



Curator:  
Jonathan Thomson

# TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY

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Kritsana Chaikitwattana



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Solo Exhibition by

**Kritsana Chaikitwattana**

15 February – 15 March, 2014

Curator: Jonathan Thomson



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# FOREWORD

**Jørn Middelborg**

Thavibu Gallery

Thavibu Gallery has the pleasure of presenting the current catalogue and exhibition, TWO SIDES TO EACH STORY, by the Thai artist Kritsana Chaikitwattana. The exhibition takes place in Bangkok, Thailand, on 15 February – 15 March 2014.

Kritsana Chaikitwattana is one of Thailand's leading and most thoughtful young artists. His work is concerned with dissonance – that rather disconcerting realm between fact and fiction, reality and illusion, spiritual and secular and lost and found. He does not aim to depict absolutes or ideological positions that are unassailable due to intense, impassioned, separatist, authoritarian or militant fundamentalism - one way or another - but with the places where these attitudes meet. Sometimes these encounters may result in conflict, as when ideologies collide, but at other times this is the only place where understanding can grow. This zone of contention is the tipping point, the place where change happens.

Kritsana Chaikitwattana 36, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine and Applied Arts (Painting) Degree from Chulalongkorn University in 1998 and completed his Master of Fine Arts (Painting) at Silpakorn University in 2002. He has exhibited widely in Thailand since 1998 when his work was included in "The Witches Stuff" curated by the late Montien Boonma. He cites Boonma as a major influence along with conceptual artists Ai Wei Wei and Joseph Kosuth and the transavantgarde artists Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi and Mimmo Paladino. Like the conceptualists his work is a sustained exploration of the production and role of meaning in art, while his commitment to the expression of emotion through painting has parallels in the work of the transavantgardists. To date he has had five solo exhibitions, seven two-man exhibition and has participated in thirteen group exhibitions.

I take this opportunity to thank Kritsana Chaikitwattana for his collaboration and Jonathan Thomson for curating this exhibition and for writing the text for the catalogue as well as the press release from which most of the above text has been adopted.

# TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY

Jonathan Thomson

Strident, fractious and at times lethal political dispute in Thailand is nowadays so frequent as to be seen as the natural order of things. When considering the nature of these disputes the term “fundamentalist” comes to mind. Fundamentalism began in the United States in the 1920s as a conservative movement in American Protestantism that expanded into full blown schism in the American church between conservative fundamentalists and their more progressive modernist brethren. Fundamental conservatism has since grown and prospered and spun off other archly conservative religious movements that gained greater prominence in the 1960s and 1970s through their opposition to the transformations in American society that they saw as an erosion of America’s moral values. They were concerned at the changes occasioned by the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the gay rights movement, the teaching of evolution and the legal right to abortion.

Fundamentalism has today become associated with any religious or non-religiously connected movements that are intense, impassioned, separatist, absolutist, authoritarian, and militant. More and more of these movement may today be seen as they come to fill the spiritual vacuums left by the demise of ideologies (including Soviet Communism), and by the perceived failure of moderate faiths to deliver on spiritual and physical promises. In 1979 the term was applied for the first time to Islam during the hostage crisis when Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took sixty-six Americans captive. With the declaration of the “War on Terror” “Islamic Fundamentalist” has since come to be one of the most common usages of the term.

Fundamentalism is now much more than traditional religiosity and has become an inherently political phenomenon that is inherently totalitarian, insofar as it seeks to remake all aspects of society and government on the basis of dogma. Many of the movements that may be categorized as fundamentalist are motivated by social, ethnic, and nationalistic grievances and may be characterized by the significant negative connotations of the term including xenophobia, bigotry, zealotry, militancy, extremism and fanaticism.

Fundamentalism, whether it is religious, nationalistic or economic, has come to be used to describe those who hold an intransigent set of beliefs. Such beliefs are said to be unassailable when they cannot be attacked or questioned or subjected to either express or implied criticism. Nothing is impregnable but the personal consequences of making any challenge to them are such that these challenges cannot easily be countenanced.

