

*Languages* English

# Exhibition Enigmatic Majorities

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*Myth of Modernity* - Chulayarnnon Siriphol (courtesy of the artist)

"As Marx said, I always believed that when our turn comes we should not make excuses for the terror."  
Ferhat Özgür

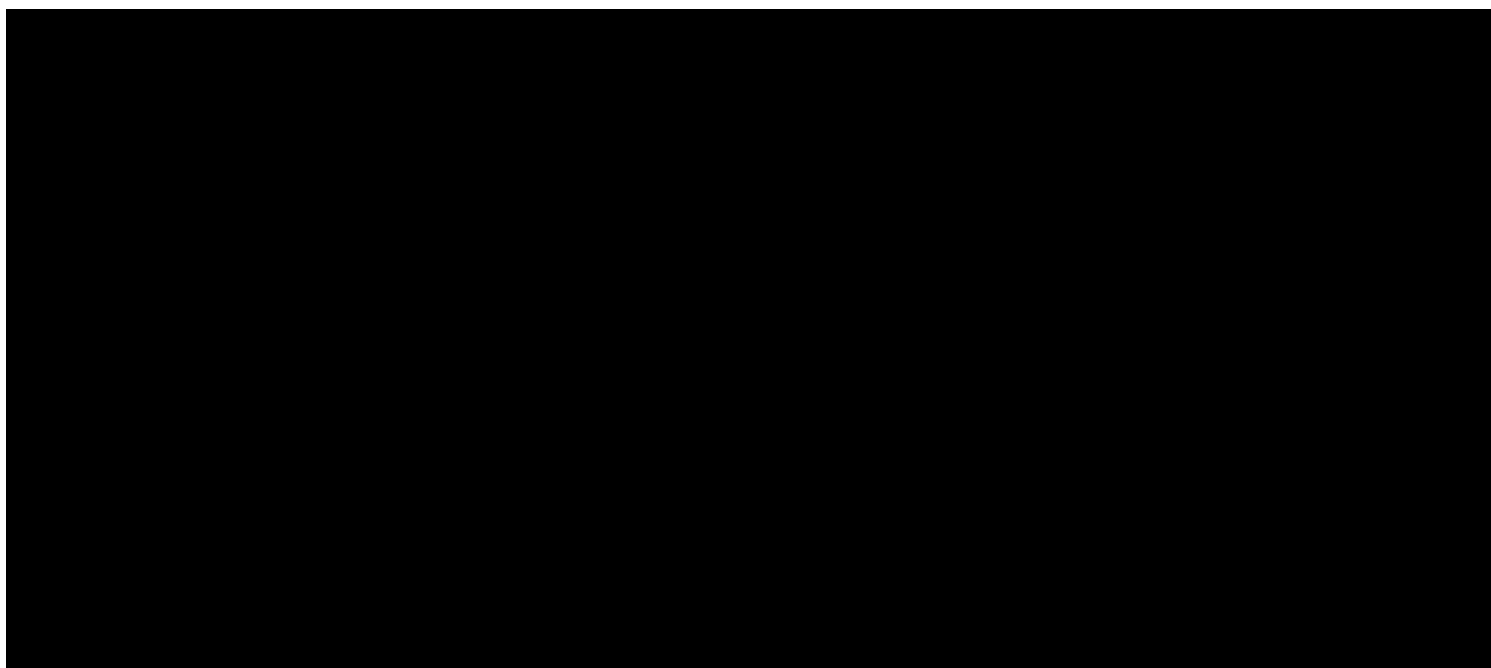
"It's a big question to ask everyone how should we live together in the future." Chulayarnnon Siriphol

The exhibition *Enigmatic Majorities* asks 'what does it really mean when "the people" themselves suddenly appear in uncountable numbers, as enigmatic majorities? Such emptiness is to be found at the very heart of the pageantry invented to reaffirm national identities.<sup>1</sup> I recall Zygmunt Bauman's statement here, that: 'National identity is painstakingly constructed by the state and its agencies ... aimed at the monopolistic right to draw the boundary between "us" and "them"<sup>2</sup> I had a chance to talk to two exhibited artists- Ferhat Özgür and Chulayarnnon Siriphol - about their exhibited work. Özgür's film *Conquest*, 2016, is a belligerently anti-Western popular re-enactment of the fall of Constantinople in contemporary Turkey, while Siriphol's film *Myth of Modernity*, presents the Thai political crisis of 2014, showing the empty signifier of the "people" in the moment of its emergence.

The idea for the film *Conquest* come from the Turkish ruling party celebration of the conquest of Constantinople, which was one of the first signs of the 'Ottomanization' process politically. Özgür explains that: 'The Justice and Enlightenment Party (AKP) seems to have adopted maintaining ongoing negotiations with the EU, towards the third term of 2011. It was not until the president declared the

construction of huge Ottoman barracks in place of Gezi Park in 2012 that the protest and occupation movement started thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Özgür clarified that Taksim Square became associated with freedom of speech and the Yenikapi Meeting Arena was associated with power. The latter also became, for the first time in spring 2017, the place for such grandiose Ottoman ceremonies. Özgür concludes that: 'Up until 2002 the conquest of Constantinople was known just as an historical record, yet over the past two decades its significance evolved politically and ideologically so much that it was associated with the victory of East over West. It symbolised superiority of the east, comprising of all the controversial concepts such as Islamism versus Christianity and tradition as opposed to modernisation. It should not be a coincidence of how an historical "term" was transformed into a political "event".<sup>4</sup>

