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The Rights Stuff Highlights of this year's Equality Forum



Vuth Lyno
PAINT IT THE TRUTH: Smoh Pit,
a portrait from the 2011 “Thoamada”
series.

Photographs by Vuth Lyno

Vuth Lyno, the 31-year-old Cambodian photographer, winner of an upcoming Fulbright Scholarship and one of the founders of art collective Stiev Selapak (Art Rebels), has titled his exhibition “Thoamada” — Khmer for “the usual.” These photographs, a combination of two series, “Thoamada” and “Thoamada II,” constitute a major artistic achievement and are Vuth’s American debut. The openly gay Vuth found inspiration for 2011’s “Thoamada” when he noticed a new acknowledgement of the LGBTQ community in Cambodia, particularly of gay and bisexual men. “This [LGBTQ existence] is nothing new to Cambodia, but perhaps the visibility, the openness, is starting to be more positive,” he says he recalls thinking at the time. The result was a portraiture series of several closeted gay and bisexual men, all with their faces painted, a decision the subjects made to obscure their identities and which they executed with their own hands. This is no glib metaphor for the mask — the necessities of protection and of a division between public performance and private persona are very real. The follow-up is a series of diptychs that place the families of LGBTQ persons in portraits next to posed shots of important moments in family history. All of the subjects of “Thoamada II” are out, a fact that Vuth resists seeing as a stand-in for any rapid development in Cambodian social mores. But the aspiration is clear: that a once-hidden community, and its hidden love, can emerge into the everyday.

—Dotun Akintoye

Through May 5, reception Thu., May 2, 5-7 p.m., free, William Way Community Center, 1315 Spruce St., 215-732-2220, waygay.org.