Nothing: A Retrospective by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lertchaiprasert

Chiangmai University Art Museum and "the land", Chiang Mai
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Organized by Chiangmai University Art Museum
Curated by Gridthiya Gaweewong
Assistant curated by Karen Demavivas and coordinated by Sasiwimon Wongjarin

LIST OF WORKS: Kamin Lertchaiprasert

SECOND FLOOR

1. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Self portrait*, 1987**
drawing by charcoal, and oil on paper
76 x 56 cm.

Self portrait is a series that Kamin produced while he was in New York. It is about himself and his feelings of alienation within a foreign country. In the beginning, Kamin focused on the expression of emotions rather than concepts in his works.

2. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Black and white photographs and photo etchings*, 1983-1987**
18 x 14 in. & 57 x 49 cm.

Kamin Lertchaiprasert was trained as an art student at the Faculty of Paintings, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts from Silapakorn University in Bangkok. He started his artistic career with photography, drawing, painting and etching. This series was created during his studies at Silapakorn in his third year. Even though the faculty did not offer photography courses, Kamin started to teach himself by experimenting with other techniques such as etching. He incorporated them in an interesting way by portraying his agony and alienation towards his own society. His studio, the Grand Palace, and Tha Pra Palace were the backdrops for this series.

Kamin expressed the loss of his mother from an accident in his photo-etching series, rendering his guilt and agony. In the Chinese funeral, he created a fake leg to burn, as a replacement of his mother's leg. This experience led him to use the mannequins and the body as a means to portray the notion of death and life.

3. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Kaw Aue Kaw Kai (Kaw Kai, Chor Ching, Thor Patak, Tor Nangmonto, Tho Tao, Tor Thaharn, Ror Rua, Wor Waen, Bo Baimai, Por Pan, Faw Fun)*, 1990**
acrylic on canvas
61 x 61 cm.

After his graduation, Kamin spent five years in New York. There, he was concerned about the issues of Thai identity. He was seeking Thai characteristics in contemporary painting outside of traditional patterns. He began to explore the

language as one possibility. He questioned, *"How is 'being Thai' reflected in art? What makes Thai culture "Thai"? Living in another country, I realized that the main cultural value, which is within ourselves all the time, is the 'Thai Language".* * The Thai alphabet became a starting point in his new series, *Kaw Ei Kaw Kai,* which marked an important step in entering into a conceptual process. He reinterpreted the Thai alphabet in the contemporary context, minimimalizing and translating them into new meanings of color and texture. The painting is part of this series which includes a catalogue in a form of the text book, which is finally being distributed in the major text book store chain Suksapan in Bangkok. The idea was double folded, to introduce the children to a contemporary version of the Thai alphabet, and foreigners to the Thai alphabet framed in a contemporary art context. The other important component of this piece was a performance *Second Childhood* which Kamin performed at his opening at Visual Dharma Gallery. In the performance, he used his foot to write the letter and cited some phrases or sentences related to the letters he wrote. It was a spontaneous piece which marked his move from an object oriented to a process oriented art. The concept is more important that the object.
(A Short Story : Kamin by Uthit Atimana, Normal – Nature Catalogue, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1997, p. 19)

4. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Niras Thailand*, 1991**
Live Performance *, Black and white photography, Footprint
20 x 14 in. each (6 pcs)

Niras Thailand (Thailand, A Journey) is a conceptual project consisting of five series including photography, poems, drawings, footprints and a drawing to spirit. When Kamin visited Thailand after spending some time in New York, he documented his daily experience during his visit with his camera. Kamin sees himself as having a tri-cultural background, as a Thai born Chinese living in the US. He incorporated that notion in his works by crafting his name in Chinese, Thai and English in the back of his sandals. They are very apparent in this series. His black and white photography are snapshots of urban landscape. These socio–political works explore labor and under privileged lives on the streets. They are fragmented and semi-documentary in style with his sandal prints imposed on corners of the images. On the works, he then wrote poems inspired by each image and stamped his sandals on the photographs.

