

FOCUS ON PHOTOGRAPHY 2012



PHOTOS: KAUNG HTET



A MYANMAR TIMES 8-PAGE SPECIAL FEATURE ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SCENE

People from the wasteland By Kaung Htet



Vox
Pop



Anegga,
a hip-hop singer, participated in the French Institute photography workshop in 2010

I participated in the workshop because I wanted to learn about photography and I thought I needed to have some training. It taught us about making photo-essays. For example, what kind of subject and how to make a story.

With the course I could improve my critical thinking and presentation skills.

I chose to make a story on "night life in Yangon". I had difficulties taking pictures at night time because my camera ISO is not good enough. Also in some places the authorities asked me why I was taking these photos.

After the course I realised that I would have to give up singing if I wanted to build my life on this. I wouldn't be able to make good photos if I didn't focus on photography.

Looking beyond the image

By Ben White

THE enduring image of Myanmar is conjured up in two pictures: one of a golden land, filled with hazy sunsets, crumbling temples and ambling peasants; while the other is of political conflict.

And given the longstanding censorship restrictions on much of the political situation in the country, photographers have predominantly followed the travel route.

The result has been an over reliance on a particular type of photography, narrowing the development of the photographic scene.

U Min Lwin, director of Gallery 65 in Yangon, said in an interview with The Myanmar Times that everything has become geared towards this style of photography.

"For the longest time photographers here were either self taught or learned from each other, creating this distinctive legacy."

Coupled with a largely domestic audience, he says this has created a unique style in some respects.

"If you compare to places like Vietnam where art has predominantly been produced for a Western audience, here there is less of an outside influence. The majority of my clientele are still Myanmar, with some expatriates and tourists as well.

"I would say 50 per cent of my exhibitions are paintings and the other 50pc photography. However, the majority of these have been more traditional travel photos."

Photographer Thiha Soul, 22, agrees that travel photography dominates the

domestic market.

"Myanmar photographers generally look to culture and tradition for photos and don't take socially reflective shots.

"The problem with this type of photography is that it is too repetitive and doesn't allow photographers to explore new styles," he said.

"It's not that this isn't any good, it's just that I feel in order to improve and

quires talent or international training," says photographer Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win.

"Taking a course here normally focuses on technical ability and to learn in English how to use a camera, whereas international photographers don't need to learn this so they can more quickly focus on the creative side," he says.

This focus on technical proficiency is deeply embed-

deal with the most advanced equipment that creates the kind of photos which make real money and attract real contacts."

And it is this commercial focus that has influenced the dominant style of travel photography here: "the main option to make money for photographers is with travel photography," says Thiha Soul.

"The photographers who

are definite rules you cannot break. In travel photography, if you take a sunset shot, you just cannot have the horizon on an angle, it must be straight."

Constraints for photographers extend to the art scene as well, where photography struggles to gain acceptance as fine art.

"I have seen more younger photographers pushing the boundaries of photography, but in general they don't have a platform to build on. Unless you have an establishment that can support artists then it isn't easy to put on shows," says U Min Lwin.

"There are some conceptual photographers working here but very much on the fringes. If they get to put on a show then only 20-odd people who are specifically interested will come.

"Instead this is happening not in galleries but on Facebook and with some setting up their own websites. I have met photographers who do great stuff but it's hard to get a viable show together," he says.

Unless artists and audiences can somehow find a way to explore more unorthodox subject matter together, it will be difficult for photographers to escape the economic trap that keeps them working in established styles.

"Both clients and artists are dependent on each other. The scene here is limited so we need to cater to their taste. It is a cost issue, if you can't find sponsors and buyers you won't get far," says U Min Lwin.

"The difficulty for photography is that most clients



The temples of Bagan. Pic: Kaung Htet

develop, photography in Myanmar needs to reflect our situation."

The emphasis on travel photography can in part be explained by the type of training received by most photographers and government restrictions on what genres of photography are acceptable.

