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S'Art festival draws record crowds, launches Cambodia's

ARTS & CULTURE

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Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) pledged that Battambang would soon become home to Cambodia's first permanent outdoor mural gallery, an initiative fuelled by the country's first-ever mural art competition for emerging artists. Supplied

What began in late October as a bold promise to transform Battambang into a vibrant, living canvas has now concluded as one of the most successful cultural events ever held in the province.

"The 4th edition of the S'Art Urban Arts Festival not only delivered on its pre-event commitments — it surpassed them, attracting more than 35,000 festivalgoers and contributing a full one-third of the 130,000 visitors recorded in the city over the Water Festival period," according to organisers.

The biennial festival, held from November 3 to 8 and powered by the TUI Care Foundation, was promoted weeks earlier as a celebration of "Colorful Cultures".

Organisers at Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) pledged that Battambang would soon become home to Cambodia's first permanent outdoor mural gallery, an initiative fuelled by the country's first-ever mural art competition for emerging artists.

They also previewed a packed lineup of street art, workshops, exhibitions, block parties and the return of large-scale puppetry and floats.

By the festival's end, Battambang had become exactly what the pre-event announcements envisioned — and more.





An estimated 9,000 spectators attended the finale, which featured hip-hop finalists, circus performers, international musicians and a highly anticipated EDM set headlined by Vanthan. Supplied

A landmark achievement: Cambodia's first permanent outdoor mural gallery

One of the festival's most significant outcomes was the successful launch of Cambodia's first permanent outdoor mural gallery.

The project, announced ahead of the event, culminated in dozens of newly completed murals created through an international mural competition.

These works are now permanently mapped on Google and digital mural platforms, offering visitors new reasons to explore Battambang's heritage streets.

The festival originally confirmed the participation of 12 international muralists. They were from the US, Spain, Switzerland, Singapore, Timor Leste, France and Germany, as well as Colombia, Canada, Japan, Vietnam, Italy, Australia and the UAE.

"In the end, 24 artists from 18 countries joined the celebration — double the initial forecast — reflecting the event's growing global appeal," said the organisers.

"Their large-scale works, spanning themes of regional solidarity and shared cultural heritage, now anchor the city's expanding reputation as an art destination," they added.





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A festival that exceeded every forecast

The pre-event press release promised six days of immersive creativity — but festivalgoers were greeted with an even richer experience.

“Sixteen pop-up exhibitions across cafes and creative spaces introduced visitors to Battambang’s artistic ecosystem,” said the organisers.

Nightly Art After Dark Street block parties on Street 2 transformed Psar Nat’s neighbourhood into a pulsating hub of music, dance, circus acts, boutique stalls and food vendors.

Star performers such as Kesorr, Sin Setsochhata, Keo Chandalin and Sam Rocker brought thousands of locals and tourists back to the streets each night, reenergising Battambang’s nightlife.

One of the festival’s most anticipated components — the hip-hop Breaking Battle announced in October — came to life with electrifying regional participation.

Judges from Japan, Vietnam and Cambodia presided over a showdown that drew huge crowds and cemented the city’s growing relevance in Southeast Asia’s street dance scene.





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Youth at the heart of the festival

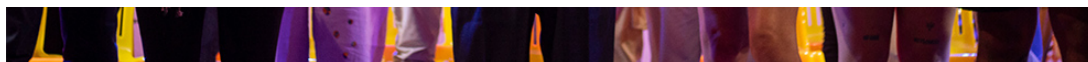
In its pre-event messaging, Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS) highlighted that children and youth would play a central role in shaping the festival's artistic identity.

The festival delivered: more than 1,000 children took part in free workshops in graffiti, painting, crafts, breakdancing, digital arts and giant puppet-making — many of them from schools and communities with limited access to arts education.

Their work culminated in illuminated floats and giant puppets for the final Art Parade. The parade, joined by guest artists from France's Les Grandes Personnes, drew thousands to the streets and led directly into the final concert in front of Battambang Provincial Hall.

"An estimated 9,000 spectators attended the finale, which featured hip-hop finalists, circus performers, international musicians and a highly anticipated EDM set headlined by Vanthan — an award-winning musician and Phare Ponleu Selpak alumnus," explained the organisers.





The 4th edition of the S'Art Urban Arts Festival held from November 3 to 8 was powered by the TUI Care Foundation. Supplied

A cultural movement reinforced

For PPS, the success of the 2025 edition goes beyond visitor numbers. In the pre-event remarks, PPS leadership framed S'Art as a movement that strengthens Battambang's rising status as Cambodia's cultural hub.

Post-event results reinforce that ambition. With visitors flooding into the city during the Water Festival period and exploring its murals, performances, markets and exhibitions, Battambang's arts economy received a significant boost.

The new permanent mural gallery is expected to drive long-term cultural tourism and establish the city as one of Southeast Asia's most distinctive creative destinations.

"The S'Art Urban Arts Festival is more than an arts festival — it's a celebration of how creativity connects people across borders," said Osman Khawaja, executive director of Phare Ponleu Selpak.

"This year's success further strengthens Battambang's identity as a vibrant cultural hub where art is shared and respected, playing a major role in boosting tourism and development," he added.



The festival originally confirmed the participation of 12 international muralists. Supplied

From vision to impact

What began with an ambitious October announcement has now concluded as a defining moment for Battambang's cultural future.

S'Art Urban Arts Festival 2025 did not simply meet its expectations — it elevated them, leaving behind a permanent artistic legacy, unprecedented community engagement and a city more alive with colour and culture than ever before.

Battambang's evolution into Cambodia's artistic heartland is no longer an aspiration. This year's festival proves it is happening now — and it is here to stay.



They came from the US, Spain, Switzerland, Singapore, Timor Leste, France and Germany, as well as Colombia, Canada, Japan, Vietnam, Italy, Australia and the UAE. Supplied

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