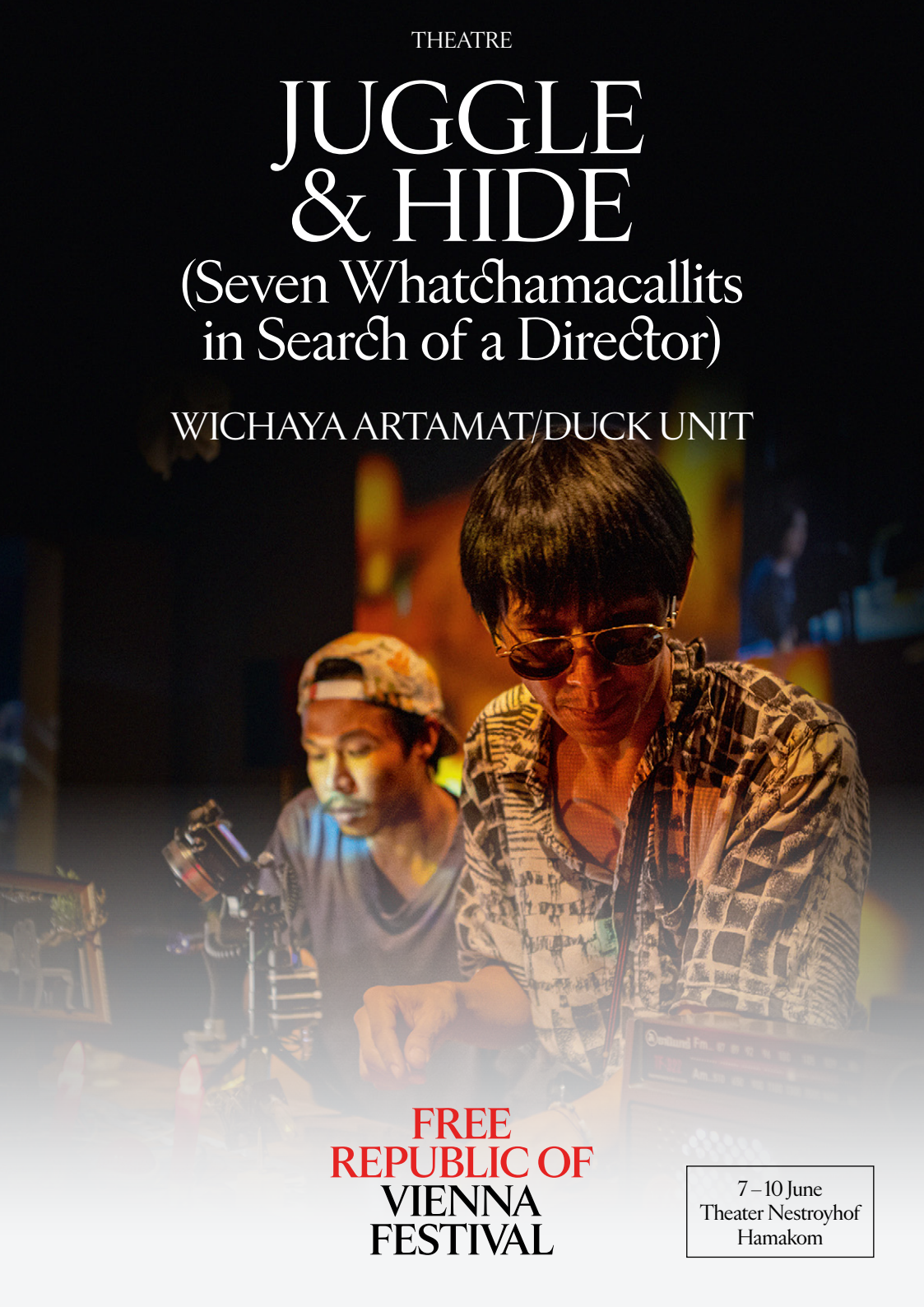


THEATRE

JUGGLE & HIDE

(Seven Whatchamacallits
in Search of a Director)

