

Meet Tith Kanitha

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INTERVIEW



Tith Kanitha is a young Cambodian visual artist. She graduated from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Design in 2008 and has made a name for herself in recent years with a series of installations, which is a relatively new practice in Cambodia. Kanitha will participate in the Cambodian Youth Arts Festival 2012, as part of the exhibition Damnaer Thmey (New Journey) held at Cambodian Living Arts' gallery. The exhibition features a group of young Cambodian artists who explore relations between tradition and contemporary world.

How did you get involved in the arts?

In 2007 when I was at university, I had the chance to attend a workshop led by renowned Cambodian visual artist Linda Saphan. This was a revelation for me: before arts were just about some sculptures and paintings, but I understood that this was all about creativity! I made my first installation artwork, which was very new in Cambodia at that time. I tried to give a message, make the installation meaningful, and this surprised people.

Of course it was easier for me to get involved in the arts as I grew up in Phnom Penh, and this is the place in Cambodia where the arts scene is developing. But I'd like to see arts spread in provinces as well, creative people are everywhere and they deserve to express themselves too!

What do arts represent to you?

Arts are my source of life, my breath. Creating things gives a meaning to my life, and it is also a way to express myself toward the whole society. This is not only a way of being but a duty: born as a human, you have to share what you experience. I just show what I see here and there. For example in Cambodia there is obviously a problem of freedom of expression, so I want to break that and witness things. My art calls to action, but I don't see myself as an actor myself, I just highlight existing things. I believe that everyone can make things happen if he or she wants to. That's why I especially try to appeal to young people.

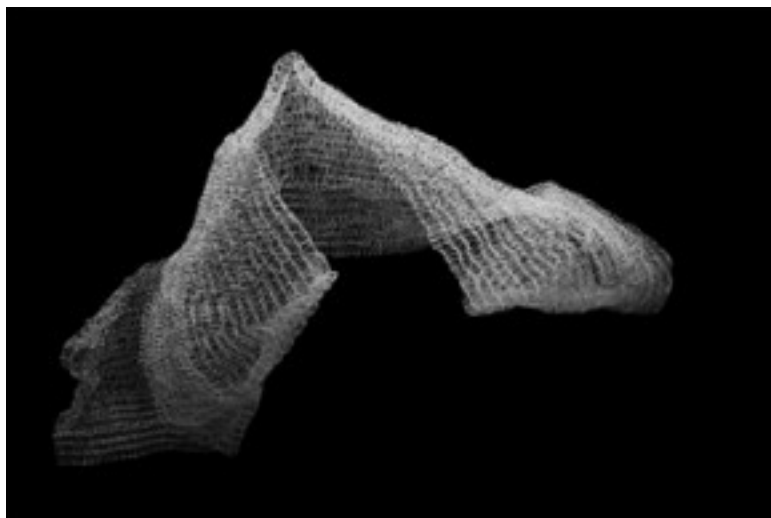
Also, that's why I am excited to see the arts scene developing in Cambodia. Many excellent artists are involved in all visual art forms and keep creating new things, although it remains difficult to live as an artist, especially to earn a decent living. But for me this is not that difficult, as I love arts and I even manage to help my family!

It seems you've started to get famous through your work... What does that mean to you?

I am happy that people notice my work of course, but I especially appreciate comments and feedbacks. I am always trying to improve myself and my work.

Can you tell us more about the Cambodian Youth Arts Festival?

I like this festival a lot! During the last edition in 2010 I was part of the organization team. I am so happy to be part of the program now!



This year I'll participate in a group exhibition about relations between Cambodian traditions and the modern world. I'll be presenting the *Hammock*, which is a traditional object but this one is made of steel wire and people can't use it. Here I am questioning the new materials we have, the change in functions of objects that occur when we move from a traditional to a modern way of life. Using this material, I could have made the hammock much quicker than a fabric hammock but I weaved it the traditional way. Through this artwork I wanted to show that today people don't take the time to relax, they cannot sit in the hammock. You cannot always get things you want, you have to be happy with what you can watch, touch, experience. You cannot push yourself too much.

What are you currently working on?

I am preparing for the Season of Cambodia festival in New York in April-May 2013. But now I am also taking the time to study, read books, talk with people... This is how I get inspiration: I create by watching, I copy images into my brain and I use them to create. I've travelled a little bit and I realized that every place is unique. So now I want to watch Cambodia and show what makes this country special, whether good or in bad.

How do you envision the arts in Cambodia in the future?

I never think how things evolve; I cannot say what the future will be like. But I guess

that if more and more people keep witnessing things, they will get more and more inspiration and understanding of the arts. For my part I continue observing and showing, actions depend on others. I want to make people think, as it seems that not enough people think today. That's why I enjoy so much the Cambodian Youth Arts Festival, as it encourages new creations, it brings new ideas. And audiences will think "Cambodian people did that, so I can do that to!"

A word for your readers everywhere in the world?

Challenge yourself as much as you can. And don't wait for tomorrow. These two mottos drive my life!

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