SOPHEAP PICH

SCULPTURES 2004 - 2013

SOPHEAP PICH

SCULPTURES 2004 - 2013

TYLER ROLLINS
FINE ART

FOREWORD

TYLER ROLLINS

This catalogue is published on the occasion of Sopheap Pich's third solo exhibition with Tyler Rollins Fine Art. Entitled *Reliefs*, the exhibition features new works from Pich's *Wall Reliefs* series, which debuted in 2012 at Documenta (13) in Kassel, Germany. The exhibition coincides with *Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich*, a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized by John Guy, Florence and Herbert Irving Curator of the Arts of South and Southeast Asia, in conversation with Sheena Wagstaff, Chairman, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art. The exhibition features ten sculptures from recent years, ranging from large-scale, organic forms to the more recent *Wall Reliefs*, and includes loans from private collections as well as from the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Arts and Design.

Pich is widely considered to be Cambodia's most internationally prominent contemporary artist. Working primarily with thin strips of rattan and bamboo, he creates sculptural forms that address issues of time, memory, and the body, often relating to Cambodia's history, particularly with regard to his recollections of life during the Khmer Rouge period (1975-79), and its culture, both its ancient traditions and contemporary struggles. Pich's work stands out for its subtlety and power, combining refinement of form with a visceral, emotive force. After receiving his BFA and MFA in the United States, Pich returned to Cambodia in 2002, where he began working with local materials – bamboo, rattan, burlap, beeswax and earth pigments gathered from around Cambodia – to make sculptural forms that reference social and political conditions in Cambodia. His childhood experiences during the genocidal conditions of late 1970s Cambodia had a lasting impact on his work, informing its themes of survival, family, and basic human togetherness.

Pich's work has been featured in numerous international museum exhibitions and biennials in Asia, Europe, Australia, and the United States, including the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (2009), Asia-Pacific Triennial (2009), Asian Art Biennial (2011), Singapore Biennale (2011), and Documenta (2012). His major site – adaptive sculptural installation, *Compound*, on view in March and April 2013 in New York City's Brookfield Place Winter Garden, was originally conceived for the 2011 Singapore Biennale, where it was displayed in the rotunda of Singapore's National Museum, and was subsequently featured in Pich's solo exhibition at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle (2011-2012) and in the group show, *Invisible Cities*, at MASS MoCA (2012-2013); it will be exhibited in 2014 in conjunction with his solo exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

We are proud to present in this catalogue an overview of Pich's sculptural works over the past ten years, beginning with his first rattan and wire form, *Silence* (2004), and concluding with his latest *Wall Reliefs* from 2013. A highlight of the catalogue is an extended interview with Pich conducted by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the Artistic Director of Documenta (13), in which the two discuss the development of Pich's work.

"LIVE LIKE A FROG AND DIE LIKE A SNAKE": CONVERSATIONS WITH SOPHEAP PICH

CAROLYN CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: When I met you at the Singapore Biennale in April 2011, I was struck by the model-like nature of *Compound*, the large sculptural installation in bamboo, rattan and wire that looked like either a small city, or an abstraction of a missile stockpile: it was at once very much connected with material and craft, while at the same time being very mathematical, almost like a three-dimensional realization – in a particularly earthy, organic material – of a computer modeling sketch for a construction still to be finished. It reminded me both of the history of abstraction in art, and of a certain playfulness with materials – a way to just pass the time within the field of art, with little or no irony, and no cynicism. This combination of humble materials, the act of making something, and the contemporary appearance of the structure, reminded me of both Arte Povera as well as conceptual and minimalist practices. It also alluded to the importance of forging alliances between the ecological and the intellectual, in order to create a form of art that is not aloof from the world of matter, or why matter *matters*, today – and yet to commit this politically charged act of aesthetics in the most subtle of manners. This is a politics of form that makes no great claims – that lies low, as if modesty and understatement were the ethos of the work, and of survival itself, in tune with notions of contemporary de-growth, where less is more. The work makes few direct references to your background in a war-torn Cambodia, yet surely has been determined by the conditions of your life there.

Sopheap Pich: I was born in a small village near Battambang, Cambodia, in 1971, just at the time when the Khmer Rouge was fighting to take over the country, and I lived through those times as a child. I was not old enough to be able to comprehend life as history.

CCB: And you lived in a rural community. Did you grow up on a farm?

SP: Yes, my parents were farmers, but my father never really liked to farm. When he was younger he learned how to read and write in the temple, and then, in the early 1970s when they started drafting people, he entered the army, as a medic. He didn't study medicine at school, but he knew how to give penicillin antibiotics and shots to people.

When the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975, my family was living in small villages near the Macleour, a rural commune of Battambang Province, where we arrived in 1976 and stayed until the end of the regime in 1979.

CCB: I remember you once told me that your father taught you to be self-sufficient and to lie low, to not be too noticeable. These are important survival skills. Was he a primary figure for you during your childhood?

SP: My father taught me to make my first fishhook out of a piece of wire when I was four years old. After having injured his backbone falling off a rooftop (he was working building huts), he became a metal smith. When he was able to "keep" me at home, I would help him flatten pieces of tin with a hammer or by stepping on an air pump he used to heat metals with. A fond memory I have from this work was the casting of an old large tablespoon. He made a sand mold of the spoon out of wet sand that he packed into two wooden boxes and then he poured molten tin in. I remember clearly how the spoon had sand all over it, and a long chopstick-sized metal handle, which resulted from the pouring of metal through the air hole. I also remember how proud my father was of the result. He had me help file off the sand from the spoon. On other days, he would have me help file off edges of buckets and other tin plates he made.

I was always a small kid and because of that I could never compete for meals at the cafeteria. I played with other little kids in the village during the daytime, making toys like tops and other bamboo toys. He said to me one day, "If you are hungry, you have to find your own food." That means you have to know how to make slingshots, arrows, traps... whatever you can make, and then go find food. He also said that if one day he was not around to take care of me, I would have to look out for myself.

So I learned how to make simple hunting devices, and I spent time looking after my younger brother. I never left home without my top and my slingshot and my clay marbles.

CCB: What does your father think of your being an artist?

SP: He is okay with it now, but he never really believed in it before. He was angry when I decided to be an artist in college. I didn't decide to be an artist until I was a second year student in university. You know? Because I wanted to do what he wanted me to do, which was to become a doctor. He wanted me to do something useful. My father used to say to me there are four or five things I shouldn't be, and at the top of the list was being an artist – meaning a poet, a writer, a dancer, a painter, a filmmaker, a musician. He also did not want me to be a politician, or a philosopher. So I resisted my desire to be an artist for as long as I could. But I wanted to take a painting class at the University of Massachusetts, and to take a painting class you had to declare a major in art, so that is how I changed, thinking I would figure out later if I could switch my major again.

I knew I was good at it, although in all of my school years I took only one art class – that was in 8th grade, during my second year in school in Massachusetts when I was fourteen years old. I knew I was good at it, and I knew I loved it. All I wanted to do was paint.

CCB: Some of your works are dark and gloomy, especially the newer grid-paintings that we first showed in dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel in 2012, suggesting dark memories of pain and suffering. Others, like the work *1979*, your installation of various pieces including an unfinished rattan Buddha and other sculptural works that look like gigantic toys or tops, which you exhibited at the Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane in 2009, refer directly to a biographical experience of embodied history – your many-days-long march from Cambodia to Thailand. How does history come into your artistic practice?

SP: In 1979, days after my father heard that the regime had ended, our family of four set out on foot toward the central town of Battambang Province. This journey took about a week, and it was the first time I had seen the burned out tanks, huge unexploded bombs, trenches, and the dead soldiers and people lying along on the road and in the rice fields. It was very exhausting and scary at the same time. I had never seen dead people in Macleour, before those days of our journey. But today, if I look at history, I don't trust what has been written, because the Cambodians say one thing, the Americans say another thing, and the Chinese yet another, and so on.

When we arrived at the town center of Battambang Province my family decided to build a hut on the edge of the river Sangkae, just in front of the temple called Wat Ta Mim. I made the "unfinished" *Buddha* rattan piece (2009) as an homage to this temple. During this time, my mother ran into an aunt of hers in the street market, who had become a beggar. That week, we found all the relatives we had been separated from during the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime. My grandmother, aunts and uncles came to live with us. My father bought a bicycle and would go back and forth across the border into Thailand on it. They called it "Ruat Puan," or evading taxes. He would ride the bike to basically the last village, walk on foot across the rice fields and official borderlines in the jungle into Thailand to bring back goods that my mother would then trade on the streets of Battambang for rice and other things we needed. This was still in 1979. It was extremely dangerous. But by going back and forth like that, he was able to gather news concerning when it would be most reasonable to take the family out of Cambodia. People like my father, people that were thinking about their children's education and had no belief that Cambodia was going to be a good place to spend the rest of their lives, were planning on leaving when they had the chance. And for my father, the chances were best then, while the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese were still fighting in different spots around the border, and so this was the moment when we could sneak through along the route he used for smuggling.

We left Wat Ta Mim in September 1979. My father first brought three or four of us on his bicycle to a relative's house in the last village before the trench lines of the border. He repeated the trip until he had brought everyone over, and then we started the next phase of the journey on foot towards Thailand. This was the scariest journey of all for my family. I cannot count how many deaths I witnessed along the way. Walking through the jungle at night, one couldn't even cough out loud. There were dangerous zones where my father would walk and crawl twenty meters ahead of us to check out the scene, and then he would come back for us quietly, and we would follow. There were land mines everywhere. My father would show them to us with his little flashlight. He would show us people he knew that had been shot or had stepped on land mines. I remember a gruesome scene with about half a dozen bodies lying just to the side of the path. It was dark. The mines were along the large part of the muddy road, to stop vehicles, tanks and oxcarts from getting through.

People moved around in order to survive: to trade for goods, to find other siblings, relatives and family members. Our trip took two nights, until we reached what is called Jumrum Chas where we remained for two or three months around December 1979. This was an old camp, still in Cambodia, where people settled before they moved on to places like the Site 1 and Site 2 refugee camps on the border of Cambodia and Thailand.

It was here that my father decided to dig a trench on the edge of a riverbank and build a small hut near a bamboo bush. My father would sneak into Thailand at around 3 or 4 in the morning to buy ice, cigarettes, clothing, and whatever valuables he could find for my mother and I to sell. We sold ice syrup water mixed with basil seed we had grown ourselves. Every couple of days I heard bombs exploding from the outskirts of the camp. I saw injured people being carried toward the border. Our hut wasn't far from the border. Some nights we had to jump into the trench and, looking up, I could see sparks in the sky.

At some stage my father found out that UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) buses were waiting on the other side of the border in Thailand. We still had to walk to get there, and it wasn't easy. A group of Khmer soldiers patrolling the border would not let us cross. My father negotiated with three soldiers a few meters away from us to get us through. He explained that he, too, was a soldier, a lieutenant of some importance, that he knew this and that person (he was making it all up), and that he was only interested in bringing his family to safety, and would return afterwards to help them fight the enemy. He succeeded; we got on the UN bus and arrived in the big refugee camp called Khao I Dang (which literally means: Hill of the Spotted Bitch).

In Khao I Dang, I learned Khmer language and math at the public school. My father learned English from private teachers in their huts. He then started teaching me and other relatives and neighbors using Oxford Book 1, while he was studying Book 2 himself. So I would attend Khmer school in the morning, and then I would take the English class with my father. For a few weeks I even took a typing class at the

Concern Center, an NGO that was located there.

CCB: The first artworks that you made after graduating from school in Massachusetts in 1995, before using bamboo or rattan, were figurative ink on paper drawings, sometimes portraits. When a person wants to be an artist it is often because there is something in the past of art that they admire. What was there in the modernist art of the past, or in more historical moments of art, that you found interesting?

SP: I remember my strong reaction when I saw a sculpture by Brancusi. There is something related to beauty in the smoothness of his sculptures that reminds me, perhaps, of a carved Buddha sculpture. However, going back even further, the first desire to be an artist originated when I was a child in the refugee camps. The first time I saw something we could call "art" was when a friend of mine who was a couple of years older (I was nine or ten at that time) came home one day with a small watercolor painting on paper that he told me he had made at an afternoon "art school." It was a piece of paper slightly bigger than the size of his palm. On it was a picture of a hut with trees on the roof, a small patch of blue pond in the front, a mountain range in the distance, ultramarine faded sky, yellow brown fields from the house to the bottom edge, and a few palm trees. It was a typical painting of Cambodia – yellow in the middle, blue on top and brown and yellow at the bottom. I was impressed by this painting and so I went to the "art school" one day with him. Because I was so small and slow, however, I was scared, and couldn't compete for any of the materials, or get the teachers' attention to help me get started, and so I never went back. I was too young, and I couldn't fight for a place to sit. There was no space to sit, and there was no paper to draw on, no crayons to draw with, and there was no watercolor – there was nothing I could do. They gave me a small piece of paper with a pencil, and left me there to figure it out alone. I had no clue what to do. I wanted to, but I couldn't. I was always the smallest child in the town because I had been sick early on in life, with chicken pox or malnutrition or some other disease, so I never grew up, and am still rather small.

CCB: Inside the refugee camps, they had art classes?

SP: Yes, there was an NGO called the Concern Center that still operates today. People go there to learn how to type the Cambodian alphabet, act in theater, do acrobatics, gymnastics, and they host performances, too. I, myself, took typing. But there were other classes, and a group of talented people that drew. I had never even seen a watercolor before. I had never seen any art before. I had never seen any flat images, nothing that was two-dimensional before then.

CCB: But were these Concern Centers, were they teaching people to do art only in order to pass the time? Or was it like art therapy for trauma victims, art therapy in a conflict zone – was it about making them learn a trade so that they could sell their watercolors or paintings to soldiers or to NGO people? Was there an economy around them?

SP: There were a lot of kids around nine, ten, or twelve years old, and it was about passing the time, not an economy or trade.

CCB: Why were you so interested in painting, if most of your work in a strange way is sculptural, today?

SP: I've always loved painting; there's something in painting that is so mysterious. I think of color, and when I think of sculpture, I think of shapes. When I was younger I was attracted to painting, and when I was in school in Massachusetts, I always considered myself a painter.

CCB: Your recent wall grid works do refer to paintings indeed, although they are reliefs.

SP: I would say that they are more sculptures than paintings.

To go back to my early story, when we left Khao I Dang in early 1984, I was thirteen years old. We spent another two months in two more transitional camps in Thailand before living for another six months in another refugee camp in the Philippines. I attended English classes in the Philippines, but there were no Khmer classes offered there. This was the first time I tasted freedom in my life. We settled in an apartment on the edge of the camp, overlooking a panorama of mountains. It was the most beautiful view I had ever seen. After school, I would go with other kids to the mountains. We had to swim across a brook, and then the jungle started. Armed with just slingshots, we'd spend hours exploring and shooting at birds, snakes, lizards. We would come back with mangoes, bamboo shoots, and birds, and our aunts would make soup and everyone made a meal of it. It was the first time I saw the ocean. One day, we walked from the camp to the ocean. It took us almost the whole day to get there.

We arrived in Massachusetts in July 1984. We joined someone we knew from our old village. I started school in the fall, and was admitted to the seventh grade. I had a terrible time understanding everyone and everything. So I was pretty much mute most of the day. I could follow the class somewhat, but I couldn't talk back. Everything was so new to me. In seventh grade, I was good at math and woodshop. In fact, I consider math and woodshop as my saviors in those junior and high school years. During the eighth grade, we moved to Northampton, a town nearby. I took art class and again woodshop. I remembered I was complimented for my paintings and I didn't want to make anything else other than paintings. My teacher ordered me to make a copy of an early Van Gogh painting. I copied it millimeter by millimeter, grid by grid. I was so angry. But after this she let me paint whatever I wanted to. And what I chose to paint were pictures of Cambodian landscapes. I remember the principal had a painting of mine in his office. I never took another painting class until my second year in college seven years later, in 1991.

In my second year at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, we were required to start thinking of a major for the junior year. I always had in mind that I would become some kind of scientist as this was what my father always wanted me to do. But that year, I had taken a music appreciation class and an introduction to poetry class, and my mind started to wander. I was affected by how passionate my poetry teacher was, and something was happening inside of me that I couldn't really explain. It was perhaps that I was beginning to understand that there were many more layers and meanings and kinds of knowledge than I had been led to believe.

One day, in the beginning of my second semester, I walked into a painting class. All the names were called except mine. I stood up and asked to be in the class and my teacher, Jeannette Cole, told me that there wasn't any room for non-majors, and that to take a painting class, you had to major in art. It took me a couple of days but I went and changed my major from pre-med to Bachelor of Fine Arts that week.

Then I went to Miami where I stayed from 1995 until 1996, and to Chicago from 1997 until 1999. There, in Chicago, I studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. From 1999 until 2003, I was in the Boston area struggling, working as an interpreter, working in a home for the mentally ill, working as a translator,

and working as a real estate agent.

CCB: Were you making any art at that time?

SP: No, I was just trying to get by, to survive. I found a barn and I had convinced the owner to rent it to me. I renovated the floor to transform it into my studio, and since I had no home, because I was paying for the studio, I initially lived in it. But it was very depressing, so I found a small bedroom the size of a closet, and moved in with some people I knew. I was still commuting to this barn and finally I had to give it up. Then one day – at this time I was working as an interpreter – I was driving on the highway, and had lost my way, when a friend of mine, an old fellow student from my time in Chicago, called me and said, "Where are you?" and I said, "I'm lost." She said, "Do you know why?" and I said, "Because I'm very bad with directions." Then she said, "No, it's because you should be in Cambodia." Two days later I was on the same highway and I heard a Cambodian rock and roll song from the 1960s on the radio, and I almost cried. I just thought, "that's it." After receiving these two signs, about a week later, I bought a ticket, and I came back. That was November 2002.

CCB: And you had no relatives in Cambodia?

SP: My brother was there. He was on his way out, and he said that he could introduce me to a few people before he left. I didn't have any money from my jobs in the US. But I had had a show at my apartment and sold a few paintings and drawings before leaving. And that was all the cash I had. Once in Cambodia, it was only local people buying my work that supported my life there. It was barely enough to get by on, and there were times when I had no money. Sometimes my mother would help and sometimes there were friends coming from Europe who would bring my drawings with them when they went back, try to sell them to collectors, and then transfer the money to me by Western Union. I never had a bank account up until about two years ago.

CCB: In some of your works there are references to the ecological crisis and disaster around the Mekong River, and the relationship with Phnom Penh, such as *Raft* from 2009.

