

Semiotics in the Artworks of Isan Artists

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Abstract

This article is part of a dissertation titled *Semiotics in the Artworks of Isan Artists* (the northeast region of Thailand) for Online Art Exhibition Design, which aimed to study the background and artworks of two Isan artists, i.e. Tawee Ratchaneekorn and Pairoj Samosorn, who are significant contributors to the Isan Arts. They received national and international awards, including Isan Best Artist and Isan Heritage Artist, as well as consistently creating numerous artworks that analyzed signs in artworks using semiology developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. The semiology was used as a framework to analyze styles, techniques, concepts, strategies, and communication in creating artworks. The artworks were associated with the names of pictures, catalogues, and interviews with the artists and art educators. Sign meaning was analyzed for both explicit and implicit meaning.

The results reported that Tawee Ratchaneekorn and Pairoj Samosorn are not Isan people. Tawee Ratchaneekorn was born in Ratchaburi. In addition, Pairoj Samosorn was born in Nakorn Srithammarat and graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Painting Department at Silpakorn University. He was a follower of Professor Silpa Bhirasri, who has a crucial role in powering the Isan contemporary arts and is respected and accepted by Isan and Thai artists. He received national and international awards, including Isan Heritage Artist and Isan Best Artist.

Semiology was employed to analyze the meaning of sign levels divided into two types. The first type was used to find the meaning of the sign in the artwork of Tawee Ratchaneekorn from the interview with the artist. The other was used to find the meaning in the artwork of Pairoj Samosorn, the dead artist, from the interview with art educators. The research revealed that the artwork of Tawee Ratchaneekorn and Pairoj Samosorn were designed as icons and indexes. The interpretation of sign meaning can disclose the meaning of the sign, background, concept, and inspiration in art creation. The viewers would then understand the inspiration in creating artworks, which the artists attempt to express through their artworks.

Keywords: sign, arts, Isan artists, Tawee Ratchaneekorn, Pairoj Samosorn

Introduction

Arts help people to have delicate minds, ethics, and morality. The artists created artworks to express their emotion for beauty and satisfaction which were inspired by experiences, cognitive processes, and living created from the development, experiment, learning, and development of techniques. These works were later created to fulfill psychological needs inspired by their impressions or depression. Any environment or circumstance was considered as the inspiration and subconscious of the artists who created a large number of artworks. The concrete, semi-abstract, and abstract artworks were concealed with ideas and experiences, which were created as signs to represent different meanings. The artists communicated via artworks while signs were presented with implicit meaning. The viewers would differently interpret the meaning of the sign based on their personal imagination, experiences, and knowledge. Therefore, to understand the artworks, one should study the caption, meaning, and guidance from the artists.

Isan is the land of civilization located in the northeastern region of Thailand. Scholars and researchers have studied Isan artworks and created plentiful artworks that reflect the Isan character. Paigapat (2012) has mentioned that the group of artists in painting belong to the Isan tradition, which is divided into three groups: 1) a group born and working in Isan; 2) a group born in Isan but working in other regions; and 3) a group working in Isan but born in other regions. Among these different contexts, they were named Isan Artists.

Signs were created to convey meaning to replace the actual objects in the texts and contexts, which might be objects, things, pictures, or others that can express the meaning and idea of the sender. What can convey meaning was considered a sign, meaning beyond itself within a specific context; that is, the meaning was formed in relation to culture (Kaewthep, 2004).

The artists created different kinds of artworks which the signifiers were created. The viewers would differently comprehend the meaning depended on their imagination and experiences which might not relevant to what the artists conveyed. Furthermore, semiology is the study of symbol system appears in human thoughts. The meaning was conveyed to replace the actual object which was considered as the substitute of meaning and symbol of the message in different social contexts.

In this regard, the current research intends to study the signs in artworks created by two Isan artists, 1) Tawee Ratchaneekorn and 2) Pairoj Samosorn. They were both university instructors and notable in the art industry in the northeast (Isan region) and were nationally recognized and regarded as role models in relation to the arts. Their artworks served as a valuable reflection as a model for art studies as well as the inspiration for art creation among the artists. Consequently, this study aims to study the backgrounds and artworks of two Isan artists and to analyze signs in the artworks of two Isan artists using semiology to identify styles, techniques, concepts, strategies, and ways in which artworks are communicated. In light of this related to artworks by Isan artists, it is interesting to consider how the signs were employed and what they meant. This would be the creation of the signs in artworks and the set of knowledge that would benefit the art industry.