"The environment and the situation of your own country influences the kind of photography you do. It is difficult to take photos outside of this perspective, it re-

quires talent or international training," says photographer Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win.

Established commercial photographer, U Zaw Min Yu, said that when he started out, he was taught that "a photographer is limited by the equipment he uses".

"There is simply not enough training available here, which makes it very difficult to advance as a photographer."

He added: "Myanmar photographers are not at the level you need to be able to

make it are those who are good at marketing their work rather than developing a distinctive style."

Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win suggests that the danger of commercially driven photography is that photographers work with clients who tend to reject experimentation in favour of more traditional styles.

While U Zaw Min Yu admits, "there are rules you just have to learn as a photographer. Sure, rules are there to be broken, but there



don't consider photographs to be proper art. Where they will pay US\$500 for a painting, they won't for a photo. The prevailing idea is that it is not as skilled, so it's a hard sell.

"For conceptual photography then it is doubly hard. Not only is it non-commercial, it is not considered a skilled art by clients," he says.

However, technological change and greater travel opportunities are helping photographers learn and develop in new ways.

Communication is becoming easier, making it more possible to learn via the internet, and the option of studying abroad brings new ideas.

"More and more [people] are going to study abroad and are slowly coming back not in the same mould, more adventurous," says U Min Lwin.

U Zaw Min Yu says that he has learned from his students as well.

"The way they experiment, it's always new. When I taught them I thought these guys would be my competitors in a few years."

But the biggest change has been the result of the advance of digital photography, which has democratized the medium but also furthered the impression that it's a lesser art form.

"With digital you can achieve a good technical level much quicker so photographers can focus more on ideas and expression," says an artistic director at the French Institute.

"Everyone has become a photographer with digital but very few can tell a story with images," he says.

"The idea now is to train a new generation of photographers to express themselves and their society. We are trying to help photographers think about their photos,

about the story they tell before taking the shot. It's about using images to write."

Such photojournalism has had to contend with long-standing restrictions.

"Here, if you do photojournalism you can get arrested, it's just not safe," says U Zaw Min Yu.

But this also offers photographers a means by which to document their society and potential international work with various agencies.

Photojournalists have faced a particular demand for certain images, subtly fitting a narrative of Myanmar politics as well as the intended purpose of showing the facts.

"Until recently photographers faced a lot of censorship, which affected their creativity. That is changing, but the question is, does it all have to be politicised? Although it is understandable, it would also be good to see other issues developed. What about nudity? For a long while that has been denied, so it is an issue as artists to address," says U Min Lwin.

As restrictions ease, there is greater opportunity for development of different styles of photography, be it photojournalism, social documentary, art, and even travel.

"Worldwide, there is money in photography as art but not here. Here the money is in travel photography, it's different. But documentary and art photography is where the rest of the world is, so I think it will come eventually," says the artistic director.

Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win agrees: "The tourist industry is opening up, so I think that travel photography could also change. At the moment it's the same shots but more foreign interaction will help develop the scene here."

