



SALA: THAI ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE, CONTEMPORARY ART  
AND SOCIAL SPACE (2008)

By

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This dissertation investigates the role of the Thai *sala* (pavilion) in Thai society, and its resilience and transformation in form, function and meaning through time.

The *sala* is considered as a symbol for many aspects and characteristics of Thai social life; a representation of Thai society today. It is also defined as a site for participation and expression and discussed within the context of the current turbulent socio-economic and political situation, with particular reference to modern urban life in Bangkok. This research brings together references and ideas regarding the *sala* to build a selective cultural history of the *sala*, including the *sala* in the 2000s.

The project also proceeds to explore the inspirational *sala* installations created by contemporary Thai artist Montien Boonma for their messages and vision of the *sala* as spiritual space – a place for contemplation, healing and peace. These two areas of interest are brought together to test their intersection. Montien's *sala* are interpreted as a metaphor for a solution that urgently needs to be found in Thai society - calm space for conflict resolution.

While the formal symbols of nation, religion and monarchy are promoted by authorities in Thailand as the three pillars of Thai society, this research provides an alternative model for understanding informal Bangkok social life. It views the *sala* as a very relevant symbol in Thai studies, emphasises architectural heritage as an essential field and places the *sala* at the centre of contemporary debates about Thai urban society.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Statement of Significance

Throughout his brilliant career, Montien Boonma (1953-2000) explored relationships between energy and space while constantly searching for new means of artistic expression. Experimenting with natural materials such as herbs, soil, candles, terracotta, ash, wood and more artificial material materials like steel, Montien channeled the essential forces of nature and Buddhist philosophy (*dharma*) into his powerful sculptures and installations. Held together by their own finely balanced tension, many of the installations created by Montien in the last few years of his life make reference to traditional Khmer-Thai architecture and, in particular, the *sala*.

Montien was frequently invited to international exhibitions and residencies, yet he often cut short these trips to return home to Thailand, the source of his energy and inspiration. His ephemeral choice of materials and unorthodox treatment of traditional themes led his art to be largely neglected by conservative art patrons in Thailand, however the international art community saw the universal enduring messages in his work, which is today in the collections of important contemporary art museums around the world. Montien has been described as “one of the most significant artists to come out of Asia in the past thirty years.”<sup>1</sup>

One of my first encounters with Montien's art occurred in 1991 when I was struck by the aura of his *Earth Pagoda* exhibited at the National Gallery. Clumps of red soil mixed with white-blue washing powder signified the washing away of Thai culture, energy appeared to explode out of the raw earth, and the huge panels were balanced elegantly, stacked in the pattern familiar to northern Thai brick workers trained in the ancient craft of pagoda (*stupa*) construction. Montien used his creativity

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Julie Ewington, Curator International Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, April 2000

in authentic, unconventional and challenging ways to address the sometimes uncomfortable realities of modern Thai life.

Experiencing Montien's *sala* in the *Traditions-Tensions* exhibition in 1995 (which later that year travelled to the Asia Society, New York), was a humbling and nourishing moment. The tall stack of rust-coloured wooden boxes, cleverly and carefully balanced, radiated a powerful aroma of Thai herbs, standing invitingly in the middle of the Chulalongkorn University Art Centre gallery. Entering the installation through an open side, I immediately felt at ease to be within the calm, peaceful space – a spiritual place where one could feel well and protected, yet connected to others and the universe, quietly contemplating and breathing in the herbal medicine. Surrounding this awe-inspiring central tower of *Arochayasala: Temple for the Mind* were four black steel *Sala of Mind* pieces, engraved full of question marks and teetering on finely-pointed tips, with the sound of dulcet-toned prayer chanting playing continually inside as one entered the individual 'headpieces'.

Montien continued to struggle against the tide of popular mainstream art in his country, forging new ground in the contemporary art world and winning international acclaim with his unique installations. Stimulated to learn more about his art, messages and approach, I continued to research the social production of art in Thailand.<sup>2</sup>

In February 2000, when we discussed making a book of his art, Montien explained, *Every artist would want that*. He envisioned something simple to communicate the progression of his work. We had known each other for several years and he was my teacher, colleague and friend. The book idea arose not because Montien was ill at the time, but because he was by then a top international artist and there was at the time no significant documentation of his work. I set about cataloguing his extensive body of work, collecting images, interviewing his friends, colleagues, curators and collectors, and retracing his extraordinary path.

The fascinating process of mapping Montien's life and work was akin to reconstructing a puzzle. I became absorbed in details and wondered how to present

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Henderson, 'The Social Production of Art in Thailand: Patronage and Commoditisation 1980-1997, MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1998

the many interesting pieces in a meaningful way. I found his sketches to be powerful and an important illuminating step to understanding the process of the production of his installations. When Montien gradually lost the use of his hands and was no longer able to sketch or sign his name, he found alternative ways to express his creative spirit by mentally visualising each work and then describing these visions for assistants to forge. At that point, I realised that true creativity knows no limits. I believe the research project was a source of energy for Montien during the final period of his life and I immensely value the time we spent together. We nurtured each other with conversation, humour and kindness. Carrot juice and colour therapy were combined with meditation in an eclectic mix of self-healing techniques. I sensed Montien was a source of real wisdom from whom I could learn much as we spoke about creativity, life, dying and spiritual paths. Eventually the cancer took his brain and lungs - experiencing Montien's physical deterioration was a real lesson in ephemerality.

As I traced Montien's progression and his explorations of his own roots, beliefs, faith and identity alongside his personal experiences which included dark tunnels of tragedy, all expressed and evidenced in his art, I began to focus on his major works in his final years – the *sala* - and kept asking: What is he saying – about the *sala*? What are the messages? What can we learn from this about the expression and demonstration of Thai culture? How is Montien's view of space so contemporary and international, yet so traditional and Thai? What is it that changes and what endures?

Montien's *sala* are places for healing and peace. They take

<p>See Fig 1 <i>Arokhayasan: Sala of the Mind</i> (1996)<sup>3</sup> P14          Fig 2 <i>Sala of Mind</i> (1995) P15          Fig 3 <i>Arokhayasala</i> (1995) P16</p>
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inspiration from the ancient Khmer *arokyasala* which were resting houses along the road from Angkor to Northeast Thailand, where Montien spent his childhood. Montien showed that there are other ways of representing the *sala* than we presently do (in a traditional, copied architectural form). His work is exceptionally Buddhist, although he expressed his beliefs in an alternative way, capturing fundamental concepts such as energy radiation and ephemerality or impermanence (*annica*) in his contemporary installations. Montien's art demonstrates an alternative expression of Thai culture which throws a conventional understanding of 'unchanging' Thai space into question.

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<sup>3</sup> A *san* is a *sala* which has been transformed into a spiritual space.

Clearly, far from unchanging, Thai space is dynamic and evolving, in response to global and local forces and itself is an impetus for change.

From my initial interest in Montien's art and his alternative interpretation of the *sala* and the questions it raised about Thai space, I turned to the traditional Thai *sala*. Travelling in rural Thailand, I learned that the *sala* plays an important role as a gathering point for people in villages and smaller towns, a multi-functional place where ideas are debated, expressed and shaped, relationships are built, and celebrations shared. In *sala* around the country, I have been invited to discuss life, family, love, the economy, globalisation and the upcoming elections. With friends I have shared sticky rice and *somtam khao niao* (green mango salad and sticky rice) picnics, danced *mor lam* (northeastern folkdance), fished for *bladook* (catfish), waited for a bus and enjoyed a herbal massage and a nap. Often located near water, on the sides of rivers, canals or lakes, the traditional *sala* has an open-sided design (of floor and roof held up with columns) which connects the visitor with nature and offers a welcome resting place to enjoy a breeze, shade from the hot sun and shelter during sudden and heavy tropical monsoon rains. The *sala*'s multi-functional open space is used by people of all ages and backgrounds. It is a stopover or transitional space, a *living room* and a hub for community social gatherings and activities. In Thailand's larger towns, the *sala klang* (Town Hall, provincial administration office or central pavilion) is a gathering point or repository of information on important life events, such as marriage, death and births.

In Bangkok, I searched for the *sala*, finding versions of it on the banks of the Chaophraya River and canals, in parks, temples, palaces and hotel grounds. However, it became clear that the traditional *sala* of rural Thailand, the open pavilion, was not present or used in the same way in the big city. The traditional form of the *sala* appears to have survived along the river, in some older, more spacious, outer areas of the city and where it can be seen as a display of 'Thai architectural heritage', such as at tourist locations, but as a site of social interaction for Thai people it has effectively been squeezed out. From observation, it seemed that the *sala* had been replaced by the shopping centre. My curiosity was aroused and I set off to discover more about the *sala* as a cultural artefact within the forces of change and its role in modern Thai society.

## Research Hypotheses

The three hypotheses underlying this research are as follows:

- The *sala* is a site of participation and expression, persisting through time, in alternative forms, engaging with and adapting to the forces of globalisation.
- The *sala* is a metaphor for a solution that needs to happen in modern Thai society - that is, a calm space for healing and conflict resolution
- The *sala* is a symbol of informal Thai social life.

## Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this research is to answer the following research questions:

- a. What is the *sala*'s role in Thai society?
- b. How has the *sala* transformed in form, function and meaning through time?
- c. In what ways is the *sala* a site of participation and expression?
- d. In what ways is the *sala* a place for conflict resolution?

To answer these research questions, three lenses were initially identified with which to interrogate the *sala* as civic space, spiritual space and commercial space, acknowledging that the boundaries across these three domains are blurred. Viewed through the civic lens, the *sala* could be explored as civic and political space, a site of expression and participation, and a forum for ideas and opinions. The spiritual lens focuses on the inspirational *sala* installations created by Montien Boonma, explored for their messages and vision. The commercial lens would look at a dominant social and commercial space – the shopping centre - questioning how it might be interpreted as an extension or new form of a *sala*, at least for an urban middle class.

Figure 4 'Lenses for Interpreting the *Sala*' shows three lenses for investigating the *sala*.

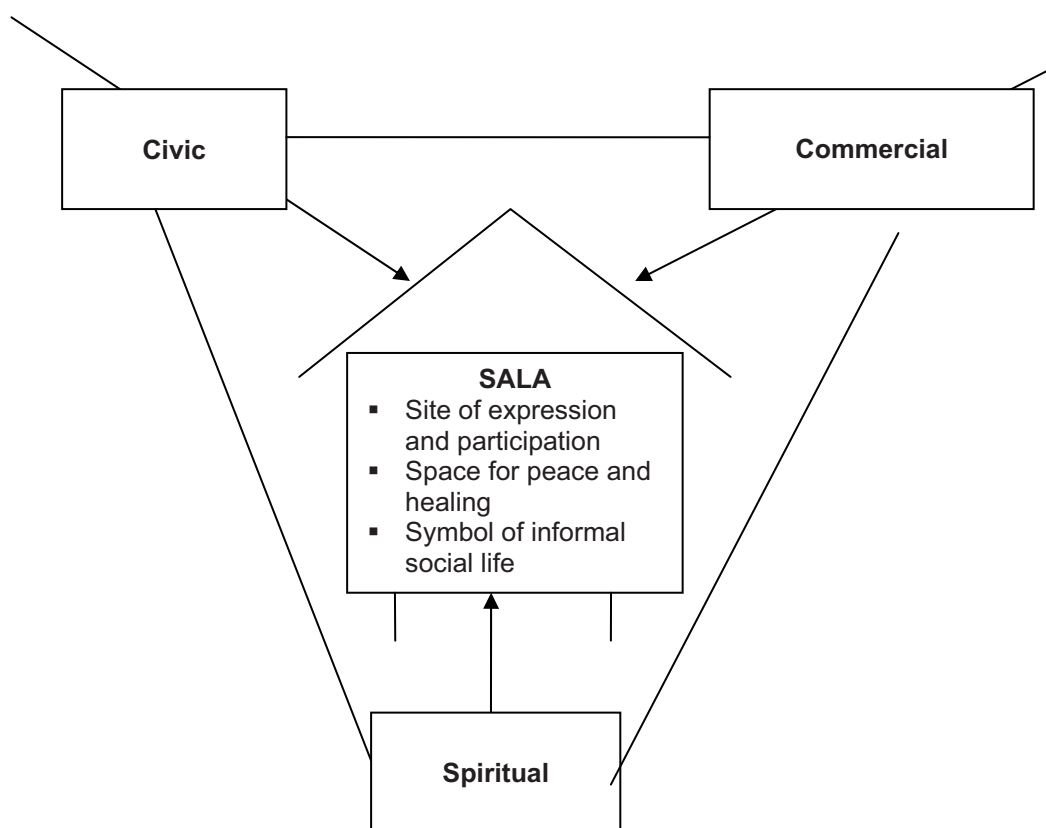


Fig 4 Lenses for Interpreting the *Sala*

Final revision of the research framework sharpened the focus on Montien Boonma's *sala*, as the field of enquiry that initially motivated this interest in the idea and reality of *sala*. By examining in-depth what has been expressed about the *sala* by Thailand's most prominent contemporary artist, the research seeks to deepen and widen understanding of the *sala*'s meaning, role and function. The investigation of Montien's *sala* art is particularly relevant as it offers an alternative perspective and interpretation of the *sala*, and a prescient vision of healing which is most pertinent for Thailand at this time. The research uses a dialectic two-way process. It investigates the *sala*'s role, use, forms, elements, process of construction, rituals, beliefs, meaning and significance for various individuals, groups and purposes. It also locates the *sala* in a social and cultural context.

Figure 5 'Macro-structural View' indicates the agents involved in the social production and life of the *sala*.

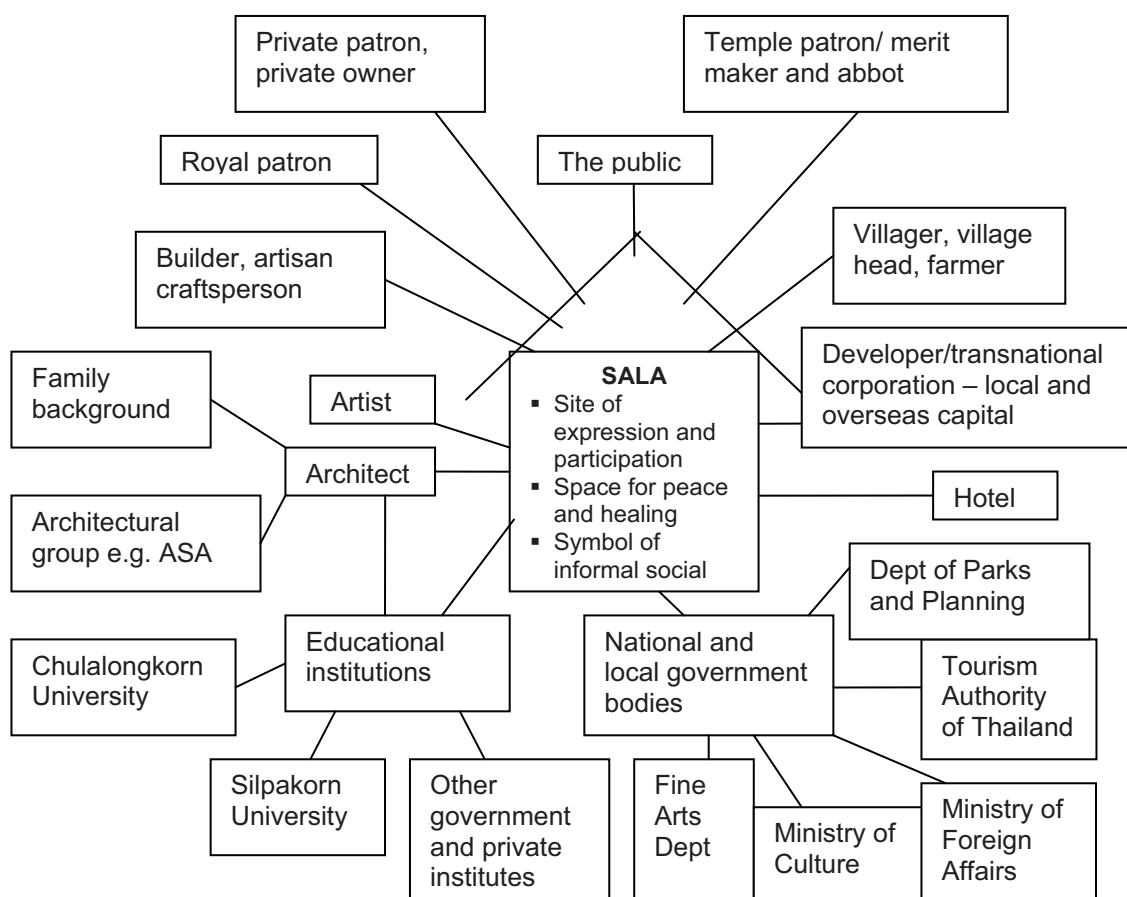


Fig 5 Macro-structural View

## Methodology

This research is going to do two things: It brings together references and ideas regarding the *sala* to build a selective cultural history of the *sala*, including the *sala* in the 2000s. It also assembles a critique of Montien Boonma's oeuvre, notably his reference to the *sala* as a space of contemplation and healing. Finally, I will bring these two areas of interest together to test their intersection. Combined methods of

archival research, field research interviews and observations and content analysis are used.

I met Montien Boonma at his home in Nonthaburi most weeks during the last year of his life, and visited him almost daily during periods of serious challenge in Siriraj Hospital. Interviews were conducted with Montien's assistants, colleagues, students, teachers, art historians, other artists, curators, collectors, art critics, family and friends. Montien's artworks, including sketches, in Thailand and international collections, were surveyed, analysed, photographed professionally and catalogued [See Appendices 1 to 3 Montien Boonma CV, Bio and List of Montien Boonma's Art]. Other primary sources consulted are Montien's BFA and MFA theses in university libraries, photographs and letters and diaries written while he was living abroad. Secondary sources of information include books, journal articles about the artist, websites, and catalogues relating to Montien's art in exhibitions, collections, commissions and museums.

More than 60 interviews were also conducted with practising architects, royal architects, university teachers of traditional Thai and modern architecture, advisors at the Fine Arts Department, anthropologists, sociologists, researchers at the Muang Boran Historical Park, government cultural officers, urban planners, developers, hotel managers and staff, Tourism Authority of Thailand staff, monks in Bangkok temples, home owners with *sala* on their land, and various *sala* users including tourists. Visits to Bangkok's National Archives located historical images of the *sala*. Interviews with the Director and staff of the National Museum, where some royal *sala* have been relocated, revealed background data and these *sala* were photographed. The original royal Thai *sala* gifted to the East West Center, Hawaii in 1967 and the reconstruction designed by royal architect Dr Pinyo Suwanakiri and reinstalled in Honolulu in 2007 were studied. The architectural sketches and construction process for this project were photographed and recorded. Together, Michael Schuster and I curated the exhibition *Sala: Gem of Thai Architecture* for the East West Center in February 2007. Traditional and modern forms of *sala* in urban areas were identified, located and photographed. Criteria for selection of the *sala* were based on typical or specific examples of a certain style or period, design elements or materials, use or context. Surveys were made of *sala* in homes, parks, temples and palaces in Rattanakosin Island, the historical centre of the city, and along the Chaophraya River and canals

(*klongs*) as well as outer suburban areas of Bangkok and the central city. In rural areas of north and northeast Thailand, people using village and roadside or riverside *sala* and home owners with *sala* on their property were interviewed about relationships with and use of the *sala* (frequency, types of events) in the past and today, as well as the symbolic meaning of the *sala* in their districts.

To test the shopping centre-as-*sala* theory, shopping centre visitors and owners in Bangkok, including the chairman of Central Dept Stores Ltd were interviewed. Observations were conducted at shopping centres including Siam Paragon, Emporium, Central World, Tesco Lotus, Mah Boon Krong and Panthip Plaza at various times of the day and days of the week. The four *sala* in the new Suvarnabhumi airport arrival and departure lounges were photographed in use and international airport visitors and the architects of these *salas* were interviewed. *Sala* in rural and urban Cambodia and Laos were photographed and *sala* users were observed and interviewed. Two Burmese visitors were also interviewed about the *sala* (*zat yat*) in Burma.

Other secondary sources used include books, journal articles, maps, photographs and sketches. At present, the only literature available specifically on the *sala* is one small booklet written in Thai by Wiyada Thongmit which surveys the ten *sala* located at fantasy Muang Boran Historical Park. Coffee table books on Thai architecture make brief reference (a paragraph at most) to the form of the *sala*, but there is no analysis of the *sala*'s role and meaning in Thai society.

This interdisciplinary study applies research techniques and approaches used in the fields of architecture, sociology, anthropology, art history, philosophy, tourism, political economy and human geography.

The original contribution of this research is that it ventures beyond a conventional survey and study of the history and transformation of the Thai *sala*, towards a deconstruction of the *sala* concept and a view of the *sala*'s dimensions and relevance in the socio-politico-economic and spiritual realms of Thai society today. Montien Boonma's *sala* is proposed as a metaphor for a solution that urgently needs to happen in Thailand's fractured society today – a calm, healing space for conflict resolution. While Thai authorities promote the formal symbols of nation, religion and

monarchy as the three pillars of Thai society, this research provides an alternative model for understanding informal Bangkok social life. It views the *sala* as a very relevant area of Thai studies, emphasises architectural heritage as an essential field and places the *sala* in the centre of contemporary debates about Thai urban society.

### **Scope**

As this research seeks to understand more about modern urban Thai life, the scope of the research is largely limited to Bangkok. References are made to traditional Thai *sala* in rural and urban areas in the central, north, northeast (*Isaan*) and south of Thailand, as well as *sala* in Thailand's neighbouring countries and *sala* sent abroad in international exchanges and gifts.

The time frame of this research includes ancient historical references to the *sala* but focuses on the period of 1990-2008, which saw a period of booming economic growth during the early 1990's followed by an economic crash in 1997. Historical perspective is built through reference to secondary sources published in English and Thai.

### **Definition of Terms**

This research defines the *sala* as:

- a. a typical Thai or Southeast Asian architectural structure
- b. a socio-spatial mechanism or concept
- c. a site for political, economic and cultural expression and participation
- d. a text or semiological system

*Sala* (ศาลา) is a Sanskrit<sup>4</sup> term for pavilion. The word may also derive from Latin 'salle' meaning 'room' (Nithi and Mertens 2005) and rooted in Germanic etymology,

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<sup>4</sup> Sanskrit is an ancient Indian language used in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. Many Thai words are borrowed from Pali or Sanskrit.

the word 'sala' is used in Italian and Spanish languages to mean room or hall. Perhaps the word 'sala' is an example of a Sanskrit word used in Indo-European languages.

This research refers to various *sala* including the *sala din* (pavilion at ground level or one step up), *sala loi* (pavilion raised high above wall), *sala rim nam* (waterside pavilion), *sala rim tang* (roadside pavilion), *sala pracham moobahn* (village pavilion), *sala thong* (large general purpose pavilion), *sala thong rong lakorn* (traditional performance pavilion), *sala rai* (pavilion for temple visitors), *sala karn parian* (temple pavilion in which monks study Buddhist scriptures (*dharma*) in the nine Parian levels of study), *sala kuti* (pavilion with enclosed space for monk's dwelling or for venerated image), and *sala sot sop* (pavilion for religious ceremony to dedicate merit to the deceased). It also makes reference to other *sala* which are used for official administration, such as the *sala klang* (provincial government administrative office or town hall, venue for formal ceremonies), *sala look kun* (law court which may be high court, constitutional court or military court), *sala look kun nai* (outer court of front of Grand Palace with government departments), and *sala prachathipathai* (a democracy training programme). The small pavilion in Thai known as *ho* also appears to be a form of *sala*. These small pavilions include *ho phun* (building housing a venerated image), *ho phra rajasa* (royal pavilion), *ho trai-ruan pitok* (repository for palm leaf manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures, usually built over a pond to prevent termites), *ho nang* (sitting pavilion), *ho nok* (small rest pavilion) and *ho rakang* (bell tower), *ho kong* (drum tower), *ho khoi* (observation tower), and *ho rob* (fort).

The simplest form of the *sala* is the hut (*tieng na*) found in rice fields and used as a temporary living space during planting and harvesting seasons. Other common *sala* are the wood-and-thatch seaside (*sala chai talae sala*) and the concrete and tin-roofed *sala* (*sala tee pak khon duen tang*) found in both rural and urban spaces.

*Heritage* is defined by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) as *our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations*<sup>5</sup>. It includes inherited traditions, customs and practices, both tangible heritage (physical form) and intangible heritage (symbolic

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO website [www.whc.unesco.org](http://www.whc.unesco.org)

meaning, significance). *Heritage* is also defined as a process of selecting features inherited from the past because of their perceived value to people and/or governments today (W. Logan, 2007).

*Cultural significance* is defined by the Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Burra Charter 1999 as the 'aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations... is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups.'

*Cultural landscape* includes both physical and non-physical elements, i.e. buildings, monuments, artefacts as well as activities, meanings and symbols (Askew and Logan 1994: 10). *Cultural landscape* represents the 'combined works of nature and of man' ...is illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal... it embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature (UNESCO, World Heritage Centre Operational Guidelines, 2005).

## **Structure**

Chapter One has introduced the research interest and objective. It outlined the research questions and clarified definitions of terms. The research methodology, including sources of information and scope was detailed. An outline of the structure of the dissertation was provided.

Chapter Two presents the literature review which explores relevant concepts offered by key contemporary thinkers and discusses them in relation to the research questions. This is presented within themes of social space, heritage and modernity.

Chapter Three considers the historical evolution of the *sala*, making links between the *sala*'s role in Thai society through time and its role today.

Chapter Four outlines the recent socio-politico-economic conditions in Thailand's present period of crisis. It contrasts the myth of Siamese culture as a place of peace and enlightenment with the painful reality of socio-political violence and religious divide.

Chapter Five investigates the *sala* and the concept of heritage, looking at the process of valuing, selecting and inheriting features from the past and the agents and power struggles involved. It explores *sala* stories and the *sala* as the *living room*, emphasising the *sala*'s changing role as a cultural artefact in the realm of Thai heritage.

While Chapters Two up to Five bring together ideas to build a cultural history of the *sala*, Chapter Six interrogates the vision of contemporary Thai artist Montien Boonma's *sala*. Chapter Six also deals with the intersection between ideas raised in earlier chapters and Montien's messages of contemplation, healing and peace. There is additionally an extended data appendix on Montien.

Chapter Seven, Conclusion, summarises the main points presented in the body of the research, considers implications and offers suggestions for further research. It suggests conclusions about the *sala*'s role and transformation as a site of participation, expression and conflict resolution. The research concludes that the *sala* is a symbol of informal Thai social life and a place for conflict resolution. Montien Boonma's *sala* is a metaphor for a solution that urgently needs to happen in Thai society – calm, healing space.



Fig. 1  
*Arokhayasan, Sala of the Mind*, 1996  
Montien Boonma  
Steel, aluminium, herbs  
370 x 250 x 250  
Collection of Acacia Fine Art Ltd  
*Photo: Paisan Teerapongvisanuporn*



Fig. 2  
*Sala of Mind*, 1995  
Montien Boonma  
Steel, graphite, prayer recording  
270 x 100 cm diameter (4 pieces)  
Collection of Jean-Michel Beurdeley (1 piece)  
*Photo: unknown*



Fig. 3  
*Arochayasala: Temple for the Mind*, 1995  
Herbal medicine, wood, brass  
320 x 270 cm  
Collection of Acacia Fine Art  
*Photo: unknown*

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical background with which to help answer the research questions relating to the *sala*'s role in Thai society and how the *sala* has transformed through time. This research is also interested in the ways that the *sala* can be interpreted as a site of participation and expression and a place for conflict resolution. The theoretical background is built by analysing what has been said by scholars about key concepts relevant to this study of the *sala*. These are identified as social space, heritage and modernity. The chapter is presented in sections under the following themes of:

#### *2.1 Social space and the sala*

#### *2.2 Heritage and the sala*

#### *2.3 Modernity and the sala*

#### *2.4 Conclusion*

In the first section on *social space and the sala*, concepts of civic space and place are investigated. Ideas of public and private space, and the value of places for participation, performance and inclusion are discussed with reference to the *sala*. As this section develops, it draws on theory which can shed light on ways which the *sala* might be seen as a site of interaction, encounter, and exchange. This section also seeks theory to help understand the *sala* in the context of social cohesion, community, networks and kinship in Southeast Asia in the past and today.

The following section on *heritage and the sala* probes issues of tradition and identity and ways that these can be constructed and imagined. It explores what scholars have said about heritage and the power struggles and values involved in the selection and inheriting process which is an inherent part of heritage. This section also explores ideas of dominant culture, class and hierarchy which may relate to an interpretation of the *sala*. The concepts of cultural capital and cultural reproduction are discussed. The discussion on authenticity and aura builds a context for viewing the

*sala* in its various forms and uses. The *sala* is related to concepts of memory, nostalgia and its role as a national icon.

The *modernity and the sala* section introduces the impact of change and modern life on the *sala*. Ideas here help to see the *sala* vis-à-vis the processes and consequences of globalisation and development. It discusses the influences of mobility, technology and communication as well as consumption and urbanisation patterns with reference to the *sala*'s role today. At the end of each section is a sub-conclusion which draws out key lessons and poses further questions for the research. The chapter concludes by bringing these lessons together, reflecting on the research questions and offering direction for taking the research forward.

## **2.1 Social Space and the Sala**

No space is 'innocent' or devoid of meaning.

- David Chaney, 1994

We make and remake space but not in circumstances of our own choosing, but under circumstances directly transmitted according to economic, social and political interests.

- James Duncan and David Ley, 1993

This section on *social space and the sala* introduces concepts of social production and organisation of space. It explores ideas of controlling space and mapping, with reference to the realms of power and knowledge. The notion of social structures of distinction is examined. This discussion draws on what scholars have said about the blurring of public and private space, along with their arguments about contested sites of participation and inclusion. Finally it considers the concepts of place, locality and social cohesion, and then generates a conclusion for the section.

### *Defining, producing and constructing space*

Spatial practice defines places, actions and signs, the small spaces of everyday life and the spaces made special by symbolic means by particular groups. It encompasses the whole of form, function, structure, perceived, directly experienced

and conceived. The spatial theory of Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre helps to see space in two realms – space which is lived, experienced and created by inhabitants and users in their everyday lives and which includes emotions, memories, dreams, and images (representational space) as opposed to that which is conceived, imagined, abstract, non-physical, intellectual and without life, yet plays a part in social and political practice (representation of space). The latter, conceived space, may be the dominant space in any society (Lefebvre 1991) and is populated by architects, planners, urbanists, social engineers, scientists and therefore features such things as maps, plans, systems of transportation and communication, images and signs to convey information. This research investigates the various dimensions and meanings of the *sala* space. Aspects of spatial practice are explored in relation to the *sala* as a site of participation and expression – both as a lived space and as a conceived or produced space. It considers *representation of space* in relation to ways the *sala* concept is imagined and expressed, such as Thai contemporary artists' interpretation of the concept of the *sala* in art to communicate social messages.

Social space is grounded in nature and the body is seen as a living reflection and measurement of space; however, as it becomes quantitative and homogeneous (and the body is eliminated), social space proceeds to the abstract (Lefebvre 1991). Space moves from anthropological to industrial, with the establishment of exchange value through the use of money, relational networks such as markets and communications, and hierarchically-organised centres such as towns are created (Lefebvre 1991). This research is interested in how the *sala*, as an architectural structure, a socio-spatial mechanism or concept and a site of participation and expression, changes through time and Lefebvre's perspective on social space provides a useful window through which the *sala* can be viewed.

The modern movement towards homogeneity can be overcome and solved by art (Lefebvre 1991). The German Bauhaus group of artists explored the concept of space and production in their search to develop *total art*. They understood that things could not be created independently of each other in space without taking into account their interrelationships and their relationship to the whole. With rational vision, they argued that the production of space corresponded to the capacity of productive forces and that forms, functions and structures came together in a unified conception (Shields, 1999). This research on the *sala* includes analysis of contemporary Thai

artist Montien Boonma's extraordinary *sala* installations, elegant forms held together by tension, which are interpretations and dialogues on space and interrelationships.

Spatial themes, including the sociology of space and spatial projections of social forms were explored in Georg Simmel's early work on space and the effects of spatial conditions upon social interaction. Social interaction produces different effects and forms, and social organisation requires organisation of space (Simmel, Frisby and Featherstone 1997). Authority and domination by political and economic institutions take on various spatial dimensions which may be revealed in territorial control. Spatial relations not only determine conditions of relationships among people but are also symbolic of those relationships. Relating spatial dimensions and social solidarity, Simmel suggests that a group's communal bonds may be stronger if there is a central *home*, noting that modern society is developing towards greater abstractness without a centre, and that communication technologies allow concrete spatial settings to be less important in many transactions (Simmel, Frisby and Featherstone, 1997). Simmel's ideas on communal closeness and the impacts of modernisation, including technological developments, on social space are useful in this investigation of the *sala*'s evolution and role in contemporary Thai society.

The ways that social, cultural and architectural space is both constructed and defined are questioned in Anthony Vidler's examination of changing roles and perceptions of modern space. Vidler looks at recent architectural developments drawing on relevant ideas from critical writing of the twentieth century, believing there to be more continuity over the last century than generally accepted (Vidler 2000). In pre-WW1 Europe and USA, urban landscape was reshaped in functional, artistic and dynamic terms. Many urban designs started taking huge proportions, both vertically and horizontally with towers, chessboard schemes and metal structures. Space was influenced by developments in electricity and public transportation, including metros and trams.

#### *Mapping and controlling space*

The socio-spatial impact of linear perspective, first developed by painters during the Renaissance and still applied in virtual reality environments, interests both Vidler and Lefebvre. Classical perspective identifies a fixed subject/observer and works in three-dimension with horizon and vanishing points to establish or frame a

clearly demarcated space. In this way, space is perceived as a projection of the subject (from the perspective or human eye of the viewer) and therefore complete (with all *the neuroses and phobias* of that subject). That space is not empty but *full of disturbing objects and forms*, including the forms of architecture and the city (Vidler 2000). This theory draws us to reflect on Thai perspective – whether it may be closer to Western or Chinese perspective – or today’s panorama pictures with vanishing point behind the viewer? Simmel and Vidler share the view that modern urban life creates artificialities in how people live and react to each other, and suggest that architectural and artistic production has destabilised spatial conditions on which we thought we could depend, leaving us alienated and uncomfortable, full of anxiety and paranoia. Rather than a vision of space *firmly embedded in collective and individual realities*, modern space is considered as *disembedded*. The city occupant is sited in a *dreamworld of the collective, multiple orders and dis-orders* (Vidler 2000). This research seeks to learn more about the *sala*’s place in the social production of space, architecture and art, and in particular to develop appropriate lenses through which we might interpret and understand the *sala*’s role today in modern Thai urban life.

The concept of *perspective* relates to the nature of distance (near versus far) and early work on the social origins of classification found parallels between the differentiated treatment of animals (domestic-home; farm-field; and wild-far away) and the categories of sister/brother; cousin/neighbour and alien/foreigner (Durkheim 1938). In a similar centre-versus-periphery example, land known intimately by villagers going about their daily activities in rural areas may be seen as *inaccessible and untamed, confusing and threatening, alien* to bureaucratic authorities in the capital. The reversal of that relationship was one of the main dimensions of the modernisation process (Bauman 2000: 31-35). In order for the state to exercise its administrative powers and to achieve its tasks, a *transparent world is a necessary condition; hence the mapping project and modern space war* (Bauman 2000: 35). By establishing or drawing the setting – mapping – certain patterns of behaviours and interactions of agents within could be shaped and controlled.

The ways that Thai territories have been shaped by and in response to powers through time have been interrogated by Thongchai Winichakul. Deconstructing nationhood with a focus on mapping, the Thai historian shows how nations compete (in the past and today) to map land and legitimise their power. Maps, required by

nations to formalise their authority, offer the state a (perhaps imagined) representation of itself, sometimes creating a nation rather than depicting reality. A medium with the power and authority to reconfigure space, and thereby shape society is a useful tool for studying the nature of society (Thongchai 1994). Benedict Anderson's much cited *Imagined Communities* considers how the novel may also function in this way (Anderson 1991). Bauman calls such a process *reorganisation of space* (Bauman 2000: 28-31). This theory draws us to consider how the *sala* may be seen as a map or tool in the shaping of society.

Power and control was visualised by Michel Foucault in the example of the Panopticon, originally conceived as a prison space with controlling supervisors hidden in the central observation tower constantly monitoring the inmates in the radiating wings of the building. Those with power (in the centre/central tower) are invisible or unclear to those outside, who are always exposed and seen, with no private space (Foucault 1984; Bauman 2000: 48-49). In this model, transparency of space and power (social relations) is manipulated and discipline is achieved through a constant threat of punishment by those who see everything - escape is not possible. The *sala* as an unlockable open-sided structure – and therefore a site for exposure and openness, an inside-outside space – might provide an alternative model for a power centre. In the *sala* model the inside can be seen by everyone on the outside – an inversion of the Panopticon and a symbol of transparency for the socio-political system.

Management of uncertainty is the aim and task in gaining and holding power and influence inside every structure – in particular the modern bureaucratic organisation and the modern state (Bauman 2000: 33-34). The historical connection between knowledge discourses and power situations has been emphasised by Foucault and Clark (Foucault 1993; Clark 1998). Foucault's concepts of power, control, and social space framed a study of the Chinese *danwei* (socialist workplace) which reveals the ways that the *danwei* system is strategically connected to power, knowledge, discipline and government in urban China (Bray 2005). Analysis of the layers and evolution of the *danwei* institution shows, as Foucault did, how power is intimately connected with knowledge and linked to behaviours or disciplines, which are generational and impact social life (Bray 2005).

Power relations and class distinction, as revealed in the reality of daily life and the nature of social life, are at the heart of Pierre Bourdieu's seminal work. Studying the observable elements of practice, Bourdieu developed key concepts of '*habitus*', 'field' and 'cultural capital' and a widely-cited theory of how social relations, privilege and power are appropriated and reproduced. The French sociologist concludes that the dominant class does not dominate overtly, but in capitalist society is statistically the beneficiary of economic, social and symbolic power. This distinction or privilege is found throughout society's institutions and practices, and reproduced by these very institutions and practices. Bourdieu's *habitus* describes *dispositions in social space*, elaborating a system for the production of particular practices, such as education, income, taste in food or art, and perception of *one's sense of place* in a social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1977, 1993, 2000). Ideals of the *civilised habitus* relate to knowledge of specific space and appropriate behaviours, perhaps such as sitting, sleeping, lying, eating or wearing shoes. These codes of conduct or manners control the boundaries of the body and reflect power relations in society. Discussion on social hierarchy, class and power is particularly relevant in this examination of the *sala* in Thai society, which reveals itself to be concerned with issues of social position, status and hierarchy.

Power in daily life, both strategic (top-down exercise of power) and tactical (opportunistic manipulations), is the focus of Michel de Certeau's much-cited study which found that in everyday behaviours, discourse and experiences, people adapt to and overcome or subvert situations of oppression. The subversive tactics of living – *making do*, which include the tactical appropriation of spaces– are used by people to maintain their own independence in a world that seeks to dominate them (de Certeau 1988). This alternative vision celebrates the power of the individual and challenges Foucault's image of the Panopticon, from which no one can escape. It also suggests that rather than simply indulging in mindless consumption, consumers develop creative strategies and are possibly themselves producers (de Certeau 1988; xi-xxiv, 29-42).

Organising space is a highly potent way to establish identity, boundary and subject position (Prior 1999). Museums are known to communicate a sense of place (Uzzell 1995) and Nick Prior's study of Edinburgh's National Gallery analyses this museum's role in displaying, legitimating and excluding. Prior demonstrates how

places embody, but also circulate, generate and sustain social hierarchies. Places such as museums – and *sala* - are powerful spatial ensembles and cultural texts which can be read or deconstructed. Space is not an empty site of representation but is loaded with power. Many spaces are manipulated by powerful social forces (Prior 1999).

#### *Public and private space*

In ancient Roman cities, public space in the form of the forum or *agora* was the site for meeting openly to discuss subjects of public interest and also served as a marketplace and centre of public business. Such places are sites for agenda setting, making private affairs public, shaping, testing and endorsing opinions, making judgements and passing verdicts. The *sala* can be viewed as a forum or *agora* a site for participation and expression. As this research investigates the transformation of the *sala*, increasingly the attention is drawn to the issues around the production, administration and use of space, particularly in congested modern urban contexts such as Bangkok.

Public space is envisioned as a space of *encounters and social engagement ... instrumental in the creation and contestation of new identities* (Thomas 2003: 183, Berman 1986). There is no expectation of privacy in a public space and anyone has a right to come into a public space, without exclusion on the basis of background or economic or social conditions. Traditional public spaces are increasingly replaced by privately-owned and administered spaces, often commercial spaces of consumption where access is related to ability to pay (Bauman 2000: 21). Alternatively, private space allows freedom of choice, the chance to try many ways of life and to make and assert one's own identity. It may also bring loneliness and uncertainty. We all feel a *need to belong*, a need to identify ourselves not just as individual human beings, but as members of a larger entity (Bauman 1995: 275).

The terms *public* and *private* are culturally specific. *Lifeworld* is used by Jurgen Habermas to describe the *immediate milieu of the individual social actor* which he sees as a *horizon of consciousness* which includes both the public and private spheres – it is the sphere of identity formation and communicative action (Habermas 1989). Communication is the most important aspect of all the activities in the *lifeworld*

as this is how the structures of the *lifeworld* are modified (Habermas 1989, Lechte 1994, 188).

Increased blurring between public space and private space has been found in Vietnamese urban life (Drummond 2000). Families and individuals make use of public space for private activities rendering that public space notionally private, while state intervention in so-called private or domestic space reached so far that the notion of private space becomes irrelevant. The boundaries between public and private spaces are *fluid and routinely transgressed*, as in Western societies, but in ways which are particular to the Vietnamese context. In contrast with an apparent decline of street life in Western cities, there is an increase in street life activity in Vietnam. Vietnamese cities, like Thai cities, appear to follow the worldwide phenomenon of the construction of *pseudo-public* leisure spaces (Drummond 2000). Changes are apparent in the use of public space in Hanoi's busy streets which are *experienced and imagined* by people. While state control and censure is still obvious, the forms of open-air pavement trading, crowding and mobility suggest a destabilisation of state control as public space and cultural heritage are contested on a daily basis (Thomas 2002). Similarly, Bangkok streets and pavements are lively with traders who display a keen entrepreneurial spirit and respond swiftly to opportunities and events. Likewise, the Thai *sala's* traditional open-sided indoor-outdoor form lends itself to *blurred public-private space* which in daily life might be used for a range of (public-private) activities. This research looks at the *sala's* role as a site for public meetings, such as local community gatherings and planning discussions, and as a place for resting, healing and communing with nature. Used for celebrations such as weddings and picnics, the *sala* is also known as a place for quiet talks, the sharing of secrets, and romantic encounters or solitary moments, which are traditionally difficult. This usage is also *fluid* and determined by the users. The *sala* is apparently in a process of transformation, particularly in modern urban areas of Thailand.

Not only has much public space been effectively privatised, but also some private space has been made public (Kayden 2000; Sklair 2005: 492). Leslie Sklair's study of the transnational capitalist class and contemporary architecture in globalising cities found that the fact that a space is legally public or private does not necessarily mean that it is effectively public or private. Shopping centres or malls which are non-government-owned are examples of private space with the appearance of public

space. In tropical Thailand, these large air-conditioned and clean commercial spaces (hyper-shopping centres) conveniently provide shelter from intense heat, sun and rain and are attractive places for people to spend their leisure time.

*Contested sites - participation and inclusion*

Public space, typically involving social encounter and exchange, may also be described in terms of *sites of contestation* – places of debate, struggle, resistance and possibly violence. Various voices and actors representing state, society and capital may be involved. Engagement in political life requires places of inclusion and participation, while access is often restricted.

Social interaction is the quality of the *polis*, where people can meet each other as equals while recognising diversity and caring for the preservation of that diversity as the very purpose of meeting (Arendt 1959, Bauman 1995: 285). The traditional meeting places (agora and forum) were sites where norms were created - *values clashed, were debated and negotiated* (Bauman 2000: 25). One of the *sala*'s roles is as such a meeting place for participation, social interaction and decision making. In rural Thailand, the village *sala* is used for various purposes including community meetings (when not held at the village head's house) to plan and decide on village developments and changes, celebrations, festivals, performances, workshops, and election canvassing.

Public space's relationship to cultural politics is highlighted in Lisa Law's analysis of the cosmopolitan character of Hong Kong's cultural landscape, which is played out in public space, specifically downtown Central on Sundays. In Hong Kong, as in many other cities, including Bangkok, public space appears to be disappearing through control of the public space or commodification of the landscape. Law's case study of contested space analyses post-colonial politics merging with the aspirations of powerful landlords and the 'vocal voices' of Filipino domestic workers who gather to exercise, sing and share social and political opinions with disruptive rallies, challenging understandings of public space (Law 2002: 1625-1645). They use the streets of Hong Kong as their *sala*.

An example of strategic public protest in Thailand is the Assembly of the Poor's confrontation with the state, expressed in street demonstrations in Bangkok for

three months in 1997. Calling for more equitable development in the country, the Assembly protestors traveled to Bangkok to camp outside Government House, transforming the capital's streets into a rural *Village of the Poor*. This display drew a strong contrast to the stereotypical view of peaceful Thai countryside, culture and identity. Protestors carried out daily activities of washing, eating and sleeping in full public view, demonstrating what Missingham describes as 'symbolic resistance and tenacity' (Missingham 2002).

The Thai temple, in the past a primary public space in daily life, has been displaced by offices, banks and shopping malls (Cate 2003: 315). The murals at Wat Buddhapadhipa, a Thai temple in London, can be interpreted to explain Thai notions of social space and are *visible tokens* of Thai past and present cultural politics, a visual hierarchy of personage and place promoting a sense of *place* (O'Connor 1990, Cate 2003:157, 290). They effectively stamp a public space – in England – as *Thai*, revealing how, in this way, art can mediate between the global and local and engage with an audience of diverse nationalities (Cate 2003:152, 286). Cate also highlights the atmosphere of standing inside the temple space with the murals conveying an aura of triumphant Buddha, worlds and states of mind, noting that murals often feature in other *wat* structures, such as *sala* or study pavilions (Cate 2003: 249, 239). This research is interested in the ways that the *sala* is also used to mark a space as *Thai*, both in this country and abroad.

#### *Locality and place*

The meaning of *locality* today is not the same as it was when information was moved by (together with) the body of its carrier, such as word-of-mouth chatting. Instantaneous communication and transfer of information are factors in the downfall of socio-cultural and political totalities (Bauman 2000, 15; Ritzer 1993, 2004). *Place* has been defined as *meaning conferred on particular spaces by groups of people through sustained association at various levels* (Askew and Logan 1994). In their study of urban change in Southeast Asia in the early 1990s, Marc Askew and William Logan suggest that as people in Southeast Asia and other regions encounter change, the concept of locality – local identification with place or community – may become less relevant or *an increasingly fragile basis for meaningful identification*. Anthony Giddens describes this process as *disembedding* (Askew and Logan 1994: 3; Giddens 1990). Modernisation has brought increasing homogenisation of lifestyles, leisure,

architecture and consuming habits, leading to a loss of locality systems. Marx's ideas on the *transforming power of materialist bourgeois ideology* and the *disinterested economic process* explain how this process leads to changes in social values, away from identification with local custom and traditional sense of *place* to which a person might refer (Askew and Logan 1994). People in a particular locality and the locality itself may not be familiar with the original *local community* and lack local geographic ties. As people seek a sense of place, locality and community in the increasingly fast-paced, hi-tech world, romantic nostalgia may drive those in the middle classes, in particular, to choose to surround themselves with replicas of earlier symbols of style, for example elaborate Thai traditional wooden house and buildings, including *sala*, even though these reproductions may actually not match their otherwise contemporary lifestyle. New and old urban lifestyles and locales are juxtaposed and localities have been swallowed by the national space (De Koninck, 1992, Askew and Logan 1994).

### **Conclusion**

This section has explored ideas about the relationships between space – lived and imagined - and power. It has drawn attention to the notion of individual practice and social relations in the small lived personal and community spaces of everyday life as well as more abstract concepts of imagined space, knowledge, privilege and control. Clearly there are differences between space that is directly experienced and that which is imagined or produced – by whom and for what purposes? The question of perspective also fits in discussion about place – who is looking at (making decisions for) who? From where? And how did they get there? The notion of central powers has illuminated some of the ways that space is defined and mapped, such as systems and governments administering territories, mapping, drawing boundaries and borders, and establishing exclusivity and identity over the space. Issues of participation and inclusion in the political space and process have been raised using examples from Thailand, Vietnam and China. Social space in cities, as places for encounters and social engagement, exchange and interaction, has been discussed and especially the blurring of public and private space as modern cities grow, with increasing commercial spaces, alienation and the loss of communities and locality systems. In today's big cities, where do people go to interact and participate? Seeking to answer the questions about the *sala's* role and transformation in modern Thai society, this

discussion helps to focus the research on the issues of people, power and place. As Thai people seek to shape their own lives, what role does the *sala* play?

## 2.2 Heritage and the Sala

Seeking to impose a cultural identity on a people is equivalent to locking them in a prison and denying them the most precious of liberties – that of choosing what, how and who they want to be.

- Mario Vargas Llosa, 2000

Society and culture, like language, retain their distinctiveness – their identity – but this distinctiveness is never the same for long. It lasts through change.

- Zygmunt Bauman, 1999

Culture flows across the world, filtered through states, markets, movements and everyday life and these structures themselves are structured and transformed by global relations.

- Jonathan Friedman, 2000

This section considers ideas relating to cultural heritage, tradition and identity which may support this investigation of the *sala*'s role in Thai society. Building on the first section's discussion of social space, this section begins by exploring the ways cultural heritage is perceived, defined and valued. It advocates a *whole social order* approach in investigating culture but rejects the idea of cultures being *separate wholes*. Culture in motion and change are considered alongside a discussion on difference, diversity and values. The debate on Asian values and *Thainess* is presented. Issues of authority, power and status are raised in terms of their influence on cultural reproduction. Community and tradition in a modern context are explored, drawing to discussion on the notions of commodified past and invented heritage.

### *Perceiving, defining and valuing culture and heritage*

*Heritage* is defined as a process of selecting features inherited from the past because of their perceived value to people and/or governments today (W. Logan, 2007). Investigating issues of cultural identity and urban change in Asia, Marc Askew and William Logan question the ways a society might determine its *heritage* or its *significant cultural landscapes* and refer to culture and cultural heritage as *that*

*expressed variously in artefacts, activity and values* (Askew and Logan 1994). Their research concerns culture as a production and considers *perceptions* of cultural heritage and cultural identity (Askew and Logan 1994). It looks at the issues of cultural preservation and protection, and the negotiated and contested meanings of various elements in the urban cultural landscape. Askew and Logan suggest that the technical definitions used by international organisations (such as UNESCO or ICOMOS) to assess the *value* of historic places may limit our understanding of the possibilities and dimensions of *heritage* and *culture* in exploring and seeking to understand the relation between societies and their built environment in the context of change and modernisation. In the past decade, global bodies have expanded their conceptions of cultural heritage, especially into the intangible cultural heritage direction (Logan 2002).

Culture can be seen as a *signifying system* through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored. Sociology of culture concerns the *whole social order* and is therefore an exceptionally complex term, including cultural practice and cultural production (Williams 1981). The *whole* approach which Raymond Williams advocates requires new kinds of social analysis of specifically cultural institutions and formations and exploration of actual relations between these and the material means of cultural production, and actual cultural forms. As well as exploring specific artistic forms with critical analysis and semiotic interpretation, the *whole* approach investigates the interaction of social and economic institutions of culture, their products, their contents and effects. This institutional analysis is combined with some historiographical and observational and analytical techniques to critique the institutions and their functions in capitalist society, including economic analysis (of ownership of institution) and economic and political history. An effective investigation of the sala as a cultural artefact requires this *whole* approach.

In order to exist, culture's meaning must be shared and actively maintained. The complex issue of *shared meaning* relates to the way social worlds are organised and enforced. Anthropologist Jonathan Friedman summarises *that power is converted into authority which becomes socialised* (Friedman 2000). Within hierarchical fields, shared cultural forms are created. To ascertain whether the same meanings are being used by different people and groups around the globe, there must be *overlapping resonances* which produce a *structure of feeling*, echoing Williams call for a *whole* approach to the study of culture.

Rejecting the concept of culture as a system – a finite collection of values overseeing the whole field of interaction – structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss recognised culture as a dynamic force and a structure of choices – a *matrix of possible, finite in number yet practically uncountable permutations*. Rather than seeing structure as a vehicle of repetitive self-reproduction and uniform sameness, Levi-Strauss preferred the vision of structure as an *engine of never-ending and forever incomplete change*, and a *catapult rather than a cage* (Levi-Strauss 1969). Denying the existence of a structure of a *society* or *culture*, Levi-Strauss acknowledged that all human activities are structured - a *non-randomness of the infinitely varied kinds of human interactions* (Levi-Strauss 1969, Bauman 1999). What collects cultural phenomena into a *culture* is the presence of a matrix (always far from completion) of possible permutations, a constant invitation to change, not *systemness* or a finite collection of significations (Bauman 1999: xxvi-xxx). Structures are both the product of human agency and the conditions for human agency - they can both enable and confine creative activity (Giddens, 1984). Perspectives on the identity process are clarified by Stuart Hall using two understandings - the *naturalistic* and the *discursive*. *Naturalistic* identification is constructed through recognising some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, with an ideal and natural solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. *Discursive* identification is a never-completed construction, always in process. It is not determined and can always be sustained or abandoned. It is this discursive understanding which grasps the true character of contemporary identificatory processes (Hall 1996, 3-4).

For the purposes of this research, a definition of *culture* could be based on the above definitions, including the learned, inherited and communicated aspects and resources (such as ideas, values, habits and capital) and the dynamic process of cultural production which creates and occurs within social structures. Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains also derive from historical experience. This does not mean that the creators of cultural forms are mechanically determined by ideology, class or economic history, but that they are *very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience*' (Said, 1993: xxiv). Like culture, identity can only be understood by taking a broader view of the transformation of the world system today (Friedman 2000). Edward Said warns that a definition of *culture* which refers to a refining and elevating element - a society's best – is often associated

with the nation or state and a source of identity to differentiate *us* from *them*, fostering xenophobia. While people everywhere are brought up to admire their traditions and countries and self-definition is widely practised, focus on *returning* to culture and tradition has fuelled religious and nationalistic fundamentalism, and *this overpassionate tribalism is fracturing societies* (Said, 1994: 54).

The primary reality of culture is mobility, non-rootedness and global availability or accessibility of cultural patterns and products (Bauman 1999: xliii). The traditional theory of culture as a *self-enclosed entity* may have applied to stable, isolated, economically simple and self-contained, relatively small populations. However, this is no longer the case in today's dynamic of *cultures on the move*. Identities retain distinction as they continue their own way of selecting, absorbing, sharing and rearranging cultural matter. *Continuity is supported by movement and capacity for change, not capacity to hold onto once-established form and contents* (Bauman 1999: xiv). Fragmentation has affected all fields of life, and culture is not an exception. In Vietnam, Thomas and Drummond observe that there are not two pure cultural forms of indigenous traditional culture and Western influences, but tradition itself is hybridised. External influences are selected and adapted - *indigenised in culturally meaningful ways* (Thomas and Drummond 2003: 14-15). Similarly, the terms *cross-cultural exchange*, *cultural hybrid* and *multi-culturalism* are not useful as they treat cultures as separate wholes and imply that is the *primary reality* (Hall 1996, 3-4). Distinct cultural identities emerge as outcomes of a long chain of *secondary* processes of choice, selective retention and recombination.

