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Interview with Noraset Vaisayakul: Psychological Interaction



Portrait of Noraset Vaisayakul. Image courtesy of the artist.

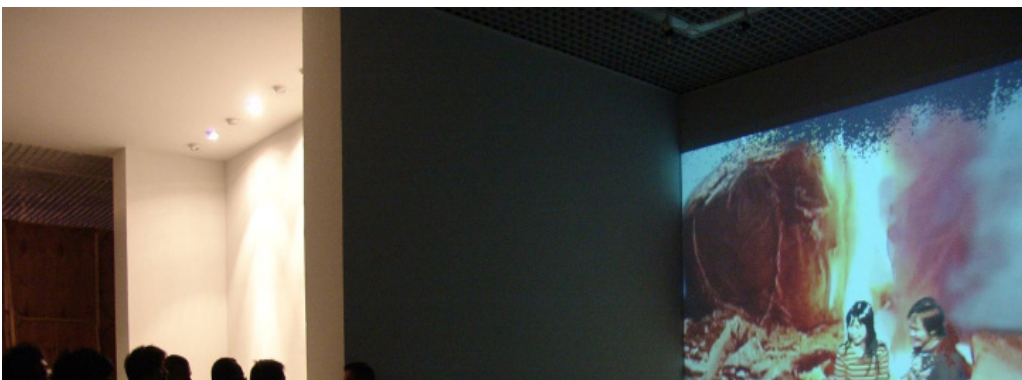


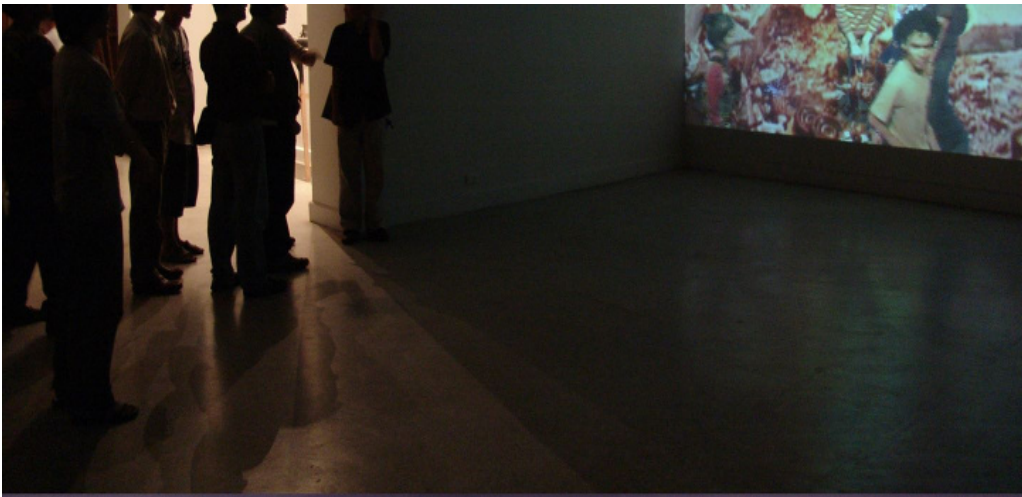


Noraset Vaisayakul's current body of work titled *If I Am Neanderthal*. Image courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of *Subconsciouscape* in 2009 at Gallery VER, Bangkok. Image courtesy of the artist.





Exhibition view of *Another World* in 2007 at PSG Gallery, Silpakorn University Bangkok. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

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The multimedia practice of Thai artist Noraset Vaisayakul is based on an interaction with the viewer and a resilient approach to the world. In a recent visit to Bangkok, Naima Morelli sat down with the artist to discuss his practice and a new work in the making.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist



Portrait of Noraset Vaisayakul. Image courtesy of the artist.

Like many artists around the world, Thai artist Noraset Vaisayakul has a day job. For him, it's in construction. One day, this job required him to live with other workers in a small house, right in the middle of a construction site. "The first time I went inside the room, I felt I couldn't breathe, let alone live there,"

said Vaisayakul, “It was smelly, there were no windows, I couldn’t lock the door. But I knew I had to stay there for 10 days.” After five days of sleeping and eating in the room, he surprisingly started to like it. Compared to the rest of the very noisy construction site, he considered the place very quiet. When the work was finished, he felt sad to leave the room.

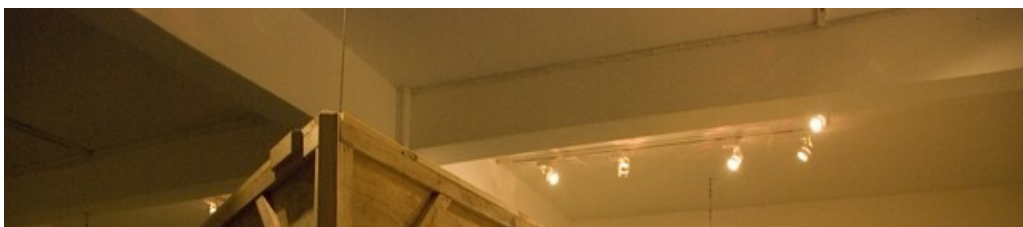
For Vaisayakul this was a lesson in resilience. It proved that dealing with one self, rather than blaming the exteriors, leads to appreciation and contentment. This is the philosophy the artist lives and works by. “Even the most horrible, kitsch picture, if you see it for 10 days in a row, you end up finding it at least acceptable, if not beautiful!” He added, “There’s no higher or lower, you can adapt to the situation when it comes. Maybe if other people would realize that, the world would be a more peaceful place.”



