

## **20 Years of Gallery Ver**

Launched in 2006, Gallery Ver has forged new milestones in Bangkok's art journey with each wave of pioneering artists, curators and gallery crews who have passed through its doors. The gallery was born from Namdee Publishing Station, an art incubator founded on the Chao Phraya riverbank in 2000 by Rirkrit Tiravanija, fellow artist Chitti Kasemkitvatana and art journalist Phatarawadee Phataranawik. Set in a loft-like shophouse in the Thonburi's Klongsan district – now dominated by the Millennium Hilton and IconSiam mall – the station helped shape Thailand's contemporary art landscape as the new millennium dawned. Thai contemporary experienced a breakout period from 1995 to 1999, driven by alternative spaces like About Studio/About Cafe and Project 304, alongside the commercial Tadu Contemporary Gallery. But maintaining this delicate momentum was difficult without government support. That was the cue for Namdee's mission to cultivate a sustainable contemporary art community. Namdee took its name from the Thai word for "bile", the juice that transforms diverse ingredients into life-giving nourishment. Rirkrit described it as a platform where art communities, both Thai and international, could mix and share ideas, practices, and friendship. The station quickly became a creative crossroads for young artists, curators, art historians, and critics, attracted by its various roles as art studio, production house, art lab, and even exciting art residency.

### **Ver – the magazine years**

Namdee Publishing Station broke new ground with Ver Magazine, Thailand's first visual-audio art publication. Drawing inspiration from Rirkrit's New York radio days, it fused photography and CD sound in fresh takes on contemporary culture – food, music, poetry, politics, art, architecture, sport, travel, fashion, etc – by international and Thai artists, architects, fashion designers, musicians, photographers and critics. The pilot issue launched in 2000 with a striking orange cover designed by editor-at-large Rirkrit and his small team. "Ver" was teenage Thai slang for "over the top" or "excessive". The magazine built an international following, with fans able to find copies in Bangkok's Tower Records, Paris's Collette shop, and museums across Japan and the US. The first issue followed up with another iconic cover featuring German artist Tobias Rehberger.

Namdee Publishing Station was also functioning as an art factory for Rirkrit's circle. Ver Magazine's graphic designers Pratchaya Phinthong and Pattara Chanruechachai doubled as artist assistants, helping Rehberger assemble a car sculpture and creating prints and paintings for Rirkrit, while a colleague Thakol KhaoSa-ad woodworked for Danish-Icelandic

artist Olafur Eliasson. Beyond the mentorship from professional artists, they also earned extra income from these projects. Pratchaya and Pattara went on to study in Frankfurt and Paris, respectively.

Rirkrit branched out to Chiang Mai with the experimental “The Land Foundation” project, collaborating with another Chiang Mai based artist Kamin Lertchaiprasert, converting a rice field into a laboratory for sustainable living. Rirkrit and Rehberger’s houses became the project’s first two installations in 2001. “Namdee shipped Rirkrit’s architectural work ‘Untitled 2000 (How it is possible ...)’ and Tobias’s house from Moderna Museet in Sweden to Chiang Mai,” recalled curator Manuporn Luengaram, a Namdee associate. Namdee produced the final project of Thai conceptual art pioneer Montien Boonma (1953-2000) – a collaboration with Rirkrit and underprivileged Bangkok children titled “The Quiet in The Land”. The exhibition, curated by France Morin in Salvador, Brazil, was accompanied by a catalogue recording the final conversation between Montien and Rirkrit.

Namdee Publishing Station also served as an international art residency, spawning new works by Sweden’s Karl Holmqvist, Frenchman Philippe Parreno and Danish collective Superflex. Later, Chitti was replaced by writer Panu Boonpipattanapong, who oversaw Ver’s controversial second issue with art provocateur Vasan Sitthiket on the cover. The final edition celebrated the talent of self-taught female artist Nim Kruasaeng, setting the stage for the station’s transformation into alternative art space Gallery Ver at Klong San in June 2006. The conversion was guided by Pratchaya, newly returned from Frankfurt after completing a master’s in art under Rehberger at the Städelschule.

