

# The Creation of a Mobile Educational Outreach Unit for Visual Arts Exhibitions

Monvilai Rojanatanti<sup>+</sup> (Thailand)

## Abstract

The art scene in Thailand is evidently active and vibrant with numerous art spaces and galleries established in many regions of the country. However this is only one side of the art movement in Thailand. On the other side, who is the audience for this growth? This research aims to tighten the gap between visual arts exhibitions and their audience as well as arguing for the importance of educational programs that should be attached to the visual arts exhibitions in the art institutions of Thailand. The research also aims to search for the medium that shows how visual arts exhibitions can educate and cultivate audiences as well as shape their hearts and souls leading to good citizenship. The Mobile Educational Outreach Unit is comprised of a database of materials to be presented to both existing and potential audiences of art institutions. The Mobile Educational Outreach Unit can help increase the size of the audience visiting art institutions by enhancing their understanding of art, which is one of the main missions of these institutions. Moreover, all the data collected in the Mobile Unit will be a beneficial addition to the visual art archives of Thailand.

**Keywords:** Visual Arts Exhibition, Museum/Gallery Management, Stimulating Community Participation, Education's Role in Art Museums/Galleries

<sup>+</sup> Monvilai Rojanatanti, Graduate Student Chulalongkorn University, 396/32 Sukhumvit 65, Wattana, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. voice: +66-81-1824-9625, email: yingmon79@hotmail.com

## Introduction

In the past century, the art scene has grown and changed noticeably in terms of the art itself along with its techniques, subjects, styles, and presentation. This is evident through the many recurring art activities held in numerous parts of the world. For example the Biennale/Biennial, Triennale/Triennial Art Fairs and Art Auctions. These activities draw people's attention towards art and at the same time they hook art into the tourism field; adding economic value to it. However, while these art activities are constantly recurring over time in a certain place they are somehow overlooked as a public possession in terms of democratization. Therefore, it is important that art institutions (art museums or art galleries) must both exist and expand to be the center for learning and research on art and culture in each region. Moreover, art institutions should be the place where art, artists and the public meet and share social and cultural contexts with each other. Most importantly, these types of institutions could foster national identity and national pride.

The Art scene in Thailand is also active and vibrant following the world's trend. Its operations are evident mostly in Bangkok and in the country's northern urban areas. Currently, the government sectors are eager to establish art institutions for the country. For instance, the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) was finished in 2008 by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and the upcoming Museum of Contemporary Art by Thailand's Ministry of Culture while the National Gallery was established in 1977. Until now, we rarely focused on visitors who came to art museums in terms of their needs, expectations, and understanding of art. Therefore, this situation results in a relatively small number of visitors to art museums. Undeniably, it is not a well-established Thai custom for the general public to visit museums or galleries for leisure, but rather it can be assumed that only certain groups or artists regularly visit these institutions. The metaphor of the primary assumption of this problem is that Thailand only has the hardware, which is the collections, buildings, and facilities, but lacks the software or programs to draw the public into the art museums. The latter of which are important links between art and the general public.

Thailand's trend of establishing art museums and art galleries has increased in the last decade with the setting up of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture under the Ministry of Culture in 2002. However, the historical development in Thailand differs from that of western countries. It came along with the push for modernization of Thailand's social and economic entities during the reign of King Rama IV in an effort to avoid western colonization, but overlooked some cultural foundation issues. Since that time we lacked the continuity and stability of cultural democratization, but recently the government sectors are more focused on supporting art activities and also the establishment of art institutions for the country. However, it was observed that the government in each term, hardly truly supports art and culture by the establishment, expansion, and utilization of art institutions. What the government sees are only physical factors or hardware of the art which is the buildings or the space, but they do not have long-term plans for programs and activities as well as a proper budget allocation plan, which would help the public to know more about visual art.

The investment in art and culture does not give immediate results like the building of a new road does. However, the cultural investment is long lasting and supports other physical development, but with little budget allocated to art and culture institutions, Thailand cannot create and maintain activities or programs with consistency over the long term. Its budget is mainly for exhibitions rather than equally allocated to educational programs, which would be beneficial to the public in terms of their knowledge and understanding towards art.

Normally, the museum's public audience is the key responsibility of the management of the museums and galleries for without audience's participation they are meaningless. However, looking at the art audience in Thailand one could say that Thais rarely visit museums. Many Thais believe that art is out of their reach as they do not know about art or have no knowledge to support their understanding of the exhibitions. Therefore, it is necessary to implement an educational service covering art institutions in order for Thais to comprehend, relate and integrate art into their daily life rather than seeing art as a background for their photo mania shots. Moreover, one needs to examine the audience or visitors of these art institutions in terms of quality together with quantity.

