
FILM REVIEW

Studio Revolt Media Lab: A Collaborative Producing Motion Imagery and Performance Projects

Chicago | Phnom Penh | Osaka
<http://studio-revolt.com/>

**Founded by
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Studio Revolt media lab helps to fill a void in diversity studies media about the diaspora of Southeast Asians with an emphasis on Cambodia (Kampuchea). Studio Revolt was founded in 2011 by American performance artist and global activist Anida Yoeu Ali and Japanese filmmaker Masahiro Sugano in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Anida Yoeu Ali was born in Cambodia in a Muslim family and raised and educated in Chicago.



Masahiro Sugano was born in Osaka, Japan, and came to the U.S.A. to earn degrees in film making. They reside in Phnom Penh scripting, editing, producing, and participating in films and performances that go beyond conventional narratives about cultural identities, prejudice, discrimination and geographic borders. Studio Revolt (<http://studio-revolt.com/>) currently provides free access to 12 videos, 14 minutes or less, that provide provocative opportunities for educators and students to reflect on and discuss ethnic, religious, racial, socio-economic, gender, White privilege, and other social issues. A chronological synopsis of film content from 2009 to 2013 follows, which explains how each video reveals the complex issues of diverse identities, acculturation, acceptance, and rejection.

Who's Got Us? (2013) is a 5-minute video poem about the strength of women and global need to provide alternative support systems to combat sexism. Three women confront and condemn sexist rights (rites) and wrongs of passage, declaring that God is not a man and protesting the requirement that Muslim women wear a

restrictive Chador with only a tiny slit for their eyes. The three women ask how and why mothers who give birth to sons allow them to grow up demeaning, dismissing, and diminishing females. Viewers should be warned of graphic language.



In *Return to Sender* (2012), a group of 16 exiled Khmer Americans send an 8-minute video letter to the President and U.S. Congress to protest U.S. deportation policies. The deportees were born in refugee camps in Thailand or left Cambodia when they were infants. They have little knowledge of the Cambodian language or culture and were deported under *PL 104-208 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996* because they committed crimes and were incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Each individual explains how they were acculturated to believe they were



100% Americans (Khmericans), never imagining their crimes would result in permanent exile. They left their American families and friends behind, including wives and children, for life in a country which is alien to them. To date, 600 Cambodians with permanent alien resident status (Green Card) have been exiled to Cambodia, and 2,000 others are facing deportation hearings.

Hadeel (2012) is a 3-minute tribute to a nine-year-old Palestinian girl who died in an Israeli air strike in Gaza. The tribute was delivered in London by Rafeef Ziadah, a third-generation Palestinian spoken-word artist and activist. She questions the status of 4.4 million Palestinians whose quality of life and existence is subject to Israeli hegemony and the global deference to their demands for total security.

Another Day / Episode #1: Veasna's Painting (2011) traces in 5 minutes the journey of a countryside artist from Battambang who goes to the capital Phnom Penh, hoping to fulfill his dream of artistic success. Veasna meets a French art collector at a gallery reception who is interested in his artworks. Veasna calls his mother and promises that she can come to Phnom Penh in six months to see his success as an artist. Harsh reality sets in



when a street cart vendor offers him \$5 for his painting.

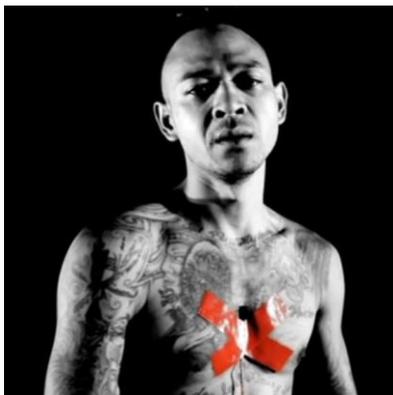


In *Another Day / Episode #2: Samnang's Bear* (2011), sixteen-year-old Samnang misses a dinner party to celebrate his completion of a drug rehabilitation program. His cousin Sophat, whose mother warns him not to associate with him, searches the streets of Phnom Penh carrying Samnang's graduation gift, a teddy bear. Sophat is worried that Samnang fell back into his life of petty crime, drugs, and prostitution. During the unsuccessful evening search, Sophat encounters a transvestite and a pimp, asking if they have seen his cousin. Out of desperation Sophat has a one-way conversation with the teddy bear about his missing cousin. At the end of his search Sophat gives the teddy to a young boy who reluctantly accepts it because he says it is a girl's toy.

