

Photographs from South East Asia - works in progress

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Disability in Cambodia
Cambodia: Tabula Rasa
Between Two Worlds



simon larbalestier

Over the last 20 years my photography has moved from album artwork for iconic rock bands such as the Pixies, through design and advertising to a more documentary approach. My current work involves detailing and documenting chronic disability in Cambodia through the help of The Cambodia Trust, a UK based Charity that operates in the poorest provinces of Cambodia.

This is a long term project: a doorway into a harrowing and often shocking Third World approach to things we might take for granted in the West: medicine, caring of patients and general awareness of disabilities

I am also very interested in working within cultures that are trying to re-establish themselves and gain a new foothold in the 21st century. South East Asia offers great potential where societies ravaged by civil war try to accommodate rapidly growing industries like travel and tourism. Meanwhile the gap between the rich and poor, the able-bodied and disabled, educated and non educated is forever

growing wider and heavily reliant on the actions of International NGO Organisations.

I am rooted in traditionalist methods of picture making using B&W film and range-finder cameras and although I am now using digital methods to output my work for clients, the origination is always from film.

I am based between the UK, Thailand and Cambodia preferring to hand print my own photographs back in the UK. I am available for International assignments including stock photography, commission, reportage, exhibitions and book publishing projects.

Simon Larbalestier, 2006
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Disability in Cambodia

Simon Larbalestier

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During the months of October/November 2005 and February/March 2006 I continued my Tabula Rasa project with the Cambodia Trust. I photographed recent clients who had just joined the Trust and revisited some families that I'd met before. I also had the opportunity to visit another province; Kampot. This province was covered by two members of the Cambodia Trust staff who have been working here for the last five years.

In most cases the families had made some progress thanks to the support of the Cambodia Trust and Self Help Groups that have been set up throughout the province. However in some cases the situation had deteriorated as the family had decided not to take further actions for various cultural reasons. Disability is still regarded in Cambodia with a mixture of suspicion and shame. Bad karma passed on from a previous life's actions is a central Buddhist belief and some families refuse to help their disabled children for this reason alone. Another problem is a lack of an educated awareness of their disabled children's needs. One of the biggest hurdles is education for the disabled and it is here that the Cambodia Trust offer solid assistance in the form of School Support Grants and can apply direct to the colleges on behalf of their clients. However, despite the intervention of NGO organisations and charities like the Cambodia Trust, long term progress is only really sustainable if the family as whole decide to work as a one unit.



Ban Pisey

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Ban Pisey (12) is affected by cerebral palsy (level 5). The Cambodia Trust provide her with a «push wheel» and a special toilet seat. A specially made wheelchair is currently being made for Pisey. She is currently enrolled on the «six over six» physiotherapy program where six consecutive weekly visits are then followed by six weeks «off» then six weeks «on» again. Progress is then assessed and the program adjusted accordingly.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Yan Sochea

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Yan Sochea (5) is unable to walk. He joined the Cambodia Trust in 2005 during a provincial survey. The Trust provide orthotic leg and foot braces. When concern revolves around the disabled child, often the parents themselves get neglected. This is one reason why the Cambodia Trust offers small business grants to help the family as a whole and help it become self sufficient.

Kampong Bay, Kampot Province, Cambodia.



Houm Srey Pech

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Houm Srey Pech (13) joined the Cambodia Trust in 1997 and is affected by cerebral palsy. The Trust provided physiotherapy sessions but as no progress was made, this was discontinued. Some patients are unresponsive to physiotherapy so there comes a point when the Trust must decide to stop and utilise their physiotherapists to work with other families. A wheelchair has also been provided and a small business development grant may be allocated in the near future.

Kampot, Cambodia.





Kim Leang
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Kim Leang (6) is affected by cerebral palsy and joined the Cambodia Trust in 2000. The Trust provide orthotic leg braces and physiotherapy on a weekly basis. The chair, pictured here, was made by her father.

Cerebral palsy refers to a group of conditions that affects control of movement and posture. Because of damage to one or more parts of the brain that control movement, an affected child cannot move his or her muscles normally. While symptoms range from mild to severe, the condition does not get worse as the child gets older.

Kampot, Cambodia



Khoev Khan

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Khoev Khan (63) fell from a tree in 2000 and is now paraplegic. Khan joined the Cambodia Trust in 2005 when a provincial survey was carried out. The Trust provide a wheelchair and a small business grant to enable the family to run a small shop on the home premises.

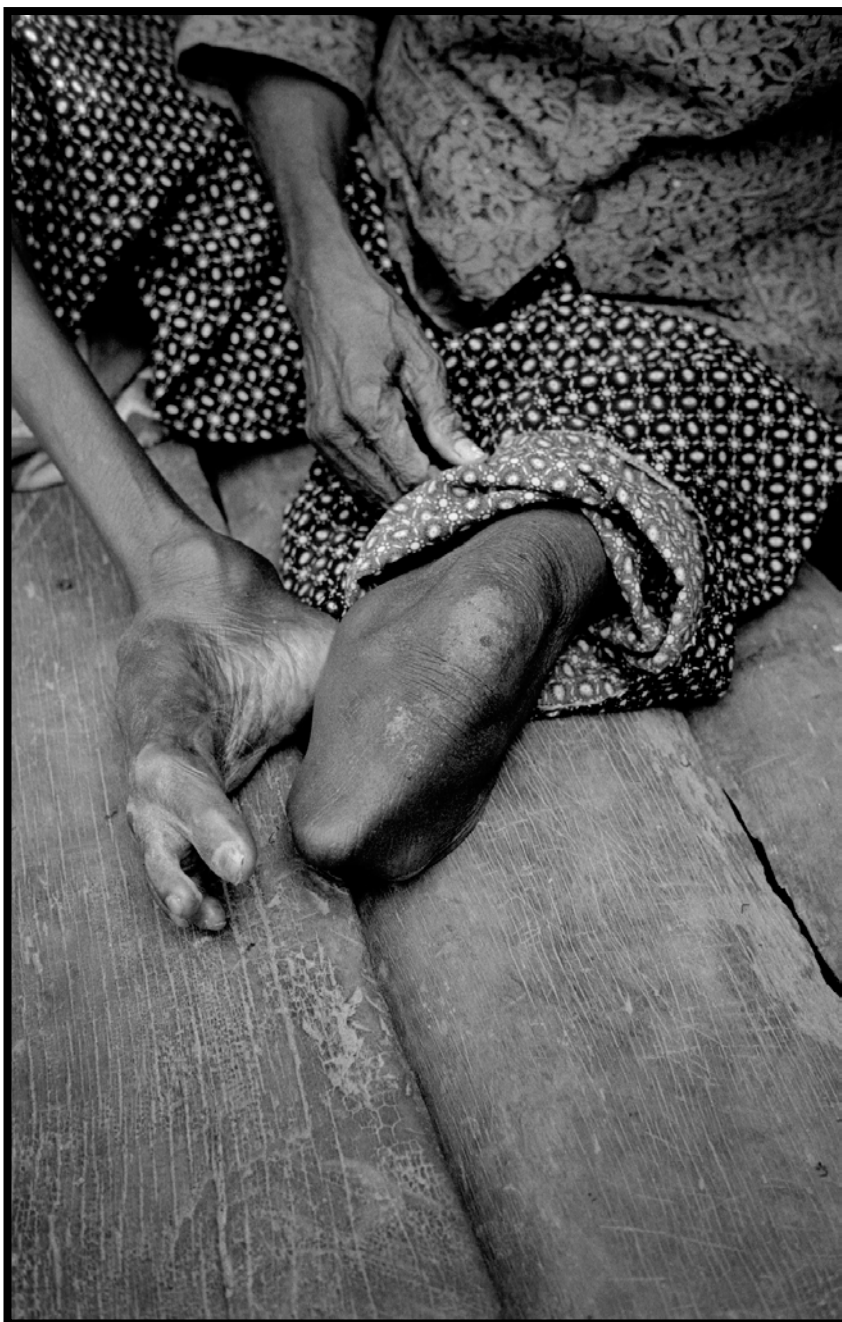
Kampot, Cambodia.



