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BATIA SAREM GALLERY

# Morrison Polkinghorne & So Sothsovankong aka Kwan

*Cambodia, Off The Beaten Track*

December 2 - 22, 2021

Off-site exhibition -  
Galerie Lee / 9 rue Visconti 75006 Paris

Preview

Contacts

Lyvann Lœuk : leegalerie@gmail.com  
Yves Zlotowski : yves.zlotowski@galeriezlotowski.fr  
batiasarem@gmail.com





*Sleeping bus driver 1*  
mixed technique on canvas  
80 x 60 cm



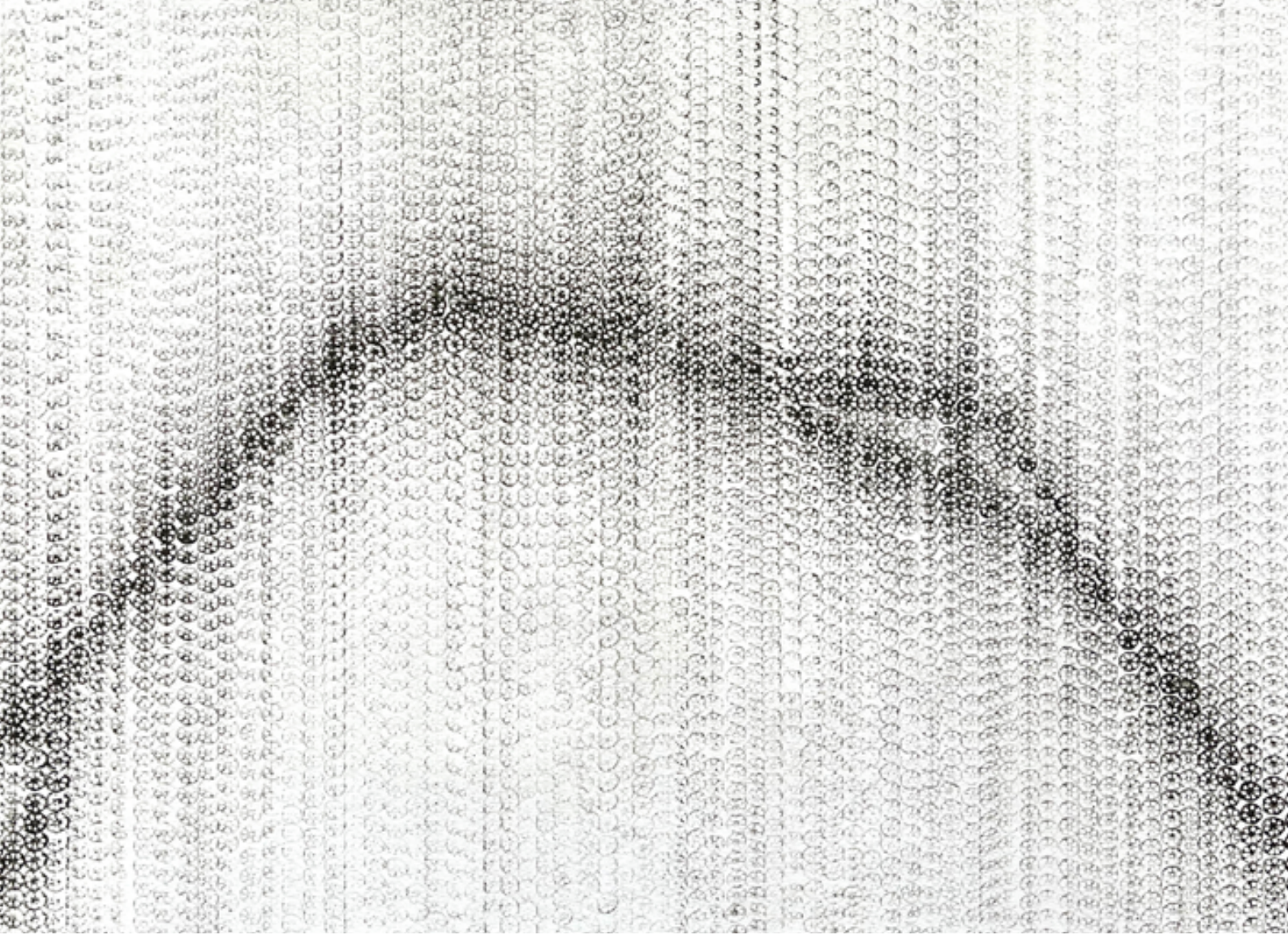
*Three river Delta #7*  
Ink on paper  
(4103 x lotus) 85 x 105 cm



Galerie Batia Sarem is pleased to feature an "off-site exhibition". With our space at Siem Reap in Cambodia being closed temporarily since October 2020 because of the Covid pandemic, we have decided to organise exhibitions of works by Cambodian artists at Galerie Lee, right in the heart of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district in Paris.

