



# REPRESENTING LOCALITIES: MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE

**Rattana Salee and  
Therdkiat Wangwacharakul**

Curator: Rathsaran Sireekan



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# FOREWORD

**Jørn Middelborg**

Thavibu Gallery

Thavibu Gallery has the pleasure of presenting the current catalogue and exhibition, REPRESENTING LOCALITIES: MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE, featuring metal works, sculptures and paintings by two Thai artists; Rattana Salee and Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul. The exhibition takes place in Bangkok, Thailand, on 21 February – 21 March 2015.

In a new series of work, the sculptor Rattana Salee continues her dialogue with the city she lives in, though shifting the focus from Bangkok's aggressive expansion via claustrophobic concrete blocks to thought-provoking representation of local architectures and domestic objects which hold personal memories. The painter Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul sets out in this series as a flaneur walking the streets of Bangkok only to find stray dogs, old vehicles and pedestrians —the experience not available to him when traveling with his car. Therdkiat often paints on metal (aluminium sheets) and Rattana works with metal sculptures.

**Rattana Salee** (b. 1982) is a holder of a Master of Fine Art in Sculpture at Silpakorn University and marked her debut solo exhibition with Shell(Shocked) —the atmospheric sculptural installation comprising metal and plaster architectural structures which reflect the private and communal complexities of urban living—at Thavibu Gallery in 2010. Among other grants and awards, she was a recipient of the French Embassy's scholarship to study at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA), Paris, France, in 2011.

**Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul** (b. 1971) graduated with a Master degree in Painting from Silpakorn University in 2003. He often paints with oil on aluminium sheets and also with oil on canvas. The use of aluminium makes his play with light and shadow unique. Typical to Therdkiat's spatially sensitive compositions are his minimal urban-scapes. In *Bangkok Station* at Thavibu Gallery in 2010, Therdkiat refrained from earlier architecturally aligned works to spotlight the daily rituals of the capital's inhabitants. Therdkiat has participated in several exhibitions in Thailand, as well as in Singapore, Japan, the Netherlands, Korea, Spain, and the USA. He was awarded the Jurors' Choice Prize in the ASEAN Art Awards in 2000.

The essay has been written by the independent curator, Rath saran Sireekan. I take this opportunity to thank Rattana Salee and Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul for their collaboration, and Rath saran Sireekan for his contribution.

# REPRESENTING LOCALITIES: MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE

Rathsaran Sireekan

## THE QUESTION OF MEDIUM

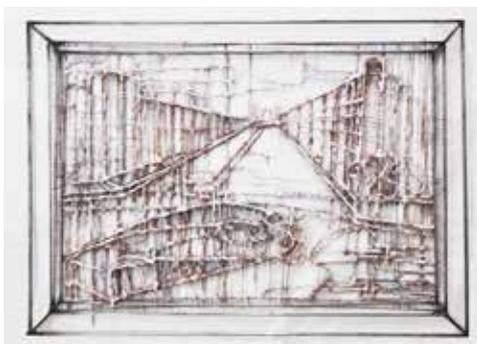
Sculpture takes space. It sits; it spreads; it occupies. The opacity of its mass is where monuments' monumentality lies.

Paint, too, is laboured onto the canvas not only to produce an effect of the 'real', but, in doing so, it captures the essence of the subjects being painted. This acquired 'essence' is meant to last. The painted face, of man, woman or animal, is always a pursuit of permanence.

The works by Rattana Salee and Therdkiat Wangwacharakul in this exhibition shows an engagement with this artistic tradition, but instead of contributing to it, they use it as a point of departure.

Most characteristic of Rattana's sculpture is the quality of abstraction. Inspired by Alberto Giacometti, the female artist renders the mass of her sculpture with steel bars, heavily worked with epoxy, to give us an unmistakable sense of erosion—a de-corporealisation of the sculptural mass. Although made to also commemorate and mark as remembrance, her sculpture is different from monuments in general. Showing no sign of aggression when it takes up space, Rattana's sculpture comes into being in the quietest sense of the word..

