

Participatory Art In Thai Society And Its Hidden Power*

บทบาทของศิลปะแบบร่วมมือในสังคมไทยและอำนาจที่แฝงอยู่

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Abstract

Participatory practice, as a form of contemporary art, seeks to remove the boundaries between artists, art, audiences and spaces. Whilst this process offers audiences a chance to voluntarily participate in the artwork, it can also be seen as the exercise of political control over unwitting participants. This article will investigate the role of participatory art in Thai society, and its political influence under the guise of participation. To achieve this, three case studies of contemporary Thai artists will be examined. These artists have been selected due to their international recognition, and their centrality to each artistic movement relating to culture, community and territory, and social organisation.¹ These three cases are 1) Rirkrit Tiravanija's conceptual art 'Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai)' 2) Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch's annual 'Art Normal' project (since 2011), which aims to create arts dialogue in the community of Ratchaburi province. 3) Sutee Kunavichayanont's protest art 'Thai Uprising' (2013-2014). In order to investigate these practices, books, papers, articles from e-newspapers and other related documents such as interview scripts have been reviewed. In some cases, the writer has taken part in the practices as a passive or active participant. These three case studies will be

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บทความนี้ถูกเรียบเรียงใหม่จากความเรียงซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกระบวนการวิชา Curatorial Practice เพื่อสำเร็จการศึกษาศิลปะบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาศิลปะร่วมสมัย สถาบันศิลปะเอนดิเบอร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเอนดิเบอร์ ปีการศึกษา 2560 เรื่อง Participatory Art in Thai Society: How Art Meet Community? โดยมี Mr. John Beagles เป็นอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาความเรียง

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¹ Saraburiwitthayakhom, sangkhom manut. *khwā̄mmāi kā̄n yū rūām kan lā̄e 'ongprakō̄ khō̄ng sangkhom*. [Human Society. Meanings, Coexistence and Elements of Social Structure]. Retrieved on November 5, 2019 from <https://sites.google.com/site/30261bambook/khwam-hmay-kar-xyu-rwm-kan-laea-xngkh-prakxb-khxng-sangkhm>

thematically examined following Professor Michael Kelly's three categories of participatory art in 'Encyclopedia of Aesthetics' - relational, activist, and antagonistic.

In conclusion, this paper suggests that regardless of processes, participatory art encourages relationships between participants and society within a specific place and time - a process that can induce collective thought and action under the premise of solidarity. Given the artist's privileged position within this relationship, art creators must remain cautious not to manipulate the rights and perspectives of participants throughout the artistic process.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Participatory Art, Relational Aesthetics, Social Practice, Community-based Practice, Collaboration