Even in modern liberal democratic societies fundamentalism is a new expression of the politics of identity that is transforming the individual’s relationship with society. A discrete political grouping within a society becomes recognized through its different and specific cultural needs. The application of diversity politics rewards these expressions of difference with even greater recognition. The dynamic is mutually reinforcing. The more different you are, the more different you get. The politics of identity over-sensitizes people to their differences and fuels hostilities. Moderate positions become marginalized as more extremist views give rise to others that are diametrically opposed to them.

If we imagine oppositional ideological positions as being at opposite ends of a long straight line and separated from one another by moderate positions of various stripes then it is difficult to conceive how they might ever meet. But if that straight line is fashioned into a circle, then there is a point at which these ideologies meet. Sometimes these encounters may result in conflict, as when ideologies collide, but at other times this is the only place where understanding can grow. This zone of contention is the tipping point, the place where change happens.

This is the place that has given rise to Kritsana Chaikitwattana's most recent painting. He is not concerned with depicting absolutes or fundamentalist ideological positions - one way or another - as that is the job of propaganda - but with the places where these attitudes meet. His work is concerned with dissonance - that rather disconcerting realm between fact and fiction, reality and illusion, spiritual and secular and lost and found. This is not an easy place to be. Chaikitwattana's recognition of the fact that there must be a place where opposites meet, however uncomfortable that might be, is the place where bonds of solidarity begin.

In a number of his earlier series of works Chaikitwattana addressed the consequences of oppositional positions. Bangkok is a place where the haves and the have-nots live cheek by jowl. Tenement sprawls of urban slums fashioned out of sheets of rusting corrugated iron press hard up against the high walls that enclose luxurious gated compounds with their spacious mansions and three car garages or high-rise condominiums with lush gardens, sparkling water features and uniformed guards in constant attendance. His images of the urban poor reflected his view that art should do more than simply offer an aesthetic experience. Likewise, his juxtaposition of work by artists who formed part of the canon of Thai modernist masters and discarded student sculptures sought to examine the source of aesthetic beauty in art. His current works do not aim to show the consequence of these oppositional positions but instead aim to express the emotional nature of the conflict itself.

Chaikitwattana's work draws on his Buddhist beliefs. In other faiths dualism may be seen to refer to any system of thought that describes human existence as comprising two fundamental yet opposing principles. Dualistic concepts of reality hinge on the conscious ego as an anchor but it is one which then creates a dichotomy between subject and object. A self that consists of a perceiving subject or "I" and a perceived object or other will lead inevitably to other similar pairings such as good-evil, love-hate, superior-inferior which all depend on each other for their definition. In contrast, a Buddhist approach to reality posits that a person must rid themselves of dualism in order to arrive at the true nature of reality which is at one with the nature of self. Enlightenment comes from an ability to live in awareness of the existence of perfect unity.

Chaikitwattana's work is an embodiment of this struggle. Some of his recent works express his concerns with conflict through a clear homage to a number of Western masters. Van Gogh is very special to him. He notes that "all of his artist life he is not a success but he does not quit. I think his life is like a sun which burns itself to express

the spiritual all the time till the end. Van Gogh's Sunflower represents both his success and failure in the same time." Similarly Munch is also important. "For me Munch's work is like a moon full of loneliness, screaming something not loud from mouth but loud from the heart. I feel something between life and death."

In these recent works Kritsana Chaikitwattana conveys emotion through abstraction and a sense of objective religious intelligibility. His work expresses anxiety and suffering and does so with an informed sensibility and integrity. It is also an expression of the artist life, the goal of human life and the space between the idealistic and realistic. It is at once intensely personal and a metaphor for the present-day struggles in Thai society. He believes we have to keep the ideal goal but at the same time we must change the ideal.

Strident, fractious and at times lethal political dispute in Thailand is nowadays so frequent as to be seen as the natural order of things. When considering the nature of these disputes the term "fundamentalist" comes to mind. Fundamentalism began in the United States in the 1920s as a conservative movement in American Protestantism that expanded into full blown schism in the American church between conservative fundamentalists and their more progressive modernist brethren. Fundamental conservatism has since grown and prospered and spun off other archly conservative religious movements that gained greater prominence in the 1960s and 1970s through their opposition to the transformations in American society that they saw as an erosion of America's moral values. They were concerned at the changes occasioned by the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the teaching of evolution and the legal right to abortion.

