

Tragedy by Proxy

Martin Collins reviews Proxy, a multi media part exhibition featuring photography, video, social media and installation art in response to the meltdown of 19th May 2010

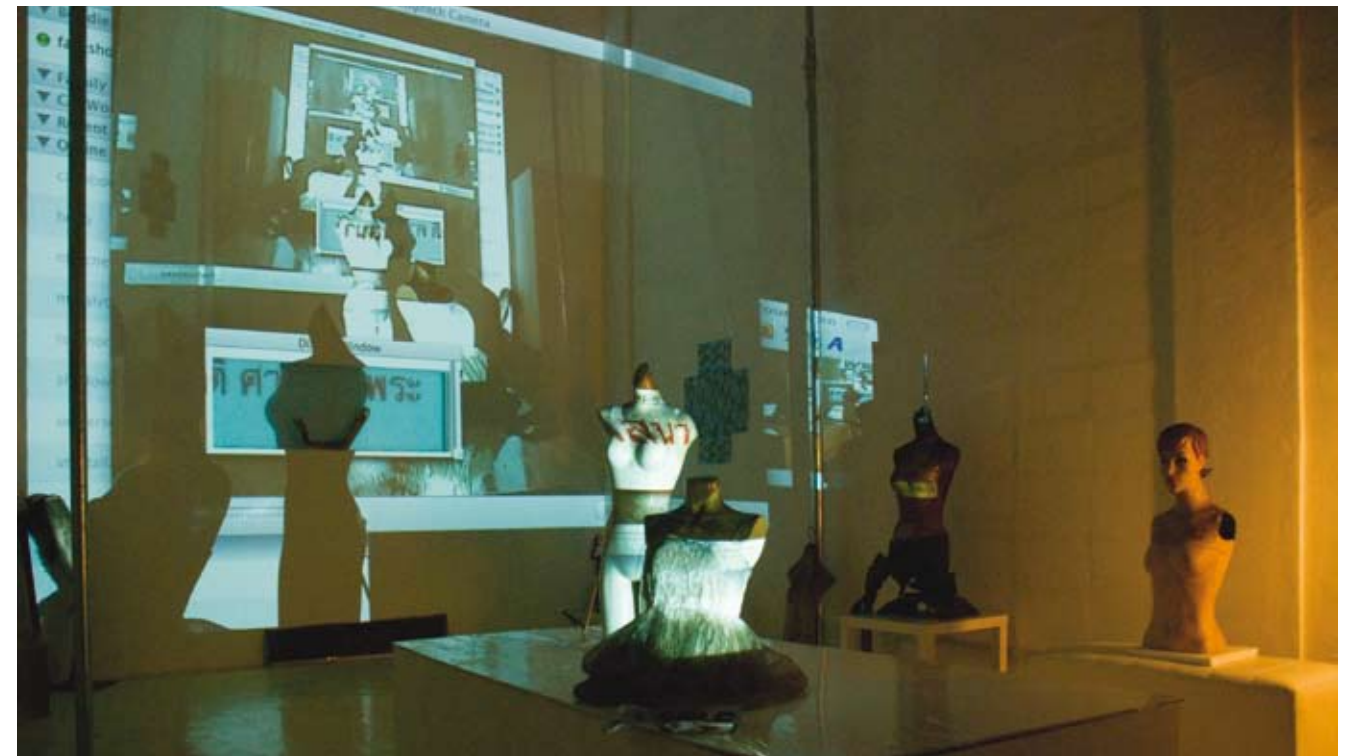
Proxy: n.

1. Someone or something that takes the place of another.
2. The ability to do or be something without actually physically doing it.

One month after the bloody end to protests calling for the re-introduction of elections, we are assured by government media (there are no others now) the ninety dead and 1,800 wounded died in a 'terrible tragedy.' But this 'tragedy' came after three months of emotional paralysis punctuated by horror, idiocy and the abandonment of all reason in the rhetoric of hate.

While Thai officials apply whitewash, a re-write, and collective amnesia in 'reconciliation', by sweeping all under the carpet they preclude any good coming out of a trauma that had its inspirational heroics, and acts of courage as well as some awful villains and crimes in deed and word.

In a collaborative show between long term resident artists Jeff Gompertz (New York) and Rupert James (UK) and local Warisara Sornpet (Thailand) we see a multimedia installation with artworks



responding to the brutal and chaotic climax and torching of landmarks, while inviting participatory responses from the web and twitter in real time (by re-running genuine 'tweets' from May 19th) and from fellow artists to contribute more works throughout July.

An ongoing group show in chapters spread over a series of weeks, Proxy investigates the nature of media validity in printed, projected and tweeted form via fixed gallery exhibits and an interactive media environment.

Gompertz and James center their work on the torching of Siam Theater first as a symbol of loss, yet through their collaboration with Sornpet, and the wider world perhaps as therapy, in which pain acts as catalyst for creation, beauty and re-birth.

Once they had begun to prowl around the gutted building, they discovered a minefield of beautiful objects, images, and sensation, which they began to document and collect. I went down to see what they were excited about and found a sublime dappled light filtering from the shattered roof, charred seats grinning like broken teeth, and post-Hiroshima mannequins with their party dresses melted into the skin.

Inside that charred Titanic the emotional resonance of scenes and objects are heightened greatly by the sensation of becoming a forensic investigator of a crime-scene; looking for emotional clues, and symbolic DNA traces amongst the Freddy Kruger décor.

In the RCA show Gompertz' installations of mannequins and twisted objects overlaid with projections, 'Body Doubles' are 're-positioned' on plinths like in a classical sculpture section in a museum, but feel like survivors, refugees or avatars of a volcanic disaster.

James' photo-lightboxes, and very impressive six-minute video 'Mourning Glory' with a hauntingly ominous soundtrack, captures beautifully many of the creepy and uplifting sensations I felt in the cinema building, and the long run-up to its destruction. Warisara Sornpet, who has a considerable local online following, particularly on social media tool tweeter, presents 'Proxy May', an interactive 'live' internet performance. In projections a re-run of the formerly 'live' social-networking reactions to the May 19th events, but through the persona/net-identity of 'Proxy May' a burnt mannequin 'survivor'. During the show responses were flooding in

live on the wall-sized projections.

The three artists show how inspiration and beauty can be made from the most humble of means, and how from traumatic experience we can find hope and understanding, for when we look closely and steadily at exterior and internalized pain, we begin to treat the wounds that cannot be healed when swept under the carpet.

I noted with heavy heart after being moved by Rupert James' video piece that the tweets coming in from Thais were mostly abusive or cynical and what we could consider 'victims' were now branded 'terrorists' and subversives who died in an unexplained hail of 'tragedy' in slow-motion.

The next collaborative efforts, plus the works above will be shown July 9th.



Proxy is held at:

Chat Room, 21/90 Block D,
RCA Bangkok
Chapter One - 18 June - 30 July
Chapter Two - 9 July - 30 July

The exhibition includes the work of:

Ruangsak Anuwatwimon TH
Martin P. Collins UK
Jeff Gompertz USA
Ruprt James UK
Warisara Sornpet TH
Chalitaporn Yamoon