



## THE NEW WEAVE

When the sculptor **Sopheap Pich** returned to live in Phnom Penh in 2001, the city offered little in the way of an independent arts scene. Taking advantage of the wave of tourism that represented the country's only economic hope, the handful of artists exhibiting in the commercial galleries of street 178 were, he feels, "a little too keen on apsara dancers and brooding sunsets behind Angkor Wat's pineapple towers."

Determined to change this, Pich made it his mission to root out and encourage contemporary artistic expression. In 2006 he helped found Visual Arts Open and curate a show in which 16 painters and three photographers exhibited in nine galleries around the capital, the first of its kind since the 1960s.

Born in Battambang province during Pol Pot, Pich emigrated to Massachusetts in 1984 and later attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His focus then was on painting. Today, from his lakeside studio at Boeung Kak in the city's northern suburbs, much of what Pich produces is bamboo and rattan sculptures woven with copper wire. His amoebic creations combine the metaphoric and the sensual, while building on the Cambodian tradition of basket-weaving and the water life of the fishing towns of his youth.

This year, Pich's career has taken him far from Cambodia. A public sculpture project for King Abdullah University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia was a lucrative commission coming soon after his work was highlighted at Shanghai Art Fair in 2008. Future venues include the Tyler Rollins Fine Art Gallery for his first solo show in New York City (September).

[www.sopheappich.com](http://www.sopheappich.com)



**Sopheap Pich** creates basket-weave sculptures for public spaces worldwide.

### For further reading

*Cambodian Dance, Celebration of the Gods*, by Denise Heywood escorts readers through the history of Cambodian dance, beginning more than a thousand years ago during the Khmer empire and leading to the revival today. Lavishly illustrated, it includes stories of dancers who survived the Pol Pot regime.

River Books, [www.riverbooksbk.com](http://www.riverbooksbk.com)