

tropical tree house



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V

I the land

the land has been likened to an environment where people go to try and realise a life previously lived only in dreams and the imagination, a place where people can live together communally and peacefully (examples of this are ashrams, spiritual resorts and new age healing centres).

Somewhere in the beginning of the early 1990's in Chiang Mai, a similar dream state and approach to art was beginning. (The Chiang Mai Social Installation, involving the mavericks of the Chiang Mai art 'scene' Rirkrit, Kamin, Uthit and Mit were the precursors to the birth of *the land*. *the land* is distant, a respite from a practical daily environment, its activities are about sharing; a land with no ownership. (*the land* was bought in 1998 by Rirkrit Tiravania and Kamin Lerchaiprasert and became a foundation in 2004.)

the land also supports a focus on the individual, as put forth by Vipassana Meditation, where one becomes a choice-less observer and sees life as a series of self-adjustment processes.

On a functional level, though still in a 'remote' context *the land's* participants and the new generation of volunteers (Kaew, Angkrit, Noy-Neu and...), are allowed to experiment artistically, architecturally, agriculturally and socially with how to live sustainably and holistically with nature. (Danish art group Superflex installed a biogas system to provide gas (transformed from buffalo waste for the kitchens located on the land. Some projects perhaps were not bound to succeed but inspire; such as Francois Roche's battery house which was supposed to be lit by buffalo power as documented in Philippe Parreno's film, 'The Boy from Mars'. If this situation is not resolved it is to be turned into a functioning green house.)

If *the land* 'produces' anything at all – such as art; architecture; sculpture; rice; gas; discussion; parties; media attention or ideas, it sees itself as a worthy collaborator with its founders' vision. Whether it exists in the minds of people as a social or artistic platform is not a primary concern. We invite those who are interested in *the land* to come with no preconceptions as to what it actually is but to endeavour to find out for yourself what possibilities it will suggest to you.

II tropical tree house

Children living in a Buddhist culture learn that Prince Siddartha was born, attained enlightenment, became Buddha, gave his teachings, and reached Nirvana all from underneath a tree. The first house to be 'built' on *the land* is not yet completed because it is still growing. It was 'constructed' by Mit, planting a ring of teak trees some eight years ago, and whilst it now has three levels made by weaving the branches together, five stories are hoped for. (It might be Chiang Mai's first skyscraper as buildings in the city can only be three stories high!).

Sometimes when visitors come to take a look at *the land* and they are asked if they saw the tropical tree house, they look dumbfounded, having not noticed it as a recognizable construction or any of its subtle presence or significance. The tree house is perhaps an ironic anomaly because unlike any of the other houses it is alive - the other wooden and more conventional house structures on *the land* are by their inherent nature, decaying instead of growing. It has been interpreted by some as a spiritual representation of our inner 'abode' but with the next breath, it is also reminiscent of childhood fantasy, a place where we can linger, and wander around the corridors of our imagination and hopes.

The tropical tree house is not for the daily practice of living instead it offers a retreat from chaos, sometimes referred to as civilized society. By letting *it* live we are given the opportunity to wait and how growth occurs slowly, naturally and effortlessly. The tropical tree house represented at CULTURE LAB is a representation of something that can heal by existing. While it can be initially seen as being a simple art project or experiment, its living status is something far richer and more real, which can be observed by allowing it to develop.

Similar to the presentation of Culture Lab by *the land* at the Palais de Tokyo, the tree house is a process and not an end result. It is a living breathing entity and in adopting the role of either the observer or the observed, one can contribute to the embodiment of *the land's* essence.

V precepts

In eastern culture there are many traditions and belief systems involving the number five. Healing systems: Wood, water, fire, earth and metal; Architecture and Feng Shui based in the tradition of Buddhist belief. The five aggregates of Buddhism are form, sensation, memory, thought and consciousness.

Uncle Chaluy Kaewkhong is a sustainable agriculturalist and originally advised *the land's* founders on how to cultivate the soil of their utopian dream. Angkrit, a volunteer of the land, has stated: "According to his, (Uncle's), way of thinking, in agriculture, one must know and respect the five goddesses of nature, namely Mae Thoranee, (Mother Earth), Mae Khongha, (Mother Water), Mae Phosop, (the Rice Goddess), Mae Phra Phloeng, (the Goddess of Fire or Sunshine and Mae Phra Phai, (the Goddess of Wind)." The concept here is that 5=1

Culture Lab wishes to present the precept of five to Tropical Nights, which is why the lecture and the evening's events are broken down into five sections. There are five doorways into the event, five sets of paintings, five levels imagined for the tropical tree house, five precepts to *the land*, (land, agriculture, social activity, sustainable living, Vipassana and art) and five hours in which to enjoy it. The very fact of outlining 'precepts' for Culture Lab seems to challenge the philosophical approach of *the land*, which discourages preconception, but in actuality this event is about encouraging contradictory thought, in order to highlight the idea that questioning beliefs is what brings society forward.

