

Philadelphia Art Gallery Strives to Save Cambodian Children

The Region's Only Art Gallery & Museum devoted to Cambodian Art & Culture donates to kids in need

Philadelphia - Picture this: your country has been ravaged by war for decades. Half the population of the nation has been murdered. Your rich cultural identity has been attacked to the point of virtual nonexistence. And just recently, signs of economic vitality have begun to sprout. To this day, thousands of small children pick through garbage dumps for scraps and work long hours in a daily struggle for survival. Landmines continue to blow off limbs to this day. Child prostitution and even slavery exist. That's why Bob and Bonna Neang Weinstein are using their wondrously intriguing and cavernous **Khmer Art Gallery & Museum** as a vehicle to bring relief to these kids in need.

This **First Friday, July 6**, (5 p.m.-9 p.m.), the Loft District's **Khmer Art Gallery** will donate 15% of all purchases to charities benefiting the countless Cambodian children in desperate need. Later this summer, Bob & Bonna and their young son will return to Cambodia. When they come home to Philadelphia, no doubt their experience will fuel their passions for saving more kids in Bonna's native land.

Growing up in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Bonna Neang Weinstein recalls a wonderful childhood. Then, in 1975, the Khmer Rouge seized power and terrorized the country for four long years. Everything changed. Like millions of other Cambodians at this time, Bonna's life was turned upside down.

Still rebuilding more than 20 years after Pol Pot's initial fall from power, Cambodia and its people are continuing the struggle to return the nation to its former glory. While progress has been made, atrocities continue and Cambodian children are still forced into prostitution - some even sold by their caretakers or stolen from their villages.

One of the charities Khmer Art Gallery is seeking to work with is **The Cambodian Children's Fund** (www.cambodianchildrensfund.org), based out of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which benefits Cambodia's orphaned, abandoned or abused children by providing secure shelter, nutritional meals, comprehensive educational programs and in-house health care, as well as a cultural center that focuses on fostering traditional Cambodian culture.

Back in Philadelphia, Khmer Art Gallery holds true to a mission of promoting Cambodian culture and houses an extensive collection of beautifully crafted Cambodian stone, bronze and silver pieces, bold, bright and jubilant paintings, stunning silver jewelry, native percussion instruments, and the city's largest collection of Buddhas. Khmer Art Gallery's Killings Fields Room, housed in a giant vault, acts as a stirring tribute to the millions who've perished during Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979 with sculptures, paintings, and video footage.

"It is through art that builds understanding," Bonna says. "Khmer Art Gallery is a place where Asian art meets American eyes," she quips. "My gallery serves as a portal between east and west."

Khmer Art Gallery is Philadelphia's only museum and gallery dedicated to Cambodian art. Artwork is selected to demonstrate the historical and artistic values of Ancient Cambodia's Millennium of Glory. New works are carefully crafted in Cambodia under the Grand Master supervision of Professor Khoun Bounna - whose works are seen throughout Cambodia and can be found in the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.

Khmer Art Gallery is located at **319 N. 11th St.**, just north of Chinatown proper, in the new loft district, home to a growing number of new and newly relocated galleries. Khmer Gallery is open Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11 p.m.-4 p.m. and by appointment. Call 215-922-5600; or go to www.khmerartgallery.com.

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