



Fragments

by Blake

*The pioneering Arts Lounge at Siem Reap's renowned Hôtel de la Paix recently played host to the Asia debut of **Fragments**, an evocative collection of sculptural works by world renowned artist **Blake**. Inspired by landmine survivors, the exhibition raised vital funds for mine clearance and survivor support in Cambodia - where up to six million landmines are thought to have been laid during three decades of civil war.*



Blake was born in Yellowknife, North West Territories, Canada on June 3 1956 and raised in Edmonton. He received an Honours Degree in Fine Art from the University of Alberta in 1979. In 1985, he moved to Paris to study figurative sculpture. In 1991, Blake moved to Monaco and opened the Monte-Carlo studio. Blake works in clay with live models to produce limited edition bronze and marble sculptures. The sculptures are cast or carved in Italy.

Traversing the Orient recently caught up with the artist in Hanoi's airport lounge

*TTO - What led you to become involved in the **Fragments** project? How did people react to it? Were you surprised, disappointed or pleased by their reactions?*

Blake - I feel that as an artist, I am privileged in that my work provides a platform from which I can speak and a freedom of expression that is unique in our world. This, I feel, allows me to contribute to the societies where I originally have found this inspiration. It allows me to examine society's conventions critically and express my beliefs through my art.

I believe in the social responsibility of the artist and this talk is about how art can make a difference. Intentional Art, as I refer to this work, is art that embodies a purpose within the concept that it carries. As conceptual



very hard to do, it seems that we are drawn to the negative so easily.

TTO - Tell us about any upcoming projects. Do you have any more work coming to this region and how can interested readers see your work or contact you?

Blake - The present project is the Burning Buddha, a bronze figure that is hourly engulfed in flames representing a visual poem that is left to speak to us of the ghost of freedom. Passers by, human rights activists and victims of abuse are expected to attend to reveal their personal experiences. The whole event will be filmed and released as a documentary. Human Rights is the cause and to raise awareness is the purpose.

I hope to show Fragments in Delhi in 2011 and perhaps Malaysia in 2013.

The sculpture that I am starting at the moment is about "Pro Choice" and what I am saying in the sculpture is that every female on this planet deserves to have the right to choose to abort a pregnancy. The choice must be theirs, their freedom lies in having that choice and every individual woman should always have the opportunity to choose. It is a basic human right of women.



Photographs by Mark Hammond

To see more of Blake's work go to the following links:

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at current rates of removal, it will take us over 1000 years to remove all of the landmines that have been placed in the ground during the last century.

This is our generations' legacy. We have left over 100 million landmines laying in wait for future generations. Landmines are indiscriminate, they will kill or injure innocent civilians decades after their intended use. They inhibit freedom of movement and often deny access to food, water, and other basic needs. They prevent the repatriation of refugees and hamper the delivery of humanitarian aid.

These weapons instill fear in communities, whose citizens often know they are walking in mined or danger-

ous areas, but have no possibility to farm other land, or take another route to school. These weapons not only injure or kill but they also remain a lethal barrier to development and post-conflict reconstruction.

Remember, to make a minefield, all that is required is the threat of a mine and the area becomes unusable. These weapons have left over 473,000 land mine survivors, many requiring life-long medical assistance. Yet even with these alarming figures, there is hope and on-going solutions to the global problem of landmines and other military waste.

A Canadian initiative; the 1997 Ottawa Convention to Ban Land

Mines provided a framework for governments to use in preventing the further production, use and stock piling of these weapons. 156 governments have joined this treaty yet the three most powerful nations in the world Russia, China and the US have failed to sign this agreement.

I like to believe that these sculptures shake people up and make them think about landmines. The work is meant to be provocative. It is here to be seen so that we might continue to be reminded of the after effects of the wars that we create.

TTO - What tangible results do you hope will occur as a result of this exhibition?

Blake - I hope to be able to fund Aki Ra and the Cambodian Self-Help Demining Charity and clear landmines in Cambodia. 30% of sales will go directly to this charity.

TTO - What were the challenges in expressing the subject of land mine victims through sculpture, how did you meet them and how do you feel about the results?

Blake - Good question, the work came easily and naturally once the concept had become clear, and it represents both physically and emotionally what landmines do to a society that lives amongst them. The biggest problem remains that as I am so involved with this cause I can't help but speak to people about the problem that landmines pose and before people can see the hope that is represented in these works they see the tragedy, and they don't want to have a piece of art that reminds them of tragedy in their home. As a result they choose not to purchase the sculpture and thus not support the cause.

I try now to speak of hope and the hope that is represented in the artwork. I have had clients that in purchasing a piece looked at the sculpture as having saved a limb or perhaps even a life. I am trying now to concentrate more on this positive aspect of the work and keep people from seeing only the negative, but this is often



art is about the idea, intentional art is about pushing that idea into action.

In 2003, I was shocked to discover that landmines are still taking casualties in Vietnam, every day, even though the Vietnamese-American war ended over 30 years before.

This experience led me to create the Fragments series of sculptures, which in turn became part of an international campaign to raise awareness of landmines; the idea that had given this work its voice. And through this process, this body of work has become more than just objects of art, more than a collection of bronze sculptures, these sculptures have accomplished something; this art has assisted in clearing landmines and perhaps have even saved a limb or maybe a life.

Fragments also serve as a symbol of hope and a reminder of the continued purpose that they serve. That is, to speak of the forgotten issue that explosive remnants of war pose in developing nations, as well as speaking of man's tragic nature and recognizing this nature, as it is upon a continuous cycle of wars that we have built our civilization.

In 2007, the Fragments sculptures toured England with a number of shows in London, Canterbury Cathedral and several galleries in the City of London as well as at Canada House in Trafalgar Square. In doing so, Fragments raised awareness of an issue with many young people who didn't know anything about the problem and reminded many who had forgotten since Princess Diana walked through a mine field in Angola shortly before her death many years ago.

Since then, many think that the problem has been eliminated. Well, that is not yet the case. Since then, public interest has turned to green issues and the ecological problems of our world, and this is of course a good thing, but I still know of little land more contaminated than that which explodes beneath your feet.

So allow me, at this point, to tell you a bit more about landmines.

Before 1900 there wasn't a landmine problem because they were not widely used.

However, in our era, the peace after conflict is, with few exceptions handicapped by military waste. Today,

