

Paw Thame, an Artist from Burma (Myanmar)

‘Some art critics write about artists the research manner, giving general information, spotlighting some artworks and providing some explanations. Art history books provide more information and are in a more academic-style of writing. The other kind of biography is like an unfinished painting. Most autobiographies are weak. The author tends to highlight the good points and hide his flaws. It is not possible for readers and scholars to know the truth. So one day, if I need to write about myself, I will tell all. Honesty is the best policy, I decided; in all I write, I am telling the truth, real events that took place in the past.’

Burma-born artist Paw Thame (1944-) was largely self-taught. A native of Upper Burma, he left for Rangoon in the early 1970s after graduating from the Mandalay University. In 1984, he moved to the United States. During the decade and a half that he was in Rangoon, Paw Thame played a notable role in the capital’s burgeoning art scene. In 1975, he founded Peacock Gallery, the first gallery to be entirely devoted to modern art and a space combining his love for horticulture and art, where some of Rangoon’s most avant-garde artists like Bagyi Aung Soe (1924-1990), Win Pe (1936-), Kin Maung Yin (1938-) and Sonny Nyein (1949-) gathered to spar and to show their works. It was the vanguard of Burma’s modern art movement. There, the artists were exempt from the ruling party’s stringent censorship rules on public exhibitions, as well as free from the mainstream figurative painters’ stifling conservatism. Their highly innovative private shows – paper cut-outs, batik, rare plants, etc. – challenged common perceptions of art at that time. It was a prolific period for all members of the Gallery. Little is however known about its founder Paw Thame’s own body of works. It appears that the gallery’s success, along with that of the school he founded, Language of Vision Art Institute, his emigration, as well as his notorious temper, have overshadowed his achievements as an artist.

Paw Thame the man and the artist is not unknown beyond his immediate circle of fellow artists. Burma’s literary and visual arts circles are closely connected communities and many writers, actors and musicians are aware of him. They have always been. But he was and remains highly selective about the people he frequents and only opens up to a handful of confidants. He is essentially a private man – far from a self-publicist – and does not seek fame in the first place. Although his intractable and perfervid temperament seemingly contributed to his being sidelined in his home country, his oblivion emerges to be voluntary for the most part.ⁱⁱ That he has been

living and working in the United States for the past twenty-six years, away from the much evolved art scene of Burma has deepened his estrangement and isolation. Not surprisingly, he does not figure amongst the Burmese artists “resurrected” by the increasing number of survey studies, monographs and articles both online and in print, published in Burma and abroad recently —ⁱⁱⁱ in spite of the regard he receives from pioneers of the modern movement in Burma. His story remains untold thus far, and he has played no part in the reconstitution of the story of twentieth-century Burmese art,^{iv} whose substantial development over the past five years has been in tandem with expanding investigations into senior figures like U Ba Kyi (1912-2000), Bagyi Aung Soe and Paw Oo Thet (1936-1993). Their stories loom large over the current perception of twentieth-century Myanmar art, to the extent of determining its shape.

But where archives have little chance of surviving vicissitudes both natural and man-made, as in Burma, oral accounts hold sway and any version of modern Burmese art is necessarily made up of hearsay and memoirs. As such, the story of a handful of “major” artists that is being canonized to become *the* history of twentieth-century Burmese art remains in fact plagued by assumptions that beg clarification. Perfunctory statements that call for elaboration are many at this ongoing construction site that is the consolidation of the history of Burmese art. At this juncture, it is clear that the account of an active but thus far sidelined participating artist like Paw Thame is precious material for crosschecking data. His way of speaking no-holds-barred exposes the tensions and aspirations within the small community of artists and overturns some long-standing assumptions of fellow artists that have been perpetuated for the sake of propriety. The primary sources for this piece of writing are the email exchanges between Paw Thame and Chris Dodge between October 2008 and March 2009. In first person, these unedited emails between an artist and a trusted friend and patron are highly revelational of the artist’s perspectives on himself, life and art. Though beyond the ambitions of this essay on Paw Thame’s oeuvre – only materials pertaining to his work are here retained, Paw Thame’s revelations that echo aspects of Giorgio Vasari’s biographies, *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times*, do merit a separate investigation. It is an exceptional witness in a milieu where few if any would call a spade a spade lest it offends. Apart from reinstating Paw Thame as an artist in his own right, his hitherto unknown account serves to further the story of modern Burmese art; it is one of the many but indispensable yarns weaving into the fabric of Burmese art history.

It is with reference to works spread over four decades since the 1970s, from Myitkyina to Rangoon and from Hawaii to Texas that we look at the art of Paw Thame. His art and person being inextricably intertwined, it is useful to first look into his life’s trajectory. Interpretations of events in his life, words, actions and works are inevitable, but these are merely the author’s

opinions; interpretations say as much – if not more – about the person making them. They are not absolute and represent no more than one of many possible perspectives on Paw Thame’s life and oeuvre. The extent to which we allow ourselves to play psychotherapist to Paw Thame, delving into his life and interpreting his experiences, is critical indeed; ethical considerations of dissecting an active artist need to be taken into account. (We remember how French writer Jean Genet was plunged into depression and unable to write for almost ten years following Jean-Paul Sartre’s thorough dissection of him in the psychoanalytical biography *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (1952).) With due respect to Paw Thame and in acknowledgement of the writer’s limited knowledge in the field of psychology, these interpretations that aim to suggest possible connections between the artist’s life experiences and his works should not be taken as conclusive. It is next for the reader to exercise his or her discernment and fellow observers and researchers to further the discourse on Paw Thame under the light of new findings and insights. Indeed, this first attempt at telling the story of Paw Thame based on the artist’s memoirs in the form of email exchanges with his friend and patron Chris Dodge is not *the* definitive story; it marks only the beginning.

Life That Was Art School

A precocious and solitary child, Paw Thame was allegedly born in 1944,^v in a small village in Upper Burma named Shwebo with a population of less than a thousand. His mother’s textile business barely met the needs of the family, and as the eldest child of six, he shouldered responsibilities beyond his age. To this day, Paw Thame recalls having to wake up at four in the morning to prepare breakfast for the entire family, amongst other duties. From young, he preferred the company of animals to that of other children. He would rather spend time with his horse or one of the animals taken in by his bighearted father than play with the neighbors’ children; he would rather draw alone than go to school, which suited his parents just well, given that they could well use an extra pair of hands at home. The lack of resources meant he had to draw using sticks on wet sand, or white chalk on the wooden panels of his home, and wait till all had gone to bed before he could paint under the kerosene lamp. But he was far from being daunted by the difficult circumstances and lack of support.

