

Mak Remissa

photographer



One of Cambodia's most successful photographers, Mak Remissa graduated in fine art and photography at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh in 1995. Now aged 41, he works for the European Pressphoto Agency, but his real passion is fine art photography. *Ants and Fish* will be exhibited at Phnom Penh's 240 Gallery for one month starting May 19.

"This is my story and I dictate the outcome"

By Charlie Lancaster

Your upcoming *Ant and Fish* exhibition was first exhibited at Java Cafe in 2006. What made you decide to show your work again?

It is unusual for works to be shown twice, but we decided that there is a different expatriate audience in Cambodia now and Cambodians have a greater interest in contemporary art. It also leads up to my *Water is Life* exhibition in November.

How has your artwork evolved?

I guess back in 2006 I didn't know what I didn't know, if that makes sense, but

I've since learned from my mistakes and I've developed a unique style. I'm becoming much more comfortable as a fine art photographer.

You are a photojournalist and a fine art photographer. What do the different mediums mean to you?

Photojournalism's function is to document a situation as it unravels. I take photos in quick succession to tell someone else's story. There's no time to think and it can be emotionally draining. With fine art photography, I step back and slow the

pace. I have time to express my thoughts. This is my story and I dictate the outcome. I prefer fine art photography because it allows me to be more creative, it's more fun and it makes me happier.

In *Ants and Fish* and *Water is Life* you have successfully managed to do the unusual, to create abstract photography. How did you do this?

I put water on glass and then mix oil colours. This style of painting allows me to manipulate patterns and the fluidity of the image. The abstract nature of the pieces allows me to comment on society indirectly.

What is your message in *Ants and Fish*?

Using the Khmer proverb 'When the water rises, the fish eat the ants; when the water recedes, the ants eat the fish', I am commenting on the need for balance in our society. If those in power make life difficult for those who have no power, the time will come when the power flow reverses and they will be made to suffer. Like the seasons, things come and go. But we are humans, not animals – we can change to live a more balanced, equal life. *Water is Life* is also about balance and the need to preserve freshwater sources.

Your photographs sell for \$600 each.

Why has the value of your work increased so dramatically in the last couple of years?

Before, we didn't take care to control the number of prints. Now every photo is a limited edition, which means values have doubled and in one particular instance more than doubled.

How long does it take to create one photograph? Do you have assistants?

It takes about one day per photo, though I shot the exhibition (24 images) over a year. I normally have one assistant, though this number will probably increase with future projects. I've also trained some of Cambodia's most well-known photojournalists.

What's next?

You will have to wait and see, but it will be more abstract. I am coaching Cambodians to understand and embrace abstract art. After all, if they don't get it, they won't get the message.

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