Guerrilla Style Documentaries for the Thai Traditional Arts

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Abstract

This paper describes the methodology of guerrilla-style filmmaking and applies it to subjects in the Thai traditional arts. Three different subjects were documented with this methodology: 1) a *khon* dance performance of *Thosakan's Abduction of Sita* at the *Sala Chalermkrung Theater*, 2) a group of artists painting murals at *Wat Phlapphachai* in the old district of Bangkok, and 3) the puppet theater of *Taleng Phai* by the *Chakrabhand Posayakrit Company.* The resulting films yield a wealth of information on these subjects. Practitioners of the Thai traditional arts have difficulties competing for exposure within the mainstream media, so this methodology is presented as a way to fill that gap. It is also presented as a teaching tool for contemporary education. The content of the documentaries revealed information typically unknown to the public. The methodology included interviews, going behind the scenes, and the recording of live performances. The resulting video was then compiled, and extensively edited, to be presented in the form of a documentary suitable for the classroom, the auditorium, or broadcast. The implications found between form and function demonstrate both the appropriateness of guerrilla-style filmmaking and the need for increased education and funding for the Thai arts.

Keywords**:** *documentary, guerrilla filmmaking, contemporary Thai art, traditional Thai art*

1. Introduction

Film studies – the roots of guerrilla style productions

In 1922 the *kino* photographers of Russia were early keepers of an idea that a cameraman should do whatever it takes to get the perfect *shot*. It was just after the Soviet Revolution, and it was a a prolific film making period. Figures 1 and 2 show the amount of risk they were willing to take.

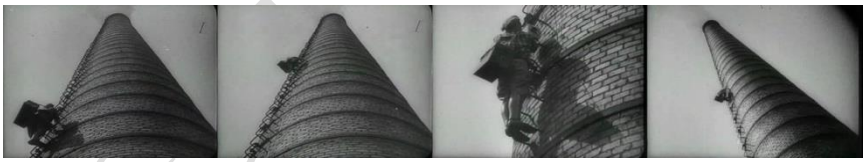

Figure 1 A *kino* climbing a tower to get the perfect angle for his motion-picture camera

Figure 2 the *kino* cameraman on top of a train,
on the side, on top of a moving car (from left to right)

The *Kino Pravda* group of filmmakers had a creed to present the truth of life. Because of the way they captured reality in their films, edited newsreels by the Pravda group have been very influential since that time. Placing their reality at the center of importance, the Kino Pravda group would do anything necessary to capture the shot they felt best communicated their truth to the audience, even sometimes altering the reality of the scene itself. Pioneers in the early filmmaking world, the Kino Pravda group never considered the philosophical implication that the presence of a camera, or a camera's operator, might have on the surrounding environment, such as in Figure 3. The filmmakers considered themselves workers. Like their working-class brothers, they were part of the world around them, in solidarity with their comrades, creating a better place to live with their labor (Leyda, 1960).

Figure 3 A *kino* cameraman spying on a sleeping person who wakes up

The *kino* approach to filmmaking is important for documentary filmmakers today because their style is still ubiquitous. Even though we have a much different daily experience with motion pictures than the *kinos* did, it is common to find someone who, for the first time, has just purchased a smart phone and is trying to get interesting photos. The way they experiment with their new camera is exactly what the early *kinos* were doing when trying to capture their reality on film, such as the attempts of the cameraman in Figure 4. They are trying to make reality cinematographic, and the types of *shots* they frame are similar.

Figure 4 A *kino* cameraman sets-up a shot

Across the globe also in the same year, a commercially successful feature-length documentary "Nanook of the North" by Flaherty (1922) was celebrated. There had been many documental works before this, none of which are well known today (Rossell, 2017). His commercial success marks the start of documentary films being used for entertainment purposes. Flaherty's 1926 film "Moana" starts with a title slate stating that the filmmaker lived with the people being documented for a period of two years. The work was an effort to bring that world to the audience. The film was an adventure in the making which within the audience could share. Figure 5 shows the lifestyles of these villagers. It was also the film which Scottish film producer John Grierson used to create the term *documentary*.

Figure 5 Life on the island in Flaherty's "Moana." Houses in the village (left), a man high up in a coconut tree (middle), a boy starts a fire (right)

In today's semantic lexicon of film studies however, Flaherty's "Moana" is considered to be stylistically more of a *docufiction* because of the staged nature of the events that take place in his films. It is not considered to be very truthful even though it is a nonfiction work. The staging of events represents a conundrum in the truthful representation of the lives of this particular group of Samoans because they would have acted differently if the camera wasn't there. Figure 6 shows one of these shots.

Figure 6 Planned shots which show the tribesmen carrying heavier loads than normal, its is an exceptional bounty

Walt Disney's 2016 film "Moana," although an animated work of fiction, stands in stark contrast with its portrayal of the same islands and their inhabitants. The titular character is now a young girl, and the manly character is more of a sidekick. More importantly the story is told from her perspective, not the wandering camera-eye perspective of someone supposedly spying in secret on the mysterious and beautiful lives of island people. Perhaps these early works could be considered the great grandfathers of the *re-enactment*, the *mock-up* or the *docudrama*. Styles which have been permanently cemented in the minds of motion-picture viewers as a type of film that is real, not make-believe, and represents the truth.

