

Dreaming in Public: Intrepid interpretations

Youthapong Charoenpan experiences 'Dreaming in Public', a newly opened art exhibition at the Silom-based Gallery Souflower, featuring the works of Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Hema Upadhyay, Jakkai Siributr and Sheba Chhachhi, four contemporary artists from Thailand and India.

Youthapong Charoenpan

While the monsoon rains during May and June can lead to a drop in temperature in Bangkok, there is a significant downside, too, in the form of floods and traffic gridlock.

The reason I mention this is that it almost put paid to my attendance at the recent launch of Dreaming in Public, an exhibition being hosted at Bangkok's Gallery Souflower, featuring artists from Thailand and India. I'm just so relieved that eventually I was able to battle my way through the elements and make it to the opening event.

Curated by Brian Curtin, Dreaming in Public, features the works of Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Hema Upadhyay, Jakkai Siributr and Sheba Chhachhi.

Private and public

While we tend to associate dreaming with an unconscious experience in which the infinite, amorphous elements of the imagination are explored, perhaps reflecting a desire for change or ambition, extra-sensory perceptions, a sense of the 'ideal', and much more both in terms of history and theory – this contrasts sharply with the 'shared' experience typically conjured up when using the word 'public'. Public typically suggests ideas based upon community and consensus, while dreaming would normally conjure up an intensely private and personal experience. From a conceptual point of view, these two apparently diverse aspects are brought into focus.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, one of Thailand's leading visual artists, is based in the northern province of Chiang Mai, where she teaches at Chiang Mai University's Faculty of Fine Art. Her contributions to Dreaming in Public demonstrate a somewhat mischievous and provocative side to her personality, along with a sense of humor.

Art for 'the masses'?

Her outdoor installations 'Van Gogh's the Midday Sleep and Thai Villagers' and 'Manet's Luncheon on the Grass and Thai Villagers' show groups of villagers from rural areas sat down observing the works of these classic European painters.

While the idea that art can only be enjoyed by a ruling elite would seem an outdated, even comical idea in most developed nations, perhaps these works suggest such an idea still holds a good deal of currency within Asia.

Personally, I think it would be a worrying trend if people first needed to be 'qualified' in some way to enter a gallery in this day and age. I found Araya's work not only humorous, but also a 'tonic for the soul'.

Versatile artist Hema Upadhyay employs all manner of media and methods, including installations, paintings and photography. Her installations have included materials as diverse as artificial limbs, cockroaches and scrap metal from cars.

Themes of displacement and isolation, underlined by a foreboding sense of violence, frame the Mumbai-based artist's work, which also creates a strong sense of intricacy and fragility. In 'From The Series Just Another Day's Detail', Hema recreates a formation of human bodies in a unique form that reminds me of animal prints. This work shows how things may not always be quite as they seem on first inspection.

A stitch in time

Jakkai Siributr uses an extraordinary and innovative practice as an artist who rather blurs any distinctions between fine arts and craft. Drawing heavily on the historic language of painting, Jakkai weaves and stitches layered images, inspired by personal memories, Buddhist practice, as well as life in his native Bangkok.

A trained textile designer, Jakkai's drawings of animals and humans engaging in various activities on fabric in 'Emotional Distortion' at first appear innocent, yet on closer inspection you'll discover some fairly explicit activities. His immaculate artistic techniques are certainly sending some pretty strong messages, which are open for exploration in terms of interpretation.

Sheba Chhachhi creates digital tapestries of cross-cultural imagery drawn from mythology, history and contemporary life. The Delhi-based artist often employs a primitive animation device to create hypnotic movement and her explorations of fractured narratives and symbolism are wonderfully set in robust sculptural forms.

In Chhachhi's 'Water Diviner', a three-minute video installation, the main theme seems to be that 'size doesn't matter when it comes to swimming', although the title might suggest more spiritual and emblematic connections at a deeper level.

The organizer points out that the main theme of the exhibition demonstrates how notions of both 'dreaming' as well as 'public' may be less affected by their juxtaposition than mere mutual infiltration. It asks, 'how exactly are notions of non-private and private, impersonal and personal, free-will and societal structures, the unconscious and

conscious individual desires different from contemporary realities that are understood through art?’

On a personal level, the exhibition re-enforced the idea that you should not be confined by the notion of dreaming nor dare not to dream – whether your eyes are open or closed.

Gallery Souflower Contemporary Art opens Monday through Saturday from 11 am-7 pm.

For further information on the gallery, please contact Tel: +66 (0)2 630 0032, or visit <http://www.gallerysouflower.com> . Dreaming in Public ends July 25.

Transport connections:

Car: With plenty of parking options, it’s easy to drive to The Silom Galleria, home to Gallery Souflower Contemporary Art. Located in basement 1 (B16), the gallery is near to the Holiday Inn on Silom Road (Silom Soi 19), opposite Tops supermarket (in what was once the Central Silom Department Store Building).

Train: The nearest BTS station is Surasak, from which you can take a taxi or motorcycle taxi.

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