The author examined the conditions of art museum management and discovered that almost all faced budget problems. Therefore, most of the time they can only handle exhibitions and their operating costs. One of the uncountable jigsaws of how to fulfill the art movement in Thailand is how to draw the image of art into the daily life of the wider Thai society? How to draw the attention of the audience to the art museums and how to raise awareness of using the art museum as a platform for social issues or lessons learned in the educational curriculum? This research project incorporates images and elements from visual art exhibitions to form an art archive or art database of educational materials for an outreach service from art institutions to address the questions cited above. Moreover, it aims to support the National Education Act (1999) and its Amendments (Second National Education Act (2002) in Chapter 4 of the National Education Guidelines: Section 25.

“The State shall promote the running and establishment, in sufficient number and with efficient functioning, of all types of lifelong learning sources, namely: public libraries, museums, art galleries, zoological gardens, public parks, botanical gardens, science and technology parks, sport and recreation centres, databases, and other sources of learning.”

In 2006, the office of the Education Council announced a Lifelong Learning Sources Award in Thailand by submission criteria. Then in 2007, the National Gallery, the Bangkok University Gallery and the Art Center at the Center of Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University received recognition awards as Lifelong Learning Sources under the art gallery category in Bangkok. However, even after this award announcement it is worth noting that the number of annual

visitors of the National Gallery is quite static after a small blip during the award year. (see figure 1).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Visitors</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>41,842</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>32,582</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>40,619</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>46,182</b>
<b>2004</b>	-
<b>2005</b>	-
<b>2006</b>	<b>47,737</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>51,367</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>47,491</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>46,595</b>

Figure 1. Statistics of Visitors, The National Gallery  
Source: Rebranding of the National Gallery (2010: 39)

Therefore, the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit for Visual Arts Exhibitions with its portable database of materials could be a feasible tool to enhance the visibility, viability, and patronage of art institutions by educating and cultivating an interest in the visual arts into the daily life of broader Thai society. The Mobile Educational Outreach Unit would be comprised of a collection of knowledge from a multitude of perspectives related to visual art exhibitions. It will be used as a public educational outreach tool to inform them about the exhibitions, create a sense of curiosity, and to draw them into experiencing learning in the art institutions themselves.

### **The History of Museum and Gallery Management: World Concepts Migrate to Thailand**

The development of museum management is different in each country, which is why we need to know the historical context of museum management. Undeniably, the history of museum and gallery management is important to our understanding of how Thailand has arrived at where it is, and why. Moreover, a comparative understanding of how others developed will enhance our understanding and the impact of future issues. Historically, the museum concept originated in Continental Europe before spreading to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and the rest of the world. Museum management in Thailand is comprised of Western influences and compromised by it.

#### *Continental Europe*

Historically the first organized museum was founded in Alexandria, Egypt around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. by Ptolemy Soter and was destroyed during civil disturbances 600 years later. This museum was an institution of advanced study, supported by

the state, with many prominent scholars in residence (Edson and Dean, 1994:3). The museum in Alexandria was the very first museum that focused on education.

At that time, its ancient collections of paintings, sculpture, and manuscripts were primarily votive offerings to the gods, paying homage to divine figures or sacred 'pavilions for the cities' (Schildt, cited in Prior, 2002:14). Later in the medieval period, the churches and monastic libraries were spiritual spaces. They housed collections and treasures that showed the glorification of Christianity. The next period of museum development is associated with the Renaissance in which there were many rich families commissioning works of art, for example, the Medici family. The display of art collections were often impressive arrangements involving the floor to the ceiling in so-called 'Princely Galleries' where only guests of princes could experience their splendor. However, because of this limitation, it points out the public's need for art museums in the periods that followed.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe was called "The Age of Enlightenment" and the bourgeoisie whose power and confidence was based on the possession of capital challenged the power of absolutism. Their radical critiques of royal privilege and the excesses of courtly life became widespread in societies due to the advancements in print media. The emergence of the bourgeoisie in society also reflects the growing autonomous status of art and culture. Art in the court was slowly undermined and replaced by new patrons, institutions for artistic support and art dealers in the market. The middle-class buyers also had the opportunity to possess works of art and some allowed public access to their collections. Therefore, the arts were no longer solely for and with the royal family or aristocrats, but they became an entity of leisure and culture in general through accessibility by broader sections of society. The emergence of the bourgeois class into the field of art brought an enlightenment of thought and an enthusiasm for equal opportunities in learning. Its movement de-functioned absolute spaces for royal glorification and gradually formed complex spaces for the nation.