*Ratchadamnoen road* (2015) most astutely plays with the concept of monument and monumentality. The contorted steel bars are interlaced convolutedly to engender a visual trajectory which culminates at the Democracy Monument at the heart of the far end of the perspective. A *mise en abyme*, *Ratchadamnoen road* is itself a monument which contains a smaller copy of itself. But far from asserting permanence usually inherent in the medium, Rattana's representation of the Democracy Monument, an emblem of Thai democracy, is frighteningly made contingent on time. An anxiety that it will one day disappear heavily haunts the entirety of this subtly political piece by the rising-star female artist.



Rattana Salee | Ratchadamnoen road

Therdkiat's work, too, calls into question the medium it is relying on to come into being. His work interestingly operates on a paradox of empathy and disbelief. On the one hand, the life-like rendition of these works, enhanced by their massive size, calls the viewer to suspend their disbelief—that these are merely painterly representations—and empathise. On the other, the layering of paint drips on the surface intentionally prevents the viewer from being directly in contact with the represented.

Indeed, Therdkiat's work complicates the genre it is taking up; that is, while representing localities—whose tradition is for the artist to capture the 'essence' and true personality of the locality being represented—his renditions of these places are highly mediated. For instance, *Sleep Well* (2014) while depicting a stray dog deep in its sleep—a call for empathy for the deserted one—bars any direct visual contact with the subject given the overlay of smudges on the foreground. Such mediation raises a question of purposes which are subject to interpretations.

## **REPRESENTING LOCALITIES: MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE**

Both artists in the show engage with the problem of representation and its relation to memory and experience of their localities.

Therdkiat sets out in this series as a flaneur walking the streets of old Bangkok such as the area of Sanam Luang, Banglampoo and local piers nearby. These areas, as he recalled, are filled with stray dogs, pigeons, passers-by, vagabonds, homeless kids and old houses, but interestingly not everything gets picked up in the representation of his memories of the localities he set foot on. The flaneurian experience was captured through the lens for later sketching and is imbued with connotations of class in the contemporary sense as it was the experience unique to the artist only when he relinquished his privileged means of transport: a personal vehicle and walked on foot with his feet on the ground, emerging himself fully in the influx of happenings surrounding him.

Therdkiat's use of a particular palette of colours suggests a strange sense of nostalgia, especially if taking into account the highly mediated surface of his work. Although the working process involves snapshots by his camera, an apparatus usually equated with objectivity, one feels one is entering a space of high ambivalence. On the one hand, the renditions are acutely realistic, recalling the fact that these are scenes recently witnessed by the artist himself and captured through the lens of his camera. Yet, on the other, they are representations of memories that have already been filtered through a strong sense of nostalgia—the anxiety of

not being able to regain the long lost memories of the old Bangkok. In the space Therdkiat has created, one is not so certain if one is seeing the localities actually experienced by the artist or the one he envisions what these localities might have looked like in the past. This unique temporal ambivalence typical of the artist's work is best conveyed by the iconography of *Memory of the River #8* (2012) in which the river's power to render things past is resisted by the anchoring of the vessels which may recall subjectivities caught up in the middle of a struggle to withstand unwanted change.

Abstraction through the erosion of the sculptural mass and the use of heavily-worked steel bars demonstrate Rattana's engagement with the problem of representation in the medium of sculpture:

*I don't want to convey likeness but express my feelings towards objects and space, some of which are no longer here. The obscurity of representation, relying on (contour) lines rather than its solidity, enhances the ability of the work to communicate subjective feelings, private emotions and temporal dimension.*



**Therdkiat Wangwathcarakul** | *Memory of the River #8*

Determined in her belief that our subjectivities are attached to the objects and architectures surrounding us, Rattana, in this series, gives us 'monuments', both in public and private terms, which have constituted her as an individual.

The wood carving *A Gift from Grandfather* (2014) which embodies a lotus pot is interestingly entitled not after the sculpture's material taxonomy but its association with the artist's personal experience—that it was a gift from her beloved grandfather. With both the gift and its bestower no longer present, Rattana conjures up the memory of her grandfather surrounding the lotus pot with an abstracted rendition of the highly charged object. The attempt to de-corporealise the medium of corporeality makes her sculpture subject more to form than matter, mind than body and memory than the tangibility present.

