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Cambodian Artistic Resilience: Outlets of Khmer Cultural Survival since the Khmer Rouge

By: Anneliese Hardman

Abstract: Museums are among the different agencies available to help people better themselves. One museum that strives to do this is the Cambodia Peace Gallery (CPG), located in Battambang, Cambodia. It was established in 2018 by the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) by Cambodian native and Khmer Rouge (KR) genocide survivor, Soth Plai Ngarm. The CPG strives to tell a story of Cambodian resilience and achievement, despite a longstanding conflict history. Through gallery exploration, genocide survivors are meant to experience trauma recovery by facing emotions they are typically told to suppress in their face-saving culture. All museum efforts are driven by a desire to showcase Cambodia's dynamic story in a way that inspires visitors to become actors for peace. The CPG's mission of informing the public about peace and how to get there ultimately encourages healing from the KR genocide (1975-1979). One of the most recent exhibits the CPG has committed itself to explores refugee camp-based grassroots efforts founded to preserve poignant parts of Cambodia's cultural identity. Specific performing arts of this nature are demonstrated in the work of past royal ballet dancer, Van Savay, whose work is captured by American photographer, Sharon May. Relief efforts are also manifested in the social enterprise of Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS). In collaboration with May and PPS, the CPG's exhibit explores how the reintroduction of Khmer arts has linked creative expression, identity healing, and hope for the future. Most importantly, the rebirth of art and culture has allowed Cambodians to imagine a future for their country. By presenting this information, the museum's agency will advance the work started in the refugee camps and promote sustained present-day resilience.

Keywords: *Cambodia Peace Gallery, Khmer Rouge, genocide, refugees, cultural memory.*

The Emerging Peace Museum Paradigm – the Work of the Cambodia Peace Gallery

Museums are "among the different agencies available to help people better themselves and to appreciate the value of modern life."[1] Reflecting this, the International Council of Museum's (ICOM) most recently agreed upon (2007) definition of a museum describes it as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment."[2] This definition explains the museum entity as a multifunctional space dedicated to public service. Robert Janes and Richard Sandell's *Museum Activism* also describes the strengths of museums as their abilities to pass on stories about communities, nations, and peoples. As a result, "it is incumbent upon all museums to help envision and create this new narrative in partnership with their communities, and then deliver this story using their unique skills and perspectives."[3]

The emerging idea of peace museums demonstrates this commitment to the progressive idea of museums acting as places of community healing, cultural renewal, and peacebuilding.[4] The International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP) define a peace museum as:

> A non-profit educational institution that promotes a culture of peace through collecting, displaying, and interpreting peace related material. Museums for peace inform the public about peace and nonviolence using illustrations from the lives of individuals, the work of organisations, campaigns, [and] historical events.[5]

One such museum that upholds these values is the Cambodia Peace Gallery (CPG), located in

Battambang, Cambodia. It was established in 2018 by the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) and Cambodian native and Khmer Rouge (KR) genocide survivor Soth Plai Ngarm.[6] The CPG strives to tell a story of Cambodian achievement and resilience, despite a longstanding history of conflict.[7] The museum engages with young Cambodians who neither learned about the KR, nor about Cambodia's victorious path to peace. The CPG also invites older Cambodians to visit and learn about the economic, political, and social factors that led to the genocide of 1975-79. Gallery exploration allows genocide survivors to recover from trauma by facing emotions that they are typically told to suppress in the face-saving culture of Cambodia.[8]

All museum efforts are driven by the desire to showcase Cambodia's dynamic story in a way that inspires visitors to become actors for peace. Ngarm summarizes this vision by explaining the CPG as:

> A place of meeting, storytelling, remembering, understanding, explanations, forgiveness and letting go. It can help to explain to the rest of the world – to tourists and visiting diplomats and politicians how and why such violence comes about, and how they might prevent future acts in other parts of the world. But finally, and perhaps most importantly, it can help to transform the attitude and feelings Cambodians have about [them]selves. [They] are not proud of [their] past, [they] often question [them]selves – how could [Cambodians] allow such things to happen. Cambodians need mechanisms to understand, and then to see also our own successes.[9]

Ngarm's words illustrate the museum's goals to address the trauma caused by the KR genocide through museum education. These aspects of peace education include facilitating dialogue surrounding trauma, acknowledging root causes of conflict, and celebrating ways conflict groups have and are achieving reconciliation. Peace education is also furthered by creating exhibits that explore how conflict happens and can be avoided, by inviting Cambodian schools to interact with the history of Cambodia, and by partnering with other sites of trauma and resilience around

the world to inform the public about peace and how to achieve it. Ultimately, the goals of these programs are to encourage healing from the KR genocide.[10]

One of the most recent exhibitions that the CPG was working to open, “Reconciliation through the Arts,” explores refugee camp grassroots efforts to preserve critical parts of Cambodia’s cultural identity.[11] The goal of the exhibition is to highlight how the arts have created outlets for listening to stories, acknowledging injustice, mourning loss, and sharing suffering. A second goal of the exhibit is also to prioritize how the rebirth of art and culture has allowed Cambodians to imagine a future for their country. To achieve this mission, the exhibition includes black and white photographs by American photographer Sharon May of the performing arts work of former royal ballet dancer Van Savay. The exhibition also features the humanitarian work of performance and arts school Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS). PPS was created by Cambodian survivors of the KR and devoted to revitalizing traditional arts in the country and giving a source of art therapy. Circus props, play manuscripts, and a multimedia video and photos from PPS’s performance of “Sokha” demonstrate the museum’s commitment to relief efforts through social enterprise. In collaboration with Sharon May and PPS, the CPG’s exhibition explores the connection between Khmer arts and creative expression, identity healing, and hope for the future. By presenting this information, the museum advances the work started in refugee camps and promotes Cambodian artistic resilience.