Noraset Vaisayakul’s current body of work titled *If I Am Neanderthal*. Image courtesy of the artist.

The body of work he is currently working on is called *If I am Neanderthal* and was inspired by this construction site episode. It will present the viewers with interaction, something he has been perfecting over the years. One of the most successful examples is his exhibition, “Subconsciouscape” held at Gallery VER in Bangkok in 2009, where he used a robot with a camera to try and explore the minds of viewers who interacted with the work.

In his practice, the artist is moved by the notion that everything (be it political, economic, social or personal) is interrelated and nothing is happening by chance. He believes that the uncovering of hidden truths and meanings is also a process to overcome fear.





Installation view of Subconsciouscape in 2009 at Gallery VER, Bangkok.
Image courtesy of the artist.

In your work we often find this longing for personal space, perhaps an isolated room or an inaccessible environment. These spaces are either physical or mentally removed from the viewer. What's your intention behind that?

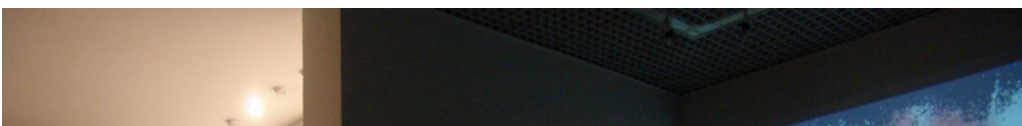
I want to not only to create my own space, I want to let people see the world with another perspective. I do believe what we're living now, it's not the real. I cannot say it for sure, nor deny it, because I have to learn more about it. I have to understand it. But that's precisely what I'm doing through art.

How did you develop this conception of the world, the one reverberating in your artworks?

At first, it just came out of my core belief; that everything is one. Everything is connected. Problems in the world, as I see it, happen because people think they are different from each other, or that we are different from the animals, or that the higher class is different than lower class. But actually, in the big picture it's all the same. That's why we have a very narrow vision to see reality. In my work I speak about that through science, using the psychological element and the behavioural element.

Indeed, you seem to be using technology to tackle spiritual questions. I find that a Buddhist conception is underlying in your work, even if this is never spelled out, or even referenced to, with that specific aesthetics.

I think you're right, but I never thought about it in this perspective. I try to create illusions through technology, many layers of illusion, to let people become aware that we are living in an illusion. And that's a problem, because we're so used to thinking the illusion is real. But it's not.





Exhibition view of Another World in 2007 at PSG Gallery, Silpakorn University Bangkok. Image courtesy of the artist.

It's like when you realize that the branch on the ground is not a snake. You can then sit forever on the branch and can't be scared of it any more. Is this the role of art for you? Helping move away from fear, which is produced by believing the illusion?

Yes, and the fear I think is closely related to hate. You hate another person because you fear them, often without even realizing it. I don't say you have to be a monk, but just develop a little awareness. An example is my show "Another World" from 2007, at PSG gallery in Silpakorn University, here in Bangkok. They had two rooms connected by corridors. I built a big blue screen system connecting the two spaces. When people come to the first room, they

system connecting the two spaces. When people came to the first room, they found it empty. But the people who were in the second room could see the people in the first room through a video, showing them with a different background of horrible scenes. The people in the first room were unaware of the disaster background, so they were happy in the room, dorking around the camera. The people in the second room however saw them smiling in a terrible scenario.

Can you tell us a bit more of your intention behind that particular work?

I feel that on the other side of the world, there are people that live on the edge. They are experiencing something horrible, people have nothing to eat, have no home, no cover. You have to be aware of that. We tend to look at our own condition only, and we can't see how everything is connected. Through art we convey how, even if we are physically distant, things happening far away are still affecting us.

Do you always have the same process for creating artworks and installations?

It is always a sort of evolution stemming from the previous work. First, I think what I want to do, and then I try to see how I can let people into my world. Only then I'll start thinking about the technology to do this. The idea is what comes first, that's why I call myself a conceptual artist. Which is like the opposite to what I have been taught at art school. We used to do the work first, then we would think how to explain what we did.

Can you tell us about the new project you are developing, If I am Neanderthal?

In my previous work I was obsessing about discovering the inside of our mind in relation to the pressures from the outside, trying to find balance in living. In my research, I have found most of my compulsive behaviors came from a problem I had with myself, not so much from the outside per se. So, I developed my framework which I call "the distorted mental state." We humans might have developed a sort of mental illness since we appeared on the planet and through human evolution. We started exterminating, destroying other humans from other breeds. We are the only species who are creating so many problems for the planet. In my new project, I'm conducting research based on paleontology and the studies on our ancestor, the Neanderthal. I will record my states of consciousness and my emotions on a painting on a 10-meter canvas as a sort of "memorandum book." Through this work, I'll try to give my take on the development of the character of modern mankind, that is so selfish, violent and weak. It's a process of self-inquiry that will speak about us all.

NAIMA MORELLI is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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