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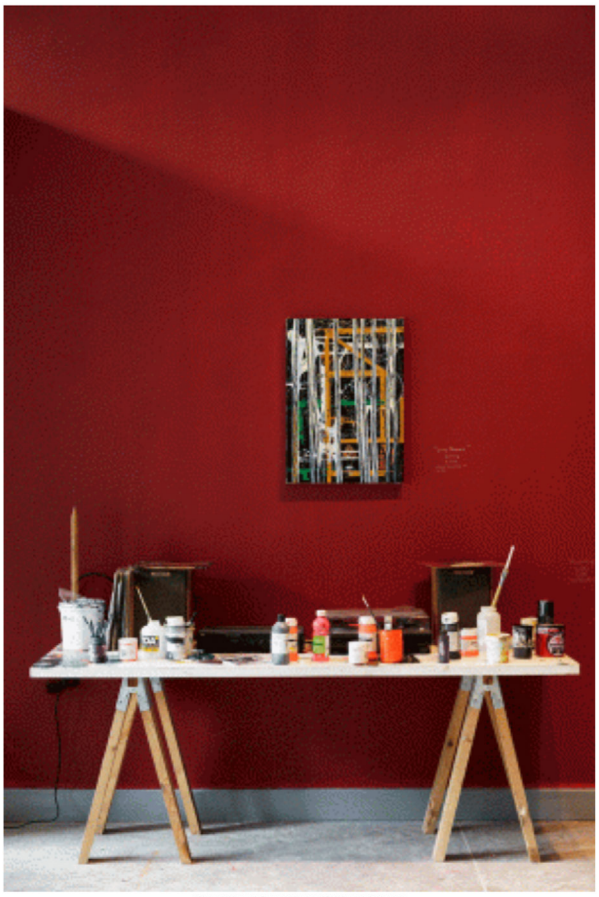
ArtReview

Udomsak Krisanamis



Udomsak Krisanamis Retrospective, from ARA Winter 2016 Udomsak

"When I stepped off the plane, I didn't have culture shock or anything. I just felt like… this is somewhere really familiar." It's Saturday, mid-September, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Udomsak Krisanamis is talking about his first impressions of New York, the city from which his abstract paintings, cobbled together out of bits of newspaper, paint and noodles, first emerged. We are sitting in the Thai artist's paint-splattered studio, around us is a mix of old works and works-in-progress. On the floor are scraps of the print ephemera he glues to his canvases, and near us is a sideboard full of the records he listens to while doing so. He has just told me: "There's nothing to discuss about my work." So we are skirting around it, outlining the circumstances of its arrival, as one might a gilded box that has just fallen unannounced from the sky.

Max Crosbie-Jones
Udomsak Krisanamis
ArtReview, February 3, 2017.
https://urlr.me/jwShcG

During the mid-1990s, Krisanamis made his name by gluing torn strips of printed matter to his canvases and systematically blacking out the words using paint or felt-tip pen. All he would leave visible were the empty centres of the characters O, o, 9 and P. Over the years, he disrupted these radiant surfaces by adding fabric, noodles and other found materials, as well as paints and inks, with a mixture of painterly touch and gestural abandon.

He has always been the reticent and slightly withdrawn sort of artist. 'He refuses to speak, to make noise, to make explanations,' is how artist-curator Rirkrit Tiravanija describes him in his curatorial statement for *Retrospective*, which ran from June through July at Chiang Mai University Art Centre, and in conjunction with an exhibition of new work at Bangkok's Gallery Ver. Krisanamis, a boyish fifty-year-old, has given few interviews throughout his career. However, his agreeing to this one suggests he is, for now, open to being better understood.

This is just a theory, of course, but it's one backed up by the modestly autobiographical bent of his retrospective (and a couple of interviews he gave to Thai media outlets to promote it. 'Finally, we discover why New York loves our boy,' wrote The Nation). While his exhibitions are often self-referential, suffused with nods to his love of golf and music, the Chiang Mai show offered us a more intimate portrait of Krisanamis and his output than any previous one (or art writer) has ever achieved.

Exploring almost 30 years of his work, the exhibition revealed how his process – a serendipitous blend of collage, drawing and painting – has developed and become all his own, despite clear ancestral links to the Arte Povera movement, Abstract Expressionism and Postconceptualism. It also fired up the imagination. Seen from a distance, the crude incident, rhythmic skeins of negative and positive space, and pentimento typical of his deeply textured and reticulated surfaces became gorgeously madcap and mesmerising. Some of the early works evoked rain-streaked windows and spores shuffling under a microscope. Later, I saw Mondrianesque grids, musical phrases dancing on a stave, billboard posters peeking through paint, a freeze-frame of Man Ray's 'rayograph' shorts and even the scrappy beauty of Japanese *boro* patchworks.

Each of the 20 works were accompanied by some supporting text handwritten in faintly legible Thai on the walls. Among the texts were quotes (including Frank Stella's 'What you see is what you see'), a short story about golf and obsession, and a poem by Emily Dickinson

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Besides the intense pleasure and all-round trippiness of Krisanamis's mundane surfaces, there were also autobiographical titbits to be gleaned. Displayed chronologically, the 20 works were each accompanied by a title, date and some supporting text handwritten in faintly legible Thai on the walls (a printout in typed English and Thai was also available). Among the texts were quotes (including Frank Stella's 'What you see is what you see'), a short story about golf and obsession, and a poem by Emily Dickinson. But most were penned by Krisanamis himself: colourful anecdotes or diaristic vignettes with a faux-naïf tone.

