

one wonders how thorough the investigation was.

Although I am looking at the situation through Japanese eyes, I think that in the near future opportunities will increasingly arise for Southeast Asian artists to participate in international exhibitions. Indeed, I think that signs of that are already emerging. To cite one example, the Thai artist Montien Boonma was included in a Kunstverein show in Frankfurt, Germany. He was also asked to participate in the artist-in-residence program called Amazonas, which was held in the Amazon River valley in Brazil.¹ Furthermore, Australia's cultural policies have undergone a remarkable change in recent years, by shifting the focus completely to Asia, including Japan.² Whatever their contents may be, such trends will clearly increase awareness of Asia, especially Southeast Asia.

The present exhibition is small in scope, yet it offers perspectives that are difficult to gain from large exhibitions. The format of the show by no means represents anything new; rather, it is completely ordinary. To put it simply, it is a group exhibition covering a few artists from two countries. Awareness of national borders is readily apparent from the title of the exhibition. While both nations have been influenced by Western modernism, the historical process regarding that influence has differed. As ties between the two countries deepen, this issue may become irrelevant. At present, however, it is better to bear it in mind, inasmuch as no problems can be resolved if the details of the process are lost and only the oriental divergences from Western modernism are scrutinized.

Despite its awareness of national borders, the show, however, avoids a format built around interaction inside Japan. In the past, interaction between Japan and Asia has always rested upon the premise, of providing an introduction. In other words, it constitutes showing the "Other" within one's own borders; all relationships generated thereby are ultimately controlled by indigenous relationships, no matter what the Other is. Cultural interaction is apt to magnify differences rather than reducing them, because it rests upon a system in which the Other is always converted into the "Self." Introductions are very useful, but unless one constantly takes into consideration the opposite aspects that they incorporate, they encourage self-complacency on the same order as the Pan-Europeanism that Western modernism has long attempted to achieve. One must bear in mind the fact that the non-European exhibition which I mentioned above is readily converted into a Pan-European meaning.

Accordingly, I will try to take the plan for the present exhibition, which can be perceived as a conversion of the Other into the Self, and turn it back into the equation "the Self as the Other (Thailand)". It could be argued that this is a slightly watered-down version of self-complacency, since both sides perpetually compare the Other, converted into the Self, in various contexts, and examine the differences. But the perspective will become much more complex: Moreover, an environment will unquestionably be created that pushes aside the mirror of Western modernism, which has clouded the vision of the Japanese and Thais, and forces both sides

to examine each other with the naked eye. The task is difficult but cannot be avoided. A format that provides a one-to-one correspondence is optimal, for it creates more favorable circumstances for reducing problems to their essence.

II. A Comparison of Contemporary Japanese and Thai Art

Although the artists and works, needless to say, are coherently organized in the present exhibition, no spatial barriers have been created by placing the works of the Japanese and Thai artists in separate rooms.

The differences generated by the artists and their works can be perceived, unassisted, by the viewer. However, it is unclear whether the artists and works will be linked in the viewer's mind by similar impressions. While recognizing that preconceptions may be unnecessary, I would like to comment briefly on the historical process in both countries. However enthusiastically acclaimed, the Other will always remain alien if it is interpreted by means of indigenous practices.

First of all, there was a difference in timing regarding when Western modernism was introduced in Japan and Thailand. By the 1920s Japan began to come under the influence of modernism, with almost no time lag. Naturally, Japan had long been influenced by it before then, but a time lag had existed between the genesis and reception of the latest Western movements. Although Western-style art education began in Thailand in 1933 under the Italian Corrado Feroci (known in Thailand as Silpa Bhirasri), the creation of modern art by Thai artists had to await the end of World War II. The period from 1949, when the first National Exhibition of Art was launched in Thailand, to 1962, when Bhirasri died, is almost universally regarded as the "influential years," in recognition of Bhirasri's impact. This represents the first period of postwar modern art in Thailand. Regarding ties with Western schools, impressionism and cubism were central; in terms of motifs, daily life in Thailand was chosen. But with a slight delay, pop art, op art, hard-edge painting, and minimalism were imported on each other's heels in the 1960s. These postwar movements, especially the ones formed primarily in the United States, did not leave a clear trace in Thailand as they did in Japan, but Thai art critics note their arrival in Thailand.

