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Of Art and Absurdity: Military, Censorship, and Contemporary Art in Thailand

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ABSTRACT | On June 15, 2017, soldiers and plainclothes officers visited Cartel Artspace and Gallery VER in Bangkok. The two adjacent galleries were hosting exhibitions by young Thai contemporary artists, *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch* by Tada Hengsapkul¹ and *Whitewash* by Harit Srikhao. The first exhibition depicted stories of political prisoners, whereas the latter recalled the 2010 military crackdown on Red Shirt protests in Bangkok. Thailand has been ruled by a military junta, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), since the May 2014 coup, but this was the first time that visual art exhibitions had attracted the attention of state officers. However, the military stormed the two galleries because of the incorrect impression that Prontip “Kolf” Mankong, a theater artist who had been convicted of *lèse-majesté* for the play *Wolf Bride*, was hosting Hengsapkul’s exhibition.

KEYWORDS | Thailand, censorship, politics, photography, contemporary art

Early in the morning of June 15, 2017, Thai soldiers and plainclothes officers visited N22, a compound of galleries and artists’ studios on Narathiwat Rajanagarindra Soi 22 in Bangkok. Upon arrival, they met Angkrit Ajchariyasophon, owner of ARTIST+RUN, who informed them that their target gallery, Cartel Artspace, would open in the afternoon. Ajchariyasophon was installing a new exhibition with a strong political message, *Far from Home* by Chiang Mai-based painter Paphonsak La-or, which consisted of twenty-nine acrylic paintings of postcard-like mountain peaks in thirteen different countries where Thais in exile have lived since the May 2014 coup (Figure 1). After *Far from Home* escaped censorship because of its harmless appearance, Ajchariyasophon warned his neighboring gallery by phone that the officers had been there.² Cartel Artspace was hosting *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch* by photographer Tada



Figure 1 | Paphonsak La-or, *Far from Home*, 2017, oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Hengsapkul, which depicted stories of political prisoners and human rights activists (Figure 2).

In fact, the officers intended to visit Cartel Artspace, as they were under the incorrect impression that Prontip “Kolf” Mankong, a theater activist who had been convicted of *lèse-majesté* for the stage play *Wolf Bride* (2013), was organizing Hengsapkul’s exhibition. Mankong had not been involved in organizing *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch*, but she had written a critical article of this exhibition of Hengsapkul’s on *Prachatai*, a Thai online news platform. Mankong was furious that Hengsapkul’s exhibition featured a photograph of her visage without her permission.

Hengsapkul decided to remove the whole exhibition before the officers paid a second visit in the afternoon. When they returned to N22, they did not see his exhibition, but they went farther to the adjacent gallery, Gallery VER, which was showing another political exhibition, *Whitewash*, by another photographer, Harit Srikhao (Figure 3).

Whitewash, which was not the officers’ prime inspection target, underlined the concealment and distortion of the truth regarding the April–May



Figure 2 | Tada Hengsapkul, *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch*, 2017, installation view, Cartel Artspace. Photograph courtesy of Tada Hengsapkul.



Figure 3 | Harit Srikhao, *Whitewash*, 2017, installation view, Gallery VER. Photograph courtesy of Gallery VER.

crackdown in 2010.³ The result of the officers' visit was the removal from the exhibition of a seven-page note concerning Srikhao's views on the ongoing political crisis in Thailand, as well as a sketch and three photographs. The officers did not take the artworks, nor did they ask to speak with the artist, who was not at the gallery when the inspection occurred. Nevertheless, they revisited N22 almost every day until the last day of the exhibition.

Lèse-Majesté and the Prisoners of Conscience

Thailand has been ruled by a military junta called the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) since the May 2014 coup, but this was the first time that visual art exhibitions had attracted the military's attention. The military has frequently interfered with media, films, books, plays, cultural events, and academic seminars both inside and outside universities for the past decade, but formal censorship to the visual arts only started in mid-2017. The reason for the ability of the visual arts to escape military attention might be its very abstruse nature and conceptual approaches to political topics, which make it extremely difficult for both the general public and government officials to read and decode political content. Some political art exhibitions have even looked completely anodyne or even decorative, if judging only from physical appearance. It is impossible to detect political messages in La-or's landscape painting series *Far from Home* or Mit Jai-Inn's colorful, textured, and large-scale abstract paintings in his exhibition *Beautiful Futures* (2018) without reading the artists' or curators' statements or exhibition reviews (Figure 4).⁴ Such an appearance easily veils artistic-political critique from the eyes of those who are outside the art circle or have limited experience with visual arts.

