

The Messengers

Artist: Ly Daravuth

Date: 2000

Medium: Photographs and sound installation

Dimensions: Various

Event: Cambodian Killing Fields

Motif: Remembrance; Faces

During the Khmer Rouge time, teenagers and children delivered messages for Angkar (the entity supposedly in charge of the regime) all over the country. The photographs used in this installation were collected by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia and are said to depict such Khmer Rouge messengers.

Ly Daravuth explains: "After talking to Youk Chang, the director of DC-Cam, I became interested in the strange idea of the truth and its documentation. Because of the blurred black and white format and the numbering of each child, we tend to read these photographs first as images of victims, when they are 'really' messengers and thus people who actively served the Pol Pot regime. The fact that, upon seeing their faces, I immediately thought of victims, made me uneasy. My installation wishes to question what is revealed by a document? What is 'the truth?' And what is the relationship between the two?"

Through various visual means, the photographs have been physically deteriorated and set amongst similarly doctored images of children from the present. The installation thus sets a curious scene in which confusion and ambivalence reign. If at first glance we assume by their poignant poses and format that the pictured children are victims, Messengers leads us to admit that perhaps it is impossible to access any truth other than the simple fact that these children once stood before a camera and were photographed. Who they are, what they did, and when they lived is not revealed by the photograph, which we still hold somehow to be the direct record of the truth. If upon entering we are seduced into easy sadness, we leave uneasy, recognizing the difficulties of ever discerning "the truth" retrospectively. --Ingrid Muan

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Cambodian Killing Fields

In Cambodia on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge armies defeated the Lon Nol regime and took the capital, Phnom Penh, immediately dispersing almost all of its more than 2 million inhabitants to a life of hard agricultural labor in the countryside. Other cities and towns were also evacuated. The Khmer Rouge renamed the country Democratic Kâmpuchéa (DK), and for the next four years the regime, headed by Pol Pot as prime minister and other members of the Standing Committee of the CPK Central Committee, terrorized the population.

Almost 1.7 million Cambodians were killed, including members of minority and religious groups, people suspected of disagreeing with the party, intellectuals, merchants, and bureaucrats. Millions of other Cambodians were forcibly relocated, deprived of food, tortured, or sent into forced labor. Of about 425,000 Chinese Cambodians, only about half survived the Khmer Rouge regime. While most of about 450,000 Vietnamese Cambodians

had been expelled by the Lon Nol regime, more were driven out by the Khmer Rouge; the rest were tracked down and murdered. Of about 250,000 Muslim Chams (an ethnic group inhabiting the rural areas of Cambodia) in 1975, 90,000 were massacred, and the survivors were dispersed. The most horrific slaughter took place during the second half of 1978 when at least 250,000 people were killed in the worst single massacre of the Khmer Rouge period.

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia
2001.

Related Visual Art:

The Messengers, Ly Daravuth, Cambodia
The Flight from Phnom Penh (History of My Family Series, No. 1), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Spreading Manure (History of My Family Series, No. 10), Svay Ken, Cambodia
The Division of the Country (History of My Family Series, No. 11), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Confusion (History of My Family Series, No. 12), Svay Ken, Cambodia
The Accusation (History of My Family Series, No. 13), Svay Ken, Cambodia
We Have Only Ourselves and Our Five Children (History of My Family Series, No. 14), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Leaf Huts: The Evening Meal (History of My Family Series, No. 2), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Taking Salt from Kep (History of My Family Series, No. 3), Svay Ken, Cambodia
The Hospital (History of My Family Series, No. 4), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Along the Road Home From the Hospital (History of My Family Series, No. 5), Svay Ken, Cambodia
The Separation of Families (History of My Family Series, No. 6), Svay Ken, Cambodia
The Meeting (History of My Family Series, No. 7), Svay Ken, Cambodia
A New Job (History of My Family Series, No. 8), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Manure (History of My Family Series, No. 9), Svay Ken, Cambodia
Self Portrait, Vann Nath, Cambodia
The Village of My Birth, Vann Nath, Cambodia
Scenes from the S-21 Secret Prison of the Khmer Rouge, Vann Nath, Cambodia
Scenes from the S-21 Secret Prison of the Khmer Rouge, Vann Nath, Cambodia
Scenes from the S-21 Secret Prison of the Khmer Rouge, Vann Nath, Cambodia
Scenes from the S-21 Secret Prison of the Khmer Rouge, Vann Nath, Cambodia
After the genocidal regime (Remains of the War Series), Tum Saren, Cambodia
The Return Home from the War (Remains of the War Series), Tum Saren, Cambodia
The Wait of the Orphans to pick up scraps of food (Remains of the War Series), Tum Saren, Cambodia
Democratic Kampuchea, Pech Song, Cambodia
Angkar, Phy Chan Than, Cambodia
The Koh Tree, Phy Chan Than, Cambodia
Night Sleeper, Lim Muy Theam, Cambodia
Sleepers, Lim Muy Theam, Cambodia
Untitled, Lim Muy Theam, Cambodia
Barbed Wire, Soeung Vannara, Cambodia
Fire and Spirit, Soeung Vannara, Cambodia
The Memory of Sculpture, Soeung Vannara, Cambodia
To Remember (sketch), Soeung Vannara, Cambodia
To Remember Series (Numbers 1-4 of 8), Soeung Vannara, Cambodia

To Remember Series (Number 5-8 of 8), Soeung Vannara, Cambodia

Related Films:

One Evening After the War

Related Literature:

Cambodian Witness, Someth May

First Month, Vann Nath

A New Colleague, Vann Nath

The Ghost List, Vann Nath

Keeping the Memory Alive, Vann Nath