

Khmer Arts & Handicraft

Traditional Cambodian arts and crafts including silk weaving, silverwork, stone carving, wood carving, lacquerware, pottery, ceramics, temple murals, basketry and kite-making have evolved from ancient times. A tradition of modern art began in Cambodia in the mid-twentieth century. The contemporary visual arts scene in Cambodia has experienced an artistic escalation.

Many farmers have expanded to weave baskets, make pots, and breed silk worms to produce silk for weaving. In recent years, more sculptors and painters have surfaced to produce marvelous pieces for tourists to take home. Silk weaving in Cambodia has a long history. The practice dates to as early as the first century when textiles were used in trade. Modern textile production skillfully mimics these historic antecedents and produce beautiful motifs that echo clothing details on ancient stone sculptures. By tourists' demand, skill workers are producing silverwork in the forms of jewelry, souvenir items, especially boxes adorned with fruit and Angkor-inspired motifs. Usually the men produce most of the forms for such work and the women complete the intricate filigree.



Efforts to restore Angkor resulted in a new demand for skilled stone carvers to replace missing or damaged pieces and from that, a new tradition of stone carving has risen in recent years. While some modern carvings remain traditional-style, some carvers have been successfully producing contemporary designs to satisfy market demands.

Cambodian artists make beautiful kites. Kite-making and kite-flying tradition dates back many centuries and was revived in the early 1990s. It is now extremely popular throughout the country. Cambodian Kite-makers cleverly attach a bow to the kites and it resonates in the wind producing a musical sound. Many tourists take home with them such a kite as souvenir.

The villages of Koh Anlong Chen (Chinese Island) on the Tonle Sap and the province of Kandal are especially renowned for skilled copper artisans. Their skill has been passed down from generation to generation.

These craftsmen cut and carve flattened copper into decorative art pieces. Pots, bowls, plates, ornamental swords, bracelets, and other souvenir items are crafted from flattened copper. While copper decorative swords are popular for Khmer weddings, copper-made decorative pots and bracelets are popular tourist souvenirs.