

# **‘FEAR’: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF THINGS YET TO COME**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this review article is to survey and summarize the substance of a solo exhibition entitled ‘*Fear*’ (2016) by Manit Sriwanichpoom, one of the pioneering contemporary photographers in Thailand. The exhibition ‘*Fear*’, consisting of 13 themes, was exhibited across four venues including Kathmandu Gallery, Tang Gallery, H Gallery in Bangkok, and Yavuz Gallery in Singapore from July to September 2016. This review article shall discuss about how the artist explains his fear with help of a photographic medium along with artistic strategies. The strategies include selecting and not-selecting objects to be photographed, the use of symbol, and computer manipulation. These allow the audiences to perceive the image of the future in mind. Finally, the artist hopes that ‘*Fear*’ would alarm his audiences to be fully aware of the mental and moral consequences of the political conflicts that are unlikely to come to an end soon.

**Keywords:** Photography; Fear; politics

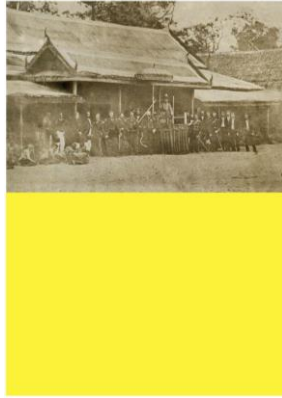
## Introduction

The art photography exhibition entitled '*Fear*' (Manit Sriwanichpoom, 2016) embodies the growing sense of dread and outright panic that has been gathering within him for over a decade. Fear is a matter of subjectivity. Some people fear because a certain situation does not proceed in a way that they desire. Or, many fear because they are unable to predict outcomes of a certain situation. For the artist, his fear has evolved through a series of past and present events. Importantly, the series of present events have a tendency to produce certain consequences in a near future. In short, he fears for a situation that has not yet happened, which is the tempestuous transformation of the Thai social structure. We are well aware of this fact further more; this transformation is hard to prevent from taking place.

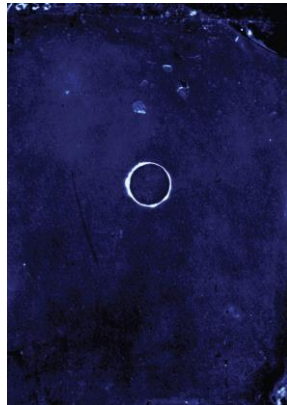
What Manit fears for has not yet happened in present time and space. However, the shape of the future develops vividly in his mind. He describes about the shape of the future with a reference to those of the present and the past. For the shape of the present, the artist photographs various, complex, and problematic social events that have just happened. For the shape of the past, he selected a certain past event that was photographed by someone else to work with. Finally, he combines the present and past events within this exhibition. If we treat his proposed events as different events that took place in different times and spaces, it is possible to think in this way. However, for this case, the series of photographed events in the past and the present exist in the same social and cultural contexts and were carried out by the same social classes of people. Therefore, it is fair enough to consider that the past events and the present ones are contextually related as illuminating a same set of truth. It could be said that the shape of the future that is likely to happen in the same social and cultural contexts can be forecasted from the series of the present events.

Manit presents his fear for a situation that is likely to take place through a specific method. The method is to analyse the complexity and variety of social and political events into themes. The exhibition '*Fear*' consists of 13 themes, each of which proposes different contents. The first theme, '*Siam Eclipse*' consists of two pieces. The first piece is '*The Last Photograph of The King of Siam*' (2016) containing two parts of composition. The top part shows the last

photograph of King Rama IV while alive in 1868, and the bottom part is a simple yellow plain without details. The second piece is a video art entitled '*Siam Eclipse 1868*' (2016). The artist animates a photograph of a solar eclipse originally taken by Francis Chit Chittrakani on Tuesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1868 into a slightly moving image.



**Figure 1:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*The Last Photograph of The King of Siam*' (2016), Old Photograph and Computer Graphic



**Figure 2:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Siam Eclipse 1868*' (2016), Old Photograph, Computer Manipulation, and Video

The second theme, ‘*Royal Monuments Chakri Dynasty*’ (2014) presents the monuments of King Rama I to VIII in close and medium shots with clear sky as a background. Photographs are of grey monochrome with no obviously bright areas.



**Figure 3:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*King Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke Rama I (1782-1809)*’ (2014), Photograph and Computer Manipulation

The third theme, ‘*Wall of Conscience*’ (2013) is a black and white series of photographs showing thick concrete walls of which height is 1.50 meters. They are positioned in front of Government House. Behind these walls stand policemen with a helmet and a shield.



**Figure 4:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*Wall of Conscience*’ (2013), Black and White Photograph

The fourth theme, '*Wall of Defiance*' (2013) is a black and white series of photographs showing walls made of car tyres and sandbags. The walls kept protestors secured from gunfire and bomb attacks during nighttime.



**Figure 5:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Wall of Defiance*' (2013), Black and White Photograph

The fifth theme, '*5 Generals Who Return Happiness to the People*' (2014) is a series of colored portrait photographs predominantly shows official uniform completed with insignia decoration. Photographs are manipulated with a technique called digital mosaic that breaks the whole image into many pixel-like squares.



**Figure 6:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*5 Generals Who Return Happiness to the People*' (2014), Downloaded Photograph and Computer Manipulation

The sixth theme, ‘*The Parliament of Happy Generals*’ (2014) is a series of colored portrait photographs of 115 Generals. Photographs were blurred and then manipulated with the digital mosaic technique.



