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BEING THAI: AN EXPLORATION OF THE HYBRIDITY OF THAI IDENTITY THROUGH CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2016

<u>Declaration:</u>

The work presented in this dissertation and exhibition has not previously

been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best

of my knowledge and belief, this dissertation contains no material

previously published or written by another person except where due

reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Kata Sangkhae

31 May 2016

Acknowledgements:

Research Abstract:

This practice-led PhD research focuses on what I propose to be the inseparable relationship between my visual art practice and my understanding of social identity within the Thai context. In the process, this research contributes to a body of imagery unique to Thai cultural experience and adds to a representation of contributions on its understanding, within a national and global context. Specifically, for this research I examine the effect of geographical and political environments on what I identify as the plurality and hybridity of Thai identities. This research is undertaken through visual investigations into the historical framework within Thailand itself and individual experiences of identity experienced within Thailand and viewed from a distance.

The research seeks to contribute knowledge through the following enquires:

How do representations of the construction and expression of a hybridised Thai identity affect and inform representation within contemporary art in a regional and global context?

How do experiences of distance and displacement from Thailand as a geographical locality and immersion within other cultural environments affect perceptions of Thai identity and its expression within broaden communicative contexts?

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Introduction

An identity consists of many different layers of complexity. Identities are created and shaped by history, environments, cultures and politics. In terms of recent Thai history, national identity has been recognized as a unique combination of western ideology and eastern philosophy. The country's identity negotiation has been a major issue in Thai history, a fact that the remarkable Thai curator, Gaweewong highlights in her statement for the exhibition 'bang-kok (2011): City Net Asia 2011', Seoul Museum of Art, in which she comments, "disasters striking Thailand are largely caused by chronic political instability and conflict between traditional value and the effort for modernization." (Gaweewong, 2011 p1) Traditional values and the drive for modernization remain the competing tensions within Thai society today.

While addressing constructions of national identity, this practice led research project focuses primarily on the hybridity of Thai identities created through a combination of cultures, religious beliefs and languages that make up Thailand today. Equally my individual experience of changing geographical and cultural environments, in this case Bangkok and Melbourne, as well as a broader appreciation for issues pertaining to globalisation, needs to be considered in my attempt at unravelling contemporary Thai identity through contemporary art practice. In this context, distance from the place of origin becomes an opportunity to examine identity in a macro investigation and to approach the research through direct experience from outside Thai environments.

Further still the research constitutes an investigation of diverse aspects of Thai culture in relation to the affect of geographical and cultural environments on the perception of a hybridised Thai identity. It does this though various media and within a multidisciplinary practice: sculpture, drawing, photography, video and installation are all employed. I propose through this practice-led research that greater knowledge about the complex nature of Thai identity is revealed and opens up new ways of understanding culture in a global but still

nationally conscious world. In part this is achieved through an intimate personal experience of being Thai and having the opportunity to view that 'Thainess' from the distance of Australia.

The background for this research is both my existing art practice, but also an acute awareness of the historical and political forces that frame Thai identity in the contemporary context. For instance, in 1932 when Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional system, the negotiation of a new identity began, foreshadowing the start of globalisation's strong impact on Thailand. According to Sum (2006, p.1), "The globalizing effect of the increasingly inter-connected world has led to two reactions within Asia Pacific… the globalised movement… a regionalizing movement." The issue of globalization has gained a tremendous amount of attention in all corners of the world and Thailand is no exception here. For example, when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced its plan of regional integration, it was anticipated that ASEAN members including Thailand would form and become one region by 2020. The objective is to foster a strong sense of community and make a collaborative effort in developing economy as well as increase social and culture progress. While integration can affirm cultural values and knowledge, it may also lead to complicated issues of confrontation between pre-existing cultural identities. As an artist one is sensitive to these issues and inevitably they manifest in aspects of my work.

As such this practice-based research aims to contextualize and develop understanding of the hybridity of Thai Identities within persistent political instability and conflicts between tradition and modernization. These conflicts have in some respects become threats to contemporary Thai society, especially in the past decade with political and socio-political conflicts even spilling onto the streets of Bangkok. If we are to consider the positive aspects of identity constructs, the social theorist Woodward offers a productive insight. According to Woodward (1997 p. 14) "Representation as a cultural process

establishes individual and collective identities, and symbolic systems provide possible answers to the questions: who am I?; what could I be?; who do I want to be?' Woodward also states that identity does not only represent individuals, but groups as well. "Identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live." Woodward (2004 p. 7). Woodward states clearly that the identity issue constitutes a relation of internal and external aspects. Therefore, the identity subject can be indicated as a structural identity. This may include a national identity and individual identity. However, Thai identity is almost always signified as one stereotype by government institutions and this raises problems. It has projected a conventional model of national identity since the 1950s even when the definition of this classical ideology had not been broad enough to create appropriate socio-space for contemporary Thais. This practice-based research will explore possible inadequacies of this model and explore alternative conceptualizations of Thai identities.

Finally, the research aims to gain more understanding around the effect of geographical and cultural environments on identity transformation and negotiation. The knowledge and results from the research benefits society by embracing the clash of cultures and begins to acknowledge and accept the prospect of multiple identities, which shines a light on new cultural developments within Thainess.

The key research questions are:

How does representations of the construction and expression of a hybridised Thai identity affect and inform representation within contemporary art in a regional and global context?

How does distance and cultural environments affect perceptions of Thai identities and its expression within broader communicative contexts?

Each chapter considers visual practice projects and processes in the context of the key questions.

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1
Contextual art practice framework and development of the research methodology

This chapter presents the research background of myself as a Thai person who has grown up in Thailand and has been socialized within contexts of Thai national identity, especially through education within the national curriculum. My previous practice is referenced as a significant influence on the practice-based research. Theoretical frameworks including aspects of Postmodernism, and historical and political analyses of Thai socio-politics as well as reflection and analysis through my practice inform the contextual methodologies of this research investigation.

Chapter 2
Complexity of Thai Identity (Thainess)

This chapter examines constructs of Thai national identity or Thainess as conveyed through populist and state sponsored narratives, which aim to produce unifying stereotypes and emblems that gloss over contemporary realities and complexities. These official narratives are contrasted with the work of three significant contemporary Thai art practitioners.

Chapter 3
Three exhibitions

The purpose of this chapter is the investigation and analysis of three exhibitions. The first of these is 'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism', with particular focus on my artwork *Red Man Swimming (re-presentation)*, 2012 Bangkok. The second is 'The Hua Krathi Project', 2013 Melbourne, and the third is 'Chaos: Yesterday and Today', 2014 Melbourne. This analysis presents the art practice in its developmental stages and in the exhibiting contexts and outlines their benefits to this practice-based research.

Chapter 4
Emptiness of identities

Different geographical and cultural environments offer new ways of thinking and relating to one's own cultural origins. In this chapter I reflect on experiences arising from living in the Australian city of Melbourne and how this has enabled me to think about my own identity as a Thai person and about Thai identity more broadly. It is here that I reflect on relationships

between people and environments and on how these reflections have prompted a series of photographs focusing on objects that serve as metaphors for questions of identity and fragmentation.

Chapter 5
Narratives of Nation and Individual Identity

In addressing issues pertaining to the hybridization of Thai identity constructs, the research questions how a unified Thai identity can be represented in terms of multiple identity constructs. The research highlights how complex identities can be defined as constituting structural and simultaneous identities. It highlights also how this definition can be applied equally to individual and national contexts. These themes help to illuminate two research projects that aim to clarify and expand the meaning of conventional Thai identity.

Chapter 6
Conceptualising: who am I?

This chapter presents an analysis of practice-based projects created to address hybridised Thai identities. The projects explore considerations of Thai identity through experiences of displacement and dislocation. Through comparison with contemporaneous examples of other conceptual practitioners' works I consider to what extent such modes are capable of addressing issues of identity construction.

Chapter 7
Politics of Identity

This research is undertaken through visual art investigations that draw on and cross-reference two different phenomena. The first concerns historical events within Thailand between 2005 and 2010, being conflicts between the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). The second point of reference concerns individual experiences of identity within Thailand contemplated from the critical distance of Australia. The question as to how distance and cultural environments affect perceptions of Thai identity and its expression within broader communicative contexts obtains greater significance in this phase of my research. In particular, through shifting focus to my individual identity as a Thai person in Australia I was able to consider the problem of identity from a fresh perspective. Two research projects, 'The Untitled Place' and 'The Politic of Identity' were created to explore this issue.

Chapter 8
The exhibition 'Who are we?'

This chapter critically analyses the 'Who Are We?' exhibition, presented at Dark Horse Experiment, Melbourne, from 13 to 28 February 2015. As a significant milestone in this practice-based research, the exhibition presented each of the research projects in a single gallery space. This enabled me to investigate associations between each cross-disciplinary outcome, and to examine the developmental stages of the works and to consider future possibilities within my practice.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

This practice-led PhD research focuses on the inseparable relationship between my visual art practice and my understanding of social identity within the Thai context. In the process, this research contributes to a body of imagery unique to Thai cultural experience and adds to a representation of contributions on its understanding, within a national and global context. Specifically, for this research I examine the effect of geographical and political environments on what I identify as the plurality and hybridity of Thai identities. This research is undertaken through visual and creative investigations into historical frameworks within Thailand itself and individual experiences of identity experienced within Thailand and from the critically distant vantage point of Australia.

Chapter 1
Contextual art practice framework and development of the research methodology

This chapter presents the research background of myself as a Thai person who has grown up in Thailand and has been socialized within contexts of Thai national identity, especially through education within the national curriculum. My previous practice is referenced as a significant influence on the practice-based research. Theoretical frameworks including aspects of Postmodernism, and historical and political analyses of Thai socio-politics as well as reflection and analysis though my practice are the contextual methodologies of this research's investigation.

Growing up in Bangkok, I have witnessed many changes in the city that go well beyond its urban landscape. For many Thai people, and here I can include myself, Bangkok can be considered as representative of the whole country's identity, because it is here that the national traditions are prominently represented, such as the monarchy and Buddhist sanga. At the same time Thailand's future is being constructed in this centre. According to Gaweewong (2011, p.1), "Bangkok is not just the centre or capital of Thailand but the country in itself." But Bangkok is not only the capital and is not only the centre of Thai government; it is the centre of modernity in the country. Over the past 10 years, Bangkok has become a melting pot of cultures, beliefs and identities. This experience sets the backdrop for my growing interest in the nature of Thai identity. Further still, reflection on my earlier art practice in Thailand led me to formulate the research methodology adopted in my PhD practice-led research.

The city's transformation has predictably engendered a string of social issues in various scales from identity negotiation to problems of an everyday nature. Where I address social issues in my artworks, I always incorporate my own experiences in them. For example, I discuss growing concerns over the heavy traffic in Bangkok. For me this is personally significant because I used to take a bus everyday and spent at least five hours a day stuck in the traffic with nothing to do. My frustration inspired me to create a sculpture that resembles an over-sized bag. The bag is a representation of a private space, which people can carry with them everywhere they go, staying inside it during a long period of time when they use public transportation in Bangkok. The piece is installed in a bus to create a contrast between private and public space. Here I incorporate myself into my art practice in both conceptual and physical frameworks.

Red Man Swimming, 1999 is another project that I immersed myself into as a performative practice. Through this piece, which examines environmental issues, I have created a padded red suit, which I wore before submerging myself into the Chao Phraya River, the main river of Thailand. Theatreworks (2004), in Singapore, *"...'Red Man Swimming'* is part performance and part documentary and refers both to the particular importance placed on water by Bangkok residents (a city that boasts its own water festival) and to the impending crisis of global water shortages". Through the performing

experience I realized that it is important to have direct experience about the subject of my investigation. This work is important as an early inspiration for it investigates a social context in my visual practices, and it is a part of the development of my research methodology, which is discussed later[1].

These previous art making processes have greatly influenced how I think and create artworks, for they inform the methodology within my doctoral research. The persistence of these methodologies suggests that self-reflection and the documentation of my art practices are integral to my process of investigation. There are key principles that I apply to the process of making art including a consideration of context, and my subjective experiences of those environments that are relevant to the production and presentation of my work. By creating several projects outside of art studios or art galleries I have a vision that art should not only reside in a gallery or a museum. In fact, art should be placed somewhere that allows the piece to interact with the surroundings beyond the conventional aesthetic. Indeed, the precise staging of an artwork in an unconventional space may constitute a critically distinct aesthetic, and in so doing may convey an explorative enquiry within the social context. As a result, I visualize art practices that relate to social contexts.

However, while social context is important where the development of art projects is concerned, I am equally preoccupied by the marriage of form and content and how these elements conspire to convey a message. Over time I have learnt that the best way to approach art research is to imagine myself 'merging' with the artwork, for this enables me to create a connection with my artworks that is personal, subjective and emotive. Consequently, the art that I create not only conveys my thoughts, but also my personal experiences and intuitions.

The last factor of importance where my practice is concerned is with the context of places. Much of my inspiration is drawn from personal experience as well social contexts. It is here that problems of urbanization and political conflicts in my country become the more interesting subjects in my practices. I notice for instance how environments and social contexts help shape my body of works and make an impact on my art practice as a whole. As my artwork starts to shift from the influence of the physical environment to the social context, this leads me to wonder about my own identity in the Thai context.

Drawing on the aforementioned methodology this practice-based research aims to investigate Thai identities through multidisciplinary practices in a variety of medias and conceptual frameworks. Such an approach enables me to address issues of identity as a layered and at times hybridised subject while simultaneously constructing subjective reflections on the complexity of Thai society.

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[1] See Chapter 3

Concepts are central to my practice, as is selecting the appropriate media to convey those interests. Conceptual frameworks have become a pervasive language in the contemporary art world. As gallerist Seth Siegelaub states, "The debut of conceptual art is unique because it appeared simultaneously around the world. Prior to this, artistic movements were very localized with all the leaders living in the same city… Conceptual art, which is an inappropriate name, was probably the first artistic movement which did not have a geographic centre." Alberro and Stimson (1999 p.12-13). In Thailand, conceptual art practices possess significant differences from the practices of 'first generation' conceptualists from the 1960s (Josep Kosuth, Sol Lewitt / Art and Language). For me these differences are personally significant because they are analogous also to social shifts that have taken place over the past sixty years, being the specific period of social transformation that influences my investigation into Thai identity following the birth of the modern Thai state in 1930s. In the 1990s, after Thai artist began studying abroad, conceptual art began to be a part of the contemporary Thai art scene.
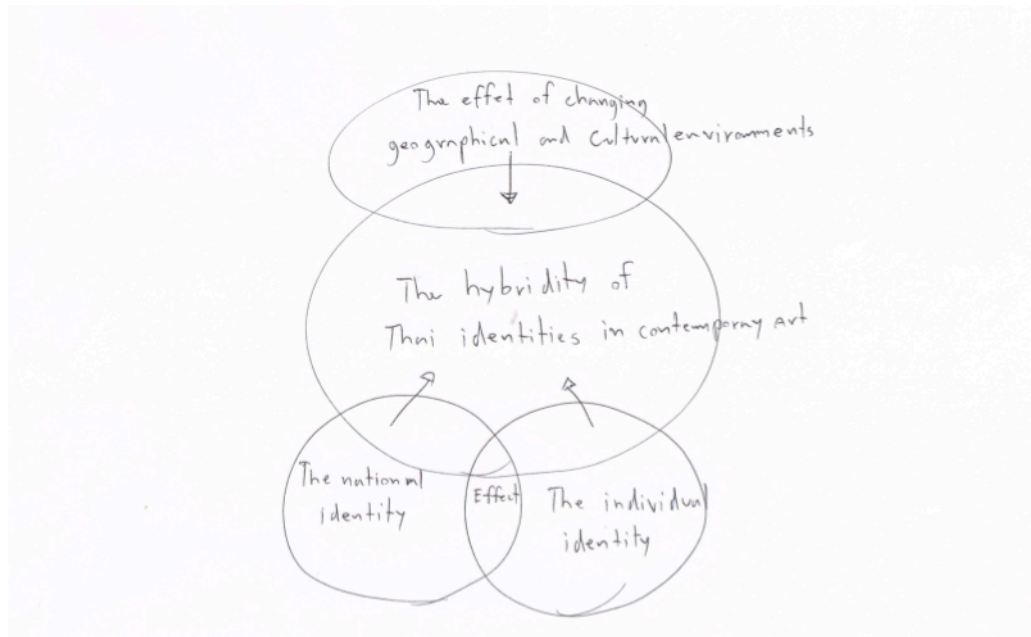
Figure1: The main structure of the research

With Thai identity being my key conceptual interest, my contention is that Thai identity is a hybrid subject that consists of two main elements:

A. National identity generated by historical processes and politically negotiated during the period of modernization since the 1930s until the present by the Thai Government.

B. Individual identity, being a combination of cultures, self, religious beliefs, and languages.

Consequently, this practice-led research investigates themes, concepts and images relating to notions of hybridised Thai identity as well as ways in which changing geographical and cultural environments can shape and affect constructions and experiences of that identity. Towards this end I investigate Thai identities in terms of individual and national contexts, because these two spheres are very often quite different yet inter-related. In contemplating the national aspect, I examine historical processes associated with State sponsored constructs of Thai identity aimed at establishing and strengthening the country through a perceived national identity. I consider also how these processes have been politically negotiated from the post-1930s modernization period until the present. In examining identity as an individual experience, I am especially interested in the effect of other cultures on Thai identity. This is based on my direct experience, and about which I conduct research outside of Thailand. Moreover, selected exhibitions, which I have participated in during this research, constitute important settings for this examination. These are important milestones for my research for they represent public outcomes for my work and enable me to reflect on my work in a formal context.

The exhibition 'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism', presented at Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC), Thailand in 2012 was an important survey exhibition of Thai art from the post World War II period to the present. It aimed to contrast Thai Modernism with Thai contemporary art, thereby revealing significant developments and changes within the region's visual arts traditions over the past seventy years. The exhibition was important to me as a practicing artist for it represented a salient and culturally specific context for my practice, which deals specifically with issues of Thai identity.

While the previous exhibition provided a context for my practice arising from my experience as a Thai artist, it was equally important for me to find a way of negotiating questions arising from my experience as a Thai person residing in Australia. The exhibition 'Hua Krathi Project', which took place in 2013, and was presented at Screen Space and Federation Square showcased the work of fourteen contemporary Thai artists working between Thailand and Australia. While much of the work drew on traditional forms of Thai art, and superficially conveyed an impression of an exotic Thai identity, much of the work addressed issues of identity, social politics and culture in modern day Thailand. Following this project I curated the exhibition 'Chaos: Yesterday and Today (Melbourne)'. This was presented in 2014, at Dark Horse Experiment; it included works by eight artists. The exhibition came in response to a unilateral declaration of martial law issued by the Thai army in 22 May 2014. In light of these events and my subsequent experiences residing outside of the country the works constituted a confrontation with my own sense of identity, which I aimed to investigate through the creation of artworks.

Another component of this research has been a literature review relating to the elements of identity, contemporary art, culture and social issues. I study literature and practices in the field of conceptual art, which have relevance to issues of Thai identity. The literature review has enabled me to develop

conceptual frameworks for addressing 'Thainess' as a structural concept, has enabled me to engage with theorisations of identity, especially in terms of hybrid identity issues, and finally has enabled me to consider 'Thainess' as it relates to globalisation.

Contextual Research Methodology
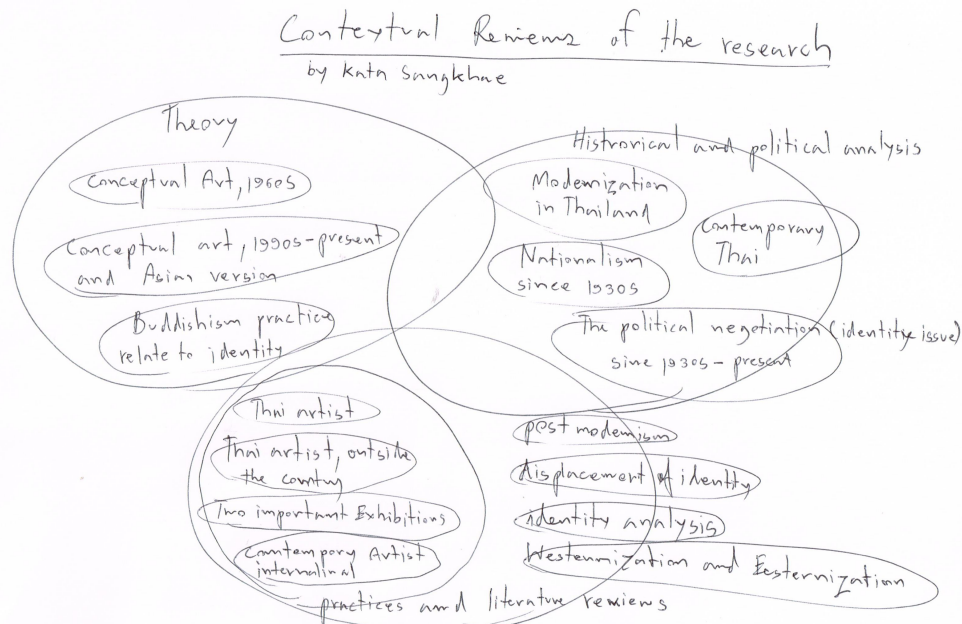
Figure 2: The Contextual Review

The contextual review consists of three main areas:

A. Theoretical framework

Aspects of post-structuralism and post-modernism facilitate insights into Thai society both historically and in terms of contemporary society. Buddhist practice is also appropriated as a personal research method.

B. Historical and Political analysis

The period of Thailand's modernisation from the 1930s onwards provides the historical context for the research. Processes of westernisation and easternisation are investigated as well as aspects of state sponsored ideologies relating to national identity as influenced by key Thai intellectuals.

C. Reflection and analysis though practice

Reflection and analysis through practice is achieved through an investigation into the artistic thoughts and philosophy of Thai art practitioners whose

practices relate to the subject of Thai socio-politics in terms of Thai national and cultural identity as well as through my own practice. The selected Thai contemporary artists are Sutee Kunavichayanont, Manit Swriwanichpoom and Michael Shaowanasai.

The investigation constitutes an examination of three key exhibitions.

A. 'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism'

This exhibition presents a retrospective of Thai art after World War II to present and addresses historical modern art and contemporary art in Thailand. I investigate how Thai art practices disseminate the connotation of Thai identities via the Thai Trends exhibition. Participating in the Thai Trends exhibition not only benefited my visual practice, but created awareness of the discursive relationship between my visual practice and my research. "Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism" was a professional practice exhibition organized by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) the Culture, Sports, and Tourism Department. The exhibition showed how Thai artists since World War II portray features of there own identities through visual art practices. This exhibition can be examined as a case study to contextualize the research and broaden knowledge relating to concepts of identity, which are extremely important in the development of my doctoral research.

B. 'Hua Krathi'

This project presents 14 contemporary Thai artists who are based in Thailand and Australia. Instead of presenting examples of traditional 'exotic' Thai identity, the project address identity negotiations through developmental issues pertaining to socio-politics and culture in Thailand. I participated in the Hua Krathi project, co-curated by Rushdi Anwar, Melanie Jaynie Taylor and Shukit Panmongkol at Screen Space and Federation Square, Melbourne 7-23 March 2013.This project presented 14 contemporary Thai artists based in Thailand and Australia. The exhibition was especially relevant to the Politic of Identity project that I created as a set of mixed media paintings on glass. These mirror paintings focus on a contemporary political subject, being a social conflict issue occurring over the past ten years in Thailand. Six circular mirrors were painted in acrylic and oil colours including small objects such as Thai chess pieces, Thai texts, commercially available adhesive stickers, artificial fruits and miniature animals, which were used as painting and art research materials. These small objects functioned as symbols and key elements within narratives possessing Thai characteristics.

C. 'Chaos: Yesterday and Today'

This exhibition was curated by myself to address and respond to the phenomena of contemporary Thai society's unstable political situation, focusing in particular on issues arising in the wake of the Thai Army declaring

unilateral martial law in 22 May 2014. The project included the development of poems and notes as an extension of my overall practice. The key poetic stanzas are as follows:

Yesterday, Thai Army declared martial law.
Today, a tram was delayed in Melbourne CBD.
Yesterday, It was earthquake somewhere.
Today, it is a coup in Thailand.
Yesterday, there was a big sale in a shopping mall.
Today, there is a demonstration in front of the library.

