



The author (left) with Bangkok friend.

A Canadian Perspective : Mid-Sojourn

by Marie-Ellana Dryden

At the end of that February day, I sat in my office watching a typical Canadian blizzard out the window. I wondered if I should leave soon to shovel my car out of the snow and scrape the ice from the windshield. Little did I know that the next phone call would place me in the searing heat of Bangkok in April!

Such an opportunity presented itself in that phone call from Mario Poulin. The Anthropology Department Coordinator and Professor at the Edouard-Montpetit College in Quebec asked me to consider traveling halfway around the world. This, he said, was a chance for me to

observe firsthand a long established and rich culture very foreign to any of my previous experiences.

Long before Mario Poulin's call, I was teaching at the elementary and secondary school levels. After earning my Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and a Master's degree in Art Conservation, I became a professional artist. Then I was employed as a conservator at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa for four years.

In January 1986 I accepted the position of Teaching Master and Co-ordinator of the Art Conservation Techniques Programme at Sir

Sandford Fleming College. The college is located in Peterborough, province of Ontario.

Throughout my experiences I realized that I must remain current in the field of art preservation. I must continue to expose myself to new areas of knowledge and awareness in conservation.

As a professional conservator, I take pride in analyzing the conditions of works of art. I propose and execute conservation treatments. And to ensure the longevity of irreplaceable objects of historic and artistic importance, I also make recommendations for storage, display, and

handling. These skills are learned only after many years of training and on the job experiences. Conservation is, therefore, a life-long vocation.

Nonetheless, the objectives of my subsequent SPAFA scholarship in the Conservation of Murals and Bronze are: 1) to observe the state of bronze and mural conservation in Thailand, 2) to share knowledge of Canadian conservation techniques with my hosts and counterparts in Thailand, and 3) to assist SPAFA in its programme of institutional linkages in Canada.

During the visit, from April 17 to May 1, 1989, I was able to accomplish the first two objectives. This was done through rigorous but stimulating tours of various conservation sites across Thailand. The third objective will hopefully be achieved in the reflection of the completed experience.

At this time of writing, having completed only one third of the fifteen days, I am already lamenting the brevity of this trip. The depth and breath of the Thai cultural heritage, of which I have barely seen the surface, is astounding. It is something which, although anticipated, cannot be understood until experienced.

One visit is enough to learn only the merest details of the rich artistic heritage that Thailand has to offer. I am however content to accept these limitations. I know I must learn as much as possible in the short time I am here.

The National Museum of Thailand and the Division of Archaeology, both under the Thailand Governments' Department

of Fine Arts, are very ably assisting me. They provide gracious and knowledgeable hosts for tours of numerous conservation laboratories, museums and religious sites in Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Suphan Buri, Petchburi and Sukhothai. I am atingle with anticipation of what the next few days will hold. Each day brings new delights.

The benefits of my Thai experience cannot be comprehended in the limited time this sojourn allows. It cannot even be expressed in a brief article. But I would strongly urge anyone, who is fortunate enough to be considered for a similar exchange, to participate willingly.

I have learned much about many things: the methods of conserving individual objects, the entire approach to a body of art revered for both artistic and religious expression and the culture that spawned it, a gentle and friendly people, an exotically beautiful country, and a unique way of life - the Thai way. Upon reflection and in comparison I have also learned much about myself.

Those who are working diligently to make this possible are too numerous to mention. However, I would like to thank two very special people for their assistance, SPAFA Publications Officer Wynette Puntuna who's energy and sense of humour have made my job of learning a pleasure, and SPAFA Programme Officer Associate Professor Kamthorn Kulachol who has kindly welcomed me and spent countless hours helping me make this programme meaningful. ■

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