An Overview of the KR and its Impact on Cambodian Art and Culture

Examining the KR genocide period offers insight into the value of grassroots efforts to preserve Khmer arts and why CPG’s exhibition of these efforts is important. The phrase KR refers to the ethnic group Khmer and the French word “rouge,” meaning red. Combined together, “red Khmer” was the name for the country’s communist party. It was led by the

dictator Pol Pot, who attempted to create a Cambodian "master race" through social engineering in the form of labor camps and mass killing. Alexander Laban Hinton characterizes the work of the KR regime as a radical assault on the past and memory in his book, *Hidden Genocides*.[12] This attack on memory included the destruction of Buddhism and multifarious traditions: the arts, economics, education traditional family, and village structures, etc. Specifically, the KR:

> Assaulted social memory by burning books and destroying libraries; banning popular music, movies, media, and styles; destroying temples; truncating communication; terminating traditional holidays and ritual events; separating family members; homogenizing clothing; and eliminating private property, including photos, memorabilia, and other mementos.[13]

The KR regime reshaped memory with no regard of human life until it aligned with the communist party's stances. The KR carried out the largest political mass killing of the post-World War II era.[14] During a span of three years and eight months, one to three million Cambodian people of educated backgrounds were murdered by firing squads, overwork, starvation, and torture.[15]

One of the largest, but typically overlooked, groups of targeted individuals during the genocide were Cambodian artists and musicians. According to an interview with the Minister of Information and Culture Chheng Peon, the KR "regime destroyed [our] national culture almost completely and killed almost 80 percent of [our] male and female performers."[16] Artists were targeted because of their ability to generate a fan base, which would have detracted from KR loyalty to *Angka*, the Khmer word for organization.[17] For example, pop music singer and genocide survivor Sieng Vanthy shared in an interview that "[she] told [KR officials] she was a banana seller. If [she had] told them [she] was a singer, [she] would have been killed."[18] Director of *Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll* John Pirozzi states in a private interview that artists and musicians "had to hide [their] identity or else [they] could potentially be a target."[19]

In 1979, the KR party split into the "new" and "old" KR parties. The "new" KR party fled to Viet Nam and requested help from the Vietnamese government and military. While this partnership ended the genocide, it also catalyzed 18 years of civil war in Cambodia between the Republican Party, Monarchist supporters, "old" KR, "new" KR, and Vietnamese militia. During this time, resettlement camps, often located in the midst of conflict zones, became places for refugees to seek asylum.[20] In one interview captured in Khatharya Um's *From the Land of the Shadows,* a genocide survivor expresses the fear instilled in camp dwellers. Sometimes Vietnamese troops shooting at camps caused this fear, and sometimes the threat of factional armies assuming control of "displaced people" caused this fear.[21] In the words of Cambodian-American clinician Dr. Sam Keo, "confinement and loss of self-determination threatened the sense of self," adding the trauma of everyday life in a refugee camp to the preexisting trauma of genocide.[22] Keo's research, conducted right after the genocide, shows that over 40 percent of Cambodian people show signs of a trauma-related disorder.[23] During this time, "a whole generation of 'camp children' were born and raised without a clear affiliation to place, "further adding to the Cambodian identity crisis. "Of the 1980s population of Site II, one of the largest refugee camps, only seven percent were older than 45, and approximately 50 percent were younger than fourteen."[24] Consequently, many Cambodians born after the KR struggled to understand their country's history and relate to their parents' traumatic experiences.

The Preservation of Artistic Resilience of Cambodian Refugees

Cambodian culture did not unravel but proved enduring. The process of preserving survivors' memories began almost immediately in refugee camps – defying the obstacles of resettled life. "Monks were ordained and music and dance repertoires retrieved," as refugees made costumes and instruments from whatever materials were available.[25] The modes of remembrance

became an integral part of the Khmer struggle to survive as an ethic group. Nostalgia infused these memories of Cambodian heritage. According to Um, feeling nostalgic was a necessary first step to reconciling personal homecoming and actualizing identity with personal pain. Unlike other genocides, the KR pitted a mostly homogenous population of Khmer Cambodians against other Khmer Cambodians. As a result, many Khmer individuals were horrified by the atrocity of Khmer Cambodians killing each other. Therefore, it was crucial that actualization rectified a strong national identity with a horrific national history.[26]

