

■  
ADMIN  
REVEAL!:  
HOW I  
GOT SUED  
FOR  
PUTTING  
MEMES IN  
MY  
CRITIQUE

Pearamon  
Tulavardhana





Ten years ago, when I was first truly mesmerized by art, it was not in my own country. Thailand was not entirely a barren land for art, but mainstream art<sup>1</sup> was not the type that encouraged critical thinking, let alone criticism. Contemporary art at that time was not as easily accessible as it is today. We are not as fortunate as European or Western countries that integrate art, culture, and curiosities into their primary education—instead, we had a top-down, authoritative teaching method where questions were considered shameful examples of disobedience, rather than a marker of participation. As a result, we have a handful of art writers and even fewer critics, because art was not as popular as telenovelas or singing competitions.

My first writing was in Thai. I explained why art is not that hard to understand, starting with classical art, the form most noticeable and reproduced by artists and art students in Thailand. This was after a few encounters with the canon of art history, mostly Western. I analyzed the symbolism of some, while others I related to the Thai context and politics at that time, especially Gericault and Goya. I didn't have a proper art history education since I studied

1 The art that was featured was mostly traditional; supported by banks, the private sector, and competitions.

film, and I only had two courses in my undergraduate years that briefly mentioned contemporary art. Besides, the top fine art university in Thailand at that time was well known for its decorative art. Apart from that, I was purely self-taught; reading, researching, and making personal interpretations.

A few personal posts I wrote went viral and snowballed into commissioned articles online and in local magazines, but writing alone was not enough to make a living. I needed a full-time job, since one article only paid around 1,500–2,500 THB (45–50 USD), and there weren't enough things to write about to sustain myself. Luckily, as a well-known young writer, I was fortunate enough to work in an art gallery even without a fine art background. I learned later in that job that the gallery was owned by an artist I studied during my only art history class, and that the artists I had been working with were important figures in Thai art history<sup>2</sup>. However, the

2 Gallery VER was established by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pratchaya Phinthong, and many other prominent names at the time. Although Rirkrit doesn't own the gallery, he still majorly influences the gallery's direction. Thailand does not have many big galleries that show internationally acclaimed artists. Some other examples of big galleries include Nova Contemporary, Bangkok Citycity Gallery, Warin Lab, and Tang Contemporary.



Meme from 2020: don't get caught in the art world trap like me.

sole reason I chose that gallery was that the barbecue at their openings was great—although I realised later that it was not the food, but the community that roped me into working full-time in this field. For that community, the vibe precedes its name.

In the first few years of my job, I could maintain writing as a side hustle. During the height of the protests in 2020–2021<sup>3</sup>, I mostly wrote about politics and art institutions, asking which side they stood for or straight up criticising their exhibitions and collections. However, as I progressed in my work, I learned that my opinions on politics, hierarchy in the art world, and capitalism were perceived as representative of the institution and what it stood for. What I wrote, officially and on personal media, was read as the voice of the gallery. I lost control of my own name. Similar to other writers my age, I

3 The 2020–2021 Thailand protests were a series of youth-led demonstrations demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, the drafting of a new constitution after the military junta drafted the one in current use, and structural reforms to the Thai Monarchy. The protests tactics ranged from conventional ones, to “Hamtarō Mosh.” The most iconic one was Harry Potter themed, when protest leader, Anon Nampa, started the monarchy reform movement. Many artists joined the ‘Free Art’ movement, showing solidarity and exhibiting their works in protests.

gradually learned to stay quiet and write about safer topics to protect both my career and my sanity. But it didn't last long.

Humor is a good conversation starter in a scene that limits who gets to say what. Two years into my career in the gallery, I made a meme account called Memeseum of Contemporary Art BKK, a parody of MOCA Thailand<sup>4</sup>, as an outlet to post funny inside jokes, gossip, and snarky comments about institutions. In my bio, I described the account as an 'art worker criticising Thai art through memes'. Of course, I had to do it anonymously to protect myself. (Well, I did make many jokes about my big boss, too, because he's such a diva.) Many of the jokes were inspired by gossip shared between friends who worked in other institutions and galleries. We formed a little 'สมาคมแม่บ้านแกลเลอรี่รุ่นใหม่' (*association of young gallery house maids*) since the majority of the people at the operation levels were either women or queer. The jokes ranged from highlighting problems faced by institutions and galleries, such

- 4 MOCA is known for having mostly Modern and Postmodern Thai Art in their permanent collection. Even now as I am writing this, there has been no revamp of the collection to update it to be 'contemporary' yet. However, there have been a few non-permanent exhibitions that show contemporary art.

