

THE MISSING PICTURE¹

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY RITHY PANH

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Produced by Catherine Dussart (CDP) and Bophana

Production Rithy Panh

Publisher Editions Grasset

In Cambodia's first Oscar-nominated film, Rithy Panh uses clay figures, archival footage and voice-over narration to tell a deeply personal story: "For many years, I have been looking for the missing picture: a photograph taken between 1975 and 1979 by the Khmer Rouge when they ruled over Cambodia...On its own, of course, an image cannot prove mass murder, but it gives us cause for thought, prompts us to meditate, to record History. I searched for it vainly in the archives, in old papers, in the country villages of Cambodia. Today I know: this image must be missing. I was not really looking for it; would it not be obscene and insignificant? So I created it. What I give you today is neither the picture nor the search for a unique image, but the picture of a quest: the quest that cinema allows."

ENGLISH COMMENTARY/VOICE OVER²

In the middle of life, childhood returns.

The water is sweet, and bitter.

1 Courtesy of Editions Grasset and Catherine Dussart (CDP). THE MISSING PICTURE won the Un Certain Regard prize at the 2013 Cannes International Film Festival, the Grand Jury Award at the Cinemanila International Film Festival, and was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 86th Academy awards (2014). In 2013 Rithy Panh was awarded Asian Filmmaker of the Year at the Busan International Film Festival.

2 English translation Letitia Farris Toussaint with the voice of Jean-Baptiste Phou.

I seek my childhood
like a lost picture.

Or rather it seeks me.

Is it because I am fifty?

Because I've seen troubled times
when fear alternates with hope?

The memory is there now,
pounding at my temples.

I'd like to be rid of it.

With clay and with water,
with the dead,
with rice fields,
with living hands,
a man is made.

It doesn't take much.

It just takes will.

His suit is white, his tie is dark.

I want to hold him close.

He is my father.

I remember in the old days in Phnom Penh,
the great gatherings at our house.

I remember laughter and singing,
the smell of caramel,
fish, spices and mango.

We danced.

We chatted with aunts and uncles.

Cousins brought fruit:
Guavas and jackfruit.

It was a time for studies and books.

I loved to hear my father read us poetry at night.

I remember how sweet life was.

Then came the war.

The bombings drew nearer in the 1970s.

I remember the first who died,
our fear,
my sorrow as a child.

So many pictures that go by again and again in the world.

We think we own them, because we've seen them.

When we discover a picture on a screen
that is neither painting,
nor shroud,
then it is not missing.

Phnom Penh was surrounded by the Khmer Rouge
who'd come to end injustice and exploitation.

They entered the capital on April 17th 1975.

There were no cries of joy,
only silent expectancy.

I was there.

I remember the look in the eyes of the young soldiers,
as if we had not been there.

They had their orders:
never touch the enemy by the hand.

The enemy, that's me.
I am thirteen.

The central bank blows up with all its money.
There is no turning back.

The city is impure.
The city is corrupt.
It is emptied within hours.

Two million people are thrown onto the roads.
They leave behind their homes,
their loved ones,
their memories.
In fact, the former world.

*Long live the glorious April 17th,
a day overflowing with joy.*

The revolution is pure.
It wants nothing of people.

Now Phnom Penh can be filmed
like in the prophecy of Puth Tumneay:
*Houses with no occupants, streets with no pedestrians,
stairs that no one will climb,
flowing rivers of blood.*

Very soon we were separated.
We headed into the country in the middle of dry season.

We are hungry and thirsty.

We go from hand to hand like animals,
in cattle cars,
then wagons.

Phnom Penh's deportation is a missing picture.

Immediately, the Khmer Rouge counted,
then separated women and men,
adults and children.
Souvenirs were forbidden, all personal effects.
Suddenly there are no individuals,
only numbers.

They cut our hair.
They take our watches, glasses,
toys, books.
They dye our clothes black.
They change our first names.

We are the new people:
bourgeois, intellectuals and capitalists,
to be reeducated,
to be destroyed.

You must embrace the proletarian condition!

This is the new land
that we call Democratic Kampuchea.
A factory with smoke most unsettling.
Concrete dikes and rice fields.
No people.

All of society is organized, collectively and militarily,
in working units.

The Angkar takes care of you all comrades!

brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers!

The Angkar is the organization.
It is all. It is each.
It is the young Khmer Rouge,
the village chief,
the head of the torture center,
and Pol Pot.

They must be watched, this barefoot people
of the sand dust.