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Even in modern liberal democratic societies fundamentalism is a new expression of the politics of identity that is transforming the individual's relationship with society. A discrete political grouping within a society becomes recognized through its different and specific cultural needs. The application of diversity politics rewards these expressions of difference with even greater recognition. The dynamic is mutually reinforcing. The more different you are, the more different you get. The politics of identity over-sensitizes people to their differences and fuels hostilities. Moderate positions become marginalized as more extremist views give rise to others that are diametrically opposed to them.

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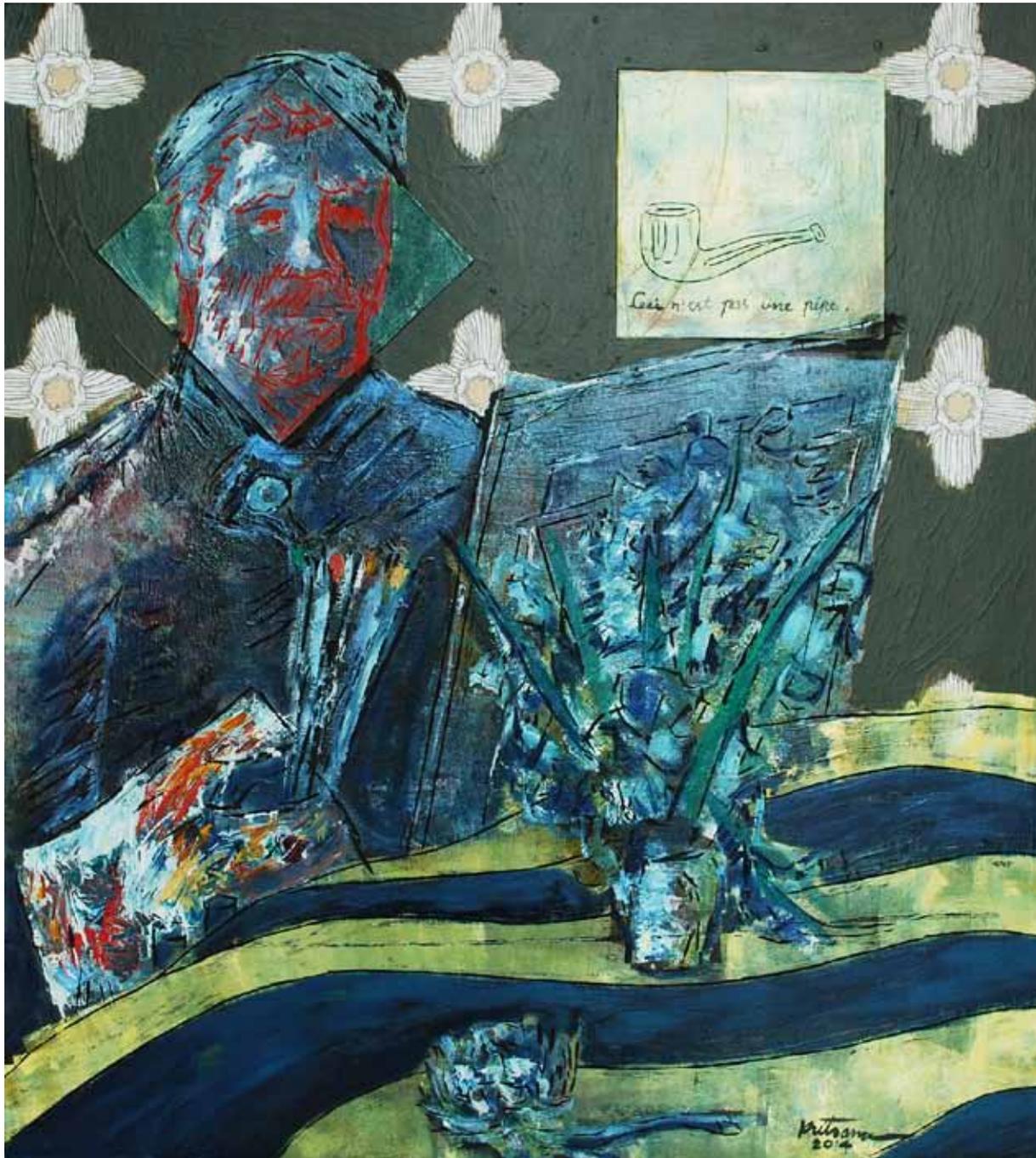
The Sunflower's Echo (1), 2013 | Oil and mixed media on board | 75 x 90 cm



