

9/14/2020

Studio Revolt Joint Statement

This public statement is a response to Kosal Khiev's slander campaign against Studio Revolt. We are outlining action steps below to prioritize our mental health and bring some closure to our work with Kosal Khiev and our documentary *Cambodian Son*.

On August 5th, Kosal Khiev used social media for 10 consecutive days to defame and disparage us with unfounded claims of financial exploitation and malpractice. By August 15th, we entered into mediation with the help of the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) with the hope to discuss grievances in a more personal forum. Because the process has been painful and drawn out, we came to realize any delay in making a public response would result in irreparable damage to our health, which has considerably affected our family. For this reason, we decided to leave mediation and offer the public our own statements and truths.

It is with the clearest of consciences that we make the following statement:

We at Studio Revolt attest, with utmost clarity and sincerity, that we did not wrong Kosal Khiev in any way concerning the norms of finance, ethics, intellectual rights, and film production. To the contrary, we did everything we could to provide Kosal Khiev an international platform to launch his career through quality films, branded websites, and access to a professional booking manager. Kosal did not have to pay for any of these services. While residing in Cambodia, we wholeheartedly supported him financially, emotionally, and artistically from 2011-2015. Our intentions were to help him reach a wider audience in an effort to bring people into critical conversations on deportation issues and broken U.S. criminal justice and immigration systems. The documentary *Cambodian Son* successfully continued those efforts, while telling the story of the arts as a transformational tool for Kosal. We are now turning this film over to the world to let its journey continue.

Studio Revolt will complete the following action steps with our film *Cambodian Son*:

1. Film Release

Effective immediately, the documentary *Cambodian Son* is [now available online](#); free of charge and accessible for personal or public screenings to anyone, anywhere. No one may charge a screening fee. Kosal Khiev and any main figure featured in the film can charge a speaker fee in relation to the viewing and discussion of the film and its issues, organized at their own discretion. Because the film will be widely available and accessible online, Kosal will have access to the film like everyone else. Copyright of the film belongs to Studio Revolt, the documentary is credited to filmmaker Masahiro Sugano.

2. Extended Interview Footage

We will be directly gifting the raw footage, through emailed links, to Kosal's family of their extended interviews on or before September 25th. It was always our intention to include a portion of the extended interviews alongside other deleted scenes as ["bonus material"](#) to the eventual DVD we would have released had we pursued an educational distribution. We will no longer be pursuing this route, and instead, all "bonus material" is now available on our website.

A [comprehensive teaching guide](#) is also provided to help community organizers and educators discuss the issues of deportation addressed in the film.

3. Memoir Clause in the MOU

“The Memoir” clause in the original MOU (Dec 17, 2014) was nullified two years ago. This was discussed in a Facebook Messenger conversation between Anida and Kosal in 2018. There has never been any issue with releasing him from this clause. We have always encouraged Kosal to pursue this route. He has always had ownership of his story. We never claimed to have rights over his life’s story. He’s a great storyteller and we wish him the very best.

On a FB text message exchange with Kosal on Aug 07, 2018, Anida Yoeu Ali wrote:

“We discussed releasing you from the contractual obligations so that you can write your memoir or even shoot a different film about your life **with no obligation to us**...As always, I encourage you to write that memoir you’ve been wanting to do. We can’t hold your hand anymore. You have to learn to do it on your own.”

4. Reconciliation of Final Payment

Because we have already set up a system in which we have honored paying Kosal over recouping our own expenses and that of our investors, Kosal will receive an outstanding final payment of \$659 on or before September 25th. After which, we have no further financial obligations to Kosal. This amount is based off of 20% of the Vimeo-on-Demand purchases to date, plus fees collected from the 2019-2020 screening events, including a small rebroadcast screening fee.

5. Full Financial Disclosure

Due to Kosal’s grave allegations of financial mismanagement and exploitation, we are issuing statements and full [financial disclosures](#) now available on our website. We are doing this to offer a narrative completely omitted from the intense social-media slander campaign.

Studio Revolt has operated with the best intentions. We have always put the struggles of artists first and foremost.

Anybody who has ever worked with Anida Yoeu Ali knows her most prized belief is that artists must get paid. Rarely do people work for free in her collaborations and/or under her leadership and mentorship. This same unflinching belief extends into her production work with Studio Revolt. Kosal Khiev was a beneficiary of this belief, substantially gaining **\$25K** during his time with Studio Revolt from 2011-2015. Kosal’s claim of exploitation is unfounded and has hit us hard because we sincerely don’t know why he’s targeted us and decided to destroy nine years of camaraderie, collaboration, and mentorship. All of this has hurt Anida deeply, because she saw him as an extension of her family and did everything she could to support him.

We are offering our [financial ledger](#) alongside a contextualizing narrative to understand the finances involved in our nine-year journey with Kosal-related projects. The documents are dense and meticulous in detail, but here is a **summary of the financial report**:

From 2011-2020, Studio Revolt raised close to **\$127K** related to all “Kosal” productions including our feature documentary *Cambodian Son*, four web episodes titled *Verses in Exile* and a series of short spoken word videos: *Unite Us*, *Why I Write*, *Moments in Between the Nights*. Expenses we have on record amount to **\$77K**. This is a conservative tally due to the loss of some records. During this time period, Kosal earned **\$25K** through us, including gigs booked by Anida, while Studio Revolt retained **\$39K** over a 9 year period. That’s about **\$10K-12K a year** during that period, for two people working tirelessly, often beyond full-time hours. Our financial disclosure also provides a value for our deferred labor, a conservative estimate because we were living and operating out of Cambodia which has a much lower cost of living. This deferred labor amounts to over **\$150K** for Studio Revolt and a detailed narrative accounting for our labor is in the document. We are not listing the deferred labor/salary with an intention to collect it, but rather to illustrate how we chose not to pay ourselves so that we could complete the film, and prioritize sharing what little money was generated with Kosal.

We hope the fully disclosed numbers prove we are not guilty of any financial wrongdoings to Kosal. However, we will tell you what we are guilty of.

We are guilty of breaking traditional rules of documentary filmmaking in order to humanely compensate Kosal so he could survive the grueling conditions of his deportation to Cambodia. Yes, we are guilty of paying artists before paying ourselves.

We are guilty of breaking our own MOU contract by sharing money with Kosal before our investor’s recoupment and before our own recoupment.

We are also guilty of passionately plunging into a documentary, before raising all the funds required to make the film.

We are guilty of doing so much work “in-house” it’s almost impossible for anyone to believe all of Kosal’s projects were completed by a two-person independent studio.

And yes, we are guilty of creating a sympathetic protagonist so compelling that his own victimization was a card used against us. While we have been clear about our own integrity, we have wondered if Kosal’s defamation charges were intentionally malicious, or if they were purely out of ignorance. We will never know.

In completing these action steps listed above, we want no further dealings personally or professionally with Kosal Khiev.

Thank you everyone for your support for our family during this moment. It was a lot of people who helped advise us during this time, and we are grateful for everyone’s support.

Sincerely,

Anida Yoeu Ali + Masahiro Sugano
Artists of Studio Revolt