

Of the Spirit: The Work of Kamin Lertchaiprasert | COBO Social

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Kamin Lertchaiprasert, No Sunrise, To Sunset





Portrait of Kamin Lertchaiprasert



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, No Past, No Present, No Future, 2018.





Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Perception Itself Is Action. Sharjahat Biennale.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, No Sunrise, To Sunset, 2018.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Problem/Wisdom, 1993-95.

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Naima Morelli

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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

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Thai Artist Kamin Lertchaiprasert speaks exclusively to CoBo about his work for the Sharjah Biennial and on the significance of art in our lives.

Text: Naima Morelli

Images: Courtesy of Kamin Lertchaiprasert



Portrait of Kamin Lertchaiprasert

How does an artist whose entire life and practice is based on spiritual concepts, deal with the harsh realities of the contemporary art system? Does a spiritual commitment enable us to transcend conforming to the necessity of these ugly realities? Or it can conversely make us more efficient in achieving priorities they emphasise, like meditation apps and

Silicon Valley-conceived podcasts have led us to believe? Kamin Lertchaiprasert, enlightens us by addressing these questions.

I had encountered Kamin around the world many times before actually meeting him. The first time in the form of a hyper-realistic statue with eyes closed in a meditative position. This was part of his work “*No Past, No Present, No Future*”, a resin-cast sculpture with human hair exhibited at the Palais the Tokyo in Paris. I stumbled into the same work at Art Stage Singapore 2018 and just a few days before driving to his studio, I saw a young version of him in some early self portraits at MAIIAM. It was still difficult to know what to expect from a conversation with him.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *No Past, No Present, No Future*, 2018.

Walking into Kamin’s studio, it was as if time slowed down and a sense of calm presided over the atmosphere. The proceeding unfolded smoothly, without any agitation as we sipped the tea Kamin prepared almost in silence.

Although the conversation began slowly and quietly, it became more animated as we approached the subject of the spirit. Kamin’s eyes lit up with childlike enthusiasm, happy dimples appeared on his cheeks as he spoke about his favourite subject. This is what he had been investigating since he started making art, namely: “Life and death, the question of meaning of being here on Earth.”

His multimedia work, is conceived from his curiosity which compels him to understand the world through a creative process: “For me making art is more about the journey, the process that can unfold through different media. The medium is not important for me. People commonly associate the idea of art with an object, a painting, a sculpture, or something that they can sell. However, to me the real creation isn’t self-centric. It’s not just for yourself, your country, your neighbour, your family. It’s the whole. Humans

beings, animals, plants, this planet, everything. When you reach that understanding, you're not really attached to the object that much.”

In the context of contemporary art, it seems as if Kamin is not rebelling against the art world “system”, but neither he is conforming to its rules. He just exists within it, on his terms – making and engaging in his own way, creating his own iterations. Exemplifying this is involvement with the 31st Century Museum of Contemporary Spirit, a community art project and conceptual museum that focuses on the conversion of body and mind into a place for artistic engagement.

Let's talk a bit about your “Perception itself is action”, your project at the Sharjah Biennial, which this year was themed “Leaving the Echo-Chamber”. Your project, a three-day workshop is based on the concept of LQ, the Love Quotient. Can you explain us what does it mean?

In our contemporary society we are very familiar with the concept of IQ, the Intelligence Quotient, and they have also introduced the EQ – the Emotional Quotient. My idea of LQ – Love Quotient belongs to an Intellectual-spiritual and Spiritual-intellectual realm. I started investigating this concept within the framework of the 31st Century Museum of Contemporary Spirit and did a workshop in Bangkok. Everyone loved it, and said it was a transformative experience for them. I was then asked to do a similar project for the Sharjah Biennial.

I asked a local community to come to stay with me four days and we travelled around Thailand. I showed and explained my philosophy behind the 31st Century Museum of Contemporary Spirit. And then we visited Bangkok, and asked people to share stories of love and kindness that they experienced themselves or had heard of. The act of focusing on that and of remembering, means taking action already. It allows you go beyond your self-centric perspective. The idea is that sharing makes those notions and memories stronger.

Some stories were really wonderful and remarkable. They make you understand more about life and yourself from a different viewpoint. And, whether these stories are true or not, they allowed participants to develop each other's LQ. To go back to the theme of the Biennial, for me the only way to leave the *Echo-Chamber* (the curatorial theme for the biennial) is by making an idea and its perception into a tangible action.





Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Perception Itself Is Action. Sharjahat Biennale.

I'm also curious to know about another recent work "No Sunrise, No Sunset", a collaboration with renown architect Surya Umpansiratana. This work was a site-specific work for the 2018 Thailand Biennial project in Krabi. How did you conceive it?

With "No Sunrise, No Sunset" is I wanted to make people realize how many perceptions in our life are illusions. We know that it is the world that moves around the Sun, and yet we perceive ourselves as stable. When you look deeply in yourself, you're not your conception of "yourself". You cannot control sickness, death, the beat of your own heart. It's your body, but it's not your body, because you cannot control it. Yourself is not yourself. A sunset is not a sunset.

My idea was to create an overlapping of illusions inside an installation, placed in a beautiful spot in Krabi overlooking the sea. On a first level, the installation presents a video of a landscape, recreating an illusion on the actual landscape. Inside the installation I placed a hyper-realistic statue of this old lady waiting for her husband.

The story I imagined for the character is that he leaves in search of the truth. He promised her that if he finds it, he would come back and marry her. She waited for him, every evening, and he didn't come back. The search for the truth is clearly a never-ending journey. I recreated this "once upon a time" kind of story so once we walk inside the installation, we ourselves become the husband.





Kamin Lertchaiprasert, No Sunrise, To Sunset, 2018.

You entire practice seems to be based on a sort of search for the truth. I learned that your upbringing in boarding school was Catholic. When did you shifted towards a Buddhist vision of the world?

I think it was around 1992, with the project “Problem/Wisdom”, where I started making sculptures using newspaper articles. While I was thinking about that methodology, I had a friend who lend me a book of a Buddhist master which deeply influenced and touched me. He inspired me to become a monk for a short time and try out meditation. At the time in my work, I tried to combine the newspaper article and the meditation. I focused all my attention on the article, trying to think only of the subject of the article. Of course, meditation is supposed to be about non-thinking, but I didn’t know that at the time. Nobody taught me (laughs). In a way it was a meditation of sort, focusing only one topic, and try to understand it. After realizing this wasn’t a conventional way to meditate, I went see some masters and learned Vipassana meditation.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Problem/Wisdom, 1993-95.

After you embarked on this path, how did your interest for the social realm met the inner dimension?

After I developed my understanding of meditation, my work changed a bit, moving from social issues to those more personal in nature. Initially I kept on looking at them as two distinct unrelated spheres, however now, I actually feel they are intertwined. Inner and outer are the same. In a practical way, this means I use art as a tool in my everyday life. Art itself is not real. The realness is in the happiness you experience while making art.
Words are just symbols of feelings, they are not the reality itself. So, it is not in this way

words are just symbolic of reality, they are not the reality itself. So it is art. In this way art becomes like homework, you have to do it everyday, or practice to get you to this point of understanding. In Buddhism they say you need a boat to take you across the river, but when you are on the other side of the river you don't need the boat anymore. Art is the same. We need it to understand the meaning of life, your mind, other people, society. But when you really understand nature, you realize you are one, there is no separation. That's your perception, your awareness. And then art means nothing at that point.

As an artist working in the industry, do you think this philosophy distances you from the art world?

I still make art, and I am in the art world, I'm just more aware that ultimately it's not that important. Because you die, so you get nothing anyway. You come from nothing, you go back to nothing. But you just realize that you have the chance to share this knowledge with others, to communicate, to lessen conflict in the world, to create happiness and harmony. In this sense art becomes just another way to communicate with other people.

About the Artist:

Kamin Lertchaiprasert was born in Thailand in 1964 and currently lives and works in Chiang Mai. He graduated with a Bachelor in Fine Art (Printmaking) at Silpakorn University, Bangkok and was awarded the Young Artist of the Year award in 1987 by the same institution. Devoted to his Buddhist beliefs, Kamin views art as a ritualistic and meditative practice allowing for better understanding of the self and wider environment. Kamin established the land foundation with artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, using rice fields as sites for art and architectural projects. His recent exhibitions include *The Timeless Present Moment* (2017) at the MAAIM Contemporary Art Museum, Thailand and *Problem-Wisdom: Thai Art in the 1990s* (2017) at the Queensland Art Gallery, Australia.

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of "Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un'introduzione" a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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