



Pieces from Berlin

Bussaraporn Thongchai

An exhibition dedicated to all the women who immigrated from war, poverty and gender inequality in their motherland

20 MARCH — 17 APRIL 2021

16 albermarle
project space



Bussaraporn Thongchai
Trans woman in a male psychiatric unit 2020
drawing on paper, 150 x 120 cm

Pieces from Berlin

Bussaraporn Thongchai

Pieces from Berlin: Thai artist Bussaraporn Thongchai exhibits striking drawings based on her work in a Berlin shelter home for women victims of human trafficking.

In 2015 Thai artist Bussaraporn Thongchai relocated from Bangkok to Berlin. Once settled she began working in a small shelter home providing services for migrant women from Africa, southeast Asia and eastern Europe who had been the victims of human trafficking and the sex trade.

Pieces from Berlin is the outcome of three years in the shelter, specifically designed to document the women's stories and experiences as they passed through refugee case procedures and began rebuilding an identity for themselves. As a migrant herself, struggling to learn a new language and find a place in a new country, Bussaraporn connected with these women and what they were experiencing and feeling.

Her large, stylised drawings in black pastel on paper starkly illustrate the women at various stages of their journeys – pregnant, hungry, homeless, bearing the burden of unpaid domestic labour, travelling with a small child, always conscious of being different and an outsider, a target of racial vilification, a slave.

The artworks are set in the Ban Ying Women's Shelter, "Ban Ying" being the Thai phrase for house of women. It was founded in 1988 when a group of social workers realised that increasing numbers of Thai women who were working as prostitutes in Berlin were not doing so of their own accord but were being forced to do so. Escape for these trafficked women was more or less impossible because there was no safe place for them to go where they would be out of reach of the pimps and traffickers.

Her experiences as a language mediator in Ban Ying influenced Bussaraporn's thinking and her art. Her focus broadened from an earlier, more personal interest in gender, sexuality and relationships to a concern for the women she was working with, and a desire to use her art to bring their plight to a wider audience.

The first iteration of *Pieces from Berlin* was presented at Ardel's Third Place Gallery, Bangkok in March 2018. Six were subsequently purchased by the Bundeskunstsammlung (Federal Art Collection) of the Federal Republic of Germany. The six remaining works are being presented at 16albermarle Project Space along with six new works produced by the artist in 2020.

Born in 1985, Bussaraporn Thongchai is a Berlin-based Thai artist known for using her life events as part of her art practice. Drawing on her childhood experiences in a patriarchal family, Bussaraporn questions gender inequality in her society and illustrates this through provocative drawings and paintings. More recently she has expanded her personal practice by addressing broader socio-political issues. She has had six solo exhibitions since 2010 and her work has been included in group exhibitions in Singapore, Hong Kong, the UK and Australia. She was included in the Bangkok Art Biennale *Escape Routes 2020*.

Artist Statement

Pieces from Berlin

Bussaraporn Thongchai

In 2017, I was invited by Ardel Gallery to exhibit my work in Bangkok. It was actually the same year that I started to work as a cultural and language mediator at Ban Ying e.V., a home shelter in Berlin. It was after two years of living in Germany, learning a new language, working as a cleaner in the kitchen of a Thai restaurant and losing the art network which I had built up my whole life as an independent female artist. Of course, it was a massive culture shock and identity crisis, it was a big transition in every aspect of my life. I suddenly became a stranger and lost the sense of belonging in both Thailand and Germany, as if I was between somewhere that I still hadn't left and still hadn't reached.

An anonymous shelter hiding in a normal residential building; it is a place where my Self-Observation Process began intensively and continuously. There is a long narrow hallway which leads to many separate rooms on each side. Behind their doors are the several lives of women and children who experienced violence, forced labour and sexual exploitation. Well, but here in this house we call them 'Clients'.

They came from different countries, speak different languages, have different backgrounds and believe in different gods. I observe them and see distinctions and similarities I can relate to. I see the difficulties they have in getting along with the unknown culture and social system, trying to adjust, to compromise with themselves and with the others, tackle obstacles and face prejudice and discrimination. Simultaneously, they have to recover both physically and mentally after their traumatic experiences.

