

### Thai artist Pannaphan Yodmanee, very promising for contemporary art in Asia

In January 2017, Thai artist Pannaphan Yodmanee, won the 11th Benesse Prize at the Singapore Biennale 2016. Previously she was selected in the shortlist of 5 East and South-East Asia artists. Her installation “Aftermath” beat out the other 62 artworks in the Biennale. It was a combination of ruins and pagodas, laid out on the floor: found objects, artist-made icons, paintings mapping the Buddhist cosmos. “The Benesse Prize celebrates artists whose practices embody an “experimental and critical spirit”, and for their potential to develop a reflection around the theme of “Benesse” (Well-Being). The Benesse Prize was presented for the first time in Asia since its first award at the Venice Biennale in 1995.

Pannaphan Yodmanee is a young artist, born in 1988. She is a graduate from the Silpakorn University of Bangkok. Her work explores the Buddhist philosophy, the permanent themes of loss, suffering, destruction and karmic cycles - birth, death, and rebirth. She combines natural elements such as rocks and minerals with painted contemporary objects that recall traditional Thai art and architecture. Her installation “Aftermath”, created for the Biennale, showed the artistic construction of Pannaphan Yodmanee’s work. On a huge wall, she presented a mapping of the Buddhist cosmos that resembled a landscape painting. A large section of the Singapore Art Museum was taken over by images of destruction and ruin. “With this scene of destruction, the artist wanted to depict the consequences of what globalization and cultural misunderstandings could create”. She also examined, like in her past works, the relevance of faith and religion in our lives. “I am seeing that ... the one thing that creates peace and happiness is religion”, she explained to the Bangkok Post in January 2017, “but in the end, people use religion as a tool to hurt each other”. The artist also asks question: why it is not allowed to use figures of Buddha in artworks in Thailand. “I feel a little bit worried, because I’m talking about religion. I am not afraid of the foreign viewers. I am afraid of the Thai viewers. There are organizations protecting Buddhism (in the country), she added. “I feel if I go outside Thailand and I give it my all in the space that they give me, I’ll have more opportunities to continue as an artist. I can’t expect anything from Thailand as my works can only be put in museums, not galleries. Thailand has a lot of quality artists, but we don’t have good management”.

Pannaphan Yodmanee already distinguished herself by winning first prizes in Thailand: in 2014 she earned the 2nd Prize/80th Singha Photo Contest, Singha Corporation, in 2013 the 1st prize in Bualuang award and the Young Thai Artist award in 2007 and 2006. In late 2016, a solo exhibition was dedicated to the artist at La Lanta Fine Art gallery, in Bangkok ; in 2015 her “The prophecy of Time” was exhibited at Art Stage Singapore. She has also participated to many group exhibitions since 2009. Her next solo exhibition, thanks to her price, will take place in Japan, at the Benesse Art Site Naoshima. The young and talented artist, put under the spotlight today, should rapidly go beyond the frontiers of her country and get an artistic recognition both in Asia and in the rest of the world.

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