

Normal & Nature
Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

ธรรมดา • ธรรมชาติ

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อภินันทนาการจาก

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Normal & Nature

ธรรมดา • ธรรมชาติ

August 9th - September 31st, 1997
at Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok

วันที่ 9 สิงหาคม - 31 กันยายน 2540
ที่หอศิลป์ตาดู, กรุงเทพฯ

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โดย คามิน เลิศชัยประเสริฐ

BY KAMIN LERTCHAIPRASERT

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Acknowledgments

This is the first solo exhibition we display at Tadu and what an exhibition it is. We are very fortunate to be able to show the works of Kamin Lertchaiprasert. All in all, 366 pieces which he created one a day continuously over a period of a whole year. The results of which are inspiring.

I would like to thank the artist and Uthit Atimana who has chronologically taken us through Kamin's career and artistic development in his essay with such an insight.

Thank you also to Luckana and the staff whose continuous effort has made Tadu possible.

Wanit Mekdhanasarn

Beyond Beliefs

I believe in Buddhism.
 I believe that everything is empty.
 I believe that emptiness is the origin of nature, the universe, energy, matter and life.
 I believe that life has two essential components : body and mind.
 I believe that the mind directs and controls the work of the body.
 I believe that the body is constantly changing.
 I believe that the original state of mind was empty and unchanging.
 I believe that in all ages and periods mankind through efforts to understand nature, created the various branches of knowledge such as religion, philosophy, science, art and so on.
 I believe that everything is inter-related.
 I believe that an understanding of the nature of our minds enables us to understand nature, outside ourselves.
 I believe that art is one path that will lead us to understand the truth or our own nature.
 I believe that the process of creating art, enables us to understand our own nature just as the process of practicing Buddhist dharma meditation does.
 I believe that the true worth of art resides not in its beauty or utility but in its spiritual value.
 I believe that if we understand the original state of mind and the working of our mind we will understand the primary source of happiness and suffering and we will be at peace.
 I believe that the world will be at peace when minds are peaceful.

*Kamin Lertchaiprasert
 August 1, 1996*

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เหนือพ้นความเชื่อ

ฉันเชื่อ ในพุทธศาสนา
 ฉันเชื่อ ทุกสิ่งทุกอย่างว่างเปล่า
 ฉันเชื่อ ในความว่างเปล่าเป็นจุดกำเนิดของธรรมชาติ, จักรวาล, พลังงาน, มวลสาร และสิ่งมีชีวิต
 ฉันเชื่อ ชีวิตมี ๒ ส่วนใหญ่ประกอบกัน คือร่างกายกับจิตใจ
 ฉันเชื่อ จิตเป็นตัวกำหนดควบคุมการทำงานของร่างกาย
 ฉันเชื่อ ร่างกายเปลี่ยนแปลงทุกขณะ
 ฉันเชื่อ จิตเดิมแท้ว่างเปล่าไม่เปลี่ยนแปลง
 ฉันเชื่อ มนุษย์ทุกยุคทุกสมัย พยายามทำความเข้าใจธรรมชาติ จึงทำให้เกิดวิชาการศึกษาต่าง ๆ เช่น ศาสนา, ปรัชญา, วิทยาศาสตร์, ศิลปะ ฯลฯ
 ฉันเชื่อ ทุกสิ่งทุกอย่างเป็นสัมพันธ์ภาพ
 ฉันเชื่อ การเข้าใจในธรรมชาติภายในจิตใจของตน จะทำให้เราเข้าใจในธรรมชาติภายนอก
 ฉันเชื่อ ศิลปะเป็นวิถีทางหนึ่งที่จะนำพาให้เราเข้าใจในสิ่งจะของธรรมชาติภายในตน กระบวนการสร้างสรรค์ศิลปะจะสามารถทำให้เราเข้าใจธรรมชาติภายในของตน เหมือนดังเช่น การปฏิบัติธรรม นั่งสมาธิในทางพุทธศาสนา
 ฉันเชื่อ คุณค่าที่แท้ของศิลปะไม่อยู่ที่ความงามทางสุนทรียภาพ หรือประโยชน์ทางกายภาพ แต่อยู่ที่คุณค่าทางจิตวิญญาณ
 ฉันเชื่อ ถ้าเราเข้าใจธรรมชาติของจิตเดิมแท้และการทำงานของจิต เราจะเข้าใจความสุขและความทุกข์ที่เกิดขึ้นตามเหตุปัจจัยตามความเป็นจริง และทำให้เราเกิดความสงบ
 ฉันเชื่อ โลกจะสันติเมื่อจิตสงบ

*คามิน เลิศชัยประเสริฐ
 1 สิงหาคม 2539*

Normal & Nature

The body of every living thing exists and then disappears, always changing. If we get stuck in a rut thinking our body belongs to us, we will be drawn into the condition of suffering. Dharma teaches impermanence and what the enlightened Lord Buddha gave us is the nature law. I am a person who has faith in the Dharma preaching of the Lord Buddha and try to apply this knowledge to my everyday life ... including my artistic creativity.