SP: The place where I made *Raft* was near the lake Boeung Kak. It is a poor, old place, a neighborhood where people that have fallen off from society find a place to live. I received the news of the government "taking" the lake, then drying it up for speculative investment reasons, and that is how *Raft* started. I began to think about the destruction that happens when a city develops and takes over a place, and the problems this causes. I also thought about Cambodia in general, because there is a cycle of destruction and rebuilding. The war in the 1970s played a big part in my psyche's development, and how I think about Cambodia – from the events related to the Khmer Rouge to our frequent fighting with the Vietnamese or the Thais throughout history. We are always destroying and rebuilding. So I used the bomb shape as a form that is symbolic of destruction, and I used cubes and rectangular shapes as symbols for both the act of building, as well as for the buildings themselves. They go hand in hand, and when you put them together you lose their meaning. This is why I call this work *Raft*, because it is like a free-floating, directionless raft. It was the largest piece I had made up to then, but it seems small compared to *Compound*.

CCB: Would you say that your work is directly connected to the political, economic and social context within which it emerges?

SP: I could say so in relation to *Raft* and *Compound*, in which I also used symbolic elements like dirt and charcoal. However, I am now more interested in what is made manifest to me inside the studio, in what reveals itself to me, rather than in making direct references to politics and the world "outside."

CCB: Let's talk about the materials that you use, which are indigenous to Cambodia. Why are your newer works mostly made out of bamboo while the earlier works were mainly rattan?

SP: Rattan is more flexible than bamboo. The new grid reliefs are more structural, so they must be physically strong, to hold themselves up. Considering that there is burlap, beeswax, resin, charcoal and dirt applied to them, they have to be sturdy - rattan tends to fall and collapse on itself.

CCB: There is burlap, too, which has a memory. It refers to the memory of painting, to a raw canvas. It is almost a marker indicating painting. It represents painting more than it is a base for painting.

SP: When I put charcoal – the black on top of the burlap – it hides the burlap, but it reveals the stitching – I leave the stitching uncovered and it becomes symbolic of noise, of many lives together, like insects, or stars.

CCB: In April 2011 we had a long conversation in Singapore, when I was planning on travelling to Cambodia in July to do research for documenta, and on that occasion you spoke to me about the artist Vann Nath, whose work for dOCUMENTA (13) was exhibited adjacent to yours in the Fridericianum. We exhibited one painting by him belonging to your private collection, which I borrowed because it tells so much about you, your generosity and the way you don't necessarily collect artists who do things similar to what you do. Vann Nath, who had been interested in socialist realism, was also trained as a sign painter and had the horrible destiny of being a prisoner of the Tuol Sleng prison, and survived, while you – by destiny, or by chance – avoided all that suffering and pain, and ended up a refugee outside of Cambodia. I remember you spoke of two very different human destinies and then, when I did come to Phnom Penh later that year, you brought me to visit him, together with Erin Gleeson. He then unfortunately died some months later, in 2012.

SP: The work that you mention, *First Night* (or *Interrogation at Kandal Temple*), is a portrait of Vann Nath himself, upon on the inception of the first interrogation after he arrived at the prison. This is a very personal and significant work. It seems wrong for me to talk about how he paints instead of what he paints, but there is something very straightforward about this painting, in terms of color treatment, that is quite different from most other paintings.

Growing up at that time, I obviously did not experience the horror that persons a few years older than I went through. I was somehow protected by virtue of being young and my parents being fortunate and clever enough not to behave suspiciously or get into trouble. When I tell people of my memories, they always ask me how I can remember so much from such a young age. And I tell them it was a bubble that I was living in. There wasn't much going on so you remember those few activities you did. All activities being anchored by hunger. Maybe it was hunger that made me remember?

As an artist, I think having not had any "real" trauma, in some ways left me very confused in the United States. I knew that I was "Khmer" as opposed to being "American," and I was always thinking and having dreams involving Cambodia, but I couldn't make the works that people expected to see. "Where is death?" they would say. And how can you make art and not speak about that history? I always felt that

being an artist was somehow wrong. How could I choose this activity when all of my family – my parents, aunts, uncles, relatives – were all working in factories and other jobs just to make ends meet? And what art was I to make?

I came back to Cambodia hoping to get away from all these questions and with the hope of finding something meaningful – anything – to confirm that I had chosen a reasoned occupation. When I got here I found that half of my relatives – half a village full of them – were in in an even worse condition, in my hometown of Battambang. They lived in shacks and averaged seven children a family. Life is truly very difficult.

What sculpture has given me is the ability to quiet most of these issues. Everything is expressed in the lines. Lines in space. Work is for me a way to focus. Work as a way of moving forward in the midst of all the complication. Work leads to acceptance. Work leads to resistance.

Vann Nath is a reminder of what the elder generations had to live through. His work expressed the things below the surface that are in our blood, in our bones.

I had encountered many tourists, some of them Cambodians, who say things like, "Why can't they stop using the Khmer Rouge as an excuse to be corrupt? Why can't they just forgive and move on? Why don't they just follow the laws?"

Vann Nath's work is a reminder that the Khmer Rouge regime wasn't just a dream. And that it is not a choice we have to just "forget" to just "move on."

I had first met Vann Nath in 2005, on the occasion of a show that I had co-organized, called "Visual Art Open," in which any artist could exhibit their works. The show was all over the place in Phnom Penh – in coffee shops, restaurants and bars, alternative spaces.

Before that, I was showing at Java Café, and what is now Cambodian Living Arts – an institution that preserves traditional music. Everything was just starting at the time.

CCB: Would you say that you initiated the contemporary art community in Phnom Penh?

SP: I did it together with others like Leang Seckon, Chath Piersath, and Dana Langlois. We called our group Saklapel, a play on the word Selpak, which means "art" in Khmer.

I made my very first rattan sculpture, *Silence*, in 2004. Guy Issanjou, the director of the French Cultural Institute, came to my studio, which I shared with a couple of other artists. Guy was preparing an exhibition and he had somehow heard of us, so he came to see us. It is then that he saw that piece. He said he was very touched by it, and told me that it was the first modern sculpture he had ever seen in Cambodia. That was pretty intense. I had all sorts of doubts and battles going on inside my head. I had always considered myself a painter, and everything I had done till then was painting. And then an accident happens. Someone tells you that that is the greatest thing you have ever done, and you don't even know that you did it.

CCB: Why are you saying that it was an "accident"?

SP: I was young and I wanted to make a form in the shape of lungs that I would have wrapped with used cigarette packages I had been collecting while travelling all over Cambodia. I would take them home, wash them with soap and water and hang them up to dry. Everything I was doing before, all the paintings, mainly self-portraits, were missing something. Every time I finished a painting I felt empty, and I would often destroy them. So I needed to do something different. I wanted to have something more tangible and three-dimensional. When Guy came to see my work, I had finished only the skeletal internal part, the frame made out of rattan which I had laid on the floor. He asked me to hang it up on the wall and look at it for a while before deciding to take the next step and cover it up with the cigarette packages. I did take the next step, but as I was covering it up slowly I began to feel less and less comfortable with it. As I covered this thing up with cigarette packages, something was very uneasy inside...

CCB: It wasn't breathing, so you wanted the lungs to breathe, rather than turn into a pop art object, with the cause of the death stuck on them.

SP: I did cover part of it and took it to the exhibition. But that night I couldn't really sleep, and I woke up very early in the morning, and ran to the exhibition center and took all the cigarette packages off. In fact, there are still some traces left from the packages due to the gluing.

CCB: The traces of some cigarette packages because of the glue anticipates the traces of plastic and color that are present in your new series of grid reliefs. So the beginning of your work in a mature sense is an act of removal. What could be the relationship between this and the trauma you experienced as a child? When you speak about the camps you never speak of them as traumatic, you speak as if that life was somehow normal.

SP: I *was* a child. The only traumatic experience I had as a child was that I was always hungry; everything else was fully normal to me. I didn't know that a world outside Cambodia existed. I thought that was the world, I thought that was life. I thought there were just one people on the planet, and it was me and the other people in Cambodia. And I didn't know there were airplanes, or trains. I didn't know that anything else existed.

CCB: What gave you joy at that time?

SP: Playing gave me joy. Making toys and slingshots, shooting birds, fishing. I would play with clay marbles, and compete with other kids with self-made wooden tops.

To go back to my father, he taught me how to make all sorts of objects one uses for hunting. He also taught me how to fish. I remember catching my first fish. I remember my father making the fishing line, and the fishhook with a simple wire, and I remember I caught a little catfish with it. I was very proud, and my father was very proud, he couldn't believe it. At the time I was six or seven years old. I was protected by him, so I didn't participate in the trauma, and I didn't know it was going on.

When I made *Silence* in 2004, I remembered that I used to have fun making things as a child, and I wanted to have that pleasure back, as an artist and as an adult. I wanted to enjoy the act of making. There is seriousness to it now, but I need to love what I do. I found that feeling again when I made that first sculpture. I knew that I loved making it, and this is why that first sculpture changed me. So I continued to make art, to use the rattan and bamboo, partly because of this happiness and partly because of Guy, who encouraged me to continue in this direction.

CCB: Your sculptures are like giant tops in a way. There is something that has to do with craft, and

games, and play and trauma. And healing. However, you are more interested in this almost modernist idea of Brancusi and in what brought him to deal with essentials, and essential forms.

SP: I knew that Brancusi, and also Giacometti's work meant something to me. I didn't really know what it meant, but I gravitated towards that. However, my first fascination was with Van Gogh. I was seduced by the works of Brancusi and Giacometti, but I felt that Van Gogh's was the greatest art. I never cared about any of the other Impressionists.

For me it was about the lines he was using, the way he was drawing and the way he was painting, whether it was a landscape or a figure, a French person or a Spanish person. For me it wasn't the subject of the painting that mattered. I always wanted to look at the technique and how it was done. That's how I was interested in these artists, independently of the period they were working in.

CCB: You're not interested in chronology or in history, but that art is somehow timeless?

SP: Yes, absolutely. I didn't start making art because I wanted to express torture.

CCB: But on the other hand if you had not had that life experience, that impactful life experience of political oppression in Cambodia, is it possible you might not have become an artist?

SP: I don't know. No, I think, even so, I would still nevertheless have become an artist. I certainly didn't start making art because I wanted to be a political artist. I wanted to learn art because I loved the actual act of painting. I love laying color on the canvas, and seeing something that comes out that I have done myself, through my own craft. I also like the independence of being an artist. I was an antisocial kid and I loved being alone, just making things.

CCB: Your work has therefore something to do with joy and a celebration of life, even though you refer to the shapes of bombs and grenades. Objects that would be used for hunting or indeed for war are enlarged and become toys and sculptures; in a way, they are useless arms. When I visited you in your studio in Phnom Penh you were making these objects that were more or less flat, like squares. You had not decided that they were actually artworks yet. They were something you were experimenting with, but until then you had exhibited shaped objects that were more free-flowing, like giant flowers. You were thinking of these reliefs as a base for something else. And then I remember saying they didn't need much else, and so you finished the first *Reliefs*. One might say this is the kind of case where, through your reaction to something said by an other, that you can approach a sort of enlightenment about something that is already immediately present in the work. Then you started to do things with those grids, like adding the earth, and the pieces of plastic, etc.

SP: Also the inclusion of dirt happened by accident. About two and a half years ago a friend of mine came back from Mondulkiri one night and brought back some volcanic pebbles. He brought back four different colored pebbles and said he collects them and that since I was using bamboo, that maybe I could use them in some way or another. I didn't think of it any more, and then, when I moved – I had an overwhelming amount of things to transport – I had to decide whether or if I was going to take them with me. I was going to throw them away, but then I thought that since they were a gift, that I should bring them with me. And that is how this dirt entered my work. This material was staring at me every day,

and then it occurred to me to grind them down and separate the colors and start mixing it with wax on the *Reliefs*.

CCB: So it happened also with the earth pigments. You are a very dialogic artist. You recognize something that is already there, when someone says, "But it's already there. It's already it, it's already the color." You just used that material straight away as itself, as the pigment, and this seems to happen often, these moments of recognition where there is no need for anything more. There is this repeated structure in which you assert that you do not invent something, but that, rather, somebody has given you something. Here you use the term "gift." There is somebody who gives you something – for example the stones, or a reaction to your structures, and then that gift from someone else becomes a tool.

SP: Perhaps accepting this gift from someone else has something to do with the desire to think about art on its own terms, and also perhaps with freedom – even a freedom from my own "authority," and this in specific was particularly present in my previous three-dimensional works.

CCB: Are you thinking of the projection of authority in terms of the control over what shape to give to the work?

SP: Yes. What shape to give it and what it means. You never lose track of that thread of little things. What could a stomach mean or what could a heart mean, or what could the Buddha mean? These new grids were something that had no particular meaning to begin with. It is about doing something that doesn't have to mean anything, positioning oneself in a more passive, receptive position. And being more of a sponge. When you came to my studio, the first things that you saw were those grids, those anonymous grids that we had just started to work on. At that stage I only knew that I wanted to do something with the grid, and you spent a lot of time looking at those grids, thinking of which ones had more potential, which ones were more interesting. I think that you were drawn to that little space that I was embarking on, and that I had no idea it was going to be an interesting thing at all. I thought at that time that I was going to make more three-dimensional things.

CCB: I would like to ask you how you go about making a painting like *Untitled (Dark Quiet Place)*? How does it start in terms of technique? You make a structure with bamboo that is like a grid, and you tie the pieces together at each juncture with metal wire, and by connecting these little parts with wire you make three-dimensional painting, these little three-dimensional off the wall paintings, or flat sculptures.

SP: I like the closed wavy structure where the burlap lays on, recedes to the back, then comes back up to the top, goes back to the back, and then comes back to the top again. For dOCUMENTA (13), I experimented with a few different ways of laying the burlap. There is a wavy pattern one, a box-like one – and then the one I that I call the open one, which allows you to see the wall, to see through the painting.

CCB: And the burlap is placed on top of this bamboo grid, which moves and sinks into the back, because you push it?

SP: I push it with a piece of wood and drip super glue on the burlap where it meets the bamboo strip, then I lay a layer of melted beeswax with fir tree or pine tree resin to make it sturdier. I slop it on quickly with the paintbrush. Then, when it's dried, I boil the dirt in cooking pots and mix it again with the

beeswax and the resin until I get it to a certain consistency that I like, and that I lay that on there with another brush. Sometimes, the color comes from the writing that's on the burlap that has been spray-painted previously when it was used in the farms or markets. If it's on the right place, I keep it.

CCB: Is the burlap always used?

SP: Yes. We buy it at the market, like a hundred sacks at a time. We wash the sacks and let them dry, and since they are quite porous and flappy, we use glue to stabilize them so that they become workable. If they don't become a little firm they don't stick well.

CCB: Was all of this craft taught to you or did you learn it by doing some experiments with the materials?

SP: The idea of the glue was mine, but it is mainly my assistants who figure out how to do it. We discuss the options, figuring out how to proceed as we go along.

CCB: What you are doing is very much connected with the idea of "practice." In your studio, with your assistants, there is a collective effort in making these works. There is another book that comes to my mind, which is Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman*, published in 2008. It is the first book of the trilogy called *Homo Faber*, which means "the man who makes." and *faber* refers, more specifically, to the man who works iron: the iron smith. This book is about this innate drive to do things, and to do things well, which is present in humans as well as in other animals – like with the bees when they make a beehive – and what it means to want to do something well. The second volume, in which this idea of "craftsmanship" is seen under the light of cooperation, is called *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation*. Since the craft process has often something to do with working together, with working with other people, he developed this idea of "together" as a craft. Being together, spending time together, is therefore considered as a craft in itself.

SP: When I was in Chicago I read a book by Soetsu Yanagi called *The Unknown Craftsman*. It is a book on Japanese aesthetics, on perfection and imperfection and what it means. It basically talks about Japanese architecture and the beauty of the trees, the gardens, and the tiles. I feel it is closer to me than western philosophy.

CCB: When we had our conversation at your studio it was a turning point in a way. We could say that summer 2011 is the beginning of these *Wall Reliefs*, which from a symbolic association always remind me of windows. Not windows onto the world, but barred windows. I would rather say prison windows. It conveys the feeling of being trapped in, when you're in a refugee camp, but it's also the way that a grid window both protects the gaze and covers the gaze. So it's also about not revealing, resisting the revelation of something, the immediate visibility of something. However, I wonder how much my seeing these paintings as bars – as almost the tale of a prison – is my projection, and how much this is conscious in you, or intended even?[1]

SP: Not intended, certainly. I actually find my work uplifting, and really not representing a prison. But I guess one could also say that if you live here in Cambodia most of your life, dealing with this kind of reality all the time, you just stop seeing it. You stop seeing the grotesque.

CCB: Do you mean that it could be in the subconscious?

SP: I do think it is in the subconscious. In this culture you are always governed by some ruler, by some ideology. And eventually you just accept that you are in this system and that you cannot really rebel against it. You can choose whether to take part in it, acknowledge it, or use it for your benefit, as in my case. I think there are grids everywhere. And I always like to say that I make the most beautiful grids.

CCB: The grid is an expression of modernity, of course. We even use it to speak about the electrical system, the power system. There are hundreds of texts about the grid in modernism, the relationship between modern rationality and power, and the use of the grid in art. And there are hidden, unconscious relations between all those grids. Arte Povera was against the grid and for the *field*. The field has other associations, with rural community, growth and horizontality as opposed to frontality and verticality. So, when you say that it is uplifting, you are saying that there is no conscious reference to the literal grids on windows of the gated communities that are popping up all over the world, and on people's houses and homes because of an increased sense of fear. Because the more we are mobile, the more we have mobile phones and information flowing all over the place, the more there is fear, whether it is induced by the media or not – like the fear of terrorism, or the fear of the financial crisis looming.

There is another lineage that your work belongs to, a lineage of work around the valuing of the daily, the valuing of the overlooked, which we know in literature, for example in the French writer Georges Perec. Or in philosophy, if we think of Michel de Certeau, the author of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, who wrote in the 1980s about the usage of things that is so individual and singular, full of invention and itself individualizing, that it is somehow stronger than consumer culture itself and its homogenization. When Arte Povera began in the mid to late 1960s, it was based on a rejection of Pop Art and the domination of Minimalism in Pop Art, basically returning to common and available materials, so-called "poor materials." They developed installations that were unique and extremely poetic. However, they were particularly interested in process, time and change in the materials, which is not a focus of your work. Once your work is finished, it is not about the materials changing with the different weather. Arte Povera was "poor" in the philosophical sense, like in Saint Francis. We could also call it humble, or daily, or simple.

