



NEWS

Bangkok No. 5 May 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:

Nat Festival Procession
in Myanmar
(Else Geraets)

NB: see article on page 21

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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

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: Buddhaisawan 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



May 19 Excursion – *“Heritage Tour of the Oriental Hotel”*

May 25 At Home – *“Mt. Kailash: Tibet’s Sacred Mountain”*

June 4 NMV Guides Social Event

June 10 Special Event – *“Footnotes in History”*

Please Note: The Study Group ‘Southeast Asian Ceramics’ is being rescheduled, with the Orientation now expected in May and meeting dates following in June. Please refer to the website for announcement of the new dates.

For further details regarding upcoming NMV events, please see announcements in this newsletter or check the **NMV website:** www.museumvolunteersbkk.net



NOTICES

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.

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



MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

Following the annual Songkran festival celebrated across the country, our dynamic team is back and ready to go!

Early in April the NMV participated in the U.S. Embassy's Spring orientation for new mission members – a good opportunity to meet future NMV members!

We were very pleased to have a lot of events at the end of the month: a very original French lecture about "Buddhism and different influences on religious painting" by Martine Mauffrey and Jean-Pierre Joly, followed the next day by the "Iconography of Emancipation from the Body" by Dr Vittorio Roveda.

Our respected Patron M.R. Chakrarat Chitrabongs gave us the great pleasure to welcome our members twice to **Baan Plainern**, the former home of HRH Prince Naris, son of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), and the grandfather of NMV Patron M.R. Chakrarat Chitrabongs. It is always a great excursion, learning about the history of our Patron's family.

Many thanks to all of you who participated in those events! We hope you enjoyed and discovered a lot about the culture and the history of Thailand.

Unfortunately the current demonstrations have forced us to postpone or rearrange certain events. We hope to announce new dates for the Study Group 'Southeast Asian Ceramics' in the near future. During this time we want to be sure that NMV events are organized in convenient places for our members.

This month our freshly minted guides from the English, German and French Guiding Workshops will begin welcoming National Museum visitors on their first guided tours. We wish them a good start and that all will enjoy sharing the treasures of the National Museum with our foreign visitors. Many congratulations to all new guides for their work, their tenacity and their enthusiasm in their new role!

News from the Steering Committee: we are happy to welcome Martine Mauffrey to Co-Chair of 'Study Groups' with Else Geraets, and the new Japanese Liaison member Yuki Kurosaki who replaced Naomi Nomoto – thank you, Naomi, for your contributions!

If you would like to share your talents, please don't hesitate to consider supporting the NMV Steering Committee with your original ideas and your dynamism for the benefit of all NMV members.

Best Wishes,

Isabelle Depaty



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

- Date:** Tuesday, 25 May 2010
- Time:** 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
- Place:** Siam City Hotel
(Si Ayuthaya Rd at Phaya Thai intersection)
Closest BTS: Phaya Thai Station (Exit 4) just across the road.
- Donation:** 200 Baht member; 400 Baht non-member
- Deadline:** Latest Friday 21 May 2010 or when all places filled
- 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

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

- Orientation:** TBA
- Dates:** Being rescheduled
- 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 to sign up.



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



NMV SPECIAL EVENT

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 first of a series of articles that will be published by the NMV News, prepared by participants of the recent Study Group 'The Art of Thai Temple Murals'. Part I is by John Toomey, to be followed by articles from Joyce Meer and Bill Lipsey and Jean-Pierre Joly.

PART I: NOTES ON HISTORY AND TECHNIQUE OF MURALS TO ENHANCE YOUR GUIDING

by John J. Toomey

Introduction

In early 2010, the NMV Study Groups Chairwoman, Else Geraets, and the two co-leaders for the proposed study group on Thai Temple Murals, Joyce Meer and Bill Lipsey, and I laid out the plans for what proved to be a most fruitful adventure into a special realm of Thai painting during March and April. During the course of our study, Joyce and Bill set out the program for our study with an overview orientation and an introduction to the Rattanakosin style of murals. Charlotte Faucherand introduced us to the style of Ayutthaya with her in-depth research; and I provided background on the history and the techniques of painting, preservation and restoration. Jimmy Sanchez followed up with the ten



Jataka Tales and Victoria Kudriavtseva with the life of the historical Buddha, both presenters using illustrations from the temple murals.

