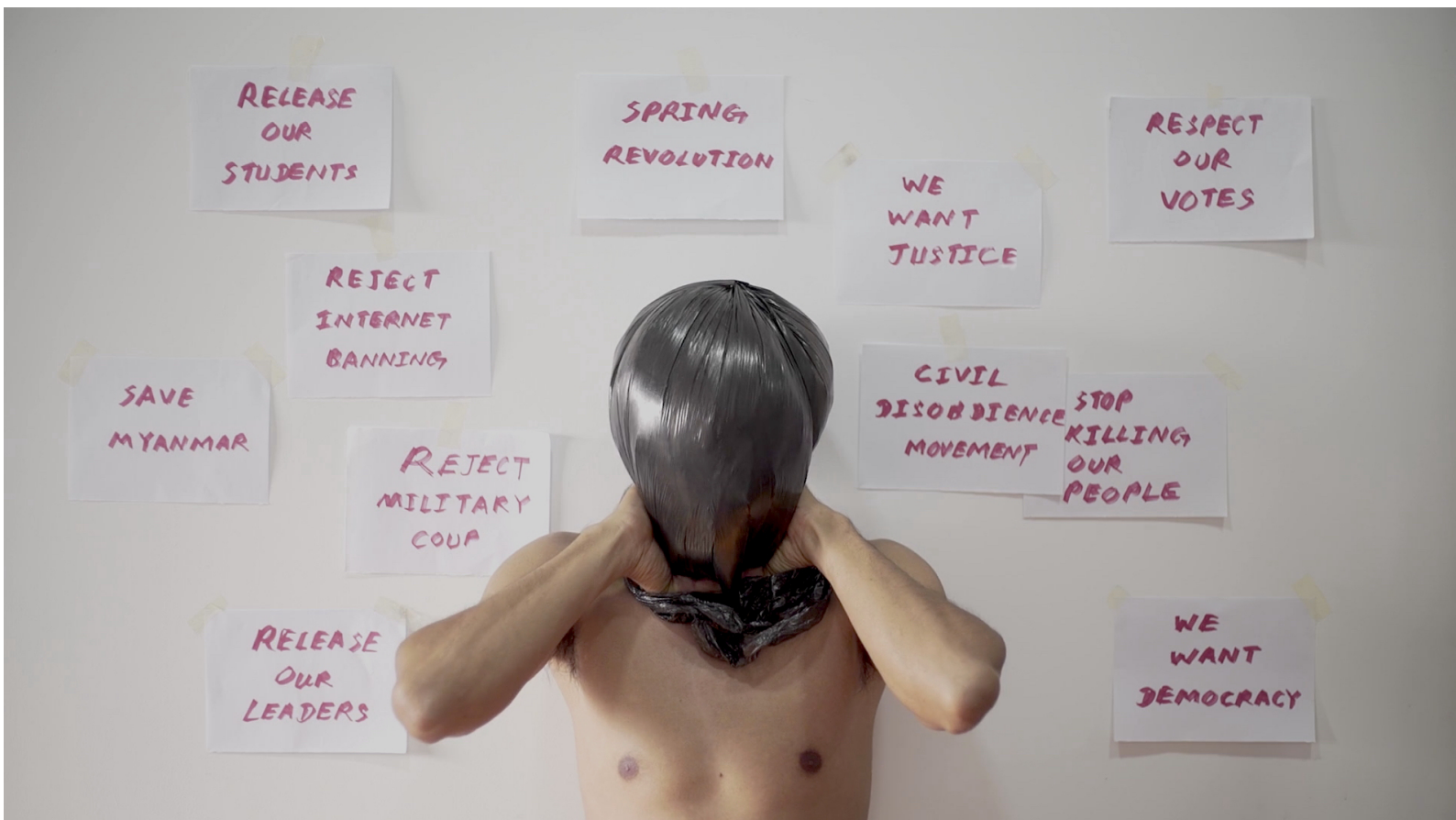


Berlinale Panorama

MYANMAR DIARIES

by the Myanmar Film Collective



70 min, Myanmar/the Netherlands/Norway, 2022.
Burmese with English subtitles. World premiere.

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Hidden from the world's TV cameras, life under Myanmar's junta of terror in the aftermath of last year's military coup has been largely invisible. As an act of creative resistance, the anonymous Myanmar Film Collective composed this feature-length film by blurring reality and fiction, all segments from their first-person perspective, woven together with blood-chilling eye-witness footage in the form of citizen journalism. Berlinale's artistic director Carlo Chatrian highlighted the film in recent interviews as being "very politically relevant."

LONG SYNOPSIS

MYANMAR DIARIES is built up of short films by ten young anonymous Burmese filmmakers, combined with emotionally harrowing citizen journalism documenting the junta's brutality, as well as courageous resistance to it.