Following the September 2006 coup⁵ and the May 2014 coup,⁶ state surveillance and censorship became more intense. Since April 2015, Article 44 of the 2014 interim constitution, which replaced the martial law that had been imposed on the country since May 2014, has legitimated the unlimited power of NCPO leader and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Any criticism of the NCPO is liable to lead to violent reprisals. In 2016, eight Facebook users—Natthika Worathaiyawich, Harit Mahaton, Noppakao Kongsuwan, Worawit Saksamutnan, Yothin Mangkhangsanga, Thanawat Buranasiri, Supachai Saibut, and Kannasit Tangboonthina—were charged with sedition



Figure 4 | Mit Jai-Inn, *Beautiful Futures*, 2018, H Gallery, Bangkok. Photograph courtesy of Kan Natthiwutthikun.

under Article 116 of the penal code and with violating the 2007 Computer Crime Act for being involved in the making and dissemination of commentary on the parody Facebook page “We Love General Prayut.”⁷ A year later, the authorities charged Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, the chair of the academic

committee of the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies and four conference attendees—Pakawadee Veerapatpong, Chaipong Sammieng, Nontawat Machai, and Thiramon Bua-ngam—for violating the junta’s ban on public gatherings at the conference in Chiang Mai in July 2017. The four conference attendees were holding posters that read “An academic forum is not a military barrack” to protest the military surveillance of the conference, which included discussions and other activities that criticized the junta’s ruling.⁸ Article 44 also allows the military to intervene in all sectors of society in the face of any perceived threat to the monarchy, national security, the economy, or general state affairs.⁹ Prosecuting *lèse-majesté* was a priority for the NCPO, and the NCPO granted authority to a military tribunal to prosecute *lèse-majesté* offenses.

Lèse-majesté or Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code is the spearhead of censorship. It states that “[w]hoever defames, insults or threatens the king, queen, heir-apparent, or regent shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years.” The untouchable status of Thai kings has also been secured by Article 8 in the constitutional provision of all Thai constitutions since 1932, which states that “[t]he king shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the king to any sort of accusation or action.”

The interpretation of what actions constitute a defamation, insult, or threat against the monarchy is limitless. In the past decade, following two coups, the control of speech has significantly expanded to other modes of expression. From the last phase of the reign of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX, r. 1946–2016) to the beginning of the new reign of King Maha Vajiralongkorn (King Rama X, r. 2016–present), there has been an unprecedented number of *lèse-majesté* cases. The wide spectrum of these unacceptable acts ranges from performing injurious speech toward the monarchy to not expressing grief for King Bhumibol’s passing and sharing an unflattering biography of King Maha Vajiralongkorn published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on Facebook.¹⁰ The first of the stage plays to be charged with *lèse-majesté* after the NCPO’s rise to power was *Wolf Bride* (2013), which put two theater activists—Prontip “Kolf” Mankong and Patiwat “Bank” Saraiyaem—in jail between 2014 and 2016.

Wolf Bride (*Jao Sao Ma Pa*) was a student play produced by the now-defunct theater group called Prakai Fai Karn Lakorn, which was affiliated with the left-leaning Prakai Fai political group. The play, which

was about a fictional monarch and his adviser in a fictional kingdom, was performed only twice, on October 6 and 13 in 2013, at Thammasat University in Bangkok; however, it was broadcast and shared on social media. Mankong and Saraiyaem were charged with *lèse-majesté* for insulting the royal family in 2014. Other actors remained living in fear or fled the country to live in self-imposed exile.¹¹ Two other theater activists nicknamed Game and Ice, who now reside in an unidentified neighboring country, appeared in *Thai in Exile*, a documentary directed by Neti Wichiansaen (pseudonym Pruy Saltihead) and produced by Wanchelearm Satsaksit (work in progress).¹² Wichiansaen is a photographer and film director who had also fled the country for alleged violation of *lèse-majesté* in 2010. *Thai in Exile* consists of a series of interviews with individuals who, for the most part, left the country after the 2014 coup. When Game and Ice appeared on screen, they said that “we became international criminals: refugees, just for playing in a drama.” Ice wore a red T-shirt with the words *Sathaban Kasat Kap Sangkhom Thai* (The monarchy and the Thai society). The color red is associated with the anti-establishment Red Shirt Movement.