I am of the belief that the process of creating art is a channel that allows me to realise the ultimate truth inside myself. Once we have seen this ultimate truth, we can then go on to discover the truth outside, in a process similar to meditation.

In this set of work, the content deals with my daily experiences. As they deal with such subjects as love and relationships, hope, peace, suffering, anxiety, fear, greed, anger, lust and so on, the experiences are both positive and negative. I bring these works as "food for thought" so a viewer can ponder the emotions contained within. With the help of meditation I believe I can rationally realise the cause of each emotion without any bias toward each experience.

According to our physical make-up, digested food gives us energy that feeds our organs while the waste is turned into excrement and urine. Similarly, each day our mind perceives both positive and negative situations which can bring us contentment or distress. My bringing each daily experience for contemplation is thus similar to the human digestive system. I pick subjects which will "feed" my spirit using the kind and impartial parts of my mind. I screen out all things that can bring me sinful thoughts.

Generally however, experiences both merciful and sinful remain imprinted on a person's sub-consciousness every time he or she comes across them. Moreover, once a person accumulates a certain number of experiences they are transformed into a thinking-action-familiarity-habit; a habit which will dictate a person's way of living.

During the past year spent creating this Normal & Nature set of work, I have realised the process of making art can also lead me towards a more conscious way of living. I have come to realise that, by following the Lord Buddha's nature law, I can live peacefully within society.

*Kamin Lertchaiprasert
March 24, 1997
English translation by
Patara Danutra*

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ธรรมคา - ธรรมชาติ

สิ่งสารพัดทุกอย่างเกิดขึ้นตั้งอยู่ดับไป เปลี่ยนแปลงตลอดเวลา ถ้าเรายึดมั่นถือมั่นในสิ่งสารพัดเป็นตัวของเราก็คงทำให้เกิดสภาวะบีบคั้นเป็นทุกข์ ธรรมทั้งหลายว่างเปล่า ไร้แก่นสาร นี่เป็นกฎธรรมดาของธรรมชาติที่พระพุทธเจ้าทรงตรัสรู้ และนำมาบอกกล่าวแก่พวกเรา ข้าพเจ้าเป็นอีกผู้หนึ่งที่มีความศรัทธาในพระธรรมคำสอนของพระพุทธศาสนา และพยายามที่จะนำเอาความรู้ความเข้าใจในคำสอนมาประยุกต์ใช้กับชีวิตประจำวันรวมทั้งในการสร้างสรรค์ผลงานศิลปะของข้าพเจ้าด้วย

ข้าพเจ้ามีความเชื่อว่าการสร้างสรรคผลงานศิลปะเป็นอีกวิถีทางหนึ่งในการที่จะทำให้ข้าพเจ้าเกิดความเข้าใจในสิ่งจะธรรมภายในตัวเอง และเมื่อเราเข้าใจสิ่งภายในก็จะทำให้เราเข้าใจในสิ่งจะภายนอกด้วยเช่นกัน เหมือนดังกระบวนการน้อมสมาธิในพุทธศาสนา

ในผลงานชุดนี้ ข้าพเจ้าได้นำประสบการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้นทุก ๆ วันในชีวิตประจำวันของข้าพเจ้าจากความประทับใจทั้งในด้านบวก และด้านลบ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเรื่องราวความสัมพันธ์เกี่ยวกับความรัก ความหวัง ความสงบ ความสุข ความทุกข์ ความกังวล ความกลัว ความโลภ ความโกรธ และความหลงมัวเมาในตัณหา ฯลฯ นำมาเพื่อพิจารณาทำความเข้าใจในเหตุปัจจัยของเรื่องราวนั้น ๆ ตามความเป็นจริง ตามธรรมชาติ โดยใช้วิธีคิดพิจารณาจากการนั่งวิปัสสนาตามแนวทางของสติปัฏฐาน 4 ซึ่งข้าพเจ้าเชื่อว่า โดยวิธีการนี้จะทำให้ข้าพเจ้าสามารถเข้าใจถึงเหตุปัจจัยได้อย่างมีเหตุผลบริสุทธิ์ ปราศจากทัศนคติที่เป็นตัวตน (อคติ) ในการมองสถานการณ์นั้น ๆ

