

# DOSSIER

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Days before his New York solo debut I sat down with Sopheap Pich at Tyler Rollins to discuss his new show *The Pulse Within*. Expanding the forms and materials of his bamboo and rattan based sculptures, Sopheap is addressing in a quiet and subtle way a project about reflection, memory, the body, and creating a time and space for “healing” (I know, “healing”... I said it. Not the artist. So don't cringe too much- somewhere this word can have an authentic and meaningful application). His forms are born from a personal place that then interact with the forms of Cambodia's history, creating sculptures that are universal to the human conditions of joy, hope, darkness, and transformation.

*Let's start with a description of your new show, *The Pulse Within*. What ideas and forms are you working with?*

All my work has been inspired by Cambodia in general since I started making sculpture in 2004. I was still painting at the time I returned. Painting stopped making sense to me after living in Cambodia for a couple of years. I wanted to make an image, something more physical. Discovering sculpture with natural material was sort of an accident, but as an artist it set me free. It just felt right when I'm started working with that material, like I had worked with it before because as a child you play in the countryside. So it's like going back in time – finding something real again.

*One thing I noticed is when the work is made of only bamboo and rattan everything in the piece is completely transparent. Now with the additions of burlap and other materials to the main form the insides are partially hidden – this is a new element and adds a new psychology to the structures.*

In general the idea of transparency is very important as a figural symbol and as a metaphor. If you know Cambodia, you know a little bit the psychology of the country now – everything is half hidden. You don't really know if the person you're talking to is being transparent and truthful. It's that kind of time we are living in, that's part of the conditions. I guess all the symbolic things of how I use my materials, prepare my material, all have some sort of echo of the environment.

*How are you bringing critical and conceptual awareness to Cambodia?*

The truth is that I got involved in the Cambodian art scene about a year and half after I moved there. I started curating exhibitions there, started a small young artist group, and in 2006 I ran a sort of guided class – I wouldn't call it teaching necessarily – with ten young artists. We would go to exhibitions together and I showed them Herzog's Fitzcarraldo and talked about that – what it takes to move a ship over a mountain. I wanted to change something, to contribute something that I know to the people who want to listen to me. I'm very open to young artists who want to be artists.

*Can you say something about your work *Caged Heart* (pictured top)?*

It first started from a couple lines from a song by a Cambodian blues player. He plays a two-string instrument and he talks about that he's an old person and can't change much. One of the metaphors he uses is, “What can I do? My heart is overgrown with mushrooms. How can I change, how can I do this?” It came from this song. I was just trying to find something that I could make with that kind of sentiment. Through working through this idea it starts to make sense and take this shape and include the tools. Found tools are something I'm interested in. They are not high-quality tools. It gives some kind of emotion and sense of discomfort.

*This is a very gorgeous shape of the heart, but when you come around to the other side, suddenly there is this other element and other psychology to deal with.*

You have to have a big heart to live in place like this. You have to be very nice on the outside and have control, but there is always some evil inside and discomfort on the inside. It's like these old hearts that have grown as big as they can grown because the cage won't allow it to get out. I want it to have that sense.

*Opening reception tonight, November 12, 2009 6-8 pm. Open through January 9, 2010 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York*

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