The exhibition, which opens on 2 December 2021 is called "Cambodia, off the beaten track" and presents two artists, Morrison Polkinghorne, an Australian who was based in Cambodia for eight years, and So Sothsovankong aka Kwan, an emerging artist who lives and works in Phnom Penh. Different by virtue of their backgrounds and age, Morrison and Kwan share a desire to renew pictorial techniques. Both artists draw on Cambodian traditions but transform them, sometimes circumvent them, to represent the Cambodian countryside, its towns or perhaps a mental landscape.





*La Seine - Ink on paper (3395 x lotus) 54 x 73 cm*

Leaving the well-trodden paths of the Cambodian art scene, sometimes encumbered by the weight of Angkor heritage and its repetitive representation, is no easy task. Morrison and Kwan gracefully call on traditional references - the ceremonial lotus flower of Buddhist rituals for Morrison, Sanskrit, which is one of the sources of the Khmer alphabet for Kwan - but by conferring on them an unexpected aesthetic function, suggesting a different way of looking at these ancestral elements, delving into their own obsessions and references; an Australian, passionate about the decorative arts and abstraction on the one hand and a Cambodian nourished by urban counter-culture and rap on the other.

Both Morrison and Kwan are mindful of the need for recycling. Both repurpose found materials not intended for art practice and so embed their practice in a "holistic circle of life"; in Morrison's case, decaying lotus flowers previously used in temple ceremonies. These are then charred and the ash from the petals distilled to make ink. He also makes his own paintbrushes from the stems, using them to create impressions on the paper.

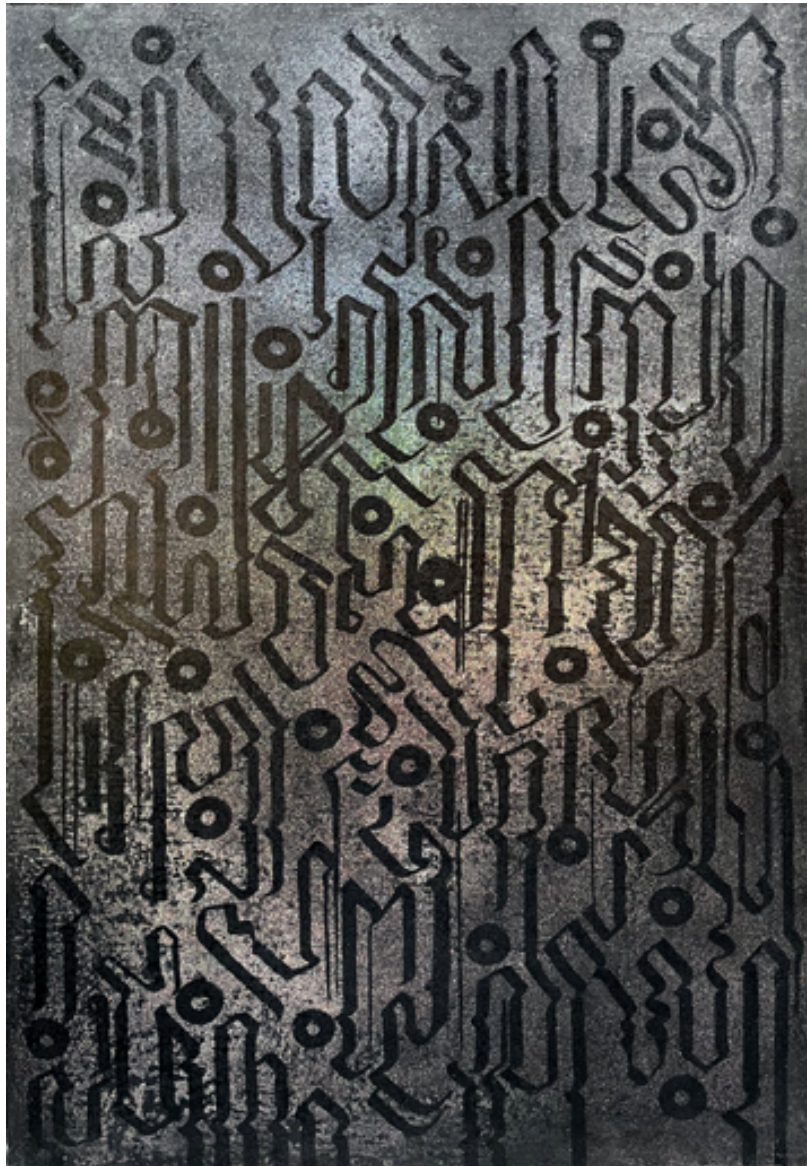


Kwan is above all a street artist: in the paintings presented in Paris, he incorporates cement recovered from the street and place it on the acrylic paint. Kwan is also using the spray paint like most street artists. The idea is to paint quickly, in response to a given environment while subverting the constraints of the street. Kwan usually draws on walls but is sometimes prompted to bring the city back with him when he breaks off scraps of metal, when he rescues broken chairs and then paints on these supports that through him have found a new function.

