

# Masking / Unmasking

# 死 သေခြင်းတရားကို ဖုံးကွယ်ခြင်း/ခွါချခြင်း Death

# をマスクする / 仮面を剥がす

Masking/Unmasking Death

Dates: Sunday, May 1 to Tuesday, May 10, 2022. Open all days from 10:00 to 17:00

Venue: Chinretsukan Gallery, The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts

Entrance: Free

Organizers: Graduate School of Global Arts (GA), Tokyo University of the Arts Yoshitaka Mori Lab, Tokyo University of the Arts Global Support Center - Tokyo Geidai Asia Art Initiative (AAI), UPN, Ltd.

Supported by: Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture), Kao Foundation for Arts and Culture

Curator: Haruka Iharada

Artist: Kamizu

Project cooperation: TERASIA

Producers: Yukari Sakata, Maho Watanabe

Informational materials, photographs, and artwork provision: Bullet Holes Country (Yuki Kitazumi, Aung Tun Lin)

Installment: Koji Kato, Jun Kawada, Tomohiro Terada, Makoto Shimura, Nina Bogushevskaya

Artwork production (Tree): Shuichi Hayashi, Tetsujiro Kawauchi

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Website: EVOLNI Co. Ltd.

## What is Masking/Unmasking death?

Kamizu (Artist)

Birth and death are the universal process for all living things. How and when we will be born and we will die cannot be controlled and are unknown to us. What we can control is how we will live between that birth and death. Some people's deaths are honorable, some people's deaths are unknown, some people's deaths are disgusting, and so on. But all are decided by how you live before you die. During their lifetime, people mask themselves with many different faces depending on the time, place, and situation. But when we die, all become unmasked.

This is not just an art exhibition. This exhibition has multiple essences. This is a place to give tribute and honour to all the fallen heroes - Myanmar citizens who gave their lives in the fight for freedom from fear and oppression by the military junta and his Tatmadaw during the revolution starting in February 2021. Their unmasked deaths show how honorable they are and how their lives were before dying.

This is a place for the audience to be able to reflect and think about their own concept of death. You can give some time to unmask your death, to see how it can be. And last but not least, this is a place where we, human beings, can feel the energy of solidarity and the exchange of perceptions about life and death.

## To Overcome Despair

Haruka Iharada (Curator)

"Masking/Unmasking Death" is an exhibition that bridges the challenge of artists' attempts to find hope by creating artworks based on victim's deaths following the violence of the Myanmar coup. It also offers background information on the "Fallen Heroes" who have become the "masks", combined with data and keywords drawn from what I have witnessed. These include images taken by journalists, and the art actions (as protest) of Myanmar artists living in Japan.

As the message by the artist, Kamizu states, "Masking/Unmasking Death" is not "an exhibition of one artist". I think the same way, and I am not approaching "Masking/Unmasking Death" as an exhibition that only aims to show the personal expression of one individual artist. I also hope the exhibition will offer routes towards a deeper understanding of the coup, and provide a way to confront the facts of the coup in Myanmar whilst also making connections with the artist's intentions through her visual practice.

Please read the information on the QR codes attached to each of the masks in the exhibition as much as possible. What connections can we make here, as people in the world of the living, who have witnessed the death of the "Fallen Heroes"? And where can we deliver the wishes of Kamizu that connect them? We hope that the experiences you have in this space, and the confrontation with "death" presented by Kamizu will help you think how we can find hope despite facing a desperate reality. In this text, I would like to share the core motivations for holding this exhibition and my own personal background with Myanmar, which unfortunately, could not be shown in the exhibition space.

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This exhibition emerged out of a project called "TERASIA: Theatre for Traveling in the Age of Isolation" (hereafter abbreviated as "TERASIA") undertaken by the members of UPN (Yukari Sakata and Maho Watanabe), which is also the organizer of this exhibition. "TERASIA" aims to take their 2018 theatrical production "Tera" staged in Japan and create new versions of it with artists from different regions of Asia, where the keywords of the work, "death," Buddhism, and temples, have a significant cultural role. Some artists from Myanmar had joined this project seeking distanced artistic collaboration in the pandemic era, and they had initially planned to create a theater piece. However, during the planning period, the coup d'etat occurred. It led to the idea of holding an exhibition presenting the Myanmar artist's project "Masking/Unmasking Death" in Japan. The creators of "Tera" in Japan, including Sakata, were graduates of Tokyo University of the Arts and my seniors when I was a student there. I was then invited to join in organizing this exhibition. The presence of members of "TERASIA," who are responsible for the management and production necessary to hold the exhibition, is indispensable for establishing a connection with Kamizu and maintaining solidarity through their creative work. Their hopeful desire to cross Asia and their strong will and actions to maintain these connections are reflected in this exhibition.