He knew very clearly what he wanted and how to obtain his heart’s desire. At the age of seven, without sufficient pocket money to purchase the toy guns he coveted, he used his talent in draughtsmanship to make banknotes himself. He was so successful at it that it was not until a week later, after spoiling himself silly with all the snacks and toys which his parents could not afford, that he was exposed. Indeed – according to what Paw Thame recalls, by first grade, he

understood the principles of chiaroscuro and could draw all kinds of fruits and cars from memory. Because he excelled in drawing and painting, the teacher allowed him to draw in class, and he went to win many prizes that did the school proud. By high school, he was working in watercolor even though he had never been properly initiated to color theory, and was soon painting the portraits of famous politicians – JFK, Lenin, Stalin, Karl Marx, etc. – all from memory without visual reference. He had neither teacher nor kindred spirit in the village, and until he left for Mandalay, the two watercolor landscape paintings at the barber’s were his principal source of inspiration, apart from his mother’s textile designs.

Although young Paw Thame proved that his talent was real and his ambition resolute, art was nonetheless a foreign concept to his parents, an activity that was preposterous as a career option. After the matriculation examination in 1964, keenly aware of his family’s fears that he would choose art if given the chance to pursue higher studies in Mandalay, he resorted to stratagem by signing up for a university course that offered prospects of a career in civil service, in compliance with his parents’ wishes, but spent all his time in the library taking notes on twentieth-century art instead of attending classes in the first year. He recalls with immense gratitude the Mandalay University library, whose art books donated by the Australian Colombo Plan propelled him into the world of art and changed his life. The first years were extremely difficult – with only corn and green mangoes to go with salt, he weighed below 95 pounds, but he considered himself fortunate all the same to have been blessed with kind classmates and supportive teachers who sometimes fed him. He became known for his involvement in modern art and his artworks were appreciated. Teachers bought his paintings and he was appointed to do most of the annual magazine illustrations, postcards for special occasions, t-shirt designs, etc. In exchange, Paw Thame, the general secretary of the Student Art Association, was dispensed of hostel fees and given the sports storage space for painting. To generate an income for himself and wean himself off his parents’ albeit meager support, he became what he calls a “professional gambler”, making enough from poker for food, art materials, leisure, investments that could generate further income – such as the amplifier set that he rented to the university for ceremonies, as well as alcohol that almost destroyed his health. By his final year, he had accumulated enough to open his first art gallery in Mandalay in 1970.

Always, Paw Thame pursued his strategy of acquiring the material resources necessary for his welfare and artistic creation from sources *other* than art – he was adamant since youth that money would destroy art – and he was immensely successful at it. Arriving in Rangoon in the early 1970s without a dime or a roof over his head, he owned up to six businesses as diverse as gallery, nursery, restaurant, taxi rental and automobile parts within six years. While the economic situation of Burma spiraled under the purportedly Socialist regime, Paw Thame drove a Mini

Cooper and continued to register considerable profits from his businesses each day – despite “taxes” imposed by government officers from varied departments. He was even able to sponsor the activities of fellow artists. But nothing was to be taken for granted. Paw Thame worked for each thing: he earned the tile he stood on, the shirt on his back, and even the prerogative to paint. His booming businesses in Rangoon caused no distraction from art – although it did nothing to resolve the bad blood between him and the Rangoon community of artists who were reportedly quite appalled by the artist’s drinking habits and temperament, as well as wary of a parvenu like Paw Thame. On the contrary, since his first solo exhibition at Lokanat Gallery (whose place in the history of Burmese art is singular) in 1973, he presented new works at the Gallery till the end of 1979, after Peacock Gallery moved to a new location on the outskirts of Rangoon. In 1975, he also founded the Language of Vision Art Institute where he initiated many youths to art during the closure of the university by the government. Art was and is after all the end of his financial conquests.

When his former wife decided that they would move to the United States in 1984, Paw Thame faced new challenges. Leaving behind the fruits of his labor in Burma, he started from scratch in a foreign land. From Hawaii to Texas, he was exhibition planner, t-shirt designer, photography laboratory manager, worker in a candy factory, wholesaler for souvenir items, carpenter and private investigator. He held several jobs at any one time, and thrice when laid off, was awarded sufficient compensation to live and paint for months. Much as Paw Thame continued to paint – except for a lull between 2000 and 2008 when he had to take care of his companion who was ill, records of his artistic achievements in the United States are admittedly scarce.^{vi} He completed an advanced course in professional photography with a thesis submission on the homeless in the United States, but did not initiate art projects on the scale of what he achieved in Rangoon. In his reflections on the two and a half decades on American soil, the trials and tribulations of life take center stage; fresh experiences in a new world flood his senses: his first personal computer in 1986, and the organization of exhibitions by artists from different parts of the world at the East West Center in Hawaii, for example. He was always kept busy, but it would appear that the real battlefield shifted from the world outside – the operation of businesses and the realization of projects, for example – to the heart and mind of Paw Thame: it became an interior battle of gradual forbearance, acceptance and even faith.

In a foreign land, Paw Thame had to overcome intense homesickness for the land he did not choose to leave, bewilderment ensuing an unanticipated divorce, and the void left by the death of his companion after years of battle with various illnesses. His wife left in 1992. Soon after, he was naturalized as American citizen. The 1990s were difficult times of adjustment. The situation improved little in the following decade which saw Paw Thame looking after the second woman

in his life until her death in 2008. Five months later, for the first time, he decided to stop working altogether. He reflected on his uncontrollable anger, reviewed his objectives, and has been leading a quiet life painting in the company of his plants, animals and cars – which he refers to as sons and daughters, and practicing insight meditation. The Buddhist teachings that his uncles inculcated in him as a child have become a beacon of reassurance in this new life marrying meditation, self-study and painting.^{vii} He wakes up at three in the morning to water his plants, watch the sky light up, listen to Vivaldi's Four Seasons and recordings of revered monks' talks on the Buddha's teachings. His dog has been his closest companion, and he finds joy and purpose in taking care of abandoned and wounded animals. He grows his own vegetables, cooks his own food and considers eating as a form of art about balance and control. This is a far cry from the early days when liquor flowed freely around the clock. Paw Thame claims that he has found happiness and needs nothing more.

