



Kim Lim

# 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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*, S12 Gallery, London.

**2018**

*Kim Lim: Sculpting Light*, STPI Gallery, Singapore.

*Kim Lim*, S12 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.

**2026**

*Kim Lim*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Hong Kong, China (Upcoming)

# Group Exhibitions

**1961**

*26 Young Sculptors*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.  
Deuxieme Biennale de Paris [2<sup>nd</sup> Paris Biennial], Paris.

**1962**

*Sculpture Today and Tomorrow*, Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford.  
3<sup>rd</sup> 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**

11<sup>th</sup> 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.  
6<sup>th</sup> British International Print Biennale, Bradford.  
1<sup>st</sup> 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, Ljubiana, 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.  
21<sup>st</sup> 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*, 14<sup>th</sup> 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: Sl2 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.