

# Your Green Is Mine

Pachara Piyasongsoot

# Artist Statement

"The park is designed to be lively and powerful representing the sanctity of the place where the statues of seven notable Thai kings are enshrined. The trees planted around Rajabhakti Park are like an army of Kings to emphasize the quality of a warrior. The main type of trees is a variety of palm plants such as the Bismarck palm, Cherry palm, Petticoat Palm, Ficus Tree, Golden Ficus, etc., which have a beautiful shape and strength. When planted in a row, they look like troops. Some types of palms are shaped like soldiers crouching down and paying respect, which are suitable for the monument of seven kings."<sup>1</sup>

Excerpt from an interview with this garden designer made me rethink how to position trees and the design of Rajabhakti Park, as well as other important places by the Thai government. The way the tree is used shows the notion of royal nationalism

ideology. Such a viewpoint is how the aristocracy sees the people. Moreover, each tree is labeled with the name of a noble person. Most of them were soldiers of high rank. In this sense, the monument is not the huge statue of the seven kings, but instead, it was a thousand or so trees in this place.

In the painting, I redesigned it with the same concept but from the opposite point of view. It is from the view of the people like me, who see the world through art. I looked into the idea that the people see the aristocracy and assumed the role of the creator of the new world. I snatched the green space and placed it in the square frame of the canvas. Various shapes in this series of works are therefore free from their real identity and the label attached to them. My imagination is free from a world where people are not in the equation.

Pachara Piyasongsoot  
Thailand, July 2023

<sup>1</sup> Thairath Online, Director of Nong Nooch Tropical Garden donated trees to decorate Rajabhakti Park, <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/east/547262>



# Bangkok

# When the sky and the land turn upside-down, the sea emerges and devours

by Thanavi Chotpradit

Among the terms designated to the Thai monarchy, one term is of particular interest here, that is, *phra chao phaen din*: Lord of the Land (*phaen din* refers both "land" and "country"). The term *phra chao phaen din* indicates that landscape plays a crucial role in constructing and sustaining sovereign authority. For Thailand, the national landscape is defined as the nation's territorial entity under the rule of the king. It is a locus of control in which power relations between the monarchy and its network are expressed through ownership, management and manipulation of land. Landscape is a dynamic medium that functions in ideological interpellation. In February 1982, King Bhumibol (King Rama IX, r. 1946-2016), whose name also means 'The Strength of the Land' (*bhumi* means land and *bala*, from which *bol* is derived, means strength), granted two plaster casts of his footprints to the soldiers at the Doi Phaya Pitak Battalion on top of Mount Yao in Thoeng district, Chiang Rai. The war against the communists in the northern highlands ended one month later. In Buddhism, the footprint of the Buddha symbolises the Buddha's presence on earth. As a trace of the king's presence, the Royal Footprint of King Bhumibol does not only emphasise the discourse of Buddhist Dharma King (*dhammaraja*) but also conceptualised the landscape of Thailand as a royal territory—a visual sign of *phra chao phaen din*—I, the Lord of the Land, was here. Here is my land<sup>1</sup>.

The central form in *Reverse Island No. 3* (2023) by Pachara Piyasongsoot resembles many things: an island, a slave ship seen from above, a miniature floating park and the footprint of the Buddha. It is an image of an object, or an island, which is composed of odd small units in sombre colouring and composition floating in a dreamlike, surreal seascape. Considering the artist's source of inspiration, that is, the garden landscape of Rajabhakti Park and his long-standing interest in royalist nationalism, I see *Reverse Island No. 3* as an adoption of a certain iconological



<sup>1</sup> For a discussion about the Royal Footprint of King Bhumibol and the Thai state's counter-insurgency, see Thanavi Chotpradit, "Re-Establishing the kingdom: Anti-communist monuments in the Thai highlands," in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945-1990*, ed. Stephen H. Whiteman, Sarena Abdullah, Yvonne Low and Phoebe Scott (Sydney and Singapore: Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 181-186.