Nget Ty

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Nget Ty (63) lost her left leg below the knee and most of her toes on her right foot when she stepped on a land-mine in 1986. Ty joined the Cambodia Trust in 2005. A wheelchair was provided but has since been discarded as it broke. Ty must travel to the Cambodia Trust centre in Sihanoukville to receive a replacement. The Trust will reimburse costs but Ty must have a signed document from the chief of her village to prove low income. For many older Khmers obtaining this type documentation is sometimes difficult as pride, shyness, guilt or other emotional barriers often prevent the disabled person from asking for help. Often the Trust are unaware of this problem until it is discovered by subsequent follow up visits.

Kampot Province, Cambodia



Say Phal

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Say Phal (59) stepped on a land mine in 1981. Phal lost her right leg and her sight in both eyes. Recently Phal's health has deteriorated rapidly, and is now affected by high blood pressure, her left leg is locked, severe headaches and is unable to remain in one position for more than a few minutes at a time. Phal joined the Cambodia Trust in 1997. She lives with her grandson Ly Chung (14) (pictured right). Chung has never attended school and cares for his grandmother full time. Phal is unable to feed herself. Chung earns \$0.5 a day from selling fish he has caught.

The Cambodia Trust provided a wheelchair in 1997 but now Phal is unable to use it. The Trust also provides a small business grant and sponsors travel costs to the hospital in Phnom Penh for medical treatment. Phal also belongs to a self help group, one of many set up in the Kampong Som Province where disabled Khmers meet to discuss ways of helping each other. The Cambodia Trust have referred her case to another NGO company Starfish who will look at ways to repair or rebuild Phal's house. Currently she and her grandson are living at a neighbours. If one NGO or charity is unable to offer the required assistance, referrals will be made to other organisations.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.





Penh Puth

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Penh Puth (41) has been blind since he was three. Puth joined the Cambodia Trust in 2003 and provided a small business grant to enable Puth to purchase a boat. He earns his living by ferrying passengers across the river and can earn up to \$0.75 a day. Puth lives with his wife and four children in an isolated house further down the river. Each day he navigates the river by counting turns («corners») and oar strokes. This becomes difficult at night when the wind picks up and he has to navigate by touching tree branches alongside the river banks. Puth also takes part in an active self help group initiated by the Cambodia Trust.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Bo Serey Vat

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Bo Serey Vat (24) is affected by polio and cerebral palsy. He joined the Cambodia Trust in 1995.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Bo Serey Vat

Simon Larbalestier

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When Vat joined the Cambodia Trust, a wheel chair was provided and Vat has since outgrown it and although the Trust have offered a replacement wheel-chair, Vat has declined the offer as he feels it is too uncomfortable to sit upright. The Trust will discuss with the family allocation of a small business grant for the future.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Ly Chha

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Ly Chha (9) is affected by cerebral palsy (level 5). Chha joined the Cambodia Trust in 2003. A wheelchair was provided by the Trust in 2005 although as she is only able to sit upright for short periods access to the wheelchair is limited. The Trust also provides weekly physiotherapy sessions.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Sok Bont Hoeun

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Sok Bont Hoeun (28) plays volleyball with his friend. Hoeun a paraplegic, fell from a tree when he was three years old. He joined the Cambodia Trust in 2003 and is provided with the wheelchair (pictured). The Trust recently provided a small business grant to enable purchase of a pig.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Ban Chan Chhetra

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Ban Chan Chhetra (24) is affected by an undiagnosed congenital birth disorder. Chhetra joined the Cambodia Trust in 1995. It is patients like Chhetra, who lives in very poor conditions, that are the most vulnerable and need assistance and treatment from the medical advancements and breakthroughs of the West.

Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Ban Chan Chhetra

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Chhetra's legs are now very weak and are constantly in spasm. Unfortunately his condition has deteriorated to a point where the Cambodia Trust can no longer offer him physiotherapy support.

Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Ban Chan Chhetra

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Chhetra has been housebound in a ground floor room for the last four years. His wheelchair provided by the Cambodia Trust several years ago, is kept upstairs.

Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, Cambodia



Ban Chan Chhetra

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Under the supervision of the Cambodia Trust staff, Chhetra visits Victory Beach, less than two kilometres from his home. He has never seen the sea before.

Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, Cambodia



Hourn Seng

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Hourn Seng (3) was born without knee joints. The Cambodia Trust were informed of this by the village chief a week after Seng's birth and he immediately joined the Cambodia Trust. The Trust sponsored travel costs to enable Seng and his mother to visit the hospital in Phnom Penh. The Cambodia Trust provided full length braces but now as the legs have grown stronger through physiotherapy, Seng only needs half length orthotics.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Tep Lygoech

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Tep Lygoech (6) visits the Cambodia Trust Centre in Sihanoukville to have an orthotic brace fitted to her left leg. Lygoech is affected by osteomyelitis an infection in the bones. Often, the original site of infection is elsewhere in the body, and spreads to the bone by the blood. Bacteria or fungus may sometimes be responsible for osteomyelitis.

As a result the bone becomes too soft and breaks very easily. Lygoech got an infection in 2004. The leg brace will enable her leg muscles to be trained and become strong again so she is able to stand. Lygoech joined the Cambodia Trust in 2004.

Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Tabula rasa : (Latin: «scraped tablet», though often translated «blank slate») is the notion that individual human beings are born «blank» (with no built-in mental content), and that their identity is defined entirely by their experiences and sensory perceptions of the outside world.

In recent times however Tabula Rasa has come to be understood fundamentally differently. While the idea that the individual can be changed remains, the power to effect that change has now ascribed to society not the self - and that power extends to the whole of human nature. Under this view, one can almost without restriction, shape the individual by changing the individual's environment, and thus their sensory experiences.

(Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabula_rasa)

My thinking is along the lines of those being born disabled, effectively having their entire future in somebody else's hands as it were. The «Blank Slate» concept I like, in that I do believe a person is shaped by their surroundings and life experiences and that to start from a disadvantaged position forces certain social changes. In the same way as 1/6th of the Khmer population was eradicated during the Pol Pot regime, most of those living in the poorest Cambodian provinces have effectively had their social and economic slate wiped clean.



