

## Some clarifications about the article "An artist revolt" published on July 13, 2017 issue of Frontier Myanmar .

By **Mauro Salvemini** , president of Culture2All NGO

Since the Culture2All NGO mission is to contribute to the quality of the cultural debate in Myanmar we have stopped using the term Biennale in the event that we are organizing **Yangon ART EXPO 2017** from 4 to 14 November and we are focused on the success of this exhibition of more than fifty very interesting artists that will fly to Yangon through the beautiful location at the top of the Junction City Tower .

However, the Frontier article needs some important clarifications.

In principle, the two most clever sentences of the article are the first and the last. The first says *"If it were not for an event that appeared on Facebook earlier this year, the issue of a biennale in Yangon would not even be on the minds of the country's contemporary artists."*

It is our pride, as an NGO that has never received funds in Myanmar or elsewhere, to see that the investment of our own money, our effort and our travelling made the nation's artists reflect on the theme of Biennale.

The other remarkable note is what the main actor of the interview says at the end of the article.

*"Htein Lin says an upside of the controversy is that it brought Yangon's often- fragmented contemporary arts community together to speak with one voice. "In the end, it's a good thing," he said. "It's an opportunity to rethink where we stand and how we understand each other and our relationship between the embassies, arts, and ourselves."*

But in this case he is too optimistic because he believes that twelve petitioners, I am not sure how many of them having a diploma in art, represent all the artists of Myanmar.

But I want to proceed with order. The following information is absolutely inaccurate and misleading. *"The plan for the biennale includes raising funds for charity, with participating artists being required to donate one of their works to Culture2All to support efforts to combat malnutrition. "*

Culture2All has a wide and ambitious long-term plan to help culture in Myanmar in the broader sense. So not just in favour of the artists but also for young people living in villages nearby or containing cultural heritage sites ( four villages have been individued so far Kakku Pagodas in the Shan State; Sa Lay in Magway State; Mrauk U in Raikine State; Kyaukpadaung, Mandalay Division ). <http://www.culture2all.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/VILLAGES-06bis.pdf>

In the invitation sent in May to artists it was foreseen that if an artwork had been sold, the artist would have donated (this was an option and not mandatory) to the NGO to contribute to the CULTURAL HERITAGE and VILLAGES project which had been distributed along with the invitation and unfortunately no one read. I have never mentioned *"malnutrition"*. However, being often in Myanmar I learned that: *"In Myanmar no one ever dies for hunger"* and I used this motto as the title of my book of photographs that you can see at [http://www.culture2all.com/myanmar\\_en/](http://www.culture2all.com/myanmar_en/)

Considering that artists have been invited free of any charge to participate to the exhibition and that the entrance to the exhibition would be free for the public, with reference to what the article says about the request to artists for donating one artwork there was a great misunderstanding.

Artists were only invited to donate a painting to expand the NGO Culture2ALL collection not because we wanted to sell the artwork to make money but for having artworks to showcase. Each artist was and is free to contribute to the Collection of Culture2All or not. We applied the same principle when, for the first time in Italy and Europe, we exhibited ten artists at Milan's TRIENNALE (not-Biennale !) which is for design art prestigious as the Venice Biennale is for art and architecture. <http://www.culture2all.com/catalogo-myanmar-art-italy-2016/>

In that situation ,on 2016, the artist KZL did not want to donate anything to the collection. For us it was so good. We carried his canvas from Yangon to Italy, framed it, showcased it for 3 months, we dismantled it and brought it back to Yangon: the artist did not pay anything, indeed, he received as a gift from us catalogues and publicity on which his works and CV are published for the first time in Italian language.

Our aim is to create a collection of contemporary artists that can be shown in Italy and Europe to ensure that artists can be appreciated, bought and possibly invited to other Biennale which take place in Europe. Our NGO has no money to buy artists' works but has excellent critics and professors to promote them.

The words of the artist Aye Ko referred to proposed Biennale "created for money"" are senseless. I'm sorry because in April in Yangon I tried to meet him but he never was available to meet me. Such a pity! Instead, with Htein Lin we have seen at least twice in 2015 and 2016 to talk about art and future projects. I've been travelling to Asia and Myanmar for more than fifteen years teaching, giving lectures, visiting and studying cultural assets, monuments, exhibitions and artists, one of the recent paper that I gave was at the Infrastructure Summit in March about the sustainable rehabilitation of cultural sites and monuments , it is published at <http://www.culture2all.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/C2A-x-summit-Myanmar-2017-07-copia.pdf>

Coming back to what Htein Lin calls "*western curatorial concepts*", it should be noted that they are those that give value to his works, earn him and let artists to participate to other events all over the world. Culture 2ALL deeply studied the most sustainable model for a Biennale in Yangon and produced one which was inclusive, equal opportunity for all artists and styles and aiming to show the real essence of Myanmar art which has unique roots into the tradition together with new prominent visions of art. Perhaps precisely this is the problem that struck him: we have opened the invitation to many other artists who represent contemporary Myanmar art other than only him and the other petitioners.

In terms of location, having in mind, that participation in Yangon ART EXPO 2017 in November is completely free for artists and visitors because a donor offers facilities. We have worked for some time to find the best solution and now there is the fantastic space, more than 1500 square meters, at the top of the Junction City Tower in the core of Yangon.

The huge space provided by the donor at the highest location ever used in Yangon for a show is a pluralistic space where autonomous perspectives can enter into dialogue and debate. The Art Expo concept defines a place in a city where people go to relax and enjoy art in this sense YAB2017 aims to cultivate collaborations, to create infrastructures and strategies for the benefit of Yangon and other cities, for Myanmar and international society. The Expo poses questions, and proposes answers to reflect on the conditions how to aim at a free art world. In a world region currently being invested with larger institutional, societal and economic

changes and still characterised by lesser infrastructures, it will be a prestigious contemporary Art Expo in Myanmar and one of Asia's most extraordinary examples of cosmopolitan faiths, communities' participation and cultural heritages. The materials of the exhibition will be also research material for a online publishing website, for futures projects involving Interlocutors outside of the Myanmar.

What I'm most sorry about this story is that we have not been able so far to have a dialogue with the opposing artists and their influential lobbying supporters. A Culture2All person went to Yangon in June to talk to Htein Lin to have constructive dialogue. Vainly. It seems that they have preferred to shoot at whatever attempts to fly whether it is Icarus or Dedalus, whether it is the Biennial, the Triennial or something other than their own rough idea. It is a pity ! But I'm sure, just because I've been to Asia and Myanmar so many times for absorbing eastern philosophy that what we're doing will be positively in favour of all the artists in Myanmar.

Anyway we would like to confirm our invitation to Htein Lin and other artists who were doubtful on our intentions to join Yangon ART EXPO 2017 and contribute with their leading role in promoting the debate about the future of Myanmar art market. We are sure that it will be surprising for them the complexity of the subject and how difficult and tricky can be assuming ideological positions.

There are some other misinformation in the article probably due to a naïve interpretation of Wikipedia information about what Biennale (always with capital B, if you do not mean biennial ) is and how they act since the first one in Venice up to the present time where many Biennale and similar expo take place all over the world comprising Asia. This demonstrates that the activities of Culture2All are needed in conjunction to Myanmar institutions such as the Academy and University of Art, which have been informed by us about the project and related developments.

But this introduces another very interesting theme about the globalization of art and the endemic features of the art of Myanmar. Let discuss that in November during Yangon ART EXPO 2017.

Mauro Salvemini  
President of Culture2All NGO  
July 22 2017