

AD REINHARDT, KHMER SCULPTURE, and American Support to Cambodian Arts

Adeena May, PhD

Afterall / University of the Arts London

C-MAP SOUTHEAST & EAST ASIA

MEDIATED MODERNITIES

9 October 2025 / 12:30 - 2:00PM
Conference Room A (CR-A) and ZOOM

In the catalogue for the exhibition *Khmer Sculpture*, held at the Asia House Gallery in New York in 1961, Ad Reinhardt published an essay titled “An Assemblage of Comments on the Mystery and Clarity of Khmer Art.” The first book in English on the Khmer arts of the Angkorian period had appeared a decade earlier, written by the American diplomat Lawrence Palmer Briggs in 1951. Reinhardt himself travelled to Cambodia in 1958, producing notes and photographs that later informed his teaching on the ancient arts of East and Southeast Asia. His 1961 essay stands as one of the earliest contributions to American scholarship on the subject. While the essay was criticized by specialists in Southeast Asian art history and archaeology, Reinhardt’s engagement with Asian aesthetic thought and art has generally been read positively by commentators on his work, often in relation to how these ideas were synthesized and to how they operated in his paintings.



Based on recent, ongoing research in the Rockefeller Archive Center and in Ad Reinhardt’s personal papers, this presentation retraces the genesis of Reinhardt’s project, situating it both within the artist’s adaption of Asian aesthetics into his own artistic system and within the growing interest for Cambodian culture in the US at the time. By so doing, I will also read Reinhardt’s engagement with Cambodia as part of a broader history of American philanthropy and its gaze towards the Southeast Asian nation, addressing some of its political implications.

Adeena Mey is a scholar, editor, and curator. His work engages with contemporary art and the history of exhibitions. The main strands of my research are artistic practices from the Global South, especially East and Southeast Asia, Africa, artists’ film and video, art history and theory, non-Western epistemologies, and their intersections. His exhibitions, screenings and discursive curatorial projects have been presented internationally, in the UK, Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. He has been a Research Fellow at the Afterall Research Centre and Managing Editor of *Afterall Journal* since 2019. Mey holds a PhD in Film History and Aesthetics and an MA in Social Studies of Science and Technology from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, and an MA in Aural and Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths College, University of London.

C-MAP SEEA Session with Adeena Mey in person

Thursday, October 9 • 12:30 – 2:00pm



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CR-A and Zoom (Link in Notes)



21 guests

12 yes (5 in a meeting room, 1 virtually)

4 no, 1 maybe, 4 awaiting



Contact Cmap

Organizer



c-map seea (21) ✓



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