



แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land

Surajate Tongchua and Maryanto

Curated by Haisang Javanalikhikara and John Cruthers

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Media Release

แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land: Surajate Tongchua and Maryanto

An exhibition of recent work by two southeast Asian artists whose work critically engages with landscape, the environment and political authority in very different ways.

Surajate Tongchua (b 1986) graduated in Printmaking from Chiang Mai University and lives and works in Chiang Mai, a city surrounded by spectacular mountainous landscapes. So it's not surprising that mountains are the inspiration for his recent series, *Lying Mountains*. But Tongchua is also passionately interested in politics, particularly the fractured politics of his own country, Thailand. In *Lying Mountains* he brings both interests together in works which employ the massive forms of mountains to question his government's authority or the lack of it.

Tellingly, Tongchua's mountains are not grand and majestic. Nor are they grounded: detached from the earth they float on white, suggesting a certain rootlessness or dissolution of structure. And looking closer, many have words printed or collaged onto their bulky slopes, mostly the word lying, endlessly repeated. Taken together, the rootless mountains and collaged words make sense of the series title. Tongchua is subtly but unmistakably contrasting our traditional understanding of mountains with the behaviour of the grand leaders of his country, and the legitimacy of its government.

Tongchua's current works feature images of mountainous landscapes in northern Thailand, sourced from Google Earth and printed onto diaphanous fabric to resemble curtains. This landscape is now regularly shrouded in smog from agricultural burning in Shan State in neighbouring Myanmar, funded by Thai investors. What we do will always come back to us, Tongchua suggests, in this case bequeathing the people of northern Thailand a serious pollution problem.

Indonesian artist Maryanto (b 1977) also studied printmaking and its influence is felt in his series *When the Tree Falls*, seen at Art Dubai 2023. For this series, he created works in various media to explore the rampant development of palm oil plantations in South Kalimantan and their encroachment onto the forests as a result. At the same time, he touches on the themes of transmigration, ownership and capitalism. While Maryanto does not frame his practice as environmental activism, his works can be considered aspirational: bringing public awareness to issues he is otherwise not able to change on his own.

Extensive on-site research is crucial for Maryanto's practice. When he becomes interested in an issue, he reads widely, collects research materials and visits the affected areas. He stays with communities, gathering stories and walking around affected areas such as forests, mangroves and mining sites. Along the way he chooses and composes images, before deciding which media to realise them in. In *In When The Trees Falls*, he creates drawings, works on paper and canvas using scraperboard techniques, embroidery and video.

The works in *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* show how those in power – government, monarchy, business - can be abusive to land. But they also raise an important question: who owns the land? Individual land is owned by individuals, but public land, or land in general? How can it be protected, how can it be cared for, how can it be useful to people equally? Visually, these works convey positive and negative responses. They heighten the collective sense of burden and heaviness, but speak with imagery and language which somehow enriches and empowers the viewer.

Cover image: Surajate Tongchua, *Lying Mountain no 18* 2023 (detail view), 200 x 100 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper

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Artist Bio | Surajate Tongchua

Surajate Tongchua (b 1986, Thailand) is currently based in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He graduated from the Department of Print Making, Faculty of Fine Art at Chiang Mai University in 2010. Tongchua's practice focuses on social power relations that affect state structure (the Organic crisis). Such critical concepts and philosophy of praxis challenge the existing world view, inviting the audience to step away from seeing under the common perception's filter. His conceptual enquiry, which is based on cross-disciplinary knowledge, art, social science, political science and government, has informed his work over the past decade. Tongchua's work reflects sharply on the political situation in Thailand by leaving traces of contention in the field of thought.