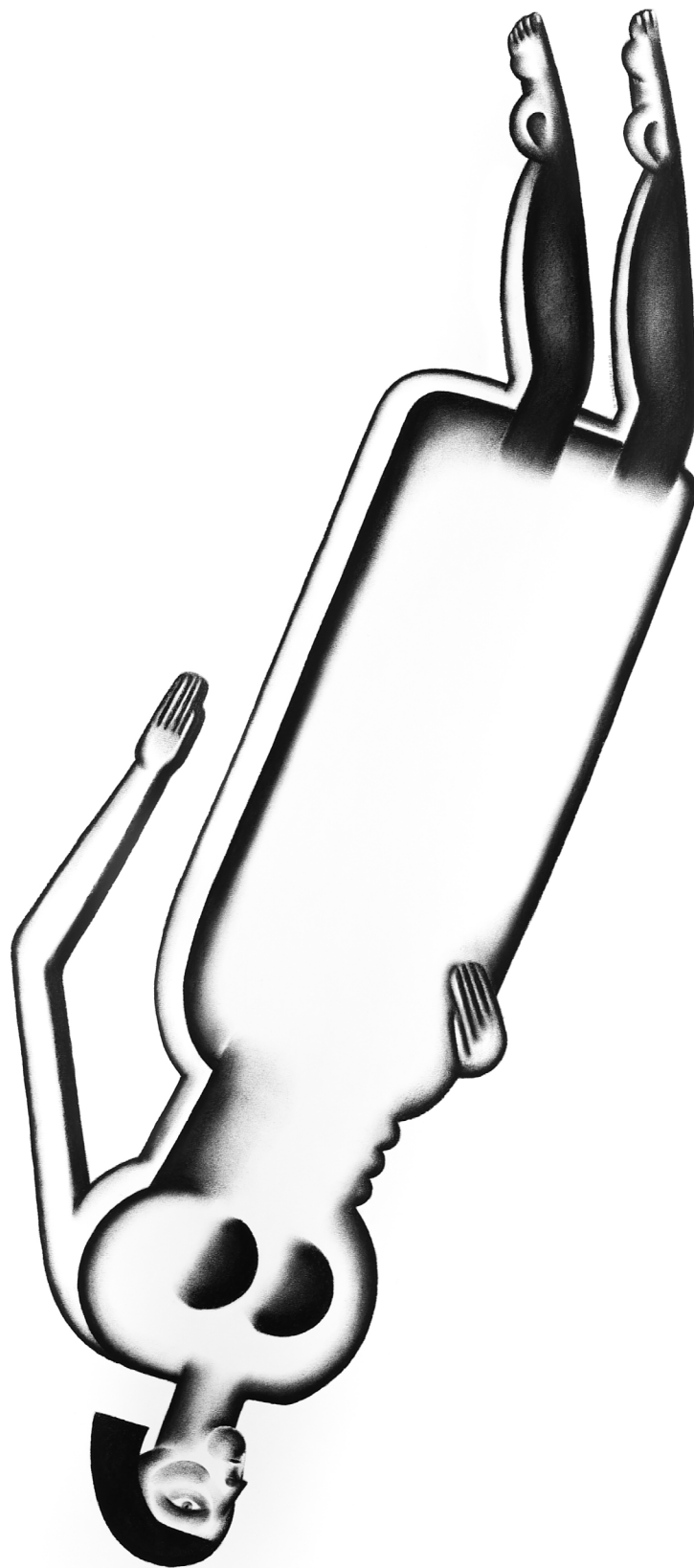
For someone from a third world country like me, it is hard to believe that these things happen in Germany, a developed country and a country that sees itself as an exemplary democracy. At the same time, it's also a source, transit and destination country subject to trafficking in people, and where the number of reported cases of racial discrimination is still continuously increasing. In this sense, the trauma doesn't seem to go away, but double.

While the ethical and political questions are constantly and often fiercely being discussed and reflected outside the shelter home, I still accompany these women and their children everywhere as usual. My self-observation doesn't seem to be any less but expands in many directions. The state of being nobody, neither an artist nor whoever I was before, has transformed me into being just a human who wants to approach the basic needs and at the same time fight for my rights and the dignity of being a human, the same as you and others.

