

Pratchaya Phinthong

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With the second solo exhibition devoted to the Thai artist Pratchaya Phinthong, gb agency confirms the important role that it has played for many years in broadening the issues surrounding conceptual art. From exhibition to exhibition the gallery is designing a new geography of this movement, placing its revitalization in the hands of artists such as Roman Ondák, Július Koller or Jifi Kovanda, whose cultural environment has been authoritatively maintained on the fringe of fame within art history.



PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG, *What I learned I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed*, 2009. Stack of Zimbabwean Dollars (ZWD) banknotes, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy gb agency, Paris.

Thailand doesn't exist on the map of art history and even the term art doesn't exist in the lexicon of this country, the notion of modern art even less so. As for the grammar of modernism and modernity, it's a completely foreign language. It is precisely this territory of an international language isolated between the languages that Pratchaya Phinthong makes use of to colonize himself from the start, as an artist. Like other artists who are considered more highbrow, he tackles the constraints of official conceptual art. It is in this way that the learning of a language elevated to the status of art makes use of its opponents to reveal the economic ways of the cultural game imposed by the Western world. Already in 2001 with the work *Farawaysoclose*, made in Germany during a residency, the artist benefited from the period of conversion from the German Mark to the Euro and came to symbolize a search for national identity. This was brought to life through the conversion of ten-baht Thai coins into two-euro coins, made possible by fooling the beverage vending machine in the art school. The work *What I learned I no longer know; the little I still know, I guessed* (2009), which gives its title to the Parisian exhibition, is a sculpture nearing completion, made up of Zimbabwean dollar bills, currently the most devalued currency in the world and no longer having a legal price. The artist proposes to the population of Zimbabwe, through a network of friends and contacts, to exchange the Zimbabwean currency for the sum of 5,000 Euros, which Phinthong obtained through the sales of his preceding work. The rise of a block of Zimbabwean bills growing on the floor of the gallery throughout the exhibition embodies these exchanges. In sum, Pratchaya Phinthong shows us that he has definitively broken free from his language teachers.

(Translated from French by Gianfranco Rosolia)