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International Report  
September 30, 2009

**Destination:** Thailand

**Highlights:**

- Learning about the use of shadows, shadow puppets, bodies and other props from Wandering Moon, a Chiang Mai based theater group, whose work mainly addresses women’s issues.

- Learning about ecotourism, local culture and environmental issues while doing a homestay with the Ko Yao Noi community based eco tourism club in Southern Thailand.

- Getting inspiration for my artwork from observing architecture that blurs the line between inside and outside space and sand patterns.

**More Detail:**
I kept an extensive blog during the trip, below are a few excerpts. For the full text see [http://sarahberkeley.wordpress.com](http://sarahberkeley.wordpress.com)

Makhampom

![Me Collecting Bamboo Shoots with Lahu Host, Pang Daeng, Thailand, July 2009](image)

Blog entry: July 9, 2009 Harvesting Bamboo Shoots  
Last weekend I got to go to Chiang Dao and Pang Daeng, to the north of Chiang Mai. The Makhampom Theater Company works with the Dara-ang and Lahu tribes there using theater to help educate the community about their rights, among other things. I’m so glad they let me join them for a few days!
Will write more about it later, but this photo was taken when we went out to the forest with our host family to harvest bamboo shoots for dinner.

Dara-ang Girl Performing, Pang Daeng, Thailand, July 2009

Dara-ang Girl Performing
I joined the Makhampom Study Tour for an overnight homestay in Pang Daeng. The locals and the Makhampom crew performed for each other the night I was there. This girl is wearing traditional Dara-ang clothes. The skirt is hand-woven and her belt is made of silver. The Dara-ang are a hill tribe that has had to flee many times and developed a tradition of sewing metal coins to the jackets and hats so they would be ready to run quickly and transport their money efficiently. Out host mom told us that a full outfit costs about 70,000 baht (about $2,000).
At Pang Daeng there are 2 tribes – Lahu and Dara-ang. The Lahu have been there longer and thus, have a bit more capital and houses like this with tile floors, where I stayed. Some of the houses also have concrete walls rather than bamboo. Recently, the Dara-ang have gotten government permission to live on this land and many people have been able to build houses with corrugated metal roofs, which is an improvement over the bamboo roofs in the old village. All of the families live with outdoor plumbing. There is usually a small shed behind the house with water running from a spigot. Showering involves filling a bowl from an open tank of standing water and pouring it over your body. All the toilets I saw were squat toilets. Most houses don’t have electricity, but some families have solar cells to power lights and TVs after dark.

Tourism, Poverty
During a lot of my trip I’ve been asking myself if there is such a thing as ethical tourism. Last Saturday a mini-van pulled up to the community center in Pang Daeng, a few tourists hopped out, snapped photos, retreated into the van and drove away. To me, it had a feel of visiting animals in a zoo. Is my behavior any more ethical? My photos aestheticize poverty and underprivileged people. As an outsider, what was I doing there? I’ve been asking myself that question throughout my time in Thailand. Am I here like other tourists are here to take advantage of the cheap food, beaches, and exoticism? I hope I contribute something worthwhile to the world as an outcome of my time here.
tribes at Pang Daeng are working on developing the tourist business to their village in such a way that they have more control and financial benefit, while educating others about their culture. The weekend we were there was sort of a test run and showcase of some of the activities and products they would offer to tourists. Staying in the village provoked me to ask myself where we draw the line between luxury and necessity. Most people from hill tribes in Thailand have no citizenship and therefore, very few rights. Access to healthcare, education and employment is severely limited. Tuesday I went a service at Wat Chedi Luang in Chiang Mai for Buddhist Lent and learned that most of the young monks (around ages 10-16) are from hill tribes. Living at the temple as monks allows them access to education in the city. Otherwise, they would only be allowed to attend school in their villages.

