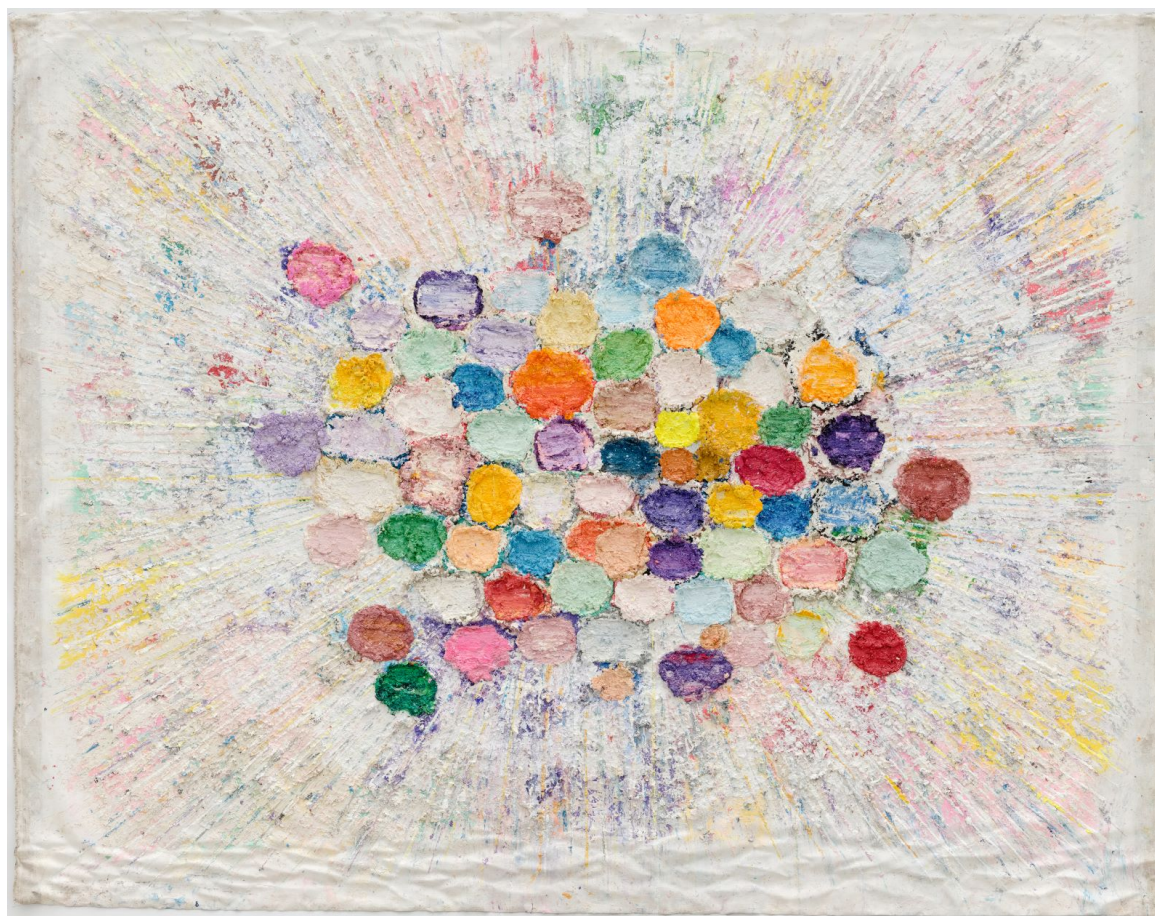


Mit Jai Inn

Dreamworld

15 September – 21 November 2021



Mit Jai Inn, *Untitled #TK-DC-1* (2019).
Oil on canvas, 170 x 220 cm. Image courtesy the artist and TKG+, Taipei

Ikon presents the first major solo exhibition in Europe by artist Mit Jai Inn (b.1960, Chiang Mai). A leading figure of contemporary art in Thailand, Mit is known for his colourful artworks that merge painting and sculpture. *Dreamworld* features recent and new works made for Ikon which embody his vision of art “as a utopian dream within everyday life” and collective hopes for a brighter future.

“When I paint, it’s not only with my eyes, but with all of my senses: touch, smell, movement. The whole entity.” Mit Jai Inn

Mit's art spans a variety of forms which he has developed over the past 35 years. *Wall Works* (1986 –) are unstretched rectangular canvases, painted on both sides with thick lines and bold patches of paint. The random slits of *Patch Works* (1999 –) break away from the clean lines and logic of minimalist painting, while the fluorescent colours and frayed edges of *Dream Works* (1999 –) express the excitement and anxiety felt by people around the world on the eve of the new millennium and since. *Scrolls* (1987 –) transform a traditional format of Eastern painting into rollable sculptures, and in *Pools* (2016 –), mounds of paint bathed in solvents evoke the climate of his outdoor studio in Chiang Mai, where high levels of humidity keep his paints sticky and viscous.

