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Archives Introduction

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Archives Introduction

With the turn towards exhibition histories as a prominent mode of enquiry within Southeast Asian art history, there is a need to recognise the importance of exhibitions that have engaged with issues concerning gender, from feminist or other perspectives. It is with this in mind that we have reproduced in this section, translations from the Thai-language catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Tradisexion*, held in Bangkok in 1995 in conjunction with International Women's Day for that year. This exhibition was organised by a group of six Thai artists—Khaisaeng Phanyawatchira, Phaptawan Suwannakudt, Jittima Pholsawek, Nopparat Chokchaichutikul, Nitaya Ueareeworakul, and Jarassri Roopkumdee—all of whom are women. Its venue, Concrete House, was an arts and community space, run by the performance artist Chumpon Apisuk and his partner Chantawipa Apisuk, who also founded the EMPOWER Foundation, an organisation that advocates for the rights of sex workers in Thailand. Such an exhibition, given its strong feminist overtone, is believed to have been unprecedented in its context at that time.

The catalogue for the exhibition was unusual in the sense that in addition to including short commentaries on the works by the exhibited artists, the organisers also invited writers—also all women—to contribute essays and short stories. These published pieces ranged quite widely in tone and form, from polemical essays, short biographical pieces, poems and songs, to works of fiction. Nevertheless, all the written pieces, as well as the exhibited works, demonstrated a concern with gender inequality and the socio-economic conditions that shape structures of oppression. In selecting the texts for translation and publication here, we have aimed to reflect the diversity of forms and voices in the catalogue, as well as the dominant themes that

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were explored within it and in the exhibition itself. As always, this Archives section is intended as a resource for further research.

Also included in this section are reflections from two members of the organising group for Womanifesto, a biennial residency and exhibition project that has taken place in various locations in Thailand since 1997. In Phaptawan Suwannakudt's text, she indicates the connection between Tradisexion and Womanifesto, with many of the artists included in the former exhibition having become part of the organising group for the latter project. Varsha Nair's contribution comprises a detailed record of Womanifesto's development, as well as a timely reminder of the ways in which its significance may yet be fully recognised.