

Sopheap Pich

TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART

529 WEST 20 STREET

November 12–January 9

For his first New York solo exhibition, Phnom Penh–based artist Sopheap Pich takes us right to Cambodia’s heart—and to its stomach, kidneys, and lungs. In a series of medium-scale installations, Pich twists, contorts, and expands bamboo, rattan, and wire into organic and subtle forms that evoke human organs. Take *Cycle 2, Version 3*, 2008, in which two stomachs are sewn together into an abstracted form, a reference to the dual concerns of starvation and food-borne illness that still plague Cambodia. *Caged Heart*, 2009, encloses a partially covered, seemingly battered vessel in a circular ring littered with farm tools and accented with delicate and downright-pretty flecks of blood-red paint.

Pich’s poetic interpretation of these individual elements—outwardly fragile but actually strong—are metonymic of the Cambodian body, and particularly of the trauma resulting from the genocide and widespread cultural destruction that occurred under the regime of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. The artist was forced to flee Cambodia as a child, and memories and anecdotes of this time, as well as his personal need to confront this history on returning in 2002, root and locate his work today.

Pich consistently maintains an emphasis on process and materiality through his novel reinterpretation of bamboo. In two large installations, he also proposes an interplay between one’s inner experience and the external urban realities Cambodia now faces. The architectural *Raft* and *Junk Nutrients*, both 2009, the latter composed of assorted colorful detritus spilling from a winding red bamboo and rattan form, reference Phnom Penh’s central and historic Reed Lake, which Pich represents in order to critique its imminent redevelopment. In spite of some unevenness in the exhibition as a whole, particularly in the slightly ambiguous relationship between the “organ” works and everything else, the output here already has a strong pulse—and is sure to cause more flutter in New York and beyond in the future.



Sopheap Pich, *Raft*, 2009, bamboo, rattan, wood, wire, metal bolts, 89 x 177 x 52”.

— Beth Citron