'Started selling works. Fell in love for the first time with a Turkish woman who had a career as a stylist. Heartbroken and ended up drinking everyday while listening to Snoop Dog's *Doggystyle* with a friend. It took me six months to forget about (sic) her...'

'Mad about golf. Hoping to be good at it so I moved to live close to a golf course in an upstate New York town called New Paltz. Beautiful town. The colors of the spring were magical. I created a lot of great works there but finally had to move away because I couldn't bare (sic) the cold.'

A search for connections – futile but no less enjoyable for it – was set in motion by the placement of these quirky texts beside Krisanamis's titles, which are often the names of his favourite songs. Ditto the picture of Miles Davis stuck next to *Silver Jungle* (2013–16), a brash, graffiti scrawl-like painting made of acrylic paint, fibreglass strips and mesh tape, and also a large boulder on the floor entitled *Stone Cold* (1990–2016). The latter had been rubbed with bread dough, a clear reference to one of Jesus's miracles, and also, possibly, to Krisanamis's Catholic upbringing.

The retrospective was peculiar for another reason: two dates were written against each painting. One referred to the original's creation; the other the duplicate's creation. That the show consisted solely of remade works only became clear on reading Tiravanija's pseudo-philosophical statement to its earnest conclusion, where he explained that 'all the paintings in this exhibition have been reconstituted, reformed by the hands of many people'.

According to Krisanamis, the reason for enlisting 12 young artists to spend nearly four months making replicas, each 1cm smaller than the original, was purely logistical. Borrowing them would have been too torturous, if not impossible, given that many are in private collections. But Tiravanija has more highfalutin ideas: 'The paintings we see here are an attempt to recollect, recall and remake images that already exist in time and space. Just as words are used over and over again in different contexts and conditions, giving us, through their repeated usage, other meanings.' Krisanamis is dismissive when I ask him to expand on this: "Those are Rirkrit's words, not mine, right?"

Max Crosbie-Jones
Udomsak Krisanamis
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https://urlr.me/jwShcG

Despite having retreated from New York to Bangkok in 2001, and then to much sleepier Chiang Mai in 2009, Krisanamis still works at a fast clip. Typically, he's at his studio six days a week. Days off he spends with his six-year-old daughter. As for golf, he plays around three times a year – not as much as before. And what of New York? Does he ever think of moving back? "I don't think so, but you never know," he says.

Writ large in his retrospective was a clear evolution in the sorts of found materials he deploys, from vermicelli noodles through to old curtain, bubble wrap and wooden shims picked up at the local hardware store

Most appraisals of Krisanamis tend to foreground his time there, and rightly so. It was there that the method for which he is best known – the aforementioned reduction of words to what writer Steve Stern calls 'atomic units' – and the prevalent reading of it – that it's umbilically linked to his taciturn nature – were forged. As an art student struggling to learn English, he began crossing out the words he knew in newspapers, mapping out the gaps in his understanding. After submitting some drawings inspired by this technique to his conceptual art class in 1990, things began to develop.

He still painstakingly blots out words, just as he did back then. Writ large in his retrospective was a clear evolution in the sorts of found materials he deploys, from vermicelli noodles through to old curtain, bubble wrap and wooden shims picked up at the local hardware store. Meanwhile, the Gallery Ver exhibition, *Paint It Black*, appeared to signal a shift towards calmer, more conventionally abstract pieces dominated by large hollow circles and oblongs that repeat against flat beds of colour. But a glance around Krisanamis's studio makes it clear that he's not one for drawing lines in the sand. Beneath his works-in-progress sit shredded strips of Korean and local newspapers, and second-generation photocopies of the figure 8 sourced from an old Chinese calendar. These word-based canvases are throwbacks, yes, but also as dense, complicated and gleefully savage as anything that's come before. One in particular looks positively cosmic, like a star-clogged night sky torn asunder.

Writing for *Contemporary* magazine in 2004, writer Kirsty Bell posited that Krisanamis's habit of erasing words, of denying their function as vehicles of meaning and of coercing them into playing a mute role in his paintings, 'seemed to manifest his own refusal to speak'. He's clearly still drawn to the strange world of silence he has created for himself. I suspect he always will be.

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THE nation

Udomsak by the dots

Finally, we discover why New York loves our boy

Udomsak Krisanamis manages to see art, Buddhism, his life – and golf – wrapped up together. The Bangkok-born 50-year-old, now a resident of Chiang Mai, made a name for himself in the New York art scene in the early 1990s but is less known in his homeland and rarely exhibits his work here.

Not that there would be many buyers in Thailand – his abstract paintings fetch the equivalent of Bt1 million. But they feature in the prestigious collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Walker and the Albright-Knox in the US and the Cartier gallery of contemporary art in Paris.