After putting *Wolf Bride* on stage in 2013, Mankong and Saraiyaem were charged and held in custody in 2014. In 2015, the Criminal Court sentenced them to five years in prison, but after they pleaded guilty, the jail terms were halved to two years and six months.¹³ They were released from prison in 2016 and still believe in the arts. Mankong said in an interview with *Khoasod English* that

if the dramatic arts can have that much impact, then I think we’re on the right track, as I always believed that drama, art, literature and other art forms can really change the world.¹⁴

Saraiyaem insisted that “I’m not going to flee from the arts and performing arts, because this is who I am.”¹⁵

Prontip Mankong on Tada Hengsapkul: Questions on Artistic Repression

Tada Hengsapkul’s *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch* was an interactive installation exhibition about former and current political prisoners serving time on political charges, as well as those living in exile. The white cubic room of Cartel Artspace consisted of forty rectangular pieces of cloth, all

covered by thermochromic paint, laid on a single shelf. Instructions written on paper tell the audience to follow along step by step:

- 01 Hold the artwork with both of your hands.
- 02 Put it to your chest.
- 03 Hold tight.
- 04 Put it back in place.
- 05 Check the number with the wall text.
- 06 Repeat it again.

Because thermochromic paint changes color when it comes into contact with heat, the images of the political prisoners appeared on these pieces of cloth (Figure 5). The faces of Somsak Jeemtheerasakul, a former history lecturer at Thammasat University who fled to France in 2014; Prawet Prapanukul, a human rights lawyer who has been imprisoned for *lèse-majesté* since 2017; Chaiyapoom Pasae, a Lahu youth activist who was shot dead in 2017 by military officials who were attempting to arrest him as an alleged drug suspect; and Prontip Mankong were among countless others. There were numbers that linked them to description cards on the wall; each card provided information and details of the accusations against them. *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch* was a result of an investigation into these prisoners' lives and stories from various online sources, mainly from *iLaw*, a Thai human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) that engaged with various groups of civil society and the public to acknowledge and promote democracy, freedom of expression, civil and political rights, and a fairer and more accountable system of justice. Hengsapkul had obtained permission from *iLaw* before using their information, but he did not contact each person individually. This exhibition did not only reflect the country's political disorder but also functioned, symbolically, as a consolation to those whose faces and bodies would emerge from the darkness through contact with the heat from human touch.

Three weeks after the opening of the exhibition, Mankong published her criticism of Hengsapkul's use of her photographic portrait on *Prachatai*. Mankong had not seen the actual exhibition but saw her image from a photograph taken by a friend who had been there and had posted it on Facebook. According to Hengsapkul, after knowing that she was unhappy with his exhibition, he called her to apologize right away. He explained his works and asked if she wanted her image to be removed from the exhibition, but she refused. A week



Figure 5 | Tada Hengsapkul, *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch*, 2017, Cartel Artspace. Photograph courtesy of Tada Hengsapkul.

later, to his surprise, she published an article titled “Sen Daen Khong Sinlapa Nai Kan Nam Sanoë Chiwit Khon” (“The Border of Art in Representing Lives”) on *Prachatai* on June 11, nine days before the closing date.

Although the conviction for *lèse-majesté* in the *Wolf Bride* case raised questions about freedom of expression and the arts, Mankong’s article, which harshly criticized Hengsapkul’s use of her photographic portrait in *The Shards Would Shatter at Touch* without her consent as an unethical practice, was surprising. Mankong, who is now a campaigner for the welfare of female prisoners, felt that, by not asking for permission, Hengsapkul took advantage of her story for his own artistic practice. She felt that she had been violated and dehumanized and used as a piece of art material:

I don’t quite understand artist-ness, I don’t know or I am not even sure whether being an artist allows one to use other people’s lives without consent or not. I don’t even know what are norms for creating art by telling stories of victims, of those whom they called “victims.” What would be appropriate for both an owner of story and a story teller (artist)?¹⁶

Mankhong's article generated heated debates among artists and activists on social media. Nevertheless, copyright was out of the question because, according to Copyright Act B.E. 2537 (1994), "news of the day and facts having the character of mere information, not being works in literary, scientific or artistic fields" shall not be deemed copyright works. The debates marked different shades of understanding the role of art between artist and artist-activist or activist-artist. Whose voice has the right to tell someone's story? Is it possible for multiple voices to do so? The debates thus problematized the concept of freedom of expression as well as the critical engagement between art and political issues. Because Mankong's story and the stories of other political prisoners who appeared in Hengsapkul's exhibition had been publicly known and all portraits had been taken from online sources, asking for consent seemed to be not only an unnecessary requirement but also an ironic call considering the injustice done to her in the case of *Wolf Bride*. If we follow Mankong's thinking—that an artist needs to first ask for a person's consent to depict that person's life in art, even if that person is a public figure and his or her story is known publicly—then she should not have participated in *Wolf Bride*, a play that, according to the judgment of the Criminal Court, sarcastically referred to the Crown.

