

Apsara in New York

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Poems
by Sokunthary Svay

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Sokunthary Svay is a Pushcart-nominated Khmer writer and musician from the Bronx, New York. She and her family were refugees from Cambodia who survived the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. She is the poetry editor for *Newtown Literary*. A founding member of the Cambodian American Literary Arts Association (CALAA), her work has been published internationally in Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, London and Australia. Svay was a subject in *New York Magazine's* "Living in a Sanctuary City" portfolio and featured in the New York Immigration Coalition's *This is Our NY*, broadcast in Times Square. Additional writing credits include *Homelands: Women's Journeys Across Race, Place and Time*, *LONTAR: Journal for Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*, *FLESH*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Blue Lyra Review* and *Mekong Review*. She is a past Willow Arts Alliance Residency Fellow and a recipient of the First Friday Residency at the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning. Svay recently received an American Opera Projects' Composers & the Voice Fellowship for 2017-18, where she will gain experience as a writer for voice and the operatic stage alongside her composer partner Liliya Ugay.

"The apsara is the mythical deity that decorates most Khmer temples, and it represents the ideal woman in Cambodia. In fact, even the classical dancers are modeled after them. My "Apsara in New York" image meant a meeting of my heritage/culture being dropped into the madness, urban temples (not necessarily religious, but sacred spaces personal and whatnot).

I feel like my work and who I am embodies the jarring combination of old world Cambodian tradition and culture with the adjustment of US, the Bronx, NYC in general."

~Sokunthary Svay

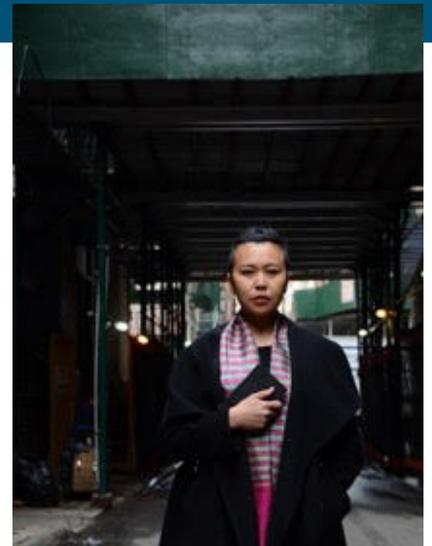
Move with the divine grace of apsaras
depicted in the royal ballet.
You possess the poise of dancers
who wooed Rodin to that Paris dock,
his Danseuses Cambodgiennes
immortalized in watercolor.

— "This is your Inheritance"

~ ~ ~

Survivors gather to resume
a dance unfinished
unfurling their fingers
in gestures
once described
as lotus blossoming.

— "Jungle Crossing, 1980"



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