

## Manit Sriwanichpoom

TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART

Spanning twenty years of his ongoing “Pink Man” series, Manit Sriwanichpoom’s exhibition of photographic works “Shocking Pink Story” critiqued Thailand’s jingoism, consumerism, and heavy embrace of tourism through an assortment of archival images and propagandistic portraits. The Pink Man character, who appears throughout the work, is embodied by Sompong Thawee, a Thai poet. He sports a hot-pink, double-breasted satin suit and tie, sometimes with matching pink shoes. On occasion he scoots around with an empty shopping cart of the same florid hue. The Pink Man journeys to Indonesia and Europe—but the most captivating pieces are those shot in Thailand, his native country. According to Sriwanichpoom, the nation’s censorious government has not given him any trouble because he doesn’t employ texts in his art. Funnily enough, he is one of Thailand’s most celebrated photographers.

In the series “Pink, White & Blue,” 2005, Sriwanichpoom’s strange protagonist poses with Thai Boy Scouts. In *Pink, White & Blue #4 (The Future)*, he sits in a gold-and-white chair, his shopping cart nearby. With his left hand, he delicately masks the eyes of a small boy, who kneels beside him and holds a Thai flag. Thawee’s five fingers, which nearly envelop the child’s face, also subtly mirror the five bars of the flag’s design—

a moment of suppressive paternalism. *Pink, White & Blue #5 [Repeat After Me]* depicts the Pink Man resting on a long desk in a classroom like a portly odalisque, surrounded by seven smiling boys. In *Pink, White & Blue #6 [Follow Me]*, he leads his young charges down a sidewalk, who appear as though they’re taking part in the world’s grimmest conga line. Their expressionless leader yet again pushes his empty cart, which has two flags attached to its front, as if it were a low-level bureaucrat’s limousine. These pieces highlight the overt nationalistic mind-set instilled in schoolchildren—particularly boys, as there are no girls in these images—along with a gendered encouragement of sameness in thinking and living.

The most arresting piece in the show was *Horror in Pink #1 (6 October 1976 Rightwing Fanatics’ Massacre of Democracy Protesters)*, 2001, a black-and-white image of the Thammasat University massacre—a far-right military and police attack on students who were protesting the return of a dictatorship. The bloodshed was caused by a rumor that a mock execution was staged of the Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn—now the king of Thailand—which led to accusations of lèse-majesté and communist subversion. The gruesome picture, originally taken by photojournalist Neal Ulevich, shows a hanged student, suspended from a scrawny tree by a thin white rope, about to be beaten by a man wielding a folding chair. A large crowd watches, some of them with their eyebrows raised, while others smile. The Pink Man is pasted in the right side of the mob, smirking and leaning calmly against his cart, perched next to a kid with his mouth open wide, likely laughing.

According to the government, forty-six people died in the massacre (witnesses say there were many more), and thousands were injured. With his interest in the mind-sets of the youth, Sriwanichpoom does not see these events as being in the past, but utterly of the present. In a country divided by yellow shirts and red shirts—signifying royalists and leftists, respectively—he has added pink, a kind of in-between color, to an in-between figure who is both cool observer and damning critic.

—Alex Garner

Manit Sriwanichpoom, *Pink, White & Blue #4 (The Future)*, 2005, digital C-print, 23½ × 20". From the series “Pink, White & Blue,” 2005.