Soon there will be no more faces,
no more friends,
no more love,
no more father and mother.
Soon there will be no more emotion,
and even words will be transformed.
Each being will be a revolutionary,
or fertilizer for the rice fields.

To hang on,
you must hide within yourself
a strength, a memory,
an idea that no one can take from you.
For a picture can be stolen, a thought cannot.

*The Angkar requests that you attend
A study session
to reconstruct yourself!*

*Comrades
soon we will be masters of the water,
of the earth and the elements.*

*Every hectare will yield three tonnes of rice.
Or five.
Or seven.*

Then we will be ten million.

*There will be no more hunger,
no more fatigue, no more injustice.*

The elderly will be fed by machines.

The Angkar is perceptive and full of solutions.

The people are the brain of the Angkar.

Long live the extraordinary grandiose Kampuchean Revolution!

Long life to a new society devoid of rich and poor!

We raise our fists.

We repeat the slogans.

The Angkar will establish a model society,
unique in the world,
without class division.

In this perfect world,
the dams are made of concrete.
The embankments are paved.
There is order in everything.

Flying over this utopia
is a red flag,
and of course this truth:
Comrade, you are so very free!

For now, you must obey,
dig ceaselessly,
move earth,
move rock.

For months
I dug a pond on arid plains.

I never saw water.

Not once.

Long live Democratic Kampuchea

A prodigious leap forward!

A marvelous leap forward!

An extraordinary grandiose leap forward!

Be determined to work in the rice fields!

Don't count on the heavens!

These slogans have not left me.

I sometimes hear them still.

Former society thought only of feasting.

Collectivism is the fertilizer and the fodder.

From now on, a saucepan is individualistic.

It is forbidden to possess one.

So we share everything.

Our only belonging is our spoon.

With hunger you get a man.

You get them all,

living or dead.

As for the sick

or those who do not obey

they are not fed

or only get half rations.

Hunger, it's for us.

Hunger, it's a weapon.

The new people are a parasitic plant.

The ancient peoples, who watch us,

live in the granaries.

They are never hungry.

To reeducate is first to destroy.

In Phnom Penh, there is a people to wipe out.

Conquest through emptiness is a picture glaring with simplicity.

The Khmer Rouge want a man made of metal,
a pure instrument of revolution.

Khmer Rouge leaders
are *the universal and homogenous State*.
They never look at each other.

There is of course Pol Pot, brother number I,
whom we recognize by his fan.
And then his comrades:
Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan.

And Son Sen.

Rise, you damned of the Earth!

The damned, that's us,
we in the fields, in chains,
wandering like ghosts.

In this capital, four years empty,
there remains the Central Committee,
and Ponear Yat High School,
which becomes Center S2I.
Here they whip,
they electrocute,
they cut,
they force feed excrement,
they get confessions.

It all starts with purity, and ends with hate.

I know the Khmer Rouge
photographed executions.

Why?
For proof?
To complete a report?

What man having photographed this scene would not want it to go missing?
I look for this picture.
If at last I should find it
I could not show it, of course.

And anyway, what would the picture of a dead man reveal?

I prefer this anonymous young woman,
who defies the camera,
and the eye of her torturer,
and still looks straight at us.

Scarlet blood
that covers Kampuchean cities & plains, our Fatherland,
sublime blood of workers and peasants,
sublime blood of men and of women,
of revolutionary fighters.
Blood turned to implacable hatred and resolved fighting,
you freed us from slavery.

Yet
one does not film with impunity.
I look at these child laborers.
Their hands. Their faces. Their weary bodies.
This young avant-garde works toward its own destruction.

At night, I told stories from before
of ghosts,
and witches,
of lost travelers,

and mischevious children.

So they put me in the kitchen, where we ate well.

I told the story of the Apollo rocket,
racing for the moon,
to these revolutionaries who spoke in numbers and codes.

Scarlet blood that covers the cities and plains,
do you cover the Moon too?

I dreamt of walking on it like Neil Amstrong
lightfooted and childlike.

One small step for man
One giant leap for mankind.

But who are these people? asks a comrade.
These people who walk on the moon?
They are Americans. I saw the pictures back then.
Americans?
You're lying.
That's impossible.

The storyteller confesses.
The storyteller is killed.

The great leap for mankind is not to be found in capitalist propaganda.

It is here,
for we who are hungry.

*Long live the independent masterful way
of Democratic Kampuchea's revolutionary Angkar
Long live its extraordinary clairvoyance*

On our moon, there is nothing.
Parched earth and dust bury it all.

