



# Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden

Newsletter Nr. 6 - February 2012

## PHA TAD KE - THE CLIFF TO UNTIE AND RESOLVE

With this Newsletter we are proud to present our first book in French *Fleurs de La Dévotion* by Biba Vilayleck & Baj Strobel, as well as our first children books in Laos, published with the generous support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - SDC.

**And thanks to you all our Tree Planting Action has raised over 25.000\$ and we will have a busy start to the rainy season !**

RIK GADELLA, PHA TAD KE BOTANICAL GARDEN

## Content

- 1-4 Friends of Pha Tad Ke
- 5-9 News from Pha Tad Ke
- 10-12 Book Publications from Pha Tad Ke
- 13-20 Botanica of Laos by Elisabeth Vilayleck  
*Ritual Flowers*
- 21-23 Chroniques by Baj Strobel  
*Les voies du Bonheur*
- 24-29 *Portfolio: Vatthana Siamkha*
- 30-33 Some Books & Other Affairs we Love
- 34-38 Project Space • Luang Prabang

*The Pha Tad Ke Newsletter is distributed 3 times a year via e-mail.*

*Big thanks to our volunteer collaborators, and if anyone is interested to writing articles or help us with occasional translations please let us know.*

*© Pha Tad Ke & the authors, 2012. Subscription at [www.pha-tad-ke.com](http://www.pha-tad-ke.com)*





## **Friends of Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden**

In January 2010 the Friends of Pha Tad Ke Association was created in France followed in July 2011 in the Netherlands and September 2011 in Laos. Each of these non-profit associations helps the creation of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden with scientific support, fund raising efforts and educational projects. In addition the Luang Prabang Fund for Culture and Conservation that was created in 2011 in the USA accepts donations that are tax-deductible for the benefit of Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden or other cultural and conservation projects in the Lao PDR.

Helping the Friends of Pha Tad Ke will allow you to follow the day-to-day evolution of the garden, look behind the scenes of its operations and participate in the Pha Tad Ke adventure !

**Information: [www.friends-pha-tad-ke.com](http://www.friends-pha-tad-ke.com)**

**When you become a member for the creation phase, your 5-year (2010-2014) membership will entitle you to:**

**Member - € 100:**

- Our newsletter (3 times a year, english/french) contains news about the garden, on-going work and actions, and articles about the flora, arts and culture of Laos.

**Friend Member - € 300:**

- Private visit to PTK, including boat trip and picnic (for 2 pax, booking required)
- A 30% reduction on the garden's publications and products (except Folies)
- Access to our favoured travel agent in Laos, reductions on hotels and restaurants etc. (see list of the partners of the Friends)
- Mention of your name on our website
- An invitation for two people to the official opening.

**Support Member - Institutions & Companies - € 2,000:**

- Mention of your name on our website with your logo
- Discount of 10% on one of our editions « Folies »
- A private reception at the pre-opening for a group from your institution/company.

**Donor Member - € 5,000 €, or more:**

- Discount of 10% on two of our editions « Folies »
- Inclusion of your name on the donor plaque at the entrance to the garden.

**Members can increase their involvement in the creation of Pha Tad Ke by supporting one or more of our individual projects:**

• **Adopt a tree: from € 50 to € 2,000**

Buying and planting a tree is only a beginning. It must then be fed, cared for and pruned. This takes time, money and care. Love your tree and adopt a seedling or a mature tree.

• **Sponsor a Bookparty: € 400**

Guided visits to the gardens for groups of children or students, who will spend a day learning about Pha Tad Ke's work and plants. The package includes transport to the garden and lunch. At the end of the day, every participant will receive a copy of our specially published books.

• **Sponsor a student: € 4,400 for 4 years**

In conjunction with three institutions, PTK has set up a grant for the best first-year student. At the end of the first year of study, the winning student will be offered a scholarship that will allow him or her to continue his or her studies. In exchange, the recipient will be required to do a two-month work placement at the garden during summer recesses and to work at the garden for one year at the end of his/her studies.

• **Sponsor a research post: € 1,800 for one year**

Given the heavy workload at the university and the very low salaries in Laos, there is little time left for building research projects. With this grant PTK will enable a post doc to do a year's research on a topic chosen in consultation with PTK.

• **Sponsor a field trip: € 10,000**

In conjunction with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, we have set up a three-year partnership to train our horticultural team and to carry out an ambitious program of monthly field trips to gather specimens for a collection of living plants that will be unique in Laos. At the same time we will collect specimens for a herbarium. Each trip will require a substantial investment in time and money but this work is imperative as it will form the very foundations of our garden and its collections.

• **Sponsor a building: from € 15,000**

Several buildings will be required to house our collections and staff, and provide facilities for visitors. These buildings will include: Nurseries (€ 15,000), Orchid House (€ 27,000), Butterfly Farm (€ 32,000), Reception area (€95,000), Restaurant (€ 95,000), offices for research staff (€ 130,000), Traditional Medicines House (€ 135,000) and Library or Herbarium (€ 190,000).





The newly founded Laos chapter of the Friends of Pha Tad Ke has received their first generous grant from the FSD. The president of the association, Mixay Somsanouk receives the grant at the French Embassy.



Meeting of the  
Flora of Thailand in Chiang Mai  
November 2011

Meeting of the  
Southeast Asia Botanic Gardens Network  
in Xishuanbanna Tropical Botanical Garden  
and Kunming Botanical Garden  
December 2011







The Fund Raising Action  
***PLANT A TREE***  
launched in December 2011  
has raised over 25.000\$

**A BIG THANKS TO YOU ALL !**

we will be having a busy time planting  
before the next rainy season







Training at the National Herbarium Laos sponsored by Pha Tad Ke in the use of Brahms software for taxonomic research.

Field trip to Ban Chok, 20km from PTK with Anna Bazicaluppo botany student from Edinburgh participating.

Visit of students from Souphanouvong University.

Visit of students from National University Laos and Sydney University Study Tour.







Delivery of our new pontoon, first step in the upgrading of our irrigation works, sponsored by the Dutch Friends of Pha Tad Ke.

Yearly offering to the Spirits.

Beating the new rice harvest.





Ethno-botanist Biba Vilayleck spend  
3 months in PTK to work on the choice of plants  
and content of our ethno-botanic garden.

