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KATIE WEST
Installation view
Cry of the Land, 2021
Heide Museum of
Modern Art, Melbourne
Photo: Christian
Capurro

Courtesy the Heide
Museum and Dominik
Mersch Gallery

FORECAST

Forecast looks broadly to the future, and to the work of emerging artists. Each issue *VAULT* shares some fresh faces for FORECAST. This issue we have examined three divergent practices. The ethical practice of Indigenous artist Katie West is informed by a tenderness towards landscape, Kai Wasikowski looks into the histories of the environmental movement, while Pannaphan Yodmanee examines the fragility of human existence through a Buddhist lens.

KATIE WEST

WRITTEN *by*
SOPHIE PRINCE

KAI WASIKOWSKI

WRITTEN *by*
LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW

PANNAPHAN YODMANEE

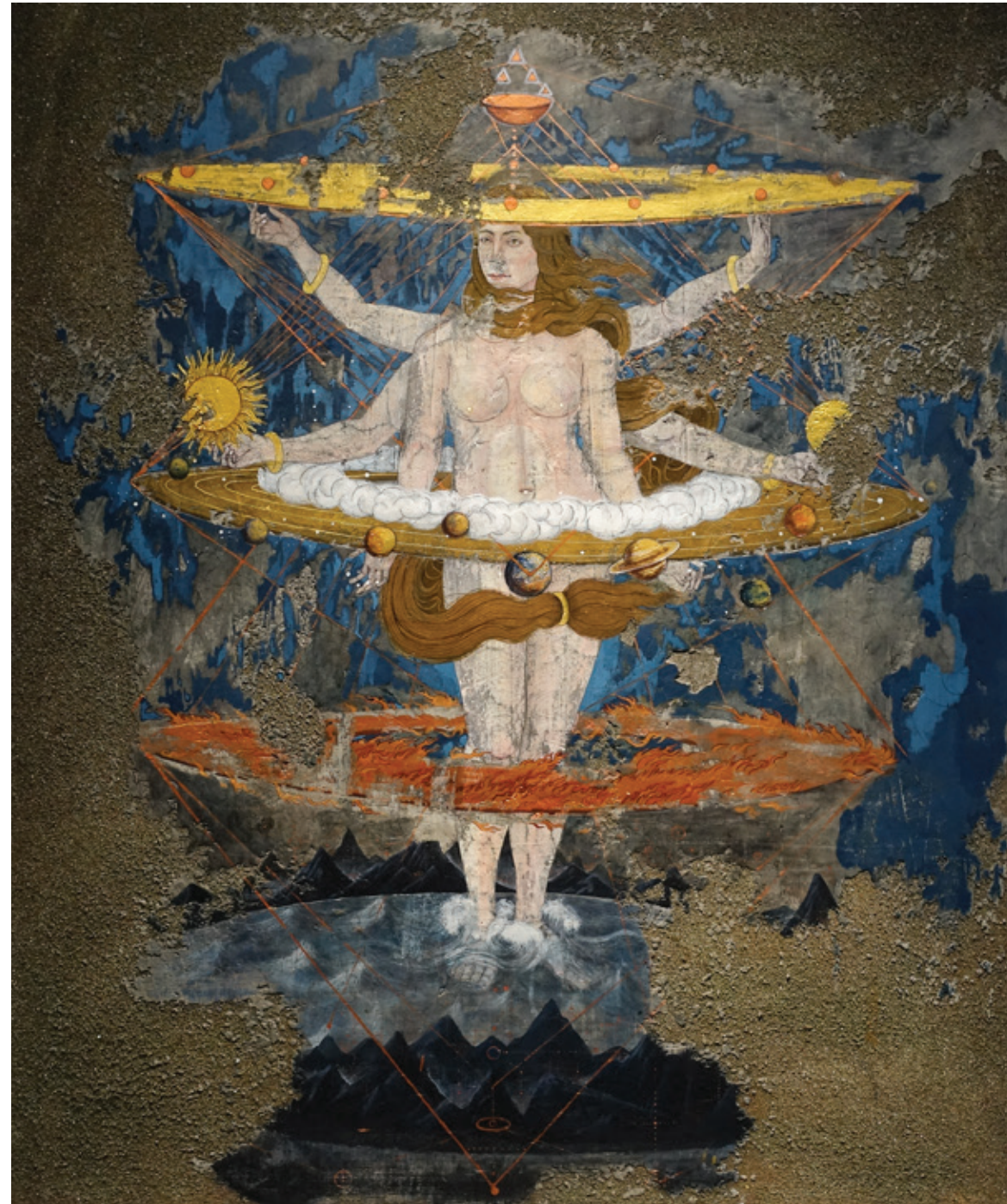
WRITTEN *by*
MICHAELA BEAR



PANNAPHAN YODMANEE

VAULT talks to Pannaphan Yodmanee about how Buddhism informs her thoughtful practice

FORECAST by MICHAELA BEAR



Top to bottom, clockwise
PANNAPHAN YODMANEE
Primordial Time, 2020
mixed media
120 x 100 cm

PANNAPHAN YODMANEE
*The Magical Cycle
of Birth and Death*
(detail), 2021
mixed media,
dimensions variable

PANNAPHAN YODMANEE
Quarterly Myth
(detail), 2019
mixed media
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist,
Yavuz Gallery, MOCA
and Lyon Biennale

Opposite
PANNAPHAN YODMANEE
Quarterly Myth
(detail), 2019
mixed media
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist,
Yavuz Gallery and
Lyon Biennale

Pannaphan Yodmanee trained in traditional Thai painting, a technique she incorporates into her mixed-media installations exploring Buddhist philosophy and cosmology in a contemporary context. While deeply embedded in local tradition, Yodmanee's work has a strong global resonance. Her immersive environments appear caught between construction and deconstruction, a reminder of life's karmic cycles and the fragility of our human existence.

