DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
THANA LAUHAKAIKUL

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Thana Lauhakaikul, professor emeritus, art and art history, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
THANA LAUHAKAIKUL

Thanha Lauhakaikul was a professor in the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin from 1977 to 2003. He died May 26, 2010, in Thailand at the age of sixty-nine, leaving behind a wife and a five-year-old daughter.

Thanha was born on January 3, 1941, in Thailand. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in sculpture at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1968. In 1974, he received a Master of Science in Art Education from the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston. In 2003, he was awarded an honorary Ph.D. in sculpture from Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

His teaching experiences included positions at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri (1975-77); The University of Texas at Austin (1977-2003); and Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand (2003-04).

Professor Lauhakaikul received many awards, including the following: Ruth Head Centennial Professorship, The University of Texas (2001); Foxworth Centennial Fellowship, The University of Texas (1992-93); New Forms Regional Initiative Grant, Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts (1990); Frank C. Erwin Jr. Centennial Fellowship, The University of Texas (1998); first place, Vietnam memorial sculpture competition, Military Order of World Wars (1979); first prize, Texas Sculpture Exhibition, Texas Society of Sculptors and Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin (1978); and first prize, “Sculpture,” Bangkok, Thailand.

Dr. Lauhakaikul has many of his sculptures located in public places, where they can be enjoyed for years to come. One of his most important and notable works, “The Fish, the Rice and the Water,” was created at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Thailand in 2002 and is located at the monument of King Naresuan at Ayutthaya City, Thailand. This monument was established in 1997-99 at the recommendation of the Queen of Thailand. In addition, under the sponsorship of the government of Thailand, Dr. Lauhakaikul created a monument in honor of the poet, Suntham Poo, in 1968.

Exhibition records are too numerous to mention. However, it is important to state for this resolution that reviews from highly respected sources at both national and international levels typically included descriptions of Dr. Lauhakaikul’s work as “significant,” “totally unique,” “masterful,” “high level of genius,” and “challenging.”

Famous in his native country, he came to the United States as a young artist and taught studio art for over thirty years. In 2003, he retired from teaching and returned home to Thailand, where he became the dean of Silpakorn University’s Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts (2003-05). Professor Lauhakaikul continued to maintain a productive studio practice by creating sculptures and installations.

Jeff Ragsdale, one of his most gifted former students, said of his mentor:
He was the most influential and inspirational teacher I ever had, bar none. In 2007, I was privileged to attend his last major art opening ceremony in Lumphini Park, Bangkok, with the Japanese Ambassador and the Governor of Bangkok in attendance. It was a great media event. Later that evening, he brought me to an art opening at the Silpakorn University that was the place to be and be seen. When we entered the gallery, which was packed with hundreds of people, all of a sudden it was like a rock star had arrived, with one person after another walking up to him, bowing humbly, and saying ‘Mr. Thana...’ It was at that moment that I realized the important influence he had.

Kenneth Hale, former chair of the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin and a long-time colleague and friend of Professor Lauhakaikul, remarked that in the past four decades, there has never been an artist on the faculty who so fully engaged students in the relationship between creativity and the environment. Hale went on to say that Professor Lauhakaikul had the ability to teach students how the simplest acts of placing objects or performing in the environment could represent extremely complex ideas.

This influence extended to many hundreds of his students, colleagues, national and international artists, collectors, and lovers of the arts. The written word cannot describe the magnitude of his contributions. Professor Thana Lauhakaikul was one of the early artists working with installations. Along with important works of art, his contributions had an enormous impact on global environmental issues. He was very passionate and devoted to environmental causes. In one instance in Thailand, he placed himself in great danger, politically, by physically protesting at the shore of a body of water, protecting a shellfish habitat and challenging its destruction, which would have occurred if the mangrove forest in Rayong Province had been destroyed. This action profoundly demonstrates his commitment to the quality of life.

Thana Lauhakaikul himself described the artistic life in the following meaningful way:

> Each minute of living an artistic life is a fight for all kinds of creative works that are full of tastes and emotions. It is a life built on movements and changes. There is no single pause, even in the moment of dreams. It is a life without a middle path, as it is based on extremities. Things come and go through the five senses that are full of mysterious contents and imaginations. That is why life is full of questions. And to seek an answer to those questions is an experience of life.

Finally, it is important to say Thana Lauhakaikul’s creative contributions are of monumental importance, and his life, in itself, is a great work of art. His art and his teaching will continue to blossom in the minds and hearts of all who have had the incredible privilege of knowing this great man.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Vincent Mariani (chair), Kenneth Hale, and Margo Sawyer.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Fine Arts on May 31, 2011. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.