**Figure 7:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*The Parliament of Happy Generals*’ (2014), Downloaded Photographs and Computer Manipulation

The seventh theme, ‘*His First Day on TV for the General Who Returns Happiness*’ (2014) displays the face of a specific General. Manit photographed the face on television with his mobile phone during a slim, erratic period of broadcast. The image is distorted due to unstable signal transmitted to millions of homes.



**Figure 8:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*His First Day on TV for the General Who Returns Happiness*’ (2014), Mobile Photograph and Computer Manipulation

The eighth theme, '*Queuing for Happiness*' (2014) presents two parts of composition. The top part shows a simple yellow plain, and the bottom part presents a black and white photograph showing people of low and middle-low social classes queuing for free stuffs.



**Figure 9:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Queuing for Happiness*' (2014), Black and White Photograph and Computer Graphic

The ninth theme, '*Fading History - Shutdown Bangkok*' (2014) presents photographs of individuals and groups of individuals who are members of PDRC. Their protesting behaviours are charged with freshness, hope, and encouragement that can be seen from their V fingers, hand holding banknotes, and fist raised over head with energy, for example. All the photographs have bleached into faded colours.



**Figure 10:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Fading History - Shutdown Bangkok*' (2014), Computer Manipulated Photograph

The tenth theme, ‘*Ratchadamnoen Motor Show*’ (2017) presents the photographs of destroyed and overturned police cars. The artist turns vertical his horizontal photographs in order to create a dynamic that is visually against gravity.



**Figure 11:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*Ratchadamnoen Motor Show*’ (2017), Color Photograph

The eleventh theme, ‘*Election of Hatred*’ (2011) presents slashed campaign posters of two main political parties. The slashed areas are of politicians’ eyes, mouths, and faces.



**Figure 12:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*Election of Hatred*’ (2011), Color Photographs



The twelfth theme, '*Haunting Memory*' (2011) presents the face of ex-Prime Minister Miss Yingluck Shinawatra. Manit took a picture of her destroyed campaign posters with a Polaroid film. After that he scanned the film, and manipulated scanned images by making original colours more vivid and contrasting.



**Figure 13:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Haunting Memory*' (2011), Manipulated Polaroid Photograph

The final theme, '*Primitive*' (2014) presents blood traces around the base of the Monument of Democracy. The bold shape is organic and looks like brushstrokes. However, objects that create brushstroke-like are not a brush, but the bodies of dead and injured people.



**Figure 14:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, '*Primitive*' (2014), Color Photograph

Manit presents 13 themes in a manner that does not entirely incorporate with the temporal order of real events. This means that he is constructing a new system for the 13 themes in order to make explicit the real content of this very exhibition. One of the basic qualities of photography is this fact: any recorded event is something that happened and existed and is no longer active in present time. A photograph is, therefore, an evidence of something that developed and ended in the past. Initially, Manit’s photographs function in this way. His photographs narrate certain events taking place between 1868 and 2014. However, the selection and rearrangement of specifically selected events, leaving temporal gaps among events unsettling and complicating temporal order, shows that the artist does not merely want to assimilate the system of the 13 themes to the real events. The new story-telling system makes explicit the ways by which Manit records visions of the future through his eyes that are recording images of the present.

Manit employs artistic methods that allow audiences to perceive the image of the future with a reference to photographic strategies that include selecting and not-selecting objects to be photographed, the use of symbol, and computer manipulation.

### **Selecting and Not-selecting Objects to Be Photographed**

The selection, and non-selection, of objects to be photographed is considerably the most significant method of this exhibition. Normally, the selection of certain objects to be photographed proves their importance to the artist, who wants to present their existence. If the artist does not select any specific object, it means the object is not significant and does not exist in his interest. Manit’s photographs are different. He selects objects and events to be photographed in order to show their real existence, and sometimes he selects them because they no longer exist. Additionally, he does not select to photograph certain objects in order to emphasize their existence and perpetuity. In short, existence refers to non-existence, and non-existence does not mean that a certain subject of photography exists. In order to clarify the above statement, four themes - ‘*Royal Monuments - Chakri Dynasty*’, ‘*Wall of Conscience*’, ‘*Wall of Defiance*’, and ‘*Ratchadamneon Motor Show*’ - shall be described.

In *'Royal Monuments - Chakri Dynasty'*, Manit selects the royal monuments of King Rama I to VIII to be photographed. Photographs express two pieces of fact: first, all royal monuments exist, and second, only eight royal monuments of King Rama I to VIII are constructed. We should also look at this photographic series from a sculptural perspective. Royal monument refers to iconic sculpture in a gesture for example sitting, standing, and riding a horse. Iconic sculpture is always set up on a high and well-decorated base. Royal monuments are created as commemoration of kings both alive and departed. Therefore, if we look at these photographs from an interdisciplinary point of view between photography and sculpture, audiences can perceive that the images of the royal monuments verify their existence along with sculptural objectives of being as a sign of commemoration of all kings who have long ceased. It could be said that the photographs of the royal monuments express both existence and non-existence at the same time.

