RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA



UNTITLED 1999 (READING FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

UNTITLED 1999
(READING FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)

January 30–April 18, 1999

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS
The Ohio State University



My feeling
has always been
that everyone
makes a work.

—RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

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Rirkrit Tiravanija
Photo: Kevin Fitzsimons

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Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled 1998 (On the road with Jiew Jeaw Jieb Sri and Moo)
Photo: Joey Kotting, courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise, Corp., New York

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Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled 1997 (Playtime)
Installation view
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Photo courtesy of Gavin Brown's enterprise, Corp., New York

When I first started, I made some food and I left it there, it was kind of boiling and cooking and smelling, and people could look at it, but they didn't really get to touch it...I realized...there was still too much distance between the work and the people looking at the work, so the next step...was to start cooking and letting people eat the meal that was made.

—Rirkrit Tiravanija
at the Wexner Center, January 1999

For nearly a decade, Rirkrit Tiravanija has created artworks in the form of kitchens, dwellings, studios, lounges, and mobile vehicles. In such works, he links people, art, and life in formal and impromptu art settings. *Untitled 1999 (reading from right to left)* adds to the artist's more recent tendency to bring together past projects originally presented singly to create new, multifaceted installations and exhibitions. This particular collection juxtaposes multiple activities that happen simultaneously, site-specifically recontextualized. Here visitors can share free meals in a curry kitchen, jam on guitars and drums, watch a film, play with a computer or inside a child-size glass house, or simply relax and take it all in.

Whether galleries or roadways, the places where people encounter art influence their perceptions of the work and their relationships to it. Although Tiravanija's work is about the things we already know—our everyday selves, environments, and activities—presenting these normal functions outside their usual situations skews any imaginable relationship between them, ourselves, and art. The familiar becomes unfamiliar, yet the installations are still comfortable places to be. It can be both disarming and liberating to abandon our usual gallery habits and break all of the standard museum rules.

Designing with real life and people in mind, Tiravanija offers the museum and its guests friendly environments

and a sometimes baffling array of free opportunities for social interaction, artistic production, and an understanding of art through direct encounters. He uses our lives and surrounding objects as both his subject and the source of his materials. Presented in unfinished formats that the general public interacts with, his installations are sculptural and functional compositions built from objects generally gathered in grocery, media, and building supply stores. Yet Tiravanija's central, defining medium is the people who visit his work, engage themselves in a protracted creative process, and change the installations over time. These projects are less about what is on view than how things function.

The work is consistently about process as well. Essentially, all of its intentions and outcomes are variable rather than predetermined. Amid the woks and wheels, lumber and hardware, screens and strings, it is the interactions of people with the art that bring the works to life. Unlike more traditional exhibitions, Tiravanija's are never static: every time people visit the gallery, they will notice subtle if not dramatic transformations. The important thing is that the work is inhabited and used by people. It would be a disaster only if the exhibition closed and nothing had changed or taken place.

Creativity is an innate human drive that is different from person to person, and Tiravanija is as sensitive to our natural creative tendencies and directions as to our perceptions of art and ideas. His multidisciplinary installations connect sculpture, architecture, and media, performing, and conceptual arts to familiar settings organized around human behaviors belonging to everyone. The installations in *Untitled 1999 (reading from right to left)* represent what may be considered the artist's and our own daily occupations of work and play, eating, entertainment, and relaxation. But the installations also express the artist's conceptual approach and formal understanding of art, as well as the possibilities and endurance of artistic and conceptual processes. Working from ideas is central to Tiravanija—his projects are like thinking made visible. They offer a social mirror that reflects human lives, but like most conceptual art, they are about art as well. He builds on and extends the conceptual art practice of finding artistic potential in virtually any form or presentation format.

At the same time, his work overturns economic systems and disrupts the business of art by making activities and opportunities that normally cost money available for free. Involving many people, organizations, materials, and objects, Tiravanija redefines and questions what art is, who is its creator, and how one can understand, market, or collect common things and transitory experiences.

Tiravanija has described *Untitled 1999 (reading from right to left)* as an apartment-like space with different areas for separate yet related activities. Those activities

parallel our own occupations to show how art and culture, our lives and creativity, are valuable, reciprocal entities. The construction period for the exhibition encompassed several challenging weeks during which the installation crew worked full bore, long and hard. But there was a lot of camaraderie along with practical modifications and newly conceived additions and enhancements to the work being installed. At every turn, we remembered that these projects were for people and all about artistic and institutional processes.

