



Korakrit Arunanondchai

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'Korakrit Arunanondchai: Painting With History in a Room Filled With Men With Funny Names' at Clearing

By Andrew Russeth | 03/05/13 4:51pm



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Walk into Bangkok-born, New York-based Korakrit Arunanondchai's show at the right moment and you'll find the room filled with white smoke, which billows every few minutes from a smoke machine positioned in front of two long fluorescent lights that lean in one corner.

As the smoke clears, you can take in two huge paintings that Mr. Arunanondchai made by bleaching stretches of blue denim, drawing on top of that fabric with lighter fluid and then lighting the liquid on fire. As the fabric burned, he photographed the action from above and, after extinguishing the flames, replaced the charred

portions with photographs of the burning that caused its destruction. He cheekily titles these paintings *Untitled (History painting)* (all works 2013).

His paintings are deliriously, almost comically accomplished, brazenly borrowing the signature gestures of numerous contemporary painters, from tie-dye (recent Piotr Uklanski) and bleach (Sam Moyer) to trompe l'oeil folding (Tauba Auerbach) and, well, fire (Wade Guyton's chilly digital scans). "You want a really great painting?" you can imagine Mr. Arunanondchai asking with an innocent-enough smile. "I'll give you a *great painting*."

These are macho gestures, to be sure, but they're presented with a mixture of sarcasm, irony and sincerity perfectly attuned to the present mood. Just watch the 12-minute video that includes snippets of tough-guy painters—Schnabel, Guston, Pollock, Basquiat—along with clips of the deadpan Mr. Arunanondchai interviewing the head of discipline at the all-boys school he attended in Bangkok and offering his own faintly mystical prescriptions for making paintings. The video shares the title of the exhibition, and every frame is tinted light blue, echoing the denim of his paintings, as if all of this (personal and art) history is the real ground, the canvas, that supports his work. It all adds up to a profound ambivalence about joining the ranks of those male artists—the "men with funny names," perhaps—though his paintings show that he could attempt just that, easily. (A group of his male Thai friends, all clad in denim, who appear in a photograph would seem to constitute his own imaginary "Irascibles"-style gang.)