

Htein Lin

Htein Lin is a Burmese artist (painting, installation, performance) and writer, and has also been a comedian and actor.

Born in 1966 in Ingapu, Ayeyarwady Region, Myanmar, he was active in the 1988 student movement at Rangoon University where he studied law. Going underground after the military takeover, he spent almost four years in a refugee camp on the Indian border, where he studied art with Mandalay artist Sitt Nyein Aye, and in an ABSDF (Northern Branch) student rebel camp at Pajau on the Chinese border. In Pajau, he and other students were detained for around 9 months from 1991-1992 and suffered physical abuse at the hands of other students in the most notorious episode of the opposition group's history.

Escaping and returning to Yangon in May 1992, he finished a law degree in 1995 before taking up work as a film actor. He held two solo shows in 1996 and 1997. Arrested in 1998 and jailed on spurious accusations of opposition activity, he spent almost seven years in jail (1998-2004). During this time he developed his artistic practice, using items available to him like bowls and cigarette lighters in the absence of brushes to make paintings and monoprints on the cotton prison uniform.

Htein Lin pioneered performance art in Burma in 1996 and continued to perform for fellow inmates while in prison. Following his release, his Rangoon street performance 'Mobile Art Gallery/Mobile Market' in May 2005 led to 5 more days of interrogation. During the period 2006-2011 he also performed in the UK and Thailand, at the US Library of Congress (2009) and at festivals and events in Finland, France, Philippines, Japan, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. Many of his performances are intended to raise awareness of the political situation in Burma.

Since leaving Burma for the first time in 2006, Htein Lin regularly participates in exhibitions and art festivals globally, as well as events and projects to promote freedom of speech, particularly in Burma. He is a founding member of the Burmese language arts website www.kaungkin.com to which he contributes poetry, prose, and artistic criticism. In 2010 curated the first Burmese Arts Festival in London. In recent years he has expanded his practice to include 3D work and video.

Htein Lin practises vipassana meditation for daily, and a major inspiration for his work is Buddhism whose themes, stories and philosophy he incorporates in his art. He moved back to Burma in July 2013, having lived in London from 2006-2013. Since returning, he has taken advantage of the new reform atmosphere to embark on a major documentary and participatory performance piece, *A Show of Hands*, capturing in plaster the arms of hundreds of Burma's many thousands of former political prisoners.

Htein Lin is represented in Yangon by River Gallery. A selection of his works are included in the Artists Pension Trust collection. Two of Htein Lin's paintings were purchased for the US Embassy in Yangon, opened in 2007. Others are in private collections in Belgium, Netherlands, Hong Kong, India (including a specially commissioned piece, *Night Shift*, for Lekha Poddar, 2014), Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, US and UK.

ART PRACTICE

Ongoing, and 2016

- Nomination for entry into Sovereign Art Prize 2016
- Gangaw Village group show, Yangon, January 2016
- Additions to A Show of Hands (multimedia project, including public participation)
- Curator, 2nd My Yangon My Home Arts Festival, **Myanmar** 2016
- Speaker, **Living Arts in Post-Conflict Contexts: Practices, Partnerships & Possibilities**, Forum organized by Cambodian Living Arts, **Phnom Penh**, March 2016
- Asian Performing Arts Market, Setouchi Triennale 2016, Takamatsu/Seto inland Sea, **Japan**, July 2016
- Curator, Peace Festival, various sites in **Myanmar**, November 2016 (tbc)
- Two documentaries about Htein Lin currently being made by filmmakers in Switzerland and USA