**Reverse Island No.4**  
2023, Oil on linen, 80 x 120 cm

sign: the footprint of the Buddha. Piyasongsoot transforms this conventional form in Buddhist art into a form of a reverse island within his own, imagined seascape. This is a playful twist to the symbol of the king as *dhammaraja*. The reverse and displacement of the Buddha's footprint (from the land to the sea) imply annihilation of the source of legitimacy of Buddhist kingship. It recalls a phrase 'to flip the sky and the land upside-down' (*phlik fa kwam phaen din*): a radical change to overturn the established order. Since the sky or *fa* also refers to the king (in his untouchable heavenly state), to flip the sky and the land upside-down is to strike against the sacred rule of the Thai monarchy and overturn it: a revolution that could flip or reverse the land and its sovereign authority.

In the series *Your Green is Mine*, Piyasongsoot challenges the notion of the king as *phra chao phaen din* through his paintings. He is a part of a generation of Thai contemporary artists who has responded to the decade-long political crisis with a critical view of the relationship between the monarchy and politics, as well as the monarchy-military alliance. His obsession with Rajabhakti Park, from the previous series made in 2021 to the present, makes his paintings of palm trees and topiary plants legible as politically engaged works of art. His landscape and seascape paintings are situated in the debates on the possession of sovereign power that have yet to be settled. These works simply ask: who owns this land, the people or the king? Could we, the people, own it?

What is Rajabhakti Park? How does it arouse the artist's curiosity and critical response? If we think of landscape as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed<sup>2</sup>, what does it do? What could be its role and significance in the royalist nationalist discourse?

Rajabhakti Park is a 35.5-hectare historical theme park honouring past Thai kings from the Sukhothai period to the current House of Chakri. It was built by the Royal Thai Army on Thai army property in the resort town of Hua Hin, Prachuap Khiri Khan. It is 12 kilometres from Klai Kangwon Palace (*klai kangwon* means far from worry), the summer royal residence of King Bhumibol. Granted its name by the king, Rajabhakti Park means 'the park that has been built with people's loyalty to the monarchs.' Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn (now King Maha Vajiralongkorn or King Rama X, r. 2016-present) and his daughter, Princess Bajrakitiyabha, presided over the opening ceremony in 2015<sup>3</sup>.

2 In the introduction to an edited volume, *Landscape and Power*, art historian W.J.T. Mitchell asks us to consider landscape not as a noun but a verb: what landscape does and how it works as a cultural practice. See W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction" in *Landscape and Power*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-4.

3 pm, "Crown Prince opens majestic Rajabhakti Park in Hua Hin," *Pattaya Mail*, September 28, 2015, <https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/crown-prince-opens-majestic-rajabhakti-park-in-hua-hin-51645>.

Besides the monumental bronze statues of seven kings (King Ram Khamhaeng, r. 1279-1298; King Naresuan, r. 1590-1605; King Narai, r. 1556-1688; King Taksin, r. 1767-1782; King Phutthayodfa Chulalok, r. 1782-1809; King Mongkut, r. 1851-1868 and King Chulalongkorn,

r. 1868-1910), the garden landscape is vital in making the park an allegory of an ideological theme, namely, royalist nationalism. The discourse of loyalty moves outward in space and moves backward in time, into the history of past kingdoms associated with the figures of each past king; they are surrounded by the loyal subjects, symbolised in the nonhuman forms of palm trees and topiary plants, mostly Fukien tea trees. Garden designer Kampon Tansacha, Director of Nongnooch Garden in Pattaya, explains that various types of palm trees in Rajabhakti Park are metaphors of platoons in the king's army; when placing in rows, they look like soldiers standing in line<sup>4</sup>. Here, natural entities are encoded and become determinate signs. Their structures and forms become instrumental to cultural, political power. They are artifices; natural beings that are clipped into ornamental shapes and placed in a designated location—a garden—an invented landscape. Thus, the garden landscape of Rajabhakti Park manifests disciplines and orders in a hierarchical structure of the royalist-nationalist-militaristic state. The symbolic forms, or the signifiers, of disciplines and orders are metaphors of loyalty (*bhakti*) to the monarch (*raja*). Landscape always represents something. Looking at it is looking at a representation, which, in this case, is of the Thai national ideology.

