

Thawan Duchanee

National Artist

Visual Arts (Painting), 2001



**The aim of building houses in a housing project
is functional. Interior designers aim is function.
But artists do not build anything for function.
Artists create tangible love.”**

Thawan Duchanee, 2004

“Hearing the whisper of the south wind

**Do not question dewdrops,
tears of Milky Way**

The best and most beautiful things in life

Cannot be seen or even touched

They must be left with heart and soul.”

Thawan Duchanee

November 2004



Acknowledgement of Achievement

Mr. Thawan Duchanee

As National Artist for Visual Art (Painting)

A 72-year-old man, Thawan Duchanee was born on 27 September 1939 in the province of Chiang Rai. A student of Professor Silpa Bhilasri, he graduated with a B.A. (Hons) from the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture, Silpakorn University, an MA in Mural Painting, Monument and Urban Planning, and a Ph.D. in Metaphysics and Aesthetics from Royal Academy of Visual Arts, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is one of the Thai painters who have made their names in the international art world. For more than 50 years he has created works with a unique artistic style that are universally acclaimed. His work “A Drawer”, a reflection of how Buddhism is perceived in a contemporary setting, is marked with depth and raw energy. It conveys a sense of Thai spirituality tinged with oriental and western philosophy. Thawan Duchanee has played an important role in making Thai art popular worldwide with his exhibitions in Thailand and abroad. He is often a guest speaker at international art conferences. Some of his works are permanently displayed as national treasures at a number of public and private modern art museums in Thailand and other countries in Asia, Europe and North America. Several international media have begun to take an interest in his life and works, and soon he was known through a number of publications, movie clips and television programmes. In 2001 he was awarded the Arts and Culture Prize by the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize Committee. His contributions to the world of art include the establishment of the Thawan Duchanee Foundation in support of visual art education. He spent more than 35 years building a museum of folk art in a plot of land covering an area of over 100 rai at Ban Dam, Nang-lae, Chiang Rai, his hometown. The museum houses a large variety of folk arts, past and present. Its educational value is enormous, providing a place for learning for younger generations.

Mr. Thawan Duchanee was honoured and proclaimed as national artist in visual art (painting) for 2001.

Mr. Thawan Duchanee
National Artist
for Visual Art (Painting) for 2001

Life:

Thawan Duchanee was born in Chiang Rai on 27 September 1939. His drawing talent was recognized even in his younger days. After finishing his secondary education in Chiang Rai, he went to Poh Chang Arts and Crafts College on a Chiang Rai scholarship. He was then known for his quick hand at drawing still life and landscape. His drawing of Wat Benchamabophit Temple was displayed at the Crafts Gallery, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan and other exhibitions of contemporary art in Thailand.

After completing his art education at Poh Chang Arts and Crafts College in 1957, Thawan followed the footstep of Damrong Wong-Upparat, a painter a few years his senior and a scholarship holder from Lampang province, in furthering his studies at the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture, Silpakorn University under Professor Silpa Bhilasri. This institute had a profound influence on Thawan whose still life painting was soon evolved into Thai Impressionism. This period also marked the beginning of the relationship between the artist and Gen. M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. The latter was a role model for the artist's way of life and thinking.

Thawan Duchanee was one of the few Silpakorn students who went on to complete a bachelor's degree. Most graduated with a diploma. After graduation and with the support of Professor Silpa Bhilasri who was the faculty dean at the time, Thawan was awarded a fellowship from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands to study at Royal Academy of Visual Arts, Amsterdam, for five years where he earned his master's and doctoral degrees.

Thawan Duchanee devoted all his life to the study of and research in aesthetics, Buddhism, and a combination of oriental and western philosophies on which his works were based. His creative genius was seen in many forms, including painting, sculpture, architecture, decorative art, music, literature and poetry. Thus, he is a role model for younger artists to emulate. He is one of the contemporary artists who introduced "contemporary oriental art" to the international community.

Achievements:

- 1961 -First solo exhibition, Suan Pakkard Palace, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1963 -Solo exhibition, Bangkapi Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1965 -Group exhibition with Inson Wongsam and Preecha Bangnoi at Royal Thai Embassy, Paris, France
- 1967 -Solo exhibition, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- 1971 -Solo exhibition, Christian Student Center, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1972 -Solo exhibition, Goethe Institute, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1973 -Solo exhibition, the British Council Bangkok, Thailand
- 1974 -Solo exhibition, Gallery Downtown Hawaii, Honolulu, U.S.A.
- 1977 -Solo exhibition, Isarael Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
- 1989 -“Contemporary Spiritual Art of Thailand” exhibition, Goethe Institute, San Francisco, U.S.A.
-Solo exhibition, Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
- 1990 -Solo exhibition, Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan Solo exhibition, the Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center, Tokyo, Japan
- 1993 -Solo exhibition, Melbourne University as artist in residence
- 1996 -Group exhibition of five leading Thai contemporary artists, Based on Buddhist philosophy, Siam Commercial Bank Head Office, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1997 -Invited by UNESCO and TIMOTCA to represent artist from Asia At “Art Beyond Borders”, an international art exhibition, United Nations Building, New York, U.S.A
-Group exhibition of five leading Thai artists at Thai Consulate And Thai Art Council, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
- 1999 -“Art Beyond Borders”, an international art exhibition, presented By UNESCO and TIMOTCA, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2000 -Exhibition to celebrate the fifth cycle birthday of the artist, Organized by Bangkok Bank, Siam Commercial Bank and Thai Farmers’ Bank at the Bangkok Bank Musical Center, Bangkok, Thailand
- 2001 -“Thawan Duchanee: Rumbling Light and Darkness”, a special Exhibition organized in commemoration of the artist’s receipt of the Arts and Culture Prize of the 12 th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2001, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan “soul of sun”, an exhibition organized in commemoration of the Artist’s award as National Artist (Visual Arts) 2001 at Thailand Cultural Center, Bangkok