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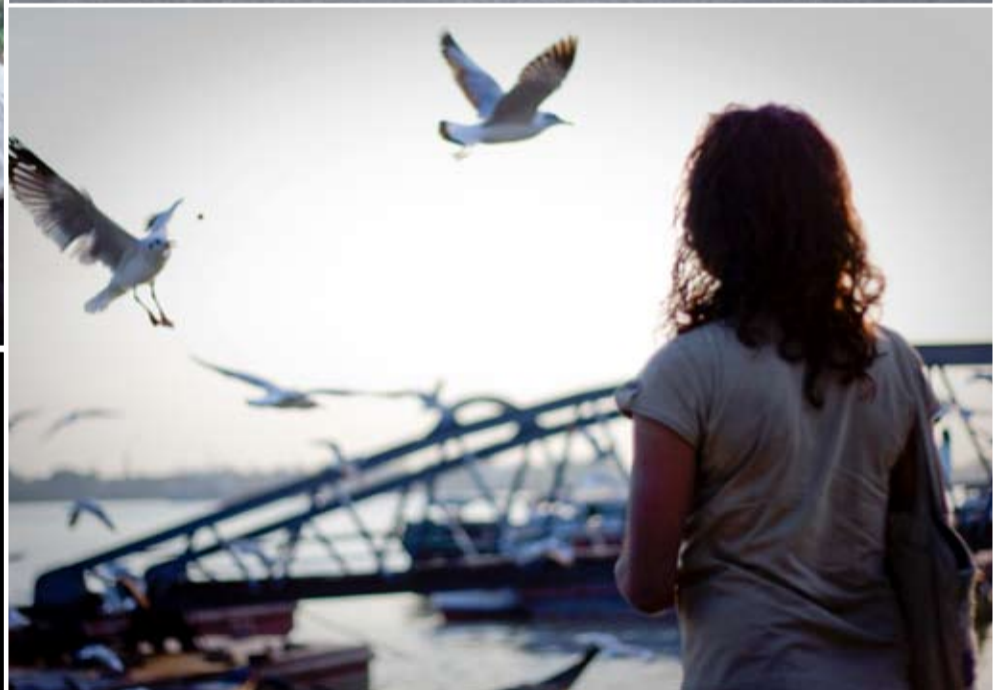
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Silent Sobbing

By Hnin Su Mon



Workshop focuses on story power in photos

By Douglas Long

AMERICAN experimental musician Laurie Anderson once made the observation that a truly creative artist could make brilliant music using a cheap cassette tape recorder, just as easily as they could generate inventive material in an expensive, state-of-the-art recording studio.

She also remarked that it was equally possible, and in fact quite common, for technically proficient musicians to pay big bucks for studio time only to churn out boring, reductive albums that were best forgotten.

This was Ms Anderson's way of saying that in music, as well as in the other arts, a healthy dose of originality has tremendous power to overcome deficiencies in equipment and technique.

This is a message that, for a variety of reasons, has been slow to take hold in Myanmar, where, in the arts, "skill" and "technique" traditionally trump imagination, and where, for example, well-known musicians can own very nice guitars but often demonstrate a reluctance or inability to do much more with their instruments than duplicate Scorpions and Metallica riffs.

This generally holds true in photography as well: Photo contests are routinely won by technically proficient but unremarkable images of prominent tourist sites, and well-established artists have been known to dismiss candid, hard-hitting photographs over gripes that the "rules" of composition have been broken.

To help remedy this situation, a workshop held in the lead-up to the Yangon Photo Festival has sought to encourage local photographers to inject more creativity into their work and think beyond the timid landscape images

that have long dominated the arts scene in Myanmar.

The workshop, held at the French Institute in Yangon from January 14 to 21, focused on teaching students how to create photo-essays, or "picture stories" told using a series of thematically related photographs.

An artistic director at the French Institute who led the workshop told the 20 or so students who gathered on the first day that for one week each would be expected to "work as a professional, with the purpose of creating a photo-essay".

The results will be screened at the festival on January 28, and prizes will be given for the best work.

Although the photo-essay has been around for many years — perhaps most famously in Life magazine, which for decades used sets of photographs to tell complex stories from all corners of the globe — the concept has not yet gained traction among local photographers, who tend to focus on studio and tourism-related work.

"Landscape photography is particularly strong in Myanmar. Generation after generation learned the same thing because they couldn't do anything else," the course instructor said.

He stressed that he was more interested in seeing work with a creative edge than photos that depended solely on high-end equipment or technical skill.

"It helps to have the best equipment, but if you have the right idea you can do a lot with very little equipment," he said. "And we are not here to talk about technique. We have to concentrate on thinking, how to concentrate and say something."

He also debunked the commonly held perception that photography was necessarily an objective art form in which artists were forbid-

den to impose their will.

"You can be subjective and show your point of view," he said.