Field visits and research on a specific person are essential components in Piyasongsoot's artistic practice<sup>5</sup>. Since 2021, the artist has looked closely to Tansacha and his garden designs. As the director of Nongnooch Garden, Tansacha received major commissions from the government to design gardens for various places including the Government House of Thailand and the cremation ground for the Royal Crematorium of King Bhumibol. Both designs, made in 2017, inscribe royalist nationalist ideology. Tansacha emphasises in the interviews that his design and use of trees should be a model of 'Thai garden' because it is simple, noble and reflects King Bhumibol's 'philosophy of sufficiency economy'<sup>6</sup>. There is a process of institutional and political legitimation which occurs within an interrelation between sight (seeing) and site (garden landscape). Trees are not just trees. And they are not where they are because of their aesthetic qualities. In his spatial strategies of composition and perspective, trees are part of the site of specific ideological attitude. This is where Piyasongsoot's inspiration and desire for critique comes from. As a painter of landscape, Piyasongsoot counters Tansacha's garden landscape as representation of royalist nationalism with the re-presentation of that representation. If landscape is a representation of something, landscape painting is therefore a re-presentation of that representation. *Your Green is Mine*



4 "Pho-o suan nongnooch yan borichak tonmai jad suan utthayan rajabhakti" [Director of Nongnooch Garden insisted that he donated trees for the garden of Rajabhakti Park], Thairath Online, December 10, 2015, <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/east/547262#>.

5 Before Rajabhakti Park, Piyasongsoot made several landscape paintings that referred to the history of communist insurgency in Isan (northeastern part of Thailand). In 2018, he travelled to the village of

Nabua in Khok Hin Hae, Renu Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom. He visited a 90-year-old Comrade Tang, or Grandpa Chom Sanmitr. A series of paintings that depict the rural landscape of Nabua village bear no sign of the incident known as "The Day the First Gun Shot Rang Out" when eight communist villagers confronted Thai security forces in 1965.

Piyasongsoot's landscape paintings have always been about politics, be it in the history or in the present, but without figurative representation of any political actors. The Nabua series was

first shown at Artist+Run in Bangkok in 2018. The exhibition entitled *Anatomy of Silence* was divided into two parts: *Anatomy of Silence: Nabua* (November 24-December 7) and *Anatomy of Silence: Sequence* (December 8-20).

6 Please see both interviews (in Thai) on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osjnxoEf6mw&list=PLIfyisQu6FX0LTIja264QQgff8GRgXUzn&index=5&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osjnxoEf6mw&list=PLIfyisQu6FX0LTIja264QQgff8GRgXUzn&index=5&start_radio=1) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQrPCnQXHQs&list=PLIfyisQu6FX0LTIja264QQgff8GRgXUzn&index=9>.



**Burning**

2023, Oil on linen, 80 x 145 cm

7 See works such as French Garden 2021; Toys, 2021; The Palace, 2022; Enclosed Garden 2022; Day and Night, 2022; Reverse Island 2022 and Behind the Wall, 2022.

is, after all, a critical response to the artificial world of garden landscape. Yet, this pictorial representation is not realistic but surreal...

Palm trees and topiary plants appeared in his panoramic paintings since 2021<sup>7</sup>. *Your Green is Mine* brings them closer to us, for us to take a closer look, and perhaps to wonder since they are transformed into some odd objects surrounded by water. They no longer look like the pictures of garden landscape, but the seascapes with floating objects, or the islands, seen from above. Piyasongsoot plays with forms of topiary plants; playfully reshapes and reframes them, and enlarges them. If trees can be clipped into ornamental shapes, they are natural entities that are capable of shapeshifting. As a result, topiary plants from Rajabhakti Park become waves, thorns, strands, clouds, islands and mines. The artist seizes topiary plants from Rajabhakti Park to create his own pictures of floating gardens in the sea.

Therefore, the most notable feature in this series is not the plants but the body of water. It is a feature that distinguishes Piyasongsoot's paintings from its origin (Rajabhakti Park). It is a sign of artist's autonomy, of independence from the origin of his subject, as both a painter who does not wish to paint in a realistic manner (a truthful representation of a garden landscape) and a Thai citizen who wishes to resist sovereign royalty, to insist that the land and sovereignty belongs to the people. In the artist's statement, Piyasongsoot declares that he 're-designs' the garden and 'reverses' it from the perspective of the common people. The title *Your Green is Mine* demonstrates a will to take possession. The act of painting here offers resistance to the ideological constructions of the royalist-nationalist state that supported by the military. Painting become a mode of political expression, a battle field between ideologies. The transformation from landscape to seascape thus expresses a dream for reform, if not revolution...