Over 1200 people attended the opening celebration, and more than half sampled a bowl of curry before leaving. We spent the entire evening in the "kitchen" of *Untitled 1997 (Free/Still)* chopping and cooking, satisfying everyone who wished to try the free meal. This installation is normally shown in a facsimile of Gallery 303, a New York art space where the project was previously presented as *Untitled 1992 (Free)* and *Untitled 1995 (Still)*. The evolving work is now called *Untitled 1997 (Free/Still)* and is part of the Robert J. Shiffler Collection and Archive in Greenville, Ohio, where it is permanently installed and, on occasion, put to use to make a meal for guests. Remnants and leftovers are salvaged and archived so that the work builds over time, and we received mysterious boxes labeled "coconut milk cans, 1992" that no one dared open. Our own leftover collection began with the remains of a meal for our press preview, and we add to it every Thursday, Friday, and Sunday (we cook at least three days a week).



At the Wexner Center, the curry installation surrounds a 1962 Ultra Van motor home driven by the artist and five Thai students in a project called *Untitled 1998 (On the road with Jiew Jeaw Jieb Sri and Moo)*, a transcontinental journey that concluded at and was sponsored by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The antique motor home was equipped for the trip with contemporary computer and communications equipment, so that the travelers could share their journey via a web site and e-mail. The Ultra Van was perhaps the most elaborate to date of Tiravanija's modified vehicles, which have also included bicycles and cars equipped to sustain a satisfying life on or off the road. Tiravanija and the students left from the west

coast in the motor home and headed east in a zigzag path, visiting American landmarks in a kind of a cross-country family vacation. After the Ultra Van was rear-ended in Arizona and left in a sadly wrecked state, they continued their travels in a newer vehicle. When Tiravanija and the students stopped by the Wexner Center for a site visit and teleconference during this journey, I innocently pointed out the rarely used and large dock door behind a wall at the north end of the gallery. Months later, the wall was removed and the crippled motor home was being carried, hoisted, and dragged into the building. Next to the motor home is a computer station showing a CD-ROM diary kept by Tiravanija and the students in Thailand and throughout their east-west adventure.

Bringing together the American motor home and the Thai curry kitchen has particular significance for Tiravanija, whose own identity connects east and west. His projects are designed to introduce many different cultures to each other through art and communication—and often cuisine. In so doing, myths and perceptions of differences are dispelled by the recognition of universal likeness. The pairing also references the artist's childhood—he moved about with his parents, who were Thai diplomats, and recalls time spent with his grandmother at her garden restaurant and TV cooking show in Thailand. In keeping with the traditions of multiple cultures, we offered American Sporks and Asian chopsticks as eating utensils for our curry guests.

Untitled (D) 1995, which resembles an unfinished, crate-like studio, was built of lumber and drywall to replicate a rehearsal space Tiravanija and his friends have used in New York. The installation was previously presented for the 1995 Whitney Biennial; at the Wexner Center it was re-created according to the artist's original plans. The room is subdivided into two areas; the first houses a film of the late Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. But even before entering the installation, you'll often hear the sounds of a band jamming in the second room, which is rigged with rock and roll instruments for visitors to play. (The equipment includes two electric guitars, an electric bass guitar, a full drum set, amplifiers, and microphones.) At the opening celebration, the rehearsal studio was



raucous and in full swing. There, groups of friends and strangers broke social (and probably sound) barriers as they shared time playing together. As part of this project, special guitar picks were imprinted with words Tiravanija chose to slyly reference other projects: "demonstration," "read, read, reading," "das social Kapital," and "one revolution per minute," in helvetica boldface type.

Untitled 1997 (Playtime) replicates architect Philip Johnson's famous glass residence at the scale of a child. Although adults are welcome in the transparent structure, it is a home supplied with paper and activities geared to youngsters. It was originally shown in the sculpture garden Johnson designed for The Museum of Modern Art in New York. By evoking Johnson's famous house—a place both private and secluded and public and revered—Tiravanija introduces the young viewers to varied ideas about architecture. At the Wexner Center, he added a monitor inside the structure that screened a comical and curious excerpt from the Jacques Tati film also titled *Playtime.*

A few years back, Tiravanija recreated his apartment in an installation called *Untitled 1996 (tomorrow is another day)* at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. That exhibition remained open 24 hours a day: people slept and bathed there, celebrated a child's birthday, had a cocktail party, and generally used the space as a home away from home. Each element of *Untitled 1999 (reading from right to left)* similarly shows Tiravanija's emphasis on process and people, his resolute faith in materials and human abilities, and his commitment to projects that are ever evolving. Here, works shown before are site-specifically altered without losing their original, conceptual essence. The interactive involvement of viewers results in multi-storied, nonlinear narratives and interpretations that shape the works and counter their sparse, unfinished, rudimentary existence. Viewers may sense that we don't need much to have what we really need—sustenance, creative outlets, companionship. Naturally some will ask, Can anything be art? If it's free, is it valuable? Tiravanija might answer that those questions too are part of the process he investigates. This isn't an art that imitates life but one that grows from an understanding of both based on direct experiences. So please don't be timid, open up and allow yourself to have a good time.

