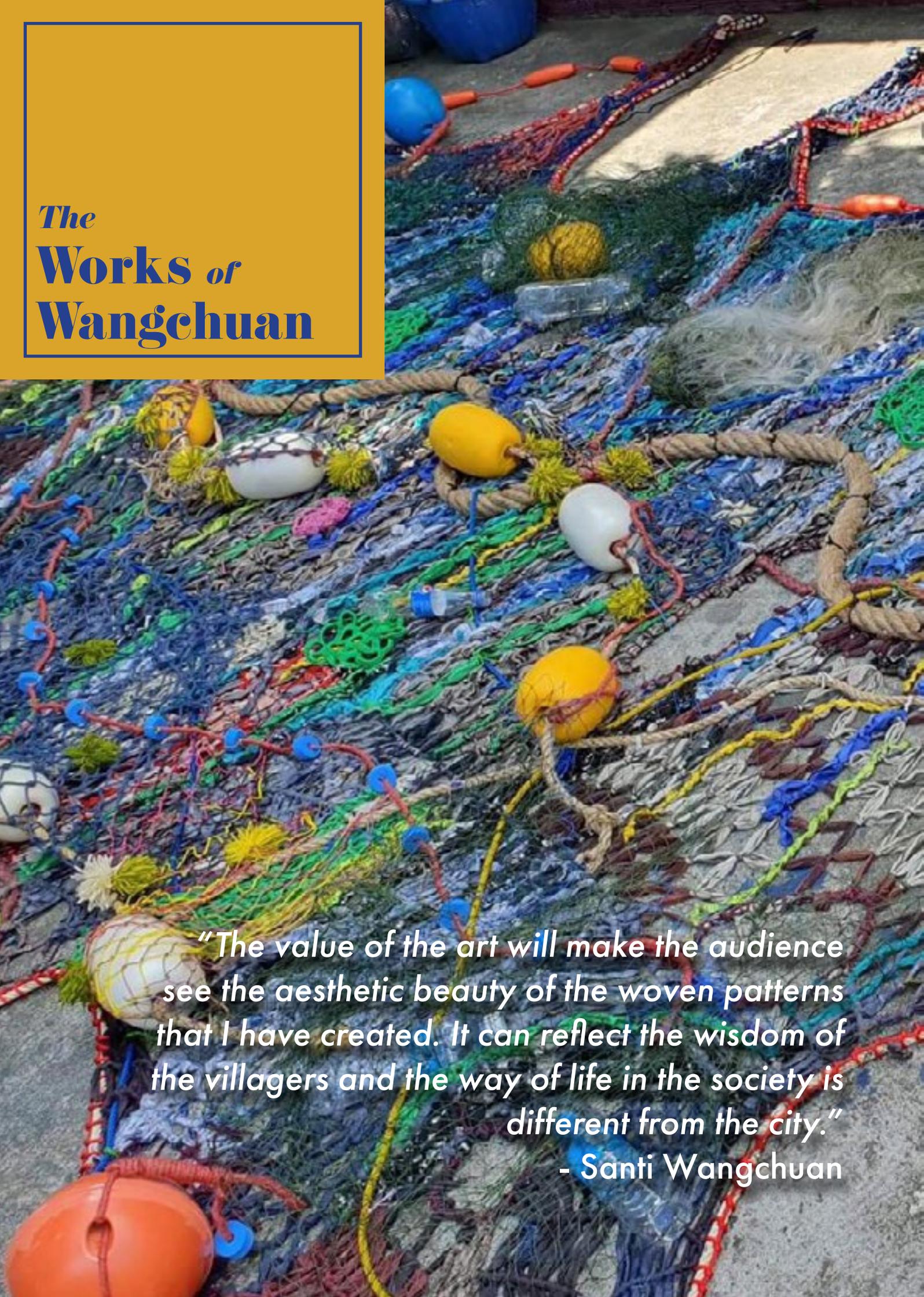


The
Stories
of
Santi
Wangchuan



YEO WORKSHOP



The
Works of
Wangchuan

“The value of the art will make the audience see the aesthetic beauty of the woven patterns that I have created. It can reflect the wisdom of the villagers and the way of life in the society is different from the city.”

