2015 in Numbers

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Foreword from the Director

2015: Celebrating a Decade of Training Filmmakers in Myanmar

In its eleventh year, YFS continued to go from strength to strength with its team of dedicated and experienced international tutors and peer trainers (see p.4) conducting over 200 days of film training for 45 existing students and 12 new intakes from ten different ethnic groups.

Among the year’s main courses were the Advanced Editing Course for documentaries and the True Fictions training in documentary-style fiction. In 2015 YFS introduced a Working with Actors module to help students get the best out of their non-professional casts and was delighted that Train to Teach graduates took the roles of cinematography and sound tutor, teaching alongside international tutors.

As well as staples such as Sound Design and Postproduction, YFS built on its Participatory Video and Investigative Documentary courses, the former in preparation for a Travelling Cinema placement in a Rakhine community in Kyaukphyu affected by the Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline, the latter followed by an exciting Pitching Competition for six YFS Fellowship Grants to develop longer documentaries, focusing on topics such as the heroin trade in Kachin State and environmentally destructive slash and burn farming in Chin State (see p. 39).

The School continued its fruitful partnership with Germany’s Goethe-Institut which sponsored the 2015 Documentary Competition (see p. 18) and, alongside the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation, provided a jury member for the Feature Screenplay Pitching Competition where a YFS-trained screenwriter won a €5,000 bursary and continuing support for his feature film script (see p. 16).

YFS trainings in 2015 produced 11 documentaries, two fiction films and three participatory videos and helped develop a further eight longer documentaries and ten feature film scripts (see p. 40). These projects are located countrywide, from Kachin to the Delta, Yangon and Mon; many explore topics of change and social justice as Myanmar reforms but the majority of its citizens still subsist on less than 2 USD a day.

Thirty YFS films screened at 39 festivals in 22 countries in 2015 and ten films won prizes including A Political Life and My Leg, both made by members of YFS’ 2014 intake (see p. 42). And YFS itself won an award: the Grant for Young Artists, part of the Japan Art Association’s prestigious Praemium Imperiale. Two YFS students flew to Berlin for the prize-giving ceremony and were congratulated by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel (see p. 49). A fitting culmination to over a decade of work dedicated to educating the next generation of Myanmar filmmakers!

Lindsey Merrison
Yangon Film School Director, July 2016
The Yangon Film School has offices in both Berlin and at the School’s headquarter in Yankin Township in Yangon. In 2015, the YFS Management Team comprised:

**Who’s Who at YFS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berlin office</th>
<th>Yangon office</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lindsey Merrison</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wion Nging Khir</strong></td>
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<td>Director</td>
<td>Project Coordinator</td>
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<td><strong>Heike Schuchhardt</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ta Re</strong></td>
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<td>Project &amp; Fund Manager</td>
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<td><strong>Johanna Huth</strong></td>
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<td>Festival Coordinator</td>
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<td><strong>Arlette Heyn</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aung Tha Ya</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Tina Walinda</strong></td>
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The **YFS Steering Committee**

In 2015 YFS appointed a Steering Committee as the School’s governing body. The Steering Committee undertakes constant and consistent oversight and is the School’s main decision-making authority. It is elected by the student body represented by the Student Sub-Committee and Lindsey Merrison who, as Director of the Berlin-based Yangon Film School e.V., serves as Chairperson and has power of veto.

The YFS Yangon Steering Committee develops the INGO’s strategy and coordinates with the Director who ensures its implementation. The Committee also ensures that all provisions of law and the INGO internal policies are abided by and works to achieve their compliance.

In 2015 the YFS Yangon Steering Committee members were:

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<td>Chairperson &amp; Founding Director YFS</td>
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<td><strong>Daw Yu Lay War War</strong></td>
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<td>(Grace Swe Zin Htaik)</td>
<td>Production Coordinator</td>
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<td>Independent Film Industry Representative</td>
<td>Yangon Film Services</td>
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<td><strong>Cho Cho Hnin</strong></td>
<td><strong>Win Thu</strong></td>
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<td>(Shin Daewe)</td>
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<td>Student /Alumni Representative</td>
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**PEOPLE**
Yangon Film School draws upon a growing pool of international and Myanmar filmmakers to tutor its courses. The 2015 courses were tutored by (in alphabetical order):

- **Aung Min / Screenwriting**
  Myanma writer, filmmaker and medical doctor, wrote the script for *The Monk* (dir. The Maw Naing) which premiered at Karlovy Vary in 2014.

- **Marleen Bovenmars / Participatory Video**
  Dutch national based in the UK where she works as a trainer for Insight Share using participatory video (PV) for community action.

- **Ellen Bruno / Investigative Documentary**
  American documentary filmmaker with a background in relief work, recipient of Guggenheim and Rockefeller Fellowships and a Goldie.

- **Karryn de Cinque / Editing**
  Australian editor of documentaries and feature films, nominated for an Australian Screen Editors’ Award in 2013 and an AFI Award in 2015.

- **Ansgar Frerich / Postproduction Sound**
  German founder-director of the BasisBerlin postproduction studio, he won the 2011 Lola for Best Sound with *Pianomania*.

- **Ivan Horák / Postproduction Sound**
  Czech sound recordist and postproduction sound designer who won the 2014 Czech Lion Award for Best Sound on *The Way Out*.

- **Joanna Huff / Film Festivals**
  German Film Festival Coordinator for YFS and director of short documentaries including the award-winning *The Ferryman and His Wife*.

- **Kyaw Ko Ko / Sound**
  YFS-trained filmmaker, one of the first graduates of the Train to Teach programme who joined the School’s roster of tutors in 2015.

- **Rachel Mathews / Screenwriting & Fiction Film Directing**
  British director of award-winning short films who also writes feature films, radio and stage plays and is developing a TV series for Channel 4.

- **Tuula Mehtonen / Editing**
  Finnish editor of award-winning documentaries including *Father to Son* (2004) and *Daughters of Palna* (2007).

- **Benjamin Mirguet / Editing**
  French editor of feature films including *Battle in Heaven* (dir. Carlos Reygadas), nominated for a Palme d’Or at Cannes in 2005.

- **Michaela Rosen / Acting**
  Austrian actress and acting coach who has appeared in almost 70 feature films including the multi-award winning *The Harmonists* (1997).

- **Erwin Schmidt / Producing**
  German independent producer who has produced films with Oscar-nominated director Wim Wenders, including the 3D dance film *Pina* (2009).

- **Melanie Sandford / Editing**
  Australian editor of over 40 documentaries and dramas including the 8-part *Australians at War* (2001), nominated for an AFI Award.

- **Fiona Strain / Editing**
  Australian editor of documentaries, TV dramas and children's series, winner of an Australian Screen Editors’ Award.

- **Tin Win Naing / Cinematography**
Annual surveys of YFS alumni reveal the high impact of its trainings with just under 75 percent of alumni working in the media.

At the beginning of 2016, YFS surveyed the 12 students who attended the 2014 Art of Documentary Filmmaking course held in cooperation with NGOs Search for Common Ground and Shalom Foundation. These students are of particular interest because they are all from different ethnicities – Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Lisu and Mon – and live in relatively isolated areas in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon and Shan States.

Here is what these students have been up to in 2015:

1. Nang Seng Htay
   - Organised a play highlighting issues facing the villagers and possible solutions in a remote village in Shan State. Also worked as a logistics officer for the Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring Project in Shan State.

2. Saw Eh Doe Poe
   - Directed the short film Resilience for BBC Media Action, developed his YFS Fellowship documentary A Season of Wishes.

3. Zaw Lar
   - Continued training with YFS taking courses in sound, Participatory Video and True Fictions where he was boom op on The School Uniform.

4. Naw Eh Shee Paw
   - Combined shooting and directing documentaries with working in her tea-shop; attended Tokyo Film Festival with YFS documentary My Leg (dir. Khon Soe Moe Aung) which she shot on the Art of Documentary Filmmaking course in 2014.