Udomsak's local profile is rising, however, with his fellow artist Rirkrit Tiravanija curating a show titled "Paint It Black" at his Gallery Ver in Bangkok and a concurrent "Retrospective" at the Chiang Mai University Art Museum.

Gallery Ver's solo show is Udomsak's first in Thailand in a decade. "Not many people have seen my work in Thailand," he admits. But the exhibition up North is perhaps the more interesting of the two because it entails reproductions by a dozen young artists in Chiang Mai of pieces that were sold privately overseas and are thus tricky to have shipped here.

Phatarawadee Phataranawik The
Udomsak by the dots
The Nation, July 21, 2016.
https://urlr.me/vTQxZA

The red and white walls of the Art Museum have more than 20 paintings that, with the installations they surround, chronicle Udomsak's creative life since 1989. He studied and worked in New York from 1990 to 2008 and has been in Chiang Mai since 2009. The originals of every single piece found buyers in the West.

"It would have been very complicated to ship the originals to Chiang Mai and our time was very limited, so we asked younger artists to recreate them," says Udomsak, who seems pleased with the results.

This retrospective is much more narrative than his previous shows, and conceptually comprises one huge installation, with white dots on the wall guiding the viewer along step by step. "The red wall is itself a giant painting that makes everything a single whole," he says.

The artist's handwritten notes about themes and inspirations accompany each piece, a change from the usual practice of listing just title and medium, which forces viewers to draw their own interpretations of sometimes complicated abstract works. Here they're allowed into the thought process with memories, song lyrics and poems, sometimes sad, sometimes cheerful.

"The text becomes part of the work," Udomsak says. "I wrote all of it except for the Emily Dickinson poems, a story from my favourite golf book by Timothy O'Grady and some quotes I found online."

What's this about golf? "Playing golf makes me happy, the same as making art!" he explains. Fair enough.

Udomsak has long used collage, adding shards of newspaper, noodles and cellophane to the paint. "Long Life None Senses" features rice noodles, wire and nails. "Art isn't necessarily produced by skilful workmanship, profound elements or superfluous materials," he's scrawled on the wall next to it in pencil.

"More importantly, art is not a supernatural thing that ordinary people find hard to understand. My work is made of whatever I have in my life."

"Creative work," he avers elsewhere, "should be produced in accordance with full emotion and feeling, in both the elements and the expression.

"The paintings and mixed-media pieces in this exhibition utilise objects found nearby, such as steel, wood, plastic, cloth, plant life, food and other scraps. These things seem to have in them my own memories and close relationships. They are the sources of my creative inspiration."

In the earlier paintings done in New York, densely layered and textured grids resemble stellar landscapes, satellite imagery, twinkling cityscapes and blinking digital universes. His work shifts between the worldly and otherworldly, the sublime and the everyday.

Phatarawadee Phataranawik The
Udomsak by the dots
The Nation, July 21, 2016.
https://urlr.me/vTQxZA

Udomsak came out of Chulalongkorn University and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, as did Rirkrit. He found living and working in different cultures and art scenes difficult. “More than anything
I learned how to survive under pressure and to be patient,” he says.
And yet, while for most contemporary artists, getting a toehold in New York during early 1990s was next to impossible, Udomsak breezed in.
“For me it was much easier,” he says. “I had my first solo show in my own tiny apartment. [Painter] Elizabeth Peyton saw it and told Gavin Brown [the gallery owner who made her a star], so I took all my paintings on the subway to show Gavin Brown, and that’s how it began.”
When he migrated to Chiang Mai in 2009 he rented the traditional Lanna-style wooden house seen in the small monochrome painting “Untitled”. “I could be closer to my parents, but I prefer somewhere other than Bangkok,’ he says. “Chiang Mai is perfect if you want to raise a family – it has everything.”
You can see “a slice of life” from Udomsak’s studio there in the installation “Poppong”, with its table loaded with the tools of the trade, a black-and-white photo on the wall and records playing on the turntable.
Surprisingly, Udomsak says there is no difference between the art scenes in Chiang Mai and New York “except Chiang Mai is so pretty and slow and you can get lazy very easily!”
In his more recent work on view in Chiang Mai, intricate detail is replaced by bold statements in dazzling but monochrome hues, the surfaces built up with layers of found material.
Rirkrit’s Gallery Ver is in contrast dominated by large paintings in black, white and blue done this year. The show’s title, “Paint It Black”, is borrowed from the Rolling Stones, whose song of the same name is a lament on bleakness and depression.
“I had a blast making these, even though I’d been through some tough times,” Udomsak says, “but that’s life. What you see at Ver, though, is the result of what came before.”
White loops appear on black or blue canvas. One bears the phrase “Golf, Eat, Sleep and Repeat”.
Glimpses of the spiritual void become evident, a Buddhist theme emerging, as it also did when he was working in the US. “For me, nothingness in both art and Buddhism mean peacefulness,” he says.