Intentionally adding narrative elements to a documentary may be frowned upon by today's more anthropologically conscious filmmakers, but passing judgement on Flaherty might be too swift. He still had to travel, at great expense and effort, to an exotic location back when filmmaking was a brand new art form. He had to leave his own society and linguistic traditions, go to the Samoan island of Savai'i, learn about its inhabitants, their rituals and practices, document them, and finally bring this story back to New Zealand; more specifically British Samoa, the mandate of New Zealand, and then on to Paramount Pictures where it received a wide audience – another commercial success (Flaherty, 1926; Wikipedia, 2017).

Vertov (1929) documentary featured Russian life, "Man with a Movie Camera" and was shot in a remarkable style. With camera-operators on the top of bridges, buildings and horse carriages. Film was still without sound so there was, by necessity, no voiceover. There was a musical score however, played by a live orchestra, and the film itself used narrative-structure types of *shots*. There are *inserts* from *long-shots* to *close-ups*, there are *reverse* shots and *point-of-view* shots. Figure 7 shows the moment the train passing as the cameraman's point of view. Since they were shot in the field in real time and there was no going back to recapture those moments, they used editing to create these abstract stories.

Figure 7 A *kino* filming an on coming train

The camera-man may have practiced standing atop the carriage as it rode along, as can be seen in the reactions of the subjects to him. Shots may have been set up, at times, but they were hardly rehearsed the way narrative films had come to be. This film was a milestone in the development of film theory and editing (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). They cut together multiple angles of the same area and time in such a way as to create complex ideas and story lines, such as the example in Figure 8. "The Man with a Movie Camera" is the quintessential example of the theory of montage.

Figure 8 A woman washing her face is cut back and forth with the shutters opening and closing which creates an abstract meaning, the shutters are closed when her eyes are covered and open when her eyes are open

The film had a high *ratio* of *footage* to the works finished length. The editors had a lot of latitude for choices when creating their iconic images, associations and feelings which would stay with their audience for a long time. This particular style of the *Kino Pravda* philosophy of how to portray reality and therefore truth is another very important way that documentary filmmaking entered the mainstream world, and even narrative film many years ago, although it is less often acknowledged than Flaherty's work.

After WWII Soviet filmmaking became unpalatable for the Americans and Soviet films became inaccessible to their general public. The dominant style of nonfiction films became the informational films

of the Navy and Army's training films and industrial engineering or science tutorials. Some examples are in Figure 9.

Figure 9 A 1937 engineering tutorial from a giant American car company

These films were made based strictly on content, relying on clarity in presentation, and had explanatory voiceovers. They could be considered to be the great grandfathers of the *talking-head* or the *industrial* video, as seen in Figure 10. Artistic elements in the making of these nonfiction films were taking a back seat to the requirements of the film industry. The unintentional shift from the philosophical truth of life to the truth of a dictated, scientific physical reality was cemented in the minds of audiences as authoritative. Films of this type created an expected style for audiences when considering whether to trust the validity of a nonfiction film.

Figure 10 Instructional videos for soldiers with explanatory voiceovers, a character explains the situation directly to the viewer

Deren (1944) works are well known among film circles and also occurred around this time period. Containing both purely artistic and documental type of works, her films contain many elements that would later become part of the guerrilla filmmaker's modus operandi of production: quick, fresh shooting in great locations using experimental techniques. Her works were thoughtfully and artistically edited. One of her more conceptually abstract pieces, "At Land," shown in Figure 11 has a unique cinematographic style.

Figure 11 In "At Land" the main character climbs up a tree, where there is a table top she then crawls down, where she is both inside the place and outside of it at the same time

Her *footage* of a Haitian society was edited and published in 1985, as a documentary titled "Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti." There were four people credited for the post-production in the film's credits: the film editor, sound editor, narrator and titler (Cherel Ito, 1985). The film marks an important change in the approach to documentary filmmaking where the filmmaker tries not to interfere with the environment during filming. The truth, which is reality, should not be influenced by the filmmaker. This style of capturing reality as it happens, and letting that drive the story, along with the *kino's* desire to show the truth, is what inspired the *cinéma vérité, observational cinema*, and *direct cinema* movements as early as 1963. *Cinéma vérité* has its origins in Vertov (Barsam, 1973).

Looking at the artistic application of film making techniques may be more enlightening in terms of the way reality, truth and artistic expression are represented in film styles. How and when a particular filmmaker uses the *close-up*, or other technique, may be more telling about their presentation of reality than labeling genre. These previous examples of films are important ones which have built up audience expectations around nonfiction films which are now colloquially called *documentaries*.