Research Objectives

1. To study backgrounds and artworks of Isan artists
2. To analyze signs in the artworks of Isan artists

Research Methodology

As qualitative research, the present study followed the guidelines and procedures for collecting the data from the biography and artworks of two Isan artists through the processes of studying, researching, and collecting data from the artist's catalog, observing and selecting the artworks, interviewing the artists, recording pictures, and analyzing the signs in the artworks of Isan artists using

semiotic theory. The data was then analyzed and interpreted to discover the signs in the artworks of Isan artists.

Findings

The artworks of two artists, 1) Tawee Ratchaneekorn and 2) Pairoj Samosorn, who have had a significant impact on Isan arts were highlighted in this study regarding their noteworthy artworks and academic contributions who received national and international awards, including Isan Heritage Artist and Isan Best Artist. They were both university instructors and well-known in the arts in the Isan region, and they were regarded as role models in the arts on a national level. Their artworks were regularly created with creativity and uniqueness, which provided a valuable reflection for art studies and served as an inspiration for other artists. Regarding the research objectives, the present study yielded the following findings.

1. Biography and Artworks of Two Isan Artists

1.1 Tawee Ratchaneekorn, 88 years old, is not an Isan native. He was born in Ratchaburi Province, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Painting, from Silpakorn University as a follower of Professor Silpa Bhirasri. Tawee Ratchaneekorn received honorary recognition as the National Artist in Visual Art (Painting) in 2005 from the Office of National Culture Committee, Ministry of Culture, two Second-class Honors with a silver medal, and three Third-class Honors with a bronze medal from the National Exhibition of Art, and the Best Artist Award of The Silpa Bhirasri's Creativity Grants in 2001, Silpakorn University. He was also awarded the Best Artist Award of Nakhon Ratchasima Province and the Isan Heritage Artist in Visual Art (Contemporary Visual Art) in 2011 from Khon Kaen University as a senior artist with knowledge and contributions to the arts and culture of the Northeast, particularly in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. He was the instructor at the College of Technology and Vocational Education, Northeast Campus, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, currently known as Rajamangala University of Technology Isan. Furthermore, he co-founded the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Design, which is recognized as the first institute of art education in the region, which was considered a founder of art studies in the Northeast. Tawee is dubbed an Isan-reflected artist, Rak Kaew Isan Artist. Tawee's artworks were impressed internally and expressed through artworks related to insensitive stories, including social reflection, way of life, belief, economy, politics, and natural resource conservation. Ratchaneekorn (2021) mentioned that *"We are artists, so we create aesthetics. Creating art should be taken seriously so that everyone can realize its value."*

Previously, artworks were realistic and distinctive, mostly inspired by nature, surrounding matters, and pictures of people and animals, which were concealed with concepts to mirror emotion and expression. The painting captured the truth about life and society. Tawee has been compassionate through personal stories since he was a child, expressing emotions associated with his way of life, beliefs, society, politics, war, and other relevant issues. He made an effort to create abstract pictures. Line, color, and shape were influenced by his thoughts and experiences. In addition, local Isan materials were used to create art using a variety of techniques: line painting, watercolor, oil painting, graphic arts, mixed media art, and sculpture. In brief, Tawee Ratchaneekorn drew inspiration to create many forms of artwork, including reflections on life, philosophy, society, politics, and surrounding matters. These were caused by the impact of feelings, thoughts, and imagination, which sparked the process of creating various types of artwork.

1.2 Pairoj Samosorn, died in 2008, aged 68 years old, was born in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in painting from Silpakorn University as a follower of Professor Silpa Bhirasri, and a classmate of Charoon Boonsuan and Thawan Duchanee. He has received the Isan Best Artist Award in Visual Art (Painting), the 1st Honorary Isan Artists, Art and Culture Center, Khon Kaen University, the Outstanding Alumni Awards in Academic Promotion, Silpakorn University, the Khon Kaen Contemporary Artist Awards, and the Diamond Ganesha Award: the Best Artists in the Northeast in Fine Arts and Preservation of Arts and Culture, Mahasarakham University. He played an

