

Book Reviews

Preview: *Cambodian Journal*

Human resilience and the strong Cambodian spirit are themes that artist Valentina DuBasky explores in her new exhibition. Liz Ledden finds out more.



VALENTINA DUBASKY'S new exhibition at Java Gallery opening June 6, follows her journey of discovery in Cambodia from 1994 to 1998. On her repeat travels, the American artist observed a fragile community attempting to rebuild shattered lives following the devastating destruction of the Khmer Rouge era.

Based in New York, Valentina maintains a painting studio in the city and has held over 130 exhibitions of paintings and prints. Represented in public collections in galleries as diverse as The Seattle Art Museum to the Fuzhou International Centre in China, she has also represented the US in an 'Art in Embassy' program at US embassies in Estonia, Iceland, Jordan, Latvia, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru and Thailand.

For her current exhibition on Cambodia, Valentina uses ink, graphite paper and mixed media on paper. Her personal interest in human rights was the driving force behind the work, with repeat visits to Cambodia throughout the 1990s until today, providing an insight into the strong will of Cambodians to recover from tragedy.

First visiting the country in 1991, Valentina returned

in 1994 with Bhavia Carol Wagner to work as the photographer for a book named *Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia* – an oral history of women and children survivors of the Khmer Rouge. During this period she also put together an educational photography exhibition on the impact of landmines in Cambodia. In 1998, Valentina returned to Cambodia once more to work as an election observer in the national elections of that year. It was throughout these visits that she gathered the inspiration for *Cambodian Journal*. She still feels compelled to return to the country.

"I have continued to come back to Cambodia as a long-term friend," she says. "In 2005, I started Art in a Box, a nonprofit organization that assists communities facing crisis situations and children at risk through art and art education." Valentina plans to spend more time in Cambodia working on Art in a Box projects with local children.

Valentina DuBasky's Cambodian Journal is at *Java Café & Gallery* from Jun. 6 to Jul. 1. Opening 6pm to 9pm on June 6.