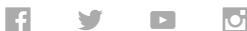


Login Register



គ្រូពេញប៉ុស្តិ៍

Subscribe

Search

The Phnom Penh Post

Tue Sep 05 2023 17:46:10 GMT+0700 (Indochina Time)

HOME NATIONAL BUSINESS LIFESTYLE SPECIAL REPORT TRAVEL SPORT OPINION INTERNATIONAL MULTIMEDIA

NOTICES



E-PAPER



PLEASE CLICK HERE

TO DOWNLOAD E-PAPER



JOIN US ON TELEGRAM CHANNEL

TO RECEIVE THE POST'S TOP NEWS OF THE DAY.



[HTTPS://T.ME/THEPHNOMPENHPOST](https://t.me/thephnompenhpost)



Changing lives and landscapes through art

Hong Raksmei | Publication date 30 August 2023 | 21:09 ICT

Share





The Happiness of the Peasants of My Village, which showcases Chhovorn's attachment to his roots.
PHOTO SUPPLIED

In a village in Battambang province, artist Van Chhovorn is turning colours and lines into a lifeline for the local youth. Teaching drawing classes to youngsters isn't just a side gig for him; it's a means to empower the community.

With every brushstroke and sketch, he's not just creating art; he's building futures.

Beyond the canvas and easel, Chhovorn has a steadfast dedication to nurturing local talent.

The proceeds from his art sales don't just bolster his personal income; they're funnelled right back into these educational initiatives, helping young artists buy the drawing boards and supplies they need.

"I sell one of my works to help our youth and young children learn artistic skills and appreciate our culture," Chhovorn shares.

Among his repertoire, a painting named *The Happiness of the Peasants of My Village* has caught significant attention.

Crafted in watercolours, the piece measures 57 cm by 78 cm and showcases Chhovorn's deep bond with his village's agrarian lifestyle.

The painting is not just an ode to the joy farmers find in their harvest but also a tribute to the country's cultural values such as respect, honesty and communal sharing, especially during festivals like Kan Ben and Pchum Ben.

"For over a year, as I couldn't sell any artworks because of the decrease in tourists, I've devoted my time to teaching the children in the village. My aim is to redirect their focus away from smart phones and to stop them from developing harmful habits like smoking. I'm committed to enriching their minds and sparking a love for art," says Chhovorn.

Born in a Thai refugee camp in 1982, Chhovorn's path to becoming an established artist was far from smooth.

The son of survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide, he himself suffered the brutality of forced labour on a fishing vessel.

But adversity only fuelled his resolve. After gaining freedom, he pursued his education at Phare Ponleu Selpak, a well-known art school in Battambang.

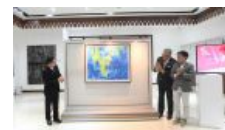
Chhovorn's talents don't just stop at painting. He's a gifted wood carver and often finds

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/lifestyle-arts-culture/changing-lives-and-landscapes-through-art>

RELATED ARTICLES



'Environmental artist' breathes life into creations with eco message



Srut Rida: Cambodian artist adds blue to the ASEAN palette



Struggling Battambang artist dreams of staging full-scale gallery exhibition



Cambodian, German artist duo collaborate on painting exhibition



Local artists set to shine at Chingay parade in Singapore

inspiration in recurring dreams, guided by what he refers to as his “Dream Teachers”.

Currently, he lives in Battambang with his family and collaborates with the arts collective Open Studio Cambodia, located in Siem Reap.

His artistic resume is studded with solo exhibitions like *Painting Hope* at Sra’Art Gallery in Phnom Penh in 2022 and *Odyssey I* at the 282 Gallery in 2021.

Chhovorn has also lent his creative brilliance to group exhibitions, such as the ASEM Cultural Festival at the National Museum of Cambodia and *Hope on the Horizon* at Factory Phnom Penh.

Chhovorn’s art has even found its way into international galleries. Notably, his works were part of an exhibition of Contemporary Cambodian Art at Galerie Lee in Paris. Adding to this, he has received accolades from the White Canvas Art Competition in 2021 and the 2020 Arn Chorn-Pond Living Arts Scholarship.

But perhaps his most fulfilling venture is the one closest to home.

