

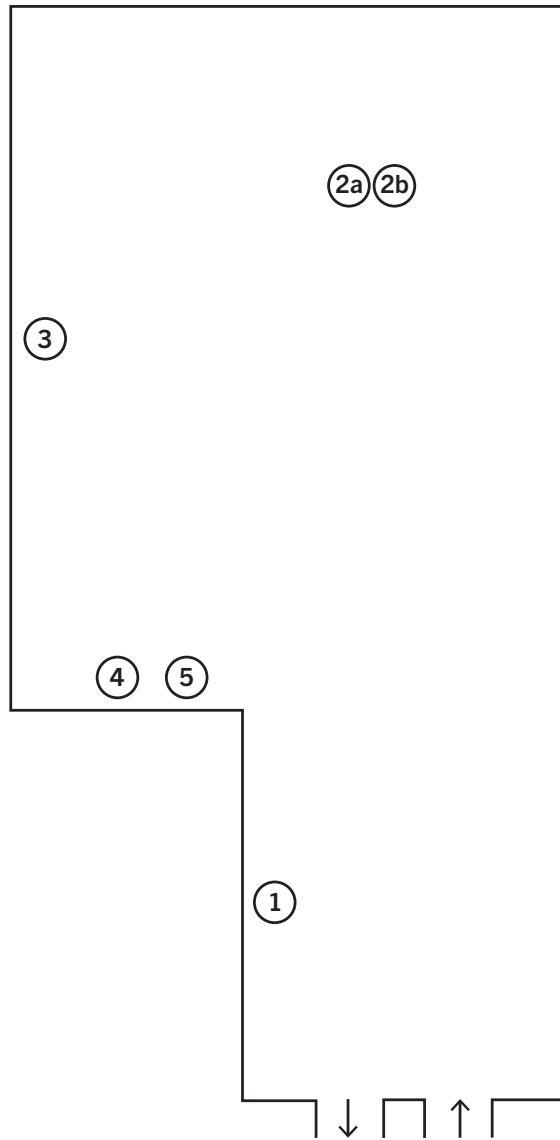
# NO PATENTS ON IDEAS

**PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG**

*No Patents on Ideas*, the first solo exhibition of Bangkok-based artist Pratchaya Phinthong in Singapore, explores the relational processes, fleeting gestures and global transactions that shape our cultural and economic systems. The exhibition centres on a projection installation that switches between *Undrift* and *Untitled (Singapore)*. Both images reference Phinthong's observations of visible and invisible systems in Singapore through a commentary on the city-state's relationship to airspace and aeronautics. As an extension of the installation, the gallery's inclined floor draws attention to the dynamics

of movement, control and resistance. The embodied experience underscores Phinthong's ongoing engagement with the ways space, environment and the body interact.

The works presented carry layers of significance drawn from their journey through production, use and exchange. Some are shaped by their cultural roots, shifting ownership or connections to historical events. Through deliberate arrangement, Phinthong transforms these objects into storytellers, encouraging us to uncover the many narratives they hold.



**① Parachute cloth and shrapnel**

c. 1942-45  
Rayon, metal  
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

This piece of parachute cloth and fragment of shrapnel belonged to Private Edward Charles Hardey, a prisoner-of-war interned at Changi after the fall of Singapore in World War II. During preparations for this exhibition, Phinthong visited the Changi Chapel and Museum, where he was drawn to the delicate, semi-sheer qualities of this old parachute cloth made from rayon. The use of rayon, a semi-synthetic fiber that was cheaper than silk and more readily available during World War II reflects the resourcefulness of wartime material innovation. By the late 1940s, rayon was gradually replaced by ripstop nylon for the making of parachutes. Celebrated for its durability, tear resistance and water-repellent properties, ripstop nylon becoming the standard for modern parachute production by the 1950s.

This artefact is on loan from the Changi Chapel and Museum, Singapore.

**②a *Untitled (Singapore)***

2014  
Digital image  
Collection of the artist

This photograph, taken from Udon Thani in northeastern Thailand, depicts the skies above the city, where an F-16 jet fighter can be seen crossing the sky as part of a military training exercise. The presence of these jets is part of a 15-year agreement between the Singapore and Thai governments for the provision of F-16 jet fighters in exchange for access to Thailand's air force training facilities. Departing daily from Udon Thani's Royal Thai Air Force base, these jets have become a recurring feature in the city's skyline. Engaging the help of friends living in Udon Thani, Phinthong captures the aircrafts as they appear, building a record of ongoing aviation activity and a document of air spaces as sites of navigation and ownership.

A version of this work was first exhibited at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore Residencies Programme open studios in 2014. It has been specially adapted for this exhibition.

## 2b) *Undrift*

2024

Digital screensaver, projection screen composed of aluminium frame and ripstop nylon used for industrial kite-making  
Commissioned by Singapore Art Museum

In *Undrift*, Phinthong recreates a stock screensaver previously downloaded onto his personal computer by a Bangkok-based computer repair shop. Banknotes from hundreds of foreign currencies have been animated to soar and fall across the screen, their rate of movement reflecting wind speed readings gathered from meteorological stations across Singapore. These notes are from Phinthong's personal collection, and traces of his ownership can be seen in the folds and handwriting that appear on them. Phinthong's subtle intervention into a generic, readymade good recalls his use of commonplace materials, processes, and symbols to highlight global systems of value, labour, and exchange.

