

Hands as the view of the world

Hand gestures in Buddhist iconography are called mudra and identify the deity and represent their role. For example, in the case of Laxmi in contemporary Thangka painting in Nepal, her first right hand shows Abhaya Mudra, the gesture of fearlessness and her first left hand shows Varada Mudra, the gesture of wish-granting. Vasudara has six arms, which hold respectively prayer beads, a gem, a water bottle, a rice ear, a sutra and the wish-granting mudra. These attributes show that Vasudara is the deity of fortune and fertility.

In the work by John Frank Sabado, the two arms hold the sun and the moon whilst the other two arms supports the sign that symbolises infinity. This figure in the painting is meant to be an existence that supports the world. The role of hands in this section is not only to hold something but also as a symbol of a view of the world that has a god, Buddha or bodhisattva at its centre.

Navin Rawanchaikul refers to the right hand of Plato in “School of Athens” and a left hand from a Buddhism painting which are connected via a book placed in the centre. By referring to the views of the world represented by these hands, a scepticism towards the oriental and classical philosophy is presented.

Dinesh Charan Shrestha Nepal
Laxmi 1999
oil on canvas

John Frank Sabado Philippines
Mediator 2001
pen and ink on paper

Amrit Dangol Nepal
Vasundhara 2004
carbon and poster colour on canvas

Navin Rawanchaikul Thailand
Can't Reach up above, Nothing down below
1993 book, glass, vinyl tube and oil on board

Hands as Existence

This is a work made with iron pipes and the hand-shaped cement. It envisioned a melody from a music instrument. The hands are placed like a musical note and you can read it as if it gives a melody as you read on. The work represents the player of the music through the hands. As in this work, Montien often used hands to represent the existence of people.

Montien Boonma Thailand
Musical Instrument 1991
iron and cement



Hands that Speak Out

The hands in this work convey a direct message by showing finger signs. Each sign stands for an alphabet. The whole work reads “DEMOKRASI” (DEMOCRACY in English). However, the hand that shows “I”, the last letter, is bound by rope to indicate that the freedom of speech is not fully granted in Indonesia and that the democracy is not yet established. By using the stamps placed in front of each panel, the visitors can retrieve and bring it back home the message that the artist sends through the work.

FX Harsono Indonesia
Voice without a Voice / Sign 1993-94
silkscreen on canvas, wood stool, and stamp

Hands as Language

Black, white and brown hands in different shapes - they show that a sign language that people without hearing disabilities are probably not concerned in their daily lives is used as a communication method all over the world. Even though sign language has a large potential for communication, it is difficult to communicate with it without a certain amount of knowledge of it. In addition, even if we know it, each country has its sign language just as it has its own spoken language, which makes it difficult for signers from different countries to understand each other. In the video in the centre, a hand that explodes represents the tragedy of such difficulty of communication. The work may intend to ameliorate the tragedy by promoting the understanding of sign language.

Lee Chunmok Korea
Hands to Be Seen and to Be Read 2000
rubber hands, wood, five monitors, video

Hands as Memory

In 1989 when Sri Lanka was still in the throes of civil war, Pradeep was arrested by the police and his hands were tortured. Many people in Sri Lanka remember their tragic experience that they had to go through by being accused of absurd reasons. He chose hands as the motif of this work because of his experience, but the numerous hands used in the work represent the existence not only of himself and people around him but many anonymous people who suffered similar experience. These hands tell of the sorrow and memories of anger of these people.

Pradeep Chandrasiri Sri Lanka
Broken Hands V 2002
wood, charcoal, nails, terracotta and print