In retrospect, the fear of poverty weighed on Paw Thame throughout his life: to own the cars his parents could not afford, to be assured of surplus funds through hard work and astute financial management – a subject he claims to have learnt from books. Every expenditure made since arriving in the United States is on record. So fierce was his desire to leave days of want behind, he started making and selling liquor at ninth grade after learning from a drunkard; so tough was his own childhood, he grew up prepared to handle all kinds of work: plumbing, carpentry, management, detective work, and much more. He would be making plans for a rainy day even when there was no real cause for worry: in 1977-78 when he moved Peacock Gallery from downtown 31st Street to the outskirts of Rangoon, it was so that he would not have to worry about rent thereafter and be able to focus on art. All this happens at a time when his businesses were thriving, he had several cars and was wealthy enough to sponsor other artists. In all likelihood, it was less money itself than a sense of security he sought, which he preserved for the creation of art. Indeed, the refrain since Paw Thame's childhood was the interplay between his *raison d'être* that was drawing and painting, and the trauma of poverty. But instead of using his forte – art – to better his lifestyle, he battled with need so that he could do art with minimal external pressures and anxieties; he made sure he earned enough to paint in peace. Poverty was the whetstone that honed his resourcefulness, versatility, astuteness, financial management skills and sense of discipline, which all came to serve his practice – while possibly aggravating his nervousness and horror of dependence^{viii}.

The more difficult the circumstances, the more resolute Paw Thame became. He was four times in jail due to brushes with the Socialist government in Burma,^{ix} but it did not stop him from reading and painting inside jail or staying committed to his beliefs. His bitterness at being ostracized and maligned by the Rangoon community of artists, whose friendship he made little

effort to win in the first place, did not prevent him from achieving recognition as an artist, esteem as a teacher and wealth as a businessman within an extremely short time; their cliquishness only made him more determined to be professional: he resolved to focus on an artist's work and not their character when assessing their oeuvre. When his wife of thirteen years left, he did not mope: he attacked life and work with greater zest, putting to positive ends the force of his agony. His mottoes: 'Anger is like atomic power. Do not use for killer-bomb project; use it for electricity'; 'You can do it, I can do it; you cannot do it, I will do it.'

One would however be mistaken to think that Paw Thame's life has been nothing but a spate of grueling tests. His passion in modern art and candor won the friendship and kindness of some of Myanmar's leading figures in the field of fine arts – artists and patrons alike. In the United States, he also won the friendship of bosses and colleagues. Even though the founder, curriculum writer and teacher of the 300-student Language of Vision Art Institute which enjoyed the privilege of purchasing art supplies from the subsidized government shop – a mark of recognition to do so alongside Burma's two state schools of fine arts in Rangoon and Mandalay – never had the chance to attend art school, he benefitted from the guidance and company of Mandalay's foremost painters: Win Pe, Aung Khin (1921-1996) and Kin Maung (Bank)^x (1911-1983) who is considered to be one of the first in Myanmar to experiment in the modern idiom.^{xi}

Paw Thame could not enroll at the Mandalay State School of Fine Arts because there were not enough students to open a night class. Ironically, he became the protégé and lifelong friend of Win Pe, principal of the same school. The reputation of Paw Thame as the mad student from Mandalay University bent on creating modern painting had reached Win Pe's ears and the latter offered to supply the young artist art materials, opening up his own atelier even where Paw Thame spent much of his time. Apart from Win Pe's sponsorship of materials, the young artist benefitted greatly from their discussions, recalling in particular the parallels between music and modern art which remains pertinent in his work today. With Aung Khin who was mostly reticent and did not respond to the aspiring artist's many questions, their exchanges – many of which were in the company of Kin Maung (Bank) at the teashop – were relatively limited though no less memorable for Paw Thame. Paw Thame was already quite familiar with the theories of Impressionism through reading and was hence impervious to the Impressionist style practiced by Aung Khin. Nevertheless, he recalls watching him paint with fondness. Paw Thame's interactions with Kin Maung (Bank) were more significant. The two read and painted together at the latter's house and Paw Thame remembers the more senior artist treating him as if he were his own son: Kin Maung (Bank) would follow the young artist's progress closely and intervene in the subtlest manner to guide him.^{xii} Paw Thame is equally full of praise and nostalgia when speaking of Kin

Maung Yin whom he refers to as a real painter: his mastery over how different parts of the painting come together and his earnestness in painting.

The Mandalay experience instilled in Paw Thame an enduring respect for the ancient capital's artists. It was a time of positive growth for both Paw Thame as an artist and person; he experienced camaraderie and kindness, as he never did before and rarely thereafter. The Rangoon adventure represents for Paw Thame the counterpoint of what he remembers of Mandalay. From Rangoon, with the exception of a handful of artists like Bagyi Aung Soe – who like Kin Maung (Bank) is arguably the father of modern art in Burma, Sonny Nyein and Ma Thanegi (1945-), whose integrity Paw Thame has absolute faith in, whom he welcomed into Peacock Gallery and still loves, the artist could muster few positive memories of the community. At any time, he also recalls with respect and gratitude two other persons: Gerald Kelly whose family has an important collection of the artist's early works from the 1970s, and U Thein Tun, head of the Tun Foundation and Myanmar's longtime supporter of the fine arts, who came to Paw Thame's succor time and again.^{xiii} Paw Thame writes at length about times with and on Kelly: his fatherliness, his love for the country's culture and people, his knowledge in the arts. Indeed, Paw Thame has a good memory. He remembers all who were kind to him, as well as those who were not.

Many Minds, Many Worlds

'You can see. My life is like my painting with many colors: some terrible, some good, some bad, all mixed up.'

Mandalay was Paw Thame's art school, part of the larger, continual class that began in Shwebo in Upper Burma and continues in Texas today. There, through printed matter from the university library, he reached out to novel twentieth-century avant-garde art forms and concepts; there in the country's former capital, he met like-minded friends and teachers for the first time. In retrospect, he was inspired by the works of only three Burmese artists – Kin Maung (Bank), Win Pe and later Bagyi Aung Soe from Rangoon, but was fascinated by countless artists from the West: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Nolde, Klee, Matisse, Miro, Dali, Chagall, Duchamp, Rothko, Gorky, de Kooning, Pollock, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Calder, Lichtenstein, and many more – not to mention his admiration for the old masters. It does not matter that Kin Maung (Bank)'s approach to painting and style is in stark contrast to Bagyi Aung Soe's, or that Pollock and Warhol had diametrically different takes on art. Paw Thame was equally intrigued. Varied art forms are at the root of Paw Thame's experimentations in modern art:

‘I would look a million times. Then I ask myself why they did this, why they decided on that, why they chose such color combinations, how they got this idea, mood, inspiration. I would research their techniques, and think over and over again.’

