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**That Wrenching Sense of Re-Contextualization:
On the Art of Addressing Nothing in Particular and Therefore Everything**

‘Queerness [is] about history. Moreover, the fall of the historically queer into the identificatory logic of self-representation marks the end of queerness per se’.
- Graham L. Hammill, *Sexuality and Form: Caravaggio, Marlowe and Bacon*, 69

To begin with some quotes that address what ‘queer’ can mean. The late literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote, in 1990, the widely-cited claim that queer is ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically’. More recently the Thai Studies academic Peter A. Jackson pointed out that queer ‘...has become a convenient way to talk about people of diverse genders and sexualities when they come together to resist anti-gay, anti-lesbian and anti-transgender laws, policies and attitudes’. Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer stated, in their introduction to *Art and Queer Culture*, ‘In its shifting connotation from everyday parlance to phobic epithet to defiant self-identification, ‘queer’ offers more generous rewards than any simple inventory of sexual practices or erotic object choices. It makes more sumptuous the space between best fantasy and worst fear’. And Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggest ‘Queer commentary takes on varied shapes, risks, ambitions, and ambivalences in various contexts’ while cautioning ‘...it is not useful to consider queer theory a thing, especially one dignified by capital letters. We wonder whether queer commentary might not more accurately describe the things linked by the rubric, most of which are not theory’.

It is worth stating that which is most obvious about ‘queer’ from these quotes: queer is the productive failure of strict notions of sexuality and gender; and an opposition to practices that seek to regulate gender and sexual identities. Queer is not a type of sexual practice or fixed mode of desiring but an exploratory space that can accommodate differences and polarities. And ideas of queer may be transformed or renewed as best to accommodate a wide variety of concerns that are not always theoretical. Here we can add another quote, from the writer Jonathan Kemp: ‘As such, queer is a practice or process of critique, an ongoing challenge to whatever stands as the norm. And over the seventeen years since it emerged as a critical term it has come to stand for different things and be used to critique different aspects of contemporary life’.

‘Queer’ is not a fixed identity nor a fixed practice but is best understood as a method – a way of thinking, doing, understanding, analyzing and producing – that carries the possibilities for its own transformation and renewal. That is, a refusal of any form of fixity. The title of my text is taken from Berlant and Warner’s essay, quoted above, which argues that for ‘queer’ to assume a definitive shape is to lose the potential for re-application and the production of ever-new challenges and knowledge. And here we can note how Queer Theory has allowed for critical questions of desire and identity to be expansively woven through our understandings of literature, aesthetics, social theory, economics, geography, political activism et al.

The ‘un-compared’ of the title of this exhibition points to the multiplicity of voices – of perspectives and understandings – that attend the ideas of queer sketched above. To allow for multiple understandings is to acknowledge a sense of the irrational and contradictory; or to insist on a refusal to circumscribe the specific or particular in order to play with the open-ended and antagonistic. However, *RADIATION: Art and Queer Ideas from Bangkok and Manila, Un-Compared* does seek to displace - or render in a nuanced, complex way - stereotypes that connect both these cities in terms of sleazy reputations. Moreover, discursive and unpredictable connections between the artists from both cities may suggest a continuum beyond the local, contingent or socio-culturally specific and therefore offer a far-reaching sense of the correspondences of queer, not necessarily universal but not entirely localized either. And what of Asia (or ‘Asia’) in terms of theories principally developed in North American academia?

RADIATION does not propose a genre of ‘queer art’ nor aim to make any statement on the relationship between queer-ness and LGBT issues. A number of artists in the exhibition explore compelling ambiguities in figures and images that otherwise aim to secure a coherent ideological function. Nigel Power’s portraits of Catholic clerics are ghostly and ominous, encouraging the viewer to repudiate their institutional significance while retaining a dreadful sense of power and authority. And while Nigel highlights the darker aspects of codes of masculinity, Ho Tam’s photographs of young Thai monks capture qualities of androgyny. In a world of pervasive and ever problematic constructs of masculinity and femininity, these images possess a strange quality; and insofar as the crossing of strict divisions of gender can carry an erotic charge, the photographs offer a curious meditation on relationships between the physical and spiritual.