Photography also plays an important role in Rattana's work. It conveys collective memory which constitutes a modern 'Thai' subject, of course, Rattana herself and perhaps also the viewers.

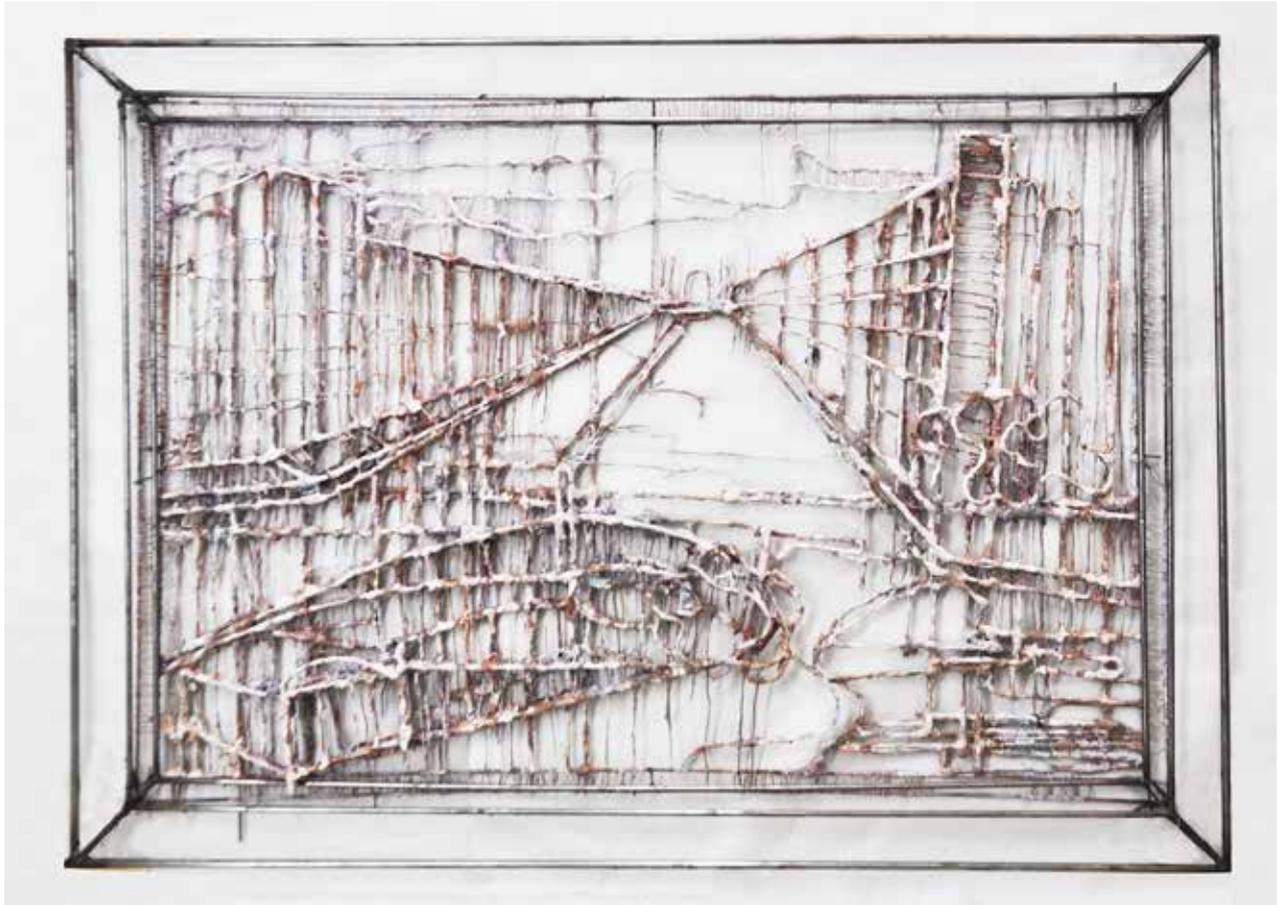
*It is true that we all have diverse personal experience, but there is also this collective memory through public architectures that we share.*

Indeed, *Ratchadamnoen road* (2015) and *Torn Bridge* (2015) are representations of public architectures abstracted from old photographs of Bangkok in the yesteryears while *Dragon Arch* (2015) is a recent creation based on the artist's everyday experience of riding the bus past this Chinese Dragon Arch marking the territory of Bangkok's China Town.

