



# NEWS

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Bangkok No. 6 June 2010

National Museum Volunteers





### **National Museum Volunteers**

The National Museum Volunteers (NMV), under the auspices of the Department of Fine Arts, is a recipient of the Thai National Heritage Preservation Award 1989, 2001 and 2004. The group is also a Member of the Council of the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

The National Museum Volunteers is an organization with Thai and international members whose purpose is to serve the National Museum Bangkok and the public through a variety of activities.

### **The NMV Newsletter**

A monthly publication of the National Museum Volunteers, distributed free to members.

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### **Cover photo:**

Bhuddhasaiwan Chapel  
April 2010

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## **NATIONAL MUSEUM BANGKOK**

### **Hours of Operation**

Wednesday to Sunday:

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Monday and Tuesday:

Closed, except on public holidays

Thai New Year and 1 January:

Closed

*Entrance fee: baht 200*

### **NMV Library**

The library is located at the rear of the Museum grounds behind the Palace building.

Hours of opening:

Wednesdays: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Membership cards must be shown when borrowing books.

E-mail: [nmvlibrary@gmail.com](mailto:nmvlibrary@gmail.com)

### **Guided Tours**

**English: Thai Art, History and Buddhism**  
*Wednesday & Thursday*

**French: Pre-Thai and Thai Art**  
*Wednesday & Thursday*

**German: Thai Art and Culture**  
*Wednesday & Thursday*

**Japanese: Buddhasaiwan Chapel**  
**Buddhism and Thai Art**  
*Wednesday & Thursday*

Time: 9:30 am

Meet at: Museum ticket office

Fee: Free (*Museum entrance fee must be paid.*)

### **For information call:**

*Guide Chairperson (Guiding and Special tours):*

*Berni Sabatini 083 302 5005*

*Tour Leaders:*

*English: Lynda O'Callaghan 02 285 6162*

*French: Isabelle Depaty 02 261 1964*

*Jean-Pierre Joly 02 271 1249*

*German: Barbara Frank 080 088 3962*

*Japanese: Kumi Ishii 02 662 2179*

*Yuki Kurosaki 02 662 6572*

NMV Website address:

<http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net>



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This issue edited by:

Devin Brougham

# CALENDAR

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- June 7 Study Group – ***“Southeast Asian Ceramics”***
- June 10 Special Event – ***“Footnotes in History”***
- June 14 Study Group – ***“Southeast Asian Ceramics”***
- June 16 Excursion – ***“Heritage Tour of the Oriental Hotel”***
- June 21 Study Group – ***“Southeast Asian Ceramics”***
- June 28 Study Group – ***“Southeast Asian Ceramics”***

**Please Note:** Due to the demonstrations we have decided to reschedule certain events and others may be changed on short notice. We will make every effort to notify participants of any changes, but during this period of uncertainty also encourage you to check the NMV website for any possible changes at short notice.

The ‘At Home’ with Denise Tomecko had to be rescheduled. A new date will be announced soon.

The Oriental Hotel excursion has been rescheduled for June 16<sup>th</sup>, as noted above.

For further details regarding upcoming NMV events, please see announcements in this newsletter or check the NMV website:  
[www.museumvolunteersbkk.net](http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net)



## NOTICES

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### **The NMV Steering Committee Seeks Your Help!**

The Steering Committee has several positions that need to be filled due to turnover related to members moving back home or onto assignments abroad. In addition, Co-Chair positions are vacant in some cases and need to be filled.

If you are interested in giving more of your time in service to our vibrant organization, you are most welcome! **The support of our members is essential** to carry out our mission of guiding foreign guests in the National Museum. Without your active participation we would not be able to host our rich cultural activities such as lectures, study groups, 'At Homes' and excursions. These are in addition to maintaining the NMV Library and producing books like "Treasures", "Through Our Eyes" and "Inspirations". The Steering Committee is the NMV body that organizes all these for the benefit of all NMV members.

No matter where your interests and talents lie, we can use your help! Please consider joining in one of these Steering Committee roles:

#### ***Chair – Publicity***

Main Role: Publicise the NMV addressing all audiences appropriately, to ensure continual raised awareness of the NMV in the Bangkok community, as well as healthy attendance at all NMV events.

#### ***Chair – Hospitality/Events***

Main Role: head up a team responsible for organizing logistics, including food and beverages for all NMV events and programs.

#### ***Chair – Touching Thailand***

Main Role: Train guides and organise special needs tours of the National Museum.

#### ***Secretary***

Main Role: record, transcribe and distribute the minutes of all meetings of the NMV Steering Committee, and the NMV Executive Committee; and to compile members' reports into one comprehensive report.

#### ***Co-chair – Study Groups***

Main Role: Organise study groups on topics of Asian art, religion, history and culture.

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***Co-chair – Webmaster***

Main Role: introduce the activities of National Museum Volunteers in Bangkok on the World Wide Web, maintain existing pages, to keep the information up to date, create and design new pages as necessary.

