

A Letter from Bangkok

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By Melissa Lam



IN ORDER TO ESCAPE THE BURGEONING SNOWFALL THIS WINTER, I MIGRATED EAST, MORE SPECIFICALLY TO CHECK OUT THE EMERGING ART SCENE THAT WAS BUSILY DEVELOPING IN THE FRENETIC CITY OF BANGKOK THAILAND. TWO INDEPENDENT ART SPACES AND THAILAND'S FIRST CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM ARE REVIEWED BELOW.

Art Gorillas, Art Gallery
260 2nd floor
Lido Multiplex Building Siam Square Soi 3
Bangkok
artgorillas@gmail.com

This independent Art space changes exhibitions monthly and features a mixture of design and visual art exhibitions. The current exhibition "Meal of Cartoon" is by Vix Graphix, a French Artist based in Thailand that uses overblown frowsy renditions of food and animals giving art goers a much needed laugh in this downward spiral of gloom and financial depression. Think of a hamburger with flowered petticoats sandwiched in a fat sesame seed bun or a pirate blue octopus eating snow cone buildings and you will have a sense of the whimsical sense of humor of Vix Graphix and the wonderful color and fun that has filled the small space gallery these past couple of weeks.

White Space
Room number 260
2-4th floor Lido Building
Siam Square

White space is an independent arts space that features experimental art from artists working and living in Thailand. The wide range of work (from installation to painting to photography) shown in the current exhibition "Trigger" was surprising, given the specific theme and tiny 500 square foot space. The exhibition centered on haphazard objects which the exhibition statement were like "accidents waiting to happen" which 'most people in Bangkok treat with caution.' The show featured nine artists, among them the Artist Collective "The Human Eye Corporation" who worked on a video installation that featured a dainty mockery of the materialistic and pervasive messages that are regularly featured in supermarkets. In contrast, Tim Brightmore's photography concentrates on the refuse left behind on Bangkok's busy streets, in particular, misplaced shoes. The photographic prints entitled "flip flop" have a lonely abandoned quality to the images focusing on a single shoe left behind on Bangkok's busy urban street. Finally Sujin Wattanawongchai's "Shelter for Free" organizes the archaic telephone booth for more needful purposes in the 21st century such as a place to rest, outfitting the booth with free coffee, chairs and reading the newspaper.

Bangkok arts and cultural centre
Rama 1 Road near BTS National Stadium
<http://www.bacc.or.th/>

The last stop was the Bangkok Arts and Culture Centre located in Siam Square, one of the city's busiest commercial districts. This district houses shopping malls, entertainment centres, cinemas, and now a major museum, all connected by sky walkways and a rapid transit train station. Whereas many of us in the West, still adhered to a purist vision of art – the museum functioning exclusively as a temple of high culture – public state-sponsored visual art spaces built nowadays in Asia pursue an altogether different agenda. In order to survive financially and secure a steady stream of visitors, museums often operate simultaneously as meeting place, cultural venue and retail destination. Thus BACC, with its mall-land location, shopping centre architecture, underground multi-storey car park, and several dozen food and commercial outlets occupying the building's lower and more accessible floors epitomizes Southeast Asia's current taste for hybrid, entertainment-oriented public spaces. The new visual art space is Bangkok's first large international-standard public art museum. Designed by Bangkok architectural firm Robert Boughey & Associates, the new Centre is housed in a twelve-floor atrium-style edifice with a corkscrew ascending ramp in a salutary homage to New York's Guggenheim Museum. The exhibition that was on at the moment featured a graduate student show which was strangely loose and given an inordinate amount of space (many students had their own room in the massive centre) as well as a more closely curated show featuring a variety of Thai Artists among them Manit Sriwanichpoom and his work "pink, white& blue" 2006.

Fast Food Attack
Vix Graphix Design