French botanist Patrick Blanc visits Pha Tad Ke  
January 2012

We welcome Somsanith Bouamanivong,  
Director of the National Herbarium Laos, as a new  
member on the PTK Scientific Committee







*Les fleurs  
de la dévotion*

ethnobotanique culturelle au Laos

BIBA VILAYLECK & BAJ STROBEL

*After 2 years in preparation we are very proud to present*

**Les Fleurs de la Dévotion**  
*Biba Vilayleck & Baj Strobel*

Book design by Olivier Leduc-Stein  
204 pages, 339 illustrations, 25 x 22cm  
Published in French language  
January 2012, Price 35 \$ / 29€

all orders at:  
[contact@pha-tad-ke.com](mailto:contact@pha-tad-ke.com)



Splendeur, sensualité, luxuriance qualifient les fleurs et plantes tropicales du Laos ; bien qu'utilisées comme comestibles, pour leurs vertus médicinales ou comme matériaux de construction, elles ont aussi une forte charge symbolique et une fonction dans l'art religieux.

Les auteurs, Michèle-Baj Strobel et Elisabeth Vilayleck ont observé avec attention les pratiques contemporaines de la tradition bouddhiste dans les temples monastères de Vientiane. Elles apportent ainsi un éclairage nouveau sur le culte, les décors et l'art floral d'un peuple profondément ancré dans son environnement naturel. Toutes les plantes utilisées (140) sont répertoriées par leur nom lao, leur nom européen, quand il existe, et par leur nom scientifique ; un glossaire et une bibliographie complètent l'ouvrage.

Splendid, sensuous, and lush, tropical flowers and plants in Laos, also play a powerful role in Lao traditional life not only as food, medicine and construction materials for shelter, but also as enduring spiritual symbols and delicate works of art. Delving thoughtfully into the living traditions of Buddhist practice in the ornate temples of Vientiane.

The authors, Michèle-Baj Strobel and Elisabeth Vilayleck, describe a rich tapestry of devotion and discipline in the floral decoration, ceremony and symbols revered by generations of orange-clad monks and the people they guide on the journey of life.

All the 140 plants described in the text are noted with their Laos, vernacular and scientific name, an index as well as a bibliography complete the publication.



ຕົ້ນໄມ້ ປຽບເໝືອນປອດຂອງພວກເຮົາ  
 ດຣ. ບົວໄຂຄອນ ສະແຫວງສິກສາ  
 ແຕ້ມໂດຍ ກິງເງິນ ແສງດີ

Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden - Luang Prabang



ເລັກງຸ້ນອຍໆ ກຸ່ງວັບເຄື່ອງປ່າຂອງດົງ  
 ຊຽນໂດຍ ຄຳຟາ ຈັນທະວົງສາ  
 ແຕ້ມໂດຍ ກິງເງິນ ແສງດີ

Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden - Luang Prabang



ດອກໄມ້ ທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກຂອງຊາດ ແລະ ຊາວພູດລາວ  
 ຊຽນໂດຍ ຮສ. ມະນີຈັນ ໄຊຍະວົງ  
 ແຕ້ມຮູບ ກິງເງິນ ແສງດີ

Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden - Luang Prabang

We have also published three books written for Laos children from 6 to 12 years.

All illustrations are made by Pha Tad Ke staff. Each book is printed in 6.000 copies with generous support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and distributed for free via an educational program through primary schools. Full color: 21 x 30cm.

*Dr. Boukhaykhone Svengsuksa*  
**Trees of Laos**

*Khamfa Chanthavongsa*  
**Plants of the Forest**

*Manichanh Sayavong*  
**Flowers and Symbols of Buddhism in Laos**





## Ritual Flowers



*The bodies of those who use flowers in their devotions will give off the perfume of sandalwood and their mouths the fragrance of lotus.  
“The Rewards of Flowers”*

In Laos, flowers constitute the language of ritual; their presence is a sign of the sacred, from a simple sprig of blossom beside the altar to the sometimes quite elaborate floral arrangements of the *baci* tray. In their simplicity and their profusion an offering of flowers is the quintessential offering, they are neither for nourishment nor of monetary value, they are quite ephemeral - lending only form and fragrance. It doesn't matter which specific flowers are used; it is clear from simply observing such rituals that white and orange are - as for many religious objects - the perfect colours. Although not having the great prestige of the lotus flower, certain flowers are reserved almost exclusively for ceremonial use and these are essentially *dok dao huang*, *dok phout* and *dok hak*.

*Dok dao huang* arranged.







In Laos, *dok dao huang*, or French marigold, which came from America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was cultivated in Europe as a decorative, medicinal and insecticidal plant, is used for offerings. It is a small herbaceous plant whose flowers are bright yellow, orange or mixed yellow, orange and purple. The leaves are dark green, narrow and indented, and give off quite a distinctive strong fragrance. The French marigold, (*Tagetes patula*) is much more modest in appearance than the African marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) which can grow as tall as 60 centimetres and has a much bigger flower. Its scientific name comes from that of the Etruscan god Tages.

This flower is found everywhere in both holy places and in religious handicraft - they blaze from every altar despite their modest size, the sidewalks are bright with the displays of sellers of religious flower arrangements, they deck coffins destined for the crematorium, they colour holy water decorate hundreds of cone-shaped arrangements that are made every day for the *Soukhouane* or *baci* ceremonies (the calling together of the souls). They are widely used in these rites because of their bright colour and great lasting ability. Their name means bright star and Lao people say that is why they are chosen for religious purposes. It is also true that African marigolds are very easy to grow, they flower all year round in tropical zones, and they are very easy to work with, their fat orange flowers very rapidly covering the cones of banana leaves. They are sold by the kilo on the markets and are usually cut with a short stem, which is easily inserted in the little green pagodas.

*Dok dao huang* in flower, in water, as *makbeng* and as powder.







*Dok Phout*, the Buddha Flower, is known as Jasmine gardenia in France but it belongs to the same family as the Frangipani. Linnaeus gave it its scientific name, *Tabernaemontana coronaria*, to it in honour of a German botanist. It came originally from a region north of India, which stretches across, to Laos. This 'jasmine' is a bushy evergreen shrub with shiny, leathery, opposing leaves. The white flowers are very fragrant and the petals are arranged like the blades of a windmill. It is sometimes classed as a gardenia but is distinguished by the fact that the stems exude a white sap when broken. It flowers at the end of the dry season, but there always seem to be fresh blooms in the markets for religious crafts. Indeed, buds of the *dok phout* are found in all floral rituals.

