

Panel Abstract: The political and social landscape of Myanmar often inhibits the more conventional channels of dissent. Instead, the varied obstacles to freedom of expression presented by past and current governments encouraged political dissenters to seek creative forums for advocating alternative views. The aim of this panel is to examine creative dissent and to discuss the role of artistic expression in seeking new avenues to innovate and reimagine Myanmar identity within the particular confines of Myanmar politics. Art, in particular, may offer a means to express dissent where otherwise unable. Can these creative dissenters succeed in implementing political or social change? Is there a captive audience for political art in Myanmar? Or, is there an underlying reluctance to mix art and politics? Is interaction with the global art community facilitating the effectiveness of art as a means to criticize current political ideologies? In contexts of varying forms of authoritarian repression, are creative artists able to shape national identities, including religious identities, in ways that run counter to regime objectives? Above all, is creative dissent politically salient in contemporary Myanmar?

Paper 1: Art and Protest in Myanmar - Ian Holliday, Professor, Department of Politics and Public Administration, The University of Hong Kong

Abstract: The paper examines the changing contribution of creative artists, and particularly painters, to political protest in Myanmar. Taking as context the long period of authoritarian rule that opened in 1962 and deepened in 1988, the paper focuses above all on roughly the past decade. Marked by a gradual introduction of the Internet to major cities in the mid-2000s, by a significant revival of civil society in the wake of the saffron uprising and Cyclone Nargis in the late 2000s, and by political reforms piloted by President Thein Sein in the early 2010s, the decade has witnessed a major reshaping of political protest. Creative artists from many spheres have played key roles in that reshaping. Focusing particularly on painters, the paper examines the changing modes of censorship they have faced, the evolving domestic networks they have formed and joined, and the new forms of global linkage they have made. At a time of rapid expansion of the cohort of professional painters, it evaluates their work for political content, both overt and covert. In a period of revived political protest across the country, it isolates the specific contribution painters have made. The overall aim of the paper is to assess how the creative side of Myanmar's resurgent civil society has been able to support and extend the objectives of its political side.

Paper 2: The Struggle of Myanmar Artists to Engage with International Movements - Aung Soe Min, Curator and Gallery Owner, Pansodan Gallery, Yangon

Abstract: In the early twentieth century the roots of Burmese art were still in Buddhism and its temple art. The first painter to come back from training in Europe, U Ba Nyan, returned in 1925, and shared with the art community the qualities that made European paintings lifelike — tone values, perspective, and materials. His enthusiasm, skills, and teaching facilitated Burmese visual art moving from a narrative form to a didactic or documentary goal and then to an independent art form. The strong lines and flat tones of the Myanmar aesthetic appeared in a Neo-traditional movement, which became a symbol of the resistance to colonialism and a symbol of true Myanmar art. At first, optimistic attitudes resulted in many artists celebrating independence in art. However, with military rule, this turned into

responses to demands for propaganda art. Even under dictatorship, artists created contemporary art; Bagyi Aung Soe might be the first modern artist in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, while many of the mid-twentieth-century artists produced outstanding work, some of their work was derivative due to a lack of interaction with a wider artistic community beyond their borders. Today, more and more Myanmar artists are attending international events and when they return they carry materials about art. This paper will examine whether or not increased contact with the international art world through Myanmar artists going abroad, and through international artists, collectors, and curators visiting Myanmar, and most widely, through the Internet, might yet turn out to be an advantage or a weakness.

Paper 3: Art versus Artifice: Burmese Painting and National Identity Under the Censorship Period (1962-2013) - Melissa Carlson, Graduate Student, Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)

Abstract: Through a review of paintings, this paper attempts to piece together the Burmese national identity crafted by the government. I examine Censorship Board-approved paintings alongside versions of national identity voiced by Burmese artists in their banned paintings. I contrast censorship of Burmese art from 1962-2013 to that of art produced under the Socialist censorship mechanisms of the Soviet Union and amid the revolutionary sentiment and Communist propaganda machines that gripped China. Despite the almost parallel historical development of these authoritarian regimes, the Burmese military government, lacking a founding mythology and external narrative, did not copy the Socialist Realism model from the Soviets or state-sanctioned woodblock prints from China. Both these states used art to legitimize their rule and to signify a break from corrupt traditions. Instead, the Burmese military government encouraged artworks of an almost mythic or Orientalist Burma based in Birman themes that deflected viewers from real life conditions. Through interviews conducted between April 2013 and October 2013 with Burmese artists, gallery owners or curators, and a member of the government's Censorship Board, this paper analyzes why and how the government forged a path of censorship within the most traditional realms of art, in a style unique to Burma. Studies of censorship of painting in Burma serve to puncture myths about the Burmese government's ideological base. International calls for a broader definition for what it means to be Burmese must be examined and positioned through the context of the Birman touchstones used to establish the government's legitimacy.

Paper 4: Myanmar Contemporary Art and Religion - Pyay Way, Curator and Gallery Owner Nawaday Tharlar Gallery, Yangon

Abstract: This paper focuses on the gradual yet dramatic changes in the portrayal of religion in Myanmar's art by comparing the different representations of religion by earlier realist and modern contemporary artists. Myanmar art first started as a form of religious communication. Earlier artists copied Buddhist stories rather than creating an analysis of the present moment or even future ideas. For example, artist U Ba Kyi produced 65 paintings that depicted the history of Buddhist society. This was an artistic record of the past rather than an original idea provoked by an artist's inner feelings based in environment, experiences, and opinions. Since 2010 there have been noticeable changes in how and for

what purpose religion is conveyed in art. Recent contemporary art focuses on reflecting religion in everyday life with in-depth analysis on not only what is, but what could be, and how the meaning could be interpreted by different audiences. Some artists concentrated on imagination and contemplation of the future by using dreamlike images to elicit new ideas and emotions like artist Zwe Yan Naing through his flying pagodas. Others attempt to convey Buddhist ethics through more abstract ways like Co Thiee's paintings on Ku Tho (good deeds). Artists today are depicting religion in unprecedented ways. Artists are investigating how religion is influencing art and how art endeavors to stir the audience's imagination and awaken critical analysis and thought about the present situation and future possibilities.