essential part in getting the contemporary Isan arts movement accepted by the art circles in Isan and Thailand. The circle of line drawing artists regarded him as the venerable artist of pencil-on-paper line drawing (Yanpisit, 2012). After graduation, he worked for the government as a lecturer at the Poh-Chang Academy of Arts teaching art composition, painting, anatomy, and drawing. While teaching, he created graphic arts and fine arts, submitted for competitions, and wrote books. He then relocated to Khon Kaen University, where in need of an art teacher. At that time, Pairoj taught art appreciation at the Demonstration School, Faculty of Education. Later, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences was established; the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, has been transferred to the Department of Humanities. Correspondingly, he had written an academic article and published it in newspapers and magazines. Subsequently, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) awarded him a fellowship to visit Japan and study the art museum. When the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts was established, he moved to become the Head of the Painting Programme as an academic in teaching and researching, an explorer of mural painting throughout the Isan region, and an art critic. His role encouraged the Isan people to realize the importance of Isan art, which was regarded as the root of Isan. His survey of mural painting in the Isan region had an impact on the art circle in academics, education, conservation, and further development, which provided countless productions, including students who became artists, academics, and teachers. The new generations of teachers gained knowledge, and the art circles then gradually expanded from the good seed of Professor Pairoj Samosorn (Paigapat, 2012).

During his working, the renowned artist of pencil-on-paper line drawing, Pairoj Samosorn, was known for creating drawing and realistic artworks. After retiring in 2000, he transferred his knowledge and experiences through a large number of semi-abstract artworks using acrylic that reflected Isan's stories.

Pairoj Samosorn was recognized as a person who made a significant contribution to the preservation and promotion of Isan arts and culture with his exquisite words and the art of literature. His perspectives on visual art in the form of messages and art criticism were published in a variety of media, including newspapers and magazines, in addition to producing artworks such line drawing, watercolor painting, landscape painting, and the painting of admired Isan civilization. These exhibited the value of arts and culture as well as the attraction of composition. Artworks should be made with fewer components but more value without any statement, as stated: *"Art has its own meaning; no more words. If it was good art, the viewers would touch and get into it automatically."* (Silsat, 2012)

2. Sign analysis in the artworks of Isan artists

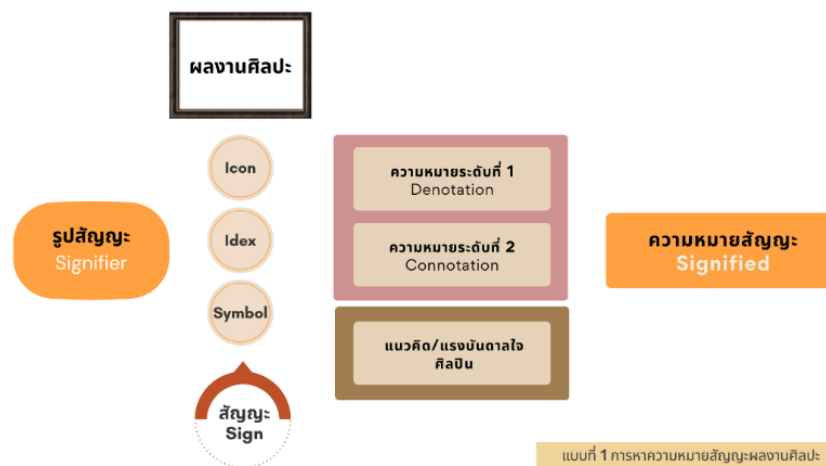
The analysis of signs in the artworks of Isan artists employed the semiology based on the conceptual framework of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who initiated the foundation of semiotics, and Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher. Semiotics refers to the communication of meaning in language and culture. F. de Saussure suggested that any form of sign can convey the meaning and thoughts of the sender. A sign is anything that can convey meaning and is made up of three components: the Reference, Signifier, and Signified. The first part is called "Reference," and the second part is called "Signifier" which refers to any pictures, lines, colors, and elements used to create the artwork. The third part is called "Signified" which is the meaning of the signifier. It is the imagination that is meant to be, the concept in thought which has been mutually agreed upon and formed from culture as the process of building meaning based on the dictionary and altered throughout the times depending on the mutual agreement of the sign user.

