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Citing Angkor:

The "Cambodian Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918 - 2000

Ingrid Muan

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2001

UMI Number: 3005763



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ABSTRACT

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The "Cambodian Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918-2000

Ingrid Muan

This thesis presents a survey of art training and visual production in Cambodia from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. The thesis begins with a consideration of the colonial establishment of a French-administered "School of Cambodian Arts" which was meant to shape and control artistic production throughout the country. At this institution, existing forms of practice were "corrected" and students were trained to mass produce hand-made "authentic" Cambodian art objects.

Following independence, the definition of "Cambodian Arts" proposed by this colonial system of production was rethought. During the 1950s and 1960s, painters working from observation laid claim to a "modern Khmer painting" while institutional reforms at the School of Cambodian Arts introduced what were considered "modern subjects" (representational drawing, design, contemporary architecture and advertising). This shift in visual regimes was cut off, however, by the devastating events of the 1970s. More recent forms of "modern Cambodian art" from the 1990s, have turned away from observation, borrowing such tropes of Western modernism as the mark of the brush and the singular gesture with which to stake their claim to the new. All these post-independence forms carry with them lingering traces of a colonial regime which emphasized the model and its multiple copies.

Through a survey of these colonial and post-independence forms of visual production, this thesis provides a first account of the 20th century in a place which art history has almost exclusively considered in terms of the temples of Angkor (9th - 14th century CE). Just as art history has written out the colonial processes through which these temples were "re-discovered" and monumentalised, so it has refused to consider more recent forms of visual production in Cambodia. A consideration of 20th century visual production in Cambodia cannot depend on the seemingly self-evident categories of artists and coherent bodies of work established by canonical accounts of Western modernism; instead, this thesis focuses on an institution and the successive regimes of training through which it introduced and enforced the concept of "the Cambodian Arts".

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Keith Moxey, as well as my proseminar professor, David Freedberg, for their patience and persistent support of this project. For insightful comments on the final draft of the thesis at my defense I would like to thank David Chandler, Gwendolyn Wright, and Jonathan Crary. During a year at Cornell University I received a gracious welcome and supportive readings from Keith Taylor as well as from the students in the Southeast Asia program. Oum Suphany and Sos Kem introduced me to the Khmer language, while Frank Smith somehow managed to make intensive language learning pleasurable during a SEASSI summer in Arizona. In Phnom Penh, Nuon Phat and others at the Foreign Language Center helped me to gain a linguistic footing in Cambodia.

My research has been supported at its preliminary stages by several grants. I would like to thank those who awarded me a Columbia University Travel Fellowship, a Social Science Research Council pre-dissertation Travel Fellowship, a SEASSI FLAS fellowship, and a Mellon Fellowship. The International Dissertation Research Fellowship which I received from the Social Science Research Council in 1997 allowed me to complete a large part of my field research. In its later stages, my research has been generously supported by the Kasumisou Foundation and the Asian Cultural Council.

In Phnom Penh, I would like to thank the many artists and teachers associated with the Department of Plastic Arts. So Chenda, Eng Sovady, Thong Sophan, and Eng Menh Seng welcomed me to the Department at the beginning of this project and have supported my work in its subsequent phases. I learned much about history and desperation at the tea table of the Department and I would like to thank all of those who shared their time and memories with me. In particular, Sam Kem Chang, Pech Song, and Pen Tra for their willingness to talk about things which are still difficult to say; Som Samai, Chet Chan, An Sok, Svay Ken, Sin Chan Than, Dy Proeung, Tang Hor Yi, Prang Som and the late Im Chan for guiding me through all things old; and Phy Chan Than, Soeung Vannara, Suos Sodavy, Prom Sam An, An Sitha, Long Sophea, and Hor Kim Srean for showing me what they meant by the new. The late Chhun Pok provided a graceful bridge between these groups and a friendship which I miss.

Early on at the School, Bruno Lefévre provided support and enthusiastic encouragement. I came to spend many hours at the National Archives where I would like

to thank all the staff, particularly Dari and Chhieng, for their patience, support and good cheer. Peter Afarnis made much of this dissertation possible through his relentless and remarkable resurrection of the National Archives collections; I cannot thank him enough for his help, his steadiness, and his companionship. At the National Museum Library I would like to thank Lim Yi for her dedication to the work there as well as Khun Samen and Hab Touch for welcoming me to the museum.

In Phnom Penh many friends kept my spirits up when things did not always go right. I would like to thank Gregor Muller for his help in the archives, his correction of French translations, as well as the many idyllic moments goneby. Kate Frieson weathered the July 1997 events with me and provided much needed support and encouragement at many stages of my work. Darryl Collins provided me with colonial details and last minute email references as well as unfailing good cheer. Kiri Schultz generously shared her experience in Cambodia with me and lent a much needed ear for my outbursts. Finally, Ro and Gigi gave me a sense of perspective, and the raft on which to escape.

In the US, I have had the fortune to meet wonderful colleagues at Columbia. For their support along what sometimes seemed as an endless journey, I would like to particularly thank Stephanie Breitenbach, Judith Rodenbeck, Leila Whittemore, and Laura Scanlon. Debra Diamond has been with this project from start to finish and her ongoing support from Columbia to the Sackler has carried me through many moments of doubt. Farther afield, Ly Boreth added his wit and insights by telephone. The work of Nora Taylor and Penny Edwards inspired me and pushed me to reconsider my ideas.

I have finished writing this dissertation in the peace of my parents' farm. My father died before this project started but I hope that it is infused with some of the dedication to research which his work taught me as I was growing up. My mother has shown extreme patience and unusual and continuous interest in my work; I thank her for staying with me even as I went far afield. Michael, Marina, Gina and Jason provided much needed writing breaks and grounding in the real world of puppets, head shavings, and temper tantrums during the final months of writing.

Finally, much of what is written here has been inflected and infected by my work with Ly Daravuth at Reyum, the storefront gallery and publishing house which we have built together over the last few years in Phnom Penh. Although he will not agree with everything that I have written here, it is from our work together, our fights together, and our life together - with Lola, of course - that much of this comes.

In memory of my father
and for my mother

Introduction

> *Khmer civilization contributed nothing to civilization except Art. It is more true of ancient Cambodia than of any country that ever existed, that the one fact of their history is their Art-history*
>
> - Ad Reinhardt (1961) "Angkor and Art"[1]

Until recently, if the art of Southeast Asia was studied at all, then what was studied was the past. Scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the monumental remains of the kingdoms of Champa (VietNam), Ayutthaya (Thailand), Pagan (Myanmar), and Angkor (Cambodia). With the demise of these kingdoms, Southeast Asian art history fell silent and the canonical story of "modern art" was firmly located in the "West" (beginning in Europe, centered in Paris, ending in New York). In the last ten years, a number of studies and exhibitions have tried to redress this temporal geography by examining visual production in Southeast Asia during the 20th century.[2] Still, within these accounts and displays, Cambodia remains a blank. So strong is the lure of the famous temples of Angkor (9th–14th centuries CE), that art history seemingly cannot admit a more contemporary Cambodian art.

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[1] Ad Reinhardt was a well known American abstract painter during the 1950s and 60s. This passage is taken from his essay for a catalogue accompanying the 1961 exhibition of Khmer sculpture at the Asia Society.

[2] See Contemporary art in Asia: traditions / tensions (The Asia Society, 1996); The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements ed. Ushiroshoji & Kawanchaikul (Fukuoka Art Museum / Japan Foundation, 1997); Modern Asian Art, John Clark (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998); and for individual countries neighboring Cambodia, Apinan Poshyananda's Modern Art in Thailand in the 19th and 20th Centuries, (PhD diss, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1990) and Nora Taylor's Artist and the State: the politics of painting and national identity in Hanoi, Viet Nam, (PhD diss, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1997).

Beginning with their supposed "rediscovery" in the 1860s, the temples of Angkor became the centerpiece for the colonial inscription of a quintessential Khmer culture'.[3] Claims of a deserted Angkor "rediscovered", are at best peculiar, given the presence of monastic communities at the site since the 13th century. Not only were parts of the temples in continuous use, but Angkor Vat was visited and described by Europeans and Japanese long before the European reception of Henri Mouhot's 1863 account suddenly fabricates a "rediscovery".[4] What this date does however mark is the beginning of monumentalization, that is, the "site"-ing of the temples as "sights", as "wonders of the world".

With their eventual clearing and literal reconstruction, the temples of Angkor became the magnificent example against which the present fell short. In their frequent treatises on art education and preservation, French planners expressed dismay over what they saw as an increasing "disdain" for "ancestral traditions". Instead of following ways of making found in the glories of their past, the artists of Indochina began producing "ever more disastrous pastiches", "unfortunate accommodations of Western motifs" resulting in "a kind of composite style, a detestable hybrid art". It was against this "degenerate", "decadent", "mixed" "confusion" that the School of

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[3] "Cambodia" and "Cambodians" refer to the modern nation state and its inhabitants who are ethnically diverse. "Khmer" is the name of the majority ethnic group living in Cambodia today. In developing a picture of "authentic art" for what was to become the nation of Cambodia, French administrators suggested that particular forms of art were the biological destiny of this ethnicity. In what follows, I use "Cambodian Arts" to refer to the visual objects which colonial policy linked to the emerging nation. See Penny Edwards' recent dissertation Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945 for a wonderful analysis of the construction of Cambodia as a nation.

[4] Henri Mouhot, Travels in Indochina, Siam, Cambodia, and Laos (London: John Murray, 1864). Mouhot's account was serialised in Le Tour du Monde in 1863.

Cambodian Arts was established in 1918.[5] Together with the adjoining Albert Sarraut Museum, the School would provide "an institution capable... of assuming the teaching and the safeguarding of Khmer arts and crafts".[6] The school training those producing the culture of the future was founded with the same stroke as the massive efforts to restore the particular cultural past of Angkor. Together, the restoration, safe-guarding, and propagation of this "Khmer culture" sealed off a kind of preserve in which the artists of the future would simply repeat the outlines of the past.

My dissertation takes this stereotype of a colonial project of cultural engineering as its starting point and then presents a narrative of the forms of visual production subsequently produced in Cambodia. While many recent projects have investigated colonial institutions and policies, few have tried to follow such formations into independence, thus analysing how colonial formations transmuted and re-figured themselves to, in many cases, become standards of "native" authenticity. The state of the present is too often simply indicted as the direct result of a now distant colonialisation without the necessary proofs of such assertions being clearly traced. I say this in order to explain my title which has become perhaps a misnomer, but a productive one. I first visited Angkor in May 1992 when the enormous international effort to arrange a free and fair election flooded Cambodia with aid, advisors, and

---

[5] Quoted terms in the preceding sentences are from Trois Ecoles d'Art de L'Indochine (1931). See also the series of articles published by George Groslier in Revue Indochinoise (1918-1919), his longer presentation of the Cambodian Arts in "L'Enseignement et la mise en pratique des Arts indigènes 1918-1930" (1931) as well as Henri Marchal, "Reflexions sur l'art moderne cambodgien", France-Asie (1949).

[6] Baudoin, Inauguration du Musée Albert Sarraut et de L'Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens (1920).

attention.[7] The counterpart to this political invasion was a perhaps equally excessive influx of what I call Restoration Culture, the national and international effort to enshrine the temples of Angkor as the cultural and economic centerpiece of a newly reconstructed Cambodia. An unofficial United Nations of restoration teams quickly appeared after the Paris Peace Accords, and was soon spending enormous sums of money to restore the temples.[8] At the same time, painters began to produce multiples of Angkor and the image of the temples was seemingly everywhere (figure 1).

Officially, this Restoration Culture labors in the name of Cambodia. Angkor is being "returned" as "the true spiritual center of the Khmer people", "the symbol of the country... the source for the Khmer people of... identity recovered".[9] But Angkor has also become the property of "mankind" through its designation as a "heritage... belonging to the whole of humanity".[10] In the less high minded rhetoric of some Cambodian officials, the temples as World Heritage simply serve to lure all of humanity to visit them, thus providing the "resources" with which Cambodia will

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[7] The United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia served as the first of the UN peace-keeping missions which have marked the 1990s. The chief goal of UNTAC was to ensure a "free and fair" election so that the "will" of the Cambodian people would be known.

[8] Restoration teams working at the temples during the 1990s have included the national teams of France, Japan, Indonesia, Germany, and China, as well as private teams sponsored by the World Monument Fund (a US based foundation), the Hungarian Angkor Foundation, and Sophia University (Japan). Overwhelmed by the number of requests for temples to restore, Richard Englehardt, the UNESCO representative in Phnom Penh from 1991-1994, warned of a "'Disneyland effect' in which each donor nation carries out its own interpretation of what Angkor should look like... Everyone now wants to produce a before and after photograph".

[9] Y. Ishizawa (Japanese restoration team, Sophia University) and Federico Mayor (director general of UNESCO).

[10] Federico Mayor, director general of UNESCO, Speech at Angkor Wat. November 30, 1991.

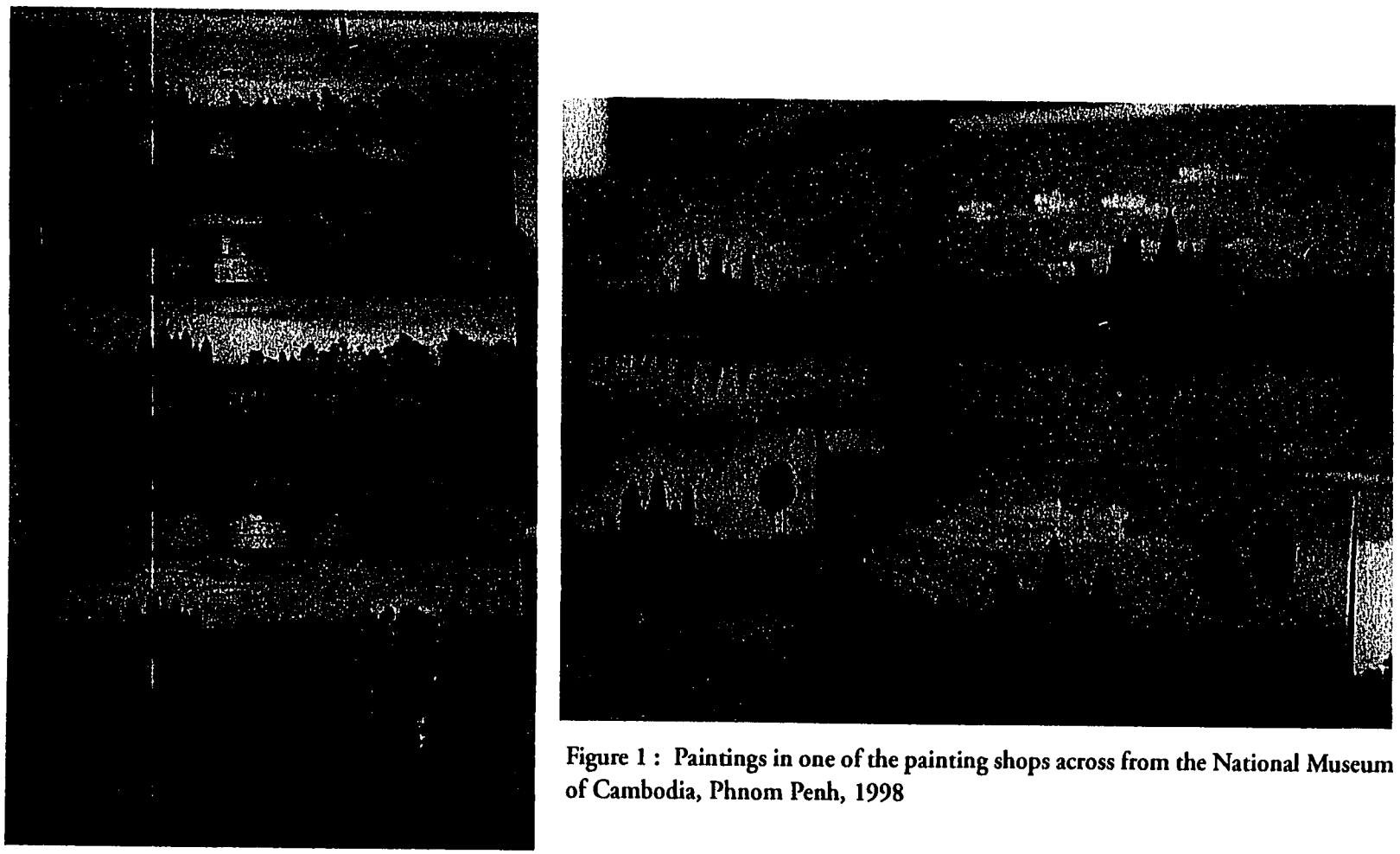

Figure 1 : Paintings in one of the painting shops across from the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, 1998

rebuild its economy.[11] The vastness of the efforts to "safeguard" the temples masks the outright violence with which Restoration Culture clears the present from its sites, writing out the contemporary from the scholarly work which is their complement.[12] It feels sometimes, a painter told me, as if there is no room for the present.[13]

I had initially thought that this contemporary Restoration Culture was simply a replication of a colonial project pursued with the same scale and producing the same effects. What I found however, at least in the area of visual production, was that it was only much more recently that the image of the temples has come to so haunt the pictures being produced in Cambodia. Initially banned from the School of Cambodian Arts as a foreign form of representation, the view of the temples was never

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[11] In the preliminary "Zoning and Environmental Management Plan for the Siem Reap / Angkor Region", Peter Aderhold outlines a "high-price policy" intended to target "culturally motivated tourists... coming from great distances", drawn from "markets" in "Europe, Japan, North America and New Zealand/Australia". The "carrying capacity" of the temples are spatially limited, thus restricting the potential numbers of daily visitors. Alderhold therefore suggests limiting domestic tourism as well as restricting road access from Thailand. A curious planning discourse results in which, on the one hand, Angkor is "given back" to the Cambodian people as the embodiment of their culture, while on the other, the viewing of this cultural symbol is reserved for the "distant" and "culturally motivated" "Western" tourist. Whose culture, we might ask, is being "returned" (and to whom) when a Japanese restored, French reconstructed, Khmer temple is used to develop "high end" international tourism?

[12] A ready example of such excisions is provided in any guidebook or scholarly treatment of the temples. In plan after plan, each temple floats in a pristine field of white. Some of what is erased becomes clear to the visitor to Angkor Vat. For today the ancient temple is surrounded by two flourishing contemporary vat complexes where one finds newly painted narrative cycles and freshly cast concrete sculptures. These current visual forms do not figure on the page of art history however. Nor for that matter do the souvenir stands which cluster around the monument of the present. Instead the present is rendered blank and the ideal temple is retrojected into an original and fictive time, to be studied "as it was". Restoration Culture labors to inscribe this representation on the real: temples are cleared (of jungle, worshippers and souvenir sellers) so that they can be framed as emblems of the past to be viewed from afar.

[13] Anonymous comment, Phnom Penh, February 1999.

part of the training offered there.[14] Instead, the early School fashioned portable objects, styled with ornaments, designated as Khmer, distilled from temple surfaces; these objects were initially sold more to French civil servants living in Cambodia than to the tourists who began to visit the temples. Nor was the image of Angkor an overwhelming theme for painting during the post-independence years. Instead, "modern painters" turned to the countryside and other forms of living tradition in order to inflect the modern with enough Cambodian content to qualify it as "modern Khmer art". It is only recently then that the monument has come to so infect painting and to so determine cultural policy.[15]

* * *

To fill in the present of a place which is constructed as past, is not to claim that another version of "modern art" can simply be uncovered and added to an art history which will thus become ever more inclusive without changing its fundamental shape.[16]

---

[14] See my discussion of the early curriculum of the School in Chapter Two.

[15] The more tragic ramifications of such a policy can be seen at the Royal University of Fine Arts, the institution which runs through my account as a central force for determining forms of visual production throughout the 20th century. Through recent international grants directly linked to the restoration of Angkor, the Departments of Archaeology and Architecture have received funding and staff development programs which have enabled them to become fully functioning Departments. The Department of Plastic Arts, located on the same campus as the other two Departments, has been left out of this funding. The Department has been repeatedly and explicitly told that its exclusion from this funding is due to its "irrelevance" for the restoration efforts at Angkor. Today at the Department, talk often turns to ways in which the Department of Plastic Arts could reconnect itself to the temples. "We could make new sculptures to replace the old ones?", one professor asked me hopefully, measuring my reaction to see whether such a plan would interest the foreigners of whom I am often the test example.

[16] I am arguing against recent projects that seem to suggest that "modern art" (taken in the stylistic sense of looking-(belatedly)-like-Western modernism) can be found everywhere and that the conventional armature of named "artists" and coherent "bodies of work" can simply be exported unproblematically. In such accounts, the particular trajectory of Western modernism towards abstraction has been generalized into "the" aesthetic response to modernization rather than one possible, culturally specific response.

Rather my project encountered many forms which initially bewildered me as an art historian since they had seemingly no relation to the familiar stylistic progression of canonical modernism. Still the objects I encountered were things of the 20th century and almost all of them were labeled "art" by those who promoted them.

It soon became clear to me that terms would have to be reconsidered, for as John Clark has explained, there are many ways to define "modern art". If - borrowing from the experience of Western modernism - we define "modern art" as the objects generated from a particular attitude, the "deliberate putting behind of the past by distancing of the artwork from an earlier set of artistic tastes", then this rupture of rejection only occurs in Cambodia in the 1950s.[17] But if we instead decide, as I have done, that modernity comes with colonialism (1863) and that cultural responses to modernisation are what constitute modern art, then the objects made during the first four decades of the twentieth century in Cambodia must also be "modern art" despite their seemingly "traditional" forms. To let these objects into the story, uncovers a curious contradiction since, at the same time that Parisian innovations were building the canon of modern art, a French-sponsored project of cultural engineering was foreclosing such expressions in Cambodia in favor of a (re)constructed traditional past.

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[17] John Clark, Modern Asian Art (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998). The "new" which is embraced in 1950s Cambodia (see Chapter Four) will seem surprising to those imbued with now standardized progressions of the avant-garde from the turn of the century to Abstract Expressionism, for what becomes "modern Khmer art" is representational painting, precisely what canonical Western modernism refutes.

Here we run into that other term "art", for the cultural policies of the Protectorate acted in the name of the "Cambodian Arts".[18] From the outside perhaps, the temples and their sculptures, the vats and their paintings, the decorated carts, and the silver boxes which French administrators encountered when they first turned their attention to culture, could be designated as "art". But within the turn of the century society in which these forms were being produced, their meaning lay much more in their use for ceremonies of worship and everyday life than in a visual contemplation that turned them into objects with purely aesthetic and financial value. I begin my story with the collision of these two systems, that is, at the moment when an imported system, self-consciously declaring itself to be the protector of "Cambodian Arts", encounters the existing practices of the countryside and the court during the early years of the 20th century.[19]

There are no "histories" - already synthesized accounts - of visual production in 20th-century Cambodia, although several recent works have touched upon art training during the colonial period.[20] Therefore, in a straightforward sense, this dissertation

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[18] I use "Protectorate" to designate the period of French colonial rule in Cambodia which lasted from 1863 - 1953.

[19] See here my account of the responses to the survey taken in 1917, Chapter One. For a discussion of the marker "Cambodian", see Penny Edward's recent dissertation Cambodge. The impulse to construct and market something specified as "Cambodian art" is of course part of that emergence of the modern nation state described in the work of Benedict Anderson and Thongchai Winichakul. As John Clark has put it: "as the state has mapped itself internally as a unit with hegemony over a restricted territory, so it has constructed itself externally as one unit in an international system of like entities", a mapping which often requires the formation of a national art as well as a broader national culture. See Clark, Modern Asian Art, p.18.

[20] See Gwendolyn Wright, The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism, Nadine André-Pallois, L'Indochine: Un Lieu d'éxchange culturel? and Penny Edwards, Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945.

simply provides a first overview of a field. It is with this aim in mind, that I have kept a wide time range and a broad brush rather than pursuing more limited and theoretical discussions of specific areas. Much of what follows certainly deserves more detailed and thoughtful attention in the future.

The primary source of information on the state of the arts and the development of the colonial art school are found in the voluminous writings of George Groslier, the chief architect and implementor of the "doctrine" for Cambodian Arts. In Chapter One, I summarize Groslier's representation of the Cambodian Arts at the turn of the century and outline the crisis that he proclaimed. I then use a discussion of the responses to his 1917 survey, and a brief overview of commissions during the first two decades of the 20th century, to throw the foundational claims on which he based his "rescue" into question. The same impulses to borrow the strange which are often listed among the primary tactics of early Western modernism (cubism), are largely eliminated by Groslier's rescue, cut off at their beginning by the promise of a market for "model", "traditional" objects.

In Chapter Two, I try to uncover and describe the actual curriculum of the School after Groslier's takeover, leaving aside the rhetoric with which his rescue has often been represented. Through this analysis, we come to see that Groslier's claim to provide a "sanctuary" for "authentic" Cambodian Art was largely fictional. Instead, the School (with Groslier at its head) became a design center for a set of "new" traditional objects that were then mass hand-produced by ever greater numbers of associated artists for a foreign market. During the time that Groslier was installing his system of production, he relied upon many of the methods associated with modern forms of product development and industrial manufacturing (e.g. division of labor,

streamlining, marketing, managing the relation of production to consumption). The School and its associated Corporations thus paradoxically became a factory for hand-made goods. In the later sections of this chapter I examine how individual artisans fitted into this factory, how the factory developed into a booming business, and how, in perhaps the most fitting response to its success, the entrepreneur Say made a machine for mass-producing jewelery which so horrified Groslier just before his death.

Chapter Three turns from the School to examine the broader culture of display which developed under the Protectorate and then continued into the period of independence. I use this chapter as a bridge to the post-independence period, sketching the broader visual culture in which specific forms of visual production found their meaning. My account shows how objects that were once exhibited for wonder became products for sale through the colonial restructurings of Tang Tok (the annual festival celebrating the King's birthday). I then follow these displays into the period of independence to describe how they became once again imbued with wonder of a very different kind. During the 1950s, a massive campaign to present "the image of America" to Cambodians led to exhibitions, films, and illustrated publications, all meant to picture a way of life and convert Cambodians to it. What was "sold" was primarily an ideology and thus such exhibitions and publications were offered for free. A similar campaign of image production is subsequently undertaken by Sihanouk's Sangkum (1955-70) in order to promote a view of Cambodia that tried to reconcile contradictions between "modern" and "Khmer" installed under the Protectorate.[21]

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[21] The Sangkum Reastr Niyum was the name of the political party founded by King Sihanouk in 1955 when he abdicated from the throne in order to enter politics. The party presided for the next 15 years (1955-1970), a period which is often remembered today in Cambodia by simply "the Sangkum" (the society).

"Modern" visual forms played a crucial role in the image of the Sangkum developed by then-Prime Minister Sihanouk. Chapter Four looks more closely at the development of "modern painting" at Groslier's School while tracing the transition of this institution to the Royal University of Fine Arts. "Modern" in the Cambodian visual arts of the 1950s and 1960s came to mean representation based on seeing, thus substituting the immediacy of perception for the repetition of production plans. Still this "modern painting" remained a form of nostalgia, since it took the countryside and a way of life untouched by modernisation as its primary themes.

Groslier's legacy of object production did not, however, simply disappear. In Chapter Five, I turn to a consideration of the after-life of his system, surveying certain forms of souvenir innovation in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh from the 1950s to the present. In these more recent manifestations, the impulses of Groslier's system return in oddly perverse forms. The contemporary images which I discuss can also however be read as the wake of the 1970s, that ten year period during which the promise of a modern Cambodia offered by the Sangkum was torn apart.[22]

Chapter Six charts the aftermath of this disaster on training and visual production in Cambodia today, providing a brief survey of the contemporary "Cambodian Arts". While old "masters" recapitulate an image of "authentic" Cambodian art that Groslier would surely have approved of, young professors sent to socialist-bloc countries during the 1980s reiterate aspirations for a "modern Khmer art" which, however,

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[22] The US sponsored Lon Nol regime was ushered in by a 1970 coup. Despite enormous US aid, the regime (which from the start was marked with an almost surreal ineptness) eventually fell to the Khmer Rouge in April of 1975. The DK regime, which ruled from 1975 to January 1979, is now "famous" for the deaths and devastation which it inflicted on its own people.

takes a very different form than that proposed during the Sangkum. Between these competing claims to "Cambodian art", the majority of painters and sculptures today are "workers" who labor at a distance from the remains of Groslier's School, making no appeal to the category of "artist". Using skills of representation and replication learned through apprenticeship, they produce by hand the mechanical images which coat modern public spaces.

I have struggled to cover what might be considered an overly ambitious range of time by insisting on holding colonialism and independence together. In doing so, I have bridged that curious gap between documents of the archives and memories of the living. Almost all of my account of the colonial era School is derived from Groslier's published writings as well as the many extraordinary reports and evaluations, previously unknown, which I found in the National Archives of Cambodia. My analysis of the "image of America" which infused the first decade of Cambodian independence relies on newly declassified materials found at the US National Archives in College Park, Maryland. With independence, my account shifts to rely upon the memories of those with whom I have spent the last three years. My final chapters thus are pieced together from conversations, stories, pictures and often contradictory memories. All representations are always already misrepresentations. Still, I have tried to listen well. As Jean Laplanche has so beautifully put it, "the past already has something deposited in it that demands to be deciphered, which is the message of the other person".[23]

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[23] Jean Laplanche, "Notes on Nachtraglichkeit", in Essays on Otherness. London: Routledge, 1999.

I have also struggled with language, for much of the Khmer which I translate refuses the illusion of equivalence. For passages which I thought might be of particular interest to those who read Khmer, I have included the original passage in the footnotes. All translations from the French and the Khmer are mine unless otherwise noted. I have included many pictures in my text. I do so for two reasons. For many readers in the West, the terrain which I cover will be unfamiliar, so that the images can perhaps help them to visualise what the text discusses. In Cambodia, few people have the luxury to engage in such enterprises of collecting and assembling, and I hope that through the presentation of this survey, I can provide a useful text to those who have been so generous to me.

Chapter One: The Crisis

In a 1913 photograph, we find "the place of the weaver" to be under the house (figure 2). Although those pictured were probably assembled for the photograph, the casualness of their pose, the presence of the children, and the fact that the loom is located just under the home's front door, indicate that weaving - in the Cambodia of 1913 - is itself an activity woven into the flow of everyday life.[1] Skip to almost ten years later (figure 3) and we find that the place of the weaver has been extracted from the flow of family life and now is found in a solitary cleared room with nothing but a loom. The weaver pictured still stops to look at the camera however, just as the woman under her house did before. Another ten years later still (figure 4), and the head of the weaver is in perfect alignment with her loom; she has simply become part of the machinery for diagramming proper technique.

This chapter investigates some of the things which might have fostered and forced the pictured change. We know quite clearly one version of the "decline" and subsequent "renaissance" of the "Cambodian arts" from the turn of the century until the 1940s, thanks to the magisterial writings of George Groslier (figure 5). Groslier was dogged and prolific in his explanation, defense, and propagation of the "doctrine"

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[1] See the survey responses from August and September 1917 for descriptions of artisanal practices in the countryside just before the colonial restructuring of art training [NAC #15200 (RSC)]. In what follows, all references to files in the National Archives of Cambodia (NAC) are followed by their file number and the collection in which they are found, in this case, the collection of the Résident Supérieur. I use "Cambodia" to designate the region in which the modern day nation state was emerging during the first few decades of the 20th century. See Edwards' Cambodge for a wonderful treatment of the construction of the nation state.



Figure 2
"A loom under the house, the place of the weaver", 1913
NMC Photography Collection, Groslier photo and caption #99



Figure 3: Weaver at the School of Cambodian Arts, 1922
NMC Photography Collection; H40

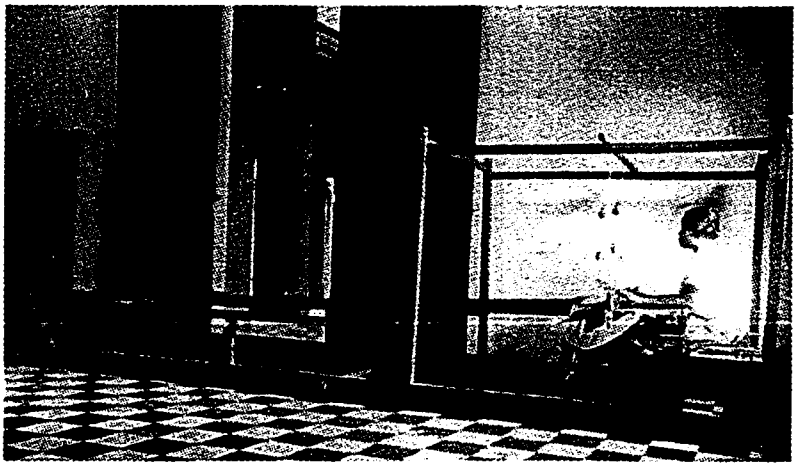

Figure 4: Weaver at the School of Cambodian Arts, 1930
NMC Photography Collection; H376



Figure 5: Groslier (seated) with the staff of the DAC, late 1920s

NMC Photography Collection (uncatalogued)

which he developed for the "Cambodian arts".[2] In articles spanning the nearly thirty-year period during which he ran the Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, the Musée Albert Sarraut, as well as the larger Direction des Arts cambodgiens, Groslier repeatedly outlined the underlying premises, the everyday operational details, as well as his future plans for these institutions and the system of cultural management which they installed.[3]

Since Groslier's writings give the most accessible and complete description of Cambodian visual arts during the early 20th century, they have often been taken as "objective" descriptions rather than as carefully placed publicity pieces whose equally important aim was to convince colonial authorities and the French public at large of

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[2] The "doctrine" is elaborated in George Groslier, "La convalescence des Arts cambodgiens" in Revue Indochinoise May/June 1919 (vol.31 #5), p.871 and "L'Enseignement et la mise en pratique des Arts Indigènes", Extrait du Bulletin de l'Académe des Sciences Coloniales vol. 16 (Paris: Société d'Editions 1931), p.1, also published as Les Arts Indigènes au Cambodge 1918-1936 for the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques, Paris, 1937 (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1937). All subsequent references to these two texts are followed by C or E followed by the page number. Groslier's writings include: "La tradition cambodgienne", Revue Indochinoise vol.29 #5 (May 1918); "L'Agonie de l'Art cambodgien" Revue Indochinoise vol.29 #6 (June 1918); "La prise en charge des Arts cambodgiens" Revue Indochinoise vol.30 #9 (September 1918); "La convalescence des Arts cambodgiens", Revue Indochinoise vol.30 #10 (October 1918); "La convalescence des Arts cambodigens" (revised article) Revue Indochinoise vol.31 #5 (May / June 1919) reprinted as a separate booklet (Hanoi, Imprimerie d'Extreme Orient, 1919); Inauguration du Musée Albert Sarraut et de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1920; "Ce qui a été fait au Cambodge pour la pratique et la protection des Arts indigènes", Arts et Archéologies khmèrs vol.1 1926; "Etude sur la psychologie de l'artisan cambodgien", Arts et Archéologies khmèrs, vol.1, parts I and II, 1926; "La Fin d'un Art", parts one and two, Revue des Arts Asiatiques, Tome VI, 1929-30 #3 September / #4 December) ; Trois Ecoles d'Art de L'Indochine. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1931 and in English "Contemporary Cambodian Art studied in the light of its past forms", Eastern Art (College Art Association 1930). For a bibliography of Groslier's writings see François Martini, "George Groslier 1887-1945" in France-Asie, vol.7 #66-7 (1951) Saigon.

[3] I subsequently use the following English translations and abbreviations: School of Cambodian Arts, Albert Sarraut Museum and DAC to refer to these three institutions. The Direction des Arts cambodgiens emerged in the early 1920s as the administrative organ overseeing the School, the Museum and the Corporations.

the merits of Groslier's project. Sources confirm, as we will see, that Groslier did provide perceptive accounts of conditions in a colony poised on the cusp of modernity. There are also however aspects of his picture that other histories throw in a more dubious light. It is important today to reassess Groslier's representations and assumptions since they provided the intellectual bases on which definitions of art and artistic identity - as well as institutional structures in which to develop and maintain such definitions - were constructed for colonial Cambodia. As later chapters will describe, these definitions and the policies they generate have had a curious and lingering half-life in post-independence Cambodia. As a friend laughingly remarked recently while watching workers struggling for weeks to sledgehammer away the stubborn base of the colonial Monument to the Dead: "the French built good foundations".[4]

What better place to start than with the triumphal inauguration of the complex which, for Groslier, was the physical embodiment of the links he tried to establish between the past and present, a complex of buildings which still today provide the focus for "cultural tourist" visits to Phnom Penh.[5] On April 13, 1920 the newly-built Museum with its accompanying School was inaugurated by colonial, royal, and

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[4] Peter Arfarnis, early October 1999. The Monument to the Dead of World War I was built in 1924-5 on a site in front of the present-day French embassy. Sections of it still remain today both displayed in front and stored behind the National Museum of Cambodia.

[5] The 1992 ZEMP Report on the preservation and development of the temples of Angkor (UNDP, 1994) discusses the desirability of "high end cultural tourism", urging limits on regional tourism of a primarily religious nature since each of the temples has a very limited "carrying capacity".

monastic dignitaries. Through surviving photographs of the event, we can imagine the moment when Baudoin, the Résident Supérieur of Cambodia, rose to speak (figure 6).[6] The inauguration of the buildings, Baudoin proclaimed, marked the "realisation of a project" to "create an official autonomous institution" able to "assume the tutelage and safeguarding of Khmer arts and crafts". By rescuing these arts from a "slow agony" of "degeneration and even decadence" that was leading "irremediably towards their annihilation", the Museum / School complex would "bring to life those crafts which have already disappeared", while "maintaining the others in their traditions".[7] The main themes of Groslier's project are all here: a threat was identified, a crisis proclaimed, a rescue performed, and a certain kind of regeneration fostered, but one which would have to be continually "safeguarded" and "maintained". Tutelage - the training of the future - was immediately sutured to conserving the past. Things that had disappeared were to be brought back, while those that still existed were to be kept as they were. Change was seemingly banished from this scenario.

The end of an art

The inauguration was a curious scene if we consider that Groslier's writings repeatedly indicted the French themselves for the "slow agony" which Baudoin

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[6] I subsequently use RSC when referring to the various Résident Supérieur's who come to figure in my account. For a recording of the largely ceremonial speech by the Palace Minister, see ការសែតក្រុងភ័មពុជា (sic)#9 (NAC Newspaper Collection).

[7] Baudoin, Inauguration (pamphlet, NMC library), p.2. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (I, page, name of speaker). I use NMC for the present day National Museum of Cambodia, formerly the Albert Sarraut Museum.

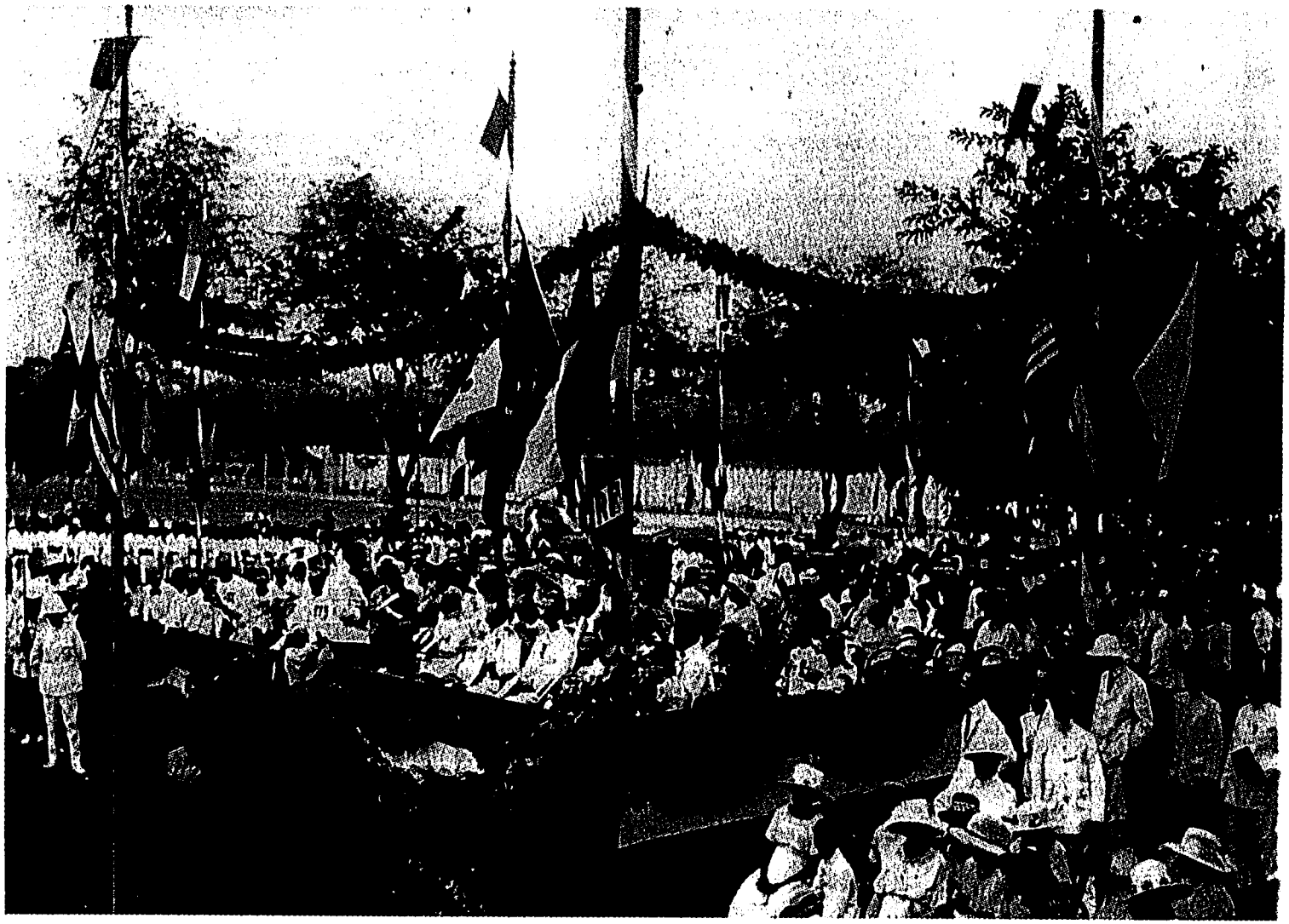

Figure 6: Inauguration of the School of Cambodian Arts and the Albert Sarraut Museum, April 13, 1920

Inauguration du Musée Albert Sarraut et de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1920

lamented. "Our appearance on these shores," Groslier wrote, "provoked such a disturbance, that the past can no longer guarantee the future".[8] The "turmoil" of "Western civilisation installing itself" had "completely upset Khmer society".[9] For Cambodia, the coming of the French was "like an old man walking along his path": "the automobile comes, blows its horn, he turns around, sees it too late, it is not possible for him to avoid it and the old man thus dies on the road".[10] "Suddenly something is dead", Groslier announced dramatically to the assembled dignitaries in 1920: "Enamel on metal is dead, damascene, niello. Give to my words their literal meaning: there is no longer a single Cambodian practicing these artistic industries which still prospered during the reigns of the Kings Ang Duong and Norodom".[11]

According to Groslier, it was the "unheard-of force and rapidity" with which new Western influences had entered the country, that had easily "finished off" Cambodian art "with a single blow".[12] A system of newly cut roads quickly allowed a "network of

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[8] Groslier, George. "Ce qui a été fait au Cambodge pour la pratique et la protection des arts indigènes", Arts et Archéologies Khmèrs vol.1, p. 467. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (CQ, page).

[9] Groslier, George. "Etude sur la psychologie de l'artisan cambodgien", Arts et Archéologies khmèrs, vol.1, parts I and II, p.128. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (psyI, page) for part one and (psyII, page) for part two.

[10] Groslier, George. "La Fin d'un Art", parts one and two, Revue des Arts Asiatiques, vol.6, 1929-30 (#3 September / #4 December) p.176. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (FAI, page) for part one and (FAII, page) for part two.

[11] I, p.19, Groslier. Damascene is a process of incising gold or silver inlay onto bronze or other metals, while niello is a process which leaves a black inlay on silver. See Anne Richter, The Jewelery of Southeast Asia (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

[12] "L'Enseignement et la mise en pratique des Arts Indigènes", Extrait du Bulletin de l'Académe des Sciences Coloniales vol. XVI (Paris: Société, d'Editions 1931), p.5.

circulation" that produced "enormous social change" (figure 7).[13] "The European colonist", Groslier wrote knowingly, "was not a spectator"; he did not simply "contemplate the landscape"(FAII, p.244). Instead he quickly penetrated into the remotest areas and there engaged in "unceasing activity"(FAII, p.244). The aims of the European were "never, let us well note, to maintain the Cambodian plan [and] to defend the local traditions, but always to uproot them"(FAII, p.244). It was not only the European who began to make use of the new roads however. Cambodians themselves who, according to Groslier were a "people immobilized for centuries", were "suddenly seized with an excessive wanderlust [and] began in the space of ten years, to tour around the country and to travel through it, part by part, not at all in order to establish an active circulation of its blood, but instead with the goal of multiplying contacts as quickly as possible with the Europeans" (FAI, p.180). It was objects however which traveled most quickly through these new networks, and Groslier marveled at the speed with which "100 little courts (with artisanal workshops) and 900 pagodas" had become inundated with "chinaware from the Grand Depot, table stands of Louis Phillipe... religious imagery from Munich... percales and flowered cottons imported from England"(R1925). The "barrel of cement", the "ton of iron", the "case of European trinkets", all penetrated easily (FAI, p.180). The influx of these things precipitated what Groslier called "the disaster": "bad Western taste" came in the form of "the catalogues of St. Etienne, the trinkets of

[13] FAI, p180. According to Groslier, in 1900 there were only fifty kilometers of surfaced roads in Cambodia and no cars. The first automobile arrived in 1912, and by 1914 there were 30 tourist cars, 5 public transport vehicles and six hundred kilometers of road. By 1929, there were 2400 kilometers of roads along with 1840 tourist cars, 820 buses and 270



Figure 7

A road
Cambodia, 1920?

NMC Photography Collection
(Groslier photo, uncatalogued)

cheap household vendors, objects of the lowest aesthetic value, the dining rooms of Henry II, the gaudy ties, the mechanical lamps, our stamped metal mantelpieces, our tinsel jewellery."[14] In a word, "all our bric-à-brac takes the road to Cambodia and finds a place of honor with the heads of the provinces as well as the Royal Palace"(R1925). Through the "careless childishness" of an attraction to the foreign, the indigenous elite had almost killed what for Groslier was Cambodia's greatest resource (FAII, p.247). No longer commissioning high-quality work from local artisans, the Cambodian aristocracy instead rushed to "replace" native objects "with Western luxuries"(E, p.5). Since the "precise moment" that "the Cambodian aristocracy have come into contact with us", Groslier lamented, Cambodian art had "been in its death throes": "The native who, since the time of Angkor, had need of nothing and received nothing from the West, living by his own resources and through his own means, suddenly discovered that he had all kinds of needs: a pair of shoes, a watch, a sparkplug, a yard of English crepe, a bicycle, a hat. By 1915, one could not find a dignitary who did not possess or at least consult the catalogue of the Manufacture d'Armes de Saint-Etienne".[15] Stripped of its "indigenous clientele", local

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transportation trucks (FAI, p.179-180). The increase in tourism during the 1920s is illuminated by these figures.

[14] George Groslier "Rapport sur les Arts indigènes au Cambodge: Le état au moment de la reprise par l'Administration française et exposé historique du Service des Arts cambodgiens 1918-1924", May 7, 1925 [NAC #11322 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to this Report are followed by (R1925). The report pages are unnumbered.

[15] FAI, p.181 and Groslier, George. "La tradition cambodgienne", Revue Indochinoise vol.29 #5 (May 1918) p.468. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (TC, page).

arts "lost the reason to form themselves"(E, p.5) and thus "the principal arts of the country... collapsed like a house of cards"(FAI, p.181).

Groslier understood this turn to the West as an attempt by the indigenous elite to "refind their lost prestige"(TC, p.459). With the increase of French presence and power, the displaced class of Cambodian officials attempted to "acquire our [French] standing, which they know [only] from its exteriors"(TC, p.459). Copying the visually recognised signs for Frenchness, "the Balat of the provinces no longer impressed his village with his sculpted litter, but instead with a phonograph, shoes, white pants, a helmet. His silhouette becomes French. Then comes the irresistible automobile and the distance between the people and the governor is reestablished"(FAII, p.248-9). Through his shift in taste, the Balat put three types of artisans out of work: the wood sculptor who once carved the decorative details of his litter, the ivory carver who once prepared its ornate balustrades, and the lacquerer who once finished its glossy interior (FAI, p.182).[16] Unemployed, such masters ceased to train apprentices and abandoned their crafts, returning to the rice fields to support their families. "The years pass", Groslier concluded, "men die, forgotten, lost in the countryside with no notice of their death, no inquiry or inventory of what they take off with them"(I, p.19, Groslier).

If one of Groslier's repeated themes was this supposed abandonment and the consequent "end of an art", he also described, in passing, forms of contemporary

[16] While Groslier reserved his harshest criticisms for court and provincial authorities such as the Balat, he also reprimanded the Buddhist clergy. As Groslier put it, instead of serving as a "sacred power" which would shelter and preserve indigenous artisans, the monks instead began to wear "robes made of English cloth", had their "religious images printed in Germany", and became "the biggest client of the importers of cement"(FAII, p.247).

production that were ongoing and even increasing. Faced with a market flooded with French goods, Groslier's "humble Khmer artist" found it impossible to "oppose his tradition to ours, especially since he works under our command."[17] Those artisans who did continue to work, began to "make concessions" and "alterations", incorporating aspects of foreign goods into their products (Ag, p.549). Through the "disastrous teaching of lamentable peddlers' wares,"(R1925) indigenous forms "hybridized" incorporating "imported objects... techniques...[and] materials"(E, p.5). Others echoed Groslier's cries. Already around 1910 Henri Marchal had observed "a certain degeneration, a beginning of decadence" in "the motifs of the most recent art": "the influence of the West, and models of deplorable taste introduced by cinema, illustrated magazines, and trinkets in the market, had made themselves felt amongst artisans used to transmitting from father to son, by tradition, ancestral motifs in which the art of Angkor was reflected".[18] "Passing easily" from the local and traditional to a "mixed style of Chinese, Japanese, or of European forms"(I, p.3, Baudoin), Khmer artisans transformed themselves into "copyists of the European," producing "miserable failures" imitating "the caraytids of Erechteion, an impressionist

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[17] Groslier, George. "L'Agonie de l'art Cambodgien" Revue Indochinoise vol.29 #6 (June 1918). p.552. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (Ag, page).

[18] See Henri Marchal, "L'art cambodgien moderne", Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises de Saigon, #65 (1913) and Henri Marchal, "Reflexions sur l'art moderne cambodgien", France-Asie, (1949), p.346. Henri Marchal became conservator of Angkor after the murder of the first conservator, Jean Commaille in 1916. He introduced the technique of anastylosis for restoration work at Angkor following a trip to the Dutch Indies in the early 1930s. Marchal lived in Siem Reap until his death in 1970. For more on colonial cinema see Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, "A survey of Cambodian film" in Film in Southeast Asia: Views from the Region (ed. David Hanan, Vietnam Film Institute / SEAPAVAA, 2000).

landscape... Lalique jewelery"(I, p.16, Groslier).[19] Those masters who were still training apprentices transmitted these "contaminated forms of art" to them (E, p.5). Allowed to continue on such a "decadent path", the Khmer would end up as a "completely emptied people" whose sole remaining talent would be that of "plagiarizing"(I, p.16, Groslier).

These descriptions of doom were meant, of course, to legitimate Groslier's enormous project of "restoring" the "arts of a people."[20] It was against these contemporary "failures" that an "authentic", "true" - and "past" - Cambodian art was to be excavated and reborn, thus healing "the break in the chain of tradition provoked by Western influences and the conditions of contemporary life"(E, p.2). It is important to repeat, however, that even in Groslier's own account of crisis, aesthetic production had not ended: it was just that the hybrid and often Westernized forms that had began to appear did not match the ethno-national portrait of "Cambodian art" that the French were developing.

The "art" of the "Cambodian people"

What then was the "art" of the "Cambodian people" according to Groslier?[21] "Peoples", to Groslier, had "an art", an unchanging artistic identity which "reflected"

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[19] Also see Tardieu's description of the situation in Cambodia in his letter to the RSC in 1924 NAC #17502 (RSC).

[20] Groslier, George. Trois Ecoles d'Art de l'Indochine. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1931, p.24. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (TE, page).

[21] George Groslier (b. 1887) was the first French baby born in Phnom Penh (his father was an official in the early Protectorate). He left the city when he was very young in order to be educated in France. Groslier trained as a painter at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts, studying with Bouguereau, Toudouze and Maignan. By the time he returned to "stabilize"

a "national mentality", "developed" and "refined" over centuries, incorporating aspects of the "climate, flora and fauna" of the specific place in which they lived (I, p.13-14, Groslier). The art of "a people" manifested "their feelings", "their past", "the essence of their race"(I, p.14, Groslier). "Cambodian art", for Groslier, "did not evolve in its principles nor in its essence"(I, p.15, Groslier). Rather, through a "fixed" program, independent from the observation of nature, a canon of representation was established and "transmitted from generation to generation" over centuries (I, p.15, Groslier). Such transmission was "not just obedience to an established formula" nor was it "the desire to imitate". Rather, for Groslier, it spoke to "something stronger, more imperious - a latent aesthetic" which revealed a "Cambodian temperament", an "ancient soul"(TC, p.465).

The individual artisan "submitted" to the "obligations" of this temperament by following long established "vocabularies"(psyII, p.213, E,p.3) His primary function was "to obey", "perpetuating indefinitely the same facts" by "executing to perfection" forms which the past dictated to him (psyII, p.213). The artist therefore "obeyed the art", "not the art the artist"(psyI, p.131). Rather than expressing individuality, Khmer artisans "reflected the whole of their race in a single of their works"(psyII, p.209). In the Cambodian context then, "art didn't try to set itself free"; rather it

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the arts, he had already made several "artistic and archaeological study missions" to Angkor (1910-11, and 1913). It was these missions which formed the base on which Groslier built his conception of the Cambodian Arts. Groslier was mobilized and served in Romania during WWI before returning to Cambodia permanently in 1917. See Nadine André-Pallois, L'Indochine: un lieu d'échange culturel, p.153-6; Penny Edwards, Cambodge, p.206; NAC #8336 (RSC) and NAC #17499 (RSC) which contains early correspondence by Groslier's father, a civil servant in Cambodia, as well as grade reports from the young Groslier's studies in France. In a retrospectively amusing anecdote, the young George Groslier was given a three day suspension from school for passing his drawing of a female nude to fellow students. Groslier's official resume is found in NAC #11887 (RSC).

"complied to the service" of what was already established (psyII, p.213). Individual artisans were "fated" to make certain forms, given their "heredity", heritage, and surroundings; the artist of Groslier's time was "identical to that of the Angkorian Khmer" using "the same aesthetic and the same methods of work."[22]

To Groslier, all spheres of "authentic" Cambodian life were steeped in the ethno-national aesthetic which he outlined: "one finds in the temple the same art, the same technique, and the same motifs as in the palace, the house, and on utensils"(psyII, p.213). "Everything" was a "pretext for (art) handwork... in a rich client's house [just] as in the pagoda or the furniture of a farmer"(CQ, p.83). Although there was an "elite" group of artisans working in the Palace, the work which they produced "differentiated itself from popular art, neither by its forms nor by its inspiration, but only by the richness of the materials used and... by the perfection of its making"(E, p.4). Work commissioned within such a milieu was always a communally recognized object whose only variables were the dimensions and quality of the materials as determined by the client. Whether the clientele was "religious, princely, or popular", it would always commission "the same things without ceasing"(psyI, p.129). Together, artisan and client made up "an artistic people who all know what is

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[22] See PsyII, p.212, 214, 215 and George Groslier, "Resume Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", 1922 in NAC #11887 (RSC). Groslier is obviously comparing Cambodia to that other context of emerging French modernism in which the "artist" was meant to "disobey" and refuse the service of tradition. Groslier frequently made use of "Khmer" in order to differentiate this "native" group from "Annamite" and "Chinese" who might, Groslier admitted, have lived in Cambodia for several generations but who were not, in his formulation, "native". See in particular Groslier's letter on "Annamite" students transferring from the Ecole professionnelle to his newly founded school in NAC #17633 (RSC).

beautiful and who understand and love the beauty and the ideal of a race"(psyI, p.129).

The passing down of artistic knowledge from generation to generation required only the "simple contact" of a master and an apprentice in order for "an alphabet and formulas" to be learned: "the atavism, the milieu, the omnipresence of the art, did the rest"(E, p.4). Exchange between master and apprentice consisted of commands which were "not personal", but which showed that "they were thousand times older than the master", stemming from "a distant origin, sacred and mysterious"(psyI, p.131). Thus "the master obeyed the teaching just like the student"(psyI, p.131). Inherited forms were "never considered... with a critical air" since they inherently "fit" an apprentice already "used to them like the trees which surround him"(psyI, 131). "Art was in the air" and "all breathed it" with a "strange universality"(FAII, p.253). Tradition thus "traced the alleys in the park, ordered the beds and gave them over to the planting of flowers and the laying of stones"(psyI, p.131). If upon consideration we find that we have as yet seen no actual art objects or discussed any particular stylistic traits, then this reflects the sweepingly general plane on which many of Groslier's descriptions of Cambodian art operated. The fact that such a thing as "Cambodian art" had to exist, a problematic assumption as we shall see, was never questioned. The specific forms and the precise method of transmission rarely enter Groslier's broadly poetic descriptions of the "park" which he came to oversee.

That the "park" was in danger however was never in doubt. In fact, the broad characteristics of Cambodian art that Groslier sketched left it, in his view, inherently open to decline. Simply its coherence and omnipresence made it vulnerable since "made from a single block, it falls as a single block"(E, p.5). As an "applied art, or if

one wishes, a utilitarian art", it was "most fragile" and "easily doomed to disappear" since objects no longer used would simply be thrown away, replaced by new and different ones (CQ, p.84). When local objects were abandoned in favor of "cheaply made objects" from the West, it was not just the object which was abandoned but also the "pretext for traditional arts", the field for making "applied art" itself (E, p.5). Despite the inherent, age old "temperament" which Groslier claimed for the artisan, the contemporary artisans of his descriptions turned out to be entirely fickle, able and willing to quickly assimilate anything and through such borrowings to "end" their art. Habituated to a system of commissions which "imitated the past", Groslier's artisan could and did "imitate all other examples" as well (Ag, p.552). Told to "make this", regardless of what it was, the artisan would "never object": "he [would] never contradict you - even if what you wished harmed his tradition" since, to Groslier, the Cambodian artisan "lacked the critical spirit and the independence necessary for such an outburst. Told three times to make something anti-traditional, there is a strong risk that he will continue in the future, every time, to make it so, since he is servile and has a real faculty for assimilation (Ag, p.552). Ironically, the tradition of oral transmission from generation to generation (an "authentic" indigenous practice if there ever was one) was seen to seal the fate of Cambodian art. With no written documents passing down traditional knowledges from generation to generation, once artisans assimilated themselves to other ways of making, these "distortions" were all that would be transmitted to future apprentices.[23] Cambodian art, in Groslier's

[23] Groslier was not alone in condemning oral transmission despite its "inherent" "native" "authenticity". See for example Baudoin who in his inaugural speech called for "eliminating

scenario, fell "victim to its [own] absolutism which was unable to support the least wound. All blows were fatal [to it]"(TC, p.469). It could only die.

More measured and specific accounts of the shifts by which fairly hermetic local communities were pulled into a broader colonial economic network are also found in Groslier's writings. In the countryside of 1917, for example, lengths of imported cloth began to replace hand-woven sampots since manufactured French cloth cost less than a quarter the price of a sampot and took only "two minutes" to buy rather than three to four months to make (FAI, p.182). The lacquered wood bowls used by monks to gather food had been copied and began to be made by machine in Europe, "embossed and enameled just like wash basins"(FAI, p.183). Again, such factory bowls sold for half the price of lacquered wood bowls and eliminated the two month period required to make and dry them. While such products from abroad came to replace things that had previously been made in the home, local production itself began to replace traditional materials with materials brought from afar. Cement was here Groslier's greatest villain. Where previously 16 strong and long wood logs had to be found to form the central columns of a temple, after 1900, Groslier noted despairingly, all the head monk had to do was "write a letter to an importer"(FAI, p.185). "Eight days later" almost any amount of cement, iron, and gravel arrived with a "specialised Chinese supervisor" and an expert in mixing cement; "there you had your pagoda", Groslier concluded (FAI, p.185). The "molds of the entrepreneur" used to make the columns and decorative details "circulated from province to

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the ignorant hands imbued only with oral traditions that mark the age of decadence in the arts and crafts" (I, p.7-8, Baudoin).

province" resulting in "serial pagodas"(FAI, p.185). Where once finely carved wood detailing finished such Vat projects, cement ornaments quickly became the norm. Why should a wood fronton be carved - a process taking three to four months and costing far more - when the entrepreneurs' molds could be used cheaply to cast cement ones in the span of a few days? The ubiquity and social importance of Vats only added to the rapidity of change since Vat building projects served as "instantaneous propaganda" for reinforced cement and mold-making (FAI, p.185).

By 1917 then, for Groslier, "one found oneself in the presence of an unknown being, an art strange to itself"(E, p.1). It was necessary, Groslier declared, "to go backwards thirty years in order to re-find the national art in its authentic forms and in the last stages of its natural and historical evolution".[24] It was in this retrospection, that Groslier found the "magnificent role" of the French. "We profit from procedures that they [the Cambodians] ignore," he announced, "[we know] research methods that they don't even imagine. It is here above all that French methods have found their place, their purpose, their magnificent role"(I, p.20, Groslier). Thanks to the French "knowledge of investigation"(I, p.20, Groslier) and through their "awakening, diffusion, and expansion of historical study", it would be "possible to make better known the true character of Khmer civilization, to revive the local art industries, and to re-find forgotten ancient processes"(I, p.7, Baudoin). Through a process of "nutrition and selection", colonial authorities would distill a pure and "authentic"

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[24] E, p.6. We will return to Groslier's theory of change in Chapter Two. Although, as we have seen, he outlined a broad notion of an unchanging tradition, passed down for centuries, he also accepted that this tradition would change. It must do so "naturally" however, within its own evolution rather than through the unnatural impact and influence of the West.

Cambodian art, "rendering accessible to its practitioners, and thanks to our methods of research, their history, their past, their literature, their ritual, their conventions, the works of art of their ancestors which time, war, [and] sales... have dispersed or destroyed"(I, p.20, Groslier). "Above all, it [was] a matter of fixing the past for the present", Groslier declared.[25] That the Khmer "were incapable of doing so themselves" was due to "social misfortunes" and "the long vassalages which have broken their roots"(I, p.26, Groslier).

According to Groslier, two "personalities" had been fatefully brought together in the colonial arena.[26] If the Cambodian artistic personality centered on faith in an unchanging canon of representation, then "prodigious evolution" and "radical transformation" were hallmarks of the "French people", whose artistic identity was marked by a continual progression of styles (I, p.17, Groslier). Within the colonial context, these two "personalities" had to negotiate a suitable relationship. While for Groslier a general colonial education (concerning "intellectual matters") should introduce ideas of "universal usage" from the outside (thus presumably drawing from the side of "prodigious evolution" and change), art education should instead tune itself to the specific "sensibility", "mentality", "outlook", "feelings", and "genius" of the local "race"(I, p.14, Groslier). While Groslier had no objection to "the less regrettable blows" by which Cambodians would become "a people of waistcoats and opera hats... that no longer put hot coals under their new mothers, that drink proper

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[25] Groslier, "La prise en charge des Arts cambodgiens" Revue Indochinoise vol.30 #9 (September 1918), p.253. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (PC, page).

water, clean their wounds with antiseptic... and make use of proper pens"(TC, p.469), it was regrettable if through such reforms the Cambodians would come to lose "their patient chiselers, their weavers... and [their] vigorous sculptors in wood"(TC, p.469). In other words, artisanal hand labor was to be preserved while modernising projects in other areas could proceed.

In the Cambodian context in particular, the "spirit" of "the native" (which after all "contained the spirit of his forefathers") had to be treated with an "attitude of respect" since remaining examples of Angkorian art showed that this spirit had created "a classical art", "of the same standing as ours", "as complete and as old as ours"(I, p.14, 17, Groslier). By what "foolish national vanity" then, Groslier asked, could the French - those supposed "children and propagandists of all liberties" - "presume to introduce [their] aesthetic formulas" into an established civilisation whose own art had been "tested and tried" "through centuries of independent practice?"(I, p.15, Groslier). Instead of "pretending to teach Cambodians how to translate their forms and their thoughts into French," a "protectionist" form of art education was to be established in which Khmer "artisans" would teach Khmer students how to make Khmer art (E, p.15). "We are neither in France nor [for that matter] in Annam or Cochinchine", Groslier warned, "for a different people and a different art, there must be different methods of teaching"(TE, p.26-7).

Surveying the countryside

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[26] On July 13, 1917, a note postale from the RSC to all Résidents of Cambodia (accompanying Groslier's survey NAC #8126 (RSC)) urged the maintenance of the "proper personality" of "the Cambodian".

Appointed in 1917 to "stabilize the administration" of the existing School of Cambodian Decorative Arts in the Royal Palace, Groslier arrived in Cambodia on what was to be a temporary mission of a partly military nature.[27] The "organising of the School of Cambodian Arts" quickly took over his mission and would become his life's work.[28] To Groslier, the first step in "taking charge" of the Cambodian arts was to "recognize" the art, "to see it freely practiced and, at least, before giving it quinine, to know if it had a fever".[29] One could not simply plunge in, "teaching an un-nameable mix of principles"(PC, p.258). Instead, the "treatment" would depend on the "diagnosis", and any diagnosis had to be based on a thorough examination (E,p.9; R1925). To proceed in this way, Groslier explained, was to "operate in the manner of a well run excavation where the earth which one displaces is itself a teacher by what it brings into the free air, by the position and state in which it is found"(PC, p.258). It was only after such a careful excavation that the arts could "finally" be "taken in charge"(PC, p.258).

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[27] CQ, p.87. The Palace School was officially called the Ecole des Arts décoratifs cambodgiens. See Nadine André-Pallois, L'Indochine: un lieu d'échange culturel, p.153-6; Penny Edwards, Cambodge: The cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945 p.206; and NAC #8338 (RSC) for more on Groslier's early missions. Groslier's resume found in NAC #11887 (RSC) lists an "aviation mission" under military service which seemingly brought him to Indochina in 1917.

[28] CQ,p.87. Groslier is surprisingly silent over previous French proposals to administer the Cambodian arts. Already in 1906, Jean Commaille (conservator of Angkor until his murder in 1916 and a painter in his own right) outlined a full plan for a French-administered art school. Much of what he wrote is later taken up in one form or another by Groslier without acknowledgement. See Commaille's August 13, 1906 "Note sur le fonctionnement d'une école des arts industriels au Cambodge" [NAC #2014 (RSC)].

[29] E,p.9. While Groslier was initially focused on what we would call the visual arts, his concerns by the late 1920s included classical dance and other forms of performance. See NAC #8338 (RSC) for one example of this expansion.

In the summer of 1917, Groslier and RSC Baudoin initiated a survey of the Cambodian countryside through which they hoped to gather "complete documentation" on existing artisans and artisanal practices.[30] Groslier's subsequent descriptions of decline and crisis drew heavily on his interpretations of the results of this survey, as well as his particular assessment of the state of the existing Palace school. The divide between countryside and Palace reflected two different spheres of art production in turn-of-the-century Cambodia. While a range of anonymous and variously trained artisans worked, as we will see, on a sporadic basis in the countryside, an elite group of the best artisans were gathered at the court, working on a full time basis as what Groslier termed "privileged slaves", "maintained, nourished, and protected in exchange for their work"(E, p.4). While Groslier came to diagnose decadence and hybridization in the Palace and the city, he declared "agony" and impending death among the artisans of the countryside.[31]

Groslier's survey was presumably distributed to all the provinces of Cambodia although only some of the responses remain today in the National Archives of Cambodia (figure 8).[32] Groslier's descriptions of the survey responses contradict the

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[30] July 13, 1917 note postale from the RSC to all the Résidents of Cambodia accompanying Groslier's survey questions [NAC #8126 (RSC)]. Also see the July 13, 1917 note postale in NAC#1141 (RSC) as well as NAC#8126 (RSC) and NAC#15200 (RSC) for survey responses.

[31] Again Groslier's comments show his dislike of the "Khmer aristocracy". The "lounge suits and coffee grinders of rich Cambodian interiors" for him had none of the "duration" which "the words tradition and custom imply". Instead, true "intact" Cambodian tradition could still be found among the "popular masses" of the countryside who remained the precarious "depository of all the vestiges of the past"(CT, p.461-22).

[32] I use the following nine responses, some in Khmer, some in French translation. The documents are handwritten and names of those who signed the documents are almost impossible to decipher:

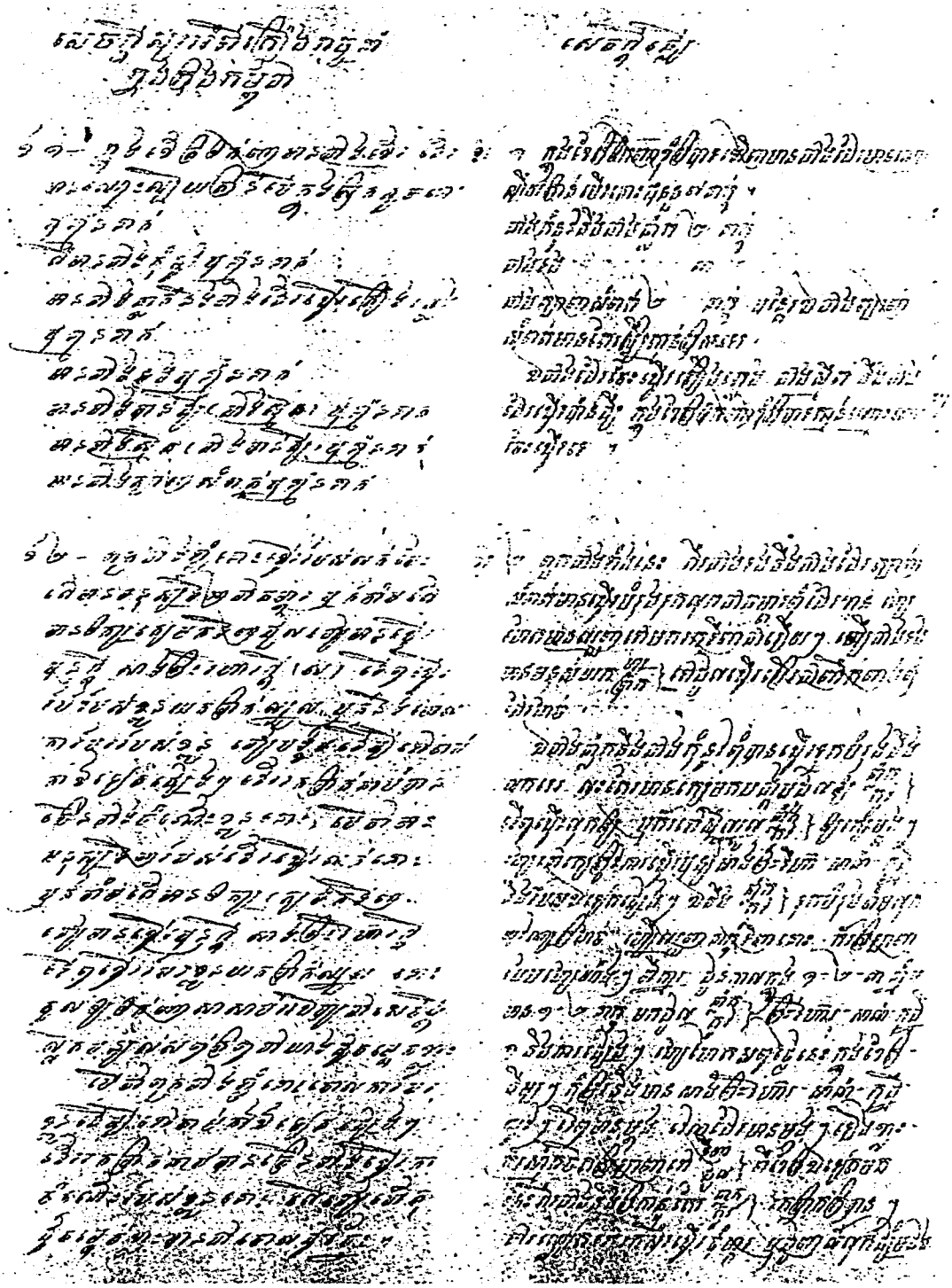

Figure 8 : One page from a reply to the survey dated August 10, 1917

NAC #15200 (RSC)

actual responses which survive today. For example, Groslier declared quite dramatically in one of his texts that "only one hundred and thirty" surviving artisans "could be found" among a population of one and a half million when he began his project of reformation in 1917 (E, p.6). Moreover, of these "remaining" artisans, many were "obliged to devote themselves to the work of the soil in order to live"(E, p.6). In Phnom Penh alone, Groslier noted, "not counting the artisans of the Royal Palace who work for the King (about twenty), we have found 16 jewelers, 1 enameler, 1 goldsmith, 3 statue casters, 1 maker of headdresses for dance, 8 sculptors, 2 painters and an undetermined number of women who know weaving but haven't practiced it for 20 years"(E, p.6).

A simple analysis of the numbers found in Groslier's descriptions compared to the surviving survey responses indicate that the calculations he used to arrive at one hundred and thirty surviving artisans are dubious at best. Counting the twenty palace artisans which Groslier noted but then inexplicably left out of his figures, we can add the thirty-two artisans he found in Phnom Penh, the forty-eight jewelers which one of the remaining responses listed as practicing in the city of Battambang alone, add the seventeen artisans of all sorts listed in another reply from Siem Reap, and we already

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a. Prey Veng, September 14, 1917 [NAC #15200 (RSC)]
b. No location given, August 10, 1917 [NAC #15200 (RSC)]
c. Pailin, August 14, 1917 [NAC #8126 (RSC)]
d. No location given August 24, 1917 [NAC #15200 (RSC)]
e. Ba Phnom, no date [NAC #15200 (RSC)]
f. August 29, 1917 Heng, Chaufaitkhet Siem Reap [NAC #8126 (RSC)]
g. September 10, 1917, Chaufaikhet Sisophon [NAC #8126 (RSC)]
h. No date, Roun, Chaufaikhet Battambang [NAC #8126 (RSC)]
i. October 18, 1917 Résident Battambang [NAC #8126 (RSC)]

reach one hundred and seventeen.[33] If we add the "undetermined" number of woman weavers in these areas (also inexplicably left out of Groslier's figures), we already have at least 130 practicing artisans using only two of the survey responses. Groslier was already discussing the imminent disappearance of Cambodian art in a report of July 27, 1917, a month before the earliest survey replies could have been returned to him.[34] His reading of the crisis was therefore already determined and survey responses were either to be put to the service of this image of crisis or were simply to be ignored.

Since Groslier frequently referred to the numbers he derived from the survey as proof of the state of crisis in which he found Cambodian art upon his appointment, we should perhaps more carefully reconsider other aspects of the survey as well.[35] The questions themselves were perhaps incomprehensible in the context of the countryside

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[33] See survey responses NAC #8126 (RSC).

[34] This July 27, 1917 report is not in the NAC but is referred to in the First Trimester Report of the School dated April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)]. The RSC's cover letter accompany-ing the survey is dated July 13, 1917, indicating that the survey was sent out sometime after that date.

[35] The afterlife of Groslier's figures is alarming. The figure of 130 surviving artisans is quoted as fact in an account forty years later (see Claude Fillieux, Merveilleux Cambodge, Paris, 1962 p.218) as well as in Eugène Teston and Maurice Percheron's encyclopedic L'Indochine Moderne (Paris: Librarie de France, 1932) which in turn comes to serve as a much quoted source of facts for later studies (for example, Edwards, p.216). Groslier's reading of crisis as a whole is also frequently repeated in later travel accounts, indicating the success with which he promoted his story. In Virginia Thompson's French Indochina, (NY: Macmillan, 1937) for example, Groslier's claims and complaints are reiterated almost verbatim, ending with: "it was almost impossible to find a Khmer who could teach native arts. Westernism had been such a solvent of local artistic traditions that the whole people needed a re-education in their own culture"(p.355). As we will come to see, none of this is very accurate. It is however interesting to note how easily convincing and palatable we find such mea culpa descriptions of the inroads of modernity and colonialism into so-called traditional societies. As I try to show, the remaining documentary evidence presents a more complicated and resistant picture.

of turn-of-the-century Cambodia. For example, the survey asked provincial authorities to note the number of Cambodian artisans "enjoying a certain reputation among the people" in the categories of painting, sculpting and making of musical instruments, jewelery, "modeling", bronze casting, and weaving.[36] Responses from rural provinces struggled to find properly "reputable" artisans fitting into the given categories. In a reply from Ba Phnom, Prey Veng Province, for example, the respondent explained that there were no artisans with a "famous enough name" but that there were some who knew their craft "only a little", not "precisely". It is not clear whether the six jewelers and three painters mentioned in this response were "counted" in Groslier's 130 artisans or not, but from adding the numbers in the remaining survey responses, it seems that they were not. Instead of the coherent and full time practice which Groslier was searching for, response after response explained that ជាង (hand laborers) made things only when they were "rented" to do so.[37] Thus they "waited" for the "opportunity" of a festival or the building of a wat, occasions for

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[36] The distinction drawn between sculptors (ជាងឆ្លាក់)and modelers (ជាងច៉ាន់ដី) seems to have been one of making form by subtraction (sculpting) versus building form by addition (modeling). Thus sculptors would be those who carve wood or stone by removing material, while modelers would be those who use clay, wax or cement to build up a form.

[37] Sculptors and painters were designated by the Khmer "ជាង painting", "ជាង sculpture", ជាង being a term used to designate all kinds of hand laborers. Groslier noted that some architects and draftsmen were called អ្នក, a pronoun of higher standing which indicated that the person drawing the plan or making the design enjoyed a slightly higher status. Groslier added that "the difference which we [in the West] make between artist and artisan - a very modern [difference] moreover - doesn't seem to be known in Cambodia"(PsyI, p.125). In its later incarnations, Groslier's School seems to have introduced this modern designation which today distinguishes ជាងគំនូរ (worker painters) from those associated with the School សិល្បករ (artists). See Chapter 6 for more on this distinction.

practice which occurred only sporadically. When such occasions did not present themselves, these artisans farmed, sold other things, and held all sorts of other jobs. It was not therefore evident that their identity as "a painter", "a sculptor", "a weaver" would in fact be the first category by which they were recognized.

The survey also inquired whether artisans of the countryside "made work and stored it with the goal of selling".[38] Responses showed that few did so. Instead they produced what was needed and spent the rest of their time on other activities. An economy of practice is thus described in which villagers made things as "artisans" only when the social milieu required it. When a vat was repainted, painters worked. When new clothes were required, weavers wove. The work produced was not necessarily important for the "art" quality of its execution, but rather for its presence and use within the particular social context.[39]

After requesting the number of artisans found to fit into the listed categories, Groslier asked about patronage, sales practices, and "why the artisans abandon their skilled work to do other things for money?" To farm, sell, or pursue other activities, according to this question, was to "abandon" what we have come to call a "profession". Based on the picture of pre-Protectorate Cambodia which Groslier built for himself, all artisans had previously had "lucrative" full-time careers, living as they did "amongst a religious people with a passion for celebrations, for color, jewelery, music, theater, and also vanities"(psyI, p.128). Actual survey descriptions of artisanal

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[38] Survey questions and responses, Ba Phnom, NAC #15200 (RSC).

[39] The work was often described in the responses as "ordinary" and "unskilled". As one typical response had it, there were several artisans in the official's area who "knew how to

practices in the countryside of 1917 indicate that artisanal production instead occurred only sporadically, unevenly, and for specific local uses. Surely part of the impulse to imagine a Cambodian countryside dotted with artisans fully supported by a native clientele came from the oft-repeated colonial notion of the Cambodian people as the builders of Angkor and thus as inherent decorators and artisans. If through the lens of the French, Cambodia should have had a landscape full of the sculptors of Angkor, it is at least partially understandable that they read decline and decay into the actual practices which they encountered in their present. Although some of the survey responses did use tropes of abandonment and loss to describe this presumed prior fullness, other responses directly rejected such nostalgia.[40] The ChaufaiKhet of Siem Reap for example wrote: "I have observed that all these artists do not throw away and abandon the artisanal practices that they are used to doing from long ago. If someone comes to rent them, they practice them. If someone doesn't come to rent them, they stop and instead farm or follow other professions". In this statement there was no dramatic shift and no emergency, no rapid abandonment either by the artisans or their clientele. Similarly, the Chaufaikhet of Battambang explained that he had "not seen that art making practices in the province were abandoned and thrown away", a response which the French translation turns into "I have not observed the complete abandonment of ancient art". When something is

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make various types of things, but not so beautifully". Response dated August 24, 1917 [NAC #15200 (RSC)].

[40] In an example of the former, the Pailin account, written by the French delegate to Battambang, lamented that the "remaining artisans" in his province were "mediocre for the most part, and losing from day to day the practice of their craft". The report curiously added however that these same "remaining" artisans continued to "inspire themselves from traditions to which they show a respectful fidelity" [NAC #8126 (RSC)].

commissioned, he added matter-of-factly, they make it. When nothing is commissioned, they do other things.

Survey replies from more urban areas in 1917 did describe "professions" with artisans working everyday on their craft, building up stock, and selling it on a regular basis. In Pailin (an area rich in precious stones), for example, two jewelers were "attached to their profession" while in nearby Battambang, forty-eight practicing jewelers were able to "continuously practice their skill, responding to the needs of a large clientele". Even in these urban areas however, painters and sculptors still only practiced their crafts occasionally when there were ceremonies, constructions of pagodas, or other events which required their work. Painting and sculpture therefore meant not so much the production of self-contained objects, transported and sold for visual pleasure, but rather remained site-specific, made for a particular place and event which had local social meaning. Such site-specificity did not, as we shall see, fit into the aims of producing portable objects which were to be so important for Groslier's reconfigured School.

The divisions noticed in the survey responses between the rural and the urban underscore the fact that 'Cambodge' was probably two quite different places in 1917.[41] Whereas a largely agrarian countryside continued to follow century old habits with only some penetration by colonial policies, urban pockets underwent rapid

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[41] Here and throughout I draw on Penny Edward's wonderful work on 'Cambodge', that curious colonial construction which was physically and culturally mapped' and molded' onto the territory which we today call Cambodia. See Edward's Cambodge, p.3, 9-10. I also however wish to remember that such constructions are rooted in a physical reality, more or less accessible, which might make the seamless dream of a nation much more problematic on the ground.

change. The body of the nation was thus divided into two parts: a countryside knit perhaps more closely to the neighboring peasants of other countries than to the urban pockets of its own nation which were increasingly exposed to the foreign and the modern.[42] While city jewelers and some rural weavers began to produce surplus goods to sell to merchants, production in the countryside remained, in the astute words of one survey reply, "very much a contribution shown on the occasion of the brilliant celebrations of the community rather than the practice of a real profession".[43]

Because making, as represented in the survey responses seems to have been almost entirely commission based, work produced would seem to reflect public taste. While several survey responses noted changes in what local publics were commissioning, these changes were not described as the abandonments or dramatic declines which Groslier would later portray. A reply from Prey Veng noted that "many" practicing artisans were "making in the new style", while "not so many" made "according to the old". This was because "people in the villages today very much like things of a new style". As for "the traditional things in the countryside from before", the people "throw them away and don't care for or preserve these things". In addition, the reply noted, "people from foreign countries" (literally "people from the outside") were coming to the countryside; if they "see old things that are still good", they "buy them to take away".[44] A reply from August 10th, 1917 concurred, noting that objects "not

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[42] Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geobody of a Nation (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

[43] Response from the Chaufaikhet, Pailin NAC #8126 (RSC).

[44] អ្នកស្រុកសព្វថ្ងៃច្រើនចូលចិត្តច្រើនតែរបស់បែបថ្មី ឯរបស់បុរាណក្នុងស្រុកអំពីដើមច្រើនតែចោះបង់ចោលមិនសូវរាប់អានថែរក្សារបស់ទាំងនោះ ខ្លះក៏ពុកចាក់បែកខ្ទេចទៅ របស់ណាដែលទៅល្អក៏មានអ្នកប្រទេសក្រៅគេយើញទិញដូរយកទៅ ឯជាង់ដែល

following traditional styles" were being made because new styles were considered "beautiful and easier than the old style".[45] This reply concluded with equanimity that those clients and artisans alike who found the traditional better, followed the traditional, while those who liked the new, commissioned according to the new.

The notion of an ongoing native public commissioning work according to changing tastes is certainly at odds with Groslier's lament of artisans completely abandoned by their patrons. Groslier's account of crisis does not allow for any "authentic" local transformation. To change could only mean to die. Here we should perhaps recall that what came to be called "modern art" in the French context grew in part out of similar fascinations and borrowings of the strange and foreign. Groslier's colleague, the future director of the School of Cambodian Arts, André Silice, confirmed the existence of an ongoing native clientele, at least for jewelery.[46] "Cambodians of all classes", Silice wrote in the mid-1920s, "have a real passion for objects of precious metal, either of gold or pure silver, and the most humble hut has a box for betel or tobacco made of silver"(Silice, p.241). "The poorest woman borrows a chain or a bracelet from a more fortunate one in order to appear at a festival", and

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រចនាទៀតក៏ច្រើនធ្វើតាមបែបទំនើបថ្មីពុំសូវធ្វើតាមបុរាណទេ។ Response from Prey Veng in NAC #15200 (RSC).

[45] ឯរចនាទីមួយៗតាមទំនើបថ្មីមិនយកតាមបែបបុរាណទាំងអស់នោះដោយហេតុយើញថារចនាទំនើបថ្មីនេះស្អាតល្អស្រួលជាងបែបបុរាណក៏ស្ម័គ្រចិត្តតាមទំនើបថ្មីខ្លះ។ ឃើញបែបបុរាណស្រួលជាជាង ក៏ធ្វើតាមបែបបុរាណទៅតាមដោយចិត្តអ្នកធ្វើស្រឡាញ់ដោយខ្លួនៗពីគ្នា។ Response dated August 10, 1917 in NAC #15200 (RSC).

[46] Silice, André. "Exemples d'art cambodgien contemporain" (part 2) in Arts et Archéologie Khmèrs, vol.2 #2 (1925) p.241. All subsequent references to this text are followed by (Silice, page).

"all the money patiently put aside sou by sou is always converted into ornaments of virgin gold: chains, rings, ear studs, or bracelets which they commission as much as it is possible"(Silice, p.241). Here no crisis or decline is noted and while perhaps the styles and the objects commissioned changed, the basic impulse to own and display remained steady. "The art of jewelery must prosper", Silice concluded, "in a country where everything that surrounds the King is in precious metal"(Silice, p.241).

Painting the Palace

What then of that other site of production which served as the highest example of Cambodian arts? If the organisation of the countryside was one area on which Groslier's rescue would focus, then the other site of French fascination was certainly the Royal Palace. Within the walls of the Palace, an elite group of artisans worked for the King. It was these artisans who would come to form the core personnel of Groslier's School of Cambodian Arts (see Chapter Two). As such, these "masters" are curious characters on whom both decadence and authenticity are painted. As rescued "masters" of ateliers, they come to guarantee the purity of the newly founded school as indigenous sanctuary. As corrupted and decadent Palace workers, prior to the establishing of the School, they supposedly had no discipline, made shockingly hybrid work, and ceased to train students. What is left out of this judgement is the curious set of limitations placed upon the masters as the French began to "stabilize" artistic production between 1907 and 1918. By briefly reviewing the history of the most public of commissions from this time, we come to see what roles were left available to the Palace "masters" and how they had to reconfigure themselves to fit into the new institutions which they, after all, participated in founding.

An early personnel dossier of Méas, "head of the painters" in the Palace, gives us a small glimpse at the workshops prior to French involvement.[47] From the ages of 21 to 25, Méas served as a scribe or "literary person" in the Palace. At the age of 25 he was "ordered to learn to make paintings (ផាត់ជ្នាំគំនូរ) from "an English man called Mr. Holland who was paid by the King.[48] Steadily accumulating honorary titles throughout his service, Méas worked as a painter in the Royal Palace for 38 years. Mr. Holland probably came to Phnom Penh through the close links maintained (often by force) between the Cambodian and Thai courts.[49] It was perhaps through this exchange as well that the large *Reamker* murals (similar to those repeatedly represented on the walls of the Thai palace since the 18th century) were painted in the Palace in Phnom Penh during 1903-4 by Tep Nimit Mak and about 40 apprentices of the Palace workshops (Figure 9).[50] As far as we know, there was no French

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[47] "Dossier Personnel Méas, chef des ouvriers peintres du Palais", 1902-3 [NAC #12974 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to Méas are from this file.

[48] Two unsigned panels hanging in the National Museum of Cambodia offices today indicate that there were painters working in a representational style (គំនូរមើលឃើញ) around 1910. The two panels show somewhat awkward renderings of the Palace and its surrounding grounds; Khmer language titles written in the paintings suggest that they were painted by Cambodians.

[49] Old painters today will say that long ago painters to the Cambodian king were all trained at the Thai court. Conversations with Chet Chan 1997 - 2000.

[50] La Pagoda d'Argent ; Polish Restoration Report 1993; François Bizot, Ramaker EFEO 1989, p.62. The *Reamker* is the Khmer version of the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*. Solange Bernard claims that Tep Nimit Mak's grandfather was a sculptor and that Tep Nimit Mak himself studied drawing at Vat Botum Vadei in Phnom Penh between 1868-1874 with a monk called Yous who "had never been touched by French influence". In addition to the *Reamker*, Tep Nimit Mak apparently made a series of paintings on canvas in 1906 depicting scenes from the *Reamker*; while these canvases were in the National Museum at the time of Bernard's writing, they seem to have since disappeared. See Solange Bernard, "L'Imagerie Populaire", France Asie #37-8, April / May 1949.



Figure 9: The *Reamker* murals of the Royal Palace, Phnom Penh, 1908-9?

Dieulefils & Vivien, Indochine Pittoresque et Monumentale, Cambodge et Ruines d'Angkor

involvement in this project and Tep Nimit Mak was in complete charge of the design and execution of the painting following the wishes of the King.[51] At the time "architect of the Palace", Tep Nimit Mak was later to become "indigenous director" of Groslier's refigured School.[52]

We can perhaps find it surprising then, that for the Marseilles Exposition of 1906 (as for all the previous and subsequent colonial expositions) the "Palais du Cambodge" was not designed by this respected Khmer architect. Rather the actual architect of the building (ironically a melange of foreign elements just as "hybrid" and "decadent" as the contemporary "failures" being condemned in Cambodia) was Lagisquet who worked under the direction of Vildieu, head architect for the Indochina section of the Exposition (Figure 10).[53] One could perhaps explain this away by saying that the use of European architects for the Marseilles Exposition was easier, given the distance from the colony and the difficulty of transposing a Khmer architect into the context of an international exposition. Leaving aside the fact that a contingent of "native workers" (possibly the palace artisans?) were sent to complete the French designed

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[51] This project has left no trace in the NAC although the powerful Palace Minister, Thiounn, later wrote a manuscript describing the scenes represented around the walled courtyard. A letter of October 13th, 1923 from the publisher Van Oest rejected the manuscript for publication, explaining that the project was too expensive and that the publishing house "was and would always be dedicated" to publishing books on "monuments from the more distant past". See NAC #9890 (RSC).

[52] Groslier eulogized Oknha Tep Nimit Mak as an "old and faithful native collaborator". See retirement letters in NAC #11124 (RSC) and Groslier, Recherches sur les Cambodgiens, p.399.

[53] The decorative moldings for the Marseilles pavilons were designed by two French sculptors, Brobeker and Raynaud, after molds and originals in the Trocadero. See Exposition Coloniale, Marseilles 1906 album, NMC library. Also see Edwards, p.177-8.



Figure 10: The "Palais du Cambodge", Colonial Exhibition, Marseilles, 1906

Exposition Coloniale, Marseilles 1906, Exhibition catalogue

pavilions in Marseilles, we can instead turn to several local commissions for public art works in order to chart the peculiar trajectory of "Cambodian style" during the first decade of the 20th century.[54] Considering that making seems to have been structured around the commission, we will come to see how disastrous this trajectory must have been for the "masters" of the Royal Palace.

In March of 1906, a competition was announced for a monument in Phnom Penh to honor Daniel Fabre, architect and Head of Public Works.[55] The competition announcement lauded Fabre as the "incontestable creator of the city of Phnom Penh", praising his "artistic conceptions" which have managed to "marvelously assimilate Khmer art", "beautifully adapting it to our architecture". By October 1908, the committee for the monument had awarded the commission not to any of the Palace "masters" but rather to the French sculptor Finot and the French architect Dufour. This can perhaps be dismissed with the explanation that it was only natural for a French civil servant to be commemorated by a French designed monument. But what of the monument commemorating the retrocession of provinces from Siam, that monumental return which brought Angkor back under the purvey of the Protectorate? In March 1908, presumably after a similar public competition, the commission for a "commemorative monument to the reign of HM Sisovath and the reuniting of Cambodia with the old provinces of Battambang" was awarded to

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[54] An arrête of December 8, 1904 [Journal Officiel] decreed that M. Henri Vildieu would be "executing under his direction in Indochina, characteristic pavilions which will be sent and set up at Marseilles by native workers".

[55] NAC #4651 (RSC). All subsequent references to the Fabre monument are taken from this file. For more on the early development of Phnom Penh's architecture see Phnom Penh: développement urbain et patrimoine, Atelier parisien d'urbanisme, 1997.

Théodore Rivière, a visiting French sculptor.[56] Consisting of a life-size bronze statue of Sisovath, seated on his throne, flanked by two bas-reliefs of fired clay, almost the entire sculpting of this monument was done in France (Figure 11). The Protectorate paid for the transportation and the monument was installed at the base of Vat Phnom in early 1909. In a progress report written in the summer of 1908, Rivière explained that he had "taken all care to preserve, beside the modern facture, the antique character of Khmer art". The Palace "masters" were left to supply the "portico in sculpted stone and masonry as well as the base... for the statue", "following the designs and under the direction of M. Théodore Rivière".[57] Thus the "masters" of the Royal Palace had become simply "workers" meant to "follow" French-designed "antique" Khmer art.[58]

Perhaps the most peculiar ongoing set of commissions were those of the Royal Palace itself. Under RSC Outrey, the existing Palace was surveyed and a "program" of rebuilding was elaborated in the hope of producing a coherent "ensemble of buildings".[59] In 1912, a new "Salle des Fêtes" (រោជធីយសិល្ប:) was built replacing the old

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[56] NAC #1994 (RSC). All subsequent references to Rivière and the commission are drawn from this file.

[57] NAC #1994 (RSC).

[58] See Edwards pages 89-92 for an account of this monument as a secular symbol of the emerging nation.

[59] NAC #23706 (RSC). On April 25, 1912, the head engineer of Public Works wrote to the RSC indicating that plans of the Palace would be drawn up, and that none other than Vildieu (principal architect for the Marseilles Exposition) would study the general reconstruction. The "original" Palace buildings were built in the late 1860s and 1870s by a similar mix of French and Cambodian characters. See Edwards, p.82-4 for a discussion of these earlier constructions. In an April 12, 1912 letter, King Sisovath himself had asked GGI Sarraut for a wide range of projects including improved irrigation systems, better road

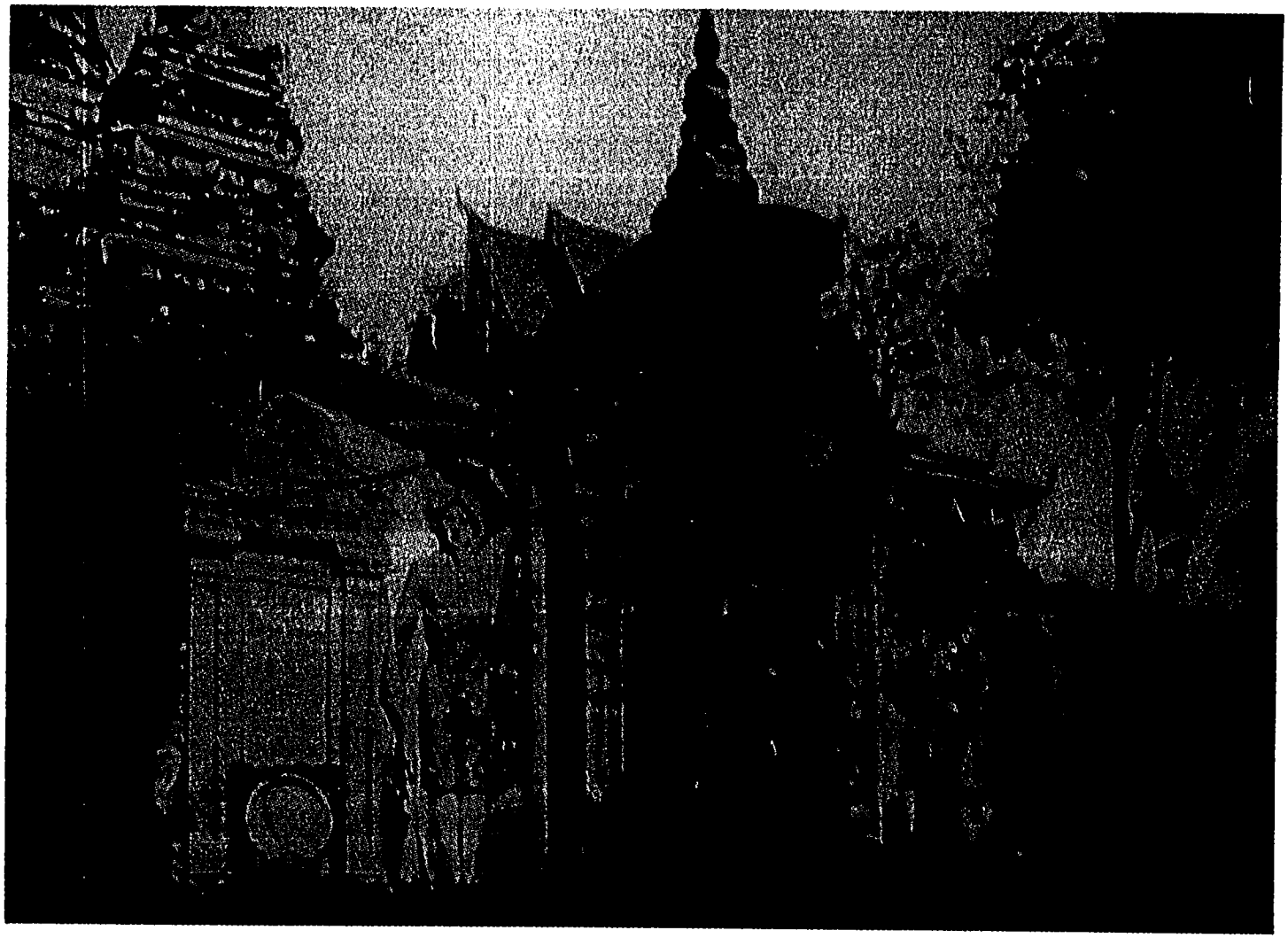

Figure 11: Rivière's monument commemorating the retrocession of territories to Cambodia, completed in 1909
Vat Phnom, Phnom Penh

Dieulefils & Vivien, Indochine Pittoresque et Monumentale, Cambodge et Ruines d'Angkor

pavilion whose cramped quarters were "a source of continual difficulty during the necessary receptions for Royal ceremonies".[60] The new building, the competition prospectus announced, was to "be inspired by Cambodian style particularly in its roof and for its decorations" (figure 12).[61] The Minister of the Palace would provide the successful (foreign) bidder with "Cambodian workers" in order to ensure the "execution of a work of Khmer art". At the inauguration of the new building, RSC Outrey praised the manner in which the Salle des Fêtes had "preserved in its exterior forms, the lines and silhouettes of the beautiful Cambodian buildings which contribute to giving [the] Kingdom a particular cachet of elegance and aesthetic beauty".[62] "We have made every effort", he continued, "to respect" this aesthetic (despite, he could have added, the use of cement introduced to Indochina by the company of his builders, the "distinguished entrepreneurs" Richaud and Papa). It is the description of a more ordinary observer at the inauguration which interests us here

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and communication networks, more hospitals and schools, and finally "reconstruction of most of my Palace of which the majority of buildings, built of wood and dating from more than 50 years, are threatened with ruin" [NAC #23706 (RSC)]. It was perhaps appropriate that the Palace reconstruction came at the end of a list of modernising requests since colonial authorities were eager to improve what they considered the abysmal hygiene of the private Royal quarters. The Palace reconstruction projects were curiously contradictory given their appeals to modern technology, building materials, and hygiene on the one hand, and their invocation of authentic (traditional) Cambodian architecture on the other.

[60] Report to the RSC, September 10, 1914 [NAC #23706 (RSC)]. When asking for his new Palace buildings, King Sisovath cleverly reminded the French authorities that the increasing number of French civil servants in the colony required the Palace to have larger spaces in which to receive all of them (noted in Outrey's May 24, 1912 Report, [NAC #23706 (RSC)]).

[61] Competition brochure, NAC #23706 (RSC). All subsequent quotes regarding the Salle des Fêtes are taken from this brochure.

[62] RSC Outrey as quoted in E. Ménétrier. "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok a Pnom-Penh" Revue Indochinoise #10 (October 1912).

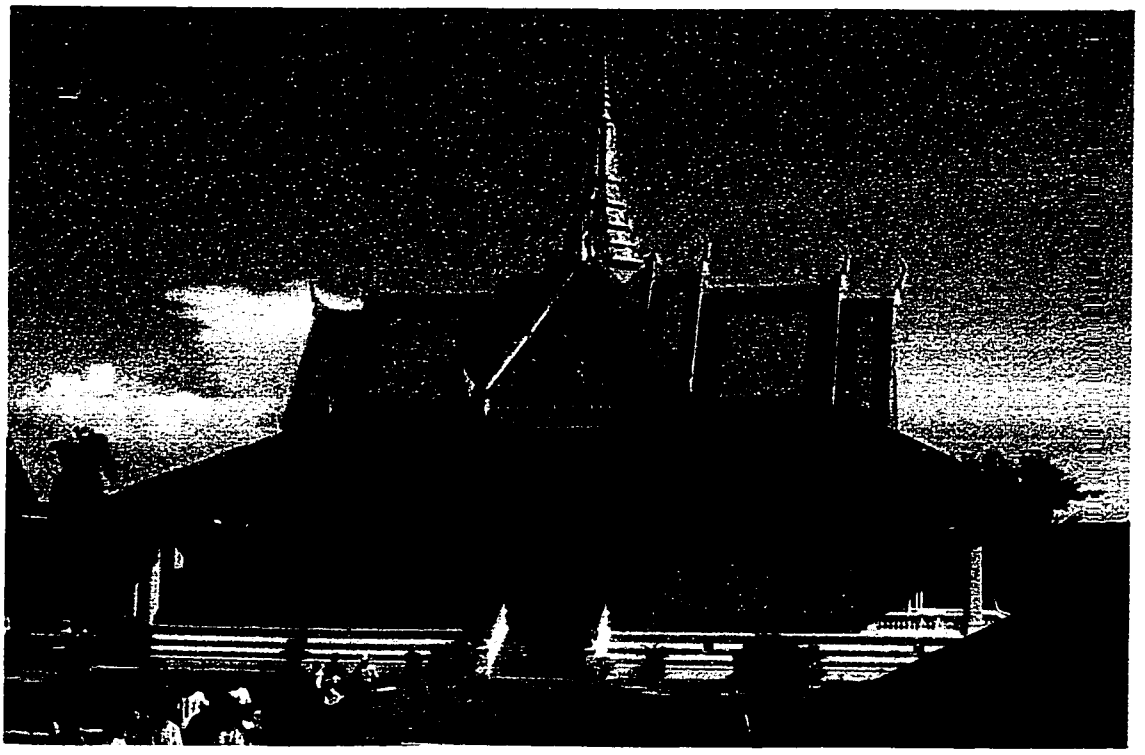
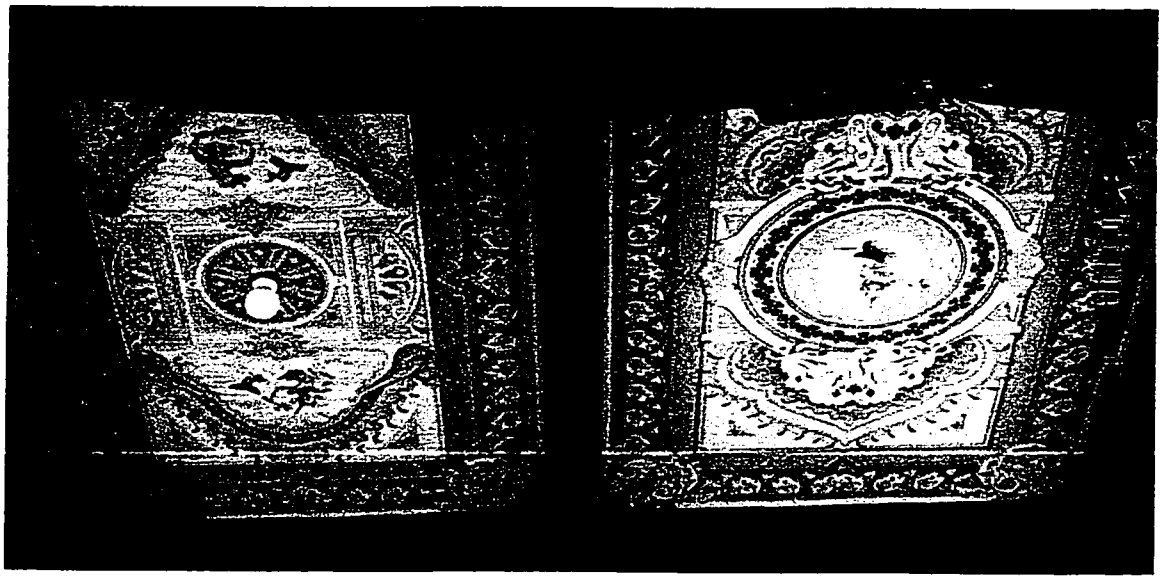


Figure 12
Above: Exterior of the Salle des Fêtes (ភោជនីយសិល្ប:)
Below: Ceiling detail, paintings by Lamorte



the most however. The new building, Ménétrier wrote, was "built in the most pure Cambodian style" and its platform was "decorated with very beautiful Khmer paintings owing to the brush of M. Lamorte" (figure 12).[63] Ethno-national style was thus dislodged from the identity of the painter so that "Khmer paintings" and Cambodian style could flow from the plans and brushes of French nationals.

The following year, a new Salle des Danses (ច័ន្ទចាយ៉ា) was built in "reinforced concrete with decorations inspired by Khmer art".[64] Construction began in February 1913 and the hall was completed by January 1914 (Figure 13). As with the Salle des Fêtes, "workers of Cambodian art from the Royal Palace" would complete the decorative moldings "following maquette models and approximate details" provided by the construction firm of Richaud and Papa. The interior paintings and decorations of the Dance Hall would be entrusted to "European artists" approved by the King. The commission for the ceiling paintings depicting Cambodian dancers and scenes from the *Reamker*, was given to Augustin Carrera in March of 1913.[65] The paintings were to be painted on large canvases in Paris and then retouched on site in

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[63] E. Ménétrier. "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok a Pnom-Penh" Revue Indochinois #10 (October 1912), p.341. The inauguration of the Salle des Fêtes took place on September 10, 1912.

[64] Letter from the RSC to the GGI, October 4, 1914 [NAC #23706 (RSC)]. The jury met in December 1912 to pick the winning bid [NAC #10204 (RSC)]. Subsequent quotes are from NAC #10204 (RSC).

[65] Contract dated March 4, 1913 [NAC #9755 (RSC)]. The commission listed thirteen ceiling niches to be painted. The large central ceiling painting was to depict the "transformation of the warriors of Indrajit into angels and dancers". Six side niches framed by ornaments were to depict Cambodian dancers in particular poses, some surrounded by other figures. Two additional niches would portray celestial dancers while shaped panels would add "ornamental decoration" to the ensemble. A final panel at the front of the hall would show the Bayon. These paintings still decorate the hall today.

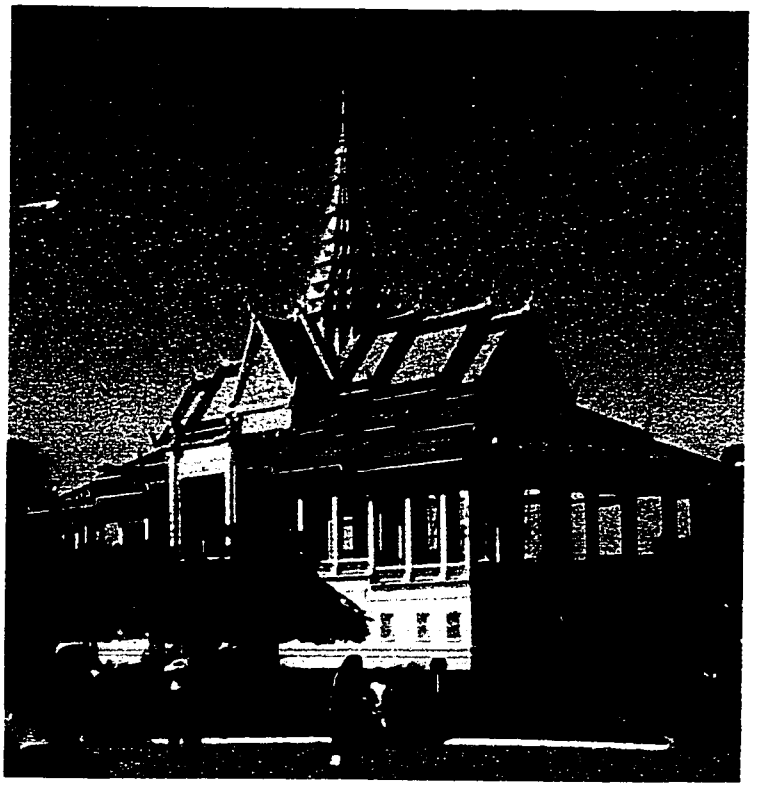

Figure 13

Above: Exterior of the Salle des Danses (ប័ន្ធចាយ៉ា)

Below: Interior view of the ceiling with paintings by Carrera



order to fit their tones to the architectural setting (figure 13).[66] Sketches were approved on March 18, 1913 by a committee which included Thiounn, Oknha Tep Nimit Mak, as well as four other French administrators.[67] Later reports noted that the finished paintings were already rolled and sent for shipping to Marseilles by January 1915. The war interceded however and Carrera was mobilized while the paintings remained rolled in Marseilles for another ten years. They finally arrived in Phnom Penh in 1925 and were approved by a committee including Stoeckel and Thiounn.[68]

We might ask then what had happened in all this to Oknha Tep Nimit Mak, painter and "architect of the Palace" (as the French continued to call him despite having replaced him with their own architects, engineers, construction companies, and painters).[69] On April 1st, 1913, the Head Engineer for Public Works wrote to the RSC attaching a schematic plan for the new Salle des Danses and explaining that "the architect of His Majesty" would prepare "Cambodian molds" as architectural details

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[66] NAC #9755 (RSC). All subsequent references to the Carrera commission are taken from this file.

[67] The committee changed the color of the eight-headed elephant of the central panel to white in keeping with its iconography which Carrera obviously didn't know. It is somewhat shocking today to see the yeaks and apsaras rendered by a French painter working in Paris from quick snapshots and limited knowledge. Odd details such as an inexplicable garland of geese creep into the indigenous iconography.

[68] NAC #9755 (RSC). The central panel has a visible signature with the dates 1913-6. It is difficult to get permission to photograph these paintings and the photograph included here is taken from outside the palace wall. My students at the Department of Plastic Arts did not necessarily believe the history I have related here until we went to look at the paintings. Only when they saw the Carrera signature in the middle canvas did they recognize the paintings, and the Palace in general, as anything other than the essence of "Khmer art" which they are promoted as today.

[69] See Groslier, Recherches sur les Cambodgiens (1921) p.399.

"to be submitted for approval before any commencement of work".[70] A series of letters from Thiounn to the RSC kept him abreast of the progress of Tep Nimit Mak's "supplementary ornaments in reinforced cement", describing their details and repeatedly asking for permission to proceed.[71] In other words, the designs even for the incidental detailing were no longer in the hands of the royal "masters" who had simply become minor executors of French plans. In his speech at the opening ceremony for the Salle des Fêtes, RSC Outrey had praised "that admirable artist Lamorte... who has been the real introducer of our decorative art to this country".[72] "I should no longer neglect", the RSC continued, "to mention to Your Majesty the name of the Cambodian architect of your Palace who has been the drafter and executor of all the sculpted motifs which ornament so elegantly the exterior facades of this pleasing building". Curiously enough, after such a prelude, the RSC never mentioned Oknha Tep Nimit Mak by name in his speech. As to the "decorative" and "Khmer" paintings of Lamorte, it is certainly retrospectively ironic that decorative art would need to be "introduced" to a country whose people were so often characterized by their colonial keepers as inherently "decorative".[73]

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[70] "Construction et décoration du Salle de Danse (Chan Chhaya), Palais Royal 1913-1927" [NAC #9755 (RSC)]. This file includes the Thiounn letters mentioned in what follows.

[71] Letter from December 29, 1913 [NAC #9755 (RSC)]. Tep Nimit Mak's cement ornaments were described as "following the proposition of the Engineer charged with the construction of the said Salle" in a December 10, 1913 letter. Tep Nimit Mak himself wrote on July 22, 1913 requesting payment for the balustrades "commissioned by Birabin, Engineer of Richaud and Papa".

[72] Outrey's speech is reproduced in E. Ménétrier. "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok a Pnom-Penh" Revue Indochinois #10 (October 1912).

[73] On the Khmer as inherently decorative, see for example, Henri Marchal, "L'art cambodgien moderne" Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises de Saigon #65 (2nd

At approximately the same time as the Salle des Fêtes and the Dance Hall, a new Throne Hall (ទិវាវិនិច្ឆ័យ) was being built for King Sisowath by the Société Cochinchinoise de Béton arme (reinforced concrete).[74] The same scenario was repeated. The competition prospectus explained that "His Excellency, the Minister of the Palace will graciously intervene to indicate to the Entrepreneur, Cambodian workers [who can be used] in view of producing a work of Khmer art": "Cambodian molds / decorations will be executed under the direction and the responsibility of the entrepreneurs by the Cambodian artisans of the Royal Palace".[75] While the ceiling paintings for the Throne Hall were charged to a French company in Saigon which "employed exclusively Annamite labor", the paintings on the far wall of the new Throne Hall were commissioned from François de Marliave, holder of the Prix d'Indochine.[76] The subject of his work was again to be the *Reamker* and Marliave

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semester, 1913) Saigon, p.72 : "the Cambodian is before all else and especially a decorator". This natural impulse to decorate spills out all over the country: temples, carts, clothing, and even the sand of prison yards provide surfaces for decoration since, for "the Cambodians", "everything is a pretext for decoration and ornamentation". I can only note here in passing how this double structure relates to larger debates of the "decorative" and the "modern". The decorative was cast out of international modernism and thus is assignment to Cambodia ensures the country's location in the past. But this was not enough as the RSC's comments show. Not only does the "decorative" become an inherent characteristic of "the Khmer" but it is introduced there, paradoxically, by a Frenchman.

[74] Report by the Engineer, April 25, 1914 [NAC #23706 (RSC)]

[75] Competition prospectus, printed 1914 [NAC #23706 (RSC)] and Proces verbal, October 11,1913 [NAC #23706 (RSC)].

[76] FAI, p.184 and NAC #17661 (RSC). All subsequent references to the de Marliave commission are taken from this file. Today, the guards at the Palace are firmly convinced that not only are the ceiling paintings utterly "Khmer" but that they were painted by Oknha Tep Nimit Mak. A similar amnesia haunts a recent coffee table book on the Palace which is littered with colonial photographs but which writes out the history of the buildings as French-Khmer concoctions. See Julio Jeldres & Somkid Chaijitvanit, The Royal Palace of Phnom Penh and Cambodian Royal Life (Bangkok: Post Books, 1999).

would again develop his sketches and complete the paintings in Paris.[77] In a letter thanking the RSC for his hospitality during a stay in Phnom Penh, Marliave promised to "remain as much as possible within the character of the tradition". A subsequent letter from the painter transmitting the first set of sketches, suggested that eventually "gold highlights" should be added to the headdresses and clothing of the figures in order to bring the paintings "closer to Cambodian taste".[78] Despite these efforts, Marliave's sketches do not seem to have been entirely acceptable to the designers of the Palace since the French architect for the project wrote back to the painter requesting that he reconsider the dark tonality of his pictures and suggesting that he return to Phnom Penh in order to "study the paintings of the *Reamker* in the Palace" (Tep Nimit Mak goes unnamed). These paintings, the architect suggested, might offer more accurate models for "the poses of your characters and the details of costume indispensable for exactly rendering your subjects of decoration". The architect closed his letter by reiterating the importance that "the different buildings that we are constructing in the Palace be treated in the same way from a decorative point of view"; thus "every effort is made to conserve in their decoration the essential characteristics of Cambodian art". On April 10, 1914, de Marliave sent a set of new

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[77] Scenes were to include: "the crossing of the sea by the army of monkeys"; the "extinction of the sacred fire, guarded by the goddess Surya, by the arrow of Preah Ream"; and the "transformation of the soldiers of the army of Andrajit into devadas and dancers". André-Pallois interprets the fact that a French painter came to paint the theme of the *Reamker* as "a good example of cultural exchange": "it is no longer a matter of seeking to promote the French empire" but rather of "putting a local tradition first"(p.99). My account instead tries to trace the power relations through which the keepers of Cambodian style were no longer Palace "masters" but became French painters and planners.

[78] NAC #17661 (RSC). All subsequent references to the de Marliave commission are taken from this file.

sketches to the RSC, writing that he hoped they would please "more than the first, as I have scrupulously conformed myself to the character of the Cambodian murals".

From the trajectory of commissions traced above, we can see that it is inaccurate to say, as Groslier often did, that it was the "Khmer aristocracy" who abandoned its artisans, at least in the context of the Palace, that quintessential example of "Cambodian style". Rather, from the turn of the century until the time Groslier took over the School, the palace "masters" were systematically excluded from public commissions and Palace projects. It was a history which Groslier would conveniently leave out of his reading of crisis. This is all the more surprising since Groslier himself was implicated in the painting of the Palace. And through his later change of heart, we can come to see the fundamental principles which would shape his reformed School.

Groslier had made several painting and research trips to the land of his birth prior to his permanent return in 1917. While he spent most of his time at Angkor, painting and photographing the ruins, Groslier was also present in Phnom Penh at times it seems.[79] In February 1914, the RSC signed a contract with Groslier to paint scenes for the Throne Hall but "only for the paintings that have not been confided to de Marliave".[80] The contract called for "a decorative ensemble" of three large paintings, one on Brahmanism, one on Buddhism, and one "establishing the relation

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[79] For an account of Groslier's activities, see the recommendation written for him by the President of the Cambodian committee of the Société d'Angkor pour la Conservation des Monuments Anciens de l'Indochine in NAC #2007 (RSC).

[80] See NAC #17661 (RSC). All subsequent references to the Groslier contract are from this file.

between the two"(figure 14). The work itself was seemingly to be painted in France, but the contract allowed for a round-trip passage from Marseilles to Phnom Penh so that Groslier could check the "tonalities" of the work within "the interior architectural ensemble".[81]

Although de Marliave's sketches were officially accepted on July 31, 1914, Groslier and Silice (who would become Groslier's vice-director in 1918 and later became the second director of the School of Cambodian Arts in the 1920s) continued to jockey for the commission, especially after de Marliave was mobilized for the War. In a March 2, 1915 letter, the architect for the Throne Hall noted that André Silice, "a painter and holder of the Indochine prize", had come to see him about the possibility of taking over the de Marliave commission.[82] The architect suggested that de Marliave had probably been killed in the war and that his contract could thus legally be dissolved. Noting that the money already paid to de Marliave was probably lost and that Silice was willing to do all the work simply for the remaining one third, the architect ventured the opinion that it would be of no risk to accept Silice's proposition, provided his work was of "a sufficient artistic value", something the architect hastened to add he had no qualifications to judge. Asking the RSC for permission to commission sketches from Silice, the architect made no mention of the

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[81] The contract explained that the relatively high price of the proposed Groslier paintings was due to the fact that the work would use "none of the conventional motifs" of Carrera's commissions (possibly decorative commissions other than the paintings in the Dance Hall described above). In addition, Groslier's paintings would be "entirely realized by Groslier" and would "provide the clear pictorial work necessary to frame the throne". For the further ranglings over the contract and Groslier's attempt to take over Marliave's space see NAC #17661 (RSC) and Figure 14.

[82] NAC #17661 (RSC).

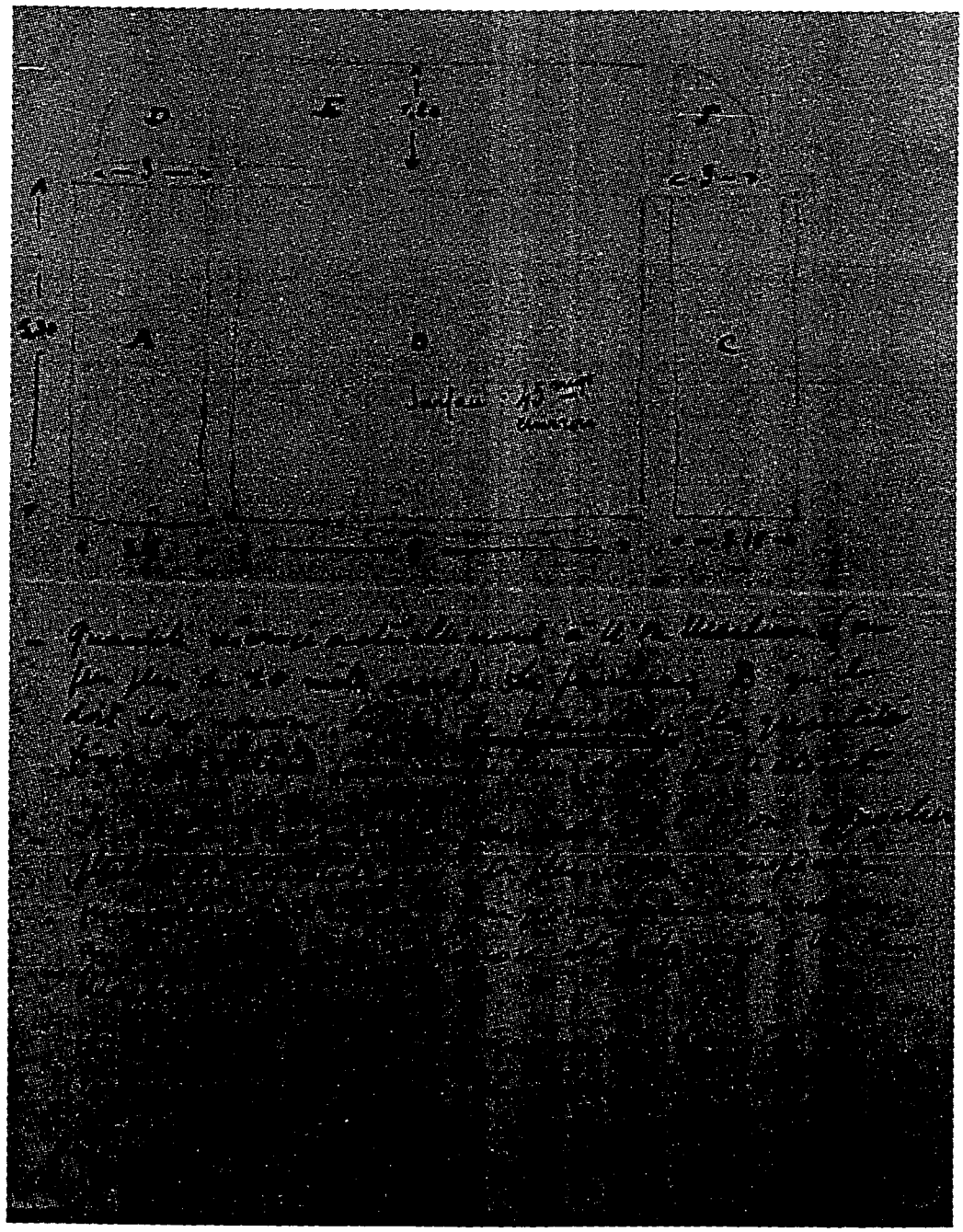

Figure 14

Groslier sketch of the wall area of the Throne Hall to be covered by the de Marliave commission and his own proposed paintings.

[NAC #17661 (RSC)]

supposed Groslier contract nor did anything ever seemingly come out of the proposed Silice commission. Although de Marliave re-appeared in France, alive and well after the war, the commission was eventually abandoned and today, the walls where the proposed paintings should have been placed are simply covered with decorative stenciling.

Groslier had already approached the Royal Palace once before. In October 1911, during one of his early painting and research missions, Groslier wrote to the King, explaining that "having dedicated many months of steady work to your Cambodia, of which I am the first French baby and where my father has passed twenty years of his career as administrator, I would like to be able to say upon returning to France that I have been noticed and encouraged by a King who is a friend of Art".[83] Asking permission to paint the King's portrait, Groslier noted that Sisowath's descendants, "following your generous example", would treasure the idea of a portrait gallery "of the rulers of Cambodia" of which "this portrait will be the first" and for which the King "will have given the idea and will have the honor of having created it". Permission for the portrait was granted but King Sisowath was apparently away at the time and we do not know if the portrait was ever painted.[84]

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[83] NAC #2007 (RSC). All subsequent references in the paragraph are to this file.

[84] The idea for this portrait gallery later haunts Groslier as he attempted to procure objects from the Palace collection for his new museum in the early 1920s. Although Groslier himself claimed that the Palace was in "complete agreement" with his Museum, correspondence from the RSC's office clearly stated that: "the King does not wish that anything belonging to the Palace be able to leave even temporarily" (the issue had already been raised through requests to borrow objects from the Palace collections for early Exhibitions abroad). Instead, just recently (i.e. during the course of the building of Groslier's Museum), the King had "expressed the wish" to make his own Museum within the Palace in the Ho-Préa-Roup, the "building of statues and portraits which presently serves the Ministry and where the offices of the secretary of accounting for the Royal Palace are found".

Between these early forays into painting "Cambodian style" commissions, and his takeover of the art school, Groslier appears to have changed his mind.[85] In the 1920s, he would write that it was in fact official examples of culture like the Royal Palace which had greatly contributed to the decline of the "Cambodian arts". Setting "an example from on high", the new Palace buildings had only served to "lure" the aristocracy away from their traditional wooden homes, causing them to build villas of concrete with "ornaments in stucco or cement".[86] "Not a single sculptor, not a single carpenter, in short not a single Cambodian artisan" had been involved in the construction of the Palace buildings, Groslier lamented: "all had been confided to European architects and entrepreneurs".[87] That such hybrid buildings became models

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Renamed the "Museum of the Royal Palace", the building was to display "the statues and portraits of the Kings of Cambodia, those of the royal family, the Ministers and the Mandarins who have rendered eminent service to the Kingdom". As the Palace Minister Thiounn put it pointedly, "this creation of a Museum fits well with the desire of the deceased King who had built this building in the intention of putting there the portraits of the Kings of Cambodia". See correspondance in NAC #9076 (RSC).

[85] I hope that through my detailed descriptions it will be clear that my project provides one particular example of what can more generally be called the complexity of colonialism. Colonial policies were rarely univocal or unchanging. Even within one person, as we see here, a dramatic shift in understanding can occur over time. In thinking through the complexities of the colonial encounter I am indebted to the work of Nicholas Thomas, especially his discussion of postcolonial theory in Colonialism's Culture.

[86] FAI, p.184. Showing the curious seduction by which the old becomes the authentic, Groslier declared that the previous Throne Hall had "not [had] a single foreign hand touching it"(FAI, p.184) while the previous Salle des Danses was "the most pure architectural jewel which the Palace still had"(Ag, p.550). What Groslier had conveniently forgotten was that these old and "pure" Palace buildings were in fact also colonial concoctions through which earlier French architects and Khmer authorities had engineered suitably regal Cambodian palaces. As Penny Edwards has described, French plans and foreign materials produced buildings in a "Cambodian style". See Edwards, p.83.

