

ARNDT

SOPHEAP PICH

Working primarily with rattan and bamboo, Sopheap Pich's sculptural practice has evolved over one decade to embrace both the representational and the abstract: multivalent voluminous forms, coiled dogs, unfurling Buddhas, tiered candles, sinuous flowers, stacked bombshells, the curvilinear Khmer alphabet, modular cities and more recently, the grid. Pich's grids refuse 'technological miracles'¹; as structure, surface, and pattern, they directly reflect both the material of the form and the form of the material.

Much of his early critical acclaim foregrounded the exotic nature of his uses of material and dramatized Khmer Rouge legacies of war and survival. While the artist agrees in his works' ability to resonate with their environment and the stories they tell of past journeys, however he increasingly draws inspiration from their processes of coming into being.

Pich's insistence on more intuitive, material and formal references intensified within and after his *Wall Relief* series dOCUMENTA(13), of which curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev noted, "When one sees these objects, one sees things that are emerging from a craft and a relationship with the will and the needs of the materials, and at the same time metaphysical, philosophical, and ontologically established objects."² For Pich, the grid as object continues to inspire the infinite potential of relationship with other materials including burlap, beeswax, earth pigments indigenous to Cambodia, and more recently, the factory-made – the latter perhaps symptomatic of the relentless industrialization process around his Mekong River studio just outside central Phnom Penh.

Pich's reliefs become private topographies, with titles both hinting and eschewing logical appropriation. Works featured in *Traitor and Tradition – Old Domain, Desert Planes I* and *Desert Planes II* (all 2014) are striped and stitched in burlap. Originally packaging for uncooked rice, the burlap is sourced from Phnom Penh's markets; each sack selected for its used (and reused) character, its markings and stitches, colour and texture. Pich preserves these traces that infer past lives. Together between the strict and revealed grid lines, his works become "noise, many lives together, like insects, or stars."³

Biography

Sopheap Pich (1971, Battambang) is Cambodia's most recognized artist. He holds a BFA, Painting, University of Massachusetts (1995) and an MFA, Painting, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1999). Pich's solo exhibitions in 2013 include *Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC and *+Collection: Sopheap Pich*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, Australia. Group exhibitions in 2013 include *No Country: Contemporary Art For South and Southeast Asia*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC; Moscow Biennale, Russia; Dojima River Biennial, Osaka, Japan and in 2012, dOCUMENTA(13), Kassel, Germany.

¹ A reference to Robert Smithson's relevant essay, 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', 1968.

² Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 'Live like a frog and die like a snake: Conversations with Sopheap Pich', in *Sopheap Pich, Sculptures 2004–2013*, monograph, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, 2013, p. 18.

³ Christov-Bakargiev, op. cit., p. 18.