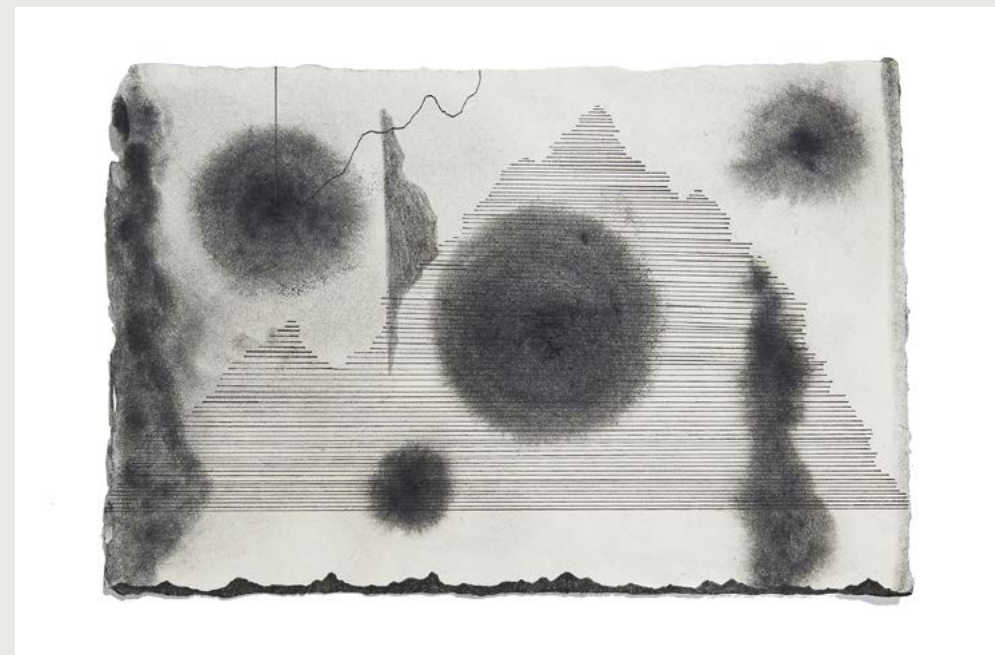
Tongchua is interested in contemporary art, conceptual art and installation art, resulting in most of his works utilising multimedia and techniques depending on the issues and content expressed. He applies a strategy of incorporating ready-mades or converting the material into another dimension to openly describe current social phenomena. Alongside his career as an artist, Tongchua lectured at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University from 2011-2015, and co-founded the Bubble Art Space in Chiang Mai in 2018, with the aim of reinforcing participatory and socially engaging art within the site. He is also on the committee for The Land Foundation, which was founded by fellow artist Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Left: Surajate Tongchua, *Lying Mountain no 17 2023*, 200 x 100 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper

Selected Works | Surajate Tongchua



Lying Mountain no 4 2023, 31 x 21 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper



Lying Mountain no 11 2023, 21 x 31 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper



Lying Mountain no 16 2023, 21 x 31 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper



Lying Mountain (Visiting Neighbours in the Summer) 2023, 150 x 900 cm,
computer graphic illustration (mixed details from original drawing) digital print on chiffon



Lying Mountain no 18 2023, 200 x 100 cm, mixed media drawing on handmade paper



Maryanto, *Palm Oil in Daily Life* 2023, silk screen print on paper, edition 100, 51 x 35.5 cm



Artist Bio | Maryanto

Maryanto (b 1977, Indonesia) is an Indonesian artist who creates black and white paintings and installations that examine socio-political structures through the depiction of landscapes. His work often explores the impact of technological development, industrialisation, pollution, and resource exploitation on the natural world.

Maryanto graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art, Indonesia Institute of Art, Yogyakarta in 2005, and completed a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 2013. Maryanto has presented solo exhibitions at Yeo Workshop, Singapore (2017 and 2015); Art Basel Hong Kong, Discoveries Section (2016); the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam; ArtAffairs, Amsterdam; and Heden, Den Haag (2013). He has also recently participated in notable group exhibitions at the Koganei Art Spot Chateau, Tokyo (2018); the Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide; the Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju; the Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (2017); the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2015); and the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, Amsterdam (2013). Maryanto has also been featured at international biennials such as the 2nd Industrial Biennale, Labin, Croatia (2018); the Setouchi Triennale, Naoshima, Japan (2016); the Jakarta and Jogja Biennales, Indonesia (2015); and the Moscow Biennale, Moscow, Russia (2013). Maryanto lives and works in Yogyakarta.

Maryanto is represented by Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

Selected Works | Maryanto



Sand Miner Bivouac 2021, scratching, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 200 cm



'Mulung' In Belian Ritual 2022, scratching on photo paper, 20 x 25 cm



Illegal Loggers 2022, scratching on photo paper, 20 x 25 cm



Palm Oil District 2023, embroidery, installation on wall, 21 x 15 cm x 11 pcs



Maryanto, Customary forest area 2022, scratching on photo paper, 20 x 25 cm

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