

Buddhist Art News

News on Buddhist art, architecture, archaeology, music, dance, and academia.

Artist explores Cambodian religion

Posted on May 16, 2012 by buddhistartnews



BY Roth Meas/Phnom Penh Post

Than Sok's exhibit, *The Halo of the Omnipresent Eye*, showing at Sa Sa Bassac Gallery, explores religion in Cambodia through an alms bowl prayer sands installation.

Than Sok, 27, a former student of the closed Reyum Art School, hopes that his exhibition, *The Halo of the Omnipresent Eye*, now on display at Sa Bassac gallery, will impress upon those who see it how some Buddhist rituals have emerged from Hinduism. He also wants to show how Buddhism is practiced nowadays in Cambodia.

"We do not use incense sticks or piles of sand for praying in Buddhism. Actually, these are Hindu traditions. Some Buddhist people are not aware that they practice Hinduism," he said.

In one installation, Than Sok uses several piles of sand at the gallery to show this custom. Next to the piles of sand, another art installation is made from several food bowls to represent the bowls that Buddhist monks carry to ask for alms every morning.

"Buddhist monks are not allowed to touch cash. In the past, they offered food or medicines to the monks. But now this has changed. Buddhist people offer money to the monks instead of food or medicine," Than Sok said.

Through his alms bowl installation, the artist hopes to express his concerns with the tradition of giving money to monks.

In Buddhism, donations are voluntary, and Than Sok feels that people should not feel pressured to give alms.

He perceives that some Buddhist people feel uncomfortable when Buddhist monks ask for alms, especially when they do not have money. He doesn't mind that people offer food or money to monks, but Than Sok wants to call attention to what happens when people cannot donate money.

"For instance, my sister used to offer cash to the monks. One day she had no money give them. She was uncomfortable, so she borrowed my money to give as an offering to the monk. In Buddhism, distribution is voluntary, not by obligation," he said.

Than Sok's sand and alms bowls installations are shown together with several of his paintings. He expects that people will understand the paintings, but is not sure about the art installations since this type of visual art is new in Cambodia.

"Maybe it's hard for local people to understand the meaning. I hope Cambodian people will understand art these types of installations some day like people do in other countries. But at the moment, I give them handouts, so it helps to explain the meaning to them," Than Sok said.

Than Sok has exhibited his art in Hong Kong and Japan and at many places in Cambodia such as Bophana centre, French Cultural Centre and Reyum Institute.

He is currently studying architecture at Norton University, and hopes his knowledge of art will help him in his future job as an architect.

Than Sok's art installations are on display at Sa Sa Bassac gallery, #18, 2nd floor, Sothearos Boulevard, Phnom Penh, until February 26.