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Before Birth

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ทุกสิ่ง
ที่ถูกล
แสง
จะมี
ชีวิต

ทุกชีวิต
มี
แสง
ในตัวเอง

ความรัก
ความเมตตา
คือ
แสง

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*Everything
Touched by
Light
Becomes
Life*

*Every life
has
Light
Within*

*Love
Compassion
Is
Light*

Before birth – After death (sculpture)

Various people have come to visit 31st Century Museum of Contemporary Spirit. Among these people, questions are often raised about who the man living in the front container is and about his insanity. I often reply, "His name is Tom. Well, I don't know whether the insanity is in him or us."

We all are aware that death is inevitable and that there is nothing we can bring along after death, neither fame nor fortune. We came into this world empty-handed and are bound to leave in the same manner. But nowadays, while we live our lives for material things that we know we cannot take with us when we die, Tom is living in the present moment. He has survived on leftover monk food (alms) and stayed nights on the streets with no concern for the future and free from ambitions that the rest of us share. This is the reason why I am not sure who the mad man is between Tom and us.

Death is always occurring and we do not know which is to come first; the next day or next life. Every moment is changing. We are never aware or attentive enough to see it until we meet a loss of things or the ones we love. That is when we understand. Though, when the time comes, it is sometimes hard to take in these natural occurrences that eventually happen to everyone.

Zen Buddhism has three major practices to reach the truth of nature, which are contemplation of Dhamma¹ puzzle (Koan²), immediate question-answer dialogues (Mondo³) and sitting meditation (Zazen⁴).

Since 2009, I have been working on this project so as to study and attempt to understand the transient condition of nature that occurs in every moment of my daily life. I have been doing this by observing daily happenings

through objects like receipts, letters, tickets, postcards, brochures, articles read and so on. I have collected these artifacts from different times and spaces and made them into many collages upon which I would draw the contour of a human skull as a symbol of transience. Then I would contemplate on these occurrences similar to contemplating Zen Dhamma puzzles (Koan) by practicing Vipassana⁵ meditation (the development of insight) to find factors of these causes. Underpinning my contemplation are key tenets of Buddhist philosophy; Anicca⁶, Dukkha⁷ and Anatta⁸ (impermanence, suffering and non-self), which form the 3 conditions of existence, from dual perspectives of the questioner and answerer. During the process, I would try to see through each problem as it is and detach it as much as possible from my personal reasons and experiences.

There is a saying that there is no teacher without a student. In my case, the teacher is my daily experiences and the Dhamma puzzle is the question of what the condition of existence before birth and after death. Later, I would write my opinion and perception onto the drawing. After that, I would take those phrases and write them onto plastic skulls almost everyday. It is a meditation to gain awareness of the meaning behind the words and experiences that occurred. From out of approximately 730 drawings, I would select only 12 pieces to be the prototype for my bronze and ceramic (Raku technique) sculptures.

With this process, I believe it can change my perspective of the world to see it as it truly is and not as how I am accustomed to see or want it to be. We can gain the understanding of truth by wisdom from reading and lis-



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tening (Suta-maya-panna⁹), rational thinking (Cinta-maya-panna¹⁰) and direct experience practices (Bhavana-maya-panna¹¹).

On January the 1st of 2013, I met Mong, who came to visit me at my studio with Somyot. They were visiting Wat Umong temple, where Mong had once ordained as a monk, which was not far from my studio. It was either fate or destiny that I asked Mong about his career. He told me that he is a copywriter, so I got the idea to let him write little messages about Dhamma that could enlighten readers and send them to me daily, one message per day. He agreed. Since then, we have never met again and he has no clue what I'm going to use these messages for and what I was doing at the time. A year has passed since that day, and he is still e-mailing me these messages daily.

Everyday, before I go about doing my chores, I would read these messages and express my opinion spontaneously and intuitively towards it within minutes. This kind of spontaneous and intuitive response, for me, is like the immediate question and answer dialogue in Zen (Mondo). It is to encourage answering from the unconscious mind; feelings and past experiences instead of rational thinking. After that, I would gather opinions from this dialogue and write them on to plastic skulls to contemplate further.

