

The Spirit of Chiang Mai: Torlarp Larpjaroensook | COBO Social



Memories, curiosity and an interest in the object trouvé are the core of Thai artist Torlarp Larpjaroensook's work. For him, pursuing his personal practice and growing the audiences for art are parallel activities.





Torlarp Larjaroensook, Insignificant Meaning

Text: Naima Morelli

Images: Courtesy of Torlarp Larjaroensook and Seescape Gallery Chiang Mai

Some artists tend to perceive the “social” aspect essential to the functioning of today’s contemporary art world, an exhausting time-consuming effort. For them, it is often completely at odds with their practice. While studio time is about isolation and solitude, hanging around the art community calls for a different part of oneself.

For Thai artist Torlarp Larjaroensook, this distinction doesn’t exist. Torlarp is on a mission to bring art to the people, there is no sense of isolation or individualism at all. His communal attitude exemplifies the generous spirit of the Chiang Mai artist.



See Scape Commune

His career began by establishing Gallery Seescape in Chiang Mai, which today celebrates its 10th anniversary. The aim was to foster interactions between non-art people and the contemporary art world. One year later, he set up a mobile

gallery project called '3147966' in collaboration with other international artists to bring art to local communities.

Torlarp's artistic commitment extends beyond this. He is the rare case of artist meets the entrepreneur. For years, he has been collaborating with Nike and the hippest cafés in Melbourne. He speaks to us exclusively, revealing what distinguishes his practice.



Torlarp Larjaroensook, Air Border

What are your first memories tied to art?

As a child, I grew up in a boathouse in Chao Chet Canal in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, a province in the central part of Thailand, two hours from Bangkok. At that time, I wasn't good at drawing, so I made my own toys from the objects I found floating on the river. My father was a carpenter, so I guess he passed his practical skill of making things on to me. I learned how to use machines very early on. All of that is found in my art today, from my interest in found objects to the feeling and textures of natural materials, like wood, which is my favourite.

You then went on to study art at the College of Fine Arts in Bangkok, and later on, majored in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Chiang Mai University. Can you tell me about the atmosphere of those years?

I have very good memories of going to Bangkok by train with my friends at that time. That's where I was first introduced to sculpture, painting and other subjects. By the time I had finished school, I had a desire to see somewhere

subjects. By the time I had finished school, I had a desire to see somewhere different from Bangkok. I knew that Chiang Mai University was more focused on contemporary and conceptual art than Bangkok was, and this elicited my curiosity.



Torlarp Larparoensook, Spiritual Space Ship

You are now celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Seescape Gallery. Can you tell me how the art scene in Chiang Mai looked like when you were just starting out, and how it has evolved over the years?

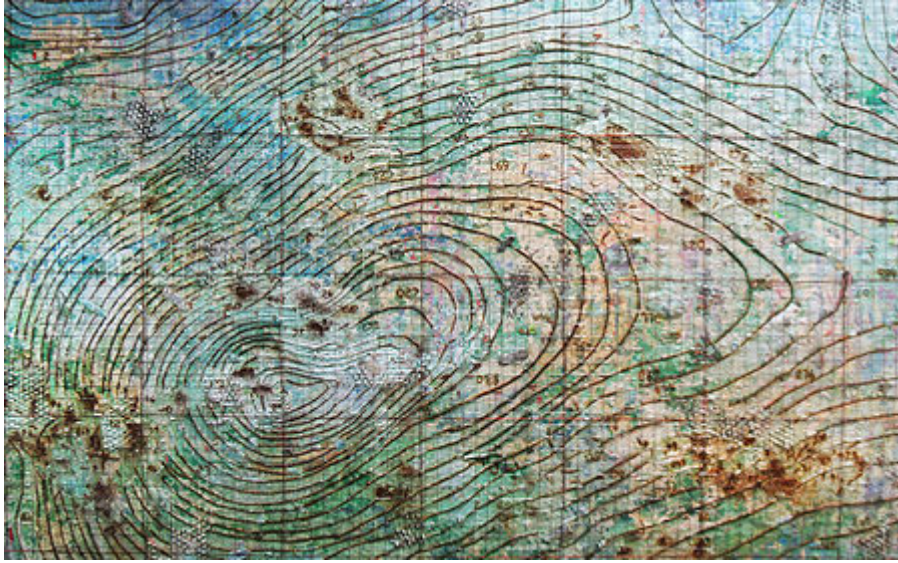
Back in the day, it was really quiet. There were very few art spaces and not many facilities at all. So, you can imagine everything was quite difficult. I was interested in showing experimental work, like installations, which wasn't something you could really sell back then. Because I didn't come from a wealthy family, I built the entire space little by little on a tight budget. However, I kept going and I was able to create a space that would be enticing not only for the art folks, but also for everyone else.

Can you tell me a bit about the concept behind the art space?

