

# SIGNS OF CHANGE

## 歲月留痕

Hand-painted commercial art made a comeback after all but disappearing in Cambodia's turbulent 1970s. Now it's facing a battle for survival all over again

柬埔寨的手繪招牌在1970年代的動盪歲月中曾一度銷聲匿跡，其後再度復興，現在又陷入掙扎求存的困境

TEXT/撰文 DANIEL ALLEN

**T**AKING A TEA BREAK, Doug Gordon surveys an eclectic collection of signs adorning his Phnom Penh shop, Trunkh – a treasure trove of art, fashion and furniture, both Cambodian and those inspired by the country's crafts. Each painted sheet of tin displays a charming freehand motif – pigs, mopeds, sewing machines, flip-flops – along with scrawls of spidery Khmer script. In today's world of neon signs and LED displays, the eye-catching array of hand-painted hoardings is delightfully archaic.

“I look on them as a fusion of commerce and culture,” says American expatriate Gordon, as he holds up a particular favourite depicting a man washing a motorbike. “I mean, how can you not like them? I just find them incredibly enchanting.”

While the country has a long tradition of sign painting, it almost disappeared during the oppressive Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s. The destruction of commercial signage was widespread and countless artists and

**趁**著小休時間，Doug Gordon 檢視他設於金邊的小店內各式招牌，上面畫了豬、摩托車、縫紉機及拖鞋等，五花八門，讓人眼花撩亂。他這間小店名叫Trunkh，售賣柬埔寨風格及富有手繪招牌工藝特色的藝術品、時裝及家具，店內的招牌每塊都是由人手在金屬板上精心繪製，除了美麗的圖案，還有外型彎彎曲曲的高棉字。在霓虹燈及LED招牌充斥的今天，這裡的手繪招牌更顯古樸別致。

來自美國的Gordon拿起一塊他特別鍾愛的招牌，上面畫了一個男人在清洗電單車。他說：「我把這些招牌視為商業和文化的融合。你怎能不喜歡它們？簡直叫人愛不釋手。」

柬埔寨的手繪招牌工藝源遠流長，但在1970年代赤柬極權統治期間，這門工藝幾近絕跡。大量商業招牌被摧毀，無數商人及製作招牌的畫師被檢控，當中不少更遭處決，害

British photographer and writer Sam Roberts' book *Hand-Painted Signs of Kratie* documents the variety of local signage (right) and examines the role it plays in Cambodian society

英國攝影師兼作家Sam Roberts撰寫《Hand-Painted Signs of Kratie》一書，記錄了柬埔寨多采多姿的手繪招牌設計（右圖），並探視這門手藝在當地社會所擔當的角色

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entrepreneurs, among others under persecution, were executed. In some cases, surviving painters were able to hand down their skills to the younger generation. In others, artists from different disciplines filled the niche by adapting their skills, although most Cambodian sign painters today are self-taught. With the growing prevalence of modern, printed billboards however, hand-painted signs once again face the possibility of extinction.

Sai Sokheang, 29, is one of Cambodia's most respected sign painters. A native of the south-eastern Kampong Cham Province, he discovered his talent for art at an early age and, in 2002, he moved north to Kratie, co-founding his hand-painted sign business, Chouk Rachana, which took a while to establish itself. "We placed a sign outside the shop that said 'artist available,'" he recalls. "At first, most people thought we could only paint the interior of Cambodian pagodas. But after a while word got around, and from then on we had a lot of clients."