Phatarawadee Phataranawik The
Udomsak by the dots
The Nation, July 21, 2016.
https://urlr.me/vTQxZA

Bangkok Post

A circle of abstraction

Udomsak Krisanamis's retrospective show involves reproductions of his previous works, but in smaller form

Udomsak Krisanamis at Gallery Ver. Photos courtesy of Gallery Ver

Currently standing at the centre of Gallery Ver is one half of a table tennis table folded up, and it has come to embody the essence of the artist Udomsak Krisanamis's latest solo show "Paint It Black". On it are layers of gauze and circling strokes of black paint, plus a wasp's nest. The insect's lodge wasn't the artist's plan but he kept it anyway.

Concurrent is the artist's retrospective show at Chiang Mai University (CMU) Art Center, and the echo, or rather the chronological link, between the two venues could not be stronger. One of his best-known pieces shown in the northern city now, for instance, is a painting on bubble wrap. Like the wasp's nest, the material wasn't the original plan, it was just for protection when his works were being shipped before he picked it up to use.

Kaona Pongpipat
A circle of abstraction
The Bangkok Post, July 20, 2016.
https://urlr.me/gvDQ6F

After graduating from Chulalongkorn University, Udomsak moved to the US and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. Ironically, he is lesser known at home compared to the international art scene where, since the mid-1990s, the artist's distinctive abstract works have begun to gain widespread recognition. His style has been compared by critics abroad to Frank Stella of the late 1960s or Brice Marden in the mid-1970s.

While abstraction is what we see up front, the thinking behind the works is always conceptual. In the retrospective show at CMU Art Center, all works on display are actually reproductions of his past works but the ratio of everything -- the canvas size or the strokes of paint -- is reduced by 1cm.

"All the paintings in this exhibition have been reconstituted, reformed by the hands of many people," wrote Rirkrit Tiravanija, who first suggested the idea of reduced-size reproduction for the retrospective to Udomsak. "This retrospective is in itself an attempt to bring into matter ideas of representation and language, and in turn, to become experience. The paintings we see here are an attempt to recollect, recall and remake images that already exist in time and space." The show takes us back as far as the 1980s, when he had one of his earliest shows. What was already predominant back then was his constant use of mundane and personal objects, and through Udomsak's rendering, their meanings were transformed.

A piece entitled Long Live Nonsenses now hung in the central exhibition room of CMU Art Center, for example, is made of noodles, wires and nails. It's a reproduced version of the piece shown at Goethe-Institut in 1989.

Going clockwise is the suggested route around the art space and viewers will see a chronological development of the artist's style. While in work like Hercules the abstract pattern is merely repeated vertical strips, in I Won't Last A Day Without You we begin to see circling strokes, the pattern which is to persist most in his later works, including the latest show at Gallery Ver.

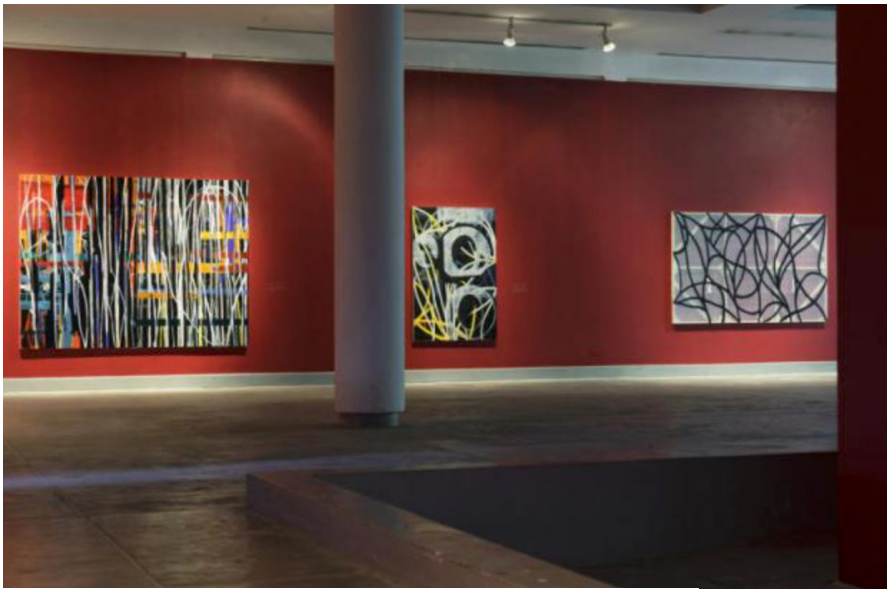
Manager of Gallery Ver Jirat Ratthawongjirakul said that the use of circles in his work came from Udomsak's habit to circle around the words he didn't know the meanings of when he started to learn English after first moving to the US. What's common in both past works at Chiang Mai and the new set in Bangkok is how they are a result of layers of paint and mixed media which have been applied, scratched out and put on again. In a work entitled What's Your Name, for instance, we see the same circles and strips, yet on top of all that, white paint was smeared on as if to hide what has been done to the canvas previously.

Kaona Pongpipat
A circle of abstraction
The Bangkok Post, July 20, 2016.
https://urlr.me/gvDQ6F

Over at Gallery Ver in Bangkok, what's most striking is how the tone of the works in "Paint It Black" is significantly more subdued, as if the artist no longer wishes the viewers to notice how complex his working process has been. One massive canvas with a black background bears rows of white circles arranged in neat order. It's only when looking closely that we realise that there is layer after layer of paint and strips of gauze plastered underneath.

