

PIX

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VOLUME 14 · MARCH 2017

THE MYANMAR ISSUE

inclusion

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FOREWORD

FRANZ XAVER AUGUSTIN,
DIRECTOR GOETHE INSTITUT, MYANMAR

Under military rule for half a century, Myanmar was substantially isolated from the world, including international exchanges and developments that took place in neighbouring countries.

Not only the economy, but also education and culture fell far behind as a result of stunted growth through sanctions and censorship.

Major universities remained closed for decades.

At least two generations of young people grew up without a robust and varied educational system.

In those years Myanmar quickly lost touch with international standards and models. Few had the opportunity to study or work abroad. As a consequence, the lack of innovative and trained professionals in almost all fields is enormous.

With such dire circumstances, the country races today to catch up with the present and prepare for the future. Artistic and intellectual exchange and the integration of Myanmar into essential international debates and discourses is critical for a new chapter to commence.

Given the urgency, I heartily accepted the offer of a South Asia oriented, visual-arts initiative to dedicate one volume to Myanmar's contemporary voice and claim, through the medium of photography. After having focused on regions spanning Nepal to Sri Lanka; Iran to Pakistan, it was only logical to include Myanmar as part of a subcontinental conglomerate.

I am encouraged to think that the outcome offers insight into emerging media-driven initiatives here, an expanding compendium of contemporary approaches which underscores Myanmar's global prospects and contribution to a growing collective memory.



Endpaper: Mayco Naing
From the series *Freedom from Fear*
Yangon, 2014
Digital

Above: Thu Rein, "Mrat"
From the series
Portraits of Artists, 2014
Digital

A BRIGHT STAR WILL SHINE

NANDITA JAISHANKAR

My second visit to Yangon in December 2016 coincided with the opening weekend of the Mingalabar! Festival. The Institut Français de Birmanie (IFB) in collaboration with the Government of Yangon Region, organized the first ever multi-disciplinary arts festival, taking to public spaces at an unprecedented scale. Giant puppets paraded the streets, itself ablaze with street art, dance, a rock concert, video mapping and art exhibitions. People gathered by the thousands – families, couples, students, and virtually every age group/class of locals and foreigners – to witness the spectacle. The energy and excitement was infectious. What became apparent to me was the complexity of debates around culture that were being addressed at this very unique time in Myanmar, deliberating questions of representation, inclusion and identity.

Myanmar gained Independence in 1948 after more than a century of British rule. Post WWII Burma was a cosmopolitan mosaic, with immigrant populations dispersed across the land. The British had put into place a series of economic overhauls and rail constructions, re-settling populations from many parts of India to Rangoon. On the surface, the economy was slowly recuperating after the war. However, just a decade after Independence, a military-led caretaker government was formed with General Ne Win at its head. By 1962, a military coup established a single-party state with the Socialist Programme Party, setting the tone of ruthless, authoritarian rule for decades to come. In 1988, almost 3,000 people were killed in anti-government protests. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was formed with a "mission to eliminate all forms of internal dissent or rebellion".



Lukas Birk/Myanmar Photo Archive
Student protests in 1988



All images from the Myanmar Photo Archive

Page 82 and p.84-85: Bellay Studio, 1979. Emulating the West, together with Asian country styles of fashion and beauty was popular in Myanmar in the 60s and 70s. This could be due to the well-distributed cinema posters and advertisements in magazines, featuring famous actors and actresses, as well as a thriving film industry.

Lukas Birk

Myanmar Photo Archive

Embrace the past

From an outsider's perspective, I feel that Myanmar's photography history has been overshadowed by the exploits of colonial practitioners. British, German and even Italian-born photographers such as Felice Beato seem to find a prominent place in ethnographic museums and books on South Asian visual history. But there is an unwritten story of local photographers that needs to find some resonance too, as they took up the medium soon after the coming of European practitioners.