***Co-chair – Monthly Events***

Main Role: plan and implement an annual programme of monthly lectures using academics, writers, public personalities, artists and experts in various fields. Subjects should relate to the history, art or culture of Thailand, South East Asia or Asia.

***Co-chair, Editing***

Main Role: Collect, review and format relevant content electronically and liaise with the printer for production of the monthly NMV News; recruit and manage editing team.

***Co-chair, Excursions***

Main Role: Provide NMV members an enriched understanding of the history, art and culture of Thailand and Asia through study excursions.

***Co-chair, ‘At Homes’***

Main Role: provide an informal forum for non-experts and non-academics to share their knowledge with members of the NMV.

***If you would like to pursue a Steering Committee role, kindly send an email to [information@museumvolunteersbkk.net](mailto:information@museumvolunteersbkk.net)***



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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**Dear Members,**

The recent turbulence in Bangkok has impacted NMV's presence at the Museum and in some cases we were not able to continue with planned activities. But, wishing Bangkok and the whole country peace with smiling Thai faces, we truly hope to be as active again soon as we always have been.

However, NMV project teams have not stopped working during this difficult period, creating ideas and planning events to welcome our members and guests. The Children's Project Team has been working on a programme of excursions to the Museum for young students. Our goal is to attract children at international schools to visit the Museum so that they can learn more about Thai culture, while having fun at the same time. We welcome any contributions and ideas from interested schools and NMV members. In a pilot project we are also supporting the National Museum Bangkok by developing new descriptions and labels for the Asia Room in the South Wing. We will offer our linguistic support with a strong multilingual team in the future.

And finally an event, which you shouldn't miss: before many of us head into the summer break, let us come together at the Museum on the 10th of June. Anette Pollner, NMV Monthly Lecture Coordinator, has been working with a small team to put together a symposium for NMV members. In a few days we will gather at the auditorium for talks, interviews, and meeting friends. For some of us this might be the first opportunity in a while to see NMV friends and for new members an opportunity to learn more about the NMV. This event will be something like a 'Family Day', just for us members. Our esteemed Patron, MR Chakrarat Chitrabongs, has very kindly accepted the invitation. Let us follow and come together – all are welcome! Let us see through our own eyes our role in Thai history and the active lives of our volunteers at the museum. Let us enjoy friends from all over the world, let us discover some secrets. It follows that a family day should be 'crowned' with delicious cuisine, for as you know: food connects people. So we are all invited to bring something for the 'potluck' lunch. Hmm, do you know how to spoil your friends? Sure! Don't hesitate to share with us your favourite dish, maybe representing your country or just an *hors d'oeuvre*? Send your registration by email to Annemarie: [nmvmembership@gmail.com](mailto:nmvmembership@gmail.com) as soon as possible.

For more information and updates please check our webpage: <http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net/html/footnotes2010.html>

See you soon at the Museum for the 'Footnotes in History' symposium.

Best Wishes,

Bo Mazur

## AT HOME

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### **'At Home' with Denise Tomecko Kailash: A Pilgrimage to Tibet's Sacred Mountain**

**Date:** TBA

**Time:** 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

**Place:** TBA

**Donation:** 200 Baht member; 400 Baht non-member

**Deadline:** TBA

**Contact:** NMVAtHomes@gmail.com

**Note:** Due to space restrictions, numbers are limited and places fill quickly. NMV Members will get priority. Reservations can be made by email only and each email will be acknowledged. Only those who have confirmed email reservations may attend the At Home presentation. Thank you for your understanding.

*In a lonely corner of Western Tibet, rising out of a desolate and rugged plain, lies Asia's most sacred mountain – Kailash. This pyramid of rock can be seen for miles around and has been a place of pilgrimage for thousands of years. It is an arduous journey of devotion in one of the highest places on earth. Mount Kailash has immense natural power, a place where the earthly and heavenly realms seem to touch, bringing the divine into view.*

*To Hindus, it is the abode of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati. For Buddhists, it is a natural mandala depicting the universe and for both it is a centre of Tantric power. In the shadow of the mountain is the exquisite lake of Manasarovar, said to have been born from the mind of Lord Brahma himself. Even for non-believers the sacred lake and mountain are breathtaking, like jewels in a magical land of light and impossible colour, in the rarefied air of 15,000 feet.*

*This is the story of one person's pilgrimage to the Sacred Lake and Mountain, walking the ancient pilgrims' route through western Nepal and across the Himalayas to Tibet. This is an insight into that journey, which changes lives and opens heart*

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Denise Tomecko is an avid traveler, a long time active member, NMV lecturer and Study Group presenter who continues to share with us her knowledge and understanding of Buddhism in the region. She will illustrate her talk with beautiful photos of her journey and be pleased to answer any of your questions.

Please join us – At Home with Denise Tomecko and Mt Kailash



# STUDY GROUP



## Southeast Asian Ceramics

- Dates:** Mondays, June 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th
- Time:** 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon
- Leaders:** John J.Toomey and Siew-Eng Koh
- Place:** South East Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University, Rangsit Campus

Following the very successful tour of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum last July, we are very pleased to announce that our next Study Group will be on Southeast Asian Ceramics. We are especially fortunate that the Museum has kindly agreed to host our meetings at their premises.