With each artist, he entered a new world. With each mode of representation, he saw the world in a new light. The different representational modes and colors allowed him to express distinct frames of mind; the gamut of Paw Thame’s experiences found voice in twentieth century’s stylistic potpourri. Indeed, Paw Thame’s openness for new experiences is paralleled by his receptivity of pictorial idioms, as well as his versatility in expression. Till today, he adopts a humble attitude towards new art forms and fellow artists both young and old.^{xiv} Assuming that the Gerard Kelly and Chris Dodge collections are representative of Paw Thame’s evolution, his oeuvre over three decades since the 1970s presents great stylistic and thematic eclecticism. If anything, it is uniformity and repetition that turn the artist off; he sees a serious artist as one who constantly pushes the boundaries by adapting novel modes of representation – even questioning them. Paw Thame has no respect for an artist who paints the same subject matter repeatedly in the same palette and composition. He equates such behavior as the breaking of the artist’s oath; it makes more sense ‘to sit under a tree and do nothing’. In fact, he defines “modernism” – a term that continues to invite debate and criticism – as the pursuit of new representational modes.

There are nonetheless recurrent manners and leitmotifs that prevail beneath the stylistic and thematic diversity. It is also possible to suggest – if not identify – the dominant influences on Paw Thame and the characteristics of his style that were being forged and strengthened in the process of experimentation. During the 1960s in Mandalay, when Paw Thame was on the threshold of modern art and reading voraciously, he was most impressed by Win Pe’s designs and compositions and the graphic quality of Kin Maung (Bank)’s works: solid colors, flat planes and clean lines. Into the 1970s in Rangoon, Paw Thame continued to display a marked penchant for the simplification of form into geometric shapes that harks back to Cézanne’s premise to ‘treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone’. Certain works from the middle of the 1970s continue to display close stylistic affinities with the works of Win Pe, Kin Maung (Bank) and Paw Oo Thet, another artist from Mandalay who had moved to Rangoon before Paw Thame and with whom there is no love lost.^{xv} With much attention to balance, the pictorial surface is scrupulously divided into flat surfaces of color that translate into architectural structures; the subject matter primarily revolves around Burmese village scenes and emerging townscapes where traditional architectural structures compete with urban concrete buildings, as epitomized by Kin Maung (Bank)’s *Mandalay Zaycho* (fig. 1). They bear many resemblances to the *Ludu* book covers published by Mandalay’s literary giants Ludu U Hla and his wife Daw Ah Mar – many of which are by Win Pe and Paw Oo Thet, and raise the question of whether the geometric simplification

of form could be hailed as a Mandalay legacy, given the Mandalay origin of its main exponents.

Paw Thame claims that he found his style as early as 1970 when traveling and painting in Myitkyina in the Kachin State along the borders of India and China, just after coming out of jail the first time and before settling down in Rangoon. His friends, mentors and patrons – Win Pe, Kin Maung (Bank), Gerald Kelly, etc. – were convinced at a very early stage that Paw Thame had his own style despite his diverse stylistic experimentations. For one, his palette and brushstrokes were considered bold in a way that was rarely seen in Burma. Indeed, Paw Thame had his own mind: his fascination with the simplification of form did not stop at Kin Maung (Bank) or Paw Oo Thet's version of meticulously delineated shapes and planned palette. He further explored the fusion of line and color: his strokes gain expressivity, and pictorial balance is achieved through the overall interplay of line and color (figs. 4-6), rather than the rigor of an immaculately designed composition and a carefully coordinated color scheme (figs. 2, 3). While the senior artists mainly applied the simplification and fragmentation of form to architectural structures and silhouettes, Paw Thame used this method of picturing the world on human figures, boats and many other objects whose natural forms rebel against the grid. Indeed, Paw Thame was a master of both perpendicular and curved lines: undulating lines and playful shapes translate the hustle and bustle of a festival scene, while slices of flat colors assert and exalt the bulk of fishing boats (figs. 7, 8). Depending on the subject matter and the artist's intention, colors range from cool tertiary hues to fiery oranges (figs. 9-11). It was not an artist who blindly applies just any proven method; his vision morphed in response to the image formed on his retina, and his technique adapted accordingly from thin washes of paint to impasto.

By the early 1980s, after ten years in Rangoon, Paw Thame had moved beyond the dominantly analytical approach to painting – carefully balanced composition with colors enclosed within well-defined outlines – to embrace a more emotive and dynamic one. The brushstrokes are applied as if in frenzy, much like de Kooning's *Women* series from the early 1950s. The bold and contrasting colors are no longer contained within painstakingly defined shapes; they spill over. Indeed, colors and brushstrokes become one in this new painting of Paw Thame. In these intersections of brushstrokes and colors, it is quite impossible to identify any recognizable object (figs. 11-16). When the painting is not abstract, there are only organic forms (figs. 14, 15), as if in reaction to the earlier phase of geometric simplification. Paw Thame claims that Bagyi Aung Soe's art has been one of the major influences on him. Could this growing inclination towards free brushstrokes have been spurred by his exchanges with the Rangoon artist? With Sonny Nyein's arrangements, Bagyi Aung Soe spent much time painting and showing at Peacock Gallery. It is well-known that the two fathers of modern art in Burma, Kin Maung (Bank) and Bagyi Aung Soe, adopted radically different approaches to painting: one was methodical while the

other was spontaneous.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were extremely fruitful years for Paw Thame: he moved Peacock Gallery to the outskirts of Rangoon where he set up a nursery together with the gallery and he ventured to marry. The years before he left for the United States were truly the gallery's most memorable period. Shows centered on specific themes – batik, exotic plants and pop art, for example – were organized on a regular basis. This vibrancy is paralleled in his oeuvre. On top of the major shift from the analytical and geometric to the expressive and psychedelic, Paw Thame was exploring myriad modes of representation with total disregard for their chronological progression. He worked on paintings inspired by the color-field theories of Rothko, alongside portraits and still-lives (figs. 17-19). That abstraction and the classical figurative tradition are situated on opposing ends of the history of Western art did not tamper his decision. Like other non-Euramerican artists of his generation in Burma and beyond, the entire compendium of Western art was his smorgasbord and playground. He was unfettered by the orthodoxy of theoretical discourse, and he freely picked whichever representational mode he considered the most effective for each painting. These foreign art forms represented no historical baggage whatsoever to the artists residing outside of Euramerica, and they were hence able to focus entirely on the idioms' visual aspects. Each approach, each style and each technique was a promise to a new beginning.

