

## Thiang Uk's Migratory Paintings

March 23, 2025

by Edward Waisnis



*Detail: Thiang Uk, "Untitled (Serpent, Fire, Hands, Winds, Sky)", 2022, oil on canvas*

The modest exhibition of half a dozen paintings by Thiang Uk, spread over the lower gallery at Bureau, is yet another opportunity to test the climate of the output of the contingent of young painters active on the scene who are grappling with form. Additionally, given the days we find ourselves in, there is a timely aspect to the work (as well as the artist) on the topic of migration. On the subject, having migrated from Myanmar, Thiang has spoken about adapting \*. To wit, Uk's trajectory through institutions that serve as cultural markers attests to his understanding in navigating such a major transition.

With four works from last year, one from the year before, and the largest from 2022, the sampling is not ideal for a proper assessment. Nonetheless, the perfume of serious intent, and stylings, are firm enough to gauge a rising talent.

Whilst trafficking in the language of Modernism, Uk brings spirituality in a manner correlative to his Southeast Asia neighbor Thai film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, embracing a melding of 'ghosts'† with nature.

Then there are evocative ripples from the early pre-formularized work of Pat Steir, Moira Dryer and Elizabeth Murray, who all contributed to restoring the spirit that was bleached out of painting by Pop. Similar evidence exists in the practice of Contemporary British painter Daisy Parris, a contemporary of Uk.



*Thiang Uk, "Untitled (Serpent, Fire, Hands, Winds, Sky)", 2022, oil on canvas 76 x 96 inches*

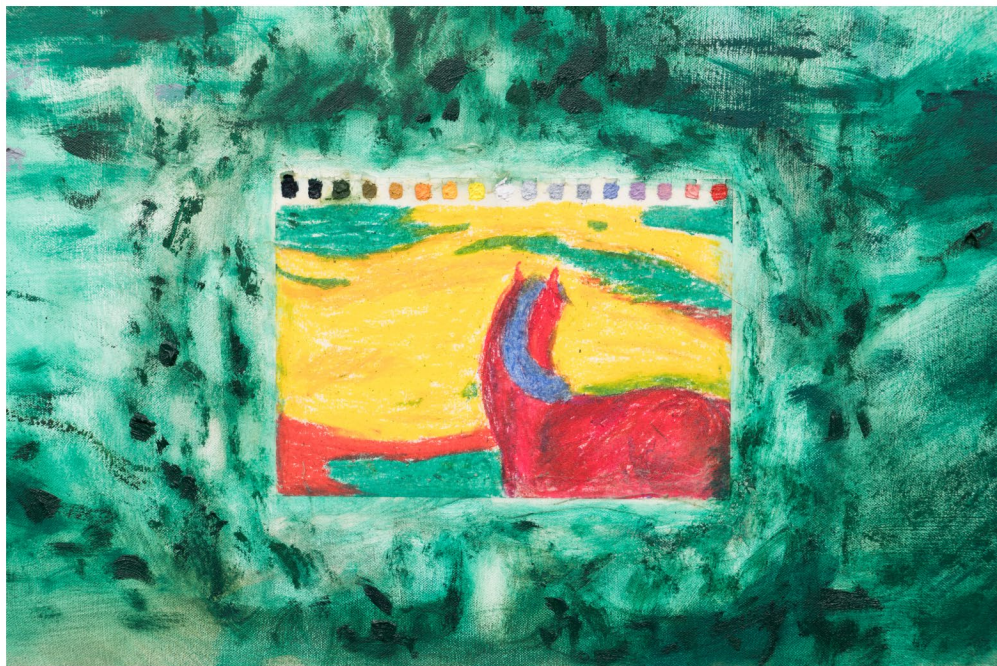
Measuring nearly six-and-a-half feet tall by eight feet across, *Untitled (Serpent, Fire, Hands, Winds, Sky)*, 2022 is packed with iconographic imagery that bubbles up from a volcanic swirl of hot colors speckled with a pattern reminiscent of the skin of a snake (or dragon) over which the high horizon line is ablaze beyond which a fortress is visible. Disembodied hands hang, seeming to signal, and a black tablet in the flavor of one of the panels of the ten commandments, or a singular tombstone, rises with glowing foreboding. Meanwhile, an egg-shaped area speaks as a procreative infused center of attention. Not only is this the earliest painting here, but it is the one that speaks with the language of the exotic to a higher degree.



