



A bird's eye view of Khao Yai Art Forest

Art in the Wild

Three hours from Bangkok lies the Khao Yai Art Forest where art, at times, dwarfs its visitors.

By SHIREYA AJMANI

IMAGES: COURTESY KHAO YAI ART FOREST

A figure emerges through the fog, still cloaked in its shifting haze. He is Stefano Rabolli Pansera, Founding Director of Khao Yai Art Forest and Bangkok Kunsthalle, and the architect behind this evolving artscape. The fog, created by artist Fujiko Nakaya, is a pioneering work of temporal sculpture.

Lightly encased on an undulating landscape, the work covers the land in a white mist, moving and changing its form with the wind that blows and the variations in humidity. Once the fog disappears, it reveals what previously may have been missed by the naked eye: dewdrops appear on tiny nests and spiderwebs between blades of the grass.

Located on the outskirts of Bangkok, the Khao Yai Art Forest is an almost surreal art park brought to life. Here, a spider is larger than you. Louise Bourgeois' giant spider, *Maman*, one of six in the world, rises from the reddish mud. Across the 161-acre expanse, art and nature operate as a cohesive pair, as though they have always belonged to one another.

Situated near Khao Yai National Park, the Art Forest is the brainchild of philanthropist and art patron Marisa Chearavanont. "The idea for Khao Yai Art Forest came during the Covid period," Chearavanont says. "It stemmed from a simple wish to create a place where art, nature, and people could exist together in harmony." The landscape has been envisioned by Chearavanont and Pansera, formerly a director at Hauser & Wirth, who relocated from Switzerland to Thailand to focus on the project. Together, through the Art Forest and Bangkok Kunsthalle in Chinatown, they have strengthened Thailand's position as a promising art destination.

"The curatorial vision of Khao Yai Art Forest is grounded in the idea that art can function as a form of

mutual healing—we heal ourselves by healing nature—rather than imposing form upon the landscape," Pansera says. "I try to move beyond the model of the sculpture park toward a model of integration in which artworks become inseparable from the landscape, to the point where visitors may no longer distinguish between the artwork and its environment."

Described by some as an 'open-air museum', artworks in this space only find their place if nature offers an opening. One may happen upon a clearing along a winding path through the terrain, only to find a video work by one of Southeast Asia's most respected contemporary artists, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook. In her *Two Planets Series*, a group of people (locals, farmers, workers, monks) encounter masterpieces such as *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* by Édouard Manet or *The Gleaners* by Jean-François Millet, for the first time, and discuss their impressions while huddling up. Watching the group study the painting, hearing their laughter and conversation, draws the visitor into a layered act of looking. The work subtly shifts the point of focus: who is observing, and who becomes the subject? "In Araya's work, the curatorial act consisted of finding a natural opening in the forest that allowed us to install the screen," explains Pansera.

Many unexpected things lie within this land; a walk down a wooded trail might lead to a pristine bar created by Elmgreen & Dragset. The work grants visitors a peek inside a fully stacked bar, opening for service only on special occasions. Titled *K-BAR*, the site-specific installation in the middle of the forest, is an homage to the late German artist Martin Kippenberger and his well-known love for alcohol. The bar centres on Kippenberger's *Untitled* (1996), visible at all times through the glass façade. The artists



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T A L K I N G P O I N T

also devised a cocktail menu with local bartenders. As with their famed 2005 installation *Prada Marfa*, *K-BAR* reads as their personal response to land art.

“The difference is fundamentally about time and space,” Pansera says. “In a museum, time is suspended in a constant present and space is controlled, neutral, and fixed. In a forest, neither can be controlled,” he adds. “Weather, growth, decay, insects, and light all become co-curators. Installations evolve rather than remain stable.”

Chearavanont recalls how the forest’s significance came through during the Covid-19 pandemic, when she spent a long time in Khao Yai. “During that time, walking alone in nature was often the only moment when I felt truly grounded. The quietness of the forest helped me reconnect with reality and regain emotional balance,” she said. “That experience changed how I understand the role of nature in our lives. It reminds me that even in difficult moments, life continues to grow and regenerate,” she says.

Here, it almost feels as though even the air has been curated, as experiences unfold beyond expectation. Visitors glide through the grounds by golf cart, breathing in fresh air and enjoying the calm far removed from the city’s rush, only to stumble upon

artworks by renowned artists. Positioned so naturally within the landscape, they seem to have always been there, as though you’ve simply come across a place where art and nature have long existed side by side.

Every artwork here feels like a discovery. That is the astute vision of Pansera’s curation. He points out his reason for placing Nakaya’s fog work in the forest. He explains, “Visitors shift from ‘looking at art’ to ‘being inside an artwork,’ producing a quieter and more embodied form of attention.”

The discovery does not just apply to humans, but also to the birds and animals that reside here. Pansera shared how Bourgeois’ sculpture of a spider became home to a bird’s nest. He recalls the night they brought the work to Khao Yai. “We completed the installation of *Maman* by Louise Bourgeois on August 9, 2025. We worked in darkness, using car headlights to illuminate the site. The spider’s legs shimmered at the edge of the forest, suspended between sculpture and apparition,” says Pansera. The bird ended up laying eggs in the nest within the sculpture, a fitting turn for a work named *Maman* (French for ‘mother’). For a brief moment, the spider became a shelter, blurring the boundary between artwork and habitat before the forest bid it farewell.

Even the visitors here can connect with nature

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—Stefano Rabolli Pansera



Maman by Louise Bourgeois



Two Planets Series by Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook

through touch. *Pulsations* by artist couple Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt, who work under the name Scenocosme, created a site-specific sound installation with a living tree. When pressed against the trunk, the tree emits a pulse, heartbeats, vibrations, and low sounds that travel through the wood. Its bark and inner layers echo the structure of a body. Leaning in reveals a rhythm that runs through the entire tree, creating an intimate exchange between human presence and living matter.

Chearavanont says, “What has surprised me most is how naturally people respond to the environment. Artists often discover new directions in their work after spending time in the forest. Visitors frequently experience a sense of calm that they did not expect. The forest seems to encourage people to slow down and reflect.”

Perched on a hilltop, *Madrid Circle* (1986) by British land artist Richard Long consists of stones carefully arranged in a circular formation, reflecting his long-standing practice of walking as art. The precise ring, a recurring motif in his work, signifies unity, continuity, and equilibrium. As a universal archetype, the circle mirrors natural cycles found in life and the cosmos, extending the forest’s narrative beyond the boundaries of human existence.

When asked about where she sees the Art Forest a few years from now, Chearavanont says, “My hope is that it will continue to be a place where people can pause, breathe, and rediscover a sense of balance between art, nature, and everyday life. We also hope to introduce a small hospitality component, with simple bungalows where visitors can stay overnight and experience the forest more deeply. The atmosphere of the forest changes at night, and spending more time there allows people to rest and reconnect. It is important that the project develops at a pace that respects the land.” ■



GOD by Francesco Arena