

Memoirs or Moe Satt's Memoirs

Performance: *Memoir Cocktails*

Oct 25, 2017

6:30pm, 7pm and 7:30pm

Exhibition: *Memoirs or Moe Satt's Memoirs*

Oct 25 – 28, 2017

Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm

KADIST presents *Memoirs or Moe Satt's Memoirs*, a solo exhibition by visual and performance artist Moe Satt. The four-day show features Satt's performance *Memoir Cocktails* (2016–ongoing) alongside his photographic series *F n' F* (2009) and his single-channel videos *Hands Around Yangon* (2012) and *Frog Fighting* (2016). Together, the artworks engage with various meanings and uses of hands in Myanmar from daily secular rituals, childhood games, and cultural implications to political signals. A long-term focus for Satt, hand gestures are central to all aspects of local lives from the moment they carry a newborn baby to the closing of eyes in the final moments of life. They also evoke a particular state of mind of Buddhist deities.

On the opening night, Moe Satt performs *Memoir Cocktails* (2016–ongoing) for the first time in the United States. Satt's work weaves a story of Myanmar's politics, culture, and society through preparing and consuming cocktails selected for their historical relevance. The story is divided into four eras significant to Myanmar's modern sociopolitical history, namely British Burma (1824–1948), the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), military dictatorship (1962–2011) and democratic periods (1948–1962 and 2011–ongoing). The performance setting simply consists of four tables—each corresponding to one time period and its related cocktail—in a dimly-lit modest room. Upon entry, the artist invites each visitor to sit at a table of their choosing. Unable to swap or visit another table, visitors thus self-select the unique story they will be told. Consequently, the consumer-visitors only receive a fragmented picture of the last 150 years of Myanmar's history. Presented for US audiences, this partial account of the narrative perhaps reflects on the engagement of the international community with the country, suggesting the audience's complicity in this story.

The exhibition continues in KADIST's office with *F n' F* (2009), *Hands Around Yangon* (2012) and *Frog Fighting* (2016). The eight black-and-white photographs from *F n' F* documents Moe Satt performing a choreographed sequence of gestures based upon those he observed on the streets of Yangon, Myanmar. Each photograph is a close-up of the artist's face and hands with a title and caption that describes the meaning of the documented gesture. Alongside the photographs, a TV monitor displays *Hands Around in Yangon* (2012) and *Frog Fighting* (2016) on loop. *Hands Around in Yangon* (2012) records people's hands manipulating materials involved in various labor and tasks such as counting money, cutting nails, and peeling vegetables. While the faces of the filmed subjects are obscured, their identities and psychological expression reside in their repetition of hand gestures as they perfect their particular craft with care. As the film ends with shots of hands patting a pregnant belly, the simple motion points to the way gestures can become responsible for the ultimate miracle of life, even in the most mundane contexts. Lastly, *Frog Fighting* (2016) features a paper frog fight, a popular childhood game in the country. Invisible yet implied, the paper-frog hands furiously fighting one another suggest animals without brains. The title of the work plays upon the dual meaning of the word 'pharr' in the Myanmar language, 'frog' and a slang word for 'to behave obsequiously.' Imbued with nostalgia, the once-innocent game becomes a metaphor of Myanmar society for Satt, whose members intensely fight each other over a bar of soap or over a lucrative work position.

With subjectivity and ambiguity, Satt's works illustrate the ways in which people communicate nonverbally with their hand gestures. Engaging with local realities of Myanmar, they also emphasize the exoteric and humor as a means for Satt to communicate with his audiences.

Visual and performance artist **Moe Satt** uses his body as a symbolic field for exploring self, identity, embodiment, and political resistance. He is part of a renowned generation of experimental contemporary artists from Myanmar who overcame government censorship and oppression to engage with performance, politics, and identity. Satt initiated the "Beyond Pressure Public Art Festival" (2008–2014) and was nominated for the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award in 2015. He has also curated exhibitions for more than a decade and is responsible for raising awareness around the world for the work of Myanmar artists.