Participants will have the chance to examine the Museum's vast and wonderful collection of shards, view at close range its rich and exquisite collection of ceramics from Thailand and neighboring countries, and gain access to its library resources. Additionally, participants will hear experts K. Burin, Curator of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, and Walter Kassela, Researcher and Museum Volunteer speak.

Don't miss this very special "hands-on" opportunity to study, identify and appreciate Southeast Asian ceramics. The size of this group is limited. Please contact the study group co-ordinator Else Geraets at [else@asianet.co.th](mailto:else@asianet.co.th) to sign up.

Note: There is a regular connection by van from Victory Monument that brings participants easily to the South East Asian Ceramics Museum. Another option is the BTS Sky train to Mo Chit and from there by taxi. Participants will be informed about transportation.



*Under glaze black stem dish, 15<sup>th</sup> C  
Sukhothai-town kiln, Southeast  
Asian Ceramics Museum  
(photo by John Toomey)*



## NMV SPECIAL EVENT

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### Footnotes in History

#### A one day symposium looking at the NMV and its place in culture and history

**With our Patron, M.R. Chakrabort Chitrabongs, our President, Bo Mazur,  
NMV Legends and a Surprise Guest.**

- Date:** Thursday, 10th June 2010
- Time:** 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (lunch included)
- Location:** NMV Auditorium
- Note:** Free for all members; guests are also welcome
- Leader:** Anette Pollner, Chair of Monthly Programs at the NMV



When we learn about art and history, we often look at the big events, the big moments, the impressive and influential characters. Often, we feel that they are the ones that create and define culture – one particular culture, or all cultures.

But throughout time, the vast majority of humans were people like ourselves – living our lives, shaping as much of them as we can, and looking up to those big and famous people.

In reality, however, it is us, the 'little people', who carry the culture. We do it in many different ways, by listening, by watching, by imitating, by adapting, by refining and sometimes also by rejecting both traditions and new developments.

We turn the big ideas into everyday life, until they become the fabric of culture, and the fertile ground where the next big thing can grow.

This symposium is about us and for us.



The concept for this symposium arose from my three years as Chair of Monthly Programs, engaging with so many NMV members, and listening to so many fascinating talks, both by the experts on stage and by the experts in the audience. More and more I started looking forward to our famous 'Q&A sessions' and the exciting and intelligent contributions by our members. I also became interested in looking at the NMV as an entity and how it engages with the surrounding culture.

When you join the NMV, you do it out of interest in Thai culture and history. (And maybe you are also looking for new friends, friends who share this interest). By engaging in the activities of the NMV, you start to play a tiny 'cameo' part in history. You learn and absorb, and what you learn and absorb shapes your life, and your impact on others. In other words, if you were not here today, the history of the world would take a different turn.

Of course, if the NMV were not here, that would be an even bigger hole in the fabric of the universe...

The symposium will be structured in short interviews with experts from the NMV like our Patron and our President, and various other surprise guests. There will also be an opportunity for everybody to do some active research on the subject



in smaller sub-groups led by those experts. We are going to create an image of the NMV and its place in history, and a way to look at ourselves in a new and unexpected way.

In my title I playfully call us 'footnotes'. So where is the place of a footnote?

It is usually printed at the bottom of the page, the foundation and deep in firm ground on which everything else is built.

Join us for a day of exploring the stream of cultures through the valley of time.

I am looking forward to exploring it, playfully and very seriously, together with you, my fellow footnotes.





## THE ART OF THAI TEMPLE MURALS:

Report of An NMV Study Group, March and April, 2010

*This is the second of a series of articles prepared by participants of the recent Study Group 'The Art of Thai Temple Murals'. Part II is by Joyce Meer, with the third installment by Jean-Pierre Joly to follow next month.*

### PART II

#### Rattanakosin Era Mural Painting

by Joyce H. Meer

Mural painting during the Rattanakosin period experienced considerable evolution. In the beginning, it continued the styles, techniques and subjects of the Ayutthaya period. Gradually it evolved, so that by the Third Reign richer colors were used, foreign faces and bodies began to appear and first attempts at use of perspective can be seen. By the Fourth Reign, major changes appeared. No longer were artists confined to scenes from the life of the historic Buddha and from the Jataka tales. Well-known folk tales and Western scenes with allegorical meanings appeared. Mastery of perspective led to many scenes with horizons. Realistic body representations became frequent in contrast to the stiff stylized iconography of the past. These trends continued into the Fifth Reign and are seen in scenes taken from the life of



Rama V and his father, Rama IV. While traditional mural painting continued to exist, particularly in outlying regions, many contemporary murals would have been unrecognizable to artists from the beginning of the era.

First Reign. The early stage of mural painting was actually a continuation of the past. The style was airy and painted on light backgrounds. People

were portrayed in a manner reflecting their degree of spiritual advancement. Thus, royal beings were shown with profiled faces, arched eyebrows, a graceful eyelid, a narrow nose and a curving mouth. Bodhisattvas, queens and goddesses were depicted in three-quarter view. On the other hand, commoners were depicted acting naturally, even grotesquely. Perspective was not used as most scenes were viewed vertically.

