

VIPOO  
SRIVILASA  
Everyday  
Shrines



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## Foreword

Craft Victoria  
is delighted to partner with  
Gippsland Regional Gallery to present  
Vipoo Srivilasa's solo exhibition *Everyday  
Shrines*. This is the first exhibition in the Craft Forward  
series that presents solo exhibitions by influential Victorian  
makers at Victorian regional centers, supported by Creative  
Victoria. Craft Victoria's core purpose is to champion making and  
ideas driven practice through exhibitions, public programs, events and  
retail opportunities. Craft's initiation of Craft Forward marks a dedication  
to bringing craft to regional Victoria through exhibitions and public programs.

The Craft Forward series highlights four established and influential makers  
within their field by pairing with a regional gallery and each presenting a major  
solo exhibition. Craft Victoria has a longstanding relationship with Vipoo Srivilasa  
through in-house solo and group exhibitions and public programs, and is delighted  
to once more celebrate his renowned practice.

*Everyday Shrines* presents contemporary interpretations of the *Spirit House*. Found  
outside almost every house in South East Asia, these doll-sized houses sit upon  
pedestals and are a shrine to the protective guardian of the land. Passersby make  
offerings to the miniature palace; an ancient animistic practice passed down  
through generations. Vipoo comments, 'I created *Everyday Shrines* as a sanctuary  
for you to contemplate and question on your achievements or failure in life. If you  
are not satisfied with your answer, here in front of many deities, you can offer  
one of your small belongings to a deity of your choice'.

Craft Victoria commends and extends appreciation to Vipoo Srivilasa  
for his dedication to this project, for his engaging and meditative art;  
to Simon Gregg for his immediate and constant enthusiasm to the  
project; to Scott Livesey of Scott Livesey Galleries for his support;  
to Creative Victoria for seeing the validity and excitement  
in such an ambitious project.

**Olivia Poloni**

Former Craft Victoria Curator, Currently Project  
Manager at Asialink Arts,  
Global Project Space

“Common throughout Thailand, spirit houses can be found outside almost every house and building. The doll house-sized homes are set atop a pedestal and placed in an auspicious location, which allows residents, workers and others to offer small gifts to appease spirits or deities, represented by doll-sized human figures.

If you’ve spent some time near one, you’ll also have seen locals giving them a deferential ‘wai’ before heading on their way, or delivering daily offerings at the doorways of these elaborate constructions - gifts of food, incense, flowers, figurines, colour fabric and candles.” - BangkokFans.com

I created *Everyday Shrines* as a sanctuary for you to contemplate and question on your achievement or failure in life. If you are not satisfied with your answer, here in front of many powerful deities, you can offer one of your small belongings to a deity of your choice who, in turn could grant you the satisfaction that you are after, love, happiness, good fortune, success, luck or even fertility.

Vipoo Srivilasa



No Quarrel Deity, 2018, 70 x 31 x 23 cm  
Ceramic, bronze glaze, mix media and wooden base



Land of Success (detail), 2017, 79 x 25 x 25 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, ceramic, white glaze and gold lustre

## Vipoo Srivilasa Everyday Shrines

by **Mariam Arcilla**

Sumptuous, offbeat, mischievous, gelastic. Vipoo Srivilasa's porcelain empires tackle the cross-cultural experiences of being a Thai-born, Melbourne based artist. Translating talismans, monsters, drag queens, native animalia, and opulent icons into intricately-decorated sculptures, he casts an intimate lens on the grand topics of spirituality, tradition, and consumerism. Srivilasa's trophy-sized figurines - of humanistic, beastly, and otherworldly morphings - are often assembled into groups as they gesture for audiences to lean in and encounter the visual and thematic iconographies riddled into these elegant monuments.

Informed by his Eastern-Western lived experiences, Srivilasa's works adds a contemporary and light-hearted slant to native traditions and rituals. Over the past fifteen years, he has used ceramics to broach stories and ask questions that reflect the cultural narrative of his motherland and adoptive country. He's explored a voluminous range of topics, from get-rich-quick schemes in *How to Make a Million Before Dinner* (2013), to religious and folkloric tributes in *Deity* (2016), to the currency of positivity in *Happy Together* (2017). For the socio-ecological *Indigo Kingdoms* (2009), Srivilasa turned mermaids into exuberant stand-ins to address the coral reef

crisis of Australia and Thailand. Srivilasa finds solace in the mermaid, his alter-ego, which stems from a mythical story passed down to him by his grandmother, of a crucial battle between the human world and the giant world. Legend has it, the mermaid was a daughter of the giants who married a soldier and led her life between two distinct cultures, just like Srivilasa.

In the new series *Everyday Shrines* (2018), the artist probes the question: what if Australians believed in Thai superstitions, and if so, what would this hybridised belief system look like? He responds with a motley crew of enshrined, folkloric heroes. Based on the proverb “those who don’t ask, don’t get,” Srivilasa’s figurines *Beckoning Lady (nang kwak) I and II* (2018) are a present-day nod to one of the most visible talismans in Thailand, the *nang kwak* (beckoning lady). As the goddess of wealth, this female deity is often placed in public view, on the counters of restaurants, stalls, and trade shops. Dressed in traditional garments, with a crowned head and a bulging money bag on her lap, the *nang kwak* raises her hand in a curved, purred wave to ‘beckon’ new customers, extra business, and more prosperity.