*Thiang Uk, "Ocean in Green (With a Drawing of Franz Marc's Painting 'Horse in a Landscape')", 2024, collaged oil pastel drawing on paper on oil on canvas, 72 1/2 x 84 1/2 inches*

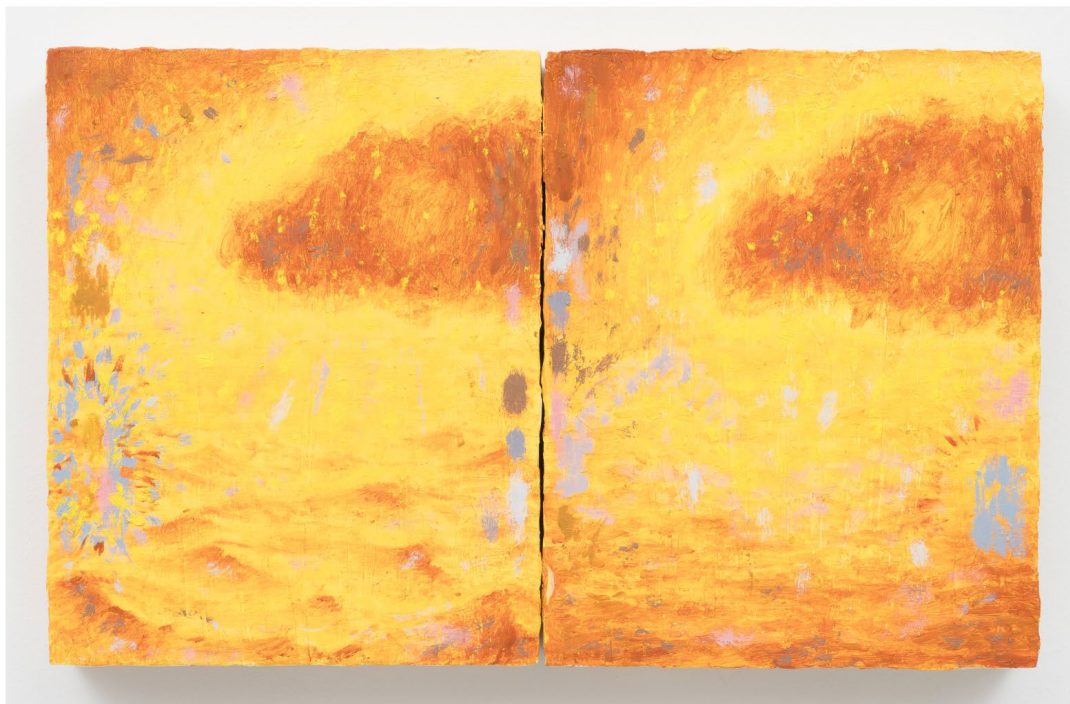


Uk is given to applying his oils with a brushy abandon favored by late-19th/early 20th century painters that capitalizes on methods forged by practitioners, from the Renaissance to the Mannerists, overlaid with flecks and dabs to facilitate highlights.



*Detail: Thiang Uk, "Ocean in Green (With a Drawing of Franz Marc's Painting 'Horse in a Landscape')", 2024, collaged oil pastel drawing on paper on oil on canvas*

In *Ocean in Green (With a Drawing of Franz Marc's Painting "Horse in a Landscape")*, 2024 the technique coalesces in the expansive hemispheres that mimic a diptych, both sides awash in rippling waves, the bisection hinged by the collaged drawing that replicates the Marc. Dryer ‡ is most vividly resurrected here in this aquatic miasma.



*Thiang Uk, "Diptych in Yellow", 2023, oil on panel, 8 x 10 inches*

*Diptych in Yellow*, 2023, a conflagration between daffodil and cadmium enhanced with apparitions that run the gauntlet of what become signature motifs for Uk.



Thiang Uk, "Horses", 2024, oil on panel, 8 x 10 inches

The sublime *Horses*, 2024, a sheet of paper-sized canvas reprises the tableau at bottom center featuring a diminutive equine, depicted in red, predominated over by swirling ranges of the titular beasts, cavorting as if caught in a storm and rendered in an early Cubist palette. A overlaid layer of descending lines of dashes, in alternating black, white, and Payne's gray, seem to connote falling snow, or rain. Overall, based on the tumultuous handling, in concert with the subject, brings the deep resonance of a scaled-down Susan Rothenberg.

Walking a line between mutability and pinpoint intimation Uk's assimilation is never at the sake of loss to either strain (East, or West) that he coalesces into a unique vision.

- HVMAN/Thiang Uk/Collision of Culture, HVMAN YouTube channel, 2019.

† I use this term in the spirit (pun intended) conveyed in Weerasethakul's films. Another example of a communicator and interpreter of the unseen, but recognizable, from the Western canon of cinema, was the late great Krzysztof Kieslowski, who filtered Catholicism through the deep cultural grounding of the Poles with mysticism and magic.

‡ Particularly pertinent with an exhibition currently mounted at Magenta Plains currently up.

Thiang Uk: *Shadow's Edge*  
Bureau  
112 Duane Street, New York  
March 1 – April 12, 2025