Values and attitudes are not historical inevitabilities or rooted in human nature. They come into being and are mediated by the polity; by the forum of thinking and talking people (Bauman 1999: li). This research proposes the *sala* as a metaphor for open constructive dialogue, a site for conflict resolution and a place for healing and peace. Analysing the evolution of conflict in the modern world, Samuel Huntington refers to the domination of cultural divisions. During the Cold-War era, global conflict on competing ideologies (communism versus democracy) was dominant, but now the conflict seems to have become based on cultural differences (Huntington, 1993: 23). Dialogue and negotiation are essential for humanity, rather than the exploitation of cultures through the promotion of discrimination, separation and opposition. Sharing experiences of daily life, living together, talking to each other and successfully

negotiating mutually satisfactory solutions to joint problems are not uncommon behaviours for ordinary people.

As contemporary societies face the challenges of globalisation and foreign influences through technology, communication and travel, they must reconcile their own civilisations/cultural identities with these new influences. Strategies for coping with change depend on circumstances, skills, cultural, political and economic resources and a proactive or defensive approach to adopting or adapting. During the past three decades of rapid change, radical conservatives in Asia have been shocked at the abandoning of traditional ways and values for *new* ideas, seeing the adoption of 'global culture' as new-age Western colonisation, dominated by large powerful multinational corporations and disseminated by strong brand-names. Many elites in Asia no longer make excuses for rejecting Western ideals of governance as alien to their cultures.

#### *Debating Asian values and Thainess*

What are (traditional/modern) *Asian values*? Who decides? What agendas are involved? Asian values promoted by authoritarian Asian leaders have tended to emphasise family ties and collective duty, in opposition to the Western concern for individual human rights. By asserting these *Asian values*, it is argued these regimes are perpetuating their own positions of power and dominance. No doubt similar shocks went through Thailand a hundred years ago when King Chulalongkorn's modernisation policy invited a rush of Western behaviour and technology. While the elite in those days travelled to the West and brought back modern ideas, imposing change on the masses who were still deeply entrenched in Thai indigenous tradition, many of today's elite (Sulak: 1990, Srisakara: 1997) are lamenting the loss of rural ways and calling for a return to traditional community culture, while the masses prefer to be modern (*than samay*) and comfortable with adopted styles and habits. This research questions the way that dominant groups may employ culture to maintain power, ideology and wealth. Debates around Thai cultural identity and *Thainess* might be described in two discourses – the monolithic and the dynamic – which illustrate the differing views. The monolithic approach, largely adopted by the Ministry of Culture, takes certain factors, such as qualities of Thai and tradition, to be unique and stable over a long period of time. In this light, certain behaviours, ideas or attitudes may be viewed as *for-or-against* Thai culture. This monolithic approach sees culture as a

static entity and therefore only takes *culture* in a partial sense, rather than the *whole*. While this view may be right for describing a point in history, it does not account for evolution, and fails to represent social reality. *Thai culture* is sometimes described as a mix of royal and rural; the arts of the court and the folklore of the villages. Thais are evoked to *hold onto Thai culture* by preserving traditions, glorifying the past. Sukhothai and Ayuthaya elite rituals are re-enacted but are of questionable meaning in today's modern settings. This form of *Thai culture* is found in the museum and is promoted by tourist agencies, but has limited relevance to Thai life today. As a result of modernisation and economic development in Thailand, the educated urban Thai elite have begun to feel nostalgic about traditional culture and the lost rural ways. Local folk spirit is romanticised and cherished, and entrepreneurs profit from commoditising it. As a cultural artefact, the *sala* is caught up in all this – in various contexts used as a symbol of Thailand, of Thai architecture, as a marker for the elite and historical, romantic rural past, and other roles.

In the search for the *essence* of basic Thai values, beliefs and identity (*ekalak Thai*), numerous studies have been made of the village and Buddhism. American anthropologists such as Lucien Hanks and Herbert Phillips explored Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s, and promoted the concepts of cultural particularism, national culture, and identities (Hanks, 1962; Phillips, 1965). John Embree's disputed *loosely-structured* theory of Thai society was based on comparison with a Japanese model and superficial observations, and gave credence to the Thai *free spirit* characterised as national identity (Embree, 1950). Valuable work by Akin Rabibhadana on the organisation of Thai society during the early Bangkok period describes Thai society as more structured, finding vertical pyramid models based on patron-client relations in politics, economics, and the village. Akin says this is still powerful in explaining Thai rural society but perhaps not urban culture (Akin, 1969, 1983, 1993).

Social practices and concepts such as avoidance of confrontation, tolerance, compassion, gratitude to parents, respect for elders, emotional distance and hierarchy are often described as core elements of Thai culture. However, William Klausner suggests there is a growing willingness on the part of Thais to confront and question authority and with this has come a willingness to become emotionally engaged. Klausner sees this as the passing of the non-confrontational approach and welcomes

the real involvement, the interactions, of individuals and groups (Klausner, 1997). Another typically 'Thai' characteristic often portrayed is adaptability, that is, a capacity to absorb cultural differences into the politically acceptable cultural mainstream, including cultural assimilation and integration of ethnic groups. Territorial invasions over the past centuries have supposedly created a form of multiculturalism within Thailand. Manpower to fight battles was a sought-after form of capital in the past, encouraging assimilation. Now, however, a shortage of land means there is a modern challenge in dealing with refugees from Burma and Cambodia seeking a less threatening existence. Racism towards the large number of Lao-speaking Thai nationals in Isaan indicates a lack of assimilation. Research by the Thailand Development Research Institute concludes that traditional Buddhist ideology, which eulogises harmony, adaptability and flexibility, is still adhered to by many villagers who find it difficult to accept or interpret the new competitive economic development (TDRI, 1994). More recent in-depth research is required to establish whether this outcome is caused by the people being Buddhist, or the implication of other factors associated with their rural and often impoverished existence. This would seem to conflict with the meaning and interpretation of 'adaptable' as a description and perhaps underestimates the extent of the incorporation of Confucian values through generations of Chinese-Thai intermarriage. Some businesses have taken it upon themselves to defend the meaning of *Thainess* in the modern world. For example Siam Cement, one of Thailand's oldest and most aristocratic companies, has run corporate public relations campaigns defending Thai culture and highlighting what Siam Cement considers Thai, including concepts like discipline (*vinai*), and religious devotion. Newer companies have followed this example as *defenders of Thai culture* with campaigns encouraging concepts such as cooperation (*ruam jai*) and consideration (*num jai*) (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 138).

This conservative monolithic view, advocated by Thai cultural institutions, is countered by the dynamic discourse which deconstructs the cultural process, asserting that Thai identity exists in continuity and is constructed at different times and different places out of different conditions. National characteristics are not seen as eternal ends in themselves. When conditions change, they change. Thai intellectuals including Thongchai Winichakul, Theerayuth Boonmee and Kasian Techapira reject the idea of a single stable Thai identity, but find a more suitable answer in the plural, diverse and conflicting views of groups and individuals within Thai society. Theerayuth

suggests each group in society has affinity with various forms of communication, and the combination of all modes of discourse – the various ironies, rhetoric and fashions – is what culture is about. The increasing global interaction and exchange of different cultures as a result of mobility, technology, communication and the world market is creating a mosaic, transnational culture; one which occurs and needs balancing between oppositions such as centre and periphery, Western culture and other, male and female, and elders and youth. (Therayuth,1995). This hybrid view of culture is supported by Edward Said who uses the term *contrapuntal ensembles* to describe the array of opposites, rather than the notion of *essentialisations* (Said, 1994: 60). It is this concept of *transnational* or universal values, which it is argued reflects modern aspects of society that is rejected by some Asian leaders as Western homogenisation of culture and identity. The dynamic view recognises relatively persistent elements of culture (such as hierarchy and religion), but considers they exist not because they are printed in the DNA of Thai people, but because they are engrained into cultural institutions. Deconstructing the official view of Thainess raises questions such as who constructs, disseminates and preserves Thai cultural identity, in what ways, towards what aim, and to what effect? These questions are foremost in the following chapters and Chapter Five's investigation of heritage and the sala as the *living room* continues to analyse work by scholars including Maurizio Peleggi and others on the creation of 'Thai style'.

Tradition, as a body of symbols and practices chosen to represent cultural and social continuity inherited from the past, is often sought as an anchor in today's world of rapid change. The state's intervention in cultural activities is widespread and continuous, constructing systems of knowledge which promote values of the past and a new era for the nation (Geertz 1993; Clark 1998). However, the meaning of *tradition* is contested and cannot be relied on to measure authenticity and legitimacy, particularly in urban areas (Anderson 1983, Askew and Logan 1994: 4). Tradition in the form of the *quaint rural* is mass produced for consumption by increasingly urban populations and tourists seeking the *exotic*. Development goals geared towards economic modernisation have created extreme *dislocation* and the *redundancy of old cultural meanings and contexts*. The response has been to *re-emphasise tradition, locality and community as the real base of authentic and sustainable development* (Askew and Logan 1994).

As countries attempt to cope with the challenges of increased mobility, urbanisation and globalisation, the rural has been found to be a site of nostalgic imagination. In Vietnam, as in Thailand, romanticism is a consequence of growing discontent with the alienation of urban industrial life (Drummond and Thomas 2003: 7). International movements of culture and information in the contemporary social and economic environment have significantly impacted upon traditional values, with changes in morals, behaviour and personal relationships. While the city is represented as a site of materialism, superficiality, spiritual alienation and corruption, the countryside is seen as the holder of traditional values and national identity (Drummond and Thomas 2003: 7-9). Among many people there appears to be a nostalgic longing for a more meaningful, peaceful, spiritual and balanced co-existence with relationships based upon emotion rather than money. State efforts to address issues of social dislocation have resulted in culture being made a major policy initiative, largely based on nostalgia and the manipulation of cultural images to create a sense of shared national culture and cultural pride.

In this era of collapsed time and space, increased technology and multiple choices, people live in a condition of objectification and detachment. This leads to an assumption that everyday life is inauthentic. In their search to discover wholeness and unity (truth and reality), Western travellers use primitive cultures as models for authenticity (Peters 1997). Traditional culture consequently becomes part of a nostalgic past, saved, codified and displayed. This museumisation of tradition, the artificial preservation and reconstruction of it as entertainment for modern society, for example, tourist sites such as Muang Boran Park with its selection of life-sized Thai architectural models and the Floating Market, reflect the measure of modernity's incorporation into the fabric of a culture.

Contrasts between past and present are discussed by Askew and Logan in the term of *great* and *little* traditions. The *great* traditions are those determined by the traditional elites and longstanding institutionalised belief systems, have established a pattern of urban significance read into icons and rituals focusing on the capital cities or centres of power. The *little traditions* are characterised by popular customs, attitudes and practices mostly from older rural areas and are embodied in the activities and everyday strategies of the inhabitants (Askew and Logan, 1994: 5, 9).

Today community is celebrated as an *enabling capacity*, rather than the constraint it was considered during the period of modernity (Bauman 1995). The idea of *natural* community is built on the premise that we are born into a specific tradition and language which dictates our thoughts, vision, speech, values and conduct. Accordingly, identity is built by faithfully embracing that tradition and keeping it strong insisting on loyalty. However, traditions are reinvented each day through our active choice to uphold, remember and perform them; they do not exist by themselves isolated from our own thoughts and actions. As people become more disconnected from each other there is a diminishing of social capital – the nature of bonds between people – which Putnam says has a negative effect on communities, the democratic process, safety, health and happiness (Putnam 2000). Polls in Putnam’s research show people wish for a more civil, more trustworthy, more collectively caring community. However, it is oversimplifying to promote community as a place of cosy warmth, safety, sharing and understanding versus the harsh and lonely life of hostile competition and ongoing uncertainty (Bauman 1995: 275).

As images and icons of the past are reworked, tradition becomes a consumable commodity (Askew and Logan 1994, Eco 1986, Giddens 1990; Lowenthal 1985). Most things today are human products, affected by human action. The tourism industries and capitalist institutions have also contributed to the destruction of the unique by mass production and commoditisation. Replicas of traditional houses and *sala* are one consequence of the urban middle classes’ search for a link with the past as they struggle to cope with loss of both community and a sense of place (locality). The 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity views authenticity in much wider and more flexible ways than requiring that the integrity (completeness and purity) of the original (structure, work of art) remains intact. An authentic work also evokes an aura and an emotional response. This research is also interested in the aura of space and of art, in particular Thai artist Montien Boonma’s *sala* installations, which are discussed in Chapter Six.

### **Conclusion**

Ideas raised in this section on *cultural heritage and the sala* have drawn attention to the issues around power within the dimension of culture. It has shown that the selection and valuation of cultural heritage is a complex process in which many agents, groups and agendas may be involved at different levels. Change is often

driven by groups which control a disproportionate share of wealth and power. Cultural symbols may be employed to display that power and status. This section helps to clarify the view of the *sala* as a created cultural artefact. Therefore to achieve the research goal and answer the research questions on the *sala*'s role in society and transformation, the *sala* must be interpreted within the broad (whole) historical experience of Thai society.

### **2.3 Modernity and the Sala**

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are... ...To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, *all that is solid melts into air*.

- Marshall Berman, 1983

Modernisation inevitably impacts on urban environments by transforming the uses and meanings of space.

- Askew and Logan, 1994

Desire does not desire satisfaction; to the contrary, desire desires desire.

-Taylor and Saarinen 1992

To learn about the *sala*'s transformation and role in modern Thai society, this section looks briefly at what has been said by scholars about world systems, hegemony and dominance alongside patterns of development and globalisation. This *whole* approach places the *sala* at the centre of contemporary debates about Thai urban society, drawing on ideas about commodification, urbanisation and the proliferation of consumer spaces in Asia, in particular the shopping centre.

#### *World-systems*

World systems are networks of intersocietal interaction and the world systems perspective seeks to explain the development of national societies and changing global patterns in the modern world. The type and frequency of interaction (systemness) and the impact of the interaction over distance are disputed. Systemness implies that actions in one locality affect the reproduction or change of

social structures in another locality. Although everything in the universe is in some way connected with everything else, some of these connections are more important than others. Urban sociologist Janet Abu-Lugod outlines a chain of city-centred regions that were interlinked throughout Eurasia in what she calls a *thirteenth century world system* (from 1250 to 1350) including the Khmer Empire which at the time reached across much of Thailand (Abu-Lugod, 1998). People traded, married and fought, diffusing agricultural goods, food, ideas and technologies, sometimes travelling long distances by sea, along rivers and overland extending cross cultural trade networks and interconnection. Remains of ancient *sala* have been found along these key trading routes, highlighting their roles as resthouses for travellers and thereby sites for participation and expression through the sharing of ideas. Systems of competing and allying states developed and were based on inter-social hierarchy of domination and exploitation. Within such systems, there are usually one or more hegemonic powers. As systems change, certain powers achieve degrees of dominance within them. Abu-Lugod regards this world system as specific and different from the modern world-systems (with a hyphen) theory described by Immanuel Wallerstein which is characterised by a particular capitalist mode of production. Wallerstein's theory focuses on the economic and political processes of the world economy, and projects how these may extend into the social and cultural domains. The terms *core*, *periphery*, *semi-periphery* are used to describe the world-economy's division of labour. In the core-periphery hierarchy, socially-structured intersocietal inequalities are demonstrated as the *developed* countries are seen as occupying the top positions while dominating and exploiting peripheral countries. World-systems theory also addresses trends of nationalism and commodification. This research considers various definitions of *sala* in different contexts, seen variously as a precious royal or sacred architectural form and commodity, a national symbol and also as a site for socio-economic political expression.

The notion of hegemony described in Wallerstein's theory draws on Italian Marxist of the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci's theory that successful leaders established dominance (hegemony) of the political scene by controlling the discourse. Criticised by postmodernists and postcolonialists for its political economy approach which did not properly take culture into account, Wallerstein has argued that an understanding of capitalism requires understanding of the relation between regions, beyond aspects of local production and consumption, and including *the control over the way in which*

*wealth circulated and was accumulated* (Wallerstein 1974). US economic hegemony is today declining as growth increases in China and India. Thailand's position between the two large Asian giants is explored further in Chapter Four on the socio-economic context of the *sala*.

Groups inherently connected to the world-economy are class or economic status groups and states. During economic expansion, higher status groups extend beyond the economic realm, bettering their position through *cultural forms of legitimation* (Wallerstein 1984: 20). Classes exist on the basis of their role in the division of labour, but also as part of their way of defining their cultural identity, conscious of the class itself and of the need to maintain its interests. In this way, the state defines classes, status/ethnic groups and households, which in turn create, shape and transform the state. It holds and maintains power with wealth and ideology. The culture of class and status groups includes tastes, which though not reducible to, reflect economic and ideological interests (Wallerstein, 1984). Research on the modernisation of Thai music analysed Thailand's position as ambiguous – while not directly and officially colonised at the end of the nineteenth century, it played a subordinate role to hegemonic powers in order to maintain independent status. In economic terms, Thailand was the *periphery* since core powers have and continue to take advantage of Thai raw materials and labour. In political terms, Thailand could be seen as *semi-periphery* since sovereignty has been maintained. Bond also noted that this *core-periphery* paradigm may also be used to explain the central focus on Bangkok<sup>1</sup> throughout Thailand's development (Bond, 1987).<sup>2</sup> This research on the *sala* explores the place and survival of cultural forms (such as the *sala*) against the diffusion of ideas from the global leading nations, drawing on other regional studies such as that on contemporary Vietnamese painting (Taylor 2004).

As European colonial forces were consolidating their territories in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Siam (Thailand's name until 1939), under the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1852 -1910), responded by embarking on a period of modernisation. New transportation and communication technologies including the railroad and printing press were introduced along with a revision of the

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<sup>1</sup> The capitals of London and Paris were core to the British and French bureaucratic systems.

<sup>2</sup> The Thai film "The Overture" portrays the challenges and impact of modernisation on Thai xylophone (*ranad*) music and during the 'cultural revolution' of 1950s-60s in Thailand.

education system. European artists and architects were invited to Thailand to build palaces and government buildings, introducing their own Western forms of the *sala* in attempts to integrate the architectures. This modernisation process included the adoption of Western clothing and other European behaviours, seen as fashionable. A study of Japan's Meiji era reveals similarities to the Thai situation during the period, with *up-to-date modern gentlemen* of the Meiji Art Society photographed in 1889 fashionably attired in Victorian dress (Clark 1998:15). This strategy was adopted apparently in order to show the rest of the world that Siam was civilised (*siwilai*) (Thongchai 1994). It also helped Thailand avoid becoming a British or French colony or protectorate, as experienced by all Thailand's neighbouring countries during that time. It may however, also be interpreted as a more indirect form of self-induced colonisation. The signing of international agreements, increased trade leading to a more open and interactive world economy supported by declining costs of transportation and communication. European powers were able to outpace the complex societies of South and Southeast Asia, leading to a rise of the West and the modern world system with capitalism and globalisation.

Economic expansion and the creation of wealth are central to the Western capitalist model of development which in theory seeks to overcome poverty. Development has been criticised as a *colonial project of extraction* which focuses too much on economic growth, with the progress and maturity of a society being measured by the level of its production (Seabrook 2003: 61). Development economist and Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen believes that fairer distribution of wealth is required to overcome poverty – macro-economic growth alone cannot succeed in this urgent challenge. Chapter Three's historical overview looks at Thailand's development process and attempts to place the *sala* in the context of time and place, as a site of political, economic and social expression. Development has also been viewed as a strategy in the Cold War and the battle with Communism (Seabrook 2003: 72). The Soviets and Chinese offered development according to their preferred centrally-planned socialist models. During the 1990s, bolder reforms of the economic system were made towards building a socialist market economy. China's most recent economic development plan stresses continuity of the political system and focuses on economic sustainability rather than growth. Critics argue that unfair development has been institutionalised in the mechanisms that manage globalisation, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the

World Trade Organisation, transnational companies and governments of the world's richest countries (Seabrook 2003: 72). Money and commodities move, but human beings are controlled while the environment and resource base are destroyed for foreign exchange

The global process of modernisation involving economic, cultural and social change is linked to the historical development of world capitalism while middle classes are seen as the great beneficiaries of modernisation (Askew and Logan 1994). The move for change is often generated from among groups within the region's societies which control a disproportionate share of wealth and power. The process of capitalism alters spatial relations and modernisation changes communications and economic relations leading to transformations in geographical and social patterns. As a result, modernity is characterised by an *extraction of time from space and place from space* (Askew and Logan, 1994: 3). Exploring the cultural dimensions of development and interpreting the role of urban places in it, the researchers note the impact on cultural resources and identity. Economic modernisation has led to severe dislocation and a common response has been to re-emphasise tradition (Askew and Logan 1994: 5-6). In the following chapters, various roles, meanings and contexts of the Thai *sala* are explored, including the *sala's* role as a national symbol. The significance of new and different forms of *sala* are explored in relation to broader changes, including the *sala* in contemporary art and the thesis of the *shopping centre as modern sala* is introduced.

Modernity brought recognition of a *public sphere* and an emphasis on reason-controlled order promoting a moral, regular, orderly world through rule-following, exemplified in the rational institutions of bureaucracy and business. While differing from each other in many respects, both bureaucracy and business seek to eradicate or overcome emotions (Bauman 1995: 54, 258). The theory of rationalisation espoused by German social theorist Max Weber uses the example of bureaucracy to depict a typically modern (advanced) way of doing things where a complex task needs division of labour and skills of many people, each doing part of the task and not necessarily aware of the whole task. Efforts are coordinated so that the overall objective may be reached and clearly defined roles are ascribed to every link in the chain so the system depends on a strict hierarchy of command. The complete task, which may be seen only from the top, is divided and subdivided as the command

descends toward the lower levels. At the bottom level, performers are faced with fairly straightforward and predictable choices. All dominance follows a similar strategy of leaving freedom of manoeuvre to the dominant, while imposing strict constraints on the dominated (Bauman 1995: 259; 2000: 69). The advantages of the rationalisation model exemplified in the bureaucratic process were recognised by Weber but he saw rational systems as inhuman and dehumanising, warning of the dangers of what he called an *iron cage* of rationality a *web of rational systems from which there could be no escape* (Weber: 1976). Depicted in Taylorism and Fordism, economy, culture and national mentality is centralised, with the company finding its way into the worker's life. George Ritzer extends this concept to suggest that the McDonalds fast-food restaurant is a more timely model for the rationalisation process as it is more like a rigidly-structured high-tech factory than a restaurant (Ritzer 1993). Asian traditions of bureaucracy may have featured in ancient systems, such as China's feudal system and in India where a strong infrastructure would have been needed to enforce the caste system. The Khmer empire, which extended into much of modern-day Thailand during the 11-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, promoted productivity through centralised control and effective mastering of engineering, cartography and agricultural systems. The *sala's* place in this discussion may be found in its role as a site for social, economic and political participation and expression.

A connecting point between tradition and modernity was the notion of reproduction (Benjamin 1973). In the age of mechanical reproduction the aura of the original withers and there is a fundamental change in the aesthetic (Benjamin 1973: 223). Art objects are brought closer to the mass audience and a signifier can receive meaning from a diversity of different contexts or be *remotivated* in a new context, leading to a new form of creativity and aesthetic possibilities rather than the degradation of art. The aura destroyed in production is re-created in consumption (Rollason 2002). The technological revolution in architecture which introduced iron, glass and concrete was a source of fascination for Benjamin in his famous *Arcades Project* in which he describes new spatial relationships between interior and exterior; the street is brought inside and the inside of the building is opened up to the outside, making the difference between private and public more problematic. The wall-less *sala* is a metaphor for this blurring of inside and outside, public and private space. This research is interested in how these concepts are socialised in Thai society.

Globalisation's meanings are contested. Three main characteristics of the globalisation phenomenon outlined by acclaimed historian Eric Hobsbawm are the technical (the abolition of space and time), the economic (the abolition of trade barriers and liberalisation of markets) and the cultural (the trend towards homogenisation). Globalisation has been criticised for the inequality generated by its deregulated, neo-liberal, free market ideology advocated by the neo-liberal school in the mid-1970s and described as *market fundamentalism* (Hobsbawm 2000: 64-66). The current world situation is described by Benjamin Barber as a war between globalisation (*McWorld*) and the localist, particularist and often intolerant forces (*Jihad*). Barber suggests we may be reduced to a choice between the *market's universal clutch and a retribalising politics of particularist identities*, in a world where *everyone is a consumer, everyone belongs to some tribe, but no-one is a citizen* (Hobsbawm 2000; Barber 1996: 7). Globalisation and the merging of markets are accused of producing a world of hybridity (complexity of culture) and homogenisation (Bhabha, 1990: 295). This process is causing strong reaction from those wishing to uphold beliefs in ethnic purity or ethnic absolutism. Jonathan Friedman doubts Arjun Appadurai's prediction that the evolution from a national to a post-national world might allow freedom from the national institution, to be replaced by the cultural freedom of diasporas (Friedman 2000). The process of globalisation involves processes of transformation and fragmentation. World decentralisation, a weakening of nation states and cultural and political fragmentation of formerly larger units has led to mass migration to traditional centres, dislocation of populations and renewed politicised identities. The rise of nationalism and indigenous and regional movements are outcomes of this transformation-fragmentation process. In Southeast Asia, a rising area of the world system, there has been a rise of national and regional identities, a new modernism and a decline of minority politics. The globalisation process also involves capitalist and class consciousness; a growing set of elites, including cultural elites are involved in this process. Friedman warns of the combination of *indigenisation and cosmopolitan hybridisation* as two *powerful polarising cultural identifications* in today's globalising world system (Friedman 2000). This research defines the *sala* space as a site for participation and expression. By exploring the influences and impacts of globalisation we are better able to see the *sala* in the context of the changing world and interrogate its role today.

The transitions from the local to global and national to transnational have changed the world. Globalisation involves the growth of transnational institutions, movements and diaspora, the weakening of the nation-state, and the rise of a new politics of identity and difference (Comaroff 1996; Keating/McGarry 2001). Introducing essays on change in Southeast Asia, Terrence McGee highlights the impact of the *transactional revolution*, noting that while all societies are characterised by a constant series of transactions (people, commodities, capital and information), flows of capital are not now generally subject to the constraints of space, though people and commodities still involve time-distance relationships. Telecommunications, computers and information systems facilitate these transactions and global mega-urban regions have become the major nodal points. This occurs within strong global forces and helped by the state, the developers and local capitalists, in close liaison if not the same groups (McGee 1994: vii). The market system allows a more open exercise of material class power, including modern market domination by transnational corporations (Friedman 2000).

Thai critics have discussed the changes within Thai culture and society as a result of hegemonic forces in operation during historical and modern periods in Thailand (Kukrit 1006; Sulak 1990, 1996). Thai academics, including Theerayuth Boonmee, Prawase Wasi (1998, 2004), Ammar Siamwalla (2001) and Chaianan Samudvanij have debated the causes and effects of the 1997 economic crisis in Thailand, relating the impact of globalisation to the cultural realm. This research questions how the *sala* may be interpreted and employed as a cultural tool, commodified or appropriated, by actors in the social network.

Some intellectuals think this current period is not fundamentally different from the capitalist mode of production globally for the past two centuries (Ritzer 1993: 156, Harvey 1990, Foucault 1993). There are continuities between modernism's rigid rationality and postmodernism's more irrational flexibility. Rather than Weber's cold uncomfortable *iron cage*, many people might view the future as a *velvet cage of McDonaldisation*: a comfortable, desired, known world which represents their standard of good taste and high quality; a more rationalised, predictable, impersonal world not cluttered with too many choices (Ritzer 1993: 160-161). Both Ritzer and Foucault see the current social phenomenon in terms of micro-systems of control; not Weber's *iron cage* of centralised control but many small cages (Ritzer 2004: 205).

### *Consumption and commoditisation*

Modern industrial society was built on production; however, society today is based on consumption, with social pressure to consume almost a *duty* with social norms which calculate a person's capabilities for playing the role of consumer (Bauman 2000: 80). People want everything fast, have a limited attention span and patience, and a mindset which seeks the same kind of thing in one setting after another. The shrinking of time (between wanting and having) leads to consumption capacity being stretched far beyond the limits of physical needs (Ritzer, 1993). Themes of globalisation and consumption are central to Ritzer's exploration of the concepts of *something* and *nothing* supporting his view that the central problem in the world today is *loss amidst monumental abundance (of nothing)*. Societies around the globe continue to move away from *something* (a social form that is indigenous, distinctive and locally-controlled) toward *nothing* (centrally-controlled and lacking distinctive content) (Ritzer 2004: xi). The proliferation of *nothing* takes the form of non-places (including shopping malls), non-things, non-people and non-services. Powerful efforts are made to transform nothing into something to give nothing a soul, or at least the illusion of it. Mostly they fail as they are dominated by the *inauthentic, the rationalized and the disenchanting* (Ritzer 2004: 189).

Commoditisation theory assumes that economic exchange creates value, that value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged, and that the link between exchange and value is politics. Arjun Appadurai believes that commodities (such as the *sala*), like people, have social lives and that by following the *things* themselves, we can discover the meanings inscribed in their forms, uses and paths, hence a better understanding of the human and social context (Appadurai, 1986: 4). Georg Simmel emphasises exchange (of sacrifices) as the source of economic value, theorising that economic objects exist in a space between pure desire and immediate enjoyment and that economic exchange, in which the value of objects is determined reciprocally, overcomes this distance. He suggests we call objects *valuable* when they resist our desire to possess them, and notes the calculative dimension in all forms of exchange (Simmel, 1978: 67). This *sala* research is interested in the ways in which desire, demand and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations, drawing attention to the relations between politics and production. Commodity production, circulation, history and interpretation are elements of culture. By putting these in full political context, the struggle between interests is revealed (Said, 1994:

66). In considering the relationship of culture to commodities, including the *sala*, it is not useful to separate the cultural sphere and the political sphere. The creation of value is a politically-mediated process which relates to privilege and social control (Appadurai 1986). Not all parties share the same interests or values. Commodities move in and out of phase and history is central to value. They may be diverted from their path and new paths created. The example of royal monopolies illustrates how *tributes* and *kingly things* can influence flows of certain commodities. Historical close links between rulers and traders are noted (Appadurai 1986). The *sala* has been used as a royal gift in international exchanges. Those in power may freeze the flow of commodities by establishing inflexible rules and restricting the field in which they move. The flow of commodities is also determined by socially regulated paths and competitively-inspired diversions. *Tournaments of value*, limited in participation, are played by privileged levels of society and may be seen as expressions of power and status. Appadurai notes the specialised arenas for such tournaments in which specialised commodities may be created. Agents involved in the flow of commodities have differences in knowledge, interest and role. Therefore variations in the knowledge of production, particularly of luxury commodities which are influenced by taste, judgment and individual experience lead to mediation at many levels. Gaps in the knowledge of production between the producer, the market, the consumer, or the destination have historically been bridged by the trader/merchant, with high profits in trade. Expertise is required to determine authenticity and becomes a taste-making mechanism. Thus Appadurai suggests the politics of value is in many contexts a politics of knowledge. Discussing contemporary change in other parts of Southeast Asia, with reference to the impact of money and ideas of overseas Vietnamese on the homeland, Thomas and Drummond refer to Commaroff's observation that, *like the colonial quest to civilise, there is faith that commodities can invoke profound social transformation* (Thomas and Drummond 2003: 11; after Comaroff 1996: 19).

#### *Urban cultural landscape*

In cities, as elsewhere, socio-spatial systems interact and over time build cultural values which can be seen in social structures, lifestyles and artefacts. This research seeks to interpret and understand the *sala* as a cultural artefact within the social complexity of the modern city by focusing on the significance of the spaces, interactions and the way spaces are being used and transformed by people and groups. Urban cultural landscape is the lived social and physical environment of the

city and it reveals national, regional and international power patterns and influence (Logan 2002; Askew and Logan, 1994: 10). Development in Southeast Asia has taken place in the context of a rural-urban divide, with a slow-growing modern sector and a much more rapidly expanding informal sector. This division and economic model could be seen in the urban social structure which was split between a small group of elites with political-military-business backgrounds and a large number of poor people trying to survive on low incomes (McGee 1994: vi). Today, Southeast Asia's urban landscape is controlled and produced by the clients of architects, developers and the state, using local and overseas capital (Askew and Logan, 1994: 8). The processes of capitalism and urbanisation are closely linked to changes in economic and social relations. Development and urban growth have altered land use and building functions.

Bangkok as Thailand's capital is the centre of power, status and change, representing Thailand in an *intense, confused and complex way*, being shaped by forces, structures and ways of life which are played out in Thai society (Askew 2002: 1). The rapid social, cultural and economic transformation of Bangkok, as well as the rest of the country and the region, reflect forces of change and inherited power structures and values (Askew 2002:10). The *political economy of space* generates architectural and urban forms in which the emphasis is upon consumption. Throughout Asia, cities are being built with luxurious shopping centres, hotels and rapid transit systems to attract visitors and compete for tourism as well as production and consumption investment. The identity of the built urban environment has become dominated by international images that *destroy or obscure rich cultural traditions* (McGee, 1994: viii). In the past, buildings in Asia were constructed by craftspeople reproducing traditional built forms which reflect climate, environment and culture. Today's modern urban space and architectural designs reflect the aspirations, wealth and power of national elites and ideas learned by internationally-trained architecture students.

Capitalist globalisation has transformed the production, marketing and reception of iconic architecture (Sklair 2005). Until the 1950s, architecture was largely driven by the interests of the state and/or religion. Today the dominant force driving iconic architecture is the transnational capitalist class, which Sklair suggests comprises four factions of people, namely corporate, state, technical and consumer

(Sklair 2005). Members of this class are increasingly globally linked with outward-oriented perspectives and seek to project images of themselves as citizens of the world (global transnational vision) as well as of their places of birth (local roots), seek to exert economic and political control, and share similar lifestyles including higher education and consumption of luxury goods and services (Sklair 2005: 486). Local and national politicians and bureaucrats combine with indigenous and transnational commercial interests and architects to create *coalitions* with a preference for spectacular iconic buildings to attract foreign investment and visitors with money to spend (Sklair 2005: 493). Globalising cities everywhere are seeking new shopping malls and entertainment spaces and iconic architecture is an incitement to spend money and there is a connection between architecture and shopping (Sklair 2005: 495). Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen are clear examples and Bangkok, like Singapore, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur and many others fit this pattern of iconic architecture, capitalist globalisation and class polarisation (Sklair 2005: 494).

Large consumer spaces, shopping malls, are becoming a global phenomenon, a *central urban manifestation of the culture-ideology of consumerism* (Sklair 2005). Around the world, the form and structure of most shopping centres is similar (Ritzer 2004: xi). In the hundreds of shopping centres in the urban landscape of Southeast Asian cities, components of consumption and elements of a *global culture* – the emergence of a *common* set of lifestyles, including dress, food, entertainment – are on display (McGee 1994: vii). The sophisticated recreation and entertainment include shops laden with imported luxury consumer items which reflect modern tastes and fashion and attract affluent young urban people who see shopping as the number one leisure activity. New patterns of spending have revealed new social divisions and hierarchies (Thomas and Drummond 2003: 2-3). People use shopping centres in a variety of countless and sometimes surprising ways, which may not have been planned by the architects and owners. As popular (private-public) spaces, huge shopping centres allow some opportunities for meeting, but their size, crowding and noise make it challenging to have quality conversations. Nevertheless, people flock to shopping centres and seem to enjoy the experience (Ritzer 2004: xiv). Shopping centres are designed to keep people spending, moving, diverted and entertained. Shoppers are not encouraged to engage or talk with each other, think about or debate something other than the objects on display (Bauman 2000: 24-25). Dehumanized, with highly impersonal anonymous relationships, shopping centres *lull and manipulate*

people into *zombies wandering the malls hour after hour, weekend after weekend* (Kowinski 1985; Ritzer 1993: 111). The shopping centre controls customers, especially young people. Parents feel that their children are safer in the safe and controlled environment of the shopping centre than on the city streets. Predictable, uniform and profitable venues for chains, shopping centres are modern *cathedrals of consumption* to which people go to practise the consumer *religion* (Kowinski 1985: 218; Ritzer 1993: 5). Some see shopping malls as *entertainment plazas built around the pleasures of shopping... the express aim of developers is to contain the entire world with the shopping place* (Barber 1995: 132, Rollason 2004). Citizens are redefined as satisfied customers in a shopping centre society (Bauman 1995: 283). The shopping centre stroller is promoted as the paragon of happy humanity and the good life. However increasing numbers of poor people are found *ineligible or flawed consumers* who are unable to afford frequent shopping-mall strolls (Bauman 1995: 283).

The origins of today's shopping centres are the busy rows of shops (*passages*) of nineteenth century Paris captured famously in Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*. Benjamin quoted the 1852 *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, describing arcades as early centres of consumerism:

*These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-floored passages extending through entire blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined forces in the venture. Lining both sides of the passages, which obtain their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need* (Benjamin 1999: 31; Rollason, 2004).

Modernity is seen through the commodification of things and the arcades as *sites where street and interior merge – the street becomes a dwelling for the stroller (flâneur, in French) – the city is both landscape and room*. The arcades are significant historical objects and a *phenomenon of extreme cultural ambivalence*:

*a dream-and-wish-image of the collective...primordial landscape of consumption...temples built for the apotheosis of the commodity, with their seductively, endlessly varied ware ...embodying the anticipation*

*and imaginative expression of a new world* (Benjamin 1999: 627, 828, 905, 637; Rollason 2004).

The power of the shopping mall is portrayed in Portuguese Nobel literature laureate Jose Saramago's novel *The Cave* (*A Caverna* 2002), a statement against the homogenising impact of global mass culture. Saramago believes that globalisation is an expression of the economic and political power of international capital and the ideological power of the media (Rollason 2004). *The Cave* is set in a small quiet village separated from a nameless city by a shopping mall which overpowers potter Capriana's workshop, symbolising the end of the artisan tradition (the local and special) overwhelmed by the forces of mass production (globalisation). Saramago describes the *totalitarian universe of the spectacle* that the potter encounters within the shopping center when he goes to work there as a night guard (Saramago 2002: 259; Rollason 2004). Images from diverse cultures are reduced to interchangeable sensations. The shopping center (free market) life is rejected in the novel's conclusion and the family leaves together to seek an alternative way of life (Rollason 2004).

### **Conclusion**

This selective review of literature relating to modernity has explored the impact of the global process of modernisation which involves significant economic, cultural and social change. It raises important points about the groups inherently connected to the world economy (class, status groups and the state) who attempt to better their position through cultural forms of legitimation. As this research seeks to identify the *sala's* place in contemporary society, the question is: *Where is the sala in all of this?* The influences of development, migration and urbanisation along with changes in communication and technology highlight social dislocation pose new questions about the *sala's* role today as a site for participation, expression and social encounter. Modern life's constant series of transactions (people, commodities, capital and information) and the process of capitalisation alter spatial relations and social patterns. A re-emphaiss on tradition and rise of a new politics of identity and difference reveal new questions about the *sala* as a symbol of the Thai nation which are explore further in following chapters. The current phenomenon of consumption and the growth of transnational institutions have highlighted the shopping centre as a primary social space in the Asian city, raising the question whether this may be interpreted as a transformation of the *sala's* traditional role.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated relevant literature within the themes of social space, heritage and modernity, seeking to shine light on questions about the *sala*'s role in Thai society today and how the *sala* has transformed in form, function and meaning through time. It has shown that space can be interpreted as everyday lived space (created by users and alive with stories and memories) and conceptual, abstract space (which is intellectual, mapped and produced) –and that the latter may be the dominant space in any society. If this is so, then in what ways is this revealed in the social life of the *sala*? Power relations, class distinction and social hierarchy are played out as space is appropriated, produced and reproduced. This research is interested to examine the development of dominant groups, including the elite, the state and transnationals in Thailand, their interaction with architecture, and the role of architecture in maintaining interests. The research questions how the interests of status groups are reinforced through the cultural realms and how dominant groups employ culture (including cultural forms such as the *sala*), to maintain power, wealth and ideology. Changing perceptions of modern space are revealed in the blurred private and public space of vibrant street life in Asian cities such as Bangkok and the proliferation of large commercial spaces. In the past, the temple and *sala* were primary public space – key places for social interaction, meeting, encounter and exchange of ideas, including expressions of protest. The influence of globalisation on the *sala*'s traditional role as a multi-functional community social space is significant and leads to further investigation of how the *sala* survives in modern conditions? What kinds of (community) spaces for participation, expression and exchange are sought by people in urban areas today? Who creates or selects *sala* spaces and for what reason? In what ways can the *sala* be interpreted as a place for conflict resolution? These questions lead the empirical study which follows.

## Chapter 3

### Historical Evolution of the *Sala*

Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience.  
- Edward Said 1993

Culture has no boundaries. Culture is about exchange, relationships and connectedness.  
- Im Sokrithy 2007

This chapter considers the historical evolution of the *sala* and of its interrelationships and transitions, in order to increase our understanding of the *sala*'s role today. Historical experience is not understood by lists, though some form of chronology may help to map change and continuity. It involves looking at the important and essential things, and in this it must be conceded that selectivity and conscious choice are an element of any history. While Edward Said has proposed that culture and the aesthetic forms it contains (such as the *sala*) derive from historical experience, this does not support the view that *sala* creators and users are mechanistically determined by ideology, class or economic history, but that they are very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure (Said 1993; xxiv).

Each temporal section in this chapter begins with an example of a *sala*. The typical features of the era are discussed with an analysis of how these were shaped by contemporary social, economic and political conditions.

#### 3.1 The Primitive Hut and Early *Sala*

The earliest records of architecture's origins, described by Roman architect/engineer Vitruvius (2nd or 3rd century BC), refer to fundamentals of existence and a simple hut built by humans who lived like beasts battling hostile nature. An alternative view of early architecture was presented by Marc-Antoine Laugier's (1753) depiction of a *Garden of Eden* golden age with people living closely

with a gentle, idyllic nature (Wittman 2007). Laugier's theory developed a philosophical discourse on the interplay of science, nature, art and society and is still relevant to architecture today (Bierman et al 2003; Rykwert 1972). Jean-Louis Viel de Saint-Maux later suggested (1787) that architecture began as a sacred act, relating human life to that of the cosmos, as an altar to worship the sun rather than to shelter from it. This placed architecture beyond a useful art, but at the very origin of human civilisation (Wittman 2007). This western view of architecture's origins may not be relevant in the Asian context, but it does raise questions about the ways that nature is perceived and respected universally.

See Fig 6 Marc-Antoine Laugier's Primitive Hut P72

The original Thai *sala* apparently evolved as a response to the climate of the region. Anthropologist Srisakara Vallipodom explains that the *sala came up naturally as Thailand is a hot tropical country and people need a structure for shade and open air*<sup>1</sup>. Simple in structure (a hut), the early *sala* was likely built of local natural materials which would have included wood, bamboo and grasses.

See Fig 7 Simple *sala* or *tieng na* in a ricefield P73

Forests of golden teakwood (*mai sak*) which swathed much of ancient Siam have long since been felled as Siam evolved from communities into villages, towns, states and then kingdoms (Srisakara 1991). Thailand's early inhabitants, the *Tai* peoples, brought the core elements of contemporary Thai identity to what is now Thailand about 1000 years ago. As they mixed with the earlier Mon or Khmer inhabitants of the region and immigrants from the great east-west trade between India and China, this area experienced the impact of various cultures, belief systems, political and social structures (Wyatt, 1984: 1). The influences on the *sala* from these interactions have yet to be investigated and one is challenged by the lack of sources on the historical or contemporary *sala*.

The powerful Khmer Empire (802-1431) which stretched from northern Thailand to southern Vietnam, including parts of Laos, Burma and Malaysia, controlled virtually every route of communication and trade in the Indochinese peninsula. Impressive monuments and stone inscriptions were constructed by the Khmer rulers who founded major religious institutions which paid homage to the gods and religion. These were also religio-political devices to bind the society to the king

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Srisak Vallipodom 8 January 2008

who was promoted as both ruler and god (*devaraja*, god-king). The temple and palace played an important role in the social network. Participation in religious ceremonies that revolved around the temple was a political and a religious act (Wyatt, 1984: 27).

The sandstone walls of the ancient city of Angkor in Siem Reap, Cambodia, are carved with bas-reliefs telling the stories of Hindu mythology – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Teaching of loyalty, dedication, faithfulness and respect, these myths are rich with images of gods and demons, the *garuda* (bird god of the sky), *naga* (serpent god of the underworld), dancing *apsaras* (angels of the clouds and waters), the monkey god Hanuman and other celestial beings. Angkor Wat itself, dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu built around 1150 by King Suryavarman II, is a mandala or representation of the Hindu cosmology. Its towers, walls and moats depict Mount Meru as the central axis of the world, surrounded by rings of mountains and sacred cosmic oceans that exist before and after creation. Reflecting Thailand's historical ties with Hindu-Khmer beliefs, images of symbolic architectural elements, such as carvings of stylised *garuda* and *naga*, are also found on some *sala* today. Interpretations of these elements and contexts are explored in Chapter Five – Reading *Sala* Stories.

See Figs 8 and 9 *Sala* depicted in Ramayana (*Ramakien*) mural P74 and P75

#### *Agnisala, dharmasala and arokyasala*

An undated stone inscription at Preah Khan temple, Angkor Thom, tells of 121 *agnisala* (rest houses or *pavilions with fire*) lining the ancient roads of the Angkor kingdom<sup>2</sup>. It states that King Jayavarman VII (1181-1220) initiated the construction of 17 *agnisala* which were lit up at night for travelers along the direct route from the capital, Angkor, to Phimai in northeastern Thailand known as the *Royal Road*. Chinese traveller Tcheou Ta-Kouan visited the area in 1296 and noted *places of rest on the main roads* (Tcheou Ta-Kouan 1902). *Agnisala* are referred to as *dharmasala*<sup>3</sup> in L. Finot's studies in the 1920s. Made of laterite and sandstone, these small spired structures had pedestals for a religious image and may have been used as religious shrines for travellers on pilgrimage who would have slept in nearby structures made of perishable materials such as bamboo and

See Fig 10 Ruins of *Dharmasala* No. 17 on the Angkor-Phimai Royal Road P76

<sup>2</sup> From Angkor east to Champa there were 57 *agnisala*, approximately 12.5 km apart.

<sup>3</sup> *Dharma* meaning Buddhist teaching and *sala* meaning pavilion

wood (Mollerup 2004)<sup>4</sup>. A convert to Mahayana Buddhism, Jayavarman VII ordered many Hindu temples to be transformed into Mahayana Buddhist temples, leading to a merging of Hinduism and Buddhism which can still be seen in Thailand today. As well as *dharmasala*, Jayavarman VII also built hospitals (*arokyasala*) along the Royal Road, in an attempt to provide better health care to his people. Priests in these temples treated visitors for their physical, mental and spiritual ailments. This evidence indicates the *sala*'s ancient role as an adjunct to temples and a transitional resting and healing space.

### 3.2 Politico-religious Architecture of Sukhothai and Ayudhya

As Angkor began to fade as a major power, King Ramkhamhaeng, King of Sukhothai, began to build an extensive kingdom (C13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>) through force and diplomacy. *Sala* are mentioned in stone inscriptions from the Sukhothai period referring to them as a place to house a Buddha image or a living space for monks. King Ramkhamhaeng's inscription of 1292 is often quoted as a reference point for the beginning of Thai history and an emblem of national identity. It begins, *In the water there are fish, in the fields there is rice...* and describes an idyllic, free kingdom, ruled by a kind and fair monarch who is loved by his people, suggesting a contrast with other qualities, such as rigid social hierarchy, arbitrary justice and heavy taxation (Wyatt 1984: 54). A devout Buddhist who respected the animist spirits, Ramkhamhaeng shared his throne with monks making Sukhothai a Buddhist state which greatly supported the monastic community. Buddhism and the state were very closely identified. Along with Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism increasingly found a place in the community – *political unity and identity were founded on a religious basis* (Wyatt 1984).

Some *sala* were built on temple sites and other *sala* were built and then later developed into temples. The *sala wat* (temple pavilion), *sala tha nam* (waterside pavilion) and *sala kan parien* (study pavilion) are all located outside the *ubosot* or

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<sup>4</sup> Thailand's Fine Arts Department lists eight *dharmasala* in Isaan. Six are noted in Cambodia. In February 2004, the National World Heritage Committee (Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, Bangkok) distributed guidelines to provincial authorities for promoting the Cultural Route from Phimai to Ta Muan, a chain of temples on the Khorat Plateau including Prasat Phimai, Prasat Phanom Rung, Prasat Muang Tam, the eight *dharmasala* and six nearby Jayavarman VII hospitals (*arokhayasala*).

temple centre and are linked to the evolution of the monks' residence<sup>5</sup>. King Ramkhamhaeng is recorded as saying, *In the palm forest there are two sala - one is Phramat sala and the other is for Buddhists* (Wiyada 1998: 134). An inscription at Wat Bang Sanuk dated 1339 (B.E. 1882) tells of the Governor of Trok Salop inviting people to build Buddhist statues and to perform other merit-making acts, including the building of *sala*. It reads, *Mung Bao day, Seventh Month, 15th Night, Year of the Mouse, the building of stone and mortar took one month and then the sala pavilion was built*. Another stone inscription at Wat Sri Chum dated 1337-1367 (B.E. 1884-1910) tells of the Lord Phramaha Thera Srisatara Churamuni Sriratana Lankateep, nephew of Father (*Phor Khun*) Pamuang, making merit by building the Uthit *sala* in permanent materials and dedicating it to Buddhism. The inscription reads, *This building, the great pavilion, Maha Tamnak*<sup>6</sup> (Wiyada 1998; 135). Apart from these stone inscriptions, there is little evidence remaining of the *sala* to which they refer.

King Ramkhamhaeng's grandson, King Lithai, composed the text of the *Traiphum* (*The Three Worlds according to King Ruang*) which describes the vertical realms of the Buddhist universe - a totally integrated physical and mythical world with Mount Meru in the centre of the cosmos. It outlines eleven realms of the world of Desire (*Kamabhumi*), sixteen realms in the world of Form (*Rupabhumi*) and four higher realms in the world of Non-form (*Arupabhumi*). According to the *Traiphum*, birth into any one of the thirty-one cosmic realms is determined by the store of karmic merit one has acquired. The kingdom is given a central place and the teachings of the monarch are prescribed as equivalent to the teachings of a fully-realised Buddha. Scholars of Thai history regard the motivation for the original composition as fundamentally political (Reynolds & Reynolds, 1982: 10) and some suggest Lithai wanted to legitimate his rule with religious authority (Chai-anan 1980: 92). Rulers of the Sukhothai, Ayudhya, Thonburi and early Rattanakosin (Bangkok) periods continued to use the *Traiphum*'s cosmic order to model the social and political institutions described in it. Integrated into the architectural design of royal and religious *sala* are expressions of the cosmology. For example, the ceiling of such *sala* are usually painted dark red, representing heaven, and stylized lotus blooms signify stars in heaven.

See Fig 11 Stylised stars in red heaven P77

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Srisak Vallipodom 8 January 2008

<sup>6</sup> *Maha* means great and *tamnak* means royal pavilion or *sala*

Significant changes in worldview took place during the period of the Ayudhya kingdom which rose in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and ruled through 33 kings until 1767. Increased in international trade on the route between India and China led to economic opportunities for Southeast Asian rulers and the spread of Theravada Buddhism, which was *more vigorous* and *very amenable to royal patronage and manipulation* (Wyatt 1984: 63). The political structure moved from parental to absolute monarchy, giving rulers more power and viewing them as *god-kings (devaraja)* holding sacred power associated with the Hindu gods Indra and Vishnu, while subjects were considered servants or slaves. Ayudhya's rigid social order was compatible with Hindu cosmology and the hierarchy was legitimised in the Buddhist concept of karma (*kum*) and respect for accumulation of merit (*baramee*). Khmer Brahmins including architects and artists were captured as Ayudhya expanded into the weakening Khmer empire in 1431. These Brahmins taught the Siamese about arts and rituals, serving as court advisors, astrologers and ceremonial masters, as they still do today (Wyatt 1984). The designs and decoration of palaces and *sala* reflected the cosmological beliefs and vertical hierarchy, linking god-kings with heavenly powers.

Fig 12 *Chao fa*, literally *piece of sky* as a roof finial, symbolizing the *garuda*, bird-god of the sky P78

From early beginnings as simple living quarters, *sala* came to be linked with religious and royal realms. The large and famous *Sala Phra Monkongbopit*, which housed the most precious Buddha signifying the image of the city of Ayudhya, was later built into a temple. In the Grand Palace of Ayudhya, which is the model for today's Grand Palace in Bangkok, there was an inner jury pavilion (*sala look kun nai*) and an outer jury pavilion (*sala look kun nok*), situated on the outer wall of the compound, where the royal palace juries met to consider cases. *Sala look kun nai* may have been for the committee for the head of the royal court (Wiyada 1998: 137). The undated affidavit of Khun Luang Maha Wat mentions that the *sala look kun nai* featured a protruding *chao fa* (roof finial) and *hang hong* (swan tail finial) and that the pond in front of this *sala* was not to be used for swimming but could be for other activities (Wiyada 1998: 137). An undated document by Khun Luang Watbradoosongtam of the Ayudhya royal tower notes that in the compound of the Front Palace, the large *sala look kun wang na* (pavilion for the Front Palace) was used for paying respect to the monks and for officials to rest before royal presentations. There was also a *sala wen mahatai* (chief pavilion), *sala* for the various

juries of royal departments or ministries of defence, harbour, palace, agriculture and city, and a *sala bun chi* (accounting pavilion). At the *sala cherntamnob*, beside the bridge, security officials guarded the city palace day and night. A moveable *sala* for guards supervising the entry of cattle, elephants, horses, bulls, and buffalos and people is noted as well as a *sala sak bua luang* (royal lotus pond pavilion) across the river. Undated historical records of Ayudhya city also mention the *sala chortan* (alms pavilion) located at the sand landing, for people to rest and wait for the rowboat to take them across from the city to the elephant camp (Wiyada 1998: 137-138). From these descriptions, it is clear that the *sala* played a significant multifunctional role as a site for the resolving of disputes concerning royal departments, as a venue for the administration of palace business and protection.

The kingdom of Ayudhya expanded its trade with foreign and neighbouring countries during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to improve economic conditions and gain political strength. Siam adapted elements of other cultures in order to improve and develop its own. Ayudhya kings also played a more important role in arts, using it to demonstrate religious performance and to characterise the kingdom. The monarchs built palaces and sponsored the building of temples and *sala*. Architectural designs reveal Hindu decorative styles and elements, along with elaborate decorations, details, lines, a larger array of colours and the plastering of gold leaf. A large amount of the kingdom's income was invested in the erection of temples and *sala*, which is considered one of the highest acts of merit for a Buddhist. Temples were the centre of art, culture and the community, and were multifunctional, serving as schools, hospitals, centres of social welfare, entertainment, news, social interaction and life rituals. During the Ayudhya and Early Rattanakosin (Bangkok) periods, the temple (*wat*) was the only institution of education and boys were taught to read and write while serving their teacher. The *sala karn parian* in temple grounds are used as study pavilions for novice and senior monks learning scriptures. Religion was undoubtedly the main factor in the integration of the Thai state (Akin 1975: 13). The Buddhist monkhood had an organised hierarchy, the centre of which was the capital.

