

WITHOUT PROVENANCE:
The Making of Contemporary Antiquity

AUCTION IN SINGAPORE 4 OCTOBER, 6PM

Jim Sanborn 2011 – 2018



WITHOUT PROVENANCE: The Making of Contemporary Antiquity

AUCTION IN SINGAPORE TUESDAY 4 OCTOBER 2018

EXHIBITION AT 4400 MASSACHUSETTS AVE NW

TUESDAY 4 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

WEDNESDAY 5 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

THURSDAY 6 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

FRIDAY 7 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

SATURDAY 8 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

SUNDAY 9 SEPT 11:00am-4:00pm

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PROPERTIES FROM:

THE SULTINATE OF BRUNAE
PRIVATE COLLECTIONS
MUSEUM COLLECTIONS
EUROPEAN COLLECTIONS
LONDON COLLECTIONS
THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA
UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS
THAI COLLECTIONS
FRENCH COLLECTIONS



SPECIALISTS FOR THIS SALE

United States {Pg. 35}

ADAM LERNER
Director and Chief Animator
The Museum Of Contemporary Art
Denver, Colorado

Prague {Pg. 37}

MILENA KALINOVSKA
Director of The Modern and Contemporary Art Collection
The National Gallery in Prague
Prague, Czech Republic

South Australia {Pg. 36}

MARTIN POLKINGHORNE
Scholar and Research Fellow at Flinders University
Adelaide, South Australia

United States {Pg.31}

GARY VIKAN
Writer and former Director of the Walters Art Museum
Baltimore, Maryland



PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN

91

A LIFE SIZE SANDSTONE FIGURE OF VARUNA
KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD PRE-RUP STYLE
3RD QUARTER OF THE 10TH CENTURY

It is believed that this nearly complete guardian figure was discovered and documented by the French in 1896 against the western wall of the collapsed temple of East Mebon. Unfortunately the piece vanished from the site in 1951 and resurfaced in the garden of the Democratic Peoples Republic of North Korea's restaurant "Pyongyang" in Siem Reap in 2012. Earlier this year Kim Jong-Un decided, reluctantly, to take it to auction for the benefit of the Republic. Varuna was considered the sovereign of the world beyond, and had magic powers and created the forms of the visible world. He meted out judgment and punishment and was seen as somewhat despotic wielder of magic.

81" (206 cm.) high (with Tenon)

\$220,000–300,000

PROVENANCE

In dispute



PROPERTY OF A MUSEUM COLLECTION

46

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF BUDDHA
KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, POST-BAYON STYLE
2ND HALF OF THE 13TH–14TH CENTURY

This work was discovered in 2001 at the site of a Khmer iron foundry, it was removed from the excavation pit and disappeared for ten years, it was finally rediscovered in the collection of a European land speculator in Siem Reap. The hair consists quite



properly of small curls, evenly covering the head and the *usnisa*. These Buddhas were the first to draw the attention of the West with their subtle plasticity and smiling natural faces.

8 1/2" (21.5 cm.) high

\$24,000–34,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Siem Reap 2011



28
A SANDSTONE TEMPLE DOORWAY FROM BANTEAY CHHMAR (CITADEL OF THE CAT)

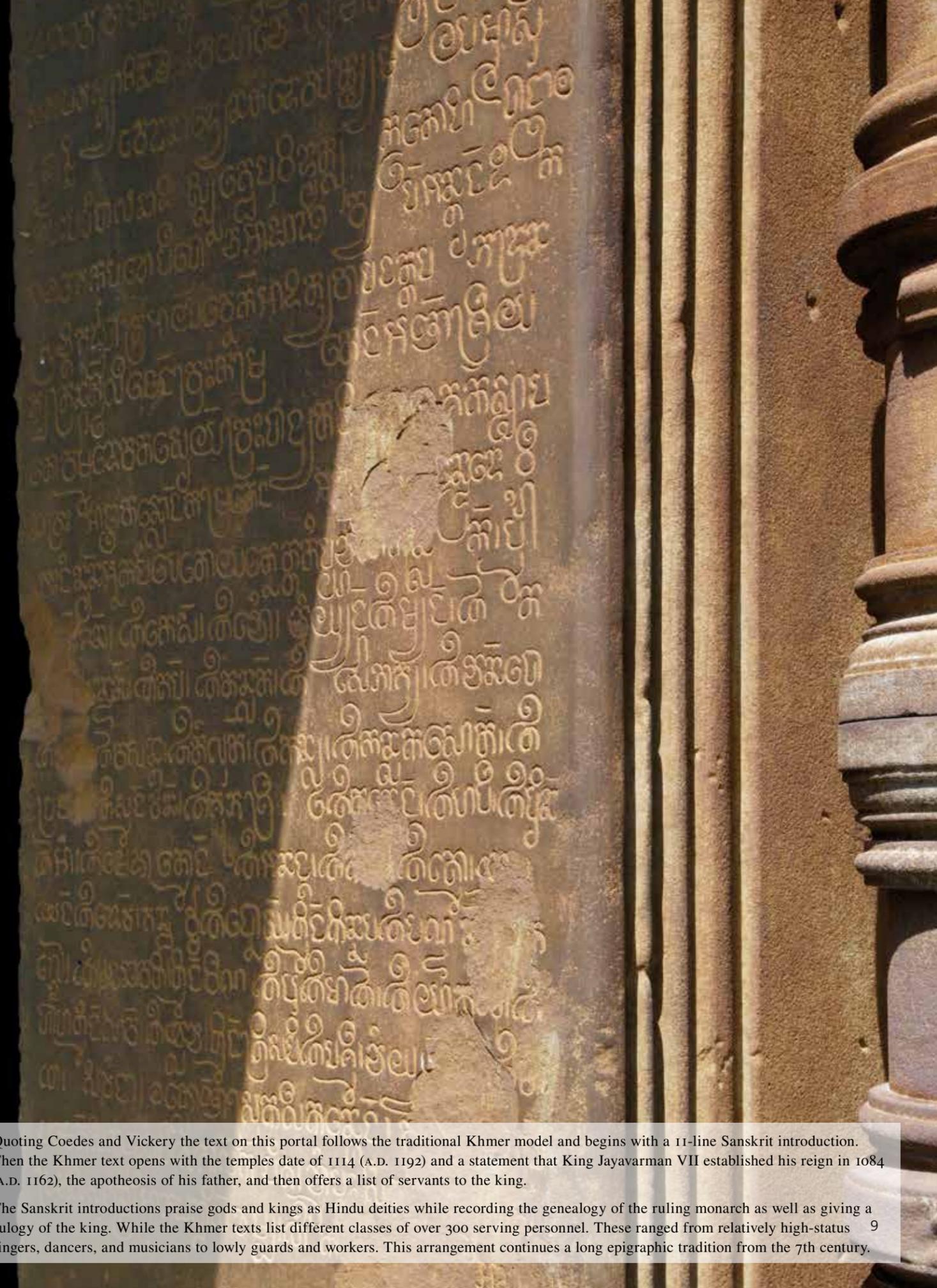
KHMER, BARYON STYLE LATE 12TH - EARLY 13TH CENTURY

112" (284.5 cm.) high

\$1,100,000–1,600,000

PROVENANCE None

This impressive work was discovered disassembled behind the residence of the Governor of Thailand's Buri Ram Province. This ensemble disappeared from a large shipment of looted Banteay Chhmar temple sections seized at the Thai border in 1998. Missing for fifteen years, it was brought to auction in Bangkok in 2011 to raise funds for the Governor's presidential election campaign. The weathered threshold is worn by thousands of feet over the centuries.



