

Strategic Projects

IV MOSCOW INTERNATIONAL BIENNALE
FOR YOUNG ART

Moscow Museum of Modern Art

A Brief History of Memory

Curator: Lauren Reid

Text describing the project

“A Brief History of Memory” draws together four Thai experimental filmmakers who use spirituality and metaphor to deal with the complexity of personal, historical and political ordeals on the people of Thailand. They speak of personal loss, civil unrest and a conflicting sense of national identity.

Their films blur the distinctions between fiction and fact, crossing time and defying physics to grapple with emotions and events beyond easy articulation. **Tulapop Saenjaroen** brings the dead back to life, with the artist speaking from the perspective of his deceased father. **Nontawat Numbenchapol** contrasts hallucinatory visuals with an ancient Thai tale to convey how national identity and belief can be easily manipulated by context. In **Chulyarnnon Siriphol's** emotionally moving short, from which the title of the exhibition is named, a mother narrates the story of her son's death in the political protests of April 2009. In his most recent piece, *Myth of Modernity*, Siriphol draws parallels between religious worship and political reverie.

Curator's text

"A Brief History of Memory" draws together four Thai experimental filmmakers who use spirituality and metaphor to deal with the complexity of personal, historical and political ordeals on the people of Thailand. They speak of personal loss, civil unrest and a conflicting sense of national identity.

Thai citizens have frequently endured border clashes, violent demonstrations and political upheaval. Since the peaceful dissolution of the Kingdom of Thailand's absolute monarchy in 1932, there have been a dozen military coups in the nation over the years, the effects of which are felt through generations.

Today, Thailand is currently in a state of political rupture. On Thursday 22 May, yet another military coup was announced. This was preceded by mass anti-government protests in late 2013 where more than 20 people were killed and hundreds wounded. The main political protestors are divided into two key groups: the Yellow Shirt royalists who support the opposition Democrat Party, and the Red Shirts who support the now former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra (and by extension the exiled Thaksin Shinawatra).

The ritual of wearing colour-coded clothing arises from Buddhist tradition where a particular colour relates to a day of the week and is worn to show respect to corresponding gods derived from ancient Indian astrology. Presently, colour has been predominantly worn to express loyalty to the monarchy, with specific colours representing past and present royal family members. Most notable are the pink shirts of today who support the king Bhumibol Adulyadej, currently the world's longest-serving monarch.

This use of symbolic colour is found in **Chulayarnnon Siriphol's** most recent piece "Myth of Modernity", in which he draws parallels between religious worship and political reverie. In the final scene of Siriphol's film, he leads us to another cosmic realm, a 'modern heaven' where the same actor appears simultaneously in different uniforms: as a monk, angel/deva, scholar, yellow shirt, pink shirt, blue shirt and V mask protestor. This scene highlights the utopian reverie of politics and the ideal of a clean and corrupt-free system, which Siriphol implies is an expectation that is beyond human capabilities.

Faced with strong censorship laws and tough penalties for those that speak out against the royal family (see law no. 112), Thai artists often use metaphor, symbolism and hidden code to quietly critique and subvert the political context. Symbolic colour is found again in **Nontawat Numbenchapol's** "Gaze and Hear", where the colours of the Thai national flag are used in jarring, near-hallucinatory visuals. The three colours of the flag; red, blue and white represent nation, king and religion respectively. In this piece, the artist contrasts the telling of an ancient Thai tale with visuals that are reminiscent of hypnosis and meditation techniques. While Numbenchapol does not name or accuse a particular individual or group, he subtly critiques the mechanism of politics and the way that it can easily manipulate belief as well as personal and national identity.

Chulyarnnon Siriphol takes a very specific point of focus in his short film, “A Brief History of Memory”, from which this project takes its title. Here, a mother narrates the story of her son’s death in the Red Shirt political protests of April 2009 in Nang-Lerng. The steady and emotionally moving narrative unfolds over black and white images of the community that, through digital animation, phase in and out of reality. Siriphol made a deliberate decision to produce the film in black and white as a way to maintain neutrality as an artist, relaying the story without anger or judgement.

Tulapop Saenjaroen also focuses on personal experience and in turn, references the ongoing intergenerational effects of trauma. In “The Return” he resurrects the dead, speaking from the perspective of his father who was killed in a car accident when the artist was five. Saenjaroen’s piece is a reminder of the universal impact of family and the feelings of loss that occur when a loved one dies not only at that moment, but as an ongoing fluctuating sensation. As with each of the artists in the project, Saenjaroen blurs the distinctions between fiction and fact, crossing time and defying physics in order to grapple with emotions and events beyond easy articulation.

The title of the project “A Brief History of Memory” directly echoes Siriphol’s work, which refers to the way that memories build up over time in the collective unconscious. The subjects explored by these three artists, who come from the same generation and the same city of Bangkok, are ongoing and have occurred to many others in different ways throughout history. “A Brief History of Memory” is intended to share not only their personal experiences and perspectives but to reflect the continuous and cumulative effects of tumult and trauma; the reverberations of which are felt in the present and will continue into the future.