Ko Yao Noi

Local transport, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009
Bang Bao showing how latex is harvested, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009

On-site latex processing workshop, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009
Fisherwoman in a longtail boat, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009

Trashcan made from discarded tires, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009
Cha Ma's house, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009

Outdoor portion of the kitchen in the house on stilts where I stayed, Ko Yao Noi, Thailand, July 2009

I did a homestay with the Ko Yao Noi community based eco tourism club. This island is on the Andaman coast near Phuket and Ko Phi Phi. Bang Bao who noticed the sea being fished out and the ocean floor getting damaged by trolling nets started the club. He worked hard to convince other islanders to stop using finely woven nets and traps. They then formed the eco tourism club at a Community Based Tourism effort and as an organization protested the unsustainable fishing practices, successfully getting a ban on trolling. This is our host family's home where we stayed for 2 nights. Out host mom is Cha Ma. She has 2 sons who help run the family speedboat business. Her husband was not around much because his father was in the Krabi hospital for surgery.
Harvesting rice shoots to plant in larger fields

Blog entry: July 28, 2009
I got to see rice being planted for the first time in my life! Throughout this trip I’ve been amazed how much work is done by hand. It’s amazing to think about how much care and time goes into every grain of rice we eat. On this island men turn the soil over and fertilize it with manure using hand push plows that have motors, similar to the rototillers we have in the USA, but requiring much more effort. They look like a slightly faster version of an ox-pulled plow.
Women gather small bundles of rice starts from a smaller garden then take them to plant in the fields. It looked like the starter patch was a community garden. School had just let out when we arrived, so the women were packing up for the day. They were COVERED in mud!
End of the Trip - Bangkok

From Ko Yao Noi I took a speedboat to a van to the Phuket Airport and flew to Bangkok. By that point I the sore throat I’d been developing seemed worse, so I got my ticket to Berlin changed to leave that evening, rather than staying on in BKK.

I had a nice dinner at a Korean Barbeque restaurant in a hotel near Chulalongkorn University with Pornrat Damrhung (Oui) who had been an amazingly gracious host during the whole trip. I don’t think I mentioned her on the blog until now. She arranged for me to meet with the Makhampong group and have a sneek peek of their study tour in Pang Daeng. There I also met Thom, who does theater productions with children and sometimes uses shadows, as does the Wandering Moon group of Chiang Mai who Oui also put me in touch with. Thom showed me some of the lighting set ups and tools she uses in her work. It was exciting to connect with an artist who likes to work with my favorite materials – duct tape and cardboard! I met with Khun Yip of Wandering Moon just before leaving Chiang Mai and was sorry I hadn’t contacted her sooner. This theater group works with shadow figures, sets and their own bodies behind and in front of the screen. Unfortunately, I wasn’t around for any of their productions, but Yip did show me some fabulous video documentation. My understanding of their work that I saw is that it expresses ideas about women, how they are viewed and how they present themselves. One piece involves a woman dancing behind the screen so her shadow is visible to the audience and then she comes out in front of the screen and continues to dance. Yip said, “Our rule is that there are no rules.” The constantly move the sets and lights creating a fly-through effect and a lot of depth. Super inspiring for me!
Blog entry: July 26, 2009, Last Day in Bangkok
I’m in a Starbucks at Siam Square. It’s loud and busy inside and out. Pink taxis, yellow and green taxis, trucks, tuk tuks, motor bikes, billboards covering all the walls with orange, blue, green, pink and blue. Families, tourists, 4 young western women around a small table, one eating a croissant with a knife and fork off a plate on her lap. A trendy girl with black hair and light brown skin talks on a cell phone in a language that’s not Thai or English. Three Thai men sit at a table outside smoking cigarettes and cigars, a cluster of magenta and lime green shopping bags piled against the coffee shop window. A white family with 3 children sips iced coffees in the outdoor table at the corner. A “New Generation” Thai girl with short brown shorts, over-sized aviator sunglasses and a striped brown and white tight sweater bounces around posing for the camera, then springs away hailing a cab…