

Exhibition and International Symposium

ART FACING THE EXTREME

NEW YORK, SPRING 2013



Chea Serey Roth, *Self-portrait in front of a skull*, 2008

EXHIBITION AND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
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SOKO PHAY-VAKALIS AND PIERRE BAYARD, PROFESSORS AT PARIS 8 UNIVERSITY, WILL ORGANIZE THESE EVENTS JOINTLY.

Several events (exhibitions, symposiums, film festivals) on the Cambodian Genocide’s memory were organized between December 2010 and January 2011 in Cambodia (at the Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources in Phnom Penh together with the French Cultural Center in Battambang) and in France (at Paris 8 University together with the Forum des images in Paris). They all met a strong success (national press releases, radio coverage, etc.).

Now, we propose as a continuation that new cultural and scientific events, such as a collective exhibition and an international symposium, take place in New York in spring 2013 within the framework of the festival “Season of Cambodia”.

First, the convergence of these two events will be an opportunity to participate in the memory work on the Cambodian genocide and to prevent its fall into oblivion. To a greater extent than other exterminations of the 20th century, this genocide has been erased from memory, even in Cambodia itself, where younger generations often ignore its very existence. So, this cultural project aims to raise the media and public awareness of this tragic and little-known period of History.

We also suggest to enlarge the scope of thinking to shed a new light on the way art can help thinking the experience of the extreme – by including some other similar tragedies such as the Holocaust, the Armenian and the Rwandan genocide, the Soviet Gulag, and other mass murders.

EXHIBITION
“CAMBODIA, ART FACING THE EXTREME”

Because of its symbolic resonance, art occupies a prominent role in the presentation of collective trauma and in the reconstruction of a respectful memory of the forgotten victims. That is why we would like to organize this exhibition that would gather 80 works of visual arts (paintings, drawings, photographs, videos etc.) made by the great contemporary artists Vann Nath and Séra, but also by young artists who participated in the project “Cambodia, the Memory Workshop”.

Séra and Vann Nath, both survivors of the genocide, already agreed to participate in the first stage of our project, in June 2008 and in January 2009. The workshop and the first exhibition were held at the Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources directed by Rithy Panh. The workshop, entitled “Cambodia, the Memory Workshop”, intended to help young Cambodian visual artists to create art works related to the genocide, using the resources of the Bophana Center. These works of arts gave birth to three exhibitions in Cambodia and in France, as well as a book, *Cambodia, the memory workshop* (Sonleuk Thmey Editions, 2010).

The event could be divided into three parts, if possible in three different rooms. The first two parts will be dedicated to Vann Nath and Séra. The last one will present the works produced on the occasion of “The Memory workshop”. This exhibition will highlight the dynamism and the strength of creation of three generations of Cambodian artists. It could last from three to four weeks in Spring 2013, during which an international symposium could also take place, “Art and the postmemory”.

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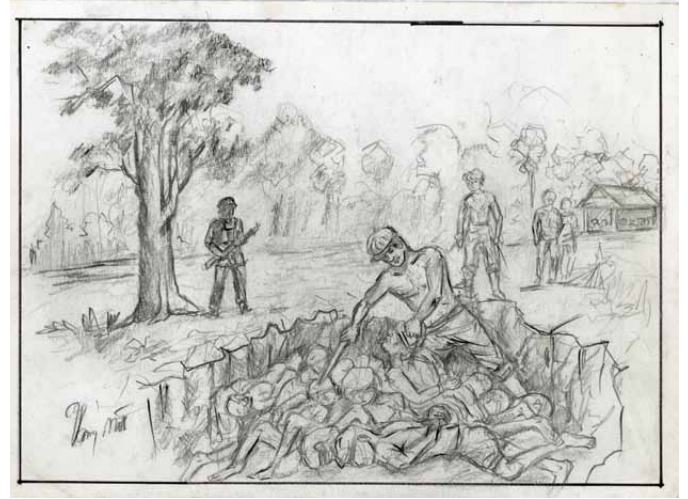
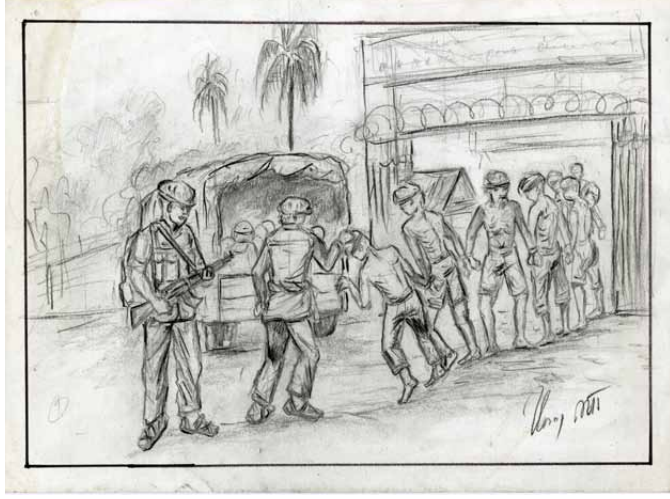
PART 1: VANN NATH, A PAINTER OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

