



Artist Pinaree Sanpitak with the Breast Stupas Topiary. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

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COLD CUTS BY PINAREE SANPITAK

Where: Yavuz Fine Arts, 03-01, 51 Waterloo Street
When: Till Feb 23, 11am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 1 to 5pm (Sundays). Closed on Mondays

Sculptures an ode to womanhood

Deepika Shetty

Arts Correspondent

In the past two decades, leading Thai contemporary artist Pinaree Sanpitak has made a name for herself by playing with the idea of the female breast and the sacred stupa in Buddhist architecture.

The resulting form, what she calls the "breast stupa", has appeared in her installations, food art and paintings. In 2008, her interactive project where she gave out breast-shaped moulds for chefs to use in their culinary creations, was nominated for the inaugural Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize here.

Her latest show presents what she calls her Breast Stupas Topiary in a gallery setting. The eight fluid stainless steel sculptures were first exhibited outdoors at the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem in The Netherlands earlier this year.

Complementing these are five large paintings of floating ovoid forms inspired by the shape of seeds.

In town recently for her exhibition opening which coincided with the top contemporary art fair, Art Stage Singapore, she said the challenge was to see how these outdoor sculptures could be presented in a gallery space.

"I visited Singapore to see if these sculptures created for an outdoor space could work in a gallery setting," she added.

They clearly did. On opening night, several guests responded to them almost instantly. They watched their own reflections in the stainless steel surface of the sculptures and slipped in between the legs of the sculptures to take photographs.

Sanpitak encourages interaction with the artworks.

"How we are seen and how we see things, these are some of the issues that interest me as an artist. I want to see how people respond to the artworks. What is it that they see? Is it the image of themselves, the shape or the form because we will all see and respond to things differently," she said.

Her exploration of the human form started when her only son, who is now 20, was born.

Motherhood prompted her to look at her body in a whole new way. "It is often said, motherhood changes you. It got me to look at my body," said the 52-year-old. "The breast was so fascinating. It was a monument to womanhood. It was all about being a woman. It was both the sacred and the central and it made me more aware of the human body."

She added: "People recognise and associate my work with the breast but my work is actually about the body. I have created sculptures in different shapes and sizes to look at aspects ranging from growth, rejuvenation to decay.

"The breast is where it all started. My current interest is in seeing what happens to the human body as it goes through the cycle of life."

The series of Seeds paintings was done using acrylic, pencil and dried flowers on canvas. She picked the materials to evoke a sensory experience while looking at the canvases.

Born in Bangkok, Sanpitak has a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree from the School of Fine Arts and Design, University of Tsukuba in Ibaraki, Japan.

Her work has been exhibited in more than 17 countries including at the 2012 Sydney Biennale, 2009 Incheon Women Artists' Biennale in South Korea and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles. In 2007, she received Thailand's prestigious Silpatown Award and her work can be found in public collections including that of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the United States, the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane and the National Heritage Board collection here.

Looking at a child run in and out of her stainless steel sculptures at Yavuz Fine Art gallery, a warm smile lighted up her face.

"I guess I am seeking ways of sometimes playfully reinventing forms we grow up and live with."