

Good Design: Mekong Design Selection ~Travel to Cambodia~

Japan Institute of Design Promotion

Ms. Sae Suzuki

●Beginning: The Mekong Design Selection, ASEAN Manufacturers and Japanese Designers Collaboration Project

The Mekong Design Selection is a collaboration project between the Japan Institute of Design Promotion (JDP) and the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC). Through the G-mark mechanism, products and services of companies from the Mekong Regional countries, namely Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV), will further aim to promote and expand exports to Japan. The CLMV awarded companies of the Mekong Design Selection 2014 have been matched with Japanese designers for collaborations to produce original brand products in order to enter into not only the Japanese market but also to other international markets. 12 groups between CLMV companies with high potential of traditional techniques and materials and the creative minds of Japanese designers were matched by JDP. The collaboration begins with their first meeting in CLMV. This international project will surely be a revolutionary project!

Mekong Design Selection: Awarded Companies x Japanese Designers

[Cambodia]	Wathan Artisans Cambodia x Mr. Ryuichi Kozeki (RKDS) Khmer Artisanry x Ms. Satoko Nihongi (Tokyo Zokei University) Villageworks Songkhem Co., Ltd. x Ms. Akiko Oshima (Ao Design) Cambodian Sedge Mats Business Association x Ms. Kaori Akiyama (STUDIO BYCOLOR)
[Lao P.D.R.]	Houey Hong Vocational Training Center for Women x Mr. Koichi Idebuchi Magic Lao Carpets Handicrafts x Ms. Kana Nakanishi
[Myanmar]	Bagan House x Mr. Satoshi Sasaki (Tokyo University of the Arts) YK Collections x Mr. Fumihiko Sano (studio PHENOMENON) Link 64 Co., Ltd. x Mr. Shunsuke Ikai, Mr. Hirohide Takei (ALBATRO DESIGN)
[Vietnam]	Vietnam Embroidery x Mr. Shunsuke Ikai, Mr. Hirohide Takei (ALBATRO DESIGN) Thai Hoa Fashion Textile Company x Mr. Mitsushi Yanaihara (STUDIO NIBROLL) Hiep Hung Group Pte x Mr. Mitsushi Yanaihara (STUDIO NIBROLL)

●The Encounter between Cambodian Awarded Companies and Japanese Designers

Of the 4 teams representing designers who will collaborate with either Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., Myanmar and Vietnam, the Cambodia team was the frontier group. (Duration of trip: February 22 ~ 28, 2015)

Our first day in Cambodia consisted of the designers meeting with the Cambodian awarded companies. Ms. Yoko Kawaguchi (adviser), Mr. Matsuura of AJC and myself as a coordinator

went to all the business locations.

① **Villageworks Songkhem Co., Ltd.**

The company was first established to help support village people. While using natural cotton, the company thrives to work toward sustaining traditional techniques and materials to match with modern flair.

New Project: Brand of custom-made uniform & corporate apparel made of organic cotton which accommodates small lot orders

Designer: Ms. Akiko Oshima (Ao Design)

After graduating from Tama Arts University, Ms. Oshima was employed at a cosmetics company and later founded Ao Design. Her expertise in design is vast and covers package design, graphics design, art directing cosmetics and toiletry product designs, PR, and others.

② **Watthan Artisans Cambodia**

It was first established as a training center for the disabled, and has grown to become an independent cooperative run by people of disabilities. While utilizing traditional techniques, the product designs and colors are contemporary. Aside from textile products, they also have wood carving products.

New Project: Brand and product that gives life to Cambodian traditional textile

Designer: Mr. Ryuichi Kozeki (RKDS)

After graduating from Tama Arts University, Mr. Kozeki worked for the world renowned designer Mr. Toshiyuki Kita. In the year 2011, he founded the Ryu Kozeki Design Studio (RKDS). His designs and art directions transcend the boundaries of different genres and is active in projects both domestically and internationally. His various other services include concept creation, product planning, brand development, and design consulting, all of which are tailored to raise the actual quality of projects.

③ **Cambodian Sedge Mats Business Association**

The sedge used for their products are 100% from the Kandal Province and is woven using traditional patterns and techniques. Their products of floor mats, table mats, slippers are all customizable by color, size and design.

New Project: A new brand product that mixes sedge and new materials

Designer: Ms. Kaori Akiyama (STUDIO BYCOLOR)

After graduating from Chiba University, Ms. Akiyama was employed by Itoki Corp. and worked on various projects on product design, branding and color schemes. In 2013, after working at STUDIO SAMIRA BOON, a design firm based in the Netherlands, Ms. Akiyama founded her own firm STUDIO BYCOLOR. The studio is dedicated to find the meaning and effects that colors have on people and employs wide range of colors in product and space design as well and

branding.

●Visits to other Cambodian Awarded Companies

From the second day, I went on a separate follow-up activity from the designers. I visited the three remaining Cambodian awarded companies and interviewed the representatives on the aftermath of winning the award. I was very pleased to see that all of the companies proudly displayed the award in the front of their shops. I felt that my mission to expand the awareness of high design literate companies to the general public will continue to be important for this project.

SentoSaSilk

I had a meeting with Ms. Seng, the president of SentoSaSilk. Ms. Seng has told us that she puts high trust in the value of winning the Mekong Design Selection and has displayed the award in the center of her display showroom. She was very pleased when she told us that the bags have also increased profits due in part because it had been awarded. Even a high government official came by to purchase several of the awarded items as gifts to bring abroad.

Khmer Artisanry

The company, Khmer Artisanry was built to protect the masterful craftsmanship of the grandmother who wove naturally dyed Khmer silk and traditional cotton items. After being awarded the Mekong Design Selection award, even more customers came in with the renewed reassurance of authentic silk being used for the company's products.

Sepako Angkor Co., Ltd. (Artisans d'Angkor)

The company, which was established as a vocational training center has grown to employ over 900 artisans. The awarded cushions were featured with an attractive advertisement with the description of the items being awarded the Mekong Design Selection. The same advertisements in the store were seen in the airport shop as well.

●The Origin of Cambodian Design “Angkor Wat”

On the fourth day of our stay, we went to see Mr. Kurata the President of Kurata Pepper and asked him “Where can one visit to get a feel of Cambodian design?” He answered “Angkor Wat, of course.” For the purpose of design research and to better understand the culture and history of Cambodia, the Cambodia team decided to go visit Angkor Wat.

The Angkor Wat is an iconic place much like Mt. Fuji is to Japan and is special because it is even featured in the national flag of Cambodia. Just as Mr. Kurata explained, Angkor Wat is the pride of Cambodians and is overflowing with the roots of Cambodian aesthetic sense. I strongly believe that one must visit Angkor Wat in order to better understand and have exchange of views and cultures with Cambodians.

●Closing: It's only the Beginning

The Cambodian team was the frontline group of this project, so every day was a new challenge in order to move forward. When we returned from our trip, we held a meeting with fellow designers who are about to embark on their trip and discussed the challenges we faced. I learned that in order for this project to have success, it is important to mutually understand customs, history, culture and feelings of Cambodia and Japan. Furthermore, I believe that the collaboration of high-quality made traditional crafts and materials with the added design sense will produce an even more thought after products in the global market. This is only the beginning. With the project, we aim to exhibit the final product at the 81st Tokyo International Gift Show in February, 2016.

For the original report in Japanese with pictures, please view this link:

http://www.asean.or.jp/ja/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Cambodia-Report_JDP_Ms.-Suzuki1.pdf