Siriphol's inspiration for the *Myth of Modernity* came from the artist reading an article about how modern Thai architecture related to traditional Thai architecture by Professor Chatri Prakitnontakarn. This article addresses how traditional Thai architecture derived from Buddhist philosophy represented by the triangle form. After the colonization period of the South-East Asia, the architecture began to change to a western style. Siriphol understands it as intellectual colonization of Thailand by the Western thoughts. Consequently, a triangle form has become associated with Thai architecture to enforce the Thai national identity within the Western globalization project. Siriphol explains that: 'The protesters against the government in 2014 thought Thailand was going to be colonized by corrupted politicians, capitalism and globalization. People thought they were good Buddhists who came out to the streets to protect their country and monarchy from corrupted politicians and globalization and to preserve national identity. So, I made the relationship between these nationalists' protests and the triangle form in architecture which is a nationalistic form.<sup>5</sup>



As part of the Extreme Centre symposium, the exhibition *Enigmatic Majorities*, successfully reached for dialogues with the Global South, which were somewhat lacking in the actual symposium's panel conversations.

1 — *Enigmatic Majorities* exhibition, Akademie der Künste der Welt.

2 — Bauman, Zygmunt. *Identity: Conversations With Benedetto Vecchi*, Polity Press, 2004, p. 22.



*Conquest* - Ferhat Özgür (courtesy of the artist)



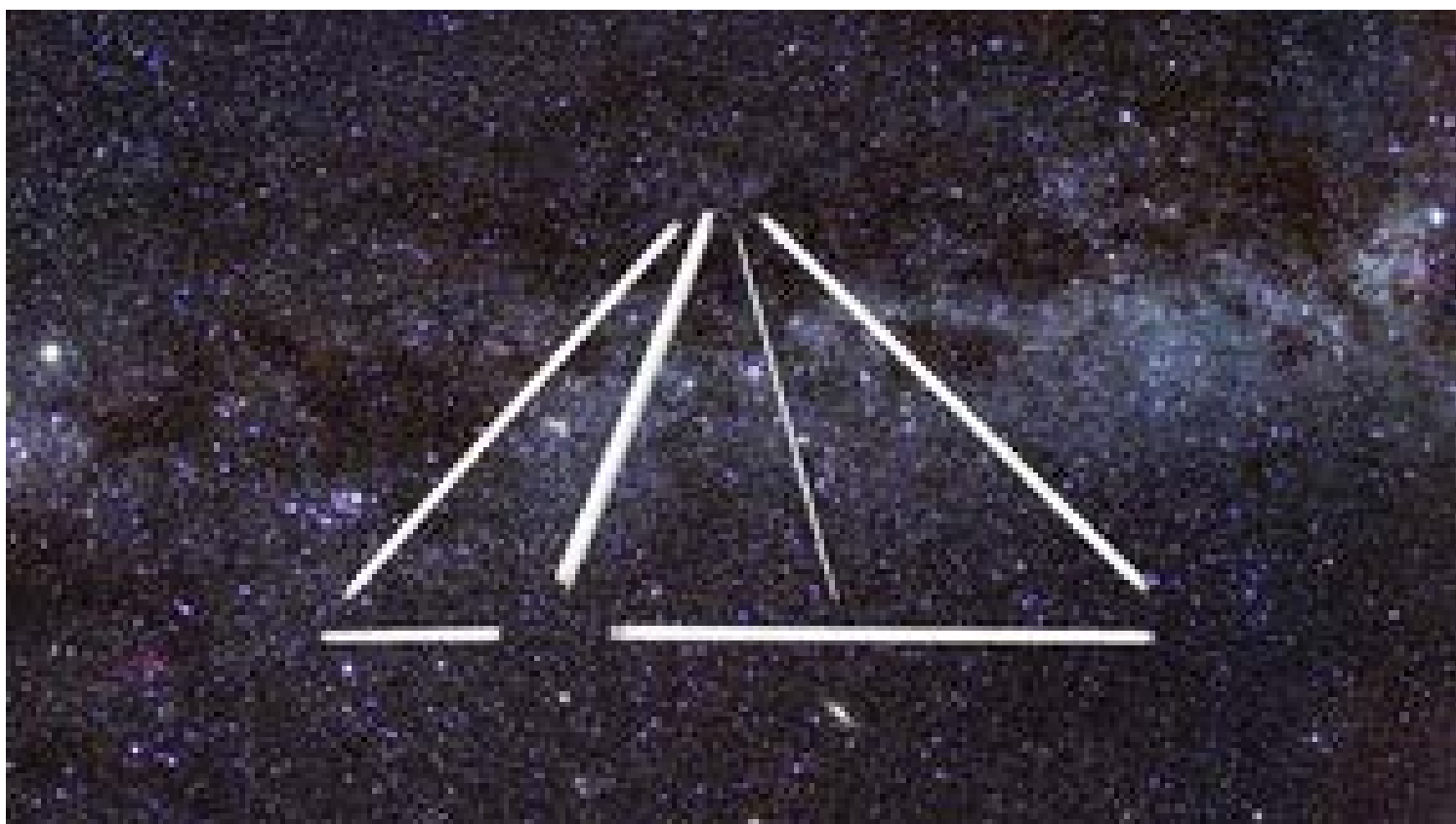
*Conquest* - Ferhat Özgür (courtesy of the artist)

3 — Ferhat Özgür, *E-mail interview by the author*, June 2017.

4 — Ferhat Özgür, *E-mail interview by the author*, June 2017.



*Myth of Modernity* - Chulayarnnon Siriphol (courtesy of the artist)



*Myth of Modernity* - Chulayarnnon Siriphol (courtesy of the artist)

5 — Chulayarnnon Siriphol, *E-mail interview by the author*, June 2017.

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