

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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SA SA BASSAC opens *Thoamada* (ធ្មូតិ) by Vuth Lyno

Vuth Lyno, *Lion*, 2011, Digital C-Print, 60x90cm

Phnom Penh – SA SA BASSAC is pleased to announce the opening of *Thoamada* (ធ្មូតិ), a solo exhibition by Vuth Lyno.

Thoamada (ធ្មូតិ) comprises a suspended circle of nine large-scale color photographic portraits and audio. The exhibition questions the line between private and public, inner and outer: the same faces appear inside and outside the circle, but your relationship to them differs. Outside the circle, you can survey the portraits one by one; inside the circle, all the subjects gaze at you at the same time. A separate earphone accompanies each portrait—each participant talks candidly about his life. You can listen to each story one by one. Your relationship with each subject is one on one.

The portraits and stories in *Thoamada* (ធ្មូតិ) derive from an intensive workshop with a professional facilitator and nine Khmer men who have sex with men (MSM) who exchanged personal stories over two days with the aim to build intimate public dialogue about, and among, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities.

For a closing activity, participants were asked to paint their faces as an expression of their identity. The results are personalized masks with meaningful symbols—an animal, a landscape, the Cambodian flag, and so on. One face is patterned with abstract shapes and circles to refer to the life cycle. A cat mask captures another's affinity to the animal as well as his cat-like personality. The man behind the fierce lion mask notes that unlike lions, he doesn't attack unless provoked. A butterfly—half in color and half in black and white—reveals the joy and sadness we all experience. An *asura*, a demonic Hindu mythical figure also referred to as a *yeak*, evokes some of the public fear still associated with LGBT

communities. Mountains and flowers are symbols of home and family, while the participant himself is a leaf—someday to transform into a flower. The flag conjures national pride and Khmer kindness. These symbols show the wide range of Khmer MSM identities.

For the artist, the circular installation of the portraits “represents a sense of community and the process of the workshop in which the participants came in, shared, and learned from each other.” The inner circle reflects the internal selves the participants want to share with the external world. The artist suggests that this community is “not complete yet.” There is a gap in the circle, a space that allows you to enter—“This space could be for anyone who wishes to be part of it.” The show challenges standard stereotypical representations of MSM and empowers them through self-representation.

The title of the show is a commonly used Khmer expression, *Thoamada* (ធ្លាប់តែ), which means things are natural, habitual, okay—the usual. The participants tell us about their everyday, normal lives. Describing the individual photo shoots, Vuth recalls, “I told [the subjects] that they can just be themselves as if someone is talking to them, which is a setting that I wish to create in the final installation—they are talking with the audience.”

Vuth’s project is collaborative. His main concern when taking the photos was “about letting the participants be creators of their own stories, be artists themselves.” The artist aims to capture the individuality of each subject, who is part of a “homogenous yet very diverse group.” He adds, “I wanted the photos to be something simple—passport photos.” Vuth’s installation is a passport to complex stories and lives. Together you, the artist, and his subjects make the journey—the collaboration—complete.

—Viet Lê, independent curator, writer, artist

About the Artist

Vuth Lyno (1982, Phnom Penh) uses photographic practices to question and explore ideas of social transformation and national progress. His exhibitions include *Magnetic Power: ASEAN-Korea Contemporary Photography & Media Art Project* (2009, Gallerydoll, Seoul), *PhotoPhnomPenh* (2008, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh) and *14+1* (2007, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh). Vuth has a Master in Social Science (RMIT University, Melbourne, 2009). He is a development worker, the Director of Sa Sa Art Projects, Phnom Penh (www.sasaart.info) and has co-curated numerous exhibitions and events in Cambodia.

About SA SA BASSAC

SA SA BASSAC is a gallery and resource center dedicated to creating, facilitating, producing, and sharing contemporary visual culture in and from Cambodia.

Thoamada (ធ្លាប់តែ) is part of Cambodia LGBT Pride 2011. Pride is a series of events aiming to provide opportunities for Khmer LGBT people to come together, celebrate who they are and be proud of their identities. It is also a chance for others to learn about LGBT issues and to promote understanding and respect.

Exhibition Details

Exhibition:	<i>Thoamada</i> by Vuth Lyno
Opening:	17 May, 6:00-8:00PM
Dates:	17 May – 12 June, 2011
Opening Hours:	Thu-Fri 2-6pm / Sat-Sun 10am-6pm
Location:	SA SA BASSAC #18 2 nd Floor, Sothearos Blvd, Phnom Penh
Web:	www.sasabassac.com

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