



Thabasano, The Overeater, 2012

SA SA BASSAC is pleased to announce Chan Dany's first solo exhibition *If They Were With Us Today*, a series of twenty new paintings that playfully transpose ancient literary characters to present day Cambodia.

If They Were With Us Today continues the lineage of two important and interconnected histories— that of Cambodian painting, and of the Reamker— a revered Buddhist re-interpretation of the ancient Indian Hindu epic poem Ramayana in which issues of trust, loyalty, love, and revenge are played out in dramatic encounters between royal and mythical characters.

As that system continues to fade, many itinerant painters for-hire are disconnected from the stories they depict, and refined knowledge of traditional rendering, costuming, and style are becoming lost to the use of stencils and low-grade materials. Chan Dany remains one of very few artists employing traditional knowledge, attempting to maintain its relevance today.

Trained at Reyum Art School, Chan spent years with teachers Duong Saree and Kun Sovanarith studying the most intact examples of Reamker murals throughout Cambodia including that of the Silver Pagoda at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. Painted in the intricate aristocratic style in 1903 under the guidance of master Neak Okhna Tep Nimit Mak, this mural was highly influential to subsequent masters. Chet Chan was one such master, whose knowledge of Reamker painting was thoroughly documented by Reyum's co-founders and scholars Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth. *If They Were With Us Today* follows Chet Chan's dictionary of characters, placing them in new roles and contexts of today's urban and newly suburban Phnom Penh.

Born in 1984, Chan Dany sees himself as part of a new age of Cambodians, whose tastes are altered almost unconsciously by a global economy. He embraces the new alongside his deliberate inclusion of the traditional; when he paints ancient characters, Chan offers incense at a shrine near his workstation while listening to K-pop. While honoring traditional ritual and rules on perspective, his bright color combinations are more typical of festive decorations today.

Like his mostly anonymous predecessors, such as the temple painters who incorporated Frenchmen during colonial times Wat Bakong in Siem Reap or modern buildings at Wat Roka in Kratie, Chan uses localization tactics to keep the past relevant for audiences. Each painting subtly indicates changes in attitudes, economy and cultural practices. Says the artist, "The Reamker characters were capable of magic in the old stories, but placed in their contemporary setting they have lost their powers. They have to earn money now; today we cannot believe in magic." Chan imagines the characters facing life as the rising set of middle class commoners in Cambodia today.

Menchanub, The Waiter depicts a young half-fish half-monkey with a part-time job serving pizza to young couples interacting with their phones more than each other. *Pipeat, The English Teacher*, once a respected fortune-teller and King of Langka, is now volunteering to teach the "language of the future" required to gain employment in a tourist driven economy. *Asophat, The Football Fan* closely watches English Premier League on the newest flat screen television. Even Hanuman the great warrior becomes *Hanuman, The Balloon Seller*; a young boy waves him a US dollar rather than a Cambodian riel.

In the gallery, Chan Dany's collection of monoscenes and accompanying short narratives can be read from a field of individual desk-like podiums. Inter-related, these characters are autonomous in presence and in spirit. The 'sala' encourages a remembrance that they are still here to teach us something.

About the Artist

Chan Dany's (b. Prey Veng, 1984) intricate practice combines his appreciation and fluency of traditional forms, techniques, and stories as a way to preserve and maintain their relevance today. Select exhibitions include *The Scale of Angkor*, Hotel de La Paix Arts Lounge, 2011; *New Asian Promises*, Palais Project, Vienna 2009; *Forever Until Now*, 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong, 2009; *Strategies from Within*, Ke Centre of Contemporary Art, Shanghai 2008, and *In Transition*, Reyum, Phnom Penh, 2007.

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: *If They Were With Us Today* by Chan Dany

Opening: Thursday 3 May 6:00-8:00pm

Dates: 3 May - 3 June, 2012

Opening Hours: Thursday - Saturday 2-6pm, Sunday 10am-6pm + by appointment

Location: SA SA BASSAC #18 2nd Floor, Sotheaeros Boulevard

Web: www.sasabassac.com

Contact: Erin Gleeson, Artistic Director, [+855 \(012\) 507 917](tel:+855012507917)

Related Events

What: *Reamker Listening Sessions* in collaboration with Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center

When: Saturdays, May 5, 12, 19, 26

Throughout the day on four consecutive Saturdays, enjoy listening to historic and dynamic recitations of the Reamker by a famous storyteller Ta Krut. Recorded in 1965 and 1968, this record of Ta Krut has been restored by Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center with the advice of Professor Alain Daniel and the support of UNESCO and Cambodian National Commission for UNESCO. To learn more and listen, visit: http://www.bophana.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=137

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