SP: Like lower on the food chain. Arte Povera has been an interest of mine from very early on, but I could never really get what they were doing. I am fascinated by it, but it was not until these last couple of years that my work happened to be incorporating these poor materials.

CCB: I remember we spoke a lot about Alberto Burri, the Italian post-Second World War artist who had been trained as a doctor and had been in a prison camp in Texas. And then when he was in Texas, he started to paint landscapes. Just after the war, in 1946-1947, he started to paint by suturing, which was his skill as a doctor. He was suturing these wounds of burlap, and he made some of them as shaped protruding canvases. Burri comes from the Città di Castello, which is near the town of Saint Francis, Saint Francis who wore burlap clothes as the Franciscan monks do today. [2]

What makes your work relevant has something to do with the materials and craft. There is a legacy of a traditional craft that is merging with an idea of autonomous contemporary art.

SP: I keep thinking about different things all the time, adding more and more thoughts, and today I was thinking about this part of the burlap sacks that I rescue: the stitching, which seems to be the most

irrelevant part. It is the most unwanted, cheapest and undervalued element of a burlap sack. It is made out of necessity and in the strongest, fastest, cheapest and most efficient way of putting the sack together. Then you just leave it alone and put stuff in it. Today it occurred to me that I am valuing that stuff, that stuff that people don't care about, that is forgotten, that has no value other than pure and simple necessity. I save it, and in turn it saves my work, it saves my pictures. It gives it that extra element that completes it.

CCB: In a way, your works remind of digital grids and constructions like one can see on the internet behind a Pixar 3-D figure, behind which there is a whole mathematical construction which is pure math. To see it emerge instead from the material itself is like pulling reality into the space of the mind. When one sees these objects, one sees things that are emerging from a craft and a relationship with the will and the needs of the materials, and that are at the same time metaphysical, philosophical, and ontologically established objects. One could even say that there is an embodiment of interests here. It is the objects and the materials telling us how to make them, what to do with them, these things are somehow in between the world itself and the intentionality of a person.

I am also curious about your relationship with the so-called natural world, with the non-human. Your structures are not processed industrially. The materials you use are close to earthly things, earthly pigments, plants as materials, bamboo, rattan. What is the relationship between your life, art, and thoughts and things that grow but are not grown by you, that are collected or reaped or used and that are associated with the rural?

SP: I guess when I came back to Cambodia, that part of me came back to life, the rural. Everything I see around me is nature. All the huts and the haystacks look natural, almost like anthills. In the countryside they make barns out of dirt and bamboo. They weave bamboo together and they cover it with a mixture of clay and rice straw. Things that are handmade are beautiful to me. However, I am now fascinated by industrial-looking things, so maybe I am moving away from nature a little bit. I see forms that are all industrial forms, and I am making sculptures based on those.

CCB: And what about the environmental crisis? Does it have anything to do with your work in general? The way that the Mekong river is collapsing, villages collapse, and I remember even your studio had half of a swimming pool fallen into the Mekong river, and there was a boat that was there taking the sand out. And the previous studio was along a lake that has been wiped out.

SP: These things affect everybody here, and they certainly affect me when I am talking about them. They make me angry. But when I am making art I am in another place, and maybe that is why I keep making art, and why I keep enjoying spending all this time in my studio, where I just think of something else. It has to be that way for me, because if I keep delving into this sadness and anger, I don't see a way for me to get out. So I am as well an escapist – I make work because I want to get to another place that I know I'm not really in, physically. Mentally, I work in my own little world, all mine, nobody else is in there, the politicians and the news don't get in there, my parents' worries don't get in there, nor do my neighbors' worries. So for me it's a black, dark space, but I find that the world can end, but as long as I have my little place, I will be okay. It's very hard to be happy in Cambodia; I don't know anyone, unless they are a complete fool, that is not affected by their context. There are so many problems, but if you start thinking about every one of them, you can spend your whole lifetime being angry, and I know people who do that. I don't want to be one of them. I believe that I have the privilege to choose to live in a world apart, alongside all the great ones who inspire me with everything and make their work and can talk about their work and can stay curious and joyful and young.

CCB: I remember you telling me how your father taught you to lie low, to not be a protagonist, to try not to get too noticed.

SP: My father taught me many things, as we discussed throughout this dialog, and he always used to tell me this phrase: "Live like a frog and die like a snake." I don't really know what it means, but if I observe how a frog lives, then I can tell that a frog never stays in just one place. And "die like a snake" probably means to persevere, to go quietly, not crying, knowing that you have tried.

CCB: Have you ever seen a snake die? They curl up. They move into a corner and curl up, and they also don't let themselves be killed, they slide away, quietly, like a reed, they bend and then rise again. So maybe that has something to do with that other aspect of the grid, which is a place of hiding or withdrawing visibility from oneself.

This dialog was compiled in March 2013 mainly on the basis of numerous conversations between the artist and the author throughout the period 2011-2013. Furthermore, some parts have been published, such as the excerpt from an email sent by Sopheap Pich to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev on August 11, 2011, published in: *dOCUMENTA (13) Catalog 2/3: The Logbook*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012, p.61; there are excerpts from a Skype conversation between the author and Gregory Galligan in early 2013, as well as excerpts from an interview with the artist published in *Phnom Penh: Rescue Archaeology. Contemporary Art and Urban Change in Cambodia*, ed. by Erin Gleeson, IFA, Berlin, 2013. With thanks to Chiara Vecchiarelli for her assistance.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev is an author, organizer of events and exhibitions, and researcher into artistic practices, the histories of art, and the politics of aesthetics. She was Artistic Director of dOCUMENTA (13) from 2009–12. Previously, she was Artistic Director of the 16th Biennale of Sydney (2008), Chief Curator at the Castello di Rivoli Museum for Contemporary Art (2002–08, interim director in 2009), and Senior Curator at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (1999–2001). She is the Menschel Visiting Professor in Art at The Cooper Union, New York (2013), and Edith Kreeger Wolf Distinguished Visiting Professor in Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University, Evanston (2013-2015).

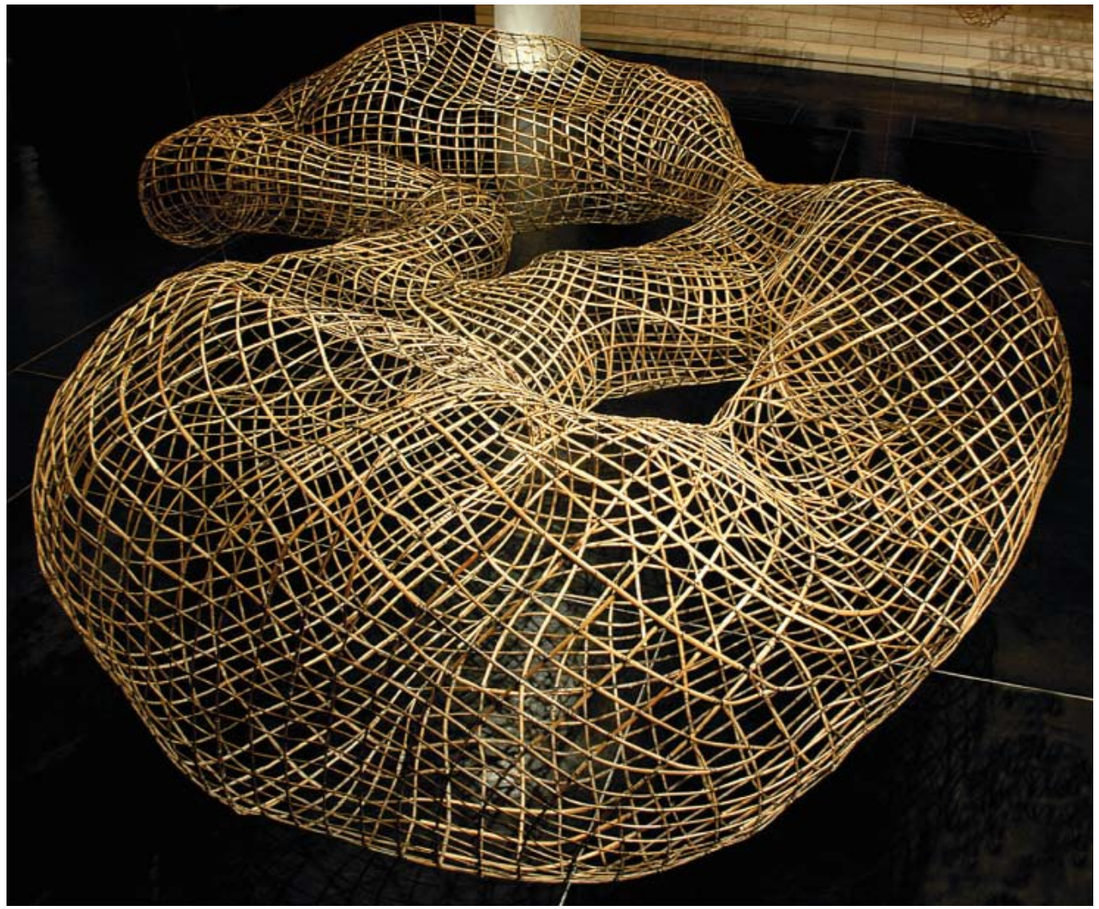
Notes:

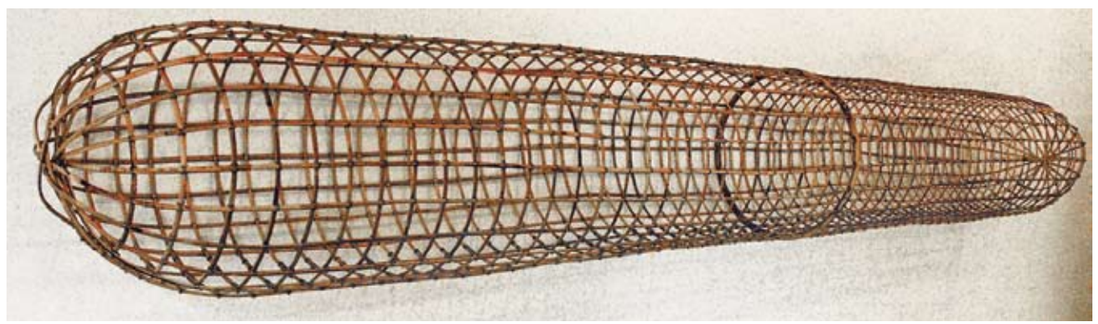
1. From a conversation between Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Gregory Galligan about Sopheap Pich's work.
2. From a conversation between Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Gregory Galligan about Sopheap Pich's work.

SELECTED SCULPTURES

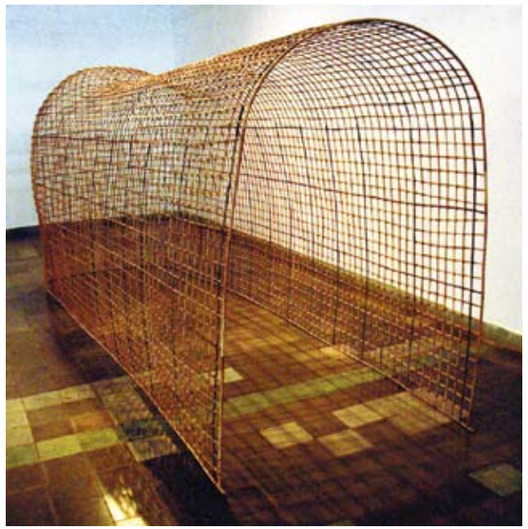
2004 - 2013

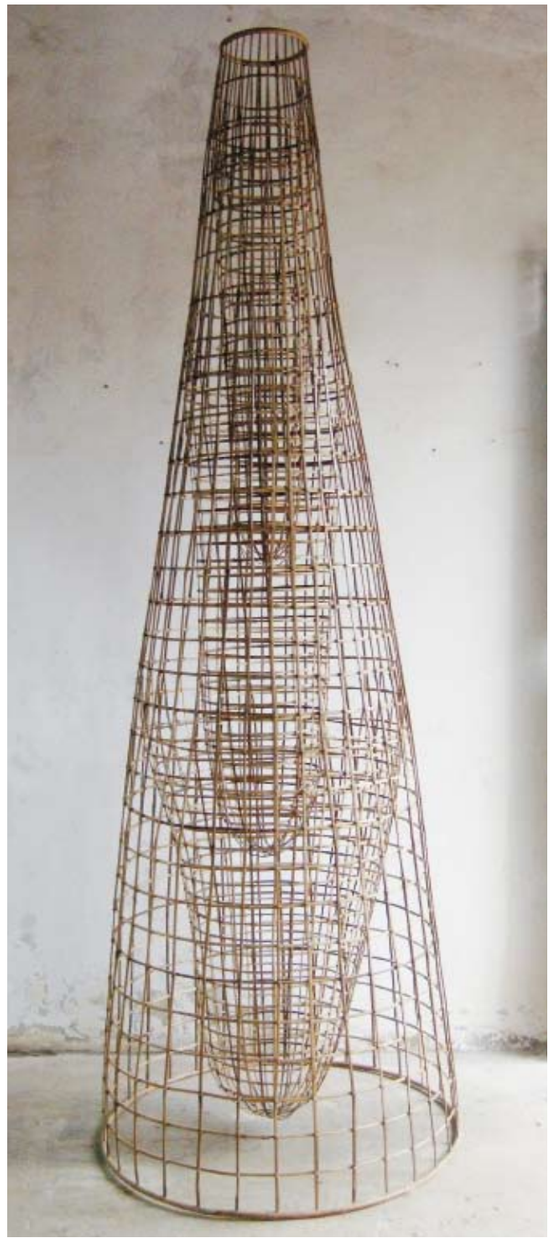
SILENCE (2004)





TOP: CYCLE (2004); BOTTOM: RIPPLE (2004)



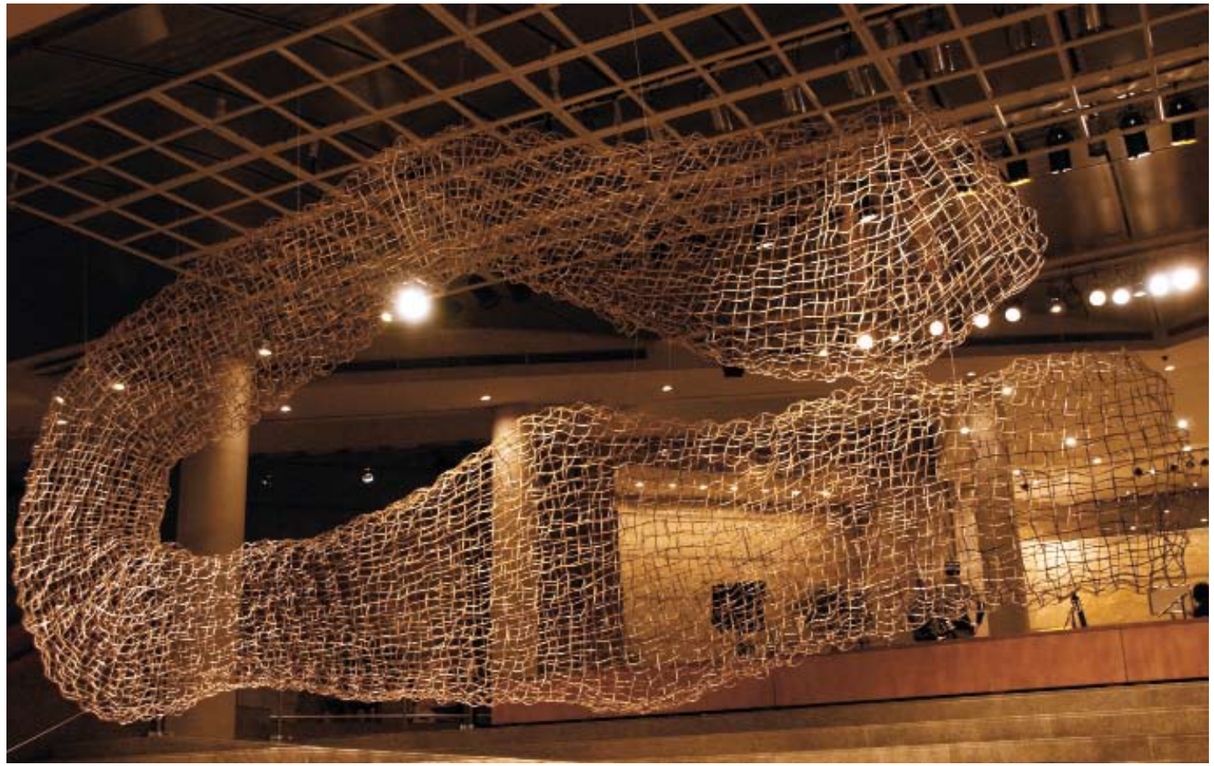


TOP LEFT: ECHO (2004); BOTTOM LEFT: HIVE (2004); RIGHT: UPSTREAM (2005)

LEFT: STALK (2005); RIGHT: LARCOON (2006)

CYCLE 2 (2006)