บทคัดย่อ

ศิลปะแบบร่วมมือ เป็นงานศิลปะชนิดหนึ่งที่ซึ่งแพร่หลายเป็นวงกว้างไปพร้อม ๆ กับการดำเนินขึ้นของศิลปะร่วมสมัย มีจุดประสงค์ทำลายเส้นแบ่งระหว่าง ศิลปิน ศิลปะ ผู้ชม และพื้นที่แสดงงาน โดยการเปิดโอกาสให้ผู้ชมเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมในผลงาน ในขณะเดียวกันนั้นเอง งานศิลปะประเภทนี้สามารถถูกมองว่าเป็นการควบคุมทางการเมืองโดยที่ผู้ชมไม่รู้ตัวเช่นกัน บทความฉบับนี้ต้องการศึกษาบทบาทของศิลปะแบบร่วมมือในสังคมไทยและอำนาจทางการเมืองที่ซ่อนอยู่ภายใต้ 'การร่วมมือกัน' โดยศึกษาจากผลงานศิลปะแบบร่วมมือจากศิลปินร่วมสมัยไทย 3 ท่าน ซึ่งเป็นศิลปินผู้เป็นเสมือนแบบอย่างในการแสดงออกถึงศิลปะแบบร่วมมือในด้านต่าง ๆ ได้แก่ ด้านวัฒนธรรม ด้านพื้นที่และอาณาเขต และด้านการจัดระเบียบของสังคม ซึ่งศิลปินทั้งสามท่านมีชื่อเสียงเป็นที่ยอมรับในระดับสากล 1) ฤกษ์ฤทธิ์ ตีรวนิช กับผลงานคอนเซ็ปชัลชุด 'Untitled 1990 (ผัดໄท)' (พ.ศ.2533) 2) วศินบุรี สุพานิชรากานนท์ กับโครงการศิลปะประจำปี 'ปกติศิลป์' (ตั้งแต่ พ.ศ.2554) ซึ่งมุ่งเน้นการสร้างบทสนทนาเกี่ยวกับศิลปะในชุมชน จ.ราชบุรี และ 3) สุธี คุณวิชยานนท์ กับผลงานศิลปะประท้วงชุด 'มวลมหาประชาชน' (พ.ศ.2556-2557) โดยผลงานของศิลปินทั้งสามท่านที่ยกมาเน้น ผู้เขียนได้ศึกษาโดยวิธีการสำรวจเอกสารและบทสัมภาษณ์ รวมถึงการเป็นผู้เข้าร่วมในบางผลงาน และผู้เขียนได้พิจารณาจำแนกประเภทอย่างกว้าง ๆ ตามงานศิลปะแบบร่วมมือ 3 ประเภทของไมเคิล เคลลี ใน 'สารานุกรมแห่งสุนทรียศาสตร์' (พ.ศ.2557) ซึ่งได้แก่ ศิลปะเชิงเกี่ยวนิยม ศิลปะเชิงกิจกรรม และศิลปะเชิงปฏิบัติ ซึ่งบทความฉบับนี้จึงให้เห็นว่าไม่ว่าจะมีกระบวนการอย่างไรก็ตาม ศิลปะแบบร่วมมือมีจุดประสงค์หลักนั้นคือการกระตุ้นให้เกิดความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างผู้คนในสังคม ณ สถานที่ใดสถานที่หนึ่ง ในช่วงระยะเวลาหนึ่ง ด้วยกระบวนการที่สามารถซักซูนกลุ่มคนให้คิดหรือปฏิบัติการได้ ๆ ภายใต้ 'ความรู้สึกเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกัน' โดยมีศิลปินเป็นผู้มีสิทธิพิเศษในความสัมพันธ์นี้ ผู้สร้างสรรค์งานศิลปะจะต้องคำนึงถึงการไม่เข้ามารือบดีเป็นสิทธิและมุ่งมองของผู้ร่วมมือตลอดกระบวนการสร้างสรรค์ผลงาน

คำสำคัญ : ศิลปะร่วมสมัย ศิลปะแบบร่วมมือ สุนทรียศาสตร์เกี่ยวนิยม ปฏิบัติการทางสังคม ปฏิบัติการโดยมีชุมชนเป็นฐาน การร่วมมือ

Introduction

Since the emergence of contemporary art, one thing we notice that distinguishes it from the past has been the expansion in the accessibility of art, with art no longer exclusively catering to academic circles or functioning as a ‘luxury good’, only possessed by the elite. The blurring of boundaries between social classes has led to more people engaging with and interpreting art, and less intellectual restriction on behalf of the traditionally advantaged groups and institutions who have historically controlled the narratives surrounding art. Especially following the rise of the ‘artist-curator’, first brought to light in 1988 by the group of ‘Young British Artists’ led by an art student, Damien Hirst, art has moved out of the white cube or government-provided space of museums or galleries into alternative spaces, strengthening the bridge between artist-art-audience-space. This process has resulted in the increased participation of people in art, not only as an audience, but also as participants or sometimes co-artists. In other words, participatory art has created many kinds of role and been one of the prevailing themes in the art world for decades, alongside revolution, migration, marginalisation, utopianism etc. Participatory art exists under a variety of overlapping headings, including interactive, relational, cooperative, activist, dialogical, and community-based art. As a Thai person, throughout this paper I will study the conception, processes, presentation and dissemination of participatory art, how it affects Thai society on a variety of scales, and how audiences interpret their intentional or unintentional participation in such events.

