

HELIUM FILMS and STUDIO HANS LUCAS present

SCARS OF CAMBODIA

a project by

Emilie Arfeuil

Alexandre Liebert



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SCARS OF CAMBODIA is a *movie*, a **photographic work** and a **webdocumentary**. The french partners Emilie Arfeuille, photographer, and Alexandre Liebert, director, testify of the Khmer Rouge History through the portrait of a Cambodian who carries physical and moral scars of it.



Picture from Alexandre Liebert movie

SYNOPSIS

Tut is a 52 years old fisherman living in Kampot. In spite of the language barrier, he told, for the first time and without any words, about his past during the Khmer Rouge Regime, to a photographer and a director, showing the hard treatments he experienced in a prison the year he turned fifteen. This shared encounter talks about the buried memory, the way it shows through gestures, attitudes and glances, the way it marks someone for life and constitutes a person. Tut's psychological and physical traumas bring to light the historical scars of Cambodia.

EVENTS // SCREENINGS & EXHIBITIONS

From 14th to 18th Décembre 2012:

Screening during the CIFF (Cambodian International Film Festival)

Du 22 Décembre au 5 Janvier 2013:

Photography Exhibition at the Bophana Center, Phnom Penh.

22 Décembre 2012 à partir de 17h:

Opening of the Exhibition and Screening at the Bophana Center, Phnom Penh.

27 Décembre 2102 à 17h // 3 Janvier 2013 à 17h:

Screenings at the Bophana Center, Phnom Penh.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When Polpot took control of Cambodia in 1975, he was determined to create a completely new society starting by destroying all the aspects of the former one. His communist regime began by executing systematically every person who had relations with the former government, and built prisons and forced-labor camps. Determinedly agrarians, the Angkar set agricultural population against city-dwellers, accused of being contaminated by the bourgeois imperialism. Phnom Penh was immediately emptied and its population sent to the countryside in camps to work under watch. They laud the intellectuals elimination and the reeducation of adult populations by manual labor.

Led by Pol Pot, this dictatorship terrorizes the population during 3 years 8 months and 20 days : the inhabitants are starved, imprisoned, tortured, or sent to forced labor camps. This genocide killed 1,7 million Cambodians, almost 21% of the population.

While today the trial of the old government is finally in progress more than 30 years after the facts, what's going on into the mind of the survivors ?



© Emilie Arfeuil

SCARS

Cambodia still carries the tracks of this genocide and has to learn how to deal with, without taboos, to reconstruct itself over it. This crime against humanity left moral and physical scars hardly hidden and which the Cambodian population has to live with every day. An omnipresence of History which is so engraved that it becomes the personal history of each.

Few Cambodians who survived this period have the desire or the courage to speak about it. This absence of word leads the victims to a long and painfull path to the statement of past traumas, losses, and mournings. This burden is aggravated by the poverty which remains very wide-spread in the Kingdom.

ENCOUNTER

It is one of these meetings which marks a life. At the foot of your building, in the coffee shop or far at the end of the world. It is by chance that Emilie and Alexandre met Tut, on a small street of pilotis houses, In outskirts of the city of Kampot, Cambodia. Emilie's resemblance with one of Tut's lost sisters started the encounter, the mutual curiosity, then the return of the memory and the sudden need to tell. It is more than 30 years later that Tut choosed to tell his story for the first time.



© Emilie Arfeuil

After almost a month with him during both shootings in last January then September, a deep intimacy and a real trust built itself between Tut and the couple of artists. It is thanks to this trust that for the first time, through the memories of his past, he revealed the horror of the Polpot regime.

A SILENT TESTIMONY

Till their first meeting in August 2010, Tut had himself decided to approach this painful subject and to entrust them, as if it was natural to speak to them about it, as if the moment had finally come. When they came back one and a half year later with their cameras, they decided not to question him : they simply give him th freedom to talk.