ANNETTA MASSIE
Associate Curator of Exhibitions
February 1999

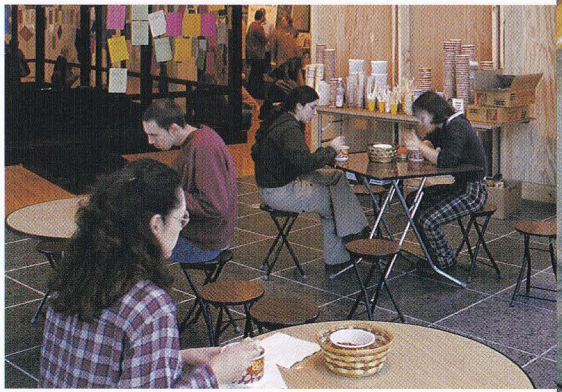


Rirkrit Tiravanija
Photo courtesy of Jason Schmidt, 1997

I see *Untitled 1999 (reading from right to left)* as a large apartment, with different rooms which can be lived in, with different functions, fulfilling different needs, different senses, different boundaries and relations. [The title suggests] reading back—or backwards—making an improper reading, but it also refers to differences in reading or possible reading. Though many of us leaf through book pages from right to left often, we still read the books or printed material from left to right. But in Chinese or Japanese (though not Thai) books/text are written and read from right to left. (Or am I getting it all reversed? It is rather difficult for me to illustrate through textual explanation, it is a physical thing.) [So it suggests] the idea of starting from a different point, place or position physically and mentally. An act against habit. A confused familiar. A shift in place or position, different scales and perspective, a threshold, another step.

—Rirkrit Tiravanija,
letter to the Wexner Center, November 1998

Rirkrit Tiravanija was born in Buenos Aires in 1961. After high school in Bangkok, he studied at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, the Banff Centre School of Art in Banff (Canada), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Whitney Independent Study Program. Since the early 1990s, he has traveled extensively, creating installations and related works in major cities and institutions in the United States, Europe, Brazil, Japan, and Thailand. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, as well as international festivals including the biennials of Venice, New York, Lyon, Sydney, Kwangju (South Korea), Johannesburg, and Berlin. Tiravanija currently lives and works primarily in New York and Berlin.











UNTITLED 1997

(Free/Still)

> Every time somebody else comes into the kitchen and helps you or eats with you, the work changes...The conversation is different. The other person has a different idea of what they're looking at...so for me it's always kind of a moving and changing thing.

—RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA
AT THE WEXNER CENTER, JANUARY 1999

LEFT PAGE
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons; Richard K. Loesch (far left and below)

RIGHT PAGE
Photo: Kevin Fitzsimons





We all lamented our loss, and thought of the time we spent with it—it was a car, a kitchen, a bed, a closet, a studio, an office, a space, a center, a nice couch, a tub and a home…The Ultra Van No. 200 was a very nice van to travel in, indeed.

—Rirkrit Tiravanija,
Untitled 1998 (Journal)





UNTITLED 1998

(On the road with Jiew Jeaw Jieb Sri and Moo)

LEFT PAGE
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons (far left);
Richard K. Loesch

RIGHT PAGE
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons (far right);
Richard K. Loesch









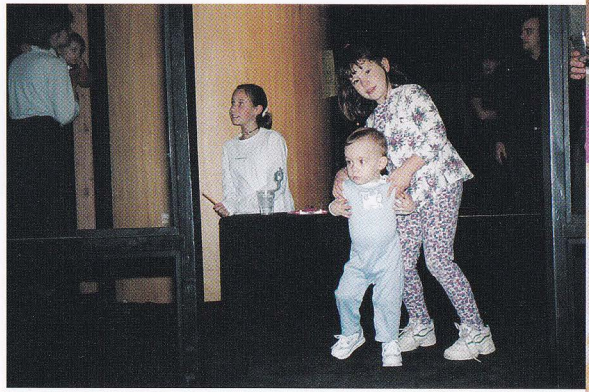
Untitled (D) 1995

The "D" comes from the musical chord D, which was originally how the piece was actually played and seen and shown... I had wanted to create a situation where everyone could come and play. So you could step in and take over and if you didn't know how to play that chord you could learn it right there and start to play...[But] it was impossible to have this D chord going forever and of course there are always people coming in and they have their own needs and ideas of what they would like to play...[So then] I just set it up so that anybody could come in and play whatever they wanted to in this particular room.