In this way, Mankong's criticism magnified the conditions and limitations of artistic activities. Repression came from all directions, not only from the state. When it comes to the victims of the draconian *lèse-majesté* just like her, it is difficult for one, with great sympathy, to counter her argument or even to retell her story through art without making her feel revictimized. On one hand, the sensitivity of this particular case invokes reconsideration about freedom of expression and artistic practice. On the other hand, it is a test, a challenge for one's ideological stance. Is it always necessary to ask permission to write or talk about someone through a work of art? Whereas Hengsapkul created his artworks as a response to an abuse of power and a disproportionate use of force on people by the junta—his personal view and feeling for the victims—Mankong saw his action as taking advantage of the victim without seeking consent from each individual: a wrongful creative repression.¹⁷ For Mankong, Hengsapkul was making a career out of her suffering. The distinction between art and art activism may appear to be unclear here, but perhaps it is useful to distinguish between an artist who speaks his or her mind and an artist who speaks for others. Within the concept of freedom of expression, both should have equal rights for expressing their political commitments.

Although the debates stimulated a dialogue about deeper understandings of political victims and a responsible and ethical discourse concerning artistic activities, everything stopped once the military stepped into the galleries at N22. Hengsapkul suspected that Mankong's article had attracted the military's attention because the exhibition had been shown since May 20 without any intervention.¹⁸ It was only five days until the exhibition's scheduled closure on June 20. Because the military usually monitors former prisoners of *lèse-majesté*, the officers must have read Mankong's article and wrongly believed that it was her exhibition, so they came to see it at Cartel Artspace. The fact that Hengsapkul has never been followed by state officials after this incident proved that he was not their real target. When the officers came back to the gallery in the afternoon, they saw only an empty space. Hengsapkul informed them that he had removed this exhibition long before they came due to Mankong's criticism.¹⁹

Caught in the Crossfire: The Censorship of *Whitewash* by Harit Srikhao

The misinterpretation of Mankong's article by the military that led to the incident at Cartel Artspace indicates the military's illiteracy with regard to visual art and their insufficient care in verifying information. The consequence of this incident was the first example of censorship of a visual art exhibition based on political issues since the two military coups. While the gallery staff was busy fetching the keys to the exhibition room, the officers wandered into Harit Srikhao's exhibition *Whitewash* at Gallery VER next door. Once they saw some images that related to the military and politics, they demanded that the images be taken down immediately.

This incident at N22 is unusual and points to a new generation of Thai contemporary artists responding to the decade-long political conflict. From the 2006 coup to the 2014 coup, the subject of politics has long been a divisive topic among Thai society as well as the Thai art community. The ongoing crisis runs parallel with the debates about "prodemocracy" and "antidemocracy" or "undemocratic" artists. Many prominent Thai artists of the older generation who had been known for being critical and progressive internationally, such as Vasan Sitthiket, Manit Sriwanichpoom, and Sutee Kunavichayanont, stayed silent on the issues of human rights, freedom of expression, and political injustice or, even worse, supported the military intervention into politics. However, many activists and protesters used artistic methods in their campaigns and demonstrations.²⁰ The controversy

over Kunavichyanont's *Thai Uprising* in the exhibition *The Truth to Turn It Over* at the Gwangju Museum of Art in Gwangju, South Korea, exemplifies this polarization in the Thai art community. The selection of *Thai Uprising*, which consisted of posters and T-shirts with messages such as "Reform now," "Shut down Bangkok," and "Seize Thailand" to be displayed for the commemoration of the Gwangju Uprising,²¹ was protested by the Cultural Activists for Democracy (CAD), which claimed that these were antidemocratic artworks and contradicted the spirit of the Gwangju Uprising (Figure 6). CAD demonstrated that *Thai Uprising*, despite being made in relation to the protest against Yingluck Shinawatra's illegitimate amnesty bill in late 2013, as Kunavichyanont had claimed,²² it was indeed used for fundraising by Art Lane, a network of artists and cultural workers, which had donated money to the antigovernment movement—the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)—in January 2014. Shinawatra dissolved the government on December 9, 2013, and called for an election on February 2, 2014. The date "13-1-57" shown on *Thai Uprising* proved that the work was