The language barrier engages a communication without words which they will choose to keep intact in all the project : they will not appeal to a translator, they will not make interviews. When the words or the language create a distance, the body language creates a direct, sensorial, emotional, sometimes very rough and violent, in front of the memory's assaults. The transmission of the memory will remain thus silent, through gestures and paper writing, within the framework of an intimate and not formal encounter.



Picture from Alexandre Liebert movie

A SUBJECTIVE PORTRAIT

In *Scars of Cambodia*, the History as archive documents or historic explanations, will stay of the order of the invisible. The visible will be the version of History which Tut chose to share and tell, his own history, with all the subjectivity that it contains and which is the heart of the project's subject.

Tut is a witness among so many others, an individual memory which is one of the stones that builds the History of his country. **The main question is not to inform again about the tragical History of Cambodia but to show how an individual deals today with the scars of this heavy past.** Beyond a reflexion about Memory, it is an intimate encounter to bring back the human being out of inhumanity.



© Emilie Arfeuil

DOCUMENTARY AND ARTISTIC INTENTIONS

This project declines in several media : at the same time a **photographic work** (exhibitions, publications), a 30mn movie (mixing photography and video), and a webdocumentary in 2013.

The photographer's and director's sensibility is similar: human, more sensorial than consensual, and at the same time documentary and artistic. They focus their glances on the same subject, the same event, the same moment; they are particular, personal, different but complementary.

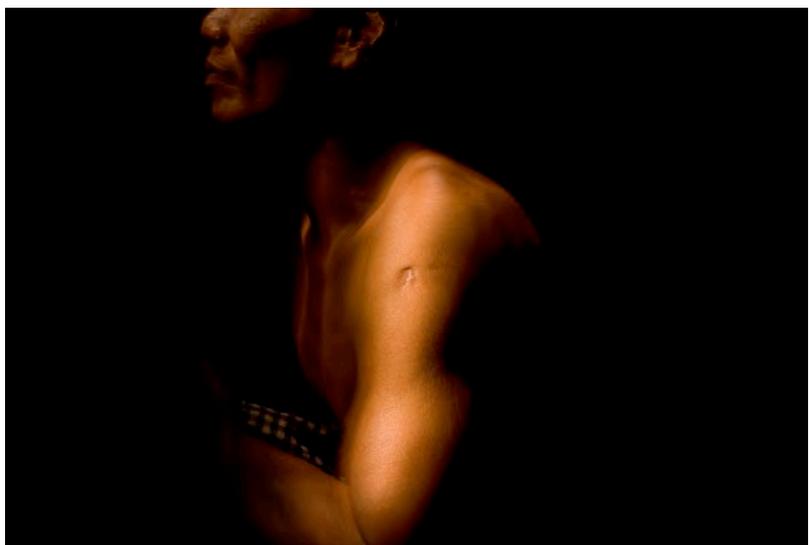
This project leans on an artistic approach, it is not at all about a journalistic report. The consensual aspect of the genre is avoided to give birth to the sensory, to pure feelings. It concentrates itself mainly on visual elements - physical scars, gestures, mimes, glances - to expose soberly the feelings and psychological scars of Tut. The memory of his trauma is visible at all times, in the repetition of his habits: cleaning with a tissu at the slightest dust, observing the movements of his cigarette's smoke and crushing it always the same way, suspending his glance on the photos of his family and lighting a stick of incense. Then his glances which leave far from any present life in one second.



Picture from Alexandre Liebert movie

Both artists go farther than the simple documentary reality, and allow the selves to stage Tut in lighting effects, to show better the tracks of his past, creating a metaphor of the loneliness caused by his trauma.

Emilie Arfeuil, the photographer, describes the scar in the first meaning of the word, as an eternal physical mark. For that, **she used the technique called « light painting »**. It needs a long exposure time in total darkness. She enlights the skin parts by parts with a maglight, to choose the direction of the light, in a kind of choreography. This technique obliges the model to stay totally immobile during all the shooting exposure. It creates a real intimacy between the photographer and the model's body. This technique requires many tries and is morally and physically exhausting for both participants. The direct contact with his marked body creates a really strong and very particular intimacy. The light accentuates the marks of the past on his body by isolating him from his environment and his present.