Immediately after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, refugee camps became "depositories of [Cambodian] culture and traditions threatened by ethnocide."[27] Cambodian people who moved to these camps brought their Khmer cultural identity with them. Well-known peace and conflict theorist John Paul Lederach writes in *The Moral Imagination* that when it comes to trauma from violence, "only the birth and creation of something new can break someone out of the expected."[28] Consequently, the surviving five million Cambodian people "each defied the expectations of victimhood," by creating spaces in which their communities could "tell truths, mourn losses, and become active participants in shaping their lives."[29] It is the work of artists that contributed to the "restoration after the genocide and to the communal process of grappling with its legacy."[30] With the mindset of wanting to give back to their homeland, many artists and musicians established programs in refugee camps for the purpose of preserving culture.[31] Upon his return to Cambodia, the founder of Cambodian Living Arts, Arn Chorn asked, "how can we find healing if we don't even know who we are?"[32] Musicians, dancers, and artists took it upon themselves to answer this question by transmitting their memories of Khmer culture to other genocide survivors, as well as to children being born in the refugee camps. Despite the devastation wrought on Khmer arts, the CPG has sought to highlight the work of

these artists in refugee camps, preserving them as cultural norms prevalent today and serving as symbols of Cambodian artistic resilience.

The Photography of Sharon May

The photography of American photographer Sharon May captures some of the efforts of artists and musicians to pass down traditional Khmer arts while living in Site II refugee camp. These photos are part of the CPG's exhibition "Reconciliation through the Arts" and are currently on display at the museum.[33] May first went to Cambodia in the 1980s to photograph the quarter of a million Cambodians living in camps along the Thai border. After three months of visiting, May decided to extend her time stating: "I was captured by the place and the people."[34] May's photographs taken between 1985 and 1986 provide intimate insight into how Cambodian people were rebuilding their lives and culture in refugee camps after tragic war losses.[35] May's photographs are compiled in her book, *Dancing in Site II: Life and Art in Cambodian Refugee Camps After the War* (2018).[36]

Student dancers in Site II practiced traditional Apsara Dance six days a week for four hours in the morning (Figure 2).[37] After morning practice, many students would then attend school, and practice again in the afternoon if extra preparation was necessary for special performances (Figure 1). During practice, "all manner of spectators – from camp children to the Thai soldiers with machine guns – would gather on the edges of the tarp to watch the young dancers," (Figure 7).[38] Van Savay, once a principal dancer in the Cambodian Royal Ballet, arrived at Site II in the early 1980s, planning to stay for only a short while. However, after meeting many of the orphaned children, she decided to stay for ten years and instructed young Cambodians on their heritage through dance.[39] Savay's husband Meas Vonroeun, a renowned

folk-dance specialist trained at the Cambodian School of Fine Arts, also taught classical and folk dances to young refugee students (Figure 8).

In one photograph, May shows a pair of fishing dancers courting each other by mimicking each other's movements (Figure 4). This fishing dance choreographed in the 1960s preserves a classical courting dance prevalent in pre-KR times. In addition to preserving classical Khmer culture, these dances also inspired students to pursue the preservation of the arts long-term. For example, the photograph titled *Fishing Dancer with Angrut* (1985-6) features dancer Chhay who now leads his own dance troupe in Cambodia (Figure 3). As a result of this cultural education, some dance students have been able to diversify Cambodia's economy by expanding it beyond the predominant agricultural sectors.

May's photographs also showcase some of the surviving musical masters who passed on the vanishing musical repertoire of Cambodia. The photographs demonstrate how Site II refugee camp became a place not just to preserve tradition, but also to evolve tradition – "in some cases breaking tradition in order to carry on tradition," (Figure 6). May's photograph *Girl Learning Traditional Khmer Kong Vong* (1985) records a "master and student playing the *kong vong* (circle gong) in a temple," (Figure 5). May recounts that the girl pictured begged to learn to play the *kong* for a long time before she finally received permission (Figure 6). Traditionally, only men play the *kong* so it is significant that a woman would be granted permission to learn and perform it. Additionally, most of the instruments were made in the camp. This allowed for musicians to transmit instrument-crafting methods to their students.

The reincorporation of music into holiday celebrations also highlights the creation of new traditions to preserve old traditions. During the 1985 Pchum Benh festival in Site II, "musicians

and dancers performed as part of the celebrations," (Figure 10). The reincorporated music celebrated community and family coming together to honor ancestors and those who were lost in the genocide and the civil war (Figure 9). May's images capture individuals at work and play, learning to dance, making music, and finding ways to survive while reviving the arts after unspeakable sorrow.

Phare Phonleu Selpak, "The Brightness of the Arts"

Not only was Site II a place where Khmer dance and music was revitalized, but it was also a place where the Cambodian circus revived. CPG's exhibition "Reconciliation through the Arts" highlights their partnership with Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) and the work of PPS to preserve, teach, and pass down practices of Cambodian circus, theatre, dance, and other fine arts. The exhibition features the humanitarian work of PPS's performance and arts school embodied in circus props, play manuscripts, photos, and a multimedia video the PPS performance "Sokha." Each of these objects captures the museum and PPS's commitment to relief efforts through social enterprise.

