







A rack of tools, which Pich uses to construct his art. © Eli Lillis

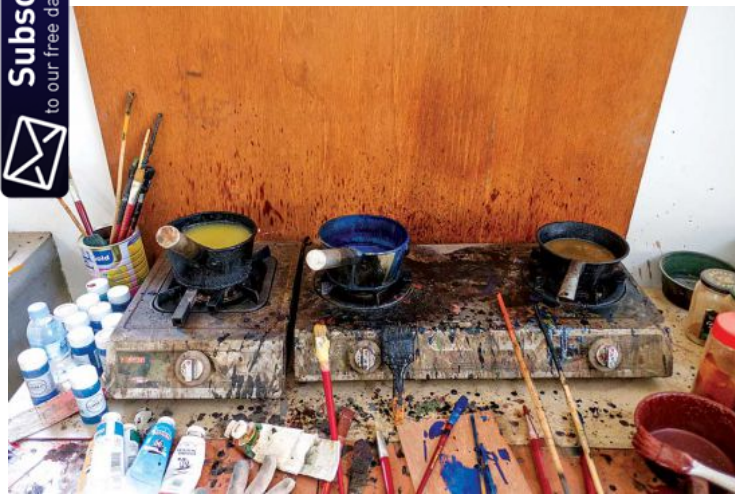
"What inspires my work is my childhood experience during the Khmer Rouge and in the refugee camp, mainly the way by which we used traditional materials to make weapons and traps to hunt animals [like] my dad had taught me," he says. "Meanwhile, utilising such materials built up my intimacy with the natural environment, through seeking, boiling, cutting, bending, burning and dyeing."

One of his pieces on display will be Big Being, a sculpture made from bamboo and wire that is about the size of a shipping container, made of rattan and steel wire and shaped like the seed of a being tree.

"People should interpret my work differently, according to their own perspectives," he says. "For example, some people may think that the Big Being represents the growth of a tiny thing to a very big thing, while another sees it in a different way. Real art should be subjective, and we artists are just the making agents."

Although Pich got his start in the US, his work is firmly rooted here in Cambodia. He obtained his BFA in painting from the University of Massachusetts and his MFA in painting from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He returned to Cambodia in 2002, and two years later turned to sculpture after he found painting work "insufficient", as he wanted to "produce rather than paint something".

Then, the artist has had solo exhibitions in galleries around the world, such as at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tyler Rollins Fine Art gallery and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation in Australia, in addition to other group exhibitions.]



A stove for boiling paint in the artist's studio. © Eli Lillis


"Sopheap Pich is among the most influential international artists," Millet says. "[He] is an artist who works with finesse, whose relationship to his environment is incredibly poetic. What strikes me in each and every one of his works is that they speak both of the world and of himself, and to anyone who looks at them."

In spite of his success, Pich does not encourage young people to be artists but "to follow their passions" while doing what they are obliged to do for themselves, their family, and their people.

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"You do not expect big money from artist's work, and it is not fun either," he says. "Instead, you will have to give up a lot. What I am doing now is both my passion and responsibility."

"Sopheap Pich, from studio to fine art" will open at the French Institute at 6:30pm on Thursday, February 16 and will be open to the public with free admission until March 18.

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