*Burning* (2023) depicts an image of a lone palm tree amidst a blizzard. It is only in this painting that water forms enormous waves, and the wind is strong, as strong as the wind in a storm. It is perhaps my habit as an art historian that makes me see J.M.W. Turner's *Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842) overlap with this painting, and see the steamboat in the lone palm tree. While Turner's seascape indicates the limits of human enterprise and its vulnerability before the superiority of the natural forces of water and wind, by contrast, the waves and storms in *Burning* signify that the garden of Rajabhakti Park, a manmade landscape, an artifice, is no greater than nature at the hands of the painter. One day, the land may be shaken, and perhaps even overturn.



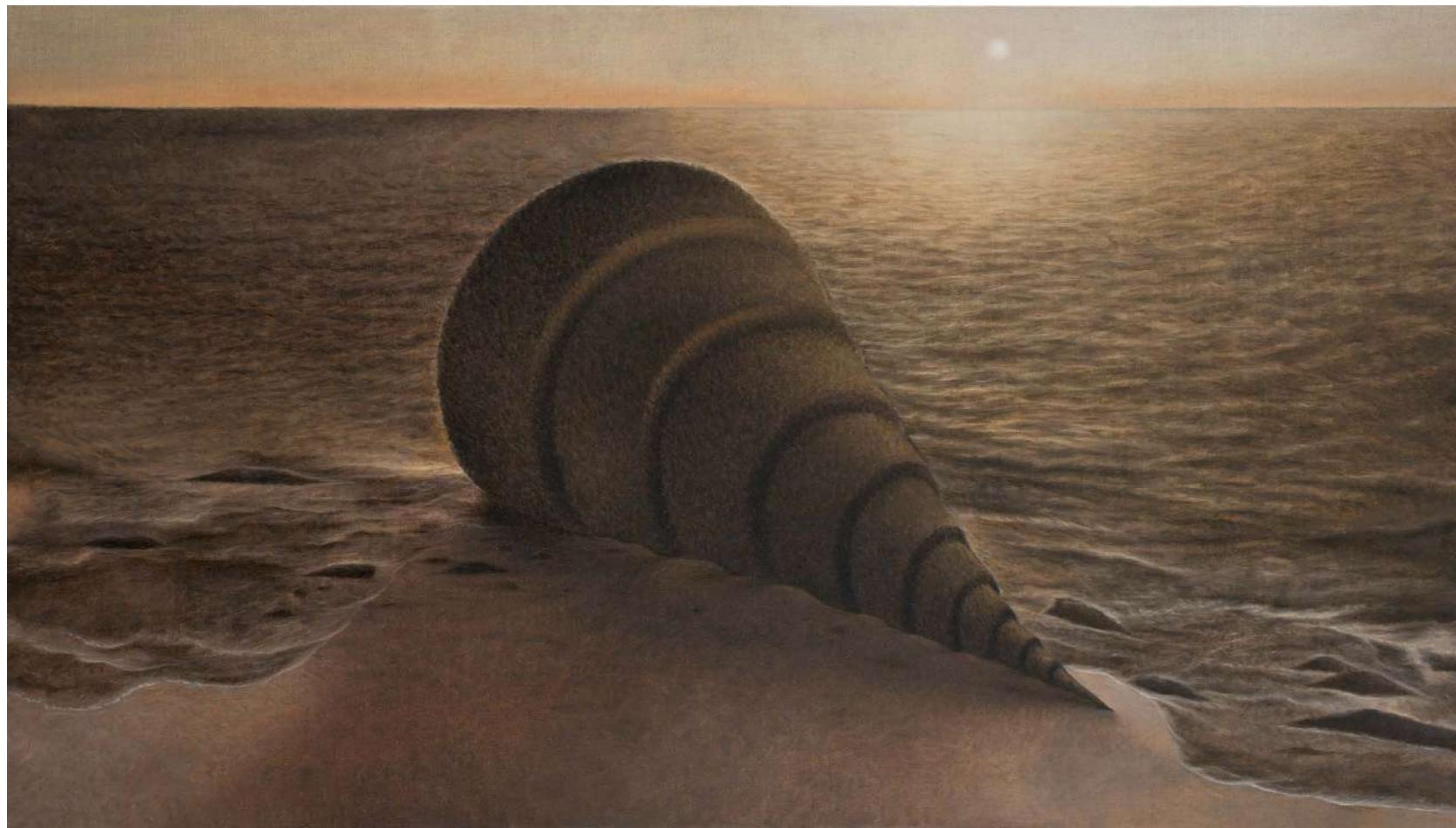
***Isolated Garden***  
2022, Oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm



***The Tree***  
2023, Oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm



***Impression, Sunrise***  
2023, Oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm



**Strand**  
2023, Oil on linen, 60 x 105 cm



**Seven**  
2023, Oil on linen, 60 x 105 cm



***The Mine***  
2023, Oil on linen, 80 x 120 cm



***Waiting for The Sunset***  
2023, Oil on linen, 70 x 125 cm

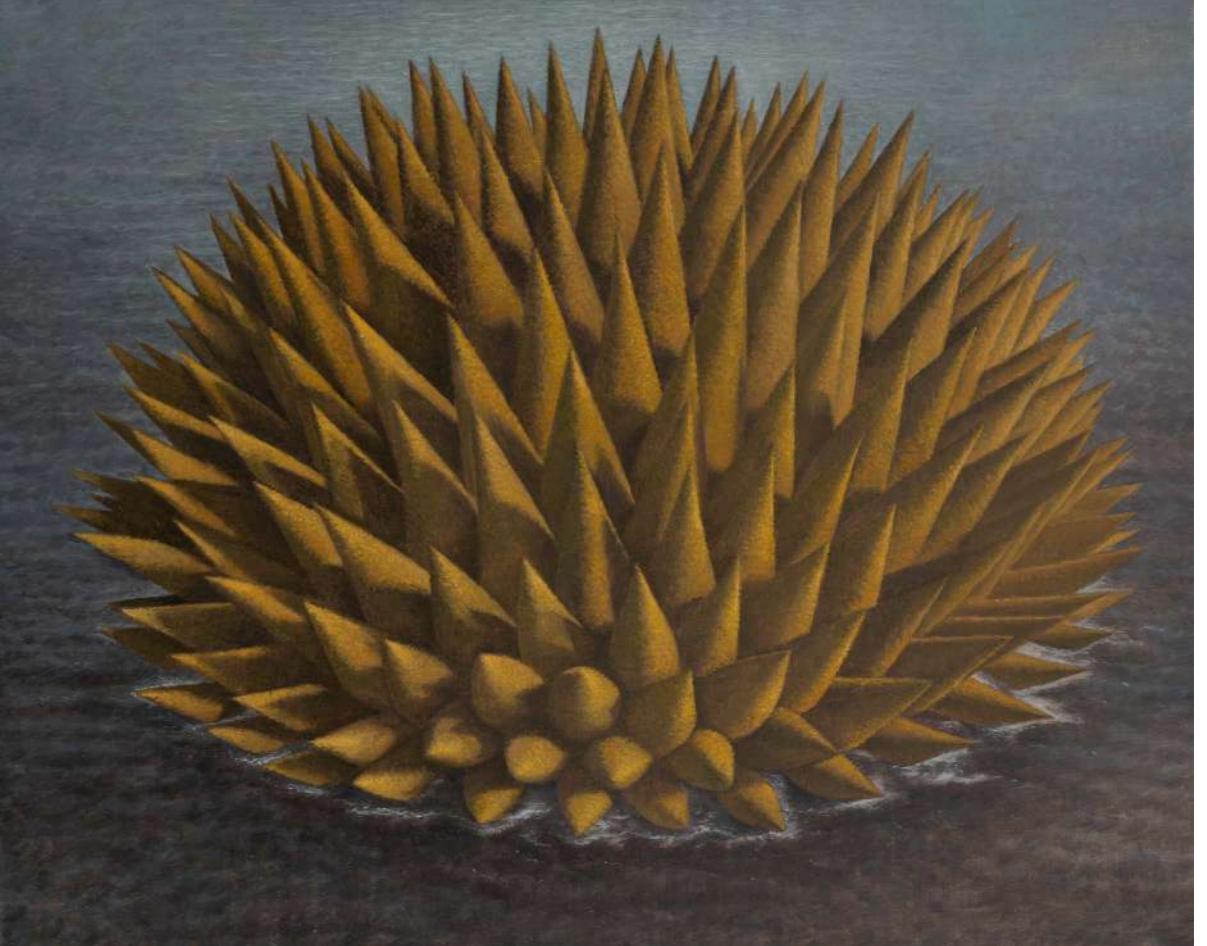


Detail of *Thorn Island* (2023)