III tropical nights, 'culture lab'

As part of its program called 'Tropical Vegetales, Lost in Paradise', the Palais de Tokyo has invited participants of *the land* to give a presentation about itself. Calling their event Tropical Nights, it will take place on the evening of the 24th August and will last 5 hours. The evening is known as CULTURE LAB and will be guest lectured by Mit and facilitated by Angkrit, Kaew and Noy-Neu.

The definition of the word lecture is 'a usually formal oral communication to an audience'. This lecture is not designed to be such. Mit has created a flyer to enable his lecture to become a more interactive, participatory event. This flyer is a physical object and with it, Mit will try to bring the audience into his understanding of the more subtle, intransient qualities *the land* is founded on, and is still developing with the help of events like Culture Lab. With this in mind, we want you to be able to feel, rather than intellectualize his lecture.

the land has been metaphorically shipped from Chiang Mai, and will take place in a temporary building, designed by Belgian artist Charlotte. In this transplanted environment, you will be able to taste and smell Kaew and Noy-Neu's delicious cooking, surrounded by the noise of Laotian music played by Kominh. There will be DJing and rapping by Angkrit, and objets d'art from 'the land', made for the occasion of Kaew and Je-Joy's birthdays.

The other events of the night will be film and documentary screenings, and a chance for social interaction. For this reason we would like to especially invite Philippe Parreno, Francois Roche, Henrik Hakanson, Alexandre Perigot, Kominh, Charlotte, Sarah de Wilde, Achim Kubinski & Molly Lambton, Yamamoto, Tanya Reihill and anyone who has visited the land or is interested in it, from French art students to the general public.

IV objets d'art...

The five series of paintings inside the temporary building have been made especially for Culture Lab, in order to present the sublime aesthetic aspect of *the land*. While some may see them as *oil on canvas*, stemming from a traditional artistic style, (whether Thai or Western) for the artist they are not seen as an entities but purely as an extension of the mind. The forces that inspired them are five tiered – social; artistic; architectural; scientific; and spiritual.

The paintings will be exhibited for a short time only, a micro representation of a day or a lifetime. They signify all things that surface and pass on; thoughts; daily toil; food; buildings; music. Their importance relates to how they are observed. Whether they are real or ethereal is of lesser relevance. They are part of the process of self-learning and it seems natural that they are here to represent *the land* at Culture Lab.

The paintings themselves are controversial in their very nature; the vibrant colours are inspired by deep meditation and depict the colours witnessed and created by Thai people in their daily lives. Their range of colour is attractive to the eye and yet the oil pigment is scraped onto the canvas with grave and almost aggressive intent. It is contemporary social and artistic discourse that brings the paintings into being. One set of the paintings on view in Culture Lab represents an imaginary set of international flags. Please feel free to take with you your own interpretation of what they might mean – it is often through individual interpretation that ideas can produce an ameliorative effect.

V quotes

I. *the land* offers an experience in a self-privileged learning environment, where criticality and exchange of practice is highly valued. We would hope that for the young artists this experience would enable them to step forward in their lives as artists and as members of community to continue to find ways and value in their artistic practices and its importance in society. I hope that for these young artists that the land will continue to be a place of possibilities, a place where they will find themselves and their peers in a community of discussion. (Rirkrit Tiravania)

II. 'I believe modern people like us should learn and collect art concepts because they can be variously applied. ...The land project is the hardest model of art. Even art lessons are hard to understand. Only a few people in the art field are able to understand. But because art is kind of a cool media – a media that is hard to understand but can create a shared ideology in the modern society. Art is hard to understand at the first glance, even to art historians and curators. It is science that always alternates and undergoes extreme media experiments, both successful and unsuccessful ones, logical and illogical ones. I'm not going to explain in depth because the basis of science of art can be explained. But there can be countless methods of interpretations according to personal technique and points of view. Art has no actual 'Right' or 'Wrong. It is the media encouraging people to think and interpret.' (Uthit Atimana)

III. Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects (Nicolas Bourriaud)

IV. There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond... While I am broadly sympathetic to that ambition, I would argue that it is also crucial to discuss, analyze, and compare such work critically as art. (Claire Bishop)

V. I once read a Nick Cave article where he said he was not a human 'being' but a human 'doing'. I endeavour to be the former. (Robin Hegarty)

The final V

Vipassana is an ancient *path* word meaning the right way to SEE the correct way to SEE the special way to SEE (observation total, holistic observation/ meditation/ observation of the reality as it is/ observing what is/ insight). Vipassana is the experiential aspect of the teachings of all Buddhas. Needless to say such an observation, such an enquiry into the truth is universal, non-sectarian, non-ritualistic, non-dogmatic and liberating. It is an art of living.