Traditional Buddhist philosophies and painting techniques are central to your artistic practice – can you talk about the origins of these influences?

From a young age, I was taught traditional Buddhist painting by a monk at my local temple in Thailand. This training and knowledge was the starting point of my practice, which looks at interrelationships between the symbolic, spiritual and secular in new and unconventional ways. I often compare Buddhist philosophy to science, reflecting on ideas such as birth, death and cosmology. The development of Buddhism, for instance, was also influenced by several religions, including Brahmanism, Hinduism, Mysticism, among others. It has a nuanced history.

How does Buddhism inform your artistic view of the world?

In the past, religion and its patronage played a major role in the creation and development of art. Art served the religious, but now I feel that art serves and reflects society, communities and people. Being exposed to Buddhism at a young age helped me to develop a deep understanding of larger philosophies and cosmologies, which I transform and explore through my artistic practice.

Can you talk more about the wider themes of migration and religion in your work?

I am currently exploring Christian philosophy, Hinduism, Mysticism, Naturalism and Humanism. I use religion to map out larger chronicles of Southeast Asian history, and the world. Some of my work reveals the way religion has influenced migration and the conquest of land, as well as broader ideas of change, loss, devastation and society's striving for development and progress.

This also feeds into your explorations of time and karmic cycles of creation and destruction ...

The histories, legends, myths and stories that have been recorded through time evolve depending on the specific context in which they are shared, and they overlap with each other in many intrinsic ways. I see my work as another iteration of these narratives. Many of the stories I depict in my work serve as a 'legend', recorded on mediums like cement to recall ancient cave drawings, or temple and church

walls that are layered with murals and frescoes. Many 'big ideas' on creation and destruction are still relevant today, and will continue to be so for generations. Empires rise and fall, ideas fall in and out of trend.

How do these oppositional elements of abstraction and figuration, traditional and contemporary, materialise in your work?

These juxtapositions allow me to tease out and confront parallels between each, and the nuances in-between. I continue to study ancient murals and traditional Thai Buddhist painting techniques, and while in college I learned contemporary art techniques. I feel that my work is very traditional and contemporary at the same time, yet interestingly many people identify my work as abstract installation art.

Earlier this year you exhibited work in Messages at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA BANGKOK), an exhibition focusing on important Thai artist Chavalit Soemprungsuk. Can you talk more about your large-scale installation The Magical Cycle of Birth and Death (2021) and how Soemprungsuk has influenced your practice?

The exhibition *Messages* focused on Chavalit Soemprungsuk's sketches of artworks and his legacy. One recurring theme and motif in these sketches was the skeleton. I created an installation examining the idea of death and rebirth – literally, by including a replica skeleton, but also through referencing the legacy of Soemprungsuk, who passed away last year.

Often your work is spatially driven and site-specific; why do you favour this approach?

I prefer developing site-specific work as I enjoy the challenge. There are so many contingencies when working onsite that push me and my work.

Can you talk about the architectural and geographical elements of your large-scale installation in the last Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art?

Spatial thinking is very important to how I conceptualise and develop my immersive installations. For the Lyon Biennale, I created one of my largest site-specific works. When conceptualising the piece I looked towards characteristics of Lyon, such as how it is France's top industrial city. I created a work that incorporated massive two-metre tall industrial pipes that people could walk into, allowing them to view my painted works surrounding them. They featured ideas on the cosmos, with a hidden narrative that mixed Buddhist cosmologies and Christianity. This was the first time I incorporated imagery of the Virgin Mary into my work, which

*Empires rise and fall,
ideas fall in and out
of trend.*



was based upon my experiences with local French Christian beliefs. I also incorporated unwanted trees found in Lyon. I really enjoyed working with the space and gathering local materials.

How is medium important to your practice?

Working through various mediums allows me to approach my practice through different lenses.

Can you talk about the different materials you incorporate into your installations?

I like playing with opposing materials, including the natural and man-made, old and new. The human skeleton I created for MOCA was made with a combination of resin and shells that resembled bone when mixed together. The bones lay among gold coins, silver brass ornaments and piles of stones. From a distance, the installation resembled a grave or a treasure trove. Each material adds its own meaning. I enjoy the process of finding the right pieces to include in my works.

What are you working on next?

Currently I'm exploring the theme of death, which is particularly pertinent in current global crises, such as Covid-19 and places of conflict. I also have an upcoming exhibition with Yavuz Gallery in Singapore at the end of the year.

In 2016 you won the prestigious Benesse Prize, which focuses on the theme of 'benesse' or 'well-being'. What is well-being to you?

My idea of well-being is to keep working on art. Awards help me continue my artistic career, and all I want is to practice art continuously. ▽

Pannaphan Yodmanee is represented by Yavuz Gallery, Singapore and Sydney.
yavuzgallery.com