[87] FAI, p.184. This statement is curious since Groslier came to work closely with Oknha Tep Nimit Mak from 1918-24 at the School. Either Mak himself considered his input into the buildings as less than "involvement", or Groslier simply wrote out the anonymous Cambodian workers who labored to actually make the planned structures.

for later art was due to an "ignorant" public, Groslier added, which allowed "good-willed but badly enlightened" European architects to get away with such follies.[88] No longer knowing their own traditions, the Cambodian public ceased to demand correctness. The bronze sculptures of dancers, for example, inaccurately represented classical gestures by following the "harmful influence" of "certain motives of decorative painting"(PC, p.262). The "decorative painting" which these mistaken efforts made use of were none other than Lamorte's and Carrera's "Cambodian style" commissions, conveniently located in the Palace where the "masters" of the Royal workshops could study them on a daily basis. It seems that once such "Cambodian style" images began to be produced by the hands of Cambodian "masters", they were deemed inauthentic and distorted, corrupting a prior purity to which there was no longer access except through French research.

This was not to say, Groslier noted, that French influence on the Royal workshops had always been so destructive.[89] Already in the 17th century, through official visitors and their gifts, or through the passage of merchants, examples of trinkets and furnishings in Louis XIV style had entered the region we today call Cambodia,

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[88] Ag, p.550. Groslier himself drew the plans and oversaw construction of the buildings for the Albert Sarraut Museum and the School of Cambodian Arts.

[89] Foreign influences had always come to Cambodia, Groslier noted. One could even say, Groslier wrote, that Cambodia was founded on combining different strands of influence (that of Brahmanic India with preexisting local religions) and that this "continuous exchange of traditions, assimilated, juxtaposed or refused" - this "constant rejuvenation" and "regime of impregnation and successive births" - was the quintessential character of Cambodian art (TC, p.267). As Nora Taylor has recently pointed out in her dissertation on 20th century Vietnamese art, there is a larger framework of Southeast Asian hybridity through which elements of the "foreign" were continually localised and incorporated into existing indigenous traditions."(p. 19). Official policy at Groslier's School would come to firmly reject such incorporations however.

particularly affecting the workshops of the Royal Palace. "Influenced by these models", the Royal ateliers of the 18th and 19th centuries introduced French decorative elements ("roses, bases of acanthus leaves") into their works (psyI, p.136). "Let us not make a mistake here", Groslier added (psyI, p.137). It was only because of the analogies and deep resonances between the floral patterning of Louis XIV style and Cambodian ornament that these adaptations worked. They were "only accepted because they found a corresponding motif in Khmer aesthetics" and could be "usefully incorporated" into existing Cambodian art, "completing it, varying it without affecting its meaning, its national principles, and its free expression"(psyI, p.137).[90] These "new elements" taken from abroad did not affect "the forms, nor the proportions, nor the general aspect of the works; they didn't replace anything which thus became absent"(psyI, p.137). Instead, secured to ancient indigenous foundations, the foreign elements "submitted to finishing touches" which "harmonized them" into Cambodian "supports" and Khmer "surroundings"(psyI, p.137). In contrast, the Palace workshops of 1917 had, for Groslier, become sites of wholesale copying and complete decadence. As he derisively described it, in the workshops of 1917 one found artisans "copying the plate of man from the illustrated Larousse" and designing "furniture for the Palace from [French] catalogues"(CQ, p.89).

In Groslier's account of things then, a Palace filled with decadence joined a countryside in decay. "Artists grow old", "most have no students" and "each day we

aid in a new disappearance: yesterday it was gilding, sampots, dances - today it is foundry and architecture - tomorrow it will be sculpture. The situation is grave, more dire than I know how to say"(Ag, p.557). Rediscovering three aging and supposedly unemployed artisans, Groslier exclaimed excitedly: "Voilà! Three specialists who are taking their last breaths! There could be others! To the rescue!"(Ag, p.559). As we shall see in the next chapter, through Groslier's "rescue", the School of Cambodian Arts was founded to "nurture" the future while the Museum Albert Sarraut was established to "conserve" the past (I, p.20, Groslier). Housed together in a single complex, students simply had to "cross a courtyard" in order to study from "concrete examples" of "expressive forms" while the very presence of "indigenous pedagogy... without any Western influence" would ensure the continuation of the best of Khmer art (E, p.2). "Native masters" were recruited, students were assembled, and instruction proceeded within a "sanctuary" administered by the French (E, p.3).

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[90] Groslier gave as an example the Louis XIV console, still found in the Palace at the time of his writing which was an "admirable" piece, "of very pure style, and of an uncontestable authenticity"(psyI, p.136).

Chapter Two: The Rescue

"As soon as art begins to issue forth from a mold, it is no longer art. One can pour Notre Dame de Paris into a mold and reproduce it a hundred times but we cannot say that the French art of the 12th to 14th centuries has thereby perpetuated itself" [1]

The School of Cambodian Arts, established in 1918, was really the Palace workshops "placed under the authority of a French director, chosen and named with [the Palace's] agreement by the Administration of the Protectorate".[2] The French-directed School remained within the workshop area of the Palace until its new building complex was completed in April 1920. As the first director, Groslier quickly established several assistant positions for Europeans. Already in January 1918, Jean Stoeckel was considered a "collaborateur" of the School, while the painter André Silice officially joined the administration a year later.[3] An "indigenous" administration was installed under Groslier and his assistants, with Tep Nimit Mak (the Palace architect)

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[1] George Groslier, "Contemporary Cambodian Art studied in the light of its past forms", Eastern Art, ed. Jayne & Warner, College Art Association, Philadelphia, 1930, p.127.

[2] Royal Ordinance December 14, 1917, reprinted in Recueil des Actes du Gouvernement Cambodgien 1920, Imprimerie Nouvelle Albert Portail. A ceremony laying the first stone of the complex which would hold the newly reorganised School and its proposed compliment, the Museum, was held on August 15th, 1917. See NAC #5603 (RSC).

[3] European personnel seem to have been divided into technical personnel (recruited from among established French artists recognized either by three acceptances to Salons, or "from among personalities whose work and previous production attests to an undeniable knowledge of the arts and history of Indochina"), and administrative personnel (recruited from the general pool of colonial civil servants). Stoeckel was an independently wealthy friend of Groslier while Silice was a painter with a good background in Chinese and Japanese arts. Stoeckel's first "mission" for the School was a 1918 study tour of "craft techniques" and their development in France. He officially became one of the two assistant directors of the School in January of 1920. See NAC #8330, 11887 (RSC) and CQ, p.106.

as the "indigenous director".[4] The existing ateliers of the Palace workshops were slightly reconfigured to, as Groslier put it, "correspond to the arts" as "practiced in Cambodia". The resulting ateliers were: 1. "Drawing" (dessin) and "architecture", 2. Modeling in wax and clay (which included pottery and mold making), 3. Foundry, 4. Jewelery (silver-smithing, gem-setting, damascene, enamel on metal), 5. Cabinet-making (including the lacquering and gilding of furniture), and 6. Weaving.[5] The first five ateliers were exclusively for male students and teachers, while the atelier of weaving was exclusively for female teachers and students.

Each atelier was headed by a "master", "chosen by the Europeans".[6] Despite this description, most of the heads of the ateliers, as well as their students, were simply transferred from the Palace workshops and continued on in re-named positions at the re-figured School.[7] Groslier used descriptions of a decrepit and decadent Palace workshop to promote his takeover. In one of his accounts he claimed, for example,

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[4] Royal Ordonnance, December 14, 1917. The "native" administrative personnel also included a director of the storeroom and sales area, an accountant and a typist .

[5] RSC Baudoin's report to the GGI, April 13, 1922 [NAC#11886 (RSC)]. The only real change to the existing Palace workshops was to establish a separate furniture-making atelier while incorporating ivory sculpture into the general sculpture atelier. Advanced students in the atelier of "dessin" trained to become "traditional painters" as well.

[6] George Groslier, "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[7] From the remaining personnel files in the NAC, we can ascertain that at least five of the original six ateliers was headed by an artisan from the Palace workshops. Personnel transferred to the School in early 1918 (with the year they entered service in the Palace if known or a ? if unknown) included: atelier of dessin: Tep Nimit Mak (1889), Men Im (1894); atelier of weaving: Tep Yem (?); atelier of jewellery: Manh Phoeuk (1904), Nhem (?), Noun Ou (?); atelier of carpentry: Ouk Nhem (1904), Rath Mao (1897); atelier of foundry: Men Chay (1893). In addition, Menh Ek, the storeroom manager and accountant in the Royal Palace since 1901, continued in that capacity at the newly re-figured school. Pech Ros, employed in the Palace since 1895, soon became the head of a separate atelier of lacquer making and Lim Pen, a worker in the Palace since 1885, headed the atelier of mask-making. See NAC #6062, #7151, #7244, #7245, #8336, #11124, #11126, #11127, #11128 (RSC).

that the workshops had virtually ceased training and that "only ten students ...of whom the eldest was 16" could be found there in 1917.[8] Letters from Thiounn at the time of Groslier's take over, as well as a diagram charting the transition, sharply contradict these claims. In one letter Thiounn suggested seven "skilled and willing jewelers" as possible teachers for the jewelery atelier alone, while providing lists of 27 "youths between the ages of 10 and 29" who wished to enter as apprentices in the atelier of "dessin" (figures 15, 16).[9]

Groslier himself preferred to emphasize the continuity between his School and the practices of the countryside, that "repository" of tradition. He described the newly re-figured school as a simple transplantation of the relations of apprenticeship once found in artisanal family workshops of the countryside. A state stipend and a dormitory replaced the usual lodging of the apprentice in the workshop, but the "familial feeling", the "frame, the milieu, the language [and] the methods" all remained the same.[10] The heads of the ateliers were encouraged to "practice their art freely as if they were at their own home", teaching "as they had learned it themselves"(R1925). Only "local or traditional tools and materials" were to be used and "only the known rules of their ancestors" were to be "applied"; thus training was to return to the way it was "in Cambodia before the arrival of the French"(R1925).

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[8] See R1925 and CQ, p.89 for Groslier's accounts of the Palace Workshops.

[9] Letter from Thiounn to the RSC, May 18, 1917 [NAC #8342 (RSC)].

[10] NAC #17503 (RSC) and PsyI, p.134. In addition to the elite training offered by the Palace workshops, artisans had traditionally learned their skills either in the vat (common for painters, architects, and sculptors) or in private mostly familial ateliers ("Gilders, lacquerers, jewelers, casters, potters, and weavers"). Skills were often passed down within extended families all living around the area of making. See PsyI, p.126-127.

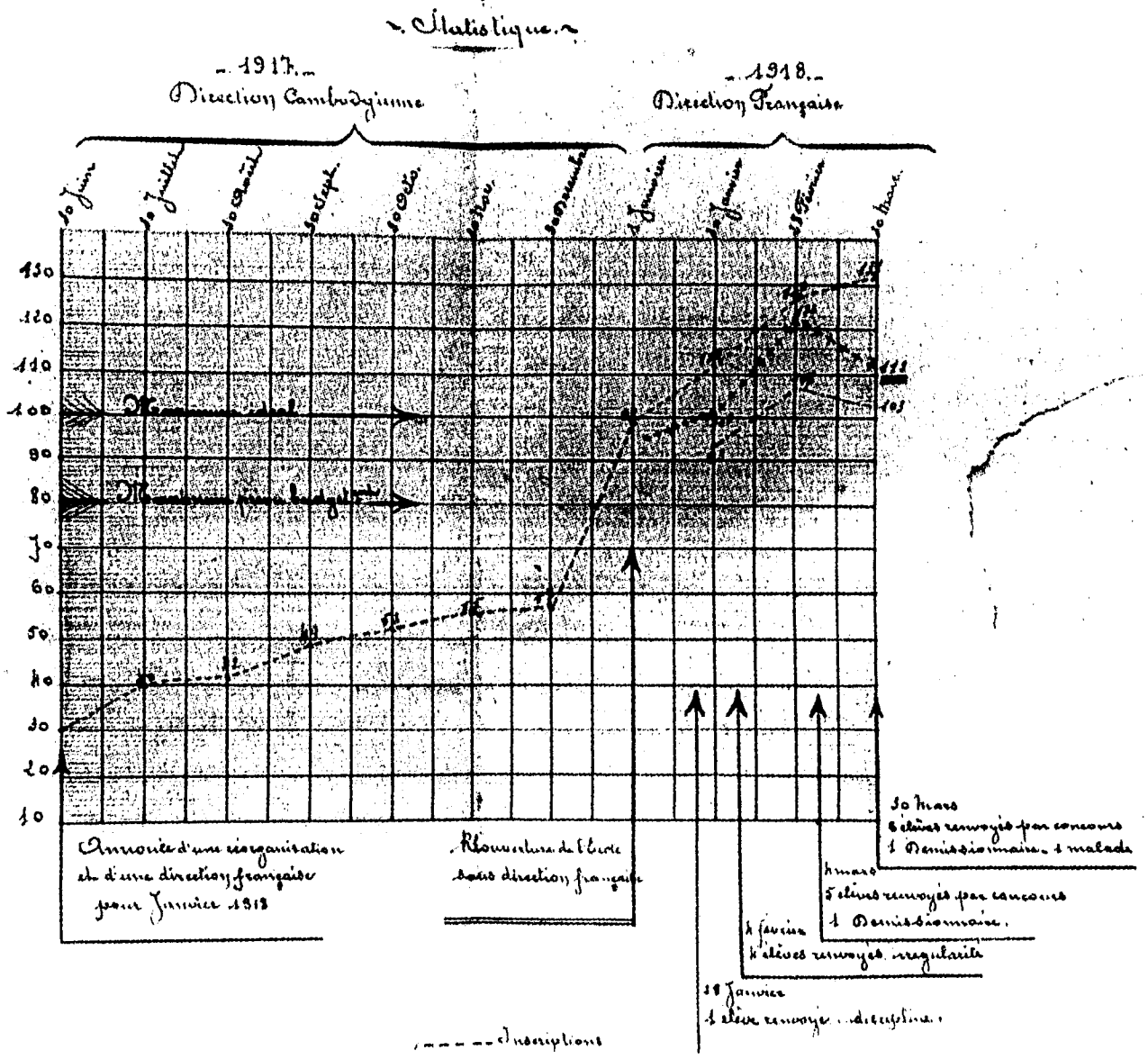

Figure 15

Chart diagramming the transition from a Cambodian to a French administration for the School of Cambodian Arts, 1918

NAC #394 (RSC)

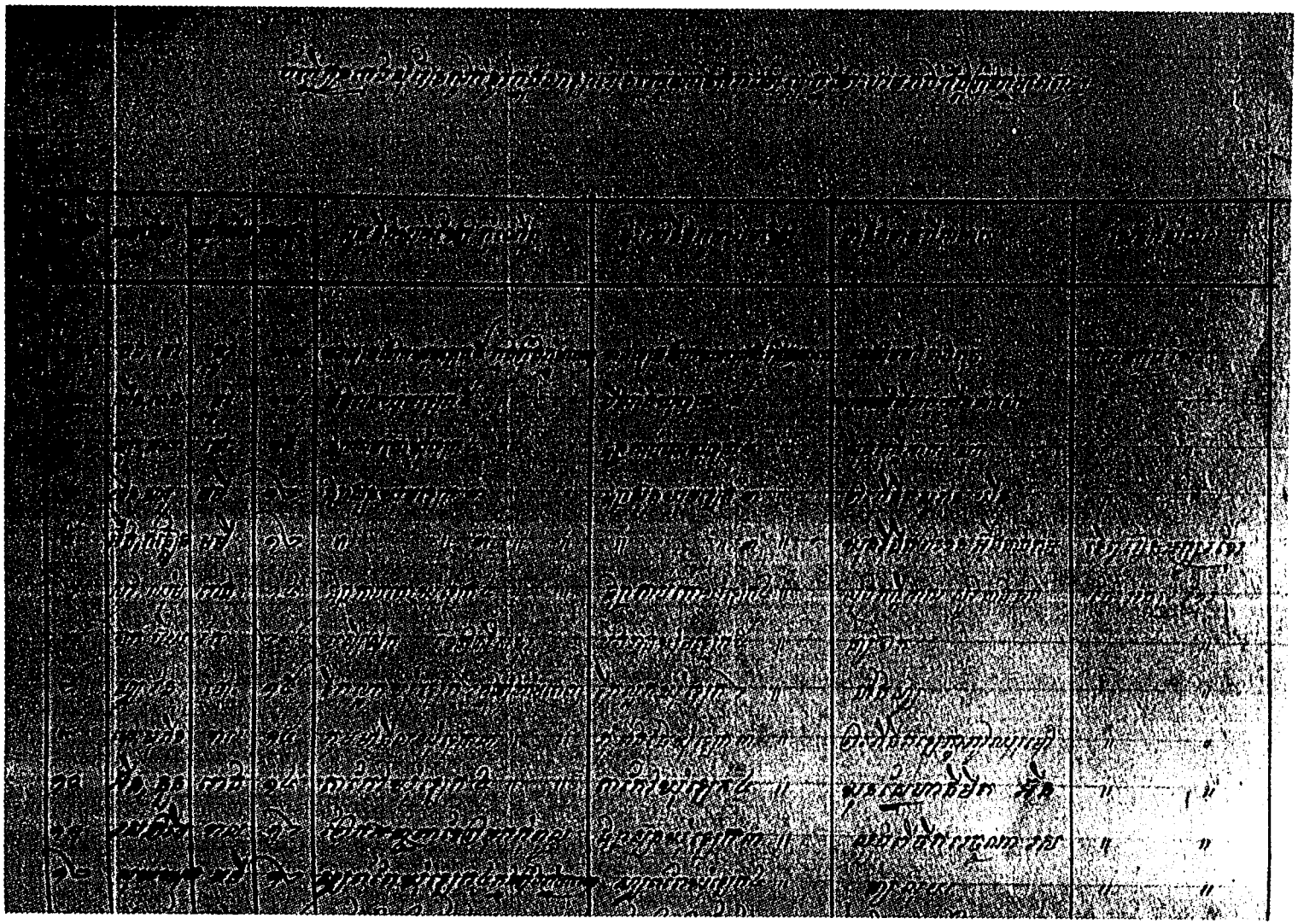

Figure 16 : Thiounn's list of students requesting admission to the School of Cambodian Arts, 1917 (partial view)

NAC #8342 (RSC)

The one restriction placed upon these "masters" was that they "purge all Western influence" from their teaching (psyI, p.134).

Now it might seem a curious mandate for a School so deliberately brought under French control to insist that all Western influence be purged. As Groslier described it, the role of the Protectorate was to "administer" a "sanctuary", providing a "very unobtrusive" oversight which "respected from above all the Cambodianisms and the personality of the art taken in hand"(E, p.2-3). The incredibility of a supposedly unintrusive position "above" is underscored by the repeated insistence with which this policy was spelled out. "We don't expand on the pedagogical methods of the [Cambodian] master", Groslier declared: "No change is to be brought to their habits, their working methods, or the materials they use"(TE, p.27; E, p.3). The Protectorate does not "make itself felt in the interior of the system" and "no one [has] ceased to speak or act Cambodian"(E, p.2). Foreign administrators worked simply to "suppress" forces assaulting the "art taken in charge", thus opening a space for "pure" Cambodian art to be freely practiced, "safe from French influence and naturally following the evolution of [this] people"(E, p.2; TE, p.26-7). Despite his own training as a painter, Groslier would never teach at the school. "I am not Khmer", he declared, and the "fundamental principle" of the School was "only to make Cambodian art and only to have it be made by Cambodians".[11] The doctrine of the "impenetrable sphere" of pure "Cambodian art" is shown clearly by the absence of

[11] "I am not Khmer" is quoted from R1925. See also the letter of June 22, 1938 from the Head of the Educational Service to the Director of Public Instruction for Indochina, spelling out this hands-off approach as official policy [NAC #9084 (RSC)].

French personnel in official photos taken of the School and its students shortly after it was put under Groslier and his French colleagues (figures 17, 18).

The Fixing of Form: "Dessin"[12]

But was this "rescue" so innocent after all? For all his protestations of non-interference, Groslier admitted that he and his assistants had not "simply crossed our arms"(R1925). Their initial oversight of the Palace workshops had allowed "inexperienced" (French) personnel to "observe" the "masters" with their students, studying their "temperament" and thus familiarizing themselves with the art "taken in charge."[13] Through these observations, Groslier and his assistants were able to "codify the teaching of Cambodian art as it conformed to the psychology of the master and the student", establishing "albums" of "models" and "fixing forms": "we classify their work, we group their models, sharpen a thousand details, and, leaning over our culture of culture [bouillon de culture], we discuss its actions and reactions. Thus, masked by our apparent discretion and our so-called abstention, we seek our way with religious respect for the arts confided to us.[14] It was in the curious task of "sheltering" while furtively (and not so furtively) shaping, that Groslier found a role "befitting our civilisation and our French administration"(R 1925).

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[12] I translate the French "dessin" and its verb "dessiner" as "drawing" but wish to keep in mind its other inflections of "design" and thus the developing of plans.

[13] Groslier, " Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[14] R1925 and Groslier, "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts" 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].



Figure 17

The School of Cambodian Arts, 1918
Above, teaching personnel and "attached workers"; Below: students

NAC #17503 (RSC)



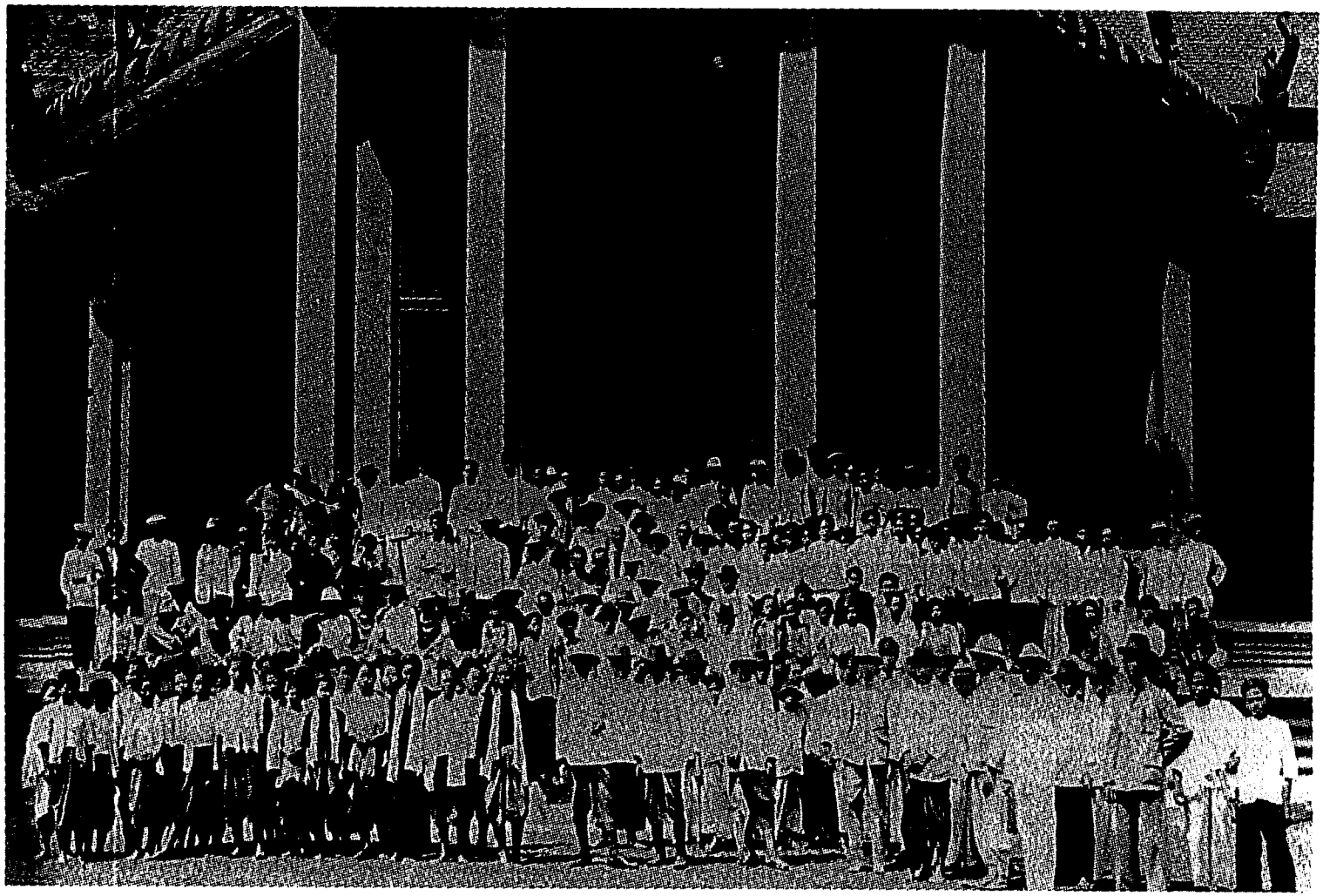

Figure 18 : Teachers, students, and workers of the School of Cambodian Arts and the Albert Sarraut Museum, 1920

Inauguration du Musée Albert Sarraut et de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Protectorat, 1920.

By the time the School moved into its new buildings, the fixing of form had led to the introduction of a crucial change. All students entering the School - except for the weavers and thus the females - began to spend an initial period of study in an atelier of drawing designated in French reports by the term "dessin".[15] Groslier himself acknowledged that this initial drawing course was "the only definite [curricular] action, deliberately taken" by the foreign administration during the first few years of the School's operation.[16] This admission seems to indicate that the notion of studying drawing before becoming a sculptor, a silversmith, or a mask-maker, for example, was not an existing practice and that, prior to the re-organisation of the School in 1917-8, each of these crafts was learned directly through working with a master of them, starting with small practical tasks and gradually being assigned more complicated ones. This is not to say however that there was no indigenous practice of drawing, only that drawing prior to 1918 had perhaps been limited to those intending to become painters of vats and illustrated manuscripts (although perhaps they too simply learned to draw as the preparatory sketch for a painting rather than as an isolated subject, studied exclusively for a period of time before painting).[17] That the

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[15] In Khmer, the atelier was called គំនូរបុរាណ, literally "old" or "ancient painting". This Khmer term has taken on the meanings which Groslier's school instilled. Thus the term is understood today to designate both the kind of drawing I discuss below, as well as traditional painting which follows long established canons of representation.

[16] Groslier, "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[17] The fact that the Khmer language has no separate term for "drawing" would indicate that drawn outlines were considered part of "painting". Even prior to Groslier's intervention, the field of painting might not have been as "pure" and separate from Western forms of representation as we might think. The Palace painter Méas (Chapter One) had after all studied with Mr. Holland, perhaps rendering the awkward bird's eye views of the Palace, dated 1910, now hanging in the upstairs lobby of the National Museum. Bastian, traveling in Siem Reap in late 1863, was given a Sino-Khmer draftsman, Xang Khien, who not only helped the

introduction of a basic drawing course for all students contrasted to traditional training, and was actually perceived as different from the training available in independent ateliers, was confirmed by Silice who noted that the son of a jeweler unaffiliated with the School had requested admission in 1923, although he could have learned jewelery making in his father's house. Artisans, Silice explained, were "little by little desiring to learn to draw (dessiner)".[18]

It is easy to misread the particularity of the kind of drawing which Groslier introduced to his School. When a Westerner reads that study was based on "traditional models emanating from the ancient Khmer monuments" or that "all teaching followed classical models", we tend to assume that this kind of study meant observing and sketching (I, p.2, Baudoin). In Chapter One, I indicated that notions of Cambodia as the land of Angkor seduced the French into assuming that the country should be full of "artists". It is perhaps a similar lure of the monument which leads us to make the easy - but false - link of the famous temples of Angkor to the early School. Thus, for example, Edwards claims that Groslier "led his students on regular visits to Angkor" although no mention of such trips are found in any of the meticulously detailed budgets and annual reports which remain from the School.[19] It

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scholar take rubbings of reliefs and inscriptions but also made plausible sketches (i.e. representational drawings) of various figures and elements of the temples according to Bastian's instructions. See Bastian's Die Geschichte der Indochinese: Reise durch Kamboja nach Cochinchine, vol.4 Jena: Hermann Costennoble, 1868.

[18] "Rapport sur la situation de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens pendant l'année scolaire", 1924 [NAC #763 (RSC)].

[19] Edwards lists her source for this information as Teston and Percheron, the same dubious encyclopedia which cited Groslier's crisis figures of 130 surviving artisans as fact. See Edwards, pg.218. Groslier never had "students" per se although as we shall see, he did teach the teachers. See NAC #17503 (RSC).

was instead, as we shall see, the students from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Hanoi who would paint views of Angkor.[20] Through the curriculum of Groslier's School, a particular and supposedly indigenous form of representation was to be "rescued", thus returning "native" art to its "authentic" pattern of "evolution"(TE, p.26-7). It was precisely the view of Angkor - or any view for that matter - which was prohibited from this system. Despite vague appeals to the monument and its sculptures, the models used for initial training at the School of Cambodian Arts were resolutely two dimensional ones, far from the perspective, light, and shade of a view. Drawing from observation, after nature, was not a "universal", Groslier warned. Rather it was a particular form, "proper for our Latin and Western schools, absolutely conforming to our [French] temperament and to the goals of our art".[21] To introduce such a "foreign aesthetic" into the Cambodian context would be to "block" Cambodian students before they would "know themselves".[22]

It is of course ironic that in order to "know themselves" students would have to study drawing, something which seems not to have been used to train the "authentic" artisans of the past. Indeed, in order to know themselves and produce "pure" Khmer art, students were threaded through a system permeated by French oversight and regulation, despite Groslier's claims to the contrary. "All correction of work", wrote Thiounn in an official memorandum on the teaching methodology to be introduced

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[20] In 1938, students from Hanoi came to paint at Angkor with the donor of the trip, a Mr. Messner. The thirty paintings which they completed were then shown in Phnom Penh at the Salle de Mairie, a venue which would have attracted a primarily foreign audience. See NAC #12268 (RSC).

[21] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]).

[22] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]).

at the newly restructured School, "will be made by the Director of the School [i.e. Groslier] or the Head of the Atelier to the teacher, who will [then] transmit it to the student".[23] In this way, teaching (i.e. the contact of student with masters) was left "pure" and "indigenous" while control - the correcting which determines right and wrong - was kept with those "above". The head of the atelier, Groslier explained, "knows that the administration doesn't keep an eye on the student but rather on him himself [the "master"], and that he will be responsible for all things and that it is to him that complaints will be addressed when a student is at fault".[24]

After its opening in January 1918, the school soon filled with the maximum number of students it could hold and Groslier described ever more applicants at his door.[25] An "aspirant" class of potential students was therefore formed and allowed to

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[23] See the reprint of official ordinances and arrêtés in Arts et Archéologies Khmèrs vol. 1. 1924.

[24] Dossiers of student work were kept by each atelier with each piece of work numbered and dated. At the end of a designated period of study, a group of teachers, with the Director [Groslier], would consider these dossiers for "the quality and quantity of production, the progress [the student] has accomplished and the time which this progress had required". Such a "means of evaluation", Groslier explained, avoided the "precariousness of an exam" and allowed for "an ongoing observation of the whole based on concrete testimony". Such evaluations also fostered an "excellent system" of internal competition which allowed the level of the School to rise without seeming intervention. Less skilled students of the second year class were repeatedly evaluated in relation to the most skilled students of the first year class. Through such comparison, "the student will be pushed by the desire to rise to the higher class, followed by the fear of being overtaken and surpassed by a student of a lower class". See "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)], "Rapport de fin d'année sur le rôle et le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", January 15, 1919, [NAC #17503 (RSC)], "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13, 1922 and the file on the re-titling of personnel, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)] as well as R1925.

[25] An initial limit of eighty students at the School was expanded to 125 by 1920 (see R1925). Once accepted into the School, students received stipends and could live on the grounds. While Groslier claimed that these privileges were not used as "bait" (C, p.873), former students of the School in the 1950s and 1960s remember the stipends and boarding privileges as the primary reason poor young men entered the School. Conversations with Chet Chan, An Sok, Sam Kem Chang 1997-2000.

study in the introductory course of drawing, without receiving any stipend, while waiting for a place to open in the official ranks of the students (R1925). Although Groslier noted the dangers of "inundating the country with artists", he was also keenly aware of the bad publicity which the Protectorate would receive if, "in our role as protectors of indigenous art", too many potential applicants were turned away.[26] The demand for places in the School allowed for continuous pressure on accepted students and the atelier of "dessin", with its mix of aspirants and already accepted students, was described as the largest and most competitive atelier of the School.[27]

The introductory drawing course that Groslier developed, studied "floral and ornamental designs" (presumably the system of Khmer ornaments called ក្បាច់) as well as the application of "the Cambodian canon" to representations of "mythological heroes, the Buddha, and the divinities"(C, p.876). A series of examples were "followed" in the "order of their progressive difficulty".[28] Som Samai, a silversmith who entered the school in the mid-1930s, remembers an instruction almost identical to the one found today in classes of គំនូរបុរាណ or "ancient painting" at the Department of Plastic Arts that has evolved from Groslier's School.[29] Here students learn rules of representation, studying entirely from diagrams hung at the front of the class room

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[26] "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)].

[27] "Rapport de la fin d'année", January 8th, 1923 [NAC #17503 (RSC)].

[28] "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts Cambodgien", September 10, 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)]. See also "Rapport de la fin d'année", 1920 [NAC #8336 (RSC)].

[29] Conversation with Som Samai, March 2000.

(figures 19, 20, 21, 22). The point is to learn the proper proportions (ខ្នាត) and relationships of line in order to eventually be able to render the canonical representation of the ornament or figure without a visual example. In other words, the student is supposed to so absorb the forms presented by repeating them over and over again, that he or she gains fluency in a language of form built out of the progression of examples studied.[30] Within this canon, a distinction perhaps needs to be made between figures and ក្បាច់ (ornaments) (figures 19, 21).

The temples of Angkor have been the primary focus of archaeological and art historical research on Cambodia. While much of this work has concerned itself with accurately mapping the temples, dating them, studying the meaning of their architectural layouts, and considering the techniques by which the temples might have been built (or should be restored), more purely art historical work has focused on the surfaces of the temples and the reliefs found there.[31] Reading up from individually

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[30] Pen Tra, who entered the School of Cambodian Arts in 1947, still remembers the rigorous introduction to "traditional drawing" given to all male students entering the School. Learning proceeded by "making according to" (ធ្វើតាម) examples of simple and later complex ornaments. Tests for competency consisted of giving the students the name of a particular ornament without providing them with the visual example. The degree to which they had absorbed and could reproduce the given traditional form in all its intricate details and proportions determined their level of skill. Conversation with Pen Tra, November 1997.

[31] "Classical" art historical scholarship on Cambodia can be roughly divided into two categories. In the first are the plans, surveys, inscription translations, and early histories produced under the auspices of the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient during the Protectorate. In the second are more recent studies produced over the last twenty years at an increasing distance from the turbulence of recent Cambodian history. These later have tended towards the coffee table variety in the US, towards continued archaeological scholarship in Paris, and towards often excessively scientific restoration studies in Japan. We can look forward to the new research which is beginning to come out of the Department of Archaeology in Phnom Penh and will surely change this landscape considerably. See the recently published Bulletin of the Students of the Department of Archaeology (#1, November 2000, Reyum) for a short description of recent theses 1996-2000.

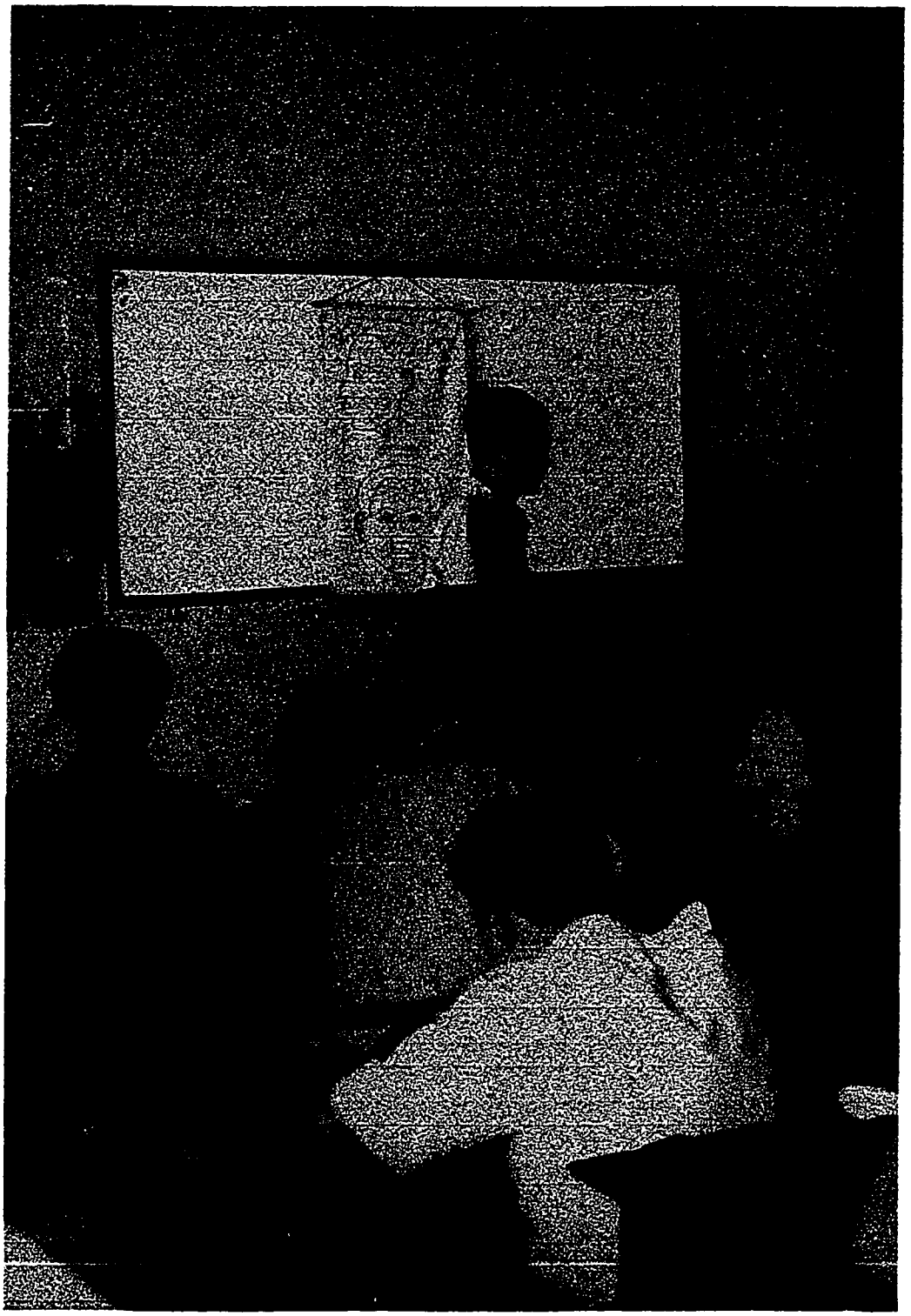

Figure 19
Foundations Drawing Class
Department of Plastic Arts, Royal University of Fine Arts, 1999

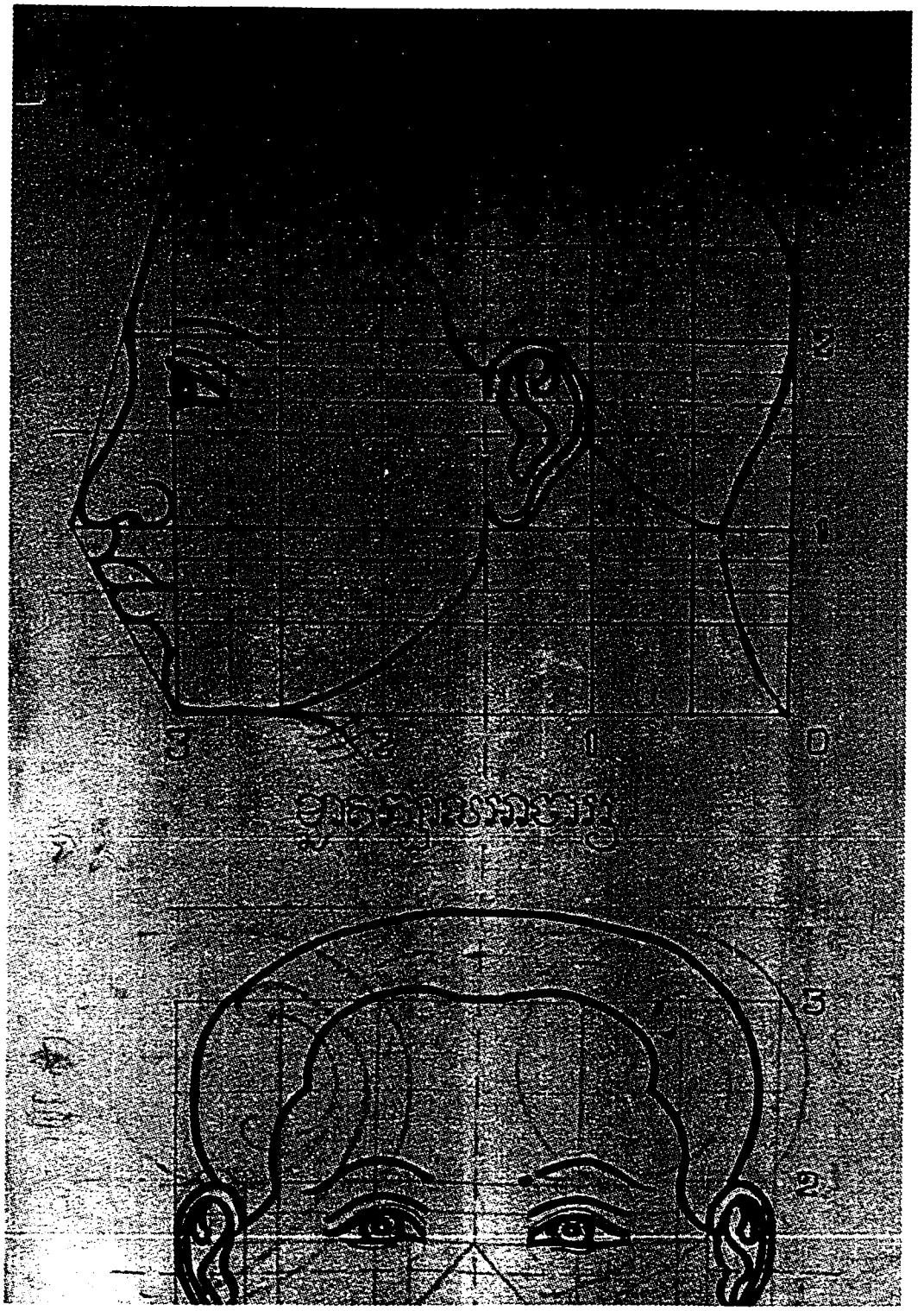

Figure 20
Diagram used for teaching "traditional painting and drawing"
Department of Plastic Arts, Royal University of Fine Arts, 1999

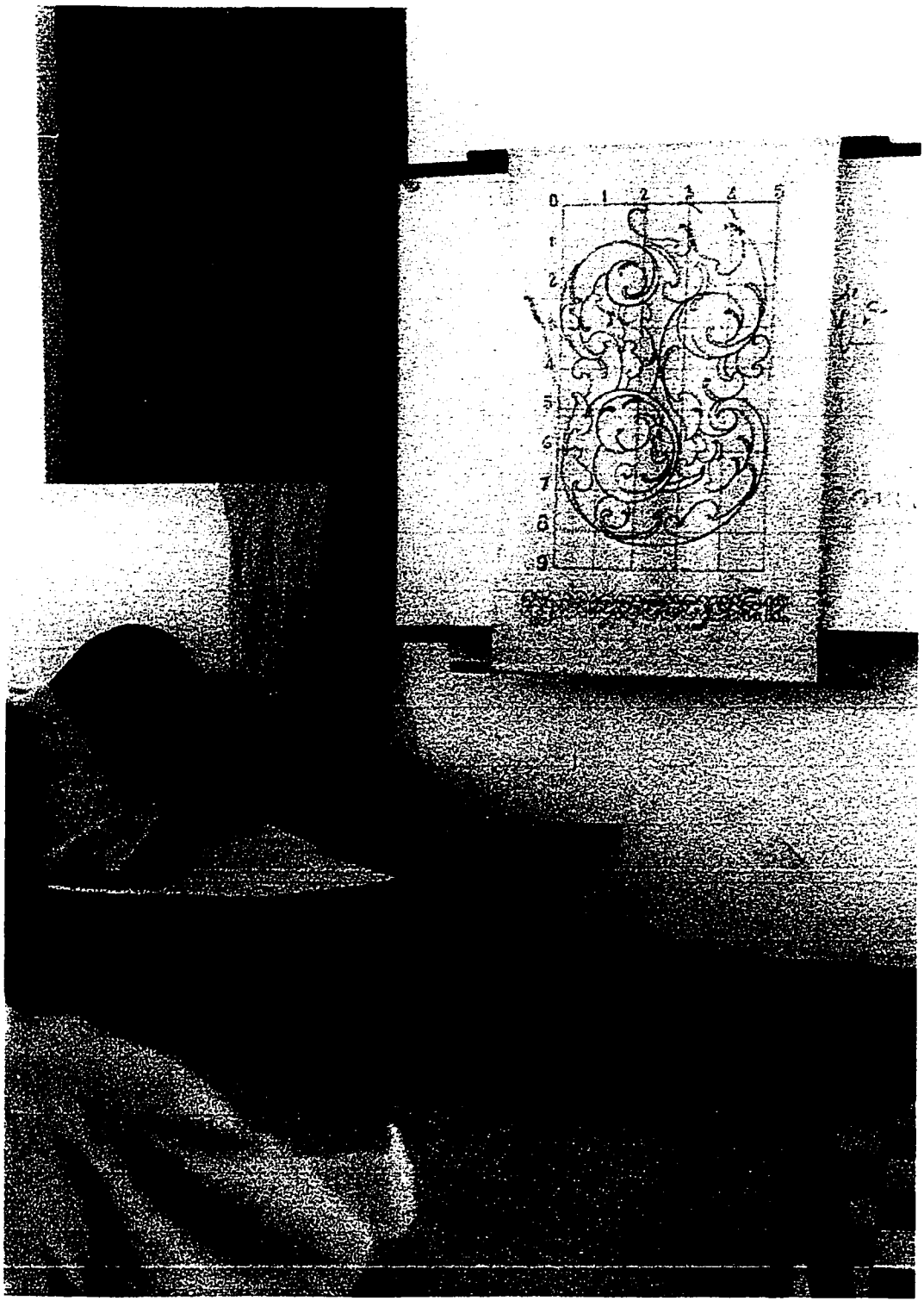

Figure 21

Drawing lesson on "kbach" (ornament)
Department of Plastic Arts, Royal University of Fine Arts, 1999

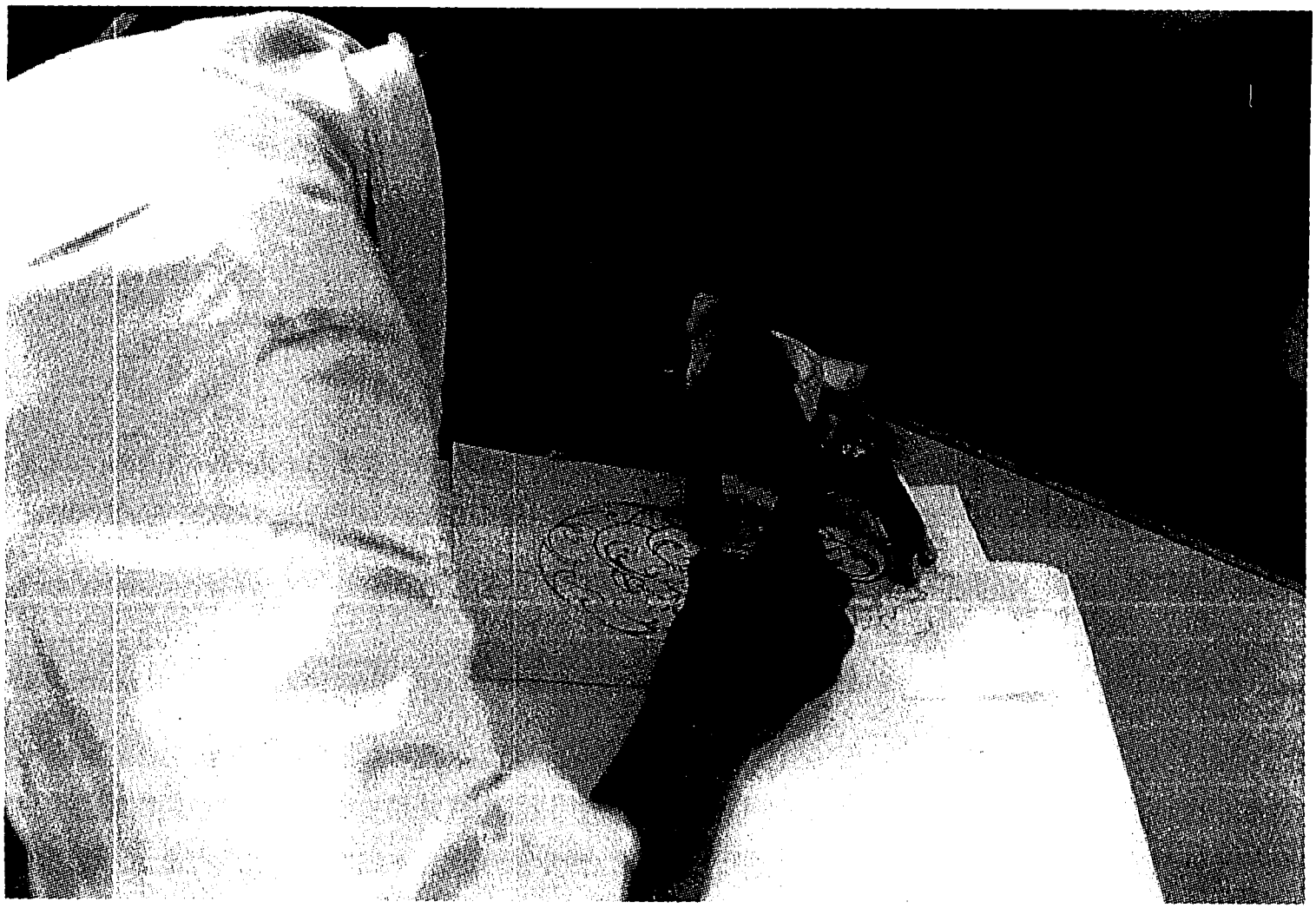

Figure 22

Student drawing from a "kbach" diagram hung at the front of the class
Department of Plastic Arts, Royal University of Fine Arts, 1999

identified figures to stories, and then to whole temples of meaning, such accounts largely ignore the vast areas of ornament which surround the figurative iconography (figure 23).[32] The method Groslier established for the School's drawing course seems to have been distilled from this figurative focus at the expense of the ornamental. In so doing, he installed a particular frame of copying which has come to haunt subsequent visual production.

Cambodian art, Groslier announced, was a "literary... cerebral and religious art" springing from "a legend, a philosophical speculation, a religious precept". Its "spirit of decoration" was to "remain as far away from nature as possible".[33] Where, Groslier asked (appealing to figurative examples) could a living garuda be found for the students to study? From what natural sources did the many-armed Siva arise? A monkey was always already a "legendary figure" drawn in a "conventional pose", its rendering having nothing to do with a monkey observed and everything to do with rules of representation passed down over generations (figure 24).[34] In what has come down to us គំនូរបុរាណ ("old painting"), figures are represented with given characteristics and in a limited set of poses.[35] One can thus conceivably learn the entire pantheon of figures by mastering the proportion and colors of each character as well as the form of

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[32] See Eleanor Manikka's, Angkor Wat: Time, Space and Kingship, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997) for a recent version of such a reading.

[33] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]).

[34] Letter from Groslier to the GGI, November 24, 1924 [NAC #17502 (RSC)].

[35] Here I would like to thank Chet Chan for the many conversations we have had between 1997-2000. See our forthcoming Reamker manual (Phnom Penh: Reyum 2001).

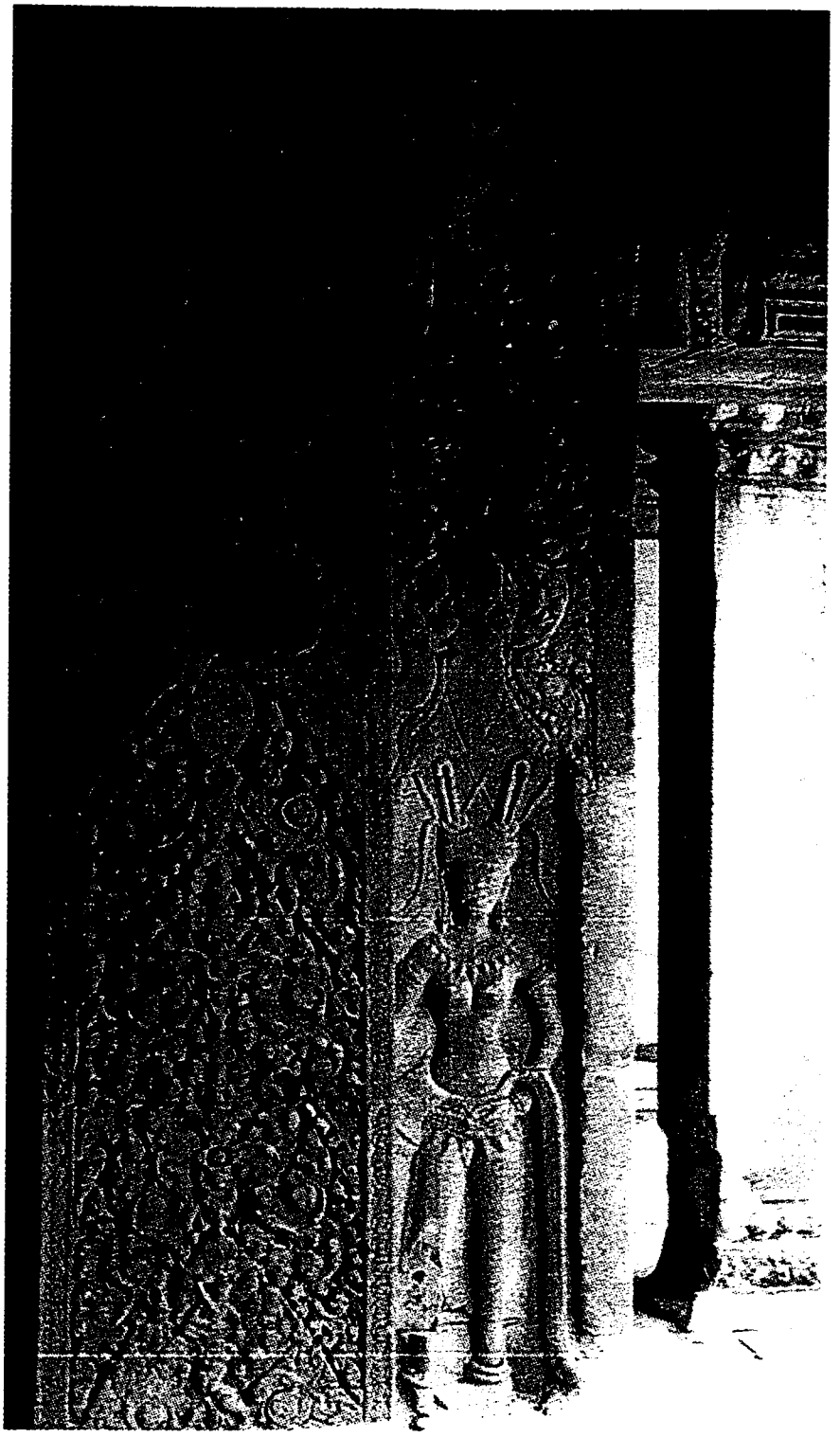

Figure 23
Angkor Vat
Wall detail with an apsara and an unfinished area of "kbach"



Figure 24

Hanuman,
a character from the Reamker.
Classroom diagram used for
teaching foundation courses at
the Department of Plastic Arts.
Side view on the left; three-
quarters view on the right.

their standard poses.[36] This is a system of representation that can, perhaps, be catalogued, diagrammed, presented and thus learned through two dimensional examples. Such a procedure becomes more questionable however when one considers ក្បាច់ , the ornamental language of form which together with the figures, makes up what can be called a culturally specific system of representation.

In the names given to ក្បាច់ (ornaments) and in the stories artists tell while explaining their progression of development, many of these forms are distilled from natural ones (ពងត្រី "the fish egg", ត្របកឈូក "the lotus petal", ធ្មេញក្របី "the teeth of the buffalo") (figure 25). The logic through which each of these simple forms is internally divided into ever greater complexity is a process, a series of gestures, an ongoing procedure of comparing and dividing. It is perhaps impossible to retrieve how this language of ornament was once passed down, prior to the diagrams of the School of Cambodian Art. Groslier himself marveled at the drawing-less base from which masterpieces seem to have sprung fully formed.[37] If learning prior to the "School" and the "class" occurred in smaller settings of making - that is, the master with a few apprentices making things together - than something of that experience is

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[36] The figures most commonly depicted in traditional painting are primarily those taken from the *Reamker* (the Khmer version of the *Ramayana*) and from Buddhist stories. In the 1960s, a kind of "modern traditional painting" developed which used some of the characteristics of representation found in traditional painting in order to construct imaginary scenes of village life in the Cambodian countryside. Conversations with Duong Saree and Pen Tra, 1997-2000.

[37] "Architecture? Never a plan drawn: direct construction with precision. Weaving? The most complicated designs, the most astonishing assemblages of colors born from the thought of the weaver as she pursues her craft"(FAII, p.253).

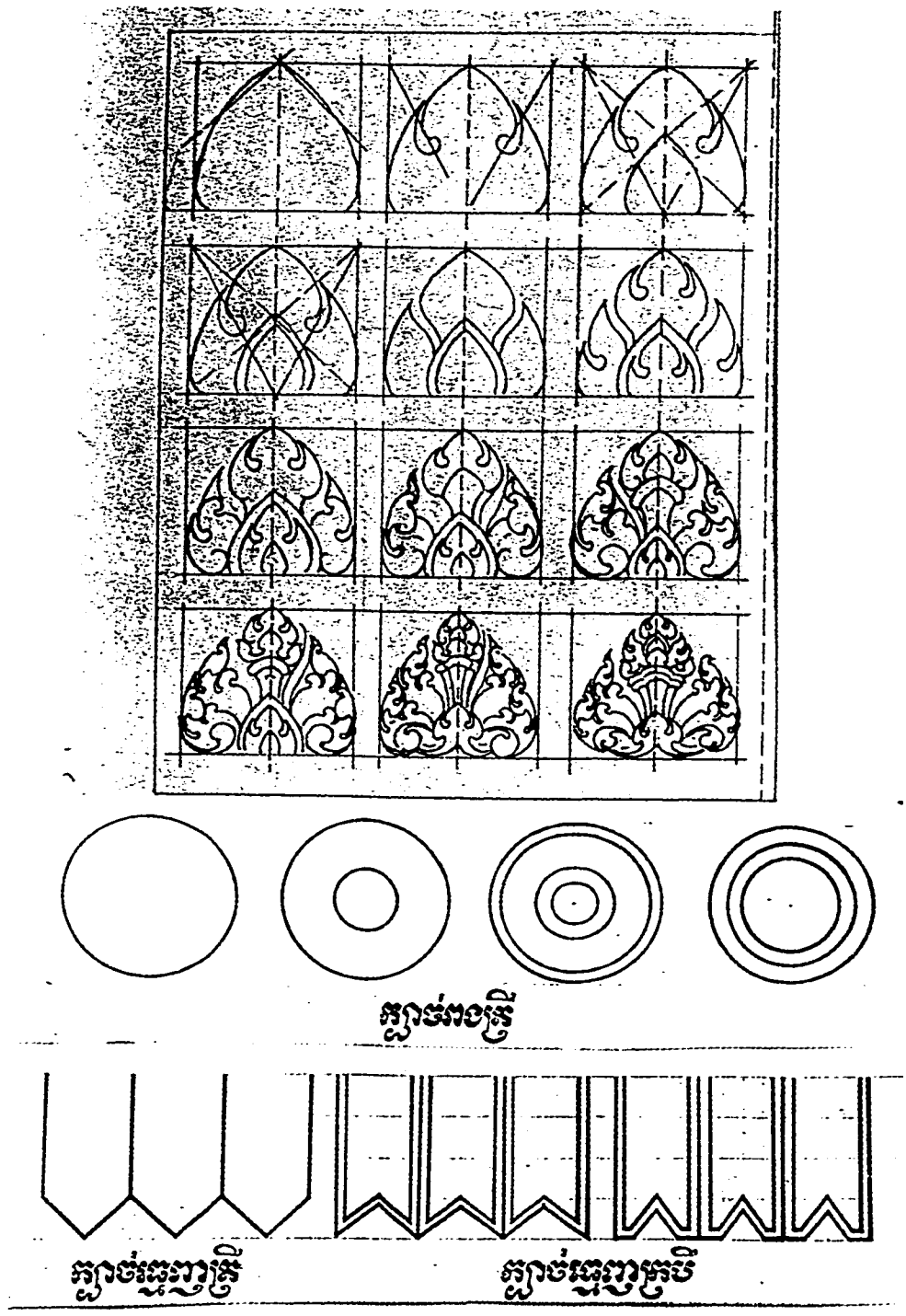

Figure 25

Various "kbach" ornaments.

Top, a progression of the lotus petal ornament; middle, the fish egg ornament; bottom left, fish tooth ornament; bottom right, water buffalo tooth ornament.

Drawings by Chan Vittarin (top) and Sin Chan Than (bottom)

perhaps recaptured (albeit in a translated form itself steeped in the colonial training of Groslier's school) by watching Som Samai chisel or Chet Chan draw today.[38] Their designs flow, covering surfaces with no armature of the grid. Each form devolves from a preceding one and the spoken explanation always connects "this which comes from this which comes from that which divides here and then goes there". The sense of a process of thinking form gained in such watching is perhaps closer to the experience of a master showing a few apprentices how to carve than it is to the group viewings of a single diagram which came to constitute "the lesson" of the School (figure 19, 21). Faced with large numbers of students, transmission of the ornaments and the figures had to be standardized to allow learning in groups rather than the watching of a process by a few (figure 26). Groslier's method of "fixing form" took the marks remaining from a process of thought and arrested each step, cutting the pattern out of its progression and pinning it onto a grid where its proportions and internal relations became more important for the copyist than its sequential relation to the prior and subsequent form. The grid divided the ornament and its progression into frozen sections, each analyzed individually for an internal system of proportions which could then be copied in order to replicate (figure 22). It is this logic which we will see haunting visual production in contemporary Cambodia in the last Chapter of my story.

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[38] Conversations with Som Samai, Sin Chan Than and Chet Chan 1997-2000. Som Samai was trained as a silversmith in the colonial School beginning in the 1930s; Sin Chan Than studied sculpture at the School in the late 1940s to early 1950s; Chet Chan was trained as a "traditional painter" at the School in the early 1960s. All three have taught at the School for many years.

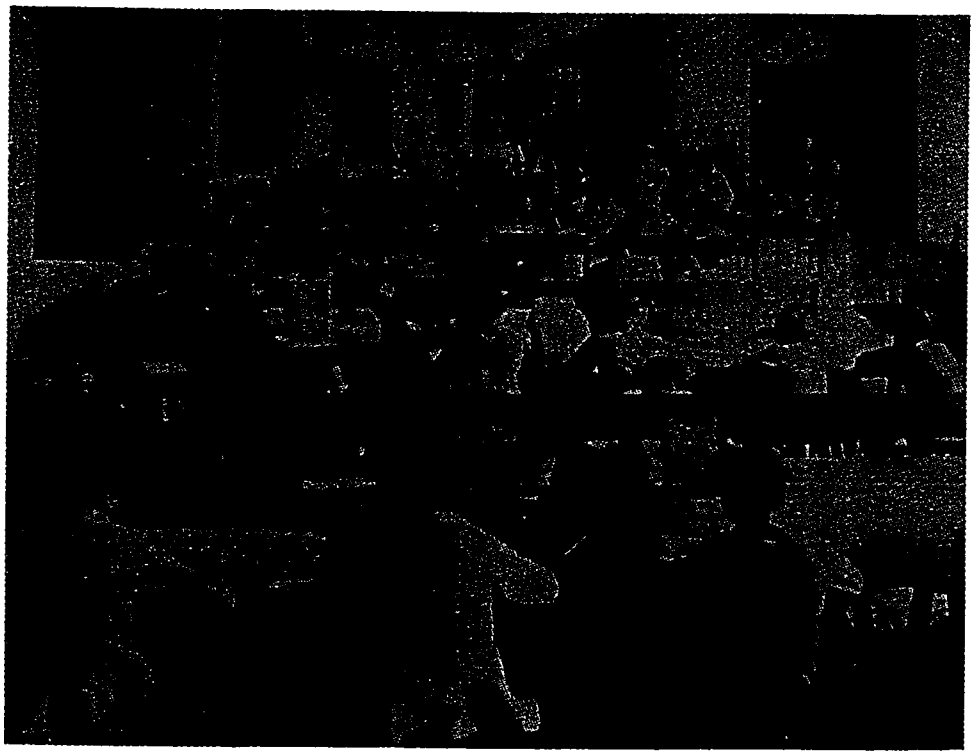

Figure 26 : School of Cambodian Arts
Above, a drawing class, 1920? Below, students in a large classroom, 1920

Above: L'Enseignement et la mise en pratique des Arts indigènes Pamphlet, NMC library
Below: NMC Photography Collection H229



Generic appeals to the monumental tradition used to elicit public support and understanding for the School, have often obscured this exclusively two-dimensional foundation of the curriculum, as well as the way in which three-dimensional models were used within it. As former students of the colonial school remember, students did view the collection of the Museum, but they never drew from it. Instead they went to study the sculptures in order to gain understanding of the proportions of representation explicated in the diagrams of the class.[39] Look Kru Saim remembers being sent repeatedly by his teacher to "look at" - but not to sketch - a particular sculpture in the Museum.[40] He was asked each time upon his return whether he now "understood" proportion. If we do not then immediately transfer Western notions of what it means to "follow classical models" (we sketch them), we can see that Baudoin's description at the Inauguration was quite precise: "All teaching follows classical models... vestiges of ancient monuments or objects from the [Museum] collection [that are] of a pure traditional style", he explained. Through the "daily viewing" of such "remains", students would come to "make masterpieces which reveal their talent, their genius", their "true personality"(I, p.2-3, Baudoin).

Groslier thus insisted on an absolute difference: "we are neither in France nor in Annam or Cochinchina", he proclaimed, "for a different people and a different art, there must be different methods of teaching"(TE, p.26-7). The reference to two of the three administrative divisions of what we today call Vietnam was deliberate. In 1924, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts d'Indochine was founded in Hanoi, largely through

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[39] Conversation with Som Samai, Sin Chan Than and Look Kru Saim, 1997-2000.

[40] Look Kru Saim, June 2000. Admittedly this happened in the 1950s but was repeatedly described to me as the "traditional" way of learning by artisans trained at Groslier's School.

the urgings, energy, and vision of Victor Tardieu.[41] Tardieu and Groslier immediately clashed over the models proposed by their two schools, spurred on by Protectorate plans for graduates of the new School in Hanoi to fan out across Indochina, teaching representational drawing from the life model.[42]

The School in Hanoi had set the "deep study" of the human figure at its core, thus installing the typical base of Western academic training. Such study, for Tardieu, developed "accuracy of the eye" which he claimed was, for all cultures, the "first instrument" of the artist.[43] Tardieu's School also encouraged students to consider what forms of local artisanal production could be borrowed and transfigured into contemporary "art". Indeed, in the ensuing cultural geography mapped by the two institutions, students in Hanoi came to learn a kind of universal "art" (beaux-arts) unqualified by a national adjective, while students at the School in Phnom Penh were

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[41] See Trois Ecole de l'Indochine and Painters of the Fine Arts College of Indochina for more detailed descriptions of this school as well as Nora Taylor's The Artist and the State: the politics of painting and national identity in Hanoi, VietNam (PhD Diss. Cornell, 1997)

[42] In addition to the obvious racial problems associated with the Protectorate's proposal ("Annamites cannot come to teach Cambodians in Cambodia"), Groslier noted that drawing from the nude model as well as the teaching of anatomy were completely impossible within Cambodian society. Not even "among the lowest prostitutes", would a willing female model be found and as for anatomy, "the simple glimpse of a human skull would be enough to empty the class of students without even speaking of the scandal that such subjects would cause among the general population". Tardieu replied that Groslier was simply fantasizing about his own preferences for models, suggesting that it would not be difficult to find male prisoners who could be used as models, agreeing that loin clothes could be used if full nudity was considered too risqué. See Tardieu's letter to the RSC, 1924 NAC #17502 (RSC) and Groslier's response to the GGI, November 24, 1924 NAC #17502 (RSC).

[43] Drawing thus, for Tardieu, was "the fundamental base of the arts" and the human form provided the "summary" for "all possible forms and by consequence, all the varied cases, and all the difficulties of drawing". See Tardieu's letter to the RSC, 1924 [NAC #17503 (RSC)]. All subsequent quotes of Tardieu are taken from this letter.

inculcated into a particular art qualified by the ethno-national label "Cambodian".[44] To Tardieu, the "complete opposition" which Groslier insisted upon between "Cambodian art" and the art of "Western peoples" was too absolute. All art was at least partly based on the experience of nature, he claimed, just as all systems of representation (including the Western perspectival one) were "unnatural" conventions. The coming of modernity, for Tardieu, necessitated that the arts of all nations be "disengaged" from their "narrow traditionalism" through the introduction of "new methods".[45] The arts of Indochina should thus be allowed (or impelled) to "evolve" as in "all [other] branches of human activity". Why, in the face of other modernising impulses brought by the French to Indochina, Tardieu queried, should "art alone... remain stationary, immovably attached to ancient formulas?" Hadn't art "always been the faithful translator of the thoughts of the people" so that the social changes brought by colonialism would necessitate changes in art as well?[46] To continue to train and enforce established "traditional arts" was to encourage a "false"

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[44] In French perceptions of Indochina, "Annamites" were often considered more advanced (and more troublesome) than the Cambodians who were seen to slumber in the past. The School in Hanoi thus emphasized the "development of indigenous art" while the Phnom Penh School was designed to "conserve" the traditional arts. For more on this double art policy see NAC #9084 (RSC) and Taylor, p. 63-4. The School in Hanoi was meant to accept students from all over Indochina who wished to study "art". In fact very few Cambodian students were accepted and those who were, seem to have struggled. See NAC #8118 (RSC) on Lean Pean, a Cambodian painting student in Hanoi during the 1930s.

[45] Wasn't this, Tardieu added slyly, precisely what Cambodians had always done according to Groslier and Silice's own learned descriptions of the Chinese and South Asian roots for Cambodian art: "If the Khmer were at a certain moment impregnated by Chinese methods, why can't they be impregnated with other methods as well?", Tardieu asked.

[46] As we have seen, Groslier admitted these social changes, noting that it was a "vain and moreover impossible pursuit" to "fight against the auto, the highway, and reinforced concrete"(E, p.7). Although he could not "recapture" the society which had produced and patronized "pure" Cambodian art, his system would ensure the continuation (or re-creation) of forms of

art "in absolute contradiction with the ideas of the time [and] in complete discord with the ambiance of the civilisation".[47]

Although he vehemently objected to Tardieu's formulations, Groslier himself had imported drawing, establishing it as a "fundamental base" which we can say transformed the teaching of Cambodian art. The drawing that Groslier introduced was not however that of the monumental model or the view of finished temples and sculptures. Rather, the drawing which Groslier introduced was based on his conception of the building of Angkor and thus was a model of production. In Groslier's imaginary reconstruction of the process through which classical sculptural monuments like Angkor Vat had been so quickly constructed, the initial design was in the hands of "a specialist" or "an architect", while the actual work was then completed by hundreds of sculptors (psyII,p.206). One artisan "traced the dessin" while others "did the chiseling": "the hand which executed did not betray [the hand] which sketched "(psyI, p.133).[48] Drawing thus was a blueprint for making things. "Never", Groslier wrote, "have the Cambodians been *dessinateurs* or painters other than to prepare the sculpture of a pillar, a fronton, the form of a tray, the color of a silk"(PC,

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production which he imagined from that former context, only now such an "art" would be produced for foreign consumers.

[47] See Tardieu's letter to the RSC, 1924 [NAC #17503 (RSC)] for all the quotes in this paragraph.

[48] Here Groslier conveniently forgot that he had introduced drawing as plan and that, at least in the time immediately preceding his restructuring, the practices of the countryside showed that drawing had not served in the way that he imagined it had in Angkorian times.

p.257). Magnificent in its "preparatory role", "drawing for drawing's sake", Groslier announced, "did not exist in Cambodia"(PC, p.257).[49]

The fixing of form: models

After an initial period of study in the drawing course of the School of Cambodian Arts, during which students absorbed ornaments and figures conforming to a precise format of relative proportion and linear clarity, they then graduated into ateliers of specialisation where they learned to make particular things. Here they encountered another system of fixing form. "Concrete examples", three dimensional "models", were presented for emulation and the curriculum consisted of learning to replicate these models perfectly. Absent from the everyday contact of the classroom, Groslier and his foreign assistants were always present through these models. For it was the "role of the French", having excavated and researched "the national art in its authentic forms and in the last stages of its natural and historical evolution", to establish and impose true models "of the most pure style" and "the most full of instruction".[50]

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[49] The reference to (and the refusal of) "drawing for drawing's sake" is simply one of many instances in which Groslier constructed his conception of Cambodian visual art in antithesis to the development of modern art in France. A curious triangulation emerges in which the form of representation used by Groslier in his own paintings is seen as conservative and passé in relation to the French avant-garde and definitions of Western modernism; in the context of Cambodia however, Groslier's own style of painting, prohibited under colonialism, will become the "modern" of independence. I look forward to developing this more in the future.

[50] I, p.20; E, p.6; C, p.875. Where in this "dying and crudely mixed art", Groslier asked dramatically, could "drops of still pure blood be found?"(E, p.1-2). What "seeds" could be used for a "still possible flowering"? (E, p.1). His answer were the diagrams and models which provided the "only means for arresting the decadence of Cambodian Art". See Comité de Perfectionnement de l'Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens: Proces-verbal, July 27, 1918 [NAC #8341 (RSC)] and E, p.2.

Two types of models were developed at the School of Cambodian Arts. One was the actual antique object re-found (or at least its copy), while the other was a new object created by the ateliers at the School based on the research of the past. The first kind of model was integrally tied to the collecting activity of the Museum, while the second type of model came to preoccupy the ateliers of the School.

During 1918 and 1919, above and beyond their teaching duties, the "masters" were charged with collecting "authentic models": "Continually on the look out for ancient objects scattered throughout the capital", the masters were to "beat the bush [as in] hunting"(C, p.873, 878). During this time apparently, "a day didn't pass without a professor... a student, their parents or their relatives bringing to the administration - either for deposit, for examination, or to sell - an object of Cambodian art"(C, p.873). In fact, "intense competition" developed to deliver such models to the School leading to a "veritable draining of interesting objects" from the countryside of which the School became "the beneficiary"(C, p.873).[51] Although Groslier read this competition as indicative of the masters' "interest" in establishing a set of models which would serve as pedagogical examples, the collecting might also have been motivated by the fact that money was given for objects of interest, a practice which allowed the procurer to make "a lucrative business"(C, p.873). Objects desired as models which could not be bought were borrowed and passed on to the

[51] Groslier expressed great hope for further "drainage" noting that monks seemed to "approve" of his "protectionism" and began to "deposit [in the Museum] interesting pieces that they possess and that are being hunted by very rapacious European collectors"(C873-874). See correspondence in NAC #8333 (RSC) for notes on foreign collectors entering the countryside.

ateliers for copying before returning them to their owners.[52] Objects which for one reason or another, could not be purchased or copied were photographed.[53] The photographic archive of the School thus in and of itself became a "precious monument"(C, p.883). In addition to front, side, and back photographs, "additional documents, vertical sections of objects [and] plans" were ordered for any object that was to become a model.[54]

Early reports on the ateliers show how central the copying of models was. By April 1918, the cabinetmaking atelier had already completed "a perfume cupboard modeled on antiquity, sculpted doors after the false doors of Angkor Vat, a wood platform with eight sculpted feet modeled after the ancient one found in Thbong Khmum" as well as many smaller implements all "modeled after those old ones used by the natives".[55] The foundry atelier was making bells "after ancient ones found in the earth and from bell ornaments depicted in the bas-reliefs [of Angkor Vat and the Bayon]" as well as "four statues modeled after ancient examples lent by a European [collector]".[56] During 1919, the atelier of foundry was "solely occupied with re-

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[52] "Forced to refind, among the natives and among collectors, ancient models of pure style", the administration had such examples "reproduced to the millimeter... as a means of definitely saving them from a disappearance which was certain a brief time ago". See Comité de Perfectionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, July 27, 1918 [NAC #8341 (RSC)].

[53] "It is perhaps not possible to buy everything nor to copy everything", Groslier wrote. See NAC #17503 (RSC).

[54] C, p.883. See NAC #17503 (RSC) and the letter of Prince Phanuvong, Minister of the Interior, to the RSC, January 8, 1919 [NAC #8342 (RSC)].

[55] "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)].

[56] "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)].

copying ancient statues lent by individuals" in order to "fix the representations of divinities in the modern Cambodian pantheon".[57] One jeweler was "making copies of all the link chains" of the "national jewelery", while another one was making copies of all the belts (PC, p.260).

The obsessive collecting and copying of the "authentic", undertaken by the Museum, the School, and the larger administration, is perhaps best captured in Groslier's own description of an octopus. The initial "organism" established in 1918 could not simply begin to "produce". Instead, it had to "absorb... fill, and fix itself"(PC, p.258). The "organism" was thus like an "octopus", each of whose "tentacles" concerned itself with a particular (in Groslier's view, dying) "artistic industry": "The jewelery tentacle wanders through the country sucking in formulas, processes, traditions, examples [and] materials which are in this way centralised by a handful of skilled workers who will fix them. The same action is undertaken by the sculpture and architecture tentacles" (PC, p.258).[58]

Models were not only searched for and collected, but they were also made anew at the School. As Groslier described the process, he would provide "general

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[57] Groslier noted the "importance" of this "iconographic work". The atelier of foundry at first trained no students and simply produced models. Each atelier had a group of assistants or "attached workers" who were already established as makers of objects. They worked under the "masters", producing model objects. These "workers" not only increased the productivity of each atelier but also served as examples for students of how to work. As the Royal Ordonnance of 1917 put it, the "attached workers" were primarily hired to "rapidly produce models and examples which the entering students were incapable of making." See the Royal Ordonnance of December 14, 1917, "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13th 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)], and R1925.

[58] In the early days of the "organism" (1918), "the octopus was working in Phnom Penh" since "one must begin in the places most frequented by the European, where the old things are the most rare and the most threatened". In subsequent years however, native inspectors (one of whom was to be a "dessinateur") would circulate in the country and continue the "collection of examples following the ancient arts"(PC, p.258).

specifications" to the "workers" who would then "draw an ensemble of conclusions": "from the general sketches which I have given, to the detailed drawings that were completed, the Cambodian personality has every place in which to manifest itself".[59] Given the recent introduction of drawing, as well as the foreign origin of the impulse to install a model-based production, it is hard to find much room here for the so-called "indigenous personality".

A more detailed description of the process of creating a "new" model is found in one of Groslier's articles.[60] A "dessinateur", a jeweler, and an enameler, all working at the School, were assigned to together create a new model for a Cambodian rice spoon. The three were left unhampered by the administration in order to "see where they would go by themselves"(PC, p.259). While the three worked, "the corresponding tentacle" of the administration "excavated documents". The bas-reliefs (of Angkor Vat and the Bayon) were "interrogated" but "in this particular case they don't respond"(PC, p.259).[61] Therefore examples were sought in the countryside where "authentic models of good indigenous style" could still be found (PC, p.262). Through comparing these possible models with the plans of the "dessinateur", the jeweler, and the enameler, a process of "confrontation" and "editing" ensued in which "absolutely nothing new was added" but "the best parts of each specimen" were joined together (PC,p.259). "Slowly" and "prudently", the designs were "corrected"(PC,

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[59] See NAC #17503 (RSC).

[60] Groslier, "La prise en charge des Arts cambodgiens", Revue Indochinoise vol.30, #9, September 1918.

[61] The images in the bas reliefs found on Angkor Vat and the Bayon were often used as a source for "new" ancient models. See PC, p.260 for an example of a "mongkot" in Angkorian style developed from the reliefs.

p.259). At a final meeting in front of the finished design all the personnel of the school ("the 39 best artisans of the country who knew that nothing foreign could be tolerated" and "who had all seen a Cambodian rice spoon") were "invited to give their opinion"(PC, p.259). The "definite design" was thus decided and the process passed to the "execution" stage in which an actual spoon was made according to the approved plans.

In these descriptions, the design precedes the actual object. Indeed, in order to create a new model it was not simply the jeweler and the enameler who were called to participate, but also the "dessinateur". A base of drawing haunts the models, and we can thus see that initial training in the drawing atelier had another purpose. The initial training in drawing gave all male graduates of the School literacy in reading diagrams, thus ensuring that they could produce a three dimensional "model" from a two dimensional "plan". The "graphic knowledge" which they thus gained in the introductory drawing course was "indispensable" for making things within Groslier's system.[62]

Groslier often illustrated his articles with examples of "degenerate art", produced just before his takeover of the School, set in contrast to "models" made in the ateliers of the School during its first few months under his direction (figure 27).[63] Several distinctions were made in such comparisons of "before" and "after". What Groslier seemingly objected to in the so-called "degenerate" objects was what he termed their

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[62] "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13th, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[63] CQ, p.89, also E and C,reprint.

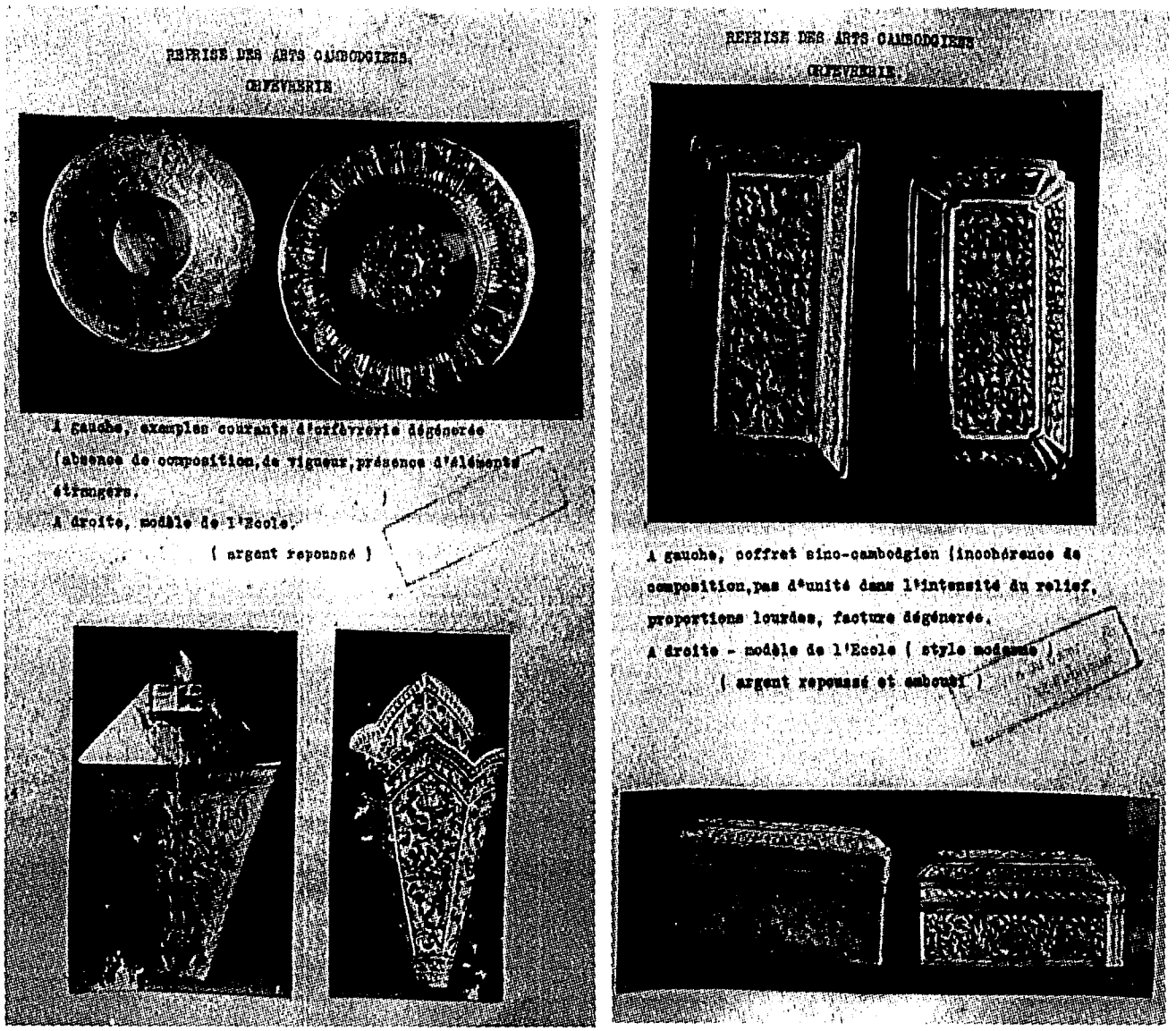


Figure 27

Models of the School of Cambodian Arts compared to "degenerate" examples found in Phnom Penh, 1918

Photography Collection National Archives of Cambodia

"incoherence", their "lack of composition", their "lack of unity", their clumsy proportions. The way in which such objects included "foreign elements" to produce a "Sino-Cambodian" style with the "badly executed" figurative details was to be eliminated in the models of the School. Indeed, at least in the early comparisons of silver objects, the School models are marked by a decided withdrawal of the figure in favor of strongly centered ornamental compositions (figure 28).[64] The animals and people scattered in the more nature-based floral patterns found on the "degenerate" boxes, were replaced with the "manual perfection" and the "extraordinary precision" of a central ផកាប់ (a master ornament) surrounded by "organising" vines (figures 29, 30).[65] The linear clarity of the diagram sections, learned in the first lessons of the School, could now easily be imposed onto any of the surfaces which would come to comprise the model objects.

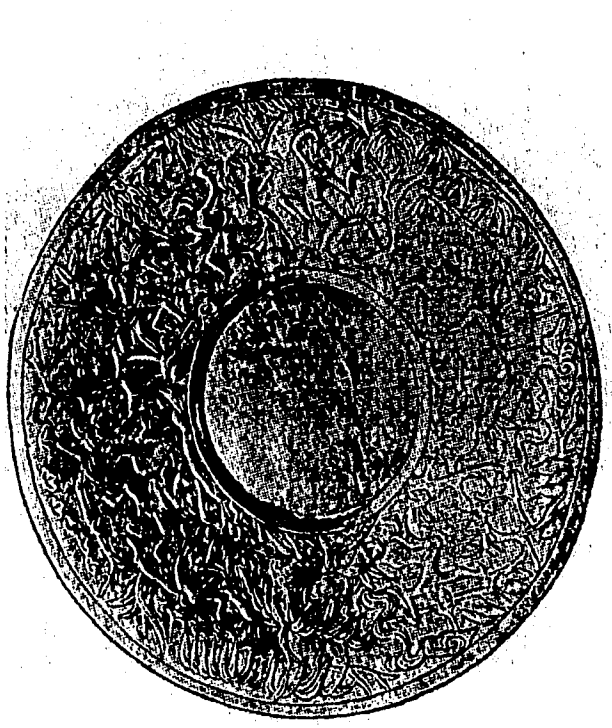
The Renaissance

In a charitable analysis of Groslier's project, one could follow his explanations as a genuine attempt to return an art to its proper evolution through the reconstruction of an indigenous form of representation. The drawing course thus would provide the "traditional base" - the "proportions, the principal limits, the canon" - from which a

[64] When I asked a randomly assembled group of professors at the Department of Plastic Arts what they thought of these comparisons, they unanimously agreed that Groslier's "after" images are the "better" work. This is perhaps nothing more than a tribute to the influence of Groslier and the impact of his pedagogy.

[65] Groslier also noted that his "models" had in general improved their "quality", offering better joints for silver boxes and higher quality bronze for cast figures. Sin Chan Than, Toung Sophon, Chet Chan and the late Im Chan discussed these examples with me. See also PsyI, p.131 and letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]).

Fig. 3.



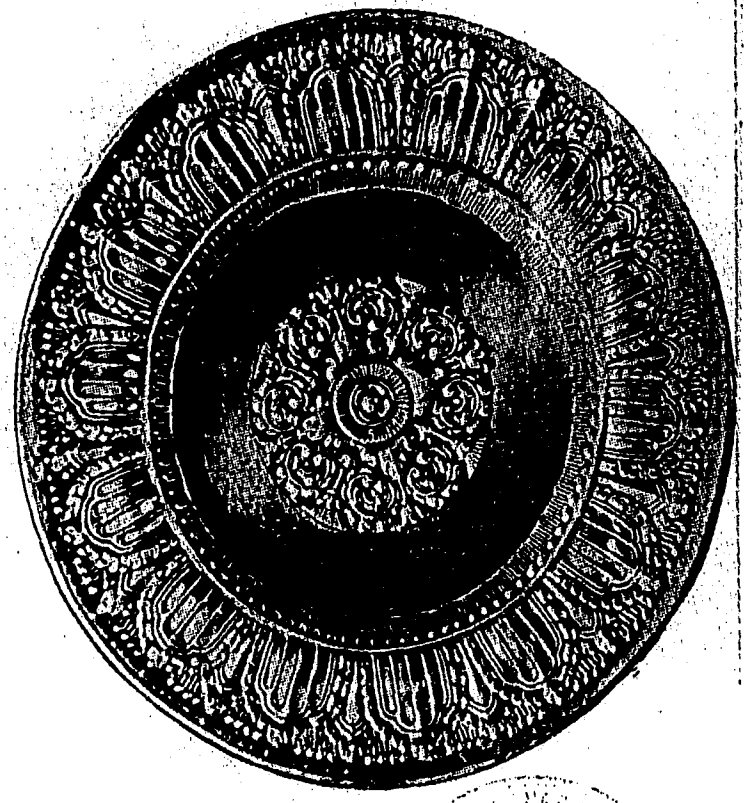


Fig. 4.

Orfèvrerie. — A gauche : Exemples de coffret sino-cambodgien à composition incohérente et plateau art cambodgien dégénéré.
A droite : Modèles de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens.

Figure 28

Models of the School of Cambodian Arts compared to "degenerate" examples found in Phnom Penh, 1918

Photography Collection National Archives of Cambodia
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Arts et Archéologie Khmers

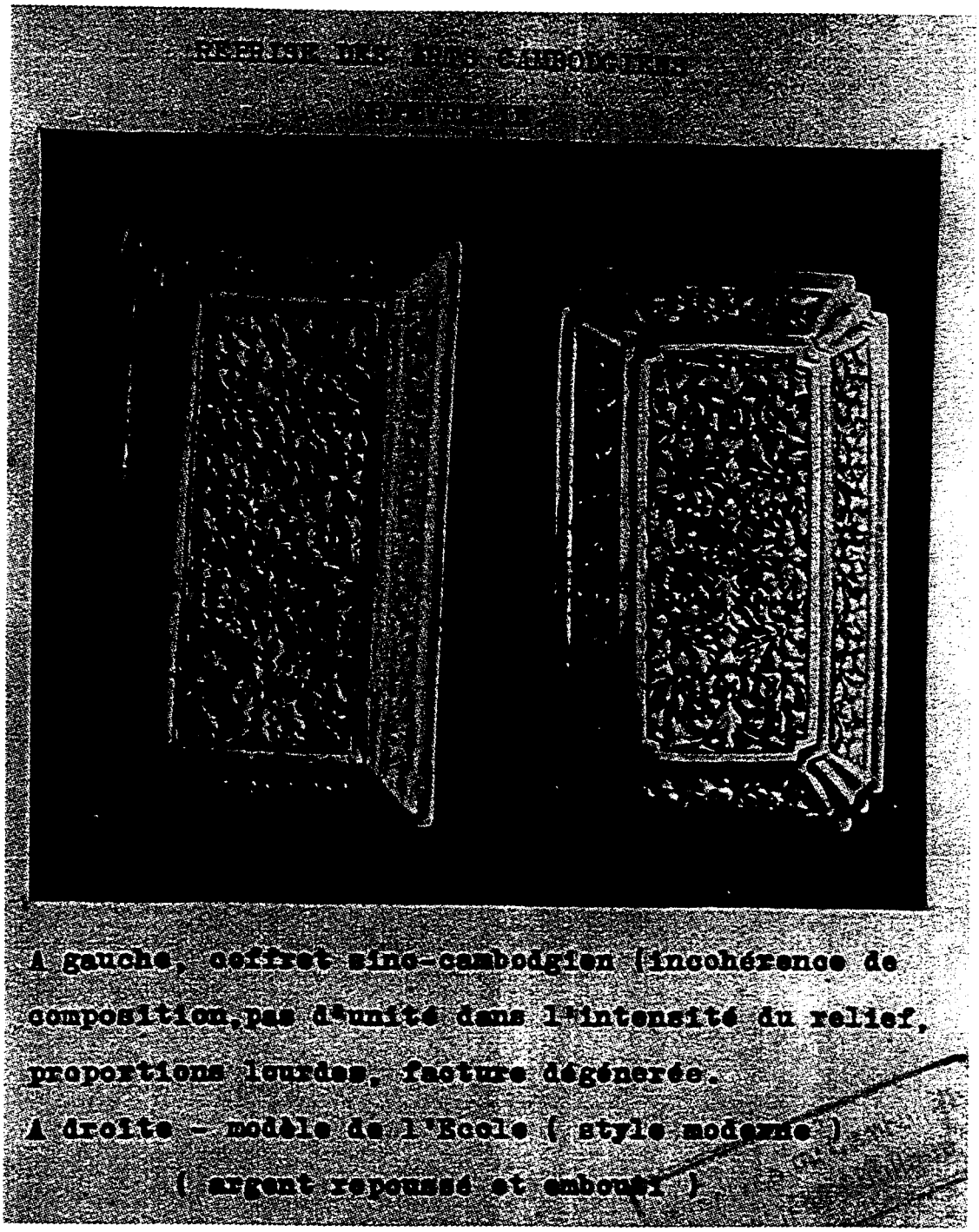

Figure 29

Silver boxes

A model box of the School of Cambodian Arts compared to a "degenerate" "Sino-Cambodian" box with "incoherent composition" and a "lack of unity" in its relief.

Photography Collection, National Archives of Cambodia

Argent repoussé.

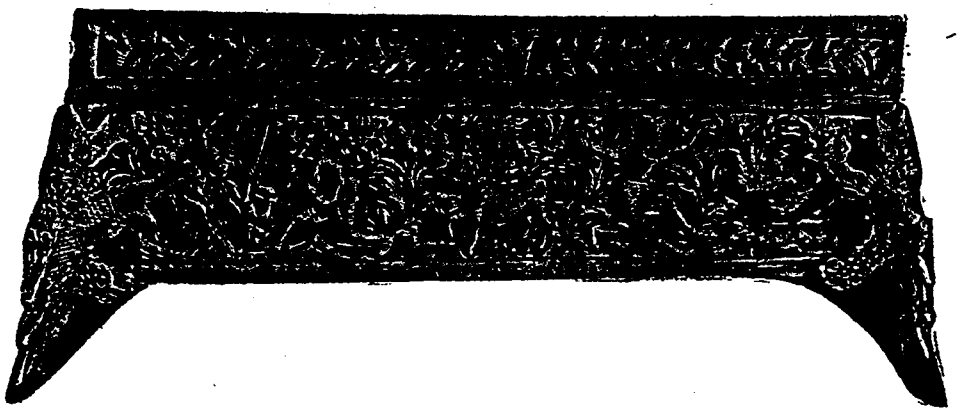

Fig. 7.

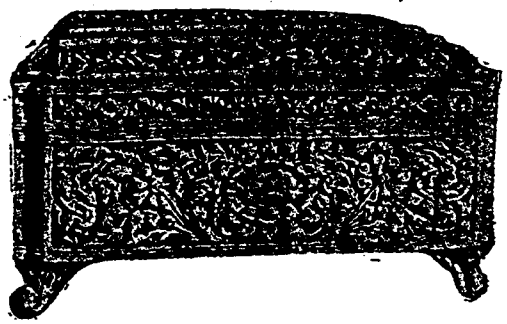

Fig. 8.

Orfèvrerie. — En haut : Coffret cambodgien, art dégénéré. Naïveté de la jonction des supports, décoration grossière, personnages et animaux maladroitement exécutés.
En bas : Modèle de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, (Décoration moderne).

Figure 30

Comparison between a model box of the School of Cambodian Arts and a "degenerate Cambodian box" with "crude decoration" and "poorly executed animals and figures"

George Groslier. La convalescence des Arts cambodgiens. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1919.

student learned "his" art. Three dimensional models subsequently guided the use of this two dimensional canon for the production of portable objects. Having achieved fluency in their "native" language of form, Groslier envisioned artisans "inventing" new objects within the established traditional frame.[66] Indeed, Groslier repeatedly objected to accusations that his School was simply teaching students to be copyists of the past.[67] Rather, he asserted that his curriculum allowed for "authentic" change:

> Who still insists that the Cambodian arts are being immobilized and that artisans are made into copyists? We have on the contrary remolded their lives... To the young Cambodians of tomorrow who have, under our guidance, learned about their ancient national traditions and who will create new things if these old ones are not sufficient, we have given them confidence in themselves and conferred to them the liberty to depart in the ways that their instincts tell them to.[68]

The "dying patient" [Cambodian art] that Groslier had received in 1918, had first to be "brought back to life"; when the patient was once again "truly strong" (a condition Groslier predicted would be reached by the late 1920s) he would be free to "go where he wishes and will follow the habits which appear to him as the best"(R1925). Under the "umbrella" of a reconstructed "tradition", a "slow evolution" would occur

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[66] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]).

[67] A highly critical report of Groslier's School was sent to Protectorate officials by the director of an applied arts school in Hanoi who had visited Phnom Penh in 1922. What most upset the visitor was the exclusive use of "graphic models" in the introductory drawing course. Whereas drawing from three dimensional casts and sculptures was permissible (and would soon find its place in the curriculum in Hanoi), the exclusive copying from the two dimensional would "imprison" students in repetition. See the letter from Groslier to the RSC in reply to a report by the unnamed Director of the Ecole des arts appliqués, Hanoi; September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)].

[68] R1925. Edwards assertion that Groslier "blackballed attempts to influence or improve the template of tradition" (p.217) would have to be unpacked and reassessed in light of Groslier's theory of change sketched here. As I try to show, the template of tradition was in fact the production of an ever increasing number of "new" "traditional" objects.

producing "a contemporary art in the light of classical art".[69] "The goal, the idea of the school", RSC Baudoin echoed, was "to rejuvenate and to render the Cambodian conscious. That is all":

> The Cambodian will do as he wishes. One gives back oxygen to his blood, stimulating his imagination. One puts at his disposition the classical elements which he will assimilate according to his new aspirations, his new needs, his new ideas. One fortifies him with the medication most suited to his body, the closest to him... In the current [climate in which] artistic nourishment is made up of Siamese mannerism, Chinese ingenuity, and various opportunisms, the School of Art offers the national dish, the essential herb, the elemental rice"(CC#1 p.271-2).

In the shelter of the School, students would "turn out indigenous".[70] With "habit" and "instinct" restored, they would be free to create new objects. Having "acted only to place a living seed in a sun which it recognized as fertile", the French administration would then "efface itself"(I, p.26, Groslier).

The Factory of Tradition

The less charitable analysis which I will offer here also begins with Groslier's claim to be resurrecting "authentic" Angkorian method and thus to return an art to its proper path. One artisan "traced the dessin", Groslier tells us, while others "did the chiseling"; "the hand which executes does not betray [the hand] which sketched"(psyI, p.133). The teams working on the temples were "sculpting machines" for which "a design is given" and there was no individual interpretation of it; the goal was to "work

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[69] PsyI, p.135-6 and letter from RSC Baudoin to the GGI, April 13, 1922 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

[70] "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13th 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

well" in the "service of a perfection" which would appear seamless (psyI, p.133, psyII, p.208). We can read this as a description of a curious kind of hand-made mass production.

Through Groslier's rescue, the School would come to serve as the designer for an assembly of hand workers constituting "machines" which produced model objects. Already in 1918, we find the atelier of drawing of the School preoccupied with "drawing models destined for the ateliers of jewelery, foundry, masks, carpentry, sculpture, molding, weaving and statues in clay".[71] During the first few months of 1918, the atelier produced "drawings of boxes and objects of all sorts... about 200 objects".[72] Already in their second year, students of the atelier were said to have "nothing more to learn" and could therefore "work" at producing plans.[73] The graduating exams for the drawing atelier consisted largely in testing the ability of students to make designs for model objects. One exam, for example, required "a floral motif chosen by the student for a piece of jewelery [as well as] a drawing of a naga with two garudas for a sculpture (my emphasis)."[74] It is more clear now why Groslier

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[71] See "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des arts" (1918) [NAC #394 (RSC)], "Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens" (1919) and "Rapport de la fin d'année" (1920) [NAC #8336 (RSC)].

[72] See "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des arts", 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)], "Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", 1919 and, "Rapport de la fin d'année", 1920 [NAC #8336 (RSC)].

[73] "Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'ecole des Arts cambodgiens", 1919 [NAC #8336 (RSC)].

[74] See the report of January 31, 1931 [NAC #17508 (RSC)]. The exam in 1933 consisted similarly of "a decorative floral motif for a piece of jewelery" along with a scene from the *Reamker*. Exams also included a "discussion of a favorite design" and a drawing "after a traditional model". See the Report of April 1, 1933 [NAC #17508 (RSC)] and "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13th 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

distilled his two-dimensional diagrams from the figurative canon of representation, cutting ornamental processes of developing form into sections and mounting them (following the canon of figures) as front, side and three-quarter representations. Such slices allowed the planning of objects so that, for example, the lid of a "model" silver box could simply replicate the diagrams on the wall of the classroom (figure 29).

The experience of the initial drawing class prepared the makers of objects for such thinking. Seemingly dislodged from any social context, the ornaments simply became patterns to be learned and fixed onto objects, thus marking them as generically "Cambodian". The meaning of the patterns and their uses in particular locations was bleached out of this method of transmission which presented ក្បាច់ (ornaments) as formal patterns to be studied and copied through relations of proportion on a page.[75] Progressing through the curriculum of the School, students learned to follow plans affixing these ornaments to varying objects which they produced in multiples. When Groslier insisted that drawing was essential for artisans to be able to "realise the art which they practice", he meant that making, within the "organism" he was creating, would mean hand production of objects in multiples based on a set of plans (C,p.876).[76]

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[75] A residual memory of the meaning and place of use for ក្បាច់ (ornaments) is still present today. See our forthcoming manual on Kbach (Reyum, 2002).

[76] Under Groslier's "doctrine", an inter-linked "treatment" was prescribed for the "agony" of the arts (E, p.8). The School, the Museum and the Corporations were "placed under a single administration charged with regulating the cohesion of their functioning and with establishing a perpetual equilibrium between demand and production"(E, p.8). This Direction des Arts cambodgiens (DAC) was established on December 31, 1919. From its inception, the DAC was headed by Groslier and day to day control of the School was gradually transferred to Silice and his assistants, although Groslier remained very much in control of the entire system until

The grounds for such a system had already been laid in early attempts by the Protectorate to restructure the existing Palace workshops.[77] As part of the 1912 reforms, Palace artisans underwent a test in which they made a work of art "for which [the artisan] himself had chosen the model."[78] The models used were apparently deemed insufficient since, shortly thereafter, several of the artisans retained in the Palace workshops were sent to the Ecole professionnelle in order to "prepare under the direction of the director of that establishment, Lapierre, an album of Cambodian drawings" which were to "serve as models in all the other ateliers"(RO).[79] Groslier would later take great pains to differentiate his School of Cambodian Arts from the Ecole professionnelle which trained workers for the various industries already existing or envisioned by the Protectorate. The two Schools were "opposites", Groslier declared, with the Ecole professionnelle "connected to progress" while the School of Cambodian Art was "connected to tradition"; one "valued the mechanical and the

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his death in 1945. See the file on retitling of personnel and development of the Direction des Arts cambodgiens, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[77] A Royal Ordonnance of January 1, 1907 "classified" artisansal production in the Palace into the broad categories of "jewelery and art works" or "clothing, embroidery, weaving". The 1912 restructuring further divided these two categories into distinct ateliers, although it is not clear how strictly this was enforced. The resulting ateliers were: 1. Drawing, 2. Modeling, sculpture on wood, and furniture making, 3. Ivory sculpture, 4. Bronze and brass casting, 5. Jewelery, and 6. Weaving, embroidery and lace-making. See Ag, p.554-6 and NAC #417 (RSC).

[78] Royal Ordonnance of April 17, 1912 in NAC #417 (RSC). Subsequent references to this Royal Ordonnance are followed by (RO).

[79] It is likely that the models used by the Palace artisans included too many foreign elements for Groslier's taste (see his description of the Palace workshops cited at the end of Chapter One). The new models made at the Ecole professionnelle were specified as "Cambodian" although their designer seems to have been at least in large part, Lapierre, a Frenchman. Lapierre had been appointed director of the newly founded Ecole professionnelle on May 26, 1903 [arrêté 208, Bulletin Administratif]. See also NAC #394 (RSC); "Organisation de l'Ecole Professionnelle", October 10, 1907 [NAC #481 (RSC)]; a restructuring arrêté of July 19, 1911 (Journal Officiel), and discussion of this restructuring in NAC #760 (RSC).

multiple", while the other "valued the hand and the single work".[80] Despite this declaration, the early transfer of models from the Ecole professionnelle to the School foretold the way in which Groslier's School, and its resulting system of production, would refute the single work in favor of hand-made multiples.[81]

More elements of the 1912 restructurings of the Palace workshops need to be considered as a prehistory to the later School of Cambodian Arts and its Corporations. The objects produced by the exam of the "masters" of the workshops were specifically designated as "works of art for sale" and the existing workshops were divided into "a School" and "a store".[82] Right from the start then, training - the development and inculcation of proper models - was tied to sales. Through "a better distribution of labor", "a more rational organisation of the various ateliers", "a more rigorous regulation of the work", and "a more methodical organisation of the production", the Royal ateliers - and the "Cambodian arts" in general - were to be made profitable (RO). Groslier singled out these 1912 initiatives as "the first effort made in the goal of developing and perfecting Cambodian arts" although he lamented the lax implementation of the reforms, using Prince Monivong's "inexperience" and

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[80] Letter from Groslier to Stoeckel, January 16, 1918 [NAC #8342 (RSC)] and "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[81] For success measured by the production of multiples from given models, see for example "Le Service des Arts cambodgiens, Statistique 1923" [NAC #17503 (RSC)], and "Le Service des Arts cambodgiens, Statistique 1925" [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

[82] The School was called the "Ecole Royale des Arts décoratifs" and the store was called the "Magasin central". See NAC #417 (RSC), Royal Ordonnance of April 17, 1912. Magasin can also mean store room although Ménétrier's 1912 description of Tang Tok clearly states that the Royal workshops had a new store meant to sell high quality objects to the general public. See "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok à Pnom-Penh", Revue Indochinoise #10 (October 1912) as well as my discussion of Tang Tok in Chapter Three.

negligence to justify his take over.[83] Under Groslier's oversight, the "currency" of tradition would be revalued by fixing its marks to new products.[84]

On April 24, 1917, King Sisowath and the RSC discussed the final restructuring that would bring the Palace workshops under complete French control. In a summary of the audience, Thiounn, the Minister of the Palace, noted the "administration's ideas" to establish "a big art school" in Phnom Penh in order to have Khmer artisans "make art things according to the good old models and ornaments from before".[85] "As in previous reigns", Thiounn explained pointedly, the majority of things which the Palace workshops had made were for the King and for the Vats which the King had built. It was for this reason that the Palace workshops, while never producing great financial shortfalls, had also never showed huge profits since their aim was not to produce surplus goods for sale to the general public, but

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[83] Ag, p.555. The 1912 restructuring put the Palace School and its store under the "general direction" of Prince Monivong with "a Committee of Surveillance" comprised of Cambodian and French officials. This oversight committee seems to have actually had "permanent control of the functioning of the School and the Magazin" with the Chef du Service de l'Enseignement (a French administrator) "more specifically charged with the technical direction and the organisation of work at the School"(RO).

[84] At the time of his takeover, Groslier wrote, "tradition" had become "a useless currency" which the Cambodians "could not exchange at our counters" (R1925). A similar linkage of training to sales had already been suggested by Jean Commaille in 1906. Commaille had been sent on a "mission" to "study the workmanship of Cambodian art and to help in publicising it in order to attempt to eliminate the dispersion without profit of works of ancient value which mark the eras of Khmer art". To bring "profit" to the arts of the colony, Commaille recommended "using the artistic spirit of the Cambodians and the taste which one still feels among them to train artisans capable of expanding their livelihood and producing in a minimum of time, objects of art that can be sold commercialiy both here and in France". The School founded for such training would be successful, Commaille wrote, "on the day that the receipts resulting from sales of its products balanced its expenses and when the students would give to local arts a new impetus". Through the profitable sale of objects of "tradition" to a certain public, "Cambodian art" would be reborn. See Commaille's August 13, 1906 "Note sur le fonctionnement d'une école des arts industriels au Cambodge" [NAC #2014 (RSC)].

[85] Letter from Thiounn to the RSC, May 12, 1917 [NAC #8342 (RSC)]. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to this letter.

rather to serve the King and his building projects, both within the Palace and throughout the countryside. In the standard form of such official letters, a summary of the content of the letter is inscribed in a short phrase to the left of the body of the letter's text. The French summary reads: "A sujet de la création d'une Ecole des beaux-arts dans la Capitale" ("on the subject of the creation of a School of Fine Arts in the capital"). The Khmer on the other hand reads សារបានអំពីគំនិតធ្វើរបស់ចនាខ្មែរឲ្យច្រើនឡើង or, "about the idea to make increasingly more Khmer art things". The meaning of the "rescue" in the Cambodian version was seen to lie in an increase in production then, while the French version emphasized the "creation" of a School not yet qualified with the adjective "Cambodian".[86]

The description of the production of the "new" rice spoon makes this double inflection clearer. For Groslier, the work of the School to collect and create models while training students to replicate them, was "a good work, a captivating work... and very French, where conservation doubles as resurrection"(PC, p.258). The School was not to simply be a "sanctuary" however in which "pure" objects would be made in order to be kept in the Museum, "conserved" and "fixed" as "numbers in a vitrine".[87] Rather, the School would be the central force for a much greater "resurrection", a project of cultural cleansing and rejuvenation in which objects of imagined former

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[86] Subsequent accounts have often described the 1918 takeover as the "creation" of the School of Cambodian Arts, thus wiping out the connection of the School to existing institutions which I try to outline and emphasize here.

[87] Comité de Perfectionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, July 27, 1918 [NAC #8341 (RSC)].

years would be mass produced for an entirely different market.[88] As such, the Khmer summary of the King's audience is perhaps the more accurate since the School was to serve as the design center for a planned production which dramatically increase the number of art objects produced and thus the number of artisans employed.

The School, Groslier wrote, functioned like "a heart", "absorbing a tainted blood and making it pure".[89] Having "demanded from the people" their "forgotten models", their "formulas known only to some" and their unemployed and unrecognized artisans, the School would return to the people, "pure models", "their formulas compiled and completed" as well as "the means for existing."[90] The School thus not only undertook a whole scale "purification" of art but promised that in so doing it would create large scale employment. Rather than build an elite "art of the laboratory", confined within the walls of his urban School, Groslier aspired to an expansive and complete "organisation" of "indigenous art"(E, p. 21). In no other colony, Groslier wrote proudly, would the "colonial governments take in hand the local art and its past, preserving the buyer and the seller at once [and] assuring the synchronicity of the production and the markets"(C, p. 884). Having been "taken in charge", "identified", and "fixed", Cambodian art was to be "developed"(R1925).

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[88] Comité de Perfectionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgien, July 27, 1918 [NAC #8341 (RSC)]. This larger aim of purifying national culture had already been outlined in the 1917 survey. A proposed "art ministry" (ក្រសួងវិចិត្រ), located in Phnom Penh, would attempt to connect and organise artisans throughout Cambodia by "encouraging them" and offering them "commissions based on classical models". See NAC #15200 (RSC).

[89] "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)]

[90] "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)].

But how was the art of an entire people to be "organised"? Again Groslier invoked figurative drawing to make his point. What use would it be, he asked, to change a Cambodian artist from a drafter of an "extraordinary fabled monkey" to a drawer of "naturalistic monkeys" when in France, "100,000 artists and decorators" able to draw such naturalistic monkeys live "in misery?"[91] It was only by "being and remaining strictly Cambodian that they will find a clientele and can live without fear of the enormous international competition which could erase them in a few years"(R1925). To remain "native" was the "only means" to "be original and seductive".[92] "What traveler", Groslier continued, would "buy on the banks of the Mekong, in view of Angkor, a work which comes from the French school, a table made as in San Francisco, an ornament pastiched from the rue de la Paix, a tree branch copied after nature?"[93] Instead the tourist would: "only be interested because the art is indigenous, Cambodian, and thus different from Western art. One can't see a French or British customer demanding from a Khmer weaver a cloth that was woven after European patterns. The goal was not to train the craft so that it echoed French handicraft but to use and develop it for what it offered in its uniqueness... as Cambodian"(E, p.9). If the place of the machine and the modern was already held by France, the "uniqueness" of Cambodia would be the "hand-made" and the

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[91] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)].

[92] "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[93] R1925. We could say that Groslier has retrospectively been proven wrong in light of the burgeoning market for handmade copies of Western masterpieces found in Vietnam and produced in "painting factories" in Hong Kong and the Philippines. Here the cheapness of the duplicating hand has allowed "real" oil on canvas duplicates to grace homes in the West for reasonable prices.

"traditional". In the curious geography of consumption that would ensue, Cambodians would produce "traditional" hand-made things for a distant clientele while relying on French manufactured goods for their everyday modern lives (figure 31). Groslier understood only too well the order of modernity that still shapes Cambodia today: "In our age, as all the great countries of the Orient and Asia modernize themselves, the West becomes more and more the client of the traditional arts that they abandon. If they were to make Turkish carpets and only sell them in Turkey, they would go bankrupt. And it is because they had only Cambodians for their clients that Cambodian arts have collapsed in the last forty years."[94]

The "Cambodian arts", from 1918 onward, would not be made then for the rapidly changing local society which had become fascinated with the "new". Rather the "Cambodian arts" would be produced for a foreign patron on which they would entirely depend for their continued health. By "seducing" this foreign patron, the "Cambodian arts" (that is, objects made by hand following designated pure models) would provide work for many artisans. It was only "by opening up markets for him" that "the native" would be "brought back to his traditional arts", and it was only through "glimpsing the certainty of a remunerative future" - "a precise future and a

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[94] E, p.7. Groslier repeatedly warned against the "internationalisation" of the arts, urging the local to remain specific. He briefly won his dispute with Tardieu when, after Tardieu's death, the "practical aims" of colonial art training were reinstated at the School of Hanoi. As the Minister of the Colonies put it in ordering the reforms in Hanoi: "a School of Fine Arts should not simply be the replication of metropolitan teaching which will not find its normal markets in the Far East and which thus risks producing artists without a real vocation or employment. It is, on the contrary by renewing the close relations with the sources of indigenous arts and with the popular crafts that the School of Fine Arts [in the Far East] can pursue active and useful work from the social point of view as from the economic point of view". See the letter from the Ministry of the Colonies to the GGI, May 10, 1938 [NAC #9084 (RSC)] and Nora Taylor, The Artist and the State for reforms of the late 1930s at the art school in Hanoi.



Figure 31

Early tourists on the Tonle Sap, their boats marked with "T" for "tourisme".

NMC Photography Collection H135

secure clientele" - that students (and independent artisans) would follow Groslier's models.[95]

In the spring of 1918, Groslier posted notices in conversational Khmer throughout Phnom Penh, explaining the idea for the Corporations Cambodgiennes which would spread the models of the School throughout the Protectorate.[96] School models (គំរូ), "completely true to ancient Khmer style", would be made available free of charge to any independent artisans who wished to use of them. At the same time, these models would be displayed for foreign visitors to see them. The School (and later the larger arts administration of the DAC) would simply serve as a liason between foreigners who wished to buy such objects and independent artisans who knew how to make them. Such a system, the Notice summarized succinctly, would solve the present dilemma that "no one knows you". "Dispersed in the villages and suburbs, without outlets or signs", the Cambodian artisan to Groslier, was "unfindable", "unable to defend his art and make the least publicity".[97] Tourists for their part, Groslier continued, were "always rushed... and don't speak Khmer"(R1925). Besides they were

[95] The effort to reconstruct traditional art was simply one example of more general efforts to bring elements of the colony into circulation and thus to convert them into value. The "resurgence of native arts", Groslier wrote once, should really be "the principle goal of a commercial organisation rather than of an artistic or pedagogical organisation"(E, p.6). What "unlimited markets", RSC Baudoin echoed, would greet "local fabrications recalling the ancient style"(I, p.8, Baudoin). See the letter from RSC Baudoin to the GGI, April 13, 1922 [NAC #11886 (RSC)] and "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", April 13, 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[96] ចាង់ហ្វាង់សាឡាក្សាច់រេចូណាខេម្មរ: មកដល់ជាង់រេចូណានិង់ជាង់ទាំង់ពូង់ដែរនៅក្នុង់ក្រុង់កម្ពុជា April 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)]. I use Corporations to refer to this organisation. The Khmer text simply calls the Corporations "groups" (ក្រុម) ; the name used today for the School store is សាជីវកម្ម (Sachivakam).

[97] E, p.2 and R1925.

"completely ignorant of Cambodian art, apt to buy anything no matter what the price"(E, p.21). Imagine, Groslier exclaimed, if by accident "an American discovered an artisan". This "miracle cannot go beyond an exchange of smiles since the Cambodian, lacking foresight and a spendthrift, never makes anything in advance [and] only works on commission [after] having received the sums which allow him to buy his raw materials"(R1925). No tourist in transit "will leave a commission and advance money to a native who doesn't have a boutique or a name"(R1925). Even if the foreigner risked such a thing, the artisan - that "mass without rigor, without definite form, without initiative" - would not be able "to submit to the formalities of customs fees [and] delivery"(E, p.21). Given this state of affairs, Groslier concluded, it was "necessary" to establish an "attentive intermediary" who could serve as the link between "all those people destined not to meet each other"(R1925).

Through the plan set forth in Groslier's Notice, "we can make them know you" and there will be "much profit".[98] "Corporations", or guilds, were to be formed which would represent the "six great arts of Cambodia".[99] Commissions placed by foreign visitors for copies of the models on display would be relayed to the Corporation members through their elected representatives.[100] A sample of the particular model

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[98] ចាង់ហ្វាង់សាឡាក្សាថ់រេចួណាខេម្មរ: មកដល់ជាង់រេចួណានិង់ជាង់ទាំង់ពួង់ដែរនៅក្នុង់ក្រុង់កម្ពុជា [NAC #394 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to the 1918 Notice are taken from this file.

[99] C, p.879. The initial Corporations were jewelery, painting and temple planning, foundry, weaving, sculpture of all kinds, and furniture-making and carpentry. By 1931, the separate carpentry and furniture-making Corporation had been eliminated (or possibly transferred to Public Works) and furniture making was included in the sculpture Corporation. See E, p.29 and CC1942, p.31.

[100] Drawing comparison to the deeply established and respected local temple culture, the Notice compared the proposed system of representation to that in which the head monk spoke

commissioned would be given to the executing artisan so that he or she would "always know about the work that you have to do". "Hurry up and sign your name", the Notice urged: "Who signs first, will get to make first". "All of you", the Notice added in a curiously threatening passage, "clearly understand that the School has more power than all of you together since the School is the representative of the King and the administration". In the coming years, a "big building" was to be built (the Museum) in which the models would be even more advantageously displayed and even more visitors would come and commission work. Artisans were to "begin to prepare for this now" by joining the Corporations and starting production according to the models. If at present "there are not many things" in the "troubled" country of Cambodia, "tomorrow", the Notice concluded, "there will be many things and after tomorrow there will be always more and more".

The response to Groslier's Notice was apparently not overwhelming. Although an initial meeting attracted 170 people, Groslier's proposal was met with incomprehension and subsequent membership meetings attracted 50 and then only 20 artisans(R1925). These 20 artisans became the founding members of the Corporation along with (or possibly the number already included) the heads of the ateliers from the School. "We start from zero", Groslier declared, explaining that the first step was the "education of the work force".[101] None of the initial members of the

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for the whole Vat community. The representative of each Corporation would meet with the director of the School once or twice a month to receive new commissions and deliver completed work. This representative also chose who to assign the commissioned work to, although the finished product, as we will see, had to be approved by Groslier.

[101] "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts Cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

Corporations had studied at Groslier's school and thus they were not yet "purified".[102] Knowing neither "how to draw nor how to compose works in our taste", the indcpendent artisans were also not yet a "reliable" or "obedient" workforce.[103] Still Groslier regarded the formation of the Corportions as an important "hot iron" in the "wound" since they allowed the "purifying action of the School" to immediately "extend outside of its walls" through the establishment of "models" from which the "work force" would produce.[104]

Let us reread the last few lines carefully, for Groslier wrote that the independent artisans did not yet know "how to draw" (and thus presumably couldn't understand the model plans offered by the School). Nor, he continued, did these artisans know "how to compose works in our taste". Indeed, in his Inauguration speech, Groslier explained that the role of the administration in the Corporation was to "signal to [the Cambodian artisan] where they excel, that which we Europeans like the best, that which they can consequently sell in the greatest numbers and at the highest prices; to organise the work and its output; to regulate production according to consumption"(I, p.20, Groslier). Groslier had left room for such a role in his picture of "Cambodian art", sketched in Chapter One. The "commands" of "tradition" were "not personal", he claimed, and because these "commands" were "thousand times

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[102] To Groslier, although "most of our models were executed by the best artisans in the capital", these models were made "in a fashion very inferior to those made by our students who are still in the ateliers" (my emphasis). Indeed, Groslier looked forward to the day when all practicing artisans in the Corporations would be graduates of the School. See Groslier, "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

[103] Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens, 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)], my emphasis added.

[104] C, p.880 and Comité de Perfectionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens, July 27, 1918 [NAC #8341 (RSC)].

older than the master", the master came to "obey the teaching just like the student"(psyI, p.131). Groslier did in fact come to teach "Cambodian art" at the School, but not to the students. As Thiounn explained it in 1917, Groslier was to "ensure the artistic education of the professors".[105] To that end, he was not only to "fix the curriculum [and] proceed with the establishment of models", but he was also to "teach a course on Cambodian art to all the Heads of the Ateliers and the professors".[106] Through these three tasks, Groslier became the designer of "tradition", that "distant origin, sacred and mysterious" from which commands would come that even the masters would obey. Thus a particular tradition was constructed for contemporary purposes (psyI, p.131).

The captions which accompany the models presented in Groslier's and Silice's articles are instructive in this regard.[107] For despite invocations of a "rescue" and a return to "authenticity", a considerable emphasis on innovation is found in their descriptions. Under an illustration of spoons, for example, the caption reads "classical and modern examples of a Cambodian rice spoon" which can be "adapted to Western

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[105] Thiounn, Discussion of the rules and regulations governing the School of Cambodian Arts December 15, 1917 [NAC #8332 (RSC)].

[106] Thiounn, Discussion of the rules and regulations governing the School of Cambodian Arts December 15, 1917 [NAC #8332 (RSC)]. Groslier described these courses more vaguely as forums "permitting discussion of all the national arts and art industries by the most reputable and skilled specialists of the Kingdom"(CQ, p.106).

[107] See the series of photographs of models found in the National Archives of Cambodia photography collection, Groslier's 1925 Report, Silice's "Exemples d'Art cambodgien contemporain", in Arts et Archéologie Khmers as well as Groslier's articles "L'Enseignment et la Mise en Pratique des Arts indigènes 1918-1930" and "La Convalescence des Arts cambodgiens".

uses" (figure 32).[108] Below a tea set of "traditional form", we find a geometric tea set described as "classical decor" (presumably the head of Rahu) adapted to "universal forms of usage" (figure 33). Here the diagrams of tradition have fitted easily onto new forms demanded by their market. Indeed, the school, Groslier wrote, would not "direct an art" because "an art is always and only directed by a clientele".[109] The fickle Cambodian artisan of Groslier's initial sketch (whose adaptability had once been said to threaten the very essence of Cambodian art) was now revalued and praised for his "flexibility" and "versatility". The signs of "classical" decoration, inculcated in the drawing course, could be affixed to any of the surfaces of objects demanded by the foreign clientele. Cigarette holders, ash trays, mirrors, and boxes, were all to be "developed" at the School and then hand produced in multiples by the associated artisans; for bigger expositions and special events, larger objects like cabinets could be traditionally coated (figure 34). The key remained the client for whom the administration "waited" and then "watched... noting his reactions, his buying power... his needs, his critiques and his pleasures"(CC1942, p.15). It was the client "above all

[108] "Classical" seems to have referred to ornaments and figures taken from the Angkorian era while "modern" seems to have referred to anything after Angkor as yet seemingly untouched by outside influence. Again, I want to thank the professors of the Department of Plastic Arts for discussing these examples with me. They immediately noted that "classical" meant Angkor and that images such as the clothed monkeys did not yet exist in Angkorian times and thus are "modern".

[109] An art is also directed by "an artisanat", the quote added as an afterthought. See Les Corporations Cambodgiennes Phnom Penh: Imprimerie Henry, 1942, p.39 hereafter refered to by (CC, page). I would like to thank Penny Edwards for alerting me to this reference and Darryl Collins for bringing a copy of it back from Australia for me.

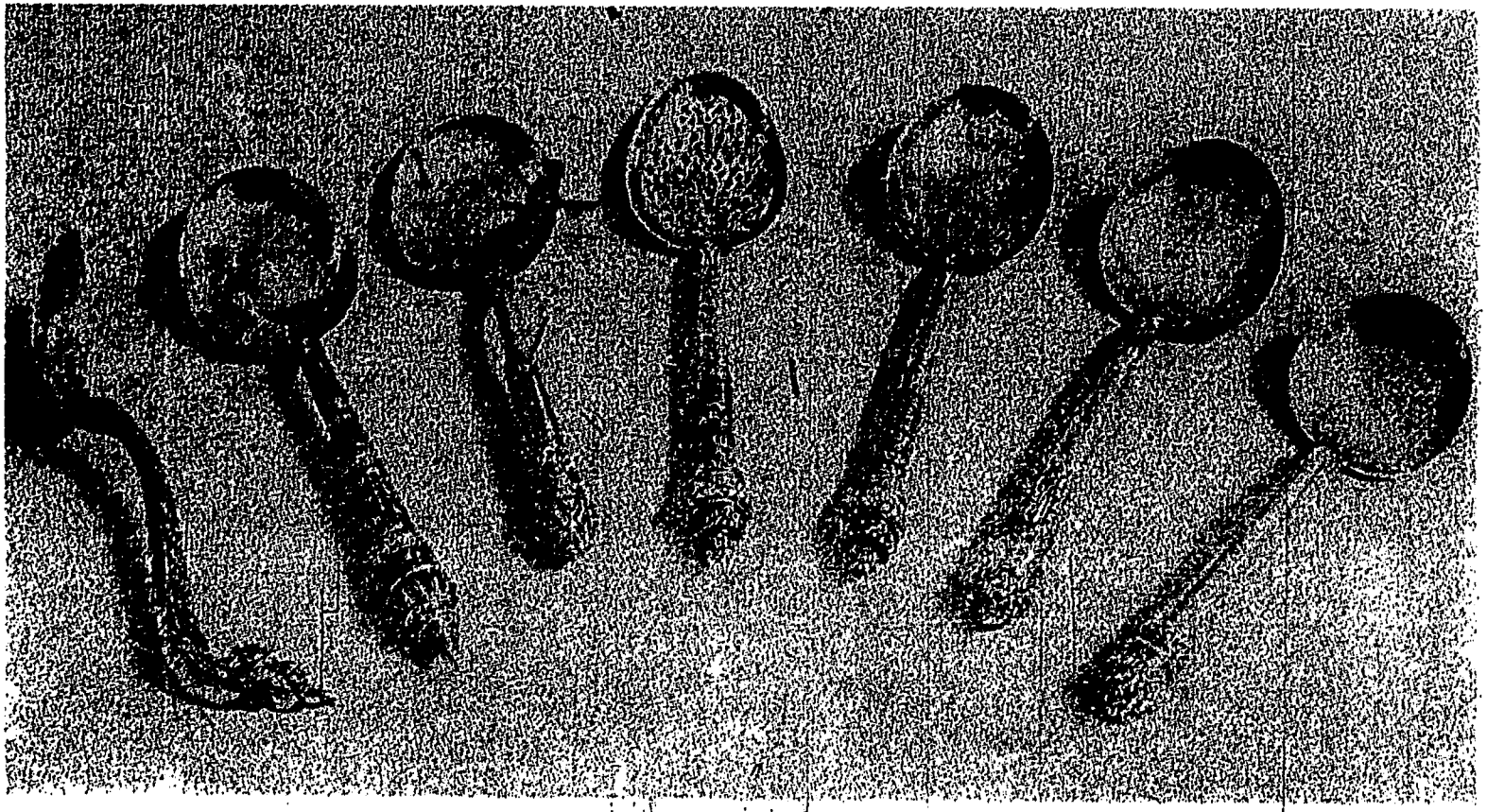

FIG. 14. — EXEMPLES CLASSIQUES ET MODERNES DE LA CUILLER A RIZ CAMBODGIENNE, SUSCEPTIBLES D'ÊTRE ADAPTÉS POUR LES USAGES OCCIDENTAUX.

