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Khmer Times/Mark Tilly Thursday, 16 March 2017 60 views

Arts education at the heart of CLA's five-year plan

Cambodian Living Arts unveiled its five-year plan this week, including a pilot plan of integrating arts education in schools in the hope of creating new opportunities for both emerging and established artists in the kingdom.

CLA, founded in 1998 by Khmer Rouge survivor and musician Arn Chord-Pond, originally worked to preserve traditional Cambodian art that was at risk of disappearing, but now offers scholarships, training and employment for new talent.

Collaborating with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO, CLA has developed a model to integrate arts and culture education into the public school system.

CLA executive director Phloeum Prim hopes the curriculum will help students think more creatively by providing a richer educational environment, while gaining appreciation for the arts which in turn will sustain the long-term future of Cambodia's creative industries.

"I hope that future generations will experience arts as a fundamental part of everyday life," he said at an open meeting about the strategy yesterday.

"When this is true, CLA's work will have been a success."

He acknowledged some of the challenges the pilot program faces, with many state school principals and teachers not appreciating the value of artistic education.

Education NGO Cambodian Children's Fund artistic director Meth Vanthy said this issue was exacerbated by the lack of cross experience between teachers and artists, with many teachers not knowing how to teach art and artists not knowing how to teach.

"Just because they are professional artists, doesn't mean they are professional teachers, so they need to learn how to teach properly," he said.

"We normally ask some of the teachers to teach our students, but the way they are teaching is just kind of copy paste, so we want to learn about art education, we want the students to learn about the arts properly."

CLA is attempting to address this, with the pilot program including teacher training and curriculum development as well as implementing extra-curricular arts activities.

As the Ministry of Education trials a full school day curriculum in three primary schools in Siem Reap province, with the ambition of eventually implementing nation-wide, CLA saw it as the perfect time to expand on arts and cultural education.

"The ministry knows teaching times need to be longer, it's the perfect opportunity to integrate arts education," CLA's Sun Bun said at the open meeting.

The five-year plan also includes providing professional development training, exchanges and workshops as well as increasing public performances and demonstrations of art forms to students in schools and universities.

CLA has also created a new artistic advisory committee featuring four associate artists to engage and mentor up-and-coming artists, including filmmaker Sok Visal, theater teacher and director Uy Latavan, visual artist Yim Maline and dancer and choreographer Chumvan Sodhachiv.

Maline said she was proud to work with CLA due to its strong connection to new talent and the industry as a whole. "It is an opportunity to share my skills and knowledge as a contemporary visual artist to others," she said.

"This collaboration I think will benefit artists, the arts sector, and help people to know more about our culture."

Chorn-Pond said he was proud that CLA helped lay the foundations for artistic development in Cambodia and he looks forward to what the next five years will bring.

"Part of my dream was always to help the young people to realize their dreams. Now we are on our way, young people are doing new things by themselves and are encouraging others to dream bigger through arts and culture," he said.

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