The word guerrilla came into English use during the Napoleonic Wars when the British, Spanish and Portuguese were fighting against huge forces. Taking part in irregular fighting as small groups, typically against larger more regular forces, was referred to as Guerrilla warfare. Much later this word was borrowed to describe a type of film that was made quickly, or made on a very small budget when compared to its industrial counterparts. The term itself connotes fighting against the mainstream in a motley crew, being in a rebel group or going up against the proverbial Goliath.

Typically the industry also controlled the channels of distribution through a particular film format used in their theaters. So guerrilla filmmakers would use 16mm film or other non-standard format to try and maintain their own creative control (Rabiger, 1992). Many of these independent cinematographers were approaching their material with an anti-cinematic filmic language to distance themselves from the mainstream. They produced a gritty feeling which was more believable because it didn't try to hide the fact that it was quickly made. Because of this attitude, the *independent* film genre was born. French *new wave* films were already considered *foreign films* by the establishment, so they fit easily into the the independent category. This style of making film came from the need to stand out from typical Hollywood fare. Soon after, though, their success was absorbed back in to the industrial system. Films such as "The French Connection" (Friedkin, 1971), "Deliverance" (Boorman, 1972), and "The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams" (Sellier, 1974) all have elements of a guerrilla-style production and share in their freshness because of it. The later film was responsible for the guerrilla-style of filmmaking jumping from the large silver screens to the smaller television screens. As a result, documentary-style had a foothold in the mainstream media.

Guerrilla could be considered a romantic term describing the way an individual with a vision can be heard even with very little money. The film industry, with its mainstream ideas, is also expensive. It comes with standard dialog and writing, standard camera angles and acting, typical genres and themes, sets and working methodologies. The studios have always had a non-experimental approach, so these guerrillas were trying to wrest creative control away from the industry. Lee (1986) film "She's Gotta Have It," again repopularized the guerrilla style. The film was considered to have a meager budget, even though it was 175,000 dollars. Rodriguez (1992) made "El Mariachi," in Spanish, for 7,000 dollars. When it won an award at the Sundance Film Festival, he went on to re-produce the work as "Desperado" (Rodriguez, 1997) with a 7-million dollar budget in the Hollywood establishment. In the late nineties and the turn of the 21st century, Guerrilla filmmaking had a revival in film schools due to books by Jones and Genevieve (1996) whose writing, starting in the late 1990s, advocates a type of shooting which is fresh, fast and from the hip. To go out and capture real life cinematically is a philosophy which can easily be traced back to the *kino* filmmakers and their documentaries of the 1920s. Moore (1989) brought documentary into the feature-film circuit with his guerrilla style productions. His first commercial hit was "Roger and Me." His films had to be shot in real time for them to have validity and impact as they captured the reactions of powerful people when they were caught off guard. Subsequent films of his remained popular and reaffirmed the guerrilla style of production.

2. Objectives

Each of the three documentaries presented in this paper were shot quickly and under adverse conditions. The goal was to make something educational for an audience who appreciates the arts or for students of film. The researcher's hope was that they could be screened in the classroom, but would also be appealing to general audiences. Independent productions like these should help spread the appreciation of Thai art. It was also necessary to make them without a budget. Due to practical constraints like the poor economy, difficult logistics, scheduling and budgeting, the guerrilla-style of production was the only way to succeed for each particular challenge. Making a formal documentary by the industrial method seemed

wasteful. It would take a lot of time and money, be staged, as opposed to real, and the finished work wouldn't be used for very long. There would also be creative constraints on the production.

There aren't many popular mainstream works about Thai Art, especially when compared to the amount of media from advertising and commercial productions. Thai Art isn't considered very marketable by most people in the industry. Even worse, many people consider it old-fashioned. When it is used in the mainstream it receives only a superficial treatment. There is a definitive lack of deeper understanding in the application of the motifs and content. Many times this casual use is controversial, which in turn scares more young people away, or makes them less interested than they could be. Recently, a controversial music video offended the sensibilities of some people. Figure 12 shows some frames from this video.

Figure 12 *Thotsakan* is not shown in the traditional stoic poses with their deep representational meanings, but doing modern things like hip-hop (left), jumping for a picture, (center) and riding go-karts (right)

I wanted to use my experience as a documentary filmmaker to capture the aesthetic of motion, poses and forms of Thai art because they are unique and full of meaning. When screening films in the classroom, students are a captive audience and likely to resent anything shown to them as being boring. The challenge was how to make the documentaries interesting and modern yet true to the art form and unoffensive to more conservative members of society.

