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For Reinhold Engberding „Trees and Time “

“Art has to do with our relation to the time in which we live” (Christian Boltanski, 1997)

The above statement appears to be an undeniable fact. However, time can be a complicated and subtle concept. It involves superimposing several layers, dimensions and space, often to such an extent that our awareness of time begins to become distorted.

A specific period of time is superimposed on an extensive length of time.

Time of shorter experience is superimposed on an accumulation of time through the crystallization of layers of experience. Continual time is interpreted by, or - on the contrary - augmented by a moment in time.

An artist's time

During each trip that an artist makes, his domestic time is suspended or interrupted by the time in which he is visiting another place. But for the artist himself, the situation above is an extension of time to work as an artist, time for creation, which can be the breaking or slipping away of time, but also a thread or chain of time spent creating the work.

Time of the artist and the tree

The tree in the area he is visiting has gone through its own time; the seasons and days until it reaches a certain level of growth. Then, the artist's time and that of the tree coincide during his visit. The times of both converge when the tree is chosen to be part of the artist's working process. The convergence of both times – the time of the tree and the time of the artist's visit – results in the creation of a new dimension of time, which is the time of partnership in the creation of art.

White thread is wrapped around the tree. Its brown trunk becomes partially white, looking exalted and yet still oppressed for almost a month, full of refinement and beauty yet visibly tight and snug. While the tree is in this abnormal condition during the artist's creation process, time is suspended or postponed – we might call it prolonging time. On the day when the white cast is created by tying thin cotton soaked in glue around the tree trunk and leaving it to dry and get stiff, the time comes for a sharp knife to cut apart the white cast. The artist's time and the tree's time converge. Time comes to an end and is preserved or recorded in the white cast made from the cotton material.

Time in and of the artwork – our time

The cracks on the tree bark, the brown stain, the empty body of an ant, the hardened pack of glue on the cotton cast, the artist's handprint: these constitute the time of contact between the tree and the visiting artist - at one moment in time. All are now frozen in the present time of the artwork. The time record, which involved a month's activity by the tree and the artist, has been preserved finally in the time of its presentation in that piece of art.

The time of the stories behind this art work is not limited to the moment of contact between the tree and the artist; it extends to cover the origins of the tree that continued to grow until it came into contact with the artist, and opens up to include the artist's departure from his home to a new place, the moment he spotted the tree and adopted it as part of his work, as his partner, and it incorporates the reason that brought them together and the time they spent together.

The time of an art work consists of all kinds of time; the period of its construction, its illumination in the exhibition hall, the time it is kept in a dark, damp box, the time when people view it – pondering and discussing -, the time when it exists only in the artist's mind, and when it disappears from our eyes and minds.

In this sense, our time, the human time, also consists of some of the periods described above.

Space and time are always related. A person is time, we are time. - Time of the creator, time of the product, time of the viewer; these three dimensions of time often overlap.

Translations from the Thai original / the English version: Somporn Varnado, Chiang Mai / Lucinda Rennison, Berlin

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, *1957, internationally working Thai Artist (for example Venice Biennale, 2005), for some years now she is a Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University. – Reinhold Engberding and Araya met end of 2006 the first time, when Engberding works with the UNESCO-Aschberg-Grant at the Faculty in Chiang Mai.