Thus, art movements, ranging from schools at the turn of the twentieth century to *avant garde* trends, chiefly those in the United States, which rapidly surfaced in the postwar period, entered Thailand in an extremely short period of time. The importation of such a complex array of art styles from the dawn to the waning of modernism boggles the imagination.

In addition to schools spanning the period from the start of modernism to its decline, art that served as a motive force for postmodernism began to emerge in the late 1960s. The work of Thawan Duchanee, as described by the art critic Apinan Poshyananda, is a case in point. The artists who made their debut after Bhirasri's death went directly to Europe and America to study; Thawan Duchanee was one of

them. His work abounds with images and energy that clearly distort the orthodox development of modernism and formalism.

In this way, modernism and postmodernism both arrived in Thailand in a brief period of time. One of the effects of these movements was that the "old" and "new" were divorced from a temporal framework and became spatial. In other words, a spatial quality was achieved in which the old and new could freely be chosen and discarded with the same value. For instance, surrealism, which also had an influence on Thawan, almost completely disappeared from Japan in the sixties. After it reached Japan in the late 1920s, it spread so widely that it was virtually synonymous with the *avant garde*, even after the war. This was still true in the 1950s. More precisely speaking, the mid-1950s and thereafter were already entering the age of *informel* painting and abstract expressionism as well as neo-dadaism and pop art. The situation has changed in the wake of postmodernist thinking, but in Japan, at least, schools that are no longer in vogue are considered *passé*. The modernist/*avant garde* influence, which can be likened to a disease, undisputably fettered Japan for a long time.

In short, Japan has repeatedly experienced the influx of Western art trends as a linear/temporal process, whereas Thailand has been forced to experience Western trends spatially on the same plane. Actually, it may be a tradition of the Thai people rather than something that they were forced to do. Nor was Japan originally linear or temporal; it became that way after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Western modernism became a model. In short, in the pre-modern period, Japan and Thailand stood on similar ground.

The appearance of Buddhist motifs and the spirit of Buddhism in *avant garde* Thai art to an extent that, from a Japanese perspective, seems audacious stems from artists' freedom to choose elements on a spatial level. At times, the treatment of Buddhism as allegory even represents an *avant garde* stance. In Japan the subject is, of course, taboo. There is no rule prohibiting it. But even if it were allowed under the rules governing motifs in traditional Japanese art, it would transgress what are commonly considered contemporary motifs. This tacit segregation dates back to the Meiji era.

Although the question of the influence of Western modernism lacks precision when summarized briefly, as I have done above, I would like to turn now to another subject: namely, differences in social consciousness in Thailand and Japan. I was astounded by a newspaper article about the bloodbath that occurred in Thailand last year when the Thai army randomly shot civilians during the political uprising in Bangkok.³ What shocked me more than the bloodshed and actions of the army was the attitude manifested by an artist. I was even more amazed to discover that the artist was Prasong Luemuang. At a solo exhibition at the National Gallery in Bangkok, he showed a huge 5-meter-wide and nearly 2-meter-high mural protesting the actions of the army. Prasong is an artist residing in Lumpun near Chiang Mai who had struck me as a gentle person with the philosophic

outlook of a hermit living in the mountains. I recall that images of birds, fish and other creatures representing neo-traditional and folkloric motifs had overflowed his atelier, which was elevated off the ground. According to the newspaper article, Prasong's mural depicted a multitude of images of military power, from army boots, rifles, swords, and bows and arrows to axes. It also depicted the gamut of human desires, from exhibitionism to money and sex. These were represented by strange creatures with human faces and the bodies of beasts whose genitalia were exposed. My image of Prasong was completely shaken.

This is what it was like in Japan in the 1950s, a decade closely linked with social consciousness and the *avant garde* and surrealist movements. There are no manifestations of this in Japan today. Nor, of course, would the kind of representation employed by Prasong be openly expressed. Although direct political action, as well as artistic expression, existed in Japan, it was weeded out by around 1970.