ดังเช่นร่างกายของเรา เมื่อกินอาหารเข้าไปแล้วก็จะถูกนำไปเผาผลาญเป็นพลังงานหล่อเลี้ยงร่างกายและส่วนที่เหลือที่ไม่มีประโยชน์ก็จะถูกขับออกมาเป็นกากอาหาร (อุจจาระ, ปัสสาวะ) ในทางเดียวกัน จิตใจคนเราก็ดำรงอยู่ด้วยข้อมูลต่าง ๆ จากประสบการณ์ในชีวิตประจำวันทั้งในแง่ดี และไม่ดี ทำให้จิตใจแจ่มใสเป็นสุขหรือขุ่นมัวเป็นทุกข์ การที่ข้าพเจ้าได้นำเหตุการณ์จากประสบการณ์ต่าง ๆ ที่เกิดขึ้นในแต่ละวันมาพิจารณาทำความเข้าใจอย่างเป็นเหตุผลบริสุทธิ์ ตามความเป็นจริงของกฎธรรมชาตินั้นก็เหมือนดังการที่ร่างกายย่อยอาหารเปลี่ยนแปลงเป็นพลังงาน ส่วนทางด้านจิตใจการนำข้อมูลส่วนที่เป็นกุศลจิตมาบำรุงเลี้ยงจิตวิญญาณ และส่วนที่เป็นอกุศลจิตไร้ประโยชน์ เราก็พยายามทำความเข้าใจหรือแผ่เมตตา อุเบกขา เพื่อกำจัดมันออกไปเช่นเดียวกับการขับถ่ายกากอาหารของร่างกาย ประสบการณ์ต่าง ๆ เหล่านี้ทั้งที่เป็นกุศลจิต และอกุศลจิตจะถูกปลูกฝังในจิตใต้สำนึกของเราทุกครั้งที่มีการกระทำ หรือรับข้อมูล และเมื่อมีมากขึ้นก็จะเปลี่ยนกลายเป็นอุปนิสัย ซึ่งอุปนิสัยนี้จะเป็นตัวกำหนดวิถีทางในการดำรงชีวิตของแต่ละคน

ช่วงเวลา 1 ปี จากการสร้างสรรค์ผลงานชุด ธรรมคา-ธรรมชาติ ด้วยวิธีดังกล่าวนี้ ข้าพเจ้ารู้สึกถึงว่าการสร้างสรรคงานศิลปะได้ช่วยพัฒนาทัศนคติของข้าพเจ้าในการดำรงชีวิตอย่างมีสติมากขึ้น และสร้างความตระหนักรู้ในกฎธรรมดาของธรรมชาติเพื่อการอยู่ร่วมกับสังคมอย่างมีสันติ

คามิน เลิศชัยประเสริฐ

24 มีนาคม 2540

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A Short-Story : Kamin.

by Utthit Atimana



Fig.1 "Pressure No.4"
black - white photograph
51 x 61 cm. 1983



Fig.2 "Myself No.1"
photo - etching
73 x 83 Cm. 1988



Fig.3 "One-self No.1"
photo - etching
69 x 78 Cm. 1988

Life-Emotion-Art.

From my experience of studying in the same class with Kamin Lertchaiprasert, it seemed that amongst art students of that generation, he was the most ambitious to become an artist. His interest in art started with photography, even though at the art institute attended, offered no course on photography; but as the energetic youngster he was, he investigated this field of art as Kamin's understands it. : "Art is an instrument to convey the emotions that evaporate insubstantially from life experiences".

When I first saw his early photography works (Fig.1 *Pressure No. 4*), I noticed two kinds of components, the figure of a real person and a sculpture of a human face, composed in different gestures, in the middle of a desolate environment and frightening atmosphere. These works refer to the connection between 'life and death' (represented by the harmonious composition of living subjects and non-living objects). At that time Kamin had just lost his mother who had a leg amputated before she died. Kamin was given the duty to make a substitute leg from paper for the Chinese funeral ceremony.

These 'insubstantially evaporating emotions from past experiences' also appear in Kamin's later graphic works, when he chose graphic art as his major field of study. His photographic work from then on developed through the process of print making.