"Photography gives you the opportunity to say something strong ... Every photographer has the chance to publish their photo-essay online and have the whole world as an audience. If you put something strong on the internet, you will have an audience."

He also said that with the advent of the iPad and similar technologies, photo-essays were becoming an integral part of the multimedia productions — which also include video, sound recordings and text — that were increasingly being



Pic: Kaung Htet

A mother and child are released from Insein prison in a government amnesty on May 17, 2010.

used to tell important stories from around the world.

"The photo-essay is the model of the future. You can already see this in the special editions of newspapers made for iPads. This is what you have to get ready for because this is how you will be able to make a living," he said.

One student, who had also participated in a similar workshop at the French Institute last November, said such courses helped local photographers take the next step toward international recognition.

"We need more workshops like this so people are

encouraged to think creatively. People in Myanmar focus too much on technical skills but don't know how to be imaginative or think outside the box. But that's exactly what we need to learn," she said.

Laurie Anderson would surely agree.

Vox Pop



Nan Tin Htwe,
a reporter with The Myanmar Times, participated in the French Institute photography workshop in 2010.

I took the course because I have always been interested in photography but I didn't know what a photo-essay was. Unlike

a news photo, it takes a lot of time to take many photos for a photo-essay.

I spent the whole night at Thiri Mingalar Market for my photo-essay. I was asked a lot of questions about taking photos by the market authorities. But that challenge has become an advantage because now when I take news photos I already have experience.

I learned that in a photo-essay you can create a story you want to tell whereas you can't create a story for a news photo.

I also learned that the most important thing in a photo-essay is that it has to be touching.

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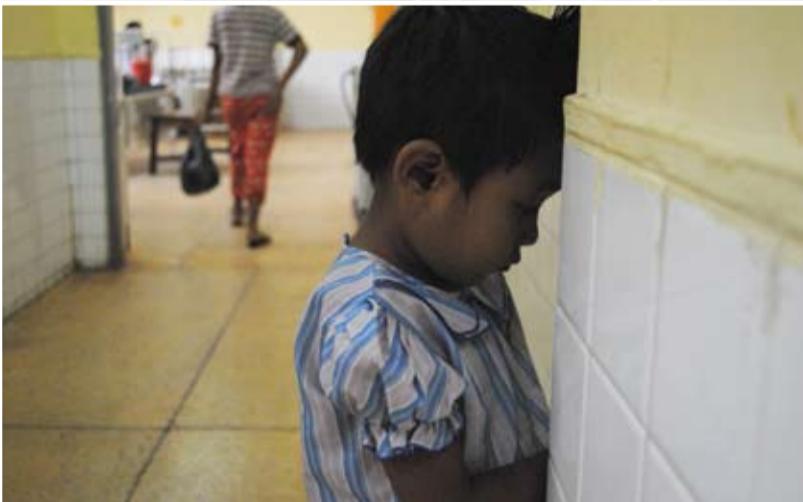
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Still Smiling

By Seng Mai





If... By Christina Win



PROGRAMME
YPF 2012

Jan 25 :

LECTURE-SCREENING AT FRENCH INSTITUTE OF MYANMAR**6:00PM** : Environmental issues at Dawei Port Project, by Zaw Oo, director of **Loka Ahlinn**.

Jan 26 :

LECTURE-SCREENING AT F.I.M.**5:00PM** : The Piktura Man.

Jan 27 :

SCREENING AT F.I.M., EXHIBIT OPENING AT ALAMANDA**6:30PM** : Pictures in Motion, "Les Nuits Photographiques festival - Paris". Screening of 2011 Prize winners, by Nicolas Havette.**8:00PM**: Exhibit Opening at Alamanda Inn (Shwe Taung Gyar Rd, Bahan Tsp). "Save the Poles", by **Nicolas Dubreuil**.