Wilfried Giessler explained the esoteric intricacies of the Traiphum and Patricia Habberjam showed us how to distinguish the special mural iconographies for the Buddha, bodhisattvas, nobles, commoners, etc. Jean-Perre Joly

led us away from the capital to the regional differences in the murals of the North where Lanna murals are often painted on wood, the special murals of Wat Phumin full of local color which have a political message, Isan where even the exteriors of temples often are painted and where some communities carry "portable murals" on cloth in processions,

and the South, while Sharon Goldhawk spoke of the new styles of the contemporary mural artists.

Joyce and Bill led us to our first half-day study trip by river boat to examine actual murals at Wat Rakhang where they had researched the unique murals on the wooden Hor Trai (Sutra Library) and its ubosoth's unusual 6th Reign murals by Phra Wanwadwichit, much influenced by western neo-classical style perspective and drawing techniques from Italian models, and in 2007 painstakingly peeled from the walls and re-mounted on panels standing out from the walls, in an effort to better preserve them. They also guided us through Wat Suwannaram's 3rd Reign murals, showing the beginnings of Chinese and western influence in murals by the two masters ThongYu and KongPae. On our final day, Khun Chumporn took us again by river boat to three Ayutthaya gems. First, at the elegant Wat Thong Nopphakhun, she pointed out how to date some of the murals to the 3rd Reign by the awkward attempts at perspective and vanishing point. Others from the 4th Reign were painted by a student of Khrua In Kong. Second, at Wat Thong Tammachat, deep burgundy and dark green used for the background behind the Buddha place the present murals in Rattanakosin. She showed many examples of Sin-thao--zig-zag "space

transformers". The bamboo fence as a scene divider when the first rice for Buddha is cooked may show some Chinese influence. Narrow pierced-work fret wooden vents added between the murals and the marble facing above the floor show attempts to preserve the murals from further damage from the climate. Lastly, at Wat Dusidaram, she showed us where the single mouse whisker brush was used to draw in very fine-line decoration in screens (flowers, etc.) and patterns on people's clothing, the lines of eyes, moustaches, mouths, on noble figures, who always sit with one knee raised in "royal-ease position" lalitsana; and she helped us to date some renovations to the 3rd Reign by the blue pigment that was only just then starting to be imported from China. We noted here large louvre-shaped wooden vents added under the murals, flush to the floor, in an attempt at preservation.

One lesson that we always come back to was that among the very best murals in all of Thailand are the ones in our very own Buddhaisawan Chapel at the National Museum Bangkok; so we are very fortunate, indeed, to be able to guide some of the very best murals in the world's artistic heritage. We hope that the following articles will enhance our NMV members' understanding of Thai Temple Murals in general when they guide.

Background of History and Technique

Thai mural painting was developed to a high degree in temples to enhance the beauty of the sacred area. Murals are usually found in the temple's ordination halls (bot) and assembly halls (*viharn*) and are still used by monks as teaching aids, evoking a tranquil atmosphere of meditation. Typically, the paintings on the upper section represent a gathering of celestials in rows, whereas those on the middle of the walls depict Jataka stories, or the

events and incidents in the life of the Buddha before and after his enlightenment, usually including scenes of everyday Thai life of people and animals in town, village and forest in the lowest registers. The walls of the

entrance, opposite the main Buddha image, typically depict the Subduing of Mara, and the back wall, behind the principal Buddha image, shows the Traiphum, the Buddhist cosmology of heaven (world of formlessness), earth (world of form), and hell (world of desire), the shocking details of the karmic sufferings of the last in striking contrast to the tranquility of the Buddha image. One may observe subtle differences in the themes of the murals. Nonetheless, they all relate to Buddhism in some way or form. In some murals, scenes of

royal ceremonies, depictions of everyday life, local myths and even the history of the country can be seen. Some mural paintings exhibit a broad lustful humor even in the most revered of scenes, an indication of the artists' sense of humor. In one way or another, the Thai paintings transport one to the mythical and fantastic realms where divinities, fabulous beasts and spirits act out their roles.