Next, if we consider the non-existence of the royal monument of King Rama IX from fact, we will find that his photography does not tell a lie. Thailand at the moment does not have a royal monument of King Rama IX. As a consequence, Manit cannot take a photograph of King Rama IX's royal monument. However, as the artist presents a photograph displaying only grey sky as a final image of this series, the image of non-existence of King Rama IX's royal monument causes a shift of meaning. Such shift does not take a visual form for investigation. It appears in our perception.

The perception towards the shifted meaning is developed within us. We, as an audience, culturally link the image of non-existence to historical information and belief. In olden days, iconic sculptures were not common because Thais believed that if an iconic sculpture was constructed while a person was alive, soon that person would pass away. Iconic sculpture was treated as a representative of its owner. King Rama IV wanted to drive the Kingdom of Siam to embrace modern science and knowledge; as a result he rejected such belief. He ordered an iconic sculpture of himself to be made while alive.<sup>1</sup> Currently, even though this belief is much relaxed, the non-existence in the atmosphere of present-day social contexts invites us to recall the belief of the rejection of iconic

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<sup>1</sup> Phra borom rup ratchakarn thi si judprien karnsarng patimakam kasart (Royal Image of King Rama IV: A Turning Point of Kingship Sculpture), accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, available from [http://www.phranakhonkhiri.com/web/knowledge\\_detail/10](http://www.phranakhonkhiri.com/web/knowledge_detail/10).

sculpture creation of live subjects, as the existence brings about non-existence and absence later.

In *‘Wall of Conscience’*, Manit selects to photograph certain events taking place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 or the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mass Protest for Democracy taking place on the same day and the same month in 1973. Selecting to photograph on that date, the 14<sup>th</sup>, is important to the artist. On that day the government of Yingluck Shinawatra set up thick concrete walls to protect Government House from protestors. Manit photographed them in the afternoon, resulting in high-contrast black and white photographic images. The dark value assists wall objects to show their true characters and qualities. Wall objects illustrate their realistic qualities of being heavy, thick, and strong. No bullet can get through them. The bright value provides a different effect. In the bright background behind the walls lies nothing.

As mentioned earlier, selecting to record the event of the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 presents a substance that Manit wants to describe. Selecting to record this very event expresses two facts: first, photographic images show the existence of a real event taking place in front of Government House, and second, photographic images imply the previous existence of a past event taking place in 1973. The two events are alike in content. Although 40 years apart – the first one is the confrontation between students and a military government, and the second one is that between Student and People Network for Thailand’s Reform (STR) and Shinawatra government - social and political conditions wherein different groups of people exist in the same society. For the artist, selecting to photograph this event may mean the same substance of both events, which is the non-existence of true democracy. Groups who have lost their right and benefits carried out the protest for real democracy. Here, the non-existence of democracy in present time will certainly affect the shape of the future.

In *‘Wall of Conscience’*, no objects or places appear behind the concrete walls. Manit allows strong sunlight in the afternoon to work at full capacity, causing the background brightening the depriving it of any detail. However, it does not mean that there is nothing to be photographed there behind the wall. The thick walls obstruct the artist and his art audience. When we try to look through something and can see nothing, a question arises: ‘What do the walls separate us from?’ It can be seen that being deprived of detail means that there is a thing that the artist and us as members of the public are not granted

permission to access. What was the thing being protected by the wall from the mass of the people?

The concrete wall separated two groups of people. The first group was those who were powerless or who have become underpowered. The second group was those who held power behind the wall. Manit stood in the same position as that of the powerless. At this very position we, audiences, have a chance to explore traces on the wall along with the facial expressions of policemen standing behind the wall. Some of them looked towards people outside the wall. Some wore sunglasses to shield their eyes from the glare and stared at the situation ahead. Policemen were protecting something behind the wall. Were they protecting nothingness? In fact, they were protecting a group of people who held administrative and governing authority of the country at that time. Of course, yet another group of people were not satisfied with those in power at that time. It could be said that Manit has already photographed all this. He has photographed the physicality of nothingness that implies certain things that cannot be seen with physical eyes.

In '*Wall of Defiance*', Manit selects to photograph another type of wall, in front of Government House. Such walls were made by STR protesters of car tyres and sandbags. Car tyres were stacked up quickly and roughly. As a result, there are gaps that allow audiences to peer through. Sandbags, made of empty fertilizer bags, were used to build the walls and to fill gaps between the walls. This is a black and white photography series that intriguingly displays details of car tyres, fertilizer bags, personal characters and the rhythmic composition of wall building. Also, audiences can see objects inserted in the wall for example a queuing sign for taxi motorcycles, a helmet, a sign with this message 'Close up Shop on the puppet government', food packs in a plastic bag, plastic bottles with some water, an untouched sandwich, two bunches of banana, plastic garbage, used gloves, a sprayed sign saying 'Do not photograph', and some blood traces on the street floor. Even though there are no motorcycle taxi drivers, wounded, or other protestors in the photographs, the details of these objects can reflect the story of STR.

After successfully seizing the streets around the administrative center of the Yingluck's government, STR built the car-tyres and sandbag walls at Government House. Although STR is a group of protestors, they are members of the public deserving of protection from the government. We may wonder why

they had to build the walls? The walls and objects inserted help to narrate that there were people who wanted to commute to and from this area on a regular basis. People drank and ate in the wall area. There were injured people, and there was a report to police. There were policemen coming to check the scene, placing a sign indicating the position of blood trace surrounded by three orange traffic cones. It can be assumed that there was a violent situation taking place in this area.