This exhibition will include some thirty drawings and sketches by Vann Nath. Since his release from the jail S-21, Vann Nath has not stopped bringing light, through his work, into what had been covered in silence: famished and tortured bodies, corpses of prisoners executed by their guards...

A documentary film, (currently made by Soko Phay-Vakalis et Pierre Bayard, in collaboration with Paris 8 University and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris-Nord) will be shown during the exhibition. The film is devoted to the work of Vann Nath. His thought-provoking testimony will engage spectators on topics dealing with the erasures of collective history, as well as their relation to artistic creation.



Vann Nath, *The mother and the child at S-21*, 2010



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PART 2: SÉRA, THE SURVEYOR OF BROKEN TIMES

With some 20 pieces (12 paintings and 12 boards of comic sketches) this second part will be dedicated to Séra's work, one of the most important artists of the European and Cambodian scene. He did not live through the Khmer Rouge period, but suffered from its consequences, notably the exile and the death of his family.

Two modes of observing the world are experienced in his work: one emphasizes fictional testimony through the practice of comic books, the other shows the impossibility of grieving through metaphorical paintings. The figure of discontinuity (gap, ellipse, non achievement, suspension), which is the main thread of his work, reveals the rupture with the event, the wandering and underlines the rejection of a linear representation of History. These two dimensions of artistic expression are distinct. But Séra's works also deal with history in a sensitive realism and his paintings – between figurative and abstract – both provide some meditation about the images' purpose to work for the memory.

The exhibition will be combined with a documentary dedicated to Séra's portray: *Le Veilleur* directed by Céline Dréan in 2010.

Séra's drawing for *Impasse et rouge*, 1992-2008



Séa, *Embraces*, 2009



Séa, *Night time (Apsara)*, 2006



Séa, *Homage (Jayavarman VII)*, 2007



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PART 3: CAMBODIA, THE MEMORY WORKSHOP

This exhibition will include some twenty productions from “The Memory Workshop”, and it will also offer space for new creations – that will be produced during a third workshop that will take place in April 2012 at the Bophana Center – which would testify to the survival or the breakdowns which have come to light since this experiment has begun.

Different in their aesthetic and technical approaches (paintings, photographs, videos, and installations) these artists from the new Cambodian generation (the post-genocide generation) show retroactively how they have recognized themselves in the past events, even though they didn’t lived through them. The diversity and the polysemy of their productions testify also to the passage from “I” to “we”, from an intimate way of living and thinking to a collective consciousness.

The exhibition will be combined with a documentary *Cambodia, the memory workshop* directed by Guillaume Suon Petit in 2009, and produced by the Bophana Center.