In 1789, France was one of Europe's richest countries, but burdened by the debt of past wars and the luxurious lifestyle of King Louis XVI's court its government was bankrupt leading to the French Revolution from which the basis of a new national community emerged. Art and culture also became an effective instrument that helped to shape the revolution itself. Consequently, as far as the revolutionaries were concerned, art was turning into state propaganda and an instrument of social change, which was inconceivable during the previous century.

The Louvre opened in 1793 and became the model for public art museums in Europe. It concentrated national pride by using certain methods of inscription, display arrangements, and decorative schemes while also developing exhibition display principles. Pictures were organized into national schools (Italian, French, Dutch etc.) and each work was given explanatory text and catalogued. Furthermore, the works of art were grouped into historical art periods based on the international standards of taxonomy. Moreover, the visitor was addressed as an idealized citizen of the state and an inheritor of the highest values of

civilization. Every citizen was provided equal access to the art museums. The layout of Louvre was followed by other museums. Its success was stated by Bennett: '*... to attach itself to the state and nation as entities that were conceived as partly separate from and superior to the king...*' (Bennett, 1995: 37).

To this extent, art museums were recognized as instruments of national consciousness, while private collections were turned over to the state or semi-state administrations. The state sponsored art museums represented for the public at large a concentration of national pride. Moreover, the public art museums and academic institutions also functioned as tools of the nation's cultural power. Lastly, the museums were the ideal monuments to democracy. They exhibited the public's artworks, gave equal access and produced and hosted cultural activities that included public participation.

#### ***USA Experience: Education Responsibility***

Initially the American public museums represented the communal identity of a bourgeois society and the ambition to be equal among the other great nations of the Western world. In Europe, the birth of public museums, such as, the Louvre museum or the National Gallery in London, showed the bourgeois political struggle for autonomy and their triumph over absolutism. Carol Duncan stated in *Civilizing Rituals* that the American elite who founded public art museums often avowed that '*... the new institutions were meant to make the cities of the United States more civilized, beautiful, and knowledgeable, more like the cultural capitals of Europe...*'.

While the class boundaries still existed, municipal art museums appeared as unifying and democratizing forces in a culturally diverse society aiming to disseminate a high culture to all citizens. They identified and simplified it as the definitive national culture, the highest philosophical and moral heritage of 'the American people.' The only way to strengthen the nation and improve the life of its citizens to be on par with or better than those in European countries was through 'education.' Besides libraries, public parks, and stadiums the public art museums were the institutions that supported American citizenship and culture. They educated America's immigrants from a multitude of countries into a single civilized nation. America's public art museums served an educational role as well offering an uplifting opportunity both spiritually and intellectually. They were inclusive and democratic public spaces accessible to all that assisted in forming America's national identity.

One of the primary intentions behind the establishment of museums in America is education. They are an educational tool of culture, history and the development of mental curiosity. Although this duty is mainly regulated by schools and other educational institutions, the museums also provide educational programs for the general public. Usually a professional museum educator is required to supervise the institution's educational programs' plans and management. They plan, develop, implement, evaluate and supervise them with the goal of enhancing the public's access together with their understanding and interpretation of the collections and resources (Edson and Dean, 1994:19).



However, not every museum has museum educators. It depends on the museum's budget and finances. In small and medium sized museums, the museum education programs may be under the supervision of curators or other staff in the organization, while in larger museums a formal position is required. Nevertheless, museum educators are frequently located at the lower end of the museum hierarchy, which indicates this field is viewed as an additional service instead of integral to the museum.

Being a center of learning, museums have the responsibility to serve the public as well as preserve and disseminate information about the cultural properties of the community. Through proper programming, visitors can have both a learning opportunity and an enjoyable experience. Consequently, the administrators of museum educational programs should view schoolteachers as allies in their educational process. Presently, school children would benefit greatly by supplementary classes outside of the school as museums are rich places for learning and are unique for teaching a variety of subjects. Furthermore school children would gain more from museum's educational programs if the information is presented in conjunction with lessons in classrooms. Museums should be reminded of this point as they provide services for their community; they should adjust to meet its needs and requirements.

#### *The Development of Art Museums in Thailand*

Historically, in Thailand the King and the Royal Family played the role of collectors. King Rama IV (1851-1868) was in the Buddhist monkhood before his accession to the throne. Consequently when the King went on a pilgrimage archeological objects and antiquities were collected in order for their conservation and to study their origins. His Majesty stored his private collection of archeological objects and antiquities as well as the tributes from abroad in the Rajruedee Hall of the Royal Grand Palace. Then in 1856, the King established the Royal Museum called Prapatpipittaphan inside the Grand Palace and moved the royal collection from Rajruedee Hall to it. This Royal Museum served the royal family and international guests.