Despite working in different media, Rattana and Therdkiat share thought-provoking problematisations of the notion of representation unique to each of their medium. Via abstraction and mediation, both artists are signaling a departure from the illusionistic tradition of realism—the venture of which is enriched by their engagement with locality and its temporal dimension, the converging point which pivots on the question of the nature of the 'Thai identity', its construction and how mediated memory takes part in that controversial process.



Rattana Salee | **A Gift from Grandfather**, 2014 | Wood carving, paint | 53 x 53 x 60 cm



Rattana Salee | **Ratchadamnoen road**, 2015 | Steel, epoxy and paint | 110 x 90 x 2 cm



Rattana Salee | **Torn Bridge**, 2015 | Steel, epoxy and paint | 200 x 95 x 25 cm







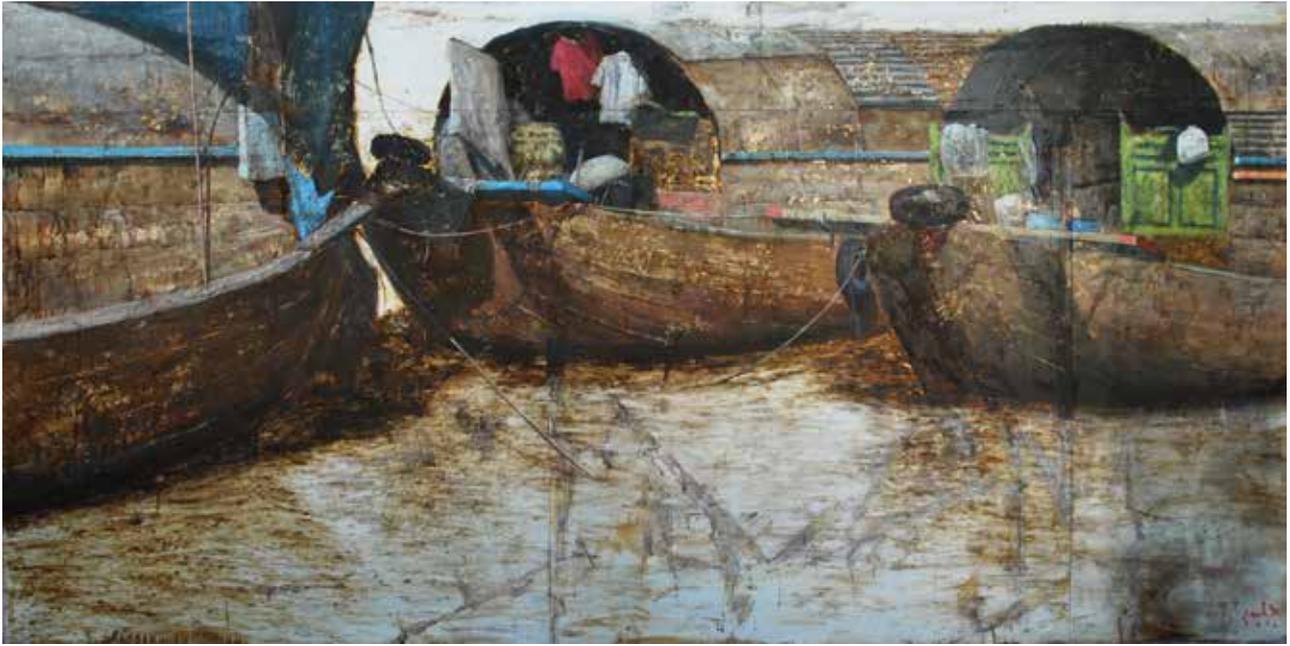
Rattana Salee | **Dragon Arch**, 2015 | Steel, epoxy and paint | 130 x 150 x 50 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Memory of the River (7)**, 2013 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 170 x 122 cm