The study of signs refers to the finding of the relationship between Signifier and Signified. According to F. de Saussure, there are two categories of Signified which are denotative meaning which is the meaning that is explicitly stated in a dictionary, and connotative meaning, which is the implicit meaning that is implied by the knowledge within groups or personal experiences. The meaning of signs depends on the text and context. Consistently, the study of the relationship between signs and actual objects suggested by C. Peirce that a sign consists of two components which are "Signifier" and "Signified". The terms "Signifier" and "Signified" refer to the following: 1) Icon, signs that replace or

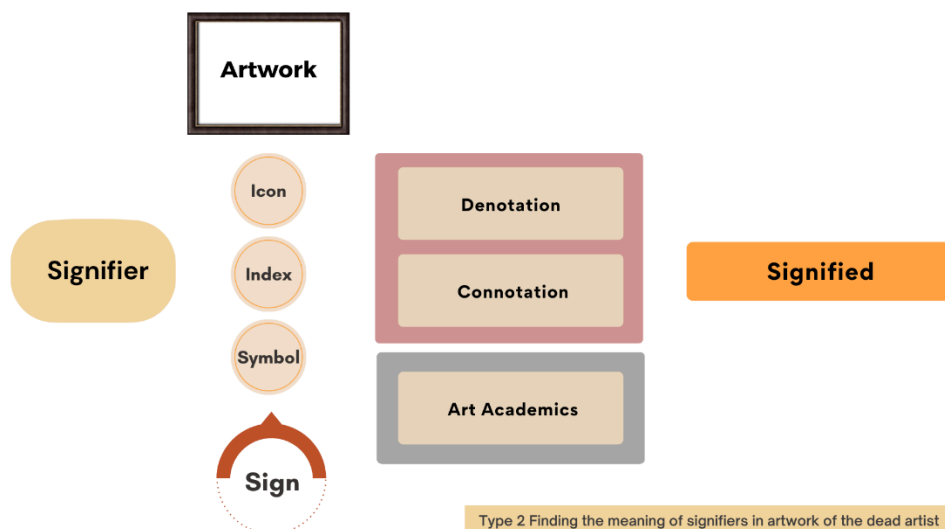
things being represented; 2) Index, signs with a direct and reasonable relationship to the reference and actual objects relevant to reasonable decoding; and 3) Symbol, the meaning generated from the mutual agreement in groups without reference to actual objects and regarded as the substitute of meaning. The decoding of signs should rely on the knowledge of the sign user (Kaewthep, 2004).

Semiology has been used to study the meaning of signs in relation to the data from the names of pictures, catalogues, and interviews with artists and art academics. The first level of meaning was referred to as denotation, and the second level as connotation. There were two types to interpret sign in artworks: Type 1 was the meaning of signifier in Tawee Ratchaneekorn's artwork, as shown in Figure 1, and Type 2 was the meaning of signifier in the artwork of a dead artist, Pairoj Samosorn, as shown in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 1
TYPE 1 FINDING THE SIGNIFIED IN THE ARTWORK**







**FIGURE 2
TYPE 2 FINDING THE SIGNIFIED IN THE ARTWORK (A DEAD ARTIST)**



According to the data collected from catalogues and interviews with Tawee Ratchaneekorn, art academics, and experts of Pairoj Samosorn's artwork, the analysis interpreted the meaning and sign of the artwork, then showed two examples of Signifier that have been exhibited and divided into three categories of sign: icon, index, and symbol. The summaries of signifiers and signified artwork are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIED ARTWORK TITLED “THE END OF THE HUNTER” BY TAWEE RATCHANEEKON


	
Signifier	Signified
<p style="text-align: center;">Icon Wood</p> 	<p>Denotation Wood is from a core of tree trunk. It's into pieces or sheets. Wood is used for creating artwork making furniture, weapon, or construction materials. Cut wood is hard.</p> <p>Connotation Cut wood refers to decay.</p>
<p>Wood is from a core of tree trunk. It's into pieces or sheets. Wood is used for creating artwork making furniture, weapon, or construction materials. Cut wood is hard, but it is decayable in the same time.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Icon wild boar canines</p> 	<p>Denotation Canine means a sharp tooth which use for tearing meat. It is between the front teeth and the molars. Wild boar is a big animal. Its nature is aggressive and ferocious. Wild boar fights by crashing with its long and curved canines.</p> <p>The canines are used for protecting itself and digging for food. Humans also use it for creating amulet and sacred objects. They believe that wild boar canines can protect them from dangers especially the dense canine and no cavity, or the big long canine.</p> <p>Connotation Wild animals, Fight, Amulet, Sacred objects</p>
<p>Wild boar looks like pig. Its nature is aggressive and ferocious. Wild boar uses its canines for protecting itself and digging for food. The animal fights by crashing with its long and curved canines. Thai people believe that wild boar canines can protect them from dangers. They create amulet and sacred objects from the canines.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Index Hunter/Carcass</p> 	<p>Denotation Hunter is a person who hunt animals for food, or sell and being a guide in the forest. Hunters also hunt the rare, or wild animals to challenge their ability. Being a hunter must be skillful. They must dare to take risk and good at fleeing. At present, the number of hunters is lower than the past. In addition, they change their role to be a tour guide, protect forest and teach the way to stay in the forest.</p> <p>Connotation Hunting, killing animals, Harming others, Dead, Loss, Separation, Sadness</p>