With its long peduncle, it fits perfectly into the spaces of the triangular folded banana leaves. It edges the larger cones on the baci tray, it is easy to thread into fine garlands or to make fat flowery, fragrant balls that one can hang up in ritual homage. This tiny flower bud allows more delicate, fine arrangements than the much larger marigold but they can be worked together harmoniously, as the pure white contrasts beautifully with the bright orange in a symbolic palette.

The *dok phout* flower and its usage





*Dok hak*, or 'Flower of Love', has many common names in French, sometimes "apple of Sodom", because it is poisonous and sometimes "vegetable mercury" as it was used for a long time as a treatment for syphilis. *Calotropis gigantea*, its scientific name, is a rural shrub, originally from the north of India, which grows all over Laos by the roadsides, in gardens and public places. The leaves are grey-green, single and woolly. Its flowers are a waxy white or sometimes slightly pink or mauve, the corolla is doubled to a thickness that botanists call a coronule with one flower inside the other. *Dok hak* is traditionally used for artistic purposes. The fibres of its stem and the spikes on its seeds make a useful pulp for paper, which was once made in Laos - nowadays the fluffy interior of the seedpods is used like kapok. The stems are still twisted into good quality string. As well, a decoction of its leaves makes a yellow dye. The leaves, the bark and the abundant milky sap of the *dok hak* are used for a number of different medicinal preparations. For instance, a ball of cotton wool dipped in the sap is used to soothe toothache and the leaves are often used as a poultice for rheumatism. But the love flower in Laos is above all a symbolic flower. Because of its name it is used for weddings; the leaves are made into cone-shaped holders for the candles and the flowers that are held by a couple during the wedding ceremony, and flowers threaded onto sticks decorate the baci table placed in front of the wedding couple. They are quite easy to work with; they made delicate and elegant flower arrangements on cones of banana leaves.





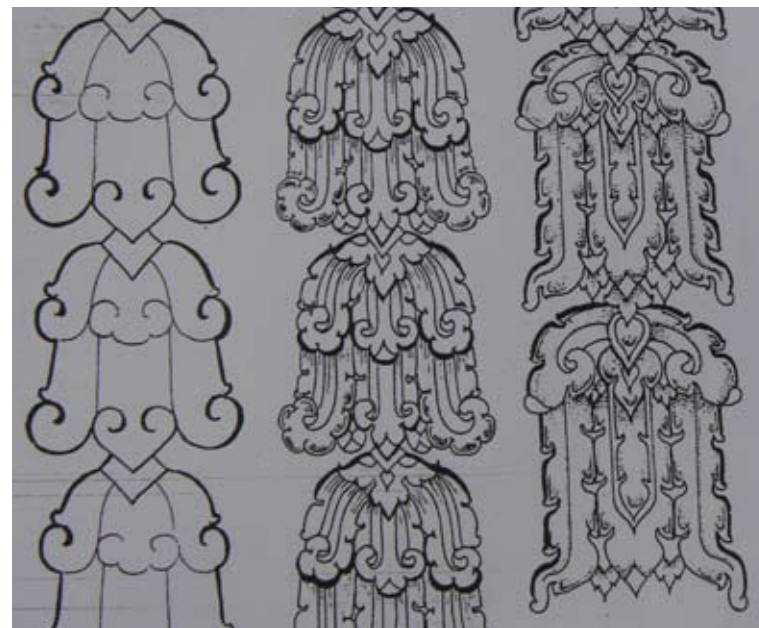


In the 1900's, Raquez noted the decorative possibilities of these flowers:

*"This flower with its subtle fragrance creates an arrangement that is all white and triples in size. The full buds go together quite symmetrically. If one opens the petals, what looks like five buttresses around the central stem appear. Turned over, they look quite different and create a third pattern. There are no leaves on the cone shape - only the flowers pressed snugly together and speared by little bamboo sticks."*



To complete Raquez' description it must be added that when these five petals are raised, only the coronule remains, a strange flower with which artists construct garlands in painting, sculpture, and anything else decorative for particular ceremonies. The architecture of these blossoms lends itself to both living floral offerings as well as to those carved in stone. In Lao temples, garlands of flowers define the spaces, decorate the tops of pillars and baseboards and serve as framing.



Once the petals are removed, the coronule of the *dok bak* has an incomparable decorative motif. Either on a thin bamboo stick, in a book of drawings or in a garland of stone, the beautiful curve of the flower defines space elegantly.

Other rare and more neglected flowers have been and are still used sometimes for the preparation of floral rituals, always from the palate of white and orange colours. Among these *dok kham phama* once held a very important place. It belongs to the genus *Saraca* (*Leguminosae*) and originates in the region of Indo Malaysia. In Thailand and in Laos, there are a dozen wild species.



These medium-sized trees prefer to grow in the shade of their neighbours. Their glossy leaves are composed in folioles in the shape of an arrow head and when they are young they are violet and white in colour and hang softly, giving the tree its distinctive appearance. The little flowers in a corymb inflorescence at the ends of the branches are in big spiky powder puffs with very long stamens. They are yellow-orange and turn to a brick colour as they mature. This stunning flowering and its subtle perfume it gives off are the reason for the reputation of the *Saraca* tree. Sometimes in Laos, one has the delightful experience, in a glade deep in the forest in the dry season, of seeing the flamboyance of the *Saraca declinata*, and sometimes in gardens, but they are seen mainly in the temples which are decorated with these beautiful trees or by another species, *Saraca indica*, introduced from India. This flower, which has a golden colour and a subtle fragrance, was the flower of choice for Buddhist rituals - long ago it was gathered to place on the top of the *baci* cone, but nowadays it's easier to buy marigolds, which have the same brilliant colour. In Laos, perfumed flowers are highly prized. But the reasons for the popularity of a particular flower in a certain time are often ignored in another age. Thus it is now rare to find people who know the *dok sakoun* (*Mimusops elengi*) as it is not a name that is often given to young girls, a name which is often confused with the Thai name *Pikun*.

Left: *Saraca declinata* / Right: *Mimusops elengi*





This lovely tree originated in India and belongs to the same family as the sapodilla. Its leaves are oblong, notched and dark green. The auxiliary flowers look like a little star with a thousand points. The fruit, known as the Malabar Plum, is a plump, shiny, oval-shaped berry, yellow or orange when ripe and contains many seeds. They are edible but not often eaten. The plant is best known for its fragrance, which lasts for a long time, even after it has become dry. An Indian text describes this languorous fragrance as being similar to sandalwood with the addition of orange blossom, tuberose and gardenia. In the past women used the highly perfumed, creamy little flowers to make garlands to wrap around their chignons, but these days the practice has been abandoned as too laborious.



