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The ~~Room~~ Room

cinating visual undercurrents in an already busy, intense exhibition: While the newspapers were busy discussing »social media revolutions«, the primary effect of the Internet seems to have been to establish the aesthetic of streaming video as a dominant visual language. The collective Abounaddara, for example, show personal accounts of the civil war in Syria that were originally released on YouTube, and in *Leaves Fall in All Seasons* (2013), Ahmed Mater uses his cellphone camera to document the ongoing reconstruction of the city of Mecca.

There's also a group of works that consider architecture as a power to contend with, particularly pertinent in a region that conflates some of the world's most illustrious skyscrapers with refugee camps, temporary structures that – especially in Palestine – are made to last. Wafa Hourani's installation *Qualandiya 2087* (2009) models the border crossing in the West Bank in some distant future after an imaginary end to the Israeli occupation as an architectural wonderland complete with an aquarium albeit one still characterized by gray cement blocks. There is an echo of this piece in Marwan Rechmaoui's *Spectre (The Yacoubian Building, Beirut)* (2006–08), a large-scale recreation in cement and glass of a chic building in Beirut as it looked after it was evacuated during the war with Israel in 2006, in all its lifeless gloom.

Had »Here and Elsewhere« not included overtly political works that take up religion, tradition, economics, and revolution head on, it could easily have been dismissed as an unrealistic impression of the Middle East and North Africa. Still, while the focus on storytelling and individual experience may be »relatable«, it also limits the exhibition's scope and places it at a safe distance from the average museumgoer in New York. Yet we are all implicated in Middle Eastern politics, whether through the disbursement of our tax money, our economic dependence on oil, our political imaginary that loves to support a popular resistance, or our fascination with the wealth of the Gulf – something the collective GCC smartly reacts to in their site-specific installation, using cheap wallpaper to turn the New Museum's lobby into that of a luxurious oriental hotel. But at the museum, we seem to want our politics »elsewhere«, lest the global entanglements of politics, money, and labor come too close to home. —

Orit Gat

Korakrit Arunanondchai

»Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door/ The gift that keeps on giving«

The Mistake Room, Los Angeles
18.7.–13.9.2014

Forms of Exchange

Korakrit Arunanondchai's show is a spectacular installation in two parts, featuring two new videos as well as a large-scale installation of props, sculptures, and paintings. Since his debut on the New York scene in 2011, Arunanondchai has been developing a body of work based on the tension between the production of classical art objects (mostly

paintings and objects located midway between design, fashion, and sculpture) and the construction of a larger fictional narrative based on his own life and identity as a fashionable young New Yorker of Thai descent. A powerful combination of youthful energy, exotic origins, and hipster intelligence here works to distract the viewer from the fact that a large part of the artworks produced are in fact extremely respectful of New York's art tradition and art mythology, in the most conventional way.

The overall narrative of the show is a fiction in which a sort of alter ego of Arunanondchai, played by his longtime accomplice, LA-based performer boychild, decides to abandon his career as a painter after a mystical epiphany provoked by different events and encounters. The whole video is an MTVesque coming-of-age story, with entrancing electronic music, too-cheesy-to-be-true subtitles (the videos are mostly without speech; in the first one Arunanondchai speaks a voiceover in Thai), and beautiful multiracial kids. All dressed in white, they alternate between gloomily splashing colorful paint at each other and smiling ecstatically.



KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI (feat. boychild)

Installation view »Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door / The gift that keeps on giving«, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles 2014

Courtesy of The Mistake Room, Los Angeles and Carlos/Ishikawa, London

Photos: Josh White/JW Pictures

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KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI (feat. boychild)
 Installation view »Letters to Chantri #1: The lady at the door /
 The gift that keeps on giving«, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles 2014
 Courtesy of The Mistake Room, Los Angeles and Carlos/Ishikawa, London

Photo: Lee Thompson, © the artist

cally in fabulous desert landscapes (Joshua Tree, FYI), while HD close-ups show boychild's disturbingly appealing crying face, smooth chest, and denim outfit splashed with dripping paint. The viewer experiences this video at a very large scale, volume blasting, in a darkened room where she is surrounded by an army of mannequins also dressed in white kimonos, vaguely quoting the so-called Terracotta Army of Chinese antiquity. The only other objects of the room are two very large silkscreens on mirrors depicting half-erased brushstrokes, as if someone had tried to clean them from the mirror, revealing the reflective surface underneath (it reminded me of notorious Guyton/Walker moves), as well as a functioned illuminated fountain whose central motif is a resin hand holding a bar of soap. The core injunction of the whole installation seems to be an invitation to the viewer (and the artist) to »clean« themselves from something that is never being really named (artistic fame? depression? The artist doesn't say). When you exit the room two attendants are waiting for you at the end of the alley of mannequins to give you a bar of soap that you receive as if it were the sacramental bread at Mass – perhaps the gift in the show's title.

Weirdly, it's the shameless piling up of so many incongruous references, combined with a genuine productive energy and an undeniable sense for how to orchestrate space, that gives force to the show, and to the Arunanondchai's work in general. It's not even postmodern anymore, it's post-

post-post-something else, and I guess in this sense the invitation to clean ourselves is deliberate and pointed. I don't »like« Arunanondchai's work in the usual sense, but I think it's an interesting avatar of the current art world's neurosis. The obvious and contemporary remake of Yves Klein's work that Arunanondchai's own work constitutes, on both formal and conceptual levels, is revealing of the craving of our materialistic society for spirituality and exoticism. The trope of megalomaniac machismo is here converted into a Benetton-oriented discourse about the beauty of intercultural dialogue in an updated fantasy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that says as much about America's ongoing fascination with youth and pop culture as it does about the post-colonial guilt of a whole sector of the art world that seems to see a mark of authenticity in Arunanondchai's Thainess, as well as a proof that globalization is an inclusive process that will give everyone a share in the consumerist cake. Of course this celebration of otherness ultimately takes place in New York, the most Western-centric place of the world: it *can* only be performed from the center. It doesn't aim to redistribute any power to the margins, just to affirm the capacity of the center to extend its influence further and further, to convert everything into its unceasing stream of fresh currency. Maybe the thick smoke screen at Arunanondchai's performance at MoMA PS1 this past March was there just to hide our mutual tears. — Dorothee Dupuis

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