The following reign also continued the museum development as after a trip to Singapore, King Rama V relocated and restored the private collection of King Rama IV to the Concordia Hall of the former clubhouse of the Royal Guards in the Royal Grand Palace. This museum was opened on the 19th of September 1874 to the royal family, royal guests, and the general public on the anniversary of the King's Birthday. In 1887, the museum was again relocated to its present location, the 'Palace to the Front' or 'Wang Na,' which formally was the palace of the Prince Successor.

During the reign of King Rama VI, his focal points in the art field were on drama, literature, and music rather than the visual arts. So during his life these areas were promoted and established strong roots in the country.

Then King Rama VII while also personally interested in museums, realized that Thailand lacked museum professionals. To address this deficit the King

transferred the museum to be under the administration of the Committee of the National Library on January 21, 1926. It renamed the Museum at Wang Na as the 'Museum for Phra Nakhon' or 'The Bangkok Museum.' Next after King Rama VII appointed the Constitution to the Thai people in 1932 and Thailand became a constitutional monarchy, museums came under the Archeology Division of the Fine Arts Department. In 1934, the 'Museum for Phra Nakhon' or 'The Bangkok Museum' was renamed to be the Bangkok National Museum.

The present King, King Rama IX, is the key supportive person of museum management in Thailand. The King encourages Thais to conserve their precious resources, as they are symbols of national pride. His Majesty also recommended that archeological finds should be housed within its territory in order to become a source of pride for the community. Therefore, during his reign numerous regional museums were established.

However, almost all of the collections in the Bangkok National Museum relate to archeology. For the traditional paintings, the museum, though while it did collect them there was less effort made in their research, study, and preservation. These traditional paintings are precious and highlights the talent and skills of the Thai artisans are being degraded day after day due to the lack of proper maintenance. Therefore, the Fine Arts Department established the National Gallery in order to collect, conserve, and exhibit these traditional paintings, including extracting the walls bearing works from several archeologically significant buildings. Furthermore, apart from housing traditional paintings, the National Gallery would serve as a space to host Thailand's contemporary art.

The Royal Mint building was constructed in 1902 during the reign of King Rama V and in 1974 the Treasury Department of the Ministry of Finance presented it to the Fine Arts Department for establishment of the National Gallery. On August 8, 1977, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presided over the grand opening ceremony of the National Gallery.

The National Gallery provides the following permanent exhibition rooms: Traditional Thai Painting, Painting in the Western Realistic Style, The Celebration Room: the Kings' paintings, Arts 1932-Present and the temporary exhibition rooms. Moreover, there is an auditorium, a library, and a lecture room educational purposes. However, from the interview with Ms. Alongkorn Chansuk, a curator at the National Gallery, these educational facilities are infrequently utilize due to inadequate staffing and a limited budget allocation from the central body. Currently, there are 19 total staff responsible for all functions of the National Gallery. After 5 years at the National Gallery, Ms. Alongkorn gradually initiate public programs, but nevertheless an appropriate level of manpower is still needed for this kind of development.

### **Stimulate Art Gallery Visits as Lifelong Learning**

Art institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are facing a challenge of engaging visitors with their exhibits, collections, programs, and services. What visitors gain from their



experience in the museum, what are their needs and expectations is a necessary topic of research in order to increase the number of visitors and their engagement. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, museums have been promoted as lifelong learning institutions and the same in Thailand, according to the National Educational Act (1999). Therefore, with the purpose of providing more engaging and stimulating lifelong-learning museums in terms of physical, intellectual, social, emotional and cultural issues, they have to be audience-centered with an understanding of the characteristics of both the existing audience and potential audiences. Specifically understanding their essential nature, needs, motivations and expectations.

Since the birth of the Louvre, museums have provided learning experiences. They use collections to convey or interpret social and political issues as well as historical stories. The Louvre developed a set of exhibition principles so that each artwork is accompanied by explanatory text and a catalogue entry. Currently, exhibitions are still the primary mission or service of museums and related institutions. Exhibitions are often categorized by the objects displayed in its galleries. Displays of visual art works such as paintings, sculptures, and mixed media comprise an art exhibition in a museum or gallery and are grouped according to international standard taxonomy. Then each exhibition embodies an intent to communicate something and most importantly provide an educational experience for its visitors. Effective communication results when there is a good combination of exhibition and interpretation. Edson and Dean stated in 'The Handbook for Museums' that 'interpretation' is the process of making something understandable or of giving something a special meaning with three basic definitions; to translate objects and knowledge into a 'language' the visitor can understand, to explain something in the context, and to represent the meaning of something according to one's artistic understanding.