*Dok salika* has a number of things in common with *dok sakoun*. These two highly perfumed plants are both of Indian origin and both have rather been forgotten in Laos these days, known only to specialists or nature lovers, although the name is popular in Laos despite confusion with the Thai name.

This little, rather twisted tree has pointed, oval notched leaves with a rough surface - so much so that they are used as an abrasive. Its small flowers occur in bunches at the ends of the branches and are characterized by a bright orange, tubular corolla surrounded by 5 to 7 petals of a waxy white. The flowers open at night and give off a delicious perfume but then fall and strew the ground by morning. Legend and, later, science were influenced by this behaviour in naming the plant. A story from India recounts how the daughter of a tribal chief fell in love with the sun, which, after having possessed her, left her for other lovers. In despair she killed herself. This tree, which has a horror of the sun, grew from her ashes and is never seen in the sun. Botanists inspired by this story, gave it the name *Nictanthes arbor-tristis* or the "Tree that weeps at night". In Laos, the elders say that in the past garlands (*so dok may*) were made with *dok salika* because the flowers were both orange and white.

Left: *Nycanthes* / Right: "Bouquet" of *Gomphrena*







However, this chromatic constant does have some exceptions, particularly *dok sam pi*, *Gomphrena globosa*. In France it is called Immortelle and in English it is called Everlasting, but Lao people are more realistic and don't give it more than three years, calling it the 'Three Year Flower'.



The plant has small bushy straight stems and leaves of a slightly bluish green. The flower heads are ball-shaped bracts in purple, white or pink and inside have tiny white flowers. A speciality of Luang Prabang the arrangements of these pompons are in soft rounded cone shapes called *phoums*. These white pink and purple "bouquets" appear on altars as a confirmation that rules are sometimes made to be broken.

*Dok sam pi* is the exception that confirms the rule, its violet and white flowers cover the *phoum*, floral offerings Luang Prabang style. These young novices hold in their hands flowers in traditional colors but from recent introduction: *Heliconia* et *Solandra*.





## LES VOIES DU BONHEUR

Texte Jean Marie Pelt & Photographies : Sebastiao Salgado

Editions de la Martinière, Paris, Octobre 2010, 179pp.

Les deux auteurs sont fort célèbres, le premier pour ses engagements dans l'écologie à travers un institut européen qu'il a fondé à Metz et ses nombreuses publications ; l'autre par ses témoignages photographiques et son regard de témoin sur un monde qui disparaît incontestablement sur l'ensemble de la planète. Il interroge notamment, à travers son projet *Genesis*, les derniers espaces vierges et les liens entretenus entre certaines populations et leur environnement en sursis.

Il faut avouer que le titre paraît un peu désuet et malvenu. Tout l'ouvrage comprend près de 160 photographies en noir et blanc et rendent plutôt compte de la détresse de la survie que de la jouissance du bonheur. Il est donc une voie ouverte sur de bonnes intentions et des évidences que personne ne saurait contester.

Six grandes parties, précédées d'une introduction, composent l'ouvrage. En ouverture, l'auteur évoque la crise actuelle et l'éventualité de trouver de nouvelles opportunités en se mettant à l'écoute de la « sagesse immémoriale » qui place l'homme et la nature au sein d'un destin partagé. Depuis la Renaissance, l'Occident a rompu les liens d'alliance et d'appartenance

qui l'attachaient à la nature. L'écologie a heureusement fait irruption au cœur de nos préoccupations tournées vers l'accumulation des biens consommables et tellement périssables. « *Tournons-nous vers une sobriété heureuse* ». Celle-ci serait encore l'apanage des sociétés où traditions ancestrales et spiritualités nourrissent les âmes et la vie des personnes. (P. 11).

Suit alors une longue litanie des blessures faites à la nature : le déboisement en Chine, en Inde et au Népal mais aussi en Amazonie, suscitent non seulement l'érosion des sols et les catastrophes météorologiques, mais entraînent surtout la perturbation des milieux naturels pour les populations qui y survivent difficilement. De la sorte disparaissent leurs connaissances du milieu, des plantes notamment, dont ils font leur quotidien pour se nourrir et se soigner.

« *le phénomène planétaire de la combustion des carburants fossiles a eu, comme chacun le sait maintenant, des effets redoutés sur le climat. De ce fait, le sort de l'homme est implicitement lié à celui qu'il réserve à la nature* ». (P. 16)

En 1854 un ancien chef indien, nommé Seathl, s'est adressé ainsi au « Grand chef de Washington » :

« *Nous faisons partie de cette terre comme elle fait partie de nous. Peut-on acheter ou vendre le ciel, la chaleur, et la terre ? Etrange idée pour nous ! Si nous ne sommes pas propriétaires de la fraîcheur de l'air, ni du miroitement de l'eau, comment pouvez-vous nous l'acheter ?* » (P. 20)

Ne faudrait-il pas, se mettre à la recherche d'une nouvelle alliance avec les biens naturels que notre temps tente de redécouvrir après des siècles d'exploitation ?

Dans cette partie, les photos de Salgado mettent l'accent sur la forêt amazonienne au Brésil, sur l'intimité naturelle que l'on devine entre un immense manguier et des enfants au Soudan et aussi une bataille de corps s'activant sous un soleil de plomb dans un champ de cannes au Brésil.



## LES VOIES DU BONHEUR

TEXTE : Jean-Marie Pelt PHOTOGRAPHIES : Sebastião Salgado



Le second chapitre s'intitule : « *Protéger la nature qui nous protège* ». Une image en gros plan représentant des mains de femme en train de cueillir du thé au Rwanda illustre l'idée que c'est la nature entière qu'il convient de protéger si nous voulons nous préserver nous-mêmes. Plusieurs textes sont à l'appui de ces assertions que personne ne critiquerait. Néanmoins, plusieurs citations viennent étayer ces évidences : Gandhi, le Dalai Lama, le Prophète par la voix du Coran, mais aussi Victor Hugo, le Talmud...

