



PRESS RELEASE...PRESS RELEASE...

PRESS RELEASE

Returned Statues to Cambodia Exhibition
National Museum in Cambodia
1st October 2014

The opening of the temporary exhibition entitled “Returned Statues to Cambodia” will take place on 1st October 2014 at the National Museum in Phnom Penh. This exhibition, organized by the Royal Government of Cambodia, UNESCO and the US Embassy, is a testimony to their effective cooperation in the negotiations that led to the successful recoveries of Khmer sculptures these past few years. The opening will be presided over by His Excellency Sok An, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister-in-Charge of the Office of the Council of Ministers.

The exhibition “Returned Statues to Cambodia”, the first of its kind, celebrates the return of Khmer art pieces to their homeland soil. They originally come from Koh Ker province, a jungle filled region that used to be the capital of the whole Khmer Empire during the 10th century. They had been looted in the 1970s during Cambodia’s two decades civil war including the cataclysmic regime of the Khmer Rouge.

The statues are unique not only because the *Koh Ker style* remains unrivalled throughout history but also because they are a part of a set of nine statues representing a very famous scene in the ancient India Sanskrit epic. Unfortunately, none of these immense, expressive and beautiful sculptures were left at the site.

Today, the Kingdom of Cambodia finally recovered six of the nine beautiful statues—five of them during the past two years: The two Pandava brothers, also called the kneeling attendants, were voluntarily returned in June 2013 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Duryodhana was returned pursuant an agreement signed on 13 December 2013 by Sotheby’s, its client, and federal officials; Balarama and Bhima were voluntarily returned by Christie’s Auction House and the Norton Simon Museum in May 2014.

The temporary exhibition is composed of two groups of panels. Five of them explain how EFEO supported the modelization, the historical and artistic specificities of the named statues, the narrative iconography of the scene, international and national restitution processes, and Khmer cultural heritage.

The temporary exhibition will expose the pieces and will cover the restoration process, necessary for a better understanding of the looting consequences, and will be followed by a permanent exhibition focused on the full-fledge Style of Koh Ker area.

For more information, please contact Ms. Jamie Lee, UNESCO Communication Officer at hj.lee@unesco.org