This composition rests on three case studies of Thai contemporary artists. Firstly, Rirkrit Tiravanija and his so-called ‘Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai)’, a contemporary installation and conceptual artist whose work explores the social role of artists and has been regularly cited by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud as exemplary of his conception of relational art. Secondly, I will discuss Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch’s annual ‘Art Normal’ project (since 2011), which aims to create a critical dialogue in the community in Ratchaburi province. Finally, I will outline Suttee Kunavichayanont’s ‘Thai Uprising’ (2013-2014), a piece of protest art as part of the ‘Bangkok Shut Down’, a political rally against the elected government of Yingluck Shinawatra that paved the way to the military coup in May, 2014. These artists can be thematically examined following Professor Michael Kelly’s characterisation in ‘Encyclopedia of Aesthetics’. This work states that; ‘in broad strokes, participatory art can be considered to fall into three categories: relational, activist, and antagonistic. While the motivations and the means in these three cases are quite different, all depend on participation’.² Even though the aim of

² Kelly, Michael. *Encyclopedia of aesthetics*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.

participatory art is to neutralise art's capacity to challenge social inventions, the question of who authoritatively owns or leads the situation has been raised regularly throughout attempts to define its essence. No such art can escape political critiques, especially when it gathers together more than one agency, citing Jacques Rancière, Bishop writes, 'the "critique of the spectacle" often remains the alpha and the omega of the "politics of art"'.

Case selection - methods and criteria

In order to investigate the practices in this article, books, papers, articles from e-newspapers and other related documents such as interview scripts have been analysed. Furthermore, the writer had a chance to be a passive audience in the 'Art Normal' project and has spent three months in Ratchaburi province as an intern for Supanichvoraparch in 2013. For the practice of Kunavichayanont, the writer was one of an active participant in the 'Thai Uprising', holding the protest sign made by the artist and facilitating the event. That is to say, direct and indirect observation has been used as the main method of research in this study. Each case study covered the following information:

1. Context: an artistic practice that considered site-specific and activity-based, which requires participants to take part to complete the process of the practice,

2. Activity: the role of audiences is shifted from passive visitors to co-artists through the activity performed in a specific space,

3. Artist: male Thai contemporary artist from the age of 48 - 58 (in 2019) who has been internationally recognised with their centrality to each artistic movement relating to culture, community and territory, and social organisation. An artist who has been constantly producing and exhibiting his works and frequently cited when talking about such activity-based practices and themes. Each artist's recognition as follows;

1) Rirkrit Tiravanija (born in 1961), his works became relational art's paradigm after pointed to Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud and has been recognised with numerous awards and grants including Hugo Boss Prize (2004) and Silpathorn Awards in Visual Arts (2007) by the Ministry of Culture, Thailand,³

2) Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch (born in 1971), a ceramic artist and photographer, best known for an activity-based artist who dedicates to giving back to the society and social development. His work has also been recognised with numerous exhibitions

³ Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, thamniāp sinlapin. sinlapāthōn. [Artist directory. Silpathorn Awards].

Retrieved on November 5, 2019 from <http://ocac.go.th/>

and awards including exhibiting in the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) and receiving Silpathorn Awards in Design (2010) by the Ministry of Culture, Thailand.⁴

3) Suttee Kunavichayanont (born in 1965), a conceptual artist, academic, author and curator whose work reflects social, economic and political changes over the past decades by raising critical questions in nationalism, power, identity and cultural convention through viewer engagement to the body of the work. He has received numerous awards and honours including Silpa Bhirasri Creativity Grants (2002) and Red Art Award 2 by Pridi Banomyong Institute (2002). He is currently a full-time lecturer at the Department of Art Theory, the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.⁵

The term of participatory art and its politics

Over the last decade, participatory art has become commonplace and acknowledged as a creative process that requires public participation. From simple public art events which are easy to get involved in, to the participation of audiences who are encouraged to volunteer to be a part of the art piece or to co-artist, the gallery-goer's experience has shifted from passively viewing to touching, smelling, hearing, tasting and even taking part, moving from exclusion to inclusion. Especially since this kind of art has entered established institutions such as public museums and galleries, the consensus view that influential individuals and institutions as well as the global art market still dictate and dominate art is being challenged. Participatory projects seem to operate and work against dominant market imperatives by diffusing single authorship into collaborative activities. Questions have also been raised around how participants are framed and understood in participatory projects, or around the 'new tyranny' of the artist, with artists able to describe the tools, choose the topics, and ultimately "shape and direct the processes".⁶

Since the beginning of the community arts movement in the 1970s, within politicised art, tensions have existed around the issues of control, power, choice and leadership. The practice of participatory art is also referred to as social practice, according to critic and Professor of Art History Claire Bishop's 'Artificial Hells'. Bishop declares that contemporary artists who work in a relational field are more focused on creating or repairing social bonds