La diversité et ses valeurs résument la portée du chapitre suivant. L'écologie attire en particulier l'attention sur ce caractère fondamental et constitutif de la nature qui est la diversité. « *Qu'il s'agisse des astres, des espèces vivantes ou des ethnies, la diversité est partout, l'uniformité nulle part* » (P. 70). Là encore un texte, de l'épopée de Gilgamesh, plus précisément, vient à l'appui de ces évidences qui de ce fait sont portées par une certaine envolée lyrique:

*« Construis un vaisseau  
abandonne les richesses et recherche la vie,  
laisse ce que tu possèdes et sauve ta vie !  
Fais monter la semence de toute vie dans un bateau,  
Un bateau que toi tu auras construit. »* (P. 78)

L'idée du bonheur se concrétise et se dissocie peu à peu de celle de la consommation ; c'est du moins ce que préconise le chapitre intitulé « *La sobriété heureuse* ». En effet, la terre s'épuise à produire des richesses que nous gaspillons et qui





ne sont pas toutes renouvelables. La sobriété doit aller de pair avec la modération des désirs. Les camps de réfugiés en Tanzanie, des images du Rwanda, du Soudan, mais aussi de Sicile mettent alors l'accent sur les biens fondamentaux que célèbrent aussi les textes spirituels invitant les humains à une modestie raisonnable :

*« Il n'est pas plus grande erreur que de vouloir satisfaire ses désirs. Il n'est pas de plus grand misère que de ne pas savoir se suffire... c'est pourquoi celui qui sait se contenter de peu est toujours satisfait ».*

Lao Tseu, dans le *Livre du Tao*.

Une très belle photo quasi surréaliste, faisant référence à Magritte, illustre cette partie mais également de très belles évocations contrastées de l'île de la Réunion, d'Ethiopie et encore du Brésil.

Une avant-dernière partie essaie de rendre compte de l'élan qui porte l'homme à trouver Dieu dans la nature. En devenant maître et possesseur de celle-ci, l'humain en a fait un matériau inerte qui a cessé *« d'être une mère comme dans les traditions antiques, pour devenir une sujette »*. Dans bien d'autres sociétés, celles d'Amazonie indienne par exemple, la matérialité des choses n'est que l'expression des esprits qui les animent. Lorsqu'on se met *« à l'écoute des grandes traditions spirituelles, l'on découvre, dans la contemplation de la nature, la beauté du créateur »*. (P. 124). La force de l'animisme est rendue par des photographies du Brésil, d'Indonésie, d'Equateur. Les textes porteurs se réfèrent aux traditions chrétiennes, talmudiques, coraniques mais aussi confucéennes.

Le dernier chapitre intitulé *« La règle d'or »* est une sorte de manifeste pour une morale écologique. Au-delà du chaos, de l'agitation, de la perte du sens et des repères, émerge dans la conscience de nos contemporains une nouvelle morale liée à l'usage qu'ils font de la terre et de ses ressources.

Ainsi, l'écologie pourrait devenir *« la religion consensuelle de notre temps »*. Ce souhait s'accompagnerait de la sobriété dans la consommation et de la protection du vivant. Pour cela il faut s'imprégner des textes et traditions philosophiques, spirituelles et religieuses de toutes origines. Il est suggéré de donner une certaine hauteur textuelle à une tradition judéo-chrétienne *« suspectée d'être la cause et le moteur de l'exploitation honteuse et de la dégradation rapide de la terre »*. (P. 141)

Les nuances infinies des gris distillent tout au long de l'ouvrage un hommage à la terre et ses habitants. Le choix du noir et blanc donne une densité évidente au regard acéré et troublant porté par Sebastiao Salgado à la fois sur l'énergie du vivant et les troubles et drames engendrés par le non respect des forces naturelles. Qui n'a pas été subjugué par cette image de la trouée grouillante de la Sierra Pelada, au Brésil ? Elle a fait la célébrité de ce photographe, qui a formé, avec Jean Marie Pelt, un duo assez convainquant pour traduire les questions cruciales mettant en relation peuples prédateurs, consommateurs, qui s'arrogent le droit de dominer terres et hommes de sociétés différentes. Ces dernières, acculées à la mondialisation sont loin de partager ces outrances, mais n'auront bientôt plus d'espace ni de voix pour les dénoncer.





## Portfolio by Vatthana Siamkha

My name is Vatthana Siamkha and I am 29 years old. I am from Luang Prabang, Laos. In 2010, I graduated from the International Hotel and Tourism Industry Management School in Bangkok, Thailand, after completing studies in finance and English teacher at college in Luang Prabang.

I love learning about new things, especially new technology. I have been interested in photography since I was 21, when my father brought some cameras (both film and digital) home from work. He worked for the Department of Information and Culture in Luang Prabang and a part of his job was to shoot photos of government conferences.

I was curious to know how to use the cameras and I asked his permission to experiment with them. I took some photos of friends and family and found I really enjoyed it!

Taking photos fills me with happiness;



it is the only way to keep the good memories of life. I enjoy looking back at my photos and have continued taking photos and improving my photography skills ever since my first experiences with my father's cameras. I like taking photos of nature, landscapes, macros and portraits. I own a semi-pro camera and a few lenses. I work at 3 Nagas Hotel, located in the center of Luang Prabang. If you have a chance to pass by the hotel please stop by and look for me. I would be very happy to get ideas about photography from you.

















**@ My library** is the brain and heartchild of Carol Kresge and some of our staff used to hang out here a lot when they were studying. We are very happy that Carol has accepted to curate our portfolio series with young talent from the Young Lao Photographer's Gallery **@ My library**.