Museums need to be aware of how to create learning environments in which visitors can feel comfortable and enhance their comprehension of the exhibitions. However people visit museums for various reasons whether it be leisure, spiritual, pleasure, seeking solitude and peace, engaging in a learning experience etc. These are personal reasons that enriches one's life. Individuals have their own interpretive learning process which should be encouraged and stimulated. Therefore, a comfortable atmosphere in the museums such as provided by the usual accompanying written information to a visual exhibitions can help people learn at their own pace and in their own self-directed way. The written materials that one usually sees in the art exhibitions and galleries in Thailand are a wall placard or a free standing text panel for the exhibition's introduction and a title placard, caption or label for each piece. These materials enhance the interpretive learning process by helping the audience understand the message from the sender, which is the museum staff's (either the curator or exhibition designer). The message in an art exhibition varies from a global to individual phenomenon representing the artists' artworks. The exhibition is the channel for sending this message to the receiver (the audience, the visitor). Does these written materials really enhance the interpretive learning process for the Thai audience? An rigorous evaluation of this question has never been assessed. But from the

author's informal interviews, one could possibly say that they are inadequate for the general Thai public unaccustomed to viewing art exhibitions.

For some exhibitions, there are brochures, gallery guides, programs, and catalogues to parallel the above written materials. However, in Thailand, the issue is on the content and context of these materials and whether they are comprehensible to the general public. As Thailand is trying to promote the art museum or gallery as a lifelong learning institution, its staff should create a comfortable learning environment for the Thai audience. Therefore learning the motivations and expectations of the Thai populace should be considered a primary step in terms of designing stimulative learning materials.

### **Experiences from the Neighboring Countries**

The educational resources used by visitors for the interpretive learning process should be the responsibility of museum staff trained in museum education. However, none of the art institutions in Thailand have established this department or employ staff dedicated to this function. With this limitation, an art museum education program in Thai neighborhoods would be beneficial for designing learning materials for its institutions.

#### ***National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts***

The National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts situated in Taichung follows international standards and organizes many public programs all year round besides the Biennale and Triennial events. They try to bring people into the fine art museum and educate them about their collection by providing services such as regularly guided tours in Chinese (or English with appointment). It also hosts a library, picture book area, family room, and media art center. The most interesting and beneficial for visual art learning is its 'Teacher's Resource Center' where they provide art learning materials like books, DVDs, and learning kits with a focus on art. These are suitable for the art teacher and educator to use as teaching tools and are available to be loaned out as needed.

#### ***Singapore Art Museum***

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) was opened to public in January of 1996 with the mission to preserve the art histories and contemporary art practices of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. Consequently, it has one of the world's largest public collections of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art. SAM is under the administration of the National Heritage Board (NHB) and works very closely with the Ministry of Education. The Singaporean government has a policy objective of establishing Singapore as an Art and Culture Hub as they believe that art and culture is a crucial base for human knowledge and personal development that leads to a better life.

At SAM, they focus primarily on school programs and work at bringing schools into the museum. The Ministry of Education is open to and brings in alternative forms of education that bring students out of the school to experience learning in a museums and realizing they are a rewarding place to go. Students can learn

more than just art from an art museum as art serves as a platform upon which discussions of social, historical, political, and cultural issues etc. are brought to the fore. Moreover, Singaporean students learn not only about Singaporean artists, but regional and international artists as well, since it is very important for them to know what is happening throughout the world.

SAM engages art in schools by organizing a 'Principal Seminar' where it informs schools of the programs available at the Singapore Art Museum and assists by taking part in planning school curriculums/syllabi utilizing their art collections as foundational tools. Additionally, SAM's education department prepares an 'Educator's Guide' that supplies the general information of the exhibition. It includes items such as the style of the artworks and the artists biographies etc. to provide teachers a general orientation to the exhibition and to assist them in planning their visit. Furthermore, the education officer designs educational worksheets for primary and secondary school students that parallels with each particular exhibition. This helps students learn at their appropriate level and attempts to relate the exhibition to their daily life.

SAM encourages young children to feel comfortable and familiar with the art museum by curating a learning gallery from SAM's collection in order to encourage lively discussions, develop creative and analytical thinking at an early age. Moreover, apart from school visits and its young visitor program, SAM also provides many activities for the general public like guided tours, workshops, guest speakers, and films etc.

