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‘Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich’

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Metropolitan Museum of Art

Through July 7

The Metropolitan Museum’s Asian art department steered clear of contemporary work in the 20th century but is embracing it, big time, in the 21st, with an impressive survey of sculpture by the young Cambodian artist [Sopheap Pich](#). Not only is this show good-sized but it’s also embedded in the permanent collection. The installation starts outside the Chinese painting galleries; continues in a mezzanine usually devoted to South Asian material; and concludes in the Southeast Asian art galleries

Mr. Pich — who was born in Cambodia in 1971, went to art school in the United States and now lives in Phnom Penh — first came to attention in New York in 2009 with a gallery show of openwork sculptures woven from rattan strips. The basketlike pieces looked lighter than air, but with their semiabstract images of half-built cities, viscera and bombs, they were weighty with ideas.

The [Met show](#), organized by John Guy, curator of the arts of South and Southeast Asia, with Sheena Wagstaff, chairwoman of the department of modern and contemporary art, gives a sense of Mr. Pich’s formal scope. The 2011 “Morning Glory,” which twists and trumpets across a wide-open space in front of the museum’s Astor Court, is monumental but finespun and transparent. By contrast, most of the work in the mezzanine gallery is small, dark and dense; two grid-format reliefs look like windows covered by grates. (A new series of his reliefs is on view through June 14 at [Tyler Rollins Fine Art](#), 529 West 20th Street, in Chelsea.)

Mr. Pich, who lived through the Khmer Rouge years as a child, resists defining his work autobiographically but acknowledges in it traces of his own and his country’s past. A woven Buddha figure, suspended among the Met’s Cambodian antiquities, refers to a faith nearly expunged in the 1970s, but gaining strength again. That the figure looks unfinished, with loose rattan strips hanging free, suggests that a cultural history is still very much in progress and that Mr. Pich’s art is part of it.