### 3.3 Rattanakosin and the Chakri Dynasty

The destruction of Ayudhya in the battle with the Burmese in 1767 resulted in the loss of the lives of many artists and artisans, art and historical records. A new kingdom was established by General Taksin further down the river in Thonburi. After a brief period, King Taksin was toppled in 1782 by General Chakri who founded the Chakri dynasty which reigns in the Kingdom of Thailand today. The capital was moved across the river to Bangkok and General Chakri was installed as King Rama I, beginning the Rattankosin (Bangkok) period of Thai history. The architecture of the Bangkok palaces, temples and sala built during the reigns of Kings Rama I-III reflects the Ayudhya (Hindu-Khmer) model for political and social structure. The layout of the Grand Palace in Bangkok follows this design which relates to the religious beliefs of the *Traiphum* (Buddhist cosmology). One of King Rama I's first projects was to compile a new version of the *Traiphum*, promoting the priority of religious texts and art in the establishment of authority. The cloister around the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (*Wat Phra Kaew*) at the Grand Palace, built in 1782 and housing the most sacred Buddha image in Thailand, depicts the Hindu epic the Ramayana (*Ramakien* in Thai) in 178 panels. As it tells the story of the battle of good (Rama) against evil (Thotsakan), the mural features many *sala* revealing the multi-functional space as a meeting place, a resting place and a shelter. One episode in the myth shows Hanuman, the white monkey king, using his magic power to swallow Rama's *sala* to protect him while he is sleeping.

See Fig 13 *Sala rai* near the *ubosot* (ordination hall) of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace compound, Bangkok P79

Fig 14 Mural of an episode of the Ramayana (*Ramakien*) showing monkey king Hanuman swallowing Rama's *sala* to protect him P80

Recognised for his artistic talents, King Rama II commissioned the rebuilding of *Wat Arun* (Temple of the Dawn) which again reflected the Buddhist cosmology with Mount Meru (the centre of the Buddhist universe) as the central spire and the spires representing the four cardinal directions. The small portable *Sanam Chan Sala* which is praised for its classic proportions of traditional Thai architecture and exquisite decorations of fine carving, gold leaf, glass mosaic and floral and foliage motifs which mix Chinese and Western styles, was used by King Rama II for relaxing while supervising construction projects. Trade with China increased during King Rama III's

reign, leading to the introduction of Chinese art styles with lacquer and motifs and their infusion with traditional Thai art.

These can be seen in the black and gold lacquer and *kanok* (flame motif) which decorate the *Dusidaphirom Sala*, used by the king as a robing chamber for arriving or departing by palanquin or elephant (hence the platforms)

See Fig 15 Wat Suwannaram mural of *sala* and Chinese trader P81

Fig 16 *Sala* in Vessantara Jataka Tale mural at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi P82

Fig 17 Sanam Chan *Sala* used by Rama II P83

Fig 18 *Disidaphirom Sala*, Grand Palace P84

(Naengnoi 1996, 105). During the reign of King Rama III, walls were added to this *sala* and the inside was painted with *devas* (angels), *yakshas* (giants), humans, trees and birds. Anthropologist Srisak Vallipodom suggests that changes to the original open-sided houses such as the addition of walls, were attempts to make the houses more elaborate and as a result of European influence<sup>7</sup>. At *Wat Suwannaram* temple in Thonburi, murals painted during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851) reveal the international interaction through the depiction of a simple thatched riverside *sala* with a Chinese trader approaching in his boat to sell goods. At the same temple, in the mural of the Vessantara Jataka Tale, where the Buddha in a previous life learns the moral of generosity, a *sala* is shown as the place where Prince Vessantara and the beggar Jukaka discuss the handing over of Vessantara's two children.

### 3.4 Modernisation and European Influence

A policy of modernisation introduced by King Rama IV, King Mongkut (r.1851-68), included elements of Western culture in an effort to avoid the threat of colonisation by European powers which faced Siam's neighbours. As a monk for forty years and throughout his reign, King Mongkut developed his knowledge of Buddhist and Western teachings, adopting a more rationalist, scientific view of the world and starting the reformist Thammayut sect of Buddhism. International trade agreements such as the Bowring Treaty, 1855, officially opened Thailand to world markets and influences, and boosted prosperity over the following two decades. By learning English, Pali and Sanskrit, as well as being open to Western technology, King Mongkut felt he would be able to better lead his country on a more universal path of civilisation, while at the same time preserving the core of Siamese identity (Sulak, 1990: 43). The visible aspects of identity such as architecture, dress and lifestyles

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Srisak Vallipodom 8 January 2008

began to change. The form and the function of art similarly began to change from solely religious and royal, to art concerned with aesthetic values. The first museum was created in 1862 to display King Mongkut's private collection of royal regalia and antiques and established a notion of *high art* in Siam. While it was not open to the general public, the museum was an attempt to display the monarch's aura and power, and to show progress.

The Siamese *sala* in the first World Fair in Philadelphia (1876) and later in Paris (1888), Chicago (1893, 1900), Louisiana (1904) and other international exhibitions impressed with the beautiful *exotic* arts and crafts, winning several awards and leading to more invitations. Participation and success in world fairs were used as a means to evaluate the place or status of a country in the world order. Thai scholar Thongchai Winichakul asserts that the numerous museums, exhibitions and World Fairs tell a narrative of the advance of Western civilisation and the exoticism of the *others* from the rest of the world (Thongchai, 1997). He suggests that the Siamese elite were humiliated to find themselves in a lowly position in the new world order, after viewing themselves at the *zenith of a small cosmos*, and used Europe as the model for *siwilai* (civilised and a full member of the modern world) in their attempt to catch up and rid their country of its undesirable, inferior status. A parallel movement can be seen today to the new generations of Thai elites driving to stand ahead and above the crowd of undistinguished people, domestically and internationally, scrambling for *desirable identity* via displays of quick wealth, acquired or purchased items of nostalgia, or by *having culture* (Thongchai, 1997: 15-26). This research explores how the *sala* plays a role and is used by groups in this *negotiation of identity* as a symbol of the nation, wealth, taste and class.

Continuing his father's policy of modernisation and civilisation in the Western image, King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (r.1868-1910), used a strategy of compromise (*bending with the wind*) to gain power and respect while maintaining peaceful relations, developing military and economic power and improving administration standards. Fundamental economic and bureaucratic changes emphasised centralisation, overthrowing the existing social order and undermining the economic status of the bureaucratic elite (*khun nang*) to give the monarch more power than any king since the latter part of the Ayudhya period. Officials from Bangkok replaced some of the ruling families in the regions and significant educational changes provided the

Thai elite with strength in economic and political resources which increased their authority. This period of uneven development saw different social groups becoming modern at different rates. Great social distance between the educated elite of Bangkok and the peasant mass of Siamese society was created by education, wealth, lifestyle and exposure to the outside world. The world-systems theories of core-periphery development and Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of cultural capital and reproduction outlined in Chapter 2 enable an interpretation of these transitions with reference to the *sala*, architecture and cultural identity in Thailand. Wallerstein's concept would assert that in economic expansion, higher status groups extend beyond the economic realm, bettering their position through cultural forms of legitimation. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and cultural capital as a means of power projects that, as a result of social position, the dominant class is the beneficiary of economic, social and symbolic power which is embodied in economic and cultural capital, and in society's institutions. This power is reproduced by these institutions and practices and an economy of taste is developed. The *sala* and other architecture built during this period reveal a curious integration of international influences and taste.

On his first trip to Europe in 1897 King Chulalongkorn was impressed by the art and architecture, and commissioned European artists and architects to work in Siam. On the lake at his Bang Pa In summer palace, King Chulalongkorn had a Victorian-style *sala* and statues constructed alongside a traditional ornate gilded Thai *sala*. The Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall at the Grand Palace was designed by Italian architects Tamagno and Allegri, with the interior decorated by Carlo Rigoli. English architect John Connish designed the Maha Chakri Palace in the Grand Palace grounds and was persuaded to place a traditional Thai roof on top of the Victorian base, creating a controversial mix of styles. The Bang Khun Prom Palace designed for Chulalongkorn's son Prince Paribatra Sukhumbhand was decorated in Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and Art Nouveau styles. Renovated in the early 1990s by the Bank of Thailand, its owners since 1945, the building has been turned into the royal mint museum, revealing the blurring between the domains of civic, royal and commercial space. New modern-style *sala* have been built on the palace's waterfront following the recent construction of the nearby Rama VIII Bridge, continuing this story of change as told through the *sala*. Renovation of the first branch of the Siam Commercial Bank

See Fig 19 Thai and Victorian <i>sala</i> at Bang Pa In Palace P85
Fig 20 Bang Khun Prom Palace new <i>sala</i> P86

building, designed by Italian architect Annibale Rigotti in 1906-1910, has highlighted the original western-style *sala* built of glass and bronze, now covered with heavy patina. Further down the Chaophraya River, Chakrapongse House, the royal residence of Chulalongkorn's favourite son Chula Charkapongse and his Russian wife Katya, features a small gazebo-type *sala* built by a Russian carpenter. Today this is the home of the prince's grand-daughter Khunying Narisa Chakrapongse who has recently added a new traditional-style wooden *sala* in the garden and opened the building as a high-end boutique hotel.

Fig 21 *Sala* at first Siam Commercial Bank P87

Fig 22 Chakrapongse House Russian *sala* P88

### 3.5 Nationalism and Militarism

Although the process of modernisation continued through the reign of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI (r. 1910-25), a more nationalistic approach emerged. King Vajiravudh made efforts to lift traditional Thai art and to balance the effects of intensive Western influences. The elaborately-decorated traditional *Sala Longsong* and *Sala Patihantasanaa* he built at Sanam Chandra Palace in Nakorn Pathom Province were moved to Bangkok in the reign of King Rama VII and today stand at the entrance of the

See Fig 23 *Sala* Longsong P89

National Museum, greeting visitors with a vision of classic Thai architecture. The extensive use of gold leaf and ornate carving signify this as a royal space which is today approached with cautious respect by museum visitors. King Vajiravudh's article entitled *Siamese Art*, written in English under his pen-name *Asvabahu*, lamented the decline of Siamese art and argued that art was *part and parcel of our national life* as it expressed the *individual ideas of our nation*, it could not be allowed to die, for *then we shall cease to be Thai* (Piriya1982: 62). He therefore enthusiastically set about supporting local arts according to his nationalistic programmes. The Fine Arts Department was established in 1911, under the jurisdiction of the Palace ministry, to preserve traditional arts and national heritage. Shortly afterwards, the Poh Chang School of Arts and Crafts was opened by the king and although a European curriculum was designed, the school also aimed to preserve traditional arts by refining craftsmanship in a formal academic setting. The institutions of nation (*chat*), religion (*satsana*) and monarchy (*phramahakasat*) were promoted and employed to create loyal and patriotic sentiments (Wyatt 1984: 229). Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (who took the Thai name Silpa Bhirasri) was selected by his government and invited to

Thailand in 1922 by King Vajiravudh. Feroci aimed to raise the standard of Thai art to an international level, while encouraging Thai artists to appreciate the value of cultural heritage (Silpa, 1954). His task was to establish trust and gain credibility for Western art styles with the Thai powers.

A large area of Crown Property land in Bangkok known as *sala daeng* (red pavilion) was donated by King Rama VI in 1925 to become Lumpini Park, the city's largest green space<sup>8</sup>. Over time, several *sala*, each reflecting its era, regional influence and community activities, have been constructed in the popular park. However, funding for architecture and art, as for all sectors, was heavily reduced by King Prajadhipok (r. 1925-35) during the difficult economic times of the world depression in the late 1920s. The Arts and Crafts Fair held since 1913 was discontinued and the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition planned for 1925 was cancelled (Michaelsen 1993). Thai architects who studied abroad gradually returned to Thailand and replaced foreigners; however, Western dominance in secular art and influences on traditional art remained.

Thai students of politics in France who were inspired by new values and ideas of democracy, elections and a constitution led a bloodless coup on June 24, 1932, ending absolute monarchy in the country. The change to constitutional monarchy led the political shift of power to the state, abolishing the traditional Siamese political order. Amongst other far-reaching repercussions, this had an important impact on the architecture and art of the period. Commissions moved from the palace to government offices, creating a new relationship between politics and art/architecture. The Department of Fine Arts was transferred from the Ministry of Palace Affairs to the Ministry of Education in 1933. The new School of Fine Arts, established in 1934 by the Department of Fine Arts, made sculptor Feroci responsible for the curriculum, writing texts and teaching most of the classes. Although the significance of tradition was underlined, the decision to follow Western training was made *to enable the graduates to find work after they finished their studies* (Piriya, 1983: 65). Feroci felt it was not possible to go back to old forms because *modern surroundings are quite different from those of the past* (Silpa, 1961: 79). The authoritarian and corrupt military regime led by Phibun Songkram 1938-44 followed fascist developments in Italy, Germany and Japan and used nationalistic drives to build an identity differentiated from the

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<sup>8</sup> Lumpini Park is 340 rai or 58 hectares

colonial powers, supporting a policy of militarism, chauvinism (especially against the Chinese) and economic and cultural nationalism (Michaelsen, 1993). This development of a progressive and independent middle class led to the creation of an extra-political, extra-bureaucratic class of influential people (Chaianan 1980). This was an age of militant nationalism in which *strong military men were depicted as leading the nation amidst a dangerous world* (Wyatt, 1984: 250). Architecture and art were used in Phibun's nationalistic drive to carry out propaganda – there was a great demand by the state for monuments, statues, medals. Large commanding pieces of political work were commissioned by the government and placed prominently in the community, *promoting mass nationalism, not just elite nationalism* (Wyatt, 1984: 252). The Democracy Monument (1939) and the Victory Monument (1940), created by Feroci and his team, followed the heroic, realistic formula. Phibun saw the Democracy Monument, which features reliefs depicting the integration of civil and military life; education, economic productivity and Buddhism, as *the great symbol of the nation* (Michaelsen, 1993). The Prime Minister's office began to directly supervise the Fine Arts Department headed by the ambitious director Luang Wichit Wathakan. A National Council for Culture was established in 1941, later becoming the Ministry of Culture, the National Identity Board and the National Research Council, and again today the Ministry of Culture. The School of Fine Arts was upgraded in 1943 to become recognised as Silpakorn University, at the time the only institution providing formal academic training in art and architecture.

During the Cold War period, Phibun regained control (1948-57) and further developed his anti-communist and anti-Chinese campaign. The conservative-nationalist military regimes of Pote Sarasin (1957), Thanom Kittikachorn (1958) and Sarit Thanarat (1959-63) which followed continued to re-emphasise traditional values, following the ideology based on principles of authority, traditional social and political hierarchy, and paternalistic rule. Sarit's *major surgery* restored the hierarchy of nation, religion and king (Thak 2007). King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, became the most important unifying symbol in the fractured Thai society and the military leaders were aware of the need to cooperate with the monarchy and the monkhood (*sangha*) to achieve their aims.

### 3.6 Development and Internationalisation

World political focus was on Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s, with a fear of communism and Chinese domination. Foreign, in particular US, aid flowed into Thailand (US\$2 billion over two decades) and was used primarily to strengthen the Thai military (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 170). Thailand and the United States became formal security allies and at the height of the Vietnam War some 50,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Thailand.

During this time, a traditional Thai *sala* named *Pratinang Patiharn Tasanai*, or *Throne of the Miracle Vision* was gifted to the East West Center by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej

on his second visit to Hawaii in 1967. One of only four such *sala* outside of Thailand to bear the king's royal seal, it is the only one dedicated by him personally. This *sala* became a landmark on the University of Hawaii campus and a symbol of Thai-U.S. relations<sup>9</sup>. In his *sala* dedication speech, His Majesty King Bhumibol said, *It is my wish that this pavilion may serve as a symbol of universal hospitality and brotherhood...Let it be a haven of love and understanding for all travelers from East and West*. Built of softwood, this *sala* inevitably deteriorated in the intense Hawaiian climate. A new replacement *sala* was designed by national architect Pinyo Suwankiri and rededicated in March 2008 by HRH Princess Sirinthorn when she accepted the East West Center Asia-Pacific Award for Development on behalf of her father, King Bhumibol. The new, more elaborate *sala* of solid teak wood features carved decoration reserved for royal architecture and extensive gold leaf. This glittering tribute may be a reflection of the educational, cultural, investment and trade links of \$25 billion annually which have become the dominant dimensions of Thai-US relations today.

See Fig 24 *Sala* gifted to the East West Center in Hawaii, 1967 P90  
 Fig 25 Royal seal on *sala* P91  
 Fig 26 New *sala* at East West Center, 2008 P92

World Bank investment and Thailand's Five-Year National Development Plans began in 1960, focusing more on economic growth than social and cultural

<sup>9</sup> Charles E Morrison, President of the East West Center, *Celebrating Ties with Thailand*, Honolulu Advertiser, 24 February 2008

development (Pasuk and Baker, 2005).<sup>10</sup> In World-system theory terms, the centre-periphery relationship within Thailand became exaggerated with the larger centre-periphery relationship between the United States and Thailand. The interest of the core, the U.S., became the interests of the ruling elite in the Thai central administration. The relationship between Thailand and the U.S was one of client to patron, an extension of the indigenous workings of the Thai bureaucracy (Bond 1987: 75). The interests of the elite were met in this period, but not those of the periphery. Privatisation of business and the opening of Thailand to international enterprise and foreign investment brought a large foreign community to Thailand. Exports increased, roads were built and the construction business grew (Askew 2002: 233). The attraction of jobs drew many rural youth to Bangkok and this urban migration disrupted social relations which had traditionally revolved around the family, village and temple (*wat*). New schools and universities replaced the role of temples as sources of higher education for young men, reducing the role of the *sala karn parian* (study pavilion). The *sala*'s role as a meeting place became marginalised as mass communication spread and people flocked to shops full of imports. As Bangkok's dominant position as the centre of government, commerce, education, power and prestige for the elite expanded, the gap between urban rich and rural poor widened. Banking and finance became increasingly powerful economically as Thai agricultural capital became industrial capital and Chinese family businesses have dominated the economy since the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> By 1979, the Bangkok Bank (Sophonpanich family), Thai Farmers Bank (Lamsam family), Bangkok Metropolitan Bank (Techaphaibun family) and the Bank of Ayudhya (Rattanakarak family) had founded 295 companies spread across finance, trade and manufacturing (Pasuk and Baker: 1996, 20). Conglomerates<sup>12</sup> grew by cooperating and by the late 1970s there were around thirty which had interests in over 800 companies (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 20-25). Through connections with generals,<sup>13</sup> a politico-financial axis dominated until the 1970s.

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<sup>10</sup> Five-year plans were a fundamental feature of socialist-communist planning and the basis of centralization of economies. They were also used in non-communist countries in the region, such as Singapore.

<sup>11</sup> Most foreign business was cancelled during the war and local entrepreneurs became tycoons filling the gaps (Pasuk and Baker, 1996, 21).

<sup>12</sup> Including Siam Cement, the Bangkok Bank group, the Chiaravanont family's Charoen Pokpand (CP), the Chirathiwats of Central Department Stores, Srifuengfung in chemicals, glass and engineering, Sahaviriya in steel, Sukree and Saha-Union in textiles, Phonprapha's Japanese vehicle importing and Techaphaibun in banking, insurance and liquor (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 23)

<sup>13</sup> In 1953 Chin Sophonpanich persuaded the generals to transfer 30 million baht to the Bank's capital account (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 25).

At the same time, large cities of Southeast Asia assumed an aura of *sacred cult centres* of the earlier Southeast Asia urban tradition as political elites reached back into the indigenous history of their countries to create national ideologies. (McGee 1994: vii). These movements and changes in social behaviour resulted in the traditional *sala* becoming used less frequently as a site for social interaction.

Student-led pro-democracy protests, arguing that the U.S. and the ruling elite had conspired for economic dominance and the exploitation of up-country resources, successfully ousted the 15-year military regime in October 1973. However a violent crackdown was led by Thanom in October 1976 (Chai-anan and Morell 1982: 165). Anti-Western sentiment during the demonstrations prompted calls for a return to traditionalism in the form of support for the monarchy, the *sangha* (monkhood) and the nation. During late 1970s and early 1980s, the state increased efforts to preserve and promote a standardised form of Thai culture, emphasising Thai heritage (*moradok Thai*) and advocating that a strong national Thai culture is vital to the country's independence and sovereignty. (Askew 2002; 233). The Office of the National Culture Commission was created in 1979 and the Office of the Prime Minister began publishing *Thai Identity* magazine. The aim was cultural continuity in an age of rapid social change and the image of traditional Thai *sala* was used as a symbol of the country's heritage.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has built an understanding of the history of the *sala* and its role in society. It has shown that through time the *sala* has evolved from a simple hut providing shelter in natural surroundings to playing social, religious and political roles. In ancient kingdoms, the *sala* along roadsides and near temples were places for resting and the healing of body, mind and spirit, such as *dharmasala* and *arokyasala*. *Sala* were also sites for resolving disputes and conflict, such as venues for the holding of palace jury courts which handled administration of ministries of defence, harbour, city, palace and finance. The *sala* has been used by monarchs and state powers to project images that they saw fit for the country, which at the same time supported and legitimised their ruling positions. Early monarchs supported religious art, building

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temples, palaces and *sala* with architectural designs and decorative elements portraying Buddhist and Hindu belief systems, which reinforced concepts of social hierarchy, royal power and status. For Buddhists, the construction of *sala*, like temples, is considered as a highly-valued merit-making vehicle.

Through trade, international relations and cultural exchanges, foreign influences have been adapted and absorbed into the indigenous Siamese system, which can be seen in the transformation of the *sala*. New ideas and styles, such as the Chinese lacquer techniques and motifs as well as European designs and materials were chosen for some royal *sala*. These changes can be interpreted as expressions of Siam's desire to portray itself as a modern, civilised nation. Over the years of participation in World Fairs, the Siamese *sala* gained a reputation as a showcase for exotic wares and continues to impress international audiences with its ornate detail. Modernisation of the country included the implementation of a centralised bureaucracy with Bangkok at the core dominating economic and political power. This system of development continued to support extreme gaps between elite and commoners, and fostered status differentiation based on reference to European standards and styles. Those socially-positioned could access education, wealth and foreign travel thereby further enhancing their social standing and opportunities. Major political, social and economic change followed the events of 1932, engendering a strong sense of nationalism. Military leaders commandeered architecture and art to promote their own agendas, exploiting traditional and modern forms. World developments such as the Cold War encouraged foreign investment in Thailand which stimulated economic growth, international exchange and democratic demands in the 1960s and 1970s. At times nationalistic fervour has promoted traditional Thai styles in efforts to generate patriotic sentiments in a changing and unstable world.



Fig. 6  
The Primitive Hut, Marc-Antoine Laugier, 1753  
*Photo: Unknown*



Fig. 7  
A sala or tieng na in a rice field in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand.  
Photo: Virginia Henderson



Fig. 8  
A *sala* in the countryside, depicted in the mural of the Ramakien (Ramayana) which features on the walls of the cloister of Wat Phra Kaew in the Grand Palace compound, Bangkok  
*Photo: Jacqueline Gilbert*



Fig. 9

A sala in the royal court depicted in the mural of the Ramakien (Ramayana) which features on the walls of the cloister of Wat Phra Kaew in the Grand Palace compound, Bangkok

*Photo: Jacqueline Gilbert*



Fig. 10  
Ruins of *Dharmasala* No. 17 on the *Dharmasala* Route or Royal Route from Angkor to Phimai.  
Prasat Ku Sila Khan, Khorat Province, Northeastern Thailand.  
*Photo: Asger Mollerup*



Fig. 11

The sala's red ceiling symbolises heaven with stylised lotus flowers representing stars in the heaven. A flame (*kanok*) design in gold and black lacquer (*rong rak pid thong*) decorates the eight pillars of Sala Samranmukhamat, built in 1903, now in the National Museum, Bangkok

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 12  
Chao fa (literally, piece of sky) roof finials on the ubosot (ordination hall) of Wat Phra Kaew, Bangkok  
The chao fa's form is said to symbolise the *garuda*, bird-god of the sky  
*Photo: Jacqueline Gilbert*



Fig. 13

Two of the eight *sala rai*, public resting places, in the Grand Palace compound, Bangkok, which is modelled on the ancient capital of Ayudhya

*Photo: Paul Chesney*

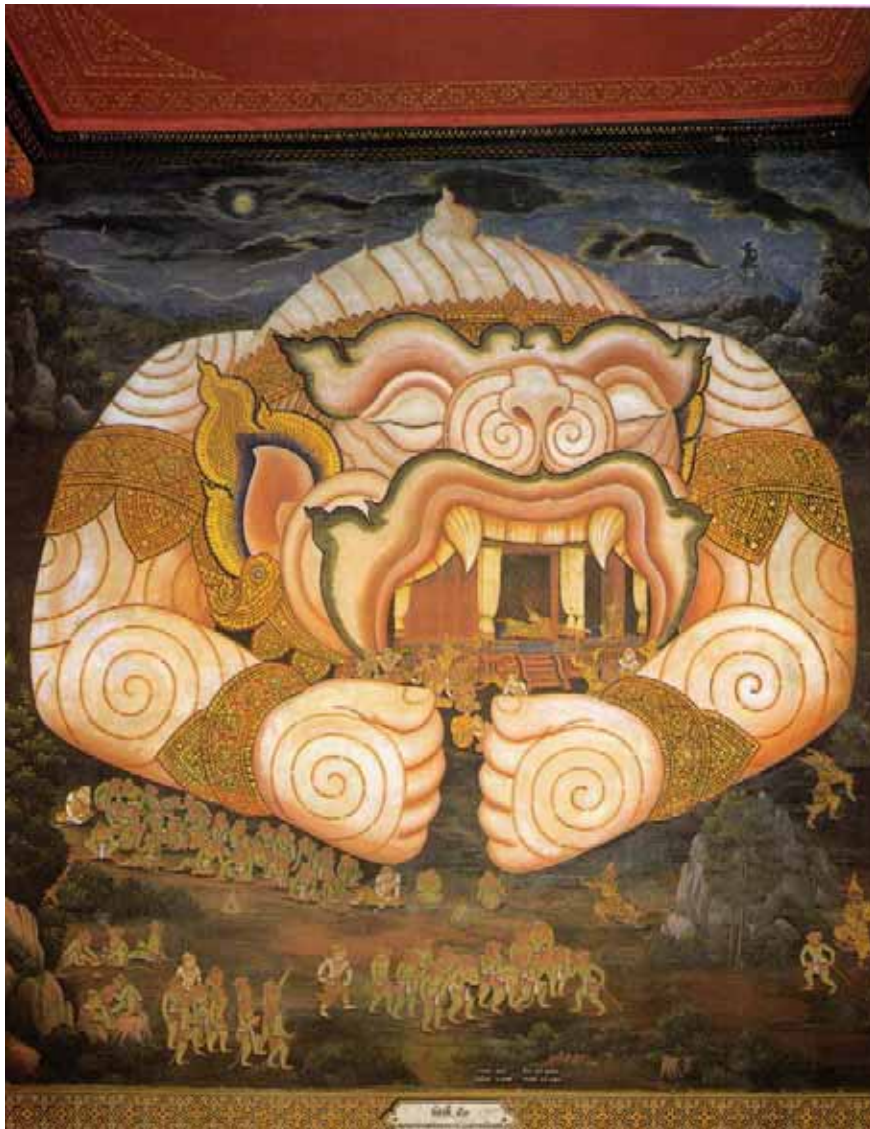


Fig. 14

A mural depicting Hanuman the monkey god using his magical powers to protect Rama sleeping in his *sala*, while the monkey army guards are lulled to sleep by tricky Mayarap's flute playing.

Room 53 of the Ramakien (Ramayana) mural around the cloister of the Grand Palace, Bangkok

*Photo: Jacqueline Gilbert*



Fig. 15

This mural at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi, depicts a wealthy Chinese trader paddling his boat and visiting a riverside sala (*sala tha nam*) to sell goods

*Photo: Jarnong Srinuan and Phaithoon Thinnapong, Muang Boran Publishing House*



Fig. 16

This mural at Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi, depicts Prince Vessantara (a previous life of the Buddha) sitting in a *sala* as Jujaka the beggar comes to sit and talk with him. Jujaka then takes away Prince Vessantara's two children, given to him as a gesture of generosity.

*Photo: Jamnong Srinuan and Phaithoon Thinnapong, Muang Boran Publishing House*



Fig. 17  
The finely decorated Sanam Chan sala in the Grand Palace, Bangkok is considered to represent excellent proportions of traditional Thai architecture  
*Photo: Michael Freeman, River Books*



Fig. 18

The Dusidaphirom *sala*, in the Grand Palace compound, which was originally built with open sides, had walls later added by King Rama III. Used as a robing chamber for kings preparing to mount and after dismounting elephants or palanquins, the *sala* is decorated inside with gold and black lacquer images of trees and birds, angels and humans.

*Photo: Michael Freeman, River Books*



Fig. 19

Two *sala* on a lake at Bang Pa In Palace, near Ayuthaya reveal the mixing of architectural styles – Thai and European – which began during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910)

*Photo: Paul Chesney*



Fig. 20

Bang Khun Prom Palace, built in 1906 by Italian architect Mario Tamagno for Prince Nakorn Sawan (Prince Paribatra Sukhumbhand), the 33rd son of King Rama V. The palace was bought by the Bank of Thailand and now houses the Royal Mint Museum. A series of modern-style *sala* have been built along the riverside alongside the palace.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 21

This first branch of the Siam Commercial Bank was designed by Italian architect Annibale Rigotti in 1906 and completed in 1910. The original western-style *sala* of glass and bronze, with heavy patina, remains in place.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*

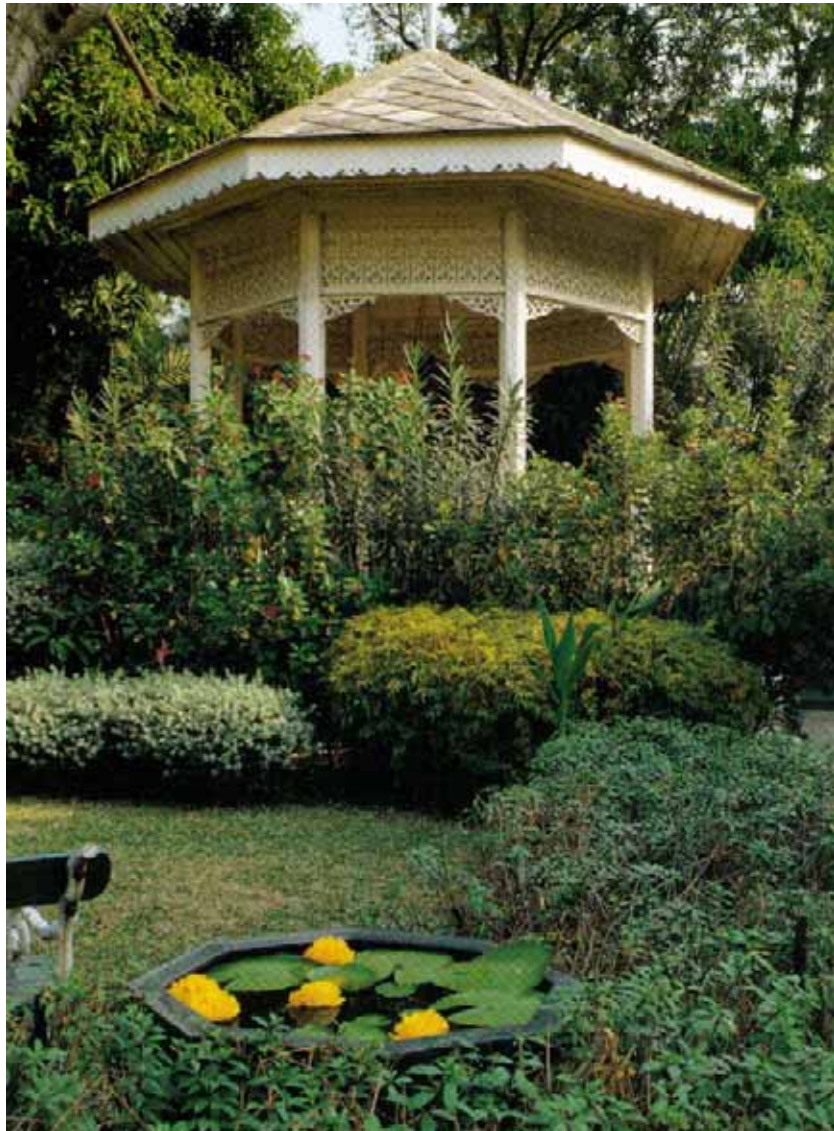


Fig. 22

Built by a Russian carpenter for Prince Chakrabongse (favourite son of King Chulalongkorn and Queen Saowabha Phongsri) and his Russian wife, Katya, this *sala* remains in its original site, now the Bangkok residence of M.R. Narisa Chakrabongse, Prince Chakrabongse's grand-daughter. The residence has recently been converted into a boutique hotel and a traditional Thai-style wooden *sala* has been added

*Photo: Heritage Homes of Thailand, The Siam Society*



Fig. 23

The elaborate *Sala Longsong*, built by King Rama VI at Sanam Chandra Palace in Nakorn Pathom, was moved to Bangkok in the reign of King Rama VII and is now in the grounds of the National Museum.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 24  
A sala gifted by H.M. King Bhumibol to the East West Centre in Hawaii in 1967  
Photo: East West Centre



Fig. 25

H.M. King Bhumibol's royal seal (*alan jakorn*) on the *sala* gifted to the East West Centre, Honolulu, in 1967. The royal seal has since been redesigned for His Majesty's 6<sup>th</sup> cycle (72<sup>nd</sup>) birthday.

*Photo: East West Centre*



Fig. 26

The new royal Thai sala at East West Centre, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist Pinyo Suwankiri, was re-dedicated by H.R.H Princess Sirinthorn in March 2008. This *sala* replaced the original which was originally gifted in 1967 and gradually disintegrated over time in the extreme Pacific island climate.

*Photo: Paul Chesley*

## Chapter 4

### Recent Socio-politico-economic Events and the *Sala*

The world is driven by money and is therefore full of conflicts and destruction – it has become exhausted and distressed. Nowadays, humanity is sinking deeper into suffering and worry because life is full of uncertainties. Economic situations are unpredictable and highly fluctuating. Our human nerves cannot cope with this kind of intense stress, leading to neurosis, psychological problems, suicide, drug addiction and a myriad of other social violence. These are the results of an economic system which is obsessed with money.

- Prawase Wasi, 1998

This chapter analyses the *sala*'s role within the context of the socio-economic and political changes occurring in Thailand during the last two decades. This dramatic period of political instability and rapid economic rise and fall has brought the country to a point of confusion and disruption. This research is interested in how these conditions have affected the *sala* and the possible roles of the *sala* in this era of contested spaces and conflicting ideologies. The research questions drive this examination of the *sala*'s transformation and enquiry into its putative role as a literal or metaphorical site for participation, expression and conflict resolution.

The first section investigates Thailand's extraordinary boom-time of the 1990s and the repercussions of the 1997 bursting of the economic bubble. It explores the tensions as the country moves through a period of political upheaval and uncertainty, relating this turmoil to the *sala*, questioning the ways in which social space such as freedom of expression and the right to public gathering are constrained through political coercion and manipulation. Conflict transformation and peace building are examined in light of the concept of the *sala* as a calm meeting place for discussion and the open sharing of ideas.

The second section on, *Amazing Unseen Thailand*, considers the impact of tourism on the country and the *sala*. Increased global interaction through telecommunications

and travel has introduced Thailand to new visitors. Tourism's growth in earnings, supported by government policies, has encouraged commoditisation of culture. One reaction to globalisation and homogenisation of culture has been a more active assertion of a Thai national identity and the *sala*'s role as a national symbol is discussed. A final section brings together the lessons from the chapter, drawing conclusions and sharpening the focus on the *sala* today.

#### 4.1 Beyond the Boom, Bust and Coup: Change and Crisis

Thailand's unplanned and extraordinary growth which ran from the late 1980s to 1997 led to a roller-coaster ride of economic and social upheaval. The rapid and huge changes in almost every sector of society have had a significant impact on Thailand's modern development and identity. Foreign and domestic investment between 1987 and 1990 was more than the previous 30 years<sup>1</sup> and in 1990 Thailand

See Fig 27 Thatched *sala* on Mekong River P106

Fig 28 Motorcycle drivers sheltering in concrete *sala* P107

became the world's fastest growing economy, aimed to turn Thailand into a *tiger*, a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC).<sup>2</sup> Policy planners directing the process of modernisation in Thailand moved attention from agricultural production to industrialisation and the service sector.<sup>3</sup> The effects of migration and urbanisation, as rural people flocked to seek newly-created jobs in industrial areas, have had severe and far-reaching impacts on both rural and urban life. Huge economic inequalities exist between Bangkok and the provinces. The movements of rural to urban, natural to scientific, and spiritual to technological, destabilised Thai people's lives. Cities grew larger and underinvestment in infrastructure and human resources increased congestion and stress. Family units became fragmented as parents left children at home with grandparents in villages. In rural areas, the traditional village *sala*, a centre of the community in the past, became emptied of middle-aged people, leaving the very young and very old gathering in its shade to discuss changes and the prospect of money being sent back home from family working in the city. In the urban areas, migrants facing long hours of commuting, low-paid repetitive factory work and

<sup>1</sup> The boom may have been triggered by foreign investment, but at its peak foreign investment accounted for only one eighth of local corporate investment (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 4).

<sup>2</sup> NICs included Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia are considered as second-generation NICs.

<sup>3</sup> Agriculture's share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reduced from 31.5 percent in 1975 to 12.4 percent in 1990 (Thailand Research Development Fund).

stressful city-life pushing them towards drugs and crime (Sunitsuda, 1991). In their new lives as factory or construction workers and drivers (of taxis, tuk-tuks and motorcycles), migrants continued to seek social bonds, meeting and sharing in *sala*-type spaces.

High growth between 1990 and 1995 fueled an atmosphere of optimism and confidence in the country. The government undertook big public projects such as transport and communications and though kin networks, corruption and nepotism, large sums of money were moving around. Illegal businesses such as gambling, drug smuggling, prostitution, smuggling of illegal labour, oil and weapons, estimated to account for a rising 11-20% of Thailand's GDP in 1997 (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 180). The unregulated industrialisation during the 1990s exploited natural and human resources. Farmland and forests were appropriated and illegal logging, dam building and toxic wastes caused serious environmental damage with serious water and air pollution.

See Fig 29 Bangkok *sala* dwarfed by the new CAT building P108

Fig 30 Pattaya Park Condo *sala* P109

New wealth brought about the rise of an assertive middle class with different life expectations and behaviour. Consumerism and materialism became widespread, encouraging desires for luxurious and extravagant lifestyles. Land prices multiplied and the stock market took off, stimulating over-investment in these unproductive sectors, with aims of quick fortunes. In a construction frenzy, skyscrapers sprang up in cities, dwarfing the traditional one and two-storied shop-houses. Traditional *sala*, such as that marking the entrance to Wat Muang Kae on the Chaophraya River in Bangkok, appeared out of time juxtaposed with towering new mirror glass structures. Multi-story concrete condominiums were built by the newly-rich and owners seeking forms of prestige and to show their patriotic good taste chose to commission traditional Thai *sala* to be built in the grounds, such as the Pattaya Park Condo in Fig 4.4, marking the condo space as *Thai*. The gold leaf and elaborate details of such *sala* make a bizarre combination with the bland international architecture, increasing the schizophrenic cityscape. In alternative combinations, wealthy middleclass landowners built substantial homes, choosing to decorate their private towers with symbols of western culture, such as the gazebo-type *sala*.

See Fig 31 Private residence with Western gazebo-*sala* P110

Excessive corruption was the grounds for the military coup in 1991 which led to violent *Bloody May* demonstrations in 1992. Eight governments attempted to run the country during the next five years, leading up to the economic crash in 1997 which has been attributed to misguided policies and financial mismanagement. Thailand faced its biggest banking scandal and began losing its advantage of cheap labour to Indonesia, China and Vietnam during this time. The conditions of the International Monetary Fund bailout package of US\$17.5 billion demanded controlled growth and reduced government spending as well as greater liberalisation, privatisation, accountability and transparency. In a complete turnaround from the booming late eighties and early nineties, Thailand faced cut-backs and increased unemployment. Large numbers of migrants returned to their villages to face difficulties finding work and strained family and community ties due to long periods in the city. Spending on overseas travel and luxury imports was reduced, and 'Buy-Thai' campaigns, exports and tourism were encouraged. The impact of tourism on the *sala* is explored in the following section. The economic crisis prompted His Majesty King Bhumibol to recommend that the country adopt a *Sufficiency Economy* approach which was implemented in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006). Promoting the *middle path* and a more balanced development approach which considers the economy, society, politics, and environment, the philosophy's goal is to achieve sustainable development and self-reliance towards the well-being of Thai people who are abreast with the world while continuing to preserve Thai national identity. During this period, new headquarters were constructed by the Royal Thai Navy across the river from the Grand Palace. Designed by Thai Architectural Council President Thanit Kityapon, the solid flat-roofed white block appears as a fortress to which a large elaborate wooden Thai *sala* was built, creating an interesting and confusing architectural dialogue between the two structures. While the main building may be interpreted as the navy's wish to express itself and be seen as a modern efficient institution, the traditional *sala* is a patriotic symbol, highlighting the *Thainess* of the key institution. The contrasts – traditional and modern, open and closed, solid and delicate – challenge the aesthetic harmony, creating confusion and conflict, perhaps reflecting the conditions of this period.

See Fig 32 Royal Thai Navy new headquarters with traditional <i>sala</i> P111
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Controversial billionaire telecom tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra and his *Thai Rak Thai* (Thais love Thais) party were elected to power in 2001 on the basis of pro-poor

policies which offered Keynesian economic boosts by pouring state money into local village projects (Pasuk and Baker 2004, Giles 2007; Hewison 2003). Thaksin's populist, neo-liberal *Thaksinomics* policies offered cheap healthcare in a 30 baht scheme and village debt relief with a one million baht fund to each village to encourage small businesses, aiming to stimulate the economy and employment and to increase Thailand's competitiveness (Giles 2007). His CEO style was appreciated by big business and his disregard of the Bangkok elite appealed to poor voters. GDP grew during 2002 to 2004, until a slump in 2005,<sup>4</sup> nevertheless Thaksin was the first prime minister in Thailand's history to lead an elected government through a full four year term in office and the 2005 election had the highest voter turnout in Thai history. With his cabinet filled with members of big business families, Thaksin used his fortune to buy influence in media networks previously controlled by the royalists, clamping down on criticism. Critics saw him as behaving arrogantly and inappropriately, transforming Thailand into a new-style capitalist economy, dividing the nation and threatening the high institution. He gained a reputation for abuse of human rights – particularly for his methods of cracking down on drugs which saw more than 2,500 people killed in extrajudicial executions. These heavy-handed methods failed to control the violence in the largely Muslim three southernmost provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, where more than 2,500 have died in a campaign of bombings, drive-by shootings, arson and beheadings since the insurgency began in early 2004. Symbols of Buddhism including teachers in Buddhist schools have been attacked in areas where the two religions coexisted for generations, pushing the country toward armed sectarian conflict. Calm, safe social space is urgently needed in Thailand and particularly in the South. This research explores the role and possibilities of the *sala* as a socio-spatial mechanism – a place for reflection and contemplation, where fixed beliefs are suspended and minds are opened, promoting healing and conflict transformation. Space for participation and freedom of expression, the *sala* concept supports open sharing of ideas, rather than censorship and constraint. Arguably, there may be potential difficulties in using a quintessentially Thai structure for negotiating with culturally conflicting groups, such as the southern Muslims. However, the *sala* in the South, and in other regions are expressions of local contexts and offer possibilities for gathering, meeting and discussion.

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<sup>4</sup> The slump was triggered by rising oil prices and inflation, severe droughts and floods and the tourism aftershock of the Indian Ocean earthquake on 26 December 2004

Thammasat University, known as the centre of democracy demonstrations in the 1970s, choose rebel architect Sumet Jumsai to design the new Tha Prachan campus library. The radical modern building introduces flattened horizontal lines, rejecting the steep vertical angles of traditional Thai architecture, which perhaps could be interpreted as a statement urging movement towards a more horizontal and democratic society. The *sala* in front of the library on the riverside mirror and accentuate this new form. Across the river, in the park at the foot of the new Rama VIII Bridge, the *sala* reflect designs which appear a confused merging of old and new ideas. While the alternative forms, features and materials of these prominent structures might also tell a *This is New Bangkok* story, the blend is uncomfortable. Rarely used, these *sala* appear to be more like unsuccessful monuments to modernity than functional social space.

See Fig 33 Horizontal design of Thammasat library *sala* P112

Fig 34 New forms of Rama VIII Park *sala* P113

Accused of corruption,<sup>5</sup> abuse of the country's system of checks and balances and bending government policy to benefit his family's business, Thaksin faced demonstrations in Bangkok sponsored by the urban middle-class People's Alliance for Democracy and led by media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul. Called on to resign, he called a snap election in April 2006 and achieved a record 16 million votes, while the other main opposition parties boycotted the election, unable to offer strong alternatives. A military coup on 19 September 2006 led by Thai army chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin sent Thaksin into exile abroad. In May 2007, Thaksin and 110 other senior officials of his *Thai Rak Thai* party were banned from holding political office for five years. Major forces behind the coup have been identified as anti-democratic groups in the military and civilian elite, disgruntled leaders and neo-liberal intellectuals and politicians. The coup was also supported by the monarchy (Giles 2007). Thai society is sharply divided in responses to Thaksin and the coup. Some argue that Thaksin opened up the possibility for the poor to have some say in politics, disturbing the Thai elite and their ideas of democracy (Giles 2007 21-22). Responses to the coup, including the *Thai Social Forum* and *19<sup>th</sup> September Network against the Coup* reveal a rising social consciousness among youth. Civil society finds spaces for participation, demonstrating in the streets and in shopping centres to get voices

<sup>5</sup> Accusations came to a head when Thaksin sold shares in Shin Corp, one of Thailand's largest telecom groups and a significant national asset, to Singapore's state-owned Temasek Holdings for a tax-free profit of \$1.9 billion

heard. As this investigation questions the *sala*'s role today, it draws attention to the lived social spaces and the tactics people use to overcome or subvert situations of oppression (de Certeau 1988). It is proposed that the *sala*, as a space for social interaction, expression and sharing of ideas, is a metaphor for a solution that needs to happen in the context of political and social crisis. Environments such as the *sala* do not automatically bring about peace, but people inside the *sala* space are encouraged to contemplate, with an open mind, the healing of conflict.

The 2006 military coup shook international and domestic confidence, markets fell and the economy stagnated. The military junta dissolved Parliament, banned protests, suppressed and censored media outlets, declared martial law and arrested Cabinet members. It suspended the popular 1997 Constitution, considered to be the most participative in Thailand's history, approving a new permanent constitution drafted by a hand-picked 250-member National Legislative Assembly (NLA). Shortly before the election on 23 December 2007, the junta-appointed NLA hastily approved a slew of laws including the Internal Security Bill giving more power to the army, allowing martial law to be declared easily, threatening democracy and the rights of physical movement, freedom of expression and the freedom of the press.

In the same month as the elections, His Majesty King Bhumibol's 80th birthday celebrations on 5 December 2007 were the culmination of a year of celebrations continuing since the celebration of His Majesty's 60 years on the throne in 2006, marking him as the longest reigning monarch in the world. The traditional Thai *sala* has been used to mark such royal celebrations. In 1995, *Sala Chalermprakiat* was erected to mark His Majesty's 4<sup>th</sup> cycle (48 years) on the throne. Painted the traditional dark red and adorned with gold leaf, the elaborate royal *sala* is a dominant feature in the landscape, situated on a prime riverside site in the popular Chalermprakiat Park. Roped off and closed to the large numbers of people who gather in the park morning and evening to exercise, breathe and catch the breeze, this *sala* clearly marks the public space as royal space. The issue of succession is a delicate subject and debates about the monarchy's role in political affairs are stifled by Thailand's strict lese-majeste laws. The adoration of the present monarch is unlikely to be repeated for his less popular son. Under a shaky government headed by People Power Party

See Fig 35 <i>Sala Chalermprakiat</i> P114
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leader Samak Sundaravej, Thailand appears to be regressing into a lawless era, facing the next episode in this period of crisis, division and instability.

### **Conclusion**

This section has explored Thailand's current period of crisis, using examples of *sala* to reflect aspects of the turbulent socio-economic-political context. The financial bubble and 1997 crash, *Thaksinomics* and military coups have created deep divisions and conflict in Thai society. Rather than freedom of expression and acceptance of difference and diversity, these are fractured times of government censorship, social control and violence. People are protesting against corruption, nepotism and economic collapse, concerned about the undermining of democracy and abuse of human rights. This discussion has debunked the myth of peaceful smiling Thai society. It has proposed that the metaphor of the *sala* as a space for contemplation and dialogue is what Thailand urgently needs today – a calm place for conflict transformation and healing.

The following section investigates tourism, as Thailand's number one revenue earner, and its impact on cultural artefacts such as the *sala*.

#### **4.2 Amazing Unseen Thailand: Tourism and the *Sala***

A multi-billion baht industry<sup>6</sup> in Thailand, tourism is one of the country's top sources of revenue, earning 547 billion baht (approx \$US17 billion) in 2007. Actively supported as a Thai government policy and heavily promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT),

Fig 36 Average Tourist Length of Stay and Spending			
Year	No of Tourists (million)	Average Stay (days)	Revenue (billion baht)
1980	1.8	4.9	17
1990	5.3	7.0	110
1997	7.2	8.3	220
1999	8,5	7.9	253
2001	10.0	7.9	299
2003	10.0	8.2	309
2005	11.5	8.2	367
2007	14.8	8.3	547
<i>Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand</i>			

<sup>6</sup> In 2007, revenue from 14.8 million tourists was 547 billion baht (approximately \$13 billion), significantly greater than any other major export, including rice, garments, computer components, jewelry, and plastic products

major, well-funded marketing campaigns, beginning with *Visit Thailand Year 1987* which saw the country promoted as an *exotic* destination, have produced significant increases in numbers of tourists visiting Thailand each year.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of tourism, the *sala* has become recognised as a symbol of Thailand and is exploited in TAT marketing campaigns within the increasingly competitive tourism industry worldwide. The distinctive and media-friendly image of the traditional *sala* with dramatic architectural lines is heavily promoted by the Thai tourist industry in advertising materials and in settings such as spas, hotels, restaurants, shopping centres and airports.

Thailand's world-famous Oriental Hotel, displays a traditional wooden *sala* in pride of place in its riverside garden. In the past, such a *sala* may have been located at this ideal breeze-catching site, however today juxtaposed with the towering modern hotel buildings behind, the *sala* appears out of place and out of time – an architectural conflict is played out. This raises questions about the changing landscape and stories of the past and present. Each evening in the Oriental's beautiful *sala*, a cultural show is performed for tourists and dinner guests, featuring displays of traditional Thai musical instruments, such as the *ranaad* and *kim* and young graduates from the Fine Arts Department in elaborate costumes retelling scenes from the Ramayana (Ramakien) in Khon masked dance. Here the *sala* is used as a stage, a performance space for displaying a standardised version of elite Thai culture which is re-enacted repeatedly for the benefit of foreign visitors.

See Fig 37 The Oriental Hotel *sala* P115

Fig 38 Shangri-La Hotel *Sala Rim Nam* restaurant P116

A little further down the Chaophraya River from the Oriental, in the heart of Bangkok's tourist facilities, the *Sala Rim Naam* riverside restaurant at the five-star Shangri-La Hotel is regularly booked out. Here two traditional-style wooden *sala* have been modified into glass-walled air-conditioned spaces with tables and chairs to meet western needs. *Sala Rim Nam* offers international guests and wealthy Thai diners a taste of fine Thai food and a *sala* experience. Openness and connection with nature,

<sup>7</sup> TAT campaigns have included Thai Culture Year (1994), Thai Cultural Heritage, Culture and Development (1995), Culture and Tourism (1996), Culture and Mass Media (1997), Amazing Thailand (1998-99), Unseen Thailand (2001-2004), Unseen Paradise II: Stay in Style (2005), and 72 Hours Amazing Thailand (2007).

an inherent characteristic of the traditional *sala*, is cut off in this sealed environment which aims to protect diners from the discomforts of tropical humidity, heat and mosquitoes. Through the additions of piped Thai music and silk decoration in this *sala*, a sense of *Thainess* is promoted.

TAT's development of the recent *Unseen Thailand* campaign identified niche areas as palaces, spas, golf, diving, boutique hotels, adventure and honeymoon and weddings.<sup>8</sup> An April 2007 advertisement in the Bangkok Post newspaper for the Sofitel hotel chain featured a photo of a couple in western wedding dress taking vows in a Thai *sala* on the Hua Hin beach. It offered *memorable magical moments, pure luxury and inspiring surroundings* at a budget price. In this context, the *sala*, is promoted as a romantic private-public space and exploited for its photogenic form. In other media, including design and travel magazines and websites. Images of the *sala* and the word *sala* have been used by luxury hotels for promotional purposes.<sup>9</sup> In these hotel settings, the *sala* has been used as a distinctive focal point for the transmission of ideas about Thai culture and as a decorative element to enhance and support the hotel and tourism business.

See Fig 39 Advertisement for <i>sala</i> wedding P117
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Thailand's current five-year tourism marketing and promotion plan (2007-2011) reflects the national agenda for *sufficiency economy* recommended by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Increased effort and resources are needed to rehabilitate popular attractions, many of which are in urgent need of restoration following decades of being subjected to heavy tourism traffic, both foreign and domestic. Seeking a balance between economic growth and the achievement of sustainable development, *sufficiency economy* tourism highlights the uniqueness of Thailand's tourism assets, particularly cultural heritage. The marketing plan states:

*Sufficiency economy tourism promotes the protection and preservation of the natural environment and instills pride in national heritage among the local population...strengthens the Thailand brand, and sharpens the kingdom's international competitive edge.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> TAT website

<sup>9</sup> Hotels using images of the *sala* for marketing in media include Amanpuri, Grand Laguna, Banyan Tree, JW Marriott Phuket, Four Seasons and Sheraton Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi Chiang Mai

<sup>10</sup> TAT News 2008 Marketing Plan

Sufficiency economy aims to attract high-income, sophisticated, environmentally aware and responsible tourists – a quality-over-quantity philosophy, focusing more on yield and expenditure per visitor than on headcount, thereby reducing tourism pressure and environmental impact on natural and cultural attractions. It targets world travelers who seek new knowledge and cultural exchange while in search of leisure, rest and relaxation.

The worldwide booming health and wellness industry has led to a proliferation of spas opening in Thailand, famous for its massage and traditional herbal medicine. Many spas around the country, including high-end hotels, feature traditional-style *sala* as indoor-outdoor venues for relaxing and pampering treatments. In this context, the *sala* plays a role as a site for healing and as a channel for the merging of the spiritual and commercial realms in the wellbeing business. The bold neo-traditional *sala* of quality materials positioned at the edge of the luxury Royal Phuket Marina Hotel's infinity pool is ideally located to catch the breeze – a key aspect of good design. It embellishes the landscape with an eye-catching reference to the country's architectural heritage, at once offering the *sala* as a symbol of prestige and patriotism.