One of the artists in the present show—Supachai Satsara—also displays a strong social consciousness. He expresses a desire to participate actively in society through art. If applied to the above-mentioned linear/temporal structure characteristic of Japan, this stance would be considered "old," but insofar as there is an historical inevitability to the story that he relates, then it is always new. Rather, his art could even be said to express the fecundity found in the existence of epic themes, whereas in Japanese art, even themes themselves appear to be in the process of disappearing.

Supachai's works also directly express his stance regarding society and the environment. The same is true of other Southeast Asian artists whose works embrace this kind of theme. Japanese art has begun to lose this frankness. Looking at this phenomenon in a favorable light, one could ascribe the reason, for example, to the fact that Japan is entering an age in which frank artistic representation does not necessarily translate into a strong message about society. Japan also reflects the fact that parody, humor, and the act of depicting relationships to society as a game have a stronger impact as art. The modern West, which heralded this trend, frequently experimented with this approach as modernism progressed.

Artistic attitudes invariably are intimately linked to the social environment in which the art exists. Jimmie Durham, whose work was shown at last year's Documenta, produces installations using natural materials such as branches and earth that he has gathered near by. Many viewers consider him an "ecologist," in other words, an artist who is gentle or kind to nature. But, far from entertaining any such idea, he undermines that viewpoint, by using materials such as oil-processed products that are harmful to the environment. This represents a game. Furthermore, he aims his shafts at the charges of individuals whose criticism of environmental destruction overlooks their own fundamental position. In that sense, Asia takes a basic, frontal stance regarding specific themes, a position that possesses far greater impact at present.

The third point of comparison concerns the similarities and differences in the major turning points experienced by Japan and Thailand in the past. After returning home from

the Netherlands, Thawan Duchanee held a solo exhibition at the Student Christian Center in Bangkok in 1968. His paintings were destroyed in 1971 by a crowd of angry students. This was what Apinan Poshyananda referred to as the "picture slashing incident." This incident invites various thoughts. One is that it suggests a feud with academism, which was taking shape in Thailand under the influence of Western modernism. It also appears to reflect discord caused by the contents of Thawan's works, which seemed to involve a process of deconstruction, while regarding Buddhist spiritual influences affirmatively. The pattern that emerges from this incident is that of an attack on artistic representation in which the obstacles that one tries to overcome appear to be doing the overcoming. If anything, Japan represents a system in which the overtaking elements criticize what is being overtaken. Chronologically speaking, the situation in Japan is clearer: an effort has been made to overtake the old with the new. The "retro" phenomenon that occurred under postmodernism in the 1980s represents a movement that sparked a change in this attitude.

In addition, Thai artists have had drastic personal experiences regarding the conflict between the old and new. This tendency lasted in Japan from the formative years of modern art to World War II, but the postwar period witnessed the formation of art as a group endeavor. The various schools all possessed a central character. However, the full force of criticism was seldom levelled against individuals; instead, a group effort was made to overcome the old. The phenomenon of art as a group activity also lasted until the 1970s, but does not generally hold true today. In other words, the critical mass of the group has been necessary until now. The same can be said of the political system in the postwar period.

In any event, it is noteworthy that a drastic change occurred at a very similar point in both countries. In Japan, the *mono-ha* school⁴ around 1970, and fringe movements connected with it, along with the decade of the seventies in general, marked a turning point. In Thailand, the conflict between different types of expression represented by modernism and what could be called a harbinger of postmodernism constituted a radical change. However, the fact that, in both countries, the turning point was embedded in the global postwar system forces one to conclude that its occurrence in the same period in both countries was inevitable.

III. Intersecting Contemporary Japanese and Thai Art

The present exhibition covers two Thai and two Japanese artists. As I noted above, it places no particular barriers between them. The Thai artists are still young, and considerable artistic growth is expected from them in the future. The Japanese artists are older; their careers boast active participation both at home and abroad, including many international exhibitions. Despite the disparity in age and experience, the four artists' mode of artistic expression is conducive to interaction. It was one of the reasons for choosing these particular artists.