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kunavichayanont, S. Biography. Retrieved on November 5, 2019 from http://www.rama9art.org/suttee/biography_en.html

⁶ Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (2002). *Participation, the new tyranny?*. 1st ed. London: Zed.

than creating a particular aesthetic, with the artists occupying the role of collaborator instead of the individual producer of objects. Additionally, Grant Kester, Professor of Art History and the founding editor of FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism, criticises the terms of participatory art projects in 'The One and the Many', saying that such art uses spectacle and shock tactics in order to discomfort participants and viewers involved in public art projects, making them "viscerally aware of their own complicity in an oppressive specular economy" (Kester, 2011). These kinds of projects only maintain problematic assumptions and generalisations relating to the background or experiences of the viewer (Kester, 2011), in which 'the process of participatory interaction itself is treated as a form of creative praxis'. Therefore, there are many different ways of negotiating relationships within the act of making art. The core of participatory art is to create something new and original, involving some degree of authorial control of the artists and supportive contribution from the participants rather than the production of an extant work.

On the other hand, a curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud seems to see it differently. According to Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' (1998), relational art encompasses "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."⁷ This kind of artwork builds a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. Bourriaud claims that "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist".⁸

Relational - Rirkrit Tiravanija's 'Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai)'

The strong emphasis on social relationships in Thai culture has also encouraged the growth of relational or interactional art in Thailand. Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's performances and installations seek to explore the connection between art and life, concentrating on the act of eating, food preparation and distribution, and re-shaping conventional gallery spaces into makeshift kitchens. He was responding to the question of how to reconstitute works that were time-based, how to re-stage performative events and how to include the collaborative nature of the work in an exhibition. His work attempted to create spaces for socialising and interaction—the public were able to experience art through pleasure and conversation. In

⁷ Bourriaud, Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics* (S. Pleasance, F. Woods, & M. Copeland, trans.). France: Presses Du Réel, 113.

⁸ Ibid., 13.

1990 at Paula Allen Gallery in New York, he offered Thai food to his visitors that he had just cooked from the gallery - recently transformed into his kitchen. No objects were displayed in the space and all the audience could only do was have dinner together and talk. As such, the work can be considered as an activity rather than object-making, attempting to dissolve the institutional barriers of inert gallery spaces. The spectator's role ceases to exist as Tiravanija's performative art diminishes the boundaries of art viewing over passive spectatorship.



Rirkrit Tiravanija performing/cooking 'Untitled 1990' (Pad Thai) at Paula Allen Gallery, New York in 1990.

Figure 1. [Rirkrit Tiravanija's Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai)] (2017, December 19). [Digital image].

Retrieved on November 1, 2019 from <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/rirkrit-tiravanija-talks-politics-cooking-ceramics/>

From this show, Tiravanija is understood to be a successful international conceptual artist. Many Thai critics agree that Tiravanija's achievement relied on the audiences interest in the exotic, as imitating culture in a place where it does not belong makes his work intriguing for those unfamiliar with the Thai culture. However, this feeling of excitement does not always lead to understanding of culture difference, alternately, it fogs the cultural authenticity by lopsidedly transferring its originality through the superficial label of 'international'. (Siripattananuntakul, 2012: 67) Apart from cultural critiques from Thai critics, Tiravanija's work has broadly raised questions surrounding the aesthetics of the act, after it became a paradigm of relational art following his inclusion by Bourriaud under the rubric of Relational Aesthetics.

Kester resents Bourriaud's assertion that artists such as Tiravanija, who he sees as emblematic of relational art, are developing new and different ways of establishing intersubjective relations (Kester, 2011). That is to say, Bourriaud's argument for this work seeks

to reorient practice away from technical expertise or object production toward processes of intersubjective exchange. This work attempts to establish a boundary between “new” relational artists and a “long tradition of performance art and socially engaged collaborative practice” and thus “fails to convey the complexity and diversity of socially engaged art (Kester, 2011).

