

# Teaching

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# Rirkrit Tiravanija

ARTIST

# Rirkrit TIRAVANIJA

(ree-krit tee-ra-va-nit)

## ฤกษ์ฤทธิ ตีระวนิช



Rirkrit Tiravanija

BORN

## 1961, Buenos Aires

LIVES &amp; WORKS

## New York; Berlin; Hong Kong; & Chiang Mai, Thailand

## THEMES

**Community  
Place**

**“It is not what you see that is important, but what takes place between people.”<sup>1</sup>**

## ART MEDIUM

**Installation  
Performance**

## ABOUT THE ARTIST AND WORK

The son of a Thai diplomat, Rirkrit Tiravanija was born in 1961 in Buenos Aires and raised in Thailand, Ethiopia, and Canada. He studied art in Canada and the United States. With studios around the world, he has continued the nomadic lifestyle he experienced growing up, living in New York City, Berlin, Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Rather than creating objects for static display, Tiravanija focuses on the interactions between people and their surroundings. During the 1990s, he began producing works that revolve around his own personal history, taking everyday experiences and restaging them. By presenting such experiences from alternative perspectives, he turns life itself into a work of art. For instance, he staged events where gallery- and museumgoers participated in cooking and eating pad thai, a traditional Thai dish. These works seek to facilitate interactions between viewers that, although simple and playful, can demonstrate how to form the necessary foundation for community-based political actions. In his practice, Tiravanija encourages people to become active contributors rather than passive consumers of culture. He also often blurs the boundary between public and private. Other works have involved inviting audiences to take tea with him in a replica of his home, serving curry to gallery visitors, and welcoming them to sit at a gigantic picnic table and take part in assembling a jigsaw puzzle.

*Untitled 2002 (he promised)* (2002) is a chrome and steel structure inspired by the modernist architect Rudolf M. Schindler’s Kings Road House in West Hollywood, which was completed in 1922. While Tiravanija’s installation shares the spatial fluidity of Schindler’s open-plan design, the reflective surfaces used to replace the wood and concrete of the original create what the artist has described as “a multifaceted image of reality,”<sup>2</sup> enlivening and multiplying the activities taking place in and around the work. When exhibited, it becomes an arena for a variety of programs, including DJ sessions, film screenings, panel discussions, and children’s workshops. *Untitled 2002 (he promised)* embodies the experiential nature of his art, which requires the active participation of the viewer in order to be fully realized. Tiravanija is a gracious host, inviting the public to enter into and engage with his work and others. He provides the parameters and acts as a catalyst but never dictates outcomes.

1 “Rirkrit Tiravanija: *Tomorrow Is the Question*,” press release, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, May 12, 2016, <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/rirkrit-tiravanija-tomorrow-is-the-question>.

2 “Rirkrit Tiravanija: *untitled 2002 (he promised)*,” Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, accessed June 30, 2019, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/13481>.





Rirkrit Tiravanija, *untitled 2002 (he promised)*, 2002. Chrome and stainless steel, approximately 2.9 × 12 × 6 m. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Purchased with funds contributed by the International Director's Council and Executive Committee Members, with additional funds contributed by American Express 2004.124

# View and Discuss

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→ Look at the installation *untitled 2002 (he promised)* (2002).

Describe this structure. How do you think it might be used? How might it feel to step inside and explore it?

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→ Many of Tiravanija's works focus on getting people who do not already know one another to participate together in everyday activities, such as sharing meals, working on puzzles, and playing ping pong.

What do you think about this way of creating art?

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→ Tiravanija created this structure as a place for many different activities to happen. It has been the site of Thai massages, yoga, Pilates, film programs, music, storytelling, face painting, making balloon animals, and concerts.<sup>3</sup>

Create a weeklong schedule of what you would most want to see happen in this space. First brainstorm the variety of programs that might take place then plan a seven-day calendar and determine the length of each program and who might participate.

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→ This work can be assembled inside or outside, in any environment.

Think about how it might function at different sites:

- In a school
- Outside, in the center of a busy city
- In a park

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Where would you like to see this structure? Why? How might the participants and activities vary according to where this structure is?

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<sup>3</sup> For more about what events happened when the work was installed at the Guggenheim in 2004, see <http://pastexhibitions.guggenheim.org/tiravanija/index.html>.

# Classroom Activities

## Artist's Inspiration

This work was inspired by the modernist architect Rudolf M. Schindler's iconic Kings Road House in West Hollywood, California. Completed in 1922 and acclaimed as a twentieth-century masterpiece, it was intended to be a communal, free-flowing home for two couples. The design includes open living spaces, a shared kitchen, four individual art studios, and "sleeping baskets" (open-air porches) instead of formal bedrooms.



Rudolf M. Schindler's Kings Road House, West Hollywood, California, 1921–22

Examine photographs of Kings Road House and compare it to Tiravanija's work. How are they similar? In what ways are they different?

## Relational Aesthetics

Gaining prominence during the 1990s and focusing on social interactions, relational art, or relational aesthetics, involves "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."<sup>4</sup> Tiravanija and likeminded artists can be more accurately viewed as catalysts, rather than central creators, of their works.<sup>5</sup>

How might you create a space to bring people together for positive social interactions? Brainstorm a list of everyday interactions and think about how they might be shared in a public and inclusive setting. Where, when, and how could these exchanges be encouraged? Create and facilitate a work of relational art then discuss the outcome. What worked? What didn't?

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, France: Le presses du réel, 2002), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> For more on relational art, see [https://web.archive.org/web/20080704044202/http://place.unm.edu/relational\\_art.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20080704044202/http://place.unm.edu/relational_art.html).

# Resources

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## Websites

- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Rirkrit Tiravanija, untitled 2002 (he promised)*. <https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/rirkrit-tiravanija-untitled-2002-he-promised>.

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## Videos

- *Brilliant Ideas*. Episode 77, “Rirkrit Tiravanija.” April 16, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2018-04-16/rirkrit-tiravanija-on-brilliant-ideas-video>.
- Stokes, Rebecca. “Rirkrit Tiravanija: Cooking Up an Art Experience,” *Inside/Out* (blog). Museum of Modern Art, February 3, 2012. [https://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2012/02/03/rirkrit-tiravanija-cooking-up-an-art-experience/](https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/02/03/rirkrit-tiravanija-cooking-up-an-art-experience/).

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## Articles

- Tiravanija, Rirkrit. Interview by Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey. *Brooklyn Rail*, February 1, 2004. <https://brooklynrail.org/2004/02/art/rirkrit-tiravanija>.
- Tiravanija, Rirkrit. “Rirkrit Tiravanija and the Politics of Cooking.” Interview by William Hanley. *Surface*, December 19, 2017. <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/rirkrit-tiravanija-talks-politics-cooking-ceramics/>.

Visit [guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials](https://guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials) for high-resolution images, audio, and video, as well as additional historical and contextual information about this artist and others featured in *Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art*.

**Note:** On page 2, the artist's surname is capitalized to differentiate it from his given name. Colloquial phonetic pronunciations are included, rather than versions in the standard International Phonetic Alphabet, to help teachers pronounce names that may be unfamiliar.

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