Maitree Siriboon is an established artist whose extravagant photographs and videos address stereotypes of the sexual desirability and availability of young men from the Northeast region of Thailand. Brazenly refusing an explicit critique of these stereotypes, Maitree has posed himself naked amidst a range of characters and props in a rural environment that bespeaks the place as one of fantasy, power and unequal exchange. We can become aware of a pull between sensual attraction and political repulsion. Maitree also creates large collages inspired by the glittering surfaces of Thai temples, and the sometimes raucous narratives to be found in rural murals. The decorative sensibility of these works is probably the last taboo in contemporary art because it most immediately prompts visual delight rather than conceptual interest. But the histories of decorative arts are rich for queer inquiry given the casual associations between decoration and feminine aesthetics and ‘oriental’ cultures.

Rendering the official rules and conventions of the world different from themselves is a key aspect of queer interests; and *RADIATION* explores the exclusionary biases, internal contradictions and ambivalent pleasures of normative claims for the world. Appropriation – the re-use of existing forms – is a recurring method because such a method not only aims to present the familiar afresh but also plays with the tense distinction between ‘original’ and ‘copy’; the very essence of ‘queer’ itself. Who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? While much contemporary art begins to answer such questions, *RADIATION: Art and Queer Ideas from Bangkok and Manila, Un-Compared* continues to insist on the import of certain aspects to these questions: all which is typically marginalized or usually disavowed.

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ARTIST WORKS FROM LEFT: Ho Tam (2003 -) from *POSER* series, 30 x 40cm (each); Piyarat Piyapongwiwat (2013) *Unknown, «After Georg Dionysius Ehret»*, lithograph, 33 x 44cm; Việt Lê (2012) from *LOVE BANG!*, video; Patrick Cruz (2013) *Mustard Bolts*, acrylic on canvas, 25 x 35cm; Nigel Power (2013) from *Holy Father* series, digitally processed hand painted photocopy of found photograph, 66 x 102cm; John Cuyson (2014) from *Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me*, looped projection; Dennis Balk (2014) *Splinter Group*, inkjet on commercial vinyl, dimensions variable; Jet Melencio (2012) *Figures in a Landscape (After Francis Bacon)*, digital print, dimensions variable.

ARTWORKS ON FRONT AND BACK: Tada Hengsapkul (2012) *Kho Looks at the Mirror #1*, digital print on matte paper, 100 x 80cm; Maitree Siriboon (2010) *Dream of Beyond Part 1*, C-print, 90 x 120cm; Amornthep Jaidee (2013) *Push & Pull Poussier et Tirer*, electronic sculpture and found object, 23 x 23 x 50cm.



BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES: Graham L. Hammill (2000) *Sexuality and Form: Caravaggio, Marlowe and Bacon*, University of Chicago Press; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press; Brian Curtin (2012) ‘Queering the Pitch, Deliberately’, *Bangkok Post*, October; Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer (2013) *Art and Queer Culture*, Phaidon; Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1995) ‘What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?’, *PMLA*, 100.2; Jonathan Kemp (2009) ‘Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future’, *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 6. 1.

