

# HEALING AND LOVING

New works by Chaw Ei Thein (Myanmar/Burma) and Krishnapriya Tharmakrishnar (Sri Lanka)

Saturday, July 9 – Saturday, July 23, 2016

YAMAMOTO GENDAI

Organized by : Arts Initiative Tokyo [AIT]

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In the lead up to the exhibition we visited their studio in Tokyo to ask them about their works and backgrounds.

Roger McDonald [AIT] (R) : Can you tell us about yourself?

Krishnapriya Tharmakrishnar (K) : I'm from Jaffna, the northern city of Sri Lanka and this is my first time being outside of my country. Coming from Jaffna to Tokyo is a big change as I haven't seen such huge crowds in all my life and I'm excited to show my works here. My works are inspired by my experience and memory, since Jaffna has experienced a civil war for three decades and I only spent three days with my mother when I was born, before she passed.

R : When did you start making art?

K : I started to draw on some walls in my house or a piece of paper and kept it under my pillow when I was young. Drawing was like a process of finding my mother to me. I studied art for six years at the University of Jaffna with an interruption of war and had an opportunity to exhibit my works at Saskia Fernando Gallery in Colombo where I was encouraged to think about what our society has done in the past. Art for me is to bridge my emotions and experiences with viewers.

R : What is the importance of drawing for you?

K : My grand father is a jeweler and my father is working with letterpress and designing patterns for advertisement. Seeing their creations side by side during my childhood inspired me to make patterns with dots and lines more than colours. They resonate well with my expression and most



Chaw Ei Thein



Krishnapriya Tharmakrishnar

importantly they are close to my feelings.

R : How about your background, Chaw?

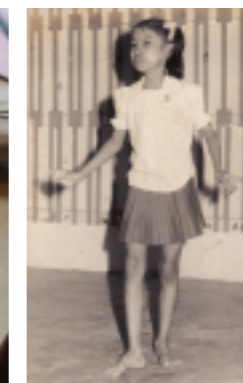
Chaw Ei Thein (C) : I was born in Rangoon (Yangon), Burma (Myanmar) in 1969. I studied Law at university because there was no school where I could study art at that time. It took me eight years to finish my degree but to be a lawyer wasn't what I wanted to pursue after all. Sometimes people that I meet are amazed that I studied law, but in Burma, the law is not an independent judiciary as the court only operates under a military order. On the other hand, I'm fortunate to have my father who is a painter and nurtured my interest and passion in art as a mentor. Singing was also what I enjoyed and there was a chance to see senior artists performing which eventually let me to join an international performance art festival in Japan and several Asian countries.

R : So, you're showing several paintings and objects on camouflage textile at the exhibition. What is the meaning behind this work?

C : This series of works started 7-8 years ago and as much as I liked to wear camouflage-pattern clothes, I started to ask myself what this pattern symbolized, especially after the uprisings that occurred nationwide in August 8, 1988 to change the political system which had been run by the military since 1962 to a democratic system. Later in 2005 when I made a street performance in the market of Rangoon, the police investigated me



Chaw Ei Thein / Found pieces of wood at her work table



Chaw Ei poem reciting at age 10



Work in progress

because they thought we were expressing political opinions and I made a decision to go into exile and live away from my country. The mixed feeling of guilt and cowardice always haunted me to find my identity and those patterns kept reminding me of the experiences I had gone through during those difficult times.

One day, I found this grey camouflage fabric in a store in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh) and I thought about replacing the original context that is constantly recalling the memory of the past and my emotions into something better to heal myself. It became my joy to find the shape of men and women in the patterns that look like they are singing and dancing. It shows how we should live and how we deserve to live in this world.

Shintaro Tokairin [AIT] (S) : You see the whole of nature in these camouflage patterns.

C : A pattern in brown means the land and light and dark green colours means trees and leaves to me.

S : You are now staying in Tokyo with your daughter and mother. Being

a mother may have changed your practice?

C : I didn't notice until now but having a daughter naturally changed the way of looking at the world with more respect and hope.

S : Krish, we see the lamp as a motif in some of your drawings.

K : This is the only remaining physical link to my mother. During the time of the civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan Army, a lot of people in the region were in an awful situation. In 1987, the year I was born, my mother had carried this lamp with her when the situation was unstable and in 1993, our family was displaced far from the city when the war happened again and I was holding this same lamp to carry just like my mother did. It has ties with my mother and the memory of my birth and the similar situation we both have experienced. Now the original lamp is in the good care of my father.

R : What does the title of the exhibition "Healing and Loving" mean for you?

C : This title means a lot to me and is strongly connected to what I've



Krishnapriya Tharmakrishnar / Work in progress



Krishnapriya at her father's printing workshop



Drawing tools taken over from her grandfather

been working on recently. Until 4-5 years ago my performance was focused on the brutal story of sacrifice that political prisoners make during their time in prison. When I looked at the audience, I could sense their discomfort because there were already too many issues they were dealing with personally in their everyday life. That changed my practice. Rather than telling the story of pain I thought that I should give more positive messages to share with others. Also, the more a political view is involved in my expression, the more of a trap I put myself in, with a lack of freedom. Sending out those messages may be also a way to heal myself, especially as I have been struggling with a sense of belonging for a long time. With whatever we have gone through in the past, I feel we have to heal ourselves to live and move on.

K : My drawing is formed with love and yearnings for my mother and it is the way to keep her in myself all the time. In today's society, we suffer from war, damage and pain...

C : And trauma?

K : Yes. So my works are there to embrace their stories closely and this has been the motivation to develop my practice. The reason I use neutral/pale colours with my drawing is that it makes it stronger for the dots and lines to express a sense of living through them. Also, being almost invisible with no ink asks viewers to observe my drawings carefully and that is another way for us to connect and interact with our feelings.

At their studio in Daikanyama, June 15, 2016