

Kim Lim

Born 1936, Singapore.
Lived and worked in London.
Passed away in 1997 in London.

1936

Kim Lim is born Shirley Lim Cheng Kim in Singapore. Her parents, Lim Koon Teck and Betty Seow Guat Beng, are prominent members in Singapore society. Lim Koon Teck is a barrister in the Colonial Legal Service and Betty Seow is the great-granddaughter of merchant and philanthropist Tan Tock Seng.

1939

The Lim family moves to Penang for Koon Teck's work. They spend the ensuing Japanese occupation in Penang. Kim Lim is homeschooled by her parents so her education is not disrupted by the war.

1945

The Lim family returns to Singapore. Kim Lim takes up ballet, having ambitions of becoming a dancer. She later gives up dance to train as a visual artist.

1954

Kim Lim moves to London and begins her studies at St Martin's School of Art in London. She trains briefly under well-known sculptors Anthony Caro and Elisabeth Frink.

1956

Encouraged by Elisabeth Frink, Lim transfers to the Slade School of Fine Art, where she studies printmaking under Anthony Caro and Stanley Jones. She rents a disused chemistry lab in West Hampstead to use as her studio, where she makes her sculptures. She begins her world travels, visiting India and Greece.

1957

Lim meets William Turnbull.

1960

Lim and Turnbull marry.

1961

Lim exhibits for the first time. Her works *Caryatid* (1961) and *Samurai* (1961) are shown in *26 Young Sculptors* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

1962

Lim gives birth to her first son, Alex. She visits Cambodia and Japan with Turnbull.

1963

Lim gives birth to her second son, Johnny. She travels with her young family to Singapore and Malaysia to visit her parents.

1966

Lim holds her first solo show in London at Axiom Gallery. Lim's *Day* (1966) is proposed to be installed at the podium roof of the Malaysia-Singapore Airlines building. A second version of the work is shown at *Sculpture in the Open Air* in Battersea Park, London.

1967

Lim's sculpture *R.R.* (1965) is exhibited at the 4th Nagaoka Contemporary Art Award Exhibition for promising young artists. One of her sculptures is chosen for display at the British Pavilion during Expo 67 in Montreal, Canada.

1974

Lim has her first solo show in Singapore at the artist-run Alpha Gallery.

1975

Tate Gallery acquires Lim's sculpture *Intervals I+II* (1973). Lim's prints are displayed at Modern Art Oxford, curated by Sir Nicholas Serota.

1976

Lim is chosen to be a part of the inaugural exhibition of the newly opened National Museum Art Gallery in Singapore, where *Day* (1966) and *Pegasus* (1962) are shown.

1977

Lim is included in the first Hayward Annual exhibition in London, as the only female and non-white artist. She has a solo exhibition at Tate Gallery, London.

1978

Lim is part of the first all-female selection committee for the second Hayward Annual alongside Tess Jaray, Liliane Lijn, Gillian Wise, and Rita Donagh.

1979

The Roundhouse Gallery in London presents Lim's first major retrospective exhibition. Lim begins to make sculpture exclusively in stone after this exhibition.

1983

Lim's *Spiral III* (1983) is commissioned for the Bishop's House in Perth, Australia.

1984

Kim Lim and William Turnbull show works at the National Museum Art Gallery in Singapore together.

1985

Lim travels to China with Turnbull.

1987

Lim and Turnbull travel to Egypt.

1988

Lim declines an invitation from Rasheed Araeen to join his 1989 exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* at the Hayward Gallery, London, as she did not want to be perceived as 'other'.

1990

Lim undergoes a major operation on her spine, resulting in a partial loss of feeling in her hands. She continues to make sculptures with the help of assistants.

1995

Lim holds her last solo exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield.

1997

Lim passes away in London at the age of 61.

Solo Exhibitions

1966

Kim Lim, Axiom Gallery, London.

1966

Kim Lim, Axiom Gallery, London.

1973

Kim Lim: Prints, Waddington Galleries, London.

1974

Kim Lim, Alpha Gallery, Singapore.

1975

Kim Lim: Prints, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.

Kim Lim, Felicity Samuel Gallery, London.

1977

Kim Lim: Graphics, Tate Gallery, London.

1979

Kim Lim: Sculpture, Drawing, Prints, The Roundhouse, London.

1982

Kim Lim, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1984

Kim Lim: Prints and Drawings, 1972-1980, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1985

Kim Lim, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1990

Kim Lim, Waddington Galleries, London.

1993

Kim Lim: Prints, Flowers Gallery, London.

Kim Lim: Stone Sculpture, The Orangery, Roche Court New Art Centre, Salisbury.

1995

Kim Lim: Sculpture and Works on Paper, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield.

1999

Kim Lim, Camden Arts Centre, London.

Kim Lim: A Tribute Exhibition, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

2014

Kim Lim: Carvings, New Arts Centre, Roche Court, Salisbury.

2017

Kim Lim, S|2 Gallery, London.

2018

Kim Lim: Sculpting Light, STPI Gallery, Singapore.