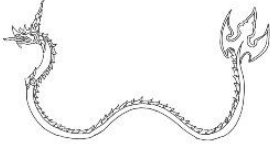

Hunter is a person who hunt animals for living and challenging his ability as well as a guide in the forest. Hunter is also a tour guide for ecotourism. Hunter kills animals, harms others, relates to the dead, loss, separation and sadness.




According to Table 1, the signifiers and signified artwork titled "The End of the Hunter" by Tawee Ratchaneekorn, is a wood craving artwork with shell, rock, and canines, 26x145x30 cm. created in 2004. The signifier included wood and wild boar canines as icons, which refers to signs that substitute or things being represented. Besides, a wood craved as hunter or carcass referred to as indexes, signs that had a direct and reasonable relationship to the reference and actual objects. The signifier was analyzed to uncover the first level of meaning, which was the definition from a dictionary, then explored the second level of meaning as the implicit meaning from the interview with Tawee Ratchaneekorn.

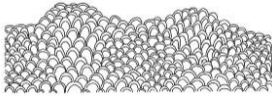
In conclusion, the sign of Tawee Ratchaneekorn's artwork titled "The End of the Hunter" employed the wood craving technique to express a meaningful artwork. According to two levels of meaning and the interview with Tawee Ratchaneekorn, the carving of a sleeping human figure in wood depicted the deterioration of a hunter's carcass with the wild boar canines on the top of the body, which seemed to be in the stomach. The concept and inspiration for this artwork came from the travel to the north of Luang Prabang District in Lao PDR. Regarding the artwork, the signs of "dead" are connected with "wild boar canines". The viewers acknowledged that "if we kill them, they kill us; if we punch them, they punch us; if we hurt him, they hurt us. We must not harm one another. It is like hurting yourself." (Ratchaneekorn, 2021). The hunter killed wild boar for selling, but he died because of wild boar canines. Wild boar canines represent fights, amulets, and sacred objects for protecting human from any harm as a superstition. It is believed that wild boar canines can protect them from dangers. Wild boar is aggressive and ferocious and fought by crashing with their long and curved canines. Canines attacked the hunter, and later died. The signifier of the hunter's carcass and wild boar canines symbolized the fight and persecution that resulted in the loss and separation of both parties. This suggested that we should not hurt or exploit anyone.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIED ARTWORK TITLED “CONSCIOUSNESS” BY PAIROJ SAMOSORN

	
Signifier	Signified
Icon Naga	Denotation “Naga” represents richness. People who live in Mekong River Basin believe in Naga. Regarding the belief, Naga is the ancestor of humans.