2015

- Group Show at 20th anniversary of **River Gallery**, Yangon, **Myanmar**, December 2015
- Htein Lin's 1999 prison soapblock carving (in the permanent collection of the ICRC museum) is currently included with pieces by inter alia Yves Klein, Ai Wei Wei, Magritte, Rauschenberg, and Dan Flavin in the exhibition ['Experiments with Trust: Gandhi and images of nonviolence' at ICRC Museum](#), Geneva curated by Josef Helfenstein, now Director, Kunstmuseum Basel and at the time, the Director of the Menil Collection, Houston, where the exhibition was first shown in 2014).
- **The Storyteller**, Solo show (including premiere of 'A Show of Hands'), curated by Nathalie Johnston Goethe Villa, **Yangon** July-August
- Autobiography: 'Ma-Pa – the ABSDF Northern Branch Affair', Yangon (published in Burmese - see 'When I was a Lousy Millionaire' (2012))
- Collected writings on art criticism (in Burmese), Yangon
- Co-curator, "**My Yangon My Home** " **Yangon Art and Heritage Festival**, a festival of community art projects to explore heritage, culture and art in **Yangon**, March
- 'Happyland' (paintings and video performance) Tasneem Gallery, **Barcelona**, July-September
- Kamarado, Group show by the Clark House Initiative, September-November 2015 [Stedelijk Museum Project Space, Amsterdam](#)

2014

- **Dhaka** Art Summit, February 'A Show of Hands' (performance courtesy of Samdani Foundation), paintings shown by Tasneem Gallery
- Beyond the Itch, solo show, River Gallery 2, **Yangon** March
- Rosary Bowl/Mastery of the Mind (installation) and paintings included in group show of Myanmar contemporary art at 'Pagodas, Longyis and Nats' at the Staatliche Museum Funf Kontinente (**Munich**), **Germany** (September 2014- January 2016)
- Panellist and performance, Contemporary Dialogues festival organised by Fluxkit, **Yangon**, October
- Performance 'Give us back our land', opening of exhibition 'Blank Mind' by Soe Naing, A-hla Thit gallery, **Yangon**, October
- Private group exhibition at **Art Basel 2014 Miami**, (in association with Pall Mall Art Advisors and Quintessentially), December
- **Capturing Only Merit**, installation in group show, Peoples Park, **Yangon**, December

2013

- Art of Transition conference, **Yangon**, March
- Htein Lin and Ernesto Leal, El Fragmento Eliminado, Tasneem Gallery, **Barcelona**, (April- June)
- Nominated artist, Absolut Art Award
- Returned to Yangon, and commenced A Show of Hands project
- Advisory Committee, Artraker Fund, 2013, and judge for 1st award

2012

- Video Lounge, India Art fair, courtesy Tasneem Gallery
- Installation: The Triple Gem, **Singapore** Fringe Festival, February
- Asia House group show, **London**, July-August
- Workshops and performances in Rangoon and Mandalay, **Burma** August
- Shanghai Contemporary Art fair (courtesy Tasneem gallery), September
- Visiting artist, **Charleston** College, South Carolina, USA, October
- Prison paintings, video (Rises and Passes Away) and performance, Freedom Film festival, Copenhagen, October
- Clark House Mumbai at ISCP **New York**, USA, November
- I C U Jest, collateral exhibition (installation and performance) by the Clark House Initiative at the 1st Indian Biennale, Kochi **India**, December 2012-February 2013

2011

- Burmese Group Show, Karin Weber Gallery, **Hong Kong**, April
- **Brighton** Festival, UK May
- Prison paintings, **Chimay**, Belgium, May/June
- Solo Show, North Wall Arts Centre, **Oxford**, June
- Nominated artist, Signature Art Prize. Asia-Pacific Breweries Foundation/**Singapore** Art Museum
- TAMA Tupada Performance Art Festival, **Philippines**, November,
- Exhibition of prison paintings for Human Rights Day, **Prague**, December
- [‘When I was a Lousy Millionaire’](#) (translated extract from forthcoming autobiographical account of experiences of detention in the jungle)

2010

- Installation: The Scale of Justice, **Singapore** Fringe Festival, January
- Let Me out of Hell, Burmese Theatre Workshop, London and **Marseille**
- Curator, Burmese Arts Festival, Free Word Centre, **London**, October
- Thavibu Gallery (with artist Chaw Ei Thein), **Bangkok**, November-December
- ArtAsia **Miami**, Karin Weber Gallery, December
- Regular performer, ArtEvict, London