As the Bangkok period progressed, its style of murals became characterized by the use of vivid colors, often highlighted by dark backgrounds and an abundance of gold. The murals of the Phutthaisawan Chapel in the grounds of the National Museum Bangkok are considered to be some of the most important examples of the First Reign. Other fine examples are in Wat Dusidaram and Wat Rakhang in Thonburi. These still have murals from the First Reign, showing the style and skills of late Ayutthaya painters. The limited use of color suggests they did not undergo major repainting when restored in the Third and Fourth Reigns, when newly imported pigments from China had become available.

A typical temple of the period would have murals depicting either the last life of the historical Buddha or the Jataka tales on the side walls between the windows. On the wall behind the principal image would be a large scale depiction of the Triphum and on the opposite wall facing the principal image, a scene depicting Victory over Mara. On the side walls over the windows would be rows showing the Celestial Assembly and at the top, rishis and gandharvas. This use of narrative probably had been in effect for around 150 to 200 years by this time.



As already mentioned, some of the finest examples of this early period are the murals in the Phutthaisawan Chapel at the National Museum. The murals follow the traditional inspiration of the last life of the historical Buddha on all four walls and, uncharacteristically, include Victory over Mara in one of the scenes between windows. Also, a representation of the Three Worlds is not included. However, the walls above the windows contain three registers of the traditional Celestial Adorers with the upper register separated by a saw tooth band and containing the rishis and the gandharvas. Also somewhat

uncharacteristic is the inclusion of Western figures in some of the scenes as well as considerable use of darker colors than was typical of Ayutthaya murals. These latter characteristics lead some to suggest changes might have been made

during Third Reign restoration. (It is believed many First Reign murals underwent restoration during the Third Reign. Unfortunately, there is no written record of this activity).

One additional example of early Rattanakosin mural painting to consider is the scripture library at Wat Rakhang, on the banks of the Chao Phraya opposite the Grand Palace. This structure was originally the house of Rama I before he became

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King. He donated it to the temple where it eventually became a library and has been extremely well maintained. On its wooden walls in its center room and retiring room are original murals which contain scenes which depict the Ramakien, the Three Worlds and scenes from the early life of Indra. The original murals are attributed to Phra Archan Nak.

Second Reign. Rama II was famous for his interest in Thai culture. Theatre and literature flourished during his reign. He was not very active in ordering the building of temples. Thus, the painting of murals was very few.

Third Reign. This period became the classical period of Thai mural painting, the Golden Age. Some of the best examples of these fine mural paintings are evident in the murals of Wat Suthat found on the large square pillars inside the Sri Sakiyama image hall as well as in Wat Thong Thammarachat and Wat Suwannaram, both in Thonburi.

The content of the murals on the long walls between the window openings in the ordination hall of Wat Suwannaram illustrate the stories from the Jataka of the previous incarnations of the life of the Lord Buddha. These were painted by this reign's best muralists in a professional competition with each other.

The story of Nimi Jataka was painted by Kru Khong Yu and the Mahosadha Jataka by Kru Khong Pae. These two painters also painted in the ordination hall of Wat Arun Ratchawaran, unfortunately destroyed by fire. In addition, they competed with one another in murals at Wat Bang Yi Khan and Wat Daowadueng (both in Thonburi).

One of the more distinctive techniques in the Wat Suwannaram murals is shown in the main figures in the Sama Jataka which appear to be gently floating out of the mural. To achieve this lovely effect the mural ground was first painted in dense shade colours after which the human figures were drawn over it. Colour was then applied to these figures with gold leaf in some cases. In addition, the Sama bay reveals the artist's attachment to realism. The forest brook has flowering plants and grasses along its banks. It runs on into the distance, passing thickets of shrubs on its long journey.

Another characteristic of Third Reign murals is the use of landscape, buildings and "wavy" lines to separate scenes, replacing the traditional sawtooth technique. In addition, the depiction of "common people" at the bottom of a scene often would illustrate "human interest" activities, including mildly erotic episodes and depictions



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of human weaknesses. Also during the Third Reign one finds many murals exhibiting strong Chinese influence. One example of this is Wat Molilogayaram, also in Thonburi.

Fourth Reign. The most significant event in Thai mural painting during the Fourth Reign can be traced to the closeness between King Mongkut and master painter Khrua In Khong. Prior to ascending the throne, Rama IV was a leading monk at Wat Bowoniwet where Khrua In Khong also was in the monkhood. As such, he would have been exposed to the King's desire for the modernization of Thailand as a means of forestalling the colonial aspirations of the Western powers.



The result of this was the painting of temple murals which broke sharply from past practices. When King Mongkut built or restored a wat, he usually had Khrua In Khong paint the murals in it. While his initial work drew on conventional subjects and techniques, his murals in Wat Bowoniwet and Wat Boromniwat departed from tradition and brought the artist enormous fame. His murals in these temples express Buddhist teachings in the form of allegories and utilize Western settings and peoples to tell the story. Different as they may be, they must have reflected the religious thinking of King Mongkut.

