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OUTLOOK

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Art as a product of society

This week Bangkok sees at least three art openings. **Chanyaporn Chanjaraen** reports on two art exhibitions of different styles: a fanciful painting exhibition at a shopping complex and a thought-provoking installation display at the AUA library.

LAST YEAR when promising senior art student Navin Rawanchaikul told me about his future after graduation, he contended he wouldn't follow the art path as he foresaw bleak financial stability.

Though Navin is a keen thinker on social-theme installation, I then agreed with him, regrettably, because installations are not saleable.

Fortunately or not, Navin did change his mind. Since March last year when he graduated from Chiang Mai University, the 24-year-old budding artist has extensively participated in more than half a dozen group exhibitions.

This month he has his first solo exhibition. It's at the AUA Language Centre Library. And next Saturday he opens one at the Art Forum Gallery.

Working on concepts and society, the artist insists he emphasizes ideas, not feelings and emotions. His works come from his rationale, the relation of causes and consequences.

Says Navin: "Beauty in my works lie in its objectives. I don't record my visual perception of beauty in nature or whatever in my art."

"In these days people are suffering from pollution, indigenous people are facing urbanisation, AIDS and cancer are prevalent nationwide. We need help and co-operation to do something good, to create awareness in the society. I think this is beauty in art."

And it's all a social theme Navin expresses in his installations. In a corner of the library is a heap of bottles piled on a wood shelf in the shape of a cylinder. Inside each sealed bottle is a black and

white photo of old local people. The bottle shelf, top reaching the ceiling, do not stand out from other book shelves in the library.

The title of the installation, and also of the exhibition, *There is no voice*, gets along with the library where silence is a rule.

The artist said he chose to exhibit in a library because the ideas of the works are related to the place. Also a library is a public space where other people can enjoy the works apart from reading.

"I talk about different sets of standards and values of people in each group. In the library, people respect intellect and language. They come to read, to educate themselves with books and texts."

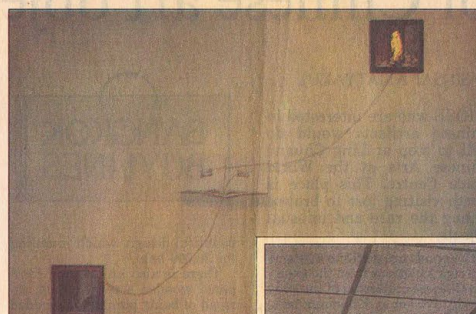
"But they might not realize that while they think they are educating themselves, their minds will be dominated by what they read, too. I can't tell whether this is right or not."

The photos of old people in the bottles are Navin's photo collection when he travelled to the rural part of the north. "Old local people are another group in the society. They have completely different sets of values from those urban ones."

"But they can never express themselves. Their voice is unheard in the city. That's why I keep them in sealed bottles."

"Egg, bell, rose, water, cotton and space" portrays another set of thinking relating to the five senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling. Six open books are placed on the floor, in each place an object mentioned in the title is in a hollow space.

The sixth book's hollow spot is empty, a reminder of Buddhist teachings on detachment from all



Can't reach up above, nothing down below. 1993.

senses and no self.

In the other exhibition, "Please donate your ideas for dispirit artistic research", Navin said the works, also installation, are a conspiracy of himself and 3,000 other Chiang Mai residents.

"Before working on the pieces I went around the city asking for ideas and some unused objects from people in Chiang Mai and explained my ideas to them. Some understood and cooperated. Some didn't and spit cigarette butts at me with annoyance. But that's also good for my art."

Asked why he bothered himself and other people roaming around town like that?, he answered: "I want participation from people in my art. I want art to be public."

The artist is from the Chiang Mai University school of art where renowned installation artists Montien Boonma and Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook are lecturers.

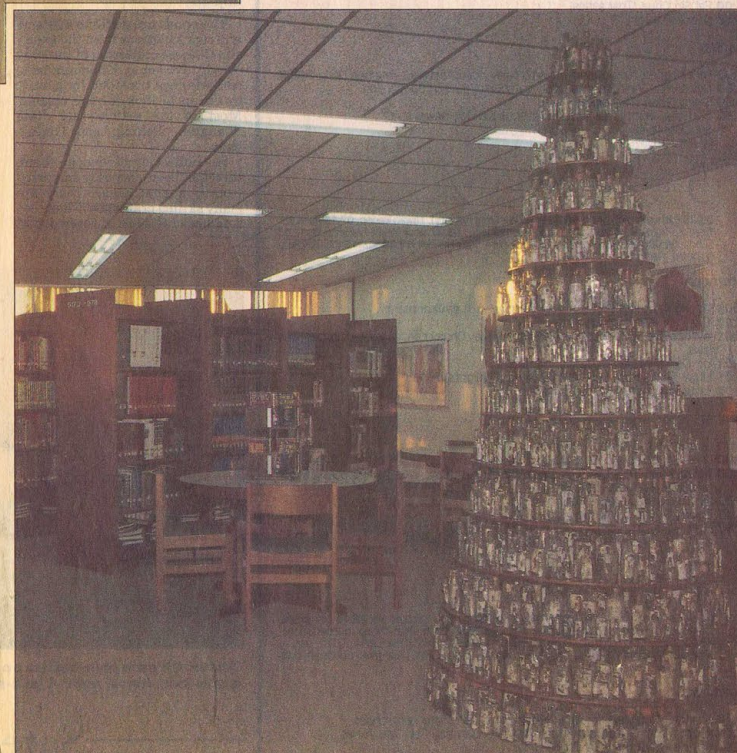
The exhibition "There is no voice" is at the AUA Library until March 31. The library is open 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday.

The exhibition "Please donate your ideas for dispirit artistic research" will be at the Art Forum Gallery from March 19 to April 2. The opening is at 6 p.m. on March 19. The public is welcome. The gallery is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Saturday.



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— left, Navin Rawanchaikul



There is no voice. 1993