The idea of PPS, Khmer for "The Brightness of the Arts," started in 1986 when French drawing teacher Véronique Decrop visited Site II.[40] Decrop's goal was to aid refugee children through the arts so that they might overcome their trauma.[41] After Site II closed in 1993, Decrop and nine of her Cambodian students moved to Battambang, Cambodia, and resolved to found an arts center.[42] The nine Cambodian students' lives changed for the better through art classes in Site II, and they desired to offer the same opportunity to other disadvantaged children through "the brightness of the arts."[43] In their homecoming, it was their goal "to help the most vulnerable children of the surrounding communities."[44]

Decrop and the students realized this dream in 1995 when PPS opened its doors as an arts school for children. The school began with art classes and later expanded to include traditional and modern music. In 1998, PPS started its circus training program, and in 1999, PPS premiered its first circus performance in Battambang and in Siem Reap, Cambodia.[45] The addition of performance to the school's curriculum has allowed entire communities to gain access to previously oppressed styles of Cambodian arts. These performances also address issues of trauma that viewers may be experiencing.

Since this time, PPS has toured internationally and become a global ambassador of Cambodian art and culture— thus demonstrating further the Cambodian people's resilience. One circus performer, Phunam, stated in an interview that traveling has allowed him to fall in love with learning about other ways of life. Most importantly, it has allowed him to "become proud to be a representative of Khmer art and culture."[46]

PPS has also strengthened its formal arts education programming by adding a public-school option that local Cambodian children can attend for their primary classes like mathematics and languages, as well as arts classes. By linking public education with the arts, PPS aims to combat school dropout rates and promote child rights.[47] PPS continues to serve its local community and offer solutions to social problems based on arts education. In PPS's schools, students reflect on past issues such as the KR genocide, and present-day issues of "domestic violence, drug abuse, and illegal migration to work in extremely poor conditions in Thailand where children often face exploitation and abuse."[48] The arts as used a tool to cope with trauma healthily and encourage positive lifestyle choices.

Over 1000 students are empowered every year through PPS schools and programs.[49]

Currently, PPS runs a Visual and Applied Arts School, Performing Arts School, and a public preschool, elementary, middle, and high school. Programs in these schools include "performing, visual and applied arts, leisure classes and vocational training, allowing children and young adults to develop their creativity, communication, concentration, and life skills, and access a sustainable artistic career while preserving and promoting Cambodian arts, heritage, and culture."[50] According to Thor Vutha, a co-founder, artist, and teacher at PPS, "developing social dialogue through access to culture and education is at the foundation of PPS. Its schools provide students with a safe place to pass time, learn practical skills for the future, and build resilient character."[51]In particular, The Visual and Applied Arts School (VAAS) offers casual leisure classes to professionals training in animation, graphic design, and fine arts. Through these efforts, PPS contributes to the success of Cambodia's current economic shift from agricultural industry to information-based industry.

By encouraging arts education, PPS prioritizes creative development and Khmer tradition (Figure 11). One PPS student and artist of *Imagining Cambodia with no War* (1997) Khom Chamrong (from Siem Reap), voiced in an interview his belief that the arts offer a second chance of vocational success to students not interested in formal education.[52] Art classes provide a powerful form of transmitting ideas and education.[53] Similarly, Bo Hok,(from Kampong Thom Province), an instructor at PPS's Visual and Applied Arts School stated in an interview that "involvement in the arts has allowed [him] to express himself in ways that sometimes societal limitations do not allow. [He] strives to present human rights issues in his art as a way of creating constructive conversations."[54] These words reflect PPS's goals to "provide its students with a complete set of technical skills, a strong fundamental and cultural knowledge of the arts, and the ability to understand, analyze, and respond to a given problem with creativity."[55]

In addition to the visual arts programming, PPS has maintained performing arts programs since the founding of its Performing Arts School in 1996.With a similar goal of providing outlets for Khmer students to learn and celebrate their heritage, the Performing Arts School of PPS was founded in 1996.Today, the Performing Arts School contains the Circus, Dance, Music, and Theatre departments. The school showcases a range of traditional and modern performances through their circus and live music shows. Students are taught to be proud of their traditional arts and embrace their Cambodian identity, despite past trauma.

One show *Sokha* is described as “a beautiful metaphor for transforming one’s dark past into positive and dynamic actions.”[56] *Sokha* is narrated through live painting that depicts the child Sokha’s memories of pre-war Cambodia and the KR.[57] Her memories manifest themselves in the form of nightmares expressing post-war trauma. However, when Sohka receives art lessons in her refugee camp, she discovers her inner strength and finds the tools necessary to heal both herself and her community. Sokha represents one of the refugee children who received art lessons in Site II and went on to co-found PPS. In the same way that the nine student founders of PPS returned to Cambodia, Sokha also returns to her homeland to begin teaching art. Through art classes, Sokha helps children to fight their dark past and transform their lives. The show highlights the long-term psychological effects of war on victims and the way that art provides a powerful way to heal and rebuild a country. Such a show reflects PPS’s goal to continue to provide hope and support through arts programs to children recovering from trauma and war.

Conclusion

In the words of Catharine Filloux, “by providing people who have been frozen in trauma a safe place to come into contact with their feelings, by reviving and honoring traditions that were almost extinguished during the Cambodian genocide, by helping people empathize with the

suffering of others, and by animating people's imaginations," the arts can slowly help Cambodians heal from their tragic past and build a more peaceful future.[58] It is with this mentality that the Cambodia Peace Gallery has partnered with artists like Sharon May and schools like PPS to designate a gallery space to grassroots efforts to maintain Cambodian artistic practices that emerged in refugee camps during the KR genocide.

