

## Theme: Collaboration Beyond Borders

### Portrait of a woman

According to the World Health Organization's statistics, up to one in three women are being abused by their spouses and family members. When their family becomes an unsafe environment, most victims choose to endure and keep quiet, not asking for help. This results from the victims' belief that it is a domestic issue and one should not make a big deal out of it for fear of divorce or criticism from society which is traditionally believed to bring shame to themselves and their families. The Portrait of a Woman project aims to present the images of women in today's Thai society to reflect the quiet violence in a place that is supposed to be the safest place for a person which is their family.

### Principles/ Concept

"Lotus leaf cannot cover the death elephant", "When you look over an elephant, look at its tail. When you look over a girl, look at her mother", and "A crow in a swan flock." These familiar Thai proverbs reflect the values that are deep-rooted in Thai society. "Lotus leaf cannot cover the death elephant" means "What is done by night appears by day". In other words, no matter how much you try, it cannot completely be kept as a secret. Just like domestic violence, even if you try to hide it, you cannot hide it completely. "When you look over an elephant, look at its tail. When you look over a girl, look at her mother" means a daughter is a reflection of her mother. This has been used to imply that if the mother is not successful in her marriage, with some reasons her daughter might not be suitable as a spouse. This shows that Thai women are expected to be good wives and mothers and have a perfect family. As a result, to maintain this ideal family image, Thai women choose to endure domestic violence. Finally, "A crow in a swan flock " means being disdained because of inferiority unlike swan that represents superiority. As a result, most women choose to preserve the image of swan by hiding the problems since should the problems be exposed, the women might be labeled as a crow. Presented in the portraits, these proverbs reflect the illusion that has caused Thai women to accept domestic abuse.

### Process/ Methodology

The Portrait of a Woman project originated from observations in illustrations of women in advertisements and book and record covers during 1960 and 1980. It was found that images of women were

presented in a sensual and seductive way to attract male audience's attention. Even though woman images have been presented in a broader variety of ways, sex appeal is still used as the main attraction, directly and indirectly, and women in the images remain the targets for criticism. This has brought up questions about what society expects from women and whether past expectations remain unchanged today. Looking into several Thai proverbs and literatures, it appears that the image of a good wife and mother with a perfect family is the image of the ideal woman, which has become a deep-rooted illusion in Thai society. This illusion has led many women, today and in the past, to accept physical and psychological abuse to maintain the image of the ideal wife, mother, and woman for fear of being ashamed or criticized by society. As a result, family has become a place of violence. The purpose of the Portrait of a Woman project is to present exhibitions that address Violence against Women and Girls, as part of a campaign to raise awareness and prevent violence against women and girls in Thai society. This exhibition hopes to be a reflection of domestic violence and demonstrate the reasons why women choose not to escape from violence. The project hopes to expand to art therapy for domestic violence victims and ask the society what an ideal woman should look like.

On the creative side, proverbs about women are interpreted as portraits to present women who try to preserve the ideal female image, willingly or unwillingly, the faces and bodies of the women were created by applying lemon juice onto the paper to the desired shape and ironing it to create burns. After that, pens and crayons are used to paint the desired parts. The burns represent physical and psychological pain that women have endured.

Technique

Pen drawing, burning and collage on paper

Reference

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