5. Bawk Seng
   - Continued training with YFS whilst also fundraising for the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC).

6. Htet Myet Aung
   - Worked in a camera crew at MRTV 4, was camera assistant on The School Uniform, filmed the YFS 2015 evaluation films.

7. Moe Moe Htwe
   - Worked as a promoter for the Karenni Literature Development organisation whilst also continuing to train with YFS.

8. Lucia
   - Camerawoman on the Peace Forum NGO project and continued training with YFS.

9. Khon Soe Moe Aung
   - Attended Exground Film Festival in Wiesbaden, Germany where his film My Leg won a Special Mention; he also won a YFS Fellowship to research his documentary In the Dark; held a short film training in his native Kayah based on his knowledge gained at YFS; worked on a number of other films including a short documentary entitled Move and continued training with YFS.

10. Saw Tu Yin Ba La
    - Combined volunteering in a local village school in Kachin with researching a short documentary.

11. Min Yin Theik
    - Combined work for the Mon National Education Committee and the New Mon State Party with continuing to train at YFS, has since been awarded a YFS Graduation Film Production Grant to begin filming a project about rafters in Mon State.

12. Prya Reh Reylo
    - Attended the True Fictions course where he was assistant editor on The School Uniform. Also worked as a PA for the Speaker of the Kachin State Parliament.

Because the majority of YFS alumni working in the media are freelance, it is difficult to quantify precisely which area they are working in: on one job they may be cinematographer, the next sound recordist, the next editor or director. The following figures are taken from a survey undertaken in early 2016 of 130 YFS alumni asking them what they spent most of their time doing in 2015.
Trainings

Film Festival Seminar / 14 March 2015 at the YFS House, Yangon

Tutor: Johanna Huth (Germany)
Participants: 16 YFS students, local staff members and other Myanmar filmmakers of mixed ethnicities and religions (10 men and 6 women)

Training Objectives: to empower YFS students to take control of the distribution of their own films. Festivals are a valuable tool in promoting the work of individual filmmakers and of the School. They can help YFS filmmakers to develop their careers and bring YFS films to the attention of audiences at home and abroad.

Description: in this 1-day intensive seminar, the YFS Film Festival Coordinator shared her extensive knowledge of film festivals and instructed students about how to submit their films and secure the best chances of having them screened at national and international festivals.

Outcomes:
• 1-day intensive seminar
• 1 international trainer
• 16 filmmakers trained in how to distribute their work to film festivals around the world
• YFS a step nearer to transferring festival work currently undertaken in the Berlin office to local partners in Yangon
Participatory Video Training

/ 24 March - 3 April 2015 at the YFS House, Yangon

Outcomes:
• 11-day course
• 1 international trainer
• 8 students (5 men and 3 women from 5 different ethnicities and 2 religions) trained in PV facilitation
• Students facilitated the making of 2 participatory videos – at
  a Christian orphanage and at the Myanmar Independent Living
  Initiative
• Students developed an understanding of the three key
  PV applications: knowledge and skills sharing, community
  mobilisation, advocacy and reaching decision and policy

The Yangon Film School Travelling Cinema project is an outreach programme which aims to:
1. Use documentary as a medium for transporting crucial messages about democracy and diversity
2. Encourage behavioural change and reconciliation, including raising awareness about human rights and gender equality
3. Conduct Participatory Video training in rural areas and build bridges, also between YFS filmmakers and different ethnic groups
4. Recruit participants for YFS courses from diverse marginalised, ethnic and/or religious groups
5. Create short testimonials by rural dwellers, sharing stories from their lives which are often marked by conflict and privation
6. Share via social media, TV, mobile phone networks and screenings a ‘video map’ of multi-ethnic Myanmar
7. Raise awareness among Myanmar’s parliamentarians and urban elite about the lives of the rural poor and different ethnicities

Tutor: Marleen Bovenmars (The Netherlands) from Insight Share, Oxford, UK

Participants: five men and three women from various ethnic backgrounds and religions
(4 Myanmar Buddhist, 1 Karen Christian, 1 Shan Christian, 1 Chin Buddhist, 1 Rakhine Buddhist)

Training Objectives:
to train eight graduates from other YFS filmmaking courses in the concept, techniques and ethical issues of participatory video (PV). The course was designed to prepare students for the YFS Travelling Cinema project (see p.12).

Description: Participatory Video (PV) is a set of techniques which help a group or community to shape and create their own film. The two-week course gave YFS students first-hand experience of various methods for group-based learning and video making and trained them to use the Travelling Cinema equipment. The students then undertook a field-based exercise: four students worked with female teenage orphans at a Christian monastery; the other four worked with a mixed group of disabled and non-disabled employees at the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI). The trainees facilitated a two-day PV course with their groups and then edited the footage filmed by their groups and organised a PV screening with participants and stakeholders at MILI. During the final two days of the course, the trainees reflected upon their learning and the essentials of participatory project design and management to prepare for their upcoming Travelling Cinema trips.

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Travelling Cinema Trip to Rakhine /

13 Rakhine nationals from Liekkhamaw and three nearby villages ranging in age from 18 to 35

Training Objectives: the four student trainers travelled to Rakhine State to implement the second of seven two-week trips planned as part of the Yangon Film School’s Travelling Cinema project (see box p. 10).

Description: the student trainers made contact with the village Headman in Liekkhamaw who helped them to organise the training in the local monastery and recruit the participants. The latter were chiefly school-leavers in their early 20s and included representatives from a local CSO and a teacher. The YFS students trained the participants in how to use the filmmaking equipment and used a ‘community map’ drawing to discover issues and problems within the community. The participants chose two key issues which they wanted to address:

i. Scarcity of job opportunities: the village and its surroundings have been significantly affected by the building of a natural gas pipeline from Kyaukphyu to China. Farmland has been ‘grabbed’ and farmers have been paid little or no compensation, leaving them out of work and with little ability to support themselves and their families

ii. Scarcity of water (ironically, heavy rain during the filming period meant the film about this project had to be abandoned)

After receiving training in how to plan their PV, the participants filmed their material. The student trainers then taught them how to edit their films. During the evenings, the students screened YFS documentaries to the participants and the wider community and led discussions about the issues raised. When the PV about problems connected to the construction of the pipeline had been edited, the students organised a community screening and the participants led a discussion with the audience. This discussion fed into the Action Plan drawn up by the student trainers at the end of the training.

Outcomes:
- 14-day trip to Rakhine state
- Four YFS students (two women and two men) delivered participatory video (PV) training
- 13 Rakhine nationals trained in how to make a PV
- PV made about issues arising from the Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline
- PV screened to the wider community and an Action Plan drawn up
- PV sent to decision and policy makers in Myanmar
- YFS documentaries screened to Rakhine community and YFS students led discussions about the issues raised
- Links between YFS and this Rakhine community established and will be maintained with the aim of recruiting members of the community for further YFS trainings in the future

‘The participants were young and intelligent but most hadn’t matriculated so they had very few job opportunities. (…) I was surprised by the big gap in education between young people in Yangon and in the countryside.’

‘The audience loved seeing different cultures from around Myanmar [in the YFS films] because a lot of them had never been outside their own village.’

Khin Warso, YFS Student and member of the YFS Travelling Cinema crew in Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State
At the end of the course participants presented a four-minute verbal pitch of their project to a YFS Fellowship Panel of three judges. The panel awarded three top tier fellowships and three mid-level fellowships of financial support for the continued development of six documentary projects. The chosen projects (see p. 39 for details) represent a wide range of issues and will be filmed in regions throughout Myanmar.

Outcomes:
- 2-week course
- 1 international trainer
- 12 students (5 women and 7 men from 5 different ethnicities and 2 religions) trained in development of longer-form documentaries
- 8 investigative documentary projects developed
- 6 projects on a wide range of subject matters awarded financial Fellowship Grants to support their further development and production

Today’s filmmakers dare to speak out more, which I think is fantastic! They are eager to learn, to share their experiences, to shout about injustices and appreciate what they get.’