Jan 28 :

EXHIBITS OPENING AND YANGON PHOTO AWARDS AT F.I.M**2:00PM**: Lecture-screening in English. "Media incidents in China", by Dr Cao Pinxin, Ph.D, dean of School of photography, Communication University of China Nanjing.**3:30PM** : Lecture-screening in English about Chinese photographer **Lu Guang** and **Environmental issues in China**, by Jean Loh (**Beaugeste Gallery, Shanghai**) and Christophe Loviny.**5:00PM**: Exhibitions about Environmental Issues by International photographers (until Feb 4).**Eric Tourneret** (France): "The Honey Gatherers"**Lu Guang** (China): "Pollution in China"**Andrew Testa**(GB): "The Moken, sea-gypsies"**Christine Cibert** (curator, France): "Fukushima"**Alexander Gronsky**(Estonia): "Pastoral"**Vincent Su** (China): "Shanghai, Memories and Prejudice"**MAK Remissa/Asia Motion** (Cambodia): "Water is Life"**Cédric Faimali/Collectif Argos** (France): "Katrina"**6:15PM**: Screening. Yangon Photo Night. Best Myanmar photographers compete for the "Best Photo-essays of the Year" awards and **Canon Kodak Photo contest**.

\$5000 worth of prizes.

The festival is placed under the high patronage of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, president of the 2012 jury.

Programme still subject to change.

Rise of citizen photojournalists 'positive' but bring challenges

By Nan Tin Htwe

As the pace of technology gets faster, the flow of information reaches the public ever quicker. In Myanmar, still with censorship and hindrances such as weekly publication for the papers, a new generation is looking to the internet for news and connections.

Here, social networks such as facebook have become more than just a means to socialise, playing a role in a faster spread of information as people share news and photos taken with mobile phones or compact cameras.

than the supposed professionals.

"Sometimes, we get information about what is happening and where from them," said Ko Soe Than Win.

Ko Khin Mg Win, a photographer with AP said the use of such information sharing was a positive development, but without the protection professional photographers have, it is open to abuse as the photographers have no ownership rights over their photos.

Some local journals, lacking the resources to hire a professional photographer, have been caught out taking photos off facebook and using them as their own.

"I spend a lot of time and money to get my photos. Sometimes although I earn nothing for taking those photos I get questioned by the authorities", he said.

A photographer at EPA news agency, Ko Nyein Chan Naing, said even though citizen journalists play a vital role, they can also be a challenge to professional photographers.

"Sometimes they get to the place before us and get photos which we can't get," he said.

"But some don't know how to work with other photographers, we need to work together in some situations," he said.

Understanding the ethics as well as having technical ability for taking photos in stressful situations is essential for photographers, says Ko Kaung Htet, chief photographer with *The Myanmar Times*.

"Sometimes they upload really gruesome photos. I have seen photos taken of traffic accidents that show everything. Those shots are not beneficial for anyone.

"Professional photographers who understand the ethics of photography know how to take photos that get the information across but still preserve a person's dignity."

While covering the floods in Pakkoku in October 2011 where more than 170 people died, he was faced with a situation of how to take a picture of a deceased old lady.

"I saw a dead body of an old woman. A girl was crying and hugging her. It was a powerful moment but I felt I didn't want to show the whole body. In the end I took a photo of part of the old woman's foot. It was able to powerfully tell the reader the situation without revealing all."

As the spread of non-professional photography develops, the benefits it brings needs to be able to balance with the concerns it brings as well. But as the use of informal informations flows continue to develop, we may well see new ways to work these issues out, such as people posting comments on social network pages.



A muslim lady listens to NDF member U Thein Nyunt thank the muslim community for their support in his election win during a press conference in Thingangyun tsp on November 20, 2010, Pic: Kaung Htet

This fast means of sharing information both engages with and diverges from more formal media, offering a key source of information but also focusing on aspects that don't get picked up on by the news networks.

However, it throws up challenges as well, both within the professional scene and also for non-professional photographers, raising technical and ethical questions, say professional photographers.

Ko Soe Than Win, a correspondent photographer with AFP told *The Myanmar Times* that sometimes non-professional photographers take better shots

"People take photos and then others use them without crediting who actually took the photo.