Visual Art Practice Methodology
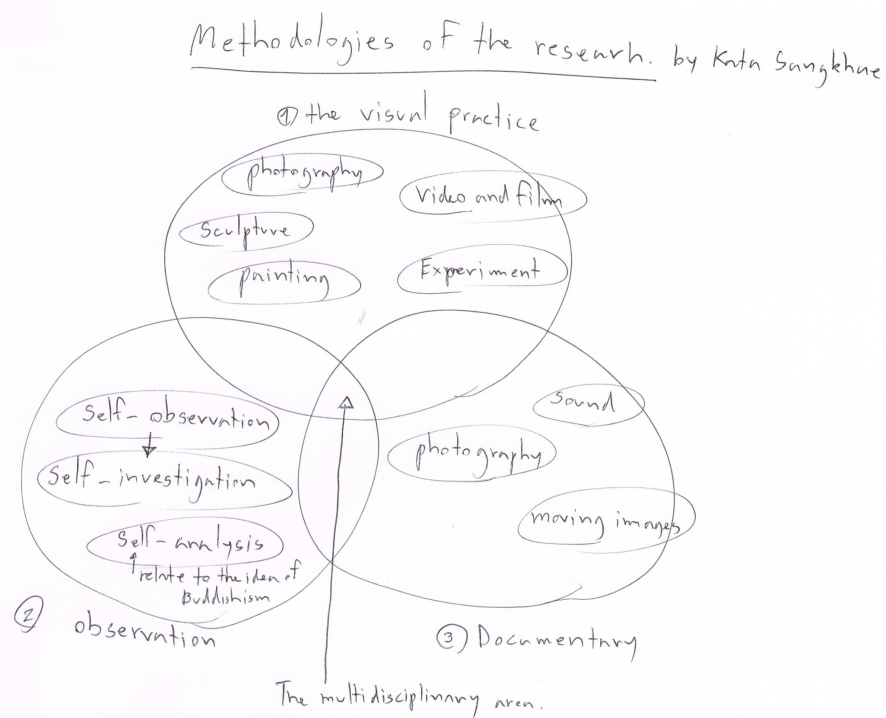
Figure 3: The methodologies of the practice

I am conducting this practice-based research through contextual reviews along with multidisciplinary practices. Through a critical review of the relevant literature and current art practices I identify important relevant issues, broaden my knowledge, improve the methodology and contextualize what is relevant to my practice-based research.

The methodologies of the research consist of three main elements.

A. Visual practice:

Visual art practice constituting multidisciplinary practice in a variety of media, being a wide-ranging approach that is suitable to addressing the complexity of identity as a subject.

B. Observation:

Primarily, observation is the method used to approach the effect of geographical and cultural environments upon my practice. I gain experience by observing an urban life in Melbourne. I gather information including observations about the relationship between people, the environment and the city and other related issues to develop the artworks. It is an important method that enables me to understand new environments, in order to develop visual skills, and to develop a greater degree of self-reflexivity, which is one of the key methods for my early practice-based project. As a Thai person in these new cultural environments, I feel it is important to become familiar with this current situation as an initial process through which I examine the effect of geographical and cultural environments on identities. During this phase of the practice-based research, observation is a principal method to understand new locations and situations, while simultaneously developing a mode of self–observation. Photography plays a role in this process shifting from observation per se to becoming the necessary media to create the body of my research projects.

C. Documentation:

Documentation constitutes the other main methodology required to investigate the research subject. Photography is a tool that provides visual evidence of particular important features and has the capacity to illustrate research outcomes. On progress of my research, photography shifts from documentary process to becoming crucial media to create the body of my visual research project. Moving images (video and film) is another method that enables me to capture the dynamics of visual information. This media can also present complex messages of content and interaction while also facilitating direct communication to audiences via moving images, sound, caption and spatial installation.

This multidisciplinary practice has been conceived as both an artistic methodology and as an academic research framework. It has been conducted through a variety of mediums from sculpture to video performance rather than a single form of media. It evokes what the art theorist Salvo (2005, p.13) suggests when he states that from "…the late 1960s …the object of art, [constituted] a move away from the static and autonomous object towards a practice which at times, literally moved out of studio, in attempt to be more responsive to the world". Through this research I examine and reflect on my

production of art and audience response in order to address issues of displacement and the subsequent transformation and negotiation of identities. The outcome of the research is the knowledge gained through practice and exhibiting. This further enables understanding of the ways in which identity is negotiated and transformed, ultimately arriving at an acknowledgement and acceptance of the prospect of a multiple identity.

This framework is enhanced by the development of a research web site, http://www.katasangkhae.com, which features aspects of my doctoral research, while exploring and generating new possibilities for expressing Thai characteristics. New experiences outside my place of origin become significant factors to rethink factors that impact identities and how these factors relate to nationality and individuality. The website also enables me to perceive points of difference that clarify my Thai identity. It is here that I consolidate evidence of my experiences within urban and suburban contexts and upon which I am able to reflect.

Further aspects of the study include visiting and critically appraising museums and galleries, researching travelling and attending local art exhibitions and events. In the process of analysing my previous artworks, I have built my own research website: http://www.katasangkhae.com/research.html. This enables me to communicate my art research to the public and to maintain an archive of my practice.

Chapter 2: Complexity of Thai Identity (Thainess)

This chapter examines constructs of Thai national identity or Thainess as conveyed through populist and state sponsored narratives, which aim to produce unifying stereotypes and emblems that gloss over contemporary realities and complexities. These official narratives are contrasted with the work of three significant contemporary Thai art practitioners.

At present, it is not only western nations that contribute to an aesthetic theory, imagining and practice of contemporary narrative. Indeed, it seems surprising that we must continue to state that all nations are equally equipped to provide reflections on life in the contemporary period. In this context however, contemporary art is a subject of intense interest for present day researchers, and increasingly those interests have expanded beyond the limits of the dominant Western powers. According to the website of the Department of History and Culture Studies, Department for Art History, Freie University, Berlin:

"The concept of "the contemporary" in art and culture has its own history - in paradoxical and sometimes conflicting ways contemporaneity in itself is historical. The historicity of the concept, is not a singular one given the many cultural contexts and places, often entangled and involved in its different constructions: these histories of contemporaneity, and their differences are (in-) formed by specific socio-political conditions and geo-political power structures." (History 2015).

Both the territory and conception of contemporary art is here expanded by taking into account the added impact of globalization. It follows therefore, that understanding and investigating Thai identity as a contemporary phenomenon, and as a socio-political phenomenon in Thailand is both significant as an aspect of this research and capable also of contributing to an understanding of contemporary art in the global arena.

To begin, concepts in post-colonialism, post-structuralism and post-modernism offer insights into Thai society in many ways, both historically and in the contemporary context. In general Thai studies do not usually include post-colonial perspectives because Thailand, unlike many counties in Southeast Asia, was never colonized by western countries. However, post-colonial discourse is still highly significant because in other ways colonialism has impacted Thailand. Equally the principle of "discourse" in post-structuralism has had an influence on post-colonial theory, which we will soon also consider. Discourse analysis is regularly used to define the forms of representation, codes, conventions and traditions of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings. Discourse theory is for instance, very important for examining the relationship between East and West. The well-known cultural theorist Edward Said makes light of this when he states:

"Without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly

understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post—Enlightenment period." (Said 1994, p.299).

While discourse theory aids post-colonial analysis, it also offers a conceptual framework that may be applied to the socio-politics, history, and culture surrounding Thai identity. Consequently, I have used it in my practice-based research. The theory of discourse has informed my appraisal and understanding of Thai national identity. Highlighting the array of problems, impasses and structures illuminated by discourse theory, the French philosopher Michel Foucault suggests:

"discourse is not a transparent and neutral media through which people can get access to truth. Any discourse is restricted by certain power. The network of the relationship of power, through working on the instrument of mass media, permeates every field of human existence such as socio-politics, economy, ideology, ethnic, history, culture, institution and structure of class, sex, emotion and etc." (Foucault, 1980, p.102)

Significantly, Foucault's words reflect aspects of my own experience, whereby one senses just how impossible it is to remove oneself from within a particular dialogue, a particular culture, and specific power relations. This observation suggests also that art practice is a way at least to mediate these factors in light of personal experience.

Remaining with the field of 'deconstruction' I have drawn also on the writings of cultural theorist Jacques Derrida, whose writing suggests additional productive pathways for examining Thai society and identity. According to Derrida's perspective, a signification in linguistics always signifies with an opposition. For example, "existence" is identified with the concept of "non-being". East is denoted because West exists. By this signification process, I investigate Thai identity or Thainess by examining and proposing oppositional forms to conventional modes of Thainess. I arrive at these oppositional forms or propositions by investigating contemporary socio-politics within Thailand along with historical socio-politics and through noting their differences to prevailing Thai stereotypes.

At the same time I conducted practices-based research outside of Thailand, thus arriving at new ways of thinking around Thai identity. Drawing on deconstruction theory, I recognize that personal identity cannot exist independently from society as a whole. Autonomous constructs such as "I think therefore I am" as articulated by Rene Descartes (1596-1650) appear insubstantial in the light of deconstruction theory. Something else takes its place, which is intimately linked to broader cultural contexts and relations.

The third element of post-modernism that is relevant to my research is Orientalism. Conventionally speaking Orientalism enabled a critique of

Western cultural biases. However cultural biases are by no means the sole preserve of Western nations. Thailand too has its own version of cultural imperialism. For example, clear biases manifested in the foreign policies of late 19th Century King Rama 3 (1824 – 1851), ruler of Siam (Thailand). Intellectual elites during this period espoused views that some minorities or ethnic groups were uncivilized, (Poncharoen 2012). Correspondingly, Nidhi Eoseewong provides evidence that King Rama 4 (known in western counties as King Mongkut ,1851-1868) was of the opinion that the Khmer Kingdom, despite having established their great capital Angor Wat, (Midnightuniversity 2001), was inferior to Siamese culture. What is illustrated here is that Siamese elitism conforms to a model of colonialism first conceived as a critique of Western thinking and discourse.

However, cultural superiority is but one facet of Thai culture and history. Indeed, the country has passed through many central ideologies and cultural influences emanating from both Eastern and Western quarters. While this mix of influences has contributed to the complexity of Thai culture and identity today, it has also set in train many contradictions and tensions, which orientalist theory is not always well-equipped to illuminate. In his key text 'Orientalism' Edward Said states:

"I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either. We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other." (Said 2000, p71).

Said (2003) reveals that the East (the Orient) as an identity does not exist. It was constructed from a European perspective in order to obtain the exotic sense of the East. Consequently, the Orientalist identity was created by ignoring the fact of diversity and regionalism, not to mention the internal contradictions of any one region. In Said's perspective, the representation of Eastern identity is not the real reflection of the Eastern identity, but is an identity constructed by Western interests.

In light of Said's orientalist critique, and bearing in mind that East/West constructs are very hard to pin down in a concrete sense, the situation with modern day Thailand becomes even more complex when we consider the extent to which Western art practices and practitioners were employed to usher in the modern nation state of Thailand during the twilight period of the Siamese kingdom.

While Western nations pursued their colonial ambitions in Southeast Asia, Thailand, which eluded colonisation, made rapid adaptations to modernity by incorporating concepts imported from European nation states. As a result, the country was not colonized, but Western culture and Western concepts were significant influences. In this period, Western art somewhat ironically, was used as a vehicle to create a civilization that resisted Western colonization, notably during 1851-1910.

As Narawan Pathomvat, who wrote 'A Cartography of the 'other': Social History and the Production of Space of 'Other' in Modern and Contemporary Art in Thailand' states:

"Art was to become a very important tool in this grand project. Western artists and architects were imported to Thailand to construct and decorate many royal and state buildings, to paint and sculpt the royal portraits, and to instruct Siamese artists." (Pathomvat 2012).

Curiously for a country with such a strong sense of national identity, the ideology underpinning contemporary art originally came from the West. It is not a concept that has a linear art history in Thailand. Art in the Western sense was initiated in Thailand in the early 1900s. While this situation established a new cultural dynamic, indeed one of particular complexity and contradiction, in linguistic terms it was almost impossible to process. In the seminar 'Philosophy of Art History in Asia', 2001, Nidhi Eoseewong states that the word "art" had no equivalent in the Thai language. In modern Thai the word " ศิปปะ (Sippa) or " ศิลปะ (Silapa)" is assumed to mean "art"; however, it actually means "beauty". The word "art" as it now appears in Thai (ศิลปะ ,Silapa) initially acquired that meaning in the reign of King Rama 6 (1910-1925), the early period of a political transformation between absolute monarch and democracy, (Midnightuniversity 2001).

According to Eoseewong's assertion, the socio-politics of Thailand during the 1930s is significant. It is not only the time that the country starts to transform politically, but it is also the period in which art and politics are asserted as important vehicles for Thai national identity. In my research practice, the socio-politics of this period are a key that I use to investigate Thai identity. Several projects that were created to explore national identity politics are inspired by this historical ideology. For example, the Thai national anthem was used as a key subject because the concept and idealistic meaning of Thai national identity in the anthem has been a permanent fixture in the national consciousness ever since it was instituted in the politically transformative period of the 1930s.

During the political transformations in the 1920s and 1930s, the 'West' as a concept became a solid influence in both cultural and political spheres, embraced especially by a new generation of Thai elites after returning from their studies in Europe. A Western democracy ideology coupled with awareness of the global economic breakdown of the period led to the Siam

Coup of 1932, an event that changed the country from an absolute monarchy to a democracy with a parliamentary system. From this moment Western ideology persisted as an influence on constructions of Thai national identity and the promotion of nationalism more broadly. Pathomvat (2012) asserts that:

"Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram [and] *Director-General of Department of Fine Art, Luang Wichtwatakan[2], and the director of School of Fine Art, an Italian, Corrado Feroci[3] - were all fascinated by Mussolini's use of art as propaganda and thus created a version of bureaucratic, institutionalized art that promoted mass national consciousness, not unlike that of Italy in the 1930s."*

Pathomvat (2012) further indicates in this period the function of art shifted from offering service to the kingdom to serving the state, effectively promoting nationalism. Art shifted its allegiance from promoting veneration of the monarchy to encouraging mass nationalism. Therefore, the official centric identity was created to transform a diverse local identity to become a single identical Thai national identity.

Artistically speaking the national ideology of the 1930s is of particular interest to me because my research focuses on the conditions under national identity since its formulation by historical processes in that time. To this day competing forces within Thailand continue to contest the national identity. National identity has become a complicated issue, made all the more so by political instability throughout the country. Further still Thai national identity was initially constructed by military elites. Consequently military culture is another factor that effects Thai identity constructs both historically and in the current period. The military dimensions of Thai identity is subsequently investigated in the 'Helmet' project, which explores how martial culture is an integral part of Thai identity.

Ultimately, and with regard to this research, understanding 'Thainess' or Thai identity in terms of the country's post-1930s national ideology is significant for it constitutes the beginning of a democratic idea, albeit one with nationalist overtones. Thai national ideologies before and after 1932 are equally important because appreciation of these factors aid understanding of Thainess both historically and in the current period.

For instance, as can we see in cultural theorist Saichon Sattayanurak's study concerning Thainess, which is encapsulated in the article 'The Construction of Mainstream Thought on 'Thainess' and the 'Truth' Constructed by 'Thainess', 2013, the development of identity constructs can, in the national sense, be

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[3] Corrado Feroci (1892-1962), the father of modern Thai art, from Florence: sculptor, designer, teacher, dean, art critic and writer. http://asianitinerary.com/corrado-feroci-father-of-thai-modern-art

traced to the writings of key intellectuals operating between 1892 and 1992. While this constitutes a distinct intellectual lineage, one moreover that has been highly influential within Thai thought, these scholars have nonetheless conformed to exceedingly conservative parameters where Thai identity is concerned. Drawing on Sattayanurak's study we outline the following prominent contributors:

Thainess: Ideological constructs by four significant intellectuals operating prior to 1932

A. King Rama 4 (1851-1868, the regime) conceived of Thainess as being synonymous with the monarchy and at the center of this relationship stood the King. In his view both the royal institution and also the civil service played a significant role in regulating Thainess and maintaining the royal prerogative. Furthermore, he conferred honorary titles upon the civil servants through royal ceremonies, which depending on their social class, determined their position within the hierarchy. Rama 4 used this form of Thainess to promote Siam as a civilized absolute monarchy state and a part of the civilized world.

B. King Rama 6 (1910-1925, the regime) was the first Siamese king to grapple with the implications of an emerging nation state ideology. To this he responded by merging Thainess with Thai national identity as a modern concept. His approach was to first emphasis Thai culture as a classical culture, with roots leading back to the Sukothai and Auyutthaya periods. This history was, he emphasised, intimately linked with the superior religion of Buddhism and the Buddha's royal ancestry. However, these elements were also combined by him with modern European concepts regarding the nation state. Sattayanurak (2013) point out that:

"He defined 'Thai nation' as a nation that comprises people whose livelihood was intricately linked with Thai culture and who were loyal to the heart of "Thainess," which consists of the royal institution and Buddhism."

The definition of 'Thai nation' and 'Thainess' during the regime of King Rama 6 was designed to respond to internal political conflicts among many high-ranking aristocrats, and to reaffirm the power structure of absolute monarchy.

C. Prince Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot (1859 -1921) was the person who transformed the concepts of 'Thai nation' and 'Thainess' as constructed by King Rama 6 Buddhist-based philosophy into a new ideology of 'nation, religion, and king'.

"This ideology was widely known among monks, most of whom came from lower-class populace both in the cities and the countryside. Many Buddhist texts written by Prince Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot became part of the monastic curriculum up to the present day." (Sattayanurak 2013).

According to Sattayanurak's assertion, Thai national identity was promulgated primarily through the educational institutions such as schools. This ideology still contains the symbolic elements of Thai nationality even in the present day. For example, it is here that we see the symbolic articulation of the three colours used in the Thai national flag. Inspired by the French tricolour, red is the colour of nation, white is for religion, and blue is the colour of the king.

D. Prince Damrong Rajanubhap (1862-1943)**,** stands apart in his vision of Thai identity for his emphasis rests on three qualities inspired by the tenets of Buddhism - Independence, Absence of spite and Wisdom in reconciliation. He conceived of these qualities as the basis on which to blend all of Thailand's ethnic groups within one unified culture. At the same time he avoided constructing a Thai identity along nationalist lines. Consequently, "Thai-style governance" coalesced as the compromise concept in response to public demands for a change in the country's absolute monarchy system to a constitutional monarchy.

Thainess ideology after 1932

After the Siam 1932 revolution, the country changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy or democracy. Despite the transition the new generation of military and political elites maintained their interest in and control over constructions of Thai identity. Central to their ideology were three key concepts: nation, religion and king. However, even as these themes were maintained, they were adapted to respond to political changes of that time.

A. Luang Wichitwathakan (1898-1962) was one intellectual who played an important role in the construction of Thainess after the 1932 revolution. Notably for Wichitwathakan, art practice became a cultural tool to construct Thai identity. Sattayanurak (2013) states that:

"Toward the end of the 1930s, Luang Wichitwathakan, who was Director General of the Fine Arts Department at the time, promoted "Thainess" in terms of Thai arts that had been prosperous from the ancient times, to instil Thais' pride in their civilized nation. This effort followed in the footsteps of intellectuals under absolute monarchy".

After World War II however, the concept of Thainess was adapted to support anti-communist forces. This arose because Thailand, during this period, was the recipient of support from the USA; consequently, the country became aligned with US interests during the Cold War. Under this regime the tripartite concept of "nation, religion and king" became a conceptual tool to convey the idea of 'protecting the country'.

"the concept of "Thainess" during this period was concentrated on the "Thainess" that would assist the state in its anti-communist efforts, which

meant "Thai nation, Buddhism and kingship". The government widely broadcasted the idea that if Thailand became communist, "nation, religion, and kingship would be utterly destroyed; therefore, those who loved and treasured "Thainess" should fight communism to the best of their abilities." (Sattayanurak 2013).

B. M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (1911-1995). From the 1950s onward M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (1911-1995) played a pivotal role in enshrining the concept of absolute monarchy as being indistinguishable from Thainess itself. His definition of Thainess was conceived with the purpose of balancing power relationships between the forces of Liberalism and Socialism, precisely because both ideologies were, after the 1932 revolution, politically antagonistic to one another, the impact of which was deeply felt in Thai society.

However, the centrist ambitions of Pramoj were not the only forces at play in the 1950s. During this period M.R. Kukrit was successful in stimulating the ideals of Royalism. He promoted the kingship as an institution that was the centre of the nation and the kingship as he perceived it was inseparable from Buddhist religion and philosophy.

"He drew a close link between Buddhism and 'kingship' and 'nation', by showing that Buddhism was a source of ethics that allows the 'king' to be a righteous ruler, and allows Thais who relate to each other in a 'know-thy-place' manner to co-exist peacefully without exploiting each other." (Sattayanurak 2013).

Thainess as defined by M.R. Kukrit was a strong influence in Thai society because it provided an ideological base for the military government that was supported by the political situation of The Cold War. His concept of Thai identity to promote absolute monarchy was also promulgated through diverse forms of mass media.

In summary, therefore, in the absolute monarchy system operating prior to 1932, the concept of Thainess that was formalised by the aforementioned four intellectuals, who, while not being wholly aligned in their aspirations shared the common concept of Thai identity as forming around nation, religion, and king. This ideology transitioned thorough the various phases of Thai socio-politics without loosing its salient features. Although the country had changed from absolute monarchy to democracy after 1932, Thai national identity, which was initially constructed by Prince Patriarch Wachirayanwarorot, had been adapted by successive thinkers to respond to the political changes in Thai society.

This symbolic conceptualisation of Thai identity persists as a mainstream concept in Thailand today, mainly because it is promulgated through the Thai educational institutions, a system moreover that was constructed by the same

self-same individuals who were responsible for conceptualising Thai identity as a national discourse.

These early formulations of Thai identity are historically relevant; however, they are equally important to this research because of their influence on me as a student within the Thai educational system and my later need to reconsider their impact on me as a Thai artist. I personally absorbed this national ideology though my educational background in Thailand, noting also how many of my peers perceived it to be the one and only truth about the nation. For me however, great emphasis was placed on the concept of "nation" because it was the concept that seemed to embody most strongly the idea of Thai identity.

In terms of religion, I recognise and periodically reflect upon my exposure to and absorption in Buddhist philosophy, which has been personally significant. For example, emptiness, simplicity and space, constitute a mode of Buddhist inspired observation in my early research projects.

Finally, the symbol of the "king" is not directly investigated in my practice-based research. For Thai people the monarchy is a very sensitive issue, and one moreover that is embroiled in controversial legal realities. As a legal concept, Lèse majesté, or the crime of vilifying the dignity of the ruling head of state, was drafted into Thailand's legislation in 1908 and subsequently carried over into the 1932 constitution. It contains the clause "The king shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the king to any sort of accusation or action"[4]. The Thai Criminal Code, Section 112 further states "Whoever defames, insults or threatens the king, queen, heir-apparent, or regent shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years"[5] .In Thailand the legislation is periodically enforced, making open dialogue about the Monarchy very challenging indeed.

But where these early constructs of Thai identity are important in terms of my art practice, I am equally concerned with issues of identity arising from recent social conflicts. These pertain to contemporary socio-politics emanating from the political struggles of the contemporary period, for these have struck at the heart of the Thai people's collective identity and their confidence as a people. Confronted with these issues my art practice has become a way of asserting my identity as a Thai person. For instance, in my research the concept of a constructed Thai national identity is explored, even as it takes shape around forms and images that are not readily identifiable as Thai. Indeed, working in environments outside of Thailand has enabled me to expand the possibility of Thainess.

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[4] Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007 from
http://www.asianlii.org/th/legis/const/2007/1.html#C02%29

[5] Criminal Code, Section 112 from http://www.thailaws.com/law/t_laws/tlaw50001.pdf.

