

THE QUIET IN THE LAND LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

NEWSLETTER 4 2007-2008

The Quiet in the Land is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit art and education organization based in the United States. Under the High Patronage of the Department of Information and Culture, Luang Prabang.

2004-2008 Artists: MARINA ABRAMOVIC, JANINE ANTONI, HANS GEORG BERGER, CAI GUO-QIANG, ANN HAMILTON, MANIVONG KHATTIYARAT, DINH Q. LÊ, SHIRIN NESHAT, JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA, VONG PHAOPHANIT, ALLAN SEKULA, SHAZIA SIKANDER, NITHAKHONG SOMSANITH, RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

IN COLLABORATION WITH UTHIT ATIMANA, DR. CAROL BECKER, CAROL CASSIDY, DR. CATHERINE CHORON-BAIX, DR. VISHAKHAN. DESAI, DR. GRANT EVANS, BOUNKHONG KHUTTHAO, DR. BORETH LY, SOMSANOUK MIXAY, RASSANIKONE NANONG, SISAVATH NHILATCHAY, DR. VITHI PHANICHPHANT, DR. HEATHER PETERS, DAVID ROSENBERG, ACHARN LUK SINGKHAMTANH, OUANE SIRISACK, PHRA ACHARN ONE KEO SITTHIVONG

THE QUIET IN THE LAND IS CONCEIVED AND ORGANIZED BY FRANCE MORIN



On August 17, 2007, The Quiet in the Land organized an event at the Luang Prabang National Museum in honor of Manivong Khattiyarat, one of the most revered artists in Laos. The event also celebrated the closing of the series of exhibitions organized by The Quiet in the Land at the museum, including one of Khattiyarat. It also celebrated the donation to the museum of twenty of his drawings, which were restored and framed by The Quiet in the Land. The event was attended by members of the community, as well as local and foreign dignitaries.

Dear Friends,

As our project in Laos draws to a close, we would like to update you on our activities since our last Newsletter.

This issue features articles on the projects of Manivong Khattiyarat, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Ann Hamilton, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, and Marina Abramovic, which have been completed or are nearing completion. It also includes an update on Shirin Neshat's project, as well as an update on the educational programs we have supported.

In addition, we would like to let you know that we will close our Project House in March 2008, after nearly four years of occupancy. Shahzia Sikander, who is returning to Luang Prabang later this month to continue her series of graphite drawings of the novices and monks of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xieng Thong, will be the last resident. For the next several months, we will focus on producing the publication documenting the project. The Henry Luce Foundation has generously given us a grant to help support the publication, which we will launch in New York and Luang Prabang in 2009.

As always, we would like to thank our wonderful staff and collaborators in Luang Prabang: Bounkhong Khutthao, Deputy Director, Department of Information and Culture; Francis Engelmann, Consultant; Outh Litthavong, Project Coordinator; and Sathou Onekeo Sitthivong, Abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xieng Thong and Director of the Buddhist Schools of Luang Prabang. We would also like to thank our funders and the individuals who have purchased limited editions. And finally, we would like to thank the artists and communities with whom we have been working.

If you wish to have more information on the Limited Edition, please consult our website at <http://www.thequietintheland.org/funding.php>.

France Morin, Project Director and President, The Quiet in the Land

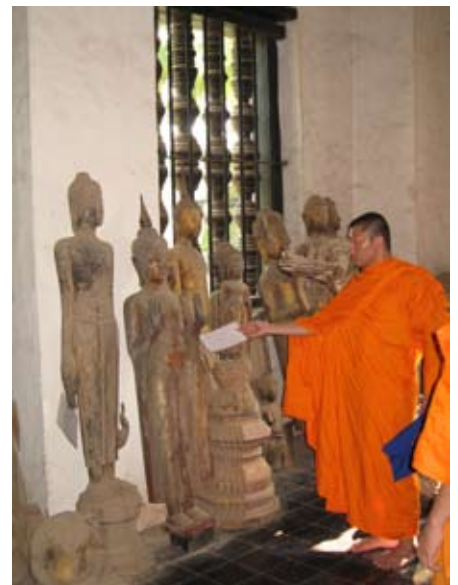
ARTISTS RESIDENCIES

Rirkrit Tiravanija

Rirkrit Tiravanija is an artist known for producing works that invite the participation of the public. For *The Quiet in the Land: Art, Spirituality, and Everyday Life*, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR (2004–2008), Tiravanija developed the project *untitled 2006* (one thousand Buddhas).