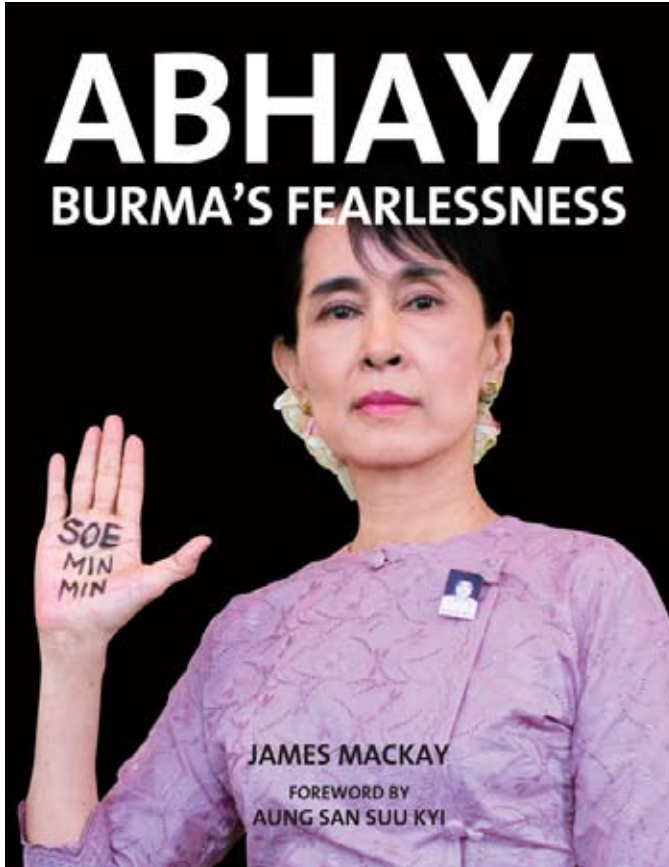
**@ My library** is a community based resource center for the youth of Luang Prabang. It is an ongoing experiment in what happens when you give motivated users the materials and encouragement they need to study anything. The numbers tell some of the story, with an average of 100+ students a day, 1,000+ books checked-out each month, and 25,000 computer hours logged last year. But the story is really about the users.

They come to read, study languages and computer, watch science, math, culture and history videos, play word games, do puzzles, thinking and problem solving activities, listen to audio books and music, enter contests, use the internet, learn photography and Photoshop and borrow cameras.

Photography is one of the most popular activities **@ My Library**. When people started asking to buy the photos on our walls we created the Young Lao Photographer's Gallery. While Laos has been photographed by many world class photographers, our angle is unique... this is our life, our families and friends, our inspirations and aspirations... this is "Laos Through Our Own Eyes."

If you are in Luang Prabang, visit our gallery **@ My Library** opposite Wat Nong between L'Elephant and Tamarind Restaurants. If not you can view selected photos in our online gallery at <http://laophotographers.zenfolio.com/>

**@ My Library** and the Young Lao Photographer's Gallery are part of The Language Project, an American 501(c)3 charity. [www.thelanguageproject.org](http://www.thelanguageproject.org)



**ABHAYA : BURMA'S FEARLESSNESS**

*James Mackay, foreword by Aung San Suu Kyi*

River Books, Bangkok 2012.

ISBN 978 616 7339 13 9, 224 pp. \$ 30,00

In 1962 a military coup lead by General Ne Win saw Burma, an isolated Buddhist country in South-East Asia, come under the power of one of the world's most brutal regimes. For the past five decades, thousands of people have been arrested, tortured and given long prison sentences for openly expressing their beliefs. Today, more than 2,000 political prisoners including monks, students, journalists, lawyers, elected Members of Parliament and over 300 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party, The National League for Democracy, are incarcerated in horrendous conditions in Burma's notorious prisons. In Burma and across the world, hundreds of former political prisoners have come together to raise awareness of the tragic plight of their colleagues still detained in jail. Abhaya – Burma's Fearlessness is part of an international appeal for their liberation.

Photographed standing with their right hand raised, palm out-turned facing the camera, the name of a current political prisoner is shown written on their hand. The sacred Buddhist gesture of Abhaya, "Fear Not", is not only an act of silent protest, but also one of remembrance and fearlessness.

*"The people featured in this book have all had to learn to face their fears squarely during the decades they have passed in the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. Their commitment has been their courage. It is important that they and what they stand for should not be forgotten, that their sufferings as well as their aspirations should be remembered. James Mackay has contributed greatly towards this vital remembrance, which is essential if our world is to become a progressively safer, kinder home for humanity."*

*"I hope that all who read this book will be encouraged to do everything they can to gain the freedom of political prisoners in Burma and to create a world where there are no political prisoners."*

Aung San Suu Kyi



AROUND LAOS IN 1900

*A PHOTOGRAPHER'S ADVENTURES*

A. Raquez

White Lotus Press, Bangkok 2012. Reprint from 1900.

ISBN 978-974-480-182-1, 560 pp. \$ 29,50

Pour qui s'intéresse au Laos et à son univers végétal ce livre est passionnant. Il est certes ancien, il a été écrit il y a plus de 100 ans, mais une réédition récente permet à tous de profiter de ce récit d'un voyageur occidental dans un Laos encore très peu connu et où tout est à découvrir. La richesse de cet ouvrage de référence n'en permet pas une analyse exhaustive c'est pourquoi nous avons choisi d'évoquer uniquement la façon dont Raquez analyse le rapport qu'ont les Laotiens avec leur environnement végétal. Nous n'oublierons pas tout au long de notre lecture que l'observateur est un homme du XIX<sup>e</sup> imprégné des préjugés de son époque et qui, pourtant, se montre singulièrement attentif à l'autre, aussi bien dans ses modes de vie que dans ses sentiments et ses croyances ; c'est assez rare à l'époque pour le souligner ici et c'est ce qui fait l'intérêt de cet ouvrage.

La première remarque à faire est la modernité du regard que porte Raquez sur le Laos. Lorsqu'il parle d'une plante inconnue en Europe il en donne, presque dans tous les cas son nom lao ce qui suppose qu'il a fait une enquête. Son attitude est celle de l'anthropologue moderne qui pense que pour comprendre l'autre il faut comprendre et respecter sa

