



# SURASI KUSOLWONG

Surasi Kusolwong was born in 1965 in Ayutthaya, Thailand. He makes performance and site-specific installations that are truly interactive, engaging audiences in exchanges that highlight the relationship between people, art and consumerism. Surasi Kusolwong lives and works in Bangkok, Thailand.

## About the work

Surasi Kusolwong constructs installations and recreates scenes in his work, for example a Thai market or a massage parlour. In BALTIC, he used 'Tiger' electric mini-motorbikes, camouflage nets and neon works, a bike hung from the ceiling and chairs on skateboards to make up a multi-levelled environment. The artist is the performer who encourages the audience to play. They may temporarily become actors, models or stunt-drivers, sharing an experience. He wants to encourage visitors to enjoy his exhibition by offering unexpected possibilities which break the boundaries between art and life.

In these events Kusolwong stresses cultural exchange and happy experiences instead of money; he wants his exhibitions to be a place of social interaction.

The artist pays particular attention to the way he displays his objects, their colour, shape, form and composition. This specific concern with the way the objects look plays with the idea of art as a product providing emotional and aesthetic delight for the audience.

## Literacy

### Keywords

- Aesthetic
- Arrangement
- Collage
- Community
- Composition
- Consumerism
- Currency
- Delight
- Form
- Globalization
- Installation
- Interactive
- Parlour
- Participation
- Performance
- Pleasure

- Democratic
- Emotional
- Exchange
- Product
- Site-specific
- Stress

## Thinking Skills

The artist was asked if a person buys a product or a piece of art at one of his market places. Kusolwong replies "You buy art because you have an attitude about it. And you buy goods, it's because you have an attitude about it. You can buy both art/goods if you have both attitudes." What do you think the artist means by this, and how do you think you can apply this sentiment to everyday life?

## Citizenship

Kusolwong talks about the system of market pitches in Bangkok where it is a case of first come first served. This might sound harsh or competitive, but the Thai mindset is to react calmly to situations as Kusolwong states, "no stress, nothing but joy." How do you think this attitude could help you if you were to be confronted with something that you felt was unfair or unjust?

The artist feels that through his work he demonstrates ways of happiness. He likes the market, its community spirit, people getting together where they can talk and discuss their opinions about whatever they like. Make a list of the differences between market places and large department stores. Which do you prefer and why?

## ICT

Using the internet, search for images of market places in Thailand. Collect these images, looking at the differences between Eastern and Western market places.

Visit your local market with a digital camera. With permission from vendors photograph the objects in the stalls, paying particular attention to the composition of the objects, their arrangement, colours, shapes and forms.

## Practical Activities

With a group of people from your school, recreate a fun market stall.

Design a poster encouraging free donation of objects to sell at your market. Using Kusolwong's example, choose someone to be the performer or MC, who will be responsible for getting the audience to buy the goods. To make this an enjoyable experience for all mark down the items at the same low price, or introduce tokens so that as many people can take part as possible.

Take a collection of products, toys, objects that you have at home. Look carefully to see where they were made. Find their labels and either draw, photocopy, or photograph them. Make these images as large as you can and collage.

Can a deodorant make you more attractive to the opposite sex? Can a candy bar bring you joy? Kusolwong views the marketplace a place for happy cultural exchange rather than for the exchange of currency. In modern culture, products are often marketed with exaggerated claims that they will enhance our lives. Flip through several popular magazines and newspapers and cut out all of the words that advertisers use to sell their produces. Assemble a collage highlighting the pleasurable experiences corporations promise customers. (Some key words to get you started: luxury, relaxation, passion, comfort.)

## To Look at:

Sachiko Abe, Laurie Anderson, Robert Barry, King Bhumipol, Marcel Broodthaers, Chaina Dolls, Marcel Duchamp, Richard Hamilton, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Andre Stitt, Andy Warhol, Fiona Wright.

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