In recent years, the integration of Luang Prabang into the global economy through increased tourism and other factors has had both positive and negative consequences. One of the negative consequences has been the disappearance of images of the Buddha from temples and sacred places in and around the city. Many of these images are stolen and then sold on the international art market, while others are simply destroyed—a problem that, sadly, has become prevalent in other countries, too, as the looting of museums and cultural sites in Iraq attests. In response to this reality, Tiravanija developed a project that has encouraged the public to contemplate the meaning of the loss of cultural heritage by engaging them as agents for the replenishment of the temples and sacred places from which images of the Buddha have been stolen.

Following a visit to Luang Prabang for *The Quiet in the Land*, Tiravanija returned to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he found in a local antique shop a small wooden Buddha carved in the Isan style of Laos and Northern Thailand. He asked a master carver and a craft workshop in Chiang Mai to carve one thousand replicas of this Buddha in various sizes. In October 2006, he had these Buddhas transported to the Project House. He



asked that the Buddhas be given to visitors, who in turn are asked to offer them to local temples and sacred places, rather than to keep them for themselves. He thus offers the public the opportunity to perform acts of generosity in the Buddhist spirit, acts that poetically acknowledge and respond to the problem of the looting of temples and other sacred places in Luang Prabang and the potential erosion of its cultural heritage.

Tiravanija amplified this gesture with a series of educational programs designed for the Sangha. In October 2007, the artist and his friend Uthit Atimana, a professor at Chiang Mai University, traveled to Luang Prabang. They lectured and led workshops for local monks and novices on the sculpting of images of the Buddha. They conducted the workshops in collaboration with local masters associated with Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha, a UNESCO project launched to help revitalize traditional artisanal skills among the Sangha, and in collaboration with Professor Bounnalitsavong from the Luang Prabang School of Fine Arts. During the workshops, Atimana, Tiravanija and their colleagues demonstrated various sculpting tools, discussed the history of sculpting of images of the Buddha, and shared their knowledge of contemporary techniques. Their goal was to help sustain the long tradition in Luang Prabang of sculpting images of the Buddha, by passing their knowledge down to the next generation.

Tiravanija's project recalls the ritual of sand, which is performed in Luang Prabang. As Hans Georg Berger has related, during this ritual, the lay people make an offering of sand to their temple, scattering it on the temple grounds in compensation for the sand they have carried away with them during the previous year. This offering exemplifies the spirit of exchange, replenishment, and generosity that animates Tiravanija's untitled 2006 (one thousand Buddhas).

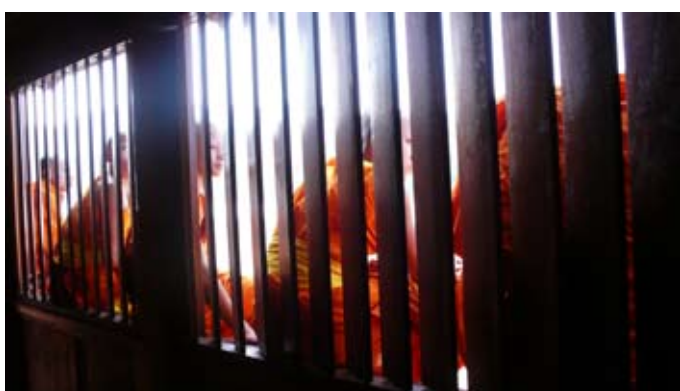
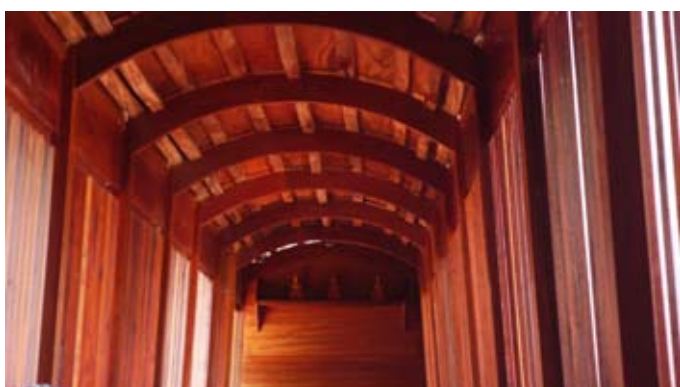


Ann Hamilton

On October 28, 2007, the second blessing (Sout Hua) of the Meditation Boat, conceived by Ann Hamilton, took place on the stairs of Vat Xieng Thong, which lead to the Mekong River. Built in collaboration with the boat builder Sichan Phongsavath and the architects Laurent Rampon, Yushi Kawaguchi, and Jean-Pierre Cuomo, the 26-meter-long boat is constructed of wood and metal. Its design is inspired by the unique monastic structures for walking meditation at Vat Hatseo, Vat Kok Pap, and the renovated Vat Loun Khoun on the west bank of the Mekong River. Our hope is that it will serve as an oasis of serenity to all the members of the Sangha for meditation practice.

