

# FAAM Collection X: Vol.3

## Smile, Please!

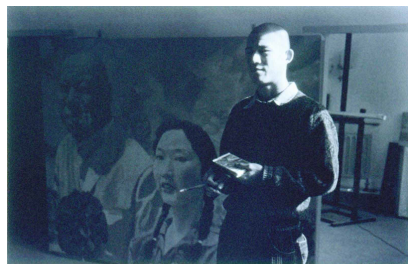
The somewhat fearless smile of Fang Lijun's work *Series2 No.3*, and the smiling beauty queen of Kham Tanh Salinkham's work *Miss Lao Contest*, are juxtaposed here. They are similar yet different, so come and closely compare the two works from two different countries and periods.



Work ① Fang Lijun (China) *Series 2 No.3*, Oil on canvas, 200 x 200cm, 1992



Work ② Kham Tanh Saliankham (Laos) *Miss Lao Contest*, Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 218cm, 2001



Fang Lijun in the studio in Yuanming Yuan photographed by Xu Zhiwei in 1993. Collection of FAAM.

### ■ Who and how many are depicted?

〈 Work ① 〉 Six people. Are they all the same person?

〈 Work ② 〉 Around five people, but it is seven!

### 【 Commentary 】

First, we explore the mystery of the number of characters in Kham Tanh's work. Please take a close look at a woman's head wearing a red cloth in the middle of the painting. It seems that three hair ornaments are depicted in the image, but in fact, it is only one. In other words, two women are hiding behind it. Why did the artist depict the two figures in such an unnatural fashion? Because the finalist of the most famous contest in Laos represents the seven daughters of King Kabinlaphom, who appears in a Lao's legendry. Every April, the contest called *Nang Sang Khan* is held in the ancient capital Luang Prabang, and many women from all over the country participate. Foreign companies such as Honda and Suzuki sponsor this. This contest also serves as a stage to showcase Laos's charm to the world.

On the other hand, Fang Lijun often features himself in his works. Looking at the photos from that time, Fang Lijun seems to be only the one with a bald head among his fellow artists, and the image of the men in his works is similar to the artist himself. Even if it is not the artist's self-portrait, we assume that the artist depicts young people with a similar position and mindset.

### ■ Hidden meanings of their smiles

〈 Work ① 〉 Cynicism toward art and society

〈 Work ② 〉 Hearty smile, yet a slight mortification?

### 【 Commentary 】

Men appearing in Fang Lijun's works always have a fearless grin on their faces. (Please turn over)

At that time, this kind of works were called 'Cynical Realism' and drawn a lot of attention. He is one of the leading artists born in the early 1960s. In Chinese, the cynicism is written as 'wanshi,' which means 'racketeering' or 'showing an expectant attitude to society, making fun of it and behaving insolently.' The artists graduated from art college in the late 1980s experienced the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest in their twenties. This generation of artists took a cynical view of art and society and focused on their inner selves.

Kham Tanh's work seems to be more straightforward. The seven finalists are smiling at the crowd of supporters and audiences at the venue. A woman on the far left, wearing a special crown, opens her mouth a little wider than the others and has a smile of pride. Indeed, this is the woman who is elected as Miss Laos of the year by voters. Perhaps, the smiles of the other nominees may hide their disappointments.



Many supporters and audiences come to see the Miss Lao Contest in Luang Prabang every April.

### ■ Exaggerated Expressions

〈 Work ① 〉 Repetitive men

〈 Work ② 〉 Spectators? Otherwise...

### 【 Commentary 】

Fang Lijun's works can be characterized by its exaggeration in which Many men with the same appearance are depicted repeatedly. This style amplifies the effect of their irreverent grim and the uneasiness of the unpretentious black clothes. Moreover, it gives us an illusion of many of these kinds of men actually exist in society. In 1992, when this work was created, many artists like Fang had their studios at *Yuanming Yuan* in Beijing and built an artist village-like community. The oddly twisting faces of men in his works would represent various pressures on them from society.

The woman's face of the Kham Tanh's work is emblazoned by shading and gives a scary impression rather than a beautiful one. This unnatural emphasis is one of the characteristics of this work. On closer inspection, one can find another exaggerated expression hidden in the painting: Miss Lao's eyes. Only her eyes are glittering with a variety of colors. Are these colors a representation of the audiences celebrating the country's most beautiful woman or one of the future that only she can foresee?

### ■ Artist

**Fang Lijun:** Born in Handan, Hebei province, China, 1963. After graduation from the printing course, Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, he was based in *Yuanming Yuan*, the artist community in Beijing, until 1994. He came into the spotlight as a leading artist of 'Cynical Realism,' which became the major trend of the Chinese contemporary art world in the early 1990s. He participated in the exhibition at the *45th Venice Biennale* in 1993, and the *4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka* at Fukuoka Art Museum in 1994.

**Kham Tanh Saliankham:** Born in Vientiane, Laos, 1973. After he graduated from National Institute of Fine Arts in Vientiane, he became an instructor of the school. In 2001, he stayed in Fukuoka for three months as a FAAM's resident artist and made nine artworks including *Miss Lao Contest* during his residence. In 2003, he was also chosen as a participating artist of the *2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale*.