Quoting Coedes and Vickery the text on this portal follows the traditional Khmer model and begins with a 11-line Sanskrit introduction. Then the Khmer text opens with the temples date of 1114 (A.D. 1192) and a statement that King Jayavarman VII established his reign in 1084 (A.D. 1162), the apotheosis of his father, and then offers a list of servants to the king.

The Sanskrit introductions praise gods and kings as Hindu deities while recording the genealogy of the ruling monarch as well as giving a eulogy of the king. While the Khmer texts list different classes of over 300 serving personnel. These ranged from relatively high-status 9 singers, dancers, and musicians to lowly guards and workers. This arrangement continues a long epigraphic tradition from the 7th century.



PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION

192

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF UMA

KHMER, BAPHUAN STYLE,
MID-11TH CENTURY

This piece was found in its current state in the closet of a Thai military official. Her polished face is sensitively modeled with delicate contours with a serene expression including gently

arched eyebrows and full bow-shaped lips. The almond-shaped eyes with incised pupils, her hair finely braided and tied back in a domed topknot secured with a strand of carved beads.

10" (25.4 cm.) high

\$20,000–30,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Phnom Penh circa 2010



PROPERTY OF THE SULTANATE OF BRUNAE

111

A COLOSSAL HEAD AND HAND OF JAYAVARMAN VII

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, BAYON STYLE
LATE 12TH-EARLY 13TH CENTURY

These two elements are all that remain of a colossal figure of the king, found together in 1979 the head and hand were on either side of the rubble pile of the torso. Sadly, Khmer Rouge soldiers had used explosives to dismember the statue, and not realizing the great weight and difficulties of jungle transport had to leave the pieces in place as they fled from villagers who heard the blast. The complete work presented a monarch in an

attitude of respect, sitting with legs crossed, torso leaning forward, with one hand (destroyed) upturned in his lap and holding above it the other (surviving) hand with a ruler and a string of prayer beads. Khmer kings often posed as various deities, the upturned surviving hand is recognized as an attribute of Vishvakarman, the architect of the gods.

The head: 39" (100 cm.) high — The hand: 20" (51 cm.) high

\$400,000–600,000

PROVENANCE

None



PROPERTY OF AN AMERICAN COLLECTOR

171

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF AVALOKITESVARA

KHMER, PRE-ANGKOR PERIOD
8TH-9TH CENTURY?

This large, finely carved, and robust head was found detached from its body, at the bottom of a 11th Century Khmer rubbish pit in 1962. Its body is now located in the National Museum of

The Chechen Republic, (reunification is unlikely). The most characteristic mark is the presence of the meditating Amitabha Buddha on his headdress.

16 1/2" (42 cm.) high

\$26,000-34,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in London circa 1968



PROPERTY OF A FRENCH ARISTOCRAT

429

A SANDSTONE YONI

KHMER PRE-ANGKOR PERIOD, EASTERN THAILAND
7TH-8TH CENTURY

Only re-discovered in 2004, this impressively carved *Yoni* was in the center of a collapsed stone pavilion on the estate of the late Vicomte Charles Vilhelm du Montegue in a suburb of Paris. It is believed that this *Yoni* was broken from its original base in the early 20th century by a privately funded rogue expedition to eastern Thailand. Interestingly the *Linga* compliment to this *Yoni* (thought for years to be lost,) was located in 2011 hidden on the estate of the Viscountess du Pantecourt, in a suburb of Paris, just fifteen miles from the Montegue estate and had been there for over 100 years. In the Hindu religion *Yoni* are representations of the female womb or vagina into which the *linga* is inserted. The complete ensemble would be associated with India's agrarian cult of fertility.

62" x 50" (57.5 x 27 cm.) in length and width

\$60,000-90,000

PROVENANCE

None





PROPERTY OF AN AMERICAN LADY

428

A SANDSTONE MUKHALINGA

KHMER, PRE-ANGKOR PERIOD
7TH-8TH CENTURY

This work was discovered behind a false wall in the collection of the long deceased Vicontess Catrine Yelloz du Pantecourte. The piece was probably collected in the 19th century and given to the Vicontess, a patron of the collecting expeditions. The Hindu god Siva was generally represented by his symbol the *Linga*. *Mukhalinga* in the form of a realistic phallus with a face belong exclusively to the Pre-Angkor Period, and this is a very fine example of the genre. The cult of the *Mukhalinga* worshiped a phallus capable of inseminating the earth and making it fruitful. This *Linga* was removed by the expedition from its position inserted into the *Yoni* (the representation of the female organ) that was left behind in the Cambodian Jungle.

61" (52.5 cm.) high

\$90,000-125,000

PROVENANCE
unknown



PROPERTY OF A MAJOR COLLECTION IN BANGKOK

41

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF DURGA MAHISAURAMARDINI

KHMER, PRE-ANGKOR PERIOD
FIRST HALF OF THE 7TH CENTURY

This piece is an early 7th century model of an original mid 7th century work that was found broken into several pieces (the original was reassembled in 1972 by the Cambodian National Museum). It is believed that this rare early carving was illegally excavated a short distance from the broken original for which it was probably a small working scale model. The piece was purchased at auction in Singapore in 1999. Sadly the traditional buffalo demon on the base was broken off much like the original. "Despite the Lack of arms and head, one can sense the gesture the goddess makes as she pierces the buffalo demon with her lance. One is almost tempted to compare the work to the famous Winged Victory of Samothrace in light of the calm and completely classical equilibrium of the goddess" (Son Soubert "*Millenium of Glory*" 1997, 168-169).

22" (55 cm) tall

\$65,000 to 75,000

PROVENANCE
As stated



PROPERTY OF A PROMINENT UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

44

THE SANDSTONE HEAD OF A RECLINING BUDDHA

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD
SOUTHERN CAMBODIA
13TH CENTURY

This exquisite head was removed in the 1970's from a remote cave temple in southern Cambodia, the much revered headless torso still remains there. Repatriation and reunion with the torso was held up by the accusation that this particular head is believed to be a forgery. Sadly the inability of the scientific community

to prove authenticity one way or the other has led to its going to auction again in the UK. The complete statue of the reclining Buddha depicts him in his last hours before passing. Furthermore it signifies tranquility, absolute detachment from the desires of the world, and the attainment of Nirvana.