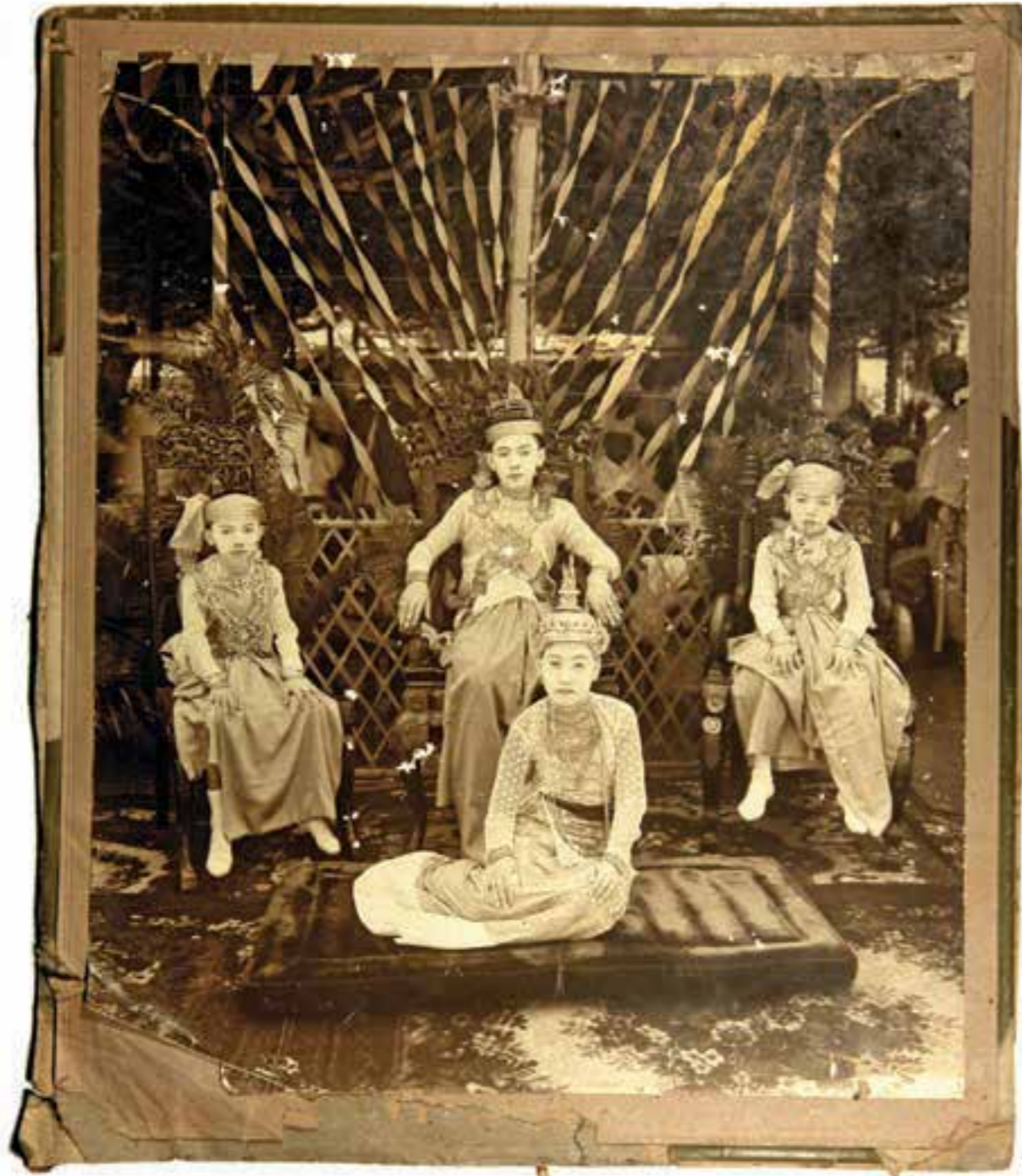
The Myanmar Photo Archive (MPA) is a physical archive of such traces that has been amassed in the recent past. The physical material ranges from studio portraiture, private photo albums, official photography, company records, science photography, documentary images as well as studio accessories, slides and negatives. MPA aims to research the historical context of the materials, the earliest of which dates back to 1890 and the most recent of which are from the present.