Cambodia: Tabula Rasa

Part 1: Kampong Som Province

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In documenting the work of the Cambodia Trust - who work with disadvantaged disabled people to enable them to participate as equals in education, employment and community life - the purpose of this project is to bring greater public awareness to the plight of those who suffer social and economic hardships resulting from the position of being disabled. The Trust aims to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency, through rehabilitation, community work, training and advocacy.

My photographs capture the «clients» of the Cambodia Trust who live in the poorest provinces of Cambodia and essentially concerns the Cambodia Trust's Community Outreach Projects. By photographing Khmers in their home surroundings it raises many social and economic questions about disability as a social concern and the practical problems of offering long term care to those opting to join the Trust.



Touch Somploy

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Touch Somploy (11) is affected by cerebral palsy (level 5) and lives in one of the poorest districts in the Kampong Som Province; the Ohcarao Commune. Somploy joined the Cambodia Trust in 2001 but when staff come to visit the house, her parents have been very obstructive and it has been extremely difficult to make progress. Sometimes the work of the Cambodia Trust faces many cultural obstacles when it comes to helping the families of disabled children. Whilst the Trust can provide a certain level of help and support the daily care and responsibility has to fall to the parents of the child and this is impossible to enforce as is the unfortunate case here.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.





Kuon Sarith

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Kuon Sarith (55) stepped on a land mine in 1985 on the Thai-Khmer border. Sarith joined the Cambodia Trust in 1999. High blood pressure caused a stroke affecting the right side of his body. The Cambodia Trust provide a prosthetic leg and crutches. In the future the Trust are looking to provide a small business development grant.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Riths Deong

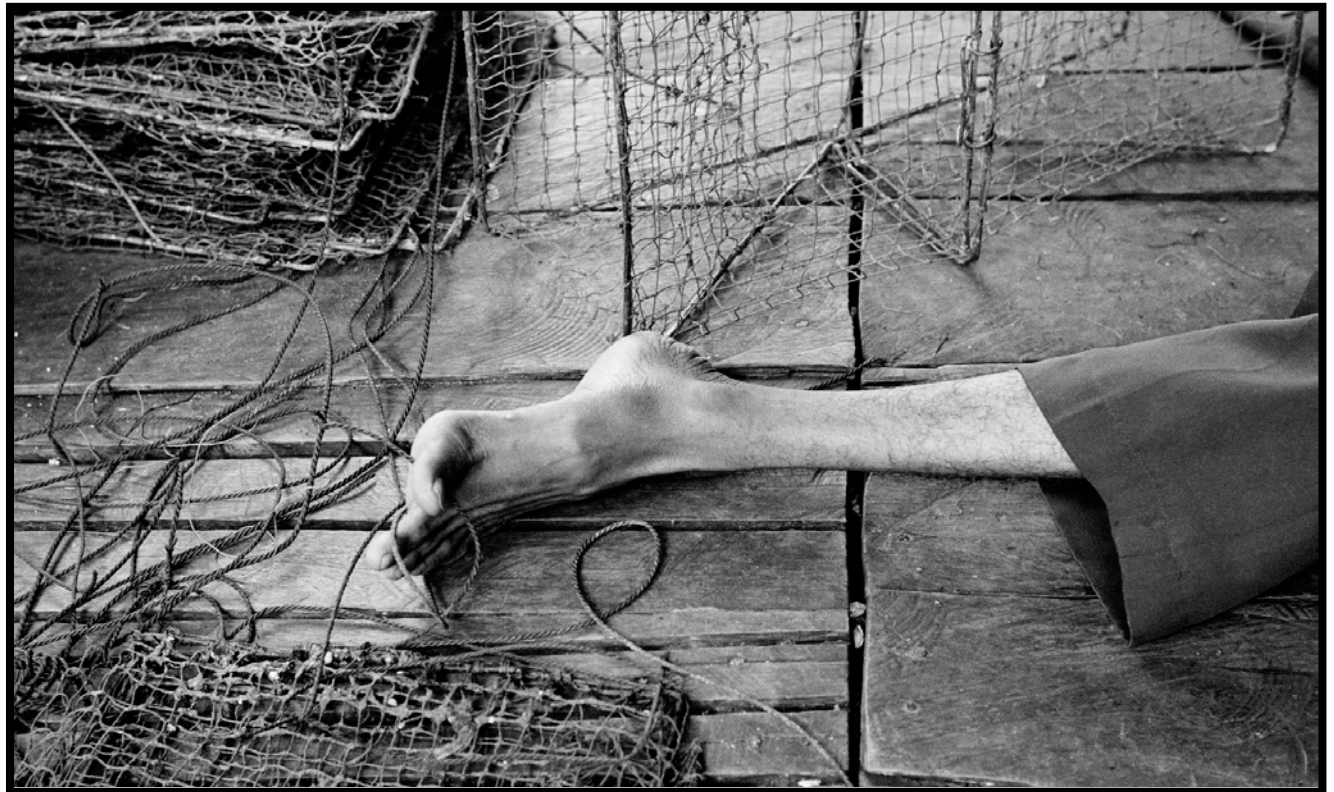
Simon Larbalestier

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Riths Deong (33) is affected by severe polio and joined the Cambodia Trust in 2004. Because of the Khmer Rouge's destruction of the health care system in 1975, polio was rife in Cambodia until recently. This easily preventable disease has affected around 50,000 people

The Trust plan to send him to college to study radio and TV repairs, so he can set up his own business. Currently he repairs fishing nets and lobster cages for his neighbours.

Sihanoukville, Cambodia.





Seat Trolley and Leg Braces

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Mao Sokha's «seat trolley» and orthotic leg braces rest against the wall of his house. Sokha (15) was affected by meningitis when he was very young.

He joined the Cambodia Trust in 2004 and the family was given a small grant to replace the pig they'd sold to pay for Sokha to visit the Kunthak Bopha Hospital in Phnom Penh to receive treatment.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Kanthnov Chey

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Kanthnov Chey (14) is affected by cerebral palsy (level 5). He joined the Cambodia Trust in 1998. On days when the pain and spasms recede he likes to watch TV in his neighbours house sitting in his trolley chair.

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



Kanthnov Chey's mother

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Kanthnov Chey's mother waits anxiously whilst her son visits a monk in the Srey Souphea Pagoda for special treatment to ease his pain. Chey is affected by cerebral palsy (level 5). He joined the Cambodia Trust in 1998 and was provided with a «trolley chair» (pictured right).

Kampong Som Province, Cambodia.