Vann Nath and others, *Tortoise*, 2008

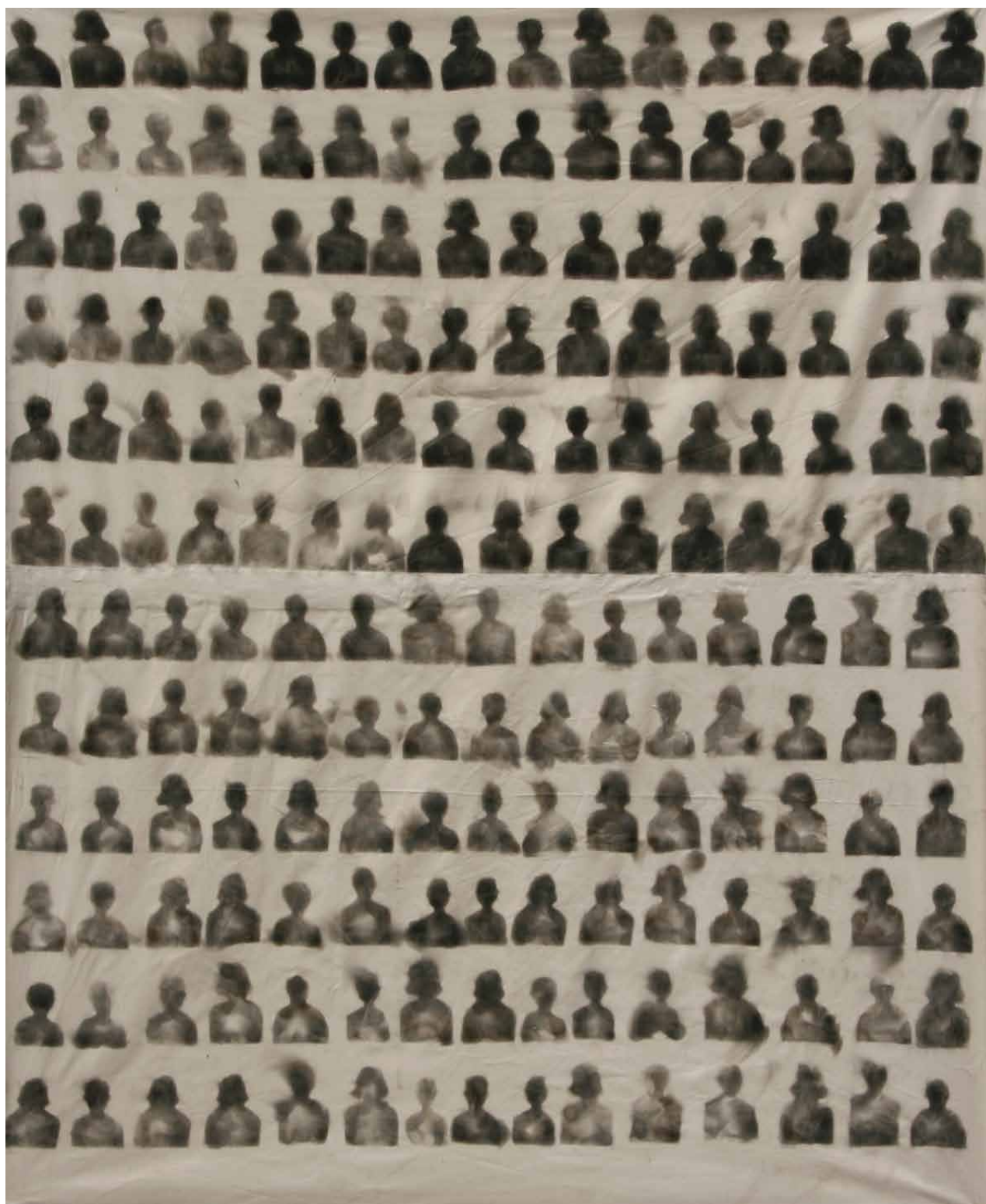


Vann Nath, *The two lotus*, 2009



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Cambodia, the memory workshop



