

Special Note : Professor Silpa Bhirasri's Life and Works

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Professor Silpa Bhirasri was born a true artist and had been a beloved teacher all his life. He is the soul-lighter of the Thai artists. He exhibited the world of modern art to enthusiastic Thai minds. Professor Silpa Bhirasri is universally respected as the spirit leader of Thai modern art.

Young Corrado Feroci

Professor Silpa Bhirasri was born Corrado Feroci to a merchant family in Florence, Italy, on the 15th of September, 1892. His parents, Arturo and Santina Feroci would have liked him to follow the family career after his completion of secondary school, but young Corrado, deeply in love with art, encouraged by an old famous artist entered the Royal Art Academy of Florence at the age of sixteen and graduated from there seven years later.

After his graduation, Corrado set his heart on sculpture and won many competitions for monument design organized by the Italian government. In 1915, young Corrado who was well-versed in the knowledge of art beautifully passed a professorship examination at the age of only twenty-three. In 1923, he was selected by the Italian government, by the request of King Rama VI, to be engaged as a sculptor in Thailand.

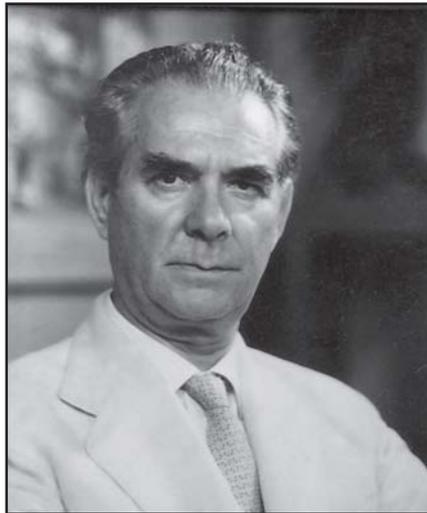
Royal Sculptor of Siam

Professor Silpa Bhirasri worked in the Fine Arts Department from 1923 to 1962. During this period he sculpted many significant monuments of the country. Some of these are three royal monuments in Bangkok : the monuments of King Rama I the Great (1929-1932) : King Rama VI (1941) ; King Tak Sin the Great (1950-1951), King Naresuan the Great in Suphan Buri Province (1956), and Dame Suranari in Nakhon Ratchasima Province (1934). Moreover,

many distinguished monuments and statues were sketched by him, such as, the Monument of Democracy (1938-1940), the Monument of Victory, the Monument of H.R.H. Prince Mahidol at Siriraj Hospital, the statues of King Rama VI, King Rama VII, His Majesty King Anandamahidol, H.R.H. Prince Naritsaranuwattiwongsa, and H.R.H. Prince Damrongrajanubhava. Professor Silpa Bhirasri is the foremost sculptor of the nation. In appreciation of Professor Silpa Bhirasri's contributions to Thailand, the royal government conferred on him the Most Notable Order of the Crown of Thailand and the Dusdi Mala Medal.

Beloved Teacher

Professor Silpa Bhirasri commenced his teaching life after he had stayed in Thailand for three years. He firstly programmed a general training course on sculpture to be taught free to the interested. Most of his pioneer students were from Poh Chang School. Some of them afterwards joined him as assistant sculptors in the Fine Arts Department. Later on the government, impressed by the outcome of the course asked him to start the bachelor programme on painting and sculpture. In 1932, the School of Arts (Rongrian Silpakorn) was established, having Professor Silpa as the director. His first class were seven in number. Among them were well-known artists such as



☞ Professor Silpa Bhirasri

Phimarn Pramoonmuk, Fua Haripitak, and Sitthidet Saenghiran. In 1942 the school was changed to the school of Fine Art (Rongrian Praneet Silpakam). In 1943 the school was upgraded to be a university entitled Silpakorn University comprised of two faculties, i.e. painting and sculpture. Professor Silpa was appointed dean of both faculties, and later also of the Faculty of Decorative Arts.

He was a most sacrificial teacher. He devoted all his time and energy to transferring his knowledge to his students. He composed many text books on art such as. Theory of Colour (1943), Theory of Composition (1944), An Aid to Arts and English-Siamese Glossary (1942-1944). Professor Silpa is the best model of the ever learning teacher. He had successively done research on art, and wrote many articles and books on all aspects of art, both Thai and western, to educate his students.

Professor Silpa held the posts of teacher and sculptor till 1962. Through these long years, he was loved and greatly admired by all his students. They unanimously affirm that he is the sincerest teacher, the greatest supporter, and the kindest father. To express their deep love and great gratitude for him, two years after his death, they asked Sanan Silakorn, one of his favorite students, to sculpt his statue which was later erected in the compound in front of the Faculty of Painting, his first faculty.

Spirit–Leader of Thai Modern Art

Professor Silpa Bhirasri, aiming at urging his students to show their talent, persuaded the Fine Arts Department to organize a modern art exhibition. The first National Art Exhibition was thus held in 1949. This exhibition has been the best venue for Thai artists, and some of them whose creative power shines forth are crowned with the title “national distinguished artist.” The National Art Exhibition has successively been organized by Silpakorn University from then until now.

He intensively used his pen in educating the Thai people in the appreciation of modern art. Some of his notable articles are : Art (1956) ; Is Art Necessary? (1959) : Culture and Art (1953) ; Contemporary Art in Thailand (1959) ; Extremities (1960); Nude-Art or Obscenity (1961). To day when we talk of Thai modern art, we regard Professor Silpa Bhirasri as the primary pillar.

All for Thai Art and Culture

Professor Silpa Bhirasri was so enchanted by Thai art and culture that he wrote a remarkable number of research works on Thai art. Some of these are Thai Painting (1952) ; Thai Buddhist

Sculpture (1953) ; Thai Patrimony of Old Art (1957) ; A New Discovery of Thai Painting. (1958) ; The Origin and Evolution of Thai Murals (1959) ; An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art (1962).