## 3) *Sacrifice depth for breadth*

2023

Handmade paper and hornet nest;  
Series of single-channel videos uploaded onto YouTube, between 47 sec to 4 min 10 sec  
Collection of the artist

*Sacrifice depth for breadth* is an installation of handmade paper and YouTube videos. Working with Chiang Mai-based papermakers specialising in the recycling of agricultural waste and animal manure into paper products, Phinthong deconstructs an abandoned hornet nest and recasts it into a single sheet of handmade paper. Traces of dried-up fecal matter, pupa shells, wing membranes and other fragments are embedded onto the surface of the paper pulp, presenting a literal record of nesting habits and activity. Next to the handmade paper is a QR code that directs viewers to a series of videos, hosted on YouTube, of the nest's interior cells and chambers. To record these videos, Phinthong inserted an endoscope, an inspection instrument with an optical lens, into the nest cavity to view and record its insides. The footage captures Phinthong's attempts at manoeuvring the device through the recesses of the wasp nest, revealing the depth and complexity of its construction. Through the act of uploading the videos to YouTube, the artist extends the reach of their work to a global audience, highlighting the democratisation of knowledge and the fluid circulation of ideas in the digital age. The title of this work references the material transfiguration of the nest, as the three-dimensional form is reconstituted into a wholly different entity.

This work was first exhibited at STORAGE in Bangkok in 2023.

## 4) *Suasana*

2015

Film and plexiglass  
Collection of the artist

In 2015, Phinthong travelled to Pattani in southern Thailand to meet with a community of widows whose lives were affected by the ongoing insurgency in their villages. In the predominantly Muslim province where the impact of differences in cultural identity, nation state and faith on life are keenly felt, Phinthong depicts the uncertainty and tension of everyday life for the widows through a series of photographic film strips. Phinthong invited the widows to unspool the rolls of film from their canisters, exposing them to light. The strips of darkened film with no negative images register both the presence and absence of the women as a means to underscore the uncertainty of life amidst violence and cultural tension. These film strips are displayed between two plates of plexiglass, the distance between each strip similar to the narrow, elongated opening in a burkha.

This work was first exhibited at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco in 2015.

## 5) *Nam Prik Zauquna*

2024

Chili paste produced by the women of Zauquna

Produced by Zauquna, a community of widows from Pattani, southern Thailand, *Nam Prik Zauquna* embodies the resilience and resourcefulness of informal economies. The widows began the *nam prik* (a type of chilli paste) home-based business to rebuild their livelihoods after having lost their spouses to insurgent violence. For this exhibition, Phinthong commissioned 1,000 bottles of *nam prik* to be distributed to migrant workers in Singapore through the food distribution programme run by Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2). Through the circulation of these homemade food goods, the work underscores the cultural significance and socioeconomic impact of the widows' participation in the informal economy. By inviting the public to share and consume the work, the artist opens up a communal space where the boundaries between art, labour and everyday life dissolve, fostering dialogue and collective reflection.

A version of this work was previously exhibited at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco in 2015. It has been specially adapted for this exhibition.

## Offsite Artworks

### ⑥ **Nam Prik Zauquna**

2024

Chili paste produced by the women of Zauquna  
Distributed via Singapore NGO Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)'s food programme, The Cuff Road Food Project.

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This is the first time that the work will be distributed to migrant workers via Singapore NGO Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)'s food programme, The Cuff Road Food Project.

### ⑦ **Spoon**

2024

Melted lead and tin  
Collection of the artist  
Distributed by artist

*Spoon* is an ongoing series by Phinthong that has been made in collaboration with the villagers of Ban Napia in Xieng Khouang, northeastern Laos. In a decade-long "Secret War" that began in 1964, the US unleashed millions of cluster munitions in that area, making Laos the most bombed nation on earth. Nearly a third of the munitions failed to explode and remain buried across the country. Faced with a surplus of war remnants retrieved from clearance operations, Napia villagers began melting and recasting the scrap metal from unexploded ordnances, turning them into silverware and souvenirs. The villagers' process of turning a once lethal munition into collectible and tradeable objects is further evolved by Phinthong, who turns the material into palm-sized shapes with a mirrored finish. Resembling modern design objects, their surfaces bear traces of contact with the earth from when they were buried, and of the sanding and polishing required to achieve their smoothness and shine. Dispersed around Singapore and free to take, this work reduces the public and monumental nature of unexploded ordnances into that which can be enveloped by the body, such that it can be appropriated individually.

A version of this work was previously made for sale on *expensive to be poor* ([expensivetobepoor.net](http://expensivetobepoor.net)) an e-commerce website project co-founded by Phinthong. It has been specially adapted for this exhibition and will be distributed around Singapore by the artist.