

## **CAMBODIA-LAURISTON ARTS PROJECT**

Cambodia has suffered a tragic recent past. The campaign of the fanatical Khmer Rouge in the 1970's, only a generation ago, continues to haunt the people of this small country. The displacement of the people and the mass executions devastated all. Amongst those targeted were the artists of Cambodia, and this has removed many of the traditions of its culture. A unique situation faces the new generation of artists who do not have mentors and role models to guide them in building upon the traditions of the past.

Cambodia has slowly begun to recover from the pain of this devastation. There are the economic hardships; Cambodia relies heavily on international aid, and then there are the hardships of the human spirit. To build a sense of identity, to recognise and value the worth of each individual, the sense of community, and the ability to build relationships, is where we believe that we, as a community, could make a contribution.

The Cambodia-Lauriston Arts Project began as an idea to make a connection. Creativity enables us to express our thoughts and feelings through our Art, to exercise the imagination, find inspiration and express emotion. It can be used it as a source of personal growth, and as well, provide opportunities to understand ourselves and others, this is what builds positive relationships. We believe that art does transcend borders and can connect people.

Our work began with a visit to two schools in the small province of Siem Reap. Both of these schools are also under the care of a Non-Government Organisation that closely monitors and protects the well-being of its children. The schools consist of boys and girls, ranging in ages from 5 to 18. The moving images that you are depicted in this video clip is their response to the possibility of making a connection with us. Through drawing and movement, they express their own identity.

What it means to be Cambodian, of Khmer culture...what it means to be children.

In Term 1, we will be preparing our own response in the form of a visual depiction of our own identity, what it means to be a child, a young woman in our own local and global context. Students from Kindergarten to year 12 will begin by preparing their own response through their art classes. They will create the visual markings that will form part of the many pieces that will become the collaborative installation

In Term 2, our Artist-in-Residence Lauren Berkowitz, an internationally renowned installation artist who treads the environment lightly will also work with us. Lauren Berkowitz, a Melbourne born artist has held numerous group and solo exhibitions both here in Australia and overseas, namely New York, France and Japan. Her most recent public commission is an installation at the Heidi Museum of Modern Art in 2005-2006.

Students will be invited to join a working group to develop their response in a range of other forms. Lauren will conduct workshops whereby this work will evolve into a collaborative installation. Lauren will develop and assemble the many pieces that will form the whole. This work will be photographed and digitally recorded and it will continue its journey back to Cambodia to be enjoyed by those who started it.

All students will be invited to participate in this project, whether currently undertaking an arts course or not. We would love to hear from students who may have interests/skills in other related art forms such as film, sound and music. Or simply an interest in becoming involved in a unique project, an opportunity to interact, express and exchange ideas and become part of a global connection through the arts. In the latter part of this year, this work will be presented as an exhibition at Lauriston Girls' School and also within a public space to reach a wider audience.

Our Artist-in-Residence will introduce herself at an assembly early in term 2. She will talk about her own art practise and her philosophy about art making....

Students will be able to register their interest as a participant in this project via the school's intranet. This will be advertised mid-term.

A poignant statement was made by a Cambodian during our visit, from a man who had lost his father, an academic, and his 2 younger sisters, He said

"They may have destroyed our art but they did not destroy our spirit".

We look forward to hearing from you.

**Sue Burke and Giuliana D'Angelo**  
**Art Department**