(*In*)*visible Presence* at Dib (Bangkok, 21 December 2025–3 August 2026)



Figure 1: Exhibition poster (*In*)*visible Presence*, inaugural exhibition, at Dib Bangkok © Dib Bangkok

Dib Bangkok (ดิบ บางกอก), a new private contemporary art museum in Khlong Toei, opened with the inaugural exhibition (*In*)*visible Presence* **[Figure 1]**.[1] Its name draws on the Thai word *dip* (ดิบ), meaning raw, natural, or unprocessed—a term that suggests both material directness and

[1] Located 111 Soi Sukhumvit 40, Phra Khanong, Khlong Toei, Bangkok 10110 Thailand. See: https://dibbangkok.org/.

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Figure 2: Architectural view of Dib Bangkok showing the museum's open courtyard and exterior © Dib Bangkok

an institutional desire to approach art before it is fully settled into canon. Housed in a repurposed 1980s warehouse in one of Bangkok's most economically mixed urban areas, adjacent to the port and shaped by a long history of labor, migration, logistics, storage, and informal settlement, Dib does not enter the city as a neutral container for art. It arrives with unusual weight.

The museum, not the collection, is new. Assembled over roughly three decades by Thai businessman and singer Petch Osathanugrah (เพชร โอสถานุเคราะห์; 1954–2023), the collection brings into public view works that have circulated in the Thai art market through reproduction, anecdote, and reputation rather than sustained direct encounter. It is also an international collection—over a thousand works by more than two hundred artists worldwide—so that the Thai material is held not in isolation but in deliberate proximity to contemporary practice elsewhere. The stakes of Dib are not only aesthetic. They are historic: what happens when a private collection —formed through one life, one taste, and one network of access—becomes a quasi-public assemblage during a time when the public sector remains organizationally unable to collect an equivalent body of work.

The museum is led by Petch's son Purat (Chaeng) Osathanugrah (ภูรัตน์ [แฉ่ง] โอสถานุเคราะห์) and directed by the Japanese curator Miwako Tezuka. The building was designed by Kulapat Yantrasast (กุลภัทร ยันตรศาสตร) of WHY Architecture, in collaboration with Bangkok-based Architects 49. Kulapat describes his approach as "acupuncture architecture": intervention that activates a place without overwhelming it. At Dib this method is visible in the preservation and reframing of industrial elements,

the use of exposed concrete, the retention of sawtooth skylights, organized around a large central courtyard **[Figure 2]**. The site spans roughly 16,000 m² in total grounds, with approximately 7,000 m² of exhibition space across three floors and eleven galleries.

This review approaches Dib through its inaugural display, making the collection visible while also raising questions about interpretation, authority, and public consequence. Visibility, however, is not the same as interpretation; a museum's authority is ultimately made through the arguments it stages over time. At present, Thailand's infrastructure for collecting contemporary art remains thin; a museum of this scale therefore carries public significance even when privately founded. Dib's importance will not be fixed by its inauguration. It will be determined by whether it acts as if its decisions instigate public consequence in a field where no comparable public collection stands beside it.

The Exhibition

The inaugural exhibition, (*In*)*visible Presence*, (ล่อง[ไม่]หน) curated by Ariana Chaivaranon (อารียนา ชัยวาระนนท์) under the artistic direction of Miwako Tezuka, offers the first sustained public encounter with the collection. Rather than organizing works by chronology, medium, or geography, the exhibition employs a looser set of connectives: material, memory, and presence. Its logic is associative rather than historical. Works are paired through resonance rather than placed in a timeline. This approach is consistent with both the edifice and the museum within it, preferring the register of experience to the register of argument. The range of different materials is one of the show's strongest editorial decisions. Works in oil and metal share rooms with arrangements built from used, abused, and abandoned objects —a lineage that runs through *arte povera* and its descendants that has been one of the most generative idioms in Thai contemporary art since the late 1980s.

The first floor opens at full scale. Marco Fusinato (b. 1964)'s *Constellations* (2015–2025) —canonical images perforated until their surfaces resolve into star-fields provides the keynote. Presence is registered as trace: an action performed on material rather than an image presented for interpretation **[Figure 3]**.

Beside the international names that anchor the exhibition, Dib's commitment to Thai contemporary practice is most telling in smaller, quieter gestures. *Colossum* (2004) and *A letter from Innocenzo X* (2004), two small works by Yuree Kensaku (ยุรี เกนสาคู; b. 1979) seen following *Constellations*, are instructive examples. Spray paint, acrylic, and pen worked into folded aluminum plates retain the sketch-like immediacy of the studio rather than the finish of a completed painting. The plates appear as if they were lifted from a working surface, with



Figure 3: Marco Fusinato, *Constellations*, 2015–2025 (detail) © Dib Bangkok



Figure 4: Surasi Kusolwong, *Emotional Machine* (VW), 2000–2001/2002/ (Permanently Damaged) 2025 © Dib Bangkok

folds, residue, and unstudied lines. Hung alongside more monumental international pieces, they refuse to function as supporting material.