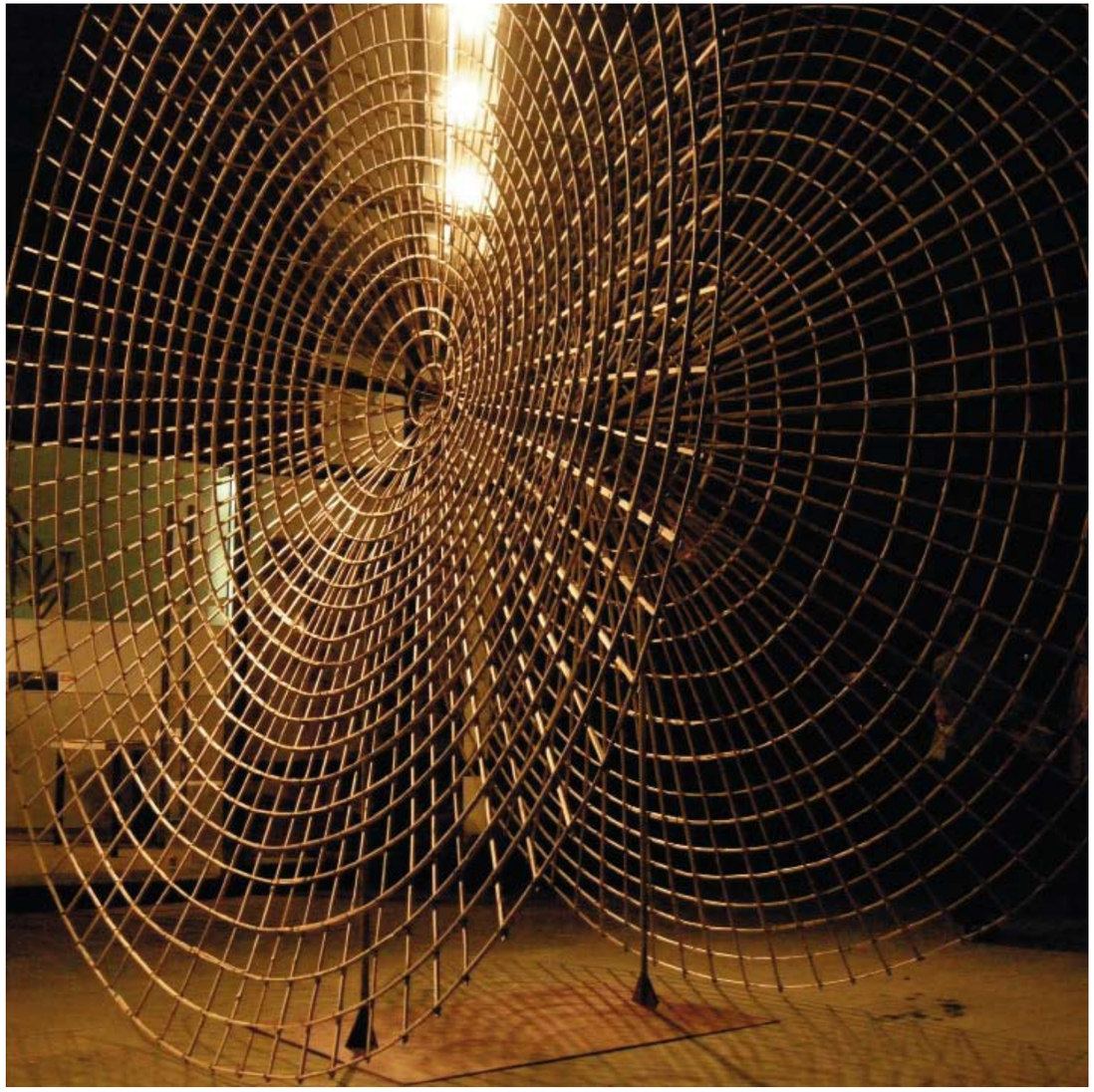
TOP LEFT: ANIMAL 1 (2006); TOP RIGHT: JAYAVARMAN VII (2007); BOTTOM: SCARRED HEART (2007)



TOP: FLOW (2007); BOTTOM: DETAIL OF FLOW

DELTA (2007)

LEFT: ARMOR (2008); RIGHT: THE DUEL (2008)

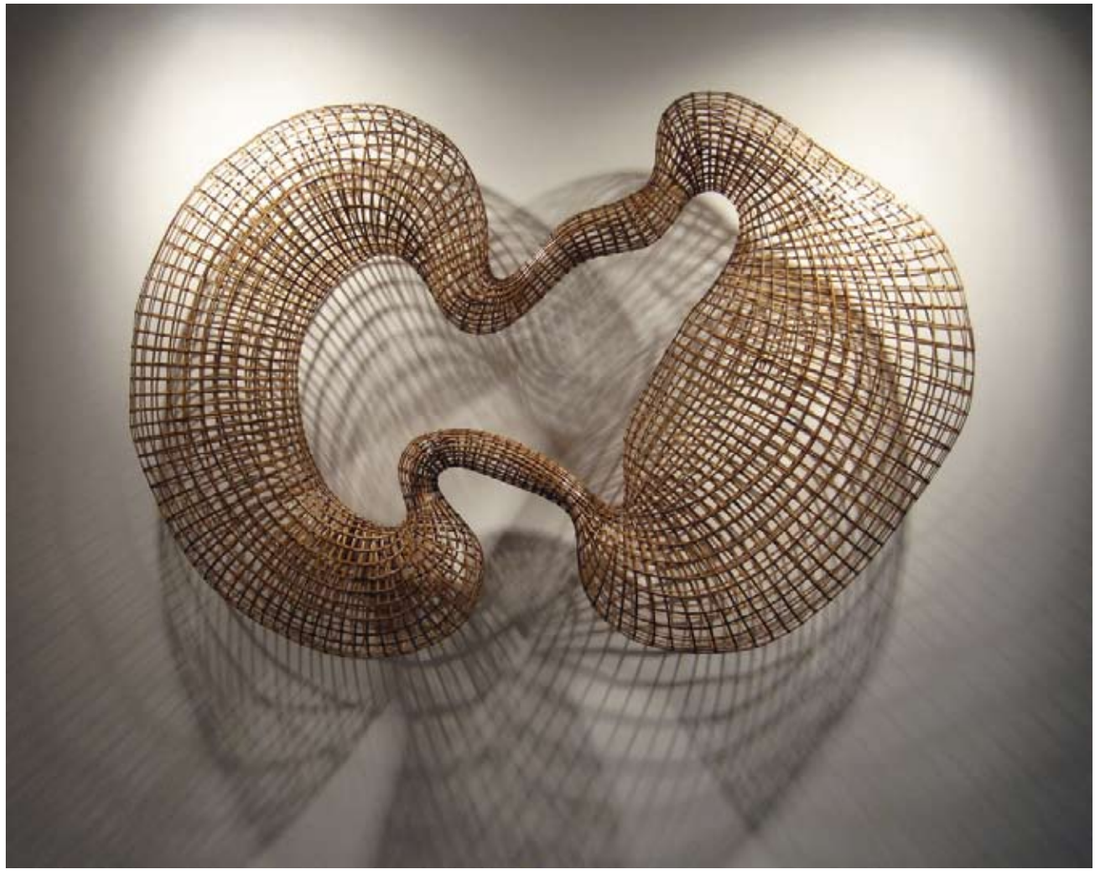


DOUBLE FUNNEL (2008)

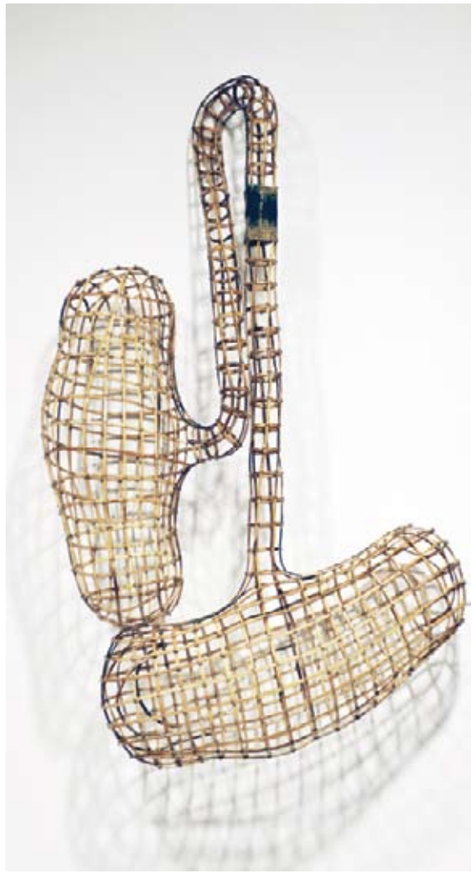
THE PULSE WITHIN, SOLO EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART (2009)

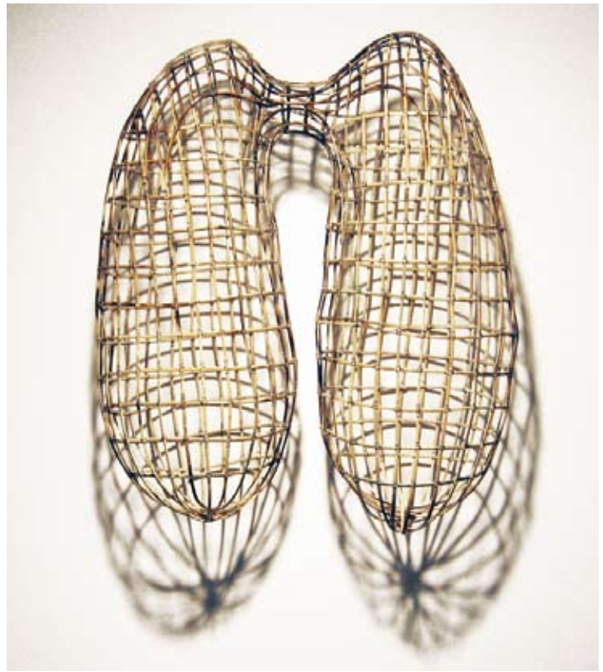
THE PULSE WITHIN, SOLO EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART (2009)

RAFT (2009)

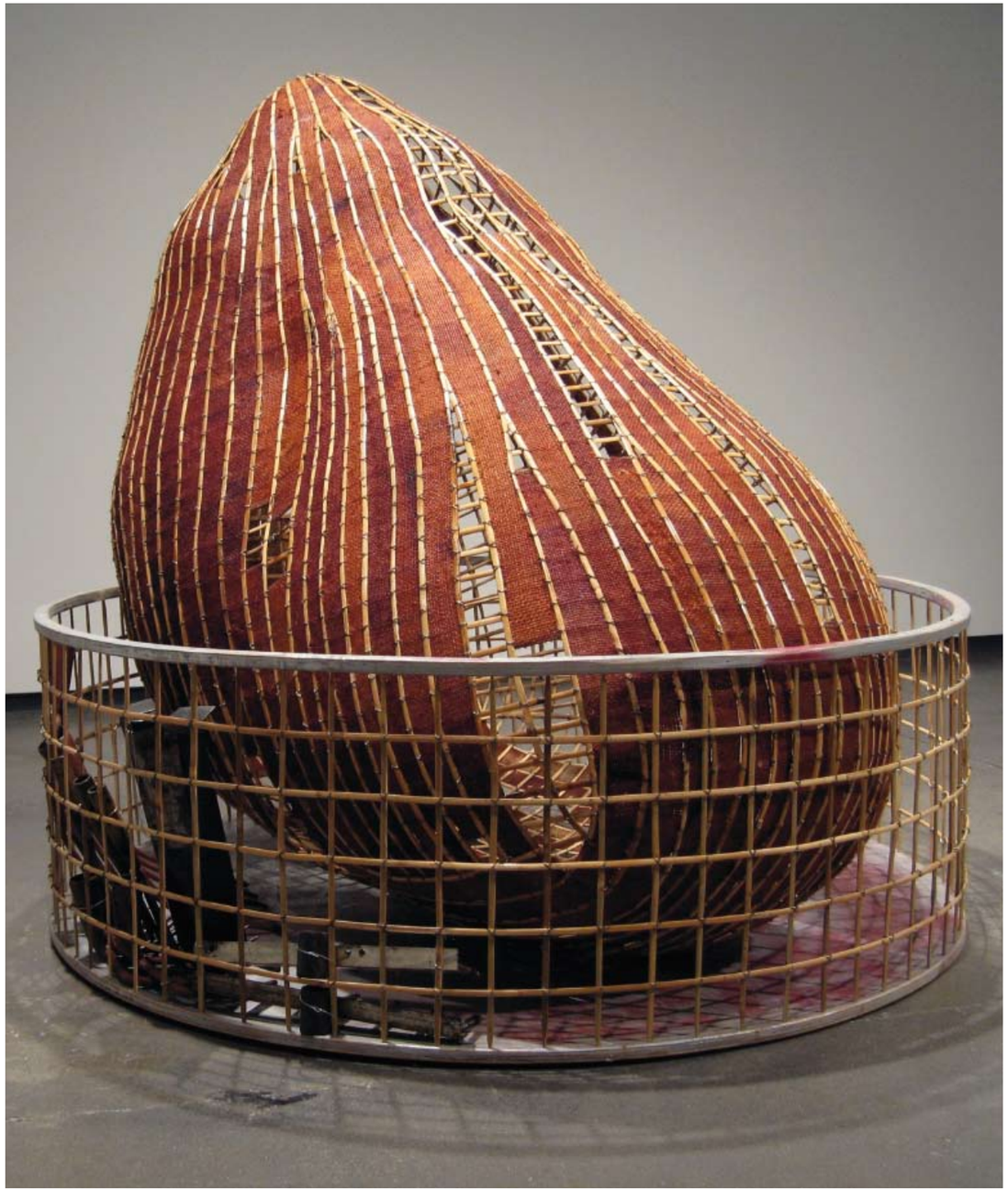


CYCLE 2, VERSION 3 (2008)





TOP LEFT: SUTURE (2009); TOP RIGHT: CONSTRUCTION - JOR (2009); BOTTOM: SILENCE (2009)



CAGED HEART (2009)

JUNK NUTRIENTS (2009)

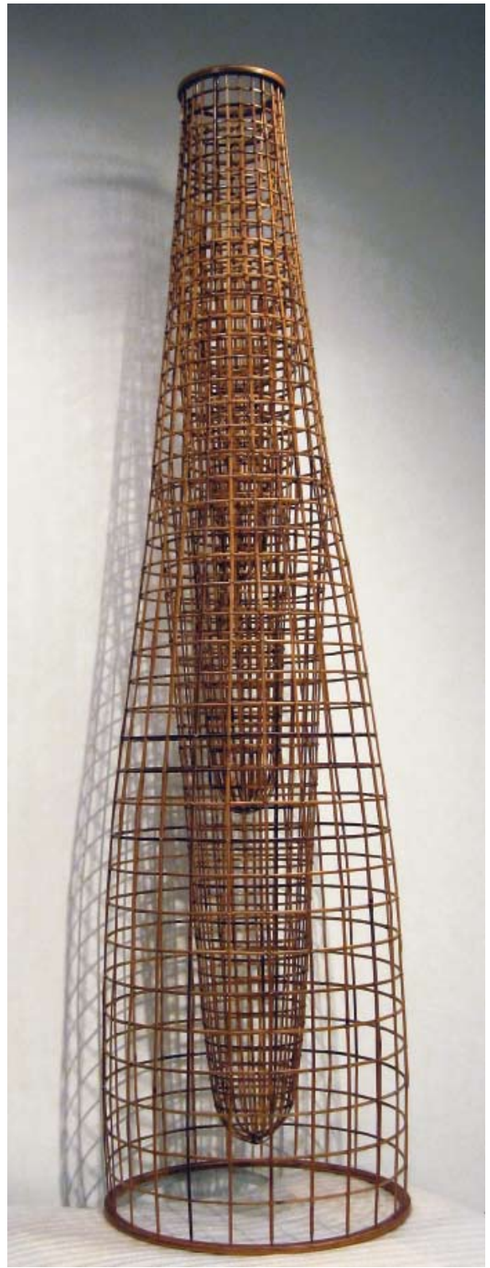
1979, INSTALLATION AT THE 6TH ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL, GALLERY OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA (2009)

1979, INSTALLATION AT THE 6TH ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL, GALLERY OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA (2009)

TOP: UPSTREAM (2009); BOTTOM: CYCLE (2009)

BUDDHA 2 (2009)

LEFT: STALK 2 (2009); RIGHT: FIGURE (2010)



TOP LEFT: CANDLES (2010); BOTTOM LEFT: HEAD IN ARMS (2010); RIGHT: UPSTREAM 2 (2011)

CHRYSALIS (2011)

MORNING GLORY, SOLO EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART (2011)

MORNING GLORY, SOLO EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART (2011)

MORNING GLORY (2011)

COCOON 2 (2011)

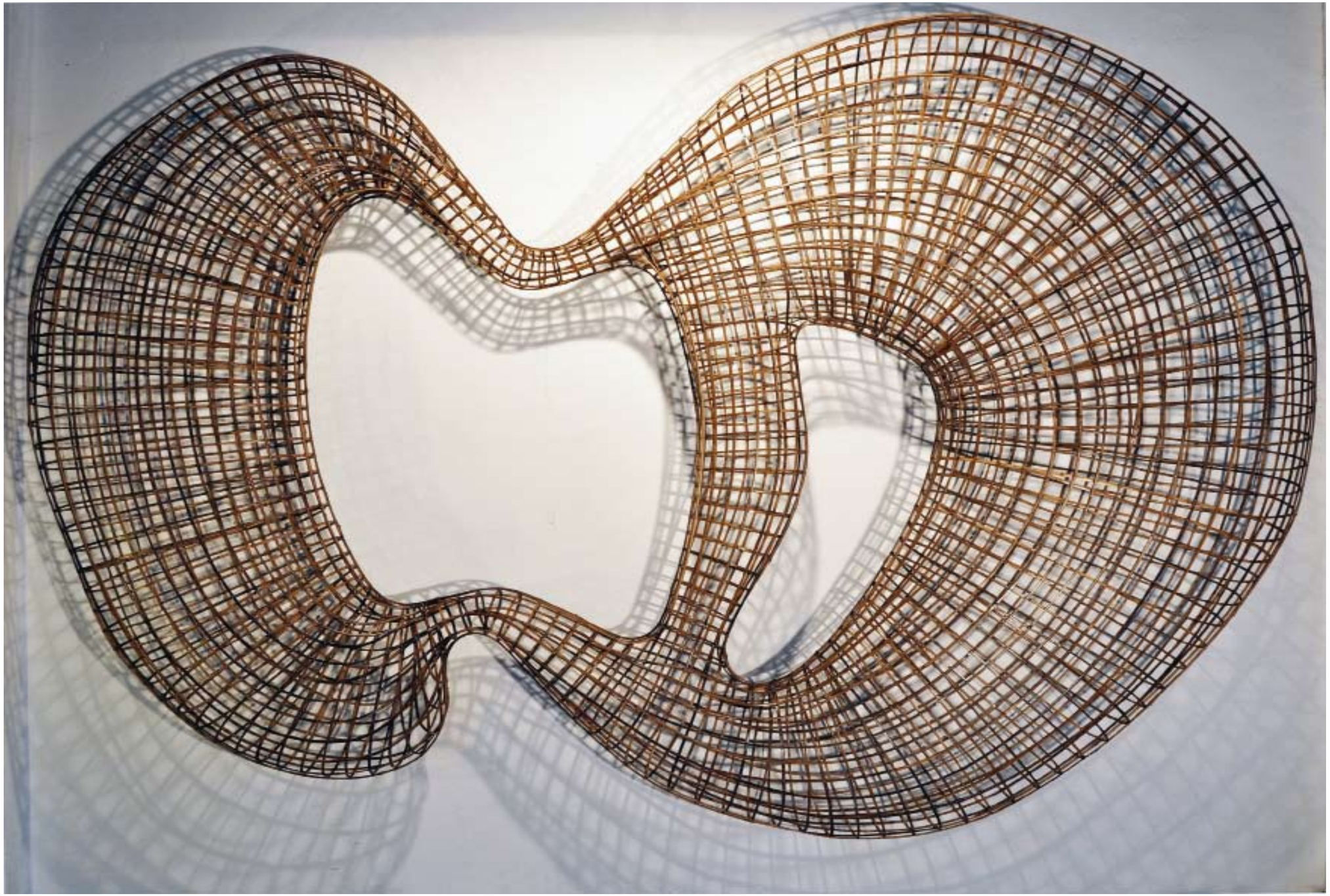
JAYAVARMAN VII (2011)

