultaneously blurring the borders between art and life. In this installation, Araya has woven various stories together into a cohesive experience. Almost akin to a surrealistic dream, she invites audiences to ponder with her the karmic consequences of being entrapped within the Sisyphean cycle of existence. J T Z

Jaonua: The Nothingness (King of Meat: The Nothingness) (video stills); images courtesy of the Artist



THAILAND

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (b. 1957, Trat province, Thailand) is a multidisciplinary artist who works primarily in video and film. She received her BFA from Silpakorn University, Thailand in 1986, and a diploma in fine arts (1990) and MFA (1994) from Braunschweig University of Art, Germany. Her works often address themes of female identity, sexuality and mortality, using images of death and lamentation. In a career spanning more than 20 years, Araya has exhibited at many international art events, including the Thai pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2005) and a retrospective on her work at SculptureCenter (New York, 2015). She lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand.