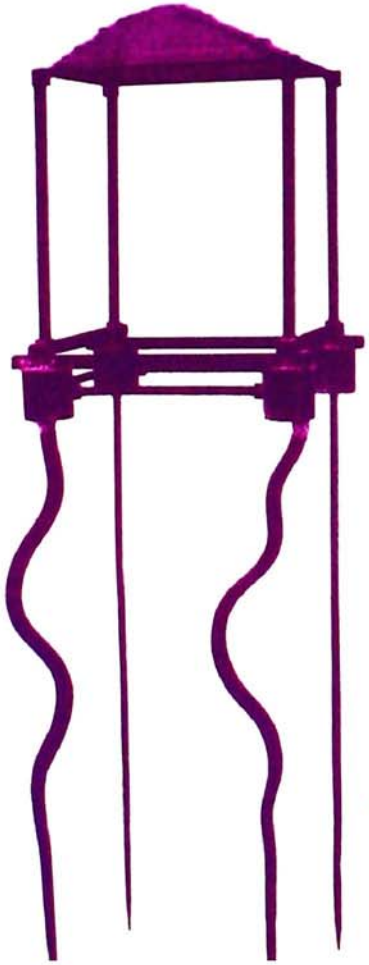
# SPAFA JOURNAL

A Publication of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for

## archaeology and fine arts



MALAYSIA

contemporary art and design

Volume 11 Number 3 September - December 2001

ISSN 0858-1975

**SEAMEO-SPAFA**
**Regional Centre for**
**Archaeology and Fine Arts**

SPAFA Journal is published three times a year by the SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. It is a forum for scholars, researchers and professionals on archaeology, performing arts, visual arts and cultural activities in Southeast Asia to share views, research findings and evaluations. The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of SPAFA.

## SPAFA's objectives :

- Promote awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asian countries through preservation of archaeological and historical artifacts, and traditional arts;
- Help enrich cultural activities in the region;
- Strengthen professional competence in the fields of archaeology and fine arts through sharing of resources and experiences on a regional basis;
- Increase understanding among the countries of Southeast Asia through collaboration in archaeological and fine arts programmes.

**Printers**

Amarin Printing and Publishing
Public Company Limited
65/16 Chaiyaphruk Road,
Taling Chan, Bangkok 10170, Thailand
Tel. 882-1010 (30 Lines)
Fax. 433-2742, 434-1385
E-Mail : info@amarin.co.th
Homepage : http://www.amarin.co.th

**Annual Subscription Rates:**
US $27 (Air Mail)
US $24 (Surface Mail)
US $19/Baht 465 (Within Thailand)

**Cost Per Issue:** US $6/Baht 150

Send comments, articles and information (on workshops, seminars, conferences, training, etc..) to :

*SPAFA Journal*
SPAFA Regional Centre
SPAFA Building
81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road, Samsen, Theves
Bangkok 10300, Thailand
Tel. (662) 280-4022-29 Fax. (662) 280-4030
E-mail : spafa@ksc.th.com
Website : www.seameo.org/spafa

**The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) promotes professional competence, awareness and preservation of cultural heritage in the fields of archaeology and fine arts in Southeast Asia. It is a regional centre constituted in 1985 from the SEAMEO Project in Archaeology and Fine Arts, which provided the acronym SPAFA. The Centre is under the aegis of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).**

**SEAMEO-SPAFA member-countries:**
- Brunei
- Cambodia
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Vietnam

**Associate member-countries:**
- Australia
- Canada
- Germany
- France
- New Zealand
- Netherlands

**SEAMEO-SPAFA collaborates with governmental agencies, international organisations and academic institutions to achieve common goals and objectives.**

**SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts**

*SERVICES AND FACILITIES*
- Full-facility conference and lecture rooms
- Accomodation/guestrooms for rental
- Exhibition/display hall
- Applied Science Laboratory
- Library and documentation centre
- Publication and audio-visual production services
- Training/Seminars/Workshops/Research

*ACADEMIC CONSULTANCY SERVICES*
- Impact Assessment on Cultural Resources
- Rescue Archaeology/History
- Museum Exhibit, Design and Curatorship
- Arts and Culture Management
- Performing Arts Management
- Cultural Tours
- Consultancy Services on Teachers Training for Art Curriculum Development

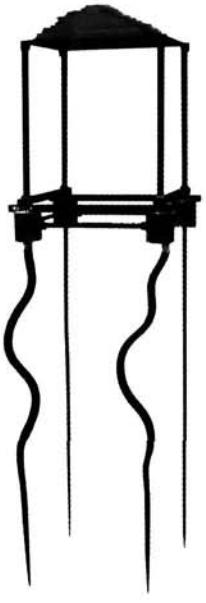
# SPAFA Journal

**Volume 11 Number 3 (September - December 2001)**


## CONTENTS

# Contemporary Art and Design
## Malaysia

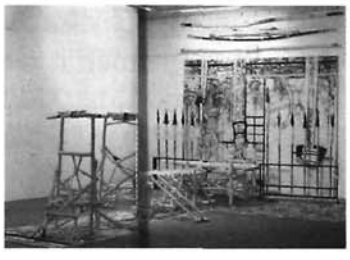
*Mohamad Khalil Amran, Co-ordinator of Liberal Studies Department, Universiti Teknologi Mara, reports on the development of art and design in Malaysia*



*Ramlan Abdullah,* 'Minaret III', *Steel & Glass*

## Artistic Tradition and Orientation

Discussion of artistic tradition in Malaysia always begins with the cave paintings of Tambun, in Ipoh, Perak and in Niah, Sarawak. Like those from other parts of the world, Malaysian petrographs consist of magical symbols which are related to shamanism as well as the prehistoric way of life.



*Zulkifli Yusof,* 'The Power I' *(1991)*

*Abdullah Ariff,* 'Coconut Plantation - Dawn', *watercolor (1948)*

These cartoon-like, stylized human and animal figurative images represent the social activities and beliefs of prehistoric society. In that context, the paintings and few artifacts recovered from the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods are universal in form and content (Mahamood, 1992).

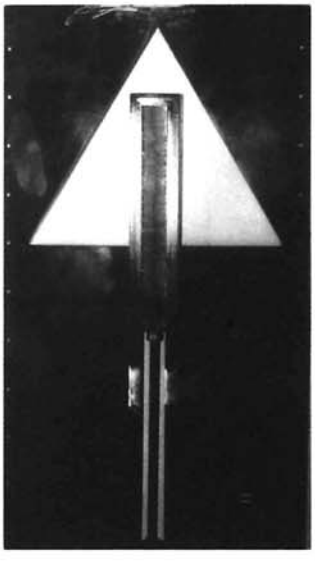
Examples gathered from the Hinduist-Buddhist period include the statue of Buddha Bodhisattva Avalokitesvasa (with eight hands) in bronze from Bidor, Perak; the standing Buddha statues from Jalong and Pengkalan Pegoh; and pots found at Tanjong Rawa, Kuala Selinsing (Md Zain, 1991). Such artifacts are similar to those created in India, China, Thailand and Indonesia.

With the coming of Islam in the 13th century, and the iconoclastic beliefs, traditional arts such as wood carvings, calligraphy and textiles, which are considered as crafts in other countries, have been regarded as a form of art in Malaysia (Mahamood, 1992).

The shift to Islam, after more than a thousand years of Hinduism, marked a post-Hindu Malay world-view in cultural and artistic aspects. The Malay world-view

underwent a major shift from being primarily mythological-animistic to being rational and philosophical in nature (Tun Uda and Al Ahmadi, 1997). Muslim craftsman, in this context, are guided by Islamic principles and '*tawhidic* welthans-chaung' (Esa, 1993). According to Tun Uda and Al Ahmadi (ibid):

*Ruzaika Omar Basaree,* 'Siri Dungun' *(1981)*



*Ramlan Abdullah, Level Picture Composition,* Metal & Glass *(1994)*

*Yong Mun Sen,* 'Kek Lok Si Temple' *(1953), watercolour*

*For the craftsman, he crafts in total submission applying his creative energy and knowledge to the utmost in the pursuit of excellence. And, at the end of the process, he leaves no signature, no name to exalt his creation. For to him this is an act of devotion.*

*Tawhid* or The Oneness of Allah is the core of consciousness, the unshakable *aqidah* (faith). In practice, everything that the true Muslim (artist or craftsman) does is in full awareness of this consciousness (Faruqi, 1984).

To uphold the purity of the faith, neither representation of Allah in any visual forms nor realistic representation of living beings, human or animal, is allowed. Alternatively, Muslim craftsmen focus on Islamic calligraphy known as *Khat*, vegetal motifs and geometric (arabesque) designs. As for the Malay Muslim craftsman, Sheppard (1978) in Living Crafts of Malaysia observes:

*They have replaced the exquisite curves of Arabic lettering with the curvilinear charm of branches, leaves, and flower, which represented the natural background of the craftsman's daily lives – the forest – with emphasis on its beauty, simplicity and majesty. The Islamic cultural tradition has been practiced more positively in another way; as in other Muslim communities, the Malay craftsmen did not attempt to design monuments to* (glorify) *God, and did not strive to achieve a unique masterpiece. They preferred to provide their patrons and general public with work that could be understood and enjoyed by everyone.*

According to Beg (1980), the concepts of 'denaturalization' and 'dematerialization' are the basis of Islamic art, and more preference is therefore an abstraction (Md Zain, 1991). In Islamic tradition, artists and craftsmen have been guided by specific principles in their creative activities.

These characteristics appear clearly in Malay crafts such as wood carving, calligraphy, woven cloth, silverware and brassware. Due to strict adherence of Malays to the teachings of Islam, all the vegetal motifs are geometrically denaturalized, and calligraphy is often incorporated as an element of traditional art. For instance, traditional Malay houses, palaces and mosques feature wood carvings, combining calligraphy with geometrical vegetal patterns.

However, under British colonisation, some subtle changes in art took place. The western mode of expression gained its popularity, and thus probably because of the British educational system being introduced in Malaya at that time, artists began to use different idioms, from traditional art (which was craft-based) to easel painting. Towards the end of World War II, artists in Malaysia began to look to the west for direction in their approach to art (Md Zain, 1991).

The emergence of the Western easel painting tradition and the spread of Western cultural values caused traditional art to be considered merely as craft. The British colonisation of the Malay Peninsula in the 19th century contributed to the birth of modern Malaysian art which engendered the dislocation and subsequently, the marginalization of traditional Malay art (Esa, 1993).

For Esa (1993), modern Malaysian art was "founded on a secularistic world-view, and advocates various philosophies and theories which directly conflicted with the

*Yong Mun Sen,* 'Waterfall Garden' *(1948), watercolour*

*Ramlan Abdullah,* 'Form & Dispersion', *acrylic sheet, fibre optics, Twin Tower Sculpture Garden (1997)*

religio-mystical world-view of traditional Malay art."

Western art tradition dominated the Malaysian art scene from the nineteen thirties until the seventies when the National Cultural Congress (1971) and the Seminar on Indigenous Roots (1979) were held in order to answer questions regarding cultural identity, indigenous art and Islam.

The creation of a Malaysian national culture, using Malay culture as the foundation, was considered to be vital to the attainment of national integration (Seong Chee, 1981). More importantly, the impact of the National Cultural Congress (NCC) on contemporary art has been the challenge for Malaysian artists to consider the over-riding significance of such issues as national identity, origins and traditional norms and values as central to artistic creativity (Esa, 1993).

The NCC established three criteria for the creation of a Malaysian national culture. Firstly, that national culture should be based on the cultures of the indigenous communities in Malaysia; secondly, that cultural elements from other cultures could be incorporated provided they are considered to be appropriate; and finally, that the religion of Islam should be a basic element in the national culture.

Today, this legacy has been carried on by several exhibitions and seminars such as Rupa and Jiwa (Form and Soul) 1979; Seminar of the Roots of the Indigenous Arts, 1979, Form and Soul; the Continuity of

*Cheong Soo-Pieng,* 'Kehidupan Tropika' *(1959), watercolor*

Traditional Arts in Malaysian Contemporary Arts, 1992; as well as the Seminar and Exhibition of the Unity of Science and Islamic Traditional Arts, 1993. Apart from the National Art Gallery (as an important art institution in Malaysia), several artists and historians who have been directly involved in this effort, including Syed Ahmad Jamal, Sulaiman Esa, Osman Bakar, D'zul Haimi Md Zain, Muliyadi Mahamood and Mohamed Ali Abdul Rahman. International scholars such as the late Ismail Faruqi and Syed Hoessin Nasr were invited to some of those events. All these efforts were successful in creating awareness among Malay artists of the traditional values and aesthetics in their creative process.

**Art and Design Education in Malaysia**

In traditional Malay society, to serve the ruler was an honour for the artist-craftsman and thus most of the major crafts centred around the court of the raja or sultan (ruler). Royal a tist-craftsmen were given elite status resulting from royal patronage. According to Sheppard (1978), a nineteenth-century Malay raja rewarded his craftsmen with nothing more than their daily food and clothing and the special status of a royal artist-craftsman.

Other than precious metal work other crafts like pottery, screw-pine mat plaiting, kite making etc. were more or less a village industry. However, it seems possible to consider the local craftsmen as the originators of the country's art and design activities (Bajuri, 1988). They were artist-craftsmen (Sheppard, 1978) whose works embodied the principles of Malay aesthetics; namely finesse, usefulness, unity, contrast and symbolism (Ali, 1989).

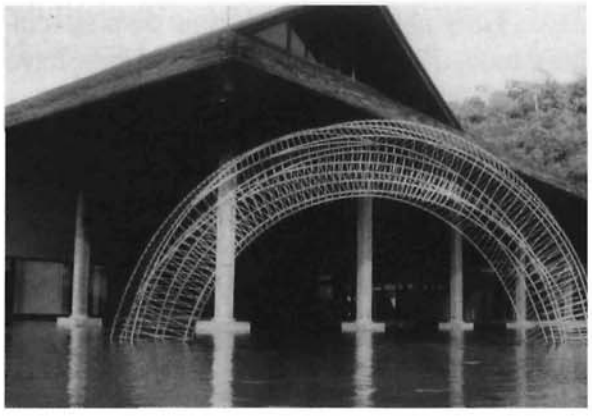
They also designed their own specialised tools (Bajuri, 1988), but would later have them made to order (Sheppard, 1978).

With colonisation and introduction of secular education (mid-19th century), came the rise of Malay intelligentsia and English-educated professionals, administrators and government servants. It also awakened the Malays to their common cultural past, and eventually Malay nationalism (Boon Kheng, 1988).

*Nik Zainal Abidin,* 'Bangau' *(1962)*

With the establishment of the first English school in 1815 (Penang Free School), the teaching of art and design (formerly known as art and craft) had been based on a purely western approach (Md. Zain et al, 1982) and was formalised 20 years later.

The kind of craft-making taught was more skill-oriented, with emphasis on English crafts. A short-lived attempt to teach superficial Malay handicrafts with ambiguous objectives was made in 1853 but was not incorporated into the curriculum until well into this century (Zain, 1982).



*Ramlan Abdullah*, Form & Soul, *Stainless steel, Sheraton Perdana Hotel (1997)*

*Ramlan Abdullah,*
'Growth', *brass, mild steel, marble (1995)*

Appreciation of Malay cultural values increased after independence in 1957. Apart from the call for revival of indigenous traditional culture for national unity in the early 70's, this was basically a starting point towards preservation of cultural heritage and values in art, design and everyday life (Mohamed, 1978, Sheppard, 1978) amidst the rapid industrialisation of the country in the 70's and 80's (Bajuri, 1988).

In terms of art and design education, the Faculty of Art and Design, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) was the first institution to offer modern art and design education. It is also the first institution to attend to the problems concerning indigenous art and traditional culture. Notable efforts have been made by the Faculty to revise and incorporate indigenous art and design in theory and studio subjects since they hosted the Seminar of the Roots of the Indigenous Arts in 1979 (Hassan, 1980).

*Yusoof Hj. Abdullah,*
'Wayang Kulit', *oil (1960), Kolesi BSLN (APS)*

In the early years, art and design education in UiTM placed emphasis on the practical, having students involved with design exercises but with little time devoted to design theory and other related subjects. Bajuri (1988) recollects the way industrial design was taught, as a student during the early years of industrial design education in UiTM:

*"Instead of giving the student design projects that could have used locally available materials and indigenous processes, most of the projects were plastic- and metal-based, involving processes seemingly very foreign to students. Among the project being set were designing a plastic liquid dispenser, a fork and a spoon, a condiment set and a plastic light fitting. Since there were no facilities for prototype building, etc., all the projects ended up being assessed and marked on drawing and visual presentations, rather than on the actual tested models. It might be due to this fact that most of the*

*students' design seemed to be more 'aesthetic oriented' rather than encompassing aspects of functionalism, etc.. However, despite this, the students seemed happy and pleased with their projects, probably having the impression that they were being westernised, a trend which was much favoured during that time. Their general idea and impression of industrial design was basically working in the city, and designing for the rich through the use of modern material like plastic. etc.. Using local material and applying indigenous processes in their design, according to them, did not make them designers, but would instead turned them into craftsmen, like those seen in the rural areas."*

*Coconut grater, Malaysia*

Since the late 80's, UiTM grads have played important roles in the design and manufacture of PROTON, Malaysia's national car. Today, the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM is the biggest art and design school in the country with more than 135 teaching staff and 2000 students, offering major Art and design courses at Diploma and B.A Hons. Levels, including Fine Art, Graphic Design, Textile Design, Fine Metal, Industrial Design, Ceramic Design, Fashion Design, Photography, Printing Technology and Art Teachers' Diploma. At post-graduate level, the school offers M.A. and PhD in Art and Design.

Other institutions of higher learning and private or commercial art institutions offering courses in art and /or design are the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Malaysian Institute of Art (MIA), Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology (LICT), the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Universiti Malaya (UM).

"[Malay] ideals are encrusted with the debris of earlier beliefs, and are being transformed"

- Winstedt

**Case study: Ramlan Abdullah, sculptor and an academic staff of the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM.** In terms of reputation and credibility, Ramlan has been awarded numerous important commissioned works at national and international levels. He won the Grand Award of the prestigous Oita Asia Sculpture Competition, Japan (1995), and the Best APEC Sculpture Award, Manila, The Philippines (1995). According to Finely (Asia-Pacific sculpture News, summer 1996), "Ramlan Abdullah is one of the best young sculptors working in Malaysia today." The varieties of conventional and unconventional materials, techniques and concepts he has applied reflect in a major way contemporary sculpture in Malaysia.

Born in 1960 in the state of Perak, Malaysia, Ramlan received his first degree in Fine Art from the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM (1982). This was followed by another BFA from Wartburg College, Iowa (1987) and a Post Baccalaureate degree from the Art Institute of Chicago before pursuing a MFA course at the Pratt Institute, New York. He is currently the Programme Leader and Senior lecturer of the Fine Art

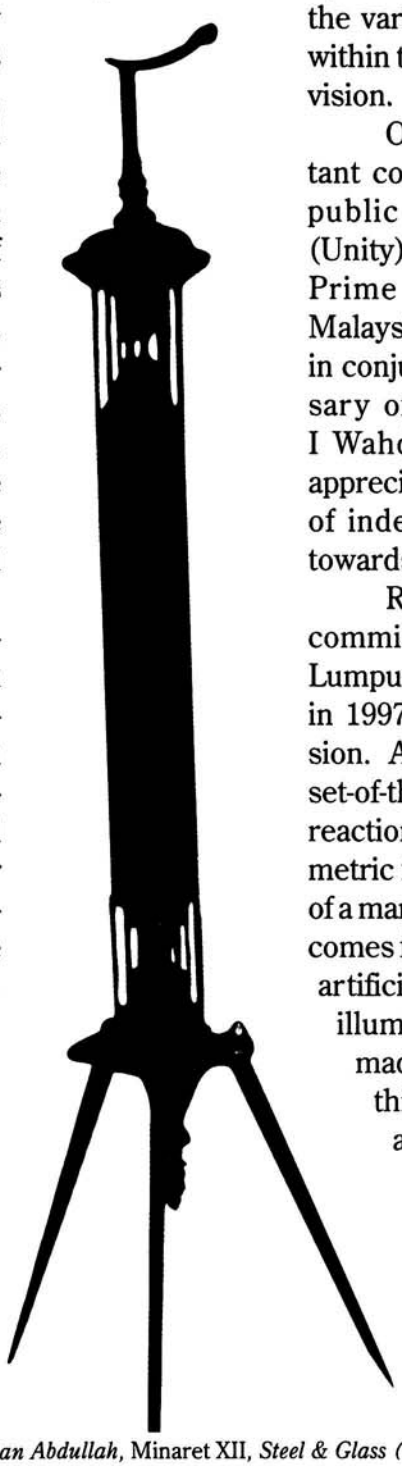
*Ramlan Abdullah, besides his* Minaret Series *(2000)*

*Ramlan Abdullah, copper/polyester/resin/glass, Apec Sculpture Garden, Philippines (1996)*

Department, the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia.

Ramlan is well known for his exploration of materials, techniques and concept in the context of contemporary sculpture in Malaysia. He has worked with timber, steel, rock, resin, glass acrylic sheet and fibre optics in a very effective and inspirational manner, with simplicity and overtones of abstraction the hallmark of his sculptures. Most importantly, Ramlan's combination of materials were directed towards unity, strength, tension and dynamism. This is seen in the consistent use of columns with pointed base resting on a firm or rather solid base or structure.

Monumenta 1999, for example, was constructed with steel and glass, while The Generation of Raw 1993 presented an interesting combination of timber, concrete, cable wire and steel. His outdoor sculpture for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Sculpture Garden at the Philippine International Convention Centre, Manila was titled VC (1995). It features a three-legged structure, which form a triangular base upon which a solid pyramid made from polyester resin and glass crowns the construction. According to Ramlan, this work focused on the idea of protection or shelter, the structure having being derived from indigenous Asian architecture. From the formalistic point of view, this sculpture is about mass, form and structure, reflecting the APEC community, the various dynamic cultures found within the group, its activity, role and vision.



*Ramlan Abdullah*, Minaret XII, *Steel & Glass (1999)*

One of Ramlan's most important commissioned works was the public sculpture called Wahdah (Unity) 1997. The patron was the Prime Minister Department of Malaysia. This project was launched in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of Malaysian independence. I Wahdah symbolised a token of appreciation for the people, the value of independence and the journey towards Vision 2020 for Malaysia.