It took me years to learn to walk upon it,
bare feet on thorns.

Muddy water trickles down my throat.
Little by little I disappear.
I'm nothing anymore.

It is strange to drink mud.
The buffalo watch us.
How odd these humans are to drink our water.

A Nestle tin becomes our unit of measure.
It contains two-hundred fifty grams of rice.
Very soon, famine strikes.
These two-hundred fifty grams, we share them daily
Seven of us
then sixteen
then twenty-five.

We share hunger.

My mother fights for us.
She builds a shack of branches, leaves and vines.
Each day she walks two hours,
so we may drink clean water.

She gets permission to take my father a half-ration.
But one night he tells us
I will no longer eat animal food.
No. I am a man.
And he stops eating.

I don't understand. I resent him.

They found some sheet metal
to carry his body to the pit grave.

My mother doesn't cry.
Not a tear before the Khmer Rouge.

That night,
she tells me how my father should have been buried,
by his own, by school teacher friends,
traditionally and peacefully.
This funeral in words
I don't want to forget.
It was an act of resistance.

My father came from a poor family.
He believed in schools.
He dreamt of sending his sisters and brothers,
his children and ancestors,
that we should be a free people.

He didn't abandon us.
He was teaching us free will.

I still feel his soul returned to our home,
where he can at last recite in peace
his favorite poem by Prevert:

*Black hair,
black hair, caressed by waves
Black hair,
black hair, tussled by winds*

Here, schools become extermination centers.
Here,
pigs become readers,
since readers were pigs.

Here, every soldier has a pen in his pocket.
Sometimes a watch on his wrist.

For us it is forbidden.
But it is a sign,

a distinction in a land that hates knowledge.

*The spade is your pen
The rice field is your paper*

*Here is the school of applied electricity
intended to train technicians.*

*The students of this school must be children of poor peasants,
or the lower middle class, or fighters,
girls and boys from the revolutionary army.*

*Comrade Thaon is sixteen years old.
At nine he joined the Revolution
and the revolutionary army.
He fought on many battlefields.
He was also wounded.*

*There are many children like Comrade Thaon
at the front and behind it.
They are countless.*

*They all have exceptional biographies.
Today they work hard with all their might and heart,
within their units,
to defend and rebuild the country.*

I spent my own childhood in film studios,
with a director neighbor.

I loved the wonderful world of wigs and costumes,
the colors and gold.
The land of giants and fairytales.
I loved it backstage,
where beautiful actresses seemed to dance just for me.

I collected scraps of film
that I watched using a box and a small light.

Then that world was destroyed
The cinemas were closed.
The artists were executed.
The singers, technicians and directors
were sent to the fields.

A Khmer Rouge film is always a slogan.

*Practice is worth all theories
so don't entertain personal ideas!*

*He who has the disease of former society
let him take Lenin for a pill!*

From now on there is but one actor.
It is not the people, but Pol Pot.

He is the Revolution. His myth must be forged.

A hut is built in the jungle, a wooden set.
Pol Pot is a Revolutionary. He drinks only tea,
uses an oil lamp,
washes outdoors.
Lives with his country, his books,
his gun, his comrades.
He lives the ideology.

Brother no. I was inspired by young humanity.
The original people.
The Jarai,
the Kuoy,
the Bunong.
A sparse handful of families who shared everything in common.
By observing them, he understood.
Like Rousseau's noble savage.

Already in Paris

Pol Pot signed his articles “Original Khmer”.

The Khmer Rouge, it’s Marx and Rousseau,
integral communism and the pure, original world.
A perfect society.

The radiant revolution shines in all its glory!

These peasants, scorned, abandoned,
adhere to the fight for justice.
They look good on the new country’s banknotes,
which will never be used.

*There is no more selling, no more trade,
no more complaints, no more theft, no more pillaging,
no more private property!*
There are no more problems.

The new people are reeducated in the rice fields.
Plunged into the original world,
that they be purified.

They must be forged.
Return to ancient ways or be destroyed.

Pol Pot says
*Those whom we cannot re-educate,
we will fight like enemies.*

*The Angkar never uses any object
from imperialist or feudal society.*

Capitalist automobiles confess their crimes.
They too are reeducated
These cars work toward edifying the new country.

Evenings after the worksite, are for indoctrination.

Words change meaning.

We speak in slogans.

The comrade with many faults is the enemy!

Whoever protests is an enemy.

Whoever opposes is a corpse!

A 9-year old boy denounces his mother for picking mangoes.

She confesses.

The child shouts

The comrade has recognized her crime!