Figure 6 | Sutee Kunavichyanont, *Thai Uprising*, 2014, photograph from the exhibition *The Truth to Turn It Over* at the Gwangju Museum of Art in Gwangju, South Korea in 2016. Photograph courtesy of the author.

made when the anti-Yingluck protesters, the PDRC, occupied Bangkok. The “Bangkok Shutdown” protests organized by the PDRC aimed to boycott the election and called for “reform before election.” Vasan Sitthiket and Manit Sriwanichpoom, who were also members of Art Lane, sent a letter to the Gwangju Museum of Art to support Kunavichayanont and accused the CAD protest of being a “defamation movement” against Kunavichayanont.²³

After the 2014 coup, Thailand saw the rise of a younger generation of artists who grew up with political unrest and presented works in oppositional ways, distinct from the older generation. Tada Hengsapkul (31), Harit Srikhao (23), and Paphonsak La-or (37) are part of this generation, whose sympathies lie with victims of the military. Srikhao is the youngest of the three. In the artist’s note, he recalled his experiences with political demonstrations in 2010 and 2014. On May 23, 2010, his family brought him, a schoolboy, to a cleaning activity held by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority called “Big Cleaning Day” to clean up six streets affected by the Red Shirt demonstrations and the April–May crackdown. This massive cleaning efforts, which benefited from the help of upper- and middle-class Bangkokians, physically cleansed and symbolically “purified” Bangkok of the dirt and blood of the Red Shirt protesters, the rural poor from the north and northern regions. In 2014, he was a first-year student of photography at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). His lecturer, who was a member of the PDRC, ordered him and his classmates to go to an antigovernment protest. Srikhao began to doubt himself and the situation around him after the 2014 coup.²⁴ As part of his self-transformation, *Whitewash* investigated the concealment and repression of truth, state propaganda, and the artist’s own ignorance about Thai politics. He said in an interview with the *British Journal of Photography* that “for four years, why have I been unaware of hundreds of people’s death[s] caused since the military crackdown in 2010?”²⁵

Whitewash is a series of photographic works undertaken from 2015 to 2016. The artist took these photographs in places where he had seen demonstrations in 2010 and edited them with various techniques, including collage, to create a hallucinatory atmosphere. The officers asked him to take down a seven-page note written by the artist, a sketch, and three photographs. Jirat Rattawongjirakul, manager of Gallery VER, remarked that the note mentioned the breakup of the demonstrations of student activists who were marking the first anniversary of the May 2014 coup in front of the

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) on May 22, 2015.²⁶ The sketch was a picture of a group of marines standing in front of CentralWorld, a shopping plaza and complex in Ratchaprasong, an area where the Red Shirt protesters were shot dead during the crackdown in 2010. In front of them was a naked red man lying on the ground (Figure 7). The three photographs featured state officers from several sectors. One photograph featured a picture of three cadets holding guns and smiling (Figure 8). The second photograph showed shirtless officers sitting on a footpath around Sanam Luang, waiting for what was likely to be a royal procession (Figure 9). The last photograph presented a group of female civil servants in white formal uniforms standing in front of a gigantic, empty frame. Their faces were covered by masks of a head statue by an Indian artist named Ravindra Reddy titled *Head* (Figure 10). *Head* was an iconic public sculpture that used to stand in front of CentralWorld when the building was partly burned down during the 2010 crackdown.

The officers informed Rattawongjirakul that these works were inappropriate, as they could threaten the peace and security of the nation. They also said that these works might attract people from the oppositional political camp to harm the gallery. Some of them were at risk of being a violation



Figure 7 | Harit Srikhao, *Untitled*, sketch, 2015–2016. Photograph courtesy of Harit Srikhao.



Figure 8 | Harit Srikhao, *Cadet (Whitewash series)*, 2015–2016, print on fine paper. Photograph courtesy of Harit Srikhao.



Figure 9 | Harit Srikhao, *Chosen Boys* (*Whitewash series*), 2015–2016, print on fine paper. Photograph courtesy of Harit Srikhao.

