



# BANGKOK STATION

Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul



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# FOREWORD

Jørn Middelborg  
Thavibu Gallery

Thavibu Gallery has the pleasure of presenting the current catalogue and exhibition BANGKOK STATION by the Thai artist Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul. The exhibition takes place in Bangkok on 13 February – 7 March 2010. The exhibition features a series of oil paintings on canvas, as well as oil on aluminum sheets which he is well known for.

The artist says: “The modern day’s hectic pace of living in the city has become very stressful as we have so many challenges to face in our lives. Our lives are filled with demands and deadlines.

The stress gets into our system and affects not just our health, but the overall way of how we feel about ourselves, situations and the people around us. I have contemplated the meaning of life in the city, and have conveyed my interpretations through the facial expressions and body postures of my human and animal subjects which can be found by just looking around you.”

The essay has been written by the critic and independent curator Steven Pettifor.

I take this opportunity to thank Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul for his collaboration, and Steven Pettifor for his contribution.

# BANGKOK STATION

Steven Pettifor

Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul opines for simpler times. His large scratch painted aluminium surfaces imbue a worn, aged patina, evoking an air of nostalgia that is far from the gritty realism of the modern urban megalopolis of Bangkok.

Therdkiat was born in 1971 and graduated with a Masters Degree in painting from Silpakorn University in 2003. His unique brand of art has warranted inclusion in several domestic exhibitions as well as Singapore, USA, Japan, the Netherlands, Korea, and Spain. He was also awarded the prestigious Jurors' Choice Prize in the 2000 ASEAN Art Awards.

In Therdkiat's Bangkok the urban elite zoom round in air-conditioned luxury cars barely stepping foot on the pot-holed sidewalks of the capital, while the impoverished sun-beaten majority struggle to eke a living in the exhaustive tropical climate. Desperate migrants arriving by train and road from all corners of rural Thailand, many are forced to prop up temporary shanties beside the railway tracks. Lost and lonely, they survive hand-to-mouth by scavenging through garbage, or driving noisy tuk-tuks through the city's polluted, traffic-clogged streets.

Previously sparse of human intervention, Therdkiat's paintings are nevertheless full of emotion. Desolate and abandoned, they are the cruel legacy of an economic progress that hasn't been fair to all. By utilising metal sheets as his storyboard, the artist customises the cheap building materials used to erect transient slums, as well as presenting a tough modern veneer to juxtapose his humanistic imagery.

Typical to Therdkiat's spatially sensitive compositions are his minimal urban-scapes. Focusing on mundane architectural detailing, weathered cracked concrete walls are penetrated by a partial window frame. Elevating the vernacular to sublimity, the artist draws attention to the subtle interplay of light and shadow, manmade and nature, by which he instils a mood of contemplation and meditation. He also harnesses staining techniques that imbue his canvases with the same metallic veneer of his mainstay aluminium surfaces,





Therdkiat is a master at evoking the loneliness of the big city. Despite the over-crowded milieu of the Asian sprawl, often individual citizens' find themselves isolated and distant from loved ones. In Bangkok Station, Therdkiat refrains from earlier architecturally aligned works to spotlight the daily rituals of the capital's inhabitants. Through greater suggestion towards a narrative, in the latest works soi dogs and pigeons vie for scraps and contribute to a street-side bestial community.

These creatures assume their own personalities as they scavenge or seek respite from the scorching heat.

Understated yet powerful in its taut air of anticipation is the painting in which a street tabby and a pack of mutts stare-off over a potential meal of a discarded fish. The diagonal composition of the singularly focused creatures against the minimal backdrop of raw canvas is potent in its narrative, a metaphor conveying the determination of Thailand's indigent to get a basic meal inside them. Through whimsical referencing to American fast food chains and Japanese anime and Manga characters, the artist also explores issues of cultural importation and imperialism. In the wake of the economic downturn of the late 1990s, there has been a consensus by artists such as Vasan Sitthiket, to attribute globalisation as the demon undermining moral and cultural values perceived to be indicatively Thai.

