

Press Release

Pratchaya Phinthong

Today will take care of tomorrow

March 28th (Thu) - May 26th (Sun), 2024

Barakat Contemporary proudly presents Pratchaya Phinthong's first solo exhibition in Korea: *Today will take care of tomorrow* from March 28 to May 26, 2024. The exhibition provides a comprehensive view of the artist's practice that brings together heterogeneous social, economic, and geopolitical systems into constructive yet open-ended friction. Widely dubbed an alchemist of disparate socioeconomic values, Pratchaya Phinthong often acts as an intermediary introducing an exchangeable currency through which distant realities reciprocate. Primarily through extensive traveling and dialogues - from Southern Africa to the South Pacific Ocean¹ - Phinthong finds and gathers materials and narratives for his art projects, allowing them to interplay in both ironic juxtaposition and fateful harmony. His works' minimal appearance and open-endedness correspond to his particular methodology, which openly invites all relevant partakers and coincidences rather than controlling them. As a result, Phinthong's works encompass the fluctuation of meaning over time and the human agencies that shape their courses.

The exhibition addresses a selection of important moments from 2012 onward in Phinthong's expansive practice through which one could segue into some of his journeys. Examples include devising an ecological alternative to the eradication method of tsetse flies that transmit the deadly sleeping sickness in sub-Saharan Africa (*Lines of the Hand*, 2012); tracking the provenance of the 'Broken Hill' skull in the Lusaka National Museum collection, Zambia, after hearing a rumor that it's a fake (*One, is the number divided by, two*, 2021); collaborating with villagers in Ban Napia located in northeastern Laos that remolds the UXOs (unexploded ordnance) left by the US army

¹ Although not exhibited here, a well-known artwork by Pratchaya Phinthong *If I dig a very deep hole* (2007), an installation including two photographs of a full moon, is a good example of his boundless traveling. Phinthong took a picture of the full moon in the Chatham Islands in the South Pacific Ocean because it was the place where he would land if he dug a hole straight through the Earth from Paris. The next day he went back to Paris to take a picture of the same moon.

during the Vietnam War (*Spoon [disk]*, 2019-, *The Organ of Destiny*, 2022-). For this exhibition, as an extension of The Organ of Destiny project, he traveled to the Korean DMZ, an important habitat for an endangered species of cranes in paradoxical association with the recent test flight of the US Air Force's B-21 stealth bomber (*The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)*, 2024 and *A Little of Everything and Nothing at All (Cheorwon and Sarang)*, 2024). The selection of works in Today will take care of tomorrow particularly notes on the vast spatiotemporal distances Phinthong takes up between the diverse geographical locations and socioeconomic functions. They signify the notion of *mobility* - the capacity to shift grounds and cross borders - as one of the momentous instruments in his works that enables and manifests in both conceptual speculation and the act of traveling. Mobility expands the elasticity of the spatiotemporal range and hence one can formulate conceptual suppositions outside an individual's reach. One can imagine scopes that seem undetectable and invisible because it is often beyond the human lifetime's scale of time and space. Moreover, mobility challenges the abstraction often employed in modes of capitalist circulation and valorization via concrete interaction with the individual relations surrounding a story. Through mobility, each established autonomous system that Phinthong brings in for an exchange of values can be provoked and opened up for conversion.

The subtle presence of his artworks may not visually convey the vast spectrum of geographies and subject matter Phinthong covers. The range is condensed to his continuous deployment of diptychs both literal and figurative in his works. The artist places two different systems in close proximity, which largely operate in two modes: pairing/doubling and exchange. In pairing/doubling, Phinthong presents two distinct subjects conventionally understood as opposites as a pair, in intimate, humble scale and form. They are so close to each other that it is uncanny, ironic, or even surreal. For example, in the photograph *Lines of the Hand*, a pair of dead tsetse flies simply lie on the artist's hand. The flies that transmit sleeping sickness, fatal without treatment, are in direct contact with a very much alive person, observing the doom-cast past and future. In some cases, the works are duplicates of another work. For instance *One, is the number divided by, two* is a painting duplicate of documentation from Phinthong's 2013 solo exhibition Broken Hill at the Chisenhale Gallery. It is part of a recent series in which Phinthong has been collaborating with a painter to copy online photo documentation of Phinthong's works photorealistically. Here, a digital photograph, a reproducible material, is reproduced again but manually by someone other than the author; as a result, it becomes a unique work of art that cannot be reproduced again. This work questions the autonomy and ownership of art, contingent on its materiality and maker and its status as a commodity and documentation. Through the formal and conceptual usage of duality, Phinthong resists a singular authority and interpretation and instead advocates coexistence and collaboration.