#### *The National Art Gallery, Singapore*

It is still under construction, but the staff has already planned what they will implement inside the new space. Their long term plans for exhibitions are decided with the accompanying educational programs before the building will be finished in 2014. Their education officers can not deny that Singapore has the same problem as Thailand in that museum patronage is in third place after shopping and movie going. However they try to create a positive habit of museum attendance through its school orientated programs. The education officers of The National Art Gallery will work very closely with the schools to bring in students to the art museum. The planned activities are varied and include workshops, lectures, and demonstrations etc. all of which students can participate and learn from art. A quarter of The National Art Gallery's space will be dedicated for Art Education.

#### *Yokohama Museum of Art*

The Yokohama Museum of Art policies support seeing, creating, and studying. Their visitors will see notable artworks from a global perspective and when they see, they may become curious in how the masters *created* them. This will serve to energize visitors to create their own works of art or study more about it through learning via the offered workshops or through research in the library. They host workshops comprised of art-making courses where visitors can meet artists and share their creative experiences. Moreover, they have childrens' workshops

where they cater the activities as a guide for children to experience art and the Yokohama Museum of Art as an enjoyable place, which in the opinion of the author, is the best way to create museum audiences of the future.

### The Mobile Educational Outreach Unit for Visual Arts Exhibitions

The information garnered from the interviews can be adapted to Thai culture in order to assist in fulfilling the educational mission of Thailand's art institutions. Naturally, Thai people like to learn, but usually they need new information to be presented to them. Moreover, patronizing museums has never been a tradition of the general Thai population. So with the potential of learning, but no directed awareness the idea of compiling information on visual art exhibitions as the foundation for an outreach service to highlight real art pieces for potential visitors was proposed.

The main components of the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit for Visual Arts Exhibitions are the following: The *Briefing*, which interprets the visual language of the exhibition into a written form adapted from text panels of the exhibition; The *Sheet(s)* incorporates a selection of representative artworks with their captions; The printed *Catalogue* and *Virtual* materials which are DVDs of recorded interviews with the artists and images from the exhibition's actual installation.

The Mobile Educational Outreach Unit is a compact, easy to carry backpack to support outreach services to Thailand's art institutions for creating an educated art aware audience for both personal and country-wide benefits. Additionally, all of the compiled information for each exhibition would become an addition to a chronological visual art database archive for future use. (see figure 2)

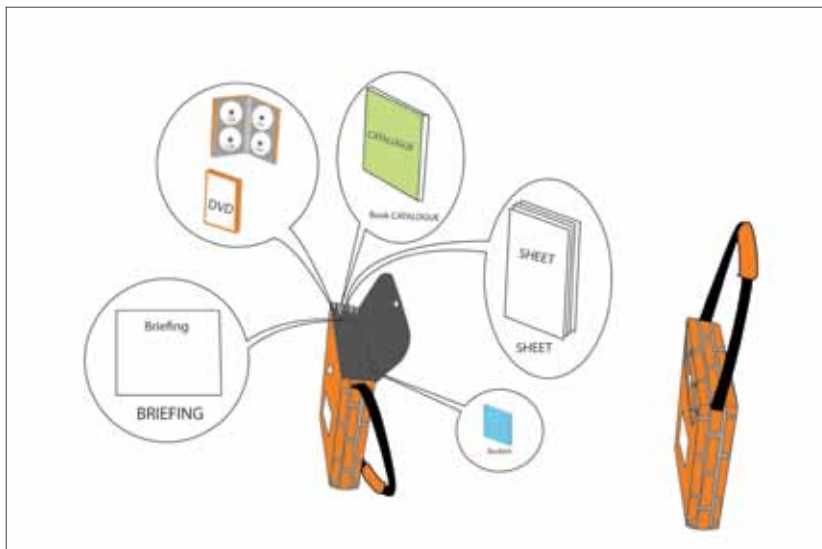


Figure 2. The design of the Mobile Unit

The interviewees and the feasibility test groups of the pilot project were comprised of Thai teachers and their young kindergarten students. The researcher utilized an exhibition at 'g23' - a contemporary art gallery at Srinakharinwirot

University. The outreach unit's materials paralleled the painting exhibition titled 'Abstract Applied Attitude' by Professor Dr. Wiroon Tungcharoen.

The outreach service was offered to the teachers at the Kukai Kindergarten that is situated in the same community where the 'g23' gallery is located. The researcher over the course of 30 minutes introduced the exhibition at 'g23' to the director and principal by using the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit's *Briefing*, *Sheets*, *Catalogue* and the *Virtual Materials* (audio-visual). Afterwards the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit was left at school for further review by other instructors. As the school's learning module at this time was about art and paper, the teachers were very interested in the exhibition and arranged for a gallery visit for their K1-K3 students (ages 3 - 5). During this opportunity, the researcher additionally prepared a guided tour and art programs for the young students.

