

# PRESS RELEASE

## ARCHIVES IN FOCUS: AN INTERNATIONAL MEETING FOR PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL CULTURE



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**The Myanmar Photo Archive and the Goethe-Institut Myanmar warmly invite you to an international photography meeting in Yangon and Chiang Mai. *Archives in Focus* reveals compelling narratives from Myanmar and beyond, showcasing both historical and contemporary perspectives captured by professional and amateur photographers alike. Spanning from colonial times to modern explorations of identity, culture, and displacement, these exhibitions offer valuable insights into our shared past.**

*Archives in Focus* offers a compelling exploration into the past to illuminate our understanding of the future. This initiative presents a rich tapestry of narratives from Myanmar and beyond, featuring both professional and amateur photographers whose works chronicle lives across eras. From colonial legacies to modern reflections on identity, culture, and displacement, these exhibits reveal how historical experiences have been captured and interpreted.

We are at a pivotal juncture globally, with societies grappling with escalating divisions and differing visions for governance and structure. "This moment of flux challenges us to reconsider how we read the present and how we can become agents of a multilateral future by reinterpreting the past. History, as much as the future, remains open to continual reexamination and reinterpretation on both personal and collective levels.

*Archives in Focus* provides an opportunity for audiences to engage deeply with these historical narratives through exhibitions, workshops, and talks. By showcasing diverse interpretations of the past by artists, curators, and collectives, the program invites viewers to explore and rethink historical perspectives.

Building on a decade of preservation, education, and exhibition efforts by the Myanmar Photo Archive and in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Myanmar since 2018, this project represents an expansion of their shared mission. 'Archives in Focus' marks the culmination of a two-year collaboration between Myanmar Photo Archive and Goethe-Institut Myanmar, focused on the diverse, community-driven, and participatory reinterpretation of the archive's visual materials. This collaborative effort concludes in a three-week international event, showcasing the results of the past two years of their joint



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MYANMAR PHOTO ARCHIVE

### DATE

4th November 2024

### KONTAKT

Yamin Oo  
Communications Department  
Goethe-Institut Myanmar  
T +95 1 9376160  
Yamin.Oo@goethe.de

### Goethe-Institut Myanmar

Kabar Aye Pagoda Road, Bahan  
Township, (Next corner of Nat  
Mauk Street), Yangon,  
Myanmar.

T +95 1 9376160  
info-yangon@goethe.de  
www.goethe.de/myanmar

work. This multi-location display, inspired by the successful /Shi exhibition organized by the Goethe-Institut in 2021, is made possible through generous support and aims to offer a fresh and thought-provoking lens on our shared past.

Photographic archives offer profound insights into our past, present, and future. These visual records capture the subtleties of everyday life, significant events, and societal shifts, serving as a tangible connection to our collective heritage. By delving into these archives, we uncover the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of past generations, allowing us better to understand the continuity and evolution of our societies. This deepened understanding enhances our sense of identity and belonging and equips us with informed perspectives to tackle contemporary challenges. Moreover, examining the past helps us identify recurring patterns and mistakes, guiding us toward more thoughtful decision-making for the future. In essence, photographic archives are invaluable tools that deepen our grasp of the present and inspire a reflective approach to shaping what lies ahead.

The program will debut in Chiang Mai with two distinct initiatives. The first is a retrospective exhibition, Contact Prints at Some Space (15<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> November), showcasing the Myanmar Photo Archive's extensive activities to offer the Thai audience a deeper appreciation of Myanmar's photographic heritage. Concurrently, the Greenhouse Community Space will host an incubator for local Myanmar artists on 16<sup>th</sup> November, fostering a space for creative exchange and idea generation. Both aim at building connections and establishing new bonds and relations.

In Yangon, the Goethe-Institut will serve as the central hub, transforming into an interactive bookshelf from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> December. This exhibit will highlight the medium of the photo book as a storytelling tool, featuring narratives from the Myanmar Photo Archive alongside works by local photographers and artists who use the photo book format to explore personal and historical reflections. Additionally, a workshop on photography restoration and two movie nights with restored films will take place at the Goethe-Institut Myanmar.

The exhibition RETHINKING BEATO, commissioned by the Italian Embassy Myanmar in collaboration with Turquoise Mountain, will delve into the life and work of Felice Beato, an Italian-born photographer who lived in Mandalay from 1887 to 1905. Opening on 30<sup>th</sup> November and running until 15<sup>th</sup> December, this exhibit examines Beato's Myanmar work alongside his photographic endeavors across Japan, China, India, Crimea, and the Middle East, shedding light on Myanmar's historical significance in global trade and economics.

War and Peace, curated by the Vernacular Social Club, offers a collective visual exploration of conflict and harmony through everyday photography. Opening on 1<sup>st</sup> December and running until 15<sup>th</sup> December in a downtown apartment at 203 Seikkantha Street, this exhibition features images submitted by club members from three continents, reflecting the dichotomies of war and peace in global contexts.