Information about each artist

Nontawat Numbenchapol
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Lives: Bangkok, Thailand
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Tulapop Saenjaroen
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Lives: Bangkok, Thailand
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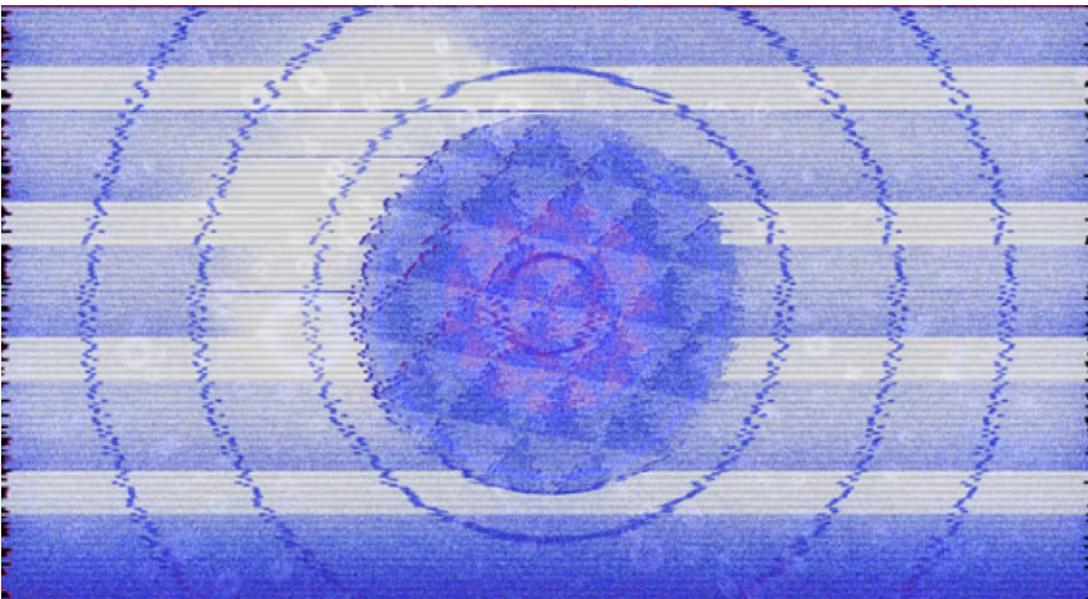
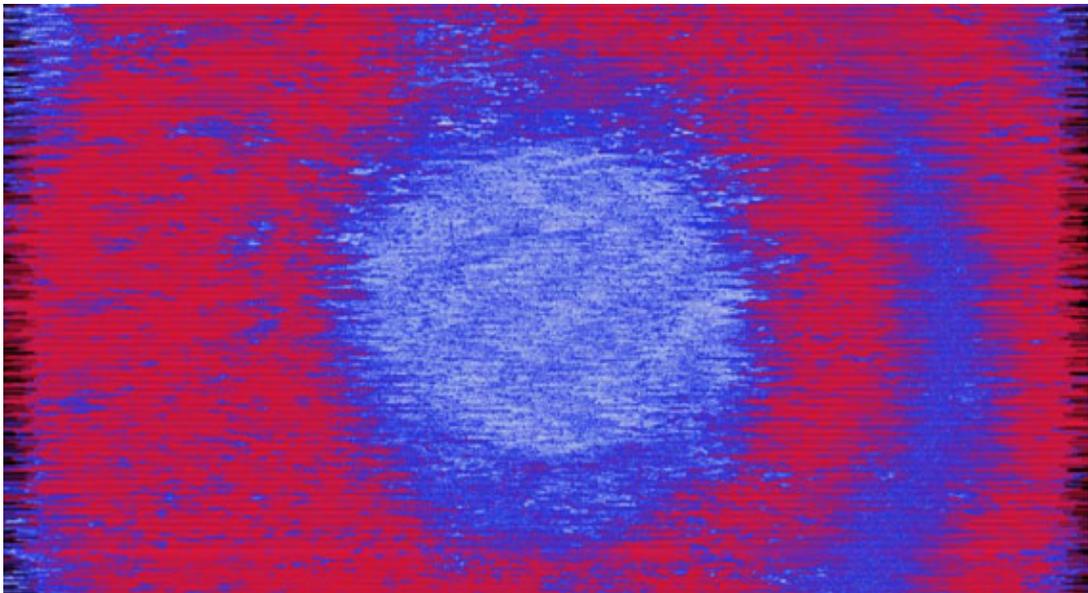


Artworks

Nontawat Numbenchapol

Gaze and Hear 2011, HD video, colour, stereo 10:00min

"Gaze and Hear" contrasts the narration of an ancient Thai tale in a very calm voice with near-hallucinatory visuals and sound. The effect is reminiscent of techniques used to enter altered states of consciousness, such as through hypnosis and the meditation channels screened widely on national Thai television. The visuals and additional sound become increasingly overwhelming and jar with the retelling of the story of King Bromathat and his son Vasutha. It creates the sensation of not only entering deeper into the story, but deeper into one's own consciousness, as if the two merge with each other. Through this visual and auditory experiment, Numbenchapol intends to highlight the way that vision and sound perception can influence and manipulate our way of life, national integration, and belief in fact.



