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Richard “Rick” Murai was born in Berkeley, CA, in 1952. After earning his MFA in 1978 from San Francisco State University, he went on to teach photography at Yuba College in Marysville, CA, where he has been teaching for nearly 25 years.

“I have a dual undergrad major in fine art and journalism, and was heavily influenced by the documentary photographers of the 60s.” As a high school photography student in Berkeley during the tumultuous Vietnam era, Murai says that he “seriously considered the photojournalist route” but ultimately concluded that “it was creatively limited” for his interests, so he moved towards the fine arts.

He states that his photographic influences “are fairly eclectic and include the relaxed, enigmatic portraits of August Sander, Irving Penn and Emmit Gowin; the simple landscapes of David Plowden; and the sacred and profane work of Joel Peter Witkin.” He goes on to say “This is probably why I enjoy teaching; I can live vicariously through the eyes, and diverse work, of my students.”

In addition to on-campus teaching, Murai has conducted numerous workshops through Yuba College in California, New Mexico, Ireland, England, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Murai [pronounced *More-eye*] makes his home in Marysville, California.

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All images © 2003 Richard Murai*

ANGKOR WAT



by

A handwritten signature in black ink, followed by a small circular emblem containing a grid pattern.

Richard Murai

Fueled by ten years of restless adolescence while in Catholic school, I've become intrigued with the visual underpinnings of religious/spiritual fervor. Beginning with an early photo-documentary of an African American Pentecostal Church in West Oakland, CA, my interest has taken me to Great Britain, India, Japan, China and the Middle East. While on sabbatical in April 2002, I traveled to Angkor – about 200 miles northwest of the capital city of Phnom Penh, in Cambodia.

This amazing complex of roughly 135 temples covers an impressive 75 square miles. The fascination and allure of Angkor is not only that it is a spectacular archeological site, but that it continues to serve as a vital and revered spiritual center. Ironically, it has survived both invasions and abandonment.

Built between 879 and 1191AD by a succession of rulers, Angkor was abandoned in 1432 after the Thais sacked the complex. For more than 400 years the complex was isolated by the jungle, but it was never lost or forgotten. Fables and legends circulated about a mystic city of the gods, but in 1860 French explorer Henri Mouhot brought Angkor to the world's attention. In 1908 the French established the Angkor Conservancy, which continues its efforts of restoration today.

In the mid-60s Cambodia became the site of "the killing fields," as Pol Pot and the brutal Khmer Rouge regime came into power. The entire population was forced into Maoist-style farming collectives, and as many as two million men, women and children – one out of five Cambodians – perished due to starvation, torture or execution during the brutal 30-year reign. While many Buddhist monks who lived in the Angkor temples were massacred, Angkor Wat suffered very little structural damage. More recently the temples have fallen victim to unrestrained looting, but the Great City continues to exude a sense of tranquility.

Using the nearby city of Siem Reap as a base, I made daily trips for two weeks to a number of temples and mountain locations. I was able to work easily with a Pentax 645. As in other foreign countries I found it essential to hire a private driver/guide and interpreter; they are indispensable in accessing out-of-the-way locations, interfacing with the locals, and generally staying out of trouble. This is more than practical when one is made aware of the areas of dense landmines on the outskirts of Siem Reap (remnants of Pol Pot's oppressive rule). Even so, I look forward to revisiting Angkor later this year, and feeding the curiosity that was fueled so many years go.



