



## Korakrit Arunanondchai

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# ARTNEWS

## DENIM FROM A DRONE'S-EYE VIEW: KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI ON HIS NEW SHOW AT PALAIS DE TOKYO

BY *Nate Freeman* POSTED 07/01/15 2:37 PM



An installation view of the show.  
AURELIEN MOLE/PALAIS DE TOKYO/CLEARING/CARLOS AND ISHIKAWA

Late June in Paris is Men's Fashion Week, and many of the runway shows take place outside the Palais de Tokyo, which is also home to a nightclub called YOYO. There are catwalks at art institutions every now and then, but it's a tad strange to see this hub of the outré turn into a one-stop shop for the world's most cut-jawed male models and the people who love them.



## Korakrit Arunanondchai

Fashion crowd aside, the real star of the museum this summer is Korakrit Arunanondchai. He's made some splashy moves stateside in years past—the Thai rap crew performing a straight-faced and outrageous set during a black tie SculptureCenter gala, the massage chairs scattered through Frieze New York, the sustained preoccupation with denim—but his show at the Palais de Tokyo, called “Painting with history in a room filled with people with funny names 3,” makes a step forward by combining the different parts of his practice into a tidy whole. Arunanondchai called it the “epilogue” of the last four years of his work.

“The loose narrative is about the construction, or the becoming, of the Thai denim Painter,” Arunanondchai said in an email from Venice, where he's taking in the biennale. “This construction pulls from the autobiographical and the shared consciousness of what I view is the fleeting ‘now’ moment of experiencing change and being in the world today in 2015. The ‘now’ feelings that may perhaps connect many people through different geographies and cultures, at least I hope.”

He goes on to say that, in terms of the whole “connecting different geographies and cultures” bit, it has to do with how he—Bangkok-born, New York-based—decided to create an expansive vision of the way Eastern religion seeps into the American popular consciousness and then unleash it in, of all places, Paris.

“My grandfather was the Thai ambassador of France and my mother went to college here,” Arunanondchai said. “My girlfriend is French and she helped me with the text. Most importantly, when I first started experimenting in making videos, I saw the movie *Sans Soleil* by Chris Marker and it started shaping the way I make all my videos... So in a way ending the series in France, this video ‘Painting with history in a room filled with people with funny names 3’ is a personal response to *San Soleil*.”

Using Marker as a reference point does help, but as for what's actually in the show, there are some problems of narration. It's not easy to simply list off the twinkly ephemera that line the walls and wax rhapsodic about how they prop up the large-scale canvases and installations. In writing, it may come off as stunt, kitsch, overkill, smoke and mirrors—all things the artist has been accused of at various points in the past. In anticipation of the show, some of Arunanondchai's friends were discussing how the kitchen sink approach couldn't possibly enhance the differing parts of his practice: the fantasy narratives, the recurring images of denim and flame, the highly stylized rap videos, the footage of the beach set to mood music, with voiceovers spouting platitudes, the all rainbow everything, the artist himself popping up in crevices not to wink but to scowl.



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But really, there are only two parts. The floor is streaked with rainbow paint and plastered occasionally with pictures, seemingly without context—there’s one of two young kids in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles shirts climbing a tree. Above, there’s a gigantic mural with an outline of fire going around a Christ-like figure made of denim. In the center, a fountain bubbles around a god-like figure that looks suspiciously like Arunanondchai, because it sort of is: “It’s a hybrid figure that is similar to a garuda (a Southeast Asian mystical birdman) a symbol for the government of Thailand,” he said, “but also as a more concrete representation of the idea of power, a vision from above.” And then there’s a jet ski covered in lettuce heads wearing Wayfarers, mannequins lying in what appear to be coffins, trees with LED lights running down the leaves, and videos filmed by and featuring flying drones.

It’s only when you see the video filmed by drones that you realize that the entire first part of the show—one whole work—is actually below you, visible only from above. Everyone is walking on it, through it. The artist explained this further in his email.

“The first part, ‘The Body,’ contains a large denim body painting made after Duangjai Jansaonoi, a Thai go-go dancer, famous for her appearance in a reality TV competition Thailand’s Got Talent in which she painted a canvas using her body as a brush,” he said. “The fountain that you see in the show is a painting of the contour of a yellow body that lays on the floor in the centre of the space, is only visible in its entirety from a bird’s eye view (or, from the perspective of a drone).”

He went on to explain that, in the universe he’s created for his practice, the muse is a spirit name Chantri, who is both the drone viewing The Body, and the soul in the second part of the show, The Spirit, which is a long video elsewhere in the exhibition with Arunanondchai’s typically wowing combination of impressive cinescapes and rap video tropes. (In the video, the voice of Chantri is provided by the artist’s mother, and she speaks in French.)

It’s a safe bet to say the French will eat this stuff up, and it will inspire some bombastic praise not usually bestowed upon an artist in his twenties.

Here’s Julien Fronsacq, the Palais de Tokyo curator overseeing the show.



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“Being the symbolic son of Rodney Graham and of Terrence Malick, Korakrit built a double exhibition,” he said over email, after a few failed attempts to meet at the museum amid the fashion week mania. “The exhibition is both a forest and a cinema theater. The first feeds the latter and vice versa. Korakrit shows how technical recording devices modified our perception, feeling and the nature of art. Rejecting a conservative position he is addressing our sublime impulse through the most contemporary evocations and technical devices.”

Fronsacq ended his email calling Arunanondchai “one of the most intriguing artists of his generation.”

Arunanondchai said he’ll be staging shows similar to “Painting with history in a room filled with people with funny names 3” in China and Thailand, where he hasn’t really shown before.

“And then after that we will see!” he said

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