

# Happily Ever After

## Recently married in Phuket



Chotiwan Tanwattananikul and Wittaya Jarupongsopon were married at the Pra Pitak Grand Ballroom of The Metropole hotel on August 16.



Ruangrong Thongtan and Premchai Tangtipongkul were married at the Phuket Ballroom of the Royal Phuket City Hotel on August 14.

Thinking back to your days as a student, there were probably a few times when some madcap idea for world domination popped into your head. You thought you could change the world, and if given the right circumstances and opportunities you might have been able to.

Hiroyuki "Hiro" Nobuto is one such student; a man on a mission, looking to do his bit to make an impact and be remembered. Whether an art project in Phuket can lead to world domination remains to be seen, but given the 10 years he has set aside to complete his goal, anything is possible.

Hailing from Osaka, 24-year-old Hiro first came to Phuket in September 2003 as an exchange student. He fell in love with the place, the people, the proximity to nature and the parties – nothing out of the ordinary there.

It wasn't until 2004 when he began studying hotel and tourism management at Prince of Songkla University, Phuket campus, that Hiro's moment of inspiration came. After the tsunami struck, Hiro saw his favorite island in turmoil, awash with grief, sadness and despair.

As he walked around the areas affected by the disaster, devoid of tourists and filled with debris and destroyed scenery, Hiro asked himself, "What can I do to bring happiness back to this island?"

Feeling overwhelmed by the amount of destruction and distraught that his beloved Phuket had been so ravaged by nature, it wasn't until August last year that Hiro found a medium through which to channel his good will.

On a night out with close friend Hirofumi Tanigami, the idea of a decade-long art project was conceived.

"People don't smile so much in Japan," said Hiro, "but in Phuket, people smile a lot more. When there was the tsunami, people stopped smiling, and I wanted to do something that could make people on the island happy again.

"I want the people in Phuket to wake up to art. I want to give them something new; something they can do; something that will be interesting to both locals and tourists. With this project, I want to create and increase the artistic potential of this city," he added.

With a madcap idea must

# Japanese

How do you bring more art to Phuket? This interesting conundrum is now being tackled by an unlikely art-project curator – a student from Japan studying hotel management in Phuket.

Gazette Desk Editor Matt Crook talks to Hiroyuki "Hiro" Nobuto about his plans to bring art to the island – and help residents still recovering from the devastation of the 2004 tsunami.



Hiro tries to memorize a series of movements performed by Japanese contemporary artist Mika Arashiki during a workshop held at Bo(ok)hemian Arthouse in Phuket City.

come a madcap name: Platr (pronounced "platter") means both a large plate and the part of a turntable that spins a record. Not an obvious connection to Phuket until you find out that the aim of the project is to "spin" life with art and culture.

Platr also stands for "Phuket life access tracking", which refers to the mini-projects of Platr that will be used to track the success of the project and how it affects people's lives.

The first project served up by Platr is ndl, pronounced "needle". In keeping with the theme, ndl is also an acronym for "nesting diaries in the loop".

Unfazed by reactions to his liberal usage of terminology, Hiro explained that ndl is an artist-in-residence program that started in December last year.

Through nld he aims to bring a number of Japanese artists to Phuket to contribute to the community.

By giving the artists the chance to live in Phuket and enhance their creativity, the artists will in turn be able to share their experiences with the community through exhibitions, talks and workshops.

Central to the project, each artist who visits Phuket is required to keep a diary of his or her trip, an idea that Hiro and Hirofumi came up with. Hiro hopes that these diaries will record the artists' inner thoughts during their stays in Phuket. The diaries will double as pieces of art, as each artist tackles the task in his or her own way.

While Hiro is evidently proud of his concept, the future of the diaries remains uncertain.

"We're planning to display them around April at the Japan Foundation in Bangkok. The diaries will also be displayed on our website. They will be printed in hard copy if we can raise the money," said Hiro.

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# artists invade Phuket



Japanese student Hiroyuki Nobuto is hoping people in Phuket will 'wake up' to art with his 10-year art project.