- Santi Wangchuan





As the long, thick, multi-coloured fibres coalesce in suspension, the art of Thai artist Santi Wangchuan bursts with boldness, energy, movement and emotion, filling every space they occupy not just with their massive bodies and their plethora of visual intricacies but also the memories associated with them. These memories are intimate, coming from the artist's childhood, but are also shared and beloved by an entire culture, the artist's own people. In Wangchuan's sprawling installations, the threatened traditions of Ubon Ratchathani in Northeast Thailand are recalled and revitalized, honouring the village where he was born and the handweaving skill that was his family's trade before the increasing mechanization of Thai society. Standing as important testaments of a history that is both personal and collective, literally interwoven with countless stories that continue to multiply as the artist delves deep into research and discovery, these works augment the growing art ecology of Southeast Asia and the diverse narrative of the visual arts of Asia in general. Stemming from Wangchuan's determination to preserve his family's old way of life, they are inspiring and moving as well.

The traditional customs Wangchuan invoke include religions, clothings, stories, tools and equipment native to Isan, the province where Ubon Ratchathani is located, creating a feast of visual and tactile sensations. However, upon closer examination, there are elements of music and choreography as well, enhancing the liveliness of the works; this way, the otherwise dense, heavy bodies of the works with its strong downwards gravitational pull achieves the sense of sound and movement as well. Taking the time to appreciate this, the viewer is better able to experience the full scope of the moment and place Wangchuan wishes to capture and immerse us in.



In the words of Singaporean curator Louis Ho, ***My Local Way of Life (2016)*** features iconography derived from cultural and religious life in the artist's hometown; discernible are visual references to traditional dance as well as calligraphy and botanical species in northeastern Thailand. Dance is the main traditional art form in Thailand so the inclusion of this completes the essence of Wangchuan's home, not to mention carry the eye around the looming columns of textural patterns. The dancing figures (outlined in white), perform their graceful, swaying routine against a lyrical background whose noise and temperature are indeed reminiscent of the saturated Thai scenery we are all familiar with.

Select
Works
in the
context of
Dance
& Music



Santi Wangchuan
My Local Way of Life
2017
Rope, Fibre and Thread
SW-000003
300 x 400 x 1000cm
(combined)

These paper drawing-sculptures are Wangchuan's sketches of "Auba" garlands, created in Thailand to as part of a ritual to honour the Buddha. The tallest sculpture is 1000cm and the shortest is 600cm. These sketches, which were shown at Art Central Hong Kong, eventually became *My Local Way of Life*. Like the final product, they are a trio of columns supporting a colorful spillage terminating into a puddle of floral patterns on the ground. The artist was inspired by the shape of Auba flower bunches to "create stories related to the art and lifestyle of the local population" specific to this religious celebration.





Example of traditional Thai dance, referenced in ***My Local Way of Life*** (see previous page)

Image provided by the artist



Auba Garlands used in worship of Buddha



Original sketch for sculptures (see opposite page)

***Visual
References***



Santi Wangchuan
Weaving of Memorable Space (No. 8), 2017
Rope, thread, fibre, antique weaving tools and fishing basket
60 x 120 cm

In addition to adopting the specific weaving techniques learned from his mother and grandmother, Wangchuan conveys his deep connections to his past and cultural heritage using objects and materials associated with the person or place being paid tribute. The incorporation of these objects is for the audience to see how their lives are inextricably tied to the ways of their society.

These objects include musical instruments, often in celebration of Buddhism in Thailand. ***Weaving of Memorable Space No. 8 (2017)*** features a fearsome mask so dominant it competes with the chaotic macramé in which it is nestled. According to the artist, the mask is one of many used in Phi Ta Khon, commonly known as the Ghost Festival, a type of masked procession taking place on the first day of a three-day Buddhist merrymaking holiday known in Thai as "Boon Pra Wate". The annual festival takes place in the months of May, June and July in Dan Sai, a small town in the upper northeastern province of Loei. Participants dress up like ghosts and monsters, wearing huge masks made from carved coconut-tree trunks, topped with a wicker-work sticky-rice steamer. The ceremony is marked by an endless fanfare of music and dancing.

The precise origin of the Phi Ta khon is unclear. However, it can be traced back to a traditional Buddhist folklore. In the Buddha's past life, he was the beloved Prince Vessandorn. The prince was said to go on a trip for such a long time that his subjects thought he was dead. When he suddenly returned, however, the people were overjoyed and welcomed him back with revelries so boisterous that it awoke even the dead, who ended up joining in. From that time onwards, the faithful would come to commemorate the legendary event with ceremonies, festivities and the donning of ghostly spirit masks.

The mask extending from the macramé sits atop a fishing basket, becoming an entity rather than an empty husk. With an intelligible body, it takes on a life-like quality and looks ready to spring into action against a chaotic background not unlike the real-life celebration that takes place in Isan every year.

Visual References

Photographs of Phi Ta Khon, or the Ghost Festival, a merry procession that is part of a Buddhist celebration in Thailand. The mask in ***Weaving of Memorable Space No. 8 (2017)*** is very typical of the masks worn in this celebration.