### Mobile Educational Outreach Unit Assessment

The researcher assessed the effectiveness of the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit by conducting interviews with teachers after their gallery visit. The feedback and comments of teachers are categorized by the four items provided in the Mobile Unit which again are; the *Briefing*, the *Sheet(s)*, the *Catalogue* and the *Virtual Materials*.

The *Briefing* is the general information that is partly adapted from descriptive panels of the exhibition. It also includes the artist's biography and the introduction in the exhibition. The teachers expressed strong interest in the biography as they think it provides inspiration and reflects their life and attitudes. Moreover, this exhibition expands their knowledge about Thai artists. Typically, they are aware of only two Thai artists namely Chalermchai Kositpipat or Dr. Thawan Duchanee and their style of painting. The mobile unit is also considered as a starter introduction of Thai artists to the public. However, it was discovered that the teachers do not have a full background on art terminology. For example, abstract art or abstract expressionism needed to be defined. Therefore, definitions or additional explanations would be needed depending upon the audience and their backgrounds.

The *Sheet(s)* are a selection of representative artworks with their captions to introduce the techniques of each piece and to differentiate their style(s) through content examples. The researcher in conjunction with the exhibition team prepared the *sheets* for the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit. The solo exhibition referenced earlier of 60 paintings titled 'Abstract Applied Attitude' is mostly abstract works and each *sheet* reflected the thoughts and processes of the curator. For example the 60 paintings were grouped under different ideas and followed the arrangement in the exhibition itself. For the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit one representative painting was selected to be included as a A4 sized laminated *Sheet* for it. The teachers recommended adding stories or providing the artist's inspiration or motivations behind that particular selection or for whole the series.

The exhibition's *Catalogue* is a book containing articles written by the curator and/or guest authors and includes images of art works shown in the exhibition

with captions, the artists' biography, and acknowledgements. The catalogue is counted as one of the primary elements for organizing a visual art exhibition. It is designed and printed with a certain level of quality. On the other hand, it could be said that the *Catalogue* is a complete set of sheets with additional articles to help the audience understand the overall exhibition. From teacher's assessments they preferred the catalogue over the other materials in terms of its appearance. They enjoyed the images, but for 'Abstract Applied Attitude' exhibition they made additional comments on the content of articles. They felt the content length was appropriate and assisted them in understanding both the artist and his art. However, they mentioned that the language and tone of the articles need to be written for general public. Thus, it faced the same problem as the *Briefing* in that art terminology may require extra explanations.

The *Virtual Materials* in the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit are DVDs of recorded interviews with the artists and images of the exhibit's installation. The results were initially ineffective due to the requirement of a DVD player or a computer. However, this could be rectified by the inclusion of a portable DVD player or a laptop with the AV files pre-loaded on its hard drive. This obstacle with its delay reduced the eagerness and simple easy access to the information. But when the teachers found a way to access and review the provided DVDs and they felt more acquainted with the artist after listening to their interviews.

Overall, the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit is beneficial in terms of preparing some basic information on the exhibition for new visitors. Consequently, the director of the Kukai Kindergarten approved a gallery visit for the students and the teachers felt more confidence in their visit of the exhibition after gaining some foundational information from the Mobile Unit. Nevertheless, the information provided must be developed in order to meet the needs and expectations of the potential audience of visual art exhibitions. Therefore, the comments and recommendations of the teachers are valuable feedback in creating effective outreach materials for visual art exhibitions in Thailand.

#### **Add-on Benefits**

The gallery visit of the K1-K3 students was useful for gathering feedback on the effectiveness of the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit project. The result is that the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit can increase audience's understanding and interest in art institutions. Besides reaching out with the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit, the researcher additionally prepared a guided tour and art program for the teachers and students.

A 30 minute guided tour included an introduction of the artworks with stories of the artist's inspiration and the work's relationship to daily life. The artworks featured in the guided tour were selected from Sheets in the Mobile Unit. The researcher applied the techniques for adding human interest to viewing an exhibition as recommended by Edson and Dean. This included; to ask open questions, stimulate the imagination, use language familiar to the visitor, make comparisons, give instructions, and use quotations. These techniques led the



audience to both new art knowledge and new non-art knowledge. The teachers and students enjoyed utilizing story telling to relate better to the artwork, while asking questions also stimulated the visitor's imagination and increased participation. However, there was a limitation in the guided tour, which is the use of language. Teachers said that some terminology was difficult for the children. But with explanatory information from the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit the teachers could assist in providing accurate explanations to the students.