YFS alumna and Student Trainer
Wai Mar Nyunt

‘This course has given me new perspectives.’

YFS Student
Tutors: Rachel Mathews (UK), Dr Aung Min (Myanmar)

Participants: four women and four men from a mix of ethnicities

Training Objectives: this nine-month programme supported eight Myanmar screenwriters to write a feature length (80-120 min) screenplay.

Description: the training was delivered via three intensive workshops (in October and December 2014 and June 2015) and e-mentoring which took participants through each step of the writing process, resulting in a polished first draft script. The third and final workshop focused on analysing the eight first draft screenplays and gave each writer an action plan for further development work. It was followed by a two-day pitching training where each writer was supported to craft a ten-minute verbal pitch of their film idea. The writers pitched their idea to a panel of judges at the YFS/MMPO/Goethe-Institut Pitching Competition. One writer won the YFS Feature Screenplay Development Award.

Outcomes:
- 9-month training programme
- 1 international tutor and 1 Myanmar co-tutor
- 8 students (4 women and 4 men) trained in how to conceive, write and develop a feature film screenplay of 90-120 minutes in length
- 8 feature screenplays on a wide range of subject matters relevant to contemporary Myanmar society developed (see p. 40 for synopses)
- Writers were trained in how to ‘pitch’ (verbally present) their film ideas and participated in the YFS/MMPO/Goethe-Institut Feature Screenplay Pitching Competition held at the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation (MMPO) in July 2015
- A 5-member panel of judges (3 international, 2 Myanmar) chose one writer to win the YFS Feature Screenplay Development Award with a €5,000 writing bursary and 12 months of further YFS script support
- YFS consolidated its relationship with international partner the Goethe-Institut and local partner the MMPO and forged a new relationship with Busan Film Festival in South Korea via international jury member Hong Hyosook (Busan Festival Programmer)
Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing / 6 July - 22 August 2015 at the YFS House, Yangon

Tutors: Melanie Sandford (Australia, Lead Tutor), Fiona Strain (Australia), Tuula Mehtonen (Finland), Karyn de Cinque (Australia)

Participants: twelve women and nine men from a mix of ethnicities and religions (15 Myanmar Buddhist, 3 Rakhine Buddhist, 1 Myanmar Muslim, 1 Shan Christian, 1 Mon Christian)

Training Objectives: this seven-week course was chiefly aimed at YFS students in their second year of study, giving them the opportunity to work on longer short-form documentary films (30 minutes maximum) and explore more diverse forms and structures of storytelling.

Description: the 11 directors shot their films prior to the course, choosing their own subject matter and filming across Myanmar. The directors then paired up with an editor to edit the films (with two directors editing their own pieces). The international tutors gave the students a free rein during the edits. Work proceeded from paper edits to first assemblies, through rough cuts and fine cuts to picture lock. Regular group screenings gave students feedback at each stage of the process. The completed films were entered into the Goethe-Institut Documentary Competition and the five winning films screened at the YFS Annual Screening in December 2015 (see p. 50).

Outcomes:
• 7-week training course
• 4 international tutors
• 21 students (12 women and 9 men from 5 different ethnicities and 3 different religions) trained in advanced documentary editing
• Students chose their own subject matters and were given a large degree of autonomy during the filming and editing processes
• 11 short documentaries (8-25 minutes in length) completed on a wide range of subject matters, the majority focusing on underrepresented and/or discriminated groups or individuals in Myanmar (see p. 34 for film synopses)
• 4 films won prizes and 1 film a Special Mention in the Goethe-Institut Documentary Competition chosen by a panel of international judges
• YFS worked closely with its international partner the Goethe-Institut and raised its local and international profile via the competition

‘Editing seems like individual work but it’s actually teamwork. The director and mentor are my fellow team-mates.’ YFS Student
Tutor: Fiona Strain (Australia)
Participants: ten women and five men from a mix of ethnicities and religions (11 Myanmar Buddhist, 1 Rakhine Buddhist, 1 Myanmar Muslim, 1 Shan Christian, 1 Mon Christian) who had just completed the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course

Training Objectives: this six-week course trained second year YFS students in all aspects of postproduction as they worked to complete the 11 documentaries edited during the Advanced Second Year Documentary Course to an international standard ready to go to the panel of judges for the Goethe-Institut Documentary Editing Competition.

Description: the coaching took place in the form of a mentorship, with the students working independently and the coach intervening where required. The participants learned and practised skills including: colour grading; preparing and checking titles, intertitles and end credits; preparing and checking subtitles; liaising with YFS sound students and composers to identify and place suitable music in the films; liaising with YFS sound students on the sound design; developing systems for efficient media management and for storing the films on the main YFS server; creating a variety of formats – including project files, DVDs, uploads and loops – for a range of distribution platforms.

Outcomes:
- 6-week training course
- 1 international tutor
- 15 students (10 women and 5 men from five different ethnicities and three different religions) trained and worked together
- Students coached in how to complete the entire postproduction workflow – including colour grading, titles, subtitles, music and preparing for the sound design/mix – meaning work previously carried out in Berlin can now increasingly be undertaken in Yangon
- Participants given a greater degree of self-confidence in their ability to complete locally produced films to an international standard

Postproduction of 11 films from the 2015 Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course completed
The Art of Sound Design Course

5 - 31 October 2015 at the YFS House, Yangon

Tutors: Ivan Horák (Czech Republic), Ansgar Frechen (Germany);
Local Sound Design Trainers: Kyaw Ko Ko, Slyne Mon

Participants: ten men from various ethnic backgrounds and religions
(6 Myanmar Buddhist, 1 Chin Buddhist, 1 Chin Christian, 2 Chin agnostic/atheist) from the radio and music industries and/or YFS students interested in and with an aptitude for sound.

Note: The School’s commitment to equal training opportunities for both genders is hampered by the fact that very few women currently work as sound technicians in Myanmar. YFS has made it a priority to recruit more women for its future sound training courses.

Outcomes:
- 4-week training course
- 2 international tutors supported by two local trainers
- 10 students introduced to or extended their knowledge in the technical and artistic aspects of postproduction sound design
- Participants learned how to communicate with sound non-professionals in the shared goal of achieving the best sound design for a film, working as team players in groups of mixed ethnicity, religion and gender (the majority of the 11 documentary directors were women)
- Sound design on 11 short documentaries was completed, overseen by the tutors to ensure it met with international industry standards
- A professional postproduction studio was set up in the YFS House, meaning work undertaken in Europe can now be transferred to Yangon. The studio can also be hired by outside projects, thus helping to raise the overall standard of postproduction in the local media industry

Training Objectives:
- to introduce beginners and broaden the knowledge and skills’ base of more experienced students in the artistic and practical aspects of sound postproduction;
- to mix the sound on the 11 short films edited during the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course;
- to set up a professional postproduction studio at the School.

Description: The tutors combined a series of lectures and practical exercises with overseeing the mixing of the 11 documentaries and project managing the setting up of the studio. The sound students collaborated closely with the directors during the sound mixing of the films.

‘In film, the sound is key: it supports the audience’s reaction to the images and makes everything feel more real.’

Kyaw Ko Ko, Sound Tutor at YFS

“In film, the sound is key: it supports the audience’s reaction to the images and makes everything feel more real.”

