

## STUDIO VISIT

# Vipoo Srivilasa

Melbourne, Australia



## Just the Facts

### Clay

porcelain

### Primary forming method

handbuilding

### Primary firing temperature

2194°F (1210°C)

### Favorite surface treatment

painting

### Favorite tools

small wooden bat I got from China many years ago

### Playlist

currently Michael Connelly's *Harry Bosch* series

### Wishlist

replacing front and back roller doors to large floor to ceiling windows

## Studio

Last year, I acquired a small warehouse 560 square feet (52 square meters) and transformed it into my current studio. The location is excellent as it's only a short drive from my home and about 40 minutes from Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD).

It was an empty warehouse with a high ceiling, a small back yard and an allotted parking space—a blank canvas that allowed me to design it from the ground up. My key requirement was to have a flexible space that I could rearrange when I needed to adapt to different functions. Having my own purpose-built space allows me to maximize my creativity and offer community-based projects or workshops on short notice. I call my studio ClayLAB.

The studio layout is very simple. The front area is for creating my work. I have four wooden benches on wheels so they can be rearranged to carry out different functions as required. The rear area is for my kilns, tools, shelves, the bathroom, and the stairs leading to a mezzanine. The mezzanine is a meeting space, a storage area, and a library. I have also set up a tiny courtyard, using old wooden crates for various potted plants.

I love the fact that ClayLAB is so close to home and it has been designed for my exact needs. I worked in a shared studio for more than 15 years and this is the first time I have had my own studio. ClayLAB is bigger than my old studio, which allows me to create larger work. I also like my painted concrete floor, which makes it easy to clean.



As it was originally a warehouse, and the studio is not dust-proof, I need to clean the studio often to minimize dust from the outside. Also, I don't like the big roller door, as it rattles quite a lot on windy days.

As the studio is part of a complex, I need to deal with a cooperative and the shared, previously installed electric (power) system. This means I cannot choose my own electrical supply or install solar panels.

I have visited numerous artist studios and many of them have influenced my design. However, the most influential studio space for me is Edmund de Waal's studio. It is very clean, simple, elegant, and fully functional. Having said that, my studio ended up nothing like his. Ultimately, I also want to go for a minimalist look even though my work is all about maximum effect!

I am currently in the process of buying a new front-loading kiln. My old kiln is top-loading, which makes it very difficult to load my figurines.

To be more environmentally friendly, I use a Gleco Trap to capture clay waste and other chemical residues. Also, during the

summer, the mezzanine can become quite warm. To eliminate the excess heat, I installed Renshade Reflective Rolls underneath the skylights, which ultimately reflect the heat away from the studio. I also installed solar roof ventilation to allow air to circulate faster so there's no need for a cooling system. I have a lot of indoor plants in the studio. They create fresh air and reduce dust as well as help cool the space down. I want to add more indoor plants to the space.

My assistants' jobs vary from cleaning the studio to painting some of the work. We have separate workbenches, but are located in the same working area. By having the studio set up this way, we can do different jobs but are able to communicate easily, and I can check their progress. Working with assistants helps me complete my pieces faster and allows me to be more ambitious with my work. It also helps me reflect on my ideas.

## Paying Dues (and Bills)

My first ceramics experience was from the College of Fine Art in Bangkok, Thailand. From there, I undertook my degree at Rang-



sit University, Bangkok. After graduating, I worked as a designer in a ceramics factory for two years, before coming to Australia in 1995. I completed my master's degree at the University of Tasmania in 1999. I am now working and living in Melbourne.

I spend most weekdays at the studio. I usually arrive around 7:30am, and always have a cup of tea to get myself in the right mindset and work out what to do during the day. I work until 3:30pm with a half hour lunch break before heading home. At home, I work on my computer to catch up with emails and paper work. I try to keep Mondays as a paper day, in order to pay all bills, write grant applications, reply to interviews, and do any bookkeeping. I do not have a job outside of my studio; however, I used to teach a workshop and have also taught in schools, but have not done either for several years.

## Marketing

Most of the time, I do not know who buys my work. I sell almost all of my artwork through various galleries that represent me. Sometimes, if public institutions buy my work, the gallery might let me know, but generally they do not. I mainly sell my work through solo exhibitions, but luckily my galleries are very good as they sell a lot of my work between exhibitions as well.

I don't really have much of a strategy for marketing, as the galleries take care of this aspect. However, making my work stand out is my strategy, I suppose. My galleries sell a lot of my work online through their websites, email list, and Instagram, so I think having a good presence both on the Internet and on social media is quite important.

Using Instagram is a great way to expand my audience. However, I have found that exhibiting at galleries is the best tool in terms of market growth.

The key advantage of using Instagram and Facebook to promote my work is that they are free. The main disadvantage is that I am addicted to them and spend a lot of time checking what's going on. I have also made my own website, using SquareSpace. I use my website as a professional portfolio, so people can see the whole range of my work.

I have been concentrating on the Australian and Thai art markets for the last 6–7 years and it has been going really well. I am hoping to expand my work into the wider Asian market as well.

I used to promote a lot of my work on a Facebook page specific for my art, but now I mainly use my personal account as it directly connects to collectors, curators, and art professionals as well as those who enjoy my work.



ALL PHOTOS: ANDREW BARCHARM

For Instagram, I create posts that provide a representation covering all of my work, as well as what I am currently working on. I try to post when I have a good image or a good story to tell.

My greatest success online was organizing *Clay For Nepal*, an online auction to raise funds for Nepal earthquake relief efforts in 2015. The project brought together ceramic communities from around the world as one and we raised over \$50,000 AU (\$38,417 US).

## Research and Inspiration

I listen to audio books most of the time while I work. I am a sucker for good crime novels. The good ones keep me working late in the studio because I want to know what is going to happen next! I hardly read magazines, but I tend to read a lot of Thai eBooks. I mainly buy paper books for reference and inspiration. I like books about traditional art and highly-crafted antiques.

Facebook provides a lot of online reading for me. I also read a lot of Life Hacker blog posts! I tend to use Google image search a lot, to find images or references for my works. Often, Instagram posts provide unexpected inspiration.

I am not sure what I do on a day off or to take a break, as I tend toward being a workaholic. I find that going out with friends to see exhibitions and eating afterward is a great way to recharge. Chatting about ideas over a good meal is a great source of inspiration.

I am fortunate that I have not had a mental roadblock yet. It is more the opposite. I have too many ideas and never enough time, so I work whenever I can!

## Most Important Lesson

The most important lesson I would say is to prioritize and plan ahead—to figure out how much time is needed to complete an exhibition so I know how many promises I can make to curators and galleries. I try to plan my day-to-day schedule four months in advance. This helps me stay on top of the projects and know if I am on schedule. It also helps me sleep at night. Once my partner said to me that “You don’t have to be the best to be happy,” which was the best advice to stop me from comparing myself to others and get depressed. A good mantra!

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