Ramlan's *locus classicus* was the commissioned work for the Kuala Lumpur Twin Tower Sculpture Park in 1997, entitled Form and Dispersion. As suggested by the title, this set-of-three sculpture dealt with the reactions of light on a series of geometric forms installed at the surface of a man-made lake. In this case, light comes from two sources, natural and artificial. During daytime, sun rays illuminate the transparent forms made from hundreds of one-inch thick acrylic sheets, resulting in a spectrum of colours with the fascinating reflection bathing the whole area. By night, fibre optics were employed to illuminate the 'floating' geometric forms.

The essence of Form and Dis-

persion is its transparent and crystal clear quality, together with the play of spectrum and reflection. According to Ramlan, these were used as metaphors to represent the quality of cleanliness and purity, honesty and trust; apart from the revolutionary materials used in this work which was a landmark in contemporary sculpture in Malaysia. As a whole, Ramlan's works can be considered an exemplar of a well-balanced abstraction and simplicity, technical skills and imaginative visual configuration.

# The Bangkok University Art Gallery

## Nipan and Ark

*Established in 1996, The Bangkok University Art Gallery (B.U.A.G.) is one of several art galleries which are participating in and contributing toward a growing sophistication in Bangkok's emerging contemporary art scene of increasingly complex visual languages.*

*Nipan Oranniwesna, artist*

*Ark Fongsmut, curator*

The director of B.U.A.G. is the amiable **Nipan Oranniwesna**, who has been an artist for more than a decade. Born in Bangkok, Nipan received 1st Class Honours in Graphic Arts from the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok; and is also a graduate of Japan's Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. He has been involved in many group

exhibitions and solo shows, among which are 'Birthplace' (1997, Bangkok); 'Thai Spirit' (Edmonton, Canada); 'Reminiscence of Earth' (1996, Yokohama, Japan); and '11 Deutsche Internationale Grafix – Triennale' (Frechen, Germany). Nipan is also Art Instructor at the School of Fine and Applied Arts, Bangkok University in Bangkok; as is BUAG curator **Ark Fongsmut**. Ark is a graduate of both Political Science (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok) and Fine Art Administration and Curatorship (University of London, London). The SPAFA team visited the director and curator at the gallery office on a recent weekday afternoon.

**What is the purpose of the university art gallery?**

**Nipan:** It is used to educate and expose the university students to contemporary art, and to involve the wider community outside the university in participating. The art space is open to all Thai artists, and Southeast Asian students; professional artists, especially young ones are approached to hold exhibitions at our gallery; and we are seriously seeking more collaborations with other institutes, such as the Alliance Francaise.

**Can you describe some of the activities?**

**Nipan:** We are happy with the number of students attending the gallery during shows (publicity for the events are made through posters, classes and flyers). We work as a group here, and the board is supportive of us. Programmes are planned one year in advance, so that we can present proposals to the board for approval. We produce 5 exhibitions every year, each lasting about 5 weeks, and University art lecturers help us as curators. Our forum for students is the major show of the year; now we are starting to organise more forums for students and public participation. Our staff consists of one director, one project co-ordinator and one curator – Ark – who lectures too.

**How are your exhibitions arranged with the artists; what criteria for selection, legal implications, for examples?**

**Nipan:** Through private connections, and people we know in the media, etc., it is not difficult to identify an artist in Thailand whom we would invite to do a show in our gallery. We negotiate easily with the artists; produce the catalogue for them; and made flexible arrangement with regard to putting the show on. No fees are charged; neither are insurance for the art pieces ever been a problem. As we

operate on a non-profit basis, the art works exhibited are not for sale.

**Ark:** We have to give credit to the artists, especially Thai artists who have been generous by showing their works at our gallery as a way of contributing to an educational institute rather than making commercial gains.

**What are some of the difficulties in running the gallery?**

**Ark:** We are supported basically by the university, with a very limited budget which does not allow for certain type of shows that cost a lot of money to organise. Apart from the money problem, if we overcome the difficulty of maintaining continuity and stability, we will be well.

**Nipan:** We have connections, friends in the art community, so no problems there ... in terms of non-financial support.

*Nipan : "We are starting to organize forums for public participation."*

**What are your objectives/goals for the gallery, and future plans?**

**Nipan:** We are focussed on using the space (gallery) here for our main activities, for the audience we have attracted, and the next step beyond that will be, we hope, engaging in more collaborations with other institutes organisations, and become more involved in community-based projects.

**Ark:** We are planning more shows on art that is concerned about the family. The subject matter is not kind of provocative, but it will compel people to be concerned about what is going on within the family.

**Future programme? What will the gallery represent - abstract work, figurative, conceptual, etc?**

**Nipan:** If we can, for the future, I want to try a show for an artist who works on media art.

**Ark:** It is not easy to implement a programme based on a theme because we invite very diverse artists, and their works vary. For the group show, yes, we have a basic theme; for example, the Loei* project which brought together 6 young artists from the School of Fine and Applied Arts of our university. It is

an attempt to provide them experiences shared with villagers (in 3 villages of Loei, northern Thailand) and develop a shift of interest from object to relationship in their perspectives and artistic expression.

**Are you mainly supporting only Thai artists?**

**Ark:** Well, not just Thai artists. Each year, we do try to invite one or two foreign artists to exhibit their work at the gallery. Our current show is 'Colourium' by Ralph Kiggell, British artist who uses tropical light colours in woodblock prints.

**Can you share some of your thoughts on the status of contemporary art in Thailand?**

**Ark:** Too much contemporary art is oriented toward urban subjects. I feel we need to move away from that, and create contemporary art from, about, and within a rural environment. I also think that we can afford more innovation, even kitsch art because at least it is something different.

*Ark : "I believe we have more freedom"*

**What about an opinion on the state of the National Gallery?**

**Nipan:** Give up!!! (laughing loudly)
(Ark expresses similar emotion, only stronger without words but two hands up raised!!)

**Ark:** We need better management, policy direction, and professionals to be involved. There are quite a lot of bureaucratic constraints that affect the National Gallery, and even if they privatised it, I'm not sure the shackles will be off because of our country background as a very bureaucratic polity. Too many different directors have made matters worse; I think a continuity of someone in charge over a great length of time will be helpful.

*The Bangkok University Art Gallery*
*Kluey Nam Tai Campus*
*3rd floor, Bldg 9*
*40/4 Rama 4 Rd.*
*Tue - Sat 9.30 am - 7 pm*
*Tel. 0 2671-7526*
*website : www.bu.ac.th*
*E-mail : nipan.o@bu.ac.th*

**What differences are there between university galleries and commercial ones?**

**Ark:** I believe we have more freedom. I don't know how it is if you're in the government or bureaucracy, but from my experiences of working here, it has been quite liberal. First of all, our pioneers/colleagues in the Visual Art Department, who are approximately of our age, have much in common with us in viewpoints. As we are of the same generation, there's a unity that enables us to convince others, those not on our side in the university, to agree and co-operate. It is good to have a free hand to work.

* '476 Kilometres: Villager Voice' was initiated by six young artists from the School of Fine and Applied Arts, Bangkok University, as field work practice in developing a shift of the artist's interest in object to that in relationship (rural ones, in this case). B.U.A.G. organised the project in collaboration with the Dan Sai Police Station of Loei province (northern Thailand), with an unusual exhibition held at the Pong Police Station, in July 2001. The participating artists shared experiences with rural folks in three villages, and created art with influences deriving from interpreting the relating to and relations amongst the villagers. Experiences included, for example, the involvement of rural children in helping transform garbage bins in interactive activities; capturing the atmosphere of the local open-air cinema; or installation works based on the 'fai' (cotton) which used to be an export item of the province.

All photographs by Nipon Sud-Ngam

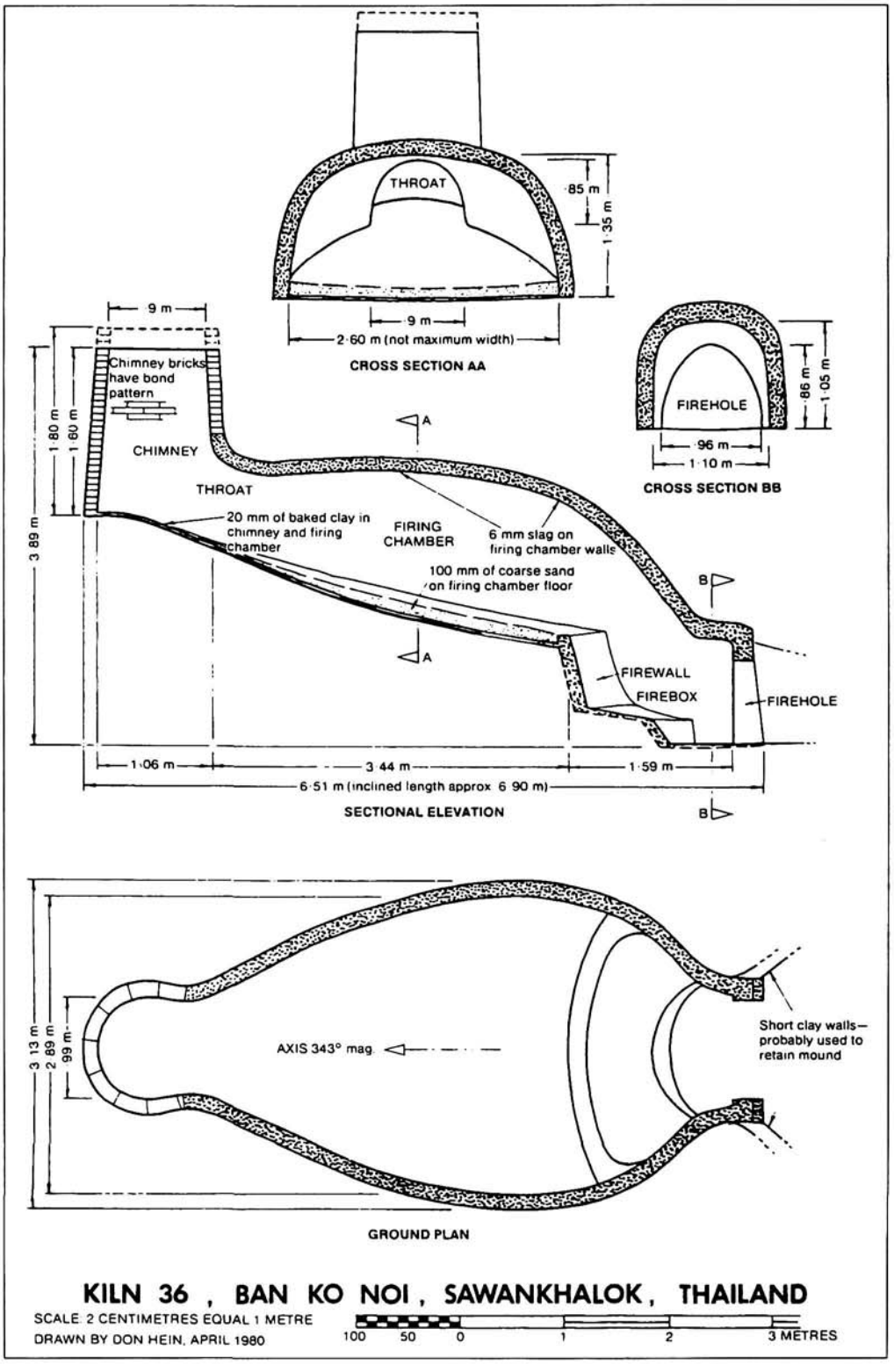



*Figure 1: Kiln KN 36 showing transitional built featuresplan, elevation and cross section from 'Sawankalok laims : a recent discovery', Bulletin of the Art Gallery of South Australia vol 88, 1980*