**The Sunflower and the Lotus, 2014** | Oil and mixed media on board | 60 x 75 cm



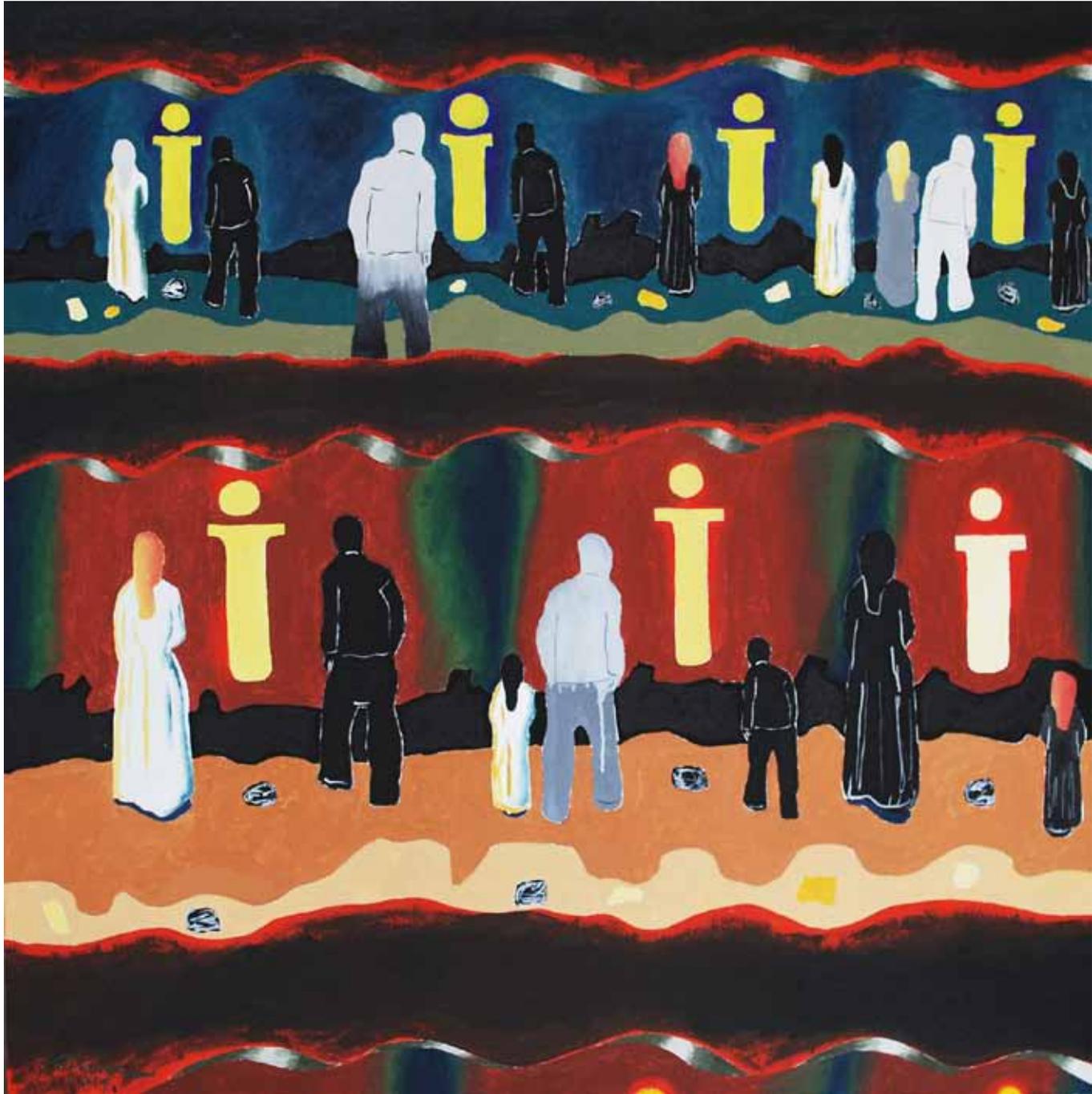
**The Sunflower's Echo (2), 2013** | Oil and mixed media on board | 75 x 90 cm