He fell in love with the simple and easy-going way of Thai life. He was also impressed by the natural beauty of the country. This made him make Thailand his home for thirty-nine years. In 1944 he had his name changed from Corrado Feroci to Silpa Bhirasri to accord with the change of nationality, from Italian to Thai.

He married Paola Angelini, and later had two children Isabella and Romano, with Fanni Viviani. In 1949 after his fourth vacation in Italy, he separated from his wife with good will on both sides. In 1959 he remarried Malini and had a blissful life with her until the end of his life in 1962.

Professor Silpa's last letter to his wife Malini reveals the modest heart of the noble artist.

Bankok
8th May 1962

My dear Malini,

In case of my death, I wish to be cremated, but without any religious ceremony. I thank you with my soul for the many years of your affection which has verified the last part of my life.

My best thought is to wish you a serene happiness reminding you always our long discussions about the complex difficulties of our life, particularly with regard to women.

Please write to Romano and ask him to inform also Isabella & Dino of my passing away without regrets because I feel to have spent my life for something useful as a very modest servant of my art. Send them my love and my wishes for their prosperity and happiness.

If the spirits have power to protect and bless the living ones I will do for you and this is my last hope.

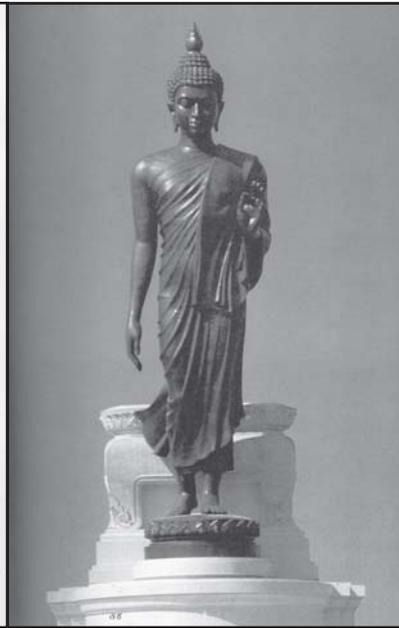
Silpa Bhirasri
(Corrado Feroci)



☞ His Majesty the King and Her Royal Highness the Queen Mother visited the 13th Art Exhibition at Silpakorn University in 1962.



The Statue of King Rama VI at Lumpini Park



The Walking Buddha at Phuttha Monthon, Nakhon Pathom



The Democracy Monument

Professor Silpa Bhirasri

Biography

- 1892 - Born on September 15, at San Giovanni, Florence, Italy.
- 1898 - 1902 - Attended primary school.
- 1903 - 1907 - Attended secondary school.
- 1908 - 1915 - Attended the Royal Academy of Art in Florence.
 - Received a certificate of painting and sculpture.
 - Entered the sculpture exhibition.
 - Earned the title of Professor of Fine Arts (1st class honours).
- 1923 - Came to Thailand and hired as a sculptor at the Department of Fine Arts, under a three-year contract with a salary of 800 baht a month.
- 1926 - Served under an unlimited contract as a teacher of sculpture at the Art Department of the Royal Institute with a salary of 900 baht.
- 1928 - Inspected the damage of Phra Buddha Trai Rattananayok, Wat Phanan Choeng, Ayutthaya.
- 1929 - Modelled the statue of King Rama I the Great.
- 1930 - Returned to Italy for vacation and for the supervision of the moulding of the statute of King Rama I.
- 1932 - Conferred the most Exalted Order of the White Elephant, 5th Class on the occasion of the unveiling of the statute of King Rama I and the opening of Phra Buddha Yod Fah Bridge.
 - Cooperated with Phra Saroj Ratana Nimman, Head of the Architecture Department in establishing the School of Arts.
- 1934 - Modelled the statue of Dame Suranari, later erected at Nakorn Ratchasima Province.
- 1937 - Organized an art exhibition of students at the Constitution Fair.
- 1938-1940 - Modelled the Democracy Monument later erected at Rajdamnern Avenue.
- 1941 - Modelled the statue of King Rama VI later erected at Lumpini Park.
- 1942 - Modelled the Victory Monument later erected at Sanam Pao.
 - Promoted to special class government official

- 1943
 - Detained by Japanese army as a result of WW II.
 - Established Silpakorn University .
- 1944
 - Became Thai citizen and changed his name to Silpa Bhirasri.
- 1947
 - Returned to Italy (3rd time)
 - Organized the Exhibition of Thai Art at the Thai Embassy, London.
- 1949
 - Organized the First National Art Exhibition, February 11 – March 10.
 - Returned to Italy together with his family (4th time).
 - Received a new salary as an expert in fine arts.
- 1952
 - Professor Silpa Bhirasri's article on Thai Painting Published.
- 1953
 - Conferred the Dushadi Mala and Silpa Vidya medals.
 - Served as the President of the National Art Association under the International Art Association.
- 1954
 - Represented Thailand at the International Artist Convention at Venice.
 - Wrote an article on "The Features of the Horse of King Taksin the Great Monument.
- 1956
 - Modelled the Monument of King Naresuan the Great later erected at Don Chedi, Suphan Buri.
- 1957
 - Modelled the Walking Buddha to commemorate the 25th century of Buddhism.
- 1959
 - Attended a seminar on archaeology of the Sukhothai period.
 - Participated in the third International Artist Convention in Vienna.
- 1962
 - Conducted research on the Nontha Buri School of Mural Paintings.
 - Wrote his last article An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art.
 - Died of intestinal cancer on May 14.
- 1963
 - Cremated under the Royal sponsor on January 17 at Wat Thepsirintarawas.