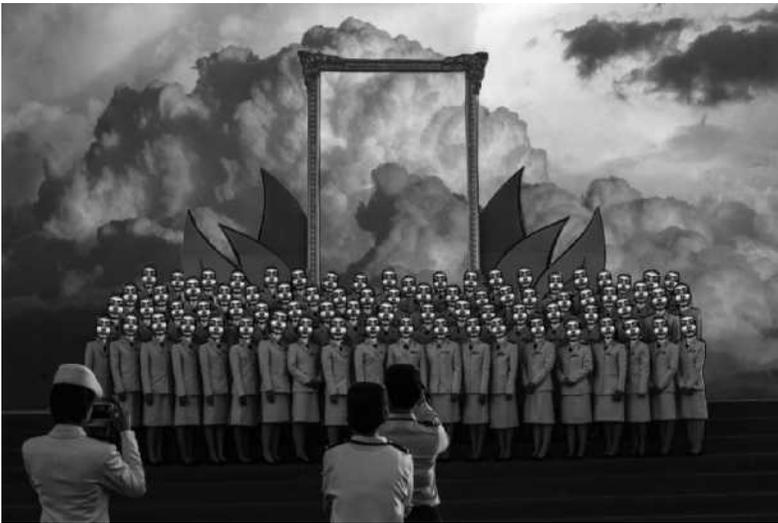


Figure 10 | Harit Srikhao, *Heaven Gate* (*Whitewash series*), 2015–2016, print on fine paper. Photograph courtesy of Harit Srikhao.

of the monarchy.²⁷ Nevertheless, the officers did not remove the censored works from the gallery—they remained in the gallery storage area. Like Hengsapkul, Srikhao was never called in for further questioning.²⁸ The two artists continue to work and exhibit other art projects without being monitored by the military.²⁹ This confirms that the military intervention was not merely about contemporary visual arts—the political messages in which are normally difficult for untrained eyes to perceive—but that the real target of the military was the former *lèse-majesté* prisoner Prontip Mankong. They had followed her, not art and not any artist.

However, once the state enters this specific mysterious realm with censorship in mind, there will likely be repeated occurrences. From this period on, Thai contemporary art had lost its magical barrier, the advantage of being able to speak the unspeakable in an oblique way. In this time of upheaval, suppression, and silence, the question of the role of art in society is crucial, yet answers can and need to be diversified. The present period in Thailand weighs so heavily that it would require particular strength and bravery to confront the apocalypse of increasing numbers of charges and convictions; however, great art and creativity frequently emerge from challenging power and the status quo. This reminds me of Wichiansaen's *Thais in Exile*, which begins with Rosa Luxemburg's famous quote: "Those who do not move, do not notice their chains." What should one do when one notices the chains? To remain still or to move—that is the question.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

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NOTES

1. This article adheres to the phonetic transcription for most Thai words but without tonal marks. I follow the “General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman Characters” devised by the Royal Institute, Bangkok, in 1999. I differ slightly from the Royal Institute’s system in using *j* for the Thai *zor jan*, not *ch*, except in accepted spellings of royal titles, royal names, and names that have been transcribed by other systems. In the case of a name that is widely known or that can be verified, I adhere to the owner’s transcription; otherwise, the spelling follows the aforementioned system of romanization. I refer to Thai people by their surnames, as in the Western convention.

2. Angkrit Ajcharyasophon, Facebook direct message to author, June 15, 2017.

3. Truth for Reconciliation and Conciliation in Thailand, *Final Report of Truth for Reconciliation and Conciliation in Thailand (TRCT) July 2010–July 2012* (Bangkok: Truth for Reconciliation and Conciliation in Thailand, 2012). The April–May crackdown was a series of protests in Bangkok by the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red Shirt Movement between April 10 and May 19, 2010. It ended with violent confrontations between protesters and government troops. It left at least ninety-four casualties and thousands injured. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva set up the Truth for Reconciliation and Conciliation in Thailand (TRCT) to investigate the April–May crackdown and to promote reconciliation. The TRCT operated for a fixed two-year period from July 17, 2010, to July 16, 2012. A civil society called The People’s Information Center: April–May 2010 (PIC), which was founded on July 19, 2010, has worked in tandem with the TRCT and has heavily criticized the TRCT’s report for failing to acquire information from all sides, particularly the military. The PIC’s report can be downloaded from <http://www.pic2010.org.truth/>.

