

Artist Pulls Metal Ball From Siem Reap to Phnom Penh

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Cambodian artist Svay Sareth yesterday pulled a giant metal ball across the Japanese bridge into Phnom Penh after leaving his home in Siem Reap province five days earlier.

The 2-meter homemade sculpture, which weighs more than 100 kg, was covered in dirt and messages from people living in the villages Mr Sareth passed through. On the bridge, traffic was held up behind the ball harnessed to Mr Sareth as he walked the final leg to pass the Royal Palace.

"I'm very happy to make this journey and meet so many nice people along the way," said Mr Sareth, before crossing the bridge to arrive five days ahead of schedule despite a sprained ankle.

The title of the artwork "Mon Boulet," or "My Ball," is a French expression to describe personal baggage from the past. Mr Sareth said the sculpture, which was like a ball and chain tied to prisoners, represented scars left by his childhood during the war.

Mr Sareth, who was born into a family of soldiers in Prey Veng province in 1972, later grew up in refugee camps. "The difficulty of pulling the ball is for all refugees, not just me," he said. "It is for refugees living all over the world who have lived through difficulties."

On the journey from Siem Reap province, Mr Sareth slept in a tent carried in a small backpack. "I wanted to relive that part of my life," he said, adding that he could not always explain his motives to interested people along the way.

Mr Sareth studied art in the Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border and co-founded the art school Phare Ponleu Selpak in Battambang province. In February, he pushed a 4-meter, 200-kg wooden boat called "Tuesday" from his rural home in Siem Reap province into the city's Hotel de la Paix Arts Lounge for a solo exhibition there.

The ball sculpture will be exhibited in Phnom Penh this September accompanied by a documentary of the journey filmed by Touch Yinmony.