Figure 32 : Models for silver spoons, School of Cambodian Arts, 1930s

Les Arts Indigènes au Cambodge 1918-1936 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques, Paris, 1937 (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1937).

PL. VII (1937)



FIG. 12. — SERVICE A THÉ DE FORMES TRADITIONNELLES (argent)

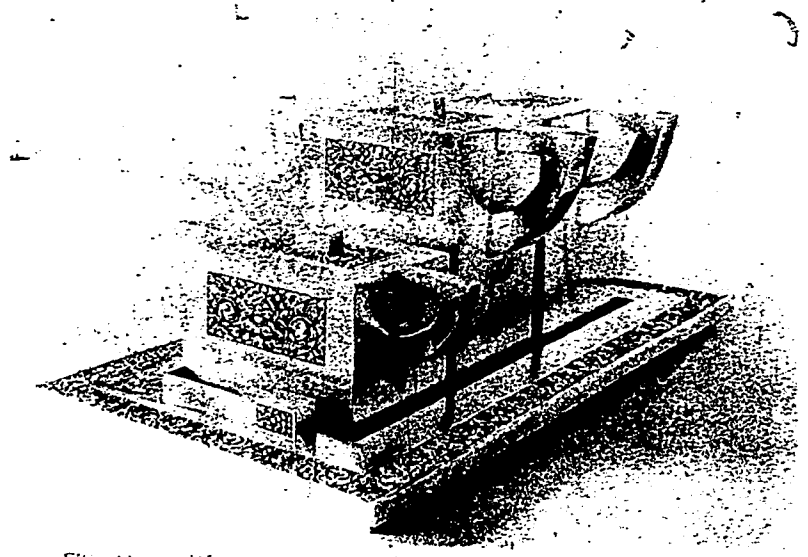

FIG. 13. — DÉCOR CLASSIQUE ADAPTÉ A DES FORMES D'USAGE UNIVERSELLES
LE RAPPROCHEMENT DE CES DEUX EXÉCUTIONS MONTRE LA SOUPLESSE
DE LA MAIN-D'ŒUVRE INDIGÈNE.

Figure 33
Models of the Corporations.
Above, a tea service with "traditional forms".
Below, a coffee service using "classical decoration adapted to forms of universal use".

L'Enseignement et la mise en pratique des Arts indigènes (microfilm, New York Public Library)

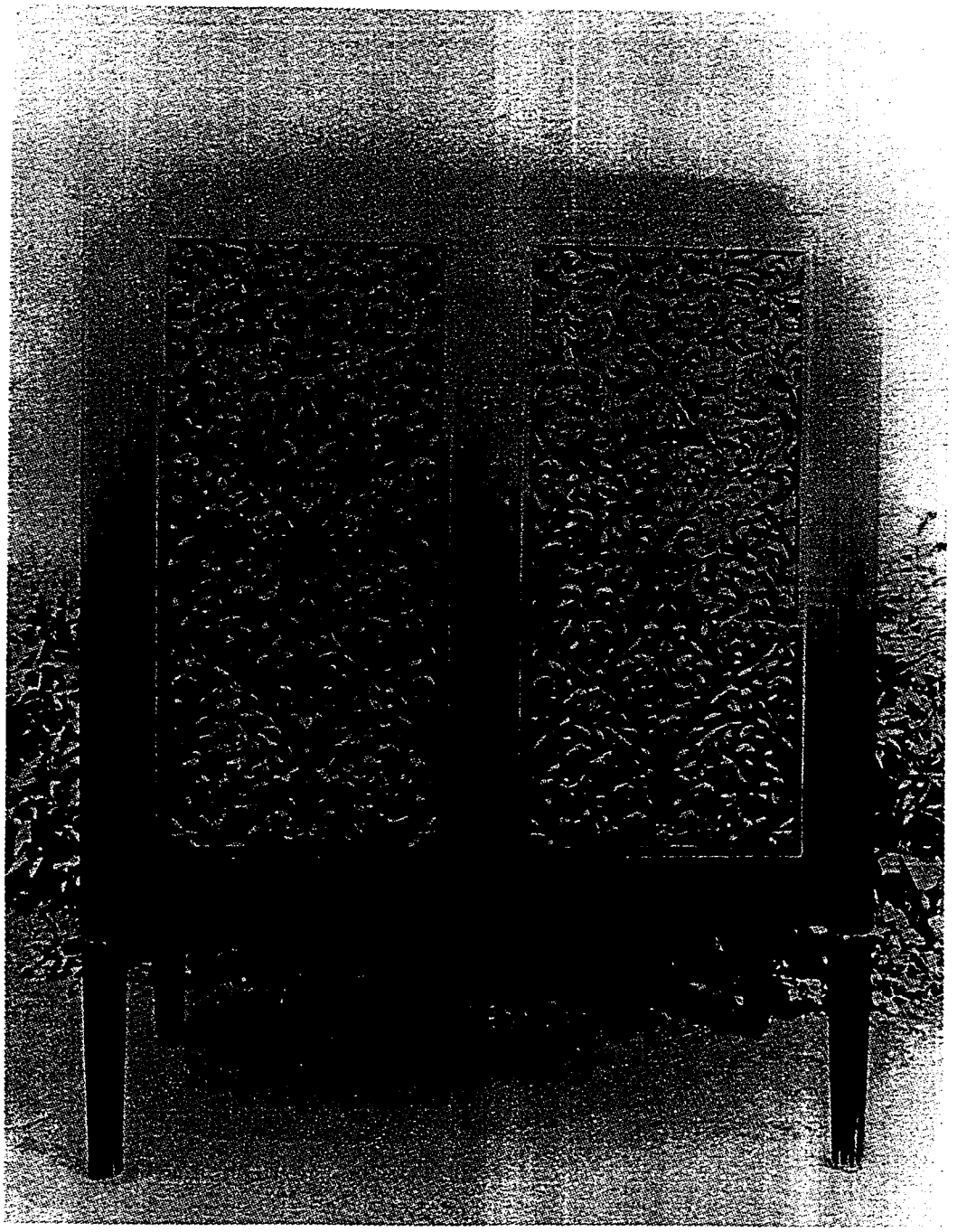

Figure 34

Cabinet prepared by the School of Cambodian Arts for the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs, Paris 1925.

NMC Photography Collection A66

who has a say" and while "forgotten models" were to be "put [back] into circulation", they could and should be "modified to the taste of the day" (CC1942, p.49).[110]

Despite Groslier's ode to the tourist, it was in fact the local foreign clientele which provided for most of the sales of the Corporations during the 1920s.[111] High hopes had initially been pinned on the "Americans who travel", but they turned out to "buy almost nothing", leaving the local French of Indochina as the "most regular" clientele (CC1942, p.43). Although Groslier was pleased with their repeat purchases, he soon realised that their patronage also presented a problem since there were only so many silver boxes and silk scarves that they could be convinced to buy. To keep their continued patronage, a steady stream of new products would have to be made, a

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[110] The "role" of the administration was to keep an "equilibrium", "regulating without cease" in order to adjust production to consumption (CC1942, p.11-12). Preparations for big foreign exhibitions or special events had to be "managed" so that the sales office could "sell thousands of objects without the labor force noticing"(CC1942, p.11). With the increase in tourism, a pronounced tourist season emerged. By building up stocks rather than waiting for commissions, the administration managed the irregularities of this seasonality as well. Minute records were kept of objects sold, numbers of clients, and numbers of artisans employed. Based on these accumulated records of "22 years of operations", plans could be made in advance for each subsequent year's production with stocks of each model accumulated so that the visitor could take the desired piece with him or her immediately (CC1942, p.12). Groslier's planning always aimed to fulfill slightly less than actual demand. Thus for example if an estimated 25 jewelers should be trained to meet demand, only 20 would actually be admitted to the school; if 100 bracelets were commissioned, only 80 would be supplied. This was in order to ensure that demand always exceeded supply and that artisans were always working at their "maximum" (CC1942, p.13).

[111] Foreign visitors to the temples of Angkor from June 10, 1924 to July 10, 1925 numbered in total 832 of which 426 were foreign residents of Indochina. The remainder included: 55 French from France, 173 Americans, 79 Annamites, 8 Siamese, 46 English, 29 Japanese, 8 Chinese, 3 Dutch, 3 Danish, 1 Belgian, and 1 Swiss. See NAC #8353 (RSC). For figures on their purchases see, for example, "Le Service des Arts cambodgiens, Statistique 1923" [NAC #17503 (RSC)], and "Le Service des Arts cambodgiens, Statistique 1925" [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

process which the "richness" of the "decorative art of Cambodia", according to Groslier, allowed to "proceed to infinity".[112]

The ateliers of the School not only developed and designed new objects within established areas of making but they also experimented with "resurrecting" presumed traditional processes and materials. During the early 1920s, the jewelery atelier experimented with several of the ancient processes which Groslier had lamented as lost in his inauguration speech. Damascene (the inlaying of silver or gold on bronze) was taught and ongoing experiments tested the use of various enameling processes in the hope of making colored bronze bowls and vases which would expand the markets available to the foundry atelier.[113] The furniture-making section experimented with lacquer-finished furniture, while ivory carving and various forms of inlaying were researched in order to improve the fortunes of the wood sculpture atelier.[114]

Graduates from Groslier's School were soon helping with the diversification of the product line. Using the vocabulary of diagrams and models with which they had been imbued, former students began to design new traditional objects, thus "creating their own models" which they "brought [to the School] to be corrected".[115] These innovations were spurred on by the "interventions" of the Corporations sales office.

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[112] "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

[113] See the Reports from 1923, 1924, 1925, 1931 and 1932 in NAC #763, #2010, #2017, #17503 #16445 (RSC).

[114] "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens" [NAC #2017 (RSC)] first version by Groslier dated January 10, 1924 / second version signed by Silice dated September 10, 1924).

[115] "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2010 (RSC)].

If, for example, "the same designs or colors of silk were appearing too often" or the "same chiseled cup turned into an object made mechanically, without thinking", the administration intervened (E, p.33). If a "scarf design" sold "only a little" and its color was "not appreciated by the clientele", the particular object would no longer be purchased by the Sales Office after a certain announced date (CC1942, p.15). "Voilà, the work force awakes", Groslier wrote: "Wouldn't it be foolish to continue [to make an object] which will then remain on their hands?"(E, p.33). Such "economic" interventions were complimented by "artistic" ones. Public competitions were announced "in order to provoke the creation of new [traditional] forms"(E, p.33). The Sales Office would, for example, display a recently discovered old silk, announcing that "all silks inspired by this model" would be bought for a higher price than usual (E, p.33). Through such strategies, "from one day to the next, a new model of art is born" and the "exploitation of an object whose repetition has become machine-like is ended"(E, p.33).

Sales at the Corporations determined the structure of the School as well, since it was the primary training site for the "work force". As Groslier put it: "if one sees an atelier of 6 founders and another of 30 jewelers, this only means that in the course of the last three years, one has sold a proportion of 6 bronze objects to every 30 pieces of jewelery".[116] Admission of provincial students was similarly regulated by an analysis of the "state of the art industries in each province, the available raw materials, and the possibilities for sales that are either found in the province or through liaison with the

[116] CC1942, p.39 and "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

capital".[117] By the 1930s, this system of regulation had made clear how little the School resembled the sanctuary it had once claimed to be. "A certain number of teachers", Silice wrote, "no longer respond to the needs for which they have been engaged".[118] These "authentic" and ancient artisans had become, in his words, "useless". An "evolution" had produced a "considerable development" in "certain branches of Khmer art" while leaving others behind.[119] This evolution was spurred by "the necessity of giving the means of making a living to our former students" and thus was determined not by "habit", "instinct", or the "frame of tradition" which Groslier claimed.[120] Rather, evolution had resulted from an engagement with a new market of foreigners who determined the shape of things. From the early conception of Cambodia as a land of sculpture, for example, which had led to the initial placement of a large number of students into the study of wood sculpture, by the early 1930s, the atelier had been reduced to six students, a number which Silice explained was sufficient to respond to "a feeble demand".[121] No longer was it possible "to hope and

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[117] Through a period of study by select "emmissaries" to the School, provincial industries would be "perfected", "revived", "renewed", and "improved", thus bringing "prosperity" to the "industry". Two annex schools were established in the early 1920s, the pottery decoration school of Kompong Chhnang, and a stone sculpture school in Pursat. See CC#1, p.275; Letter from RSC Baudoin to the Résidents of Pursat, Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom], September 3, 1919; and Letter from the Résident of Kompong Cham to Groslier, September 15, 1919 in NAC #11886 (RSC).

[118] Letter from Silice to the Chef local du service de l'enseignement; May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)] .

[119] See NAC #11886, 16445, 17503 (RSC).

[120] Letter from Silice to the Chef local du service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]

[121] Letter from Silice to the Chef local du service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]. Once the "foremost atelier of the School", the atelier of sculpture had

envision that sculpture on wood will now have the favor that it once had", Silice wrote. On the other hand, the atelier of jewelery had "undergone a considerable expansion" within Groslier's "organism", in response to the shift in clientele through which "Khmers have become Europeans".[122]

"After a circuit across the ages and the country", all visits by foreigners were to come to "a successful end" in the Museum / School complex (figures 35, 36).[123] Faced with the temples of Angkor, Groslier explained, tourists were "beset" with questions. The first question was always "what has become of these audacious builders of the past?"[124] Having traversed the monuments of Angkor and viewed the collections of the Museum, a short visit to the School would already supply the answer, since the visitor would see there "the splendor of antiquity", "perpetuated" in present practices (CQ, p.105) (figures 37, 38, 39). But what, the tourist then wondered, did the "present day Cambodian make?" If the Cambodian no longer

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become "the least frequented because of the few markets open to sculptors". See also Silice's 1933 Report [NAC #16445 (RSC)].

[122] Letter from Silice to the Chef local du service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]. By 1940, the sculpture atelier was reduced to a single professor when Rollet noted that a retiring professor did not need to be replaced because of the small number of students. No form of making was ever completely eliminated however since the administration realised that taste shifted and clienteles re-form themselves. It was thus "an obligation" of the School to "conserve proven forms of making" for the day that they would find their proper form and thus a market. Groslier frequently wrote of the need to avoid having graduates take up new vocations other than those that they had been trained for at the School since this would give the School a bad reputation. See "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)]

[123] In order to guarantee a clientele, a "solid chain" had to be forged between "the ancient capital and the new one". The links in Groslier's chain included: "protection of the artists and artisans, Corporations, School of Arts, conservation of ancient Cambodge... publicity, [and] tourism" with a "tourist route" developing between the "two poles" of the temples and the Museum / School. See Groslier's report on the Museum, October 7, 1918 [NAC #17663 (RSC)].

[124] Groslier's report on the Museum, October 7, 1918, [NAC #17663 (RSC)].

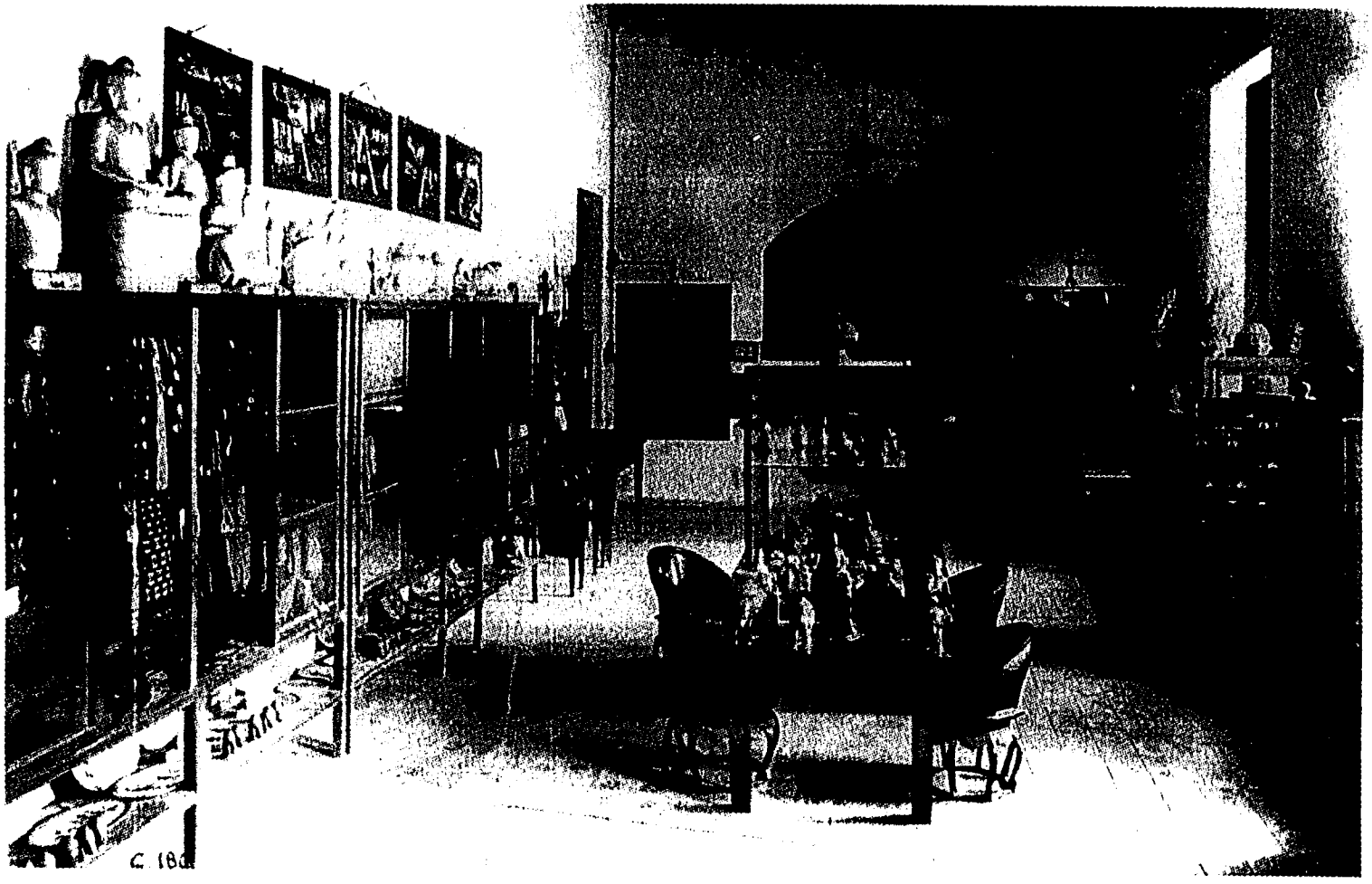


Figure 35 : Sales office of the Corporations in the Albert Sarraut Museum, 1933?

NMC Photography Collection G180

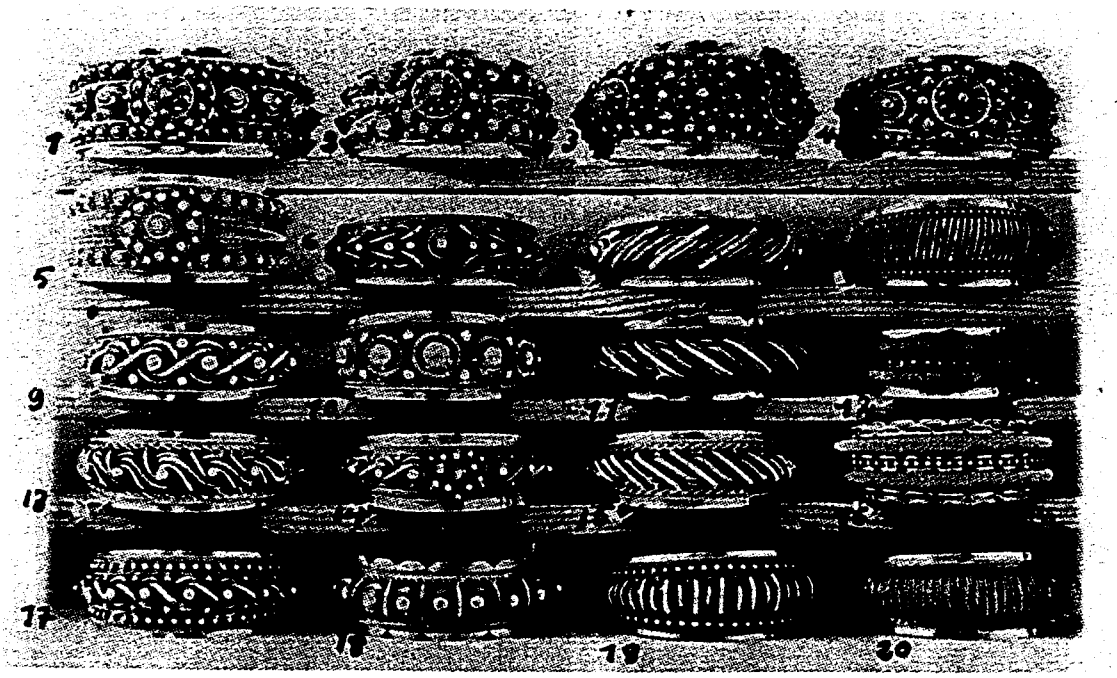
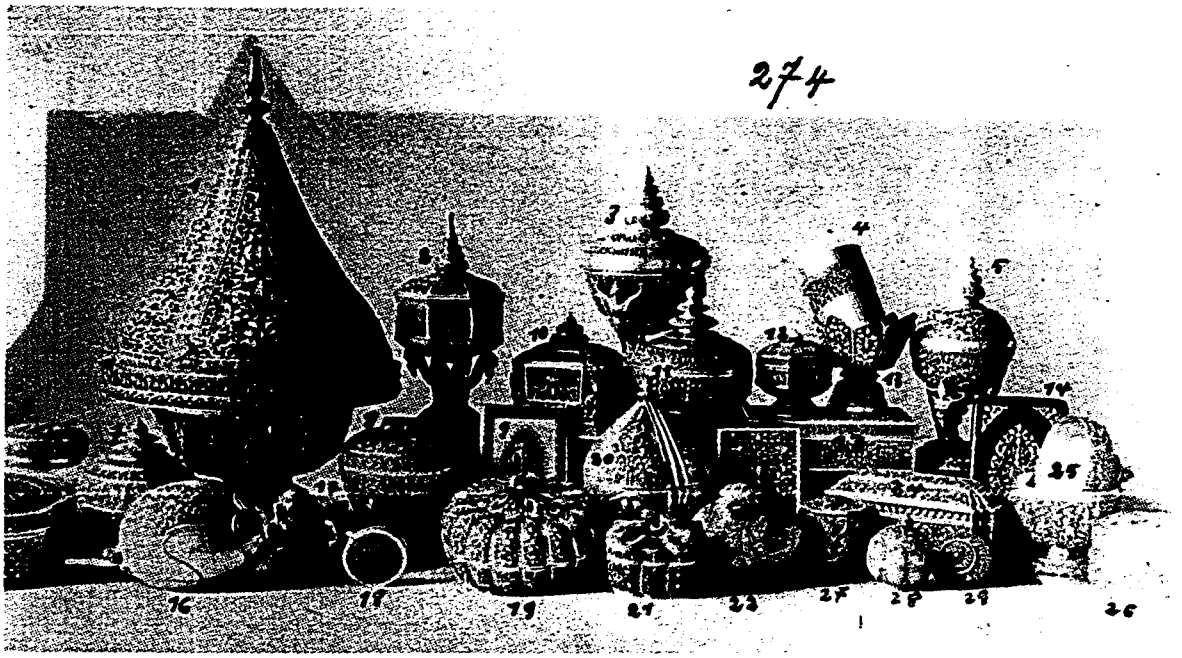


Figure 36

Models, Corporations catalogue
Above, silver rings; below, silver boxes

Rephotographed from the photography collection of Som Samai



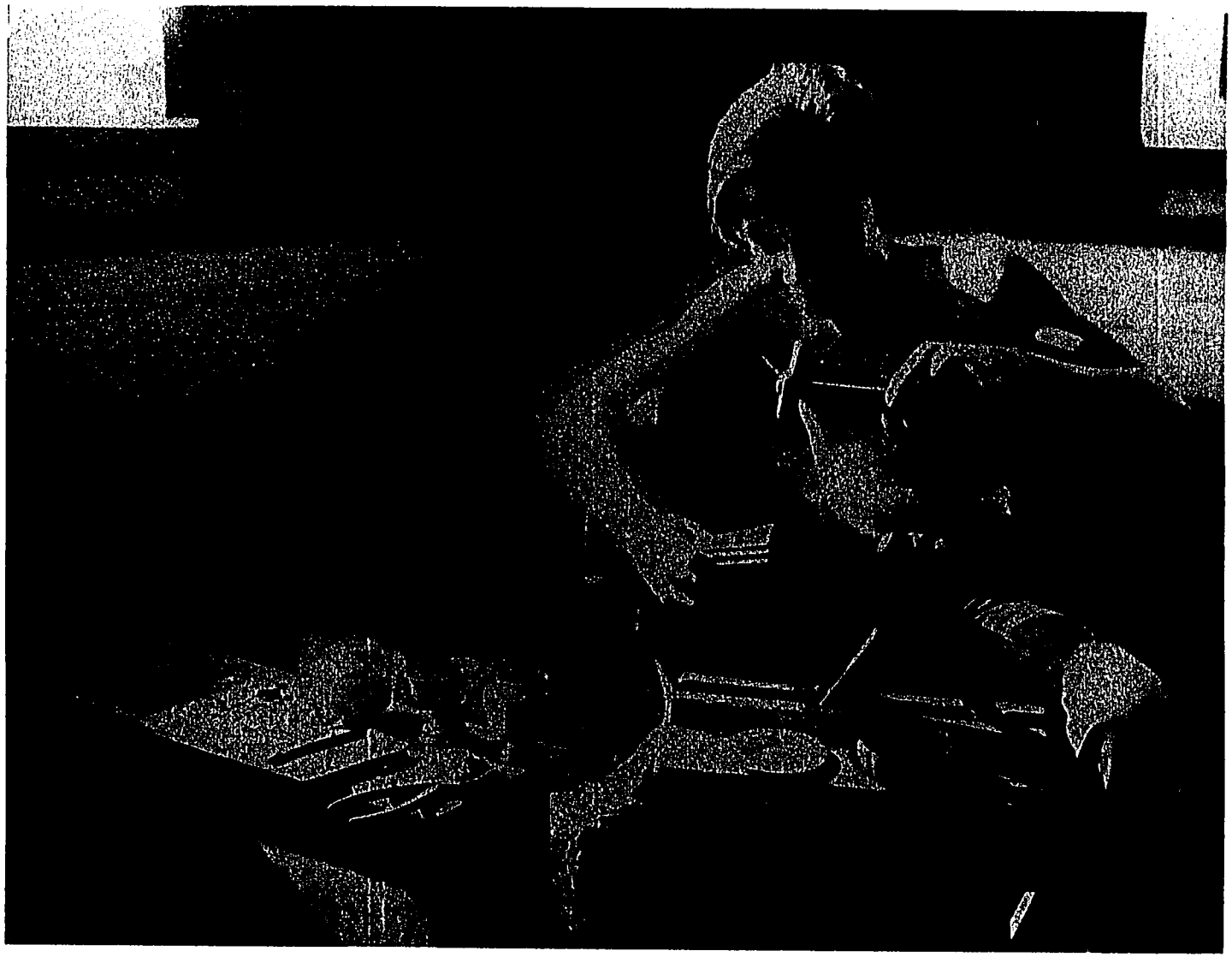


Figure 37

Student in the jewelery section of the School of Cambodian Arts. From a series of photographs taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making at the School.

NMC Photography Collection H387

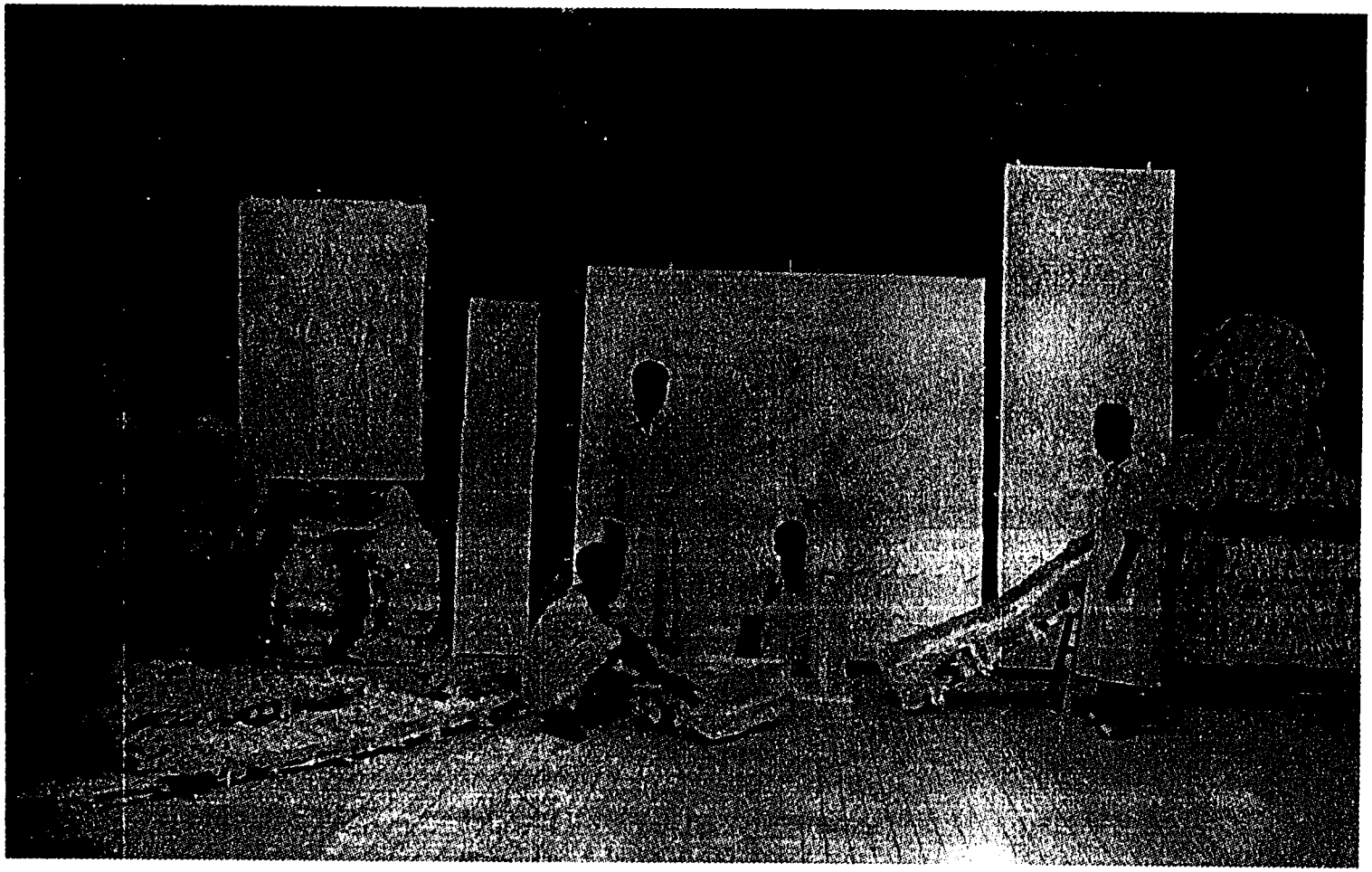


Figure 38

The team of mold-makers associated with the School of Cambodian Arts and the Albert Sarraut Museum. From a series of photographs taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making and activities at the School.

NMC Photography Collection H363



Figure 39

Student in the jewelery section of the School of Cambodian Arts. From a series of photographs taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making.

NMC Photography Collection H390

built audaciously, what was he doing? The reply was already found in Groslier's third question: "What can be brought from this legendary country that will recall its dignity to us and will reveal it to the West?"(CQ, p.105) It was the small portable object - the high quality souvenir – that provided his answer, and it was the production of such objects that would preoccupy the Corporations and the School of Cambodian Arts for almost forty years.

The Masters

It is hard to know what the so far unnamed "masters" of Groslier's School thought of all this (figure 40).[125] The personnel files which remain in the National Archives of Cambodia are a random assortment which have survived through the accidents of history. In these files the teachers appear as they were recorded by the French, marked for certain characteristics and ignored for others. It is still instructive, however, to again compare Groslier's official representations to details found in these archival remains.

In his reports of the early School, Groslier glowingly and frequently reported that "not a defection [was] noticed" during the "difficult time of beginning".[126] The old teachers from the Palace had worked with "initiative", "confidence", and "dedication" to ground the new institution on firm foundations.[127] The masters had blossomed in

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[125] The "masters" were primarily men, and the curriculum which Groslier installed was for the male students. I look forward to being able to spend more time in the Archives trying to find out about the preserve of women, the weaving section, headed for so long by the sisters Nosei and Lekha, one of whom is pictured here.

[126] C, p.872 and NAC #17503 (RSC).

[127] NAC #17503 (RSC).

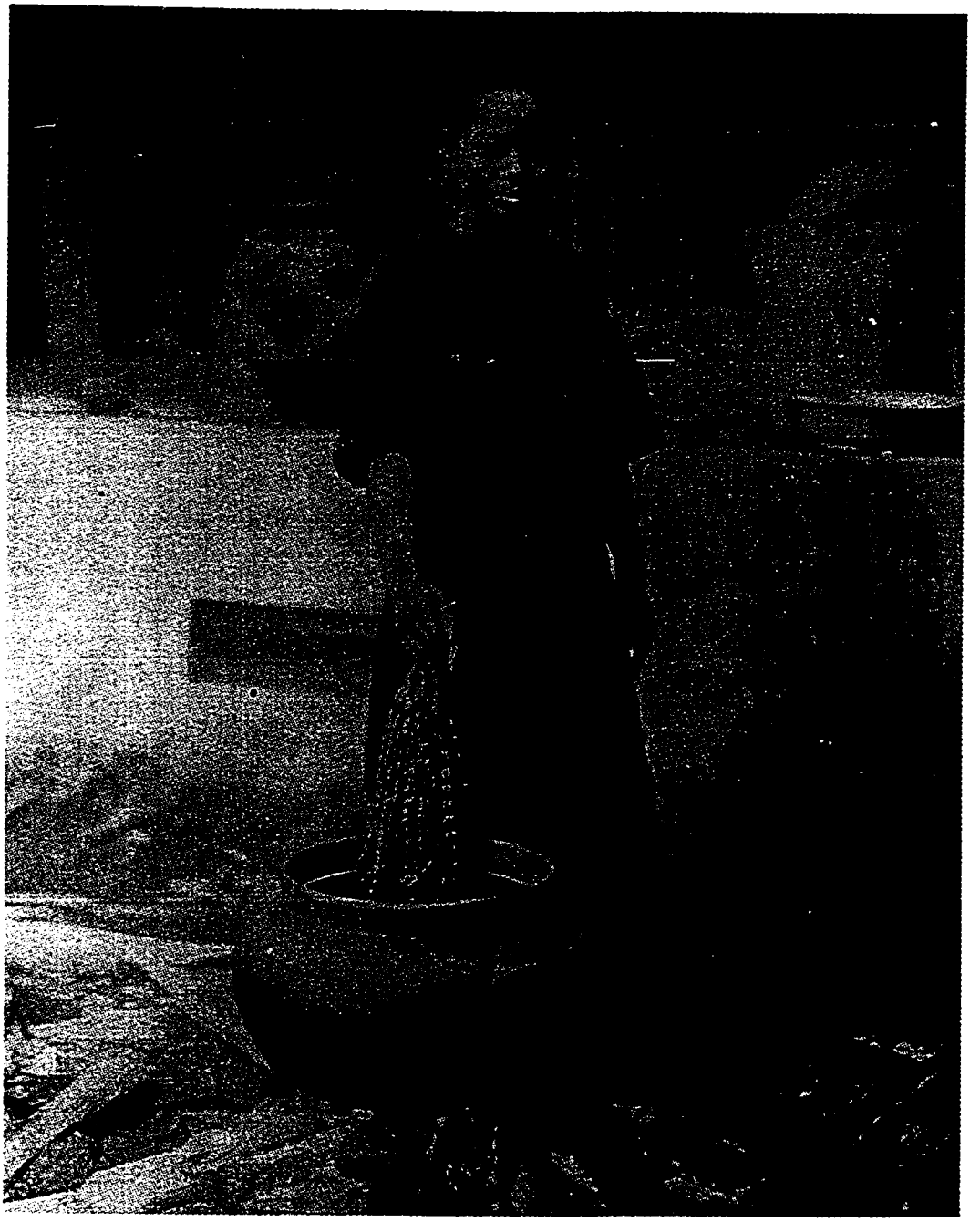

Figure 40

Dyeing silk thread.

The woman pictured is either the teacher Lekha or the teacher Nosei. Lekha and Nosei were sisters who taught weaving at the School of Cambodian Arts from the late 1920s through the 1950s. The photograph is from a series taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making.

NMC Photography Collection H375

the new version of the School, "boosted by the confidence... publicly put in [them] by the French administration"(R1925). The ease with which the personnel had settled into the routines of the School, Groslier added, was all the more surprising since the masters were "a group of individuals already aging, considered by their people as members of an elite"(C, p.872) (figure 41). Suddenly the members of this group had found themselves "from one day to the next, under a serious discipline, a method and a regularity"(C,p. 872).

A very different picture of the first year of the School is found in an "anonymous request" of August 1918, addressed not to Groslier but rather to his superior, the RSC.[128] The "old functionaries", as the group of teachers writing the letter called themselves, opened with praise for the new "tranquility" which they had supposedly found under the recently established French administration of the School. Such administrations were renown, the teachers continued, for "not permitting Cambodian functionaries to oppress those under their authority". It was for this reason that the teachers were appealing to the RSC, since in actual fact, Tep Nimit Mak (the former palace architect who had become the first "indigenous director" of the School) was

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[128] Letter from the old functionaries to the RSC, August 1918 [NAC #8342 (RSC)]. All subsequent references are to this letter. Additional snippets of unrest appear in Groslier's own reports, despite his retrospective claims of "no defections". The first trimester report on the School noted that a jeweler called Nhêm, highly recommended by the Minister of the Palace "at the moment when I [Groslier] formed the personnel of the School and lacked a base on which to guide my judgement", had not "produced the indispensable efforts which were demanded of him" and had been dismissed. In addition, Oknha Noun Ou, who had headed the atelier of jewelery in the Palace before becoming head of the jewelery atelier of the School had "difficulty adjusting to close supervision". Groslier wanted to dismiss him but "upon the insistence of the Minister of the Palace, I have left the status quo... Moreover [Noun Ou] seems to have understood that he only hung by a thread and no longer called attention to himself. He seems to me to be an opium smoker". See "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des arts cambodgiens", April 15, 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)].

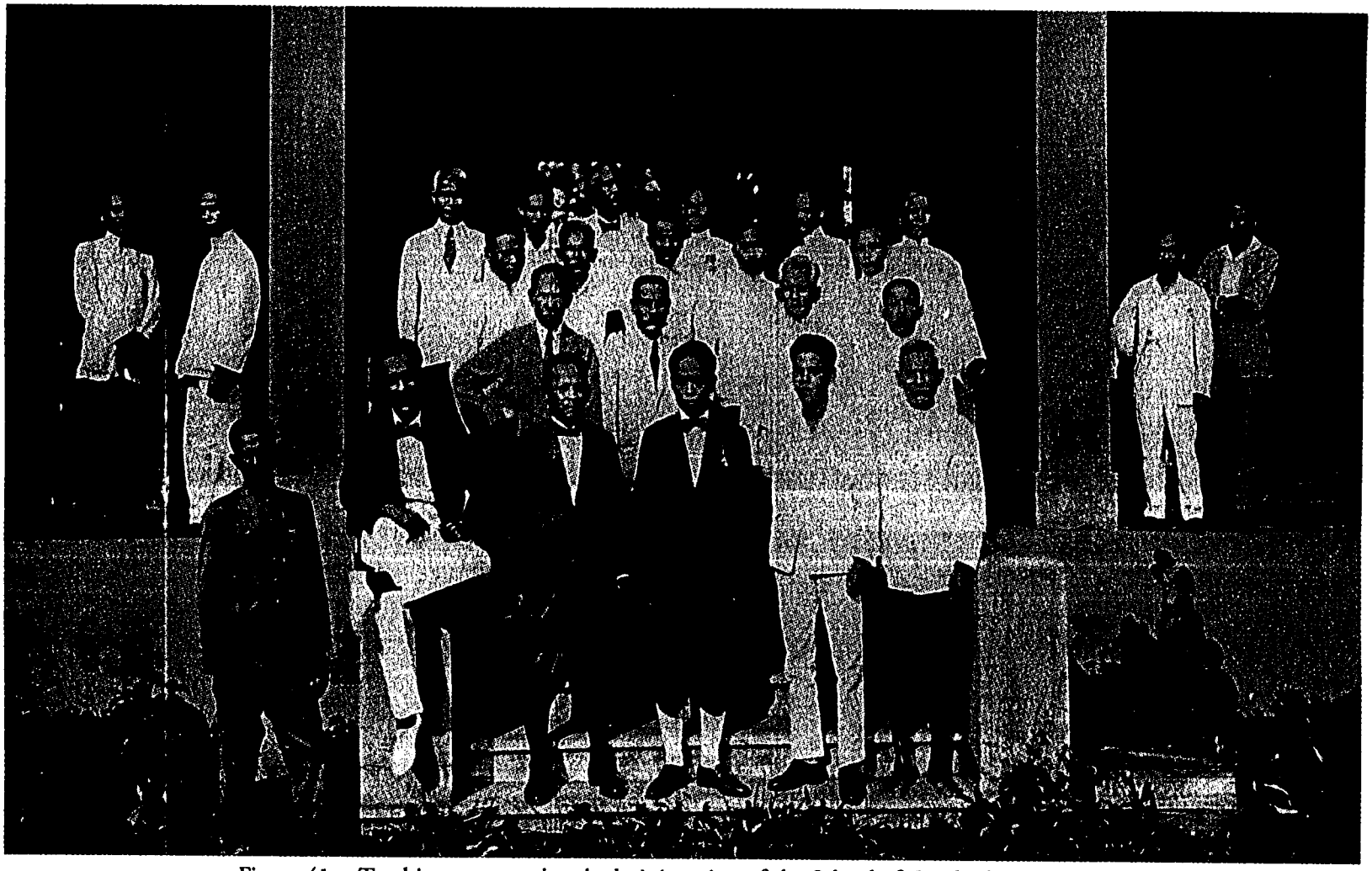

Figure 41 : Teaching personnel and administration of the School of Cambodian Arts, 1930

NMC Photography Collection H361

such an oppressor. Mak, the letter claimed, was only supporting those teachers who "please him by giving him either money or other gifts". Through this system younger artisans were being promoted at the expense of older ones. "Those who are truly capable", "bringing all their good will to their work" and having "confidence in their own capacity" so that they "do not [need to] seek to please", were not rewarded and received poor evaluations. Although some would claim that such evaluations were in the hands of the French director (Groslier), the teachers continued, it was really Mak who, as the conduit for all the information reaching Groslier, had caused such decisions to taken be based on misinformation. Mak's motives were clear to the writers of the letter: "[Mak] does not seek to allow the development of progress among Cambodians. He does not wish Cambodians to be instructed; he wants all the services to be solely directed by himself in the interest of preventing the loss of his benefits". Examples of Mak's dishonesty and abuse of power could readily be provided, the writers continued. But Groslier had so far "ignored all the facts related above" and continued to give Mak free rein.[129] It was possible, the writers added, that Groslier did not even know that "in this School there are two parties, the one of Mao and the other of Mak". Translating the situation into terms that would have been more easily understandable for the RSC in 1918, the writers concluded: "these two parties can be compared to France and Germany who are presently at war: the party of Mao is that of France and the party of Mak is that of Germany". If Groslier

[129] When Mak wished to do someone a favor, the masters added, he simply told Groslier "that it [was] a request from the Minister of the Palace" and Groslier "hearing only that it [was] a request from the Palace, always agreed and never refused". In 1918, Groslier was angling for access to the Royal Treasury in order to chose objects for his Museum. See NAC #9076 (RSC).

continued to only listen to one party (i.e. the party of Germany), he would "have troubles".

We did not know whether the RSC responded but Mao was soon transferred to the administration of the Corporations while Tep Nimit Mak remained at the School as a trusted "collaborateur" until his retirement at the end of 1923.[130] The letter of the disgruntled teachers outlined another division in the School however through which younger artisans were being promoted at the expense of older ones. The teaching personnel were soon divided between "masters" transferred from the Palace workshops (who were accustomed to working for the King within the pre-restructuring context outlined above), and the first graduates of the refigured School who increasingly took over the ateliers and Corporations as the 1920s progressed.[131] Among the first group we find a striking amount of "fatigue", among the second group we find an understandable amount of "devotion". In reviewing their files, we can see that it

[130] Groslier eulogized Tep Nimit Mak upon his retirement: "The cooperation which he has brought to the organising of the School and its subsequent functioning is immeasurable. His extremely wide knowledge of all the Khmer arts has permitted us to coordinate their study and to fix their traditions. Most of our teachers are his students. Thanks to his prestige among the better artisans of Phnom Penh, we have been able to rapidly organise the Corporations and win their confidence. He is therefore not only a master craftsman of great value... but also a devoted servant of the Protectorate whose good will has never been lacking". See NAC #11124 (RSC). For the first few years of the School, Oknha Réachna Prasoer Mao appears on its lists as a painter and architect described as "young" and "dedicated" (CQ,p.105). He was subsequently transferred to the Corporations where he served as an inspector. He returned to the School in 1925 (after Mak's retirement) and served there as head of the atelier of drawing until the 1940s. See NAC #426 (RSC).

[131] Groslier frequently noted that he looked forward to the day when the Corporations and the School could be filled with graduates of the School who had grown up within its regime and were accustomed to its "discipline". See "Résumé Historique de l'Ecole et du Service des Arts", 1922 [NAC #11887 (RSC)].

proved more difficult than Groslier officially admitted to fit those accustomed to other ways of making into his system of production.[132]

Many of the masters transferred to the new School from the Palace workshops were old enough to have experienced the entire course of restructurings and redirectings which I have traced. Thus for example, Rath Mao had worked as a furniture maker in the Palace since 1897, well before the first 1907 Protectorate sponsored restructurings.[133] Although his early service was commended, by 1931, Brecq (an interim director of the School of Cambodian Arts) found Rath Mao "very slow in everything that he does, very irregular in his production. He could do better with a little more energy and punctuality". Plans were made to replace him with his son whose "professional value" was "slightly higher", and Rath Mao was dismissed from the School in June of 1932.

Men Chay became head of the foundry atelier of the new School, having served in the Palace since 1893.[134] Despite early evaluations praising him as "a very good caster who knows his skill in depth", by 1926 he was "working somewhat slowly", and by 1927, his service was deemed only "passable". Men Chay "is skilled", Stoeckel (the

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[132] A much later account, in a different context, admitted as much: "Like most peasant societies, [Cambodian] life is organised so that the rural population is dependent for very little outside of the family and the village. Obtaining their participation in the economic life of the country will be a long-range problem of the first order...." See "Economic Capabilities of Cambodia", Despatch #104 October 13, 1955 851H.00/10-1355 in RG 59 General Records of the Department of State Indochina: Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs 1955-59 Microfilm C0008 Reel 44.

[133] Personnel file, Mao Rath [NAC #7244 (RSC)]. All subsequent quotes on Mao Rath are taken from this file. Generally the names in these personnel files are presented with their family name first and their given name second, following the order of names in the Khmer language. I use the names as they appear in the French language evaluations.

[134] Personnel file, Men Chay [NAC #11126 (RSC)]. All subsequent quotes on Men Chay are taken from this file.

interim director of the School at the time) wrote, "but lacking in the energy for directing his atelier". "Often nonchalant", Men Chay was "the object of several reproofs on this subject". In a June 2, 1927 letter, Men Chay asked for 29 days leave, citing a feeling of "general fatigue". His personnel file was closed with this request.

In 1921, an atelier of lacquer was established at the School and Pech Ros, an artisan who had worked in the Palace since 1895, was appointed to head it (figure 42).[135] Again, evaluations from the early 1920s noted his special aptitude as a "good lacquer worker and painter" who "knows the art of lacquer thoroughly". By 1927 however, Pech Ros was described as "a little nonchalant" and subsequent evaluations note a "lack of reliability" and a "slowness" which increasingly crept into the master's work. By 1932, Pech Ros was, in Silice's eyes, "a good lacquer worker but unevenly devoted to his work which he could do better if he wished to take care". He "works very well", Silice added, "under the conditions of being closely watched". Frequently absent during 1933 because of a "lack of energy", Pech Ros died on April 30, 1934.[136]

Others had to be watched closely as well as they aged. Chau Pol, one of the members of the first Cambodian mold-making team, was early on described as "very reliable... active and intelligent", giving "complete satisfaction in the accomplishment of the difficult and delicate task" by which inscriptions and sculpture molds were

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[135] Groslier Report to the Director of the EFEO, June 11, 1921 [NAC #1993 (RSC)] and [NAC #7245 (RSC)] and Personnel file, Pech Ros. Despite Pech Ros's presence in the Palace since 1895, the School's lacquer atelier was described as having "brought back the art of lacquer which had been lost".

[136] I have managed to put some of the "masters" from these files together with what are probably their photographs in the National Museum of Cambodia collection. Without the interventions of the late Sam Yang, I would never have been permitted access to this important archive of photographs.

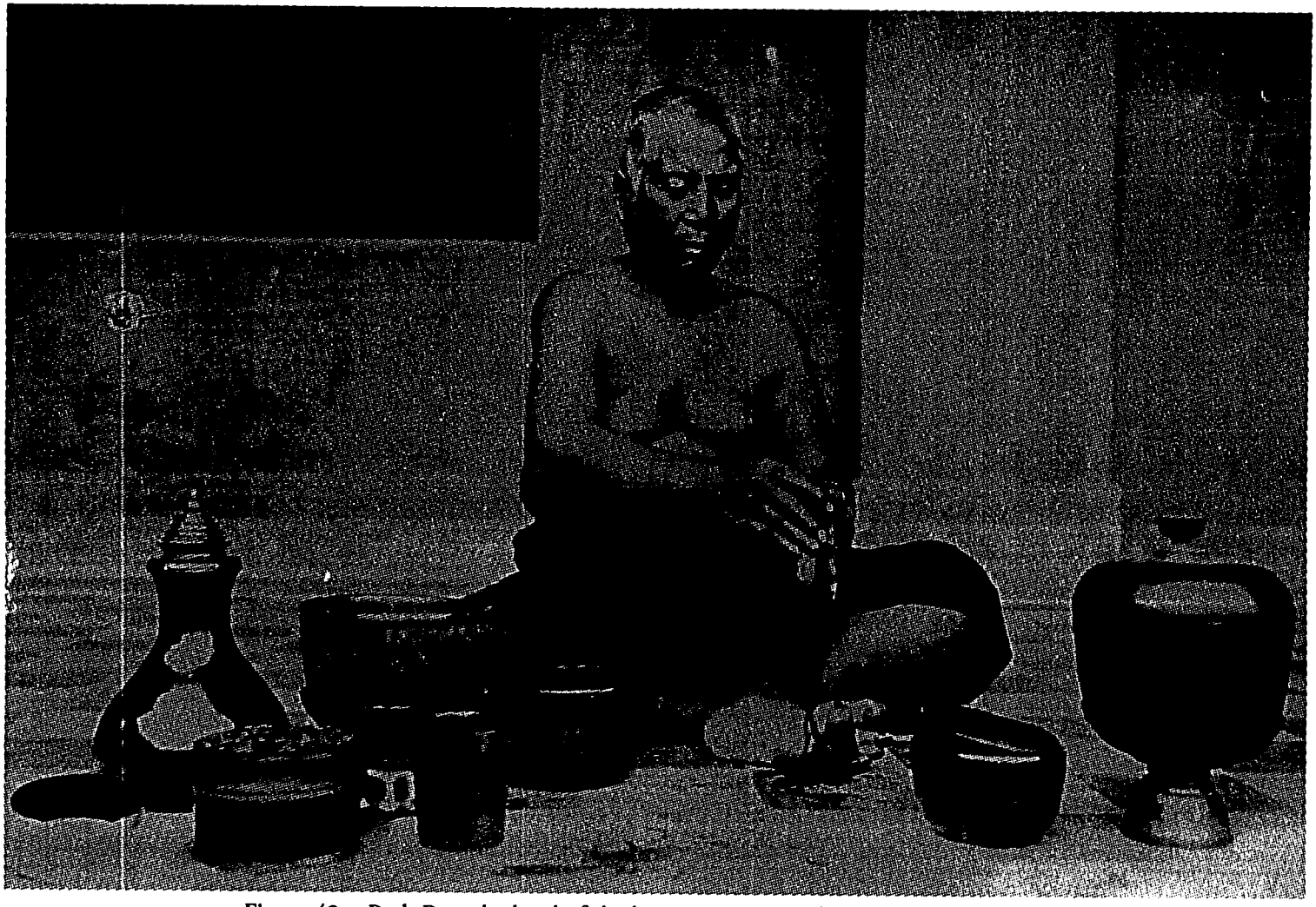

Figure 42 : Pech Ros, the head of the lacquer section, School of Cambodian Arts.
From a series of photographs taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making at the School.

NMC Photography Collection H381

collected throughout Cambodia.[137] By the late 1920s however, although he was still described as a "good sculpture worker who knows his craft deeply", Chau Pol had become "irregular", still knowing how to "work admirably when he wishes" but "needing to be watched very closely". In the end, Chau Pol had become "a character that was sometimes difficult. One must know it to understand it". In all of these descriptions of the older Palace masters, it was not their knowledge or their skill which was in question. Rather their productivity and their commitment to the ethic of production, instilled by the new School, was in doubt.

One of the few old masters to receive unqualified praise from his French evaluators was Lim Pen, the old mask-maker who had served "Norodom and then Sisowath for 30 years, making masks and accessories for the dances and arranging the ritual ceremonies of the royal dancers"(figure 43).[138] Lim Pen worked "without failing" and, as Silice described it, "was still at his work table three days before his

[137] Personnel file, Chau Pol [NAC #10653 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to Chau Pol are taken from this file. During a leave in 1920, Groslier studied the "most recent procedures of mold-making" at the Louvre and the Trocadero in order to establish a mold-making service at the School. The establishment of the mold-making section was considered important to the "publicity" efforts of the colonial administration as it would allow the dispersion of copies of Cambodian sculpture throughout the world. While in Paris, Groslier apparently engaged a French mold-maker to come to Cambodia for six months in order to "train a team of native mold-makers". The students chosen for training under the Frenchman were already "accomplished draftsmen and modelers in wax"; it is not entirely clear whether these students were the "Annamites" transferred from the Ecole professionnelle to form the first mold-making team at the School or not. By 1923, the school mold-making team was dispatched to make a complete catalogue of the inscriptions of Cambodia. "In the course of his travels", Chau Pol had "discovered several unknown inscriptions and has brought to the Museum a great number of rare pieces". He had been "charged with delicate missions into the interior of the country" and had completed them satisfactorily. See files NAC #1993, #8330, #8341 (RSC) as well as Keo Vang's personnel dossier in Box 264 (RSC).

[138] "Rapport de la fin d'année", 1920 [NAC #8336 (RSC)]. See also the letter from Silice to the Local Director of the Service of Teaching; May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

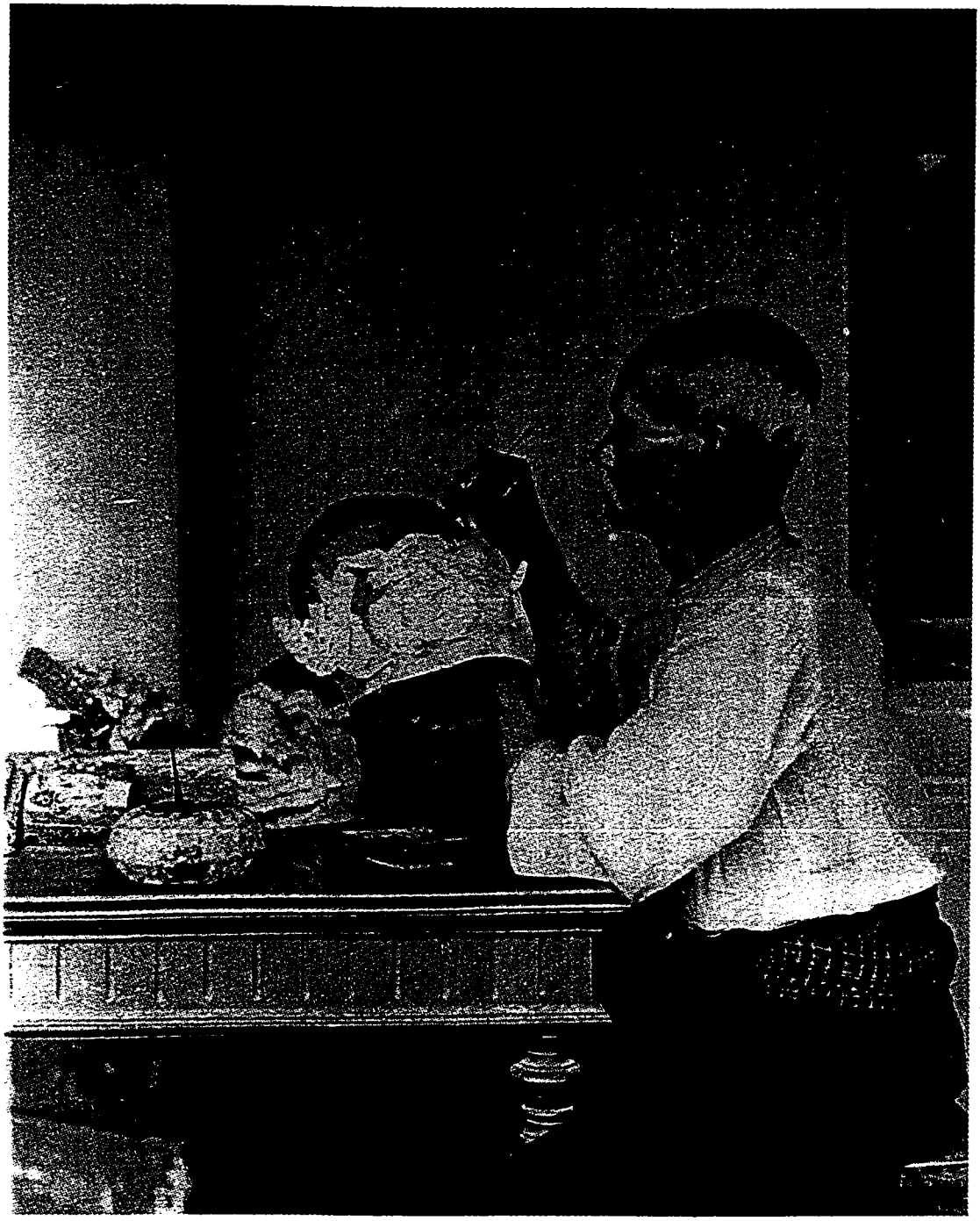

Figure 43

Lim Pen, the mask-maker, at work at the School of Cambodian Arts. From a series of photographs taken in 1930 documenting techniques of making.

NMC Photography Collection H395

death".[139] Perhaps the reason that Lim Pen remained satisfactory throughout his evaluations was that mask-making was one of those "ancient" arts which was simply preserved for a future day. Without an expected production quota, the work of his atelier remained much as it had always been, focused on the repair and possible new commission of the few masks required by the Royal Ballet each year. The ateliers of foundry, lacquer work, and mold-making, on the other hand (where we find Men Chay, Pech Ros, and Chau Pol), were considered production sites where many objects were to be made, thus installing a logic of making in which the Palace masters became "fatigued".

A somewhat different inflection of the difficulty of the transition is displayed by the case of Tep Saly, the "typing secretary" of the School from 1918 to 1938 (figure 44). Having served as a Palace functionary since 1913, Tep Saly was transferred to the School of Cambodian Arts in 1918.[140] While at first, Tep Saly was described as "very devoted", "very precise and punctual", performing the duties of typist and interpreter with "pleasure and regularity", by 1926 he had become "sour" and "argumentative", a condition which caused him to make "unjustified claims". By the late 1920s, Tep Saly was spending most of his typing time composing a flood of garbled letters in French which he sent, in a shocking breach of protocol, directly to the Governor General of Indochina. The letters requested a higher position in the

[139] Letter from Silice to the Local Director of the Service of Teaching; May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]. A lump payment of three months salary was made to Lim Pen's widow, Ouch, upon his death. As the RSC put it, "this widow seems worthy of attention, given the long and good service rendered by her deceased husband." Letter from RSC Silvestre to Directeur de l'Ecole des AC, June 13, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

[140] NAC #7097 (RSC). All subsequent references to Tep Saly are taken from this file.

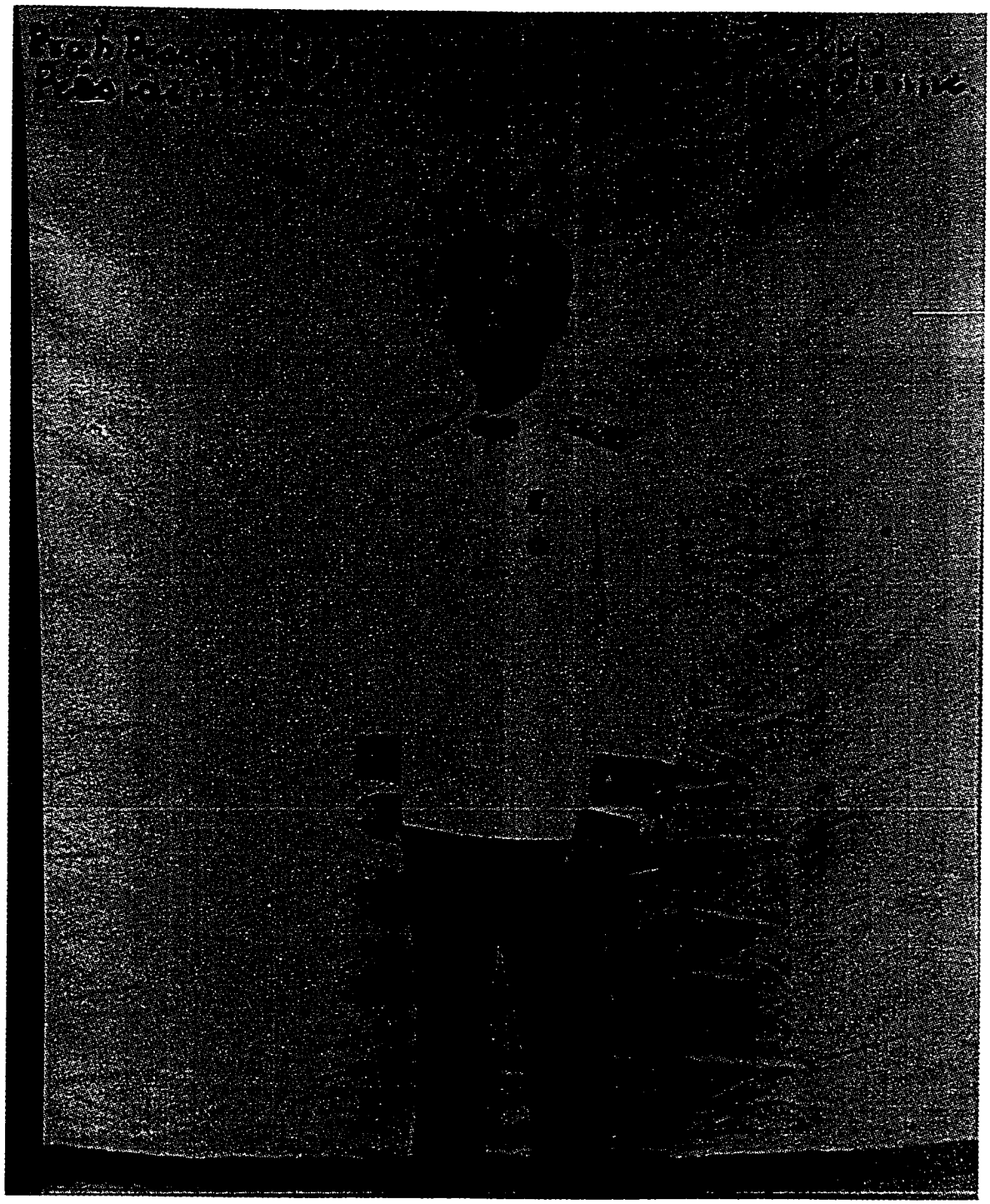

Figure 44

Tep Saly, late 1920s?

NAC #7097 (RSC)

colonial administration, more suited to the standing which Tep Saly saw in ceremonial titles granted him by the Palace.[141] Having eventually received a terse reprimand from the GGI (conveyed indirectly via the RSC), Tep Saly decided to use his typewriter to raise his standing by his own means. By keeping much of Groslier's correspondence during the early days of the School, Tep Saly had access to the addresses of various dignitaries and scholars who soon received elaborately typed "honorary Buddhist diplomas" courtesy of the art school secretary.[142] Replying to the deluge of inquiries from the recipients of these mysterious diplomas, the RSC explained that "this diploma is printed without authorization by an author who is stricken by a mysterious madness causing him to pretend to be the president of an organisation which only exists in his imagination". Despite reprimands and a hearing on his mental health, Tep Saly remained at the School as a secretary.

It was during his later years at the School of Cambodian Arts that Tep Saly began to compose a series of accounts of his family history which laid the grounds for his most persistent claim: "I am the heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Vientiane,

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[141] Tep Saly played with the trope of protection and the Protectorate in these letters: "I have been waiting for my missive to be appreciated and hoping that it would be taken seriously and placed intimately close to the GGI when I ask him to be my protector. What is his reaction? ... With the hope that the French flag of the GGI is flying over me, I am very well aware that I am in its shadow and I hope that the GGI will give me the pleasure of meeting my request with success. I put myself under the protection of GGI". Eventually the secretary's many letters were answered by a terse letter from RSC Silvestre to Groslier in September of 1927 asking him to convey to Tep Saly "the proper path of hierarchy". The title of Préa Prasor Chanda, given by the King to Tep Saly, is "purely honorific and does not give him the right to claim to obtain employment in the Cambodian Administration", the RSC explained. "It is his duty, if he wishes to enter into this latter, to present himself for one of the required examinations, instituted for this purpose" [NAC #7097 (RSC)].

[142] The diplomas, which recognized the "religious merit" and "devotion" of each receipient, granted them admission to a rather vague association of "honorary Buddhists". Recipients included Sylvain Levi, George Coèdes, as well as various Thai princes and monks.

Laos" he wrote in April 1929, "I beg you, Monsieur Résident Supérieur to recognize me as such... and to allow me to benefit from all the rights which are enjoyed by Laotian Princes". In the history which Tep Saly left us, he lays claim to the lineage of a splinter group of the royal family of Vientiane which had moved south into Cambodia during the early 1800s, fleeing both the repeated wars with Siam as well as internal rivalries over succession to the throne of Vientiane. Remaining in "temporary sojourn" in Cambodia, the family slowly lost memory of its royal roots. Learning of his royal lineage through the death-bed confession of his father, Tep Saly decided to take the implications of such a heritage seriously. By the early 1930s, he had printed royal birth certificates for his five children as well as a royal marriage certificate for his wife. On the occasion of the birth of his sixth child, a Prince, he sent royal birth certificates and letters of announcement directly to the highest colonial authorities. A specially created Laotian insignia was stamped on his frequent letters of request and he printed a name card for himself announcing (despite the fact that he has lived in Phnom Penh for his entire life) that the "heir apparent to the throne of the Kingdom of Vientiane" was residing "provisionally [in] Phnom Penh".

The official reaction to all this was predictable. In reply to a steady deluge of letters requesting recognition of the art school secretary's royal roots, the RSC replied concisely, "this request is incomprehensible"; "it appears that the interested party is soliciting a lifetime salary due to his pretense of being a Laotian prince. It is incontestable that this secretary is not in full possession of his mental faculties." Despite the "incontestability" of his "madness", Tep Saly remained in the employment of the School of Cambodian Art until the end of the 1930s. While frequent mention was made of his "insanity" and "terrible" state of "mental

derangement", his performance, his manner of service and all other aspects of employment were repeatedly described as "very good", "very satisfactory", and "very proper".[143] A 1932 evaluation explained that "besides the fact that this secretary believes that he descended from the royal family of Laos, there is nothing else to reproach about his service". Increasingly frequent administrative requests to commit him to the asylum in Saigon were just as frequently rejected by the medical board of the Phnom Penh hospital which noted the "harmlessness" of his "delusions". The sequence of medical hearings, letters of reprimand and repeated evaluations of his competence seem to have finally exhausted Tep Saly. At one of the last hearings into his sanity, asked why he had persisted in writing letters long after he had been repeatedly told to stop, Tep Saly gave the simple explanation that his requests had never been adequately answered by those to whom they were addressed and so he felt he had to continue to try to be recognized by them. His final request to the Protectorate comes in December 1937. Tep Saly wrote: "I have served the Administration for 20 years without interruption and have never requested or obtained a leave of absence. Now I am feeling tired and am in need of rest in order to stabilize my failing health". As with so many of his letters, it is unclear whether he ever received a direct answer. Disciplinary proceedings dragged on throughout the next year and a final terse exchange led to his last typed letter: "I have the honor", Tep Saly wrote, "of respectfully begging you to accept my resignation effective as of January 1938. I no longer wish to remain in the Administration".

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[143] Despite an administrative note from the mid-1930s declaring that "this comedy has lasted long enough", Tep Saly was promoted in January of 1937 "because of his seniority" within the ranks of the civil servants.

Meas Ponn (figure 45) was hired by the School of Cambodian Arts as a typing secretary in 1929, partly in order to take over duties which Tep Saly seemed incapable of completing.[144] Meas Ponn was young (19 years old) and thus would in a sense grow up within Groslier's administration. It is in this younger generation that we leave the "fatigued" and come to the "devoted". Early evaluations noted that Meas Ponn was "very good, very reliable, regular and assiduous, knowing French well and sufficient for typing". He remained "serious and punctual", "devoted and reliable" throughout the 1930s, a period in which his duties gradually expanded to include accounting as well as oversight of all salaries and raw materials. By 1939, Rollet singled out Meas Ponn's "very good memory for texts and rules", calling him "a model of devotion, courage and zeal". In the turbulent years of the early 1940s (perhaps in light of increasing security concerns and the necessity to rely on trusted personnel) Groslier transferred Meas Ponn temporarily to the Museum, describing him as an "advanced" or "evolved" (évolué) secretary, capable of any of the tasks confided to him. Shortly thereafter, during the months of virtual independence (1945) to which I will return in Chapter 4, Meas Ponn was named Director of the School of Cambodian Arts, the first Cambodian to occupy the position. French administrators however continued to oversee and evaluate the School. One such evaluation from 1948 described Meas Ponn as: "a serious functionary, more than good willing. He directs with competence the School of Cambodian Arts where development has not ceased despite the reduced means put at [the institution's] disposition. He faithfully executes, without oversight, the orders that are given. He

[144] Meas Ponn, personnel file [NAC #20169 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to Meas Ponn are taken from this file.

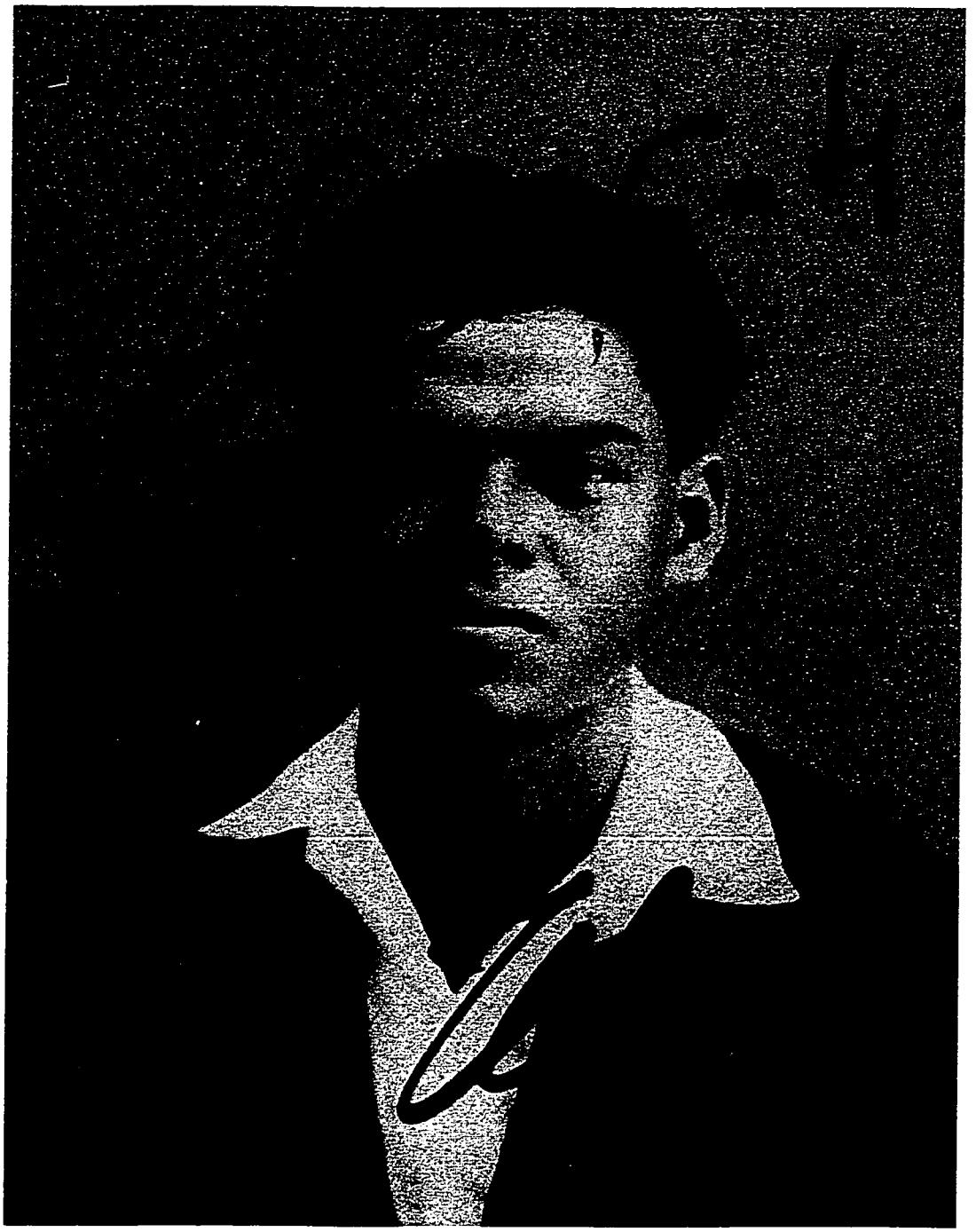

Figure 45
Meas Ponn, 1929

NAC #20169 (RSC)

takes initiative and never recoils from responsibility." In what was to be the final evaluation of Meas Ponn in 1950 at age 41, he was described as:

> an excellent functionary who should have a rapid and brilliant career in the Administration. I can only appreciate his real value at the School of Cambodian Arts of which he has been the head for several years. Moreover, he has given me complete satisfaction in giving proof of his efforts and his activities for the good progress of this scholarly institution. His authority and his technical knowledge have made him a collaborator of the first order".[145]

A year later, on November 8, 1951, Meas Ponn died at the Hospital Préah Két Méaléa, Phnom Penh, from an unspecified illness.

Similar devotion is found in the career of Tuon Keo, a graduate of one of the first classes of the School in the early 1920s (figure 46).[146] Trained as a "dessinateur", he was sent to Kompong Chhnang in 1924 to take over and run the existing ceramics decoration training program. It appears that Groslier did not take much interest in existing forms of local ceramic production during the initial period in which he was transforming the Palace workshops into the School of Cambodian Arts. The "only one hundred and thirty" surviving artisans which Groslier claimed to have discovered in Cambodia in 1917 did not seem to include local populations of potters. Other colonial authorities had however begun to notice and commission work from

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[145] Full control of the Museum, and the larger arts administration was ceded by the French to the Cambodians at a ceremony on August 9, 1951. In the speeches, much was made of the technical and scientific foundations of the past half-century on which, the argument ran, French involvement in restoration and research would continue to build while respecting the new national sovereignty of Cambodia. See Textes et Documents concernant le fonctionnement de l'EFEO sur le territoire du Royaume du Cambodge (Hanoi: EFEO, 1952) NMC library.

[146] Tuon Keo, personnel file [NAC #11128]. All subsequent references to Tuon Keo are taken from this file.

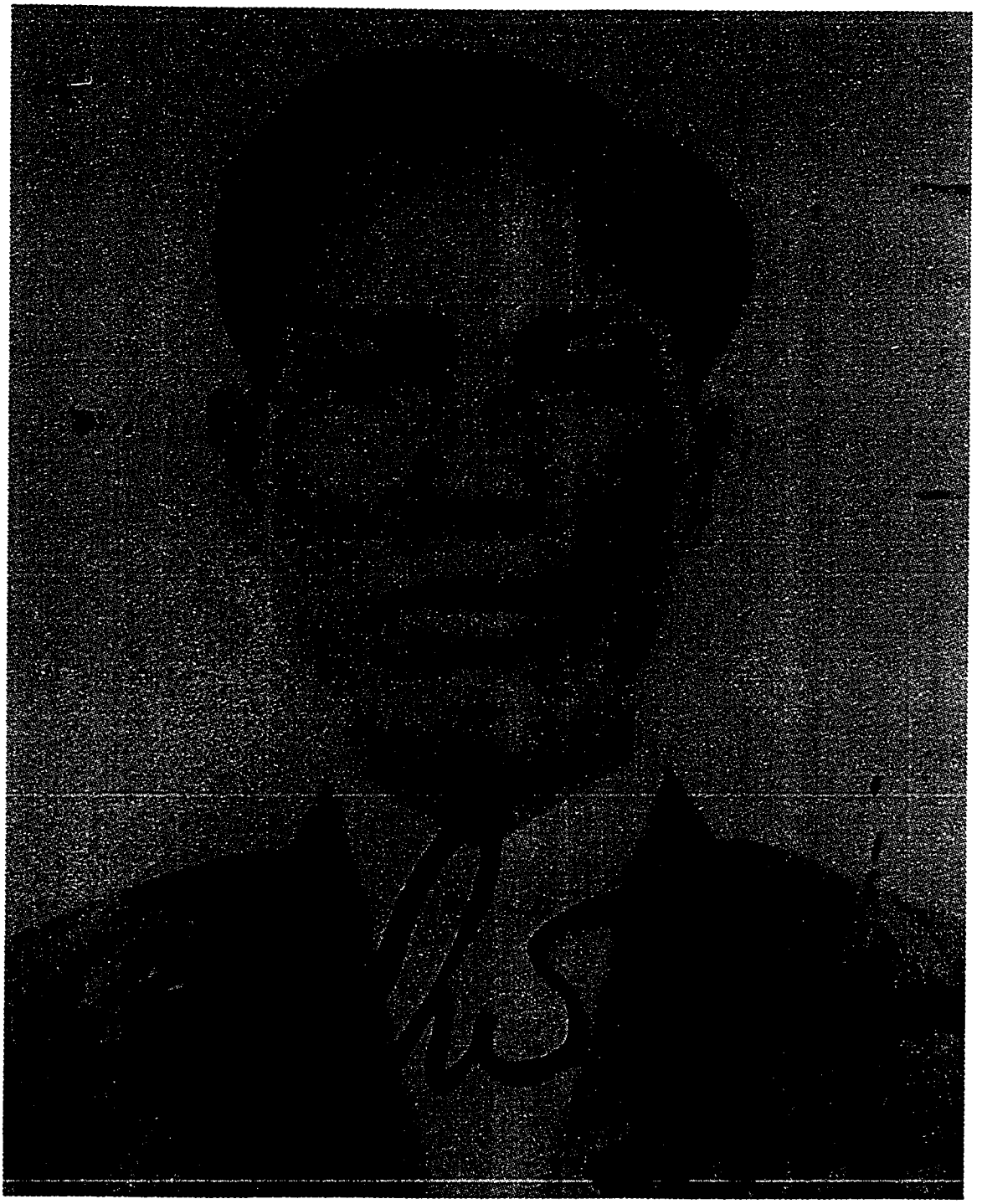

Figure 46

Tuon Keo, 1932

NAC #11128 (RSC)

Kompong Chhnang. In 1917, for example, the RSC ordered a set of "painted plates" from the region while in March of 1919, the Director of Agricultural and Commercial Services requested that 3500 flower pots be made.[147] The letter for this second commission seems to have been accompanied by a real French flowerpot. As the Director explained it, the French flower pot would be "of interest to the natives" since they would be "inspired by this model to improve their fabrication". Not only should they "imitate the form" of the French pot, but they must try to "obtain a firing, if not similar [to it] than better than that which they ordinarily achieve".[148] Shortly thereafter, Madame Michel, the director of the residential school in Kompong Chhnang, initiated a program in "the art of painting on plates" as part of a broader initiative to develop more vocational training opportunities.[149] Michel hired a "Cambodian painter" to teach courses in drawing and several students from these classes began applying their lessons to pots, producing decorated ceramics which Michel then marketed.[150]

The initiative of Michel and her school of decorative painting soon came to the attention of Groslier.[151] Complaining that he had "never been consulted for the

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[147] See correspondance in NAC #3780, #15371 (RSC) for these commissions.

[148] Letter from the Director of Agricultural and Commercial Services to the Résident of Kompong Chhnang, March 1919 [NAC #15371 (RSC)].

[149] Conseil de Résidence, Session de 10 Juin, 1920 [NAC #4746 (RSC)]. The correspondence refers simply to "Madame Michel" and we do not know her full name. See NAC #1985 (RSC).

[150] Letter from the Administrator of Civil Services to the RSC, January 13, 1922 [NAC #1985 (RSC)].

[151] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, January 20, 1922 [NAC #1985 (RSC)]. All subsequent references in this section are to this letter.

organisation of this section of Cambodian art and the training of students", Groslier noted that Michel would have benefited from the advice which his institution would have "happily" provided her with. Such counsel would have avoided the unfortunate hiring of a "drop-out" from the School of Cambodian Arts, "a bad Cambodian artist", "a painter after postcards and photographs" who had begun to "make oil paintings" on the plates of Kompong Chhnang. It was premature to decide, Groslier added, "whether the decoration of plates is a Khmer family industry" since research into the subject had not yet been conducted in depth. "Charming works" could possibly be made, but only, Groslier claimed, "on the condition that the Cambodian temperament manifests itself in all its originality". What Groslier seems to have objected to was the introduction of a view. The postcards and photographs used by the "bad artist" implied that the painter was painting scenes, views which presumably used perspective and modeling and thus strayed from the resolutely linear surface proposed by the diagrams of the School in Phnom Penh. The Kompong Chhnang program therefore had to be brought "back in control".

Colonial authorities were quick to support Groslier's complaints and by 1924, the Kompong Chhnang training program had been put under the "technical control" of the School of Cambodian Arts.[152] Through the new link to Phnom Penh, "models" were provided and "suitable directives" were given to ensure "the maintenance of

[152] For the incorporation of the Kompong Chhnang school into the DAC (Groslier's larger art administration) and its relation to the School in Phnom Penh see "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", December 31, 1924 [NAC #2010 (RSC)]. This is simply one example of how Groslier attempted to consolidate control of the arts throughout Cambodia. A similar stone sculpture initiative, begun by another French civil servant in Pursat, was similarly brought under Groslier's control in the early 1920s.

Khmer tradition".[153] Tuon Keo was appointed the technical director and only teacher of the annex school in Kompong Chhnang.[154] He quickly established an introductory six months drawing course, identical to the one found at the School in Phnom Penh. Here all students learned "Cambodian motifs" prior to learning to "paint [them] on baked clay or wood".[155] The "drop out" who preceded Tuon Keo must also have studied in the introductory drawing course in Phnom Penh, before leaving the School; the models he had chosen for ceramics were however very different than those installed by Tuon Keo and Groslier. Throughout the 1920s, Tuon Keo used both the geometric patterns found on ancient ceramics undug at Phnom Kulen, and the linear scenes of figures defined as "traditional painting" at the School of Cambodian Arts as his only "authentic" models (figure 47).[156]

In using such models, Tuon Keo was repeatedly described by Protectorate reports as a "very good worker", "a very good draftsman", "devoted", "conscientious", "always giving complete satisfaction".[157] He was also described as "very active and very devoted" in raising the Kompong Chhnang atelier to "new levels of prosperity" by "organising the sale of [his student's products]" and providing "very pretty dish models" for the 1931 Colonial Exposition. In these evaluations, this development

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[153] Letter from the RSC to the Résident of Kompong Chhnang, January 23, 1922 [NAC #1985 (RSC)].

[154] Personnel file, Tuon Keo [NAC #11128 (RSC)].

[155] Internal Rules of the Annex School of Kompong Chhnang, 1924 [NAC #1222 (RSC)].

[156] See "Rapport trimestriel sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens", 1918 [NAC #394 (RSC)] for an early account of Groslier's interest in the Phnom Kulen ceramics as models of production.

[157] Personnel file, Tuon Keo [NAC #11128 (RSC)].

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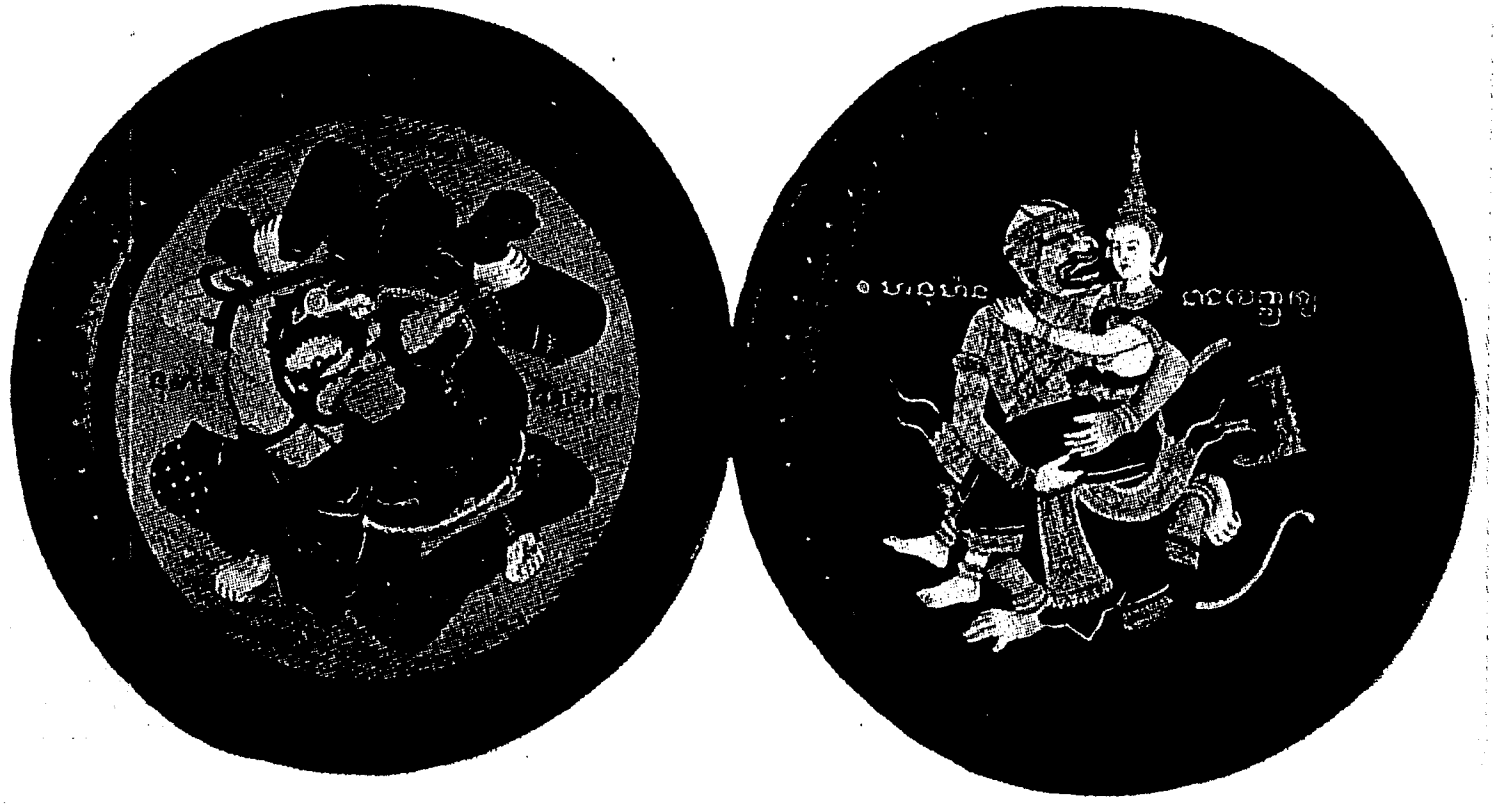

Figure 47 : Models for the Pottery decoration school in Kompong Chhnang made by 3rd year students at the School of Cambodian Arts, 1923-4. On the left: Hanuman and Nilapat, on the right: Hanuman and Ponyakay.

A. Silice, "Exemples d'art cambodgien contemporain" in Arts et Archéologie Khmer vol.II #1, 1924.

and marketing of products was given equal weight to teaching. The transport of painted pottery from Kompong Chhnang to Phnom Penh eventually proved too costly and difficult however. In addition, hopes for a tourist land route by which foreigners would pass through Kompong Chhnang on their way to Angkor were soon dashed.[158] By 1932 (when the Protectorate was most battered by the ripples of the Great Depression), the School in Kompong Chhnang was closed and Tuon Keo was recalled to Phnom Penh to join the atelier of "dessin" at the School of Cambodian Arts. He remained a "courageous and devoted" teacher in Phnom Penh, persisting at the "somewhat ungrateful task of teaching aspirants who are ignorant of just about everything".[159] In January of 1941, Tuon Keo suffered partial paralysis as a result of a stroke induced by hypertension. After a sequence of leaves, his death was announced on June 7, 1942. In the trajectory of his career, we can see how much Groslier's system was introjected into the younger generations trained at the School of Cambodian Arts during the 1920s and 1930s. Working somewhat independently from direct control in Kompong Chhnang, Tuon Keo strove to establish a base of drawing and two dimensional design identical to that of the School of Cambodian Arts. In addition to developing models and training his students to replicate them in multiples, Tuon Keo sought markets for these products as an integral part of his practice.

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[158] "Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement de l'ecole des Arts cambodgiens" 1932 [NAC #16445 (RSC)].

[159] Personnel file, Tuon Keo [NAC #11128 (RSC)].

Success

The system of the Corporations initiated by Groslier in 1918 was eventually, by almost all accounts, extremely successful. In their first year already, the foundry, weaving, and jewelery Corporations were deluged with a "veritable rain of commissions" and it became clear that there was a market for "native" objects presented to foreigners in accessible environments.[160] This public response had, in Groslier's opinion, "ratified" the restructurings of the School and justified the model objects which he had introduced.[161]

In addition to the economic successes, the system of regulation established by the Corporations allowed for a "sudden evolution" and purification of objects being produced independently. As more and more artisans who had not studied at the School of Cambodian Arts came to accept Corporation commissions, they promised to "observe the model" and to "accept all corrections which the Direction makes in the course of the work".[162] An inspector circulated among these contracted artisans, "correcting" work in progress and "stopping errors at the moment when they are produced, and thus are repairable"(E, p.34).[163] Artisans were thus "guided" and

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[160] The large number of commissions and the limited numbers of artisans caused problems in the punctuality of delivery and led to a four months waiting list. See C, p.880-1. Because the Corporations were so "overwhelmed", Groslier at first undertook no publicity on their behalf. The initial clientele was not predominantly tourists but rather the temporary or semi-permanent foreign residents (primarily French) of Indochina. See NAC #17503 (RSC).

[161] Already in 1918, Groslier noted, some jewelery pieces had been commissioned seventeen times and Corporation sales had reached considerable sums (C, reprint, 10).

[162] Comité de perfectionnement de l'école des arts, August 2, 1921 [NAC #8341 (RSC)].

[163] As we have seen, Mao, a "well respected local artisan" and the good "French" character of the 1918 letter of complaint against Mak described above, was appointed the first inspector of the Corporations (R1925).

"counseled" with "free teaching" offered to them since they "were not graduates of the School and often practiced a degenerate art or had a lax style".[164] The speed with which the work produced seems to have changed in 1918 indicates that already skilled artisans were simply adhering to a new set of values promoted by Groslier's designs (clarity, centered compositions, the following of clearly articulated plans). Accustomed to commissions, they could easily adapt.[165] In jewelery, for example (which Groslier had dubbed both the "most perverted" as well as the "most vibrant [art industry] in Cambodge"), the simple substitution of proper and pure models for the previous examples of "cheap imitation jewellery" worked miracles (R1925). The system of the Corporations not only allowed for control of artistic forms thus producing what Groslier called "healthy work", but it also allowed for the "choices of the international client" to be "guided" (R1925, E, p.7). Thus the system of models and Corporations installed a "filter" through which both producers and consumers would be "purified"(CC1942, p.3).

Through the lure of the Corporations, independent artisans began "demanding" to work on the grounds of the School in order to learn the various models which they could then produce for profit through affiliation with the Corporations. The administration encouraged their presence at the School since, "by seizing at the same time several generations" of masters, independent artisans, and students within the

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[164] R1925. Workers recruited from Kompong Luong to help with a flood of silver commissions were made to study at the school for a bit to "bring them up to date" (C, p.881). These "short classes" were said to quickly bring them up to sufficient skill. See NAC #17503 (RSC).

[165] "Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens", 1919 [NAC #83336 (RSC)]. Work was "very quickly regularized and perfected" through the "very close liaison" between the Corporations and the School.

walls of the School, "we have under our eyes the most ignorant ones, the mediocre and half-formed artisans, [as well as] the masters".[166] All of these "workers" could thus "benefit in a permanent fashion from our control".[167] The school, Groslier wrote, became "like a home" for artisans, while the display of models became "their treasure"(C, p.884). Even those who worked outside of the School, "without official relations to us", were encouraged to make use of the School's models which deliberately circulated freely "without trademark".[168] The King himself (at least according to Groslier) had, after a visit to the School, decided that "his own artists would also work under the artistic regime of the School" and that he "would no longer give them work without having them pass through this purification.[169] Through the successes of the Corporations system, the arts began to "acquire more

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[166] R1925. Artisans unaffiliated with the School were, for example, encouraged to use the school kiln for any enameling projects they might have. Such use "allows the control of work in the course of execution" and familiarised outside artisans with the philosophy and methodology of the School and its Corporations. See "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1925" NAC #17503 (RSC).

[167] NAC #8336 (RSC)

[168] "Rapport sur la Situation de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens pendant l'année scolaire 1923-24", NAC #763 (RSC). Groslier noted proudly that the Corporations had remained informal with "no identity cards, no lists, no rules, no social discussions, no politics"(CC1942, p.25). It was only at the moment of transaction that either the client or the artisan was a member: "the one delivers an object, is paid for it, and goes. The other buys an object, pays for it, and goes. And in these few minutes of contact, the artisan and the consumer benefit from the organisation, the actions, and the experience of the Corporation Cambodgiennes" (CC1942, p.25).

[169] CC#1, p.267. A much more prickly version of Groslier's relations with the Palace is traced through numerous incidents of competition and misunderstanding which I cannot trace here. See in particular the early incidents which ensued when Groslier tried to move items from the Royal collection to the Museum in 1918-1919. In 1927, the transfer of a statue of Maitreya from the Palace to the Museum elicited so much protest from its Kompong Chhnang donors that the statue was later returned to the Royal Library. In the 1940s, debate again swirled over whether the Royal Library was entitled to collect cultural objects and thus to compete with the Museum. See correspondence in NAC #9104 (RSC).

prestige" since "the artisan" became "a lucrative career", "secure, with increasing markets each year"(E, p.28).

In order to meet such demand, the Corporations had to make use of an ever increasing number of artisans. It was not, Groslier warned, a matter of "depending on a greater activity" on the part of their existing workers that would allow the Corporations to increase production. Hands could not be rushed and the products depended on their high degree of finish. It was rather through "the multiplication of its artists" that "a bigger production" could be achieved (CC#1, p.274).

Groslier did however restructure certain existing practices so that they might become more efficient and thus produce more objects. In bronze sculpture, for example, the existing practice in which one artisan completed the entire sequence of wax modeling, mold-making, and casting, was split, creating two different ateliers for different stages of the production process. In the atelier of "modelage", students modeled wax figures. These figures were then cast by the atelier of foundry (C, reprint 1919). While previously the single artisan making and casting his own figures took 15 days to produce one sculpture, with Groslier's reform, five modelers and one caster working as a team could make many more sculptures in a shorter time for the same amount of profit. Groslier called this restructuring of the production process, the "prosperous destiny" of foundry casting.[170]

The lure of markets and the resulting emphasis on producing multiples had already been foreshadowed by a response to the 1917 survey.[171] The administration,

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[170] NAC #17503 (RSC)

[171] Survey response, August 24, 1917 [NAC #15200 (RSC)].

the response suggested, should "make models of a type like the catalogues that the merchants in France are sending". If "many people would like to buy [such objects]", provincial artisans would be "encouraged because people were buying a lot" and the artisans would therefore "work", producing many things. It was envisioned therefore that Groslier's system would provide products for foreign buyers just as French manufactured goods were offered for sale in the colonies. The only difference was that Cambodian objects, though multiple and identical like factory goods, were to be made by hand. The inspector was not only to oversee proper forms, but also to manage production. As "home counselor" he was to inform the administration of progress on commissions, while "stimulating the slow workers and encouraging the hesitant ones at their own doorstep"(E, p.24). In the end, completed objects were delivered to the sales office by the representative of the Corporation for inspection and approval by Groslier. Approved objects received a stamped seal attesting that they were "made in Cambodia and present the real and authentic character of Khmer art".[172] The fact that the stamps for these seals were made in France only underscores how much Groslier was the designer of this production project.[173]

By the early 1930s, Groslier's attention began to shift from the local foreign purchaser and the tourist to the development of more distant markets for Corporation products.[174] Not only had tourism declined because of the economic crisis, but direct

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[172] Comité de Patronage meeting, July 30, 1918 [NAC #8335 (RSC)].

[173] See Groslier's announcement that these stamps had arrived from France in the notes of the Comité de Patronage meeting, July 30, 1918 [NAC #8335 (RSC)].

[174] In the beginning of the Corporations, Groslier explained, "we were unable to occupy ourselves with exportation since we didn't have the manpower" nor the available funds; only research and "satisfying the local clientele and tourists" was possible (CC1942,p.42).

access to Angkor from Saigon and Thailand had cut the number of visitors coming to Phnom Penh.[175] In addition, the success of the Corporations had stimulated local competition. By the end of 1929, for example, Groslier noted that the sales of scarves and weavings had fallen off at the Corporations sales office because of the "competition which we have with home sellers and also because of the beginning of saturation of the Indochinese population".[176] By 1935, independent art boutiques which "didn't exist in 1925", had come to take up "an entire row" of the street leading to the Royal Palace (E, p.37; CC1942, p.44). In these boutiques, "patrons" had "installed themselves outside of the Corporations, selling directly both to the tourist and to the native".[177] Since Corporations models were freely available and not "trademarked", many of the objects offered in these boutiques were "clearly inspired by our models"(E, p.38). However, quality was generally lower, at least in Groslier's assessment, and thus it was the artisan who "fails our standards" that could "find a market there"(E, p.38). This, Groslier concluded, was healthy since "a hierarchy of labor is spontaneously and naturally established in the shadow of the Service of

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[175] Direct boat and air passage from Saigon to Angkor had begun in the 1920s and, fearful of losing the clientele who would thus "bypass" the capital, branches of the Corporations sales office were opened at Angkor and in Saigon. These offices covered "all the doors of exit"(E, p.22).

[176] "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1929" [NAC #17506 (RSC)]

[177] E, p.38. A "native clientele" had in fact "reappeared", Groslier announced. As Groslier described it, "the native clientele which turned their backs... since 1900", and which had been "a little astonished in the infatuation of the European for that which it had neglected" slowly returned to the Cambodian arts, especially after "its first appetites for imported trinkets [had been] appeased"(E, p.37). Groslier actually encouraged "independent boutiques of the city" to use his models; the Corporations sales office promised to buy any unsold boutique object based on a Corporations model that was "correct and in excellent condition" provided it had the price established by the Corporations (CC1942, p.17).

Arts".[178] The Sales Office of the Corporation remained the site of quality in this picture, since it resolutely refused to "put its stamp on trivialities"(CC1942, p.20). Responsible for "recommended art" , "correctly made" and offered at a "reasonable" price, the Corporations office must "always be awake, and cannot accept objects thoughtlessly"(CC1942, p.19).

Groslier claimed to be happy with such "signs" that "the natives [were] beginning to fend for themselves".[179] The whole of his work, he explained, was a road clearing operation in which the "natives take, little by little, the path which we have shown to them".[180] The administration's task, in this model, was to always "continue to go ahead, increasing our spheres of influence and clearing new terrain".[181] To turn to an international arena was to "clear" one such terrain. As he often did, Groslier used figures for making his argument. A Corporations object taken back to Europe reached the eyes of at least 50 other people, Groslier calculated.[182] By multiplying the total number of objects sold since the Corporations had begun, Groslier concluded

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[178] E, p. 38. Groslier had a somewhat different take of the independent boutiques which existed in 1917 prior to his restructuring of the School. "Chinese workers" (presumably Chinese Khmer) had realised that the first tourists presented a market and were beginning to "exploit the situation", showing "no shame" in making a so-called "Cambodian art" which Groslier condemned as "hybrid". Their boutiques, "well placed in the middle of the city", monopolized all purchases. For Groslier these Chinese entrepreneurs not only took the market for Cambodian style art away from Cambodian artisans but they further lowered the taste of the potential clientele by accustoming their buyers to "Chinese transpositions" (C, p.879).

[179] "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1929" [NAC #17506 (RSC)].

[180] "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1929" [NAC #17506 (RSC)].

[181] "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1929" [NAC #17506 (RSC)].

[182] "Rapport de la fin d'année sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", January 8, 1923 [NAC #17503 (RSC)]. All remaining quotes in this paragraph are to this reference.

that by 1923, 193,300 Europeans "in a great number of contexts have before their eyes a real concrete example of Khmer art". The "artistic movement" fostered by the School and its Corporations could envisage "a future with confidence" based on this far-flung network of admirers.

The Colonial Exposition of 1931, held at Vincennes, outside Paris, provided the key for developing these new markets.[183] At the Exposition, "more indigenous objects of art were sold than in the course of the whole preceding year in Phnom Penh, a year which had been the most active since the foundation of the Service".[184] As a result of this success, the Economic Agency for Indochina, along with the RSC, approved the opening of a permanent sales office in Paris, catering to a "metropolitan public [who] have thus shown themselves to be very favorably inclined with regards to Cambodian art"[185] This "new organ of diffusion" quickly required more objects and upon

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[183] Groslier was involved in the design of the buildings representing Cambodia and the displays to be put in them. The infamous reproduction of Angkor Vat was planned by Groslier in collaboration with the architect of the Exposition and members of the Department of Public Works (whom Groslier claimed did nothing). Decorative details and the sculpted wood entrance of the building were completed by ateliers at the School of Cambodian Arts. A metre high "traditional painting of the principal episodes of the life of the Buddha" was completed by the atelier of *dessin*, rolled and shipped to be included in the displays. The entire middle gallery of the exhibition space was reserved for "Arts cambodgiens". See the 1929 report with its attached note on preparations for the 1931 Exposition in NAC #17506 (RSC).

[184] "Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts Cambodgiens", May 31, 1932 [NAC #2013 (RSC)]

[185] "Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts Cambodgiens", May 31, 1932 [NAC #2013 (RSC)]. The Parisian sales outlet of the Corporations opened on December 20, 1931.

Groslier's return to Phnom Penh in December 1931, he "pushed" the "labor force to supply [the objects] in an intensive way".[186]

A network of foreign outlets also came to be established as a result of the interest shown on the part of merchants visiting the 1931 Exposition who later sent inquiries to the sales office in Phnom Penh. Sample objects from Corporations stock were initially sent to interested merchants on a trial basis. If the objects sold well, the merchant could pay for them and thus establish a permanent relationship. If the samples did not sell, they could simply be returned (in perfect condition) and the merchant would only lose the shipping fees (CC1942, p.43-4). Other efforts to establish international networks were pursued through third parties. Thus for example in 1933, Corporation silk scarves, silver jewelery and bronze sculptures were included on the "Indochina Publicity Mission" of the Houtman, a ship which traveled to South Africa, exhibiting Indochinese goods in all the ports in which it stopped (figure 48).[187] By 1940, outlets or representatives of the Corporations had been established in Port-Saïd (Egypt), San Francisco, Santa-Barbara, Los Angeles, Washington (USA), Algiers (Algeria), Papeete (Tahiti), Bangkok (Thailand), Batavia (Dutch Indies), Singapore, and Medan, among other places.[188] The scale of these

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[186] Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", May 31, 1932 [NAC #2013 (RSC)].

[187] Rapport de Maître Dubreuilh et de M.Prêtre sur la Mission de Propagande Indochinoise au bord du S/S Houtman, 1933 (pamphlet in the library of the National Museum of Cambodia). The tour was sponsored by Diethelm Company and traveled to South Africa. A report of the tour noted that the Cambodian goods did not sell as well as other Indochinese art objects since they seemed too highly priced in comparison to, for example, bronzes made in Vietnam at the Bien Hoa school.

[188] Echo du Cambodge January 23, 1941 ; February 6, 1941 "Service des Arts Cambodgiens". See also "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts Cambodgiens au cours de l'année 1940" [NAC #2135 (RSC)].

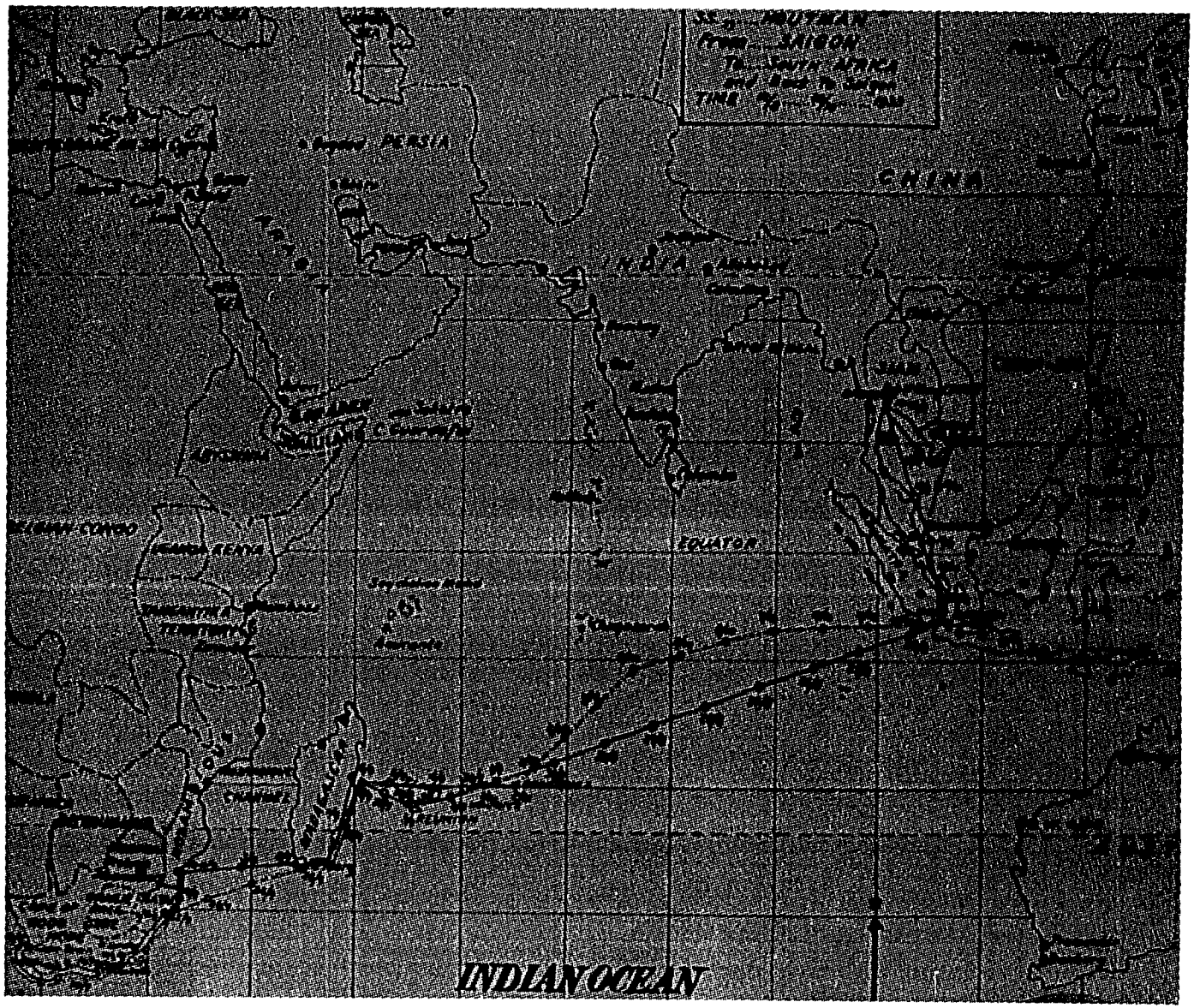

Figure 48

Map of the route taken by the SS Houtman on its mission to publicize the products of Indochina, 1933

Rapport de Maître Dubreuilh et de M.Prêtre sur la Mission de Propagande Indochinoise au bord du SS Houtman. Pamphlet, NMC library, 1933.

exports, explained one newspaper account, could never be imagined if the artisans had not been organised: "a single isolated Cambodian, unsupported by the Administration and faced with the duties of fulfilling the formalities and conditions implied by such exportation, could not alone have been able to carry out or supply the funds necessary to cope".[189]

The Catastrophe

It is perhaps not surprising, given the increasing demands for more things which such a network of outlets produced, that by the 1930s Groslier found "the natives" beginning to "confuse quantity with quality" as they increasingly appeared at the Corporations sales offices "with botched weavings and scarves in series"(E, p.37). Groslier should perhaps have realised that he was on a slippery slope when he met with a group of Parisian jewelers during the 1931 Colonial Exposition. "For a quarter of an hour", Groslier wrote, "I had to demonstrate to these gentlemen that our boxes were made by hand. They believed them to be stamped and retouched, influenced by our prices which they found to be very cheap with regards to those that they knew for seemingly similar work made by machine".[190] The hand-made had become so precise, so identical, and so cheap, that it was indistinguishable from the machine-made.

In 1940, an entrepreneur called Say, brought a stamping machine which he had developed to the annual festival of Tang Tok to which we will turn in the next

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[189] Echo du Cambodge January 23, 1941 ; February 6, 1941 (NAC newspaper collection).

[190] See Groslier's letter of defense in the Say incident file [NAC #23304 (RSC)].

Chapter.[191] The machine made patterned embossed silver boxes, buckles, and earrings. Entered in the festival competition as a "machine allowing the execution of series of works of jewelery", Say's display threw Groslier (a member of the jury for the exhibitions) into a rage. In a remark which later apparently received much play in the Khmer language press, Groslier declared that: "this machine should be thrown away and its inventor shot". The police report on the incident tempered Groslier's statement by explaining that it was simply an "imaginative and somewhat brutal way" of expressing the idea that the use of Say's machine "risked exciting the market with a great quantity of pretend objects of art which have not come from the hands of the artisan".[192]

"The world experience over the last fifty years", Groslier wrote in his February 19, 1940 defense of his outburst, "has shown without exception that where the machine penetrates, nothing is able any longer to stop it. I have therefore declared that the machine in question is dangerous".[193] The livelihood of the 400 to 500 jewelers who "presently work with their hands" in Cambodia was in danger, Groslier continued.

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[191] NAC #23304 (RSC). All subsequent quotes to the Say incident are taken from this file.

[192] See NAC #23304 (RSC). The main protester against Say besides Groslier was Minh Mol who was described in the Police Report of the incident as a jeweler who, "besides the School of Cambodian Art, [has] an almost complete monopoly on the sale of silver objects to tourists". The report added that Mol's appeals to the "needs and pretended interests of his workers, threatened of being deprived of their livelihood, ring more simply as self interest, especially since his wealth and power (he already has a 402 Peugeot) is clearly superior to that of the little mechanic Say". Mol's workshop is remembered as second only to the School by Som Samai, a silversmith trained at the School in the 1930s. Mol employed many recent graduates of the School and soon had formed a kind of second silver Corporation. As an article published in 1936 explained, Mol "will make objects in pure silver from any model given to him and employs many workers to execute them." See November 1936, Le Khmer "Minh Moll: Orfèvre diplomé de l'Ecole des Arts cambodgiens". I would like to thank Penny Edwards for bringing my attention to this article and providing me with a copy of it.

[193] NAC #23304 (RSC). All subsequent references to the Say incident are taken from this file.

Whereas Say had so far concentrated on making "stamped trinkets" for the masses, Groslier worried that such "entrepreneurs" would soon turn to the market for the "indigenous arts" where "a clientele always abundantly presents itself". Through "the most simple reasoning", the "mechanical embosser or his imitators" would begin to make molds able to produce objects identical to the models of the Corporations. Because the machine could make them in series, at least 25 a day, it would soon replace the silversmiths who required five to ten working days to make one box. In addition, because of the vastly lower prices which the entrepreneur could charge for such stamped boxes and jewelery, boutiques would "not be able to resist mixing that which comes from the chisel with that which comes from the stamping machine". From there, Groslier warned, it was a short step to "an Italian, a Spaniard, an American [beginning to] make molds in Khmer style after photos or designs, just as he already makes objects in the style of Louis XIV". Worse still, combinations of the machine and the hand could be profitably imagined in which a box made largely by machine would be finished with "a few blows of the chisel, a retouch made in ten minutes" that thus would give the box superficial hand-chiseled qualities similar to those produced by the Corporations.[194]

The Khmer press and public had an apparently very different opinion of Say's machine. "Instead of congratulating the Cambodian Say from Kompong Cham who has made a series of mechanical tools which are really masterworks", an account in Nagaravatta, January 20, 1940 noted pointedly, "the foreigners [who composed the jury] have reproached him for having invented [something] which could... prevent the

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[194] NAC #23304 (RSC).

hand laborers from making a living".[195] To the "young Cambodians", a later issue of Nagaravatta explained, Say's machine, "furnished... proof that Khmers are capable also of making industrial machines, of setting up ateliers, and even of making products like European industry".[196] The machine thus was an example of "the clear desire of the Cambodian people to evolve and the proof that they will succeed in what they wish". It was the "the wicked and jealous French [who] want the Cambodian to remain backwards, maintaining him in the old worn track while Chinese and Annamites benefit from all the progress". The administration of the Protectorate, the newspaper announced, was "unconcerned with the Cambodian artisans" and therefore the artisanat should organise and agitate.[197] What seems to have happened in the short term at least was that Say gained much publicity from the controversy and thus received commissions for a thousand boxes from European and Annamite establishments. "Every night", the police report concluded, Say "elaborates to his

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[195] NAC #23304 (RSC). I rely here on the Police Report translations of Nagaravatta articles. It is one of the great ironic legacies of colonialism that a supposedly complete set of Nagaravatta, the Khmer language newspaper, resides in the archives in France while no copies are to be found in Phnom Penh.

[196] Nagaravatta, January 24, January 31, 1940 as translated in the police report [NAC #23304 (RSC)]. All subsequent references to in the remaining paragraphs are to this reference.

[197] Groslier's reply to this was rather weak. The fact that Say had had to come to Phnom Penh from Kompong Cham to establish himself indicated that Say's machine did not "reveal the aspirations and dispositions of a whole people" since he had been unable to find a clientele for his stamped trinkets in the countryside. Rather it was the limited, urban clientele (condemned once before as an "aristocracy" abandoning their artisans) who were fascinated with the machine. In addition, the so-called "invention" was really nothing when placed into a European context, Groslier explained. While "for a Cambodian, the stamping machine was "an indisputable success", the machine was really only an "elementary apparatus, a good work for a student in his 3rd year of the Ecole professionnelle" and "nothing miraculous which testifies to a particular mechanical sensibility of which one could gain an appreciable economic effect" [NAC #23304 (RSC)].

compatriots in front of his stand the merits of his invention and its utility for the future of Cambodia".

The lessons of the many colonial "fairs" and "expositions" organised by the Protectorate to which we now turn had been well learned. As an article in a January 27, 1940 issue of Nagaravatta put it:

> the Exposition of 1940 has brought to light interesting objects which give the impression that the Cambodian people begin to progress, thanks to the mass which interests itself more and more in the industry able to lead the youth of future generations towards prosperity... Following as always [our] campaign to bring about a renaissance of the Cambodian people, [we] ascribe the inferior intellect of the Khmers to the insufficiency of the technical training given to young Cambodians... This is due in large part to the people who, charged with educating have not wished the Khmer people to become as educated as foreigners; [they] have just barely taught the Cambodians to know how to make purchases from others.[198]

[198] NAC #23304 (RSC).

Chapter Three : Display

In a 1959 report on the activities of the United States Information Service in Cambodia, an officer in charge of exhibits is quoted as saying:

> The exhibit-conscious public in Phnom Penh is almost non-existent. Third dimensional [sic] displays or displays with components in motion are still not seen even in what local advertising exists. Cambodia is the country of the photograph or poster carelessly tacked to the wall. To our knowledge, there are no advertising agencies. Even the Ministry of Information exhibits which tour the country would be considered crude and lacking in eye appeal in neighboring countries of Southeast Asia. Exhibits for Cambodian audiences must be simple and graphic since impact must be made with pictures and not through captions or long explanatory text.[1]

At first glance, such a judgement seems ironic since "Cambodge" had been so often displayed during the Protectorate.[2] As we have seen, exhibitions were essential to Groslier's "organism" and the sales network which he developed for the products of the Corporations (figure 49).[3] While most of the displays associated with these efforts took place abroad, there is also a history of exhibitions in Phnom Penh during the 20th century to which I now turn. The processes of commodification through which

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[1] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", March 27, 1959 in RG306 Reports of the US Information Agency / Inspection Reports and Related Reports 1954-1962, Box 2. The quote continues: "the arduous process of translating and scribing[sic] Cambodian language captions at times does not justify itself in that the language is so lacking in technical vocabulary that many French terms are put into Cambodian script. Naturally those who do not understand French do not understand the Cambodian transcription."

[2] See Bruno Dagens Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire; Herman Lebovics, True France: the wars over cultural identity 1900-1945 ; and Penny Edwards, Cambodge for some recent treatments of this popular theme.

[3] See "Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens au cours de l'année 1940" [NAC #2135 (RSC)] as well as my discussion of the Corporations at the end of Chapter Two.

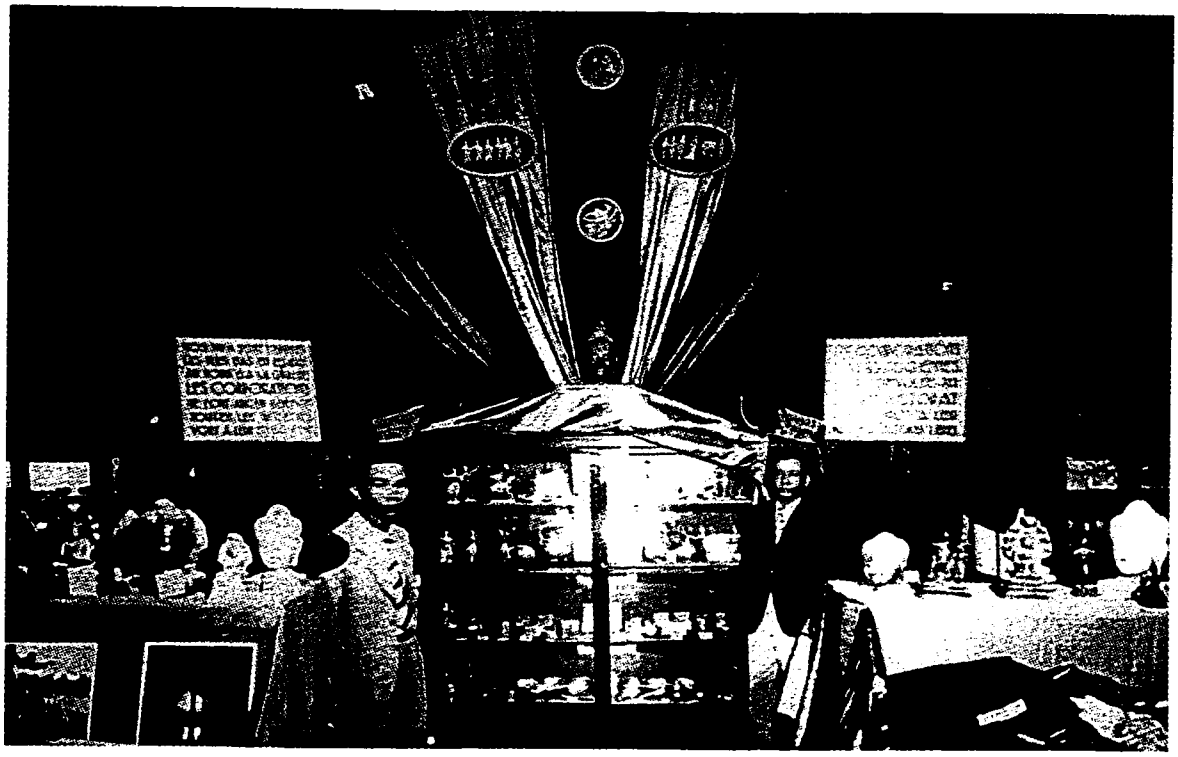
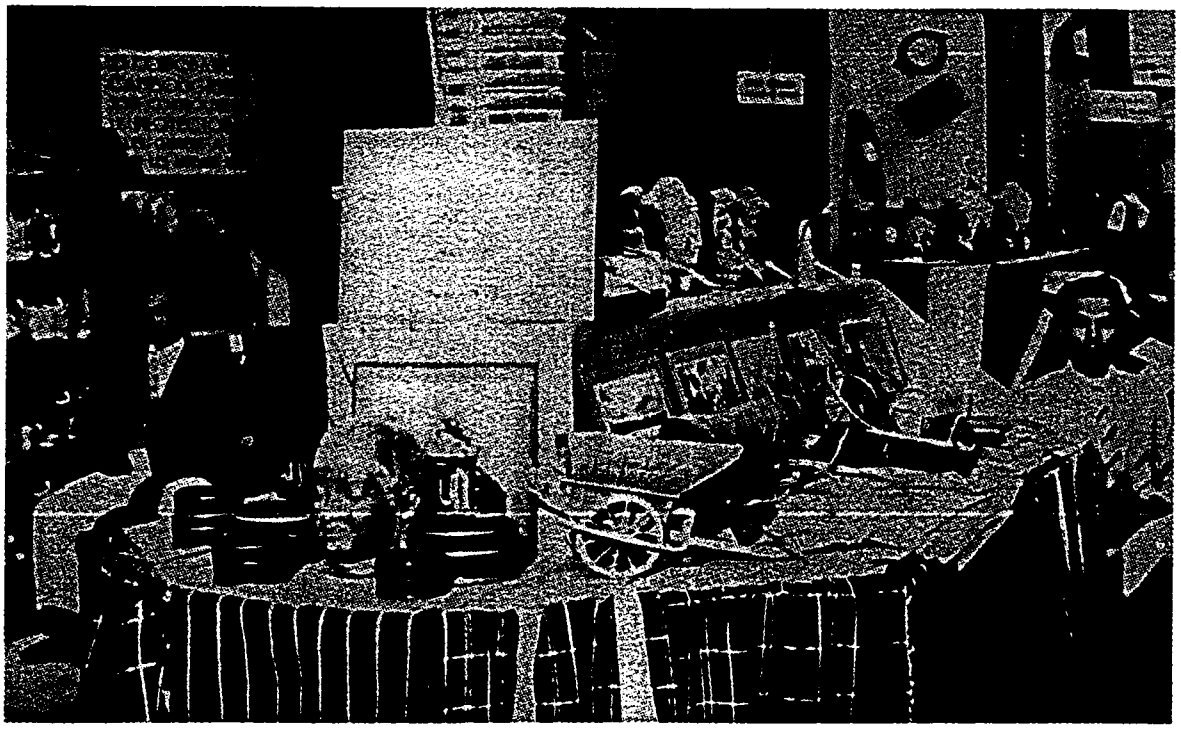


Figure 49

1937 Fair at Haiphong (Tonkin), Cambodian Corporations exhibition stands

NAC #16213 (RSC)



tradition became a product is clearly evident here. Indeed, we will see that Groslier's products simply joined many other commodities that were increasingly on display in Phnom Penh as the 1920s and 1930s progressed. When we follow such displays into the era of independence, however, a different logic will come to infuse them, setting the scene for my discussion of "modern painting" in Chapter 4.

Tang Tok

តាំងកុ (Tang Tok) is a festival which was held annually at the Royal Palace of Phnom Penh, in order to celebrate the birthday of the King.[4] In addition to the rites held inside the Palace and the popular entertainments offered outside the Palace walls, early accounts of the festival described exhibits on display tables arranged inside the Throne Hall and "all around the surrounding wall, under the gates".[5] The table arrangements were "made by the ministers, monks and functionaries of the Provinces", and - to French eyes - their displays seemed to contain everything. Objects "from all over the place" were shown under "the most varied lights: lamps, candelabras, photophores"; "French or German clocks, Chinese or Japanese statues, artificial flowers, Cambodian art objects", all these "strangely disparate objects" were jumbled together so that one found "costly or pleasing pieces right next to baubles

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[4] កុ means "table" and តាំង means "display" although it also can mean "to set up", or "to establish". The name of the ceremony therefore is "display tables" or "to set up tables". The King's birthday is still celebrated today as a national holiday although the displays and events associated with the holiday have been curtailed in recent years.

[5] See A. Leclère, "Tang Tok" in Revue Indochinoise #1, Volume 2 (1904-1905), p.338 and E. Ménétrier, "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok à Pnom-Penh", Revue Indochinoise #10 (October 1912), p.334.

without value".[6] For Ménétrier, writing in 1912, it was incomprehensible that a cardboard elephant with a movable head (an early advertising mascot for "Le Nil" cigarette paper) could "be enthroned in the place of honor". The individual objects which he instead singled out for praise were pieces which more closely embodied his pre-conceptions of Cambodian art: "a series of animals in carved silver", "furniture of ebony incrusted with mother of pearl", "mythological animals sculpted in wood".[7]

By the curious process in which traditions are constructed and then retrospectively naturalized, accounts of Tang Tok from the 1920s already described its displays as "a tradition among the Cambodian population" in which "offerings of a ritual character" have "varied little for a great number of years".[8] Leclère's early descriptions however noted the "recent creation" of Tang Tok, explaining that the festival and its displays were "considered by the natives as an innovation to which French customs were not foreign".[9] The notion of such an annual display had been pieced together then as much from foreign ideas of allegiance and exhibition, as from indigenous practices of offering.[10]

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[6] E. Ménétrier, "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok à Pnom-Penh", p.334-5.