See Fig 40 Sala at Royal Phuket Marina Hotel P118
Fig 41 Sala as shopping center coffee shop-bar P119

Bangkok is known as a shopper's paradise and visitors to the large River City Shopping Centre, beside the Sheraton Hotel, are tempted to stop at the traditional-style wooden *sala* wedged between the large modern concrete buildings. A coffee shop and bar offering international food and sunset cocktails to shoppers, the *sala* is a gathering place for international tourists sharing ideas and reflecting. This *sala* also plays the role of a cheap reproduction souvenir, an add-on and inauthentic reminder of tradition in the rapidly changing landscape.

Arriving at and departing the new Suvarnabhumi Airport, travelers encounter a *sala*. It is a first and last impression of Thailand. The new airport's ultra-modern steel and glass building with pale blue light was designed by a Chicago-based firm. After it was completed, Thai artists and designers from Silpakorn University were invited to instill some *Thainess* into the massive structure, through the addition of Thai art murals along walkways and four *sala*, commissioned with a budget of 12 million baht,

three million baht each. Silpakorn architecture instructor Somkid Jiratatsanakul explained that as a symbol of Thailand, the *sala* added *Thai feeling* to the space. Amongst the duty-free electronics and fast-food shops, the traditional *sala* appear from another time, clashing and conflicting with the surroundings, yet given pride of place and eagerly photographed by tourist wielding their digital cameras to capture visual souvenirs of Thailand.

See Fig 42 <i>Sala</i> at Suvarnabhumi Airport P120
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This section has examined the ways that the *sala* is used within the context of Thailand's rapidly growing tourism industry which is encouraged by the Thai government as an important source of revenue for the country, particularly during present difficult economic times. Cultural elements including images of the traditional *sala* feature in media around heavily-promoted tourist campaigns aimed to attract high-income visitors interested in culture and leisure. As tourists seeking *authentic*, *exotic* experiences and new vistas spend time and money taking photographs and shopping for souvenirs to obtain visual records of that experience, the commoditisation of Thai culture, supported by government policy, results in an inverse phenomenon whereby culture authenticates itself through acts of tourism. Repackaged for the international market, Thai culture takes new forms; in some cases more accessible, universal forms, or alternatively highlighted *Thai* projections. The traditional wooden *sala* is marginalised amidst Bangkok's chaotic modern cityscape. Promoted as a national symbol, in hotels and airports the *sala* is used as an expression of ideas about Thai culture. Displaying traditional forms of the *sala* on their premises, hotels and businesses seek to build their prestige, distinctiveness and express patriotism. In these luxury settings, the *sala* serves as a decorative garden element, a venue for cultural performances or romantic celebrations or a restaurant catering to western habits and needs. Today's widespread interest in health and wellbeing has encouraged spas and resorts, which use the *sala* as a site for experiencing massage and healing treatments, reflecting the ancient *dharmasala*'s function and role in modern commercial settings.

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the great changes in Thailand's socio-economic and political conditions during the past two decades as well as the impacts of increased tourism which are relevant to understanding the role and symbolism of the *sala* as a contested

site for expression and participation. The chapter has raised some of the uncomfortable realities of contemporary Thai life, tending to debunk the myth of Siamese culture as a smiling, peaceful land of enlightenment, projected in government-sponsored tourist promotions. Simmering tensions, coups, corruption, spiraling violence in the south, religious division, conflict, protests and political instability are unfortunately Thailand's headlines in the 2000's. In these turbulent modern times, the *sala* has transformed and found new roles. It has been fostered as a national icon and a marker of royal space. Gardens of hotels and middle-class private homes display traditional *sala* as symbols of status, prestige, patriotism or nostalgic reverence for a lost past. At the same time, new modern forms of the *sala* have been adapted by some institutions to portray impressions of contemporary and international developments. As Thailand continues to face the fractures, trauma and turmoil, the *sala*, as a communal space for contemplation, dialogue and healing, is proposed as a metaphor for a solution that urgently needs to be found in Thai society – unity and peace.



Fig. 27

On the banks of the Mekong River, in Chiang Rai Province, this bamboo-and-thatch *sala* is a popular shady meeting place

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 28  
Motorcycle taxi drivers sling hammocks and shelter from the rain in this concrete-and-tile sala in Phuket, Southern Thailand.  
*Photo: Bruce Stanley*



Fig. 29

A traditional riverside *sala* (*sala rim nam* or *sala ta nam*) appears stranded beside the imposing mirror-glass Head Office of the Communications Authority of Thailand. Both glitter in the setting sun.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 30

In the gardens of the new Pattaya Park Condo, a new traditional-style sala was commissioned from Silpakorn University architecture instructor Somkid Jiratatsanakul

*Photo: Somkid Jiratatsanakul*



Fig. 31

This substantial private residence on Bangkok's Chaophraya River displays a western gazebo-type *sala* in a rooftop garden

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 32

A traditional-style *sala* built in 2005 in front of the new Royal Thai Navy building, Bangkok. Designed by Thanit Kityapon, President Thai Architectural Council

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 33

The modern extension to the Thammasat University Library, designed by Sumet Jumsai, includes these new *sala* which blend with the contemporary main structure

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 34

Modern designs of the *sala* in the new park at the foot of the new Rama VIII Bridge.  
*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 35

*Sala Chalermpraktiat* (Phrathinang Por Tam Chalermpraktiat Nai Luang) in the popular Santichaiprakarn Park on the banks of the Chaophraya River, Bangkok, was built in the 1995 to commemorate H.M. King Bhumibol's 4<sup>th</sup> cycle (48 years years) on the throne. Members of the public may not enter this *sala*

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 37

A traditional *sala* on the riverside of the Oriental Hotel, Bangkok.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 38

The sala of Shangri-La Hotel's popular *Sala Rim Nam* restaurant are air conditioned with glass walls

Photo: Virginia Henderson

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Fig. 39

This hotel advertisement in the Bangkok Post (April 2007) offers *magical moments, pure luxury and inspiring surroundings* if you get married in a Thai sala on the Hua Hin beach.

Photo: unknown



Fig. 40

This *sala* at the end of the infinity pool of the Royal Phuket Marina Hotel adds a Thai touch to the luxury international tourist resort. *Sala* design by Assoc. Prof. Ruthai Jaijongrak.

*Photo: Indigo Real Estate Ltd*



Fig. 41

Squeezed between the River City shopping centre and the Sheraton Hotel, this new traditional-style sala is a coffee shop and bar

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 42  
One of four traditional Thai *sala* which decorate in the new Suvarnabhumi Airport terminal.  
Design by Nond-Trungjai Architects, Planners Co, Ltd.  
*Photo: Virginia Henderson*

## Chapter 5

### Heritage and the *Sala* as the *Living Room*

The survival of the local and the methods of *conservation* generally appeal to tradition and there are associated problems establishing the authenticity of the *traditional*.

- Terrence McGee, 1994: vii

This research is interested in the role of the *sala* in Thai society and how it has transformed (in form, function and meaning) through time. The ways that the *sala* functions as a site of participation and expression and as a place for conflict resolution are questioned. This does not reduce the view of the *sala* as a cultural artefact related to formal aesthetic styles or as a chronology of forms and features, but sees it as located and co-existing amongst other cultural and socio-political systems, contexts and processes.

*Heritage*, defined and discussed in Chapters One and Two, refers to inherited traditions, customs and practices – both tangible (physical form) and intangible (symbolic meaning and significance). It involves a process of selecting features inherited from the past because of their perceived value to people and/or governments today. This chapter discusses the selection and valuation process, and the way the *sala* is supported, used and valued by people and institutions. The analysis is presented in four sections, as follows:

5.1 Valuing the Past: The Selection Process

5.2 Reading *Sala* Stories

5.3 The *Sala* amidst Change

5.4 Conclusion

### 5.1 Valuing the Past: The Selection Process

The heritage selection process discussed in this section investigates the *sala* as a selected cultural artefact and asks who has the power to make the selection and for what purposes? This section investigates the ways that groups may use culture and heritage, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain ideology and power. The position of the *sala*, promoted as a symbol of Thailand, reveals how it has been used in this process. Focusing on the *sala*, heritage and the valuation process, the section analyses how and why people value such cultural features as the *sala*, referring to the *sala*'s changing role.

Government institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and the Fine Arts Department (FAD) take an active role in prescribing, defending and upholding what they consider to be heritage. These bodies define and communicate their values through policy decisions, funding and publications. They tend to have a monolithic view that culture is something pure and fixed to be preserved and protected. From this perspective, change is a challenge and a threat. For the past century, since it was set up by King Vajiravudh in 1911, the FAD has managed the heritage fields of architecture, archaeology, history, archives, museums, literature, drama, music, performing and traditional arts. In its current mission statement, the Fine Arts Department defines its role rather loftily as:

*responsible for the protection, preservation, conservation, maintenance, revival, promotion, creation, dissemination, education, research, development and transmission of national cultural heritage to sustain value and identity of the nation<sup>1</sup>.*

FAD Deputy Director General Somlak Charoenpot explained that the Department has been *continually evolving, growing and responding to changing circumstances as it performs its duty of preserving and promoting Thai cultural heritage*. As the FAD's position and role is linked with national policy and the Thai Constitution which supposedly highlights decentralisation and democratisation, the FAD's mission states that it:

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<sup>1</sup> Fine Arts Department statement, Somlak Charoenpot, Deputy Director General

*encourages the active participation of local organisations in dealing with their specific cultural needs, assuming a new direction for cultural management via supervision, guidance and budget assistance, thus ensuring the continuity of the Fine Art Department's commitment to cultural legacy of the whole nation.*

The FAD's supervision and guidance of local organisations takes many forms, including sending FAD *experts* to community meetings to give advice. Despite the democratisation and decentralisation noted in the FAD mission statement, in Thai society's hierarchical arrangement, government officials are accorded status which translates into power to influence decisions. Local organisations may find it challenging to reject FAD suggestions, particularly where the heritage project relies on government funding. The FAD and Ministry of Culture see themselves as *defenders of Thai culture*. The Ministry of Culture's recently reissued booklet on *Thai Social Etiquette* describes an idealised nostalgic Thai society which is neither past nor present but a small segment of the society, *occupied by senior bureaucrats of the sort that work in or with the Ministry of Culture* who generally have *good surnames and private income*.<sup>2</sup> The booklet gives extensive advice on appropriate behaviour in Thailand, stressing the importance of seniority and good manners and suggesting that *one must be aware and careful of almost every gesture or movement, and also of almost every word or sentence one utters*. Social commentator Chang Noi notes the Ministry's emphasis on hierarchy and deference which supports the status quo. Beyond the essential role of promoting and preserving past and present creativity, the Ministry of Culture seems to see its mission as managing *the way things should be*, overseeing how people should live and imposing the values of an elite minority, in the name of *Thainess*. The Culture Ministry's edicts have been described as both *hilarious and tragic* (Chang Noi 2007). It has banned certain forms of dress and songs, declaring them to be *against Thai culture*, and actively censors film and contemporary art. For the Ministry of Culture, artefacts such as the traditional *sala*, which is promoted as a national symbol, communicate an appropriate image of the country which fit the nationalistic discourse, able to project the image of *Thai space*.

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<sup>2</sup> Chang Noi 13 November 2007

Architectural heritage which the FAD deems of national significance, such as *sala* commissioned by and dedicated to kings, is well maintained and placed in prominent public sites. A more enduring expression of ideas and a *national face*, architecture is considered the most political of the arts in any country. For special royal events, such as auspicious birthdays (cycles of 12 years) of members of the royal family and funerals, *sala* are funded, designed and constructed by the FAD in collaboration with the Royal Household. The following section on *Royal Sala Stories* analyses the ways in which the monarchy has, through time, enabled and supported (selected) certain *sala* in order to communicate ideas which it considers to be valuable.

Public seminars and workshops organised with communities and featuring local and international speakers, help to build greater awareness of heritage's importance and role. Some government and private educational institutions have opened courses and advanced degrees in heritage studies, including Silpakorn University's Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism international programme, Thammasat University's Cultural Management M.A programme and Chulalongkorn University's Thai Architecture.

The National Culture Commission plays a role in the heritage selection process, such as by bestowing the title of *National Artist* upon artists, architects and performers who it deems to have produced a significant body of work and contribution to the country's heritage, recognising and honouring them as *living national treasure*. The following section of *Reading Sala Stories* reveals the ways in which architects may earn such a title, how they value it and the benefits which can accrue from it.

The maintenance of built heritage in Thailand is supported by funding and expertise given by various groups with their own agendas. The restoration of monuments in the Sukhothai Historical Park, site of the ancient capital discussed in Chapter 3, was undertaken in the 1980s by the Thai and Japanese governments, UNESCO, and private donors. Although this work was criticised for alteration of archaeological evidence and *arbitrary reconstruction of monuments to suit the interests of the tourism industry* (Peleggi 1994: 85), it was listed as World Heritage in 1991.

Antique collectors are also involved in the selection of heritage. Often wealthy middle-class people with disposable income, these collectors may admire the quality and richness of old wood, value the technique and design of the finely carved motifs, appreciate the simple rustic character and fantasise about the stories engrained in the worn teak floorboards. Old wooden *sala* around the country, such as in temples and schools, are being sold off as these government-sponsored bodies implement renovation programmes. The *sala* are bought by collectors, dismantled and moved onto their land, where they may be reassembled in original form or transformed into alternative structures. In such cases, the *sala*'s role is transformed from a public communal space for gathering, sharing and learning to a private place associated with nostalgia and status-building. Thailand's most famous Benz salesman, millionaire Sia Lek Viryapan, spent many years and over 25 million baht creating his dream in *Muang Boran* (Ancient City) Historical Park, a huge map of Thailand's architectural heritage with original and reconstructed traditional buildings and *sala* on the site. Praised for the initiative and criticised for its questionable authenticity, *Muang Boran* is visited by thousands of Thai students each month.

Private businesses and banks are also taking it upon themselves to play a role in the heritage selection process, seeking to build their reputations as civic-minded organisations. Corporate social responsibility policies urge businesses to identify areas to which they will donate profits for the benefit of society. At the same time, these activities provide businesses with opportunities to advertise themselves. The Bank of Thailand and the Siam Commercial Bank, in which the Crown Property Office has significant shares, have chosen to support the restoration of some old buildings around Bangkok. These prominent structures, often colonial palaces, are given complete makeovers including enhancing floodlights, and in the case of the Siam Commercial Bank, large corporate banners displayed on the walls outside noting the sponsor of the work. Chapter Three discussed *sala* which feature in these two examples - the very modern *sala* which now dominates the Bank of Thailand's renovation of Bang Khun Prom Palace and the original bronze colonial *sala* which stands in front of the first branch of the Siam Commercial Bank.

See Fig 20 and Fig 21 P86 and P87
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This section has discussed the role and power of government agencies such as the Ministry of Culture and the Fine Arts Department in the process of selection and maintenance of heritage, specifically in the form of the *sala*, which is valued and promoted by these state agencies as a symbol of Thailand. The aura of the royal family influences the selection process which is managed by the state. However, the state does not have a monopoly on the construction of heritage. Private businesses, banks and collectors contribute to the selection process according to their own tastes and budgets. The following section digs deeper and analyses everyday *sala stories* which reveal the ways in which these groups influence the forms, functions and roles of the *sala*.

## 5.2 Reading Sala Stories

The practice of storytelling helps us to make sense of our lives. Architecture is based on stories of people and place and is related to experiences and meanings (Dovey 2001). Who gets to tell the stories, where, when and how becomes a political process. Stories which are chosen reveal what is considered to be important, from the storyteller's viewpoint. Chapter One introduced a Macro-structural view of the *sala* which mapped the agents participating in the social production of the *sala*. Each agent has a story. This section presents five stories offering perspectives on and interpretations of the *sala's* role today. The *sala* stories are drawn from field and archival research, to show how the *sala* is used by individuals, groups, communities and institutions to forward their own agendas, which may relate to social connection, health, national identity, status and the status quo.

The first, a *community sala story*, reveals how the *sala* is used and valued by various communities as a social and civic space for gathering and sharing. The *royal sala story* considers the influence of the royal family and the events in their lives in which *sala* play a role. The *national sala story* explores the ways that state-managed cultural and religious institutions use the *sala* in the process of building a Thai national identity. The *architect's sala story* shows the intricate social networks involving educational institutions and developers which lead to *sala*

<p>A community <i>sala</i> story  A royal <i>sala</i> story  A national <i>sala</i> story  An architect <i>sala</i> story  A tourist <i>sala</i> story</p>
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commissions and creation. Finally, the *tourist's sala story* offers perspective from international visitors experiencing the *sala* in the context of the hotel and tourist industry.

### ***A community sala story***

To answer the research questions relating to the *sala's* role and transformation, this section investigates the *sala's* social space through a community and civic lens. It interprets the meaning of the *sala* through analysis of its various literal and abstract forms and functions in relation to contexts and the use of space in everyday life. Lived community informal and formal spaces for engagement are discussed alongside the opportunities and responsibilities for people within the community, city and country to shape their own lives. This socio-cultural and political discussion analyses the *sala* in relation to people and power. Civic space relates to social life in the public arena – civil society – *the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interest, purposes and values*.<sup>3</sup> Civil society's institutional forms are, in theory, distinct from those of the state, family and market, although boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society includes diverse actors, institutional forms and spaces, for instance community organisations, cooperatives, activist groups, cultural groups, environmental groups, voluntary and non-profit sector, non-governmental organisations, religious organisations, men's and women's groups, trade unions and academia. These groups have varying degrees of formality, autonomy and power<sup>4</sup>. This section analyses the *sala* and civic space in relation to the processes of social and political change. In civil society, even non-political spaces and organisations play a vital role in democratic development because they help to build trust, shared values and social capital, which increase social cohesion and influence the political arena. The *sala's* role is explored as a social space for participation and expression – both political and cultural.

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<sup>3</sup> London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society website  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/>

<sup>4</sup> London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society website  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/>

The *sala* supports civic engagement by connecting individuals with the larger community. In the *sala*, people gather together, in small or large groups, chatting in a relaxed way, often sharing food and stories, perhaps improvising a small picnic or party with singing, joking and laughter. Such fundamental interactions help to build social cohesion, networks and kinship. In rural areas, community groups use the local village *sala* as a central gathering point for meetings on issues which may influence their lives and impact the development of the area. In this way, the *sala*'s role is that of a neutral space for bringing parties together to participate in the administration of the village. It is an integral part of the connected, open sense of community that characterises traditional Thai culture. At meetings in the village *sala*, ideas and opinions are expressed and exchanged. Issues which affect the group are raised, proposals for plans and changes which may have impact on the community are presented and debated. Suggestions for activities and future development are considered, and administrative duties and obligations of people in positions of responsibility in the community are clarified through negotiation. In this way, the *sala* is seen as a forum for ideas. The process of sharing ideas, talking, listening and spending time together in the *sala* space builds a sense of unity and solidarity.

A key social space in the community, the *sala* is a site of participation and expression and negotiation. Known as a *living room* by some Thais, the *sala* has a multi-functional role serving the community and users as they need. The traditional *sala* in rural Thailand, built in the centre of the village, is a communal public meeting place, open to everyone and a centre for the sharing of news and ideas. People in the community may decide or be invited or be requested to donate their money, time and labour to build a community *sala*. Social bonds are strengthened in the process of participating in the project, working together to build a facility to develop the community. This donation may be related to the construction of temple *sala* which is seen as a merit-making activity in the Buddhist context,<sup>5</sup> though community *sala* are not necessarily and often are not within the temple compound. Community *sala* construction can also be funded from district administration budgets which are administered by local councils and an elected village

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<sup>5</sup> Higher merit accrues to the act of building rather than repairing, hence low priority to the maintenance of temple *sala*.

head (*poo yai bahn*) who becomes a significant and powerful figure in the community daily life, negotiating with higher authorities and influencing decisions, such as the construction, maintenance and use of the *sala*.

A photo of a *sala* in an Isaan village, taken in the

See Fig 43 Village *sala* in Isaan, circa 1930 P147

Fig 44 Sharing food in a rice field *sala* in Chiang Rai P148

1930s, shows a large wood-and-grass thatched *sala* with broad eaves for good shade and raised above the ground on pillars to avoid flooding, ideally suited to the climate and environment. Chapter Three noted the origins of the *sala* as simple living spaces for people in tropical regions. The village *sala* is large enough for a mass of people to sit together and is a key gathering space used for community activities such as celebrations, meetings and group learning and training. Large events in the community such as a wedding or an ordination bring people to the *sala*, spending nights and days beforehand working together to prepare food and decoration for the celebration. Community meetings and workshops arranged by visiting development workers are held in the central *sala*, seen as the common space for gathering ideas and building consensus around plans for change. In daily life, people stop at the *sala* to take a short rest in the shade as they pass by, meeting friends, chatting and passing the time of day, sharing stories, gossip and snacks and sometimes taking a nap. Private personal space can be limited in Thai houses shared by many people, hence the *sala* has been and is used as a *place to get a way* and spend some time quietly, reflecting on life challenges and plans. The open-air atmosphere of the traditional *sala* is conducive for connecting with nature, meditation and contemplation. In parks and along roadsides, the *sala* is used as a place to rest and wait, literally a bus-stop on main roads.

See Fig 45 *Sala* as a resting place P149

Fig 46 *Sala* provides shade in Ayudhya Historical Park P150

Fig 47 *Sala* as a bus stop P151

*Sala* near bodies of water are particularly popular in late afternoon and among young men who like to go fishing. They are also seen by elders in the community as *safe* areas where young girls and boys can meet and socialise in plain view of the rest of the community. A place for games and flirtation, the *sala* is also a site and symbol of rural romance and has also been portrayed this way in the media. Popular country music (*look*

*thung*) singer Poifai Malaiporn's hit music video *Sala Daeng Haeng Kwarm Larng* tells the classic story of a poor young country boy who falls in love with a young woman in a *sala daeng* (red pavilion). They flirt but the woman eventually goes off with an SUV-driving rich man and he's left alone and broken-hearted. In this scenario, the *sala* represents the romantic but impoverished life in the countryside which in the end cannot compete with the power and allure of the big city.

The impacts of development, modernisation and urbanisation, discussed in Chapter Four have led to changes in the village community *sala*'s role, form, function and meaning. In large provincial towns, the *sala klang* (central pavilion or Town Hall) is an important place for the community as it houses the government offices of provincial administration, which people must visit to register life events such as births, deaths and marriages, and to obtain information and documents including passports and driving licenses. Today these are large, imposing, modern, air-conditioned buildings surrounded by Thai flags, promoting the *sala klang* as national space, rather than local community space. Thailand's development has historically been driven from the Bangkok capital, the seat of parliament, banking, business and the royal family. The core-periphery theory outlined in Chapter Two illuminates the workings of power imbalances and the ways that centralisation and decentralisation may affect people's daily lives. Large and increasing gaps between rural and urban standards of living, including income, education, healthcare and other critical areas, discussed in Chapter Four, have created larger divisions within the society at large. Bangkok stretches ahead of the rest of the country in terms of development, infrastructure, job opportunities and salaries. Other regions and rural areas in the North, Northeast and South of Thailand have long called for decentralisation and autonomy at grassroots level, through local councils which meet in the *sala*. People seek to participate and influence the decisions which affect the development of their village or provincial town and their lives. Contested spaces and conflicting ideologies are the story of Thailand today. In the political arena, there is no *sala* – calm, peaceful space for reflection and conflict transformation while it seems the country is yearning for that.

At the same time, in increasingly large urban areas, urban planning and architectural design appear to cater to clients who prioritise returns on commercial property, reducing community public areas available for people to access and connect with nature. What is needed is more *sala* space and parks. In Bangkok's sprawling urban areas, communities struggle to find their own informal space for participation and expression of shared interest, purpose and values. The city's few parks, including Lumpini Park, Bangkok's largest public park, are lively social spaces in mornings and evenings. Formerly known as *Sala Daeng* field and donated by Rama VI in 1925, Lumpini Park features a variety of *sala* which are used by social and sporting clubs to mark their space. Before dawn, in corners of the park, groups set up to practise their traditional keep-fit techniques which are cultural expressions serving to strengthen social networks and help people stay physically and mentally healthy.

For the *chi kung* practitioners, the *sala* functions as a base and a site for gathering and socialising before and after the exercise session which blasts loud Chinese music. The morning ritual of drinking tea and talking politics in and around the *sala* is performed by groups of Chinese-Thais seeking to sustain their community cultural roots and identity. A gift from China to celebrate King Bhumibol's 72nd birthday in 1997, the elaborate bright red octagonal *sala* decorated with classical Chinese lanterns and yellow fretwork becomes a community and national marker of space. *Sala* which catch the most favourable breeze and *chi* (vital energy) are popular sites. In the sharing of the *sala* space, interaction occurs naturally among individuals and members of different groups. The open *sala* space is welcoming and people enter seeking to calmly experience the natural environment. Elderly Chinese men chat in Mandarin alongside young joggers taking a rest and a homeless woman sitting quietly with her bags. The *sala* in Lumpini Park, now locked at night, have in the past been used as overnight shelters by migrants, street children and other young and old homeless people trying to *make do*. Socio-economic conditions which have led to the *sala* being used in this way have been discussed in Chapter Four. In a large traditional Thai *sala* in another corner of Lumpini Park, couples

See Fig 48 Ballroom dancing club in a *sala* in Lumpini Park P152

Fig 49 Dancers in a *sala* P153

Fig 50 Joggers stretching in a northern-style *sala* P154

Fig 51 Chinese *sala* at Lumpini Park P155

of ballroom dancers swirl and dip to the waltz and cha-cha, gliding their dancing shoes over the smooth marble *sala* floor which dates back to the 1940s. The selection of various *sala* laid out in the natural setting of Lumpini Park might also be read as a text, a biography of the experience of the city of Bangkok. Formal and informal, simple and elaborate, regional examples and Victorian, Khmer and Chinese *sala* are all represented.

An Islamic-style *sala* greets visitors entering Bangkok's Masjid Tuk Daeng Mosque by boat from the Chaophraya River. Representative of Thailand's Moslem community, which comprises approximately five percent of the country's population, largely based in the troubled three southern provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, this *sala* is a site and symbol of both conflict and peace. As people pass and gather in the distinctive onion-topped *sala* to discuss the issues of the day, the escalating violence in the insurgency in the south is an urgent topic. Ideas for dealing with the conflict and negotiating towards peace are shared by concerned elders who take care of the mosque and *sala*. In neighbouring Cambodia, a community participation programme funded by the Asian Development Bank has built a series of district *sala* as community meeting places to foster dialogue and engagement. The *sala klang*, provincial government administration offices in Thailand's provincial cities, are repositories of information on citizens' lives. Records of births, marriages, divorces and deaths are registered at the *sala klang*, along with the issuing of identity cards and driving and other business licences. In Bangkok, the *Sala Wah Klang Krung Thep Mahanakorn* is the headquarters of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) central administration office.

<p>See Fig 52 Islamic <i>sala</i> at Masjid Tuk Daeng Mosque P156          Fig 53 Community <i>sala</i> built by ADB in Cambodia P157          Fig 54 <i>Sala Wah Klang</i>, Bangkok P158</p>
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This section has interpreted the *sala* as a community place for meeting, coming together, connecting and sharing, exchange and encounter, performance and celebration, all of which are valued by Thai people in their social life. The *sala* is read as a place which supports social cohesion and the development of networks. As a contested site of expression and participation, the *sala* is a forum for ideas, negotiation and conflict resolution. It enhances communication by providing flexible, open-sided, *open-minded* space. While it brings people together and offers shelter, rest and support, the *sala* is

also a place for learning new things, exercising the mind and the body. The construction and use of a *sala* is a community's way of expressing itself, within the power structures that exist in social life.

### ***A royal sala story***

Classical Thai architecture reveals a hierarchy of forms and decoration, with specific styles for ordinary, royal or religious contexts, which should not be mixed. Royal architecture follows specific guidelines regarding proportions, design and decoration. It is considered inappropriate for royal design to be used in other contexts, such as private homes or common public spaces. The significance of the elaborate architectural classification scheme is to delineate and mark royal space and *empower* it with auspicious and prestigious symbols. Traditional decorations often feature intricately carved details and the application of prestigious materials such as gold, with its aura of wealth and permanence, lacquer, mother of pearl and glass mosaic, believed to reflect evil. Through design and decorative elements, it links royal space with the space of gods, reaffirming legitimacy and power.

Royal *sala* play significant roles in court rituals of the present and past, including coronations, tonsurates and cremations. Royal coronations are elaborate ceremonies involving a specially-constructed ceremonial *sala* as a bathing or ablution

pavilion. In a ritual which is thought to date back to ancient Indian tradition, the Chief Brahmin invites the king to take a ceremonial bath of purification and anointment three or four days before the coronation (Naengnoi 1996). For coronations of the nine kings of the present Chakri dynasty, the bathing *sala* have been erected near *Phra Thinang Amarin Winichai* throne hall in the Grand Palace compound in Bangkok. To celebrate His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ascension to the throne in 2006, a new *Sala Phratiinang* throne was installed in the Grand Palace grounds. The tonsurate ceremony involved the shaving of the topknot (*sokan*) of a royal offspring at the age of 13

See Fig 55 *Sala* in bathing ceremony before coronation of King Rama VII P159

Fig 56 *Sala* in royal tonsurate ceremony of Prince Chulalongkorn P160

Fig 57 *Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok Prasat* – *sala* as throne hall P161

Fig 58 Pyre with *sala* built for King Rama IV's funeral P162

years, the oncoming of puberty, and was last performed in 1932 before the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy. Similar lavish ceremonies celebrating important royal events were also supposedly ended. The photo of the 1865 tonsure ceremony of Prince Chulalongkorn seen in Figure 5.13 shows King Mongkut (Rama IV) standing behind in the *Sala Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok Prasat* throne hall. The small *Phrathinang Aporn Phimok Prasat* built for King Rama IV is considered to *epitomize all the finest qualities of Thai architecture, in style, proportion and details* and a replica was sent to the 1958 World Fair in Brussels.

Funeral pyres for Thai cremations are *sala* known as *Phra Meru*, symbolizing Mount Meru (*Sumeru* or *Merumas*), the home of the gods and centre of the Brahmin-Buddhist universe. The *sala* is seen as a temporary resting point as the spirit moves from one world into another. The height of the funeral pyre *sala* communicates a person's social status – the higher the *sala sowd sop* (cremation pavilion) the greater merit the person is believed to have accumulated in life. While the crematorium or funeral pyre for commoners (*sala sowd* or *sala thum*) is less ornate, for royal cremations, the pyre itself and other pavilions surrounding it, for officials, members of the royal family and an elaborate pavilion for the king, are all built of new materials and never used again (Naengnoi 1996: 146).

Detailed planning and considerable budget are given to these royal *sala*. The funeral pyre for the Mae Faa Luang, the mother of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, was a lofty 37 metres high. In January 2008, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthorn selected the final design for a *sala* to be built by the Fine Arts Department in Sanam Luang for the cremation of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana, the king's sister, which takes place in November 2008. The funeral pyre-*sala* is to have a castle-style high-ceiling roof, four balconies, decorated entirely with traditional wall ornaments and to be topped with a seven-tier white Sawettachatra umbrella to symbolise high royalty. Cabinet approved a budget of 300 million baht (US\$0 million) of state funds to pay for the royal funeral *sala*. However, the monarchy does not depend on state funding due to the

economic strength of the Crown Property Bureau.<sup>6</sup> Some funerals of high-ranking Thais are royally-sponsored.

Royal *sala* built in public spaces, such as that built in place of a 1920s movie theatre at the foot of *Wat Saket* or Golden Mount (Askew 2002; 235) and the *Chalermprakit Sala* built in 1995<sup>7</sup> in the popular riverside park near Phra Athit Road can be interpreted as contested space. Both popular public spaces have been transformed by the ornate royal *sala* which are forbidden for commoners to enter. The large and elaborate *Sala Samranmukkamat* built by Rama V in 1903 is a commanding structure in the public grounds of the National Museum, formerly palace land.

See Fig 59 *Sala Samranmukkamat* built by Rama V P163

Gifts of royal *sala* have been made by His Majesty King Bhumibol to Hawaii, Hamburg, Tel-Aviv and Lausanne. The original 1967 East West Center *sala*, discussed in Chapter Three with reference to the fostering of Thai-U.S. relations during the Cold War, was rebuilt and rededicated by HRH Princess Sirinthorn in March 2008. Retaining the original title of *Pratinang Patiharn Tasanai* (Throne of the Miracle Vision), the impressive new ornate *sala* catches eyes as its heavy gold leaf glitters. Similarly, the elaborate *sala* for Lausanne, marking the 17 years His Majesty lived there early in his life, is described in tourist literature as a *gift of gold*. The aura of gold projects an image of the *sala* as a royal-sacred space of merit and status. In both these contexts, the royal *sala* gifts become markers of Thailand in foreign countries, extending the country's borders and space and promoting the golden treasure of the nation.

See Fig 60 *Sala* gifted to Hamburg P164

Fig 61 *Sala* gifted to Lausanne (2007) P165

<sup>6</sup> The business arm of Thailand's royal family, the Crown Property Bureau's wealth has been estimated at 1.123 trillion baht (US\$3 billion), most of which is in landed property in central Bangkok, known to be 8,835 rai (552.18 hectares), banking (Siam Commercial Bank), cement, petrochemicals and insurance (Porphant Ouyyanont, economist at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2007 Journal of Contemporary Asia).

<sup>7</sup> *Sala Chalermprakit* is dedicated to Rama IX 4<sup>th</sup> cycle on the throne

### ***A national sala story***

The traditional Thai *sala* (*salathai*) is known among Thais and foreigners familiar with the country as a symbol of Thailand (*sanyalak kong prathet thai*) and of Thai architecture.<sup>8</sup>

The gifting of a national symbol or treasure, such as a *sala* is interpreted as an expression or gesture of friendship between countries and international institutions, boosting relations, cultural understanding and peace-building efforts. The Thai *sala* gifted to the East West Center in Hawaii, as discussed above in the *Royal Sala Story*, is situated amongst large trees near other gifts to the Center, including the Japanese Tea House and Garden and the Korean Palace, each supposedly representing an example of the country's *best*, a national face. Walking in the Center's *Asian garden* is an architectural, educational and cultural adventure. Through gifting a *sala*, Thailand participates in the international cultural exchange ritual which has been honoured for centuries, since curious early travellers first visited new places, offering gifts in exchange for new ideas and opportunities. Akin to a *twinning* of countries or the beginnings of a Memorandum of Understanding, *sala diplomacy*, as in the gifting a Thai *sala*, requires considerable resources including national budget allocation, time and effort by architects, builders, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies and involves ceremony and protocol. Diplomatic ties between Thailand and Israel which began in 1998 were marked by the building of a Thai *sala* in Tel-Aviv.

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Thailand has participated in International Exhibitions and World Fairs, sending its finest examples of arts and crafts to impress foreign audiences. At the 1911 Turin Exposition, the Italian media wrote glowing descriptions of the Thai *sala* and architecture, reporting how impressed European visitors were by the sight of the exotic eastern *sala*. Through See Fig 62 Thai sala 1964 World Fair P166 the years of participating in international fairs, the Thai Pavilion has earned a reputation for its elaborate details and finery. The Thai *sala* at the New York World's Fair 1964-1965, *Peace through Understanding*, was

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<sup>8</sup> Dendao Silpanoon, Curator, National Museum, Bangkok

popular for its ornate red-and-gold high roof (*mondop*). In 1997, residents in the northern town of Utanede, Sweden, raised money and arranged with the Thai government for a Thai *sala* to be built to mark a century since King Chulalongkorn visited Stockholm's Art and Industry Exhibition and traveled to the upcountry town. Much of the year under snow, this *sala* links the two countries and marks an historical event which some people in the Swedish town feel to be significant.

The *sala* is promoted as a national icon by Thai government efforts through its Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, the Fine Arts Department, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and other bodies, working together. The grounds of government buildings frequently feature prominent traditional *sala*, which appear to be more as decorative visual cues than functional space. Rarely used, these *sala* such as the one in the grounds of the new Royal Thai Navy Headquarters are patriotic symbols and reminders of the country's traditional architectural techniques. Chapter Four analysed the ways that *sala* have been used to project an image of the nation in the context of dynamic socio-politico-economic events. The Thai nation's alternative face of modernity and internationalism is seen projected in Thammasat University's new *sala*.

See Fig 32 Royal Thai Navy *sala* P111

Fig 33 Thammasat University new *sala* P112

The extent to which the *sala* in Thailand has evolved and been transformed by international influences as a result of Thailand's participation in the global arena is discussed in Chapter Three. Reflections of the image of the Thai nation's through time can be seen in the *sala*. Reference to the Victorian *sala* installed at Bang Pa Inn Palace which King Chulalongkorn felt showed the Siamese nation as *open and civilised* at the turn of the 20th century and the popular ornate red Chinese *sala* in Lumpini Park gifted to King Bhumibol in 1997 which reveals the significant presence of the Chinese community in Thailand tell their own stories of change in the country.

See Fig 19 Victorian *sala* (1897) P85

Fig 51 Chinese *sala* (1997) P155

This *national sala story* concludes by relating the *sala* to the Grand Palace, which is promoted by Thai authorities as a key symbol of the country, a gem of beauty and a national treasure. The *sala* at Wat Phra Kaew in the Grand Palace encircle the *ubosot* (ordination hall) of the Emerald Buddha and provide resting places for devotees visiting the temple. In the centre of the capital, in the monarch's original residence and adorned with golden images of Hindu gods (Indra-Vishnu-Rama) and celestial beings (*garuda* bird god of the sky and *naga* serpent god of the underworld), the *sala* plays a role in linking this unique *Thai* experience of religious, royal and national history.

See Fig 63 <i>Sala</i> at the Grand Palace P167
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### ***An architect's sala story***

As a national icon, the *sala* is in demand and some architects including Wanida Phungsoonthorn and Pinyo Suwanakiri have made their careers from and around the *sala*. Both honoured with the title of National Artists in Architecture under the National Cultural Commission's annual awards, these architects are regularly commissioned by the Thai government to design *sala*, such as those gifted to foreign countries, discussed in the previous sections.

Traditional Thai art in the past was unsigned and anonymous, undertaken as a merit-making activity and a religious offering. Today in Thailand, the profession of architect is prestigious and wealth generating and commissions for *sala* can be generous. Working within Thai architecture's rigid regulations for royal, religious and vernacular architecture, including codes for proportions and ratios, architects endeavour to show their individual style and skill, to build a reputation for quality.

The connections between members of the same educational year and institute, ethnic community, business and family can lead to work opportunities for the selection and construction of *sala*. Public and private projects hold competitions inviting architects to submit proposals or the architect may be commissioned outright to design and build the *sala*.

Instructors from Silpakorn University, recognised as Thailand's central institute of art, are regularly approached to advise and participate in state and independent architectural projects, including the building of *sala*. Wanida Phungsoonthorn is respected for her skill in Thai architecture and her projects are big religious buildings, including *sala sot sop* (cremation pavilion), *sala thong* (large pavilion) and *sala kam parian* (pavilion for learning in temple). Wanida was commissioned by the Thai government to design Thailand's *sala* at the Buddha's birthplace in Lumpini, Nepal and her *Sala Ton Pak Nua* (northern style *sala*) built in 1996 and situated in Rama IX Park is dedicated to His Majesty King Bhumibol. Other Silpakorn architects including Trungjai Buranasomphop and Somkid Jiratatsanakul have been invited to design art for public projects such as the Suvarnabhumi Airport which opened in 2006.

Pinyo Suwanakiri was raised as a temple boy where he received his early education and was encouraged to draw, developing a skill of designing using two hands simultaneously - which in later life added to his reputation and TV charisma. With a government scholarship, Pinyo studied and taught in the architecture faculty of Thailand's prestigious Chulalongkorn University. He received the honour of Royal Architect and undertook international commissions from the government during the 1990s when his brother Trairong was Deputy Minister of Finance. The *sala* he designed and built for the Thai government in Hamburg, Tel-Aviv and Hawaii have made national and international headlines. In Canada, commissioned by a wealthy private client, Pinyo designed and built a traditional Thai-style spa made of cedar wood and water heated to melt the snow. Following in the family tradition, Pinyo's daughter is also now a Royal Architect, specialising in *sala*.

See Fig 64 Pinyo Suwanakiri sketching *sala* details P168

Fig 65 Sketch of *sala* at East West Center P169

Fig 66 Sketch of *sala* at East West Center P170

Fig 67 Sketch of *sala* at East West Center – floorplan P171

Fig 68 Team of artisans building East West Center *sala* P172

Fig 69 Example of Thai joinery P173

Fig 70 Detail of wood carving on royal architecture P174

Fig 71 Roof finials – *naga* and *chao fa* P175

Fig 72 New *sala* at East West Center (2007) P176

Beyond the initial design, the architect needs to work with a team of craftspeople to construct the traditional *sala* according to the specific instructions and preparation. Dr Pinyo regularly uses the same group of artisans who are familiar with his working style. Care is taken to align the structure with the cardinal points with the front of structures facing east. Similar to the construction of a traditional Thai house, the *sala* may require several hundred pieces of teak wood interlocked with a special joinery technique of Thai traditional architecture which uses no nails. Instead planks of wood are hinged or locked together, enabling the structure to be easily dismantled and reassembled in another location. In the case of the new *sala* for the East West Center in Hawaii which featured intricate royal decorative designs and was completed in 2007, Dr Pinyo's team of craftsmen carved, painted and assembled the *sala* in a Bangkok workshop before it was disassembled and shipped to Honolulu. There it was reassembled onsite taking approximately one month. Before the team of artisans begins erecting the *sala*, a ceremony is conducted to prepare the ground by making offerings, paying respect and asking for blessing. In the construction process, donated items such as money and toy cars are buried underneath the floor pillars. This is believed to appease the *naga* (god of the underground or owner of the land living beneath) and bring prosperity to the structure and the people within it.

### ***A tourist sala story***

A key revenue earner for Thailand, the tourism industry is supported by government policy and generates many jobs. The interplay of tourism and the *sala* has been analysed in Chapter Four on *Amazing Unseen Thailand*. This *tourist sala story* reveals the experiences and impressions of local and international tourists encountering the *sala*.

In Thai tourism literature, pictures of the traditional Thai *sala* feature alongside other icons such as the elephant and orchid, reinforcing a national image and promoting the country as a place of art and nature. The growth of wellbeing and health businesses in international tourism has encouraged an increase in the number of spas and resorts in Thailand, many of which feature *sala*. Scattered along the beaches and near pools and

lakes, the *sala* attracts people. Among tourists, the *sala* is appreciated for the *superb Thai architecture, the beauty of the space, the lovely open space, its welcoming and friendly atmosphere and the connection with nature.*<sup>9</sup> An Australian tourist commented, *The sala on the beach at Koh Man Nok really made our beach holiday. We could sit there all day with the breeze and make it our own space. We ate there, played scrabble there – it was our space and very pleasant.*

Tourists also appreciate the *sala* as a healing space for massage and yoga. International resorts such as the Banyan Tree in Phuket and the Maldives advertise massage in outdoor Thai *sala*, suggesting that the *sala* experience extends beyond Thailand. Yoga Centre Samui promotes itself with pictures of its hilltop yoga *sala* drawing yogis looking to practise in a place with space which *lets in the elements and is not enclosed.*<sup>10</sup>

For other tourists, the *sala* experience can be in the form of an air-conditioned Thai restaurant or an airport photo opportunity, as noted in Chapter Four. The traditional wooden *sala* decorating the new Suvarnabhumi Airport's arrival and departure lounges give international and Thai travellers their first and final images of Thailand, reinforcing the iconic status of the *sala* in Thai culture. More like a shopping centre than a transport hub, the airport itself is a national showcase. The design of all four airport *sala* is central-Thai style, subtly reaffirming the dominance of the capital and central region of the country. No visitors are allowed to step inside these *sala*, giving an impression that they are sacred-royal space or monuments rather than a community living space. Designed by Silpakorn University architects with a budget of 12 million baht, the ornate, traditional wooden *sala* clash markedly with the futuristic structure of the airport, further reflecting the contrasts and conflicts within Thailand today

See Fig 73 <i>Sala</i> at departure gate of Suvarnabhumi Airport P177
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<sup>9</sup> Thai and foreign tourists and long-term residents of Thailand

<sup>10</sup> Yoga practitioner

### 5.3 The *Sala* amidst Change

This section considers the *sala* in the changing world, introduced in Chapter Two in a discussion on modernity and analysed further in Chapter Four on recent socio-politico-economic events and the *sala*. It speculates about changing roles and forms of *sala* within the context and impact of urbanisation, communication technology and consumer spaces. In what ways are *sala* sites of participation and expression? Where are the *sala* in the city today?

As masses of people continue to move to live in cities, social and environmental problems including congestion and crowding, crime, traffic, pollution and diminishing natural space are exacerbated. *Sala* space is squeezed, traditional communities lose their centres and social isolation increases. Described by Walter Benjamin as the *dreamworld of the collective*, with *multiple orders and disorders*, large cities such as Bangkok are chaotic and multi-layered.

As rapid technological change has revolutionised the speed of communication, the internet and mobile telephones offer new opportunities for socialising. Proliferating at astounding rates across socio-economic, geographic and cultural boundaries, mobile phones are changing the way we organise ourselves, and interact with each other. Virtual communities are built online and the popularity of electronic social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace offer alternative modes of social interaction, meeting and chatting – activities which traditionally took place in a *sala* – without leaving home. Thailand's first internet server was named *Salanet*, reflecting the concept of the *sala* as a meeting point for participation, exchange and expression of ideas.

Today, the dominant social and commercial space in Thai urban social life is the shopping centre. The two realities of the traditional *sala* and the shopping centre co-exist. In parts of Bangkok,<sup>11</sup> the traditional form of the *sala* is still observable while in other areas it has been taken over by commercial space, including shopping centers. As people seek interactions, the shopping centre is increasingly the only place to go. A site

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<sup>11</sup> Traditional *sala* are found along the banks of the Chaophraya River and canals (*klongs*),

for participation and expression of ideas, the shopping mall is a display of status, wealth and material goods. Billed as *lifestyle centres* offering *everything you could ever want in your life*, these vast air-conditioned hyper-shopping malls in the city centre and suburbs attract customers looking for new ideas and experiences, as well as those who simply find these to be the convenient comfortable meeting places in the city. The question is whether and in what ways these new shopping malls or *cathedrals of consumption* (Kowinski 1985: 218, Ritzer 1993: 5) may be considered as new-age *sala* for the urban middle class? Some Thai architects and anthropologists feel uncomfortable with this analogy, yet agree that malls provide social places and people in cities today tend to spend leisure time in shopping centres engaging in activities for relaxation and fun.

The blurring of public and private space is seen in shopping centres which have the atmosphere of a public space but are privately owned. In these *quasi-public hybrid* spaces, the space is controlled, replacing the former communal cultural and public spaces which met needs for leisure, like parks and open spaces – and *sala* (Hall and Page 2005). Highly-managed and secure areas like malls reduce the perception of fear but are criticised for leading to a sense of placelessness where people do not develop a positive relationship with the places or space of leisure. This may be debatable in the case of the Bangkok mall and further research is required to establish the relationships people have with the shopping centres in their lives. Although they are hermetically-sealed and air-conditioned, shopping centres have a physical layout and sense of space similar to a *sala*, with large open central atrium.

Two competing groups own most of the shopping centres in Bangkok. The Sino-Thai Chirathivat family owns the Central Department Store chain which includes the staggering CentralWorld megamall, Bangkok's largest *shopping and lifestyle complex* featuring a 500-room five-star hotel, a convention centre, 500 shops, 50 restaurants, 18 cinemas, two department stores, the biggest bookshop and supermarket in town, a vast outdoor activity area and a bowling hall. Opened in 2006 and costing 26 billion baht, the complex is 830,000 square metres – 30 percent bigger than any other shopping mall in Thailand and an extremely large *sala*, if it were to be seen as such. President and CEO Kobchai Chirathivat attributed Central's increased sales during 2007 to stronger spending

by affluent customers and explained that the mall takes its form out of capitalism. He felt it gives Thailand a *new deep dimension offering all kinds of retail experience imaginable...anything you could want in your life*. Describing a global trend, he noted that people today *yearn for something extreme, outstanding and unique* that can satisfy and fulfill their dreams – *they don't just want to buy something, they want a new pleasurable feeling...a real life shopping experience*. Similarly, owners of the Emporium and Paragon shopping centres, known for their luxury imported goods and elaborate exhibitions, cater to wealthy high-society with international tastes and substantial incomes. Displays of wealth and status, these shopping centres are elite space. The *habitus* of dominant culture and class, discussed in Chapter Two, is exhibited in the ownership and participation in luxury shopping centres.

Second-level shopping centres, rather large supermarkets, such as Big C, Carrefour and Tesco Lotus, offering goods at lower prices and catering to families, are favoured by less affluent people still seeking to participate in the *shopping centre carnival*. Sombat, a 66-year old housekeeper (*mae baan*) and her friends treat themselves by walking to Tesco Lotus in Bangplad to spend Sunday afternoons strolling around in the air conditioning, playing (*len len*) and looking around (*doo cheuy chuey*) - window shopping. They may buy some small goods and snacks there, but the main aim is to be with other people, look at pretty things, be amongst the action, and to see what others are doing, wearing and buying. They can go with no money to just window shop and still be part of *something*. In this context, the shopping centre is a *20 baht meeting point* and a place for participation and expression - a *sala*,

Bangkok's deluxe international-style shopping centres are more sumptuous than those in the West. In a modern capitalist way, they can be seen as mirrors of King Chulalongkorn's modernisation strategy to avoid colonization a century ago, attempts to show to the world that Thailand is a civilised (*siwilai*) nation. These luxury hypermarkets are also inversions of the early World's Fair *sala* – instead of Thailand's exotic treasures which are on display and fascinate the rest of the world, it is the expensive imported products which titillate the Thais.

Urban planning today apparently favours consumer spaces, despite people yearning for communal space with nature – *sala* space and parks. Responding to the customer desire for nature and novelty, shopping centres are now offering *versions* of nature for shoppers. Siam Paragon's<sup>12</sup> Undersea World in downtown Bangkok features an artificial tropical rainforest installed underneath the concrete and streets. A *Living Wall* in the lobby and open space with fountains endeavour to *naturalise* the built space, creating a *sala*-like meeting space popular among young and old. During November 2007, Emporium Shopping Centre installed a *jungle-zoo* complete with rare animals, exotic flowers and air-conditioning units peeping out of the banana palms. In these contexts, *created nature* is an inauthentic commodity, drawing crowds of city dwellers longing to *touch nature* and take home a photo of the experience. This may seem far from the experience of sitting in a traditional rural *sala*, yet for urban middle class dwellers it may be as close as it gets.

Just as the *sala* is a site for participation and a forum for ideas and debate, Bangkok shopping centres today have become places for political protest and conflict. Tensions and conflict under ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra were expressed by demonstrations in Siam Paragon and CentralWorld shopping centres, high-profile locations ensuring reach and media coverage. In this way the mall, like the *sala*, is a community centre for the exchange and transmission of ideas, a place for news.

### **Conclusion**

This section has investigated the *sala* amidst the changing modern context of communities dislocated as a result of urbanization, alternative spaces for social interaction as a consequence of technological innovations such as the mobile phone and internet, and the increasing presence of shopping centres in urban life. It has noted the phenomenon of globalization and localisation occurring side by side, responding to each other and the challenges to balance these forces. A new archetype for the *sala* is projected in the shopping centre, a contemporary social centre, meeting point and place

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<sup>12</sup>Siam Paragon was formerly the site of the Siam Intercontinental Hotel, a green haven with elegant traditional Thai *sala* in the middle of extensive grounds, a popular wedding venue.

for encounter and exchange of ideas among the urban middle class. In these open public-private spaces, owners and customers participate in the display of status, wealth and material goods. Used as a site for political debate and protest, the shopping centre role today as a forum for expressing ideas, participating in exchanges and gathering community support reflects that of the traditional *sala*. The shopping-centre-as-*sala* paradigm presents a modern interpretation which recognises change in *sala* form but persistence of function and meaning, as a site for participation and expression and a centre of Thai social life.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the *sala* in relation to the concept of *heritage*, investigating this process of valuing and selecting features inherited from the past because of their perceived value to people and/or governments today. It has discussed the ways that those in positions of power, such as government institutions including the Ministry of Culture, Fine Arts Department, educational institutes, the monarchy, banks and business people use their power to shape an image of the country – the way they would like it to be – adopting the *sala* as a tool to forward their agendas. Formal representations and collective expressions of the *sala* have been explored as well as the personal and individual use of *sala* as an informal space for social gathering.

In different contexts and ways, the *sala* is used by individuals, groups, communities, architects, developers, educational, cultural and religious institutions, tourists, the hotel and tourist industries, the royal family and the state.

Through the relating and reading of various *sala* stories, the chapter has explored how and why people today value the *sala*, as a community civic space supporting social cohesion, a symbol of royalty, a national icon, a sign of wealth and prestige, a cultural and artistic expression, a place for wellbeing and health and a way to maintain the status quo. In this complex process, competing global and local forces collide and shape the *sala*'s changing role.



Fig. 43  
A village sala photographed by Prince Damrong on his travels to Isaan (North-eastern Thailand)  
*Photo: National Archive, undated photo, circa 1935*



Fig. 44  
Sharing food in a rice field *sala*, Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand.  
*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 45  
This *sala* in Ayudhya is an ideal place to catch the breeze  
*Photo: Jacqueline Bert*



Fig. 46

A sala in Ayudhya Historical Park. The Ayudhya Kingdom flourished during 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Photo: Jacqueline Bert



Fig. 47  
A typical roadside *sala* which is used as a bus stop  
Photo: Jacqueline Bert



Fig. 48

Early each morning, keen ballroom dancers gather to practice in this traditional *sala* in Lumpini Park

*Photo: Jacqueline Bert*



Fig. 49  
Ballroom dancers practising in a *sala* in Lumpini Park  
*Photo: Jacqueline Bert*



Fig. 50  
Joggers stretch and relax in this northern-style sala with *gaulair* roof finial (perhaps symbol of buffalo horns), located just inside the front gate of Lumpini Park, Bangkok's largest public park.  
Photo: Jacqueline Bert



Fig. 51

This Chinese-style *sala* beside a lake in Lumpini Park was a gift from the Chinese community in 1997 on the occasion of H.M. King Bhumibol's 6<sup>th</sup> cycle (72<sup>nd</sup>) birthday

*Photo: Jacqueline Bert*



Fig. 52  
An Islamic-style *sala* in front of Masjid Tuk Daeng Mosque on the Chaophraya River, Bangkok  
*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 53

One of the many district community *sala* built in Cambodia since 2003 under an Asian Development Bank grant to provide meeting space for Commune Councils.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 54

*Sala Wah Klang*, the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) central administration offices (City Hall) in Sao Ching Sa district of the capital. *Sala Klang* (City Hall/Town Hall) are found in all large provincial towns and function as repositories for information such as the registration of births, deaths, marriages, licences, and other such official records.

