

(between)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

ART PROJECT + EXHIBITION JUNE 01_JULY 10/2011 **PHNOM PENH**

Between brings together four contemporary artists from Myanmar, Aung Naing Soe, Ma Ei, Htoo Aung Kyaw, Phyu Mon, and four contemporary artists from Cambodia, Yim Maline, Khvay Samnang, Meas Sokhorn, Tes Vanna. This is the first time that such a collaboration has occurred. The artists involved in this art exchange and exhibition reveal individual notions of what contemporary art can be. All of them explore different forms and materials, engaging with their inherited meanings and transforming them conceptually. This exhibition is an explosion of symbols, which move in and outside of the traditional gallery space.

In Cambodia, it is becoming increasingly common for artists to use found objects, tools of daily life and performance art as forms in their work. In Myanmar a parallel interest in these modes can be seen, beginning in the last decade. Due to this relatively new progression these artists have a noticeably fresh approach. I wonder if this commonality in the development of practice is a result of their similar art history: both countries' visual art practice is based in traditional artisanship and both countries were colonized during a similar period. Myanmar by the British from 1824 until 1948, and Cambodia by France from 1863 until 1953. The colonial powers introduced modern painting techniques and themes to both these countries. (Not without controversy it should be noted.) Also both countries experienced a period of liberal modernism in their visual culture in the 1960's.

At the present time, contemporary art practice in both Cambodia and Myanmar is limited to relatively small groups of mostly young artists. Subjects and themes broached are diverse across the two countries. Young artists in Cambodia are exploring their contemporary surroundings whilst playfully appropriating the iconographic symbols developed by their predecessors. Cambodian artists are also engaging with non-traditional topics, including their recent history, with a seemingly critical motivation. In Myanmar 'reality' has become a central focus in contemporary art. This could be the reason why multimedia and performance art has been adopted in recent years. Perhaps because each respective form has an ostensible closeness to 'the real' and exhibit an oft-confronting immediacy. This said, lyrical and poetic symbolism is also a vital aesthetic in the visual culture of Myanmar.

In this artist exchange project and exhibition we have worked together, as art professionals, seeking artistic approaches to examine the manifestations of and issues in the fields of the environment, feminism, care and spirituality. Starting to communicate with each other via online chat several months ago, we found ourselves caught between virtual worlds, communicating by the written word in a second language. We discovered we were confronting a similar issue of being caught between competing interests: the agenda of our art practice and the restrictions our socio-political environment. This shared experience gave us the name of this art project + exhibition, 'between'.

Lydia Parusol (Organizer and Curator, between)

Cultural exchange is an important part of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's activities worldwide. Since several years now the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Southeast Asia facilitates exchange between artists from Myanmar/Burma and artists abroad, in particular within the ASEAN Region. We think that artists are an important part of civil society - often overlooked by the international donor community - and contribute more than just their works of art to satisfy the art lover. We also see art as a vital necessity, a way of communication and expression, intercultural comprehensible. In particular in challenging sociopolitical environments contemporary art can provide an important space for reflection upon relevant issues. At the same time art can provide a retreating room of sorts, but also provide a useful platform for intervention.

But it is not enough for artist to constantly reflect on the conditions within their own limited realm of action. Exchange and dialogue with fellow artists from other countries is essential to reflect on trusted perspectives and - if needed - to challenge those perspectives. The experience of difference and exchange of ideas can result in new impulses and creations.

In this regard we are very delighted to support an artists exchange between Myanmar/Burma and Cambodia. Both countries were closed to the outside world for many years and only recently opened up and re-emerged on the international art map. Both countries are still little-known for their contemporary art scene and creative power, but merely perceived from a very limited perspective often linked to their recent violent past. Therefore it is all the more important to facilitate this art exchange, promote emerging artists from both countries and provide a platform for interaction and to showcase their work to a wider public.

We would like to thank all the artists involved and in particular the curator and organiser Lydia Parusol and the Meta House Phnom Penh! We hope that this will be just the beginning of a long-lasting friendship between the artist communities in Myanmar/Burma and Cambodia.

Jost Pachaly (Director)

Rainer Einzenberger (Program Coordinator Myanmar/Burma)



An art project + exhibition
supported by the Heinrich Boell Foundation Bangkok
at Meta House Art Gallery, Phnom Penh.