# "ROMANCING THE SHARD"

## An interview with Don Hein

**Don Hein** *is an Australian archaeologist who has worked for more than 20 years at Ban Ko Noi (since he excavated his first kiln there in 1980). Kho Noi is the site of the main Thai ceramics production of the export era, commonly known as Sawankhalok, which was at its peak in the 15th century AD. During the 1980s, he was the field director of a joint Thai-Australian ceramics project that made significant discoveries about the nature of this production, particularly that kilns and much of the technology were of indigenous development. Hein has recently completed his PhD, titled "The Sawankhalok Ceramics Industry" (Deakin University, Australia 2001).*
**Ray Hearn** *interviews the field-smart and scholarly 'adventurer' archaeologist.*

It has been twenty years since the joint Thai–Australian work, *The Thai Ceramics Archaeology Project* (TCAP), which began in 1981 at the kiln site Ban Ko Noi, or Sawankhalok as it is generically known, in central northern Thailand. The project was formed as a direct result of Don Hein's 1980 discovery of a kiln, KN 36, of a type known to exist in the north but not previously found at Ko Noi, where only later brick built kilns had been documented. The kiln was an in-ground kiln slab built one with transitional modification, including a brick chimney (Figure 1). The find suggested that contrary to the prevailing opinion at that time, the production here was of much longer term with beginnings before the Sukothai era, and that rather than based on imported knowledge and technology the stoneware ceramics production was mostly of localised Thai based development.

Although Hein and the team were to make many significant pioneering discoveries, little apart from scientific papers on progress results or reports have been published. There has been no overview of the work of Hein and TCAP members, or acknowledgment of the joint nature of the project. This interview, with the on-site director of TCAP, seeks to explore the personal side of often quite exciting finds in which the painstaking work of a dig, a sense of serendipity, intuition and adventure mixed with forensic deduction are revealed:

Following only a crude, outdated map, Don Hein journeyed to the ancient Thai City of Sisatchanali, covering the final stages along the Yom River by canoe when tracks ran out.

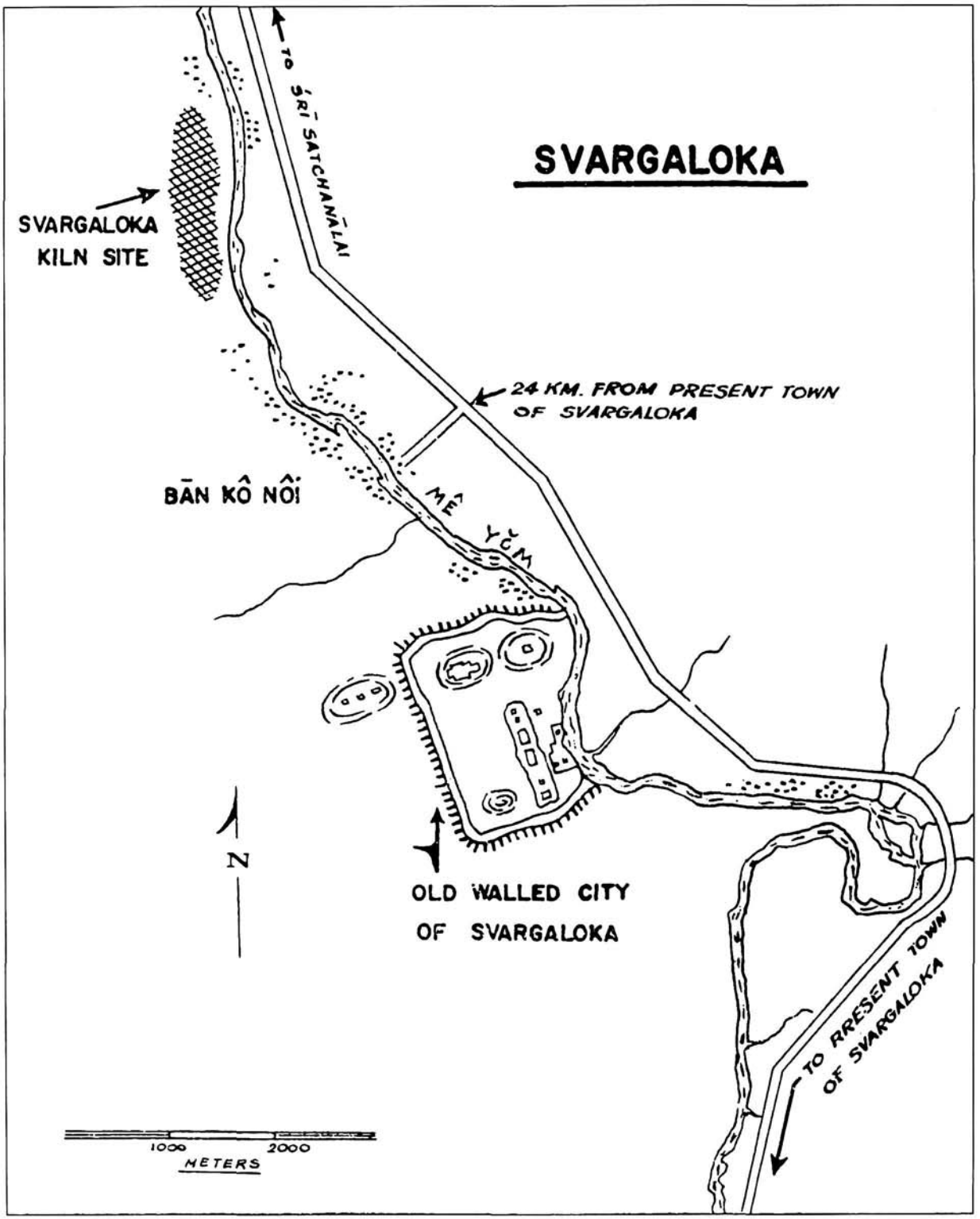



*Figure 2: Sketch map of 'Svargaloka' kiln.*
*"The Ceramic wares of Siam" by Charles Spinks, 1965 p.36.*
*The 'mud map' that Hein used to locate the Ban Ko Noi Kiln Site*

The balding archaeologist was searching for buried treasure. A treasury of ancient pottery. He found it too. "Yes', grinned the 47-year-old Mr Hein back in his cozy Adelaide office. "It all seems like something from *Raiders of the Lost Ark.*" (interview in *The South Australian Magazine*, Mann 1984: 4-5).

**Ray:** *Can I begin by asking you first of all about how you became interested in the Ko Noi site and the old kilns?*

**Don:** In 1970, we decided to travel overland to Europe and back, and by mis-adventure we got locked into Southeast Asia for a little while. We travelled - by ship in those days – up to Singapore from Adelaide, and the ship took our luggage by mistake onto Hong Kong or somewhere, and we had to wait some time for them to come back. In the meantime, we bought a vehicle and decided to go up into Thailand, which was one of those romantic, exotic places that we'd only heard about, and we loved it. We loved the climate, we loved the people, and we loved the country. Even though the Vietnam War was still in full flood, and there was lots of evidence of the war, we did visit many historic places, some of the Khmer sites and the old cities Sukothai and Si Satchanali. On our return to Australia, I was offered a job at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA). What I was to discover was that the gallery did have a marvellous collection of Southeast Asian ceramics. The collection was under the curatorship of Dick Richards who had only recently (1969) been able to purchase a major Singapore private collection, including many Thai wares, and having a ceramic background since art school days I took some interest in this.

I started to ask questions, and as I learnt what little was known about Thai ceramics, I began to suspect that there was more to the story. Well, in fact there was absolutely a lack of information, a dearth of good knowledge about them, and therefore some looking into that was required.

**Ray:** *How did your first visit to the Ko Noi kilns come to pass?*

**Don:** In 1975, on a return trip from China, I went to Sukothai and then up to the kilns for the first time. All I had was the map in Charles Nelson Spink's 1965 book, *The ceramic wares of Siam* (Figure 2) which was really only a thumbnail sketch of the area showing approximately where the kilns were. Following the map I went on the main road close to the River Yom as indicated, to the spot where the kilns were shown to be located on the opposite bank. The main road was very much smaller then, though now a highway, and there was no road at all behind Ko Noi, which now runs back behind the monuments. That didn't exist then, and indeed you couldn't go to Si Satchanali by road because there was no bridge across the river. There were no bridges anywhere then except for one 50 km away at Sukothai. Before the bridge at the modern town of Si Satchanali was built, the only way to get across the river was by canoe or boat. Therefore, there were no vehicles because there were no roads on the opposite side - on the west of the river there were no vehicles. The only vehicles I saw were *kwai lek,* little motorised farm carts.

I walked in to the river and got a canoe, as there were lots of canoes on the river then, across the river. I walked along

till I found the kilns, or some evidence of kilns. It was clear that big mounds in the undergrowth were kiln mounds. You could see one or two that would have been exposed back in the '60s by the Fine Arts Department; in particular, work had been done to preserve the last remaining arched roof section on what we now call kiln KN7.

I suppose there were a dozen very obvious mounds, and a slightly greater number of kilns clearly observable, so that was my first contact with the actual site. Also, there are the ruins of the marvellous ancient city quite near the kiln site, the walled city of Si Satchanali which itself is an exotic and poetic representation of history. The old city had been cited for restoration and redevelopment by the Thai Department of Fine Arts at this time, so there was some growing Thai interest in the culture of that era.

After my return to the AGSA, I took an even greater interest in Thai ceramics, and in the ceramics story. There was a growing awareness of Thai ceramics and some exhibitions were now beginning to include Thai wares, but it was not so long ago that these were as nearly always wrongly identified as Chinese ceramics. It was only at the turn of the century that people realised that there was such a thing called Thai ceramics.

I was determined to research Thai ceramics further, using actual on-site evidence.

**Ray:** *How did your official interest come about?*

**Don:** Having one's appetite whetted after the first visit in 1975 by the potential of the site to provide information on the gallery's collection, I applied for and was granted a UNESCO Fellowship to Silpakorn University Post-graduate School of Archaeology for a twelve-month period in 1977.

We (my wife Toni and I) were based in Bangkok but spent a great deal of time at Si Satchanali/Ko Noi investigating the kilns, and we very quickly established that there were many of them. I was particularly interested in kiln production and construction, and I thought the site itself would provide very valuable information. Until then, most information about Thai ceramics didn't come from the production sites at all, but came from shipwrecks and secondary sites, export location sites in The Philippines and Indonesia. The large kiln site at Ko Noi, then relatively unknown, was particularly of much interest to me.

**Ray:** *What on site documentation had there been of the kilns?*

**Don:** Statements in various Thai sources talked about an entrenched and accepted 'magic number' of 47 kilns being located at Si Satchanali. The number came, I think, from Lucien Fournereau's work back at the turn of the century. At first, he thought there were hundreds of kilns but later amended it to a very small number, I think it was 47, just from recall. We were not able to find out which kiln was meant to be which, so we adopted our own numbering system. Kiln number one at Ko Noi was KN 01, chosen as a central point right beside what was then watchman's hut. We basically started to number at first in sequence as we found each kiln. KN was Ko Noi; PY was Pa Yang and PK Pitsanalok and so on

Our first maps of the kiln site, and the first assumptions raised, were made in 1977

during that study year. We quickly realised that there were hundreds of kilns at Ko Noi alone, and more at other sites. The kilns at Pa Yang just outside the city walls were well known, and there are kilns at Sukothai and Pitsanalok too.