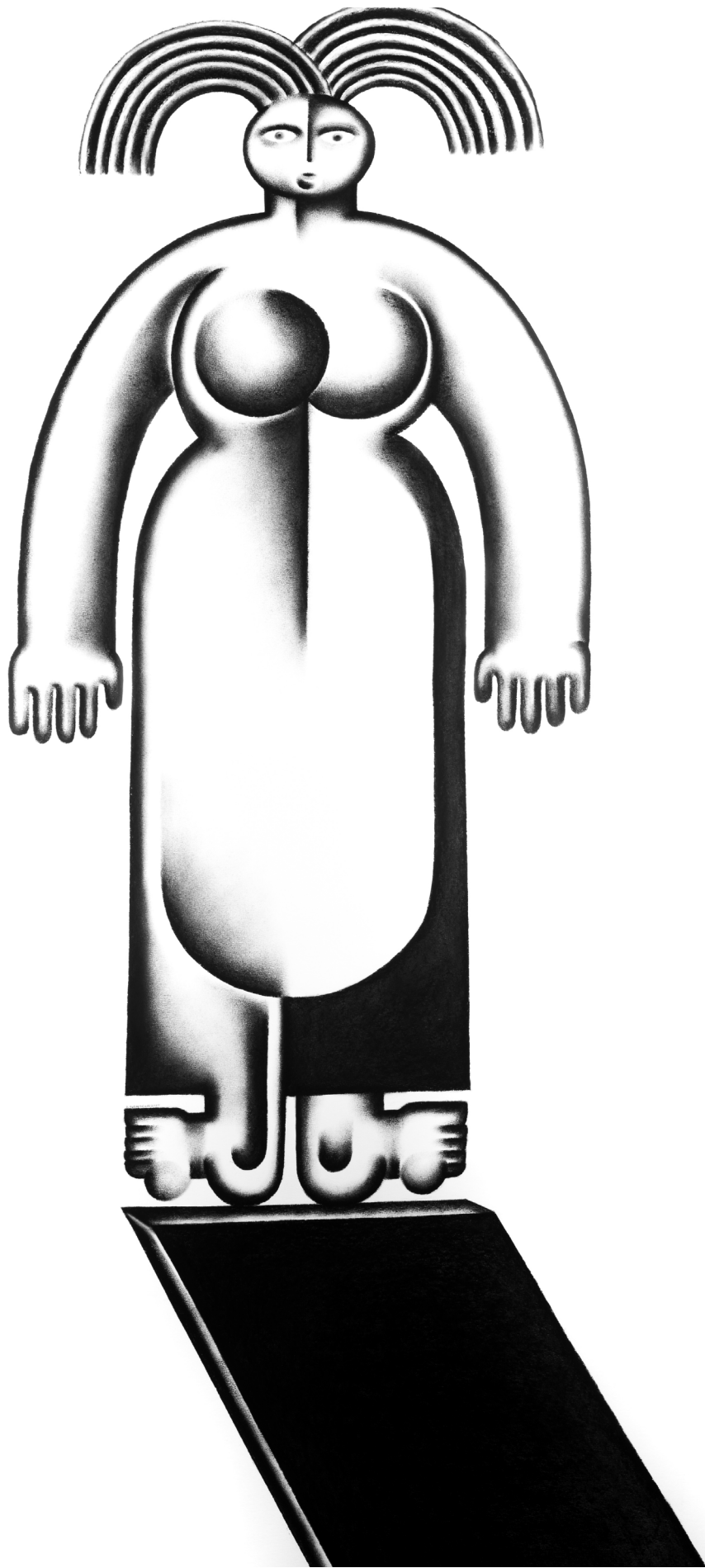
Before I started to work on this series and brought them back to Thailand in 2017, I asked myself:

"What would happen if I bring all these stories back to where I come from? The place that I'm not able to stop looking at and thinking of. If a small piece of the Berlin Wall can be sold as a tourist's souvenir, I too can bring back these stories I collected, as pieces from Berlin"

Bussaraporn Thongchai
24 February 2021



Bussaraporn Thongchai
A Young girl from Vietnam 2020
drawing on paper, 150 x 118 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
The cliff of depression 2020
drawing on paper, 150 x 115 cm