Another conceivable approach might have been to illumi-

nate cross-cultural artistic differences in the same generation. In the future, this sort of exhibition will probably increase. However, the deliberate exclusion of this perspective from the present exhibition derives from a distaste for an orientation that would end up revealing a linear and chronological gap. A problematic structure that departs from the main theme of the interaction could even conceivably emerge. But, when thinking about the future of Japanese art, a useful approach is to cast contemporary art in a reverse light by placing it in the field of Thai art, in which even new myths are spatialized and presented as an alternative, using archaic and early modern myths as a vehicle.

Supachai Satsara's mode of representation delivers a counterpunch against contemporary Thailand, which is experiencing a high rate of economic growth. The contents and technique behind his work are straightforward. They unleash shafts of criticism at the rapid, overwhelming flood of materialism, for example, through a gargantuan band made of a vast number of automobile license plates and through tire strips. All of the materials used by Supachai were produced and discarded by industrial society. He uses them as a medium of expression as well as a text or theme. The license plates are neatly arranged in rows or piles. A throng of human beings, like specters or ghosts, are depicted on the license plates. Which represents the true form or essence? Or, perhaps, if the license plates signify countless deaths created by industrial society, then the manner in which they are arranged, representing order in that society, becomes a metaphor for industrial society's graveyard. Although a graveyard inherently stands at the point of return to the soil, the graveyard of industrial society is an orderly thing, like a coin locker, which is placed on the ground. Supachai's mode of expression may be straightforward, but it contains the kind of perspective that invites such associations.

Sansern Milindasuta's mode of representation places more importance on inner images. That does not mean to say that his work manifests no outward social awareness; if it does exist, however, it resides within him as something that has matured of its own accord over time. If something *is* called into question, it is the conflict between modernism and formalism. Sansern paints on rectangular canvases while continuing to depict figurative and abstract images using unconventional materials such as wire netting and slate. What this stance reveals is nothing other than an effort to problematize and examine form as well as images. This approach reflects his sojourns in Great Britain and Germany; for him, it is inevitable.

In recent works, the rectangular shape of the canvas has been replaced by irregular forms that slip from the wall onto the floor, which is covered with earth, producing "living paintings." Although this interpretation cannot be considered particularly outstanding from the point of view of examining painting as an art form, it makes a unique interpretation. Is the artist trying to achieve a parody of painting by means of painting, including formalism and post-formalism, which follows the same course? Yet Sansern is in earnest, and there is no mistaking the fact that he is seriously

wrestling with this problem.

What makes me sense the richness of Sansern's artistic sensibility is the fact that, no matter how insignificant they may be, the objects he depicts convey a cosmic feeling. One may wonder what cosmology can be found in nets and broken rocks, yet he discovers therein the wondrous shapes and textures of substances and objects. And he presents them as something that is not actually possible, but has existed in people's memories and might potentially exist. This way of looking at things is distinctive.

Senzaki Chieo is well known for his installations of trees and branches, but this time he places plants in a case on a forklift. The plants placed on the forklift, which is extended as far as it will go, seem very unsteady. They radiate a sense of danger that they might fall to the ground at any moment. If the plants were presented straightforwardly, their relationship with the forklift would be direct and unsatisfactory. The reason is that the installation would turn into a simple formula of plants (nature) and forklift (industry/civilization). Realizing that possibility, Sensaki has erected two or three guards around the plants (nature). After performing administrative acts, namely, placing them in pots and arranging them in a case, he has placed them in the "palm" of a forklift. In a sense, the installation is the ultimate expression of the inability of plants (nature) to be rescued as a result of human intervention. This suggests a postmodern game involving the theme of environmental destruction.