There was a tremendous amount of looting going on - hundreds of diggers every day. I have photographs and field notes of this phenomenon. 'Diggers' came from various villages to the Ko Noi kiln site looking for artefacts to sell to the tourists, and in the process doing tremendous damage to the integrity of the site; but at the same time, looters' holes revealed to me important things. There were varying depths that this cultural material came from, a range of shards showing a variety of productions. The intense nature of the diggings revealed other ruins below the surface, and led one to suspect that the site was extremely complex and not a simple arrangement of a few kilns on mounds.

**Ray:** *In 1977, you documented the site, but had not yet carried out any official excavation?*

**Don:** After the research year in 1977, the next trip for me was in 1980. I planned to look further into the nature of the kilns, and to follow up on the importance of the site. I did some more survey work on locating kilns, and this led to the discovery of the first in ground kiln, but we had had a long involvement with the site by then.

I was fiercely determined to make some significant new discovery. When you are funded to work, you do then feel driven by the need to be able to achieve something specific. It was soon near the end of the trip, but that was the length of time remaining in Thailand, and it was down to the last few days. I hadn't really made any major progress, just details, bits and pieces to add on to what I'd already known earlier, but I was quite determined to come up with something.

It was so hot at that time during the early dry season, December/January. We didn't do too much walking around by this stage; we knew the site pretty well in terms of its typology and knew where various mounds, shards, and kilns were. I decided to look where there were surface kilns in a small group behind Sun's (a villager) house. These had been discovered by or shown to Dick Richards and already checked earlier in 1980.

While poking around in that general area, I noted that the clay pans and dry paddies had cracked in an overall turtleback pattern. I noticed one clay pan in a slight depression, and amongst the dry grey bushes there was one single green bush growing. As this was the kind of bush that needs water, as I stared at it, I realised that it must have a source of water to be so green. On closer inspection, among the general turtle back sort of cracks in the claypan there was a circle of crazing around the bush indicating to me something was under the surface causing that pattern.

I dug down a few centimetres and discovered a circle of bricks which to me could only be the top of a chimney of a kiln, and the explanation was that the kiln was acting like a sort of giant pot plant to hold moisture. More importantly, the top of the chimney being present meant that the rest of the kiln was almost certainly still there. The chimneys are the first things that break and fall away.

So I came home, and made a request for funding to go straight back to excavate this in-ground kiln. We set up a joint project

with the Department of Fine Arts, completed the dig, and in the same year published something on our excavation in the *Art Gallery of South Australia Journal* (AGSA journal) of 1980 - December of 1980.

For the first few seasons, an annual dry season field trip was undertaken but from 1984, a continuous field presence was maintained for several years until the end of the project. I was the on-site director of TCAP.

**Ray:** *What was so significant about this kiln, KN36?*

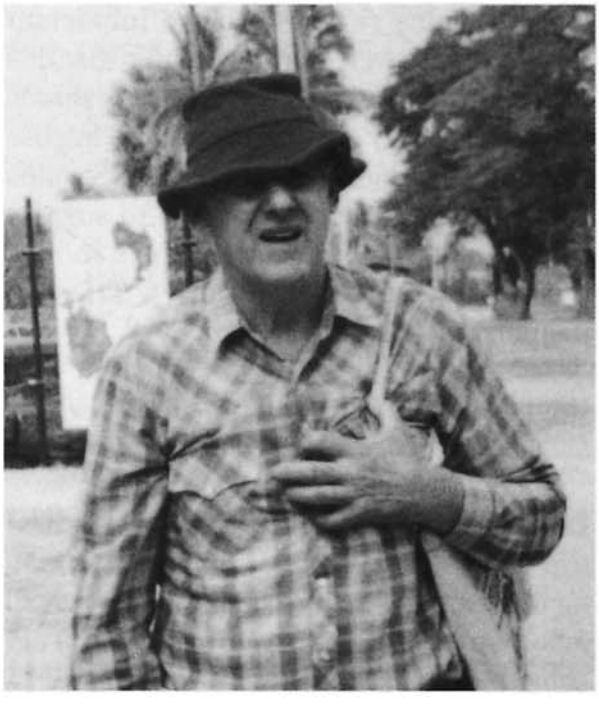
**Don:** KN36 was intact; the first intact kiln found at Ko Noi. It was also the first in ground kiln found outside the north; these were not previously known at Ko Noi. KN 36 was an in-ground kiln of transitional type built of slab and brick, not an excavated hole like the earlier bank kilns. This opened up a whole prospect of the earlier excavated kilns dug into the ground evolving on the one site to later constructed surface and brick. The single green bush had led to an extremely significant find.

**Ray:** *TCAP (Thai Ceramics Archaeological Project) was formed in 1980, and this was an extremely significant year for you, wasn't it?*

**Don:** TCAP was formed in 1980 when this find was reported in the AGSA journal, and the Gallery together with the University of Adelaide were successful in a very substantial series of ARC grants over seven years, together with other funding. Because of the gallery's collection we were able to argue that fieldwork would extend our knowledge, and the collection could reinforce the research.

**Ray:** *TCAP was very much a joint venture?*

**Don:** Yes, very much so. Although the discovery of KN 36 was mine alone, right from that first excavation we were working together with the Thais, and over the years I have made some very good friends. Initially there were six members, three each from Australia and Thailand. The Australians were myself and Dick Richards from the AGSA and Dr Peter Burns from the University of Adelaide. The Thais, Pisit Charoenwongsa, Prachot Sanghanukit and Seehawat Maenna



*Don Hein*

were from the Department of Fine Arts, Archaeology Division.

Later, the membership was widened to include a range of scientists and other specialists, most notably Dr Mike Barbetti, from the Mackintosh Quaternary Dating Centre at the University of Sydney, who did some dating work for TCAP.

Anyway in 1981, we did our first TCAP dig looking at the kilns in the KN 36 area and discovered KN 60, the updraft kiln. There were updraft kilns there as well as stoneware cross drafts (and metal furnaces) but there is still some question about their role, because of the fact that most earthenware pottery was produced elsewhere. There was some thought that they may have been used in a process of double firing, bisque firing for stoneware, but in fact that is not true because all that stoneware was fired with a single fire.

**Ray:** *There are no bisque shards of stoneware form whatsoever?*

**Don:** Yes that is correct, there are none. All the updraft kilns were associated with terra-cotta wares or earthenware, and no glazed wares. That is in Si Satchanali, it may not be true for Sukothai, but that is another story.

**Ray:** *Have you looked at the Sukothai kilns at this point?*

**Don:** Yes I had, we were aware of other kilns in the region, and I spent a fair bit of time in 1977 at Sukothai, and mapped the kilns. Some basic maps also appeared in publications during that time, so there was some information available. The Sukothai site was difficult at that time because it was a no-go area. The police warned us about going there because as well as 'digging', crime in general was a serious problem, robbery and so on.

I knew a local family, and I became familiar with people living there. There's nobody living there now, but in those days there were houses there. These people would be out digging away, and I would be looking at what they were finding. There were people with guns on guard on the perimeter in case the police came and it was all very difficult.

**Ray:** *What was the next major project for TCAP?*

**Don:** Now I guess the next major discovery occurred in 1983, which was our third season under TCAP, and we were doing two digs. One was at Pa Yang, being done by Dick Richards on kilns that are part of the mound and quay system - large mounds associated with canals that was fairly sophisticated. The only evidence that I am aware of in Asia where kilns have been so arranged and clearly associated with canals. Our research suggested that the later export wares were transported directly from the kiln site to Sukothai by canal, rather than river.

**Ray:** *Dick Richards was at this dig Pa Yang, at the same time you had another dig?*

**Don:** While that was going on I was doing a dig at what is now the kiln KN 61 museum site. The reason I was doing a dig there is that the year before Dr John Stanley - using a caesium magnetometer - had located signals of an anomaly under the ground in that area. We put down our standard 2 x 2 square metre pit, went down about five metres and found nothing. There were vertical differences between two different types of soil matrix with some ash present, so that is probably what the signal revealed, perhaps from a kiln firing pit, but more likely canal or flood action.

I still thought that there was a kiln nearby, and I had an idea where it ought to be. Now the area was scattered with looters' holes, and all the locals said - we were in the

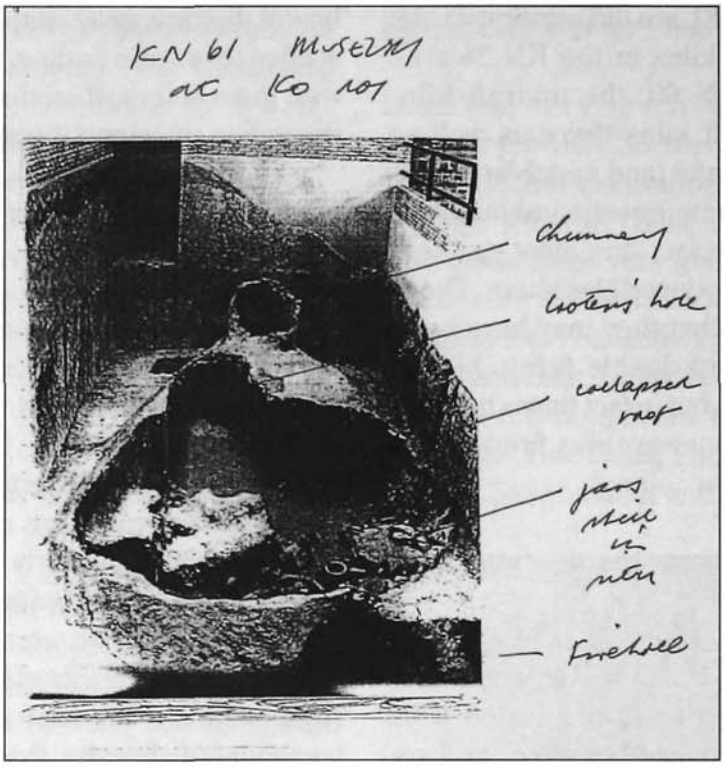



*Figure 3: Photograph of kiln KN 61 in the museum as Ban Ko Noi, showing collapsed roof and jars still in situ*

middle of a village, remember - "You are wasting time; we have dug everywhere and yet there is no kiln."

**Ray:** *Acting on a hunch, you still felt that the kiln was nearby, and therefore continued to check out the looters' holes?*

**Don:** There were many of these holes around the area, some of them several metres deep. Because they were partly filled with rubbish, I kept digging them out in the evening after we had finished site work. This was a very painful exercise because any disturbed ground has *mot dang,* a little red ant that bites and brings up big welts on your skin when you go down. I remember there was one time I suffered about 120 bites, a bit like a small bee sting, so you need to be quite determined if you are going to take up this sort of work.

As I dug down the bottom of one of these, quite close to our pit, within 3-4 metres of our excavation, I found shards of a jar rim the right way up, and immediately below it found other shards in the opposite direction - the bottom of the pot. I realised that this was extremely significant.

