

CHRISTIE'S COMES TO CAMBODIA

ARTWORKS GO UNDER THE HAMMER IN PHNOM PENH

✎ EVE WATLING ✎ COURTESY OF CHRISTIE'S

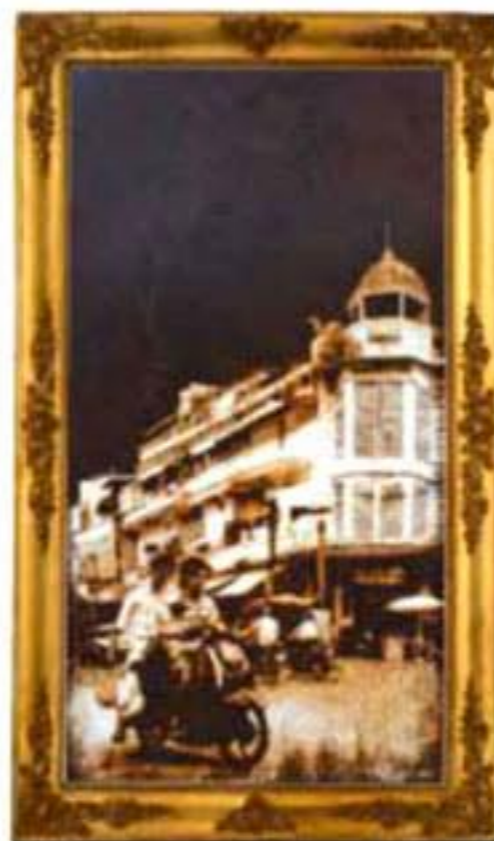
In March, ReCreation Art Agency Phnom Penh hosted its second Christie's Auction, in which local and international artists donated an artwork to be auctioned off at Raffles Royal Hotel. Presided over by the famed Christie's auctioneer Lionel Gosset, the auction raised an impressive total of \$26,000.

Two thirds of money went to the Cambodia 2000, a charity that provides art supplies to artists. "Improper use of materials is a big problem in Cambodia," says Matthew Tito Cuenca, an artist and the director of media and public affairs for the auction. "The country is a dumping ground for toxic paints that they can't sell anywhere else. Many artists don't even realise the stuff they are working with is so dangerous. A lot of lacquer used here has benzene in, which kills brain cells as soon as it's inhaled." Aside from health issues, bad materials affect the longevity of artworks produced. Cracked ceramics and

faded paints are common problems for the Kingdom's artists.

This auction looks like it's to be the latest in a line of many. "Christie's is really big in South East Asia right now," says Cuenca. "They made \$2 billion in the region during last year alone. People are investing in art as it doesn't depreciate in cost." But is the Cambodian art scene ready to be included in such a monolithic industry? "My concern in Cambodia is that the talented artists don't have a voice yet. At the submission process, we ask to see every artist's body of work to check that it's part of a cohesive artistic journey rather than a one off random piece, so people feel sure that they're investing in a solid artistic talent".

We caught up with three artists who donated some of the most interesting and innovative works to the auction to discuss their pieces:



THEO VALLIER – 'INTERNATIONAL'

How did you make International?

First, I got a sheet of scrap iron. I painted the first layer of my design using white paint and let it outside, adding water to it till it's really rusty. I repeat this process about 3 or 4 times, building up layers of rust, and then when it's done I varnish it. The darkest parts in the picture are the parts where it's just rusted iron with now paint, and the lightest parts are with the most layers of white paint.

How long does a rust painting take to make?

It depends on the season – the iron rusts faster in rainy season.

What was the inspiration behind International?

I come from a graffiti background. I used to tag rusty fences and saw how rust would overwhelm the paint, so I decided to try and recreate this in the studio. I paint urban landscapes on scrap metal from construction sites, so I'm still staying with the 'street'. I've just brought a welding machine, so next I plan to make different shaped rust paintings. I don't see them as two dimensional canvases, but as objects.

valliertheo.com

MATTHEW TITO CUENCA – 'KAMPOT APSARA'

Tell me about your piece...

I'm a figurative artist who usually does conceptual neorealism; classical pieces with a strong concept. I like to mix unconventional and conventional materials. There's always an inside joke in all of my pieces; one exhibition I did featured fluffy toys made out of razor blades.

What inspired you to use Kampot pepper?

It's indigenous. That's the strength of Cambodian art; taking advantage of their indigenous

materials, like seeds and tree bark. Cambodian artists like Phe Sophorn really inspire me. He is always doing exciting and different things, like his sculpture made out of ribs.

What about Cambodia do you find so inspiring?

At the moment it's going through a level of political change which could mean a great growth in creativity, and an upheaval of traditionally accepted norms.

matthewcuenca.com



NICK SELLS – 'BUILDING BLOCKS'

Tell me about your piece.

Recently, I've been able to get some unique photographs of places around Phnom Penh, so I made a building blocks piece out of these images. The building blocks fit together and can be dismantled. It's like Phnom Penh itself; changing fast.

What do you think of this rapid development?

I didn't really have any opinion in mind. It was just intended as a fun piece, and to illustrate what's going on. Ultimately, I want people to make their own picture of the city.

How do you see it displayed?

It could be a centrepiece, but I could see lots of potential for different ways to move it around. Each side has a photo, so there are lots of different pictures you can build with it.

Do you have much experience with 3D work?

No! It was my first piece. It was a big learning curve – we made this special glue out of flour and wood glue to stop the inks running. We did the lacquering ourselves too. It was a bit of a mathematical nightmare to get the photos to line up!

nicksellsphotography.com