## How it feels walking through MOCA BKK exhibits



Meme from 2022: no amount of curation can save you from the fact that you have been collecting nudes enough to open a museum for them.



Meme from 2020: spoiler: They can't.

as insurance and shipping tax, to exposing institutional hypocrisy embedded in the art scene and its systems. It was like a small therapy group confiding in each other, wondering about 'what food is served at this opening reception?'<sup>5</sup>, or even warning each other not to forget to pray to the local shrine before installing media works in unfamiliar spaces<sup>6</sup>. Thailand is best known for its food and ghost stories; of course, it was inevitable.

Just like my writing, my memes went viral. My follower count grew from a few hundred to thousands, including many prominent figures in the art scene. After making memes for years, it became a form in itself. Memes are fast. They're one of the best ways to respond to a fast-paced community like an art scene. At the same time, after receiving requests from my followers to submit their own memes, I realised that I had opened a platform for people to approach art criticism in a more entertaining way, which neither academic writing nor journalism could achieve. Similar to art, memes can be both a

5 Shout out to Jim Thompson Art Center for serving what everyone agrees is the best catering.

6 You'd be surprised to know that ghost and spirits love to meddle whenever the work requires electric, waves, wifi, or wires. I think they are similar because they both operate in an unseen plane.

common language and an interpretative allegory, which allows for the engagement of a wider public.

By staying anonymous and not speaking up too much, I finally felt safe in my line of work. Well, until my writing landed me in court. *Literally*. You thought this would be only about art? No, the script has changed to *Legally Blonde*.

One day, a letter from the court arrived at my parents' house. I was being sued for defaming this one artist I referenced in a meme-based criticism I wrote about a government collection and its questionable acquisition process. Almost gave my grandmother a heart attack. As absurd as it sounded, the court accepted the lawsuit. It was nerve-wracking at first. My accuser decided to go all the way down south to sue me, so there I was, going back and forth between Bangkok and Nakornsrihammarat<sup>7</sup>, sitting in the same room as a man who shot and murdered his friend.

But eventually I got used to going to court and seeing how cases were processed. Luckily, my publisher found and funded a lawyer for me. Of course, I

7 AKA the Florida of Thailand. Known for guns, crazy stories, and a deep love for right wing and conservative parties. The food is great, though.



Meme from 2020 that got me threatened: ok but that's the first thought that came into my mind when I saw #thawanduchanee art toy tho.

## That 'one' art award we see every single year



Meme from 2020: as a nod to many art awards by the government, banks, and big corporations.

could choose the easy way out: accept the charges and apologize, as that is what my accuser wanted the most. My punishment was to be made an example. But if I did, it would open a gateway for other artists or institutions to sue more people for voicing their opinions. I knew I couldn't back down. I chose the hard way: to fight for my rights. And to add a little spice, I took the matter to the media. And so the case became one hell of a talk of the town, because who the hell sues a critic?

My accuser was a professor at Chiangmai University and later became known as '*the one who sued the writer*' by everyone at the university. Even the janitors. The case lasted almost three years. Since the beginning, everyone in the art scene showed solidarity and reassured me of the right to freedom of speech. But as I was gathering evidence to fight in the court, proof that I was eligible to write a critique, I started to doubt this. The case not only cost me my time, it also cost me my mental health and self-esteem. Revisiting the text I wrote when I was younger and more daring made me anxious. Would my actions affect the lawsuit? What if they don't take my writing seriously because I included so many memes? What if the judge thinks it's not

academic enough because of the kind of language I used? Since then, I have pondered: ‘What qualification does one need to be able to criticize?’

But I did win in the end. Like *duh*. The judge even asked the artist if he did not want his work to be criticised, then why not keep it to himself? Part of the reason I won the case was that I held a position in an art institution. It pains me to think of what would have happened if I hadn’t. What if I had never had any experience in writing? Or even worse, I’d been sued by a big corporation that no one dared to touch?