Tulapop Saenjaroen

The Return 2008, MiniDV, colour, stereo 5:00min

“The Return” is an attempt by Tulapop Saenjaroen to recall his lost memories of his father who passed away in a car accident in 1991 when the artist was five years old. Personal family photographs from his funeral are overlaid with the imagined voice of his dead father coming back to life. The spectral voice gives guidance to the artist; encouraging him to appreciate his mother, asking whether he remembers his father, how he felt about his loss and what it was like to grow up without him. In the final scene, the illusion of the returned father is broken and we discover that the artist himself is speaking as the narrator, creating a strange and moving feedback loop between father and son, between personal history and its own otherness.



Chulayarnnon Siriphol

A Brief History of Memory 2010 SD digital video, monochrome, sound 14:00min

"A Brief History of Memory" is dedicated to the people who died during the political crisis in Thailand. The effect of the crisis is narrated by the voice of a mother who lost her son in April 2009 along with moving images of the Nang-Lerng community where she and her family lived.

The Nang-Lerng community survives through continuous changes, which cause many memorial imprints, one after another, memories that have been transmitted from one generation to another, memories that have been transmitted from those who went away before to those who are still here. Even though time has changed, these memories are still drifting and circling around.

As an outsider, being able to capture these memories and convey it as a film, is like capturing a brief history of memory and not just letting it slip as time is passing by. Text by Chulayarnnon Siriphol

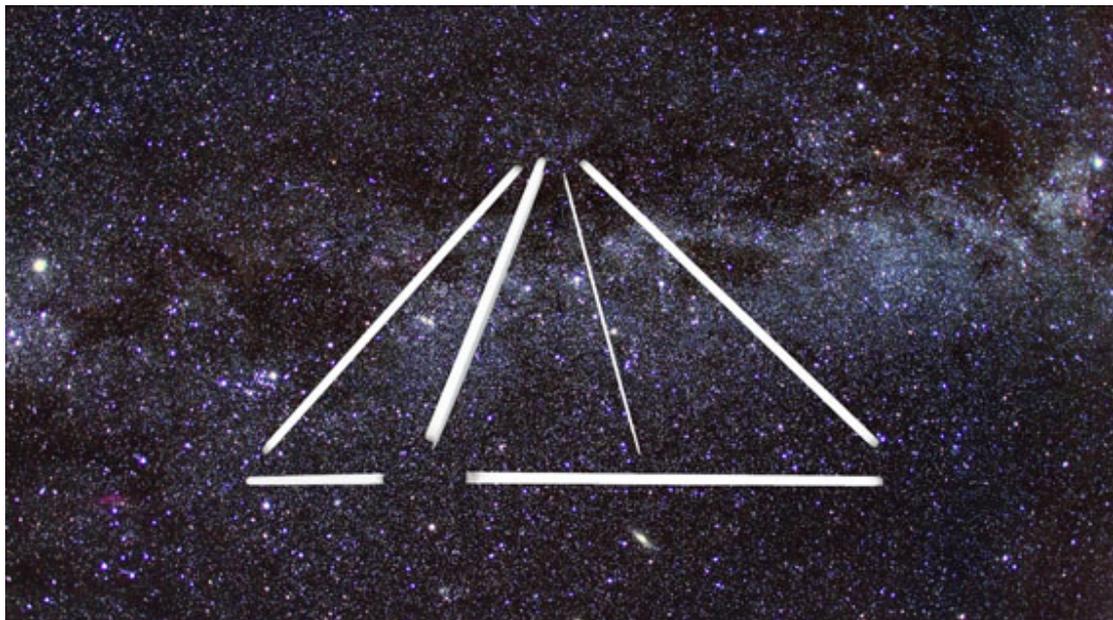


Chulayarnnon Siriphol

Myth of Modernity 2014, HD digital video, colour, sound 16:00min

“Myth of Modernity” focuses on Thai Buddhism, and specifically the simplification over time of ornate architectural structures of worship. These structures that pervade Buddhist culture, such as pagodas, palaces and spirit houses, were symbolically built to represent the ‘three worlds’ of Buddhist cosmology. The influence of modern architecture and the west have resulted in the popular reduction of these forms into the geometric pyramid.

Siriphol draws a parallel between this simplification of structures of worship and the state of modern Thai politics. He views the political realm as being similar to the religious realm of worship and implies an idealistic reverie in politics, politicians and the mass experiences that occur during party rallies and demonstrations.



Information about curator

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