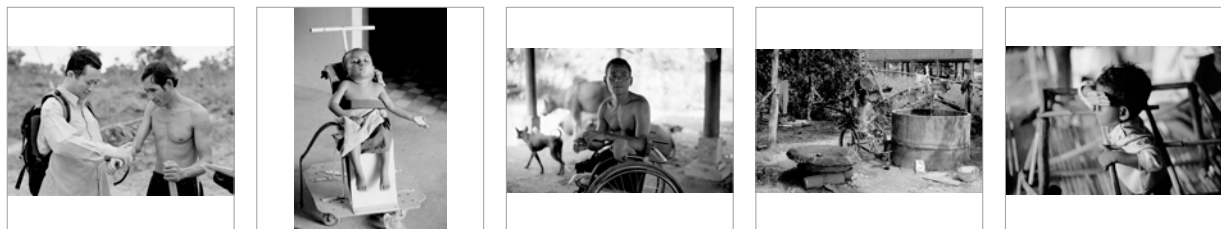


Cambodia: Tabula Rasa

Part 2: Kampong Chhnang Province

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Heng Not

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Heng Not (15) a multiple amputee from birth, stands aside to let a Khmer villager laden with grasses pass, on her way home from school. Not joined the Cambodia Trust in 1999 and has been provided with prosthetics, special shoes with built-in inserts and a school support grant to enable her to study alongside her peers.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Banh Proung

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Banh Proung (11), who is affected by severe polio, sits in his wheelchair (donated by the Cambodia Trust in 2000) and watches Sal (4) flying his kite. Proung attends the local school nearby and can cook for himself. Cambodia Trust staff monitor his progress and have confirmed that a new wheelchair is to be ordered from Phnom Penh.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Cambodia Trust Provincial Survey

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Three times a month the Cambodia Trust Centre in Kampong Chhnang carries out surveys in the surrounding provinces to locate other potential clients who are eligible to join the Cambodia Trust's Rehabilitation Programme.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Huol Srey Von

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Huol Srey Von (21) a multiple amputee from birth, is visiting the Cambodia Trust Rehabilitation Centre to have a 'pen holder' fitted. This will enable her to write. Von is also awaiting her wooden wheelchair to be replaced.

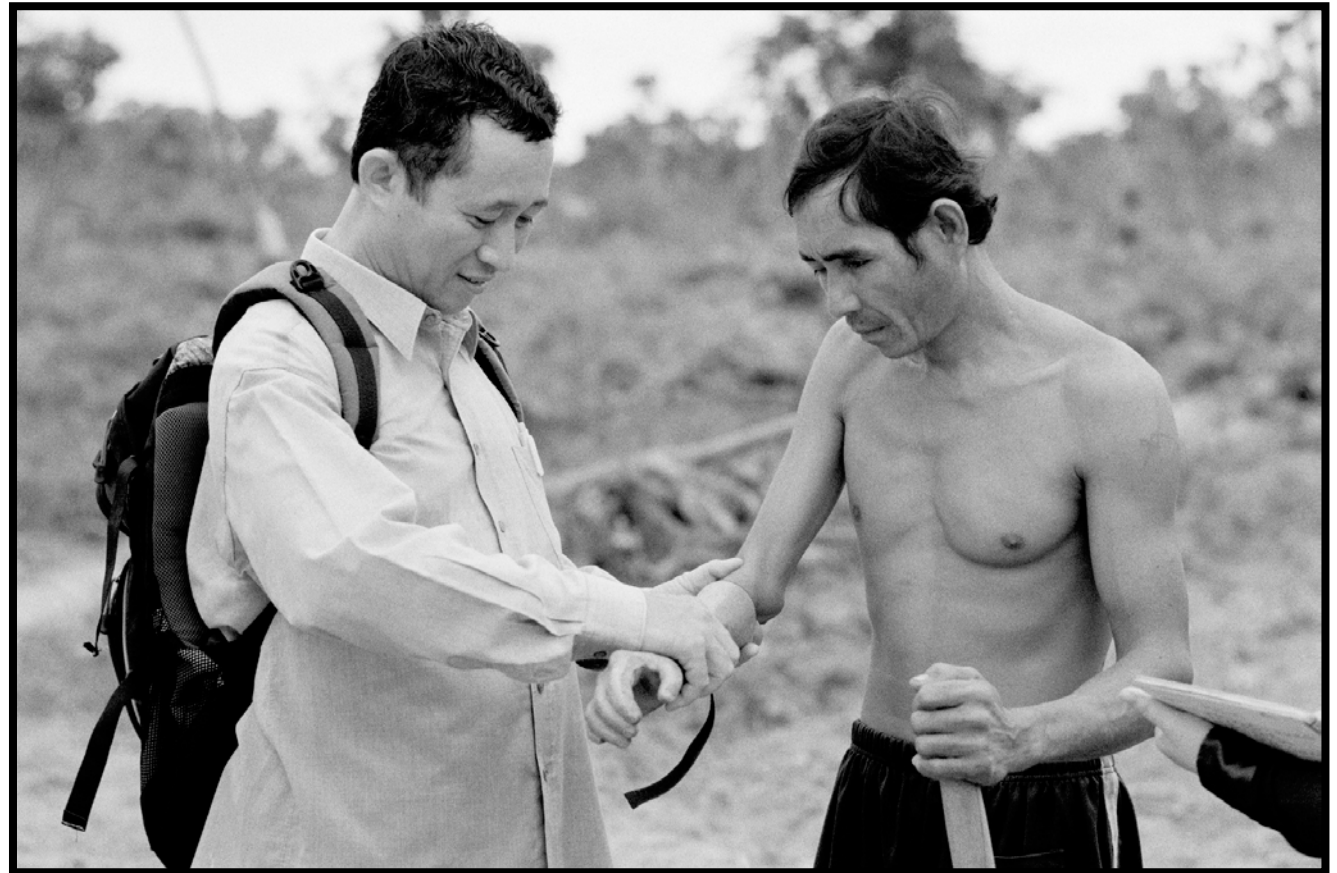
Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia.



Nov Sorn

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Nov Sorn lost his right eye and right arm from an explosion by a B40 rocket launcher in 1995. Here Cambodia Trust staff fit a new prosthetic arm and give Sorn two different prosthetic hands to enable him to carry out various tasks. He earns his living by digging out tree stumps for farmers averaging 5,000 Riel (\$1.25) per day. During the rainy season this work is virtually impossible as much of the land is flooded and the stumps are deeply buried in the mud.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Kanthnov Chey

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Kanthnov Chey (3), is affected by Down's Syndrome. Em visits the Cambodia Trust Centre in Kampong Chhnang to have a special chair repaired for her from a patient who no longer requires it.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Lem Yem

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Lem Yem (53) a multiple amputee, lost both his legs from a land mine injury. Yem joined the Cambodia Trust in 1998. Despite his loss of both legs, Yem can drive a tractor and work in the fields, repairing fences and planting trees. In the dry season he works from his wheelchair. During the rainy season he hitches his wheelchair behind his tractor with a fan belt to journey to work.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.





Lem Yem

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Lem Yem takes a shower from his well in his wheelchair. The Cambodia Trust visit him today to check on his wheelchair as it has been recently repaired at the Kampong Chhnang Cambodia Trust Centre's workshop.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Houk Sok Charoeun

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Houk Sok Charoeun (7) is affected by cerebral palsy. The Cambodia Trust provide physiotherapy, a walking frame and home adaptation. Charoeun has only just been able to sit up unassisted.

