

ATTENTION ART EDITORS  
For Immediate Release

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## SKIRTING THE ISSUE HTEIN LIN SOLO EXHIBITION



### Exhibition Period

23 January to 9 March, 2019

**12 December 2018** - 10 Chancery Lane Gallery is proud to present acclaimed Burmese artist Htein Lin in his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong. This is a two-part exhibition of works: **Bespoke and Skirting the Issue**. Bespoke is a reflection on Myanmar's current existence, spiritual, political and material. The second part, Skirting the Issue is a collaborative project with Burmese women reflecting on accepted doctrines that lead to gender inequality. The exhibition consists of two parts. The front of the gallery will display a sculptural installation made from wagon wheels and the back room will show a series of paintings on traditional Burmese skirts called Longyi.

### Bespoke

While returning to his home village in Ingapu, Ayeyarwady Division of Myanmar, Htein Lin noticed the accumulation of wagon wheels, formerly used for ox-cart farming or transport, now left abandoned as motorized machinery and vehicles have taken over. Contemplating on the wheel Htein Lin created

Bespoke. Htein Lin explains, “The image of the wheel is important to many cultures. It is often a metaphor for a cycle or repetition. In Ancient Egypt, it was a solar symbol. In Indian religions, including Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, it is linked to Saṃsāra the cycle of rebirth.”

“The dharma wheel (dharmachakra in Sanskrit) is one of the oldest symbols of Buddhism. ‘Turning the dharma wheel’ is a metaphor for the Buddha's teaching of the dharma or the law. The circle, the round shape of the wheel, represents the perfection of the dharma, the Buddha's teaching, the rim represents meditative concentration and mindfulness, which hold practice together, and the hub represents moral discipline. The number of spokes varies.”

As a regular meditator, Htein Lin sees that the wheel is a central symbol for his daily life. However, he also acknowledges that the wheels in our daily lives are changing with industrialisation. He notes, “On return to my village I have seen that ox carts and wooden ploughs were being replaced by scooters and trawlergyis. Spindles are being replaced by imported fabrics and clothes.” Since 2014 Htein Lin has been accumulating these discarded relics of a simpler non-mechanised age from his village: cart-wheels, yokes, cow clappers, spinning wheels. He has incorporated these found objects of old wheels into sculptures to reflect our current existence, spiritual, political and material.

The gallery presents five works of his Bespoke series: Immobilised, Crushed by the Wheels of Industry, Wheel Right, The Wheel and its Shadow.

The work, Immobilised, which comprises six wagon wheels linked together comments on Myanmar's current politics. It is traditional in Myanmar politics to try to mobilise people by calling for unity. But while we may be able to join hands, our diversity can paralyse us illustrated by the inability of the linked wheels able to move. Upon each wheel are a variety of wheel-related quotes from King Lear, nursery rhymes and songs are inscribed on the rim.

Crushed by the Wheels of Industry are two works where the wheels have been deconstructed and their 16 spokes reset until they resemble futile cogs in a machine. The spider-like sculptures are obsolete beings in face of modernisation.

Wheel Right symbolizes the melting clocks in Dali's ‘Persistence of Memory’ which inspired Htein Lin to break a wheel, fold it at a right angle, so that it is permanently braked and broken. This was a hard transformation to achieve and many cuts were wrong and spokes were wasted.

The Wheel and its Shadow represents a karmic cycle of rebirth in Buddhism. Your karma always follows you as the wheel of the cart follows the ox, like your shadow. As one wheel is blackened it wheel creates a karmic shadow for the other.

### **Skirting the Issue**

Htein Lin's latest project explores the concept of ‘hpone’, which means power, glory, or influence. Hpone is accumulated through meritorious deeds in a past life and only achieved by men. Hpone-gyi – meaning ‘big hpone’ - is Burmese for monk.

It is widely believed in Myanmar, by both men and women, that a man's hpone, or masculine power, can be weakened by contact with women's clothing and in particular clothing from the waist down, including the skirt-like longyi (or htamein to give it its precise name as a woman's longyi). It is not unusual for a mother-in-law or sister-in-law to accuse a wife of failing to look after her husband and undermining his strength just because she is washing their clothes together.

These beliefs have been used to political effect. For example, opposition activists used to organize panty protests against the military regime, creating stickers depicting the generals, which could be

stuck into knicker drawers. An National League for Democracy (NLD) activist Chaw Sandi Htun was arrested just before the election in 2015 for commenting on the similarity between the colour of the army uniforms and a green longyi worn by Aung San Suu Kyi, and suggesting that supporters could wear a piece of her longyi as a bandana. (<https://www.mmmtimes.com/opinion/17047-military-skirts-issue-of-powerful-women.html>).