PATCHWORK_HTOO AUNG KYAW

(between)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

HOO AUNG KYAW (b. 1978 Kyaukpadaund / lives + works Yangon) Htoo Aung Kyaw holds a BA in Philosophy from University of Mandalay and an Art Diploma from the Fine Arts School in Yangon. He is a member of New Zero Art Space and he regularly participates in Color Stream group art exhibitions. His formal approaches include portraiture, semi-abstract landscape and action painting. He also creates installations, performance and video art. In 2008 Htoo Aung Kyaw participated in the Nippon Myanmar International Performance Art Exchange. In 2010 he exhibited in + ROAD, an Indonesia/Myanmar art exchange project at Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta, and he also performed at Sika gallery in Bali.

PATCHWORK

Painting and collage, 120x80cm, collage mixed media, acrylic on canvas, photographs and CD-ROMs.

Htoo Aung Kyaw is interested in creating contemporary art using traditional imagery. For this work, he combines Buddhist depictions of both Cambodia and Myanmar. "I feel like we have similar cultures and traditions," says Htoo Aung Kyaw, "I want to look at the similar ideas and concepts – the tiny space of oneness between both cultures." He notes, "The Naga or dragon snake is used in both cultures to guard over our pagodas." He uses the Khmer word 'wat' and the Burmese word 'phaya' (both meaning pagoda) in this work over and over again, like endless chanting.





UNTITLED_MA EI

(between)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

MA EI (b. 1978 Dawei / lives + works Yangon) Ma Ei has a BA in Physics from the University of Yangon. After leaving university she deviated from the field of science to pursue her interest in art. She began her arts education in 2007, participating in various international art workshops at New Zero Art Space, and has since exhibited throughout Asia. She reflects upon both feminism and Buddhism through her installation, painting, performance and photographic work. In 2010 she took part in the Asia Topia Performance Festival in Thailand, Pan Asia Performance Festival in Korea and Beyond Pressure in Myanmar. In the same year she was also a resident at Tokyo Wonder Site Aoyama. Her passion for literature has led her to run a bookshop in Yangon.

UNTITLED

Painting and mixed media, 100x90cm, acrylic on canvas, Cambodian frames.

“As a painter how can I be free from the canvas?” poses Mai Ei. Normally, the frame supports the painting. In this work, Ma Ei puts the frame on the canvas. She uses this as a metaphor for how the gender roles she observes in society can be adapted. Often in our society men are presented like the canvas, as more important than women, whom are diminished to a supporting role like the frame. By changing the relationship of the canvas to the frame Mai Ei proposes that men can support women as much as women can support men. As human beings, men and women are on an equal level, says Ma Ei. Given this, forms and structures in society need to be changed, perhaps transformed, she suggests, by adjusting our thinking and lifestyles. Without the boundaries of the frame, the openness of the canvas can also free the artist. “It can help me to let life’s daily annoyances flow out. Changing structures, changing limitations - liberates this very moment.”





UNTITLED_YIM MALINE

YIM MALINE (b. 1982 Battambang / lives + works Siem Reap) Yim Maline's rigorous and meticulous practice spans media and scrutinizes the complexities of freedom. By reinterpreting her childhood memories and unraveling contradictions of the present, she creates work in which the playful and unsettling coincide. Yim Maline studied visual art at Phare Ponleu Selpak in Cambodia (1995-2003) and received her Diplôme National Arts Plastiques (DNAP, Art Option) at École Supérieure des Beaux-arts in Caen la mer, France (2010). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions in France and Cambodia and just recently presented a solo exhibition, Remember, at SA SA BASSAC in Phnom Penh (2011).

UNTITLED

Installation, size variable, nails, cotton, plywood, nylon strings.

Black/white. Hard/soft. Sharp/dull. Two starkly different zones: above the potentially dangerous, below the potentially harmless. By contrasting materials and associations, the artist poses poignant questions drawn from her experience of being born into civil war and raised into relative peace. At any point in time, the power above can drop its weight. To remain soft is to absorb, to accept, however heavy or sharp the infliction. Yim Maline asks us: With what state of mind do we enact and encounter power? With what state of mind do we experience the hard rain?