Dennis Balk is an educator, visual artist and writer based in Bangkok. Since the late 80s his gallery and museum work has addressed the conditions of narrative and the narrative aspects of historicizing the present. **Yason Banal** is a graduate of Goldsmiths College in London and based in Manila. His videos, performances, photographs and installations veer across oppositions: the fictive and the real; reportage and folklore; and sociology and fantasy. Banal’s contribution to *RADIATION* is as www.artworld.xxx. **Jigger Cruz** is based in Manila and exhibits internationally, including Switzerland and San Francisco. **Patrick Cruz** is a multidisciplinary artist based between Vancouver and Manila. He studied at the University of the Philippines and received his Bachelors of Fine Arts at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2010. **Richard Hawkins** is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles. His first book of fiction *Fragile Flowers* was released by Les Presses du Reel in 2013. The first survey of his works in France, titled *glimmer*, premiered at Le Consortium, Dijon, also in 2013. **Tada Hengsapkul** is based in Bangkok and exhibits internationally. Solo shows include H Gallery Bangkok and Toot Yung Gallery, Bangkok and group exhibitions include Tally Beck Contemporary, New York City and the Chongqing Youth Biennale, China in 2011. **Amornthep Jaidee** was born in Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand. He has been living in Canada for over a decade, where he received his BFA from University of Lethbridge, Alberta and is currently completing a MFA at Concordia University in Montreal. **Robert Langenegger** is based in Manila and his paintings typically reference the art historical canon of political allegorists including Goya, Daumier and more contemporary figures such as Robert Crumb and Philip Guston, within the absurd, surrealistic context of modern Philippine life. **Việt Lê** is based in San Francisco. A PhD graduate of the University of Southern California and University of California, Irvine, his solo exhibitions include University of Urbanna Champagne Illinois, California College of the Arts, San Francisco and Java Arts in Phnom Penh. Group shows include Boston Center for the Arts, Boston and Aljira Center for Contemporary Art in New Jersey. **Jon Cuyson** is a graduate of Columbia University in New York City and based in Manila. He exhibits internationally and has participated in the Skowhegan Artist Residency in Maine. **Dave Lock** is based in Manila. He has exhibited in the Philippines and Singapore. **Lui Medina** is a graduate of the Slade School of Art in London and based in Manila. She exhibits internationally and lectures at the School of Design and Art, College of St Benilde in Manila. **Jet Melencio** is based between Manila and Toronto. He exhibits internationally and recent projects include production design for the Ballet Philippines’ original production *Crisostomo Ibarra*. **Piyarat Piyapongwiwat** is a graduate of Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier Agglomération in France and based in Bangkok. She has held solo exhibitions at Angkrit Gallery, Chiang Mai and Toot Yung Gallery in Bangkok. Group exhibitions include the *29th Tehran International Short Film Festival* and the Bangkok Art and Culture Center. **Nigel Power** is based in Bangkok. He exhibits internationally and leads the MFA in Visual Communication at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi in Bangkok. **Julius Redillas** is based in Manila. He exhibits extensively in the Philippines. **Michael Shaowanasai** is based in Bangkok and one of Thailand’s most celebrated artists. Among an extensive exhibition and project record, Michael has twice represented Thailand at the Venice Biennale. **Maitree Siriboon** is a graduate of Thailand’s Silpakorn University, based in Bangkok and manages Whitespace Gallery. He exhibits internationally, including New York City, Italy and London. **Jakkai Siributr** is based in Bangkok. He exhibits internationally and is represented by Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York City and Yavuz Fine Art in Singapore. **Jason Paul Tecson** is based in Quezon City in the Philippines. He exhibits regularly. **Joseph Tecson** is based in Quezon City in the Philippines. He exhibits regularly. **Henry Tan** is based in Bangkok. A multi-faceted artist, he possesses a long history of provocative contributions to local and regional art scenes. **Ho Tam** is based in Vancouver. A graduate of the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York City, he exhibits internationally. **TRASHER BANGKOK** is a group of club promoters in Bangkok. **Trek Valdizno** is based in Bulacan in the Philippines. He exhibits extensively. **Costantino Zicarelli** is based in Manila. Represented by Silverlens Gallery in Manila and Singapore, he exhibits regularly and was artist-in-residence at Small Projects Tromsø and Kino Kino in Norway.



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Special Guests:
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Việt Lê
Ho Tam

Curated by Brian Curtin
February 13 – April 11 2014