Thai identity is indeed enmeshed with the socio-politics of the nation. For example, drawing on the work of Antoni Gramsci, Pathomvat (2012) suggests that:

"a culturally hybrid country such as Thailand falls comfortably into this cultural hegemony. From birth to death, every Thai has been inculcated into just such an ideology - devotion to the triad of Nation, Religion (Buddhism), and Monarchy (The King)" (Pathomvat 2012).

Similarly, Sujit Wongthes suuports analysis that there is an unseparated relationship between the discursive currents of Thai cultural identity and national ideology at an official level. In his article, 'Thainess in Nationalism' Wongthes (2013) draws on the work of Nidhi Eoseewong, in which Thainess is shown in its perennial relationship to nationalist ideology. However, Wongthes also notes that these constructions of Thainess are the theories of a relatively elite group operating at the upper echelons of Thai society. This is not a discourse that has evolved from the 'man in the street', the broad base of the Thai population. Rather Thainess as a discourse constitutes a very narrow conceptualisation of Thai identity. Wongthes concludes moreover that there are two persistent themes within Thainess, being, a national leader and a national culture, however both are constructed by either the reigning monarch or the government.

According to Pathomvat and Wongthes' statements, Thai national leaders are ubiquitously perceived as the individuals who construct and direct the national culture. In terms of the fine arts it is apparent that these leaders make use of artists and art practices to convey the ideology of their regimes. Furthermore, with the advance of Western colonization in Southeast Asia, notably from the mid-nineteenth century, art in Thailand became an important tool to construct national identity. Pathomvat (2012) states that between 1890 to 1930 art exhibitions and projects became a part of Siam's (Thailand's) national project to represent modernity and civilization. After 1932, art practices continued as one of the methods that Thai governors use to construct Thai identity and to promote nationalism.

In Thailand therefore Nationalism persists as an important concept because it informs many ideologies within Thai society, shifting however in emphasis depending on political and economic factors. Nationalism refers to a political ideology with a 200-year history. It is associated with collective identity wherein people share unique qualities that enable a construction of social characteristics. In contrast the term 'nation', in the Thai context, has come to the fore as a consequence of modernism and the process of modernization; as a term it suggests homogeneity throughout the identity of the people.

In general, the concept of nationalism as a political tool operates in the following manner.

a. To create and sustain unity within the country.

b. To create a national identity in order to prevent the threat from other countries. In the past, the Thai government also created an official identity to protect the country from Western colonization.

c. To control the expansion of foreigners living in the country.

d. To protect national interests such as the economy.

While authoritarian figures and a powerful intelligentsia have been highly influential in terms of Thai identity, their tendency has been to rely upon single stereotypes that reflect government interests and institutions. In light of this legacy, my practice-based research uses various media to depict the complexity of Thai identity through visual investigations. The aim is to examine the historical frameworks used by successive Thai governments to promote national identity through various symbolic forms such as the national anthem, monuments and public media.

While Thai national identity has evolved into a relatively conventional model, the defining features of this classical ideology – nation, religion, king – are hardly broad enough to create appropriate socio-space for contemporary Thais. It is in light of this observation that I am attracted to working in a variety of artistic media, precisely because it offers the possibility of broadening representations of identity through the particularities of the different media. In particular, I aim to deconstruct the symbolic elements of Thai national identity, and in so doing investigate contemporary Thailand's political ideologies, along with an individual identity analysis.

In creating new representations of Thai identity it may be possible that these images help to recontextualize and indeed contribute to understanding of the complex nature of Thai identity, not as a singular entity but one with multiple and at times conflicting characteristics. This I feel is especially important in the context of persistent political instability and the associated conflicts between tradition and modernity, for how can we hope to have stability if we do not even have a realistic image of who we are as a people.

Clearly it is through an interrogation of identity that we arrive at self-understanding. As a Thai person, the investigation of Thai identity in this practice-based research is for me interchangeable with my self-analysis. That is why this research focuses on Thai identity in both the national context and at an individual level.

It is at this point however that we must consider the extent to which Thai identity constructs are reflective of the national makeup. Are all Thai's the same? Broadly speaking almost all Thai people have an identical language and religion, though this is by no means universal. LePoer(1987) draws attention to cultural and ethnic differences within Thailand, factors moreover that are socially and politically significant. According to LePoer:

"Although the population was relatively homogeneous in the 1980s--an estimated 85 percent or more spoke a language of the Tai family and shared other cultural features, such as adherence to Theravada Buddhism-- regionalism and ethnic differences were socially and politically significant. Moreover, these differences affected the access of specific groups and regions to economic and other resources, which in turn heightened ethnic or regional consciousness "(LePoer 1987).

In terms of regional Thailand, LePoer(1987) states that one of the primary facts underpinning regional and ethnic relations is a political dominance of the Central Thai. She explains that Central Thai is defined as people who consider central Thailand their birthplace or the Central Thai (Standard Thai) dialect their first language. The other main regional and ethnic groups are Northern, North-Eastern and Southern Thai. They are generally defined by a place of birth and/or their dialects. Generally, the culture of the Central Thais is considered to represent the majority of Thais because of a historical fact, wherein, since Bangkok becomes the capital city of Siam (Thailand) in 1782, the Central Thai have been politically dominant.

LePoer (1987) points out that one of the sociological problems arising from this situation is that the Thai government's policy promotes assimilation but does not encourage the effective collection of statistics on Thai ethnicity. There are Government statistics on tribal minorities, refugees and aliens but sometimes the veracity of these facts are challenged by both scholars and the groups in question. She states that, in the 1980s, minority groups were being afforded equal rights, but this did not mean they could expect cultural incorporation within official identity paradigms. National identity at this level remained dominated by the culture of the Central Thais.

According to LePoer: *"In the past, the government took the position that all Tai[6] people should be accorded all the rights, privileges, and opportunities that went with being a citizen. In the 1980s, members of non-Tai minority groups were being afforded similar rights, and efforts were being made to incorporate them into the Ekkalak Thai[7]."* (LePoer 1987).

The domination of *Ekkalak Thai*, or Thai identity by the Central Thais may for some have gone unchallenged. However, as much as internal challenges from ethnic minorities were being thwarted, a far greater challenge was to come from without, from the overarching realities of globalisation.

In an important interview in *Dynamics of Thai Identity "Nation Religion King"* Nidhi Eoseewong states that globalization may well be a contributing factor to a change in the identity of the Thai people. He states that the change caused by socio-economic developments in Thailand in the past 30-40 years has

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[6] 'Tai' is the Thai word for 'Thai'.
[7] The Thai phrase 'Ekkalak Thai' can be translated as 'Thai identity'.

profoundly affected how people identify themselves with one or more aspects of Thainess (Siamintelligence 2012).

He stresses in particular that people's identity is not a naturally occurring phenomena, but rather is socially constructed. When people have enough political power, they do not merely create their own identity, they also determine other people's identity. This is because every ethnic group comprises parts of the identity negotiation, as is the case in Thai society. Eoseewong provides an example in which minority groups were able to construct their own identity without accepting the identity that authorities provide. In the past, the tribal groups who live in Northern Thailand were considered to be a main cause of environmental problems because they cut down forests to make their farms. However, we can now site their efforts to build a new identity as unique people in the country. Through their communicative efforts they have conferred a new status upon themselves as a community that protects the forest because they live in close proximity with it; they are custodians of the land (Siamintelligence 2012).

This example shows that Thai identity is a social construction. Furthermore, it is a dynamic process in which all groups and individuals are part. Yet even though I am aware that different ethnic groups in Thailand have their own cultural identities, this research is squarely fixed on Thai national identity in a broader sense. Even where this may be problematic for some, it remains the central subject in all its complexities. To a certain extent one might say I embody this subject and express it through my work. The implications of this statement really concern the extent to which one's individual experience, or rather one's subjective experience is a part of the historical process. Indeed, the possibility that one's own experience is historically valid is affirmed in the writing of post-colonial theorist Edward Said, who states:

"All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation… for interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place." (Said 1981, p154-156).

Historically speaking my own epoch really begins in the late 1960s, during which time the conventional expression of Thainess was overwhelmingly challenged by the social transformations of the era. The rapid growth of capitalism and an expansion of globalization connected different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds in one political economy. It is at this time that Thai identity had little to offer in terms of adapting to these changes. Reflecting on these issues Sattayanurak (2008) emphasizes that *"The accepted definition of "Thainess" is also too narrow to help Thais understand the complexities and diverse changes in their society, especially the*

economic, social, political and cultural problems which have occurred since the late 1960s."

In similar tones Eoseewong stresses that Thai identity had been constructed since before and after 1930 by the intellectuals and elites in ways that did not match the realities of modern-day Thais. Eoseewong states *"In Thailand, we also created an identity for ourselves since a long time ago. At some period of time, we identify that we are Buddhist, but with the social change today, the meaning of people's identity is not the same as it was created in King Rama 5's regime[8]. I do not think it works that way. People do not think they are Thai as Thainess in King Rama 5's regime."* (Siamintelligence 2012).

The above statements certainly resonate with my direct experiences and background. For me the continual reiteration of and ideological reliance upon Thai national identity discourse in the socio-political sphere is in fact one of the key contributing causes to the nation's problems. It is one of the reasons that Thailand has been politically unstable for so many years, even up until the present.

In Thailand the ramifications of the country's prolonged political instability are not only political, for the protracted nature of this uncertainty has impacted social conditions and relations throughout the country. In responding to this situation however, my aim is not to build a political propaganda in the name of art. Rather my ambition is to explore my own identity as a Thai person and to create artistic space with a view to gaining greater understanding of Thai identity in the contemporary era. This ambition is not entirely unique, in so far as understanding Thai identity and indeed expanding its definition is something that is shared by many Thai citizens. For example, according to Sattayanurak (2008)

"This is the Thai identity crisis which every faction of Thai society must unravel together and as quickly as possible, by finding a way to re-define "Thainess" so that it is broad enough to give each member of every group his or her own "space" in Thai political society on an equal basis, and allow them to live a dignified life as befits every human being." (Sattayanurak 2008)

For me one way of expanding representations of Thai identity is to draw on artistic forms that do not emanate from within the national context, but rather from sources that interest me individually. For example, one of my research projects draws inspiration from a well-known conceptual art project dating to the 1960s 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' 1968, by American artist Sol Lewitt. In this project Sol Lewitt wrote out 35 sentences about conceptual art, such as 'conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists'. The project established his reputation as an artist whose utmost concern was the concept rather than the form where art was concerned. I found this to be inspiring, partly because 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' is formally unlike anything in

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[8] *Chulalongkorn the Great (1853-1910)*

Thai culture, but also because of its conceptual commitment to ideas without form, which ironically is deeply resonant with my understanding of Thai Buddhism, which places great emphasis on mind and formlessness. Therefore, my project, 'Sentences on My Art', 2012 was created as a means of exploring who I am as a Thai person and as a way of experimenting with how to represent Thai identity through a Western conceptual platform.

'Sentences on My Art' was created during a process of self-examination with particular emphasis on my cultural background as a Thai person. The 'Sentences on My Art' manuscript includes fifteen answers in response to the question 'who am I?' The answers include such statements as 'I am an artist', 'I am a conceptual artist', and 'I am Thai artist'.

Sol Lewitt's manuscript came out of the Conceptual art context of the 1960s and was conceived as a means of asking who we are in the contemporary context. Its queries extend to how we conceive of ourselves at different scales and in different positions. However, in adopting this work as a point of reference I remain keen to locate my practice within a national context, especially as my subject is effectively Thai.

Yet attempts at finding context for my work is not entirely straightforward. For example, some of my work is inspired by Buddhist philosophy, but it bears no resemblance whatsoever to the appearance of traditional Thai Buddhist art, so it is hardly an arena in which I can set my practice, not to mention that this is but one theme in my work. Added to this is the general absence of a coherent set of characteristics or styles that one might ascribe to Thai contemporary art. For instance, in a recent article 'Two new museums set to boost contemporary art in Thailand' (2015), the Irish-born art critic and curator Brian Curtin, who is based in Bangkok, is quoted as saying:

[that] *"Thailand doesn't share the post-colonial histories of most countries in Southeast Asia also makes it harder for international audiences to understand or contextualize Thai art, according to the curator. "The 'lack' of a coherent identity for contemporary art in Thailand enables it to be less commodified than its neighbors, and this underlines its relative invisibility on the regional or international art market"* (Panyalimpanun 2015).

While Curtin's observation may be true in a superficial sense, that is, in terms of the external appearance of much contemporary art in Thailand, I see a different picture. In recent years Thailand's complex socio-politics has profoundly impacted the life of Thai people generally and it has also emerged as a key theme within Thai contemporary art. As such, the context for my work that I see as especially significant, is the work of other Thai contemporary artists who address issues of Thai identity arising from the existential problems associated with Thai socio-politics.

The many problems addressed by Thai contemporary artists come in the wake of enormous social shifts within the Asian landscape. While the newly coined term 'the Asian Century' may suggest something optimistic for the region, it also masks a myriad of social problems and inequities. So before we turn our attention to some of the artists in whose work I recognise similar themes and interests to my own, let us briefly consider some of the forces that have contributed to these socially conscious art practices.

In the early 1990s, the social landscape of many Southeast Asian nations changed. This was largely due to economic shifts, to globalization, to new political policies, and to the presence of a growing middle class. These changes gave birth to a new class of urban poor, many of whom were dispossessed farmers, and whose presence in urban centres challenged traditional relationships and authority. Lola Lenzi states in 'Art as Voice: Political Art in Southeast Asia at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century':

"Vocal and active protest was embarked upon in some parts, while in others, change of a more institutional nature was implemented. In 1986, the People Power movement claimed victory in the Philippines, toppling the Marcos dictatorship. Thailand, politically unstable for most of its post-1932 constitutional Monarchy history, saw eruptions of sporadic violence through the 1970s and 1980s", (Lenzi 2011).

Lenzi confirms that recent art practices in Southeast Asia reveal a strong relationship between art and social function. The artists do not only aim to renew the descriptive critiques of the past, but to manifest socio-political realities with conceptually and formally creative methodologies to mirror the complexities of the times. In this I identify my precise ambitions. Lenzi further describes the link between contemporary art and social phenomena in Thailand:

"This challenging of national power structures and their offshoots— institutional corruption, cronyism, authoritarianism, abuse of power, the biases of racial policies, uncontested monolithic systems, and in addition, organised religion and the monarchy in Thailand—, is often coupled with an investigation of evolving personal and cultural identities, quite new in societies where individualism is still suspect. The search for empowerment at a civil society level is never far from the quest for self. These engaged works, neither a reaction against formalism nor political for the sake of it, are the positive response to the faint whiff of freedom permeating Southeast Asia from the 1990s" (Lenzi 2011).

For me, these words carry great resonance, both as a Thai person and also as a Thai artist. But while they are suggestive of something that I perceive as a motivating force within my own practice, they also highlight themes and qualities that I detect in the work of other Thai artists. It is here that we examine the work of three such artists, and with whom I share thematic interests. As we will see their works constitute specific critiques of Thai

nationalism and conservatism, conveyed through the themes of nation, memory and the disputed ownership of history. The three artists in question are Manit Swriwanichpoom, Michael Shaowanasai and Sutee Kunavichayanont.

Three Thai artists

a. Born in 1961, **Manit Swriwanichpoom** is a photographer, a writer, a film director, a conceptual artist, and a social activist. The most well-known series in his practice is the photographic project 'Pink Man', which has been the subject of numerous critical reviews. For instance, when Lenzi (2011) asserts that issues of historiography constitute a key dialogue in contemporary Southeast Asian art, she sites Sriwanichpoom's photographic work 'The Horror in Pink', 2001 as an example. In this C-type photographic print the artist appropriates a controversial historical image, taken by press photographer Neal Ulevich, which documents a violent episode in Thai history dating from 6 October 1973. Into this scene that records a 'lynch-mob' hanging of a Thai student, Sriwanichpoom inserts an image of himself as the 'Pink Man', a character of his own making who always appears in a tailor-made pink suit. In acknowledging Thailand's new obsession with consumerism he appears in the image with an equally pink shopping trolley. The contrast of the violent scene, the lone university student hung by members of an opposing political group, and the figure of the pink businessman is his frivolous attire delivers a socio-political critique, in that a dark moment in the nation's history is contrasted with a symbol of an emerging socio-economy that links Thai people to the ritual of consumerism. The image is a deeply cynical one, yet it is somehow strangely moving for it contrasts the intense and divisive struggles of one generation with the disengaged aspirations of a subsequent generation. Indeed, judging by the age of the Pink Man he may well have been a student when those violent events first occurred.

Through his practice Swriwanichpoom brings to light important features and limitations within Thai identity, notably its failure to reconcile national sentiments and capitalism. His practice visualizes confrontations between traditional structures and the free-market after the 1990s and the consequent disharmony arising within this period. For me, Swriwanichpoom's work is important for it addresses issues that are key to my practice-based research, namely national identity conflicts arising in the current historical era.

b. Born in 1964 **Michael Shaowanasai** is a Thai-American artist who uses several different media including photography, video, film, performance art and installation art. His multidisciplinary practice is emblematic of many Thai artist's working today, especially those who use a multi-disciplinary model to address social phenomena. For my part, I also use several media to create my practice-based research. Clearly however, multidisciplinarity is not unique to Thai practice; rather it constitutes a mode of art practice that has enormous

currency in the globalized era. Therefore, in embracing this approach, Thai artists participate in an aesthetic discourse of the present, a factor that highlights just how much contemporary Thai art is no longer bounded by national traditions and concepts.

For example, one issue that is relatively new to Thai culture, and one that Shaowanasai tackles through contemporary art is the place of homosexuality within Thai society. For Shaowanasai, who is openly gay, this topic is the subject of his project 'Portraits of a Man in Habits' 2003. By presenting himself in the guise of a gay monk, Shaowanasai challenges conventional Thai attitudes, which would normally shy away from such issues. Through these images Shaowanasai questions the precise role of Buddhism as one of the three symbolic icons 'nation, religion, and King', for it brings to light an aspect of the Buddhist sanga or monkhood that has traditionally remained in the shadows. In Thailand homosexuality is perceived as a form of weakness, so homosexuality within Buddhism might be construed by some as symptomatic of an internal crisis within the national religion. Shaowanasai's project exposes this hypocrisy; furthermore it was seen as highly controversial when it was first aired to the Thai public.

"Michael Shaowanasai tested this by photographing himself made up as a Buddhist monk. The result was a heated outcry. Buddhists tried to block the exhibition, and Shaowanasai responded by showing the photograph rolled up. Subsequently he made a photograph of himself as someone who had just left the monkhood." (Photography 2007).

While Shaowanasai tackles homosexuality in religion, and Swriwanichpoom critiques socio-politics and consumerism, my particular focus is on the construction of Thai nationhood. Though each of these subjects differ one to the other, they are bounded nonetheless by their focus on social and cultural topics. Similarly, it is possible to include the work of Sutee Kunavichayanont within this cluster of Thai artists for his works also deal with social issues.

c. Sutee Kunavichayanont is a native Thai artist whose practice addresses issues arising from rapid social and economic change in Thailand since the 1990s. His art practice responds in particular to the growth of globalization in Thai culture. In doing so Kunavichayanont contemplates national identity during a period of socio-political change. Undertaking art education in both Thailand and Australia, Kunavichayanont completed his BFA in Graphic Arts from Silpakorn University; the first modern art school in Thailand, which opened in 1989. He also has a Masters of Visual Arts from the Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Australia, which he obtained in1993.

As a result of his educational background, Kunavichayanont has been influenced by both Western and Eastern traditions and experiences. His background has provided Kunavichayanont with an opportunity to explore Thai identity from both Thai and Western perspectives, which is clearly evident in his practice. Kunavichayanont and I share a common experience,

namely art education in both Thailand and Australia. I am comfortable to say this has shaped our personal perspectives and enabled us to focus on the subject of our homeland and how it links to globalization. Our education has also affected how we explore Thai identity as a hybrid phenomenon. In both instances this theme of hybridity can be explained in terms of postcolonial discourse. For instance, cultural theorist Homi Bhaba proposes the possibility of a Third Space arising from post-colonial critique, which I recognize as a process that has occurred in my own work and in the art of Kunavichayanont. According to Bhabha:

"It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory—where I have led you—may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity." (Bhabha 2006).

In his practice Kunavichayanont uses materials, objects and symbols that relate to Thai cultural codes. These include elephants, traditional figures and Thai boxing, known as Muay Thai. In order to decode these cultural materials a background appreciation of Thai culture is helpful, lest some of their meanings be lost to the viewer. Even so, Kunavichayanont represents Thainess through contemporary art practices by using conceptual objects, which are nonetheless emblematically Thai. In one project:

"His installation, '12 Reasons why Thai People are not Afraid of Globalization', is part of a larger body of work entitled 'Stereotyped Thailand', first presented as an installation in 2005. These works exemplify how western and eastern culture can exist both in conflict or accord. Kunavichayanont playfully appropriates stereotypical aspects of his native culture, such as massage, boxing, elephants, and traditional dress and dance. In his original installation, made to look like a classroom, he subverts these elements to comment on western understanding of Thai culture in contrast with the reality of contemporary life in Thailand" (Photography 2009).

Compared with my own research, objects embedded with Thai cultural codes have also entered my practice. However how this began was not through looking at 'Thai' objects. Rather, I first began with a documentary process, taking photographs of small found objects on the streets in Melbourne, Australia. These photographs of small abstract objects later prompted me to collect other small objects that relate in subject and content to Thai identity.

In furthering my practice, the collected objects were used as my research materials. For example, Thai chess pieces, artificial fruits and miniature toys appeared in various artworks. I first used these objects in my practice to represent the idea of hybridity. They were produced for an international market and originally came from different countries, including Thailand,

Australia and China. Consequently, they carried many cultural codes. These objects, with their 'international styles' were used as art materials to represent Thai identity, albeit a particular type of Thainess that was represented by multicultural and multinational materials. In my project they 'became' Thai because I incorporated them into my personal aesthetic.

Another feature that Kunavichayanont's practice has in common with my research-based practice is its socio-political focus. Through his practice Kunavichayanont began focusing on Thai identity in terms of Thai cultural phenomena and the effects of globalization since the 1990s. Later it shifted focus to Thai socio-politics since 2000. Included here is the artwork 'History Class', 2000. Kunavichayanont used the narrative of Thai political change since 1932 to create the woodcut images on school tables, enabling him to symbolically link Thai national ideology with the national education system.

Like Kunavichayanont, I am similarly drawn to representing Thai identity in terms of a national ethos, using both local iconography and wider cultural forms. Similarly, I see the political revolution in 1932 as significant to investigations of contemporary Thai national identity. Our practices also examine identity negotiations arising from the socio-politics of the present. This is an issue of significance in Southeast Asian contemporary art, which the arts writer Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop highlights in her New York Times article 'Southeast Asian Artists Look to the Present'. Kolesnikov-Jessop states:

"Some people may think it's a show exclusively about political art, but it's not," said Ms. Lenzi. "It is high on socio-politically engaged works because in my view many of the best artists in the region are making that kind of art." She pointed out that after a complex past — characterized by political structures that have included colonialism, dictatorship, autocracy and, finally, democracy — many of the region's artists have only recently felt able to address that past openly in their work" (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2011).

In conclusion, Sriwanichpoom's practice presents us with images of Thailand's national identity conflicts, which came to the fore in the 1990s as a result of rapidly changing socio-economics. These issues still continue today. It mirrors also the *raison d'être* of my practice-based research - Thai identity should be openly explored and in many dimensions. Kunavichayanont's practice contains three aspects that are similar to my practice. One is his educational background, being European and Thai. This combination of Western and Eastern perspectives suggests an entirely new approach that enables us to explore the multiple aspects of Thai identity. Secondly, the incorporation of Thai cultural codes and materials into an artistic methodology is something that Kunavichayanont's practice and my practice have in common. Moreover, these incorporations are reflective of the twin themes of localism and internationalism. The final aspect that suggests commonality is the socio-political investigation focusing on Thai national identity throughout the historical framework. However, one difference in our practices is the

individual artistic expression that every artist uniquely possesses. It confirms the existence of art as an aesthetic and suggests the possibility of difference for everyone as a human being.