LEFT: HANGING AROUND (2011); RIGHT: AGAIN (2011)

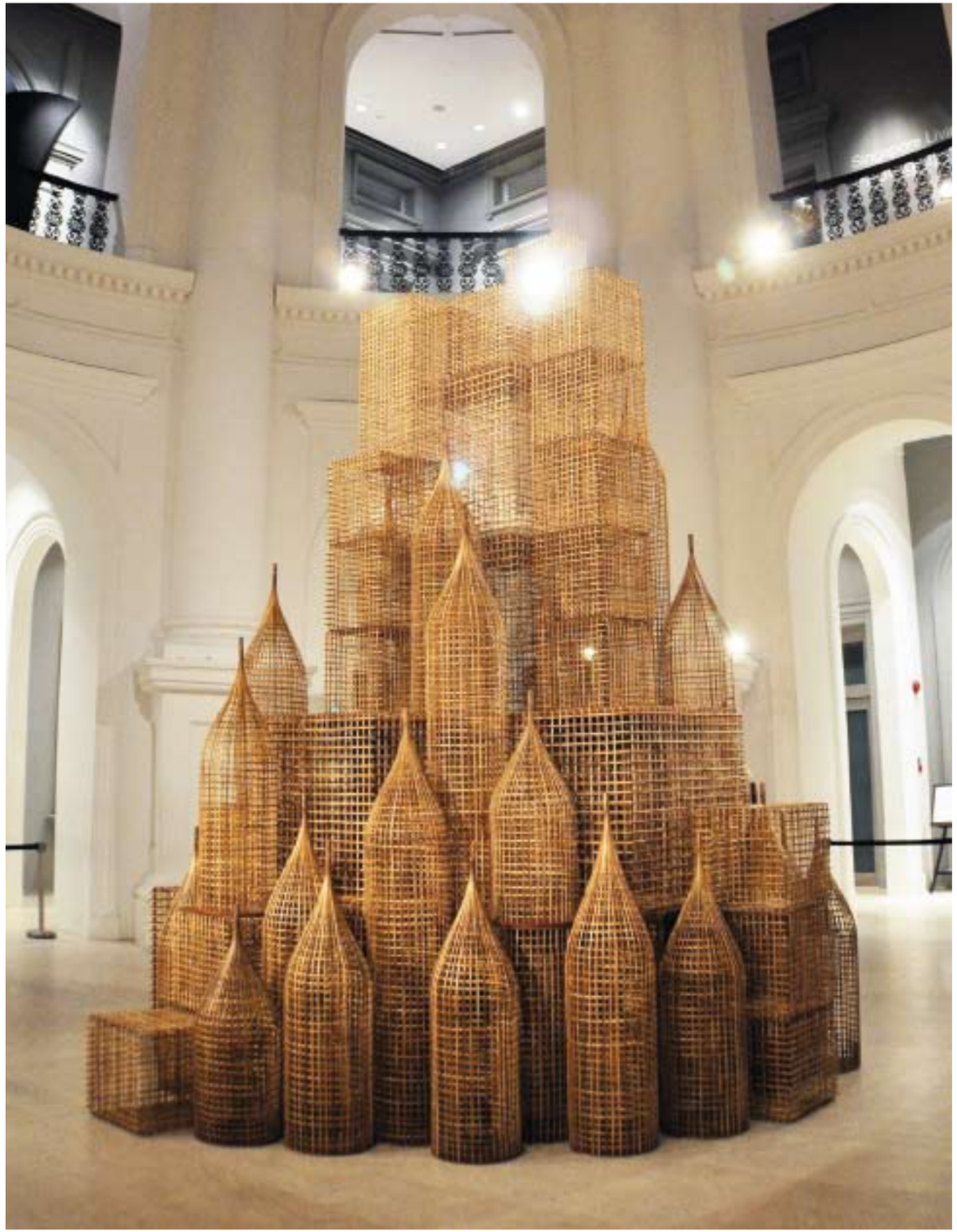
LEFT: NEVER MIND (2011); RIGHT: COCOON 1 (2011)

SEATED BUDDHA (2011)

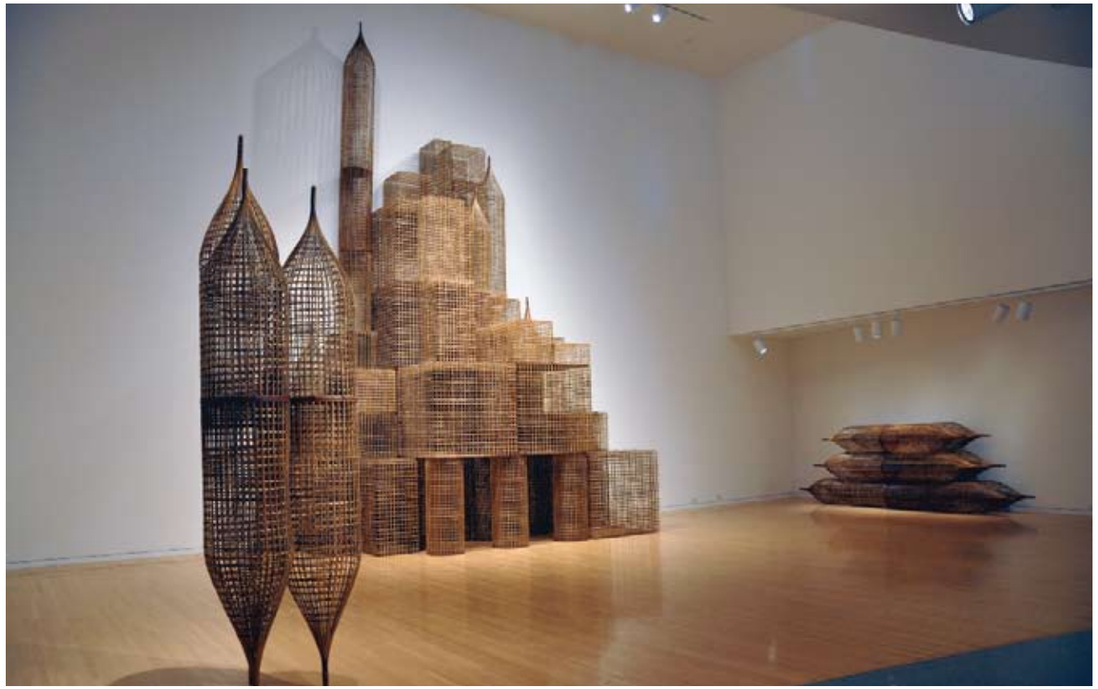
LEFT: MORNING GLORY 2 (2011) RIGHT: MORNING GLORY 3



CYCLE (2011)



COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE (2011)

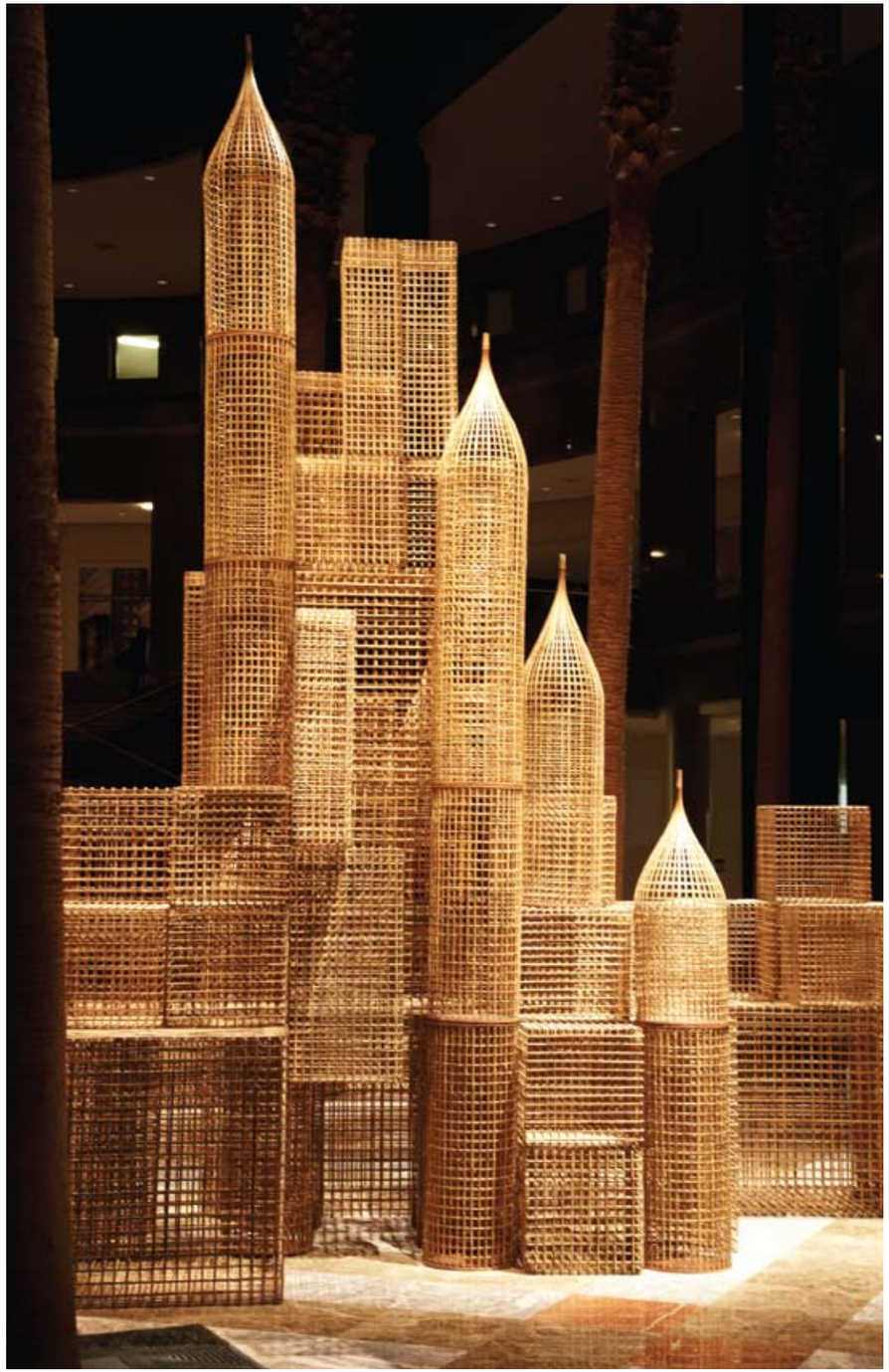


COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT THE HENRY ART GALLERY, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON (2011)

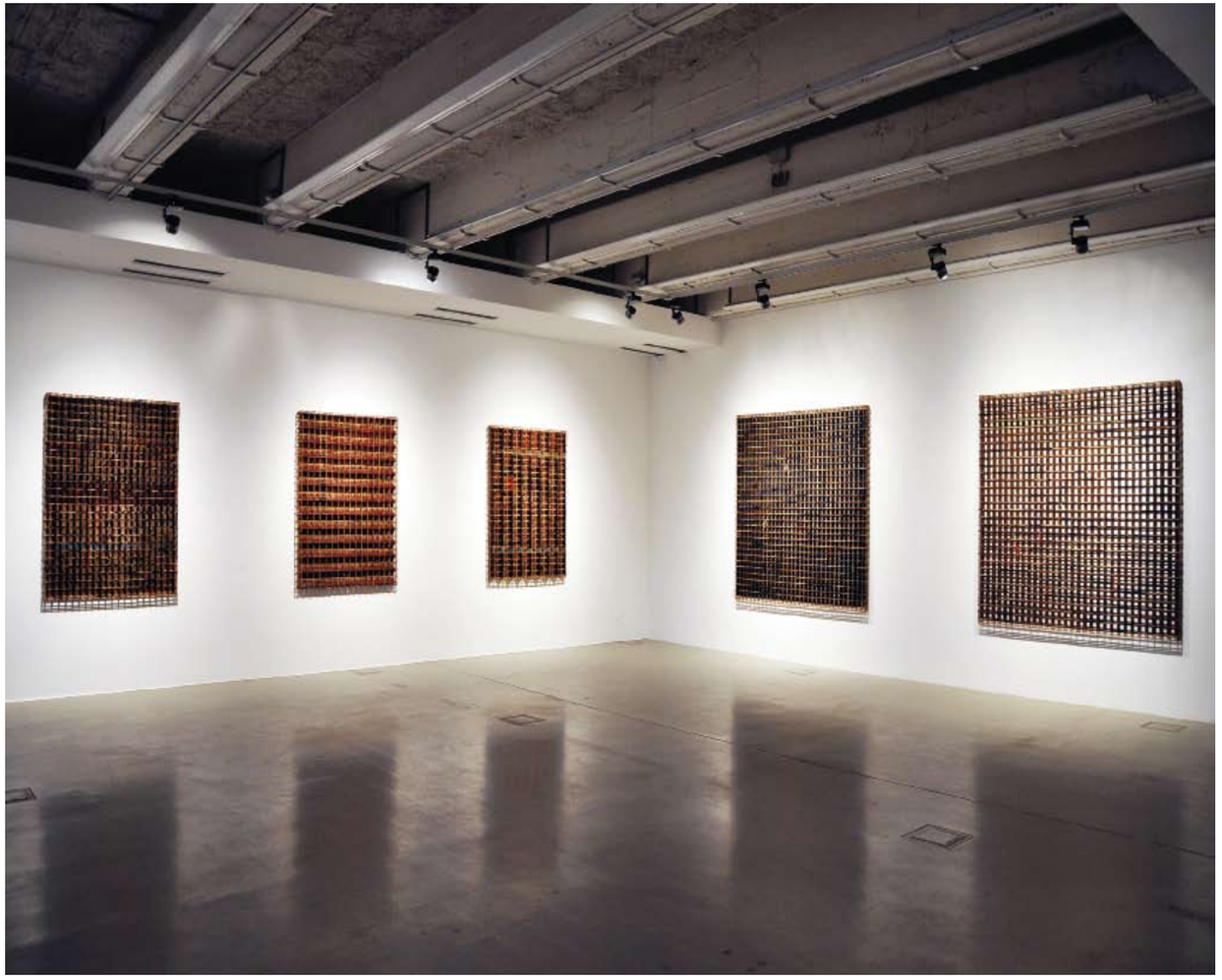
COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT MASS MOCA, NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS (2012)

COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT MASS MOCA,NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS (2012)

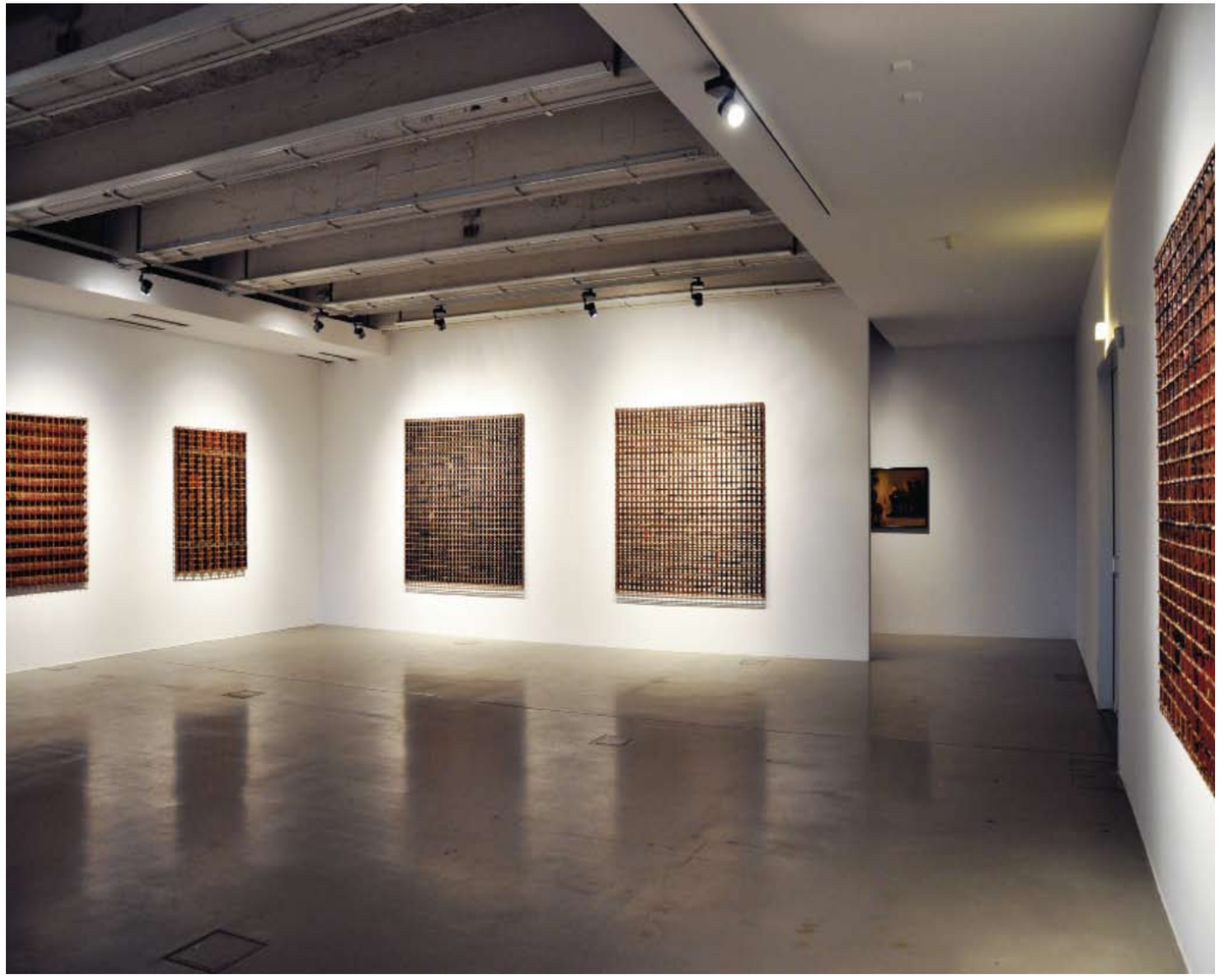
COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT THE BROOKFIELD PLACE WINTER GARDEN, NEW YORK (2013)



