

Instinct by Tith Kanitha

16 January- 28 April, 2018

Tith Kanitha (born 1987, Phnom Penh) is a cross-disciplinary artist working between the visual arts in sculpture, performance and installation and in Cambodia's independent film industry as an artistic director and actress. *Instinct* marks the artist's second solo exhibition, following *Companions* at the French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh (2011). Select group exhibitions include *Le paysage après coup*, Centre d'art contemporain Faux Mouvement, Metz (2018); *SUNSHOWER: Southeast Asian Art from 1980s to Today*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017); *Today of Yesterday: The Return*, Yamamoto Gendai, Tokyo (2015); *Rates of Exchange: Uncmpared | Art in Bangkok and Phnom Penh*, H Gallery, Bangkok and SA SA BASSAC, Phnom Penh (2014); *Phnom Penh Rescue Archaeology: Contemporary Art and Urban Change In Cambodia*, ifa, Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany and *The Memory Workshop*, Columbia University, NYC (both 2013); *SurVivArt*, the artist's home, Phnom Penh and House of World Cultures, Berlin; *Dom-naer Thmey / New Journey*, Cambodian Youth Art Festival, Cambodian Living Arts, Phnom Penh (2013). *Still Water*, Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, Phnom Penh (2011); *I Love PP*, Java Café, Phnom Penh (2008); *With a Body Comes Suffering*, Department of Plastic Arts, Phnom Penh (2007). Select performances include *Heavy Sand*, as part of *Reclamation Recreation: An Urban Beach Party*, SA SA BASSAC (2012), and *Women Move Away from the Stove*, as part of *Hey Sister, Where Are You Going?* Sovanna Mall, Phnom Penh (2010). Kanitha was an artist-in-residence with New Zero Art Space, Yangon Myanmar, for *Gender Under Reflection: Southeast Asia Contemporary Art Exchange Program* (2012); The Art Initiative Tokyo – Backer foundation at Yamamoto Gendai, Tokyo (2015); Bose Pacia Transparent Studio, NYC for Season of Cambodia and *FIELDS: An Itinerant Inquiry Across the Kingdom of Cambodia* (both 2013), and *FIELDS II: On Attachments and Unknowns*, Phnom Penh (2017). She was nominated for the DAAD Berlin Residency (2014) and the Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2017). She holds a BA in Interior Design, Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2008).

SA SA BASSAC is a non-profit exhibition space, reading room and resource centre dedicated to Cambodian contemporary art and its histories. Our program in Phnom Penh focuses on exhibitions by Cambodian artists and collaborative, Southeast Asia-leaning projects, all of which inspire multivocal educational programs. We partner with local, regional and international institutions, residencies, museums, and galleries to expand networks and knowledge for artists and audiences alike. SA SA BASSAC was co-founded in 2011 by Stiev Selapak artist collective and curator Erin Gleeson.

SA SA BASSAC is pleased to present *Instinct*, our first solo exhibition with Tith Kanitha (born 1987, Phnom Penh). *Instinct* brings together sixteen steel wire sculptures of varying sizes and distinctive, biomorphic forms. The artist has playfully staged them as characters throughout the exhibition space in both conventional and surprising ways – they hang, drape and dangle at different levels from the ceiling and walls, and rest on or slightly off open-ended pedestals.