26" (66 cm.) long

\$40,000–70,000

PROVENANCE:
Disputed



PROPERTY OF A LONDON COLLECTION

430

A SMALL SANDSTONE DEVI FIGURE

KHMER, BAPHUON STYLE,
MID 12TH CENTURY

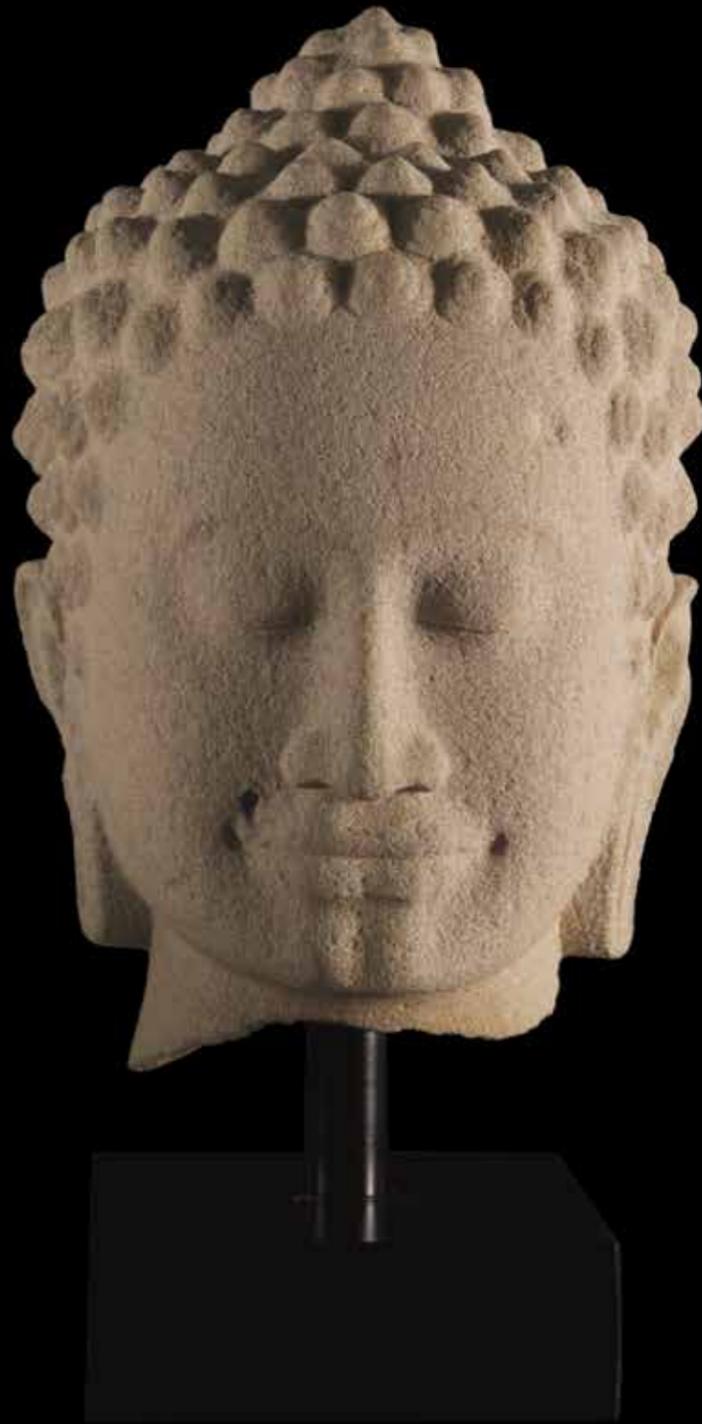
This small figure was looted by a local farmer in 1981 from a pedestal in the rubble of a Khmer royal residence. It was smuggled out of Cambodia by Swiss diplomatic pouch and was auctioned in London in the late 1980's. The London collector who purchased the piece was unaware of its dubious provenance and sent the work to a major international exhibition of Khmer antiquities where it was recognized as stolen from the recently restored residence.

Sensitively modeled and wearing an ankle-length *sampot* with finely incised parallel pleats, the upper edge looped and secured by a flat belt, her bare torso is modeled with delicate contours and her face is set with a serene expression. Her hair is finely braided and tied back in a conical three tiered chignon secured with a wide string of pearls.

15½" (39.3 cm.) high, not including base

\$30,000–50,000

PROVENANCE:
None



THE PROPERTY OF A UNIVERSITY

416

A RED SANDSTONE HEAD OF BUDDHA

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, POST-BAYON STYLE
13TH / 14TH CENTURY

This representative of the “Commaillé Buddhas,” after their discoverer Jeane Commaillé, who disappeared in 1916 under dramatic circumstances, is distinguished by its plasticity, it is at once supple yet monumental. The elegantly curved eyelids

are lowered, directing a benevolent gaze toward the worshiper. The hair consists quite properly of small curls, evenly covering both the head and the usnisa.
9 1/4" (23.5 cm.) high

\$9,000–11,000

PROVENANCE
Unknown

PROPERTY OF A EUROPEAN COLLECTION

67

A SERIES OF ELEVEN (11) FOOT BASES

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD
ANGKOR THOM
LATE 12TH CENTURY

These foot bases are all that is left of the small devotional sculptures broken off at their ankles and sold by looters. These bases (a poignant reminder of past looting activity) were recovered during extensive renovations at the Angkor Thom complex in the 1960's. Authorities

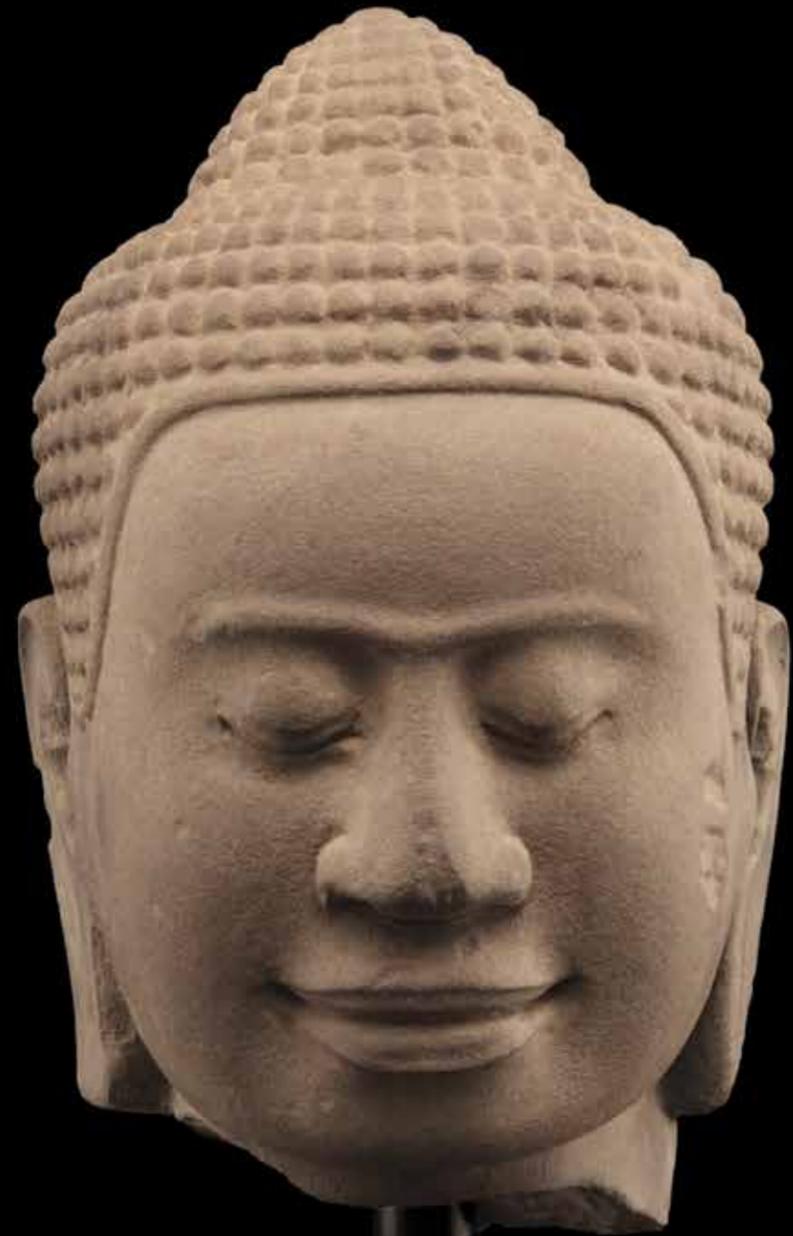
determined that these objects (stolen from “secure” warehouses in Siem Reap) were transported out of Cambodia on Thai military vehicles in 2009, and were offered for sale in Switzerland at that time.