Following Paw Thame's move to Hawaii in 1984 and into the 1990s, there is a significant retreat from abstraction that was a salient aspect of his oeuvre from the early 1980s. In its place is the triumph of figurative painting. The prominence once given to free expressive brushstrokes has also faded noticeably. Instead, there is a return to an analytical approach with angular geometric forms. New subject matter emerged: American interiors and street scenes (figs. 20-25), as well as icons of Burmese culture: the Mandalay Palace moat, teak monasteries, brick temples of Pagan, market vendors of farm produce, figures in ethnic dress, performers of classical Burmese theatre, etc. (figs. 26-34) The new themes correspond to the exploration of new sights and sensations on the one hand, and homesickness on the other. Although it is not the first time that Paw Thame attempts this repertoire of Burmese cultural icons that is the *métier* of "Scott Market artists" – whose works are expressly made for the tourist eager for souvenirs of exotic Burma, its exploitation intensified in the United States. Using different media, techniques and modes of representation, he sought to rekindle familiar images from home. The traditional monastery building that is found in large numbers in and around Mandalay, for example, is represented using oil and watercolor – the latter bearing an uncanny resemblance to Paw Thame's early works that were executed under the influence of Kin Maung (bank), Win Pe or Paw Oo Thet (figs. 26, 27). As if through painting, Paw Thame could be transported back to Burma to relive his

adventures amongst the ethnic minorities in Myitkyina, the serenity of monastery grounds, the sounds and smells of the local market; it is as if ties with his people and home were being renewed and strengthened through painting. To date, the artist still misses the home he shared with friends and students.^{xvi}

In adopting specific modes of representation, media and techniques, Paw Thame exploited the formal characteristics particular to each of them to imbue a picture with specific moods. The exploration of styles had begun in the 1960s with studies of reproductions of avant-garde works from the West and the observation of works by some of Mandalay's foremost modern painters. Through practice, Paw Thame became increasingly versatile and a master of styles: he knew – to borrow a term from linguistics – the “linguistic competence” and limits of each mode of representation, and he used them intently. Progressively, his paintings came to be beyond representation and abstraction; they are simply pictures of his wandering mind, as can be seen in the previously discussed works from the 1990s (figs. 20-34). Paw Thame's works from the last decade makes it even clearer that his paintings are snapshots of his mind: musings over Burma's last royal family whose faces have been obliterated by history, a reminder of the humiliation endured under foreign occupation, meditations on specific concepts and forms, musings on life and social injustice, and more flashbacks to Burma (fig. 35-43). Paw Thame once wrote that if there were an odometer in him, it would show millions of mileage. In fact, his oeuvre alone bears adequate testimony to the dynamic and restless man that he is: a mind that is perpetually on the move even if the body stayed put in one place, a mind that is ever ready to reinvent itself.

It is likely that the new dimensions in Paw Thame's oeuvre since the 1990s have to do with the upheavals he was experiencing on the home front. The void left by Paw Thame's first and second loves and new financial constraints most certainly affected his outlook, lifestyle and art. His most recent works reflect a maturity that has more to do with approach than style *per se*. Mostly in ink, pencil and pastel, there is a homogeneity in style that marks the arrival of a signature style: powerful lines, majestic forms and structures, and rigorous spatial organization through the adroit distribution of forms and colors (figs. 44-51). The palette also presents a richer and wider range of transition tones which provides a greater sense of depth to the image (figs. 43-45). The sense of drama, agitation and violence that ignited earlier works is now replaced by an aura of radiant quietness. While Kin Maung (Bank)'s brand of geometric fragmentation is largely founded upon the perpendicular, Paw Thame's genius is the use of diagonals which lends a sense of movement to the representation of architectural structures and still-lives (figs. 47-50). In Paw Thame's latest works, balance and dynamism co-exist. Building upon the foundations laid by senior artists, Paw Thame moved on to develop his own pictorial language. Indeed, despite Paw Thame's unconventional trajectory outside of the academic system of training and his

distaste for academic conventions – he maintains that he is born ‘a freedom star’ and does not appreciate the academic pictorial conventions promulgated by the more conservative figurative painters of Burma, the evolution of his oeuvre is not contrary to the Burmese convention of “copy-research-create” that begins with the imitation of old masters’ works, followed by research and experimentation before the eventual creation of original art. Perhaps this is also not something exclusively Burmese either.

The One World That is Art

Beneath the multitude of representational modes, there is a single reality that engages Paw Thame on a most profound level: his relationship with painting. It is a fusal one. Each work is a world into which he plunges. With the unseen forces that surge from the expansive blank canvas, he wrestles and battles till some sort of accord is reached between the metamorphosing image and his psyche, when he has been emptied of all vitality and the very last ounce of his energy sublimated. The way he locks horns with the transforming canvas is not at all unlike the way he lunges at the vicissitudes of life, much like the way he fought as a boy and adolescent in his hometown of Shwebo in Upper Burma. He is a warrior – whether with regard to life or art. There is neither space for moderation nor hesitation in the way he lives and creates; a sense of urgency dictates his relationship to the world: with art, the women in his life, his students, his cars, his plants, his animals, his friends, as well as those who failed him.

Even when under the influence of works by other artists during the phase of experimentation, Paw Thame thought no more of what he had seen once he began his own painting. It certainly did not matter what and how he was painting – whether they were village huts from Burma or American skyscrapers from two different sides of the globe, whether it is using pastel or oil: he was one with painting. Given the profound intimacy of the process, it is no surprise that he has difficulty parting with his work. When – and if – he does revisit it in another time and space, the encounter is akin to meeting a love long lost, an experience provoking bemusement and inviting reminiscence.

Predictably, Paw Thame compares the two women in his life to paintings: the loss of them was like the disappearance of two precious paintings. He conflates life and art:

‘I am doing the art of living. The daily is like making a painting without canvases, brushes and paints. I compare art to practical life. [...] I told my art students, making a painting is about making the right decisions, control and balance. You will face your life like in making a painting. [...] You are always trying to make the right decisions,

controlling yourself, balancing yourself like a bank account. I call that the art of living.’

While living by the principles of painting as Paw Thame claims to do, he also brings painting into his living environment:

‘I think about this house as my canvas. I painted all my driveways, walkways, even on the roof, in all different colors, different designs. I change every year; I am painting all year round. [...] I think about my car as an empty canvas. I decorate just as I am creating a painting. Same thing.’