If we consider '*Wall of Defiance*' along with the political event by the end of 2013, we will find that STR built the cartyres and sandbag walls in order to protect themselves from almost nightly attacks by anonymous gunmen who shot gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades into their camp. Manit was not in the situation during nighttime; he could not take a picture of the real situation to show their existence. However, selecting the situation during daytime by dividing the photographs into two interconnected groups is a considerably effective method that makes his message clear. The first group of photographs '*Wall of Conscience*', shows strong objects expressive of power that no weapon can destroy. The objects reflect the government then in power which had the capacity to create a high-standard of protection for itself. The second group of photographs, '*Wall of Defiance*', displays inferior walls in terms of efficiency, with their weak spots vulnerable to attack. The wall reflects a group of members of the public with the right to vote who were yet calling out for real democracy, and at the same time had to create such homemade substandard protection for themselves. The artist narrates the situation from both sides. It could be said that all photographs of all walls demonstrate groups of people, their differing abilities to achieve varying standards of self-protection, the power play, the challenge and tension between the groups. Such was the truth that the public perceived in that period of time, which the artist makes explicit in a visual form.

In '*Ratchadamneon Motor Show*', Manit selects to photograph police cars damaged by PDRC protesters in February 2014. Eleven photographs show the existence of a situation, displaying police cars damaged in terms of physicality and psychology. Damage in terms of physicality refers to actions of breaking the windscreen and turning the vehicles upside down. Damage in terms of psychology refers to the action of painting the vehicles' body in national tricolors of red, white, and blue as represented on the Thai flag that embodies the unity of nation, religion, and king respectively. Additionally, hate graffiti were

written everywhere on the vehicles for example ‘Cock’, ‘Evil lizard (name) worse than dogs’, ‘Have today because Big Bro gives it to me’ [Then top cop’s exact words thanking Thaksin for his top appointment], and ‘So you said you’d look after the people like your kin.’ In general, when compared with previous destruction by red shirt people, this character of damage is a kind of symbolic expression - painting and overturning with no irreversible damage. They did not destroy completely by burning down and bombing vehicles for example.

If we set aside the political contexts and concentrate on the physicality of the photographs, we will see that they narrate the event straightforwardly. Police properties were damaged. Hate speech written on the vehicles damaged the prestige and authority of the police in terms of moral values, efficiency, and ethics. In conclusion, we see the image of the police as victims. But, when we consider the final image of ‘*Ratchadamneon Motor Show*’, we see the other side by an unintentional flip of the coin.

The image of garbage spilling out of the vehicles, which include a liquor paper box, Chinese and Western playing cards, and cigarette butts, poses a question. These objects are not necessary for security duties. They are brought for entertainment during leisure time among members of family or friends. It can be seen that these inappropriate objects appeared out of place and time. This raises a question against the traditional practice in field operations of police officers. If it is the norm to treat such work as close to recreation, it would be worrying. It means that the photographs of garbage identify the real existence of the decline of values, efficiency, and ethics.



**Figure 15:** Manit Sriwanichpoom, ‘*Ratchadamneon Motor Show*’ (2017), color photograph

## The Use of Symbols

Manit uses symbolism as another creative method of giving shape to the future. Symbols are treated as a representation of artist's thought that he wants to convey. Symbolism can take any form. However, the symbol must be composed of two parts: form and content. Form and content are unconditional to each other. Their relation can be altered according to conditions designated by the artist, society, and time. For example, the artist can create the lotus as a form to present a specific content such as 'good deed', 'mother', or 'religion.' At the same time, if the artist wants to convey a content of malevolence, he can use a form evocative of evil like a reptile or a corpse. Manit uses a simple yellow rectangular plane, grey light, and blue light as symbols to convey complicated contents.

The yellow rectangular plane appears in two series of photography – *'The Last Photograph of the King of Siam'* and *'Queuing for Happiness'*. The composition of *'The Last Photograph of the King of Siam'* is as follows: The top part shows an old photograph of King Rama IV and the bottom part locates the yellow rectangular plane. The composition of *'Queuing for Happiness'* is as follows: The top part shows the yellow rectangular plane, and the bottom part shows the images of people queuing up for giveaways. Though the composition of the two photographic series look simple, the content of the yellow rectangular plane, and their relation to the photographs in each series appear complicated.

Manit does not identify the meaning of the yellow rectangular plane anywhere in his catalogue. However, over the past 10 years, all Thais have become familiar with yellow as the colour of Monday - day of birth of King Rama IX. Therefore, the yellow rectangular plane in *'The Last Photograph of the King of Siam'* may refer to a relationship between King Rama IV and King Rama IX. Matching up the two great kings who are 148 years apart means something. Let us investigate situations taking place in two different periods of time.

King Rama IV is the first king to drive the Kingdom of Siam to embrace modernity. He established the foundation for Thai foreign policy and relations and improved the country. He developed foreign policies by negotiating the



Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between the British Empire and the Kingdom of Siam, or the Bowring Treaty. At the same time, he conducted many social improvements including Western education endorsement, organising overseas trips for Thai officials, and empowering people by providing them a better life through civil rights, for example providing the right to be granted protection from the state, providing the right for people to be informed with useful information, providing the right to all citizens to petition him directly, and easing citizens from indentured slavery (Office of the Public Section Development Commission, 2007a: 2-22).