Kyaw Ko Ko, Sound Tutor at YFS

Outcomes:
- 4-week training course
- 2 international tutors supported by two local trainers
- 10 students introduced to or extended their knowledge in the technical and artistic aspects of postproduction sound design
- Participants learned how to communicate with sound non-professionals in the shared goal of achieving the best sound design for a film, working as team players in groups of mixed ethnicity, religion and gender (the majority of the 11 documentary directors were women)
- Sound design on 11 short documentaries was completed, overseen by the tutors to ensure it met with international industry standards
- A professional postproduction studio was set up in the YFS House, meaning work undertaken in Europe can now be transferred to Yangon. The studio can also be hired by outside projects, thus helping to raise the overall standard of postproduction in the local media industry
Tutors: Rachel Mathews (Lead Tutor; screenwriting and directing, UK); Erwin Schmidt (production, Germany); Michaela Rosen (acting, Austria); Tin Wai Naing (cinematography, Myanmar); Kyan Ko Ko (sound, Myanmar); Benjamin Mirguet (editing, France)

Participants: seven women and thirteen men from various ethnic backgrounds and religions (12 Myanmar Buddhist, 2 Kayah Christian, 7 Shan Christian, 1 Myanmar Chinese, 1 Mon Buddhist, 1 Rakhine Buddhist, 1 Lisu Christian, 1 Myanmar Islam) plus two YFS student editors (both Myanmar Buddhist).

Training Objectives: most participants were in their second year of study and this was their first experience of fiction filmmaking. Fiction films have bigger crews than documentaries (in this case ten per film) and the students had to develop close and effective working relationships to create two short fiction films. The producers were given cash budgets and had to budget and schedule their productions independently.

Description: the two-month course was divided into four parts

1. The Creative Producer (2 weeks) covered all aspects of fiction film production, from script analysis and breakdown to budgeting, financing, scheduling and organising preproduction, production and postproduction as well as marketing, distribution and rights clearances. The tutor emphasised the key role played by the producer both as a practical and creative figure and mentored the producers as they worked with their crews to complete preliminary budgets and shooting schedules for their films. The training was supported by a series of guest lectures.

2. True Fictions Filmmaking – including ‘Working with Actors’ and Film Exercises (2 weeks) – an intensive training in ‘true fictions’ type filmmaking i.e. fiction films with a documentary sensibility, filmed with non-actors in real locations. A dedicated ‘Working with Actors’ workshop trained the students how to get the best out of their non-professional actors. The students completed preproduction of their films, including location scouting, auditioning and casting. The producers were mentored by the production tutor to refine their budgets and shooting schedules. The directing, cinematographer and sound tutors set the students filmmaking exercises to practice key aspects of fiction filmmaking including shooting dialogue, using a moving camera, lighting for a night-time shoot and telling the story through images.

3. True Fictions Shoots (2 weeks) – the two ten-person crews travelled to their locations in Hmawbi and Hlegu Townships and spent a fortnight shooting their short fiction films. The student editors started editing in parallel to the shoots. The tutors and editors watched the daily rushes and gave feedback to the crews by phone and in person, identifying required pick-up shots.

4. True Fictions Editing (4 weeks in total) – the two YFS student editors and three assistant editors were mentored by the international editing tutor to complete the edits of the two films. The films then went into postproduction (music, sound design, colour grading, main titles, subtitles and credits) and will be ready for distribution to international film festivals and Myanmar television in 2016.

Outcomes:

• 8-week training course
• 4 international and 2 local tutors plus a series of guest lecturers including Hollywood production designer Anna Livia Cullinan and established Myanmar director and producer Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi
• 20 students trained in all aspects of fiction filmmaking, including production, directing, camera, sound, production design, working with (non)actors and editing
• Participants worked closely as team players in groups of mixed gender, ethnicity and religion in often challenging conditions, learning how to organise themselves professionally and solve problems creatively
• Female students took leading positions in the film crews as producer, director, production manager and assistant director
• Participants received a portfolio of documents – including contracts, release forms, schedules and budgets – plus transferable skills to use in subsequent film projects, both at YFS and independently
• Two student editors were mentored by an international tutor and three assistant editors received ‘on the job’ training as the two films were edited
• The YFS slate of independent films about underrepresented groups in Myanmar was augmented by two short fiction films (see p. 40 for synopses)
Kyaw Ko Ko – YFS Sound Tutor

Kyaw Ko Ko (38) grew up by the river near Bogale Township in the Delta. His father was manager of the local rice mill, his mother a housewife. He joined YFS in 2009 and discovered a love of sound. In 2013 he graduated from the Train to Teach programme and is now a YFS sound tutor.

What made you join YFS? I wanted to be a filmmaker since I was young but never got the chance. Then I was studying at the University of Arts and Culture in Yangon and I met YFS sound tutor Ivan Horák who encouraged me to apply to YFS. I was really curious about sound. I started to explore it and fell in love! In film, the sound is key: it supports the audience’s reaction to the images and makes everything feel more real.

In 2015 you went on a 3-month placement to BasisBerlin sound studio in Germany. What do you do there? I learnt more about sound design such as making foleys and mixing sound in a mixing stage with very up-to-date equipment. Ansgar Frerich (founder-director of BasisBerlin and a YFS sound tutor) taught me a lot of things. It was great being in Berlin. The weather is good in summer and the public transport is excellent.

In 2015 you also became a YFS sound tutor. Tell us a little about that. I felt so proud to become a tutor. As a student in Myanmar, it’s not easy to find out about sound. It hasn’t been taught here for decades, so I’m really pleased to be teaching sound at YFS.

What are the challenges of being a tutor? It can be hard to put everything into words, especially when time is limited. Some students don’t fully understand what I’m saying. I’m always looking for the most effective ways to teach and adjust my methods. But I really enjoy teaching.

Do you think sound is improving in Myanmar films? Nowadays, some directors and producers are paying more attention to sound and they want good sound in their movies and also good mixing. I think sound is gradually taking on more importance in Myanmar.

What can YFS do to get more women involved in sound? If we want more female sound people, we have to introduce sound and encourage everyone to become a sound tutor. I was sound tutor on the recent Beginner’s course and I showed everyone how sound can work in their imagination. Students of both genders became really interested and now want to learn more. I think this will help.

What are your future plans? I want to stay in Myanmar but I also want to gain more experience by working abroad and with experienced sound designers so I can bring more powerful sound design back to Myanmar and share my knowledge. I intend to write a book about sound design in Myanmar. And I dream of having a sound studio and owning a sound company of my own.

Wai Mar Nyunt – YFS Student Trainer

Wai Mar grew up in Yangon where her parents were civil servants. She joined YFS in 2008 and has directed films including My Positive Life for the NGO FXB about a man living with HIV. She combines her work as a YFS student trainer with her own filmmaking.

Why did you join YFS? I was interested in moving images and making video art and installations. An artist friend introduced me to YFS.

You have also studied at FAMU in Prague. What was that like? I took an MA in Cinema and Digital Media at FAMU which lasted two and a half years. It was a very serious and demanding course but they were great at teaching story and visual concepts.

Your FAMU graduation film was a longer documentary? Yes, it’s called Unfinished Painting. It is about the run-up to the 2010 Myanmar general election and follows a female journalist. In 2010 many filmmakers were under surveillance by the secret police and there was no one to record the event. I decided to come back from Prague to film – as a woman and a new face I thought the secret police would pay less attention to me! My fellow filmmakers Pe Maung Same and Tay Zar Win Tun (also YFS alumni) and I filmed from 2010 to 2012.

How have things changed in Myanmar since you made the film? People in the media feel less threatened now. We no longer fear going out with cameras into the streets. And there is more scope now to argue about politics, business, travel and migration.

You recently taught filmmaking in Malawi, how did that come about? Today’s filmmakers dare to speak out more, which I think is fantastic! They are eager to learn, to share their experiences, to shout about injustices and appreciate what they get.

Are there differences between the filmmakers joining YFS now and when you joined? Yes, I teach directing on the Beginners’ course. I really enjoy it. It’s amazing to meet so many different people and hear their ideas. People hold stories deep inside themselves. My job is to encourage them to share them. And I share my filmmaking experiences – both good and bad! In Myanmar, most people don’t know what documentary is. I love giving newcomers a taste of documentary films, helping to clear up their misconceptions, discuss ethics and, most importantly, what they really want to do in the future.

