



Pieces from Vipoo Srivilasa's *Always Better Together* series (2022); the artist in his Melbourne studio (opposite)

# VIPOO SRIVILASA

With a playful approach that marries European-Australian and Thai motifs, this Bangkok-born artist's figurines are full of charm.

"There were many ceramic factories in Thailand but not many ceramic artists," says Melbourne-based artist Vipoo Srivilasa, recalling his early frustrations studying art and ceramics at Rangsit University International College in Bangkok. "There are designers and mould-makers but it wasn't until I moved to Australia that I realised you could be a ceramic artist and make a living. That's when I knew what I was going to do."

Working mostly in small-scale ceramics, Srivilasa's work is joyous, charming and a beautiful cross-cultural exchange of motifs and ideas derived from Thai and European-Australian decorative arts – the use of blue and white, for instance, which can be found in both Asian and European traditional porcelain items, as well as flowers. "The flower patterns appear when I make work about different cultures because they can have different meanings," he explains. "For example, the lantana flower – in Australia, it's a weed but in Thailand, it's used to pay respect to our teachers."

Collaboration is a key part in Srivilasa's practice. While his use of clay started in the early noughties, for more than a decade he has explored the medium – sometimes incorporating food – via community projects, through mentoring or pieces created in a partnership. "Clay is easy to work with and reminds people of their childhood," he says of his devotion for the material.

"When you work with your hands, it does something to loosen the mind. It helps people to open up." He believes that clay absorbs whatever you're feeling, "from head to hand to heart" and because of this he refuses to work when he's sad or angry, in case the energy is transferred.

"Clay teaches patience and how to be humble. You put it in the kiln and fire it and you don't always know what will come out. But that's the most exciting part and what I love about it – the kiln takes away what I can control and that's very exciting to me." ●



## Studied at:

Rangsit University International College, Bangkok; Monash University, Melbourne; University of Tasmania, Hobart.

## Exhibited at:

Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria; Edwina Corlette Gallery, Brisbane; Adrian Sassoon, Pavilion of Art & Design, London; Olsen Gallery, Sydney; The National Gallery, Bangkok; Saatchi Gallery, London; Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taipei; Galerie Handwerk, Munich; Korean International Ceramic Biennale, Icheon.

## Selection of awards:

Ceramic Artist of The Year, The American Ceramic Society (2021); Korea-Australia Arts Foundation Prize, highly

commended (2019); 44th Muswellbrook Art Prize, Ceramic, winner (2017); Basil Sellers Art Prize, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, finalist (2016 and 2015).

## Breakthrough moment:

*Roop-Rote-Ruang (Taste-Touch-Tell)* exhibition. "I was offered a solo show [at the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art exhibition in 2008], on the condition I didn't use plinths. So I made it a dinner project. I cooked people a Thai meal and used my work to serve the food and tell the story of how I moved to Australia. It changed how I use clay, not just as sculpture but as a medium to connect communities."