Seemingly interested by the disconnected, transient manner in which anonymous disconnected urbanites absently interact through their daily encounters, Therdkiat also displays paintings focusing on riding public transport. Reminiscent of Edward Hopper's lonely commuter paintings, such as the 1965 Chair Car, the artist accurately captures the relentless heat, discomfort and congestion of riding upon metropolitan buses, songthaew, and trains. Depicting faceless commuters entering into close proximity as they alight dusty municipal buses, brushing passed one another in the nameless detachment of urban living, Therdkiat's commuter compositions enforce notions of migration.

As the metropolitan masses become increasingly anaesthetised to daily scenes of impoverishment on city streets, Therdkiat's socially commentating compositions are as relevant today as 18th century British painter William Hogarth's moralistic engravings were to a wayward British society centuries before.



**Bangkok Station (4), 2010 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 150 cm**



**Bangkok Station (3), 2010 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 150 cm**



**Bangkok Station (5), 2010 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 150 cm**



Bangkok Station (6), 2010 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 180 cm



Bangkok Station (2), 2010 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 160 x 230 cm



**Bangkok Station (1), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 160 x 240 cm**



**Along the Way, 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 158 x 230 cm**



**Forget Me Not** (13.4), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 160 x 160 cm



**Forget Me Not (13.3)** , 2009 | Oil on aluminum sheets | 122 x 130 cm



**Forget Me Not (13.2), 2009 | Oil on aluminum sheets | 150 x 150 cm**



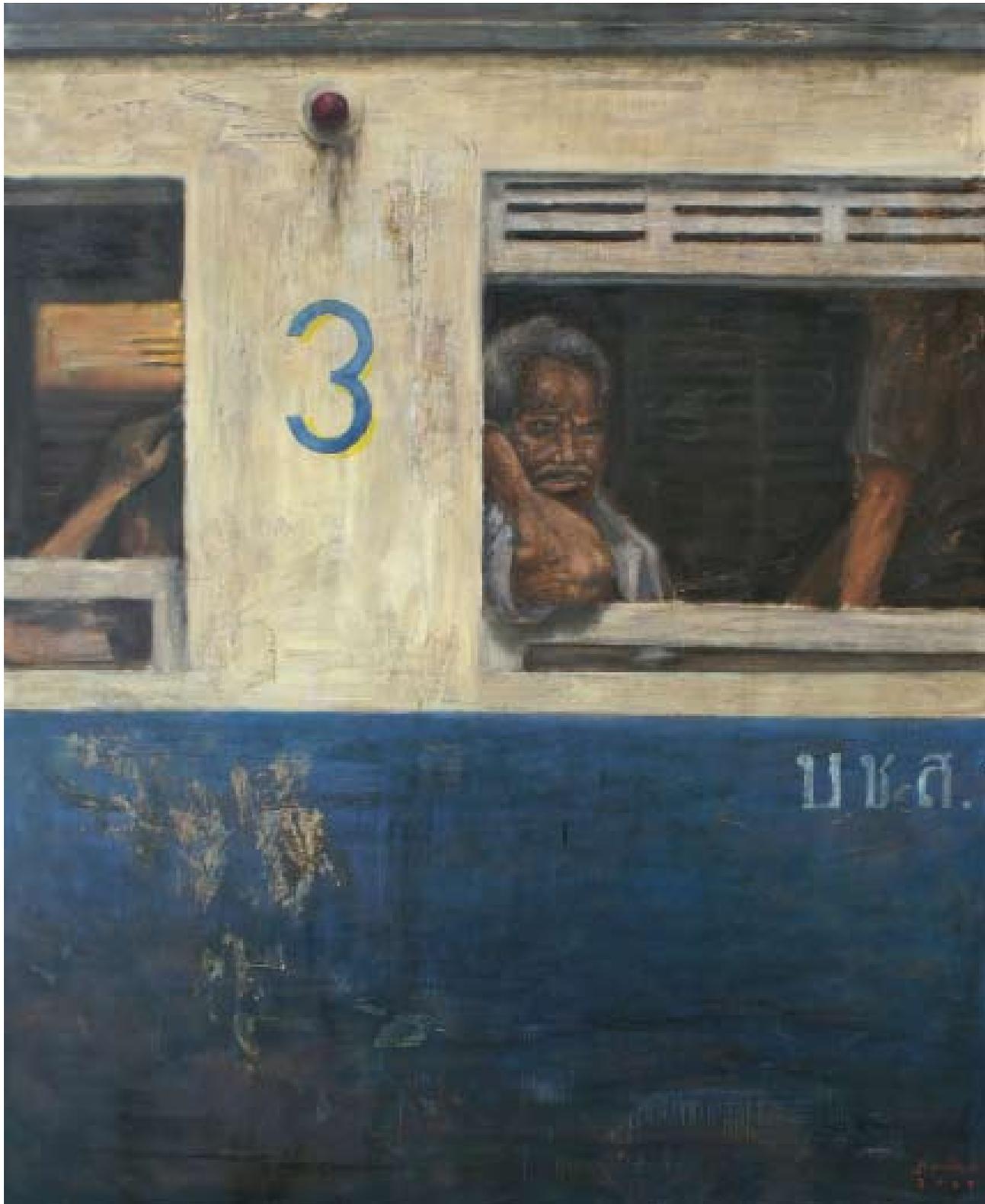
**Forget Me Not** (13.1), 2009 | Oil on aluminum sheets | 150 x 150 cm