Chapter 3: Three Exhibitions

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate and analyse three exhibitions, each of which include artworks by Kata Sangkhae. The exhibitions are 'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism', 'The Hua Krathi Project' and 'Chaos'. This analysis establishes a series of associations between the professional development and art practice of Kata Sangkhae through the professional practice and doctoral research project: 'Being Thai: An Exploration of Hybridity of Thai Identities Through Contemporary Art Practice'. The chapter further analyses the exhibition processes and outcomes.

3.1 Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism Exhibition

'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism' was organized by Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), Culture, Sports, and Tourism Department. This significant exhibition showcases seven decades of art in Thailand, specifically during the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej , the present King of Thailand whose reign began in 1946. It shows more than 300 artworks created by nationally renowned artists and included also works by a new generation of Thai artists. The exhibition was held from August 30 to November 4, 2012 at Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC), Thailand. The artworks were selected by the Chief Curator Professor Dr. Apinan Poshyananda, Committee of Bangkok Art and Culture Centre Foundation together with a team of highly regarded peers. Curator Gridthiya Gaweewong selected 'Red Man Swimming', 2012 by Kata Sangkhae for exhibition in the project's 'Experimental Art and Media Culture' component.

The exhibition was constructed around nine key themes:

1. Search of Thai Identities
2. Inspiration from Buddhism
3. Social Space and Patronage
4. Fantasy and 'Sur' reality
5. Abstraction and Individualism
6. Socio Political Struggle
7. Gender and Marginality
8. Locality and International Limelight
9. Experimental Art and Media Culture

Analysis of this exhibition and my involvement with it constitutes a case study that reveals how it is possible for studio practice and professional development to be integrated. The following analysis accounts for how participation in the exhibition benefited my academic research, while reflection on the progress and outcomes of the project played a significant role in the development of my professional practice. Moreover, it enabled me to develop a critical awareness of the discursive relationship between visual practice and critical writing for the purposes of the doctoral exegesis.

Exhibition goals (Curatorial goals)

According to the exhibition press release in August 20, 2012, the exhibition organizers had a clear set of aims with regard to Thai art practices. They outlined their intentions to:

a. promote cultural knowledge among the people of all genders and ages.
b. present a retrospective of Thai art in the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej after World War II to the present.
c. address historical modern art and contemporary art in Thailand.

Figure 4 Red Man Swimming (re-presentation), 2012

According to the exhibition's press release (2012) "The theme 'Experimental Art and Media Culture' is focused on a new media and concept which involves experimenting with different forms and techniques of presentation, and the use of various media as components of art process and production." It is in the context of this theme, 'Experimental Art and Media Culture', that 'Red Man Swimming (re-presentation)', 2012 was exhibited, along with others artworks by contemporary Thai artists. Initially, the original 'Red Man Swimming' was created in 1999 for the project 'City On The Move 6'[9] in 1999, being one of the early contemporary art projects in Bangkok. In this project I focused my interest on the arena of environmental research. I created a padded red suit,

[9] Cities on the Move 6 took place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 9th-30th October 1999. Cities on the Move is a series of multi-media exhibitions designed to stimulate discussion of social changes and universal issues in visual and architectural cultures: http://www.asef.org/projects/themes/culture/929-cities-on-the-move-6.

which I subsequently wore prior to submerging myself into Chao Phraya River, the main river of Thailand -

"'Red Man Swimming' is part performance and part documentary and refers both to the particular importance placed on water by Bangkok residents (a city that boasts its own water festival) and to the impending crisis of global water shortages." Theatreworks (2004)

The re-presentation of 'Red Man Swimming' included four documentary photographs situated in a series of plain metal trays. These trays were filled with water and the piece interacted with audience members via a sound recording of the artist's breathing. Audience members were able to individually listen to the work through a headphone set, which was attached to a wall in the exhibition room. This way of presenting 'Red Man Swimming' enabled the possibility of revitalizing aspects of performance via the documentation, as well as addressing aspects of the exhibition's space and context by its interaction with the audiences.

Evaluating current research outcomes

My practice-based research concerns the relationship between my art practice and the subject of Thai identity, in particular how these two forms work together in relation to sites, situations and specific exhibition conditions. For the doctoral research I examined the impact of personally shifting geographical and cultural environments on my perception and articulation of the Thai identity, especially as a hybrid construct. As a means of addressing Thai identity as a subject, I looked also at ways in which Thai art practitioners disseminate their ideas concerning Thai identity. While participation in the exhibition 'Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism' enabled awareness of the discursive relationship between visual practice, research and exhibiting, the structuring of the exhibition around nine themes also alerted me to the variety of ways that Thai artists after World War II portrayed features of their own identities through visual art practices. This exhibition enabled me to contextualize my practice and research alongside other Thai artists and to broaden my knowledge relating to concepts of identity. In addition, the exhibition provided an opportunity to work with other artists who also use processes of experimental new media.

3.2 The Hua Krathi Project

Figure 5: Sentences on My Art, 2012, video 3.21 minutes at Screen Space, Melbourne

This project, titled 'The Hua Krathi', which translates into English as 'The Condensed Coconut Milk', presented the work of 14 contemporary Thai artists based in Thailand and Australia. Rather than presenting examples of art that conveyed traditional exotic Thai identity, the project addressed identity negotiations through the work of artists who engage with emerging issues of socio- politics and culture in Thailand. I was one of the artists to be included in 'The Hua Krathi', which was curated by Rushdi Anwar, Melanie-Jayne Taylor and Shukit Panmongkol, and presented at Screen Space, Federation Square, Melbourne 7-23 March 2013.

According to an unattributed statement in the exhibition catalogue, the exhibition aims to generate cultural exchange between Thailand and Australia through understanding and awareness of interactions between both countries.

"Shifting away from the exotic and tropical identity of Thailand, the project explores the conflicts between the rural and the urban Thai landscape, whilst addressing contemporary developmental issues of the socio-political, the cultural and the personal" (ATAI 2013).

In response to the exhibition, Russell Store, Head of Asian and Pacific Art, Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane drew attention to themes within the exhibition that intersect with my research, namely the hybridity of Thai identity. Store states:

"It offers a manifold view of Thai contemporary art and culture, pushing against a singular content, emphasising experiences of displacement and isolation the carrying of multiple identities, the ongoing importance of tradition and faith, and specific rather than general cultural positions…It also shows us that Thai contemporary artists are now part of the story of Australian art" (ATAI 2013, p. 85).

Moreover, this exhibition is relevant to the 'Politics of Identity' project that it is one of my practice-based research projects. In this research project I created a set of mix-media paintings on mirrored glass. The series focuses on contemporary political subjects, concerning social conflict issues occurring in the past ten years in Thailand. Six of the mirrors were painted using acrylic and oil colours, with small objects incorporated into the assemblage. These included such things as Thai chess pieces, Thai texts, stickers, artificial fruits and miniature animals. These small objects functioned as symbolic keys to narratives with Thai characteristics.

In total, three of my research projects were exhibited in the 'The Hua Krathi' project. They were 'Sentences on My Art'[10], 'Let's Sing This Song'[11] and 'The Untitled Place'[12] They were developed to address the diversity of Thai identity and emphasis the experience of displacement experienced by the Thai diaspora.

'Sentences on My Art' is a 3-minute, 21 second video art piece that explores Thai identity though text and moving images. A series of sentences was developed, outlining various answers to the question 'who am I?' The answers included such responses as 'I am an artist', 'I am a conceptual artist', and 'I am Thai artist'. Fifteen answers were constructed to identify myself in an art practitioner context. They constituted a statement about myself as a person who has multiple layers of identity.

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[10] See Chapter 6
[11] See Chapter 5
[12] See Chapter 7

'Let's Sing This Song' is a one-minute video performance in which I sing the national anthem of Thailand while walking through a tunnel in the outer Melbourne suburb of Sunbury. It is an appropriation of the Thai national anthem which is broadcast everyday at 8.00 AM and 6.00 PM on Thai television and radio. This project concerns historical processes surrounding ways in which the Thai Government has attempted to construct Thai national identity since the 1930s. However, this iteration of the national anthem is my individual version, conceived as a means of delivering a private message about an aspect of Thai nationalism.

'The Untitled Place' is a series of collages that merge Thai and Australian tourist postcards. These included images of kangaroos, Australia's iconic marsupial, along with one of Thailand's national animals, the Asian elephant. This experimental project was aimed at challenging classic stereotypes of Thai identity. The intention was to challenge and expand constructions of Thai identity by combining visual and symbolic elements and forms from another culture. The resulting images were intended to represent a new characterisation of Thainess, being a hybridized Thai identity arising from my personal experiences outside of Thailand.

These three projects were developed and presented to address the diversity of Thai identity and to reflect on experiences of displacement experienced within the Thai diaspora. Each project conveys an alternative sense of Thai identity and feature as key components of my practice-led research.

3.3 Chaos: Yesterday and Today Exhibition

Forming a part of this research 'Chaos: Yesterday and Today' was an exhibition that presented the works of eight international contemporary artists from Thailand, Australia, Kurdistan, Korea and Norway. This exhibition responded to contemporary issues confronting Thai society, including instability in the realms of culture, environment, politics and everyday life. The artists' works ranged across both conceptual and experimental practices, relating to personal and/or social critique. The exhibition was shown from 6 - 26 June 2014 at Dark Horse Experiment, an independent gallery in central Melbourne. I curated this exhibition as a way of responding to political phenomena affecting contemporary Thai society. It confronted the political instability arising from the Thai Army's declaration of martial law, which took effect across the country on 22 May 2014.

Responding to this event, I wrote the following poem, which was the inspiration for the exhibition.

Yesterday, Thai Army declared martial law.
Today, a tram was delayed in Melbourne CBD.
Yesterday, It was earthquake somewhere.

Today, it is a coup in Thailand.
Yesterday, there was a big sale in a shopping mall.
Today, there is a demonstration in front of the library.

The exhibition was open to the public for two weeks following the seizure of power by the Thai military junta. The show was planned as an urgent response to the political phenomenon. Managing this exhibition was my action as an arts practitioner, conceived with the intention of expressing the unpredictable conditions of life in Thailand and to critique the political situation. However, I also used this exhibition as an experimental platform. The situation in Thailand was the motivating factor to extend an invitation to seven contemporary artists to explore this social instability. Aside from mysef, the invited artists were:

Apichat Yim yong
Nuttapon Sawasdee
Rushdi Anwar
Melanie Jayne Taylor
Sansern Rianthong
Elmedin Zunic
Jungwoo Hong

I encouraged all artists to express and generate their artistic interests in their own fashion. At the time there was a strong feeling of urgency to say something about the situation in Thailand and the show came together quite quickly because everyone responded straight away. I used the exhibition as a framework for a new installation work, 'Coup or Not', 2014, in which I attempted to create allusions to the military forces that overthrew the government. The piece was made from deer horn, a military jacket and a miniature tree. For me this was an unconventional way of expressing a contemporary sense of Thainess. In traditional Thai culture this kind of critique or commentary is generally seen as being rebellious, which is exactly how other Thais responded to the crisis. As Prapoon Kumjim, Head of The Art Centre at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok commented:

"Since the 2006 coup detat and series of the public protests, followed by the November 2008 Bangkok International Airport seizure, civil unrest erupted again during May 2010, which resulted in 91 deaths with mayhem around Bangkok…These disunities are not the kind of subservient Thainess that is taught at school." (Kumjim 2013).

Figure 6: Coup or Not, 2014, a deer horn, a military jacket, and a miniature tree

'Coup or Not' delivers a message about the unpredictable nature of Thailand's political instability and the profound effect these conditions have had on Thai society and on individuals. I used the military jacket as a conceptual material. It was hung on the deer's horn. I attempted to create a surreal juxtaposition that might also provoke a question, being, if after successfully overthrowing the government someone just hung this jacket up, would another junta come and get this jacket to enact another coup? This is Thailand's history. The surreal sensibility was further enhanced by the placement of a miniature tree

on one arm of the horn. The deer horn and the tree abstractly link back to the woodland camouflage pattern on the jacket. Therefore, 'Coup or Not' can be seen as a representation of Thai identity because it reflects upon Thailand's military culture.

As we have shown, participation in three exhibitions formed an important part of the research practice. In the first case study, participation in the Thai Trends exhibition not only benefited my visual practice, but created awareness of the discursive relationship between my visual practice and my research. The result of making 'Red Man Swimming' in a new form expanded my artistic methodology to the extent that I was able to develop new ways of presentation in my practice-based research. Subsequently many of my research-based artworks benefited from this process in that, following their initial public presentations, I re-presented them in different artistic forms. 'The Hua Krathi' project and 'Chaos' were exhibition platforms that enabled me to create significant frameworks to test my research and artistic outcomes. These experiences also informed an additional exhibition project, titled 'Who Are We?' presented at the independent Melbourne-based gallery Dark Horse Experiment, which will be examined later in Chapter 8.

Chapter 4: Emptiness of identities

Different geographical and cultural environments offer new ways of thinking and relating to one's own cultural origins. In this chapter I reflect on experiences arising from living in the Australian city of Melbourne and how this has enabled me to think about my own identity as a Thai person and about Thai identity more broadly. It is here that I reflect on relationships between people and environments and on how these reflections have prompted a series of photographs focusing on objects that serve as metaphors for questions of identity and fragmentation.

Figure 7: Unidentified Objects 1,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches

Initially, I approached my theme concerning the hybridity of Thai identities by taking photographs of small objects on the streets to examine my new geographical and cultural environments in Melbourne and to consider my

responses as a Thai person to them. In this two-fold review - outward observation of the urban environment and inwardly directed self-observation - I walked through physical spaces around the city and took photographs of the kinds of small discarded objects that people generally ignore. Many of these objects were once part of larger intact objects and served a practical purpose. The photographs show these objects and are documents of urban life in these new environments. Additionally, I found that when walking around parts of the city that were unknown to me, I noticed how the experience created in me a sense of emptiness. This sensation later developed into one of the methodologies for researching identities.

Unidentified Objects

During this phase of the practice-based research, observation served as a principal method for understanding new locations and situations. Observation was also directed to myself, a process of self–observation took place. During this period my photographic technics evolved from straightforward documentation to becoming the necessary media used to create the body of my research. Listed below are fifteen photographs from the 'Unidentified Objects' series.

Unidentified Objects

1 Unidentified Objects 1,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
2 Unidentified Objects 2,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
3 Unidentified Objects 3,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
4 Unidentified Objects 4,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
5 Unidentified Objects 5,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
6 Unidentified Objects 6,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
7 Unidentified Objects 7,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
8 Unidentified Objects 8,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
9 Unidentified Objects 9,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
10 Unidentified Objects 10,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
11 Unidentified Objects 11,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
12 Unidentified Objects 12,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
13 Unidentified Objects 13,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
14 Unidentified Objects 14,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches
15 Unidentified Objects 15,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches

These fifteen photographs were selected from many images taken on the street. All of the selected images are landscapes. The format of each finished work is vertical, even though the in-camera shot was horizontal and in all of the images the depth of field is shallow. Details on the left hand side of each photograph are not as crisp as the center and right hand sections of the compositions. Consequently, these low depth-of-field techniques combined with a ninety-degree rotation of the horizontal line, which occurred after the image was printed, create a rhythmic effect when the photographs are exhibited in a continuous sequential line. Installed on the wall as an entire

series, the in-focus details and the out-of-focus areas work together to produce a sense of time passing and the space through which we pass as changing. I liked creating this sense of place and time for it links to the making processes embedded in the photographs and also to a style of walking through Melbourne that one might describe as a philosophical engagement with the city.

For a person who is newly arrived to Melbourne both the architecture and the cultural environments have a deep impact. For me this experience clearly brought to mind the question 'who am I?'. Indeed, this became a question of utmost personal significance. I wanted to know, what is my self identity, both as an individual and as a Thai person. When I was in Thailand, the question 'who am I as a Thai person' never featured in my art practice because I just lived in the familiar Thai environment. There was no point of comparison. For example, most Thai people, including me, share the same Thai language, even though we may speak different dialects and share one general culture. In contrast, when we consider the effects of globalization on Thai society, the differences between regional and urban culture becomes less apparent because under the regime of globalization people partake of a singular ideology based on economic growth. In Thailand after the 1990s this was clearly the case. In the article 'Thai Economy in Mid 1990' Pasuk Phongpaichit sites World Bank statistics that show how Thailand was the world's fastest-growing economy during the period 1985 to 1994, (Phongpaichit 1996, p. 369). One effect of this growth was the homogenisation of Thai identity but with it, and at a personal level, one sensed a growing concern about Thai identity.

When I conducted my practice-based research outside Thailand, the unfamiliar environment of Melbourne was important because it helped to to focus my self-investigation. The question 'who am I as Thai person' became the key subject of my art during my practice-based research.

Responding to the question 'who am I as Thai person?' I initially recognised two parts to the question. Firstly, who is signified by the pronoun 'I' and secondly what is signified by 'Thai'? To answer the question 'who am I', my observations in Melbourne were a vital part of the self-investigation. In this circumstance I found that the question 'who am I' cannot be simply answered. Generally speaking, identity is linked to environment, but as a Thai person living outside of Thai environs and surrounded by people with limited relationships to Thai culture, the question of my Thai identity became uncertain for it did not have the usual supports to affirm it. From my perspective I was the only person who carried the concept of Thai identity. In this situation, my identity as a Thai was not appreciated by others, at least not in any great depth. But rather than being something negative, this distance from the place of my original background enabled me to recognise and appreciate the empty space of my identity. It suggested to me a new dimension in which Thai identity was present, in that it can be experienced beyond Thailand. This emptiness and its accompanying potential formed the

basis of a self-investigation process and in terms of my art research led to the development of the 'Unidentified Objects' photographic project.

My contemplation of emptiness was such that it became a key part of my methodology in that I found this state through my search for identity. This came up because, as a person from a different cultural background and as one who did not know the new environment of Melbourne or any of its people, I was confronted simply by myself. No one knew or even asked the question 'who is he?' Rather the question came about through a relative degree of isolation. This 'conversation without asking' raised many questions about the composition of an unknown person's identity.

The emptiness I encountered enabled me to investigate Thai identities in enlarged contexts and through supplementary probabilities. Being in Melbourne helped me to explore the question 'what is Thai?'. Initially, I examined Thainess by investigating un-Thainess, which occurred through the process of making the 'Unidentified Objects' photographic series. I took into consideration an idea proposed in the article 'National Identity Crisis and Thainess', wherein the author states:

"Thainess is worth conception, and promulgated from what is not Thai. "Thainess, or "khwam pen Thai" is a value system that prescribes what is acceptable from what is not, what is Thai from what is not."(Anderson 2012)."

As we have already remarked Thainess is a conceptual frame that was originally formalized by government institutions and intellectuals. As a concept it has been propagated through public media and the national school system and from the 1950s onwards it became a national convention that was powerfully instilled in the Thai population. However, this definition of Thainess fails to create appropriate socio-space for contemporary Thais. Therefore, in creating my practice-based project 'Unidentified Objects' I endeavoured to expand the definition of Thainess and to claim a broader social space in which Thainess exists, not as a traditional concept but as one that is contemporary, hybrid and complex.

For me this claiming of socio-space is an expansive gesture. However, it suggests also an alternative potential for Thainess, especially when compared with historical moments where the ideological appropriation of Thainess by political forces aimed to limit Thai identity. For instance, traditional Thainess can be seen as consisting of several significant symbolic aspects such as 'nation, religion and the monarchy'; however, in the 1960s, being a period of military nationalism, former Prim Minister Sarit Thanarat, appropriated Thainess for nationalist reasons. In 'A Country Study' LePoer (1987) states that:

[during] *Sarit's regime, he revitalized the slogan "Nation-Religion-King" as a nationalist political motto. It was characterized as uniting the paternalism of the traditional Thai and the thoughtful principles of Buddhism.*

Yet an appropriation of Buddhist religion along nationalist lines establishes a relatively obscure justification for power, for Buddhism is not merely ethical, it is philosophical as well. Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics are not easily aligned with authoritarian power structures, yet it remains nonetheless an important feature of it. In the case of the 'Unidentified Objects' project I drew on the philosophical aspect of Buddhism, recognising also that Buddhism is one of the three significant pillars of Thainess. Within the process of making, which included the method of walking through urban spaces with the aim of 'not considering' that environment, but turning instead to 'self-awareness', it is possible to see this as a Buddhist meditation. This is affirmed when we turn to the relevant literature. For example, in 'Mindfulness in Plain English', Mahathera describes the process of meditation as:

"He learns to watch changes occurring in all physical experiences, in feelings and in perceptions. He learns to study his own mental activities and the fluctuations in the character of consciousness itself. All of these changes are occurring perpetually and are present in every moment of our experiences" (Mahathera 1991).

In Thai Buddhism meditation is a process of self-investigation and the realisation of the truths of life. Mahathera (1991) states that there are many branches of Buddhist practice; however, they divide into two schools of thought, which are Mahayana and Theravada. Mahayana is prominent throughout East Asia whereas the Theravada system of practice exists in Southeast Asia. It has shaped the cultures of Burma, Laos and Cambodia, but more importantly of Thailand. People can perform meditation in many actions including walking. When I walked around the city of Melbourne for example, taking in the changes in the architecture and in my body movement, these physical and mental elements became a practical way of realizing that self can be non-self.

While emptiness is a concept in Eastern religions and philosophies, expressions of it can also be found in Western thought. Curiously there is a strong link between Western interests in 'walking' as a philosophical activity and awareness of 'emptiness'. Frédéric Gros, author of 'A Philosophy of Walking' mentions that many Western thinkers agree that walking is an important part of their philosophical practices, including such figures as Frederic Nietzsche and Emanuel Kant. Gros (2014) states that walking can create feelings of emptiness:

"By walking, you escape from the very idea of identity, the temptation to be someone, to have a name and a history ... The freedom in walking lies in not being anyone; for the walking body has no history, it is just an eddy in the stream of immemorial life" (Gros *2014).*

Another example, dérive is a psychogeographical concept founded by a Paris-based collective of radical artists and theorists. The concept of dérive is an unplanned journey through urban landscapes. It is a critical method for

understanding and developing the specifics of geographical environment on the emotional and awareness of individuals. This concept was a critical methodology in the theories of the Situationist International[13], which was the radical group of artists and political theorists in 1950s. Refer to the situationists, the dérive was a technique to explore urban landscape to achieve new experiences. Guy Debord who is a significant situationist theorist states in his Introduction to Critique of Urban Geography that

"The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance that is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the terrain); the appealing or repelling character of certain places — these phenomena all seem to be neglected. In any case they are never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account " (Debord 1955).

However, my observatory processes walking in Melbourne formed a meditative methodology based on Buddhist practice. Accordingly, this is the internal way to generate wisdom and understanding, and to realize the simplicity of my self identity. Further, in Buddhist meditation, controlling breathing and focusing one's thinking on one single thing is a method to directly encounter oneself. I adapted this process as a documentation method, which occurred by taking abstract photos of small objects that I found on the street. The selected found objects have simplicity of shape and form, which I was attracted to during the walking process. These shapes and forms subsequently inspired my research projects, including 'a series of mirror painting in 2013' and 'Thai National Anthem (Morse Code) Tower, in 2015'.

Buddhism is an important feature of Thailand's national ideology, and Thai identity more broadly, for more than 90 percent of the Thai population identify as Buddhists. However, Buddhism in Thailand currently has grown into a hybrid conception that has arguably, in the present era, merged with capitalism. Further, its early influences include Animism and Hinduism, which were local beliefs prior to the arrival of Buddhism. Buddhist concepts and images of the Buddha have been important subjects in Thai traditional art. However, in contemporary Thai art, conventional Buddhism has been scrutinised and critiqued, both in terms of its close association with nationalism and as a subject in art practices. Brian Curtain, the Irish-born but Bangkok-based contemporary art curator stresses that Buddhism is no more the major subject in Thai contemporary art. According to Curtain:

"Buddhism used to be the primary theme for Thai art, thanks to the strong influence from modern artists such as Thawan Duchanee and Prateep

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[13] Situationist International was an organization of social activists made up of avant-garde artists and political theorists, prominent in Europe from its formation in 1957 to its dissolution in 1972.