His mother weeps softly.

To confess

is to accept to die,

for the Revolution to be just.

When humans will be free and equal to this degree,

will they still be humans?

The mother closes her eyes.

Is it to picture her child?

She says nothing.

Then she is taken into the forest by guards,

never to return.

I want to escape the mud, the hunger,

my black clothes.

Walking in the water is torture.

I collapse from exhaustion.

Sometimes an airplane crosses the sky.

Is it observing us?

Will it parachute a camera to me?

So the world will know at last?

The missing picture: that's us.

This unreal airplane saves me.
I have no more name, no more family,
no more hope, but I still have a human heart.

I think of the old days.
Of my brother who disappeared in Phnom Penh
on April 17th, 1975,
with his guitar.
The Khmer Rouge must not have liked him.
Not his smile,
not his teenage bangs,
not his songs.

Colour has vanished,
like laughter, song and dance.

Our day to day life is a combat,
a war against nature,
against words,
against the enemy.

*The children sent to the front are small
but full of energy to fulfill their duty!*

And me, I kept repeating
*The Angkar never makes mistakes,
The Angkar is everything.*

I don't wish anyone to see a child die.
Feet swollen.
Face swollen.
As if all that was left was water.

The little girl is shaky with hunger,
so she steals corn.

The group leader catches her,
and brings her back to us.

It is a crime.

The grandmother forbids her to eat the corn.

We don't steal. We are proud.

The little girl cries.

And me? I don't get it.

During the night the child chews salt.

Her teeth crunch.

Hunger strikes at night.

She sleeps next to me,

her belly swollen, her expression blank.

She sighs.

She calls her mother.

She calls her father.

Then she called no more,

and we buried her.

The two other children died soon afterward.

I wish to be rid of this picture of hunger and suffering.

So I show it to you.

The mother is transported to the hospital.

There she learns her sixteen-year old daughter has died.

Here, everyone dies.

Without a word she strokes her forehead.

She picks the lice off the beautiful, gaunt face.

Then she too lies down on the wooden planks.

Fishing is forbidden,

yet fish abound by the hundreds.

In hiding I catch one.

Two days later I take it to my mother.

But she is already dead.

So, I understood I would be alone.

I pictured our house again,
our kitchen,
the garden,
the notebooks,
my parents' faces.

These pictures are not missing
they are inside me.

*We are determined to fulfill our 1977 political duty
with an extraordinary great leap forward.*

I have become one of these children at the worksites.

Looking closely at this movement,
one sees the fatigue,
the falls,
the gaunt faces.
One sees the cruelty.

One sees that some can no longer work.
Yet, there is a camera.

Here is the teacher.
That's what we call her.
She teaches us the spade and shovel.
And ideology.

Let us live in perfect equality!

It's the children's revolt. We are not happy.

Of course,
Each must count on no one else!

But Khmer Rouge cadres eat better than us.
They never go hungry.
Where is the equality?
So our leaders do their self-criticism.

My friends and I are sent to a very tough camp
the very next day.

At this worksite
we must dig 3 cubic meters of dirt in the morning
and make 25 to 30 kilos of fertilizer in the afternoon
from leaves and cow manure.

There were so few cows
trees and leaves
that these quotas are unattainable.

If we don't manage to extract these 3 cubic metres,
they are raised to 5 cubic metres.

Work eagerly!
Don't be defeatist before the enemy !

You must love and respect the collectivity!

This camp was a tomb guarded by a man in a felt hat.
His dog watched us curiously.

This man beat those who didn't obey his rules.
We were forbidden to dig for roots to eat,
and forbidden to speak.

He ate alone and had his own food.
So did his dog.

We share our children's rations.

In Paris or elsewhere,

those who loved our slogans,
those who read books
have they seen these pictures?
Or were they missing?

I return to the past.
To all those who died.
My sisters,
my brothers,
my cousins,
my parents.
Childhood is both far and near,
with its gentleness,
its joyful cries,
its laughter,
and voices.
Childhood is a refrain.

I haven't been home since April 17th, 1975
yet I remember every detail,
the paintings,
the doors,
the jugs,
the hallways.

My house became a gambling dive,
a karaoke,
then a brothel.
It too was voided,
torn from its history.

There is no truth.
There is only cinema.
The revolution is cinema.

I remember the great flood of 1978.
I was already at a labor camp
and we were so hungry.

Then a huge bale of rice straw
washed up on the riverbank.
We even found eggs.
So we ate.

With film too, the harvest is glorious.
There is grain.
There are these calm, determined faces.
Like in a painting.
A poem.