And so winning was not the end of it. After the case was closed, I stopped writing for years. I became cautious as more and more big corporations and private organizations became involved in the art world. I was even threatened with a lawsuit once again; this time, by the son of a ศิลปินแห่งชาติ (National Artist<sup>8</sup>) who accused me of ridiculing his exhibition. Going against big corporations and nepo babies is a war I know I can never fight alone.

8 Thailand has a National Artist system which rewards artists whose works have been ‘proven’ to be a contribution to the cultural sector. This reward comes with a lifetime monthly stipend, health insurance, and funeral support. Of course, most artists who received this award are artists who paint traditional artworks, royal portraits, and propaganda art.

## Thai Art Professors be like



Meme from 2021: as a response to a professor who threatened to use violence with his students during democratic and freedom of speech protests in Chiangmai.

nobody:  
absolutely nobody:  
me with apple vision pro:



Meme from 2023: submission from @\_butsapa\_.

Memes are not academic enough for the art scene to support. And how do I even explain a meme to the court? Amidst my anxiety, I imagined myself saying, ‘But your honor, don’t you think it’s funny?’

Looking back, there is not only a lack of understanding of criticism but also of humor. Thai people are funny; we use jokes, and we turned our language into a form of playful code long before memes existed<sup>9</sup>. But our humor is a defense mechanism in a cycle of authoritarianism, controls, and limited freedom of speech. Humor is ok for those in power as long as they are not the ones being laughed at, even though their actions are beyond laughable. That is why Thais often turn powerful figures into local memes. This system also manifests within the microcosm of the Thai art scene.

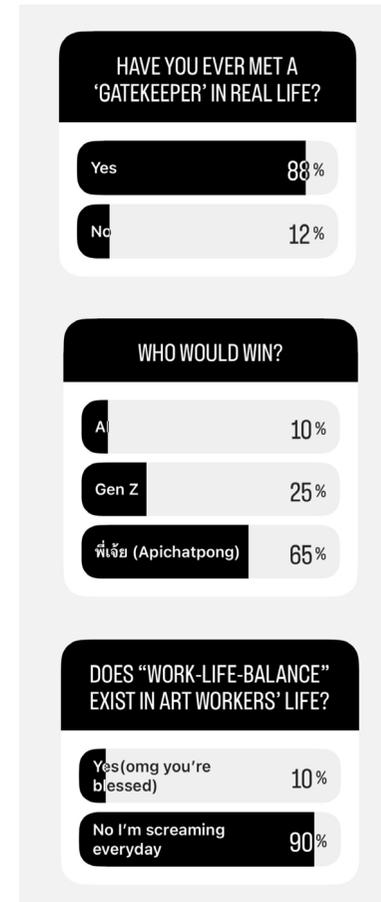
My two accusers were straight men with enough power to give them the confidence to think they could punish anyone beneath them, especially women.

<sup>9</sup> This is possibly due to the severe lèse-majesté law, primarily Section 112 in Thailand that criminalizes defaming, insulting, or threatening the King, Queen, heir-apparent, or Regent, carrying severe penalties of 3 to 15 years imprisonment per offense, even affecting foreigners and extending to online speech. Resulting in Thai people developing codes to talk about this topic to avoid getting arrested.