Some of the first Burmese cameramen served as apprentices to European photographers. By the late 19th century, photography was flourishing with Burmese, Indian and Chinese-run studios here, well up to the 1940s. The following years

of war and occupation forced many out of the country. Once Burma gained Independence in 1948, professional portrait studios were in very high demand and a wide spectrum of society from the 1950s and 60s found themselves captured by the lens. In 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup, banning the political opposition, suspending the constitution, and introducing a "Burmese way of socialism." The change of government and political agenda forced foreigners once again out of the country, and hence affected what was captured or exposed of the lives of those who remained within, given there were restrictions on photography at the time.

The images presented in this short essay give a glimpse into the practice of professional photographers in the last 90 years. At a time when social media has taken so much of recorded history onto a global platform, perhaps the little-known pasts of the image in Myanmar will resonate with the visual tropes prevalent in South Asia, if not the wider world. The images selected convey a sense of the changing popular tastes and conventions of the urban communities in Myanmar, focussing on portraiture and what may be considered, art photography, seen in the use of multiple exposure and hand-colour tinting.





This image was taken during the Shinbyu (Novitiation) ceremony, a significant coming of age ritual in the life of young Buddhist men in Myanmar, which marks the beginning of their religious education. The boys ask the monastery abbot's permission to become novices, after which their heads are shaved and their fine clothes are exchanged for austere robes worn by monks. This image was taken in the 1930s – a tumultuous time in Myanmar, coloured by early nationalist movements and riots. Buddhism was a mainstay through it all, being the face of the Burmese majority and therefore its cultural identity.



In the 1930s and 40s, the first trick photographs started to appear in Burma. Montages and double exposures became specializations of some photographers. This image from the early 30s is made of two negatives merged in the darkroom. During British rule, sports like cricket, football, tennis and boxing were introduced to the country and clubs were opened but were usually only accessible to the elite in society.

A hand-coloured image from the 50s.





Dear Ngo,
 For Perpetual
 Remembrance.
 Your's Ngasing.
 23.9.02.
 ဦးတင့်၏
 မိခင်အတွက်
 မေ့မိမိရမိမိ