At last I see the Revolution they so promised us.
It exists only on film.

These sacks of rice were not for us.
Were they reserved for our leaders?
Or shipped abroad, since they are marked in Arabic numerals?
Or were they film props?
Full of sand?

Our every move was scrutinized,
Our every breath,
and even our silence.
But the great famine escaped Khmer Rouge leaders.

Did they not know?
Did they not see?
Could they not act?
Does the truth lie in the slogans so glorious?
Or in these pictures, that are not missing?

This is what Pol Pot has to say:

*Currently our cooperatives are well-established units,
politically,
and in spirit,
capable of accomplishing all of the Angkar's directives.*

*Througout the land
they have fulfilled their revolutionary duties well.
They have transformed our sad, dry regions of former times,
poor and without drinking water.
Now there are ponds great and small,
canals interconnecting,
green rice fields and orchards.
These cooperatives are founding a new society,
purged of corruption,
and rogues of all sorts.
These cooperatives are founding a new society,
collectivist, un-corrupt
equal and prosperous.
These cooperatives live a perfect existence
in terms of food,
health, sanitation,
culture, studies
and education.*

The reality is this:
Straw huts.
Drought.
Exhaustion.
Hunger.
Neon lights to work by night.
Speakers blaring slogans.

Ideology was rampant in the fields.

The one who shot this footage, slow and true,
was named Ang Sarun.

He was a Khmer Rouge cameraman.

To him we also owe this footage of a speech by Pol Pot.

Why this haze?
Is it a technical glitch?

Or did he mean to show the children in rags?
To show brother no. I the true state of the nation?

The cameraman is tortured,
then executed.
His body disappears.
His story disappears.
But not this footage.

*Let us commit to brandishing ever higher
the red standard of the Revolution!*

It sounds like Mao.
It's an Angkar slogan.

Pol Pot goes to the airport in person
to greet Zhang Chunqiao of the Gang of Four
and Geng Biao.

Chinese comrades inspired the policies and ideology
of Democratic Kampuchea.
This picture of fraternity is not missing.

The great leap forward, is it not wonderful?
Is not each day a celebration?
Is not Kampuchea succeeding,
through purity, through void
where the Chinese Revolution failed?

Is not Kampuchea an extraordinary laboratory of ideology?
Is not this visit a lesson?

We hunted rats.
We ate them.
We ate insects,
roots,
and raw snails.
That's how dehumanization starts.

With hunger.
With disease.
With physical decay.

Who filmed the sick people?
Who filmed the pagodas turned hospices?
The maggot-eaten knee of my bunk neighbor?
Or the young woman
who can't deliver,
who screams all night,
alone,
hitting her belly, to death?

Of course, there's a Khmer Rouge hospital.
I lived there for weeks in the huge halls of death.
Medicines are stored in Coca-Cola bottles.
Patients are injected with coconut water, so pure.

I wished I could not hear the moaning,
the hiccups, the screaming,
no longer smell the damp rotting flesh.

The dead go at night.
Mornings I'd carry them away on wood planks.

And I survived.

This man sitting on the floor is too weak.
He does not eat.
He cannot move.
I've pictured him all these years.
I hold out a hand to him.

The Khmer Rouge have banned capitalist medicine.
They chop roots.
They boil them.
They experiment with traditional remedies,
and therefore revolutionary.

Everywhere are experimental units using humans.
At S21, for example.

There are no more diplomas!
There are only practical diplomas!

I washed the halls.
I washed the sick.
And every morning,
I carried the dead
down to the pit.

Sometimes, I teeter at the edge of the void.
There are hollow sounds.
Bones knocking.
Hands that seek and find those of a child.

This child who says he's alive and who tells the tale,
that's me.

In the middle of life,
childhood returns,
sweet and bitter,
with its pictures.
Childhood as drowning.
Childhood as a question:
How is it that I am here?
Why couldn't I have helped my loved ones more?

Already in childhood,
death is present.

We understand the Khmer Rouge by watching their footage.
Pol Pot forges a reality conformant with his desire.
Even nature must conform.

Sometimes

the cadres gathered several villages
and showed a film
boasting our bare-handed fight
against the colonial powers.

Of course,
we knew that the actors were bad,
that the film was bad,
and many of us slept in the back, exhausted
like me.

For four years
we were moved from worksite to worksite.
How do you revolt when all you've got are black clothes and a spoon?
When you are lost?
When you are hungry?

Some say now that it's because of Buddhism and the acceptance of destiny.

