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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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A digital print from “Jaonua: The Nothingness” (2016), by the Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook.
Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art

ARAYA RASDJARMREARNSOOK

Through July 28. Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street, Manhattan; 212-229-9100, trfineart.com.

The weightiest themes with the lightest touch: That could be the motto of the perceptive Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (pronounced raz-JAR-min-suk), one of the most prominent artists working in Southeast Asia today. In spectral, delicately comic videos, often with hushed narration and ambient sound, she explores mortality, mental illness, humans’ obligation to animals, and the role of women in Thai society. In many that were on view in a 2015 retrospective at SculptureCenter in Queens, and in two new works here, meaning is unfixed and death is nothing to get worked up about.

The video installation “Jaonua: The Nothingness,” whose five channels are projected on a rug, a bed and other irregular surfaces, broaches these themes through staged sequences and documentary footage, often with animals. A dog and a horse ride on the back of a truck through Chiang Mai; a buffalo is slaughtered in an abattoir; a European woman reads philosophy to an audience of indifferent goats. “Art reminds us of a state of animal vigor,” she proclaims, channeling Nietzsche. The farm animals seem unsure about that.

The captivating new video “Sanook Dee Museum” — or “Fun Museum” — revisits an earlier conceit of Ms. Araya’s: showing copies of renowned Western artworks to Thai villagers, who judge and appreciate them on their own terms. Now she brings village people, along with some monks, dogs and a guitarist, to a new, fictional art institution where the newcomers puzzle over a reproduction of Rembrandt’s “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp” and the Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra’s photo of a mother and newborn. They also look at earlier works by the artist herself, including a harrowing video of a mental patient shot with an anonymizing blur. (“Maybe they don’t have a good camera,” one suggests.) Understanding is incomplete, as it must be in this world, but there are other ways to engage with art at the Fun Museum: At the end, villagers and curators get up and dance.

JASON FARAGO