Left
 Santi Wangchuan
Native Instruments
 2019
 Weaving, Native Instruments
 SW-000014
 90 x 100 cm

Below
 Santi Wangchuan
E-san Lifestyle No. 1
 2018
 Weaving
 SW-000002
 70 x 140 cm



In the work simply titled ***Native Instruments (2019)***, Wangchuan incorporates the “khaen”. The khaen or khene is a type of wind instrument made of bamboo and is associated with the Lao people of Laos and Isan. In musical performances, the dancers change their costumes with the conclusion of every dance, or story.

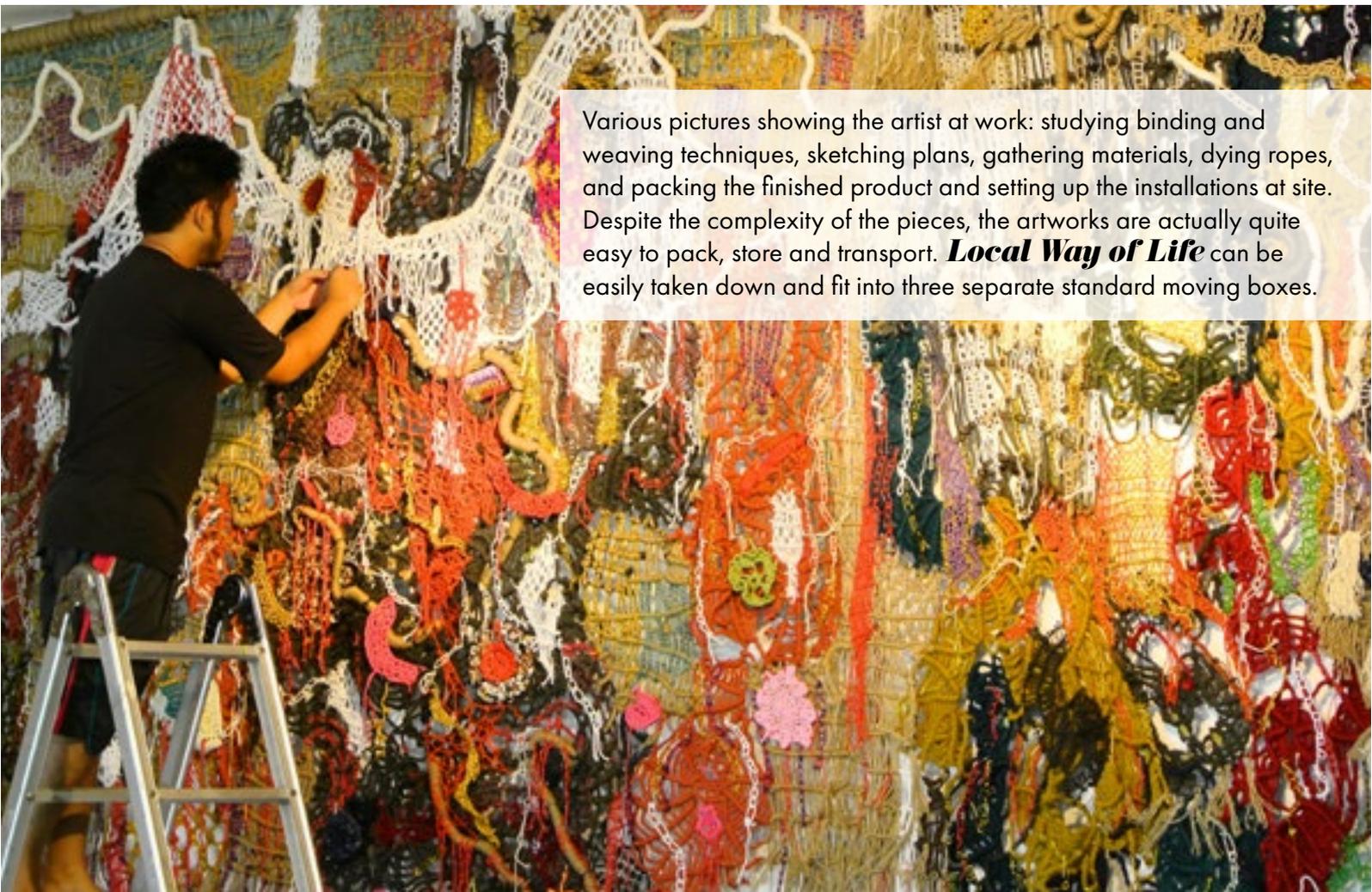
The instruments are incorporated in ***E-san Lifestyle No. 1 (2018)*** as well. E-san refers to Isan.