Unsatisfied with only showcasing his skills, Chhovorn has undertaken the noble task of educating underprivileged children in his village.

Through his art and teaching, he’s painting not just canvases but also a brighter future for his community.

Van Chhovorn’s classroom is a symphony of youthful laughter and the swish of paintbrushes. It’s a diverse ensemble of 12 older kids, aged 13 to 16, and 15 younger ones, all eager to learn. But setting up this haven of creativity wasn’t easy.

Faced with financial constraints, Chhovorn reached out to a local organisation in Prek Ta Chreng village, part of Ek Phnom district in Battambang province.

“If I waited a few more years until I had the funds to open my own classroom, it would be a disservice to the children’s time. So, I approached the NGO school and volunteered to teach them,” Chhovorn explained.

A mere \$50 from a single painting sale arms him with essentials—pencils, paper, and paperboards. Inspired by his initiative, other local artists have contributed additional supplies.

While the classroom has come a long way, it still lacks some fundamental art supplies such as easels, brushes, and colour trays.

Never one to be discouraged, Chhovorn is planning another art sale to make sure every student has the opportunity to fully engage with their artistic pursuits.

In a quiet corner of Battambang, another of Chhovorn’s paintings basks in the sunlight.

Titled *What is Wrong with Me?* this artwork, created with acrylics on fabric and priced at \$1,900, weaves a story of struggle, resilience, and hope.

It takes viewers back to 2000, when a young Chhovorn and his stepfather took a perilous journey to Thailand, a chapter filled with deception and hardship.

Upon his return, Chhovorn faced the grim reality of his stepfather’s absence and the ensuing poverty that gripped his family.

Despite the odds, he assumed the mantle of provider and pursued higher education.

His story is a mix of triumph and hardship. While he managed to turn his life around, not all his siblings have been so lucky. One struggles with drug addiction and has faced legal troubles, highlighting the broader societal challenges many in Cambodia face.

“My painting serves as a poignant reminder that even amid poverty’s darkness, there is

a spark of hope, a flicker of resilience that can conquer the greatest odds,” Chhovorn says.

More than just a canvas, the artwork serves as a powerful narrative about parental responsibilities and their lasting impact on children’s lives.

The sale of *What is Wrong with Me?* could further enrich the lives of the local children, Chhovorn hopes.

He envisions the proceeds from this painting providing much-needed art supplies, steering these young souls away from potential pitfalls and towards a brighter, more creative future.

Chhovorn’s zeal for teaching art to children dates back to 2010, during his days as a student at Phare Ponleu Selpak.

The seed of the idea was planted back then, but it took more than a decade for the dream to fully blossom. Part of the delay was due to Chhovorn’s own life challenges, which included navigating a childhood without the presence of parents.

Now, more than ten years later, Chhovorn’s vision has unfolded.

In collaboration with a local organisation, he has finally realised his long-held dream of nurturing young talents.

Through the alchemy of colours and lines, he’s not only imparting artistic skills but is also painting a brighter future for his community.

Before his community classroom came to life, Chhovorn’s own children were his first students.

Teaching his daughter and son was more than just a paternal duty; it was a prelude to a larger dream.

Chhovorn hoped to nurture their burgeoning talents so they themselves could participate in the White Canvas Art Competition in its second year.

“Knowledge is a treasure, but practice is the key to it,” Chhovorn often says.

He firmly believes that hoarding knowledge diminishes its true value.

For him, the essence of life is enriched when individuals share what they know, spreading ripples of enlightenment through society.

This moral compass guides his approach to teaching, making him not just an instructor but also a keen advocate for the open sharing of skills and ideas.

Chhovorn’s keen eye often spots the hidden gems among his students.

He understands that every community has its prodigies, children endowed with exceptional talents that, if nurtured, can one day lead to extraordinary contributions.

By cultivating young talents, he envisions a future where art not only beautifies but also strengthens the fabric of society. In his view, every brush stroke can be a step towards a better society.

His children, his students, and their unfolding creativity stand as living testaments to this belief.

Through the simple yet profound act of teaching art, Chhovorn is painting a landscape where culture thrives, knowledge flows, and the community finds its most vibrant expression.