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bussaraporn Thongchai

BORN 1985 NAKHONPHANOM, THAILAND

Bussaraporn Thongchai is a Thai contemporary artist who works primarily in drawing and painting. She was born as the youngest of four daughters in a small town in the Nakhonphanom Province in 1985, and was raised in Isarn, the north-eastern region of Thailand bordered by the Mekong River. She studied a Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts at Silpakorn University in Bangkok (2004-2013). During the final year of her Bachelor's degree in 2009, she was selected for *Brand New*, an annual exhibition and forum for young artists and art critics curated by Gridthiya Gaweewong at Bangkok University Gallery. One year later Bussaraporn had her first solo exhibition *All About Her* at Ardel Gallery of Modern Art in Bangkok. In this exhibition she criticized the patriarchy through the observation of her father's power and violence, and the consequences for other family members as well as the moral paradox in her family. Two years after the death of her father, her solo exhibition *The Man Number 10* explored the complicated relationship between herself, her father and all of her ex-boyfriends. Shortly after, her third solo exhibition *SORRY! Life in Progress!* was held at Gallery N, Bangkok. Bussaraporn literally moved into the exhibition space, living and working in the venue for one month while visitors to the gallery were welcomed to observe her life in progress. Two years later, in 2015, her fourth solo exhibition *I'm Not Your Holy Mother* was set up as an ironic symbol of the struggle during her latest relationship with a guy who enthroned an anonymous woman as his sacred Mother.

In 2015 Bussaraporn relocated from Bangkok to Berlin and began working in the Ban Ying shelter, a refuge for women from Africa, southeast Asia and Eastern Europe who were victims of human trafficking. In March 2018 she held her fifth exhibition, *Pieces from Berlin*, at Ardel Third Place Gallery Bangkok, inspired by the lives and experiences of the women.

Bussaraporn has exhibited in group exhibitions such as *Art in the Ninth Reign: Thai Trends from Localism to Internationalism* at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre and *Thai Transience* by 25 Thai artists at Singapore Art Museum. In 2014 she was a finalist in Sovereign Asian Art Prize in Hong Kong. In 2015, along with 24 Thai artists, she was selected for the *Thailand Eye* exhibition at Saatchi Gallery, London.

16albermarle Project Space

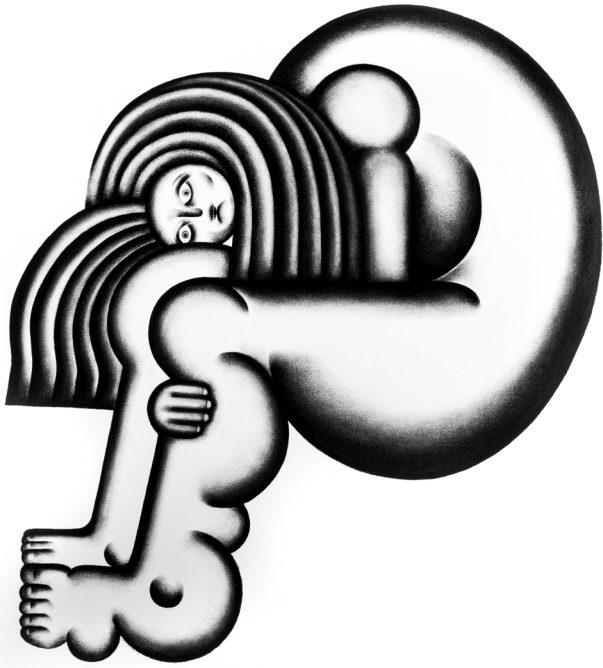
16albermarle is a gallery and project space providing Australian audiences with the opportunity to see and learn about contemporary art from southeast Asia. It is directed by adviser, curator and collector John Cruthers and managed by Emily Isabel Taylor. Based in Newtown in inner city Sydney, 16albermarle stages 4-6 exhibitions a year, including one exhibition annually of Australian art. In addition to exhibitions and public programs, 16albermarle will run tours to art events in the region. It is open by appointment.

Haisang Javanalikhikara, Curator

An artist's daughter, Haisang studied media arts, contemporary art and curatorial practice for five years in the UK. Returning to Bangkok she worked at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre from 2012-2018, while studying for her DFA from Chulalongkorn University. In 2019 she was appointed a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, where she's a director of her faculty's gallery and co-learning space CU Art4C, founder and editor-in-chief of the multimedia e-magazine Teleaesthetics (teleaesthetics.net) and currently developing the first Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice degree to be offered in Thailand.