Further information:

An example of a dance performance with the khaen instrument can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZTt62Q-lxk&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR2qLhrs9T HEaB6Uulx5X1V5hLVXkaA9C3xXhSmQT_Fi1WHxI0RvmZcCsXiA
 *Skip to 0:20 for the first close-up of the khaen



The Working Process



Various pictures showing the artist at work: studying binding and weaving techniques, sketching plans, gathering materials, dying ropes, and packing the finished product and setting up the installations at site. Despite the complexity of the pieces, the artworks are actually quite easy to pack, store and transport. ***Local Way of Life*** can be easily taken down and fit into three separate standard moving boxes.



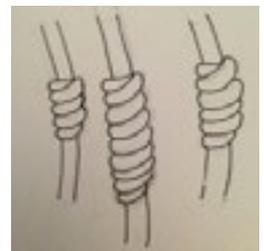
"My grandmother taught me natural rope dyeing techniques. Each technique results in its own dye that is beautiful and different."
 - Translated, adapted and summarised from Chapter 3 of Santi Wangchuan's PhD thesis.

Symbolic Meaning of Knots and Ties in Thai Culture

Friends and loved ones share in a ceremonial tie, a method of tying the wrist of two people. This creates a prosperous relationship between individuals.



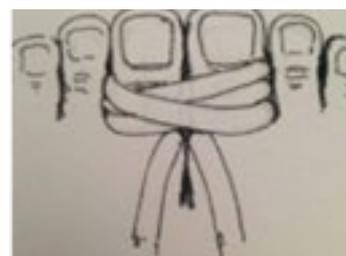
A worm-shaped knot, numbered according to an auspicious number is tied to the arm of a baby to bless it.



During wedding ceremonies, relatives tie the wrists of the bride and groom together. In addition to the wristbands, a nuptial good luck thread called "the twins" is positioned on the couples' heads.



During funerals, the corpse is bound in specific ways so as not to allow the deceased to fall into the "ring of suffering".



"These ceremonies have existed since ancient times. These are all religious and cultural beliefs that play a deep role in the lives of Thais from birth to death."
 - Translated, adapted and summarised from Chapter 2 of Santi Wangchuan's PhD thesis.



Artist Biography

Santi Wangchuan's hand-made woven works are inspired by his family's traditions and is reflected by integrating religion, stories, equipment and tools that are native to his hometown. Born into a family of traditional weavers, he acquired the skill at a young age from his grandmother, and through his mixed media work, he resourcefully preserves an art technique that is soon to be lost as provincial communities are faced with rapid urbanisation.

After studying art history and the art traditions in Thailand, he sought an outlet to re-engage in his family's dying craft, which once served as their main source of income. As machinery became more efficient and modern furnishings became the preferred choice, hand-woven baby cribs and beddings became obsolete. The family business was dissolved and his relatives progressed to find sustainable jobs. As such, Wangchuan's fascination is derived from the intervention of urban development, and places emphasis on the changes in the way of life as known to him.

Wangchuan weaves together intimate memories and relationships, harmonizing items such as personal belongings and remnants of clothes that once belonged to his family members. Detailed and complex, his abstract work symbolizes his intimate affection and warmth towards his family, and serves as a long-lasting remembrance for loved ones he has lost. The various colourful weaving patterns and independent shapes that he creates highlight societal metamorphosis, folk wisdom and beliefs, as he continues the conservation of his culture.

Born in 1988, Santi Wangchuan earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Thai Art (Second Class Honors) from the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, and recently graduated with an MFA in Visual Arts, the Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok. Most recently in 2015, Wangchuan was awarded the "3rd Honoured Bronze Award" at the 61st National Exhibition of Art, Bangkok, Thailand. He has participated in multiple art exhibitions, such as the 35th Bualuang Painting Exhibition, The Queen's Gallery, Bangkok in 2013, and the Amata Foundation's 'Art Awards'.

About
Yeo
Workshop

Yeo Workshop is a contemporary art gallery that produces a series of exhibitions, represented artists projects, and gallery-based programmes such as talks, symposiums and guiding research. Its aim is to promote the work of contemporary local and international artists with a strong artistic practice, and engage with the Singaporean and visiting audience. It puts emphasis on education via programmes surrounding its exhibition.

Yeo Workshop has been permanently based at Gillman Barracks, Singapore since Fall 2013.

Other projects of the gallery include the Arnoldii Arts Club, a course-based arts club, focusing on art history, art production and art markets. It also initiates and curates community projects, such as the recent "Singapore Arts Club", a Gillman-Barracks-wide public art project in January 2016, to provide platforms for artists and to reach a wider audience.

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