It was a time

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1.
fléchette

On a somber August night in the year 1914, beneath the darkened skies of the Prussian Empire, the thunder of warplanes shattered the stillness. In their shadow, a strange rain began to fall—not of water, but of steel. Slender, pointed darts, forged for silence and death, cascaded from the heavens in their hundreds of thousands. They tore through rooftops, splintered wooden floors, pierced flesh and bone—striking down humans and animals alike, whether lost in sleep or roused in terror by the sirens' mournful cry. These were flechettes, weapons of uncanny design: no larger than a finger or a hand, yet capable of devastation through nothing but the pull of gravity. A vision of destruction was captured by the renowned Austrian writer Robert Musil in his short story *Black Bird*:

> "It's an aerial dart. These were pointed iron rods no thicker than a pencil lead that planes dropped from above in those days. And if they struck you in the skull, they came out through the soles of your feet…"[1]

At first glance of *PINDROP*, the painting series by **Sudaporn Teja**, I was instantly reminded of the steel fléchette once deployed by the French military during the First World War. That association arrived swiftly—an image of silent weapons falling from the sky. But upon reading further into the artist's background, her conceptual framework, and eventually speaking with her directly, I came to see that these works possess a subtlety and delicacy far beyond a mere visual echo of instruments of destruction. Instead, they pose a profound question—one that touches on the unfolding of moments, and the very nature of *time* in our lives. As the artist herself describes, the series "presents a dual image—of events that have not yet ended and those that have already passed—coexisting within the same imaginative space, observed from different perspectives, at different moments." This exploration of temporal layering reaches back to *Julieta.*[2] In Sudaporn's previous exhibition, pins were delicately placed upon withering rose petals, floating just above the surface of the water. As time unfolded, the petals began to decay. One by one, some of the pins lost their hold and sank, leaving rust-colored traces at the bottom of the vessel. The artist chose not to retrieve them, allowing the quiet transformation to continue—uninterrupted, uncorrected.

Each pin resting on a fading petal became a fragile emblem of balance—an image of the precarious equilibrium of 'life' itself, which is to say, of 'time'. In this way, her work echoes the philosophical inquiry at the heart of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*—a seminal text often interpreted to suggest that, in the end, 'being is time'.

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[1] Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, translated by Peter Wortsman (New York: Archipelago Books, 2006) 158.

[2] Exhibited from August 2 to 27, 2023, at People's Gallery, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre.

2.

punctus contra punctum

The *Pindrop(red)* series also reaches back—quietly yet deliberately—to *The Art of Fugue* by Johann Sebastian Bach, the seminal Baroque composer. Both the number of works and the techniques employed in each painting echo and converse with Bach's intricate musical constructions.

Though *The Art of Fugue* was left unfinished, it is widely regarded as one of Bach's final masterpieces. Yet debate continues to this day: what, truly, was its purpose? What concept lay at its core?

One prevailing hypothesis suggests that the piece was part of a pedagogical collection, music composed for practice, following in the lineage of the *Inventions and Sinfonias*. The elegance born from mathematical structure and harmonic complexity is often seen as a reflection of Bach's evolving compositional mind in the final years of his life.

Another interpretation ties the work to the last decade of Bach's life, during which he became involved with Leipzig's intellectual elite. He was a member of the *Society of Musical Sciences*, founded by Lorenz Mizler, whose ideals rekindled Bach's interest in ancient musical theory—especially the mathematical relationships and hidden symbols embedded within all things.[3] *The Art of Fugue* was among the works he composed for the Society, employing the technique of counterpoint, or *contrapunctus*: the art of interweaving more than two independent musical lines within a framework of musical rules and theory, either developed by Bach himself or drawn from the legacy of earlier composers which gave rise to compositions of intricate complexity and a distinct, unconventional musical aesthetic.

It is this counterpoint—this intertwining of independent, coexisting musical lines—that lies at the heart of *Pindrop(red)*. Here, it becomes not only a representation of time, but of voices—divergent yet equal, held within a carefully designed structure of order and rules. The artist's use of red is equally intentional: of all visible wavelengths of light, 'red' stands at the edge—just before it slips into the unseen spectrum of infrared. And yet, it is 'red' that holds the lowest energy of them all.

In this light, the act of falling—or the moment of suspension before descent—within the *Pindrop(red)* series can also be read as a quiet chronicle of our present political moment, inscribed through visual form.

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[3] Anatoly P. Milka, *Rethinking J.S. Bach's The Art of Fugue,* Translated by Marina Ritzarev (London: Routledge 2017) 11.

3.
Just in time

What strikes me most—at least personally—about *PINDROP* is how it draws us back to reconsider the meaning of 'time' itself.

In the century before, the world became governed by acceleration. 'Speed' was no longer a choice, but a condition—a pathology of modern life. As the French writer Marcel Proust once observed, with the advent of the train, we were no longer afforded the time to contemplate—to reflect on life or the passing landscape as we once did. For Proust, the train was a symbol of the accelerated world, a new force that reshaped time in his era.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, a new crisis had emerged. Time itself began to fracture—what the Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes as *dyschronicity*. Time, broken into ever smaller units, became a tool of management and control—by states, by capital, and most insidiously, by technological capitalism. In such a world, the simple act of *dwelling in time*, of lingering in thought or reflecting deeply, became increasingly rare—if not impossible.[4]

And if life is time, as Heidegger once suggested, then what becomes of life when time is fragmented? This question lies at the heart of Han's philosophical search. Across his many writings, he urges us to rediscover time—not the time of the clock, but the time we live and feel. To do so, he suggests, we must turn to literature, to cinema, to music, and to the arts—creative forms that allow us to confront 'otherness', both outside ourselves and within.

In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that *PINDROP*, the painting series by **Sudaporn Teja**, offers such a confrontation. It invites us to face 'otherness'—through images that are not mere aesthetic embellishments, but quiet interventions. These are images that suspend us in thought, offering a pause in a world of fractured time—and perhaps, even guiding us back toward a kind of 'time' that cannot be divided.

Translation by Wichuta Lohityotin

[4] Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time* (London: Polity, 2017) vi.