In this work, I tried to collect these sets of knowledge to improve and change the expressing techniques and apply them into my art creating process in order to learn and understand about life, nature and myself. I use this creating process to change my inner attitude towards the outer world, to see it as it truly is. Everything, every moment and every condition, is transient

(Anicca) and not to be habitually attached to nor perceived according to what the passion desires.

What I have gained from this work are the words of truth understood through language without direct experience and art pieces that occurred from reading and rational thinking (Suta-maya-panna and Cinta-maya-panna). It is like solving a problem in verbal terms, but practically, it has yet affected any changes in behavior (negative energy) nor has it truly improved my unconscious level. What is missing in my daily Vipassana meditation throughout my working process? Maybe there has been too much rational thinking in order to find the answer, which has made my understanding of truth in the working process only terms of rati on in words. However in the ultimate truth¹², which is beyond words and reason, there exists a direct experience (Bhavana-maya-panna) within the unconscious level of awareness of the body, sensations and mind. This exists in every moment of arising and passing away (Anicca) which occurs so fast that we cannot grasp it in our common everyday consciousness; about things that exist in the non-existing and non-existing within the existence. The present moment exists although does not exist at the same time. It is the gateway to the past and future, and that is the condition before birth and after death.

March 8, 2014.

References.

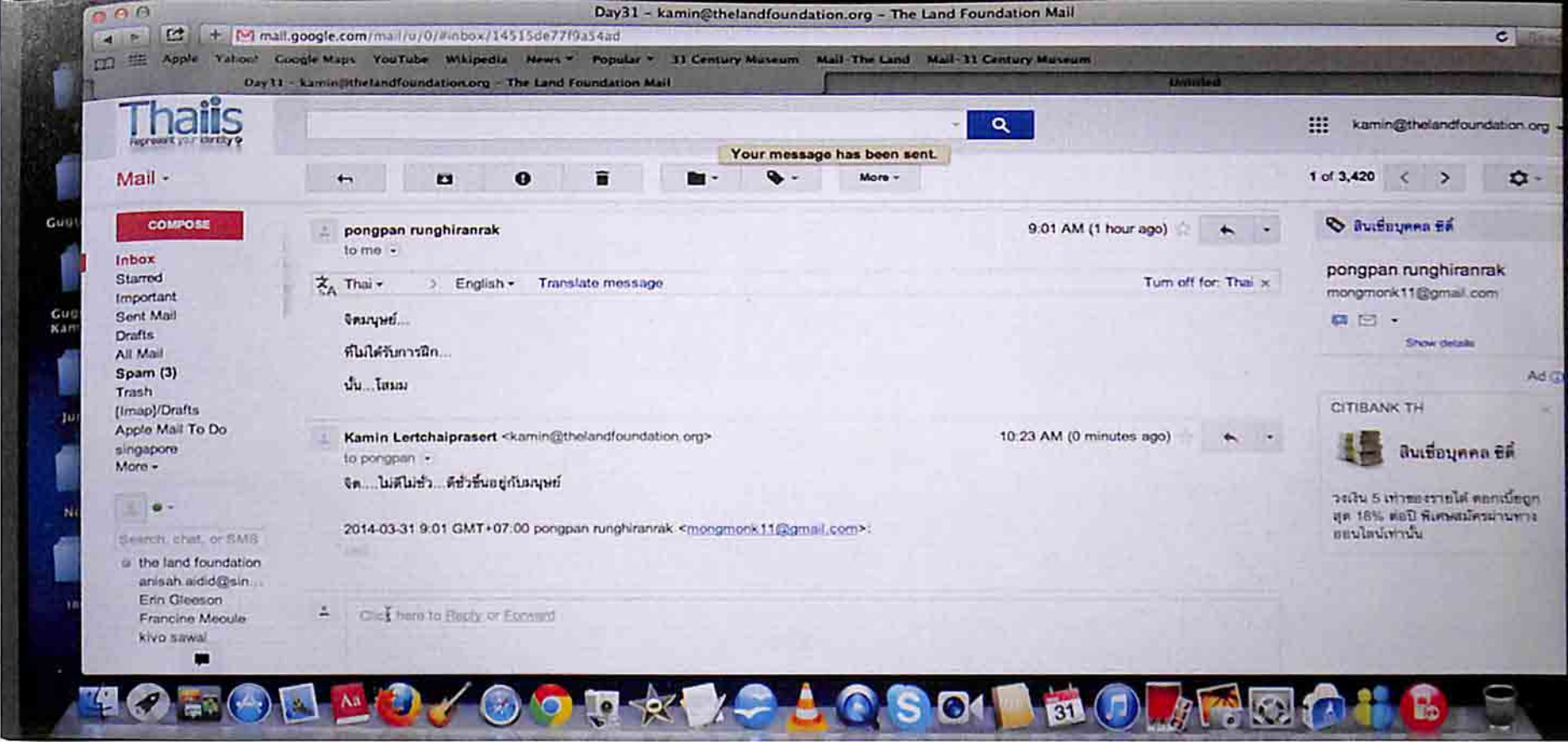
1. Dhamma : Often refers to the doctrines and teachings of the faith, but it may have broader uses. Also, it is an important technical term meaning something like “phenomenological constituent”. In Buddhism can have the following meanings:
 - The teaching of the Buddha as an exposition of the Natural Law applied to the problem of human suffering.
 - The Laws of Nature considered both collectively and individually.
 - The state of Nature as it is.
2. Koan: is a story, dialogue, question, or statement, which is used in Zen-practice to provoke the “great doubt”, and test a student’s progress in Zen practice.
3. Zazen: seated meditation; is a meditative discipline practitioners perform to calm the body and the mind, and be able to concentrate enough to experience insight into the nature of existence and thereby gain enlightenment.
4. Mondo: questions and answers also known as “Dharma Combat”; is a recorded collection of dialogues between a pupil and a Rōshi (a Zen Buddhist teacher). Zen tradition values direct experience and communication over scriptures. (Some teachers go so far as to instruct their pupils to tear up their scriptures.) However, sometimes the mondo acts as a guide on the method of instruction.
5. Vipassana: ‘insight’, is the intuitive light flashing forth and exposing the truth of the impermanency, the suffering and the impersonal and

- unsubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence. Vipassana is commonly used as a synonym for vipassan-meditation, in which satipatthana, four foundations of mindfulness or anapanasati, “mindfulness of breathing,” is used to become aware of the impermanence of everything that exists.
6. Anicca: ‘impermanent’ is the first of the three characteristics of existence. It is from the fact of impermanence that, in most texts, the other two characteristics, suffering (dukkha) and not-self (anatta), are derived. Impermanence of things is the rising, passing and changing of things, or the disappearance of things that have become or arisen. The meaning is that these things never persist in the same way, but that they are vanishing dissolving from moment to moment.
 7. Dukkha: ‘suffering’, ‘anxiety’, ‘stress’, or ‘unsatisfactoriness’, is the second of the three characteristics of existence and the first of the Four Noble Truths (Sacca). The term dukkha is not limited to painful experience, but refers to the unsatisfactory nature and the general insecurity of all conditioned phenomena which, on account of their impermanence, are all liable to suffering, and this includes also pleasurable experience, though dukkha does not deny the existence of pleasurable experience, as is sometimes wrongly assumed. The principle of dukkha is one of the most important concepts in the Buddhist tradition.
 8. Anatta: ‘not-self’, non-ego, egolessness, impersonality, is the last of the three characteristics of existence. The annata doctrine teaches that neither within the bodily and mental phenomena of existence, nor outside of

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- them, can be found anything that in the ultimate sense could be regarded as a self-existing real ego-entity, soul or any other abiding substance. It is the only really specific Buddhist doctrine, with which the entire structure of the Buddhist teaching stands or falls. While the case of the first two characteristics it is stated that all formations are impermanent and subject to suffering, the corresponding text for the third characteristic states that ‘all things are not-self’.
9. Suta-maya-panna: ‘knowledge based on learning’ is that knowledge which one has heard from others and thus acquired through learning.
 10. Cinta- maya-panna: ‘knowledge based on thinking’, is that knowledge which one has acquired through one’s own thinking, without having learnt it from others.
 11. Bhavana-maya-panna: ‘knowledge based on mental development’ is that knowledge which one has acquired through mental development in this or that way, and which has reached the stage of full concentration.
 12. Paramattha-Sacca - Sammuti-Sacca: The two truths; Ultimate truth and Conventional truth. The Buddha, in explaining his doctrine, sometimes used conventional language and sometimes the philosophical mode of expression, which is in accordance with undeluded insight into reality. In that ultimate sense, existence is a mere process of physical and mental phenomena within which, or beyond which, neither real ego-entity nor any abiding substance can ever be found. Thus, whenever the suttas speak of man, woman or person, or of the re-birth of a being, this must not be taken as being valid in the ultimate sense, but as a mere conventional mode of speech.

