

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
May 1997

AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF KHMER ROUGE PRISONERS OPENS THIS MONTH AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979
May 15-early fall, 1997

Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979, an exhibition of some twenty black-and-white photographs of Cambodian prisoners, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on May 15, 1997. The Communist group known as the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia in April 1975, after five years of disastrous civil war. Under the leadership of Pol Pot, the secretary of Cambodia's Communist party, the Khmer Rouge rounded up and held captive more than 14,000 Cambodian men, women, and children in S-21, a top-secret prison in the Phnom Penh district of Tuol Sleng.

A former high school, S-21 was one of many detention centers where those accused by the Communists of being enemies of the state were interrogated and tortured. The anonymous photographers, Khmer Rouge soldiers, took the photographs for purposes of identification and documentation. Eventually all but seven prisoners at S-21 were executed, died from horrific abuse, or committed suicide.

When the Khmer Rouge fell from power in 1979, S-21 was converted into the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. American photographers Chris Riley and Doug Niven discovered 6,000 original 6 x 6 cm negatives in an old cabinet at the museum—all that remained of the identifying photographs that had been taken of prisoners held at S-21—and recognized that these

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