

FREEDOM & JUSTICE ?

Jittagarn Kaewtinkoy



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Solo Exhibition

By

Jittagarn Kaewtinkoy

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Steven Pettifor

Unsurprisingly, Thailand's artists tend to become more politicised in the wake of dramatic social upheavals and intermittent military interventions. During the student led demonstrations and subsequent crackdowns of 1973 and 1976, artists Pratuang Emjaroen and Prasong Luemuang led the dissenting charge, while after the bloody coup of 1992 it was Vasan Sitthiket along with Chumpon Apisuk and the Ukabat (fireball) performance artists who were quick to voice their hostility to the military takeover.

Thailand's most recent military putsch of 2006 once again roused artists to visualise interpretations upon the consequential dilemmas facing Thai society. Yet aside from the firebrand Vasan and critical photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom, there have been few overtly political artists to commentate on the entrenched cronyism and corruption that have become the mainstay of Thai politics.

To the neutral observer, Thailand has never appeared a more divided country. This growing disharmony has begun registering and permeating the art of emerging artists, including 32-year-old painter Jittagarn Kaewtinkoy. His slick mimicking caricatures previously took aim at international statesmen like George W. Bush, while in 2008 he turned his brush against those within his own country he felt were obsessed with financial profiteering from their strategic positioning.

Claiming neutrality, Jittagarn's surreal symbolic sarcasm was fairly transparent and heavy handed as he took aim at all those he deemed driven by capitalist rapacity. Having been handed a two-year prison sentence for abuses of power, it was the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who came in for the heaviest scrutiny, along with his ex-wife Potjaman, and former Prime Ministers Samak Sundaravej and Banharn Silpa-archa.

Back then Jittagarn was criticised for being superficial. Yet in the wake of the May 2010 bloody street protests, several of Thailand's more internationally recognised artists including Rirkrit Tiravanija, Thavorn Ko-udomvit, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, and Sakarin Krue-on, have also jumped aboard the political bandwagon, with mixed reception.

With political provocation still the backbone of his creative output, Jittagarn's latest series looks at iconic global figures and their veracity towards freedom and justice. He considers the empty rhetoric of statesmen who supposedly propound peace, as compared to the sincerity of true advocates, no better personified than in Aung San Suu Kyi, who struggles for democracy in Thailand's bordering state of Burma. Jittagarn also ponders the motivations behind the international community awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barack Obama, and then to the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo.

Today, Jittagarn deliberates upon a world where America is the sole super power, flexing its muscles of self-interest by meddling in the regional affairs of Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. He is also troubled by how a rogue state like North Korea uses the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) as bargaining chips in volatile brinkmanship politicking.

In the new post 9-11 world order, the global community has become increasingly aware to the ramifications and interdependencies of international politics. Like many today, access to web-based social networks and media sourcing has nudged Jittagarn and his generation towards more politicised debate. The furor over WikiLeaks exposing hidden policies, and subsequent arrest of Julian Assange for what many believe are politically fuelled charges, is an endorsement to the internet as a vehicle for political activism. Consequently Jittagarn portrays Assange as a champion of justice.

Somewhat conveniently categorised as heroes or villains, Jittagarn's rationale mirrors biblical signifiers to good versus evil, as well as convenient tabloid media sensationalism. While the artist canonises Suu Kyi as a winged angel, demagogues Than Shwe and Kim Jong Il don masks typical to comic book villainy, as does Russian leader Putin and China's Hu Jintao.

An earlier work:



A Fighter, 2006

Acrylic on canvas

100 x 121 cm

Abandoning the garish palette of the 2008 *Game Gaol Goong*, the latest series of paintings convey a cracked and burning post-apocalyptic landscape through gloomy subdued hues. Stylistically, he vies towards satirical caricature in the vein of early 20th century German artists George Grosz and Otto Dix, who were proponents of New Objectivity. Another artist to acknowledge Grosz and Dix's social cynicism is Vasan, who Jittagarn cites as significant to his own approach. The renegade Vasan's nihilistic art has from the outset sought a halt to political, social and moral degradation. Jittagarn also finds common ground in the subversive pop cultural jibes of Ron English and Banksy.

Jittagarn is first to admit that he may not fully grasp the layered complexities and histrionics behind current political debates, nor does he claim to level judgment. But as a subjective emotional and intellectual response, the artist firmly believes he has every right to confront such subject matter. Amidst his own nation's ongoing and uncertain political impasse, and within a continent where individual civil liberties are often stifled or utterly suppressed, Jittagarn's satirical art should be recognised not only within the context of artistic expression, but as a rarefied individual critique in an otherwise muted region.



The Lady, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 100 x 120 cm



Predator & Prey, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 130 x 150 cm



Nobel in Shackles, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 80 x 80 cm



Power & Fear, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 100 x 120 cm



The Prey, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 80 x 110 cm



The Fall of Justice and Freedom, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 180 cm



Freedom & Justice?, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 150 x 200 cm



The Three Faces of Politics, 2010 | Oil on canvas | 130 x 150 cm

CHRONOLOGY



Jittagarn Kaewtinkoy

Born 1979 in Uthaitхани

Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) from Rajamangala Institute of Technology, 2001

Selected Art Exhibitions

1995-1997 Group Art Exhibitions at The College of Fine Arts, Suphanburi

1998 - *AIDS* Group Art Exhibition at Silpakorn University, Bangkok

1999 - The 9th Toshiba *Brings Good Thing to Life* Art Competition, Bangkok

2001 - The 18th Exhibition of Contemporary Art by Young Artists, Thailand

2002 - The 7th Hitachi Group Art Exhibition *Inspire the Next*, Bangkok

- Group Exhibition *In My Life* at the Faculty of Fine Art, Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Bangkok

2006 - *Keep On Keeping On* Graffiti Art Exhibition by The Rebellious Group at Si-am Art Space, Bangkok

2007 - *Artists Self-Portraits* Group Exhibition at The Silom Galleria Art Space, Bangkok

2008 - *GAME - GAOL - GOONG* Solo Show at Artery Gallery – Bangkok

2009 - *Aesthetics of Body* Group Exhibition at Artery Gallery, Bangkok

2010 - *Subtleties of Character* Group Exhibition at WWA Gallery - Culver city, **USA**

2011 - *Freedom & Justice?* Solo Show at Thavibu Gallery - Bangkok



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