

Defects of life

Pim Sudhikam mixes art, craft, memory and everyday object in her ceramic exhibition at Tao Hong Tai: d Kunst, Ratchaburi.

Text Brian Curtin
Photos Weeraya Wanalertlak Fouchard

■ A self-evident rule of writing criticism is to focus on the objects to be critiqued and not, for example, discuss how what you ate for breakfast affected your worldview that day. However, my 2-hour journey from Bangkok to the 'Tao Hong Tai: d Kunst' gallery in Ratchaburi to see Pim Sudhikam's newest series of ceramic sculptures had an effect on me which is difficult to disentangle from whatever it means to critically focus on objects. It was raining; the sky was dead; and the gallery is in a coastal city that reminds me of where I grew up in Ireland, and from where I had just returned for a holiday. Nostalgia inflected by a casual sense of depression, or melancholia, necessarily infected whatever I had to do that day. But, more profoundly, Pim's dark-colored, irregularly-shaped and encrusted objects appeared to affirm my mood and therefore provide an opportunity to elaborate its interest, rather than simply provide a means to indulge my bad day.

'Domestic Ware' is a large series of small-scale sculptures that mostly consist of white porcelain objects (bowls, teapots etc.) embedded in earth-colored blocks of various abstract shapes. The contrast between the clean surfaces of the former and the rough textures of the latter is striking; and suggests a sense of excavation but also a marriage of potent opposites: form versus formless, the ritualistic versus the happenstance or the domesticated versus the natural. Further, the works possess a funereal quality, as if the functional objects are being returned to their

original place. Pim's particular method of firing here – wood firing – is a dying practice (but Ratchaburi is noted for it) and the effects are unpredictable because ash from the wood can affect the surface of the clay, causing so-called defects. Pim welcomes these 'defects', alongside the shadows caused by flames and, moreover, cracks in the final product.

All these considerations point to how Pim treats domestic ware as a fossil or heightens how the objects of our everyday life can be understood as such; after all, while we might be inclined to think of our functional vessels as throwaway, they are evocative of personal histories and can be treated as precious reminders of the past (hence the affirmation of my melancholia). Further, as Ajarn Juthamas Tangsantikul perceptively points out in her accompanying essay, these ubiquitous utensils signify the ways in which we domesticate our daily habits and rituals. By thinking in these terms, we can wonder about objects as remnants of our past, the present and our possible futures. With 'Domestic Ware' Pim has produced a vision of our domestic landscape that is at once familiar and strange. It should also be noted that her apparent disregard for producing the 'perfect' ceramic finish is commendable in an age when distinctions between art and craft still hold sway. Great art typically prompts us to think differently about what we believe we already know and great craft-people typically push at the limits or boundaries of their practices. ■

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