Khrua In Khong's painting differed in many respects from past muralists. He often had his whole story contained in a single panel (rather than several scenes in the same panel). His depictions of nature were typically realistic. He is considered by some to be the first Thai to adopt a true three dimensional perspective technique. Whereas contemporary muralists were taking advantage of the availability of new colors from China, Khrua In Khong tended to a monochromatic color scheme, avoiding contrasting colors, to produce a harmonious effect. Backgrounds often were dark, with males dressed in dark colors but with females dressed in light blue or pink resulting in the ladies looking soft and gentle.

In many ways the realism of the Western scenes in

Khrua In Khong's paintings is remarkable, given the fact that he never visited the West, only having access to pictorial representations received from abroad.

The *ubosot* of Wat Bowoniwet contains six columns running lengthwise down each side of the hall. The religious meaning of each column is indicated by the background color of the column which shows the state of the heart of the people depicted on the column. For example, black is the background color of the first column and it indicates the people depicted are engaged in unmeritorious

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activities. The fifth column, with an off-white background, indicates people who have discarded their earthly occupations and are bent solely on seeking spiritual salvation. One traditional technique maintained by Khrua In Khong on these columns is covering important figures with gold leaf.

The lower level of the walls of the *ubosot* contain murals depicting various scenes connected with the Buddhist activities and customs of the people. For example, the first murals contain scenes depicting aspects of an ordination ceremony. Other panels show scenes of the general activities of the daily routine of the Wat.

Perhaps the most celebrated murals painted by Khrua In Khong in the *ubosot* are scenes on the walls over the windows and doors. These scenes are all distinctly European in style and character. Each scene symbolizes in allegory a virtue of the Buddha, the Dhamma and/or the Sangha. The scenes are of everyday occurrences, but upon careful study, can be understood to contain a Buddhist message. For example, the first scene shows doctors tending patients, signifying the Buddha as the cleanser of evils from the sick spirits of men. The ability of Khrua In Khong to so realistically capture European scenes is indeed remarkable. According to records of the Wat, the

idea for the murals was King Rama IV's when he was the abbot.

Another important Fourth Reign Wat which was influenced directly by Rama IV is Wat Pathumwanaram (Wat Pathum), located on Rama I road and which today is in the midst of modern shopping centers. However, when Rama IV built this temple it was outside the city wall. Wat Pathum was built as a King's place of refuge, where he could get away from his daily routine, take some pleasant relaxation and enjoy the company of the royal family. The King would arrive by boat along the Saen Saeb Canal.



The murals in Wat Pathum tell the folk story of Sri Thananchai, which is an old story of a crafty and ingenious court jester. There

is said to be a Laotian version of Sri Thananchai, perhaps a Chiang Mai one as well. Some confuse him with Sri Prat, a great poet from the Ayutthaya period. Regardless, Sri Thananchai was only a court jester. His stories are told throughout Thailand, showing him to never be at a loss to deal with the problems he encounters or to lack the wit which has made him so famous. The story was depicted in the murals and was intended as relaxation for the viewers.

The mural paintings of Wat Pathum reflect the people's way of life, their

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dress and the history of the period. They also testify to the peaceful way of life enjoyed by the Siamese people in the reign of Rama IV. As with many Fourth Reign murals, many scenes incorporate Western people and architecture. Wat Pathum murals, however, are considered to have the finest renderings of the atmosphere and landscape, with some uses of colors considered to be more advanced than those in Europe at the time. They are among the finest examples of Thai paintings of the time.

Wat Somanat also was built under the patronage of Rama IV. Wat Somanat artists departed from tradition by omitting the life of the Buddha and the Jatakas and instead painted a rarely seen folk story, that of Inao, a literary work of Rama II.

These mural paintings use Western perspective devices to show distance with realistic landscapes with pale horizons and a gradually darkening sky above. Distance is distinguished through variations in the size of objects. Trees near to the viewer are larger, those further away gradually diminish in size. Light and shadow become gradually blurred as distance increases according to the principles of perspective. Representing tall trees with straight trunks was a novelty when these paintings were produced. They replaced the sinuous, twisting Chinese style. Trees

painted further away were painted in faded colors and of smaller sizes to suggest depth according to the new mode of perspective. In traditional Thai painting, water was represented with rippling lines, but in the Fourth Reign water was drawn naturalistically. This new approach to landscape painting reflected the art fashion of the day.

Fifth Reign. The innovations introduced in the Fourth Reign continued and became more popular in the Fifth Reign and continued throughout the reigns of Rama VI and VII. During the Fourth and Fifth Reigns, mural themes often were taken from history or even the present, rather than solely from Buddhist legend.



Among the examples of Fifth Reign mural paintings are those at Phra Thinang Songphanuat at Wat Benchamabophit and those at the *ubosot* of Wat Rachapradit.