Sathou Onekeo Sitthivong, the Abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xieng Thong, organized the blessing, which was attended by about seventy members of the community, including nine monks and nine novices from local monasteries. The boat will be presented to the people of Luang Prabang on February 28 and 29. On both days, it will travel along the Mekong River from the community of Ban Done to the community of Ban Chan, as the monks and novices on board chant and meditate.

The Quiet in the Land has bequeathed the Meditation Boat to the Sangha and has fully funded its operation for the next five years. Hamilton will return to Luang Prabang in September 2008 to speak with the Sangha about their experiences in using the boat.





Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba

In October 2007, The Quiet in the Land premiered Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's film *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree* at the Project House to members of the community. The film has also been screened at Lehmann Maupin Gallery in New York, Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo, and Manchester Art Gallery in Manchester.



Shot in Luang Prabang, with the participation of more than fifty students from the Luang Prabang School of Fine Arts, the film examines how Southeast Asian youths strive to achieve contemporary definitions of success without losing the essential roots of their heritage. The first part, The Ground, focuses on a group of determined joggers running around a circular track in an open-air stadium. The second part, The Root, portrays illusory images of traditional lanterns. And the third part, The Air, features a group of students floating down the Mekong River in small boats, trying to capture the rapidly passing landscape in paint. When the Bodhi Tree, a symbol of Buddhism, comes into view, some of the students abandon their boats and swim toward it, while others move on. The film was made in collaboration with Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York and Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo.



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Production still from the film “The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree” 2004-2007

Courtesy: The Quiet in the Land/ Laos, Mizuma Art Gallery/Tokyo, Lehmann Maupin Gallery/New York
 Photo: Yukari Imai

Marina Abramovic

In January 2008, Marina Abramovic came to Luang Prabang with a film crew to shoot her project, *The Quiet in the Land*. During her first visit to Luang Prabang, in the summer of 2006, Abramovic was moved by the spiritual atmosphere of the city, which is inextricably connected to the city's locale, a peninsula surrounded by lushly forested mountains at the junction of the Mekong River and its tributary, the Khan River. But she was also struck by the number of children she saw playing in the streets with toy weapons, a common occurrence during certain festivals; the violent programming beaming from the television screens in the homes of so many families; and the growing evidence of environmental degradation in the face of rapid development. She decided to develop a project that examined these contradictions.

Before she began the shoot, Abramovic participated in two ceremonies with a shaman she had met on her first visit. During the shoot, which took place over the course of several weeks, she filmed the mountains that surround the city; a sacred tree located on the island of Done Khoun, which is believed to be inhabited by spirits; and other scenes that reveal the connections between the natural environment and the spiritual culture of Luang Prabang. But the most ambitious scene was shot in a full-scale house filled with oversized furniture. With the invaluable assistance of Jean-Pierre Cuomo of Naturaliamoulage, *The Quiet in the Land* built both the house and the furniture to the artist's specifications. In this dream-like set, twenty-seven children from the Children's Cultural Center, aged seven to ten, dressed in military uniforms and armed with toy weapons and remote-controlled helicopters, engaged in an imaginary confrontation. At the end of the shoot, the house was dismantled, the materials were donated to a local village, and all of the toy weapons were burned in a special ceremony. By juxtaposing images of the natural environment with images of chaos as enacted by the children, Abramovic hopes to deepen viewers' understanding of the interrelationship between how we treat the environment and how we treat one another, and to underscore the importance of exercising compassion toward both.





Shirin Neshat

Shirin Neshat will travel to Luang Prabang in October 2008 for her project. After an inspiring trip to Luang Prabang in 2005, and after reflecting on her perceptions of Lao culture, she has been contemplating a film-based project that would explore the persistence of the traditional performing arts in contemporary Lao culture—specifically, dance and music. Laos is a country that has endured a series of upheavals in recent years, from the Vietnam War, to the establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, to the growing impact of globalization and modernization. As a result of these factors, traditional cultural practices, including the performing arts, have been threatened. In many ways, Neshat sees parallels between her home country of Iran and Laos. As in Laos, in recent years Iran has experienced radical cultural transformations that have threatened traditional cultural practices—so much so that many members of the generation born after the 1979 Iran revolution have little knowledge of traditional Persian history and culture. Neshat is interested in developing a narrative that follows the lives and art of a few performers from Laos to convey the complexities of the tension between the past and the present, the traditional and the contemporary.