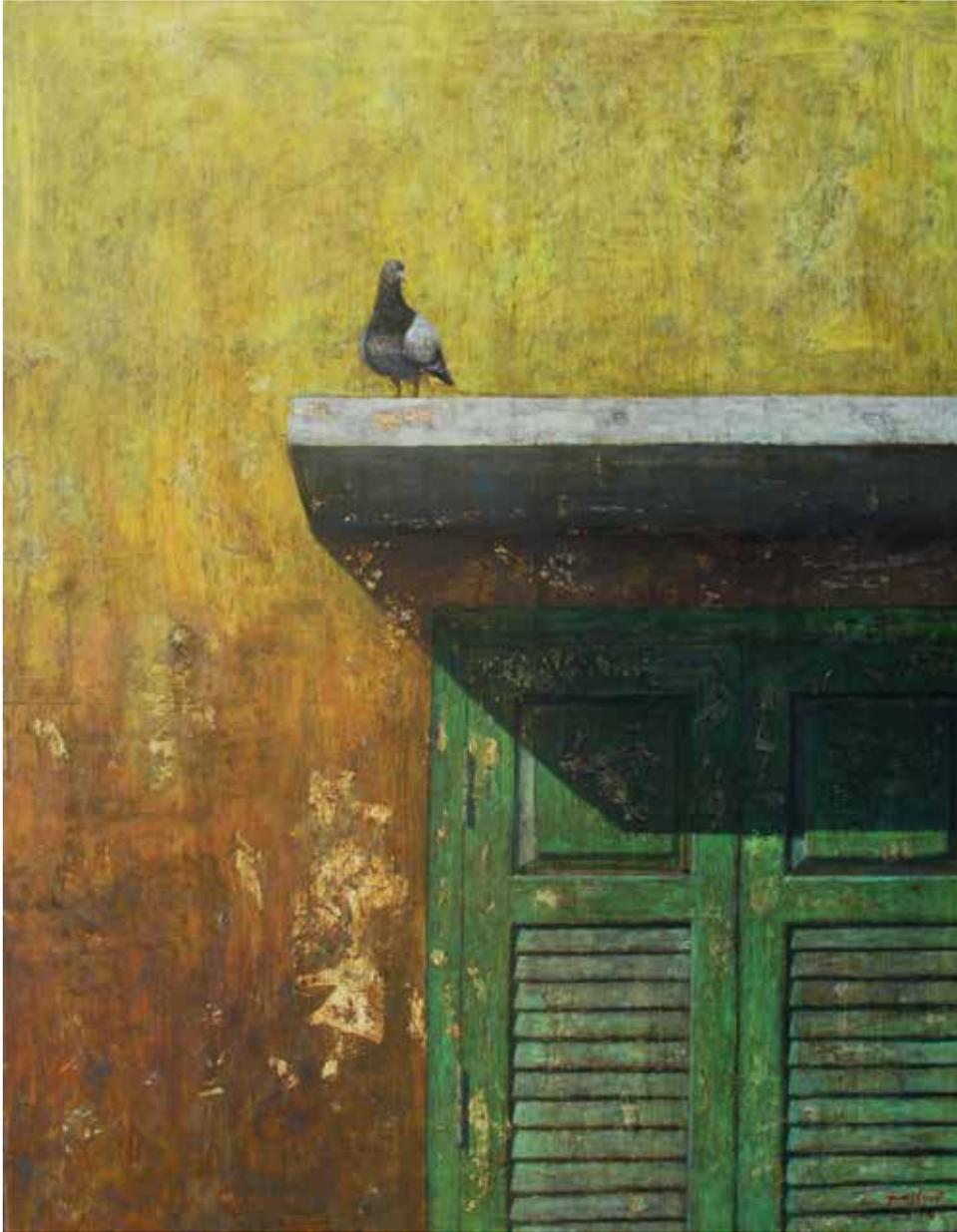
Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Memory of the River (6)**, 2013 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 170 x 122 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Memory of the River (9)**, 2012 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 243 x 120 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Memory of the River (8)**, 2012 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 243 x 120 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Alone Again**, 2015 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 140 x 180 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Three Birds**, 2015 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 200 x 140 cm (2 panels)



