




Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Crystal Globe Competition

သစ်သီးချုံ

Fruit Gathering

a film by AUNG PHYOE

A woman is silhouetted against a dark, misty forest at night. She is holding a glowing, cylindrical lantern in her right hand and a basket of fruit in her left. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees, and the ground is covered in dense foliage. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and serene.

Original Title : သစ်သီးခူး

International Title : **FRUIT GATHERING**

Director : **AUNG PHYOE**

Countries : **MYANMAR - CZECH REPUBLIC - FRANCE**

Production Year : **2026**

Duration : **97 min**

Language : **BURMESE**

Technical Information : **1.33:1 , SOUND 5.1**



CAST

NANDAR MYAT AUNG (SAN KYI)

NANDAR MYINT LWIN (THEINT THEINT OO)

THIDA SOE KHANT (EI EI KHIN)

TIN TIN EI (OHM KYI)

MIN NYO (PHONE SHWE)



SYNOPSIS

In industrial Yangon, young factory worker San Kyi dreams of returning to her native village. Her relationship with co-worker Theint Theint Oo evolves from closeness to growing distance, revealing tensions between their expectations and life prospects. Amid exhausting labour, social repression, and economic uncertainty, both women seek escape and intimacy. San faces family pressure, emotional confusion, and a deep yearning for a life of dignity. The film delicately portrays female friendship and the fragile balance between intimacy, longing for change, and the social realities of contemporary Myanmar.

CREW

DIRECTOR & SCRIPT WRITER: AUNG PHYOE

CINEMATOGRAPHER: THAIDDHI

EDITOR: EMILY SWE

COSTUME DESIGNER: AKARI DIRAKO

SOUND DESIGNER : JAN RICHTER

PRODUCTION DESIGN: MG MOORE PHYU

PRODUCERS: THU THU SHEIN, THAIDDHI

CO-PRODUCER (CZECH REPUBLIC) : VÍT JANEČEK

CO-PRODUCER (FRANCE) : CLAIRE MARQUET



Production

THIRD FLOOR FILM

Co-productions

D1 FILM (Czech Republic)

ART_PRODUCTION (France)

A man with glasses and a white t-shirt is looking intently at a camera monitor. The monitor displays a scene with a person in a green shirt. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the camera's viewfinder and some ambient light from the background.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

AUNG PHYOE is a writer, director, and film editor based in Yangon, Myanmar. He holds a Diploma in Editing from Whistling Woods International. His short film "Cobalt Blue" (2019) premiered at the Pardi di Domani section of the Locarno International Film Festival, while "Evening Clouds" (2022) had its premiere at the Singapore International Film Festival. From 2018 to 2025, he worked with 3-ACT, a collective he co-founded, contributing to the publication of a cinema magazine and organizing workshops and film programs. Alongside his film work, he translates literature and writes short stories in Burmese.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2022 - **EVENING CLOUDS**

(Short, Fiction, 18 mins)

(2022 - Singapore International Film Festival - The Southeast Asian Short Film Competition)

2019 - **COBALT BLUE**

(Short, Fiction, 27 mins)

(2019 - Locarno International Film Festival - Pardi di domani - Concorso Internazionale)

(2019 - Singapore International Film Festival - The Southeast Asian Short Film Competition)

2018 - **SEASONAL RAIN**

(Short, Fiction, 30 mins)

(2018 - Locarno International Film Festival - Open Doors Screenings)



INTERVIEW WITH AUNG PHYOE

The title *Fruit Gathering* carries a certain poetic weight. Does it refer to a specific literary influence, or is it a metaphor for the fragile emotional bonds and "desire" that the characters are trying to harvest in a harsh environment?

Yes, I am aware that it is the title of a poetry collection by Rabindranath Tagore. When I first encountered the Burmese translation of this book, the title reminded me of the time in the upcountry when villagers gather fruit before the monsoon, which is around mid-May. Of course, I later became aware of the metaphors of desire, but when I started writing the script, the title came to mind immediately in a metaphorical way. Later, I merged the physical act of the fruit-gathering season with the character's desire to return to her native home with someone she wants to keep in her life. So, I tried to work the title on both layers—the metaphorical and the literal.

What was the initial image or personal observation that sparked the need to tell this particular story? Was there a specific moment or encounter that made you feel this relationship between San Kyi and Theint had to be captured on film?

It was about 15 years ago, when I returned to Myanmar as a young adult after studying for years in Singapore, that I found myself exploring Yangon as if I were seeing it for the first time. Riding the commuter rail one day, I noticed a solitary young woman crossing the tracks toward a nearby housing complex and was struck by the sadness on her face. I only knew that the location was near the factories. I wondered if she worked there herself, or if she was perhaps bringing a lunchbox to her husband who worked at the factory. Whatever the situation, the sadness and helplessness on her face were remarkable.