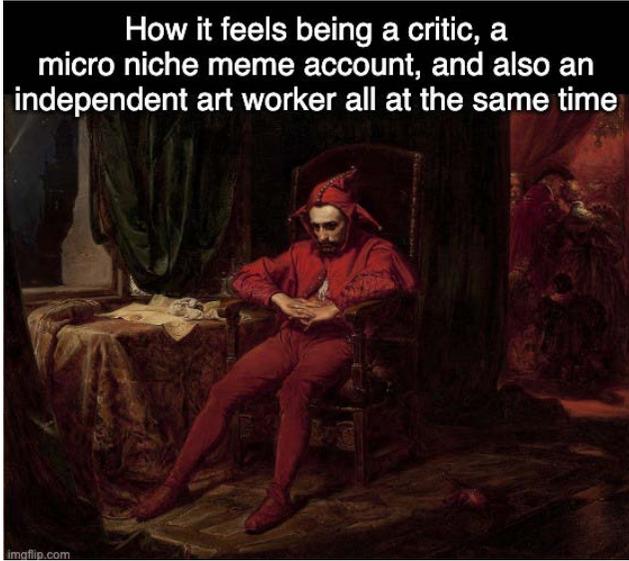
Both men were also associated with traditional and conservative factions of art. The artist who dragged me to court based his practice in Buddhist art, yet proved that he has almost no understanding of Buddhism's teaching of 'Anatta,' or losing one's ego. The son of the National Artist was trying to grapple with the new market by digitally revamping his father's traditional work, although with almost zero knowledge about digital art. As the trends in big institutions, galleries, and the market shift towards contemporary and more critically engaged art with big institutions, galleries, and the market, the power of modern art that is tied to extreme patriarchy and traditional academic institutions is grasping for its last breath. Thailand is in a web of power abused in different forms, and art is the epitome of this tug-of-war between freedom of speech, equality, and the dying power that is desperately clinging to its past glories.

But regardless, this was the beginning of a new era for my meme account. Its casual vibe and popularity among the younger generation allow it to be a safe space for young artists and art students to voice their dissent. I have since had meme submissions from my followers and friends—some asking to be



Meme from 2025: questionnaire in collaboration with Chai-Dai Project.

How it feels being a critic, a micro niche meme account, and also an independent art worker all at the same time



I made this meme specifically for this text and would like to dedicate this to every art meme maker trying to make it in this field.

credited, some anonymously—which helped ease my fear. Submissions have even included reports on institutional abuse, such as sexual harassment and violence inside academic institutions. They helped me regain the humour and boldness I had lost.

Being anonymous has had its benefits: I could make fun of anything and not take any responsibility for it. But at the same time, I saw the potential and importance of meme submissions that open the stage for others to chime in with their thoughts and jokes. If I wanted this platform to be an open conversation, I could no longer hide behind an alias. I needed to build trust with the community that I have built through this meme account. And so, I revealed that I am the one behind that account. It was better than being called *‘the writer who got sued’* all the time. In the end, the reveal didn’t come as a surprise to many. They already either knew or speculated about it since the beginning because I was basically the only writer young enough to use memes. It was a dead giveaway; we only have a handful of art critics in Thailand.

Just as there are pros and cons to being anonymous, the same goes for having your name revealed.

After I announced that I am behind the meme account, I have had more recognition at art world gatherings. Opportunities have opened up in the art world. However, it also complicated my position even more. Many of the people I criticise and make memes about are those whom I owe, those who could grant me future opportunities, those whom I also regard as friends. How do I do my work as a critic or a jester without souring these relationships or even my future career? I don't want to stay quiet just to please them. And so, I realised that I can't run this account with my voice alone. I need more voices to strengthen the sense of solidarity within the community through memes, from close friends who take docent gigs, young artists, art students, and fellow art workers. Criticality doesn't come from one person sitting alone in their room; it is often born from conversations and sharing ideas with different people whose shared experiences reflect one another through humor. After all, laughter is our first known coping strategy line of defense.

Looking at other meme makers within my neighboring countries, such as Singapore Museum Meme and Antikolektifkolektif Club, I think I am fortunate to be able to do a face reveal and still maintain a safe position within the art scene. When



Meme from 2024: submission from @kristiyakarn

TL: ศิลปิน is the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture under the Ministry of Culture

New collection is new woman vibe ✨ So much aura so demure so mindful

Big applause to @pr\_ocac for this in depth and diverse collection to be our new national treasure. We have come so far. 🙏



Meme from 2024: when I got teared eyes from watching this scene.

I was working anonymously, I was truly grateful to the people who knew my identity and still didn't go around announcing it or putting me in a difficult situation. When I was sued, I realised that the other essential quality of a critic, apart from their critical thinking and analysis, is their courage; the courage to risk their stability, career, and relationships to voice their beliefs and make the community a better and safer place. To hope, and allow others to hope that the scene and the institution can be better.