EDUCATION

Boun Ok Pansa and Meditation Retreat for the Sangha

In October 2007, as we have done since 2004, The Quiet in the Land supported the twenty-four monasteries of UNESCO’s World Heritage Site Protected Area, as well as the Children’s Cultural Center, to encourage the creativity around the Festival of Light (Boun Ok Pansa, End of Buddhist Lent). During the rainy season, which lasts about three months, the monks of Luang Prabang traditionally remain in their monasteries. At the end of this period of retreat, the city celebrates Boun Ok Pansa, a festival in which the city’s monasteries and houses are illuminated throughout one night with lanterns made of bamboo and paper. In preparation for the festival, monks and novices, families, and other groups of lay people make decorations, bamboo boats, and rafts of different sizes. After a ceremony of blessings at Vat Xieng Thong, the “fireboats” are floated downstream. The Quiet in the Land will help establish a committee to help ensure continued support of the monasteries’ and the Children’s Cultural Center’s contributions to Boun Ok Pansa in the future.

In December 2007, as we have also done since 2004, The Quiet in the Land supported what has become an annual meditation teaching retreat for the Sangha in a forest on the outskirts of Luang Prabang. The retreats are attended by hundreds of monks and novices. Their purpose is to strengthen the Sangha—which has been challenged by the growing intrusion of the Internet, the English language, tourism, and other changes wrought by globalization on traditional spiritual practice and discipline—by reintroducing Vipassana. Vipassana is a Lao meditation practice that had been in partial abeyance since 1975. At the retreats, the elder monks instruct the younger ones in the fundamental concepts and practices of Vipassana, thus helping to ensure the survival both of this tradition and of the Sangha itself.



ABOUT THE QUIET IN THE LAND



The Quiet in the Land is inviting from 2004 to 2008 more than 35 artists and educators from Laos, the Mekong Region, and elsewhere to visit Luang Prabang to collaborate with a wide range of local community members. The collaborative projects open up for questioning broad social and cultural categories such as art, craft, heritage, tradition, and religion to envision how the creative process can be used to address poverty, displacement, the loss of tradition, and the other effects of globalization and to reveal how the preservation and development of local cultural traditions can be a source not only of such intangibles as pride in local identities, but of sustainable development that could enrich the livelihoods of excluded persons..

The project is guided by the conviction that the practice of art, broadly defined, offers both individuals and communities—including the poor, the disenfranchised, and others who have been adversely affected by globalization—the potential to acknowledge for themselves the dignity of the activities of everyday life; to understand more deeply the relevance of preserving and adapting their cultural heritage to the challenges they face in the 21st century; and to build the capacity for transforming their lives for the better by harnessing the under tapped power of the creative spirit.

The Quiet in the Land presents a wide range of programs, including exhibitions, publications, and other initiatives, to help foster diverse artistic traditions, cultural vitality, understanding and communication, and the potential of contemporary artists as catalysts of positive change.

The following foundations and individuals have contributed to our third project in Laos.

For the project in Luang Prabang, it has received the support of the American Center Foundation; the Asian Cultural Council; Lorenz Bäumer; the Culture Envoys Program of the U.S. Department of State and the American Embassy in Vientiane; John Alan Farmer; the Federal Foreign Office, Federal Republic of Germany and the German Embassy in Vientiane; Ken Freed; the Henry Luce Foundation; the Jim Thompson Foundation; Sean Kelly; the Open Society Institute; Cecile Panzieri, Keith Recker; Ruby Shang, Brent Sikkema; the Thin Man Fund, and Gerard C. Wertkin.

The Quiet in the Land in Luang Prabang is funded in part through the sale of the limited edition portfolio. The portfolio has been published in October 2006 as an edition of fifty, numbered I to 50, plus sixteen hors commerce (HC), numbered I to XVI, for the artists and the author, and two Printer's proofs. Each portfolio includes twelve photographic diptychs (twenty-four 11 x 14 in. [28 x 35.5 cm] produced specifically for the project by twelve of the participating artists). Each diptych signed by the artist. The photographs are presented in a case in silk designed by Carol Cassidy. The case's clasp is designed by Lorenz Bäumer.

For information www.thequietintheland.org

Texts by John Alan Farmer and France Morin. Special thanks to Paul Bloxham and Francis Engelmann for their collaboration in editing this newsletter.