



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Center for Friends Without A Border Hosts Hiroshi Watanabe Photography Exhibition

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (June 16, 2009) – The Center for Friends Without a Border (Friends Center) proudly announces the arrival of renowned photographer Hiroshi Watanabe's exhibition, 'Ideology in Paradise'. Watanabe's work has been widely exhibited in galleries around the world. The 'Ideology in Paradise' exhibition presents a vivid, colorful and unbiased account of North Korean culture and everyday life. Watanabe's work will be exhibited in the Friends Center Art Gallery from July 1st through December 31st, 2009. An opening reception honoring the artist's work and benefiting Angkor Hospital for Children will be held on July 5th at 6:30pm at the Friends Center Art Gallery. Watanabe's artwork will be made available for sale by way of donations to the hospital.

Currently based in Los Angeles, Watanabe was born and educated in Japan, at Nihon University. Watanabe has most frequently worked in black and white imagery; however, the 'Ideology in Paradise' exhibit is a remarkable demonstration of Watanabe's exceptional talents in vibrant color. Between 2006 and 2007, Watanabe made several trips to North Korea, intrigued by the myths told of the North Koreans during his childhood in Japan. Watanabe had been led to believe that North Korea was a country that allowed police to brutalize citizens and the poor to die of starvation in the streets. Watanabe's innate curiosity drew him to North Korea to investigate the legitimacy of these claims. While traveling through North Korea, Watanabe consciously put aside preconceived notions in order to capture images truly representative of the culture of North Korea.

Watanabe writes of his artistic process, "I go to places that captivate and intrigue me. I am interested in what humans do. I seek to capture people, traditions, and locales that first and foremost are of personal interest... at times, I envision images I'd like to capture, but when I actually look through the viewfinder, my mind goes blank and I photograph whatever catches my eye.... I believe there's a thread that connects all of my work -- my personal vision of the world as a whole. I make every effort to be a faithful visual recorder of the world around me, a world in flux that, at very least in my mind, deserves preservation."

Audiences and critics alike have praised 'Ideology in Paradise'. As Lesley Martin writes, "... the experience of looking at Hiroshi Watanabe's images is eerily like stepping into a Social Realist painting: the ruddy-cheeked young girl playing the accordion, the traditional gowns in brilliant pinks and greens of dancers swirling beneath the omnipresent image of the dear leader and the DPRK flag. One is quietly lulled into the sense that life in North Korea might, in fact, be just as it appears within the frames of these images—normal—instead of like the stories of kidnappings, military posturing, and famine."

Watanabe has published eight books and his work is displayed in the permanent collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, The George Eastman House and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Watanabe's recent accomplishments include the Hearst 8 x 10 Biennial Award, the Center Project Competition First Prize, and the Photolucida Critical Mass Book Award.

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The Center for Friends Without A Border at Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) receives and educates the many visitors to the Angkor Hospital for Children campus. In addition to viewing rotating exhibits from celebrated photographers worldwide, visitors have a unique opportunity to learn more about the impact of Cambodia's recent history and the dramatic progress being made today through the medical care, education and outreach programs provided by AHC. Angkor Hospital for Children provides free pediatric care to more than 300 children each day; trains thousands of healthcare professionals each year; and strives to restore Cambodia's healthcare infrastructure. Every child has the right to a happy and healthy life!

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