

Opposite page**LEE KIT**

Installation view of 'You.' at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2014.
Photo by Cheung Pak Ming.
Courtesy the artist, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority and Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong.

This page**LIM SOKCHANLINA**

Urban Street Night Club
2013

Metal and wooden screen,
single-channel video: 18 min.
Courtesy the artist and Sa Sa Bassac,
Phnom Penh.

In the last year or so, for the first time in living memory, temporary fences around construction sites in Phnom Penh have been decorated with colorful advertising images and flashing electric lights. Cambodian artist Lim Sokchanlina, who has lived in Phnom Penh since childhood, has been documenting this new phenomenon with photography, video and sound recording.

"Urban Street Night Club," held at Sa Sa Bassac gallery, re-created the experience of encountering a particularly garish stretch of fencing located near the city's bustling casino. The exhibition consisted solely of one large-scale installation, *Urban Street Night Club* (2013)—a freestanding wall incorporating a video projection as well as a selection of digital photographs—that filled the gallery with the pulsating colors and sounds of the rapidly transforming environment.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors were initially confronted by a 2.7-meter-high blank wall, which had been hand-built from low-cost materials and weighed down by sandbags. The willfully disorienting experience heightened the surprise of walking around and discovering the vivid, rainbow hues of a video projection displayed on the other side of this structure. The thoughtfully paced video is dominated by iconic scenes of Cambodia, including the temples of Angkor Wat, *apsara* dancers and tropical flowers. The video is projected onto unpainted sheet metal, which is flat enough for the footage to be seen clearly, but reflective enough that the video's rhythmically shifting light bounced back onto the walls of Sa Sa Bassac's high-ceilinged white-cube space. A soundtrack of street noises punctuated by pop songs accentuated the immersive nature of the encounter. The installation felt like a carefully crafted environment of skillfully manipulated light and sound.

The video, however, is of unadulterated

documentation. For the artist, the process of observation and recording is as much a part of the art, and as important, as the final exhibited work. Lim sees his constant documenting of Cambodia's transformation as a means of research. His curiosity and criticality allow him not only to join the growing number of contemporary photographers working to create an indigenously authored visual archive of Cambodia, but also to foster an alternative model of learning and teaching art. Lim is a co-founder of the collective Stiev Selapak, which offers free art classes and experimental residencies at Sa Sa Art Projects, Phnom Penh's only artist-run space. Lim's engagement with his community extended to "Urban Street Night Club," which not only depicted the changes in the local urban environment, but more importantly invited reflection on the social implications of such developments.

For Lim, the mesmerizing effect of the colorful LED lights captured in the installation's video recalls a kind of discotheque; hence the title given to the work, the series of accompanying photos and the show itself. Straightforwardly descriptive, the title hints at Lim's critical hesitation toward hedonistic spectacularization of urban life. Many of the scenes captured in *Urban Street Night Club* linger on a jarring juxtaposition between the wealthy and the needy. Nevertheless, in simultaneously replicating and critiquing such spectacle, Lim acknowledges its complex, yet seemingly unavoidable, seductive power.

According to the catalog, the real-life fencing that inspired Lim's work "shifts attention away from what it conceals," while also "maintaining a backward looking collective consciousness that blinds us from the present mechanisms of control." Lim suggests that the decoration adorning these fences distracts passersby from considering the questionable deals that often facilitate these prime real-estate sales and the demolition of historic architecture at such sites. Moreover, these fences, in displaying advertising images of Angkor Wat and other icons of Cambodian nationalism, perpetuate the practice of defining Cambodia primarily by its past achievements.

"Urban Street Night Club" matched the novelty of Lim's subject matter with a display that was equally thoughtful and original. Although the placement of the photographic series in a small room adjoining the main gallery space was somewhat awkward, the immersive quality of the video installation was largely unprecedented in Cambodia's recent exhibition history—the number of site-specific video installations shown in Phnom Penh can be counted on one hand. Lim is an artist whose keen observational skills are complemented by his aesthetic and daring conceptualism.

ROGER NELSON

