

Bringing Together Contemporary Art of ASEAN Countries

Art work of artists in various Southeast Asian states are exhibited in a regional show that has kicked off in Bangkok

It seems as if galleries displaying contemporary art are sprouting everywhere; even in the local markets of various Southeast Asian countries, one can find dynamic art scenes, pieces of abstract art here and there. Artists in the region are exposed and attracted to modern art, and have been creating work of distinct styles worthy of recognition. To publicise the emergence of this trend, the work, and the artists, an art exhibition “asean ARToday Thailand & Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar/Burma” was held in Bangkok (June 4-28, 2002) at the Thavibu Gallery. Jointly organised by Thavibu Gallery and the ASEAN Art Associates, the show offers for viewing paintings and artwork by ten Thai artists, two from Cambodia, three from Laos and two from Myanmar. The event is part of a series of exhibitions that will take place in many countries in the region, culminating in the international exhibition, ‘ASEAN Art Expo’ (at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 19 October-24 November



Aung Kyaw Htet, Myanmar



Kongphat Luangrath, Laos

2002), which will include work of about eighty artists from the ASEAN countries. The exhibitions are organised to raise awareness of contemporary Southeast Asian art among the international community.

At the June 4 inauguration ceremony in Thailand, Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer, Director of UNESCO, Bangkok, opened the occasion with a speech, to some seventy guests, that succinctly summed up the regional situation of contemporary art. He said that the show would provide an opportunity to sample the diversity, and view some of the best visual art produced in Southeast Asia today. Dr. Shaeffer shared his view, which has been expressed by an increasing number of observers, that Thailand has “a large number of artists, and the styles, media and subject matter chosen by Thai artists are among the most diverse in the region.” He spoke of the country’s “solid indigenous foundation for painting through traditional mural art in its temples”, and that they are now confident in exploring new means of expression. Several Thai artists, he noted, have involved themselves in the world of emotions (love, joy, despair, loneliness, etc..), rather than in simple and beautiful subjects (such as romantic landscapes and still life) that used to have a hold on many.

Among the countries in Asia, Thailand has one of the most vibrant contemporary art cultures, with artists venturing into the sphere of abstraction and installations/mixed media. This is attributed to what Dr. Shaeffer described as “a high degree of freedom of expression in Thailand”, which does not exist in many other countries in the region due to political and social restrictions. He pointed out that although Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar “share much of the same cultural heritage as Thailand, they have



The opening



Socang Vanara, Cambodia



aseanARToday



Thaiwijit Puangkasemsomboon, Thailand

not enjoyed the same amount of freedom of expression and interaction with outside communities”, a freedom often perceived as vital to artistic development. According to him, the ‘contemporary’ visual art from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar depicting scenes of villages, temples, markets and situations in daily lives, is a reflection of a focus on traditional values due to the relative isolation experienced by the three countries. He stressed that there is nothing wrong in featuring traditional subject matters in paintings, and that some of the artists are very skillful. Dr. Shaeffer, however, would like to see the direction of the development of contemporary visual arts in these three countries, which “will be highly interesting”, he said.

A large number of the exhibits shown in Bangkok will be on display in Kuala Lumpur during the international ‘ASEAN Art Expo’, which will coincide with a three-day art symposium. The symposium will be attended by art professionals and those interested in the visual arts.



Sudjai Chaiyapan, Thailand

Thavibu Gallery Co., Ltd. is a Virtual Art Gallery for quality paintings. The Gallery’s objective is to promote quality art, particularly from Thailand, Vietnam and Burma, hence the name Thavibu. The emphasis is on young and upcoming artists whose works express and communicate the imaginative aspects of their culture and

reflect concerns that range broadly from the spiritual and aesthetic to the social and political.

For more information on the international exhibition, ‘ASEAN Art Expo’ (at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 19 October-24 November 2002), please contact:

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