Bishop is also critical of Bourriaud’s theory. She argues that these relational aesthetics are less concerned with intersubjective relationships than with “scenarios” and systems of a display (Bishop, 2014). These “scenarios” are considered inherently political because they have the capacity to produce positive human relationships (Bishop, 2004), although the quality, effect, or existence of these relationships is never examined or called into question (Bishop, 2004). Agreeing with Kester’s argument, she claims that space or events are programmed ahead of time and then set in place before the viewer (Wilson, 2007).

The aim of both Kester and Bishop is to find a set of criteria with which to assess participatory art. They acknowledged that participatory art persistently exists in socially engaged communities through the activity. Kester describes successful community arts projects as exemplifying a “pragmatic openness to site and situation, a willingness to engage with particular cultures and communities in a creative and improvisational manner, a concern with non-hierarchical and participatory art processes, and a critical and self-reflexive relationship to practice itself” (Kester, 2011).

Activist - Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch's 'Art Normal' project

This paper now moves on from the participatory art that attempts to re-shape the role of the gallery of Tiravanija to the reversed efforts of Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch. Supanichvoraparch pioneered the community-based ‘Art Normal’ project in the small city of Ratchaburi, in Ratchaburi province, Thailand. In order to break down a conventional gallery’s boundaries and make art more accessible to locals, Supanichvoraparch displayed various artworks in areas synonymous with their daily lives. A citywide exhibition was created and shown to the public for the first time in December 2011. Stemming from the notion that ‘Being surrounded by art doesn’t automatically make someone an artist, but living in beautiful surroundings can stimulate imagination and creativity’⁹, Supanichvoraparch attempted to address the fact that visiting art galleries and museums in Thailand is not a traditional activity among ordinary Thai people. As visual arts are generally perceived as high culture and exclusively for the wealthy, educated and those with a high social status, as a response, the

⁹ Jepson, A. and Clarke, A. (n.d.). *Managing and developing communities, festivals and events*. 1st ed.

Art Normal project has endeavoured to introduce the notion that there is no need for artworks to exclusively be placed in a frame in a gallery space. Despite being the best known example of this, the Art Normal project was not the first attempt at exhibiting art outside of gallery spaces in Thailand. Back in 1996, 'Project 304' was the most influential alternative art space in the Thai art scene, having turned a small apartment in Bangkok into a non-profit art space. The Project 304 was ran by a group of artists with shared interests, led by the apartment's owner Krittaya Kaweewong. They aimed to provide a space for artists, especially conceptual and experimental artists, to show their work without having to wait for opportunities from big institutions, as well as challenge people's perception of where art should be placed. Artists could use any corner of the apartment, bathroom, balcony, and understairs cupboard to express their practice. Throughout its six years of operation, Project 304 created a chain reaction within the Thai art scene, breaking from the limited ways of exhibiting art and spreading art out to public spaces through hosting an experimental film festival in a public park and organising various travelling exhibitions. (Oupkum, 2015) Even though Project 304's ambition was similar that of Art Normal - which is to say that both aim to connect art to the public by removing the sacred shell of the white cube - it tended to focus on artists rather than the public. Art Normal, on the contrary, focused on developing the notion of artistic practice amongst people who live in the certain area. While Project 304's approach was inside-out, Art Normal project had an outside-in focus.

Art Normal project reduces the complication of understanding art by encouraging local residents to understand and become aware that art is part of their daily life. Due to high levels of socio-economic inequality in Thailand, disadvantaged communities often have a weak social network with which to access information on job opportunities and community activities. Working on a project with the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Supanichvoraparch attempted to transform Ratchaburi into a contemporary art destination where art is everywhere to be seen, and where the locals are familiar with art. This project presented the opportunity for community members to create and exhibit their artworks in their everyday environments, in places of familiarity and routine.

This project included a series of artworks from 124 artists, which were placed in 75 random locations with the concept that 'Every house is a gallery and every place is an art museum'. The exhibition venues included coffee shops, restaurants, food stalls, beauty salons, grocery stores, butchers, on a local bus, on the rooftop of a ferry, and in Ratchaburi's first hotel. The set of works consisted of sculpture, painting, photography, poetry and public graffiti.

Local residents were trained in painting, photography, and short films by artists, displaying their artworks in their homes or businesses. Therefore, those contributing to the Art Normal project included contemporary artists, community members of both the younger and older generations, and a network of professional artists.



Photographs displayed on a local bus in Ratchaburi province, as part of the first 'Art Normal' project, Ratchaburi, 2011.