No doubt, art gives Paw Thame direction and structure to his life. It is more than a profession for him; it is the bridge that connects him with fellow human beings. Through art, he is able to put behind him the trauma of excessive responsibility as a child and to quell the destructive anger whose roots are similarly buried in childhood^{xvii} to display the immense generosity and tenderness that few have the chance of knowing, save his closest friends and students whom he treats like his own children. It is a bounteousness that accommodates even plants. In fact, the primary reason for setting up Peacock Gallery was to exhibit and sell the works of his students, so as to bring them greater confidence, as well as to arouse their parents’ interest in art and inspire their respect for it eventually. His best friends – Win Pe, Sonny Nyein and Ma Thanegi, for example – were all made through and for art. In fact, he demonstrates no interest in associating with individuals indisposed to art. By the 1990s, despite immense longing for his home country, he ceased contact with the American Burmese community: he found them too insular and caught up with the pursuit of material comforts to express substantial interest in art. In all instances, Paw Thame sought the common ground that is art. It is his lifeline and the beacon that guides his person, way of life and dealings with the rest of the world.

In the Fringe

‘The lovely big-bird jet planes flew to the United States and dropped us at Honolulu International Airport. I thought, now that I am in the wide world outside, maybe hope can grow, I can become one of the international artists that is my dream.’

Paw Thame is a displaced Burmese artist in the United States as much as he is an estranged American artist from Upper Burma. The evaluation of Paw Thame against the history of Burmese – or American – art is a tricky task for he belongs to both, yet neither. For close to

three decades, he has been away from his country of origin. Understandably, his mark on the current map of Burmese art is faint, if at all. Mainly, he is known as the founder of Peacock Gallery who left for the United States. In the States today, he lives alone in a town of Vietnam War veterans in western Texas, surrounded by plants and animals. He continues to paint, but away from the circuit of biennales and art fairs, his work is virtually unknown in his adopted country despite six exhibitions in Hawaii, Washington DC and Atlanta, not forgetting numerous workshops, talks and panel discussions. An independent artist who works outside of the histories of Burmese and American art, his oeuvre resides in no man's land, in a vacuum without echo. He insists that his sole duty is to create; whether his work enjoys brisk sale, is written about, known to the American audience and reintroduced to Burma or not, these are issues of no consequence to him. But the alienization of Paw Thame is not merely the result of geographical displacement, or even his deliberate withdrawal from the limelight; it has multiple causes. Both his non-conformism to either system and the disenfranchisement of Burmese art are at the root of his marginalized status. Apart from his personal decisions that do not favor integration, there are cultural and historical factors at play that are beyond his control. His decision to focus on creation, leaving all questions of reception and gain at the door, may not be as reckless as it seems.

Paw Thame's unsparing personality was prone to being misunderstood in Burmese society. The lack of welcome that he sensed in Burma's ex-capital, which remains the seat of the country's avant-garde art, exacerbated his angst and magnified his gaucheness – even the closest friends with the best intentions could be subjected to rebuff. He admits to not knowing how many enemies he had in Rangoon. While his free spirit and disregard for societal norms earned him the respect of a handful of individuals, they triggered the condemnation of many in a society that emphasizes communal living. His straightforward and outspoken nature was also often interpreted as offensive in this culture where discretion is highly valued. Of a highly explosive temper that is incomprehensible to Paw Thame himself, he does not benefit from the kind of good reputation enjoyed by the outwardly gracious Paw Oo Thet, suave Win Pe and even-tempered Kin Maung (Bank). Violent drinking further undermined his professional image. In other words, he failed to play the “Mr Nice Guy” that would have won the seal of approval by those in position of advancing his influence. Predictably, Paw Thame took a back seat in the local art press.^{xviii} The fact that none of his students – who number hundreds – became prominent artists did nothing to review his position in the history of Burmese art. With time, his name passed into limbo – if not for the memory of his friends from Peacock Gallery.

Yet, Paw Thame embodies some of the most quintessential qualities of the modern Burmese artist: his insistence on “purity” and “sincerity”, his disdain for the art market and his propensity

for stylistic eclecticism. The last trait is common to the majority of artists working outside of Euramerican centers who felt free to experiment with an array of idioms from the West irrespective of their contextual significances. While qualities like “purity” and “sincerity” are likely to raise an eyebrow if listed as criteria for good art in the West, they remain a touchstone for artists in Burma and are leitmotifs in their discourses on art. They are not Paw Thame’s invention. Finally, in his conviction that money would destroy art – the reason why he worked hard to earn money from avenues other than art to finance artistic creation, Paw Thame is far from alone. The fiercest detractor against mixing art and money is probably Bagyi Aung Soe, the *enfant terrible* of modern Burmese art. There is also Kin Maung Yin whom Paw Thame applauds as a “true painter” and who is held in high respect by all in Burma for the “purity” of his approach to painting. Like Paw Thame, although he is not against selling his work, it is against his principles to paint with the intention of monetary gain. Akin to the Chinese literati painters who placed painting above wealth and status, they would rather do without money than make money out of art – not because they despise money, but because they find it unconscionable to use painting to make gain.

The reluctance to engage in the art market by Burma’s most prominent exponents of modern art has to do with the country’s cultural inclinations and historical particularities. Under the alleged socialist government from 1962 to 1988, the sale of artworks was limited to the handful of official exhibitions held by the government, private parties organized by diplomats and artist-run galleries; it is not possible to speak of professional art dealers and an art market in Burma until the turn of the century. Isolated for almost four decades, the artists inside Burma developed their own ideals and practice according to Buddhist philosophy that permeates their culture – from which ground rules like “purity” and “sincerity” have been derived, independently of the world outside. To this generation of artist at least, art has a spiritual and moral dimension above all else; Buddhist representations are the matrix around which all others are organized. These credos are not necessarily compatible with the capitalist underpinnings of international art.

In the United States, Paw Thame was thrown into a new art world whose rules he did not know how to embrace. For one, coming from Burma whose art curriculum remains at least half a century behind time, he is unschooled in rhetoric, dialectic and many other disciplines that make the core of artists’ training in any Western art institution. When he first arrived in Hawaii, unable to accept the galleries’ terms and conditions, he would rather peddle his works at touristic spots like the zoo, even if it meant he would make no sale. He continued to absent himself from the American art market – less than ten exhibitions in twenty-six years – and his works remained outside the circuit of high art as a result. The price of his refusal to mix art and money: to be obliged to spend much energy and time on matters other than art for survival, as well as to be

condemned to being kept on the threshold of prestigious art establishments reserved for artists who play the game according to the prescribed rules. His condition is not the result of any assessment based on the merits of his oeuvre.