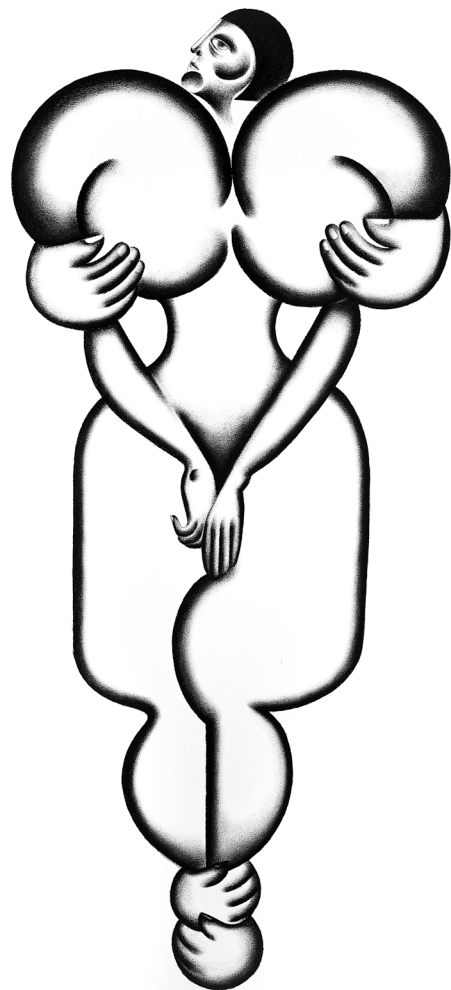


Bussaraporn Thongchai
Again, and again in the Counselling Room 2021
drawing on paper, 112 x 150 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
The same feet that saved me also tortures me 2020
drawing on paper, 150 x 120 cm