It was one of those marvellous feelings you get when you know you have made a major discovery. As wasters are normally thrown down the shards, scatter horizontally, and are mixed with other shards. This small jar, however, was still preserved upright on the one spot; it could only have been a crushed pot still in situ caused by the collapse of the kiln.

I realised that I must be standing on the floor of the very kiln we were looking for, and not only that, there were wares still in situ from its roof falling in, and subsequent abandonment. Exciting stuff worth every *mot dang* sting!

So we extended the excavation, and found kiln KN 61 now on display in the museum (Figure 3). This is a large in-ground kiln, about five and a half metres long and nearly four metres wide, used for making large metre diameter metre-high jars and smaller jars. Some of these wares were still in position but potters did not know this at the time and abandoned the kiln.

**Ray:** *The looters didn't know this either?*

**Don:** No. They must have noticed the broken jar on what was the kiln floor, but lacked the experience or intuition to know what the shards might reveal.

**Ray:** *The looters' hole is quite clearly visible in the subsequent excavation and museum. There are the crushed pots, particularly by the firebox, but there is a large area of the kiln empty.*

**Don:** That's the top end of the kiln. When I say the kiln collapsed, you have to imagine a space the size of half an egg and two portions of it have collapsed. What we think happened is that the potters got down when it was cold, got down the chimney and salvaged whatever pots they could, and then came upon the crushed collapsed area and went back. The firebox area was also caved in and they could not do anything from that end either. They probably thought that all the rest was damaged and not worth digging out.

An example of serendipity at work with some jars left for 500 years for posterity.

So this was a discovery that became a museum. It was quite a wonderful thing to be personally involved with because you are driven by the demons to keep on looking; because you suspect you know something

*Figure 4: Photograph: Kiln KN 42 museum general view of excavation*

*Figure 5: Photograph: looking into KN 42 pit*

Looking down into pit
KN 42 at left, floors of excavated kilns
KN 110 is shown at bottom of
excavation pit in the centre of the
photograph

must be near to cause that bit of ash you found, some reason for all the looters' holes ...

**Ray:** *What led you to the KN42 discoveries?*

**Don:** In the following year, January 1984, I began full-time work as the on-site director of operations, and stayed for several years. I began to plan the excavation on 42 for a number of reasons: firstly, to begin with a major project to look at the range of production; and, secondly, I believed from the evidence, mainly from looting operations, that mounds were built-up debris of previous kilns being demolished, and were not deliberately made.

We chose kiln 42 as one of the mounds in which we could test this hypothesis. We chose the most damaged mound with looters holes all over and it was a rather damaged site. We felt quite responsible about that, that we did not choose the best of the mounds that perhaps could give the best information. We were not sure what we were doing but chose the site that had been most disturbed.

We started to dig down but had to open a second pit as there were more kilns that we found in succession: nine kilns one on top of the other, and two more close by, making eleven kilns (Figures 4 and 5). The bottom one only had been built on the original ground surface but each subsequent kiln was built up on the thrown-down ruins of the one before (Figure 6).

Excavating those kilns was a major revelation and proved the hypothesis that the mounds built up over time as kilns were rebuilt. We also estimated the working life of the mound to be about 300 years; 11 kilns, the life of the kiln about 20-30 years. That was the figure we came up with, and I still maintain was the life of the kilns (in that sequence).

Radio carbon dating by Mike Barbetti later does seem to confirm a production of around three hundred years for the export industry, that is from the fourteenth to sixteenth century AD (In *World Archaeology,* Barbetti and Hein 1989).

We did find shards of another sort of ware lower down in the sequence which we called "Mon", this being the name we gave to the earliest wares. The villagers knew the wares by that name.

**Ray:** *What does "Mon" signify?*

**Don:** We believe now that the Mon people, who controlled the region before Sukothai emerged, did operate those kilns, and that's

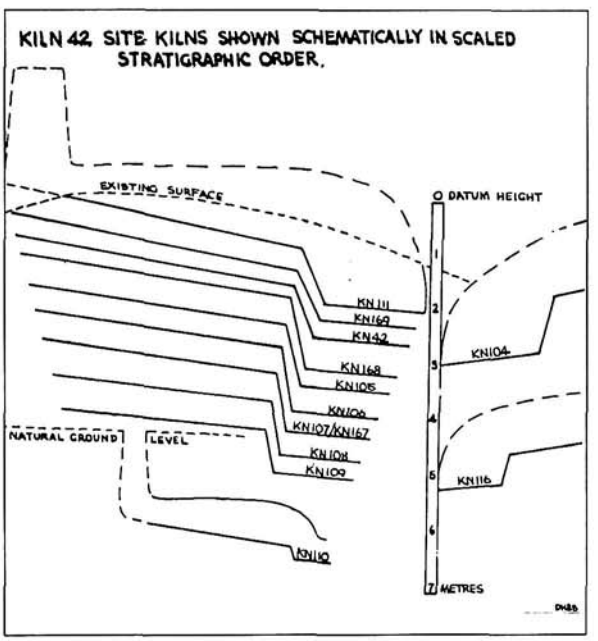



*Figure 6: Sketch: stratigraphy of sequence of kilns "Field Report on the Excavation of Kiln 42 Ban Ko Noi Si Satchanali, Thailand" by Don Hein, September 1985 (unpublished)*

borne out by research done by Dr Michael Vickery. The Mon presence is supported linguistically by the interpretation of names like *Chaliang* and *dau turiang* (kiln / bowl) which do have a Mon translation but make no sense in Thai (Vickery 1987).

**Ray:** *At the Kiln KN42 Site, you knew that you had excavated to the original ground level, and KN 109 was first in the sequence of kilns?*

*Normally the archaeologist stops digging when sterile ground is identified, because natural sediments show that the cultural level limit has been reached - below that, nature; above that, culture; so there's no point in digging any further. But I knew...*

**Don:** Normally the archaeologist stops digging when sterile ground is identified, because natural sediments show that the cultural level limit has been reached - below that, nature; above that, culture; so there's no point in digging any further. But I knew...

**Ray:** *But you knew about in-ground kilns from KN36, and northern Thai kilns?*

**Don:** Clearly I knew about in-ground kilns. At the site there were ceramic shards about that didn't belong to the surface kiln production. Acting 'on spec', I instructed the team to keep on digging, digging down through the natural ground for a further metre and a half until we came to a change in the soil; a discolouration from natural ochre of the river terrace sediment to a red/orange colour.

Even before we reached the body of the kiln itself, I knew we had reached heat-affected soil, and that we had located an in-ground kiln.

That's the kind of thrill the archaeologist gets: it's like Christmas.

**Ray:** *You would have known that you would need to dig down a couple of metres or so?*

**Don:** That's correct; that's the depth the kiln would have been at if there were one. If the chimney is to have sufficient draft, that's how deep the kiln needs to be. The top of the chimney must come out at ground level like a rabbit burrow.

**Ray:** *Unlike kiln KN61 where you had indicators (a magnetometer anomaly and a trench with ash), the discovery of this kiln (KN110) must have been an extra thrill because there was no real reason for that in-ground kiln to be there at all.*

**Don:** No, it was just a hunch; you get hunches like detectives get a certain hunch, and keep following it when everything else says quit.

**Ray:** *You also had a hunch about Wat Don Lan?*

**Don:** Yes, there was no surface evidence at all to suggest kilns, but from aerial survey photographs I could see a depression indicated as overlapping circles. John Stanley subsequently found an anomaly, and we dug and found kilns just where I suspected. This was all done by deduction. There was no surface evidence whatsoever, but we found kilns there.

**Ray:** *If an in-ground kiln hadn't been found there (at the KN42 pit), would you have kept digging elsewhere on that mound?*

**Don:** No, not on that site, but I would have continued to look for in-ground kilns because I knew they existed. I wanted to prove the relationship between them and surface kilns, and to show that the progression from in- to on-ground was continuous.

**Ray:** *What is it that was so important about the discovery of 110?*

**Don:** KN110 was terribly important, because we could see a development of the technology needed to fire to higher temperatures. KN110 was an early kind of kiln built initially without a firewall. There were various stages of this kiln's use to show how a firewall developed during its working life.

The kiln floor started off as just a gentle slope, and then material fused onto the floor, became too difficult to remove without damaging the kiln, and so was tolerated and left. Gradually the kiln floor level in KN110, where the ware is loaded, became elevated above the firing chamber floor, and formed a step: and so a firewall had come to be developed.

The potters probably then began to realise burning wood for the firing could be contained in front of this wall. When stoking you didn't knock your pots; and the natural draft begins to work better with the hottest flame being drawn directly into the ware chamber, and of course this was necessary to be able to high-fire glazed ware.

We could see the stages of development, and we could see the reasons why that development took place. The firewall developed because of the use of the kiln, where you push it to a higher temperature when you have glaze wares in it. Over time in later kilns, a wall was deliberately constructed, but we see the actual invention and development of the firewall in KN110.

That's how good discovery comes about - the development was really recognition of the actual events. The evidence of this firewall evolution showed the stages of an indigenous sequence of development; there was no external intervention.

**Ray:** *With your insights and intuition, you are like the potter of old. One of the things I think is useful to your work is your experience in the technical side of ceramics production acquired from your art school background. When you look at the kiln site you do so as a potter, not just an archaeologist. To me this is exciting because if you perceive that there's a perfectly logical production development to help with the business of making pots. Many others without ceramics experience may miss the evidence.*

**Don:** Exactly. That really summed up the situation; the potters were not introduced to new ways of potting from external ideas. I see a local evolution of kiln technology; see the reasons for the changes and developments. I recognised that there are logical reasons, reasons related to production, the consequences of temperature, consequences of the materials being used.

**Ray:** *It's much easier to model the negative space of an in-ground kiln than it is to construct a surface kiln?*

**Don:** The potters made surface kilns by creating an in-ground kiln on the surface, but you can't dig a kiln out of the air, so you have to construct it out of something. The later kilns were made out of brick, perhaps because the Thais used brick in architecture

a great deal. You wouldn't invent a surface kiln like the type at Ko Noi to be built with brick; you wouldn't design it, and you couldn't. Nobody would begin with brick to make a kiln like that. The potters had to invent a most complicated way of

Figure 7. complicated brick pattern to allow dome of kiln to be constructed using an arch (Figure 8)

*Figure 7: Photograph of brick work showing complex pattern to construct domed ovoid shape (kiln 13 Ban Ko Noi)*

constructing the surface kilns because the rectilinear brick didn't suit itself to making ovoid forms (Figure 7).

The Thai potters invented, or re-invented the arch (Figure 8).

**Ray:** *Rather than a sudden end to the industry, there seems to have been a gradual decline?*

**Don:** All the evidence at the kiln site is that the last kilns, those upper most on the mound, were old kilns; they were fired to the end of their working life. For example, all show a large build-up of slag in firebox and chimney, worn bricks, and repairs.

**Ray:** *This indicates that the industry faded away; rather than suddenly being abandoned, the kilns were fired out to the end of their working life and just not rebuilt.*

**Don:** The disaster theory came about when the huge piles of broken ceramics that surrounded the now fallen kilns were explained by violent breakage, perhaps by war-mongering invaders, but we know that quality-control over centuries led to the large piles of wasters that surround the kilns. However, the Burmese invasion of the late C16 AD is used by many writers as a terminal date for the industry. There is a general consensus that the export phase of Ko Noi ceramics production did finish around that time, coincidentally or not.