# Singapore

**Thorn Island**

2023, Oil on linen, 60 x 75 cm



**Reverse Object**

2023, Oil on linen, 60 x 75 cm

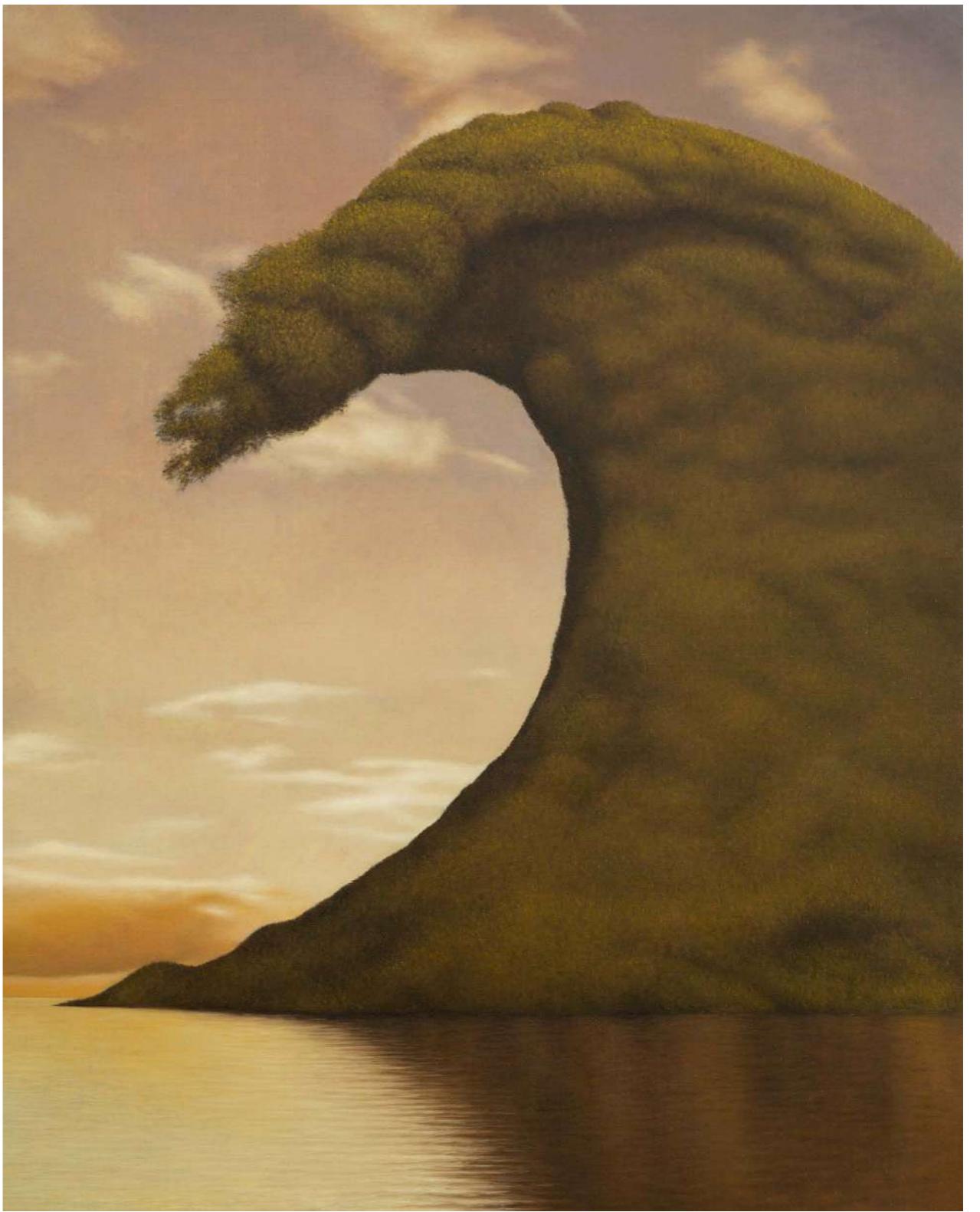


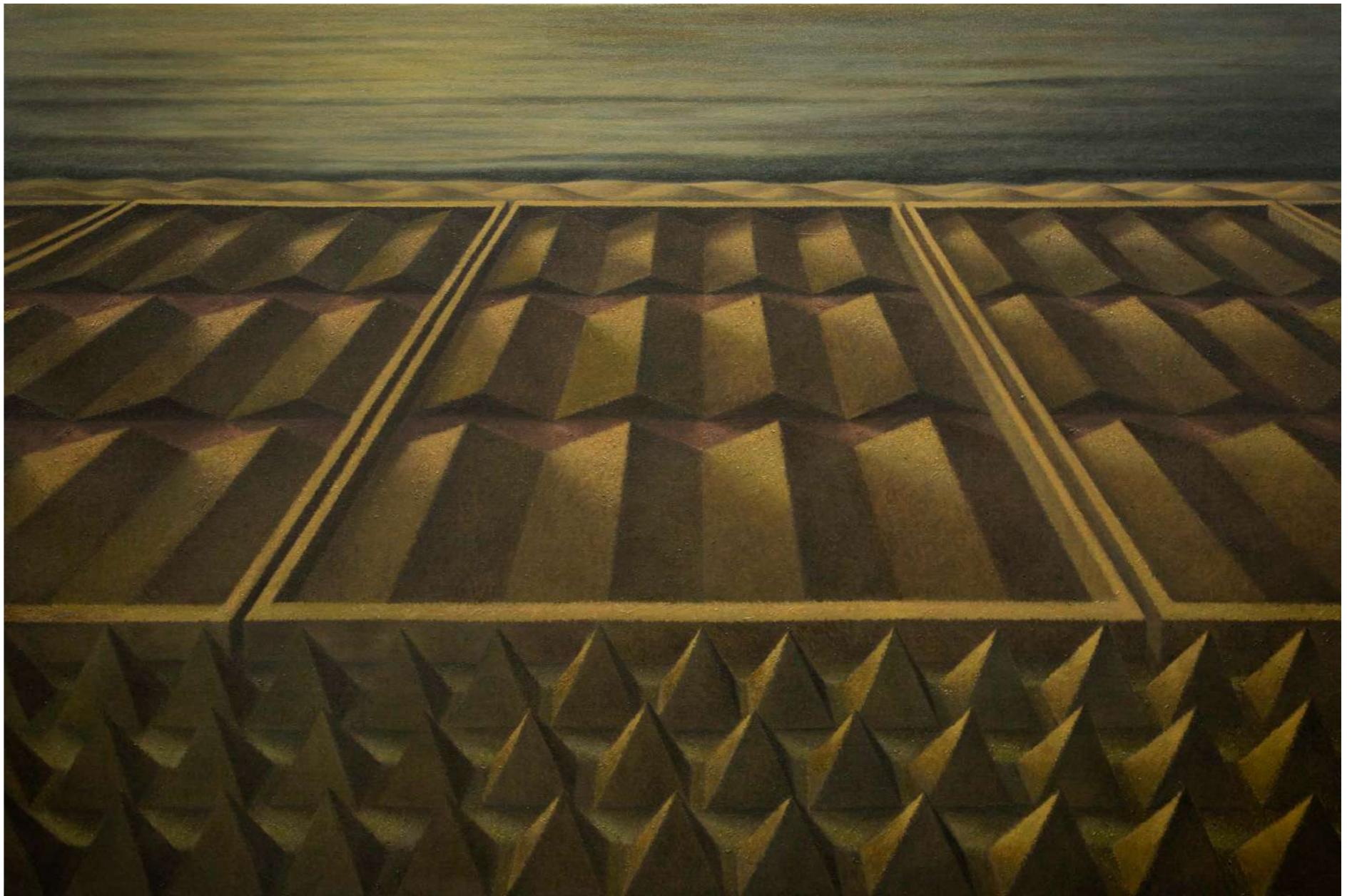
***Your Clouds Are White***  
2023, Oil on linen, 100 x 80 cm



