

## The fight between real and fake

### Exhibition explores the reality of counterfeit goods

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Speaking of fake products, one would probably think of brand name bags and pirated DVDs. A walk around "Pharmacide Arts & Counterfeit Goods", an exhibition which runs until May 26 at Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) will probably change your perception of what's real and what's not, as well as explain why buying fakes is not the economical and harmless choice that we often believe it is.



Cambodian artist Lim Sokchanina's photo reflects on the prevalence of counterfeit consumer goods.

With popular fake products ranging from the usual branded goods that we often see on sidewalks, such as luxury brands and plush toys with trademarks, to items that make you wonder "why on Earth would anyone want to fake that?", the exhibition reveals the truth about counterfeit goods that have seeped into our daily life, some by our own choice and some by mistake.

The Cultural and Cooperation Section of the French embassy, in collaboration with the Department of Intellectual Property, Tilleke & Gibbins Museum of Counterfeit Goods and BACC, aim to promote and enhance awareness and exposure about fake goods, including hazardous bogus medicines. The exhibition digs deeper into the dark side of this business and creates public sensitivity about the risks of choosing phoney goods.

Estimated at over 50 billion per year, the trafficking of counterfeit medicines is an extremely lucrative market for criminal organisations. According to recent studies, the trade in counterfeit medicine represents 5-10% of the total global pharmaceutical market. Additionally, more than 50% of all medicines offered online are spurious, especially pills related to sex, weight loss and beauty. In some developing countries, 60% of the pharmaceutical products distributed are fake.

Other kinds of fakes are just as hazardous. While we might think that carrying a fake Gucci bag is a personal choice and does not hurt anyone, the exhibition argues that if counterfeit products are tolerated, we will end up living in a world where most things in our daily life are counterfeit. We will not be able to rely on anything and have to live in a permanent state of uncertainty and danger.

These underground businesses are also involved in the exploitation of labour or even children, as well as illegal immigrants. As weapons and drug trafficking carry stiff penalties, some criminals gradually shift to counterfeiting and piracy, because it makes just as much profit, if not more.

The exhibition displays items borrowed from the Tilleke & Gibbins Museum of Counterfeit Goods, which houses a large number of counterfeit and pirated items accumulated over the years from raids. The items include ones we are probably familiar with, such as Gucci purses with odd-looking logos, or Lacoste shirts with a funny-faced alligator, as well as fake products that we are unaware of, such as office supplies, travel guides and mobile phones.

The fake one is juxtaposed with the real one and in many cases, if it weren't for the "genuine" and "counterfeit" labels, it would be almost impossible to tell which is which. It is sort of like playing an advanced level of Photo Hunt to spot the very subtle differences. It shows that we are living in a world where it is easy to be deceived by imitations that keep getting more and more sophisticated. You might have been using fake UHU Stics all your life and never know that what you are using is a counterfeit product, or even know that fake UHU Stics exist. The same goes for pencils, printer cartridges, mobile phone batteries and alcoholic beverages.

On the walls of the exhibition room are paintings by various Asean artists. Marc Hammond, film director of Pharmacide Mekong and curator of the exhibition, said that he had travelled the region looking for artists, starting from a circle of friends. After three months, he had come into contact with over 250 artists, but only a small selection of the pieces have made it to the exhibition.

Each picture has its own message regarding counterfeit drugs.

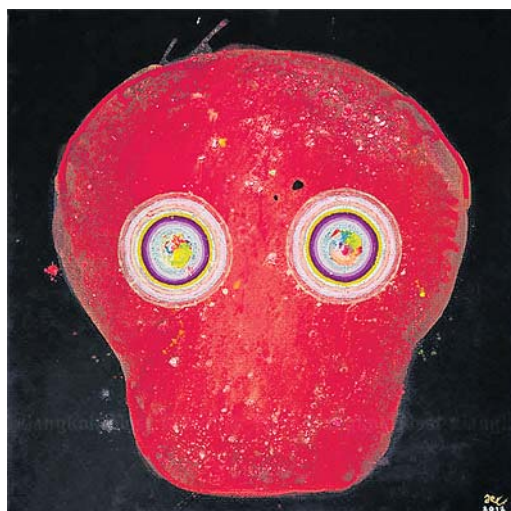
Pharmacide Arts & Counterfeit Goods exhibition also includes two discussion sessions. The first discussion, which takes place today, is on the subject of protecting intellectual property rights in Asean.

The second talk, on April 27, is a discussion among experts, focusing on the situation of counterfeit goods and law enforcement.

**Pharmacide Arts & Counterfeit Goods runs until May 26 on the 8th floor of Bangkok Art and Culture Centre.**



Genuinely angry or faking it? Purchasing harmless, economically savvy fakes, such as trademark-infringed products, might perpetuate sweatshops that employ children and illegal immigrants.



A picture by Haritorn Akarapat.

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