



Vipoo Srivilasa

STORY JOHN MCPHEE

Vipoo Srivilasa is undoubtedly one of Australia's busiest ceramic artists. In 2013 alone, he held solo exhibitions in Sydney and Brisbane and his work was included in twelve group exhibitions in Australia, Europe, Asia, Canada and the United States. Vipoo is an artist who knows no cultural or geographic boundaries – he is passionately engaged in the work of his contemporaries and enthusiastic about getting together, swapping ideas, and organising exchange programs. Working with people is central to his life as a ceramic artist.

Born in Bangkok in 1969, Vipoo graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Rangsit University in 1994. His first job was in product development for a ceramic export company, specialising in plant pots. While in this position, his designs proved popular and were sold internationally. Rather than building on this early commercial success, Vipoo came to Australia, where he undertook a Graduate Diploma of Arts at Monash University in 1997 and in 1998, a Master of Fine Art and Design at the University of Tasmania. His hectic program of exhibitions began in the late 1990s and has not let up since.

Through your career, your work has changed from vases and bowls to more sculptural work.

I am not sure why my work has changed. I think it is because I get bored quickly and need to play with new ideas or new forms to excite myself. But, having said that, I am making plates and vases again!

You have also moved from earthenware to porcelain?

I first worked with earthenware and colourful glazes. In 2005 I began to experiment with porcelain. I had been offered an exhibition in Bangkok and wanted to show work that would connect with a Thai audience. I came up with 'blue and white', and really enjoyed making it. Les Blakebrough's 'Cool Ice' porcelain had just become available in Australia. It was whiter than any clay I had previously used and set off my blue painting.

These blue and white works have explored things that are shared with my native Thailand and my new home, Australia. I use blue and

white as a reference to the porcelain of China exported to Europe hundreds of years ago, but also to my own migration from Thailand to Australia, from east to west. But, of course, blue and white porcelain is also beautiful.

My 2013 solo exhibition at Maunsell Wickes in Sydney was called *Red room*. It was inspired by European displays of Chinese blue and white porcelains. Much of the imagery related to Sir Joseph Banks, the botanist who discovered so many of Australia's plants, and some shapes even referred to Dutch tulip vases. And, there were portraits of cats. In my past life I was a cat!

Your decoration often uses Asian and European religious symbols.

I use a lot of symbols. Many from different religions, but I am careful to make sure that I use them in a way that will not offend people. I never combine images of Buddha and Jesus. Instead I use the lotus stand or the halo of an angel. Religion is an inspiration.



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I have used Roop-Rote-Ruang (Taste-Touch-Smell), the Buddhist philosophy of Ayatana, to create a series of dinner parties hosted by me. The dinner embraced the Buddhist concept of the six channels of awareness; sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch and mindfulness.

I love working with people. I think it helps me change the way I see ceramics and the way I work with clay. Clay is not just a material from which to make functional pots or sculpture. It can also record stories from communities and serve as a connection between people.

Do you express political messages in your work?

Some of my earlier work was concerned with the preservation of the Great Barrier Reef, and anti-pollution issues, as well as famine, and political violence in Thailand. I work in series and they reflect my concerns at the time. I like the idea that my work can help spread messages to people all around the world. Art is a powerful tool. However, while it is pleasing to hear my work being described as having a message, that is not its most important aspect, although I am not sure yet what that really is!

Can you tell me about your spoons for charity project?

In 2012 I was involved with a community project in Campbelltown organised by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Anne Supinya, the wife of the Thai Consul in Sydney, saw the exhibition and asked me to make something for her Thai Cooking for Charity project.

The set of spoons I made became very popular after its announcement on social media. While I had used my connections as a ceramic artist

to help people before, I had not created a special product like the spoons. Previously I had organised online auctions to raise money for flood victims in Brisbane and Thailand. Using my skill as a ceramic artist to help people is something that is very important to me.

And you enjoy collaborative work.

Currently I am enjoying creating work that interacts with audiences or involves communities. Aftermath (2010) was a collaborative project with the Pottery Workshop and PWS Gallery in Jingdezhen, the famous porcelain producing city in China and Monster by Hands another with the Thai Celadon factory, and Pong Noi Art Space in Chiang Mai. Both showed me how clay can be an interactive medium. I am an outgoing person and easily connect with others. I love working with people, connecting with those who are making art and seeing them so happy with the results. It gives me energy.

I work in a very small studio, which trains me to be organised and clean. I need to plan in advance where to put drying work, bisque work, and finished work. Otherwise the studio would have no space. Being an artist is lonely, as I am in the studio on my own every day. So working with others adds extra excitement to my work. It often results in the unexpected and sharpens my mind to be quick to resolve issues.

In 2011 I was invited to organise a residency in 2013 at Medalta Art Gallery in the historic pottery district of Canada. It brought together South East Asian and South East Canadian ceramic artists in the exhibition SEXSE. I invited Krisaya Luenganantakul from Thailand, Teo Huey Min and Thomas Cheong from Singapore, in addition to



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Boon Kiat Seet from Malaysia. The five of us worked hard and also worked on another Spoon Project which was then shown at Red Star Studios in Kansas City. Things just happen.

What's next?

I want to build up a strong relationship with more South East Asian ceramic artists. One day there will be an Asia Pacific ceramic conference in Australia. I want to get everyone together and make sure it is fun and successful. More things will happen. ■

Vipoo Srivilasa is represented by Edwina Corlette Gallery, Brisbane, Beaver Galleries, ACT, and Adrian Sassoon, UK

www.edwinacorlette.com
www.beavergalleries.com.au
www.adriansassoon.com
www.vipoo.com

01 Net Working, 2013, cobalt pigment on porcelain, 38 x 16 x 16cm

02 Vipoo Srivilasa in his studio. Photography by Eve Wilson

03 Joseph Banks, 2013, cobalt pigment on porcelain, 2.5 x 26 x 26cm

04 How to Make A Million (series), 2013, cobalt pigment on porcelain, approx 30cm (h)

05 Vipoo Srivilasa in his studio. Photography by Dustin Trey

Courtesy the artist