The gallery's goal is to "build voices that can both speak and hear, acknowledge and respond, and ultimately connect. A culture that emerges from a violent past must both account for the past and create a future."[59] In the process of moving on from the KR, Cambodian refugees have learned to make sense of a new normal. They have preserved their culture and traditions by passing down knowledge to new generations of Cambodian people.[60] "Young Cambodians all over the world are wanting to learn more about themselves"— about their arts, their culture, their dance, their music, their poetry.[61]

The CPG aids in this process by presenting art forms that represent both history and positivity. While there are "plenty of museums that show the in-depth suffering of Cambodians," the Peace Gallery is the only one that strives to invest "in young Cambodian leaders of the next generation."[62] The visitor experience relies heavily upon linking the emotional response of visitors to their need to process trauma. Additionally, the museum addresses the long 18-year process that has culminated in the current peace of Cambodia and has continued through the current work of Cambodian peacebuilders. These components of the museum highlight Khmer resilience which in turn translates to confronting painful memories and promoting identity healing and redemption.

This research that I have presented is part of the Cambodia Peace Gallery's effort to

celebrate Cambodian strength through exhibition development. The revitalization of the arts in Cambodia has linked creative expression, identity healing, and hope for the future. By engaging with this research, I hope that the reader will be inspired to also imagine a future Cambodia transformed by the rebirth of art and culture.

List of Figures

Figure 1: May, Sharon. Flowers of the World, Dance Practice. Black and white photography. 1985. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia.

ការលះបង់និងការហ្វឹកហាត់រាំ នៅជំរុំសាយធូ ឆ្នាំ១៩៨៥ ។

[illegible]

Devotion, Dance Practice, Site II, 1985

Dancers in Site II practiced 6 days a week for 4 hours a day in the morning, studied general subjects in the afternoon, and then often practiced again at night to prepare for special performances. Students were 6 to 18 years old, many of them orphans. For all, the dance school became a new family.

In the early 1980s, when their camp was destroyed by shelling, many of the dancers followed their teacher Voan Savay into the mountains, where they continued to practice dance even while hiding in the forest.

Figure 2: Cambodia Peace Gallery, Cambodian Artistic Resilience, Devotion, Dance Practice (object label), currently on display

Figure 3: May, Sharon. Fishing Dancer with Angrut, black and white photography. 1985. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia.

Figure 4: May, Sharon. Fishing Dancers Courting. Black and white photography. 1985. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia.

Figure 5: May, Sharon. Girl Learning Traditional Khmer Kong Vong. Black and white photography. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia. 1985.

ក្មេងស្រីរៀនឧបករណ៍គងវង់បុរាណខ្មែរ នៅជំរុំសាយធូ ឆ្នាំ ១៩៨៥ ។

លោកគ្រូនិងសិស្សលេងឧបករណ៍គងវង់នៅតាមវិហារ។ ក្មេងស្រីនេះ បានសុំរៀន លេង គងវង់ អស់ពេលយូរណាស់មុនពេលបានអនុញ្ញាតឲ្យរៀន ព្រោះកំរមានស្រីត្រូវបានជ្រើសឲ្យរៀនណាស់ ធម្មតា ភ្លេងពិណពាទ្យ លេង ដោយប្រុសតែប៉ុណ្ណោះ។

Girl Learning Traditional Khmer Kong Vong, Site II South Temple, 1985

Master and student play the *kong vong* (circle gong) in a temple. This girl begged to learn to play the *kong* for a long time before permission was finally granted for her and a select few women to learn ceremonial *pinpeat* instruments, usually played only by men.

Figure 6: Cambodia Peace Gallery, Cambodian Artistic Resilience, Girl Learning Traditional Khmer Kong Vong, (object label), currently on display.

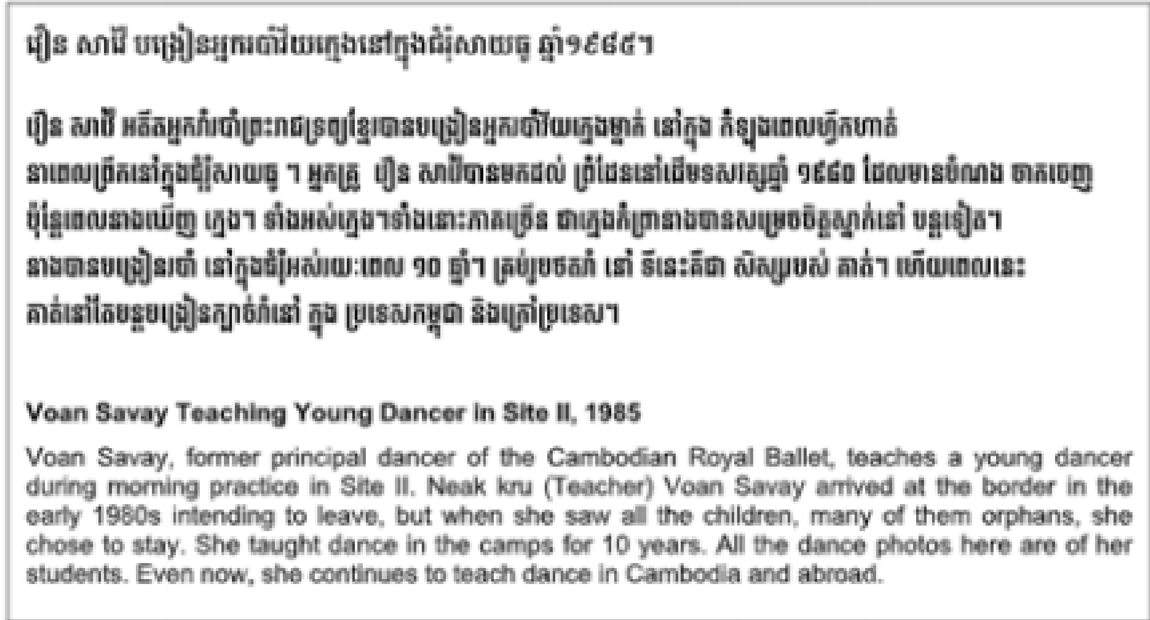
ការហាត់ របាំបុប្ផាលោកិយ៍ នៅជុំរុំសាយធូ ឆ្នាំ១៩៨៥។