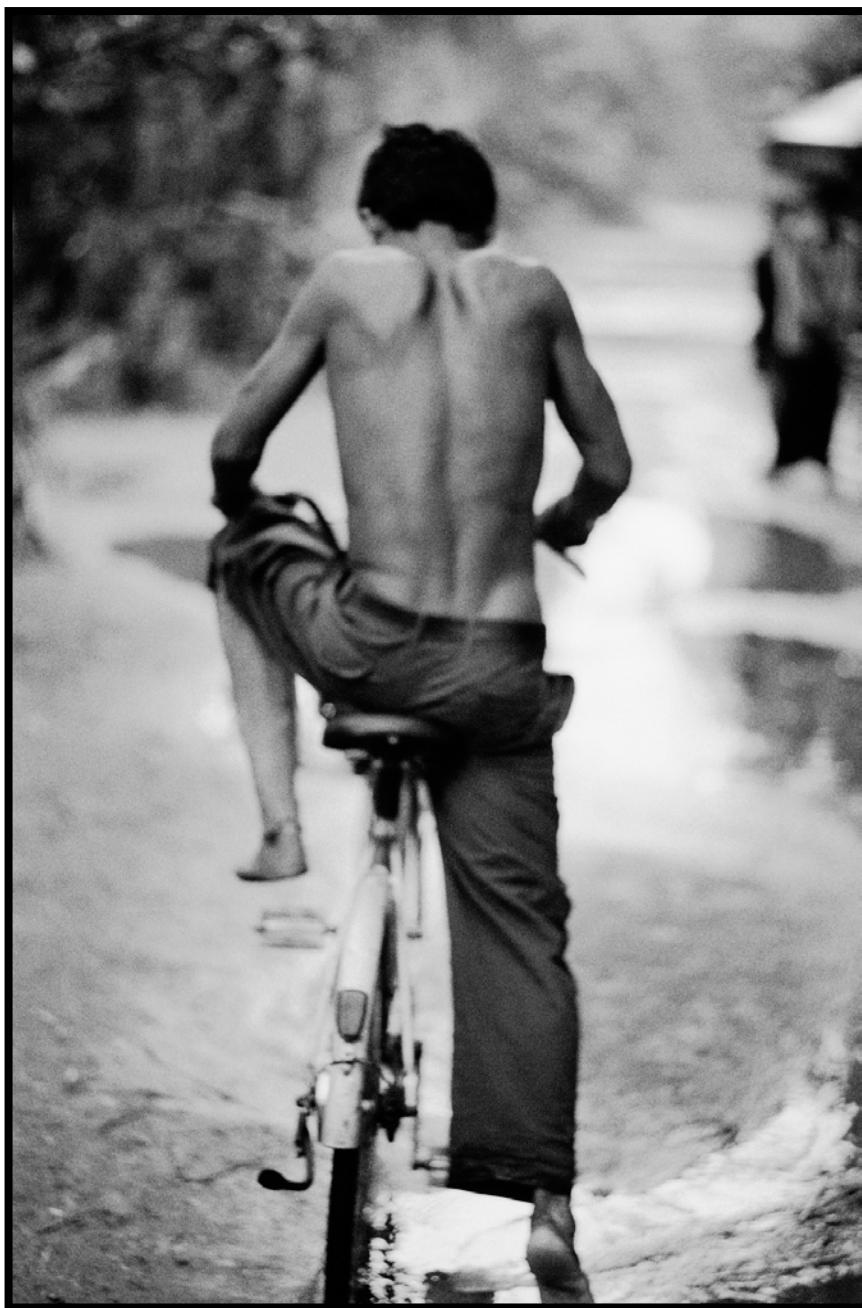
Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Pal Rim

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Pal Rim (40) a landmine victim, rides bike with his broken prosthetic leg, during a monsoon shower. Rim has not had time to visit the Cambodia Trust Centre to replace his prosthetic which is 6 years old.

On this visit an appointment is confirmed and the Cambodia Trust will come to collect Rim and take him to their centre.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Soun Nary

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Soun Nary (15) who is affected by polio is paralysed from the waist down. Nary joined the Cambodia Trust in 1998 and is now able to attend her local primary school Kro Lang School. Being 15, Nary is several years older than her classmates who average 8-10 years. Cambodia Trust provided a ramp to enable wheelchair access to the classroom and grant to buy her uniform and school study materials. Prior to this Nary had to crawl everywhere and couldn't attend school.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Soun Nary
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Nary talks with Pen Sontary, Community-based rehabilitation Team Leader for the Trust. As the school year ends Nary wants to graduate to another class along with her peers however this isn't possible until funds are found for a new wheelchair ramp to allow her access.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Bo Narey, Bo Nara, Bo Narong

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Left to right Bo Narey (16), Bo Nara (13), Bo Narong (19), who are affected by muscular dystrophy. This devastating illness has already claimed 3 family members. They joined the Cambodia Trust 1999.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Discarded Wheelchairs

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Discarded wheelchairs belonging to Bo Narey and Bo Nara. Their condition has deteriorated so badly that the wheelchairs cannot be used and plans are being made by the Cambodia Trust to provide a downstairs toilet and paved walkway with hand rails, to help the boys maintain normal their normal daily routines.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Sin Phally

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Sin Phally (41) has been affected by very high blood pressure since she was 37 and also suffers from «drop foot» and some paralysis in her left side as a result of a stroke. Before she joined the Cambodia Trust in 2003, Phally spent a year housebound. The Cambodia Trust have provided a walking frame and wheelchair to encourage Phally to become more self-reliant. However venturing downstairs and into the outside world is still very difficult for her.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.





Nov Sorn

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Nov Sorn, Amputee. Lost his lower right leg and right eye when maimed by a B40 rocket whilst a soldier in 1995. Earns money by digging out tree stumps (\$2.5 USD per ten square-metre) almost impossible to earn any money during the raining season as the ground is too waterlogged or flooded to remove stumps.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



Los Ply

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Los Ply (7), who is affected by a congenital birth disorder (bilateral club foot), sits outside the Cambodia Trust Centre, Kampong Chhnang. This current visit to repair orthotics (foot braces -inner shoes). Ply has made 11 visits since joining Cambodia Trust in 1999.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



Nap Vannet

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Nap Vannet (5) is affected by cerebral palsy. Vannet joined the Cambodia Trust in 2001. In many cases, the cause of cerebral palsy is not known, so there is nothing that can be done to prevent it.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



Walking room

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A patient waits in the «Walking Room» whilst his orthotic support brace is adjusted in the workshop.

Cambodia Trust Centre, Kampong Chhnang



Han Him

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Han Him (38), a landmine victim joined the Cambodia Trust in 2002.