You recently taught filmmaking in Malawi, how did that come about? Sai Khong Kham (also a YFS student) and I joined up with (YFS sound tutor) Ivan Horák and Nyasa Films International from Prague to tutor a three-week documentary workshop in Malawi. It was the country’s first documentary training and it was a really great experience. I’d love to travel and take part in more projects like this in the future.
Participants: six male and one female YFS student trainers of mixed ethnicities

(5 Myanmar Buddhist, 1 Kayin Buddhist, 1 Chin atheist).

Training Description: in 2009 YFS introduced its Train to Teach programme in which more experienced students are mentored by international tutors to learn how to teach the next generation of Myanmar filmmakers. In a three-year programme, student trainers begin by shadowing international tutors to become familiar with YFS course content and teaching methods before taking on an increasing amount of responsibility to deliver the School’s training. The student trainers are observed and assessed by international tutors and receive feedback. At the end of the programme, successful student trainers are qualified to apply for positions to teach YFS courses within their area of expertise.

During the School’s 2015 curriculum, the following students continued to train or completed the Train to Teach programme:

1. Dr Aung Min – co-tutor in the third and final workshop of the Feature Screenplay Development Programme.
2. Zaw Win Htwe – editing trainer (technical) during the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course.
3. Slyne Mon – following a 3-month training placement at BasisBerlin sound studio in Germany, Slyne became co-tutor alongside the international tutors on the Art of Sound Design course.
4. Kyaw Ko Ko – following a 3-month training placement at BasisBerlin sound studio in Germany, Kyaw Ko Ko became co-tutor alongside the international tutors on the Art of Sound Design course. He was also sole sound tutor on the True Fictions training course.
5. Tin Win Naing – having graduated from the Train to Teach programme, he was sole cinematography tutor for the True Fictions training course.
6. Khin Myanmar – as student editor for the True Fictions Editing Course, she combined her editing work with training an assistant editor.
7. Sai Nyi Nyi – as student editor for the True Fictions Editing Course, he combined his editing work with training two assistant editors.

Outcomes:
• Ongoing annual programme
• Seven YFS-trained students (six men and one woman) learned key skills in training their fellow students in their area of expertise (screenwriting, camera, sound and editing)
• Student trainers developed confidence in their skills and knowledge, and their ability to pass on these qualities to their peers
• YFS students benefited from being trained by Myanmar nationals, facilitating a clear understanding of the concepts and techniques being taught without the need of a translator
• YFS students benefited from seeing student trainers as role models, demonstrating that filmmaking can be taught to a high standard by Myanmar nationals (and not just trainers from abroad)
• Two student trainers graduated from the programme and received contracts as YFS tutors on an equal footing with international trainers – an important step in the School’s long-term goal to hand over significant training responsibilities to local trainers
## Summary of 2015 Training Statistics

### 2015 YFS Students by Ethnicity

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<td>Mon</td>
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% Non-Bamar: 40%

### 2015 YFS Students by Religion

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</table>

% Non-Buddhist: 26%

### 2015 YFS Students by Gender

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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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</table>

% Female: 33%
YFS Training Courses in 2016

All courses have a Teach to Train component, meaning graduates of at least five YFS courses can learn to pass on their skills to their peers. The trainings, including the residential courses, will take place at the School in Yankin Township, Yangon.

1 3 February – 26 March / The Art of Documentary Filmmaking for Beginners
Seven-week residential
This YFS flagship course for six male and six female participants aged 20-38 introduces documentary filmmaking via screenings, classroom teaching and practical exercises. Students make four five-minute and four ten-minute documentaries. Co-taught by international and Myanmar tutors and student trainers.

2 29 February – 12 March / Cinematography and Sound Training Module 'All in a Day’s Work'
Eleven-day residential
An intensive camera-and-sound training module within the Beginners' course.

3 25 April – 21 May / Introduction to Editing
Four-week residential
The 12 Beginners’ Course participants are introduced to digital editing suites and the role of the film editor and practice editing a range of short exercises.

4 23 May – 4 June / Participatory Video Training for Travelling Cinema Crews
Ten-day non-residential plus three-day debrief
In 2016 there will be five two-week Travelling Cinema placements in Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine States. Taught by an international participatory video specialist, this training prepares YFS students for their Travelling Cinema trips. The tutor will also debrief crews returning from their placements.

5 20 June – 2 July / Documentary Directing and Development
Two-week non-residential
Led by an experienced filmmaker, the course teaches students how to develop longer-format films on more complex topics requiring research. It is followed by a pitching competition where a jury awards YFS Fellowship Grants to help directors develop their projects further with YFS mentoring.

6 11 – 30 July / How Films Work: Film Analysis Course
Three-week non-residential
A course in which students learn how to deconstruct feature-length films according to their cinematic elements giving students a deeper understanding of how the art of editing relates to storytelling.

7 1 – 18 August / Other Ways of Seeing: A History of Film Form
Three-week non-residential
Designed for practicing filmmakers, the course proceeds from the practicalities of camera, composition, editing, sound, etc, and uses film clips and stills as the students learn to analyse different film forms.

8 22 August – 17 September / Postproduction
Four-week non-residential
Students learn professionalism in the final stages of the edit and how to finesse a film. Includes locking the cut, working with directors and producers, subtitling, colour grading and preparing for sound design plus an introduction to the School’s new Premiere Pro NLE software.

9 19 September – 15 October / Sound Design
Four-week non-residential
An international sound designer works with graduates of previous courses and introduces new students to the technical and artistic aspects of sound postproduction and design for documentary and fiction.

10 24 October – 4 November / The Art of Screenwriting
Two-week non-residential
An introduction to creating screenplays for short fictional stories inspired by real life. Writers are guided through the entire development and writing process to produce the first draft of a short screenplay.

11 Five trips in 2016 / Travelling Cinema Project
Two-week placements in Shan/Chin/Rakhine and Kachin
An outreach programme in regional and/or remote rural areas across Myanmar which includes film screenings, filming of video diaries and rural testimonies and a two-week participatory video facilitation to help participants make their own short films about issues facing their communities.

12 January – June 2016 / Myanmar Cinema Heritage Project
Six months’ research
The student researcher appointed by YFS and its partner Goethe-Institut in 2015 will continue to conduct research into private and state film archives to catalogue Myanmar’s audio-visual heritage, assess status of holdings and provide information on the historical context of individual titles.
In 2015 YFS students made 11 documentaries (of 8-25 minutes in length) as part of the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course. The films were entered into the Goethe-Institut Documentary Competition and a panel of international judges, including producer Grace Swe Zin Htaik, artist Htein Lin and director-cinematographer Aung Ko Latt (all from Myanmar) as well as Maren Niemeyer (Goethe-Institut Germany) and Cara Mertes (Just Films, Ford Foundation, New York, USA) awarded four films prizes and singled out one film for a Special Mention at the YFS Annual Screening in December 2015, where all five films were screened.

These documentaries will be released as single DVDs and on a compilation DVD with a short film About the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing Course. They will also be distributed to international festivals and broadcasters in Myanmar and abroad in 2016. The films are:

1. **Mother & Son**
   - Directed by Thwe Myo Nyunt, edited by Zaw Win Htwe
   - Winner of the 2015 Goethe-Institut Diamond Documentary Award (1st Prize)
   - The mother of two men who took part in the 1988 pro-democracy uprising remembers their struggle and sacrifice for the sake of a more open society.

2. **Slate**
   - Directed by Khin Warso, edited by Sai Nye Nyi
   - Joint Winner of the 2015 Goethe-Institut Ruby Documentary Award (2nd Prize)
   - The discovery of a discarded object from her past prompts the filmmaker to return to the slate mines of her native Mon State.