The murals in the *ubosot* at Wat Rachapradit depict the Royal Ceremonies of the twelve months of the year. These ceremonies and festivities are a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist belief and belong to each month of the old Thai lunar calendar. The murals were begun during the reign of Rama IV and finished in the Fifth Reign. They reflect stories written by Rama V from notes made by his father, King Mongkut. Also, there is a panel near

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the entrance showing King Mongkut observing the lunar eclipse in 1868 in the South of Thailand.

Phra Thinang Songphanuat (The Royal Ordination Building) was originally a residence built for Rama V when he entered the monkhood and was located on the grounds of the Grand Palace. Later, the King had it moved to Wat Benchamabophit where it contains several monks' residences (*Kutis*), a central dining pavilion and a residence for the senior monk. Murals at Phra Thinang Songphanuat depict events during the reigns of Rama IV and Rama V (focusing on Rama V) and portray historical happenings, traditional customs and royal ceremonies. These paintings are considered to have been markedly influenced by the Western style. Interestingly, the ubosot of Wat Benchamabophit contains murals which broadly follow the customary Buddhist themes and layout of temple mural painting.

An important mural artist of the Fifth Reign was Than Tong, one of whose masterpieces was Wat Poramayikawas, where he served not only as artist but also as architect and interior decorator, thereby creating a total harmony of design. His murals consisted of Buddhist-themed paintings and included the thirteen ascetic practices for monks as well as scenes from the life of the Buddha. Many of these murals contain an interesting blend of traditional techniques with the more modern western influences; and it is for this that they are best known. An example would be a mural blending European style buildings with figures of monks and lay people in traditional Thai costume.

Sixth Reign. A fine example of Sixth Reign murals are those in the *ubosot* of Wat Rakhang (also the location of the Rama I home mentioned above). The murals traditionally feature the Jataka tales and were painted by Phra Wanwadwichit, who was well known in the sixth reign. An interesting feature of these murals is the renovation effort, which was undertaken by Italian experts and has resulted in the murals being set on panels which are set out slightly from the wall of the *ubosot*. They are currently in very good condition.

Seventh Reign. A series of temple murals from the Seventh Reign are those in Wat Suwandaram. Uniquely, these were painted in oil on a prepared wall. They tell the story of King Naresuan from his childhood until his death. Instead of the traditional Victory over Mara, the mural in front of the principal Buddha image depicts the scene of a historical combat on elephants, while those behind the principal image depict figures of deva in flight. These paintings are on a grand scale with the figures being life size.

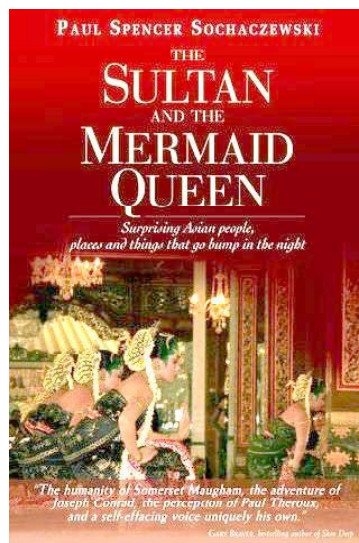
Clearly, murals in the Rattanakosin era evolved, both in subject matter and technique. Certain traditional practices, particularly use of Buddhist-related subject matter, continued throughout the period, while in certain locations new sources of inspiration were found. Thailand is fortunate to be home to many temples and, therefore, many superb examples of the genius of the Thai mural painter. Readers are encouraged to do their own exploration. They will be well rewarded.



## BOOK REVIEW

### ***The Sultan and the Mermaid Queen: Surprising Asian People, Places and Things that Go Bump in the Night***

by Paul Spencer Sochaczewski



Asia is an endlessly curious place, according to Paul Sochaczewski, where unusual people engage in surprising behavior that sometimes defies rational explanation.

Sochaczewski's latest book, *The Sultan and the Mermaid Queen*, takes the reader on a voyage of discovery to places most people will never visit. In fact, his stories unveil situations and characters most of us never imagined. As long-time Bangkok resident Harry Rolnick, author of *The Chinese Gourmet*, and *Spice Chronicles*, notes: "What a discovery: That rarest of writers, he has discovered an eternal assemblage of arcane explorers, putative emperors, frivolous mystics, sacrosanct elephants, and, yes, miracle workers; a book for everyone who knows that the Mysterious East is alive and well."

The *Sultan and the Mermaid Queen* includes a selection of some 70 of the more than 600 articles Sochaczewski has published in the International Herald

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Tribune, GQ, CNN Traveller, Wall Street Journal, Travel and Leisure and Geographical.

The anthology includes “bump in the night” tales of dragon princesses, ‘lightning teeth’ and ‘dinosaur fishes,’ as well as profiles of unsung heroes stretching from Bhutan to Borneo to Komodo Island.

Readers will meet the last elephant hunter of Vietnam, a man who has reached the celebrity status of Michael Jordan through his commercial product endorsements, and a homeless man in Hawaii who has the résumé to prove that he’s the *real* last Emperor of China. In another piece we learn how Alfred Russel Wallace, a 19th Century British naturalist, might have a better claim to the theory of natural selection than Charles Darwin. We discover how to bargain for good luck on ‘Amulet Island’ in the Philippines. Yet another captivating story tells of Indian villagers who are as angry at one of their more popular gods because the deity absconded with one of the local mountains.