Library Moat, Ta Prohm Temple



Avalokiteshvara (Buddha of Compassion), The Bayon



Avalokiteshvara (Buddha of Compassion), The Bayon



Apsara, Banteay Srei Temple



East Corridor, Banteay Srei



West Entrance, The Bayon



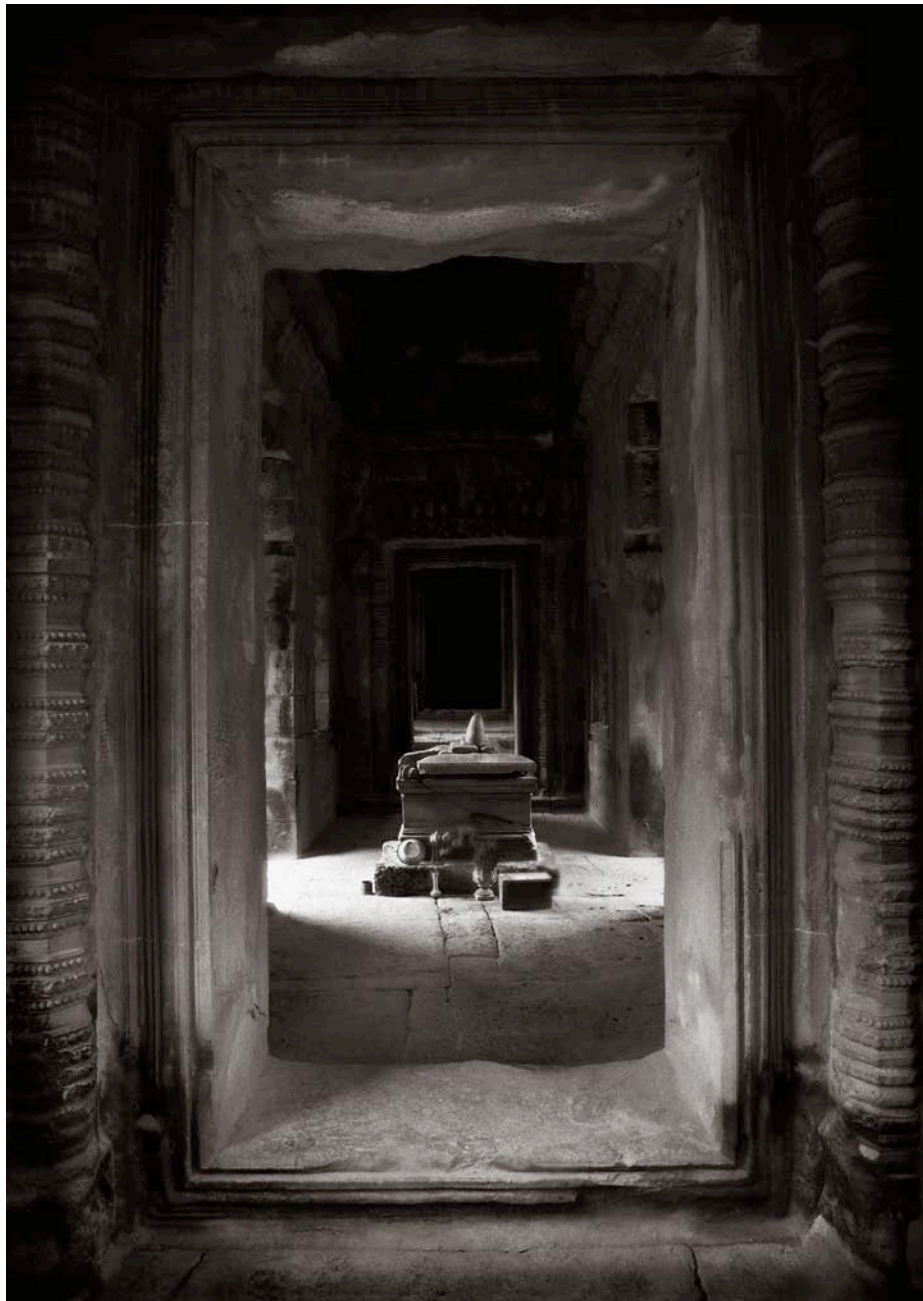
Sunset, The Bayon



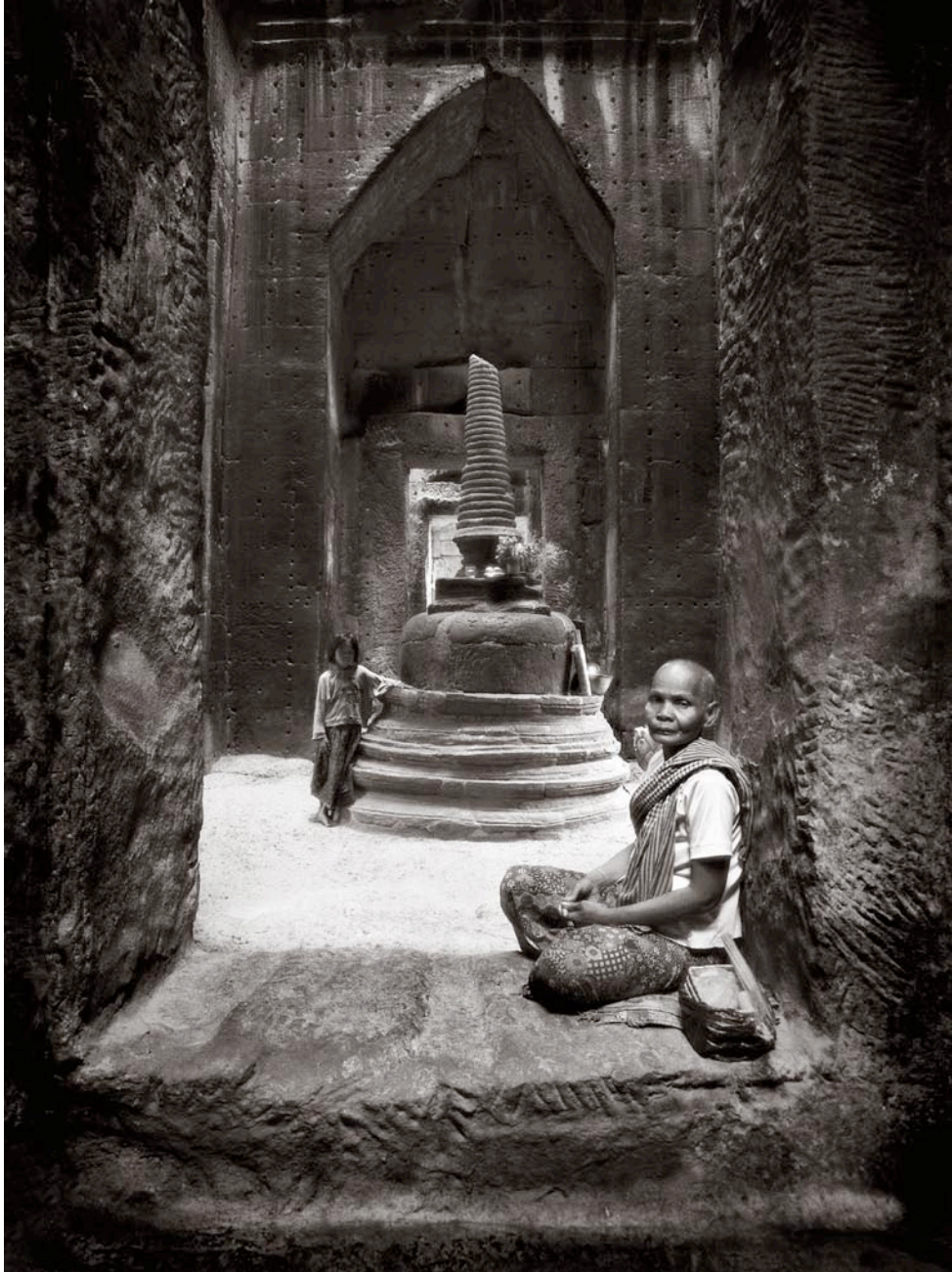
Fig Tree, Banteay Srei Temple



Centering, The Bayon