Kochabua. Perhaps the most locally recognized artist, Chalermchai Kosipipat, known for his colorful character and white temple Wat Rong Khun in northern Thailand, is a poster boy for Buddhism-inspired Thai art. But as most contemporary Thai artists no longer adopt such influence, it "cannot be used as a consistent reference in exhibitions" (Panyalimpanum 2015).

As a contemporary artist myself, I have never used the image of the Buddha or Buddhist themes as many earlier Thai artists did. However, I used Buddhist concepts in a contemporary way as part of the practical methodology in my practice-based research because Buddhist mindfulness paralleled and informed my photographic documentary research. Buddhism is in my personal background and it has become a part of my identity for I absorbed Buddhist practices and concepts and used them as methods in my research project. For me, this is a practical way to express my self-identity and to explore new possibilities for Thai identity, especially as an individual person who carries a Thai Buddhist background.

To sum up, in my experience 'philosophical walking' in Melbourne created the ideal conditions to realise the 'emptiness of identity' and with it the infinite potentialities available to identity constructs. This walking process initially entailed observation of the urban environment, its features and its inhabitants. However, it is also entailed a process of self-investigation informed by Buddhism as encoded within Thai national identity constructs and through my personal background as a Buddhist. The documentary process gave rise to the photographic series, 'Untitled Object', featuring images of anonymous objects with implicit reference to my self-reflections concerning emptiness. This conceptualisation of emptiness enabled me to explore Thai identity beyond my comfort zone. It gave me the self-assurance to generate new representations of Thai identity from outside of the place where that identity first originated. It further enabled me to come to realisations about Thai identity through an immersion in a contrasting cultural environment, namely Australia.

Importantly, the process and its outcome from this stage prompted the realisation that Thai identity can be represented in many different ways. Geographical contexts beyond Thailand can provide material to represent it in this respect. The outcome of my art research project suggested to me a further step to create a documentary film focusing on the aesthetics of Melbourne's streetscapes, infused with the narrative of Thai identity. I was further inspired to produce a series of circular mirror paintings, titled 'The Politic of Identity' as well as two additional artworks, 'The National Canon Shell', and 'Tower Speaker', which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Figure 8: Unidentified Objects 2,2011, digital print, 24x30 inches

Chapter 5: Narratives of Nation and Individual Identity

In addressing issues pertaining to the hybridization of Thai identity constructs, the research questions how a unified Thai identity can be represented in terms of multiple identity constructs. The research highlights how complex identities can be defined as constituting structural and simultaneous identities. It highlights also how this definition can be applied equally to individual and national contexts. These themes help to illuminate two research projects that aim to clarify and expand the meaning of conventional Thai identity.

During this phase of the practice-based research, I endeavour to investigate the hybridity of Thai identities in terms of cultural phenomena through the process of creating visual art products in various mediums. It is here that I experimented with moving-image techniques and film. Documentary process remains as one of the main methods used by me to investigate and research my subjects. For example, in one film, Decode: narrative identitiy, 2013, I interspersed images of Melbourne with signs and symbols related to Thai identity. This was accompanied by Thai music, and featured images of myself as an embodiment of Thainess. This enabled me to experiment with ways in which aspects of Thai identity can be portrayed within different cultural and geographic environments, thus suggesting that Thainess is not about place but rather a sensibility. Moreover, it is a sensibility that affects the way in which I see things. It is a simultaneous exploration of my Thai identity as a Thai citizen, as a member of Thai society and as just one person who has Thai experience in his background.

Narrative of National Identity Through The Thai National Anthem

In seeking to understand the significance of identity my work functions as a psycho-social-archaeology of identity – an investigation on multiple levels that looks both outwardly and inwardly.

I was born and raised as Thai. I think like a Thai, and to a certain extent am bounded by conservative Thai ideology. As previously mentioned this ideology was promulgated through public media and the state-run school system and it has been a major instrument of nation-building. However, it has also been deployed with little consideration of issues around difference within Thai culture. Reflecting on this situation I began to formulate the following questions: What exactly is Thai Identity? And: Are there other key components that define our Thainess that have not been brought to light?" This quest acquired greater personal significance when I began my research based on new experiences outside of my place of origin, for these experiences enabled me to see differences, which in turn helped me to clarify my Thai identity.

As a means of exploring Thai identity from both individual and national perspectives, I created a video work related to the Thai national anthem, titled 'Let's Sing This Song', 2013. In Thailand, people are required stand up twice a day, at 8.00 am and 6.00 pm for the national anthem. Every television and radio channel is required to broadcast the official Thai national anthem as

stipulated by the Thai government. In response to this, I created my own individual version of the Thai National Anthem. This version features in a short film that includes a written transcription of the Anthem so that people who do not speak Thai can still sing along.

In addition to the prominent place that the anthem has in Thai culture, historical documentary papers related to descriptions of Thai national anthem inspired me to create this work.

The story of the Thai national anthem is an ironical narrative for it reveals how multiple competing parties have endeavored to obtain ownership over a nationally unifying concept as embodied in the anthem, while maintaining partisan political allegiances. This situation is revelatory of the fault lines within Thai society today and it has prompted me to both research the history of the anthem and creates an artwork in response to that research. In the history of Thailand before 1932, the Royal Anthem (Phleng Sansoen Phra Barami) was used as the national anthem of Siam; however, in 'History of Thai national anthem' Jeamteerasakul (2004) states that the Royal Anthem should not be considered as the national anthem because the context and concept of the Royal Anthem and the national anthem are dissimilar.

Astonishingly, as my research reveals, the original national anthem of Thailand is different in many public contexts. Even The Prime Minister's Office, being the department that is responsible for issues of national identity, does not possess much information about the anthem. This research therefore is both an opportunity to develop artworks in response to the anthem, but is equally an opportunity to clarify a number of historical facts surrounding this national anthem. For me this is an important step because it is linked to issues of Thai identity negotiation during the period of modernization until the present.

Phleng Chat Thai, The national anthem of Thailand, became the official national anthem in 1939, precisely during the period when Siam became Thailand. The national anthem of Thailand was formally released in 1939. Phra Jenduriyang composed the melody over a three-week period, following the now famous coup of 1932. The lyrics were written by Kun Wichitmatra in 1932, which, in 1934, he subsequently reworked with Chan Khamvilai. In 1939 Luang Saranuprapan made further changes, resulting in the definitive version that we know today. Noticeably, the original melody has been maintained. In contrast the lyrics were adjusted on three separate occasions because of political negotiations pertaining to national identity constructs in that period. Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram announced a law that the anthem must be broadcast every day at 8.00 and 18.00 in government offices and schools, including broadcast medias such as TV and radio, stating also that people must stand up to show respect for the nation. This law still exists today; however, there are no particular punishments for those who do not comply.

The Thai national anthem has been a persistent symbol of the Thai nation state up to and including the present. The historical fact of the anthem is reflective of a self-conscious national discourse, promulgated through political and institutional channels. Originally it was created to emblematize the modern nation state and replaced the Royal Anthem following the Siam Coup of 1932. This historical fact shows that the existing institutions were challenged by a new modern national state discourse, inspired in part by Western templates. The anthem of Thailand developed in this context and has been used as the symbol of Thai national ideology. It does not mention the royal institution because it was created as the symbol of a national state ideology.

Further still, since its inception as a national symbol the Thai national anthem has been popularly received within Thai society, and is widely perceived as an inviolable fixture within the popular imagination. According to Jeamteerasakul (2004), in 2003 the Thai Ministry of Defense employed a well-known entertainment company to modify the melody of the national anthem. The aim was to create an updated version more in keeping with contemporary tastes. However, the general public was far from pleased with this 're-branding', believing that the national anthem was not available for negotiation. The commissioning of a recently formed pop music production house further compounded the problem, for it was generally perceived that popular music was an entirely inappropriate genre to associate with the national anthem. While the episode exposed the extent of popular feeling towards the national anthem it also highlighted a certain lack of awareness as to what the anthem signifies. For instance, while nationhood is emphasized in the anthem, references to religion and the institution of the monarchy are not. Unsurprisingly popular sentiment was not bothered by these details as generally people perceived the attempt to change the anthem as an attack on all three aspects of Thai society.

Nevertheless, in Thailand currently, the Royal Anthem, while no longer having the same status it possessed during the period of the Siam Kingdom, continues to be used as an additional symbol of the nation. Both anthems are used together in many official occasions. Moreover, the national anthem and Thailand's flag have, since the 1970s, also been used at political demonstrations. Initially the Thai national anthem was created to promote democracy while decreasing the prominence of absolute monarchy. It later became a well-entrenched symbol used for promoting democracy. Therefore, practically speaking, the anthem not only serves one national state ideology, but also has been adopted by all political ideologies that lay claim to Thai national identity. It is a poetic evocation of democracy as well as a tool of political ideology.

Let's Sing This Song

Figure 9:The still image from Let's Sing This Song, 2013

Let's Sing This Song, 2013, 1.05 minutes
Directed by Kata Sangkhae
Cinematographer and Editor by Somporn Tamarama

'Let's Sing This Song' is a one-minute video performance, in which I sing the national anthem of Thailand while walking through a tunnel in the Melbourne suburb of Sunbury. This trunnel was selected for its special echo effect. The reflection of sound across the tunnel walls creates a soft yet distinct and repetitive echo. Through the metaphor of the echo and the iteration of the Thai national anthem the project aims to evoke historical process, and specifically the Thai Government's attempt to construct Thai national identity since 1930s.

The film was directed by myself Kata Sangkhae, while Somporn Taramaha was the cinematographer and editor. It is a one-minute short film that records the process of the performance, and after that it was edited in a studio to include special effects in order to create scenes infused with the colours red white and blue, being the colours of the Thai flag.

As mentioned previously the Thai national anthem is broadcast twice a day at 6.00 am and 8.00 pm on public media, following the edict of Prime minister Phibunsongkhram in 1939. Phibunsongkhram endeavoured to construct Thai national identity by using the mass medias as instruments of power. These national anthem broadcasts have always been produced with great formality by the Government. In contrast, my film is construed as an individual and idiosyncratic version of the nation's anthem.

The title of the piece 'Let's Sing This Song' endeavours to suggest a critique of national propaganda strategies associated with the national anthem. The rationale was to encourage individuals to consider the national anthem individually, away from the collective contexts in which it is usually experienced and to use this individual experience to critically reflect on the meaning of the anthem. In my rendition of the anthem there were a number of subtle shifts in its delivery that made it into a somewhat uncanny rendering. This would doubtless be detected by those who are familiar with this tune, primarily because I had to control the speed of both the singing and walking to accommodate the precise distance of the tunnel. It was a process in which I had to 'control my body', so that my body became an artistic element within this conceptual video performance. Through embodying this critical experience of Thainess my performance can be seen as an ontological art practice. It reflects my experience of being Thai.

Moving images, sound and caption from the video also created interaction and delivered a multi-sensory communication to viewers. However how the moving images are installed is also important. Therefore, I further developed 'Let's Sing This Song' by installing the video in a storage box in order to enhance the aesthetic and a conceptual outcome. The detail of this artwork was described in Chapter 8 Who are we?

The following transcriptions reproduce the lyrics of the Thai national anthem in full, both in Thai and secondly in English.

Lyrics for the Thai national anthem in English script, transcribed by Kata Sangkhae:

prathet thai rouam leaut neau
chat cheua thai
pen pra cha rat
pha thai khong thai thouk suan
yoo dam rong khong wai
dai thang mouan
dauy thai louan mai
rak samakki
thai ni rak sa ngop
tae theung rop mai khlat
ek ka rat ja mai hai khrai khom khi
sa la leuat thouk yat pen chat phli
tha leuat pra thet chat thai tha wi
mi chai chai yo

The national anthem of Thailand translated into English:

"Thailand embraces in its bosom all people of Thai blood,
Every inch of Thailand belongs to the Thais.

It has long maintained its sovereignty,
Because the Thais have always been united.
The Thai people are peace-loving,
But they are no cowards at war.
Nor shall they suffer tyranny.
All Thais are ready to give up every drop of blood,
For the nation's safety, freedom and progress..."[14]

Decode: narrative identity

Figure 10: The still image from Decode: narrative identity, 2013

Decode: narrative identity, 2013,10 minutes.
A film by Kata Sangkhae
Cinematographer: Somporn Taramaha
Editor: Somporn Taramaha
Story: Kata Sangkhae
Original scores: Moby Gratis
Theme song "Who am I": Kamol Tanasol
English subtitles: Chatchadawan Keawtapaya
Location: Port Sea Life Saving Club, Sunbury, Melbourne CBD
Special Thanks: Anathipat Able, Patrick Storey ,Wanwisa S, RMIT AV Loans,
Ceri Hann

'Decode: narrative identity', 2013 is a film that was developed using
documentation processes; however, following this, the documentary method
was developed into an art video which was guided by five inter-related
annotated directives, which I refer to as a 'conceptual script'. The film

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[14]The English translation from
http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/thailand/Thailand_anthem.pdf

presents a series of complex messages arising from the components of the conceptual script, which were further realized through the filming, editing and presentation processes.

In the film the language is both Thai and English. The English subtitles were provided by Thai translator Chatchadawan Keawtapaya. The online website Moby Gratis was the source for parts of the musical score while the theme song "Who am I" was created Kamol Tanasol using lyrics derived from the conceptual script, by Kata Sangkhae. Somporn Taramaha was the Cinematographer and editor for the project. Music from the Moby Gratis website was selected for the project as a way of introducing a 'globalized' product into this Thai cultural scenario, thus disrupting the traditional narrative of a supposed authentic Thai culture.

The film was set in three distinctive locations - Melbourne's central business district (CBD), a tunnel in the suburb of Sunbury and coastal regions near the town of Portsea, located on the south eastern peninsula of Victoria's Port Philip Bay. These places were selected for their contrasting geographical and urban features, with the intention of constructing visual metaphors to describe different aspects of an individual identity and also to examine the effects of geographical and cultural environments upon this specific subject. Melbourne's CBD was selected as an idealised city centre, with its more endearing qualities coming into focus when contrasted with the congested Thai capital Bangkok. The tunnel was selected because of its distinctive atmosphere and sound properties. The elongated space creates an echo, which in this instance was caused when I sang the Thai national anthem as part of the performance. The Portsea coastline was chosen to point out yet another contrast between the natural world and the urbanized environment. The film footage, which includes aesthetically pleasing images of both the Australian landscape and the city of Melbourne, were selected to represent a disjunction and dissimilarity between my current situation in Australia and the conflicted political dynamics arsing from my life-long participation in Thai society, the source of my personal background. This contradiction of new geographical and cultural environments enlarges both my vision and personal experience of identity as a human being.

Artistically speaking documentary is one of my key methodologies deployed to investigate this research subject. In progress of my research, photography technics shift from documentation to become crucial media to create the body of my research project. Photography is one medium that provides visual evidence of particular important features and can present research outcomes. I have used this method to create a series of artwork-photographs. This was done in early projects and later extended to the documentary film 'Decode: Narrative Identity'.

I further discovered in the process of making photography and film the potential of analogue camera lenses. Dating from between World War II and the more recent past (1950s-1980s) the lenses in question can be used to

create a distinct photographic aesthetic, which differs from the effects achieved through the currently available digital lenses. I have been collecting lenses from that period and have selected the appropriate lenses for my research practice. Moreover, this specific equipment creates both a tangible and visual link to the historical period under investigation. For example, the diffusion of light and the vignetting caused by the lenses suggests something akin to a phantasmagoria or something glimpsed in a dream, which is a quality I wish to exploit.

In these practice-based research projects, the documentary film 'Decode: narrative identity' developed out of the previous film 'Let's Sing This Song'. 'Decode: narrative identity' evokes what I feel to be a sensibility that characterises aspects of Thai identity. For instance, it aims to shift scales, between national identity constructs and personal experiences of identity, informed especially by experiences from within the Thai diaspora. The documentary film uses a story concerning myself. I pursue Thai identity research, conducted outside of my country of origin. The project contains a narration that takes the form of five phrases. These phrases are "Thai Thai", "Urban", "Self", "Existence" and "Nation". Each of these key concepts constitutes the structure of the film. They represent components of our individual sense of identity and are deeply enmeshed within our experience of being human. Further still, such qualities enable us to connect both intellectually and emotionally to the environment and to society.

Being guided by the key concepts, rather than working with a script I developed the film footage. I chose to work in this way because I wanted to present the actual sensations I associate with documentary narration, which come from my direct experience working in this form. Additional projects in this research were also incorporated into the film. This included the 'Unidentified Object' photographs, the 'Sentences on My Art' video and 'Let's Sing This Song'. All the research projects in this film constitute documentary elements, and were selected to transmit messages about my Thai identity. The story of Thai identity research within my practice can also be seen as a representation of being Thai. Therefore, it is a representation through another representation in order to address the hybridity of my Thai identity.

Figure 11: The still image from Decode: narrative identity, 2013

<u>Script of Decode: Narrative Identities, translated by Chatchadawan Keawtapaya</u>

This script aims to differentiate between an abstract identity, a national identity and an individual identity. It describes the narrative background of this practice-based research and the research questions, which are evoked by experience of being displaced from Thailand to Melbourne and presents the research outcomes discovered through the art making processes.
The following texts appear throughout the film as opening captions to each titled section.

Tittles

Some (people) asked me "what did you think about this city and was there any difference from where you came from?" My answer was "here I saw life, enjoyment and happiness, there where I came from was quite colourful.

Because, I was a stranger, I came from somewhere else. When I work, I work from my own experience in life. So I found emptiness here. This feeling was a doorstep to begin my interested in new surroundings…

Thai Thai

My work is an attempt to search the meaning of Identities. I was born and raised as Thai. Therefore, I think likewise bound by Thai ideology. Not too long ago, I was beginning to wonder, 'What is exactly Thai's Identity', 'Are there some key components that define our Thaisness?' This quest becomes more significant when I began my research from new experiences outside my

place of origin. It allows me to see differences in order clarify my Thai identity.

Urban

"I found emptiness while I was walking in a crowded city, no one knows me and vice versa I don't know anyone". In unfamiliar surroundings, among strangers, I was nonetheless different from those objects that were dropped on the streets, partials of something, pieces of photographs or someone left over activities. It was a resulted of an unknown journey from a nameless author.

Self

"Who am I?" It probably sounds crazy to loudly ask yourself this question? And again another following awkward question, "Who is I?" I play some parts, some roles according to several contexts. I'm an artist, a man, a teacher, and a student. Also I'm a man who is communicating with you at this moment.

Existence

"Things that we forgot didn't mean that we didn't remember. Also it didn't mean that it wasn't there."

I began to be interested in ideas and cultures that shape us to become something or someone. It started with the origin of one existence. We start the same, as a human being but at a different time and space. We forget those first few years of childhoods. Although, I do know that our capacity of seeing the world, as a child didn't disappear as we thought it was. It always has been passed on from one generation to another.

Nation

I was born after we drew a line of the Thai nation. I stood up twice a day (8 am in the morning and 6 pm in the evening) for our national anthem. I am singing this song for all Thais. Furthermore, I would like to invite you to sing along and join me sending Morse code of Thailand National Anthem to all nations.

'Let's Sing This Song' and 'Decode: narrative identities': Assessment conclusions

Reflecting upon these two research projects, 'Let's Sing This Song' and 'Decode: narrative identities', the films were created to refine and expand the meaning of conventional Thai identity. The first project was created to represent the Thai national anthem from my individual perspective. It is reformulated as a private anthem and as a way of criticizing the idea that Thai national identity should only be controlled by the government or official institutions. It suggests that individuals can also express national identity. The second research project, which is a ten-minute documentary film, was created as a narrative of Thai identity incorporating both national and individual perspectives. Both projects feature elements of different identity discourses, such as national, individual and diaspora identity. Both research projects are the development of documentary photographs and of observations undertaken whilst walking in urban contexts. As a result of these processes, the Thai national anthem, which is a national identity symbol, was reformulated in terms to suggest a different ideology. The narrative concerning Thai identity similarly took shape in cultural environments other than Thailand.

Figure 12: The still image from Decode: narrative identity, 2013

Chapter 6: Conceptualizing who am I?

This chapter presents an analysis of practice-based projects created to address hybridised Thai identities. The projects explore considerations of Thai identity through experiences of displacement and dislocation. Through comparison with contemporaneous examples of other conceptual practitioners' works I consider to what extent such modes are capable of addressing issues of identity construction.

During this phase of the practice-based research, I experimented with a variety of media and presentation techniques in order to rethink and re-present the hybridity of Thai identities. In this stage I created text and video works related to national and individual identities, in which documentary was used as the main methodology both to record and later create artworks focused on the research subject.

Sentences on My Art
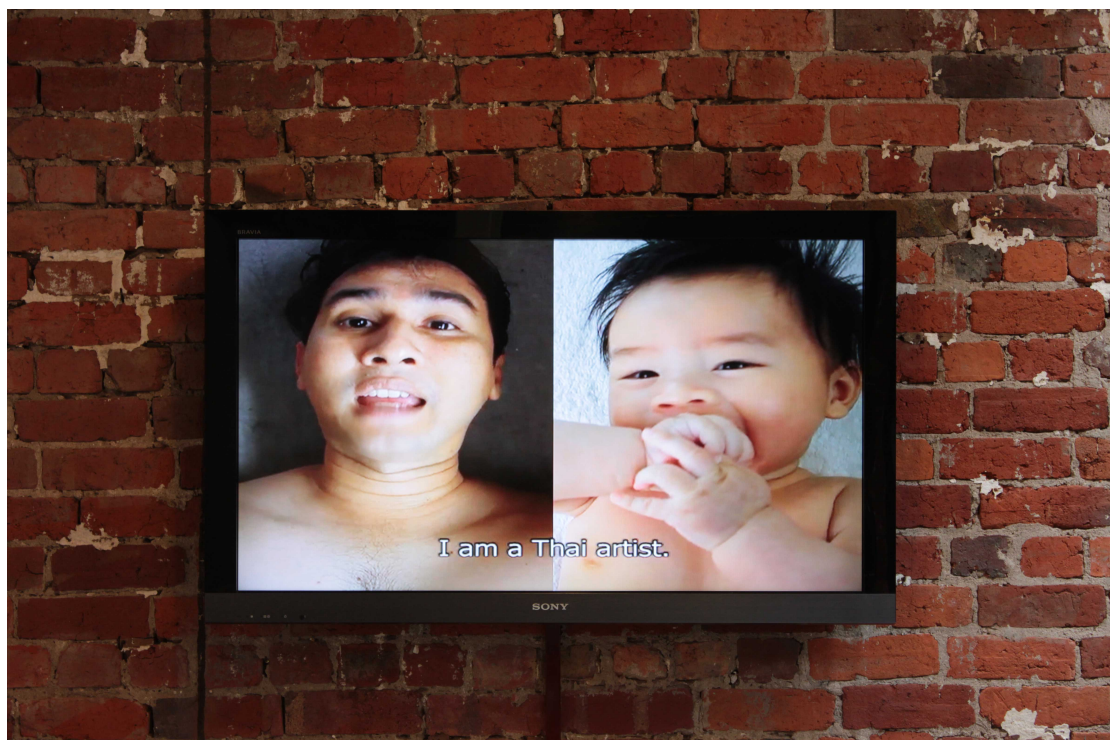
Figure 13: Sentences on My Art,2012, video 3.21minutes

The pieces I created during this phase of the practice-based research included one text-based work, and a video piece, which are listed below. They are:

Text work
Sentences on My Art, one page text, 2012

Video work
Sentences on My Art, video 3.21minutes, 2012

The text-based work 'Sentences on My Art' is constituted as a manuscript that describes various answers to the question 'who am I'. The answers include such things as 'I am an artist', 'I am a conceptual artist', and 'I am Thai artist'. In total there are fifteen answers, which identify myself as an arts practitioner.

In comparison with this text-based piece, the video work 'Sentences on My Art' is a development of the manuscript. In the video I read the fifteen answers, which can be heard over the top of edited moving images of myself and a one-year-old child.