របាំបុប្ផាលោកិយ៍ សំដែងពីការកោតសរសើរចំពោះភាពស្រស់ស្អាត និងក្លិនក្រអូប នៃ ផ្កាតាមរយៈរបាំ។ ក្នុងកំឡុងពេលហ្វឹកហាត់នាពេលព្រឹកនៅក្នុងជុំរុំសាយធូ អ្នកទស្សនា គ្រប់ប្រភេទ កុមារមកពីជំរុំ អ្នកថតរូប ទាហានថៃដែលស្ពាយកាំភ្លើង បានមកជុំគ្នាមើល អ្នករបាំវ័យក្មេង។

Flowers of the World, Dance Practice, Site II, 1985

Flowers of the World expresses an appreciation of the beauty and fragrance of flowers through dance. During morning practice in Site II, all manner of spectators—from camp children to the photographer to Thai soldiers with machine guns—would gather on the edges of the tarp to watch the young dancers.

Figure 7: Cambodia Peace Gallery, Cambodian Artistic Resilience, Flowers of the World, Dance Practice (object label), currently on display.



វឿន សាវី បង្រៀនអ្នករបាំវ័យក្មេងនៅក្នុងជំរុំសាយធូ ឆ្នាំ១៩៨៥។

វឿន សាវី អតីតអ្នករាំរបាំព្រះរាជទ្រព្យនៃបានបង្រៀនអ្នករបាំវ័យក្មេងម្នាក់ នៅក្នុង កំឡុងពេលហ្វឹកហាត់ នាពេលព្រឹកនៅក្នុងជុំរុំសាយធូ ។ អ្នកគ្រូ វឿន សាវីបានមកដល់ ព្រំដែននៅដើមទសវត្សឆ្នាំ ១៩៨០ ដែលមានបំណង ចាកចេញ ប៉ុន្តែពេលនាងឃើញ ក្មេងៗ ទាំងអស់ក្មេងៗទាំងនោះភាគច្រើន ជាក្មេងកំព្រានាងបានសម្រេចចិត្តស្នាក់នៅ បន្តទៀតៗ នាងបានបង្រៀនរបាំ នៅក្នុងជំរុំអស់រយៈពេល ១០ ឆ្នាំ។ គ្រប់រូបថតរាំ នៅ ទីនេះគឺជា សិស្សរបស់ គាត់។ ហើយពេលនេះ គាត់នៅតែបន្តបង្រៀនក្បាច់រាំនៅ ក្នុង ប្រទេសកម្ពុជា និងក្រៅប្រទេស។

Voan Savay Teaching Young Dancer in Site II, 1985

Voan Savay, former principal dancer of the Cambodian Royal Ballet, teaches a young dancer during morning practice in Site II. Neak kru (Teacher) Voan Savay arrived at the border in the early 1980s intending to leave, but when she saw all the children, many of them orphans, she chose to stay. She taught dance in the camps for 10 years. All the dance photos here are of her students. Even now, she continues to teach dance in Cambodia and abroad.

Figure 8: Cambodia Peace Gallery, Cambodian Artistic Resilience, Voan Savay Teaching Young Dancer in Site II, (object label), currently on display.

Figure 9: May, Sharon. Circle of Hands, Pchum Benh Festival. Black and white photography. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia, 1985.

រង្វង់នៃដៃ ពិធីបុណ្យភ្ជុំបិណ្ឌ ជុំរំសាយធូ ឆ្នាំ ១៩៨៥ ។

ក្នុងអំឡុងពិធីបុណ្យភ្ជុំបិណ្ឌឆ្នាំ១៩៨៥ នៅជុំរំសាយធូតន្ត្រីករនិងអ្នករបាំ
បានសម្តែងក្នុងការប្រារព្ធពិធីរួមទាំងការប្រគេនព្រះសង្ឃនូវចង្ហាន់ពិសេស ដែលកំរមាន។ ក
គឺជាពេលវេលាដើម្បីរស់ជាមួយគ្រួសារនិងសហគមន៍ ដើម្បីគោរពដល់ជីដូនជីតា និងដើម្បីឧទ្ទិសកុសលដល់អ្នកដែលបានបាត់បង់
ជីវិត ដោយសារសង្គ្រាម។

Circle of Hands, Pchum Benh Festival, Site II, 1985

During the 1985 Pchum Benh festival in Site II, the musicians and dancers performed as part of the celebrations, which included offerings to monks and a rare feast. It was a time to be together with family and community, to honor the ancestors, and to remember those who were lost in the war.

