

Gallery VIB
The Art of the Royal Palace

Words and Photography by Kennie Ting

Unfortunately, when I arrived that weekend, King Sihanouk had just passed away, and his body been ceremonially laid in state in the Royal Palace. As such, most of the Palace compound – about three quarters of it, including its most architecturally stunning buildings like the Napoleon III Pavilion – were closed for a minimum of three months. Access was still allowed to the compounds of the Silver Pagoda, however so I made the best of it, along with throngs of tourists from China (primarily).

While the architecture of the buildings within the Silver Pagoda compounds were rather less than inspiring – channeling the far more stunning Grand Palace in Bangkok – I was fascinated by the murals that adorned the walls of the compound; murals that told the tale of the *Reamker*, or the Cambodian version of the Hindu Epic the Ramayana; and were replete with shimmering palaces, epic battles, divine beings, and fabulous beasts.

The murals had seen better days in their more than hundred years of existence. Entire tracts of them were in dire need of restoration; some even had been completely erased. But even then, they were still stunning to behold, and exceedingly characterful, far surpassing similar murals that line the walls of Bangkok's Palace.

In this gallery I present twenty scenes of the *Reamker* Murals – digitally touched up but still demonstrating the damage they have sustained – and some other instances of art within the Royal Palace. The monkey god, Hanoman, appears in multiple scenes in this tableau. But unfortunately, I don't know much more about the *Reamker* to explain what actually happens in these scenes. Nonetheless, I think that visually, they are striking enough to capture the reader's imagination.

* * * * *



Fig. 1 – Statue of King Jayavarman VII, in the Angkor style.



Fig. 2 - Palace Scene



Fig. 3 – Celestial Army



Fig. 4 – Divine Visitation.



Fig. 5 – Grand Audience.



Fig. 6 – Epic Battle.



Fig. 7 – Demonic Battle.



Fig. 8 – Panorama.



Fig. 9 – Close-up of unicorn (at the top left corner of Fig. 8), just to show the extent of detail in these murals.



Fig. 10 – Hanoman, the monkey god.



Fig. 11 – Another version of Hanoman.



Fig. 12 – Three-headed White Elephant.



Fig. 13 – The monkeys and the fish.



Fig. 14 – Sailing Ship



Fig. 15 – Apsara, or divine being.



Fig. 16 – Naturalistic representations of birds.



Fig. 17 – Another opulent royal / divine audience.



Fig. 18 – The Royal Insignia.



Fig. 19 – Royal Coat of Arms, with an elephant and a tiger.



Fig. 20 – And finally, a seated Hanoman.