In *Another Day / Episode #3: Bopha's Body* (2011), a 10-minute mini-drama, violence occurs when a brother tries to intervene in a relationship between Bopha, his pregnant sister, and her live-in boyfriend, a gambling addict who owes money to a loan shark. The brother wants Bopha to have an abortion because the family is ashamed of her relationship with a street musician. The brother tries to force his sister to take a pill to induce an abortion. Bopha refuses to end her pregnancy, and a violent fight erupts between the brother, sister, and boyfriend.



My Asian Americana (2011), a 3-minute vignette, features eight Asian Americans, including four Khmer exiles, who gather in Phnom Penh to share their favorite memories of life in America. Each one validates his or her cultural roots as an American. Four are Americans who can return to the U.S.A. while the others must remain in Cambodia. Their litany of emotional memorabilia includes sports, music, food, fishing, national holidays, and good times they enjoyed with their families and friends in the United States.



Why I Write (2011) is part of the life story of Kosal Khiev, an ethnic Khmer born in a Thai refugee camp. His Cambodian family immigrated to the U.S.A. in 1981 where he made bad choices and was involved in a gang. At age 16, he was convicted of attempted murder and spent the next 14 years in prison. Upon his release Kosal was exiled to Cambodia, a nation he never visited. In seven minutes Kosal explains in rap verse how he writes and advocates for those struggling under racial oppression in the U.S.A.

Instant Slapping (2011) features two Korean Americans, a brother and his older sister who live in Los Angeles and Philadelphia. They have an Internet chat fight over unresolved family issues, which becomes physical. First the sister asks her brother when was the last time he called their mother. He belittles her nagging. Then the sister questions whether he is the real father of his girlfriend's baby. Their instant messaging of insults disintegrates into digital slapping. Viewers should be warned of graphic language.



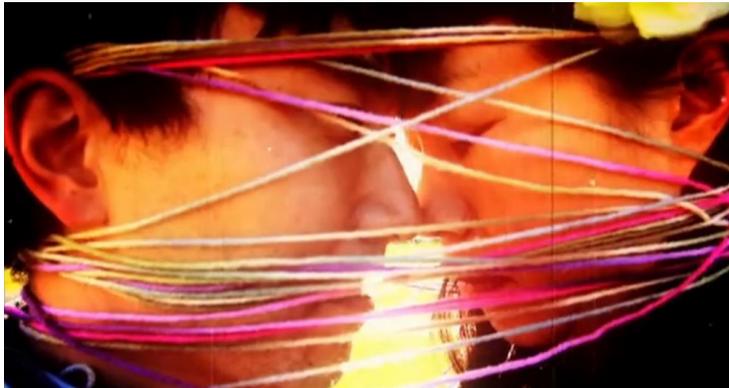
1700% Project: Mistaken For Muslim (2010) is a five-minute litany and indictment of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab hate crimes that erupted in the U.S.A. after the terrorist bombings on 9/11. The status of Muslims in America is compared to the 1942 internment of 112,000 Japanese Americans by the U.S. government during the Second World War. After September 11, 2001, individuals across the nation suspected and often mistaken to be Muslims were subjected to violent acts and hate crimes by those proclaiming to be patriotic Americans.

March 28, 2003

Following the events of 9/11 the FBI created an Arab American Advisory Committee after hate crimes against people perceived to be "Arab" or "Muslim" increased by 1700%

In *Yarning for Love* (2009), a young Asian couple involved in a romance becomes emotionally tangled by a mysterious metaphorical ball of yarn. As their

relationship becomes more complex, the yarn proliferates binding them closer together. The four-minute comic narrative was shot in the style of a silent movie with an original piano score.



In *Maria's List* (2009), seeking a quiet place to reflect about life, a pregnant Asian woman enters an empty cathedral in Chicago. She initiates a 3-minute interpretive dance which reflects the vicissitudes of life as she seeks refuge from her daily grind in Chicago.

Conclusion

The 12 short videos from Studio Revolt Media Lab show progressive growth in cinematic quality and diverse content in the four years since 2009. The videos collectively earn a 9 on a scale of 10 in terms of expressing social conditions, engaging dialogue, promoting self-reflection, transformational education, excellence in cinematography, pacing, sound, music, and editing.

Resources

Cambodia: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/cambodia.html>

Countries and Their Culture: Cambodia

<http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Cambodia.html>

Khmer Folktales and Fables

<http://www.khmerbuddhistrelief.org/k.folktales.htm>

Public Law 104-208 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996

<http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/PUBLAW/HTML/PUBLAW/0-0-0-10948.html>

Removing Refugees U.S. Deportation Policy and the Cambodian-American Community

http://www.leitnercenter.org/files/2010%20Cambodia%20Report_FINAL.pdf

Cambodian-Americans Confronting Deportation

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2013/01/27/cambodian-americans-confronting-deportation/MK3TQy80UJyG2HjfKKtEIO/story.html>