King Rama IX is a great developer who is a role model of new management. He develops human resources through education and life quality endorsement. He develops all of these through natural resource managements - including water, soil, and forestry management - agricultural management, public health management, and royal development projects (Office of the Public Section Development Commission, 2007b: 9-21).

He is a perfect model showing how to learn, develop, regulate, follow, and evaluate results of all initiated projects in order for his people to live a happy and self-sufficient life.

It can be seen that this is a similarity between King Rama IV and King Rama IX. Both kings are true developers concerned with the happiness of their citizens. It is not surprising that the artist brings the old photograph and the yellow rectangular plane together in order to explicate that the two kings provide similar benefaction to the country.

However, the selection of the old photograph of King Rama IV specifying an event on the 18th of August 1868 invites us to ponder about a real content that the artist wants to propose. The photograph records the expedition of King Rama IV to view a solar eclipse at Wha Gor District in Prajuabkhirikhan Province. Crown Prince Chulalongkorn also accompanied his father. Both of them were infected with malaria. 44 days later, King Rama IV passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1868 (Office of the Public Section Development Commission, 2007c: 1). There are two aspects to this event. The first aspect is that King Rama IV wanted to open up the country to modern science and knowledge. He tried to express to Western diplomats that the Kingdom of Siam was clear of

superstition and ready to enter the modern era (Phuriwikraipong, 2016). The second aspect is that the event developed according to a belief that the eclipse would bring about change, namely the abrupt switching of kings with no advance preparation. Crown Prince Chulalongkorn ascended the throne as King Rama V on the 11th of November 1868, or 42 days after the death of his father.

If we look at the whole event logically, we can see that malaria does not arise from astrology and astronomy, but parasitic protozoans received from the mosquito. King Rama IV was 64 years old at the time. It was probably much harder for him to fight off the infection. Crown Prince Chulalongkorn who was 15 years of age was much stronger, so he recovered soon and lived. The eclipse is a natural phenomenon of the alignment of the sun, the moon and earth. Each year, there are approximately two eclipses, with five eclipses maximum (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2016). However, humans cannot acquire the answer for everything in this world. The concurrence of the two events led the people of the past as well as those of the present to wonder about the future.

In '*Queuing for Happiness*', the simple composition tells us that the long queue takes place in the reign of King Rama IX. But, here the yellow rectangular plane does not harmonic well with the event depicted. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Government employed a traditional method of making people happy. Giving out freebies is thought as the best way of returning happiness to poor and underprivileged people. This method seems to contradict King Rama IX's economic problem-solving strategy including an emphasis on self-sufficiency the improvement of local communal economy, and the promotion of social harmony. This strategy brings about cooperation to solve problems at their cause. When culprits are identified, it is advisable to deal with them directly. The king demonstrates ways of solving problems in a sustainable manner. This well-strategised process of problem solving can lead to self-sufficiency and sustainable happiness. However, giving out freebies as an exercise to return happiness to the people brings the opposite result. If the giveaways run out, happiness runs out too. The government must provide giveaways endlessly. It is possible that the queue of happiness will never end, unless the current government applies the royal strategy to repair the economic problems soon.

It can be seen that the yellow rectangular planes in '*The Last Photograph of the King of Siam*' and '*Queuing for Happiness*' contain different content. The yellow plane in the first series expresses the similarity of the two events that are 148 years apart, whereas the yellow plane in the second series expresses the dissension of concepts. It could be said that form and content of the yellow rectangular plane have an unfixed relation depending on events and social and historical contexts that the artist presents.

The next symbol is the grey light that appears in '*Royal Monuments - Chakri Dynasty*'. Light and shade are clear and sharp; it can be assumed that the artist took these photographs during a strong-sunlight period. Taking a photograph during this time contributes to a high bright and dark contrast. When we reconsider the photographs again, we will find that there is no obvious bright area as there should be. The light seen here is grey and dark. Grey light makes the whole atmosphere in the photographs unusual. We can find similar grey light in nature, for example a period before rain when sky is full of grey clouds, a period before sunset or dusk, and a period during a solar eclipse.

In these periods of half-light, if we are to consider the world around us, we will perceive beauty in a dimension that we have never seen before. The grey light gives an air of stability; the royal monuments appear steadfast, strong and enduring. The light emphasises on the shape of figures that are set upon a tall and well-decorated base. Viewers must look up to explore the figures against clear skies with little clouds behind. The gesturing figures standing against the sky encourage certain perceptions. For example, the photograph showing the back of King Rama IV's sculpture makes us feel as if he was leaving us behind, while the photograph of King Rama VIII's sculpture encourages us to feel and imagine that he is gazing at an unknown destination. It could be said that Mani's grey light persuades us to immerse ourselves and submit our feelings in peaceful surrender to the transformative transition between brightness and darkness; and to carefully consider things that appear before our eyes. We then perceive the timeless beauty of all royal monuments under the grey light. Finally, we may obtain a similar conclusion. The transformative process from one condition to another is a wonderful natural process, if we look at it with enlightened eyes.

The final symbol, the blue light, appears in '*Siam Eclipse 1868*'. '*Siam Eclipse 1868*' is a video art created from an old photograph. The artist changed

its original colours - black and white - to blue, and manipulate the bright area of the sunlight to look as if it was moving a bit. The blue light makes the ancient photograph of the eclipse look modern. We may wonder why the artist has changed the colours from black and white to blue, or, to be precise, change time from the past to the present. Let us investigate this video piece.