Furthermore, Phinthong mediates an exchange, a two-way correspondence in his artistic production and engagement sites. In the ongoing series *Spoon [disk]* and *The Organ of Destiny*, he has been working with the villagers of Napia in northeastern Laos, who have been melting UXOs to create silverware and souvenirs to sell to tourists. Phinthong pays the villagers the production fee he received from galleries and institutions and as a result produces materials that extend bilateral fields and values. The villagers' renewal of once a lethal munition, still a threat to many people in Laos, into something functional and tradeable is similar to Phinthong's artistic gesture of transforming the original context into another. David Teh, a writer and curator, as well as a long-term collaborator of Phinthong, stresses that the gesture is not to merge the different systems but "...instrumental, the exchange always two-way: the artist sacrifices the symbolic and economic privileges of art in favor of nonart actors, but in return, appropriates their nonart material as an artwork."² By transferring the seemingly bound values and resources from one system to another, another social route is paved that could unsettle the rigid, unilateral flow of means and recognize the tangible realities of abstract macro economies.

Pratchaya Phinthong's emancipatory as well as reductive strategies together coincide with an organic behavior that is cyclical, one that abides by natural law to self-regulate to stability. The dynamic approach, which oscillates between the macro and micro, community and individual, art and nonart, is further intensified in the variable placement of his works in this exhibition. Not the first time employing this tactic to integrate the nature of sociality of materials,³ Phinthong has proposed two installation variations of *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)*, the newly commissioned work for the exhibition *Today will take care of tomorrow*, to alternate periodically throughout the exhibition. This work is an extension of *The Organ of Destiny*: five pairs of *The Organ of Destiny* are rearranged in the shape that resembles a B-21 Raider in one iteration, and a selection of five poses a couple of cranes take to communicate with each other, in another. Like the forest in the video work, *Today will take care of tomorrow*, which ironically can protect itself from illegal loggers due to the embedded metal shards damaging their machinery, one bird of destruction is repeatedly transformed into the other of hope and regeneration.

Pratchaya Phinthong draws novel cartographies of meaning by revealing events and social relations hidden under generalized definitions. However this cartography is not merely a conceptual one, but it is through direct and concrete encounters in his travels. At times the problem seems too abstract and overwhelming in scale in the complex systems of neoliberal globalization and ongoing histories

2 David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017), 78.

3 Pratchaya Phinthong, *This page is intentionally left blank*. Dec. 2, 2018 - Jan. 27, 2019, BANGKOK CITYCITY GALLERY, Bangkok. The arrangement of precast concrete parking curbs was adjusted daily throughout the show.

of trauma; Phinthong takes the basic method of exchange in an economic structure as a pragmatic opening to conversion. And soon enough, we see the world as interconnected structures, the local and global simultaneously. Like a kind of holistic but subtle transformation one experiences long after a good journey, a series of encounters unknowingly leave an imprint in time. But as the way nature heals itself, it is difficult to notice them as “evidence” because it takes a lifetime or even generations. As today takes care of tomorrow, it happens in time without us even having to try, and we may have to simply observe and listen today.