I think art should be happening in the community. I didn't want to just make my own artwork and exhibit it, I wanted to engage people. Sharing with the community is vital to me. I believe that art should be an integral part of each person's life. Everyone should have a daily encounter with the different aesthetics of art.

From the beginning, I tried to create a synergy for Seescape. I have my own space and a room for the exhibitions, and a space with pieces we can sell and a café. This allows us to sustain the space and be exposed to different kinds of people. Our way is to be multifunctional. We can't survive just on art exhibition

sales alone and we've never had sponsors. I'm funding the space myself by selling my art, as well as commercial work.



Torlarp Larjaroensook, Air Border 2

In terms of your work, one of your most celebrated series is the ongoing 'Air Border'. Can you tell me a bit about it?

I work on this series on and off, when I'm inspired. I got the idea from a show called 'Tropikos' I did at HOF Art Space in Bangkok with other artists living in tropical latitudes. In terms of climate, we experience similar issues and conditions.

For this work, I used the weather chart of the tropical world zone during a storm period as a painting outline, then bent steel wire along those lines on painted canvases. When I work on them, I conceive myself as a bit of a farmer, leaving my work outdoors and letting the air, sun, rain and other natural phenomena to oxidize the wires. By having the paintings exposed to the weather, I give up control and co-create with nature.





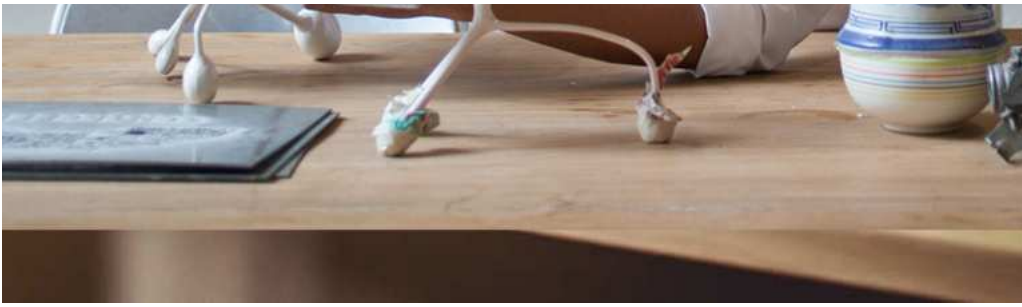
Torlarp Larparoensook, Installation view of Spiritual Space Ship at Bangkok Art Biennale

Another leitmotiv of yours is the interaction between modern technology and ancient spirituality. When did you first start exploring this idea?

It started with the show ‘Send Mom to the Moon’, which I did in 2015. I was influenced by this blend of technology and spirituality that I experienced as a kid when I used to go to my grandma’s house. She is a Chinese descendant, so we celebrated the Chinese moon festival. At the same time, she was also a witness of the time when Russia and America first sent rockets into space, which carried the world’s best innovations. The moon became a symbol that was tied to spirituality as much as future discoveries.

Also, my most recent artwork at the Bangkok Art Biennale is called ‘Spiritual Spaceship’. The installation is from 2018 and reflects on this theme. It is an assemblage of antique teak cabinets, circuit boards and Thai decorative items. It represents a space odyssey to connect the past and future with a time-travel machine.





Torlarp Larpjaroensook

Your latest show in Singapore is called ‘The Insignificant Meaningful’. Can you share a bit about the work that you are going to present there?

For this project, I continued to use found objects that I had assembled together. I got the idea when I last went to Singapore and was exposed to a blend of many different cultures, including the Chinese, Indian, Thai, Malay Eurasian and Peranakan cultures. I explored second-hand shops and found many different objects from various countries. By assembling them together I wanted to represent not only the reality of Singapore, but also the syncretism of the entire area of Southeast Asia and the constant migration of its people.

About the Artist

Torlarp Larpjaroensook is a multidisciplinary artist who is interested in the integration of various techniques; painting, sculpture, installation and interactive art to connect art to wider audience. In 2008, he established Gallery Seescape in Chiang Mai in order to create interaction between people and art. In 2009, he set up a mobile gallery project called “3147966” in collaboration with other international artists to bring art to local communities. In 2011, he had a solo exhibition “Bookshelf” at 8Q Singapore Art Museum where his work was collected by Singapore Art Museum. In 2012, his solo exhibition “In Progress” was exhibited at Richard Koh Fine Art Gallery, Singapore. He also was one of a selected Artist in Residency of Koganecho Bazaar Yokohama project (Japan) and created an installation art called “Live there life here” aimed to connect people and different places with art. Torlarp is now based in Chaing Mai, Thailand where he runs Gallery Seescape and actively create his new series of work.

Born on December 9th, 1977, he was raised in a houseboat in Ayutthaya. He studied art at the college of Fine Arts, Bangkok. Later on, he graduated a Bachelor degree with a major in painting from Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University.

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.