The sizes are variable, with the average being 25" (63,5cm) tall, including the tenon bases

\$40,000–60,000 for the group

PROVENANCE
None





PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN

320

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF BUDDHA

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, POST BAYON STYLE
2ND HALF OF THE 13TH–14TH CENTURY

This small finely modeled head was found missing from the north wing of *Gopura III* east, Angkor (Siem Reap) in 1998. It was rediscovered in 2011 in the bonnet of a late model car owned by the governor of Thienborn Province. The broad and delicately modeled face echoes the style of the Bayon, but the

expression is entirely different. More relaxed and prepossessing it seems to betray different religious concerns. The elegantly curved eyelids are lowered, directing a benevolent gaze toward the worshiper.

7 1/2" (19 cm.) high

\$12,000–22,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Thailand circa 2011



THE PROPERTY OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

143

A SANDSTONE FEMALE DEITY

KHMER, BAPHUON STYLE
11TH/12TH CENTURY

Having been originally shipped out of Siem Reap Cambodia in 1987 as a high-end reproduction this exquisite Devi figure holding a lotus petal in its upturned hand was authenticated by the Cambodian Antiquities Authority in 2001 (they had located its foot pedestal in the jungle). The work was subsequently auctioned in London and purchased by a Collection in Luzern Switzerland. An anonymous collector then purchased the work from the Swiss Collection to allow its repatriation and finally the piece was returned to Cambodia.

45" (114 cm) tall (with the tenon)

\$248,000 (to repatriate)

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Luzern and repatriated in 2015



PROPERTY OF THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

172

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF UMA

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, BAPHUON STYLE,
12TH CENTURY

As with so many of these small Devi figures this work was in the collection of a major American museum for decades. A problem arose when the piece was accidentally knocked off its base and lost its head during an annual Gala event. Conservators were starting to repair the piece when they noticed that there was no surface weathering penetration at the break and quietly declared the piece a forgery.

The Baphuon period arguably represents the high-point in the depiction of the female form in all of Khmer art, drawing on the developments of the previous half-century and introducing further refinements.

20" (51 cm.) not including base or head

Currently unavailable for sale

PROVENANCE*

Rank & Son LTD. London.

Acquired from Chenda Hom, Bangkok, 1972

*As stated: The work is currently stored in an IRS warehouse in the Midwest



PROPERTY OF A LADY

16

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF JAYAVARMAN VII

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, BAYON STYLE
LATE 12TH–EARLY 13TH CENTURY

This rare work was unearthed by authorities in the family compound of General Wue Ton in 1982. This head which is possibly from Angkor belongs to a series of presumed portraits of Jayavarman VII. The king here is shown looking visibly older

than in other works of the same nature. The expression, which is softer and more relaxed than in other royal portraits, indicates a model who has grown less willful and more serene.

7 1/2" (19 cm.) high

\$18,000–26,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Bangkok circa 1983



PROPERTY FROM A PROMINENT LONDON COLLECTION

48 (on hold)

A SANDSTONE FEMALE DIVINITY

ANGKOR PERIOD, BAPHUON STYLE
LAST QUARTER 11TH CENTURY

This finely polished, exquisitely carved sculpture of a female divinity was recovered in a raid by Cambodian border security on a casino in Sisophon on the Cambodia/Thai border in 2004 where the piece had been mounted on a pedestal at the entrance to a Thai massage parlor. The foot pedestal was found earlier in-situ in the Cambodian jungle in 1954. The pedestal and sculpture were reunited in 2010, only to be smuggled out of Cambodia. They reached London in 2012 where, with false documentation, they were brought to auction. The finely pleated skirt rises behind and dips forward below the navel and is knotted in front over the square patterned floral belt.

53" (134.5 cm.) high with its short tenon

\$90,000–130,000

PROVENANCE

Currently In Litigation



PROPERTY OF A EUROPEAN COLLECTION

69

A SANDSTONE HEAD OF AVALOKITESHVARNA

KHMER, BAPHUON STYLE,
11TH–12TH CENTURY

The headdress and facial features of this work are very similar to a head that was stolen from the archeological warehouses in Siem Reap where the body still resides. A conical three-tiered Chignon-cover surmounts this exquisite head and is surrounded by a diadem tied in back with a square knot, typical of Baphuan

diadem knots. The face is represented with arched eyebrows, wide open rimmed eyes and full lips. The neck of item #69 displays one of the usual three indented "beauty lines" and the ears' interior rims are scalloped.

15 1/4" (38.7 cm.) high

\$26,000–34,000

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Bangkok circa 2001



The Making of
Contemporary Antiquity



THE PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN

92

A PAIR OF SANDSTONE FIGURES
OF VISHNU

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, KULEN STYLE,
9TH CENTURY (FACING FIGURE)

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, KLEANG STYLE,
11TH CENTURY (REAR FIGURE)

Found soaking in a strong acid bath in Battambang province Cambodia, it can be assumed that these two large figures are in-process forgeries. As such they are offered here at a fraction of their worth as originals. We must assume given their present circumstances that the iconography of these Vishnu deities remains constant. With the *Cakra* (disk) and the *Sankha* (conch) and other accoutrements missing, the cylindrical miter and conical lotus leaf chignon-cover nonetheless confirms their identities. 57" (145 cm.) high (facing figure)

76" (193 cm.) high (rear figure)

\$45,000–60,000 (for both in their current state)

PROVENANCE

None

SANBORN'S PROVOCATION

When I was director of the Walters Art Museum, I loved to play a mischievous game with visitors to my grand, wood-paneled office in the family's 19th-century townhouse on Mount Vernon Place. High on the wall to the left as they entered hung a fine 17th-century copy of the *Mona Lisa*. I would teasingly pose the question: how do you know that this is not the "real" *Mona Lisa*? For those who hadn't already heard the story, I would then recall the events of 1911–1913, when an Italian handyman named Vincenzo Peruggia stole Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece off the walls of the Louvre, squirreled it away in a trunk in his Paris apartment for two years, then brought it to Florence, where he offered it to a gallery owner who turned him in.

