

Myanmar through brothers' eyes

Older sibling Soe Soe depicts diversity in everyday scenes; the younger Khin Zaw Latt captures hopes of street children

Deepika Shetty
Arts Correspondent

Looking at their divergent styles of painting, it is hard to tell that Soe Soe and Khin Zaw Latt are brothers.

In their 14 works at the Street Stories exhibition, Soe Soe evokes the drama and even the romance of rain in abstract pieces that appear like creative observations from a car window, while Khin Zaw Latt captures the hopes and aspirations of the children of their native Myanmar.

Their common ground: Art was something they grew up with and a career in the arts was "natural" for them, the brothers said in an e-mail response from Yangon, where they are based. Their pianist father and dancer mother introduced them to art early.

Elder brother Soe Soe, 49, started painting professionally when he was 18. Over the years, he has made a name for his ability to portray everyday scenes with a restrained use of colour.

He often gets his ideas driving around the city and observing everyday scenes. His intention is neither to "romanticise" nor overly dramatise everyday stories.

From early in his career, he has been fascinated with "the human form". This is seen in works such as the 2012 painting *In The Heavy Rain* and the 2015 piece, *In The Rain, 2*. Both acrylic-on-canvas pieces are deeply layered works that portray people going about their lives even when it pours heavily.

He says: "My objective as an artist is to depict Myanmar and its beauty. My works represent the diversity of my country and the changes of the seasons. My art is not influenced by the situation in Myanmar."

His younger brother, Khin Zaw Latt, 35, on the other hand, captures the hopes and aspirations of his country's street children.

In works with titles such as *Want To Go School*, he portrays children with hopeful eyes held back by circumstances. The tense line between hopes, dreams and reality is often depicted by empty bowls the child holds or the symbolism of a rope holding the child back.

Early in his art career, he received acclaim for his images of Buddha, drawing inspiration from the two



years he spent in a monastery studying English from 2002 to 2004, after he had graduated from the Yangon University of Art and Culture with a fine arts degree.

In 2012, another subject found him while he was on holiday in Mandalay. He recalls that at the time, "something moved me deeply as I watched children begging, selling postcards and shells at Chaungtha Beach. Each of them had such strong, moving stories for not being at school. Their stories made me very sad".

He adds that during the military regime, "the education system was devastated and school was compulsory for only five years".

He started a monochrome series on street faces of the children.



In the Rain 7 (2015, above) by Soe Soe (far left) and *Want To Go School* (right, 2012) by Khin Zaw Latt (left).

PHOTOS: INTERSECTIONS GALLERY

"There was very little colour in their life," he explains.

Since 2012, he has sold several paintings to raise funds for street children. "I feel a serious need to paint them. I hope it can make people take notice of their lives."

Prices for the brothers' works here range from \$2,900 to \$9,000.

deepikas@sph.com.sg



**VIEW IT / STREET STORIES
BY SOE SOE & KHIN ZAW
LATT**

WHERE: Intersections Gallery,
34 Kandahar Street

WHEN: Till Feb 28; 2 to 7pm
(Wednesday to Friday),
1 to 5pm (Saturday and Sunday).
Closed on Monday, Tuesday
and public holiday

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: Call 9128-5260/9798-5611
or go to intersections.com.sg