Artwork Description

(1)

“.”, “..”, “...”, “....”, “.....”, “.....” (2018)

Pigmentary print, framed

68.3 x 45.5 cm (framed 71.6 x 48.7 x 3.4 cm)

42.6 x 63.5 cm (framed 55.8 x 67.1 x 3.4 cm)

30 x 59 cm (framed 33 x 62.2 x 3.4 cm)

30 x 59 cm (framed 33 x 62.1 x 3.4 cm)

42.6 x 63.8 cm (framed 45.9 x 67.2 x 3.4 cm)

42.6 x 63.5 cm (framed 45.8 x 67 x 3.4 cm)

A group of six photographs seems to each depict a different cluster of stars in the night sky, but a few photographs among them hint that they may not be what they appear to be. In them, hands are holding the flat plane that was thought to be the very skies. They are in fact cardboards used to display lottery tickets now left with only the traces of the pins that fixed the merchandise; all unpinned by those who had dreamt of the odds. The hands holding the cardboard belong to various street vendors such as a tuk-tuk driver and a ravioli vendor. Then the boards are backlit by the vendors' kiosk and vehicle lighting, from which the constellation of holes is rendered more definite and glamorous. Abstracted from its surrounding reality, it is like the blind hope that caused the holes from the beginning. Each puncture belongs to individuals who took part in the pipedream, which may be the same mechanism of economic abstraction that seduced them into the promise of wealth in the first place.

(2)

One, is the number divided by, two (2021)

Oil on canvas, acrylic case

44 x 36 cm (acrylic case: 47.5 x 39.5 x 5 cm)

One, is the number divided by, two is a painting duplicate of the documentation from Phinthong's 2013 solo exhibition *Broken Hill* at Chisenhale Gallery. It is part of a recent series in which Phinthong has been collaborating with a painter to copy photorealistically online photo documentation of Phinthong's works. Here, a digital photograph, a reproducible material, is reproduced again but manually by someone other than the author; as a result, it becomes a unique work of art that cannot be reproduced again.

The exhibition and project *Broken Hill* explores the provenance of the 'Broken Hill' skull in the Lusaka National Museum, Zambia collection. Phinthong started the research after hearing a rumor that it was a fake, and the original is housed at the Natural History Museum in London. Soon after confirming that it is true, Phinthong traced back to the network of individuals who were involved in the making of its history.

The 'Broken Hill' skull is the first early human fossil found in Africa, which became crucial evidence for the theory of human evolution positioning the origin of recent ancestors of Homo Sapiens in sub-Saharan Africa. It was originally discovered by Zambian miners at a lead and zinc mine in 1921 in Kabwe, Zambia, and was taken to the Natural History Museum in London.

At Chisenhale Gallery, Phinthong exhibited the replica skull loaned from the Lusaka Museum, as well as another copy he bought online. He also invited Kamfwa Chishala, the Lusaka National Museum guide, who had been telling the visitors the journey of the replica skull, fused with his autobiographical accounts. Chishala retold the story throughout the exhibition in London. Along with the painting *One, is the number divided by, two*, Phinthong continues to question the autonomy and ownership of art, contingent on its materiality and maker and its status as a commodity and documentation.

(3)

Lines of the Hand (2012)

C-print on paper, framed

21.3 x 29 cm (framed 23.2 x 31.8 x 2.7 cm)

Edition of 5 (+ 1 A.P.)

Lines of the Hand, is a photograph part of the *Sleeping Sickness (2012)* project, originally commissioned by Documenta 13, and further branched out in his solo presentation at La Criée Centre for Contemporary Arts, Rennes. Like many of his projects, Phinthong relocates the resources from European art institutions to fund and shed light on the healthcare challenges in Africa and proposes pragmatic solutions.

The project spanned three continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa – including Phinthong’s extensive research trip in Zambia, one of the sub-Saharan African countries affected by the sleeping sickness, or trypanosomiasis, transmitted by tsetse flies. The disease infects and kills thousands of people and livestock every year, and it is fatal without treatment. The first public iteration of the project was *Sleeping Sickness (2012)* shown in Documenta 13, Kassel. There Phinthong simply displayed a pair of dead tsetse flies, a fertile female and a sterile male, on a classic white pedestal with a glass cover. The composition in *Lines of the Hand (2012)* is almost identical to the setting in Documenta 13, only it is the artist’s hand where the flies lie, not the pedestal.

