

ART IN REVIEW

Solo Show for Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook at Tyler Rollins

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529 West 20th Street, 10th floor,
Chelsea

Through Feb. 25

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, who lives and works in Thailand, made her New York City debut in the big group show “Contemporary Art in Asia:

Traditions/Tensions,” organized by the Asia Society in 1996, but has had to wait until now to have a solo here.

In the meantime she has gained an international reputation with a series of bizarrely serene, death-haunted videos.

In them she appears in pristine settings, ministering to cadavers borrowed from morgues. She tenderly dresses a young woman who was a suicide. She sings lullabies to corpses. In a video called “The Class” she stands at a blackboard, lecturing six sheet-covered bodies about death, periodically stopping to ask them questions and to comment, tartly, on their responses.

Some viewers have taken the work to be Buddhist; Ms. Rasdjarmrearnsook has spoken of sources in personal loss. Whatever their inspiration, they are unforgettable.

The more recent videos in her solo show are far lighter in tone. For these she placed reproductions of famous European paintings — Manet’s “Déjeuner sur l’Herbe,” Millet’s “Gleaners” — in outdoor settings in rural northern Thailand and invited local villagers to look at them. The audience comments — on farming details in the Millet, and body types in the Manet — are practical and hilariously critical in ways that close art-history readings could never be.

The best video, though, does touch on Buddhism. It’s set in a village temple, where a monk uses two unlikely pictures — Artemisia Gentileschi’s violent “Judith Slaying Holofernes” and a Jeff Koons photograph of himself posed between bikini-clad models — as illustrations for a moral homily. The monk is an ingenious charmer and retains firm control of his congregation of elderly women, young children and little dogs as he takes his sermon to absurdist ends, much as Ms. Rasdjarmrearnsook herself did when she taught death to the dead.