**This is neither the real Vincent van Gogh nor Pipe, 2014** | Oil and mixed media on board | 90 x 100 cm



The Path of Vincent van Gogh, 2014 | Oil on canvas | 121 x 151 cm



**Moon and the Lovers, 2014** | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 120 x 120 cm



The Scream and Madonna in Parallel Worlds, 2014 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 110 x 145 cm



**Between Inside and Outside, 2013** | Oil and mixed media on canvas | 61 x 46 cm



**One Day We Will Be One Cloud, 2013** | Oil and mixed media on board | 80 x 60 cm



Where do we have to go? (1), 2013 | Oil on canvas | 46 x 61 cm



Playing in the Sea with Heads and Legs, 2013 | Oil and mixed media on canvas | 61 x 46 cm



Where do we have to go? (2), 2013 | Oil on canvas | 68 x 68 cm



Wall of Eternity, 2013 | Oil on canvas | 68 x 68 cm

# CHRONOLOGY



## **Kritsana Chaikitwattana**

Born 1977 in Hat Yai, Thailand

### **Education**

1998: Bachelor of Fine Arts from Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

2002: Master of Fine Arts from Silpakorn University, Bangkok

### **Selected Art Exhibitions**

#### **Solo Art Exhibitions**

2014 - *Two Sides to Every Story* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok

2009 - *Absolute Aesthetics* at Dee Gallery, Phuket

2007 - *Venuses of Bangkok* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok

2003 - *A Difficult Journey* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok

2000 - Solo show at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

## Group Art Exhibitions

- 2013 - *From Hangang to Chaopraya* at Korean Cultural Centre, Bangkok
- 2010 - *Long March by Chamchuree Group* at Artery Gallery, Bangkok
- 2008 - *Spititual Spaces* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok  
- Art Singapore, **Singapore**  
- *Vision of East Asia 2008* at The Capital Libray for The Olympics, Beijing, **China**
- 2007 - *Voices from our Family* at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- 2006 - *Brightness of Life* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok  
- *Back from Bangkok* at Quartierlibre Gallery, **Canada**  
- *Art Taipei*, Taipei, **Taiwan**
- 2005 - *51th Nationnal Art Exhibition*, Nakorn Pratom, Thailand  
- Group Show in Madrid, **Spain**
- 2003 - Group Show in Seoul, **Korea**
- 2002 - *Lines* at Marsi Gallery, Bangkok  
- *48th National Art Exhibition*, Thailand
- 2001 - *Life and Life* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok  
- Singapore Art Fair, Singapore  
- *Proud to be Thai* at Baan Bangkok Gallery, Bangkok
- 2000 - *All Thai Alternative* at Space Contemporary Art, Bangkok
- 1999 - *13th Visual Arts Exhibition* at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok  
- *Witchess Stuff* curated by Montien Boonma at Project 304, Bangkok







B1G1 - Thavibu Gallery has partnered with Buy 1 Give 1 Free, which implies that when you buy an artwork from Thavibu Gallery you will automatically give a donation to a charity in the B1G1 network. Donation from one painting purchased provides one blind person with accommodation and shelter for one month. [www.b1g1.com](http://www.b1g1.com)



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