What's also enjoyable in "Paint It Black" is the personal aspect of it. The canvas of one painting is actually the styrofoam board which Udomsak used for putting his painting tools on in his studio, but now is put in frame as another piece of artwork. The frames for circles drawn on canvases are actually the wheels of his and his daughter's bicycles, and we realise that Udomsak's abstraction is perhaps a very straightforward narrative after all.

Visiting the retrospective and then his latest show at Gallery Ver is seeing the artist going around in circles and finally back at the very beginning of his career: a look at himself as an artist and his realisation that any object can be art if one is to ponder on it and feel deeply enough about it.



Udomsak's retrospective at CMU Art Center. Photo courtesy of Gallery Ver

Kaona Pongpipat
A circle of abstraction
The Bangkok Post, July 20, 2016.
https://urlr.me/gvDQ6F

Art in America

Udomsak Krisanamis

To a culture that perceives art as a globally accessible product, transmitted and received at the click of a mouse, the Thai artist Udomsak Krisanamis's work might well seem solipsistically self-referential. His paintings record nothing so much as the labor of their making; he is a golfer, and his shows are rife with references to the sport; his films—brief loops shot on a cell phone—are modest autobiographical distillations of quotidian particularity. And yet, step back, and he is sketching—with characteristically dry humor—a critical commentary on the international shop window of postmodernism, its presumption to speak across all boundaries.

At Kunstverein Freiburg, a huge headline, painted directly on the wall in block capitals, proclaimed GLOBAL INVESTMENTS. It might have been an enlargement of one of the newspaper snippets Krisanamis glues to his collages. Was the line referring to the abstract paintings hanging below? The words came across loud and clear, although they were surrounded by suggestions of dissent. "SOOP SIP"—painted on the adjacent wall within a sky blue speech bubble—is a phonetic translation of a Thai gossip column logo, meaning "rumors," although the tail of the bubble absurdly indicated the concrete floor as its source. So much for the voice of the mass media. The paintings—each 5 by 3¼ feet and dated 2011—are composed of loose bands of black acrylic almost entirely obscuring the brightly colored grounds. These forms might have been adapted from the headline fonts, converting their facile communication into a muting of expression. Inarticulacy is proffered as an alternative to the glib exchange of information. Destabilized and deconstructed by the surrounding works, GLOBAL INVESTMENTS read like words ranted in a language the speaker does not understand.

The sequence of paintings formed a generic late-modernist hang of upright rectangles, a configuration that is simultaneously formal abstraction, minimal decor, and one manifestation of established art market value—a type of "global investment"—which conforms to a venerable template handed down by Rothko, Reinhardt, Rauschenberg, Stella, etc. This is the picture one might glean from an installation shot. The vertically applied paint was diversified by a few horizontal white lines spanning the panorama like a horizon. Up close, this view was replaced by a tactile impression of landscape, the densely layered acrylic rutted and grooved like dried-out mud—a metaphorical switch from global distance to local perception. The viewer was conveyed beyond the linear syntax of language into an incrementally gathered field of temporally ambiguous materiality that might have been designed to be perceived by the fingertips, like Braille.

Mark Prince
Udomsak Krisanamis
Art in America, August 27, 2011.
https://urlr.me/eapwPh

The vertical black bands of paint and the compressed capital letters found a three-dimensional counterpart in 100 wooden sculptures—models of enlarged golf tees, upturned to resemble model missiles. Brilliant Mistake (2011) takes the cliché of golf as a Western recreation for the financially flush and extends it in various directions: to color the GLOBAL INVESTMENTS line with suggestions of both military aggression and bland leisure; and to claim the paintings as another indulgence of moneyed free time, an implication the artisanal labor of their making resists. The golfer might be a painter or a collector; the painter a worker or a producer of cultural capital. Krisanamis exposes himself in all these guises before proceeding to generate irony at their expense. A glass cabinet contained "merchandise"—handbags printed with an exhibition logo, figurines of swinging golfers and a turntable playing a 1950s golf tutorial (Country Club Shop, 2011). It mimicked the convention of a golf club's pro shop, but its wares were the artist's personal trinkets as much as a collection of commodity ciphers. Krisanamis risks fusing subjective expression and objective critique, as distinct from so many current artists who keep their hands patronizingly clean by assuming not to partake in the production process they critique.

Upstairs, three monitors on cheap packing crates played medleys of films: a New York Ferris wheel, an amusement park in Bangkok, Krisanamis's baby daughter sleeping under a mosquito net. The images straddled continents and cultures, the private and the symbolic. Similarly, a series of collages on packing cardboard combined capitalistic jargon—MONEY GAME, YEAR OF HIGH CRASH, THREAT OF CURRENCY WAR—with Ab-Ex drips and smears of paint. The cut-out headlines interpreted the drips as cartoon rhetoric: Crash! Splash! A final exception featured the phrase AN ORDINARY GOLFER. By satirizing his own subjectivity—his painterly gestures and his artistic persona—Krisanamis challenges the presumed congruence between local experience and the squeaks and shouts of the global media and the global art world it increasingly subsumes.

