OLD BUILDINGS IN YANGON
AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THEM

An Art of Documentary Filmmaking Workshop held by the Yangon Film School in 2012

Since its inception in 2005, the non-profit organisation Yangon Film School has brought together experienced filmmakers from around the world and young Burmese men and women with little or no prior media experience for residential trainings in all aspects of filmmaking — with a particular emphasis on documentary.

In 2012, the school gathered another multi-ethnic group of participants for the fifth edition of its beginners’ workshop, the Art of Documentary Filmmaking.

Guided largely by their peers, six women and six men from locations as diverse as Taunggyi, Mogok and Bogalay spent a month getting to grips with the practical, ethical and artistic aspects of the genre. Edited by YFS student editors, these novice filmmakers’ works explore some of Yangon’s old colonial buildings and their fascinating inhabitants.

This DVD contains both the participants’ Final Films and First Film Exercises and also short films About the Art of Documentary Filmmaking and Introduction to Editing Workshops that include glimpses of other YFS courses on Screenwriting, Sound Design, Film History and Film Analysis. Together, they provide a vivid record of the school’s trainings in 2012.

In 2012 the Yangon Film School Workshops were supported by:

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MY GRANDFATHER’S HOUSE

Duration: 13'59"

Director: Shunn Lei Swe Yee, Camera: David Kyaw Thet Aung, Sound Recordist: Lin Hnin Aye, Editor: Zaw Win Htwe
Project Mentor: Pe Maung Same, Editing Mentor: Melanie Sandford

Thakin Htein Win’s granddaughter reminisces about the old wooden house where she grew up—a house which was once a meeting place for some of the architects of Burma’s independence movement, in which her grandfather played a pivotal role.

Born of a Burmese publisher father and a Shan mother, young English graduate Shunn Lei Swe Yee has been active in a number of youth and development networks. A passionate feminist and co-founder of the ‘Rainfall Gender Study Group’, she claims that one of the reasons she joined Yangon Film School was to learn how to make films that will give a stronger voice to women in Myanmar. One challenge she faced during the making of My Grandfather’s House was finding a way to turn her female protagonist’s breathless interview into a resonant commentary more in keeping with the film’s evocative images.

INSEIN RHYTHM

Duration: 11'00"

Director: Soe Moe Aung, Camera: Han Lin Thwin, Sound Recordist: Nu Nu Hlaing, Editor: Kyaw Myo Lwin
Project Mentor: Lay Thida, Editing Mentor: George Cragg

A humorously edited portrait of the sights, sounds and rhythms of Yangon’s Insein railway station—but a stone’s throw away from one of Myanmar’s most infamous prisons.

Soe Moe Aung hails from Hmawbi, a town about 30 kilometres northwest of Myanmar’s former capital of Yangon. An audio technician and radio announcer, he has worked for a number of local stations and also writes drama for radio. He attended a film course in India’s New Delhi before being accepted to the Yangon Film School in 2012. Initially despondent after viewing the rushes for Insein Rhythm—‘there was no story and no protagonist!’—Soe Moe Aung and his editor Kyaw Myo Lwin found a way to create an equally absorbing narrative from the station’s own rattle and hum.

NO. 62, PANSODAN STREET

Duration: 12'21"

Director: Cho Phyne, Camera: Sandar Linn, Sound Recordist: Sai Nyi Nyi, Editor: Khin Myanmar
Mentors: Shin Daewe, Hnin Ei Hlaing, Melanie Sandford

This short documentary takes us behind the crumbling façade of one of Yangon’s grand old colonial edifices—known to many as the ‘Lokanat gallery building’ on account of the famous art gallery on the first floor—to meet some of the people who call this place home.

Cho Phyne is Shan-Chinese and grew up in Taunggyi in Shan State. After graduating in Public Policy from Yangon’s Dagon University and taking a course in Chinese at the University of Foreign Languages, she started up her own designer fashion business in 2003. Cho Phyne has long been interested in art and photography as well as environmental issues; she sees documentary as a way of alerting audiences to issues that affect their lives. In spite of a looming police presence, Cho Phyne’s crew returned several times to No. 62, Pansodan Street to capture on film this sterile yet sadly deteriorating building.

THE OLD PHOTOGRAPHER

Duration: 15'06"

Director: The Oo Maung, Camera: Soe Kyaw Tin Htun, Sound Recordist: Zin Mar Oo, Editor: Thet Su Hlaing
Project Mentor: Pe Maung Same, Editing Mentor: George Cragg

An affectionate portrait of ninety-year-old Indian photographer G. M. Ahuja, who still lives in the once popular photographic studio in downtown Yangon that his father opened almost a century ago.

Business management graduate Thet Oo Maung is of Kayin-Armenian descent. A dedicated humanitarian, self-taught painter, photographer and videographer, he has often used his skills to record the activities of organisations such as Gahahita, Activista and ActionAid—for whom he has worked or volunteered. His decision to join Yangon Film School was motivated by his desire to improve his filmmaking abilities and so support Myanmar’s transition. Besides continuing to make his own films, he now works as YFS School Manager. Much of the warmth exuded by The Old Photographer derives from director’s closeness to his elderly protagonist.

CRIES AND WHISPERS

Duration: 8'08"

Editor: Thet Su Hlaing, Editing Mentor: George Cragg. Filmed by: Thet Oo Maung, Soe Kyaw Tin Htun & Zin Mar Oo

A couple and their newborn baby in an old, high-ceilinged apartment. He tries to comfort their daughter while she taps at the keyboard. Is everything as it should be? In this experimental short, YFS student editor Thet Su Hlaing explores how to create fictional meanings from some atmospheric documentary footage abandoned by one of 2012’s novice crews.