WICHAYA ARTAMAT/DUCK UNIT



**FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL**

7 – 10 June
Theater Nestroyhof
Hamakom

If God is 'the invisible hand that steers everything', does that mean that in theatre the director is God? And is every play a dictatorship? Thai director Wichaya Artamat actually considers his artistic work an antithesis to authoritarian systems. In order to evade censorship in his own country, he turns to props as metaphors. With *Juggle & Hide*, Artamat now questions this process and his own role as the director-God. Did he force a meaning upon all these objects? This is the first European showing of the playful and radical performance *Juggle & Hide*, in which Artamat confronts the real political unfreedom in Thailand with the total freedom of the arts: pictures, songs, food and ventilators become a united front and challenge the theatre maker's power; they simply take over the stage. Artamat thus asks one of the central questions in the Republic of Gods: Can art reach a point where it creates an utterly new world?

Language
Thai

Surtitles
German, English

Duration
75 mins


barrier-free access

Q & A
8 June, following
the performance

THIS PLAY WAS
SELECTED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAMME
ADVISORY BOARD.

Concept, Direction Wichaya Artamat **Text** Pathipon (Miss Oat), Wichaya Artamat **Artistic and technical direction** Pornpan Arayaveerasid, Rueangrith Suntisuk **Dramaturgy** Yuya Tsukahara **Sound design** Araki Masamitsu **Mechanics creation** Laphonphat Duongploy **Technical operation** Piti Boonsom, Chayamon Srijaruyanon **Sound engineer** Toru Koda **Object operation, Stage management** Surat Kaewseekram **Technical coordination, Assistance management** Monthira Jamsri **Producer** Sasapin Siriwanij **Translation subtitles** Uma Trachu (German), Carina Chotirawi, soi squad (English)

Production For What Theatre **Coproduction** Kyoto Experiment, The Japan Foundation, Duck Unit **Supported by** The Saison Foundation, KYOTO ART CENTER, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC)

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

World Premiere October 2023, Kyoto Experiment

3 QUESTION FOR WICHAYA ARTAMAT

1. Dear Wichaya, in your production *Juggle & Hide* you engage with the history of Thailand – what understanding of history underlies this approach?

I find that each historical event is composed of various external and internal circumstances and factors that combine to reach a particular point. Our lifetimes are very short within the wide sweep of history, and we can all be its witnesses, recorders, narrators, forgetters and contributors.

2. What memories do you associate with the coups referenced in the piece?

I saw a cycle of violence. Each coup led to the drafting of a constitution that diminished the rights and benefits of the people, to protests, to conditions that fostered violence, to unfair elections, to situations that led to protests and to conditions that led to another coup.

3. Is a collective memory of Thailand's history important for understanding the piece?

I think that an audience with no prior knowledge of Thai political history can also enjoy searching for the causes of this cyclical abnormality. Audiences with some basic knowledge or those from a relatable society might have a more immediate grasp of it.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THAILAND

FROM THE SIAMESE REVOLUTION TO THE PRESENT DAY

1932 – The Siamese Revolution

On 5 February 1927, seven men met in Paris; they spent the subsequent days planning a revolution in Siam. Calling themselves Khana Ratsadon (People's Party), their aim was to convert the absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. Their intellectual leader was a law student, Pridi Banomyong.

Pridi Banomyong

A politician, professor and leading figure in Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) as well as founder of Thammasat University and the Bank of Thailand, Pridi Banomyong made significant contributions to the first constitutions of the country. He was a prime minister briefly in 1946 and went on to become a symbol of resistance against authoritarian rule.

On 24 June 1932, the People's Party disempowered the absolute monarchy, arrested the royal guards and announced a constitution with the basic principle that 'The supreme power in the country belongs to the people.' While King Prajadhipok initially agreed to collaborate, royalist forces attempted to regain influence. The struggle between the old

and the new order revolved around the constitutional role of the monarchy.