The titles of the three documentaries are: "Khon, Masked Dance of Thailand," "Line, Color and the Whole Story," and "The Amazing Puppets of Chakrabhand Posayakrit." The *khon* tells the story of *Sita's Abduction by Ravana* which is from the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the ancient Hindu epic. For this first project, I was interested in capturing images of this group of young adults as they prepared for their performance. Backstage they emanated a playfulness, a particular truth of life which made me think of the *kinos* and what their approach might be to something lighthearted and cultural instead of severe and political. For the second project, I was particularly interested in capturing good images of the paintings at *Wat Phlapphachai* because they were so colorful, stylistic, and uniquely modern. Since the only chance to capture these images were during construction, it was not possible to avoid the scaffolding. The stories in the mural paintings come from the life of *Prince Siddhartha*, the *Jatakas*, and the history of Bangkok. The floral, lotus, fire and *kanok* patterns all come from ancient Thai traditions. The use of color and design of characters is influenced by the work of national artist Chakrabhand Posayakrit, as the project leader and other painters were students of his. Finally, the gestalts and movements of professor Chakrabhand's traditional puppets were captured with well-framed compositions in long-shots and medium-shots, and capture the fine details in these puppets with close-ups. The puppet performers retell the story, from the *Ayutthaya* period, when *King Naresuan* defeated the Burmese army in an epic elephant battle. Even though the subject of each documentary is distinct, their expression and execution have many similarities. The movement and poses of the dancers and puppets are related. The portrayal of characters in the mural paintings also use these same gestalts and poses, the same expression of line and forms. Figure 13 contains a shot from each of the documentaries.

Figure 13 A common gestalt is the hand pose for crying. Here it is used in a *khon* dance (left), mural painting (middle), and puppet theater (right)

3. Methodology

The interior walls of the *ubosot* at *Wat Phlapphachai,* in the district of old Bangkok, have been recently painted with new murals. In depth interviews of four of the main artists were conducted, pertinent information logged and compiled, then the interviews were edited to form a structure for the film. A medium-end, high definition video camera with a manual zoom lens was used. The editing process was completed with Adobe CS6 Premiere Pro software, with hardcoded subtitles made in Adobe InDesign. Extensive color timing and matte-work was done both in Premiere and SpeedGrade. For the sound, Audacity sound editing software was used to create musical loops, doctor bad recorded sound, and create transitions between speakers or for different clips of the same speaker.

Guerrilla films typically have very small crews, with each member playing multiple roles. But this documentary had a crew of only two people, myself and my producer. Showing up on site with only a camera, lapel microphone and small LED light, the project leader agreed to be interviewed. The interviewer was skilled and knowledgable about Thai art. Associate Professor Pakorn Prohmvitak, conducted the interviews, then set up two additional days for shooting. Interview sound was recorded with a standard, but old, lavalier microphone. There were a total of three visits on separate days: July 9th, Aug 6th 2016, and March 19th 2017, which created a total of almost 6 hours of footage. This interview footage is considered the A-roll. The B-roll footage consists of the paintings in progress on the interior walls of the *ubosot*. This includes as many straight on shots of the paintings as was possible in the circumstances. Many paintings were not able to be video-graphed because there was no scaffolding set up for that area. Shots of wall paintings are already difficult because of poor light, bad angles and the focal length of the camera lens and the short distance to the wall.

The interviews were framed in a way which is typical for documentaries, because it was my intention to create a formal style of presentation which would be easily recognizable as a documentary. For this type of shot the subject is typically framed in a medium-shot on one side of the screen looking at the interviewer who is next to the camera. This type of shot is actually borrowed from narrative film. It is a type of *reaction-shot* from a typical dialog *two-shot* sequence, normally cut between the subject and another character. This has the effect of engaging the audience, making it seem like the interviewee is a character in the film addressing the audience, but still not looking directly into the camera. The film can intentionally cut away from the interviewee's picture if he or she looked into the camera, or when some spoken content is removed. This precise framing is difficult to achieve. The interviewer must be on the correct side of the camera with the interviewee facing the space in the screen left over due to the framing. The natural light forces the placement of the camera, and therefore the interviewee, so that the subject is in a three-quarter view with a highlight. See Figures 14 and 15. This causes the interviewer to look across the lens at the face of the interviewee as if she were in a dialog scene in a narrative structured film. The camera should be lower than eye height of the subject and looking up at him or her.

Figure 14 The interviewee is on the left, looking across the lens at the interviewer who is on the right side of the camera, the camera operator strives for a three-quarter view. The interviewees in the first and last pictures have highlight on their right side which mimics the look of a rim-light even though it only natural light is used.

Figure 15 Although the use of natural light is better in the first picture, the interviewee does not look towards the space left in the frame. The picture on the right is better in terms of framing.

The piece was heavily edited to bring out the content revealed in the interview process. An A-roll/B-roll editing technique was used to bring out the topics exposed during the interviews. First the bulk interviews were put down on the timeline in a logical order. Appropriate B-roll pictures were matched to these soundbites which were created when the interview pictures were removed but their sound left in place. B-roll footage highlighted the spoken content adding tangental information, or was used to cover up interview footage that wasn't visually pleasing. Jump-cutting between soundbites of the same interview was avoided to maintain a formal style. The B-roll automatically contained pictures of the work in process, including shots of the scaffolding, the presiding Buddha image still wrapped in plastic, and the general chaotic environment of unfinished painting.

