

old styles and techniques of fine-brush painting, he seamlessly incorporates the visual language of period costumes, 1960s nostalgia and modern architecture into his aesthetic framework. With an ever-refined taste for ornament, costume and gesture, he has developed a sensibility that rests somewhere between the bizarre and the banal. Indeed, Shieh displays the unique ability to capture the spirit of tradition without conforming to it. ■

BANGKOK

Sopheap Pich: "Tidal"

H GALLERY

BRIAN MERTENS

Bangkok exhibitions are featuring more artists from abroad, as demonstrated by "Tidal," the Thailand debut of 39-year-old Cambodian sculptor Sopheap Pich (SEE AAP 44). Using the most economical artistic means, Sopheap articulates forms that reflect sensitively on his country's troubled recent past. Each ruggedly elegant work comprises one or more volumes of latticed, split cane alluding to the human body—its membranes, organs, bones and limbs—while also commenting on history and culture.

Scarred Heart (2007), for example, takes the form of a recumbent 1.5 meter-high amphora with a shallow lateral groove suggesting an abrasion or wound. Another heart-shaped work, *Jayavarman VII* (2007), wistfully references a 13th-century ruler known for his public works, initiatives lacking in modern Cambodia. Covered in burlap, the piece is topped with two glass jars of the type used for fire-cupping in Chinese medicine, recalling the king's construction of many hospitals. The quirky heart shape was inspired by the mold of a classical-style Khmer bust that Sopheap saw in use at a local foundry.

Delta (2007) is a room-sized installation that hints at the deepest layers of a culture shaped by rivers and fertilized by annual flooding. The sculpture's form suggests both a riparian terrain and a digestive organ, evoking a land that is inundated with riches, yet aches for sustenance.

Impetuous (2007) could be viewed as a playful but skeptical look at the male ego and its role in human affairs: five small phallic shapes hang on the wall, pouting drolly earthward. Other works took on canine forms—Sopheap's nip at the dog-eat-dog tone of life in Cambodia's new era of crony capitalism. The show, created mostly on-site, was skillfully installed in the space, a restored 19th-century timber villa.

Sopheap doesn't fuss with "craft," despite one's first impression of this work. He



SOPHEAP PICH — *Armor* (2008) Rattan, metal wire, 105 x 100 x 40 cm, courtesy H Gallery, Bangkok

left Cambodia at the age of seven during the Pol Pot regime and returned in 2003, a few years after master's degree studies in painting at the Art Institute of Chicago. Deciding then to venture into sculpture, he found that rattan was one of the most suitable materials on hand from suppliers in Phnom Penh. Although Cambodians have long used cane to craft tools and buildings, Sopheap didn't train with craftspeople or otherwise borrow their methods. He doesn't weave this versatile material in the traditional way, but instead fastens it with wire, allowing freer forms. Compared to the meticulousness of craft, Sopheap's sculptural techniques are more expressive. Yet nothing was strident in this extraordinary show, helping make it persuasive both as social critique and art. ■

MUMBAI / NEW DELHI

Gargi Raina: "Constructing the Memory of a Room"

MULTIPLE VENUES

ZEHRA JUMABHOY

Repetition is the mother of creation in Baroda-based Gargi Raina's solo show, "Constructing the Memory of a Room." The exhibition, which traveled from Bodhi Art in Mumbai to a section of the Travancore Palace in New Delhi, included her cherished motifs (headless horses, bedraggled birds and tarnished mirrors) and hopscotched across mediums: photography, video, installation, drawing and mixed-media canvases. For instance, the amber-colored horse in a small paper collage, part of the series "Constructing the Memory of a Room" (2005), became the gigantic wooden creature of *Hujoom* (2007), an installation that greeted visitors at the entrances of both venues.

Before the 1947 Partition, Raina's family hailed from Lahore, although the artist herself was born in New Delhi in 1961. Raina's art has always spoken about memory, loss and politics; conceptualized between 2001 and 2007, this series continues to intertwine these themes, inspired in particular by a visit to her father's pre-Partition home. References to the home—like the black-and-white checkered flooring in one of its rooms—infiltrated the two displays.

At Bodhi Art's three-floor gallery space



GARGI RAINA — *Hujoom (Horse)* (2007) Wood, rope, cloth, dimensions variable, courtesy Bodhi Art, New Delhi