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Dog and Fish**, 2013 | Oil on aluminium sheets | 170 x 165 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Sleep Well (2)**, 2014 | Pastel on canvas | 100 x 100 cm



Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul | **Sleep Well (1)**, 2014 | Pastel on canvas | 100 x 100 cm

# CHRONOLOGY



## RATTANA SALEE

Born 1982 in Nakhorn Sawan

Bachelor of Fine Art, Silapakorn University, 2007

Master of Fine Art (Sculpture), Silapakorn University, 2013

Certificate from Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France, 2011

### Selected Art Exhibitions

- 2015: *Representing Localities: Memory and Experience* with Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok
- 2013: *Tropical Lap 7 : ECHO – The Poetic of Translations residency program* at LASALLE College of the Art, **Singapore**  
*Haiku International Sculpture Exhibition* - Okinawa, **Japan**  
*Inevitably Imperfect* at Artery Post-Modern Gallery, Bangkok  
*Body and Identity* at Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre, Bangkok
- 2012 *Myths and Reality* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok  
- *Warning* at Atelier Jean-Luc Vilmuth, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts - Paris, **France**
- 2011: *How did I get Here?*, at Da Wang Culture Highland - Shenzhen, **China**
- 2010: *Shell Shocked*, Solo Show at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok  
*24 Hour:24 Days*, at the Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre, Bangkok  
*24hr.Art Project in Brand New* at Bangkok University Art Gallery, Bangkok
- 2007: *Art Thesis Exhibition* at Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.  
- *Asian Fellowship 5.7.5 Haiku Mini Sculpture* - Okinawa, **Japan**
- 2006: *24hr.Art Project* at Desolate house No. 33, Sukumvit 23 Rd., Bangkok
- 2005: *From archaeological to Fine Art* at PSG Art Gallery, Bangkok
- 2004: *The Stock Exchange Of Thailand Sculpture Competition* at The Stock Exchange of Thailand, Bangkok



## THERDKIAT WANGWATCHARAKUL

Born 1971 in Surin

Bachelor of Fine Art, Silpakorn University, 2003

### Selected Art Exhibitions

- 2015: *Representing Localities: Memory and Experience* with Rattana Salee at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok
- 2012: Third Decade of Bua Luang, Group Show, Bangkok
- 2011: *Silpa Bhirasri Creativeity Grants 13*, Group Show, Bangkok  
– *How did I get here, Group Show and Residency* at Da Wang Culture Highland Centre – **China**
- 2010: - Solo show – *Bangkok Station* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok
- 2008: Group show to Commemorate HM The King's 80th Birthday at The Queen's Gallery, Bangkok  
- Solo show: *Light of Life* at D-Gallery, Phuket, Thailand
- 2007: Group show: *Enduring Reality* at The National Gallery, Thailand
- 2006: *Tradition and Modernity in South East Asian Art*, at Asian Cultural Center, New York, **USA**
- 2005: Group show: by Picassomio, **Spain**  
- *The Brightness of Life with Kritsana Chaikitwattana* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok
- 2003: Solo show: *Life Must Go On* at Akko Gallery, Bangkok  
- Group show: *Chaos of Life* at Onibaba Due, **Japan**  
- Seoul – Asia Art Now, **Korea**  
- *Thai Life* with Santi Thongsuk at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok
- 2002: Solo show: *Made in Bangkok* at Galerie op Zolder (Thai Art Foundation), Amsterdam, **Netherlands**
- 2001: Art Singapore, **Singapore**

2000: Solo show: *Life (1)* at BaanBangkok Gallery, Bangkok

The 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 51st National Exhibitions of Art

### **Awards**

2000 Jurors' Choice Prize in the ASEAN Art Awards, Singapore

2001 3rd Prize, Bronze medal - painting, 47th National Exhibition of Art

2002 2nd Prize, Silver Medal - painting, 48th National Exhibition of Art



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