By condensing the spoken words into content groups, and then adding B-roll, the piece became more interesting. The explanation by Tom, who was the head of the project, had given basic information about the project such as the time and money required as well as the number of artists working on it. She explained the conditions of the job and eventually talked about her artistic process. Then the other three interviewees were put on the timeline as well. The camera always focused on the subject so the interviewer's questions needed to be edited out. This was automatically accomplished by only choosing the parts of the interviewee's answers which were poignant and complete in themselves. At this point the speaking content was able to be shaped into a narrative-like structure by taking similar content from the other interviewees and then mixing and matching their order. When Ms Saijai talked about color it was logical to talk about forms next, so after that footage of Mr. Somchai talking about the traditional motifs was used. It was Mr. Athapon who was the most talkative and who also explained his artistic philosophy very deeply, so a lot of his commentary was used. This was how the subject shaped the outcome.

Popular songs were sampled and looped to create a soundtrack with a modern feeling. Sampling of songs and digital audio production techniques were used to keep the piece feeling contemporary. Sampling short clips of popular songs has long been a way to avoid copyright infringement, and with digital audio it has become a methodology widely used. Sampling creates new music from old songs. A lot of natural sounds were added such as animal sounds, wind and water to create the feeling of a mythical forest such as the *Himavanta* forest, and also to cover up audio problems from the recording environment such as wind and thunder which EQ could not remove. There was always background noise such as traffic noise, kids playing near by and other music playing in the area nearby. The interviewees were put in black and white to bring out the color in the mural paintings and B-roll footage, making the documentary seem even more colorful and lively.

By dividing the total length of footage by the length of the finished work, the shooting ratio for this piece can be calculated as 12:1. This is a very low ratio for a documentary production which usually is more like sixty to one. The interview footage lasts for 2 hours 4 minutes and 8 seconds (2:04:08;00) and the B-roll accounts for 3 hours 54 minutes 23 seconds and 22 frames (3:54:23;22) of the total footage. The technical specifications of the video are 1920 by 1080 pixels and 24 frames per second (using the AVCHD part 10-MPEG 4 high definition video codec). Distribution is expected to be via online sites or screened in auditoriums at institutions of higher education.

4. The resulting works

Khon, Masked Dance of Thailand

The traditional story of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* was adapted into the *Ramakien* during the *Sukhothai* period. The dance which is used during the performance can be traced back to the *Ayutthaya* period and has been refined throughout the *Rattanakosin* period. The poses and gestures which appear in the movement of the dancers have meaning which relates to the story. The pose of the hand near the eye is used to mean crying in the scene when *Rama* informs *Sita* he must leave. The movements of *Hanuman* mimic those of a hyper, itchy monkey. During the battle scene the dancer playing *Rama* physically climbs up upon the actor playing *Thotsakan* symbolizing his defeat, which can be seen in the third frame of Figure 16.

Figure 16 Poses from a *khon* performance, *Rama* readies for *Thotsakan* (left), battle (middle), *Thotsakan* is defeated (right)

The researcher was able to get permission to record in the *Sala Chalermkrung* Theater with a letter of request from the university. With only a small camera and by talking with the performers, we were able to get behind the scenes. With almost no preparation, or pre-production, just the camera and experience in the traditional arts, it was possible to get interesting footage to make a documentary without an explicit voiceover or any other explanation. The pictures tell the story just fine. There wasn't any need to influence the surroundings during recording or interrupt the flow of the footage with speaking during the film itself. Montage editing techniques tell the story showcasing some of the highlights from the performance so that the audience could experience the gestalts of the different scenes. Using the same philosophy as described in the methodology above, editing techniques were used as well as color grading and sound editing to tie the footage together. It was the researcher's intention to let the footage speak for itself and strive for a natural progression, using editing to maintain continuity.

Line, Color and the Whole Story: the Mural Painting at Wat Phlapphachai

Painting of the murals at *Wat Phlapphachai* took 20 artists and lasted five years. The project leader was Saijai Nimnoul. Working on a traditional task, she used modern industrial pigments, rich colors which in the past were not available or typically used, and she explained her methodology. Her group sometimes used color theory from the abstract expressionist painters and other times used non-Western methods. They also pioneered their own techniques. The methods of creating and applying the Thai motifs were explained as well as the challenges of tying all of the story elements together. Overall there was a comprehensive approach. Any individual pictures or artistic styles which stood out or weren't cohesive to this design philosophy were reworked. Any part of the paintings she wasn't satisfied with were repainted. Continuity between the styles of different painters was carefully considered.

