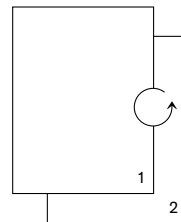


Shifting Landscapes Film Series

Engagement Guide

INTRODUCTION

This *Engagement Guide* is a companion to our four-part Shifting Landscapes documentary film series, which explores the power of art and story to orient us amid the darkness of our time. Following a musician, a poet, a writer, and a filmmaker who are each embracing the alchemical power of story to connect and transform us, this series opens ways of being that hold both catastrophe and love as our landscapes change and disappear. Responding to great changes within their landscapes—the vanishing song of the nightingale in southern England, the desecration of a sacred mountain in Hawai‘i, a melting glacier in Iceland, and a traditional way of life threatened by development in Cambodia—they create art that can help us understand the changes beginning to affect the places we call home; and offer stories that open us to our connection with the Earth. In four corresponding guides, we invite you to explore the pathways illuminated by these storytellers and a depth of relationship with your own shifting landscape. Through spaces of reflection, discussion, and practice, each guide offers ways to weave these stories with your own; to open a dialogue and share values within your community; and to cultivate a living connection with your landscape.



For hard copies, print the following two pages double-sided to save paper.

HOST A FILM SCREENING

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Contact us at screenings@emergencemagazine.org



Shifting Landscapes Film Series *Engagement Guide No. 4*

TASTE OF THE LAND

Since fleeing Cambodia with her family during the Khmer Rouge regime, documentary filmmaker Kalyanee Mam has spent much of her life searching for a rooted connection to place. This film traces her experiences becoming displaced from Cambodia; assimilating to life in Stockton, California, in her childhood; connecting to her origins through language and food; and telling stories through filmmaking of people who are suffering disconnection from land because of conflict, development, and industrialization. *Taste of the Land* ultimately follows her to the landscapes of Cambodia—which have been changing through deforestation and urbanization—where her tender documentation of the disappearing, relational ways of life that these places have held has led her deeper into spiritual relationship with her homeland.

This film asks how we can find a sense of physical and spiritual “home” despite becoming displaced or disconnected from our landscapes. Looking at the way landscape is intimately entwined with a sense of self, as both home and ancestor, nourishment and spirit, the film explores how stories—whether of an ancestral connection, or a connection to people still living an embodied kinship with the land—can awaken a memory of this sacred relationship. It revolves around the Khmer understanding of the word *cheate*, meaning both land and taste, and how experiencing “tastes of the land,” whether through food, fragrances, stories, experiences in nature, or relationships with communities, can open us to who we are in relation to place. As Kalyanee comes to know the landscapes of Cambodia this way, she realizes “home” to be an inner space, existing wherever she remembers herself as part of the land.

REFLECTION

This section invites you to reflect on the themes explored in Taste of the Land. To engage with these prompts, you could write responses to them in a notebook, sit and contemplate them, or take them with you to a quiet outdoor space.

(1)

Kalyanee shares that the Khmer word for “taste,” *cheate*, is also the root word for “land.” She shows how a “taste of the land” is developed through sensory experiences of it, and says once these experiences become internalized, your connection with the land cannot be lost. Reflect on your own sensory experiences of a place you feel deeply connected with. Think about the food you’ve eaten there, the fragrances and sounds present there, and how your body feels in that place. How would you describe the “taste” of this landscape? How did these experiences deepen your understanding of it?

(2)

Kalyanee says, “When I’m there on the Tonlé Sap, and in the jungle, and around trees, and with people who live connected to these places, I feel I can be who I am without the extra stuff that we build on top of ourselves in order to survive in a technological, mechanized, and disconnected world.” Reflect on what elements within you might qualify as this “extra stuff.” In which landscapes do you feel most aligned with a sense of your truer, deeper self? How is this identity both connected to and shaped by the land?

(3)

We live in a time when most of us are disconnected from either our ancestral homeland, our place of birth, or a landscape that we have felt a deep sense of belonging in. Kalyanee’s story speaks to challenges faced by anyone who is removed from an embodied and sustained relationship with these places—challenges that are only deepening as the impacts of climate change and development render our landscapes unrecognizable. Reflect on what connects you to the place that offers you a sense of home, considering things like food, language, music, memories, and stories. Thinking about cultural and physical changes occurring in your homeplace, how do the things that connect you to the land help maintain a sense of rootedness amid change or loss? What new forms of “home” are you discovering in the midst of these changes?

(4)

Visiting Angkor Wat in the film, Kalyanee says that “these monuments will not last forever. Even culture and traditions will not last forever. No nation, no country, will last forever. The only thing that will last are the things that truly nurture us.” Reflect on what within your landscape nurtures you physically, emotionally, and spiritually. What of these feels permanent, even when the future of the landscape seems uncertain or changing? In what ways do you think a spiritual nourishment from the land will outlast the present physical qualities of your landscape?