*Photo: Virginia Henderson*

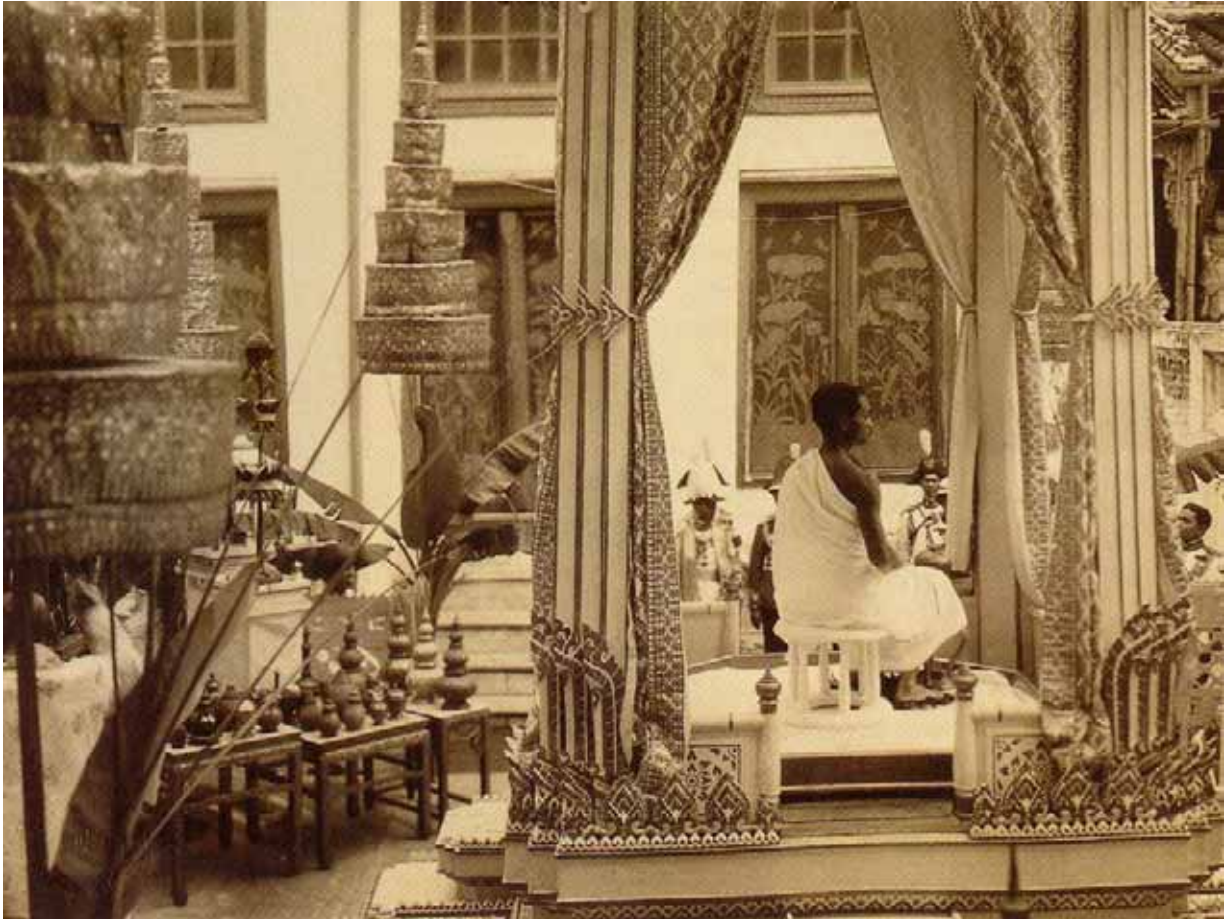


Fig. 55

King Rama VII, King Prajadhipok is shown in a specially-constructed bathing pavilion, preparing to take the ceremonial bath, a coronation ritual.

*Photo: RBC, River Books*



Fig. 56

During the tonsurate ceremony of Prince Chulalongkorn (who became King Rama V) in 1865, King Mongkut, his father, is standing in front of Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok Prasat, a *sala* considered as a throne hall

*Photo: RBC, River Books*



Fig. 57  
Phra Thinang Aporn Phimok Prasat, a *sala* considered as a throne hall, in the Grand Palace, Bangkok



Fig. 58

The tall pyre-*sala* built for King Rama IV's funeral in 1910, modelled on Mt Meru, the mountain at the centre of the Buddhist cosmology. *Sala* built for officials surround the central structure.

*Photo: National Archive, Bangkok*



Fig. 59  
*Sala Samranmukhamat*, built in 1903 during the reign of King Rama V, now displayed at the National Museum in Bangkok.  
*Photo: Virginia Henderson*



Fig. 60

Thai *sala* in Hagenbeck Park, Hamburg, Germany, designed by Pinyo Suwanakiri, dedicated to H.M. King Bhumipol Adulayadej on his 72nd birthday (6<sup>th</sup> cycle) in 1999. In 1998, another *sala* was built in Tel Aviv to mark this auspicious occasion and Thai-Israel Friendship, the beginning of diplomatic ties between the two countries. For these royal *sala*, the classification of architecture and decoration is at the highest level.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwanakiri*



## GIFT OF GOLD

STANDING PROUDLY ON A SMALL grassy hillock, beautifully framed by majestic trees, the new Thai Pavilion, recently inaugurated in Lausanne, as a gift from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej to commemorate the 17 productive years he spent in his youth in the Swiss lakeside city, is a distinctive and unusual landmark. Open on three sides and illuminated until 11pm daily, the golden royal pagoda has quickly become a compelling attraction for both local people and international visitors. Sited in the northwest section of the lovely Denantou Park, which runs for a long stretch alongside Lake Geneva, facing the Savoy Alps, and where the iconic Olympic Museum, the world centre of sport, is also located, the new pavilion, designed by a leading Thai architect, was assembled in 18 days

by his assistant and a team of Thai craftsmen and artists in collaboration with the parks and promenades department of the City of Lausanne. The finely painted and elaborately decorated wooden structure is 16 metres high, with a delicately carved roof topped by a slim and delicate finial. It is, in fact, the second of its type to be erected to commemorate a Royal Thai link with Europe. The first is in Bad Homburg, Germany and was donated by HM King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, grandfather of the present Monarch.

Speaking at the festive inaugural ceremonies for the pavilion, the Mayor of Lausanne, Daniel Bréaz, said the city was honoured to have this lasting and beautiful visual souvenir of its close and affectionate association with HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej. "They



Top: The 16-metre-tall, six-metre-wide wood and stone pavilion is located in Denantou Park, overlooking the stunning Lake Geneva. Above: A Thai specialist puts a few finishing touches on a section of the ornate pavilion.

were important and indeed vital years of study and peaceful family life for His Majesty and made a considerable impact on his long subsequent reign, during which he has so deservedly won the love and admiration of his people. We will cherish his gift with pride."

FABRICE COFFRINI/GETTY IMAGES (TOP, ABOVE)

Fig. 61

A sala given by H.M King Bhumibol to Lausanne to mark the 17 years he lived there early in his life.  
 Photo: Sawasdee, Thai Airways in-flight magazine December 2007



Fig. 62  
Postcard of Thai sala at 1964 World's Fair in New York *Peace through understanding*  
Photo: Cardcow, vintage postcards and collectibles



Fig. 63

A *sala rai*, public resting place, in front of the ordination hall (*ubosot*) which houses the Emerald Buddha, on the east side of the Grand Palace compound, Bangkok, during a merit-making (*tam boon*).  
*Photo: Paul Chesney*

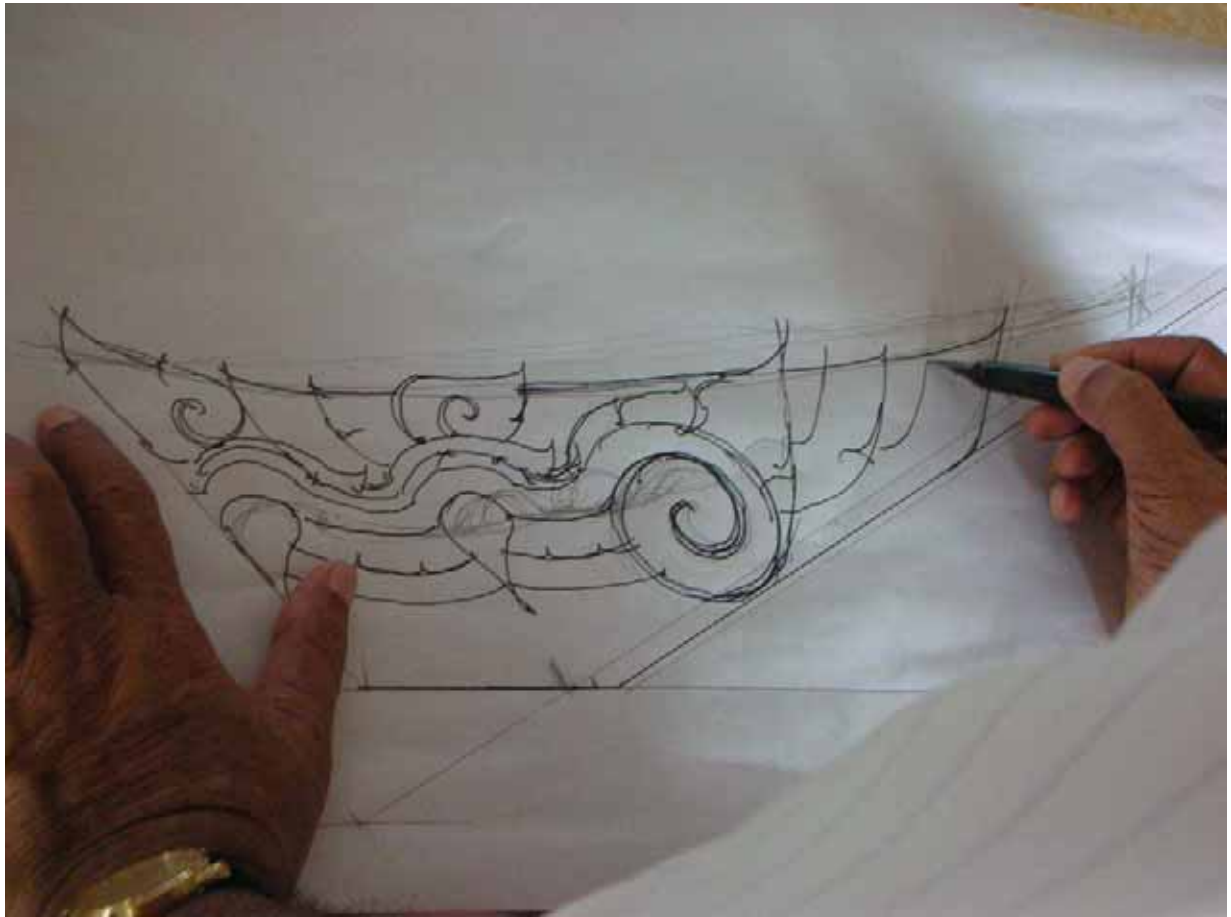


Fig. 64  
Pinyo Suwanakiri sketching details for the *salathai* built for the East West Center, Hawaii in 2007.  
*Photo: Pinyo Suwanakiri's assistant*



Fig. 65

Sketch for the new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist (architecture) Pinyo Suwankiri, dedicated in February 2008  
*Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri*

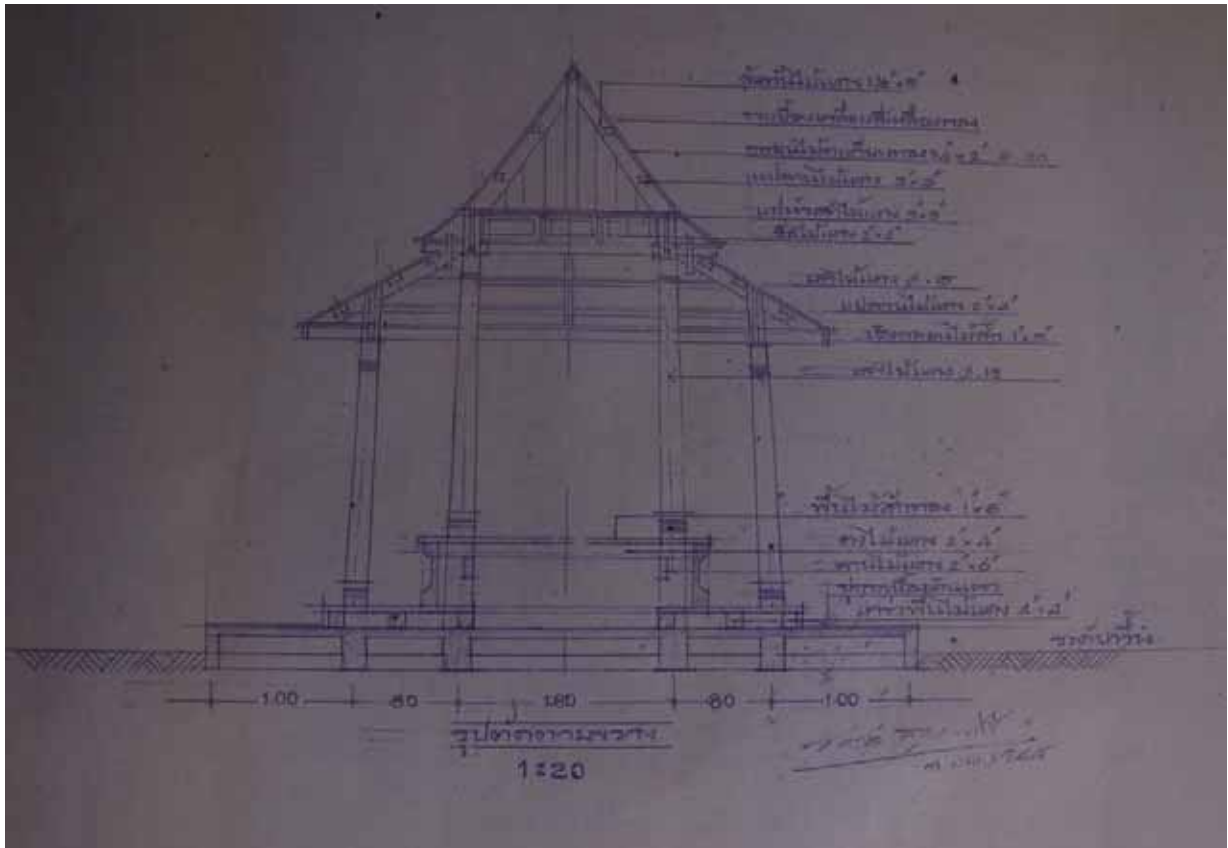


Fig. 66

Sketch for the new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist (architecture) Pinyo Suwankiri, dedicated in February 2008

Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri

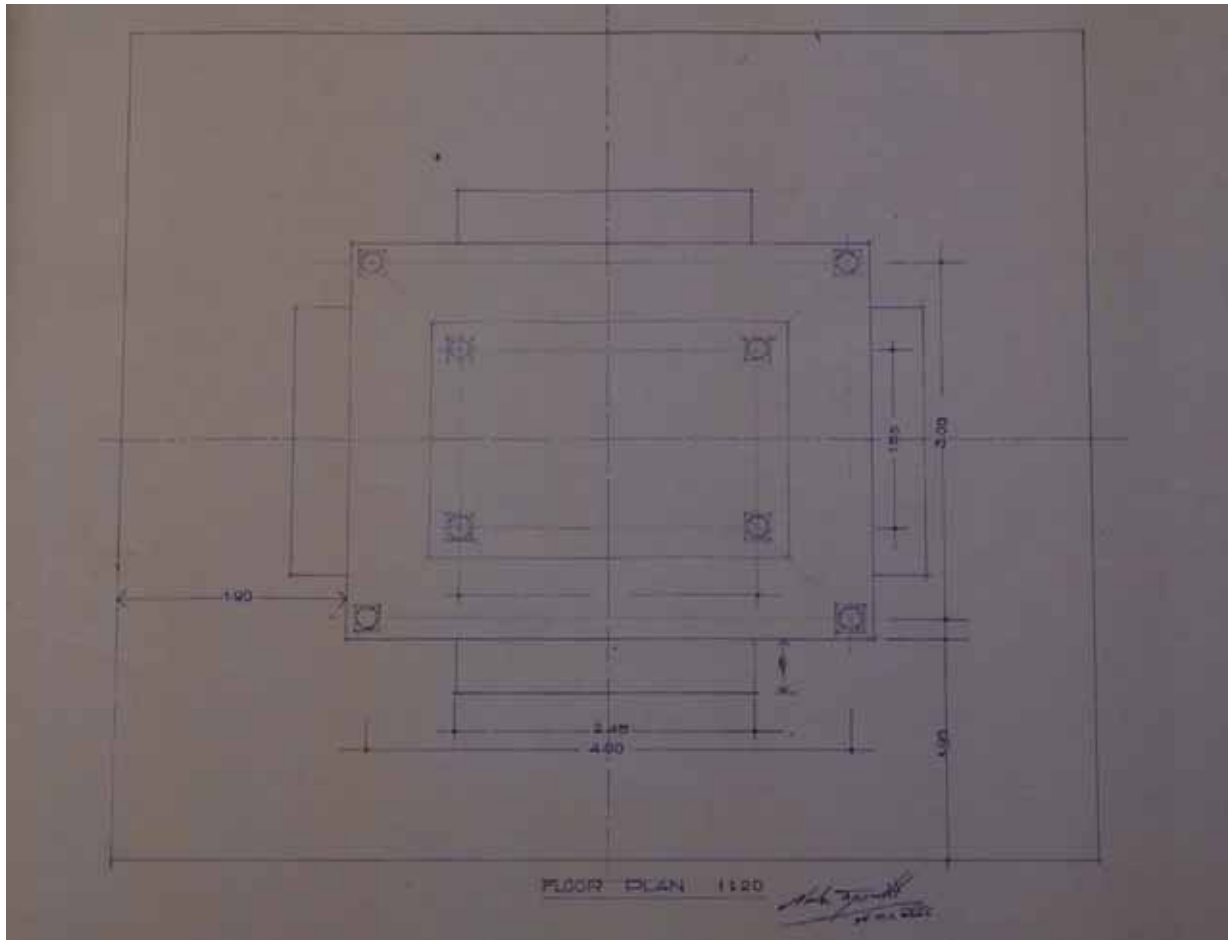


Fig. 67

Floorplan sketch for the new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist (architecture) Pinyo Suwankiri.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri*



Fig. 68

Construction of the new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist (architecture) Pinyo Suwankiri. The *sala* was fully assembled in a Bangkok workshop then dismantled and shipped to Hawaii where it was reassembled in one month by a team of six craftsmen.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri's assistant*



Fig. 69

An example of traditional Thai joinery which uses a locking system rather than nails, making dismantling of the building easier.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri's assistant*



Fig. 70

Details of the wood carving on the royal *salathai* designed by Pinyo Suwanakiri for the East West Center, Hawaii. According to the rules and hierarchy of Thai architecture, specific decorative features are used for royal architecture alone.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwanakiri's assistant*



Fig. 71

Roof finial details on the new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by Pinyo Suwankiri. At the top is the *chao fa* (literally, *piece of sky*, representing the mythological bird god of the sky, *garuda* (*krut*, in Tha). Along the side is the *ngao* (symbolising the *naga* or serpent god of the underground). These two elements struggle against each other, mirroring the tension of gravity between earth and air, which holds (architectural) structures together.

*Photo: Pinyo Suwankiri's assistant*



Fig. 72

The new royal Thai sala at East West Center, Honolulu, designed by royal architect and National Artist (architecture) Pinyo Suwankiri, was re-dedicated by H.R.H Princess Sirinthorn in February 2008. This sala replaced the original which was gifted in 1967 and gradually disintegrated over time in the extreme Pacific island climate.

*Photo: East West Center*



Fig. 73  
Sala at departure gate of Suvarnabhumi Airport  
Design by Nond-Trungjai Architects, Planners Co, Ltd.  
Photo: Virginia Henderson

## Chapter 6

### Montien Boonma's *Sala* as a Reflection on Healing

I use the pigments of primitive medicine and the voice of a prayer with the visual construction, hoping that people can feel calm, comfortable and rested in my environment. I want my installation to give people the feeling they are in a spiritual place, such as a church, temple or mosque....We find answers to our questions when we are calm.

- Montien Boonma January 1995

Every human being is an artist – every action is a work of art....society as a whole is one great work of art in which each person can contribute creatively ...(towards healing) the vast social wound that needs repair.

- Joseph Beuys

...my faith that art can provide useful models and tools for understanding the world, and these models eventually proliferate into the broader culture and become functional in the collective consciousness.

– Mathew Barney January 2007

All art is a healing session.

- Ted Hughes

This chapter investigates the spiritual *sala* installations created by contemporary Thai artist Montien Boonma (1956-2000). These alternative interpretations of the *sala* invite analysis of the changing role of the *sala*, offering new perspectives from contemporary art and calling into question the notion of *unchanging* Thai space. The chapter looks at what Thailand's most respected contemporary artist says about the *sala*.

To answer the research questions about the *sala*'s role as a site of participation, expression and conflict resolution, Montien's *sala* are explored for their messages and

vision. Further questions include: What is Montien trying to say (about the *sala*)? What is being communicated (to whom) and how is it communicated? Why did Montien choose the *sala* and what is the role of his *sala*? And what do Montien Boonma's spiritual *sala* installations say about Thai space and social life? The chapter looks at the works and life of this extraordinary artist in terms of Thai heritage itself and reflects on what this can tell us about the demonstration of Thai culture and the modes of expression of Thai spirituality.

The first section introduces Montien's *sala* – a selection of installations created during the 1990s. It gives a critique of Montien Boonma's oeuvre, notably the *sala* as a space of contemplation and healing. It investigates the sources of inspiration and evolution of these *sala*, linking them with the changes in the world and events in Montien's personal life. The vision and messages of Montien's healing *sala* are then interpreted within three key themes of ephemerality, authenticity and coexistence. This is brought together with ideas from the selected cultural history of the *sala* developed through earlier chapters, to *test* the intersection. Here I propose that Montien's inspirational healing *sala* installations are a prescient vision of healing for the Thai state and a metaphor for a solution in the country today. Thailand and Thai people are yearning for reconciliation and unity – Montien's *sala* offer space for conflict resolution – a place for healing and peace.

### **6.1 Introducing Montien's *sala***

Montien's contemporary art installations and sculptures of *sala* are intended to be spiritual healing spaces which awaken the senses and calm the mind. In themselves, they are stories of struggle and contradiction – enveloping, private spaces yet open and public – tranquil and porous while oppressive and dense – finely balanced, held together by their own tension of opposing forces. Fragrant Thai herbs used for traditional medicine and other local authentic, natural materials are combined with industrial materials of steel, concrete and brick, creating challenging contrasts and dialogue.

Radiating the powerful aromas of healing herbs such as ginger, eucalyptus, ginseng, turmeric (*khamin*),<sup>1</sup> the *sala* both stimulates and soothes, offering relief and protection. Wholesome natural smells and the low sounds of chanting welcome the visitor, encouraging interaction with the space, inhaling the medicine, absorbing the atmosphere and being in the moment.

Inside lung-shaped *sala* such as *Nature Breath: Arokhayasan* (1995), *Arokhayasan: Sala of the Mind* (1996) and *Temple of Mind: Nature Breath* (1996), the central branches of brass lungs coated and filled with fresh aromatic herbal mixtures urge visitors to breathe in and out slowly, gently and deeply, reminding of the importance of the breath, the essence of life, and making the spiritual link between mind and body, as in *vipassana* meditation. The brass bells of *Temple*

*of the Mind: Sala for the Mind* (1995), which appear to be ringing silently, reverberating within the *sala*.

The large architectural bodies, two, three or four metres high, are built of wooden and steel boxes rubbed with the aromatic herbs, ash and soil carefully stacked on top of each other, building upwards in rhythmic, repetitive, meditative forms. Large brass bells and lungs dangling in the middle of the *sala* act as ballast or counterweight, pulling the

#### **A Selection of Montien's Sala<sup>2</sup>**

Fig 1 *Arokhayasan: Sala of the Mind* (1996) P14

Fig 2 *Sala of Mind* (1995) P15

Fig 3 *Arokhayasala* (1995) P16

Fig 74 *Sketch for Studying Inside of the Sala* (1994) P203

Fig 75 *Temple of the Mind: Sala for the Mind* (1995) P204

Fig 76 *Nature Breath: Arokhayasan* (1995) P205

Fig 77 *Temple of Mind: Nature Breath* (1996) P206

Fig 78 *Bell of Mind* (1997) P207

Fig 79 *Breathing House* (1996) P208

Fig 80 *House of Hope* (1996) P209

Fig 81 *Zodiacal Haus* (1998) P210

<sup>1</sup> Montien's sketches of *Arokhayasala* indicate 17 different herbs used in Thai traditional medicine. Herbs he used including *cinnabar*, *cinnamomum camphora* (*karaboon*) and *fahtalajon* as well as *simarubaceae*, *myrtaceae*, *alliaceae*, *simarubaceae*, *ebony tree*, *malvaceae*, *graminac* and *citronella grass* which are noted on his *Sketch for House of Practising the Mind* 1995

<sup>2</sup> Montien's titles and spelling varied – such as *Arokhayasala*, *Arochayasala*, *Arokhayasan*. This research uses original spellings from sketches. A *san* is a *sala* that has been invested with special meaning.

deftly-balanced towers together and stabilising them. Constructing the *sala* installations is a meditative act in itself, requiring and developing a calm, focused mind and a steady hand, usually a team of people working together. The intention and process of creation, participation and collaboration is highlighted. Intricate technique, sequences and patterns follow those traditionally used by Thai artisans in brickwork and architecture. The interlocking pieces dispense with nails by the harnessing of natural opposing forces - the structure pulls itself together to keep from tumbling down.

Engraved with encircling labyrinths of question marks and exclamation marks, the *Sala of Mind* (1995), poised delicately balanced on finely-pointed stilts, were created by Montien during a time of personal crisis. An expression of shock, pain and suffering, after the death of his wife in 1994, these *sala* communicate confusion and despair and at the same time offer a place for contemplation – both conflict and peace. The *sala* became a symbol of Montien's healing process. Standing inside, in the darkness, flashes of light can be seen through the question marks cut in the black steel. Montien explained,

*The question mark represents what we don't know, which is the obstacle. The exclamation mark, a mark of surprise, expresses a kind of hope, a not-knowing, a sense of discovery. I perceived a gap between these two...the question and the response – these two are never-ending. A response can turn into the subsequent question. It's like our mind.*<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the *sala* of *Breathing House* (1996-97) and *Zodiacal Haus* (1998) allow light to filter through holes in their black roofs, flickering like stars in the night sky, a way of connecting with the universe in a spiritual conversation. Montien's *sala* invite people to enter – to come inside and become part of the art – and to participate in a process of personal reflection and dialogue by looking inside and up.

*When viewers visit this room (Sala of Mind) with a dome-like roof, they look like they are wearing a chada (traditional Thai headpiece). The chada, like a hat, is a metaphor for the belief system that one believes in - religion or -ism, so to speak. This piece provides a space for people to examine their beliefs, let them be in a sala of mind to rest their mind and thoughts. It could also be*

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<sup>3</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongshirachai, Art and Asia Pacific, July 1995

*a space where people might ask questions, like whether god exists, something like that. It's a kind of ritual space.*<sup>4</sup>

Sites for connecting with nature and self discovery, Montien's *sala* engage the outside and inside, positive and negative space, creating *in-between* places. Gaps and voids open possibilities and hope for healing and peace.

## 6.2 Influences and Inspirations

This section briefly summarises some of the key influences and inspirations within Montien's extraordinary *sala* installations created during 1994 to 1998. These revolved around nature, tradition, faith and society and included his Thai roots and heritage, Buddhism, international art teachers, his wife and the changing world during the 1970s to 1990s.

Montien's Curriculum Vitae, a biography and a list of his artworks are included in Appendices 1, 2 and 3. The biography is organised around relevant themes, as follows:

- Nature/Roots in the Red Earth (1956-85)
- The Search/Learning (1985-88)
- Back to the Land/Tradition and Culture (1988-91)
- Faith/Suffering (1991-94)
- Healing /Hope (1995-97)
- Space / The Void (1997-99)
- Energy /Radiation (1999-2000)

<p>See Appendix A Montien Boonma CV P238  Appendix B Montien Boonma Bio P241  Appendix C List of Montien Boonma's Art P283</p>
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Growing up in Udorn Thani in *Isaan*, Northeast Thailand during the 1960s and 1970s was a formative experience for Montien. *Isaan's* distinctive dark red soil is deceptively poor, making it a challenge for farmers in the region to survive. Rural lifestyle and traditions including the use of herbal medicine and respect for nature were part of Montien's early life experience. A keen observer of nature and good at science,<sup>5</sup> Montien was also determined and passionate about art from a young age. The ruins of ancient

<sup>4</sup> Montien interview by Gridthiya Gaweewong, 5 March 1997

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

Khmer temples still scattered across *Isaan* fascinated Montien, not only their physical characters but also their social functions as sacred spaces for healing and rest. The function, form and meaning of these ancient *sala* and *arokhayasala* found along the Royal Road between Angkor and Phimai, discussed in Chapter Three, inspired Montien's first *sala* installation.

*Sala of Mind was influenced by the form of the Khmer prang (spires) at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. I like the concept of tevalai – a palace of god, a space of god. It is so inspirational that I, too, would like to create such a specific space.<sup>6</sup> ..In my installation, I worked with the concept of Khmer people constructing temples Arokhaysala 800 years ago. These temples were like hospitals where the people's physical and mental problems were looked after by priests who did ritual acts and ceremonies to heal. Taking the sacred water, herbal medicines and prayer helped people to feel better or to obtain a feeling of restfulness, in a calm state of mind.<sup>7</sup>... My concepts keep evolving and returning, like the way of life... I go back to the Khmer temple – I love to do anything about Khmer temples.<sup>8</sup>*

A devout Buddhist, Montien sought a deep understanding of *dharma* (natural truth). Montien considered himself an artist and not a priest or a shaman. He read Buddhist scriptures, practised meditation, made merit at temples, and led a simple, humble life. His strong faith included interest in all belief systems, including animism and the supernatural. He explained,

*Being born in Thailand, Thai, Buddhist philosophy is already part of my cultural heritage. Personally, I have great respect for religious values, not only Buddhist, but in essence most of the world's religions...I think the spiritual element helps people to concentrate their minds<sup>9</sup>....My work is not Buddha silpa (religious art). I have never painted pictures of the Lord Buddha, but I'm fond of using forms like stupa, bells, pagoda and the like*

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<sup>6</sup> Montien interview by Gridthiya Gaweewong, 5 March 1997

<sup>7</sup> Montien's statement, *Sala of Mind* exhibition catalogue 1995

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Montien 31 March 2000

<sup>9</sup> Montien interview by Alfred Pawlin, *Reaching Beyond Tradition*, Asian Art News, Nov-Dec 1991

*in my art. Many of my works show the influence of Buddhism because it is my religion that makes me calm.*<sup>10</sup>

On the first day of his education at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, Montien met one of the most important people in his life, Chancham, whom he married in 1985. Though the young artist couple did not spend long together as they were advised by a monk to live apart, Montien attributed his creative power to Chancham, who passed away in 1994, explaining (*The link*) *lies in the faith, the belief my wife had in my art, that I would be a good artist...she believed in me, in my art.*<sup>11</sup>

A late developer, Montien won a scholarship and studied art in Italy and France from 1986 to 1988, there discovering teachers who brought out his creative talent. Sculptor Claude Viseux in Paris encouraged him to be bold and was impressed by Montien's drive.

*Some people said it was strange and wondered why I got so much energy to create in the 34<sup>th</sup> year of my life... Before that, I couldn't find any real artists and I found my professors there in Europe. I learned different things...M. Claude was an amazing man. He had his own style and taught me about spirit... He said to me, Don't follow the mode... He hated if I experimented with my work too much... Sometimes he said my work was too small.*<sup>12</sup>

In Europe, Montien became inspired by the Italian artists who recycled discarded natural materials in mixed-media artworks - *Arte Povera* influenced me a lot...<sup>13</sup> and *Fluxus* which believed in the absolute connection between art and life. He especially paid attention to German artist Joseph Beuys' theory of Social Sculpture which espoused the social, cultural and political function and healing potential of art in which all people participate and benefit. Beuys enthused about the power of a universal creativity and art's potential to bring about revolutionary change. He saw works of art as being as fleeting as life itself and, rather than seeking to create eternal works, wanted his art to start people

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<sup>10</sup> Khetsirin Knithichan, *The Nation* 31 July 1995

<sup>11</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongchirachai, *Art and Asia Pacific*, July 1995

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

thinking. Montien often referred to Beuys as one of his key mentors. Travel in Europe exploring new ways of life and belief systems, including Christianity, opened Montien's mind and encouraged him to experiment further. He appreciated the rich historical contexts and reflected on the links with Asia and the current world situation.

*I love to look at the old things. In Italy we see ancient things from the Roman period, made by people with a Mediterranean attitude that's similar to Thai society... I love to see any old objects or articles in their home...I love, I love, I love that. I love that way. It's a way to understand today. If we know the past, we can understand nowadays.<sup>14</sup>*

Committed to the process of art for social change, Montien's art was influenced by and responded to the rapidly changing world. Forces of development and globalisation during the 1970s to 1990s which have had such a strong impact on the fabric of social life in Thailand were the subject of his art. Works such as *Changing World* (1980, 1983 and 1984) and his award-winning *Natural Forms in the Present Environment* (1984) exposed the conflicts and challenges to balance industrial and technological advances with respect for nature during this turbulent period.

Although he was stimulated by and appreciated his international opportunities and experiences, Montien found his true inspiration in Thailand, within his own culture.

*Whenever I make my work, I always use things that I found important in the past in Thai society – things that are lost today... When you understand the past, you can solve problems... I get inspiration from Thai culture. Thai artists don't accept my work as traditional Thai, but at the same time westerners think it's not absolutely western and has some sense of Thai. This is contemporary art – in between, all the time.<sup>15</sup>*

When he returned home to Thailand in 1988, Montien found he was in an interesting position – loving his country and finding renewed inspiration in his own traditional cultural heritage and roots, yet firmly committed to new ways of making art and

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<sup>14</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 22 July 1997

<sup>15</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 11 May 1995

expressing his ideas in a contemporary manner. His first solo exhibition, *Story from the Farm* at the National Gallery in Bangkok in 1989, expressed ideas about the real struggles being faced by people in rural Thailand. The sculptures and assemblages of rough local materials, such as farming tools, clay moulds of clenched fists, animal hides and raw egg and feathers shocked the conservative Thai art circle, which had its own ideas of Thai art as beautiful and refined. Thai artist Panya Vijnthansarn commented to Visual Dhamma Gallery owner Alfred Pawlin that Montien's work was *very advanced for Thai people*.<sup>16</sup> The local art establishment found his work uncomfortable, difficult and challenging – which was exactly what Montien was trying to do by reinterpreting the past and giving it current relevance.

*In contemporary art, you find something with more personality. International contemporary art is about individualism. I'm different from European artists, but I use the same language as them. We have the same purpose – expression. It's a very international language. It has imagination for people... I get inspiration from Thai culture... and it's really personal... Thai artists don't accept my work as Thai traditional, at the same time westerners think it is not absolutely western and has some sense of Thai. This is contemporary art, in between all the time... Creativity and contemporary art nowadays is about finding something new, new perspective and another dialogue between this day and the days in the past. It's asking questions. Even though my work talks about concepts I got from the past, I don't see it the same as my ancestors. I see it in recent days... you try to find something of your own expression.*<sup>17</sup>

A strong social consciousness drove Montien to create art which focused on the critical issues people struggle with every day, especially as Thailand was undergoing massive upheaval and grappling with socio-economic-political crises, discussed in Chapters Three and Four. He sought to understand and express the reality of people's lives, offering his art – in particular the *sala* – as a space for reflection.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Alfred Pawlin 24 March 2000

<sup>17</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 11 May 1995

*My work is about real situations in my society, my personal problems and the situation of life today. I live in the present world, I am inspired by it and draw inspiration from my true environment... I am trying to express my concern for contemporary life in my society. If I can do that then my work can have an impact in a number of ways because I am not thinking only about the art form. If we understand the problems we face, then we can go further than formal art and perhaps find solutions. My way is not to study in order to find something that no one else has done before, but rather to contribute solutions that will have an impact outside the world of art too... For me personally, an artist has to understand his situation and how to analyse it, and this also includes his economic and social circumstances, in fact, everything that constitutes his life. If artists really understand their specific situation then they can use it to create.<sup>18</sup>*

During Thailand's economic boom up until 1997, increasing numbers of newly-rich people including developers and bankers appeared on the art scene as patrons and collectors. Most did not understand Montien's work and found it unattractive, difficult to install and exhibit. As investors, they were reluctant to purchase art made of ephemeral materials. Montien was not interested in their money or the art market, though frustrated at the lack of understanding of his work. He pursued his own vision and through the kindness and generosity of friends and family was able to fund his creations.

I don't intend my work for people to buy. I make something that I want to make. If you like to buy, I sell... I'm not a business man. I'm not good at trying to say how much money... The important thing, if I can do as I want, that's enough for me. If I can do as I want, as I can, I don't mind<sup>19</sup>...I'm the real man. I do what I want... I don't follow fashion... I don't think about money... I find the way to make it.<sup>20</sup>

Personal suffering, frustration and confusion during the illness and death of his wife and then his own passing drew Montien to his beliefs and understanding of Buddhist

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<sup>18</sup> Montien interview by Alfred Pawlin, *Reaching Beyond Tradition*, Asian Art News, Nov-Dec 1991

<sup>19</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 22 July 1997

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Montien 13 June 2000

philosophy and the teaching of natural truth to find peace. During Chancham's struggle with breast cancer, he searched for solutions, undertaking making merit activities and the curative aspects of traditional medicines. At the time of Chancham's death, Montien's art was focused on the concept of sites of contemplation and healing, spaces for looking deeply inside and questioning. These became the *sala*. He explained,

*When I was very troubled, I prayed and chanted a lot, supplicating all the sacred forces. Sometimes things got better, sometimes worse. It was a kind of hope struggling between the knowing and the not-knowing. When people pray, even monks, they never really get there. Though they might feel they receive some kind of blessing, or inspiration. Every person's life is a process of building belief or faith – an empire for us to be able to survive. Without this empire, or this faith, we would be uncontrollable, we wouldn't know what to do, why should we work... Why should we live? Even though we know we must die, we still try to discover something so that we can pass a better day. Those who are sick understand this... whatever we believe in, we create a space there. That space is like a kind of realm. Or as Joseph Beuys put it, thought is a form of sculpture.<sup>21</sup>*

In his ongoing search to understand more about people's lives and to find ways for his art to serve society, Montien linked ideas around social and spiritual space. He described his way of learning,

*When I arrive in a new city, in Thailand or wherever, I usually look for two places; the temple and the market, because these two places give a picture of peoples' lives – an idea of their beliefs and their daily needs. When I arrived in Stuttgart, I opened my city map and looked for the churches... When you open a map, you have to believe that what you are looking for will be there... For me, churches are like stars. Sometimes we think that there are things on earth that are related to heaven. My work speaks from the space between our beliefs. It is about the linkage to heaven, which is very important for the city... On this map, I imagined the ringing of the church bells and marked the reverberating of these sounds. I*

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<sup>21</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongchirachai, Art and Asia Pacific, July 1995

*blackened the areas to mark the bell radiation and then expanded the sound. When we look at the stars, we don't know much about them. However, we believe that the constellations can have some influence on people in this world. I am interested in the spiritual aspect, so I transformed the stars of the churches in Stuttgart into a view of the stars of heaven, combining the two.*<sup>22</sup>

Fig 82 Sketch for Zodiacal Haus (1998) P211

Fig 83 Sketch for Zodiacal Haus (1998) P212

Fig 84 Sketch for Zodiacal Haus (1998) P213

In the creation of *Zodiacal Haus*, one of his final *sala* works, Montien explained that

Stuttgart's many beautiful churches were an inspiration and that *you go inside and you look up. You look for the god and you look up, like a mind work*<sup>23</sup>. Sketches for *Zodiacal Haus* reveal the process of development of Montien's ideas during the three-month residency. A sketch dated November 4 1998 shows a map of Stuttgart with the churches marked with circles – *about one kilometer around each that we can hear the bell ... the radiation of the bell goes to the people... so connecting. I believe in the sky and earth connecting.*<sup>24</sup> The sketch dated December 25, Christmas day celebration for Christians, shows the black shading encircling around the churches (the radiation) extended to fill the frame, transforming the locations of the churches into spots of light, an image of a night sky full of stars. Standing inside the *Zodiacal Haus*, looking up through the turret of the church spire, small holes in the black steel let through light, like stars flickering in the night sky, reminding the visitor of the vastness of the universe and our insignificance in it all.

### 6.3 Vision and Messages

This section interprets the vision and key messages in Montien's *sala* installations, reflecting on the research questions regarding the role and transformation of the *sala* in Thai society, in particular as a site of participation and expression and as a place for conflict resolution. It is acknowledged that the communication between an individual and a work of art is a personal and subjective experience.

<sup>22</sup> Montien interview by Jean-Baptiste Joly, February 1999, Stuttgart

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

The vision of Montien's *sala* is of a space where conflict can be transformed. Suffering, tension and the struggle are accepted as an inherent part of life. Peace and healing are nurtured through the process of engaging in dialogue, quiet contemplation and reflection, building mindfulness of and being at one with the reality of nature. Minds and hearts can be opened. Harmony and unity are possible.

Universal messages of healing, hope and peace are offered in Montien's spiritual *sala*. These messages are built around faith in nature and natural truth (*dharma*) which speaks of ephemerality, authenticity and co-existence. Traditions and beliefs are respected in this *sala* space and the body, mind and soul are soothed and united.

Montien's *sala* offer alternative expressions of Thai spirituality and new space to experience the spiritual sense of timeless, spaceless being – not by sitting in a conventional space for religious practice (such as a temple, church or mosque). Through the *sala*, Montien created and expressed the feeling of a spiritual healing space. With conscious intention and mindful process, Montien sought to create the feeling of a calm, safe space in which visitors would feel at ease. Montien felt that *the process of creating a work is more important than a work itself*.<sup>25</sup> The creative process is the healer. Art is a healing force for the healing of self, others, the earth.

In the healing story of the *sala* installations, participation is a key theme. For Montien, audience interaction is essential – the viewer is an integral part of the installation. It is through engagement and interaction that healing can take place. People actively participate in the healing process by stepping in and looking inside (the *sala*, themselves), reflecting and engaging in dialogue and questioning. Through the self-directed act of engaging with the art and entering the *sala*, the visitor indicates an open willingness to cooperate and a self-guided mode, taking responsibility and initiative. Rather than suggesting environmental determinism (space dictates the outcome), the *sala* experience offers sensory stimulation in a calm natural space, supporting visitors who seek a place for contemplation, reflection and peace. Montien's *sala* invite people to

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<sup>25</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 22 July 1997

walk in and look within, to absorb the aura of authentic natural materials and to connect with nature and the self.

Essential life force, the breath of life, is symbolised in the act of inhaling herbal aromas. Focus on the action of breathing in and breathing out reminds us of the rise and fall of all living things. Breathing is the link between mind and body and builds mindfulness in *Vipassana* (insight) meditation. Inside the *sala* installations, the visitor is made conscious of the breath's role and awareness is drawn to the importance of the lungs, the space within and space without (the body).

The participation and cooperation of a large number of people is required in the process of building the large *sala* installations, such as *Temple of the Mind: Sala for the Mind* (1995) or *Arokhayasan: Sala of the Mind* (1996) and the *House of Hope* (1996). Reinforcing the wisdom of ancient architecture, the *sala* are constructed in simple steps – stacking boxes or hanging beads, one process repeated over and over again – a meditative activity. Assistants observe there is *something powerful about the sort of necessary collaboration to create these works, something very human. The process to make them requires human interaction and cooperation... see the pieces as bringing people together in a peaceful way in addition to creating a refuge as well.*<sup>26</sup> Through interaction and cooperation, the *sala* are carefully constructed (and dismantled) each time they are moved. Everyone participates mindfully in the creative process, not just as a viewer or visitor, but invests intention, time and energy to ensure the outcome is a success. This is a powerful metaphor for the healing and peace urgently needed in Thailand today. Montien's *sala* are an expression of hope – a way through the darkness. The *House of Hope*, in particular, tells a story of faith in humanity and healing, the power of nature and natural truth. Referring to the struggles in modern society, these *sala* are a symbol of social transformation and conflict resolution.

Montien's *sala* are stories of natural truth, the essence of Buddhist teachings (*dharma*). Montien's art is exceptionally Buddhist and the *sala* represent transformation – impermanence (*annica*) is a key concept. All things change and pass – everything in life

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Josh Harris 10 March 2008

is ephemeral. Using fresh and dried herbs, ephemeral materials which deteriorate through time, the *sala* installations are not designed to last. Rather they capture the inevitable process of deterioration and promote people to think. They remind the visitor that life is a temporary thing, momentary and short lived. As they fade, crumble and decay, these living and dying *sala* creations tell the story of transformation and the inevitable rise and fall of life. They are a deconstruction of immortality, a vision of the frailty of the human body and the fragility of life.

The apparent strength and *permanence* of black steel used by Montien for *Sala of Mind* (1995), the first time he chose to work with such an *enduring* material, reflects the struggle to come to terms with the impermanence of life, in Montien's case it was the loss of his dear wife. Herbal pigments rubbed inside, the sound of chanting and the encircling and repetitive question and exclamation marks create a ritual site, acknowledging the ephemerality of the material world. *Sala of Mind* urges the visitor to calm the emotions and look deep inside for answers.

Authenticity of substance and integrity of process are important to the creation of the *sala* installations. The search for the truth, the essence of the matter, is a key message in Montien's *sala*. Visitors enter and become part of the experience, looking deeply inside rather than just observing from a distance. Commitment to authenticity guided Montien's search to understand the true nature of things through art. Natural materials, including real elements of water, soil, wood, charcoal and ash are essential features of Montien's works.<sup>27</sup> Objects and materials used daily are invested with life stories and manifest a *real phenomenon* or meaning and use in society and culture. Montien explained, *I pay attention to not only their forms, colour and textures, but also to their internal compositions and functions in our society.*<sup>28</sup> The herbal medicines of the

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<sup>27</sup> The elements of earth, water, fire and air are seen as the four outward essences, according to Buddhist philosophy. The fifth essence is consciousness or the mind and a sixth essence is the void or *nibbana-dhatu*. Mind and void, the fifth and sixth essences, lie deep inside; they are *the within*. Looking without is materialism. Looking within penetrates to the heart and centre of all things. In the end, there is oneness with void-ness – being empty of *I* and *my*. To be void of *I* and *my* is to be void of all defilements and to be free of defilements is to be free of suffering or *dukkha* (Buddhadasa 1956: 64, 69, 89).

<sup>28</sup> Khetsirin Knithichan, A Time of Change, The Nation 31 July 1995

*sala* harness the natural healing power of nature and the energy vibrating within these authentic natural materials radiates an aura. In the *sala*, when one encounters these authentic living materials (herbs), the sense of smell is aroused, alerting and clarifying the mind, opening the human connection with the forces of nature and the universe. Montien explained,

*I believe that materials can transfer radiation to the people... If you can smell it, there is some extension inside to your body... So I found that if I want to make something to help the people, the material has to be real... When you smell something you try to separate what kind of odour is coming to you and you try to refine your sensibilities, that means you try to understand what people are saying to you... If the artwork can help to clear the wall, to clear something that blocks the sensibility of the people, I love that. That is my intention.<sup>29</sup>*

Hope is clearly the vision and message in the *sala* of *House of Hope* (1997). Thousands of tiny balls of traditional herbal medicine strung up into shimmering curtains form the *body* of the *sala*. Like prayer beads or rain drops pouring down forming puddles, the strings waver naturally, suggesting the dynamic nature of life, unfixed, unable to be held. Encouragement to be part of this *hope* is communicated through the stools in front helping visitors to walk up and inviting them inside. Thick swirls of earthy herbal mixtures painted onto the gallery walls surrounding the *sala* heighten the aromatic experience and suggest both bruised, threatening clouds and celestial skies – struggle and hope. Montien explained,

*It looks like a big solid but it's not solid. It's like something concrete but you can't see it. It's like hope...It's a kind of respiration that passes through the structure of the house. It's like trying to find something in the dark. Like looking at the stars, trying to see what the image looks like. Like god. We're not sure if it exists or not, but we need to reach it at the end... You can feel something exists, but you can't touch it. It's a problem... I believe in some things and I fight with my beliefs. Like when I pray or when I have an experience, I think something exists, but I couldn't reach it. Does it really*

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<sup>29</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 22 July 1997

*exist or not? ... It's important for me, the struggle... I'm interested in that way, something that we can't reach, but we're fighting to go there, to go there, to go there, it's important to go there... This is the way of life, life always continues. To go, to go, even though we don't know... You need hope... When you believe in something above, you think you can almost touch it... Look at the house, if you hold it down it's like a hope. So that's why I call this the House of Hope.<sup>30</sup>*

Coexistence and balance are key messages in Montien's *sala*. Experimenting with concepts such as symbiosis (many dissimilar bodies living in harmony) and unity in earlier work, Montien expressed concerns about the conflict in contemporary Thai society and the need for balance – between tradition and modernity, nature and technology, and rural and urban ways. These *sala* acknowledge the struggle, instability and uncomfortable contradictions which exist in nature. At the same time they are a holistic vision of how tension can be harnessed, with opposing forces working simultaneously to tie the whole together, making it stronger. In the rhythm and movement of pushing and pulling, pieces of the whole can work together and play a role to stabilise each other, and therefore the unit. As in a mandala, there is harmony and order, crucial in healing. Herbal medicines, chanting, and the practice of meditation promote a sense of interconnectedness. Pieces of the *sala* – boxes, bells, lungs – are interlinked and *collaborate*.

Concentration and awareness are required in the process of constructing the *sala* installations. Each piece of the *Arokhayasala* is an important part of the whole and the pieces rely on each other for the work to stay together. This is a poetic reference to the concept of interconnectedness and coexistence. Tension which holds things together can also tear things apart – this is the struggle. The *arokhayasala* symbolise the tension in the world, the human body, and architectural structures. Like the rise and fall, the push and pull are conflicting yet balancing forces of life. In this way Montien's *sala* can be seen as a metaphor for social cooperation and unity. They also represent the potential for balance and harmony, essential for health and wellbeing. The finely-pointed tips of the legs of *Sala of Mind* (1995), *Breathing House* (1996-97) and *Zodiacal Haus* (1998) suggest this

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<sup>30</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 22 July 1997

delicate balance and Montien explained, *I encourage everyone to step into my installations to experience the tension... my works are illusory.... While it looks comfortable from the outside, when you enter it you will experience a very uncomfortable sensation. Life's like that – it's a struggle for most people.*<sup>31</sup>

Perceived as unstable and a public liability at the *Traditions/Tensions* exhibition at the New York Asia Society in 1995, Montien's *Arokhayasala* caused its own tension amongst organizers. The American gallery managers wanted to secure the *sala* with a string from the roof, to ensure the structure would not collapse causing possible injury to visitors and consequent lawsuits. Montien was confident that the work was stable and secure and felt that the tension holding the installation together was an integral part of the work. Despite his protests, Montien conceded to the gallery's demands and was *devastated*<sup>32</sup> about this (invisible) string, believing that it destroyed the real meaning of the work.<sup>33</sup> Montien's friend, curator Apinan Poshyananda, explained that this incident nearly broke their friendship. Artistic integrity and the communication of messages of authenticity, coexistence and tension were all-important for Montien in his *sala*. The process of healing and peace depends on an understanding of and respect for natural truth.

#### 6.4 Testing the Intersection

This section brings the investigation of Montien's *sala* alongside the selective cultural history of the *sala*, developed in Chapters Two to Five to test their intersection. It asks what then, if any, might be the connections between Montien's contemporary art *sala* installations and the traditional *sala*. Further,, what may be learned from bringing these *sala* ideas alongside a radical new form of the *sala* imagined in the modern urban shopping mall. In this process of exploring links, new understandings and interpretations can be developed about the *sala*'s role in Thai society today.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Brecelec and Jim Algie, Art in Balance, The Nation 16 September 1996

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Apinan Poshyananda 5 July 2002

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Montien 20 February 2000

What does Montien's *sala* say about the traditional *sala*, Thai spiritual space, social space, heritage and art? Montien's *sala* says there are other ways to express and communicate spiritual space, other than in a copied temple. It offers alternative interpretations and expressions of the concept of the *sala* – other than the traditional repeated versions and images used by the Tourism Authority of Thailand and national religious and cultural bodies. In creative new forms and spaces, Montien's *sala* challenge the prescribed notions of the *sala* and spiritual space.

The key questions in this investigation explore the *sala* as a site of participation, expression and conflict resolution. At the heart of these questions are issues of power, space and change. The spiritual, civic and commercial spaces of modern Thai social life rub up against each other, overlapping, blurring and creating tension. Montien's aromatic and meditative *sala* symbolise calm healing space so vital for human growth and peace, increasingly challenged and compromised in today's crowded urban environments and ideological battlefields. The representation of harmonious social space comprising individual pieces united and working together to support the whole is an inspiring model for society. Like the traditional *sala*'s role as a natural open community centre, built by people for people to come together for common interest, Montien's *sala* welcome all visitors to come inside and engage in dialogue with the internal space – of the *sala* and the self – to reflect on one's place and insignificance in the vast universe. The public-private spaces of Montien's contemporary *sala*, intimate personal enclosures within large public and international art galleries, create new opportunities, spaces and participants in the *sala* experience of connection.

Further questions are raised regarding who supports or *enables* the *sala* – in its various possible forms or incarnations – and who participates in the *sala* creation and use, in what ways and for what reasons? The range of participants in this complex arena includes artists, architects, designers, developers, owners, communities, visitors, government agencies, businesses, royal and private patrons and individuals, each with ideas and an agenda, and all taking place within the socio-politico-economic context of a time. In this process of conflict and struggle within the changing environment, heritage is shaped. Governments, organizations, groups and individuals seek to influence the

direction of change or maintain the status quo, asserting values and beliefs which they believe to be valid. Visions and versions of *Thainess* – the imagined essential characters of Thai culture – are presented, debated and upheld or rejected, in an ongoing struggle and process of power expression and negotiation.

Expressed ideas of social space, the traditional *sala*, with forms ranging from the simple wood-and-thatch hut to extravagantly golden Thai architectural statements, are created and used by groups and individuals according to needs and desires. The elaborate traditional *sala* preferred by monarchs and the Thai government, and offered as gifts to other countries, incorporate and uphold entrenched architectural codes which delineate social space. Through the use and symbolism of decorative elements, these elite *sala* promote fixed ideas of classical architecture, art, beauty and what the *sala* is and should look like. They send messages of difference between royal and vernacular space, upholding vertical social structures and notions of exclusivity. The traditional community *sala* represents civic space which encourages participation by all and the free expression and debate of ideas. Montien's *sala* installations are likewise the artist's particular vision of the *sala* as a social place for healing and peace, through private-public engagement and dialogue with the self, natural processes and deep contemplation. Rather than seeking to enhance (personal, royal, national) status, the intimate enclosures of Montien's *sala*, with their awe-inspiring images of stars above in the night sky, encourage the individual to reflect, be humble and to diminish the ego by acknowledging the immense universe and all-powerful nature. The *sala* built or reconstructed in the gardens of rich, urban middle-class Thais may be seen as expressions of status and wealth. Selecting traditional Thai designs for the construction of elegant new *sala* structures on their property or transporting original, old *sala* from rural schools or temples to city residences, these wealthy elite may only use the *sala* to express a romantic nostalgia for a lost past or to project an image of the patriotic Thai citizen.

