

THE MISSING PICTURE

(L'Image manquante)

A film by Rithy Panh



France, Cambodia, 2013, 96 mins Cert 12A

Winner, Un Certain Regard Prize, Cannes Film Festival 2013

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SYNOPSIS

The film is adapted from the autobiographical sections of Rithy Panh's book *The Elimination* (published in 2013 by The Clerkenwell Press), exploring the story of his family before and after the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh.

Pol Pot's communist regime overtook the Cambodian capital on April 17, 1975. Panh was eleven years old. Citizens were rounded up and sent to agricultural labour camps. With the ostensible purpose of eliminating class divisions, all personal effects were confiscated. Numbers replaced individuals. Torture and executions were undertaken for the slightest infraction. Hunger soon dominated. The regime was built on mass deprivation and fear.

In a bold imaginative leap, this story is pictured via carved figurines (created by Sarith Mang), overlaid by narration.

'For many years, I have been looking for a missing picture: a photograph taken between 1975 and 1979 by the Khmer Rouge, when they ruled over Cambodia...On its own, of course, an image does not prove mass murder, but it prompts us to think, to meditate, to build history. I searched for it in the archives, in old papers, in the villages of my country, in vain. Now I know: this image must be missing. I was not in fact really looking for it; would the image not be obscene and insignificant? Thus I have made it up. What I offer you today is neither the image nor the search for a unique image, but the image of a quest: the quest that cinema allows.'

Some images must be missing always, always be replaced by others. In this movement there is life, struggle, difficulty and beauty, the sadness of faces lost, the comprehension of what was once: sometimes nobility and even courage, but never oblivion. '

Rithy Panh

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For photos please go to: <http://www.newwavefilms.co.uk/press.html>

CREDITS

Written & Directed by

Produced by

Text written by

With the voice of

Music

Sculptor

Photography

Editors

Special Effects

Sound

Sound Mixing

Rithy Panh

Catherine Dussart

Christophe Bataille

Randal Douc

Marc Marder

Sarith Mang

Prum Mésa

Rithy Panh, Marie-Christine Rougerie

Narin Saobora

Touch Sopheakdey, Sam Kakada

Eric Tisserand

Coproduction

With the support of

In collaboration with

the participation of

with the support of

CDP, ARTE France, Bophana Production

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Centre national du cinéma et de l'image
animée

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RITHY PANH

Rithy Panh is an internationally acclaimed Cambodian filmmaker of both feature and documentary films. He was born in 1964 in Phnom Penh. Like so many of his generation, he lost his father, mother and other members of his immediate family to starvation and overwork as a result of their confinement in Khmer Rouge labour camps. In 1979, he escaped the Khmer Rouge by crossing the border into Thailand. He took up residence in France the following year and later graduated from the French National Cinema School in Paris (IDHEC).

He started his career by directing documentaries for which he received numerous prizes: *Site II* (1989), *Cinéma de notre temps: Souleymane Cissé* (1990), *Cambodge entre guerre et paix* (1992). He dedicated his first feature film, *Neak Srê (Rice People)*, to the memory of his family. Though not explicitly about the country's political upheaval, the film tells the story of a post-Khmer Rouge era family's struggle to survive from the land against the forces of nature. It was the first ever Cambodian film selected in the Cannes Film Festival competition. In 1998, his second feature film, *Un soir après la guerre*, was selected for the Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival.

He has directed many documentaries, among which are *Lumière sur un massacre: 10 films contre 110 000 000 de mines* (1997), *Van Chan, une danseuse cambodgienne* (1998), *La Terre des âmes errantes* (1999). *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, premiered in Un Certain Regard, was released widely and earned Rithy Panh numerous awards. The film is structured around interviews with former prison guards from Phnom Penh's notorious Tuol Sleng prison, reuniting them with the prisoners who had once been under their watch.

Rithy Panh was able to return to Cambodia in 1990 and now divides his time between Cambodia and France. He created the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre in Phnom Penh, the aim of which is to preserve the country's filmic, photographic and sound history. The centre is named after the subject of one of Mr Panh's early film, *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy*, about a young woman who was tortured and killed at S-21 prison.

L'Image manquante (The Missing Picture) is his latest film. It was inspired by the book he co-wrote with Christophe Bataille, *The Elimination: A Survivor of the Khmer Rouge Confronts his Past and the Commandant of the Killing Fields* (Clerkenwell Press, 2013). The film won the highest award of Cannes' Un Certain Regard selection.



Filmography and Bibliography

FILMS

1989	Site II
1990	Souleymane Cissé
1992	Cambodge, entre guerre et paix
1994	Neak Sre, Les gens de la rizière (Rice People)
1995	The Tan's Family
1996	Bophana, une tragédie cambodgienne (Bophana, a Cambodian tragedy)
1997	Un soir après la guerre (One evening after the war)
1997	Lumières sur un massacre (Lights on a Massacre, in 10 films Against 110 000 000 Land Mines)
1998	Van Chan, une danseuse cambodgienne (Van Chan, A Cambodian Dancer)
1999	La terre des âmes errantes (The Land of Wandering Souls)
2000	Que la barque se brise, que la jonque s'entrouvre
2002	S21, La machine de mort khmère rouge (S 21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine)
2003	Les Gens d'Angkor (People of Angkor)
2005	Les Artistes du théâtre brûlé (The Burnt Theatre)
2006	Le papier ne peut pas envelopper la braise (Paper Cannot Wrap up Embers)
2009	Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (The Sea Wall)
2010	Duch, Le maître des forges de l'enfer (Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell)
2011	Gibier d'élevage
2013	L'Image manquante (The Missing Picture)