Where were those fine minds then?
In their books?
In their lofty ideas?

Here it is not karma, not religion that kills.
It's ideology.

At the start of all totalitarianism is falsity.

*You're afraid of your enemies?
You're afraid of tree trunks.*

I worked in the great forests.
We had to cut trees to plant corn crops.
There was the heat, the humidity,
the snakes, the tarantulas,
the monkeys,
and the lizards that some of my comrades ate.

Don't let yourselves be vanquished by nature!

Vow to attack!

Make a breach!

These slogans never roused me
but the sounds of the great forest did.

We hardened,
grew used to fighting the cold,
to controlling our bodies.
After the storm, we slept in wet clothes.

I remember the central market
its tart, joyful smells,
the scent of jasmine.
I remember lovers
their shy gestures
their glances.

I remember abundance.
I remember silk,
fish, meat,
and the smell of boiled chicken,
that obsessed me for four years.
I remember happy meals.

At my childhood market
people had a mouth.
They laughed and talked. They kissed.

It's the same street,
lively then empty.
Yes, the same,
the neighborhoods of Phnom Penh,
if you only open your eyes.

I remember this world so imperfect and human.
2000 years of slavery
said Pol Pot

He's a human being like you and me.
He simply made a choice,
an ideological choice,
be it a criminal one.
It's complicated,
that's why I really wanted to make this film.
No one is born an assassin or an executioner.

The father
Our son sure jabbers now...
On and on he rambles.
At least he's good with words...

The mother
You'd rather he be a teacher, like you.
But it's our story he's filming.
That's us.

The father
But there are the poor who are hungry
The rich expropriated them too,
yet he thinks only of the Khmer Rouge...

The father is right.
Already before the Khmer Rouge,
the poor were thrown off their land.
They enrolled the people because of this injustice.

And then there were the Americans.
They dropped 500,000 tons of bombs
on the country.

So the poor joined the Revolution.
They raised their fists.
The Khmer Rouge lied to them about justice,
about equality,
about happiness,

about progress,
about everything.
And these same poor
still dig dirt today.

Sometimes I picture a child.
Let's say it's me.
He had it all wrong.
He didn't know how to fish,
to walk barefoot, or fight.

Years later
He feels guilty for not having helped the destitute.

They say talking helps.
You understand.
You get over it.

For me,
this wisdom will never come.
It's not a picture of loved ones I seek.
I want to touch them.
Their voice is missing,
so I won't tell.
I want to leave it all
leave my language, my country
in vain
and my childhood returns.

Now it's the boy who seeks me out.
I see him.
He wants to speak to me.
But words are hard to find.

This black dog
is the god of passage.
It takes me to its boat.
When I look at it, I see the man in the felt hat

and the river of floating corpses.

In the village where I lived,
Some families stayed on after the Khmer Rouge left.

The young men went to work in Thailand.
The former village chief,
who was cruel and terrified us on his horse,
was not arrested.
He lived happily, I believe,
and had many children.

The Khmer Rouge canteen is gone.
Hardly anything remains.
A few shards of jugs,
rusted pans,
a clay oven.

It's all over
like a cruel film.

As for the pit graves near the hospital
where I buried so many,
and my mother, and my sisters,
The pits have become a manmade lake,
dug out by an international organization.

The bones have been carried away.
Pumpkins and corn have been planted.
But the lake is so salty,
and such an odd green,
that no one dares use it or drink from it.

Are the dead there?
Yes.
Sometimes it seems we walk over them.
So I step away.

There are always souls who wander,
seeking a place,
a sweet, noble thought.
Many resisted.
Many.
In silence.
In a word.
In a smile.

Sometimes a small gesture is all it takes to say no.

I think of my father who announced his choice.
Sometimes, silence is a scream.

Mourning is difficult.
There's no end to the burial.

There are no more cattle cars.
There are no more slogans.
No more young guards in black.
There is the blood-drenched earth.

Their flesh, is mine.
So we are together.

There are many things that Man should not see or know.
Should he see them,
he'd be better off dying.

But should any one of us see or know these things,
then he must live to tell of them.

Every morning,
I worked over that pit.
My shovel hit bones and heads.
As for dirt, there is never enough.

It's me they will kill.

Or maybe they already have.

Of course I haven't found the missing picture.
I looked for it,
in vain.

A political film should unearth
what it invented.

And so I make this picture.
I look at it.
I cherish it.
I hold it in my hand like a beloved face.

This missing picture
I now hand over to you,
so that it never cease to seek us out.