

Cambodian photographer comes out on top at Angkor

Mon, 2 December 2013 Thik Kaliyann
Siem Reap

A young Cambodian woman from Takeo province beat international competition for the top prize at this year's Angkor Photo Festival last weekend.



Neak Sophal's collection The Hang On depicts everyday Cambodians with their faces covered. NEAK SOPHAL

Neak Sophal, a 24-year-old graduate of Phnom Penh's Royal University of Fine Arts, won the award for her collection "The Hang On".

Françoise Callier, program coordinator of the Angkor Photo Festival, said the 24-year-old photographer was chosen as the winner because she told the real story of Cambodian people through her photos.

"Her story is really the best," said Callier of Sophal's exhibition, which depicts the daily lives of Cambodian people without showing their faces.

"Some of the collections don't really tell stories, but hers is very interesting," she added.

Sophal said she was both surprised and delighted to have won the award,

adding that she attempted to portray many walks of life in Cambodia.

"My photography collection was about the Cambodian people's daily lifestyles, which are always burdened," said Sophal.

The title of the collection refers to Sophal's idea that people from all backgrounds are constantly struggling to "hang on" to life.

"Some are lucky enough to be able to do their favourite job, some would prefer a higher salary, some just find a job for a living. But they will all face difficulties in their lives," she said.

As the winner, Sophal will receive the Hope Françoise Demulder Award and a cash prize of €2,000 (\$2,720) supported by the Un Declic Contre Une Claque Association in Paris, France. She will also receive a Canon Powershot S110 camera.

Sophal said she has no plans yet as to how to spend the grant money, but added that her camera needs a new lens and that she may well buy one in the near future.

She was announced the winner on the closing night of the Angkor Photo Festival at Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor. This was her first year at the festival.

It took an independent jury composed of seven judges several hours before they chose Sophal's photography collection as the winner. At the end of the week, participants presented slide shows of their work to music.

Sophal's work has previously been exhibited around Phnom Penh. In January, her exhibition "Behind", which portrayed Cambodians showing their backs to the camera, ran at Java Cafe in Phnom Penh. Her "Sonleuk" exhibition, which

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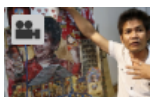
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The Angkor Photo Festival in Siem Reap, which is organised by the Angkor Photo Association, was created in 2005 and is the longest-running international photography festival in Southeast Asia.

This year, the festival welcomed internationally acclaimed photographers Shahidul Alam and Jean-François Leroy as guest curators. The top prize in 2012 went to Truth Leem of South Korea.

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