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The 1950s to 1970s were a golden era for Myanmar's film industry, creating a thriving cinematic culture often called the "Burmese Hollywood." During this period, studios flourished, producing numerous films that captivated local audiences. Influenced by Bollywood and Hollywood, Myanmar's films explored themes of romance, folklore, and social issues, and actors became national icons. Directors like Thukha and actors like Win Oo and Khin Yu May were celebrated for their work. Despite limited resources, the industry maintained high standards until the late 1970s, when stricter censorship under the military regime began curtailing creative freedom. This exhibition offers valuable insight into Myanmar's rich movie poster and memorabilia heritage. Drawing from the Myanmar Photo Archive and other contributors, it delves into the aesthetics of film posters, advertisements, and fan albums.

Also downtown, at 243 Bo Aung Kyaw Street, visitors can experience a collection of reinterpretations of archival images. Originally commissioned during an open call by the Goethe-Institut Myanmar and MPA, these artistic reflections are curated by Aung Myat Htay. The exhibition, titled *When Spirits Flow Backwards*, features work by Han Reality, Moe Myat, May Thin Kyi (video), Kelvin Shine Ko, Kyaw Min Htet, Alco Htoo, Ko Sai, and Ye Kyaw Aung.

Two displays featuring images from the Myanmar Photo Archive are also set up at downtown Café Deja Brew and the popular Yangon Book Plaza.

*Archives in Focus* stands as a rich, multidimensional exploration of visual history and its impact on our understanding of the present and future, inviting audiences to engage with and reflect on the profound narratives of our shared past.



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## PROGRAM DETAILS

### Chiang Mai / Thailand:

**Title: CONTACT PRINTS - An exploration of Myanmar's photographic history**

**Location: SOME SPACE Gallery**

124/ 4-5 Sri Poom Rd, Si Phum, Mueang Chiang Mai District, Chiang Mai

Opening: Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (4:00 - 9:00 pm)

Duration: 15<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Title: THINK AFTERNOON - An incubator for presenting Myanmar's visual history**

**Location: Greenhouse Community Space**

10 Siri Mangkalajarn Rd, Tambon Su Thep, Mueang Chiang Mai

Date: Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (2:00 - 6:00 pm)

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### Yangon / Myanmar:

**Title: Page by Page**

**Location: Goethe-Institut Myanmar/ Archives in Focus HQ**

Kabar Aye Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, (Next Corner of Nat Mauk Street), Yangon

Opening: Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (4:00 - 9:00 pm)

Duration: 29<sup>th</sup> November - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: Head-Quarter of *Archives in Focus* with a display on MPA book production and a small summary of the exhibitions and events that have happened in the past.

- A workshop on Zine and book-making
- Movie nights by Save Myanmar Film on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024 at 6:00 pm.

**Title: RETHINK BEATO**

**Location: Turquoise Mountain**

47B Pho Sein Street, Yangon

Opening: Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (4:00 - 8:00 pm)

Duration: 30<sup>th</sup> November - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: RETHINK BEATO - An exhibition co-organized and funded by the Italian Embassy and the Myanmar Photo Archive provides an in-depth insight into the work of pioneering Italian photographer Felice Beato, who spent over a decade working in Mandalay at the turn of the last century.

**Title: War and Peace - the Vernacular Social Club**

**Location: Downtown Apartment Top Floor**

201/203 Seikkantha Street, Yangon

Opening: Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024

Duration: 1<sup>st</sup> December - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: A collection of amateur and vernacular photographs gathered by the members of the Vernacular Social Club.



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**Title: Movie Mania**

**Location: Downtown Apartment Top Floor**

201/203 Seikkantha Street, Yangon

Opening: Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024

Duration: 1<sup>st</sup> December - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: This is dedicated to Myanmar's rich film culture. In this exhibition, they will present posters from their collection.

**Title: When Spirits Flow Backwards / ဝိညာဉ်များနောက်ပြန်စီးဆင်းသည့်အခါ**

**Location: Downtown Apartment Top Floor**

243-245 Bo Aung Kyaw St, Yangon

Opening: Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Duration: 6<sup>th</sup> December - 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024

Program: The work shown in "When Spirits Flow Backwards" is an extension of commissioned pieces from an open call by MPA and the Goethe-Institut Myanmar. Curator Aung Myat Htay presents the work of eight Myanmar artists in this immersive exhibition.

**Title: IT'S FASHION**

**Location: Yangon Book Plaza**

Lanmadaw St, Yangon

Duration: 29<sup>th</sup> November - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: In one of Yangon's best book centers, the Myanmar Photo Archive will display a selection of fashion photographs from the 1950s until the 1990s.

**Title: A Cup of ...**

**Location: Café Deja Brew**

No.134, 37th Middle Block, Between Maha Bandola & Anawratha Road, Yangon

Duration: 29<sup>th</sup> November - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Program: An intimate display of social gatherings and time spend together photographed in the 1970s and 1980s.

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**About Goethe-Institut**

The Goethe-Institut is the globally active cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 151 institutes in 98 countries, it promotes knowledge of the German language, fosters international cultural cooperation, and conveys an up-to-date image of Germany. Through cooperation with partner institutions in numerous other locations, the Goethe-Institut has a total of around 1,000 contact points worldwide. [www.goethe.de](http://www.goethe.de)