Nemi Jataka, Wat Rakhong

Joyce Meer notes these following exceptions in themes: King Mongkut, Rama IV of Rattanakosin, wished to expose Thailand to western ideas, including new painting materials and styles, and through his

friend, the monk and master painter Krua In Khong, brought about a sudden change in the style of mural paintings. Besides using central perspective, vanishing point, etc., he painted scenes to be interpreted allegorically. In what appears to be just a western painting there are hidden messages of the teachings of Buddha, Dhamma, etc. Wat Pathumwanaram tells a folk story of Sri Thananchai, which is an old story of a crafty and ingenious court jester. The story was used to convey a moral message and to entertain. The

murals at Wat Somanat tell the story of Inao, a literary work of Rama II which was originally an Indonesian tale. The ubosot of Wat Rajapradit show festivities and Royal Ceremonies of the twelve months of the Thai Lunar calendar. The murals at Phra Thinang Songphanuat, where Rama V had spent his monkhood, on the grounds of Wat Benchamabophit, focus on the events during the times of Rama IV and Rama V. A master painter Phraya Anusarn Chitrakorn painted western style in oils, using western perspective and chiaroscuro at

Wat Suwandaram, illustrating the historical narrative of the deeds performed by King Naresuan. There are mural painting done in the Chinese style which include auspicious symbols and the articles of the

literati scholar. The paintings show the strong Chinese influence beginning with the 3rd Reign; and the most unusual of them, because they are painted in *kammalor*, a technique using colored lacquer, not tempera, are in Wat Ratcha Orot.

We are hard pressed to find examples of painting older than those from Ayuddhya times, though a few fragments do exist from Sukhothai, notably from the secondary Chedi Jet Teow in Si Satchanalai, suggest-

ing that an indigenous approach in refined monochrome linear expression was already being developed along the lines of Sukhothai sculpture. The oldest drawing from the Lanna Period is a Jataka in the cellar tunnel of Wat U-Mong done in the 15th century, on the Thai-Burmese border at the foot of Doi-Suthep-Pui Mountain, near Chiangmai.

TRADITIONAL THAI PAINTING WAS TYPICAL OF ASIA – Conventional perspective was ignored and figures

were large or small depending on their importance. The following characteristics are found in the painting styles of China, Korea, Japan, and India, as well as Thailand: Shadows were unknown and spatial distance was suggested

by the relative placement of figures and overlapping of architectural details. Figures were two dimensional and landscapes were merely sketchy backdrops. One remarkable technique of pictorial composition called “apportioning areas” was employed as a technique to arrange the picture. This is comparable to the “bird’s eye view” of Western painting. There is a strict iconography of rank expressed by the angle of the profile and the use of fine lines known as “hook for nose and jot for eye”.



Celebration at Conception fo Vessantara, Wat Thong Nopphakhun

When starting a Thai mural, the artist left a space for the main story, which was bordered by *sen phlaeng*, which could be a heavy or gray line. After the pictures of the palace and the forest were drawn, the artist drew pictures of the people and the story in the appropriate positions. Decorative *sin thao*, saw-tooth or zigzag lines, were drawn around each of the scenes in the same frame as “space transformers”, effectively isolating the scenes from considerations of perspective by doing away with any surrounding intermediate or middle ground. Later a more sophisticated use of palace roofs and crenellations, shrubs, rocks, or lines of people or processions of animals or military was used for such “space transformers”. Alternatively, the artist used mountains or trees as borders not only to separate scenes or episodes of the story and but also to unify them. Thus, we see continuous, flowing panoramas of places, palaces, towns, events and country landscapes with real and mythical people or creatures. In Siam, landscape never had the symbolic meaning it had for the Chinese, though, and was allocated as work for the apprentices to do as simply a necessary background to the all-important



Khun Chomporn with Guardians, Wat Thong Thammachat

narrative. Even so, in the finishing touches, the involvement of the master is often seen, even in the landscape background, such as details of leaves, so intricate that one can identify the species of tree, and in landscape elements that complement the body contours and poses of the figures. This practice served to highlight key deities and aristocrats in the narrative. The concave curve of

the body, echoed by the bend of a tree or outline of a rock probably derives from the *tribhanga* S-curve pose imported with the Indian style of sculpture.