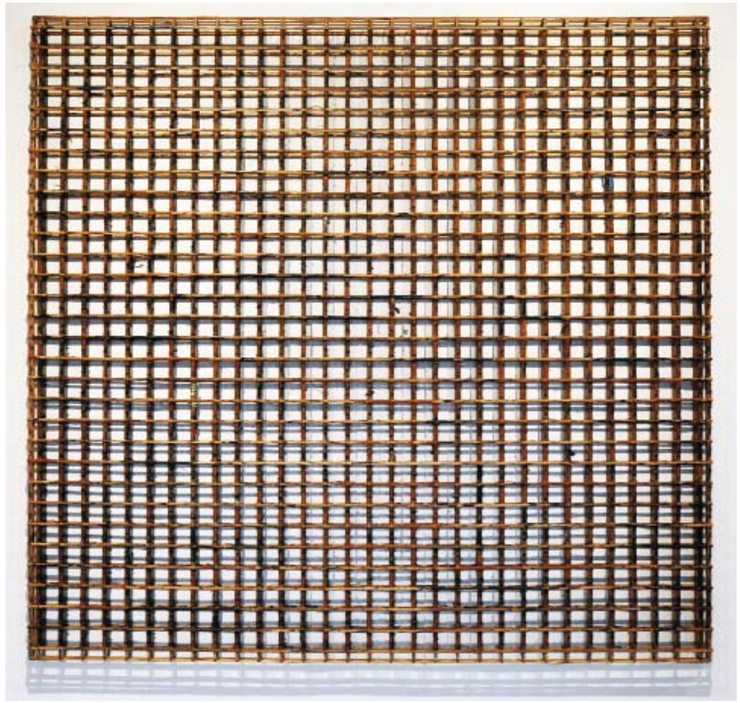
COMPOUND, AS INSTALLED AT THE BROOKFIELD PLACE WINTER GARDEN, NEW YORK (2013)

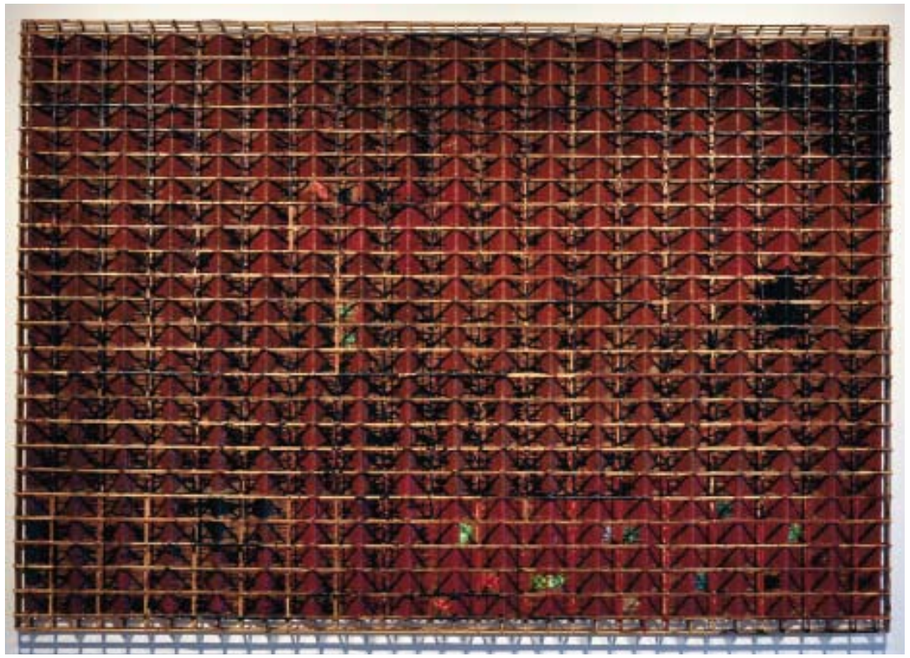


DOCUMENTA 13, INSTALLATION IN THE KUNSTHALLE FRIDERICIANUM, KASSEL, GERMANY (2012)



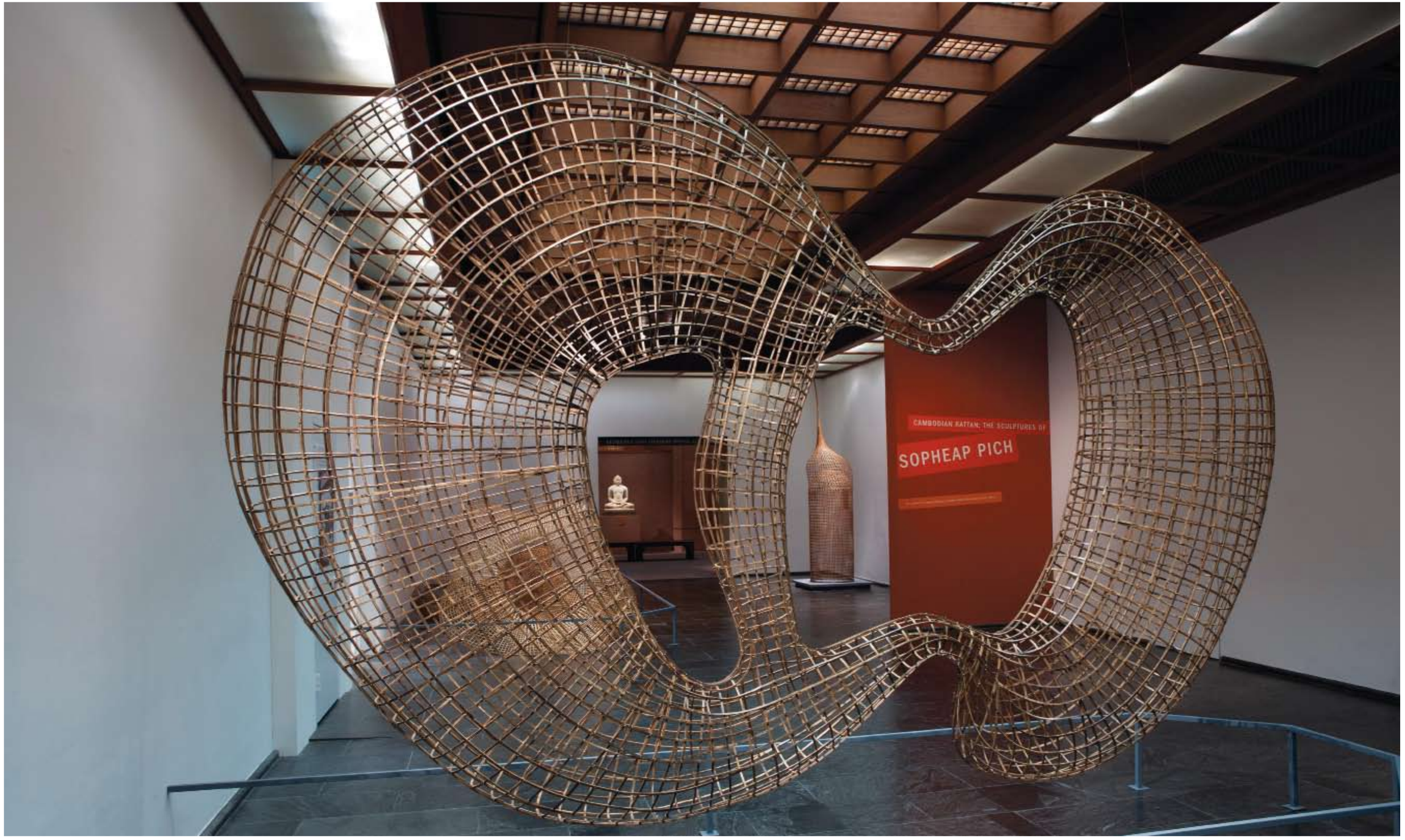
DOCUMENTA 13, INSTALLATION IN THE KUNSTHALLE FRIDERICIANUM, KASSEL, GERMANY (2012)





TOP: FIELDS OF RATTANAKIRI NO. 2 (2012) BOTTOM: RATTANAKIRI VALLEY DRIP (2012)

SEATED BUDDHA - ABHAYA MUDRA (2012)



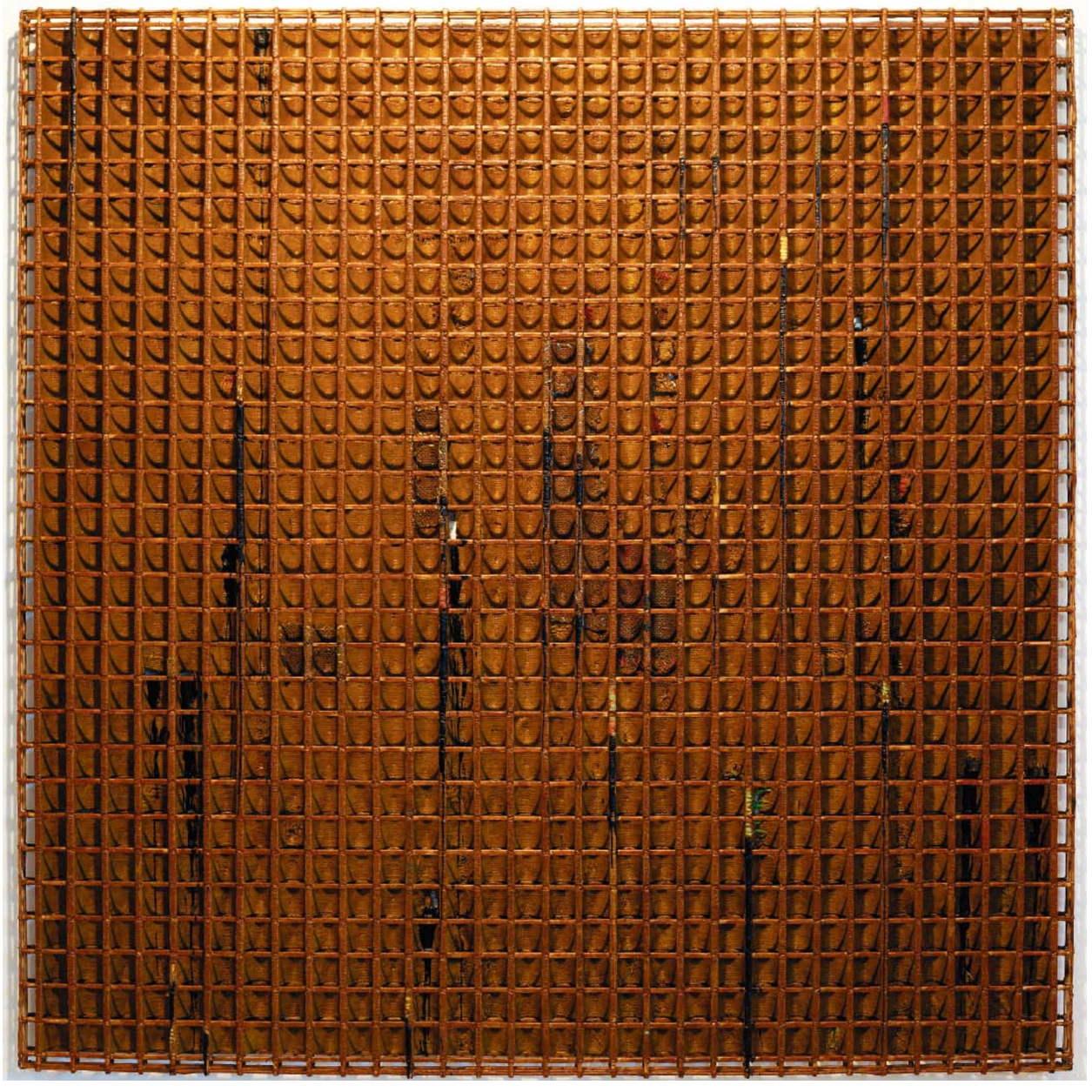
CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, (FEBRUARY TO JULY 2013)

CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,)FEBRUARY TO JULY 2013)

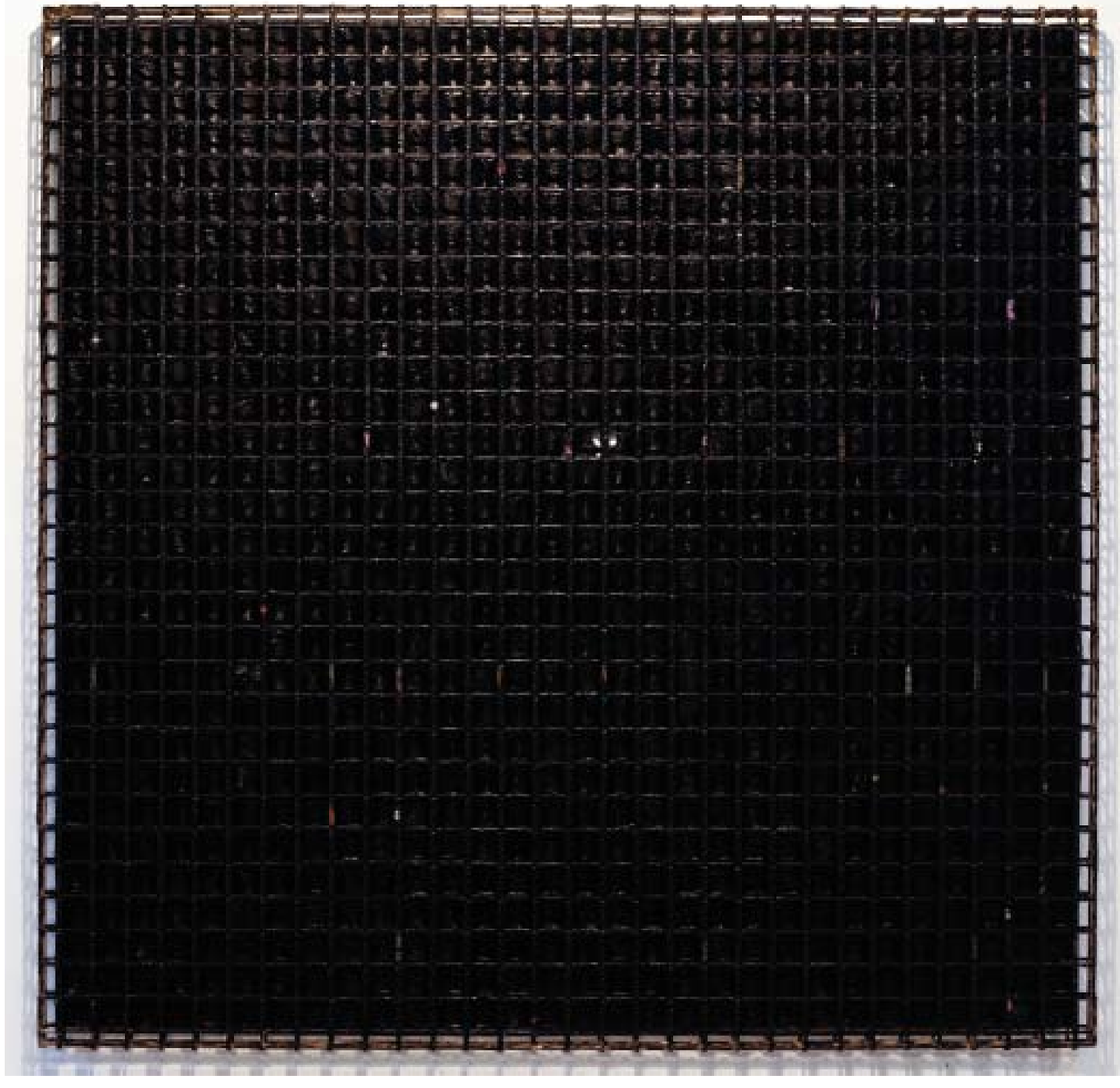
CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, (FEBRUARY TO JULY 2013)

CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, (FEBRUARY TO JULY 2013)

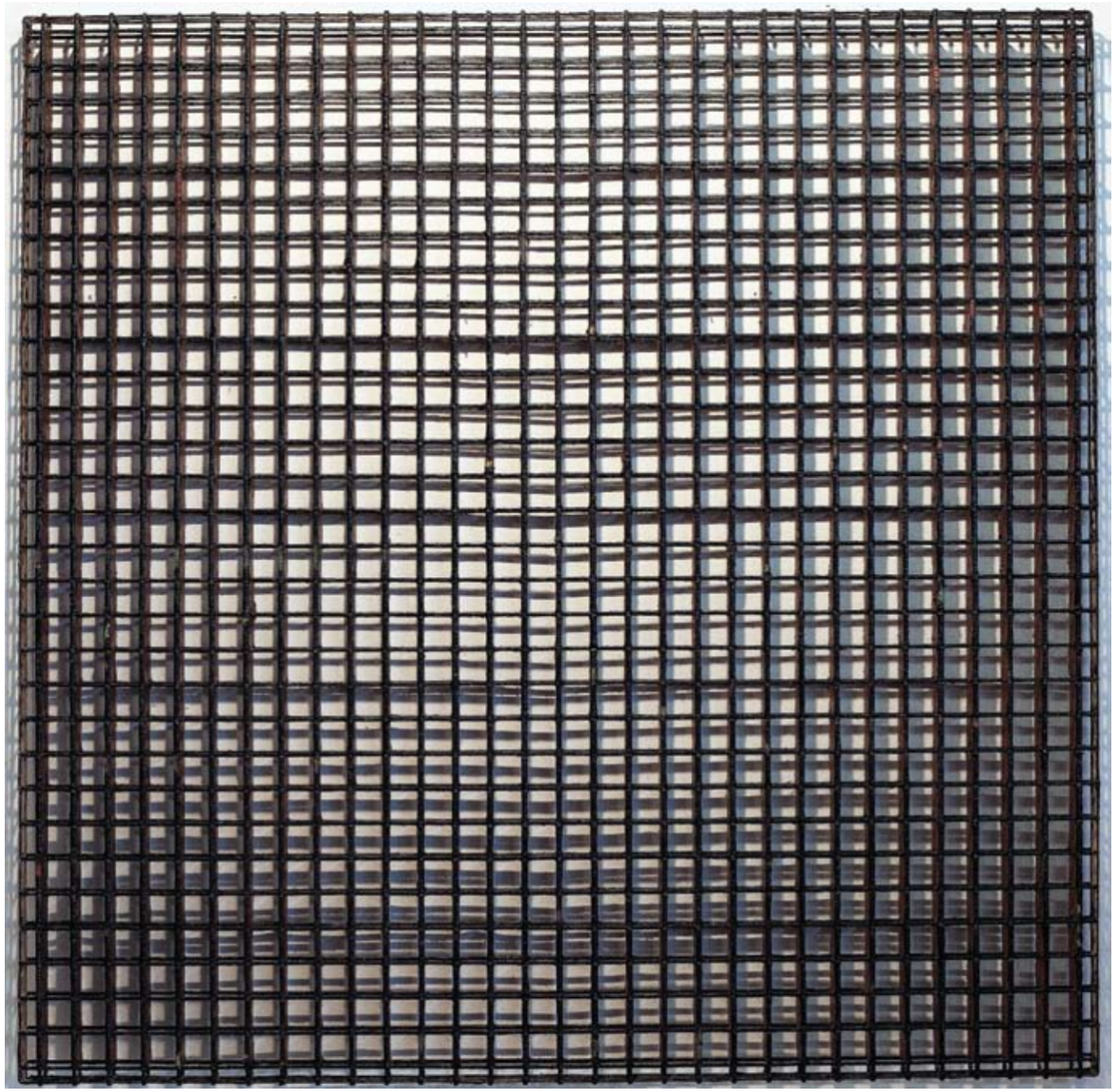
CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, (FEBRUARY TO JULY 2013)