Sentences on My Art by Kata Sangkhae

The 'Sentence on My Art' text pieces was inspired by the work 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', by Sol Lewitt, first published in the magazine '0-9' (New York) in 1969 and the publication 'Art-Language' (England) in the same year.

Presented below are the answers that feature in my work 'sentences on my art'.

1.   I am an artist.

2.   I am a conceptual artist.

3.   I am a contemporary artist.

4.   I am a visual artist.

5.   I am a media artist.

6.   I am a sculptor.

7.   I am a photographer.

8.   I am a performance artist.

9.   I am a Thai artist.

10.   I am an international artist.

11.   I am a human being.

In this research process, the question 'who am I as a Thai', while having been addressed in my earlier research, remains important for it is linked to me as a

person who has multiple layers of identity. In 'Sentences on My Art' the questions were asked as a conceptual framework appropriated from a well-known conceptual piece; but it was also created to encompass identity concepts operating on different scales. For instance, most of the sentences related to myself as an artist, as an individual, as a Thai artist, and as an international artist. Finally, it concluded with the sentence 'I am a human being'. For me, this project generated a link between my Thai identity and a global context as a human.

The Morse Code

Looking at the history of Thailand it is apparent that the country felt the influence of globalization even during the 19th Century, which in turn impacted the identity of Thai people. During the early modern period in the 1850s, Thailand was faced with the possibility of Western-style modernization and colonization. The country had to develop many forms of infrastructure to create a civilization capable of withstanding Western colonization. This included the construction of a communication system using telegraphy. This new and rapid communication technology had a transformative effect on Thai culture and identity and also impacted Thailand's national ideology. This historical situation and my previous project inspired me to create my next project, which created links between the themes of national identity, history and globalization.

'The Morse Code' 2012 is an artwork that constitutes a Morse code inscription of the Thai national anthem in English; in other words, a two-fold process of translation. The centrality of the Thai national anthem to Thai identity came to the fore in the 1930s. It represents Thai ideology in a form that may be thought of as a national poem, which is still revered in Thai society today. Through transcribing the text, first into English and then into Morse Code I have transformed this important text through a conceptual methodology that first 'colonizes' it through a Western language, one moreover that has great international currency and then into a more obscure form that is often used in military contexts. This process fundamentally changed the original nature of the text. However, in transcribing it into a 'martial' language, one might arguably say I returned the text to an essentially Thai context, because Thai culture is profoundly influenced by its military.

The following is the Thai national anthem written in Morse code.

The Thai national anthem in Morse Code

.--. .-. .- - .... . - / - .... .- .. / .-. --- ..- .- -- / .-.. . .- ..- - / -. . .- ..-
-.-. .... .- - / -.-. ....- .- / - .... .- ..
.--. . -. / .--. .-. .- / -.-. .... . / .-. .- -

.--. ..... .- / - ..... .- .. / -.- .... --- -. -- / - ..... .- .. / - .... --- ..- -.- / ... ..- .- -.
-.-- --- --- / -.. .- -- / .-. --- -. -- / -.- .... --- -. -- / .-- .- ..
-.. .- .. / - .... .- -. -- / -- --- ..- .- -.
-.. .- ..- -.-- / - ..... .- .. / .-.. --- ..- .- -. / -- .- ..
.-. .- -.- / ... .- -- .- -.- -.- ..
- .... .- .. / -. .. / .-. .- -.- / ... .- / -. --. --- .--.
- .- . / - ....- -. -- / .-. --- -.. / -- .- .. / -.- .... -.. .- - -
. -.- / -.- .- / .-. .- - / .--- .- / -- .- .. / .... .- .. / -.- .... .- .. / -.- .... --- -- / -.- .... ..
... .- / .-.. .- / .-.. ..- .- - / - .... --- ..- -.- / -.-- .- - / .--. . -. / -.-. .... .- - / .--. ....
- .... .- / .-.. ..- .- - / .--. .-. .- / - .... . - / -.-. .... .- - / - .... .- .. / - .... .- / .-- ..
-- .. / -.-. .... .- .. / -.-. .... .- .. / -.-- ---

prathet thai rouam leaut neau
.--. .-. .- - .... . - / - ..... .- .. / .-. --- ..- .- -- / .-.. . .- ..- - / -. .. .- ..-
chat cheua thai
-.-. ..... .- - / -.-. ....- .- / - ..... .- ..
pen pra cha rat
.--. . -. / .--. .-. .- / -.-. .... .- / .-. .- -
pha thai khong thai thouk suan
.--. ..... .- / - ..... .- .. / -.- .... --- -. -- / - ..... .- .. / - .... --- ..- -.- / ... ..- .- -.
yoo dam rong khong wai
-.-- --- --- / -.. .- -- / .-. --- -. -- / -.- .... --- -. -- / .-- .- ..
dai thang mouan
-.. .- .. / - .... .- -. -- / -- --- ..- .- -.
dauy thai louan mai
-.. .- ..- -.-- / - ..... .- .. / .-.. --- ..- .- -. / -- .- ..
rak samakki
.-. .- -.- / ... .- -- .- -.- -.- ..
thai ni rak sa ngop
- .... .- .. / -. .. / .-. .- -.- / ... .- / -. --. --- .--.
tae theung rop mai khlat
- .- . / - ....- -. -- / .-. --- .--. / -- .- .. / -.- .... .- - .. .- -
ek ka rat ja mai hai khrai khom khi
. -.- / -.- .- / .-. .- - / .--- .- / -- .- .. / .... .- .. / -.- .... .-. .- .. / -.- .... --- -- / -.- .... ..
sa la leuat thouk yat pen chat phli
... .- / .-.. .- / .-.. . ..- .- - / - .... --- ..- -.- / -.-- .- - / .--. . -. / -.-. .... .- - / .--. ....
tha leuat pra thet chat thai tha wi
- ....- .- / .-. ..- .- - / .--. .-. .- / - .... . - / -.-. .... .- - / - .... .- .. / - .... .- / .-- ..
mi chai chai yo
-- .. / -.-. .... .- .. / -.-. .... .- .. / -.-- ---

Morse code was selected to represent the national anthem because in my mind I have associated it with information I unearthed regarding the

appropriation and manipulation of Thai national identity by military elites, many of whom graduated from educational institutions in Western countries in the 1930s. In 'Thai Telegraphy and Teleprinter', (Janprasert, 2014) Thai historian Sompon Janprasert notes that *"Generally, the telegraph was started in Thailand in 1875. Its accomplishment was done with the first implemented link between Bangkok and Sumutprakan in 1883 during the reign of the King Rama V. At the same year, the post and telegraph department then was established."* (Janprasert 2014). The other reason for using Morse code relates to the fact that the technology had been used as a method for communication in Thailand since 1875 and only ceased on 30 April 2008. It had been used for the same 125 years in which identity negotiations profoundly affected Thailand, so for me it is an apt metaphor of this period – a strange constructed language moving across the country and affecting every form of communication.

The Morse code project was also developed into a physical representation of the text code by creating it as a sound-based code. Following this was presented in a sculptural form, 'Thai National Anthem (Morse Code) Tower', 2015, using speakers and sound, with the piece occupying an area of 100 x 100 x 300cm. It was exhibited in the exhibition "Who Are We?", which was open to the public from 13 to 28 February 2015 at Dark Horse Experiment, Melbourne.[15]

This research project was a sound sculpture that featured several 'found' audio speakers of different sizes and types. These were stacked up one by one to form a tower resting on a square wooden table. All the speakers were collected by me during this practice-based research. The sculptural form was designed as a monument to signify national identity. However, the sculptural audio speakers contained an ironic point, which rested on the idea of my 'speaking out' about my Thai national identity as an individual. Conceptually speaking this non-hierarchal gesture of speaking out as an individual is considered by me to be another way of being Thai and conveying my identity through my art practice.

As a narrative within my research in this stage, the Morse code project was a development of the previous project, 'Sentences on My Art', however the later project focused on a particular aspect of military culture, in particular how in Thailand it is inter-related with national identity. 'Thai national anthem in Morse code' was a conceptual platform that enabled me to express ideas related to recent Thai history. It expressed how military codes, languages and structures are significant influences on Thai national identity. 'Thai national anthem in Morse code' represents the complexity of national identity concepts in so far as the anthem, as represented in this work, has been filtered through many historical ideologies and codes. The influence of the military on contemporary constructions of Thainess is however an important feature of current Thai socio-politics.

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[15] See Chapter 11 "Who Are We?" exhibition.

The National Cannon Shell

Figure 14: The detail of The National Cannon Shell, 2014, a 135mm cannon shell, artificial flower, 20x20x60 cm

'The National Cannon Shell' is an additional artwork that also focuses on the Thai national anthem, especially as I stamped the words of the anthem into the surface of the 105mm brass cannon shell, which is the principal component of this sculptural work. This project was inspired by The Siamese Revolution of 1932, which changed the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional system, but it also makes a statement about the enduring presence of the Thai military within the country's political sphere. This point is made in the article 'Land of Smiles? Land of Coups, More Like' where the author notes that:

"According to statistics compiled by Human Rights Watch, since the end of absolute monarchist rule in the 1930s: "there have been 18 coups, 23 military governments, and nine military-dominated governments" in Thailand". (Stout 2013 p2).

According to 'Coups in Thailand study during 1932-1981' the author Thanee Sukkasem states that political problems, economy problems, social problems and internal conflicts in the army are the main contributing factors to Coup d'etats in Thailand, (Sukkasem 1981). These problems are still continuing and more crucially during the present by political instability.

The process of making 'The National Cannon Shell' entailed a continuous four-hour performance, during which I used a metal punch to emboss each letter in the words of the Thai national anthem onto the metal surface of the 105 mm brass cannon shell. The process of making using the metal punch was a way of enacting a Buddhist meditation. This was similar to the meditation process I used in my observations of Melbourne street life in the earlier phase of this practice-based research. In stamping the cannon shell, I had to carefully select each letter as any mistake would be indelibly imprinted on the shell. For me this process was another way of conducting a self-investigation, for in focusing on the narrative of the anthem, I was also focusing on something that had influenced my identity. In this way I was able to examine myself as a Thai person. This process was also comparable to the experience of singing the Thai national anthem while walking through the echo-filled tunnel in the 'Let's Sing This Song' project.

While items derived from military contexts have previously appeared in my work, such as the trench-coat used in 'Coup or Not', 2014, the use of the shell casing has a more specific history related to art making. For many years and in many traditions soldiers have made small artworks using discarded shell casings, which are often referred to as 'trench art', a term derived from the trench warfare of the First World War. Within this genre cannon shells are the most common materials used by amateur soldier-artists. According to Kimball (2005):

"Casings from artillery shells of several different calibers casings for the standard artillery field pieces: the French and American 75mm, German 77mm, or British 18 pounder guns and the larger 105mm, 155mm and 210mm artillery pieces] and several sizes of naval shells [1pdr, 3pdr, 6pdr] were the most common ones used for making this kind of trench art." (Kimball 2005).

The objects that constitute 'trench art' powerfully convey the feelings, emotions and stories of people who are directly affected by war. As an expression of self-identity, many trench art objects are made by soldiers to confirm their existence in battles. However, soldiers are not the only people to manufacture these items, for civilians affected by conflict are also known to make different forms of trench art.

In my case, my cannon shell project is a way of reflecting on my Thai national identity, which, as we have seen is informed by military conflicts. In historical terms cannon shells have been incorporated into Thailand's national memorializing of important military conflicts. For example, not long after the Siam Coup of 1932, there was the Boworadet rebellion in 1933, against the Siamese Government. Arising as a consequence of conflict between the pervious royalist regime and the new constitutional government, the rebellion resulted in the defeat of the rebels. While Prince Boworadet (1877-1953) and his family had to leave the country, many of the constitutional government's soldiers were killed. For their funeral the bones were put in cannon shells. In the article 'Art and Architecture of Siam Revolution' Chartri Prakitnonthakan states that the bones were placed in artillery shells for safeguarding in the constitutional monument (Prakitnonthakan 2009, p 89).

The government built this monument in 1936 to honor the memory of the constitutional guardians. Nowadays the monument is rarely mentioned because the conflict between Thai royalists and their opponents still continues to the present-day. Even so, the monument shows how military culture is an important aspect of Thai national identity.

As an artwork 'The National Cannon Shell' was finally completed by the insertion of artificial flowers into the opening at the end of the shell. These white, blue and red coloured flowers were selected as a reference to the three symbolic colours in Thailand's flag. These colours on the flag are symbolic representations of the three main Thai ideologies - nation, king and religion. However, the artillery shell was presented as my 'conceptual container' to hold these 'national flowers'. This for me is an alternative representation of national identity for it brings to the fore the military aspect of Thai culture, which in my mind is the fourth pillar of Thai national identity - Nation, King, Religion and the Military.

Figure 15: The National Cannon Shell, 2014, a 135mm cannon shell, artificial flower, 20x20x60 cm

The Helmet project

Figure 16: Helmet of Military Power #1, 2015, a digital print, 50x70cm

In this chapter, I started with the question 'Who am I?'. I explored this research question by appropriating Sol Lewitt's 'Sentences on Conceptual Art'

as a platform to investigate my Thai identity. The artistic outcome in 'Sentences on My Art' video work suggested to me the idea that myself as a Thai person is a reflection of hybrid layers of individual, national and international identities. Thai identity synthesises Western and Eastern influences; it is both local and international.

In greater detail I investigated my own sense of national identity by creating 'The Morse Code' project and 'The National Cannon Shell'. According to these artistic outcomes and historical research, I found that military culture is a significant contributing factor to the makeup of the Thai national identity.

In light of these factors, in a subsequent project, titled 'The Helmet' 2015, I focused my research investigation on the martial attributes of Thai identity. In this project I drew a link between Thai military culture and national anxieties concerning globalisation. 'The Helmet' project consists of three main artworks, which are 'Helmet of Bomber', 'Helmet of Military Power' and 'Helmet of Gun'. All of these pieces represent feelings about Thailand's present day political problems and identity encounters.

The military aspect of Thai identity was represented in my research-based artworks by incorporating ready-made objects such as replica guns, miniature army figures, replica award cups and Thai chess pieces. These ready-made materials were specifically selected as a means of referring to the contemporary political situation in Thailand following the coup in 2014 and the seizure of power by the military in 2015.

The first piece I constructed in this series was 'Helmet of Military Power'. It features a green army helmet with miniature elephants and military figures sitting on top. The elephants were stacked up in order of size - large to small, which created a monumental form. In general, the elephant in Thailand is considered to be a national animal because in Thai history, elephants were used as important vehicles for Generals and Kings during war times. The elephant represents the elegance of the country from past to present. Therefore, elephants became important national symbols to represent the country's identity. For example, in the history of the Thai flag, the elephant image was uses as a symbol of the Kingdom up until 1916. The elephant as a symbol of identity represented the Kingdom, but in the present day it is the mascot of Thailand, just as the kangaroo is often seen as the mascot of Australia. The elephants in my helmet sculpture are historically potent and also physically threatening; they are a clear symbol of power.

'Helmet of Military Power' was first created as a sculpture and subsequently formed the basis of a photographic artwork. In the two photos that make up this work I am wearing the helmet and a military uniform. The two photographs are front and side view portraits. This allusion to police arrest photos was intended as a way of creating a feeling of anxiety in the viewer. In the sculptural form, 'Helmet of Military Power' was developed as an

installation work for the exhibition 'Who Are We?' at Dark Horse Gallery in 2015.

 'Helmet of Military Power' was represented on three tables of different sizes, vertically stacked to suggest military hierarchies and power structures. The European style tables, which formed the plinth or base of the sculpture, also implied a Western underpinning to the Thai state. For example, the military elites who were responsible for the Siam Coup in 1932 studied in Europe. They obtained democratic and republican ideologies from their immersion in Western countries and through Western educational systems.

Figure17: Helmet of Bomber, 2015, a digital print, 60x75cm

I continued to investigate ways of conveying feelings of threat in the next helmet sculpture 'Helmet of Bomber', which featured a motorcycle helmet and small objects such as Thai chess pieces, miniature trees and rocks. The work was intended to suggest an 'explosion' which I achieved by covering the smooth white smooth surface of the helmet with small objects that radiated out in all directions across the top of the helmet. 'Helmet of Bomber' was worn during the creation of a portrait photograph. The photo was staged in an outdoor location, with the idea that I would look like a bomber. The image juxtaposed harmless and threatening forms, such as toys and the helmet, to convey the thoughts and feelings in my consciousness regarding the instability of Thai socio-politics.

Figure18: Helmet of Gun, 2015, a digital print, 80x55cm

The third helmet, 'Helmet of Gun' incorporated a motocross helmet, replica award trophies and four toy pistols. The work aimed to represent feelings related to violence and power, for these are themes that cannot be separated from Thai identity, especially in light of the conflicts surrounding political change in the country. As an ever-present threat to the country the threat of violence has manifested as a wound in the minds of Thai people. In the past tens-years the country has faced many difficulties including the future succession, social inequality, the role of the military in politics. Consequently, there have been many political demonstrations and repeated military coups. Therefore, 'Helmet of Gun' symbolizes the confrontations that are continually occurring in contemporary Thailand.

The helmets were chosen as the key components in these artworks because the form both conveyed a feeling of power but was also easily incorporated into the medium of portraiture, which is especially well-suited to my investigation of identity. Further still, as an artistic investigation into being Thai, one moreover that is inspired by Thai history and the phenomena of contemporary Thainess, the helmets were equally well-suited, mainly because military culture is prominent in Thailand. According to Naphadej Kanchana and Surapon Buntusarnee, co-authors of 'The Identity of Contemporary Thai in Globalization' (1996), contemporary people in Thailand can be divided into two groups - the first is the generation who were 15 – 25 years old at the time of the Massacre of 6 October 1976, and the second generation are those who have no direct experience of that important democratic demonstration, which occurred against the former military dictatorship of Field Marshal Thanom Kititkachor, (Buntusarnee 1996, p 80).

According to Naphadej Kanchana and Surapon Buntusarnee the two groups mentioned above represent different and important facets of Thai identity. As a means of articulating the differences that exist between these groups they highlight two mechanisms for interpretation, which they call "the phenomenon of enemy" and "the phenomenon of fiction"(Buntusarnee1996). These phenomena, they suggest, are capable of addressing differences between these two generations of Thai people. This is especially so in regards to their opinions concerning the role of the military in Thai society.

With regard to the 'phenomenon of enemy', the first generation were strongly influenced by concepts regarding justice and equality in society, which they encountered through published texts. In their opinion the military dictatorship was a threat because of the violence perpetrated during 1970s. The second generation was different because they did not have this kind of experience under military dictatorship. In their case, television was a powerful influence, far more so than the kinds of social literature that influenced the former generation.

Kanchana and Buntusarnee's 'phenomenon of fiction' really refers to fiction writing as a genre and also, fictional films and television. For me the 'phenomenon of fiction' is important with regard to to my identity, both as an artist and also as a member of the post-1976 generation. My generation, from childhood onwards, was influenced by movies and television. For instance, many American superheroes such as Superman were significant. These heroes who have special powers and advanced technology were idealized by my generation (Buntusarnee 1996, p 83).

The superhero genre was an influence in my helmet project. My helmets appear to have special powers because of the objects that are attached to them, such as the replica guns. In the photographs associated with this series the helmets have semi-mythical qualities that may be compared to classical deities.

In contrast, the phenomenon of enemy, as conceived by Kanchana and Buntusarnee, has no direct bearing on my experience because I was not directly exposed to the violence of the military dictatorship. Therefore, the military culture and imagery evoked in my work is not strongly infused with emotional overtones. Rather it is presented in a relatively neutral fashion. This neutrality is significant because my experience is not one of actual violence. Rather, it is one of anticipation and anxiety, that violence may happen at any time. Currently the military have enormous power in Thailand and this has created wide-spread fear amongst the population, including me. The Helmet project conveys this sense of anxiety. The pieces also represent global anxieties generated by such things as climate change and political instability. The artistic outcomes of my helmet project therefore are not only an investigation of Thai identity in terms of its military culture, but they also respond to global identity issues.

In conclusion, the helmet project is an art research practice that embodies the nervousness of contemporary societies. Many countries in the world have confrontations in the spheres of culture, politics and economics. At the same time, the helmet project encompasses anxieties about Thai military power. Consequently, my work links international and regional themes in the context of a specific cultural identity. Thai identity, it suggests, is also a part of an international identity.

Chapter 7: Hybrid Identities

This research is undertaken through visual art investigations into the historical framework within Thailand itself and through individual experiences of identity experienced within Thailand and viewed from a distance. The question as to how distance and cultural environments affect perceptions of Thai identity and its expression within broader communicative contexts obtains greater significance in this phase of my research. In particular, through shifting focus to my individual identity as a Thai person in Australia I was able to consider the problem of identity from a fresh perspective. Two research projects, 'The Untitled Place' and 'The Politic of Identity' were created to explore this issue.

The Untitled Place

Figure 19: The Untitled Place, 2013, a series of collaged postcards

'The Untitled Place', 2013 is a series of collages based on postcards designed for the tourist markets of Thailand and Australia. The series aims to merge the respective imagery of these two types of postcards as a means of illuminating key components of Thai identity. Different parts of the postcards are merged or overlain. These include popular Australian sightseeing landmarks, as well as native Australian animals relocated onto famous beaches in Thailand. The intersection of imagery aims to generate new possibilities in terms of framing identity and to raise questions about authorship and spectatorship – who is the presumed author of the identity in question, who is the imagined spectator?

This hybrid postcards project is an experimental practice through which I investigate Thai identity by combining elements from another culture. It

represents a new characterisation of Thainess and elaborates the hybrid qualities of Thai identity.

For me, the process resonated with theorisations of 'split-space' as articulated by the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, who in 'The location of Culture' states:

"The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is the in between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves." (Bhabha 1994, p38).

The selection of tourist postcards from Thailand and Australia were of conceptual significance because of the presumed intent that attends each group of postcards, namely they they convey their localized identity to other people. These postcards were generally produced as souvenirs for people from other cultural backgrounds to the one represented. They typically present stereotyped images and artefacts related to the signified country. In the case of Thailand and Australia well-known landmarks and locations, as well as unique animals and plants, and lifestyle images were typically included.

I became interested in the postcards and wanted to respond to them, using ideas and feelings connected to Bhabha's 'split-space' concept, mentioned above. To explore this idea of a split-space with Thai and Australian characteristics, postcards from both countries were merged together by me using collage as the primary technique. In this way I was able to create new postcards consisting of hybridized Thai and Australian imagery spliced together. In both cases national symbols were present in the same postcard. These included an image of the iconic Australian kangaroo, together with an image of the Thai elephant, which is considered to be the Thai national animal.

In another example an image of a Thai Buddha was placed on the background of a famous Australian geographical landmark, the Twelve Apostles, which can be seen from the Great Ocean Road on the south coast of Victoria. Similarly, kangaroo images were collaged onto the images of The Grand Palace of Thailand. In these examples identifiable icons were displaced, which to my way of thinking suggests new possibilities for thinking about the concept of Thainess for it disrupts the classical stereotypes of Thai identity.

'The Untitled Place' project was presented in the exhibition 'Who Are We?' at Dark House Experiment in Melbourne from 13 to 28 February 2015. This exhibition formed a part of my research process. The project was conceived of as an installation that incorporated all of the postcards within an overall

compositional arrangement. Each postcard was mounted in a different style of frame and attached to a postcard stand. The stands were selected to mimic displays in souvenir shops. The presentation of postcards on stands enhanced the theme of tourism for this project. Tourism is an especially strong influence on Thai identity, particularly after 1936. One reason for this is, four years after the Siam Revolution, the tourism project plan was presented to the Siam Government to promote tourism as an industry, (TAT 2003-2015). However, it later became one of Thailand's main industries. It also generated relations between Thailand and the wider world resulting in almost 25 million tourists visiting Thailand in 2014[16] alone.