4. For a review of Mit Jai-Inn’s exhibition *Beautiful Futures* at H Gallery in Bangkok, see Ariane Kupferman-Sutthavong, “Moral Maze of Modern Thailand,” *Bangkok Post*, last modified February 7, 2018, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/lifestyle/art/1408882/moral-maze-of-modern-thailand>.

5. For a discussion of the 2006 coup and its consequences, see Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed., *Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand’s Political Development since Thaksin’s Downfall* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2014). The 2006 coup was a royal-supported military coup that toppled elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The Council for the Democratic Reform (CDR) led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin staged a coup on September 19, 2006. The CDR, which later became the Council for National Security (CNS), appointed Surayudh Chulanont, a former supreme commander of the Royal Thai Army and member of the Privy Council, to be interim prime minister. Following the coup was a series of political conflicts between the royalist, anti-Shinawatra movement, known as the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or

the Yellow Shirt Movement, and the proelectoral politics movement, known as the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red Shirt Movement.

6. “Thai Coup: Leader Gen Prayuth Receives Royal Endorsement,” BBC, last modified May 26, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27572726>. The 2014 coup was a consequence of the blanket amnesty bill drafted by the government of Yingluck Shinawatra, younger sister of Thaksin Shinawatra, in November 2013. Prior to the coup was a demonstration by the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), an antigovernment movement and successor to the royalist Yellow Shirts. The PDRC closed down streets in Bangkok and governmental offices and demanded for unelected government appointed by the King. The conflict ended with a military coup staged by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) on May 22, 2014. On May 26, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX, r. 1946–2016) endorsed the coup and formally appointed General Prayut Chan-o-cha to be prime minister.

7. “Thailand: 8 Charged for Mocking Junta Leader on Facebook,” Human Rights Watch, last modified May, 9, 2016, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/09/thailand-8-charged-mocking-junta-leader-facebook>. Worathaiyawich and Mahaton were also charged with Article 112 or *lèse-majesté* for their Facebook commentaries, which the authorities considered to be offensive to the monarchy.

8. “Thailand: Drop Bogus Charges against Thai Studies Academics,” Human Rights Watch, last modified August 16, 2017, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/16/thailand-drop-bogus-charges-against-thai-studies-academics>.

9. “Thailand: Invocation of Article 44 of Interim Constitution Will Continue to Deteriorate Rights Situation in the Country,” FORUM-ASIA, last modified April 3, 2015, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=18741>.

10. “Jatupat Boonpattaraksa,” Political Prisoners in Thailand, accessed March 25, 2018, <https://thaipoliticalprisoners.wordpress.com/decidedcases/jatuphat-boonpattaraksa/>. An activist, Jatupat Boonpattaraksa, also known as Pai Dao Din, was charged with *lèse-majesté* for sharing King Maha Vajiralongkorn’s biography published by BBC on his Facebook page on December 3, 2016. Boonpattaraksa was the first person to be charged with the royal defamation law in the new reign. He was released on bail on December 4, 2016, but the court revoked his bail on December 22. Boonpattaraksa has remained in prison ever since. The May 18 Memorial Foundation of South Korea awarded him the prestigious 2017 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights in April 2017.

11. “Thai Theatre Actors in Exile after Coup,” *Prachatai*, last modified November 6, 2015, <https://prachatai.com/english/node/5261>.

12. Nethi Wichiansaen, Facebook direct message to author, April 14, 2016. *Thais in Exile* can only be viewed on the internet. There is a short teaser trailer and a documentary synopsis on the Global Reporting Centre website and a longer teaser trailer on Vimeo. The Global Reporting Centre, which supports the production of *Thais in*

Exile, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to highlighting important yet neglected stories around the world. However, the documentary remains unfinished. For a short teaser trailer and a documentary synopsis, see <http://globalreportingcentre.org/the-threat-of-exile-a-film-on-the-fight-for-freedom-in-thailand/>. A password is required to access the longer teaser trailer on Vimeo. In a personal conversation via Facebook Messenger, Wichiansaen informed me that he could not get visa entries to France and the United States to conduct interviews with other exiles because the Thai state had revoked his passport.

13. “Court Sentences Theatre Activists to 5 Years in Jail for Lèse-majesté,” *Prachatai*, last modified February 23, 2015, <https://prachatai.com/english/node/4808>.

14. Kaewta Ketbungkan, “Art on Trial: The Wolf Bride,” *Khaosod English*, last modified September 26, 2016, <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/life/arts/2016/09/26/art-trial-wolf-bride/>.