At the end of the floor stands Surasi Kusolwong (สุรสีห์ กุศลวงศ์; b. 1965)'s *Emotional Machine*—an installation built around a 1965 Volkswagen Beetle painted a saturated blue and suspended upside down. The car's hollowed-out shell with its roof facing the ground, recalling a boat or raft, rocks gently as a swing or houseboat when visitors climb inside. The work evokes the traces of lived journeys as well as the aura of the ready-made. Flipped and suspended, it folds into one hybrid vessel of Thai vernacular memory with European road travel and the global circulation of consumer goods. Historically, the work marked Surasi's institutional visibility in Europe in the 2000s; its presentation at Dib allows Thai audiences to encounter, in person, a work well-known through circulation abroad **[Figure 4]**.

The second floor turns the viewer toward remembering. In a small room dedicated to Surat Osathanugrah (สุรัตน์ โอสถานุเคราะห์; 1930–2008)—photographer and Petch's father—hang black-and-white prints from *Vanishing Bangkok*, the series in which Surat set out to document everyday streets, markets, and canals as they were displaced by highways, malls, and suburban expansion. Within Dib, the work operates on two registers: as a social document of an urban Bangkok that has, in many places, ceased to exist and as a family archive embedded within a museum founded by his son and now chaired by his grandson, Purat. This is one place where the museum's private genealogy is most visible: the collection does not only collect "Thai contemporary art" as an abstract category; it also collects a family's own history of seeing and recording Bangkok.

Not far from the Surat room sits Somboon Hormtientong (สมบูรณ์ หอมเทียนทอง; b. 1949)'s *The Unheard Voice* (1995). This first appeared in the artist's introductory exhibition in Thailand after he spent years studying and living in Germany. Somboon acquired wooden pillars from an antique shop, laid them on the gallery floor, and invited monks to chant *suat bangsukun* (สวดบังสุกุล)—a funerary rite ordinarily performed for the dead—over them **[Figure 5]**. The



Figure 5: Somboon Hormtientong, *The Unheard Voice*, 1995 © Dib Bangkok



FIGURE 6: Montien Boonma, *Lotus Sound*, 1992/1999–2000 © Dib Bangkok

ritual ended the useful lives of the pillars both symbolically and functionally: it dispatched them as architectural elements and it mourned what they had once supported. Read against the 1990s, the work functioned as a critique of development's violence: the dismantling of material culture faster than it could be remembered. It is also an example of how Thai contemporary art turned ritual into medium.

The thread linking artists of the same generation through related concerns carries onto the third floor, the majority of which is given to Montien Boonma (มณเฑียร บุญมา; 1953–2000). Montien's distinctive achievement was to fold Buddhist conceptual practice into contemporary artistic production without reducing either. Petch was among Montien's major patrons during the artist's short career. Given Montien's central contribution to Thai contemporary art and the small number of his works in Thai public collections, Dib's holdings now constitute one of the most significant bodies of his work in the country. *Lotus Sound* (1992/1999–2000), an installation of 500 terracotta bells arranged in tiered rows and intercut with hanging golden lotus forms, carries an intimate biography alongside its formal power **[FIGURE 6]**. After learning that his wife had been diagnosed with cancer Montien turned to temples in Chiang Mai for prayer and meditation; the work bears the imprint of that turn. The exhibition closes with *Zodiac Houses* (1998–1999), an architectural-scale structure that invites the visitor into a dim, repetitive geometry recalling both scaffolding and a ritual pavilion: a temporary shrine translated into contemporary sculptural language **[FIGURE 7]**. Both of these works are not simply "spiritual" in theme; they ask that presence be sensed through space, repetition, enclosure, and breath.

The sequence of the exhibition suits the building's vertical narrative. Visitors move from the ground floor's material



FIGURE 7: Montien Boonma, *Zodiac Houses*, 1998–1999 © Dib Bangkok

heaviness toward increasingly luminous and elevated spaces above. A reflecting pool, a translucent skin, and carefully staged vertical circulation altogether produce movement from the industrial to the contemplative. The ground level retains a degree of industrial rawness, while the upper floors become more refined, controlled, and light filled. The sawtooth roof admits diffused light, giving the top floor a calmer and more spiritual atmosphere. This journey from concrete to light is not accidental: it produces a kind of ascent. Architecture here does not simply organize circulation; it gives the visit a symbolic structure in which contemporary art becomes something approached gradually, then encountered in spaces that feel quietly set apart from the city.

Collection and Context

It is a privilege to see these works gathered in one place. Since the late 1980s, Thai contemporary art has been shaped by a transformation in artistic practice that exceeds the inherited languages of painting and sculpture. Artists began to move the field toward installation, performance, media work, happenings, conceptual practice, socially engaged formats, and experimental exhibition-making. Names such as Apinan Poshyananda (อภินันท์ โปษยานนท์; b. 1956), Kamol Phaosavasdi (กมล เผ่าสวัสดิ์; b. 1958), Chumpon Apisuk (จุมพล อภิสุข; b. 1948), and Montien Boonma (1953–2000) stand here less as a canon than as markers of a wider shift: a movement away from medium-based prestige toward contemporary time-based, participatory, ephemeral, or conceptual forms dispersed across objects, documents, and actions. If Thai modern art's institutional culture was anchored in the recognized achievements of painting and sculpture—objects that can be stored, insured, displayed, and valued through established systems—then the contemporary turn posed simultaneous practical and theoretical problems. This contemporary transformation in practice was not matched by an equivalent transformation in collecting infrastructure. The problem was not the absence of artists, exhibitions, or audiences. It was the absence of institutions capable of collecting, conserving, researching, and re-displaying the new emerging forms. This is not to say that Thailand had no collecting institutions or no contemporary art collections. There were private collectors, foundation acquisitions, and institutional purchases throughout the period; Petch was not alone.