** Live performance was coined by Kamin himself; regarding that life is a performance. And he's a performer.*

5. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***ART Series*, 1989**
etching on paper
12.5 x 15 cm. (4 pcs)
Collection of Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

When he returned to New York after his trip in Thailand, Kamin was confused about the meaning of art. He started to compare art with other disciplines and raised interesting questions. *Art Series* consisted of images of Albert Einstein, Pope John Paul II, Naked Girl, and himself. Einstein represented science, which he questioned in relation to creativity, "If art is creative, won't science be more creative than art?" He also questioned Pope John Paul, who represented the spiritual world, "If art is spiritual, what about religion? Should it be more spiritual than art? The girl performing oral sex rendered the idea of the everyday. While Eastern people believe that art is

part of their everyday experience, what about oral sex, it's created out of necessity, but only for pleasure? Is it more creative than art? The fourth one is his self-portrait screaming and confused.

6. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***I want a gold medal, sir*, 1992**
drawing on paper
90 x 60 cm.

Two decades ago, National Art Competition was considered one of the most important forums for young and mid–career artists in Thailand. Most of them waited to join this annual competition and hoped to win the 'gold medal' from the 'National Competition". Kamin sent this piece to enter the competition in attempt to mock, and critique this competition system. It was a straight forward massage to the jury, candidates, and competitors, as well as audience. This piece is a site specific work, which reflects its content and site. His satirical and humorous statements have a hidden agenda. He spoke honestly about human desire. It is also a critique of the art community's mentality that institutions need to 'endorse' their artistic career.

7. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Time and Experience*, 1990**
***Hand Paint*, acrylic on paper, 365 pieces, 8 x 8 in. (each).**
***Foot Print*, acrylic on paper, 365 pieces, 11 x 14 in. (each).**

Kamin referred to Albert Einstein on the notion of time, "*I am impressed by a quotation from Einstein in which he wonders how we acknowledge 'Time' ; we perceive time through experience ; everybody conceives 'Time' differently, depending on their state of mind. This concept made me realize the value of 'Time' as related to my own state of mind and my experience in everyday life".* * This is the first series of his famous one year works. Kamin started to work everyday, one piece a day, experimenting with painting by hand and foot. It was produced at the same time as the *Kaw Ei Kaw Kai* series, while he was in New York, to prove his own existence. This piece was also considered as his self–therapy. Kamin displayed the series by placing them on the floors and walls. *Hand paint* was laid on the floor and *Foot print* on the walls. Kamin allowed people to step on the works in an attempt to change the perception and behavior of the audience. He wanted audiences to consider the value of the works, instead of the objects. In this show, the pieces will serve as a 'floor' or 'carpet' for Rirkrit Tiravanija's installation *Untitled (D)* which are musical instruments set up to be played by the audience.
(A Short Story : Kamin by Uthit Atimana, Normal – Nature Catalogue, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1997, p. 21)

8. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Niras Thailand, Drawing to Spirit*, 1992**
A video, live performance when the artist burnt his 1000 pieces of drawing by charcoal, earth, wind, water, fire and acrylic on paper.
8 x 20 in. (each)

Inspired by Chinese yin and yang philosophy, this piece focuses on the balance of nature. The forms are comparable to amoebas and other natural forms. He considered this process, as a self–study, a nature study, and an art therapy. During the show, he went to the gallery space every day, and burned a drawing every eight

minutes. In Chinese tradition, burning fake money or other materials is a means to make merit and pay respect to the spirit of the dead body. Kamin used this ritual as a means to pay respect to senior, creative people who have passed away. This piece marks an important step for him again, in terms of using ritual, culture, and then moving on to ephemerality and emptiness. It was his manifesto not to cling to the object, but to gear them towards spiritual value. He stepped forward to do more process oriented works.

9. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Niras Thailand in Poem*, 1991**
live performance, acrylic and charcoal on paper, 104 pieces
14 x 14 in. (each).

Also inspired by yin–yang philosophy, Kamin created a void in these works as a metaphor for emptiness by actually cutting a hole in the paper. Another hole was drawn alongside this void, to symbolize invisible natural forms like air. He's interested in the relationship between the visible and invisible aspects of nature. The vertically oriented forms and lyrical paint strokes of his poems written in Thai is reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy. Trained as a printmaker, Kamin transformed his real life experiences into these pieces by using his sandals (crafted into three languages) as print blocks with himself as the printing machine and the ground as paper. As a live performance, he printed his sandals onto the paper and wrote a poem on the work inspired by his daily experiences each day. As part of his journey, *Niras Thailand in Photography* represents his physical trip through the urban landscape of Thailand, while this series *Niras Thailand in Poem* is an internal trip through his mindscape.