From the video, we will see that the moon is a little bit smaller than the sun behind. This causes a circle of light that is called an 'annular eclipse'. It is due to the position of the moon that is far away from the earth. But, if the moon were closer to the earth, the moon would have covered the entire sun. We call this 'total eclipse'. An eclipse takes place in a short period of time, let's say approximately seven minutes. As soon as the sun and the moon move apart, the sky is back to normal. For this video piece, Manit extends the period of eclipse as if it would never end any time soon. Audiences can recognize the slight change in the annular eclipse.

In order to comprehend why the artist changed black and white to bright and modern blue, and extended time endlessly, we may need to learn about astrology and history relating to eclipses. Ancient people believed that eclipses brought about changes in many forms for example disaster, epidemic, administrative upheaval, politic conflict, financial mismanagement, and the departure of important figures. In the reign of King Rama IV, there was a prediction, but the king went ahead with his journey to view the eclipse with Western diplomats (Phuriwikraipong, 2016). After the eclipse on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1868, a substantial transformation relating to important figures who were King Rama IV and the prince developed. It started with the death of the king on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1868, followed by Crown Prince Chulalongkorn ascending the throne as King Rama V on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1868. At that time, he was only 15 years old. Therefore, it was necessary to have regents. During that period, he was educated continuously, and visited nearby countries including Singapore, Java, Burma, and India that were under the rule of Great Britain and Holland. The visit later led to the country's improvement. Upon turning 20, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk for 15 days and organized the second coronation in 1873 marking his complete succession to the throne (Office of the Public Section Development Commission, 2007). We can learn from history that the transformation did not happen and end within seven minutes like an eclipse. It

took approximately five years for the real transformation to evolve and become complete. It is possible to view the blue light and the extension of time in the video work as the message of the artist: the transformation that is based on important figures is always time-consuming.

## **Computer Manipulation**

A final method that Manit uses to make explicit the shape of the future is computer manipulation through three techniques: digital mosaic, colour fading, and colour adjustment.

The first technique, digital mosaic, breaks an original photographic image into a number of small squares. The mosaic image looks abstract. Normally, mosaic is a form of ancient art originated in Mesopotamian Civilization. A mosaic image is created from small pieces of materials for example glass and stone for architectural decoration. Contemporary designs use graphic software to design and plan mosaic construction for architecture. This helps to save time and prevent errors. Moreover, we see technicians and editors use digital mosaic as a tool of censoring individuals' identity on mass media like newspapers and television for example. In brief, mosaic in the old days was a technique that artisans used to create decorated image for interiors. And digital mosaic in the present time helps with planning large-scaled mosaic decoration and also a method of censoring individuals, concealing their identity on mass media.

Manit employs the digital mosaic technique to create two series of photography that include '*5 Generals Who Return Happiness to the People*' and '*The Parliament of Happy Generals*'. The artist downloaded portrait photographs from governmental websites and used digital mosaic technique to manipulate them. The manipulated images are of bright and fresh colours, displaying small pixel-like squares. Digital mosaic makes images more interesting. But audiences see only rough outline of original individuals. In short, the technique the artist used blurs those individuals' identity.

Identity is a combination of characteristics that helps to identify an individual from others. Identity can be innate characteristics as well as socially created ones. For example Sub-Lieutenant Santi Lunpae (b.1935), designated

National Artist in International Music in 2015, has a tenor voice. The voice is considered an innate identity of his. Additionally, Santi is a singer for The Royal Thai Army Musical Division. Therefore, his occupation as a singer/officer is a social identity that helps to make him unique and different from others.

Manit uses digital mosaic technique to blur the identity of five Generals and the generals in Parliament. If we analyze the images in detail, we will find that their innate identity is gradually blurred, but their social identity remain vivid, strong, and powerful. Their social identity can be surmised from their uniform complete with insignia decorations. The artist enlarges the portrait photographs up to one meter high. Even though blurred, the group of large photographic images express awe for the aura of power of the shining uniform. It can be seen that the artist is intrigued by the social identity of the Generals. If so, what are his objectives in censoring their social identity? Why does Ministry to censor such powerful uniforms?

Analysis of the title '*The Parliament of Happy Generals*' may lead to an answer. 'Parliament' in the current social context refers to a governmental organisation that consists of 200 members who are appointed, not elected by the public. From the photographs, more than half are active and retired military officers whose highest rank is General. 'Happy' refers to a cheerful feeling. Therefore, the meaning of the title should be 'Generals appointed to work in parliament are happy, and the five Generals are happy too, as they are about to return happiness to the people. If the artist is saying: the five generals are happy because they fully intend to administrative a happy nation, why then has he censored the generals in both series? Let us continue the analysis.

Individuals who are censored on mass media are often youth who commit crimes and individuals, both adult and youth, who are accused of a criminal offence. Whether the first or the second group, having a mosaic bar on the face appearing in mass media creates a psychological effect, conveying to media consumers a sense of unreliability, distance, and guilty, since such blurring often relate to criminal rather than civil cases. Apart from this, censorship in contemporary social contexts is not only for individuals who commit crime, but also of those who have different opinions and do not comply with state regulations. The state controls and censors individuals' expression in terms of thought and action. Censorship is a practice of the state or authority

over members of the public. Punishment of going against the state is to make people disappear from public space and atmosphere.