In recent years, Tsuchiya Kimio has shifted from installations dealing with the dismantlement and reconstruction of houses to works using the ashes of houses that he has burned until nothing but a fine powder is left. Repeating the process of incineration turns a house (a material object) into clean, white ashes, creating an existence that seems to transcend even the aspect of a material phenomenon. This suggests the negation of material objects, or the ultimate state or nature of an object that possesses a desire for negation. In that sense, the ashes represent the border between existence and non-existence. Language (memory) has been extracted; it is all that lies within the ashes.

Along with this work, Tsuchiya will create an installation in Thailand. It consists of filling the exhibition space with the images of animals and plants which are extinct or on the verge of extinction and projecting their names from a machine suspended from the ceiling.

Through art as a mode of expression, Tsuchiya and the other artists in the present exhibition possess a perspective and subject matter that are strongly connected in some fashion with present-day society. Although Sansern's mode of expression is not directly connected to the environment and industrial society, insofar as he directs his ecological gaze at modernist forms his work fully satisfies the aims of the present exhibition. Above all, modernism and postmodernism create an environment that transcends modes of representation. The exhibition should provide a venue for investigating through the act of representing the differences and the common ground shared by the artists. This is an important, and long overdue, issue today.

Notes

1. Amazonas refers to the artist-in-residence program called Arte Amazonas: International Fine Arts Workshop in Brazil, which was organized by the Goethe Institute. The exhibition was held from February 1-27, 1992. Twenty-nine artists from around the world participated in the program, which was conducted in the following cities in the Amazon River valley: Belém, Manaus, and Porto Velho. Montien showed works that have not been seen in Japan. The plans of his work call for a latex image of a breast 100cm in diameter and 40cm in height. It is displayed with the nipple upside down on a hammock. The breast serves as a metaphor for nature; it signifies the source of all life. Accordingly, in Montien's concept, the breast, being placed upside down on the hammock, becomes a metaphor for existence (breast=life=nature) that is in danger, since it might fall. In other words, the work is an ecological expression of the crisis facing nature. As a net that signifies existence from life to death, the hammock, a common object in Indian life, reinforces that meaning. In a sense, the hammock, as the circulation of life, is a powerful existence supporting the breast. But, in Montien's rendering, it becomes the image of an existence that is exposed to danger.

At the Amazonas exhibition, Montien also exhibited a work called 'The Reincarnation,' which featured an enormous hollowed-out gum tree, signifying the womb, of a pregnant woman, and an installation called 'Cut-Shut Off,' in which he employed a variety of materials.

For further reference, see: *The Nation*, June 16, 1992. *Bangkok Post*, May 28, 1992.

2. Exhibitions actively introducing contemporary Japanese art have been held in Australia. The 1st Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was held in Brisbane from September 18 to December 5, 1993. Altogether 76 artists from 13 nations took part in the exhibition. In addition to the Australian hosts, the participants included the five of six member states belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (excluding Brunei) as well as Vietnam, Japan, China, Hong Kong and South Korea, from East Asia; New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

3. Ono Junji, "The Bloodbath in Bangkok: A Shocking Brush," *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper, evening ed., November 11, 1992, p.6. The title of Prasong's mural was 'Animal Society.' Thawan Duchanee has frequently employed the technique of expressing contemporary events allegorically using Buddhist lore. This can be seen in the 1989 series titled 'The Battle of Mara.'

4. The *mono-ha* school is a major postwar Japanese movement that is mentioned in tandem with the *gutai-ha* school, named after the Gutai Art Association. It denotes a trend among artists and works that emerged around 1970. At first, it was associated with happenings and events, followed by a phase of comparing and identifying elements of the mode of expression used by *arte povera* in Italy and the *supports/surfaces* movement in France, which developed in the 1960s. Later there was a tendency to look at it in terms of unique Japanese representation. The theoretical foundations were provided by Lee U-fan, who crystallized the tide of criticism against modernism, by characterizing modern Western art as "the history of the manipulation of images." Major artists associated with the *mono-ha* school include Koshimizu Susumu, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, Narita Katsuhiko, and Yoshida Katsuro. The artists exhibited materials and objects such as wood, iron, glass, cotton, paraffin, clay, and paper, with little effort to alter them to create illusionary representation. The *mono-ha* school is related to the installation movement, which arose later. For an extended treatment of the subject, see Tani Arata, *Kaiten suru hyōshō—gendai bijutsu/datsu postomodan no shikaku* (Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1992), a study of Japanese art since the 1970s.