FIRST FLOOR

10. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Muang-nging Saelao*, 1991-1992**
oilstick and acrylic on canvas
366 pieces, 12 x 12 in. (each).

Muang – nging Saelao was the former name given to Kamin Lertchaiprasert by his family. Changing his name into 'Thai' was one step to changing his identity. After finishing his *Kaw Ei Kaw Kai* series in New York, he began this series with a child–like, cartoon version. To search for a 'Thai identity' in the works of art is problematic. He considers how languages and the search for national identity lead to a nationalism that nurtures the ego and produces political conflict, racism, and in the worst case, war. Hence, he was looking for something more 'universal' in his works. A new possibility in his approach to art drew inspiration from children's art which is free, innocent, and honest with no allegiances to nationhood. He used spontaneous, childlike drawings in his *ABC* series to make fun of the art world. Kamin expanded this technique to *Muang-ning Saelao* to express his thoughts in 1991–2 when he was in New York and Bangkok. This series was divided into two parts. In the first, he dealt with social problems and in the second, his personal problems. In this work, Kamin neither cares about aesthetics nor art theory. He plays with his own identity on many levels, as a child and as an adult and with his three cultural backgrounds. In this project, he realized that honesty and straightforwardness allows himself to release the art theories and restrictions which he learned in his career. His understanding of art and individual freedom in expression was increasing.

11. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***What's in My Mind,* 1992-1993**
oil pastel and charcoal on paper, 365 pieces
22 x 30 in. (each).

What's in My Mind is a continuation of the series *Niras Thailand in Poem*. This series and another project called *Art is not Silpa* deals with the notion of 'Time'. Kamin started this project in August 1992, and finished it 365 days later. This project is a continuation of the philosophy found in his previous works. Kamin 'still' makes one piece per day. – The work 'still' deals with daily experiences. In this project, Kamin still evaluates his experiences and tries to understand them in order to see whether they were right or wrong, suitable or not. He 'still' writes a short sentence that summarizes his thoughts, together with his signature and the date of the experience.
(A Short Story: Kamin by Uthit Atimana, Normal – Nature Catalogue, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1997, p. 23)

12. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Normal and Nature,* 1995-1996**
charcoal on paper, 366 pieces
35.5 x 100 cm. (each).

*"I was searching for the meaning of life and the value of art, until I read this book. It made me understand that Buddhism is a way that led to the 'Ultimate Truth', with very clear directions on the various steps towards that 'truth' and how to practice. When I understood what this book communicated to me in writing, I decided to put the Buddhist method into practice". * Normal and Nature* is a continuation of Kamin's masterpiece, *Problem – Wisdom*. The influence of Luang Pho Cha, (the famous Monk) led him to practice mediation and yoga. This is the most important turning point in his life and artistic practice. Kamin works with his daily experience as simple as it can be by using charcoal on paper. He summarized his thoughts and put them on the paper. The series is part of a learning process in trying to understand nature and himself. The series looks and sounds didactic, but it is intended for himself, not the audience.
(A Short Story: Kamin by Uthit Atimana, Normal – Nature Catalogue, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 1997, p. 24)

13. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Nothing,* 2000- present**
drawing by charcoal on handmade paper
1460 pieces, 21 x 27 cm. each
work in progress

There are many ways to do meditation such as sitting, walking and staring. However, Kamin created his own meditation method through drawings, based on his experience and training as an artist. Amidst his busy schedule at his alternative space Umong Sipphadhamma, doing his own works, and taking care of his family and the Land, Kamin spared some time each day to make a drawing in order to let go of himself into nothingness. He pays attention to his breathing, in and out, and empties himself of thought, by drawing on handmade paper. When he's done with each one, he places them in a glass box. Kamin 'practiced' these pieces from 2000 until the present. This work is still in progress. It emphasizes the necessity of the present. His working process reinforces the notion of art and life. He considers the value of art making in the process of each activity. Time, ephemerality, and the direct

experience of the everyday are important elements in his work as they are in Rirkrit's process.

14. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Sitting*, 2004**
charcoal on handmade paper
365 pcs, 21 x 27 cm. each
work in progress

Sitting is one of the two series that Kamin is working on at the moment. Both works in progress are displayed in this retrospective. By showing this work in progress, Kamin shows that time plays an important role in his work. "Sitting" for him is to stop all activities in order to examine oneself. 'When your body stops, your mind starts to stop', he said. He's trying to learn the core and value of life through seeing things as ephemeral, *anitjang, tungkang* and *anatta*. From his experience with sitting, Kamin consequently draws on paper. He will continually put his drawing in the remaining empty frames now hanging in the space for the duration of the show. Like the works in *Nothing*, he shows us that time, experience, and daily life is important to his life. Art making is a process of improving and balancing life. It is about sharing and nature. It is as significant as his learning process through Buddhism, by using art to reshape his own soul.

15. Kamin Lertchaiprasert
***Anitjang, Tukkang, Anatta*, 2000 (self portrait)**
charcoal on paper
126 x 62 cm.

A continuation from *Normal and Nature*, this piece clearly shows how much Buddhism has influenced Kamin's work. The process is similar to *Normal and Nature*, but the difference is that he did not draw from just everyday experiences. He picked the subject matter from both external and internal experiences. He practices meditation in order to understand things with detachment. Everything is nothingness, empty and ephemeral. In the works, he wrote three words of Buddhist wisdom: *anitjang* (uncertainty), *thukang* (suffering) and *anatta* (Ephemeral). This work addresses the issues of uncertainty in the life cycle: birth, old age, sickness and death, by using two images, one of his father in wheelchair, and one of his son in his clip.

(Based on conversation with Kamin Lertchaiprasert, August, 2004, Chiangmai)

LIST OF WORKS: Rirkrit Tiravanija

None of the works here are original; the works in this exhibition are copies. Typically in a museum retrospective, each of the artist's major works are gathered and shipped to the host institution. In this case, each piece has been translated from its original form into the version that has been made on site at the CMU Art Museum. For example, in *Untitled (pad thai)*, which was exhibited in New York in 1990, the

installation included electric woks, a variation on the traditional charcoal woks you see here. Similarly, the apartment just outside the museum is outfitted with local Thai furnishings, instead of the Western furniture found in the earlier versions which were shown in Cologne and New York. Most of the "copies" found in this retrospective include local materials that relate both more directly to the Chiang Mai community and also to Rirkrit's own upbringing in a Thai household. Here we cannot help but consider questions of origins and originality, as the "copies" somehow become original.

Second Floor

1. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (Mr. Spock), 1968-1998/2004**
framed color ink-jet print

This photograph was taken by Rirkrit's father in 1968, and is an image of Rirkrit and his sister, where the artist plays with Plasticine. Rirkrit later re-photographed the image and used it as a documentation of his first sculptural experiment. (Mr. Spock is a character from the popular American TV series, *Star Trek*, an alien with trademark pointed ears.)

2. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (kaw for kai), 1981/2004**
spirit house, temple, audio recording through three speakers, and drawing

My second year in undergrad school...I made a Spirit House, which is a miniature house they commonly build on a pole in Thailand. Its use is for the spirits on the land. A shrine to them with food and water in it, a place to communicate.
So when I was making it, I was thinking what does this mean to be making this here in the west and what would it mean to bring it back to Thailand. It was about language and identity. All work that I have ever made is about the position I am in the western world, which I was trying to understand.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey. "In Conversation: Rirkrit Tiravanija," *Brooklyn Rail*, February 2004.)

Rirkrit's earliest work in our exhibition, *Mai Me Chue* (kaw for kai) was originally made in 1981 and points to Rirkrit's use of architecture to explore his hybrid place in the world. Rirkrit left Thailand for college in Canada when he was 19 years old, with the vague idea of becoming a photojournalist, although at that point his only exposure to photography came from *Life* and *National Geographic* magazines. His art education began in earnest in Canada and then the United States, where his learning was framed in a Western art discourse. His work, therefore, manifests both influences, that of Thailand, and that of the West, and in it, Rirkrit practices a process of "cultural retrieval" in the blurring of art and life, allowing him to fluctuate between cultures. By placing the spirit house in this exhibition and in the land of his origin, he is, in a sense, paying respect to the location, according to Thai custom. The drawing of the first letter (*kaw* for *kai*) of the Thai alphabet as a backdrop for the house can be seen as a way of locating one's position through language. In his 1990 painting *Kaw Aue Kaw Kai*, Kamin also depicted the Thai alphabet as a way of exploring his identity. Writer Bruce Hainely touches on the complexity of this in-between state, saying, "because of his Thai origins, many have linked Tiravanija's aesthetic to Eastern philosophies. This may be...crucial. Yet consider for a moment, that the importance of wandering, of chance, of duration, of openness, defies simple national

and temporal boundaries." *(Bruce Hainely. "Where are We Going? And What are We Doing? Rirkrit Tiravanija's Art of Living," Artforum, February 1996.)*

3. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 472), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 473), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 474), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 479), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 480), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 483), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 497), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 499), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 566), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 77485-1), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (no. 77485-2), 2001/2004**
***Mai Me Chue* (monks walking on the beach), 1997/2004**
A Selection of Posters
framed color ink-jet print copies of color photographs

When a monk speaks, people contemplate what he says.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija in conversation with Montien Boonma, December 13, 1999, Bangkok. France Morin. *The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art and Projeto Axe.* Bahia: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, 2000, p. 97-98.)

Rirkrit began practicing art through photography. This early series of photographs reflects his long-standing interest in the medium. Despite his frequent travel, Rirkrit decided, early on, to stop making photographs outside of Thailand, and instead focus solely on images of the daily experiences of novice monks. Also hanging in the space is a selection of photo-based posters by Rirkrit, made in the last five years. His interest in posters arose out of their ephemeral nature and their possibility for widespread distribution. In the same room, Kamin also exhibits his photographic works, which marked a progressive departure from what was being taught in Thai art schools at the time. From the beginning, both artists were drawn to capturing the immediacy of everyday experience through photography.

4. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (non/ruedu fon), 1991/2004**
mats, pillows, a lot of people

Time is measured. I am interested in working beyond this measurement. I reconsider everything and give it no time. There is no beginning and no ending, it is just there.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Nicolas Bourriaud and Eric Troncy, *Documents*, February 1994.)

Sleep is an escape from time being measured. In this installation, Rirkrit lays down mats and pillows typically used for both private and public gatherings in Thailand. This museum gallery provides yet another parallel space in which people can take time to relax and find comfort, not only in the installation, but also in each other. Rirkrit addresses essential human needs in his work, throwing into relief what is immediate and tangible. Here, his work can be linked to the early films of pop artist Andy Warhol in its reference to basic human functions framed in an indefinite time and space. Like Warhol, Rirkrit views art as a total environment that is not separate

from the reality of experience and relationships. The situation exudes a casual, transient atmosphere in line with the artist's nomadic sensibility.

5. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue (dee),* 1995/2004**
7 guitars, a lot of people

Music is something we can all understand. The piece was made for people to play together or have other people play-an open-ended space.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija in "Eye of the Beholder", article by Nancy Gilson, *The Columbus Dispatch*, January 27, 1999.)

This piece was originally produced for the Whitney Biennial in 1995. While the relationship between the people playing the guitars, and those not playing is clearly determined by the number and availability of instruments, the relationships determining *who* will play are not. Regardless, their activities are the most crucial element in the work. The work's openness embraces the chance and chaos of life in real time performances as exemplified by the concerts of American composer and artist John Cage, and Fluxus events. The play in perception of the handprints on the floor and the footprints on the walls of Kamin's piece *Time and Experience* frame Rirkrit's installation in a visual rhythm.

The work is titled after the D-chord, which is particularly easy to learn on the guitar, thus encouraging everyone to play. The cord charts provided give simple instruction, allowing for a continuing stream of visitors to sustain the note throughout the duration of the exhibition.

First Floor

6. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* ( ), 1989/2004**
3 pedestals, green curry ingredients,
charcoal burner, utensils

Basically I started to make things so that people would have to use them, which means if you want to buy something then you have to use it.
It doesn't have to be all the time. It's not meant to be put out with other sculpture or like another relic and looked at, but you have to use it.
My feeling has always been that everyone makes a work-including the people who take it to re-use it. When I say re-use it, I just mean use it.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Rochelle Steiner. "En Route", *Parkett*, Vol. 44, 1995.)

