

## Jakkai Siributr *There's no Place*

I first encountered the work of Thai artist Jakkai Siributr in the 2024 Venice Biennale collateral exhibition, “The Spirits of Maritime Crossing,” organized by Apinan Poshyananda at the 17th century Palazzo Smith Mangilli Valmarana. His installation, *There's no Place* (2020–), featured a cascade of colorful banners hung low across a narrow corridor like curtains, and visitors had to stoop and shimmy their way through. Made in collaboration with communities around the world, the banners are embroidered with children's drawings. With a painted 18th-century Neoclassical ceiling above, the experience was enchanting.

Knowing that Canal Projects would close with a solo exhibition by Siributr titled “There's no Place,” I was curious to experience

the work in a 19th-century cast-iron building. Canal Street, where SoHo meets Chinatown and Tribeca, is a thoroughfare of Francophone West African vendors peddling counterfeit designer bags and souvenir shops run by Chinese immigrants. Once through the babel of shouts between hawkers and tourists, I found a sanctuary in Siributr's rainbow-hued textile installations inside the gallery. The multicultural trade in mass-manufactured knockoffs made for an absurd backdrop to the handstitched works that interweave 20th-century Thai history with intimate stories of loss, grief, memory, and the rippling social impact of COVID-19.

The show's opening in late January was delayed by a day due to a nationwide strike, led by student groups at the University of Minnesota, calling for “No work. No school. No shopping. Stop funding ICE.” The protest took on a religious resonance in its boycott of consumption—particularly in relation to Siributr as a Thai artist from a majority-Buddhist country, where

those of the cloth are meant to relinquish material wants. Fittingly, each of Siributr's works touches on an aspect of religious life, from the antique, tattered Tibetan thangkhas (including a family heirloom) comprising *Matrilineal* (2023) to the talismanic objects stitched onto *Airborne* (*Klongtoey*) (2022) and the *Outworn* series (2023)—amulets that echo the popular Buddhist reliance on charms and temple rituals for protection and prosperity. The latter two pieces resemble tapestries assembled from reconstructed uniforms and garments gathered from Thai service workers whose livelihoods were affected by the collapse of tourism during COVID-19.

Some of the works reference Siributr's family, whose fate intertwined closely with modern Thai history. The aforementioned *Matrilineal*, as well as *Broadlands* (2023), reflect on the family's English connection. In 1935, Rama VII (1893–1941) abdicated following years of conflict with the constitutional government established

after the 1932 revolution, and lived in exile in the UK until his death. Siributr's grandparents accompanied the King and Queen as courtiers, but were permitted to take only two of their four daughters. The sisters—Siributr's mother and aunts—did not reunite until after World War II. After their deaths, the artist inherited their clothes and jewelry, which he reworked by hand into these pieces. Darker still is *Sompong* (2023), which addresses the aftermath of the still unsolved murder of Rama VIII (1925–46) in 1946, when Siributr's great-great-uncle, a royal page, along with two fellow aides, were scapegoated and executed. His daughters, with whom the artist grew up and whom he calls aunties, carried that ordeal by innocence throughout their lives. Amid black feathers and lace, he embedded a Burmese embroidery that belonged to the eldest daughter, the work's namesake, who ultimately committed suicide despite a successful career.

Against this density of trauma and tragedy, Siributr's bright palette and tactile approach to retelling his family's and collaborators' stories become forms of healing. During the opening, he specifically drew attention to the back of the works, where layers of patches and meticulous networks of stitches remain visible, carrying their own quiet beauty. As violence continues to unfold today and long-hidden ugliness comes to light, a timely solace emerges in the thangkhas and humble textile works that gesture toward enlightenment and possible paths ahead.

### KELLY MA

Installation view of **JAKKAI SIRIBUTR's** *Airborne* (*Klongtoey*), 2022, machine-sewn face masks made from deconstructed uniforms and talismanic objects, 2.5 × 2.1 m. Courtesy Canal Projects, New York.