Art programs are valuable for children in terms of creating a positive experience in the art gallery. Like the Yokohama Museum of Art, this gallery has a mission to administrate activities that allow children to experience art and make them feel comfortably familiar with art galleries. After the guided tour, an art program was held, which was designed to mirror the metaphorical style of paintings in the exhibition. The art program was called 'Monster' with the objective of creating an abstract monster. (see figure 3)



Figure 3. 'Monster' Art Program

### Conclusion

Unlike European development, the museum management in Thailand was formed by Royal initiation because of desire for modernization. However, in comparison with other social and political issues, art and culture were a last priority. Since then, the limitations of museum management have become evident. Back in 1888, the institution known as the museum moved into the present area. Thailand's Museum Department was organized under the Ministry of Dhammakarn (presently the Ministry of Education). Peng Bunnag (Cha Muen Srisoraluk) was the first director of the Museum Department and had an opportunity to study museum management abroad (France, England, Germany, and Italy). After his study trip, he submitted a project proposal on museum planning and management to His Majesty King Rama V but unfortunately the project could not be implemented because of budget restrictions. Budget shortfalls seems to be the normal circumstances for museum managers in Thailand. However, luckily, we still have budget that can be put on exhibitions all year round.

Consequently, the primary mission of the art institutions in Thailand is to only support the visual art exhibition. Nevertheless, the exhibition itself is only the presentation or physical act of placing artworks for public view. However the mission of the exhibition will only be completed when communication between the viewer or public and the curatorial team has occurred. The communication of information process originates from the balance between the physical display and the explanatory ability of the exhibition. Normally, in each exhibition, we care for the physical display rather than the public's proper understanding of the exhibition. The most used communicative tools are text panels, captions and catalogues that infrequently help the general audience understand the exhibition. Therefore, additional educational tools are required to assist the general public in order to enhance their cognitive ability along with their visual ability.

Generally, the museum's educator is responsible for enhancing the publics' access and understanding of exhibits, but the role of an educator in the art institutions of Thailand is not clearly identified and supported. Moreover, from time to time, limitations in management and funding issues recur keeping the institutions at a capability level of only organizing exhibitions. This lead to the creative solution project of the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit of Visual Arts Exhibitions in order to support the existence of Thailand's art institutions and fill the gap between art and the general public.

Art institutions are truly lifelong learning sources that provide intellectually and spiritually uplifting opportunities. However, one major barrier for the visitors of art institutions is their lack of knowledge about visual art, which undermines their confidence in patronizing them. Therefore, written materials that parallel the exhibition and proper programming should be initiated and extended via methods such as the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit to the public in order to increase their confidence, comfort level and curiosity drawing them into public art institutions. Furthermore, school teachers should be considered allies in the educational process, which would support Thailand's National Education Act and enhance the viability the country's art institutions. From the trial project, it proves that the Mobile Educational Outreach Unit for Visual Arts Exhibitions could boost the visitor's knowledge and confidence and increase their attention to visual art exhibitions. Nevertheless, constant development and audience assessment are required to address the changeable needs, motivations, expectations and lifestyles of the people of Thailand.

## References

- Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum; History, Theory, Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Chansuk, Alongkorn. Curator, The National Gallery. Interview, 27 February 2011.
- Cheang, Geraldine. Educator, Singapore Art Museum. Interview, 29 October 2010.
- Edson, Gary and Dean, David. *The Handbook for Museums*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Hein, G. E. "Museum Education." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by S. Macdonald, 340-352. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Hooper-Greenhill, Elean. *The Educational Role of the Museum*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- International Council of Museums. Development of the Museum Definition According to ICOM Statutes [Online]. Available from: [http://icom.museum/hist\\_def\\_eng.html](http://icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html) [2010, July 27]
- Low, Sze Wee. Deputy Director (Heritage) Arts and Heritage Division, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. Interview, 29 October 2010.
- Office of the National Education Commission. National Education Act, 1999. Available from: <http://www.onec.go.th> [2010, December 18]
- Prior, Nick. *Museums and Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.
- Shoji, Naoko. Curatorial Coordinator, Yokohama Museum of Art. Interview, 18 December 2010.
- The National Gallery. About the National Gallery. Available from: <http://www.national-gallery.go.th/eng/about.html> [2010, December 11]
- Thongpoonsak, Rapeekarn. *Rebranding of the National Gallery*. Master's Individual Study, Master of Arts in Cultural Management, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 2010.