***The Great Wave***

2023, Oil on linen, 100 x 80 cm





***Behind The Wall***

2022, Oil on linen, 80 x 120 cm



***Day and Night***

2022, Oil on linen, 100 x 150 cm



Detail of *The Tree* (2023)

# Pachara Piyasongsoot

b. 1985, Bangkok, Thailand



Artist portrait. Photo by Manasak Khlongchainan

Pachara Piyasongsoot graduated with a bachelor's degree in B.F.A. (Graphic Arts), from The Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University.

He is interested in the political and social context in Thailand. His painting are usually based on research of real places, people and narratives, by using photographs as important references for developing artworks.

Pachara's solo exhibitions include *Harvest* (2021) at Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, *Eternity Village* (2020), and *Anatomy of Silence* (2018) both at ARTIST+RUN, Thailand, and finally, *Author from the past* (2012) at DOB Hualamphong Gallery, Thailand.

Currently he is living and working as a full-time artist in Bangkok, Thailand.

## Education

2008 B.F.A. (Graphic Arts), The Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

## Solo Exhibitions

2023 *Your Green is Mine*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Gillman Barracks, Singapore  
2021 *Harvest*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
2020 *Eternity Village*, ARTIST+RUN, Bangkok, Thailand  
2018 *Anatomy of Silence*, ARTIST+RUN, Bangkok, Thailand  
2012 *Author from the past*, DOB Hualamphong Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2023 *Diverse Visions*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Gillman Barracks, Singapore  
2022 Hotel Art Fair, The Standard, Bangkok Mahanakhon, Bangkok, Thailand (with Richard Koh Fine Art)  
2021 *Painting X*, XSPACE Art Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand  
2020 *One to ten*, Joyman Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand  
2018 *Invited Artist : Angkrit Gallery*, Speedy Grandma, Bangkok, Thailand  
*The Blind Dates*, Ferme de Quincé, Rennes, France  
*Affordable Art Fair In A Row #1*, NOIR ROW ART SPACE, Udon Thani, Thailand

2014 *Messages*, KOI ART GALLERY, Bangkok, Thailand  
*Metropolitan*, Bangkok, Thailand  
*Little Big Prints*, Bangkok, Thailand  
*After the missing dialogue*, BACC, Bangkok, Thailand

2009 *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bangkok Triennale International Print and drawing Exhibition*, Bangkok, Thailand  
2007 *Guanlan International Print Biennial 2007*, China  
*14th International Print Biennial Varna*, Bulgaria  
Thai-Japanese Graphic Arts Exhibition *Cross Border*, Bangkok, Thailand  
*The 24<sup>th</sup> Exhibition of Contemporary Arts by Young Artist*  
19<sup>th</sup> Toshiba Bring Good Things to Life Art Competition, Bangkok, Thailand

2006 *Computer Arts* by The Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University at VER Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand

## Awards

2008 Special Award of the 20<sup>th</sup> Toshiba Bring Good Things to Life Art Competition, Bangkok, Thailand  
Honorable Mention Award Epson Color Imaging Contest 2008 (Graphic)  
2007 Grand Prize Winner Young Thai Artist Award (Two Dimension Art) organized by SCG Foundation



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A solo exhibition by Pachara Piyasongsoot

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Richard Koh Fine Art,  
Peterson Building, 712/1, 9th Floor, Sukhumvit Rd, Khlong Tan, Khlong Toei, Bangkok 10110, Thailand  
16 September - 7 October 2023

Cover page front: Detail of *The Great Wave* (2023)  
Cover page back: Detail of *Isolated Garden* (2022)

### THAILAND

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