

The Cambodian artist Sopheap Pich is more and more successful on the international arts scene

Sopheap Pich is a major contemporary artist in Cambodia. He started as a painter but he rapidly moved to sculpture for which he is largely renowned both in Cambodia and all over the world. At the moment he has two exhibitions, simultaneously, at H Gallery in Bangkok and at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York.

Pich studied in Chicago where his family settled, fleeing the Khmer Rouge regime. He went back to Cambodia in 2002. "After I arrived, I felt it was the right place and time to be an artist without any strings attached", he explained to Culture Box. "As a sculptor, having accidentally stumbled on rattan, bamboo and metal wire as my main materials, I sensed I was free from the art history that I knew".

Sopheap Pich creates sculptures inspired by human anatomy, plant life and geometrical structures. His themes relate to the significance of objects and how people interact with them, as well as the experience of the passage of time. Pich also incorporates aspects of his environment in his work. In 'Morning Glory' (purchased by the Guggenheim Museum New York in 2011), he shows a common plant that became an important source of food when millions of people were starving. In *Junk Nutrients* (2009) Pich denounces foreign investment which is devastating the natural resources in Cambodia and forcibly evicting residents.

In March 2015, in Art Basel Hong Kong, he presented "Wall Structures", a new series, made of scaffolds, fences and works including precious stones for the first time. In the Tyler Rollins Fine Art exhibition in New York (8 December 2016-7 February 2017), entitled "Rang Phom Flower", Pich presents his most large scale sculpture to date, inspired by the flower clusters of the cannonball tree ("rang phnom" in Khmer), which has a strong cultural resonance within Cambodian culture. In Southeast Asia it is associated with the sal tree under which Buddha was born, and is often planted near Buddhist temples. This sculpture was first exhibited in early 2016 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, USA, in *For the Love of Things: Still Life*, where it was shown alongside works by artists ranging from Picasso to Warhol and Mapplethorpe. Sopheap Pich definitely has made his reputation on the international arts scene these last few years. Moreover a solo exhibition was dedicated to the artist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York during the Cambodia Festival in 2013.