

ELIZABETH PULIE + SAVANDHARY VONGPOOTHORN

Australia

If art production is thought of in the Freudian sense as being an act of compulsion then the joint exhibition of Elizabeth Pulie and Savandhary Vongpoothorn at Sydney's Gallery 4A must have been the result of their respective obsessive-compulsive conditions. Each artist presented four works created via manically repeated actions: intricate beading in the case of Pulie and multiple pointillist-style needle pricks in the case of Vongpoothorn.

Pulie's beaded string works and Vongpoothorn's paintings were hung opposite each other on the two main walls of the gallery. Their face-off posed a direct challenge of interpretation. Initially the artists' distinctively different (almost contradictory) creations were apparent. Vongpoothorn's paintings were small and neatly framed under glass while Pulie's beaded curtains were invitingly tactile and, by comparison, quite large. However seemingly incongruous the combination of their art may have been a strong dialogue clearly existed between them.

The bulbousness of Pulie's beads was neatly juxtaposed against the perforated negative spaces of Vongpoothorn's needle-punctured paper. Jointly, the creative techniques which they chose to employ (the use of needle and/or thread) referenced womens' craft. Individually, Pulie evoked images of milk bar doorways, shower curtains and psychedelic lava lamp-filled lounge rooms whilst Vongpoothorn's geometrically-patterned paintings were reminiscent of meditative mandala-like shapes. Considered separately then, Vongpoothorn's work could be labelled with a 'quasi-religiousness' and Pulie's with a 'quasi-kitschness'. That the two managed to come together at the same time and place was curious. That they did so quite harmoniously was confounding.

Pulie's and Vongpoothorn's exhibition was the second to be held at the recently opened Gallery 4A in Sydney's Chinatown. Gallery 4A was established by (and takes its name from) the Asian Australian Artists' Association; a non-profit national organisation initiated in order to foster and encourage the professional development of Asian-Australian artists.

Given Gallery 4A's agenda then, it was interesting to see how two artists, one of Anglo-Australian background (Pulie) the other of ^{Laos} Thai-Australian heritage (Vongpoothorn) could combine their seemingly conflicting styles and have their commonalities show through despite their differences. The complex task that was attempted here was the creation of an environment where a language of art interpretation based on homogeneity could exist in preference to one originating from an Ameri-Eurocentric basis. The risk involved in combining Pulie and Vongpoothorn in this environment (as unavoidable metaphors for West vs. East, Anglo-Celtic vs. Foreign Other, etc.) was the possibility that the issues at hand might be reduced to a basic (and rather trite) sentiment of: "Even though we are from different backgrounds we still have things in common.". The underlying paradox is that once difference between things has been established it is difficult to regard them with equality, for

surely 'different' by definition is not 'equal'. The risk, though, is one that has to be taken at an artistic level and on a broader scale in order for Australia to positively reconcile its own changing society with its projected international identity.

Elizabeth Pulie + Savandhary Vongpoothorn
Gallery 4A, Sydney
10 April - 3 May 1997