Dib enters this public field in the form of a private practice built precisely in relation to that gap. Petch acquired works through galleries and artists' studios rather than auctions. He preferred depth over breadth, and he collected precisely the kinds of work that public infrastructure struggled to hold. The result is a private collection at museum scale, including Thai works from the period in which Thailand's contemporary art organization was least able to systematically collect them. That alone gives Dib art-historical weight that no exhibition platform, however ambitious, can replicate. But the same condition that produces Dib's weight also produces its risk. The collection was assembled by one collector, through one set of relationships, tastes, and access points. In a national context where no comparable public collection exists, Dib's selections—of artists, works, periods, and international juxtapositions—are likely to function not as one reading among many, but as the dominant frame through which Thai contemporary art after the late 1980s is encountered, taught, and remembered. This is an unusual privilege for any private collection, Especially in the case of Thailand.

But this privilege is also where the exhibition's difficulty begins. Holding a collection of this scale forces a curatorial choice the museum has not yet fully made. (*In*)*visible Presence* is generous in what it exhibits and careful in how it shows it, but reluctant to organize works into an explicit art-historical argument. Instead of moving through Thai contemporary practice in terms of chronology, generation, or movement, the exhibition holds its material together through softer connectives. Room by room, the logic is resonance rather than history. For an exhibition whose collection is itself an art-historical document, this is a substantial omission. It is not a curatorial failure. The associative logic is consistent with the architecture and with the experiential register preferred by the museum. But it carries a cost. When canonical Thai works are arranged primarily through the language of material and memory rather than through their position within a developing field, they are read as individual encounters rather than as parts of a history available for study.

Underneath this concern is a wider point. Even with the depth of holdings on view, the exhibition makes legible something the rest of the field has been reluctant to name: the works at Dib are themselves fragments—substantial fragments, but fragments—of a body of Thai contemporary art whose other parts are held in private hands, in artists' studios, in foreign museums, and in informal personal archives across Thailand and abroad. No single private collection, however ambitious, can recompose that whole. The most important effect of (*In*) *visible Presence* may therefore be what it can not announce: the absence of a national contemporary art collection in Thailand suddenly, and forcefully, becoming visible. The case for public collecting is most clearly made/ produced in the space where private collecting has done its best work.

Dib is a legacy institution founded on private wealth, opening after the death of its founder. Its institutional meaning depends on whether that collector's biography can become a sustained mandate. Internationally, the Mori Art

Museum in Tokyo offers one instructive precedent in which a family institution became more than the family by building curatorial leadership and a durable programming logic; domestically, MAIIAM offers a smaller but clearer civic posture in Chiang Mai, grounded in ongoing relationships with artists and scholarship.[2] Dib inherits both lessons under harsher conditions: larger scale, stronger symbolic authority, with no founder in the room.

The deeper problem is not that Dib is private, but that it stands at a scale that few public institutions in Thailand can meet. In that context, private decisions acquire public gravity; a canon held by one collector, one taste, and one line of descent is fragile; that fragility becomes a problem of the field rather than merely of one institution. The responsibility this places on Dib is not to replace the state, but to build usable infrastructure: research and scholarship others can cite, access others can use, and programs that enlarge—rather than eclipse—the wider ecology of collecting, study, and re-display. This does not mean erasing the collection's origin in one life and one taste; rather, it means making that founding sensibility explicit and placing the collection in conversation with the wider field and with the publics who will inherit its consequences.

Dib's importance will not be fixed by its opening year, nor will it be fixed by its first decade. It will be shaped by the institutional practices put in place at the beginning: making curatorial reasoning legible, investing in research, and treating access—archives, viewing, re-display, and study—as a core public function.[3] Over time, the question is not whether Dib can provide a single authoritative account of Thai contemporary art after the late 1980s, but whether it can host the conditions for the production of multiple accounts: through scholarship, sustained programming, and a willingness to let interpretation remain open.

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[2] For institutional background, see Mori Art Museum: https://www.mori.art.museum/en/; and MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum: https://maiiam.com/ (see also Sébastien Tayac, this volume).

[3] As of June 2026, admission was 750 baht for foreign visitors, with a lower rate for Thai nationals and residents—a high price by the standards of museum admission in Thailand and a significant barrier for students and the general public. The fee is not unreasonable, however, given the costs of conservation, environmental control, security, insurance, and interpretation to international standards, all of which Dib appears committed to maintaining. A discounted student rate would nevertheless make the collection more accessible.