[7] E. Ménétrier, " Les Fêtes du Tang-tok à Pnom-Penh ", p.334-5.

[8] Draft press release (undated, probably 1924) NAC #2000 (RSC).

[9] "I understand no part to correspond to a Cambodian idea", Leclère wrote, "since in no part of Cambodia is it the custom to celebrate the anniversary of the appearance of an ordinary being in our world, even that of the Buddha". See A. Leclère, "Tang Tok", p.336.

[10] Here, drawing on Penny Edwards' work, one could say that the displays as a whole pictured the beginning of a nation, drawing together regional areas into a single exhibition and displaying the King's domain. Tang Tok inscribed obedience to the King (and the emerging nation) by requiring provincial authorities to pay homage through their displays or provide acceptable explanations for their absence. Leclère claimed that provincial governors resented the festival since it required considerable expenditures on their part. As we have seen in

Initiated during the first years after King Norodom installed his court in Phnom Penh, by 1912, the jumbled objects on display at Tang Tok seemed, at least to French eyes, to embody the crisis which Groslier would proclaim. Where early versions of the tables had perhaps primarily exhibited "native" art objects and natural oddities, by the time Ménétrier visited in 1912, European images had become the objects of fascination. Whether the origin of the object was local or distant, the point was that through the assembling of remarkable things, tribute would be paid to the king. The things displayed were objects considered particularly beautiful, or particularly strange, arranged in a collection of wonder for visitors to view. The greater the abundance and diversity of objects offered, the more wonder was assembled and the more homage was paid. From early photographs of the displays, we can perhaps recognize both the jumble which French eyes found (figure 50) and the form of offerings familiar to local eyes (figure 51).[11]

Officials of the Protectorate apparently viewed the perplexing accumulation of things and their lack of categorization with dismay. By 1924, the displays had been organised into broad categories of "agriculture", "industry" and "art", and in 1925, new regulations were introduced bringing Tang Tok almost entirely under the control

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Groslier's early suggestion for a portrait gallery, as well as the early Palace construction projects, Cambodian Kings were urged to acquire the mandatory attributes of Western royalty. In one of the earliest efforts in this vein, the French entrepreneur Caraman foisted a set of "fifty paintings copied from the great masters in oil" on King Norodom as part of an ill-fated royal shopping order in 1873. It was to such transfers of "French customs" that Leclère attributed the emergence of Tang Tok. I want to thank Gregor Muller for alerting me to Norodom's painting order. See his forthcoming dissertation on Caraman and the early Protectorate (University of Zurich).

[11] Such offerings are still found, in variously ordered arrangements of fruit, soda, flowers and incense, piled in rows before statues of the Buddha in Vats throughout Cambodia today.

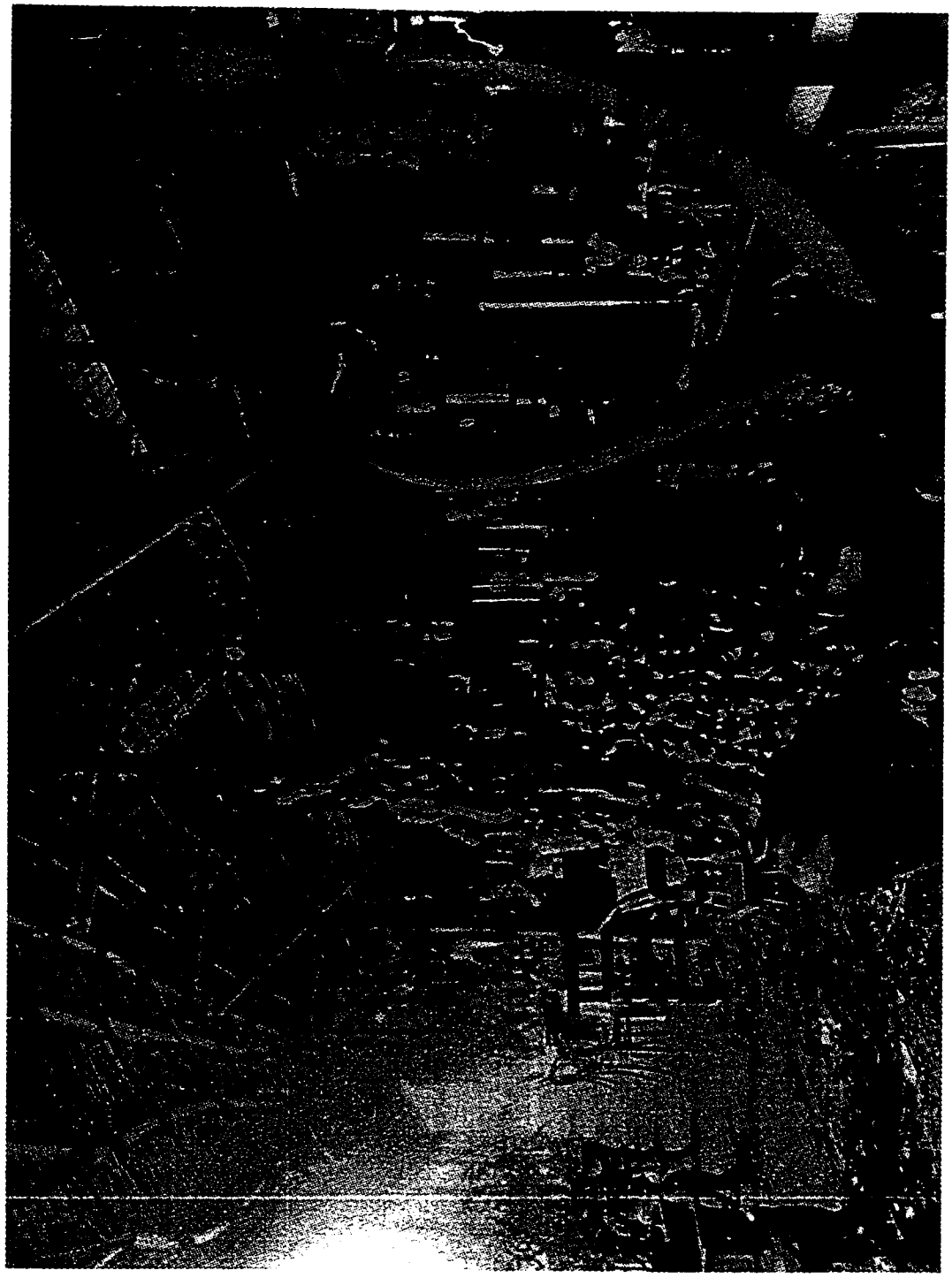

Figure 50 : Stands of Tang Tok 1924

L'Impartial (September 1, 1924) NAC #5603 (RSC)

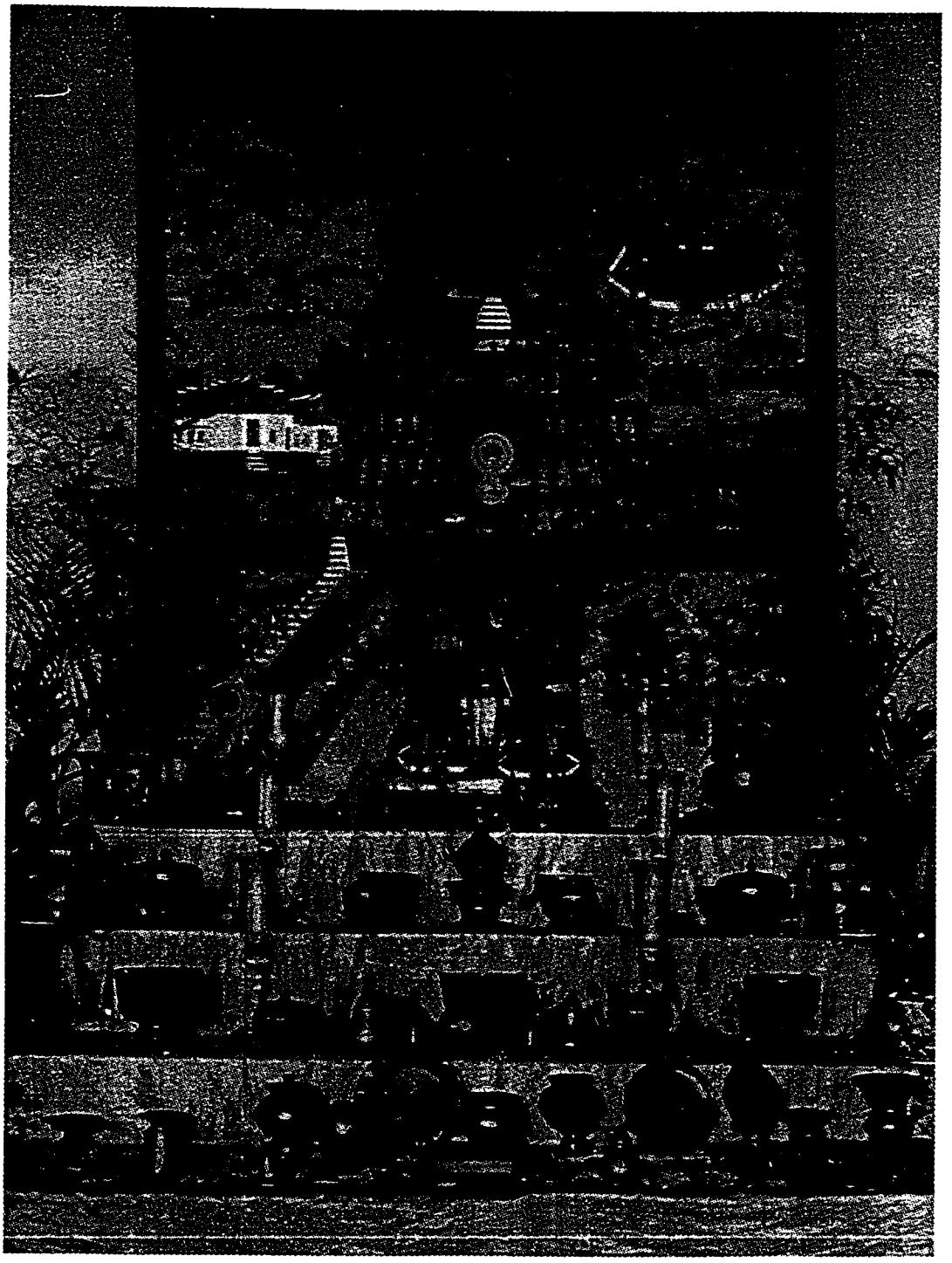

Figure 51

Tang Tok, 1924: Stand of Prince Watchayavong Sisovath

L'Impartial, September 1, 1924 NAC #5603 (RSC)

of the Protectorate.[12] A committee appointed by the RSC would oversee installation of the exhibits. Displays were specifically urged to "throw into relief" the "economic characteristics" of each region, while more specific categories of display were established dividing "things" into "products of the soil", "animal products", "mineral products", and "products of family industries" (including artisanal products such as silk weavings, mats, ivory carvings, jewelery, bronze figurines, pottery, lacquer objects, and musical instruments).[13] The first competition for the displays of Tang Tok was held in 1924.[14] While the official purpose of the display remained "to express to the King wishes for prosperity and longevity from the mandarins and functionaries of the Kingdom", the competition was meant to spur the collection and display of "the still ignored riches of Cambodia" for which the "possibilities in the economic domain surpass the hypothesis of the most optimistic".[15] The "products" of "artisans and artists" were shown alongside the "products" of agriculture and industry, with monetary prizes offered in several categories.[16]

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[12] See "Tang Tok" L'Impartial, September 1, 1924 [NAC #5603 (RSC)] and the Circulaire of the RSC, September 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)].

[13] Circulaire of the RSC, September 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)].

[14] "Tang Tok", L'Impartial, September 1, 1924 [NAC #5603 (RSC)]. The stand of Prince Watchayavong Sisovath, pictured in figure 51, won first prize.

[15] Despite its aspiration to display products from throughout Cambodia, the displays of Tang Tok seem to have only represented regions around Phnom Penh during the early 1920s. In 1925, for example, the vast majority of exhibited objects came from Kandal (954), Phnom Penh (345) and Kompong Cham (240). Siem Reap only exhibited 51 objects indicating perhaps how little the nation had congealed. See the Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 NAC #2427 (RSC).

[16] Prizes seem to have been awarded both to individual regional displays (thus encouraging competition between the Residencies) as well as in the broader categories of "products presenting an artistic character" and "products of the soil or of family industries. See "Tang

Many of the provincial objects of wonder, brought for display at early versions of Tang Tok, appeared year after year as representative of a particular region. Objects thus lingered, refusing to disappear. With the introduction of competition, the same objects could repeatedly win prizes, and French observers complained that the exhibits were always the same (although they admitted that huge crowds of local viewers continued to come to wonder year after year).[17] In 1925, the new commissioner of Tang Tok suggested that all objects on display be offered for sale.[18] Not only would this cut down on the number of objects exhibited, and thus on the jumble, but "we will help this exposition proceed towards the formula of a commercial fair which, in my opinion, must be the goal of our efforts".[19] By re-framing a display of wonder into a sale of products, RSC Baudoin had, in the words of one observer, "very successfully taken advantage of this ancient custom [Tang Tok] in order to try to create competition between the Cambodians and to encourage them to develop themselves in the artistic domain as in the economic domain".[20] Monetary prizes were awarded

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Tok", L'Impartial, September 1, 1924 [NAC #5603 (RSC)] and the draft press release (1925) in NAC #11402 (RSC).

[17] Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)].

[18] The new commissioner was, appropriately enough, the director of the short-lived Musée Economique. In the spirit of his suggestion, prizes in the category of musical instruments were eliminated since the instruments traditionally brought for display were "all made long ago and thus were not for sale"; as a result of the withdrawal of a monetary prize, within a few years, musical instruments were no longer brought for display. See Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 NAC #2427 (RSC).

[19] Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)]. Although the requirement that all objects be for sale was never fully implemented, by 1928, objects which had won prizes were banned from repeated exhibition. See the memo on the organisation of Tang Tok, October 31, 1928 [NAC #1167 (RSC)].

[20] Undated draft report in NAC #2000 (RSC).

by a jury handpicked by Protectorate officials. The decisions of this jury soon "purged" the stands of "ridiculous objects that a bad and childish taste had introduced" and, by the late 1920s, "the ritual exhibition" had been converted into "an exhibition of an economic character".[21] The meaning of "to develop" in the "artistic domain" that is thus revealed has already come clear to us in Chapter Two. Things of wonder had become products for sale.

The huge local crowds attending Tang Tok throughout the 1920s did not however convert into great numbers of sales.[22] Local populations proved either too poor - or too accustomed from previous exhibitions to simply looking and wondering without buying - to suddenly become a reliable clientele. By 1930, the presence of such local crowds, and their gradual conversion to consumption, inflected Tang Tok with another purpose. Through the display of French products, the exhibition could "improve commerce by showing Cambodians objects made in France".[23] In doing so, Tang Tok was simply following more "advanced" administrative sections of Indochina. At the first "Foire" of Saigon (1927), in addition to the pavilions mounted by each of the administrative units of Indochina, the Fair was dotted with European commercial concerns eager to open new markets in the colonies.[24] Displays

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[21] Undated draft report in NAC #2000 (RSC). The transformation necessitated a new title, at least in French, and by the late 1920s the annual exhibition was called "Exposition des produits du sol et des industries familiales du Tang-Toc".

[22] Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)].

[23] Exhibition Report, September 10, 1925 [NAC #2427 (RSC)].

[24] Foire Saigon (December 7, 1927 - January 17, 1928) Saigon: Société d'Edition et de Publicité Indochinoises, 1927 (NMC Library). The Cambodian pavilion predictably showcased the "traditional arts" (silk, silver) but also included considerable displays of natural resources such as fish and rice.

hawking fans, tools (figure 52), and Nestle milk (figure 53), encouraged local viewers to become consumers of such modern conveniences. By 1 930, the displays of Tang Tok in Phnom Penh included not only automobiles and agricultural machinery (figure 54), but foreign "Houses of Commerce" whose stands soon equaled those of the local administrative regions (figures 55, 56).[25]

The 1930 Tang Tok also featured a series of stands devoted to the School of Cambodian Arts and the Corporations under the title "Musée Albert Sarraut" (figure 56). As the official catalogue described it, "the art exhibition" was now "limited" to "products" from the School of Cambodian Art and its Corporations.[26] It was simply another way in which jumble had become order and the place of art had become clear, secure, and separate. Already at the 1912 Tang Toc, the art school of the Palace had established a salesroom separate from the regional displays where objects worthy of the King were offered for sale to the general public.[27] The "great number of heteroclite objects of little interest" on display at tables from each regional area began to be distanced from "the true marvels of Khmer art" which were to be assembled in a single place and put under a single administration.[28]

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[25] Catalogue for the 1930 Tang Tok, NAC #5432 (RSC). The displays of Houses of Commerce had to be approved by Brecq, the "Artistic delegate" of the Exhibition (and an employee of the School of Cambodian Arts); only those exhibitions considered sufficiently aesthetic would be admitted.

[26] Already in 1927, the "art" displays of Tang Tok were overseen by Groslier and a Khmer counterpart; only stands under the purview of the School and the Corporations could enter into the competition held for "art". Prize categories followed the divisions established by the ateliers of the School: jewelery, sculpture, foundry, weaving, traditional painting, and antique objects of all kinds. See "Rapport sur l'organisation de l'exposition", May 14, 1927 in NAC #1828 (RSC).

[27] E. Ménétrier, "Les Fêtes du Tang-tok à Pnom Penh", p.334-5.

[28] Draft press release (undated, probably 1924) NAC #2000 (RSC).

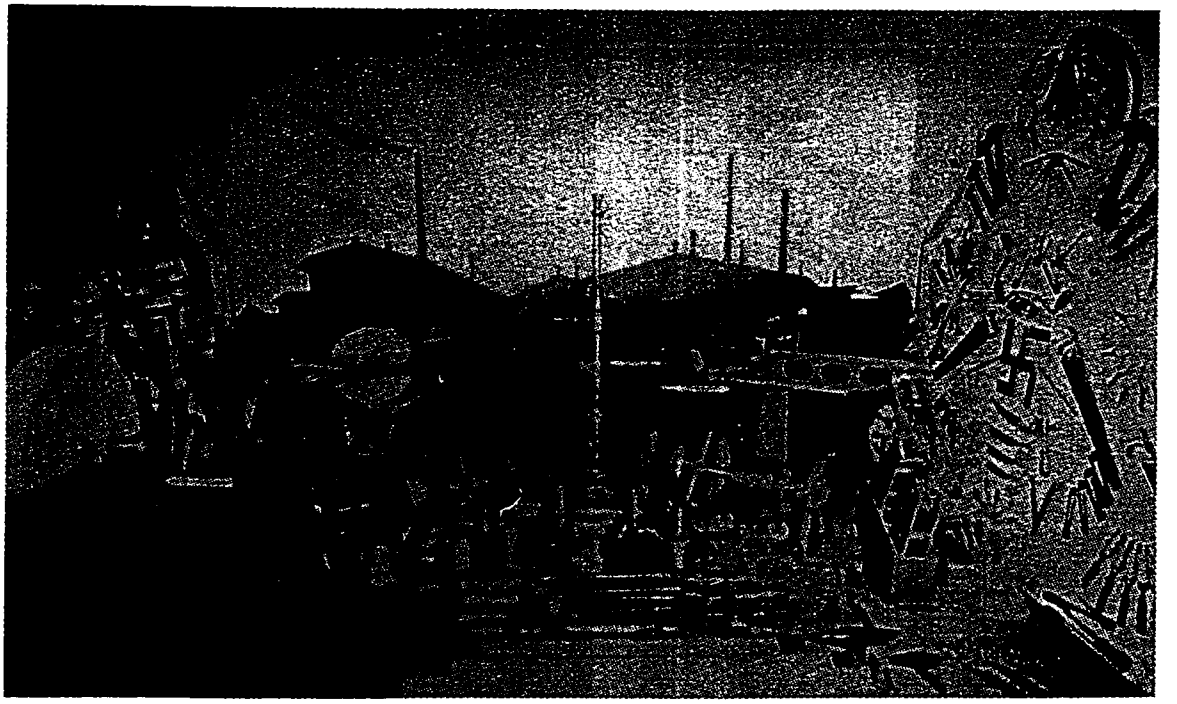

Figure 52

Saigon Fair of 1927-1928
Stands exhibiting tools (above); fans and umbrellas (below)

Foire Saigon (album, NMC library)

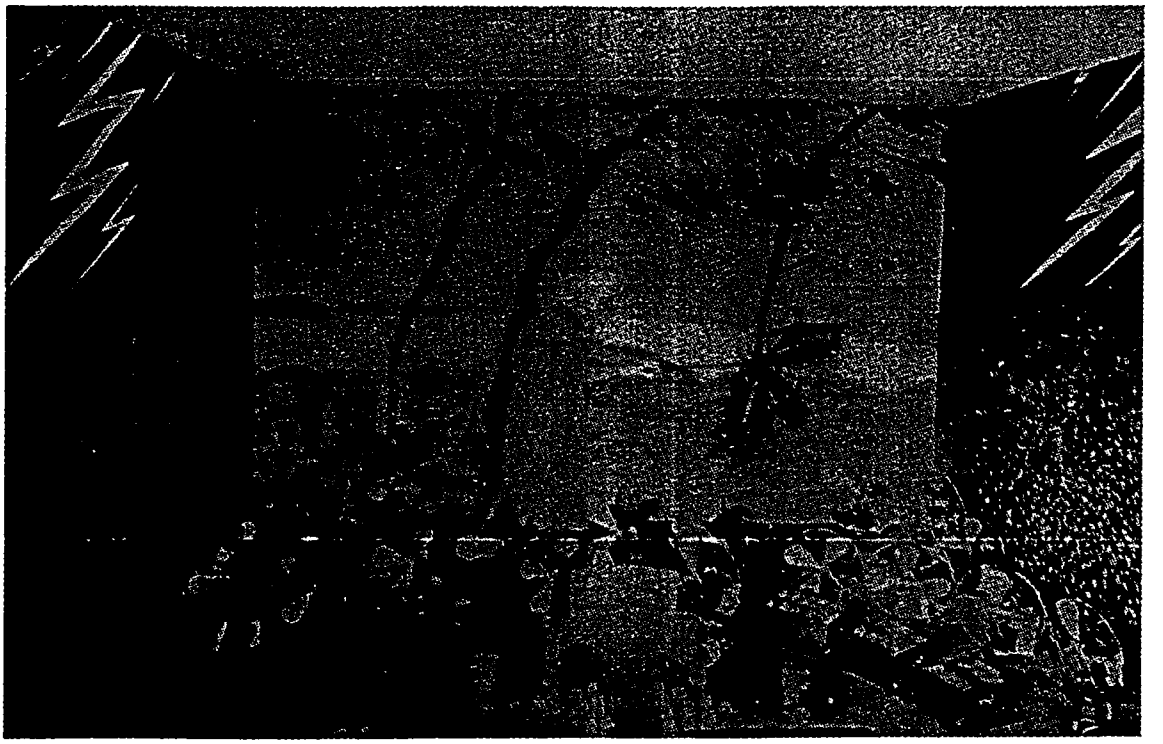



Figure 53

Saigon Fair, 1927-8
The Nestle stand

Foire Saigon
album, NMC library

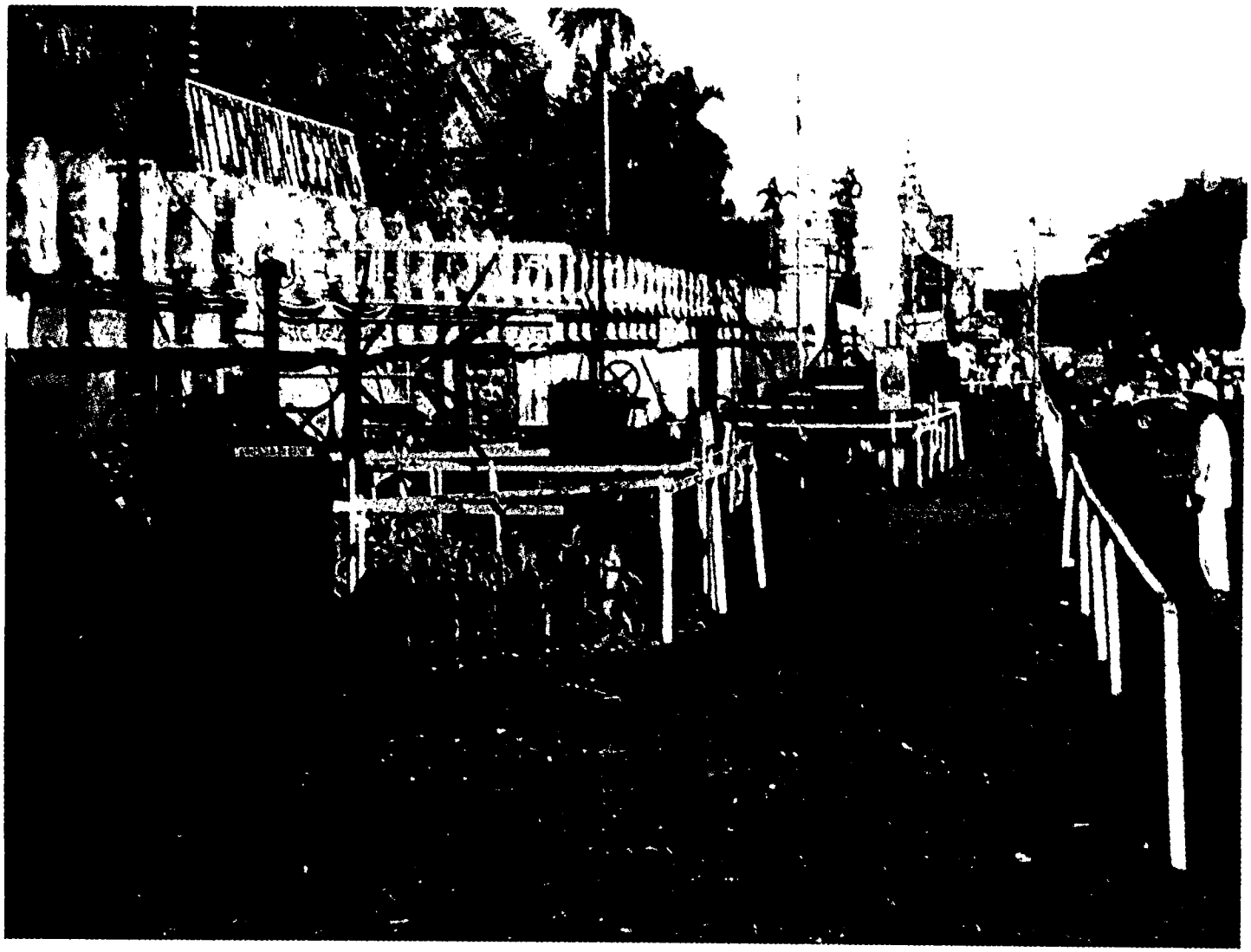

Figure 54

Tang Toc agricultural equipment diplay, 1930

Teston & Percheron, L'Indochine moderne (Paris: Librairie de France, 1932)

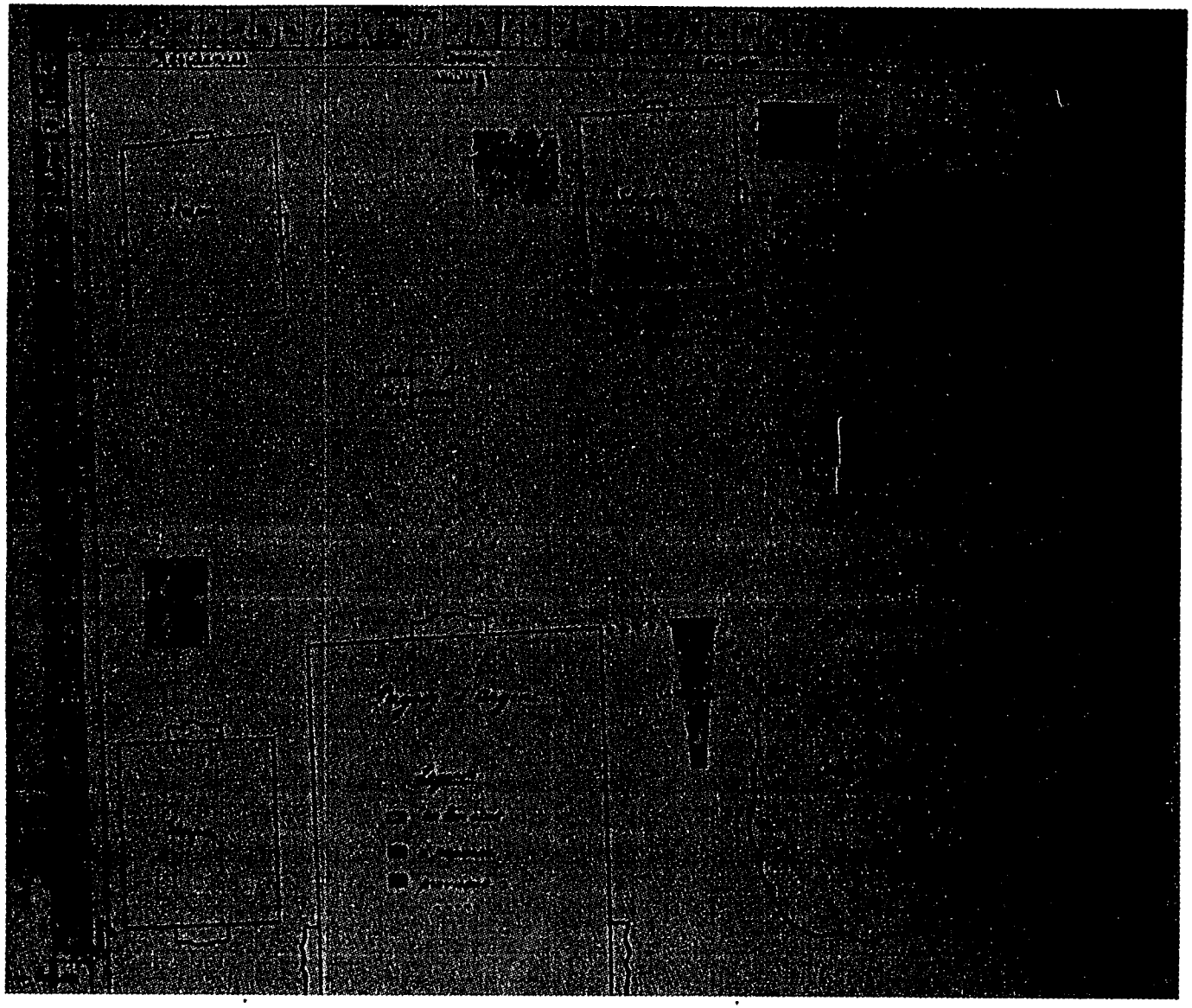

Figure 55

Plan of Tang Tok, 1927 prior to the Houses of Commerce displays

NAC #1828 (RSC)

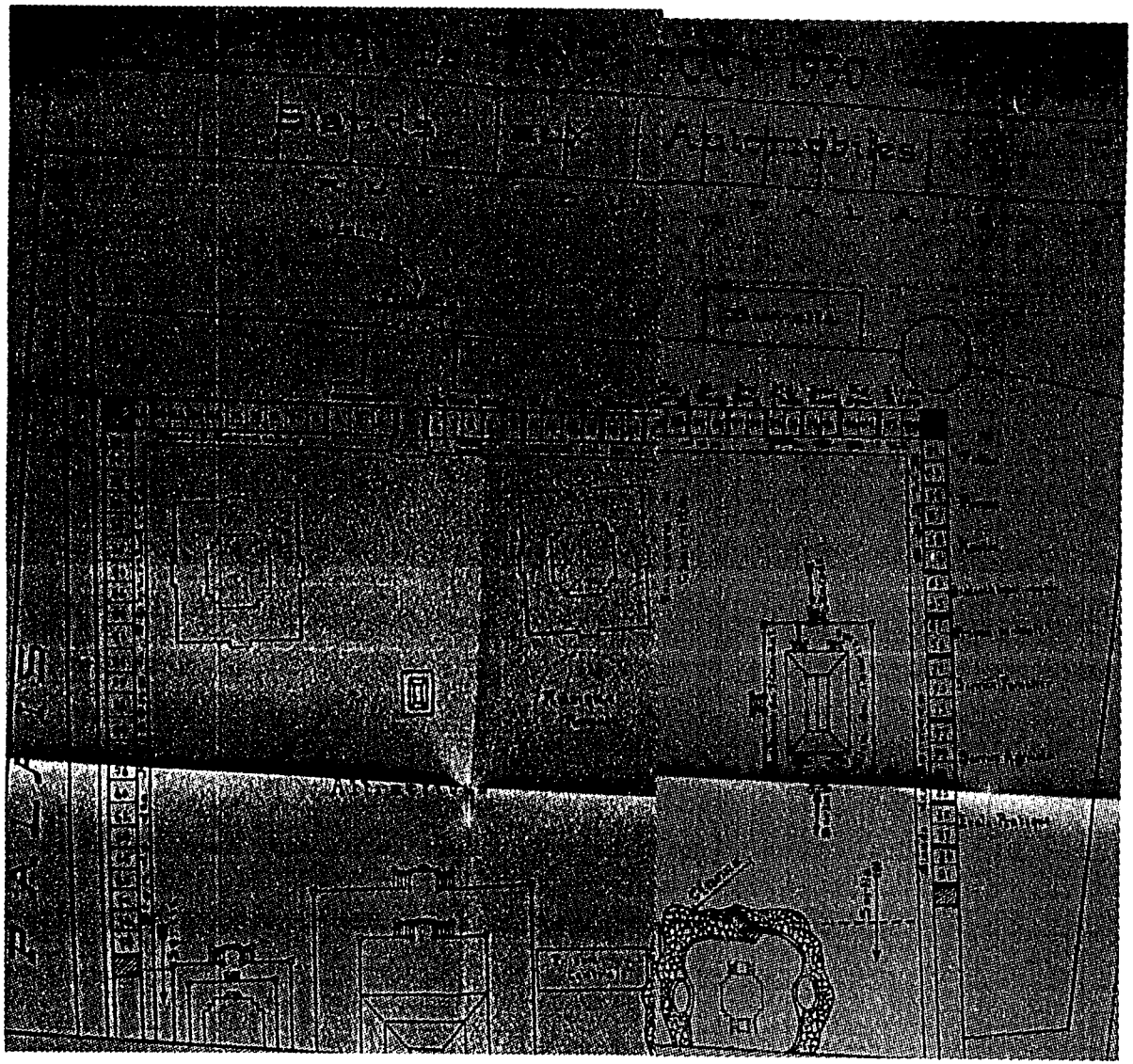

Figure 56

Tang Tok, 1930
Houses of Commerce (left);
Groslier's art display,
Albert Sarraut Museum
(center left);
provincial residencies
(center right)

NAC #5432 (RSC)

In a curious sense, Tang Tok served as a counterpart to Groslier's efforts since local authorities worked to dredge up antiquities and oddities for their displays. Surveying forgotten pockets, they brought the "antique", the "traditional" and "the strange" into a public light.[29] Groslier was of course occupied with collecting "authentic" models and examples of traditional forms from which to develop new products. By 1925, he had secured the right to preview the exhibits and chose "objects of art or archeology destined for his Museum" prior to the general opening of Tang Tok to the public.[30] Through tactics such as the 1928 decorated cart competition, Groslier's administration used the mechanism of Tang Tok to facilitate the collection of particular objects.[31]

The displays of Tang Tok therefore worked in several ways. Things that were once objects of wonder became products, joining those of the French in a display meant to develop markets and convert Cambodians to consumption. Unlike the newly manufactured objects offered by France, the products of Cambodia (at least in

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[29] While Groslier certainly concentrated on the first two categories, the photographs which he assembled as part of the Museum's collections spoke to the third category. The Museum's photography collection was meant to picture all that which could not be physically contained within the walls of the Museum. The images include "specimens" of hill tribe people, provincial houses, classes of school children, ceremonies, landscapes and other un-transportable views. Such collecting of course recalls Malraux's Museum without walls. Malraux remains infamous for attempting to steal sculptures from the temple of Banteay Srei in 1923. As his wife Clara later put it, the two had simply wanted "to put works of art that were being threatened by the jungle back into circulation". See her autobiography (Memoirs, 1967) and the account of the Malraux affair in NAC #15824 (RSC).

[30] See NAC #4254 (RSC) for the controversies which ensued over Groslier's right to preview the exhibitions and chose objects for his Museum and Corporations sales office.

[31] The 1928 Tang Tok included a competition for "indigenous carts decorated with sculptures and applications of metal or ivory"; the competition announcement urged local authorities to search the areas of their reponsibility for possible cart submissions, explaining that some of the

the artistic domain) were the old, the traditional, and the unique. To sell these, however, would eventually deplete the store. Thus a system of substitute production ensured that the original remained as a model on display at the Museum while its copy entered circulation. By excavating the treasures hidden in provincial pockets, Tang Tok became a forum for product development and diversification, annually offering up more traditional things that could serve as models for more and more commodities made by hand in a traditional style.

Independence

In the first flush of independence, an "event like Tang Tok" was held but was posed as "different" because "the objects displayed would not be sold."[32] It would seem for a moment that we here return to the wonder of things in which the viewer was meant simply to look rather than to buy. But the pamphlet for the 1955 International Exhibition of Phnom Penh declared that "there has never been this type [of Exhibition] in Cambodia before", thus explicitly ruling out any relation to the earlier Tang Toks. Many Cambodians, the writer added, would "not understand this event" called "an International Exhibition" (figure 57).[33]

The International Exhibition of Phnom Penh had been created in order to celebrate a new chapter in Cambodia's history. Having "turned the page" from

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carts in the best condition would be preserved in the Museum after the Exhibition was over. See the organisational brochure for the 1928 Tang Tok [NAC #1167 (RSC)].

[32] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ សរសេរដោយលោក ញ៉ែម ឌ៉ីម Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

[33] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ សរសេរដោយលោក ញ៉ែម ឌ៉ីម Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

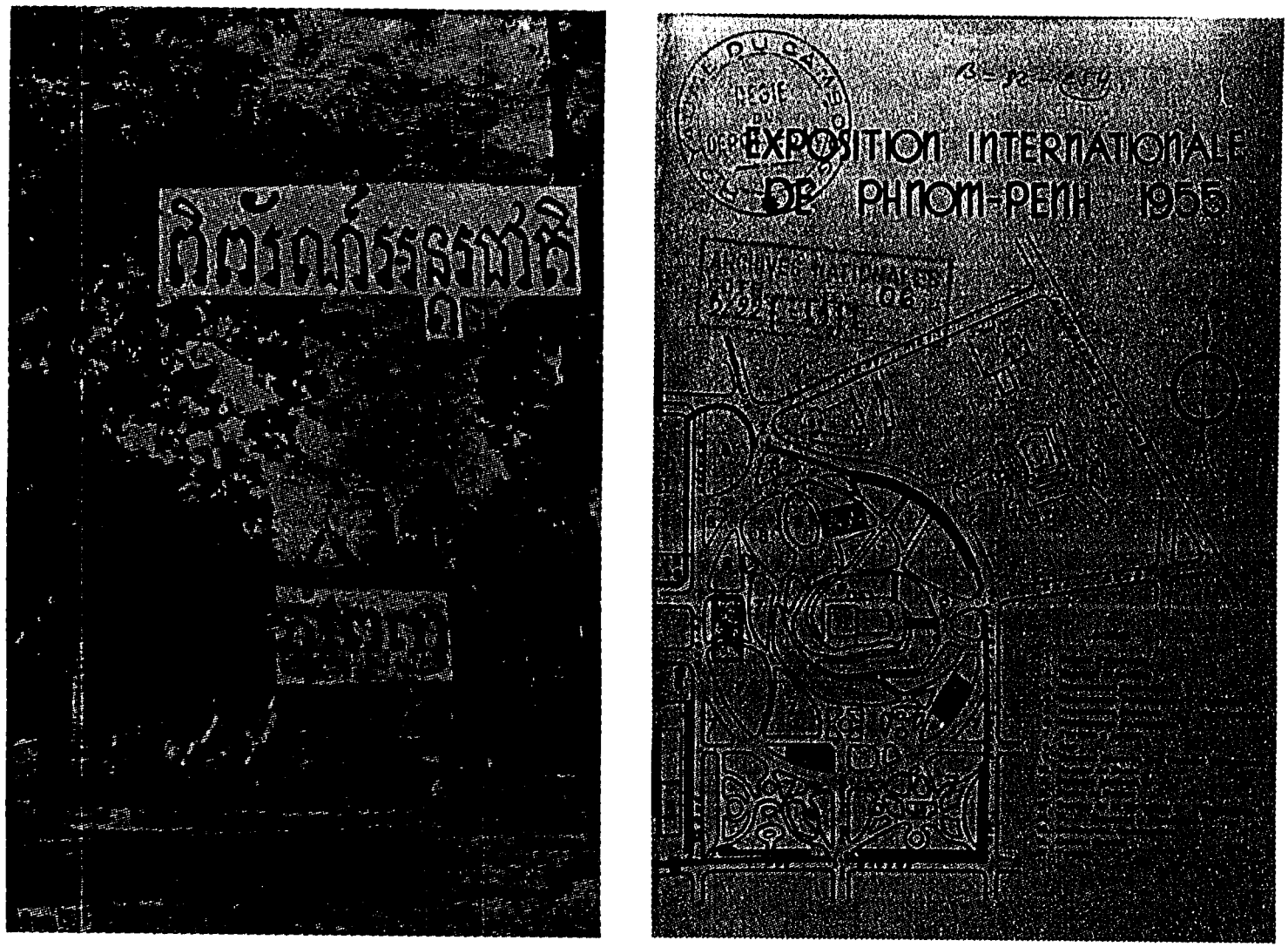

Figure 57 : International Exhibition of Phnom Penh, 1955. Exhibition pamphlets: Khmer (left); French (right)

NAC Box 215 (DC)

colonialism to self rule, the Exhibition would compel "all countries of the world to open their eyes and recognize this fact".[34] By staging a specifically International Exhibition, Cambodia would set itself within the community of nations as an equal. Prior to independence, the Khmer language pamphlet which accompanied the Exhibition explained, Cambodia had not been allowed this freedom and was instead locked within the closed networks of colonial trade and diplomacy as determined by the French. During the almost hundred years of the Protectorate, the pamphlet asked rhetorically, what countries had Cambodia had relations with? In what countries had Cambodia advertised its products?

The author of the pamphlet was obviously not familiar with (or chose to ignore) the far-reaching networks which Groslier had established for the Corporations. Nor did the pamphlet's author, Naem Kem, find much of worth in colonial art policy. Over the last 100 years, he wrote, "French colonialism" has "taken our land, oppressing and throwing away our culture".[35] By denigrating Cambodian culture, and "telling the English that our culture was a corrupt culture, a slave culture", the Protectorate had ensured that "French culture was more praised". In this reading, the "protection" of "authentic Cambodian art" was really a policy to "protect" the status of French art, thus, we can add, guarding its corner on the modern. At the International Exhibition of Phnom Penh, these wrongs would be righted since the "culture of our nation" would be praised by the attending international community.

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[34] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ សារសេរដោយលោក ញែម ខឹម Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

[35] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ សារសេរដោយលោក ញែម ខឹម Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia). All subsequent references in the paragraph are to this pamphlet.

Indeed, the pavilions housing the Cambodian exhibits were strikingly different from any of the pavilions representing Cambodia at exhibitions during the Protectorate (figures 58, 59, 60). Their glass facades and angular geometries echoed the forms proposed by international modernism, visually asserting that Cambodia had not only joined the community of nations but had entered the look of the modern. Designed by the Khmer architect Seng Suntheng, the pavilions were praised as "very modern and pleasing".[36] In a place previously designated as the site of the past, visitors now found the established forms of the modern world and thus a new identity for Cambodia.

Within the four Cambodian pavilions of the Exhibition, the resources of the country were exhibited but not sold.[37] Here the State strove to "offer the entire world a demonstration of the National patrimony".[38] In order for such a demonstration to take place, the entire world of course had to come to Phnom Penh. To that end, other nations were invited to present their own pavilions at the Exhibition.[39] France, Japan, the US, Holland, India, Laos, the Federation of Malaya and Singapore,

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[36] See បុណ្យពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ លោកសៅ in លោកសៅ Free World vol.5 #1, 1955 and "A Final Report on the International Exposition of Phnom Penh", Despatch #230, January 12, 1956 851H.191-Ph/1-1256 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency, Office of Research, Country Project Correspondence 1952-1963 Box 3.

[37] The encyclopedic intention of the Exhibition comes clear in the lengthy lists of objects exhibited in the four Cambodian pavilions of Natural Resources, Technological Resources, Social Resources and Cultural Resources. See "Exposition Internationale de Phnom Penh 1955", NAC Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

[38] Report of Laspeyres to the King in Angkor ("Affaire de l'Exposition Internationale de Phnom Penh"), 1956 [NAC Box 84 (Documents of Cambodia)], p.28.

[39] Pavilions and stands were built around Vat Phnom and along the Avenue Maréchal Joffre toward the Hotel le Royal. The Exhibition opened on November of 1955. See the French and Khmer language Exhibition brochures in NAC Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

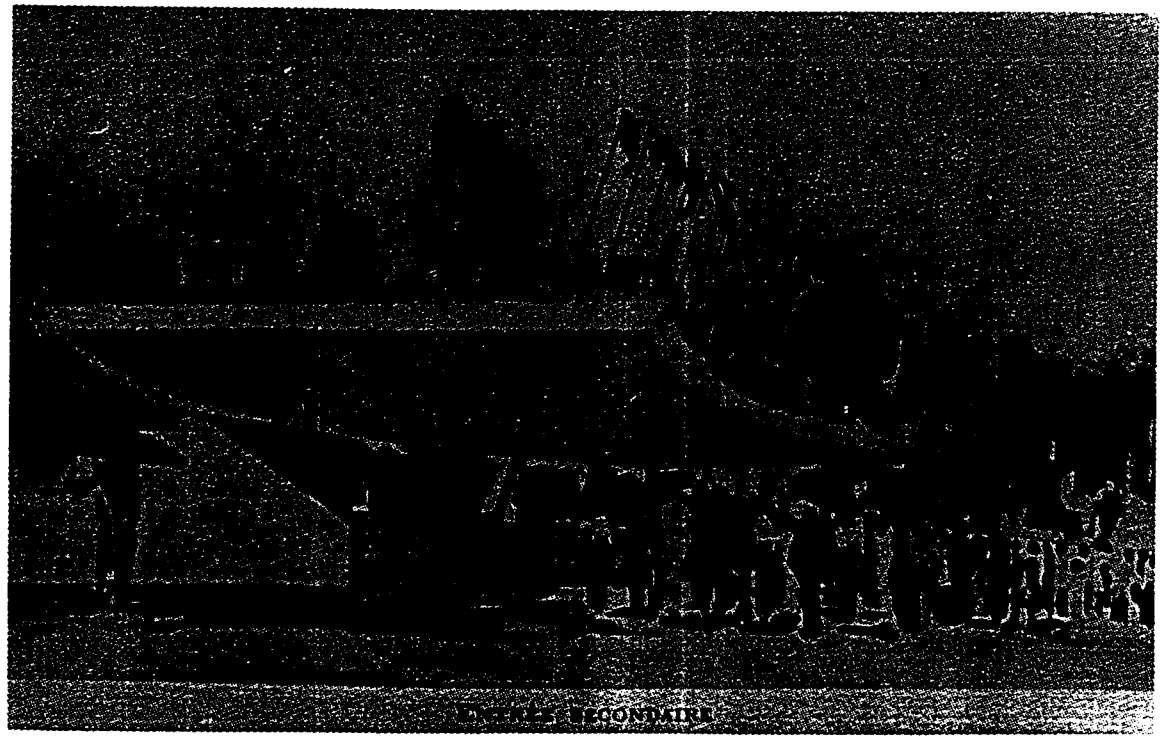
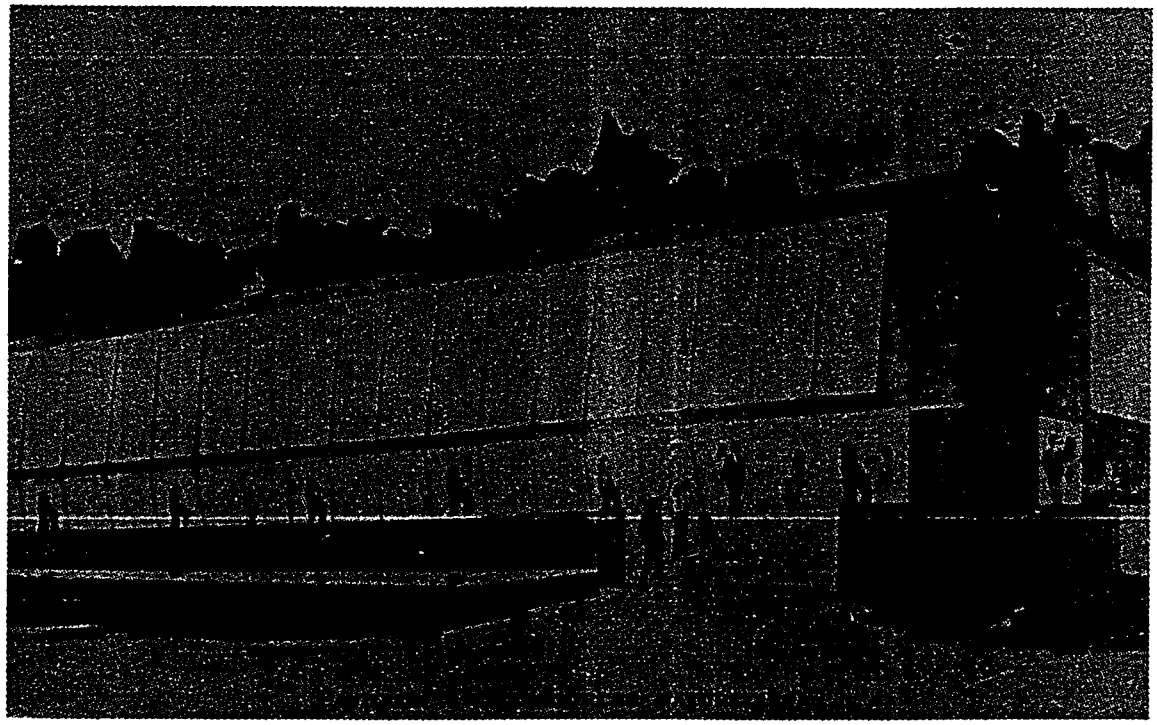


Figure 58 : International Exhibition of Phnom Penh, 1955
Architect sketches of the pavilions
Above: an entrance; below: the Cambodian pavilion displaying natural resources

Exposition Internationale de Phnom Penh, Pamphlet, NAC Box 215 (DC)



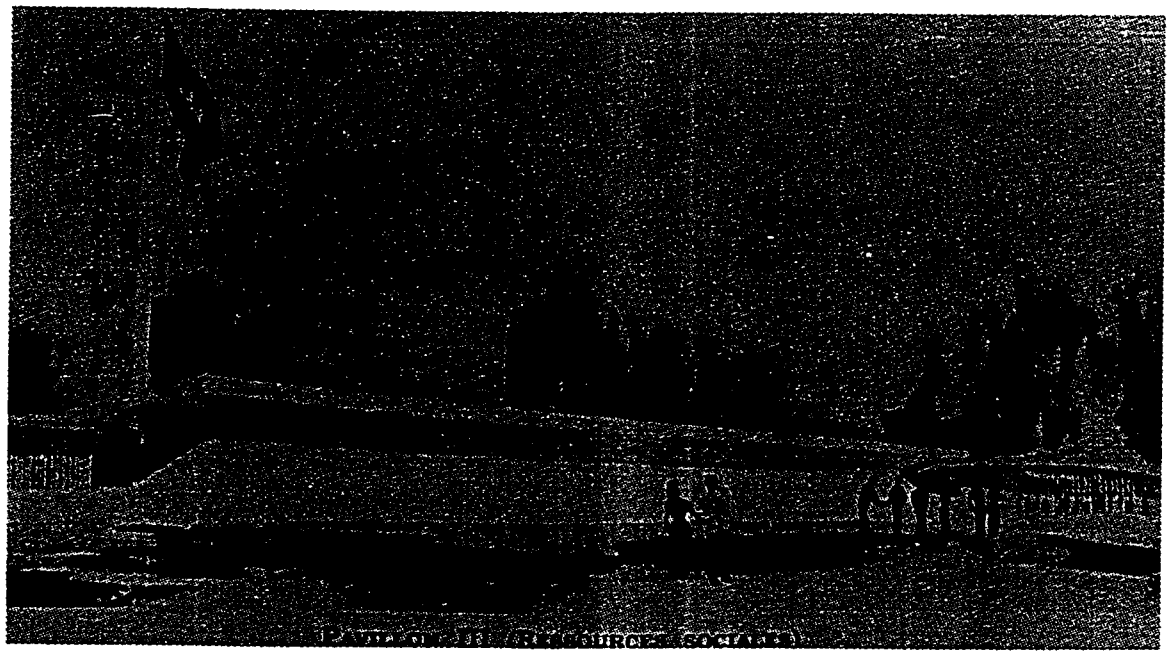
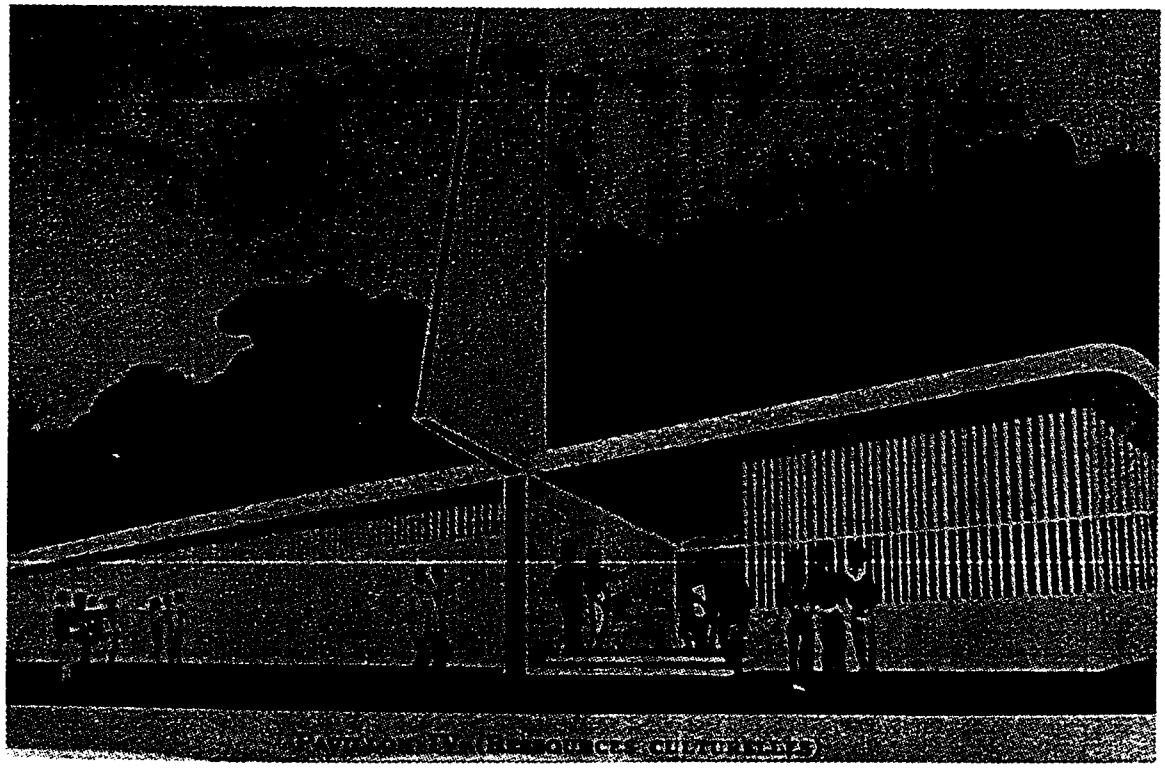


Figure 59 : International Exhibition of Phnom Penh, 1955
Architect sketches of the pavilions
Above: the Cambodian pavilion of social resources
Below: the Cambodian pavilion displaying cultural resources

Exposition Internationale de Phnom Penh, Pamphlet, NAC Box 215 (DC)



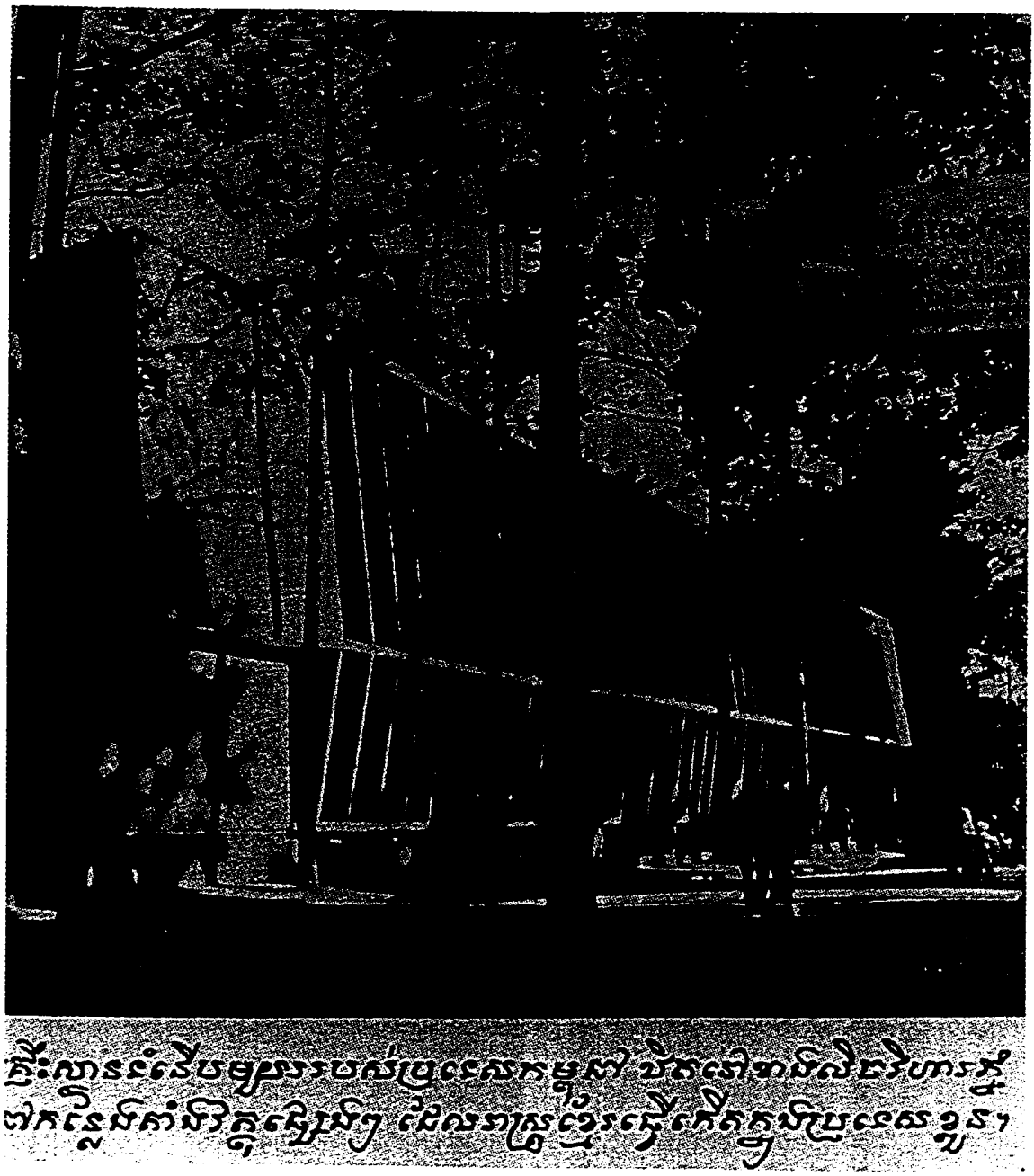


Figure 60 : International Exhibition of Phnom Penh, 1955

The caption reads: "one of the modern pavilions of Cambodia located West of the sanctuary of Vat Phnom. This is one of the places where various things that the Khmer people have made in our country are displayed".

Free World, volume 5, #1

Thailand, and Vietnam all mounted individual national pavilions. There were also pavilions for international business concerns as well as restaurants and amusement stands. An Asian Film Festival, an International Festival of Asian Song and Dance, an International Competition of Asian Children's Drawings, an International Photography Competition, an Exhibition of Asian Masks and Puppets, the Miss Cambodia Beauty Pagent (with four European beauty queens as judges), and various sporting events and activities (including demonstrations by the US Olympic Swim team and the track athlete Bob Mathias) all took place during the course of the Exhibition.[40]

The Khmer language pamphlet resorted to an almost stream-of-consciousness definition of the displays: "Exhibition - the act of setting down - putting, opening, showing in order to see, to look at the international - between peoples, between various nations".[41] An International Exhibition, the pamphlet continued more straightforwardly, was "the exhibition of various things of various nations", things like "art objects, technologies, industrial products, medicines, culture, social affairs" which "each country has brought to exhibit in one place or one country" following a general

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[40] For the fullest account of these activities see បុណ្យពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ in លោកសេរី Free World vol.5 #1, 1955. We can notice in this list a clear interest in pan-Asian events which indicates a post-independence shift away from the colonial French sphere of influence towards allegiance with an imagined broader Asian community. We will see this shift again in my discussion of the Japanese painter Suzuki in Chapter Four.

[41] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិ ការតាំង ការដាក់បើកបង្ហាញឲ្យឃើញ ឲ្យមើលអន្តរជាតិរវាងប្រជាជាតិ រវាងជាតិនានា in ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

(and international) call to display.[42] The slide in this list from the relatively concrete "art objects", "industrial products", and "medicines" to broader and less exhibitable concepts of "culture" and "social affairs" emerges as a crucial tension in the post-independence exhibitions which I chart here. While the sales of products remained an underlying concern, these displays were just as preoccupied with more intangible forms of convincing and conversion. In the 1950s and 1960s, installations of pictures were meant to win over viewers to certain ideas of how to live, how to rule, and what society to create. Indeed, as the Khmer pamphlet explained, while the task for foreign viewers was to finally see what "Cambodia in 1955" really was, local viewers could use the opportunity of the Exhibition to "compare" the "economy, progress and culture" of other countries to that of Cambodia.[43] The normal distance of geography did not allow such forums of eyes "seeing clearly together". It was only at the Exhibition that countries could be compared and contrasted so that views of the world would come clear.[44]

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[42] ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិបានសេចក្តីថា ការតាំងវត្ថុផ្សេងៗរបស់ជាតិនានាដូចជា គ្រឿងសិល្បៈ បច្ចេកទេស ឧស្សាហកម្ម ឧសថកម្ម វប្បធម៌ សង្គមកិច្ចជាដើម ដែលប្រទេសនានាបានយកមកតាំងនៅកន្លែងណាមួយ ឬនៅប្រទេសណាមួយដែលគេបានកំណត់ទុកជាមុន in ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

[43] មកមើលឱ្យឃើញសេដ្ឋកិច្ច វឌ្ឍនធម៌ វប្បធម៌របស់ជាតិគេដើម្បីប្រៀបធៀបនឹងជាតិយើងin ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

[44] The commercial was always intertwined with broader notions of displaying and comparing nations and their cultures. As the Khmer language pamphlet explained, Cambodia was rich in natural resources and certain agricultural and artisanal products. But "how could people be expected to come and buy [such things]" if "no one knows what kinds of things our country has?" The exhibition was therefore a "publicity event" (បុណ្យឃោសនា) to advertise both the new international status of Cambodia and its national resources and products. ពិព័រណ៍អន្តរជាតិភ្នំពេញ Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia).

"The Free World"

The international arena into which Cambodia stepped in 1955 was increasingly divided into two camps. Delicate discussions had ensued during the planning of the 1955 Exhibition as to whether all countries should be invited to display or whether the Exhibition should be limited to "the nations of the Free World".[45] In the end, perhaps through US pressure, the organisers limited invitations to the countries of the Free World.[46] This did not, however, end the jockeying for positions in the Exhibition although the competition was perhaps friendlier than it would have been had the socialist-bloc countries been invited. Informed at an early informational meeting that the French planned to create a large display area centered around a "replica of a Parisian street, complete with a restaurant and a cafe and possibly a dancing hall", the US Embassy in Phnom Penh was soon urging for a similar commitment on the part of the US particularly after the Japanese developed an exhibition plan of a scale equal to that of the French.[47] As one US Embassy telegram put it, "US interest in this strategically important country and critical area allows nothing less".[48] Available markets and economic concerns were secondary to the political task of promoting

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[45] The "Free World" was the US-sponsored slogan for those countries allied against the Communist bloc throughout the Cold War. By the late 1950s, Cambodian officials came to object to the use of this slogan since it carried with it the implication that the rest of the world was not free.

[46] Telegram #101, July 25, 1955 851H.191-Ph/7-2555 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files 1955-1959. In what follows, I use US as an abbreviation for the United States of America.

[47] Despatch #1, July 1 1955, 851H.191Ph/7-155 and Telegram #101, Phnom Penh Embassy to the Department of State, July 25 1955, 851H.191Ph/7-2555 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[48] Telegram #165, August 9 1955,851H.191Ph/8-955 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

America's message and thus gaining ever more allies to the US side of the Cold War. Exhibitions could "present evidence that US social and economic progress under [a] free enterprise economy benefits the majority instead of just the few".[49] The primary purpose of the US display at the International Exhibition of 1955 therefore was to present a message, an image that would persuade, a display that might convert.

Under the official theme of "Peace, Freedom, Progress", the US pavilion included displays of farm equipment, communication devices, and sewing machines, as well as a model low-cost house which the US Operations Mission (USOM) was promoting in the countryside. The US exhibition also included a model voting booth, photographs of life in the United States, and promotional material produced by the Information Service.[50] The final US Embassy report on the Exhibition noted that despite the ongoing controversy over the management of the Exhibition, US participation "was a notable success and did an eminent service to the cause of American-Cambodian relations".[51] A public opinion poll showed that "the US

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[49] Department of State Telegram to Phnom Penh, September 26, 1962 851H.191-Ph/9-2162 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State / Central Decimal File 1960-3, Box 2559.

[50] The US was awarded a gold medal for its exhibit by the organising committee of the Exhibition. Its pavilion included the first public display of a television set in Cambodia. See Telegram January 17, 1956 851H.191-PA/1-1756 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal File 1955-1959 and the "Final Report on the International Exposition of Phnom Penh", Despatch #230, January 12, 1956 851H.191-Ph/1-1256 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency, Office of Research, Country Project Correspondence 1952-1963 Box 3. In what follows I use USIS to stand for the United States Information Service.

[51] "Final Report on the Phnom Penh International Exposition", Despatch #230, January 12 1956, 851H.191Ph/1-1256 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files 1955-1959. For the "aftermath" of the Exhibition and the government's inquiry into its financial mismanagement see Angkor ("Affaire de l'Exposition Internationale

pavilion's television [was] easily [the] outstanding hit of [the] fair", while running tallies of attendance at the various national pavilions showed "US first, India second, France third".[52]

Why was the United States so concerned with Cambodia during the 1950s? As an inspection report from the late 1950s explained, US officials stationed in Cambodia "feel they are in the front-line trenches on the boundary of the Free World and are giving everything they are capable of to keep Cambodia from being lost to the Communists."[53] An enormous importance was placed on Cambodia within the larger US struggle against Communism. The domino theory (and Cambodia's centrality in it) was outlined in a confidential memo in 1961:

> Cambodia's importance derives solely from its strategic position in Southeast Asia. It is the key to the area as the Japanese [during WWII] realised [when they] used it as a springboard for their attack on Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. If Cambodia were to come under Communist domination, both South Viet-Nam and Thailand would be outflanked and eventually fall, and the road opened for aggression against Malaya and Indonesia. United States policy toward Cambodia therefore has been and continues to be predicated on its strategic position.[54]

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de Phnom Penh"), 1956 [NAC Box 84 (Documents of Cambodia)] and my "The International Exhibition of Phnom Penh", Phnom Penh Post, April 1998.

[52] Telegram #221, March 22 1956, in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 15 and "Final Report on the Phnom Penh International Exposition", Despatch #230, January 12 1956, 851H.191Ph/1-1256 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[53] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[54] Confidential Memo from Ambassador Trimble to the Secretary of State, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asia Affairs, Cambodia Files 1958-1963 Box 5.

In the name of defending their "free-world position in Southeast Asia", the US distributed enormous amounts of aid in Cambodia during the 1950s.[55] The purpose of this aid was to "prevent Communist intrusion into military and civil police forces" and to "minimize Communist penetration of education and other vital public programs"; US aid was "not intended to underwrite Cambodia's plans for rapid economic development".[56] In other words, the aid agenda had a clearly self-interested purpose within a larger international context and was therefore not overly preoccupied with local specifics. Aid was given in order to win US influence in an arena in which other countries were also jockeying for position in relation to the larger polarity of the Cold War.[57]

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[55] Of an aid package which by the end of 1960 had totalled 195 million dollars, 102 million dollars were for military support (91 million for troop salaries, 11 million for military equipment and construction projects), and 32.5 million dollars were spent on the Khmer American Friendship Highway linking the new French-constructed port in Kompong Som to Phnom Penh. The remainder of US aid was spent on agricultural and educational development, health projects and USIS activities. The extent of US involvement in Cambodia during the 1950s comes clear through a comparison of US aid figures to estimated aid received from other countries. By 1960, Cambodia had only received $18.5 million from France , $4.1 million from Japan, $1 million from the United Nations, $28 million from Communist China, and $10 million from the Soviet Union. See "Briefing papers for Saccio Visit", November 20, 1959 and Confidential Memo Trimble to Secretary of State (undated) in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asian Affairs: Cambodia Files 1958-1963 Box 2 and 5 as well as the State Department Telegram to Phnom Penh, December 30, 1959 851H.0093/1-260 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1960-3 Box 2559.

[56] See "Briefing papers for Saccio Visit", November 20, 1959 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs / Office of Southeast Asian Affairs: Cambodia Files 1958-1963 Box 2.

[57] When the Khmer-American Friendship Highway (built with great fanfare in the late 1950s) developed embarassingly large potholes only two years after construction, US embassy despatches pleaded for instant funding in order not only to return the road to a useable state but also to repair the damage which "American prestige" had "suffered". The Ambassador feared that the potholes would become "a gold mine" for the "leftist press" in the ongoing publicity war with "Communist interests". See Confidential Memo Ambassador Trimble to Walter McConaughy, Assistant Secretary of State, May 18, 1961 in RG59 General Records of

In the race to win Cambodia over to their side of the Cold War, US officials found themselves hampered by the "intense nationalism" of the country.[58] Through Sihanouk's doctrine of neutrality, Cambodia steadfastly stuck to a foreign policy which placed the maintenance of independence as its primary goal. Aid and independence therefore remained in tension throughout the 1950s. In response to such a situation, the US developed an approach in which the US would "present" itself as "a nation supporting Cambodian independence and respecting its policy of neutrality".[59] Through US aid, Cambodia - as an independent and equal partner - would be offered opportunities allowing the country to achieve levels of "freedom" and "prosperity" produced by the "American way of life".[60] To follow such a strategy, the US Embassy and its related offices in Phnom Penh had to "present an image of the US" to the Cambodian public.[61] Whereas in other countries, more forceful and

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the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of Southeast Asia Affairs, Cambodia Files 1958-1963 Box 5.

[58] "Annual Report on the Educational Exchange Program in Cambodia" Despatch #153, November 3, 1958 511.51H3/11-358 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, Box 2156.

[59] "Country Assessment Report - 1960" Despatch #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[60] "Country Assessment Report - 1960" Despatch #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[61] For discussions of "the image" see the Country Assessment Reports from 1959, 1960, and 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

threatening images of the US were to be constructed and promoted, "in Cambodia... the image [of the US] must be friendly, dignified and trustworthy".[62]

Image construction loosely fell into two categories. Through the first, "proper" representations of US actions and intentions in Cambodia were to be produced at a time when US involvement was increasingly visible in the countryside because of US aid-sponsored model homes, model schools and model roads (figure 61, 62). The "dramatisation" of such aid activities would, the argument ran, supply "evidence" of US "support for, and strengthening of, Cambodian independence".[63] The second component of image construction required making the distant, visible and present. "Life in America" (and in a more general sense, "Life in the Free World'") was to be repeatedly presented and elaborated for Cambodian audiences. Through such exhibitions, the argument ran, Cambodians would be converted to "our way of life". By the early 1960s, each annual Country Assessment Report invoked this campaign to create the "desired Stereotype of the US".[64]

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[62] "Country Assessment Report - 1959" Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

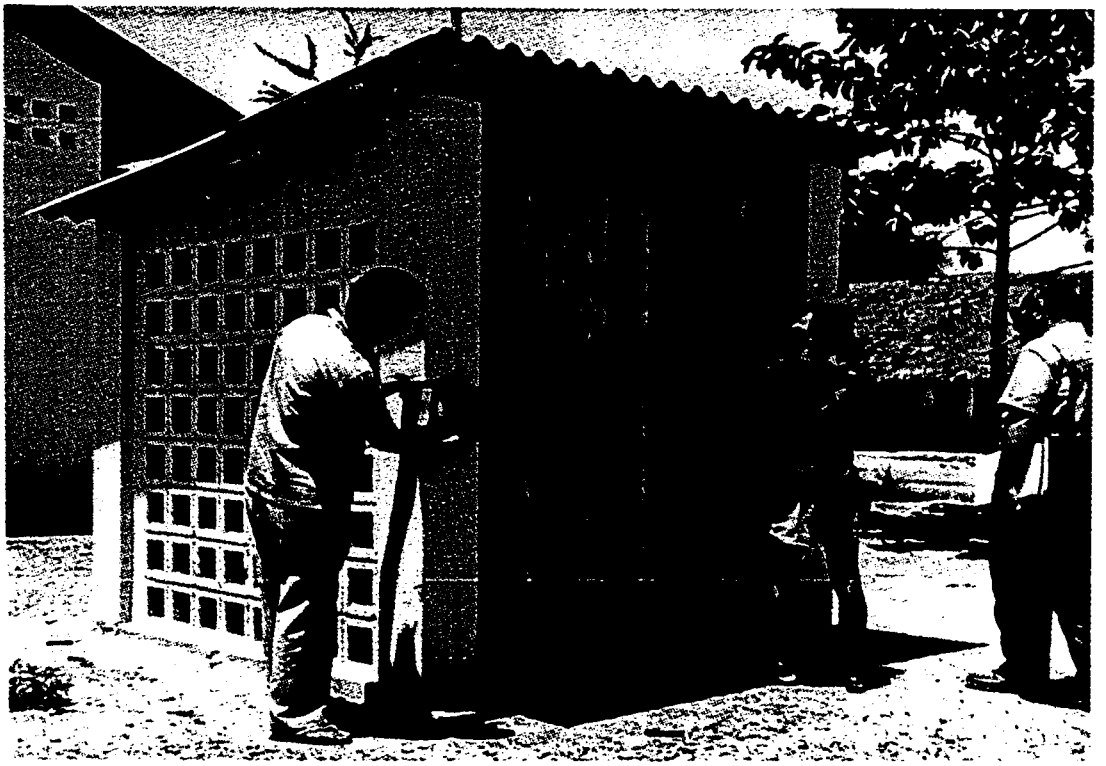
[63] "Country Assessment Report - 1960", Despatch #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[64] See "Country Assessment Report, 1961", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64, Box 220 and "Country Assessment Report - 1962", Despatch #8, January 29, 1963 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220. French officials had embarked on a similar project of image projection in the waning days of the Protectorate. In the midst of Japanese occupation, French authorities planned "historical exhibitions of a permanent nature" in Hanoi, Hue, Saigon and Phnom Penh; these History Museums were to emphasize the poverty and despair of "Indochina prior to the arrival of the French" and the advances subsequently made under the Protectorate. Through such displays, "the permanence of our effort in this country" would become clear to all viewers.



Figure 61
US Aid project in Cambodia, 1962
Above: model school; below: model toilet

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-62-1898 (above); CAM-62-1597 (below)



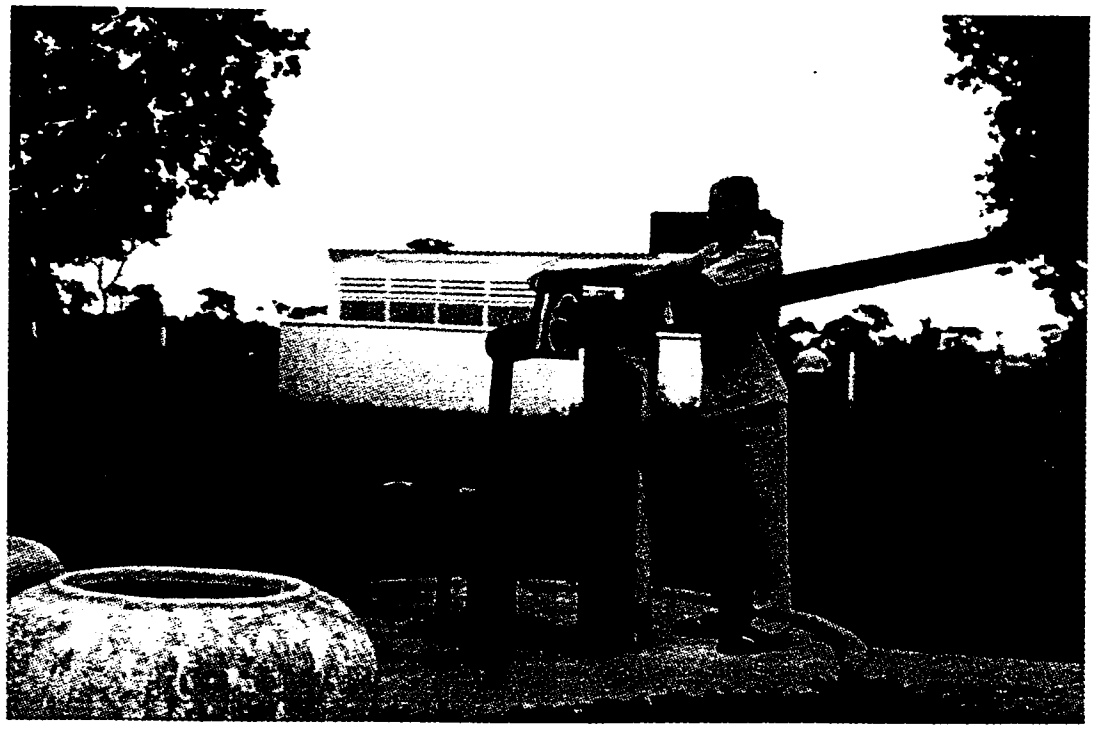


Figure 62 : US Aid projects in Cambodia, 1962
Above: model well; below: inspector with a model school in progress

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-62-1614 (above); CAM-62-1636 (below)



The presentation of "an image of the US" relied on an extensive machinery which disseminated visual materials throughout Cambodia during the 1950s. "All media" were to be mobilized in the effort to convey "the image" and the campaign's effectiveness was repeatedly measured in surveys and opinion polls.[65] I concentrate here on elements of the campaign which affected visual culture in Cambodia, noting however that the production of an image of America had many more facets than I can address here.[66]

One of these historical displays was temporarily assembled in an aisle of the School of Cambodian Arts where it was inaugurated in July of 1943 during the GGI's visit to Phnom Penh. See correspondence between Robbe, the GGI, the RSC, and Groslier in NAC #9104 (RSC) as well as David Ayres, Tradition and Modernity Enmeshed: the Educational Crisis in Cambodia 1953-1997, PhD diss, Sydney University, p.52.

[65] One 1961 survey asked Cambodians "what opinion do you have of the culture of the following countries". The users replies were tabulated and reported to Washington as signs of the success of the image campaign:

	Excellent	good	fair	bad
USA	64%	23%	5%	1%
USSR	33%	18%	12%	2%
France	28%	32%	12%	2%

See "User's Evaluation of the USIS library, Battambang, August 1961" IRI.CAM.11 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Office of Research and Research Reports 1953-1986 Box 15 and "Country Assessment Report - 1960", Despatch #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[66] The purpose of the Educational Exchange Program, for example, was to "get Cambodia to look in our direction: long, intelligently and in large part on our home grounds where we can be seen as we really are". The "American system being what it is, we need have no fear that once Cambodians have begun, they will keep looking. As they do, the emotional and mental state that is the basis of neutralism will be modified. If this happens to enough Cambodians in positions of prominence or potential leadership in the next few years, it should be a telling factor in the development of the country's foreign policy". Under the "Key Persons Project", groups ranging from "government officialdom", the "religious hierarchy", educators, the media, the political opposition and Chinese businessmen, were targeted for free trips to the US. Through such trips, the leadership of the country was meant to develop "warm, first-hand impressions of America", borrowing methods and ways of living which they saw in the US. Close attention was paid to the reciprocal trips to China and the Soviet Union which were soon being offered to the same "Key Persons". As one despatch asserted, the Venerable Huot Tath who toured Communist China shortly after his visit to the US, "was much less impressed with what he saw [in China] because of his previous visit to the US". Similarly, "it may perhaps be assumed that [the writer Sam Nhean's] voyage to the US served to keep him from

In October 1951, the first issue of the Khmer-language version of the United States Information Service magazine លោកសេរី (Free World) appeared in Phnom Penh (figure 63).[67] Print runs of the magazine went from 15,000 to 70,000 copies during the years of its distribution (for free) in Cambodia (1951-1959).[68] Throughout the 1950s, the USIS office in the Philippines produced the text and images for the magazine which promoted a certain picture of "the free world" and its activities. Published in each of the languages of the countries in which it was distributed, the magazine stressed the unity of "free Southeast Asia" (Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, South Vietnam) as well as the integral connection between this bloc and the larger "free world", particularly the United States. Articles in the magazine predictably included political topics addressed in more or less general ways. Profiles of leaders of the "free world" mingled with specific accounts of recent events in the region, presented from the official US perspective ("The American Protectors in South Vietnam"), as well as more general blueprints for proper democratic behavior (figure 64). Other sections of the magazine presented seemingly apolitical pictures of culture and society both in free Southeast Asia and in the US. The first issue, for

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being more impressed by what he saw in the Soviet Union". See Despatch #402, June 18, 1957 511.51H3/6-1857 and "Annual Report on the Educational Exchange Program in Cambodia", Despatch #153, November 3, 1958 511.51H3/11-358 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, Box 2155 & 2156.

[67] Copies of លោកសេរី (Free World) are found in the National Library of Cambodia as well as the US National Archives at College Park, Maryland. The copies are seemingly undated and I reference them by their volume numbers.

[68] "Country Assessment Report - 1959", Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220. The magazine was ordered to stop distribution in 1959.

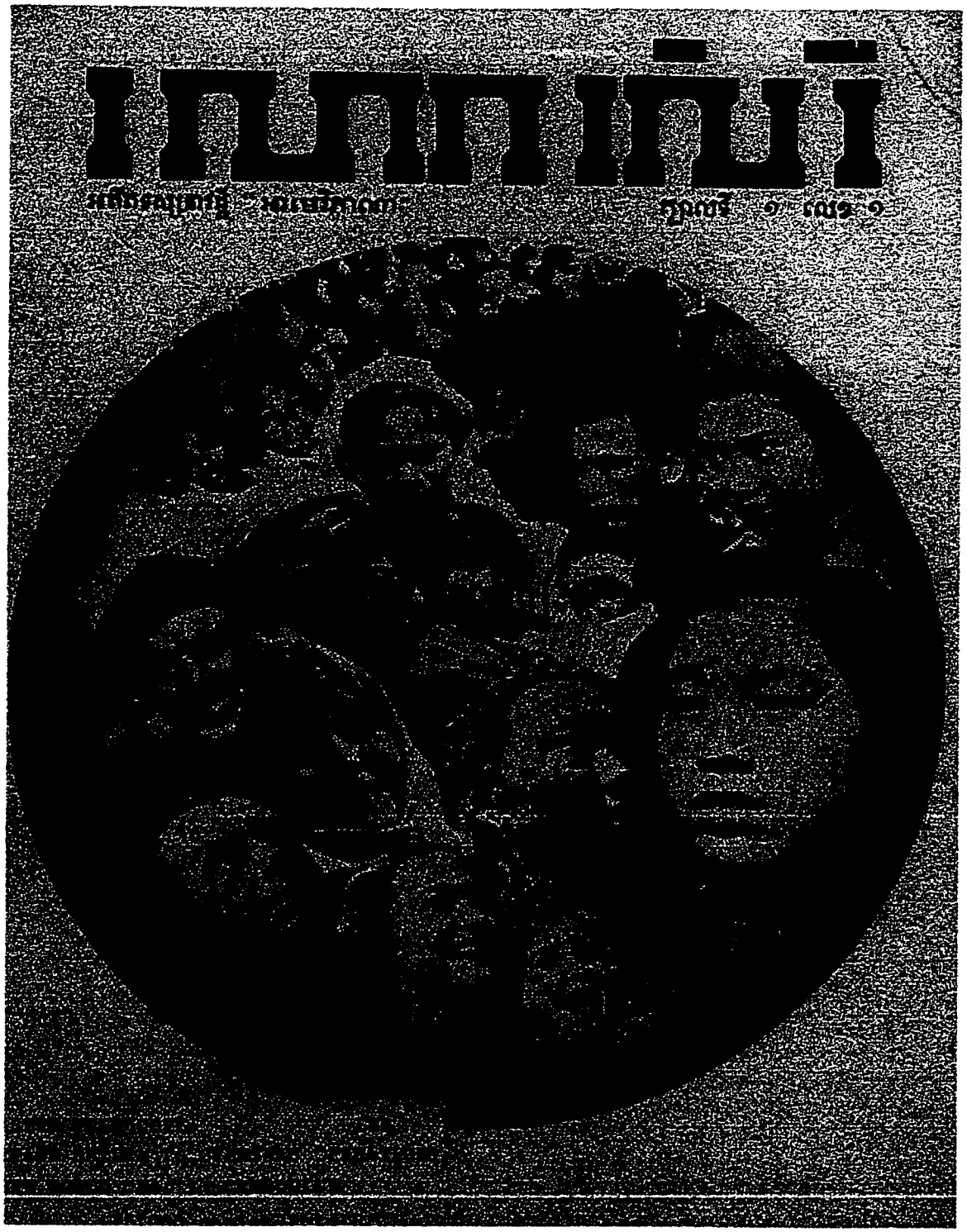

Figure 63

Cover of the first issue of Free World

Free World, volume 1, #1 (1952?)



Figure 64

Free World article on the "free" elections in the Philippines

Free World, volume 2, #3

example, included an article on fashion for women. Issue two presented an overview of "Music in Asia" as well as an article on the care of children and the importance of playing games with them. Subsequent issues included articles on the Islamic wing of the Met (Vol. 1, #10), Grandma Moses (Vol. 2, #1), the "Traditional Arts of Cambodia" (Vol.1, #12) as well as an account of the 200th anniversary of Columbia University (Vol.3, #9), all in easily accessible format with plenty of pictures accompanied by brief explanatory texts. As a USIS Inspection Report put it, លោកសេរី (Free World) avoided direct critiques of communism, striving instead to present an engaging view of life as it was supposedly lived in the "free world".[69] The magazine thus promoted a way of life and hoped that its readers would convert to it.

A considerable breadth of images was presented in the arts sections of លោកសេរី (Free World). Simply to see Meso-American, Native American and Islamic Art presented in an accessible visual format, must have opened horizons for readers of the magazine. And that was the point.[70] In the first issue of the magazine, the experiences

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[69] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[70] The free spread of "information" so emphasized by the Americans was complimented by the American Library, still often mentioned by elderly painters in Phnom Penh today. The library offered a free reading room with a collection which included "illustrated books on painting, sculpture, architecture, interior decorating, landscaping, industrial and household design". The library was "highly popular and effective in attracting students and teachers as well as the casual library visitor" (a view confirmed by elderly Phnom Penh dwellers today who remember the Library fondly). On Thursdays small children were invited to use the library with special classes which showed them what the library was and how to use it. See "Country Assessment Report, 1961", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64, Box 220 as well as the article on the American library in volume 3, #10 of លោកសេរី (Free World) បណ្ណាល័យសាធារណៈរបស់ក្រុមហ៊ុនសេនាការអាមេរិកកាំង . The American

of a Thai student studying at Pratt were described (figure 65).[71] While the photographs of Bong Sovat drawing from the model, studying pictures in the library, and viewing the Brooklyn Museum Native American collection described a typical academic studio training, the text emphasized the friendship and openness with which Bong Sovat had been received by American students as well as the new ideas and techniques which he would take home with him to Thailand. Freedom and a respect for cultural difference were the frequently emphasized themes. In volume 3, #3 we find an article on the "freedom" of American factory workers who painted and exhibited "art" in their free time.[72] "Freedom in Painting and Teaching" (volume 5, #5) tells the predictable story of a Chinese painter separated from her husband and young son by the Communist takeover of China (she was studying at Columbia University at the time).[73] The family was reunited in the United States and Nun Ju Ku continued to paint and exhibit her classical Chinese drawings. The US, the article suggested, welcomed all cultures and allowed the free pursuit of all forms of artistic expression. Other articles detailed traditional forms of art found in the Southeast Asian region, underscoring American respect and interest for such locally specific

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Library was sacked in 1964 when the US withdrew (or was kicked out) of Cambodia. Today the building which once housed it is being renovated to serve as offices for the ruling Cambodian People's Party.

[71] ឱសរិតវិចិត្រសិល្បៈនៅសហរដ្ឋអាមេរិក in លោកសេរី (Free World) vol.1 #1.

[72] លុះការងារចប់ស្រេចហើយ in លោកសេរី (Free World) vol.3 #3.

[73] សេរីភាពខាងគំនូរលោបពណ៌និងការបង្រៀន in លោកសេរី (Free World) vol.5 #5.



Figure 65 : Bong Sovat, a Thai student at Pratt Institute.
Left: Bong Sovat painting in painting class.
Right: Bong Sovat in the Brooklyn Museum, "standing looking at the work of red-skinned Americans from long ago".

forms of culture.[74] Indeed the covers of លោកសេរី (Free World), underscored the delicate balance which the publication straddled between the promotion of the new (the US as the land of technological advances) and the respect for existing traditional practices (figure 66). Allegiance was the primary aim, and preservation and development could therefore both be embraced.

លោកសេរី (Free World) was one of two "mass-audience instruments" used by USIS to produce "an image of America".[75] During the Protectorate, no Khmer language films were made and no films were made by Cambodians.[76] Movie going was, however, a popular activity and many French films were imported and shown with a spoken Khmer translation, as, increasingly, were American, Chinese and other foreign films.[77] USIS immediately established a film production section within its Phnom

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[74] Here Cambodia figures prominently with articles on the School of Cambodian Arts, stone sculpture, and Khmer silver making. See ឃុវជនសម័យថ្មីរៀនសិល្បៈបុរាណ (Volume 3, #9) ; លំអិតនៃសិល្បៈក្នុងសម័យបច្ចុប្បន្នទៅប្រៃទេសកម្ពុជាធ្វើតាមប្រពៃណីពីបរមបុរាណ (Volume 5, #4) and ការងារជាទីស្រឡាញ់ ប្រាក់ជាប្រពៃណីមួយទៅប្រៃទេសកម្ពុជា (Volume 6, #1). The articles on Native American and Meso-American art found in early issues were a clear attempt to rebut Communist messages that the United States was a racist and repressive State in which indigneous peoples, as well as African-Americans, were routinely oppressed.

[75] "Country Assessment Report, 1959", Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220. Free World was frequently described as "one of the principal means for calling attention to and listing the accomplishments of American aid programs". See "Country Assessment Report 1959".

[76] See Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, "A Survey of Film in Cambodia" in Film in Southeast Asia: Views from the region, ed. David Hanan, Vietnam Film Institute & SEAPAVAA, 2000.

[77] By 1949, more American than French films were clearing the censors of Indochina. In 1949, entry was granted to: 585 French films, 652 US films, 106 English films, 90 Chinese films, 29 Italian films, 1 Russian film, 10 films from India, 6 Argentinian films, 6 Swedish films, 5 Swiss films, 2 Austrian films, 4 Canadian films, 2 Danish films, 3 Mexican films and 1



Figure 66 : Front and back cover of Free World
On the front cover (right), "modern" construction which abandons traditional bamboo scaffolding;
On the back cover (left), a traditional puppet troupe.

Free World, volume 1 #9

Penh office which began not only to make Khmer language films but to train a staff of Cambodian film makers (figures 67, 68).[78] By 1958, the USIS film officer (an American) with 32 Cambodian staff members was producing 26 newsreels, 4 documentaries, and 12 training how-to-do-films annually, all in Khmer language.[79] The range of films produced appears from the list of USIS films for 1959. Newsreels produced included footage of Cambodians at a police training school in Florida, a short movie on a Cambodian judge at the World Conference of Jurists in New Delhi, and a film of the visit of the Cambodian Minister of Information to Japan. Feature films had been made on the US-sponsored Teacher Training Center at Kompong Kantuot, on the Khmer American Highway project ("Highway of Progress") and on "The 3 Pillars of Cambodian Strength: Church, Throne, and Nation" (a project meant to underscore American respect for the fundamental values of Cambodian

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Norwegian film. See "State Department Motion Picture Report 1950", June 11, 1951 851G.452/6-1151 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State / Central Files Indochina 1950-1954 Microfilm LM71 roll 43.

[78] The USIS office in Phnom Penh grew quickly from a sub-post of Saigon to a full fledged office which, by 1956, employed 12 American and 88 Khmer staff members. See "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by John Slocum 1956 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2. There are indications that one of the first full length feature films made by Cambodians was filmed using USIS equipment loaned to soldiers who produced the film during their free time. This film played to excited audiences in Phnom Penh during 1958-9. I want to thank Ly Bun Yim for our conversation about early Cambodian films, May 2000.

[79] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.



Figure 67

Film workshop with Mr. Julian Ely for the employees of the USIS Information Division Vat Phnom, Phnom Penh, 1963

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-63-3129 (above); CAM-63-3124 (below)





Figure 68

Training course in Phnom Penh on the operation, repair, and maintenance of film projectors sponsored by US aid for the Cinecar project 1957

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-57-1014

society). In addition, a set of USIS films were made on "Cambodia's economic independence", including "Bounty of the Water", "Hybrid Corn", and "Pepper".[80]

These films were shown by 13 mobile units (cinecars) which traveled through the provinces, showing films in the evenings under the stars (figure 69).[81] USIS films were also popular in commercial movie houses, both in Phnom Penh and in the provinces (figure 70).[82] The US embassy in Phnom Penh estimated that USIS films were reaching more than 5 million viewers annually by 1959.[83] With such audiences, there was however "a constant shortage of films in the Cambodian language and many more could be used".[84] USIS film production was aimed of course at countering the "flood of soft-spoken, inoffensive propaganda, particularly commercial films" entering

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[80] "Country Assessment Report - 1959", Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[81] The American Library also sponsored film programs targeting groups of students. These programs included one for the School of Art, presenting the films "Asian Artists in Crystal", and "Korean Art Masterpieces", "both [films] appropriate for the audience, both evidence of US interest in Asian culture". See "USIS Country Assessment Report", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[82] After independence, the Ministry of Information in Phnom Penh established its own board to control film imports, levying considerable tax on foreign movies and newsreels in order both to raise revenue for the newly independent government and to encourage local film production. Because of this tax, movie house owners were eager to show locally produced USIS films which were not considered imported. Movie houses were also of course eager to show films which the Russian and Chinese embassies could supply them with locally. USIS preferred distribution through public movie houses since such showings muted the propaganda aims of their films. "Best results", wrote John Slocum in his 1956 "Inspection Report", "can be obtained by permitting local people to handling showings themselves".

[83] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[84] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by John Slocum, 1956 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.



Figure 69

Cinecar, mobile public address unit, 1958

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland
RG286 CAM-58-606



Figure 70

Eden Cinema, Phnom Penh 1961

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-61-687

Cambodia from Communist China and the Soviet Union.[85] In its weekly "Memorandum on Chinese Affairs", the Embassy in Phnom Penh sent reports to the State Department on the "infiltration" of such Communist films. During the week of September 8, 1958 for example, the Cine Khemera was showing the "Hanoi film" (i.e.VietMinh) "The Road to Victory in VietNam". Cine Kim Phong was showing "Sputnik I", "Sputnik II", "World Youth Festival in Moscow", as well as another Russian film entitled "Training of the Bears", while the Cine Casion was showing a documentary of "Sihanouk's second trip to Peking".[86] These films subsequently traveled to provincial movie theaters, a diffusion which was greeted with dismay by US officials.[87] Given the "heavy penetration of ChiCom, Viet Minh, Soviet and leftist tinged Indian films", US field officers pleaded for newer American films to be made

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[85] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[86] "Memorandum on Chinese Affairs", by Stanton Jue, September 8, 1958, 851H/9-1658 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959. An early November 1958 Memorandum reported that a Chinese movie crew was making a documentary which included scenes of road construction (and thus competed with the Khmer-American Friendship Highway project underway at the time). The Memorandum also listed a growing number of Chinese goods - "tiger" mosquito repellant, "5 goat" cement, "panda" cigarettes - finding their way into Phnom Penh markets. See "Memorandum on Chinese Affairs", November 4, 1958 851H/11-2058 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[87] In addition to showing Chinese films in public movie houses, Chinese interests soon established their own version of the cinecar. In December 1959, a Sino-Khmer entrepreneur named Lee Shu-teh established a mobile film unit to show his "May Day in Peking". An alarmed US Embassy Despatch explained that "the showing of films by mobile units has been a regular USIS program. This is the first time that ChiCom [the Embassy short hand for Communist Chinese] elements have had mobile unit-type of movie showings in Cambodia". See "Memorandum on Chinese Affairs" 851H/10-758 (fall 1959) in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

available for screening.[88] "So far, American films here have been 2nd or 3rd rate pictures and do not portray the US today", wrote the US Embassy Chinese affairs officer: "Chinese informants [have] said [that] the US will lose the information battle here unless something is done to facilitate the entry of better American films".[89]

The "information battle" made use not only of moving pictures but also of displays. "The exhibit", read one country assessment report, provided an "inexpensive and effective medium in this part of the world".[90] Using the "principal device" of a "series of 8 x 10 photos", "modest exhibits" of US projects and US advances could be displayed on a continual basis.[91] Indeed, displays mounted in the windows of the US

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[88] "The demand is basically for French-dubbed American films", the Embassy despatch added, "although French films do well, conceivably as a substitute". The English speaking public was miniscule and almost all American films were dubbed into French and sometimes Khmer. While noting that the 1955 Bandung conference had made Cambodian government officials aware that they were "an island surrounded by an Asia which uses English", the American library was realistic about the situation as well, actively pursuing a policy of acquiring books from all Free World sources including France and Nationalist China. See Airgram July 24, 1961 511.51h5/7-2461 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State / Central Decimal File 1960-3, Box 1062 and "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[89] Memorandum on Chinese Affairs by Stanton Jue, September 8, 1958, 851H/9-1658 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959. As tensions rose between US efforts and Sihanouk's Sangkum, USIS Phnom Penh increasingly urged the production of films showing "progress being made in non-Communist Asian countries". Hawaii was emphasized in USIS presentations of the US in order to show that "US ideals and policies are not inimical to the Oriental framework". See "Country Assessment Report - 1959", Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

[90] "Country Assessment Report 1959" Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[91] "Country Assessment Report 1959" Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

Embassy, at the American Library in Phnom Penh and at the Information Center in Battambang are remembered vividly by elderly artists in Phnom Penh today (figure 71).[92] The USIS exhibitions program consisted both of agency exhibitions organised in Washington D.C. and then sent from country to country, and local exhibitions, developed by the USIS office in Phnom Penh. In 1958, for example, agency exhibitions shown in Cambodia included "Space Unlimited", "Sports in the USA", "Contemporary American Prints", "20th Century Highlights of American Painting", and "Architecture in the USA".[93] Locally produced exhibitions of the early 1960s included an exhibition about the USOM teacher training school in Kompong Kantuot, a display illuminating US-sponsored police training program for Cambodian officers (figure 72), and a tableau detailing the introduction of new crops by US advisors (figure 73).

As a network of USIS sponsored "Information, Cultural and Educational Centers" were established, these exhibits and displays traveled to more remote areas of the Cambodian countryside.[94] "Exhibits", the 1961 Country Assessment concluded, "were

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[92] Conversations with Tang Hor Yi, Eng Menh Seng, Pen Tra and Sin Chan Than, 1997-2000.

[93] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia" by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

[94] The original seven centers were not entirely successful and had been "taken over" by the Ministry of Education in the late 1950s although they continued to make use of USIS materials. By 1961, plans called for seven additional provincial centers to be built in order to allow greater distribution of USIS exhibits, films and publications in Cambodia. See "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2; "Country Assessment Report 1959" Despatch #19, March 9, 1960; and "Country Assessment Report 1961" Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State / Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development Staff: Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

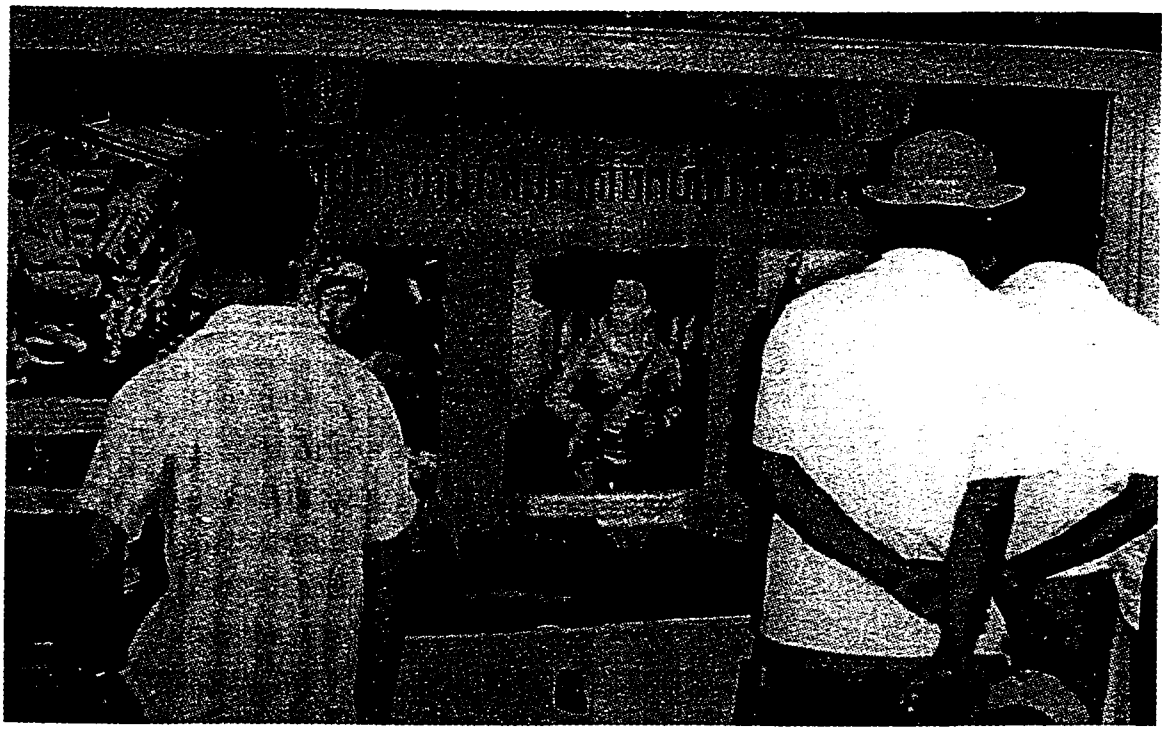

Figure 71 : USIS display windows, Phnom Penh, 1961
Above: the US space mission of May 1961
Below: the visit by Mr Ho Tung Ho, director of the teacher training college, to the US

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-61-9031 (above); CAM-61-12727 (below)





Figure 72

USOM Building window exhibit: US training of the Cambodian army and police, September 1961

US Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-61-1605

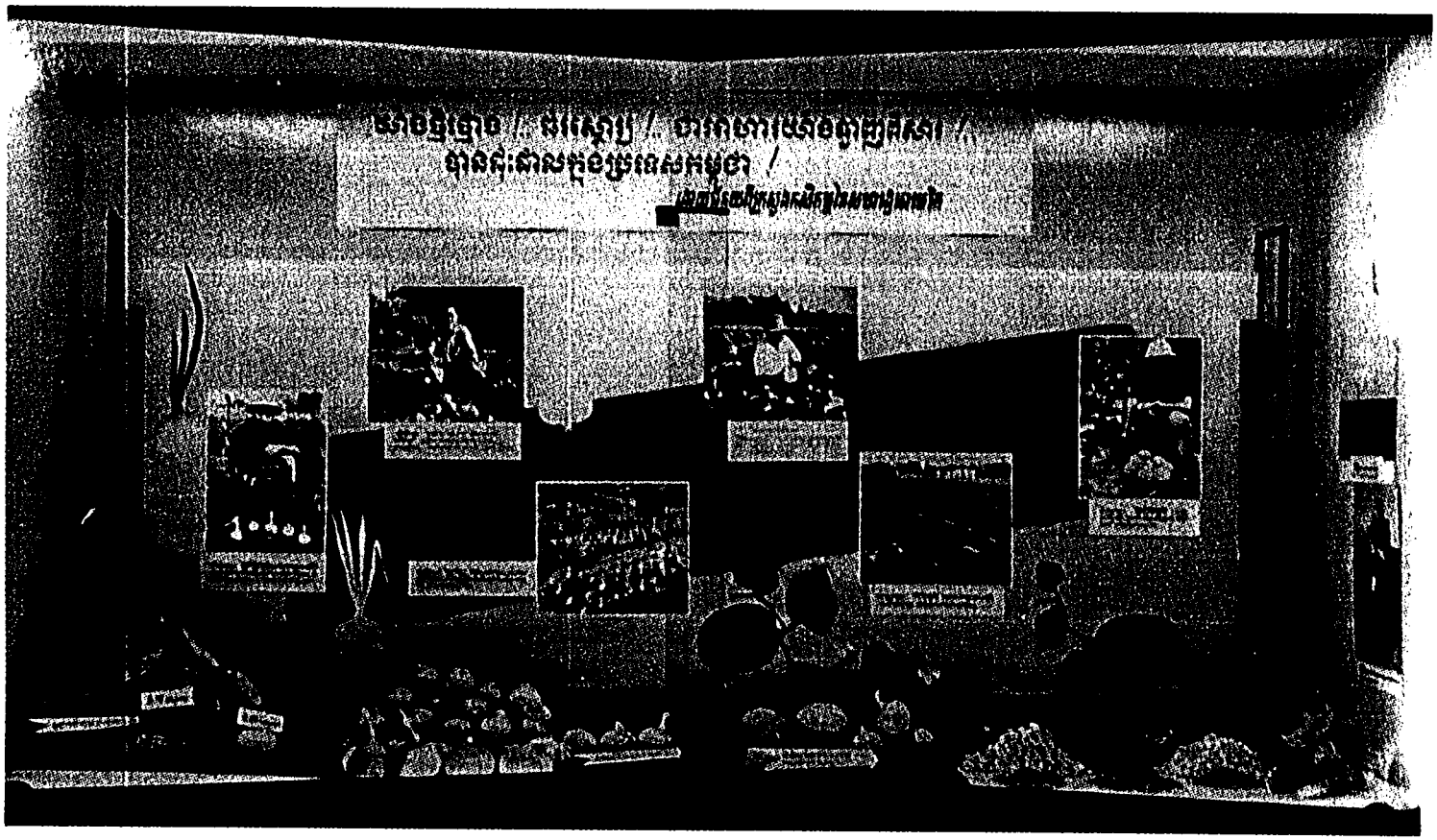

Figure 73

USOM Building window display: New crops for Cambodia. "Delicious!", 1963

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-63-265

particularly useful in trying to get across the story of American education and scientific achievements".[95] What the inhabitants of the Cambodian provinces made of such exhibitions is an open question although it seems that basic translation problems arose quickly. As one evaluation explained, an agency exhibition entitled "Country Agent" could have "reminded one of what life [was] like in the Corn Belt if one had grown up in Iowa and moved away to the city, but to the uninformed with no frame of reference, the exhibit carried no message at all."[96] "Most Agency-supplied exhibits", the inspection report concluded, "are far too sophisticated for our audiences".[97]

Such reservations were not expressed publicly. Rather in press releases and newspaper accounts of US-sponsored exhibitions mounted across the world during the 1950s, "Uncle Sam" was said to have "scored a success in a global salesmanship effort to show the world the true story of life in America under both a free political

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[95] "Education" in this account meant displays on "small colleges in the US, a pictorial account of the visit to the US by the Director of Cambodia's Basic Education program, and Cambodian student activities in the US"; "scientific achievements" meant "space shots, astronauts, and missile developments". The most successful exhibition mounted during USIS's tenure in Cambodia was the display entitled "Would you like to take a trip to the moon?" See "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia" by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2 and the "Country Assessment Report, 1961".

[96] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader, March 27, 1959 in RG306 Reports of the US Information Agency / Inspection Reports and Related Reports 1954-1962, Box 2.

[97] A Country Assessment Report for 1962 noted a similar problem with USIS films not produced in Cambodia. These films, the report explained, "presume a frame of reference about US geography, history and institutions which only a very few of the most highly educated Cambodians possess". Since the films' accessibility must be a problem for all developing countries, it was headquarters in Washington rather than individual country offices which should consider this problem, the report concluded. See "Country Assessment Report - 1962", Despatch #8, January 29, 1963 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220.

system and free enterprise".[98] In exhibitions such as "Products of Freedom for All Free Men", and "The People's Capitalism Exhibition", the US countered Communist representations of a life of drudgery under capitalism by presenting "typical" (happy and prosperous) workers surrounded by the most modern appliances against a backdrop of jazz and sports meant to illustrate the essence of American life.[99] By 1956, the Commerce Department would announce that "the US is winning the cold war" at international exhibitions; US displays had "literally stolen the show" from the USSR.[100]

The American Festival

The "single largest cultural exchange effort" by the US in Cambodia during the 1950s was the so-called American Festival, a series of performances and exhibitions held during an eight week period from late 1956 to early 1957.[101] While the festival

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[98] "Our Trade Fairs are Scoring over World", The Evening Star (Washington DC) February 18, 1957.

[99] "Products of Freedom for all Free Men" was the theme of the US display at the 1956 Bangkok Fair. See "Thai Ruler Opens Trade Exhibition", The New York Times December 8, 1956. The "People's Capitalism Exhibit" offered a twelve step description of the development of people's capitalism meant to rebut Communist claims that capitalism served "the selfish interests of a few". Designed by the Advertising Council, the US Information Agency sponsored show traced American life from 1776 all the way to the Barnes family, a supposedly typical working class family of 1956 who owned a new car and modern appliances. "Reactions of foreign visitors", closely tabulated by USIS at the "preview" exhibition held in Washington DC, found a credibility gap. Viewers sensed that the steelworker, Mr. Barnes, couldn't possibly buy all the things exhibited within his model home on his stated salary. See "The People's Capitalist Exhibit: A Study of Reactions of Foreign Visitors to the Washington Preview", Bureau of Social Science Research, American University, March 1956 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency, Office of Research, Country Project Files 1951-64 Box 17.

[100] "Trade Fair Victory is claimed for US", The New York Times January 3, 1956.

[101] US Embassy Despatch #402, June 18, 1957 511.51H3/6-1857 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, Box 2155.

was in its planning stages, despatches between Washington D.C. and Phnom Penh worried over how to reasonably account for the fact that "in a neutral country... within a comparatively short period of some weeks, there was to be such an unprecedented inundation of American culture".[102] All efforts were to be made so that "particularly in the cultural field, we avoid any suspicion of ulterior motives or any obvious efforts to capture Cambodians, especially elite intellectuals, for the US"(AF,p.4).

Such concerns over appearances were outweighed by the creeping realisation that socialist-bloc countries had also embarked on campaigns to win Cambodia over to their side of the Cold War struggle. Cultural accords had just been signed between Cambodia and the Soviet Union, Communist China, Poland and Czechoslovakia (AF,p.4). In addition, the Chinese premier, Chou-En lai, had just been received in Phnom Penh with "a public event...[which was] outranked in importance, hullabaloo, and red-carpet display only by the Coronation of last March"(AF, p.4). The American Festival was thus a way to answer back with a whole series of "programs, newspapers, posters, throw-aways, banners, booklets, publications and public events".[103] The Festival was conceived on "a country-wide scale" with exhibits and

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[102] "Educational Exchange: The American Festival", Despatch #341, April 22, 1957 511.51H3/4-2257 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal Files, Box 2155. All subsequent references to this report are followed in the text by (AF, page).

[103] AF, p.4. The US had hoped to make the Festival a collaboration with the Cambodian government and thus to feature intertwined US and Cambodian flags all over the country, just as the Chinese and Cambodian flags had been entertwined during the Chinese premier's visit. Such official support was not however forthcoming, a fact which Embassy staff attributed to "official fatigue" following Chou-En lai's visit or, more sinisterly, official "misperceptions" of the Festival as an "American counter-offensive" to the Chinese visit. The most likely reason

performances traveling to USIS provincial centers. Early plans had called for each of the eight weeks of the Festival to be centered around a theme although in the end, this proved too difficult.[104]

The Festival opened with a performance of something called "Mr. Dorsey's Tom Two Arrows", an event which apparently included "Native American dances" and a special appearance by the newly crowned Miss Cambodia in "Indian costume".[105] The opening night highlighted some of the difficulties of cultural diplomacy. While general audiences were apparently entranced by the "vaudeville" nature of the entertainment, reactions among diplomats and government officials ("more educated and traveled Cambodians") ranged from "frank boredom to open disappointment that a much ballyhooed American Festival should open on such a jejune level".[106] Subsequent festival performances by the Westminster Choir, the Benny Goodman Orchestra, Mr. Sebastian, and the San Francisco Ballet all met with similarly mixed

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for official disinterest was that the government was collapsing in one of the periodic destabilisations of Sihanouk's Sangkum. See AF, p.8-9.

[104] Planned themes included "a keynote American idea (Freedom of Speech, Reverence for Religion), a characteristic American activity (our political system, how our churches help our communities), and an American subject viewed historically (literature, Negro spirituals)", AF, p.5.

[105] AF, p.9-14. USIS films on Native Americans were also screened at the end of the night. It would be interesting to further consider the promotion of marginalized indigenous US cultures within USIS-sponsored programming of the 1950s. The celebration of diversity evidenced in the programming contrasts bitterly with the slow and bloody history through which civil rights legislation was finally passed in the US.

[106] AF, p.12. In a USIS inspection of 1959, we read that visits by Marian Anderson and Benny Goodman had been appreciated by Prince Sihanouk but not by the general public. The inspection report urged an increase in "athletes and coaches, popular entertainers, vaudeville teams, etc. Ballet soloists, symphony orchestras and sophisticated dramas, so popular in other parts of the world, are a complete waste of time and money here". See "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

successes.[107] As the retrospective report put it, famous American artists were chosen to "bring culture to a culturally underdeveloped people, much the same way that the missionary believes that he is bringing religion to a pagan one"(AF, p.22). Mr. Sebastian's Bartok was apparently incomprehensible to local audiences and Benny Goodman's music was described in one local newspaper as sounding like "a turkey gobbling"(AF,p.20). In addition, "even when [the performance] does interest them, Cambodian notions of audience manners do not include the idea that spectators should be silent." Instead, the audiences were talkative and "exuberantly noisy", something the performers were unaccustomed to. The most successful events, ironically, were those with large foreign attendance on the part of diplomats and local expatriates since such audiences were appreciative and behaved according to the performers' expectations (AF, p.23).

Two exhibitions were included in the Festival. The first displayed "prize-winning American photographs" including a "collection of outstanding photographs taken in Cambodia" by USIS photographers. A photographic competition was sponsored in conjunction with this exhibition and "all Cambodian students throughout the country... were urged to emulate the American photos in the Exhibit".[108] The other exhibit of the Festival was entitled "Life in America" and presented pictures of life in

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[107] AF, p.28-9. Mr. Sebastian was a harmonica player who traveled with his piano accompanist. Cold War cultural competition can be clearly seen in the wake of the Festival. Shortly after the announcement of the planned San Francisco Ballet performance, a Czech dance troupe suddenly appeared and performed in Phnom Penh; a Soviet ballet troupe, also scheduled at the last moment, danced in Phnom Penh the week after the San Francisco Ballet had performed.

[108] Ly Bun Yim remembers this competition as the reason he began to take photographs. He went on to become one of Cambodia's premier filmmakers in the 1960s and early 1970s. Conversation with Ly Bun Yim, May 2000.

the US (figure 74).[109] As the introductory billboard put it, "we hope this event will enable Cambodians to visualise how Americans live and work and play" by "providing for Cambodians an imaginary trip to a great friendly nation in the West." Representations of daily life at home and at work, on the farm as well as in the "great cities", allowed Cambodians to view life as it was supposedly lived in America.

The Image of the Sangkum

By early 1959, US Embassy reports were noting a "steady deterioration" in relations between Cambodia and the US.[110] A police guard had to be stationed at the American Library and "an elaborate exhibit" which the local USIS offices had "recently produced locally on Khmer American friendship" was not permitted to be "shown country-wide because of government disapproval."[111] By the end of 1959, the Ministry of Education and Information had completely shut down USIS's "two mass-audience instruments", prohibiting distribution of លោកសេរី (Free World), and

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[109] ក្រឡេកមើលសហរដ្ឋអាមេរិក in លោកសេរី Free World, vol.6, #11. The exhibit was held in front of the Hotel le Royal in Phnom Penh with a group of 19 billboard size displays for the photos.

[110] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2. Incidents leading to the decline included the conflict in Vietnam, US unwillingness to help solve border problems with Thailand and Vietnam, Cambodian perceptions that the US was pressuring the country to join SEATO, Time magazine's attack on Sihanouk, suspected US covert aid to coup attempts by Sam Sary and Dap Choun, as well as increased aid and diplomatic exchange on the Cambodian side with Communist China. See David Chandler's The Tragedy of Cambodian History, Chapters 3-4.

[111] "Inspection Report, USIS Cambodia", by James Meader March 27, 1959 in RG306 Records of the US Information Agency: Inspection Reports and Related Records 1954-1962, Box 2.

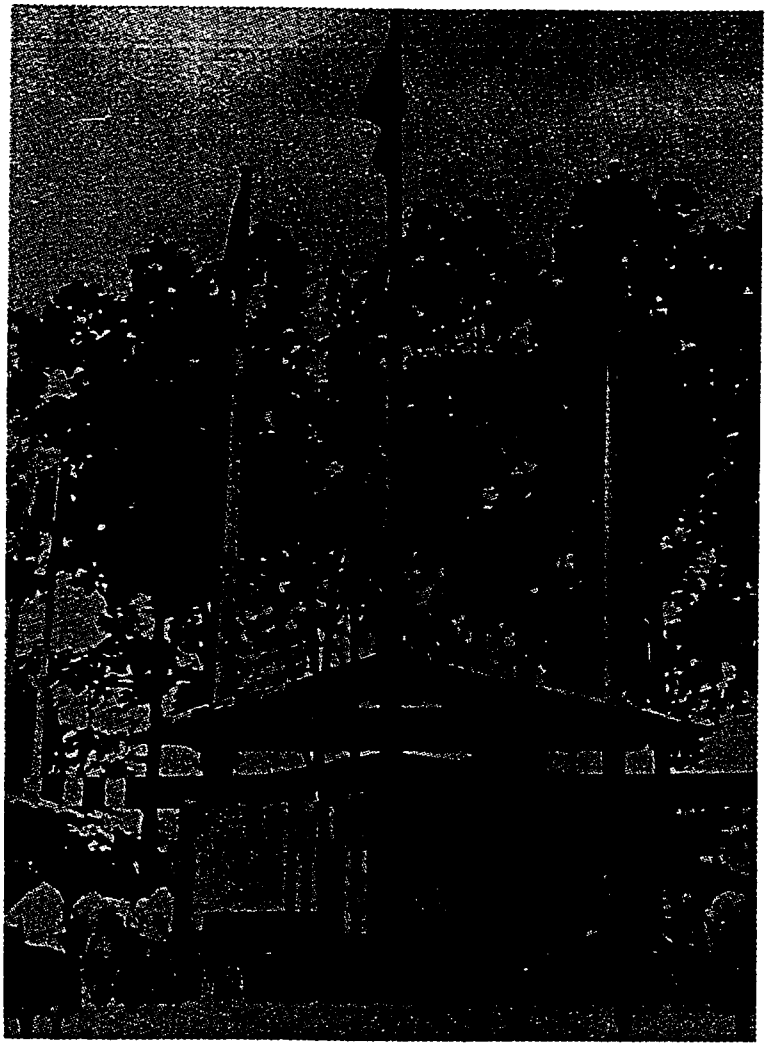
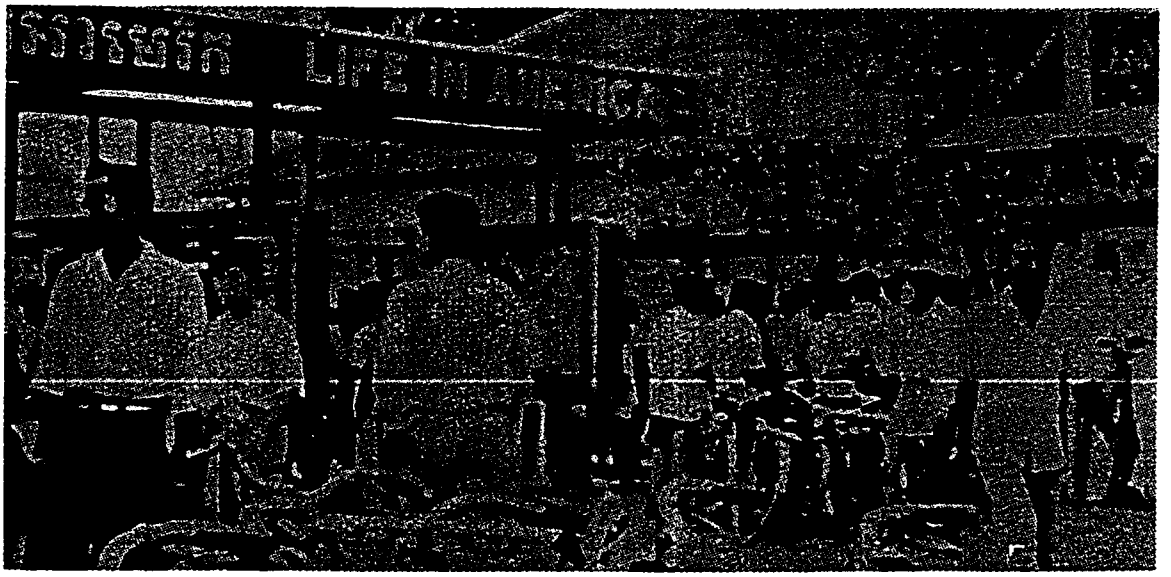


Figure 74
"Life in America" Exhibition
1956-57

Free World, volume 6 #11



banning USIS sponsored cinecar tours.[112] The change in climate became painfully obvious to the remaining US Embassy officials. "You would hardly recognize Cambodia if you were to come back now", wrote one staffer, "the changed attitude of rank and file Cambodians is, unfortunately, all too obvious and so unnecessary".[113] By 1964, the "official American community" in Cambodia had fallen from 600 to 70 and "those of us who remain are isolated from official and personal contact with Cambodians and now must obtain much of our information and impressions by other means".[114] Sihanouk terminated all US aid to Cambodia in late 1963, and, in May of 1965, diplomatic relations were cut off between the two countries.[115]

The era of American influence had seemingly ended. But the lessons of image creation had been well learned. We could say that during the late 1950s and 1960s,

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[112] "Country Assessment Report - 1959", Despatch #19, March 9, 1960 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development Staff, Country Files 1955-1964, Box 220. USIS was permitted to continue private film showings at its libraries and community centers while loaning the cinecar units to the Ministry for its own showings which sometimes included USIS films. One of the reasons given for the shut down of Free World was that the phrase "free world" was objectionable to the Ministry. A new version of the magazine entitled "International Panorama" was planned but never published.

[113] Confidential Memo, Haverkamp to Hirschfeld, March 31, 1964 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Burma and Cambodia, Records Relating to Cambodia, 1964-1967 Box 1.

[114] Confidential Memo, Bergesen to Green, December 29, 1964 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Burma and Cambodia, Records Relating to Cambodia, 1964-1967 Box 1.

[115] See Confidential Memo, March 17, 1964 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Burma and Cambodia, Records Relating to Cambodia, 1964-1967 Box 1. Sihanouk broke off diplomatic relations with the US on May 3, 1965 after a bombing by South Vietnamese / US troops on the border near Anlong Tras in which one Cambodian was killed and four wounded. See Secret Briefing Papers, November 11, 1965 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State. Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Burma and Cambodia, Records Relating to Cambodia, 1964-1967 Box 1. See also David Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History.

Prime Minister Sihanouk used almost every aspect of the USIS regime to produce an image of his Sangkum.[116] He published glossy magazines filled with stories and photographs of himself and his work for the Sangkum.[117] He made films of his Cambodia, showing them first to diplomats and later to general audiences.[118] And he memorialized the "achievements of the Sangkum" in a permanent exhibition which opened on November 23, 1961 (figure 75).[119] Displays in the hall emphasized advances in "industrialisation, transport, communications, production and social progress" as well as progress in the arts (figure 76).[120] Other government sponsored exhibitions of the Sangkum, both at home and abroad, presented images of life in Cambodia to national and international audiences (figures 77, 78).[121]

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[116] The young King Sihanouk had abdicated in 1955, installing his own father as King and forming a political party called the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (the People's Socialist Community as David Chandler translates it). Sihanouk was elected prime minister that same year and the subsequent 15 years (1955-1970) of his rule are often called "the Sangkum" ("the society"). A US-sponsored 1970 coup ushered in the Lon Nol administration which stumbled to its final defeat by the Khmer Rouge in 1975.

[117] See Cambodge, Kambuja, Le Sangkum, Réalites Cambodgiennes, Cambodian Commentary, the retrospective Photos Souvenirs du Cambodge: Sangkum Reastr Niyum published by the Royal Palace in 1994, as well as the publicity photographs remaining in the NAC photo collection and the library of the Royal University of Fine Arts (southern campus), Phnom Penh.

[118] See Eliza Romey's article in Film in Southeast Asia: Views from the Region, ed. David Hanan (Vietnam Film Institute & SEAPAVAA, 2000) as well as her M.A. Thesis at Monash, 1998.

[119] Airgram #A-133 Nov.28, 1961 851H.191/11-2861 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1960-3 Box 2559.

[120] Airgram #A-133 Nov.28, 1961 851H.191/11-2861 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1960-3 Box 2559.