The ten previous lives of *Prince Siddhartha* traditionally wrap the walls of temples, the way the Stations of the Cross might be placed in church ambulatories. These traditional stories explain the *Birth of the Buddha*, his *Enlightenment*, the *Twin Miracles*, the *Opening of the Three Worlds*, the *Arrival of 2,500 Monks*, and the *Passing of the Buddha.* Other traditional stories are from the *Jatakas*, which explain the ten previous incarnations of the Buddha. On the layer above there are angels in full traditional regalia. The stories are defined by Buddhist doctrine, but the details of expression are up to the artists who paint them. Implicit in the details are the choices by the painters which shape the emphasis on particular parts of the stories. Their style of painting also creates a particular mythos. The mural paintings here are typical of traditional art in some ways yet distinctly modern in others. The line, forms and use of color range between typical *Rattanakosin* style usage and completely unique. Figure 17 shows the use of opposite colors which was inspired by the color theory of the Abstract Expressionists.

Figure 17 Use of opposite color theory with a *nagra* painted with sky-blue and orange (left), and *Rattanakosin* style use of color with blue and green (right)

In this case there were particular constraints on design because of the needs of this particular temple. The conditions for the murals laid out by the temple chief dictated that one wall would be the history of the Bangkok period. The addition of the history of the Bangkok period added a particular

design challenge for the mural painters. The other stories are well known because of their traditional use in Buddhist temples. The remaining three walls contain the *phutta-phrawasat*, literally Buddha history, which are the stories of Prince Siddhartha from his birth, through enlightenment and death. The stories include iconic Buddhist images of many scenes such as *pajon-marn*, where *Mara's Army* is wiped out by the flood created by *Mae Torani*, the Earth goddess wringing out her hair. Prince *Siddartha* gazes upon an old man, a sick man, a dead man and an ascetic to create the story of the *Four Sights.* There is the story of the *Birth of the Buddha* upon where he takes seven steps leaving a blooming lotus at each. The story of *Leaving the Palace* shows him renouncing his wealth to become an ascetic. In *The Twin Miracles* he brings forth the sun and the moon at the same time.

These artists worked hard to incorporate the stories into the remaining spaces while tying them together contiguously. There are lions, *nagras*, monkeys, giants, monks and people. On the upper most level, the third tier, rows of angels tie the entire composition together. The use of color, and modern pigments, is unique in style yet indebted to national artist Chakrabhand Posayakrit. There is every traditional type of motif imaginable painted with gold leaf, sometimes adorning the costumes of angels and sometimes creating the figures of mythical animals from the *Himavanta* forest.

The artists explained their methodology, conceptual approach and obstacles thoroughly during the interview process which, when cut with the footage of the paintings under construction, contained a wealth of information about the creation of traditional patterns, color choices and composition. The painters assume that everyone already knows about the content in the stories, but new comers who may see the video will catch on quickly.

The Amazing Puppets of Chakrabhand Posayakrit

Being familiar with the gestalts and movement in Thai traditional dance and the poses of angels and humans from the stories of the Ramayana in traditional painting, I was ready to capture the motion of the skilled performers in the large troop of performers who recreated the events leading up to the famous Siamese elephant battle between *Burengnong* and *Naresuan* in the ancient *Ayutthaya.* This performance had a traditional Thai orchestra and elaborate sets, which when combined with the expert motion of the puppeteers created the most lifelike movement and rhythms. The fine work of the hands and faces of the puppets contain the same motifs and patterns used in the mural paintings above, but the artistic quality and refinement are unsurpassed. The four hour long performance was recorded five separate times and some of the senior members were interviewed. This play contains twelve scenes, an overture and an epilogue all accompanied by live music. As elaborate as they were, these performances were considered only rehearsals by professor Chakrabhand.

5. Discussion

"Line, Color and the Whole Story" has a very formal presentation style. The finished work doesn't seem much like a guerrilla documentary because this formal style was maintained throughout shooting and editing, but behind the scenes it was still a zero-budget production which was shot very quickly. By not allowing any jump-cuts between interviews of the same person, the researcher avoided the ubiquitous style seen so frequently on Thai television. The editing process was very important. The in and out-frames of clips from the B-roll and their subsequent placement over the A-roll was carefully considered. The point was to maintain the expression of the speaker and then expand or visually explain their content at that moment. If there was a moment when the speaker was passionate, their face would be used. When an interviewee repeated words or lost their train of thought, it would be cut out leaving a jump-cut that needed to be covered up. So it created a kind of jigsaw puzzle where empty spaces needed to be filled with B-roll. Therefore the finished piece could have had many different outcomes. The need to use of so much of Mr. Athapon's footage, compared to his colleagues, dictated many of the decisions related to timing and pacing of the overall sequence. Since he explained his artistic method so well, it was necessary to use large portions of his interview to understand his philosophy behind such a large undertaking. This changed the emphasis of the piece dramatically, it suddenly became more about the artists and their process than the art. It humanized the piece. The footage of the interviews were made black and white. By removing the color from these clips, the color in the mural painting stood out even more.