3. **Sugar & Spice**
   - Directed and edited by Mi Mi Lwin
   - Joint winner of the 2015 Goethe-Institut Ruby Documentary Award (2nd Prize)
   - A loving portrait of the filmmaker’s parents who eke out a living making ‘jaggery’ sweets from toddy palm syrup in the central dry zone.

4. **The Music Lover**
   - Directed by Arrow Luck, edited by Thet Su Hlaing
   - Winner of the 2015 Goethe-Institut Jade Documentary Award (3rd Prize)
   - Guitarist and singer Nyein Moe lives with his family in coastal Mon State. He is HIV-positive – as are two other members of his family.

5. **32 Souls**
   - Directed and edited by Sai Naw Kham
   - Special Mention from the Jury
   - A portrait of Nai Yin, an old woman from Mong Het in northern Shan State, who reflects on her life marked by conflict, privation and loss.
6. **Floating Life**  
Directed by Wynn Htut, edited by Soe Arkar Htun  
A purely observational film that describes the life of a family of vendors on a Yangon ferry boat.

7. **Life as We Know It**  
Directed by Mim, edited by May Htoo Cho  
The Maramagyi are a Buddhist ethnic group who came to Rakhine State from Bangladesh almost two centuries ago. In this portrait of a Maramagyi couple, the Rakhine filmmaker touches on some of the challenges facing this little-known people in her conflicted state.

8. **My Mandalay**  
Directed by Shunn Lei Swe Yee, edited by Zaw Nang Oo  
The filmmaker looks back fondly on her childhood memories of Myanmar’s second largest city and contemplates how this legendary place is changing.

9. **Lovely Bones**  
Directed by Nwaye Zar Che Soe, edited by Hnin Ei Hlaing  
Pauk Gyi earns a living ferrying people back and forth over the Ngawon River in Myanmar’s Delta — in spite of being severely disabled.

10. **The Washu Family**  
Directed by Lin Hnin Aye, edited by Khin Myanmar  
A gentle portrait describing the lives of a Lisu family in a remote village in Kachin State, where life has changed little in the last century.

11. **Made In Mandalay**  
Directed by Nay Linn Htun, edited by Zin Mar Oo  
As cheaper footwear from China floods the domestic market, the makers of traditional velvet-and-leather Mandalay slippers are struggling to survive.

'I wanted to tell the story of a student in the 1988 uprising. I got the idea because even now students are being arrested at the Letpadan demos.’  
*Thwe Myo Nyunt, director of Mother & Son*
In 2015 YFS students developed eight longer-form documentaries (of 60-120 minutes in length) on the Investigative Documentary Course. At the end of the course, the students pitched their projects to a panel of three judges. Six films were awarded Fellowships with financial support to help the students develop their projects further. The six YFS Fellowship Documentaries currently in development are:

1. The Killing Needles  
   (developed by Zaw Lat)  
   Focusing on a young heroin addict in Kachin where the drug trade flourishes unhindered by law enforcement or treatment programmes.

2. A Season of Wishes  
   (developed by Pann Mo Mo Chit and Saw Eh Doh Poe)  
   With 200,000 IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in Myanmar and 600,000 migrants arriving in Yangon in 2014, the film explores the reasons why so many people in the country are on the move and examines the lives of some of the recent migrants.

3. Unsettled Home  
   (developed by Thwe Myo Nyunt)  
   Ma Su and her family are just some of the thousands of Yangon residents forced to move many times due to the city’s over-inflated housing market.

4. Burnt Mountain  
   (developed by Anna Biak Tha Mawi)  
   Traditional slash and burn farming in Chin State, Myanmar’s poorest region, wreaks environmental destruction. The film looks at alternative means of livelihood as well as villagers’ resistance to change.

5. In the Dark  
   (developed by Khon Soe Moe Aung)  
   Follows villagers in Kayah who live near a giant power plant they themselves helped to construct, but who still exist without electricity.

6. Why We Left  
   (developed by Khin Warso)  
   An examination of the common practice of young people in Myanmar emigrating in search of a better life, and entering an unknown world of instability and danger.
Fiction Films Produced

In 2015 YFS students participating in the True Fictions filmmaking course produced two short fiction films. These will be released as both single DVDs and as a compilation DVD with a film About the True Fictions Course. They will be distributed to international festivals and broadcasters in Myanmar and abroad in 2016.

1. **The School Uniform**
   - Director: Shunn Lei Swe Yee
   - Screenwriter: Cham Myaye Kyaw
   - Producer: Soe Arkar Htun
   Sabai is delighted to be able to send her young daughter to school. But disaster strikes when she cannot afford to buy a school uniform. What will it cost this loving mother to get her little girl what she needs?

2. **Book Lover**
   - Director: Nay Lin Htun
   - Screenwriter: Thida Soe
   - Producer: Khin Wasso
   Labourer Naing Oo has a passion for books and reading. When his roof starts leaking, he struggles to raise the money to protect his prized collection of Myanmar encyclopaedias. Will he accept the help of bossy landlady Ma Cho?

‘I never imagined that making a film would be this hard!’

Fiction Films in Development

In 2015 YFS students in the Feature Film Development Programme developed eight feature-length screenplays to polished first draft stage. YFS is now encouraging these writers to work with a producer on their project and to apply to international script development programmes.

1. **The Man in the Room**
   - by Cham Myaye Kyaw
   Returning to Yangon after years spent working abroad, a man discovers the only house he can afford is already occupied: by a ghost.

2. **Nandar**
   - by Khin Su Kyi
   A mother goes on a quest in a lawless border town in Shan State to bring the man who raped and killed her daughter to justice.

3. **The Land**
   - by Yee Nan Thike
   A farmer and his young son travel to Yangon to seek restitution when their land is grabbed by the military.

4. **Junction**
   - by Cho Wutyi Lwin
   A naive young country girl is threatened with sexual exploitation when she becomes involved in Yangon’s seedy karaoke club scene.

5. **House**
   - by Thida Soe
   A young Yangon couple struggle to stay together as they desperately try to find a place to live in the city.

6. **Dream?**
   - by Htoo Paing Zaw Oo
   An intrepid young woman is caught up in cronysm and a corruption scandal as she seeks to become a journalist.

7. **She**
   - by Khin Nge Htwe
   A university lecturer is forced to become a mother when her dying sister bequeaths her an unusual legacy: her three young children.

8. **The News Fan**
   - by Thwe Myo Nyunt
   An intrepid young woman is caught up in cronysm and a corruption scandal as she seeks to become a journalist.

9. **Splash**
   - by Su Su Hlaing
   Teenage Wa Toke scavenges in Yangon’s rubbish dumps. When he becomes hooked on glue, he falls into the control of a street gang.

10. **Parcel**
    - by Anna Biak Tha Mawi
    Chin girl Sui Sui faces increasing pressure from her family to become a ‘parcel bride’ and go abroad to marry a man she has never met.

YFS has also helped two additional writers to develop feature film screenplays as part of the YFS Screenwriting Competition. These scripts are now in a good stage of development and are ready to seek production finance. They are:

1. **The News Fan**
   - by Thwe Myo Nyunt
   An intrepid young woman is caught up in cronysm and a corruption scandal as she seeks to become a journalist.

2. **Parcels**
   - by Anna Biak Tha Mawi
   Chin girl Sui Sui faces increasing pressure from her family to become a ‘parcel bride’ and go abroad to marry a man she has never met.

YFS student

‘It’s a challenge working with a big crew because there are more people and we have to compromise more. But everyone has their role to play.’