鴻年全學
 有志者事竟成
 黃甲全學
 1957.10.1



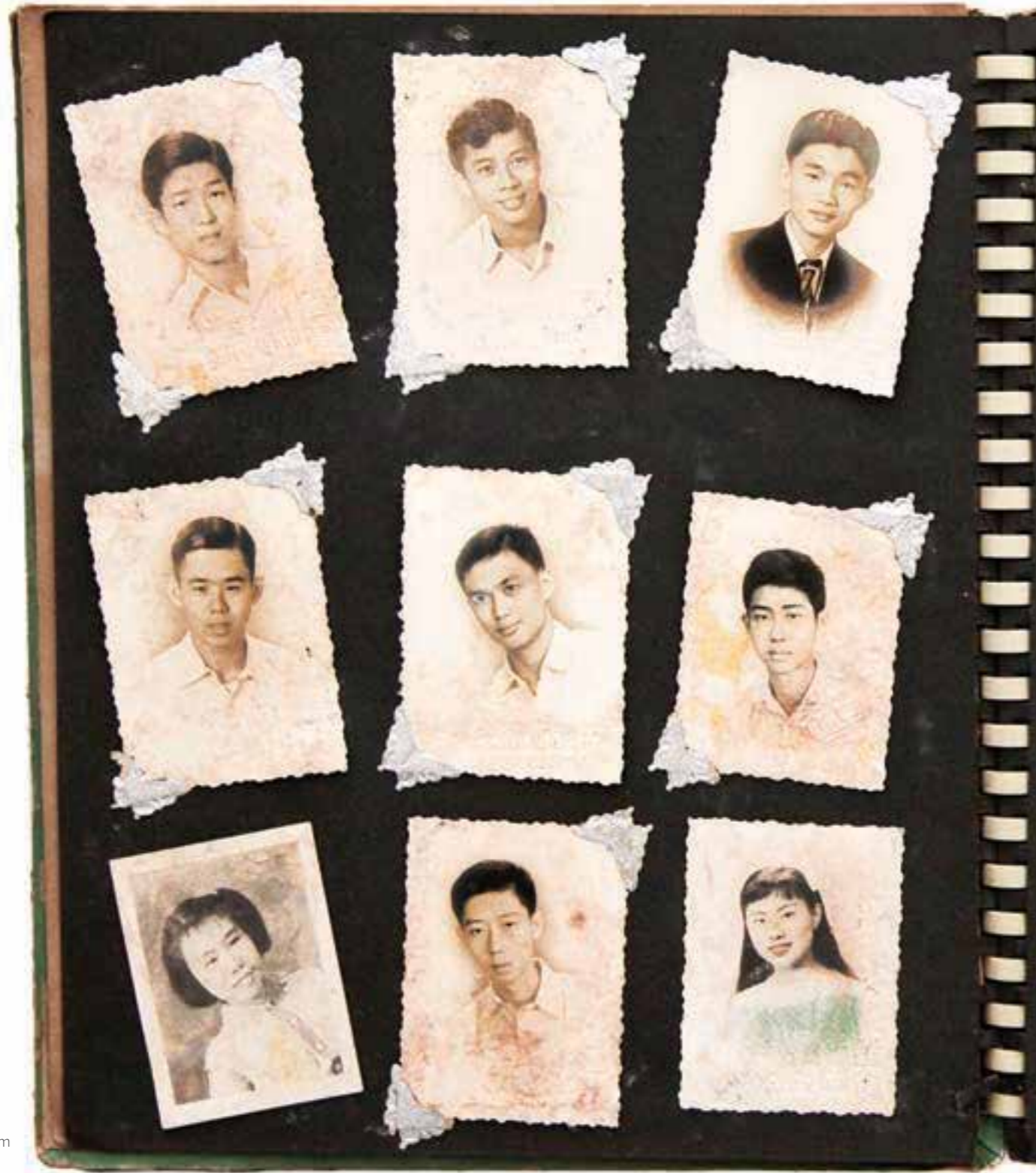
My beloved Nyo (a.k.a) Mal Ohnmar. I hope you will always remember the "ar pone" snack from Aung San Amusement playground, whenever you see this photo. With much love, from Shwe Lin to Shwe Su".

After the early colonial photo studios had disappeared or had been taken over by local photographers, a large number of Chinese-run studios opened. Many of the names and logos were in Chinese and their clientele would be Chinese speakers. During General Ne Win's rule (1962–1988), the ban on Chinese-language schools caused the decline in Mandarin speaking. The note on the image reads: "For classmate Hong. Where there is a will, there is a way. From classmate Huang."

Left: This note says, "My Beloved Nyo (a.k.a) Mal Ohnmar. I hope you will always remember the "ar pone" snack from Aung San Amusement playground, whenever you see this photo. With much love, from Shwe Lin to Shwe Su".



The photograph above from 1977 was taken at Central Photo Studio, Yangon, which has been closed for some time. A Burmese wedding can be religious or secular, extravagant or simple. Chinese families in Myanmar might prefer less conservative weddings, adopting fashionable Western-style vestiges, and a dinner for friends, family and colleagues; together with the auspicious "double happiness" inscribed in Chinese characters, wishing the couple good fortune. The 1970s were tense times for the Chinese community, and the less attention an event invited, the better.