An example of his work during the last three semesters toward his Bachelor's Degree is shown in (Fig.2 *Myself No. 1*). Here Kamin intended to show his guilt, which is connected with his childhood, through his work. His former photographic work was adapted by the special characteristics of the etching techniques, shown in the moving lines (aggressive and direct), and the rough surface laid upon the flat photograph, in order to represent the stressed emotions, evaporating and alienated from his inner self.

In the works he did before his thesis (Fig. 3 *One-self No.1*), Kamin experimented with the use of photographs of himself, gesticulating in 'agony'. These photographs had also been adapted by the special characteristics of the etching technique as in the former works.

In his art thesis (Fig. 4 *Agonizing* and Fig. 5 *Men*), A certain change is apparent in the main component of the images, of which only a strange human model is left. Kamin wants his work to be interpreted more broadly. He conveys a state of personal agony, which he sees as the basic nature of all human beings.

I believe that through the works Kamin made when he was a student, it is obvious to see the connection between his favorite art & artists. It is very common for new artists all over the world to begin their development from the 'artistic intellectual heritage' of art history. It is interesting to point out here that in these very early works a certain aspect appears which will also become evident in his later work. That aspect is his interest to come to an understanding of life's philosophy and his reconsideration of life experiences to be conveyed through his work or his writing. He loves the 'directness and sincerity' of communication.

I have to admit during that time, amongst young Thai artists, Kamin was the most successful to be quickly accepted by Thai society, due to his overflowing ambition to "be an artist". After his solo exhibition at the Gallery of the Silpakorn University in 1987, Kamin immediately decided to go 'gold digging' in New York City, the world center of contemporary art, a considered must for every young artist, a place that can make unknown artists world famous.

It was not as easy as he thought, especially for a Thai artist who wanted to become involved in the New York art-politics. He began at a personal low, down on his luck. He rented a cheap place and tried to support himself by working as a waiter in a restaurant. There was not much time left for creative art work.



Fig. 4 "Agonizing"
photo-etching
71 x 73 cm. 1986



Fig. 5 "Men"
photo-etching
71 x 73 cm. 1986

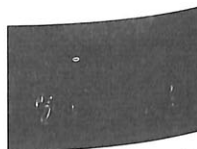


Fig. 6 "I look at myself"
sketch installation
room size 14 x 16 F.
1988 - 1989



Fig. 6 detail of "I look at myself"
oil on canvas
room size 14 x 16 F.
1988 - 1989



Fig. 7 "Art No.1"
etching 12.5 x 15 cm. 1990
collection of Singapore Art
Museum, Singapore.



Fig. 8 "Art No.2"
etching 12.5 x 15 cm. 1990
collection of Singapore Art
Museum, Singapore.

During the first two years in New York, Kamin created a body of work, continuing both in concept and style from the work in Thailand. In New York he turned into a painter who worked on a very large scale. He experimented with paintings in series. He presented his works together as 'installation art' (according to the fashion at that time). The content and subject matter still dealt with the human condition, with the burden of struggle and agony. This body of work (Fig. 6 *I look at myself*) introduces the cycle of life : birth, old age, pain, death, life before birth, life after death. The main component of the picture is an image of himself, situated in a Christian context : Adam and Eve, the bite in the apple from the forbidden tree (the Tree of Wisdom), death on the crucifix, etc..

Parts of this work had been shown in public. When looking at this work someone may wonder: **why is it that Kamin, from his art thesis on, refers to Christianity in his art?** His answer to this is : *"I once was a pupil in a Christian school; I studied the bible; I prayed; I attended Christian ceremonies, until I felt a mental bond with God, but I am not interested in Christian formalities, nor in their ceremonies".*

The concept comes before the emotions.

Kamin would not easily forget his 3rd year of living in New York. It was a bad year for love, but a good year for his finances. He started to work as a printmaker for other artists. This job solved his financial problems. He also had the chance to continue his art education in an art institute there. His social contacts with the artistic scene in New York increased. Another important aspect that changed his life as an artist was the fact that he changed his concept on art.

I am sure that his residency in America has been an important factor in the change of concept. It seemed that Kamin had thrown away the kind of art that conveyed the energy of emotions, and he started to emphasize on conceptual-based art works, inspired by his readings and his rationality. In this kind of art, **the concept comes before the emotions.** Kamin still held on to his everlasting characteristic, namely 'directness', but this time his directness was sarcastic and jeering, dealing with the arts and other topics he feels involved with.

