

RITUALS: ink, oil, cotton, and thread

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RITUALS: ink, oil, cotton, and thread draws its title loosely from ritualistic tasks that involve a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order, and on the actual materials deployed by the artists to create their works, among others, ink, oil, cotton and thread. Featuring mixed-media works that span craft-based textile, to painting, drawings and video installation by three emerging Southeast Asian artists: Parinot Kunakornwong, Moe Satt and Iabadiou Piko, this group exhibition investigates the possibilities of repetition of gestures in art as a way to foster personal or communal transformation and reconciliation.

Semantically, the word 'repetition' implies the act of repeating something, an action or an event, as well as the result of that repeated action. By virtue of reiteration, 'repetition' often becomes a type of ritual. Rituals are ubiquitous in everyday life. Some of our routine tasks (from how we prepare our coffee, to the way we keep our work desk organized and so on) have become part of the daily ritual, connecting us to our community and society in general. However, while routines may or may not imply explicit agency or motivation, the repetition of gestures that are performed by Parinot Kunakornwong, Moe Satt and Iabadiou Piko in this exhibition bear ritualistic dimensions, urged by the desire to transform something into something else. Ritual and repetition inform the featured artworks in a variety of modes: from personal investigation in spirituality, alchemy and shamanism, to the investigation of the individual in society in which we strive for recognition and participation.

In his works on paper *Heads in The Head* Parinot Kunakornwong investigates the subconscious that influences the thoughts and images that form in his head, and the quasi-shamanistic ritual of transferring these images to paintings. His thoughts, emerging through shapes and forms, materialize as ghostly spirits on paper. Specifically, *Heads in The Head* delves into Parinot's longtime fascination with myth, spirituality and shamanism, as well as the changeable nature of the objects that are able to transform and evolve through alchemy. This is achieved in this series by applying thick layers of gouache, gesso and acrylic on sheets of A5 paper. These components, mixed together, engage in an alchemical reaction that is evocative of what Parinot defines the "transformation of ordinary material into art." As Parinot leaves the components to react with each other, he simultaneously manipulates the same thick impasto that covers the surface, all the while guided, in a trance-like state, by his subconscious, "the artist's inner voice." Similar to how shamans, when spirit-possessed, are able to bring to life images or events from the world beyond, Parinot's inner energy guides him through the process until the 'heads' or faces appear distinctively on the surface.

In Moe Satt's video and mixed-media installation of umbrellas titled *The Umbrella Project*, the artist explores the notion of the ritual by investigating the cycle of rupture and reconciliation in society, with particular reference to his own politically unstable Burmese society in the selection of colors for the umbrellas that correspond to the colors of Myanmar: yellow, green and red. To do so Moe Satt transforms colourful handicraft umbrellas from his native Myanmar by adding zips to the shades, which can be zipped and unzipped repeatedly, cleaved and rejoined, to signify the rupture in the fabric of society. The gesture of zipping and unzipping is as much personal as it is collective, in that the artist invites the audience to participate, in effect breaking and repairing the umbrellas. Moe Satt is not new to performing repetitive rituals in his practice, especially working with props like his own hands or of other peoples' to deliver the social and political underpinning of his works. For instance, in *No Reason, from Face and Fingers*, which started in 2008 during a two-month residency in Malaysia, he tried to find new positions each day for his hands on his face to highlight the role of the (artist's) body as subtle a conduit for critique and communication. The imposing 2.5-meter span umbrellas in *The Umbrella Project* are repeatedly intervened upon by the artist's and audience's hands, expressing the meaning of being shaded, but also that of being supervised or manipulated.

Iabadiou Piko's vibrant collage works, on the other hand, explore environmental and personal themes that are drawn from the artist's daily observations of his community. Ranging from simple written words to intricate compositions that combine doodles, shapes, and forms, his gestural works playfully deploy a variety of mediums, such as acrylic, oil, charcoal and pencil, which are molded and transformed through the artist's repetitive gestures of adding or removing material to and from the canvas. As a self-taught painter who majored in art photography, Piko approaches the canvas with curiosity, as a playground for improvisation and abstraction. Inspired by 20th-century artists such as Twombly and Basquiat, Piko transfers his emotions and daily experiences to his works through ritualistic gestural marks and splashes of colors, which become, through the appropriation of abstraction, text, image and memory, personal commentaries on society. In reverse logic to Parinot's works on paper, the final image 'emerges' on Piko's canvases not as the result of alchemical and spiritual forces, but as testament of the artist's conscious choice to allow the viewer the 'space' to enter and experience his works.

As a whole the narratives presented by the works in *RITUALS: ink, oil, cotton, and thread* weave together the mundane and the sacred, routines and rituals, that stem from the artists' autobiographical experiences. Whether organic or otherwise tactile and encrusted canvases, engaging installations and vibrant palettes welcome the viewers as they enter the exhibition space, where the three artists, hailing from different cultures and backgrounds, Thailand,

Myanmar and Indonesia, come together for the first time prompted by their shared interest to investigate the significance of gestural repetition in their practice, as well as in society, and the role of the body in the production of the work where repetition, as “eternal return,” is “power to begin and begin again.” (Deleuze 1968, 136)

Bibliography

Deleuze, Gilles. 2004 [1968]. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: A&C Black.