Pages from a private photo album with images from the 1960s



Forthcoming: The Student Issue – Experimentation

In the last decade, South Asia has witnessed a deluge in exploratory works being produced by students, who have been mentored within newly formed photo/visual arts departments. The scope of student work – in image-making and writing – has also been exponentially broadened through festivals, workshops and training exercises, as well as the personal drive of a generation who took to the camera without the availability of taught courses. All of these conjoined efforts has led to a rich and varied reading of the contemporary – the form images *can* take and discussions that need to be debated around future practices. Photography is no longer restricted to the single image, but demands consideration as an inter-media device, a hybrid, wherein the domain of the documentary is constantly pushed with the creation

of new work, collaborations and even by investigating the unexplored archives of modern practitioners in order to learn from their trials and tests.

In the forthcoming issue, we would like to enlarge the canvas of what student work in the present accounts for; where it comes from, and even, who constitutes a student(?) – by considering processes and evolving styles across generations; also bearing in mind how existing departments are charting new approaches to the medium as an inter-disciplinary agent.

The role of the university, criticism and pedagogy as a whole are therefore allied to this issue, reflecting on existing contemporary practices.

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Back cover: Photo ca.1950s.
Lukas Birk/Myanmar Photo Archive

Photographers

AUNG KHIN MYINT is a contemporary painter and artist based in Yangon. His first solo exhibition was held at Lokanat Gallery in 2005. A member of the New Zero Art Space, he regularly participates in group shows in Yangon.

AUN RAZA studied multimedia arts at the National College of Arts, Lahore. Since 2010, he has been travelling extensively, encountering vastly different cultures and ways of life, which has developed his impulse to photograph people through experiencing similar kinds of connections that he had in Pakistan. Based in Italy, Austria and Canada, he is also a contributor to Getty Images.

BORIS LE MONTAGNER is a photography enthusiast who has been living in Myanmar for the last a year and half. He has been working on personal projects and has worked with the Yangon Photo Club and the Yangon Photo Festival.

DEBASISH SHOM completed a three years professional course in photography from Pathshala South Asian Media Institute. Currently he is working as a freelance photographer and as a tutor in Pathshala South Asian Media Institute.

DIEGO MAYON is a freelance photographer from Italy. In 2009 he received a Master's Degree in Photography at NABA (New Academy of Fine Arts, Milan). His work is based on assignments and personal documentary projects.

ELIZABETH RUSH'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Granta*, *Orion*, *The New Republic*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Al Jazeera*, *Witness*, the *Huffington Post*, *Frieze*, *Nowhere*, *Asian Geographic*, *The Dark Mountain Project* and others. She is the recipient of the Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities at Bates College (2015-2017) where she is designing and teaching courses that carry digital technologies and the environmental sciences into the humanities stream.

EMILY PHYO was born and raised in Yangon. She studied contemporary art at New Zero Art Space. Currently she works with installation and performance art, and more recently photography. Her work has been exhibited in Cambodia, Singapore, and Yangon.

FARHAD RAHMAN is a Bangladeshi documentary photographer. After completing his Engineering degree and a 3 year professional photography course at Pathshala, he is currently working as a photographer and Faculty at Pathshala, South Asian Media Institute in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

JESIM FEROEZ is a freelance photographer. He completed his PGDMA in Documentary photography from Sri Aurobindo Centre of Arts and Communication, Delhi. He participated in a photo exhibition organized by TERI, 2014. Other notable achievement includes his time lapse video of North East India, which was published in Explore Trail.

KO LIN MUANG is a self-taught photographer. He participated in the 6th Yangon Photo Festival, 2014. He went to École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie as resident artist for 3 months. Some of his photos have been exhibited in Salon de la photo (Paris 2014), *Ma vie en Provence* (Arles 2014). He is currently working on his project of "Asian Eyes on Europe".

LUKAS BIRK is an Austrian artist who exhibits regularly and organizes visual media workshops. He has set up artist-in-residence programs in China and Indonesia and has organized networks of local artists to co-operate with those in his native Austria. He previously worked on archiving the history of box camera photography in Afghanistan. His most recent photo book deals with modernization in China. Currently, he is working on Myanmar Photo Archive, a project to archive private photographic records from Myanmar, which was initiated by him.