- Represented Thai artists at Langawee International Festival of Art, Langawee, Malaysia
- Group exhibition with 12 leading Asian artists, National Museum, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 - “Trinity”, a solo exhibition at the Queen’s Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
- 2005 - Joint exhibition with Kamon Thatsananchali at National American Museum at Iris Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, San Francisco
- 2006 - Solo Exhibition, Artcor, Los Angeles
- 2007 - Solo Exhibition, National Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2008 - Mobile Exhibitions of National Artists in Khon Kaen, Nong Khai, Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Kut Island, and Chang Island in the Indochinese Project
- 2009 - Mobile Exhibition of National Artists in Luang Prabang, Laos in a cultural exchange programme
- 2010 - Mobile Exhibition of National Thai-American Artists at Contemporary Art Gallery, Los Angeles
- A committee member to select contemporary young artists nationwide in the “Youth Camp for Creative Contemporary Art” Project
 - Organizing an exhibition of 60 young artists from youth camps at Ban Dam, Chiang Rai province
 - Leading young artists to show their works in a cultural exchange programme in U.S.A.
 - Organizing Project “Mobile Art Festival to the Southern Part of Thailand” exhibiting a collection of valuable works from 15 living national artists, including works by H.E. Chuan Leekpai, honorary artists, and senior artists, as well as organizing a number of other exhibitions at the General Prem Tinsulanonda Historical Park, Mueang district, Songkhla province
 - Joint Mobile Exhibitions of National Artists, Senior Artists, and Honorary Artists under the 5th Mobile Exhibition Project on “Cultural Way of Life in the Southern Border Area of Thailand” at Institute for Southern Thai Studies, Songkhla province; Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus; and Thammarin Thana Hotel, Trang province
 - Joint Mobile Exhibitions of National Artists and Senior Artists in an art and cultural exchange programme with international artists from Malaysia and Singapore, under the Mobile Exhibition Project on “International Art and Culture: Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore” at Thaksin University, Phattalung Campus, Phattalung Province and in Singapore

Awards and Honours

- 1985 -Award Gold Medal as Artist of the Year by the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage
- 1997 -Invited by United Nations to represent artists from Asia and Exhibited his works in New York, Paris Rome, Lisbon, Canberra And Tokyo
- 2001 -Awarded the Arts and Culture Prize of the 12 th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2001, Fukuoka, Japan
- Honoured as Thailand's National Artist, Visual Arts (painting)
- Honorary doctoral degree in the field of Painting from Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Social Contributions

To most people Thawan Duchanee may earn a lot of money from his paintings and drawings. To him, however, money is not everything. It does not lead to any substantial change. He is the same old person who enjoys a life of simplicity. He is very modest and frugal. Most of his time is spent on drawing and painting. Most of the proceeds he received from his works are spent on promoting art education and creative art. He hopes that one day Thai society will attach the importance it deserves to art and aesthetics. He spends much of his time on building an art house, commonly known as Ban Dam situated at Nang Lae in Chiang Rai Province, his hometown. He wants it to be a place where one can study national art and culture in the art museum setting. Built on a plot of land covering more than 100 rai, the museum consists of more than 40 buildings of pure and applied northern architectural styles. It exhibits folk art of local artists from past to present together with a large collection of cultural artifacts from all parts of the world. These artistic and cultural collections are a result of more than 30 years of hard work. The museum is open every day to the public.

Over the last 30 years or so Thawan Duchanee has been working to bring together artists and artisans in various parts of Thailand and organize several art events at which their works could be displayed. Apart from his prolific work, Thawan donated 12 million baht to set up Thawan Duchanee Foundation in 1996. The proceeds from the fund are given to support educational activities of the institutes that he used to be part of, i.e. Chiang Rai Witthayakhom School and Samakkhi Witthaya School in Chiang Rai, Poh Chang Arts and Crafts College and Silpakorn University. The foundation offers a number of scholarships to poor students with good scholastic intent. Financial assistance is given to all forms of study including arts, sports, music, medicine, monasteries, religious centres, travel, and curatorial activities as well as conservation of forests, water, mountains and other natural resources. During the past five years, additional grants are given to university students and organizations with social, religious, philosophical and artistic affiliations. In short, Mr. Thawan Duchanee is a painter whose life is dedicated to humanity and cultural causes.