The outcome of 'The Untitled Place' project suggested to me aspects of Thai identity that could be revealed through processes of juxtaposition with other cultural codes. At the same time however, the project also suggested something about Australian identity, which was not intended as part of my research. After reflecting on this thematic ambiguity I decided to focus more exclusively on signifiers of Thai identity and to not mix cultural codes as I had in 'The Untitled Place' project. Following this project, I continued to explore aspects of Thai identity, in particular addressing issues related to Thai politics and through themes with which it is linked to identity. The key group of works that emerged in this period were a series of paintings on circular mirrors, which are examined below.

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[16] The information from Tourism Strategy 2015-2017 by Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Thailand.

Politic of Identity

Figure 20: Demonstration Structure, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

A series of mirror painting

1. Demonstration Structure, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.
2. Thai National Anthem, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.
3. We Sing This Song, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.
4. Thai Parliament, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.
5. National Symbol, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.
6. Thai Dare Win, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

Prior to making both the mirror paintings and the postcard collages, I experimented with a moving image technique and film, which resulted in 'Sentences on My Art' 2012 and 'Let's Sing This Song', 2013. I also created a documentary film – 'Decode: narrative identities', 2013. This film linked geographical images of Melbourne with Thai identity, which I intended as a way to examine how new geographical cultural environments could influence

both the experience and articulation of identity. This documentary film and the video art pieces did, in my view, articulate the position of my research with regard to examining national and individual identity constructs. I further experimented with combining materials with Thai characteristics with comparable Australian material culture, which occurred in the postcard project. As a result, I created the new narrative around Thai identity. Finally, these artistic outcomes suggested to me the idea to create further narratives about Thai identity. This took shape around the repeated form of the circular mirrors.

The mixed media paintings on glass mirrors again centred on Thai identity, with the added possibility of the viewer seeing their own reflection in the exposed parts of the mirrors. Mainly the paintings focused on contemporary political issues, in particular social conflict issues spanning the past ten years in Thailand. Six of the circular mirrors were painted using acrylic and oil colours and featured small objects such as Thai chess pieces, Thai script, commercially available stickers, artificial fruits and miniature toy animals. These small objects became symbolic elements within a constructed narrative with Thai characteristics. The circular mirrors were selected to support painting techniques in which empty areas are left in the composition, thereby creating a reflection of the exhibiting environments, which contrasts with the Thai narrative. This technique of juxtaposition has helped me to investigate the effect of changing geographical and cultural environments on the hybridity of Thai identities.

'Demonstration Structure' was the first mirror painting that I made. The name of this artwork refers to a political situation in Thailand, specifically political protests that have repeatedly occurred in the past ten years. These protests have occurred so regularly that they have added a new dimension to Thai identity. Social commentator Christopher Shay highlights this point in his article 'The conflict of Red -The National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and Yellow - The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)'. He states:

"in 2014 — like 2013, 2010, 2008 and 2006 — demonstrators filled Bangkok's streets, demanding the government step down. With a beloved king in fragile health, a still-powerful military at odds with the current government and no love lost between the leading political parties, stability is not likely to come to Thai politics any time soon. A clear pattern of protest and unrest has emerged since the ouster of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra eight years ago", (Shay 2014).

Reflecting on this political phenomenon, I considered that one way to represent it was to use miniature figures painted in red and yellow. It is here that Military figures were used to create a narrative concerning Thai politics. In 'Descent into Chaos: Thailand's 2010 Red Shirt Protesters and the Government Crackdown' Human Rights Watch states that since 1932 Thailand had passed through eighteen coups, twenty-three military

governments and nine military dominated governments (Human Rights Watch 2011, p 32). In keeping with this pattern, the present government in 2015 is the military junta that seized the power in May 2014.

'Demonstration Structure' was painted in acrylic and featured blue cloud shapes. This was intended to represent the royal ideology, which remains a complex and highly sensitive issue with regard to this research. Along side this piece, the first mirror painting, 'Demonstration Structure, 2013', represents the main concepts concerning political confrontation in contemporary Thai socio-politics. It evokes aspects of contemporary Thainess in terms of the politics of identity. It also poses questions about representations of myself and the extent to which it is possible to convey hybridised identity constructs within a unified image.

Figure 21: Thai National Anthem, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

The second circular painting to be completed was 'Thai National Anthem', 2013. 'Thai national anthem' features hand-written abstract texts, as well as vinyl stickers with Thai words. Sections of the Thai national anthem can be seen while other texts can be appreciated as abstract shapes and forms. All of these elements blend together as the representation of Thai national identity. These aesthetically pleasing text-based forms are contrasted with the more kitsch Thai stickers. I have created this juxtaposition as a way of

contrasting official Thai identity and vernacular Thai identity as signified by the idiom of the stickers. This juxtaposition is not merely visual, as it also occurs within the meaning of the included phrases. For example, the final sentence of the Thai national anthem suggests that "All Thais are ready to give up every drop of blood / For the nation's safety, freedom and progress." In the painting this phrase sits alongside stickers that state "เรียนไปปวดหัว มีผัวดีกว่า" or "Studying causes headache, Better get husband". Therefore, this 'Thai National Anthem' painting aims to establish a new identity. I contend that this result is the split space.

Figure 22: We Sing This Song, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

The third articulation of Thai identity in this project is the painting 'We Sing This Song', 2013. As a continuation from the anthem painting, the work incorporated many phrases from Thai national songs. Like the national anthem the selected songs also encouraged Thai people to sacrifice themselves for the nation. In this work I used an additional technique, which is

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spray paint. In it I used green camouflage tones to represent the military and I painted it in such a way that from a distance it looked like camouflage but up close the text was apparent. The words are in Thai language, so for people who cannot read Thai the meaning of the text is again camouflaged. This effect emphasises that identity issues are both complicated and hard to convey to others. Homi Bhabha recognises this complexity, stating:

"Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.", (Bhabha 1994, p 2).

Figure 23: Thai Parliament, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

'Thai Parliament' was the fourth painting in the series. It is a painting in which I reflect on demonstrations organized by the People's Democratic Reform

Committee (PDRC) in 2013-14. This was a big demonstration in Bangkok, in which a critical question was posed to the government concerning the amnesty law applied to the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra[17] and brother of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.[18] This demonstration ended with a coup on 22 May 2014. With regard to the protest leading up to the coup Berthelsen, in "Thai Game Plan: Drive Shinawatras into Exile" states that the protesters not only wanted to oust the government but wanted also to eradicate the power of the former Prime Minister Thaksin and with it his far-reaching influence. Berthelsen suggests:

"The real motivation…was to drive every trace of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra not just from power but from the country and to eradicate any vestigial remnants of his influence. Now, with the coup that took place on May 22 and a military government installed, government agencies are going after Thaksin's sister Yingluck, the former Pheu Thai prime minister, and political figures close to her." (Berthelsen 2014).

Reflecting on this political situation, I alighted on a well-known Thai 'black comedy' about corrupted or immoral politicians that Thai people always compare to animals. With this in mind I used several kinds of miniature animal figures within my compositions. I also appropriated the logo of the Thai parliament as the main image in this piece -'Thai Parliament, 2013'.The logo features the Thai Constitution on top of an offering bowl. This image was appropriated from the Democracy Monument, which was built in 1939 to commemorate the Siam Revolution of 1932. My mirror painting uses these elements to create a narrative about the present instability of Thai socio-politics.

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[17] Thaksin Shinawatra is one of the most influential politicians in Thai politics. He was the Prime Minister of Thailand during 2001-2006.
[18] Yingluck Shinawatra is the first female prime minister during 2011-2014. She is Thaksin's younger sister.

Figure 24: National Symbol, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

The next piece, 'National Symbol' advanced out of my usage of the logo of the Thai parliament and the image of the Thai Constitution of 1932. In this instance however, I used several found objects to represent Thai identity and Thai socio-politics. A replica gun was used to represent the violence arising from the struggle for politic change. Journalist Charlie Campbell highlighted the extent of the violence, pointing out that several people were killed and many more injured in bomb blasts in Bangkok's shopping district during the protests. Indeed, some 600 hundred people were injured in 2014. Campbell also contends that the political situation contributed to increasing levels of violence in Thai society more broadly.

"After three months, anti-government protests — aimed at unseating Yingluck and purging Thailand of the influence of her divisive brother, former Prime Minister Thaksin — have become increasingly characterized by indiscriminate street violence." (Campbell 2014).

In this work an imitation mango fruit was used as an ironic symbol of the country. Replica award medals and the circular composition rendered in paint, which suggests a target, were intended to convey the idea of an authoritarian game. All found objects in this work relate to contemporary Thai phenomena and to symbols of Thai national identity including the red, blue and white colours, which reference the Thai flag.

Figure 25: Thai Dare Win, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

The last painting in this series was 'Thai Dare Win', 2013. The image of the world map was used as the main visual element in the artwork. However, unlike many world maps Thailand is placed in the middle to ironically suggest that Thailand is the centre of the world. Thai chess pieces were used to suggest 'political games' in Thailand and the Asia Pacific. This artwork also carries a message, for it suggest that the political confrontation in Thailand is also related to world politics and to globalization. Simon Long affirms this view on Thai politics, which is outlined in his article 'Trying not to choose; A region pulled between China and America'. Long states:

"East Asia is the scene for an unprecedented experiment in international relations. Never before have so many countries been so intertwined economically with one big power (China) while looking to another (America) as the ultimate guarantor of their security" (Long 2015).

All of the artworks in the 'Politic of Identity' project were exhibited as a way of testing their aesthetic and conceptual strengths, which was an important step in my practice-based research. They were also shown alongside other artworks in the exhibition "Who Are We?" at Dark House Experiment in Melbourne, 13-28 February 2015. My critical examination of the works in the exhibition context and the outcomes of this process are analysed in the following chapter, titled 'Who Are We?'.

Chapter 8: Who are we?

Figure 26: Helmet of Gun, 2015, a helmet, replica guns, replica awards cup, 50x50x50cm, Helmet of Military Power #1, 2015, digital print, 50x70cm, and Helmet of Military Power #2, 2015, digital print, 50x70cm.

This chapter critically analyses the 'Who Are We?' exhibition, presented at Dark Horse Experiment, Melbourne, from 13 to 28 February 2015. As a significant milestone in this practice-based research, the exhibition presented each of the research projects in a single gallery space. This enabled me to investigate associations between each cross-disciplinary outcome, and to examine the developmental stages of the works and to consider future possibilities within my practice.

The key focus of the exhibition was my mixed media art practice and its thematic concern with the hybridity of Thai identities. The research projects were installed in the gallery space, both as an opportunity for public presentation, and also as a means of analysing the interplay of media within my practice. I wanted to see how my projects worked together in relation to one another.

For me the exhibition enabled further exploration of Thai identities. Through it I was able to reflect on how historical experience and politically motivated ideologies have shaped the national identity of Thailand since the 1930s. On the individual side of things, I was able to reflect on a few personal influences derived from different cultures, which have influenced my understanding and experience of Thai identity, especially in the context of the practice-based research projects conducted by me in Melbourne over the past three years.

Research aims for the exhibition process

a. To test my research questions and visual art projects in a public context.

b. To access and access and assess audience engagement with my work during the exhibition period.

The visual practices

Twenty-one cross-disciplinary art research outcomes were exhibited in the gallery space. The exhibition included a sound sculpture, video artworks, a documentary film, photographs, research documents and art objects. All of the elements were presented as components within a unified whole, representing the complex nature of contemporary Thai identity and historical manifestations of Thai national identities.

List of works

1 Sentences on My Art, 2012, one-page text, 30x40 cm.

2 Political Ball, 2014, Thai chess pieces, a bowling ball, acrylic paint, 30x30x30 cm.

3 Thai National Anthem (Morse Code) Tower, 2015, speakers and sound, 100x100x300cm.

4 Helmet of Bomber, 2015, a helmet, miniature trees and objects, Thai chess pieces, 50x50x50cm

5 Helmet of Military Power, 2015, a helmet, elephant figures, soldier figures, tables, 30x 60x180cm

6 Helmet of Gun, 2015, a helmet, replica guns, replica awards cup, 50x50x50cm

7 Helmet of Bomber, 2015, digital print, 60x75cm

8 Helmet of Gun, 2015, digital print, 80x55cm

9 Helmet of Military Power #1, 2015, digital print, 50x70cm

10 Helmet of Military Power #2, 2015, digital print, 50x70cm

11 Tower of hybrid postcard, 2015, collaged postcards, mirror, a postcard stand, 60x60x170cm

12 The National Cannon Shell, 2014, a 135mm canon shell, artificial flower, 20x20x60cm

13 Demonstration Structure, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

14 Thai Dare Win, 2013, Kata Sangkhae, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

15 We Sing This Song, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

16 Thai National Anthem, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

17 Thai Parliament, 2013,mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

18 National Symbol, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm

Films and videos

1 Let's Sing This Song, 2013, 1.05 minutes
Directed by Kata Sangkhae
Cinematographer and Editor by Somporn Tamarama

2 Decode: narrative identities, 2013,10 minutes.
A film by Kata Sangkhae
Cinematographer: Somporn Taramaha

3 Sentences on My Art, 2012, video 3.21minites/Kata Sangkhae

Who Are We? Who is 'We'?

The title of this exhibition, 'Who Are We?' was chosen both to describe and to raise questions about how people identify themselves and others from different cultural backgrounds. While the exhibition title does not only suggest a specific identity, the contents of the exhibition aimed to evaluate and account for the complex nature of identity within the specific community of Thailand and its people. The question proposed by the exhibition focuses on who a person is, which requires a layered and at times metaphysical response. William Bernard points out in his essay, 'Identity and Identities', that questions of this nature relate to ethics and politics in many ways. However, the question also raises personal and social identity issues. Bernard recognises this, stating: *"But there is another kind of ethical question that can be expressed by asking the question "what am I?" This type of question concerns one's identity as a person who belongs to a certain family, group or race; they are questions of social identity."* (Bernard 1995).

The approach I used in answering the question 'Who are we' can be considered in two parts. Firstly, I examined what is meant by 'who', and secondly I considered what is meant by 'we'. 'Who' as it appears in the title of this exhibition refers to the narrative of Thai national identity. However, to answer what 'we' means is more complicated for it requires a more nuanced understanding.

Because 'we' often denotes the society or community of a particular person, its meaning will change depending on the different cultural and political structures of the community in question. 'We' in this exhibition title refers to those who are closely familiar with or immersed in the Thai cultural background. But in asking this question a further questions lingers - what is a

person's 'self' and what is the collective 'self' of 'we'? If we are to answer this, then one must consider a broader definition where any group identity is concerned, that is, we recognise that the group may not share only one social identity, but rather a hybridity of social identities. As Bernard (1995) notes, the question 'who am I' is a question of social identity. In this exhibition, Thai identity is explored as a way of recognizing it as a collective identity. Therefore, the word 'we' can include other people from different backgrounds in its compound meaning in terms of the social identity. 'We' may come from different ethnic groups, politics and cultures, but it also signifies that 'we' share some common identities such as 'we are human beings'.

The installation of hybrid contemporary Thai

Twenty-one artworks were combined in a thematically unified solo exhibition in the Dark Horse Experiment gallery space. Thematically speaking they were installed to contextualise the complex nature of contemporary Thai identity both as an individual experience and as a national phenomenon. In terms of my practice the exhibition provided an overview of the works completed during my practice-led PhD research.

The included artworks were divided into different groupings, organised both by subject and media. These are listed and critically examined below.

The Helmet

Figure 27: Helmet of Military Power #2, 2015, digital print, 50x70cm

The first part of the exhibition constituted three helmet sculptures and a group of digitally printed photographs, which featured the helmets and were staged in different locations with contrasting backgrounds. 'Helmet of Bomber', 'Helmet of Military Power' and 'Helmet of Gun' were created by using ready-made objects such as a helmet, miniature trees, Thai chess pieces, toy guns and replica trophies. These ready-made materials were specifically selected to reference the contemporary political situation in Thailand following the coup of 2014 and the subsequent military government that came to power that year.

'Helmet of Military Power' was developed as an installation specifically for the gallery. Three tables of similar styles but of different sizes were stacked up in a vertical position to evoke conceptually a sense of power and military hierarchy.

The helmet sculptures were shown together with three digital photographs, titled 'Helmet of Gun', 'Helmet of Military' and 'Helmet of Bomber'. In these photographs, helmets were worn by me or put into specific locations as a means of conveying a feeling of nervousness or unease. For example, to imply that I may be a bomber in a public location, in 'Helmet of Bomber' I am photographed at an outdoor location. However, in a somewhat comical way, I am 'camouflaged' because the artificial landscape on top of the helmet is similar to the surrounding landscape. While the physical forms of the helmet sculptures are represented through the photographs, transformed into two-dimensional imagery, they still conjure feelings of anxiety.

The Helmet project also symbolises contemporary anxieties concerning globalization. This includes issues such as climate change, economic problems, ethnic tensions, and political instability. Consequently, my art research outcomes not only respond to Thai national identity issues, they also argue and question identity issues more broadly, especially in the context of globalization.

In 'National Identity and Global Culture' (2010) Professor Marsonet Michael, from the University of Genoa, Italy points out that the word 'globalization' in the past years has been filled with negative connotations. Globalization becomes a sort of mascot which embodies one of the illnesses of the world. However, it is symptomatic of confusion. Globalization does not necessarily imply a diminishing of differences and uniqueness (Marsonet 2010). In contrast, it could mean contribution to the world that respects differences and uniqueness. Thus, evaluating and investigating the narrative identity of one specific community such as Thailand may require methods that enlarge or perhaps emphasise the positive aspects of globalization.

Caroline Turner (1993), Deputy Director and Manager (International Programs) at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane shows that contemporary art is a result of tradition, of cultural confrontation with history, and encounter with Western art and culture, which remains an especially dominant form of

cultural expression globally. However, rapid changes in economics, politics, technology and information systems are pushing the world towards a global culture. Turner refers to concepts developed by Dr Apinan Poshyananda in the essay 'Internationalism and Regionalism: Paradoxes of Identity'. Poshyananda suggests that Thailand holds realities for the region as a whole. The merging of different inflectional varieties of contemporary art and culture (culture syncretism) are not fully understood by viewing them through Euro-American paradigms.[19] She concludes that everyone should be aware of this situation and attempts to include new paradigms into prevailing theoretical frameworks (Turner 1993).

For me, the helmet projects represent art research practices that aim to embody nervousness in contemporary societies. Many countries in the world tend to confront this nervousness with cultural, political and economic responses, however these responses are not always effective in giving voice to the feelings surrounding such issues. In contrast, the helmet projects communicate feelings of anxiety through presenting images and forms connected to narratives of Thai identity underpinned by military power. They are derived from a local context (Thailand), but they address issues that are global in scale.

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[19] Apinan Poshyananda,"The development of contemporary art of Thailand", p.93-106.

The Reflecting Circle

Figure 28: We Sing This Song, 2013, mix-media on mirror, 100x100 cm.

In the 'Who are We?' exhibition, a group of circular mirror-based artworks were installed on the gallery walls. These paintings were created as a way of investigating issues related to social conflicts that have proposed significant challenges to Thai society over the past ten years. Contained within these works are forms based on Thai national identity symbols, being key features of the country's officially constructed identity narrative. The Thai flag, national song lyrics and the official emblem of the Thai parliament are some examples.

Six of the mixed media paintings on mirrored glass were included in the exhibition. Their titles are 'Demonstration Structure', 'Thai Dare Win', 'We Sing This Song', 'Thai National Anthem', 'Thai Parliament' and 'National Symbol'. Each artwork reveals a different story about Thai national identity.

For instance, 'Demonstration Structure' came out of a research process that examined the structure and characteristics of political phenomena in Thailand. Two groups of miniature figures, which were painted in different colours were used in the centre of the circular shape to symbolize an encounter between two politic ideologies. The 'reds' or 'red shirts' distinguish themselves from the opposing political forces or 'yellow shirts' by the colour of their attire, notably their t-shirts, a colour scheme I have here replicated.

The intensity of these 'red / yellow' conflicts is highlighted by CNN reporter Dan River, who, in the article 'Explainer: What are the protests in Thailand about?', reveals how local residents in Bangkok were vexed by the intense political conflicts.

"They are displeased with the disruption caused by the red shirt protests. They are generally middle-class city dwellers. They are not pro- or anti-government, they simply want the government to shut down the reds to end the violence and interruptions to daily life" (Rivers 2010).

The mirrors were intentionally conceived to achieve a physical effect, namely capturing the passing reflection of viewers within the composition so that their image would intermingle with the symbolic language of the painting. By varying the density of the paint, from thick impasto to thin veils, different kinds of spaces were interposed between the reality of oneself, seen in the mirror, and the reality of the constructed image. The intention here was to raise questions about the way in which people construct and distort their own image, which was important in terms of understanding how imposed identity constructs can effect the way people see themselves.

Reflecting on one of the objectives for the exhibition, I further recognise a desire to obtain public feedback and criticism regarding issues of Thai identity. This encounter with audiences is part of my methodology to establish understanding about the effectiveness of my work in communicating ideas about this topic. To achieve this, during the exhibition, I asked viewers for feedback regarding their responses to the show. They were aware for instance of their reflections in the circular mirror pieces, and communicated their emotional reactions to seeing their own images within the texts, objects and symbols in the circular paintings.

Initially each of the circular mirror paintings were designed with the idea of visitors creating photographic self portraits when they visited the exhibition. The idea was, that interaction with the exotic objects and the sight of their own faces would act as an invitation to produce a self-portrait photograph. The circular mirror paintings were installed on the wall at eye-level to enhance this self awareness and engagement. The process of creating a reflecting space together with their placement became a method for prompting self-expression through self-portrait photographs in viewers.

Additionally, as we live in a technologically connected world, mobile phone cameras really are a tool at the disposal of most people. For instance, taking a 'selfie' is a very common thing these days. 'Selfie'[20] is a colloquial term meaning 'a self-portrait photograph' that is often shared on social networking

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[20] By 2013, the word "selfie" had included in the online version of The Oxford English Dictionary. BBC. 2013. Self-portraits and social media: The rise of the 'selfie' [Online]. BBC. Available: http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22511650 [Accessed 3 April 2014].

services such as Facebook, Instragram or Twitter. According to a 2013 survey titled 'Selfies', which appeared in the Australian-based Bunbury Mail newspaper, journalist Jillian McHugh suggested that two-thirds of Australian women age 18–35 take selfies in order to post on Facebook (McHugh 2013). The newspaper is not an academic journal, but the sentiment of the article appears to accurately reflect contemporary on-line culture.

But before we dismiss social media selfies as a frivolous pictorial form with little or no connection to other modes of cultural expression, let us consider some other examples of culturally located selfies. As the following example reveals, this mode of self-presentation is a widespread technique through which people express their identity in present-day society. Further still, it can blur the boundary of an identity's geography by sharing their images of identity on social media platforms. In terms of Thai culture, in 'Matichol Online' Dr. Arnusorn Unno, at the faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, Thammasat University, Thailand provides the example of classical Thai costumes[21] being incorporated into expressions of personal identity through rituals of dressing up and performing for social media. Thai national costumes are becoming more popular in present-day Thailand, and social media has become an important channel to express this identification. He states more that this phenomenon is a reaction of what we call 'Globalization'. The term tends to mean that culture is the same all over the world, with Western culture being the centralizing agency of that global culture. However, many Thai people reject this hypothesis. Dressing in traditional Thai clothing is one way of resisting the tide of globalisation (Matichon 2014).

My analysis of the exhibition, 'Who Are We?', confirms to me that the attending audience actively investigated and reported upon the exhibition via their mobile phones, which they used initially to take self-portrait photographs, which were then uploaded onto social media networks such as Facebook, along with comments about the show. These audience-generated self-portraits together with the images of Thai identity symbols were shared worldwide through the Internet. Therefore, the circular mirror research became not only an investigation into Thai identity and politics, it made an active contribution to Thai identity negotiations through public discourse and the dissemination of imagery via the Internet. Furthermore, these representations of Thai national identity merged with people's self-presentation in both the physical space of the gallery and also the virtual spaces available in social media and on-line platforms. The expression of one local identity was circulated within this globalization system, therein revealing the extent to which local and global identities are intimately entwined.

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[21] The classical Thai costume phenomenon has become a trend in 2014. The campaign has seen as a multidimensional culture.