Mark Prince
Udomsak Krisanamis
Art in America, August 27, 2011.
https://urlr.me/eapwPh

FRIEZE

The Story of 0

Udomsak Krisanamis is playing golf. On a recent exhibition poster and in the catalogue of his retrospective at the Wexner Center we see him, club in hand, walking across an Arcadian expanse of green. Putting. Calculating strokes. The photos are blurred, but he seems happy. It's not clear where he is exactly. It looks far away: a country club ... but what country? Clearly he's not here, not in the gallery, the place where the work is. This special sort of removal is one of the cultural meanings of golf, something learned from television. In the sitcom world golf is code for a privileged inaccessibility. Where is the doctor when we need him? Where is the executive who's skipped an important meeting? Off on the course, miles from town, hitting little balls into the sky. Can't be reached. (Chuckles from the laugh track.) That idyllic elsewhere is the place where Krisanamis chooses to be seen.

As an index of Krisanamis' place in the art world, these photographs of the artist are a telling joke. Born in Thailand in 1966, he set up shop in New York in 1991 and began turning out gorgeous, hermetic abstractions: dense all-over patterns built up from newspapers, paint and dried noodles. Somewhat notoriously, he doesn't talk about his art, saying everything is in the work. No particular ideology, programme or movement accounts for these images. Critical response has invoked notions of pure retinal pleasure and claimed the works' mystery as their central attribute. 'Painting today doesn't have to "mean" anything per se', we are assured in a review of the artist's latest show. 'One feels but cannot "get" a Krisanamis', reads the text in the Wexner catalogue. (The book, perplexingly, is titled The Intimate Portrait.)

Whatever their source, the works themselves do stick in the mind. You worry at them, as at a piece of fraying cloth. It seems as if something is going on that isn't strictly art; an elsewhere is woven into their structure. Is it worthwhile to wonder if, and to what extent, the photos of Krisanamis striding along the fairway like a suburban dandy are meant to have any explanatory power? (We've had Artist-as-shaman, Artist-as-research-scientist, Artist-as-publicity-agent - why not Artist-as-golfer?) What goes on between the putting green and the canvas?

Steven Stern
The Story of O
Frieze, September 4, 2007.
https://urlr.me/CGgDXr

Wandering through almost a decade of Krisanamis' work at the Wexner, you can see how his images have evolved, complicating their own complications. What has remained constant is his singular, specific use of collaged material. He takes letters from newspapers and numbers from supermarket price stickers and blocks out everything but the rounded empty centres of the characters O, 0, 9 and P, the part typographers call the 'counter'. The letters - or rather, the parts of them that show - function as atomic units, bits (in both the conventional and computer senses of the word) from which the works are constructed. Inexpressive in themselves, these tiny circles of borrowed negative space are imported onto the canvas by the hundreds, glued down in strips and patches, where they can be read as points of light, as decorative millefiore patterns, and as nodes of information. Later pieces incorporate translucent white cellophane noodles as structural elements. They don't seem to signify 'food' or 'Thai-ness' any more than the pasted letters mean 'language'. Ready-made brushstrokes, they flow down the surface in irregular verticals, adding yet another layer to the picture plane: pasta impasto.

The sheer quantity of these pasted-on elements registers as significant. It's hard to look at the paintings without being struck by thoughts that aren't quite art thoughts - such as marvelling at the excessive effort involved in their making, the way you would at a barn-sized rubber band ball or a cathedral made of toothpicks. What kind of person would bother to do such a thing? There's a hobbyist's obsessiveness here, a superfluity of attention, that usually seems reserved for activities beyond the pale of the aesthetic. Stand in front of a work such as Methane (1996), spreading across the wall past the edges of your field of vision, and you're awed by the grandeur of scale, the solemn reserve of the image: thousands of minute white Os against a black ground. At the same time, though, another kind of awe is invoked: imagined scenes of the mind-numbingly precise work involved in an almost pathological process. The compound feeling is an odd, off-putting reverence, a skewed Sublime.

It's likely you're also aware that the painting looks remarkably like a night sky. Or a cityscape, maybe. The white points shine in the black field, clouds of purple densities seem to open up in the spaces between them. The representational is rarely very far away in Krisanamis' abstractions.

Steven Stern
The Story of O
Frieze, September 4, 2007.
https://urlr.me/CGgDXr

Never called forth on purpose (it's not a night sky or a cityscape), it is none the less generously tolerated as a side effect. In a particularly stunning piece from 1992 the collaged letters range across the canvas glow like lights seen from Hollywood Hills; clusters and rows seem to indicate neighbourhoods and avenues. You think: it looks like Los Angeles. Krisanamis has titled it Looks Like LA ... , the sort of title that's pronounced with a shrug and a deadpan tone of voice.

