



Heng Ravuth, *Innermost, Screenshot I*, mixed media on canvas, 120x160cm, 2011.

SA SA BASSAC is pleased to announce the opening of *Innermost* by Heng Ravuth, a solo exhibition of mixed media works that extend the artist's concentration on self-portraiture, combining painting and photographic practices.

Trained as a realist painter, in 2007 Heng turned to photography, allowing him a more immediate, intimate, and intuitive way to study how self-representations can or cannot express his inner feelings. Image making became integral to his search for self-understanding and a way to cope with the relatively new concept of identity and individualism in today's Cambodia.

Exploring both maleness and humanness, his photographic serial work became increasingly private, sometimes nude, sometimes performative, in both color and black and white. Says the artist, "Nudity, particularly in Cambodian culture, sounds uncomfortable and sometimes disturbing as it strongly connects to the very intimate privacy of bodies that we usually don't talk about. It also connects to shame and dignity and therefore we seem to try to hide it. Our bodies, our face, our skin are the connection between what we feel inside and how we express this in our daily lives, our specific cultures."

For *Innermost*, Heng plays with this private/public gap, beginning with a selection of intimate self-portraits from his archive, including hidden faces and nude figure studies. *Innermost, Dream* is an abstract profile from the artist's first ever solo exhibition, while *Innermost, Screenshot I* and *II* are hidden portraits, one face behind sunglasses, one with head in hand; diffuse light from a computer flash reference portrayals of the self in our digital age.

It is Heng's studies of the nude figure that echo traditions from another place and time. Heng's first sessions in public space were within deteriorating iconic buildings in Phnom Penh. Francesca Woodman-like in their elusiveness and atmosphere, his initial poses were shadowy, hunched over while descending a staircase (*Innermost, The Building*), while later he posed in large bare rooms with props such as a book (*Innermost, The Mansion*). *Innermost, Forest Walk I* and *II* connect to both the photographic and painterly intentions of American artist Thomas Eakins in their portrayal of youthful men at one with nature, and the rare veritable commitment to studying the male nude against cultural constructs of their time.

These source images, originally prominent works in themselves, have been humbled to a thumbnail scale typical of social media profiles today and multiplied on contact sheets to form a pixilated wallpaper over parts of the canvas. The artist scratched into this layer of emulsion and covered parts of its surface with somber colors, crafting new, iconic and painterly versions of these small photographs. Viewed from a distance, the whole invites us to search for the individual. Discovering the individual, we are drawn back to the whole.

#### About the Artist

Heng Ravuth (b. 1983, Phnom Penh) explores potentials of self-portraiture in photography and painting. He earned a BA in Painting, Royal University of Fine Art, Phnom Penh, 2006. He has exhibited widely within Cambodia including solo exhibitions *Dream*, PhotoPhnomPenh / Java Café and Gallery (2007) and *Nude*, PhotoPhnomPenh / XEm Galerie, Phnom Penh (2009).

#### 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.

#### Exhibition Details

Exhibition: *Innermost* by Heng Ravuth  
Opening: Friday, 9 December, 6:00-8:00PM  
Dates: 9 December, 2011– 8 January, 2012

Opening Hours: Thu-Fri-Saturday 2-6pm / Sun 10am-6pm  
Location: SA SA BASSAC #18 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Sothearos Blvd.  
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