—Rirkrit Tiravanija
at the Wexner Center, January 1999

LEFT PAGE
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons; Richard K. Loesch (far left)

RIGHT PAGE
Photo: Richard K. Loesch







There is no wall really in this glass box, so the only place you can put anything up is on the glass...The whole structures becomes the shell and the wall and the exhibition space itself...It is a very pristine looking object right now. Hopefully in a week, when everyone gets to interact with it, it will start to evolve itself and change in some fashion. I like to see the thing change depending on the interaction of the people who are using it, so there is no real sense of how it will look. As long as there's action it will be quite fine.

—Rirkrit Tiravanija
at the Wexner Center, January 1999





UNTITLED 1997

(Playtime)

LEFT PAGE
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons (far left); Richard K. Loesch

RIGHT PAGE
Photos: Richard K. Loesch

Acknowledgments

Rirkrit Tiravanija's exhibitions are about people and their interactions with each other and art. His projects employ many individuals, organizations, and diverse talents in prominent and obscure roles. We extend heartfelt congratulations and deepest thanks to Rirkrit for his collaboration, enthusiasm, and accomplishments. The following list, hopefully not too incomplete, includes those whose generosity, hands, and efforts also made this exhibition possible, beginning with a special note of gratitude to our extraordinary funders and in-kind supporters: Bob Shiffler, Toby Devan Lewis, Wild Oats, Columbus Percussion, and the Wexner Center Foundation. Exhibition Designer Benjamin Knepper and the entire Wexner Center Security staff merit particular mention for their consistent cooperation, creativity, and patience. Thanks are also due to the installation crew and the Wexner Center staff, especially those included in the following list of helpful colleagues and essential friends: A & B Auto Wrecking, Dwight Alsbach, Tom Alspach, Glen Arbogast, Su Au Arnold, Atlas Van Lines, Amanda Ault, Nadine Bailey, David Bamber, Bruce Bartoo, Kirstie Bell, Scott Bennett, Claudia Bonham, Ann Bremner, Gavin Brown, Anne Burkhart, Robert Chaney, Elizabeth Cherry, Alex Cofield, Color Text, Columbus Fasteners, Columbus Pipe, Chris Conti, Cooch@skrew.com, Cottingham, Cross Country Transport, Jill Davis, Dealers Lumber, Matt Driscoll, Emerald Isle Production, Mary Finke, Kevin Fitzsimons, Kristine Flaherty, Kim Fullenlove, Sherri Geldin, Kevin Hathaway, Pug Heller, Norm Helmkay, Andy Hensler, Chris Hill, Paul Hill, Elaine Hostetler, Dick Howell, Peter Huttinger, J D Jackson, Stephen Jones, Java and Mark Kittrick, Koo Stark (the band), Joey Kotting, Rory Krupp, Darnell Lautt, Terry Libby, Richard K. Loesch, Michael Lucas, William Massie, Patrick Maughan, Jeff McCargish, Patrick McCusker, Gretchen Metzelaars, Migros Museum, C. C. Mitchell, Kate Monson, Krista Morelli, The Muth Brothers Co., Ellen Napier, Alicia Oddi, Ohio State University Roads and Grounds staff, Ohio State University Units staff, Jeffrey M Packard, Bill Parker, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Rite Rug, Sarah J. Rogers, Jim Rupp, Schreiner's Hardware, James A. Scott, Sherwin Williams, Jenny Shrodes, Karen Simonian, John Smith, South Texas Drywall, Aida Stanish, State Fire Marshall's Office, Timothy Steele, Joe Stoneburner, Mike Sullivan, Irene Tesfai, Maria Troy, Patricia Trumps, Ultra Van Motor Home Coach Club, United Window Inc., Wasserstrom Restaurant Supply, Wexner Center Café, Wexner Center Host Committee, Ken Wildman, and Rein Wolfs.

A. M.
February 1999

Related Publication

Tiravanija, Rirkrit. *Supermarket*. Zurich: Migros Museum/Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1998.

This monograph, copublished by the Wexner Center, is the most comprehensive publication on Tiravanija's work to date. It documents his projects in numerous color images and commentaries by artists, curators, critics, collaborators, and friends who have shared experiences with the artist.

Look for this title in the Wexner Center Bookshop.



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ON THE COVER
Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled 1999
(reading from right to left)
Installation views
Wexner Center for the Arts
The Ohio State University
Photos: Kevin Fitzsimons (far left and right center); Richard K. Loesch (left center and far right)