Sochaczewski, whose other books include *Soul of the Tiger*, *Eco-Bluff Your Way to Instant Environmental Credibility*, and *Redheads*, has been a resident of Thailand since 2007. Bangkok residents may be familiar with his regular lectures at the National Museum and Siam Society, and the various creative writing workshops he holds with NMV and the Neilson Hays Library.

Wannabe writers could do worse than examine how Sochaczewski constructs his stories. *The Sultan and the Mermaid Queen* is an example of creative non-fiction, a genre made popular by Tom Wolfe and Truman Capote – telling the truth in an interesting way.

Some of the stories appear light-hearted (trained jumping cats in Burma) but Sochaczewski generally uses a quirky scene as a jumping-off point to make bigger points, like examining the depth of Buddhist faith in the trained-feline tale.

Some of the reportage is serious. The author relates the politically Byzantine true story of Bruno Manser, a ‘Swiss Robin Hood,’ who mysteriously disappeared in Malaysian Borneo in 2000 while encouraging the semi-nomadic Penan tribe to fight against timber operators who were decimating the tribe’s ancestral forest home.

The title of the book reflects one of the longer pieces in the book, an Indonesian love story centuries old but still widely celebrated in central Java. Sochaczewski interviewed the Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX of Yogyakarta about his love affair with the Mermaid Queen, the Goddess of the South Seas.

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One of the best bits of philosophy in the whole book comes from the late sultan who said, “You can’t always ask a western question to an Asian situation. You may believe the story or not, but don’t always try to analyze with your Cartesian mind.”

This seems to be a guiding principle in this book – encouraging the reader to “switch modes” as one character says. Reflecting the fact that things aren’t always black and white Sochaczewski writes in layers – like a curry – adding a touch of history, a sprinkle of mythology, a philosophical insight, a clutch of (always relevant) trivia, and even a smidgen of geopolitics.

Sochaczewski maintains a healthy level of self-deprecation and modesty. He avoids the temptation of making excessive observations about the people he profiles. He lets the reader judge for him or herself.

Perhaps the author himself says it best: “Good travel writing shines a little beam of light on both the writer and the subject, and makes an attempt to put things in context, even if that context is a movable feast. I like to look into the fog, and slowly try to discern shapes, relationships, and, if I’m lucky, a bit of meaning. But sometimes all that can be seen is the fog, so I describe the miasma. Sometimes *meaning* is a bonus. Or, as Picasso put it more elegantly, ‘when I run out of red I use blue.’”

Finally, this is good reporting. Paul doesn’t write about wars and famines – his human-news stories are sometimes less obvious. He was the only journalist to report on how a Borneo longhouse successfully sued Big Timber and the government to reclaim their tribal lands. He was one of the first journalists to write about Hobbits in Indonesia, and helped alert the public to the environmental dangers of miracle rice and decimation of turtles in eastern Indonesia.

Singapore: Editions Didier Millet 2009, ISBN-10: 9814217743, 372 pages

Available at Asia Books, Kinokuniya and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

# EXCURSION

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## Heritage Tour of the Oriental Hotel

- Date:** Wednesday, 16 June 2010
- Time:** 9:45 a.m. – 12:00 noon
- Location:** Mandarin Oriental Hotel
- Donation:** Members 600 Baht / Non-members 900 baht
- Reservation:** Aviva Biran: biranaviva@gmail.com  
Please advise your mobile phone no. when booking  
Prepayment required
- Deadline:** 11 June or when filled

The world renowned Oriental Bangkok is the oldest hotel in Bangkok. During the reign of King Rama IV, when Thailand opened up to trade as a result of the Bowring treaty, two Danish sea captains saw the need for a hotel by the Chao Phraya to cater to the seafarers and traders who sailed upriver.

Since then the hotel has undergone many changes, but has remained one of the important landmarks in Bangkok. Throughout the years many famous writers stayed at the hotel producing some of their best known works: Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Noel Coward became the founding fathers of the famous Author's Wing in the hotel.

In order to learn more about this hotel's significance in Bangkok's history, the NMV has organized a special heritage tour of the Oriental Bangkok. We will be welcomed by Khun Susie, the Oriental's Director of Public Relations. In the Authors' Lounge or Regency Room (depending on availability) a historical talk will be given by American-born author Harold Stephens. An explorer, adventurer and writer of dozens of travel articles and books, Stephens has made Asia and the Pacific his passion and home. We are honoured to have Mr. Stephens share his experiences and knowledge with us.

A tour of the hotel's different wings will follow and morning tea/coffee will be served.

This excursion provides a unique opportunity to learn more about the long and fascinating history of this celebrated hotel.