All references are taken and edited from:
- Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms & Doctrines. Nyanatilok, Ven.
- en.wikipedia.org





Before Birth, After Death (drawing), 2008 – 2011
Permanent marker and collage on Sa paper
Wall Size 1340 x 520 cm (L x H)
715 pieces, size of each piece 21 x 31 cm (W x L)

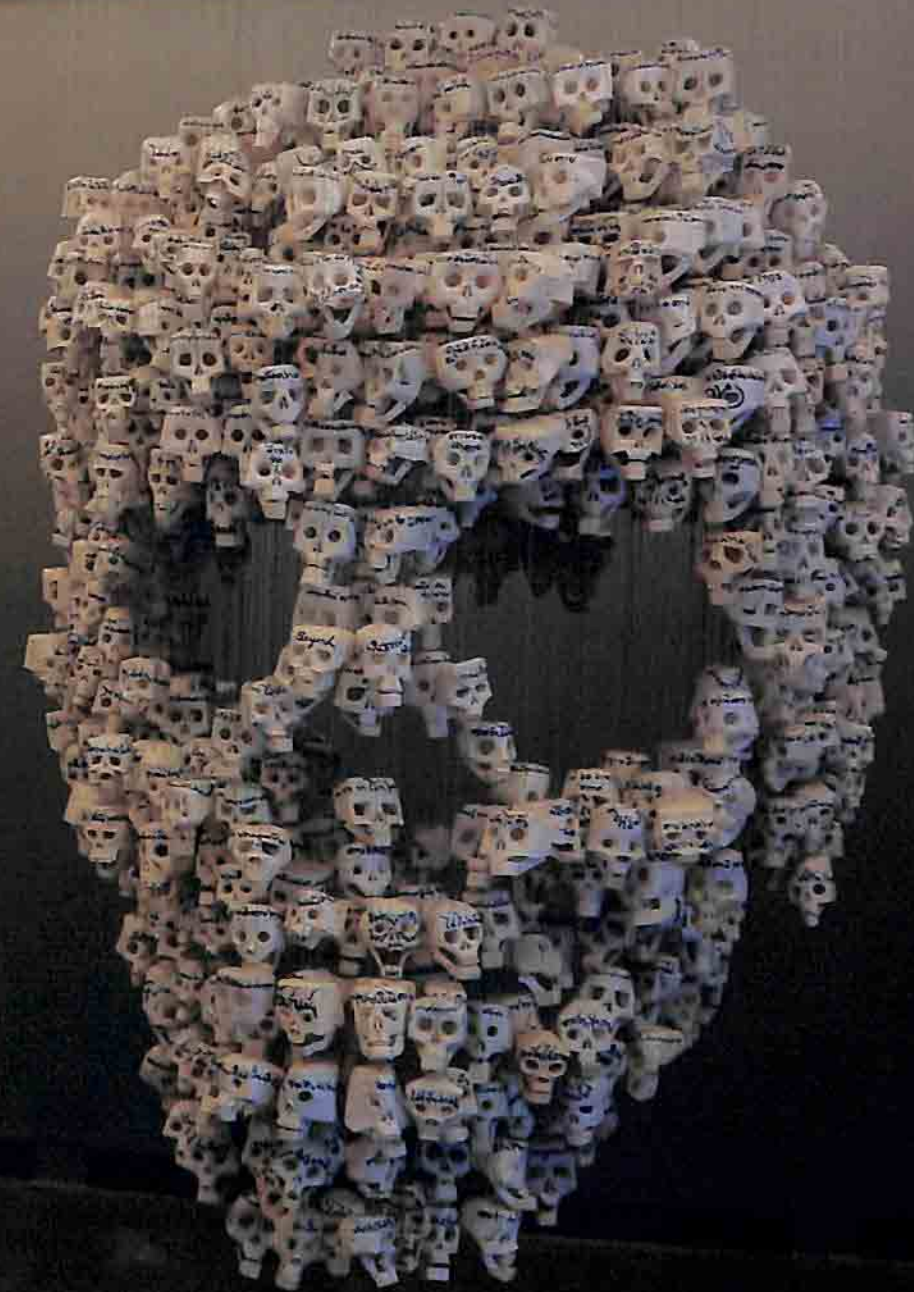
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Before Birth, After Death (plastic skull), 2008 – 2014
Permanent marker, screw and recycled plastic bottles
Size 225 x 285 x 340 cm (W x L x H) 1089 pieces,
average size of each plastic skull 14 x 16 x 22 cm (W x L x H)



