



Sopheap Pich's "The Pulse Within"

By **Manhattan Fine Arts Examiner**, James Horner
December 7, 8:12 PM



Sopheap Pich with
Photo by James Horner.

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Blood curdles through exposed organs at "The Pulse Within," [Sopheap Pich's](#) first New York solo show at [Tyler Rollins Fine Art](#) in Chelsea. This native Cambodian has captured the horror of the Khmer Rouge era (1975 to 1979). His sculptures made out of bamboo, rattan and other materials, crook and come around back with pain. Based on his sometimes warm, but tortured childhood, Pich has created a number of works resembling organs and symbols of his homeland. Starting out as a pre-med student at college may have influenced his anatomical works of angst and terror, which also represent the living that survive in his country today.

While in New York for his show, I was able to meet with Pich at the gallery to discuss his intriguing work. Originally a painter, Pich changed to sculpture because he felt that painting was too confining. He could easily erase a painting and start over, but with sculpture, he would have to work what he started out with and make it into his vision. The artist mostly uses bamboo for this sculptures, which he stumbled upon one day in a shop near his home. Pich was smitten with the material early on as he could cut it into strips from rods and create objects that cast curious shadows, broadening the work. His sculptures could also become one with the audience, as Pich pointed out when visitors at the gallery were behind one of his larger works.

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Pich incorporates other materials and items that he collects. Common among Cambodians who are very poor, they collect scrap metal and other items to sell for income. In addition, creating sculpture reminded him of his childhood when he would create sling-shots and items needed for household use. In the beginning he utilized bamboo as a frame for his works and covered it with cigarette packages, but then he grew to love the bamboo on its own and realized that this was his medium.

Walking among Pich's handmade sculptures, you can feel the girth required for their creation and display for public scrutiny. With "Caged Heart," Pich builds a heart out of bamboo, covered in strips of red burlap – creating an open/closed organ sitting in a cage surrounded by farm tools. It's almost as if he's putting his heart out in a field where he once had worked as manual labor, exposed to all elements and individuals, bad and good. With "Raft," the largest piece in the show, Pich told me that he was mixing the old Cambodian symbol of the Raft, with structures that look like skyscrapers – the new opulent Cambodia. The flotation device on "Raft" also looks like bombs, which were dropped on Vietnam. "Junk Nutrients," a colon form of burlap and exposed bamboo spilling out junk, shows the casualties of an industrial society and an organic

Cambodian environment that must survive among the trash.

In the end, Pich's organs not only exemplify the suffering he endured in his past, but also serve as an example of how consumerism and excess can exalt and leave the waste behind. There is also a thread of hope in his work, that paints a picture of a brighter and peaceful Cambodia.

"The Pulse Within," is on view until January 9, 2010 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street, Suite 10W, New York, NY.



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James Horner Photo by James Horner.

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