Thai mural artists depicted human figures according to a definite organization of styles ranked according to their level of spiritual attainment. Buddhas often face the viewer

straight on. Those of the highest order of nobility were portrayed in profile with an arched eyebrow like an inverted comma; a graceful, elongated lotiform eyelid; a narrow aquiline nose with full nostrils; a curving moustache above thick, slightly pursed lips shaped like a boat; and two notches on the chin. Such fine details called for a brush made of a single mouse whisker. Such nobles pose frozen in the postures of Thai classical dance or seated with one knee up in the royal-ease position

lalitsana. Bodhisattvas, queens and goddesses, whose features are also soft, tranquil, and youthful, were usually depicted in $\frac{3}{4}$ view, with eyes lowered and a faint smile, and also float as if dancing. Commoners and animals were portrayed naturally or even grossly and without controlling their emotions and were shown as awkward and sometimes licentious buffoons.

PREPARATION AND TECHNIQUE –

The Thai painter strove to be worthy by practicing patience and devotion to his religious calling. Whether monk or layman, he was highly respected and his apprentice was expected to show his loyalty to his master in the annual ceremony of *wai khru* (bowing respect to the master) to honor the masters of past generations as well. The apprentice carried out the menial chores like grinding the pigments, before being allowed to color in the background, and later slowly learned the ways of the profession. When he died, a master's brushes, sketch books, mortars, pestles, and other tools were highly venerated by his family.

The first step is to wash the mineral salts away from the walls with extract from the pulverised leaves of the *khi-lek* (Siamese Cassia) or neem tree,

combined with desalinated lime-water, fine sand and sugar, each morning for one or two weeks, until they are completely clean. This is tested by rubbing *khamin* (Thai turmeric) on the walls. If the walls are salt-free, the turmeric will leave a yellow hue instead of red.

Next, white clay or *din sor pong* is boiled with glue made from buffalo skin, making a most powerful paste. Alternatively, white chalk mixed with a binding paste of roasted tamarind seeds can be used. Several coats of



*Garuda with Celestials,
Wat Thong Nopphakhun*

the mixture are applied on the walls. When dry, the walls are scrubbed with a whetstone until smooth, like a white board ready to take the ink of the master artist's sketches. The master outlines the composition,

often using a stylus and red wash for the figures, for the apprentice to fill in later with colors. Skilful painters do not need to draw outlines and Siamese artists preferred to judge measures by eye and thumbnail rather than follow a tedious procedure. Another method was to copy lines on Thai *sa* paper and stencil the pattern on the surface, then use charcoal to define the outlines before applying colour.

This time-consuming process of preparing the wall is, unfortunately, not

durable, as the majority of murals have perished in the tropical humidity and rains due to the dampness lingering in them. Also, the walls are constructed of brick and stucco; and, when the interior walls are painted, the original plaster just described is first treated with a sand and lime coating, serving as a base for subsequent layers of fine plaster. A final coat of sifted sand, earth, and lime, combined with an adhesive to hold the pigments is applied to the last coat of dry plaster. Because the colors are applied to a dry wall, unlike the European technique of wet-wall fresco which would allow for deep penetration, the priming and, more frequently, the pigment itself can “bubble” and flake off from a dry wall in the humid climate. Thus, the very structure of the walls themselves contributed to the destruction of the murals.

COLORS AND BRUSHES – The earliest surviving murals are characterized by earth colors made from natural pigments. The *bot* murals of Wat Yai Suwannaram in Petchaburi, dating from the 17th century are well preserved as are those in the lower crypt of Wat Ratchaburana in Ayutthaya, which are actually frescoes dating from 1424. The traditional Thai painter had five primary pigments: the close equivalent of scarlet from red ochre or cinnabar, yellow ochre, ultramarine blue, pipe-clay white from chalk, and pot-black from soot. There were also greens from certain leaves or malachite and gold from gold leaf. With these he was able to produce many other

colors. Prior to the 18th century, indigo and other powdered pigments were also sometimes imported from China, while other natural colors were taken from the clay of riverbeds. All were tempera colors, finely ground powders extracted from natural materials such as rocks, soil or wood and mixed in bowls with a resin called *makhwit* (*Feronia elephantum*) or buffalo skin glue binder. Gamboge, a golden-yellow made from the sap of a tree related to the mangosteen was used to outline compositions. Thai tempera is of good quality; so the color of the murals looks fresh and does not change. Therefore, the old murals are durable and would last a very long time, but for the climate.