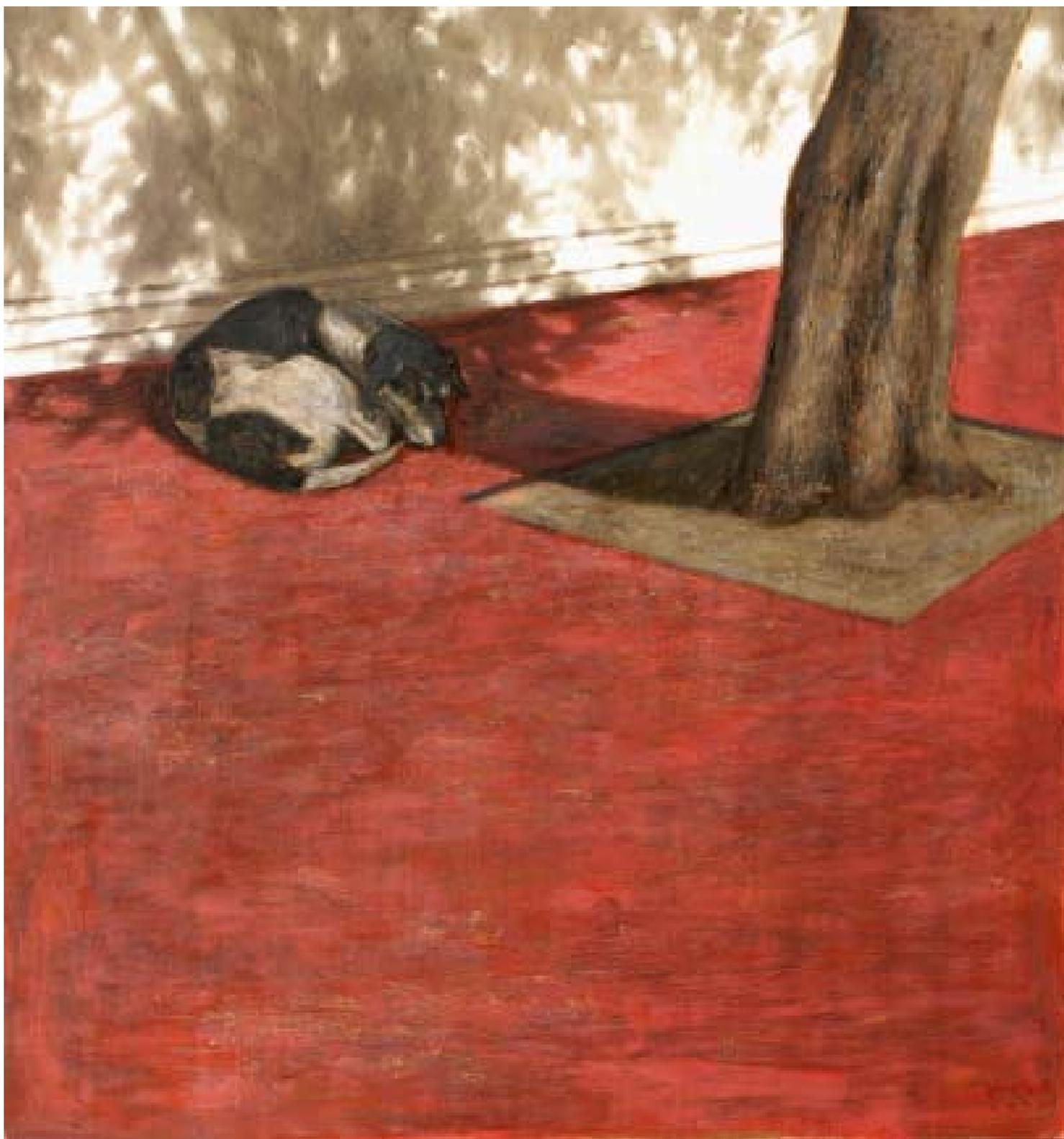
Dogs, Cat and Fish, 2009 | Oil on aluminum sheets | 130 x 240 cm