Regarding the history of contemporary Thai art, I have consulted the works of Apinan Poshyananda and Anuvit Charensupkul.

ビヨンド・ザ・ボーダー

サンズーン・ミランダースト

スパチャイ・サートサーラ

千崎千恵夫

土屋公雄

作家解説は、たにあらたが執筆し
作家のデータについては
作家自身から提出された資料に基づき古市保子がまとめた。

Beyond the Border

Sansern Milindasuta

Supachai Satsara

Senzaki Chieo

Tsuchiya Kimio

The note on each artist is written by Tani Arata,
and the data in this catalogue was mostly based upon material received
from the artists themselves and edited by Furuichi Yasuko.



庭師 No.7
アクリル, 蠟, 粘土, 木
撮影=ターウィーバン・ポーンワット
Gardiner No.7
acrylic, wax, clay, wood
photo: Thawee Pan Phoonwattou
180×130cm, 1993



庭師 No.4
アクリル, 蠟, 粘土, 木
撮影=ターウィーバン・ポーンワット
Gardiner No.4
acrylic, wax, clay, wood
photo: Thawee Pan Phoonwattou
170×100cm, 1993



庭師 No.2
アクリル, 蠟, 粘土, 木
撮影=ターウィーバン・ポーンワット
Gardiner No.2
acrylic, wax, clay, wood
photo: Thaweepan Phoonwathu
134×145cm, 1993



「象牙色のささやき」シリーズ

(左からNos.3,6,4,2)

紙, 蠟, 粘土, 木板, プラスチック・ケース

撮影=ターウィーバン・ポーンワットウ

“Ivory Whisper” series

(from left: Nos.3,6,4,2)

paper, wax, clay, wooden board, plastic case

photo: Thaweepan Phoonwathu

No.3: 45×35, No.6: 55×30, No.4: 45×30, No.2: 45×30cm, 1992



「扉」シリーズ

“The Door” series

(左から: from left)

扉(鉄)

アクリル, 油彩, 蠟, 鉄

The Door (iron)

acrylic, oil, wax, iron

124×80cm, 1992

扉(木)

アクリル, 油彩, 蠟, 木

The Door (wood)

acrylic, oil, wax, wood

93×79cm, 1992

扉(鉄)

アクリル, 油彩, 蠟, 鉄

The Door (iron)

acrylic, oil, wax, iron

124×53cm, 1992

撮影ニターウィーパン・ポーンワットウ
photo: Thaweepan Phoonwathu



サンスーン・ミリンダースト
Sansern Milindasuta
photo: Nitikorn Kraivixien

生息する絵画

サンスーン・ミリンダーストの作品はタイ現代美術の未来を投影している。「形式」の展開およびそのデコンストラクションの方法が今後のタイ現代美術の行方を暗示しているということだ。

彼のイメージの発するところ、それははなはだ内面的なものだ。個的でひそやかなイマジネーションがゆったりとした時空のなかで、まるでそれ自身の物語を紡ぐように増殖していく。〈静物〉としての絵画の形式は、サンスーンにあっては常に変質すべき〈生態〉というゆるやかなネットに包囲されており、それはまた“絵画を増殖する絵画”のメタファーでもある。

最初は矩形の形式だった。しかし、彼は同時にスレートのような石、金網など非絵画的素材および支持体に描いていた。非定形な絵画オブジェはこのような方法で生まれ、しかもそれらはとどまるところを知らないもののように連鎖的に繰り返されていた。何が出どころかもわからない、しかし形象としては圧倒的にもおもしろい小オブジェの“博物誌的サンプリング”はこのようにして生まれている。《象牙色のささやき》(1992年)はこうしたレリーフ形式のオブジェの典型である。

だが、われわれは彼のもう一方の試行も見ておかなければならないだろう。それは「形式」の溶解を告げるいくつかの表現であり、《扉》(1992年)、《庭師》(1993年)、《ベルベット・ドロップ》(同)などの最近のシリーズ作品である。