*Beckoning Kangaroo* (2018) sees Srivilasa unravel an Australian version through a dollar-signed kangaroo with a joey in pouch - both with outwardly-gestured paws. I’m immediately drawn to the emblematic positioning of its porcelain feet; they bring to mind the Aussie folklore of a kangaroo’s hind feet symbolising balance and progress. After all, the marsupial can only skip forwards, not backwards, while its clownishly



*Beckoning Kangaroo*, 2018, 40 x 16 x 16 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold luster

strong legs serve to equalise the brunt of its oddly-shaped proportion. Similarly, the *Yin and Yang Serpents* (2018), which also presents two beckoning hands, are “a double force that calls for good luck,” Srivilasa says, adding that the duelling serpents also bear a kangaroo head as a playful envisioning of a mythical Aussie serpent. Harking back to his fabled and binary motifs, Srivilasa reveals that serpents connect Heaven to Earth, giving them special powers to spray holy water for good luck. “The work shows a dark and light serpent entwined together to represent the Yin Yang symbol, which gives peace and balanced energy to the business owner,” says Srivilasa. “Flowers bloom all over the figurines as a result of the holy water - it’s a great symbol for ‘blooming business!’”

In *Household Spirit* (2018), Srivilasa pays homage to the traditional *saan phra phum* (spirit houses) positioned in many Thai homes, schools, shopping centres, and offices. Made from ceramic, wood, plaster and gold lustre, spirit houses are doll-sized miniature domiciles that act as spiritual insurance policies; they bestow upon their new inhabitants happiness, prosperity, and good health.

“The spirit of the first owner of a house, whose strong bond with the house means it will look after the land, as well as the people currently living in it,” says Srivilasa. “Nowadays, properties and houses change hands so frequently, you hardly know who is your household spirit, and they hardly know who you are. The ritual of paying respect to the spirit is now more for protection and an offering of peace, so the spirit does not get upset and bring bad luck.



*Yin and Yang Serpents* (detail), 2018, 60 x 21 x 21 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, gold lustre and wooden base



It's a way to make two strangers live together in harmony." In Srivilasa's version, we see a modern household spirit "who is sitting on a mythical creature, ready to dart around to save me from trouble in a heartbeat!"

Thailand is currently witnessing a cultural overhaul due to Western commercialisation and urbanisation, and as a result, new buildings leave no spare ground for the erection of spirit houses. It's this socio-gentrification that fuels Srivilasa to repurpose this ritual in the hopes of reviving local customs. Srivilasa's colleague, fellow Thai artist Kitikong Tilokwattanotai, echoed this feeling to me: "We're seeing modern homes being built with no space allowed for spirit houses. Some traditions are fading away because of the influx of modern trends and a new, younger generation of home-owners. What Vipoo is doing is important, because it reminds us to keep our traditions alive."

Born in Bangkok in 1969, a teenage Srivilasa originally wanted to become a traditional Thai dancer, having been mesmerised by the exquisite art form and its fluid, mesmerising hand gestures. His mother took him to enrol in dance school, "but when we arrived, the reception area was empty," he recalled. After a long wait, the pair gave up and walked out. "That's when I saw, across the road, a building that said Fine Arts." Their reception area was manned, with staff attentively providing information. "I took this as a sign," he says, "I applied to learn art instead." Taking up ceramics, Srivilasa completed a degree at Rangsit University in Bangkok, before decamping to Australia in 1997 to upskill his practice with a Masters of Fine Art and



Design in Tasmania. He then moved to Melbourne, where he's been living and working ever since. "From time to time, I wonder what it would be like if my path was not of a ceramic artist, but that of a Thai traditional dancer, but I don't let myself think about it too long," asserts the 48-year old artist, "I'm happy with what my life has to offer now." You could say that as a ceramicist, Srivilasa's hands employ a similar fluidity: they dance, but instead of gesturing through air they slam into clay, shaping it into elegance through the handmade process of "pinching, pressing, rolling, slapping."

*Everyday Shrines* extends Srivilasa's desire for tradition to form the structure and foundation of our shared identity - regardless of cultural shifts and new trends. "Traditions shape who we are today and who we are likely to become," he believes. "Keeping the deities tradition alive provides a sense of comfort, and sometime a sense of belonging and security. It could bring people together in an unexpected way and create community. It also provides a way to find peace and hope when you get lost in this fast and modern world."

Mariam Arcilla is a Sydney based writer, curator, and marketer.



*Flower Power* (detail), 2018, 65 x 23 x 23 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold lustre

Beckoning Lady I (detail), 2018, 63 x 25 x 25 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold lustre



Beckoning Lady II, 2018, 68 x 17 x 17 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold lustre

Protector and Peace (detail), 2018, 42 x 15 x 15 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold lustre



Yin and Yang Serpents, 2018 (back view) 60 x 21 x 21 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, gold lustre and wooden base

Tree Nymph, 2018, 33 x 12 x 12 cm  
Porcelain, cobalt oxide, and gold lustre



Front and back cover: *Peace Together* (detail), 2017, 75 x 23 x 23 cm, Porcelain, cobalt oxide, ceramic, white glaze and gold lustre  
Page 1: *The Next Super Hero*, 2018, 24 x 14 x 14 cm, Porcelain, cobalt oxide, gold lustre and wooden stand  
Photography: Andrew Barcham / Design: Dianna Wells Design

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