The Cambodia Trust is visiting Him to repair current prosthesis which is 3 years old.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



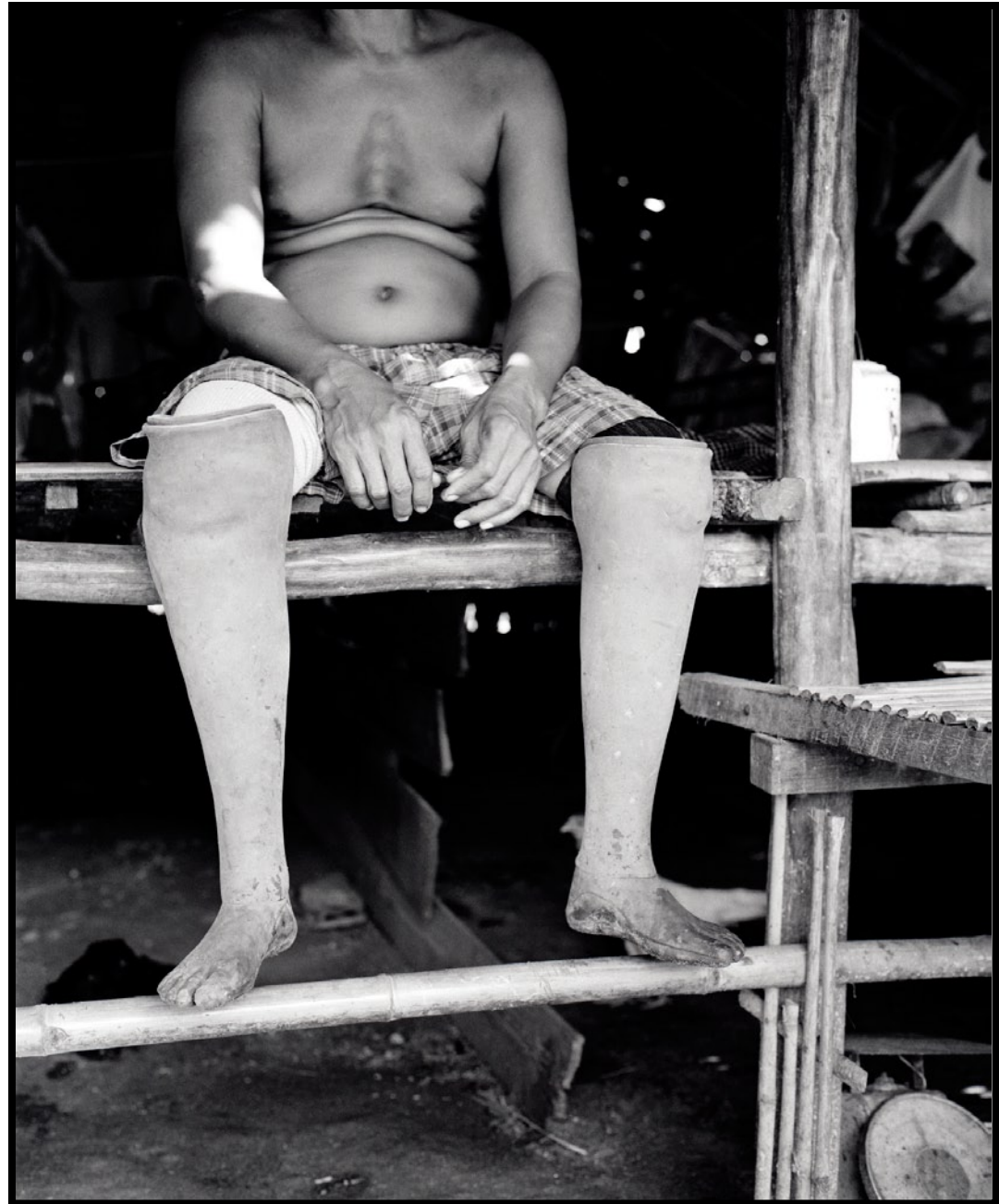
Sem Son

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Sem Son (51), Double Amputee (lower legs). Joined Cambodia Trust in 2002. Loss of both lower legs from infection caused by cuts in his toes when working in the soil. Infection spread up left leg and had to be amputated. A year later another infection on one of his right toes resulted in his lower right leg being amputated. Since been diagnosed as Diabetic. Cambodia Trust have provided both prosthetics.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia





Nam Joy

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Nam Joy is affected by osteomyelitis caused by an abscess in his right forearm (now affecting his left leg), attending a presentation from the Cambodia Trust to the Peam Commune of Samaki Meanchey District, during a provincial survey.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



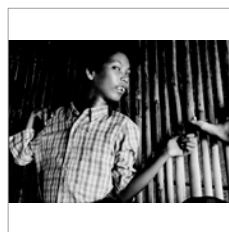
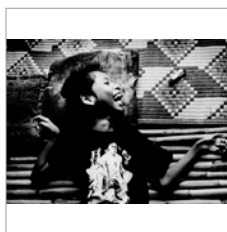


Cambodia: Tabula Rasa

Part 3: Srey sisters

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Srey Srous & Srey Chet

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Left to Right: Srey Srous (13) Srey Chet (22) both are affected by severe (level 5) cerebral palsy. They joined the Cambodia Trust in 2000. A disused «day chair» can be seen in the background. Specialist wheelchairs are currently being made by ARR Japan in Phnom Penh. Cambodia Trust will purchase these wheelchairs on behalf of the two sisters.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.





Srey Srous & Srey Chet

Simon LARBALÉSTIER

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Since my first visit in July, the specially designed wheelchairs from Japan have arrived (see right). Usually the two sisters spend two hours a day in the wheelchairs to assist and develop mobility exercises prescribed by the Cambodia Trust.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia.



Srey Srous

Simon Larbalestier

<http://www.simon-larbalestier.co.uk>

Many children with cerebral palsy have other problems that require treatment. These include mental retardation, learning disabilities, seizures, and vision, hearing and speech problems.

With treatment, most children can significantly improve their abilities.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia





Srey Chet

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Cerebral Palsy occurs when the brain is damaged and inaccurate messages are sent from the brain to the muscle. Cerebral Palsy is non-progressive, non hereditary and non contagious. Many people believe that cerebral palsy and other disabilities *are* contagious, and this is frequently a reason why disabled children are excluded from school. This is why advocacy work is so important, to challenge these ideas which are rooted in social and cultural beliefs and of course a result of lack of education.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



Discarded Daychair

Simon Larbalestier

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Srey Srous' original 'daychair' lies discarded underneath the house.

Kampong Chhnang Province, Cambodia



Between Two Worlds

Simon Larbalestier

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This is a long term project examining the displacement of communities and culture in South East Asia. As South East Asia tries to align itself to the 21st century alongside the countries of the West and the developing countries like China and Korea, often traditional elements of their culture becomes misrepresented, juxtaposed and misunderstood. Refugees, the elderly and those in the poorer provinces who have had only a rudimentary education are out of the loop and often unable to benefit from recent technological developments.



Koktamol Sanctuary

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The Koktamol Sanctuary is located on the outskirts of Siem Reap. Koktamol is a sanctuary for elderly Khmers, mainly women, who come here to live, pray and meditate. Their possessions are very few yet displayed with much care. Many have come here to escape the pressures of family life. Many will stay until the end of their natural lives. A series of small one room concrete huts surround a small temple pagoda. The single room is screened to provide toilet facilities. Daily routine is simple: prayer and meditation, the preparation of food for themselves and the many dogs that have congregated here.

Siem Reap, Cambodia.





Koktamol Sanctuary

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The sense of community is very strong. This is a place I have visited many times. On each visit the surroundings have changed, sometimes new members occupy the huts of previous occupants.

Siem Reap, Cambodia.



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The depiction of Koktamol Sanctuary is a long term project during which mutual trust is developed. It takes time to overcome the member's shyness enough for them to be photographed - which is understandable considering they came here to escape the prying eyes of the real world. For me it represents an insight into an ancient Khmer culture and how it deals with the concept of approaching old age, infirmity, loneliness and eventually death.