BOOKS

La Machine Khmère Rouge, Monti Santésok S-21 (with Christine Chaumeau, Paris: Flammarion, 2009)

Le Papier ne peut pas envelopper la braise (with Louise Lorentz, Paris: Grasset, 2007)

L'année du lièvre, Tome 1 : Au revoir Phnom Penh, by Tian, introduction by Rithy Panh (Paris: Gallimard, 2011)

The Elimination: A Survivor of the Khmer Rouge Confronts his Past and the Commandant of the Killing Fields (with Christophe Bataille, London: The Clerkenwell Press, 2013)

Interview with Rithy Panh

Is the word 'reconstitution' adequate for this film?

No, my film is much more lively than this. It's about what makes a man, what constitutes him. I am a peasant. I've got my feet on the ground. I'm very naive. I don't expose grand theories. In fact each time you try to delve into theory, you fall flat on your face. You fall into voyeurism, into pathos.

What is the missing picture?

That's the question raised throughout the film. What are we seeking? Is it a picture showing Khmer Rouge executing someone? Is it my parents whom I would have liked to see get older? What would have happened had my nephews not died, had they got married? All of this is the missing picture. The goal of *The Missing Picture* is less important than the process of the creation of the missing picture.

What story do the figurines tell?

There are two types of images in my film: the propaganda images that we can *dissect*, and the images that I create, the ones I project. These two types of images continually contradict each other. My figurines don't move, we're not in a 3D animated film. They are static. We're the ones moving, creating the atmosphere... On the other hand, there is no atmosphere and there is no sound in the propaganda images. People don't speak to each other. My figurines speak through their placing in space, and thanks to the voiceover they're much more lively and expressive than the people we see in the archival images. The people I show in archival images are robots. They are a people made of dust, of grains of sand. In this case the human being no longer counts, identity no longer counts. It is the mass that counts. Here the planning comes first.

Was the act of 'sculpting' important to you?

I wanted the audience to see the act of fabrication of the figurines, a gesture that allows them to be placed somewhere or removed. Technically, I could bring them in or remove them without anybody seeing anything, but the movement was important to me. When you look at a Buddha head, for you it's a sculpture, for me it's a soul. When you go to the Guimet Museum (Paris), you go to see art on display, but all these sculptures have a soul. Art and the soul must not be separated. Art is powerful if it is honest, if it has humanist values. If art is generous, free, inventive, then it has a soul.

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Isn't it a cinema film, a film about cinema, about what one can express through cinema?

The film starts with shots of deteriorated film reels, the proof of time passing, of the destruction of images, images that perhaps no longer exist. And meanwhile, four shots later, figurines appear, and desire surfaces. A poet, in the Greek sense of the word (a creator), appears. A human being is really human only if he is a creator, not in the sense of God creating the world, but as the creator of the imaginary and of expression. This is what makes us human, and it is in that dimension that cinema can find its strength. 3D is great, everything flies, but it is entertainment. It doesn't have a soul. My little characters are not in 3D, they are made of clay, they have a soul, they don't move but they concentrate all the emotions.

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Then we started on something else. I don't want to be told that I am digging the same ground. It's not time and again about the Khmer Rouge. Each of my films offers a different perspective. It's my story, but told differently. Woody Allen is a New York Jew, that's all he talks about in his films. I like his work a lot and I would never go to him to say: 'Stop telling me the same story.' Each time, a Woody Allen film presents a new way of filming, a new mise en scène, a different situation, like when he has the characters come out of the screen in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. All these inventions mean that he is not just a guy who's found a ground that he could continue to work. We come back, here, to the idea that art creates a soul.

Could we say that there's a degree of self-deprecation in this film?

Perhaps my family is watching this film and thinking that I've become an expert in blah- blah. This film is much more personal than my previous ones and, at the same time, it asks questions and puts me in danger. Even its form is dangerous. Someone who sees the figurines might wonder if I've made an animated film about the genocide and the Khmer Rouge. I think one must show some degree of self-deprecation because it demonstrates humility. It's a warning to myself: if art always brings something new, a way of seeing, if it helps understand, then it's important to continue because that is necessary. It's not worth doing it just for the sake of doing it... Each new work must add something. Any film that achieves this proves that you're much stronger than any form of totalitarianism, any form of destruction ever imposed on you. You have to be a filmmaker before being a filmmaker of the genocide. The day you're only a filmmaker of the genocide, it's best to stop and become a bartender or run a restaurant.

And after *The Missing Picture*?

My quest continues through my activities at the Ateliers Varan (Paris) and at the Bophana Audiovisual Research Centre (Phnom Penh, Cambodia). All this represents one and only film. The day you'll hear that I am making a musical, it will mean that I'm feeling much better in my head, but I will still have focused for thirty years on a work that explores the genocide in Cambodia.

Interview by Mélanie Carpentier published in *Grand Écart* (Cannes Film Festival, 25 May 2013).
Translation Diane Gabrysiak

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