In both cases, there is a desire to experiment, to discover original instruments and non-traditional mediums. But, once the experimenting is done, the realisation of a composition marked by harmony and appeasement unites the two artists. The colours Kwan uses - sky blue, pink or black enhanced with silver - offset the rough and ready life of the urban environment. For Morrison, the systematic repetition of the same motif allows a hazy geography to emerge, a mountain landscape that appears behind the clouds, a river perhaps or even a map, drawn in contrasting white, black and grey to find a balance as with a meditation.



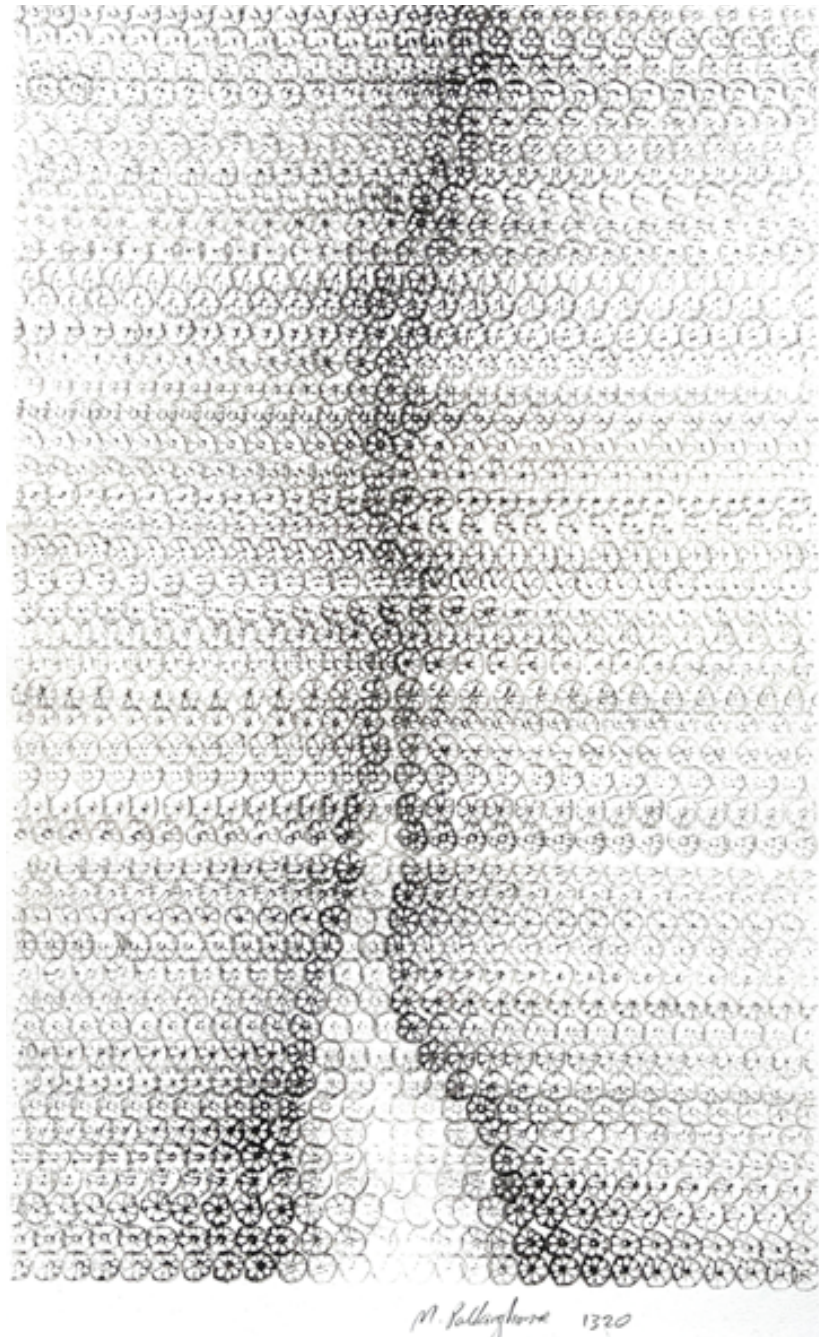
*Son Maligne*  
mixed technique on canvas  
93 x 69 cm



*Moonlight at the West 2*  
mixed technique on canvas  
120 x 80 cm

Finally, the reinvention of language is at the heart of their practice. They share the same wish to create a new alphabet, incomprehensible but sensitive, which has an emotional impact on the viewer. Morrison uses a repetitive process to create the same motif created by the cut lotus stem, such that it becomes a strange ideogram whose meaning changes depending on the pressure with which it is applied into the paper. His practice suggests a mantra, with no literal meaning but which, through repetition, allows the viewer to get access to a form of truth. Kwan uses altered, unrecognisable Sanskrit elements which are as much illegible graffiti as they are elements that ultimately leave a visual mark. These signs mean something, they end up conjuring strange dancers or buildings that free themselves in the night.