More recent works evoke the urban in different ways: you look at them in the same way you might look at a city. The paintings are nominally structured into grids, like the street plan of Manhattan, but there's a more complex geometry going on than the four-square box dreamt of by city planners. The ubiquitous letter-orifices here are all colour-xeroxed price stickers - chemical blue and orange 6s and 9s - glued down in messy, sometimes overlapping strips. Heavily built up along their circumference with thick acrylic paint, the holes in the numbers become physical depressions in the uneven surface of the work, a tactility that was suggested but not realized in earlier paintings. Collaged noodles striate up and down. Weaves of vertical and horizontal painted lines intersect, passing through, above and under each other. It's exhausting trying to catalogue all the different relationships enacted by the visible and hidden parts. These paintings have a fractal energy, a complexity of infinite regression that extends to the tiny white crescents visible in the misregistration of the numbers. In all of Krisanamis' work, from thefaux-pastoral to the pseudo-urban, there's the sense that a game is being played. The rules are not explicit, but they may have something to do with scale, and with the way scale is negotiated. Gradations of scale are ways to measure distance. But what sort of distances are depicted here? There are no objects, but still there's a feeling of enlargement, of looking simultaneously through binoculars and an electron microscope. Just looking, though, doesn't provide all the answers - you have to play through.

Here's a game to imagine: each playing field, though structurally similar, is materially different in every detail. There are bunkers and hazards. You play on your own, alongside others, but not with them, and not really against them. You have a set of specialized tools to choose from, and a knowledge of the way the territory has been marked by previous players. The way to begin is to start walking. Calculating strokes. Hitting little balls into the sky.

Steven Stern
The Story of O
Frieze, September 4, 2007.
https://urlr.me/CGgDXr

The New York Times

Art in Review

UDOMSAK KRISANAMIS AND FRANZ ACKERMANN

Gavin Brown's Enterprise
620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy Street, West Village
Through Feb. 17

This yin yang of a show pairs the Thai artist Udomsak Krisanamis, known for his collage paintings that recall Southeast Asian textiles, with the Berlin-based Franz Ackermann, whose so-called mental maps have given him a reputation as the art world's urban nomad. Between their two installations (each has a room filled with paintings on canvas placed on top of wall paintings), a galaxy of pictorial events takes place.

You enter Mr. Ackermann's light-filled installation first, a mix of computer-game aesthetics and the eye-candy colors of Japanese anime. On the walls he has painted zigzagging, crystalline patterns that lead your eye on a quick journey around the gallery.

You'll see, among other things, a photo of a Corbusier-style apartment complex (the quintessential sign of contemporary urban development); a spinning sculpture shaped like a flattened globe; and a Photo Realist painting that is a close-up of a windbreaker and a suitcase on which there is a baggage claim sticker with Mr. Ackermann's name printed on it.

In contrast, Mr. Krisanamis's dark installation looks back rather than forward. The rectilinear compositions of his predominantly black paintings, which all lack his earlier works' cosmological appeal, resemble an aerial view of Pompeii. The occasional strokes of bold color, mainly yellow, are applied in de Kooning-like gestures. Even the chandeliers, which he's fabricated from extension cords and aluminum prayer bowls, simulate a popular Droog design from 1993.

Just thinking about the physical energy it takes to navigate the fast-paced, if imaginary, world Mr. Ackermann presents could wear you out, while looking at Mr. Krisanamis's experiments with the well-worn territories of the grid may leave you wanting something more.

Bridget L. Goodbody
Udomsak Krisanamis and Franz Ackermann
The New York Times, February 2, 2007.
https://urlr.me/CckVXH

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW; Udomsak Krisanamis

Udomsak Krisanamis, who immigrated to the United States from Thailand in 1991, may be the Frank Stella of current painting. He started out in the mid-1990's with widely admired, physically distinctive black-and-white abstractions that reduced painting to ground zero. His working process -- combining East and West, art and craft, real and abstract, chance and plan -- entailed making collages of newsprint and then blacking out everything except the O's and zeroes, initially, with a felt-tip pen. The resulting paintings were as mind-bogglingly straightforward in conception as they were mesmerizing in effect -- evoking star-clogged night skies, twinkling cityscapes and blinking digital universes.

But like Mr. Stella of the late 1960's or Brice Marden in the mid-1970's, Mr. Krisanamis has had to face the challenge of what next, knowing that the only way is up, toward greater physical and pictorial complexity. His third solo show, like his second, is transitional. His solution is, again, to do the same, only more, creating deeper, more layered suggestions of space with surfaces more heavily encrusted with self-referential materials (Thai noodles and snippets of his psychedelic 1997 exhibition poster) and with thicker, more colorful paint.

Big open grids suggesting city streets or plaids dominate these compositions, but it is the myriad detail -- the constant shifts in color, texture, pattern and spatial depth --- that rule. What's missing is the startling gap between, to paraphrase Mr. Stella, what you see and what you get, between the stupefying mundanity of the actual surface and its dazzling visual effect. The new paintings are much the same at any distance, which is incredibly rich and complex, but also more conventionally abstract.

Mr. Krisanamis's means remain distinctive, personal, culturally suggestive and full of possibility. But at least for the moment, the visual effect is not nearly as clearly his own.

Roberta Smith
Art in Review; Udomsak Krisanamis
The New York Times, September 29, 2000.
https://urlr.me/w8tFdT

ARTFORUM

Udomsak Krisanamis

Udomsak Krisanamis lives, paints, and golfs in upstate New York. He is originally from Thailand—which is what the cellophane rice noodles that snake up and down the surfaces of his collage paintings refer to, right? Well, the answer to such a question is always “yes and no.” Think of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s Thai curry dinners and the sly ways his personal life informs his art. Krisanamis’s Thai roots are less evident in his work than is his traditional approach to the craft of painting (and, I guess, his passion for golf). His art is right in line with the most venerated of modernist traditions, abstraction and collage; his densely layered, obsessively worked surfaces are like jeweled palimpsests, replete with expressive energy.