Intentionally shooting the scaffolding with rack focuses and depth-of-field shots maintained a feeling of being behind the scenes, while deemphasizing other problems with the B-roll such as shakiness or distorted perspectives. It was difficult to get straight-on shots of many of the paintings because the scaffolding was not far enough away from the wall to pass the focal length of the lens. Panning and tilting of the camera, while on the scaffolding was difficult do to it shaking and distorting the picture the farther away it was. The pictures didn't have to match exactly what was being said because the pictures contained their own information which could highlight or contrast what was being said. This added another layer of meaning which made other sound bites from the interviews redundant. The content was condensed further and the meaning expanded during this process. Editing A-roll/B-roll style was the intention from the beginning but it did not change the way the piece was shot - trying to capture the beauty of the paintings with as much camera variety as possible. Close-ups and details, long shots, pans and tilts. Since the ratio was low, almost every shot was going to be used anyway, but this doesn't mean that the design of the documentary was locked. It evolved during the editing process like a tightening down which had the potential to take many different forms. The shots which went along with what was being said helped certain parts of the narrative structure of the piece develop in such a way as to affect the decisions for the order of subsequent interview sound bites. The spoken audio was doctored with audio editing software to balance and equalize the levels, remove unwanted sounds (as much as possible), and create a natural flow as if it had all been spoken at once. Then a lot of time was spent experimenting as to what types of musical themes should be used for the soundtrack. It was quite difficult to use contemporary music without destroying the mood of artists working on an ancient traditions, and vise versa it was difficult to use Thai traditional music without the risk of boring a youthful audience. Songs were spliced, repeated and mixed at very low volumes to create the mood. Excerpts from the playing Thai classical music master Boonyang Khetkong.

6. Conclusion

In terms of filmmaking, the market for selling any type of video, has long been flooded with zero-budget productions. Since consumer cameras became much less inexpensive in the late 1990's and early 2000's, there are very few institutions willing to invest large sums of money in video productions. Using a guerrilla-style is efficient. Traffic gridlock in Bangkok makes coordination slow. Logistically if it takes four hours of travel to get the talent and equipment together, it would be prudent to finish during the first meeting. In a normal production, appointments must be set up, studios rented, or permission received to begin shooting. Bangkok filmmakers ask their crew and talent to meet at the shooting location. However, this does not guarantee that everything will go as planed. When someone is late, or doesn't show up at all, the filming can not start. The rental of the equipment is easily wasted, among other things like time and money. The usual method of renting a vehicle and driver to pick-up all the talent and crew would take up the entire day, and sometimes the entire budget. One other solution is to get everyone involved to stay at the site for a week or so, like a field camp, which is impractical.

Many times the mere act of asking permission makes stakeholders nervous and unwilling to allow any photography to take place at all. They worry about negative press, or their own responsibility. This inflates the importance of the film in the wrong direction. In one case, it started with a letter asking for permission but the temple manger did not want to talk to us. He could not be bothered to even look at our request. Filmmaking is difficult and there are a multitude of minute practical decisions which must be made which ultimately shape the stylistic outcome of the piece. Here, good moments were captured because of the ability of the interviewer to relax the interviewee and his style of asking them leading questions. The artists were happy to have a documentary made about them. They were happy for the recognition and exposure.

Guerrilla filmmaking was the only way to successfully complete a documentary in such a difficult environment. Someone who is willing to invest a lot of time and money can work through the channels that exist here in Bangkok, such as the numerous films and advertising companies, but those channels come with restrictions. Good documentaries are not driven by profit but by subject matter, in this case the desire to capture a live performance, an artist with years of experience working, or the cultural relevance of an event. The world is changing very fast in many aspects: technology, globalization, education. By documenting an events such as these, the researcher can create a snapshot of history before it is history.

People familiar with the traditions may add to the discussion and further increase my knowledge, and years from now it will be a marker of the times and the attitude of those times. Viewers from other cultures will have insights into the context of artistic activities. Hopefully, young Thai students will like Thai art more.

For educational institutions within Thailand, Thai art is a vastly underused resource. Traditional Thai art is contemporary, deeply philosophical and inspired via many dimensions. Buddhist temples need painting and a modern expression of traditional arts comes alive in the *ubosot*. Artists with extensive training in the traditional Thai artists are contracted by temple administrators to create murals regularly. These artists have their own approach and philosophical constructs which guide their expression, sometimes formal, sometimes playful, but always artful. They are like the museums of the West except the paintings are part of the architecture instead of hung on the walls in frames. It is a tradition full of vitality and meaning. There has always been a flexibility in the style of the art, with different regions have different styles.

Thai art is underrepresented in the West, mainly due to just how far away it is. From the dominance of China upon the world stage, to British history in India, and the history of WWII bringing Japan into the consciousness of Westerners, in America fat smiling Chinese Buddha images are more abundant than Thai Buddha images, pictures of Ganesh are more common than *Phra Picanet*, and Zen philosophy is more widely known than Theravada Buddhism. Thai art, however, is a living tradition with deep roots that goes back millennia. The refinement and stylization of motifs were solidified, and separated from other traditions, 700 years ago in the *Sukhothai* period. Yet this art is relatively unknown outside of Thailand. Western art schools require history of Western art courses, while SE Asian art, Indian or Chinese art is only an elective course, if it is even offered at all. There was a huge failure of colonialism – in a Western-labeled Indochina – which created conflict in Vietnam and Cambodia from the 1950 all the way into the 1980s. This might have helped bring Thailand into the American consciousness a little because of the cooperation of our armies, but when Thailand is compared to their SE Asian neighbors, they come in last place for English proficiency. These factors are some examples of the obstacles faced by cultural artists who when seeking exposure for their work notice there are many things about Thailand still invisible to the outside world.

Glossary of film terms

assembly – the initial editing of a film, putting together the clips in order
cinéma vérité – a movement in the film world which started around 1963, generally considered to be for documentaries, which acknowledges that the presence of the camera influences the behavior of the participants and their surroundings
close-up – a shot of a persons face or head, usually including the neck and some of the shoulders
cut – a film edit, or changing from one clip to another; originally it was an actual cut, at a particular frame, made on the film strip itself which was then appended to another roll of film from a different shot
direct cinema – directly capture reality and represent it truthfully
docudrama – dramatized re-enactments of actual events, from documentary theater
docufiction – the cinematic combination of documentary and fiction.
documentary – a nonfiction motion picture intended to document some aspect of reality
footage – the exposed and developed film roll from the motion picture camera; synonymous for an unedited shot or series of shots
foreign film – a film that wasn't made in English, or a film from another country
French new wave – an style of filmmaking from the 1960s which rebelled against common literary and narrative devices that were ingrained in the films of that time
independent film – a film made, uncontrolled by major studio
industrial – a film made to promote a factory or company; a promotional film
insert – an editing technique which cuts from a larger picture size to a smaller one, generally from the same angle
kanok – a traditional motif with roots in ancient Cambodian art, the Thai motif is specific and was developed in the *Sukhothai* period

kino – the Russian word for a camera or camera-man
Kino Pravda – from Russian, literally *true film;* a group of Russian filmmakers from the 1920s
long-shot – a picture wide enough to contains at least an entire person from head to toe
mock-up – to create a quick narrative based on
observational cinema – anthropological documentary, without a voiceover or commentary, which was widely used in the field of social sciences until it was widely criticized for dehumanizing its subjects
point of view shot – a shot taken from the position of the eyes of the subject, or actor, showing the audience exactly what they would see
ratio – the length of time of a films footage compared to its final edited version
reaction-shot – a typically close shot where one actor reacts to the actions of the off-screen actor
re-enactment – a recreation of an actual event for a documentary film
reverse shot – a picture take from the opposing angle of the previous shot, frequently used in dialog
shot – a clip of film or video; a piece of footage from a camera
two-shot – the framing of a shot where there are two actors in the frame, however a variety of picture sizes can be used and the term also includes the close-ups, over-the-shoulder shots and reverse shots which are included in the cinematographic process for narrative films
talking head – motion picture of a news anchor or similarly framed shot where a person explains to the audience

Glossary of Thai terms

Arrival of 2,500 Monks – an unannounced event where a multitude of monks came to hear one of Buddha's sermons on the full moon
Ayutthaya – the capital of Siam before the modern period
Birth of the Buddha – the traditional story of Prince Siddhartha's birth
Burengnong – the Burmese king, Bayinnaung, from the war in Ayutthaya
dharma – the unending cycle of rebirth; the natural law of the universe
Enlightenment – the moment Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha
Himavanta – a forest with magical angel-creatures
Jatakas - Buddhist stories which tell about the previous ten reincarnations of the Buddha
lai thai – a typical Thai traditional motif seen in drawings, paintings, architecture and sculpture
nagra – a mythical water serpent
Naresuan – a Thai prince held hostage in Burma during his childhood; the prince who won the battle of the war in Ayutthaya
Nipphan – Buddhist heaven; Nirvana
Opening of the Three Worlds – when the Buddha exposed the three level of heaven, earth and hell
Passing of the Buddha – the actions and saying of Buddha before he broke the cycle of reincarnation and achieved *Nipphan*
Phra Picanet – Ganesh, the god of art; the incarnation of Shiva with and elephant's head
phutta-phrawasat – from Thai, literally Buddha History
Ramakien – The Thai version of the Ramayana
Ramayana – the ancient Indian epic poem involving Rama, Sita, Hanuman and Ravana
Rattanakosin – The modern period, or Bangkok period starting in 1782
Shiva – the Hindu supreme being
Siddhartha – the prince who renounced his wealth and fortune to study the dharma
Sukhothai – the time period, and region, when what is today considered distinctly Thai came into being, including the refinement of the arts and language, around 700 years ago
Theravada – the School of Buddhism followed in Thailand
Thotsakan – The Thai version of Ravana from the Hindu epic Ramayana
Twin Miracles – when the Buddha drew together the Sun and the Moon at the same time
ubosot – the ordination hall of a Buddhist temple
Wat Phlapphachai – The Buddhist temple being painted during the making of the documentary for this project: *Line, Color and the Whole Story*

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