**Ray:** *You continued to research at Ko Noi after 1987?*

**Don:** I've researched at Ko Noi for more than 25 years now. I expect to complete a major project on the technology of the kilns and wares later this year. We have also worked extensively throughout the mainland Southeast Asian region – in Laos, in Cambodia, and this year again in Myanmar. Burma I expect will reveal much more of the ceramics story in the next little while.

**Ray:** *There is also a similar stoneware technology found throughout mainland Southeast Asia?*

*Figure 8: Arch bricks clearly showing in collapsed roof of kiln KN 03 at Ban Ko Noi*

**Don:** Another dimension: Myanmar. Ceramic production in Myanmar began quite early as well, and we are finding in-ground kilns and surface kilns there now, which are obviously part of the same chronology and part of the same history. According to old records, Burmese kilns in the eighth and ninth century AD were producing glazed ceramics. The cross draft kilns used in Myanmar are like those found in northern Thailand and so must have a common origin in a similar technological tradition.

I have no doubt Cambodia, Vietnam, and China have a different trend of a distinctly different type of cross draft kiln, without going into detail now.

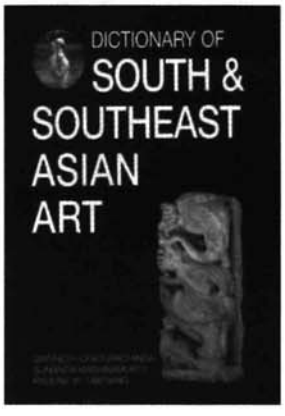
Satisfaction: Don says: "It's all about establishing, I suppose, some order to the questions about the history of the ceramics in the area. I guess life's about little satisfactions and, for us, this is one of them" (*The Bulletin*, March 31, 1992 ).

**Ray Hearn is a Research Associate of the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin Australia, and is currently completing his PhD on the contemporary and historical stoneware production of the kilns at Ban Ko Noi.**

# DICTIONARY OF SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

Gwyneth Chaturachinda
Suranda Krishnamurty
Pauline W. Tabtiang

**Who is Avalokitesvara?**
**Where is the Golden Temple?**
**What is a dharmachakra?**
**What kind of creature is the Garuda?**
**Of what significance is the naga?**
**What is a zari?**




This basic dictionary of South and Southeast Asian art offers clear and concise explanations of all these terms and hundreds more. With over 700 entries, 78 line illustrations, and 15 colour photographs, this little volume makes a handy reference for anyone interested and engaged in South and Southeast Asia - travellers and residents, new students in the field, museum goers, and general readers. Explanations are succinct and easy to understand. Entries range from terms encountered in South and Southeast Asian history, religion, mythology, and literature, to those specific to art and architecture. Words are drawn from the diverse religious traditions of the region, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, and Taoism, and from the countries of the region, including Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

From abhayamudra through ziarat, this is an essential dictionary for anyone stepping into the fascinating world of South and Southeast Asian art.

Published in 2000 by
Silkworm Books
Suriwong Book Centre Building
54/1 Sridon Chai Road, Chiang Mai 50100
Thailand.
**E-mail :** silkworm@pobox.com
**Website :** www.silkwormbooks.com

# 'Reformasi Indonesia!' Protest art, 1995-2000

*Arahmaiani*
*Tropical Elegy, 1998, charcoal*

Nowadays many ethnographic museums found themselves needing to reconsider the display of their collections. Usually these collections were assembled during colonial times. Their purpose was to inform the Western public about the different cultures of the exotic 'Other'. Museum Nusantara in Delft has changed its display of the permanent collection of Indonesian objects, and now stresses the mutual cultural exchange between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The museum has also set itself the goal of informing visitors about recent developments in Indonesian culture.

Museum Nusantara opened an exhibition, 'Reformasi Indonesia!' on 9 June 2000; a display of 'protest art' produced by twelve Indonesian contemporary artists. Around forty works (paintings, graphics, drawings, and objects) focussing on the turbulent period of reformasi, the process of reforms in the political, social and economic field which have taken place in Indonesia between 1995 and 2000. The reformasi movement was elucidated in even more detail by illustrative posters, items of election propaganda, T-shirts, and newspaper clippings. The exhibition revealed that under a repressive regime, visual artists needed to invent their own, secret language. The twelve artists belonged to the post-Independence generation (thirty to fifty years old). They have studied international modern art developments, and wanted to claim their place in the international art world. Most of them lived and worked in big cities: Jakarta, Bandung, or Yogyakarta on the island of Java. The selection of the works was based on the critical content and the social involvement of each individual artist.

To produce art that criticized the Soeharto regime was not without its dangers. Artists could be jailed or find themselves repressed in many ways. Therefore, Indonesian visual artists developed their own, often 'hidden' language, full of subtle symbolism. It was only after 1998 that criticism could be expressed openly.

The exhibition 'Reformasi Indonesia!' demonstrated this change: from the indirect, often complicated symbolism in 1995 to the open and active protest in 2000. The main theme of the art works remained the same: the political and cultural manipulation of the Indonesia citizen during the 32 years of the New Order government of Soeharto.

## Wild pig

The first part of the exhibition stressed the dominance of the Javanese culture as one of

the important sources of corruption and stagnation. A huge oil painting, *The Field of Tension between Reality and Illustration,* by Astari Rashid (1953) showed a seated aristocratic Javanese couple wearing traditional clothing. Their acquiescent attitude is in contrast to the clippings from the daily newspapers that have been attached to the canvas under the layer of paint. Dashed over the papers, red paint drips down, an allusion to the eruption of violence in 1998. Between the couple is a gorge through which flows a river. The landscape is divided in two: the left features the modern capital Jakarta, the right a traditional Javanese village. A tree of life used in the shadow theatre (wayang kulit) has been placed in a niche above the landscape. This tree refers to the end of the old era and the beginning of a new phase in Indonesian history.

A strong comment on the process of reformasi could be seen in the series of three

*Djoko Pekik: Hunting the Wild Boar, Indonesia 1998, oil on canvas*

huge paintings of a wild pig by Djoko Pekik (1938), the oldest participant of the exhibition. In the first work (1996), a massive black pig is seen at the forefront keeping its milk all for itself. In the background, the skyline and the flyovers of Jakarta can be seen (symbols of the richness of Soeharto and his clan). Crowds of people are moving slowly towards the pig. In the second work, Indonesia 1998, *The Wild Pig Hunt,* the situation has changed.

The people have captured the pig and tied it to a bamboo pole. To the right, a number of dancing figures are holding a party, but further in the background some older men are surveying the situation with a critical eye: the pig is not yet dead. Finally, in the third work, *Without Flowers or Telegram of Condolence, Year 2000,* the pig has become a corpse. Birds and flies pick the flesh from the carcass. A ravaged, burned-out landscape is the legacy of the Soeharto clan. In the background the luxurious apartment buildings and motorways of Jakarta are visible. Pekik has made a statement about the escalating contrast between the rich and the poor. His paintings are a tribute to the 'small people', the Indonesian *rakyat,* who are exploited by the greed of those in power, symbolized by the wild pig.

### Empty chairs

In the second part of the exhibition, the cruel manipulation of the individual by the state was expressed by Agung Kurniawan (1968), Hanura Hosea (1966) and Tisna Sanjaya (1959). Their lugubrious drawings and graphic works show ghostlike people without eyes or ears, people who are moved as puppets by those in power. Empty chairs refer to a power vacuum situation: who will be the next president?

Some Indonesian artists joined in the student protests. Through installations in exhibitions and performances, these artists expressed their criticism of the Soeharto

regime. Indonesian 'protest art' has had some precedents: first during the colonial period, when Indonesian painters supported the struggle for Independence (1945-1950). The second was at the beginning of the 1970s when the 'New Indonesia Art Movement' (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru) was founded. This movement supported the student protests against the government which took place in that same decade. Some members, like one of the founders, Harsono, are still active.

The last part of the exhibition showed works by artists who were political activists as well. Arahmaiani (1961) and Harsono (1949) participated in the student demonstrations and observed the riots that took place in May 1998. The chaotic situation in which plundering, arson, murder, and rape were the order of the day inspired Arahmaiani to make a series of charcoal drawings with the title *Tropical Elegy.* Dark silhouettes watch passively while their house burns. A woman is threatened with a knife. In *New Order Wayang,* dead bodies are impaled on a bamboo stake. The tree of life, used to signal the beginning and the end of a Wayang performance, has been placed in the middle. Above the tree, a seated figure with a necktie is in power. A tank is aiming its guns at the performance.

*Agung Kurniawan: Morfological study, 1996, charcoal.*

The aggression and violence used by the army and the police during May 1998 have been portrayed by Harsono in his series *Republik Indochaos.* Based on the enlarged form of a hundred rupiah postage stamp, these etchings are a documentation of 13 and 14 May 1998. Combining photographs, texts and etching Harsono demonstrated a harsh reality: burning bodies, the army shooting, and the police with clubs beating up demonstrators. A portrait of Soeharto bears a diagonal stamp with the text 'expired'.

## New doors

The difficult position of the Chinese (Christian) minority in a country in which the majority of the people is Muslim has been touched on in *The Kingdom Come.* In the work, a screaming Chinese woman is making the sign of the Cross to protect herself from evil. Harsono worked together with Roman Catholic priests in Jakarta trying to help the victims of racism and religious discrimination.

The purpose of the exhibition 'Reformasi Indonesia!' was to demonstrate that contemporary Indonesian artists were touching upon new subjects. Like the Russian *Glasnost,* the Indonesian process of *Reformasi* has opened new doors. Shocked by the growing violence in Indonesian society, these twelve artists have expressed their concern about the future of Indonesia. They have examined the psychology of the country and its inhabitants. This open search into corruption, power and responsibility is new for a country where artists were not free to criticize the government. This protest art has to be seen as a stepping stone towards democracy in Indonesia.

**By Helena Spanjaard, IIAS Newsletter number 23**

'THERE BEFORE YOU'

# ANGKOR OBSERVED

DAWN ROONEY

ORCHID GUIDES

## ANGKOR OBSERVED

by DAWN ROONEY

This is the second book in the series THERE BEFORE YOU. It consists of a selection of early travellers' impressions of the Khmer empire's ancient, 12th century capital and the legends that inspired the majestic stone temples of Angkor, which were described by a visitor in the 1920s as "the most impressive sight in the world of edifices".

The work brings to the reader out-of-print impression of early western travellers, and also includes tales and legends based on an oral tradition, published for the first time. It serves as a guide-book companion, as an introduction to Angkor and as supplementary reading following a visit. It is also of interest to the armchair traveller unable to venture as far afield as Cambodia.

The author has a PhD in art history, and has written several books on Southeast Asian art and culture, including *Angkor. An Introduction to the Temples* (1994).

