

“Malaka” (rather than Melaka or Malacca) throughout the text, a remarkable lapse in a volume devoted to Southeast Asia.

This is a valuable work, drawing on a wide range of mainly Western sources and scholarship, with much data and reference material presented in useful formats. In addition, the ideas presented with respect to the chronology and degree of Chinese control of Southeast Asian commerce over the seventeenth century will engage scholars for years to come.

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Performing Vulnerability: Risking Art and Life in the Burmese Diaspora. By Emily L. Hue. University of Washington Press, 2025. xiii+300 pp.

In the summer of 2025, I visited Bangkok and met up with a performance artist from Hong Kong, who suggested that we stop by the BACC (Bangkok Art and Culture Centre), where a friend of hers was installing her work for an exhibition that was scheduled to open a few days later. There, we met the curators, two displaced Burmese artists—whom I will not name to protect their identities—who explained the nature of the show, which included works by artists from Myanmar, Iran, Russia, Syria, Hong Kong, Tibet and the Uyghur diaspora. Titled “Constellation of Complicity”, according to the curators, it highlighted the shared spirit of resistance against authoritarianism across the world. A few days later, I received an

email from the curators informing me that representatives from the Chinese embassy in Bangkok had asked that the BACC close the exhibition. That night, the curators, who had taken refuge in Thailand since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, once again fled to an undisclosed country.

I mention this story as it illustrates the precarious situation faced by Burmese artists that Emily Hue highlighted in her gripping account of Burmese performance artists in the diaspora. The artists captured in Hue's book have faced similar, and worse, legal confrontations both within Myanmar and abroad. Hue takes care to craft her narrative with compassion and empathy for the artists but is also wise not to limit her analysis to their personal political journeys. The result reveals an aspect of what we have come to take for granted as "global art history" or "diasporic art", which problematizes the liminal spaces in which art and artists find themselves when they leave their country of birth and are expected to, as Hue explains, "perform" their humanitarian condition—that is, put on display their status as political refugees. This is what the author calls being in a state of "elastic vulnerability", or a "constellation of gestures that artists perform onstage and later translate offstage as petitioners of both the US state and the arts and humanitarian industries of human rights" (p. 20).

The book is organized into four chapters, two of which focus on two Burmese artists: Chaw Ei Thein (b. 1969) and Htein Lin (b. 1966). These artists have created works that speak of practising art both under a repressive military regime and in temporary or permanent exile. They illustrate that the trauma endured in their home country is never far from their bodies and, as Hue states, "refugees do not simply 'get over' their past" (p. 148). The first chapter sets the stage for some of the questions that form the core of the book. In using audiences' "global romance" with Aung San Suu Kyi and the burden placed on artists to adequately represent the trauma that their fellow citizens have endured, Hue asks us to consider the distinction between artistic freedom and personal freedom. She asks what shared values arts and humanitarian industries uphold

(p. 14). The second chapter employs the exhibition *No Country*, which took place at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2013, to explore further the idea of borderlessness and the history of land dispossession. Hue asks a poignant question that applies to the ways in which museums treat artists from different parts of the world more generally, and diasporic artists more specifically: “does an artist’s current place of residence really capture the full journey of crossing borders?” (p.110).

The third and fourth chapters offer insight into the lives and works of Chaw Ei Thein and Htein Lin. The author focuses on how they use their bodies to express their condition. The artists also rely on Buddhist concepts of repair, self-negation, self-sacrifice and self-injury. One of Htein Lin’s works featured him enveloped in a monk’s robe, standing on a platform against a projection of the 2008 documentary *Burma VJ*, a film that bore witness to the protests known as the saffron revolution, where monks took to the streets only to be victims of a military crackdown. Hue describes the performance as one of the unravelling of his body (p. 211). She asks, “what is the endgame of unravelling if it potentially ‘ends’ the artist engaging in it? What traces does it leave behind so that others may follow?” (pp. 212–13). That question points to the dilemma that artists who use art as a form of political engagement face, and one she addresses at the start of the book with a description of one of Chaw Ei Thein’s performances that re-enacted acts of torture against political prisoners. Is the work “legible” to audiences both in the United States and Myanmar? In bringing Myanmar to Brooklyn, as she states, who is the intended recipient of the performance? Burmese who have suffered trauma at the hands of the military or Americans who might feel empathy for them?

In June 2012, I witnessed the very same performance that Hue described, but it took place in Chicago at the Defibrillator, a non-profit artist-run space. I was completely absorbed and terrified by her actions, which were so palpably real. At the time, I did not have the vocabulary to explain what I had seen. Hue’s compassionate and compelling book puts it in perspective. Her book offers readers,

scholars and students interested in human rights, Myanmar, global contemporary art and performance art a means of accessing the complex entanglements of persecution, displacement and artistic practice.

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The Politics of Coercion: State and Regime Making in Cambodia.
By Neil Loughlin. Cornell University Press, 2024. 172 pp.

In 2023, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) ran virtually uncontested in national elections for the second term in a row, marking the continuation of the party's four-decade dominance of politics in Cambodia and ushering in a generational transfer of power from long-standing Prime Minister Hun Sen to his son Hun Manet. The extraordinary durability of autocratic rule under Hun Sen and his allies begs the question: how has the CPP managed to maintain cohesion and sustain its dominance amid real contention and opposition?

In this book, Neil Loughlin offers a fresh perspective on the source of the CPP's dominance. Marshalling evidence from an impressive roster of high-level CPP interviewees and a variety of historical and contemporary sources, Loughlin contends that coercion constitutes the "entire architecture of the regime's authority over society" (p. 3). In positioning coercion as the primary explanatory variable in the CPP's four-decade rule, Loughlin pushes back against a substantial literature tracing the party's political success to its aggressive pursuit of vote-buying and clientelistic developmentalism. He further rejects the notion of the CPP as a mass-patronage organization, asserting instead that the party's origins in a period of violent conflict and as an externally imposed political force have rendered the CPP machine uniquely suited not to the delivery of rewards but to repression.