### **Birth of a pioneering gallery**

Gallery Ver launched its mission to support local artists and connect Thai contemporary art with the international scene with a debut solo exhibition by Udomsak Krisanamis. “We decided to turn the empty space into a platform for young artists, so they could get exhibition experience before bigger opportunities came their way,” Rirkrit once explained.

The gallery operated as an experimental art lab, opening its space for young curators and art practitioners in all genres: painting, photography, sculpture, installation, moving-image, live performance, poetry, and even cooking. Importantly, it served as a public venue for discussion between creatives and their audience.

Pratchaya also highlighted the gallery's value as a space for hands-on learning. "While preparing Udomsak's solo show, I learned a lot about his artworks and practices." Influential Silpakorn University art academics such as Sayan Daengklom and Thanavi Chotpradit contributed to programmes for exhibitions by Sathit Sattarasart and Udomsak Krisnamis.

In 2009, young curators Worathep Akkabootara and Somsuda Piamsumrit chose Ver for their debut exhibition, "Safe Place in the Future (?): Dystopia Now Utopia Never".

The critically acclaimed group show on global warming then jumped to Bangkok's Jim Thompson Art Centre and Museum of Contemporary Art and Design of De La Salle College-St Benide in Manila. Meanwhile the gallery had become a meeting ground for local and international artists, art students, curators and collectors. Regular guests included the late Thai collector Petch Osathanugrah, the late Italian curator Pier Luigi Tazzi and renowned art patron Reinhart Frais. "Ver could change constantly because it didn't need to be a certain thing. This is what we meant by a 'station'," Rirkrit said in a 2011 interview with Gallery Ver's director Jirat Ratthawongjirakul. "If you wanted to work on one thing, you could do it, coming and going as you pleased."

However, when early proteges like Pratchaya Phinthong and Arin Rungjang began holding their own exhibitions elsewhere, he realised it was time for change. Aiming to "get closer to the public", the gallery shifted to a two-storey shophouse on Tanao Road near the backpacker hub of Khaosan in July 2010. Under Singaporean curator Joseph Ng, the new premises presented dozens of solo and group shows by both Thai and international artists. One standout piece was "erasing 22'09 (unfinished)", a 2010 video and sound installation by Rirkrit and artist Nico Dockx. Created during the peak of unrest in Bangkok, the piece challenged the notion of art as a static form in a period of transformation by depicting the physical erasure of a previous artwork. Sathit Sattarasart also waded into the politically charged atmosphere with his installation "Absence and Recurrence", tracing the underlying currents of Thailand's tumultuous 2010. International collaborations brought fresh perspectives, including the exhibition "Playing Arts" by German artist Christoph Riemer and Thai artist-writer Panu Boonpipattanapong in February 2011.

### **On the move again!**

Ver switched gears again in 2012, relocating to a disused railway depot at the trendy Suan Rod Fai Night Market under new director Jirat. Reminiscent of Berlin's art squats or Beijing's 798 gallery district, Ver's new space buzzed with raw creative energy amid the pubs, dance

clubs and cafes of the weekend night bazaar. And a prime location within walking distance of both the BTS Skytrain and MRT subway drew a new audience. The gallery opened on February 11, 2012, with the show “Retro-Ver-spective”, featuring works by 15 Thai artists previously exhibited at the gallery plus two invited artists. Next came exhibitions of abstract paintings by New York icon Spencer Sweeney and new works by Thai artists Arin Rungjang and Paphonsak La-or. But after just 15 months, Ver entered a new and uncertain chapter when Suan Rot Fai market relocated to Srinakarin Road in the eastern suburbs.