On the subject of money, Hiro said that most of the project is funded by individual donations totaling more than half a million baht.

Other sources of income are the artists themselves (who pay a required contribution), the Royal Thai Consulate in Osaka, and a special government fund for activities marking the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan-Thailand Diplomatic Relations. Unfortunately, the budget for this year is still 150,000 baht short of planned spending.

One might assume that for such an artistic project, the man behind it would be an artist, but not so in Hiro's case. An avid fan of art? Not quite. A vague interest? Almost. "I don't really have

much interest in art itself, but the project is not just for art. It's created by art, but it's for the people," revealed Hiro.

"I don't have an artistic background," said Hiro, "but a lot of my friends are artists and I have seen that art can be something constructive that can motivate people.

"Like I said, this project is for the people. I do want to learn about art, and I have set myself the goal of learning about it through this project. Every artist who comes here for the ndl project gives a number of talks."

The first artists who Hiro arranged to visit Phuket were photographer and videographer Shunsuke Takawo, who was on the island December 21 to 29, and

videographer Shigeo Arikawa, who visited from January 17 to February 10. Filmmaker Noriyuki Kimura was here in April, while more recently, contemporary dance artist Mika Arashiki gave a talk and workshop at Bo(ok)-hemian Arthouse in Phuket City on August 4.

The talk was largely attended by Japanese people, with one Caucasian girl and a few Thais also present. Mika gave a talk in Japanese that was translated into Thai, much to the dismay of the farang girl.

In presenting videos of her work, Mika gave the audience a visual display that needed no translation. Though considered dance, Mika's shows would perhaps be better described as "ar-

tistic movement", as they are often performed without music.

During the workshop segment, Mika invited the 30 or so people in attendance to engage in some artistic moving. The language barrier proved too much for some of the Thais in attendance, who were left confused about what they were being asked to do.

The Japanese contingent were more forthcoming, pairing off with enthusiasm. At one point, Hiro joined Mika and the two stood side by side, performing variations of a *wai*; Hiro's face remained a picture of astonishment and bemusement.

The latest artist to come to Phuket is videographer and poet Takaki Sudo, who arrived August 7 and will be on the island until August 31. Takaki told the *Gazette* that he hadn't yet had time to think about what form his work on Phuket was going to take. "I don't want to hurry," he said.

Takaki said that people will see the end product of his time in Phuket in two to three months. He plans to make a video of interviews with Phuket people, although at this stage he still needs time to think about what questions he wants to ask those people.

After he returns to Japan the video will then be edited and distributed - although Takaki was uncertain by what means.

Such uncertainty is a strong theme throughout the Platr project. Hiro said that at some point there will be an exhibition of the work of all the artists who visit Phuket, but he hadn't been able to find a place on the island suitable to hold such an event.

The exhibition will likely happen in Bangkok, he added.

Ndl is just the first installment of Hiro's 10-year project, and he hopes to have brought up to 10 artists to Phuket before the end of 2007. Without much interest in art, Hiro finally revealed that Platr is part of his thesis for his masters' degree in hotel and tourism management and his PhD in community management.

Traveling back and forth between Thailand and Osaka, where he studies at Osaka City University, Hiro said that he may eventually move to Bangkok to study at the research center at Chulalongkorn University.

Despite having set aside 10 years to complete Platr, like most visionaries, Hiro has his sights set upon multiple goals.

"When I finish my studies I want to go and work for the UN," he said. "If I stop doing Platr then the project will probably stop too. The future is uncertain really."

Before Hiro decides to call it a day on his project, Phuket residents have a visit from the Dowding Club to look forward to in October.

On their website, the Dowding Club say they have "no conception of music", "no idea of music" and "make sweet songs sometimes".

Sound enticing? In characteristic fashion, the venue and format of this musical extravaganza is yet to be decided, but when it happens, expect improvised music played on self-made electronics. Whatever the results, it will be unique.

"I'm not so keen on interesting things," concluded Hiro. "I wish to highlight Phuket through the eyes of various artists and to have the world know another Phuket; it isn't just an Asian resort."

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