(5)

Throughout the film, we witness how Kalyanee finds her way back into a spiritual and ancestral relationship with the landscapes of Cambodia through food and foraging, being present on the land, and forming close relationships with people whose lives are completely entwined with the well-being of the land, especially her friendship with See. Consider the evolution of your own spiritual relationship—newfound or ancestral—with your homeplace. What opened or is opening a sacred connection between you and your landscape? What experiences shifted your perspective on this relationship, or took you deeper into it? What does this relationship give you? How can you nurture the land in return for the gift of this connection?

Ahead of the discussion prompts below, feel free to share what within the film and/or Kalyanee's work as a storyteller resonated with you most.

(1)

In the film, Kalyanee shares how she was moved by how See's sense of self was rooted in her landscape. Begin by sharing an experience where you became attuned to how your identity was connected to the land. Discuss how the nature of the landscape you live in influences the way you conceptualize your place in the world. In today's culture of hyper-individualism, how have our identities become disconnected from place? How does becoming conscious of the ways our sense of self is tied to the well-being of a landscape change our relationship with it?

(2)

Part of Kalyanee's personal story is her experience of grief—from the anguish of her family's displacement from their homeland to her own longing for a profound sense of belonging and witnessing of the destruction of forests, rivers, and lakes in Cambodia. Discuss how grief led Kalyanee to be open to journeying deeper into a spiritual relationship with the land. Share how grief at what is disappearing or has been lost in your own landscape, or your ancestral homelands, challenges or deepens your own connection with the land. What other feelings for the Earth does this grief lead you towards? Discuss how grief can also be a form of love and care for the land.

(3)

In the film, Kalyanee visits Phnom Penh and speaks with a young family who live by the side of a railway track built on top of a forgotten and filled-in lake. She asks the question: "What does it mean when a whole generation loses the memory of a place?" Share your response to this question and discuss how development and industrialization strip away the memory held by a landscape. What do you think the physical and spiritual fallout of this could be for the generations who remember the place as it was, and then also the generations to come who will not know the beauty of the landscape that once was there?

(4)

Reflecting on her films and the process of making them, Kalyanee realizes that rather than merely documenting the impact of destruction on Cambodian landscapes, she was also documenting a way of life that persists there—an embodied relationship with the land held by the people whose stories she tells. Discuss how sharing stories of this way of life is perhaps more powerful than simply documenting destruction. What can bearing witness to these ways of life offer us as we try to find our own way back into a different way of being with the Earth?

(5)

Kalyanee says that once she saw and felt how it was to live with the land, an ancestral memory of her own connection was awakened. No matter one's ancestry, or what has been kept or lost within one's culture, each of us holds deep within an ancient memory of what it is to live spiritually connected to the land. Discuss how awakening this memory is central to transforming our relationship with the Earth and can help catalyze a paradigm shift in our individual and collective ways of being amid climate change.

We see in the film that Kalyanee connects sensorily and spiritually with the landscapes of Cambodia through food. Her mother's cooking, foraging for mushrooms in the forest of Northern California, harvesting and preparing food with See and Lat in the Areng Valley—these are all experiences that take her deeper into a taste of the land. This practice is designed to explore this idea. Make sure you have ample space and time to allow yourself to engage deeply with each prompt.

(1)

Find something that you can eat that comes from your local landscape or area. This could be as simple as buying a piece of fruit from the market that's been grown locally or picking something from your garden. If you have experience in foraging, perhaps you can gather some berries, mushrooms, wild herbs or greens, or you can prepare a meal made from ingredients reflective of the cuisine typical of your landscape.

(2)

Begin by thinking about this piece of food, considering where in your landscape it comes from, how it grows or is made, and the season it belongs to. Next, as you prepare the food—whether cooking or simply washing it—focus on the sensory experience. Feel the textures, smell the fragrances, and observe the colors. Do these sensory experiences bring up any memories or images for you? Why did you choose this food—is it special to you? Did you grow it yourself? Does it feel most reflective of the food tradition of your landscape? Reflect on *your* relationship to this food.

(3)

Sit down to eat and make sure there are no distractions around you—no phones or chores or anything that would pull you away from having your full attention on eating. As you put each morsel into your mouth, do so slowly and focus on opening and activating each of your senses so that they are focused on the experience. Take several minutes to contemplate each of the following prompts as you continue to eat: What does it look like? What does it taste like? What does it smell like? What does the texture feel like? Pay close attention to the flavors: the sweetness, the bitterness, the earthiness, or any other distinct qualities.

(4)

After eating, take a moment to reflect. Close your eyes and sit quietly, considering the relationship between yourself and the food you just ate. Think about how it came from the land that you live on. What elements of your landscape could you sense within the food: sunlight, the color and texture of the soil, perhaps the salt of the ocean? What characteristics of your landscape did it bring to mind? How does this help you understand the land in a different way than usual? How does knowing that this food came from the land that nourishes you spiritually change the way you eat it and how it tastes? If it feels right, you may wish to offer a word of gratitude or a simple thank you to the land for the food.