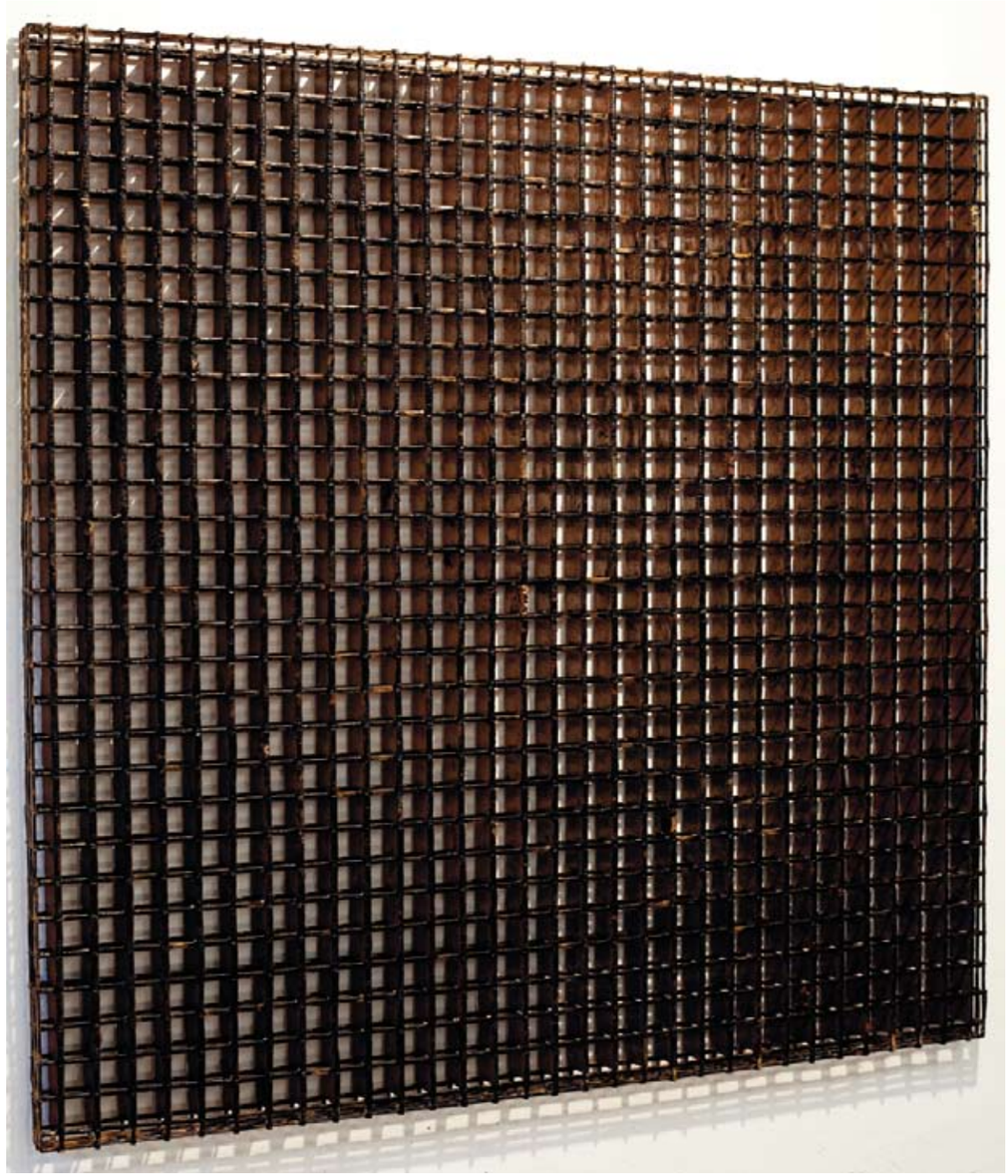
FERTILE LAND (2012)



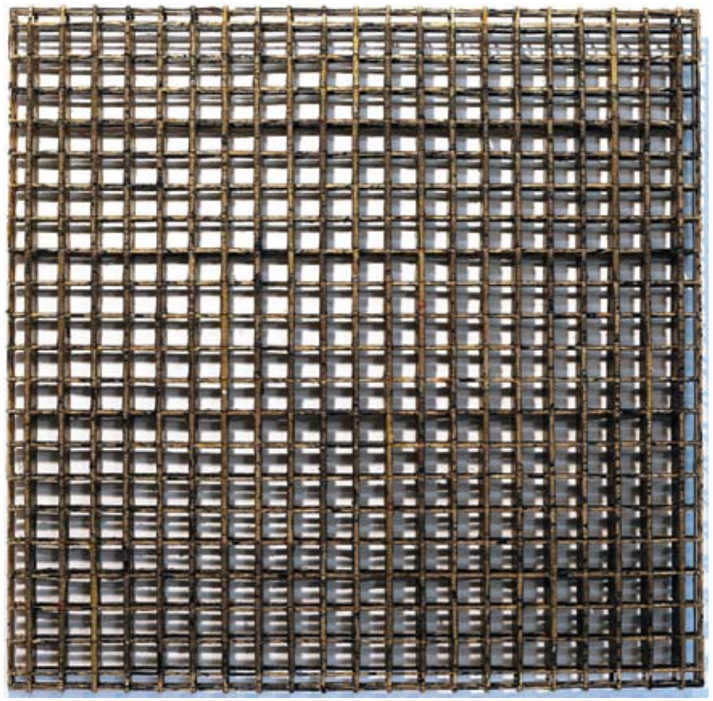
UNTITLED (THE NIGHT NO. 2) (2012)

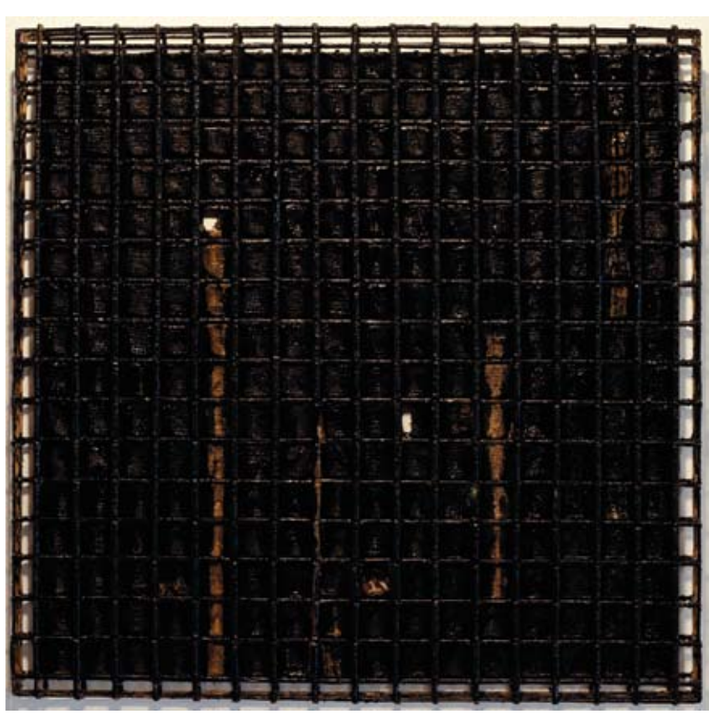


EMBERS AND DUST NO. 1 (2013)

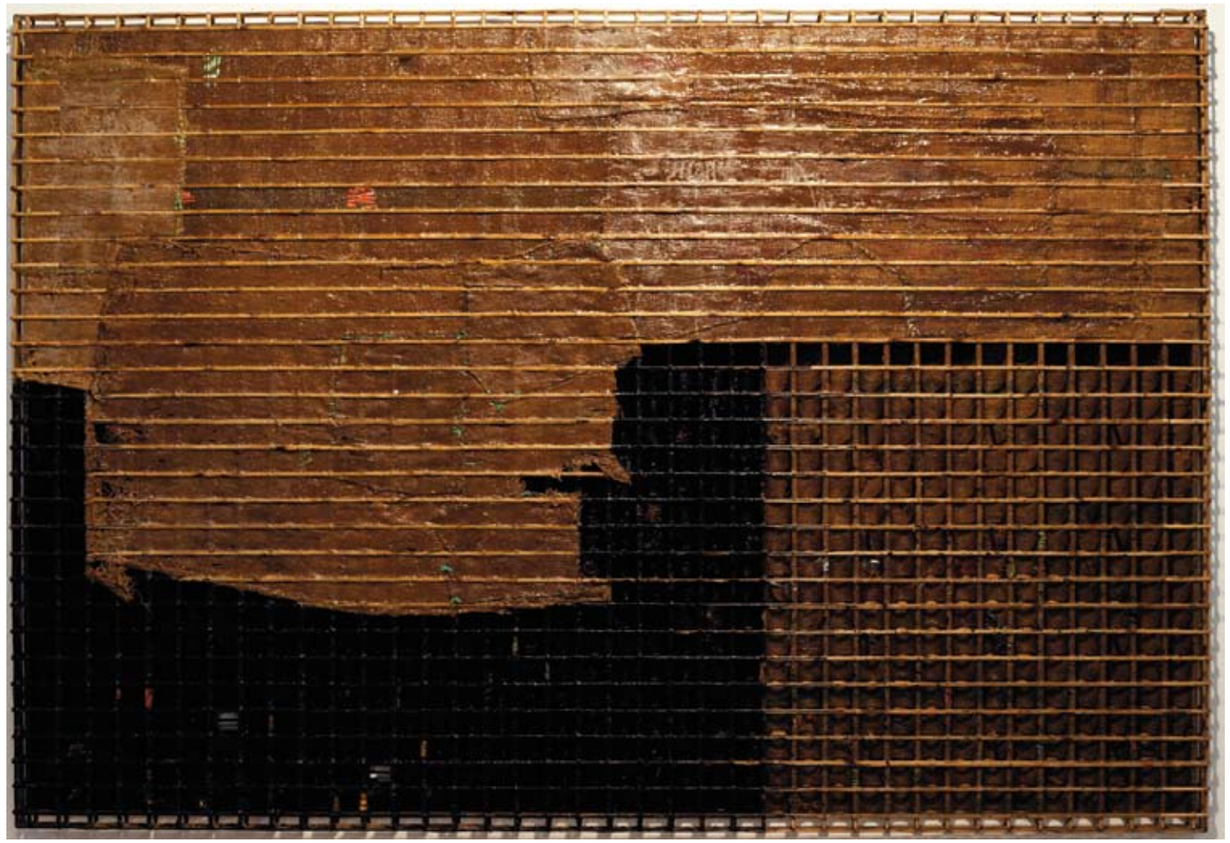


EMBERS AND DUST NO. 2 (2013)

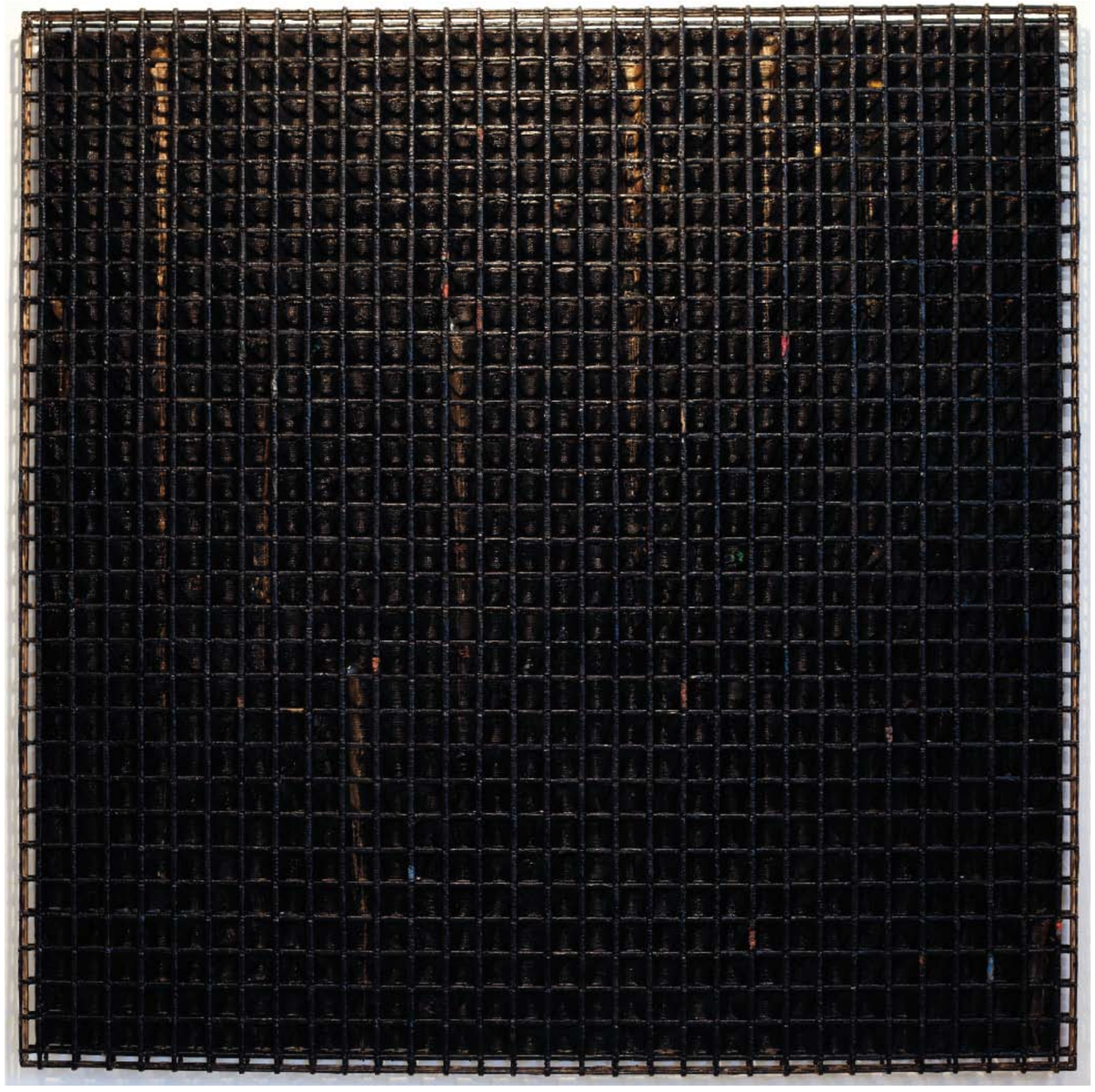




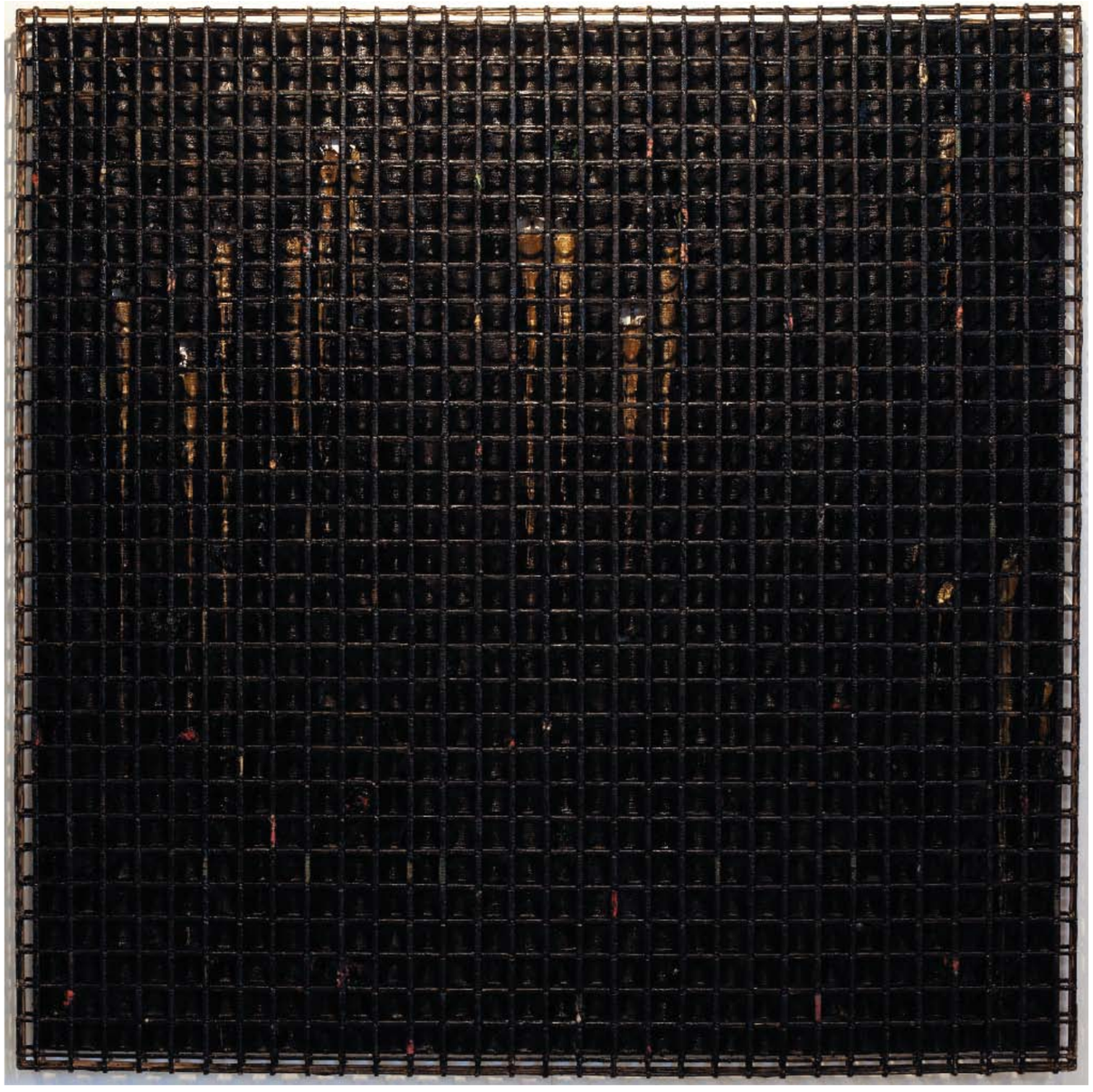
TOP: LICHENS AND MOSS (2012); BOTTOM: LUMINOUS FALLS (THE EDGE) (2012)



BARREN LAND (2013)



LUMINOUS FALLS NO. 1 (2013)



LUMINOUS FALLS NO. 2 (2013)

LIST OF WORKS

Silence
2004
rattan, wire
18 x 10 ¼ x 21 in. (46 x 26 x 53 cm)

Cycle
2004
rattan, wire
165 x 96 ½ x 35 ½ in. (420 x 245 x 90 cm)
Collection of the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

Ripple
2004
rattan, copper wire
159 x 19 x 19 in. (403 x 47 x 47 cm)

Echo
2004
rattan, copper wire
102 x 26 x 41 in. (260 x 65 x 105 cm)

Hive
2004
rattan, bamboo, wire, copper wire
170 x 42 x 84 in. (432 x 107 x 214 cm)

Upstream
2005
rattan, bamboo, wire, copper wire
39 x 39 x 118 in. (100 x 100 x 300 cm)

Stalk
2005
bamboo, rattan, wire
165 x 33 x 26 in. (420 x 84 x 65 cm)

Larcoon
2006
rattan, wire
151 x 34 ½ x 32 ¼ in. (384 x 88 x 82 cm)
Collection of the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

Cycle 2
2006
bamboo, rattan, aluminum and metal wire
219 x 124 x 40 ½ in. (557 x 315 x 103 cm)
Collection of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, WA.