Manit is a member of the public. He does not have the authority to control anyone's thought and action. He is the one who is controlled in the public space. But, in the art world, he uses digital mosaic to control and mold the expression of group identity by blurring innate identity. Moreover, he transformed the Generals' social identity into broken squares conveying the perception of unreliability, distance, and guilt. Here, we may arrive at a conclusion that Manit is playing the role of the all-powerful director able to switch places with the Generals, so that here they are the ones being controlled and even punished. Unlike punishment by the authorities, the artist's punishment entails depriving them of innate identity; they become nameless with no social identity. It is not possible to identify any individual. All they have left is the brilliantly shining uniform that might possibly evoke a sense of familiarity.

Colour bleaching is another technique that the artist uses to pinpoint what might possibly happen in the near future. Colour bleaching appears in *'Fading History - Shutdown Bangkok'*. Normally the faded colour of a photograph indicates that the photograph is old and depicts a faraway past for present audiences. However, Manit took photos for this series between 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013 and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 which is not that long ago, hardly past history but still contemporary. By bleaching the photographs' colour, the artist speeds up the event's process of becoming history, further widening the distance between present audiences and the protest.

Manit turns all the protesters' actions into fading history. Protestors creatively expressed their group identity by decorating themselves in the national tricolours of red, white and blue down to their wristbands, whistle necklaces and hijabs. Many expressed their individual identity to encourage other protesters. For example by dressing up in an ancient warlord costume, piling up amulets, and a pink wig. Apart from this, many expressed their financial support by showing off strings of stapled banknotes along with a sign indicating their objectives. It could be said that the artist causes their individual and group identities, along with their facial expressions revealing of their heart, attitudes, and political aims, to become fading history. We cannot wait to ask this question: What will happen if these protesters find out that their endurance

and struggle on the streets for their political ideology, for 7 months and 22 days, have indeed faded from the national consciousness at the present time?

The last technique is colour adjustment. The artist dramatises colours in order to make photographs look vibrant, emotional and eye-catching. We find this character of colour adjustment in *‘His First Day on TV for the General Who Returns Happiness’* and *‘Haunting Memory’*. Colour dramatization reflects certain realities that the eye cannot see.

*‘His First Day on TV for the General Who Returns Happiness’* shows colour adjustment of photographs that Manit took with his mobile phone of the television screen during a few seconds of unstable transmission. Technological error changes and distorts the General’s individual identity. Brighter pink and green colours around the eyes lead to a perception that the image is eerie, uncomfortable and abnormal because nothing is in control. These images form part of an important occasion when the General went on air solo for the first time on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2014 to explain about the process of returning happiness to all people in the country.

Manit chooses to photograph a moment of unstable signal rather than a moment when everything is in control. Photographing a brief moment of time, even a moment showing a mistake, reveals a certain reality: that a controlled situation always has a period that cannot be controlled. In other words, there is no completely controlled situation on earth. Manit freezes time in a moment of loss of control. This gives the audiences a chance to visually explore the shape of error in their own time. This error invites us to ponder the process of returning happiness - a process that requires distinct controlling measures since it is much more complicated. This series of photographs persuades us as art audiences and members of the public to prepare for the period of instability during the process of returning happiness to the whole nation.

*‘Haunting Memory’* is a portrait series created from Polaroid photos that Manit had taken of Yingluck Shinawatra’s election posters. The negatives were scanned; the resulting images were then manipulated by adjusting the original colours making them vivid and different from the original scanned images. Analysis of *‘Haunting Memory’* must be done in parallel with *‘Election of Hatred’*.

*‘Election of Hatred’* is a series of photographs of damaged campaign



posters in the election of 2011. The damage inflicted took four forms. One, slicing off facial features including eyes, mouth, and even the entire face; two, slashing repeatedly on the face as if the person who did this wanted to injure the real person; three, spraying paint on eyes and allowing the paint to run as if the eyes were bleeding; four, writing the word 'Burn' which refers to a previous protest by red-shirt people [which ended in many acts of arson both in Bangkok and upcountry]. The destruction of the representative image expresses violence in terms of action, thought, and emotion of destroyers. Destroyed objects in public space clearly show a threat. It was a social phenomenon that broadly occurred during a period when the power to administer the nation was being hotly contested [the 2011 elections that brought Yingluck Shinawatra to power].

For *'Haunting Memory'*, Manit presents only the face of Yingluck Shinawatra. He adjusted colour with the help of graphic software. The characters of manipulated images are close to those of painting and graphic art. This raises questions: Why did not the artist present her portrait as seen like those images in *'Election of Hatred'*? Why did the artist dramatise the photographs' colours?

One of the basic qualities of photography is to display a truth based on the way light operates. Light wave travels to meet object and reflects the image of object to Polaroid film that records the image. One of the similar basic qualities of painting and graphic art is to express the artist's concept through visual elements. Concept refers to a mental image that exists in the mind of the image owner. The conceptual image does not necessarily resemble its origin. It shows how its owner perceives and understands that object. We may analyse at the early stage that the artist wanted to present seen images; he recorded them with a camera. At the same time, he wanted audiences to see beyond what the eye sees. He then adjusted the photographs' colour to bright with a high contrast of dark and light value, and complimentary colours.

The face of the former first woman Prime Minister of Thailand is stained with colours. Each image shows different sets of colours. Her face is treated as an empty canvas that waits to be filled with colours. Her face is not painted carefully and sophisticatedly. On the contrary, it is smeared and sprayed with flecked with colour in an emotional manner. However, she always smiles as if to say: 'No matter what colours stain me, no matter how hard it is, you will see my ever-smiling eyes and mouth.' *'Haunting Memory'* presents two substances: First,

images show the unchangeable image of smiling Yingluck Shinawatra; second, colourful brush strokes refer to persons who paint or stain her.