Bussaraporn Thongchai
Mary is my mom 2020
drawing on paper, 150 x 108 cm

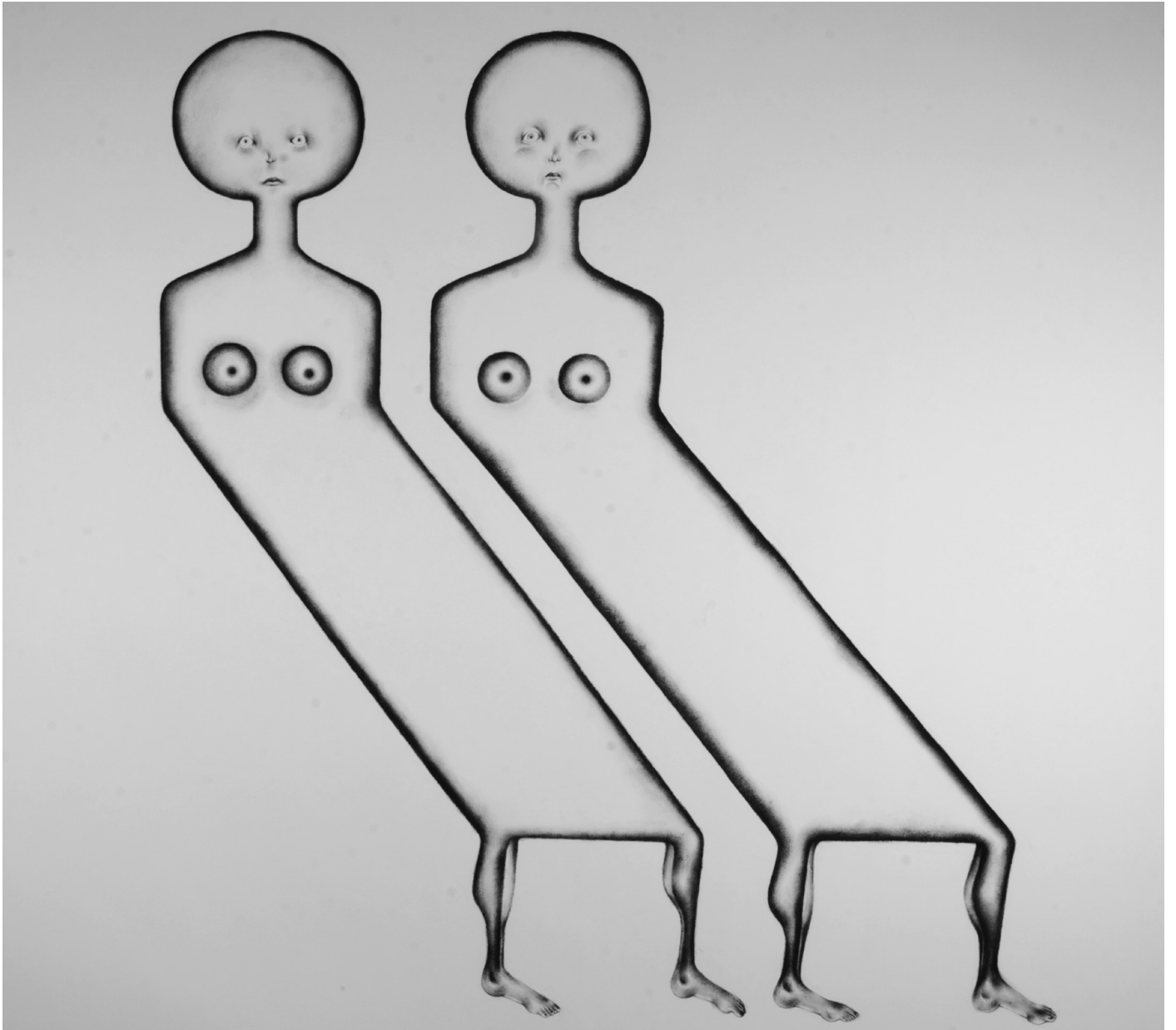




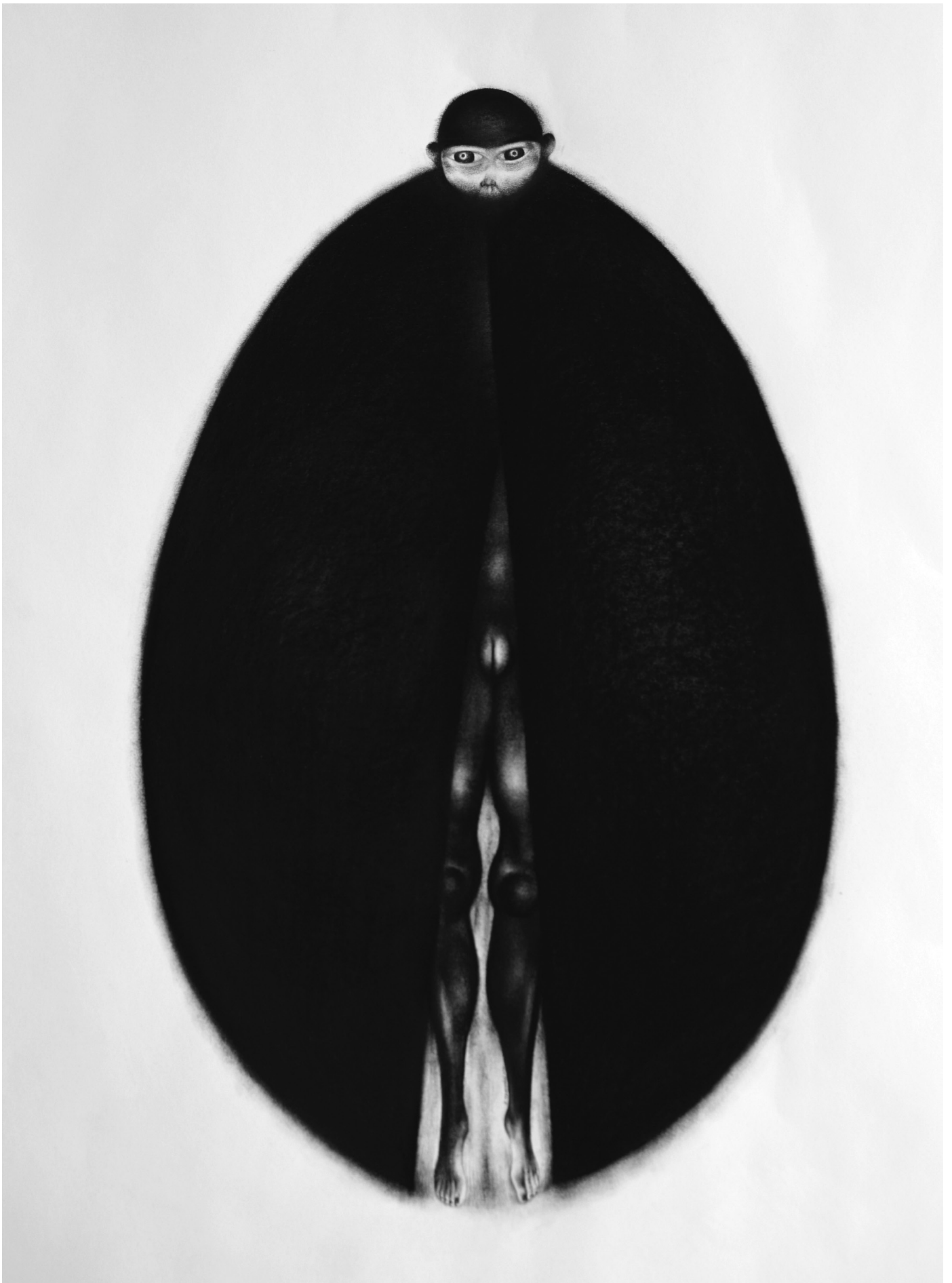
Bussaraporn Thongchai
Fight – Flee? 2017
drawing on paper, 110 x 90 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
Domestic Workers – Modern Slavery? 2017
drawing on paper, 110 x 90 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
Who deserves the Bed? 2017
drawing on paper, 130 x 120 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
Asylum 2017
drawing on paper, 110 x 90 cm