Sokheang handles work for clients across north-eastern

得這門工藝幾近失傳。後來，少數倖存的畫師把手藝傳給年輕一輩，也有本來從事其他創作的工藝師轉行製作招牌，這門手藝總算給保留下來，不過，柬埔寨現時大部分招牌畫師都靠自己摸索技術。隨著印刷製作的時尚廣告牌愈趨流行，手繪招牌再次面臨絕跡的威脅。

29歲的Sai Sokheang是柬埔寨著名的招牌畫師。他出生於東南部的磅湛省，年輕時已展現過人的藝術天份。2002年，他向北移居桔井省，並跟朋友一起創立手繪招牌店Chouk Rachana。Sokheang的手繪招牌生意花了一段時間才站穩陣腳。他回憶道：「我們在店外放了一個寫上『畫師長駐』的招牌。最初，大家以為我們只會為柬埔寨的佛塔內壁繪畫。後來，才知道我們會畫招牌，有了口碑，光顧的客人就愈來愈多。」

Sokheang每月大約製作三至四個招牌，他的客人遍及柬埔寨東北各省，主要客戶包括電單車維修店、理髮店和美容店。另外，他

Hand-painted signs are a charming Cambodian characteristic. "I look on them as a fusion of commerce and culture," says Doug Gordon (above)

手繪招牌展現柬埔寨的獨特魅力。Doug Gordon (上圖)指出：「我把這些招牌視為商業和文化的融合。」

**"Collectively, they represent a window onto Khmer society"**  
「整體而言，手繪招牌是探視高棉社會文化的一扇窗口」



"You can't rush the sign," says artist Sai Sokheang (left), who says they can take from a few hours to several days to paint, depending on their complexity

手繪招牌畫師Sai Sokheang (左圖)指出:「製作招牌不可以操之過急。」他表示招牌的製作時間視乎其大小和複雜程度,由數小時以至數天不等

## WHERE TO BUY

You can find small-scale replicas for sale in Bojangles restaurant on the Phnom Penh river-front, while Trunkh has original signs and a range of merchandise inspired by the art form. Products inspired by signs for barbers and beauty salons can be found in NGO Friends-International's Friends 'N' Stuff shops.

## 購物資訊

旅客可以到金邊河畔的Bojangles餐廳逛逛,那裡有手繪招牌的小型仿製品出售。Trunkh店內有原裝手繪招牌及多種相關精品發售。在非政府機構Friends-International經營的Friends 'N' Stuff也可找到設計靈感源自理髮店及美容店招牌的工藝品。

### Bojangles Bar & Restaurant

269 Sisowath Quay,

Phnom Penh

+855 12 457901

### Trunkh

Street 294 and Sotheaeros

Boulevard, Phnom Penh

+855 12 812476

### Friends 'N' Stuff

No. 215, Street 13,

Phnom Penh

+855 23 555 2391.

Friends 'N' Stuff can

also be found at the

### InterContinental Hotel Phnom Penh

296 Mao Tse Toung

Boulevard, Phnom Penh

www.intercontinental.com

Cambodia, producing about three to four signs a month. His biggest customers are motorbike repair shops, barbers and beauty salons, although he has also worked for the Cambodian government and various non-governmental organisations, such as Oxfam.

"The design process for a hand-painted sign varies," Sokheang says. "Sometimes the client has very specific requirements that constrain artistic creativity. In other cases, the client only has a rough idea of what he or she wants. I can then make recommendations and have more freedom of expression."

Once the design has been finalised, the sign painter begins laying it out, usually on sheet metal. The paint is then applied, often with different lines of text in different colours. The size and complexity of each sign dictates its production time, which can range from a few hours to several days. "You can't rush the sign," says Sokheang. "After all, everyone is going to see your work. The best advertisement for a sign painter is his own signs."