Figure 2. Supanichvoraparch, W. (Photographer). (2019, March 23). "Photographs on a local bus" [Digital image]. Retrieved on November 1, 2019 from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156877612475801&set=pcb.10156877649480801&type=3&theater>

There were a number of Thai artists who contributed to this project. For example, in the first edition of Art Normal in 2011, writer Prabhassorn Sevikul wrote a short story, the text of which was painted along the bank of Mae Khlong river. Audiences had to walk a total of 3 kilometres to read the story. The work of Sakarin Krue-on in the second Art Normal in 2016, entitled Koi Kee Line Dance (2016), was a video art-based documentary made by the artist together with an Aerobic Dance club. It shows the connection between members of the club and the community's outdoor space. A shed structure with benches for the community members to come and sit and rest was also built, with Krue-on's video installed inside. The area has now become akin to a public garden, with potted plants donated by residents in the area.



A short story by a writer, Prabhassorn Sevikul, painted along the bank of Mae Khlong River, as part of the first 'Art Normal' project, Ratchaburi in 2011.

Figure 3. Supanichvoraparch, W. (Photographer). (2019, March 23). "Prabhassorn Sevikul's short story" [Digital image]. Retrieved on November 1, 2019 from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156877581315801&set=pcb.10156877649480801&type=3&theater>

Upon reflection of the Art Normal project, this public art event has succeeded in contributing to community development, which was a key priority of the project. The newly trained locals have improved their creative skills, which has led to an increase in self-esteem and a strong sense of community pride. From the social dimension, this public art event has engaged locals, professional artists, amateurs, arts organisations and local government - enhancing these relationships, developing social capital, and encouraging a strengthened sense of collective identity.

Although the Art Normal project has established a distinctive identity for Ratchaburi, Supanichvoraparch admits that the project has not always been received positively. Some locals disliked the idea of displaying a collection of photos along the Mae Klong River, saying that Ratchaburi deserves to be a peaceful and clean city and that no fancy artwork was needed. It is noted that history and the preservation of a legacy often form the foundation of a city's identity, however in times of inevitable change, art is often used as a means to preserve the old whilst simultaneously finding a way to update it and make it more relevant.



“Cat Town” by JARTOWN Group, graffiti art in the city of Ratchaburi as part of the first 'Art Normal' project, Ratchaburi in 2011.

Figure 4. [Cat Town by JARTOWN Group] (2016, March 4). [Digital image]. Retrieved on February 5, 2019 from <https://www.bangkokpost.com/lifestyle/art/886096/ratchaburi-roll-of-the-dice>

From the perspective of Supanichvoraparch, art can be seen as a driver, motivating people in the city and revealing strong societal bonds. Additionally, this kind of solidarity can drive groups of people to partake in antagonistic social movements. As in Kester's argument, the artists can use their position to instigate a participatory planning process, which eventually leads to blurring the lines between artistic practice, planning, education and political activism. This must be judged according to cautious, contingent criteria that blur aesthetics with ethics. Additionally, Claire Bishop argues that participatory art should function as a means for exploring discomfort, dissensus and antagonism.

Antagonistic - Sutee Kunavichayanont's 'Thai Uprising' (2008)

From the positive outcomes of participatory art to the negative, Sutee Kunavichayanont's Thai Uprising was selected to be exhibited in "The Truth to Turn It Over", an exhibition at Kwangju Museum of Art in South Korea curated by Jong-young Lim. The show was organised as a tribute to the thirty-sixth anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising—a rebellion in 1980 which involved South Koreans taking up arms against government troops after they fired upon students at a protest.

Kunavichayanont's work was one of the most controversial in this show, broadly affecting not only Thai art society, but also international art society. 'Thai Uprising', featuring protest-themed posters and T-shirts based on those distributed during the 2013-14 rallies, provoked Thai social-media sphere to light up with debates. Kunavichayanont's critics contend

that his support for the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) movement that disputed elections, handed down an elected government, and helped create the conditions for military intervention, hardly makes the show a symbol of championing of democracy. After the protest, the government of Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister at that time, was replaced by a junta government in the ensuing coup of May 2014.



Protestors of PDRC movement making the signs by spray paint to be held up in the PDRC parade, Bangkok, 2013.