And as small as it may seem, it really did work. A few years after I wrote the criticism of the Ministry of Culture's collection<sup>10</sup> —the one they sued me over—improvements in the acquisition process within the ministry have been made. Whereas previously the selection of artworks alluded to connections, nepotism, and favoritism, resulting in the acquisition of artworks that did not fully reflect or benefit the people, now the ministry has appointed curators and art historians with minimal ties to artists to research and propose artworks for the collection.

<sup>10</sup> Other critics such as Apinan Poshyananda, also the artistic director of the Bangkok Art Biennale, also wrote about the government, although in a more formal tone. The collection has also gained more public attention because of my lawsuit.



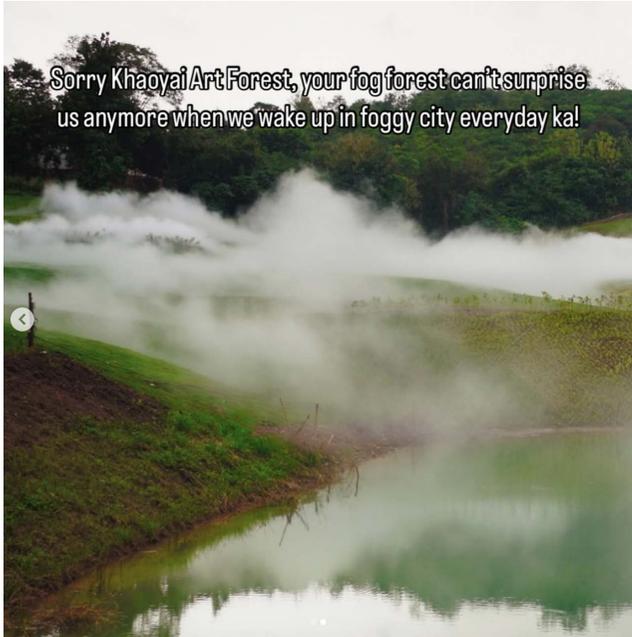
I now work part-time for a bigger institution, where I curate and write independently. It was surprising to me at first that they didn't have any issue with me making fun of them. I guess 'any press is good press.' I still make memes today to respond to certain things or when something strikes my mind. All while wondering whether it's right to separate my writing, curation, and meme-making into different personas. In *Bridgerton*, when Penelope admitted that she was Lady Whistledown and that the reason she wrote was so that she could be heard, I felt it entirely. A gallery or an institutional worker is often considered one of the lowest in the hierarchical structure of the art scene. They are often underpaid, overworked, mentally overwhelmed, and they have little to no voice. When Penelope faced more pressure, expectations, and domination from the Queen after her identity as Lady Whistledown was revealed, and the alias became tied to her identity, it struck even harder.

Identities within the art world are complex when one career is often not enough to make a living or advance one's path, and relationships are often hard to define. Unlike Penelope's position as a noblewoman who doesn't need a day job, has no competitor,

and writes beautifully by the window, in my position, making memes or writing criticism alone can't really sustain a life. In the end, I think the reason I'm still making memes is to send messages to both the institutions and workers alike. To let people at the operational level, like me, know that they are not alone and the issues they are facing can't be silenced or ignored. To the institutions, my memes work as both a love letter and a complaint.

Making jokes about institutions also means that you don't only revere them but also expect them to do a better job. In a time where criticism is lacking and the media often compliments and promotes institutions, it is important to have vigilant eyes within the community to point out possible hypocrisies and hold them responsible for what they aim and claim to be. Memes can generate a rapid response, making audiences aware of ongoing crises that institutions may have forgotten. They make it harder for institutions to get away with unfair treatment, hypocrisy, and sloppy work. Essentially, asking them to be more in touch with reality. Turning institutions into memes flattens the distance between us, the audience, the workers, the art practitioners, and them, the institutions. It invites them out of their





Meme from 2025: gotta look on the brighter side in this cough  
cough weather ka 🤔🌫️  
This meme is a reference to my previous criticism on Bangkok  
Kunsthalle and Khaoyai Art Forest.





ivory tower to laugh along with us. Being able to admit that no one is perfect is a step forward for the community to support and help each other and move toward a future where we value each other equally. It might sound grand for a mere meme account to wish for, but if we could start by laughing together, that would be nice enough. In the end, who doesn't like a good little laugh?