*Fleuve 1*  
Ink on paper  
(1320 x lotus) 47 x 60 cm

For those looking at Morrison's drawings or Kwan's paintings, there is something in the process of appearing and that is precisely what these two artists propose: they want the viewer to witness the gradual and meditative emergence of a form, which each individual can define depending on how they see things. That is what we like about both these artists; they surprise us with their innovative approach to drawing and painting but their experiments go beyond performance, in that they give life to a language of the unspoken and mental landscapes which can be seen by those with the patience to go off the beaten track.

## So Sothsovankong aka Kwan

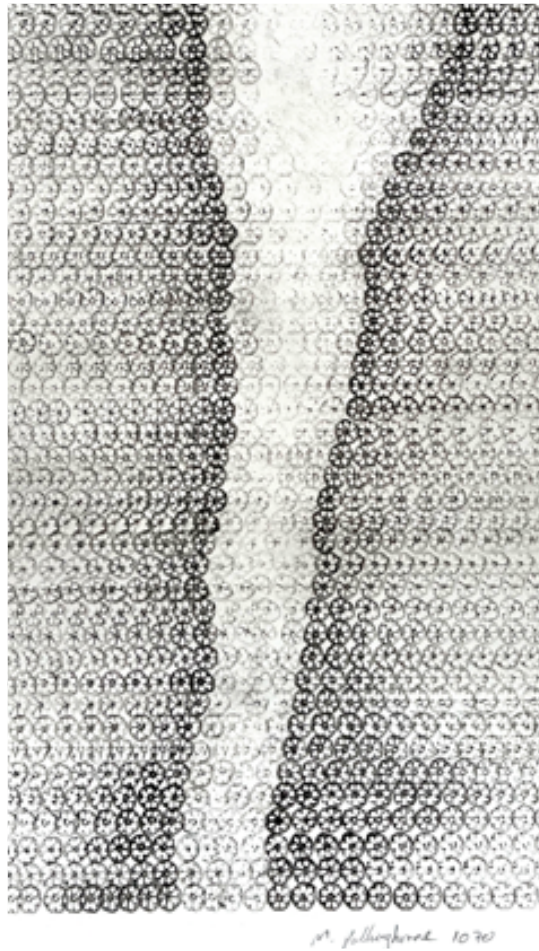


*Moonlight at the West 1*  
mixed technique on canvas  
120 x 80 cm

So Sothsovankong aka Kwan was born in 1998 in the Banteay Meanchey province of Cambodia. So Sothsovankong signs his work as a graffiti artist, painter and singer using the pseudonym KWN23. In 2018, he was selected as a Cambodian emerging artist by "Creative Generation" and this led to his first solo exhibition at the Java Creative café in Phnom Penh. The exhibition was called "Light at the end of the tunnel". Together with Many Sin and Shanghai Chang, he set up the artists' collective, Homeless, and the three artists now have several exhibitions to their credit: at Bong The Gallery in Phnom Penh (I don't Belong Here, 2019); Mirage in Siem Reap (180°, 2019), and at Sra'Art Contemporary Art Gallery in Phnom Penh (Talking Texture, 2021). Kwan currently lives and works in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



# Morrison Polkinghorne



*Fleuve 2*  
Ink on paper  
(1070 x lotus) 47 x 60 cm

Morrison Polkinghorne was born in 1966 in Tasmania and grew up in Alice Springs, Central Australia. Trained as in textile design, he lived in Cambodia for eight years, from 2014 to 2021, of which 7 in Battambang. He has developed his personal drawing technique, using decaying lotus flowers. He makes his lotus-flower ink by charring the petals and distilling the ash and using the stem to print the ink onto the substrates. Morrison has counted the exact number of impressions made since his first drawing. He has, in particular, shown his work at Java Café, a gallery in Phnom Penh (Sacred Ink 81,472 lotus impressions, 2018), at the Serindia Gallery in Bangkok, (148 913 Paths of the lotus ink, 2019) and at the Sofitel Phokeethra in Phnom Penh, (Les Impressions Khmères, 2020). He received the International artist award, DIFFA Chicago Art for life award, and in this context took part in a group show of award winners in 2021. He currently lives and works in Australia.