[121] An exhibit entitled "Le Cambodge aujourd'hui" travelled to London, Paris, Tirana, Budapest, Bulgaria, Varsovic and China during 1964-5. This exhibit of photographs, charts and sample products of the Sangkum was meant to show "national progress since 1955" and thus to counteract what Sihanouk considered a major American propaganda campaign to



Figure 75

Then-Prime-Minister Sihanouk giving a tour of the Sangkum Exhibition Hall to the President of Mauritania, 1967

NAC Photography Collection, Album 6, #194



Figure 76

Jackie Kennedy visiting the Permanent Exhibition of the Sangkum, 1967

NAC Photography Collection, Album 3, #92





Figure 77

Exhibition on industrial progress under the Sangkum
The paint on display was manufactured in Cambodia

RUFA Photography Collection (uncatalogued)

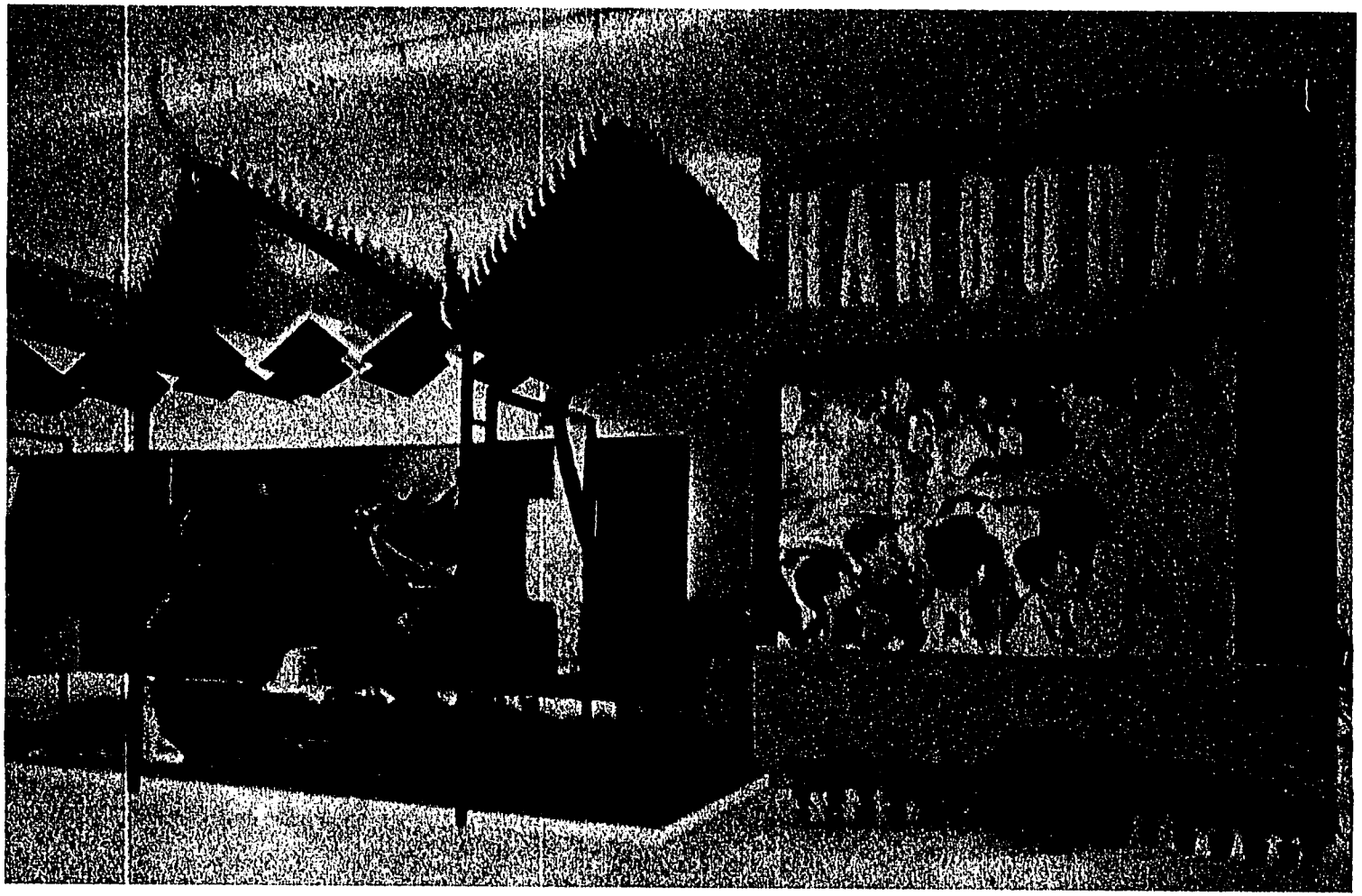

Figure 78

Cambodia section of the Zagreb Fair, 1961, designed by Vann Molyvann.
The caption explains that the installation "joins the Khmer decorative tradition to modern imperatives"

Le cambodge d'aujourd'hui September / October 1961

Ironically then, in retrospect, we can say that Sihanouk and USIS engaged in very similar projects, both aiming to create images or perceptions of how things were. The task to present the image of the US was perhaps the easier one at first glance, since it was offered up as a distant dream to those who rarely had the opportunity to check its reality. The image of Sihanouk's Sangkum relied on a similar distance, however, since it was largely produced for foreign consumption and sought international standing for Cambodia just as the 1955 Exhibition project with which I began this Chapter. Kambuja, Sihanouk's films, and the Sangkum Museum were not addressed to provincial peasants who would have instantly understood that the glossy images of industrialisation, international meetings, and film openings, had little relation to their everyday lives in rural Cambodia of the 1950s and 1960s.

To lead into my discussion of "modern painting" in the following chapter, I want to briefly sketch definitions of the arts as they were presented within Sihanouk's image of the Sangkum. In a 1965 article in Kambuja, Vann Molyvann suggested that "a complex" caused by "the greatness of Khmer classical art" had "led Khmer artists and artisans to reproduce pale copies of masterpieces".[122] The "teaching methods" of Groslier's School had "encouraged subservience to, and nostalgia for, an art-style defined by imitation"(NL). In the Sangkum, art education had changed and students instead learned to "create original works" which would show their "artistic personality" and "creative imagination"(NL). Still national style was preserved and a

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depict Cambodia as a "miserable State, the least developed in all of Asia". See Etudes cambodgiennes #4, 1965 (October, December).

[122] Vann Molyvann, "New Life Infused into the arts in Cambodia", Kambuja, #2, May 15, 1965, p.68-9. All subsequent references to this article are followed by (NL).

"sound grounding in Khmer classic art" was the base on which a modern Khmer art would grow (NL). Students were thus not only to "assimilate the art of the past" but would also "become acquainted with modern ideas and techniques"(NL). Thus "well-equipped", "psychologically liberated", and "suitably inspired", they would come to create "original works" which would "contribute to the creation of a modern national art"(NL).[123] The coexistence of the old and the new, promoted by Sihanouk's Sangkum, is perhaps best illustrated in the decorations of Chamcar Mon, the "State Palace" completed in 1967. Designed by Vann Molyvann and personally decorated by Prime Minister Sihanouk, the decor was said to be "worthy of modern Cambodia".[124] Indeed, hanging on one wall we find a copy of the famous relief of the "Churning of the Sea of Milk" found on the walls of Angkor Vat (figure 79). On the adjacent wall however hangs a landscape by Nhek Dim, who we will meet in the next Chapter. A "modern painting" by a contemporary Cambodian "artist" was thus put on equal level to the monumental past.[125]

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[123] In his own work as an architect as well, Vann Molyvann had turned to Angkor for "inspiration" but felt the need to "transpose" and "adapt" this tradition to new realities. "We borrow much from the West", he explained, "but what we borrow should get a Khmer character in order to be really integrated in our civilisation". Vann Molyvann had studied in France, receiving an architecture degree with honors. He returned to Phnom Penh in 1956, served as Rector of the newly founded Royal University of Fine Arts (1965-7) and became Minister of National Education and Fine Arts in 1967. USOM sponsored the building of one of his most famous projects, the Chatomuk theater. He also designed the National Stadium and the National Theater. See Vann Molyvann, "Modern Khmer Architecture" Nokor Khmer #1 October - December 1969, editor Norodom Sihanouk, p.36-37.

[124] "The State Palace of Chamcar Mon" Kambuja, July 1967 (English version).

[125] The decorations at Chamcar Mon apparently also included portraits by the Indonesian ruler Sukarno's personal portraitist, Groslier's portrait gallery returned in another form.



Figure 79 : Two views of a Chamcar Mon Reception Hall
Above, back wall, "The churning of the sea of milk", a copy of the relief on Angkor Vat
Above, right wall, landscape by Nhek Dim.
Below, detail of the wall with the Nhek Dim painting.

NAC Photography Collection, above: Album 3, #97; below: Album 7, #239



Chapter Four : គំនូរសម័យ គំនូរទំនើប "Modern Painting"

I now return momentarily to the late Protectorate in order to chart more specifically the development of "modern painting" (and other "modern" forms) at Groslier's School.[1] By the late 1930s, a current of discontent was running through Groslier's School, foretelling Vann Molyvann's diagnosis of the "complex". In a 1937 letter to Nagaravatta, a former student of the School called Say voiced his complaints.[2] The School in Phnom Penh had "only taught students to know how to make pure Khmer art objects", Say wrote. It had not "taught the making of other kinds of art objects" appropriate to "the new era of today".[3] Out of all the graduates of the School, their gainful employment notwithstanding, none were to be seen "exhibiting at those big gatherings".[4] The work produced by graduates of Groslier's School was instead threaded through a network of sales outlets, Say explained, which primarily benefited object makers, particularly the silversmiths and the weavers. At the "big

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[1] I would like to emphasize that my use of "modern painting" and "modern Khmer painting" quotes directly from the older painters involved in the changes described in this chapter. In other words, what I try to trace here is the assertion and development of something self-consciously described as "modern Khmer painting" ("គំនូរទំនើបខ្មែរ"). Conversations with Pen Tra, Sam Kem Chang, Tang Hor Yi, 1997 – 2000.

[2] Nagaravatta, February 20, 1937. As noted earlier, no copies of Nagaravatta are to be found in Phnom Penh. I would like to thank Penny Edwards for alerting me to this letter and giving me a copy of it. See her account of Say's complaint, Cambodge, p.233-4. We will perhaps never know whether this Say is the same as the Say of the silver stamping machine found at the 1940 Tang Tok as described at the end of Chapter 2.

[3] សាលារចនាដែលបង្រៀនកូនសិស្សឲ្យចេះធ្វើការ គឺឲ្យចេះតែការរចនាដែលជារបស់ខ្មែរសុទ្ធប៉ុណ្ណោះ មិនបានបង្រៀនធ្វើការរចនាជ្រុងៗតាមកាល តាមសម័យថ្មីឥឡូវនេះទេ។ in Nagaravatta February 20, 1937.

[4] មិនឃើញក្លាំងទីធ្វើការនៅប្រជុំធំនោះ។ Say concluded his letter with praise for the School, noting that it had allowed many Khmer to find employment ក្បិតមានខេមរៈជាតិចំនួនជារាប្រើនដែលមានផ្លូវរកស៊ីធ្វើការ។

gatherings" which so fascinated Say, one found only the work of Vietnamese and Chinese (and we might add, Europeans, although Say does not mention them); Cambodians could not hope to compete at such gatherings since "they know how to work only in the Khmer style, that is all".[5] The reason for this state of affairs, Say concluded, was that "our country is organised after theirs" and therefore did not yet have schools teaching "ways of working and making business according to this new era".[6]

Already in 1945, the newspaper កម្ពុជា (Kampuchea) was advocating training as the path out of colonialism. In an article on "The Development of Cambodia", the editors noted that "although our country has sent students to France now for years already, still our country develops very slowly unlike other countries".[7] The reason for this belatedness, the editors concluded, was that "our country doesn't have enough schools of all kinds". The Vietnamese (with the help of the French) had been able to establish more higher education institutions than the Cambodians, and it was for this reason that "many Vietnamese know more than we Khmer". Advisors would have to be brought from the outside, for the foreseeable future, in order to remedy this state of affairs. "Even Thailand had taken other nationalities to serve as advisors" during its

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[5] ចេះតែធ្វើការតាមរបៀបខ្នាតចំណែកប៉ុណ្ណោះ។ Say does not specify what "large gatherings" he is talking about although we can imagine from the structure of the 1927-8 Fair in Saigon that it was such exhibitions that Say was referring to.

[6] ស្រុកយើងរៀបចំក្រោយគេជង ស្រុកយើងមិនទាន់មានសាលាសម្រាប់បង្រៀនធ្វើការកសុីតាមកាល តាមសម័យថ្មីនេះ។

[7] កម្ពុជា (Kampuchea), #196, July 1945? NAC newspaper collection. The un-footnoted quotes which follow are all taken from this article.

period of modernisation, another article from the same year explained.[8] Once the Thai "knew everything" however, they had told "all the other nationalities to stop and go back".[9] The advisors who would help run Ministries that "we Khmer don't yet know how to run" would no longer be exclusively French however; instead, a mix of foreign "experts" would be invited to help the country develop, although ultimate control would remain in Cambodian hands.

These opinions were voiced during the tumultuous days of 1945. With the coming of World War II, Indochina was quickly occupied by Japan. The Japanese allowed French administrators to continue at their posts until 1945 when, on the verge of defeat, they launched a surprise coup. On March 9, 1945, all French administrators were interned and the French military was disarmed.[10] What ensued was a short period of virtual independence in which the young King Sihanouk and others were encouraged to take over the governing of the country. Many new laws were passed and substantial re-structurings were proposed. The School of Cambodian Arts and the Museum (as well as the management of tourism and the conservation of historical monuments) were placed under a newly formed Ministry of Religion and Fine Arts.[11] The Musée Albert Sarraut was renamed the Jayavarman Museum.[12] And,

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[8] កម្ពុជា (Kampuchea), #210 August 1945? , NAC newspaper collection.

[9] កម្ពុជា (Kampuchea), #210 August 1945? , NAC newspaper collection.

[10] See Chapter One of David Chandler's The Tragedy of Cambodian History. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and Milton Osborne's account of the early years of King Sihanouk's reign in Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). The French returned to rule Cambodia in late 1945 although their control was, arguably, never full re-established; Cambodia officially became independent in November 1953.

[11] Kram #9-NS, March 17, 1945 [Journal Officiel March 22, 1945]

as we have seen, Meas Ponn was appointed the first Cambodian director of the School of Cambodian Arts.[13]

Groslier had been interned by the Japanese, presumably in early March when other French officials were rounded up. He subsequently died on June 17, 1945.[14] The circumstances of his death are not clear although it is most often said that Groslier died as a result of his interrogation by the Japanese secret police. One obituary related that Groslier had been ill and bed-ridden, a condition which raised the suspicion of the Japanese.[15] By this account, he was arrested and taken to a Japanese-staffed hospital where he died at the age of 58. His body was summarily cremated by Japanese officials and no reasons were given for his sudden death.

With Groslier's passing, the "astonishing renewal of Cambodian artisans... which justifiably will remain known under the name of the Groslier School" had come to an end.[16] The "renaissance" already tentatively noted in 1924 had become fact by 1949 when Henri Marchal, the long serving conservator of Angkor, reflected on what he

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[12] Kret #48-NS, April 11, 1945 [Journal Officiel April 19, 1945].

[13] Kret #74-NS, May 8, 1945 [Journal Officiel May 10, 1945].

[14] "Inauguration à Phnom Penh d'une rue George Groslier", Bulletin de la Société des études Indochinoises, Vol.21 (1946) Saigon, p.18.

[15] François Martini, "George Groslier 1887-1945", France-Asie, November-December 1951, #66-7, Tome VII. See also the obituary written by Groslier's son, Bernard Phillipe Groslier in Disciplines Croisées; Homage à BP Groslier, ed. Georges Condominas, Paris: Editions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1992.

[16] "Inauguration à Phnom Penh d'une rue George Groslier", Bulletin de la Société des études Indochinoises, Vol.21 (1946) Saigon, p.18.

called "modern Cambodian art".[17] Through the creation of new markets, Marchal wrote, Groslier had encouraged the local arts. Jewelery and weaving had found a ready clientele in the metropole, while less moveable forms of culture had also been revived under Groslier's tutelage. Temple building, vat painting, and shadow puppet theater were all part of the Renaissance Marchal noted during the 1920s and 1930s. But what of the present, Marchal then asked? What of Cambodian art in 1949? His answer was somber. There was "a renewal in the arts", but one which was "in a sense the reverse of the movement which Groslier sought to provoke in turning Khmer art towards its ancestral traditions":

> Yielding to the current of modernisation from which it is difficult to free oneself, the Cambodian artisan shows a tendency to do the opposite of that which has been done up to this point, under the pretext of being up to date, of not being retrograde. I am afraid that, through snobbishness, in order not to appear poorly informed, he casts aside with a scorn or disdain which I find regrettable, all his artistic past where he gives the real proof of talent. This is to say that in literature, in music, in sculpture, or in painting, the Cambodian artist who believes himself civilised and who wishes to appear up to date, lets himself be led by the most advanced and audacious recent schools, which are not always a proof of the real aesthetic superiority of Europe.[18]

Marchal's assessment was echoed in an article by Solange Bernard from the same year.[19] Bernard had observed young students at the School of Cambodian Arts being

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[17] See "Rapport de la fin d'année, 1924" [NAC #2010 (RSC)] and Henri Marchal, "Réflexions sur l'art moderne cambodgien" France-Asie #37-38, April / May 1949.

[18] Henri Marchal, "Réflexions sur l'art moderne cambodgien" France-Asie #37-38, April / May 1949, p.825. As in Groslier's previous comments that "no drawing for drawing's sake" existed in Cambodia, the relation of such evaluations to French modernism is fairly clear. For Marchal, the most "advanced" and "audacious" moves of the French avant-garde were to be avoided. It would another project to flesh out the relationship of the French painters who ran the School of Cambodian Arts from 1918 to 1945 (all of whose work was stylistically a kind of impressionistic realism) to trends in Western modernism which they "escaped" by coming to Cambodia.

[19] Solange Bernard, "L'Imagerie Populaire", France Asie #37-8, April / May 1949, p.829.

initiated into sketching from nature. Emphasizing the "profound contradiction" between such practices and Groslier's "authentic" diagrams, Bernard asked: "Will true art remain for [these students], as for their ancestors, in the most faithful and exact reproduction of traditional figures, or will they enter into the human world, directly accessible through vision?"[20] To enter into the temporality of the visible was to fall from the authentic timeless and "supernatural" of what had preceded.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, Groslier limited his curriculum to what he considered the "arts as practiced in Cambodia". His School was "organized for those Khmers who wish to learn drawing and architecture, jewelery making, foundry work, sculpture in all materials, and weaving. But make note! French art is not taught at the school".[21] This policy was accentuated through categories proposed by foreign exhibitions. At the "Foire" of Saigon of 1927-8, for example, the pavilion of "Cambodge" displayed the silk weavings and silver boxes of the Corporations, as well as natural products such as fish and rice.[22] Other pavilions representing the administrative units of Indochina presented their identifying objects in a similar fashion, while European concerns (mostly French) were represent by their manufactured goods (fans, tools, Dubonnet bottles, the Vulcan pump, and the Nestle cow). There was also however a separate pavilion entitled simply "Beaux Arts" ("Fine Arts"). No Cambodians showed their work here, and it was probably to the

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[20] Solange Bernard, "L'Imagerie Populaire", France Asie #37-8, April / May 1949, p.829.

[21] "Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens" in Echo du Cambodge January 23, 1941 (NAC newspaper collection).

[22] Foire Saigon (December 7, 1927 - January 17, 1928) Saigon: Société d'Edition et de Publicité Indochinoises, 1927 (NMC Library).

exhibitions of such "big gatherings" that Say was referring in his letter of complaint. For what was displayed in the gallery of "Fine Arts" was "Peinture" (Painting) – the "French art" which was explicitly "not taught at the School" in Phnom Penh.[23]

Instead, the pavilion of Fine Arts at the Saigon Fair featured "nine drawings of the Royal Cambodian Dancers" by none other than Groslier himself. The accompanying catalogue described these works as "a poem composed with two instruments: talent and simplicity".[24] We cannot be sure what drawings Groslier exhibited but they were probably similar to the sketches, more finished drawings, and single frontispiece painting found in his Danseuse cambodgiennes: anciennes et modernes (figure 80, 81, 82).[25] In this early illustrated text, images of dancers abound, based on precisely the kind of observation which Groslier banned from the School of Cambodian Arts. The work of the second director of the School, André Silice, was also featured in the Fine Arts pavilion at Saigon (*The bridge of Chrui Changvar*, and *Boats on the Mekong*) along with the works of a few of the students from the newly founded "Ecole des Beaux-Arts" in Hanoi.[26] Silice's work, the catalogue tells us, showed an "almost Oriental understanding of the joy of life: all is sacrificed here to the present tense, to the foreground; the rest, vague, participle of the future, the distant".[27] Here the "Oriental"

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[23] "Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens" in Echo du Cambodge January 23, 1941 (NAC newspaper collection).

[24] Foire Saigon (December 7, 1927 - January 17, 1928) Saigon: Société d'Edition et de Publicité Indochinoises, 1927 (NMC Library).

[25] George Groslier, Danseuses cambodgiennes: anciennes et modernes Paris: Challamel, 1913.

[26] Foire Saigon (December 7, 1927 - January 17, 1928) Saigon: Société d'Edition et de Publicité Indochinoises, 1927 (NMC Library).

[27] Bellugue, another painter who briefly worked at the School in Phnom Penh, also exhibited his *Portrait of the young Jacques le Fol*, *Interior Court of the Museum*, and *The Sanctuary of*

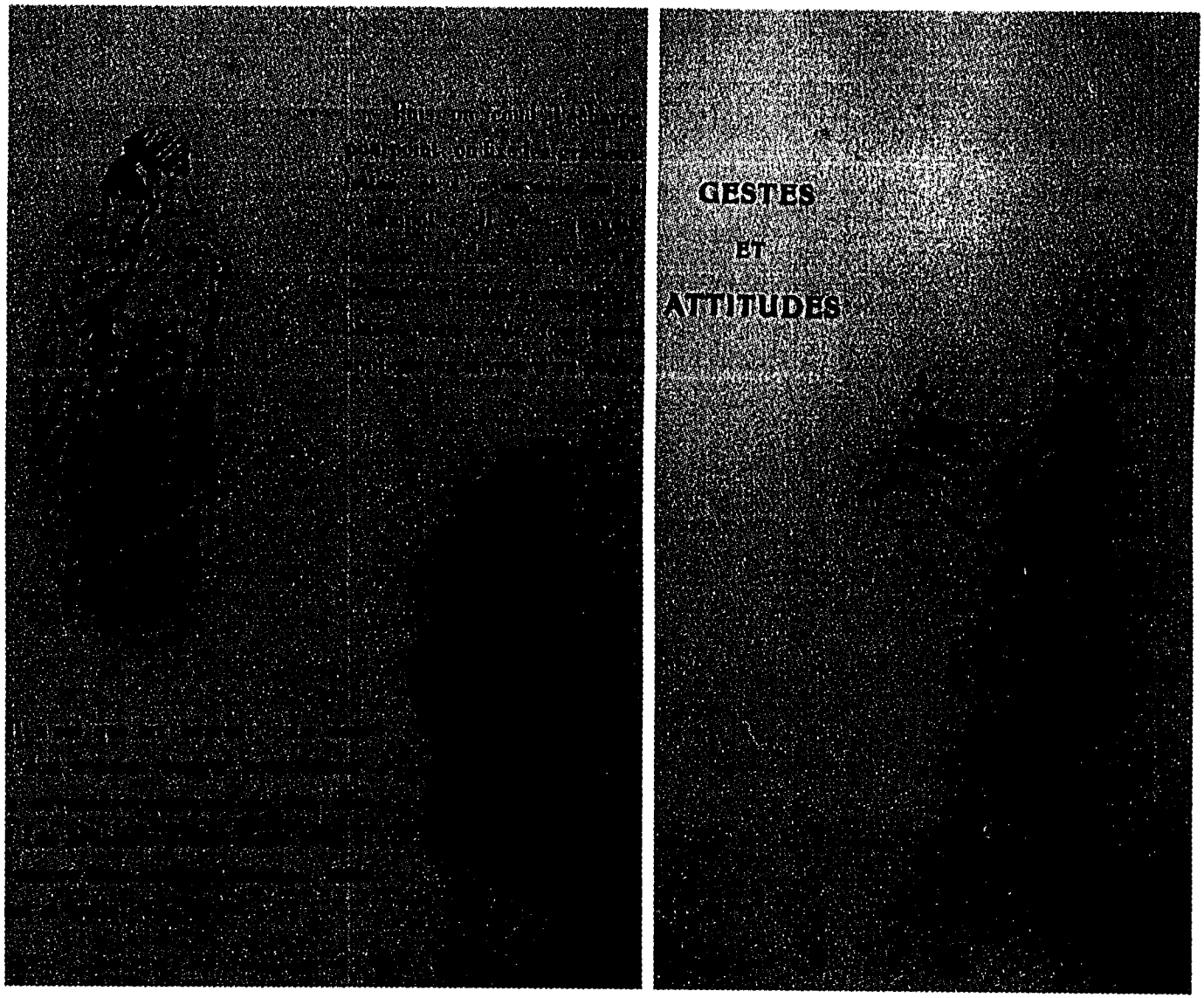

Figure 80

Groslier sketches from his book on Cambodian dance

Danseuses cambodgiennes
Paris: Challamel, 1913

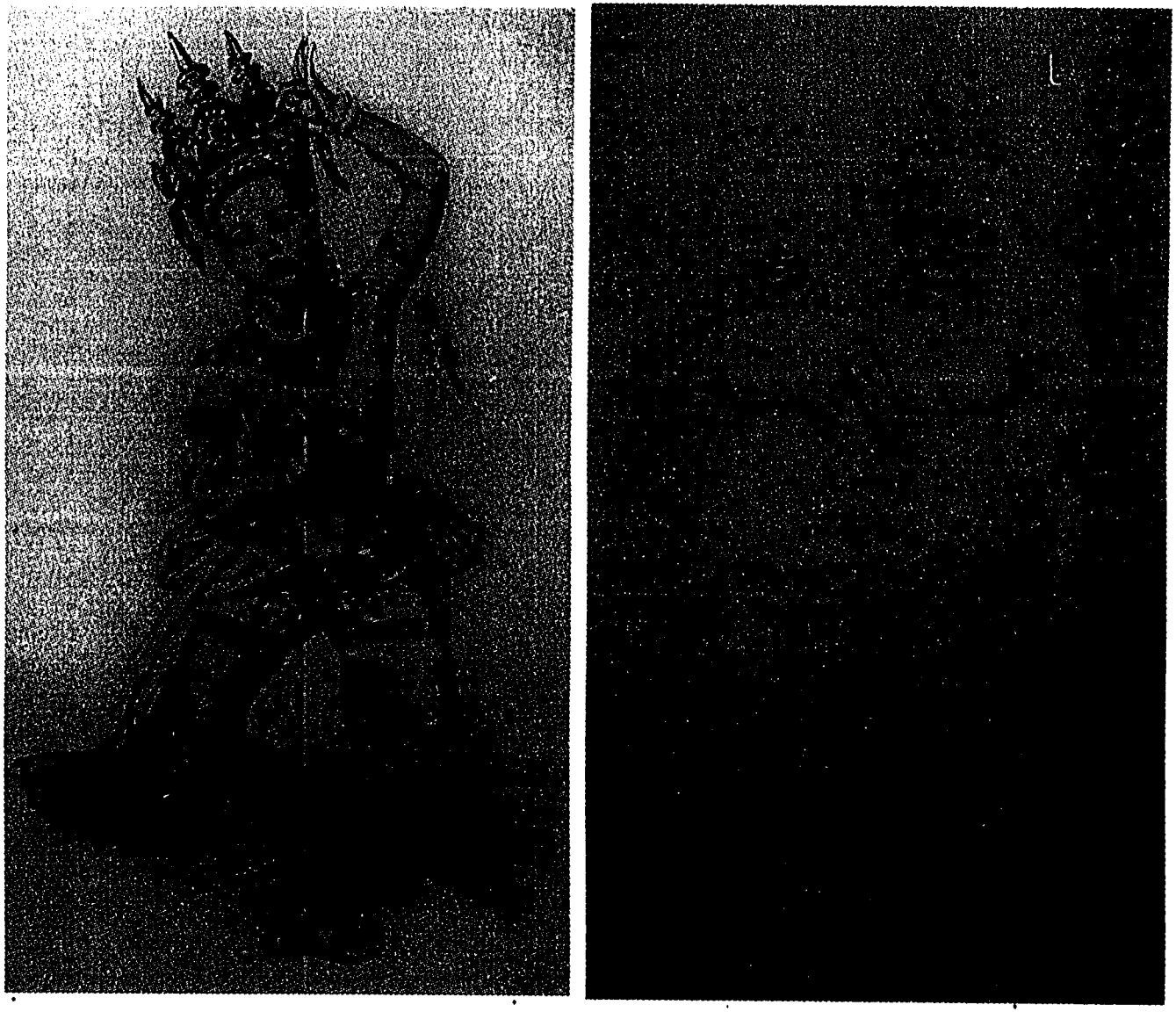

Figure 81

Groslier sketches from his book on Cambodian dance

Danseuses cambodgiennes
Paris: Challamel, 1913



Figure 82

Groslier painting: Frontispiece for his early text on Cambodian dance

Danseuses cambodgiennes: anciennes et modernes Paris: Challamel, 1913.

in general (as opposed to the "Cambodian" in specific) allows for the immediacy of a view rather than the repetition of two- dimensional plans.

The display of "Painting" was not simply a distant affair, staged outside the borders of the Protectorate. A steady stream of painters passed through Phnom Penh during the 1920s and 1930s, exhibiting their landscapes and frequent views of Angkor at Hotel le Royal and other venues in the city.[28] Longer term residents like Tô Ngoc Vân (a recent graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Hanoi, who came to teach at the Lycée Sisowath in Phnom Penh) also held exhibitions.[29] Even within the walls of Groslier's School, as we have seen, the long-serving directors during the Protectorate were French painters (first Groslier, then Silice and finally Louis Rollet from 1938 to

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Angkor Vat. See Foire Saigon (December 7, 1927 - January 17, 1928) Saigon: Société d'Edition et de Publicité Indochinoises, 1927 (NMC Library).

[28] For example, from November 17-25, 1934, Evariste Jonchére (winner of the Grand Prix de Rome and the Prix d'Indochine) held an exhibition of his work at the Hotel Royal. Mme. Thionat exhibited her paintings in Phnom Penh in May 1936, following a stay at Angkor where she found "numerous motifs to paint, one more beautiful than the other". The "English painter of great renown", Mr. Kelly, visited Angkor in February of 1937 and formally requested a troupe of dancers as models during his stay. In November 1937, the painter Ménardeau mounted an exhibition at the Hotel le Royal while the Chinese artist Wong Wan Ung probably displayed his drawings during the same year. In December 1937, the painter Daragnes arrived for a working mission which the GGI hoped would produce "some works useful for publicity". The publicity posters of Angkor alone would have provided ample visual examples of representational painting to Phnom Penh audiences. The local audience for such exhibitions seems to have been of a particular sort however. On August 18, 1938, the organiser of an exhibition of paintings of Angkor executed by students from the art school in Hanoi wrote to the RSC requesting his help in publicising the exhibition "to the Palace, the Cambodian elite, and the European element that interests itself in the arts" [NAC #12268 (RSC)]. See NAC #2665, #3347, #3352, #3365, #5147, #5161, #12446, #12465 (RSC) for more information on these visiting artists.

[29] In 1938, as he was preparing to return to Vietnam after a three year teaching stint, Tô Ngoc Vân requested an exhibition at the Salle des Fêtes de la Ville during the Water Festival. In a letter of November 3, 1938, Tô Ngoc Vân described "the principal works" of his exhibition as "landscapes which Cambodia has inspired in me during the last three years". In 1950, Tô Ngoc Vân became director of the re-opened Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi. See NAC #12276 (RSC) and André-Pallois, p.225.

1945-6). Although all three seem to have continued working (or at least exhibiting their works) while they were directors of the School, they kept their form of representation resolutely separate from the curriculum which they oversaw.

When we ponder this geography of representation in retrospect, we could say that the decorative object was consigned to Cambodia by the early configuration of the School, thus leaving painting as the preserve of the French. To picture Cambodia - or Angkor for that matter - was a task for foreign brushes. Following this line of argument, we could conclude that those forms of the decorative and the sculptural, traditionally ignored in mainstream accounts of modernism, were assigned to Cambodia as an identity which would ensure her location in the past. When painting was finally allowed into Cambodia, it came in a belated form, at least when one engages in such comparison of histories.[30] Here however I simply wish to try to understand what "new" or "modern painting" (គំនូរសម័យ គឺនូរទំនើប) meant in its local context.

Suzuki and the coming of "modern painting" (គំនូរសម័យ)

It is not clear how the Japanese painter Suzuki came to teach at the School of Cambodian Arts, although by the late 1940s and early 1950s he was regularly listed as

[30] In World Impressionism: the International Movement 1860-1920 Norma Broude explains that "among artists all over the world in the 19th century, there was an impulse to paint contemporary life and experience directly from nature, to study the effects of nature's light, and... to proclaim the artist's individuality, sincerity, and the immediacy of experiences"(p.10). The title of her anthology ends the "international movement" of Impressionism in 1920. Cambodian impressionism - if there is such a thing - comes at least twenty-five years after this cut-off date.

a member of examination commissions.[31] Today Suzuki is remembered vividly as the person who brought "modern painting" to Cambodia. In the various versions told to me, Suzuki brought what "we didn't have yet", and the kind of painting which he came to teach is always specified by the adjective "modern".[32] In one version of Suzuki's coming, it was King Sihanouk himself who invited the painter to come from Paris because "he was Asian like us, but knew about modern painting from his Parisian studies"; "he could [therefore] teach [us] something that we didn't have yet".[33] In another version of the story, Suzuki had come to Cambodia during the Japanese occupation as a military draftsman. When he started to make sketches of King Sihanouk's children, the young King appreciated the style and felt that Suzuki should stay and teach so that there would be Cambodians able to draw from life as well.[34]

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[31] See Prakas #1845 from September 21, 1948 (Journal Officiel, September 23, 1948), Prakas #2655 from September 15, 1952 (Journal Officiel, September 1952) and Prakas #1606 from May 22, 1953 (Journal Officiel, May 1953). Suzuki's name is spelled variously in these official references and I instead use the name by which he is remembered today in Cambodia, simply "Suzuki".

[32] I would like to thank Pen Tra ប៉ែន ត្រា, Sam Kem Chang សំ គីមចង, and Tang Hor Yi តាំង ហោយ៉ី for tirelessly answering my many questions over what turned out to be a four year period (1997-2001). All three are former student's of Suzuki and they have certainly paid tribute to his teaching by their descriptions on which I base my account. Other younger painters working in Phnom Penh today echo the phrases that these former students use to describe Suzuki and his painting. In Khmer, "modern" and what "we didn't have yet" translate as សម័យ ទំនើប យើងមិនទាន់មានទេ។

[33] Conversation with Pen Tra, October, 1997. In fact, Suzuki seems to have studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Tokyo although he exhibited in Paris and had a French wife. See Solange Bernard-Thierry, "Exposition Suzuki à la galerie Else Clausen", France-Asie, #91 (December 1953) as well as the review of Suzuki's 1960 exhibition at the Maison de France in Phnom Penh in Realités cambodgiennes, December 23, 1960 (NAC, newspaper collection).

[34] Conversation with Sam Kim Chang, October 1998. The stories of Suzuki's arrival in Cambodia have perhaps been retrospectively infused with what seems to have later become a close relationship between then Prime Minister Sihanouk, the painter, and the School. In

It was perhaps also the considerable activity of Rollet, the last French director of the School of Cambodian Arts, which spurred Suzuki's coming. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Rollet painted the large decorative canvases which still grace the old Palais du Commissariat in Phnom Penh today (figure 83); his painting of a fire on Chrui Changvar was displayed in the National Museum in the mid-1950s.[35] In a project which would seem to punctuate the end of Groslier's School, Rollet and Tonn Khieu, the master of wood sculpture at the School, produced a series of woodcuts for a manual on the Cambodian economy (Figure 84, 85).[36] Following the logic of Groslier's system, Rollet designed the plans for the wood cuts while Tonn Khieu cut the blocks themselves. As the opening page of the booklet described this collaboration: "drawings by Louis Rollet, woodcuts by Tonn Khieu". The images collect clichés, collaging products for which each province was known together into pleasing panoramas (Siem Reap, Kampot) or dense tableaus (Svay Rieng). Although these images open a view of Cambodia previously rejected by the curriculum of the

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1945, the young King Sihanouk established two prizes in his name for the best students graduating from the School of Cambodian Arts (see Kram #147-NS December 27, 1945, [Journal Officiel]). Today Suzuki's painting of Srah Srang still hangs in the King's private quarters where I was graciously granted permission to photograph it.

[35] Conversation with Pen Tra, June 2000. A painting of a fire on Chrui Changvar by a French painter Rupin (? the signature is unclear) hangs in the upstairs offices of the National Museum today; it is not clear what relation this painting has to the one by Rollet which Pen Tra remembers but which is no longer displayed. Pen Tra notes that the presence of Rollet's paintings in the Museum, and perhaps those of other French painters, may have spurred King Sihanouk to hire the Japanese painter to come and teach at the School. Thanks to Darryl Collins for giving me the proper name for a building which has subsequently served in so many guises (government hotel in the 1980s, UNTAC headquarters in the early 1990s, and today as the offices of the Development Commission for Cambodia).

[36] Le Cambodge Economique was published by the RSC for internal administrative uses in 1942. Whereas Rollet's signature is clearly visible on all of the images, Tonn Khieu's signature requires a bit of deciphering (and of course a knowledge of Khmer) since it sometimes simply reads as shading marks on the page.



Figure 83 : Paintings by Louis Rollet, the last French director of the School of Cambodian Arts
On the right: signed and dated 1943; on the left, unsigned but presumed Rollet, 1940s

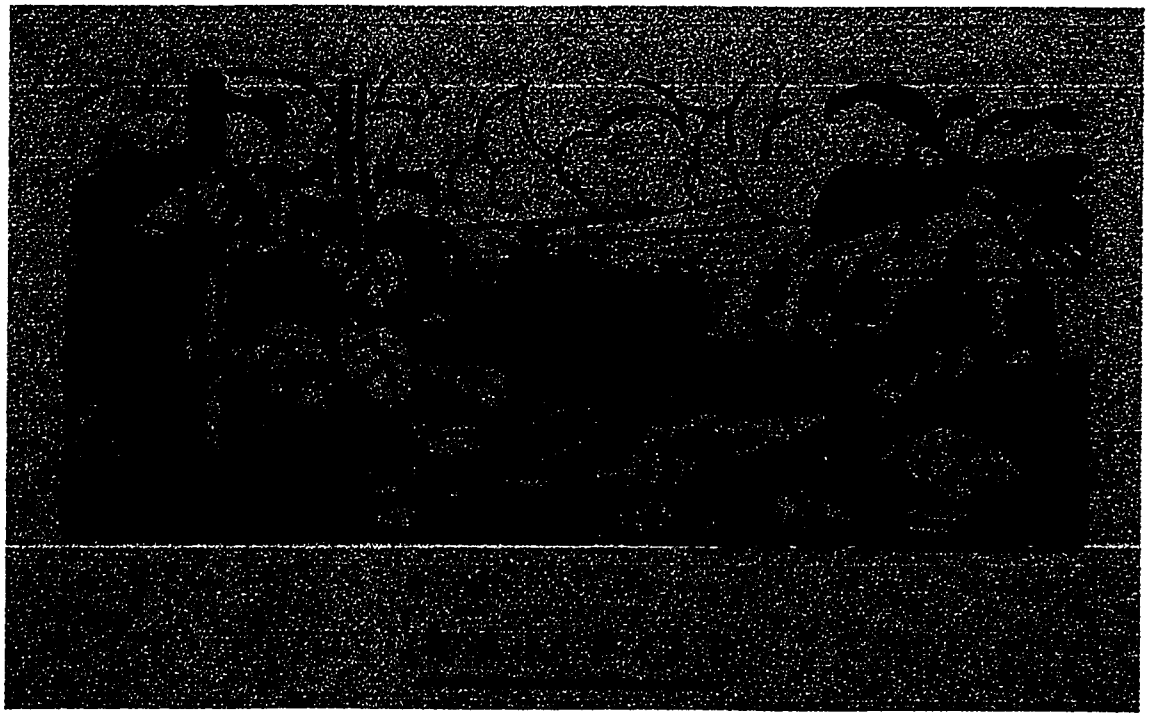
Palais du Commissariat (today the CDC, Phnom Penh)



Figure 84

"Drawings by Louis Rollet, woodcuts by Tonn Khieu"

Le Cambodge Economique RSC 1942



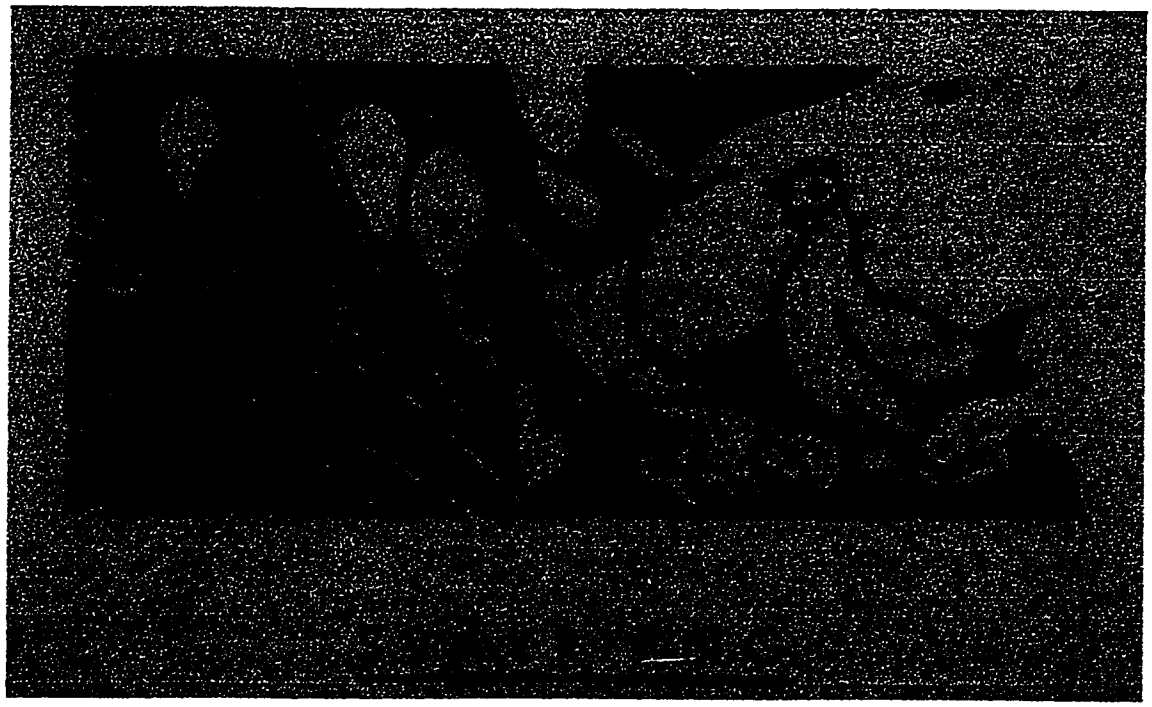
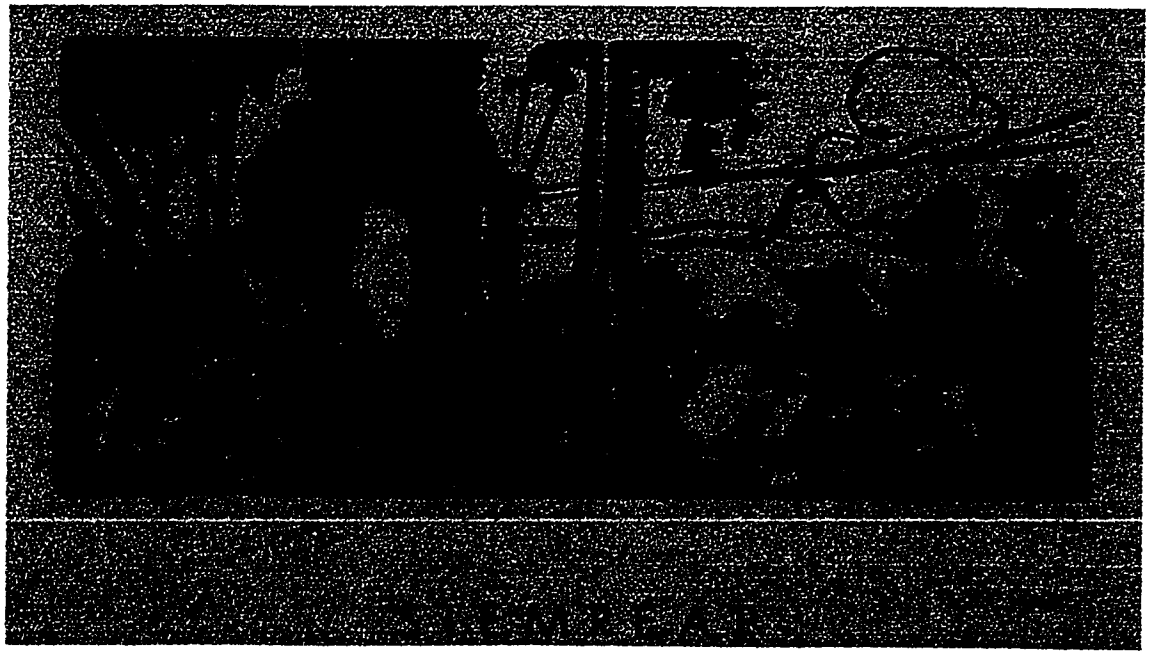


Figure 85

"Drawings by Louis Rollet, woodcuts by Tonn Khieu"

Le Cambodge Economique RSC 1942



School, they still follow the logic of Groslier's system. A drawn plan is given and the Cambodian hand simply obeys its contours, providing the hand labor for realising a pre-determined object.

Officials of the Protectorate themselves seem to have reconsidered Groslier's aims by the late 1930s. A report on education in Cambodia, written in 1939, suggested that the time had come for there to also be "a real School of Art (and no longer a School of Cambodian Art), free in its teaching and its destiny".[37] Through this new School, "Cambodia also could have its designers, its architects, [and] its artists perhaps". The existing School of Cambodian Arts, the report continued, "only produces artisans devoted to the imitation of traditional art". The report suggested that drawing from life should be introduced as a suitable base for training, using however "Khmer models" (presumably casts of Khmer sculpture) in order to "leave a national imprint on Cambodian art". In short, the report concluded, "an effort must be made to orient pupils, who today are too exclusively absorbed in the study of the traditional arts, towards the meaning of modern art [that is], towards the interpretation of nature". Such a pedagogical shift would, at the very least, prove practical, the report concluded, since the Protectorate would no longer have to bring qualified draftsmen, architects, and representational painters from Vietnam or France for service within the Cambodian administration. We can see in these suggestions a curious slippage of meaning in the term "modern" when it is used in different contexts. For French administrators in the colonies, "modern" meant a regime of

[37] "Rapport sur l'Enseignement professionnel, pratique, agricole et artisanal au Cambodge" by the Director of the Educational Service, Phnom Penh to the Director of Public Education for Indochina, 1939 [NAC #27017 (RSC)]. All subsequent quotations in the paragraph are to this Report. My emphasis is added to "Cambodian".

representation useful for illustrations and for architectural renderings, a form of representation defined in opposition to that embodied by the traditional objects of colonial art training. This "modern" of the colonies becomes the conservative and the traditional however when it is set back into 1930s France and compared to movements of international modernism and the avant-garde.

By 1948, Suzuki had established his section of "Peinture" as he called it (he taught in French) or "គំនូរសម័យ" (modern painting) as it was officially translated into Khmer on a plaque above the atelier's door at the School of Cambodian Arts.[38] What then was this "modern", "new" painting? In the first year of Suzuki's atelier, students sketched from basic three dimensional forms (cube, cylinder, pyramid, sphere), learning thus to render the illusion of volume through representations of light and shade. More complicated still-lifes were later introduced followed by drawing from the live model.[39] We can recognize this method of training as a basic Western academic curriculum at the same time that we must understand how radically different its logic was from previous exercises at the School. Thus within its local context, such teaching was "new" and the form of painting which it produced came to be called "modern".

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[38] Conversations with Sam Kem Chang, May, 1999 and June, 2000. Students also began to call it គំនូរលាបពណ៌ វិចិត្រកម្ម គំនូរមើលរើញ, two of which can be translated literally as "painting by putting down colors" and "painting looking seeing". It was this course which Solange Bernard must have observed in 1949.

[39] There was no budget for hiring models and Pen Tra remembers the students drawing one another. Both Sam Kem Chang and Pen Tra were told by Suzuki about drawing from the nude model but they remember that it was not permitted "because of the modesty of Khmer culture". Conversations with Pen Tra, and Sem Kem Chang, November 1998 and June 2000.

The point of this "new" painting was to represent the seen. The essence of Suzuki's "Peinture" was to observe nature directly and then to "catch" a particular moment on canvas. To do so seemed an impossible task, Sam Kem Chang remembers, since everything was always changing and students had to try somehow to capture a single instant of light and atmosphere.[40] Where previously diagrams distilled from tradition had remained motionless examples for hours of copying, now everything was tied to what was immediate and constantly shifting. Suzuki forbade copying from anything other than nature and his former students can still recite the phrases he used to prohibit copying from two-dimensional examples.[41] "Nature was the real teacher" and students had to stand in front of what they were painting, otherwise their work would be "wrong from the real", "wrong from the true".[42] In Sam Kem Chang's words, they learned "to observe" , then to paint, and then "to look

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[40] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000. Of course these descriptions point to the kind of Impressionist realism being taught in Japan in the 1920s. See World Impressionism: the International Movement 1860-1920 (ed. Norma Broude, New York: Abrams 1990), John Clark's Modern Asian Art, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998) and Paris in Japan: the Japanese Encounter with European Painting (eds. Takashini, Rimer, & Bolas, Saint Louis: Washington University Press, 1997).

[41] Students were forbidden to paint from a photograph, to paint from another painting, to paint from their imagination, or to venture into abstraction. To copy from photographs would produce paintings "just like photographs" which were clear and sharp all over rather than having a central subject of focus. To paint from the imagination or to venture into abstraction was selfish (សំរាប់មើលតែខ្លួនឯង) since painting had a purpose: "We paint for them to see something", Pen Tra remembers his teacher explaining, "if it's hard to see [and understand] what is the point?" Suzuki also apparently felt that Asian abstraction too often "simply copied from them [i.e. the West]". As we shall see, Suzuki's doctrine of painting the seen, if it can be called that, comes to have another inflection in 1960s Cambodia when it is taken up by painters allied with the Khmer Rouge to press for an agenda of social realism in opposition to the "prettiness" of Nhek Dim. Conversations with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, October and November 1997, October 1998, June 2000.

[42] ខុសពីការពិត Conversation with Sam Kim Chang, November, 1998; Pen Tra, October 1998.

again", checking to see if what they had painted was "right".[43] Comments offered in critiques by Suzuki included: "you haven't thought to see", "you don't see yet", "you look but you don't see".[44] It is for this quality of immediacy - of being at a particular place at a particular time - that Suzuki is most often remembered today. The fact that his own work was composed and often painted in the studio away from nature and direct observation is generally ignored in these accounts (figure 86).

In addition to the idea of representing a single moment of presence, a notion which would have seemed radically new to students previously trained under the old curriculum of the School of Cambodian Arts, Suzuki introduced another model which today is often referred to by his students as equally influential to their thinking.[45] In his atelier (where students spent the entire day with their teacher), Suzuki showed many examples of what appear to have been primarily Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art while telling students about the lives and ideas of the "artists" who had made the pictures. The idea was not to copy the pictures shown but rather to absorb the idea of an artist and his work.[46] Gauguin and Van Gogh (whose

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[43] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

[44] Conversations with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang 1997-2000. មិនគិតមើល មិនទាន់មើល មើលហើយ ប៉ុន្តែមិនឃើញ។ Suzuki's teaching was in French but is remembered by his former students in Khmer language phrases. This raises many issues of translation which I do not address here but hope to in the future. The translation of the Khmer term គំនូរមើលឃើញ into "representational painting" (it's closer to "painting look and see") is problematic in and of itself, since it allows us to slip into the familiar rather than trying to discern what was particular and local about Suzuki's "modern painting".

[45] Conversations with Sam Kem Chang 1997-2000; Conversation with Dy Proeung, January 2001.

[46] Despite his emphasis on nature and perception, Suzuki told his students that eventually, to become "artists", they would have to develop individual visions. As Pen Tra remembers it,

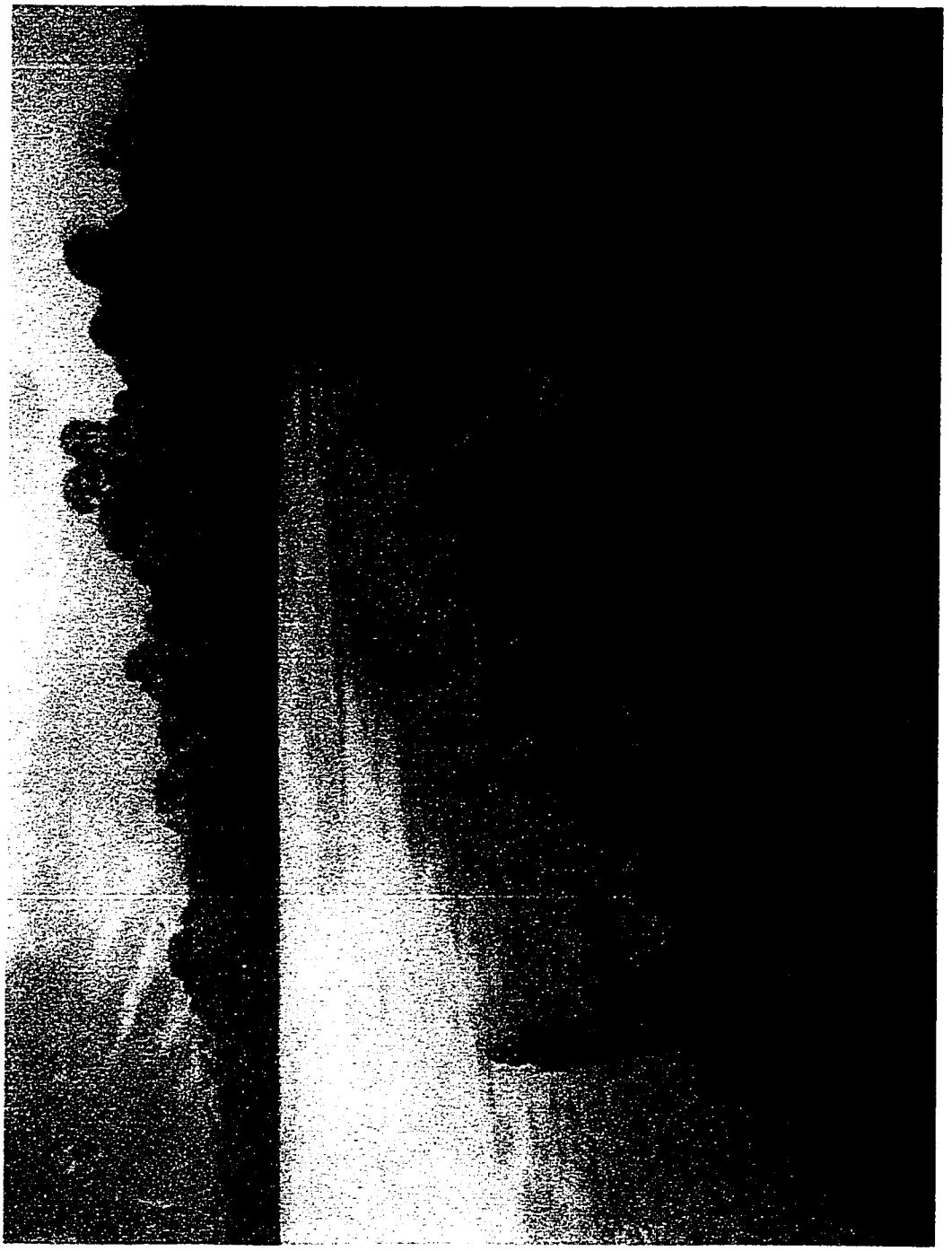

Figure 86
"Srah Srang"
oil painting by Suzuki
about 8 feet wide

Collection of HM
King Sihanouk

story of psychological problems and life-time neglect is vividly remembered) are the most often cited. Picasso and more abstract painters were also shown but Suzuki emphasized their foundations in representational drawing which artists "had to know first" before they could follow their individual paths.[47] Sam Kem Chang remembers that he "struggled to understand it all" as the discussion was in French and the pictures were "very new to Khmer eyes".[48]

It seems that Suzuki did not discuss Khmer culture with his students, nor did he single them out as somehow specifically Cambodian and thus tied to a particular kind of ethno-national art. Rather, Suzuki thought of the drawing and painting which he taught as "international", based on a kind of observation from nature which had universal rather than culturally specific characteristics.[49] Cambodian students of Suzuki soon came to realise however that the "clear" observation of life could in fact produce a painting which they would claim as specifically "Khmer" since it would be about life in a particular environment with certain kinds of color and light.[50] Direct observation would show what was intrinsic. Thus, although they were learning the "modern painting of all countries", Suzuki's students often came to emphasize its

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Suzuki stressed that each of the "artists" (សិល្បករ) that he showed to his students was important for their own thoughts (គំនិតខ្លួនឯង). Pen Tra contrasts such an idea to contemporary painting in Phnom Penh where he notes that any idea which sells is immediately copied by all the other painters. Conversation with Pen Tra, June 2000.

[47] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang and Tang Hor Yi, May, 1999. Tang Hor Yi remembers a considerable art historical component of the all day studio with a survey that began in Greece and then Rome.

[48] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, May 1999.

[49] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

[50] Conversations with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

national specificity.[51] This allowed them to solve the exquisite dilemma of "modern art". Since its unqualified form was already taken by the West, "Cambodian modern art" would have to rely on the usual ethno-national adjective to distinguish its uniqueness and refute its belatedness.

By all accounts, Suzuki and his way of painting were quickly accepted (figure 87).[52] Although at first some of the older artisans at the School found Suzuki's painting strange, even unintelligible, there seem to have been no objections to his presence and in fact, he soon gained a remarkable amount of influence at the School.[53] The first group of students to study with Suzuki were chosen from upper level students in the atelier of drawing. Pen Tra claims that the five best students of the atelier were chosen and that the teachers of the drawing atelier at that time were "happy" that Suzuki's "technique" or "speciality" was coming to the School. "Modern painting", they said, would enable Cambodia to be "like other countries", that is, "modern", "developed", "advanced".[54]

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[51] Conversation with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, June, 2000

[52] Conversations with older artisans who are not "modern painters": Chet Chan (a traditional painter who studied at the School in the early 1960s), Srieng Y and Look Kru Saim (sculptors trained at the School in the late 1950s and early 1960s), Conversations spring 2000. All three described Suzuki's style of painting with the phrase ម្យ៉ាងវ៉ែរ, or "one type also". In other words, it was seen as simply another possible kind of painting.

[53] In a reading which should warn us of the legibility of representational painting if it has not been taught, Som Samai, the silversmith, describes how older artisans looked at Suzuki's paintings and were unable to recognize their subjects. Conversation with Som Samai, May 2000.

[54] Conversation with Pen Tra, June 2000. The teachers in the drawing atelier at the time were លោកគ្រូសរ and លោកគ្រូអៀង. Pen Tra explains that they were happy because this ឯកទេស would allow Cambodia to be ដូចស្រុកគេ យើងមិនទាន់មាន.



Figure 87 : Photograph of the students and personnel of the School of Cambodian Arts, 1953? (Suzuki is not pictured)

Photograph courtesy of Sin Chan Than

When asked to account for how so foreign a form of representation was not only smoothly integrated but soon received precedence over existing ateliers, students from the late 1950s and early 1960s emphasize that Cambodia was "not narrow then".[55] Suzuki's style of painting was valued as "the new"(សម័យ). In this all too familiar order of things, "the new" which came from abroad and required foreign languages (Suzuki taught in French) was seen as better and more advanced than what existed locally.[56] In the descriptions former students offer, it is almost as if the fact that the older teachers, established at the school "did not know [how to make] the new" which gave these new forms their fascination.[57] The value of "modern" representation is perhaps best shown in a photograph of Mey Preap, the old sculptor and mold making teacher

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[55] Look Kru Saim, a sculptor educated at the School in the late 1950s, remembers that "everyone wanted to enter the modern painting section". Suzuki's form of painting at that time was viewed as "advanced", "modern", and "developed", while sculpture was seen as "low" (ទាប). Suzuki's accounts of Western "artists" seem to have presented a different possible social standing for those who made visual objects. Colonial hierarchies had denigrated hand labor and white collar clerk and administrative positions were coveted. Sam Kem Chang's father, trained as a traditional painter at Groslier's school in the 1920s, did not want his son to go to the School, citing the social stigma of hand labor. While Sam Kem Chang persisted because of his love for painting, others, like the son of the traditional painting teacher Sar, for example, studied at a "higher" school (Lycée Sisowath) and went on to become director of the National Bank in the 1960s. Conversations with Sam Kem Chang, Look Kru Saim, June 2000.

[56] Conversation with Chan Puon, Sam Kem Chang, Look Kru Saim, and Pen Tra, June, 2000. Chan Puon is a sculptor in Siem Reap who was educated at the School of Cambodian Arts in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The attitude described here pervades my students at the Department of Plastic Arts. "We are underdeveloped" they tell me and look eagerly to any knowledge that they can learn from the outside.

[57] Conversations with Look Kru Saim, Chan Puon, June 2000. "អត់ចេះសម័យទេ"។ We can here recall the Nagaravatta descriptions of Say's stamping machine, quoted at the end of Chapter Two. To the "young Cambodians", the newspaper explained, Say's machine, "furnished... proof that Khmers are also capable of making industrial machines, of setting up ateliers, and even of making products like European industry".[57] Such advances were evidence, the newspaper concluded of the "clear desire of the Cambodian people to evolve and the proof that they will succeed in what they wish".

at the School during the 1950s. Although he primarily made gorgeously incised stone ក្បាច់ molds (the ornament molds still used today in An Sok's mask-making atelier), when he was asked to pose for លោកសៅរ៏ (Free World) in the mid to late 1950s, the old master instead embraced a representational sculpture (figure 88).[58]

There are those who find all this a little ironic. For as both Dy Proeung and Sam Kem Chang eventually told me, គំនូរមើលឃើញ, "the painting of looking and seeing" was not really "new" at all. The reliefs of the Bayon, the plants and animals of the *Reamker* painting in the Palace, even the names of the ornaments, as we have seen, all speak to a tradition of observation and representation from nature. "There is no such thing as the new (សម័យ)," Sam Kem Chang tells me laughingly, "it was always already there". The reason that representation based on observation became so firmly marked as foreign and new, Dy Proeung adds, is simply because "they advertised about their culture".[59] And, he might have added, purged observation from the diagrams of

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[58] Mey Preap's atelier of mold-making was featured in លោកសៅរ៏ (Free World) vol. 7 #2 as a place where "ancient art was created anew". This atelier also helped to make the monument for the Khmer American Friendship Highway. Plans for the monument were drawn up by Oliver Cherel, an architect affiliated with the US mission, and its sculpting was "assisted" by the American sculptor John Rhoden (a Rome Prize winner). The monument is described in the Khmer version of Free World as "built according to Khmer traditional ways" (presumably through molds) while the English version describes it as a monument "in a traditional Khmer style". See សិលាចារឹកស្តីអំពីការងារួមគ្នា : ជាង់ចម្លាក់ជាតិអាមេរិកាំង់ដែលបានទទួលរង្វាន់ទៅទីក្រុងរ៉ោមបានជួយកសាង់សិលាចារឹកនេះ in លោកសៅរ៏ (Free World) vol. 8 #5.

[59] Conversation with Dy Proeung, June 1999 (គេជ្រុញជ្រាយអំពីវប្បធម៌គេ)

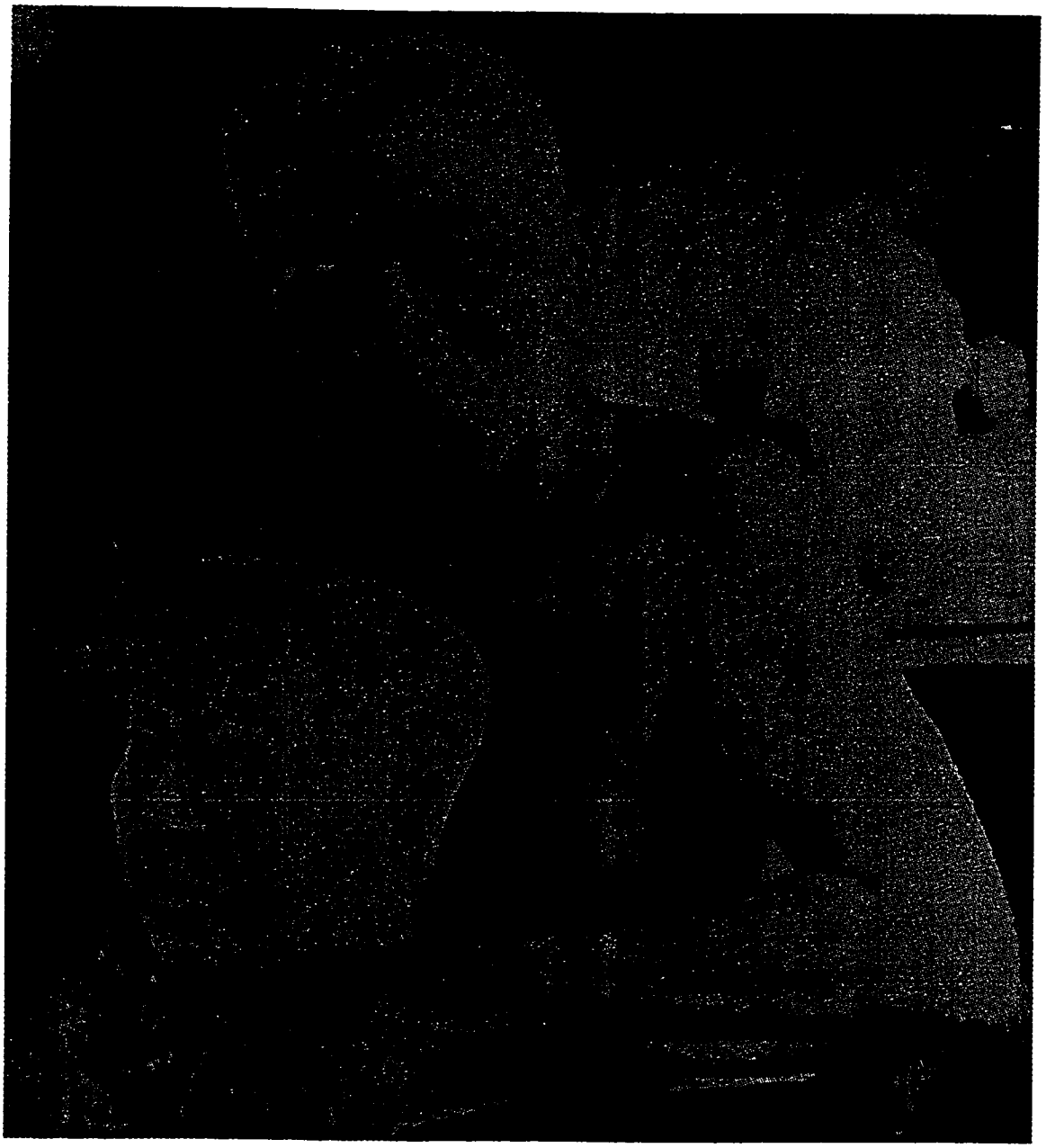

Figure 88

Mey Preap, head of the atelier of mold-making and sculpture
School of Cambodian Arts, mid-1950s

Free World volume 7, #2

Groslier's School. The thirty years of training to replicate plans had specified and fixed tradition in paths which it might not have found if left to less structured devices.

By the late 1950s, the curriculum and the impulse of the School of Cambodian Arts had decisively shifted from Groslier's original conception. His introductory drawing course was abandoned and entering students were immediately placed into the various technical sections based on their performance in an entrance exam of representational drawing.[60] A distinct hierarchy emerged in which the "best" applicants were directly placed in Suzuki's atelier.[61] "Good" applicants were then divided between the section of គំនូរផ្សាយ (loosely translated as "publicity painting"), another "modern" section to which we will return, and the atelier of គំនូរបុរាណ ("traditional drawing / painting") which once had been the mandatory destination for all entering male students. After these ateliers of two dimensional making were filled, "lower" students were placed in the various object-making ateliers.[62] Students in all ateliers began to study at least some representational drawing (គំនូរមើលរយើញ) as well

[60] Sam Kem Chang thinks that his entering class (1958) was the first year for this change. Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

[61] Conversations with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, November 1997 and June 2000. Prior to Suzuki's coming, the sections of silver jewelery, weaving, and traditional painting (vat painters) were considered the most desirable sections. Former students of the School explain that these sections offered the chance for the most lucrative living after graduation.

[62] Former sculpture students openly confirm that their sections were considered less desirable. Some of the students in Suzuki's atelier were dropped back into other ateliers if they couldn't make satisfactory drawings. This was decided by a committee but Suzuki's judgement had the most weight since he was the "specialist". Conversations with Look Kru Saim, Dy Proeung and Chan Puon, June 2000.

since, as Sam Kem Chang explains it, "even the sculpture student had to observe the ក្បាច់(ornaments) that he was making".[63]

Modern Art Education

The shift in representation was not confined to the School. During the 1950s, the US Information Service began to employ young Cambodians with any kind of art background as both designers of still pictures (USIS posters, displays and exhibitions) and producers of moving pictures (the USIS film production unit) (figure 89). Through its apparatus of magazines, exhibitions, book collections, and film screenings, USIS both opened the eyes of young artists and changed the forms of representation they thought of using. We have already seen how Ly Bun Yim was spurred by the American Festival photography competition to become a film maker (Chapter Three). Others perhaps were influenced by the workshops on silk-screen and mechanical reproduction techniques offered by USIS throughout the 1950s to teachers and employees of Ministries and Schools (figure 90). USIS also offered training in "new" fields such as drafting which were necessary for ongoing US aid projects (figure 91). The cover of សេរីភាព(Free World) itself became a forum for images very different from those which had been taught at Groslier's version of the School (figure 92).

There was an even closer link between aid and forms of representation however. The teacher training and rural development projects sponsored by US aid during the

[63] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, November 1998.



Figure 89

"Busy art room of the Communications Division Media Division" US Information Service Phnom Penh, 1960 (Nhek Dim center, smiling)

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-60-410

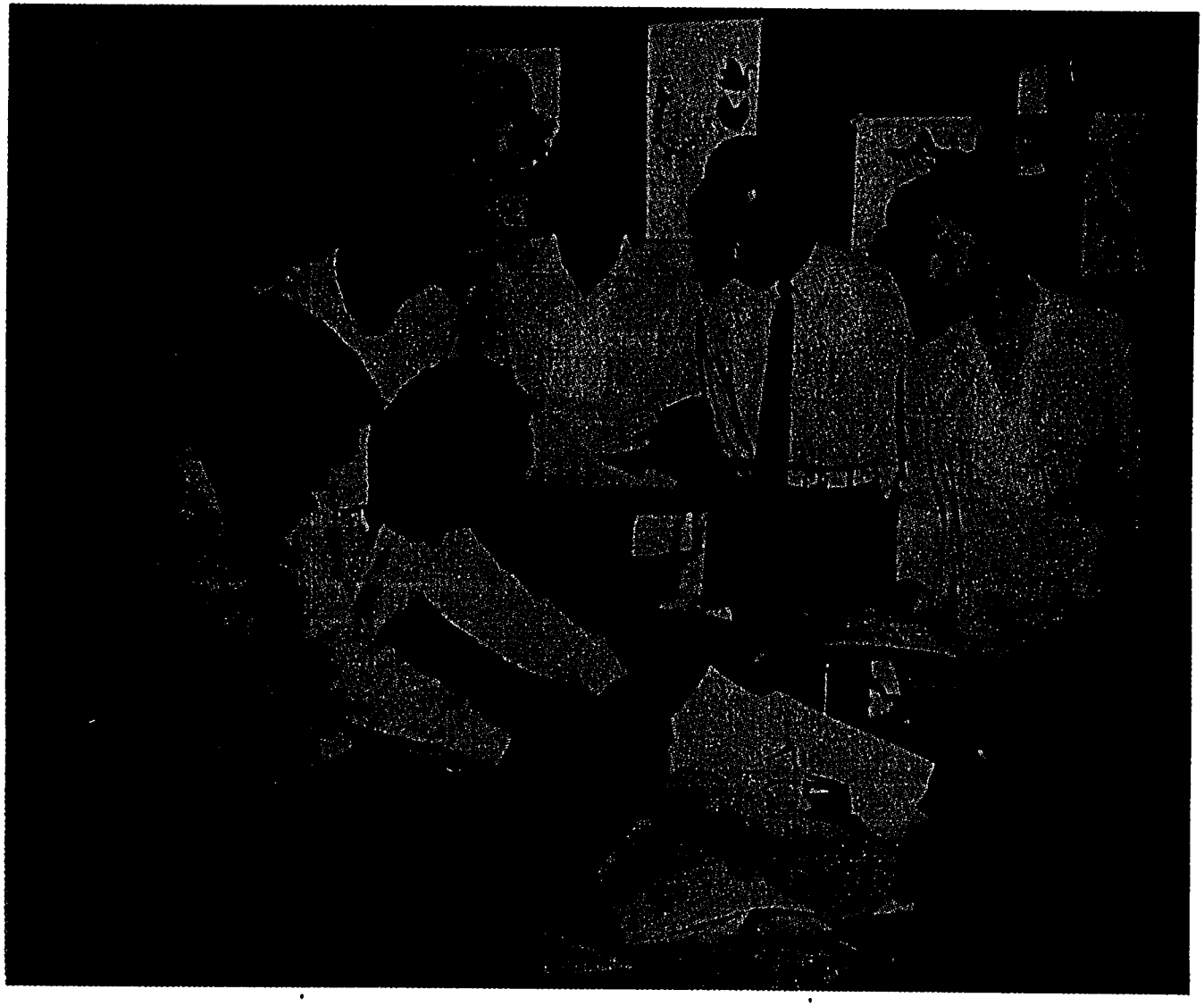

Figure 90

Silkscreen workshop sponsored by the US Information Service for Cambodian artists, ministry employees, and US Operations Mission artists, 1956.

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland
RG 286 CAM-56-300

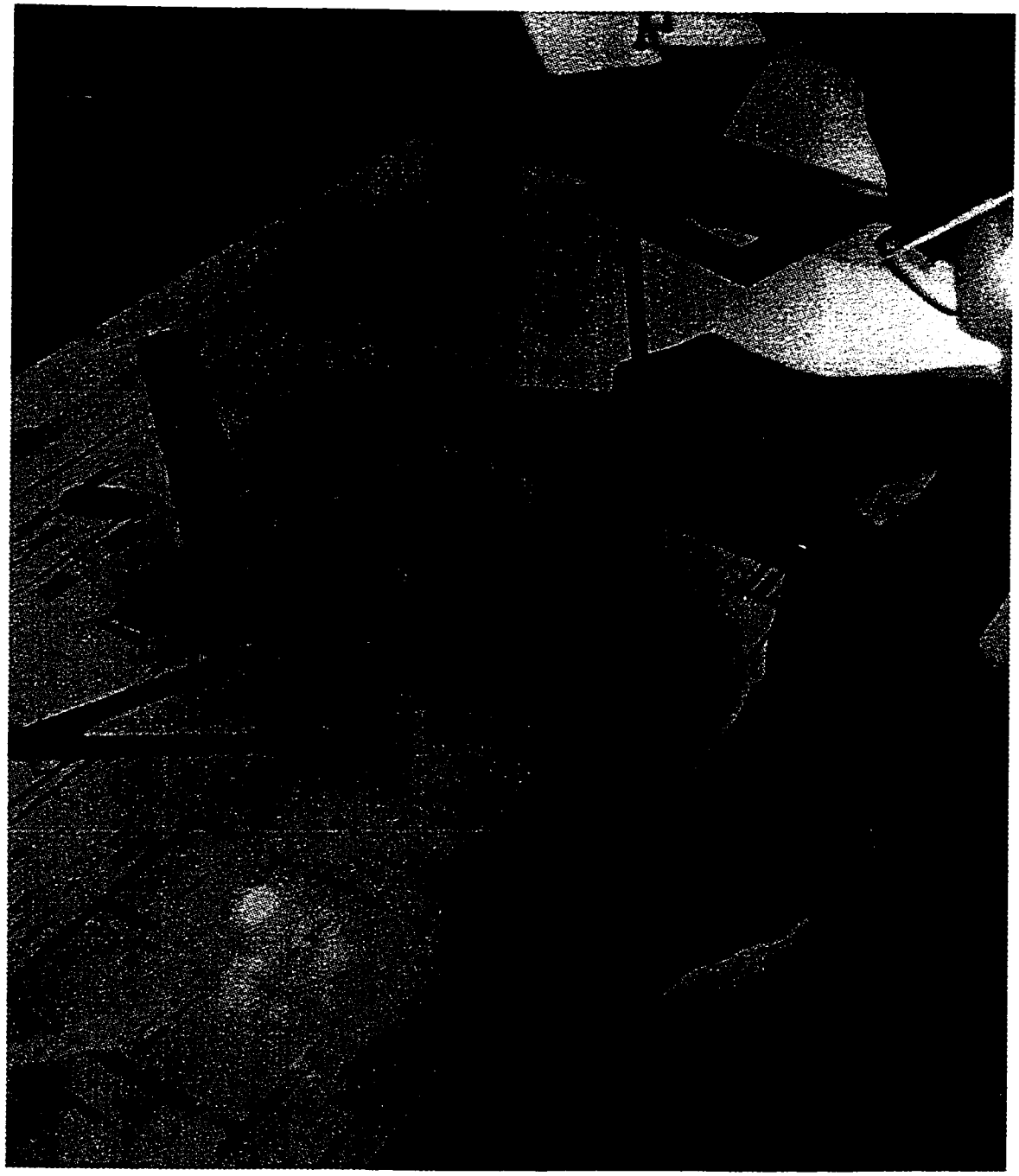

Figure 91

Draftsman at the United States Information Service Office, Phnom Penh
Drawing plans for low-cost housing, 1957

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-57-588

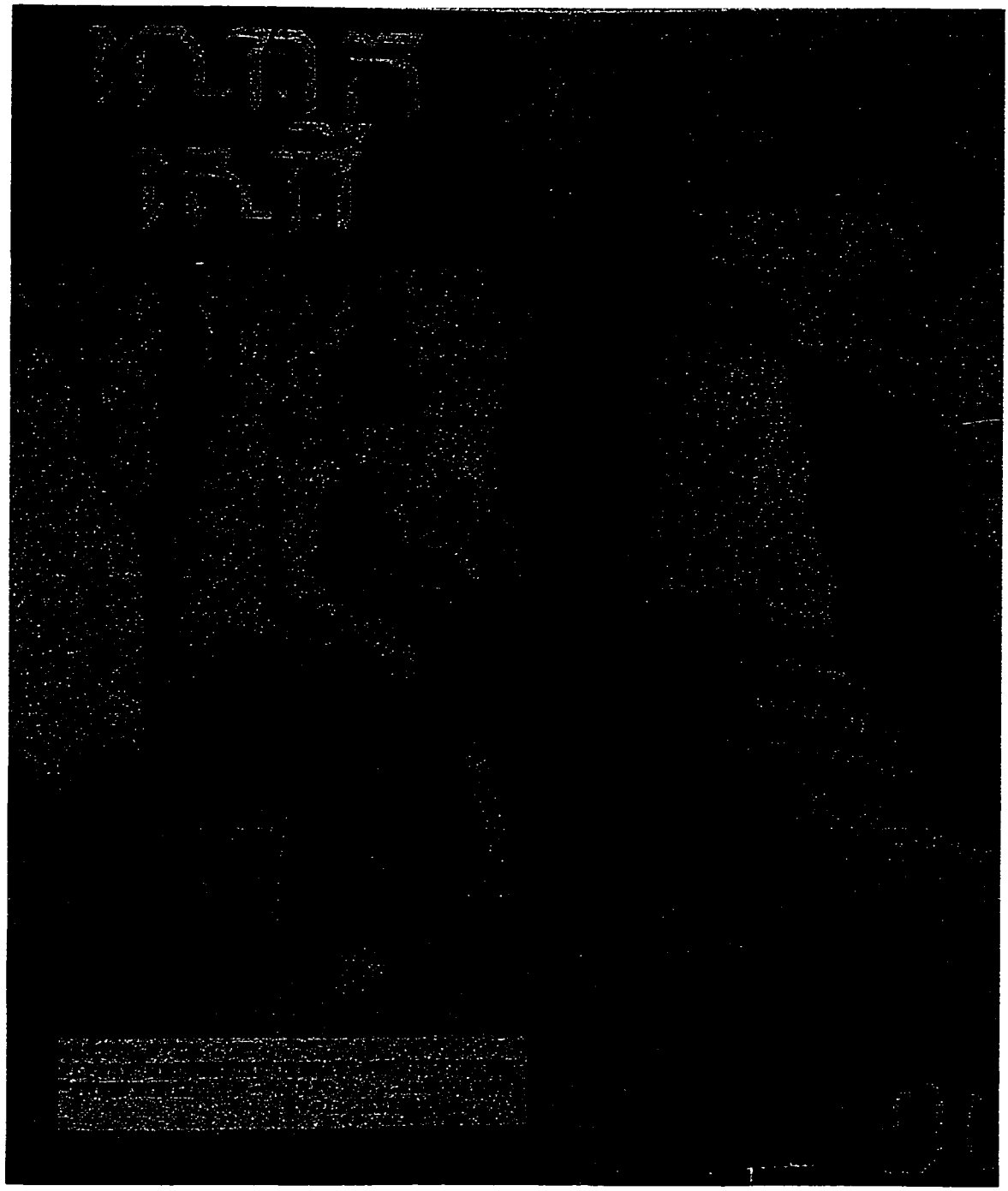

Figure 92

Free World cover, painted by Kong Som Ol, employee of the USIS Information Division mid-1950s

Free World, volume 3 #10

1950s required the development of simple forms of visual explanation. "Fundamental courses" on, for example, the spraying of crops with US pesticides, could be presented to rural audiences (with high illiteracy rates) through the use of pictures and posters displayed on blackboards and "flannel-boards" (figure 93). "Illustrated lectures" on cooperative farming were more successful than translated monologues (figure 94). And USIS displays and traveling exhibitions made use of visual messages to explain the aims and techniques of US aid (figure 95). In model schools, forms of representational drawing became both a general foundation of "modern education" as well as a means to convey notions of proper behavior and hygiene (figure 96). Art could not only help children to "express themselves" but also could be used to explain other fields of knowledge.[64] In the US-sponsored model teacher training center of Kompong Kantuot, still-life drawing was introduced as an integral exercise for developing observational skills (figure 97).

In this climate, Suzuki's students easily found employment since their "new" skill was considered "necessary" for a "modern" nation.[65] Pen Tra was hired by the Ministry of Tourism to draw images for tourism posters; Ouk Yin worked for the Ministry of Defense developing images for use in army recruitment; Nhek Dim was hired by USIS; Sam Yuan eventually worked for the National Bank, designing and drawing images on bills of money (figure 98); and Sam Kem Chang became an art

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[64] វិចិត្រសិល្បៈនិងមុខរបរនៃយុវជនភូមា in លោកសេរី (Free World) Volume 3, #11. This article described a US-sponsored teacher training program in Burma which emphasized art as an educational tool and an integral part of early development. As such, these forms of illustrative realism were promoted as integral parts of development and modernisation.

[65] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

Figure 93

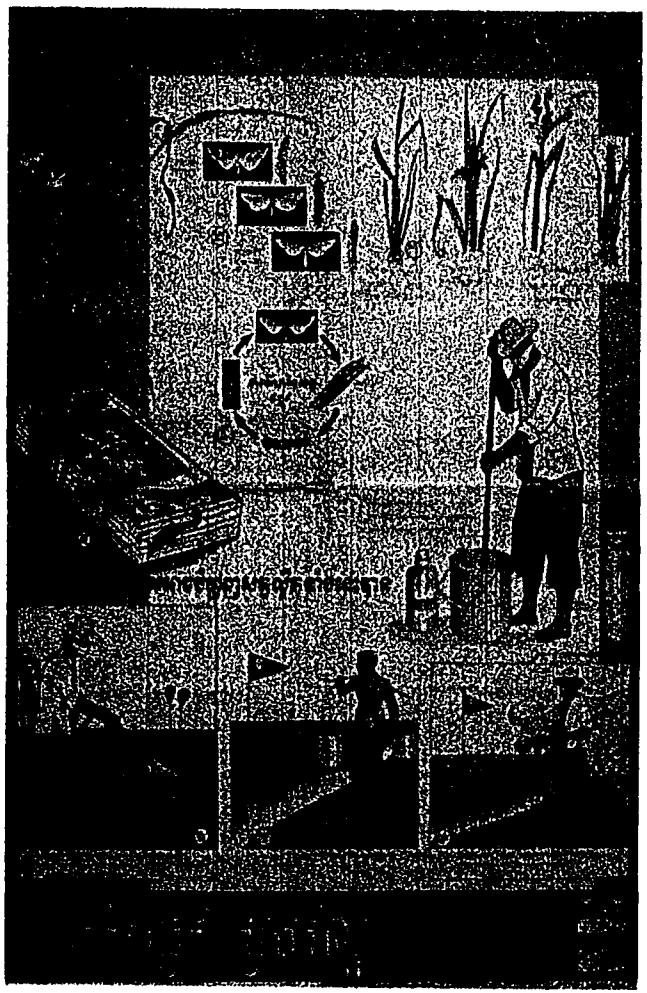
Nhek Dim working at the US Information Service as an "artist in the Information Division".

Near right: The use of blackboard drawings in basic education. Nhek Dim is drawing a pesticide sprayer on the blackboard.

Far right: Poster on pesticide spraying for better rice, painted by Nhek Dim for USIS, Phnom Penh.

Near right: US National Archives at College Park, Maryland
RG 286 CAM-58-244
Far right: large poster collection of the National Archives of Cambodia





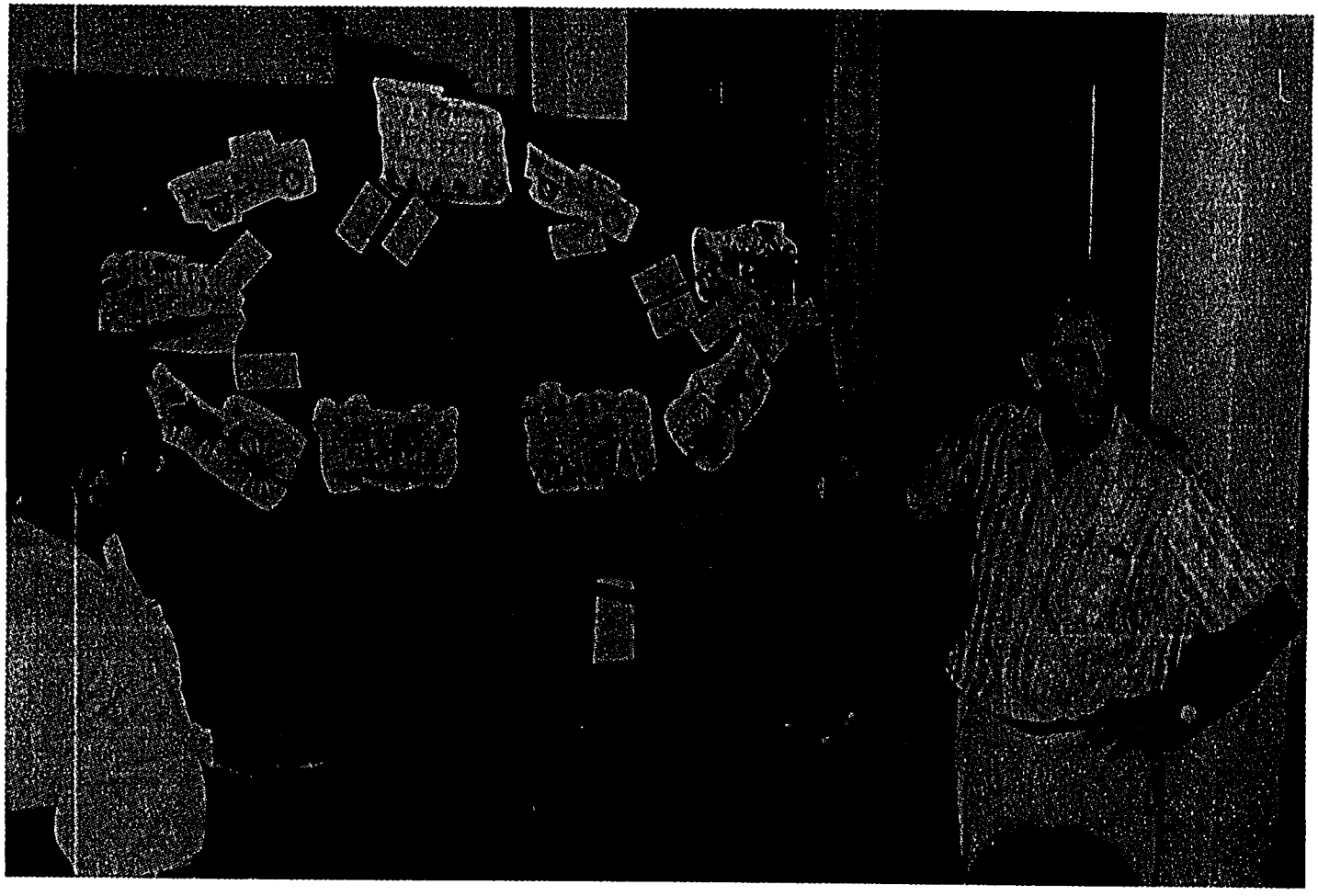


Figure 94 : US-sponsored agricultural cooperatives advisor Fred Knobel giving a demonstration of how to give an illustrated lecture, August 3, 1962

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-62-1955



Figure 95
US Operations Mission Building window display: well drilling.
The sheer strangeness of these odd visual displays must have had their effect on passerbys.

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-62-141

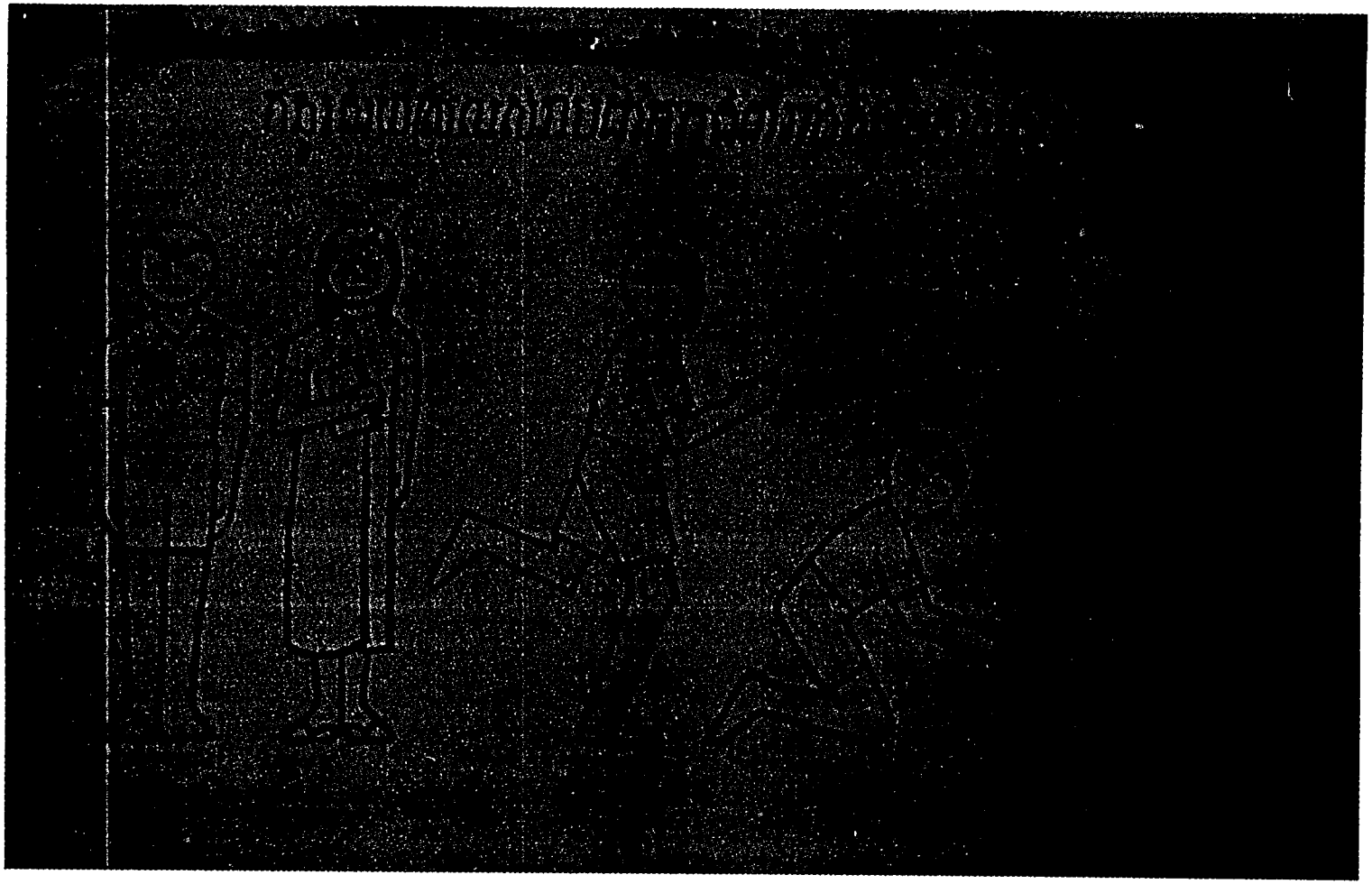


Figure 96

Poster study, Kompong Kantuot Teacher Training Center established by US aid, 1959

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM Photos

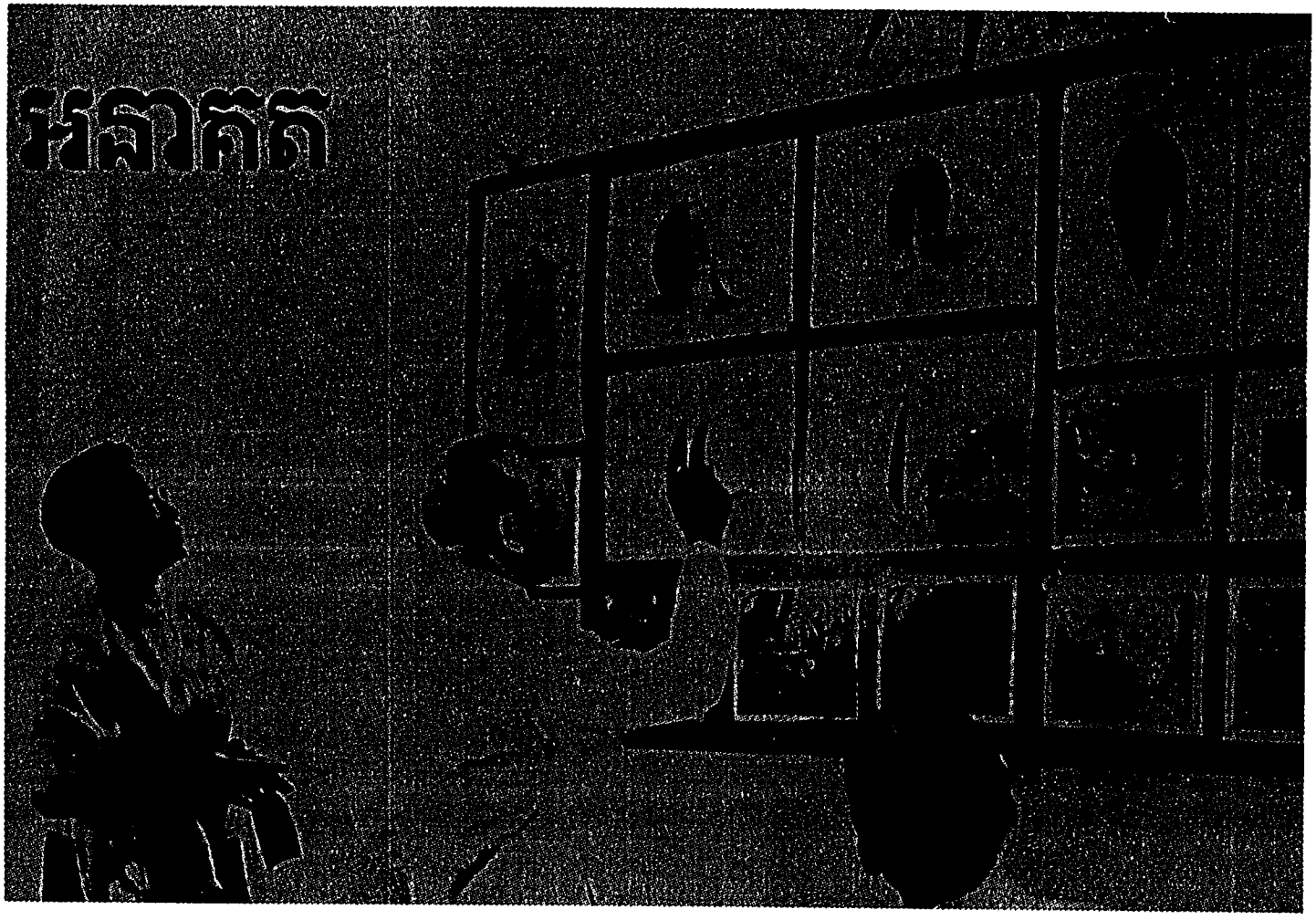


Figure 97

Their Majesties at the opening of the US-sponsored teacher training facility in Kompong Kantuot 1957?

Free World volume 7, #9

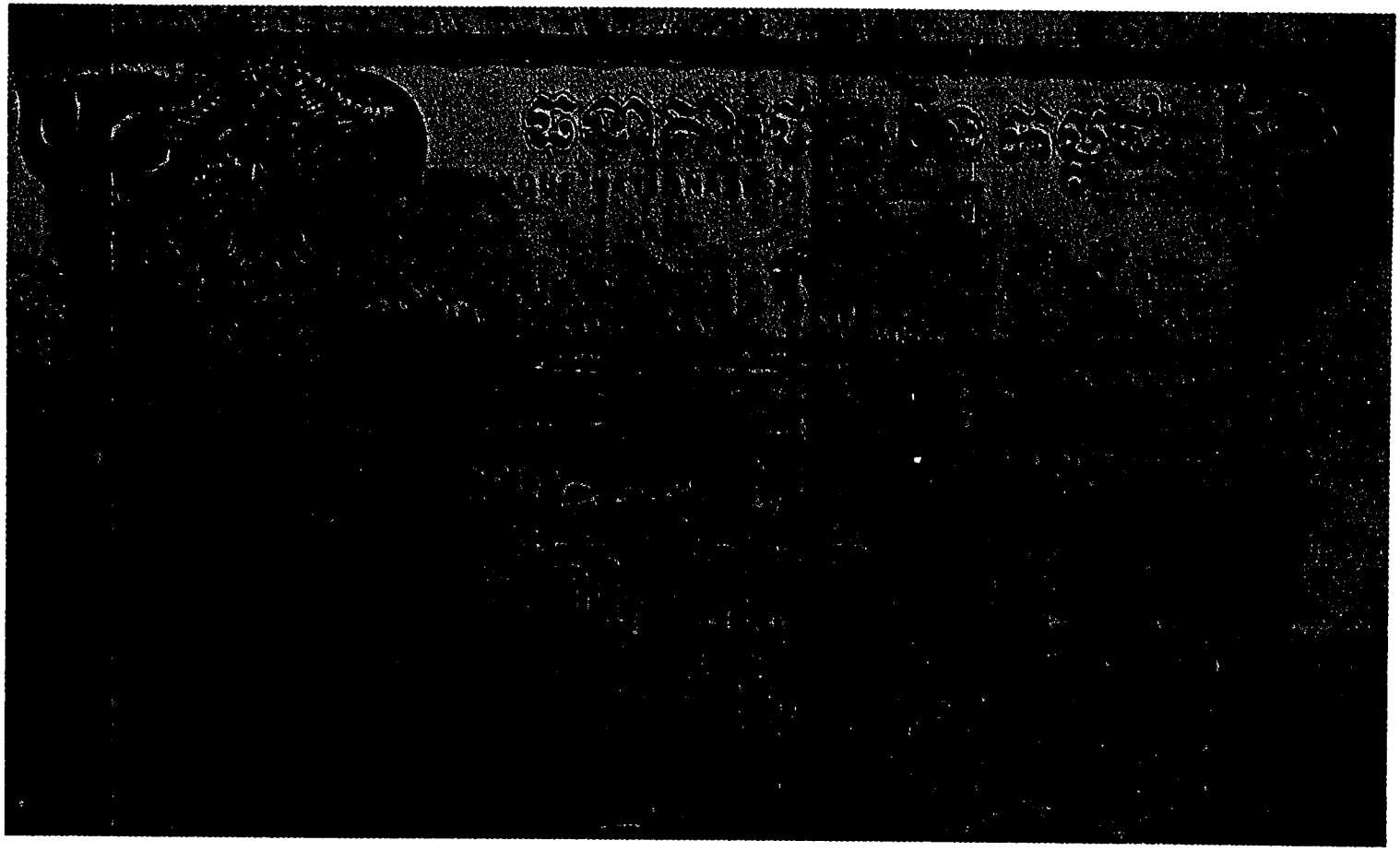


Figure 98

A 500 riel note designed by Sam Yuan, 1960s

Courtesy of Sem Kem Chang

education trainer for elementary and high school teachers.[66] "The people", Sam Kem Chang explains retrospectively, were "becoming interested in modern painting" and therefore "the schools had to start to teach them how to draw the things that you see" (figure 99).[67]

Indeed, the curriculum installed under the general educational reforms of 1958 (reforms which were meant to reshape the educational system to meet the "needs of a modern Cambodia") offered almost exclusively representational drawing exercises.[68] Objects were to be observed and sketched, perspective was taught, and studies of light and shade dominated. Only in the December assignment of the 5th year was there any reference to something specifically designated as "Khmer". The student was to make a drawing of a "piece of Khmer jewelery [or] the royal sword". This cultural artefact however was to be observed as a finished object, set in light and shadow, rather than as a diagram of two dimensional ornaments to be constructed into an object through means of a plan. A December assignment for the 4th class, similarly asked students to draw from a cast of "a capital", perhaps an Angkorian capital. The assignment was to observe and render a three dimensional object in space however,

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[66] When Suzuki retired in the early 1960s, his former student Lay Bun Kim ឡាយ ប៊ុនគីម was chosen to replace him at the School. This choice was more by default than anything else since many of the better students already had good jobs and were in demand in other areas of the government. Suzuki remained in Cambodia and when he died a few years later, his widow gave his paints, books and supplies to the Artist Association which I will describe below. Conversation with Pen Tra, June 2000 and Sam Kem Chang, November 1998 and June 2000.

[67] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, October 1998.

[68] Through these reforms, science and technical subjects were added and emphasized, while French history was largely removed and replaced with Cambodian history. French language began to be de-emphasized and a program of drawing was included. See the "Introduction" by Chau Seng, Minister of Education in Programme de l'Enseignement Secondaire Khmer. September 19, 1958 [NAC Box #187 (Documents of Cambodia)].



Figure 99

Visit of Chan Thong Roeun, "key person" and educator, to Wiona State College, USA 1963

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland
RG 286 CAM Photos

rather than to consider the ornamental system carved on its surface. In the 1959 primary education program manual, drawing was presented as a skill necessary to "develop precision in seeing and dexterity of the hands".[69] The object of observation was "never [however to] be drawn in advance on the blackboard like a model to be copied", the teaching manual emphasized. Rather the teacher should teach the child to "observe the object attentively in order to discern the real forms from the apparent forms: a table with four legs, from a certain angle, appears to have only three."[70] "Modern education" thus was set in direct contrast to Groslier's diagrams which had been, after all, "drawn in advance" and put at the front of the classroom as a "model to be copied".

"The Image of America" : Painting

In their analyses of general education in Cambodia during the early 1950s, US officials were surprised that "few attempts" had "ever been made within the public schools to stress the importance of Cambodian culture and art".[71] Art was therefore added to the list of ways in which US aid hoped to "broaden knowledge" in

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[69] Programme de l'Enseignement Primaire Ministry of Education, 1959 [NAC Box #189 (Documents of Cambodia)].

[70] Programme de l'Enseignement Primaire Ministry of Education, 1959 [NAC Box #189 (Documents of Cambodia)].

[71] US Embassy Despatch #311, March 20, 1956 (Visit of Mrs. Grace Morley, "art expert", January 26 - February 4, 1956) 851H3/3-2056 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959. All subsequent references to the Morley visit are to this file.

Cambodia.[72] One of the first visitors to Cambodia on the Educational Exchange Program, sponsored by the US, was the "art expert" Grace Morley. On January 30, 1956, she gave a lecture on "The Evolution of American Art" to Lycée Sisowath and Ecole Normale students.[73] The following week, Morley lectured to "fifty Cambodian notables" on "Modern Art: International Movements and the Significance of Cambodian Art for Contemporary Artists". Notably missing from her schedule of events was any prolonged contact with the School of Cambodian Arts. The Embassy concluded that "Mrs. Morley's visit can generally be termed a quite successful one" since it represented a "pioneering venture in the field of arts for this country" and had underscored the importance of art education.[74]

As relations deteriorated between the US and Cambodia, programs which had hoped to build on such exchanges had to be scrapped, and USIS activities came under increasing scrutiny by the Ministry of Information. In the climate of the early 1960s, "cultural activities" were "more warmly received than informational efforts", and the USIS program was "modified to accommodate itself to this fact".[75] It was perhaps for

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[72] US Embassy Despatch #311, March 20, 1956 (Visit of Mrs. Grace Morley, "art expert", January 26 - February 4, 1956) 851H3/3-2056 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[73] US Embassy Despatch #311, March 20, 1956 (Visit of Mrs. Grace Morley, art expert, January 26 - February 4, 1956) 851H3/3-2056 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[74] US Embassy Despatch #311, March 20, 1956 (Visit of Mrs. Grace Morley, "art expert", January 26 - February 4, 1956) 851H3/3-2056 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal Files 1955-1959.

[75] "Country Assessment Report, 1961", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64, Box 220. In the early 1960s, the USIS film production team not only produced an hour long documentary of the funeral of the King, but they also collaborated directly with the Queen to produce a full-length documentary on the Royal

this reason that, beginning in 1960, USIS sponsored an annual exhibition open to all Cambodian painters which is still remembered by artists in Phnom Penh today as a crucial forum for new work (figure 100).[76] Out of the assembled paintings, the twelve best works (chosen by USIS) were published in a calendar which was then widely distributed throughout Cambodia. While painters remember this exhibition as an "opportunity" for "modern painting" to be recognized and to receive public acclaim, USIS had a predictably different agenda. As a Country Assessment Report of the first exhibition in 1960 put it, the exhibition was meant to "graphically demonstrate American interest in Cambodian culture and art".[77] The publication of the calendar furthered this aim through its "very wide distribution" while attendance figures of 500-600 viewers a day "meant that 5000 to 6000 people saw it, something of a record in Cambodia".[78]

In subsequent years, the exhibition and competition "exceeded the post's fondest expectations".[79] In 1961, 157 paintings by 57 artists were shown, up from the

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Ballet. The Queen called this effort "the first completely disinterested film the US has produced in Cambodia". See "Country Assessment Report 1962", Field Message #8, January 29, 1963 in RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64, Box 220.

[76] Conversations with Tang Hor Yi, Sam Kem Chang, Pen Tra, Eng Menh Seng, Svay Ken, Tuong Sophan, Chan Lay Heng and Chet Chan, 1997-2000.

[77] "Country Assessment Report 1960", Field Message #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[78] "Country Assessment Report 1960", Field Message #16, January 28, 1961 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[79] "Country Assessment Report", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962.

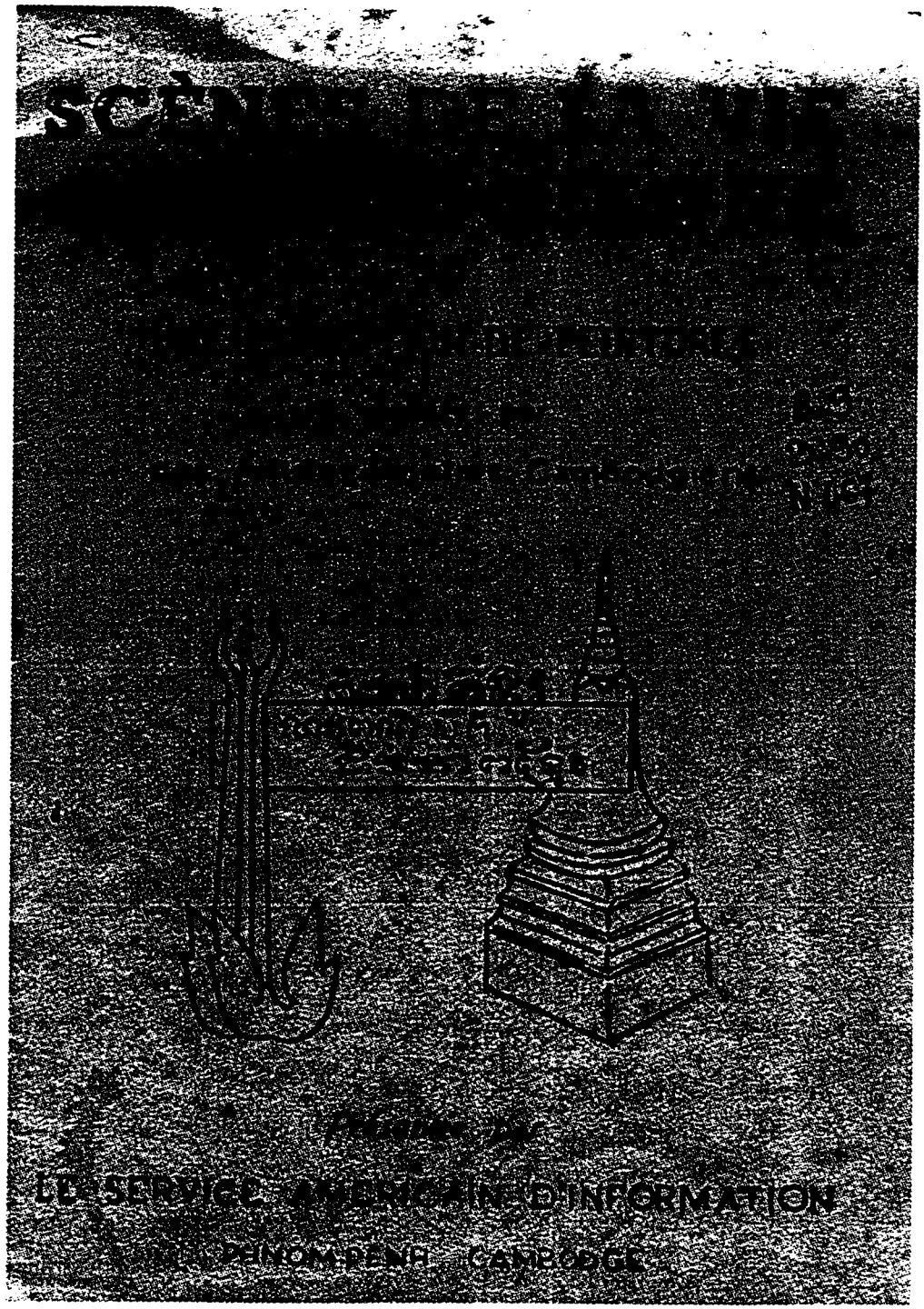

Figure 100

Cover of the 1960 USIS-sponsored painting exhibition at the American Library , Phnom Penh

NAC Box 215 (Documents of Cambodia)

preceding year's 41 paintings by 21 artists.[80] "Interest" had been created, "rave" notices in the local press had been garnered, and the event had put the US not only in the spotlight but for once in an extremely favorable spotlight, something that was not a common occurrence in the early 1960s in Cambodia.[81] The third and final USIS exhibition in 1962 attracted 210 paintings by 86 artists, "twice the number of the previous year's competition" (figure 101).[82] "Good publicity" was garnered "in the press and over the radio" and the USIS offices were particularly pleased that "Prince Sihanouk sent two of his close assistants to buy some of the pictures for his personal collection"; USIS also presented two of the prize-winning works to the prime minister as a token of American friendship.[83]

We can look at the titles of the work displayed with the benefit of hindsight. Today, as we will see in the last two Chapters, it is safe to say that the most often painted "view" in Cambodia is that of Angkor Vat (figure 102). In the way in which traditions become naturalised, the ubiquity of Angkor today, makes us think that it was always so. Thus we have seen that it is easy to imagine Groslier's students

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[80] "Country Assessment Report", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[81] 21,000 visitors attended the 1961 exhibition. See "Country Assessment Report", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962.

[82] "USIS Country Assesment Report 1962", Field Message #8, January 29, 1963 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.

[83] The 12 prize winning works became the property of USIS. It is not clear whether they bought them from the painters or not. See "USIS Cambodia Country Assesment Report 1962", Field Message #8, January 29, 1963 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64 Box 220.



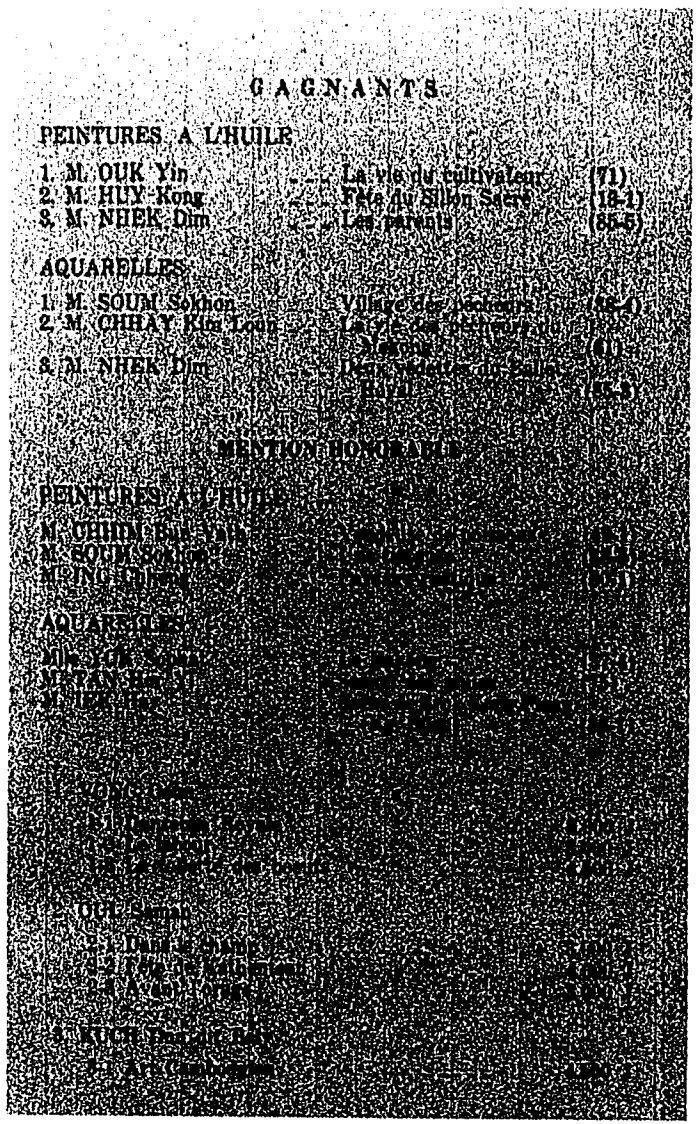

Figure 101

Cover and opening page of the 3rd and final USIS sponsored painting exhibition American Library Phnom Penh 1962

NAC #11122 (RSC)

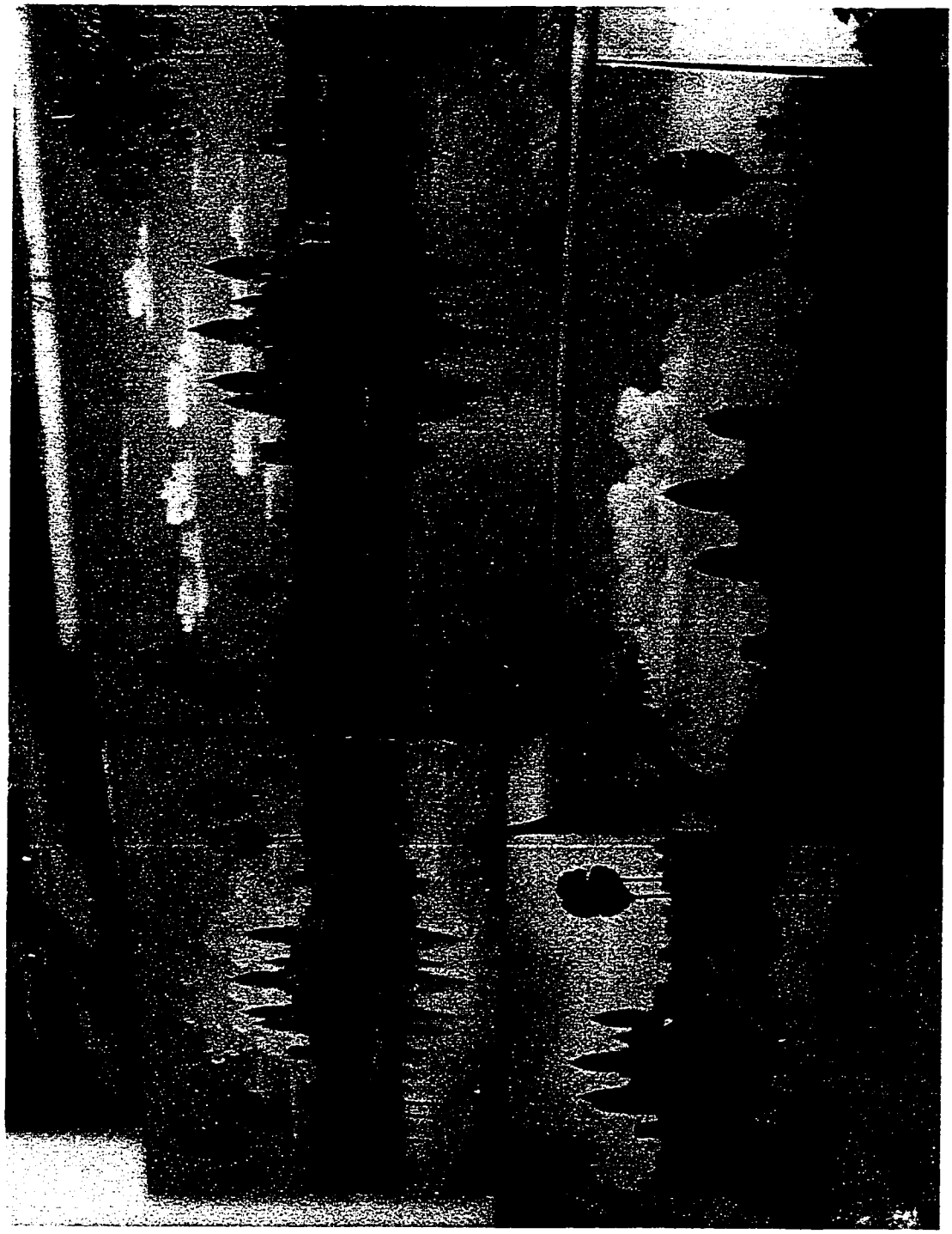

Figure 102
Angkor paintings in a painting store near the National Museum of Cambodia 1998

sketching from the monuments and making replicas of their view. After independence as well, when we read about Suzuki's method, we could imagine a sudden blossoming of such Angkor scenes. But a look at the catalogue for the last USIS exhibition of 1962 convinces us that this was not so. The prize winning entries were primarily landscapes. There were also portraits and scenes of traditional culture perhaps, but few of the repetitive monumental images of today (figure 102). Increasingly as the 1960s went on, an indigenous audience of middle and upper class urban Cambodians bought such "modern" paintings of the countryside and of traditional culture.[84] It is worth emphasizing then that through the mid-1960s, the monument as a subject seems to have had little relation to the history of visual production which I have traced here. We can however notice a foretaste of what was to come, since what was represented served a certain kind of nostalgia. The pictures listed did not portray the new although they used a new form of representation. The factories of the Sangkum, the televisions and cars of urban life, in fact the city as a whole is missing here. We can see then that the painters, who primarily lived in Phnom Penh, did not paint their immediate lives or surroundings but rather turned to archetypes of the countryside (the farmer, the fisher, the weaver) as well as to traditional acts (the ploughing ceremony, the ceremony at the vat, and traditional dance) in order to secure the "Cambodian" label for their "modern paintings".

[84] Conversations with Chet Chan and Houy Kong, brother-in-law of the late Nhek Dim, January 2001.

Nhek Dim and Sam Yuan

Nhek Dim and Sam Yuan were both students of Suzuki's who probably graduated from the School of Cambodian Arts in the mid-1950s. Today in Phnom Penh, Nhek Dim is remembered by many painters and even ordinary city inhabitants as the "most famous" Cambodian painter of the Sangkum. Indeed, we find him already listed among the winners of the USIS annual exhibition in 1962. Sam Yuan on the other hand, is remembered only by a few elderly painters who however vehemently insist that he was "a much better painter" than his more flamboyant counterpart.

One of the reasons that Nhek Dim is perhaps better remembered is that he became rich.[85] In the 1960s, Nhek Dim established his own gallery first near the "new Market", and then along the river on Quai Sisowath. There he showed only his own paintings and those of his brother, Nhek Doeun, and his brother-in-law, Houy Kong, making a considerable fortune and, by many accounts, fitting the role of the first "modern artist" in Phnom Penh.[86] Employed by USIS in the 1950s, Nhek Dim eventually was sent for training in the United States. His surviving family confirms that the oft-repeated story that Nhek Dim was sent to learn cartoons with "Walt

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[85] For the following section I rely on conversations with the late Sam Yang, Look Kru Saim, Pen Tra, Tang Hor Yi, Sam Kem Chang, Ouk Roeun, Ouk Dit, Kong Bunna, Houy Kong and Dy Proeung as well as many of the younger sign painters and Angkor painters found around the School and the Museum, 1997-2001. It is particularly the white Mustang convertible which Nhek Dim brought back from the US that is remembered today as a sign of his affluence. In one charming version of this story, Kong Bunna told me of how the horse emblem of the car was stolen in Phnom Penh; a visiting friend from the US brought a replacement for Nhek Dim.

[86] Conversations with Look Kru Saim, Tang Hor Yi, Pen Tra, Sam Kem Chang, and Houy Kong, 1997-2001. Nhek Dim also drew cartoons for newspapers throughout the 1960s.

Disney in Hollywood"(figure 103).[87] Nhek Dim returned from the US with a style that was considered even more modern than Suzuki's, although it is hard to decipher what this meant from the few remaining examples of his work (figure 104).[88] Asked to explain, painters point to his use of រចនាប័ទ្ម(brushstrokes) and colors, by which we can perhaps understand that his paintings became more and more painterly as he fitted more and more comfortably into his role of "modern artist". By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a market for Nhek Dim paintings, as well as the paintings of other young painters, had developed.[89] The "artist" as a role had been established as an idea and students at the School aspired to follow it. In retrospect, Nhek Dim is remembered for his fame, flamboyance, and wealth; the paintings he made were simply a means to this end.

To those who are retrospectively critical of him, Nhek Dim was a commercial phenomenon who thought more about what would sell than about what modern Cambodian painting should become. Thus, for example, many painters link the soft porn paintings so often found in Cambodia today to early examples supposedly first painted by Nhek Dim upon his return from the States. Certainly the faded copies of these advertising paintings, attributed by store painters to Nhek Dim, would speak to such a lineage (figures 105, 106). Others simply say that everything Nhek Dim

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[87] Conversation with Houy Kong, February 2001. Almost any painter associated with the School today will tell you a version of this story. I first heard it from a young archaeology student in the summer of 1995.

[88] See the upcoming catalogue and exhibition of Lors Chinda's Nhek Dim collection planned for May 2001 in Phnom Penh.

[89] I would like to thank Neil Manton who served at the Australian embassy during the late 1960s and early 1970s for sharing his memories of this time with me. He also went through the effort of trying to track down the work of Nhek Dim and Ouk Yin in Australia for me.

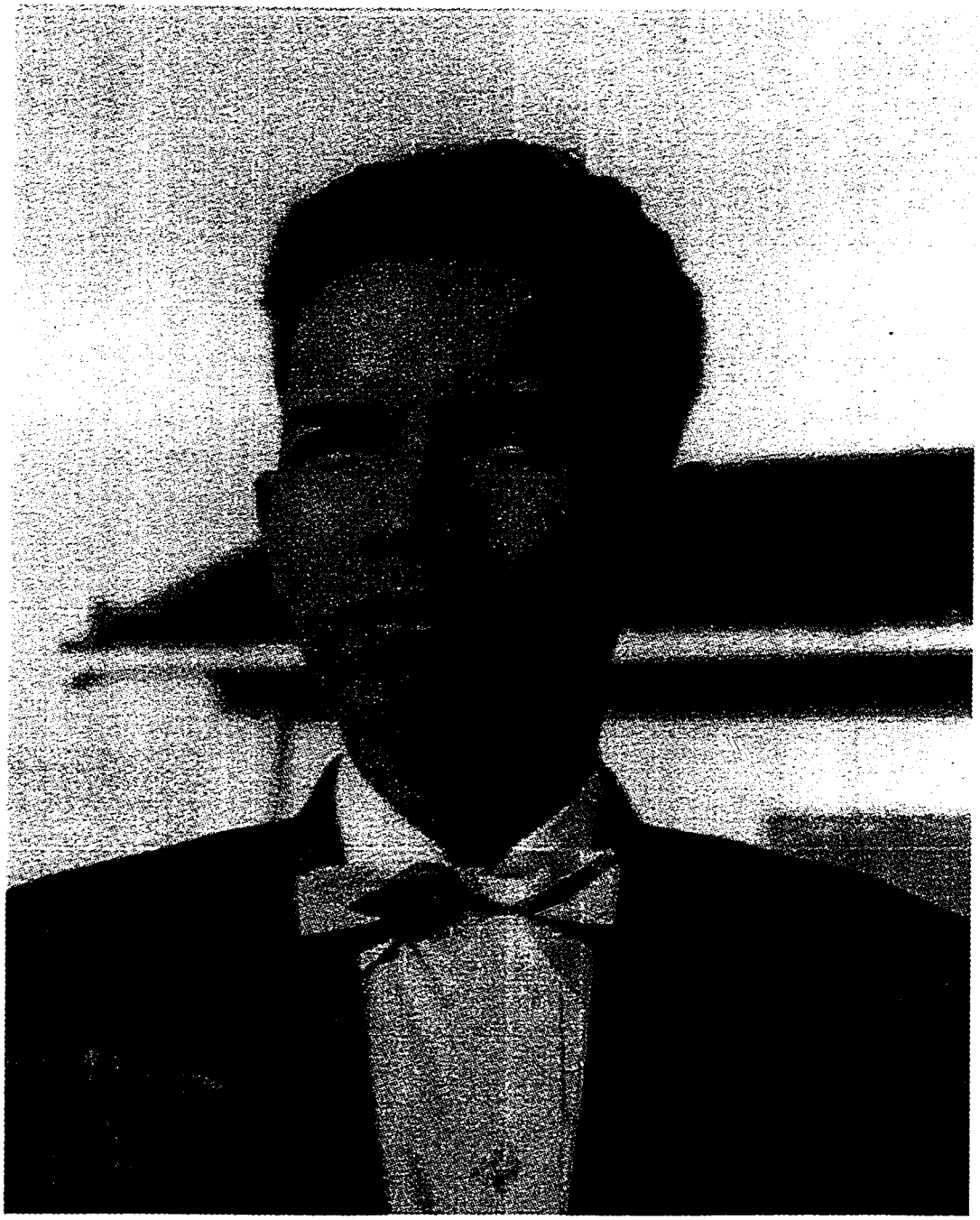

Figure 103

Nhek Dim
Photograph taken on the day he departed for a USIS training course in publishing held in the Philippines, 1957

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-57-250



Figure 104

Nhek Dim, "Landscape"

oil on canvas, approx. 3 feet wide, photograph courtesy of Asasax

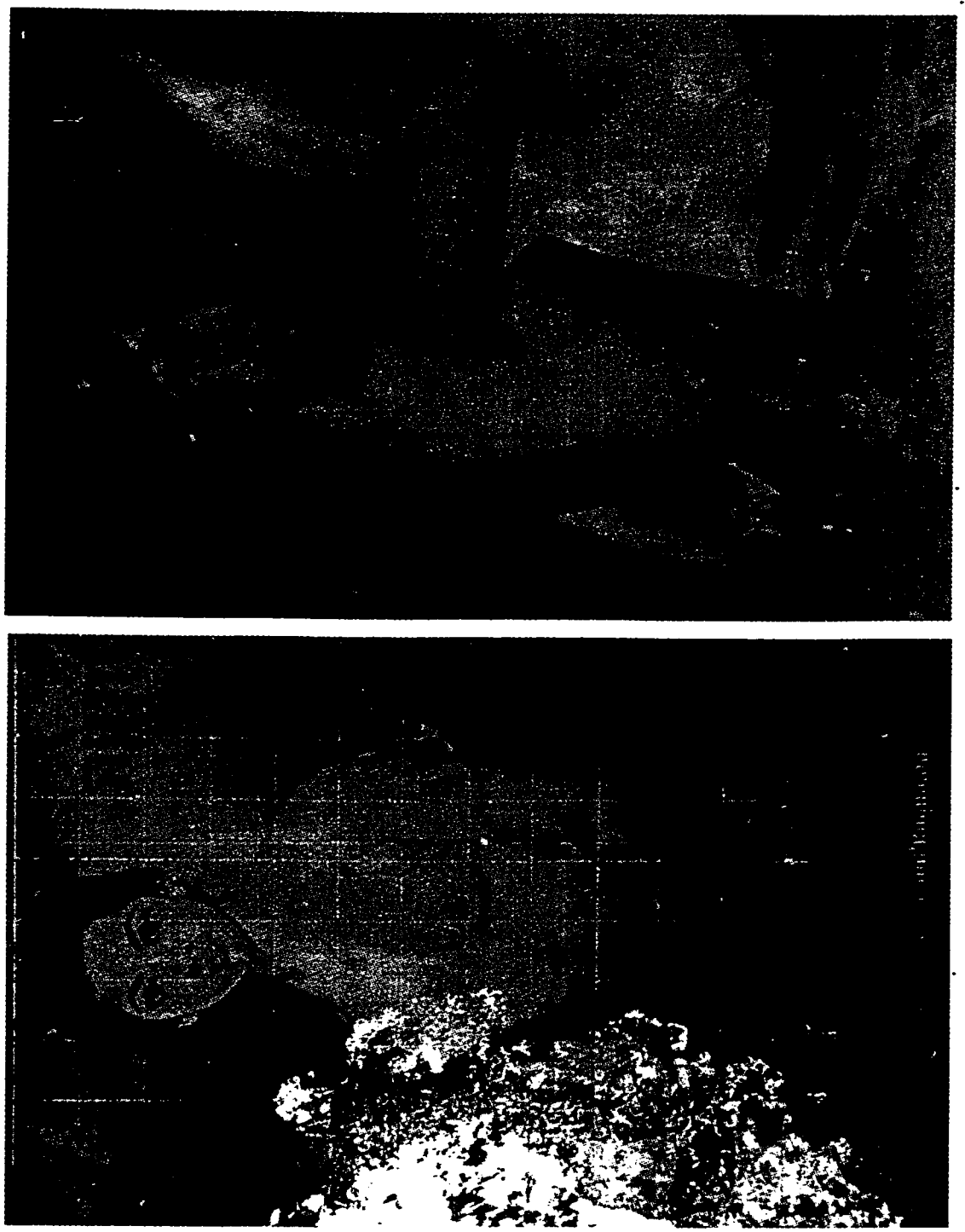

Figure 105
Advertising poster paintings attributed to Nhek Dim
Photographed in a "worker" painter's shop, 1998



Figure 106
A wall of paintings
Tourist painting
store across from
the National
Museum of
Cambodia
1999

painted was "pretty" (ស្អាត) which, depending on the tone of its usage, can mean a whole range of things from straightforwardly beautiful to nice in an insipid and negative sense. Nhek Dim did seem to chose subjects at a remove from everyday life. In painting the pretty, he came to focus on dancers, women, and idyllic landscapes; he mined the traditional and the past, showing it to people whose city lives no longer had those meanings.[90] His figures are described as "separate", each for themselves, posed for the viewer rather than interacting within a scene.[91]

A very different story is told of Sam Yuan (figure 107).[92] Sam Yuan grew up in the household of Sam Kem Chang, whose father was a traditional painter trained at Groslier's School in the 1920s. At a young age, Sam Yuan entered the School of Cambodian Arts which was very near to the family home.[93] After his initial training in the foundation drawing atelier, Sam Yuan was chosen to enter Suzuki's section. There he learned to paint and to speak fluent French, becoming one of Suzuki's

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[90] The Nhek Dim painting in Chamcar Mon (figure 79, Chapter 3) shows a landscape with an Angkorian temple. This would seem to contradict my claim that the monument did not haunt painting of the 1960s as it does today. Those painters who survive from the 1960s explain that the "modern painters" described here were concerned with making their own style and their own singular compositions. The temples were one subject among many and if they were painted, as they undoubtedly were, the paintings were one-time compositions rather than rote multiples directly copied from poster and postcard models. Conversations with Pen Tra, Sem Kem Chang, and Tang Hor Yi, 1997-2000.