Train of Hope (1), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 130 x 160 cm



**Train of Hope (2), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 130 x 160 cm**



Lonely (10), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 160 cm



Lonely (11), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 140 x 195 cm



**On the Sidewalk (1), 2008 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 195 x 400 cm**



**On the Sidewalk (2), 2008 | Oil an acrylic on canvas | 195 x 400 cm**



**Me and the Pack, 2009 | Oil on aluminum sheets | 150 x 200 cm**



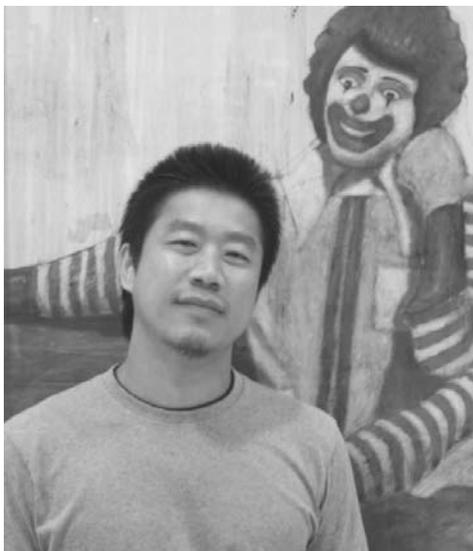
Poverty vs Excess, 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 195 x 230 cm



Sleep Well (2), 2009 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 200 cm



**On the Sidewalk (3), 2008 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 195 x 230 cm**



## THERDKIAT WANGWATCHARKUL

Born 1971 in Surin

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Silpakorn University, 2003

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

The 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 51st National Exhibitions of Art

2000 Solo show: Life (1) at BaanBangkok Gallery, Thailand

2001 Art Singapore, **Singapore**

2002 Solo show: Made in Bangkok at Galerie op Zolder (Thai Art Foundation), Amsterdam, **Netherlands**

2003 Solo show: Life Must Go On at Akko Gallery, Thailand

Group show: Chaos of Life at Onibaba Due, **Japan**

Seoul – Asia Art Now, **Korea**

Thai Life with Santi Thongsuk at Thavibu Gallery, Thailand

2005 Group show: by Picassomio, Spain

The Brightness of Life with Kritsana Chaikitwattana at Thavibu Gallery, Thailand

2006 Tradition and Modernity in South East Asian Art, at Asian Cultural Center, New York, **USA**

2007 Group show: Enduring Reality at The National Gallery, Thailand

2008 Group show to Commemorate HM The King's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday at The Queen's Gallery, Thailand

Solo show: Light of Life at D-Gallery, Phuket, Thailand

2010 Solo show – Bangkok Station at Thavibu Gallery, Thailand

### Awards

2000 Jurors' Choice Prize in the ASEAN Art Awards, Singapore

2001 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize, Bronze medal - painting, 47<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition of Art

2002 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize, Silver Medal - painting, 48<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition of Art





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