Figure 10: Cambodia Peace Gallery, Cambodian Artistic Resilience, Circle of Hands, Pchum Behn Festival, (object label), currently on display.

Figure 11: Chamrong, Khom. *Imagining Cambodia with no War.* Oil on canvas. Cambodia Peace Gallery. Battambang, Cambodia.

End Notes

[1] George Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 5.

[2]"What is ICOM's definition of a museum?" International Council of Museums, last modified in 2007. https://icom.museum/en/faq/what-is-icoms-definition-of-a-museum.

[3] Robert Janes and Richard Sandell, *Museum Activism*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2.

[4] Moira Simpson, "Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education," Museum *International*, 61, no. 1–2 (2009): 123.

[5]"International Network of Museums for Peace," International Network of Museums for Peace, International Peace Bureau, last modified in 2021. http://www.ipb.org/members/international-network of-museums-for-peace.

[6] The proper pronunciation of this is "Saw-th Play Nawm."

[7]"Towards National Reconciliation: A Peace Museum for Cambodians," Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, last modified in 2018. http://cambodiapeacegallery.org/background.

[8] The term "face-saving" has been a qualifier since the 19th century. This concept is typically used to describe many Asian societies' social value of avoiding the open expression of certain emotions such as embarrassment, anger, or sadness, because they are perceived as weakening to one's social standing. As a result, in order to maintain dignity and preserve reputation, someone will "save face" and avoid showing their feelings.

[9]Soth Plai Ngarm, "A Peace Museum for Cambodia," Cambodia Peace Gallery, The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, last modified in 2019. http://cambodiapeacegallery.org.

[10] John Galtung, "The Theory of Peace and the Practice of Peace Museums," (The 3rd International Conference of Peace Museums, Kyoto and Osaka, Japan, Nov. 6-10, 1999).

[11] The exhibition "Reconciliation through the Arts" was supposed to open in March of 2020. However, due to financial difficulties related to COVID, the exhibition was canceled. Despite this, the research done in preparation of the exhibition has been compiled into this paper. All objects belonging to Phare Ponleu Selpak have been returned, including *Imagining Cambodia with No War.* However, all works by Sharon May are still on display at the museum.

[12] Alexander Laban Hinton, *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 149.

[13] Hinton 2014, 149.

[14] Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies of Genocide* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 402.

[15] Nancy Amphoux, trans., *Cambodia: Year Zero* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 62-63.

[16] Sam-Ang, "Preserving a Cultural Tradition: Ten Years After the Khmer Rouge," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine* 14, no. 3 (1990).

[17] Chheng Phon, “Others Address Drama Day Ceremony,” *Kampuchea Review* 6, (March 31, 1982): H1.

[18] *Don’t Think I’ve Forgotten: Cambodia’s Lost Rock and Roll*, directed by John Pirozzi (Festival du Nouveau Cinéma de Montréal, 2014; Argot Pictures, 2014), Netflix.

[19] “The Nearly Lost Story of Cambodian Rock 'N' Roll,” All Things Considered, National Public Radio (NPR), last modified on April 24, 2015. https://www.npr.org/2015/04/22/401020275/the-nearly-lost story-of-cambodian-rock-n-roll.

[20] Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press Stable, 2015), 219. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15zc5wj.

[21] Um 2015, 219.

[22] Um 2015, 219.

[23] Um 2015, 224.

[24] Um 2015, 219.

[25] Um 2015, 236.

[26] Um 2015, 235; The word “nostalgia,” is a combination of the Greek word “nostos,” meaning “homecoming,” and “algos,” meaning “pain.” These words express the Khmer experience of returning to Cambodia as one of victorious homecoming and painful remembrance.

[27] Um 2015, 240.

[28] Paul Lederach, *Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

[29] Catherine Filloux, “Alive on Stage in Cambodia: Time, Histories, and Bodies,” in *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*, ed. Cynthia Cohen, Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, and Polly Walker (Oakland, California: New Village Press, 2011), 203.

[30] Filloux 2011, 203.

[31] Sharon May and Loung Ung, “Surviving the Peace: An Interview with Loung Ung,” *Mānoa* 16, no. 1 (2004): 52; This information is also found in Pollie Bith, Sharon May, Mao Somnang, and Pal Vannariraks, “Words from the Fire: Three Cambodian Women Writers,” *Mānoa* 16, no. 1 (2004): 171.

[32] Jinx Davis, “Arn Chorn Pond – The Musical Magician Healing Cambodia,” Magical Cambodia: A Cultural Rebirth, accessed on July 26, 2020. https://www.magicalcambodia.com/arn-chorn-the-musical magician-healing-cambodia.

[33] This photo series by Sharon May was installed at the CPG in 2018 and was opened alongside the rest of the Museum on Paris Peace Agreement Day, October 23, 2018. Paris Peace Agreement Day symbolizes when the four warring factions—the Monarchists, “new” KR, “old” KR, Republicans—signed an agreement of peace to end the civil war in country. This agreement included that the United Nations (UN) would set up a five-year transitional authority, responsible for creating pathways towards a fair and free election, unifying the militia, rearming the country, repatriating Cambodians, etc.

