

SOKHA

Creation 2012



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From «Cambodia, the Memory Workshop» © Sonleuk Thmey Editions / Phare Ponleu Selpak

Introduction

> The Angkar

The Angkar, refers to the organization which ruled Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975. The performance *Rough* is based upon true events during the genocide when an absurd political regime was elevated as an ideological system.

The Khmer Rouge took power on April 1975, in a country already ruined by war. In three years, Cambodia received three times more bombs than Japan during World War One. Borders were closed and all people living in the cities were forced to migrate to the countryside, modifying space and territories, and destroying lives.

Post genocide societies which have been displaced and disseminated now struggle to find a sense of belonging and reconstruct their identities within their new communities. Memories of the atrocities committed during the Reign of the Khmer Rouge still haunt Cambodians today.

> *Sokha* or the awakening from nightmare

Sokha is a war child who is haunted by visions of the atrocities carried out during Cambodian Civil War and the destruction after the Khmer Rouge regime. This is a story of *Sokha's* journey where memories and the surreal intertwine with myths and facts. «I woke up one day, I was walking on the sand and when I looked back it was the tracks of a bird». So starts the journey of *Sokha*.

In a terrified flutter, the bird sinks into feeble light, disappearing and losing itself to the darkness. *Sokha* is consumed by fear and hides underground, physically and metaphorically. In darkness she is prostrate and alone amongst a chaotic symphony of bombs. She then draws the darkness of her unspoken memories and finds an outlet for her fears through painting.

By expressing her emotions and memories through art she welcomes back friends into her life and eventually revives her soul and finds a space to retire with dignity. The birds silently reappear, this time crossing the space to bring a sense of hope.

The performance uses different art forms such as circus, visual art, traditional Khmer music and dance to reveal the long term affects suffered by post war victims whilst portraying a sense of optimism.

«Life is not a novel, we are still here.»



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Project genesis

Originating from drawing workshops held to help children overcome the traumas of war and camp life in Site 2, (a refugee camp at the Thai border) Phare Ponleu Selpak was formally founded in 1994 by returning refugees in their hometown, Battambang, Cambodia.

Phare Ponleu Selpak, meaning «the brightness of arts», is a Cambodian NGO aiming to support community development through a holistic right-based approach focusing on children. Phare Ponleu Selpak focuses on local intervention, closely developing with the communities of the surrounding area, offering a broad range of services.

Since late 2000, a partnership has united the Collectif clowns d'ailleurs et d'ici (CCAI), a French association based in Pantin in France, and Phare Ponleu Selpak with the objective to support and empower the circus school of Phare Ponleu Selpak by improving educational capacities, technical skills and artistic level.

This partnership has enabled many Cambodian students to pursue trainings in French Circus Schools: Rosny-sous-Bois, Lomme, Bordeaux, CNAC. Phare Ponleu Selpak has welcomed around one hundred European performing art professionals travelling to Cambodia to share their skills and knowledge and assist to produce touring shows performed by Cambodian students in Europe, Africa and Asia:

- 2003 *Bong Touch Bong Thom & Co.* [France and Spain]
- 2005 *De 4 à 5* [France, Spain, Algeria]
- 2005 *Phum Style and Holiday* [France]
- 2006 *De 4 à 5* [France, Italy]
- 2006-2007 *Phum Style and Holiday* [France, Spain]
- 2007 *De 4 à 5* [France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Reunion]
- 2007 *Holiday* [Japan]
- 2008 *Phum Style* [France, Spain, Netherlands]
- 2009 *Putho!* [France, Spain, Italy, Belgium]
- 2009 *Phum Style* [France]
- 2010 *Putho!* [France, Italy, Belgium]
- 2010 *Royaumes* [France]
- 2011 *Putho!* [Belgium, France, Germany]
- 2011 *Royaumes* [Belgium, France, Germany]

All the productions have followed the same pattern, having an external stage director polish technical acts created by the performers, and collaborating with the artistic director of Phare Ponleu Selpak, Khuon Det, to write and rehearse the pieces.



© Phare Ponleu Selpak



Painting of Nov Cheanik © Phare Ponleu Selpak

Artistic means

> Staging

The show is built around a constantly changing fresco, interacting and altering the performing area and the audiences' expectations. Canvases are stretched which resemble huge, white book pages, that gradually get covered with painted images. Cable walkers travel on tightropes hooked across the stage which function as graphic elements creating tension beyond the art pieces.

> Visual arts

The artist executes live painting performances all the way through the show, with the circus troupe taking part in the creative process. Western and oriental sensitivities are confronted, enriching each other. It is a first for Phare Ponleu Selpak to have visual arts alive on stage not only through the realization of a decor, but also by giving rhythm to the piece.

> Circus techniques

Circus performers enable the audience to experiment with the fears and hopes of *Sokha*, the main character. Juggling, acrobatics, rolabola, and tightrope walking are included to symbolize the fears and risks of *Sokha* and be the living subject of the painter's attention. Working session at the bophana audio-visual resources center of Phnom Penh, part of the «Cambodia, the Memory Workshop».