How do we know for sure, I would say, that in the meantime Peruggia didn't swap out the real one on behalf of the rich American railroad tycoon, Henry Walters, and that the one now hanging behind thick, bulletproof glass in Paris is really the copy? Could those hordes of gawking tourists who jostle one another to get a fleeting snapshot of what they think is the renowned *La Gioconda* tell the difference? In the case of that *Mona Lisa* in my office, I had the luxury of taking it down from the wall so my visitors could have a close look at the enigmatic smile. And what if the real *Mona Lisa* had been lost in the Second World War, as many feared it might? Imagine how important Walters' copy would be then.

The "fake" question is more subtle than it might at first appear, given that it involves the intent of the maker and the identification applied to the artwork by the person who later possesses it. When Walters bought the fabled Massarenti Collection in Rome in 1902—1,700 works ranging from Etruscan bronzes to an 18th-century canvas by the Italian master Tiepolo—he received a spectacular cache of stellar

paintings that the collector, a priest in service of the Pope, claimed were by Titian, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Unfortunately for Walters, these were all copies of famous originals by those masters. But the artists who painted the copies did not consider them fakes, nor did the original owners; rather, they understood them for what they are, very good copies. Only later, whether through misunderstanding or deceit, were these paintings labeled as creations by the great masters. At that point, and for the first time, they became fakes, since they were, in effect, then traveling with false IDs.

What does fakery mean in a world where we typically know ancient Greek masterpieces only by way of their Roman copies, and where the Chinese have been creating astoundingly good copies of revered originals for many centuries?

I once took a tour of the storerooms of the Maryland Historical Society. When we were shown a scruffy Victorian folding chair with a small plaque on its seat claiming that Robert E. Lee used it during the Second Battle of Manassas, one person in our group began to cry. That plaque simply repeated the story the donor offered years ago, and while we all took the chair to be "authentic" and filled with the aura of the great Confederate general, maybe the donor was mistaken, or maybe he was lying. No aura, no tears.

With the Walters *Mona Lisa*, as with Roman copies of Greek originals, there is an aesthetic dimension to the work distinct from its authenticity. If a copyist is able to capture the stylistic flavor and aesthetic power of the original, as the Roman sculptor of the famed Vatican *Laocoön* certainly did, then so what if it's a copy? Well, the "so what?" should be obvious: when a copy carries a false ID, for whatever reason, it not only distorts our shared understanding of the past,

it corrupts the art market, which can be very painful financially for collectors and museums.

Jim Sanborn has given us all a rare gift of artistic provocation. Certainly there is an abundance of beauty in this exhibition, but it is beauty that provokes thought, and reflection. I recently showed his brilliant Khmer “auction catalogue” to a seasoned collector friend with long experience in buying Asian art. The dramatic cover photo of Varuna immediately elicited these endorsing words: “What a handsome piece!” And it is a handsome piece. The sculptor, a contemporary Cambodian, has captured that elusive, sumptuous beauty that is the hallmark of the best of Khmer art.

My collector friend went on to recount one harrowing story after another, going back to the 1960s, of collectors, curators, and directors being fooled by Khmer fakes, which are now scattered among museum collections nationwide. Then together he and I recalled the recent, widely publicized cases of looted Khmer antiquities being repatriated to Cambodia. What can be trusted as genuine? What is legal? And, going forward, what will the trade be, if any, in Khmer art?

Enter Sanborn and *Without Provenance*. The takeaway from this extraordinary show is a vision for an art-collecting world very different from our own, but hardly without precedent. Sanborn’s imagined world, which would make complete sense to an ancient Roman, is one wherein those skilled artist-craftsmen of Cambodia whom we now call forgers and who muddle the art marketplace would be understood to be what they are: gifted copyists. And their works would be bought for what they are—copies—and valued for what they offer: powerful evocations of the artistic genius of the past. With, of course, the added advantage that they are legal, they are relatively inexpensive and thus eminently collectable, and they are in abundant supply.

For this vision, and for the gift of being provoked through art in the best possible way, thank you, Jim Sanborn!

Gary Vikan, PhD
Former Director,
The Walters Art Museum

WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ANTIQUITY?

The design of the *Without Provenance* catalog intentionally mimics Southeast Asian pre-auction folios currently produced by large auction houses. The design of the *Without Provenance* installation is inspired by the objects, presentation, and lighting of the Khmer antiquities galleries of the Guimet Museum in Paris and the preview galleries at large auction houses. These parallel inspirations highlight, in a contemporary museum context, the relatively new problem posed by the introduction of forged and looted antiquities into the global antiquities market. The ambiguity of its presentation is a metaphor for the ambiguity of authenticity present today in many auction houses and collections.

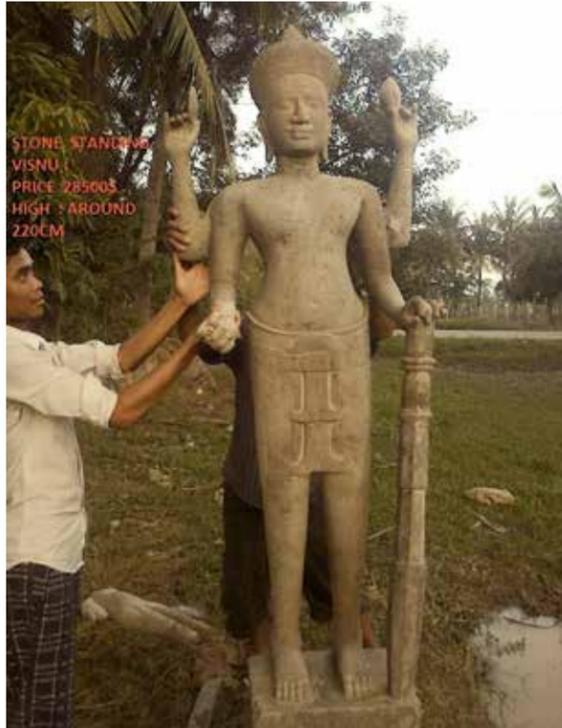
Khmer artworks and large architectural pieces have been in high demand since the opening of Cambodia in the 1980s after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge. This demand has far outstripped the supply of stolen objects, resulting in a thriving, high-end forgery market operating at the same time as—and competing with—the looting of ancient sites.

It is estimated that 70 percent of Khmer antiquities in major private and public collections are either fakes or have been recently stolen from ancient sites. Determining the authenticity of stone antiquities in particular is extremely difficult. This fact enables a robust market for both stolen and forged objects to thrive. In particular, the forgery of Khmer stone sculpture has become a flourishing industry, hidden for decades by artists controlled by unscrupulous antiquities dealers located primarily in Thailand.

I had long wanted to explore the concepts of authenticity, forgery, and reproduction as they relate to the global trade in ancient artifacts. In 2011 I began an almost eight-year quest to realize this project—a quest that took me to Cambodia, where, thanks



to recommendations from the stone conservation laboratories at the Freer-Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I was able to identify and commission several Cambodian sculptors to produce perfect sandstone replicas of 8th- through 13th-century Khmer sculpture. At the same time, and at first quite unintentionally, my search for sculptors led me into the subterranean world of Cambodia’s master



forgers. Over the years, I was able to earn their trust; they allowed me to study the processes by which new pieces were transformed into “antiquities.”

Once the commissioned carvings had completed their journey from Cambodia to my studio, accompanied by video documentation to assure Customs and the FBI that these really were contemporary pieces, not ancient, possibly looted art, the next phase was to physically and chemically distress the new works. Using techniques learned from the forgers and my own experiments, I painstakingly worked the sculptures’ surfaces to make them virtually indistinguishable from genuine Khmer antiquities, sending them visually back to the past.