Shortly after in Rennes, under the same exhibition title, he displayed an installation of an ecological and affordable trap for tsetse flies, produced by a Thai company in collaboration with the artist and other researchers. The ecological traps were an alternative to the irradiation method that not only eradicated the tsetse flies but also the surrounding ecological system. Another component was an edited video campaigning the irradiation method to sterilize the male flies; images were removed from the film, and only the sound and subtitles describing the original visuals remained, directly referring to the extreme extermination strategy. Throughout the exhibition, images sent by the local people who had utilized the traps to assess the result were also added to the display.

(4)

Spoon [disk] (2024)

Lead and tin melted from unexploded ordnance of war
21 x 19 cm

Between 1964 and 1973 the US without notice dropped an estimated 270 million cluster bombs on Laos to cut off supply and tracking lines into Vietnam. Thirty percent of them remain unexploded in the ground, continuing to cause various short and long-term casualties. Laos is historically the most bombed nation per capita. “More bombs were dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War than on Germany and Japan combined during World War II,” reported CNN in 2016.

Pratchaya Phinthong has been working with the villagers of Napia in northeastern Laos, who have been melting the UXOs to create silverware and souvenirs to sell to tourists. Phinthong pays the villagers the production fee he receives from galleries and institutions, producing materials that extend bilateral fields and values. The villagers’ renewal of once a lethal munition, still a threat to many people in Laos, into something functional and tradeable is similar to Phinthong’s artistic gesture of transforming the original context into another.

(5)

The Organ of Destiny (Assembly) (2024)

Polished lead and tin, electric wire, stainless steel
1 pair size: 70x25 cm, 110x25 cm, variable installation

In continuation of his collaboration with the Napia village, Laos, Phinthong began *The Organ of Destiny* series in 2022. *The Organ of Destiny* is a pair of melted UXO plates that resemble the mirrors used to treat phantom limb pain. Phinthong was inspired by Steven Sumner, a Canadian activist who also suffered from phantom pain, who distributed these mirrors in areas all over the world with low income.

Commissioned by Barakat Contemporary on the occasion of this exhibition, *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)* is an expansion of *The Organ of Destiny*, using five pairs to form two installation variations to alternate every two weeks throughout the exhibition. One version takes the shape of a B-21 Raider, and in another, a selection of five poses two cranes take to communicate with each other. The B-21 Raider, a stealth bomber developed for the US Air Force by Northrop Grumman, took its first test flight in November 2023. It is mostly undetectable on air radars, otherwise only

identified as a small bird. Phinthong makes a paradoxical connection to the migratory cranes, an endangered species that inhabits the Korean DMZ, another site of which ecology is immensely influenced by complications of the Cold War. The Korean DMZ has been flourishing with flora and fauna, many of which are endangered, welcoming the isolation post-trauma. The electric wires hanging from the ceiling and supporting the cranes' poses are a reminder of the powerline accidents, which injure and kill many of the cranes at the DMZ.

(6)

Today will take care of tomorrow (2022)

PP/MOV4 video

40 mins.

*When we look
at the road
that my people
have been through,
during the war
that was upon us,
during now the peace
that we are surviving,
that we are trying
to find within ourselves,
within our land,
on our land,
there is
no doubt
that our deeds,
our thoughts of today
will take good care
of tomorrow.*

– Paul Malimba, Excerpt from *Today will take care of tomorrow*

Today will take care of tomorrow, the title of Phinthong's video work on display and the exhibition, comes from the title of Paul Malimba's poem on Laos' tragic history as well as its power to heal. The

forty-minute video is an infrared view of the forest and an old Buddhist temple completely ruined by the bombing in Laos. In the first person perspective slowly strolling through, the gaze rests on the traces of violence, shards of ammunition embedded in the trees. Ironically, the forest can protect itself from illegal loggers due to the metal debris damaging their machinery. The capacity of nature to absorb violence and heal is further highlighted in the connection Phinthong makes to the Korean DMZ in *The Organs of Destiny (Assembly)*.