The kinds of pigments can sometimes be of use in dating a mural. For example, if the mural is quite light in color it could very well come from the Ayutthaya period or at least from the Ayutthaya school. The traditional painting technique continued into the Bangkok period, when colors became richer, thanks to pigments imported from China and other foreign countries. Around the middle of the 19th century, artists began using chemical pigments and Western perspective. Spatial values were eschewed for atmospheric affects, and opulent gold leaf and bold primary colors radically altered the delicate harmony of the old subdued earth colors. In contrast to the lightness of the Ayutthaya murals, dark greens and burgundy reds served as the somber background for depictions of architectural structures; and groups

of figures during Bangkok times and palaces and citadels are white or beige with bright roofs and gold-leaf decorations.

The apprentice purified the pigments of stones and foreign matter by repeated washing and sieving before they were pulverized. He also made the brushes from barks and roots. The bark of *kradang-nga* (*Canarium odoratum*) was soaked in water to make it pliable and then flattened, pressed, and shredded into long flakes, pounded, frayed and cut to a point. This brush was used for smooth, flat areas of the mural. Round brushes were made from the aerial roots of *lamchiak*

(*Pandanus tectorius*). The core was shredded and the pieces bound into a circle which was useful for stippling in trees and shrubs into a painting's background or dabbing in the spots of elephant skin. The distinctive appearance of Thai murals is somewhat attributable to the characteristics of such brushes. The wiry lines of the small brush, unlike those of the flexible Chinese brush, are due to the hairs which come from the inner ear of a cow or a whisker of a mouse. Most brushes were fitted into a bamboo or wooden, sometimes even silver, handle.

PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

– Thai murals have long suffered from what Rita Ringis termed “benign neglect”, and I have noticed that often faces were removed, perhaps to keep as talismans to capture their spiritual power? But since the '70s the Fine Arts Department with help from private individuals and groups, UNESCO and the governments of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, has

begun work that has gained the attention of the public in preserving and restoring the murals, most notably in the case of Wat Suthat and the Chapel Royale of the Emerald Buddha in the mid-'80s, using a combination of traditional techniques with modern technology.

A new technique from Italy which uses fine digitalized vertical lines was employed to differentiate the newly renovated spots from the untouched ones. Imagining the lost parts of the murals was the most painstaking part of the process. To avoid this problem in the future, the murals have been photographed, then reproduced using a hi-tech Epson digital printer to capture their subtlety of light and shadow. The resulting images form an archive that accurately records the original artistry of the painting for another 200 years.



Mural under Restoration Chapel Royale of the Emerald Buddha

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN HERITAGE

PAYING HOMAGE TO THE NATS A BURMESE SUB-CULTURE

By Else Geraets

The nats have been worshipped in Myanmar since ancient times, and like other primitive cultures, the ancient Bamar people believed – before the arrival of Buddhism – in spirits who were living around them and which had to be placated to make sure they would not wreak havoc in their daily life.

According to the Burmese there are three different kinds of nats: the spirits living in nature, the devas of Buddhism and a special category of nats – all men or women of royal blood who met a tragic and unjust death. Their stories are closely associated with the history of Myanmar and the Bamar people in particular.

King Anawrahta of Pagan (11th century) tried to ban the belief in the nats in order to promote Theravada Buddhism, but his people could not stop the daily worship and he was forced to seek a compromise. He

selected 36 nats to be locked up in a shrine in the Shwezigon pagoda and he added the Hindu god Indra to be their head. That is how Indra, Burmanised as Thagya-min, escorted by devas who, as divinities are superior to the nats, were integrated into Burmese Buddhism.

The people in Upper Myanmar and especially in the Monywa region are strong believers in nats and festivals regularly take place to pay homage to them. It is interesting to know that the nats have wives or husbands, daughters or sons, the 'nat-kadaw'; during the rituals these mediums will be possessed by the nat and obey his orders. Most "nat-kadaw" are the wives; these mediums are 'lady-boys' who will dance in honor of the nats. Beautifully dressed and bedecked with jewelry, these 'nat-kadaw' master the art of charming their audience completely while playing a game of flirtation and seduction.