The messages of impermanence and fragility of life in Montien's innovative, herbal *sala* installations, contrast with those communicated in the static, traditional *sala* built by monarchs and state cultural agencies, which are heavily-laden with gold leaf exuding an aura of enduring power, enlightenment and divine protection. Repeating images of these

*refined* versions of the *sala* reinforce notions of hierarchical society and are supported by those with an interest in maintaining power and the status quo. As state and other bodies struggle to assert their positions of control in this way, Montien's *sala* introduce new ideas, making people think and challenging the notion of *unchanging Thai space*. Built of simple, natural pre-lived/loved materials and instilled with their own stories and histories, Montien's *sala* draw on heritage and ancient local wisdom in seeking solutions for a modern age. In Montien's *sala*, the Thai-Khmer concept of *arokhayasala* – literally places (*sala*) without illness – is revitalised, bringing ancient beliefs and therapeutic approaches into contemporary spaces and minds. From crumbling ruins on isolated country roads in Northeast Thailand to chic galleries in downtown Tokyo, Canberra and New York, the *sala* is transported and transformed. Yet the messages of healing and peace are resilient and remain relevant, translated across centuries, cultures and oceans. While teams of archaeologists from Cambodia and Thailand continue their work searching for the original remains of these early healing *sala* dotted along the Royal Road of the ancient Angkor Empire, Montien's contemporary versions of the *arokhayasala* offer to local and international audiences the ever-pertinent and universal messages of healing and peace. An expression of the fundamental Buddhist tenet of natural truth, Montien's herbal *sala* embody natural processes, inevitably deteriorating with time, as do all material objects. In these *sala*, nature as a source and site of creation and healing as well as destruction is respected. The themes of change, power and natural truth in Montien's *sala* embody stories of connection with nature, the self and the universe. Arguably, the *sala* built by monarchs in the past can be seen as expressions of power, in this case the power to rule. Instead of the ephemeral herbs used by Montien in his *sala* installations to communicate the fragility of life and passing of time, the traditional royal *sala* in repetitive forms are adorned with gold, the most lasting and alluring of elements. Conflicting messages of ephemerality and endurance, the humble and the mighty, healing and power become interacting chapters in this *sala* story.

The concept of participation is a key point of intersection among Montien's interactive *sala* installations, the traditional *sala* as a central community social space for gathering and sharing, and the popular modern shopping centre. In each, it is the human interaction and presence which brings the *sala* to life and gives it meaning, beyond an

architectural structure. As the traditional *sala* connects people with each other and nature, Montien's alternative *sala* recognises and values a human need for connection with nature and promotes an understanding of natural truth. Buddhist or spiritual art for Montien was not about representing icons such as Buddha images but rather creating spaces with which viewers can interact in a reflective process around *dharma* (natural truth). Montien's *sala* challenge people to question, to think and to put aside entrenched beliefs. Arousing the senses and stimulating *vipassana* (breathing meditation), the aromatic, healing, herbal sanctuaries offer private-public space for contemplation. Inside the international art museums where many of Montien's *sala* are located today, public space is transformed into personal space within the *sala* as the visitor participates and engages with the artwork in a self-reflective process of looking within.

The *dharma* messages in Montien's spiritual *sala* suggest that the ego and desire may be overcome through mindful meditation. Rather than overcoming desire, as in a spiritual practice, the shopping mall is all about stimulating desire. These popular new venues for social interaction appear to be public space but are actually privately-owned, mostly by wealthy Sino-Thai families. Chapter Four has explored the economic dominance of these groups and their far-reaching influence. The impacts of increasing urbanisation and the associated changes in social behaviours, also discussed in Chapter Four, call into question the role of the *sala* in rural and urban areas of Thailand today. As the populations of Asia's large and medium-sized cities continue to grow and intensify, land is grabbed by developers of commercial spaces and has led to a proliferation of huge shopping malls. These air-conditioned hypermarkets attract crowds of people wishing to participate in modern life – to be part of the action – amongst new ideas, fashions and technology, seeing and being seen. Apart from the shopping centres, Bangkok today offers few alternative (natural, recreational) spaces for people to gather, meet friends, exchange ideas, celebrate, and other activities which may have taken place in a rural village *sala* in the past. Social bonds could be strengthened as a result of spending relaxed leisure time together in the traditional *sala*. There, differences of opinion and ideas could be raised, debated and hopefully settled. As a place for conflict resolution, Montien's spiritual meditative *sala* also offer visitors the opportunity to participate in a peace-building process, to starting by looking within, encouraging positive

change through individual personal effort. The overlapping and blurring of spiritual, civic and commercial *sala* spaces are a reflection of Thai informal social life today.

Gifting the first royal *sala* abroad to Hawaii in 1967, His Majesty King Bhumibol recognised the *sala* as a place for peace with his dedication, *Let it be a haven of love and understanding for all travelers from East and West*.<sup>34</sup> The *sala* is open to everyone – a safe, calm meeting place for sharing. Inevitably worn down by nature and time, the East West Center's *sala* was rebuilt by and transformed from a simple red-pillared space to an elaborate statement of royal Thai power, with extensive gold leaf covering the intricate architectural decorative details reserved for royal structures. Following her father's wish, HRH Maha Chakri Sirinthorn rededicated the *sala* as *a place where people can rest and gather... a symbol of universal friendship and brotherhood*.<sup>35</sup> The traditional Thai *sala* is today promoted and seen as a national icon. International gifts of *sala* have become more frequent. Following the success of the *sala* rededication in Hawaii in March 2007, Thai newspapers reported that HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthorn believes *the presence of Thai-style pavilions overseas is a great way to promote Thainess*.<sup>36</sup> Fine Arts Department Director General Grienggrai Sampatchalit outlined a plan to construct Thai pavilions in foreign countries according to HRH's wishes.<sup>37</sup> Discussions of *Thainess* in Chapters Two and Five have drawn attention to the definition of heritage as a process of selecting features from the past because of their perceived value to people and/or governments today. Whose vision and version of the *sala*? In this case, the *sala* gifts to other countries take the form of gold-laden Central Thai-style court *sala*, representing Thai royal space and power, promoted by the royal family and Thai government.

These royal *sala* gifts contrast with the *arokhayasala* built by Khmer monarchs who ruled parts of Thailand 800 years ago. Rather than serving to uphold an image of the country, these early *sala* were public health amenities along roads for the physical, mental and spiritual treatment of travelers and locals. Undoubtedly inspired by this vision of the *sala* as a social healing centre, Montien integrated traditional healing herbs and

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<sup>34</sup> HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej *sala* dedication speech, East West Center, Honolulu 1967

<sup>35</sup> HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn *sala* dedication speech 2 March 2008

<sup>36</sup> Bangkok Post 17 March 2008

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Grienggrai Sampatchalit 28 January 2008

meditation into his *sala* installations. In the luxury *sala* which feature in hotels and spas around Thailand, the *sala*'s roles as a symbol of the country and as a place for healing are played out clearly. Catering to an elite public, these *sala* are also expressions of economic status and reflections of influence of private businesses, in particular within the tourism and hospitality industry. Commercial tourist spas in Thailand use the same traditional herbal *primitive*<sup>38</sup> medicine used by Montien in his spiritual *sala* installations to arouse the senses and focus the mind towards inner peace.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced Montien Boonma's spiritual *sala* installations into this investigation of the *sala* in Thai society today. Emerging from the artist's inspirations, influences and experiences, including growing up amongst the ruins of ancient Khmer *arokhayasala*, the practice of Buddhism and traditional healing practices, Montien's *sala* also draw on personal experiences of tragedy. They reference the economic, political and social change and crisis in Thailand during the 1980's and 1990's. The chapter has explored the vision and messages of healing and peace within these spiritual *sala* which speak of natural truth – impermanence, authenticity and coexistence. The intersection between the investigation of Montien's *sala* and the cultural history of the *sala* developed in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five has been tested, revealing new and alternative expressions of the *sala* and of spiritual space.

The resilience of the *sala* is shown in its role as an essential social space, a community *living room* and a place for healing of body, mind and spirit. While function endures, forms of the *sala* may relate to socio-economic-political power. Built and created by individuals, communities and monarchs and artists, the various *sala* discussed here convey messages which are shaped by the sender and interpreted by the receivers or users. Remembered nostalgically by many Thais as a peaceful, open, natural space, the *sala* is also promoted by Thai authorities as a symbol of the country, using a highly decorative version which follows rigid architectural codes and represents hierarchical

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<sup>38</sup> Montien referred to traditional herbs as *primitive medicine*

social structures of power. In Montien's art installations, the concept of the *sala* as Thai cultural heritage is reinterpreted, transformed and reinvigorated for contemporary and international audiences while the messages of healing and peace are communicated in innovative and creative ways. This artistic expression of the *sala* as spiritual places of peace is a link which brings classical Buddhism to the modern age. The notion of *unchanging* Thai space, supported by those in positions of power, is challenged by such new ideas and versions of the *sala*.

As an art installation, Montien's *sala* involves people and depends on their participation and interaction, in the same way the traditional *sala* requires the cooperation and collaboration of individuals and group for its successful construction and use. It is not solely the environment of the *sala* itself which may lead to healing and peace, but the mindset of the participant or *sala* visitor which must be open to change. As Thailand struggles with the troubled political and social crises today, space is needed to mediate the violence and disruption. Montien's *sala*, with their messages of healing and peace, are interpreted here as a metaphor for a change that urgently needs to happen in Thai society – a calm place for conflict transformation.



Fig. 74  
*Sketch for Studying Inside of the Sala*, 1994  
Montien Boonma  
Charcoal and pigment on paper  
75 x 105 cm  
Collection of Jean-Michel Beurdeley  
Photo: Aroon Peampomsopon





Fig. 75  
*Temple of the Mind: Sala for the Mind*, 1995  
Montien Boonma  
Herbal medicine, wood, brass  
320 x 270 cm  
Collection of National Art Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
*Photo: Unknown*



Fig. 76  
*Nature Breath: Arokhayasan*, 1995  
Montien Boonma  
Steel, herbs, lead  
256 x 215 x 215 cm  
Collection of Acacia Fine Art Let  
*Photo: Josh Harris*



Fig. 77  
*Temple of Mind: Nature Breath*, 1996  
Montien Boonma  
Brass, iron, herbs, latex  
354 x 245 x 241 cm  
Collection of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art



Fig. 78  
*Bell of Mind*, 1997  
Montien Boonma  
Copper, brass bell  
240 x 15 cm  
Collection of Surind Limpanonda  
Photo: Aroon Peampoomsophon



Fig. 79  
*Breathing House*, 1996-97  
Montien Boonma  
Steel, plywood, herbs  
430 cm  
Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo  
*Photo*: Norihiro Ueno, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo



Fig. 80

*House of Hope*, 1997

Montien Boonma

Steel grill, herbal medicine, wooden stools, mixed media

Variable dimensions

Collection of Dakis Jannou, Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens

*Photo: Paisan Teerapongvisanuporn*



Fig. 81  
*Zodiacal Haus*, 1998  
Montien Boonma  
Steel, wood, herbs, cinnabar, mixed technique  
300 x 90 cm (6 pieces)  
Collection of Petch Osatanagruh  
*Photo: Peter Hartung, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart*

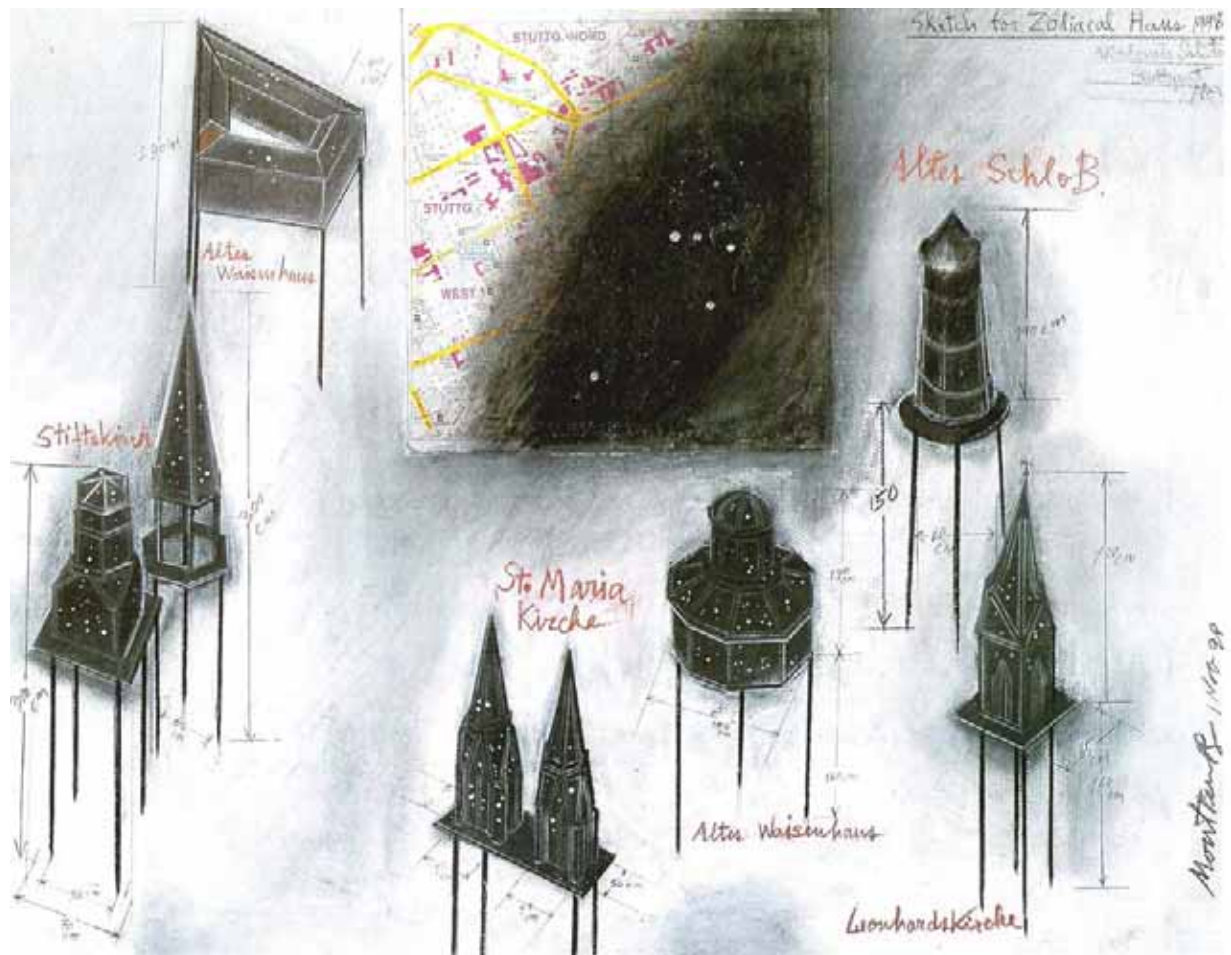


Fig. 83  
 Sketch for Zodiacal Haus, 1998  
 Montien Boonma  
 Map of Stuttgart, crayon  
 Photo: Peter Hartung, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart

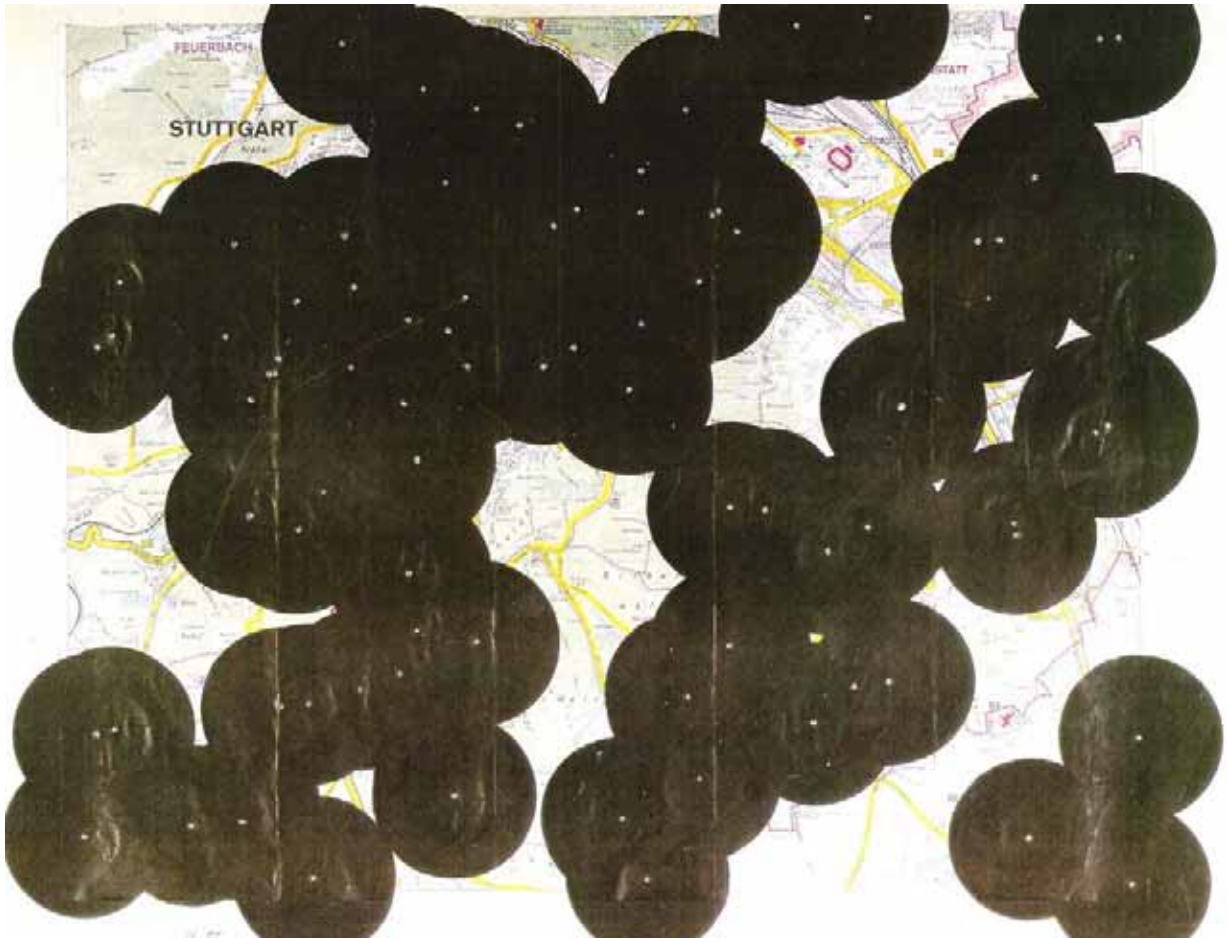


Fig. 83  
*Sketch for Zodiacal Haus*, 4 November 1998  
Montien Boonma  
Map of Stuttgart, crayon  
*Photo: Peter Hartung, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart*

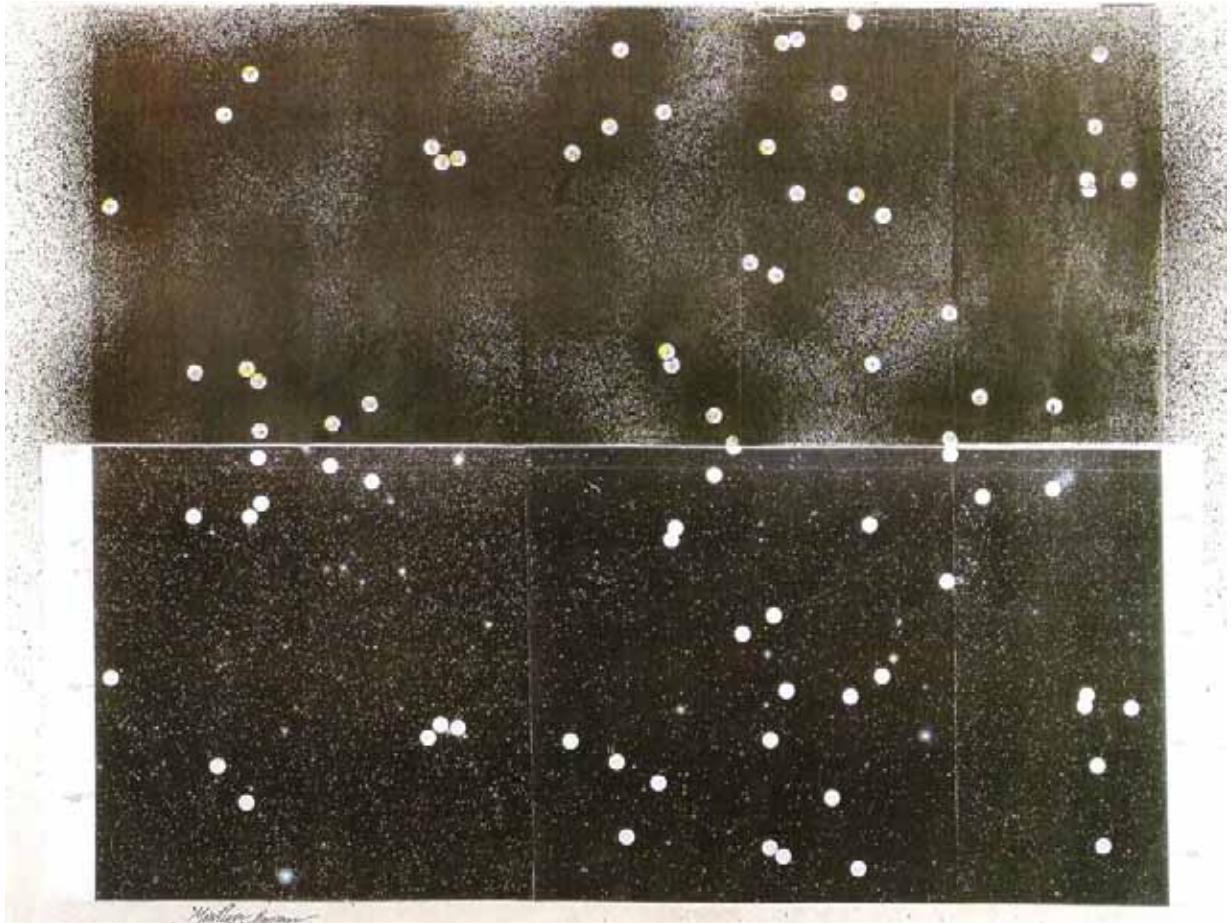


Fig. 84  
*Sketch for Zodiacal Haus*, 25 December 1998  
Montien Boonma  
Map of Stuttgart, crayon  
*Photo: Peter Hartung*

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

...the central challenge of our time: finding a way to work together to solve the problems we have created.

- Nelson Mandela

Every human work has to be seen as a kind of art.

- Joseph Beuys

This research has examined the *sala*'s role in Thai society and questioned its transformation as a social space of participation, expression and conflict resolution. Relevant literature around the concepts of social space, heritage and modernity was examined in Chapter Two for the ideas which might usefully guide the research.

Chapter Three's discussion of the evolution of the *sala* revealed that the *sala* evolved naturally within the region's tropical climate where people need a structure for shade. Early houses were open-sided and the *sala*-house functioned as a simple living space. This secular space of daily life would have been a centre for social interaction and allowed connection with nature – the elements, plants and stars – in this way introducing a spiritual aspect to its role. From these beginnings as a place to rest from and with nature, the *sala* has transformed in form, function and meaning through time according to the forces of the day, including the processes of modernisation and globalisation.

Ancient Khmer ruins of early *dharmasala* – hospital chapels – found along the Royal Road between Angkor and Phimai in Northeast Thailand were once places where Hindu-Buddhist priests attended to people's physical and mental needs with herbal remedies, massage and chanting. Stone inscriptions from the Sukhothai and Ayuthaya periods link the *sala* to royal temple construction and to temple and merit-making ceremonies. Within Bangkok's Grand Palace compound, where the Chakri dynasty was established in 1782, eight *sala rai*, resting pavilions for temple visitors, surround the

*ubosot* (ordination hall) of the sacred Emerald Buddha and are used daily by Thais coming to make merit and by tourists. In past court rituals such as the tonsure ceremony, coronations and cremations, the *sala* has played a role as a symbolic royal resting space and a site for elite participation in these power-affirming ceremonies. During the early 1900s, King Rama V's strategy to modernise Siam and thereby avoid colonisation included inviting European architects and engineers to build palaces and public buildings. Rotunda or gazebo-like *sala* appeared as displays of *civilised* Western style. Siam's participation in World Fairs has for over a century featured a *sala* laden with the country's finest arts and crafts, showcasing talent and promoting a unique *Thai* style. Nationalistic fervour, which brewed during the 1940s and 1950s when Thailand was under military strongmen, saw the promotion of traditional values and traditional Thai *sala* were built and located in prominent public spaces, such as Lumpini Park.

Development during the 1950s and 1960s, fueled by US dominance on the world stage and fear of communism spreading in Southeast Asia, brought Thailand and the *sala* into a new era of international relations and *sala diplomacy*. Used as a base for US troops, Thailand built its relationship with the US, symbolically gifting a *sala* to the East West Centre in Hawaii in 1967. More Thai students began to study abroad and brought back to Thailand new ideas for art and architecture. The robust economy which arose from favourable international exchange rates and a policy of turning *battlefields into marketplaces* in the mid-1980s launched a period of unprecedented construction. Commercial glass towers sprung up around Bangkok, dwarfing traditional spaces on the ground, including parks and riverside, squeezing out the traditional *sala*. These old wooden structures were sometimes bought and moved to private land by nostalgic urban dwellers seeking to recreate the simple pastoral life and lost rural ways. The *sala* has also been used as a status symbol by wealthy middle-class citizens. Neo-traditional versions of the Thai *sala*, sometimes made with depleted stocks of golden teakwood, glass and airconditioning for comfort, promote the *Thai* style and serve to communicate patriotism.

Some of the *sala* built during the booming 1990s were experiments with new forms and materials, integrating foreign elements in an eclectic mix of styles. *Sala*

recently built by the Thai government, such those in the new Rama VIII Park on the Chaophraya River, and those designed by rebel architect Sumet Jumsai at Thammasat University reveal a radical change in design and proportion. The indigenous Thai steeply-sloping roof which is practical during heavy rainfall has been adapted to a more horizontal form, in harmony with the modern extensions to the university and the cable bridge, and each other. In their prominent locations, these alternative *sala* communicate that the capital is a modern international city. It also appears to be a significant breakaway from the rigid rules of traditional Thai architecture which dictate the style, proportions and decoration of particular architectural structures, including *sala*. These codes clearly distinguish between royal and vernacular architectural styles, as in the differences between *ratchasap* (royal language) and everyday Thai language, elevating the royalty and royal *sala* to another social level.

Inside the very contemporary Suvarnabhumi Airport terminal, four traditional Thai *sala* decorate the arrival and departure areas, giving tourists and travelers their first and last memories of Thailand. These *sala* are forbidden to be entered, functioning purely as decoration. Outside along riverbanks, lakes and at the beach, the *sala* is still a popular space for resting and social gathering.

Chapter Four outlined the recent socio-politico-economic events during the current period of crisis in Thailand. It referred to the simmering tensions and painful reality of political instability, coups, economic mismanagement, violence in the south, corruption, human rights abuses and tears in the social fabric as a result of religious and cultural division. This discussion tends to debunk the myth of Thailand as a land of peace and smiles by looking under the veneer to the tragedy and chaos which are a real part of the daily struggle. The research questions the role of the *sala* as a site for conflict resolution and this chapter highlighted the need for a calm, safe place where people can put aside their differences and be at peace with each other and themselves.

The impact of tourism, Thailand's number-one revenue earner, reveals that the *sala* plays a significant role in the hospitality and tourism industry, used in promotional materials enticing tourists to tropical havens and as a key feature of the increasingly-

sophisticated spa industry. Here the *sala* is used in a commercial context, to enhance the operations of hotels and resorts. Elegant versions of the *sala* made from high quality woods, designed by internationally-trained architects, portray a luxurious and stylish space which is suitably inhabited by upwardly-mobile visitors with status, including rich Thais and foreign tourists. These *sala* are used as new-age healing spaces where massage and herbal treatments in the natural space promise to enhance well-being, at a considerable price.

Heritage and the *sala*, discussed in Chapter Five, drew attention to the selection process and made reference to issues raised in Chapter Two regarding dominance, power and values. It asked and investigated questions about who is choosing to maintain or sustain which elements of cultural heritage, why and how? As social and cultural capital is reproduced and sustained to maintain the status quo, the *sala* as a cultural artefact plays a role in mediating this process.

*Sala* stories in Chapter Five have revealed some of the ways that the *sala* is used by individuals, groups, communities, architects, developers, educational, cultural and religious institutions, tourists, the hotel and tourist industries, the monarchy and the state to forward their agendas which include fostering inner peace, wellbeing, health, kinship, unity, status, nationalism, wealth and the status quo.

Change in Thailand and the world as seen in the *sala*'s form, function and meaning were introduced in Chapter Three on the historical evolution of the *sala*, This was developed further in Chapter Four's discussion of the country's recent period of change and crisis. Chapter Five's look at the *sala* amidst change took this further to consider the *sala* in the context of significant change in urbanisation patterns, advances in communication technology and increasing consumer spaces. As they grow larger, cities and city living become increasingly more challenging in terms of pollution, traffic and congestion. Open green spaces of Bangkok, much of which is owned by the Crown Property Bureau, are diminishing as developers respond to the attraction of economic gains to be made from the construction of huge commercial spaces, including hyper-shopping centres in the city centre and suburbs. These large air-conditioned spaces,

billed as lifestyle centres offering *everything you could ever want*, attract customers looking for new ideas, experiences and material goods, as well as those who simply find these to be the convenient, comfortable meeting places in the city. The roles that shopping centres play in terms of social space are relevant to this discussion of the *sala* and the city. The original research framework identified this dimension of *shopping centre-as-sala* and proposed to investigate the phenomenon. This commercial realm remains an area for future research which may generate valuable understanding about Thai culture and society today and the directions in which it seems to be heading. Likewise advances in information technology and the proliferation and popularity of electronic social networking websites, such as Facebook and MySpace, offer alternative modes of social interaction. These new sites allow people with computer skills access to opportunities for meeting others and chatting – activities which traditionally took place in *sala* – without leaving their homes or computers. Another suggestion for future research in connection with the *sala* is into the ways that these locales (shopping centres and internet sites) are used and valued by people as meaningful social space in their lives.

Beyond a conservative study of the evolution and transformation of the *sala*'s form, function and meaning, this research reached further to explore an interesting alternative dimension of the *sala*. The extraordinary *sala* installations by Thai contemporary artist Montien Boonma (1956-2000) were brought into this discussion for the light they shine on the research questions about the *sala*'s role as a place for participation, expression and conflict resolution. The perspective of Thailand's most significant modern artist, whose *sala* installations are perhaps his most well-known works, offered valuable insight into understanding the *sala* space. This innovative and bold artist, raised in rural northeast Thailand among the ancient Khmer ruins of *dharmasala* – hospital chapels – has impressed the world with his powerful spiritual art which offers universal messages of healing and peace. Montien's *sala* challenge the assumptions about unchanging Thai space by showing alternative ways to represent spiritual space which is not in a copied temple *wat* or any familiar Buddhist icon. His *Sala of Mind* (1995), *Temple of the Mind: Sala for the Mind* (1995) and *Arokhayasan: Sala of the Mind* (1996) have traveled the world and been appreciated widely. Drawing on his strong Buddhist practice, local traditions, herbal remedies, *Vipassana* breathing meditation,

Montien distills the *sala* to its essence. His *sala* are places of faith (all denominations), healing and hope. This is a prescient vision for Thailand in this time of great tension and disunity. The prophetic messages communicated in Montien's *sala* are a prescription for what is needed for this country's future – a metaphor for what needs to happen in the Thai state – the attainment of peace.

This thesis concludes by revisiting the research questions outlined in Chapter One and reflecting on insight which has been generated in the research process. The first research question asked about the *sala*'s role in Thai society. This research has shown the resilience of the *sala* and the continuity of its multi-purpose role as a space for community, calm, healing and spiritual renewal. The second research question, a somewhat contradicting or challenging question, asked how the *sala* has transformed over time. Answering this question, with reference to the new speed of social change and capitalist modernity, set up something of a dialectic: the more things change, the more they remain the same. Thai society becomes disconnected while the *sala* persists, albeit as a bauble for the rich. Montien's *sala* is certainly contemporary, it is not new but goes back to something very ancient. The third question asked how the *sala* might be a site of participation and expression. The answer draws attention to the exclusionist *sala* of the state, the monarchy and the rich. It also highlights Montien's attempt to re-imagine the *sala* as a new form of a site for participation and for re-discovered expression. The fourth and final question raised the idea of the *sala* as a place for conflict resolution. All art might ultimately be political, but alone, without the willing engagement of people, it may not be able to resolve conflict. In Montien's art, the *sala* is a place for encounter, struggle and reflection, a metaphor for a more participative community and a more contemplative humanity.

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## Appendix A

### Montien Boonma CV

February 25, 1953 - August 17, 2000

#### Solo Exhibitions

- 2004 *Montien Boonma: Death Before Dying*, National Gallery of Art, Bangkok
- 2004 *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
- 2004 *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 2003 *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, Asia Society, New York,
- 1999 *Das Haus der Sternzeichen*, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart
- 1998 *House of Hope*, Deitch Projects, New York
- 1998 *Melting Void*, Marsi Gallery, Bangkok
- 1997 *Montien Boonma*, Art Front Gallery, Tokyo
- 1997 *Montien Boonma: Arokhayasala Installasjoner*, Stenersenmuseum, Oslo
- 1997 *Montien Boonma*, Galerie Beurdeley & Cie, Paris
- 1996 *Arokhayasan*, Visual Dhamma Gallery and Bangkok Playhouse, Bangkok
- 1994 *Marks of Mind*, Silom Art Space, Bangkok
- 1993 *Works 1991-1993*, National Art Gallery, Bangkok
- 1992 *Arte Amazonas*, Goethe Institut, Bangkok
- 1992 *Aum*, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
- 1991 *Montien Boonma: The Pagoda & Cosmos Drawn with Earth*, Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery, Tokyo, and Mitsubishi-Jisho Atrium, Fukuoka
- 1990 *THAIAHT (Thai-Thai)*, National Gallery, Bangkok
- Form and Material*, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
- 1989 *Story from the Farm*, National Gallery, Bangkok

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2005 Venice Biennale, Italy
- 2002 Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 2002 Art, Religion, Faith and Vision, Art Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- 2000 *The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art and Projeto Axe*, Museu de Arte Moderna de Bahia, Brazil
- 2000 *12 Asean Artists*, Balai Seni Lukis Negara, Malaysia
- 2000 *Thai Artists and the Goethe*, Goethe Institute, Bangkok
- 2000 *Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai
- 2000 *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial*, Japan
- 2000 *Glocal Scents of Thailand*, Edsvik konst och Kultur, Sollentuna, Sweden
- 1999 *Trace*, Liverpool Biennale, Liverpool
- 1999 *1<sup>st</sup> Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale*
- 1999 *Our Expression: Montien & Hitori*, Silpakorn University, Bangkok
- 1998 *Construction in Process VI: The Bridge, Works in Public Areas*, Melbourne
- 1998 *The Edge of Awareness: Art for the World, (WHO 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary travelling exhibition)*, Geneva, New York, Sao Paolo, New Delhi
- 1998 *Global Vision, New Art From the 90's Part III*, Deste Foundation, Athens
- 1997 *River Project*, Dimension Endowment of Art, Taipei
- 1997 *In Between the Void*, Johannesburg Biennale, Johannesburg
- 1997 *Corner*, Project 304, Bangkok
- 1997 *Being Minorities*, Hong Kong Art Center

- 1997 *Glimpses into the Future*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima
- 1997 *Die Andern Modernen: Zeitgenössische Kunst Aus Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
- 1997 2<sup>nd</sup> *Johannesburg Biennale*, Johannesburg
- 1996 *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, The Asia Society, New York
- 1996 *Into the Next Decade*, Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok
- 1996 *Islands: Contemporary Installation Art from America, Asia, Europe and Australia*, National Gallery of Australia
- 1996 *Container 96*, Copenhagen
- 1996 *Montien Boonma/Thaiwijiit Puangkasemsomboon*, Bangkok University Gallery
- 1995 *Asian Modernism*, Japan Foundation Asia Center, Tokyo
- 1995 4<sup>th</sup> *International Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul
- 1995 *Thai Tensions*, The Art Center, Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- 1995 *Art and Environment III*, National Gallery, Bangkok
- 1994 *Faret Tachikawa Art Project*, Tachikawa, Japan
- 1994 *Beyond the Material World*, Adelaide Festival, Adelaide
- 1994 *Thai-Australian Cultural Space*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney National Gallery, Bangkok and Chiang Mai Inn Plaza, Chiang Mai
- 1994 *Content and Sense*, National Gallery, Bangkok
- 1993 1<sup>st</sup> *Asia-Pacific Triennale*, Queensland
- 1993 *Prospect 93 International Exhibition of Actual Art*, Frankfurter Kunstverein und Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt
- 1992 *New Art from Southeast Asia*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, Fukuoka Art Museum
- 1992 *Melancholic Trance*, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
- 1992 *Arte Amazonas*, Museum de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro
- 1991 *The Integrative Art of Modern Thailand*, Lowie Museum, University of California, Berkeley
- 1991 *Thai Spirit*, White Group, National Gallery, Bangkok
- 1991 *Print Installation*, National Gallery, Bangkok
- 1990 *Readymade Boomerang: 8<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1990 *Von der Natur in der Kunst*, Wiener Festwochen, Messepalast, Vienna
- 1990 *Asia Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition*, City Hall, Hong Kong
- 1990 *Enneagram Nine into 9*, Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok
- 1990 *Art & Environment*, Gallery of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok
- 1989 *Les Peintres Thailandais Traditionnel et Contemporains*, L'Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris
- 1989 *From the Outside Looking In*, USIS Gallery, Chiang Mai and Bangkok
- 1989 *Asian Contemporary Watercolours*, Thailand Cultural Centre, Bangkok
- 1988 *43eme Salon de Mai*, Grand Palais, Paris
- 1988 *Olympiad of Art*, Olympic Park, Seoul
- 1987 *42eme Salon de Mai*, Grand Palais, Paris
- 1987 *La Ruee Vors L'Art: Exhibition of Schools of Fine Arts*, Nantes, France
- 1984 3<sup>rd</sup> *Exhibition of ASEAN Painting and Photography*, Manila, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Bangkok
- 1984 *Paper Work*, Silpakorn University Art Gallery, Bangkok
- 1983 *Contemporary Art From Thailand*, Nuremburg

1983 *Concours International d'ex Libros et de Miniatures Graphiques an Memoire a Nikolas Prusie*, Poland

1982 *Culture in Danger*, British Council Gallery, Bangkok

1982, 83, 84, 87 *White Group Exhibitions*, Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok

1977, 80, 83, 84 *National Exhibition of Art*, National Art Gallery, Bangkok

### **Education and Positions**

1997-2000: Instructor in Faculty of Painting, Sculpture & Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

1996 Instructor in Mixed Media, Chulalongkorn University

1988-95 Instructor in Mixed Media Sculpture, Chiang Mai University

1989 MFA, Silpakorn University, Bangkok (Post-graduate course in Painting)

1988 *Matrise Nationale en Arts Plastiques*, Universite de Paris VIII, Faculte de l'Arts Plastiques, Saint Denis, France

(under direction of JeanLouis Boissier: conceptual photography)

1986-88 Studied sculpture in Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts, Paris

(student in Atelier de Claude Viseux: sculpture)

1981-86 Instructor in Visual Arts at Chang-Silp College of Fine Arts, Bangkok

1979-80 Designer at the Art Gallery, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

1978 B.F.A. (Painting), Silpakorn University, Bangkok

1974-78 Student of Painting in Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok – King Bhumibol Adulyadej Scholarship

1971-73 Student in Fine Arts Dept, School of Art and Crafts (Poh Chang), Bangkok

### **Public Collections and Commissions**

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Singapore Art Musuem

Faret Tachikawa, Tokyo

Fukuoka Art Museum

Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

Hiroshima Contemporary Art Museum

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Olympic Sculpture Park, Seoul

Deste Foundation Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens

Vancouver Art Gallery

## Appendix B

### Montien Boonma Bio

1. Nature/Roots in the Red Earth (1956-85)
2. The Search/Learning/ (1986-88)
3. Back to the land/Tradition and Culture (1988-91)
4. Faith/ Suffering (1991-94)
5. Healing/Hope (1994-96)
6. Space/ The Void (1997-98)
7. Energy Radiation (1999-2000)

#### 1. Nature / Roots in the Red Earth (1956-85)

Montien Boonma was born in Bangkok in 1953, the second of six children. His father Surarak was a military officer with the US army and his mother Jirawan gave up her job as a teacher to take care of the children full-time. At that time, Thailand was a sleepy backwater but following the introduction in 1960 of Thailand's five-year National Development Plans and with the input of US aid money in the fight against Communism, the country began to develop rapidly. In 1964, the Boonma family moved from Bangkok to Udorn Thani province in the northeast of Thailand, known locally as *Isaan*. Montien's aunt, Jirawan's oldest sister, had asked the family to come and live with her as Montien's father was often away from the home doing surveillance trips in Laos. The two sisters felt it would be better if they could both take care of the children.

Growing up in rural Udorn Thani was a formative experience for Montien and throughout the rest of his life he continued to refer to it as home and himself as *khon Isaan* (a native of the Northeast). In one of the most impoverished regions of Thailand with extreme conditions of drought and flooding, the lifestyle is simple and many of *Isaan's* Lao-speaking people eke out a living as rice farmers, enduring the dry heat to cultivate the red dust topsoil, working off-season in cities as drivers or on construction sites. Shades of *Isaan's* distinctive red dust-soil came to figure prominently in much of

Montien's art, reflecting his rural roots, affinity with the land and a strong sense of place and home. As a child, Montien was good at science and loved to read. He was also fond of growing plants and playing outdoors. He and his siblings Koson, Paitoon, Benjamas, Paniti and Sirilak enjoyed the usual Thai games, such as making catapults to fling whatever objects that came to hand across the canals (*klongs*) – and to escape wild dogs.<sup>1</sup> On Sundays, the Boonma children were often taken to visit temples in the area and encouraged to participate in the local festivals such as *Khao Pansa*, the beginning of Buddhist Lent, lining up in their best clothes and parading along the road with decorated candles.<sup>2</sup>

Early in his life, Montien showed his artistic talents, often drawing in his free time. Montien's father, a native of *Isaan* himself from Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima), used to carve pipes from bamboo for the children to play and Montien recalled his father as his first art teacher.<sup>3</sup> Montien used to visit his aunt's house nearby to paint and work. She encouraged him to follow his passion and supported him along the way. Towards the end of his life, Montien was particularly pleased to see her when she came alone to visit him in hospital. When one of the Udon schoolteachers suggested that Montien go to Bangkok to study art, his parents were not enthusiastic. However, by the time he reached eighteen years of age, Montien had decided he needed to follow his desire and secretly set off to Bangkok with two friends. To fund the trip, he stole money from his mother, an act he felt guilty about for the rest of his life. In the last few months of his life he called a close friend to confess and clear his conscience.<sup>4</sup>

In Bangkok, Montien stayed in a temple near Poh Chang School of Arts and Crafts, then moved to share a small room with his artist friends from Udorn – Chumpot Bunyamonkol (Pot), Somchai Vachirasombat (Wan) and Chart Kobjitti, who went on to win a SEAwrite prize for his novel *Wela* – 'Time'. The aspiring young artists supported themselves by painting posters for theatres and trading at the night market. Montien also lived at the home of his mother's youngest sister, Chomchoey in the suburb of Taksin-Bukalo while he studied at Poh Chang from 1971-73. At that time, before it became more technology-oriented, the artistic standard of Poh Chang was

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

very high and compared with Silpakorn University, the major art school in Thailand. Many of the instructors taught at both institutions.

On his first day at Poh Chang, Montien met two people who were to influence his life greatly. Lining up as first year students, Montien was struck by the beauty of young Chancham (Num) when she came up to him to ask for assistance to find the bathroom.<sup>5</sup> From that moment, the two began a loving friendship that lasted for both their lives. He also met Chokchai Datpo and as they continued to study the two close friends were competitive in a positive way. Both were hard working, Chokchai would often win prizes for his drawing, while Montien would win the watercolour awards. Montien admired Chokchai's dedicated (*kai yan*) approach to creating art and to life in general<sup>6</sup>.

Montien's early artworks done at Poh Chang include the prescribed studies of the human form, abstracts and cubist paintings of Thai boats at the floating market. After graduating in 1974, Montien and his sweetheart Chancham moved to study at Silpakorn University in the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts. Friends recall that Montien used to talk about art all the time and he was known for experimenting with various media.<sup>7</sup> One of Thailand's well-known neo-traditional artists, Chalermchai Kositpipat, studied in the same year as Montien at Silpakorn, but chose to major in Thai Art. Chalermchai and Montien held a mutual respect for each other and through the Thai system of education which bonds students of the same year and within institutions, the two maintained a friendship throughout their varied lives.

A popular student, Montien was elected the third-year class representative for student activities, in charge of organising entertainment and art events. At the same time Amrit Chusuwan was the first-year student rep and stayed in a room opposite Montien. Together the two budding art managers organised films and music nights and sold tickets. When they held one particularly successful night in 1980 they made a profit (20,000 baht / \$800) for the first time and arranged for the money to go to student scholarships. One project was a trip to Koh Samet to welcome 35 first-year

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Montien 2 November 1999

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Kamol Phaosavasdi 1 May 2001, Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

students. However the boat to the island was cancelled due to high monsoon winds and big seas so the group of a hundred people (including ex-student graduates who used to join the celebrations) had to stay in the coastal town of Ban Phe for three nights. The senior students camped underneath the bungalows of the 'freshies' during the heavy rain, but the planned entertainment had to be cancelled and there was nothing to eat and drink. As the leader of the group, Montien was very upset about the disruption but managed to adapt the circumstances into a campfire theatre. He entertained the sodden crowd by singing Vietnamese songs he had learned during his childhood encounters in Udon Thani. He didn't know the meaning of the words but the Thai students found it very amusing. Much later when Vietnamese artists visited Thailand in 1995 for the Thai-Vietnamese exhibition, Montien was asked to sing the Vietnamese songs again and the visitors told him the tunes were about going to war.<sup>8</sup>

One night when Montien was sharing a bottle of whisky with friends Rungsak, Dum and Nontichai at Ming Lee restaurant, a popular haunt for Silpakorn senior students located just outside the university gates, Nontichai declared that he wanted to escape from Bangkok. He persuaded his drinking colleagues to take a taxi to the seaside and the gang arrived at Ban Phe at two in the morning, staying on the pier drinking, sheltering from the strong wind under fishing nets. At dawn they caught a boat across to Koh Samet island and continued to eat and drink. Smelling badly fishy from their night under the nets, they jumped into the sea to wash their clothes and frolic in the nude. For lunch they grilled the dried toad (*oong ung*) which was a gift from Dum's father. When everyone became hungry again that evening, they realised that they only had about twelve baht (50 cents) between them. They went to a local restaurant and explained the situation, handed over the twelve baht and assured the owners that they would come back to pay their bill another day. The restaurant trusted the students, gave them dinner, whisky and some money to get back to Bangkok. When they returned from this three-day spontaneous island adventure, Montien claimed that he could not believe he would do such a thing.<sup>9</sup>

During his fourth year at university, Montien began to reveal his distinctly different ideas about art. His photographic works included an installation from a series of nude photos focusing on parts of the body and a photographic study of people at

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Amrit Chusuwan 14 July 2001

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Amrit Chusuwan 14 July 2001

the local horse-racing stadium – recording the stadium as it gradually filled with a crowd. When he sketched an askew table and put it in Acharn Chalood Nisamer's room, his instructor Acharn Sun said, *I cannot teach that – the perspective is not true. You cannot build a table from that*<sup>10</sup>. Montien then started a series of airbrush acrylics of traffic signs that developed into his final BA thesis *Rules of Society*. In his thesis, Montien wrote, *'I'm interested in breaking the rules. I believe that everybody has a mind to do that. I do believe in the law, but I would like to find out something different.'* At the same time, he wrote that he believed that people need someone or something to lead them.<sup>11</sup> His works *Social Sign* (1977) and *Static Flag* refer to the harsh military crackdown on students demonstrating for democracy in 1973 and 1976. *Social Sign* portrays the rigidity of military control while *Static Flag*, 1980, shows a windless Thai flag drooping sadly. This work was exhibited in the 1977 National Exhibition of Art at the National Gallery in Bangkok.

After graduating from Silpakorn University in 1978 with a BFA in Painting, Montien remained another two years working at Silpakorn as the designer for the University Art Gallery and teaching art on a voluntary basis. At the same time, Chancham, an avid sketcher, graduated with an MFA in etching and became an instructor at King Mongkut Institute of Technology. From 1978 to 1989, between his BA and MA theses, Montien actively participated in a range of group exhibitions and was a founding member of the White Group (begun 1980) with other Silpakorn graduates led by Sawasdi Tantisuk, including Vichoke Mukdamanee, Saravuth Duangjumba, and Panya Vijnthansarn. He was concerned about Thailand's increasing environmental degradation and the challenge of reconciling the competing forces of nature preservation and industrial development. Promoting coexistence and a middle path, he warned of the indiscriminate use of technology against nature, and sought to harness nature's energy into his art. As Thailand's development plans roared into action, Montien used his art to raise awareness of the potential conflicts between modernisation and traditionalism and the need for co-existence. He continued to focus on social issues, rural-urban disparities and the rural struggle in particular. As modern consumer behaviour became more apparent in the country, Montien was sensitive to the obvious spiritual and material conflicts and continued to develop his earlier ideas about the individual and government control. His sketch

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Amrit Chusuwan 14 July 2001

<sup>11</sup> Montien Boonma BFA thesis, Silpakorn University Library

*Buddha Image Today* (1983) suggests the demise of Buddhism in the materialistic world.

In his *Changing World* series, Montien explored a variety of techniques and materials. Three collage-photo-drawings depict corn-cobs with steel screws, scattered with grains of rice. For other works in this series he used watercolour and glued paper plates. One piece with two broken picture frames and tyre marks roaring through the middle was achieved with the assistance of Montien's brother-in-law who was asked to run his car over the paper.<sup>12</sup> This piece caught the attention of Chulalongkorn University's Society of Education in Environment and in 1984 Montien received an Honorary Award from the institution. Montien explained, '*This work refers to the spiritual and cultural changes caused by rapid economic development. The tracks represent economic growth, while the frames symbolise culture.*'<sup>13</sup>

When Montien returned occasionally to visit home in Udon Thani he would enthusiastically relate stories about Bangkok to his family and show them pictures. For his family, art was a strange and foreign world, about which they knew little. Montien's sister recalls that Montien was a good son but did not have much time to spend with his parents,<sup>14</sup> In 1981 Montien became an instructor in Visual Arts at Chang-Silp College of Fine Arts in Bangkok. As a teacher, Montien was concerned about the future of his students and encouraged them to study further at university. In one session, a few months into his teaching career, Montien invited a group of about ten students to an experiment. They discussed art into the night, slept at the college and in the morning woke at sunrise to take photos.<sup>15</sup> Montien's strong interest in photography at this time was supported by his friendship with Thai photographer, Tom Chuwiwat. He worked in Tom's photo shop and the cuttngly titled *A Man Who Admires Thai Art* (1984) shows a gloating self-portrait embellished with ink tattoos. This provocative statement inspired other Thai artists to question the famous Thai smile and is a classic expression of Montien's keen wit.

One of his students, Apisit Nongbua, who later became his close assistant, recalls that the first time Montien came to teach the Composition class, he spoke so

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

<sup>13</sup> Khetsirin Knithichan, A Time of Change, The Nation 31 July 1995

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

sternly that everyone was afraid of him. In response to student foolery when his back was turned, Montien shouted angrily, *'Why did you do that? Don't you know art is serious?'* To maintain control, sometimes he kept his eye on the students at the same time as drawing on the board. Apisit received an 'F' from Montien for one of the first assignments and when he asked why, Montien replied, *'Because you play in class. Don't ask me again.'* Years later when Apisit and Montien were working on one the many large commissions they created together, Apisit reminded Montien of this time but he didn't remember and claimed, *'Impossible, I could never fail you!'*<sup>16</sup> Montien first starting working with his long-standing assistant Apisit in an installation for his MFA thesis project at a lakeside in Lat Krabang, near Bangkok. Together, at night, they installed a metallic crop by planting aluminium bolts in rows of organic mounds of soil. This work is his mother-in-law's favourite because she saw in it a *simple lovely form*.<sup>17</sup> The concept developed into a series of environmental sculptures titled *Symbiose* created during his studies in France. In *Natural Forms in the Present Environment* (1984), Montien's respect for nature and the land is highlighted. Hammering nails and metal screws into a cut-off tree stump, with wire to stabilise, he created an almost-elegant statement, for which he was awarded third prize in the Thai Farmers' Bank annual art competition. Montien explained that famed Thai artist Thawan Duchanee had declared that if this work didn't receive a prize he would walk out.<sup>18</sup>

After entering the Thailand National Exhibition of Art in 1977, 1980 and 1983, Montien was beginning to find some local recognition for his work. When *Natural Forms* was exhibited at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) in Bangkok, the hottest venue in town at the time, the work was damaged. Originally created with two loops, only one survived the BIMA event.<sup>19</sup> The piece is now in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery in Bangkok.

Before marrying Chancham on 1 March 1985, Montien, aged 29, followed the Thai custom and spent one month as a monk in a local temple and his hair was still shaven short on the wedding day. The formal reception was held at the Siam Intercontinental Hotel in Bangkok. Following Thai tradition, the young couple went to live with the bride's mother in Nonthaburi up the river on the outskirts of Bangkok, and

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

Montien became like a son to Chancham's mother. However the young couple did not spend long together as a monk advised them to live apart, so Montien applied to study abroad.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. The Search / Learning (1985-88)

Eager to develop his art and experience the world, in 1985 Montien applied for and was awarded a Thai government scholarship to study abroad. Initially he intended to study in the UK but the available position was eventually given to another candidate. He chose to travel for a year in Italy where he was impressed by the artistic and cultural environment. Hitch-hiking over the Italian mountains he was amused to learn how a Fiat develops speed wobbles without enough passenger weight to balance it. Though stimulated by this taste of international adventure, Montien also discovered that the academic qualifications he would gain in Italy would not be recognised by the Thai education system back home. Later Montien explained, *I had many sketches, no money and was just married. I took a chance to study in France.*<sup>21</sup>

In 1986 Montien headed to Paris, navigated the complicated bureaucratic system faced by foreign students seeking study visas and set about absorbing the French life around him. He enrolled at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) and settled into his small room at the Foyer d'étudiants asiatiques in Rue de Babylone, a small all-male dormitory run by kind Catholic priest Père Jean Hirigoyen who had worked in Vietnam for 20 years. The Foyer took thirty students from Asian countries and Montien was one of three students from Thailand staying there at the time. On each floor of the hostel were nine students from Asian countries and one French student. Each student had a room with a bathroom, small bed, bookcase, and a small round balcony overlooking the Foyer's garden<sup>22</sup>. Helpful, kind and understanding, the priest took care of the visiting Asian students and encouraged them to learn French and adjust to their new lives in a foreign culture. When his students were short of money for books, Père Hirigoyen invited outside visitors to dine at the hostel and introduced them to the students, facilitating patronage. Montien formed a close and lasting bond with the priest.