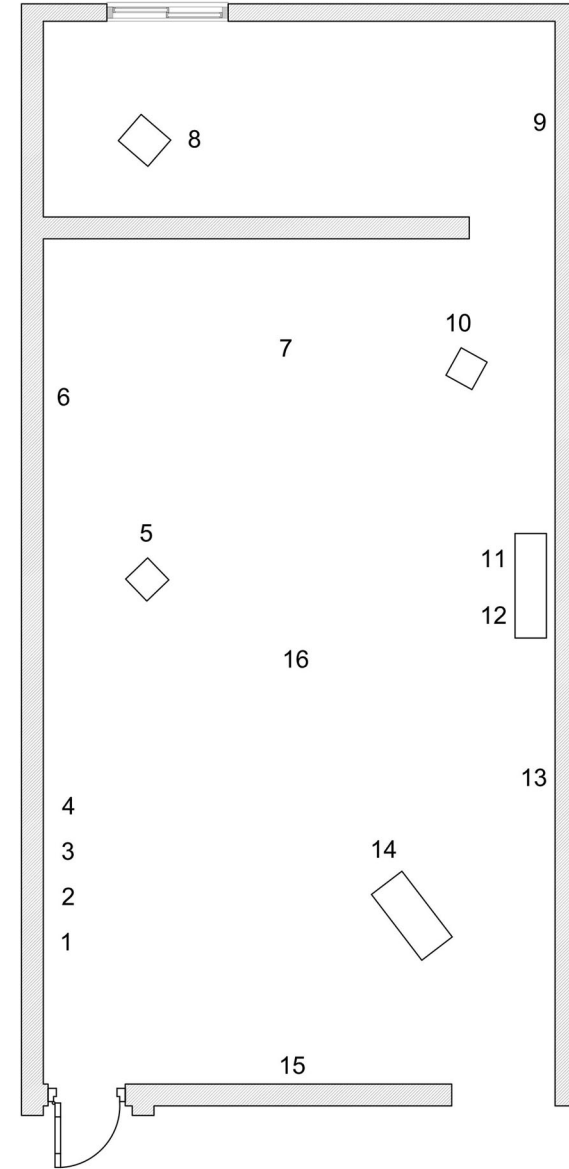
Tith Kanitha's sculptures are grounded in material, process, and time. A graduate of the interior design program at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, Kanitha found steel wire through handicraft practices at the school over a decade ago. Describing it as an "insignificant material whose primary function is to support others," she began experimenting and slowly transforming its craft and industrial associations. Her first forms were representational – balloons as symbolic of freedom, a mosquito net inferring the domestic, and both played a role in her site-specific, public performances and installations. Subsequent exhibitions saw her focus on sculpture, pairing the steel wire works with fabrics and frames. *Instinct* is the artist's first exhibition to present her material singularly.

Working from her apartment in a bustling neighborhood of Phnom Penh, Kanitha's process is a physically, conceptually, and metaphorically laborious negotiation with her material. After unspooling her wire, she works through the natural entanglements, hand-coiling around a thin copper dowel to amass great lengths of helical modules. Spring-like, the flexible lengths stretch and compress, and interlock when wrapped around one another. She says the work feels complete when "it can breath on it's own terms."

In a two-way conversation with her material, the artist describes both careful listening and gentle subversion, of finding a flow or falling into drift: "There is a state of meditation when I coil – my mind travels while my wrist rolls. Many days I question what I'm doing, sitting in my houserepeating this motion. Different days have different answers. Sometimes I have no answer. It is part of the way to process and deal with history, and with the pressures, the expectations, the normalization of so many things in my society."

Kanitha actively challenges socially and culturally assigned roles of sexual difference, repeatedly renegotiating her role in a society where she does not neatly fit. She demands her freedom not to cook, to prefer a messy house, unkept hair, natural skin, and above all, she demands her freedom to be an artist who resists notions of authority deemed inherited, linear, and rational. To Kanitha, instinct is a skill and a discipline, a means to empower the unconscious, the somatic, and the imperfect.

Tith Kanitha's sculptures are infinitely evocative. There are hints of the figurative, of appendages, antennas, erotic openings, of the archetypal, of plant-forms, membranes, of garments, and of hair and its knots, bristles, and extensions. All have frays; unserged beginnings, middles or ends, depending on how you read them. And there is time. Kanitha's process is a tactile means of tracing time, which is contained but not bound in her diary of wires. - EG



All works: Tith Kanitha, *Instinct* series.
Hand-coiled, 7mm steel wire, dimensions variable
#1-14,16: 2017; #15: 2015.