A republican and activist, Mit's works often convey his resistance to the Thai monarchy and military rule. Since 2020, popular protests in Thailand have called for political reform and for King Maha Vajiralongkorn to step down. Though punishable by imprisonment, thousands of people, including Mit, continue to campaign at their own risk, galvanised by the possibility of change. At times, colours in Mit's works such as red, blue, yellow and silver reference Thai politics and his indigenous Yong heritage. Their defiance of traditional formats of painting also convey his rebellious spirit.

For Mit, painting is both intensely physical and deeply meditative. Using his hands, fingers and, occasionally, a palette knife, he dabs, slaps and pulls colours across the canvas, blending them intuitively. The thick consistency of his paints is derived from a mixture of old oil paint, gypsum powder, colour pigments and acrylic paints, loosened with linseed oil. Reflective minerals increase the dazzling effect of their combined colours and give them their "magic" glow.

An idea of circulating positive energy between humans and the natural world is at the heart of Mit's art. He sees painting as a way of transferring fields of energy from the earth (the source of his materials) into his works and their surroundings. Site-specificity is an important element of his practice: for instance, the suspended "flags" of *People's Wall* (2019) at Jim Thompson Art Farm, Thailand, or the immense scale of *Planes (Hover, Erupt, Erode)* (2018), which reflected the cavernous buildings of Cockatoo Island, Sydney, Australia.

Mit has often given his works away, for members of the public to keep, and for other artists to incorporate into their own projects. These gestures highlight Mit's belief in his artworks as gifts, whose meaning lies in the hands of their owners, hosts and viewers. They have also resulted in his relative lack of recognition in the art world, outside of Thailand. A co-founder of initiatives *The Land* (1998 –) and Chiang Mai Social Installation (CMSI) (1992 – 98), Mit has frequently eschewed authorship of these projects, preferring to foster their collaborative spirit. For him, collective will is the essence of sincerely held beliefs in both art and Buddhism.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive monograph on Mit's life and work, published by Ikon and ArtAsiaPacific Foundation. It will include full-colour

documentation of the exhibition and key works, with texts by Melanie Pocock, Ikon Curator; art historian Simon Soon; critic and curator Brian Curtin; plus an interview with the artist by Gridthiya Gaweewong, Artistic Director, The Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok.

Visiting Ikon: Entry is free. To book a ticket or for more information on current opening times and visiting guidelines please visit ikon-gallery.org

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Laura Jaunzems on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or l.jaunzems@ikon-gallery.org

Social Media - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery
Links: ikon-gallery.org

Note to Editors:

1. Further reading: [How I became an artist: Mit Jai Inn](#), *Art Basel*, April 2021.
2. Biography: Mit Jai Inn (born 1960, Chiang Mai) was raised in an indigenous Yong family and Lanna weaving village in Northern Thailand. Aged nine, Mit became a novice monk at Djittabhawan Buddhist College, Pattaya (1970 – 1976). He began his artistic training at Silpakorn University, Bangkok, whose neo-traditionalist curriculum he eventually rebelled against. Leaving for Germany in 1986, where he camped in Kassel during *documenta 8*, he enrolled in the Master's programme at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. There, he met acclaimed Austrian artist Franz West, for whom he worked as a studio assistant (1988 – 1992). Returning to Thailand in 1992, he founded with a group of Thai artists the Chiang Mai Social Installation (CMSI), a festival of ephemeral installations and performance art in public spaces and temples throughout the city. Over the past twenty years, his work has been exhibited in major museums and galleries including the Yokohama Triennale (2005); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2007); Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (2011); Singapore Art Museum (2014); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2018); Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan; and the 18th and 21st Biennales of Sydney (2012 and 2018). His work is represented by Silverlens in Manila and TKG+ in Taipei. Mit lives and works in Chiang Mai.
3. Please note all dates are subject to change, in particular as a result of Government announcements relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational

charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org

1. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
2. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. artscouncil.org.uk



Installation view, Mit Jai Inn, *People's Wall* (2019).

60 sprayed canvases, 4 × 1.5 m each, dimensions variable, at Art on Farm, Jim Thompson Farm, Thailand, 2020.

Image courtesy the artist and Jim Thompson Art Center