## EXCURSIONS POLICY

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Participating in NMV excursions is a benefit of being a member. An NMV member may be accompanied by a non-member if they are family or a house guest (maximum of 2), space permitting.\*

### **Bookings**

- Always make reservations by email to the organiser listed in the announcement.
- Please provide your name, mobile number plus membership status of you and guest(s).\*
- You are not registered until your request has been received by email and an acknowledgement has been sent to you in writing.
- Reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis.
- By making a booking, you are committing to pay in full for your place.
- If full payment is requested prior to an excursion and has not been received, the organisers retain the right to pass your place to another person.
- Often an excursion announcement will give a booking deadline. If full, the trip may close and be finalised before this date.
- Until the excursion organiser is actually in receipt of your payment, you are not considered to have paid.
- The NMV reserves the right to cancel an excursion if enough members do not sign up.

### **Cancellations**

- Your payment indicates your intention to travel. If you cancel, there will not be a refund.
- If you cannot attend an excursion, please notify the organiser immediately.
- If you cancel your booking, unpaid fees are considered a debt owed to the NMV. We regret that no further bookings can be made until this debt is cleared.

### **WAIVER OF LIABILITY**

*The NMV will not provide personal insurance for excursion participants. The Museum Group's Excursions are an activity of the National Museum Volunteers, which is a non-profit organization and is not a professional travel service. It cannot be held responsible for any injury, loss, or damage that may occur during any excursion, although the Museum Group's Excursions will make reasonable efforts to provide for the safety of participants.*

# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Please complete all details on this form and mail to the address below with a crossed cheque of 1,200 Baht for residents in Thailand (1,800 Baht for couple) or **2,000 Baht** or **US \$60** (for cheques drawn on a US bank) for an overseas subscription, made payable to **NATIONAL MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS**. *We regret Postal Orders cannot be accepted.*

**MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON**  
**National Museum Volunteers**  
**P. O. Box 1305, Nana Post Office**  
**Bangkok 10112**

Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: (First name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Family name) \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE USE CAPITALS)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Nationality \_\_\_\_\_

New Member                       Renewal                       Change of Address

Cash: \_\_\_\_\_ Cheque Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Bank Name & Cheque No: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please indicate if you would like to volunteer in any of the following:*

Guiding       Newsletter Contribution       Library       Slide Library  
 Editing       Computer Skills       Publication       Hospitality  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Membership entitles you to:

- > Attend the guiding workshop to train to become a museum guide.
- > Participate in study groups.
- > Enjoy discounted fees and preference on local and out-of-country excursions, at homes and lectures.
- > Receive the NMV monthly newsletter
- > Use the NMV library (Possibility to borrow books)

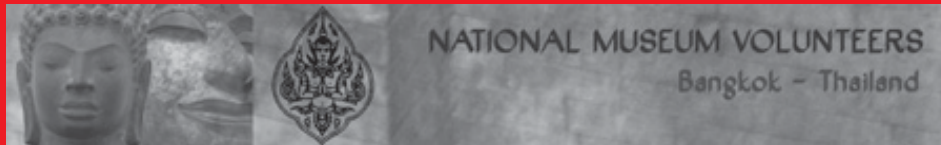


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\* Executive committee members

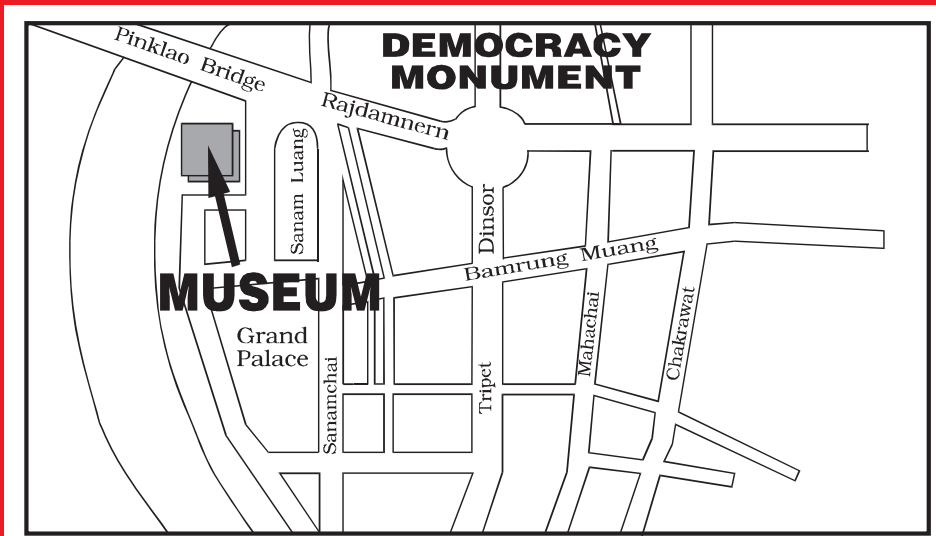


[www.museumvolunteersbkk.net](http://www.museumvolunteersbkk.net)

### **National Museum Volunteers**

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**The National Museum Bangkok is located on**

Naphrathat Road (ถนนหน้าพระธาตุ)  
between the National Theatre and Thammasat University,  
across from the Sanam Luang