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<sup>20</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongshirachai, Art and Asia Pacific July 1995

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Montien 10 January 2001

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Nantawat Boramanand, 4 May 2001

Montien was considered a late developer, but his spirit was very positive and he had a keen desire to learn. He studied at ENSBA under sculptor Claude Viseux for two years and also in the Faculté des Arts Plastiques at Université de Paris VIII under the direction of conceptual photographer Jean-Louis Boissier. Montien explained,

*Some people said it was strange and wondered why I got so much energy to create in the 34<sup>th</sup> year of my life... Before that, I couldn't find any real artists and I found my professors there in Europe. I learned different things from both of them. M. Claude was an amazing man. He had his own style and taught me about spirit... He said to me, 'Don't follow the mode...' He hated if I experimented with my work too much... sometimes he said my work was too small... He was an old-style artist<sup>23</sup>.*

Montien worked hard each day, from eight in the morning through until nine at night. Years later he recalled that Prof Boissier had said, *'I've never seen my students work hard like this' and he invited me to his house three times. The other students were jealous because they were never invited.*<sup>24</sup> In the evening he joined his friends at Le Foyer to dine together. His close friends during this time included Heddy Julistiono, an Indonesian science student, Saw Lucas, a Burmese art student who made gravestones, and Nantawat Boramanand, a Thai student of law who later became the Director of the Centre for Promotion of French Legal Studies in the Faculty of Law at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. In their free time, his friends would visit Montien's shared atelier and though Heddy and Nantawat were legal and science students and sometimes did not understand Montien's imagination, they all got along very well.<sup>25</sup>

Inspired by his introduction to the artists of the Italian *Arte Povera* movement, who used commonplace objects blending life and art in installations, Montien experimented further with alternative materials. He would make nocturnal expeditions with friends to collect material for his work from the Parisian rubbish bins. The materials in *Leaves A* and *B* were collected on the way to his art classes.<sup>26</sup> Living in France exposed Montien to other belief systems, broadening his Buddhist worldview.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Nantawat Boramanand, 4 May 2001

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Montien 22 June 2000

Buried deeply in *Leaves A* and *Leaves B* are subtle yet important references to Christianity – obscure crosses which the artist himself struggled to point out when viewing the work many later in 2000.<sup>27</sup>

Montien was constantly making new connections and crossing borders and looking outside. A natural communicator, he adapted quickly and soon picked up conversational use of the local language. In an extension of this learning, he began to use French titles for his works. Developing his *Symbiose* series, and extension of *Natural Forms in the Present Environment* which explored the coexistence of nature and modern life, Montien hammered small nails into chopped branches he found in the Paris dump. He chose elaborate French titles for his works, such as, *Symbiose d'elements naturels et de structures crees dans l'imaginaire d'aujourd'hui (1,2,3)* (1986). These *Symbiose* works were selected to show at the annual Salon de Mai expositions at the Grand Palais in 1987 and 1988. To celebrate this honour, during the first week of the exposition, Montien invited a large group of friends from Le Foyer to accompany him to the exhibition and they visited the Grand Palais again three or four times because Montien enjoyed seeing and photographing his sculpture in such a fine setting.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the exhibition, two or three of Montien's works were installed in the reception room of Le Foyer and one sculpture was set in the garden of Le Foyer. It was still there in October 2000. The organic wood and steel forms nestled amongst scattered dead autumn leaves, overlooked by Le Foyer's Christ on the cross. Montien appreciated the natural setting that brought the symbolic spiritual forces and icons together.<sup>29</sup> After showing in the reception area of Le Foyer, Le Pere kept the *Symbiose* pieces in his storeroom to protect the wood, glue and cement works from the ravages of outdoors. Montien's thesis with photos of the *Symbiose* works is in the library in Paris. An aluminium piece, *Symbiose*, was sent to Korea in 1988 for exhibition at the Seoul Olympic Sculpture Park and Montien travelled to Korea with Thai artists Vichai Sithirat and Preecha Arijunka to represent Thailand there. Montien jokingly related that his favourite teacher Claude Viseux was angry because he did

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Montien 22 June 2000

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Nantawat Boramanand, 4 May 2001

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

not represent France. He later put this piece in front of the statue of Christ in the arms of St Joseph in the garden of Le Foyer to create a dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

During his European art education, Montien's art was to develop definitively. He found direction for his art and inspiration from 'real artists'. He was introduced to new influences and new perspectives, especially the ideas of Prof. Boltsanski and the 'Nouveaux Realistes'. He was impressed with Joseph Beuys' politically-charged conceptual installations and through his study of Beuys' work, Montien learned more about the rights of the individual and cultural identity. Beuys was to become a strong influence on Montien throughout his artistic life. Montien referred to Beuys when he said,

*Every person's life is a process of building belief or faith – an empire for us to be able to survive. Without this empire, or this faith, we would be uncontrollable, we wouldn't know what to do, why we should work... why should we live? Even though we know we must die, we still try to discover something, so that we can pass a better day. Those who are sick understand this. It's the in-between. Whatever we believe in, we create a space there. That space is like a kind of realm, or as Joseph Beuys put it, thought is a form of sculpture... Beuys made me understand the material of the work.<sup>31</sup>*

While in Europe, Montien kept in touch with his family in Thailand, sending cards and letters and the occasional gifts. When Montien's wife Chancham visited Montien in Paris for two weeks in 1987-88, Nantawat Boramanand recalls that it was the happiest time of Montien's life in France. Num was the only woman to stay at Le Foyer and La Pere put the young couple in a special big room at the end of the first floor. They went out together with Indonesian and Burmese friends and had lunches of Thai food.<sup>32</sup> Montien's sister Benjamas, her husband and young son visited Montien in France at the same time Chancham and her mother were there. They all stayed in Montien's apartment and Montien took good care of them, bringing home croissants and preparing food. Montien took them all to visit Montmartre, the Louvre, and other

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Montien 31 March 2000

<sup>31</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongshirachai, Art and Asia Pacific, July 1995

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Nantawat Boramanand, 4 May 2001

famous sites.<sup>33</sup> An old friend from Silpakorn University, Amrit Chusawan, who was studying in Poland at the time, came to visit Montien in Paris. Amrit recalled that at that time Montien taught him some big things, taking him to visit the Musee D'Orsay, the Grand Palais, the Pompidou and other important art venues. Montien told Amrit that whenever he was looking for inspiration, he went to these places and whenever he missed his wife, he went to visit *Venus* in the Louvre, saying, *Do you see how beautiful she is?*<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Back to the Land / Tradition and Culture (1988-91)

When Montien returned home to Thailand from Europe in 1988, he took a position at Chiang Mai University in the north of Thailand and threw himself into teaching, creating and exhibiting. Based on what he had learned abroad, Montien's approach differed from the traditional Thai method of art instruction and involved more challenge and communication between student and instructor. This new style was received with caution at the university. He explained, *My colleagues had doubts about what I taught. In 1990 they accepted me because one of my students (Tawatchai Puntusawasdi) was awarded the Silver Medal in Sculpture in the National Exhibition of Art.*<sup>35</sup> Montien was known for his caring support and personal interaction with his students. His medal-winning student, Tawatchai, later won an Asian Cultural Council scholarship to travel and study in New York and Los Angeles in 2001 and designed the praised Thai Pavilion in the Venice Biennale in 2003. Another of Montien's protégés from Chiang Mai University who has proceeded to carve an impressive international career is Navin Rawanchaikul, known for his *Taximan* and *Curatorman* conceptual art. A student of painting and not in the Montien's mixed media sculpture course, Navin asked Montien if he could visit and get his criticism. Provocative Thai artists Chatchai Puipia and textile-performance artist Montri Toemsombat also studied with Montien.

Chiang Mai was a special time and place for Montien. Although living apart from his wife who stayed in Bangkok teaching at KMIT, Montien said this was a happy time and that he spent all his time working and reconnecting with the natural and more

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit 1 July 2001

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Amrit Chusawan 14 July 2001

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

traditional way of life with which he was familiar and felt most comfortable.<sup>36</sup> He explored the ancient temples in the surrounding area including Lampang, Lamphoon, Phrae, Nan, Mae Hong Son and rural village activities.<sup>37</sup> He chose to work with local natural materials such as bamboo, straw, horn, feathers, terra cotta pots and chicken cages to create installations. Montien explained that his salary as a teacher at a Thai government university was 6000 baht (\$240) per month and tubes of imported oil colours cost 150 baht each, so he realised that he could not afford to continue creating with oils. At the same time, he was searching for more essential materials to express his beliefs about art and life.

*At that time there was money available from the government for many kinds of materials for classic sculpture, like marble or bronze casting, but these materials don't belong to our culture, they deny Thai heritage or a universal language. They are scientific technology and western oriented. These imported materials are not real and they are expensive. I'm more interested in the primitive.*

When the body of work he developed in Chiang Mai was presented in his first solo exhibition, *Story from the Farm*, at the National Gallery in Bangkok in 1989, it shocked the conservative-minded Thai/Bangkok art circle. Thai artist Panya Vijnthansarn commented to Visual Dhamma Gallery owner Alfred Pawlin that Montien's work was *very advanced for Thai people*.<sup>38</sup> It made an impact on the audience who found the crude aesthetics challenging and collector Chatvichai Prommevedhi said that at the time he found the exhibition *not so impressive - it didn't really click*.<sup>39</sup> In an interview some years later, Montien reflected that he saw this exhibition as his first step as a professional artist.<sup>40</sup>

Using French titles such as *La Metamorphose (The Change)* and *Buffle Muet (Silent Buffalo)*, Montien's works revealed his concern for and empathy with the struggle of farm workers and their hand-to-mouth existence. He drew attention to the large and increasing gaps between the life of rural poor toiling the earth with basic tools in difficult conditions and the comfortable affluent existence in the capital. *Story*

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 3 August 2001

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Alfred Pawlin 24 March 2000

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Chatvichai Promadhattavedi 9 July 2002

<sup>40</sup> Khetsirin Knithichan, A Time of Change, The Nation 31 July 1995

*from the Farm* came at a time when Thailand was racing towards becoming a Newly Industrialised Country. The country's rapid economic growth, stimulated by the 1985 Plaza Accord agreement and the subsequent appreciation of the Japanese yen<sup>41</sup> along with premier Chatchai Choonhavan's government policy of changing battlefields into marketplaces, led to a massive rural-urban drift and radically-changed lifestyles for many – from one of countryside simplicity to urbanised industrial factory work and conspicuous consumption. The exhibition was a statement of caution from Montien, a reality check for the boom-time behaviour, a reminder of traditional values, origins and the people. Montien sketched numerous elegant buffalo forms and his beasts of burden were created from sacks of rice, discarded horn and four-legged wooden stools - simple strong forms from the land. Wit and humour are also part of the complex metaphors. In what was to become a signature motif in later steel works, his question mark made of sack and string probed for answers to what he predicted as a growing crisis in the country. The exhibition featured the series of *Group of Primary Forms* and included *Energy of Life* works made of real egg, also bamboo chicken cages. While living in Chiang Mai, Montien traveled each month to visit Chancham in Nonthaburi and the egg reference may also have been related to the imminent arrival of their son Chumpon (nickname Bank) who was born in July 1989. Years later, during a photography session at his home, Montien joked that the colour of the strong yellow yolk looked like the traditional Thai-Chinese salted egg (*kai kem*).<sup>42</sup> *A Pair of Water Buffalos* and *Buffle Muet* were bought by Thai collector Petch Osathanugrah and due to deterioration were later reworked by Montien's student-assistant Tawatchai Puntusawasdi whom Montien described as *very understanding and skilful*.<sup>43</sup>

Montien's first solo exhibition drew on the material from his MFA at Silpakorn University. In his thesis titled *Manual Activities in Rural Life* Montien wrote,

*I use equipment commonly used in making a living in the countryside such as fishnet (hae), spade (siam), rake (krard), rice thrashing sticks (mai nuat khao), watering can (karnard), dipper (krabuaytaknam), etc.*

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<sup>41</sup> As it became more expensive to export from Japan, many Japanese companies invested funds and set up companies in Thailand, attracted by its regional access and favourably-priced labour market. The U.S., European and other East Asian countries followed Japan's lead. However, it is a myth to say that the boom was caused by foreign investment. It may have been a trigger, but at its peak foreign investment accounted for only one eighth of local corporate investment (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 4).

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Montien 22 June 2000

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

*I also use materials such as rice hay, rice bunches, soil and lime with hand impressions on it to symbolise physical exertion on the hard work, a common practice in rural Thailand.*<sup>44</sup>

Along with his strong interest in Chiang Mai, Montien frequently visited the many ancient temples, including his favourite, Wat U-Mong. He became fascinated by northern and Khmer architecture and the way the workmen constructed the sacred structures according to a set pattern of brick-laying. He began to experiment with the pagoda-temple-stupa concept. His initial works in this theme comprised soil and glue on paper, and later ash and charcoal, a pigment with which Montien said he felt most comfortable. One of his early stupa was constructed of washing powder boxes in reference to the washing away of Thai culture. During this search for inner form in 1989, Montien created some of his most elegant early works including *Black Stripe*, *Black Stupa* (now in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum) and *Earth Pagoda*. For the process of creating "*Earth Pagoda*", Montien explained,

*The process is...I put sand on paper and after that I put soap powder... like a ritual process to clean it... It's about building up the new civilization... -three-two-two-one-one (the panels are stacked as in the traditional architectural construction of a pagoda).*<sup>45</sup>

The owner of *Earth Pagoda*, Chatvichai Promadhattavedi, admires artists who take tradition and apply creative innovations. At the opening of Montien's second solo exhibition *THAIAHT* in 1991, he recognised Montien's attempts to take Thai heritage and make something new out of it. Chatvichai was not concerned about the image but more interested in the conceptual and visual aesthetics. As well, he appreciated the powerful scale of the work (over 3.5 metres tall). Chatvichai found this work an elegant statement about the Buddhist concepts of disintegration and impermanence. With its crumbling and fading ephemeral materials, it may also have been a reference to the state of Thailand in the political and economic world. He bought the work on the opening night. During Chatvichai's experience as the director of the popular Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, he found in the Thai aesthetic system *not much emotional intensity. It's evasive*. In Montien's work he found an effective antidote to this evasion. He commented, *At that time, not many of the contemporary movement were making*

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<sup>44</sup> Montien's MFA thesis, 1987

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Montien 2 March 2000

*Thai statements. Montien and Vasant Sittiket seemed to reach maturity together – both naturally intellectual and with the inspiration of travel.*<sup>46</sup>

In 1990, Prof. Peter Weirmair showed *Earth Pagoda* in Vienna in *Von der Natur in der Kunst* at the Wiener Festwochen, Messepalast. Montien's *Form and Material* 1990 solo exhibition at his friend and mentor Alfred Pawlin's Visual Dhamma Gallery was a further opportunity to show his developing pagoda/stupa series. He exhibited *Soil Pagoda in Ten Panels* (1989), *Soil Pagoda in Two Panels* (1990) and *White Pagoda in Two Panels* (1990) which were created with soil and paper with torn edges, to depict the sound of the bell from inside.

Montien's 1990 series of *Greats from the East and West* reveals his belief in a universal understanding which encompasses all the world's belief systems and the valuable lessons within each. In the blue-grey *Great from the East*, created from burnt charcoal and ash to symbolise cremation, the round form represents a Buddha head. A *Great from the West*, made with red soil, makes a reference to the blood of Jesus on the cross and the Christian custom of burying the dead.<sup>47</sup>

For his *The Pagoda and Cosmos Drawn with Earth* solo exhibition in Chiang Mai, August 1991, later shown in Fukuoka and Tokyo in 1994, Montien explained, *Chetiyas and stupas (pagodas) are constructed to house the relics of venerated monks and the ashes of laymen – an idea which originated from the pile of ash and dirt remaining where the Lord Buddha was cremated. They are places of worship and reminders of the Buddhist philosophy concerning the escape from samsaravatta – the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. I use dirt, charcoal and ash to transform the three-dimensional architectural structure of a pagoda into a two-dimensional work of art. The pieces are laid out in the same way and pattern as the traditional brick-laying in pagoda construction – so the work embodies a real physical feature of a pagoda and is placed at the same level as the viewers, so standing in front of the work they will instantly sense the real phenomenon of the pagoda,*<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Chatvichai Promadhattavedi 9 July 2002

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Montien 20 March 2000

<sup>48</sup> Montien's statement *The Pagoda and Cosmos Drawn with Earth* catalogue, August 1991

In this period of prolific creativity, Montien was contemplating the religious and social forces of the world and, through the symbol of the human hand, acknowledging the effort of the individual and the ego. Discussing the concept of *Manual Traces in the Paddy Field with Fishnet and Spade* with Gridthiya Gaweewong in 1997, Montien explained that his *Manual Activities* series was a fusion of painting and sculpture derived from his previous *Stupa* series, composed of layers of bricks and representing Thailand's agricultural society,

*I got the idea from a terra-cotta factory at Chang Kien Buddhist Temple in Chiangmai where people were working on the rooftop of the temple. I collected the impressions of the factory workers by clamping their hands on clay that I had prepared. At first, the workers were reluctant to participate, so I made some impressions myself. The point was to record the products of their energy. In Thai, we have a saying that a man's production is the result of his hands and his efforts.<sup>49</sup>*

Process and action was important to Montien and he was interested in capturing the process of natural life forces in his work,

*I recorded action on the walls by using my hand to draw waves with soil on sheets of paper... The question was how could we document a wave of water? We can't draw moving water. When we go to the sea, we see the wavy traces in the sand where the sea touches it. That is the wave of water in two dimensions. It's also the story of the changing dry land... I intended to create neither illusion nor a focal point in the work... It doesn't need to have a perspective... I'm interested in something right in front of me – action, activity, so I used the fishing net and a spade with hand of squeezed clay – they were transformed into the harvest and the product of our land. I portrayed them straightforwardly. The other point that interested me was the four elements: earth, wind, water and fire.<sup>50</sup>*

Montien experimented further with the waves of soil on handmade (sa) paper, creating the elegant *Water* which features terra cotta pots and tiny flecks of gold leaf and is now installed at Bangkok University. His work *Trace out the Fire Wind Water*

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<sup>49</sup> Montien interview by Gridthiya Gaweewong, 5 March 1997

<sup>50</sup> Montien interview by Gridthiya Gaweewong, 5 March 1997

*Dirt* (1991) specifically deals with the concept of transformation and the cycles and forces of nature.

*I work with clay and spread the pieces on paper to let the wind and sun dry them... with iron that is transformed by fire into another form... water as a transforming agent... We in the East traditionally believe that our body is created from earth, water, wind and fire. Here, the body is represented by wood; when it burns... it turns to ashes and eventually becomes one with the earth. Wind and water in the title are references to the breath and body fluids.*<sup>51</sup>

Around this time Montien began to focus on the concept of the vessel and perspectives of inside and outside. *Trinity* (1991) makes reference to the Buddhist trinity of Buddha, *sangha* (the monkhood) and *dharma* (the teachings), while *Pots and Footprints* provocatively shows his own footprint in the middle of each pot. *Old Pot* (1992) continues this theme with a comment on life's inevitable process of deterioration. He also began experimenting with the candle, a symbol of wisdom or enlightenment and used with lotus flowers and joss sticks in merit-making ceremonies. Burning and dripping the wax on paper and board, Montien created a series of *Candle Drawings* in 1990, including the large four metre work *Paintings and Candles*. Some developed into skull-like forms in *La Tete A* and *La Tete B* (1990) and *La Tete 1, La Tete 2*, (also called *Aum, Aum, Aum*) (1991). These skull silhouettes are also reminiscent of alms bowls and he mentioned the *Kruad Nam* ceremony of pouring water on the ground to benefit the dead buried there.<sup>52</sup> In *Candles Painting: Full Moon* and *Loi Krathong* (1991), which were later reworked as *Sunrise* and *Half Moon* (1996) in commissions for collector Surind Limpanonda, Montien was interested in the moon's reflection on water. He explained that these positions gave him ideas for the later *Floor and Wall* project.

At the outbreak of the Gulf War with vivid images of bombing shown on television, Montien adapted his candle creations into the *Benediction* series. In this context, Montien explained that the burning candles depicted bombs on the burning

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<sup>51</sup> Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, *Meditative Art from Montien Boonma*, The Nation 9 January 1992

<sup>52</sup> Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, *Meditative Art from Montien Boonma*, The Nation 9 January 1992

earth, destroying nature and peace, and his hope that maybe the dripping of the candle could help people go to heaven.

#### 4. Faith / Suffering (1991-94)

A devout Buddhist, Montien practised meditation and lived simply. He believed in the Buddhist tenets of compassion (*metta*) and loving kindness (*karuna*) and tried to practise these in daily life. Buddhist philosophy is based on the concept *dhamma* or natural truth. It teaches that everything is impermanent (*anicca*) and mere illusion. Life or worldly mental states are understood as *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness or suffering, and the cause of this *dukkha* is some form of craving, attachment or ignorance - *dukkha* is a result of *anicca*. Once *dukkha* is thoroughly penetrated and understood, *nibbana* or nirvana can follow. *Nibbana* literally means coolness or the utter quenching of *dukkha* and can be described as the cessation of greed, anger and delusion – the ending of all craving, attachment, selfishness and ignorance. The evolution from *dukkha* to *nibbana* is the sole issue of *dhamma* practice [Note 4.1] Revered Thai monk Buddhadasa Bhikku, abbot of Suan Mokh temple in the South of Thailand described the heart of Buddhism as the realisation that nothing whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to as *me* and *mine*.<sup>53</sup>

Also somewhat superstitious, Montien believed the magical word *Aum* could open doors to the spiritual world. After the opening of his solo exhibition *Aum* at Visual Dhamma Gallery at the end of 1991, Montien explained,

*The word Aum begins Hindu prayers and it is believed that when Aum is uttered, the mind will become clear and serene. It is a kind of meditation... I believe that while we pour the water on the ground, we can communicate with the spirits underneath... My works were not created purely from religion or superstition. They develop solely out of my personal intuition.*<sup>54</sup>

While on an artist residency in Germany and missing his family back home, Montien created the meditative *Drawing for Training the Mind*, a series of drawings of alms bowls, explaining,

<sup>53</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Keys to Natural Truth*, Buddhadasa Foundation 1999, pp xi-xii

<sup>54</sup> Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, *The Nation* 9 January 1992

*When I realised this work, I was constantly reading the sermons of Luang Por Chah Suphattho, abbot of Wat Non Phong in Ubon Ratchatane in Thailand, who talks about the calm mind. I read every morning before I started to work, so maybe this work is formed unconsciously from the concepts that I had read about and my idea of using simple materials in simple ways. I was in Germany, in Worpswede at the time and had no idea for doing work concerned with the town. The idea of making a monk bowl came to me when I asked myself what form I wanted to make.*

Of his extensive collection of Montien works, collector Chongrux Chantaworrasut says this piece is his favourite because of its simplicity. [Note 4.6] Furthering his focus on the alms bowl, Montien created the terracotta installation *Alm* which features increasing numbers of clenched fists hanging on the edges of fifteen gold-leaf lined bowls, all finely balanced on a triangular base. Montien explained that the work is about careful balance and controlling the self – if one of the fists is removed, the bowl topples.

*I am fascinated with the shape of the monk bowl... its shape looks organic, geometric and ambiguous. The bottom of the bowl is curved so it can only stand with support from the bottom, so monks always hold them in their arms. I think about the space in the bowl and would prefer to be in this space which for me is separate from the outside world. I would like to place my mind inside the bowl... We have to put something inside in order to balance it. So this process is similar to that of the mind. If your hand holds it, it's like controlling passion... trying to find balance in the mind... Our life is between good and evil. I'm interested in the nature of life that is open to purify the evil. Even though we are not all Buddhist, we know what's good and what's not. But that's the moment of examination. The desire to turn left or right or follow the middle path are attempts by human beings trying too much to control their lives, like the nature of the water which has to flow downward. Our mind is similar to the water flow. So it's a great conflict in our lives whether we would like to go up or down. We want to be good, then to do good things, and we must do that. I'm really interested*

*in this stuff. I don't think it's nonsense. Artists are not nonsense people.*<sup>55</sup>

*Alm* was sold to Fukuoka Art Museum and another version of this work was made. The duplication upset the Japanese owners, but Montien thought it was not convenient to borrow the work and he felt he had the right to create another if he wished. He donated the second version of *Alm* to the HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday commemorative exhibition. Works in the exhibition were auctioned to raise funds for the planned Rama IX Art Museum and Montien was disappointed to discover that the organisers had felt his work was too difficult to display at the event, though the venue was the spacious Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre. By default, the Rama IX Art Museum is today the owner of the second *Alm*.<sup>56</sup>

In his seventh solo exhibition *Works 1990-93* at the National Gallery in Bangkok, Montien showed rope forms of *Alm*.

*Rope is formed by twining fibres and I get the feeling of concentration from the structure of rope which is used to join things together – to make everything one, in unity. I coiled the rope in a gradual spiral to form the bowl. The spiral of rope makes me think about the Zen gardens in Japanese temples and the image of water in Thai mural paintings. I want the wave of spiral rope to represent the wave of my mind inside the bowl. The different forms of bowls symbolise the various characteristics of the mind. The remains of the rope join in the centre in a jumbled pile, like a nest, with a cast of my fist laying in it. My fist print symbolises the self, the spirit and the evil desire (mara).*<sup>57</sup>

Montien's alms bowl concept, launched him into an extensive series of sketches for a *Wall, Door, Floor* project which saw the bowls lifted and protruding from walls, connected to each other lip-to-lip and delicately balanced on fine points, as if feeding each other. Handwritten notes on these sketches indicate that Montien intended these terracotta pots to be filled with Thai perfume, whisky, water or milk. A ladder element is added into the wall and jar arrangements in *The Annunciation* (1991-92), perhaps a

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<sup>55</sup> *Montien Boonma* exhibition catalogue, Beurdeley & Cie. Paris, December 1997

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Alfred Pawlin 24 March 2000

<sup>57</sup> Montien Boonma statement in *Works 1990-93* catalogue

reference to the idea of climbing the walls to escape from the ego/self/selfishness. For *Oblique Wall* (1992), Montien used handmade sa paper, charcoal, ashes on board and introduced a fluorescent red light, leading to an interesting contrast. This bright pink effect also featured in his bold *Venus of Bangkok*. A statement about the negative social impact of Thailand's rapid economic development, *Venus* refers to the many young people being drawn to find work in urban areas and ending up enslaved at construction sites and brothels.

Two Asian artists were invited to participate in the *Arte Amazonas* international environmental art workshop in Brazil, organised by the Goethe Institut in February, 1992. Montien spent three weeks in Manaus, once the centre of the world's rubber industry, researching and working with the local Indians. Montien explained,

*In this project, artists were asked to work at the site and receive inspiration from the Amazon environment. I already knew the book The Last Rainforest in Thailand and two photos in that book gave my work a strong direction - one showed a nude Indian woman at work, with uncovered breasts. The other was of people at work putting a cup to the tree to get rubber sap/milk. These two images inspired me to view nature as mother and I did sketches on this concept that were sent to Brazil before I went. During my stay in Manaus, I went to the island of Terra Nova and I asked the local people for a huge trunk. The island is full of rubber trees but the locals are sometimes afraid as the trees destroy their homes when they fall down. I started to work on a huge trunk that was about 80 years old. I put an oval deepening in the wood and filled it with rubber milk. The elevation in the trunk symbolises the belly of a pregnant woman, so I called this work Reincarnation. Then I discovered the hammock and how it is used by the Indians. The hammock is really part of their life and their main furniture. In my work I use the hammock to hold the trunk in a diagonal position... Reincarnation refers to the image of a pregnant woman but I feel it also has other meanings. One of these might be that the present situation is bad and we would like to give birth to a new one.<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup> Montien Boonma conversation with Alfred Pawlin, *Arte Amazonas* exhibition catalogue, June 1992, Goethe Institut, Bangkok

Montien's *Reincarnation*, *Hanging Breast*, and *Cut-Shut Off* were exhibited in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 and some of his *Arte Amazonas* works were hung in the central garden at Bangkok's Goethe Institut when he returned. These works mark a significant progression in Montien's choice of materials. In the exhibition catalogue he explained:

*In my previous works I have used natural materials like soil, charcoal, ash and terracotta. This is the first time I am going to use heavy materials like bronze and steel to cast the base. We take materials from the earth and cast them into natural forms again. So the image of nature as mother comes out of the earth... In the Bangkok exhibition, I will also use brass, which is the same material that we use for Buddha images in Thailand. The image of the Buddha is very pure and shining and gives some kind of light to the people. For me the image of breasts can be put in a similar context, as breasts also represent the power and energy of nature. The surface of my breast sculptures is very smooth and its fullness is inspired by the volume of Buddha sculptures. The powerful image of breasts full of life should give some kind of energy to people, similar to another kind of energy transmitted through the Buddha image. The brass breasts will be hung in the garden to put it in touch with and in context to another form of energy, the light of the sun... The form of the environment is important for me to make choices of what I am going to present. For this show at the Goethe Institut in Bangkok I will use the small garden in the middle of the building. This garden represents an oasis in the middle of a concrete jungle. I like to make this place interesting for visitors. Usually people come to this Institut to look at works on the walls or in rooms and often people ignore this small greenery. This little garden is also the lungs of the Institut.<sup>59</sup>*

Installing his works at the Goethe, Montien was delighted to discover that his idea to harness the energy of the sun into his works worked splendidly. He recalled how the effect combined with bird sounds to create a moving memory of nature in the urban space, *At a certain moment in the morning, the sunlight reflected off the hanging breast like a mirror - the trees in the garden were reflected onto the wall of*

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<sup>59</sup> Montien Boonma in *Arte Amazonas* exhibition catalogue, June 1992, Goethe Institut, Bangkok

*the Goethe. I didn't plan that but I love it. It's like a communication of the spirit.*<sup>60</sup> Actively concerned about social and environmental issues, Montien explained how he saw the role of the artist in society.

*The artist's challenge is to get in touch with the feeling of the society in which he lives. One has to feel and sense what is happening and what could help the individual and society. Artists need to have quick responses and fine sensitivity. They should not just follow society but present their own concepts. If an artist feels that society is turning in the wrong direction, he has to act and tell the truth. If we are really sensitive, we can predict some movements and help people understand us better. We don't need to think so much about advancement and progress – more important is the quality of life. I am not against modernisation but we have to find solutions for the problems. We took a lot from our ancestors and now we have the responsibility to choose what to do with it. We cannot return to a primitive life but we can find the creativity to solve the problems... I work with primitive materials and I want people to think about what they represent. It does not mean that I want people to return to the forest. As an artist you are not an expert on environmental problems, but you realise that they exist. If we are sincere about the situation, we can show it directly. It is not the artist's work that is the solution – it is the results of the work and what kind of thoughts it inspires in people.*<sup>61</sup>

During his trip to Brazil, Montien was also deeply concerned about the health of his wife Chancham who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991. His way of dealing with this crisis was to channel his emotions and ideas into his art, intensifying the messages in these elegant pieces. This included continuing his exploration of space and creating larger, more architectural installations, constructed from carefully-selected materials that could capture and convey their own essential meanings. He explained:

*I love to work with corners and am not particularly interested in using flat walls. I really like triangular space. The pieces in which I started working with corners were Lotus Sound and Homage to Lung Ruen in 1992 at the Asian*

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with MB 20 March 2000

<sup>61</sup> Montien Boonma conversation with Alfred Pawlin, *Arte Amazonas* exhibition catalogue, June 1992, Goethe Institut, Bangkok

*Cultural Centre in Tokyo. These pieces were turning points for me.... For me, the feeling between the person and the object is very interesting, so I continue to use materials to move the audience... The feeling as one enters a space interests me. In the search for the meaning of objects, I'm interested in their quality... I think to accomplish your art-making process you must let the materials represent themselves as much as they can. They should be able to portray their own qualities, their stories that relate to the audience's experiences. Whether an artwork is successful or not depends on the artist's experience and his ability to share with others. If the work is too laden with ideas, it's not appealing to anybody. If it represents very individual ideas, then the audience can't get it. That's the weak point of this type of work. So, if I do my work, I'm aware of this difficulty and try my best to overcome it. Otherwise it's just personal stuff.<sup>62</sup>*

Thai art historian and curator Somporn Rodboon recommended Montien to be invited to the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennale held in Australia. His impressive *Lotus Sound* (1992), subsequently purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery, is created from carefully-stacked and finely-balanced terracotta bells with delicate gilded lotus petals attached to the wall above, like the marks applied by monks in the blessing of a space. Montien explained that this work, which is not easy to install, uses one drop of glue on one point and is really just held together by tension. When the work was first shown in Bangkok's National Art Gallery, a passing truck shook the building causing some of the bowls to slip and fall from the tower. Montien was typically intrigued by the dynamic effect and described the intention of his installations:

*In their current state they represent the energy of a moment in space and time. If they were to collapse, like Lotus Sound did once, then my installations will take on another form, as the forces of energy dictate... The shape changes with time and the emotions of the viewer.<sup>63</sup>*

Responses to *Lotus Sound* have been dramatic. Reinhardt Fraiss of Acacia Fine Art recalled, *I was crucified before it. In Brisbane, when I saw the bells, I understood it was Arte Povera with a spiritual dimension, not just the minimalist. There's a human concern and a spiritual quality in his work...it's about consciousness. (German artist)*

<sup>62</sup> Montien Boonma exhibition catalogue, Beurdeley & Cie. Paris, December 1997

<sup>63</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongchirachai, Art and Asia Pacific July 1995

*Sigmar Polka said that the artist is nothing more than a medium for a higher force and I think with Montien it's definitely true – it's like a window to the real world, a window into consciousness... it's like art is his possibility of conveying something important, it's just a tool... art is like a messenger, it's like a window for people.*<sup>64</sup>

The gardens of one of Montien's favourite temples, Wat U-Mong in Chiang Mai, were the site for another of his circular stacked-bowl installations, *Vessel-Meditation* (1983). Montien explained that each morning of the exhibition, he would go to sweep the fallen leaves around the work, creating a spiral path, like a meditation. [Note 4.20 A] For *The Pleasure of Being, Crying, Dying and Eating* (1993), another large bowl installation, Montien included molds of jaw-bones, bone-shaped chopsticks and false teeth in some of the bowls, with dark red table cloth and napkins symbolising heaven and wealth, explaining, *We have to die, we have to eat.*

Invited to participate in the Tachikawa Project in Japan during 1993-94, Montien returned to tell Gridthiya Gaweewong that he found the building amazing, with buildings everywhere. In *Rock Bell Garden*, another in the bowl-tower series, Gridthiya Gaweewong explained that, *Montien wanted to balance high-technology with the spiritual, especially at Tachikawa – he wanted to add a spiritual aspect to that city.*<sup>65</sup> As word of his extraordinary art began to spread, Montien began receiving numerous invitations to participate in international exhibitions and his policy was to accept them all, if at all possible. Working ceaselessly, he organised his seventh solo at the Bangkok National Gallery, installed *Prayer of Abhisot* (1994). Revealing his resourcefulness, Montien arranged for a video projection onto paper on the walls of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which Tony Bond recalled was *[a] splendid solution to a difficult problem.*<sup>66</sup> He prepared sketches for an installation in the Adelaide Botanical Gardens for the *Beyond the Material World* festival exhibition at the beginning of 1994. The dark forests full of questions seen in *Sketch for Sculpture in Botanic Garden Adelaide* and *Study for Adelaide Arts Festival* reveal a deeply troubled soul. Chancham's cancer was advancing and Montien was consumed with frustration and confusion, many questions and few answers. Seeking to create a place to calm the mind, he conceived *Room*, seven small personal booths constructed of

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Reinhardt Fraiss 26 March 2000

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Gridthiya Gaweewong 8 April 2001

<sup>66</sup> Discussion with Tony Bond in Bangkok March 2001

untreated wood lined with black cotton printed with repeated gold question marks and exclamation marks. A recording of the ceremonial chanting to welcome the god of art greeted viewers as they entered the booths to stand, sit or lie and look up and contemplate. Montien explained, *It looks comfortable from the outside - when you enter it you will experience a very uncomfortable sensation. Life's like that - it's a struggle for most people.*<sup>67</sup> Unable to leave his wife, Montien called on the assistance of his friend and student Navin Rawanchaiful to construct and install the works based on the sketches. Montien described his struggle during this period,

*When my wife was bed-ridden, in critical condition, I went and made propitiations at shrines everywhere. I would chant continuously the Jinapanjara (an ancient mantra popularised by the late Buddhist saint Somdej Toh of Wat Rakhang) and whatever I found in Lok Thip magazine (literally "Heavenly World", a journal focused on the Buddhist supernatural). I took an oath to Mother Kuan Im (Avalokiteshvara - the bodhisattva of compassion) to stop eating beef. I went to pray at the Buddha relics of Doi Suthep and Khruba Sriwachai. I recited the names of all the Buddhas, gurus and deities - it was what I hung on to, like a kind of plea. I donated a pair of buffalos, trying to find a pregnant one. The temple did a ritual saying 'may you be free from calamity and bad karma'. The buffalo was named Boonrod (the merit to escape) because my name is Boonma (the approach of merit). In the end it gave birth to a pair of twins, a male and a female. It turned out I saved three lives from the slaughterhouse, so I thought my wife would make it... the omens seemed to suggest that we had made merit in time ... in April, I couldn't paint. All I could do was trace these marks, these question marks because I didn't know what to do. Sometimes I would read monk sermons... Breathing is so important to me. My wife's cancer spread from her breast to her lungs and they stuck tubes down her nose and throat in order for her to breathe. She could only communicate with me through letters. For four months before she passed away we communicated in a silent space.*<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Brecelec and Jim Algie, *Art in Balance*, The Nation 16 September 1996

<sup>68</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongchirachai, *Art and Asia Pacific* July 1995

A small paper and ink collage, *Untitled 27/3/37*, created just three weeks before Chancham passed away on 18 April 1994, shows a heavy exclamation mark on a question mark with a teardrop-shaped dot. Montien explained,

*The question mark represents what we don't know, which is the obstacle. The exclamation mark, a mark of surprise, expresses a kind of hope, a not-knowing, a sense of discovery. I perceived a gap between these two... the question and the response – these two are never-ending. A response can turn into the subsequent question. It's like our mind... It's a gradual process. It seeps in slowly and dries slowly, like water seeping into the sand. With the sun shining on it, it might look like it's dry on the outside, but inside it's still seeping... Only on the day of the cremation, when I felt I would not see my wife again, did I cry uncontrollably. At the funeral, I was just teary eyed... I'm very Thai, I don't cry a lot, but it just kind of seeps... It's not that I want to turn my personal life into my work. But I feel it's a kind of reality that everyone reaches at some point. Many people say to me, 'It's about time you stopped this obsession with question marks.' I tell them I'll continue because this is not an art-related problem. If a person's life is like that, why should he change it?<sup>69</sup>*

## 5. Healing / Hope (1994-97)

Following the death of his wife in April 1994, Montien moved from Chiang Mai to Bangkok to be with his son. Through his art, he endeavoured to deal with his personal loss and inevitably entered a black period. Up to this point, Montien had preferred to leave his materials untreated and raw, but he began to experiment with a black stain from carbon-graphite and to use more permanent metals such as steel and aluminium. He explained, *My previous artworks were created in Chiang Mai where there's an abundance of natural resources available. But living in Bangkok, I have to change to substances that are available in the capital.*<sup>70</sup> The question marks continued, becoming bigger and bolder. In *Marks of Mind and the Saint* (1994-95), he experimented with fabric, lamp, gold thread on black cloth. A small amulet was subtly hung upside down in the middle.

<sup>69</sup> Montien interview by Albert Paravi Wongchirachai, *Art and Asia Pacific* July 1995

<sup>70</sup> Khetsirin Knithichan, *A Time of Change*, *The Nation* 31 July 1995

In preparation for an exhibition in Germany in 1994, Montien suggested to Kamol Phaosavasdi that they do a two-man show *Content and Sense* at the National Gallery in Bangkok. In this way they could establish the details required by the German organisers, take professional photos for the catalogue and bring the shipping company in to measure the size and weight of installations and sculptures and give a quote. Montien shared his experience with Kamol. Although only a couple of years younger, Kamol says he respected and admired Montien as a senior because of the strong work he created and his serious commitment to producing his art. *He worked all the time and he was quite clear about his ideas and the concepts*, said Kamol. As it turned out, the planned exhibition in Germany was cancelled due to a change of budget and director. In 'Content and Sense', Montien presented the large steelworks of *In Between*, a tunnel-like piece with recorded chanting symbolising a ritual space and inspired by Wat U-Mong in Chiang Mai and *Black Question*, which he later reproduced in aluminium with a back on it and installed in his garden at Nonthaburi. Kamol said,

*Many of Montien's artist friends in Thailand criticised him, telling him to work another way so that things would not be so difficult, but Montien was able to cleverly twist his ideas and combine them with a way that made his art speak - not by talking about personal events and feelings directly, but contextualising them in his art in a more obscure way. Nobody could understand the deep impact of the things that he confronted. He fought for spiritual understanding and dealt with the emotional events in his life, bringing that into his work.<sup>71</sup>*

Montien was inspired by the form and function of the ancient Khmer temples that are today still scattered across the northeast of Thailand, where he was raised. During the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries the Khmer empire covered this part of modern-day Thailand, Buddhism and Hinduism were merging and the priests in these temples treated visitors for their physical, mental and spiritual ailments. Using boxes of wood and metal to construct the shape of a *sala*, he smeared pigments of indigenous Thai medicinal herbs such as ginseng, *khamin*, *karaboon* and *fah-talajon* to further engage the senses by adding a healing herbal aroma. Montien's multi-sensory soothing spaces offered spiritual strength and curative comfort to the visitor.

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Kamol Phaosavasdi 1 May 2001

The wooden *House of the Mind* attached to a wall invites visitors to peep through small viewing holes to see the lungs hung upside down and to breathe in the smell of herbs inside. In his experiments with lungs cast in various materials including bronze and filled with herbs, he began to present the lungs as vessels and to encourage the controlled breathing associated with meditation. Montien explained,

*In my art, I use the pigments of primitive medicines and the voice of prayer. I hope that people feel in a calm state of mind and physically rested by looking at or entering one of my works. Within this chaotic city life, I want my installations to give people the feeling they are in a spiritual place such as a church, temple or mosque.*<sup>72</sup>

At the *Thai Tensions* exhibition at Chulalongkorn University in September 1995, Montien installed *Sala of Mind*, made of black steel punched with question marks and exclamation marks and covered with herbs. Visitors would walk underneath the *sala* and contemplate with the sound of chanting. The *sala*'s origins were related,

*Sala of Mind was influenced by the form of Khmer prang (spires) at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The faces of Shiva and Isuan in such architectural structures are amazing. I like the concept of tevalai – a palace of god, a space of god. It is so inspirational that I, too, would like to create such a specific space. This piece derives from my previous project, Room, which was square rooms surrounded by question marks and exclamation marks printed on curtains. This project focuses only on the question marks. When viewers visit this 'room' with a dome-like roof, they look like they are wearing a chada (traditional Thai headpiece.) The chada, like a hat, is a metaphor for the belief system that one believes in – each religion or 'ism, so to speak. This piece intends to provide a space for the audience to examine their beliefs, let them be in a sala of mind to rest their mind and thoughts. It could also be a space where people might ask questions, like whether god exists, something like that. It's a kind of ritual space<sup>73</sup>... In my installation, I worked with the concept of Khmer people constructing temples Arokhaysala 800 years ago. These temples were like hospitals where the physical and mental problems of the people were looked after by the priests who did ritual acts and ceremonies to heal. Taking the*

<sup>72</sup> Montien's statement *Content-Sense* exhibition catalogue January 1995

<sup>73</sup> Montien interview by Gridthiya Gaweewong, 5 March 1997

*sacred water, herbal medicines and prayer helped the people to feel better or to obtain a feeling of restfulness, in a calm state of mind.*<sup>74</sup>

From *Sala of Mind* Montien developed his series of *Arokhayasala*. Montien appreciated the form of pagodas and bells and in his first *Arokhaysala*, of large wooden stacked pagodas he, used bells as counterweights, later moving to metal lungs. *Temple of Mind: Sala for the Mind* (1995), featuring herbs, lungs and bells, was bought by the collection of National Art Gallery of Australia.

The *Thai Tensions* exhibition at Chulalongkorn University, curated by Apinan Poshyananda, became part of the *Traditions-Tensions: Asian Contemporary Art* exhibition at the Asia Society in New York in 1996. Montien's *Arokyayasala Temple of Mind*, now in the collection of Acacia Fine Arts, travelled to New York. Apinan recounted that during the stress of installing the *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Asian Art* exhibition in New York, he and Montien nearly broke their friendship.<sup>75</sup> A key participant representing Thailand in the exhibition, Montien had decided to ship another *Arokhayasala* different from the one he had indicated to Apinan during preliminary arrangements. When the work was unpacked in New York, Apinan realised the difference and was disturbed that the surprise piece (of different dimensions) would create problems in the arrangements for carefully worked-out floor space. Although this challenge was dealt with by some last minute reorganisation, the Asia Society gallery managers then expressed their concern that the piece appeared unstable and could be a potential hazard (and insurance liability) should it fall on visitors. They recommended that the *sala* be stabilised by connecting an invisible string from the artwork to the roof, but Montien refused. For him, the meaning of the work would be lost by this 'interference' to the essential tension holding the work together. As the exhibition opening approached, Montien was eventually persuaded to agree to the gallery request. Montien was disappointed and felt the work had totally lost its essential character. Later the two friends were able to resolve their differences over some of Montien's favourite Guinness and pickled vegetables in a popular New York bar.<sup>76</sup> When asked to speak to *Traditions/ Tensions* audiences about his work, Montien discussed how the structure of his work was influenced by the work of other

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<sup>74</sup> Montien's statement, *Sala of Mind* exhibition catalogue 1995

<sup>75</sup> Discussion with Apinan Poshyananda 20 September 1997

<sup>76</sup> Discussion with Apinan Poshyananda 20 September 1997

artists, such as Donald Judd and Richard Stellar. Montien preferred to express his ideas in his artistic creations, rather than talk directly about his personal situation and what was on his mind. He was reticent about revealing his emotions and the forces affecting his life that brought the real impact and power into his art. Apinan called out to him in Thai, asking him to talk about his wife, so Montien explained to the audience how the lungs and herbs in his *Arokhayasala* related to seeking a cure for his wife's cancer.

Back in Bangkok later in 1996, Montien set about installing his latest versions of *Arokhayasala*, *Sala of the Mind* simultaneously shown at Visual Dhamma Gallery and the Bangkok Playhouse on Petchburi Road. Alfred Pawlin, the owner of Visual Dhamma and Montien's old friend, described Montien's powerful *Metal Tool House* as a *coffin* and was impressed by Montien's understanding of space and use of it. Pawlin says *it was like kinetic art looking for a sacred space*.<sup>77</sup> *Metal Tool House* was shown once again in October 1999 at in a small two-person exhibition with Japanese artist Hitori at Silpakorn University's Decorative Arts Faculty gallery. At the Bangkok Playhouse, Montien installed an enormous scaffolding-like structure of steel rods extending from the floor upwards to the very high ceiling, representing the Buddhist cosmology and universe of good and evil. Hands and teeth molded from brass, symbols of the masses struggling upwards, were attached all over the precarious structure. At the base, hanging from wire, a large copper bowl of 40-proof rice whisky, symbolising hell, emanated a potent eye-watering aroma. Montien explained the process, *I took three years to do this one and we used 10 bottles of local whisky. I had a cast of my mouth done in Yaowarat (Chinatown) with my mouth contorted like a grimace*.<sup>78</sup>

In Chiang Mai that year, Montien created *Body Temple* (1996), based on the form of coffins. This work was given a ceremonial burning at the end of the outdoor exhibition. *His Temple of Mind: Nature Breath* (1996) was purchased into the collection of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. During 1997, Montien was constantly traveling to install his work in international exhibitions. Solos in Oslo and at Art Front Gallery in Tokyo featured his *Perfume Paintings*, made of herbs and cement and using stools to bring the viewer up close to the aromatic textured works. He

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Brecelec and Jim Algie, *The Nation* 16 September 1996

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

participated in the Johannesburg Biennale and exhibited in Berlin, Hiroshima, Hong Kong and Taipei. *Breathing House* (1996-97) was purchased by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.

Montien was on the Board of the Project 304 art space set up by Gridthiya Gaweewong (Jeab). He told Gridthiya that he accepted every invitation to travel out of Thailand and she explained that it seemed even Asia was a limitation for him,

*In Thailand at that time, most artists were working in two-dimensional art with only Montien, Kamol Phaowasdi and Araya Rajareamsook doing installations. Montien needed like-minded people to share information and appreciate what he was doing. Besides, his work could not be sold. Only his drawings and sculpture could sell, not the installations. Going out meant he could get a per diem, honorarium, production costs, etc. Thailand did not really have such a system or an infrastructure or galleries to help him realise projects in terms of production.<sup>79</sup>*

At Project 304, Montien helped to decide on exhibition proposals and curated the *Witches Stuff* exhibition in 1997, featuring 28 young artists from the three universities where Montien taught - Chiang Mai, Silpakorn and Chulalongkorn. One of the young stars, Montri Toemsombat, explained, *Acharn Montien let me do what I wanted to do and encouraged me to learn from it. He taught me that in art nothing is right or wrong. He gave me the power. He told me to carry on and do what I want.<sup>80</sup>* Gridthiya says, *Montien opened the channel for students – put lines together and tuned the system. He gave students a chance to experiment to do what they want – surprising in the Thai context. If you say that outside, especially in the Western context, it's like a laughing stock.<sup>81</sup>* As well as encouraging young artists, Montien was also conscious of the blocks within and between the educational institutes, explaining, *I teach everywhere, to break down the barriers.<sup>82</sup>* Kamol Phaowasdi said, *In his teaching, Montien had talent for encouraging students to produce their work in any way they wanted. A lot of his students such as Navin Rawanchaikul and Kowit*

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Gridthiya Gaweewong 8 April 2001

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Montri Toemsombat 17 September 2000

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Gridthiya Gaweewong 8 April 2001

<sup>82</sup> Montien interview by Jennifer Gampell 11 May 1995

*Juntratip in Chiang Mai and Monti Toemsombat from Chulalongkorn have become successful.*

Gaweewong says, *In the early 90's he was the only artist to travel around and return to tell us about it. He opened our world and spoke about important artist friends he had met, like Nam June Paik, in a way that we could get to know those people as humans not as icons. After each exhibition abroad, Montien would come to see the gang at Project 304 and tell us about the experience – the good things and the problems, he was a great storyteller. ...The thing I liked most about Montien was his enthusiasm and energy. Every time I met him I was recharged. We could absorb his energy, he was so inspirational.*<sup>83</sup>

For the Beurdeley gallery exhibition in December 1997-98, Montien took his young son Bank to Paris, the first time Bank had traveled abroad. Montien had been away from his family a lot, travelling to international exhibitions and felt he had left his son in Thailand too much. It was difficult for the two of them to adjust to being together. Jeab kept Bank company while Montien installed his works. To select the works for this small retrospective exhibition, Jean-Michel and Montien communicated through Gridthiya. After considering the shipping possibilities and the floor plan of the small antique shop with lots of shelves with windows, they chose small works and paintings but also included some previous pieces such as *Manual Traces* that Montien had available in his studio. Jean-Michel was impressed by the way Montien worked with the space, very cleverly presenting the lungs as antique objects, and with how he used the space and solved problems. Apisit, Montien's assistant, agrees that Montien had a fascinating style of working,

*Montien was not interested in the timing or schedule – he worked until he felt a piece was finished. He experimented with many pieces at the same time and finally he would decide at which point to stop on one. He could catch everything in nature – bring it into his work. Before the opening of an exhibition, it's very exciting. At openings, Montien would stand in front of the work and explain it and introduce me. He loved to tell everything about the problems, the mistakes. Once in Tokyo I made a mistake and five minutes before the grand opening, a guard came to tell me that one bowl had broken and there was Thai whisky was all over the floor. When I told Montien, he*

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Gridthiya Gaweewong 8 April 2001

said, Don't worry. Let me see. *First he went to tell the announcer to wait, then he went and changed the title to, Thai Smell/Atmosphere - come to see you a lot.*<sup>84</sup>

In the flurry of exhibitions during 1997-1998, Apisit usually went ahead of Montien, to arrange the staff/local assistants, site and materials. Montien would call at night to check if things were OK. Apisit speaks with pride when he describes the curious reactions of international visitors in Sweden, Geneva, New York and Milan to Montien's work. *It was the first Thai avant-garde contemporary art they had seen. Before this they had associated Thailand with Thai dancing, women and massage, but not contemporary art.*<sup>85</sup>

Invited to do an artist residency at Deitch Projects in 1997, Montien was not content. He found it difficult to find materials and inspiration from that setting and longed to be back in Thailand.<sup>86</sup> Before cutting short this six-month residency, Montien created one of his most admired pieces, *House of Hope*. Visitors were engaged by the aromatic herbs painted onto the gallery walls and 1500 threads strung with thousands of tiny balls of Chinese herbal medicine creating a *sala*-like space in the centre. Apisit explained that he and Montien experimented with the herbal balls hoping to find a way to prolong the smell. *House of Hope* traveled to the Global Vision, New Art from the 90s Part III at the Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art in Athens and when it was shown in that hot and dry climate, there was no smell. Nevertheless, it was purchased as part of the Dakis Joannou collection.

## **6. Space / The Void (1997-99)**

An incredible schedule of invitations saw Montien constantly travelling on the international circuit during 1998 with his work exhibiting in New York, Sao Paolo Biennale, Geneva (*Edge of Awareness: Art for the World* (WHO)), Athens, Oslo and Milan. Back in Bangkok, for his *Melting Void* exhibition at Marsi Gallery at the Suan Pakard Palace, Montien painted partitions of a maze-like installation with *chad*, a vermilion pigment made from cinnabar, often used in traditional Thai paintings. This series developed into *Melting Voids/Molds for the Mind*. From a series of elegant

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Apisit Nongbua 2 May 2001

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Montien 13 July 2000

sketches, he created five large molds of Buddha images (head, standing and sitting) made of plaster, gold foil and steel, which were shown at Numthong Gallery in August 1998 and at the First Fukuoka Triennale in June 1999. The Fukuoka Asian Art Museum bought two of the casts for \$30,000 and the other three molds were returned to Thailand where Montien had them destroyed. He felt deeply disturbed that he had defaced the Buddha images by signing his name on them and by removing the *usnisha* (flame of enlightenment) from the top of the head. Later, he confided his concern that this act may have been the reason for his sickness.<sup>87</sup>

In Geneva, participating in the huge World Health Organisation exhibition in Geneva, Montien was impressed by Navajo sand painter Joe Ben Jnr's installation which featured a domed tent about the same height as a human, symbolising a universe, and natural-coloured sand poured from the centre of the room to the door. Montien felt Joe Ben Jnr and he shared similar understandings of art. On some of these international trips – to France, Geneva, Singapore and Stuttgart – Montien took his son. These were sometimes difficult times with angry outbursts as the father and son struggled with their relationship which suffered from extended periods apart. Though Montien's reputation as an international artist had grown, his family did not notice any change in his personality and his sister Benjamas was pleased that *our ordinary brother came back*.<sup>88</sup>

More time was spent in Europe at the end of 1998, when Montien headed to a residency at Academie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, which he felt was *an interruption*.<sup>89</sup> He had been developing his *Arokhayasala* series, but the new German context introduced other ideas and he refocused on the spiritual spaces of Stuttgart. Although the situation, facilities and support from the staff of the Academie were all fine, Montien found himself enduring a cold European winter in a small room, again far from his family and homeland. While there he managed to complete a commission for Bangkok collector Sirind Limpanonda, *Drawing of Mind in Stuttgart* (1999), a variation of a 1992 piece, also created in Germany. Both these pieces are meditations on the shape of an alms bowl and evolve from daily sketches.

