

CARLOS/ISHIKAWA

Korakrit Arunanondchai

No history in a room filled with people with funny names 5

23 November – 22 December 2018

A lake of No History

No History refers to the human history that is recorded through verbal storytelling and other forms of myth-making that mutate over time. Ghosts, for example, occupy No History zones. The thing about Ghost stories is that they are often the product of localized subjectivities, united by geographical, regional or internet niches, coming together to create a story that is passed on over time. Often, ghosts and spirits are tools for resisting oppressive power from empires or dominant tribes of people. A local ghost in the forest areas of Southeast Asia made American soldiers sick if they dared to enter the forest or failed to pay respect.

A cave in Northern Thailand has a few of these ghost stories. The most famous one – about a princess, “who lay down in agony, waiting for her lover, and became the goddess of the cave”. This is the cave where the kids were trapped. The cave sits in a border area, home to a large population of stateless people and ethnic minorities – three of the kids fled Burma as refugees. This border is also a confluence of forces at the heart of the region’s history: this border was defined after WW2, during the rise of King Rama 9, as Thailand became the U.S. military Cold War base in Southeast Asia; during the spread of state-sanctioned Buddhism, used to direct power towards the political center in Bangkok. This history is mostly unrecorded – there is a law against talking about the Royal history of Thailand. Within the invisibility and opaqueness grows a certain power – a mythical time when things can exist in-between and new stories can be written.

This year, the cave was home to many forces. The state, which is now a military-run government, became the protagonist of the story, shaping the narrative to support an election planned for February 2019 – the first since the coup. Spirit mediums, monks, and ghosts of Thailand were there, shoulder-to-shoulder with the American military, international capitalist Elon Musk and his staff, the state scientists.

The plight of the kids became a moment to reframe Thailand and present it to the world, but also back to itself, creating new stories with roles for the helpless and the benevolent, the caregiver and the care-receiver. In the act of letting something take care of you, you also lose a part of yourself and become that something else. In the cave story, the military performs care for the people, for the children, and for the inhabitants of this marginal borderland.

The late King Rama 9, who was the symbolic father of the country. The Ghosts, who laid down the princess. The Naga, caring for the locals who worship them. Dr. Susan Brown, caring for rabbits and other abandoned animals. The rabbit, domesticated by humans to exist in a nature that is created through the stories that humans created for ourselves – what does it mean to return these animals to nature?

Care itself becomes a symbolic act, or a story that refuses to die.

This work tries to draw relationships between these people and events through the metaphor of touch. Touching a green light, the light transforms into a story in a dark, opaque place. The green light becomes the green light of the movie screen or the green screen in a movie production. The movie itself as an event in which light is abstracted into story. The audience of the cinema becomes “possessed” through the movie-watching experience, living and feeling through stories that are not theirs. These stories continue to breathe and live within the bodies of the audience.

Two other memories:

The current state of my grandparents, a continuation from the prequel, “With history in a room filled with people with funny names 4” (2017). My grandmother, in a state of dementia, is in a hospital, and my grandfather, at their house, flipping through the old photo albums. Both of them connected through a stand-in object – a rabbit doll that accompanies them through the day. The rabbit doll accompanies the different ghost-like bodies in the main video. Beyond the bodies of people that have been a constant subject of this video series from the beginning in 2011, this video tries to capture the slightly changing air around them.

Performing with boychild, is the memory palace of the relationship I have with my friend and collaborator boychild. Her fluid role as the different iterations of the Nagas. Here is a proposal for a possession that wants to allow things to change and be fluid. For me, respect should feel more like Love. Stories created with bodies being in a room together. A relationship. A way to speak without speaking. A way to touch without touching and a possibility for connection that bypasses the ways in which the state-sanctioned histories have allowed us to connect. I know you are a story and I know the world is a story. There are aspects of the world that are uncontrollable. Let this anarchic energy pass through us and, as it does, become a part of us.

“No history in a room filled with people with funny names 5” (30:44 minutes)

Korakrit Arunanondchai and Alex Gvojic (with boychild)

Camera: Alex Gvojic, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Rory Mulhere, Yukontorn Mingmongkon, Jon Wang

Sound Design and mixing: Aaron David Ross

Music Contribution: “Final Mercy” by Dj Richard

Programing: Michael Potvin (Nitemind)

Bangkok Production Team: Suchada Sirithanawuddhi, Pises Wongsathianchai, Akerat Homlaor, Narong Srisophab, Tanawit Misa, Krissakorn Thinthupthai, Naporn Kongsuan, Nata Sato

Research and production: Nok Chida

Still Photography: Nick Sethi

With: boychild, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Tippayavarna Nitibhon, Varachit Nitibhon, Grace Church (Maesai, Thailand) Nana childcare and foster home (Maesai, Thailand), Ramasun Military Camp and Museum (Udonthani), Charlermchai Kositpipat and White temple, Dr. Susan Brown

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