

# HYPERALLERGIC

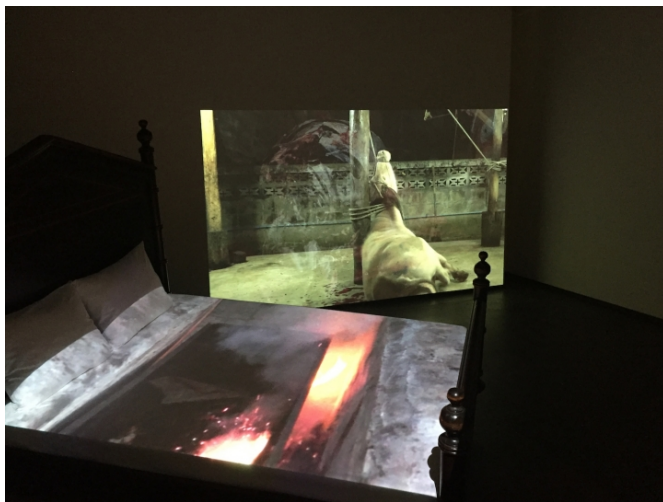
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## Carnal Humans and Bookish Animals Cohabitate in a Sprawling Video Installation

At Tyler Rollins Fine Art, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's complex, fragmented narrative features goats being read French philosophy and horses getting lectured on Plato.

Bansie Vasvani | 7.20.2017

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Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Jaonua: The Nothingness* (2016), installation view, five-channel video installation, bed, rug, picture frame, window frame, 35 min. (all images courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art)

Thai artists Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's long-standing affection for animals and her role as an animal rights activist are deeply embedded in her new five-channel video installation "Jaonua: Nothingness" (2016). Rasdjarmrearnsook is [widely acclaimed](#) for her eerily serene videos of her conversations with corpses, so it seems a likely progression that this new work features goats and horses being read French philosophy and lectured on Plato.

Commissioned for the 2016 Singapore Biennale, and now on view in the US for the first time in [Jaonua: Nothingness & Sanook Dee Museum](#) at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, Rasdjarmrearnsook's simultaneous multi-channel projection of a complex, fragmented narrative on a picture frame, a window casing, a bed, a rug, and directly onto the wall make up what the artist refers to in her description of the video as "the inseparable entanglement of things/lives/subjects."



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Jaonua: The Nothingness*, installation view

On entering the gallery, overlapping sounds of firecrackers, muffled speech, and the piercing bleats of a baby goat can be heard. The sounds preempt the disjointed and somewhat surreal interplay of images in the videos that reflect Rasdjarmrearnsook's engagement with Buddhist thought on attachment, greed, suffering, death, rebirth, and nothingness. In channel five, shown on the back wall of the gallery, vivid pornographic sexual scenes are shown on a monitor that serves as a dinner table for a man and woman who are conversing while eating a meaty meal. Here there is no mistaking mankind's overpowering yearning for carnal and sensuous pleasures. The atrocious extent of what people are capable of doing in order to appease these desires is implied through the intercutting of clips from one of Rasdjarmrearnsook's earlier works, which shows the slow, torturous death of a buffalo in an abattoir in Thailand before it is finally butchered and carved.

The sins of excess and gluttony are pervasive in this work, as are lingering representations of death and suffering. In channel one, we watch, projected through a picture frame, a naked woman sitting atop a portable toilet in a tree devouring fruit. As absurd as this image might seem, the woman's naked body and the implication that she can both eat and defecate at the same time captures a primal, animalistic facet of humanity. The act of eating due to desire more than necessity can also be seen in channel four, where a group of people, shown on a lopsided bed, discuss death and art while eating a meal at a crematorium. The same video features Buddhist funerary rites, demonstrating the inevitability of death and the cyclical nature of creation. Similarly, channel one indicates suffering with interspersed scenes of the distressed cries of an abandoned baby goat in a swamp, and images of an old, uncared-for stray dog.



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Jaonua: The Nothingness* (detail)



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Jaonua: The Nothingness*, installation view

From the outset, Rasdjarmrearnsook contrasts two kinds of settings, juxtaposing human behavior driven by the obsessive need for pleasure with more serene and idyllic depictions of the animal world. The naked woman perched in a tree observes a scholar below her reading excerpts from Deleuze's essays on Nietzsche to a herd of sheep grazing and romping in a lush green meadow. Images of horses carousing in a wooded area while a professor lectures to them on Plato and the Stoics are projected onto a carpet in channel two, and in channel three we observe calm domestic animals being taken in an open van for what the artist refers to as a "tour" through the local village in Chiang Mai, where she lives.

If one were to extrapolate, from video clips of the artist writing in a book on Buddhist philosophy, and her idea to introduce Nietzsche and Plato to disinterested sheep and horses, it might seem as if the animals' lack of interest in philosophy is in keeping with the Buddhist idea of nothingness — possessing a quality that transcends cause and effect. Like her one-sided conversations about death with corpses — who appear to be experts in the field — the animals here seem to have an inherent, almost spiritual condition that prevents them from getting bogged down by imposed environmental conditions. These lectures with animals are perhaps not as compelling as Rasdjarmrearnsook's dialogues with the dead, but "*Jaonua: Nothingness*" certainly conveys the artist's belief in the superiority of animals to the human race.



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *Jaonua: The Nothingness* (detail)

*Jaonua: Nothingness & Sanook Dee Museum continues at Tyler Rollins Fine Art (529 West 20th St, Chelsea) through July 28.*