‘It’s hard to find the right cast … it’s particularly hard to find non-actors in Yangon since everyone’s busy working. They can’t just put aside their work to be in a film.’
Screening YFS films at national and international festivals helps raise the School’s profile and promote the work of its filmmakers. Festival screenings also help YFS to transmit information about democracy and diversity contained in its films and to raise international awareness about the lives and concerns of Myanmar citizens, including the urban and rural poor and marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

In 2015, 30 YFS films screened at 39 festivals in 22 countries, including in the UK, Finland, Greece, Taiwan, Germany, Italy, France, the USA, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Myanmar, Afghanistan, India and Iran. The School’s films won a total of 10 prizes and eight students had the opportunity to travel with their films to attend a festival in person. The School’s most successful festival films of 2015 were:

**Tyres**
(30-min documentary, director: Kyaw Myo Lwin, cinematographer: Aung Ko Ko, editor: Myo Min Khin)
Shot in luminous black-and-white, this documentary observes a community of tyre recyclers in Yangon’s South Okkalapa Township. Adding to previous festival successes, the film screened at eight festivals in 2015 and won four more prizes including Best Student Film at the Festival of South Asian Cinema in Kathmandu and Best Cinematography Award at the 12th Jeevika Asia Livelihood Documentary Festival in New Delhi.

**Missing**
(20-min fiction film, director: Khin Myanmar, screenwriter: Cho Wutyi Lwin, cinematographer: Tin Win Naing, producer: Hnin Ei Hlaing)
Based on true events in the screenwriter’s own family when her father became a political prisoner, Missing is one of the first fiction films in Myanmar to address the wrongs of the previous dictatorship and had a deep affect on audiences at the Wathann Film Festival in Yangon where it won the Best Short Film Award.

**My Leg**
(16-min documentary, director: Khon Soe Moe Aung)
Set in civil-war blighted Kayah State, the film observes former ethnic fighters and ex-soldiers from the Burmese military working together to fit landmine victims with prosthetic legs. This film won a Special Mention at the Exground Film Festival in Wiesbaden, Germany and filmmaker Khon Soe Moe Aung had the opportunity to travel to the festival to present his film and participate in post-screening Q&As.

**A Political Life**
(20-min documentary, director: Soe Arkar Htun)
The story of one of Aung San Suu Kyi’s bodyguards who gave up his political work for his long-suffering wife. At just 19 years old, Soe Arkar Htun was YFS’ youngest filmmaker when he made this, his debut film. It won 1st Prize in the International Student Creative Awards in Japan and Soe Arkar Htun travelled to Osaka to present his film and collect the award.

‘It’s great that Yangon Film School helps filmmakers to attend festivals. This paves the way for us to tell the world about conditions of practice for filmmakers in Myanmar.’

Khon Soe Moe Aung, YFS Student
Screenings of YFS Films at Festivals in 2015

TOTAL NUMBER OF YFS FILMS SCREENED: 30
TOTAL NUMBER OF FESTIVALS: 39
NO. OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES: 22
TOTAL NUMBER OF PRIZES: 10

Most screened films: Tyres and Behind the Screen

Myanmar Cinema Heritage Project

Researcher: Maung Okkar (Myanmar)

Project Description: The storage conditions of Myanmar’s national cinema and television archives is precarious. Some of the 18,527 Betacam and U-Matic tapes have been digitised and despatched to a new storage site at Thakton, but most have not. The current archive lacks temperature and humidity control and fire protection. A restored and protected archive will help Myanmar’s filmmakers to engage with and critically examine their cultural and political history on film and tape, enable them to use archive footage in their films and also help to promote conflict resolution and the concerns of disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups.

In the first year of this ongoing project, YFS appointed Maung Okkar to research private archives in Yangon and Mandalay, including that of his own filmmaking family. Permission was also applied for to gain entrance to State archives in Yangon and Thakton (still pending). Maung Okkar uncovered useful information about the condition and provenance of private holdings in Myanmar’s film community and made inroads into obtaining consensus from copyright holders regarding the need to store prints and non-film materials in climate-controlled conditions. He also began to catalogue and identify titles for possible restoration and conducted interviews with proponents of Myanmar’s ‘golden age’ of cinema.

Outcomes:
• Ongoing research project
• Researcher appointed to undertake research in private archives in Yangon and Mandalay
• Successful lobbying for consensus amongst copyright holders that prints and non-film materials require better storage conditions e.g. in a climate-controlled national film archive
• Cataloguing of film heritage begun with a view to identifying several films from Myanmar’s ‘golden age’ for restoration
• Historical film material being identified which can be used by current Myanmar filmmakers to help them engage audiences and encourage the critical examination of their country’s history and society
• YFS fostered cooperation between cultural actors and media education professionals, supporting film as a cultural industry
May Htoo Cho (34) is a Yangon native. Her father was an army engineer who left the military during the 1988 uprising and became a mechanic. Her mother is a nurse. May Htoo Cho joined YFS in 2007 after studying cinema and music at Yangon’s University of Arts and Culture.

You left YFS for a few years – why?
I studied with YFS from 2007-08 but then I got married and had two children. I couldn’t attend YFS whilst they were small but I always stayed in touch and came back in 2012 when our youngest was old enough because I want to be my own person.

Is it difficult combining being a mother and filmmaker?
Bringing up children is a big responsibility for a mother and making a good film is a big task for a filmmaker, so it’s not easy. I have to give all my strength, energy, thought and experience to both my films and my children. Before I can make a film, I have to be very organised and plan everything for my family. Luckily I’ve got people to take care of my children when I’m filming.

Why do you want to make films?
Filmmaking is the best way for me to engage with the world outside my own little circle. If I find something interesting that I feel passionately about, I want to make a film. Now I’m a mother, I’m interested in making films about children and women.

Your husband Diramore is also connected to the film industry?
My husband is a musician, composer and singer. He composes a mix of Western and Myanmar classical music and creates music for Myanmar feature films. We like to watch films together and discuss them.

You recently went to the Watersprite Student Film Festival in Cambridge – can you tell us about that?
I went with A Political Life (dir. Soe Arkar Htun), which I edited, because the film won the Filmmaker of the Future award. The festival’s patron is UK producer Hilary Bevan Jones and I met her, other filmmakers, funders, people from NGOs and Cambridge students. There were lots of panel discussions and sessions on pitching, storyboarding, screenings, animation, a script lab and Q&As with influential people from the film industry. I couldn’t catch everything they said because of the language but I felt like I was in a new world. I was one of only two people there from Asia and I felt really proud to be a filmmaker from Myanmar in the UK. It was the first time I’d ever been abroad and Cambridge is a beautiful city with an amazing university. I want to thank YFS and Lindsey Merrison for teaching me to become a filmmaker and giving me this opportunity.

How did the audience react to the film?
It was very touching and powerful for them. They wanted to find out more and asked me questions about Myanmar’s current political situation, about what the protagonist is doing now and also what I’m going to do next - which is to make another documentary, a short fiction film and also to work together with my husband and friends on MTV projects.

Film Commissions for NGOs and Other Clients
In 2015 YFS students and alumni were able to earn income working as freelance crew members and filmmakers for a number of projects created by the School’s production company, Yangon Film Services. The production company worked with high-profile national and international NGOs and other organisations including Care International, the Open Society Foundation, the EU delegation in Myanmar, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the Global Law Summit and the New York-based production company Sacred Productions. Production highlights include:

Love & Other Matters
Directed by Su Su Hlaing, edited by Zin Mar Oo
A 40-minute documentary made for the Dutch NGO Document Our History Now about the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Myanmar today and their bid to promote their rights.

H is for Home
Directed by Tin Win Naing, edited by Zaw Naing Oo
A 5-minute documentary for INGO Care International about gender-based violence in Myanmar.

The Life of Pio
Directed by Wai Mar Nyunt
Part of an ongoing project by the Singapore-based production company Persistent Productions about a young Myanmar engineer struggling with the new Singaporean quota regulations.

How I Live With Cancer
Directed by Sai Khong Khan
The Myanmar section of a documentary for Persistent Productions set in five different countries about closing the global survival gap in paediatric oncology.

Bank with Us: an educational film on sales and marketing for banks
Directed by Wai Mar Nyunt, edited by Sai Naw Kham
A 20-minute educational video commissioned by German NGO GIZ about how Myanmar banks can promote sales and marketing.

