

# An expat's interpretation of Thailand's ying and yang

By Coconuts Bangkok July 29, 2013 / 15:34 ICT



**COCONUTS HOTSPOT** - Scottish expat Richard Skene has been living on and off in Thailand for about 20 years. Like many *farang* who have come to call Thailand home, Skene was first captivated by the city's bacchanalian delights. Two decades later he's lost interest in a night out in Patpong and become more intrigued by the teaching of Buddha. Skene's first art exhibition "The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom" is a visual tribute to this transformation.

In a series of artworks on display at Eat Me Restaurant & Gallery July 30th - August 30th, Skene explores the conflicting themes that have come to dominate his personal narrative while in Thailand. The collection runs the gambit from photography, video, light installations and still images. Many of them are provocative and several are even too graphic for us to publish on this website, but we can assure you that you won't leave without an opinion.



Before the exhibit opens tomorrow we sat down with Skene to learn more about his ying and yang.

*Your day job is in real estate how did you get into art?*

It's a very recent development. I found myself a few years ago in my early forties thinking of ideas and interested in doing something a bit different. And because I've always liked art and design I started thinking about things that I thought would be cool to have in my own home. So I created a list and the list grew and it got more interesting. Because I've been living in Thailand a lot was inspired by my environment.

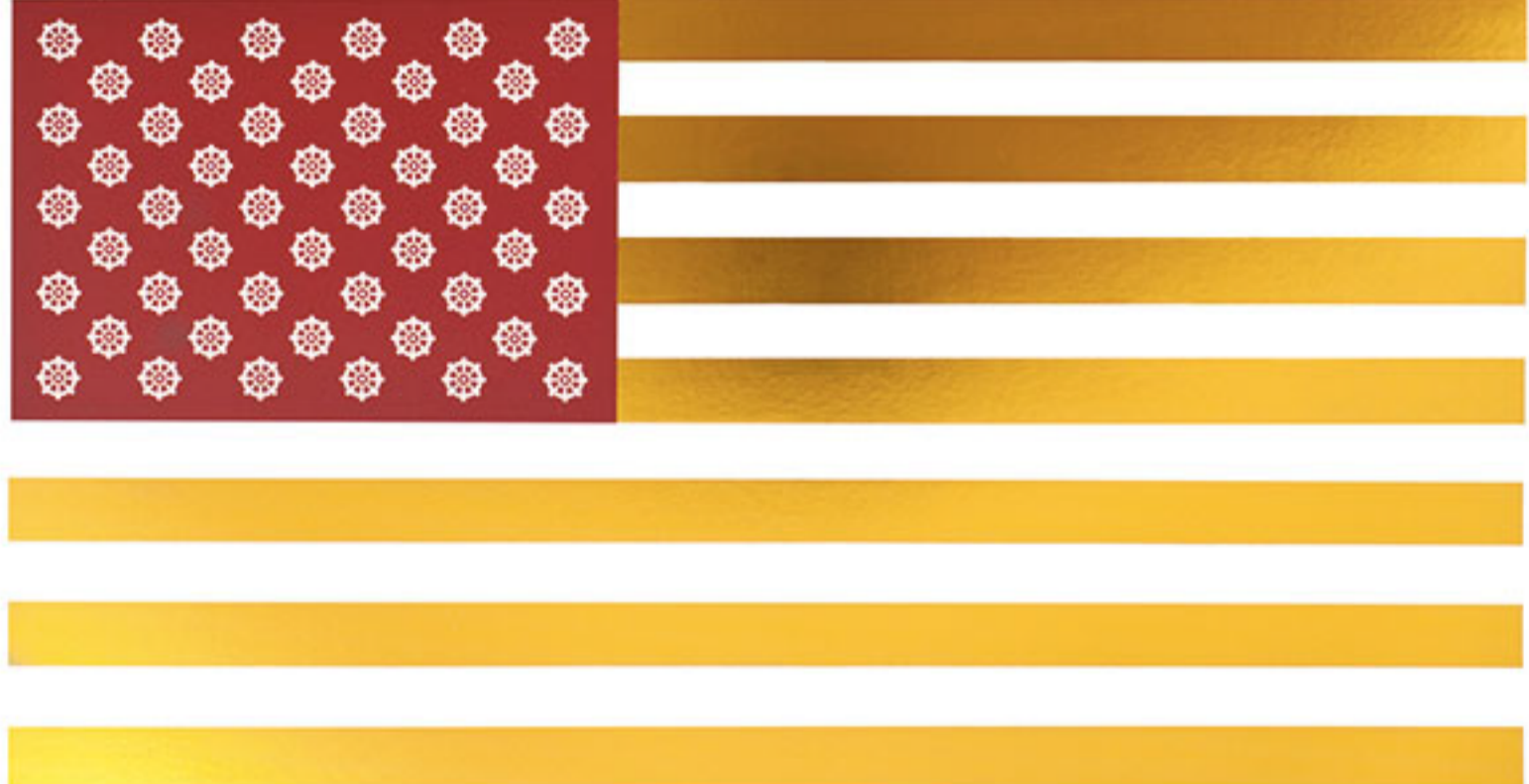
After two years I had this long list and I just felt compelled to make them. I just really wanted to see these ideas become a reality. At first it seemed bizarre and I was nervous about telling people, but ultimately my curiosity won out. I then figured that if I was going to make them I might as well exhibit them and if I was to exhibit them I might as well sell them.

*What are the big themes that influence your work?*

Much of the work has Buddhist themes, but a lot also has ideas from the other side of Bangkok – the nightlife and more debauched hedonistic aspect.

I found that quite interesting and I thought – how can I tie them together? And it reminded me of this quote I first read in the autobiography of Boy George, which was, "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." I think it's very true and I think it's very good message, especially for Thailand because in Thailand there's two main stereotype as far as overseas people are concerned. One is the nightlife from the places like Patpong and the other is temples and monks and Buddhism. So if you think about it the two stereotypes are at opposite ends of the spectrum, but it does in a way reflect Thai culture, certainly modern popular culture and the way it's perceived by visitors.

It's also mildly autobiographical because the first time I came to Thailand I was 25 and I certainly was pursuing a more hedonistic lifestyle and now that I'm 45 my lifestyle is completely different and much healthier.



*What was your lifestyle back when you first came to Thailand, when you were 25?*

It was probably the same as every young single person who comes to Bangkok. It was like being a kid in a sweet shop to start with and it's great fun. But of course as you get older and mature you see the other side and the novelty wears off.

*You're not a Buddhist but do you think aspects of Thai Buddhism have influenced you and affected your work?*

Compared with when I was first here I've given up smoking and drinking and taken up exercise and a good diet. So these are changes that have nothing to do with Buddhism. But I do believe that the Buddhist philosophy about karma whether it's spiritually correct or not I think it's common sense. When you're young the hedonistic lifestyle is fun and exciting but as you get older you see it in a different way and it catches up with you. And when you realize what does make you happy – it's people, people and experiences. I've read a lot about people and that's what it tells you. It's not to be materialistic. It's to keep things simple and try and be happy and good and realize if you live a bad life you'll suffer.

In the search for happiness we all think about what's going to work best. I remember getting a Bible and on the page by the bookmark was a sentence that said, 'the only way to be happy is by making others so,' which I thought was a fantastic paradox but probably very true.

**FIND IT:**  
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Opening reception: Tuesday 30 July, from 5:30 to 8:00 pm  
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