



3AM:



Time



Sensitive



Curated by Adriel Luis

Introduction by Adriel Luis, Guest Curator

It is a luxury to consider “arts-activism” a novel concept. To do so is to bask in the belief that the work of artists and activists are not interconnected; that society can progress without creativity, and that imagination can flourish without liberation. But the assumption that art and activism can be mutually-exclusive is, like other luxuries, an escape from reality. For 3AM, creative and social practices have always been inseparable. The collective is informed by the deep traditions of its home nation of Myanmar (formerly Burma), their visions for the future, and what they perceive as complex dynamics with authoritarianism and suppression. 3AM's works blur the lines between performance, visual, and media art, appearing in street protests in the capital city of Yangon, in exhibitions at museums and galleries worldwide, and in media pieces online. Members Ma Ei, Ko Latt, and Yadanar Win are each distinct artists across an array of talents and mediums – but together, they exemplify the power of art and activism in collaboration.

3AM emerged in 2016 as part of a new wave of art that swept Myanmar when the Southeast Asian nation established its first democratic government, following six decades as a military-run state in global isolation, and over a century of British colonization. Almost instantaneously, the people of Myanmar discovered ideals of self-determined governance and expression, along with free press, global capitalism, and the internet (along with their countless complexities). Yet, the need for protest persisted, amidst human rights violations against ethnic minorities such as the Karen and Rohingya peoples, police violence, and persistent power struggles within the highest offices. In February 2021, the Myanmar military overthrew the civilian government. The coup led to mass demonstrations, internet shutdowns, and economic collapses. Meanwhile, Myanmar was not spared from the global pandemic, making the urgencies and challenges of demanding equal rights all the more dire.



Still from *Civil War*, 2021

Throughout all of this, 3AM has been at work. Immediately responding to the coup, the collective participated in the surge of protest signs, street art, and public demonstrations, calling for worldwide attention to the society in turmoil. Eventually, many of Myanmar's artists, including 3AM's members, were forced to go off the grid or seek international asylum.

3AM: Time Sensitive invites us to examine the depths of global empathy and solidarity. Of the three pieces in this exhibition, two of them (*Civil War* and *With Avarice*) are new works completed in 2021 during the coup period. Both videos capture the artists entangled in movements that teeter between cooperation and conflict. Their themes respond to a universal dilemma: how scarcity and excess mark imbalances in power and resources. Meanwhile, *Still in the Present* (2016) was developed in the beginning of Myanmar's brief period of democracy, and offers further insight into society in constant transition.

The imagery, gestures, and sounds in *Time Sensitive* are sometimes disarming, unnerving, and even jarring. They are also vivid, intimate, and fiercely human. As 3AM's first show in the United States, this exhibition does not intend to differentiate two nations or evoke sympathy by proxy. As it conveys how art and activism are interwoven, it also hopes to dissolve the barriers that distance us from one another. Today, we know that a society does not need to be labeled as "developing" or "third-world" to palpably relate to concerns of being in crisis, under siege, or to have its social fabric torn. *Time Sensitive* is an urgent response to this moment that defines all of us.



Still from *Still in the Present*, 2016



Stills from *With Avarice*, 2021

About 3AM

3AM is a pioneering performance art trio based in Myanmar. Its members, Ma Ei, Ko Latt, and Yadanar Win, exhibited internationally as individual artists before becoming a collective in 2016 during a collaboration in Stockholm, Sweden. 3AM's performances blend improvisation and routine action, and are set in studios as well as public space before live audiences. Captured on photography and video, they are experimentations on body, space, time, and personal objects. The artists' works are strongly focused on current social and political issues, and directly confront the challenges and struggles of contemporary artists in Myanmar.

About Adriel Luis

Adriel Luis is a community organizer, artist, and curator who believes in collective imagination as a pathway toward liberation. His work is focused on bridging artistic integrity and social vigilance. He is a part of the iLL-Literacy arts collective, which creates music and media to strengthen Black and Asian American coalitions; is creative director of Bombshelltoe, which works with artists to highlight marginalized communities affected by nuclear issues; and collaborates with dozens of artists and organizations through his curate and design engine, Phenomenoun. Adriel is the Curator of Digital and Emerging Practice at the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, where he advocates for equitable practices in museums and institutions. Adriel has been a speaker at the Tate Modern, Yale University, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the China Academy of Fine Arts. He has a degree in human sciences from UC Davis in Community and Regional Development and a minor in Asian American Studies.

Exhibition Checklist

<i>Still in the Present</i> , 2016	<i>Civil War</i> , 2021	<i>With Avarice</i> , 2021
Multi-channel video installation	Single-channel video installation	Single-channel video installation
1:52 min.	12:48 min.	8:38 min.

Courtesy of the artists.

Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) is committed to promoting innovative contemporary art and thinking. Leading with curiosity and care, we are a catalyst, generator, and advocate for visual and interdisciplinary arts.

We gratefully acknowledge the leadership of our Board of Directors and the valued support of our sponsors, members, grantors, and patrons.

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Cover image: Stills from *With Avarice* (detail), 2021

All images courtesy of the artists.