MARYLISE VIGNEAU has been documenting life in Asia focusing on cities and on what development or isolation does to them. Her work has been shown in Angkor Photo Festival, Foto Istanbul, Yangon Photo Festival, Nairang Gallery in Lahore, Java Gallery in Phnom Penh and Focus Photography Festival in Mumbai. It has also been published in PIX (India), Asia Life and Milk (Cambodia), Eyesopen (Italy), Oneworld (Netherlands). Her work about the Lahore Mental Hospital in collaboration with Aun Raza has been

exhibited in February 2016 at QR Photo Gallery in Bologna, Italy. In November 2015, she joined the Anzenberger Agency in Vienna.

MAYCO NAING is a Yangon based photographer. She received a B.A. degree in Economics from Yangon University in 2005 and founded, Mo.K Studio in 2009. She has won two international awards, New York Farmani Gallery Creativity Prize, YPF (2010) and Young Talent Prize, Dali International Photo Festival (2015). She has participated in numerous exhibitions across France, Yangon and Bangkok. Her most recent solo exhibition, *Identity of Fear*, was shown at New Zero Art Space in Yangon in December 2016.

MINZAYAR OO is represented by Panos Pictures. Since 2012, he has been freelancing for international news agencies, newspapers, magazines and INGOs in and around Myanmar. His work has been published in *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *National Geographic*, and *La Repubblica*, among others. Minzayar has won multiple awards at Yangon Photo Festival, 9th China International Press Photo, Foreign Correspondent Club of Thailand Asia-Pacific Photojournalism Contest 2015, Days Japan International Photojournalism Awards 2016, Istanbul Photo Awards and 12th China International Press Photo. He was also nominated for Joop Swart Masterclass in 2016.

NAY THWAY is an amateur photographer with no formal training who has a deep interest in photography. He has previously worked at Uniteam Marine, an international ship management organization. He currently works with the family business. His photo story, *Rainbow Marriage* was featured as part of the Yangon Photo Festival, 2014.

NGE LAY is a multi media artist with a particular interest in performance and photography. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Singapore, Hong Kong, Cambodia and Dhaka.

NORA (KHIN THETHAR LATT) is a multimedia artist and filmmaker based in Yangon. She has participated in international exhibitions in France, United Kingdom, Japan, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Myanmar. In 2015, her

project "Hunger" won the Young Talent Programme 2014/15 Solo Exhibition at ION ART Gallery, Singapore.

PHILIP BLENKINSOP'S visceral black-and-white imagery has been published in the world's leading media and has been exhibited in museums and galleries internationally. His work has been the catalyst for political discourse and debate, including within the US Congress where he lobbied personally for the United States to intervene in the ongoing genocide by the Lao Government against the Hmong militias who fought for the USA during the American War in Indochina. Awarded the prestigious Visa d'Or Award three times, he has also been awarded Amnesty International's Photojournalism Prize for Excellence in Human Rights Journalism. In 2012 Blenkinsop was made an Honorary Fellow of Falmouth University in recognition of his services to photojournalism.

PHYOE KYI was born and lives in Taunggyi, Shan State. He works with installation, photography, graphic and sound art. He is also a freelance graphic designer. He has exhibited in Germany, UK, Thailand, and Singapore.

PABLO BARTHOLOMEW'S work has been featured in publications like *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *National Geographic*, *Geo*, *Der Spiegel*, *Figaro*, *Paris Match*, *Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *Observer Magazine*. He has exhibited over 30 solo exhibitions at galleries, museums, art and photo festivals in India and around the world. He was a photojournalist with Gamma Liaison for 20 years and is currently continuing his long-term project on the Indian émigrés, alongside discovering his Burmese roots and working on his father Richard Bartholomew's photographic and literary archives. A three-time World Press Photo Award winner, Bartholomew was bestowed the Padma Shri by the President of India (2013) and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2014).

