Thai Art
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As a painter, I have always regarded the artist’s canvas as an avenue for subtle creative expression. In the didactic world of traditional Thai art, however, I found that it was not so much about the artist’s individual achievements or artistic originality. Rather, the paintings serve as powerful visual illustrations for monks to propagate the teachings of Buddha to devotees. I learnt about this during a one-week field trip to Bangkok along with my classmates as part of the “SE3224: Thai Drawing and Painting” course last semester.

The module, which was taught by Dr Irving Johnson from the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, brought me face-to-face with some of the most exquisite works of Thai art in Buddhist temples across Central Thailand, from Buddhasawan Chapel to Wat Khongkharam. The highly subsidised field trip was a memorable experience where we had a chance to take a well-deserved break in the middle of a hectic semester and take drawing classes at the Pok Chang College of Fine Arts.

Enrolled in possibly the first Thai art class outside its country of origin, I found myself drawing and spilling ink over hundreds of elaborate patterns every week. This ultimately resulted in my final project, a portrait of Phra Wessuwan, a guardian god in the Thai Buddhist cosmology. I still remember having fun shopping for art materials and painting with my classmates.

Under Dr Johnson’s guidance, we put up Wijit: Thai Art by NUS Students, an exhibition which showcased some of these final-year projects at the NUS Central Library from 7 to 16 August 2012. Planning the exhibition was a great learning experience, given the unconventional gallery space and limited time and resources. In spite of the challenges, the exhibition went well and we were all smiles after the setup as we viewed our glistening gold-leafed works standing proudly on their easels.

22 August 2012
My final art project *Phra Wessuwan* displayed at the exhibition

The exhibition, *Wijit: Thai Art by NUS Students*, was held from 7 to 16 August at NUS Central Library