	<p>Nature, richness, and stability are created by Naga. On the other hand, Naga can bring disaster to humans. The form of Naga looks like serpents with crests. It refers to greatness, fruitfulness, and luck. Naga serves as a bridge of the secular world and the sacred world. The beliefs of Naga are different in each region. Naga has a golden body and red eyes with colorful scales. The color of the scales is able to indicate the Naga's prestige. An ordinary Naga has one head while the noble Naga has three-headed, five-headed, seven-headed, or nine-headed appearance. The noble Naga descended from Phaya Set Naga (Anantanakharat) who is the throne of Vishnu Narai Paramanat Na Kasien Samut, Anantanakharat. In addition, people believe that Naga can transform into an attractive human. Some regions believe that Naga is the king of water, and others believe that Naga is the king of the sky. The noble Naga is a self-arising creature and is in the ruling class. They live in water such as rivers, swamps, canals, or lakes. Some people believe that Naga lives in the sky, or the Four Heavenly Kings. The origin of the belief of Naga is from India.</p> <p>Connotation "Naga" refers to water, richness, worship, belief, and faith.</p>
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<p>Icon Baci or Khan Mak Beng</p> 	<p>Denotation "Baci or Khan Mak Beng" is the item for inviting the protecting soul to return the body. It is made from banana leaves and the style looks like Krathong. Baci has 3, 5, 7, or 9 layers. The base is the biggest layer and the tip is the smallest. There is a stick in the core of Baci. Oblations are put in Baci and the tip of Baci has a boiled egg. Baci Su Kwan Ceremony is Thai and Laos tradition. According to the belief, all people were born with "Kwan" Kwan is a soul that protects lives and follow the owners everywhere. Su Kwan Ceremony is the ceremony of inviting the protecting soul to return the body. In addition, they believe that it is a ceremony to support encouragement, consciousness, and wariness. In the Northeast of Thailand (Isan), it is called "Pa Baci", "Pa Kwan" Some regions call "Kun Baci" Baci is divided into 3 kinds in Northeast Thailand which are Pa Kwan, Pa Baci, and Mak Beng. These are the components of tradition, rite, and Hit Sip Song Khlong Sip Si (Twelve Annual Festival of Isan people observed once a month) of Isan people. Baci shows the beauty of tradition and culture. It is the representation of civilizations from the past to the present.</p> <p>Connotation "Baci or Khan Mak Beng" refers to sacred items, Isan culture, and blessing ceremony</p>
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<p>Icon Fish</p> 	<p>Denotation “Fish” are clod-blooded vertebrates and aquatic animals. They breathe with gum. Fins help them to move and balance themselves. Some kinds of fish have scales, but some kinds do not. The fish’s shape, size, and character are various and different. They eat both plant and animal origin. Fish are found in general sources of water.</p> <p>Connotation “Fish” refers to the cycle of life and fruitfulness.</p>
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<p>Index Buddha's footprints</p> 	<p>Denotation Buddha's footprints are Buddhist icons shaped like an imprint of Gautama Buddha's foot or both feet. Buddhists worship the footprints. There are two forms: natural, as found in stone or rock, and those made artificially for being representations of Buddha.</p> <p>Connotation “Buddha's footprint” refers to Buddha, sacred items, and worship.</p>
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<p>Index Lotus</p> 	<p>Denotation “Lotus” is water annual crops. Its stem is rootstock in the mud. Lotus is a monocotyledon. The leaves grow from the stem, leafstalks, and flowers rising above the surface of the water. The leaves mostly have round shapes. Lotus flower has a white or pink color with fragrance. Lotus flowers are used for decoration in ceremonies. Seeds are eatable. Lotus has been dubbed as the "Queen of water plants" The flower is a symbol of virtue. It is also the flower of Buddhism. Lotus relates to Buddha’s life since birth, enlightenment, and nirvana. The form of lotus petals is used for creating the base of Buddha image. Lotus is the one of worldwide popular flowerers. In the ancient time, Lotus is the flower of Egypt. It is the symbol of richness and is the representation of Horus God. Egyptians believe that Horus God was born from Lotus. In addition, Lotus is a component of the architecture. Many decorations and architecture are created from the shape of Lotus, for example, ashes keepsakes, and showers. Lotus is also a metaphor of woman’s breast.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Index River</p> 	<p>Denotation “River” is a large natural stream of water. It is the center of small streams. A river begins at a source which is usually a watershed or a spring then flows to the mainstream. The small streams go to tributaries. In general, the watercourses flow along channels that are flanked by banks. The end of the river is spread out. This area is called river delta.</p> <p>Connotation “River” refers to life, living, and way of life</p>
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The researcher found the meaning of Pairoj Samosorn's artworks created in 2006, as shown in Figure 2, titled "Consciousness," using the acrylic painting technique on a 60x80 cm canvas. The signifiers included Naga, Baci or Khan Mak Beng, and Fish as the icons of the artwork; an icon refers to a sign that represents the same or something similar to the referred thing. The Buddha's footprints, lotus, and river were indexes, a sign with a direct and reasonable relationship to the reference and actual object. The signifier was analyzed for denotation, which was the meaning regarding the dictionary, and analyzed for connotation, which was the implicit meaning. Another artwork analysis was from the interview with art academics or experts. The signifier of the artwork titled "Consciousness" by Pairoj Samosorn using the acrylic painting technique presented a meaningful artwork. Based on the denotation and connotation, the academic suggested with the hypothesis that it was a picture of Buddhism. The picture of Buddha's footprints referred to the following of the footsteps of the great teacher, who was the leader of being free from suffering, that is, following the Eightfold Paths of the Buddha (Saeng-ging, 2015, cited in Samosorn, 2015). The picture also indicated a trace of life cycle, a trace of Naga, which shape represented the sign of ritual (Tukpoe, 2015, cited in Samosorn, 2015). Some practices are common: big fish eat little fish; the strong defeat the weak. Naga is related to water, whereas the lotus is supposed to signify freedom since it is rising above the surface of the water and being free from everything. The lotus of Buddha-Dhamma consists of three components: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, which refer to the followers who follow the Buddha and ought to be happy. In addition, the spiral, especially the right spiral, represents birth. Frequently, Pairoj showed examples that the letter starts with the number one (๑) came with a head, all Thai letters were with head and they moved around to the right. The reading of Thai books also read from the left to the right, similar to its head. Regarding picture, the overall is to compare the lessons in Buddhism. Naga represents richness along the Mekong River Basin, where believed in Naga. The shape of the fish was invented to be relevant to the lessons of the Buddha. The color scheme was in yellow representing the religion. The lotus was also painted to represent religion. Blue was water. Purple was the color of sadness, sorrow, and disappointment. The interpretation by color, if the follower follows the Buddha, they will be free from everything which might be social context. Besides, the 12 lines of the

