

'Virgin Spring' Today and Siti
An installation, 2002

A selection of photographic documentation and texts from the installation, and related materials

Originally presented at the artist's studio, Bangsar Park, Kuala Lumpur,
in October and November 2002 as:

Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam

'VIRGIN SPRING' TODAY and

SITI

an installation

with an essay on 'The Mengkudu and I'
The Disasters of War, After Goya, 1994, charcoal on canvas,
and a series of installation related unfinished paintings on canvas

Feeling

The intensity of feeling may be disturbing to some, frightening to others, but surely not to those who comprehend the arts wholly and know how to feel.

I feel, I absorb, I empathise. People say "Relax"...

I cannot "relax" living with such horrors around me, I cannot look the other way, turn my back on misery, especially when the victims are little innocents, babies, children, teenage girls, the poor and struggling and suffering...

I feel... I feel with the pounding of the blood in my heart and with my soul.

In Faust, Goethe puts it precisely and truly:

“If feeling fails you vain will be your art
And ideal what you plan unless your art
Spring from the soul with elemental force
To hold its sway in every listening heart”

I want my art to spring “from my soul with elemental force” in all my work though I suffer along with it. Graham Greene once said, “Self-expression is a hard and selfish thing that can feed on everything, even upon itself.”

'Virgin Spring' Today



'Virgin Spring' Today, 2002, installation

Ingmar Bergman's "The Virgin Spring" [Jungfrukällan, 1960]

In the darkness of a breaking dawn, a lascivious, unmarried, expectant woman named Ingeri (Gunnel Lindblom) dispassionately performs her morning ritual: preparing a fire on the stove, opening the roof door in order to allow the daylight to stream in, invoking the Norse god Odin in an envious and vengeful plea. In another room, the feudal landowner Töre (Max von Sydow) and his wife Märeta (Birgitta Valberg) solemnly recite their morning prayers and perform a symbolic act of penitence in remembrance of Jesus Christ's suffering, before joining the tenant farmers and servants at the communal table. Their coddled, fanciful, and vain daughter, Karin (Birgitta Pettersson), is noticeably absent from the breakfast table after spending a late evening at the village dance, and Märeta is quick to excuse her oversleeping as a symptom of an ensuing illness. Töre reminds Märeta of Karin's obligation to bring the Virgin Mary candles to church, and criticizes Märeta's excessive leniency towards their only surviving child. Karin reluctantly awakens and eventually agrees to bring the candles to church, but only after cajoling Märeta into allowing her to wear a lavish and elaborate dress that has been set aside for the church offering. Accompanied by Ingeri, Karin journeys through the dark and ominous forest and soon finds her faith and humanity tested when she encounters a desperate, lawless, and morally bankrupt band of goat herdsman.

Adapted from a fourteenth century Swedish legend by screenwriter and novelist Ulla Isaksson, *The Virgin Spring* is a harrowing, yet ultimately affirming portrait of faith, humanity, and atonement. Using chiaroscuro imagery that interplays light and shadows, Ingmar Bergman reflects the process of spiritual illumination in the transitional era of the Middle Ages where mysticism, amorality, and paganism coexisted with the period of intellectual, artistic, and religious enlightenment: the opening image of Ingeri performing her chores that transitions into an illuminated crucifix as Töre and Märeta pray; the physical dissimilarity between the fair haired Karin and the dark haired "adopted" Ingeri; the stark visual contrast between the dark and claustrophobic interiors of the farmhouse and the sunlit path along the stream; the light precipitation of snow after the brothers' unconscionable act. As Ingeri (the allusional fallen sinner, Mary Magdalene) becomes a witness to the manifestation of secular discord and divine grace, she follows her own figurative path from religious darkness and moral bankruptcy to a state of spiritual baptism and enlightenment.

SITI

an installation

Mephistopheles in the court of the Lord God Almighty speaks to the Lord Almighty:

Your suns and worlds are not within my ken,
I merely watch the plaguey state of men.

The little god of earth remains the same queer sprite
As on the first day, or in primal light.

His life would be less difficult, poor thing,
Without your gift of heavenly glimmering;

He calls it Reason using light celestial
Just to outdo the beast in being bestial.

from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part I: Prologue in Heaven



Three men get jail, rotan for raping 11-year-old

Three men were sentenced to jail for the rape of an 11-year-old girl. The court also ordered the seizure of their vehicles.



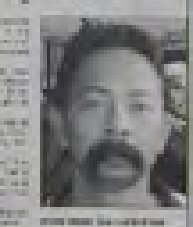
Seven charged with rape

Rapist gets another 11 years

A man convicted of raping a young girl has been sentenced to an additional 11 years in prison.

Man claims trial to raping daughter, 12

A man has claimed that he was tried for the rape of his 12-year-old daughter.

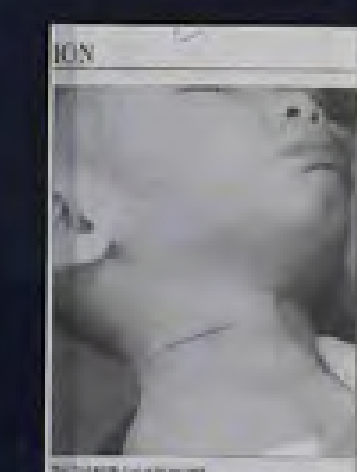


Juveniles unrepentant as they plead guilty to rape

Several juveniles have pleaded guilty to rape and remain unrepentant.

