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Kitchana Lersakvanitchakul

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The late painter Praktik

Thai PBS profiles more artists in the third season of its award-winning documentary series 'Siam Silapin'

Television viewers once again have the opportunity to celebrate the lives of monarchs and National Artists as the third season of the documentary series "Siam Silapin" or "The Greatest Thai Artists" starts tonight on Thai PBS.

"The series is one of the government's continuous projects to honour our kings and the artists who have created priceless pieces of art and culture to promote a sense of patriotism and values among Thai children and adolescents," says Culture Minister Sukumol Kunplome.

Initiated in 2006 by the Office of the National Culture Commission, or the Department of Cultural Promotion as it is known today, in collaboration with the National Artist Foundation, the documentary was aired for first time in 2008 on Modernine Channel. Since then, it has been broadcast on government-run Thai PBS and in 2009, picked up the prize for Best Documentary at the Golden Television Awards.

"Unlike in the West, where entire channels are dedicated to making interesting documentaries, Thai production companies generally don't invest in making documentary films. Yet they provide both entertainment and knowledge," says Prisca Pongtadsirikul, director-general of Department of Cultural Promotion, who says she was inspired by cable TV's Biography

channel.

"It is our responsibility to encourage our national artists to pass on knowledge to the next generations. However, this project focuses on recording those artists' life stories and knowledge, including their valuable pieces of works, if possible while they are still alive. A documentary is the best way to encapsulate their entire story while entertaining the viewer.

"This documentary offers an in-depth story and analysis and has more selling points than a written biography. It has plenty of emotion and is mixed with drama, making some of the life stories seem a little like short stories as we bring in comments and reflections from the subjects' students, followers and offspring. We also anticipate that the series will act as an inspiration for artists of the new generation," she says.

This new series portrays the biographies and masterpieces of artists in different fields. Prisna says she hopes the artists' lifestyles, work styles and their struggles to overcome obstacles will inspire viewers to create their own work with determination and elaboration, while simultaneously raising awareness of the values of different fields of arts that they need to help conserve.

Among the monarchs and artists covered in this third series are King Rama III, King Rama VI, MR Kukrit Pramoj, and Senee Saowapong (Sakchai Bumrungpong) in the poet and author category; painters Prakrit "Jit" Buabusaya and Kamol Tassananchalee; artist Chalood Nimsamer; sculptor Chamruang Vichienket; architects Pradit Yuwapukka and Air Vice Marshal Arwuth Ngermchuklin; musicians Sudjit Duriyapaneet, Euea Sunthornsanan, Surapol Donovanik and Phongsri Voranuch; Nairongpakdee (Jian Jarujaron) and Songchart Chuesiri in the classical dance category; and performance artists Prayoon Yomyiam (lamtad mae prayoon) and Thongmak Chantalue (mor lam).

The series, which has been a year in production and cost between Bt4 and B5 million, will be shown in 24 episodes, each of 50 minutes.

"After we completed the selection of the National Artists, we asked for permission from their offspring. Some initially disagreed with our presentation ideas but we were able to reach agreement. We thoroughly researched our subjects and conducted hundreds of interviews before we started writing the script. Both students and relatives took part in checking the script," says Prisna.

Who does she expect to tune in to the documentary series?

"Thai PBS has a variety of viewers. But from feedback, our documentary mainly targets a working people," she says.

The DVD of the series is distributed free to schools, who are encouraged to use it as an educational medium and also for research.

"We also give the DVDs to all embassies to publicise to their nationals," says Prisna.

"National artists dedicate their lives to their works. I would like everyone to appreciate those works," says the director general.

OUR HEROES

"Siam Silapin" ("The Greatest Thai Artists") airs at 10pm on Thursdays on Thai PBS.

Visit www.ThaiPBS.or.th.



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