(7)

A Little of Everything and Nothing at All (Cheorwon and Sarang) (2024)

Oil on canvas

38.3 x 51.5 x 4 cm (each)

A Little of Everything and Nothing at All (Cheorwon and Sarang), the new painting diptych interrelated to *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)*, zooms into the story of Cheorwon and Sarang, a female and a male crane couple both wounded and taken special care by the DMZ Peace Town for Migratory Cranes in Cheorwon-gun, Gangwon Province. The painting is of a photograph Phinthong took of the infertile eggs Cheorwon and Sarang laid during his visit to the DMZ Peace Town. The size of the work is congruent to the standard crane egg. Cranes are known to have one partner during their lifetime, and one or two chicks, remarkably similar to a heteronormative nuclear family. The family unit stays together even when a member is left behind wounded. Because of both their health conditions, Cheorwon and Sarang have been laying infertile eggs for two consecutive years without leaving the DMZ. Associated with Phinthong's usage of diptychs as a duplicate of photographs, this work further underscores the notion of multiplicity in regeneration and hope.

Overview of the Exhibition

1. Date

- Thursday, March 28th - May 26th, 2024
- 10:00 - 18:00 | Tuesday - Sunday
- During the exhibition period, two installation variations of *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)* will alternate every two weeks (4/11, 4/25, 5/9, 5/23). The two forms are based on the the recently unveiled B-21 stealth bomber from the US Air Force and the gestures of the crane inhabiting in the DMZ. The rearrangement will be reminded via our instagram story the day before.

2. Address

- 58-4, Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea

3. Inquiry

- info@barakat.kr
- +82 2 730 1948

1. About the Artist

Pratchaya Phinthong



Pratchaya Phinthong (b. 1974, Thailand) lives and works in Bangkok. His works often arise from the confrontation between different social, economic, or geographical systems. They are the result of a dialogue, and bring all their poetic forces from an almost invisible artistic gesture. From his travels, the artist collects objects, materials, and stories that he assembles in his work. He often looks at gathering forms and matters that are opposite but that complete and correspond to one another. His major solo exhibitions include: Singapore Art Museum (upcoming in 2024); Art Center University, Wang Thapra, Bangkok (2020); Art and Culture Centre, Bangkok (2015); Lothringer 13, München (2013); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2013); Centre d'Art Contemporain, Rennes (2012); Modern art museum, GAMeC, Bergamo (2010); Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brétigny (2010).

Pratchaya has also been represented at the Istanbul Biennial; Gwangju Biennale; 2nd CAFAM Biennale, Beijing; DOCUMENTA (13); New Museum Triennial, New York; Taipei Biennial, Taipei; Singapore Biennale; Dhaka Art Summit; The Center for Contemporary, Tel Aviv; Kunsthalle Basel; Museum of Modern Art, Moscow; Centrale, Brussels; National Art Center and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; 14th Biennale de Lyon; Biennale of Contemporary Art, Timisoara; Para Site, Hong Kong; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, MACAN, Jakarta, amongst others.

Pratchaya's work is included in the collections of prestigious institutions including M+ Museum, Hong Kong, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; GAMeC, Bergamo; and SF MOMA, San Francisco.

2. Major Works



Pratchaya Phinthong, *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)*, 2024

Polished lead and tin, electric wire, stainless steel, 1 pair size: 70x25 cm, 110x25 cm, variable installation