*"Go to Angkor, my friend,*
*to its ruins and its dreams."*

P. Jeannerat de Beerski, 1923.

*Approximately 260 pp., richly illustrated, maps, bibliography, index.*

Please supply the following book(s):

| Qty | Title | Price | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | **Angkor Observed (ISBN 974-8304-79-5)** | **US$ 23.00** | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Add postage, packing and handling (add 15% of value, min. $9). _____

**Total amount $** _____

☐ Check Enclosed

Name_____

Address_____

Postal Code _____ City _____ Country _____

✉ *Asia*: ORCHID PRESS, P.O. Box 19, Yuttitham Post Office, Bangkok 10907, Thailand Fax: +662 930 5646 E-mail: wop@inet.co.th

✉ *North America*: 4840 Acorn Street, Montreal H4C 1L6, Canada. Fax (514) 934 6043

✉ *Europe*: P O Box 5259 Maj., N-0303 Oslo, Norway. Fax +47 22 56 57 66

**Dance, the Spirit of Cambodia**

The Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh will present a classical and folk dance and music from Cambodia, *'Dance, the Spirit of Cambodia'*, during a national tour (U.S.A.) between August 11–September 29, 2001. This Royal University of Fine Arts project will last 9 weeks, involving 41 dancers and musicians in a coast-to-coast trip of 12 cities. The performance of this troupe will mark the first time in more than a decade that the living traditions of Cambodian music and dance have formally toured in the U.S.A.

Repertory for the scheduled 28 public performances on tour will include dance and music from Cambodia's folk and classical traditions and an extended excerpt from the 'Reamker' dance-drama.

The project's Artistic Director is Proeung Chhieng, Vice Rector and Dean, Choreographic Arts.

Initiated and produced by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) in partnership with Asia Society and Lisa Booth Management, Inc., it is a public celebration of more than a decade of documentation, preservation and cultural exchange fostered between the Royal University of Fine Arts, US presenters, funders, and Cambodian-American communities.

Contacts for information about performances, visit our Performance Calendar. For general and press inquiries, contact Lisa Booth Management, Inc. at artslbmi@msn.com or call 212 921-2114.

http://www.asiasource.org/cambodia/

**Asian Art at the Venice Biennale 2001**
**July 05, 2001**

The Venice Biennale, running from June 10 to November 4 this year, is the oldest and most prestigious international exhibition of contemporary art in the world. This year Asian and Pacific Islander artists are making a big splash at the show, exhibiting some of the most innovative works and receiving a

great deal of media attention and critical acclaim.

In the Japanese pavilion, Masato Nakamura's towering installation of golden arches has been consistently called one of the best works of the year, while Chinese artist Xiao Yu and Taiwanese photographer Chang Chien-Chi have raised a great deal of controversy with their explorations of what the BBC calls "the darker sides of their societies." Also of note, two Korean American artists, Michael Joo and Do-Ho Suh, are representing Korea in the Biennale with intriguing sculptural installations that explore the concept of cultural hybridization and the relationship between individual identity and the larger society.

This year also marks the first year New Zealand and Hong Kong are participating in the Biennale. Entitled "Bi-polar," New Zealand's entry features the work of Peter Robinson and Jacqueline Fraser, two artists of Maori descent who take different approaches to dislocation and identity in their work. Hong Kong, which is trying to establish itself as a centre for contemporary art, is showcasing "Magic at Street Level," an exploration of Hong Kong's urban landscape.

Asia's prolific participation in this year's Venice Biennale is a sure sign of the region's full entry into the international contemporary art scene.

*Syed Shaha Rudding Bakeri "Batik off Batik"*

## Corporate patrons prop up budding Thai artists

Considered by some as having the best modern art collection in Thailand, Tisco Asset Management Co. started collecting art some thirty years ago. The investment bank (Thailand's first) began art collection because its executives believed that this would attract the attention they wanted, rather than as an investment. Today, the company has three hundred pieces of mostly Thai contemporary art, helping to expose the works of local artists who may not be well known. In recent years, collection of art within the corporate sector has grown substantially in Thailand, with UCOM (United Communication Industry Plc) also assuming a significant role in contributing towards Thai art. From the vibrant contemporary art scene in the country, there is optimism that others will join the trend, and provide more opportunities for lesser-known artists.


## NEW ACQUISITIONS

Blais, Genevieve. **The Dalai Lama.** London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000, 86 p., 20 cm.
ISBN 0-340-78011-8
DALAI LAMA/BUDDHISM

**A chronicle of King Chulalongkorn's royal visit of Sweden and Norway Rattanakosin era 116.** Bangkok: Office of the National Culture Commission, 1999, 100 p., 30 cm.
ISBN 974-7506-18-1
THAILAND-FOREIGN RELATIONS-SWEDEN/
THAILAND-FOREIGN RELATIONS-NORWAY/

**City-community: Singapore art today.** Singapore: National Arts Council, 1999, 237 p., 30 cm. (published on the occasion of the visual arts festival Nokia Singapore Art 1999, 4 Dec.1999-30 Jan.2000)
ISBN 9971-88-713-4
ART, SINGAPORE-EXHIBITIONS/ART, CONTEMPORARY-20TH CENTURY-SINGAPORE-EXHIBITIONS/

H.H.Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara. **Forty-five years of the Buddha.** Bangkok: Ruan Kaew Printing House, 1993, 341 p., 22 cm.
ISBN 974-7445-26-3
BUDDHA-HISTORY

Jeldres, Julio A. and Somkid Chaijitvanit. **The Royal Palace of Phnom Penh and Cambodian Royal life.** Bangkok: Post Books, 1999, 132 p., col.ill., 25 cm.
ISBN 974-202-047-7
CAMBODIA-HISTORY/PALACE-CAMBODIA

Jones, Sian. **The archaeology of ethnicity: constructing identities in the past and present.** London: Routledge, 1997, 180 p., 24 cm.
ISBN 0-415-14158-3
ARCHAEOLOGY/ETHNOLOGY

Lynn Pan, ed. **The encyclopedia of the Chinese overseas.** Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, 1998, 399 p., 30 cm.
ISBN 918-3018-92-5
CHINESE-ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Miner, Brad. **The conservative encyclopedia: 200 of the most important ideas, individuals, incitements, & institutions that have shaped the movement.** New York: Free Press Paperback, 1996, 318 p., 24 cm.
ISBN 0-684-80043-8
CONSERVATION-ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Moore, Eliabeth, Hansjorg Mayer and U Win Pe. **Shwedagon: golden pagoda of Myanmar.** Bangkok: River Books, 1999, 191 p., col.ill., 24 cm.
ISBN 974-8225-46-1
SHWEDAGON/MYANMAR-PAGODA (SHWEDAGON)

**National Museum Volunteers 1969-1999: the first thirty years**. Bangkok: National Museum, [1999], 56 p., 21 cm.
NATIONAL MUSEUM-THAILAND

Office of National Culture Commission. **The Centennial of H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongprabandh.** Bangkok: Office, 1991, 270 p., 30 cm.
ISBN 974-8359-12-3
NARADHIP BONGPRABANDH,H.R.H. PRINCE WAN WAITHAYAKON KROMMUN, 1891-1976-BIOGRAPHY

Tong Trung Tin. **Vietnam sculptural art in the Ly and Tran dynasties (xi$^{th}$-xiv$^{th}$ centuries).** Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 318 p., ill., 21 cm. (text in Vietnamese)
SCULPTURE-VIETNAM (LY AND TRAN DYNASTIES)


Santi Leksukhum. **Ayutthaya art.** Bangkok: Muang Boran, 1999, 216 p., ill., 25 cm.
(text in Thai)
ISBN 974-7381-27-3
ART, THAI (AYUTTHAYA PERIOD)

## SELECTED ARTICLE FROM JOURNAL

Batten, John. **"Laurence Aberhart: Macau and China,"** Art AsiaPacific, vol.33, January-March 2002, p.62-67.
ABERHART, LAURENCE-PHOTOGRAPHER

Boonyarat Rojanapiyawongs. **"Pathom Phanomrung,"** Advanced Thailand Geographic, vol.49, November-December 2001, p.283-301.
PHANOMRUNG-BURIRAM

Arunsak Kingmanee. **"A symbol representing the birth of Lord Buddha carved on a Sima stone,"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.45, no.1, January-February 2002, p.78-87.
BOUNDARY MARKERS/JATAKAS

Aimorn Tanthien. **"The Thai State Attorney Museum: the first legal museum of Thailand,"** Thai Library Association Bulletin, vol.45, no.3, July-September 2001, p.14-22.
THAI STATE ATTORNEY MUSEUM

Cha-Em Kaewkhai. **"Inscriptions on silver coins of ancient Burma.,"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.45, no.1, January-February 2002, p. 66-71.
INSCRIPTIONS-MYANMAR

Hoskote, Ranjit. **"Atul Dodiya: the possibilities of political art,"** Art AsiaPacific, vol.33, January-March 2002, p.38-45.
ART, POLITICS/ATUL DODIYA-INDIAN PAINTER

Jarunee Incherdchai. **"Phra Bot: wisdom in traditional Thai painting,"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.45, no.1, January-February 2002, p. 24-45.
THAI MURAL PAINTING

Langenbach, Ray. **"Statutory obligations: the performances of Tehching Hsieh,"** Art AsiaPacific, vol.33, January-March 2002, p.46-53.
TEHCHING HSIEH-TAIWANESE ARTIST

Patipat Pumpongpaet. **"Wat Phu Khao Thong (The golden mountain temple),"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.44, no.6, November-December 2001, p. 12-27.
PHU KHAO THONG TEMPLE-BANGKOK

Natthapatra Chandavij. **"The Buddha image of Gandhara style discovered at Nakhon Pathom in relation with silk route in Pakistan,"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.44, no.6, November-December 2001, p. 28-51.
BUDDHA IMAGE (GANDHARA STYLE)-THAILAND

Robert, Claire. **"The art of Wang Zhiyuan: a state of flux,"** Art AsiaPacific, vol.33, January-March 2002, p.68-75.
WANG ZHIYUAN-CHINESE PAINTER

Sayan Praichanjit. **"The Intakhin klin site: ceramic production unit of Lanna period recently excavated at Thung Phan Aek – Phan Fue Muang Kaen, Chiangmai, Northern Thailand,"** Silpakorn Journal, vol.44, no.6, November-December 2001, p. 52-75
CERAMICS-THAILAND (CHIANGMAI)

Sompoj Sukaboon. **"Phra Soralak Likhit: a Thai painter of the early period, a creator of western style paintings",** Silpakorn Journal, vol.44, no.6, November-December 2001, p. 76-91
THAI PAINTER/PHRA SORALAK LIKHIT-PAINTER


Whiles, Virginia. **"Imran Qureshi,"** Art AsiaPacific, vol.33, January-March 2002, p.54-61. MOHAMMAD IMRAN QURESHI-PAKISTANI PAINTER

## SOURCES

**Art AsiaPacific.** A quarterly magazine published by Fine Art Publishing Pty Ltd, 42 Chandos Street, St. Leonards, NSW 2065 Australia, email: infor@finearts.com.au, http://www.artasiapacific.com ISSN 0741-2037

**Advanced Thailand Geographic.** Published six times a year by Green Macpai Company, Tel.(662) 433-7412-3, Fax. (662) 882-5376 http://www.atgmag.com, email: atg@atgmag.com ISSN 0859-5369

**Silpakorn Journal.** Published twice a year by the Promotion and Public Relations Section Office of the Secretariat, Fine Art Department, Na Phra That Rd., Bangkok 10200 Thailand, Tel. (662) 224-2050, 222-0934 ISSN 0125-0531

**Thai Library Association Bulletin.** Published four times a year by Thai Library Association, 1346 Akarnsongkraw Rd. 5, Khlongchan, Bangkapi, Bangkok 10240 Thailand, Tel. (662) 734-8022-3, Fax. (662) 734-8024 ISSN 0857-0086