



Explore the 'Expanse' of Minimalism with Sopheap Pich



Installation View of Expanses at the Tyler Rollins Gallery in New York.

TEXT: Bansie Vasvani

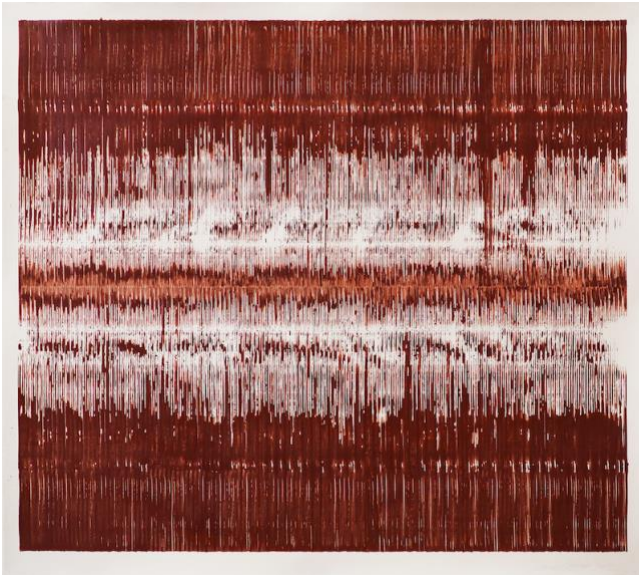
IMAGES: Courtesy of Tyler Rollins Gallery and the artist

Last May, at the 57th Venice Biennale I was enchanted by Sopheap Pich's drawings and sculpture included in the "The Pavilion of Traditions" section of Christine Macel's exhibition, "Viva Arte Viva." Installed in the cavernous Arsenale, Pich's new striped drawings beckoned from afar. Unlike his static bamboo sculptures, the interactive garnet and white striations appeared to reverberate with an internal rhythm creating a surface that was at once dynamic and calm, powerful but quiet. In the drawings and accompanying sculpture titled "Monument 2," 2016, Pich's ingenious incorporation of indigenous materials from his native Cambodia resulted in a brilliant correlation between colour and form with equally forceful spiritual effects.



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Pich's sixth exhibition "Expanses," at the Tyler Rollins Gallery in New York comprises of larger more complex versions of the drawings from Venice alongside Monument 1 and 2, and a huge bamboo sculpture "Ordeal," 2018, first shown at Singapore's Asian Civilizations Museum. Here, in a series of four recent drawings made in 2018 called "Pulses," 4, 5, 6, and 7 a veritable musical composition unfolds. The melodic notes are created by repeatedly pressing a bamboo stick dipped in red oxide and gum arabic onto arches watercolor paper. The pressure applied to each application forms the ensuing red and white gradation of rhythmic lines that remind me of the high and low notes of music. On a hunch, I asked Pich at the opening of the exhibition if a particular artist or musical score inspired the drawings. "Max Richter," he said. Like Richter who is described as the "architect of a post-minimalist electronic revolution," Pich's austere markings create their own calming cadence. In "Pulses" 7 and 8 the uniformity of the central white strokes with equal measures of garnet on the top and bottom steered me towards imagining the opening of a glacially paced musical composition. By contrast, the palpable vibrations in "Pulses" 5 and 6 denoted by longer frenetic lines in both colors packed together on wider canvases than the earlier two works convey intensity and the build up of haunting melodicism. Yet none of this ferocity deters the inherent polyphony of the work.



Sopheap Pich, Pulse No. 5, 2018. Red iron oxide and gum. Arabic on Arches watercolor paper mount on canvas, 131 x 145 cm.

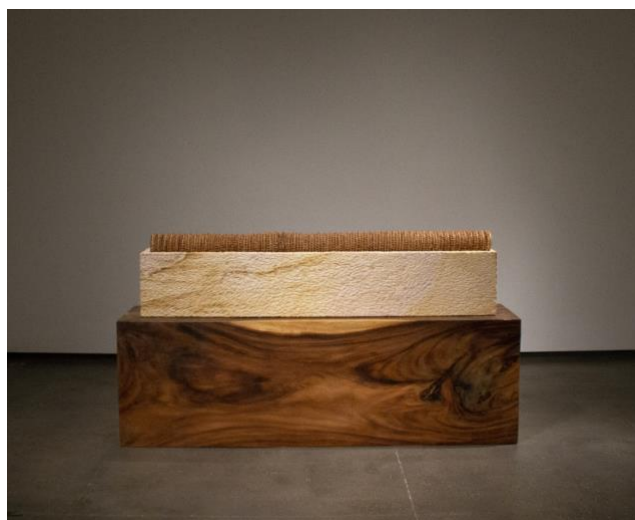
Much like Richter's roots in classical form, Pich's work reflects the spare methodology and harmony of Minimalism. Although the process of making the drawings is very different from his woven sculptures, this ideology manifests in all his art. For instance, the pod from the Ordeal tree originally imported from Africa to Cambodia inspires the sculpture "Ordeal." Considered to be harmful because powder extracted from the bark of the tree is poisonous, here the pod embodies something that is delicate and light. Made mostly from bamboo and wood, Pich utilizes the local lattice technique to construct vast beech colored wing like expanses. The openness of the woven structure combined with its formal black armature and fluid lines give the piece an airy bearing. In this way, Pich's increasingly abstract forms evoke the natural symphony of nature as they are transformed into free flowing graceful objects. As in many of the artist's previous works made from native substances like stone, jute, beeswax, and natural

pigments the inherent quality of commonplace materials is distilled to construct elemental forms.



Sopheap Pich, Ordeal 1, 2017. Bamboo, rattan, wood, wire, metal bolts, 74 2/5 × 34 3/5 × 12 3/5 in; 189 × 88 × 32 cm.

Similarly, Monument 1 and 2, made consecutively in 2015 and '16, mutate into Pich's unique language of abstraction. The woven cylindrical pieces embedded in the sculptures were originally conceived as small circular rattan bracelets for a friend. However, once each elongated intertwined cane object is encased in carved grey and white soapstone and placed on solid wooden rain tree bases, they recall mausoleums for ancient scrolls. Here too the meditative aspect of his work is revealed through the repetition of each circular shape. Although Pich is not particularly religious, the prevalent tenets of Buddhism in Cambodia focused on freeing one's mind and spirit is embedded in his work. Divested of complex references to history or doctrine, Pich's art is steeped in a minimalist aesthetic that offers a highly purified form of beauty. It is precisely this mode of refinement that propels new notions of minimalism and propagates, as the title of the exhibition suggests, the much-needed "expanses" of artistry in one's mind.



Sopheap Pich Monument 2, 2016. Rattan, copper wire, Pursat yellow sandstone, wood 39 × 72 × 15 3/4 in; 99.1 × 182.9 × 40 cm.

Bansie Vasvani is a curator and art critic with a focus on Asian and other non-Western art practices. She investigates contemporary art that mines issues of cultural identity, politics, immigration, and the commingling of varied cultural influences. Bansie travels frequently to Asia to study, research, and write critically. Currently she is working on showcasing art from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India at several institutions.

Her work has appeared in Hyperallergic, ArtAsiaPacific, Art Review Asia, Artnet news, Art21 Magazine, Brooklyn Rail, Sculpture Magazine, Daily Serving, Aesthetica Magazine, and Modern Art Asia amongst many other publications.

Bansie has a BA in English literature, Bombay University; an MA in English and American Literature, Northeastern University; ABD (all but dissertation) in English and American Literature, CUNY Graduate Center; and an MA in Modern and Contemporary Art History, Christies Education, New York where she earned the Best Student Award.