Siem Reap, Cambodia.





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Their possessions are very few, here a modern day Uni-ball pen shares a makeshift plinth with a tin of incense sticks.

Siem Reap, Cambodia.



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Faded photographs of revered Buddhist Monks hang alongside images of famous Khmer pop stars.

Siem Reap, Cambodia.



Kumpong Pluck Commune

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The Kumpong Pluck Commune is one of three communes sited together in the area surrounding the Tonle Sap Lake in the Province of Siem Reap. There are more than 30 such villages in this area. When the lake swells in the monsoon rains to seven times its normal size, many communes and villages become «floating villages». These are semi-permanent sites where houses are built on stilts above the level of the flood waters. Some villages consist of house boats anchored to the bottom of the lake. Often the community is a mixture of Vietnamese and Khmer.

In the first week of July 2005 when the lake was at its lowest point the villagers had to travel some distance in order to fish. One man left his rice pot cooking. Unattended it eventually caught fire. Within two hours the fire had destroyed 187 houses making 1382 people homeless. In less than a month the monsoon rains would fill the Tonle Sap Lake flooding this particular commune. When a state of emergency was called, LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights) visited the Kumpong Pluck Commune to offer medical aid and food supplies. Unfortunately LICADHO visited for two days only due to commitments elsewhere. After local newspapers reported this the government sent corrugated metal sheeting and wooden poles to provide emergency housing. Other than such emergency help these communes have to survive on their own.



Kumpong Pluck Commune

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Boy with mother, waiting to be examined by LICAD-HO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights) Medical Team during a visit to the Kumpong Pluck Commune.

Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.



Kumpong Pluck Commune

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Children waiting to be examined by LICADHO. Due to pressures from further commitments to other communities in crisis, LICADHO can only visit for two days to offer medical aid and food supplies.

Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.



Kumpong Pluck Commune

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Boy holding plastic bag of antibiotics, distributed by LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights).

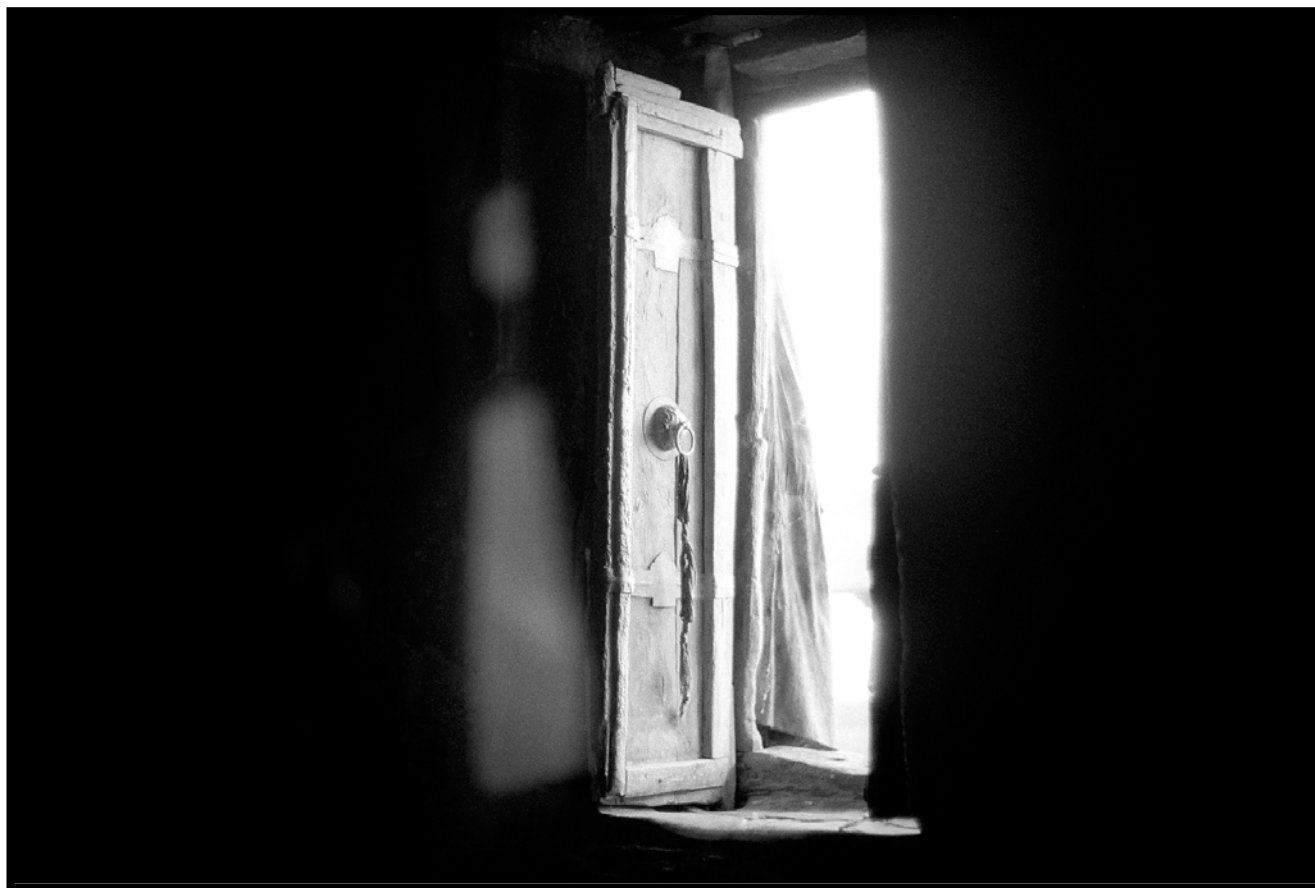
Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.



The Edge of Beyond

Simon Larbalestier

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Ladakh known as the land of numerous passes and mystic lamas is bounded by two of the world's highest mountain ranges, the Karakoram and the Great Himalayas. The altitude of Ladakh ranges between 9,000 to 17,000 feet. It is inhabited by many Tibetan refugees who fled here after Tibet was invaded by the Chinese.