Student Case Study – May Htoo Cho
May Htoo Cho (34) is a Yangon native. Her father was an army engineer who left the military during the 1988 uprising and became a mechanic. Her mother is a nurse. May Htoo Cho joined YFS in 2007 after studying cinema and music at Yangon's University of Arts and Culture.

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Just as it was celebrating its 10th birthday, YFS was delighted to hear that it had been selected by the Japan Art Association as the winner of its Grant for Young Artists, part of the Association’s prestigious Praemium Imperiale which is often described as the ‘Nobel Prize for the arts’. YFS is the 19th winner of the Grant which was launched in 1997 and is awarded to a group or institution which encourages the involvement of young people in the arts.

YFS Director Lindsey Merrison and YFS students Lay Thida (who joined the School in its first year in 2005) and Soe Arkar Htun (who joined in 2014 and, at 19, was the School’s youngest member at the time) were presented with the Award by Hisashi Hieda, chairman of the Japan Art Association, at a special ceremony in Berlin in September 2015. They subsequently attended a reception hosted by Germany’s Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, in the Chancellery of the German parliament where they were also congratulated by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The Grant for Young Artists is worth 5 million yen (c. 41,000 USD). YFS used the award chiefly to pay for the postproduction of the 11 short documentaries completed during the Advanced Second Year Documentary Editing course and to help fund the 2015 True Fictions filmmaking course.
YFS held its first Open Day in July 2015, throwing open the doors of the School building it rents at 5 Mya Yadanar Road, Pyithayar Avenue, Yankin Township, to around 200 people – including members of the EU Delegation in Myanmar, partner organisation Goethe-Institut, as well as government and cultural actors from the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation, the Myanmar Motion Picture Development Department, local and international filmmakers, potential students and people from Yankin and the neighbourhood management committee interested in seeing what went on inside the house.

Various rooms were dedicated to different areas of filmmaking – including an editing room, screenwriting room, sound design room and cinematography room. Students and tutors were on hand to discuss their specialisms, demonstrate the School’s filmmaking equipment and provide information about its training courses. YFS films played on loops throughout the house. In addition, the upstairs teaching room hosted screenings of YFS films throughout the day with filmmakers in attendance to participate in Q&As following the screenings.

YFS flyers, merchandise and DVDs were on display and attracted much interest on the part of Myanmar visitors and foreign guests alike. Food and drink were also provided, adding to the relaxed and informative atmosphere of the day.

After having, by necessity, kept a low-profile during its early years, YFS was delighted to present its work to a wider public and to have the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of its students. Application forms for the 2016 training courses were available to visitors at the Open Day which has already proven to be a useful recruiting tool for the School’s upcoming courses. The day’s success has prompted YFS to make the Open Day a regular event.

The 2015 Annual Screening and the Goethe-Institut Documentary Awards

The YFS Annual Screening in 2015 was the perfect occasion for the School to celebrate both its 10th anniversary and its award of the Grant for Young Artists by the Japan Art Association as part of the Praemium Imperiale (see p. 49). Around 260 students, alumni and guests from the media, arts and development sectors and civil society in Myanmar attended the evening reception held at the Mya Yeik Nyo Hotel in central Yangon.

Introduced by Isabel Faria de Almeida, Head of Operations at the EU Delegation to Myanmar, the event began with two short films about the School after which several students and alumni took to the stage to describe what YFS has meant to them. The second half of the evening was devoted to the announcement and screening of the winning films of the 2015 Goethe-Institut Documentary Competition. The award-winning students were presented with their trophies and prize-money (both kindly sponsored by Goethe-Institut) by the three Myanmar jury members Grace Sae Zin Hlaik, Htein Lin and Aung Ko Latt, as well as Goethe-Institut Director Franz Xaver Augustin.
Looking back over the last decade, it is astonishing to consider what YFS has achieved. From such small and fragile beginnings – a single three-week workshop for 12 filmmakers in a hotel in Yangon – to an established film school with around 60 students enrolled on a three-year programme of study; a store of professional-grade cameras, lighting, sound and editing equipment available to students and alumni for the production of around 15 films annually; a postproduction studio providing professional colour grading, sound design and mixing; a permanent staff of ten in Yangon and Berlin plus a pool of around 20 international and local tutors and 20 student trainers, and a growing body of alumni, the majority of whom continue to work in the media, running their own production companies or the country's first film festival, and making a significant contribution to a stronger, more independent film industry in Myanmar.

There is, however, much that remains to be done. In 2015 the three most pressing issues facing YFS were:

1. Establishing the School as an INGO
   YFS set up the Yangon Film School Steering Committee (see p. 3) in November 2015 to become the organisation’s chief decision-making body. At its inaugural meeting, the Committee discussed the School’s vision and strategy, of which consolidating its legal status in Myanmar is an important part. As a first step, in November the School submitted an application for registration as an international non-governmental organisation to the relevant ministries. As of March 2016 the School has received temporary INGO registration.

2. Appointing a Country Director
   YFS has been run successfully for its first decade by School Director Lindsey Merrison in Berlin. However, as the organisation continues to develop and grow, it is essential to find someone to head the School’s operations in Myanmar and to assist with fundraising. Having been unable to identify a suitable Myanmar national, the School decided to seek an expatriate with the broad skillset – including proven fundraising, project management and reporting skills – required for this role. A Call for the new position of Country Director was published in December 2015. The role will be appointed in 2016.

3. Finding a permanent home for the School
   YFS currently delivers most of its training from a rented house in Yankin Township, Yangon. Increasing rents and the School’s continued expansion make finding a permanent home a matter of urgency. Political uncertainty both before and after the 2015 election increased the challenges of this search but the School has made it a priority for its discussions with the new government during 2016.

Taking YFS to the Next Level

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Student Case Study – Khin Warso

Khin Warso (25) grew up in rural Mon State where her parents ran a general store. In 2015 she was one of the School’s busiest students, joining a Travelling Cinema placement, directing a short documentary, producing a short fiction film and developing a longer documentary.

What did the villagers think about the YFS films you showed them?
Female viewers were very sympathetic towards the child protagonists in the films. The audience loved seeing different cultures from around Myanmar because a lot of them had never been outside their own village.

In 2015 you also made Slate, a short documentary which won 2nd prize in the Goethe-Institut Documentary Competition. Was it difficult to film in the slate mine?
I got quite stressed during the filming. I wanted to shoot new things but capturing the process of mining slate was tricky and it was also difficult to film the children using the slates to write on in the school. Filming in places without electricity was also a challenge.

What did you do with your prize money?
I shared it with my film crew and my Mum!

You also produced Book Lover, one of the True Fictions films.
It was my first time as producer and it was hard work. I now know the producer has to be very organised. But it was also fun and the production mentor, local trainers and my crew all helped and supported me. It certainly hasn’t put me off producing – I’d like to produce more films now.

And you won a YFS Documentary Fellowship. What is your documentary about?
The working title is Why We left and it is about migration. This is something which is affecting more and more people in Myanmar, both mentally and physically. I want policy-makers to look at this issue and to close the big gaps in opportunities for people living outside the cities.

What made you join YFS?
When I was little my dream was to work at a TV station. I heard about YFS from a friend and decided to join so I could learn how to make films of my own. I became a YFS student in 2014.

You had a very busy year in 2015. It began with a Travelling Cinema trip.
Yes, I travelled with three other YFS students to a village near Kyaukphyu Township in Rakhine State to help villagers make a participatory video. The participants were young and intelligent but most hadn’t matriculated so they had very few job opportunities. Government schools need more skilled teachers to encourage their pupils to continue learning and access higher education. I was surprised by the big gap in education between young people in Yangon and in the countryside.

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YFS Partners in 2015

The Yangon Film School
would like to thank all of its partners in 2015 for their support

[Logos of YFS Partners]