



CLEARING

Korakrit Arunanondchai

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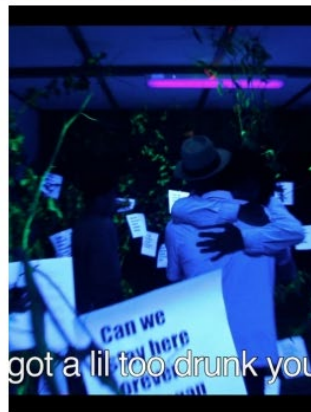
by Ben Noam

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Interview

ART

**KORAKRIT
ARUNANONDCHAI:NO
SHIRT,NO PROBLEM**





Korakrit Arunanondchai

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The work of 26-year-old Bangkok-born Korakrit Arunanondchai spans artistic disciplines and refuses to be pinned down. His solo debut at CLEARING gallery in Bushwick, "Painting with History in a Room Filled with Men with Funny Names," features two denim paintings made with bleach and fire. In one corner, a fog machine slowly spews smoke, enveloping the room in haze. A mounted photograph shows a gang of young Thai men all in denim, and, as the show unfolds, these mysterious men come to life in a short film with heavy voiceovers. Across town, SculptureCenter's "In Practice: Double Life" group show includes a dim, neon-lit video installation by Arunanondchai drawing viewers deep into its cave-like recess.

An avid collaborator, Arunanonchai has worked on videos, performances, and music with a cast of downtown's most delusional divas, including musicians [Mykki Blanco](#) and Jaki Doyka, artists Dora Budor and Spencer Sweeney, and director/stylist Halley Wollens. He is the life of his own party, and everyone is invited.

BEN NOAM: Growing up in Bangkok, what kind of art were you looking at?

KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI: I had never seen any contemporary or Western art in Thailand. It wasn't accessible, or I didn't know where to find it. We didn't have access to the Internet until pretty late, when I was like 17 years old, and even when we finally did, it was really slow. I had four brothers, so needless to say, I didn't really have time to browse the net.

NOAM: What did you think when you saw art for first time?



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ARUNANONDCHAI: The first time I saw contemporary art was towards the end of high school, when I visited my brother in London. The first piece I'd seen in my whole life—which was really, really lucky—was Olafur Eliasson's *Sun* (2003) in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern.

NOAM: What was your impression of the work at that time?

ARUNANONDCHAI: I grew up without much spectacle in my life, at least not like that. Seeing that the spectacle of culture could rival that of nature was a powerful experience. So many thoughts were running through my head. I remember thinking, "This is the best possible thing you can make for other people." And simultaneously being humbled by it: "There's no way I could make something like this." But deep down in my head, in some fantasy alternate universe, I thought, "I want to have a show in the Turbine Hall."

NOAM: Was this when you realized you wanted to be an artist?

ARUNANONDCHAI: No. [*laughs*] One defining moment was when my rock-star career kind of failed.

NOAM: Your band was pretty famous in southern Thailand but never really took off in the north, right?

ARUNANONDCHAI: Right, I made it into the building of the biggest record company in Thailand. They sat me down and were just like, "We don't like your music, because it's bad. We don't like your bandmates, because they don't look good. But we like you, because you could potentially look really good, and you can't sing, but we'll put you in this program where you can learn to sing."

NOAM: So you told them to go screw themselves and went to art school in America?



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ARUNANONDCHAI: Yeah, and never looked back!

NOAM: When I think of your work over the past few years, I see a real connection to musicians and specifically hip-hop bravado.

ARUNANONDCHAI: While I was in studying with artist Matthew Ritchie, I was asked to choose an outside practice, not in the visual arts, and analyze its system for constructing meaning. Then he asked us to transfer this back into the visual arts, basically combining their abilities with our abilities. I chose Drake. I started making video installations, and I became the star.

NOAM: I did notice around that time you stopped wearing your shirt in public as much. Was this a coincidence?

ARUNANONDCHAI: I think for me in New York, it's like, when someone sees me with my shirt off, then they want to take their shirt off too, and then someone else inevitably wants to do it too. It's like a social signifier that things are about to get crazy now, which creates a more desirable social space for me. I went to an all-boys' school, and when we would go to big concerts, people would all take their shirts off, and this was a sign that people were having a really great time, and that we're all human beings.

NOAM: Your recent studio visit with Hans-Ulrich Obrist sounded more like a Puff Daddy video than your typical curator-meets-artist, awkward-date model.



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ARUNANONDCHAI: I never left New York, but I think I'm still jetlagged. We met at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning on Dasha Zhukova's crazy yacht. By the looks of it, Hans had been up for hours already—well dressed, in a suit. I think he's on Da Vinci's sleep cycle or something. It was an incredible meeting, sort of like in *Lost* when John Locke met Jacob. For me, it was really great to meet him because my art project is, in a way, to uncover more of Thai art history and to find my place within that context. He knew everything about Thai art history. He had been in contact with all these Thai artists who passed away.

NOAM: Your grandfather was the Thai ambassador to America, France, and Vietnam. Do you feel like he instilled in you a sense of cultural leadership, or the desire to act as a liaison between Thailand and the global art community?

ARUNANONDCHAI: That might have something to do with it. I think a lot of people from less-developed countries who were privileged enough to study in America will be able to identify with me. If we are in America or if we're in Thailand, we hope our future will be in a more developed and advanced place. At the same time I have a responsibility to my home, to improve it in any way I can, and to update it. Maybe that's my grandfather, a family tradition.

NOAM: What's next?



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ARUNANONDCHAI: I am working on a trilogy of videos, which will be something like my *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Each one will be a video installation treatment. It's a project to redefine and start a new art practice. Each part—Death, Purgatory, and now Rebirth—I actually carry out in real life and each take about a year to make. Death was my thesis project around the time of my graduation. Purgatory was made at Skowhegan last summer and is currently being shown at Sculpture Center. I am starting the third part of the trilogy, Rebirth, now. It will be a feature film, but I will no longer perform in it. It's going to be shot in various locations throughout Thailand and America. It's based on a story about three women's journey to Spiral Jetty and a rogue Buddhist temple. Because this is such a large project, the next four shows I'm doing will be vignettes of this film.

"PAINTING WITH HISTORY IN A ROOM FILLED WITH MEN WITH FUNNY NAMES" IS ON VIEW AT CLEARING IN BUSHWICK UNTIL MARCH 24. "IN PRACTICE: DOUBLE LIFE" IS ON VIEW AT SCULPTURECENTER UNTIL MARCH 25.