## Around Laos in 1900 A Photographer's Adventures

A. Raquez

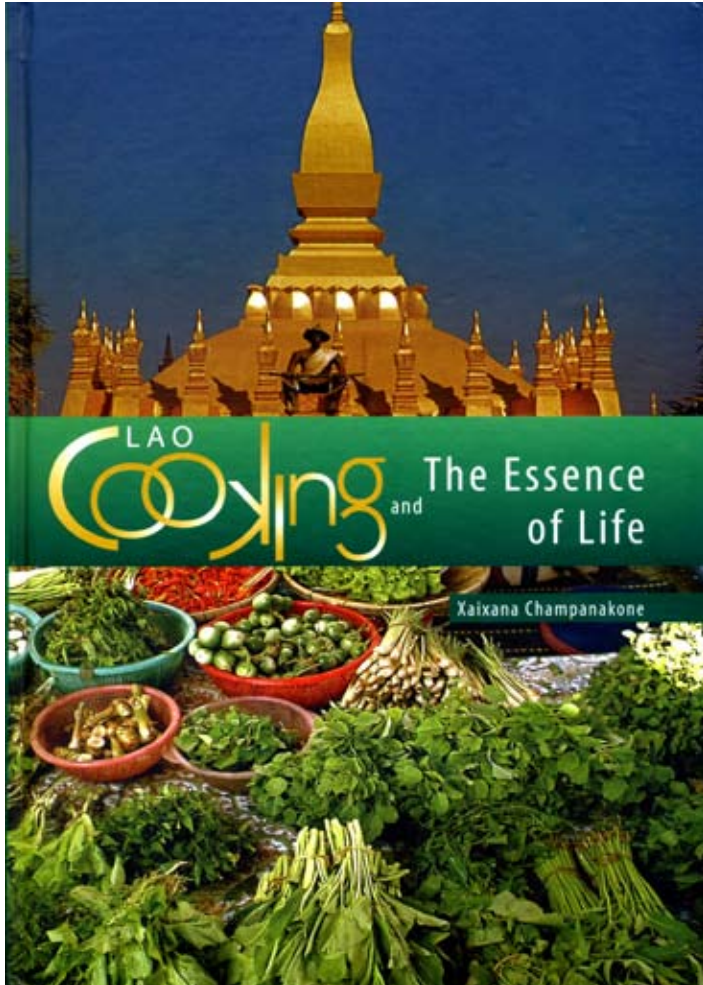


langue. Ainsi il observe la façon dont on collecte la sève de certains arbres : « ce sont des may niang d'espèce résineuse. Les indigènes creusent l'arbre, y mettent le feu pendant quelques heures et en éteignent ensuite les ardeurs. La résine coule alors abondante ». De la même façon il parlera du kok boc ou du jeu de tikhi qui « se fait avec une noix de coco consciencieusement graissée ».

Il observe en ethnologue les usages du pays comme la façon dont les bateliers du Mékong se font tatouer, avec de l'indigo, un tigre « dont les phi de l'eau ont grand peur ». Il collecte également un certain nombre de contes et devinettes, telle celle qui décrit l'Aréquier : « son long corps se tient debout et majestueux portant sur la tête un chapeau à queue de phénix. Il couve ses petits pendant l'hiver et les nourrit pendant l'été ». Il est écologiste avant l'heure lorsqu'il déplore la disparition programmée du Teck exploité massivement pour son bois.

Enfin tout au long de l'ouvrage il revient sur les relations des Laotiens avec leurs voisins et avec une naïveté touchante il insiste sur la supériorité du peuple lao.

This extensive report presents information on the daily life and livelihood of various groups of people in Laos. First published in 1902 as a travelogue around Upper, Central and Lower Laos, this book also includes an assessment by a Frenchman critical of development work already undertaken by the French colonial administration. Raquez was travelling with the chief administrator of a



recently unified Laos and thus he was close enough to power to obtain information no other writer of the time managed to obtain. Contemporary personalities, colonial administrators and scholars pass before Raquez's sharp eyes as do Laotian and Siamese personalities of the time. Besides presenting a number of straightforward pro-French political considerations on the Indochinese colony and its neighbour, Siam, the book also provides a multitude of facts about its natural setting, economic products, food, history, geography, legal system, customs and religions and about the life and struggles of various highland tribes. The book includes 135 period photographs made by A. Raquez during his journey around all provinces of the country.

#### LAO COOKING AND THE ESSENCE OF LIFE

*Vincent Fischer-Zernin*

White Lotus Press, Bangkok 2011. 206 pp. \$ 30,00

How the book happened Ten years ago, after having spent the better part of my time in Thailand, life sent me to Laos. Contrary to knowing everything, with only a river separating these two countries, I knew nothing. There is to this day no book available about Laos which is written with insight, respect and deep appreciation in discovery of the wonder that is Lao people's attitude to life. The seeker in me had no choice but to set out on his

## Belgian Tourists in Burma, Siam, Vietnam and Cambodia

Captain Georges Chaudoir  
Mr. and Mrs. Émile Jottrand



White Lotus



own. Three years into this pursuit Sisavanh Manlom became my friend and teacher opening up a spectacular new world where simplicity and sanity reign supreme. He handed me the keys to Lao society and culture. In Laos, conversation about such earth shaking matters is carried on with leisure and for pleasure, which is obviously done over food. This I prepared for the occasions, creating the mood, and challenging his taste buds. His tastes buds said: ? Listen to me, write this down?. The beginning of a cookbook was made. Eating and talking, or rather listening, made it soon clear that the way Lao people cook to nourish body and soul is nothing other than an extension of their ?being?, going about life with ease and humility. To understand Lao Cooking one needs to understand all things Lao. The cookbook became a book about the Lao, a universal book about Cooking and Life.

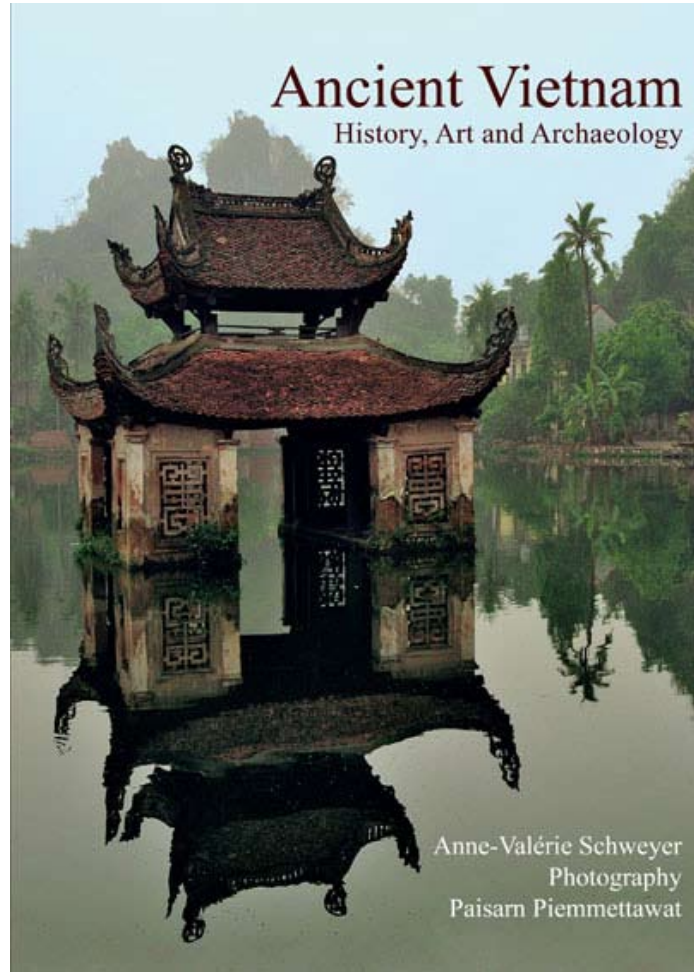
### BELGIAN TOURISTS IN BURMA, SIAM, VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA (1897)

*Chandoir, Georges & Mr. & Mrs. Emile Jottrand*

White Lotus Press, Bangkok 2011.