spiral pattern might represent Isan tradition, Lunar Festival and Fourteen Laws (Heet 12 Khong 14), including Khan Mak Beng in rural Isan (Silsat, 2015 cited in Samosorn, 2015).

Finding the signified employed two types to explore the meaning of icons, in which the information would be recorded including the meaning, and background of the concept for creating artworks of the artists who intended to communicate through artworks, which would inform the information of the background, idea, and inspiration of artwork creation.

Discussion

The analysis of signs in Isan artworks was based on the conceptual framework of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who initiated the foundation of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce, and the analysis of sign meaning proposed by Bhukonglee (2017) in the dissertation titled "The Plot Structure and Symbols in Thai Cartoon". The symbols were analyzed from signifieds divided into two levels of meaning as the components in order to communicate to the viewers. The first level of meaning, denotation, was the definition from a dictionary. Furthermore, the second level of meaning, connotation, contained the implicit meaning. This was relevant to Charles Klayman's study (2016), "Making Art Work: a Pragmatic Interpretation of Art", which placed an emphasis on the study of art creation, the pragmatic interpretation of art using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, and three types of sign meaning: icons, indexes, and symbols.

In light of the results of this study, Tawee Ratchaneekorn and Pairoj Samosorn played significant roles in motivating Isan arts and were recognized at the national level as role models in relation to life, work, art creations, and academic works. They were honored with national and international awards, including Isan Best Artist and Isan Heritage Artist. Although neither of them was native to Isan, they both absorbed its culture, traditions, architecture, and arts, and they expressed these through their artworks.

Isan-reflected artist Tawee Ratchaneekorn is known as Rak Kaew Isan Artist. His artworks were internally inspired and conveyed through insensitive stories about societal reflection, way of life, belief, economy, politics, and the preservation of natural resources. For example, an artwork titled "The End of the Hunter" by Tawee Ratchaneekorn expressed the signs of "death" through the carving of a sleeping human figure in wood, representing the deterioration of a hunter's carcass connected with the "wild boar canines", which were magically believed to be the signifier of fights, amulets, and sacred objects to protect them from dangers. Tawee's artwork served as a warning to viewers not to harm or take advantage of others. The fight would result in the loss and separation of both parties.

In addition, Pairoj Samosorn provided an essential movement in the contemporary Isan arts accepted by the art circles in Isan and Thailand. The circle of line drawing artists regarded him as the venerable artist of pencil-on-paper line drawing. Following his retirement, he transferred his knowledge and experiences into ideas and imagination, and expressed them through artworks, e.g. the signified of artwork titled "Consciousness". He communicated the story related to Buddhism, Isan traditions and rituals through signs, Buddha's footprint and lotus of Buddha-Dhamma: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The term "Naga" represents greatness and richness, while "Baci" refers to the cultures, traditions, and rituals of the Isan people. "Fish" is a metaphor for the cycle of life, the fact that big fish eat little fish, and fruitfulness.