"It's their own time and money to get those photos so if other people use them then they should be honest," Ko Khin Mg Win said.

Ko Maung Maung Thant takes photos of anything he can to show what is happening in Myanmar and shares them on his facebook page.

"Some people take my photos and use their own name," said Ko Maung Maung Thant, who was able to upload shots of a school fire near Inya lake before anyone else.

Lens makers focus on smartphone cameras

By Charlotte Raab

LAS VEGAS – Smartphone cameras are getting better all the time and accessory makers are now offering a variety of lens options for the devices, intensifying their rivalry with the compact "point-and-shoots."

Some of the lens attachment makers have been displaying their products at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) which closed on January 19.

Apple, in launching the latest model of the iPhone, the 4S, in October, sang the praises of its new camera, calling it the "you-can't-believe-it's-on-a-phone camera."

"This just might be the best camera ever on a phone," the California gadget-maker said of the 8-megapixel resolution. "And with all-new optics, it just might be the only camera you need."

Elodie Macquet, head of market-

ing for Xshot, a California company that makes tripods for the iPhone, said the improved smartphone cameras have been "kind of been a death sentence for the lesser quality compact cameras."

"Now that I have a 4S, I hardly ever use my little camera anymore," Macquet said, adding that with programs like Instagram and Hipstamatic" she can also do "arty" photos."

At the same time, the iPhone camera does have its limitations and a number of companies have stepped up to fill the gap.

A New York firm, Gogeto, has developed an iPhone lens attachment called the "Dot" that turns video shot by the smartphone into panoramic footage.

The Dot resembles a shot glass or a magnifying loupe such as those used by jewelers or photographers, only slightly smaller.

It clips on to an iPhone, aligning

with the lens of the camera, and transforms the footage into a 360-degree panoramic image.

Gogeto began shipping the Dot, which costs US\$79, for the iPhone 4 and the iPhone 4S in October. A version for the Android-powered Samsung Galaxy Nexus smartphone will be available in the first half of this year.

A California company at CES, Olloclip, is offering a \$70 three-in-one lens solution for the iPhone 4 and iPhone 4S.

The Olloclip provides fisheye, wide-angle and macro lenses.

The wide-angle provides a field of view double that of the normal iPhone, according to the company, while the macro lens provides 10X magnification.

Olloclip inventor Patrick O'Neill hopes to bring the Olloclip to Apple stores in Europe in the spring and is considering ramping

up production in China.

Funding for the Olloclip was raised on Kickstarter, a website that collects donations for creative projects. O'Neill sought \$15,000 but ended up raising \$68,000.

Matt Schmidt, a spokesman for Fujifilm, which won the best camera award at CES for its mirrorless Fujifilm X-Pro 1, said cellphone cameras may have improved but there remains a market for inexpensive compact cameras.

"Entry level cameras are still very important for new photographers," Schmidt said.

"In some ways the market might be shrinking," he said. "On the other hand the smartphone is introducing new people to photography."

Fujifilm for the moment has no plans to build accessories for the iPhone or any other smartphone and neither does its rivals Canon or Nikon. – AFP

Vox
Pop**Min Zayar**

is an amateur photographer who participated in the French Institute photography workshop in 2011

I only knew the basics of photography. I didn't know what technical skills would be needed to take quality photos. And since it was a free workshop I decided to take part.

I thought I could learn to improve my technical skills but I found we were to be taught photo-essays and the technical stuff I wanted to learn was only one part of the course.

The important element of the workshop was to generate ideas. They said, 'anybody who has a good camera can take a good photo, but a story idea is more important.'

My photo-essay was called 'Delivery'. I wanted to tell a story about an ordinary woman giving birth. They liked the message but there were some angles that they wanted me to improve. It was my first photo-essay and I only had three months experience in photography before.

I haven't done a photo-essay since the workshop but I have improved my photographic skills. Mostly I take scenery shots.