PHYU MON (b. 1960 Mandalay / lives + works Mandalay) Phyu Mon is the first female artist in Myanmar to work in multimedia and performance art. She has participated in several local and international exhibitions, as well as in a number of performance festivals. Phyu Mon has been painting and writing poetry and short prose since her early teens. In 1985 she graduated from Mandalay University majoring in Myanmar Literature. Following this, she founded the women's art group Blue Wind, which organizes annual multimedia festivals in Myanmar. Her work has been exhibited throughout Asia, Europe and the USA. Phyu Mon also writes articles about international art, and publishes contemporary poetry and scientific texts.

SONG FROM NATURE

Installation, size variable, found branches, roots and leaves, paper birds, Cambodian traditional rattan baskets, light chain, bricks, mosquito netting, sand, acrylic.

Many of Phyu Mon's works are of reflection of her environment. Currently, she is particularly interested in the phenomenon of natural disasters occurring around the world. She says, "These calamities, caused by the lack of care taken when waste is thrown away, make me feel very sad". Recycling waste material is important to her and thus she uses it to create her artwork. Phyu Mon suggests, "nature is always singing to us but we barely give back to her in return for what she does". This work is dedicated to nature, like a hymn to it, so as we never forget how important nature is to us, reminding us that we can only survive when we are in harmony with it.





SAMNANG COW TAXI, PHNOM PENH_KHVAY SAMNANG

(between.)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

KHVAY SAMNANG (b.1982 Svay Rieng / lives + works Phnom Penh) With subtlety and humor, Khvay Samnang employs a diverse array of media to reflect on various aspects of Cambodian society in order to pose questions to their affects and relevance today. Khvay Samnang has a BA in Fine Arts majoring in painting from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh (2006). His work has been widely exhibited in Cambodia and in international exhibitions including Arles Photo Festival in France (2008), Forever Until Now at 10 Chancery Lane Gallery in Hong Kong (2009), Tokyo 2010 at Tokyo Wonder Site Hongo (2011). He was also a resident at Tokyo Wonder Site Aoyama (2010).

SAMNANG COW TAXI, PHNOM PENH

Performance video installation, digital Video, duration 20 mins.

Samnang Cow Taxi is a site-specific performance-based video project. The eponymous taxi (Samnang means "lucky" in Khmer) originated in Tokyo, in 2010. The artist was only able to navigate this foreign city through the generous advice of the local Japanese people. To reciprocate their kindness, he created a simple wooden rickshaw and offered his transport services to many amused strangers. All the while he was wearing large buffalo horns sculpted from human hair - a reference to low-tech, rural Cambodia where cows remain essential for transport and ploughing. For Samnang Cow Taxi, Phnom Penh, the artist shifts his focus to the environment. Playing an earnest, ambitious and responsible cow-citizen, Samnang spent days collecting one taxi-full of refuse dirt and sand from street gutters and construction sites. He subsequently transported it 30 kilometers outside the urban center to one of many locations where the banks of the Mekong River is severely eroding.





LIFE II_AUNG NAING SOE

(between
MYANMAR CAMBODIA)

AUNG NAING SOE (b. 1985 Yangon / lives + works Yangon) Aung Naing Soe has a BA in Fine Arts majoring in painting from the National University of Art and Culture in Yangon (2004). He has been working as a performance artist for ten years and believes “all things in the world can be changed through art”. He has said that since his time at university he has been touched by the power of art and has become completely immersed in it. Both nature and Buddhism have influenced Aung Naing Soe’s research and creativity. His artwork is motivated by a desire to combine the real and the imagined. Aung Naing Soe has participated in several group exhibitions in Myanmar since 2005. To support his art practice he works part-time as an art and craft teacher, magazine illustrator and designer.

LIFE II

Video installation, 210x125cm, wood, transparent plastic sheets, ice blocks, digital video, duration 10 mins.

Once Aung Naing Soe went to one of the many busy markets in Yangon. He paused suddenly, impressed by the sight of ordinary ice blocks melting in the heat. Amongst all the bustling of people, animals and goods, the ice blocks just melted, undisturbed by their surroundings. For Aung Naing Soe, this is symbolic of life; “the inner core of existence is unimpressed by any movement, emotions or activities,” he says. It’s moving fearlessly to its destination of decay and finally to death. It is this, which has inspired Life II.