We’re beginning to let go of some of the polemics of previous decades. Painting today doesn’t have to “mean” anything per se; it is no longer obliged to break new stylistic and theoretical ground by distinguishing itself from past models. A painting can function experientially for the viewer as a purely phenomenal, retinal pleasure field while at the same time existing as a noumenal “thing in itself.” Krisanamis doesn’t have anything to say about what his paintings mean except that they speak for themselves. Indeed, the hand-wrought surfaces are articulate: The aforementioned noodles (which function more formally than symbolically), pieces of color Xeroxes patterned with numbers (mostly sixes, nines, and zeros in these works), and Magic Marker drawings are layered into mesmerizing grids that resemble satellite photographs or circuitboards—images of raw information.

The paintings have remarkable potential as visual ledgers of contemporary life, and we’re free to make all manner of associations. Significantly, the only overt reference the artist provides is to the game of golf. Photographs of the artist on the links accompany the work in one way or another. The poster for this exhibition, for example, is a lush image of Krisanamis golfing; in the catalogue/artist’s book for his ten-year retrospective on view at the Wexner Center for the Arts, plates of his paintings are interspersed with photographs of the artist stepping up to the tee, taking a shot, and striding across the green.

Jan Avgikos
Udomsak Krisanamis
Artforum, Volume 39, N°3, November, 2000, p.154.

For emphasis, the titles of some works and the occasional pseudo-imagery that slips in allude to the game. In *Right in My Cup* (all works 2000), a collage painting on a stretched blanket, the reference occurs not only in the title but also in the loopy pattern, like a fly's-eye view of a golf hole, that "blankets" the surface.

Krisanamis depicts himself as a lone figure on the course, as if he's vacationing somewhere that's always warm and sunny, far from the maddening crowd. In a way, the golfer's leisure is not so different from the kind of visual pleasure Krisanamis's work affords, nor is the artist's happy solitude so different from the position his paintings take by distancing themselves from polemical debate—as well as from zealous promotions for everything that's new about painting today.

Jan Avgikos
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ARTFORUM

Udomsak Krisanamis

Udomsak Krisanamis' most recent series of collage paintings represent, on one level, a continuation of an earlier series of drawings that began with his arrival in this country from Thailand several years ago. Those drawings literalized the way he learned English: by reading the daily newspaper. Udomsak would take a pencil and cross out each word he understood, so that what began as vast fields of print with only an occasional graphite mark, progressed, along with the artist's increasing knowledge of English, into allover fields of thickly layered graphite out of which an unknown word occasionally peeked.

The collage paintings began with a similar process of erasure; in this series the surface of the newspaper is effaced by a spreading stain of black Magic Marker. However, in these works the interruptions in the black field are not produced by unfamiliar words but by the negative space inside letters: the hole of an *O* or in the top half of a *P*. To construct these paintings, Udomsak engages in an obsessive process of searching through the newspaper for "holes" of the same size, which he then tears out and dips in glue before affixing them to the canvas, creating a dense, puckered surface. With their patterned masses of blackened newspaper, these works reference Robert Rauschenberg's "Black Paintings," but beyond the apparent formal affinities lies Udomsak's unquestionable sympathy with what critic Helen Molesworth, writing in a recent issue of *October*, described as the underlying anality of Rauschenberg's project.

As psychoanalyst Ernest Jones explains, "Books and other printed matter are a curious symbol of feces presumably through the association with paper and the idea of pressing (smearing, imprinting)." Udomsak, however, is not content to allow the reference to anality to remain an unconscious manifestation; rather he makes this connection explicit not only through the compulsiveness of his practice, but through the recurring motif of the hole—the orifices that puncture the dense surfaces of his paintings.

Andrew Perchuk
Udomsak Krisanamis
Artforum, Volume 34, N°8, April, 1996, p.107.

In the most striking work in this series, a thrift-shop blanket rather than a canvas is used as a ground, on which the mounds of collaged elements, with their viscous, swelling stains, are applied. The use of the blanket, symbol of childhood dependencies and fixations, adds another dimension to Udomsak's invocation of the scatalogical—it evokes the infant's fascination with its own feces, which are its only means of signaling compliance with or rejection of environmental constraints. This process of understanding, based on the body and its functions, creates a productive tension with the acquisition of language—a much later epistemological process—to which Udomsak refers in his use of the newspaper. Indeed, as Freud discusses, it is the knowledge of bodily particularity that must be suppressed in order to stimulate the higher faculties: the base functions of the body must be sublimated into the shape of the body as a whole to produce art. Udomsak's collage paintings refuse this sublimation and instead revel in the pleasure of the excremental —covering, smearing, pressing, and gluing. A pleasure that seems to obliterate the far more dubious satisfaction of learning as the newspaper disappears beneath the shiny and impervious surface of Udomsak's elemental glue.

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