RUBÉN SALGADO ESCUDERO is a freelance photographer from Spain. Rubén's works have been exhibited in over 20 cities across the world including New York, London, and Tokyo and at the Rencontres d'Arles festival in France. His

project has been published in numerous international publications, including *National Geographic Magazine* and *TIME*. He has won various international awards including the Sony World Photography Award, two years in a row. Rubén is currently finishing his first photography book with the Grammy winning musician, Residente of Calle 13.

THU REIN is an artist who was born in Taunggyi, Shan State. He has held five solo exhibitions and participated in more than 25 group exhibitions in Myanmar. His work has been shown in Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States of America.

YADANAR WIN is a performance, video, and installation artist living in Yangon. She joined New Zero Art Space as a collaborative member in 2009, where she remained for 5 years as an organizer, participant, and volunteer. It was during these years that Yadanar began to experiment with performance, video, and installation art. Yadanar also works as an arts and cultural manager at the Goethe Institut, Myanmar in Yangon.

Writers

HAYMANN OO is curator of New Zero Art Space, Yangon. Haymann studied at the curatorial workshops organized by New Zero Art Space in 2012. She presently organizes and manages several art and community projects, exhibitions and educational programs. She focuses on art education and audience participatory art. She has written several articles for the *New Waves Art and Literature Magazine* and writes for *Art Monthly*, a magazine of Myanmar arts. From 2014, she started to take a leadership role at New Zero Art Space and work towards promoting and encouraging Myanmar artists and international collaborations.

MAE YWAY'S poems have appeared in periodicals and poetry collections since 2010. Her first collection *Courier* was published in June 2013. Her joint poetry book with Cho Pain Naung titled *You & I*, was published in July 2016.

MATT GRACE is an English photographer and founder of Myanmar Deitta who is based in Yangon. Matt first came to Asia in 2006 when he began working with the Burmese communities of northern Thailand. He returned to London where he

studied Photojournalism at the London College of Communication and spent two years plying his trade as a press photographer before moving to Yangon at the beginning of 2010. In Yangon he worked predominantly on advocacy media work and training with the numerous NGOs propping up the country's ailing public health system. He also pursued personal photographic projects looking at youth culture in the city. In 2013 he founded the non-profit organization Myanmar Deitta, which works to develop resources for documentary photographers and filmmakers in Myanmar.

NANCE CUNNINGHAM is the co-founder of Pansodan Gallery and Pansodan Library and Archive, both located in Yangon. She has been living and working in the Myanmar cultural sphere since 1999. In that time, she has worked extensively in the humanitarian field, as well as collaborating on several bilingual Burmese and English dictionaries, and translating Burmese literature into English. She also owns a small press, Pansodan Books, which publishes books relating to Myanmar culture and language.

NATHALIE JOHNSTON is founder and director of Myanm/art, an exhibition space, gallery and reading room in Yangon. The mission of Myanm/art is to further investigate contemporary Myanmar art, assist in collaborations between creative fields in Yangon and cities such as Beijing, Singapore and Stockholm, and promote artists and their work to a local and international audience. She began her work in Myanmar in 2009, completed her MA thesis on the evolution of performance art in Myanmar in 2010, and has organized numerous projects since, including the Myanmar Art Resource Center and Archive (MARCA).

SAN LIN TUN is a writer, poet and translator based in Yangon. He was educated at Yangon Technological University (Y.T.U) and the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (I.T.B.M.U). His flash fiction *Parallel Lines* appeared in NAW Anthology 2011, and his short story "Warm Bosom" appeared in H2 Ethnic Short Story Anthology in 2015. He won first prize in poetry for 2015 Wales National Day hosted by British Club in Yangon.

Advisory for this issue:



New Zero Art Space is a nonprofit visual arts organization that was established in Yangon in 2008 by artist and curator, Aye Ko. Aiming to empower and educate a new generation of practitioners, the gallery and art library promotes local contemporary voices through its display of sculptures, video, performance art and photography, but also fosters collective training and debating through workshops, free classes and a residency programme.

We would like to thank the following people for their support, encouragement, insight and feedback for this issue of PIX.



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