Ironically, Paw Thame's resolution in preserving the integrity of art by divorcing it from monetary concerns has denied him the title of "professional artist". By the standards of today's art world, art not being his full-time occupation, is a pastime, and as such, he is no more than an "amateur artist" – a term that insinuates ineptness and frivolity. As a matter of fact, in the world beyond Burma where his choices are unlikely to be concurred, his decisions give rise to doubt as to whether he is a serious artist in the first place. But as any peer would testify – ask Kin Maung Yin or Win Pe for a start, Paw Thame is anything but a dilettante when it comes to art. So what is it exactly on his mind? Paw Thame is no ignoramus; he knows the rules of the game full well. It is because he acquiesces that it would be the price to pay for maintaining a 'clean artist life':

'All my paintings are like tennis balls. No matter how well I play, I cannot participate in the Mandalay University tennis games. And no matter how well I paint, I will still remain an art scholar, art hobbyist. Maybe you can call me an amateur artist, not professional. But I can continue with my childhood drawing and coloring with any medium anywhere.'

Apparently, the opinion of the art critic, historian and curator is of secondary interest to Paw Thame. What matters most is his pursuit of art, unhindered and unadulterated. The candid quality he reserved for art as a child is still very much alive. As much as Paw Thame disregards the hierarchization of artists, he closes his mind to that of artworks. While he venerates museum masterpieces, he is no less open to works outside the temples of high art. First and foremost, he seeks the purity of creation; it is the painter's mind that he values:

'I found amateur artists' paintings, Sunday painters' paintings with their original outer frames. I do not care about their subject matter, technique, size, pigment quality, damages, medium. I really care about their soul, their spirit, their mood of years ago that are maybe now gone. I went to the store many times. I looked again and again. I gave all my time until I caught their spirit.'

In truth, what matters to Paw Thame is the integrity of the work, not whether it is in the collection of a reputable gallery or museum, or whether its maker enjoys the title of "professional artist". Indeed, his acquiescence to being an amateur artist – just so that his relationship with painting is shielded against all external interferences, whether commercial or institutional – is

incomprehensible to actors of the international art world; it is beyond them. With a similar stance, he appears ill-disposed to compete in the international arena; he fits not into the biennales – spectacles and circuses of contemporary urban culture – that are *de rigueur*. He does not speak the language. According to the rules of the game defined by an art history shaped by the Euramerican experience, even his stylistic versatility amounts to no more than artistic immaturity. The values esteemed by Paw Thame and his fellow artists in Burma are indeed context-specific. They have little currency outside of Burma and are mostly irrelevant in the United States where Paw Thame has been residing for more than a quarter of a century. Alas, the trajectories and priorities of artists outside the centers of international art – and finance – are often swept under the carpet. Their stories of art remain to be told, although attempts at an art history that is a palimpsest of paradigms old and new (East and West) are being made. Till then, artists like Paw Thame either dance to the tune of a single story of art – that defined by Euramerica, or opt out.

It is unlikely that history would look at Paw Thame's oeuvre as American instead of Burmese, but neither is his oeuvre nor person necessarily "authentically" Burmese in the eyes of those who make the rules for art. The officials and masses in Burma expect skilful renditions of idyllic landscapes, traditional dancers and pagodas, whereas players of international art – dealers, curators and collectors who have never stepped foot in Burma but profess to know what "serious" Burmese art ought to be like – demand regurgitations of sensationalized humanitarian horrors, according to what they have been fed by the media. But Burma is not just pretty pagodas and dancers; she is not the golden land advertised on travel brochures. Neither is she uniquely made up of child soldiers, corrupt officials and wretched farmers. If Burma is all of them, she is also much more: she is testimony to the resilience of the human spirit. She is where faith is incessantly put to test by the most difficult if not impossible conditions – an ultimate triumph of the human spirit that is beyond exclusivity to a specific race or nation. No one would know this better than Paw Thame's generation of artists who witnessed the passage from colonization to independence to socialism, who persisted in modern art throughout the decades of declining conditions under socialist rule. Paw Thame needs not apologize for making neither pagodas nor politics the heart of his work – neither is better than the other; both are forms of propaganda from different sides of the fence that do nothing but flatten the experience of Burma and rob her people of their dignity. His works are mirrors of the mind, humble attempts at connecting with humanity.

Admittedly, Paw Thame's universal disposition fits ill into the currently widespread parochial approach to art, whose *modus operandi* is to contain artists and their works within national brackets and types, and whose claims of the "international" still neglect the development of apparatus necessary to accommodate nations and cultures beyond Euramerica on the same footing.

Regardless, it is not for he who does not paint to tell an artist what to paint, especially an artist who awaits no compensation apart from the fulfillment of creation. Paw Thame's singularity lies precisely in his defiance of definitions and categorizations. He is neither the professional nor the amateur, neither local nor international. Be it to see the world as Paw Thame does or to see him in perspective, we should first look at his work. It is his oeuvre as well as the trajectory behind it that should serve as the yardstick for his place in the story of art, not peripheral indications like the definition of the professional artist or the frequency of participation in biennales and art fairs – facile systems of calibration that might serve the immediate purposes of quantification but neither enhance the quality of appreciation, nor contribute to the theoretical framework of art in the long run. Let the work of Paw Thame speak. It is long overdue.

Yin Ker

Shanghai, August 2010

ⁱ In 1989, the Burmese military changed the name of the country from “Burma” to “Myanmar” whose pronunciation follows the name in the Burmese language. The new name is considered illegitimate by most Western powers that do not recognize the regime in power, although it is acknowledged by ASEAN. In this essay, I will refer to the country as Burma in conformity to practice in the United States but without any political connotations.

ⁱⁱ Paw Thame’s longtime friend and colleague, Ma Thanegi, to whom the author owes much of her insights into the artist as well as Burmese arts and culture in general, believes that it was Paw Thame who deliberately lost touch with the art community in Rangoon. He did not even write to his best friend Sonny Nyein. Ma Thanegi, written communication, August 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ To date, the most comprehensive publication in any European language on Burmese art is Andrew Ranard’s *Burmese Painting: A Linear and Lateral History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009). It is preceded by a collaborative effort of a smaller scale by Sein Myo Myint, Khin Maung Nyung and Ma Thanegi, *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging* (Ho Chi Minh: Education Publishing House, 2006). Publications on individual artists include Ma Thanegi’s *Paw Oo The: His Life and Creativity* (Rangoon: Swiftwinds Books, 2004) and Yin Ker’s “Modern Burmese Painting According to Bagyi Aung Soe” in the *Journal of Burma Studies*, Volume 10 (2005-06). The websites of universities, museums and galleries also feature an increasing number of online resources on modern and contemporary Burmese art.