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Montien 20 April 2000

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Benjamas Somprakit, Montien's sister, 1 July 2001

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

Taking maps of Stuttgart and encircling the spiritual centres (churches) scattered around the city, Montien began the process of creating the *Das Haus Der Sternzeichen* (Zodiacal Haus) works which developed the star concept. Around each of the churches he marked the radiation of the sound of the church bells. As he traced the overlapping of the sound radiations, the drawings became images of dark night skies with bright stars. He explained,

*When I arrive in a new city, in Thailand or wherever, I usually look for two places: the temple and the market, because these two places give a picture of peoples' lives – an idea of their beliefs and their daily needs. When I arrived in Stuttgart, I opened my city map and looked for the churches. When you open a map, you have to believe that what you are looking for will be there... For me, churches are like stars. Sometimes we think that there are things on earth that are related to heaven. My work speaks from the space between our beliefs. It is about the linkage to heaven, which is very important for this city... On this map of Stuttgart, I imagined the ringing of the church bells and marked the reverberating of these sounds. I blackened the areas to mark the bell radiation and then expanded the sound. When we look at the stars, we don't know much about them. However, we believe that the constellations can have some influence on people in this world. I am interested in the spiritual aspect, so I transformed the stars of the churches in Stuttgart into a view of the stars of heaven, combining the two.<sup>90</sup>*

Good quality steel, by now one of Montien's favourite materials, was used to create six figures inspired by the cathedral turrets of Stuttgart. As in his *sala* series, visitors were invited to enter the spiritual installation and absorb the herbal aroma painted on the inside. Looking up, tiny stars created by light shining through holes gave the sense of being in an infinite space, *This piece gives a feeling of serenity... it suggests that man is a tiny spot in the universe and I think it answers the chief question of life.*<sup>91</sup> Just as the *Das Haus* exhibition was getting underway at the Akademie in January 1999, Montien collapsed. He had passed out several times over the months but this was obviously more serious. Jean-Baptiste Joly and other friends

<sup>90</sup> Montien interview by Jean-Baptiste Joly, February 1999, Stuttgart

<sup>91</sup> Jakapan Vilasineekul, curator of *Death Before Dying: The Return of Montien retrospective*, National Gallery Bangkok, April 2005

at the Akademie Schloss Solitude arranged for Montien and his son Bank to be flown home where Apisit Nongbua and Montien's mother-in-law met him at the airport and took him for treatment.

## 7. Energy / Radiation (1999-2000)

When Montien arrived home from Germany in January 1999, he was admitted to Siriraj hospital where doctors diagnosed a brain tumour. He was given chemotherapy and radiation treatment, and spent most of 1999 in and out of hospital. Though sick, he continued to work on projects and received many visitors. During breaks from hospital, he stayed at home in Nontaburi with his son and mother-in-law, trying to be helpful around the house and fixing things. His creativity continued to flow.

Inspired by photos of natural springs in the Tsumari region of Japan sent from the organisers of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in April 1999, Montien to create a piece for the 2000 exhibition. At the Singapore Expo Convention Hall, Montien envisioned a further variation of *Bowls of Mind* (1999), this time with eleven bowls and needle drawings on brass and copper sheets. Together with his team of Apisit Nongbua, Tawatchai Puntusawasdi and Kittti, Montien wrote instructions, installed the work in Bangkok, had it photographed and then shipped to Singapore for the organisers to set up themselves. Later he was disappointed to see a photograph of his work on site with a reception desk in front. The piece was shown at an outdoor park in Singapore two months later and Apisit now treasures one of the copper sheets with a trace of Montien's handprint, rejected in the production process. Unable to attend the 1999 Liverpool Biennale curated by Tony Bond, Montien sent Apisit to install *Zodiacal Haus* (*Das Haus Der Sternzeichen*). For the *Glocal Scents* exhibition in Sweden 2000, Montien sent an untitled work of large copper monks bowls, which he explained are a double reference to the traditional Thai actions of eating for survival and chanting and meditation for learning<sup>92</sup> – Sitting and relaxing for living.

In early 2000, Montien began to lose the use of his right hand, discovering with shock one day that he was not longer able to sign his name. As his ability to sketch became more limited, he began to rely on verbal instructions to assistants, students

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Montien 13 July 2000

and friends to implement and cast at the steel factory in Bang Khae.. He described a work that he dreamt to create for the Asia Pacific Triennale,

*When I was in Stuttgart I started a project about stars – a Christian concept. I love to continue the work, so this new piece is the story of Hanuman who yawns the stars when he wants to sleep. I want to make his form like this [gestures a large space around his head] – like an earth, like a ball. Hanuman's head is like the earth too and inside it's not solid. It has this star inside. I'll make it one metre in diameter – of steel, because it's not so expensive and I love the colour and quality of steel<sup>93</sup>. ... For the Bangkok Art Project, as I was in Stuttgart, I asked a student to do the star work – about stars of Thai temples and beggars in society. Stuttgart has many, many, hundreds of very beautiful churches – I love to go there. The churches are like stars, sprinkled around the city, sprinkled in the sky. It's like what we're looking for. You go into the church and you look up. You look for the god. Like a mind work.<sup>94</sup>*

An invitation from international curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in June 2000 asked Montien to participate in his book *Unrealised Projects*. Montien found this a very interesting concept, wondering whether a better title might be *Unrealistic Projects*. By this time he had lost the use of his arms, but was excited to share his new process of creating conceptual art,

*Most of my work is in between – presented and unrepresented. I like something that doesn't tell too much and something happens... Nowadays I can't use my hands but my memory makes the work. There is no obstruction to make it, like sketches. It just comes out directly. If you draw or sketch you have obstruction of the media. It's a good way to make work without sketching... Especially after I got cancer this year – I still have a mind to work, so I think this is like conceptual, but no media first. I realise the work by thinking about the solution. I wake up at three in the morning and think about the work until 7am. So every day I have five projects in my head. When I wake up I think about the first work to find the solution. So it's very clear. Sometimes one piece, when I wake up. Another day I go back to the first work. I can remember.*

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Montien 13 March 2000

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Montien 13 July 2000

The five projects Montien was working on in his mind at this time included a piece for the Kirishima Open-Air Museum, a work for the Queensland ATP in Brisbane in 2002, and two solo exhibitions which he planned for Visual Dhamma Gallery in August and the National Gallery in September. The fifth was to be another project for Geoffrey Deitch in New York, for which he was developing his concept of looking from different perspectives, inspired by the gates of Wat Bovornives, one of his favourite temples. He explained, *The gate of this temple has small windows and if you look directly, you can't see inside - only by looking at an angle can you see.*<sup>95</sup> Montien's concept for the two solo exhibitions was Chopin's *Funeral March*, for which he had the sheet music and had marked page 42. During a visit on 13 July, he asked me to play this music on his out-of-tune piano and said he thought the tune was sweet. The work was to use brass pipes like fine lines of sheet music with holes like musical notes. It would be presented in three sections, with inscriptions and the words "*Ahhh Oooh Ahhh Oooh* (like breathing, chanting or crying). After some practice, he asked me to record my voice making these slow low chanting sounds, which were similar to the recordings of chanting used in his earlier *Sala of Mind* (1995). That day he was also excited about the Shanghai Biennale in November and planned to go with his assistant. He was starting to think about creating a new piece for that [an older piece, *In Between* (1994) was eventually sent. It was installed outdoors, near the entrance of the exhibition]. His plans also included reproducing his diaries in versions of blue and brown ink. There was urgency about his creative energy that day. A totally driven artist, he said,

*I'm the real man. I do what I want...I don't follow fashion...I don't think about money... I find the way to make it.*<sup>96</sup>

Montien's friend and international curator Gridthaya Gaweewong recalls that the last time that Montien came out of hospital was the day before a lunar eclipse. Together they went to The Mall shopping centre at Ngam Wong Wan with driver, nurses and Montien in a wheelchair, as Montien wanted to buy a telescope for his son Bank's birthday. After careful inspection of the selection, he chose one of the best. Montien confessed that he had always wanted a telescope when he was young. They dined heartily on Montien favourite *yam hua ple* at See Faa restaurant and bought a

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Montien 13 July 2000

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Montien 10 July 2000

cake for Bank.<sup>97</sup> Queensland Art Gallery's Assistant Curator of Contemporary Asian Art Suhanya Raffel visited Montien on 18 July 2000 to discuss his participation in the Queensland ATP. Regarding the two projects for the Queensland Art Gallery proposed by Montien, Suhanya wrote,

*Montien Boonma's association with the Queensland Art Gallery began in 1993 when he worked with the Gallery on the First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. The work he made then, which is now a part of the Queensland Art Gallery Collection, is called Lotus Sound. During the installation of this work Montien spent time in the Gallery and got to know the architecture of the building well. When I visited him in July 2000, extremely ill with cancer, he still vividly recalled this building and described it as the building with long walls and few corners. Montien's first proposed work remarks on this and revolves around the construction of a 3 metre high wall, about 10 metres in length. The wall stands about 1 metre in front of the gallery wall. The wall is rendered white, similar to the temple walls of a Buddhist temple in Bangkok. Over the length of the 10 metre wall are 12 rectangular open windows. These are no ordinary windows. They are oblique ones in which the walls behind the openings slope away in sharp parallel angles. This makes certain that the viewer has to peer deep into the window in order to see what is behind. What the viewer will see over the course of peering through the twelve windows are fragments of a disappearing Hanuman, which have been drawn on the rear gallery wall. The bottom of a heel, the tip of an ear, the end of Hanuman's curving tail, a monkey hand, the front profile of his face and so on. The whiteness of the two walls, the first being the shorter one in front with the 12 rectangular openings and other being the rear gallery wall, is broken up only by the shadows cast by the sharply angled window recesses and the fragmented drawings that are glimpsed by those viewers who peer through to see what is behind. The second proposal features a large bronze bowl. The internal surface of the bowl is set with myriad layers of teeth and the bowl is balanced on a three legged bronze stool. The three legs of the bronze stool end as points on the floor. The bowl stands just above waist height. The bowl is large, of approximately 1 meter in diameter and as deep. The outside is a smooth dark globe and the inside looks like a large open mouth that is*

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Gridthiya Gawee Wong 8 April 2001

*screaming or shouting. Suspended behind this bronze bowl are 10 long brass temple horns. They flank the bowl, five on each side, echoing the silence that is captured within the cry of the bowl.*<sup>98</sup>

Although his sickness was by now advanced and debilitating, Montien began collaborating with his friend Rirkrit Tiravanij for the Sao Paolo Biennale. Rirkrit's video project was cooking food with homeless people while Montien planned to send postcards between Thailand and Brazil, though he was not happy with the work. Montien was looking forward to his solo exhibition at the Asia Society in New York in 2003 and to revisiting the Soho bar with the Guinness and pickled vegetables which he had enjoyed before with Apinan Poshyananda. Unable to sit, Montien realised that perhaps flying was not an option, so we discussed the merits of travelling by cruise ship or on the Orient Express<sup>99</sup>. He was delighted with the idea of laying back on the train and observing the scenery. With two newly-tailored suits and a fine telescope, Montien had prepared himself to disappear into the stars. He passed away on 24 August 2000.

A solo exhibition of his works, *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, curated by Apinan Poshyananda, toured during 2003-2004 to Asia Society, New York, the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. A retrospective *Montien Boonma: Death Before Dying* was exhibited at the National Gallery of Art, Bangkok in 2004.

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<sup>98</sup> Suhanya Raffel email correspondence, 1 September 2000

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Montien 20 July 2000

## Appendix C

### List of Montien Boonma's Art

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Media</b> With record of Montien's notes handwritten on sketches	<b>Dimensions</b> H x W x D H x L x D cm F-framed UF-unframed	<b>Collection</b>
<i>Composition</i>	1971			
<i>Drawing (pose)</i>	1971			
<i>Untitled (boats)</i>	1972			
<i>Social Sign</i>	1977	Acrylic on canvas	120 x 120 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Static Flag</i>	1980	Acrylic on canvas	180 x 140 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Changing World</i>	1980	Drawing, collage on paper	28 x 35 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Changing World</i>	1980	Drawing, collage on paper	23 x 38 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Changing World</i>	1980	Colour-retouch photograph	33 x 50 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Buddha Image Today</i>	1982	Pencil, charcoal	37 x 38 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Adam &amp; Eva</i>	1983	Watercolour on paper	58 x 76 cm	
<i>Woman</i>	1983	Watercolour on paper	40 x 55 cm	
<i>Sarn Jao</i>	1983			
<i>Sarn Jao and Iron Doo</i>	1983			
<i>A Changing World</i>	1984	Watercolour, pencil on fabric, paper		
<i>A Changing World No. 1</i>	1983	Watercolour, mixed media	107 x 84 cm	Rushda Thanaporn
<i>A Changing World</i>	1983	Mixed media, paper plates, rice, watercolour	53 x 80 cm	Rushda Thanaporn
<i>A Changing World No. 6</i>	1984	Watercolour, paper plate	70 x 50 cm	Rushda Thanaporn
<i>Sign of New Civilisation</i> No.5	1984	Watercolour	96 x 71 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>A Man Who Admires Thai Art</i>	1984	Colour pen on photograph	72 x 64 (F) 46 x 40 (UF)	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Natural Forms in the Present Environment</i>	1984	Mixed media		National Art Gallery, Bangkok
<i>Symbiose</i>	1984			Lat Krabang installations
<i>Symbiose d'elements naturels et de structures crees dans l'imaginaire</i>	1986	Work on paper	65 x 50 cm	Private Collection Peera Ditsabangjong

<i>d'aujourd'hui (#1)</i>	1986	Work on paper	65 x 50 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Symbiose d'elements naturels et de structures crees dans l'imaginise d'aujourd'hui (#2)</i>	1986	Work on paper	65 x 50 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Symbiose d'elements naturels et de structures crees dans l'imaginise (#3)</i>	1987	Mixed media		Le Jardin des Missions Etrangeres a Paris La Bibliotheque Asiatique, le foyer d'etudiants asiatiques
<i>Symbiose</i>	1987	Mixed media		Seoul Olympic Park
<i>Symbiose</i>	1987	Mixed media		Seoul
<i>Leaves A</i>	1987	Maple leaf, copper powder, acid	66 x 50 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Leaves B</i>	1987	Maple leaf, copper powder, acid	66 x 50 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Untitled</i>	1988	Lacquer-paint, leather polish, mirror & black stool	78 x 137 x 36 cm	
<i>Sack &amp; Cone in Green</i>	1988	Sack, cone, lacquer paint	200 x 180 x 30	
<i>Le Grand Moment</i>	1988	Hen cage, straw, sack, linseed	300 x 130 cm	
<i>History from the Farm</i>	1988	Cone, sack, horn	25 x 150 cm	
<i>Untitled</i>	1988	Charcoal sketch	???	Rolf Kaiser
<i>Untitled</i>	1988	Charcoal sketch	98 x 66 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Untitled</i>	1988	Charcoal sketch	74 x 100 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Untitled</i>	1988?	Sack, string	200 x 140 x 50 cm	Artist's collection
<i>A Pair of Water Buffalo (or Buffalos: From the Field to the Town)</i>	1988	Unhusked rice, sacks, buffalo horn, stools, straw	180 x 160 x 60 cm	Petch Osatanugrah
<i>Buffle Muet</i>	1989	Unhusked rice, sack, horn, stool	160 x 72 cm	Petch Osatanugrah
<i>La Metamorphose</i>	1989	Egg, feathers, rice paper, latex on rice paper	91 x 56 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>One Egg and Feathers</i>	1989	One egg, feathers		
<i>Energy of Life A</i>	1989	Egg on paper	45 x 60 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Energy of Life B</i>	1989	Egg on paper	45 x 60 cm	Artist's collection

<i>The History of Birth</i>	1989	Hen cage, feather duster, cloth, cord	100 x 120 cm	
<i>The History of Birth No. 1</i>	1989	Hen cage, leathroid, feather duster, cord, straw hat	250 x 100 x 120 cm	
<i>The Story of Metamorphosis of the Farm</i>	1989		500 x 200 x 300 cm	
<i>Untitled</i>	1989	Lacquer on paper	76 x 56 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Drawing</i>	1989	Soil pigments, charcoal, crayon on paper	70 x 100 cm	
<i>Primary Form No. 2</i>	1989	Hen cage, feather duster, synthetic resin, rice paper	130 x 50 x 50 cm	
<i>Primary Form No.5</i>	1989	Hen cage, feather, rice paper, synthetic resin		
<i>Group of Primary Forms</i>	1989	Hen cage, feather duster, rice paper, synthetic resin, cord	60 x 220 x 50 cm	
<i>Skeleton</i>	1989	Leather, iron	72 x 53 x 205 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Two Animals</i>	1989	Wooden stools, chair, straw, cushion in leather		
<i>Six Handprints and Wooden Scooper Elements</i>	1989	Cord, white cement, wooden scooper		
<i>Handprints and Straw</i>	1989	White cement, straw, acrylic	90 (h) x 12(w) x 11 cm (diam)	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Untitled (Hands and Straw)</i>	1995? (1989 idea)	Straw and concrete	115 x 15 x 12 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Handprints and a Hand Thresher Element</i>	1989	Hand thresher, white cement, straw, acrylic	92 x 72 x 25 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Handprints and Tools</i>	1989	Cord, white cement, rake		Artist's collection
<i>Black Stripe</i>	1989	Soil pigment, charcoal, glue, iron, glass, terracotta	100 x 70	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Black Stupa</i>	1989	Soil, rice, flour on paper	288 x 198 cm	Singapore Art Museum
<i>Earth Pagoda</i>	1989	Soil, pigment, charcoal, detergent powder, indigo on paper	362 x 174 x 2.5 cm	Chatvichai Promadhattavedi
<i>Soil Pagoda in Ten Panels</i>	1989	Soil, pigment on paper, bricks	287 x 233 x 15 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Pagoda in Boxes Construction</i>	1989			

<i>Primary Form of Stupa</i>	1989	Soil pigment, charcoal on paper			
<i>Untitled</i>	1989 1990?	Soil pigment on paper on paper on board, iron frame	188 x 77 x 4	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Untitled</i>	1989? 1990	Soil pigment on handmade paper on board	118 x 80	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Two Panels</i>	1990	Soil pigment on rice paper	110 x 60 cm		
<i>Three Parts Stupa</i>	1990	Soil pigment on paper	170 x 60 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Stupa</i>	1990	Mixed technique, wood, cement	180 x 111cm	Peera Ditsabangjong	
<i>Soil Pagoda in Two Panels</i>	1990	Soil pigment on rice paper, bricks	135 x 55 x 15 cm	Eric Bunnag Booth	
<i>Group of Stupa</i>	1990	Soil pigment, sand on paper	500 x 200 cm		
<i>The Great from the East</i>	1990	Charcoal, ash on paper	100 x 170 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>The Great from the East</i>	1990	Charcoal, ash on paper	100 x 170 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd	
<i>The Great from the West</i>	1990	Soil pigment on paper	100 x 170 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>The Great from the West</i>	1990	Soil and pigment on paper	100 x 170 cm 194 x 81??	Acacia Fine Art Ltd	
<i>The Greats from the East and the West</i>	1990	Soil pigment, charcoal, ash on paper	550 x 180 cm		
<i>Untitled</i>	1990	Cement, soil pigment on rice paper	110 x 60 cm		
<i>Two Times</i>	1990	Soil pigment, charcoal, ash on paper	110 x 82 cm		
<i>White Pagoda</i>	1990	Charcoal, white cement, gravel on paper mounted on board	110 x 82 cm	Artist's collection	
<i>Soil Pagoda</i>	1990	Soil, gravel on sa paper	59 x 77 cm	Eric Bunnag Booth	
<i>White Pagoda in Two Panels</i>	1990	Charcoal, ash, limestone and acrylic on paper	120 x 80 x 5 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley	
<i>Early Pagoda</i>	1990	Brick smashed	58 x 77 cm	Disaporn Chansiri	
<i>Primary Form</i>	1990	Soil, gravel, bitumen	71 x 102 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>In the Early Form of Pagoda</i>	1990	Soil, gravel on paper	71 x 101 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Charcoal Pagoda with Pots</i>	1991	Charcoal, ash, gold foil on paper on board	500 x 203 x 3 cm	Chongrux Chantaworrasut	
<i>Pot (from above)</i>	1991	Soil, ash, gravel, gold-leaf, burned candle holes	101 x 71 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Pot (from above)</i>	1991	Soil, ash, gravel, gold-leaf, burned candles holes	101 x 71 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	

Stupa	1990	Cement, steel	250 x 220 x 50 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Handprints in Cement and Tools	1990	Mixed techniques	250 x 350 x 50 cm	
Sarm Hgan Sarm Tang	1990?			
Manual Activities	1990	Installation	500 x 250 x 100 cm	
Manual Activities: Handprints with Tools	1990	Mixed media	160 x 50 x 50 cm	
Manual Activities: Fishnet	1990	Mixed media		
Manual Activities: Scooper	1990	Mixed media		
Manual Activities: Handprints Construction	1990	Terracotta, rake, digging tools	75 x 50 x 50 cm	
Handprints and a Belt	1991	Terracotta, belt, steel wheel	Variable	
Trace Out of the Fists on Ash, Dirt with Spade	1991-92	Sa paper	280 x 100 x 6 cm	
Inside-Outside Handprints	1991-92	Terracotta on wood shelves	200 x 20 x 40 cm	
Manual Traces in the Paddy Field with Fishnet and Spade	1991	Soil pigment on paper, terracotta, fishnet, spade	495 x 650 x 100 cm	
Water	1991	Soil pigment, gold-leaf on rice paper, terracotta	472 x 284 cm	Bangkok University
Water (single)	1991	Soil pigment on rice paper, terracotta jar (65 cm)	76 x 55 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
Swelling Movement A	1991	Soil on paper	50 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
Swelling Movement B	1991	Soil on paper	70 x 100 cm	Artist's collection
Swelling Movement C	1991	Soil on paper	75 x 107 cm	Artist's collection
Wave A	1991	Soil pigment on rice paper	56 x 75 cm	Artist's collection
Wave B	1991	Soil pigment on rice paper	133 x 57 cm	Artist's collection
The Local Jar	1991		120 x 240 x 5 cm	
Trinity (or Trio)	1991	Charcoal, soil pigment, ash on paper	100 x 210 x 3.5 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
Inside-Outside	1991	Soil pigment on rice paper, terracotta	120 x 240 x 20 cm	Ratch Osathanugrah
Trace out the Fire, Wind, Water, Dirt	1991	Charcoal, ash, dirt, smashed brick, terracotta, wood, sa-paper	180 x 140 x 5 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
Trace (-like)		Brown paper		

<i>Spherical Shape</i>	1991	Soil, smashed brick, ash, charcoal, wood, sa-paper	140 x 180 x 5 cm	
<i>Untitled - Stupa</i>	1991	Charcoal, soil, ash, brick, sa-paper	83 x 122 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Pots and Footprints</i>	1991	Charcoal, ash, gold-leaf, soil on paper	100 x 210 x 3.5 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Inside-Outside Pots</i>	1991	Soil, limestone on paper	100 x 210 x 3.5 cm	
<i>Untitled</i>	1990	Soil, ash, candles on paper	54 x 72 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Untitled</i>	1990	Candle wax, gravel, charcoal	57 x 37 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Bowls Candles &amp; Matches (set of 3)A,B,C</i>	1990	Candle, charcoal, matches	43 x 56 (UF) 50 x 65 (F)	Rushda Thanporn
<i>Paintings and Candles</i>	1990	Candles on paper	420 x 210 cm	Petch Osathanugrah
<i>Candle Drawing</i>	1991	Candle wax on paper	40 x 50 cm (each)	
<i>Benediction</i>	1991	Candle wax, gold leaf on photo under 9 glass plates	31 x 31 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Benediction</i>	1991	Candle wax, gold leaf on photo	51 x 61	
<i>Benediction</i>	1991	Candle wax, gold-leaf on photo	66 x 77 (F) 49 x 61 (UF)	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Benediction No. 2</i>	1991	Candle burn holes in 3 photographs, gold leaf on board	50 x 62 cm	Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
<i>Benediction</i>	1991	Candles burn on photograph, iron	66 x 76 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
<i>Candle Painting</i>	1991?	Candle on board, iron	266 x 85 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
<i>Candles Painting: Full Moon</i>	1991	Candles on wood panels	122 x 244 x 3 cm (each -2)	Bangkok University
<i>Candle Painting</i>	1990	Candle on plywood	122 x 244 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
<i>Candle Drawing 1, 4</i>	1990	Candles on sa-paper	42 x 58 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Candle Drawing 3</i>	1990	Candles on sa-paper	36 x 50 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Candle Drawing 2</i>	1990	Candles on sa-paper	42 x 58 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Candle Drawing 1</i>	1991	Candles on brown sa-paper	65 x 84 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>La Tete A</i>	1990	Mixed media on black paper	44 x 57 cm	Artist's collection
<i>La Tete B</i>	1990	Mixed media on black paper	44 x 57 cm	Artist's collection
<i>La Tete 1</i>	1991	Collage, candle paint	44 x 57 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>La Tete 2</i>	1991	Collage, candle paint	44 x 57 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>La Tete 3?</i>				

<i>Black Candles Curtain</i>	1991	Candles on wood panels, torches, amulet		Jacques Prades
<i>Leaf in the Golden Forms</i>	1991	Drawing on paper	70 x 100 cm	
<i>Sketch for Basket of Self - Page B</i>	1991? 1996?	Charcoal and white crayon	76 x 93 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Sketch for Basket of Self - Page C</i>	1991? 1996?	Charcoal and crayon	56 x 75 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Venus of Bangkok</i>	1991	Bucket, wood, paint, bricks, sponge, metal	185 x 185 x 95 cm	Eric Bunnag Booth
<i>Homage to Lung Ruen</i>	1992	Steel, terracotta, transparency, mirror	Variable	
<i>Old Pot</i>	1992	Soil, gravel, white cement on paper	49 x 69 cm	Surind Lumpanonda
<i>Sketches for Alm A, B, and C</i>	1992			
<i>Sketch for "Alm" 92</i>	1992	Charcoal "Terracotta handprints hang up at the mouth of bowl. Inside covered with gold foils. 4 steel needle legs"	41 x 60cm(UF) 66 x 98 cm (F)	Patravadi Mejudhon
<i>Alm</i>	1992	Terracotta, fist prints, bowls, steel tables, gold foil	68 x 300 x 260 cm	Fukuoka Art Museum
<i>Alm</i>	1992	Terracotta, fist prints, bowls, steel tables, gold foil	68 x 300 x 260 cm	Rama IX Art Museum Foundation
<i>Bowl</i>	1992	Charcoal crayon	63 x 83	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Bowl</i>	1992	Charcoal crayon	63 x 83	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Bowl</i>	1992	Charcoal crayon	63 x 83	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for Wave and Bowl</i>	1992	Charcoal, pencil "Materials: cords, glass, hook, glue. Enlarge glass"	63 x 83 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>The Annunciation</i>	1991-92	Terracotta jars		
<i>Untitled sketch - 5 pots</i>	1992?	Charcoal, colour	50 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Floor/Earth, Wall/Heaven</i>	1992	Terracotta, gold leaf, wood, charcoal, soil, electric light, jar	55 x 45 cm (ladder) 300 x 30 cm	
<i>Sketch for Wall Door, Floor Project 1992</i>	1992	Charcoal, crayon	41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for Wall Door, Floor</i>	1992	Charcoal, crayon	41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut

<i>Project 1992</i>						
<i>Sketch for Wall Door, Floor Project 1992</i>	1992	Charcoal, crayon		41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Wall Door Floor Project 1992</i>	1992	Charcoal, crayon "This work is composed of two terracotta in Red and in Black. The Red puts on the cornbase at the mouth of the ... Two of these have to fill with Thai perfume."		41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Floor Door Wall Project 92</i>	1992	Charcoal, crayon		41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Wall Door Floor Project 1992</i>	1992	Charcoal "Whisky, water or milk, milk or water, red terracotta jar, steel casting"		41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Wall Door Floor Project 1992</i>	1992	charcoal		41 x 59 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Wall, Door, Floor Project Page A</i>	1992	Charcoal "Works composed with 3 terracotta jars and 2 steel ladders. Walls and floor of the exhibition play the important part of this work where they help to construct the positions of jars & ladders on walls & floors. Have 6 oval forms in black charcoal." "Inside this jar installs spotlight and paint in red and gold" (RH wall). Black terracotta jar inside covered with soil pigment (Floor)"		68 x 88 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Wall, Door, Floor Project Page B</i>	1992	Charcoal "The oval form has its size same as width of jar's mouth"		68 x 88 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Door, Wall, Floor Project</i>	1992	Charcoal		63 x 83 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	
<i>Sketch for Objects</i>	1992	Charcoal		54 x 74 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut	

Sketch for Door, Wall, Floor Project 1992	1992	Charcoal "Steel sheet, Lime, Cotton, Rubber"	63 x 83 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Sketch for Wall, Door, Floor Project	1992	Charcoal, crayon "Steel Bowl of Terra Cotta Bowl inside painted in Red Sheet steel fixed at the corner of the arch door (Cadmium Red)"	63 x 83 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Sketch for Wall, Door Floor Project 1992	1992	Charcoal "Vertical & Horizontal position may be the most important idea for this project"	74 x 56 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Drawing for Floor, Door, Wall Project	1992	Crayon on paper	40 x 55 cm	Edouard Mornaud
Sketches for Wall, Door Floor	1992	Crayon on paper	40 x 50 cm	Artist's collection
Oblique Wall	1992	Sa-paper, charcoal, ash, board, fluorescent lamp	270 x 240 x 100 cm	
Sketch Oblique Wall/Floor	1992	Charcoal, colour (blue)	50 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
Oblique Floor	1992	Crayon on paper	55 x 75 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
Sketch Oblique Floor	1992	Charcoal colour (with red)	55 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
Sketch Oblique Floor	1992	Charcoal colour (more red)	55 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
Sketch for Scenes #1	1992	Mixed media on paper	50 x 70 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
Sketch for Scenes #2	1992	Mixed media on paper	50 x 70 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
Drawing for the Mind Training and Bowls of the Mind	1992	Crayon, pencil on paper, terracotta, wood base	500 x 360 cm 40 x 60 cm (60/50? pieces)	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Swell of Self	1992	Rope, synthetic, clay, pin, glue	250 x 200 x 250 cm	
Study for Swell of Self	1992	crayon	40 x 50 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
One Brick/Early Pagoda	1992? 1990?	Smashed brick	58 x 77 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
One Brick	1992			

<i>Homage to Motherhood</i>	1992?	White pencil and soil on brown paper, crayon on paper	67 x 92	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for the Breast</i>	1992	Crayon and black felt on grey paper	58 x 78 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Mother (mae)</i>	1992	Soil and crayon on black paper	56 x 81	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Untitled</i>	1992	Red soil, white crayon pencil	56 x 81 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for Sound and Breast</i>				
<i>'The Last Breast' Amazonas Project</i>	1992	(Pencil on paper) charcoal on grey paper	50 x 70 cm 60 x 80 (F)	Eva Asavesua
<i>Sketch for the Breast</i>	1992	(Pencil on paper) white crayon on black paper	50 x 70 cm 60 x 80 (F)	Eva Asavesua
<i>Sketch for Amazonas Breast</i>	1992	Pencil on paper		
<i>Sketch for Amazonas Project in Bangkok Goethe Institut</i>	1992	Mixed media on paper	50 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
<i>The Objects Forms and ...in the Maternal Breast</i>	1992	Mixed media on paper	50 x 70 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Sketch for Amazonas Project in Bangkok Goethe</i>	1992	sketch	50x70?	
<i>Sketch for A Hanging Breast</i>	1992	Pen on paper	49 x 70 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Sketch for Amazon Breast</i>	1992	Work on paper		
<i>Sketch for Cut-Shut Off</i>	1992			
<i>Cut-Shut Off</i>	1992	Mixed media	250 x 50 cm	
<i>Reincarnation</i>	1992	Rubber tree and latex	250 cm (length)	
<i>Sketch for Reincarnation Breasts</i>	1992	Pen on paper	49 a 70 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Lotus Sound</i>	1992	Brass (in tree)- green in rain Steel (rusting - made in CM) Terracotta, lotus covered with gold	350 x 300 x 300 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut (3) Artist's collection (2) Kenneth & Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
<i>Drawing of Lotus Sound</i>				
<i>Vessel Meditation</i>	1993	Terracotta bowls, lead, brass, fabric, wood		Installation at U-Mong Temple, Chiang Mai
<i>The Pleasure of Being, Crying, Dying and Eating</i>	1993	Porcelain bowls, brass, lead, fabric		
<i>Please Give Me More</i>	1992	Charcoal on paper	80 x 110 cm	Artist's collection
<i>More Chopsticks Please</i>	1993	Collage, charcoal, crayon on paper	83 x 112 cm	Artist's collection

<i>Untitled</i>	1993	Collage, drawing, felt	58 x 78 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Study for the Mandible Bows</i>	1993	Collage, colour pencil on paper	75 x 101 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Destination of Life</i>	1993	Charcoal, ash, terracotta, wood, steel	270 x 150 x 20 cm	Tachikawa Project
<i>Rock Bell Garden</i>	1993-94			
<i>Sketch for Sculpture in Botanic Garden Adelaide</i>	1993	Charcoal, pastel on paper	55 x 74 cm	Robert G. Boughey
<i>Study for Adelaide Arts Festival. 1994</i>	1993	Charcoal crayon on paper	56 x 76 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Untitled Sketch</i>	1994?	Pencil and colour	55 x 75 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Sketch for Botanic Garden - Two Walls</i>	1993-94	charcoal	89 x 69 cm	Michelle Cooper
<i>Room</i>	1994			Art Gallery of South Australia
<i>Window</i>	1994	Paper, herbs		
<i>Prayer of Abhisot</i>	1994	Photocopy papers, sound, stones, wood, monitors, photocopy machine		
<i>Trimurati</i>	1994	Sandstone dust, wood, wooden box on canvas mounted on board	210 x 180 cm	Surind Lumpanonda
<i>Sketch for Dining Room 'Triple'</i>	1994	Sandstone, hardwoods on canvas on plywood	83 x 71 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for Dining Room 'Stupa'</i>	1994	Sandstone, hardwoods on canvas on plywood	83 x 71 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Untitled - Trimurati?</i>	1994?	Soil, wood, plaster	228 x 234 x 11 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Wa-Length</i>	1994			
<i>Untitled - 27/0/37</i>	1994	Paper and ink	57 x 45 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Marks of Mind and the Saint</i>	1994-95	Fabric, wood, lamp, gold thread on black cloth,	90 x 200 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
<i>Sketch for Marks of Mind</i>	1994	Charcoal crayon on paper	75 x 107 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
<i>Untitled</i>	1994	Charcoal, graphite	76 x 102 cm	Rushda Thanaporn
<i>Sketch for In Between (Tunnel)</i>	1994	Crayon on paper	56 x 76 cm	Peera Ditsabangjong
<i>Untitled (Wat U Mong)</i>	1994?	Charcoal (2 piece)	248 x 104 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Untitled (Wat U Mong)</i>	1994?	Charcoal, tar?(2 piece)	58 x 78 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sala of Sati</i>	1994	Charcoal on paper	83 x 114 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut

Sketch for Sala of Mind	1994	Charcoal, mixed media on paper	75 x 107 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
Sketch for Studying Inside of Sala	1994	Charcoal, pigment on paper	75 x 107 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
Sketch for Sala of Mind	1995	Crayon on paper	106 x 75	Peera Ditsabangjong
Sala of Mind	1995	Steel, graphite, prayer recording	270 x 100 cm (diam.) (4 pieces)	Jean-Michel Beurdeley Artist's collection
Black Question	1994	Aluminium, graphite	55 x 244 x 117 cm	Eric Bunnag Booth
Black Altar	1995	Aluminium, graphite, herbs	120 x 480 x 100 cm	Queensland Art Gallery
In Between	1994	Steel, graphite, tape recording	270 x 100 x 100 cm	Jean-Michel Beurdeley
Roof and Ladder	1995	Charcoal, pastel	66 x 83	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Under the Roof	1995		375 x 199 cm	
Untitled	1995	Sketch		
Untitled (Lungs - 3)	1995	Brass, herbs	Variable?	Disaporn Chansiri
Nature Breath (3 lungs)	1995	aluminium, brass, herbs??	80 x 28 x 15cm	Artist's collection
Untitled (Red Heads A)	1995	Soil, herbs on paper	114 x 85 cm	Artist's collection
Untitled (Red Heads B)	1995	Soil, herbs on paper	100 x 129 cm	Artist's collection
Respiration No. 3	1995	Soil, herbs on paper	75 x 105 cm	Robert G Boughey
??Blow Up	1995	Herbs, paper		
??Blow	1995	Herbs, paper		
??Ladder/Rook	1995	Pencil crayon on paper		
House of the Mind	1995	Wood, herbal medicine, brass, lamps	160 x 150 x 200 cm	
Sketch for Arokyasala (Temple for the Mind)	1995	Pastel, charcoal on paper	100 x 70 cm	Robert G Boughey
Arokhayasala, Temple of Mind	1995	Herbal medicine, wood, brass	Variable? 320 x 270 cm?	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Temple of the Mind: Sala for the Mind	1995	Herbal medicine, wood, brass	320 x 270 cm (diam)	National Art Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Sketch for House of Practising the Mind	1995	Charcoal, pastel crayon on paper	66 x 101 cm	Robert G Boughey
Sketch for House of Practising the Mind Istanbul Biennale	1995	Charcoal, crayon on paper "Inside the room, lungs coating in brass, aluminium coated with herbal medicines (Simarubaceae, Myrtaceae, alliaceae, Simarubaceae, Ebony tree, Malvaceae, Graminac -	66 x 101 cm	Kobkam Toshiba (Thailand)

Sketch for "House for Practising the Mind"	1995	citronella grass" "Herbal medicines fill in the lungs sculpture which are installed inside the room. The viewers are the part of my concept. Room with the small windows are on the walls in different levels for the viewer to sit or to stand"	70 x 100 cm	Rushda Thanaporn
House for Practising the Mind	1995			4 <sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennale
Nature Breath: Arokhayasan	1995 1996?	Steel, herbs, lead	256 x 215 cm 210 x 210 cm?	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Sketch for Nature Breath	1995	Pencil on paper		
Sketch for Nature Breath	1995	Charcoal, crayon on paper	79 x 116 cm	Bobby & Varsha Nair
Sketch for Lung Temple	1996	Charcoal, pastel on paper	50 x 80 cm	Robert G Boughey
Temple of Mind, Nature Breath	1996	Brass, iron, herbs, latex glue	354 x 245 x 241 cm	Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
Red Breath	1996	Watercolour (chemie) on paper	93 x 76 cm	Artist's collection
Red Breath	1996	Watercolour (chemie) on paper	83 x 63 cm	Artist's collection
Arokhaysala, Temple for Mind	1997? 1996?	Steel, aluminium	370 x 250 cm (diam)	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Manual (Metal?) Tools House	1996	Steel, brass, graphite installation		
Untitled - Arokhayasala	1996-7	Wood, herbs	205 x 125 x 60 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
Sketch Arokhayasan Temple for the Mind 1996	1996	Charcoal, crayon "Brass bowls/steel pipes construction connect with copper wire & brass objects"	54 x 74 (UF) 76 x 93 (F)	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
Arokhayasan (Sala of the Mind)	1996			Installation at Bangkok Playhouse
Untitled	1996	Glass, herbs in whisky, brass	120 x 30 x 40 cm	
Untitled: Two Acts I	1996	Brass	62 x 80 x 93	
Untitled: Two Acts II (Untitled: Between Two Acts)		Brass, Japanese saki	33 x 90 cm	
Untitled: Between Two Acts	1996-97	Brass, Japanese whisky (sake)	90 x 90 x 35 cm	Hillside Gallery, Tokyo

<i>In Between the Acts</i>	1996	Glass pot, herbal medicine in whisky and cast brass	30 x 140 x 40 cm	Hillside Gallery, Tokyo
<i>Homage to Mr Judd</i>	1996	Wood, herbs	693 x 190 x 45 cm	
<i>Body Temple</i>	1996	Installation at Panthong Temple, Chiang Mai		
<i>Sunrise</i>	1996	Candle on plywood	120 x 240 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Half Moon</i>	1996	Candle on plywood	120 x 240 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Drawing for Breathing House</i>	1996	Drawing		
<i>Breathing House</i>	1996-97	Steel, plywood, herb	221 x 430 cm	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
<i>Bowl</i>	1997	Brass and cinnabar	28 x 80 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
<i>Bowl (silver)</i>				Ying Rath
<i>Bowl (brown)</i>				Artist's collection
<i>Sketch for Acts of Mind</i>	1997	Work on paper		
<i>Between the Void</i>	1997			Hillside Gallery, Tokyo
<i>Untitled</i>	1997	Herb on wood	150 (diam) x 15 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
<i>Untitled - Group of Bell of Mind</i>	1997	Copper, brass, brass bell	240 x 150 cm (diam)	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Arokhayasala, In Between the Void</i>	1996			
<i>Whispering Wood</i>	1997	Wood, brass, herbs	300 x 300 cm	
<i>Perfume Painting and the Stools</i>	1997	Herbs on paper, herbal clay on wood	250 x 220 x 100 cm	Hillside Gallery, Tokyo
<i>Perfume Painting</i>	1997	Herbs, plaster, clay on paper and wood	150 x 85 cm	Artist's collection
<i>Perfume Painting</i>	1995-97?	Herbs, clay on paper, wood	150 x 85 cm	Disaporn Chansiri
<i>Perfume Painting</i>	1997	Herbs, plaster, clay on paper and wood	150 x 85 cm	Artist's collection – at least 4
<i>Necklace Box</i>	1996	Charcoal	43 x 59 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
<i>Untitled</i>	1996	Charcoal	43 x 59 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
<i>Untitled</i>	1996	Charcoal	43 x 59 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
<i>Drawing for House of Hope</i>	1996	Pen and pastel	41 x 56 cm	Rolf Kaiser
<i>Drawing for House of Hope</i>	1996			
<i>House of Hope</i>	1997	Steel grill, herbal medicine, mixed		Dakis Jannou Collection, Centre for

			media			Contemporary Art, Athens
<i>House of Hope (detail)</i>	1997		Herbal medicine			
<i>Yellow Void</i>	1997					
<i>Sketch for Yellow Void</i>	1997		Crayon and pencil on paper		65 x 50 cm	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Stupa with One Brick</i>	1998		Soil, sand, white cement, brick on canvas		230 x 178 (173?)cm (5 panels, 82 x 66 cm each)	Surind Limpanonda
<i>Tunnel</i>	1998		Graphic ?? on paper on canvas		110 x 86 cm	Surind Lumpanonda
<i>Untitled (Tunnel)</i>	1998?		Charcoal, herbs, plaster		143 x 88 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Untitled</i>	1998?		White plaster		145 x 89 cm	Chongrux Chanthaworrasut
<i>Sketch for Melting Void</i>	1998		Charcoal "Plaster Buddha's moulds inside coated with red pigment"		55 x 88 cm 77 x 101 (F)	Patravadi Mejudhon
<i>Sketch for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		55 x 80 cm	
<i>Sketch for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		54 x 75 cm	Michelle Cooper
<i>Sketch for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		96 x 67 cm	Michelle Cooper
<i>Sketch for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon, charcoal? on paper		72 x 101 cm	Chatvichai Promadhattavedi
<i>Studies for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		55 x 76 cm	
<i>Sketch for Melting Voids</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		75 x 55 cm	
<i>Studies for Melting Void</i>	1998		Charcoal crayon on paper		56 x 76 (UF) 70 x 90 (F)	Marc Bogerd
<i>Studies for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		56 x 76 cm	
<i>Studies for Melting Void</i>	1998		Crayon on paper		56 x 76 cm	Valentine Willie
<i>Sketch for Melting Void 1998 (Buddha Head)</i>	1998		Charcoal on paper		58 x 78 cm 79 x 99 (F)	Tom van Blarcom
<i>Melting Voids: Moulds for the Mind</i>	1998					Fukuoka Art Museum - 2
<i>Melting Void</i>	1998				260 x 115 x 120 cm	
<i>Melting Void</i>	1998				260 x 107 x 90 cm	
<i>Melting Void</i>	1998					
<i>Untitled</i>	?				89 x 69	Michelle Cooper
<i>Drawing "United Walls" Dalat Vietnam</i>	1998		Charcoal, crayon "Material: 4000 Cooking charcoal, 5 round tables, 5 stoves, 5 windows & steel"		55 x 75 cm 70 x 90 (F)	Rushda Thanaporn

Sketch "Unified Walls"	1998	Charcoal, crayon	55 x 75 cm 70 x 90 (F)	Rushda Thanporn
Red Table/Black Wall	1998	Charcoal, crayon "4 stoves place under the --table" "Cooking charcoal wall construction on the round table. Red light lamp"	55 x 75 cm 70 x 90 (F)	Rushda Thanporn
'Hue's Window'	1998 June	Pencil, pastel, collage	76 x 56 cm	Rushda Thanporn
Sketch Project 'Melting Void' at Marsi Gallery	1998	?	55 x 79 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
Study for 'Melting Void' at Marsi Gallery	1998	?	55 x 79 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
Project for Marsi Gallery 'Melting Void'	1998	?	55 x 79 cm	Jean Michel Beurdeley
Melting Void	1998			
Sketch for Zodiacal Haus in Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart	1998			Akademie Schloss Solitude?
Sketch for Zodiacal Haus in Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart	1998			Akademie Schloss Solitude?
Untitled	1998	Drawing on map (2)		
Sketch for Zodiacal Haus, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart	1998	Charcoal	50 x 65 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Untitled	1998	Charcoal	50 x 65 cm	Acacia Fine Art Ltd
Das Haus Der Sternzeichen	1998	Steel, mixed technique, wood, herbs, cinnabar	300 x 90 cm 6 pieces	Petch Osatanagruh
Drawing of Mind in Stuttgart	1999	Graphite on paper on canvas	204 x 225 cm	Surind Limpanonda
Bowls of the Mind	1999	Crayon on paper, terracotta, wood	380 x 840 x 50 cm?	Singapore Art Expo Commission

## Appendix D

### Glossary

<i>agnisala</i>	rest house (pavilion with fire) also known as <i>dharmasala</i> found along on the ancient Angkor Route between Siam Reap, Cambodia and Phimai, Northeastern Thailand
<i>alan jakorn</i>	royal insignia
<i>anapanasati</i>	mindfulness of breathing
<i>anatta</i>	not self
<i>anicca</i>	impermanence
<i>apsara</i>	dancing angel
<i>arokyasala</i>	rest houses for healing along the ancient Angkor route
<i>Ayudhya</i>	old capital of Siam for 400 years until 1767
<i>baht</i>	Thai currency (December 2008 \$US = 33 baht approx.)
<i>bairaka</i>	ridges on the sloping edge of the gable, representing the fin on the back of the <i>naga</i> (serpent guardian of the underworld)
<i>ban</i>	village
<i>bang</i>	water hamlet
<i>bap</i>	demerit
<i>baramee</i>	accumulation of merit
<i>boon</i>	merit ( <i>tam boon</i> – make merit)
<i>bor nam</i>	pond. A <i>sala</i> or <i>hor trai</i> may be built on a pond to protect from termites
<i>Chakri</i>	current dynasty in Thailand (Rama I to Rama IX)
<i>chang</i>	artisan or craftsman
<i>chao fa</i>	horn-like finial on the roof of temples and special <i>sala</i> , representing head of the <i>garuda</i> (bird guardian of the sky), literally ‘piece of sky’
<i>chat</i>	nation
<i>corvee</i>	conscripted labour
<i>deva</i>	angel
<i>deva-raja</i>	god-king
<i>dharm</i>	natural truth, Buddhist teachings
<i>dharmasala</i>	rest-house (literally, pavilion for natural truth) – see <i>agnisala</i>
<i>ekalak</i>	identity
<i>farang</i>	foreigner
<i>garuda (krut)</i>	mythical bird-man, god of the sky, vehicle of Indra/Vishnu
<i>hang hong</i>	small finials at the bottom of the gable, representing swan tails or <i>naga</i> heads
<i>hong</i>	swan
<i>hor trai</i>	scripture pavilion, library for Buddhist manuscript
<i>Isaan</i>	north-eastern Thailand
<i>jantan</i>	rafter
<i>jao por</i>	godfather
<i>Jatakas</i>	stories of the Lord Buddha’s 547 previous lives
<i>kalae</i>	crossed gable ends (Northern Thai-style)
<i>kan thuay</i>	wooden bracket to support eaves
<i>kanok</i>	flame motif
<i>khet</i>	district, in the town or city
<i>khun nang</i>	high ranking civil servant
<i>klong</i>	canal
<i>klorn</i>	wood on top of purlin ( <i>paē</i> ), under thatch or tiles
<i>kradai</i>	stairway (also <i>bandai</i> )
<i>krajang</i>	gable beam
<i>kuek puang</i>	lotus-shaped decorative elements on sala ceiling, symbolizing stars in heaven
<i>kum</i>	karma, the consequence of action

<i>langkha</i>	roof – may be tiles or thatch of palm leaf or <i>ya kha</i> grass
<i>Lanna</i>	kingdom in northern Thailand
<i>loong khan/loong norn</i>	steps (usually an uneven number)
<i>maha saramee</i>	lord
<i>mai</i>	wood
<i>mai sak</i>	teakwood
<i>mara</i>	desire
<i>merumas</i>	Mt Meru, centre of Buddhist cosmology, with heaven, forest, ocean and mountains
<i>metta</i>	compassion; loving kindness
<i>mondop</i>	pulpit
<i>moradok chart</i>	national heritage
<i>muang</i>	principality
<i>na bahn</i>	pediment, triangle under the roof at the front
<i>naga</i>	giant serpent, god of the underworld
<i>nai</i>	master
<i>najua</i>	gable, triangular panel
<i>nak leng</i>	gangsters
<i>nam jai</i>	co-operation
<i>nipan</i>	nirvana, bliss, not being reborn to suffer
<i>ngao</i>	horned finial
<i>pae (paelan)</i>	purlin – on top of beam, transfers weight from <i>klorn</i> to rafter
<i>panlom</i>	windbreak on roof- lower end often decorated with <i>ngao</i> (horned finial)
<i>paticca samuppada</i>	interdependence
<i>phramahakasat</i>	monarchy
<i>phrai</i>	slave
<i>phra pla</i>	more formal and elaborate – sala for king or royalty
<i>phrasayam devadhiraraja</i>	Guardian of Siam
<i>phra thinang</i>	throne hall e.g. Chakri Prasat
<i>phu nam</i>	a supreme leader
<i>phu noi</i>	less influential person
<i>phu yai</i>	important senior people
<i>phuen</i>	floor gaps for rainwater drainage to prevent rot
<i>por khun</i>	father figure, paternalistic despot
<i>pun</i>	mortar
<i>rai</i>	measurement of area (1,600 square metres or 400 square wa) 20 rai = approx 10 acres = approx 3.5 hectares
<i>Ramakien</i>	Thai version of the Indian epic Ramayana
<i>ratthaniyom</i>	cultural mandate
<i>rong rak pid thong</i>	black and gold lacquer
<i>sak</i>	teak
<i>sakdina</i>	system of social stratification using land title deed
<i>sak thong</i>	golden teak ( <i>tectona grandis</i> )
<i>sala</i>	pavilion
<i>sala bun chi</i>	accounting pavilion (in Ayudhya period)
<i>sala chor tan</i>	alms pavilion
<i>sala cherntamnob</i>	bridge and boat pier (in Ayudhya period)
<i>sala din</i>	pavilion at ground level or one step up (not high) e.g. Wat Suthat
<i>sala karn parian</i>	pavilion for learning in temple e.g. Wat Pho
<i>sala rim nam</i>	pavilion beside water (also known as <i>sala ta nam</i> )
<i>sala klang</i>	provincial government office building – town hall
<i>sala kuti</i>	pavilion with enclosed space for monk's dwelling or venerated image
<i>sala loi</i>	pavilion raised high above wall
<i>sala look kun</i>	law court
<i>sala look kun nai</i>	outer court of front of Grand Palace – government departments
<i>sala pracham moobahn</i>	village pavilion, popular place to sit and chat in the evening
<i>sala prachathipathai</i>	democracy training program

<i>sala rai</i>	pavilion for temple visitors
<i>sala rim tang</i>	roadside pavilion
<i>sala sak bua luang</i>	royal lotus pond sala
<i>sala song</i>	temple pavilion
<i>sala sot sop</i>	cremation pavilion
<i>sala thong</i>	large pavilion ( <i>hong thong</i> is large general purpose room)
<i>sala thong rong lakorn</i>	large pavilion for performances
<i>sala thum</i>	funeral pavilion
<i>sala wen mahatai</i>	chief pavilion
<i>sala wat</i>	temple pavilion
<i>samae</i>	wooden nail
<i>sammathi</i>	meditation, concentration
<i>san</i>	pavilion with sacred meaning
<i>sangha</i>	monkhood
<i>sao</i>	post
<i>sao ek</i>	first post (which gets blessed) when building a <i>sala</i>
<i>sao ruen</i>	house post
<i>satsana</i>	religion
<i>satsana phut</i>	Buddhism
<i>sen thang ariyatham</i>	cultural route, route of civilization (เส้นทางอารยธรรม)
<i>seung</i>	barn
<i>Siam</i>	Thailand's name before 1939
<i>siwilai</i>	'civilised' (adaptation of English word)
<i>sok</i>	unit of measurement, 0.5 metres
<i>sunyata</i>	voidness
<i>stupa</i>	pagoda or pyramid-shaped tower in temple grounds
<i>Sukhothai</i>	capital/kingdom in 13 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>tamnak</i>	royal pavilion
<i>tha</i>	boat landing
<i>thammayut</i>	sect of Buddhism introduced by King Mongkut
<i>than samay</i>	modern
<i>tieng na</i>	rice field hut
<i>thong</i>	large roofed open space, e.g. <i>sala thong</i> (open pavilion), <i>hong thong</i>
<i>Traiphum</i>	Buddhist cosmology
<i>ubosot</i>	ordination hall
<i>viharn</i>	assembly hall in temple compound
<i>vinaya</i>	natural discipline
<i>wa</i>	measurement of area. one <i>sok</i> = 0.5 metres, four <i>sok</i> = one <i>wa</i> (two metres) one square <i>wa</i> = four square metres 400 square <i>wa</i> = one <i>rai</i> (1,600 square metres)
<i>wai</i>	gesture of respect with two hands joined
<i>wat</i>	temple
<i>ya khao</i>	rice granary
<i>yaksha</i>	giant
<i>yan</i>	district, neighbourhood or area identified with particular trade or group (made up of <i>ban</i> and <i>bang</i> )

### Acronyms

B.E	Buddhist Era (543 years before Christian era, e.g. 2008 is 2551 B.E.)
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## Autobiography

### Virginia Henderson

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Virginia Henderson was born in the South Island of New Zealand and continues to spend time there at the family farm. In 1986 she began travelling and worked in the USA, UK, Egypt and Hong Kong before arriving in Thailand in 1990 where she has since been based.

Virginia works with international development agencies, local communities, non-governmental organisations and the media as a facilitator and documenter, to support communication and dialogue. She applies her interests in art and culture in the fields of heritage, strategic planning, HIV/AIDS, emergencies, refugees, child rights and health. From 1991 to 2000, she worked at Silpakorn University, Bangkok, as an advisor in the Archaeology Faculty and an assistant to the President, coordinating international programmes. During that period she completed an MA in Thai Studies from Chulalongkorn University and her thesis on the *Social Production of Art in Thailand 1980-1998* was recommended for publication. Virginia also organises exhibitions, festivals and events, including cheese rolling in Waikaka since 2006.