Having visited a nat festival before, I could not resist the temptation to go again when I realized that the timing of this festival suited me perfectly. During the fall while visiting Yangon I found out the dates and the exact place of the festival; now I only had to find three friends who were willing to come along. One short mail was enough and in early March we left for a fascinating experience with the nats.

We were lucky, as two nat festivals were taking place in the Monywa area

at more or less the same time: the Zeedaw and the Bo Bo Gyi festivals. The Zeedaw festival deals with the story of Ye Yin Kadaw who became the minor wife of a Shan Sawbwa. Because of her formidable powers and witchcraft she was sent into exile and drowned near Zeedaw. The 'nat-kadaw', dressed in black and carrying two swords dances in front of her shrine

and, while entering a light trance, transmits her blessings to the worshippers.

But not all the 'nat-kadaw' were wearing black. One older man, dressed in a yellow and orange dress, his face covered with a thick layer of make-up, started to dance and in response to the excitement, the audience began throwing lots and lots of money around. Money is

an important part of the nat dance, it goes in all directions – people loving a particular medium will give him money and depending on the person who gives it the money will find a place either on the headdress or the dress of the medium. The money is counted continuously and given to those who have a role in the show; the singer, the band, the entourage, his patron or anyone who is important to the 'nat-kadaw' at that moment, it can even be you or me.



At the end of the show we followed him to his room and were invited to sit with him in front of the shrine. He was obviously an important medium as he started to say something about each one of us; we felt a bit reluctant, but some things were interestingly true. When I told him that I had been to Mount Popa twice, the most important nat shrine, his interest

was aroused and he asked me to come forward and he gave me a shawl, a very appropriate present in my case.

The second festival, Bo Bo Gyi started two days later. Bo Bo Gyi is a very important nat as he is the 'grandfather' of the village and has a shrine near the entrance of each village where people come to worship on special days. The story is a

bit confusing and different for each village, but in Ahlone there were once two royal children (his grandchildren of course) drowned in the Shweli River, who since then are considered to be nats. There is also a story of an unhappy love and when the young woman feels cheated by her lover, she jumps into the river. All dramatic events and reason enough for a fascinating festival.

It all starts with the arrival of the nats. First, three buffalo carts arrive in Ahlone in the early morning bringing just the spirits to the town as their images are already in their shrine. As the grandchildren live in a tree near the river, the carts are coming through the river and welcomed by all the mediums that gather there; they then accompany the carts to the shrine while the thousands of worshippers wait patiently along the narrow roads with their bouquets of Eugenia leaves to greet Bo Bo Gyi and his grandchildren. Once the buffalo carts have passed, the crowd follows them and they all join in front of the shrine. Offerings to Bo Bo Gyi, besides the Eugenia leaves, comprise white or yellow flowers and offering-trays with a green water melon and green bananas. Between all those worshippers there were the four of us, a bit surprised to see that we were suddenly standing



in the shrine, in front of the Bo Bo Gyi statue while hundreds of people waving their Eugenia leaves and offering their melons and bananas tried to come to the front.

The afternoon was dedicated to the 'nat-kadaw' known as 'Know-Know' a well-built man of 60 years. While applying his make-up carefully we saw the man being transformed into a woman; the complicated hair-do to attach the crown was a real master piece. The brushes, the powder boxes, the eye-shadow were all scattered around the floor and his make-up artist did a wonderful job. There was a stressful moment when the color on his eyelids was not to his liking, but one of the boys managed to tone it all down and 'Know-Know' was happy again. Now he had to get into a bra, and the dress was literally pinned to him piece by piece. Lots of jewelry was added; she really looked gorgeous and seemed ready for the show. Three of these 'lady-boys', obviously the most respected and most celebrated 'nat-kadaw', were dressed up and they were leading the opening shows starting around six o'clock in the evening.

But first there was the official opening of the festival, performed by the two caretakers of the shrine with a short

prayer in front of the image of Bo Bo Gyi and the blowing of the conch. After that there was a rush outside as everybody wanted to dance around an open fire in the courtyard. This dancing around the fire lasted for many hours, badly irritating our eyes.

Now was 'Know-Know's moment: when she came into the shrine she captured the attention of all present with her beautiful body, her sensuous movements and her act of singing and flirting with all the young men present. The way she danced was riveting, never getting caught in the long train of her skirt, kicking it elegantly away or turning in such a way that it unfolded by itself. Of course the money went up and down, and we enjoyed watching her, seeing her counting the money knowing exactly where it all went and how much.