^{iv} Paw Thame’s appearances in publications are scant. When his name does appear, it is only in passing, without any investigation into his oeuvre. He is mentioned briefly in *Myanmar Painting: From Worship to Self-Imaging* and appears twice in Ranard’s version. In the latter, he is presented as the artist who ran Peacock Gallery and a ‘young modernist of talent who tried to revive the movement by opening up galleries, but he gave up and also left the country’ (2008: 269, 297). There is neither discussion on his work, nor any example of his work in this richly illustrated publication. In Aung Myint and Aung Min’s 2009 publication on contemporary art in Myanmar in Burmese – the first of its kind in the country, a page and a half is devoted to Paw Thame. The analysis remains however limited due to the survey nature of the enterprise.

^v Paw Thame’s year of birth is a mystery. He recalls, ‘In primary school registration, I learnt that I was born in 1944, but I am not sure, because one gentleman grabbed me from the streets and put me in school. He did my school registration. A few years later, I found out that even my father’s name is wrong on the registration document.’

^{vi} A half-dozen exhibitions – including a small solo show held in Washington DC in 1992 – took place in the United States between 1984 and 2010, but none compares to his seventh solo exhibition in Bonn, Germany in 1986 thanks to the support of a German patron. To date, it is probably Paw Thame’s most significant solo show outside of Burma.

^{vii} Three of Paw Thame’s uncles were Buddhist monks. During the school holidays, they made sure that he either ordained as novice, or studied the Buddha’s teachings seriously. Despite his strongly Buddhist background, he is not averse to other spiritual beliefs. As a teenager in his home village, enticed by church organ music, he subsequently completed a correspondence course in Bible study in English. Throughout the years, his respect for Christian values has been maintained alongside his practice of Buddhism; Paw Thame sees no conflict between the two religions.

^{viii} Paw Thame is fiercely independent: ‘If I depend [on others], I am ashamed of myself. I told Phyu Phyu Win and Kyi Kyi Aye many times [that] if I became disabled and could not walk, I would crawl to grab my stuff. I did not like depending on parents even when I was boy.’

^{ix} Paw Thame was first arrested and jailed in Shwebo for anti-government activities in 1970. He went to jail the second time in Moulmein because of association with anti-government labor members, the third time in Rangoon at the Kyauktada Township Police Station for his banned solo exhibition in 1974, and the last time in Rangoon again due to his portrait of UN Secretary U Thant for his funeral in the same year.

^x Kin Maung (Bank) is thus called because the artist worked in a bank. Many people in Burma have the same names. Names of hometowns and workplaces are hence affixed to distinguish individuals.

^{xi} Mandalay is renowned as the centre of classical Burmese culture. Under British colonial rule, Rangoon came to be the political and commercial centre, as well as the seat of avant-garde experimentations in fine arts. Aspiring artists like Paw Thame, Win Pe and Paw Oo The moved to Rangoon in the 1960s and 1970s.

^{xii} Paw Thame recalls, ‘One day I was painting the Sagaing Kaung Hmudaw Pagoda [...]. I was not satisfied with the painting. U Kin Maung looked at my painting and did not say to stop painting. While I was out in town, U Kin Maung locked up my painting. When I came back home, I could not find the painting. I asked U Kin Maung and he said that painting was done and there was no need for any more touch-up. He unlocked it and gave it back to me.’

^{xiii} According to Paw Thame, U Thein Tun intervened when the artist was jailed in 1974 for his banned exhibition at Lokanat Gallery and another time when he was made the object of a targeted scandal set up by two other prominent figures of Rangoon’s art scene.

^{xiv} Paw Thame writes, ‘All Myanmar artists are more skillful and can paint greater details than me. I cannot compare to them. [...] I cannot paint like all Burmese artists. Maybe I need reeducation or relearn from Myanmar artists. I want to, I like learning from all. I love learning anything. When in jail, I learned from prisoners; I refer to jail like university. [...] Teach me. I am always open, ready to learn.’

^{xv} Paw Thame recalls Paw Oo The’s bouts of jealousy over the success of his school and gallery, amongst other deeds that gravely contradict the more senior artist’s image as paragon of virtue. Questions on Paw Oo The’s integrity have already been raised in Ranard’s *Burmese Painting*. He quotes Kin Maung Yin, ‘Yes, POT is an artist-saint “to the Burmese people,” he said, “but not to those of use who knew him”.’ (2008: 229)

^{xvi} The Burmese military government withholds visa from individuals who are thought to contest its legitimacy. Given Paw Thame’s portrait of former United Nations Secretary U Thant for his funeral in 1975 and his book cover design for Aung San Suu Kyi’s publication in 1993 on the occasion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50th Anniversary, it is not certain if it would be possible for him to return to Burma in the immediate future.

^{xvii} One of Paw Thame's uncles who was a monk was murdered by a mentally ill person whom he was treating. Paw Thame was a child then when he witnessed the decapitated body at the scene of crime. He received no psychiatric therapy following the shock. It is plausible that this incident fed Paw Thame's rage in some way.

^{xviii} Ma Thanegi recalls that Paw Thame was mentioned in the newspapers in relation to the shows at Peacock Gallery, but not as much or as often as the other members. In the first place, no one wrote much about the modern artists. Ma Thanegi, written communication, August 2010.



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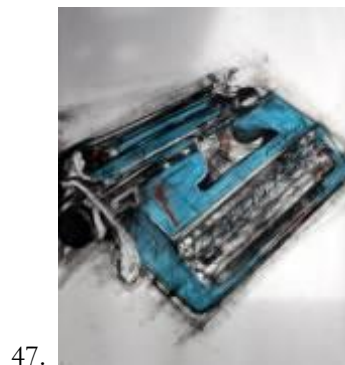
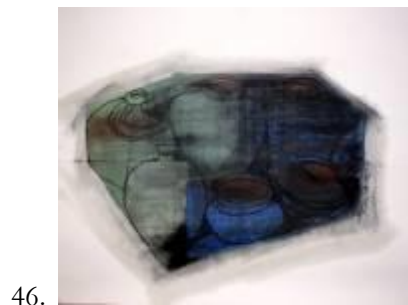


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