[91] Conversation with Ouk Roeun, June, 2000.

[92] Here I would again like to thank Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang for sharing their memories of Sam Yuan with me. The following section relies on conversations with them 1997-2000.

[93] Sam Kem Cheng's father asked the School to take the boy as it was a good opportunity for a child without a stable family. When Sam Yuan entered the School, probably in 1952, there was still a mandatory period of drawing in the atelier established by Groslier.

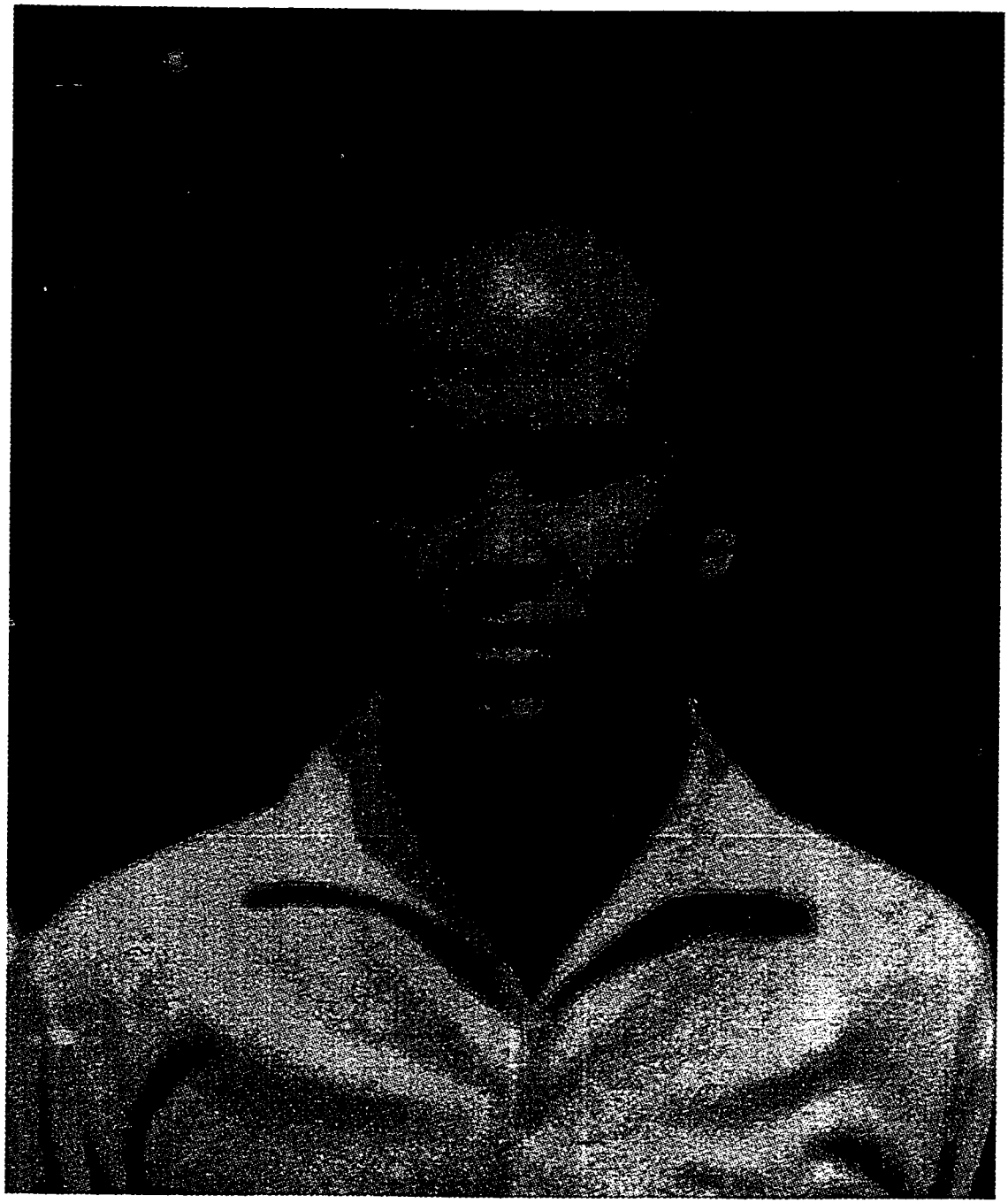

Figure 107

Sam Yuan in the early 1960s

Photograph courtesy of Chet Chan

favorite students.[94] It was with Suzuki's backing that Sam Yuan won a scholarship to continue his painting studies in France.[95] As Sam Kem Chang remembers it, Suzuki felt that Sam Yuan "wouldn't get lost" and would return to a "Khmer meaning" (ខ្លឹមសារខ្មែរ). As we have seen, Suzuki was not a nationalist so this interpretation probably came as much from Sam Yuan himself as from Suzuki. Indeed, when Sam Yuan returned, he frequently talked about national characteristics with his friends and fellow painters. He rejected the brushwork of Nhek Dim, explaining that the decorative line and flat colors of the *Reamker* painting in the Palace showed the essential forms which Khmer painting had to keep (figure 108).[96] The *Reamker* paintings, to Sam Yuan, spoke to a tradition of representing the truth, a form that was honest in its very presentation of visible outlines and clear colors. Nothing here was hidden, while in European painting things weren't clear and possibly lied.[97] Sam Kem Chang retrospectively understands that Sam Yuan was trying to make both national

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[94] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

[95] Sam Yuan studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts des Paris where he became a communist and was supposedly involved in demonstrations. As Sam Kem Chang remembers it, these actions angered then prime minister Sihanouk and caused Sam Yuan's scholarship to be revoked. Sam Yuan therefore returned to Cambodia after a year or two of uncompleted studies. A position was waiting for him (through the influence of the old teacher Sar who was neighbors with Sam Kem Cheng's father) to design bank notes for the National Bank.

[96] Sam Kem Chang remembers being "surprised" by Sam Yuan's paintings upon his return from France. Sam Kem Chang had expected "the modern" as defined by the brushstrokes and the color of Nyek Dim. Instead, Sam Yuan's paintings imposed order and fields of color, insisting upon a linear architecture which held the surface. Those who remember Sam Yuan repeatedly compare him to Gauguin in this sense, thus keeping him "modern" but distinguishing him from the mark of the brush.

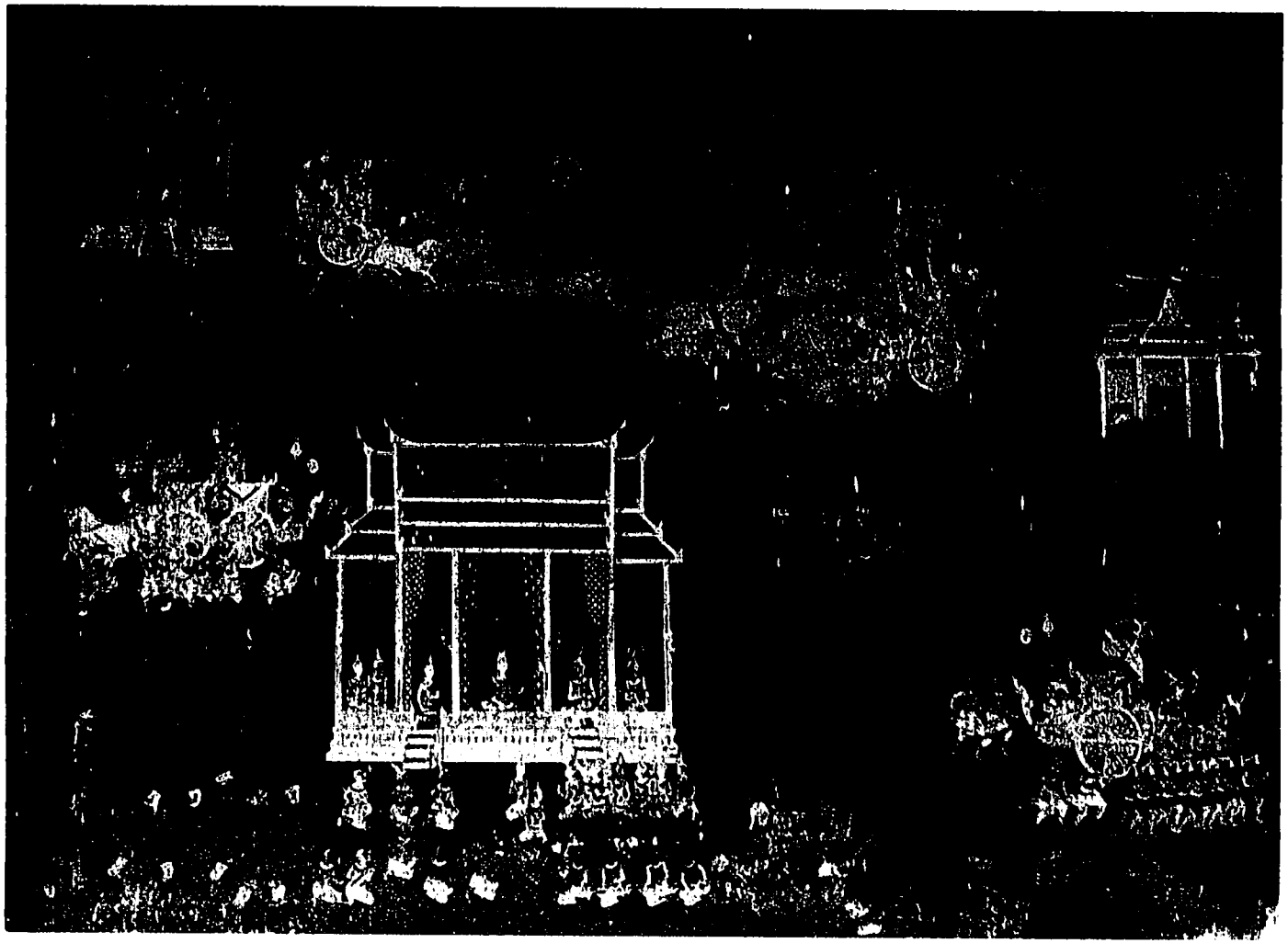

Figure 108

Scene from the *Reamker* Royal Palace Phnom Penh (painted by Tep Nimit Mak and his students, 1903-4)

painting and a painting that was true. It was for this reason that Sam Yuan increasingly took as his subjects the poor and the disenfranchised, thereby showing what was left out of the image of the Sangkum. At an exhibition in Paris in 1960, Nhek Dim was awarded medals for his paintings of landscapes and temples, while Sam Yuan on the other hand, won a medal for a painting entitled "Manual labor".[98] Whereas Nhek Dim's figures are remembered as isolated from one another as presentations for the viewer, Sam Yuan's figures interacted with each other within a scene, speaking to a kind of community of village life which offered hope.[99]

Another aspect of Sam Yuan's practice spoke to this community as well. Whereas Nhek Dim remained resolutely individual, using his gallery only to show and sell his own work and that of his family, Sam Yuan, Pen Tra, Sam Kem Chang and a group of other artists founded the "Association of Khmer Artists" (សហគមន៍សិល្បៈវិចិត្រករខ្មែរ).[100]

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[97] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, May, 1999. He explained it as ត្រង់ពិតប្រាកដ. Dy Proeung remembers that គ្រូអៀង , the teacher of traditional drawing, also came to feel that Suzuki's paintings were not clear or detailed enough; they lied, the teacher said.

[98] "Painters Recognized" in Cambodian Commentary (June 1960 #9), a magazine published by the Ministry of Information beginning in 1959.

[99] Conversation with Ouk Roeun, May 2000. The reader will of course want to see the paintings of Sam Yuan. The only problem is, there aren't any that I know of, at least not in Cambodia. There are two woodcut prints by Sam Yuan that hang in the private painting museum of the Royal Palace. They show landscapes with peasants at work, long sweeping views of nature and labor knit together.

[100] It is difficult to translate this name because of the ambivalence in one of its terms. សហគមន៍ means "community" or "association" សិល្បៈ means "art". But វិចិត្រករ is a "modern" term coined to describe the kind of painting which Suzuki introduced to Cambodia. It can also however mean more generally "artist" or the "maker of beautiful things. The actual association did not limit its membership to painters or to those who pursued "modern painting". In fact, the Association was busy collecting documents on the traditional arts when it broke apart following Sam Yuan's flight. In keeping with the broad intentions of this community of

This Association of Khmer Artists seemingly took over what had been proposed by the American Library and USIS (although they would not necessarily have welcomed such a comparison). They mounted annual exhibits, established a collection of books and documents, and provided a forum for discussion and comradeship (figure 109). Techniques such as wood cutting, print making, and more traditionally Khmer techniques such as mask-making and lacquer mold-making, were to be shared among all the members.[101] A review of one of their exhibitions in 1968 noted that "many works and styles" were displayed together, although future plans of the Association called for smaller group shows and one-person shows as well.[102] Indeed, Pen Tra remembers the 1960s as a period when "modern painters" at least began to try to forge individual styles out of their experiences of Suzuki's teaching. The point was to develop a signature, a style that was "modern", "Khmer", and "individual". This project, tragically, did not get very far. It was a time of លាបមុខគ្នា (painting one another's faces), that wonderful Khmer expression for the process by which one is labeled first a communist, then a subversive, and finally a danger to the State. By the late 1960s, through his association with a League of Students with foreign educations (a League which included those who later were to become some of the most notorious

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artists, I translate the title of their group as the Association of Khmer Artists. Conversations with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, 1997-2000.

[101] Pen Tra remembers Sam Yuan returning from France and urging Cambodian artists to work together. He repeatedly pushed for exchanges of information among the often fractured artistic community. In one story, Sam Yuan became so angry at Keth Roeun (the lacquer professor at the School) for not sharing his recipes for curing the raw resin used to make ornamental details on Khmer masks that he threatened to go and learn the process in Siem Reap if Keth Roeun wouldn't tell him. Conversation with Pen Tra and Sam Kem Chang, October 1998.

[102] Réalites cambodgiennes, July 26, 1968

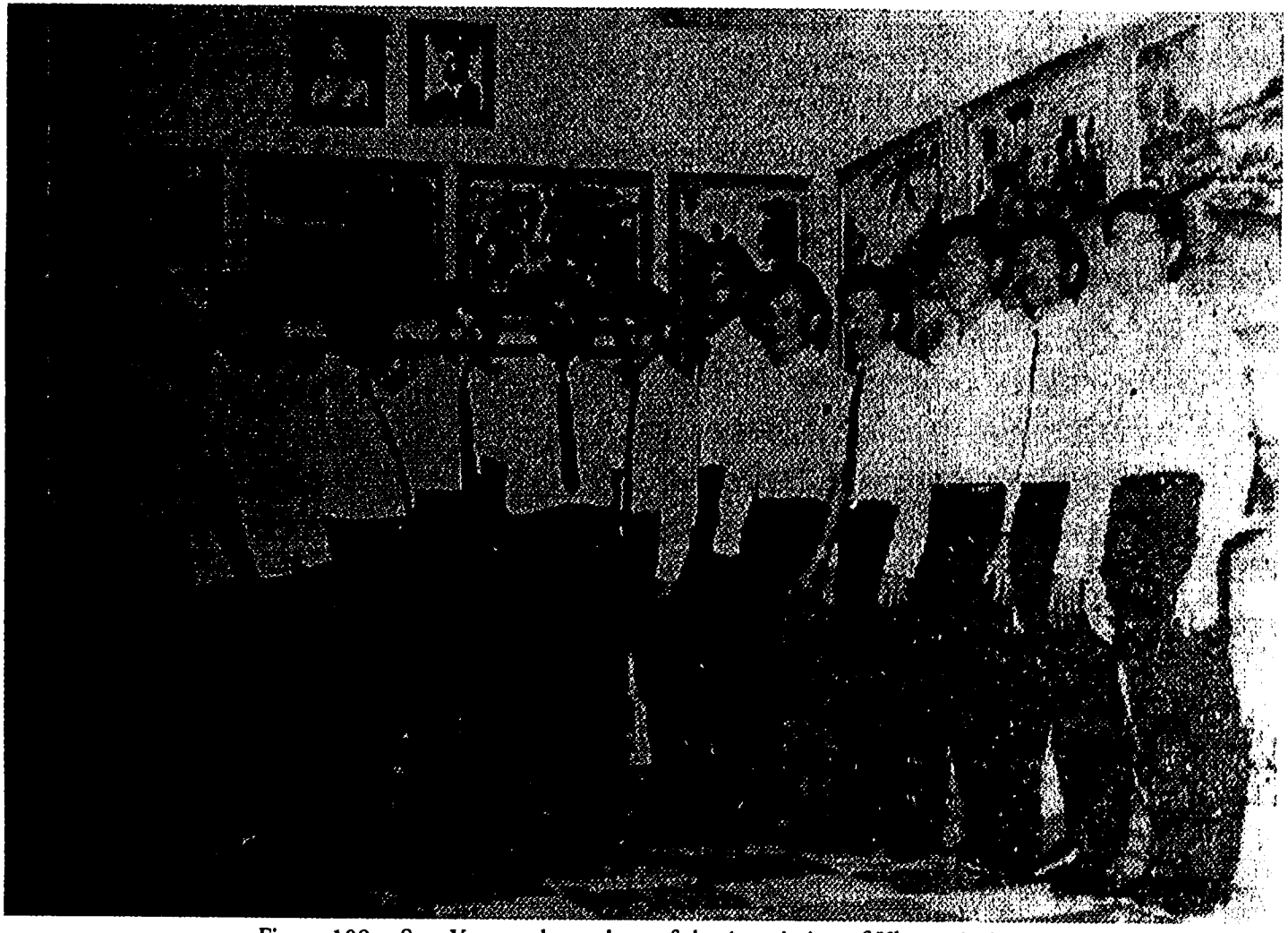

Figure 109 : Sam Yuan and members of the Association of Khmer Artists

Réalites cambodgiennes, July 26, 1968

Khmer Rouge), Sam Yuan feared for his safety and fled Phnom Penh for the Khmer Rouge camps in the jungle.[103] He died from illness in the jungles shortly thereafter.

The Royal University of Fine Arts

Groslier's School of Cambodian Arts was transformed into the Royal University of Fine Arts in 1965.[104] Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Sangkum had established a series of higher education institutions which would make up for the lack of educational opportunities already noted in the newspaper editorials of 1945, cited at the beginning of the Chapter.[105] In practical terms, the founding of these institutions allowed many more Cambodians to benefit from higher education, since the funds which had previously allowed a few to study for degrees in France would now, the argument ran, let many study at home. There were other less openly stated

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[103] The សមាគមន៏សិស្សចាស់ was an association of students who had studied abroad, mainly in France. This group was notorious by the late 1960s for its Khmer Rouge members. Because the Artists Association sometimes used the building of this group for meetings and exhibitions, the artists of the Association became suspect as well. For the less benign aspects of Sihanouk's Sangkum, see Chandler's, The Tragedy of Cambodian History, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

[104] The School of Cambodian Arts became the Department of Plastic Arts (an awkward but official translation from the French). Four other departments of archaeology, architecture, music, and dance were found at the new University. The University provided the first training ever for Cambodian students in archaeology and temple restoration; despite the French fascination with Angkor, they had never instituted a program for training Khmer specialists in restoration, preferring instead to use Cambodians as laborers while leaving intellectual and engineering work to French nationals.

[105] Higher education institutions founded in the 1950s alone included: Institut National d'Etudes Juridiques, Politiques et Economiques (1953), Ecole Royale de Médicine (1953), Ecole Royale d'administration (1956), Institut National Pédagogique (1958), Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines (1959), Faculté des Sciences et de la Technique (1959), and Ecole Nationale de Commerce (1959). See L'Enseignement Supérieur et le Developpement, the published proceedings of a conference held in Phnom Penh, December 27-31, 1971 for more information (NMC library).

political reasons since many of the students who had been sent to France (and elsewhere) to study returned as Communists opposed to Sihanouk's rule. The founding edict for the University of Fine Arts added another political distinction: "the teaching of art has been practiced since the era of the French Protectorate but in an incomplete manner and at a low level."[106] At the new University, a firm grounding in "classical" Khmer art was to be combined with the study of "modern" techniques and advances. Through such a curriculum, students would create "modern Cambodian art" and graduates would become "artists".[107]

The early introduction of "modern painting" into the curriculum by Suzuki was soon followed by other changes. When Sang Sen Taing returned from Paris, probably in 1958, a section known as គំនូរផ្សាយ (advertising painting) was established.[108] A student at the Lycée Sisowath before going to study architecture and interior design in

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[106] Kram #226-CE January 18, 1965 quoted in Livret de l'Etudiant de l'Université des Beaux Arts Phnom Penh: Ministry of National Education and Culture, 1972 (NMC library).

[107] See Vann Molyvann's "New Life infused into the arts in Cambodia", Kambuja, #2, May 15, 1965. Thong Sophan (a graduate in bronze casting who became a teacher at the School in 1964) remembers that teachers and students were happy with the change to a University even though it meant that the visual arts had less space within Groslier's complex of buildings. Teachers received higher salaries and had a higher social standing in their new found roles as University professors. Where previously students had graduated with "worker" diplomas (ជាង), after 1965 they graduated with degrees equivalent to any other University degree (although there is some debate as to whether this change in diploma was granted willingly or whether it only was granted as a result of student demonstrations).

[108] The following section relies on conversations with Chan Lay Heng, May, 2000. Chan was in the first graduating class of this new atelier. When he entered the School in 1955 he still studied traditional painting for a mandatory period of 6 months. He then entered the section of "plans" taught by Kong Sar, the traditional painting teacher, for several years. In this section, temples and vats for several years while "modern" architecture and contemporary family homes were only considered in the last year. All this changed when សង់ សុន ថង់ Sang Sen Taing replaced Kong Sar. There is some disagreement over Sang Sen Taing's name; some insist that he was Tai Sin Taing.

Paris, Sang Sen Taing had never studied at the School of Cambodian Arts. The fundamentals which he introduced in his section of teaching were what his former student Chan Lay Heng describes as "modern subjects" (perspective, observational drawing, quick sketching with charcoal). His students studied exclusively French examples of design and architecture although Sang Sen Taing urged them to keep "national characteristics but be modern". Students, according to Chan Lay Heng, interpreted this to mean that they should take Khmer subjects - visual themes such as the ornaments, apsaras, or temples - and paint them in "a modern style".[109]

Indeed, this interpretation of the linkage of "modern" and "Cambodian" seems to have infused the School with the view of Angkor. Publicity photographs for the new University, taken in 1965, show students sketching from that quintessential sign of the glorious Angkorian past, the head of Jayavarman VII (figure 110). In a curious conflation of the diagrams of Khmer ornament and the tradition of Suzuki, students began to sketch from the Museum collection and to draw from the remnants of "Khmer culture" (figure 111). If we agree with Groslier that there was perhaps a different logic to the formation of such figures, then to sketch them as objects in space is to turn them into a view, a paradoxical mix of two systems of representation. In making "modern Cambodian art", the marker for the qualifying adjective "Cambodian" would be the ancient subject (for example the head of Jayavarman VII) but it would be rendered in a new and "modern" way (say, representational drawing). The section which Sang Sen Taing established, គំនូរផ្សាយ seems to have encompassed

[109] Conversation with Chan Lay Heng, May 2000. Sang Sen Taing was killed in an automobile accident around 1964. His own work included the interior and exterior design of the National Bank and the interior of the National Theater and Chatomuk complex.

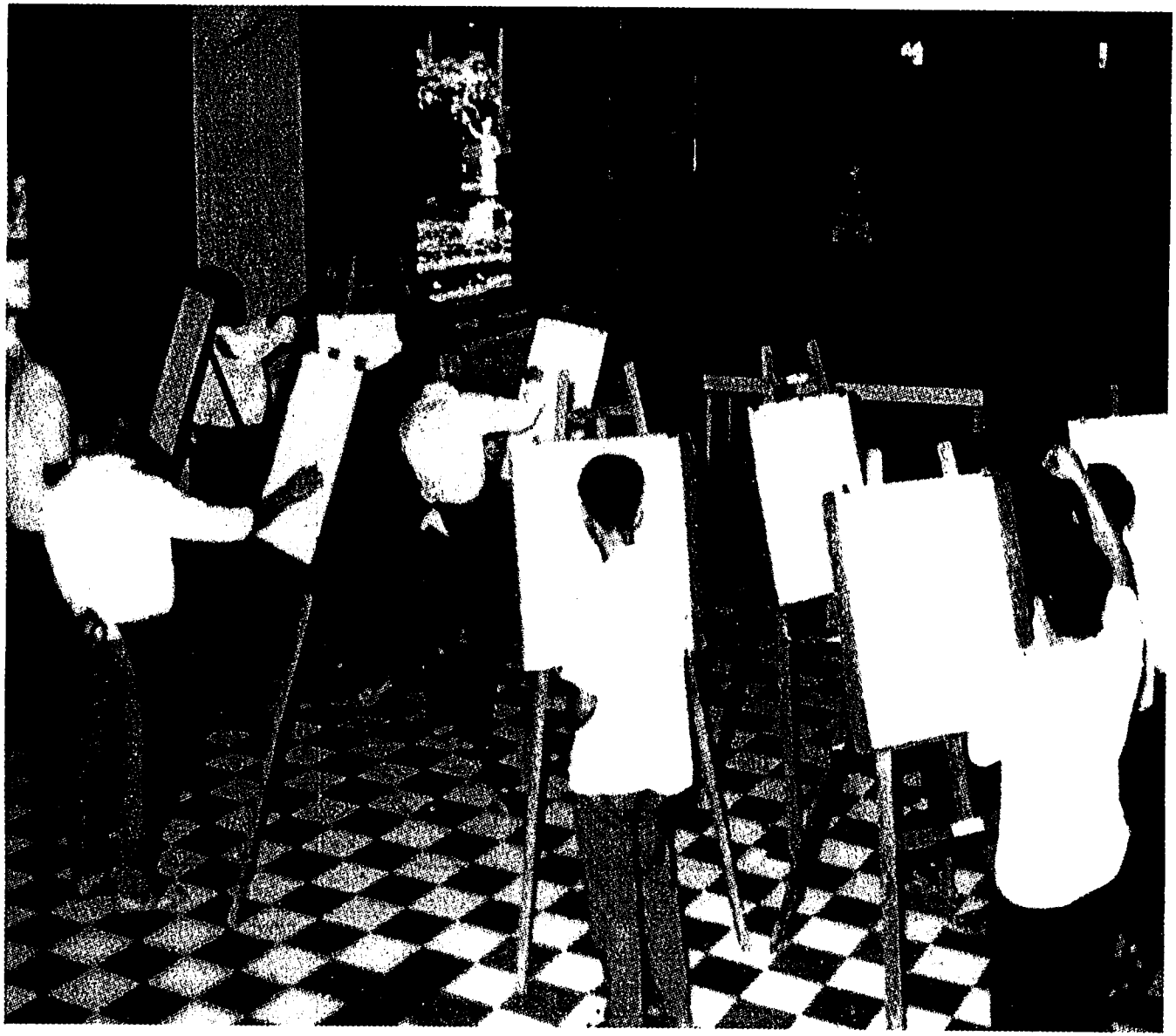

Figure 110

Publicity photographs for the newly opened Royal University of Fine Arts
A drawing class at the Department of Plastic Arts. The model is a copy of the sculpture of the head of Jayavarman VII

RUFA Photography Collection

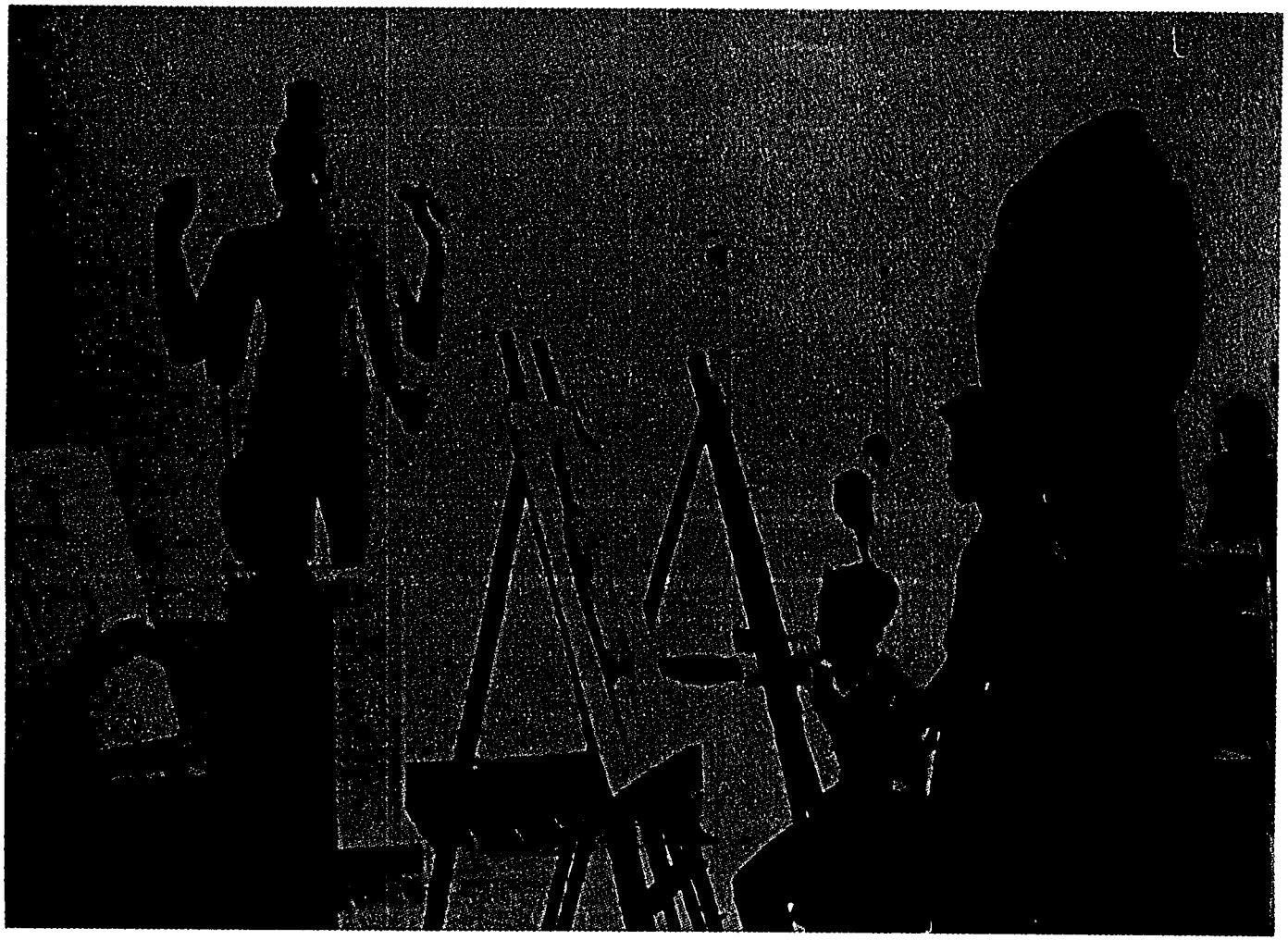

Figure 111

Publicity shots for the newly opened Royal University of Fine Arts; Students from the Department of Plastic Arts drawing from sculptures in the National Museum of Cambodia

RUFA Photography Collection (uncatalogued)

the wide range of subjects which he was introduced to in France: graphic design, interior design, poster design, set design for film and theater, and fabric design are all remembered as topics of study by his students (figure 112). His section became the second most popular specialisation in the School after "modern painting"; it was popular both for its "newness" and because more international companies were coming to Phnom Penh so that design and advertising work became available.

Similar modernising impulses occurred in the sculpture section of the School. Former students and teachers in the sculpture section remember two Russians who came to teach representational sculpture at the School in the 1960s.[110] The Russians had been invited to teach because "we only had classical styles" and they could teach anatomy and representation from life.[111] This Russian "research in volume" was part of a Soviet technical cooperation program with aims similar to the USIS programs sketched in Chapter 3.[112] The "plastic research" sponsored by the Russians produced sculptures which look very much like academic studies based on observation (figure 113). We can see therefore that "modern Khmer sculpture" defined itself through the same system of representation as "modern Khmer painting", distinguishing itself from what had come before by breaking with a canon of rules and turning to the rendering of the visible.

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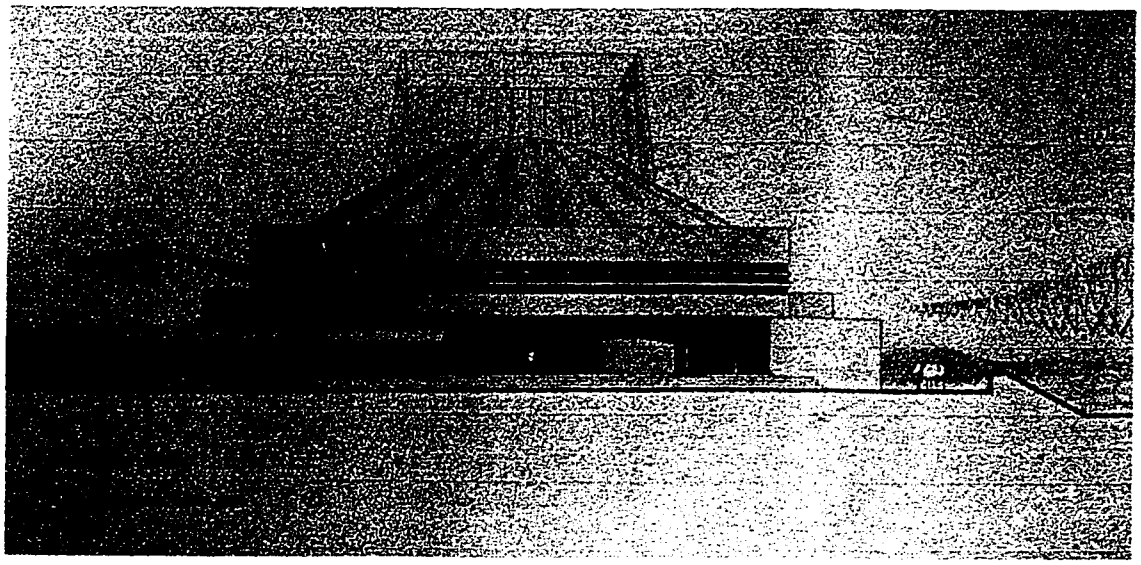
[110] Unfortunately, their names have been half forgotten and are recounted in Khmer as something close to Ropopov and Givi. Conversations with Srieng Y, Look Kru Saim, and Thong Sophan 1997-2000.

[111] Conversation with Look Kru Saim, June, 2000.

[112] "La Renaissance de la Sculpture Khmère" in Kambuja, January 1970.



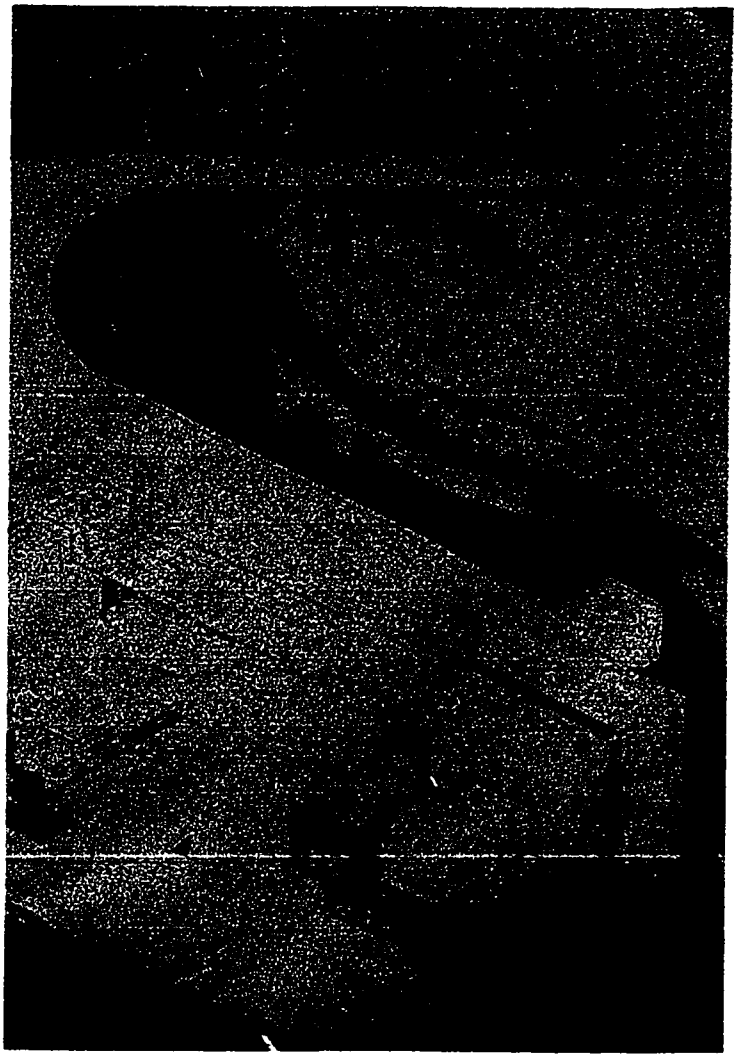


Figure 112

Chan Lay Heng
Graduation piece

Design for a resort completed for the degree in the section of "publicity painting"

Royal University of Fine Arts
1962-3





Figure 113

Russians teaching at the Royal University of Fine Arts (above)

Student work from the representational sculpture class (left and below)

Kambuja January 1970



There was another "modern" inflection to the School as it was transformed into a University. In addition to producing "artists", the future of many of its graduates was seen not to lie in the production of multiple hand-made traditional objects but rather in an engagement with the new industries developing during the Sangkum. Man Mkot had been educated at the Ecole Normale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, and he returned to head the Department of Plastic Arts in the late 1960s.[113] As head of the department, he emphasized modern applications which could provide his students with employment after graduation while helping to develop aesthetically superior industrial products for Cambodia. A fabric design program built relationships with the state textile factories and student critiques and project presentations were often attended by industry representatives. A newly established ceramics department was linked to the State ceramics factory in Ta Khmao, thus proposing both industrial and art definitions of ceramics to its students. For those aspiring to become ceramic "artists", examples of contemporary Japanese and Western ceramic ware were provided, while almost no attention paid to the ceramics of Angkor.[114] In this increased engagement with industry, the role of the graduate of Groslier's School had shifted dramatically. No longer would the graduate be a producer within a system of hand-made mass production. Rather, graduates of the

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[113] I would like to thank Ouk Dit, a former teacher of fabric design and Man Mkot's widow, for sharing her memories of this time with me.

[114] Conversations with Som Samnang (a graduate of the first ceramics class at the School), Kang Proeung (head of the ceramics atelier today and a former student of the atelier in the 1970s) and the late Chhun Pok (head of the atelier of ceramics until his untimely death in 1998, Chhun Pok single handedly rebuilt the atelier to its present state) 1997 - 2000. The reverse is true of the present day Ceramics section where all the models are Angkorian. See my article with Ly Daravuth, "The Ceramics Section of the Faculty of Plastic Arts, Royal University of Fine Arts" in Udaya #1, 2000.

Royal University of Fine Arts would provide the ideas, designs, and plans for machine made objects, thus helping to establish a truly national industry. In service of this project, elements of traditional Khmer culture were put to use on the surfaces of newly manufactured objects in order to mark and distinguish them as unique among all the other competing products of the world market.

By the early 1970s, plans called for the University of Fine Arts to relocate to a new and modern campus, thus allowing the Museum to expand and fill the old colonial complex (figure 114).[115] A similar turn to the future is found in the rhetoric of a 1972 pamphlet which summarizes the curriculum of visual arts training. The "principal mission of the Department of Plastic Arts is to raise the level of teaching in the Plastic Arts and to adapt [the Arts] to the evolution of new techniques and to the needs of our modern society".[116] At the Department of Plastic Arts, the lowest course of study, the Diploma of art (2 years), still trained "artisans of arts" in "traditional drawing, modeling, sculpture, ceramics, weaving, lacquer, foundry, and jewelery". In this lowest level, we recognize Groslier's School of Cambodian Arts. The second level of study (a three year course for the Baccalaureate of Arts) would train "technicians of arts, heads of atelier and masters of drawing destined for general secondary school teaching". Here the curriculum had already shifted to representational drawing and modern subjects (anatomy, perspective) which would produce "masters" of a very different type than those envisioned by Groslier. The highest level of study (a four

[115] See the uncatalogued "Correspondance folder" of the NMC library: February 8, 1967 letter from Chea Thay Seng, Conservator of the NMC to the Secretary of State for National Education and Fine Arts, and the February 9, 1967 letter from Yim Venn, Director of Arts to Chea Thay Seng.

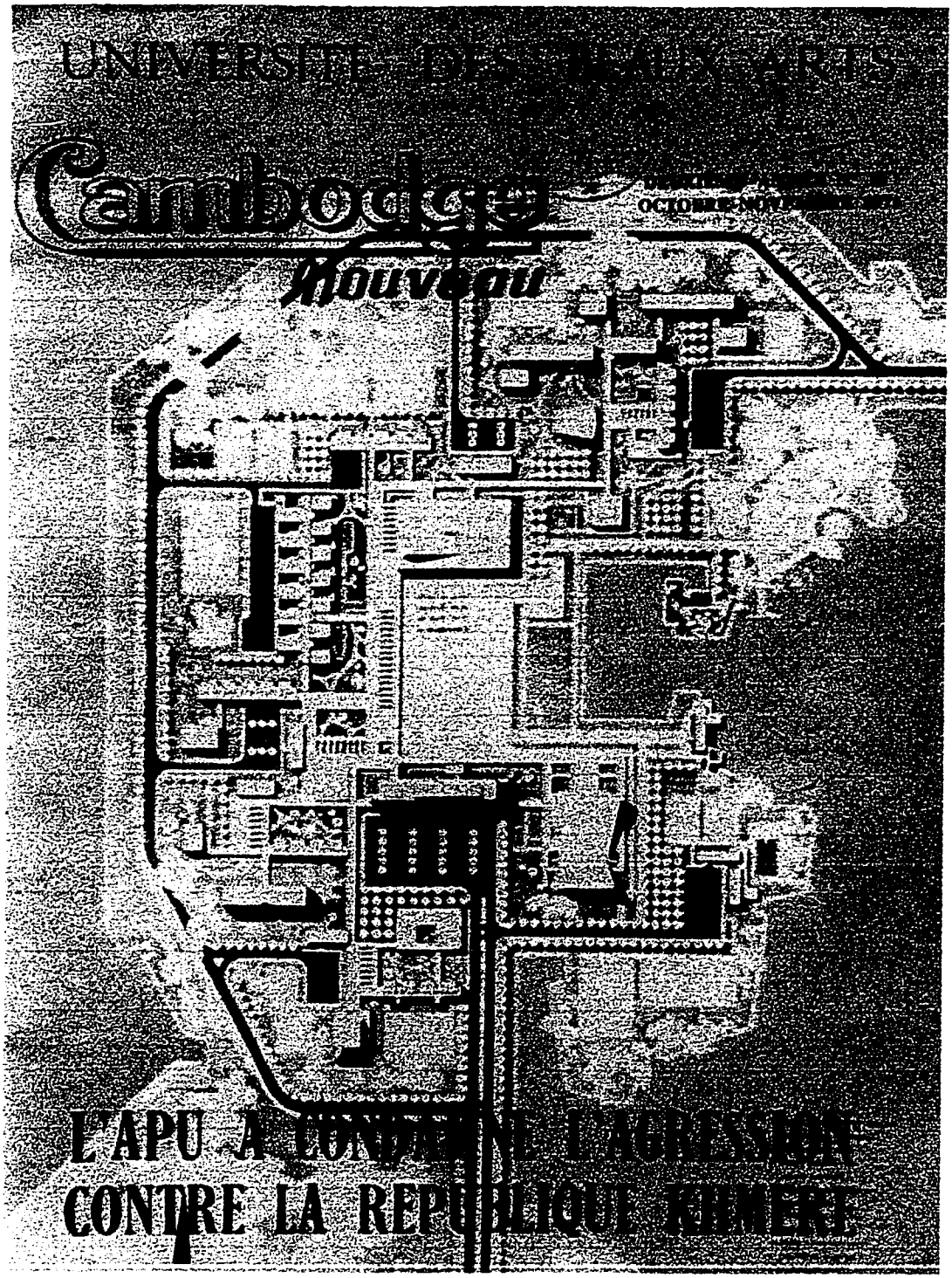

Figure 114

Plan for a new campus for the University of Fine Arts

Cover, Cambodge nouveau October-November 1971

year course for the equivalent of a B.F.A) offered only "decoration (design), painting, and sculpture". All the object making ateliers previously set at the heart of the Cambodian Arts (mask- making, bronze-casting, jewelery, weaving) had thus fallen to the lowest levels of art education, while the highest forms of training would now produce "modern" painters, sculptors and "designers". The University had thus divested itself, in large part, of Groslier's heritage. The production of the "Cambodian Arts" outside of the School walls however, took on a life of its own, accelerating far beyond the regulations of taste by which Groslier had once tried to shape all forms of visual production in Cambodia.

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[116] Livret de l'Etudiant de l'Universitè des Beaux Arts Phnom Penh: Ministry of National Education and Culture, 1972 (NMC library).

Chapter Five: The Independence of Tradition

What then happened to the "Cambodian arts", that system of hand producing multiples of tradition which Groslier had installed? As we have seen, teaching at the training site for the workforce (the School) gradually shifted towards forms of representation considered "modern". These forms rejected the multiple and the copy in favor of the immediate and the seen / scene. A notion of the "artist" was also promoted in which a unique vision would create individual works rather than identical objects in series, based on given plans. Still, the Corporations lingered into the period of independence, although their pre-WWII network of sales was seemingly never reconstituted.[1] Their system of oversight unraveled and the model objects produced were no longer inspected with the same rigor; increasingly, artisans of traditional products dealt directly with independent stores that had become established around the National Museum of Cambodia.[2] Still, the sales office of the School, which at some point during the 1950s was moved to the School premises and thus out of the Museum, remained a place where those associated with the School (both teachers and increasingly students) could offer their work for sale.[3] Work

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[1] Conversations with Som Samai, Srieng Y, Look Kru Saim, Chet Chan, An Sok and Thong Sophan, 1997-2000. See also the "Statut de la Cooperative des Artisans Khmers" (June 11, 1952) NAC Box 109 (Documents of Cambodia), and the Report of 1973 by the UNDP (Mission Exploratoire, Project #KMR/72/020, Khmer Republic) in NAC, Box 182 (Documents of Cambodia). In 1973, state-organised artisanal guilds of various kinds had 1461 members according to this report, while the Corporations had only 45 members, presumably those still associated with the School.

[2] See the individual interviews with artisans in the Report of 1973 by the UNDP (Mission Exploratoire, Project #KMR/72/020 (Khmer Republic) in NAC, Box 182 (Documents of Cambodia).

[3] Conversations with Som Samai, Chan Lay Heng, Look Kru Saim, Srieng Y, Chet Chan and Thong Sophan 1997-2000.

displayed at the សាជីវកម្ម: (the name for the Corporations sales office in the 1950s) was increasingly exhibited on a consignment basis, and "modern paintings" were displayed alongside objects based on Groslier's models. In 1958, a separate government-sponsored guild for silver makers further splintered the coherence of the Corporations system (figure 115).[4]

Officially, Sihanouk's Sangkum kept many of the aims which Groslier had first espoused for the traditional arts. "For the Cambodian," a 1965 article in Kambuja tells us, "their craft fills an aesthetic need".[5] Objects "fashioned carefully, following their tradition" were individually made by hand. Such an "outlook on things" was the opposite of "mass production", although intensive hand-production would and should "permit the manufacture of easily exportable goods".[6] "Khmer crafts" were to "achieve a position in the world market" through "the Sangkum Exhibitions, as well as the specialised sections attached to Embassies, Consuls, Airports and Tourist Agencies".[7] As with Groslier's products then, hand-made objects embodying an independent "Cambodia" were to be manufactured and marketed to foreigners.

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[4] Members of the សិល្បៈសហការណ៍ខ្មែរ received silver from the State and were paid monthly salaries for producing certain amounts of work following given models. This guild provided secure employment for a generation of silversmiths during the 1960s based on a range of models which included those developed by Groslier's School as well as those developed through new client commissions in the post-independence period. Conversation with Som Samai, January 1988.

[5] "Khmer Handicraft" Kambuja, #5 August 15, 1965.

[6] Webster's Dictionary defines manufactured as : "the process of making wares by hand or by machinery, especially when carried on systematically with division of labor... to produce according to an organised plan".

[7] "Khmer Handicraft" Kambuja, #5 August 15, 1965.



Figure 115

Som Samai in front of the sales outlet of the Silver Cooperative, December 23, 1958

Photograph courtesy of Som Samai

A certain tension however increasingly pervaded the promotion of the hand-made as a sign for Cambodia. In 1957, the National Exhibit of Industrial, Agricultural, and Handicraft Products opened in Phnom Penh.[8] Artisans from the provinces were brought to Phnom Penh to "show their hand work", making objects on site for city viewers and foreign visitors to see. Although the exhibition, at first glance, would seem to fit into the trajectory of Groslier's School and the Protectorate exhibitions, the industrial products listed first in the Exhibition's title were no longer exclusively foreign. The products of Cambodia had come to include not only weaving and silver work, rice and fish, but also samples of Cambodian machine-made goods like tiles (figure 116). Increasingly, the Sangkum promoted an identity of a "developing" Cambodia in which machine production and industrialisation were the signs for the modern (figure 117). Publicity shots taken for Kambuja in the 1960s proudly show the weaving of a traditionally patterned silk fabric in a factory, a scene which would have elicited Groslier's rage but which, in the context of the Sangkum, is celebrated as one step in the development of a modern Cambodia (figure 118).[9]

Ambassadors and country representatives attending the 1957 National Exhibition were said to be "very interested in the kind and quality of products exhibited here".[10] Despite this rosy public assessment, US Embassy despatches were considerably less

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[8] ដំណើរទៅកាន់សេចក្តីចំរើន in លោកសៅ Free World, volume 7, #4.

[9] We can see here a resonance with the local reaction to Say's silver stamping machine described at the end of Chapter Two. To the "young Cambodians", Nagaravatta explained, Say's machine, "furnished... proof that Khmers are capable also of making industrial machines, of setting up ateliers, and even of making products like European industry". The machine thus was an example of "the clear desire of the Cambodian people to evolve and the proof that they will succeed in what they wish".

[10] ដំណើរទៅកាន់សេចក្តីចំរើន in លោកសៅ Free World, volume 7, #4.

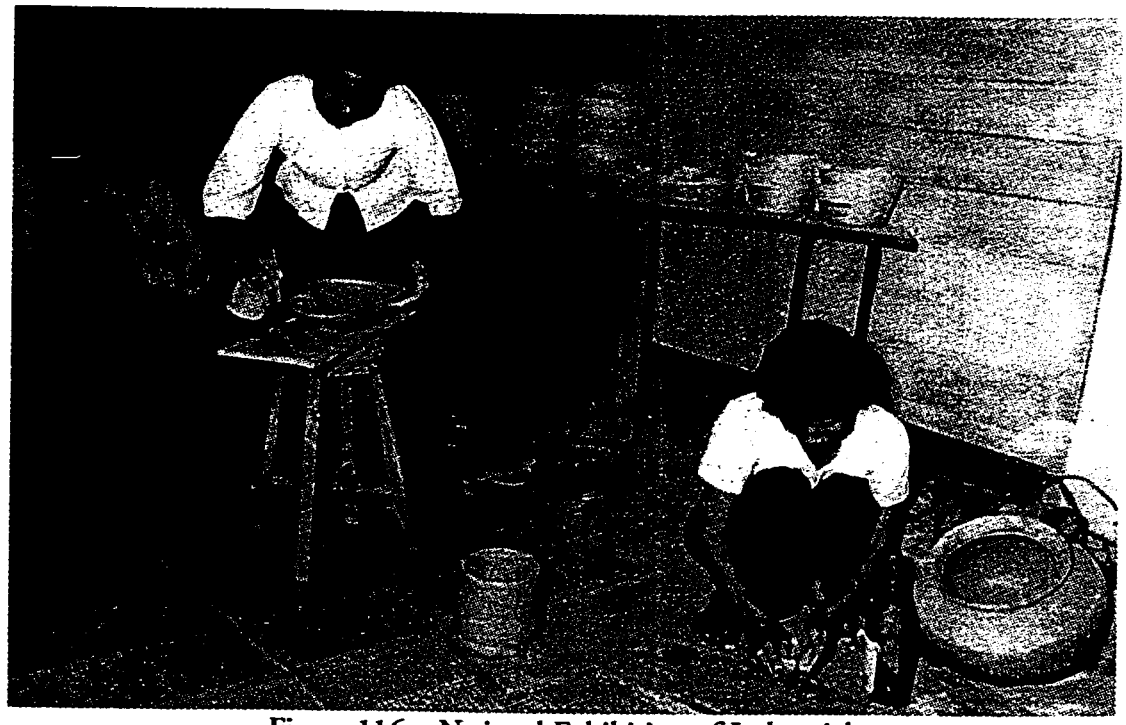

Figure 116 : National Exhibition of Industrial, Agricultural, and Handicraft Products, January 1957
Top: display of pottery making; Bottom: production of tiles by machine

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 top CAM-57-1001; bottom CAM-57-1004





Figure 117

Placard for industrial progress under the Sangkum, 1960s?

RUFA Photography Collection (uncatalogued)

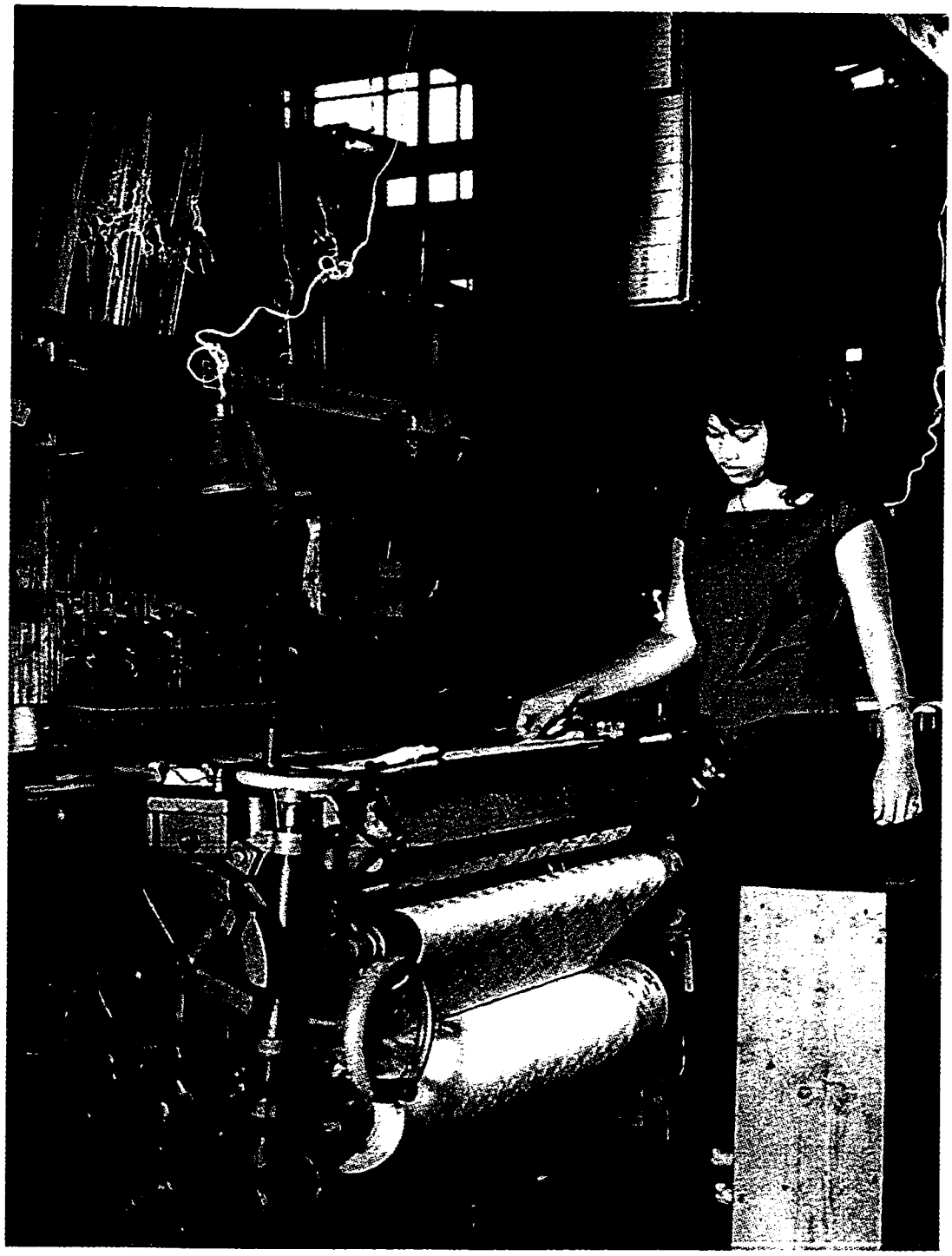

Figure 118

Silk-weaving factory, 1960s

RUFA Photography Collection (uncatalogued)

complimentary. An examination of the exhibits by Embassy officers "led them to the conclusion that this is primarily an exhibit of the primitive state of Cambodian enterprise. A few fabricated rubber articles such as poor quality hose and several small-size mechanical rice huskers were shown. Few of the handicraft articles displayed are suitable for international trade".[11]

It was here that Russel Wright could help (figure 119).[12] Wright was hired by the US government to "make a study and develop plans for increasing the production of handicrafts and small industry products" in "Free" Asia.[13] His study tour would result in an exhibition ("The Southeast Asia Rehabilitation and Trade Development Exhibition") as well as a set of recommendations for putting Southeast Asian handicrafts to better use. The "overall aim" was to "raise the standard of living of the people by helping the natives through training and technical assistance to develop their handicrafts for American consumption with designs that retain the character of their culture".[14] As Wright saw it: "Cambodia is the only country whose products are

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[11] Despatch #137 November 5, 1957 in RG59 US State Department Central Files / Indochina: Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs 1955-1959 / C0008 Microfilm Reel 45

[12] Russel Wright was a well-known American designer. As William J. Hennessey put it, by the 1940s, Wright was "easily the best known designer in America": "His name was a household word. By designing and successfully marketing inexpensive mass-produced consumer goods, he played a key role in leading middle-class Americans towards an acceptance of modern design". See Russel Wright: American Designer, William Hennessey, MIT Press, 1983.

[13] The International Cooperation Administration of the US government sponsored the Russel Wright project. The countries involved in his project were Taiwan, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Thailand and Hong Kong. See Russel Wright Project, Press Release, June 5, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

[14] Russel Wright Project, Press Release, June 5, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

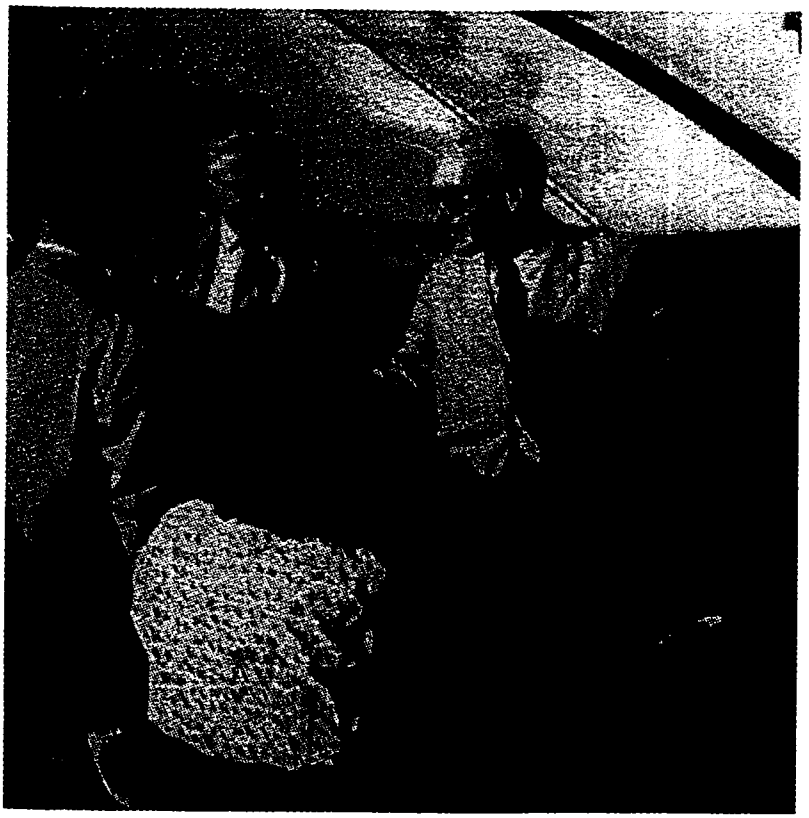

Figure 119

The Russel Wright Project

Left: Russel Wright arriving at the Phnom Penh airport, 1956

Below: "Cambodian Art photographed for the Russel Wright Project"

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG286 CAM-56-53 left: CAM 56-140-146 below



completely untouched by Western Culture. There are possibilities for the development of their woodcarving, matting, basketware, informal and inexpensive lacquerware, cotton specialties, metal tableware in limited production, carving in stone, bronze casting and cement garden sculpture"[15] "The native flavor of the design" (as interpreted by Russel Wright) was to be "retained" although such existing forms would have to be "styled for the Western market".[16]

US Embassy support of the Russel Wright project in Phnom Penh was part of a larger policy to shore up "inherent factors of resistance to Communism in Cambodia"; factors of resistance identified by the US included Cambodian nationalism and the "popular devotion [of the people] to traditional ways" (including a faithfulness to religion, the Monarchy, and the arts)".[17] The Russel Wright Project - as well as events such as the exhibition of Angkorian art at the Asia Society in 1961 - were meant to "demonstrate American interest in Cambodian traditions and culture".[18] The content of what was supported seems to have been fairly irrelevant; it was the image of the US as supportive, helpful, and aiding things recognized as

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[15] Russel Wright Project, Press Release, June 5, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59 D398) Box 32.

[16] Russel Wright Project, Press Release, June 5, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59 D398) Box 32.

[17] "Country Assessment Report, 1961", Field Message #9, January 31, 1962 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Cultural Affairs Planning and Development, Staff and Country Files 1955-64, Box 220.

[18] Another USIS sponsored project to publish a brochure on "Iv Touth's vat and its collection of Angkorian artifacts" was meant to show that Americans can actually "intelligently discuss Buddhism and the ancient civilisation of the Khmers", a surprising admission of insecurity with regards to the French and their scholarship. See the 1961 "Country Assessment Report".

Cambodian that was crucial. Support for any kind of art which could garner the US favorable publicity was to be pursued in the battle for Cambodia's hearts and minds. We can therefore understand that US policy saw no contradiction (and had none of the objections which Groslier would have had) to USIS's promotion of "modern painting" at the same time that Russel Wright was developing markets for the so-called "traditional arts".

The exchange of "hand-made goods" among "nations" was particularly important, the prospectus for the Russel Wright project explained, since "these products reflect the ways of life and the cultures of the nations exchanging goods with each other."[19] While "modern industrial economies" were exchanging more and more machine-made objects, such products were "frequently devoid of identity with the characteristics of the peoples involved". It was particularly in "the highly industrialised nations" that a "growing interest" was found for "handmade products, both utilitarian and decorative".[20] Such quaint objects "help us to picture something of the character of another country" as well as providing "some relief from the symmetry and uniformity of mass-produced goods".[21] The demand for such hand-made goods in the US was attributable to the "great and growing market for home

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[19] "Background notes on Russel Wright project", June 8, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

[20] "Background notes on Russel Wright project", June 8, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

[21] "Background notes on Russel Wright project", June 8, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

furnishings" which had resulted from the more than 28 million Americans who came to own suburban homes in the 1950s.[22] For these "citizens and consumers", the Russel Wright project would provide "something new and valuable for [their] homes, something graceful or ingenious which adds to the quality of [their] life".[23] The situation was beneficial to all, the prospectus for Wright's project concluded:

> For the industrial nations, it will mean new supplies of needed and desired merchandise, products which do not compete with machine-made products and can only be produced as a result of craftmanship and available labor abroad. For the nations producing these handicraft articles, it will mean new sources of export, the creation of additional industries, increased sources of income for small urban and village industries, and more balanced economies. For the trading nations as a whole... a better understanding will develop among [these] nations as we use more of each others products.[24]

The position that Cambodia was to take in such a scheme was all too familiar. Objects "styled" for foreign consumers would be made by hand in large quantities,

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[22] Speech by Henry Cabot Lodge (US Representative to the UN) at the opening of the exhibition of the Russel Wright project at the Coliseum, New York, June 25, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 Box 32. A glowing account of the Wright exhibition in លោកសេរី Free World elaborated the project's goal. The exhibit had shown the Americans "new things for decorating their houses and themselves" while finding "new markets" for artisans in Asia. The US Embassy was dismayed by this article since it apparently conveyed much more enthusiasm than Russel Wright himself had expressed during his stay in Phnom Penh. Wright had apparently "not been favorable or encouraging" regarding the potential of the Cambodian arts, although he remained enthusiastic about his project in general. See សិល្បៈខ្មែរមានគេសរសើរយាំងខ្លាំង នៅស.រ.អា inលោកសេរី (Free World) vol.5, #8 and Despatch #320 April 10, 1958 in RG59 State Department Central Files, Indochina: Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs 1955-1959, C0008 Microfilm Reel 45.

[23] Speech by Henry Cabot Lodge (US Representative to the UN) at the opening of the exhibition of the Russel Wright project at the Coliseum, New York, June 25, 1956. See reference in Footnote 21.

[24] "Background notes on Russel Wright project", June 8, 1956 in RG59 General Records of the Department of State: Miscellaneous Records of the Bureau of Public Affairs 1944-1962 (Lot 59D398) Box 32.

thus creating both "art and contemporary jobs".[25] Sketches which remain from the project's sojourn in Cambodia indicate that Wright's plans considerably altered the type of silver work promoted by Groslier's School (figure 120). Still, through Wright's initiatives, Cambodian silversmiths would remain at work at their tables and thus would "not have to undergo a complete and bewildering change in their whole manner of existence for the sake of economic development.[26] In the resulting geography, Cambodia would remain the domain of the hand, producing objects designated as "characteristic" of "Cambodian culture" because they were not machine-made. The "industrial nations" were not interested in helping to improve the "poor quality hose" or the "mechanical rice huskers" which the US Embassy despatch, cited above, described as "primitive", since such machine-made Cambodian products could conceivably come to "compete" with those of the already industrialised world. Instead, by helping to develop ever more markets for hand-made crafts, Cambodians would be compelled to continue to produce multiples with their hands. The Russel Wright project seems to have floundered and none of his initial sketches were made into products. Still, the aim to market hand-made Cambodian objects to foreign audiences followed in Groslier's footsteps and, it should be added, remains a recurrent impulse among the "development" and "income generation" projects of today.[27]

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[25] ដំណើរសិល្បៈពីបុរាណ in លោកសេរី (Free World) Volume 7, #9.

[26] Speech by Henry Cabot Lodge (US Representative to the UN) at the opening of the exhibition of the Russel Wright project at the Coliseum, New York, June 25, 1956. See reference in Footnote 21.

[27] While these projects are almost exclusively initiated by foreigners, the Cambodian staff (like Tuon Keo long ago) quickly become imbued with their logic and can quite successfully take

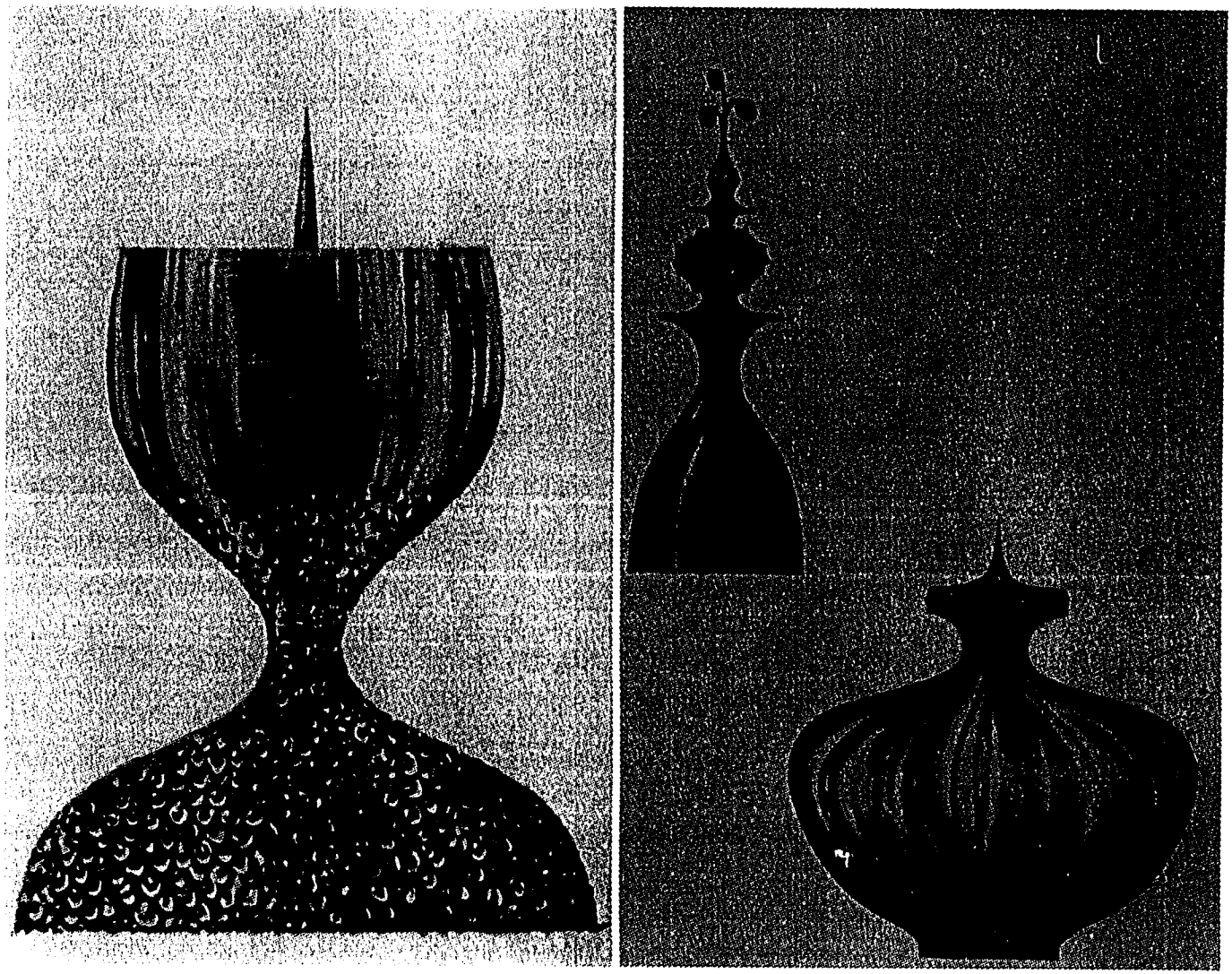

Figure 120

"Proposed art objects for Cambodian artists designed by Mr. Kahn, Russel Wright's representative", 1957 candle holders?

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-57-940

Rubbings

I want to turn now to the more local and less obedient afterlife of Groslier's training. Groslier had always wanted the models and regulatory control of his administration to extend throughout Cambodia, thus "fixing" the proper national forms for objects. Already in 1919, scholarships were offered to provincial students, especially those from Siem Reap.[28] Tourists to the temples of Angkor were "avid about statues and jewelery", Groslier explained, and artisans would find an "always renewed clientele" in these visitors.[29] Plans were made to establish an annex School in Siem Reap as well, although the failure of similar initiatives in Pursat and Kompong Chhnang made Protectorate officials reluctant to try again.[30] By 1932, Silice requested that Tuon Keo (the head of the ceramics decoration school in Kompong Chhnang whom we have met in Chapter Two) be transferred to Siem Reap "in order to direct a small group of artisans made up of former students of the School of Cambodian Arts who have returned to their province and for whom a director is necessary".[31] Such an annex school would "expand the means which former students

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them over once they have been "trained". See, for example, recent initiatives in Phnom Penh such as Tabitha Crafts and Rehab Crafts.

[28] Letter from the RSC to the Résidents of Pursat, Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, September 3, 19 19 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]. Quotas were set with the largest numbers of students coming from the Siem Reap area.

[29] Letter from Groslier to the RSC, August 29, 1919 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

[30] See "Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens", May 1932, Letter from Silice to the local director of the Service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932, and Letter from RSC to Silice, June 13, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

[31] Silice requested "a director" for the Siem Reap school which was meant to initially train 10 students in a drawing atelier. These students would later be divided between ateliers of bronze casting (3 students), and jewelery (7 students). See Letter from Silice to the local director of the Service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)].

of the School have for making themselves known, under our protection, reaching more easily a tourist clientele which escapes us in Phnom Penh".[32]

It would appear from Silice's description that graduates of the School who did not remain in Phnom Penh, in close proximity to the Corporations, did not remain obedient. A "director", he wrote, was "necessary" for them, as was "protection". At the National Exhibit of 1957, several USIS photographs show a stand of "leather objects from Siem Reap" (figure 121). In addition to an apsara-adorned lamp shade and what appear to be relief rubbings in the left background, we find a view of Angkor Vat, front and center, over the table. Similarly, in an issue of លោកសេរី (Free World) from 1955, we find the leather makers of Siem Reap pictured with their lamp shades in front of a large scene of Angkor Vat (figure 122).[33] We can now remember the "drop-out" in Kompong Chhnang (see my discussion at the end of Chapter Two), who started to paint "scenes" on pottery using "postcards" and "photographs". It seems that, left to their own devices, the graduates of Groslier's School began to innovate. They did so however within the frame which Groslier's teaching had suggested to them: producing products recognizable as Cambodian for foreign tourists. Using the same logic that motivated Groslier's system, these newly independent artisans rejected the limits of his plans and models, instead broadening the definition of what could be considered "Cambodian Arts" by developing an ever-

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[32] See Letter from Silice to the local director of the Service de l'enseignement, May 21, 1932 [NAC #11886 (RSC)]. An outlet of the Corporations sales office was established at Angkor in 1926 (E, p.22).

[33] ការប៉ុនប្រសប់ខាង់ហប៊ីស្សក in លោកសេរី (Free World, vol.5 #3).

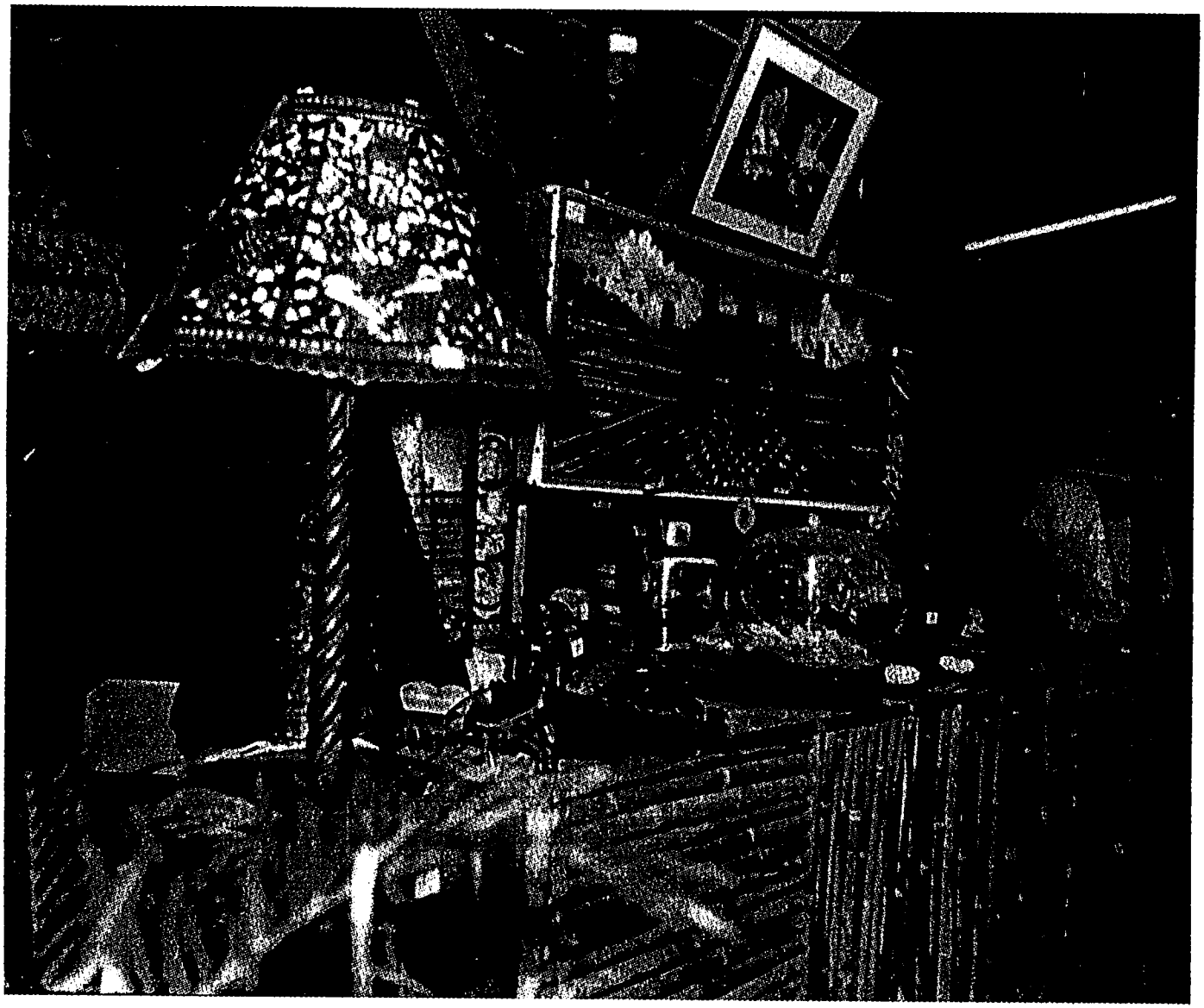

Figure 121

Stand of objects from Siem Reap Province National Exhibition 1957

US National Archives at College Park, Maryland RG 286 CAM-57-990



Figure 122

Leather workers, Siem Reap Province. mid-1950s

Free World volume 5 #3

growing line of new products. The lamp shade is a brilliant example, since it took an existing form of making (piercing leather sheets to make shadow puppets) and produced a modern object for use by European clients. The pierced leather could be rolled up and thus was easily portable, resilient for the journey home. The lamp shade was not however adorned with one of the typical characters of shadow puppet theater but instead copied the dancing apsaras found on the columns and walls of the Bayon. Indeed, these independent artisans seem, from the beginning, to have focused on the monuments and their potential for product development. The site of the temples was after all a forum at which foreigners could be engaged, largely outside the system of Groslier's control.[34]

The 1950s and 1960s seem to have brought to Siem Reap a foretaste of the kind of cultural tourism found in Cambodia today. Chhit Ou (who is now about fifty) says that he has sold souvenirs in Angkor Park since he was seven (figure 123).[35] He remembers that in the Park of the 1950s and 1960s, there were never the hordes of sellers which any tourist to Angkor encounters today. As Chhit Ou explains it, in the 1960s, there were too many other ways to make a better living, either by farming or teaching or working in the industries established by Sihanouk's Sangkum.[36] Still,

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[34] As we have seen, the colonial art school never established an annex in Siem Reap and although the Corporations opened a sales office at Angkor in the late 1920s, control of local artisans remained negligible. Conversations with Him Tour and Chhit Ou, 1998. The only prohibition that Chhit Ou can remember from the 1960s was that one could not make exact copies of Angkorian sculptures since such new copies might confuse those who were responsible for policing artefact theft.

[35] Conversations with ឈិត អ៊ូ (Chhit Ou) March - May 1998, November 1998.

[36] Conversations with Chhit Ou, March - May 1998, November 1998. "People had enough", he says of the Sangkum time, noting that in the early 1960s there were about 20 full time souvenir vendors in the Park and two stores selling souvenirs in Siem Reap. He estimates that

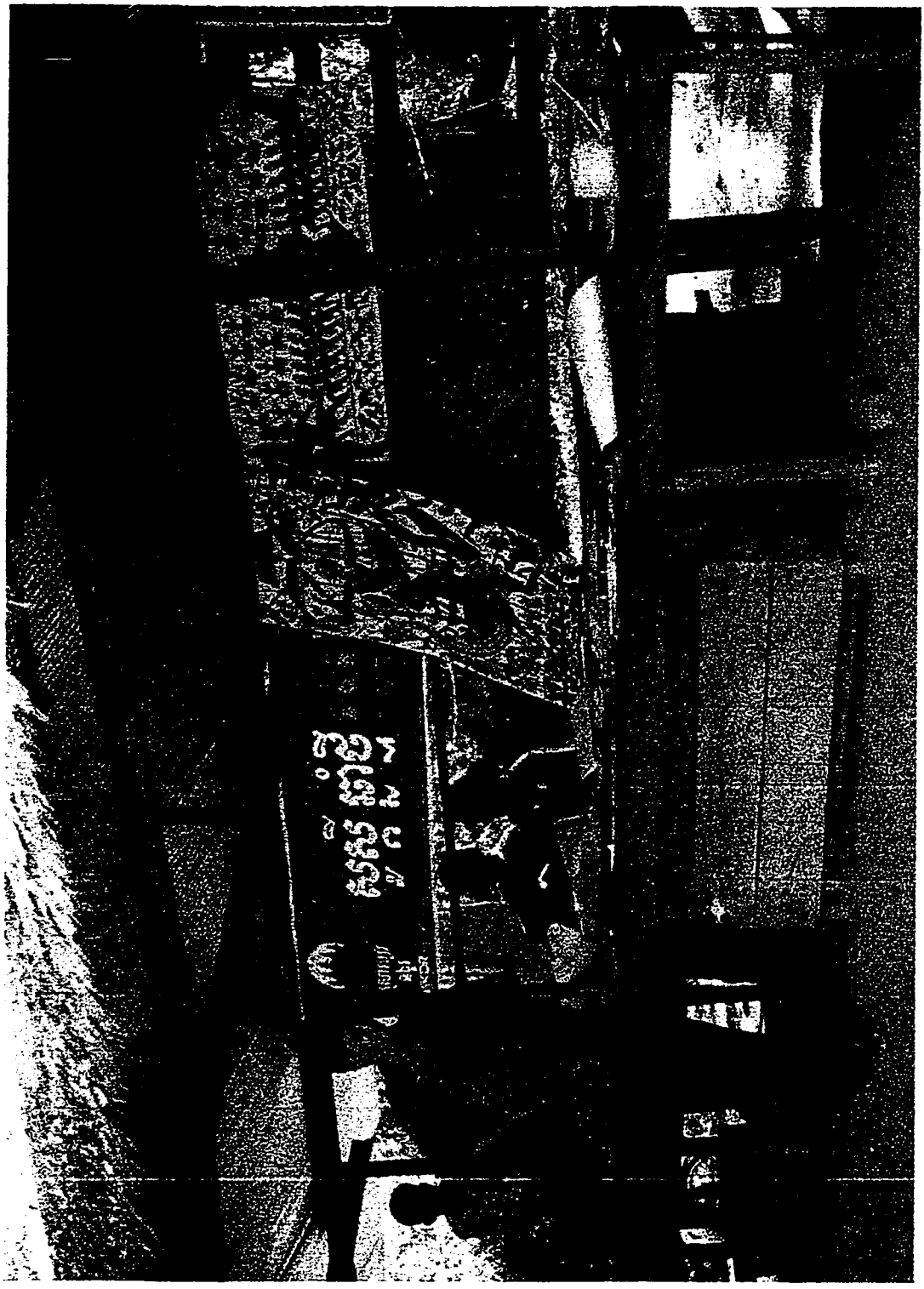

Figure 123 : Chhit Ou at his stand selling rubbings Angkor Park, 1998

there were villagers who made souvenirs and vendors who sold them in the Park. Chhit Ou remembers a kind of hierarchy in which objects stamped with "Arts cambodgiens" - that is, the silver boxes and the figurines of bronze produced by the Corporations and associated with the School in Phnom Penh - still cornered the market for those particular objects. But the increasing number of tourists who came to the Park encouraged local artisans to develop other objects which might catch foreign eyes. Their innovations were not, however, subject to Groslier's "filter", and if the object sold, others soon followed suit.

In the 1960s, a group of recent graduates from the School of Cambodian Arts came to work at the Conservation d'Angkor.[37] The Conservation had, of course, a long-standing tradition of mold-making and inscription rubbing for research purposes, something which the students would have been familiar with as well from the mold-making team attached to the Museum and established at the School in Phnom Penh. Although today some insist that it was graduates from the School of Cambodian Arts that came to work at the Conservation who hit upon the idea of making rubbings for tourists, លោកសេរី (Free World) had already published a

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at the time the Khmer Rouge came too close for the Park to be viable in the early 1970s, there were about 50 sellers in the Park and three souvenir stores in Siem Reap town.

[37] Dy Proeung ឌី ប្រឿង the first of this group, arriving in Siem Reap in 1961 shortly after his graduation from the atelier of drawing in Phnom Penh. He was trained in the drawing of plans by French members of the EFEO in Siem Reap and went on to publish temple plans with Guy Nafilyan. The late Im Chan អ៊ឹម ចាន (1964), Chan Puon ចាន់ ភួន (1967), and Et Somal ឹត សំអុល (1968), all sculptors trained at the School in Phnom Penh, went to work at the Conservation d'Angkor in the years in parentheses. These sculptors do not remember good working conditions: they were equated with "laborers" and were made to ride in the backs of trucks with the weed clearers. The French personnel were often critical of their work and

photograph of the rubbing process in an article from the late 1950s, urging its readers to "reuse" the temples of Angkor as an economic resource.[38] The "fabulous remains" were to be "observed, taken, and used anew by the artists of Cambodia", the article explained. The photograph illustrating the article showed how rubbings could "overcome" the "problem" that the famous relief images were immovable. Rubbed reproductions, the caption noted, could "go out and be sold in far away markets" (figure 124). Rubbing on the walls of the temples, as pictured in លោកសេរី Free World, was banned by the 1960s.[39] It was therefore certainly through the ingenuity of former students like Dy Proeung and others that the idea of "fake" reliefs developed (figure 125). These wax, and later cement, reliefs could be used as the ground for repeated rubbings without depending on the forbidden temple surfaces (figures 126, 127).[40] Those making rubbings soon realised that their reliefs did not only have to

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deemed it "insufficient" for Angkor. Conversations with Chan Puon, Et Somol, Dy Proeung, and the late Im Chan, October - November 1998, June 2000.

[38] ដំរីណាលសិល្បៈពីបុរាណ in លោកសេរី (Free World) Volume 7, #9.

[39] In the early 1990s, the Park was in such chaotic conditions that people of various nationalities again began making rubbings from the actual reliefs found on the walls of Angkor Vat again. It is only through the more recent efforts of APSARA, the Cambodian authority charged with the oversight of the temples, that sellers and souvenir stands are being registered and regulated. The frictions which such regulation has brought only underscores the role of the Park as a meeting place for two very different expectations. Visiting foreigners wish to view ancient temples in a secluded jungle, while poor Cambodians from all over the country flock to Siem Reap today because they know that they will find tourists there and therefore money. How to manage these two expectations and solve the problems of their contradiction is the challenge facing those who administer the Park.

[40] Dy Proeung remembers that BPGroslier (the son of George Groslier who became conservator of Angkor in 1960) saw his first "fake" relief mold and its rubbing, congratulated him, and raised his salary for such ingenuity. The wax reliefs which Dy Proeung accumulated during the 1960s, many made from Conservation molds in turn taken from the walls of Angkor, were taken away by the Khmer Rouge, presumably to make candles. Today, rubbing

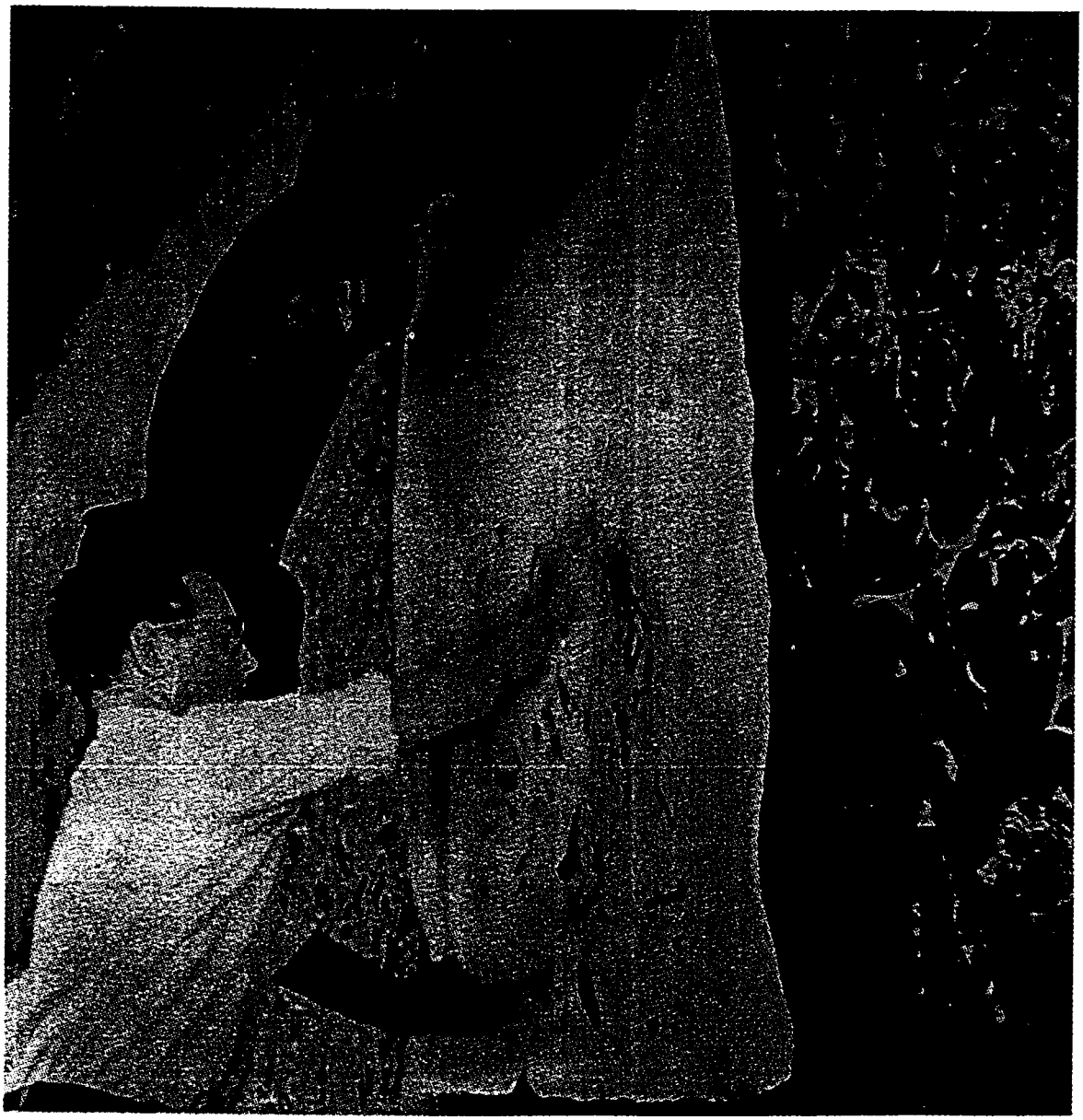

Figure 124

American craft-development expert making rubbings at Angkor Vat, 1956-7

Free World, volume 7 #9



Figure 125

Rubbing Workshop, Siem Reap, 1998
Above: pounding an apsara off a cement mold; below: adding color to the rubbed relief



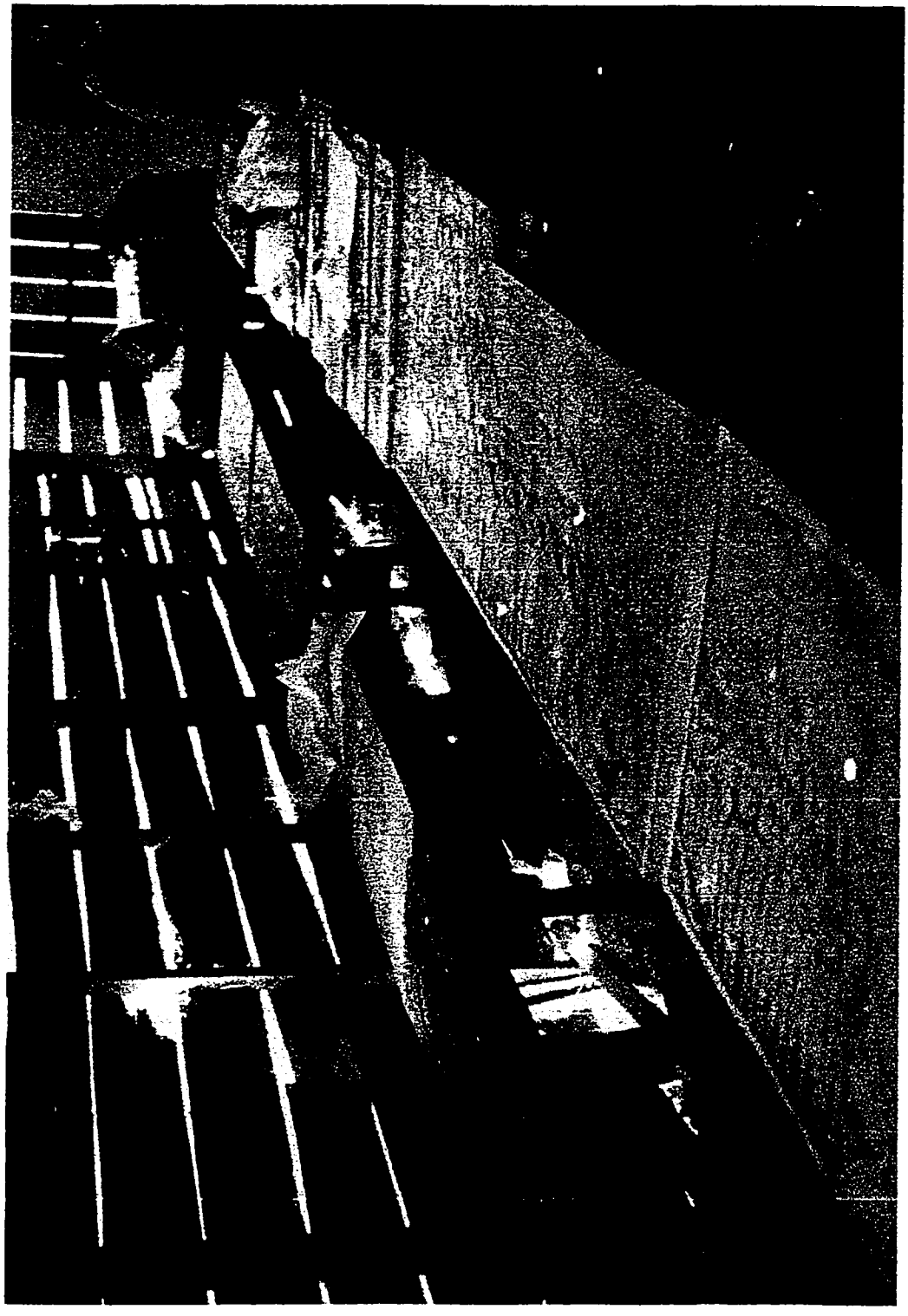

Figure 126 : Chhit Ou's Rubbing Workshop, Siem Reap, 1998

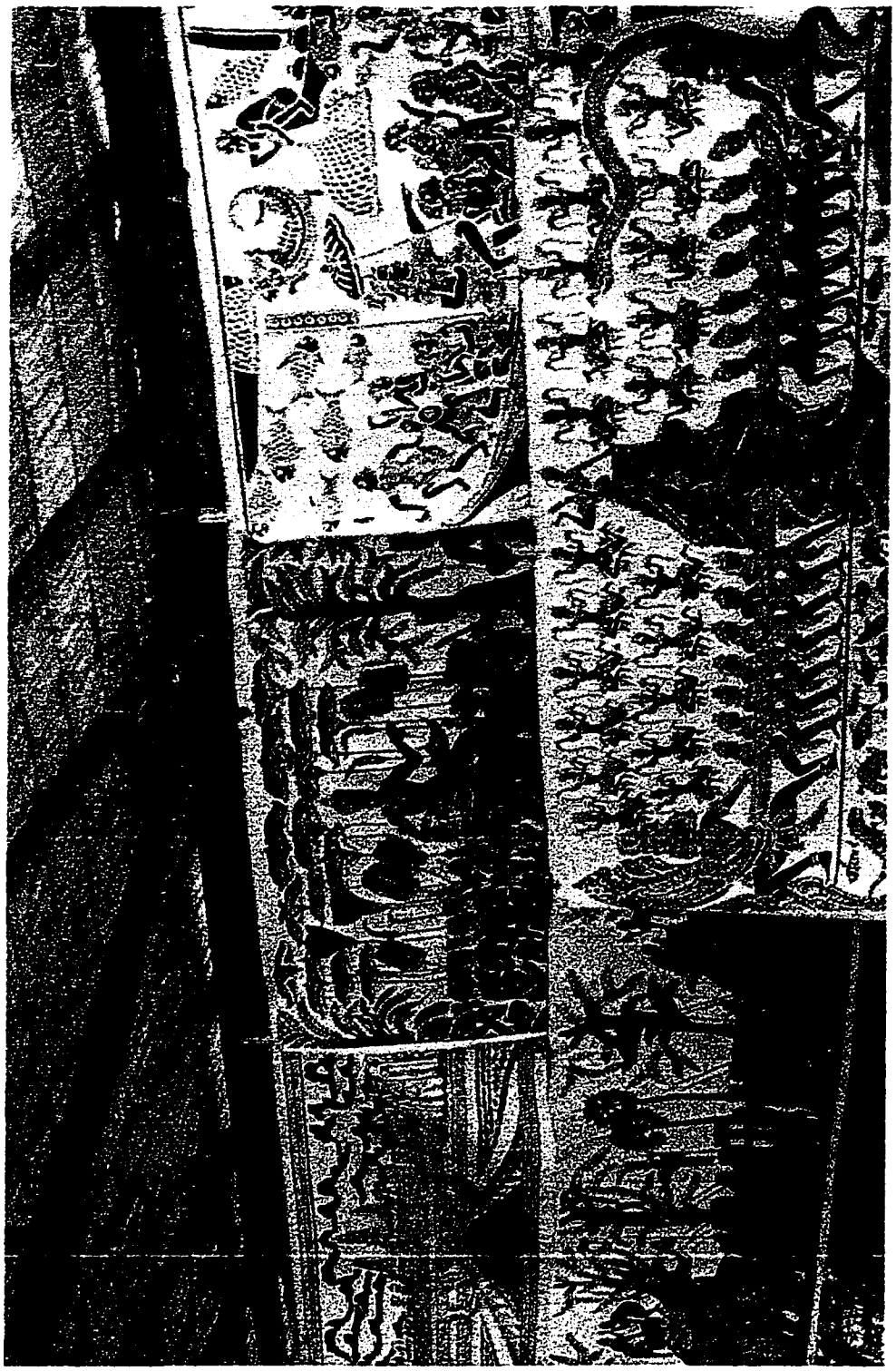

Figure 127

Stand selling rubbings, Angkor Park, Siem Reap, 1999

replicate temple walls but could also offer famous views (figure 128). Photographs thus became reliefs beaten out by hand in a curious reversal of mechanical reproduction. The "Cambodian art" object as portable souvenir, which in Groslier's version had remained tied to a diagram of the surface, now opened itself to the forbidden view.

The View

A 1963 article on tourism at Angkor lamented the lack of "acceptable" views offered by the postcards and other images for sale in and around the temples.[41] Badly framed, badly printed, and falsely labeled, these images were all the more astonishing given the "thousands of excellent photographs that have been taken in Cambodia".[42] Indeed, it seems that the array of images which the temples inspired in the metropole, and in publications targeting foreign audiences, may not have circulated widely among the general public in Cambodia until well into the 1960s. Ly Bun Yim remembers that after the American Festival photography competition of 1957 in which he won (or was given) a camera, he began to shoot simple pictures of the countryside around his home, selling the resulting prints as "postcards" in the book

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molds are almost exclusively made from cement cast from wax-carved reliefs in turn copied from photographs. Conversation with Dy Proeung, June 2000.

[41] Réalites April 5, 1963 (NAC newspaper collection).

[42] Réalites April 5, 1963 (NAC newspaper collection).

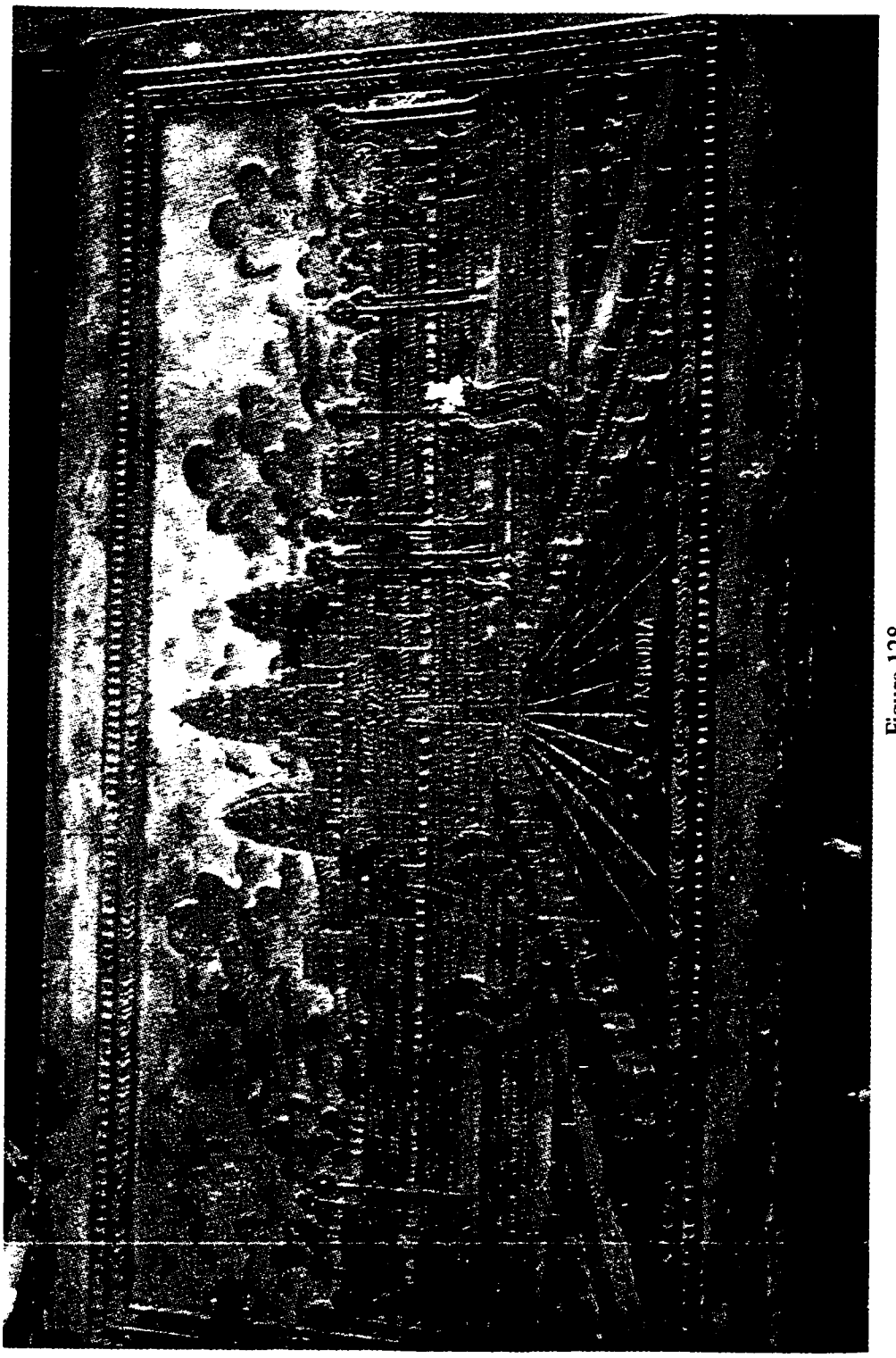

Figure 128

The causeway to Angkor Vat: cement relief for making rubbings

shop of the provincial capital. These postcard images were an instant success since there "weren't many pictures" at that time, at least in Kompong Cham Province.[43]

The clearing of a view was a gradual process by which the temples were monumentalised and made into "sights" or "wonders of the world". Before the Protectorate, the temples were fitted into a different context of worship and use, one which seems not to have considered the temples as objects to be viewed from afar (figure 129). While the colonial era saw the clearing and promotion of the temples of Angkor as sights to be viewed, Groslier's doctrine specifically prohibited the representations of such a view, insisting instead that "authentic" Cambodian art was largely limited to portable objects with patterned surfaces. Within this colonial scenario, it was the visiting French, English and "Annamite" painters who could depict the view of the temples and represent the Cambodian landscape. Still, already in the early 1920s, some of those who "dropped out" of Groslier's School and the larger system of cultural engineering it installed, became renegades making use of the views that were increasingly being produced by foreigners.[44] These renegades did not however turn to a premature embrace of Suzuki's immediacy of perception.[45] Instead

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[43] Conversation with Ly Bun Yim, May 2000. For examples of Angkor images which became popular in the metropole, see Bruno Dagens, Angkor, p.182-3, Edwards, and Lebovics.

[44] See the end of Chapter Two where I describe the "dropout" from Groslier's School who began to teach decorative painting on ceramics in Kompong Chhnang. Groslier complained that the "dropout" was painting oil paintings on ceramics using "postcards and photographs" as models. See Groslier's letter to the RSC, January 20, 1922 [NAC #1985 (RSC)].

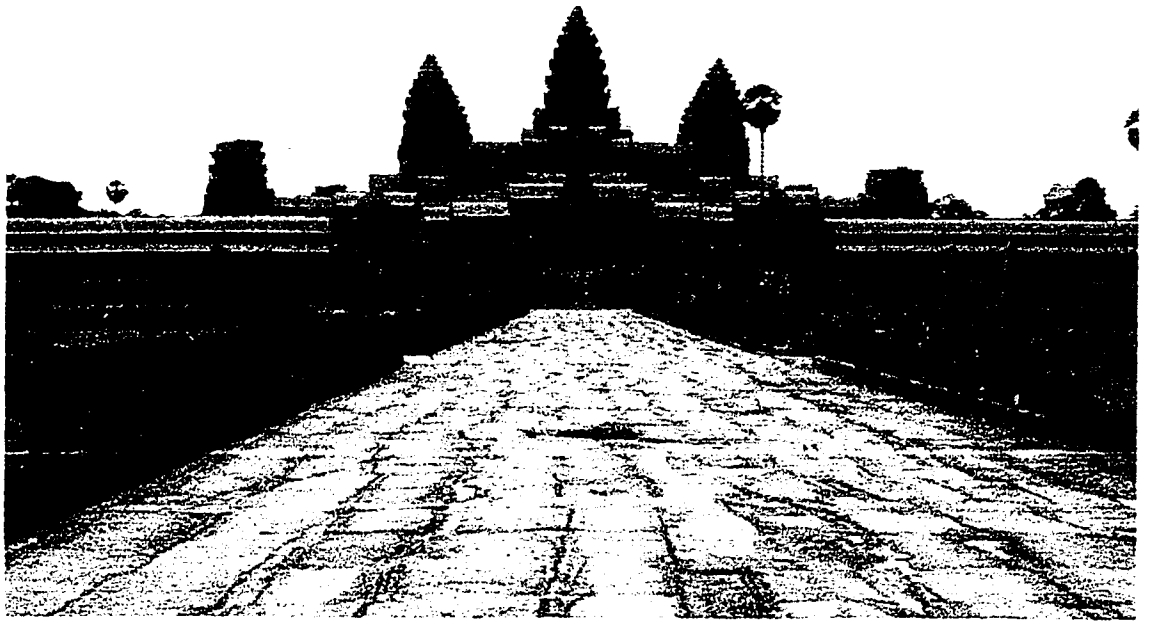
[45] Even the graduates of Suzuki's section later realised that it was difficult and time-consuming to stand in front of whatever one was painting. An increasingly available bank of postcards and photographs provided an ever growing number of easy views, and the photograph seemed, to these students, close enough to life. By the early 1960s, for example, Sam Kem Chang had begun to work almost exclusively from photographs shortly after his graduation from the School of Cambodian Arts. At this time, he was working in the newly reconstituted Palace Workshops. Prime Minister Sihanouk seems to have reestablished the Palace Workshop in the



Figure 129

Two photographs which bookend the monumentalisation process
Above: early view of the causeway to Angkor Vat with a monk, before 1908
Below: present-day view of the causeway to Angkor Vat

Above: Les Ruines d'Angkor, Charles Carpeaux, 1908.



their views were copies which accessed their source through the logic of Groslier's training. Postcards and photographs were gridded off and then replicated using the same two-dimensional map of proportion that instilled Khmer ornaments into several generations of students at the colonial school (figure 130).[46]

With the breakdown of Groslier's control, all the foreign images of Cambodia's past became "documents" (ឯកសារ) for representation. Here we can recognise the same lure that Palace "masters" felt long ago when they turned to Lamorté's decorative "Khmer style" paintings as models for the "Cambodian arts" (see Chapter One). Once commissions for "Khmer style" paintings began to be given almost exclusively to foreigners, and once an extensive body of research on Cambodia's past had been compiled in the French language, the source for "authentic" local identity paradoxically seemed to lie abroad.

In April 1960, National Geographic published an article by Robert Moore entitled "Angkor, Jewel of the Jungle". The article was illustrated by reproductions of paintings by Maurice Fiévet, a Frenchman whose "remarkable paintings", "re-creating the daily life of this lost civilisation", had "undergone minute scrutiny for accuracy by Bernard Groslier and George Coèdes, French scholars who have devoted years to

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early 1960s, inviting not only traditional artisans but also "modern painters" to work in the Palace, producing the gifts which Sihanouk gave to foreign visitors as well as helping to decorate Palace and State buildings. Conversations with Sam Kem Chang, An Sok, Chan Puon, Et Somal, and the late Im Chan, 1997-1999.

[46] Since 1970, the three towered causeway view of Angkor Vat has been associated with Sihanouk, the flag of the Sangkum and thus royalty. During the PRK of the 1980s, the official view became the five tower view from the side being painted here. Painters at the School remember being ordered not to teach the three tower causeway view during the 1980s. Conversation with Pech Song, July 1995.

Figure 130

Student exam at the Department of Plastic Arts. The student is holding his postcard model in his left hand. The exam consists of being able to replicate the image of Angkor Vat. Students are sequestered in curtained enclosures and the exam takes place over several days. In this particular case, the fighting of July 1997 interrupted the exam. A few days later, the exam continued with students continuing their copy paintings despite the extreme political uncertainties.



unraveling Angkor's riddles".[47] In image after lurid image, "Artist Fiévet" (as the captions call him) unveiled life at Angkor (figure 131).[48] I found these images, not in the library in New York, or in some worn collection of National Geographics stored in a suburban American garage. Rather, reproductions of Fiévet's paintings were repeatedly presented to me by Cambodian painters as ឯកសារ, "documents" of "real life" at Angkor (figure 132).[49] We see here the familiar structure in which the "authentic" and the "Cambodian" are accessed through a model proposed by French research, this time however through the paintings (rather than the research and resulting diagrammed plans) of a Frenchman. The way the model was copied recapitulated the grid which Groslier had used to inscribe relations of proportion in his diagrams at the School. The photographs and xeroxes of Fiévet's paintings found in Cambodian painters' studios today are almost always scored with a pencilled grid which turns their pictures into squares of proportion, replicable by the same visual comparison used to copy Groslier's diagrams (Chapter Two, figures 19-22). Despite the opening of the view, it is transmitted as a model through the armature of the two dimensional diagram.

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[47] "Angkor, Jewel of the Jungle", by W. Robert Moore, paintings by Maurice Fiévet in National Geographic, April 1960, p.517. This text serves as a kind of celebratory entrance to the article and is printed on its opening page.

[48] The representations were supposedly based on Groslier's and Coèdes' research as well as Ta-kuan's well known 13th century account. The rather fertile imagination of the parties involved is visible in the representations of scantily clad women in variously suggestive poses. Illustrated scenes include court ceremonies, fishing excursions, battles with the Siamese, and a visit by the king to Phnom Chiso.

[49] Dy Proeung, the Khemera Angkor Drawing store in Siem Reap, as well as painters in the stores in Phnom Penh, all have these images in their studios either as photo reproductions or as well worn xeroxes.



Figure 131

The caption reads: "among women of the noble houses one finds many as light as jade". One of the loose leaf images from National Geographic found in Dy Proeung's studio

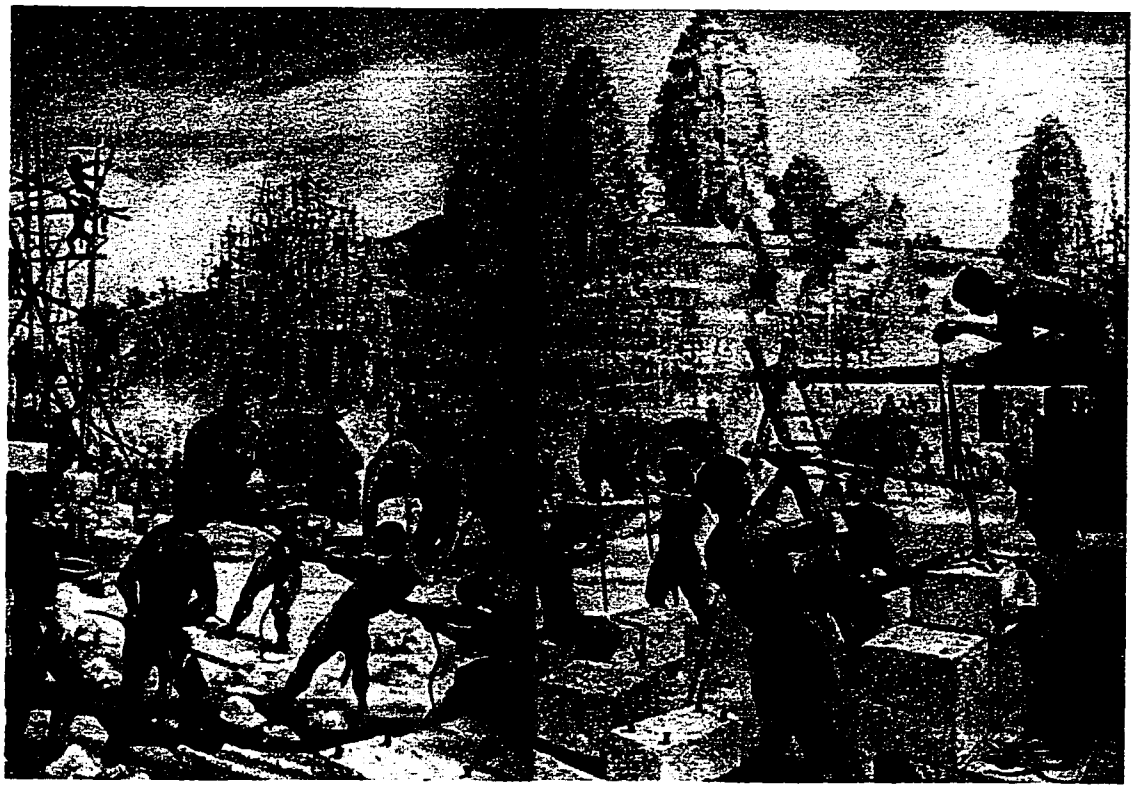
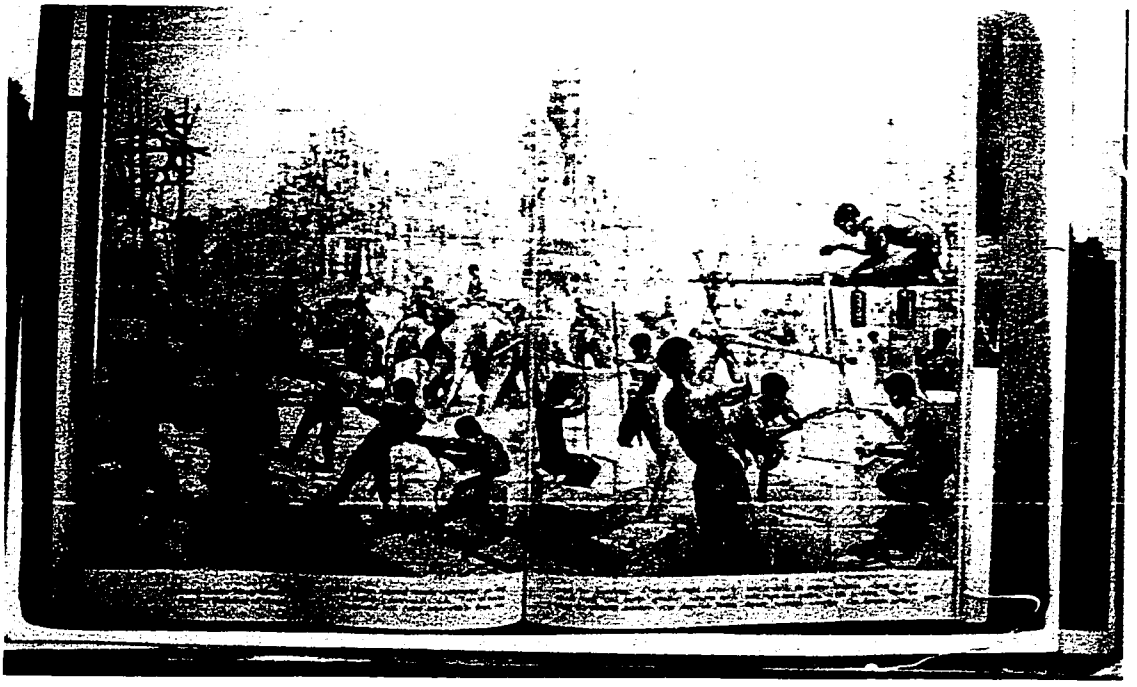


Figure 132

Temple construction scene, National Geographic, April 1960
Above: New York City Public Library copy;
Below: gridded xeroxed copy, "Khmera Angkor Drawing Shop", Siem Reap, 1995



But copying here also becomes a springboard for variation, if not for imagination, and perhaps this is the only contemporary space which remains for those who today are both painters and "Cambodians" . Within their traditional frame, Groslier told us, Cambodian artists would innovate. Their language was given but its details could vary.[50] The paintings in this sense are perverse embodiments of Groslier's notion of tradition and permissible change. In some construction scenes, the towers of Angkor Vat transform into those of the Bayon; temple models, shrines and scaffoldings are added, while men and elephants are slightly shifted in each rendering (figure 133). Each painter thus claims "his own" version of the construction despite the similarity of the scenes, and a familiar vocabulary is used to produce never ending variations. Scenes which sell well are immediately copied by others in multiples, since painters watch the habits of their clientele with the same care that Groslier once did, continually adjusting their products to perceived demand. In the proliferation of such paintings, we can read a paradoxical fulfillment of Groslier's prediction that the "richness" of Cambodian art would allow product development to "proceed to infinity".[51]

There are many examples of such variations copied from foreign images considered authoritative and true. An early aerial photograph reproduced in The Opening of Aerial Tourism in Indochina (1929) is repeated from all angles in the various lights of sunrises and sunsets (figure 134). Intriguing details taken from engravings of Delaporte's drawings during his 1860s expeditions to the temples are

[50] See R1925, PsyI, p.135-6, and CC#1, p.271-2.

[51] "Rapport sur le Fonctionnement du Service des Arts cambodgiens", 1924 [NAC #2017 (RSC)].