Considering this along with political contexts, there are many groups of people who stain her image, which is charged with complication and violence. They are: her relative; her relative’s supporters; her and her relative’s beneficiaries; people who hate her relative but consent to her relative’s thinking; people who hate both her relative and his thinking; and finally, people who sympathy with her. She is in the middle of all these emotionally charged groups. Hatred, dissatisfaction, sympathy, and fear of losing power and advantages strike at her. She has absorbed all our emotions. She functions as her relative’s representative; many react to her as if they reacted to her relative [brother Thaksin, former PM]. Her image becomes a socially complex memory that intrinsically touches her relative, and many groups of people who want to but cannot react to her relative directly. Her image is the collective memory that continues to haunt all groups of people for a while, as she smiles on unchangingly.

Epilogue

Content of each photographic series will be demonstrated briefly in a table below:

Table 1: Content of Each Photographic Series

Title of Photographic Series	Content
<i>‘The Last Photograph of The King of Siam’</i>	The meeting of two important events, one taking place in the cosmos and another one on earth – the departure of the king and the coming of the new one, which humans cannot fully comprehend. This concurrence invites people to ponder the future.
<i>‘Siam Eclipse 1868’</i>	Transformation that relates to important figures always takes time. It does not happen and finish within minutes like an eclipse.
<i>‘Royal Monuments - Chakri Dynasty’</i>	The existence of seen objects and its reality may not go together. Existence may refer to non-existence, and vice versa. Additionally, the transformation from one state to another is a natural process that cannot be avoided. Everyone needs to be resilient.

**Table 1:** (Continued)

<b>Title of Photographic Series</b>	<b>Content</b>
<i>'Wall of Conscience' and 'Wall of Defiance'</i>	The absence of democracy. The democratic system in Thailand has progressed little in more than 40 years. Finally, the stressful confrontation between Shinawatra's government and STR is addressed.
<i>'5 Generals Who Return Happiness to the People' and 'The Parliament of Happy Generals'</i>	The series show an artistic experiment: swapping places with the authority figures to take the controlling position; the artist censors them by blurring their innate and social identity.
<i>'His First Day on TV for the General Who Returns Happiness'</i>	A small error persuades us to think about larger errors in the process of returning happiness to the people.
<i>'Queuing for Happiness'</i>	Authority's problem-solving strategy is ill-advised and unsustainable.
<i>'Fading History – Shutdown Bangkok'</i>	The great endeavour of the PDRC becomes faded history.
<i>'Ratchadamnoen Motor Show'</i>	Inferiority in terms of moral value, efficiency, and ethics of a few police officers contributes to a question against the values, efficiency, and ethics of the larger governmental organisation.
<i>'Haunting Memory'</i>	Yingluck Shinawatra as an actor on the political stage. Her real identity can be explored from facial outline, eyes, and mouth. Apart from this, the memory that the public has of her is made up of the doings of different groups of people.

It can be seen that each photographic series reveals 'content' that connects to many events. However, if we try to generalise all contents, we will find that the events that Manit recorded in the past few years are connected logically. They make us fully aware of problematic situations. Considering the events that involved people, we experience disappointment, concern, question, and aggressive challenges against the governments. Considering the events that involved politics, we experience being threatened in public space, and emotional expression charged with violence during the election campaign. Considering the events that involved government, we experience the inferior efficiency of administration, control and problem-solving, aggressive censorship of thought and suppression of freedom of political expression, and the obstinate

centralization of power. Finally, considering the events that involved history, we experience the similarity between past and present events, which invites us to think about the future. It could be said that Manit gives shape to the present of which shape is charged by violence in terms of actions toward objects, language, and psychology. What, then, does the future look like?

The final video piece entitled ‘*Primitive*’ may yield an answer. ‘*Primitive*’ is composed of a series of photographs, showing blood traces and arranged into a moving image. The blood of protesters killed at the base of the Democracy Monument. Assassination by anonymous gunmen left three dead and 22 people injured. They are members of PDRC.

Once upon a time, killing was part of the human instinct. Humans killed for food, to protect their community, and for the survival of their race. With civilization humans developed a consensus on the reasons and rules of co-existence so that killing would no longer be existence so that killing would no longer be necessary (Opotow, 2000). But in fact, killing or taking the life of others still exist everywhere in the world including Thailand. The psychological process whereby a person comes to think that others do not have enough value and right to continue their life is called dehumanization or the collapse of the human as a moral animal.

In every series in the exhibition ‘*Fear*’, we perceive the psychological reaction between two groups of people, between one who hold power and another one who lose power and interests. The photographs express conflict and disagreement that increasingly become more violent, leading to an overwhelming desire for complete destruction. As human anger and hatred rise unconsciously, the standard of morality unconsciously lowers as well. Killing or taking someone’s life seems to be the best way as it cuts off all possible complications. This is what Manit fears. However, what the artist most fears for is the danger of dehumanization that does not focus only on the number of dead people in the situation. It concerns directly with situations afterward. Reconciliation or returning happiness after killing can hardly happen within a short period of time. It is the outline of the collapse of Thai social structure that Manit is scared to think of.

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