### **From regional fairs to Bangkok pop-ups**

After closing its doors at Suan Rod Fai, Gallery Ver continued its mission through local and regional fairs, alongside pop-up shows in Bangkok. It stepped into the regional market in January 2014, showcasing emerging Thai artists like Ruangsak Anuwatwimon at Art Stage Singapore (now known as S.E.A. Focus). Ver artists soon became a familiar presence at major Asian expos like ArtJog, the biggest art fair in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They also drew more global eyeballs when the Hotel Art Fair landed at Bangkok’s Luxx Langsuan Hotel in May 2014. Along with the international showcases came Bangkok pop-ups to promote local art communities. Gallery Ver collaborated with pioneering Thai art collective Nuts Society to present “Quality Secondhand Art 2013: Re-creation” at a design office in Wang Thonglang from February to March 2014. Founded by Toi Ungkavatanapong and his late wife Piyaluk Benjadol, Nuts Society features around 40 artists and designers who work with leftover materials and junk. Later that year, Ver introduced emerging Chiang Mai artists Arnont Nongyao and Piyarat Piyapongwiwat in the duo show “Trance” at Yet Space in Thonburi, featuring immersive sound and video installations curated by Lyla Phimanrat.

### **Building an art community at N22**

After years of searching, Ver found a large warehouse on Narathiwasrachanakharin Road, Soi 22, creating the art cluster N22 in March 2016. The 800 sqm-space brought together three galleries, three studios, and collaborative projects under one roof. Ver was the largest, with over 120 sqm of exhibition space. Neighbours included Cartel led by Chiang Mai artist Mit Jai-Inn, the Tentacle collective, studios opened by Kamol Phaosavasdi, Be Takerng Pattanopas, and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, and a boho cafe. Over time, more galleries and artists joined, including The ARTIST+RUN, promoting northern Thai and Bangkok art (since replaced by Nue Contemporary), La Lanta Gallery, and VS Gallery. N22 quickly became a lively hub, hosting opening receptions where generations of artists exchanged ideas. Ver’s signature smoked-barbecue receptions even inspired the innovative BBQ International Gallery – a miniature gallery on a converted BBQ stove, curated by Yingyod Yenakarn,

giving emerging artists a platform to express ideas on art, rights, politics and the environment.

Over nine years at N22, Ver staged more than 80 exhibitions, featuring conceptual and context-based artists such as Kamol Phaosavasdi, Udomsak Krisanamis, Chitti Kasemkitvatana, Arin Rungjang, Som Supaparinya, Thasanai Sethaseree, Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, Wantanee Siripattananuntakul, Viriya Chotpanyavisut and Yujin Lee. Numerous artworks exhibited here were collected by private collectors, Thailand's Ministry of Culture and other international art institutions. While the main gallery focused on established artists, the Project Room nurtured rising talents including Nuttapon Sawasdee, Prapat Jiwangsan, Piyaat Piyapongwiwat, and Thavika Savangwongsakul. In 2024, VS Gallery took over the Project Room to continue supporting young artists.

Ver has worked with numerous guest curators, including Pojai Akranakul, Loredana Pazzini Paracciani, Ariane Kupferman Sutthavong, Nim Niyomsin, Kittima Chareeprasit, and Ariana Chaivaranon, enriching the gallery with fresh perspectives and international expertise.

On the global stage, Ver has focused on international art fairs rather than collaborating with institutions. Highlights include Osaka International Art 2025 (in conjunction with the World Expo 2025), "Dream and Reflection" at Seoul's Hangaram Art Museum, and its Frieze London 2023 debut with Wantanee Siripattananuntakul's solo show, "People Say Nothing Is Impossible, but Beuys Does Nothing Everyday", entered by Rirkrit in the new "Artist-to-Artist" section.

As Bangkok's contemporary art scene evolves, new galleries like Bangkok CityCity Gallery (2015) and Nova Contemporary (2016) are rising, drawing some artists away from Ver as they seek greater exposure, financial opportunities and professional advancement. Entering its third decade, Thailand's contemporary art pioneer faces a clear challenge: to amplify Thai artists' presence on the world stage, strengthen ties between local and global art communities, and nurture the next generation of creative talent.

Phatarawadee Phataranawik

Edited by Rod Borrowman