このうち《庭師》は地(床)に立つ絵画である。これと似た連作のなかには土を床に敷き、土から生まれる絵画をイメージさせるものもある。まさに絵画は大地に降り立って生息を始めようとするのだ。そのとき、矩形の輪郭はすでにない。《扉》というシリーズ作品をはさんで、サンスーンの絵画は〈矩形〉〈変形〉そして〈やわらかな輪郭〉という、いわば形式主義の崩壊のステップを踏む。“土に生息する絵画”あるいは“壁絵画(形式)の床へのズレ落ち”、“皮膚のように呼吸する輪郭”、このような豊かな解釈はどのようにして彼にやどったのだろうか。

溶解する形式は、その一方で無限の増殖性をはらみ、絵画の内側において細胞分裂を引き起こしている。微生物の繁殖のようである。洗練された線描、色調はほとんどなく、血や肉、ときに生存しようとする意志すらもった生命体のようにそれはイメージされ、作者の“わだかまる内面性”を率直にあらわそうとする。絵画という表象の矛盾に満ちた内面すらメタフォライズするだろう。

サンスーンはあらわれているものごおしの確執は好まない。見えざる水面下の表象と戦う。それはいまだ見えざる自己との戦いでもある。その意味では、彼の作品に見られる形式溶解の一連の作業は、部分的な執着をよそに常に全体性を得ようとする“契機”であり、絵画の内界への踏み込みは、イマジネーションの復元力を待望する試みでもあるのだ。

Paintings that Live

Sansern Milindasuta's works reflect the future of contemporary Thai art. In other words, the development and deconstruction of form in his work suggests the direction in which Thai art is heading.

The degree to which Sansern's images are generated internally is unusual. A quiet, private imagination leisurely proliferates in time and space exactly as though weaving its own story. In Sansern's hands, the form of paintings as still-lives is surrounded by a gentle net —“ecology”— that is ever changing. It is also a metaphor for “paintings that generate paintings.”

At first Sansern produced rectangular works. However, he also painted on untraditional materials and backgrounds such as slate and wire netting. These were free-form paintings *cum* objects. Moreover, they were expressed in endlessly recurring chains. It would be impossible to single them out individually to determine where they begin. As images, however, the artist has fashioned them into “a sampling of naturalist history” consisting of small fascinating objects. ‘Ivory Whisper’ (1992) is typical of *objets* that take the form of a relief.

But we must also direct our gaze at another type of experiment carried out by Sansern. This is found in three recent series of works, ‘The Door’ (1992), ‘Gardiner’ (1993), and ‘Velvet-Drop’ (1993) that announce the dissolution of form. ‘Gardiner’ is a group of paintings that stand on the ground, namely, the floor. Other similar series include one in which the artist has spread earth on the floor, creating the image of paintings growing out of the soil. Indeed, the paintings seem to descend to earth and begin to live there. There are no more rectangular outlines. The series titled ‘The Door’ marks steps taken by Sansern toward the collapse of formalism, so to speak, using rectangles, irregular forms, and soft outlines. How did such fertile interpretations as “painting growing in the earth,” “frescoes (forms) that slip down onto the floor,” and “contours that breathe like skin” lodge in Sansern's mind?

The dissolution of form conversely embodies an endless reproductive capacity; it generates cell divisions within the painting, like a culture of microbes. Almost no refined lines or tones can be found. The images are treated like living forms that possess flesh and blood — and sometimes even a will to live. They frankly try to express the artist's inner being. They may even serve as a metaphor for the inner aspect of paintings as a form of representation that abounds with contradictions.

Sansern does not care for discord between the objects that are depicted. He wrestles with the invisible representation beneath the surface. This also represents a battle with his hidden self. In that sense, the series of efforts to dissolve form in his paintings represents a chance to constantly achieve a wholeness separate from attachment to the parts. Stepping into the inner world of the painting also constitutes an experiment that eagerly looks forward to the restorative power of the imagination.