The Second World War (1939–1945)

Japanese troops landed in Thailand on 8 December 1941. The government under Plaek Phibunsongkhram initially agreed to allow safe passage and eventually declared war on Great Britain and the USA in January 1942. From 1943 onwards, as the tide of the war was turning against Japan, Thailand began to ease away from the relationship and started providing support to the allies with intelligence.

After the end of the war, the British sought to expand their influence. However, the USA prevented a return to colonial control, asserting that Thailand would be treated as a country under Japanese occupation. The USA therefore took on the role as new foreign patron.

The post-war period was marked by political instability. On 6 June 1946, King Ananda Mahidol was found dead in the palace. The circumstances of his death have still not been established. Royalist

circles accused Pridi Phanomyong, who fled into exile. The monarch was succeeded by his brother Bhumibol Adulyadej. Having initially returned to Switzerland, he was crowned as Rama IX in 1950 and promised to 'reign with righteousness for the benefit of the people'.

Plaek Phibunsongkhram

Plaek Phibunsongkhram, known as Marshal P, was a pivotal figure in the Khana Ratsadon party. He served as the prime minister from 1938 to 1944 and again from 1948 to 1957, shaping comprehensive policies of modernisation and nationalisation that together are described as the Thai cultural revolution.

1973 – The 14 October Uprising

From the 1950s onwards, unrest grew among students who increasingly looked to left-wing ideologies for guidance and protested against the government's pro-American policies. Although political assemblies were prohibited, the protests expanded significantly from the year 1968.

When thirteen students were arrested in October 1973 and charged with planning to overthrow the government, hundreds of thousands took to the streets to demonstrate in Bangkok. The protesters demanded that the prisoners be released; they soon added calls for a new constitution and the resignation of the government.

The demonstrators appealed to the King to mediate. The generals agreed

to the prospect of a new constitution; an audience at the palace was granted. On 14 October, however, soldiers opened fire while dispersing the demonstration. 77 people died and 857 persons were injured. The King opened the gates to the palace to the fleeing students and publicly criticised the government. The events marked the beginning of a new phase of political mobilisation.

From 1975 onwards, left-wing movements were met with intensified violence by right-wing paramilitary groups like Krathing Daeng (Red Gaurs). The political climate grew more radicalised in 1976. Militant rhetoric and state-tolerated violence were increasingly directed against students at Thammasat University.

The Massacre of 6 October 1976

Police and paramilitary units surrounded the university on the morning of 6 October and opened fire on campus.

Charupong Thongsin

Charupong Thonsin was a student at Thammasat University who was shot during the massacre. His mauled body subsequently became a symbol of that day's violence.

Students were lynched, abused or burned as they tried to escape outside of the university. According to official numbers, 43 students and two police officers died. Thousands were arrested. The military assumed power by a coup that same evening.

1976–1991 – Semi-democracy and military rule

After 1976, civil institutions and military control remained formally divided in Thailand, while society and economy underwent significant modernisation.

General Prem Tinsulanonda became the prime minister in 1980. He enjoyed the support of the King to establish a stable system that was, however, strongly controlled by military and bureaucracy. This was frequently described as a semi-democracy.

Chatichai Choonhavan succeeded to the post in 1988 as an elected prime minister. His government focused on opening the economy and cooperation within the region. At the same time, there were growing concerns about corruption and the political elite was increasingly accused of clientelism.

Another military coup followed in 1991. A transitional government was implemented and elections were held in 1992. The military leadership once again assumed power, triggering massive protests.

Black May 1992

In May 1992, hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the military government. These protests were supported by the urban middle classes and soon spread throughout the country.

The army reacted with extreme violence. Serious clashes lasted for three

days. On 20 May, the King intervened and publicly demanded an end to the violence. By the time the protests ended, 39 persons had died and numerous people had been injured.

The government resigned and a transitional government held new elections.

Seub Nakhasathien

Seub Nakhasathien was an environmental activist and conservationist who became known for his activism against large-scale environmental destruction. He committed suicide in 1990 and became an icon of the Thai environmental movement.