The resulting works in *Without Provenance* are not museum shop “replicas” since they are not cheaply

mass produced. They are not criminal “forgeries” either, because this implies that the pieces are offered for sale as genuine antiquities, which they are not. Instead, they are what I refer to as “high-end reproductions” or, alternatively, “contemporary antiquities.”

The individual auction catalog pages included with each work in this installation and grouped as an accompanying presale folio serve two purposes: they accurately describe the physical characteristics of each piece (style, period, date, and size) but the text/provenance paragraph of each work is historically based fiction that offers insight into the myriad ways looted artworks are discovered and then find their way into the auction market.

While fakes have indeed become a big problem for some individuals and institutions, ironically they also offer a potential salvation for antiquities left in situ. The concept is simple: encourage the production and sale of high-end reproductions that will add additional risk to buying a genuine antiquity; sales of the latter will fall, demand will drop, and in situ objects will be a little safer.

This reversal is already happening. Most top-tier international museums have stopped buying Cambodian antiquities, and French antiquities conservation groups have begun the process by bringing out many of these “contemporary antiquities” from Cambodia. I hope *Without Provenance* will further encourage dealers and collectors, as well as the public, to reassess the dynamic behind antiquities trade and offer their support to this counter-trend.

Jim Sanborn
Artist

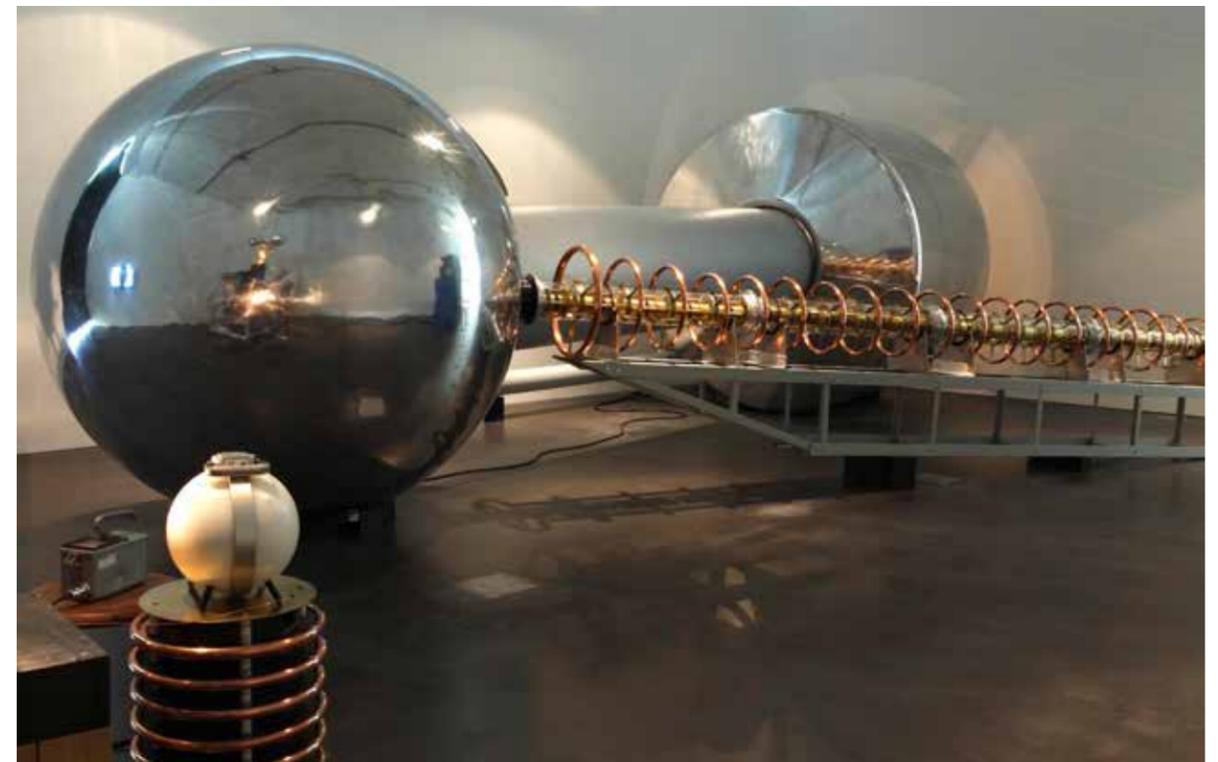
INTERVENING IN HISTORY

Jim Sanborn is an artist like no other artist I have ever encountered. And it’s not easy to be such an outlier. For at least the last 50 years people have been repeatedly breaking the mold for what counts as an artist. And yet, Sanborn seems to be exploding the model in an entirely unique way.

A crucial element of Sanborn’s uniqueness is the fact that he becomes an expert in the different fields that he takes on in his work. He taught himself paleontology as a young man and excavated several dinosaur skeletons, which he donated to the Smithsonian. He learned cryptography before making an artwork that contains one of the most famous undecipherable codes in the world. He learned particle physics to build a particle accelerator to fission uranium. In his most recent body of work, *Without Provenance*, he mastered the techniques of ancient art forgery to

create stone sculptures scientifically and aesthetically indistinguishable from genuine artifacts. Like all of his endeavors, he executes his adopted craft with the same skill as the field’s leading experts. In some cases, he’s better.

Sanborn’s ability to become, with such ease, a leading expert in very disparate fields suggests that he operates on a plane above expertise. It’s as if he surveys the different kinds of mastery involved in making a civilization, then drops into whichever one advances his art. Most of us, including most artists, are working below, on the level of expertise. We strive to distinguish ourselves by becoming masters in a field. Since Sanborn arrives at expertise easily, he can decide which field of expertise to pursue to say something about how that field is building or destroying civilization. His work doesn’t look like art because



his scope is larger than art. His lifelong interest in archaeology is telling because that is an arena whose scope is the entirety of a civilization.

His current work related to monuments of Cambodian civilization brings greater insight into what his work has always been about. He has always been interested in making art at the scale of civilization itself and the temporality of epic history. Even his 1990s series of largescale light projections on mountains suggests his ambition to create art on a heroic scale, commensurate with the ancient pyramids. In recreating the Los Alamos lab where the first atomic bomb was assembled, he shed light on the scene that initiated the possibility of humans ending human history. His work is less interested in art history than human history.

Sanborn is highlighting the way that forgers and the thieves of Cambodian antiquities are intervening in

history, working within an international marketplace to disturb the authentic records of a culture. His MO is to jump into precisely those environments and learn the systems that support them, working at the same scale as the world-destroyers. Creating contemporary antiquities, he is making monuments as a form of art. He is shedding light on how monuments dissipate like the melting of polar icecaps through the accumulation of so many nearly invisible destructive acts motivated by self-interest.

Sanborn recreates the forgeries and the marketplace in which those forgeries operate. He recreates the entire world-destroying scene. It's his ambition that ultimately makes Sanborn stand out from other artists. He is a world builder.

