

Longing and Belonging

16 August – 12 October 2024

Artist Statement

Savanhdary Vongpoothon

I spent many days with Uncle Muòi a vietnames bamboo weaver, learning the intricate woven patterns he uses to make platters, fish traps and other beautiful bamboo objects. I have taken these techniques and applied them when weaving strips of mulberry bark paper from northern Vietnam. The companion pieces 'Rama was a Migrant (I)' and 'Rama was a Migrant (II)' are made up of woven strips of mulberry bark paper.

The most exciting aspect while making these series was discovering corresponding references between the images of the mythical flying horse in the 14th-century sacred text, the Rama Jataka, to an image of a Siho – a flying mythical horse depicted in contemporary Lao traditional textiles. The Siho in traditional weaving is always accompanied by a spirit figure riding the flying horse.

In 'Rama was a Migrant (I)' and 'Rama was a Migrant (II)', the painted image of Rama and Lakshmana sitting on their flying horse, Manikap appears repeatedly on the woven pieces of paper. This image depicts the journey of the two brothers along the axis of the Mekong River, from Vientiane in the north to Cambodia in the south, to rescue their sister Santa, who was kidnapped by their cousin Ravana. This eventful tale is from the epic Rama Jataka. I framed the spiritual figures and the mythical horses in the symbolic water of the Naga, which refers to the Laotian stretch of the Mekong River.

For the Lao people, the Mekong River is more than just a body of water: it is a life force and home to the Naga, the river dragon or serpent that protects the Naga Cities of Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

The more knowledge you have the more healing power you have, and understanding of your past, your history, the people in your life. Their memories become your memories, personal histories and connection with other people. So I guess it's an expansive gesture as well. When you say a healing quality ... my way of saying is I am learning all the time. That process is healing.