

# MONOLOGUE

Vandy Rattana

ST PAUL St Gallery Two

25 September – 23 October 2015

The practice and works of Vandy Rattana serve to contradict the images of Cambodia that have been most widely captured and circulated. From the ethnographic gaze of the French Protectorate (1867–1949), to recent decades of war reportage, genocide studies, and clichés of tourism, a disproportionate representation of Angkor Wat and the Khmer Rouge perpetuates a static imaginary of Cambodia as a place and people incapable of continuity.

Born into the tenuous recovery period after the official fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Vandy began photographing as a form of continuity, concerned with the lack of physical documentation of more personal stories and monuments unique to his history and culture. His early serial works straddled the line between photojournalism and conceptual practice, and were consistently focused on the everyday as experienced by Cambodian people. With subjects ranging from informal domestic scenarios with the artist's family, to labour conditions on rubber plantations, and the building of the capital's first skyscraper, Vattanac Capital Tower, Vandy's early work chronicled the contemporary moment while creating a more comprehensive archive for future generations. His more recent work is critical of historiography, and increasingly turns towards fiction.

Vandy's most widely known work, *Bomb Ponds* (2009), was made following a transformative encounter with the craters left over from the United States' bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Dissatisfied with the level of documentation of the bombing and its repercussions, the artist turned toward intensive scrutiny of the historiography of his country. He traveled to the ten most severely bombed provinces, engaging villagers in locating and testifying to the existence of the craters, and how they are lived with today.

*MONOLOGUE* offers another portrait of the land, another physical and physiological scar, another silenced aftermath that is given voice. The only sound in the film—the artist's monologue—is directed at the sister he never met, who rests somewhere beneath one of two mango trees on a small, measured plot of land, alongside his grandmother, and five thousand others of the estimated 1.7 million who died during the Khmer Rouge regime in 1978.

Unlike at the tourist site known as the Killing Fields, one does not pay to enter this grave. There is no signage, no skulls on view, no annual reenactment of killing for spectators. Vandy's sister's grave resembles thousands of others around the country as they are today: unmarked, fertile, agricultural land. The film approaches the site by overlapping these past and present histories. The artist's voice and the dream-like sequences in *MONOLOGUE* counter that of the journalist, that of the official Khmer Rouge trial testimonies. When violence can no longer be seen, Vandy complicates our perception of its aftermath with intimacy. What is reconciliation? Is continuity memorial enough? *MONOLOGUE* destabilises time, the distance of history, polarising ideas of justice, the possibility of logic, and of peace. It becomes difficult to continue gazing at this history as if it belongs to others.

Erin Gleeson  
SA SA BASSAC

Vandy Rattana (b. 1980, Phnom Penh) cofounded the collective Stiev Selapak (art rebels) in 2007, and with them opened Sa Sa Art Gallery in 2009, followed by Sa Sa Art Projects in 2010, both in Phnom Penh. Selected solo exhibitions include *MONOLOGUE*, Jeu de Paume Paris and CAPC Bordeaux (2015); *Surface*, SA SA BASSAC, Phnom Penh (2013); *Bomb Ponds*, Asia Society, New York (2013) and Hessel Museum of Art, New York (2010). Recent group exhibitions include *Today of Yesterday*, Yamamoto Gendai, Tokyo, Japan; *Time of Others*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan / National Museum of Art, Osaka; *Documenting as Method: Photography in Southeast Asia*, Chiang Mai Photo Festival 2015, Chiang Mai University Art Center, Thailand and *The Khmer Rouge and the consequences. Documentation as artistic memory work*, Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, Germany (all 2015). His work was also included in *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations*, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St Louis, USA (2014), and *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, Asia Society, Hong Kong (2013) and *dOCUMENTA(13)* (2012). Vandy is nominated for the Hugo Boss Asian Art Prize 2015. He lives and works in Phnom Pehn, Taipei and Paris.

Vandy Rattana, *MONOLOGUE*, 2015. Single channel HD video, colour, sound. 18:55 minutes. Co-production Jeu de Paume, FNAGP and CAPC. Courtesy of the artist.