

January 12, 2012
For Immediate Release...

WAY OF WATER
BRUSH PAINTINGS BY VICHAI CHINALAI TO BENEFIT VICTIMS OF
THAILAND'S HISTORIC 2011 FLOOD

Artist's Statement by Vichai Chinalai:

A major disaster happened in Thailand at the end of 2011. In a country used to flooding, it was to become the historic flood of half a century. The 2011 rainy season was very different and very unusual. It started early, from the month of March: the rains came and came and came for months. In between there were severe tropical storms that saturated the ground. Then two killer typhoons came – one in September and one shortly after in October. The typhoons dumped billions of cubic meters of water on the northern region of the country. Chiangmai, Thailand's second biggest city, was immediately inundated.

Then the water started moving south. At the height, thirty percent of Thailand was flooded: cities, towns, agricultural areas and ancient historic preservation sites were under water, some for more than two months. The world heritage cities of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai were under more than six feet of water,

North of the Bangkok, one-by-one five huge industrial parks were flooded, operations ceased and factories shut down, some it appears for good. In Bangkok the domestic airport became a giant lake and was shut down. Main highways were closed and railways to the north and east stopped operating. Transportation in and out of the city was disrupted. In some areas of Bangkok the flood waters were as high as 10 feet, leaving only the roofs of the houses showing. In Bangkok alone, two million people were affected. More fortunate others moved to the upper floors of their homes. There were shortages of everything – drinking water, food, medicine and not surprisingly, water pumps.

More than 600 people in Thailand died by drowning and electrocution; many others are still unaccounted for. Half a million factory workers around Bangkok alone became homeless and of course out of work, and those whose families were from other areas could not travel to their home towns in the countryside.

The situation was horrific. It affected everyone in Thailand, physically and mentally.

I was there in our family compound as the flood waters headed toward and reached Bangkok. We moved my 98 year old mother to an apartment in a nearby building for a month, fearing that if the waters came suddenly it would be too late to evacuate her. My older brother had put hundreds of sand bags by the compound walls, installed water pumps and together we moved everything we could to higher floors. Then we waited, following the news hour by hour. I went to bed at night expecting to wake up to water everywhere. Day by day the water came closer and closer. Meanwhile each day more friends and relatives reported their homes and cars filled with water. One friend did come downstairs in the morning to find his refrigerator floating in the living room.

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Several days passed and the headwaters of the flood reached another friend's area. I decided to go to help her rescue her house. Since my area was still dry, I managed to buy a big submersible water pump with a 30' long hose. I took the sky train (which being high up was still running) to the end of the line, descended to the street which was now a canal, and struggling to hold the pump and the hose chest-high, waded through the water. I watched for a military truck, the only form of transportation left at road level, to pick me up and take me to the closest drop-off point to my friend's house. From there I again waded slowly and carefully to the house. A normally half hour trip took 2 hours and longer to get home that night.

We installed the pump and started it right away. We stuffed the drains in the house with cement-filled plastic bags but the water still came up from unnoticeable cracks in the floor. We used rags and mops to absorb the water, squeezed them out into buckets which we dumped outside into the water that would simply come back in again. One pump was not enough so every day I repeated the trip with another pump. Family arrived the third day after an 8 hour trip that should have taken two hours. Working 24 hours a day for 5 days, 5 people with 5 pumps running continuously, managed to save the house. Neighbors in the surrounding houses couldn't fight the water – they lost everything that couldn't be moved to a higher floor.

My friend was lucky: she only lost sleep. Her rescue team lost sleep with her, taking turns through the days and nights watching the pumps and mopping up water. In my family compound, we were lucky too – the flood never reached us, but quietly went another way. Many people, however, were unlucky. They lost their homes, their livelihood, their health, and in some cases their lives. So many people need help now to get back on their feet.

In between boxing household items, carrying furniture, visiting my mother, helping my friend and watching the news somewhat obsessively, I started to paint about the water. A series of brush paintings, continued back home in New York, now forms this small exhibit titled **Way of Water**. Thanks to the generosity and kindness of Bill Caskey and Liz Lees, promoters of the San Francisco Arts of Pacific Asia and Tribal & Textiles Arts shows where the paintings will be shown, this is my opportunity to do something for the victims of the floods by donating the proceeds of the sales of these paintings to the **Chaipattana Foundation Aid and Restoration Centers for Flood Victims** under the auspices of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Srinthorn.

Anyone who might simply like to make a donation, can donate money directly through their website at http://www.chaipat.or.th/chaipat_english/ or give a check, payable to Chaipattana Foundation with "Support the Chaipattana Foundation Aid and Restoration Centers for Flood Victims" written on the memo line, to me or send it to:

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