Figure 5. Kunavichayanont, S. (2014, January 13). *Posters of Shutdown Bangkok* [Digital image].

Retrieved on November 4, 2019 from <http://www.rama9art.org/suttee/visual.html>

Kunavichayanont addresses social and political issues through his interactional art installations, which invite people to partake in the making of the artwork itself. With more than a million people including students, citizens, activists, educationists and joining the protest, Kunavichayanont provided stencil paper blocks and spray paint for the protesters to make T-shirts and also produce posters for fundraising. These signs were held up with pride by protestors as they paraded throughout and closed down seven venues including main roads, famous monuments, and a public park in Bangkok. In consideration of this matter, the works of Kunavichayanont can be considered as a manifestation of power, transforming to a sign of support and solidarity for people holding them. The inclusive power that was established and disseminated in being able to touch the work that once belonged to the artist created the social bond amongst the group of protestors. Incidentally, if this series of work were framed and displayed in the conventional gallery, it would probably be a passive work in a mundane space. Therefore, we can consider that the process is more important than the product, this project works because of the relationship between like-minded protestors, through the same time and place.



Stenciled T-shirts saying "the Victory of Citizen" and "We Will Surely Win! The Artists Are Here", to wear in the parade of PDRC movement, Bangkok, 2013.

Figure 6. Kunavichayanont, S. (2014, January). *Making stenciled T-shirts Protesting the Government in Chitlom Art Lane* [Digital image]. Retrieved on November 4, 2019 from <http://www.rama9art.org/sutee/visual.html>

After this, Kunavichayanont's works were selected and exhibited in 'The Truth to Turn It Over' once the PDRC movement has stopped. A group of artists and academics sent an open letter to Gwangju Museum of Art to protest against the participation of 'Thai Uprising', in which they said this work is "anti-democratic" and opposed to human rights and free spirit. This letter is endorsed on behalf of the Cultural Activists for Democracy (CAD), a group comprising of 118 activists. It states: "Rather than promoting democracy and civilian rule, his project at [the museum] recites his contribution to the recession of Thai democracy such as posters using stencil techniques, T-shirts for PDRC supporters, and so on". Following this, the curator of this exhibition, Jong-young Lim, had to publish the declaration letter alongside the 'Thai Uprising' pieces of Kunavichayanont.



Suttee Kunavichayanont's 'Thai Uprising' displayed in the exhibition, 'The Truth to Turn It Over', at Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju in 2014.

Figure 7. [Suttee Kunavichayanont's Thai Uprising] (2016, June 8). [Digital image]. Retrieved on November 5, 2019 from <https://www.artforum.com/news/activists-criticize-gwangju-museum-for-exhibiting-anti-democratic-thai-artist-s-work-60476>

Critics are used to writing about a body of work by an artist. Audiences are interested in who a work is “by.” So, making art through participation and ascribing authorship to a group—especially a group of nonprofessional artists—has created difficult issues of authorship and interpretation. Artists and critics invested in this art form often contend that a social and aesthetic value exists in creating a participatory process that moves away from the individualistic model to a more socially horizontal structure. The emergence of participatory practice in the Thai art scene has reminded people of the increased freedom of expression that has developed throughout Thai society in recent years. The debate about the selection of Kunavichayanont’s work, whilst exacerbating tension between rival political groups, stimulated an important discussion and much-needed criticism surrounding Thai art.

Conclusion

Participatory practice can be instrumental in the development of tangible networks and interpersonal links, not only in the form of art events or activities, but also in seminars, workshop and art exhibitions where dialogue exists, and ideas are exchanged. The space around participatory art provides opportunities to interact, socialise, and develop relationships through discussions among audience members and participants. Much of this creative work has contributed significantly towards transforming society’s understanding of art and its socio-cultural value. Therefore, to encompass all that art can be, it should not be limited to any specific measures or outcomes. There is much to be done to unpack the complexity and political efficacy of collaborative art. As

we can see from the abovementioned projects of the three Thai artists, all these works encourage the public to question the ‘water they live in’ through the artists’ repurposing of social and cultural objects, as well as symbols that are part of everyday life. Throughout the construction of participatory artwork however, the balance of power between artist and participant must be considered. As such, artists must remain vigilant and cautious not to blur the thin line between social engagement and political manipulation.

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