Kim Lim, S|2 Gallery, London.

2023

Kim Lim: Space, Rhythm & Light, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield, UK.

2024

Kim Lim: The Space Between. A Retrospective, Singapore National Gallery, Singapore.

2025

Kim Lim: Water Rests, Stone Speaks, UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, China.

Group Exhibitions

1961

26 Young Sculptors, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.
Deuxieme Biennale de Paris [2nd Paris Biennial], Paris.

1962

Sculpture Today and Tomorrow, Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford.
3rd International Biennale of Prints, Tokyo.

1966

Sculpture in the Open Air, Battersea Park, London.
Chromatic Sculpture, Arts Council Gallery, Cambridge.

25 Camden Artists, Camden Central Library.

1967

Expo 67, British Pavilion, Montreal.

Transatlantic Graphics, Camden Arts Centre, London.

Leicestershire Collection, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

Nagaoka Prize Exhibition, Nagaoka Museum, Japan.

Sculpture 1960-67 from the Arts Council Collection, various locations (UK), touring 1967-1970.

1968

Sculpture in a City, Arts Council touring exhibition, various locations (UK).

Summer Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.

Prospect '68, Dusseldorf.

Mostra Mercato d'Arte Contemporanea [Contemporary Art Talent Show], Florence.

1969

Open Air Sculpture, Middelheim, Antwerp.

Recent British Prints: 15 Artists, IBM Gallery, New York.

1970

British Sculpture out of the Sixties, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

3ème Salon Internationale de Galeries Pilotes, Musée Cantal des Beaux Arts, Lausanne, and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

1974

Rottweil Festival, Rottweil, Germany.

1975

11th Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.

1976

Inaugural Exhibition, National Museum of Art, Singapore.

1977

Hayward Annual, Hayward Gallery, London.

1978

The Mechanised Image, Arts Council of Great Britain, UK.

Grafica 78 Internazionale, Museo Nazionale Messina, Italy.

1979

International Biennale of Prints, Tokyo.

6th British International Print Biennale, Bradford.

1st Biennial of European Graphic Arts, Heidelberg, Germany.

The First Exhibition, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1980

Norwegian International Print Biennale, Fredikstad Library, Norway.

Sculpture, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1981

Southampton Museum and Art Gallery, Southampton.
Print Biennale, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.
Summer Exhibition, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.
Camden Artists, Camden Arts Centre, London
Sculpture for the Blind, Tate Gallery, London.

1982

Women's Art Show 1550-1950, Nottingham Castle Museum, Nottingham.
British Sculpture 1951-1980, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London,

1983

Arcade Gallery, Harrogate.

1984

Group Show, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.
Contemporary Carving, Plymouth Arts Centre and various locations (UK),
touring 1984-85.
Kim Lim and William Turnbull, National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore.

1985

Beyond Appearance, Castle Museum, Nottingham and various locations (UK).

1986

Bradford Print Biennale, Bradford.

1987

Premio Internazionale Biella Per L'Incisione 1987, Turin.
Black & White, Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London.

1988

Stoneworks, Powys Castle, Welshpool, Wales.
Sculpture, Waddington Galleries, London.
Abstract Art from Sheffield's Collections, Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield.

1989

The Cutting Edge, Manchester City Art Gallery.

1992

Sculpture, Waddington Galleries, London.
New Displays, Tate Gallery, London.
Light and Shadow, Wrexham Arts Centre, Wales.
Art Asia '92, New Art Centre stand, Hong Kong.

1994

Tresors Fair, Singapore.

1995

British Abstract Art Part 2: Sculpture, Flowers East, London.
Sculpture Garden at Roche Court, New Art Centre, Salisbury.
Journeys West, University Gallery and Firstsite at the Minories, Colchester,
and various locations (UK).

White Out, Curwen Gallery, London.
Ka Editions, The Eagle Gallery, London.
21st International Biennial of Graphic Art, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

1996

British Abstract Art Part 3: Works on Paper, Flowers East, London.

1997

Half the Sky: Chinese Women in London, Museum of London.

2015

Art Paris, Art Plural Gallery, Paris.

2017

Sculpture in the Close, Jesus College Cambridge, Cambridge.
Sculpture in the Sixties, Pangolin, London.

2018

Kaleidoscope: Colour and Sequence in 1960s British Art, Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition, various locations (UK).
Speech Acts, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.
Minimalism: Space. Light. Object, Singapore National Gallery, Singapore.
Structures of Meaning | Architectures of Perception, Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

2019

Objects of Wonder. British Sculpture from the Tate Collection 1950s-Present, Palais Populaire, Berlin.
Suddenly Turning Visible: Art and Architecture in Southeast Asia (1969-1989), Singapore National Gallery, Singapore.

2021

Breaking the Mould: Sculpture by Women since 1945, Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition, various locations (UK).
O Canto do Bode, Casa da Cultura da Comporta, Portugal.
Hockney to Himid: 60 Years of Printmaking, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK.

