

Sopheap Pich

H Gallery, [Bangkok, Thailand](#)



Expectations of Sopheap Pich's first solo show in Bangkok were high. The Phenom Penh-based artist has been steadily building an international profile and glimpses of his work tend to lead one to search for more information about him. Of course, interest in the artist probably extends more generally to Cambodia and its burgeoning art scene. Pich's sculptures and installations evoke local contexts through their materials and ostensible concerns but could never, as this exhibition demonstrated, be reducible to local contexts because of his methods.

Zoomorphic and otherwise bulbous forms woven from rattan and wire hang, sit, and emerge from the walls of the gallery. The semi-reflective surface of the rattan, its undulating form and skeletal shadows give the installation of sculptures a transient quality. Abstracted dog-like shapes appear to struggle to free themselves from their base, and an enormous replica of a stomach glitters to the degree that belies the sculpture's materials and labour-intensive construction. Other pieces include small phallic shapes in various stages of erection, and traditional water containers turned impractical objects for aesthetic deliberation.

The title of the exhibition, "Tidal", is an apt one for the experience of the installation, in that there is a great sense of fluidity between the sculptures, but it also alludes to the artist's home country: from the Khmer civilization's foundation on water to current failures to irrigate Cambodian land resulting in widespread poverty. Individually, each piece functions symbolically: the stomach for hunger; dogs the ubiquitous sign for scavengers in South East Asia; water vessels however, an engagement on this level would quickly run dry, so to speak. Taken as a whole, or in terms of installation, "Tidal" proves compelling because of more lateral interpretations of the artworks' relationship to the theme.

Therein lays the crux of Pich's importance as an artist. At the level of form, rattan as a signifier of vernacular or indigenous craft is very much resisted and the near-minimalism of his approach fits expectations of contemporary art very well. However, Pich's intention in this regard is an open question. To the extent that Cambodia provides his inspiration one can only hope that he never becomes trapped by the country he is working out of.

Brian Curtin