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A Voice of One

By Dirk Gorre

Totalitarian governments kill their own. Beyond the subversive rhetoric and carnage, they rob generations of self-awareness, displacing a voice that represents the population they profess to uphold.

Dispersed during the upheaval and genocide of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodian youth, who have come of age in cities like Long Beach, are battling the aftermath of becoming a lost generation. Through the artistry of some, that voice is being documented.

Sayon Syprasoeuth, California State University, Long Beach alum and Claremont University art graduate is a Laos-Cambodian whose work structures itself in the politicized nature of his former country.

Cambodian culture is infused with color. Posited along the Anaheim Street corridor of Long Beach the traditional dress, music, and food infuses itself with vivid schemes that underlie the historical turmoil of an expelled culture.

So too does Syprasoeuth exemplify the color motif of the Thai/Cambodian culture. His mixed media paintings exude warmth and strength within the vibrant frame. His five paintings at the Japanese American Cultural Center in Los Angeles draw on the movement; subjects in *sampong* adorn and stimulate the eye. The physical movement speaks to the uncertainty of home and culture; a fractured existence that separated family members.

Many of the displaced were orphaned. Entire villages were expelled or killed, and with the connection of family destroyed security in identity seems fragile. Adaptation becomes a way of retaining values.

As Long Beach's immigrant community expands, the cultural borders disappear and reappear as a commingling of one.

Syprasoeuth writes, "Since I am reflecting on fragility and ephemeral aspects of culture and life itself, it is my desire to bridge these parallel conditions and have them coexist on

hind the past but carries it with him. His transient history is compiled in his work. A second generation Cambodian of Laos descent, the artist first arrived in the United States in the Midwest. In between, Syprasoeuth's family transitioned from various refugee camps in Thailand, Hong Kong, and the Philippines.

Reoccurring in a second piece, *This Field Will Not Hold*, the theme of a muted figure continues. Both panels radiate light, captured in flashes of glitter and exuding atmospheric qualities. Again the figure is concealed, revealing eyes that reverse the gaze. The vision soars. Adversarial and inviting, the masculine form is adorned in the feminine. Duality of the shape is revealed in obscurity. The viewer searches for meaning, resolved in the ocular direction of the figure's gaze.

Beyond the complexity of Syprasoeuth's art lies the political. Developed in the aftermath of a Marxist regime his paintings guardingly work outside the realm of "art for art's sake." Infused with a captured timeliness, each painting deftly and deceptively infuses the borders that divided the young artist and his progression of immigration.

Defending a class of beliefs belies a position that draws on the political. All art infuses the political. Set in time and place, societal time is structured in the presence of debate. Seemingly distanced from a political nature, every gesture of society lends itself to a position of class, ethnicity, and economics.

Everything amassed in art is political, differed only by its revolutionary tone. Syprasoeuth's voice has set the tone of the argument; Westernized culture, in all its divisions of class, has yet to decide its voice in the complicity of genocide and in the dissemination of a generation of voices unheard.



ARTWORK BY Sayon Syprasoeuth

the same plane."

Untitled Name fragments physicality. The shape of the face lacks a mandible but communicates purely through the gesture of the eyes, as one. The form relies on the visual connection within an anamorphic quality; hybrid in spirit, the tool of nourishment shrouded, seemingly exposing the inner voice of the artist.

"I am negotiating a field of opposites, gesture and pattern, intuition and intellect, heroic and intimate, masculine and feminine." Syprasoeuth has not so much left be-