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## Friendship

By **Dusadee Rukmanee**

The experiences gained from being a part of the Clay Alchemy project are some of my most precious ones in all my life. I received so many good feelings and happiness from this Project, opening my knowledge to new ideas, which is one of the most important issues of any artists.

When I first arrived in Melbourne, I absorbed the first feeling of being in another country, and that is the cold that kept seeping through my jacket and hat, which I could never use at home. Most of the people I saw were foreigners. What really held my most interest were the public sculptures, along the street sides, beside buildings, actually everywhere around the city. All the sculptures are good quality works. This means that Australia truly understand the importance of arts and is willing to support arts and artists financially. From visiting several art galleries, I noticed the varieties of art works, the broadening of minds and the acceptance of all work methods. Galleries here do not base their operation purely on the objective of making profits. I reached this conclusion because I have noticed several pieces of work shown that are difficult to be sold. Some city like Shepparton though rather small but operates a large art gallery, holding precious and high quality art works, and supports arts activities for every age group. This confirms my belief that the mind of the people in this country is greatly developed. They understand the beauty of exquisite art and thus ensures the serenity and calm in their lives.

I am very interested in observing the Australian artists ways of thinking, their inspiration and working method. I was lucky to be in Melbourne during the Melbourne International Art Festival, when art works are installed and shown all over the city, in galleries, small lanes between buildings or inside train stations. It gave me a lot of opportunities to observe and learn. One of the artists kept a water bug in a clear plastic box, and put small coloured stones, and gold flecks with it. Then the artist took pictures of how the bug built its nest, using those stones, and made a slide show. The plastic box with the bug and its nest was also shown next to the projector. To me, this is really incredulous how a person can make an animal to create such a beautiful work of art. Another artist painted a stray white dog with colours, until it resembled a soccer ball. This makes an uninteresting dog into a appealing one, which brings smiles and chuckles to all. Several pieces of art work demonstrated that an artist does not really have to create the work, or work very hard on it, but the perception, the conceptualization are much more important.

I have always hoped that one day I would have an opportunity to see and maybe touch Australian native animals because Australian animals

is very famous in their uniqueness. Visiting a Koala Sanctuary was one of the highlights in this trip. Here I had my long wished for chance to be closed to the sleepy and cuddly koala bears and to hand feed kangaroos. The feeling of closeness and delight when the kangaroo placed its paws on my hands and ate from my hand is a totally brand new and one of the happiest experiences in this trip. There is another animal which I had never heard of before, but turned out to be the one I love best, is the wombat. It looks a bit like a rat, as big as a small pig with no tail and is sort of chubby and really likes to sleep. My heart goes all the way out to them on my first sight. At the Phillip Island where we went to watch penguins coming up the beach at night, after feeding all day in the sea. The most exciting time was when the first group of penguins marched from the sea to the beach, with their distinctive walking style. Having our fill of watching the penguins coming up the beach, we moved on to watch them sleeping or resting under the bushes. These penguins are so used to human beings; they just continue to do what they are supposed to do, regardless of prying human eyes. I greatly appreciate the conservatory works done on the Philip Island, by providing, maintaining and keeping the area safe for animal habitation. I do believe that human and animals have equal rights to live in this world.

Another responsibility of the Thai artists was to a give talk and demonstration at universities and other places for people who are interested in ceramics. By doing so, we publicize both our work and our ways of thinking to others. I think that this activity was very successful, because many people voluntary attended and some took part in the demonstration, by spontaneously working side by side with the Thai artists. Working together, sharing ideas and methods of working is a great opportunity to learn about each other and create a great friendship. After the talk and demonstration, we usually visited the studios, lecture rooms and observed how the Ceramics Department are run. In this way, we can bring what we learn to our students in Thailand. Visiting artist homes is also very beneficial because we then had the first hand opportunity to perceive the Australian artists way of living and their working method. Even though our lives may differ, but we can see the same professionalism through the tools used, traces of works done and lastly the artist personality. I think I can easily adapt myself to the Australian artist ways of living and working method, since we are all the same person in a way, a ceramics artist.

A total of 12 artists are in the Clay Alchemy Project which started in the middle of September, when the Australian artists visited Thailand for 14 days, and ended by the Thai artists visiting Australia for 10 days in October. During the time in Thailand, we first got to know each other through Vipoo Srivilasa's warm and entertaining meeting, such as pairing us off for questions and answers to

find out about each other interests, and then presented the answers to the group; or tearing up strips of paper and then jointly combining the strips into something else. From this lovely start, we came to know and appreciate each other more and more through travelling together in the tour bus and through taking parts in the demonstration, chatting and even eating together as well. Every morning, I woke up very early, so I would be on time to travel with the Australian artists and build up friendship that I hope will last forever. At the end of their visit to Thailand, I already felt like we had been friends for at least 10 years.

When the time came for the Thai artists to visit Australia, I can still recall the happiness in my heart, when the Australian artists came to see us at the Victoria Hotel. I felt like I would never have enough of being with them, talking, laughing and enjoying each other friendship. I think all of us felt the same way. Then it is our turn to hold talk and demonstration, where the Australian travelled with us and pitched into the demonstration as well. Staying overnight at the Lighthouse Cottage where we cooked and talked was another of my highlights.

One of the Clay Alchemy Project objectives is for the artists to be friends with each other, get well acquainted to the extent that we can work well together. I think we achieve more than that, because our relationship is much, much deeper. At Hampton Yacht Club farewell dinner, which was the formal closing of the Pproject, all our eyes were misted and on the way back to the Hotel, the bus was very quiet as we all feel the tender tugging at our hearts. I believe that the friendship and relationship gained from this project is extremely valuable and can only be kept through honesty and sincerity.

All of these occur through Vipoo Srivilasa's inspiration, initiation and hard work. As a born Thai living in Australia, Vipoo wants to create an atmosphere that develops cooperation, collaboration, and assistance between artists of the two nations. Sharing and absorbing the differences between the two cultures will also influence each other's lives and thinking in the future. I also believe that we have obtained higher goal than expected. I know, in my heart, that a great number of good things will come out of this Project in the future. I also would like to express my appreciation for the assistance given by the Australia – Thailand Institute and the Thai International Airline, who truly understand the impact of the development of arts and artistic minds. Lastly I would like to express my happiness, how I felt honoured and impressed to be a part of the Clay Alchemy Project. I will keep this memory fresh in my hearts all through my life. Again, I thank you all from my heart.

For more detail of the project visit [www.clayalchemy.net](http://www.clayalchemy.net)

1. Flags at Simon house 2. My favourite public art 3. One of Vipoo Collaboration game-paper creation