[34] Jeremy Jones, “Author Deeply Inspires by Cambodia,” GoUpState, last modified on November 4, 2007. https://www.goupstate.com/article/NC/20071104/News/605205491/SJ; May explained that she would say (the place and people of Cambodia are) “chap arom” to describe how she was captured by the people of Cambodia. In Khmer, this is usually translated as “interesting,” but literally it means “to capture one’s consciousness.

[35] “Dancing in Site II,”*Angkor Photo,* 2008, https://angkor-photo.com/apf-programme/dancing-in-site-ii. See the exhibition: “Dancing in Site II,” etc.

[36] Sharon May, *Dancing in Site II: Life and Art in Cambodian Refugee Camps After the War* (New York: Tonsai Editions, 2018).

[37] Apsara Dance is the name of the traditional dance style in Cambodia. It dates to the 8th century and is depicted in the stone bas-reliefs of the Angkorian temples in Cambodia. While not all dancers depicted on the temple complexes are Apsara Dancers, such figures are normally portrayed in *sampot*, a long, rectangular cloth worn around the lower body and tied up at the belly with various colors and patterns. Dancers typically also wear a *chang pong* shirt on their upper body. Women normally are shown wearing a crown on their head and frangipani flowers in their hair. Many Apsara Dances are inspired by Cambodian mythology of the Funan and Angkor era.

[38] The place the dancers would gather was a room with wooden floors, open-air walls, and doors made of bamboo, with a palm-frond roof.

[39] Sharon May, "In the Shadow of Angkor: A Search for Cambodian Literature,” *Mānoa* 16, no. 1 (2004): 28-29.

[40] Pronunciation is “Far Pawn-lue Cell-Pack"

[41] “Phare Ponleu Selpak,” 10 Years Caravan, last modified in 2018. https://www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/phare-ponleu-selpak.

[42] May 2004, 32.

[43] “Our Story,” Phare Ponleu Selpak, accessed on March 29, 2021. https://phareps.org/our-history.

[44] “Phare Ponleu Selpak,” last modified in 2018.

[45] “Our History,” Phare Ponleu Selpak, accessed on July 26 2020. https://phareps.org/our-history.

[46] *20 Years 20 Portraits* (Phnom Penh: Phare Ponleu Selpak, 2014).

[47] “The Issues,” Our Mission, accessed on March 29, 2021. https://phareps.org/the-organization.

[48] “The Issues,” accessed on March 29, 2021.

[49] Emily Martin, "It’s celebration time for 20 years of Phare Ponleu Selpak – and you’re invited!” Phare Ponleu Selpak, The Cambodian Circus, last modified in 2013. https://pharecircus.org/its-celebration time-for-20-years-of-phare-ponleu-selpak-and-youre-invited.

[50] “Phare Ponleu Selpak,” 10 Years Caravan, last modified in 2018. https://www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/phare-ponleu-selpak.

[51] "Our Team: Thor Vutha," Phare Ponleu Selpak, date accessed July 26, 2020. https://phareps.org/team.

[52] Khom Chamrong, (artist and student from Phare Ponleu Selpak) interview by Anneliese Hardman and Morganne Darrasse, Feburary 5, 2020, interview 1, transcript, Cambodia Peace Gallery, Battambang, Cambodia.

[53] Khom Chamrong, (artist and student from Phare Ponleu Selpak) interview by Anneliese Hardman and Morganne Darrasse, Feburary 5, 2020, interview 1, transcript, Cambodia Peace Gallery, Battambang, Cambodia.

[54] Bo Hok, (instructor at PPS 's VAAS), interview by Anneliese Hardman and Morgane Darrasse, Feburary 5, 2020, interview 1, transcript, Cambodia Peace Gallery, Battambang, Cambodia.

[55] "Our Team: Srey Bandaul," Our Team, Phare Ponleu Selpak, date accessed July 26, 2021. https://phareps.org/team.

[56] Craig Dodge, "The Symbolism in 'Sokha," Phare News, last modified on Mar 21, 2017. https://pharecircus.org/?s=Sokha.

[57] "Sokha," Phare Ponleu Selpak, Phare Ponleu Selpak Circus Tent, Battambang, Cambodia, January 23, 2020.

[58] Filloux, "Alive on Stage in Cambodia: Time, Histories, and Bodies," 202.

[59] Jinx Davis, "Arn Chorn Pond—The Musical Magician Healing Cambodia," Magical Cambodia: A Cultural Rebirth, accessed on July 26, 2020. https://www.magicalcambodia.com/arn-chorn-the-musical magician-healing-cambodia.

[60] Um 2015, 236.

[61] Sharon May and Loung Ung, "Surviving the Peace: An Interview with Loung Ung," *Mānoa* 16, no. 1 (2004): 52; This information is also found in Pollie Bith, Sharon May, Mao Somnang, and Pal Vannariraks, "Words from the Fire: Three Cambodian Women Writers," *Mānoa* 16, no. 1 (2004): 53.

[62] Rithy Odom, "Museum Focused on Peace and Reconciliation Opens in Battambang," Voice of America (VOA), last modified on October 31, 2018. https://www.voacambodia.com/a/peace-museum-opens-in cambodia-focused-on-reconciliation/4635413.html.

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