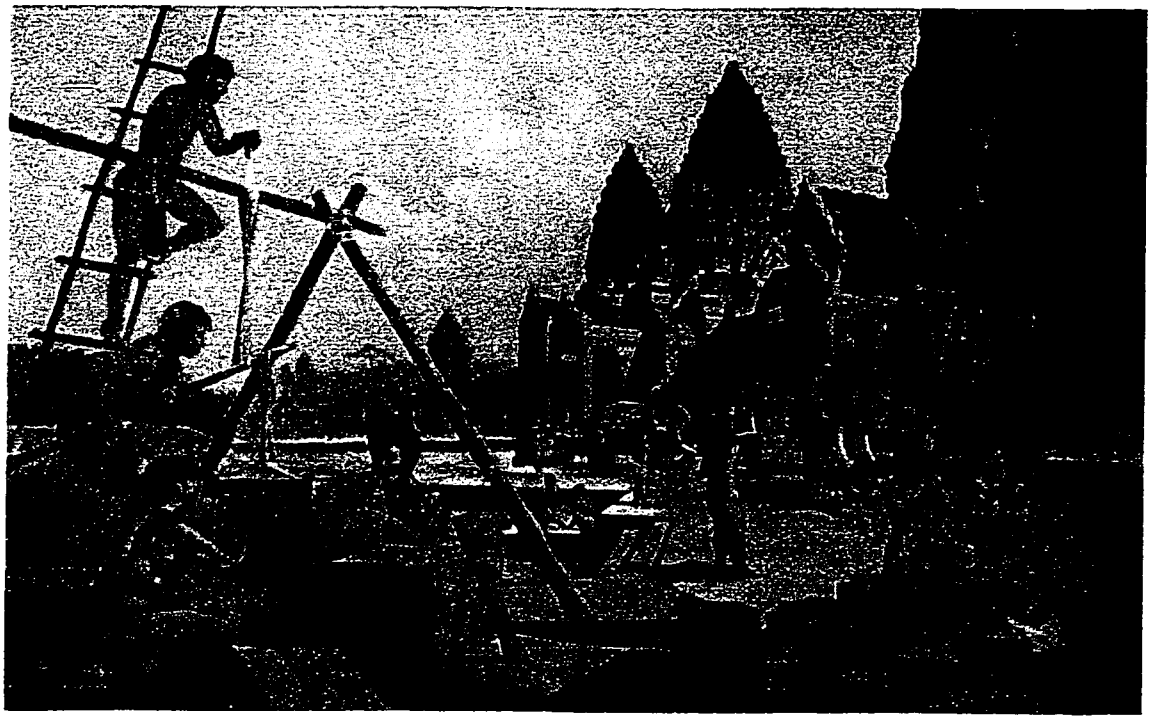
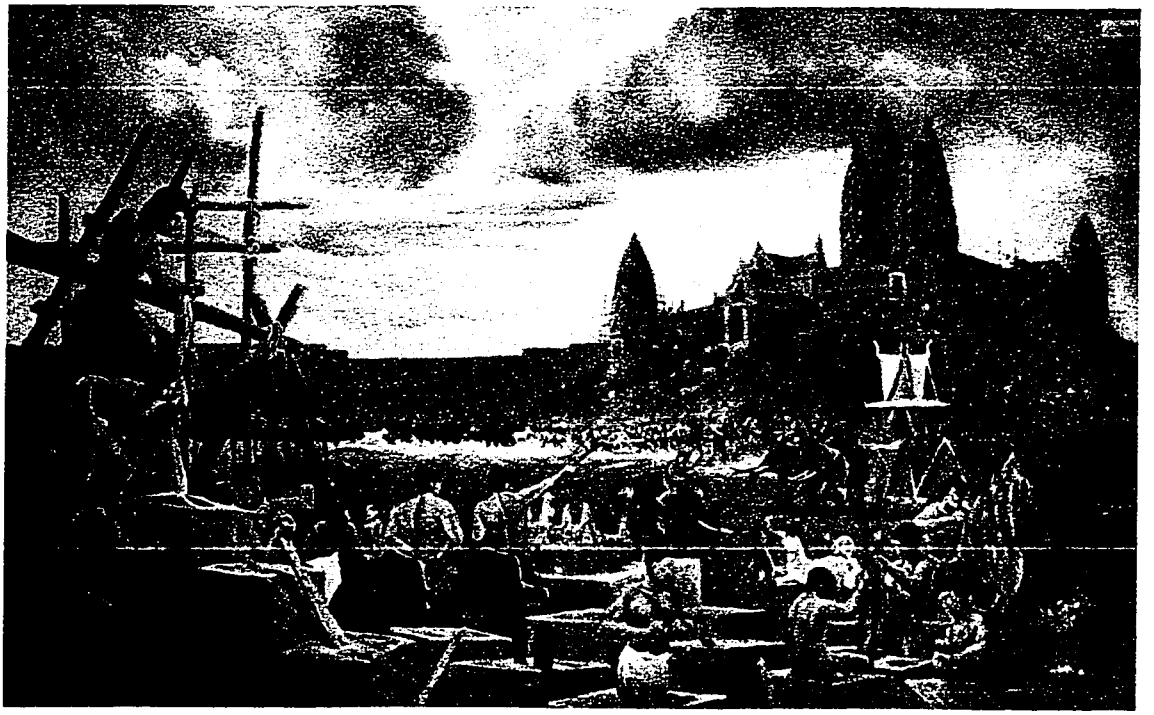
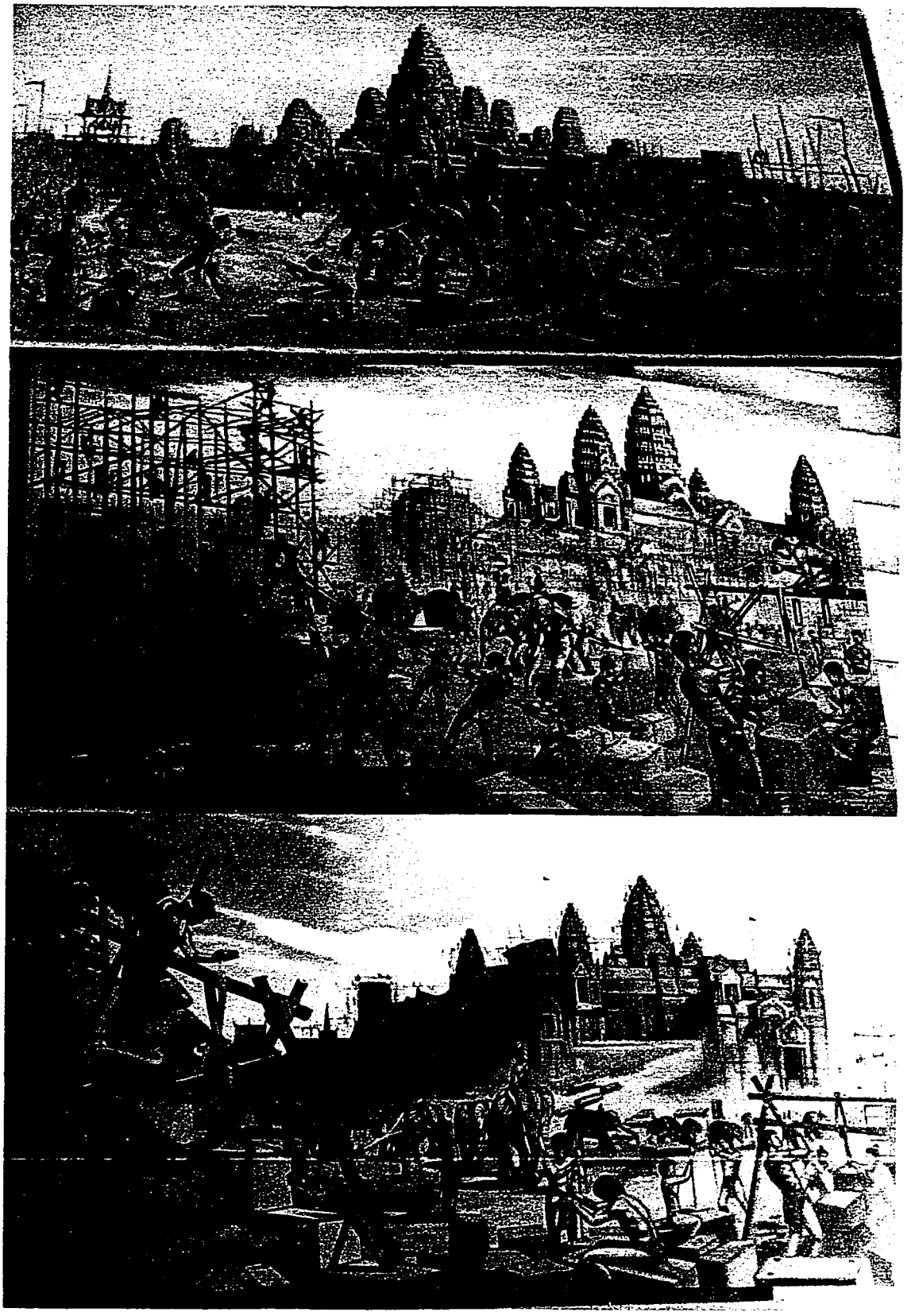
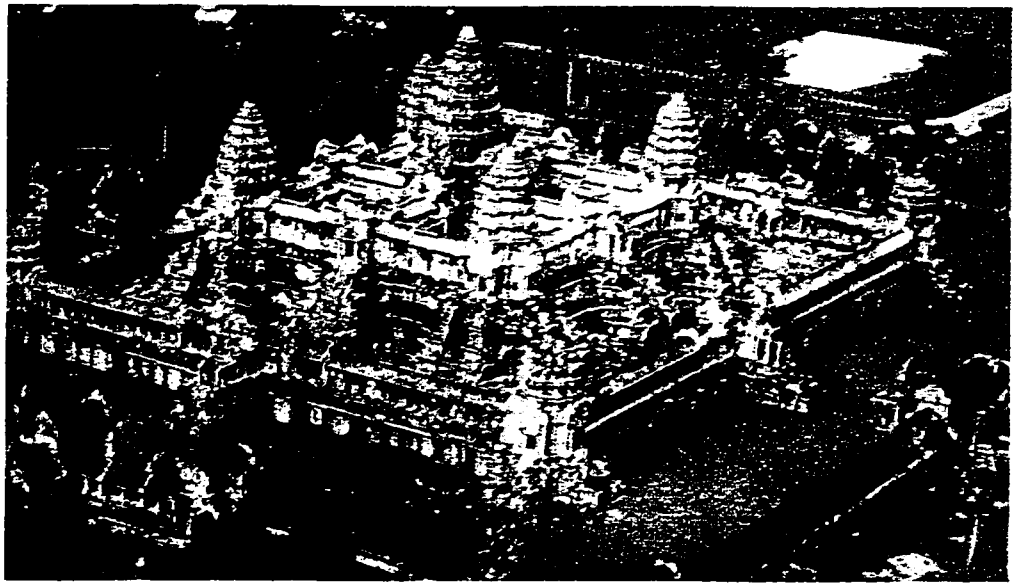


Figure 133

Five store paintings presenting variations on the temple construction scene, 1995-1998







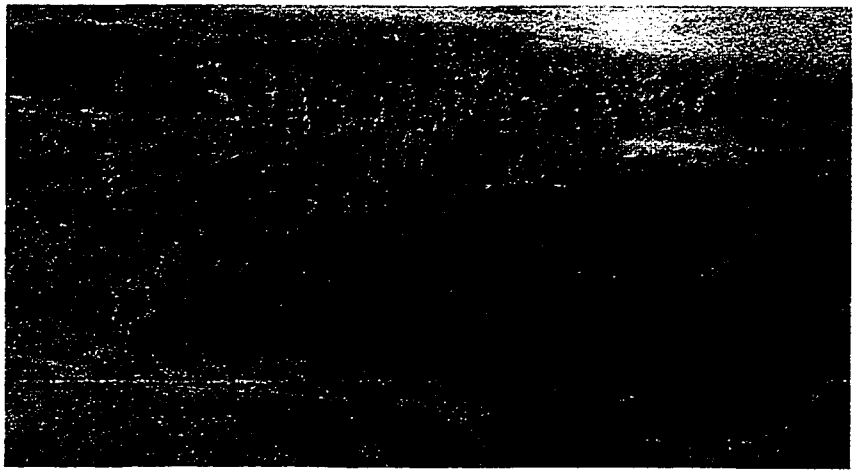
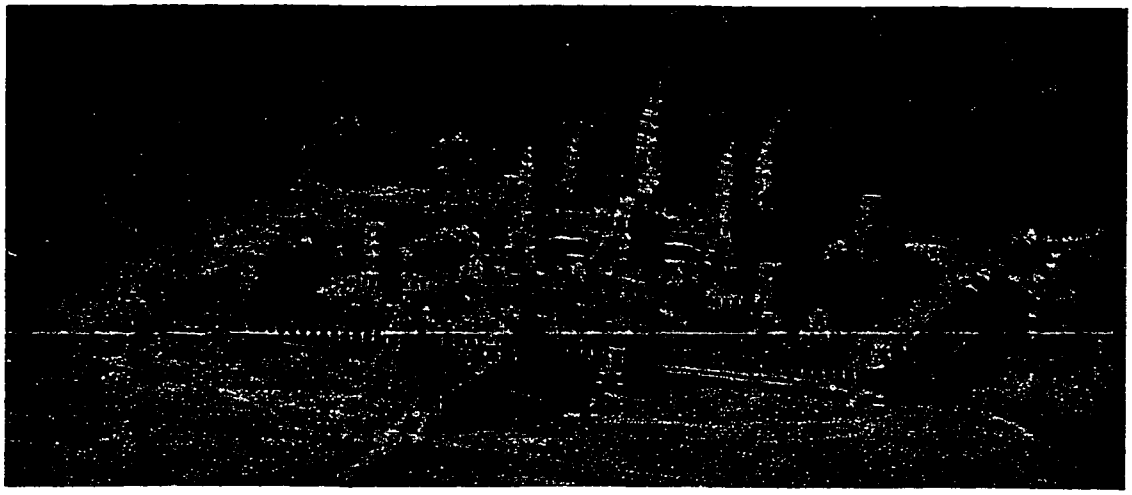
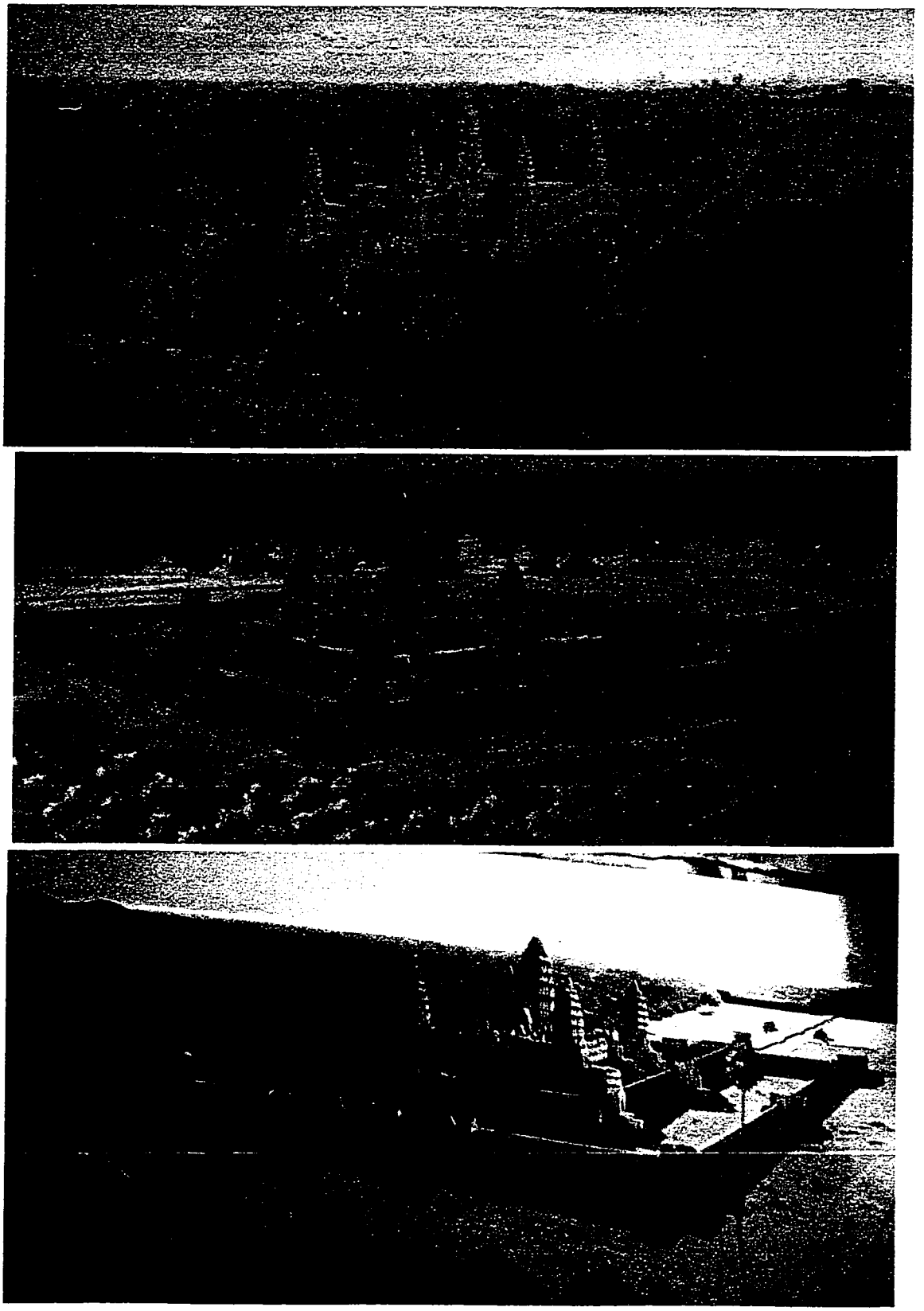


Figure 134

Above: aerial view of Angkor Vat photographed in the late 1920s.

Below and on the following page: A series of paintings of the aerial view of Angkor Vat, shop paintings Phnom Penh, 1995





painted as large contemporary oil paintings (figures 135-7). Further afield, Fiévet's notion of recreating scenes from an imagined past allows the recomposition of Angkorian landscapes, peopled by "early men" which are however copied from French textbook drawings of cavemen (figure 138).[52] These primordial scenes cobble together elements of the Bayon and the silhouette of Angkor Vat, producing imaginary landscapes which are copied in turn, producing such minute variations that different paintings at first seem identical (figure 138). Painters are anxious to find new "documents" of Angkorian time in order to style a variety of views for their clients. Their base however is never their own imagination or on-site study of the temples; rather their pictures are always grounded in the gridded surface through which they replicate a two dimensional photographic or painted view, a picture of Cambodia produced from the outside.

Many of the painters who paint these scenes are graduates of the later day version of Groslier's School (figure 130).[53] Students aspire to make these Angkor views and learning consists of mastering the replication of the photograph via the grid in order to thus secure a living by making multiples (figure 139). The painters of these scenes live in Phnom Penh and often have never been to Angkor. They access the monument through the photograph and therefore their paintings replicate the logic of

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[52] The "source" for the barbecuing men is an illustrated French school primer which shows the "first peasants" wearing loin-clothes and rough headdresses. Conversation with Pech Song who has a xerox of this primer in his studio, November 1998.

[53] In Siem Reap today, the stores which sell paintings buy them from Phnom Penh. The store keepers explain that not only are the Phnom Penh paintings cheaper (there are many graduates of the School), but they are also more accurate, "clearer" and "better" because they are painted by "artists" from the School. Conversation with stand owners in front of the Grand Hotel, November 2000.



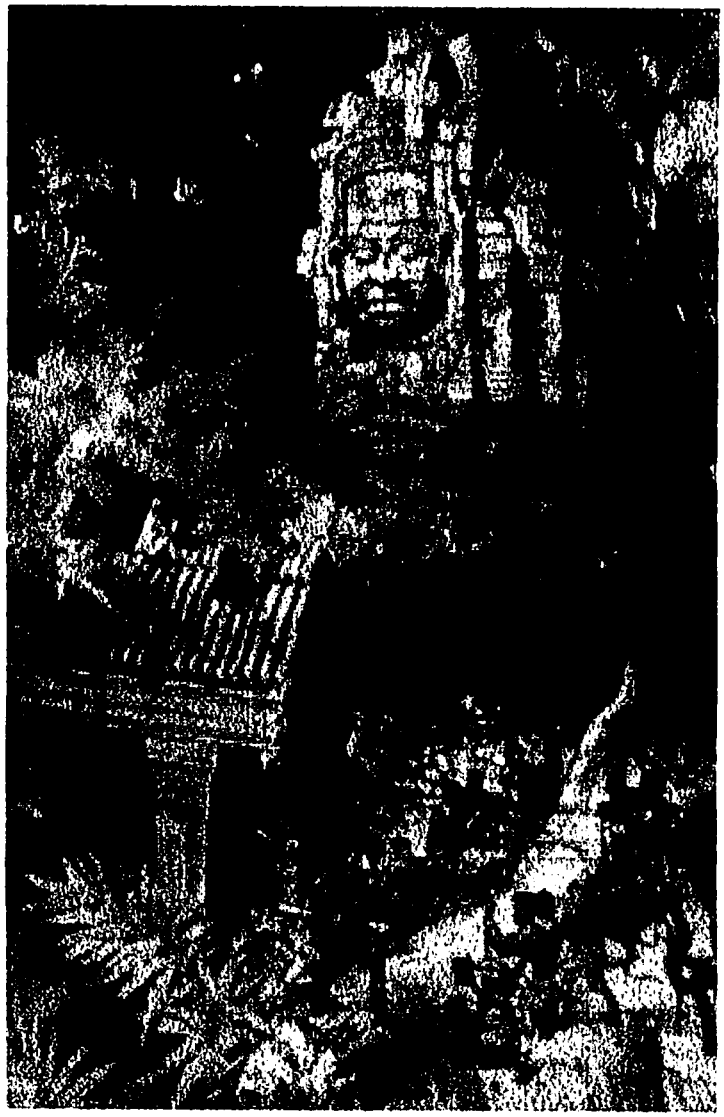

Figure 135

Near right: engraving after a Delaporte sketch 1870s

Far right: Painting in one of the painting stores opposite the National Museum, 1997

near right: *Voyage au Cambodge* *Louis Delaporte Paris 1880*

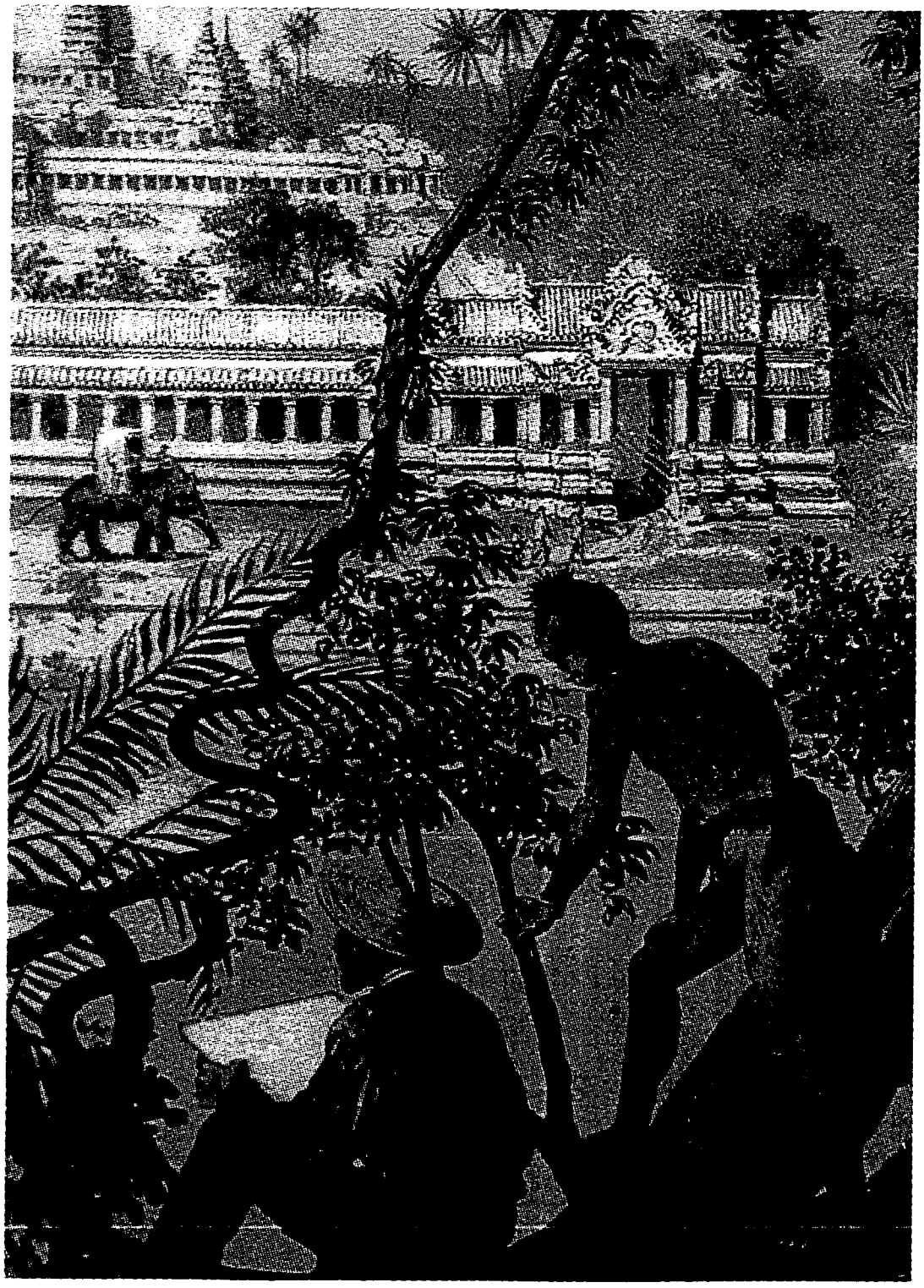

Figure 136 : Engraving after a Delaporte sketch

Louis Delaporte, Voyage au Cambodge Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1880

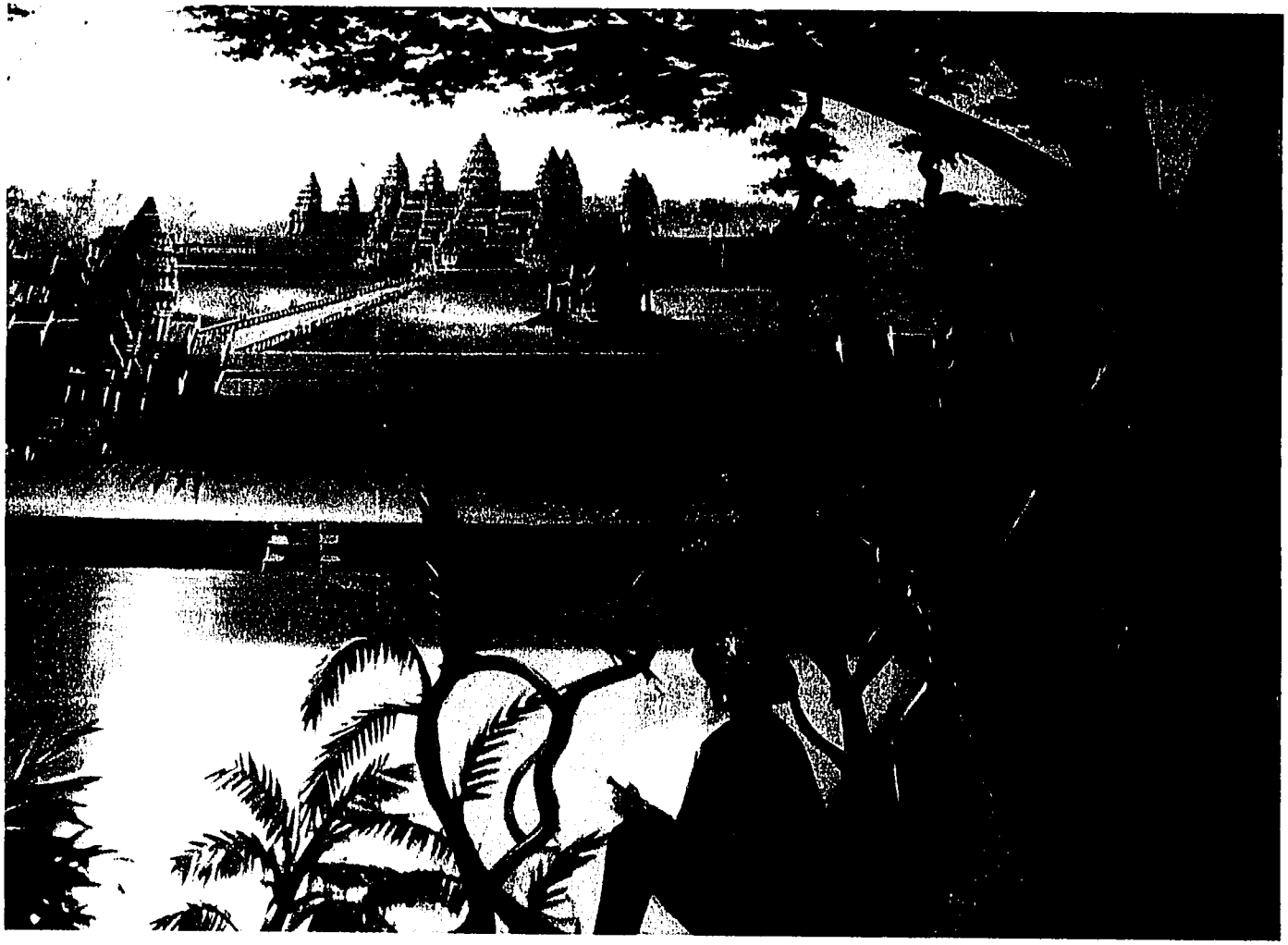

Figure 137

Detail of a painting in one of the painting stores across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 1997



Figure 138

Various versions of Angkorian pastoral scenes
Painting stores across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 1995











Figure 139 : Student painting at the Department of Plastic Arts, 2000

print reproduction. The areas of light are made up of at most three tones, while areas of shadow are composed from two darks (figure 140). This shorthand of modeling is mechanically applied using the same smooth brushstroke to cover the surface as efficiently as possible. Despite the seeming detail from afar, the closer one comes to these scenes, the more blandly resistant and dead their surface becomes. Paint which from afar built the illusion of a solid building dissolves into arrays of identical marks which leave only an empty icon in its place. For what has the view of Angkor become for these painters other than an two dimensional object which they can sell in repeated multiples? Produced in mass quantities, these are the new versions of the "Cambodian Arts".

Besides the ubiquitous view of Angkor, one also finds landscapes and women in abundant replication in the painting stores which today line the street to the National Museum, across from Groslier's School (figures 141-144). Here set themes echo : the same palm tree and boat are recomposed into curiously similar sequences (figure 142); the same two houses are set into repetitive ocean bays (figure 143); while the same doll-faced woman appears in an array of stereotypes (figure 141).[54] In tourist terms, Cambodia today is not only famous for its temples but has also become renown for its imagined idyllic tropical landscapes and its growing sex trade. The allure of the tropics built from these two stereotypes has quickly caught the attention of painters who precipitate these desires onto their canvases in multiples with slight variations, offering such images as ready alternatives to the temples.

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[54] These representations of women are a topic for another project. The stereotypes present the depressing spectrum of roles available to women in Cambodia today: the goddess apsara / traditional dancer; the country pure virgin; the soft core porn star; and, in a kind of hangover from the 1980s, the pretty communist worker of the fields.

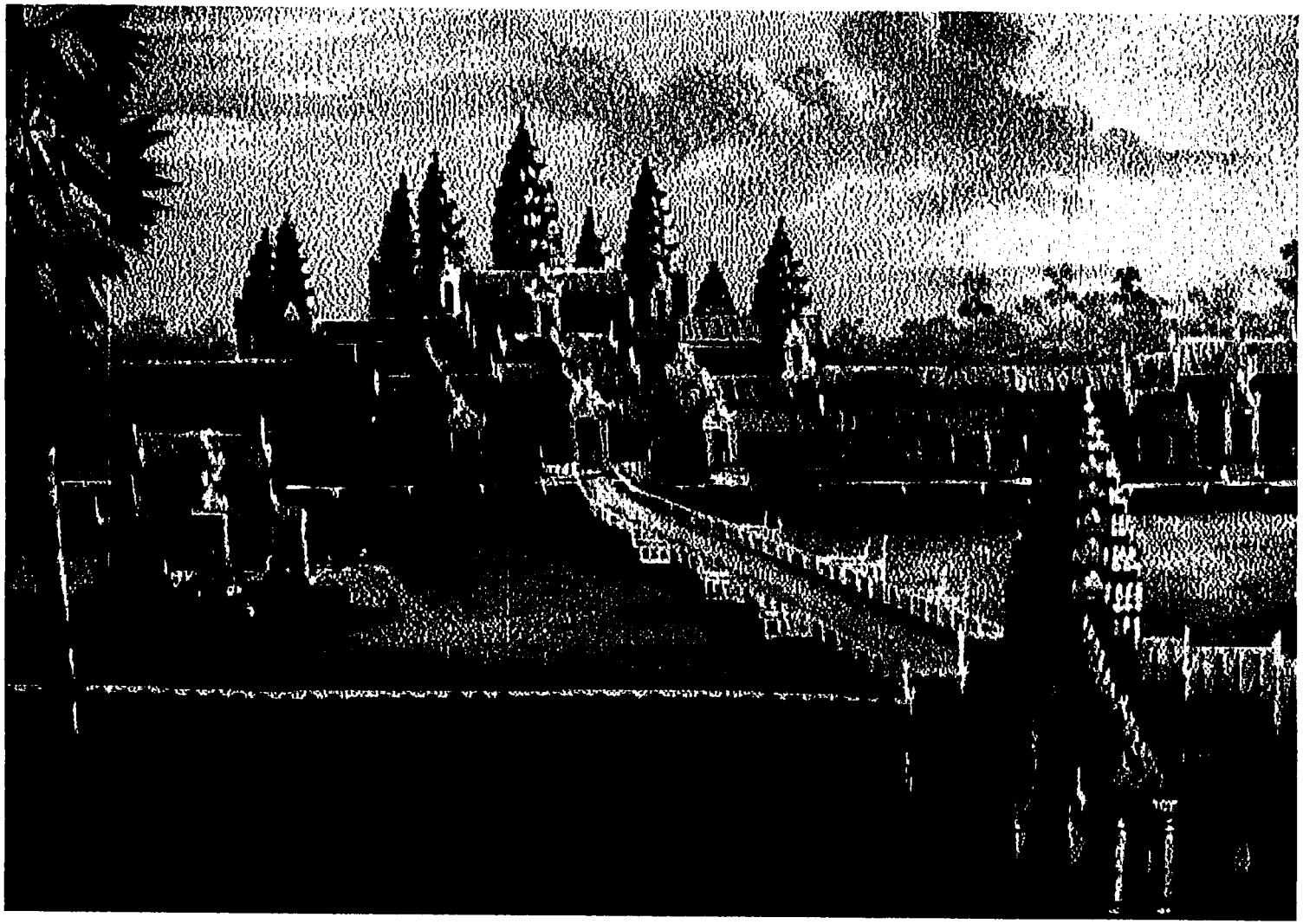

Figure 140 : Detail of the typical handling of a store painting of Angkor Vat, 2000.

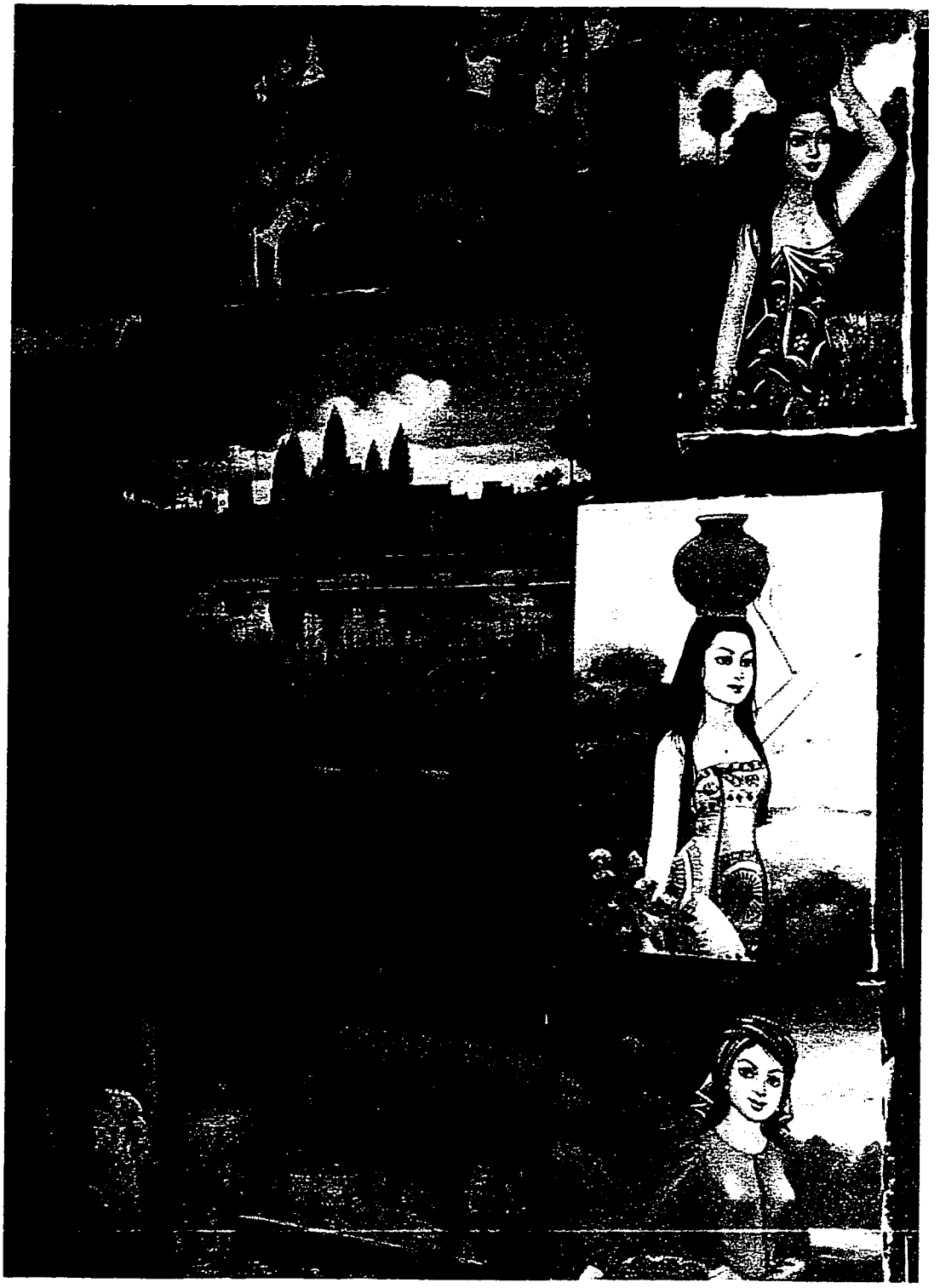

Figure 141

Painting store interior, across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 1997

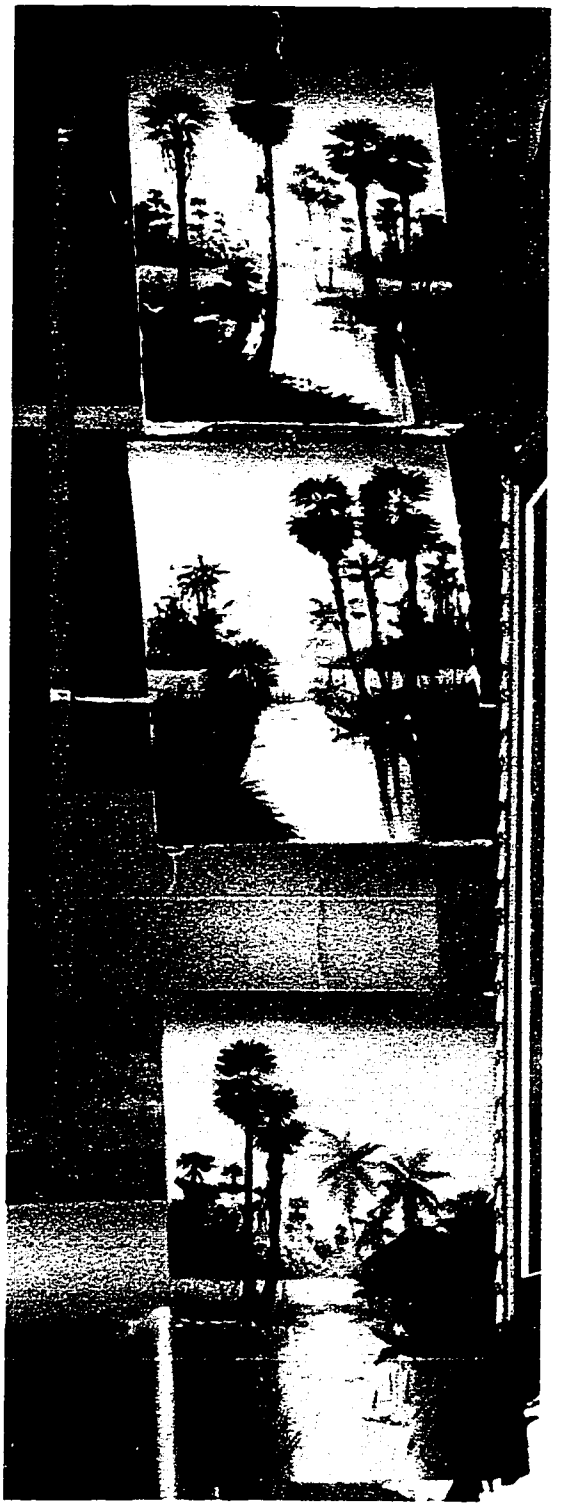

Figure 142

Landscape paintings
Painting store across from the
National Museum of
Cambodia, 1999



Figure 143

Four landscapes

Painting store across from the National Museum, 2000

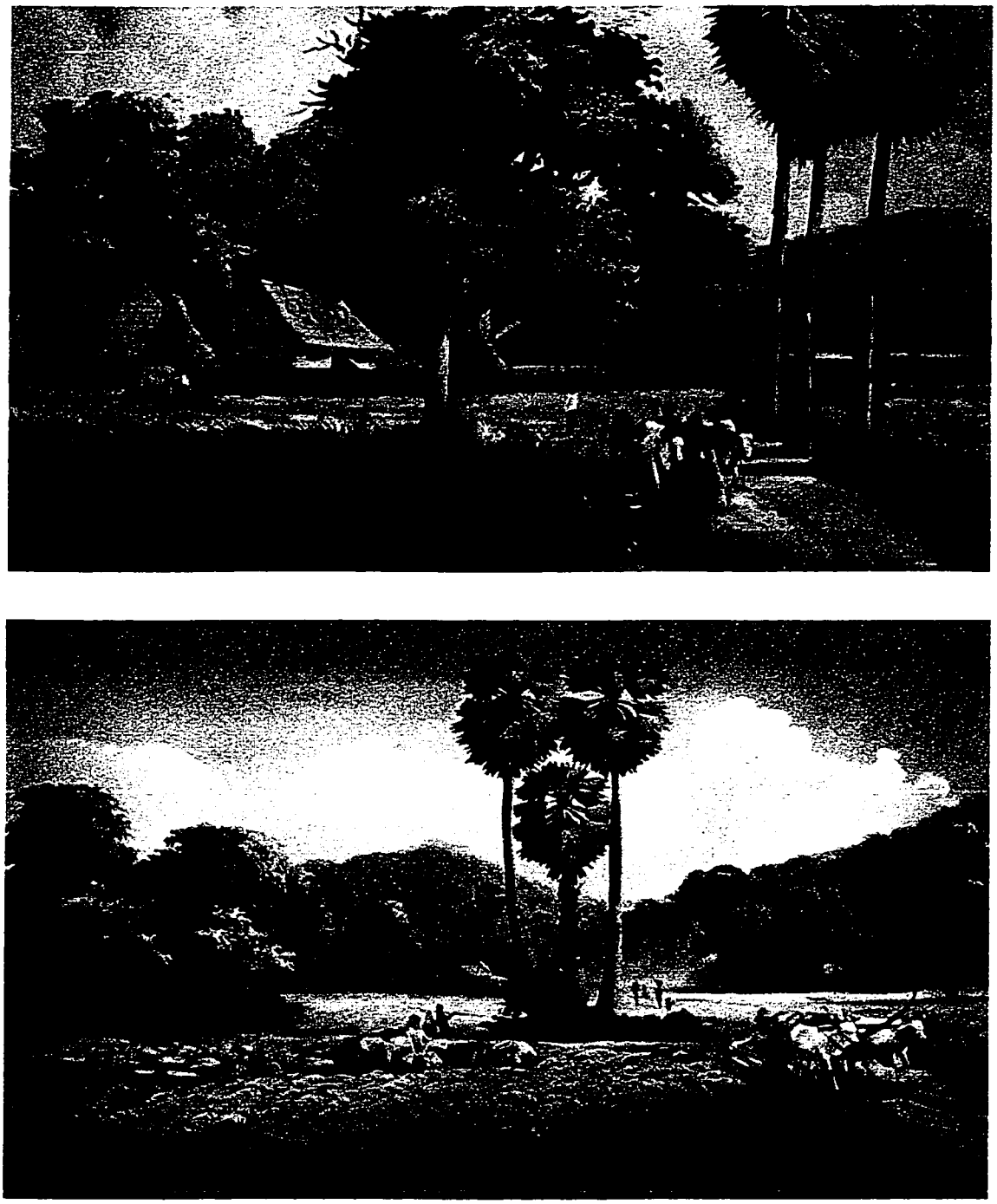

Figure 144

Two landscapes
Painting stores across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 2000

There is also, however, a considerable domestic market for all three of these painted subjects (temples, landscapes, women). In the resurgent nationalism of the 1990s, paintings of Angkor Vat grace almost any office, hotel, and home, a national logo if ever there was one.[55] But pictures of idyllic landscapes and perfect women are also bought by local Cambodians to put in their homes. These images are considered ស្អាត (pretty), and thus presumably very different from life as it is lived in local everyday reality. As one painter told me, "we haven't fixed anything outside, it's all broken, so inside we want to look at pretty things".[56] The idyllic countryside scenes, untouched by poverty, pollution, or, for that matter, any mark of the 20th century (figures 142-4) - the perfectly smooth, coyly smiling women - the ideal un-peopled views of Angkor - these are all precisely the opposite of everyday life in Cambodia today. It is here that the sadder aspect of Cambodia's tourist trade appears.[57] For all the painters who make such idyllic scenes have lived through the era of the Khmer

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[55] Here see work of Charles Keyes, Benedict Anderson, and Penny Edwards among others. The largest clientele for Angkor paintings seems to be the expatriate Cambodians. Interviews with painting store owners, 1997-2000. These painting store owners have an extremely refined idea of what styles of paintings various nationalities appreciate and buy. Whereas Japanese and Cambodians from abroad like clear replications from photographs, according to these store owners, Westerners dislike such repetitions and instead prefer paintings which show individual gesture and brushstroke. When I first visited Cambodia in 1992 and then 1994, the only painter whom I saw making such works was Sophannarith. As his paintings began to sell, others began to copy them. Today, the tourist entering only one of the painting stores will think that such a gestural painting is unique. Upon entering several more of these stores, the tourist finds the unique gesture perfectly replicated in any number of copies and variations.

[56] Conversation with Asasax, May 1999.

[57] Horrific as it may seem, Cambodia is one of the countries now playing host to "war tourists" and those who come to see the sites of "genocide". The typical tourist itinerary for Phnom Penh, as spelled out in almost any guide book, suggests spending a morning at the National Museum of Cambodia viewing the splendors of Angkor followed by an afternoon spent at the Tuol Sleng Prison Museum viewing the horrors of the Khmer Rouge.

Rouge. Most of them, as urban dwellers, carry a sense of uneasiness - if not terror - for the countryside where they spent those fearful years. In the picture-perfect smoothness of the paintings they make in multiples, they refute any sign of their own histories. One could call this the blankness of trauma.[58] Or is it the will of the damaged to forget and go on?

[58] See the catalogue essay by Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth in The Legacy of Absence (Reyum, 2000).

Chapter Six: The Landscape of Today

In April of 1975, the Lon Nol regime fell and the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh, ushering in the era of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Within a few days, the cities were emptied and most Cambodians became field laborers during the subsequent years of terror.[1] Perhaps the best known account of painting during the Khmer Rouge era is that of Vann Nath, a sign painter from Battambang who after his arrest served as a painter in the Tuol Sleng Prison (figure 145).[2] The sculptor Im Chan worked in the same prison workshop but afterwards insisted on a more private settling of his experiences. Vann Nath and Im Chan both subsequently described making primarily portraits of Pol Pot during their time in the prison; they assumed that these pictures were put in public places or given as gifts to visiting leaders.[3]

Sam Kem Chang objects to their accounts.[4] Working in Phnom Penh as an illustrator for the newspaper បដិវត្តន៍ (The Revolution) throughout the DK years, he

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[1] See among many other accounts, François Ponchaud, Cambodia Year Zero; Chandler and Kiernan, eds. Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea; Karl Jackson, ed. Cambodia 1975-1978; Michael Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982; as well as the more retrospective analysis of the cultural ramifications of the tragedy in Ebihara and Ledgerwood, Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile. See also The Legacy of Absence, an exhibition and catalogue which I co-curated with Ly Daravuth at Reyum, 2000.

[2] Vann Nath, A Cambodian Prison Portrait: One Year in the Khmer Rouge's S21. After the January 1979 collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, Vann Nath helped to refigure the prison into a museum, painting a series of pictures which depict life and death as he remembered it there. These graphic images of torture, along with the display of photographs taken of prisoners at the time of their entry, form the central display of the museum.

[3] Conversations with Vann Nath and the late Im Chan 1997-2000. Im Chan was trained as a sculptor at the School of Cambodian Arts and later worked at the Conservation in Siem Reap.

[4] Conversations with Sam Kem Chang, 1997-2000.

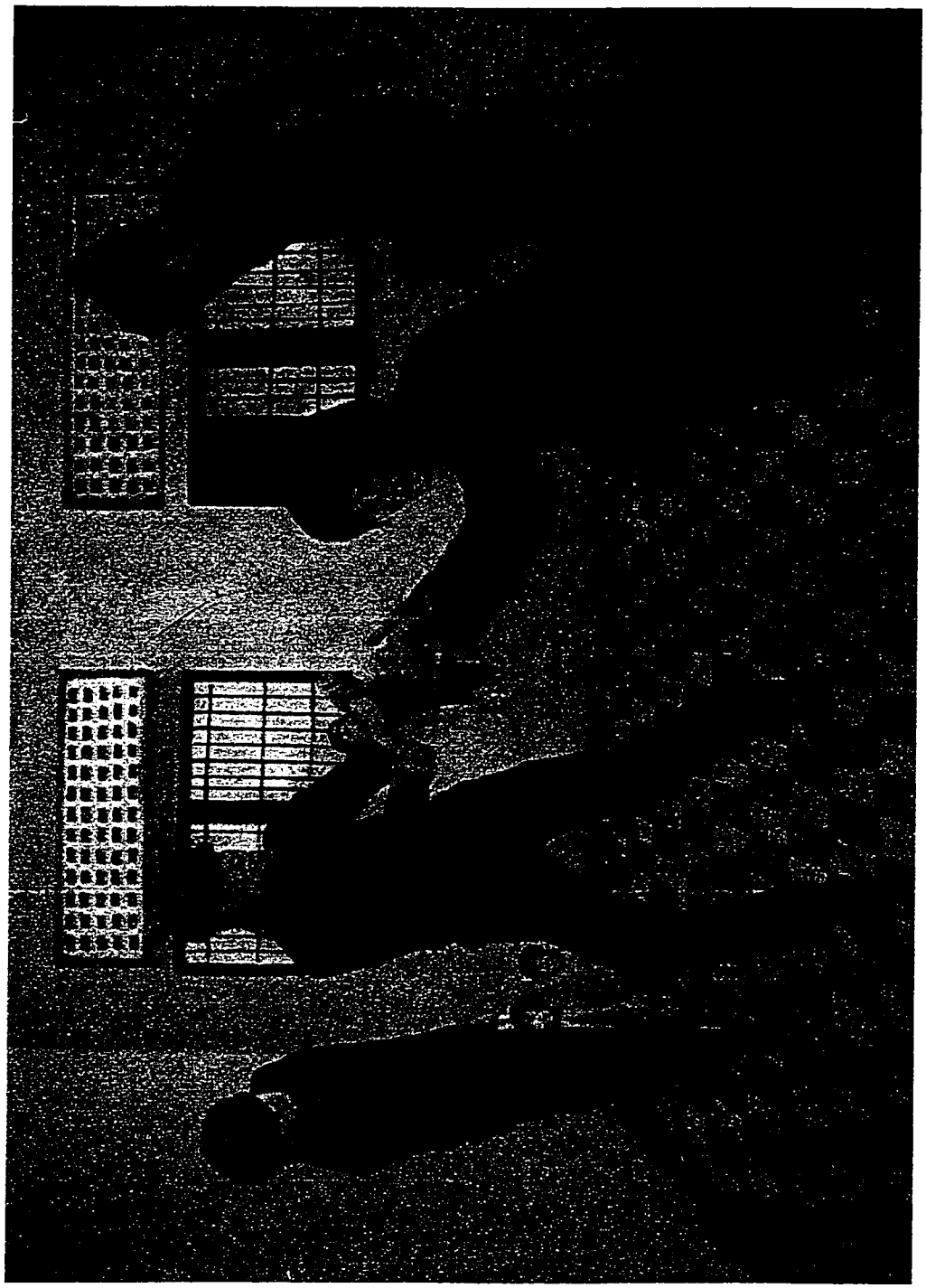

Figure 145
Vann Nath Painting of Tuol Sleng Prison, 1980

(oil on canvas, approx. 5 feet wide) Tuol Sleng Prison Museum Painting Collection

insists that Pol Pot would never have allowed his picture to embody the revolution, noting that he never saw an image of the leader in any of the buildings he entered during those years. It was through his connection to Sam Yuan and the Association of Khmer Artists in the 1960s - as well as from his experience training teachers - that Sam Kem Chang had befriended some of the Khmer Rouge who came to power in 1975. Although he walked out of Phnom Penh to his family's village along with all the other city dwellers in April of 1975, Sam Kem Chang was soon recalled to Phnom Penh in order to work at the Ministry of Culture under Yun Yat. In addition to making descriptive drawings and cartoons for newspapers and other DK pamphlets, Sam Kem Chang traveled through the provinces "photographing progress" and collecting images for use in DK publications.[5] In early 1976, Sam Kem Chang received permission to recall painters and other artists who had been his friends in the Association of Khmer Artists in order to restart some kind of School of Fine Arts that would help with the publicity efforts of the DK regime. Sitting together in 1997, telling me this story, Sam Kem Chang and Pen Tra both laughed.[6] Pen Tra received Sam Kem Chang's summons but was too scared to respond and somehow managed to avoid it. Yun Yat soon decided that "the time wasn't right yet anyway" for establishing such a School since there was still "fighting going on".[7]

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[5] Sam Kem Chang remembers Chinese film crews traveling in a similar manner, presumably producing movies which others remember being occasionally shown at monthly meetings (Conversation with Ly Bun Lim, May 2000). All these activities (newspapers, publications, film) replicate US tactics of the late 1950s and those of the Sangkum in the 1960s.

[6] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang and Pen Tra, November 1997.

[7] Conversation with Sam Kem Chang, June 2000.

In Battambang, Pech Song was similarly employed by DK as a draftsman.[8] A graduate in "modern painting" from the University in the early 1970s, Pech Song was imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge in Siem Reap in 1975 under suspicion of being a Lon Nol soldier. He claims to have drawn on the walls of his prison cell, thus revealing his skill to his guards. He was released and sent to Battambang to work for provincial authorities. As one of the few survivors who will admit that his life was not physically difficult during DK, Pech Song tells of eating normal food and living in a good house in a section of town where other workers (such as mechanics and technical personnel) lived with their families. While his wife and small children lived upstairs, Pech Song worked in a studio on the ground floor, primarily drafting plans of the province showing planned new roads, canals, and minefields. His work included preparing the banners for meetings by carefully following slogans and color instructions sent from Phnom Penh. He also painted huge roadside posters with messages of border protection, productivity, childbearing advice, malaria awareness, and anti-Vietnamese propaganda. Retrospectively both Pech Song and Sam Kem Chang recall working many nights until late under fear that their work would not be acceptable or would not be finished by a deadline.[9] Sam Kem Chang describes how the staff of his office devolved from a committed group of revolutionaries into a terrified, intensely paranoid, and splintered set of individuals who one by one disappeared, never to

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[8] The following paragraph is drawn from conversations with Pech Song, 1997-2000.

[9] Conversations with Sam Kem Chang and Pech Song, 1997-2000. Pech Song's wife today says that she has retrospectively understood the goal of the DK regime: they didn't want either to develop Cambodia (as DK rhetoric claimed), nor to kill all Cambodians (as some today claim). Rather, the goal of DK was simply to get everyone to follow orders, no matter what the order was, no matter how terrible it was. Paraphrase of a conversation, June 1998.

return. By early 1978, Sam Kem Chang himself was ordered to stop drawing and therefore feared for his life (although his wife continued to cook for high level leaders). In a seeming change of heart, he was again fully employed in late 1978 to draw anti-Vietnamese cartoons in the face of the impending invasion.[10]

In January of 1979, as Svay Ken has shown in his brilliant depiction of partition (figure 146), Vietnamese troops "liberated" Cambodia from the DK regime.[11] As Svay Ken describes it, the Vietnamese entered and stood pointing one way, urging people (and dogs and cows) into the urban centers; the Khmer Rouge stood and pointed the other way, ordering people into the mountains and forests of the West.[12] Between the Khmer Rouge who were fleeing, and the Vietnamese soldiers who were entering, the people ran back and forth, starving and too stunned to believe the messages of either side.

None of the work that Pech Song or Sam Kem Chang completed during the DK regime has survived, although today they can provide lively descriptions of both their life and their work during that period. Perhaps the clearest and most startling remaining visual evidence comes from Pech Song. In 1979, he shifted with apparent ease to work for the Phnom Penh arts and propaganda section of the newly established,

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[10] A similar late reprieve to the internal purges of DK has been noted in political histories of the time. See particularly Michael Vickery's account of the experiences of intellectuals who were lured back to Cambodia by the DK and then kept in what was very close to a prison camp for the regime's duration. Only during the last few months did their conditions improve. See Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982, p.151.

[11] This event became yet another point of contention within larger Cold War politics. The US, for one, insisted that the Vietnamese had "invaded" (rather than "liberated") and thus steadfastly refused to recognize the PRK throughout the 1980s (while supporting border resistance elements which included the reorganised Khmer Rouge).

[12] Conversation with Svay Ken, December 1999.



Figure 146

Svay Ken "The Division of the Country, 1979", 2000
From a series of paintings depicting the experiences of the Svay family during the Khmer Rouge era

(oil on canvas, approx. 2 feet wide)

Vietnamese-sponsored government (the People's Republic of Kampuchea).[13] Part of his duties included designing the original "models" for the poster paintings to be put in public places throughout Cambodia (figure 147). To make these designs, Pech Song attended high level meetings and propaganda sessions in order to be imbued with the ideology of the new government.[14] He then freely "created" the poster designs which, upon approval, would circulate as small scale models throughout Cambodia (figures 148, 149). Local sign painters were commissioned by authorities to paint large scale copies of his designs for placement by provincial roadsides. Pech Song still calls these posters some of his most "creative" work, contrasting them to the rote copies of photographs of apsaras and Angkor Vats by which he makes his living today (figure 150). With their repeated themes of "protecting and (re)building the motherland", these works are also described by Pech Song as "not very different from what I did for the Khmer Rouge". All he had to do for the new regime of the 1980s, he explains, was to "leave out the anti-Vietnamese stuff" (the new regime, the PRK, was supported by the Vietnamese while the Khmer Rouge had been rabidly anti-Vietnamese).[15]

The experiences of Pech Song and Sam Kem Chang during the DK are the exception. To simply read the names of the students who entered the School of Cambodian Arts (and later the University) during the 1950s and 1960s and then

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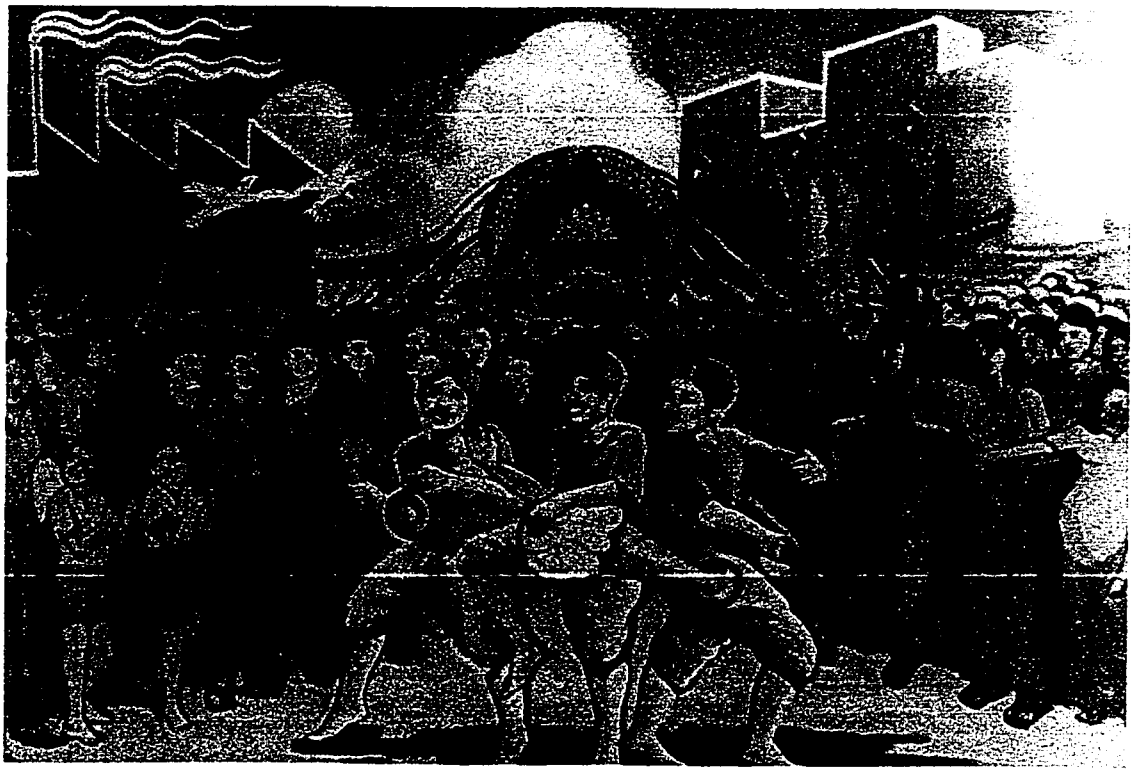
[13] Vietnamese authorities in Phnom Penh had initially thought that Cambodian painters would have to be sent to Vietnam to "learn" to paint propaganda. Pech Song laughingly explains that Cambodian painters who had been compelled to work for DK soon convinced their Vietnamese bosses that they already had sufficient propaganda skills to immediately begin working for the new regime. Pech Song explains the ease with which he shifted from regime to regime in this way: "I am a painter first and foremost, I painted what they told me to paint". Conversation with Pech Song, August 1997.

[14] Conversations with Pech Song, 1997-2000.

[15] Conversation with Pech Song, August 1997.



Figure 147 : Pech Song, Poster designs
Above: The five year anniversary of the PRK (January 7, 1979 - January 7, 1984)
Below: Social unity, production and traditional culture pictured together for the five year anniversary



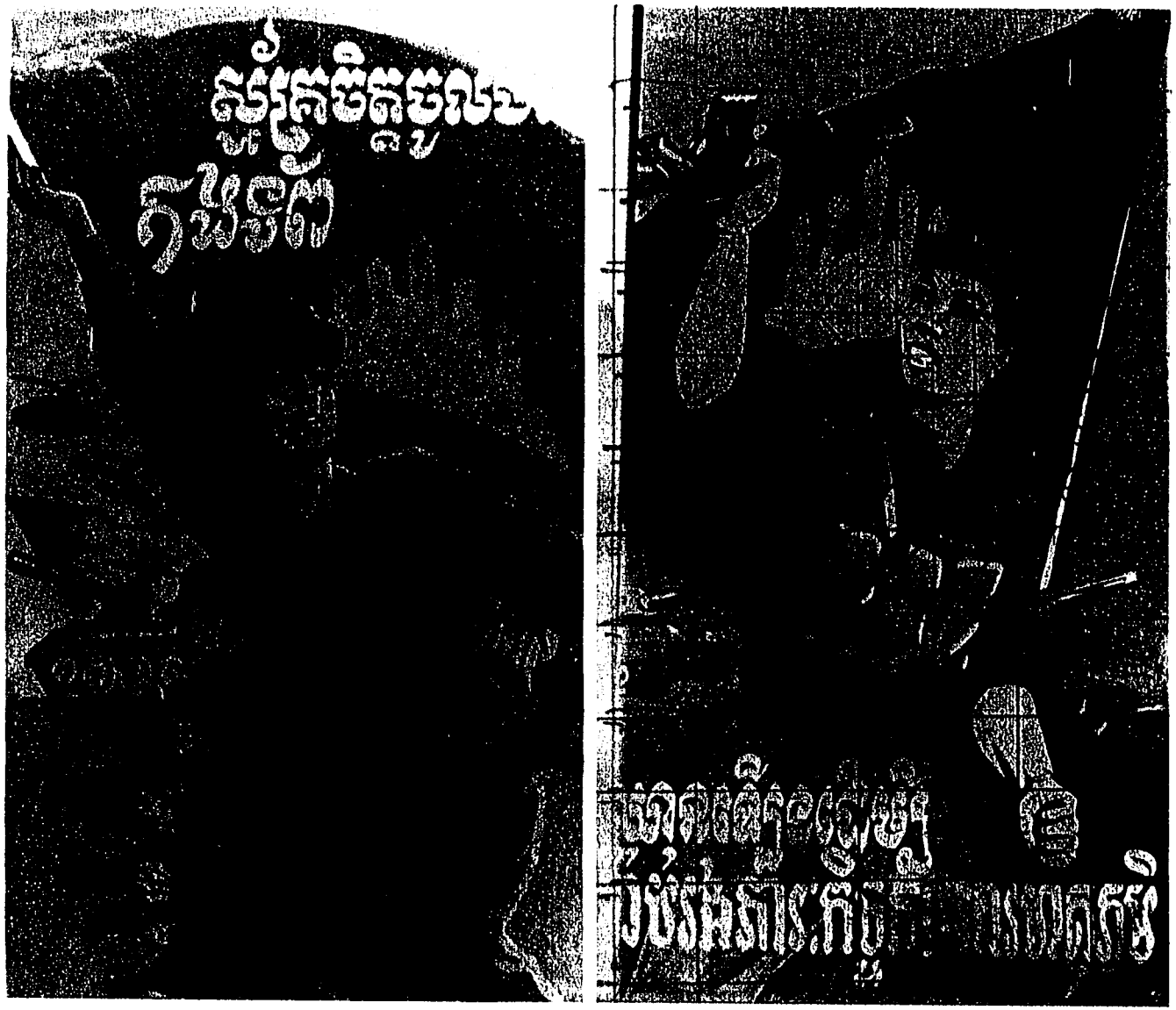


Figure 148

Pech Song, Designs for posters recruiting soldiers, early 1980s

Left: "Volunteer to become a soldier"

Right: "Step up to ensure the protection of the motherland"

(Photographs of paintings now destroyed, courtesy of Pech Song)



Figure 149

Pech Song, Poster designs, early 1980s

Left: "Commit to increase production during the dry season to 100%"

Right: "The alliance of workers, farmers, soldiers, and intellectuals"

(Photographs of paintings now destroyed, courtesy of Pech Song)



Figure 150

Pech Song
Apsara paintings 1999

(oil on canvas, approx. 4 feet high)

compare these lists to the living today is to provoke a haunting liturgy to the dead.[16] Those who did survive the years of hard labor and fear returned to Phnom Penh to find the grounds of the University of Fine Arts overgrown with chest high grass.[17] The School had largely been abandoned during the regime (almost four years), although some remember that certain rooms had been used by the Khmer Rouge to store fertilizer and, more eerily, shoes, while others claim that one room showed signs of being used for a torture chamber. Workers preparing the nearby Ministry of Justice for the forthcoming trial (in absentia) of DK leaders were borrowed to help clear the School grounds.[18] Descriptions of the spring of 1979 recall a slow and almost miraculous process in which people who had once lived in the city gradually walked back to Phnom Penh.[19] Former students and teachers who had survived, appeared one by one at the School. As that year proceeded and it became more clear who had returned and who had died, Som Samai organised the surviving professors and sent

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[16] Conversations with Tang Hor Yi, Pen Tra, Thong Sophan, Srieng Y, Chet Chan, and the late Im Chan and Chhun Pok, 1997-2000. Simply among the few painter's names which I have rehearsed from the 1960s, Sam Yuan as we have seen died before the regime came to power. Nhek Dim, Ouk Yin, and Man Mkot all died during DK as did many of the professors at the School whom I have not found room to mention.

[17] Conversations with An Sok and Som Samai, 1997-2000. The silversmith, Som Samai became the first post-DK dean of the Faculty and was the motivating force for its initial reconstruction; it is a tribute to his energy and dedication that he quickly managed to collect professors and supplies and restart instruction at the School.

[18] Conversation with Som Samai, June 1999

[19] Conversations with Som Samai, Svay Ken, An Sok, Prang Som, the late Chhun Pok, and the late Im Chan 1997-2000.

them to look for materials, documents and tools, both along the roads of Phnom Penh, and at the homes of professors known to have died.[20]

When the school allowed the first class of students to enter (1980), a flood of applicants appealed to authorities for entrance since those studying would be allowed to stay at the school with basic meals provided (figure 151). It seems that many of the members of the first classes admitted to the School had family connections either to the University of Fine Arts prior to DK or to members of the newly reconstituted Ministry of Information, Culture and Propaganda. Both students and professors of the early 1980s remember a rigorous discipline (the flag was saluted at 7:30) which was motivated as much by what they had gone through as by fear of the new authoritarian regime.[21] Certainly the threat of being summarily drafted into the army kept many of the male students diligently studying at the School. Descriptions of the early 1980s at the School also however emphasize the feeling of the time "before there was money" (salaries were paid in rice until about 1983). Everyone had nothing, these accounts

[20] An Sok, for example, went to the home of his former teacher, Keth Roeun, a well-known mask maker who had died during DK. An Sok dug up the molds, used to cast the lacquer detailing on masks, which Keth Roeun had buried in his garden as the fighting came closer in 1975. Today, An Sok and his son An Sitha (today head of the lacquer section of the Department of Plastic Arts) still use these molds in their mask-making workshop. Asked about their return to Phnom Penh after the DK, some of the personnel of the School remember supplies and objects as largely untouched until the Vietnamese began to ship the good paper and paint back to Vietnam; others describe total devastation by the Khmer Rouge and stress the necessity of rebuilding everything.

[21] Training was at the high school level and the School reopened under the name "The School of Fine Arts". University-level training (with Departments of Archaeology and Architecture as well as Plastic Arts) only reopened in 1989.

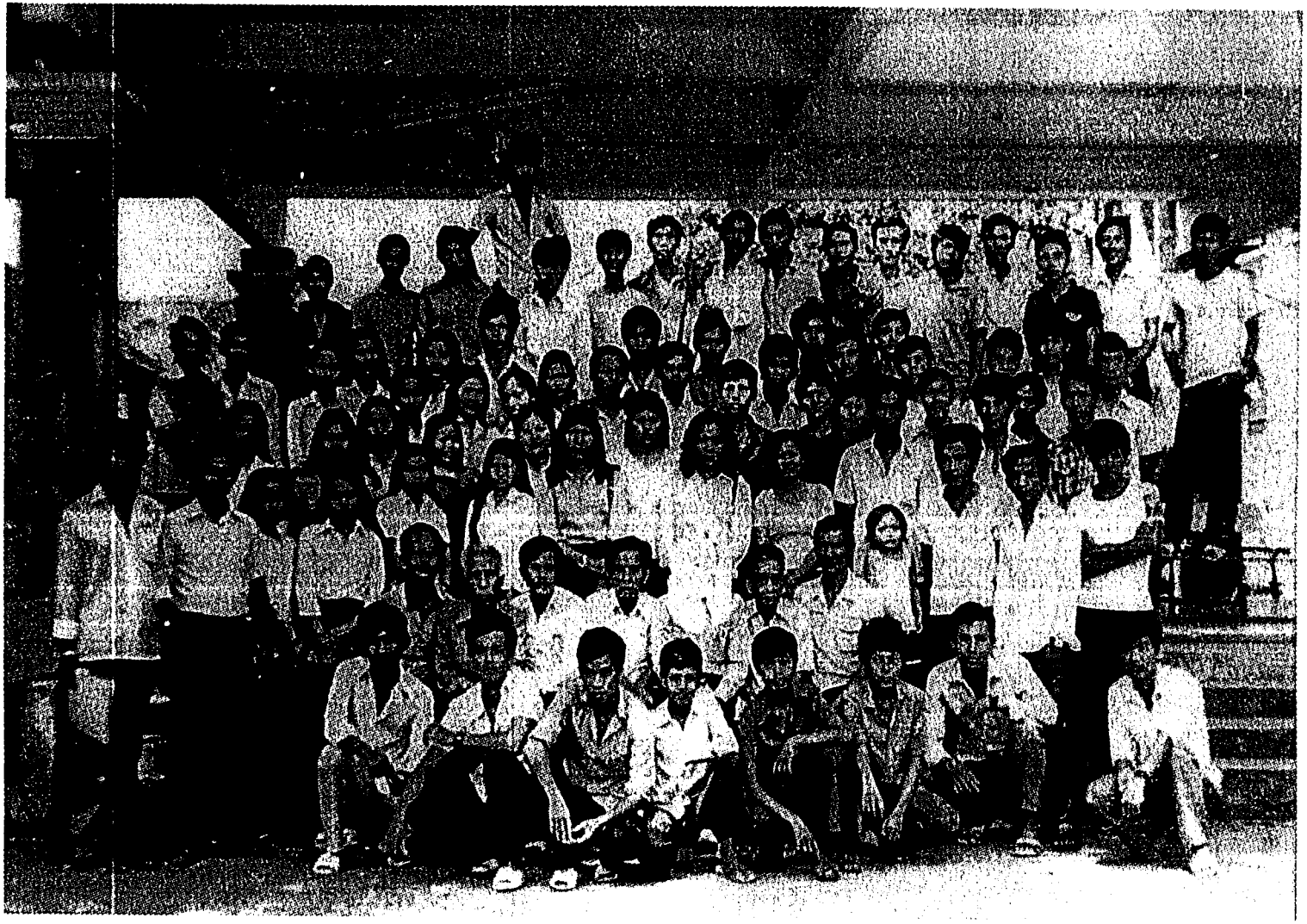

Figure 151 : The School of Fine Arts, faculty and students, 1981-2?

(photograph courtesy of Chhoeun Rithy)

recall, and so much had been lost: "we were all equal and worked together, trying so hard to bring something back".[22]

What then did study consist of, given the huge gaps in the School caused by the death of so many artists and teachers? Supplies were quickly provided by aid organisations, so a basic frame of paper and pencil was reestablished. As one professor explained, the easiest thing to do during the initial period of reconstruction was simply to take an object, put it there, and ask the students to draw it. Some of the things used as models were familiar "traditional" or "modern" sculptures left over from before the DK (figure 152). Other objects used as models were newly introduced, flown in by the Vietnamese who came to help the School (figure 153). For the first years of the 1980s, Vietnamese advisors taught subjects such as anatomy and set design at the School (figure 154, 155). In contrast to these "modern subjects", "traditional painting" was also reborn using the diagrams of Groslier (figure 156). Those who had survived remember feeling an additional urgency to teach such "Cambodian" subjects since many felt that the DK years had destroyed Khmer culture.[23] Other assignments seem more surreal given a traumatized student body and the context of the times. Fish inexplicably became the subject for postage stamp designs for a new Republic

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[22] Conversations with Som Samai, An Sok, Prang Som, Thong Sophan, Srieng Y, and the late Chhun Pok 1997-2000.

[23] The mandatory introductory course of drawing using these diagrams had, as we have seen in Chapter Four, been abolished at the School during the late 1950s (although the traditional painting section continued to train students to follow the canon of representation formalised by Groslier). Today the drawing course developed by Groslier has been reinstated at the high school level and is considered a foundation course which conveys intrinsically Khmer forms. Some say the course was initiated during the early 1980s in order to rebuild culture. Others claim that it was only in 1989 that the curriculum was revised and "Khmerized" in the words of one professor. Conversations with Som Samai, An Sok, Prang Som, Thong Sophan, Srieng Y, and the late Chhun Pok 1997-2000.



Figure 152

Drawing of a Khmer sculpture
Student assignment
School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

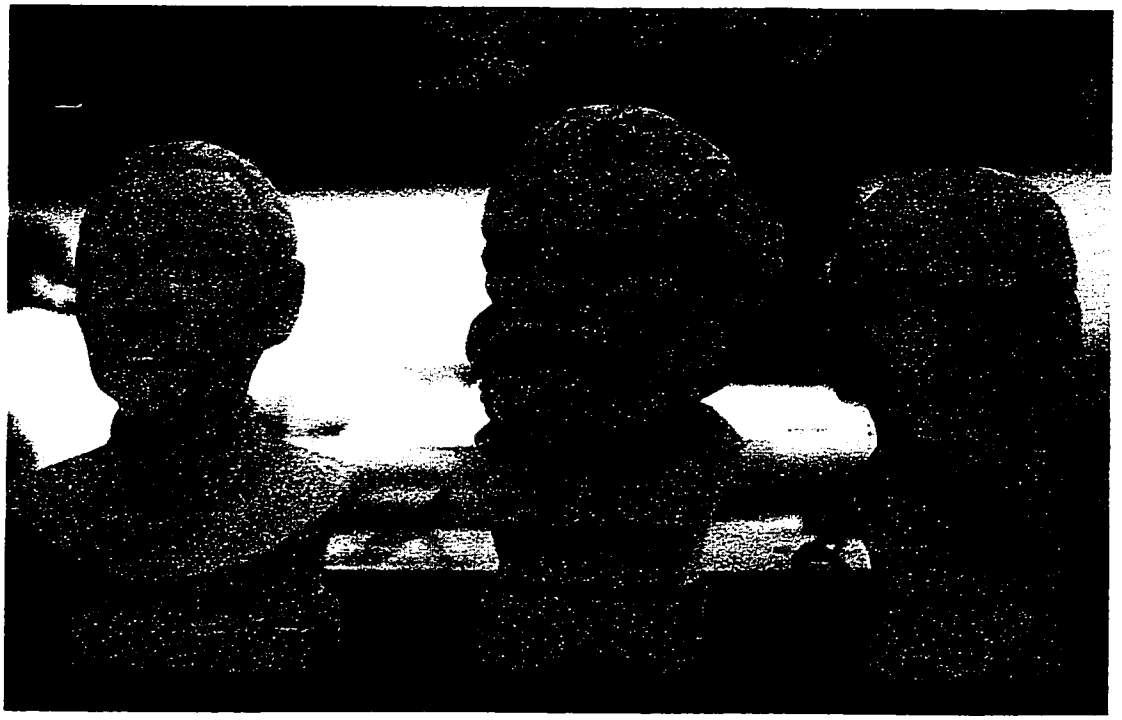



Figure 153

Above: Busts brought by Vietnamese advisors to the School of Fine Arts in the early 1980s. Left to right: Ho Chi Minh, Marx, Lenin

Left: A student drawing of the bust of Lenin, early 1980s, School of Fine Arts

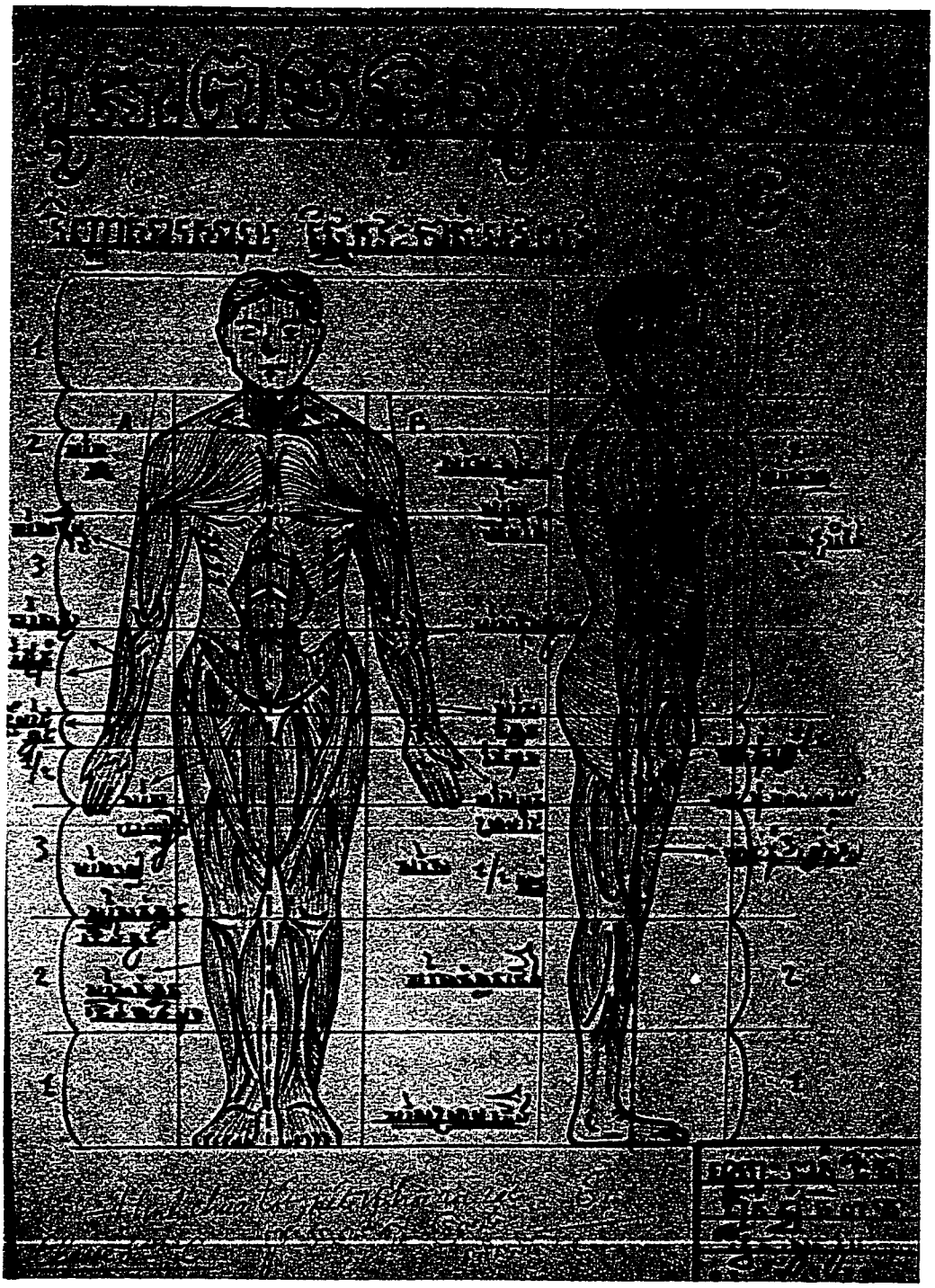

Figure 154 : Anatomy Assignment, School of Fine Arts, 1983
Corrections are made in the Vietnamese language by a Vietnamese advisor

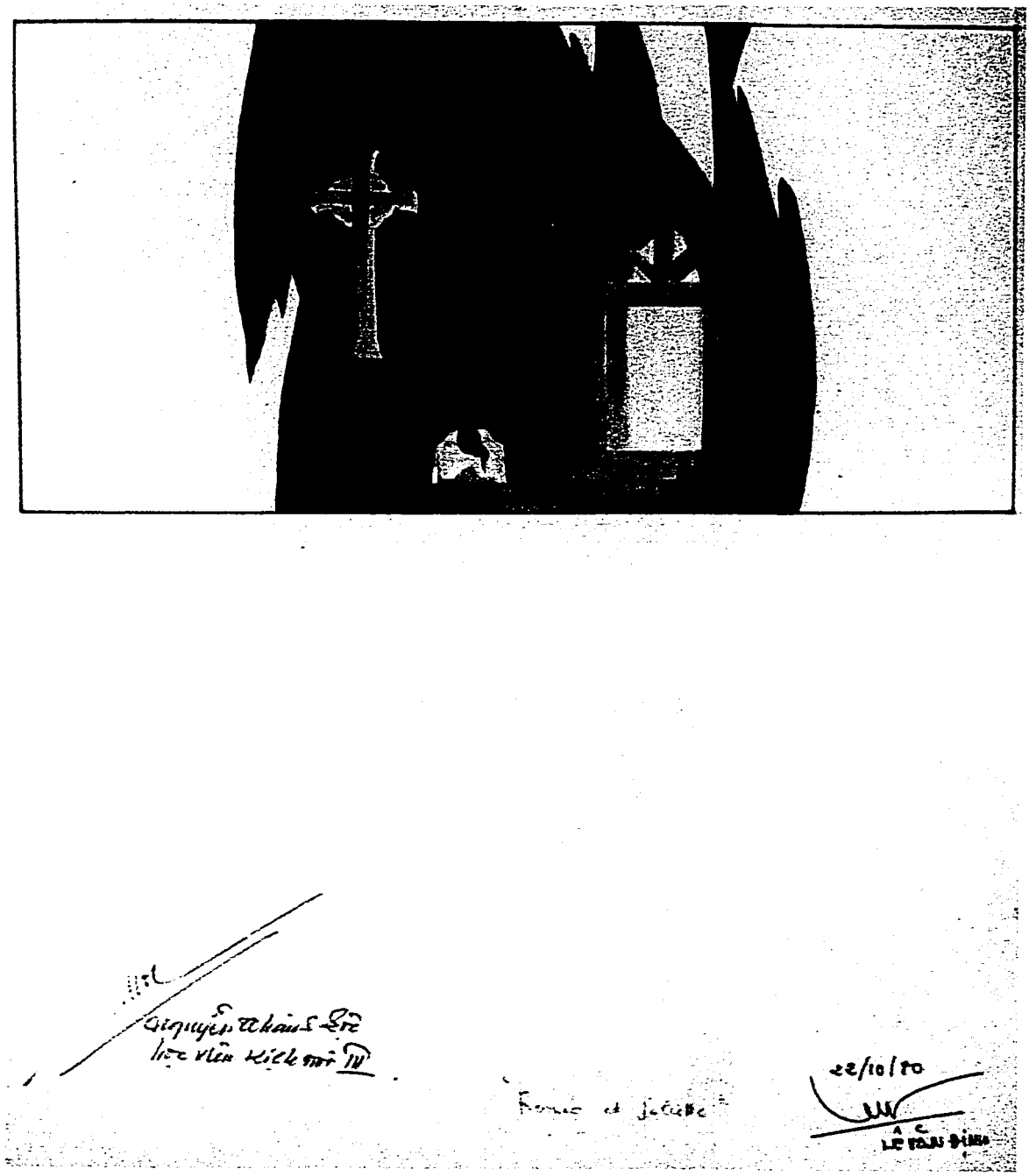

Figure 155 : Set for Romeo and Juliet
Sample design by a Vietnamese advisor at the School of Fine Arts, 1980



Figure 156 : Kbach Angkor, a Khmer ornament
Student assignment, School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

presented in Khmer and French (figure 157); sketches were made for propaganda posters like those of Pech Song (figure 158, 159); and peace poster design flourished despite the ongoing civil war (figure 160). It is hard to imagine how students in 1981 must have felt completing assignments which asked them, for example, to design paper with logos for "Indochina peace" (figure 161).[24] Nor can we imagine a way in which they might have coherently synthesized the various models and representations offered to them during those chaotic times. Former students describe a kind of focus in which they tried simply to attend each class and think about what was assigned, cutting out the other emotional and personal problems which beset them.[25] Retrospectively, some agree that the training they received was piecemeal and that they learned less about Khmer culture and history than they would have liked to.[26]

Examples of "masterpieces" from these years can still be found in the storeroom of the Department of Plastic Arts.[27] The topics of these paintings were assigned by the School administrators and, in the early 1980s at least, seem to have reflected the

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[24] Indochina was invoked by the Vietnamese in order to explain the historical connection between the two countries, legitimating their coherence as a single whole. This unit is still invoked, surprisingly, in things like the SPAFA art curriculum workshop for Indochina (January 1999).

[25] Conversations with So Chenda, Phy Chan Than, Soeung Vannara, An Sitha and Long Sophea 1997-2000.

[26] Conversations with Touth Bun Chheng and the late Chhun Pok, 1998. The degree to which the Vietnamese-sponsored government suppressed teaching about Khmer culture is still a sensitive and difficult topic today. While some told me retrospectively that the "traditional drawing" of Groslier was not permitted at the School during the 1980s, this must be an exaggeration since several of the current professors received degrees in "traditional painting" from the School during the early 1980s

[27] "Masterpieces" are the large paintings which students complete in order to receive their final degree from the School. Today the storeroom of the Department of Plastic Arts languishes in a state of total despair with bats and termites slowly destroying the more than 1000 paintings



Figure 157

Postage stamp design
Student assignment, School of Fine Arts, 1983

(watercolor on paper, approx. 1 foot wide)
RUFA Collections (uncatalogued)

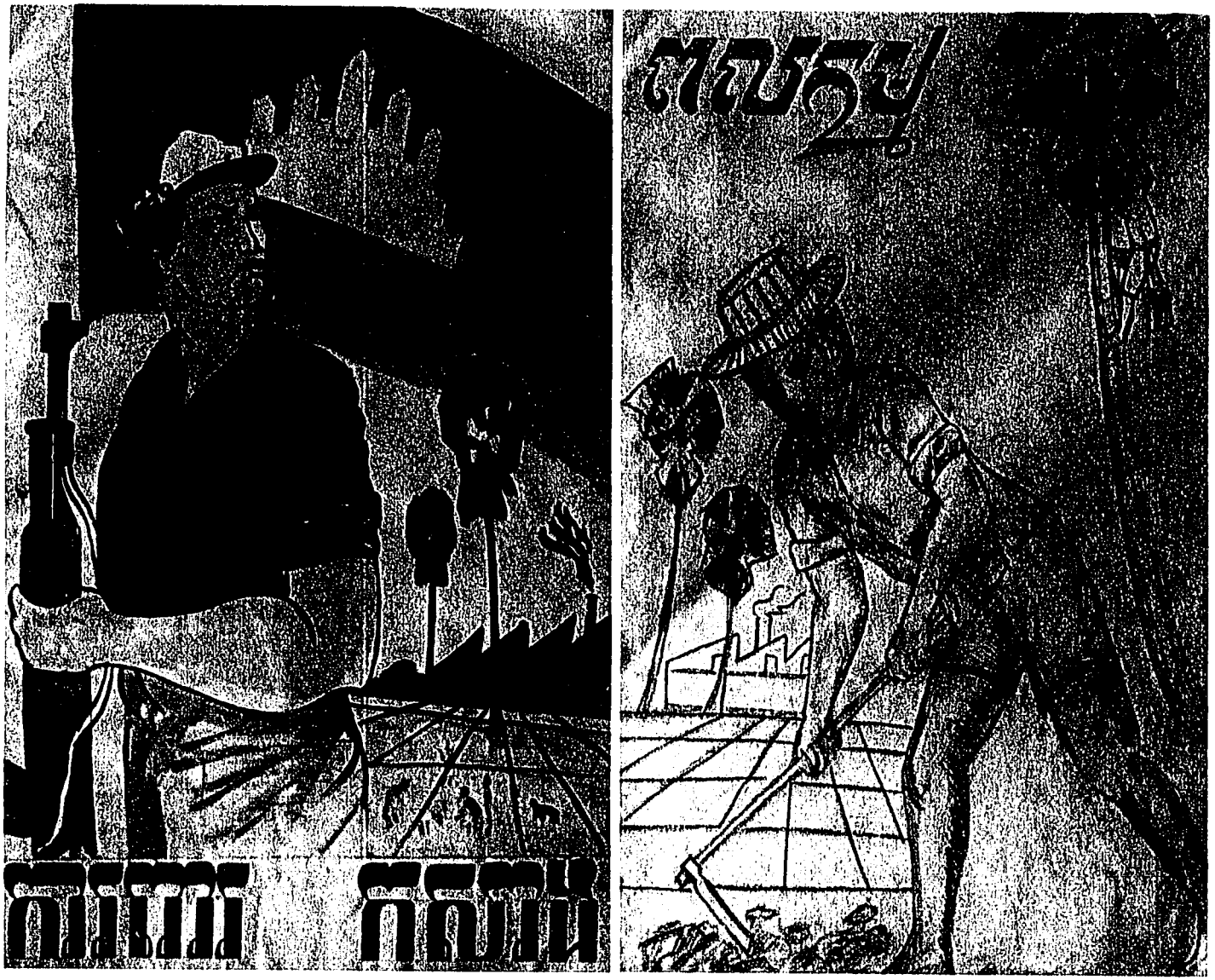


Figure 158

Poster Designs Student assignments, School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

Left: "Protect, Build up"

Right: "Strength"

(watercolor and charcoal on paper, each design approx. 1 foot wide) RUFA collection, (uncatalogued)



Figure 159

Poster Designs
Student assignments, School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

Left: "Protect, Build up"

Right: The alliance of workers, farmers, soldiers and intellectuals

(charcoal on paper, each design approx. 1 foot wide) RUFA collection (uncatalogued)



Figure 160

Peace Poster Design, School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

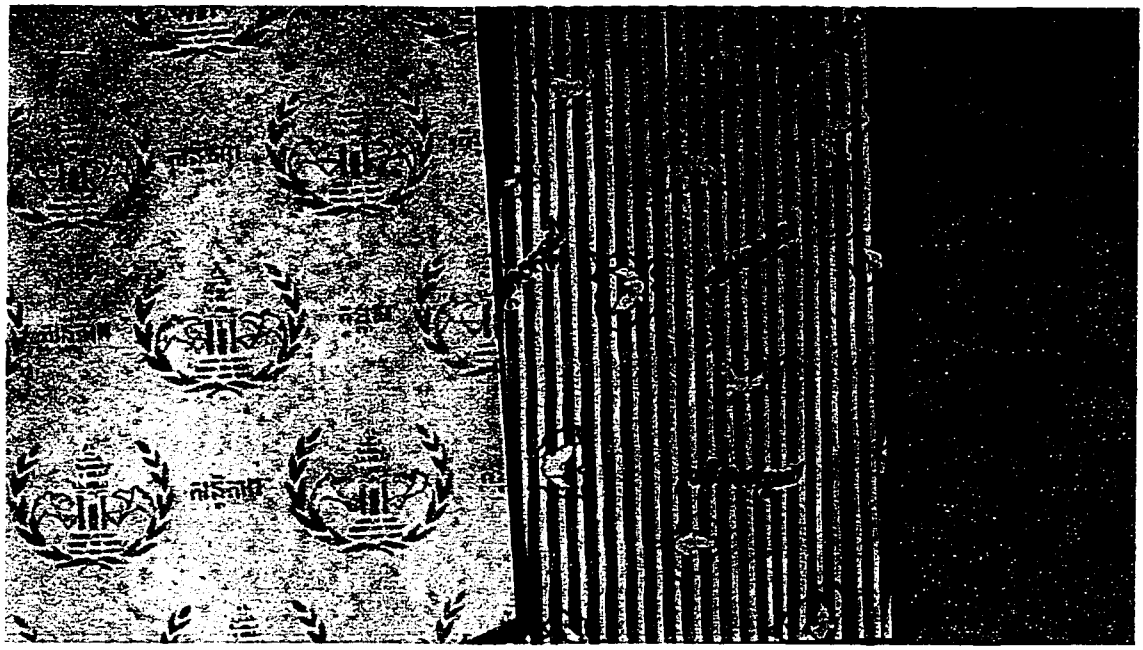
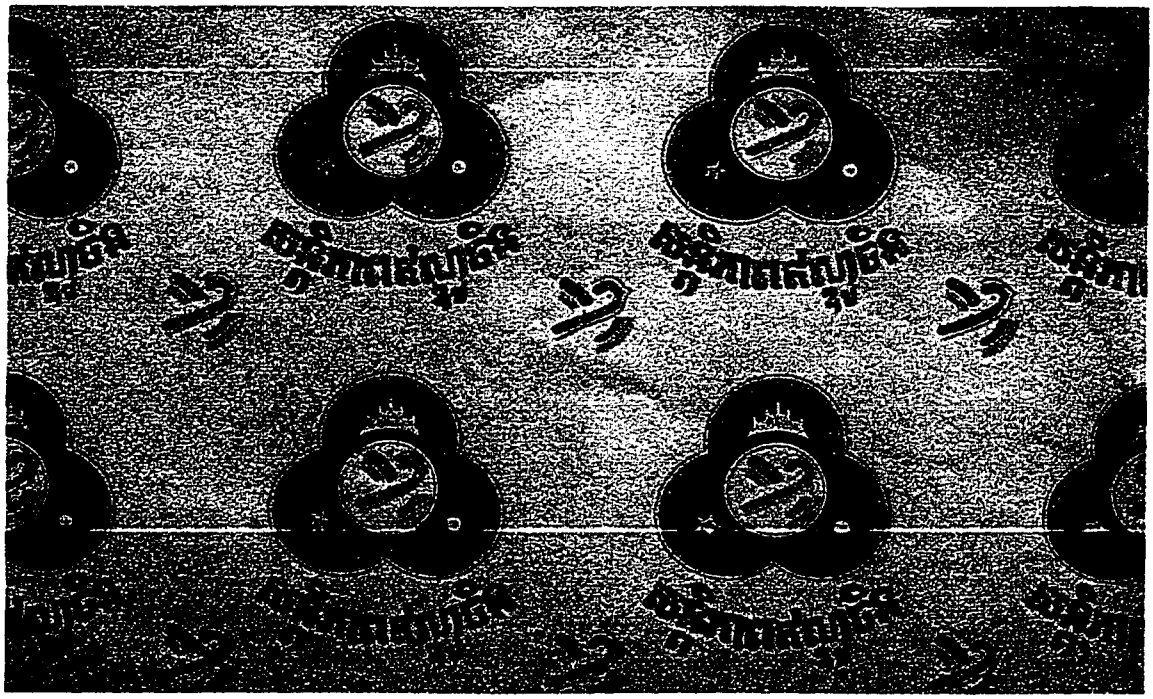


Figure 161

"Peace Paper". The paper below reads "Peace Indochina!"
Student Assignments, School of Fine Arts, 1983



sentiments of the Vietnamese "liberators". In one enormous canvas, "The Scream of Khmer Blood", Pol Pot smiles eerily out of a bloody sea ringed with a beach of skulls (figure 162). Another huge canvas shows a bicycle factory in action, ode to the rebuilding of small industries (figure 163). Other images offer poster-sized rehearsals of official horror (figure 164). "War. We don't need it!" announces one poster, ironically echoing the size and gesture of a travel poster urging tourists to visit Cambodia (figure 165). The US is represented as well through a painting depicting one of the 1963-4 demonstrations against American imperialism (figure 166).

Through their new alliance to the "socialist brotherhood", Cambodian artists were drawn into an existing network of exhibition.[28] In 1981, for example, several sculptors were included in the "International Exhibition of Small-scale Sculpture", a display of sculpture from socialist countries which was held in Budapest, Hungary.[29] Although work was picked up by Ministry officials and presumably delivered to Hungary, all that the wood sculptor Sin Chan Than has to show from the exhibition is an empty catalogue page in which his work - depicted alongside the sculptures of Cuban, Angolan, and Polish sculptors - is represented by a simple blank white box (figure 167). Artists regarded these 1980s exhibitions with increasing bitterness as their work was never returned and rumors circulated that officials who did attend the exhibitions

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found there. In the new triumphalism of the post-Cold War era, there seems to be little interest in preserving or studying "Communist" paintings.

[28] The "socialist brotherhood" is a phrase which young professors repeatedly use today when asked to describe the PRK years. It is one of the eerier characteristics of contemporary Cambodia that people can still easily use the various rhetorical languages which they learned to survive the various regimes they have lived through.

[29] Thong Sophan and Sin Chan Than were included in this particular exhibition. I want to thank them as well as An Sok for telling me about this rather bitter history during conversations 1997-2000.

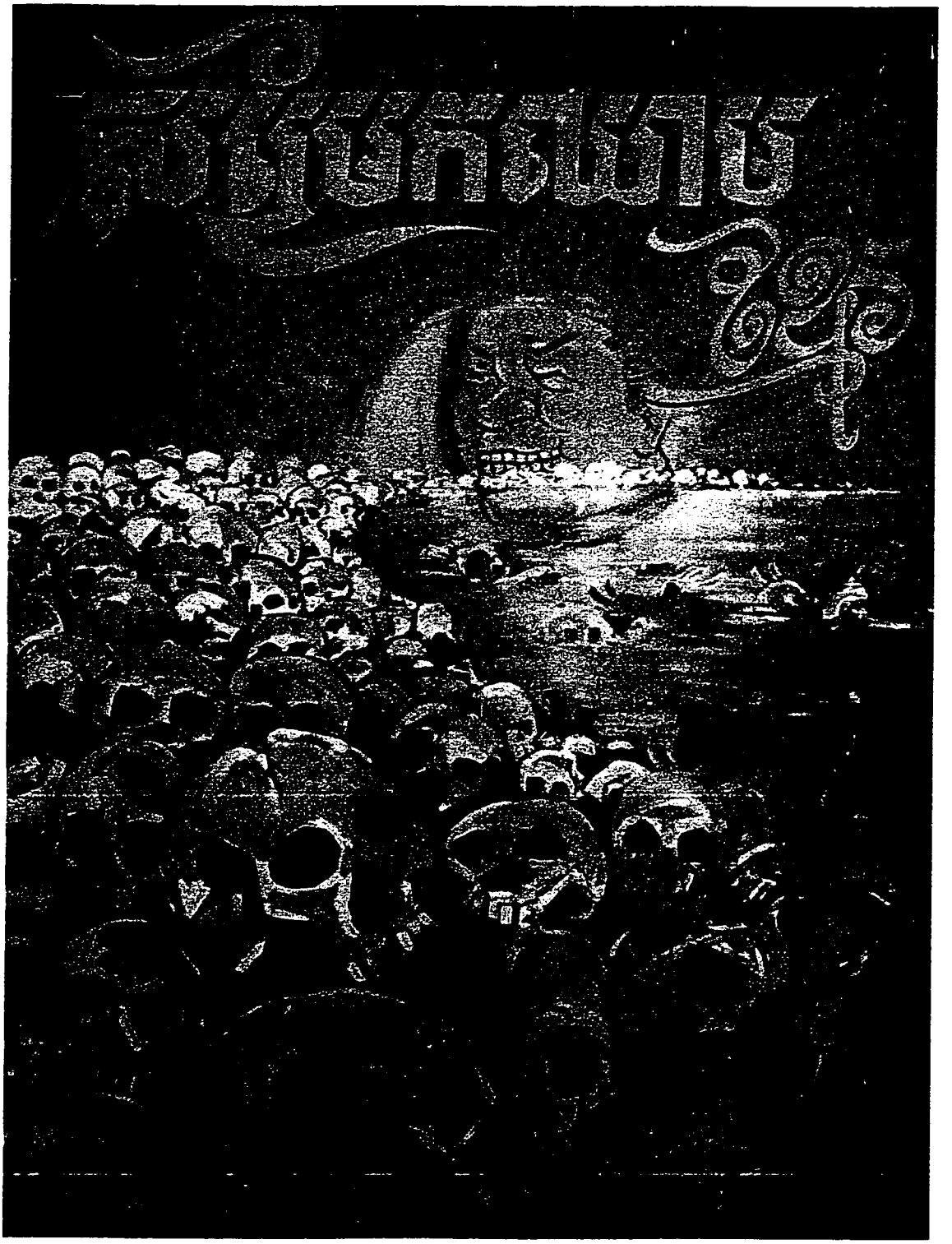

Figure 162 : "The Scream of Khmer Blood", School of Fine Arts, early 1980s

(oil on canvas, approx. 10 feet high)

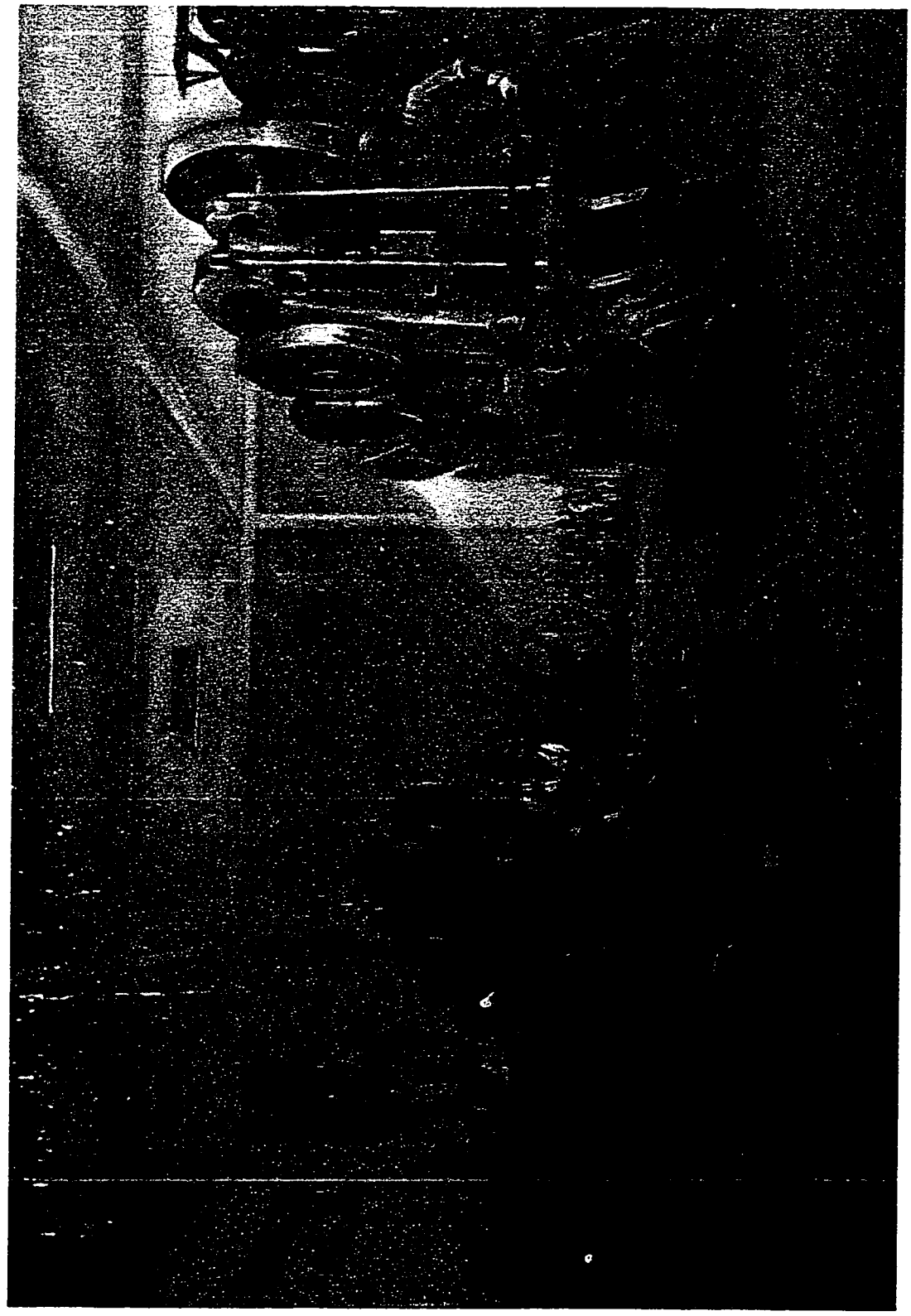

Figure 163 : "Bicycle Factory", School of Fine Arts, 1980s
(oil on canvas, approx. 10 feet wide)

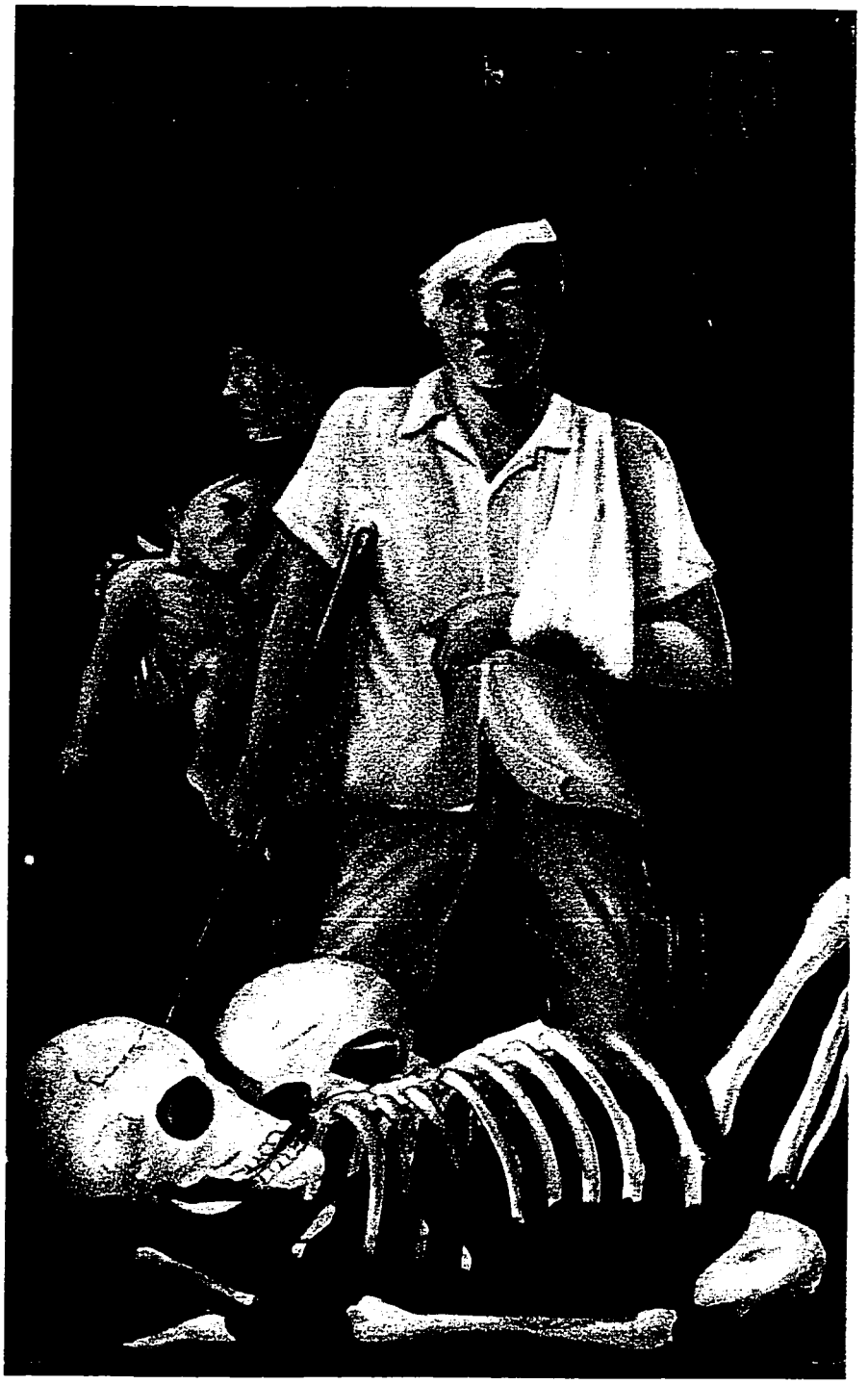

Figure 164

"The Accidents of the War", School of Fine Arts, 1980s

(oil on canvas, approx. 4 feet high)

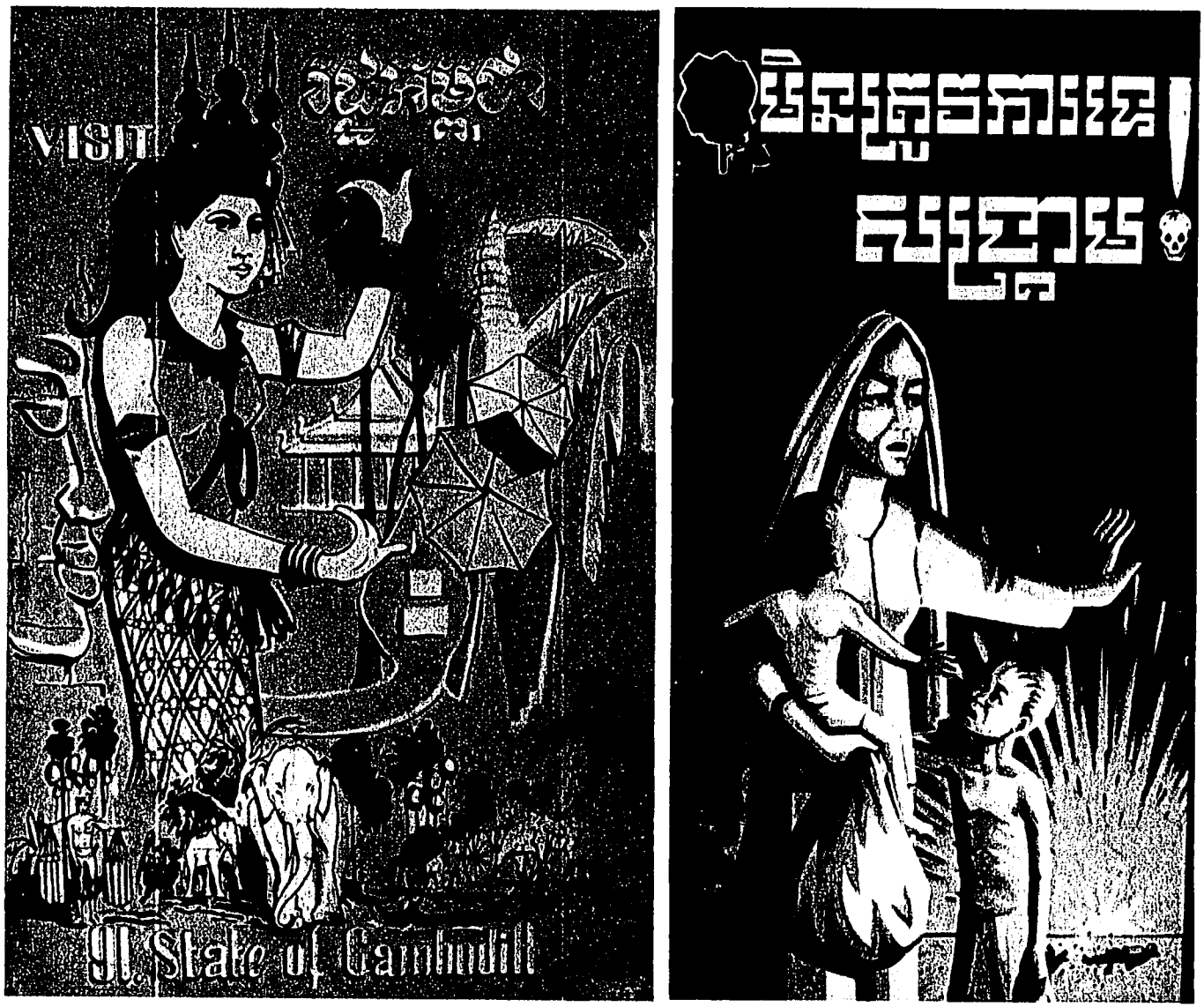

Figure 165

Poster designs, School of Fine Arts 1980s - early 1990s

Left: "Visit the State of Cambodia"

Right: "War! We don't need it"

(oil on canvas, each design approx. 4 feet high)

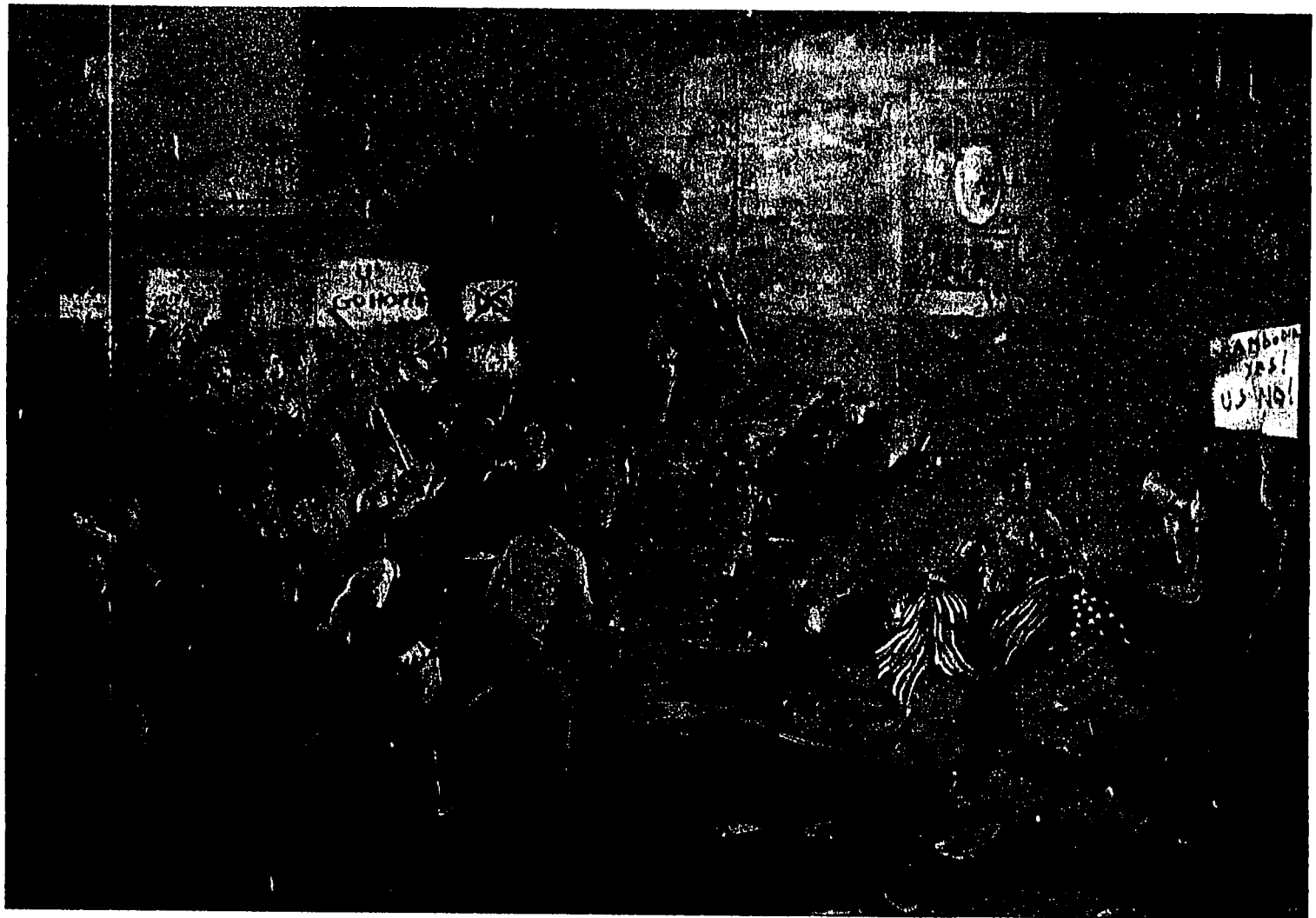

Figure 166 : Depiction of the demonstrations against the United States in 1963-4, School of Fine Arts painting, 1980s

(oil on canvas, approx. 2 feet wide)

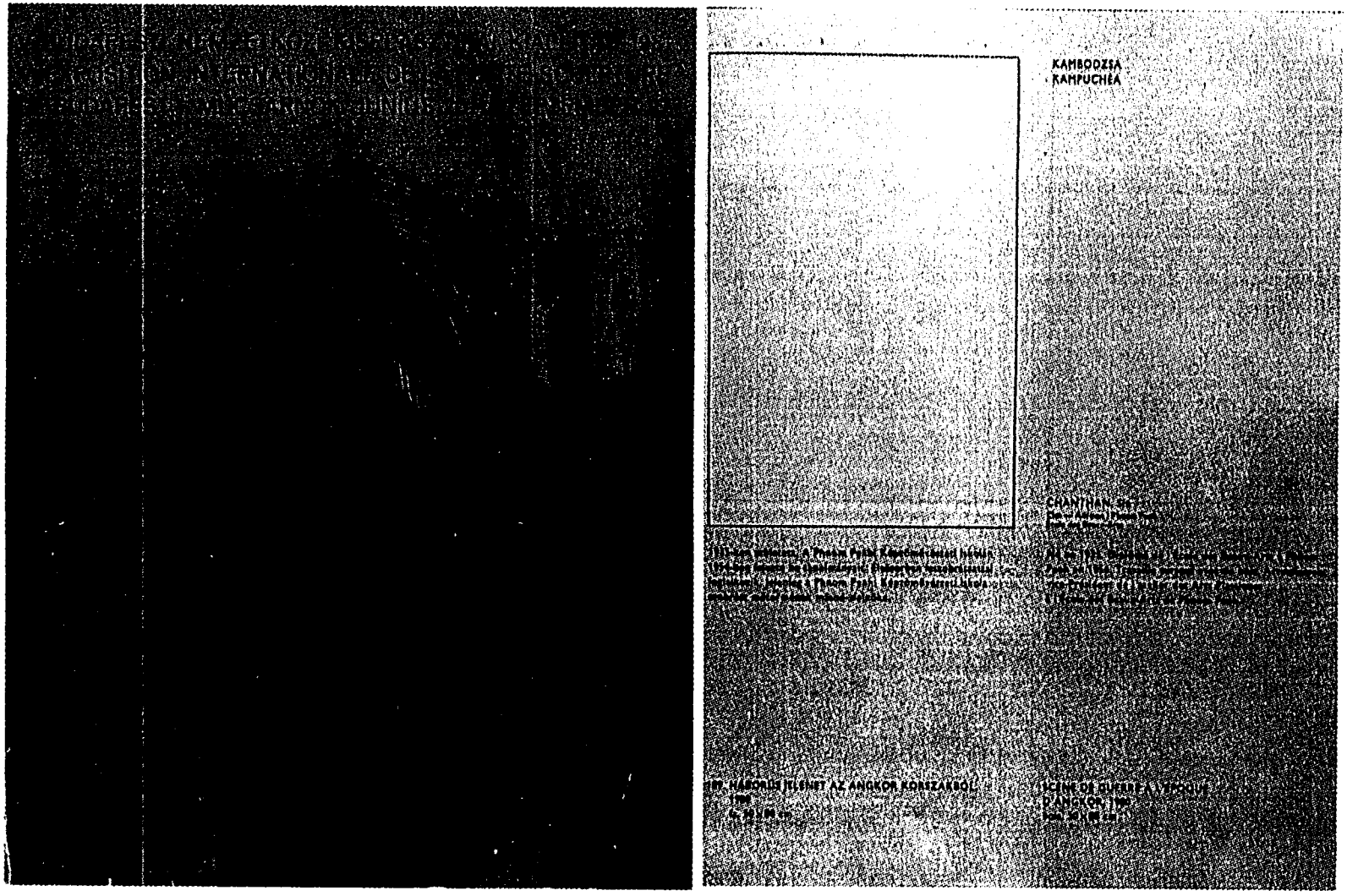

Figure 167 : Catalogue for the "International Exhibition of Small Sculpture", Budapest, Hungary, 1981

Left: cover; Right: page with a blank instead of a photograph of Sin Chan Than's wood sculpture, "Battle scene during the age of Angkor"

not only claimed the works as their own, but subsequently sold the objects for their own profit. The good will of the early 1980s easily disintegrated under such policies, coupled with the increasingly desperate financial situation in which professors at the School found themselves, once money was reintroduced and goods began to be sold. Unevenness reappeared quickly as government officials became increasingly wealthy while civil servants such as the teachers at the School of Fine Arts remained destitute.[30]

There was however, another aspect of the socialist brotherhood which gave great hope, at least to the students at the School in the early 1980s.[31] Since many intellectuals and artists had died, been killed, or fled during DK, credible higher education was extremely difficult to reestablish. The plan was to quickly train a generation of students at the School of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh and then send them abroad to study at accredited art schools where they could acquire diplomas that were the equivalent of MFAs.[32] When they had completed their studies abroad and returned to teach at the School of Fine Arts, the Ministry thinking ran, higher

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[30] Even today, the average salary of a full professor at the University of Fine Arts remains below $20 US a month and is often paid months late.

[31] Conversations with Phy Chan Than, Soeung Vannara, So Chenda, Long Sophea, Hor Kim Srean, An Sitha, Prom Sam An and Touth Bun Chheng, 1997-2000.

[32] It has been interesting to teach at the Department of Plastic Arts for the last two years, and thus to watch the latest influx of educational aid. Training seminars with foreign "experts" focus on the <u>form</u> of "international" higher education. Rarely is the content of what is to be taught discussed other than to suggest simply taking the courses offered by a Western college curriculum and imposing them. Workshops are held on "the credit", "the A,B,C,D,F grade", and "the diploma". Through such workshops, credentials like the "MFA" have become widely known and greatly coveted. The official Ministry stance seems to have been that all students returning from these socialist-sponsored study periods have MFAs, although in private, many will express doubt over both the degrees and their equivalencies. In one of the more amusing results of the push to "get Cambodia up to international standards", the newly imposed A,B,C,D,F grading system has metamorphosed in some current classes to a system in which students get A+++, A++, A+, and A, with anything lower than an A considered failing.

education of an international standard would once again be offered to Cambodians by Cambodians. The relationship of the PRK to Vietnam, and thus to the larger socialist brotherhood, allowed this plan to actually come true on a surprisingly large scale. Each year, "developed" countries of the brotherhood offered specific scholarships in painting, interior design, sculpture, and fabric design (as well as many other fields of study outside the visual arts) to students from the "poorer" countries of the brotherhood. It was through this system of educational exchange that a whole set of students, educated during the first few years of the 1980s at the School of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, were sent abroad.[33] They were, in the words of Long Sophea, "supposed to go abroad to learn new technologies and then return home to stir these new techniques together with our Khmer traditions in order to come up with something deliciously new".[34] Their study abroad, generally lasted seven to nine years, including language training. Thus they left the Cambodia of the PRK between 1985

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[33] The present day Department of Plastic Arts at the University level is staffed by these returnees who include, by their area of study with the institution granting their M.F.A. in parentheses:
Painting: Heng Mony Phal (Academy of Fine Arts, Kiev, Ukraine), Chhoeun Rithy (Academy of Fine Arts, Kiev, Ukraine); Soeung Vannara (Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, Poland); Phy Chan Than (Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary); Sous Sodavy (Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary); and Tum Saren (University of Fine Arts, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)
Sculpture: Touth Bun Chheng (Academy of Fine Arts, Sophia, Bulgaria); and Prom Sam An (Academy of Fine Arts, Gdansk, Poland)
Design: So Chenda (Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary); Hor Kim Srean (School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Moscow, USSR); Long Sophea (School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Moscow, USSR); and Pen Daravin (Academy of Fine Arts, Sophia, Bulgaria).
In addition, An Sitha, who today heads the high-school level lacquer and mask making section, received an MFA in lacquer painting from the University of Fine Arts, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. I would like to thank all of them for their conversations, their support, and their interest in my research during the four years I have spent at the Department.

[34] Conversation with Long Sophea, May 1998.

and 1988, and returned to the post-UNTAC "democracy" of the newly reborn Kingdom of Cambodia.[35]

All of the graduates granted scholarships admit in retrospect to some degree of shock when they were simply put on planes one day and sent off to Moscow, Kiev, Sophia, Warsaw, Gdansk, or Budapest (figure 168). They generally spent one year in intensive language programs with fellow students from smaller socialist-allied countries such as Angola, Cuba, and Czechoslovakia. Some of their fellow students had no art background whatsoever; they simply filled the quota which each of the developed socialist countries offered annually to smaller poorer countries of the socialist alliance. Even within the Cambodian group, students like Long Sophea, who had studied traditional painting at the School of Fine Arts, was designated as a design student, a field that she had never heard of. She was eventually offered the choice of studying either car design or fabric design at the School of Industrial and Fine Arts in Moscow.[36] Given their teenage years under the DK, and the limited education which they received at the barely reconstructed School of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, it is hard to underestimate the adjustments which each of the Cambodian students had to make in order, for example, to successfully study fabric design at a Moscow art school (figure 169). Once released from the language course into the study of art, many of these students underwent extremely painful periods of self-evaluation brought on by the

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[35] In the brilliantly insightful description of one of these students, the very different Cambodia to which he returned had acquired "democracy, human rights and anarchy".

[36] Although she remembers well the glossy images of automobiles which tempted her to study car design, Long Sophea explains that her advisor reminded her that such a vocation would not be particularly practical in Cambodia since large-scale industrial production would probably not develop in Cambodia during her lifetime. Conversations with Long Sophea 1997-2000.



Figure 168 : Heng Mony Phal, "Kiev"

(watercolor sketch, 11x14 inches approx.)

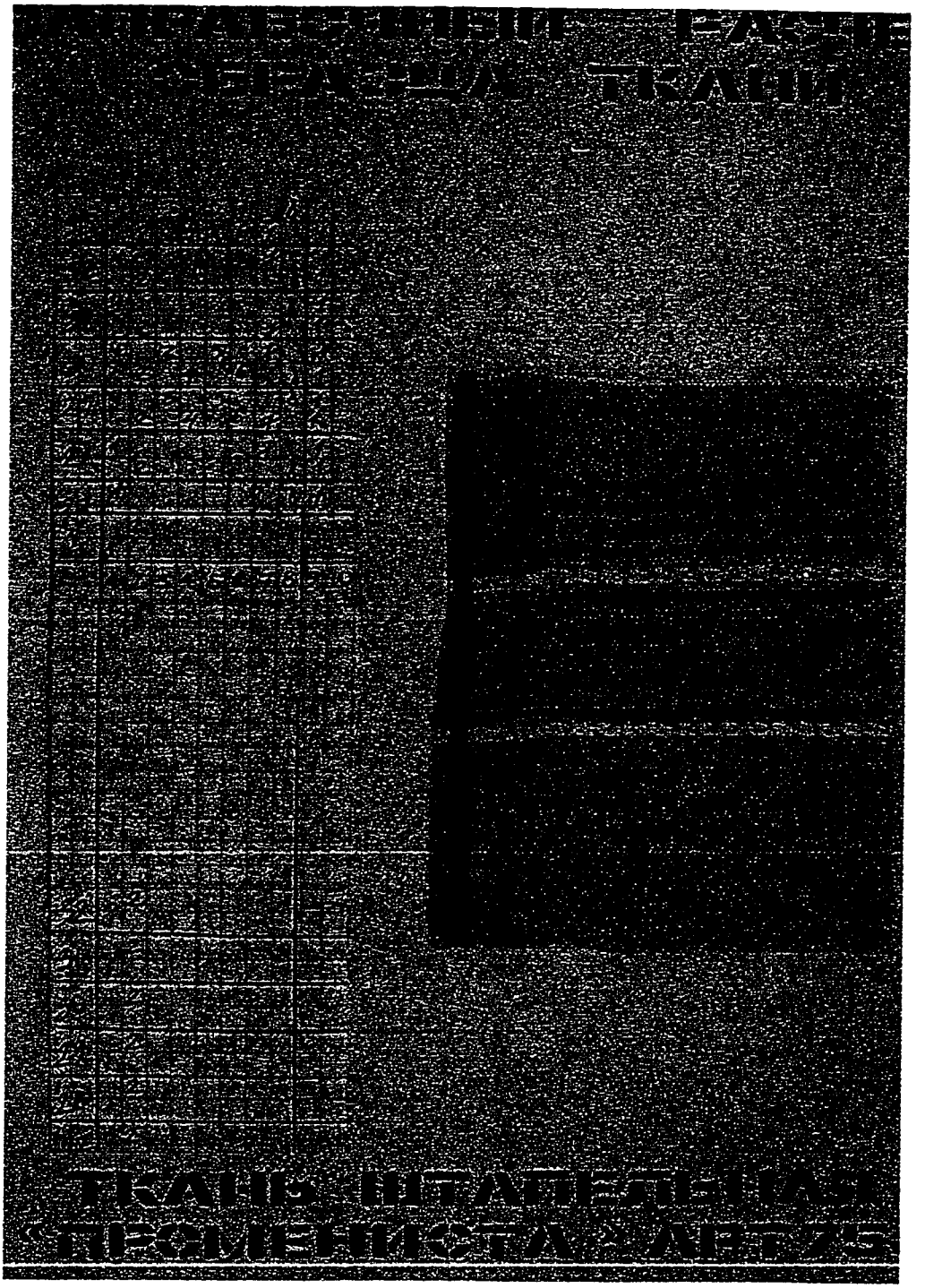

Figure 169

Page from Long Sophea's MFA thesis on fabric design and textile production, Institute of Industrial and Fine Arts, Moscow 1992

scathing comments which professors and fellow students made about their "retrograde" work.[37] The painters Soeung Vannara (studying in Warsaw) and Phy Chan Than (studying in Budapest) both describe being threatened with a return home if their styles did not change from the simple representational realism they had practiced in Phnom Penh to "something more modern".[38] Both spent agonized periods in the libraries of their Academies, looking at "modern" painters and trying to think of what tactics and elements they could use to make "their own style". A particular and personal style, they learned, was the signature of an "an artist".

