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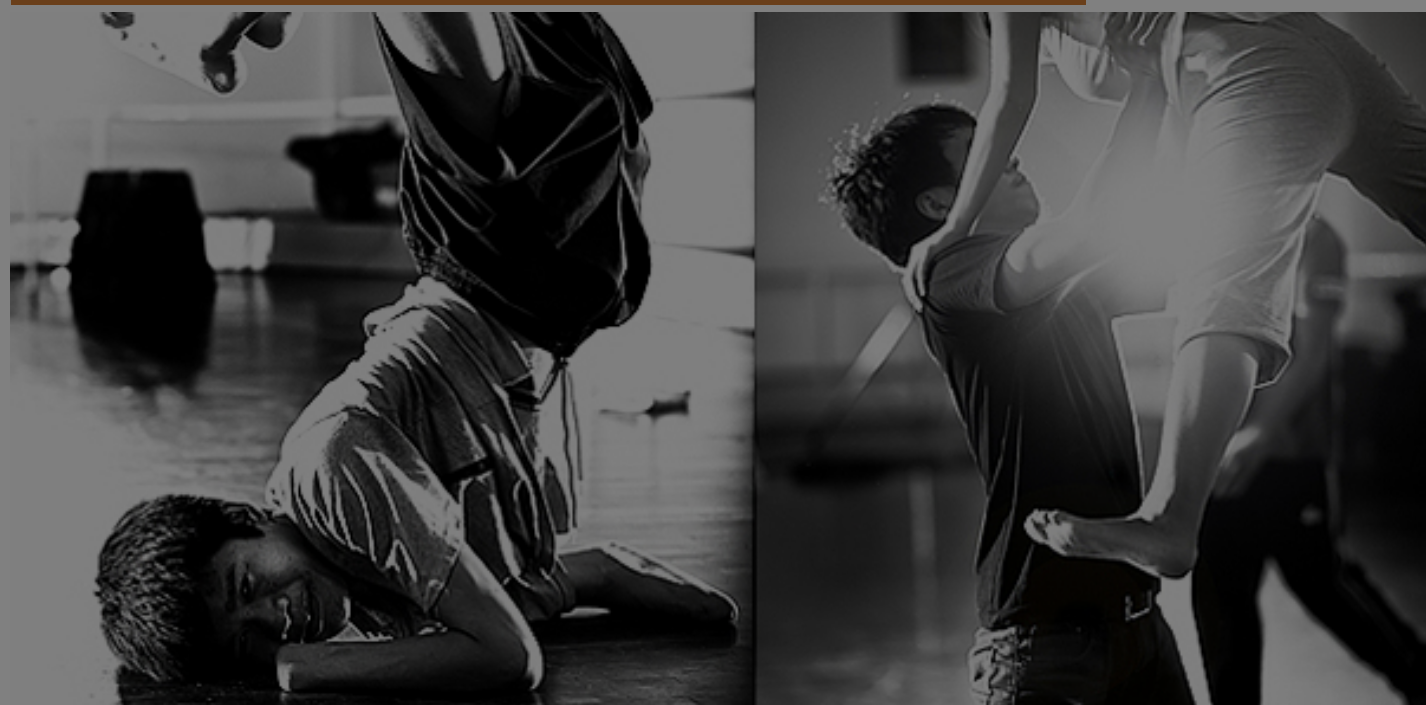
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The **FangMaeKhong Festival** is the first international dance festival in Laos, created in 2010 with the objective of bringing access to the arts and culture to various communities across the country, as well as to provide exposure, performing and networking opportunities for young artists in the **Mekong Region**. The annual festival began its first edition with performances and workshops in the major cities of Vientiane and Luang Prabang, and in two years has since expanded its reach to other towns and rural communities, and now includes elements of community outreach for youth, the handicapped and residents of drug rehabilitation facilities. The festival developed from a series of collaborative performance projects undertaken by choreographer Olé Khamchanla and the dancers of the Vientiane-based hip hop group Lao Bang Fai that took place in 2007 in Laos and subsequently toured to France in 2008 and 2010. The collaboration led the young Lao dancers to establish and mentor youth dance workshops and groups in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, Pakse and Thakhek. **In 2009, the workshops by Olé and the Lao dancers were incorporated in the international cooperation programme between the Rhone-Alpes region in France and Khammouane province in Laos.** Also in 2009, the group entered into a collaboration with television station France 3 and produced its first performance for a village in the rural community in the south of the country, in one of the dancers' home villages. With the development of these regional dance groups, the FangMaeKhong festival was a natural progression. Olé proposed the festival to provide a performance platform for their efforts and **to create networking opportunities between them and other emerging artists in the Mekong and Southeast Asian region, as well as counterparts from Europe.** The festival features intimate performances including both local and international artists in both ticketed and non-ticketed events in formal venues as well as open air spaces, introducing a diverse and growing audience in the country to different dance forms and artistic expression beyond hip hop and popular commercial forms. **Through workshops, film screenings and discussion forums, the festival offers opportunities for young artists in Laos to develop their skills, make international connections, engage in artistic, cultural and personal exchanges and open their imaginations to new techniques, cultures and ideas.** The third edition of FangMaeKhong in 2012 will feature performances and workshops in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, as well as a fully-fledged village tour to four rural locations in the vicinity of Vientiane, in partnership with Handicap International and a group of disabled performers. Future plans for the festival include an expansion to other countries in the Mekong Region.

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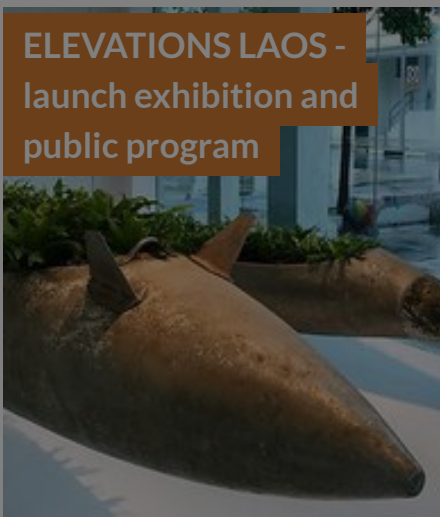
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