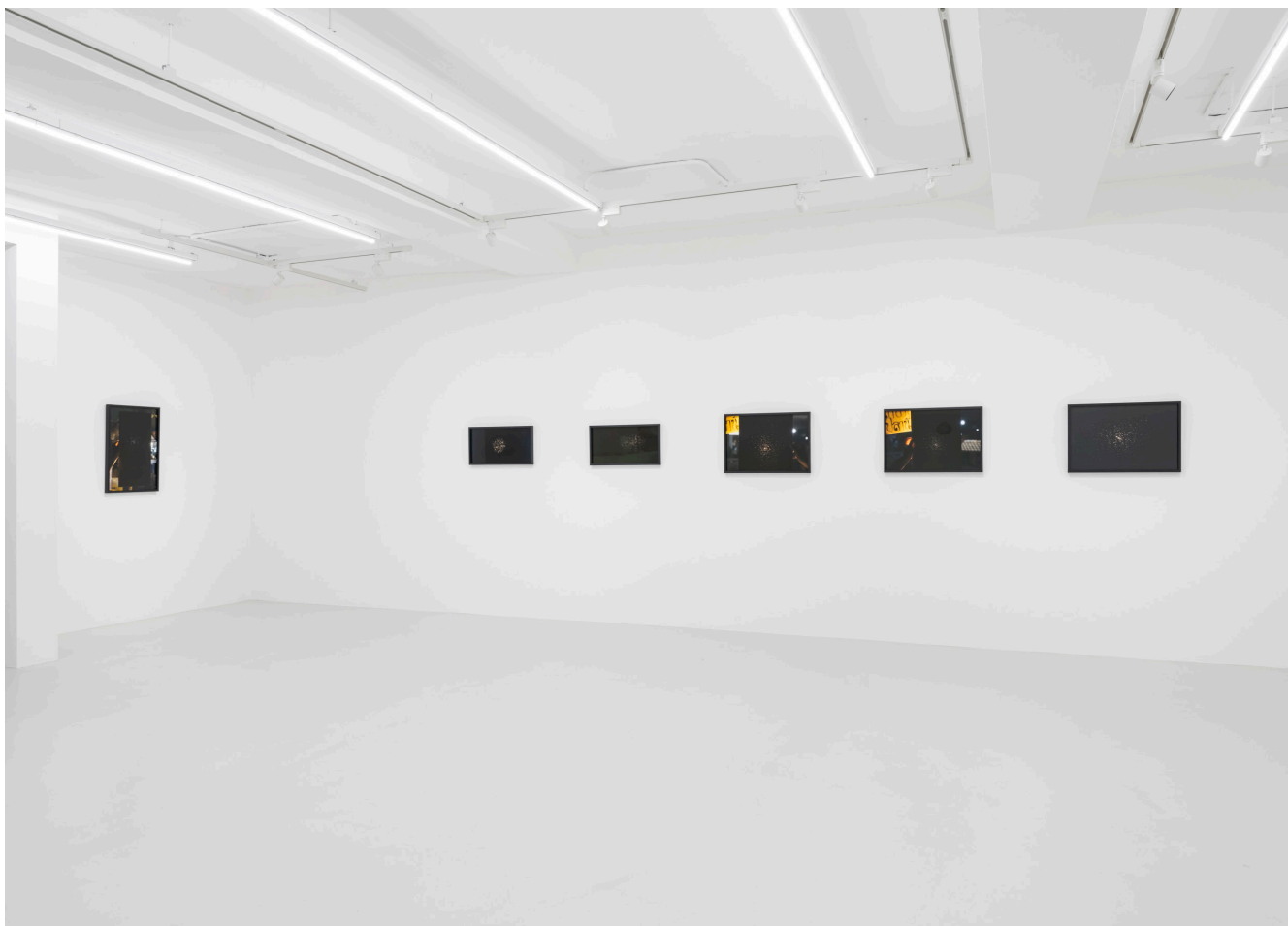
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, *The Organ of Destiny (Assembly)*, 2024
Polished lead and tin, electric wire, stainless steel, 1 pair size: 70x25 cm, 110x25 cm, variable installation
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, *A Little of Everything and Nothing at All (Cheorwon and Sarang)*, 2024
Oil on canvas, 38.3 x 51.5 x 4 cm (each)
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, "... " series, 2018
Pigmentary print, framed
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, ".", 2018
Pigmentary print, framed, 68.3 x 45.5 cm (framed 71.6 x 48.7 x 3.4 cm)
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, "...", 2018
Pigmentary print, framed, 30 x 59 cm (framed 33 x 62.2 x 3.4 cm)
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, *Lines of the hand*, 2012
C-print on paper, framed, 21.3 x 29 cm (framed 23.2 x 31.8 x 2.7 cm)
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, *One, is the number divided by, two*, 2021
Oil on canvas, acrylic case, 44 x 36 cm (acrylic case: 47.5 x 39.5 x 5 cm)
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Pratchaya Phinthong, *Spoon [disk]*, 2024
Lead and tin melted from unexploded ordnance of war, 21 x 19 cm
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary

3. Installation views



Installation view of Pratchaya Phinthong: *Today will take care of tomorrow*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Pratchaya Phinthong: *Today will take care of tomorrow, 2024*

Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea

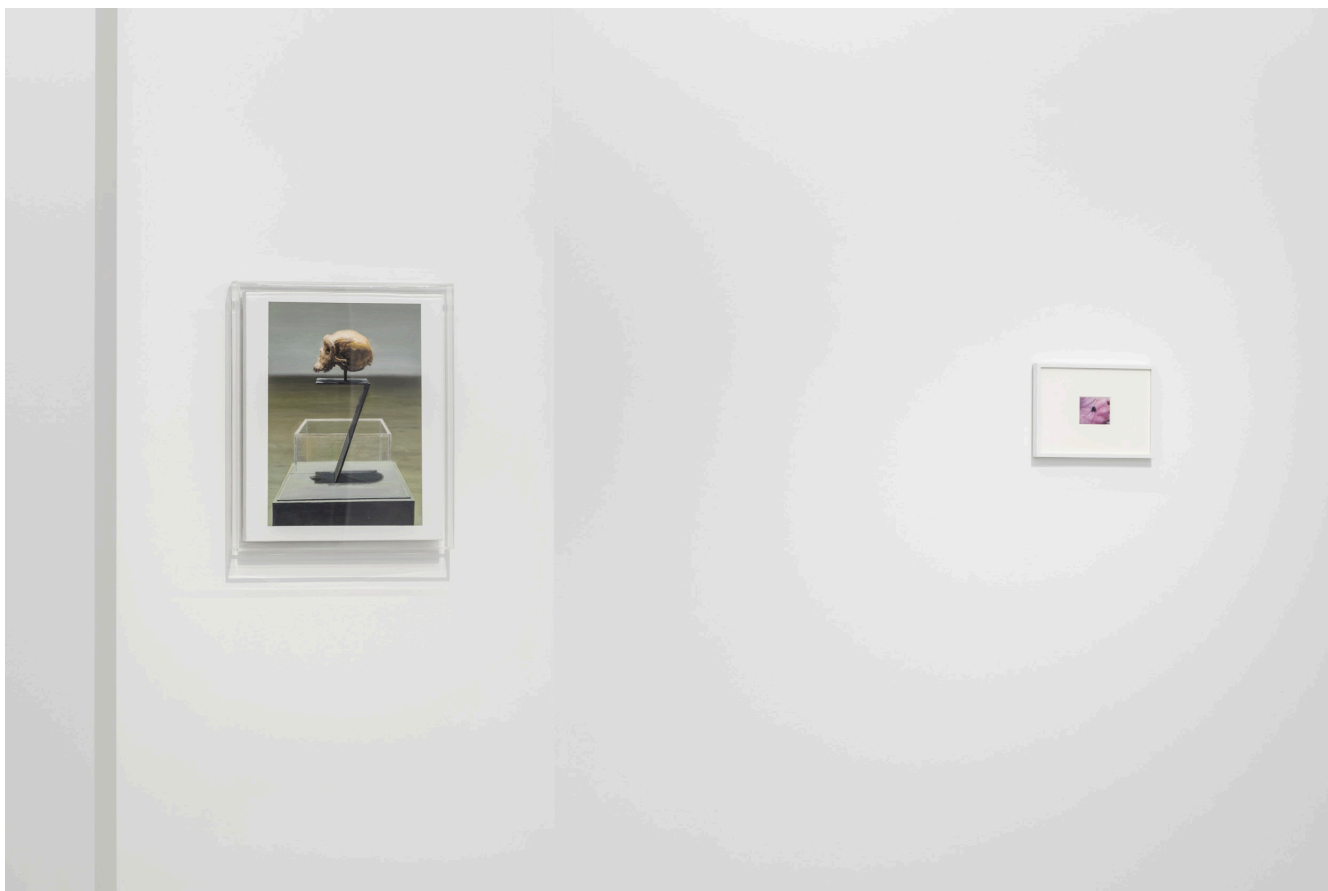
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Pratchaya Phinthong: *Today will take care of tomorrow*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Pratchaya Phinthong: *Today will take care of tomorrow*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Installation view of Pratchaya Phinthong: *Today will take care of tomorrow*, 2024
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary