

# IKON

## Exhibition Guide

### **Soi Project, *Island***

**27 May – 22 June 2008**

**ikon Eastside**

Established in 2003 by Jiro Endo (Japan) and Wit Pimkanchanapong and Pitupong Chaowakul (Thailand), Soi Project is a group of artists, musicians, architects and designers that engages audiences in interactive and social situations.

This collaborative approach is essential. Predominantly based in Bangkok, an inherently community-focused city without a western-style arts infrastructure, Soi's members choose instead to create their own critical framework in which to situate their practice. In the Thai language, Soi means 'alley' and is suggestive of an organic, self initiated pathway. By working together they develop a constructive dialogue that extends to their audience, creating a fluid context within which to operate. Typically working outside accepted art environments, Soi Project prefers to use popular culture – situations such as a rock concert or nightclub – as a route to new places of interaction. Through architectural concerns, their ideas often centre on the relationship between real space and the representation of space by new technologies, and the way we navigate both.

*Island* (2008) is indicative of this approach. Here, a composite of satellite images from Google Earth™ covers a three-dimensional, synthetic land mass. The passage of time on the island is simulated through the use of lighting that gradually shifts from the dark of night through brilliant daylight to darkness again over a 24 minute cycle. Visitors are given stickers of buildings, swimming pools, beach umbrellas, animals and billboards to be attached to the island, in this way, affecting its future. They might mimic the impact that a sudden influx of tourists or developers has on an otherwise unspoilt place; build cities or leave areas occupied only by animals and vegetation. By strictly limiting the number of stickers per visitor, Soi Project creates a need for negotiation and trade whilst also leaving open the possibility of subversive activity. To build a major road network for example, would require the co-operation of many individuals. *Island* explores the human drive to occupy territory; to mark out real or imagined boundaries whilst controlling what occurs

within them. We therefore make ourselves at home on the island and through the collaboration engendered through the work, build a sense of common ownership.

In this way, the island becomes at once a fantasy resort and a mechanism through which our understanding of technology can be subverted. The digital maps don't appear as unreachable 'virtual' spaces but instead, by removing them from the screen, Soi Project creates a social and ultimately habitable environment. The comments, or tags, left by each participant provide a means of traversing the terrain, referencing the hyperlinks found on web pages. These 'click throughs', the ability to jump from one place to another, betrays Soi's interest in cubism, whereby several facets of the same experience are revealed simultaneously. In *Island*, countless interactions and relationships are exposed drawing the audience into a complex symbolic world.

Soi Project is keen to exploit the duration of such an experience, challenging the viewer to 'waste' time with their work. The 24 minute lighting cycle suggests how long one might take, a substantial amount of time for anyone to be in the presence of a work of art. Thus Soi Project conceives of their work as ongoing action research, pushing at the limits of conventional artistic experience.

During their time spent in Birmingham, Soi also presents *Fruits*, a fruitstand modelled on those found on street corners in Sharjah, where this work was first produced. Here, visitors are invited to make paper bananas, apples, oranges, pears and tropical fruits from cardboard cut-outs. These are then added to the display, and in return, each participant is given a piece of real fruit to take away. Through the folding of a flat shape into a three-dimensional form, Soi Project is again considering the multi-layered nature of representation and its resemblance to hypertext. The tabs which must be used in order to glue the fruit templates together hold text: names of different fruit written in Arabic, Thai and English which, when matched correctly, enable the successful completion of the model; the flat shape providing a map to the three-dimensional form. The meeting of different languages also suggests international communication and understanding.