SLEEPING TREASURE_MEAS SOKHORN

(between)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

MEAS SOKHORN (b. 1977 Phnom Penh / lives + works Phnom Penh) Meas Sokhorn studied Interior Design at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, graduating in 2004. His first solo exhibition, in 2006, featured paintings and sculptures. In 2007 his sculptures, which utilize natural materials, were recognized by the Signature Art Prize. Since then Meas Sokhorn's work has rapidly evolved, becoming more intense, using found materials including barbed wire, kindling, plastic string and chopsticks to produce large-scale installations. Through the evolution of his work, he has arrived at a critical position, addressing his own personal history, the global art market and post-colonialism.

SLEEPING TREASURE

Sculpture, 120x110x85cm, second-hand wheelchair, metal wire, pots, Meas Sokhorn's old paintings.

For Meas Sokhorn, the transformation or repurposing of objects, especially everyday tools, can reveal a hidden truth. He uses this technique to speak about what he observes and reflects upon in society. The assemblage of different objects by Meas can often be seen to be disturbing or even abstruse to the viewer. A wheelchair is usually used to carry a disabled or elderly person. However, in this work, Meas removes its function, totally dismantling the wheelchair, twisting it into a completely unrecognizable state. In life, a person's health and the way it is cared for can be twisted and deformed in the same way, he suggests. "I am interested in the human condition, and how positive aspects of it can be lost or lacking", says Meas. "Some hardships can be lived out in wrong era or place." He asks, "When is this notion of the loss and lack experienced on a conscious level?" Meas believes that we have to take care of others in our society, especially those who need help, as they desire to function at the same level as everyone else. "For those who are healthy, instead of appreciating their lives and the lives of others, they throw themselves into an enormous amount of shallow entertainment." One important consideration for the artist, particularly in his own country, is to reflect on the assistance that is provided by others in crisis situations. This assistance is of primary importance to our needs as humans, he asserts. For Meas "this means sharing...sharing our experiences with one another".





BELIEVE_TES VANNA

(between)
MYANMAR CAMBODIA

TES VANNA (b. 1982 Battambang / lives + works Siem Reap) Tes Vanna moved to Siem Reap in 2003 after studying painting at Phare Ponleu Selpak in Battambang for seven years. She was motivated by her dream to learn more about the world and seek independence through art. At Artisans d'Angkor, she works with and trains young deaf and mute artists. In 2010 Tes Vanna participated in the inaugural YOU KHIN women's art prize at Java Arts in Phnom Penh and in 2011 her work was exhibited as part of the To See group show at the French Cultural Centre, also in Phnom Penh. Tes Vanna uses metal, acid, acrylic and copper leaf to create 2D artworks however she recently discovered installation, which has become her medium of choice; "for me liberty and independence are the two most important and meaningful words".

BELIEVE

Installation, 200x100x100cm, wood, glass, mirror, metal wire, oil lamp, gold leaf.

Tes Vanna feels caught between the levels of her consciousness. These levels, which interact with each other, all belong to the one entity. To be between those levels is part of each existence she believes. In the past Tes wasn't sure, "I would stand in front of the mirror, so I could see my past and my present life". Life is always connected to what happened in the past, suggests the artist. "The light is like my heart. My heart is burning. My blood vessels are holding my heart. The mirror resembles for me the truth of past, present and future." Tradition is for Tes like a box, which is controlling and telling her what she can and cannot do. She desires to be fearless enough to go anywhere. She wants to move past the traditional thinking she sees in Khmer society, to know where she is standing now, in the present.



EDITOR IN CHIEF

Lydia Parusol

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jean Mathis

misterzang@gmail.com

PHOTOS

Vinh Dao

www.blind-eye-productions.com

PRINTING

Sok Heng Printing House

Phnom Penh

 **HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**
SOUTHEAST ASIA

www.boell-southeastasia.org



META HOUSE
PHNOM PENH
German Cambodian
Cultural Center

www.meta-house.com

Thanks to M.E.T.A Film school Phnom Penh



Phnom Penh
June 2011
300 copies