300 pp. \$ 27,00

This first English translation presents two travelogues of Belgian travellers around the turn of the twentieth century. A journey through the Nagaland Hills in present-day India, Burma and Siam to Bangkok in Thailand.



### ANCIENT VIETNAM HISTORY, ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

*Anne-Valérie Schweyer, Photography Paisarn Piemmettawat*  
River Books, Bangkok 2012.

ISBN 978 974 9863 75 6, 428 pp. \$ 25,00

The history of Vietnam is one of spectacular confrontations, both cultural and ideological between the world of the Chinese – a world adopted by the ethnic Viet living in the Red river basin – and the Indian world – facets of which are seen in the Cham, whose numerous small kingdoms were strung out all along the coast from north of Hue to south of Phan Rang.

The first part of this book presents a comprehensive history of Vietnam from the 6th to 15th centuries, highlighting the clashes between the two major civilisations which are the foundation of modern Vietnam. The second part takes the reader on a tour of over 60 archaeological sites which are a testament to this history. Maps, plans and numerous photographs will help us to experience the history of ancient Vietnam both in its early beginnings and its subsequent evolution.

French scholar Anne-Valérie Schweyer is an acknowledged expert in Cham history and has contributed to many books and journals.



## Project Space • Luang Prabang

**Project Space • Luang Prabang** is a multifunction nonprofit space for producing exhibitions and events. The building with three floors, and a rooftop terrace with stunning views, is in the centre of Luang Prabang and will host several exhibitions per year and collaborate with other cultural institutions in Luang Prabang and elsewhere, on joint events and projects.

**Project Space • Luang Prabang** is an initiative of Jean-Pierre Dovat and Rik Gadella.

**Project Space • Luang Prabang**  
Kitsalat Road 6 (Opposite Dara Market)  
Luang Prabang, Lao PDR  
Tel: + 856 71 21309

[www.projectspace-luangprabang.com](http://www.projectspace-luangprabang.com)





**Exhibition: December 17th 2011 - February 26th 2012**

**PALATTEU CHAMPASSAK**  
**SHADOW THEATRE OF CHAMPASSAK**  
**Drawings by Somphone Vongsouvanh**

*The Renewal of a Genre*

Shadow puppetry is part of a long-standing tradition in Asia. Probably originating in China, where we get the phrase ‘Chinese shadows’, this form of entertainment is also enjoyed in India, in Indonesia, in Cambodia and undoubtedly other places as well. The renewal of this type of popular spectacle forms part of a larger project, which is the registration of Wat Phu as a World Heritage site. In 2007, one of the architects responsible for the sites met an elderly ‘shadow master’ who told him about how the shows were staged around 1975 and showed him the temple where the precious puppets, probably dating from the fifties, were being kept. These were then acquired by the architect in charge of the project and are now part of the collection in the Wat Phu Museum. Because of this, another elderly puppeteer, Mr. Somphone, decided to fix up the characters, as they should be and to restore the luster and vigour of this form of theatre, known as the Palatteu of Champassak.



### The Scripts

The characters and the situations take one back to stories like the legendary Ramayana of ancient India, re-told in Sanskrit and dating from the 3rd century BC. But other edifying legends and stories add to flesh out the repertoire of the show; like, for example, the story of 'Khatthanam' or that of 'The Four Frangipanis' More than 160 roles will be memorized by the puppeteers who interpret these theatrical amusements. This is essentially comic theatre that occasionally takes a swipe at the powers that be.

Remember the adventures kept in the Pralak Pralam, which are the Lao version of the Ramayana. It has the special quality of re-uniting the different episodes where oral and written tradition combine in a complex manner. The thread of the story is the adventures of the prince Rama who has been unjustly thrown into tragic adventures to find his beloved wife Sita who has been stolen from him.

### Drawings of articulated models

It is essentially the original drawings of Mr Somphone, which are presented in this exhibition. Imagined and created according to memorised models, the characters come to life on large sheets of paper. Colored with crayon, they appear shaded as if to make them more substantial and each articulated arm is presented next





to the character, separated from it and uncoloured. The designer and creator is a sort of orchestrator of the group, the guardian of the shapes who writes in a book all the characteristics of each role, of which he knows the attributes, the noble deeds, character traits, the voice and the legends that it depicts.

Created first on paper, the designs are then placed, like a pattern, on a piece of dry leather, which is tailored to the desired shape. The tracing of the silhouette and the features of the character are the most creative part of the making of the puppets. Then all that remains is to connect the pieces of leather and fix them onto a stick. Some figures are pierced, allowing for the play of light and evocative shadows.

### Two types of Puppets: a game of light and shadows

The exhibition at Project Space • Luang Prabang, presents both a large display of the drawings of Mr. Somphone and a representative collection of puppets from the past and today. It is therefore interesting to compare designs and articulated objects. The very old pieces are instantly recognizable; they are fully formed, schematic, almost naïf and decorated with openwork, like Keo, who wears a sort of sarong, a pralong, the checked black and white cloth worn by men after a bath. Keo, very expressive, always speaks Lao, and is part of the first trilogy, with Nhot and Palatteu,



an essential part of the plays. Other characters like the Kinari (feminine characters with bird's tails), the princes and princesses are worked differently - rather more like sculptures or the murals one sees painted in temples. All the figures, from the drawings as well as the puppets that are shown here, come from a hybrid text made up of the entanglement of many other texts which decline into many plots and their intertwined stories. It is rather like we are looking at a skein of multiple threads. There is a resonance in the telling of these stories in the art of weaving fabric, integral to Laos; the exchange of dialogue, the enchantment of spirits and the reflection of the cycle of life, in richness and poverty, that echoes the style and movement of the stories and the puppets.

**Michèle-Baj Strobel**

*Translation by: Suzy Young*