

onto the floor where it is reflected by the black plastic covering that surrounds the room, transforming the space into something akin to an oracle's crystal ball, channeling the emotions and atmosphere of the work itself. In the black and white video a crippled dog walks awkwardly around a grassed area, seemingly unaware of its condition and status – quite happy, in fact. It's a difficult piece to watch, but just as hard to pull away from. Juxtaposed with the sadness of the dog's situation, the monochrome footage evoke a sense of nostalgia and the happiness of the dog instills a sense of hope that keeps the viewer engaged in anticipation of a positive development.

Spread across three walls in the main upstairs space is the namesake work of the exhibition, the multichannel video installation "Great Times Message, Storytellers of the Town, The Insane," (2002). Consisting of three concurrently-running video interviews with female patients of an insane asylum whose identities are kept hidden by the blurred footage, highlighting the plight of each patient and enabling the viewer to immerse themselves in each woman's story, the installation is a powerful investigation of grief and a poignant exploration of femininity.

In part two of the exhibition, "Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: The Village and Elsewhere," at the University of Sydney (USYD) Art Gallery are two more video works as well as a series of series of drawings and film stills. The central work at USYD, "Village and Elsewhere: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Beheading Holofernes, Jeff Koons' Untitled and Thai Villagers" (2011) is from the artist's "Village and Elsewhere" series. In the video a Buddhist monk attempts to teach a group of men, women, children, and dogs, all of whom face away from the viewer, about two works of art, a raunchy untitled work by Jeff Koons and Artemisia Gentileschi's 1612 painting "Judith Beheading Holofernes." Clearly out of his depth, the monk turns to Buddhist philosophy in an attempt to explain the works. Complementing the "Village and Elsewhere" video is a film still from the artist's "The Two Planet (Van Gogh's The Midday Sleep 1889/90 and the Thai villagers" (2007) in which a group of Thai villagers discuss iconic Western artworks while sitting in the middle of a field. Both works investigate the dichotomy between Thai and European art history, while at the same time expose the complexities of contemporary life, status and identify in particular, through two very different cultures and societies.

The second video work at USYD is "I'm Living" (2002) in which a woman lays different outfits on the lifeless body of a dead female, evoking the paper dolls that were a staple toy of young girls in the not too distant past. The tenderness with which the body is dressed suggests that perhaps the actions of the woman are in some way impacting the status of the body. But regardless of which item of clothing the body is covered with, death still prevails, highlighting the futility of the ritualistic process, which although beautiful and loving, has no impact on the body, only on the woman doing the dressing. "I'm Living" (2002) challenges perceptions of the rites and rituals associated with death, and explores the process of grieving.



One of the highlight of the exhibition is the technically masterful series of early intaglio prints that reflect melancholic poetics of childhood and her memories of being an Asian woman, focusing on illness and the death of members of her family, according to the Grove Art index. It is these hauntingly beautiful, spiritual works that perhaps best reflect the context of her practice, which is provincial in nature but global in scope. The aesthetic displayed in the print series is reminiscent of that seen in other artists from the South East Asia region, speaking of a regional visual language that successfully combines the traditions of her own culture with influences from the Western art world, resulting in a regionally significant but internationally accessible practice that. Rasdjarmrearnsook's work resonates with that of artists such as Cambodian sculptor **Sopheap Pich**, whose work is influenced by his connection with his homeland of Cambodia as well as his own personal history, but is also characterized by its architectural geometric grid construction, initiating a fascinating dialogue between the traditional and the avant-garde, much like Rasdjarmrearnsook's work. But regardless of what the exhibitions reveal about the context of Rasdjarmrearnsook's practice in a wider art historical context, which could potentially place her as the progenitor of a distinct aesthetic, in "Storytellers of the Town" and "The Village and Elsewhere" Rasdjarmrearnsook emerges as an artist of immense talent, intuition, and honesty.

"Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Storytellers of the Town" is at the [4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art](#) until May 10, 2014 and "Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: The Village and Elsewhere" is at the [University of Sydney Art Gallery](#) until May 3, 2014.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is represented by [100 Tonson Gallery](#) in Bangkok and [Tyler Rollins Fine Art](#) in New York.

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