The sound of a national identity

Included in the 'Who Are We?' exhibition was the sound sculpture 'Thai National Anthem (Morse Code) Tower' created using several found-speakers and an audio recording of Morse code. The different sizes and types of audio speakers were stacked up one by one as a tower form, which rested on a square wooden table, which was installed in the middle of the gallery.

The speakers were found objects, which I collected over a period of a few years during this research. Initially this tower was created as a sculptural element to represent an idea about monumentality, which many nation-states including Thailand use as iconic structures for glorifying national ideology. Prakitnonthakan (2008) suggest that monuments of this kind became a part of Thailand's national discourse during the Revolution in the 1930s. For example, in the article 'Memory and Authority on Ratchadumnern Road' he describes how, during the Siam Coup of 1932, the government was trying to create 'new memories' by drawing a historical dividing line between 'old Siam' and 'new Siam'. The aim was to replace the 'old memories' of King Rama 5, who brought a modernising influence to Siam, with 'memories of democracy', which was pursued through the creation of new national monuments such as the 'Democracy Monument' on Ratchadumnoen Road.[22]

By following the historical progress of Thai national identity negotiations, I was inspired to incorporate the tower form into the artwork 'The Morse Code', as these two projects were part of the same thematic trajectory. In this work the Thai national anthem is represented in an English text transcription and is translated also into Morse code.

The Morse code sound artwork makes allusions to historical evidence that suggests Thai national identity in the 1930s was influenced by military elites. Furthermore, it suggests that ever since the Siam Revolution of 1932 Thailand always was a military regime, both officially and unofficially. In the article 'Good News and Bad News of Military Regime', Pongsawat (2015) sites Matichon's world-wide study of the role of the military in politics, which reveals that approximately 19% of governments globally are conducted under military rule. The study also shows that undeveloped countries, which have a potential to become democracies, are especially vulnerable to military intervention and control.

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[22] Ratchadumnoen Avenue is an important road that has been a symbol of new memories. In 1932, the government began to change the landscape of Ratchadumnoen area. Starting by cutting mahogany trees that grown since the reign of King Rama 5 to expand the road, and build commercial buildings, hotels, malls and most importantly, the Democracy Monument. PRAKITNONTHAKAN, C. 2008. ความทรงจำ และ อำนาจ บนถนนราชดำเนิน *(Memory and Authority on Ratchadamnoen road)* [Online]. Prachatai. Available: http://www.prachatai.com/journal/2008/01/15503 [Accessed 8 April 2015].

The rhythmic intonations of Morse Code produce a psychological effect that contextualizes this practice-based research, for it enables the audience to hear the enigmatic sounds of the messages that constitute the Thai National Anthem (Morse Code) Tower piece. However, what they may not realize is how, at the beginning of the piece, which they encounter on walking into the space, the volume is set at a threshold point precisely between perceptible and inaudible. The person's consciousness is then besieged by the sound, which rises in volume. This strategy is crucial for it contains a way to decode the whole installation.

The recorded sounds of the Morse code were an intimate part of the speaker tower in terms of both form and content. For example, while the speakers signify the means by which the government controls and publicizes identity constructs, and the use of multiple speakers was intended to suggest the many different regimes that have tried, time and again, to control and determine Thai identity, the recorded Morse code sounds infused the work with an emotional charge.

Therefore, through these works, I represent ideas and feelings concerning the construction of Thai identity by appropriating political and ideological forms, such as the Thai national anthem. As a conceptual medium this is translated into English in order to render the anthem in an international language. Subsequently, the seemingly international version of the Thai national anthem is further translated into Morse code. This translation was conceived as a playful way of shifting an identity code from its regional significance, firstly into a globalized context and then into and a martial context.

Repetition of identities

The reflective device used in the circular mirror paintings aimed to convey multiple layers of reality within the picture plain. While the motivating factor behind this device lay in the ambition to communicate a hybridity of Thai identities, the same ambition is also present in additional works, which were executed in a range of other media in the exhibition. Guided and inspired by Thailand's historical narrative and the many chapters of identity negotiation within it, I aimed to draw on examples of those stereotypical emblems to evoke the continuous presence of identity politics in Thai consciousness. Changes in the political context since the late 1800s to the present have affected the creation, negotiation and transformation of Thai identity. In the early period of modernity in Thailand, the King and royal intellectuals retained influence over definitions of the country's identity. However, after the revolution in 1932, new definitions of Thai identity reoccurred. Thai identity was communicated to society through various mechanisms, such as education, religion, monuments and also mass media.

The processes and tools that Thai governments use to create national identity have been appropriated by me as a methodology to create artworks in this exhibition. For example, the helmet project appropriated the monumental form associated with the 'Democracy Monument' of 1936 as a sculptural template. It is also presented in photographic form, which I did as a way of emphasizing the patterns of repeat, reiteration and reproduction that characterize Thailand's perpetually contended national identity debates. Both the installation and manipulation methods used in this phase of the research are intended to highlight the manner in which Thai identity is constructed.

Thematically speaking, repetition and variation are also apparent in the Thai national anthem project, which was also included in this exhibition. This project uses the Thai national anthem as a thematic basis, through which the theme of identity repetition is emphasized. Firstly, the anthem was translated into English, which is used in a video piece titled 'Let's Sing This Song'. Initially exhibited in 'The Hua Krathi' project [23] in 2013, it appeared on a single TV monitor. However, in the 'Who Are We?' exhibition the piece was re-presented inside a small black box. Audience members could view the one-minute performance/video on a small monitor in its location in the box by viewing it through an eye-sized hole. Viewing was only possible one person at a time. This specific presentation was designed to emphasize the idea of a single individual reflecting on the symbolic importance of Thai nationhood, as signified by the Thai national anthem.

The Thai national anthem remains an officially sanctioned government controlled articulation of nationhood; however, 'Let's Sing This Song' is an individual interpretation of the anthem. Critically speaking it is a way of asserting equality of views between individual conceptions of identity and politically motivated conceptions of identity.

Secondly, the Thai national anthem transcribed into English was a further conceptual process that added an additional layer to my reflections concerning the anthem. A special stamper was used to stamp the transcribed text, one letter at a time, onto A4 paper, which was exhibited as a documentary object next to the 'Let's Sing This Song' installation. As an installation method it enabled me to further elaborate the narrative of Thai national identity.

The transcription of the anthem also appeared on another research-based artwork, titled 'The National Cannon Shell'. Again, in this work, the methodology stemmed from readings of the political situation in Thailand. The aim of this piece was to associate identity politics with a signifier of conflict, the cannon shell, for it is Thailand's internal and often violent conflicts that have characterised, further complicated and undermined its identity. For example, in the last fifteen years, people in Thai society have been affected by very divisive political ideologies characterized by different definitions of

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[23] See Chapter 3

democracy. This is brought to light by Chaiwat Sath-Anand,[24] professor of political science at Thammasat University, Bangkok and director of the Thai Peace Information Centre, who is quoted in the article 'Reflecting of the protracted conflict and Democracy in Thailand', Isranews (2015). He states:

"Thailand is a symptom of social conflict, which is characterized by protracted encounters. It is different from general conflicts because it decreases an ability of the society in conflict managements, and reduces the ability of society to manage the problems." (Isranews 2015)

Sath-Anand further points out that if the conflicts continued for too long time, in the end, the relationship between social organizations and the disparate groups in Thai society would collapse. Consequently, he is concerned that if the conflicts worsen, it will be even more difficult to solve the problems. This is a profound threat to the society of Thailand (Isranews 2015).

While this research project, including works like 'The National Canon Shell' cannot directly solve conflicts in the nation, it endeavors nevertheless to gain and provide more knowledge and develop understanding concerning Thailand's identity negotiations. By installing the research projects in the gallery space, I aimed to narrate Thai identity subjects in different visual forms in order to publically articulate, clarify and propose a different view about this topic. This display format constituted an artistic method to illustrate the possibility of understanding and exploring more deeply aspects of Thai identity.

Reflection in this research shows that military culture is a significant influence on Thai identity and, in contemporary Thailand, this influence has increased. While in Thailand, military involvement in politics can be traced to the Siam coup in 1932, this influence accelerated during the regime of Sarit Thanarat between 1947 and 1957. Matichon (2015) states that since the coup in 1947, the Thai army has played an important role in the society, especially in Sarit Thanarat's regime.[25] It was during this period that the military became

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[24] Chaiwat Satha-Anand was born in Bangkok, Thailand in 1955. He holds a PhD in political science from University of Hawaii at Manoa, professor of political science at Thammasat University, Bangkok and director of the Thai Peace Information Centre, which conducts studies and activism in relation to the Thai military and social issues. Satha-Anand is an expert on non-violence, theory as well as activism, and on Islam. http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/about-icnc/academic-advisors/2901-chaiwat-satha-anand-founder-and-director-of-the-peace-information-centre-at-thammasat-university-the-foundation-for-democracy-and-development-studies-and-thailand-research-fund

[25] Sarit Thanarat (born June 16, 1908, Bangkok—died Dec. 8, 1963, Bangkok), field marshal and premier in a military government of Thailand from 1958 to 1963.Sarit's regime was highly authoritarian. Political parties were banned, opposition newspapers were made to cease publication, and constitutional rights were suspended in order that dissenters could be jailed without trial on charges of subversion. In foreign policy he was pro-American and anti-Communist, keeping

entrenched within the workings of Thai society. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the military from Thai society and consequently I have made more references to Thai military culture in my work.

Figure 29: The installation's view of the exhibition: Who are we?

Thailand in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and relying increasingly on U.S. military aid to stem the threat of Communist insurgency within Thailand. When Sarit died he was succeeded as premier by Gen. Thanom Kittikachorn.http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/524355/Sarit-Thanarat

Chapter 9 Conclusion

This practice-led PhD research focuses on what I propose to be the inseparable relationship between my visual art practice and my understanding of social identity within the Thai context. In the process, this research contributes to a body of imagery unique to Thai cultural experience and adds to a representation of contributions on its understanding, within a national and global context. Specifically, for this research I examine the effect of geographical and political environments on what I identify as the plurality and hybridity of Thai identities. This research is undertaken through visual and creative investigations into historical frameworks within Thailand itself and individual experiences of identity experienced within Thailand and from the critically distant vantage point of Australia.

This research process and my multidisciplinary art practice, which includes sculpture, drawing, photography, film, video and installation has enabled me to obtain greater knowledge about the complex nature of Thai identity, while opening up new ways of understanding myself as a Thai person and as a contemporary artist. My research has clarified the nature and outcomes of practice-based projects and provided new knowledge to my art practice, which closely addresses issues regarding the hybridity of Thainess. But while the research has contributed to my professional practice as an artist and as a researcher, it has also contributed to my role as an arts instructor, as it has given me critical skills and insights into practice based processes, which I can communicate to others. Further still, the experience of conducting Thai identity research while based in Australia has enabled me to expand my understanding of Thainess. These insights are valuable to me personally, especially as they have taken place during a period of immense existential crisis within Thailand currently. In this respect they may also help me to work with other Thai artists who wish to further explore their relationship to Thai culture through art practice. It is my hope that this may be a basis for affirming Thai cultural identity in ways that reflect its complexity, diversity and capacity for growth and change.

The research seeks to contribute knowledge through the following enquires:

> How do representations of the construction and expression of a hybridised Thai identity affect and inform representation within contemporary art in a regional and global context?

> How do experiences of distance and displacement from Thailand as a geographical locality and immersion within other cultural environments affect perceptions of Thai identity and its expression within broader communicative contexts?

Through research-based projects, I investigated notions of hybridised Thai identity as well as ways in which changing geographical and cultural environments can shape and affect constructions and experiences of that identity. This different cultural environment beyond Thailand impacted the way

in which I express and represent myself in my art practice. It has enabled me to expand the possibility of Thainess.

In my research, the concept of a constructed Thai national identity is explored, even as it takes shape around forms and images that are not readily identifiable as Thai. For me, contemporary Thai identity, while drawing on long local traditions, may be realized as an amalgam of Eastern and Western ideas, influences and encounters. Historically, this integration began many hundreds of years ago, long before modern-day Thailand was formed in 1932.

In the early phase of my practice led research, I found that the exploration of Thainess through 'self-investigation' led to deeper self-awareness. This investigation provided me with clarity about my identity as a Buddhist practitioner, which is intimately linked to the religious traditions associated with Thai national identity. However, the Buddhism I encountered in myself is not Buddhism in the religious sense. Rather it is a way of thinking about self-investigation and self-awareness.

My practice-based research exposes my sensibilities in regards to Thai identity, with regard to both individual identity and national identity constructs. These two spheres are often quite different yet they remain inter-related. In terms of national identity, and in the context of its historical manifestations, I examined the processes associated with state-sponsored constructions of Thai identity aimed at establishing and strengthening the country through a perceived national distinctiveness. I considered also how these processes have been politically negotiated from the post-1930s modernization period until the present.

Insights concerning the theoretical and historical construction of Thai identity permitted me to explore and propose oppositional forms to conventional modes of Thainess. Moreover, the research created an opportunity to clarify and discover some of the general aspects of Thai identity that I had not previously recognized. In responding to this opportunity it is clear that the character of Thai national anthem is a significant cultural artefact of Thai national identity as it was constructed following the military intervention in 1932. My acquaintance with the national anthem since childhood provided material for me to create new artworks.

The completion of this practice-based research was achieved through several outcomes involving artistic research projects. In the early projects, such as 'Unidentified Objects' 2011, my artistic methodology included observation, photographic imaging and critical analysis of the effect of geographical and cultural environments on my perceptions and experiences of Thai identity. This emerged as an important methodology, which enabled me to understand the role of newly encountered geographical environments on my understanding and reading of Thainess. Immersion in these new environments enabled me to develop a greater degree of self-reflexivity, being one of the key methods in my practice-led art research.

A variety of media, which included text-based art, conceptual modes of practice, video and object art are evidenced in the research. This variety of media enabled me to rethink and represent the hybridity of Thai identities. Examples of this outcome include 'Sentences on My Art' and 'Thai national anthem in Morse code', 2012. The artistic outcomes of this research also include video-based works, which suggested to me the extent to which my identity as a Thai person can be seen as hybrid and layered, incorporating individual, national and international identities. Thai identity synthesises Western and Eastern influences. It is local and international.

'Let's Sing This Song', 2013 and 'Decode: narrative identities', 2013 address different identity discourses including national identity constructs, individual identity and identity within the Thai diaspora. These research projects are the development of documentary photographs and observations conducted during walking tours in Melbourne. Artistically, the outcomes of these moving images (video and film) enabled me to dynamically capture visual elements that elaborated the personal, conceptual and historical attributes of Thai national identity as generally express.

More controversially based on my research and analysis of the present political situation in Thailand, I found that the Thai military and the culture that surrounds and emanates from it strongly influences Thailand's identity negotiations today. Therefore, I conducted my research concerning the military influence on Thai identity. I looked in particular at how propaganda generated by the armed forces imparted varying degrees of anxiety to the Thai population, and was also a product of the anxiety at the heart of Thai society particularly around themes of a perceived threat from globalisation. Several artworks were produced to explore to this situation, including a series of circular mirror paintings in 2013 and 'The Helmet Project' in 2015. Through these works I was able to articulate ideas and feelings concerning socio-political realities in Thailand today.

Significantly, I feel that anxiety as a condition of daily life has emerged as a new feature of Thai identity. In contemporary society, anxiety both reflexing and caused by political instability, has evolved from 2005 onwards. Thailand's socio-political crisis came about through confrontations between different political ideologies and through inequality between city dwellers and rural residents. It began with conflict between the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), which supports the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), an anti-Thaksin group. Moreover, this political instability was compounded by the seizure of power by the Thai Army in 2006 and 2014.

Within my examination of the official motifs of Thai identity I note in particular that although the Thai military is a key contributor to issues concerning Thainess, there is no overt symbolic representation of the military as an institution within the construction of the nation. For example, the three colours of the Thai flag symbolically evoke nation, king and religion; however there is

no military reference here. Similarly the Thai national anthem makes no direct reference to the military. This omission, which effectively renders the Thai military invisible at a symbolic level, further compounds the sense of anxiety in contemporary Thai culture. We cannot say for sure what is the military, which adds to the general sense of uncertainty where the armed forces are concerned.

Through my practice-based research, this senses of anxiety manifested in artistic forms such as 'The Morse Code' 2012, an untitled series of circular mirror paintings in 2013, 'Coup or Not' 2014 and 'The Helmet Project' 2015. As an extension of my art practice and as an expression of my identity as a Thai person, I recognise the effect of this insecurity and anxiety at a personal level. Moreover I find that the feelings of anxiety and insecurity arising from interventions by the military into Thailand's political sphere represents another, possibly new form of Thainess, which stands in sharp contradiction to the central national projection of a Buddhist national identity, which emphasizes calmness and harmony.

Finally, Thai identity was explored in ways that lay beyond the established conceptualisations of Thainess. I was able to make this leap through using multidisciplinary art practice as the investigative platform, something that is relatively new in contemporary Thailand and which, for me, generated new ways of understanding myself as a Thai person, both retrospectively and in the present tense. I did this through locating myself in Australia where, at a remove from Thai territory I could critically appraise the many conflicts, tensions, anxieties and possibilities of being Thai in the contemporary era.

As an artist the outcomes of my research projects opened up new space for my practice. One of the key methods that emerged from this research was a way of developing photographic and film images, which I made using old camera lenses from the 1950 and 1980s to enable a particular aesthetic to enter my work, one moreover that conjured a feeling of nostalgia for an imagined period of intact Thai identity. Conceptually, aesthetically and politically, Thai identity remains a thought-provoking area, which I will continue to study and articulate in my art practice.

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WOODWARD, K. 2004 *Question of identity: gender, class, ethnicity*, Open University series, Sage, London.

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Curriculum Vitae

Kata Sangkhae was born in Bangkok in 1976. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Visual Arts from the School of Fine and Applied Arts, Bangkok University, Thailand, before continuing his studies in the Master's Degree in the Sculpture Area at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), USA. He is currently a professor at Bangkok University. In his role as a contemporary artist, he has created works relating to identity, urbanization, tourism, cultural environments, and identity problems stemming from changing places and locations.

KATA   SANGKHAE
Date of Birth: 1976
Email :   sangkhae@hotmail.com
                   http://www.katasangkhae.com

Education:
1998   BFA (Visual Art) Bangkok University
1999-2000   Art instructor at School of Fine and Applied Arts,
              Bangkok University, Bangkok
2001-2002   Teaching Assistant, University of California, Los
              Angeles, USA
2002   MFA (Sculpture) University of California, Los
               Angeles, USA

Experience:

2002   : Visiting instructor, The Communication Design
                  Program, a bachelor of fine art degree of Vjiravudh
                  College and Milwaukee Institute of Art &
                  Design, USA
2006   : Visiting instructor, Satakunta University of Applied
                  Sciences, Finland
                 :Jury of the Young Artist of Thailand, by ROSL
2009   :Guess Speaker for the leadership workshop on
                 Climate Leaders by The British Council & ASEF
2006-2011   : Chairperson, Bangkok University gallery
Present   : Art instructor at School of Fine and Applied Arts,
                  Bangkok University, Bangkok
                : A PhD (Art) candidate ,RMIT ,Melbourne

Honors & Awards:
1998   :(The prize), "The New Expression in Thai
               Contemporary Art" The collaboration between a group
               of Japanese artists and the Department of art Theory,
               Silpakorn University, The gallery of the Faculty of
               Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Bangkok
2002   : The D' Arcy Hayman Award

Solo Exhibitions:
1999   -   "Water room project", Wong Wien 22, Bangkok
2000   -   "You are here", Bangkok University Art gallery,
         Bangkok
2004   - Everest, About Studio/ About Café, Bangkok
2010   - " Ghost Identity", Koi Art Gallery, Bangkok
2015   - "Where are We",Dark Horse Gallery ,Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibitions:
1998   - "Classroom" various school, Bangkok
         -      "Grounding" Photographs by emerging artists,
         curated by Chitti Kasemkitvatana ,About studio
         , Bangkok
         -      "Witches Stuff" curated by Montein Boonma ,
         Project 304, Bangkok
         -      "Grounding II", About Cafe, Bangkok
         -      "Book" Old Kurusapha Publishing Building,
         Bangkok
         -      "The   New Expression in Thai Contemporary
         Art" The collaboration between a groups of
         Japanese Artist and the Department of art Theory,
         Silpakorn University, The gallery of the Faculty of
         Painting,Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Bangkok
         - "City on The Move" a collaborative project with
         Chitti Kasemkitvatana and Panu
         Boonpiputtanapong, curated by Hou Hanru and
         Hans-Ulrich Obrist, P.S.1, New York, USA
         - "Ta-lad-nad-sil-la-pin" Anniversary 25 years 14
         October, (Project 304), Sa-nam-   luang, Bangkok
         - "Kidthung" Wan-Ngam-Thee-Sam-Prang, Talapat
         Sugsa School, Bangkok
         - "As yet unnamed, not yet in progress", Project
         304,Bangkok
         - "First" Photography Bar, Pomprab, Bangkok
         "Salon show" project304 (new space), Bangkok
         -      "FAB", National Gallery and Bangkok University
         Art Gallery, Bangkok
         - "Redman swimming II", "Cities on the move 6",
         Chao-Pra-Ya River and Tadu Gallery, Bangkok
2000   - "PararellWorld", Project 304,Alliancaise
         International Art Center&Plastique Kinetic
         Worm (Singapore), Bangkok
         -"Redman swimming II", "Useby: asia pacific artists
         Initiate Project", Center of Contemporary
         Photography, Gertrude Street Melbourn, Australia,
         Curated by Sarah Tutton&Tessa Dwyer
         -"Dearm of boat", "L'Art Dans Le Monde 2000",

Culee du pont Alecandre, Paris. Organized by the Beaux Arts Magazine & Bang Magazine
- "Where are you", "This is", Bangkok University Art Gallery, Bangkok,

2002 - " Thesis one", The New White Gallery, Dickson Art Plaza, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

2002-3 - " Present Perfect "The Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok

2004 - " Untitled" The International Artist Workshop, Organized by Sutra, Bhaktapur, Napal
- " Here and Now " About Studio/ About Café, Bangkok (curated by Natalie Bouton)
- "VS", OH! Exhibition, Bangkok
- Flying Circus Project by Theatreworks, Singapore

2005 - "Your map, it's not mine", "[Re] write the city , Bangkok

2006 - "boundary", "School of Bangkok",Tadu Gallery, Bangkok
- "Melting Place" Bangkok University Gallery (new Space), Bangkok (curated by Ark Frongsmut)
- "Red man swimming II and Little Kata", "Tout a Fait Thai 2006" Centre George Pompidou, Paris, France
- "Traitorous", School of Bangkok: who and where are we in this contemporary era Exhibition, Bangkok University Gallery, Bangkok
- As yet Unnamed Project, About Cafe, Bangkok

2008-9 - Bangkok 226, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, Bangkok

2009 - " Please take me home", Safe Place in the Future, Ver Gallery, Bangkok
- "Dear Luxembourg" 7th Asia-Europe Art Camp – Art Workshop for Visual Arts 2009, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg

2010 - "Living Room" 100 Tonson Gallery, Bangkok
- School of Bangkok, Bangkok University Gallery, Bangkok
- "As yet unnamed" Taipei Art Village, Taiwan

2011 - "KFTA (Kata Free Trade Area)", Curated by Patrick Storey, Earl Lu Gallery, LaSalle College of The Arts, Singapore
- "City_net Asia 2011" Curated by Gridthiya Gaweewong, Seoul Museum of Art, Korea
-"Bangkok" Adel, Curated by Brian Curtin DOB Gallery, Bangkok
- "Bangkok Reprise", Curated by Brian Curtin Chulalongkorn Art Centre, Bangkok

2012 - "Thai Trends" Curated by Gridthiya Gaweewong, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, (BACC), Bangkok

2013   - "Hua Krathi project", curated by Rushdi Anwar and,
              Melanie Jaynie Taylor and Shukit Panmongkol at
              Screen Space and Federation Square, Melbourne.
2014   - "Chaos", Dark Horse Gallery, Melbourne, Australia