In the 1990s and early 2000s, almost all signs in Cambodia were painted by hand. Today, the look of the signs – along with the goods and services they promote – have radically changed. In the capital Phnom Penh, the increasing number of chic boutiques and smart cafés prefer clean cut, digitally printed advertising. Cheaper

也曾為柬埔寨政府以及樂施會等非政府組織製作招牌。

Sokheang說:「手繪招牌的設計過程不盡相同。有些顧客對招牌有特定要求,令藝術創意受到限制。有些顧客對招牌沒有太多想法,我會為他們提供意見,創作的空間較大。」

在完成設計後,畫師會直接在金屬片上勾勒草圖,之後上色,招牌大多會用不同顏色寫上宣傳字句。製作時間視乎招牌的大小和複雜程度,由數小時以至數天不等。他說:「製作招牌不可操之過急。畢竟,所有人都會看到你的作品,畫師店舖的招牌就是他的最佳廣告。」

在1990年代及2000年代初,柬埔寨的招牌幾乎都是以人手繪製。現時,招牌的外觀,以及招牌所宣傳的貨品和服務,全都跟以往不同了。在繁鬧的首都金邊,時尚的服裝店和咖啡店湧現,這些店舖都喜歡使用乾淨俐落的數碼印刷廣告,廉價和更耐用的塑膠已取代金屬片的地位,成為製作招牌的首選材料。

居於柬埔寨的英國作家兼攝影師Sam Roberts在2012年11月出版了有關手繪招牌的書《Hand-Painted Signs of Kratie》,他說:「科技普及,加上畫師的工資上升,肯定有利於機器製作或數碼招牌的流行。」他補充道,雖然手繪廣告招牌再次在英國和北美洲



and more hard-wearing plastic has also largely replaced metal as the material of choice.

“It was inevitable that access to technology and rising labour costs would tip the balance in favour of mechanical or digital sign formats,” says Sam Roberts, a British writer and photographer living in Cambodia who published the book *Hand-Painted Signs of Kratie* in November 2012. He adds that, while hand-painted advertising is enjoying a resurgence in places such as Britain and North America, Cambodia is still some way from reviving the struggling art form.

Painted signage in Cambodia is not looked upon with the same nostalgia or artistic value as it may be in the West; rather, it is often just a common part of everyday living. “Much more than simple antiques, many Cambodian hand-painted signs still adorn shops and roadsides across the country,” Roberts says. “Collectively, they represent a unique window onto Khmer society and history. We can only hope that people like Sai Sokheang will find a way to continue their work and keep this iconic piece of Khmer culture alive for future generations to enjoy.”

Exhibitions in Phnom Penh and shops such as Trunkh are helping to showcase signs and artists, but this may not be enough to sustain the tradition. Maintaining the skills of the trade falls to the sign painters, and the economic incentives are far from compelling. Bowing to the pressures of the times, even Sokheang has acquired a printing machine. “I still prefer to produce signs by hand, but you have to give the clients what they want,” he says. “I’m still painting some signs by hand, but in the future, who knows what will happen?”

等地流行起來，但這種手工藝在柬埔寨仍處於掙扎求存的狀態，未見復興跡象。

在西方社會，手繪招牌被視為懷舊和充滿藝術氣息的工藝，在柬埔寨卻只是普通的日常事物。Roberts說：「在柬埔寨，手繪招牌不是古董，全國各地的商店，甚至在街上都看得到。整體而言，手繪招牌提供了讓人們探視高棉歷史和社會文化面貌的一個獨特途徑，我們希望Sai Sokheang這類畫師能夠繼續創作，並將這種極有代表性的高棉文化傳承下去，讓後世也可欣賞它的美。」

金邊的手繪招牌展覽及Trunkh等店舖，的確有助宣揚招牌手藝及畫師，卻不足以支持傳統工藝的傳承。保存這門工藝始終要靠畫師，但又因為欠缺經濟誘因難以吸引新血入行。Sokheang為了與時並進，也買了一部印刷機。他說：「我仍然喜歡一筆一筆地繪畫招牌，但也要顧及客人的需要。我目前仍然手繪部分招牌，但將來如何只有天曉得。」■

For locals, hand-painted signs aren't nostalgic antiques so much as part of the cultural milieu

對當地人來說，手繪招牌只是社會文化的一部分，並非帶有懷舊氣息的古董

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**出發日期：**

由即日起至2013年7月11日

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牌照號碼：352024