2001–2014 – Thaksin, Polarisation and the Road to the Coups

Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister in 2001. His government combined economic populism with a strongly centralised style of government. He garnered much support among the rural populations with such policies as an affordable health care programme and a village development fund. At the same time, the urban middle classes and the traditional elites grew increasingly uneasy at his concentration of power and business networks.

Thaksin's party Thai Rak Thai won the 2005 election once more with a clear majority. Critics accused him of systematically using state power in order to secure his own economic interests. Royalist and conservative circles increasingly considered his popularity a threat to the established order. Influential

persons close to the privy council also repeatedly voiced their concern about corruption and moral decay in politics.

The People's Alliance for Democracy, known as the 'yellow shirts', formed amid this atmosphere. They depicted Thaksin as a danger to the monarchy and the state and mobilised in particular the urban, conservative classes. The royal colour yellow became a political symbol of this movement. Demands to remove Thaksin were, however, rejected publicly by the King himself.

The military launched a coup on 19 September 2006 while Thaksin was abroad. The coup was openly legitimised by citing loyalty with the monarchy. Tanks and soldiers were decorated with yellow bands and the new military leadership presented itself as a defender of national stability against corruption and political polarisation. The democratic institutions were suspended and a transitional government installed.

However, the coup did not lead to stabilisation, instead triggering the growth of a new mass movement. The United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), known as the 'red shirts', formed in 2007. It considered itself a counter-movement to PAD and demanded the reinstatement of democratic elections as well as political participation for the rural population and lower income classes.

The political landscape was increasingly divided into two camps. The yellow shirts presented themselves as defenders

of the monarchy, of order and traditional institutions. The red shirts considered themselves defenders of democratic legitimacy and social equality. Many of their supporters came from rural regions and the rising lower middle classes and voiced criticism of the structural inequality entailed in political representation.

These tensions escalated in 2010. The red shirts occupied central parts of Bangkok and demanded re-elections. Negotiations failed and the military violently intervened in the protests. More than ninety people, most of them demonstrators, died in the subsequent clashes. Fires were started in large parts of Bangkok.

Thaksin's political camp returned to government in 2011, now using the name Pheu Thai Party. His sister Yingluck Shinawatra became prime minister. Instead of shifting the political dispute, it prolonged it in an institutionalised form.

The conflict escalated once more at the end of 2013 when protests arose against an amnesty bill that would also have permitted Thaksin's return. The protest movement was led by Suthep Thaugsuban and organised as the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). It demanded the implementation of a non-elected reform council and shut down central parts of Bangkok.

Yingluck dissolved parliament and triggered re-elections. The opposition boycotted these and blocked off polling stations, so that the elections could not be held everywhere and therefore could

be annulled by the court later on. The protests once more erupted into violence that resulted in the death of dozens and hundreds of injured.

On 20 May 2014, the army declared martial law. Two days later, it took full control. The constitution was suspended and general Prayut Chan-o-cha became prime minister. The 2014 military coup marked the preliminary end of a decade of recurrent political crises among elected governments, conservative elites and military interventions.

2016 – The Death of the King

King Bhumibol Adulyadej died on 13 October 2016. His reign had lasted seventy years. Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn was later announced as Rama X.

2020 – Youth Protests

A new protest movement formed in 2020. Taking the name Free Youth, they demanded re-elections, an end to political hectoring and a new constitution.

For the first time, students and activists began openly discussing and demanding reforms to the monarchy. The lawyer Arnon Nampa became a central figure of the movement; he has been sentenced for lese-majeste several times.

About three hundred members of the group Bad Student protested outside of the Ministry of Education on 5 September, calling for an end to state harassment as well as the reform of outdated regulations and the educational system overall. Next to these changes, they also demanded the resignation of the Minister of Education.

A protest of an extent not seen for years broke out on 19 September. Around a hundred thousand demonstrators occupied Sanam Luang square outside of the royal palace and remained there over night while the police mobilised over ten thousand officers. Thai human rights lawyer and democracy activist Arnon Nampa had announced that a symbolic plaque to usher in a new democratic era would be unveiled in the morning.