2009

- Beyond Burma II Group show, Menier Chocolate Factory, **London**, UK 9-14 Feb
- Outside In: Alternative Narratives in Contemporary Art, University Museum and Art Gallery, **Hong Kong** 9 June – 19 July 2009 (group show including prison paintings)
- Group show at Karin Weber gallery, **Hong Kong**, July 2009 (tbc)
- Missing Asia, Observing Europe, Tasneem Gallery, **Barcelona**, Spain, November 2009 - January 2010 (solo show)

2008

- 'Beyond Burma' Group show, Chocolate Factory, **London** 11-23 Feb
- 'Twenty Years On', Suwunnabhumi Gallery, **Chiang Mai** 13-18 March
- 'The Cell', Karin Weber Gallery, **Hong Kong**, 27 March-13 April
- 'Out of Burma', Quest Gallery, **Bath**, 13 May-5 July (solo show)
- 'Recycled', Coningsby Gallery, **London**, 17-23 August (solo show)

- 'Recovering Lives', School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, **Canberra**, Australia, Aug-Oct (group show)
- 'Crossings, Contemporary Asian Art' [Olson Gallery](#), Northern Illinois University, **DeKalb, IL**, USA 28 August – 3 October (group show)
- Museum of Resistance, Deportation, the War, Rights and Freedom, [Museo del Carcere Le Nuove](#), **Turin**, Italy 24 October – 12 November (solo show - exhibition of prison paintings)
- Featured artist, Himal magazine

2007

- Artist in Residence, www.rimbundahan.org nr **Kuala Lumpur**, Malaysia 2006/7.
- Paintings completed secretly while in prison on cotton cloth using a variety of media and techniques were exhibited in a solo show '**Burma: Inside Out**' at **Asia House, London July-Oct 2007** (see www.hteinlin.com for media coverage including Economist, Int. Herald Tribune/NY Times, Sunday Times, BBC, CNN, C4 News).
- **Venice Biennale 2007** collateral event: Migration Addicts group show (curated by DDM warehouse Shanghai)
- **Asian Attitudes, Poznan** National Museum, **Poland**, July 2007 (group show)

OTHER

- Advisory Committee, INDEX on Censorship
- Judge, 2015 Yangon Film School-Goethe Institut Documentary Competition
- Judge, Murals, Koestler Trust Prison Art prize (UK) 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014
- Meditation discipline guide for warders and prisoners, Insein Jail, December 2013
- Juror, Yangon Human Rights film festival, June 2014; group performance at opening
- Selection Panellist for the first Artventure/Article 19 'Freedom to Create' prize, 2008
- Invited to submit works to Artists' Pension Trust – Beijing collection
- Consultant, 'This Prison Where I Live' (about Burmese actor and political prisoner Zargana), Rex Entertainment Films, 2010
- Participated in NYU seminar: Imagining the Future: New Worlds, New Arts, New Models, co-curators Anna Deavere Smith and Gideon Lester, **Abu Dhabi**, April 2011
- Established **kaungkin.com** to showcase the best of Burmese writing and art (in Burmese) live and online, in Burma and in London
- Adviser to Writers and Scholars Education Trust on arts capacity strengthening in Burma, 2012/2013, including convenor of the 'Art in Transition' seminar in Yangon, March 2013
- Founding member of Burmese Theatre Workshop, a London-based drama co-operative performing original plays in English (2008/9)
- Coach to young Burmese actors and comedians. Judge for awards to graduates of documentary and short film courses in Burma
- Regular contributor on the arts to Sone-Nan-Tha magazine (2013-4)
- Contributes articles, radio dramas, poetry, short stories and illustrations for magazines in Burma, Burmese vernacular radio stations and international media
- Awareness raising work with Amnesty and other human rights groups
- Educational work with primary and secondary schools, exploring themes of capture and imprisonment, and using printing techniques with found objects.