2022

Creating Abstraction, Pace Gallery, London.
Post-War Modern: New British Art from 1945-1965, Barbican Art Gallery, London.
A Century of the Artist's Studio: 1920-2020, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

2023

Soft and Weak like Water, 14th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, Korea.
Phantom Sculpture, Mead Gallery, Warwick Art Centre, Warwick, UK.
Small World, Taipei Biennial, Taipei, Taiwan.
If Not Now, When? Generations of Women in Sculpture in Britain, 1960-2022, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield.

2024

Beyond Form: Lines of Abstraction 1950-1970, Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK.
Daiga Grantina. Notes on Kim Lim, Kunstmuseum Appenzell, Appenzell, Switzerland.
We Will Go Right Up to the Sun: Female Pioneers of Geometric Abstraction, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Germany.

Public Collections

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London, UK.
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia.
Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport, UK.
British Council Collection, UK.
British Museum, London, UK.
Fukuyama City Museum, Hiroshima, Japan.
Government Art Collection, London, UK.
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE.
Ingram Collection, UK.
Jerwood Collection, UK.
Leicestershire Education Council, UK.
Middelheim Museum, Belgium.
M+ Museum, Hong Kong.
National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.
Nagaoka Museum of Modern Art, Japan.
Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK.
Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, USA.
National Galleries Scotland, UK.
Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton, UK.
Tate, UK.
Wakefield Council Permanent Art Collection (The Hepworth Wakefield), Wakefield, UK.

Selected Publications

Gene Baro, 'The Work of Kim Lim (Interview)', *Studio International* Vol. 176, No. 905 (November 1968): 186-189.
Hetty Einzig, 'Kim Lim', in *Kim Lim*, exhibition catalogue (London: Nicola Jacobs Gallery, 1982), p. 2.
Julia Farrer, 'Kim Lim's Prints', *Kim Lim*, exhibition catalogue (London: Camden Arts Centre, 1999), pp. 49-68.
Hammad Nasar, 'Resisting Resolution: Kim Lim's Playful Stillness', in *Kim Lim*, exhibition catalogue (London: S|2 Gallery, 2018).
Joleen Loh, 'Relocating Kim Lim: A Cosmopolitan Perspective', *Southeast of Now: New Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 2018): 33-62.
Joleen Loh, 'The Photographs of Kim Lim: A Visual Essay', *Art History* Vol. 44, No. 3 (June 2021): 532-553.
Hammad Nasar, 'Vectors of the New in Postwar Art in Britain', in Jane Alison (ed.), *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-65*, exhibition catalogue (London: Prestel Verlag & Barbican Art Gallery, 2022).

Abi Shapiro, 'Space, Rhythm and Light in Kim Lim's Work: An Introduction', in Abi Shapiro (ed.), *Kim Lim: Space, Rhythm and Light*, exhibition catalogue (London and Wakefield: Lund Humphries and the Hepworth Wakefield, 2023), pp. 11-49.

Bianca Chu, 'On Devotion: Some Questions on the Practice of an Estate', in Abi Shapiro (ed.), *Kim Lim: Space, Rhythm and Light*, exhibition catalogue (London and Wakefield: Lund Humphries and the Hepworth Wakefield, 2023), pp. 105-116.

Adele Tan, 'Retrieving Colour and Culture: Another View into Kim Lim', in Adele Tan and Joleen Loh (eds.), *Kim Lim: The Space Between. A Retrospective*, exhibition catalogue (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2024), pp. 15-26.

Stefanie Gschwend (ed.), *Notes on Kim Lim*, exhibition catalogue (Appenzell: Kunstmuseum Appenzell, 2025).

About

Kim Lim (1936–1997) was born in Singapore and moved to London in 1954 to pursue her artistic training, studying first at St. Martin's School of Fine Art and later at the Slade. There, she explored printmaking and sculpture with equal enthusiasm—two approaches that formed the basis of her work in the four decades that followed. She drew equally from European modernist artists she admired, including Brancusi and Giacometti, as from the natural, architectural, and artistic forms she encountered on her travels across Asia, North Africa, and Europe. A keen observer of nature and of natural forces, in her printmaking and sculptural work she would echo the sinuous curves of a vast desert plain, the waves of a silent sea breeze, and other experiential moments of life in her work.

Much of Lim's early work can be characterised by her engagement with materials such as wood and bronze. Works such as *Abacus I* and *Abacus II* (1959), two sister relief sculptures modelled after the ancient Chinese calculation tool, employ a poverty of material and reveal Lim's ability to transform fundamental shapes and concepts with an elegant gesture. Her series *Intervals*, which refers to both sculptural and paper works, employs negative space with equal detail as it does with ideas of density and volume. The year 1979 would prove to be a watershed moment for the artist, culminating in a mid-career survey show at The Roundhouse where Lim would exhibit works from every period in a non-linear and non-chronological method, partly in response to the venue itself, a circular gallery space. This was also the year that Lim moved toward an embracing of stone and marble mediums, materials that would remain present in her practice until her untimely passing in 1997. Lim's work remains an important signifier of the British art scene in the post-war period and indicates both the internationalism at that time, as well as the universality and longevity of her artistic concerns.