Adam Lerner
Director,
Museum of Contemporary Art Denver

ANGKOR REPLICATED: HOW CAMBODIAN WORKSHOPS PRODUCE FAKE MASTERPIECES, AND GET AWAY WITH IT

As part of my work as an archaeologist, my team and I recently discovered an ancient artists' studio in UNESCO-listed Angkor, an area in Cambodia that was home to numerous capitals of the Khmer Empire and is now one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia.

The finest examples of Cambodian art produced at these sites during the Angkorian period (circa 800–1400 CE) are recognized as among the greatest artistic masterpieces of the premodern world.

Sadly, the looting of such material has caused considerable problems in a world that is progressively becoming concerned about the integrity of both public and private collections.

Since 2014, art institutions and private collectors have returned 11 sculptures to Cambodia. All were looted, or illegally obtained or exported.

This represents a significant postcolonial correction in the ownership of cultural property. But for about the same amount of time that looted art has been traded between buyers and sellers, another issue has remained hidden.

Fakes have overrun the Cambodian antiquity market, their authenticity obscured by the skill of the artists who make them. Indeed, a significant proportion of the artists are so accomplished that the modern origins of their work will probably never be recognized.

The art of Angkor and mainland Southeast Asia is particularly vulnerable. In correspondence with

me, Helen Jessup, an eminent art historian and the author of six books on Cambodian art, made the connection between war, looting, and fakes:

“Civil disturbances roiling Cambodia for 30 years made access difficult and led to a thinning of the ranks of experts in the field, including within Cambodia itself. Political uncertainty enabled illicit access to ancient sites and looting was rampant. Thailand was the usual destination for the stolen objects, handled by networks of middlemen and dealers and serving as models for skilled craftsmen to replicate. Provenance issues in strife-torn regions were fudged and acquisitions increased with few questions asked.”

While peace has thankfully returned to Cambodia, the lucrative production of fakes continues.

Few know more about the production of replicas than contemporary artist Jim Sanborn, who witnessed the skill of Cambodian fakers first-hand while researching a project of his own.

Jim told me:

“Over a six-year period I travelled back and forth to infiltrate the forgery trade in order to gain the knowledge that generations of forgers had used to age their pieces.”

The result is Sanborn's path-breaking work *Without Provenance: The Making of Contemporary Antiquity*.

Martin Polkinghorne
Scholar and research fellow in
archaeology at Flinders University



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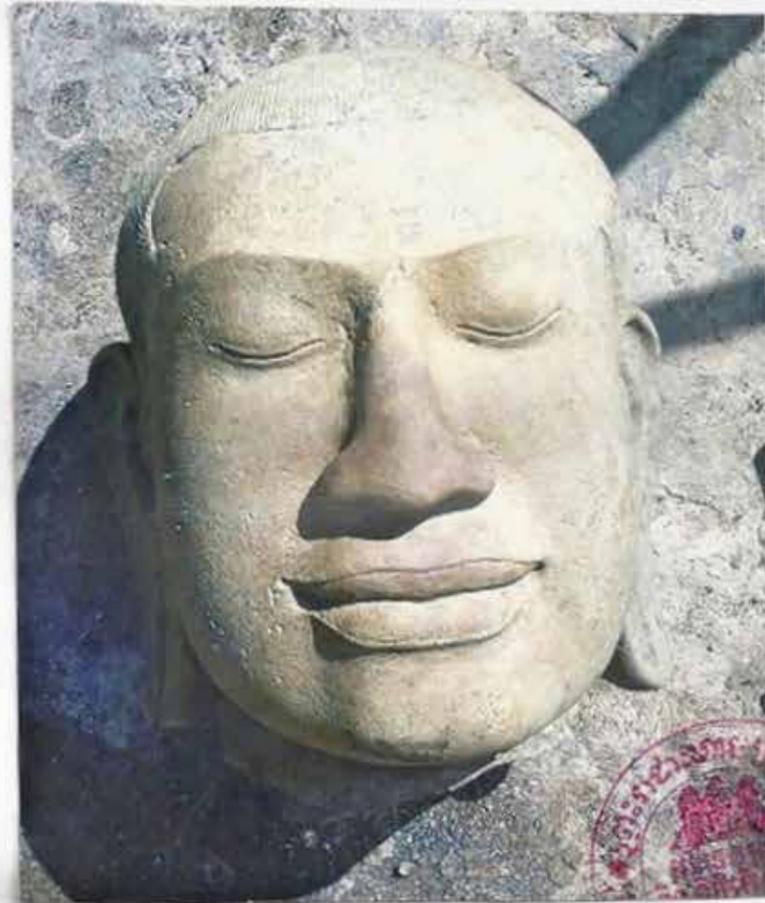
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JIM SANBORN AND THE REALITY EFFECT

"The 'reality effect' is not secondary but constitutive... art is given a new message as a rite of initiation through which to re-experience life."

Jim Sanborn is an artist whose work is intellectually charged and politically subversive—all of his projects tend to be aesthetically exquisite as well as conceptually complex.

His affinity, on one hand, is with the artists of Arte Provera such as Gilberto Zorio, Giovanni Anselmo, Luciano Fabro, and Jannis Kounellis, as their interests took them to fields outside of the arts arena and into environmental and societal issues in general. As a young artist, Sanborn felt that their openness and capability of breaking down hierarchies between art and commonplace things empowered him to make work that was immensely personal. Sanborn's early fascination with archeology and paleontology led to his intense respect not only for geology and for the forces of nature, but also for the inheritance that the earth carries and culture creates.

On the other hand, Sanborn's work with the environment, which preoccupied him for a number of years, has not kept him away from political awareness. Sanborn is a politically savvy and morally aware artist. I see his intellectual vigor and process of thinking and making as being comparable with other profoundly important and widely recognized 20th-century artists, such as Joseph Beuys, Hanne Darboven, Leon Golub, Hans Haacke, On Kawara, Nancy Spero, and Gerhard Richter. What Sanborn and these artists have in common is that behind their varied visual language they layer political and philosophical implications that make a pointed contribution to the concerns of our time. All of these artists challenge us to a new recognition of a higher perspective,

enabling us to expand on our awareness of art that strives to bring a deeper emotional experience.

In this context, let me mention two more recent projects by Sanborn. They seem apart at first, dealing with different subjects, and are executed in strikingly different ways. While they are highly diverse, they address a key question—the problem of the world we live in and how it is affected by decisions we, as a “human community,” make. Sanborn's concepts concentrate on the topic of survival and touch on the important value of responsibility. His two recent labor-intensive installations, *Critical Assembly* (2003) and *Without Provenance* (2018), have strong visual presence and a passionate scope; they speak to a guilt linked to destruction—that of humanity and culture.

Critical Assembly is an artistic reconstruction of the laboratory environment where the infamous Trinity device, an early version of the atomic bomb, was assembled. The beauty of individual pieces in this exquisite installation does not mask the fact that Sanborn put enormous effort into research, resulting in one of the most devastating critiques of the use of nuclear physics to produce weapons of mass destruction in the visual arts.

The complexity of *Critical Assembly*, both on the material and intellectual level, is remarkable. The timeliness of this work is tightly linked with the moral dilemma of practitioners of nuclear physics and those like them, who are faced with the applied use of their extraordinary and potentially devastating findings.

