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Viewer participation completes the art work

by [Kate Mattingly](http://www.pinklineproject.com/artchat/author/kate) (<http://www.pinklineproject.com/artchat/author/kate>)

Never before have I seen so many crucial ideas pressed into so small an area. Yet the beauty of this exhibit - *Puzzling (a) Space* at Hillyer – is that it gives a feeling of depth and expansion.

Curated by Jeong-ok Jeon and Jammie Chang, *Puzzling (a) Space* presents four artists who create with different media - painting, video, installation and performance - and share an interest in site-specific work. But this term is not used in the conventional sense to mean a creation in an unusual space or taking place outdoors: as curator Jeon explains: "they share a common interest in the notion of here and now."

"Site" operates on multiple levels: it is the place of exchange between an artist's work and the audience's reception; it is the site of experience – the history of each artist that impacts his or her view of the world, and it is the specific place of creation that influences what the artist makes.

The four artists included are Suon Hong from Korea, Chakraphan Rangaratna from Thailand, Ding Ren, a Chinese-American, and Eric De Leon Zamuco who came to the USA from the Philippines in 2005.

In some ways the exhibit is a puzzle: how do these four different artists share one room of a gallery and a foyer? How do their different experiences of being from Asia and in Asia resonate with one another? How does this exhibit challenge the notion that cross-cultural exchange occurs only between two nations at one time?

Most provocative is Zamuco's *A Tale of Common Things* which he participated in as a performer during the exhibit's opening on September 3. Crouched over, sitting on a tiny chair and dressed all in black, Zamuco was writing on his feet with a red crayon. Some of the gallery's visitors walked by him without realizing the artist was there. At a gallery talk the next day Zamuco explained that he was writing "There are people who ate my people like bread... There are people who are eating my people like bread... There are people who will eat my people like bread..."

Zamuco says he is interested in postcolonial narratives, adding that having a sense of history gives him a better sense of "my place." The mixed-media installation he has created literally cuts through the wall that separates the foyer from the gallery and on a narrow, rectangular table sit used bars of soap. They look like vertebrae of a spine. Zamuco explained during the gallery talk that "cleanliness" was often part of imperialists' agenda in colonies. "Civilizing" a region often went hand-in-hand with "purifying" the natives.

Each artist approaches the complicated nature of difference and coexistence in fascinating ways. Ding Ren created two video installations that show patterns of light in her studio, and this marks her last exhibit in DC as she is preparing to move to Amsterdam. Her work – called *Reflected Light Series* – is a poignant and poetic farewell.



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Chakraphan
Rangaratna | detail
image of My Ship Is
Not Pretty | 2009-10 |
size variable | mixed
media installation



(<http://www.pinklineproject.com>)

Soun Hong |
Sidescape
(Washington, DC. Feb.
2010-11) | 2010 | 24 x
33.4 cm | oil on canvas



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Suon Hong spent February in Korea watching images of the snow that decimated DC. He selected photos of the blizzard, chose a small piece of each one, then painted this snippet of the picture. Hong's work is called (aply) *Sidescape*. He had never been to DC, so his arrival here last week made it possible for him to search for his subjects.

At the gallery talk, he told us (through an interpreter) of his elation upon seeing the monuments and statues he had painted. Hong's works come in varying sizes and he hung them in unconventional ways in the gallery – some very high, some very close to one another. They remind me of how we are so bombarded with images and stimuli that we often overlook details or moments that take place off the beaten path. The multifaceted nature of Hong's work makes it resonant: at first glance the paintings may appear simple or straight-forward, yet understanding the artist's concept and the process behind his creation turns *Sidescape* into a statement about imagery that is disseminated, absorbed and consumed.

Rangaratna's work also uses paint, but in a very different way. In the foyer of the gallery his works suggest a visual diary of a vacation. Most of them are geometric, but there is one bunch of black marks on the wall where it seems as if the artist was testing a can of spray paint. During the gallery talk Rangaratna revealed that this is exactly what those marks are, and he left them because they provide a point of contrast to the hard-edged, perfectly aligned shapes that appear in his other images. A favorite piece in this collection is a fuzzy grey creature that appears to be playing ping-pong at a fluorescent green table. His work is entitled *My Ship Is Not Pretty*.

The exhibit, on view until October 22, is an ideal way to expand notions of cross-cultural exchange and site-specific work. As curator Jammie Chang said at the gallery talk: "I enjoy the art which invites the audience to be part of it." *Puzzling (a) Space* reminds us of how observers are vital participants in the realization of an artist's work, and how art has the ability to shift our view of the world we think we know.

Ding Ren | inspiration
of Reflected Light
Series | 2010



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Eric De Leon Zamuco |
Sacred Raiment | 2009
| size variable | rawhide
dog treats, Plexiglas,
stainless steel, wood,
paint

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