

PRESS RELEASE

The Return to Cambodia of 74 Khmer Cultural Objects
from the Family of Douglas Latchford

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has the honor to inform the public that seventy-four (74) Khmer cultural objects recovered from the possession of the late Douglas Latchford have been returned to the Kingdom of Cambodia, in accordance with the 2020 agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and the Latchford family.

The return of this significant number of Khmer cultural treasures marks another major achievement in recent years, following the repatriation of important Khmer artifacts from the Latchford family in 2021 and 2023. This success reflects Cambodia's continued and determined efforts to recover, safeguard, and restore the cultural heritage of its ancestors for future generations.

These artworks date from the pre-Angkorian period to the height of the Angkorian Empire and include masterfully crafted sandstone and metal sculptures, as well as ritual objects. Among the most significant pieces are two exceptional sandstone sculptures from the early Angkorian period, dating to the first fifty years of the 9th century, during the reign of Jayavarman II, which Latchford claimed originated from Phnom Kulen. These male and female divine figures are regarded as exemplary works created during the formative period of the Angkorian Empire and are often referred to as the "divine couple." Based on available evidence, the female figure is considered a rare masterpiece of the Kulen style.

The collection also includes a sandstone head of Brahma and a statue of a yaksha (rakshasa) from the Koh Ker temple complex. The serene yet powerful head of Brahma was originally attached to a body enshrined in a major temple, reflecting the cosmological vision and refined artistry of the Koh Ker style. Another remarkable piece is a bronze sculpture in the Bakheng style, representing an outstanding example of the early development of Khmer iconography.

These 74 objects are not merely works of art; they are living testimonies to the wisdom, creativity, and spiritual spirit of Khmer civilization. For decades, many national treasures were separated from their homeland during times of war and unrest. Their return clearly demonstrates Cambodia's unwavering commitment to seeking justice for its cultural heritage and sends a strong message to the international community that the Cambodian people remain united in protecting and preserving their national cultural assets. The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts reaffirms its steadfast dedication to safeguarding and promoting ancient cultural heritage for future generations and for humanity as a whole.

The repatriation of these objects formerly held by Douglas Latchford underscores Cambodia's persistent and responsible efforts. Cambodia reiterates its commitment to working in good faith with private collectors, institutions, and governments worldwide to ensure that revered Khmer cultural heritage is returned to its country of origin. Each return carries profound significance in healing historical wounds and restoring national dignity and cultural identity.

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts expresses its deepest gratitude to Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, President of the Senate and former Prime Minister, and to Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, for their visionary leadership and the Win–Win Policy, which brought full peace and stability and created the necessary conditions for the recovery of Khmer cultural properties displaced during times of conflict.

The Ministry also sincerely thanks and commends the efforts of the United Kingdom authorities, including the Metropolitan Police Service Art and Antiques Unit, the Heritage Crime Task Force, the OSCE Border Security and Management Unit and Transnational Threats Department, the British Embassy in Phnom Penh, and all relevant authorities both abroad and in Cambodia. Special appreciation is extended to the Archaeology and Research Team of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts for their professionalism, dedication, and tireless investigative efforts in securing the return of these invaluable treasures.

Finally, the Ministry expresses its special thanks to Mr. Bradley J. Gordon of Edenbridge Asia, legal advisor to the Ministry; Mr. Steven Heimberg of Stalwart Law Group; and Ms. Malina Antoniadis of NOSTOS Strategies for their assistance in facilitating the return process. The Ministry also extends its gratitude to Chip Mong Group, Canadia Bank, and artists Ngoun Chan Devith and Tep Boprek for their generous financial contributions in supporting the transportation costs for the return of these invaluable Khmer cultural treasures.

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