> Music

Cambodian music is essentially a unison of several instruments: wind instruments (Khloy, Sneng, Peypok, Salaï, Slek), string instruments (Tro, Takhe, Ksediev, Khom) and percussions (Sampho, Skor, Thon, Kong, Krap, Chap, Pan). This original creation will be performed live by two musicians and will rely on an original soundtrack using sound effects and outdoor recordings.

The crew

> Partners

Sokha is co-produced by PPS and CCAI, and with collaboration of individuals having a deep knowledge of both Khmer and European culture. The journey is directly inspired by the personal experiences of the author Khuon Det, and the obstacles faced when building a Social Care Center inspired by his childhood years spent in a refugee camp at the Thai border. Documentation workshops at the French Institut and Bophana Center made the gathering of many archives like photos, videos and testimonies, possible in completing the sources necessary for the shows creation. The finalized script is the result of a workshop attended by Khuon Det in the Phillipines, organized by the association PETA (Phillipines Educational Theater Association).

> The direction

Sokha is a collaboration between Khuon Det, founder and artistic director of Phare Ponleu Selpak, Agathe Olivier, tightrope walker and stage director from the company Les Colporteurs, and Joel Colas, tightrope walker, clown and artistic director from the company A&O.

Khuon Det grew up in a refugee camp on the Thai border, which is where he received training in drawing as well as martial arts and gymnastic lessons. Back in Cambodia in 1992, he did internships in Phnom Penh at the National circus school, mainly concerning pedagogical skills. Being one of the founders of Phare Ponleu Selpak in 1994, he created the circus school in 1998 and then directed most of the productions that followed.

Social work was crucial at the very beginning to attract and convince children and families to the positive effects of performing skills and circus training. Slowly, following the growing success of the shows, that gradually performed in other provinces and abroad, more and more students attended the activities. Nowadays 120 children, teenagers and young adults from the poor commune surrounding PPS, are part of the circus department.

Sokha is first time Khuon Det retells his own story, the story of a young man who decided to dedicate his life to help the community recreate conditions for peace and development and overcome the traumas of the war generation.

Joël Colas starts his professional life as a clown, tightrope walker and dancer, after his graduation with congratulations in 1992 from the CNAC (Centre National des Arts du Cirque, in France). He worked with several companies including Cirque Baroque, before creating his own group called A&O, in 1998. He likes with his company to mix together several disciplines in order to enhance the expressions and emotions that he wants to transmit. His interest for different cultures and capacity to give, leads him to monitor workshops concerning performance and circus arts, on both technical and acting aspects, in America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Agathe Olivier is a professional tight rope walker, a reference for all the young artists following the same path. She organizes regular training sessions in circus schools around the world, through an original approach to her subject. She worked together with Antoine Rigot in Cirque Roncalli, with the Cirque du Soleil from 1985 to 1988, and then with the Théâtre de l'Unité for the show *Story of the Soldier*. In 1990 they created their own company Les Colporteurs, and generated several productions: *Filao* (1997), *Diabolus in Musica* (2003), *Le fil sous la neige* (2006), *Les étoiles* (2007), *Sur la route* (2009). In 2008, Les Colporteurs received the prestigious circus price SACD.

> Artistic team

Stage director: Khuon Det

Performers: Pin Phounam, Chhuon Chandann, Heng Samnang, Nem Sothea, Chea Sophea, Khuon Kimlon, Ngai Sokheng

Visual artist: Nov Cheanik

Musician: Kheav Sothan, Touch Srey

Technician: Meas Mongkol

Technical rider

Facilities

→ Bus access to the stage (12m long, 3.5m high, 2,5m bright) Please provide a safe car park for the bus during the contract.

→ The troupe arrives the day before the first performance in the afternoon. The troupe leaves the day after the performance in the morning.

Duration

1 hour 15 min

Crew (12 persons)

1 manager, 7 circus artists, 2 musicians, 1 visual artist, 1 technician

Stage

Proscenium opening: 10 meters

Depth: 10 meters

Height: 6 meters

Floor: black dance floor

Black back drop and wings

1 chair on stage for the musician

Backstage: coat hangers

Dressing room

→ For 10 persons backstage, provided with mirrors, electricity, tables, chairs, water, shower, toilets

→ 15 liters of water at the arrival of the troupe

→ In the afternoon of the performance, catering for 12 persons with fresh and dried fruits, cakes, juices, fruits, soda, water

Lights

1 projector 5kW with shutters

7 PC light 2kW

16 PC lights 1kW

36 PAR CP 62

1 PAR CP 61

6 profiles SX 614

5 profiles SX 613

1 profiles SX 713

5 platines

3 floor stands

Sound

1 stereo diffusion HP type MTD 112

2 loud speakers on wind-up stands (3 m high)

1 dimmer 12-2-2

2 CD players

3 type Sennheiser 421 mikes

1 SM58 mikes

3 lapel mikes

4 mike stands

3 small mike stands

Set up

→ The day before

1 shift in the morning (before the arrival of the troupe): setting of the stage, lights, sound system

1 shift in the afternoon: set up, sound check

1 shift in the evening: light check, focus, rehearsal

→ The day of the performance

1 shift in the afternoon (rehearsal, 1 shift in the evening: performance, strike after the show)

Human resources to provide: set up: 1 light technician and 1 sound technician

Performance: 1 sound and light technician

Strike: 2 persons to help