

Pop Up Art School Exhibition

Interview with Theresa Baw

By Belinda Baker

Belinda Baker interviews Theresa Baw about her role with the 'Pop Up Art School Exhibition' which raised funds for the pro-democracy protesters in Myanmar.

Belinda Baker (BB): *What was your role with the Pop-Up Art School Exhibition?*

Theresa Bay (TB): I started painting acrylic on canvas towards the end of 2017 and would try to paint whenever I had some time. Sometimes, I enrolled in a painting course for a term at an art school called art. est. I discovered that painting brings me joy.

At the beginning of this year, my art teacher, Ashley Frost, decided to hold a painting exhibition for the class that I attended. We called it the 'Pop-Up Art School Exhibition'. We had the option to sell our artworks.

I decided to donate all of the proceeds from the sale of my paintings to the pro-democracy protesters in Myanmar opposing the military takeover. After hearing what I intended to do and about the Myanmar cause, the other seven students also generously agreed to donate their sales to the Myanmar cause.

The Pop Up Art School Exhibition continued for three weeks. During that time, we sold about 23 paintings. The gallery very generously waived its commission, so 100% of the proceeds was donated to the Myanmar cause. In addition, there were many generous donations from compassionate people.



Altogether, we raised \$4,990 from the sale proceeds of the paintings and \$11,730 from donations.

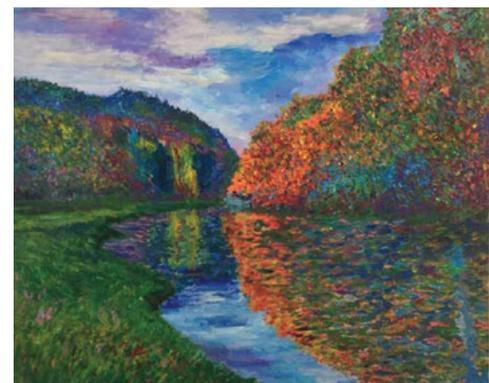
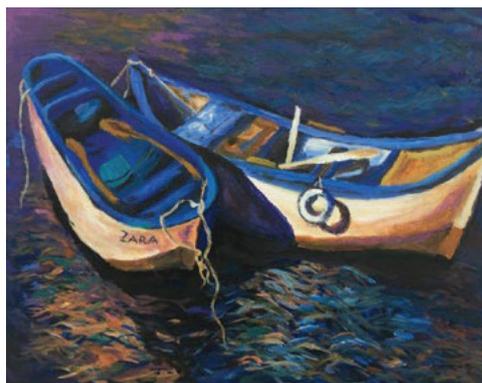
BB: *How and why you become involved?*

TB: In February this year, the military in Myanmar led a coup against the elected government. Many politicians were arrested, and the country went into turmoil. Myanmar, having previously been under a military dictatorship for decades, had recently had a taste of democracy for the last five years. The coup spurred hundreds of thousands of civilians to start protesting against the military. The junta's forces have killed more than 860 people since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Many more civilians have been injured and imprisoned. On one of the bloodiest days, at least 114 people were killed, including many children. One 14 year old girl was singing pro-democracy songs inside her home, when she opened the door

of her house to one of the protestors fleeing from the military crackdown. The girl was instantly shot dead by a soldier.

I was born in Myanmar, but my family came to Australia when I was an infant in the 1970s. My parents originally thought they'd only stay a couple of years and return to Myanmar (in those days it was not so bad). By a pure stroke of luck, they decided to settle in Australia permanently. Things could easily have turned out differently. We are so fortunate in Australia to take democracy, the rule of law and a stable political system for granted. Imagine if all of our freedoms were suddenly eliminated overnight? Imagine if you had to risk your life to keep a fraction of the freedoms that we are so used to? That is what we are currently witnessing in Myanmar.

For me personally it has been difficult to watch the fatalities mount each day, but I also feel astonished by the bravery of the people when they have been called to step up.





The combination of the courage of the people in Myanmar and the fact I am in a position to help them, motivated me to support the cause through the Pop-up Art School Exhibition.

BB: *Can you please tell me more about the situation in Burma and the BCDC?*

TB: The money raised will be donated to the Burmese Community Development Collaboration (BCDC). The BCDC is a voluntary organisation that was set up many years ago by the Burmese Community in Sydney. BCDC has been helping different social welfare causes in Myanmar, including by raising funds from different events, such as food festivals. On almost every weekend, volunteers cook food and sell their delicious cuisine at stalls to raise funds for BCDC. People come out in droves to support these events.

Since the military coup, the current focus of BCDC is to help the protesters by channelling the funds to the civil disobedience movement (CDM). There are plenty of people and their families that have lost their incomes, food and lodgings due to striking and protesting. As an example, those who work on the railroads in Burma often get provided with accommodation. Any of those workers that have undertaken CDM are dismissed from their accommodation and lose their income. One family has accepted 21 such displaced people into their home and property. The funds raised help provide food and running costs for their new lodgings. BCDC is involved in funding makeshift medical clinics for the protestors that are injured by the brutal military during demonstrations. Some of the donations also help support the running of makeshift medical clinics.

In a rare move, the United Nations General Assembly has voted in favour of stopping the flow of arms to Myanmar, amid concerns the country is headed for a civil war. The 193-member council also condemned Myanmar's February 1 military coup and urged the military to immediately stop all violence against peaceful protesters. By the resolution made in mid-June, the UN has also urged the military to respect the results of the November 2020 election and release political detainees, including leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

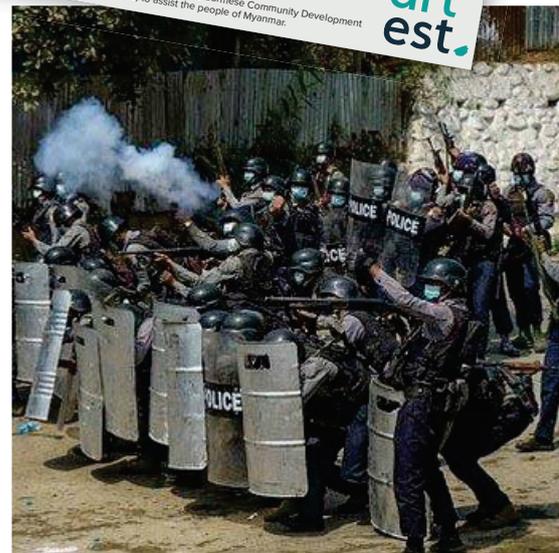
BB: *Will there be another Pop-Up Art School Exhibition?*

TB: There are currently no plans for another Pop-up Art School Exhibition to raise funds for the Myanmar cause. However, the model of holding an art school exhibition for charity will be replicated again. The current exhibition being launched at the end of June is for a charity providing homeless services for women and girls.

BB: *The ways that barristers can be involved/ support generally?*

TB: To make a donation to the BCDC, please contact Win Min Swe on winwah9@gmail.com

People can also support the Myanmar cause by attending rallies, and writing a letter via email to their local MP or to the Australian Foreign Minister about encouraging Australia to impose targeted sanctions on the military regime, their families and close associates. For further details see: <https://www.jamieparkers.org/burma>. **BN**



'With my Own Two Hands' is a regular column in *Bar News*, which looks at ways in which barristers and the judiciary are improving local, regional and international communities 'with their own two hands' (with acknowledgement to the Ben Harper song of the same name). To suggest subjects for future interviews, please email Belinda Baker at bbaker@odpp.nsw.gov.au.