



PRESS RELEASE

SIEM REAP, ANGKOR CONSERVATION – MARCH 18, 2026 COMPLETION OF THE RESTORATION OF THE KOH KER DANCING ŚIVA STATUE



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RESTORATION AND REBIRTH

Under the high patronage of H.E. Dr Phoeurng Sackona, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts of the Kingdom of Cambodia, a ceremony will be held on March 18, 2026, to mark the completion of the restoration of the Dancing Śiva statue from the site of Koh Ker.

The event will reveal the outcome of a major project led by the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), under the authority of the National Authority for Preah Vihear (NAPV), with the support of ALIPH - International alliance for the protection of heritage.

The 10th-century statue of the Dancing Shiva from Koh Ker is a remarkable masterpiece of Khmer heritage. Standing five meters tall and weighing nearly seven tons, this colossal statue was toppled in the 14th century and shattered into more than 10,000 fragments by looters during the civil war.

Its meticulous restoration, carried out between 2020 and 2026, builds on archaeological documentation and research initiated in 2012. Directed by Eric Bourdonneau (EFEO) with Benoît Lafay heading the restoration team, the project brought together highly experienced sculpture restorers and specialist art mounters to reassemble a monumental three-dimensional puzzle.

As one of the most complex restoration projects conducted in partnership with Cambodian heritage institutions, it also provided specialized training in stone conservation for 20 professionals, ensuring the transmission of essential skills for future work. This restoration stands as a powerful testament to the efforts undertaken to ensure that looters do not have the final say.

"We are proud to have supported bringing back to life an exceptional masterpiece of Khmer heritage, while also strengthening local conservation skills and partnerships for the future.", said Valéry Frelaud, ALIPH Executive Director.

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – CAMBODIA

Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
National Authority for Preah Vihear
APSARA National Authority
Angkor Conservation
National Museum of Cambodia
Preah Norodom Sihanouk – Angkor
Museum

The archaeological site of Koh Ker was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on 17 September 2023.

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A MASTERPIECE OF ANCIENT CAMBODIAN HERITAGE

The monumental statue of the Dancing Śiva was erected in the first half of the 10th century within the royal sanctuary of Prasat Thom, founded by King Jayavarman IV (r. 921–941) at Koh Ker. For nearly two decades, Koh Ker served as the capital of the Khmer kingdom, temporarily eclipsing Angkor.

The sculpture formed the centrepiece of an ensemble representing Śiva's victorious dance over death. The god was surrounded by four deities: the graceful Umā, the fearsome Kālī-Camundā, and two male guardian figures, Mahākāla and Nandikeśvara, the latter beating a drum to accompany the divine dance.

At the centre stood Śiva himself, rising above a pedestal once encircled by a nāga. Carved from a single block of sandstone, the statue, with its five heads and ten arms animated in a dynamic posture, represents an extraordinary artistic and technical achievement.

Beyond its sculptural virtuosity, the Dancing Śiva of Koh Ker occupies a central place in the history of Khmer art. It established a powerful iconographic model of Śiva as “Lord of the Worlds,” protector of Khmer kingship, later reproduced on temple bas-reliefs across the kingdom, notably at Banteay Srei, at Vat Phu, and in the recently damaged sanctuary of Preah Vihear.

PROJECT IN NUMBERS

- **Statue** : 5 heads and 10 arms; nearly **5 m high**; estimated weight of **7 tones**.
- **600 person-days** of conservation–restoration
- **215 person-days** devoted to structural design and fabrication
- **2,750 fragments with sculpted surfaces** recorded, with **more than 700 joins identified**
- **70% of the torso** repositioned on the surface of the sculpture
- **5 training sessions** in sculpture conservation
- **11 professions** involved in the project

Thanks to the support of



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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Chaired by **H.E. Mr. Kong Puthikar**
Director General
National Authority for Preah Vihear (NAPV)

CORE PROJECT TEAM

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Mr. Éric Bourdonneau
Associate Professor
at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO),
Head of the EFEO Koh Ker Archaeological Mission

HEAD OF RESTORATION TEAM

Mr. Benoît Lafay
Sculpture Conservator-Restorer

RESTORATION TEAM

Ms. Nathalie Bruhière
Sculpture Conservator-Restorer

Ms. Violaine Pillard
Sculpture Conservator-Restorer

In close collaboration with:

Mr. Chhan Chamroeun
Deputy Director
Head of the Angkor Conservation Restoration Team

Mr. Mok Doueng
Deputy Director, Department of Research,
Training and Documentation (NAPV)

Mr. Thach Phanith
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MOUNTING AND STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING

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Press kit available upon request.
Press visits to the site can be
arranged by appointment.