

boldly highlighting injustice, ecological and racial exploitation, materialistic gratification, and self-obsession.

Steven Pettifor

...

Jonathan Thomson at Thavibu Gallery

For his first exhibition in Thailand, in 2011, at the newly opened inter@thavibu, Australian arts writer, curator, and artist Jonathan Thomson presented paintings and neon-light works that addressed consumerism and commodity culture through Pop-style eroticism. Within the context of associated historical painting, Thomson employed the naked female form to channel desire and explore the aesthetics of beauty.

Returning to Thavibu, Thomson's recent exhibition *All Things Bright and Beautiful* extends previously established themes through recent experiments with electroluminescent wire. Similar in approach to the reductive forms in his *White Girls* series, in his latest works the artist's hand is perhaps more evident as his compositions are more intricate by the malleable wire.

In these three-dimensional relief works traditional approaches are enriched through contemporary materials. Images are carefully mapped out before holes are drilled through white-powder-coated aluminum panel. The wire's flexibility allows the artist to weave bold, fluid forms. The most elaborate of these threads delivers freshness to the classical floral still life, as in *EL019 Still Life with Lilies and Daisies* (2012).

Unlike the rigidity of the earlier neon works where the focus was more toward minimal white effulgence of image, the exhibition's lighting condition determines the ethereal blue radiance coming from the wire. The overall impression of the image varies greatly in aesthetic appeal and mood, from the cool glow of blue light to the warmer flesh-toned sheen of the uncharged wire. A *memento*



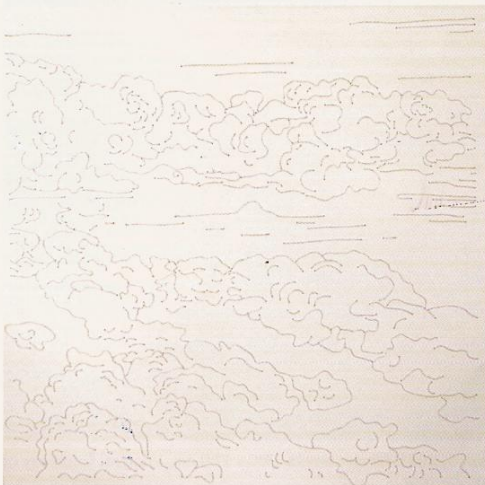
Jonathan Thomson, *EL019 Still Life with Lilies and Daisies*, 2012, wire embroidery on aluminum panel, 100 x 100 x 5 cm.

mori reflecting nature's changing states and impermanence, the works are transitory with the wire's phosphor coating eventually breaking down to leave the copper-hued wire in its permanent state.

Originally presented at the *Kobe Biennial* (2011) in Japan, the exhibition's largest work is the five-panel wire embroidery *EL 016 KW1, KW2, KW3, KW4, KW5, KW6* (2011). A layered, constructed cloudscape, the semi-abstract curvilinear cumulous map stretches across two walls becoming a swirling, stormy torrent before petering out to a gentle cirrus. Evoking the ephemera of passing clouds, the rhythm of the curving relief is reminiscent of

forest foliage. The panels were shown in Kobe as half of a *yin/yang* aesthetic opposite another five-panel cloud interpretation that has overtures to traditional, decorous Chinese landscape painting. Two of those panels are on display as the standalone *EL 016 KE1* (2011).

The physical and spiritual possibilities suggested by clouds have long provided man with a source for inspiration and speculation. The celestial bodies are suggestive of a higher plane in Christian symbolism, a gateway to the heavens as depicted in Michelangelo's fresco the *Last Judgment* (1537–1541), in which Christ, the saints, and angels float on clouds. In more recent interpretations,



Jonathan Thomson, *The Celestial Court*, 2011, wire embroidery on aluminum, 100 x 100 x 5 cm. Images: Courtesy of the Artist.

Korean artist Chang-Ae Song's 2010 series of graphite drawings *Mass – Nebula* explore the infinite and metaphysical potential of clouds. Thomson acknowledges such a tradition through the smaller cloud study *EL011 After Constable 21 9 1822* (2011), in which the romantic optimism of John Constable's celebrations of bucolic life is reinterpreted through contemporary luminescence.

Steven Pettifor

...

THE UNITED STATES

New York City

Yan Pei-Ming at David Zwirner

discovered the large portrait paintings of Yan Pei-Ming in 2003 at the *50th Venice Biennale*. His exhibition was included in one of the 11 sections within the seemingly endless rambling Arsenale. Each equidistant section was given over to one of 11 "international" curators. The Asian section, curated by Hou Hanru, titled *Zones of Urgency*, included the greater number of artists within an allotted section. This is where Yan's paintings were situated.

The congestion that resulted from the overload of installations in this section, in addition to a full-scale heat wave, gave the large portraits of Yan Pei-Ming an unexpected aura that clearly dominated the exhibition. To view these immense faces expropriated from various media and painted in a highly expressionist style offered an experience that was confounding and unforgettable. I have often reflected as to why Yan's paintings appeared so important at the time. Was it because of their scale? Or the way they were mounted side by side on the high wall of the Arsenale? In either case, they inadvertently offered a statement on the endurance of painting at a time when painting did not seem to have the authority of mixed media, performance works, installations, or projected video.