The prints of Albert Einstein sticking out his tongue, and of the Pope, with the word 'art' printed upside-down over the images, are full of humor (Fig.7 *Art No. 1* and Fig.8 *Art No. 2*). Kamin sees it as problematic that there is still a large gap between the people who deal with art and those who don't understand art (a print of a monkey that holds books on science and religion is another example). Representations of the past, present or future are compared conceptually, in order to state some questions concerning human cultures from different points of view. These works are realistic in style, using skilled etching techniques, which he had by then mastered.

Another important question that arises when I consider Kamin's stay in New York - why Kamin started to read so much when he was over there? He started serious reading on Eastern philosophy, Tao Philosophy, Zen-Buddhism, etc.. Inspired by the Yin-Yang concept of Tao Philosophy, Kamin made a series of drawings (Fig.8 *Untitled*). Drawing is a kind of 'therapy' for Kamin, which he does when he feels himself becoming too extravagant. The main components of the picture are abstract, divided into two parts; for example, a white form with a black form, a natural form with an imitated form. This work is further developed in the works '*Niras Thailand*', of which will be discussed.

I still cannot guess what change in Kamin's perception of the New York art world made him decide to leave it behind, and return to Thailand, at the end of 1990, extremely disappointed. He bravely announced he had quit "Being an Artist". From my personal point of view, I dare say that his personality at that time was kind of abnormal: very self-confident, direct speech, dictatorial in discussions and etc.. People thought him crazy. At last, Kamin decided to enter the Buddhist monkhood for a short while.

Looking back at his past, Kamin said: "I was very confused at that time about several things, and very disappointed in the so called 'high art-world'. I used to believe that art is beneficial for the human spirit, but it seemed more and more clear to me that art was becoming more and more materialistic, adding to the desires and lusts of the people, becoming big business, playing games, competition, power, etc.."

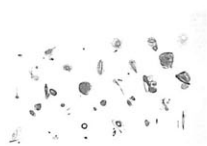


Fig. 9 "Untitled"
drawing, charcoal on paper
9 x 10 inch, each 1990



Fig. 10 "Thai Painting"
acrylic on canvas
18 x 18 inch, each
44 pieces 1990-1991



Fig. 11 "Thai Painting 9"
acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inch, 1991



Fig. 12 "Thai Print, 1991"
hand print, 44 pieces
11 x 44 inch, each 1991



Fig. 13 Detail of "Thai Poem 1991"
acrylic and charcoal on paper
22 x 22 inch, 40 pieces, 1991

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Fortunately, his "boredom of art" didn't last long. Kamin was selected to participate in a group exhibition "*Enneagram-Nine into 9*", together with a number of leading contemporary Thai artists, at the Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok. An attempt was made to establish a group of artists, to join in co-operative art-activities. This attempt, however, failed eventually. At that time there were intense discussions on topics such as whether specific features, characteristic for a specific culture, can be found in contemporary art; and how can art become an instrument to search for those specific cultural features; how can "being Thai" be reflected in "Thai" art?

Now that Kamin had resumed his artistic energy again in Thailand, he decided to return to New York at the beginning of 1991. The main questions he had on his mind were: *How is "being Thai" reflected in art? What makes Thai culture "Thai"? Living in another country, I realized that the main cultural value, which is within ourselves all the time, is "Thai Language".*

This second time in New York was more pleasant for Kamin. He dedicated all his energy to the creation of the work called "*Gaw Ery Gaw Gai*". This project was divided into 5 series, created simultaneously. The art project "*Gaw Ery Gaw Gai*" can be considered a main version of a school-book for learning Thai alphabet. In the examples (Fig.10 *Thai Painting* 1990-1991 and Fig.11 *Thai Painting*), he used masking tape to mask out the letter 'n' and used his fingers to smear colour on it, letting his imagination run free as he concentrated on what this particular letter evoked him. This image abstractly refers to the rhythm of a cock fight. When he

felt satisfied with smearing colours around his palms and fingers, he used his fingers, still soiled with colour to make his hand print on paper prepared in advance with masking tape, masking out a Thai letter. We see an example of this in (Fig.12 *Thai Print, 1991*). Furthermore he used his hand, still soaked with paint, to write a letter on white paper, which resulted in the series "*Thai Poem*". He used his imagination to call up associations with this particular letter, which often resulted in words or short sentences. There are no limitations (Fig.13), and often he has played with words with a double meaning.