Bussaraporn Thongchai
Moral - Food? 2017
drawing on paper, 105 x 85 cm



About

The term “Ban Ying” comes from the Thai language and means “house of women”. The association was founded in 1988 on the initiative of a group of social workers who worked in a Berlin-based information centre for sexually transmitted infections and AIDS. They realised that increasing numbers of Thai women who were working as prostitutes in Berlin were not doing so of their own accord but were being forced to do so. Escape for these trafficked women was more or less impossible because there was no safe place for them to go where they would be out of reach of the pimps and traffickers.

This situation served as the impulse for the establishment for Ban Ying’s first project, the Women’s Shelter. In 1990, the Ban Ying e.V. Coordination and Counselling Center opened. Towards the end of the 1990s, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was a rapid increase in the number of women from Eastern European countries who had been affected by human trafficking seeking help from Ban Ying e.V. Over the past few years we have seen growing numbers of women from the Latin American and African region and, more recently, a sharp rise in the numbers of women from South-Eastern European countries.

A change to the German penal code in 2005 redefined human trafficking as a crime against the personal freedom of an individual, rather than a crime against sexual self-determination. Following this reform, Ban Ying e.V. was one of the first projects to provide support for women who had been trafficked for the purpose of labour exploitation.

As a result of these historical developments, Ban Ying has so far provided advice and counselling to women from more than 70 different countries and continues to campaign for the rights of migrant women who have experienced violence, exploitation or human trafficking.

Coordination and Counselling Center Against Trafficking in Human Beings

Ban Ying Coordination and Counselling Center provides support for women who have been affected by human trafficking in two levels: at the practical level with advice, counselling and supervision provided by social workers, and at the theoretical level with an analytical, political and educational approach.

Women’s Shelter

Ban Ying’s Women’s Shelter offers an anonymous, protective living space for women who have been affected by human trafficking, as well as for the domestic workers of diplomats. The shelter is staffed by two female social workers and two language mediators for Thai and Filipino. Language mediators for other languages are brought in on a case-by-case basis. The supervision in the shelter centres around the needs and requirements of the residents. The women are supported in learning to live as independently as possible and in asserting their legal rights.

For more information about Ban Ying go to: <https://en.ban-ying.de>



Bussaraporn Thongchai

An African woman, her son and their first arrival in Germany 2017
drawing on paper, 150 x 110 cm



Pieces from Berlin

Bussaraporn Thongchai

Acknowledgements

Conservation
Photography
Installation
Gallery Intern
Design

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Sineenart Meena
Emily Isabel Taylor



16 Albermarle Street, Newtown NSW 2042 Australia
Thu - Sat 11 - 5 pm, by appointment
16albermarle.com