The "Artists"

Some of the students who were able to study abroad returned to Cambodia carrying work from their MFA Exhibitions under their arm. Others left everything they had done behind (figure 170). A few others chose not to return at all.[39] The reception given to the returning graduates was not what they had expected nor did it

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[37] As their studies progressed, these students were also exposed to some of the uglier results of the end of the Cold War. By the early 1990s, racism against foreigners made some of them fearful to live in the countries where they were studying. In addition, their funding was threatened and many of them worried how to scrape by until they could finish their diplomas. While some of their professors were supportive, others made clear that the foreign students should go home and the sooner the better. This was in direct contrast to the rhetoric they encountered when they first arrived, when they were repeatedly told that the socialist brotherhood embraced Asians and Africans.

[38] Both Phy Chan Than and Soeung Vannara worked briefly in a workshop established for graduates of the School during the early 1980s. Members of the workshop were required to make a set number of paintings per month for the Ministry. Phy Chan Than remembers that it was easiest to fulfill the quota by making representational paintings from postcards rather than producing the time-consuming traditional paintings which he had been trained to make in the School for his diploma in traditional painting.

[39] Ouk Darachan, for example, remained in Kiev, Ukraine where he today paints and teaches. In all, about twenty students from the School of Fine Arts studied abroad during the 1980s.

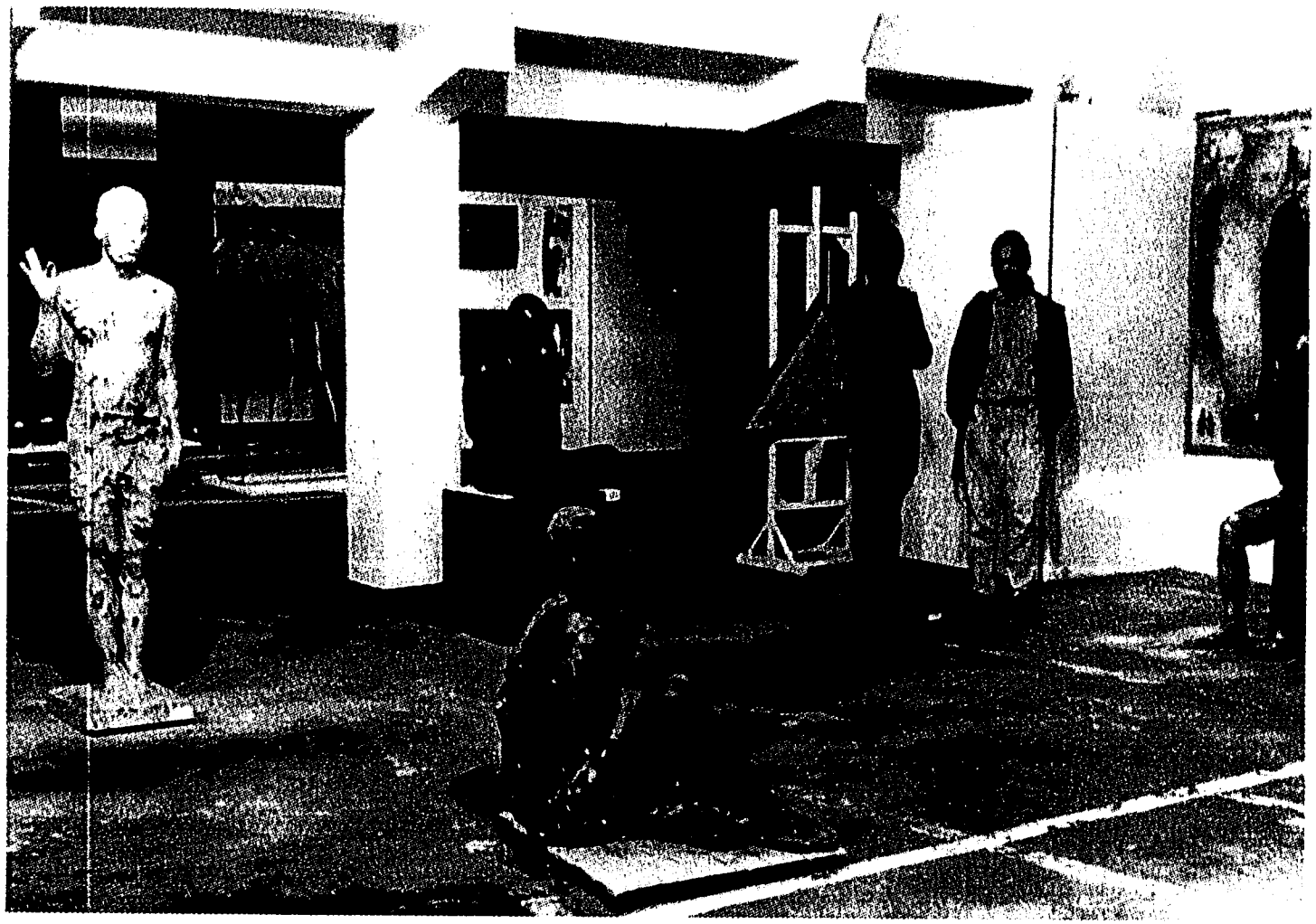

Figure 170

Prom Sam An with his MFA exhibition at the Academy of Art, Gdansk, Poland

fit with the original inception of the plan, as formulated under the former Culture Minister, Chheng Pon. Although they were placed at the Department of Plastic Arts as teachers when they returned, one by one, nothing was done to smooth their integration.[40] Since their diplomas were considered "higher" than those of the older professors, these young returnees were soon charged with University-level teaching while their former teachers were demoted to teaching at the high school level.[41] The styles which the students had struggled to learn, and then had proudly taken on as their own while abroad, were rejected as strange and foreign. The response of the older professors to their work was eventually distilled into a single accusation: the work of the returning students was "not Khmer".[42]

Such accusations surprised some of the returnees since their training abroad had, especially in its final years, emphasized a return to elements of their own culture which

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[40] The Ministry under the PRK had intended to host seminars and exchanges of ideas when these students returned from their studies abroad. Conversation with Chheng Pon, September 1997. The post-election government was strikingly disinterested in making use of the skills which these students brought back with them, at least in the field of visual arts. Long Sophea, for example, wrote a thesis on fabric design and had experience as an intern in textile factories. Today, the countryside around Phnom Penh is littered with clothing factories belonging to foreign interests while almost no attention is paid to developing a national textile industry based on Khmer ornamental patterns. In general, the returning students were often asked why they had learned such useless languages and histories rather than studying English, the currency of development after UNTAC. In this sense, they remain tragedies of the Cold War. As Touth Bun Chheng asked me in October of 1998, "what good is it that I know all about Bulgarian art history?" Conversations with Phy Chan Than, Long Sophea, Chhouen Rithy, Touth Bun Chheng, Chan Lay Heng, Thong Sophan, Chet Chan and Hor Kim Srean, 1997-2000.

[41] Given the respect for elderly people still prevalent in Khmer culture, the placement of the young ahead of the old immediately fostered bitter feelings within the Department of Plastic Arts. In this policy, we can again recognize the structure of thought which made Mey Preap clutch a representational bust when asked to pose for a photograph (Chapter 4, figure 88). What came from the outside and was sanctioned as "modern" and "developed" was given greater value than the local.

[42] Conversations with Phy Chan Than, Long Sophea, Chhouen Rithy, Touth Bun Chheng, Chan Lay Heng, Thong Sophan, Chet Chan and Hor Kim Srean, 1997-2000.

they were encouraged to use in order to compose a final examination piece or exhibition. Long Sophea, for example, felt that many of the confusing and often conflicting elements of her trajectory from a traditional painter to a modern fabric designer, were reconciled through her final graduation piece. In a huge silk batik hanging, she depicted Sovannamacha, the mythical mermaid of the *Reamker* (the Khmer version of the *Ramayana*) with her child Machanoh, in a swirl of bubbles and rays which broke the figure into an abstract pattern of planes (figure 171).[43]

This was a tactic by which students negotiated both their studies abroad and their rocky return home. Incorporating what they called "Khmer subjects" into images which, through the mark of the brush or the fracturing of the picture plane, formally exhibited what they considered "a modern style", they could come to create "modern Khmer art".[44] Breaking the smooth surface of the ubiquitous Angkor paintings discussed in Chapter Five, these "artists" have come to distinguish their work not only by this mark of the hand, but by their commitment to make single works of "art" rather than serial copies. In "Offerings at the Temple" (figure 172) and "Pounding Rice" (figure 173), Soeung Vannara and Phy Chan Than represent what they call "traditions" of Khmer society (the visit to the vat, the pounding of rice as it was once done by shirtless women in the countryside). But these identity scenes are represented by building up resolutely painted surfaces scored with the ជ្ជាក (brushstrokes) that these

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[43] Designed for a specific wall in the Chatomuk Theater, the piece was never hung because the Ministry of Fine Arts and Culture refused to pay for it. As the child of Sovannamacha (the mermaid) and Hanuman (the white monkey), Machanoh is depicted as a monkey with a fish tail. He appears at the lower right of the hanging while Sovannamacha is shown at the top center. See figure 171.



Figure 171 : Long Sophea, Sovannamacha
Graduation piece, Institute of Industrial and Fine Arts, Moscow

(batik on silk, approx. 12 feet high)



Figure 172

Soeung Vannara, "Offerings at the temple", 1998

8 x 11 inch
acrylic sketch 1998



Figure 173 : Phy Chan Than, "Pounding Rice"

oil on canvas, approx. 4 feet high 1997

"artists" consider the marks of the "modern". Long Sophea's "Study" (figure 174) inserts an ornamental sign for Cambodia into the "new technique" of collage, just as Asasax relies on the icons of Angkor (the apsara, the temple facade) to build his richly surfaced "modern color reliefs" (figure 175). Forms drawn from Western modernism are thus used to depict local scenes and subjects. As with the "modern Khmer painters" of the 1950s and 1960s, the meaning of "Cambodian" is seen to lie in the icons of its past and in the imagined habits of traditional life in the countryside.

There is a melancholy belatedness to the tactics of these "artists". In Phy Chan Than's "Banteay Srei", we find Monet reflected a hundred years after the fact (figure 176). This "modern Cambodian painting", we could say, is new only through its combination of two bygone histories. The tactics of a sanctioned "modern" artist are used to present the authentic "Khmer culture" of the past (the Angkorian temple of Banteay Srei). The obviousness of these references can make the picture read as an easy out, a quick synthesis of what is retrospectively universally recognized as the "modern" (Monet), with what is uncontestably "Cambodian" (Angkor). Or perhaps the hollowness of its re-presentation embodies the painfully inevitable predicament faced by those trying to link the two terms of "Cambodian" and "modern". Groslier once described colonial culture as the meeting of two "personalities" who had to negotiate a suitable relationship (I, p.14-16, Groslier). The French "personality", for Groslier, was that of continual change and innovation, while the Cambodian "personality" was unchanging and constant. Since such a construction bequeathed the "modern", meaning the always new, to France, the innovation which came to

[44] Conversations with Phy Chan Than, Soeung Vannara, and Long Sophea, 1997-2000.

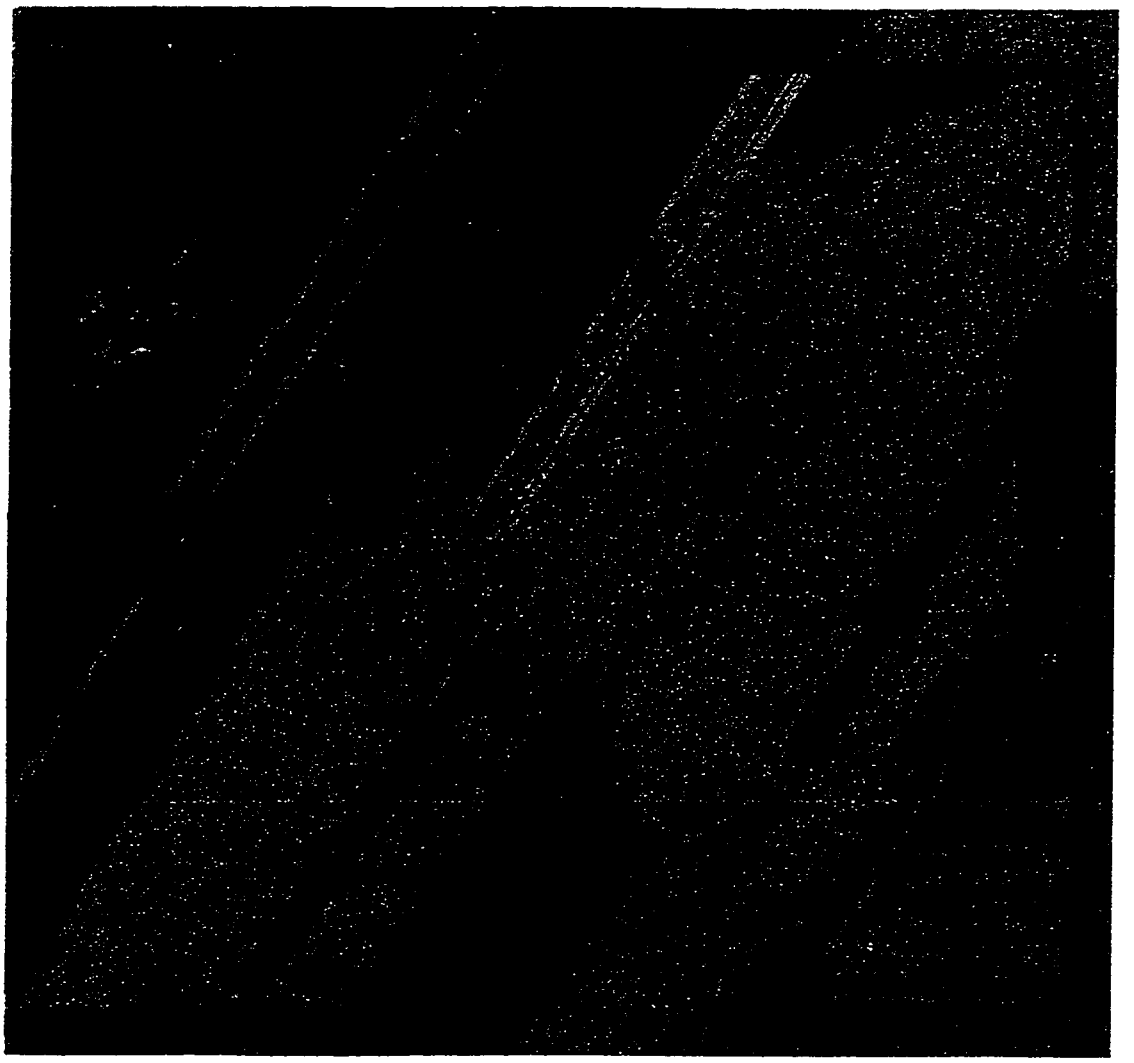

Figure 174

Long Sophea, Collage study, 1998

paper and watercolor, 10 inches square

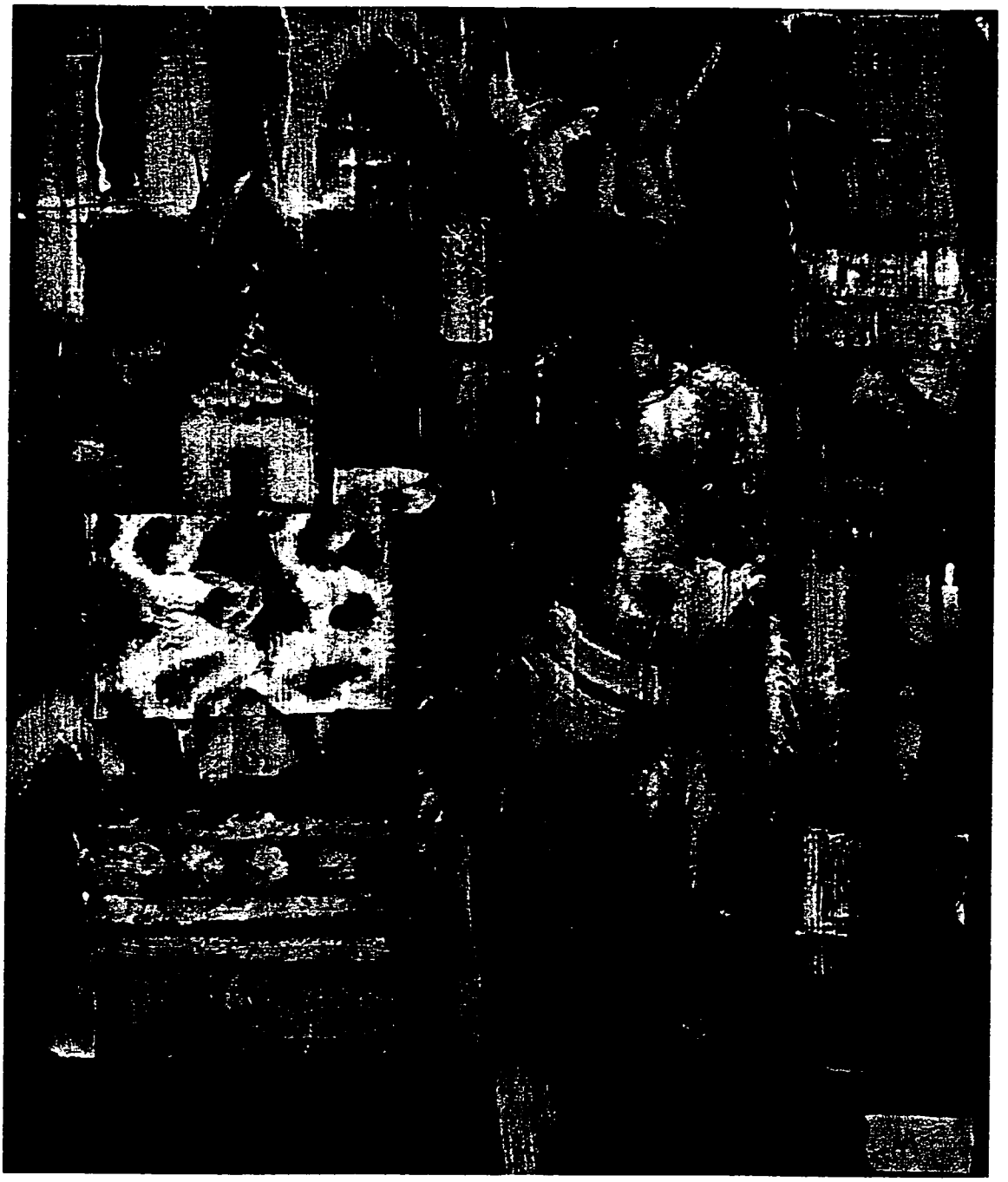

Figure 175

Asasax, "Apsara"

oil paint and silk collage, approx. 2 feet high, 1999

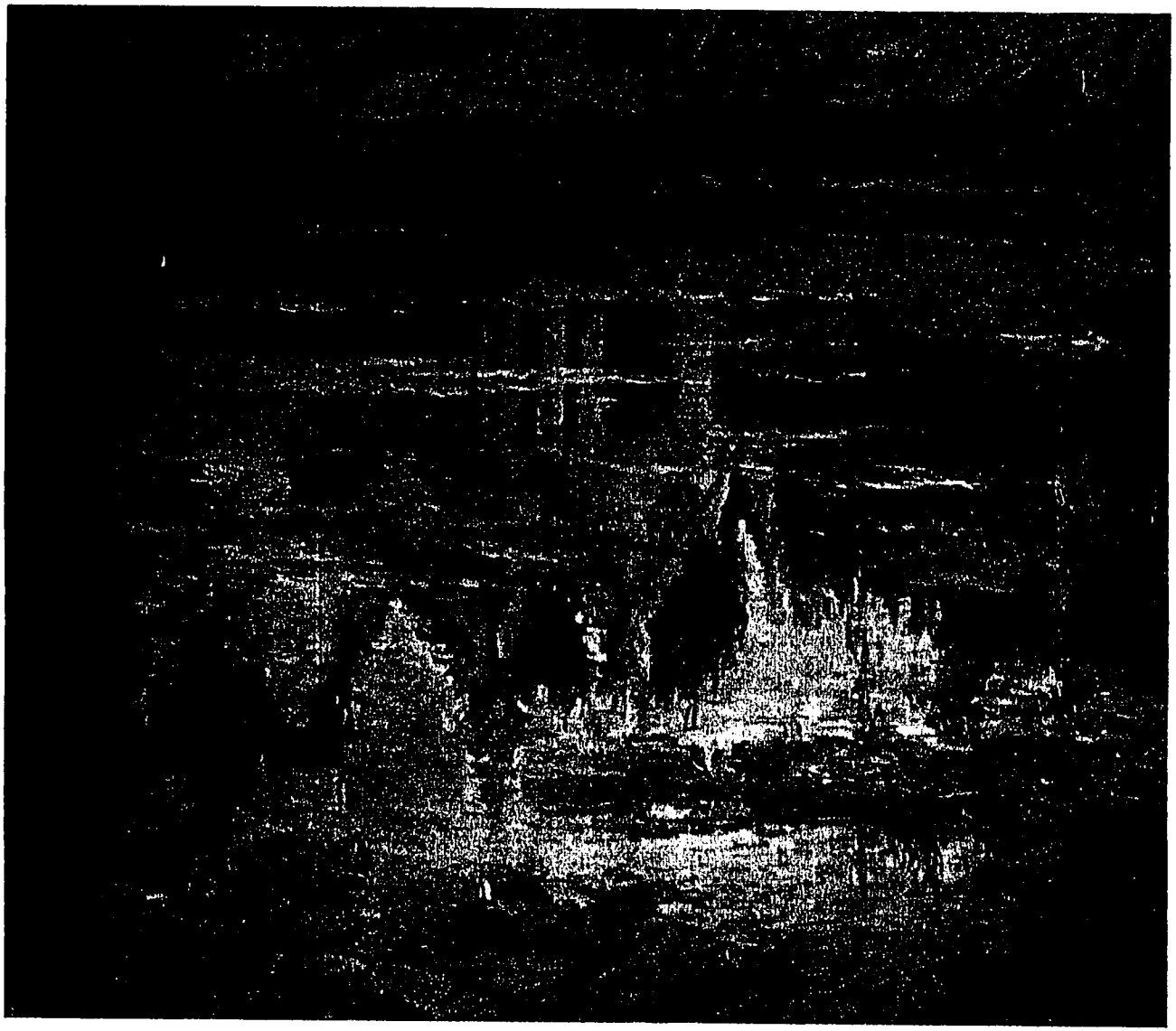

Figure 176

Phy Chan Than
"Banteay Srei", 1999

oil on canvas,
approx. 5 feet x 4 feet

characterise the adventures of the avant-garde was defined as explicitly not-Cambodian and thus was banished from forms of training established in the colony. In its place, the given model and its multiple copies was installed as the logic for making "authentic" Cambodian art. It is perhaps then unavoidable that a quest for the "Cambodian modern" will require a model, copied from elsewhere, and infused with national specificity through reference to recognised stereotypes of the past. In another recent painting, Phy Chan Than depicts an oft-copied scene of traditional dance, found on postcards throughout Cambodia (figure 177, 178). Through a layer of facetted brushstrokes, the painting lays claim to the position of "art", far removed from the smooth surfaces and mechanical repetitions of the tourist paintings (figure 179). But the gesture of the brushstrokes as even facets, only tentatively breaking an insistent photographic surface, give to their stated expressive purpose a curious in-authenticity. The "artist" is after all appealing to a notion of the gesture as individual which has been hollowed out by Western critiques. Thus stranded amongst marks borrowed from other pasts, the "modern" work of the "artists" often reads as a belated form that cannot stand outside its local context.

Lately, for better and worse, these young "artists" have recognized another subject which can identify them as Cambodian while offering them entry into the exhibition channels of "modern art".[45] In works such as "Fire and Spirit" and "The Koh Tree",

[45] Here I am myself implicated through my involvement with the Legacy of Absence Project. Through the invitation of Cliff Chanin, I initiated and co-curated with Ly Daravuth an exhibition which asked artists to consider the legacies of absence created by the DK regime. Subsequently, independently of our initiative, painters associated with the tourists shops have begun to realise that "genocide paintings" have their market too (as Vann Nath, the survivor of Tuol Sleng, knows only too well and too painfully). It is too soon to see where this recognition will, lead but given that the Tuol Sleng prison is already a major tourist attraction, one can certainly imagine a market for images based on events under the DK.

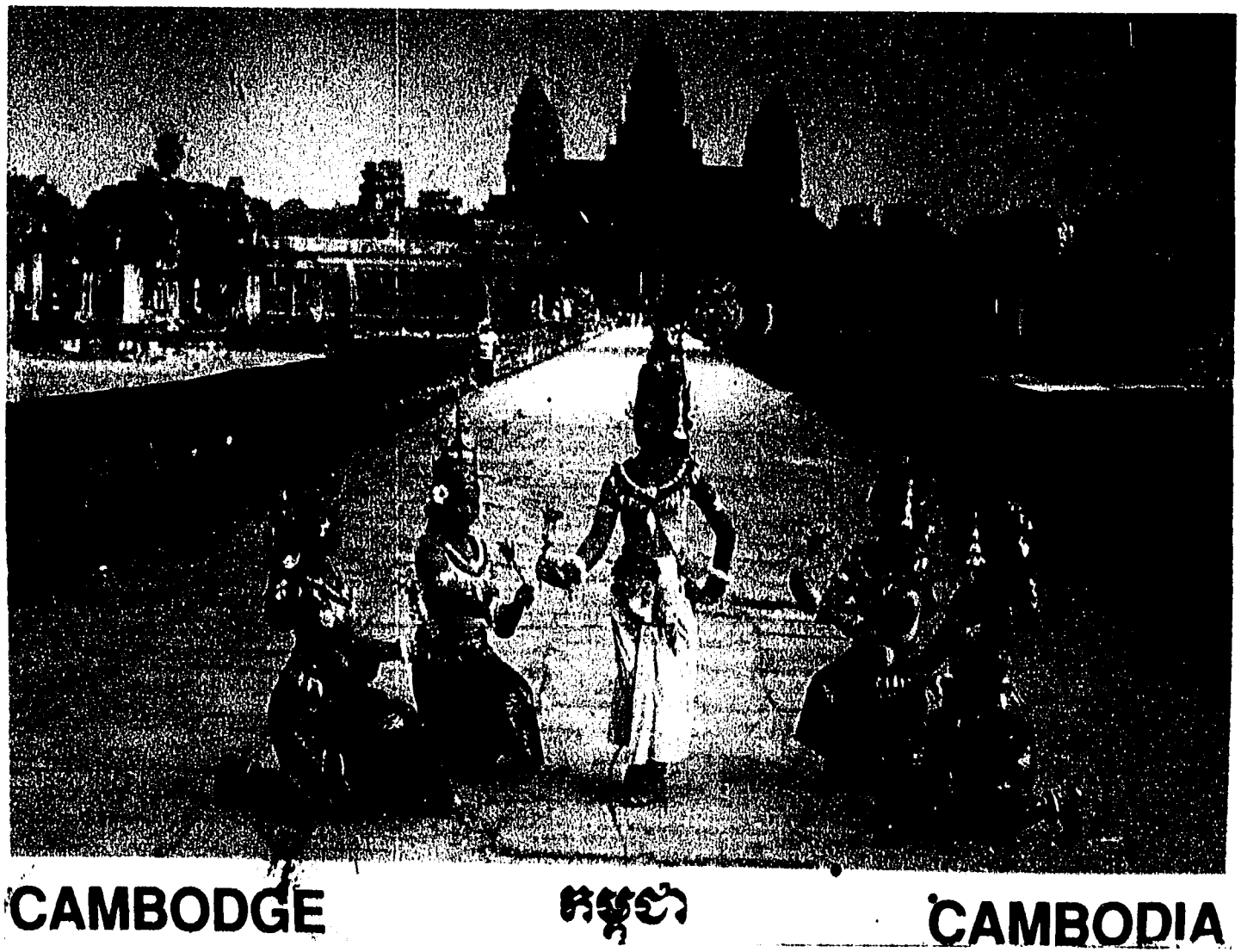

Figure 177

Postcard used as a model in the studio of the "worker painter" Ou Min.



Figure 178

Phy Chan Than
"Dance", 2000

oil on canvas,
approx. 5x4 feet

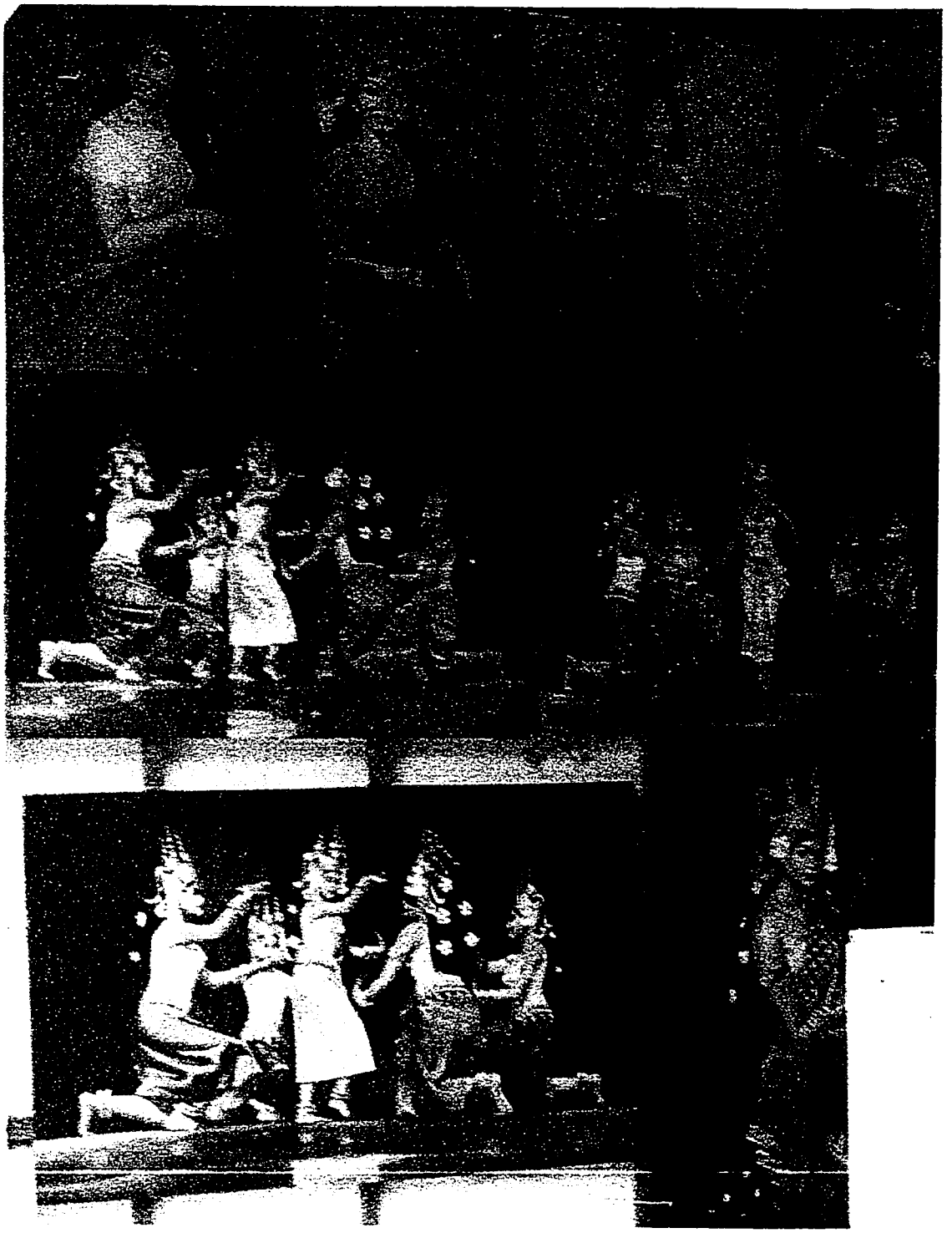

Figure 179

Paintings in a painting store across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 1998

Soeung Vannara and Phy Chan Than have made some of the first images to reconsider the legacies of the DK regime. These are works of memory filtered through public symbols. Soeung Vannara (whose father, a sculpture professor at the Royal University of Fine Arts during the 1960s, died during the regime) presents us with a screen of signs circling a central figure of flesh and flames (figure 180). Where do those go, he asks, who have not been cremated as they should be according to Buddhist belief? The ក្បាច់ ornaments (as well as copies of Sam Yuan's 1960s money bill designs) weave a sea of souls around his question. Phy Chan Than's "The Koh Tree" resurrects the ambiguity of an oft-cited parable from the DK years (figure 181). "Plant a Koh tree in front of your house" was a phrase used both as official threat and as whispered advice (Koh in Khmer also means mute). As an order, the saying meant to keep quiet about anything that one had seen or heard. The unofficial repetition of the order among the people was simply whispered advice on how to stay alive. In Phy Chan Than's painting of the slogan, the vast trunk of the Koh Tree is fractured and scarred, a portrait of all those who survived and carry their damage with them today. A river of blood runs across the trunk, adding another, retrospective saying (coined by the subsequent Vietnamese-sponsored regime) of the early 1980s which reminded the Khmer people that, during DK, their "blood had run like a river" and their "bones had grown into mountains". As painted overlays, these slogans build up a memory bed of the regime and its aftermath.[46]

[46] For more on these young painters and their work on the DK regime, see the catalogue The Legacy of Absence (Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth) Phnom Penh: Reyum 2000.



Figure 180 : Soeung Vannara, "Fire and Spirit", 1999

oil on canvas, 145 cm x 105 cm

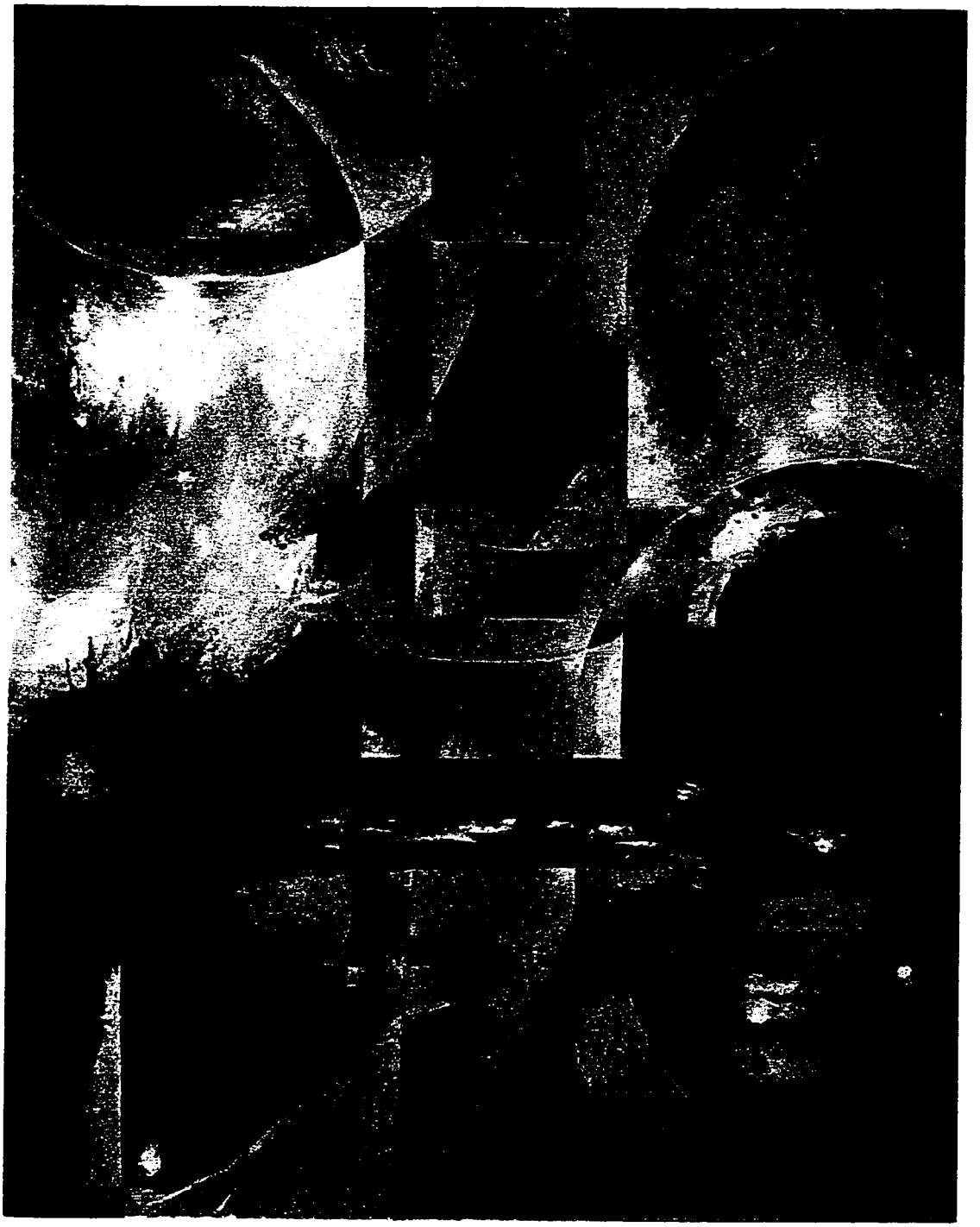

Figure 181

Phy Chan Than, "Koh Tree", 1999

oil on canvas, 2 meters x 1.5 meters

The "Masters"

With Cambodia's entry into ASEAN, efforts are being made to include Cambodian artists in both regional and international exhibitions which take as their theme "contemporary", "modern art".[47] The young "artists" described above are generally considered first, since their work is recognizably "modern" to the curators of various nationalities who make up the international art scene. There is something curious in this however since there is also a group of older "masters" at work in Cambodia who are certainly contemporary - if not "modern" - and who also claim to make "Cambodian art".[48] The masks of An Sok (figure 182), the silver work of Som Samai (figure 183), the paintings of Chet Chan (figure 184), all these fall out of the visiting curator's purview since they are not considered "modern art" despite the very living presence of their makers and the admitted high quality of the work.

Trained in the "traditional" sections of Groslier's School, before and shortly after independence, the work of these "masters" continues where the Corporations left off. What they make on commission are the objects once offered by the sales office catalogue of the Corporations. Som Samai's tea set in fact replicates the set pictured as a model object in one of Groslier's published examples (Chapter 2, figure 33, top). Their work elicits many of the same claims with which Groslier framed the Corporations' objects. Using ornamental patterns and replicating what are now

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[47] Recent curatorial missions included those for the Fukuoka Art Trienniale of 1999, the Philip Morris Awards Exhibition, the Asian Art Expo (forthcoming in 2001), as well as the Legacy of Absence Project described above.

[48] "Masters" seems to be the way, in English at least, that those who today wish to "rescue" the traditional arts avoid the perjorative connotations of "artisan" while reserving "artist" for the "modern". In Chapter Two, I used "masters" as well, marking its difficulty with the photograph of Nosei, one of the female weaving teachers at the School.

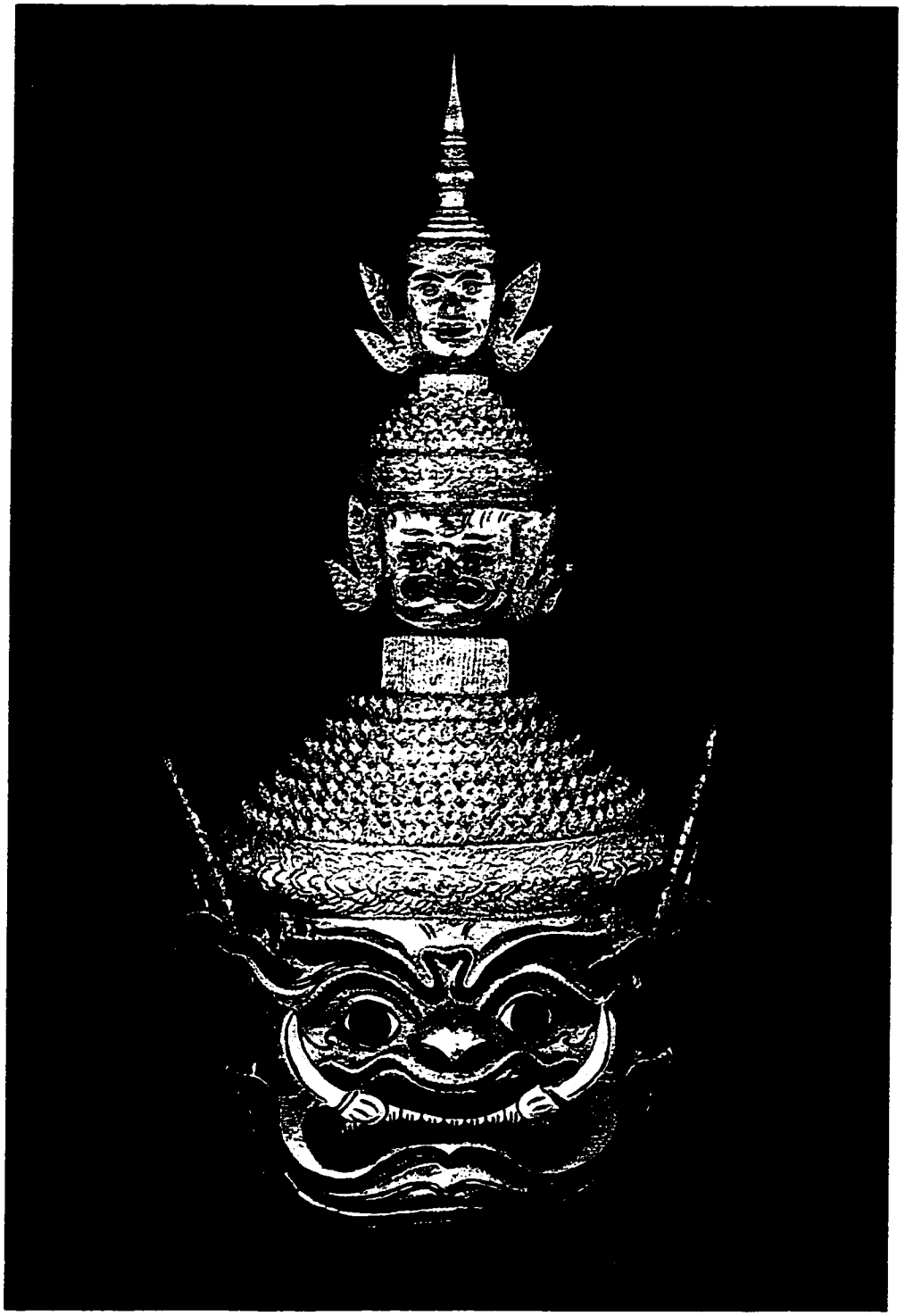

Figure 182

An Sok and An Sitha, "Krong Reap", 1998

Papermache, lacquer, gold leaf and enamel paint; approx. 2 feet high

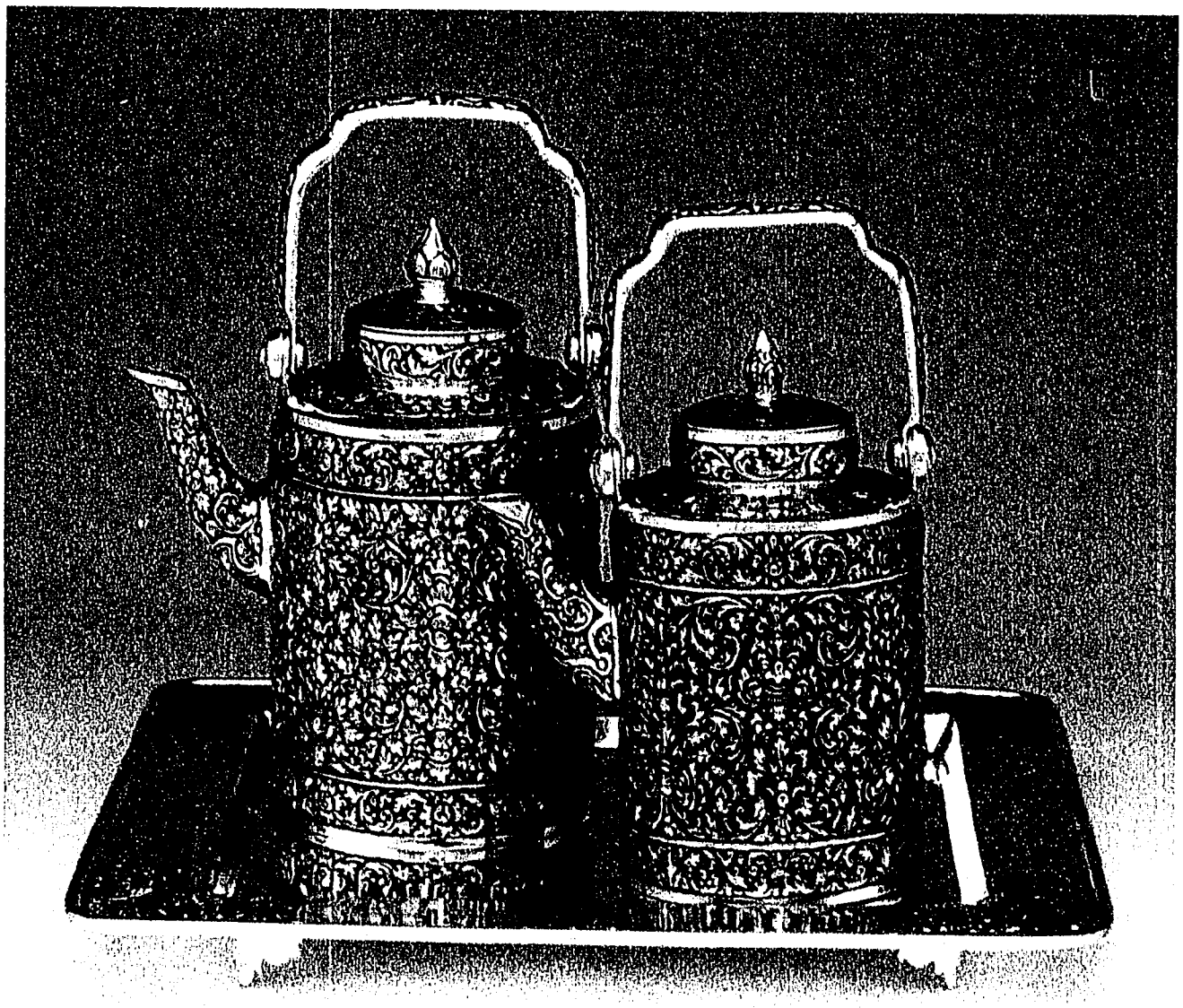

Figure 183

Som Samai
Tea Set, 2000

carved silver
Private collection

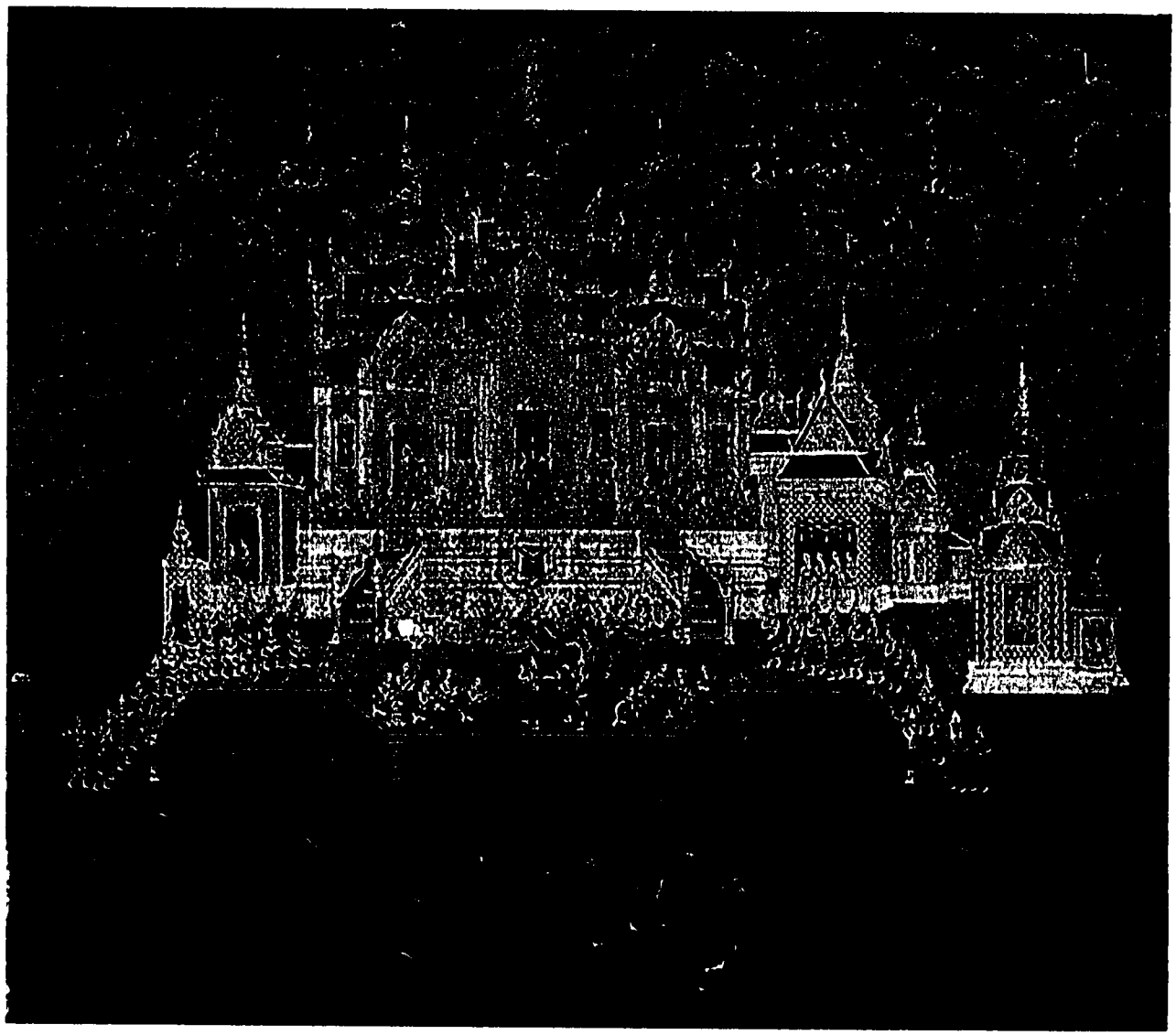

Figure 184

Chet Chan
A palace in the heavens from the story of the *Reamker*

tempera on canvas
with gold leaf
2.5 x 3.2 meters
Private collection

considered the "authentic Khmer" forms of model objects, the products of these "masters" are instantly labeled as "traditional Cambodian art", and the "masters" themselves are collected and inventoried as "living legends".[49]

I thought about the curious nostalgia with which we of the West transform an old man with a skill into a "legend" when I went to visit Him Tuor, the 66 year-old stone sculptor who today carves in his workshop along the river in Siem Reap (figure 185).[50] He is old by Cambodian standards, and thus I assumed that the skill with which he carves his stones came from years of repeated practice. But this is not so. In fact, he has only sculpted as a full-time "profession" since 1995. Before that he was a farmer. Him Tuor's father was one of those part-time artisans described in the responses to Groslier's 1917 survey. When people needed sculptures or paintings, he made them; when they didn't, he worked the rice fields of rural Siem Reap province. Although Him Tuor learned to make things from his father, he has no formal training and it

[49] The cataloguing of "living legends" was a project initiated by the local UNESCO office in the spring of 1998. In their designation as living legends, "masters" are viewed as endangered. Indeed, some masters successfully market the idea of being the last traditional master in their area of expertise in order to garner higher prices for their work. The reasons why this might perhaps be indeed accurate today, given the situation of contemporary Cambodia, are not particularly uplifting. The almost complete breakdown of the educational system, coupled with extremely low salaries, has led to a pedagogical situation in which no knowledge is truly shared if financial profit can be made by keeping that knowledge for oneself or for one's family. The best trained young silversmiths and mask-makers in Cambodia today are therefore the sons of the older masters. Having said that, I must also add another example. Chet Chan's encyclopedic knowledge of the *Reamker* comes not from some age old well spring of knowledge, passed down in the blood, but rather from the years in which he served as a research assistant to the Polish restoration team working in the Palace throughout the 1980s, long after he had completed his studies at the School (where he says he did not learn much about the story of the *Reamker*). In the Palace, Chet Chan studied Tep Nimit Mak's *Reamker* painting, learning all the characters and their forms which he puts to use today in his paintings. In other words, his mastery is self-taught through research, implying that other masters could, in the future, similarly develop from their own efforts. See our forthcoming *Reamker* manual (Reyum, 2001).

[50] Conversations with Him Tuor and his family, October 1998, June 2000. All information on Him Tour is from these conversations.



Figure 185

Him Tuor in his workshop, Siem Reap 2000

never occurred to him to "make sculpture for sale" until the 1990s. Before the Khmer Rouge regime, he was simply in his village, tending his fields and making things when other villagers requested them. It was only with the coming of UNTAC that he began to realise that there might be a greater market for sculpture than he had previously envisioned. Relocating his family to Siem Reap, he opened the stone sculpture atelier where his entire family today makes replicas of Angkorian sculptures (figure 186). Although during the first year that he was sculpting, he "practiced" by using newspaper images to make the head of Ranariddh and the figure of Hun Sen (contemporary Cambodian political leaders) (figure 187), these pieces were still in his workshop in mid-2000 and have found no market when compared to the demand for the Angkorian replicas which grace his sales table in hand-made multitudes (figure 188). The replicas are made from photographs gleaned from guide books and coffee-table art histories. Gridded off with the familiar squares, these images are transferred onto the stone as diagrams from which chiseling proceeds (figure 189). In a recent touch of inspiration, some of the photographs which serve as models are transferred by simply xerox-enlarging them to the scale of the commission (figure 190). Unskilled young workers roughly chisel the traced form while Him Tour "corrects" and finishes the piece.[51]

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[51] Him Tour's clientele is entirely foreign. No Khmer, he says, will buy his work since they prefer the cheaper cast concrete replicas of Angkorian models. Still he sees an irony in this for although the foreigners eagerly patronize his workshop, the authorities have not yet called him to work on replacing the apsaras of Angkor Vat, for example. Instead, he says, Cambodian authorities have "hired the Germans" (the official restoration team now working on Angkor Vat) so that one day, when they write histories of Cambodia, "they will call today the German era, the German style".



Figure 186 : Him Tour's workshop with various family members engaged in various stages of the carving process, Siem Reap 1999.

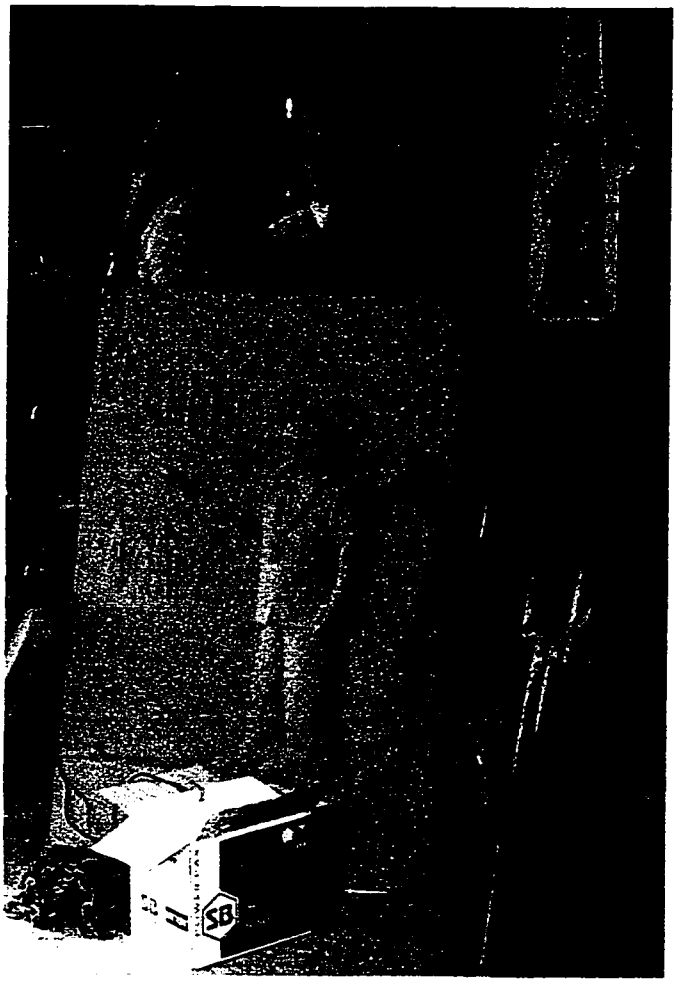




Figure 187

Practice sculptures in Him Tuor's workshop, 2000

Left: Prime Minister Hun Sen and his wife dedicating a school complex

Below: National Assembly President Ranariddh, central two sculptures



Figure 188 : Selling stand, Him Tour's studio, Siem Reap, 1999

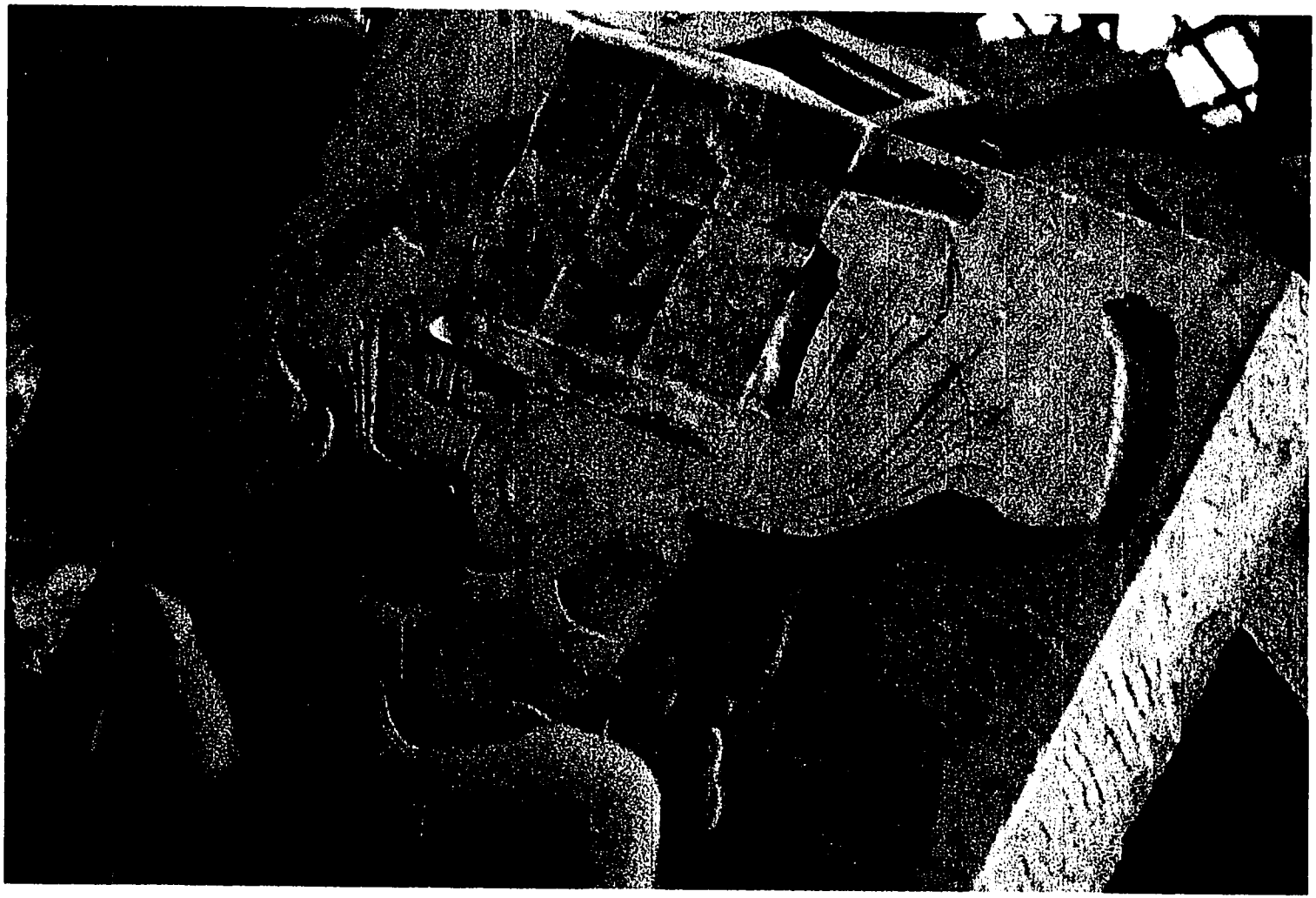


Figure 189

Partially completed stone relief with its xerox model, Him Tour's studio, Siem Reap, 2000

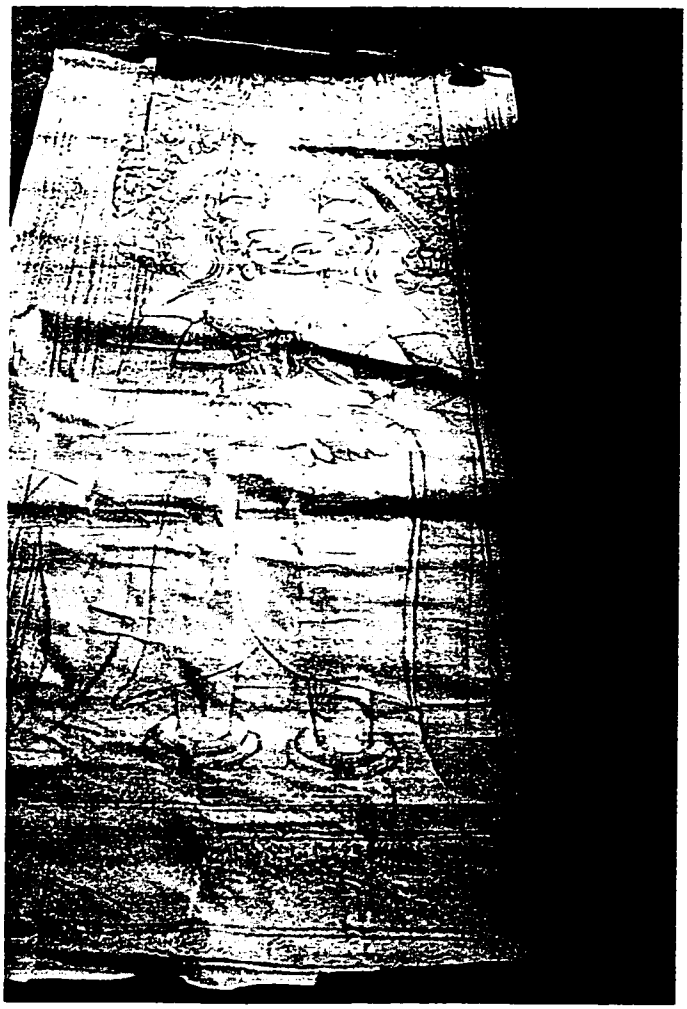
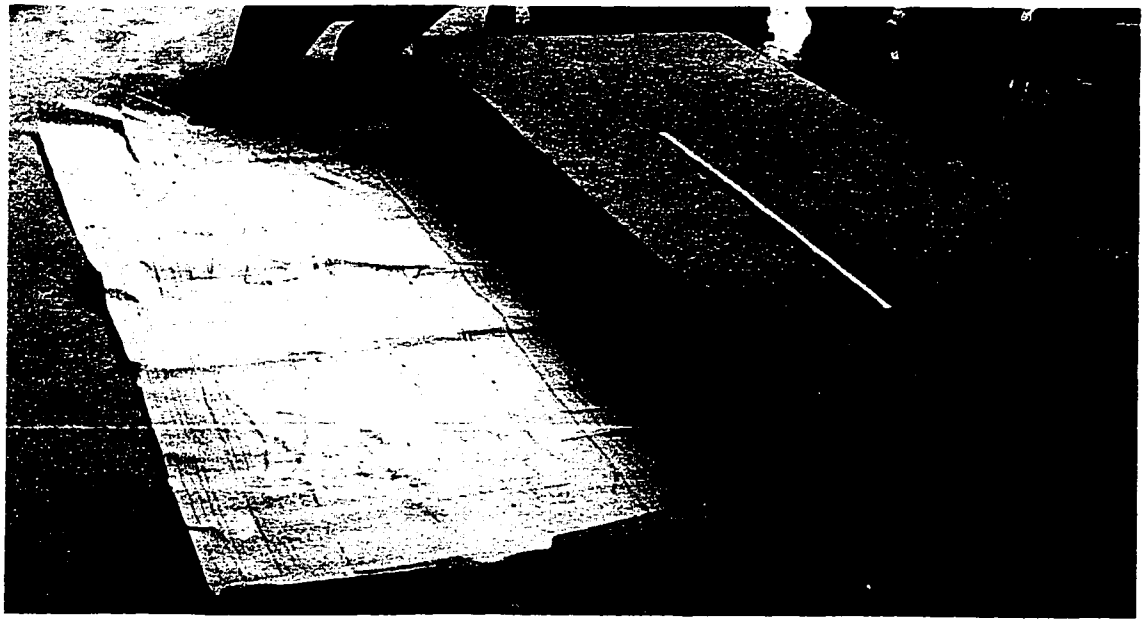


Figure 190

Xerox enlargements of an Angkorian apsara that will be used to trace the figure onto the block before carving.



Between the work of the "masters" and that of the young "artists", we can sense an uneasiness at the heart of our terms. Through Groslier's School, Protectorate art policy ensured that the meaning of "Cambodian", in the visual arts at least, would remain firmly secured to the model and the past. To make meant to replicate. To borrow from the outside as part of a process of innovation and creation which is never entirely one's own, was explicitly ruled out of this regime as not-Cambodian. The "Cambodian master" is thus a master of the copy, producing exquisitely detailed replicas of desired objects which, despite their largely foreign clientele, are considered to be authentic signs of a living "Cambodian culture".

"The Workers"

The same logic of the model and its copy is found in a "lower" sphere as well where the vast majority of painters and sculptors working in Cambodia today are found.[52] We have already met the painters who work for the tourist trade in Chapter Five. They primarily paint repetitive scenes of Angkor Vat and repeated versions of idyllic country landscapes (figures 140-144). Although these painters are mostly trained at the University of Fine Arts, they readily admit that their everyday practice does not qualify them to the title of "artist" (although some make what they consider single "art" works - ស្នាដៃ - when they have time). Instead, their daily practice consists of replicating the photographs and postcards which they use as their models. These painters execute the large scale portraits displayed for official visits (figure 191) as well

[52] For this section I draw from my "Report" to the Cambodian Shop Sign Project of the New England Folklife Center. I would like to thank Joel Montague and Laurie Kalb for their input during the time I was working on the consultancy.



Figure 191

Roadside paintings for the visit of the Vietnamese Prime Minister
Right: HM King Sihanouk, Left: Vietnamese Prime Minister
Phnom Penh, 1998

as the curious images which outside investment increasingly demands (figure 192).[53] Entranced by such cheap and precise hand-painted reproduction, foreigners have come to commission such things as family portraits, or a complete set of the Los Angeles Lakers (figures 193, 194). Left with the snapshot models for such commissions, painters in their free time make new images to display their skill and versatility in the hope of luring more foreign clients to their stores. It is through such a process of translation that Santa Claus becomes a painter in one lingering June display (figure 195). Local business can also be made by replicating the photographs of the dead. Creased and faded, often hidden during the DK years, these precious reminders are repainted at a larger scale and in more durable oil (figure 196).

These "painters" are arrayed along a scale from "artist" (សិល្បករ) to "worker" (ជាង).[54] In large stores (figure 197) and small stands (figure 198) throughout Cambodia, those who are called "worker painters" (ជាងគំនូរ) make the images which

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[53] The painters who made the gigantic Shaquille O'Neal billboard knew him only as "the King of Ball"; the painter of Cindy Crawford (figure 202) had no idea who she was but thought the idea of selling a watch with a woman he considered "beautiful" was so good, that he copied it for a jewelery store sign commission. Recently, the newly rich in and around Phnom Penh have taken to commissioning life-size portraits of themselves, a practice which provides more work for these worker painters. In an oddly belated tranposition of the value which oil portraits once had in the West, these paintings are prized for their ability to be "just like" the original. What is celebrated is the ability of the hand to perfectly render two mechanical processes (photography and its enlargement).

[54] A brief survey cannot of course include everyone. The counterpart to the worker painters are the sculptors and casters who crank out multiples of ornaments in cast concrete for vats and new villas throughout Cambodia. In addition, particularly in the provinces, painters specialising in vat painting circulate, painting increasingly garish vat interiors which use gridded images from Thai and Indian Buddhist pamphlets as their models. The categories sketched here are not at all impermeable either. Soeung Vannara (the "artist" of "Fire and

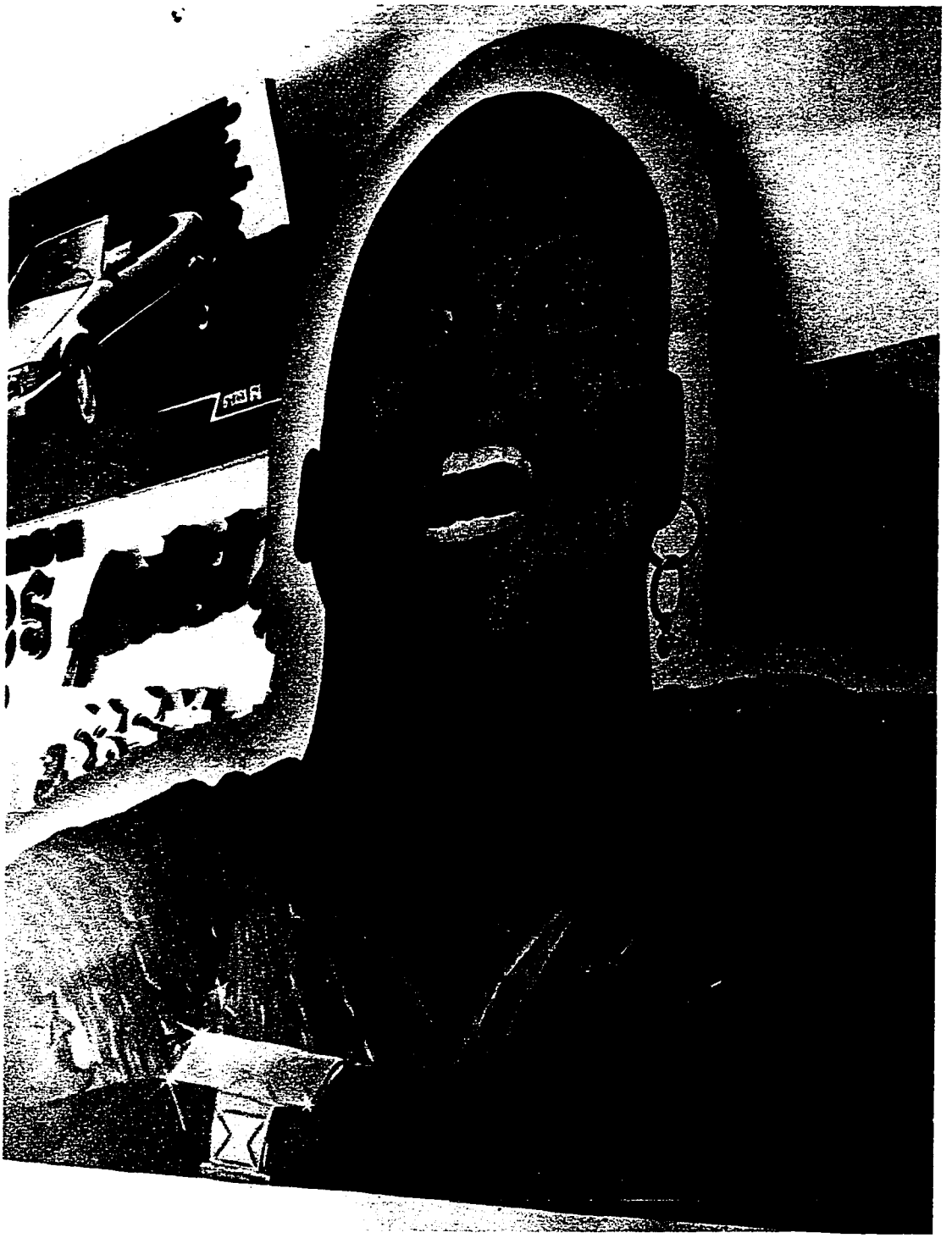

Figure 192

Shaquille O'Neal in Chan Rachana's painting store
15 foot high enamel on metal painting for a sports club venture that never materialised. The matching painted "body" is stored at the painter's home.

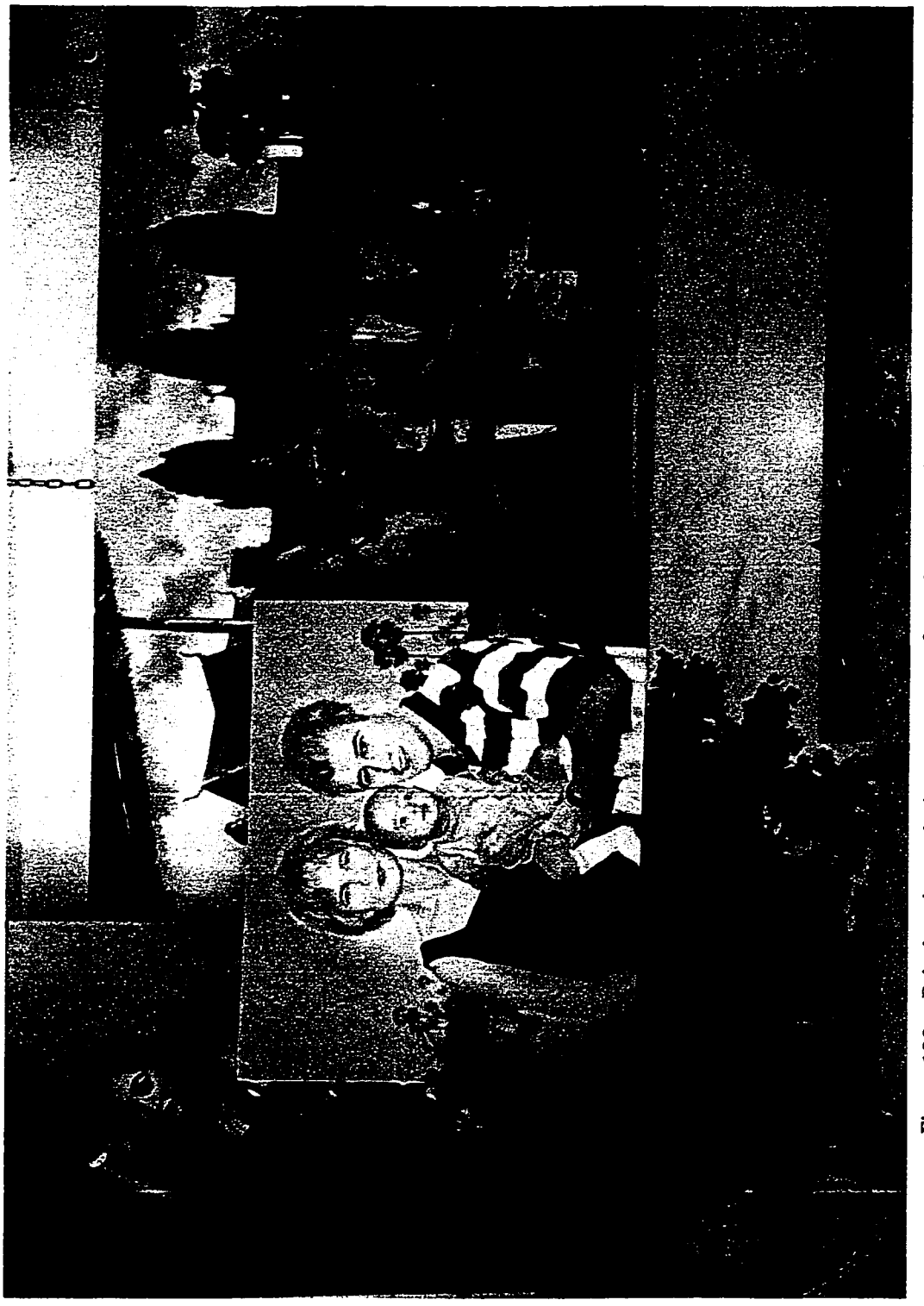

Figure 193 : Paintings in a painting store across from the National Museum of Cambodia, 1998

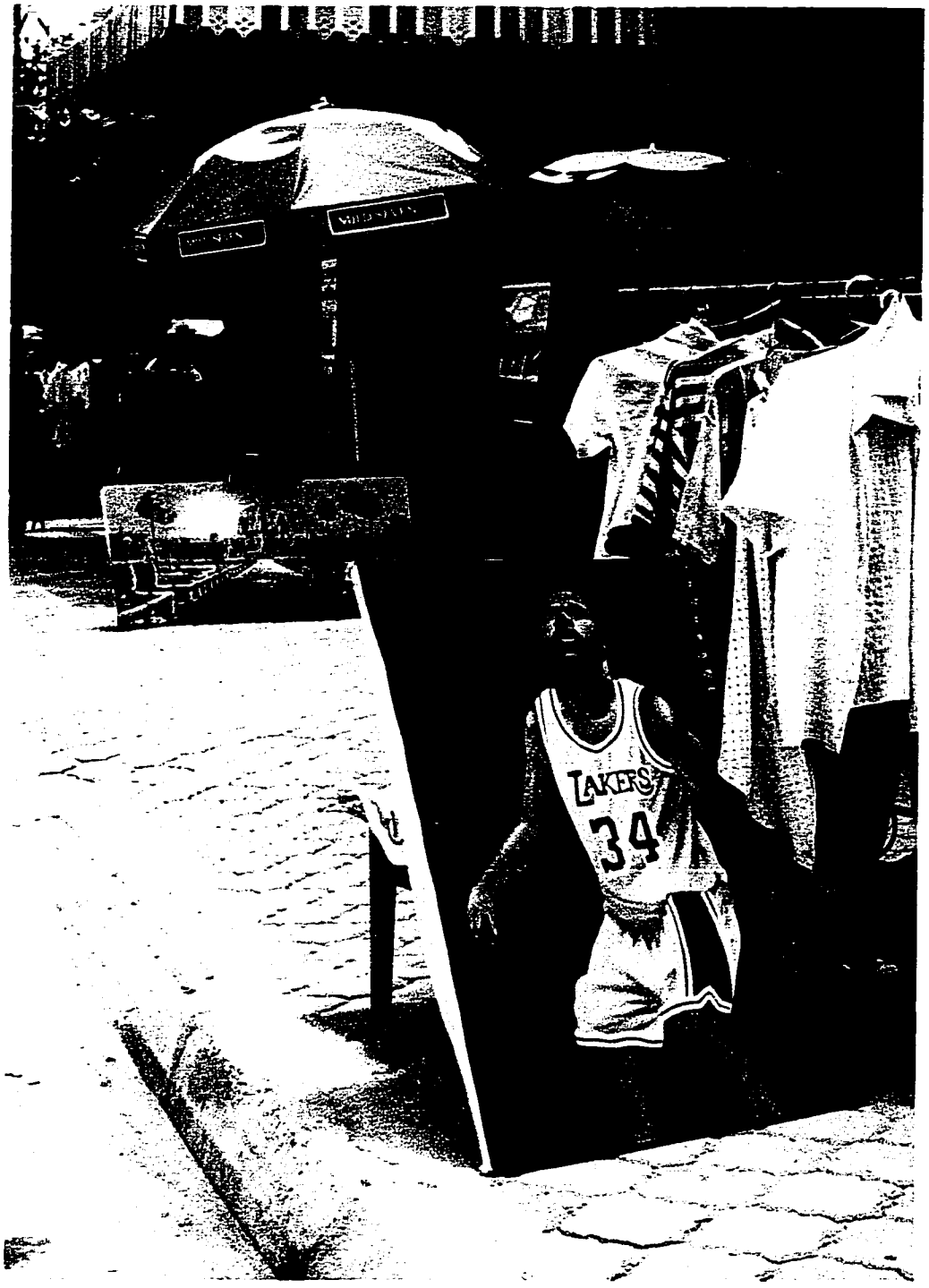

Figure 194

Paintings drying in the sun outside of the painting stores across from the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, 2000
Front, part of a complete set of Laker's players commissioned by a foreigner; Back, the causeway to Angkor Vat painted for the tourist trade.

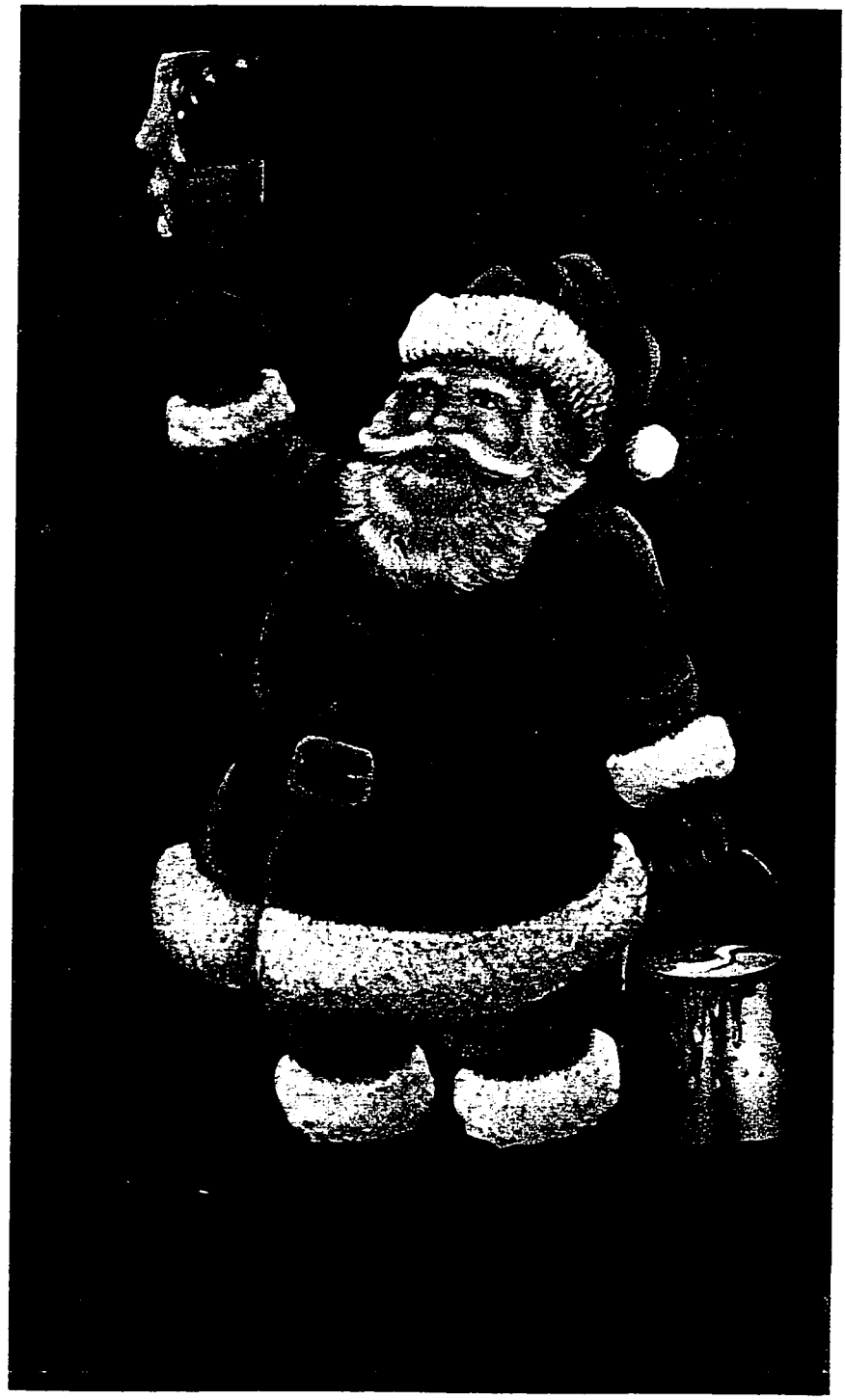

Figure 195

Santa Claus the painter, at the "Bayon Modern Painter" Shop
Phnom Penh, June 2000



Figure 196

Wall of Chan Rachana's Painting Store, Phnom Penh, 2000
Top right: an array of lettering; Middle: photographs and their commissioned copy paintings commemorating the dead; Bottom: sign in progress for a beauty salon offering mud treatments.



Figure 197

Chan Rachana's Painting Store, Phnom Penh 2000



Figure 198

Roadside painting stand, Phnom Penh, 2000

flood the public spaces of Cambodia today.[55] Their most frequent commissions are for store fronts and free-standing shop signs which, since the early 1990s, have increasingly made use of pictures in addition to simple text (figure 199, 200).[56] Individual paintings for hair salons (figure 201), for watch and jewelery stores (figure 202) and for eye doctor stands (figure 203) also provide income.

All these paintings reproduce a given image through the grid (figure 204), and the first lesson of apprenticeship for a "worker painter" is to learn to "put down squares" (ចាយក្រឡា) (figure 205). Thus these "worker painters" also perversely repeat the foundations of Groslier's curriculum. For the first lesson of the School of Cambodian Arts taught the replication of ornaments and figures through the armature of a diagram which allowed easy copying through the study of the proportional relations thus created between forms. Advanced students, Silice told us in 1920, could already duplicate any ornament, "constrained only by the dimensions given by their teacher".[57] So today, given a photograph, the worker painter can duplicate Shaquille O'Neal as

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Spirit", described above) is now busy painting a vat with his relatives in order to make money; he also sometimes paints rote copies of Angkor Vat photographs to support his family.

[55] As a "worker" painters told me in Siem Reap one day, there are "artists" (like the young painters associated with the University, described above) who have the luxury to "imagine". Since he was poor and "didn't have the time to think" however, he simply made "copy paintings" as a "worker".

[56] Under the SOC regime of the 1980s, signage and advertising were strictly controlled and shops seem to have had simply lettered signs of various colors depending on the services or goods offered by them. It was only in the 1990s that signage was deregulated and that the free-for-all array of signs which today coat public surfaces in Phnom Penh, began to develop. Conversation with the sign painter Tim Thorn, May 2000.

[57] "Rapport de la fin d'année", 1920 [NAC #8336 (RSC)]. Photographs of ornaments were used as substitute diagrams in the classroom of the 1920s as well, with the photograph gridded off to display the proper proportional relations.



Figure 199

Typical Phnom Penh storefront with a handpainted store sign above. This particular store sells bridal wear and helps with wedding arrangements.

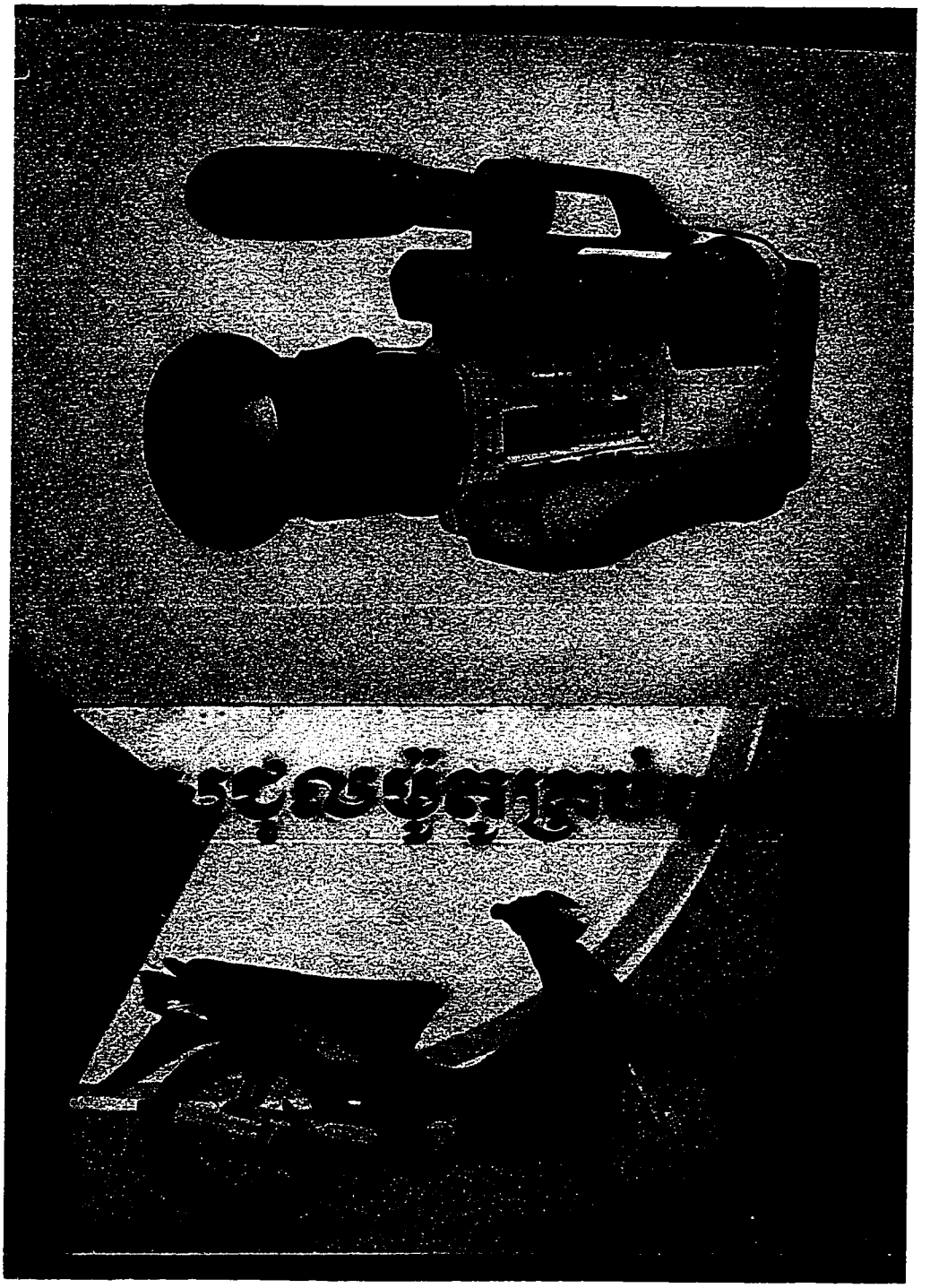

Figure 200

Above: airbrushed sign for a camera store
Below: sign for a motorcycle repair store
Examples of work at the "Bayon Modern Painter", Phnom Penh, 2000



Figure 201

Paintings for a beauty shop, Phnom Penh, 1999

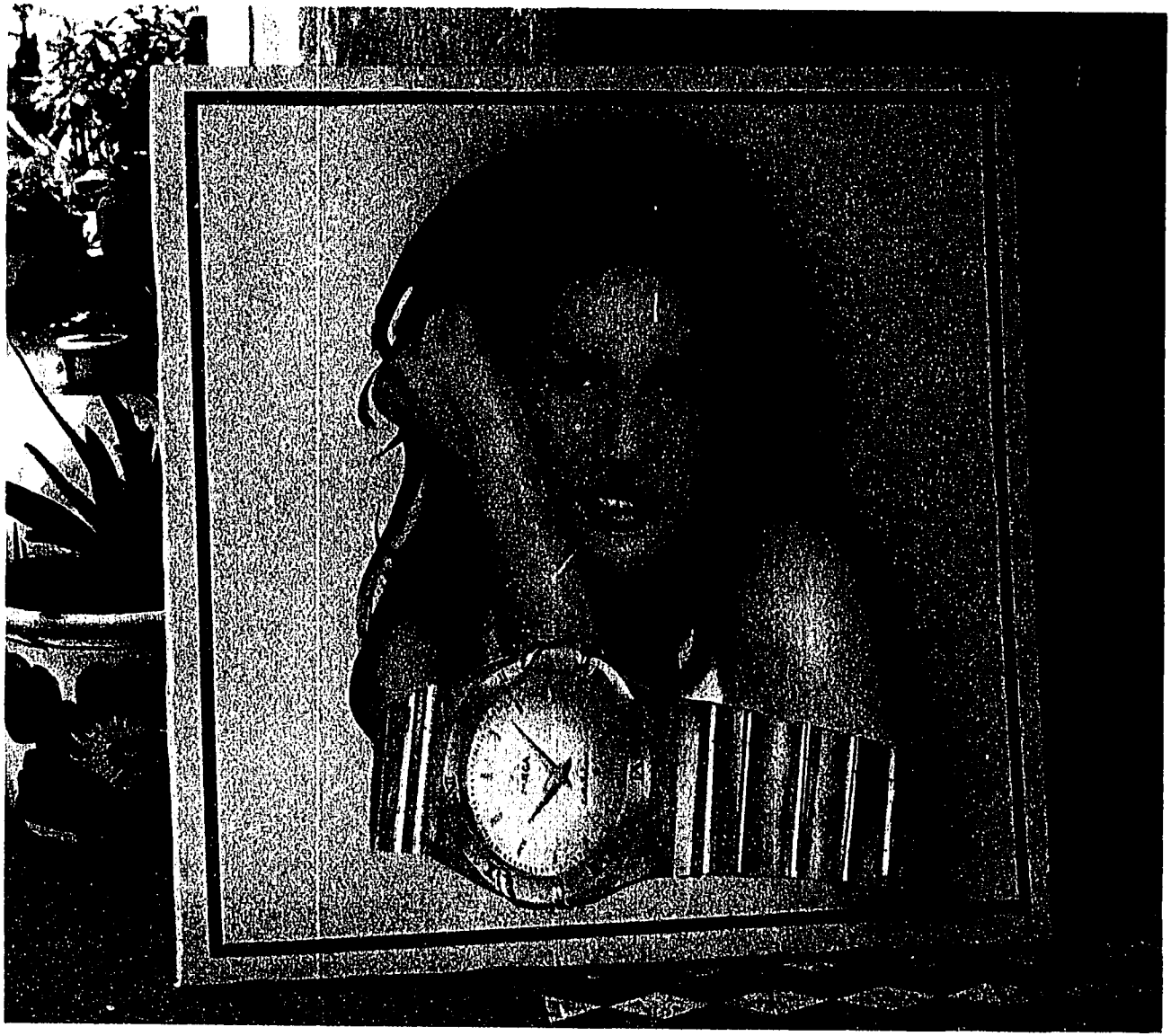

Figure 202

Entrance to Chourb Sophal's Painting Store with an air-brushed rendering of a Cindy Crawford ad set out as an advertisement for the painting store, Phnom Penh 2000

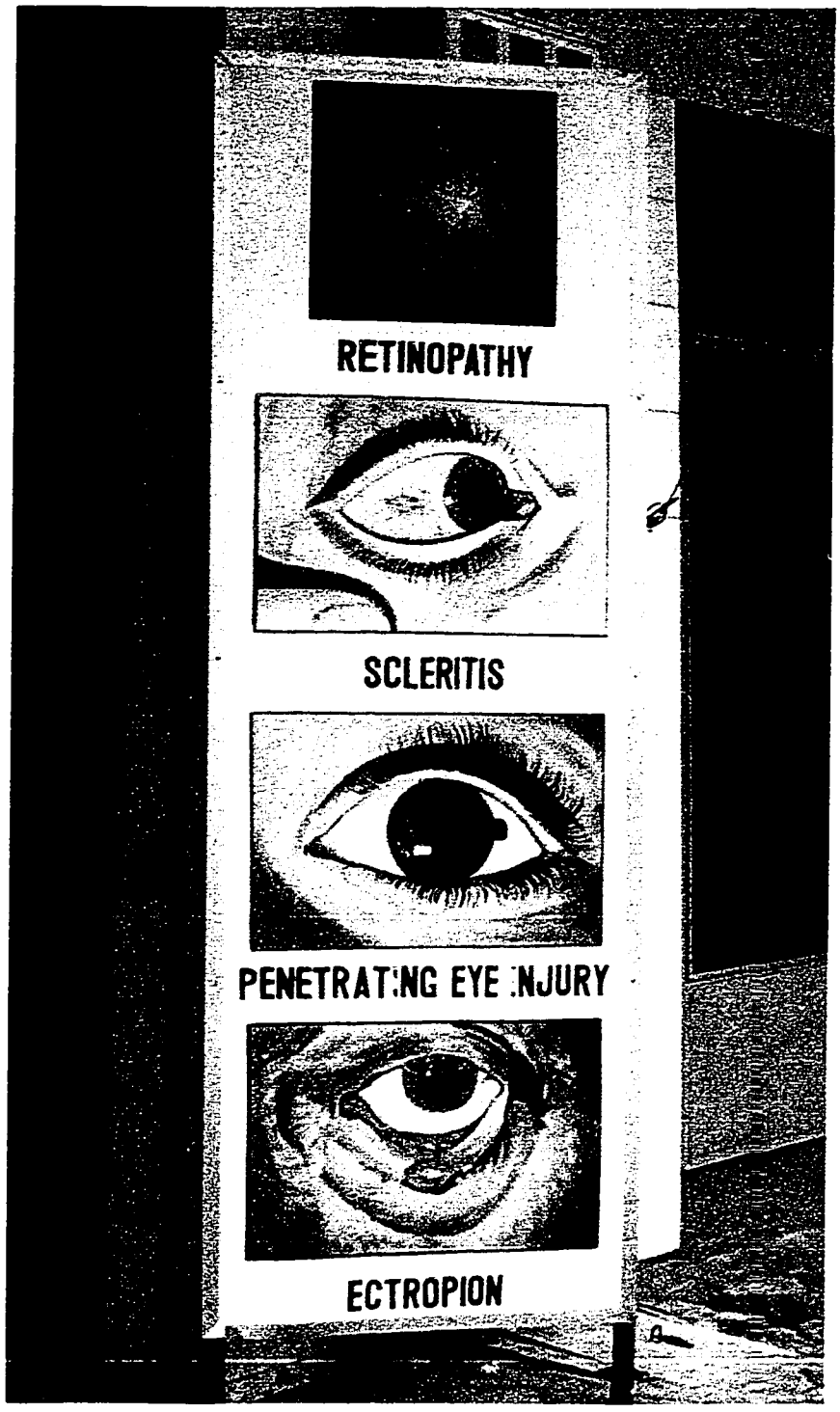

Figure 203

Eye doctor sign, Phnom Penh, 2000

enamel on oil, about 8 feet tall

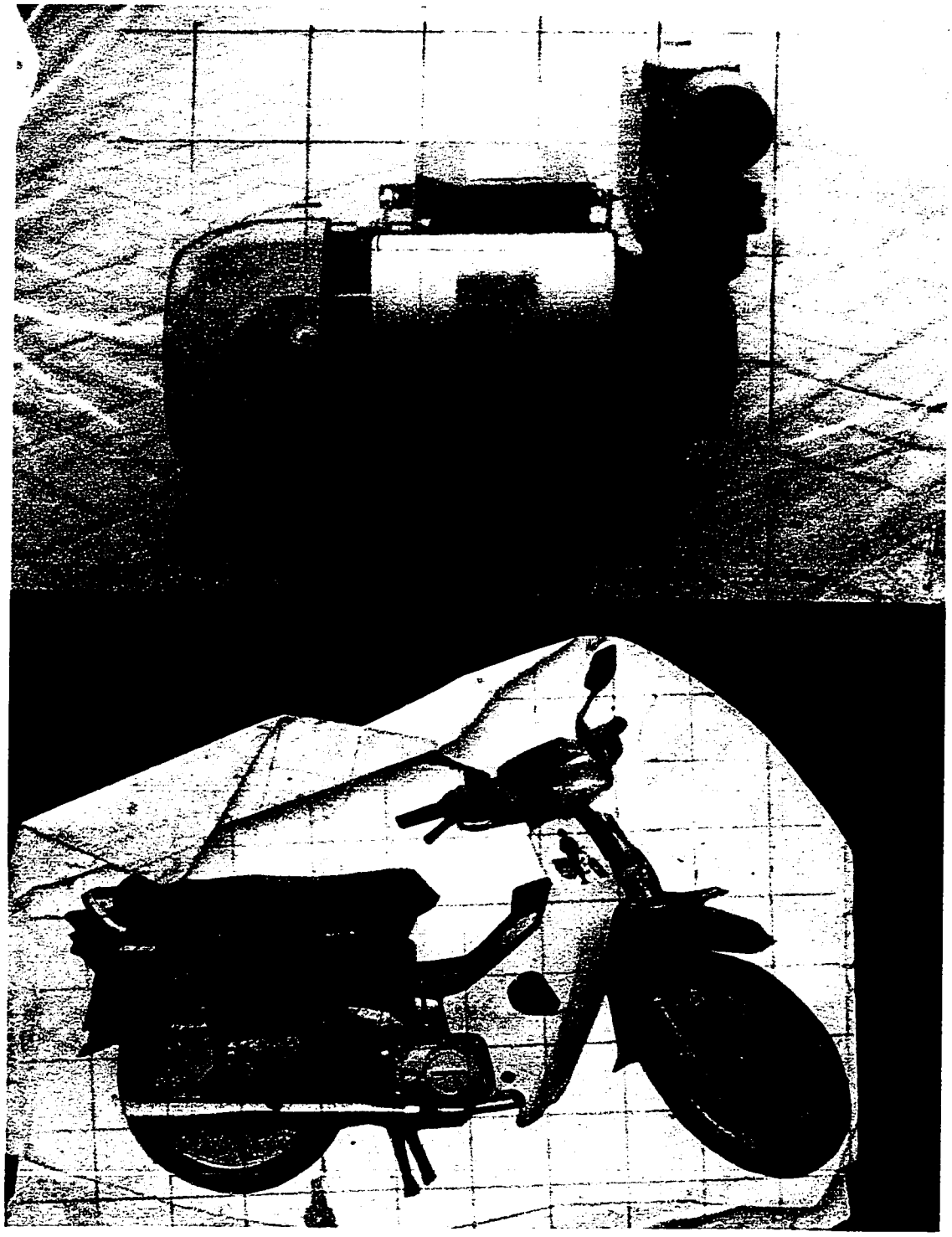

Figure 204

Photographs used as models in a Phnom Penh painting store, 1999



Figure 205

Cheng Sayorn, owner of Chouk Tip Painting Store (seated at the desk)
His younger brother is learning to "put down squares" in the foreground
Phnom Penh, 2000

large or as small as one desires. These worker painters watch their market as carefully as Groslier's Corporations once did. With the influx of international companies and their advertising (Fuji, Kodak, Caltex, Marlboro), the painted surface is slowly becoming passé, replaced by the shiny gloss of machine-made signage. Local clients wish to imitate the appearance and finish of such global advertising. Thus a whole host of ingenious hand-made ways to imitate plastic surfaces have been created by the worker painters (figure 206, 207).[58] In doing so, they simply present another instance of the geography through which Cambodia remains a place of the hand-made multiple.

[58] Conversations with Tim Thorn, Suon Mony, and Chourb Sophal, April-May 2000.



Figure 206

Above: a beauty salon store sign with lettering made of sheet plastic glued to styrofoam. The painted figures of Thai soap opera stars are also mounted on styrofoam in order to mimic the look of molded plastic. Bottom: A "modern" sign of plexiglass with cut electric tape lettering and spray paint which looks from afar like it is machine made.

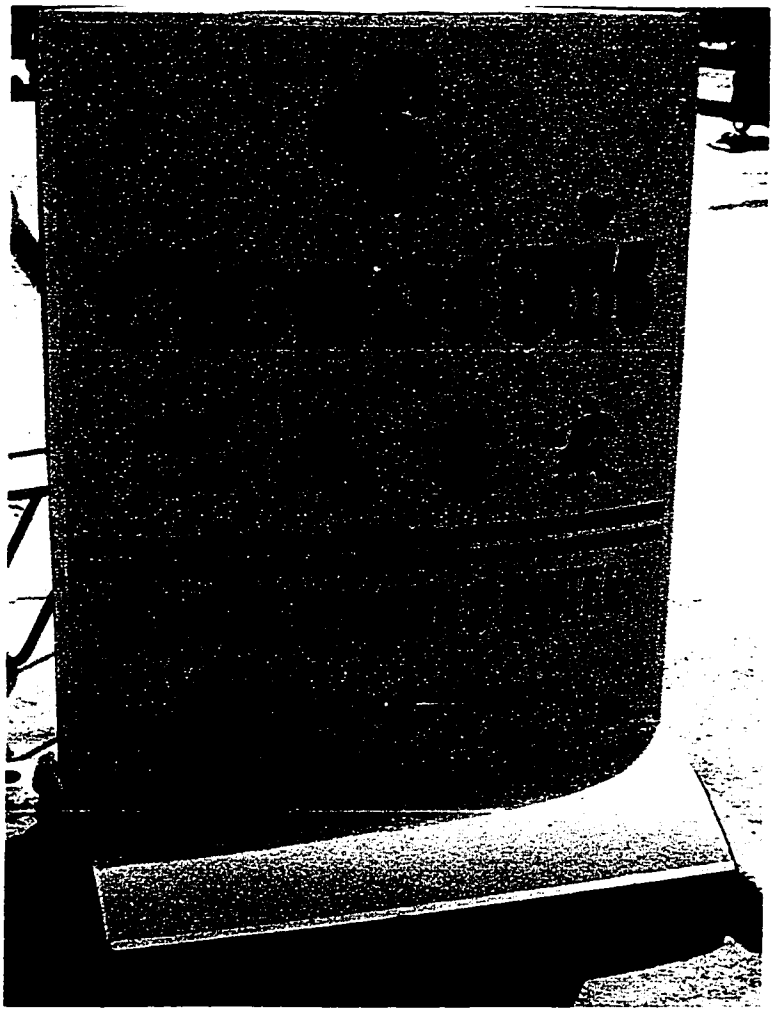



Figure 207 : Chourb Sophal's Painting Store

Various kinds of lettering hang on the back wall. These letters are made of pieces of hand-cut plastic glued together to imitate the look of machine made molded plastic letters. Phnom Penh, 2000

Conclusion

"It has reached the point where, in thirty or so years, those art historians who succeed us, will be able to add to our two paragraphs, only a third entitled 'The Disappearance of Cambodian Art under Foreign Influence'"

- George Groslier (1930)[1]

The forms which I have traced here are the results of various regimes, ambitions, and impositions, most of which have tried to offer a single definition for the "Cambodian Arts" during the 20th century. My text, in a sense, is simply one more version of such projects in that it details certain objects, emphasizes particular periods, and thus builds one possible narrative for what has been a scholarly blank. Still, I hope that I have avoided Groslier's dogmatism by refusing to declare disappearances and by tracing some of the multiple definitions of the "Cambodian Arts" which have been offered during the 20th century.

What I have written then is what could be called a survey of "modern Cambodian art". But I hope that my account has also indicated an uneasiness with all three of those terms. The 1917 survey of the Cambodian countryside had as much difficulty finding "art", as it did discerning the coherence implied by the term "Cambodian".[2] Groslier was looking for famous and full-time makers, producing unique objects which could be offered for sale. He thus presupposed the category of "artist" that had developed in the particular context of 18th and 19th century France. His search for

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[1] George Groslier, "Contemporary Cambodian Art studied in the light of its past forms", in Eastern Art, Philadelphia: College Art Association, 1930, p.127.

[2] See my discussion of the 1917 survey results in Chapter One as well as Penny Edwards' recent dissertation on the colonial construction of the nation state of Cambodia (Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945.)

"Cambodian artists" was disappointed however since, in the countryside of 1917, he could only find rice farmers who occasionally wove, painted, or sculpted when everyday life, a ceremony, or a temple construction required such images or objects. In the Palace workshops as well - although high quality work was produced on a full-time basis, often made for decorative purposes which Groslier would have associated with the aesthetic role of "art" - the objects produced remained the purview of the King and did not enter into circulation as products for sale to a general public. It was only in a few towns (Battambang, Pailin, and Phnom Penh) that Groslier found people akin to the "artists" he was looking for: that is, people known for their skill who made things on a full-time basis and lived off the sale of those objects.

But even among these "artists", Groslier's preconceptions for "the art of a people" were again unsettled.[3] The "Cambodians" of 1917, particularly in urban areas, were becoming interested in the "new". And when they did commission jewelery or other objects for their own aesthetic appreciation, they seem to have turned away from established local ways of making in order to embrace outside images and ideas brought by the increased contact with France introduced through the Protectorate. Lists of objects, cited by Groslier as examples of decadent urban production, show as much. Mixtures and imitations abound, and the "Cambodian Arts" had seemingly come to include "an impressionist landscape... Lalique jewelery" as well as work in the style of "the French school, a table made as in San Francisco,... a cloth woven after

[3] See Groslier's speech at the Inauguration of the Museum and School, 1920 (Inauguration, p.13-14) as well as the responses to the 1917 survey for descriptions of the "new". [NAC #15200 (RSC)].

European patterns".[4] In their incorporation of these "new" influences, the pictures and objects being produced could be said to accurately embody the colonial state of affairs through which a previously somewhat isolated tributary society was threaded into larger colonial networks. The possibility for such socially embedded expressions of change to be deemed "Cambodian" however was withdrawn by the force of Groslier's project. Instead, through the lure of markets, an "authentic" Cambodian art was constructed out of the past and produced, at least initially, for a largely foreign audience.

Groslier secured his two uncertain terms - "Cambodian" and "Art" - by suturing them together and decreeing that the result would differ irreducibly from that vast body of (Western) "art" unqualified by ethno-national labels. Whereas "art" of the recent past in the West generally meant academic forms based on a system of perspectival representation, Western "modern art" was becoming a progression of individual expressions grouped into styles which would be retrospectively organised into a march towards abstraction. Both of these definitions of "art" were purged from the colonial construction of the "Cambodian Arts". Instead of the view, Groslier installed the diagram; in place of individual expression, Groslier insisted upon obedient repetition. Distinguished by the exquisite hand-made finish of identical multiples, the "Cambodian Arts" were marketed through the networks and possibilities of modernity while promising the hand and the style of the past.

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[4] Inauguration, pg.16, Groslier, R1925, and Letter from Groslier to the RSC, September 26, 1922 [NAC #2008 (RSC)]. Also see Tardieu's description of the situation in Cambodia in his letter to the RSC in 1924 NAC #17502 (RSC).

What then of that third term in our survey title, the "modern"? As I have shown, the gesture of turning to the outside by which, for example, "impressionist paintings" came to be made in Phnom Penh, was largely foreclosed through institutions of art training and production installed by the Protectorate. The "Cambodian Arts" were thus carefully cordoned off from the tactics of French contemporaries who were laying claim to the title of "modern art". To say this, however, is to fall into a paradoxical trap. For such comparisons take the particular trajectory of Western modernism as the lens through which the rest is described, measured and understood. As I worked on this thesis, it seemed to me that instead of engaging in such comparative judgements, it was important, at this point, to try to understand the particular meaning of "modern art" in post-independence Cambodia through the careful detailed local analysis which I have tried to engage in here.

Still, the relation to Western modernism remains a crucial dilemma at the core of colonial cultural engineering. For the "modern" – with all its meaning of the new, the advanced, and the developed – had, by the 1950s, already happened once. And by the time Cambodian independence removes institutional bans on certain kinds of representation and expression, the meaning of "modern art" has already been determined through its certified forms and canonical histories which enshrine a particular trajectory from Paris to New York. Thus when another self-consciously "modern" aesthetic is constructed within the context of Cambodia, this other "modern" is already belated, caught inevitably in comparison to the first "modern" of the West.

"Modern Cambodian art", taken within its local context, proposed a self-conscious break from Groslier's "Cambodian Arts", insisting on the singular instead of

the copy, opening a view while leaving the patterned surface of tradition behind. Within this local context, "modern painting" (and sculpture) dispensed of obedience and instead asserted an immediacy that supposedly could only be registered by one particular set of eyes. When we view this local formulation through Western eyes however, we recognise that familiar figure of the "artist" as individual imbued with a unique vision, a model which has only been strengthened by the training of young Cambodians during the 1980s in academies of the socialist bloc which were themselves institutions set on the periphery of the first "modern" and thus followed in its wake. The brush stroke as a direct expression of the individual, the surface of the painting as a record of an encounter, these familiar tropes of Abstract Expressionism become the base on which to claim a personal style.

An excruciating dilemma presents itself however, since it is increasingly difficult to cut the logic of the local out of the meanings which circulate in a global context. Whereas in the context of Cambodia, this representational and later gestural "modern art" breaks with the local past and is decidedly "new" and "different" to what has preceded, in the larger international (Western) context, its forms are considered passé, even academic. Cambodian formulations of the "modern" thus seem almost always to be restatements of that "developed", "advanced", "abroad" to which Cambodia so often looks for magical promise today. Given such a temporal geography, all that can seemingly salvage the claims of innovation required by the assertion of "modern art" is the fall back onto the ethno-national marker of "Cambodian", thus reopening all the

cliches of an identity installed under the Protectorate, that period in which the idea of a coherent "Cambodia" with a unified "Cambodian culture" coalesced.[5]

The images encountered in contemporary Cambodia embody this predicament. They do so however not only by referencing subject matter gleaned from colonial stereotypes of Cambodian identity (Angkor, traditional dancers, tropical landscapes). The vast majority of forms encountered in Cambodia today are haunted as well by the formal logic of Groslier's training. It is as if the model and its copy – as well as the procedure taught for its multiplication – have become a form of identity, a "Cambodian" way of making art. Consider a photograph shown to me by the painter, Pech Song, for example (figure 208).[6] On this photograph of Suzuki's painting, blue ink scores the young girl's face into a set of intersecting lines, transforming her painted features into easily replicable formal relations of shape. It is a familiar grid first introduced by the lessons of the School of Cambodian Arts (figure 209). The gridded lines are found on all the photographs which fill the studio of Pech Song today (figure 210). The photograph of Suzuki's painting is a model, Pech Song explains, providing an image to be used whenever the depiction of a young girl is required. We can understand in retrospect, the odd irony of submitting a painting by Suzuki - that proponent of the irreducible singularity of immediacy - to a procedure of infinite replication. The view which Suzuki's "modern painting" ushered in has retrospectively become entangled with the lingering logic of Groslier's factory. The photograph thus embodies the two major - and conflicting - regimes of

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[5] See Edwards, Cambodge as well as my discussion of the 1917 survey results in Chapter One.

[6] See my discussion of his work in Chapter 6. In the 1960s, Pech Song was trained as a "modern painter" at the Royal University of Fine Arts, the later day incarnation of Groslier's School of Cambodian Arts.



Figure 208

Photograph of a painting by Suzuki, Pech Song's studio, 1999

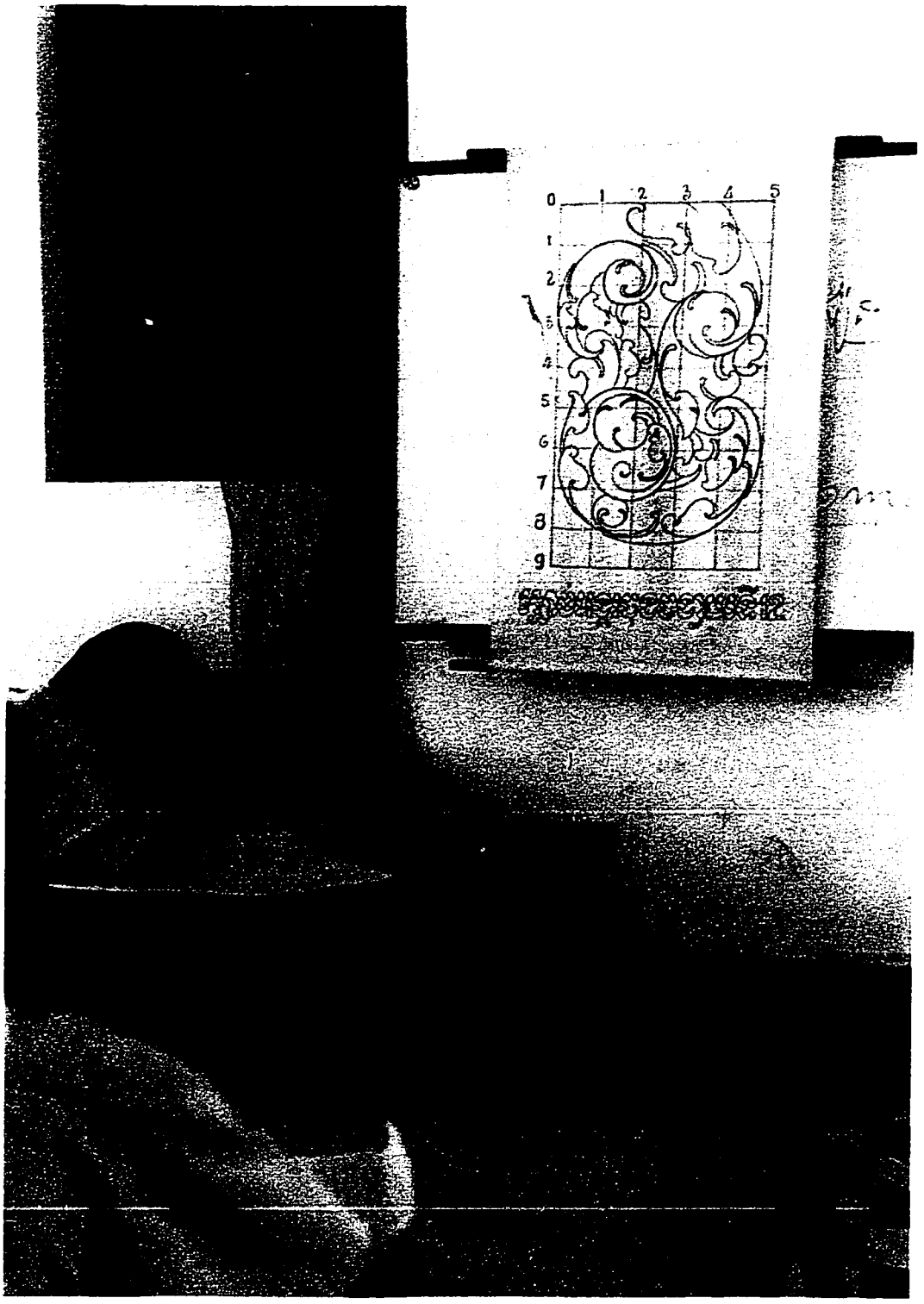

Figure 209



Figure 210 : Photographic "model" (left) and tourist painting (right), Pech Song's studio, 1999

representation which have laid claim to the title "Cambodian Art" during the 20th century, just as it shows the difficulty of freeing oneself from colonial procedures, particularly when they have been fused to a persistent notion of identity. The singular and the immediate of the "modern" soon fell back on Groslier's diagrams for visual production, using their grids to replicate a view which in its multiples still embodies the aims of the colonial School (figure 211).

Much of what motivated my research for this dissertation from its start was a desire to make some kind of sense out of the chaotic forms of the present, sketched in my last two Chapters. The images and objects found there were very different from those that I was familiar with from so-called "modern art history". Still I felt that if they were taken seriously and set into a historical context, they would offer one of the many accounts of modernism which must be written before "modern art history" takes on the meaning that I think it should, that is, a consideration of all the visual objects produced in all regions of the world during the period of modernisation and its silent twin, colonialism. It is the task of the 21st century then to perhaps find the forms and sentences which will allow three terms joined during the 20th century – "Cambodian", "modern", and "art" – to settle more easily, either together or apart.

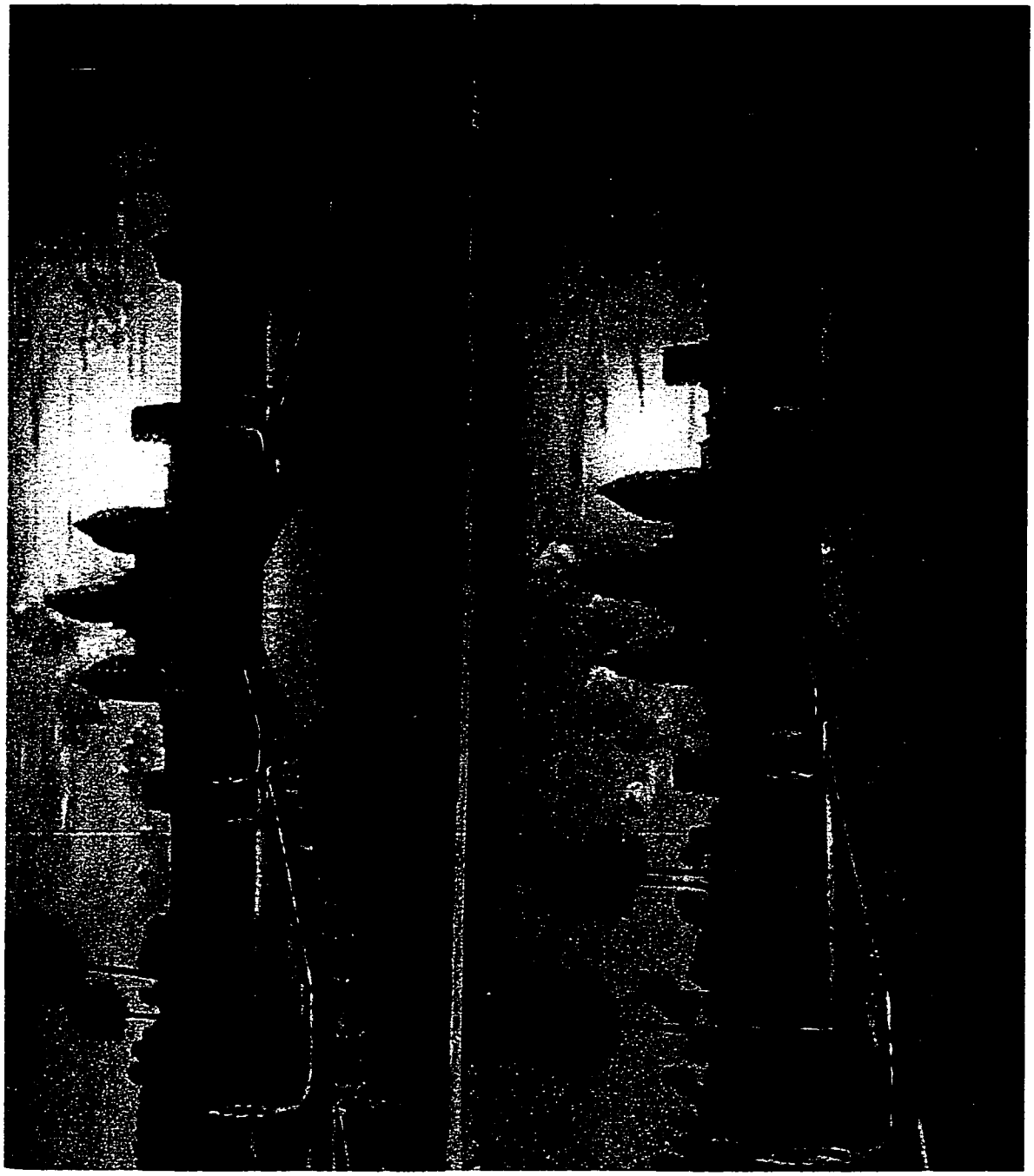

Figure 211
Angkor Paintings in a painting store, Phnom Penh 1999

Glossary

Annam - the central section of present-day Vietnam which under the French colonial regime of Indochina was a separate administrative unit called Annam

apsara - a celestial dancer

Balat – a Cambodian provincial authority under the Chaufaikhet or governor of the province

Chaufaikhet – the top Cambodian authority of each province who served under a French Résident, or provincial governor during Protectorate Cambodia

Cochinchine – the southern section of present-day Vietnam which under the French colonial regime of Indochina was a separate administrative unit called Cochinchine

Conservation d'Angkor – the institution founded by the EFEO in 1908 to clear, restore, and preserve the temples of Angkor

DAC – the Direction des Arts cambodgiens, an umbrella arts administration established in the early 1920s to oversee the School of Cambodian Arts, the Albert Sarraut Museum, as well as the work of preserving culture throughout Protectorate Cambodia.

devada – a deity

DK – Democratic Kampuchea, the regime established by the Khmer Rouge which ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.

Ecole professionnelle – a vocational training school founded in Phnom Penh in 1902 which aimed to train Cambodians in various industrial trades.

EFEO – the Ecole Française d'Extême-Orient, the French society for research on the Far East which was founded in 1899.

GGI – Gouverneur Général d'Indochine, the top French administrator for Indochina who was directly responsible to the Minister of the Colonies in France.

garuda – a mythical flying creature

Lon Nol – a general who served Prime Minister Sihanouk's government throughout the Sangkum years before staging a coup in 1970 which brought him to power and established the short lived Republic of Cambodia (1970-1975).

naga (Sanskrit) or **neak** (Khmer) – a mythical serpent with many heads

Preah Ream – the Khmer name for *Rama*, the hero of the *Reamker*, the Khmer version of the *Ramayana*.

Prix d'Indochine – a prize awarded annually at the Salons in Paris which provided its winner with a trip to Indochina. The details of the prize (duration of stay, teaching requirements) were revised several times.

PRK – the People's Republic of Kampuchea, the Vietnamese sponsored regime which ruled Cambodia from 1979 to 1989, following the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Protectorate – the French colonial regime which ruled present-day Cambodia from 1863 to 1953.

Rahu – a mythological demon who is said to sometimes swallow the moon or the sun, causing eclipses

Reamker – the Khmer version of the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*.

Résident – the top French provincial authority, or governor, during Protectorate Cambodia

RSC – the Résident Supérieur du Cambodge, the top French administrator of Protectorate Cambodia who was responsible to the GGI.

sampot – a length of woven cloth wrapped around the waist to form a skirt (women) or sometimes a twisted pant (men).

Sangkum – the period of time from 1955 to 1970 when Prime Minister Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum party ruled Cambodia

Tonkin – the northern section of present-day Vietnam which under the French colonial regime of Indochina was a separate administrative unit called Tonkin

vat – a temple complex which includes living quarters for the monks

yeak – a demon, the evil forces of the *Reamker*

USIS – US Information Service

USOM – US Operations Mission

ZEMP – Zoning and Environmental Management Plan for the Siem Reap / Angkor Region, a comprehensive study for the management of the temples and their surroundings, published in 1994.

Time line

1860 – 1904	Rule of King Norodom over the territory of present-day Cambodia
1863	Establishment of the French Protectorate over Cambodia
1904 –1927	Rule of King Sisowath during the French Protectorate over Cambodia
1918	Transfer of the existing Palace workshops to a French administered School of Cambodian Arts
1920	Inauguration of the Albert Sarraut Museum and the School of Cambodian Arts buildings
1927-1941	Rule of King Monivong during the French Protectorate over Cambodia
1941	Coronation of King Sihanouk
1953	Cambodian independence is granted
1955	King Sihanouk abdicates his throne, giving it to his father, in order to enter politics
1955– 1970	Prime Minister Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum party rules Cambodia for a period often called the "Sangkum"
1965	The School of Cambodian Arts becomes the Royal University of Fine Arts
1970	A Lon Nol coup removes Prime Minister Sihanouk from office and establishes the Republic of Cambodia
1975	Lon Nol's government falls to the Khmer Rouge
1975 – 1979	Democratic Kampuchea, the regime of the Khmer Rouge
1979	Vietnamese troops enter Cambodia and remove the Khmer Rouge from power
1979 – 1989	The People's Republic of Kampuchea, a Vietnamese sponsored government rules over Cambodia and is allied to the larger socialist bloc of the Soviet Union. Fighting continues between the government and various opposition armies along the Thai border including the regrouped Khmer Rouge

1989 – 1993	State of Cambodia
1991	The Paris Peace Accords arrive at a peace treaty for Cambodia
1991 – 1993	UNTAC, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia oversees elections in Cambodia which are held in 1993
1993 – present	The Kingdom of Cambodia is reestablished

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Most of what I have written relies on the archival sources and interviews listed throughout my text. All references marked NAC are from the National Archives of Cambodia. Sections on US policy towards Cambodia rely on the US Archives in College Park, Maryland. Here I simply list some of the secondary sources which have influenced my thinking.

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