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Title of the plastic skulls

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1st Box

1. Un-preventable. Understandable.
2. Welcome everyone. Everyone is invited.
3. Die from juvenile stage.
4. Happiness is valued when shared.
5. Not always black.
6. Smile with it.
7. The utmost of love.
8. Beyond.
9. Into the dust.
10. Human and animals are the same.
11. Die from the past and future.
12. Nature die, we die.
13. The inevitable is passing away.
14. Die for Dhamma.
15. No resurrection.
16. No return.
17. Come from zero. Go to zero.
18. Normal - Nature.
19. Ritual kills creativity.
20. All path leads to emptiness.
21. Like a dream.
22. Occurring anytime.
23. Look carefully and beauty is visible.
24. Die before birth.
25. Sleep without awaken.
26. The bond of father and child never breaks.
27. A white boundary.
28. Wealthy, poor, good and bad all perishes in the end.
29. Fear is a trap.
30. Under the mask of virtue, truth and beauty.
31. Die from me and mine.
32. Fashion kills original nature.
33. Without love is like living dead.
34. If the suffering of the body does not cease, then let it die. Don't allow the suffering of the mind.
35. Every moment has it's own fingerprints.

2nd Box

1. The absolute of knowledge is free from knowledge.
2. Marriage without faith is failure.
3. No escape.
4. Love never dies.
5. Without the natural way, all paces are rushed.
6. Abnormal becomes normal when the time comes.
7. Free from impulsion, when understand the destination of life.
8. Only once.
9. Dreams are illusive thoughts.
10. From dust.
11. Occurring everywhere, every time and everyone.
12. Best friends, die from benefits.
13. Experiment to learn. Death is learnt without experimenting.
14. Comes from nothing. Goes to nothing.

15. Without violence, having peace within.
16. The art of death is to observe death at all times.
17. The nature of mind, never stays still at any moment.
18. Free from abusing one self and others.
19. Only spirit remains.
20. Every party has an end.
21. Die from love and lust, and then truth is seen.
22. Lavish.
23. Without Self. Without Karma.
24. Art is without objects but not without energy.
25. Without honesty, love dies.
26. Life is without freedom and liberty. This is the nature of life.
27. Life after death.
28. Without the consumerism way, time slows down.
29. Die from conflict, happiness and suffering.
30. Without art of living, without contemporary art.
31. Die for power. Power for what?
32. Every moment, I will do to you as the spring does to the Sakura tree.
33. Every moment is to make the discourse.
34. Every moment is an experiment, You do not know if you do not try.
35. Everything is related.

3rd Box

1. Free from secure within the frames.
2. The way of nature changes all the time.
3. Start from outside of the structure, ending inside the structure.
4. Born alone. Gone alone.
5. Morals are for the spirit. Food is for the body.
6. Greed and lust kills the Utopia.
7. Both same and different.
8. Out of cause, beyond consequences.
9. Today, life gets one day shorter.
10. No one is born for happiness.
11. Birth is in death, Death is in birth.
12. No Death. No Zen.
13. When religion becomes a goods.
14. Behind the beauty.
15. The purpose of life is not birth or death, but is in the present.
16. Beyond Zen.
17. Nature gives to all.
18. Beyond the prophecy.
19. Is everywhere within us.
20. Death makes life complete. It is perfection in imperfection.
21. Die from fame.
22. The nature's way dies from material lavishness.
23. Nature has no birth nor death.
24. Life passes by with no return.
25. Greed, anger and illusion.
26. Love is like the interest, death is the capital of life.
27. Know the destination to journey, so does to live life.
28. Death is the best teacher.
29. No standstill, no movement, no birth and no death.
30. Death is all.