“I have painted on longyis before, when I was in prison, and the white cotton longyi of the prison uniform was the best available canvas. I would persuade departing prisoners to give me their old uniforms, but I only obtained them from the men.”

Htein Lin says, “With this project, I am inviting women to bring me a used longyi, in return for which I give them a new one. I paint a portrait of them on it, and discuss the question of hphone with them. I then invite them to write some thoughts about what this belief means to them, and how it impacts on their daily lives. Some have commented on its impact on where they hang their longyis out to dry. Another told me how she washes her husband’s longyis together with her own when he’s not around, but make a show of doing it separately when he’s there, to reassure him.”

Skirting the Issue began with workers and female friends and family based in the industrial zone in northern Yangon, where my studio is located. But as the word has got out about the project, I have had requests from my female artist friends to participate. With many of them strong feminists, their views may not represent the majority of Myanmar women today, but they may be the voice of tomorrow.

### **About Htein Lin**

Htein Lin is a Burmese artist working in painting, installation and performance, as well as a writer, and has also been a comedian and actor. Born in 1966 in Ingapu, Ayeyarwady Division, he was active in the 1988 student movement at Rangoon University where he studied law. After going underground after the military takeover he was arrested in 1998 and jailed on spurious accusations of opposition activity, he spent almost seven years in jail (1998-2004). During this time he developed his artistic practice, using items available to him like bowls and cigarette lighters in the absence of brushes to make paintings and monoprints on the cotton prison uniform.

Htein Lin pioneered performance art in Burma in 1996 and continued to perform for fellow inmates while in prison. Following his release, his Rangoon street performance ‘Mobile Art Gallery/Mobile Market’ in May 2005 led to 5 more days of interrogation. During the period 2006-2011 he also performed in the UK and Thailand, at the US Library of Congress (2009) and at festivals and events in Finland, France, Philippines, Japan, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. Many of his performances are intended to raise awareness of the political situation in Burma.

Since leaving Burma for the first time in 2006, Htein Lin regularly participates in exhibitions and art festivals globally, as well as events and projects to promote freedom of speech, particularly in Burma. He is a founding member of the Burmese language arts website [www.kaungkin.com](http://www.kaungkin.com) to which he contributes poetry, prose, and artistic criticism. In 2010 curated the first Burmese Arts Festival in London. In recent years he has expanded his practice to include 3D work and video.

Htein Lin practises vipassana meditation for several hours daily, and a major inspiration for his work is Buddhism whose themes, stories and philosophy he incorporates in his art. He moved back to Burma in July 2013, having lived in London from 2006-2013. Since returning, he has taken advantage of the new reform atmosphere to embark on a major documentary and participatory performance piece, A Show of Hands, capturing in plaster the arms of hundreds of Burma’s many thousands of former political prisoners.

Katie de Tilly, Director of 10 Chancery Lane Gallery comments, "Htein Lin's artistic practice is profoundly ingrained with all aspects of today's Myanmar. Having come suffered years in prison, lived in the UK and now coming back to his homeland, his observations are keenly witnessed and brought into his practice with discernment going past mere perceptions."

### **About 10 Chancery Lane Gallery**

10 Chancery Lane Gallery is committed to playing a major role in documenting the development of art within the Asia Pacific region by consistently holding survey exhibitions by country or theme of emerging, mid-career and established artists, talks, forums and publishing books that bring together the individual historical context of the artists with the development of the arts within Asia. The gallery focuses on the Asia- Pacific, however, keeps its eye on international opportunities around the world, bringing international cultural appreciation to Hong Kong.

Representing important artists such as Huang Rui, Wang Keping and Shi Guorui (China), Atul Dodiya (India), Bui Cong Khanh, Tuan Andrew Nguyen and Dinh Q. Lê (Vietnam), and Manit Sriwanichpoom (Thailand), 10 Chancery Lane Gallery is committed to playing a role in documenting the development of Asian art. The gallery has worked with curators Feng Boyi, Beyond the Red Curtain - China, Erin Gleeson, Forever Until Now - Contemporary Art Cambodia, Iola Lenzi, Subjective Truth - Thai Contemporary Art, Zoe Butt and Dinh Q. Lê, Time Ligaments - Vietnam. Katie de Tilly is President Emeritus and one of the founders of the Hong Kong Art Gallery Association.

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