15. Kaewta Ketbungkan, “Art on Trial: The Mor Lam Singer,” *Khaosod English*, last modified September 19, 2016, <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/life/arts/2016/09/19/art-trial-mor-lam-singer/>.

16. Prontip Mankong, “Sen Daen Khong Sinlapa Nai Kan Nam Sanoe Chiwit Khon” [The border of art in representing lives], *Prachatai*, last modified June 11, 2016, <https://prachatai.com/journal/2017/06/71894>.

17. Chayanit Itthipongmaetee, “Not Here to Entertain You: B-Floor Confronts Thailand in Movement and Meaning,” *Khaosod English*, last modified September 18, 2016, www.khaosodenglish.com/life/arts/2016/09/18/not-entertain-b-floor-confronts-thailand-movement-meaning/. In 2015, Ornanong “Golf” Thaisriwong of the theater group B-Floor performed *Bang La Merd* at Thong Lor Art Space in Bangkok, which partly referred to the two theater activists who had been imprisoned for performing *Wolf Bride*, Mankong and Saraiyaem. It received no criticism from Mankong or other activists. *Bang La Merd* was first staged in 2012 at the Pridi Banomyong Institute. At that time, it was inspired by the conviction of Amphon Tangnoppakul (Akong [Grandpa]), who had been sentenced to twenty years in prison for allegedly sending four SMS messages that were defamatory in nature to the Queen and the monarchy to the personal secretary of then-Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. The 2012 performance ran without military intervention, but the 2015 performance, with the addition of the Mankong and Saraiyaem stories, required permission from the military.

18. Tada Hengsapkul, in discussion with the author, January 11, 2018.

19. Teeranai Charuvastra, “Soldiers Remove Artworks from Bangkok Gallery,” *Khaosod English*, last modified June 16, 2016, <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2017/06/16/soldiers-remove-artworks-bangkok-gallery/>.

20. For further discussion, see Thanavi Chotpradit, “Silence in Thai Contemporary Art,” *ArtReview Asia* 4, no. 5 (Winter 2016): 54–57.

21. The Gwangju Uprising, or the May 18 Democratic Uprising, was an uprising in the city of Gwangju, South Korea, in 1980. It was a demonstration against Chun Doo-hwan's military government that ended in defeat. In 1997, a national cemetery and a day of commemoration on May 18 were established.

22. "'Sutee' Yan Mai Dai Riak Rong Ratprahan-Kan 'Gwangju' Plot Ngan Sin-Yam Mai Chai Ko Po So. Khae Mee Naeo Kid Trong Kan" [Sutee insisted that he did not call for military coup, protested Gwangju not to remove artworks—insisted on not being PDRC, just shared same ideas], *Maticchon Online*, last modified May 17, 2018, <https://www.maticchon.co.th/news/139310>.

23. "'Manit-Vasant' Ron Jo Mo. Thueng 'Gwangju' Nun Sutee Bok Pen Sinlapin Prachathippatai-Rong 'Mee Sati-Ot Thon' Krabuan Kan Sai Rai Pai Si" [Manit and Vasant sent letter to Gwangju to support Sutee, saying he was a democratic artist—asking for more sensibleness and patience towards the defamation movement], *Maticchon Online*, last modified May 18, 2018, <http://www.maticchon.co.th/news/140540>.

24. Harit Srikhao, "Whitewash: Photographer's Note (Addition Statement for Curator)," accessed April 29, 2018, <http://www.gommagrants.com/img/Whitewash-Photographer-Notes.pdf>.

25. Alex Jackson, "Political Unrest in Thailand, in Harit Srikhao's Whitewash," *British Journal of Photography*, last modified August 4, 2017, <http://www.bjp-online.com/2017/08/political-unrest-in-thailand-in-harit-srikhaos-whitewash/>.

26. Jirat Ratthawongjirakul, in discussion with the author, June 17, 2017.

27. Neon Boonyadhammakul, "What Exactly Went Down when the Military Visited Gallery VER," *BK Magazine*, last modified June 21, 2017, <http://bk.asia-city.com/city-living/news/military-visited-gallery-ver>.

28. Harit Srikhao, in discussion with the author, January 10, 2018.

29. Tada Hengsapkul, in discussion with the author, January 11, 2018. Hengsapkul suspected, however, that he was once monitored by Thai officers when he was chatting about Thai politics with another Thai artist in a café in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in late 2017.