

CULTURE

Meta House's 'Global Hybrid' Exhibit Mixes Art Influences



Chan Nawath

This digital artwork on plastic by artist Chan Nawath entitled "Innocent Anka Sam" features a twist on a famous US army recruitment poster, substituting a smiling Pol Pot for US icon Uncle Sam.

BY MICHELLE VACHON
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

For artist Meas Sokhorn, being a "global hybrid" means remaining open to the world around him.

For example, he said, "OK, I don't understand a language they use in Africa, but I don't care. I enjoy the rhythm, the tap of the music.... Or maybe a sentence really raps me in a song from the Philippines. And you mix all this like in a fruit drink, and create."

Artist Chan Nawath sees this global mixing as an age-old process that has simply evolved. Cambodian arts, he said, "were influenced by India. Then we made changes and it became ours." The same applies today, he said; people can use globalization to move ahead in whatever direction they choose. Whether 1,500 years ago or right now, "No one can live alone, no one can progress alone."

With that process in mind, Meta House in Phnom Penh will be showcasing a number of Cambodian and Cambodian-American artists in its new exhibition "Global Hybrid," which opens Thursday night and will run through August 2.

Mixing a panoply of elements from around the globe, Leang Sekon's collage "World City 2" contains, among other things, an ancient Egyptian-style figure, a Chinese pagoda, Mount Rushmore's sculpted heads of US presidents, and a Cambodian

woman with a 1960s hairdo.

Mr Nawath's pop-art piece "Innocent Anka Sam" consists of a smiling Pol Pot pointing directly at the viewer in a sly twist on an old US military recruitment poster featuring US national icon Uncle Sam.

"The meaning is according to the audience," Mr Nawath said. "I just put the picture and people can choose the answer, choose the topic, choose the explanation by themselves."

Among other pieces is a giant rattan floor sculpture by artist Sopheap Pich; a man's torso painted blue and wearing white briefs by Em Riem; and a large barbwire, rattan and plastic ribbon sculpture by Mr Sokhorn.

From the Cambodian-American artists, who are based in Long Beach, California, there is a silk-screen print in which Khmer writing turns into Khmer classical dancers when viewed from a distance, a work done by graphic artist Tom Tor. According to his website, the artist was commissioned to design a Barack Obama campaign poster during the 2008 US electoral campaign.

Many of the Cambodian-American artists, such as exhibition coordinator Sayon Syprasoeuth, who left Cambodia when he was nine, know little of the country their parents fled in the 1970s or 1980s.

For Mr Syprasoeuth, being a



Pring Samrang

Artist Em Riem's sculpture of a torso is seen through a loop in a rattan piece by artist Pich Sopheap. Both pieces are part of the upcoming Meta House exhibition "Global Hybrid."

"global hybrid" amounts to having an Asian face while needing to learn how to behave among Asians and to study a Cambodian culture he has never known. Busy building a life on minimum wages in the US, his parents had little time to pass on Khmer traditions to their children, he said.

His work in the exhibition is called "A Message from Cambodia," which is in fact a tired, late-1970s portable tape recorder with duct tape around the battery compartment to keep it shut.

This is the type of tape recorder that Mr Syprasoeuth's relatives in the Serei Saophoan area still use to send messages to his family in Long Beach, he said.

Although some in Serei Saophoan have mobile phones, many farmers cannot afford them, let alone pay for a call to the US. Their

way to communicate in a globalized world is to send cassettes to relatives overseas, Mr Syprasoeuth said.

This can seem rather odd to their US relatives, who nevertheless respond in the same manner, he said.

During the exhibition, visitors will be invited to record their comments on the tape recorder.

The show came out of US artist Denise Scott's goal to feature Cambodian artists during Khmer New Year celebrations in Long Beach. Ms Scott lives in Long Beach and spends part of each year in Cambodia.

A great deal of work later, her idea led to an exhibition at Meta House in July 2008, a second one in Long Beach this April, and the exhibition opening on Thursday, said Lydia Parusol of Meta House, who worked with Ms Scott on the project.

Sovanna Phum Art Association May Be Going Under

The Sovanna Phum Art Association, which is the only group in Phnom Penh to offer a weekly schedule of theater performances, is on the verge of becoming a victim of the economic crisis. The association of more than 200 artists is now facing a rent increase at its facility on Street 360 off Monivong Boulevard, and may be forced to shut down within the next three months, artistic director Mann Kosal said. Created in the mid-1990s, the association supports itself solely with ticket sales and special performance fees. "Since the economic crisis erupted, [foreign visitor] ticket sales have declined by about 50 percent," Mr Kosal said, adding that Cambodians who come to the shows have the choice of not paying admission. "I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to wealthy business people who love the arts and want our arts to thrive.... Just lending us land to build stages would be enough," he said. (*Kuch Naren*)