

ស្បែកធំ

Large Shadow Puppets

Shadow Puppet Theater in Cambodia is called *sbaek thom*, which means *large leather* and is a reference to the cow or buffalo hide from which they are made. *Sbaek thom* is performed at night in the open. The performance area is made up of a large white sheet behind which a fire or coconut shells is built. The art form includes dance and martial arts with puppeteers performing behind and in front of the screen.

To make *sbaek thom*, hides are cured and dyed tan or black or left natural. Characters and scenes are drawn on the leather and then cut out with a sharp knife. Images include figures of heroes, princesses, giants, and monkeys, as well as palaces, battle scenes, and forests. The puppets are placed on two sticks used by the puppeteer to manipulate it. Shadow puppet theater probably dates from the Angkor era (9th-13th centuries) and most performances tell the story of the Reamker (pronounced *riemkee*), the Khmer version of the Indian epic poem, Ramayana. Today people create their own stories and images.