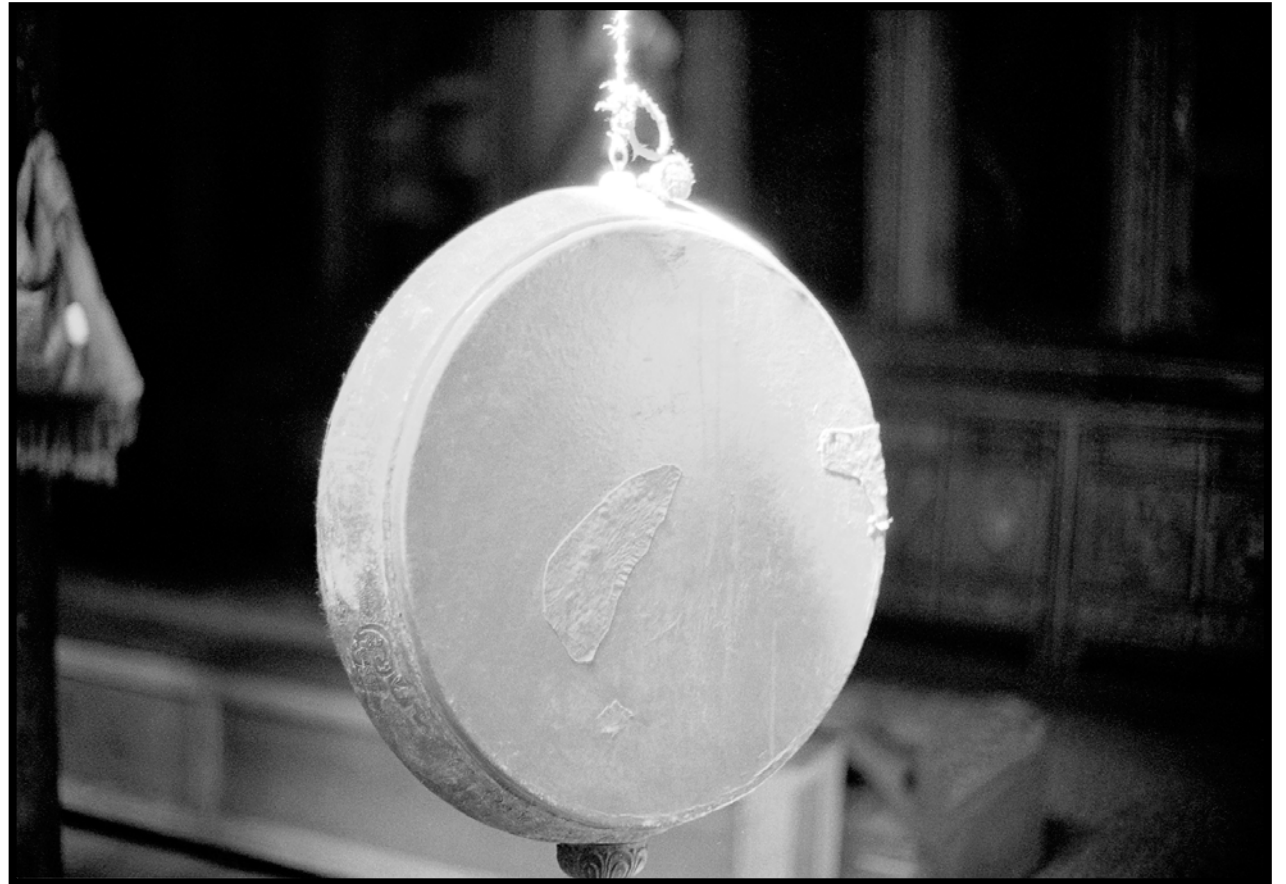
Decaying gompas occupy the many mountain ranges some dating from the 8th century. Strings of prayer flags (Wind Horses) can be seen on the horizons, carrying their single mantra across valleys, each time the wind blows. The business of tourism is a short lived period for a few summer months of the year before the snow falls and the passes freeze over.



The Edge of Beyond

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An old Tibetan Ritual Drum catches the early morning sunlight in the Hermis Gompa.

Leh, Ladakh, Northern India.



The Edge of Beyond

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A recycled tin now used as a waste bin in a desperate attempt to keep the mountains of Ladakh free of plastic bags and water bottles brought over by tourists.

Markha Valley, Ladakh, Northern India.



The Edge of Beyond

Simon Larbalestier

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A Temple Guardian in the Lamayuru Gumpa. Ladakh,
Northern India.



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Payer flags (lung ta) with the images of a wind horse carry their single mantra across the Markha Valley each time the wind blows. The Kongmaru-La (pass) stands at 5150m above sea level.

Markha Valley, Ladakh, Northern India.



The Edge of Beyond

Simon Larbalestier

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Two Ladakhi children play outside the Sankar Gompa in Ladakh's capital: Leh. Ladakh, Northern India.



Thai-Burmese Border

Simon Larbalestier

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Burma's ongoing 50 year civil war continues to displace it's communities many of which seek refuge on the Thai-Burmese Border. A border whose defined edges are always moving as new minefields are laid. Hidden jungle refugee camps are situated several kilometres away from popular tourist trekking sites. Certain Hill Tribe villages are granted «Hill Tribe status» by providing tourist attractions. The Karen Hill Tribe who wear 1-5 kg neck rings being a perfect example. On a steep slope hidden from the view of the tourists, a commune of Burmese land mine refugees struggle to make ends meet. An almost impossible task when the monsoon rains turn the slope into a slippery deluge of mud.



Thai-Burmese Border

Simon Larbalestier

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Three Karen Hill Tribe girls wearing the one and two kilo gram «neck rings». By providing a tourist attraction these refugees are granted «Hill Tribe Identity Status» and allowed to reside on the Thailand side of Thai-Burmese Border.



Thai-Burmese Border

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A discarded doll in a Karen Hill Tribe village symbolises the migration of refugees to the Thai-Burmese Border.



Thai-Burmese Border

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Two boys both HIV Positive in a hidden refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese Border.



Thai-Burmese Border

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A young child looks out in the early morning mist. His future is uncertain, the land given for the building of their village is on very steep ground and during the monsoon season becomes very unstable. Access to the traditional stilted houses is very difficult for the land mine victims that have gathered here.

Thai-Burmese Border.



Cambodia has one of the world's largest disabled population, including an estimated 40,000 land-mine survivors and 50,000 people affected by polio. In a country where the average income is less than \$1 a day, disabled people are the poorest of the poor. Discriminated against at every level of society, they are seen as 'useless'; a burden on the family and the community.

The Cambodia Trust works with disadvantaged disabled people to enable them to participate as equals in education, employment and community life. The Trust aims to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency, through rehabilitation, community work, training and advocacy.

The Cambodia Trust projects documented by Simon are reliant on the support of international donors. If you would like to support the Trust's work, please visit:

<http://www.cambodiatrust.com>



Exhibitions

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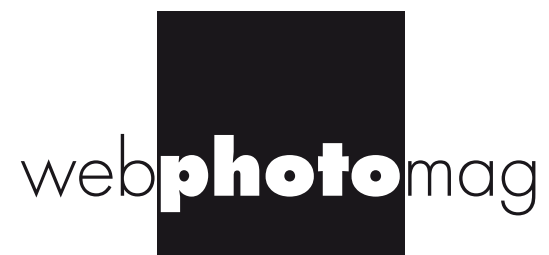


Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 *"Simon Larbalestier"*
Beau Damon Richards Gallery - San Pedro, USA
- 2004 *"Simon Larbalestier"*
Iguapop Gallery - Barcelona, Spain
- "The Pixies"*
Primavera Sound Festival - Barcelona, Spain
- 2003 *"Dreamland"*
Galleri Thomas Ehrngren - Stockholm, Sweden
- 1999 *"Simon Larbalestier"*
Scott Nichols Gallery - San Francisco, USA
- "88 2 99"*
Houston Gallery - Seattle, USA
- "Attracting to Emptiness"*
Edge Company - London, UK

Group Shows

- 2005 *"Art of Music"*
Forest Lawn Museum - Glendale, USA
- 2002 *"Circus, Carnivals, Freaks & Oddities"*
CPOP Gallery - Detroit, USA



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