Summary of the Demands to Reform the Monarchy

1. Revoke the King's legal immunity
2. Revoke the lese-majeste laws, grant amnesty to every persecuted individual
3. Separate the King's personal assets and the crown estate
4. Reduce the budget allocated to the monarchy
5. Abolish the royal offices and unnecessary institutions such as the privy council
6. Open the monarchy's assets to audit
7. Abolish the King's power to make public political comments
8. Cease propaganda related to the King
9. Investigate the murders of commentators and critics of the monarchy
10. Prohibit the King's future endorsement of coups

That memorial plaque was installed in the square on 20 September as a symbol for democracy and to replace the original plaque from 1932 that had disappeared in 2017. In the morning, Parit Chiwarak woke the remaining demonstrators and guided a remembrance service for the victims in the struggle for democracy. The plaque was installed at the auspicious time of 6:39 am and embedded in the ground.

The head of state subsequently made several public statements, noting among others national unity and loyalty. Demonstrations took place on an almost weekly basis from September 2020 onwards. Beyond those making the political demands, there were also LGBTQ+ groups, protesters in solidarity with Myanmar and groups of artists calling for freedom of opinion. The movement frequently adopted symbols from popular culture, including the three-finger greeting from *The Hunger Games*, a yellow rubber duck as well as the cartoon character Hamtaro.

The protests continued throughout 2021 and receded in 2022 due to strong repression and surveillance measures; activism increasingly relocated into the digital sphere.

The progressive Move Forward Party won the national elections on 14 May 2023 with a clear result, having campaigned on demands to reform the lese-majeste laws. However, it was not able to achieve a majority in the Senate. Instead, the Pheu Thai party entered a coalition with conservative and pro-

military forces, making Srettha Thavisin the prime minister on 22 August 2023. Thaksin Shinawatra returned from exile in that same period.

The head of state granted amnesty to Thaksin on 1 September, reducing his prison sentence. Further political events and security incidents shaped the subsequent months, including a mass shooting in Bangkok in October as well as cases related to drugs and corruption in December.

In 2024, the constitutional court decided that the Move Forward Party had acted unconstitutionally with their reform efforts. This led to a potential ban of the party. At the same time, activists such as Arnon Nampa continued to be prosecuted. The activist Netiporn Sanesangkhom died in May following a hunger strike.

In June 2024, parliament legalised same-sex marriage in a historical step for Thailand. Controversial Senate elections that are the subject of severe criticism for their complex structure and potential for manipulation were held at the same time.

The text was provided by For What Theatre and is presented here in a condensed version.

BIOGRAPHY

Wichaya Artamat is an experimental Thai theatre-maker who studied film at Thammasat University. In 2008, he began working in theatre as a project coordinator at the Bangkok Theatre Festival, and in 2009 he became a member of the New Theatre Society. In 2015, he co-founded the collective For What Theatre with others. His international career began as an assistant director on Toshiki Okada's *Prattbana*.

Artamat's work combines political concerns with playful forms and a distinctive, unconventional theatrical language. A central focus of his practice is collective memory and the question of how societies construct and erase memories – particularly in relation to historical moments and commemorative dates.

Since the European premiere of his play *This Song Father Used to Sing (Three Days in May)* at Kunstenfestivaldesarts in 2019, Artamat has toured internationally and developed new works in various countries. He has appeared at the Wiener Festwochen twice, including with *This Song Father Used to Sing (Three Days in May)* (2019) and *Four Days in September (The Missing Comrade)* (2021).

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehnargasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien, T + 43 1 589 22 0, festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for the content) Milo Rau, Artistic Direction **Translation** Nadezda Müngersdorff (wordsmithery) **Picture Credits Cover** © Jukkrit Hanpipatpanich **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio **Layout** Valerie Eccli

15 MAY –
21 JUNE 2026

REPUBLIC
OF GODS



MAIN SPONSOR



PUBLIC FUNDING BODY



CATERING PARTNER



MOBILITY PARTNER