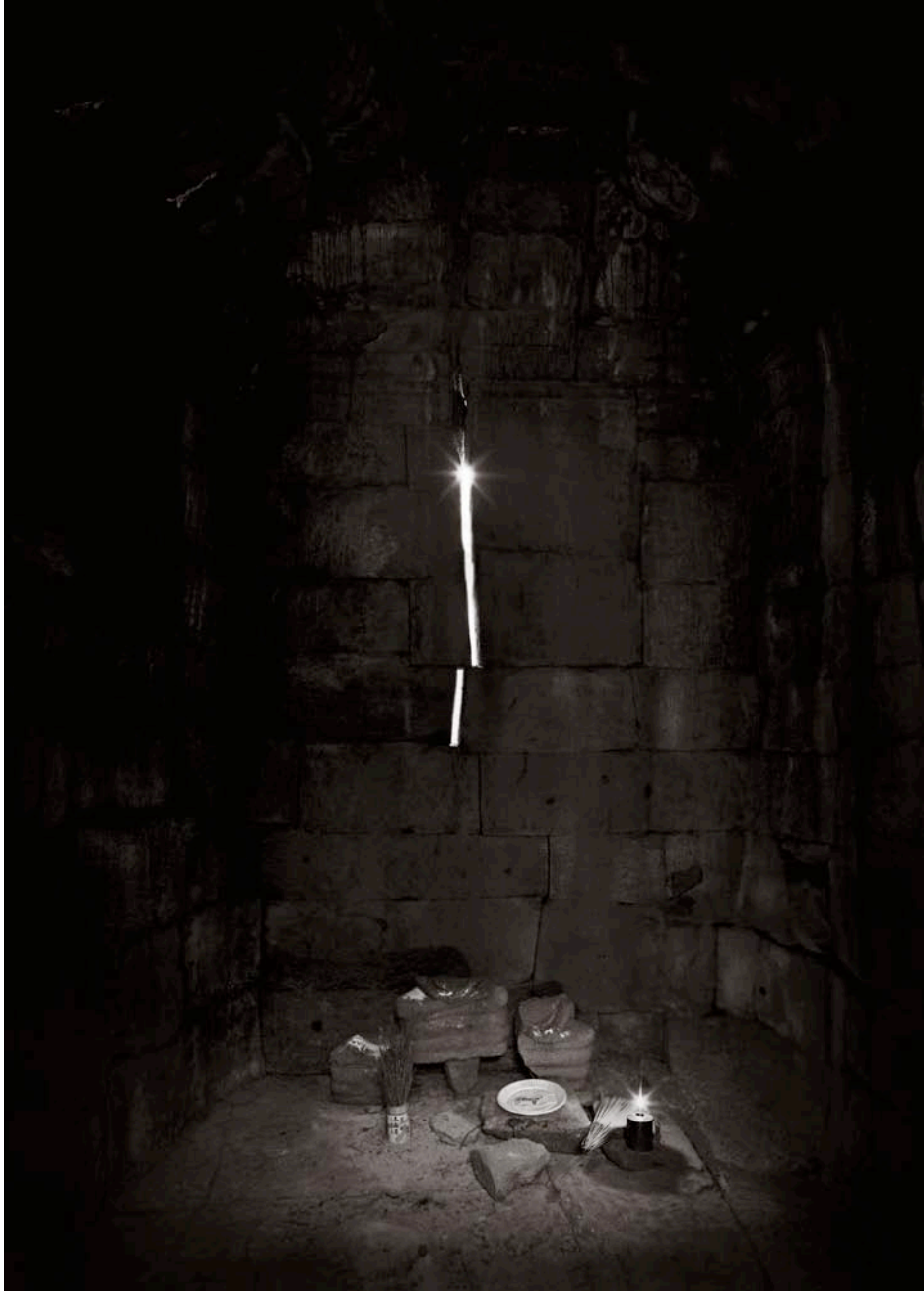
Lingum, Banteay Kdei Temple, Angkor Thom



Grandmother & Granddaughter, Preah Kan Temple



Monk Boys, Looking East, Angkor Wat



Lightning, Banteay Kdei Temple