Student raped near busy shopping mall

A student was raped near a busy shopping mall. The incident has caused a stir in the community.



Babysitter abused my grandson, says man

The Malay Mail

Dramatic rescue of teen abducted for RAPE AND RANSOM

POLICE FREE 18-YEAR-OLD GIRL, PROBABLY IN TAMPOK KONDUP IN A STOLEN ACCIDENT IN SHAH ALAM. SHE WAS RAPED AND SEXUALLY ABUSED. IMMEDIATELY.

38th

www.malaymail.com

A CHRONOLOGY OF HORROR

A detailed timeline of various rape cases and legal proceedings.

Face to face with his daughter's alleged killer

A man has had a face-to-face meeting with the alleged killer of his daughter.

Two admit to raping 7-year-old in break-in

Two men have admitted to raping a 7-year-old child during a break-in.

Suspect charged with raping daughter

A suspect has been charged with the rape of his own daughter.



What two survivors say

Two survivors of a crime share their experiences and the impact on their lives.

'DEATH' DEBATE RAGES ON

A heated debate continues over the death penalty for certain crimes.

Scant protection under Domestic Violence Act

Victims of domestic violence receive scant protection under the current law.

Need for more prosecutions, convictions, not death penalty

There is a need for more prosecutions and convictions rather than relying on the death penalty.

Misconceptions about rape

The article addresses common misconceptions and myths surrounding rape.

Death for rape poser for cabinet

The proposal for the death penalty for rape is being discussed by the cabinet.

'Rape victims need support, respect'

Rape victims need more support and respect from society and the legal system.

Mixed reaction to death penalty for child rapists

There is a mixed reaction to the proposed death penalty for child rapists.

Report molest cases to police

Parents are urged to report molestation cases to the police immediately.

Dealing with rape

The article discusses various methods and challenges in dealing with rape cases.

Treat rape as a complex of serious crimes

Rape should be treated as a complex and serious crime.

SUPPORT FOR STIFFER PENALTY

There is strong support for a stiffer penalty for child rapists.

Tougher laws on rape a welcome move

The implementation of tougher laws on rape is a welcome move.

Death likely for child rapists

The death penalty is likely to be imposed on child rapists.

Rais: Groups opposed to death for child rapists

Some groups are opposed to the death penalty for child rapists.

Newspaper reports from 2002, framed by the artist but not included in the exhibition



The Mengkudu and I



1984–1985: Digging deep into the soil around the rather small mengkudu tree, *Morinda Citrifolia*, I come up with a small pile of roots, bright turmeric yellow when first cut into:

During several years around 1984–1985, I had been reading and researching for myself the arts and crafts of the Asian region. Something drew me to the rust-red dye used in ikat and pua weaving, a dye that was said to lie buried deep in the bark of the roots of the *mengkudu* (or *engkudu*). The obvious attraction was the beauty of this colour, which in the jargon of the trade is an extremely “fugitive” dye, and scores of secret recipes abound because of its importance to the people of Java, Bali and the surrounding islands. Historically the tree travelled eastwards from India where plantations of the tree were cultivated for dying purposes.

Calling the dye “fugitive” is an understatement. I found it most maddeningly elusive. The expert dyers of Sarawak and Indonesia would say that my difficulties were due to the fact that I did not invoke the right gods or make the proper offerings to the spirits involved. This is true. I did not. However, somewhere deep down within me under layers of a defence system, something made me pursue the dye. I wanted my canvas to soak up this subconscious calling, and I proceeded with a great determination, which turned into something of an obsession even. I did everything I could, from pestering the FRIM for information, for roots, for leaves of the *jirak* (*Symplocos*) a catalyst, to twice visiting the textile museum of Jakarta, looking into their books and copying out their “recipes”. Needless to say the recipes were varied and many in number.

Laid out here are the results of all my attempts.



6+5 dyed in 5 with top pre-dried

Spores
+ Lincosad oil

Soil + spores
Soil + spores

Bark sol. + T.
+ Spores
+ Spores

soil sol. after heating bark + spores

soil sol. after heating bark + spores

73
Bark sol. + T. + Skin 1

same soil. Surprised that it dig stuff before impossible to dig.

12/11/2002 13:11

The big canvas kept haunting me over the years. I had turned my back on all that I had considered a failure. Then something happened. I am a Believer — I believe in God and His angels. One of them said “Nim, you should show all that stuff you know — it’s interesting”.

I thought about it hard I cleared up some mouldy patches on the canvas. It looked good — the colour had a woody glow. Then without consciously thinking or planning, I reached out for a photograph of an awfully significant house in Penang, my hometown — a house I had revisited and photographed in one of my many attempts at exorcising an ancient pain (of 40 years); and taking the picture I stuck it to a precise point of the canvas and the work was completed — there are varied shades of mengkudu, there’s me, and there’s the close door — and exorcism completed by the guiding hands of God!





The Disasters of War, After Goya, 1994, charcoal on canvas, 152.5 × 122 cm



Unfinished paintings related to the installation



Installation in progress, October 2002



'Virgin Spring' Today In Progress, October 2002 Preparation