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My first visit to Myanmar was in 2017. At the time, the Tokyo Olympics were on the horizon, and we were entering an era of "mobility" to such an extent that we could not even imagine the transformation of the world brought about by the coronavirus. Tokyo University of the Arts was also initiating an international exchange program with eight art universities in five ASEAN countries. I was the coordinator of this program, and over the next seven years, I frequently had the opportunity to visit Myanmar through this program. Before the coup, Myanmar was alive with energy. The country has maintained a unique and powerful traditional culture that dates back to the history of the Kingdom of Myanmar in Southeast Asia, and was also experiencing a time when the economy was growing at a breakneck pace against the backdrop of intervention and advancement amidst a globalizing society. The passion and vigor with which the artists living there were engaged in their creative practices had an unforgettable impact on me, even in my encounter with "new culture" as I know it. Then the coronavirus spread and the coup d'etat occurred. I was shocked to see and hear about the tragic situation from my Facebook friends' timelines and messages, but at the same time, I was frustrated by the lack of information distribution, reporting, and discussion in Japan. As for the coup, there is a lot of information online and a lot of willingness to spread the word, but there are no opportunities and few ways to receive this news and connect people who speak out from Myanmar to actual and meaningful "action". What is lacking in our society in the wake of the coup in Myanmar is a place to receive this information and a willingness and way to connect peoples' will and the ideas that are generated and take them further into real action. Time just continues to pass and it is difficult to resolve the situation.

What I learned from the coup d'état in Myanmar was the tremendous despair of not being able to make anything happen. The tyrannical, unlawful violence never ceased despite people just simply demanding freedom and a future. Those who speak out endure and survive in fear of their lives; at times dispossessed of everything. Voices of resistance persist. Or, in silence, wills find their way to be communicated.

Information keeps spreading, calling for further dissemination. To see and overcome recurring despair and to resist injustice in society; what the creative community and people witnessing this despair can and should do is continue creating and sustaining a cultural pathway towards hope. "Masking/Unmasking Death" may be just a small step along this path, but I hope that this action will inspire people to plan projects and put forward more ideas that can take us beyond this despair.

#### Kamizu (Artist)



Kamizu is an artist and art therapist from Myanmar who has pursued a career in visual art for over two decades. Actively involved in numerous domestic and overseas art projects and workshops over that time, she strongly believes that art can bring peace and mindfulness to anyone. Her philosophy is that every human being is an artist from a different perspective; it is just that some do not notice this themselves. She hopes art can be a platform to interact with people and connect them to themselves, to each other, and to nature as part of an emotional journey. Her works are research-based, and extend beyond painting and drawing. Kamizu has presented four solo exhibitions to date in Myanmar, Japan, and Malaysia. In addition, she has participated in numerous international art festivals, art fairs, and artist residencies. Her works have been featured in more than twenty group exhibitions at venues in Myanmar, Austria, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In recent years, she has also founded a space where she facilitates art and expressive healing workshops and programs. Her identity has been concealed for safety since the military coup in Myanmar.

#### Haruka Iharada (Curator)



Born in 1991 in Okinawa, Japan. Doctoral student in the Graduate School of Global Arts, Tokyo University of the Arts and a Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (DC1). Her research focuses on art and cultural activism in Southeast Asia, and she conducts practical research on the art movement in Asia, including Okinawa. She is also active as a curator, coordinating the creation of art, video, film, and other artworks for the same topics. Major projects include: planning and production of the documentary film "CONSTELLATION" (directed by Keijiro Nakamori) (2016); curation of "HOTEL ASIA Unidentified Landscape 2018" (Okinawa, Fukuoka, Chongqing, China, etc., 2019), "Portraits of Ryukyu; Turnover from the models to artists." (Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, 2021), and others.