This image is not uncommon. Many Burmese people do not look very happy; they are not necessarily depressed, but you can always see a certain burden on their faces. As the train continued through the city's industrial area, I imagined that the woman might be a garment worker toiling in a nearby factory. Over the journey of developing this project, her sadness became intertwined with my own life experiences. In the earliest draft, there were San Kyi and her family, and Theint Theint Oo was at the fringes of the narrative as a co-worker. As I lived my life through the process, the story shifted into the current narrative as I became aware of what San Kyi really longs for. It takes years of lived experience and many drafts.

Fruit Gathering explores a very specific kind of intimacy within a rigid, industrial setting. What motivated you to explore the friction between the "monotony" of labor and the "fluidity" of human desire? Is the factory a character in itself, or a barrier to the protagonists' inner lives?

As I mentioned above, the location where I first found inspiration led me to explore the industrial areas—mainly garment factories where most of the workers are young women. Exploring desire against such a background is something I have rarely witnessed in Myanmar cinema or literature. Perhaps this is because desire is normally seen as a luxury, or something improper to explore within the working class; in literature, I mostly find innocent unrequited love stories or the economic and social struggles of working couples.

I also want to explore queer desire, but most of those stories end up focused on familial and societal restrictions. I felt I had to create a protagonist who is alienated from her family, community, and society in a way where her sexuality is not the primary issue—only then could I access her psychological trauma in depth.



In transitioning from short films to a feature, how did your approach to directing non-actors evolve to maintain that sense of authenticity over a longer narrative arc?

To maintain the audience's attention and prevent them from disconnecting during a two-hour narrative, we need a constant and natural flow of performance from the lead actors. This is very difficult in Myanmar; we don't have a modern theatre tradition, so we often find commercial stars on one hand and non-actors on the other. I conducted the casting over several years. The lead actress had worked with me on a previous short film, and the other main actors are alumni of the National University of Arts and Culture, Yangon, where they were exposed to performance art.

I worked closely with the casting director to discuss which individuals best embodied the characters' traits and characteristics. Once casting was complete, we began a long rehearsal process, practicing the physical movements in the script and the emotional journey of each main character. During this process, we discussed the characters in detail; I took the actors' feedback and adjusted the roles as they inhabited the characters, making them more truthful than I had initially imagined. We worked together to build each character's story through the actors' portrayals.

The relationship between the two protagonists is described as unfolding through "shades of silence" and unspoken desires. As a director, how do you work with your actors to communicate complex internal shifts without relying on heavy dialogue?

I am aware that, as a male filmmaker, making a film about female desire could be problematic. Therefore, I work carefully with my actors so they understand my intentions, ensuring they never feel uncomfortable, exposed, or exploited. I take all their input and feedback and adjust the scenes as much as possible while maintaining my vision. When expressing desire or difficult emotions, I make sure my actors feel that I am part of the process—expressing it along with them—rather than just sitting at the monitor to judge. By building this kind of trust, we can explore their inner lives naturally and without it feeling performative, capturing that vulnerability and those subtle emotional shifts. Working with a female editor also helped me to eliminate the male gaze.

As a filmmaker documenting contemporary life in Myanmar, do you see your role as a detached observer of these social realities, or is the act of filming an intentional effort to preserve the emotional truths of a specific time and place?

I feel every writer (filmmaker who writes their own script) is an observer, an outsider. You have to be one. There is no other way to write or to depict than to be on the outside—to be on the edges, looking in, having perspective, and having distance. But then, when you start creating a story of your own, a part of my own personality and experiences are diffused into those observations to give them life. To reach the emotional truth, your research, your perception, and a part of yourself must all fall into place. It is a very difficult and mysterious process to me, and it is only a subjective feeling that I feel is right. Others may have a different joint of view as well.

The film's atmosphere relies heavily on the passage of time and seasonal shifts. Given that principal photography took place during a continuous summer schedule, how did you and your production team technically and creatively simulate these environmental transitions?

Operating on a limited budget made it impossible to maintain a long-term shooting schedule across different seasons. We had to prepare thoroughly and adjust the script to capture the sense of seasonal changes. In Yangon, summer and winter look identical outwardly, so we differentiate these two seasons through the color palette and the interior texture of the indoor spaces. For the monsoon—which occurs around the midpoint of the film—we created the rain on a small scale using a rain machine and specific interior textures.

How would you describe being an independent filmmaker in Myanmar right now?

In Myanmar, the challenges are very real and often quite heavy; there is a constant sense of uncertainty. Yet, it is that very uncertainty that makes the act of creation feel essential. For me, filmmaking is a process of finding quietness within a lot of noise. I do not claim to have a grand perspective on our situation; instead, I simply try to remain a student of the craft. I believe that even in the most difficult times, there is a profound dignity in observing the mundane.



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Fruit Gathering

written & directed by AUNG PHYOE

a THIRD FLOOR FILM production
a coproduction with D1FILM , ART_PRODUCTION
producers THU THU SHEIN, THAIDDHI
co-producers VÍT JANEČEK , CLAIRE MARQUET

CONTACT

THU THU SHEIN
contact@thirdfloorproduction.com

VÍT JANEČEK
Tel (CZ): +420603164232
info@D1film.com