The film shows how Myanmar goes from the military coup to nation-wide protests and civil disobedience, to barbaric repression where thousands of peaceful protesters are imprisoned and murdered, to a growing popular armed revolt against this monstrous military junta.

Moving organically back and forth between documentary and fiction, the film offers a seamless flow in which the filmmakers find innovative creative ways to keep their protagonists anonymous.

An extremely urgent film in a time when Myanmar has almost disappeared from the news headlines around the world.

BACKGROUND

Myanmar had long been one of the worst dictatorships in the world, ruled by a brutal military since 1962. In 2012, the military began to loosen its grip on the country, and Myanmar went through a ten-year long fragile democratic transition of expanding civil and political freedom, and an economic boom that this opening brought with it.

All this came to an end on February 1st 2021, when the military took over in a coup. The military had just lost the country's second election since the democratic transition in an overwhelming landslide. It proceeded to arrest the entire democratically elected government, including state counselor Aung San Suu Kyi who is currently on trial. All independent media were closed and the Internet periodically cut off.

Enormous peaceful protests against this repression began, as well as a nation-wide civil disobedience movement (CDM) of strikes and refusal to cooperate or collaborate with the military regime, which continue to this day. The military responded with brutal repression, arresting, torturing and killing thousands of protesters.

And escalating its cruelty to unparalleled barbarism: running over protesters with trucks, burning protesters alive, killing journalists in prison, bombing and burning down entire villages in reprisal for any resistance.

This cruelty has only mobilized a population into an ever-growing popular armed insurgency against the regime.



THE MYANMAR FILM COLLECTIVE (MFC)

In such extraordinary difficult times, a group of young Burmese filmmakers - both men and women - continue their work - as an act of creative resistance against the military regime. The group has chosen to remain anonymous, and calls itself The Myanmar Film Collective (MFC). They remain anonymous for their own safety, for thousands are being arrested and murdered for resisting the military regime, and those in the creative industries are being targeted as well.

After the military coup in early February last year, the filmmakers wrote the following:

This film is a reaction to the “spring-like dream” of freedom in Myanmar that lasted for merely ten years. It is about enthusiasm and hope of a young generation brutally crushed. Perversely, it is a nightmare that the older generations had hoped would never occur in this country again.

The filmmakers in this collective currently living in Myanmar decided to express this confusing, nightmarish time and the state of hopelessness through the medium of film, and weave short documentary and partly fictionalized anonymous hybrid films together.

MYANMAR DIARIES will be the collective expression of the youth born in the '90s and the older generation who have grown up during the military rule. In it, you will see not just the despair, but also the absurdity of the whole situation, the sheer horror of the foolishness of the thirst for power, as well as the never-ending hope that there is still a chance for good in this seemingly hopeless world.

One year later, as the film has its world premiere in February 2022 in Berlinale's Panorama, the MFC shares the following update:

This film is an expression of the pain and suffering our country has suffered since the military coup. It is a cry of injustice. And a demand that the world take notice. Not ignore us. Let the film become the statement that says "No More". Let the film be a voice for the people who have no voice.

We hope MYANMAR DIARIES will be a historical testament to remind us, and warn us and future generations about what must never happen again: that a country's freedom can be taken away from it. We feel it our ethical duty to capture this horror on film. What has happened in Myanmar is not just a threat against the people of Myanmar, but against the principle of democracy and Human Rights in the entire world. If we allow any dictator to act as they want with impunity, it paves the way for the next monster to follow.

THE MFC DOGMA

The MFC decided that all their short films to be included in Myanmar Diaries must be 'first person' storytelling. They are to be hybrid films that blur the boundaries of documentary and fiction. The films are true stories: their own experiences, or experiences of others close to the directors that are filmed in a 'live' setting or through memories and dialogue. Sometimes, scenes are recreated from these experiences. A creative documentary style, with hybrid elements, to enhance freedom of creative storytelling.

This has become necessary because the filmmakers are not able to film openly, outside, on location. It is now so dangerous for journalists and filmmakers in Myanmar that you can be arrested on the street just for carrying a camera, let alone using it.

The most important dogma of the MFC is that all the protagonists in their films are to be anonymous - for their own safety. Thus, their challenge has been to tell emotionally compelling stories without ever showing a face.

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PRODUCTION

Netherlands-based ZINDOC produced MYANMAR DIARIES. Creative producer Corinne van Egeraat and her director partner Petr Lom lived in Myanmar from 2013-2017 teaching film and documentary photography, and making their feature documentary BURMA STORYBOOK.

ZINDOC has produced two other films from Myanmar this year: SAD FILM (12 min.) an anonymous short about living in fear and the impossibility of filmmaking in Myanmar, which premiered in Venice this year; and LETTER TO SAN ZAW HTWAY (25 min.), a collective film about the inspiring Burmese artist/ activist San Zaw Htway and his resistance to dictatorship, directed by Petr Lom which premiered at IDFA recently.

WORLD SALES

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