

## EUROSEAS CONFERENCE 2017

Title of the panel: “The texture of Tuol Sleng memory: An interdisciplinary inquiry into the material traces of the Cambodian Genocide”

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Description of the panel:

The torture and execution center S-21 in Phnom Penh was a central institution in the terror apparatus run by the Khmer Rouge political police between 1975 and 1979. Right after the collapse of the state of Democratic Kampuchea in January 1979, it was refurbished as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Since then, it has been playing in Cambodia and abroad a major role in the recollection of Khmer Rouge atrocities. In the process it became an iconic representation of the crimes of the Pol Pot’s regime, featuring in books, movies, exhibitions, social media, and artworks. In 2000 artist Dinh Q Lê created a work entitled *The Texture of Memory* (after the study by American scholar James E. Young on Holocaust memorials). It was a series of embroideries, white on white, based on photos of S-21 inmates, which the artist invited spectators to touch so that the ‘dirt’ left by their fingers would make the faces of the prisoners appear. Taking its cue from the artwork of Dinh Q Lê, the panel proposes to reflect on Tuol Sleng as ‘sensory experience’ through the combined perspective of material culture, anthropology, and visual studies. It explores the history and legacy of the site through its material traces, such as objects, textiles, images, and archives. The questions it raises are: How do ‘we’ (survivors, perpetrators, visitors, curators, researchers) make these artifacts ‘talk’? To what extent do material traces of Tuol Sleng reactivate living memories? How are they made significant across generations, communities, and cultures? What is the effect of the medium of representation on people’s perception of the site? To what extent does Tuol Sleng shape the notion of cultural and tangible heritage in Cambodia? The panel suggests materiality as a new prism through which to analyze the memory politics in/of Cambodia today, and articulate present-day forms of remembrance within a historical context.

Single session with 4 participants:

Stephanie Benzaquen  
Magali An Berthon  
Anne Laure Porée  
Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (tbc)

Discussant (tbc)