The second evening had a similar program, lots of 'nat-kadaw' dancing to pay homage to Bo Bo Gyi. During this festival it is forbidden that women dance, with one exception, on the third day starting in the early morning female 'nat-kadaw' are allowed to dance in front of the shrine of the grand-children of Bo Bo Gyi.

We were there as well and it was 'Know Know' again who was dancing and playing with the cradle and a young boy he obviously fancied.

Once she left the stage all the minor mediums, male and female took turns to dance and worship the nats in the cradle.

Finally we had to leave the nats and head for Mandalay where I was hoping we could have a glimpse of the Shinbyu festival, where young boys, dressed up as the Prince Siddharta, go into the monastery for a short while for their initiation into Buddhism. We were lucky again and followed a group of seven boys and

girls, all beautifully dressed, from the Mahamuni Temple to the shrine of Bo Bo Gyi where the final worship took place. This was a wonderful climax of the trip as it 'made the circle round'. Even at such an impor-

tant moment, when the boys or girls enter the monastery, a visit to the nat shrine is as important as a visit to the Buddhist temple. Again the same offerings of a green water melon and green bananas and yes, of course, lots of money was offered to the image of the nat.

Although Myanmar is a Buddhist country with many golden pagoda's, the nats with their colorful and exciting festivals are worshipped as intensely as the Buddha, perhaps even more so in the northern part of the country, as their histories are all very human and the people can easily relate to them.





EXCURSION

Heritage Tour of the Oriental Hotel

- Date:** Wednesday, 19 May 2010
- Time:** 9:45 a.m. – 12:00 noon
- Leaders:** Khun Somsri (Susie) Hansirsawasdi and Mr. Harold Stephens
- 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:** 14 May 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.



Oriental Hotel, Authors' Wing



EXCURSIONS POLICY

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.

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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.*

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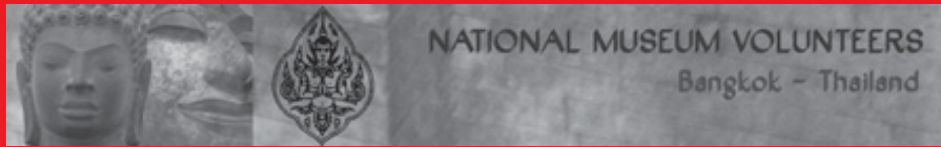
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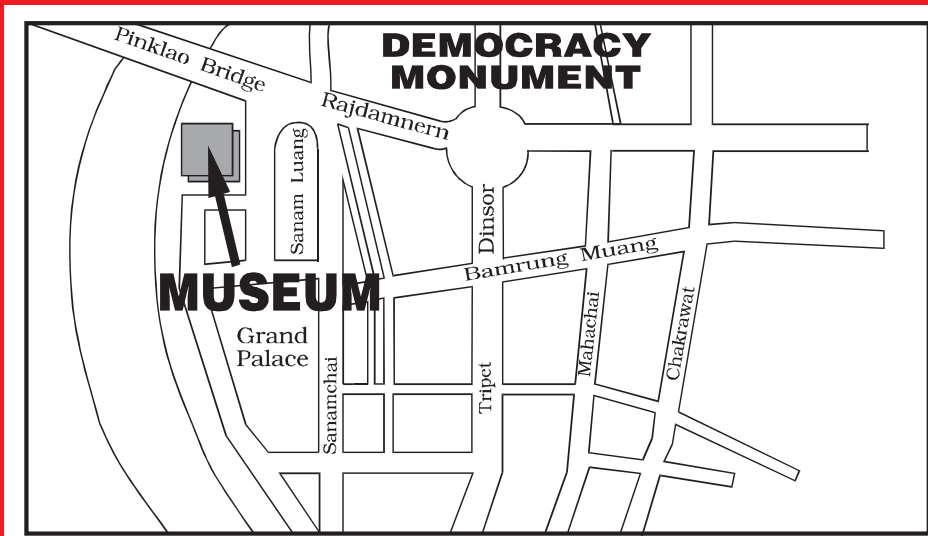


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