© Emilie Arfeuil

Alexandre Liebert creates a **silent movie**, mainly visual and sensorial documentary, where the scriptwriter is Tut himself, by his memory but also by his life today. Tut does not speak either French or English; Alexandre does not speak Khmer. The unique way of communication is the body language, an intense visual element that possess a real dramaturgic power. The camera is at the same time an observer of this reality where the past resurfaces, but also goes by « mise en scène » to bring to light some aspects of his memories.



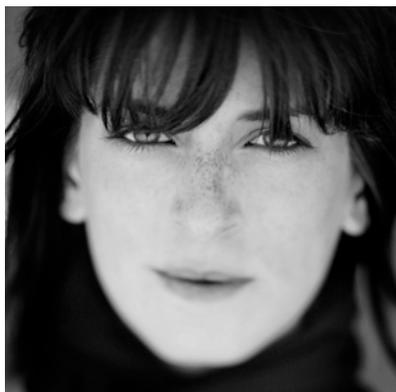
Picture from Alexandre Liebert movie

He decided to apply also the technique of " light painting " in the video to capture the marks on his body, explore his skin with a torch in total darkness to reveal the indelible mark of History.

THE AUTHORS

Emilie Arfeuil

PHOTOGRAPHER // www.emiliarfeuil.com



Born in Clermont-Ferrand in 1983, she actually lives and works in Paris between two travels.

Since she was fifteen, I practice photography in self-taught and exhibit very young in festivals and galleries. After Cinema and Arts studies in the University Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris, she worked for some years on short movies, videoclips and avertisings, from first assistant director to director of photography. By chance, she began to work for fashion and advertising photography as a freelance photographer and art director during several years.

Today, she have decided to dedicate herself essentially to personal projects, which are mainly documentary ones, and elaborate portfolios for exhibitions and press. Her work is based on atmospheres and the feeling of "suspended time",

inspired by the realistic paintings and the movies, with a social dimension always on her mind.

In 2011, she was a **prize-winner of SFR Young Talents** " Paris les Halle:s glances of today " in workshop with Patrick Tourneboeuf of the french Agency «Tendance Floue», and exhibited in the Forum des Halles and next to Robert Doisneau at the City hall. In 2012, she was a **prize-winner of 30 to 30 women photographers** and **Coup de Cœur of the Bourse du Talent Reportage** for "Sweet Cambodia" (early work of *Scars of Cambodia*).

Alexandre Liebert

DIRECTOR // www.alexandreliibert.com



Alexandre discovered movies quite late, nevertheless he was rocked all his childhood by the VHS his parents collected. He directed a first experimental short film in Super8, VINGT DONT QUATRE BIS, which allowed him to register to the University Panthéon-Sorbonne. Self-taught, he loves technique as much as art, investigates the special, mechanical or digital effects, and discovered some animation skills. He writes, directs, manages, edits and builds everything from A to Z, passionate by the slightest detail which participates to the construction of his movies.

He obtains his Bachelor's degree, as well as the prize of the **best short film of fiction** in the University Festival of Paris for his short film DOUBLE PUMP. He have created an association with three friends, LOS DESPERADOS, with whom he directed the

short film *CHIMERE* (**3 selections in festivals**), then *AE [EUDANL' AH]* (**12 selections in festivals and 5 prizes**).

Meanwhile, he directs several music videos and experimental essays (*BLACK AS SNOW*), animates cinema workshops for teenagers and works for a webzine, *NOGOMAG*, for whom he directs regularly short and funny reports.

In 2011, he came back from a solo trip of eight months, with in his pockets an experimental documentary about the city of Pushkar, in India, (*HOLY DRUG AND HIS CAMEL*) and numerous *CINEMATIC WORLWIDE JOKES* which decorate his blog *INSIDE TRIP TO THE NEXT WORLD*.