It is precisely this double-edged sword—a contrast between beauty and destruction—that a contemporary artist must reconnoiter if the work is to



be relevant. Dave Hickey, art critic and writer, underlines this in his essays published under the collective title *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*. He points out that “as long as nothing but the ‘beautiful’ is rendered ‘beautifully,’ there is no friction and things do not change.”²² I would argue that all of the aforementioned artists are aware and work consciously with this double-edged sword, neither indulging in empty gestures nor pushing dogmatically, without mastery of a particular message. Their works are perfect cases in point of the tension Hickey discusses, between ethics and aesthetics. Sanborn cannot be anything other than involved with issues that matter. While the above project deals with humanistic aspects, the following project looks at cultural heritage.

Without Provenance is a conceptually ambitious installation of exquisitely made art objects that are contemporary copies of original Cambodian Khmer sculptures. They are extremely well replicated and carved in Cambodia. Ancient Khmer sculptures are treasured by famous public and private collections and frequently appear in prestigious international art auctions. Sanborn’s inspiration for this complex piece is based on his visit to the renowned Guimet Museum (*La Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet*, or National Museum of Asian Arts) in Paris, which holds one of the largest and most gorgeous collections of Asian art works outside of Asia.

The installation aims to replicate the feeling of the antiquities galleries of the Guimet. The entire

installation is accompanied by an “auction” catalog conceived by the artist to replicate those published by auction houses, with each piece receiving its own page and provenance report, accompanied by a photograph.

What precisely is Sanborn’s intention in creating *Without Provenance*? He brings to our attention the devastation of looting—extraordinary artworks are damaged so that only the most attractive and transportable parts are saved for effective sale to a collector. Sanborn further highlights the forgery practice and the physical risks to its practitioners, because of their use of dangerous chemicals applied as aging treatments to the sandstone they work with.

On my part, I can no longer be ignorant about damage done to the original, exquisite art pieces and to the ancient sites from which they have been removed. The installation speaks to this on several levels, and simultaneously highlights the nature of making art. Particular questions connected with looting and the production of new, forged artifacts have given rise to the *Without Provenance* installation. The loss of culturally meaningful objects for an individual’s personal gain and the difficult conditions of artisans who labor on these forgeries in Cambodia are the true subjects of the piece. Like other politically motivated artists, Sanborn’s work is about the fragility of the human condition.

Perhaps it makes sense to bring in examples of work by other artists of Sanborn’s generation with similar convictions, and striking attitudes and methods. Chris Burden, one of the most provocative artists of his generation, believed that art should address political, social, environmental, and technological changes—that new art should aim to be outside the conventional monetary-driven mainstream. Burden’s

Tower of Power was built with 100-kilogram bricks of pure gold surrounded by several paper matchstick men positioned around the tower on a marble base. This piece provides a superb link with Sanborn’s work in that it addresses the transiency of human life and the power of money.

Lothar Baumgarten explored in the installation *Question of “The Other”* the relationship between “primitive” and “civilized,” focusing on the Yanomami Indians living in danger of extinction in the Amazon rainforest. In this instance, the artist made a statement about European imperialism and the destruction it brings to other societies. Baumgarten, like Sanborn, works with politically charged topics and subsequently complex visual articulations. These artists’ language is free of conventions, their expressive means adjusts to their ambition to make experiential work that would allow us to “re-experience life.”

In Sanborn’s artwork physical beauty can be seductive and thus engaging, but more importantly it lures viewers to grapple with conceptually challenging and troubling topics. His projects have a huge human dimension and reflect on problematic moments in modern history. His way of responding to the complexity of ethical dilemmas is to make work that is both seductive and alarming in its appearance and implications. He is one of the few uncompromising artists who demands our involvement with the context of his work as it relates to politics, history, science, and humanity.

Milena Kalinovska
Director of the Modern and
Contemporary Art Collection,
National Gallery in Prague

¹ Lumley, Robert (2004). *Movements in Modern Art*, Povera Arte. London: Tate.

² Ibid p. 93



THE PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN

123

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF A DVARAPALA
(TEMPLE GUARDIAN)

KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, BANTEAY SREI STYLE
10TH CENTURY

The guardians have accoutrements that suggest nobility and were probably minor divine figures, inhabitants of Kailasa, the abode of Siva. The power expressed by this figure is heightened by the tense back muscles that inform the viewer that this was more than simply a temple guardian standing to one side of a sanctuary door. Sadly this figure would have been located at a cardinal point relative to the temple it guarded had it not been removed to its present location.

54" (137 cm) high (with tenon)

\$80,000–110,000

PROVENANCE

Private collection, acquired in
Siem Reap, 2011



THE PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN

320

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF BRAHMĀ

KHMER, PRE RUP—KLEANG STYLE
10TH–11TH CENTURY

This looted and badly damaged work was recently removed from the back of an antiques shop in Siem Reap Cambodia. The deity is clothed in a traditional Khmer *Sampot Can Kpin* with a fishtail fold in the rear. The bare torso is elegantly contoured and the surface is smoothly polished. There is significant surface separation (blistering) on one of the four faces.

67" (170 cm) high

\$40,000–60,000 (in its current state)

PROVENANCE

M.R. Mun Collection, acquired in
Siem Reap, 2012



THE PROPERTY OF A SIGNIFICANT
EUROPEAN COLLECTION

23

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF
AVALOKITESVARA
KHMER, PRE-ANGKOR PERIOD,
PHNOM DA STYLE, 7TH-8TH CENTURY

Discovered in 2009 by the Cambodian military during the construction of an airfield near the village of Tan Long north of the early Oc Eco site, the statue was buried two meters deep. This piece unlike its avatar at the Guimet Museum is broken into three sections and is missing its right arm with its attributes. It is said that this Bodhisattva of compassion was created by "a ray from Amitabha's right eye during a state of ecstatic contemplation".

67" (170 cm) high

\$120,000–140,000 (as is)

PROVENANCE

42 None



THE PROPERTY OF TWO GENTLEMEN

104

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF UMA
KHMER, ANGKOR PERIOD, BAPHUON STYLE,
11TH CENTURY

Recently dug up by two brothers in far-western Cambodia this sensitively modeled figure is wearing an ankle length *sampot* with finely incised pleats. Her bare torso is modeled with delicate contours and her face carries a serene expression, her hair is finely braided and is tied back in a domed *chignon* (obscured by the hand) and secured with by a circular incised band, the body smoothly polished.

41½" (105 cm) high

\$40,000–60,000

PROVENANCE

Chhatna and Son, Ltd. London
acquired quietly, Siem Reap, 2012

43



THE PROPERTY OF THAI GENTLEMEN

16

A SANDSTONE FIGURE OF VISNU
KHMER, BAKONG-ANGKOR VAT STYLE
11TH-12TH CENTURY

Wearing a finely pleated *sampot* tucked under an incised belt with an unadorned scabbard, this large museum quality piece was removed to its present location from a looted archeological excavation at Banteay Chhmar in 1996. The torso of this stylistically transitional piece is bare and finely polished, with the facial features finely modeled and the hair plaited and drawn in to a cylindrical *chignon*, centered by a seated Amitabha and secured by a foliate crown. Surviving its looting Visnu's two remaining attributes the *Sankha* (conch) and the *Cakra* (disk) are still in the deities upraised hands.

56½" (144 cm) high

\$130,000–150,000

PROVENANCE

Please call for clarification

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