There were two types of patterns to find the meaning of signifiers in artworks (Figures 3 and 4). Type 1 was employed in the instance of the alive artist. The data were collected from interviews with artists to find the meaning of signifiers in Tawee Ratchaneekorn's artwork. Moreover, Type 2 was employed in the case of the dead artist by interviewing with art academics to find the meaning of signifiers in Pairoj Samosorn's artwork.

FIGURE 3
TYPE 1 FINDING THE MEANING OF SIGNIFIED IN ARTWORK

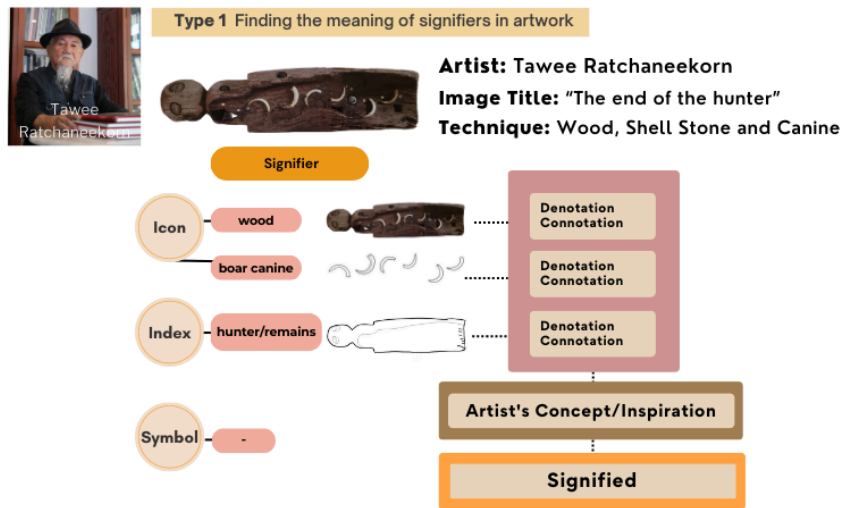
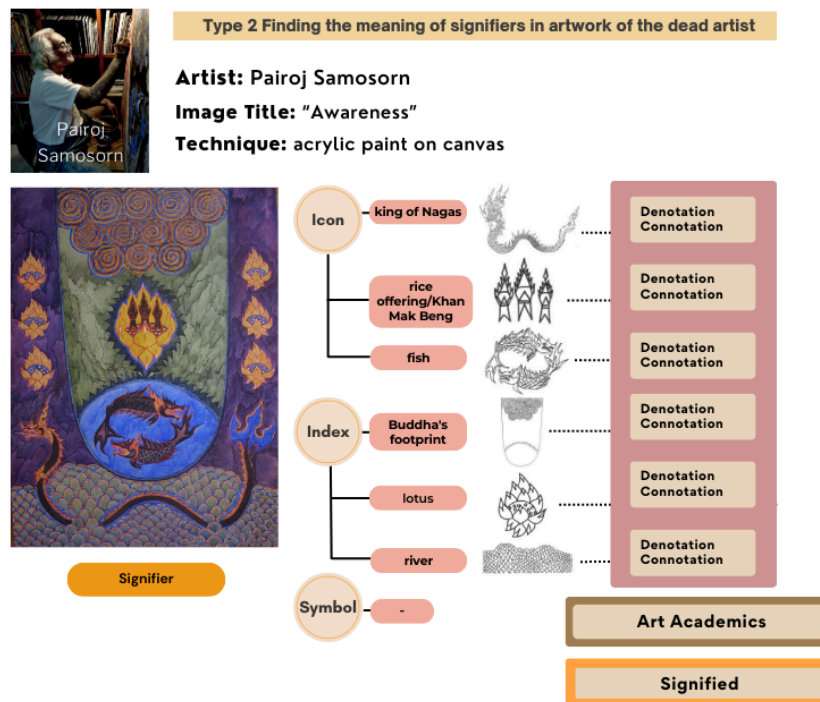


FIGURE 4
TYPE 2 FINDING THE MEANING OF SIGNIFIED IN ARTWORK



In conclusion, the design of these two types to find the meaning of signified in artworks can indicate the concepts of meanings and backgrounds in creating artworks by the artists that were intended to communicate through the arts. It was also regarded as a record of the background, concept, and inspiration behind the creation of the artworks, as well as a record of the signified of the artworks.

Recommendations

- 1) The types for decoding signified were developed, which can be applied for those who are interested in analyzing the signs of other artworks created by other artists.
- 2) The finding the meaning of signified found in the artworks can be added.

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