Although Rirkrit's later works revolve around use in an art context, this early piece displays a conspicuous lack of function. By placing components of the cooking activity on pedestals, the mundane objects are given the status of precious museum artifacts. This calls to mind Marcel Duchamp and his "readymades," in which the artist ascribed value not through aesthetic, but conceptual criteria, inviting the interpretation of the viewer to complete the work. Rirkrit draws particular inspiration from Duchamp's famous readymade *Fountain*, evident as he removes the culinary objects from their utilitarian context, revealing, then, something aesthetic in their forms, and, in turn, something utilitarian in the art these forms have come to displace. As this early work incorporates the theme of cooking, we see Rirkrit begin to explore ideas of cultural displacement and institutional critique, taking into account the

anthropological structures created to explain difference in the museum context. We also see Rirkrit's characteristic uneasiness with and subversion of the way art and artifacts are traditionally kept at a distance from the viewer through the architecture of their display. In *Mai Me Chue ( )*, the odor of the green curry permeates its environment well beyond the pedestals.

These institutional structures, Rirkrit felt, fostered only a curiousity about cultural objects, and not the conditions surrounding their use. *Mai Me Chue ( )* retrieves objects from the isolation of permanent display and returns our attention to their function in the living world.

First Floor

7. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (pad thai), 1990/2004**
5 woks, *pad thai* ingredients, cooking equipment and utensils, a glass case, a lot of people

Gavin Brown: *Who had the biggest influence on you?*
Rirkrit: *My grandmother. I grew up in her kitchen. We watched a lot of TV together. She owned a big restaurant. She also taught cooking on Thai TV.*
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Gavin Brown. "Other Things, Elsewhere", *Flash Art*, 1994.)

This became a significant factor in my development as an artist. I learned the arts of sharing and giving...came in the form my grandmother knew best: the preparation of food and the sharing of meals.
(Rirkrit Tirvanija in *The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art and Projeto Axe*, essay by France Morin, Bahia: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, 2000, p. 92.)

In Thailand, the social act of partaking in a meal reinforces the familial bonds that hold together the society's communal structure. *Mai Me Chue (pad thai)* was the first work where food was cooked and consumed in the exhibition and thus it is perhaps here that his grandmother's early influence on his work is most evident. Like his grandmother, cooking is for Rirkrit a way to bring people together, while he can remain in the "kitchen." Indeed Rirkrit does not conceive of these works as "performances," insisting that this term puts too much emphasis on his own personal participation. He prefers that it is the activity of the cooking and the eating that occupies the audience. In Rirkrit's removed stance from the work, he is often compared to Andy Warhol, while his creation of a space where art and life are no longer oppositional, but, instead, complementary, recalls the conceptual focus of German artist Joseph Beuys.

At the time of the original work's installation in New York, the US was experiencing an economic depression; the act of giving out free food then was particularly loaded, and Rirkrit's exploration of ideas of consumption and disparity in the market served to question the very institution of art itself.

On the exhibition's opening night, *pad thai* will be cooked and served freely to everyone, in keeping with the Thai custom of generosity when welcoming guests. The remnants of the meal will then be on display for the duration of the show, as traces of the passing of time and activity.

8. Rirkrit Tiravanija

***Mai Me Chue* (kuay tiew rua, kor sor nung song jed nung), 1993/2004**
plastic canoe, 2 gas stoves, 2 pots for boiling water, a supply of instant cup noodles. (Please be careful with hot water!!)

I was interested in the construction of a metaphor at the base level (formalistic) of cultural hybrids (canoe, dried oriental noodles, water into a canoe, a boat on dry land and surrounded by water). On another level, displacement of functions, displacement of cultures/or multicultures.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Nicolas Bourriaud and Eric Troncy, *Documents*, February 1994.)

Originally conceived for the Venice Biennale in 1993, this work was inspired by the voyage of Marco Polo to Asia in 1271 and his subsequent introduction of the noodle to Italian cuisine, yielding the now characteristic Italian pasta. This is, therefore, a work about how culture travels through consumption, often yielding a hybrid version of the original. New versions often arise as much out of misunderstanding as intention. Here, water boils in a plastic canoe, while a ready supply of instant noodles await your ingestion. Consumption and hybridity are culturally charged as *Mai Me Chue (kuay tiaw rua, kor sor nung song jed nung)* turns our attention to these common substances here in Thailand, plastics and noodles, this time coming into focus for us through Italy, through the art exhibition, and through the efforts of an ambitious early journey across the world.

9. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (tom kha gai, jed sian samurai, spagetty cowboy), 2001/2004**
7 gas burners, 7 pots, 700 bowls, *tom kha gai* ingredients, cooking equipment and utensils, mats, a lot of people.

The further you are the more you actually realize where you're coming from.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija in *Crossings*, catalogue essay by Germaine Koh, 1998, p. 170-73.)

Like *Mai Me Chue (pad thai)*, this work explores relationships, ephemerality, utility, and basic needs through the unremarkable act of cooking and the resulting unlikely consumption of a free meal in the space of an art exhibition. Originally conceived as a performance with two young Thai artists for an event in Turin, Italy, in this version, Rirkrit sees his own role in the event as irrelevant. When the work was originally installed in Turin, it explicitly played with Rirkrit's position as "other," while here in Chiang Mai his position has changed. What does it mean to serve a Thai dish to a Thai audience in a Thai art museum? How does this alter or add to the work?

In this exhibition, Rirkrit gives the Thai participants the routines and necessities they already live with on a daily basis. He positions these activities in the context of an art museum space in Thailand where the concept of such an institution is still a new and developing phenomena, which lends to a flexibility in rules not found in western counterparts. Therefore, Chiang Mai University Art Museum has been a site for every day activities not conventionally placed in a fine art institution: book fairs, vegetable markets, textile stalls. In other words, Rirkrit's installations and activities situated in this space is less out of the ordinary here than in professionalized institutions abroad. How this exhibition's participants will receive his work still remains to be seen. Regardless, his emphasis is in doing away with any distance that hinders the experience of life in the *now*. The museum is a frame for these activities that surpass the mere spectrum of art. In Thailand, this potential has just begun emerge.

10. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (mai me arai), 2004**
dyed saffron cotton fabric.

Brooklyn Rail: *Are you a Buddhist?*
Rirkrit: *It is a practice, it is like breathing.*

I always felt that if I was good at something it would be natural, I never got obsessive. Now I like to do nothing which is sometimes a lot of work.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey. "In Conversation: Rirkrit Tiravanija," *Brooklyn Rail*, February 2004.)

Art has many different levels and you have to make your own level. You have to decide where you want to be, and then just go for that. It doesn't have to do with anything else in the world. Just yourself. You get there, and maybe nobody sees it, but you get there. It is, at least as I think of it, a spiritual thing.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija in "En Route" (essay by Richard Flood), *Parkett*, Vol. 44, 1995.)

<u>On Museum Grounds</u>

11. Rirkrit Tiravanija
***Mai Me Chue* (proongni ja yood pood kap jak pai, proongni ja grai pen kae wan nueng tau nan), 1997/2004**
building replica of artist's New York apartment with zinc, plywood, personal contents, a lot of people.

You have to live with my work, not in an object way but in a conceptual way.

The apartment is like a stage where a lot of different events can happen. You can have a dinner party or a wedding or live there for a while. I have no real sense of how it will work. It either works or it works better.
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Daniel Pinchbeck, "NY artist Q & A: Rirkrit Tiravanija", *The Art Newspaper*, No. 94, July-August 1999.)

Gavin Brown: *Your work often seems to strive at disappearing, to escape being named as art in the first place. Do you see any distinction between an evening at Rirkrit's home and one in a museum?*
Rirkrit: *No.*
(Rirkrit Tiravanija with Gavin Brown. "Other Things, Elsewhere", *Flash Art*, 1994.)

Ben Butler *(an art student who resided in Rirkrit's facsimile apartment at Gavin Brown Enterprise, New York during the summer of 1999)*: *Even though I don't understand the piece, there's a level of comfort, like a womb.*
(Carly Berwick. "While Some Live for Art, Others Live in It", *The New York Times*, August 1, 1999.)

Rirkrit has referred to his activities as "parallel spaces" to describe the works' engagement with their immediate art environment and the world beyond, and nowhere is this better exemplified than in *Mai Me Chue* (proongni ja yood pood kap jak pai, proongni ja grai pen kae wan nueng tau nan). First executed in 1997 in Cologne and then two years later in New York, the apartment meets a whole set of human needs as a rent-free, working home, providing a total environment for communal engagement.

From September 10th until October 15th, the apartment will be situated on museum grounds, open to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, welcoming the community to simply use it and feel at home.

English and Thai text on Kamin Lertchaiprasert by Gridthiya Gaweewong
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