Both Sonrin, S21, 2009

Cambodia, the memory workshop



Chea Serey Roth, *Double portraits*, 2009

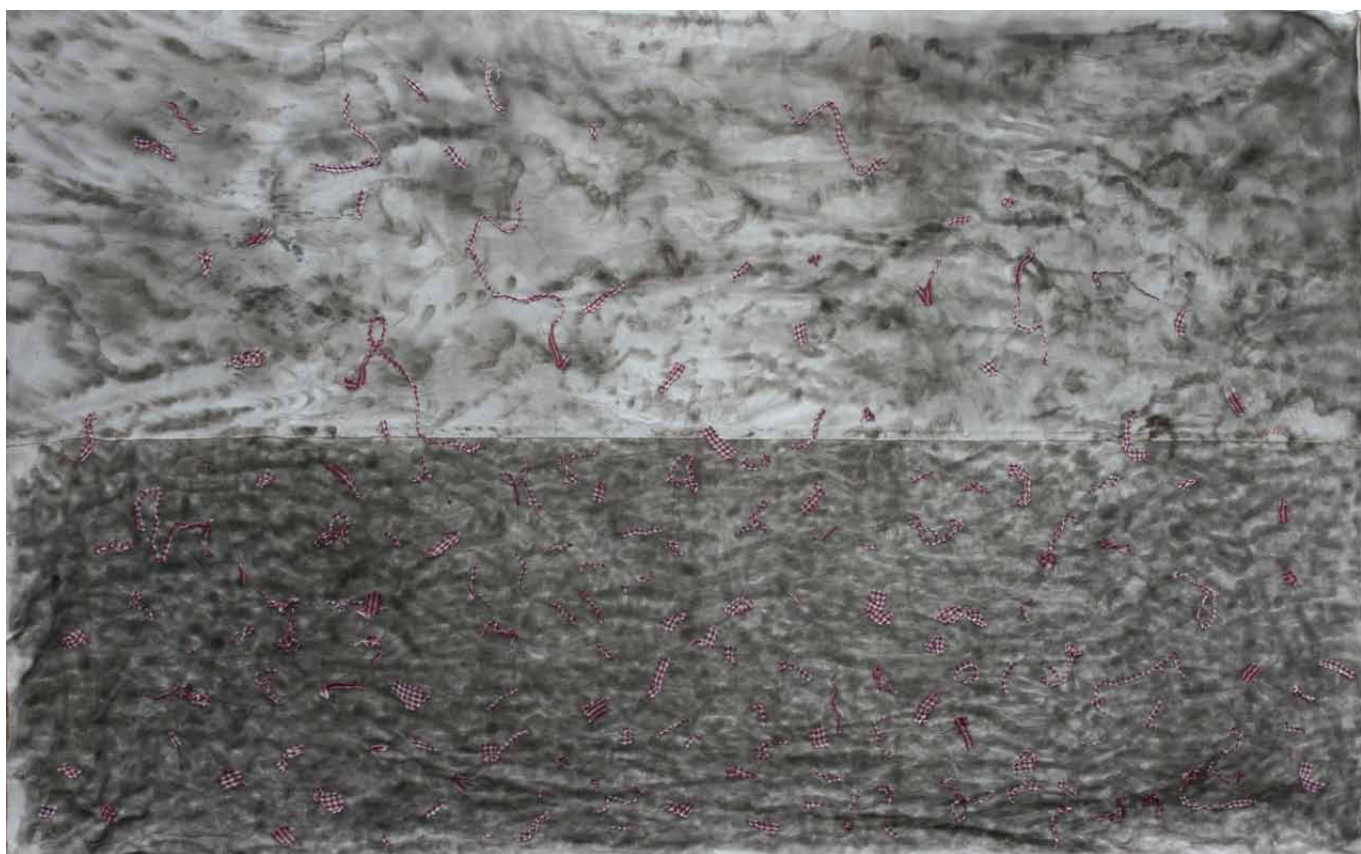
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Cambodia, the memory workshop

Nov Cheanick, *Refugee*, 2008



Both Sonrin, *Landscape 1970 - 1979*, 2008



Cambodia, the memory workshop

Phe Sophon, *Apsara with the skull*, 2009 (detail)



Kong Channa, *Drops (Mourning Veil)*, 2009



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Cambodia, the memory workshop

Séra. *Young refugee*, 2009



Cambodia, the memory workshop



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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
“ART AND POSTMEMORY”

This international symposium will first deal with the Cambodian experience, examining the capacity of art to bear witness to human experiences of the extreme. It will also offer to share some knowledge on this subject. How does art question genocide? How does it manage to give substance to absence or loss, both to direct witnesses and to people – it is the meaning of “postmemory” – who did not know the genocide? How does it sometimes manage to say more than the survivor or the scholar? These are some of the questions the symposium will try to answer.

This symposium will not be limited to Cambodia, although that country will constitute an exceptional example. It will also include international specialists on genocide and exterminations in Armenia, USSR, Rwanda, Bosnia, and of course the Holocaust. These specialists will examine, through different aesthetic means – literature, theater, painting, cinema, photography –, the experience of mass murder and the way the “unspeakable” can be transmitted.

It will provide an opportunity for North American researchers to work with European (especially French) colleagues in a discipline little known in Europe called “Genocide Studies”. In this way, this symposium could contribute to promote collaborative research on the two continents.

This international event will be co-organized by Paris 8 University and an American University, which could be Rutgers University, which is already a partner of Paris 8 University. Moreover, Rutgers University hosts the *Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights*, an international center, pioneering genocide studies, and more specifically the question of the Cambodian genocide.

PARTNERS:

On the French side, the exhibition and the symposium will benefit from the support of the “Institut Universitaire de France” which Pierre Bayard belongs to, and probably from Paris 8 University, Maison des Sciences de l’Homme Paris Nord, and the magazine *Art Absolument*. We plan to build up some partnership with the French Cultural Department of the French Embassy in the United States, and with the Arts Network Asia (ANA) and American foundations.

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