Animal 1
2006
rattan, wire
16 ½ x 8 x 5 in. (42 x 20 x 13 cm)

Jayavarman VII
2007
rattan, wire, burlap, glass
20 x 22 ½ x 12 ¼ in. (50 x 57 x 31 cm)

Flow
2007
rattan, wire
325 x 154 x 67 in. (825 x 390 x 170 cm)

Delta
2007
rattan and wire
188 x 134 ¼ x 27 ½ in. (478 x 341 x 70 cm)

Armor
2008
bamboo, rattan, wire
41 x 39 x 16 in. (105 x 100 x 40 cm)

The Duel
2008
bamboo, wire
99 x 47 x 24 in. (252 x 120 x 61 cm)

Double Funnel
2008
rattan, wire
109 x 163 x 163 in. (277 x 415 x 415 cm)

Raft
2009
bamboo, rattan, wood, wire, metal bolts
89 x 177 x 52 in. (226 x 450 x 132 cm)

Cycle 2, Version 3
2008
rattan, wire
80 x 53 x 12 in. (203 x 135 x 30 cm)

Suture
2009
rattan, wire, burlap
28 x 19 x 7 in. (71 x 48 x 18 cm)

Construction - Jor
2009
rattan, bamboo, wire, varnish
25 x 16 x 6 in. (63.5 x 41 x 15 cm)

Caged Heart
2009
wood, bamboo, rattan, burlap, wire, dye, metal farm tools
51 x 46 x 47 in. (130 x 117 x 119 cm)

Junk Nutrients
2009
bamboo, rattan, wire, plastic, rubber, metal, cloth, resin
65 x 49 x 29 in. (165 x 124 x 74 cm)

1979
2009
rattan, wire, wood, burlap, pigments
sculptural installation, dimensions variable
Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

Upstream
2009
stainless steel
350 ½ x 92 ½ x 92 ½ in. (890 x 235 x 235 cm)
Permanent installation, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Saudi Arabia.

Cycle
2009
cast bronze
244 x 157 ½ x 47 in. (620 x 400 x 119 cm)
Permanent installation, King Abdullah University of Science and Tenchnology, Saudi Arabia.

Buddha 2
2009
rattan, wire, dye
100 x 29 x 9 in. (254 x 74 x 23 cm)
Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (Purchase, Friends of Asian Art Gifts, 2012).

Stalk 2
2009
bamboo, rattan, wire
144 x 54 x 29 in. (365 x 138 x 73 cm)

Figure
2010
rattan, burlap, wire, pigment, water-based paint
87 x 23 x 9 in. (221 x 58 x 23 cm)

Candles
2010
rattan, wire
39 x 31 x 16 in. (99 x 79 x 40 cm)

Head in Arms
2010
rattan, burlap, pigment, water-based paint
30 x 25 x 15 in. (76 x 63 ½ x 38 cm)

Upstream 2
2011
bamboo, rattan, plywood, wire
98 ½ x 27 ½ x 27 ½ in. (250 x 70 x 70 cm)

Chrysalis
2011
cast bronze
Permanent installation, IFC Plaza, Ningbo, China.

Morning Glory
2011
rattan, bamboo, wire, plywood, steel bolts
210 x 103 x 74 in. (533 x 261 x 188 cm)
Collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY.

Cocoon 2
2011
rattan, wire, burlap, beeswax, earth pigment
75 x 73 x 69 in. (191 x 85 x 75 cm)

Jayavarman VII
2011
rattan, plywood, burlap, glass, beeswax, charcoal, spray paint
66 x 36 ½ x 22 ½ in. (168 x 92 x 57 cm)
Collection of The Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY.

Hanging Around
2011
rattan, wire, burlap, beeswax, charcoal
65 ¾ x 12 x 4 ¾ in. (167 x 30 x 11 cm)

Never Mind
2011
rattan, burlap, encaustics, charcoal, wire
51 x 15 x 6 ½ in. (129 ½ x 38 x 16 ½ cm)

Again
2011
rattan, burlap, encaustics, earth pigment, wire
30 x 19 x 2 ½ in. (76 x 48 x 6 cm)

Cocoon 1
2011
rattan, wire, burlap, beeswax, earth pigment
30 x 14 x 10 ½ in. (76 x 36 x 26 cm)

Seated Buddha
2011
rattan, bamboo, wire, plywood
100 x 86 ½ x 43 ¼ in. (256 x 220 x 110 cm)

Morning Glory 2
2011
rattan, wire
89 x 43 x 34 ½ in. (226 x 109 x 87 cm)

Morning Glory 3
2011
rattan, wire
123 ½ x 44 x 21 in. (314 x 112 x 53 ½ cm)

Cycle
2011
bamboo
24 ½ x 165 ½ x 116 in. (62 x 420 x 295 cm)

Fields of Rattanakiri No. 2
2012
bamboo, rattan, burlap, wire, beeswax, damar resin, earth pigment, palstics, charcoal, oil paint
79 x 79 x 3 in. (200 x 201 x 8 cm)

Rattanakiri Valley Drip
2012
bamboo, rattan, burlap, wire, beeswax, damar resin, earth pigment, plastics, charcoal, oil paint
63 x 91 x 3 in. (162 x 232 x 8 cm)

Seated Buddha - Abhaya Mudra
2012
rattan, bamboo, wire, plywood
100 ½ x 87 x 45 in. (256 x 221 x 114 cm)
Collection of The Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA.

Compound
2011
bamboo, rattan, plywood, metal wire
as installed at the National Museum of Singapore:
157½ x 98½ x 98½ in. (400 x 250 x 250 cm)

main structure as installed at the Henry Art Gallery: 252 x 186 x 75 in. (640 x 472 x 190 cm)

overall dimensions as installed at Mass MoCA:
157 x 280 x 187 in. (144 ¾ x 711 x 475 cm)

main structure as installed at Brookfield Place:
216 x 108 x 132 in. (549 x 274 x 335 cm)

Untitled (The Night No. 2)
2012
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastics, damar resin, beeswax, charcoal
79 x 79 ¼ x 3 in. (200 x 201 x 8 cm)

Fertile Land
2012
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, earth pigment, oil paint
79 x 79 x 3 in. (201 x 201 x 8 cm)

Embers and Dust No. 1
2013
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, earth pigment, oil paint
79 x 79 x 3 in. (200 x 200 x 8 cm)

Embers and Dust No. 2
2013
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, earth pigment, oil paint
79 x 79 x 3 in. (200 x 200 x 8 cm)

Lichens and Moss
2012
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, earth pigment, oil paint
47 x 47 x 3 in. (122 x 122 x 8 cm)

Luminous Falls (the Edge)
2012
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, bronze powder, copper powder
39 x 39 x 3 in. (100 x 100 x 8 cm)

Barren Land
2013
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, synthetic resin, charcoal
98 x 79 x 3 in. (250 x 200 x 8 cm)

Luminous Falls No. 1
2013
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, bronze powder, copper powder
79 x 79 x 3 in. (200 x 200 x 8 cm)

Luminous Falls No. 2
2013
bamboo, rattan, wire, burlap, plastic, beeswax, damar resin, charcoal, bronze powder, copper powder
79 x 79 x 3 in. (200 x 200 x 8 cm)

PHOTO CREDITS

All photographs except for the following are courtesy of the artist or Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Detail of *Flow* and *Junk Nutrients*: Vandy Rattana

Sopheap Pich, *1979* series, 2009, installation views, "The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art," 5 December 2009 – 5 April 2010, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.
Purchased 2010 with funds from the Estate of Lawrence F. King in memory of the late Mr. and Mrs. SW King through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation.
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery
© Sopheap Pich
Photograph: Natasha Harth. Courtesy of the artist and the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

Installation views of *Compound* at the Broofield Place Winter Garden: presented by Arts Brookfield in collaboration with IN RESIDENCE, the visual art program of Season of Cambodia: A Living Arts Festival and Tyler Rollins Fine Art. Images courtesy of Arts Brookfield. Photographs: Jesse Untracht-Oakner.

Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich: Images © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Embers and Dust No. 1, Embers and Dust No. 2, Lichens and Moss, Luminous Falls (the Edge), and *Barren Land*: Lim Sokchan Lina.

SOPHEAP PICH'S STUDIO ASSISTANTS WITH *SEATED BUDDHA*.
CLOCKWISE FROM CENTER: MAO, SOPHEAK, KONG VUTHY, PHA, PU KET, MUN SOPHAI, VONG VICHET

SOPHEAP PICH

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

EDUCATION

1999
MFA in Painting: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL.

1995
BFA in Painting: The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, MA.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN.

2013
Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

Reliefs, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY.

Compound, Brookfield Place Winter Garden, New York, NY.

2012
In Spite of Order, H Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

2011
Morning Glory, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY.

Compound, The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

2010
Fragile, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2009
The Pulse Within, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY.

2008
Strands, The Esplanade, Singapore.

2007
Recent Works From Kunming, TCG/Nordica, Kunming, China.

Tidal, H Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

Flow, Sala Artspace, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2006
Moha Saen Anett, Gallery Dong Xi, Vestfossen, Norway.

2005
Chomlak, sculptures and drawings, The Arts Lounge of Hotel de la Paix, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Sculptures and Drawings, Amansara Resort, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

2004
Pdao, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2003
Excavating the Vessels, Java Café and Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2002
Recent Works, The Brewery Studio, Boston, MA.

1997
Empty Wooden Cigarette Boxes from Cambodia, The Augusta Savage Gallery, Amherst, MA.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013
Collecting Art of Asia, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA.

Connect: Phnom Penh: Rescue Archaeology – Contemporary Art and Urban Development in Cambodia, IFA-Galerie, Berlin, Germany.

Gentle Matter, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore.

2012
dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany.

Invisible Cities, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA.

Encounter: The Royal Academy in Asia, Asia Institute of Contemporary Art, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore.

2011
Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan.

Singapore Biennale, Singapore.

Here / Not Here: Buddha Presence in Eight Recent Works, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA.

2010
Classic Contemporary: Contemporary Southeast Asian Art from the Singapore Art Museum Collection, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

2009
Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.

Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.

Truly Truthful, Art Asia, Miami, FL.

Forever Until Now: Contemporary Art from Cambodia, 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong.

2008
Sh Contemporary: Best of Discovery, Shanghai, China.

Strategies from Within, Ke Center for the Contemporary Arts, Shanghai, China.

The Mekong Project, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos.

The Drawing Room, Rubies, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2006
Paint Around the Dog, with Jack Bauer, Lake Studio, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2+3+4 Cambodian/Vietnamese Exchange, Java Café and Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2005
Visual Arts Open, Elsewhere and New Art Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Transit, with Michèle Vanvlasselaer, Java Café & Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Première Vue, Passage de Retz, Paris, France.

Je/Jeu, French Cultural Center, Yangon, Myanmar.

2004
Guide, French Cultural Center, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Continuity, Shinta Mani, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Guide, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Meik Sratum, Silapak Khmer Amatak, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2001
Subject Picture, The Optimistic, Chicago, IL.

2000
Just Good Art 2000, Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago, IL.

Memory: Personal and Social Testimonies, The Augusta Savage Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.

1999
Altered Object, Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago, IL.

Young Talents II, Contemporary Arts Workshop, Chicago, IL.

MFA Thesis Exhibition, G2, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Yellow/Face, Gallery Pilson East, Chicago, IL.

Cows on Parade, a collaborative project with J. Zakin and S. Biggers for The Chicago Park District, exhibited at the Field Museum Campus, Chicago, IL.

1998
Presidential Dinner Exhibition, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

1995
Recent Paintings, Gallery Del Sol, Miami, FL.

BFA Thesis Show, The Augusta Savage Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Metroplitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY.

Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY.

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA.

Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, WA.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Guy, John. "Cambodian Rattan: Memory and Place in the Art of Sopheap Pich," *Orientations*, vol. 44, no. 4 (May 2013).

Bollansee, Marc. *Southeast Asian Contemporary Art NOW* (Singapore: Singapore Straits Times Press, 2013).

Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn, ed. *dOCUMENTA(13), Das Begleitbuch / The Guidebook,* and *Das Logbuch / The Logbook* (Ostfilden: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012).

Ng, Elaine W. "Where I Work: Sopheap Pich," *Art Asia Pacific* (May 2012).

Muehlig, Linda, ed. *Collecting Art of Asia* (Northampton: Smith College Museum of Art, 2012).

Ly, Boreth. "Of Trans(national) Subjects and Translation: The Art and Body Language of Sopheap Pich," in *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012).

Lenzi, Iola, ed. *Negotiating Home History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011).

Upchurch, Michael. "Cambodian Artist Evokes Tumult of His Homeland," *The Seattle Times*, (November 18, 2011).

Graves, Jen. "A Weightless Series of Cages," *The Stranger* (November 2011).

Taylor, Nora. "The Sublime Grows in Muddy Ponds," in *Morning Glory,* Tyler Rollins Fine Art (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2011).

Huang, Iris Shu-Ping. *Medi(t)ation - 2011 Asian Art Biennial* (Taiwan: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2011).

Turnbull, Robert. "The Rebuilding of Cambodian Art," *The Art Newspaper* (October 2011).

Gereben, Janos. "Modern 'Buddha Presence' at Asian Art Museum," *The San Francisco Examiner* (September 28, 2011).

Goodman, Jonathan. "Return to Cambodia," *Sculpture* (September 2011).

"Woven Narrative," *Thailand Tatler* (July 2011).

Taylor, Nora A. "Art without History? Southeast Asian Artists and Their Communities in the Face of Geography," *Art Journal* (July 2011).

Seno, Alexandra A. "A River View Reshapes a Sculptor's Work," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 23, 2011).

Seno, Alexandra A. "A Dream Weaver Goes Global," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 8, 2011).

Curtin, Brian. "Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House." *Artforum* (April 2011).

Mertens, Brian. "Sopheap Pich" in *Singapore Biennale 2011* (March 2011).

Kolesnikov-Jessop, Sonia. "Definitions of Home at the Singapore Biennale," *The New York Times* (March 21, 2011).

Peterson, Jane A. "Open House at the Singapore Biennale," *The Wall Street Journal,* (March,11 2011).

Harding, Allison. "Here/Not Here," *Treasures* (Asian Art Museum of San Francisco Magazine) (January 2011).

Masters, HG, ed. "The Pulse Within," *Art Asia Pacific Almanac* (2010).

Turnbull, Robert. "Cambodian Art Emerges From Horrors of a Murderous Past," *The New York Times* (December 29, 2010).

Poddar, Sandhini. "Best of 2010," *Artforum* (December 2010).

Kwon, Liz. "Art & Space," *bob Magazine* (April 2010).

Fyfe, Joe. "Sopheap Pich," *Art Forum* (February 2010).

Wei, Lilly. "Sopheap Pich." *ARTnews* (February 2010).

Curtin, Brian. "Sopheap Pich," *Flash Art* (January 2010).

Ly, Boreth. "Of Texture and Tactile Memory: Situating Sopheap Pich's Work in a Global and Local Perspective," in *The Pulse Within* (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2009).

Yuko, Yamaki. "Sopheap Pich," in *The 4th Fukoka Asian Art Triennial* (Fukoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2009).

Horner, James. "Sopheap Pich's The Pulse Within," *Examiner.com* (December 7, 2009).

Amanda Valdez. "The Pulse Within," *Dossier Journal* (November 2009).

Alexandra A. Seno. "A Coming of Age for Cambodian Artists," *The International Herald Tribune* (March 18, 2009).

"The New Weave," *Sphere Asia* (March 2009).

Wong, Jill. "Cambodian Art: Opening the Box," *C-Arts Magazine* (March 2009).

Mertens, Brian. "Tidal: Sopheap Pich," *Art Asia Pacific* (March 2008).

Pettifor, Steven. "Speaking to the Past and the Present," *World Sculpture News* (September 2007).

Spunner, Suzanne. "New Art, New Cambodia," *RealTime Arts* (April 2006).

PUBLISHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION
SOPHEAP PICH: *RELIEFS*
AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART
APRIL 18 - JUNE 14, 2013

PUBLISHED BY:
TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART, LTD
529 WEST 20TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10011
TEL. + 1 212 229 9100
FAX. +1 212 229 9104
INFO@TRFINEART.COM
WWW.TRFINEART.COM

CATALOGUE LAYOUT: MOLLY NUTT

PRINTED AND BOUND IN THE UNITED STATES

SPECIAL THANKS:
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev
Molly Nutt
Sam I-shan
Lee Smith