

# Exhibit opening focuses on horrors in Burma

By Goldee Greene  
Staff writer

BEACON—Horrific, ongoing physical and psychological torture against the nation of Burma by the military dictator General Than Shwe, including the house arrest of its iconic, duly elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was discussed on Main Street on Saturday at Mount Beacon Fine Arts' packed opening reception, "Freedom and Art," on Saturday.

Burma, renamed Myanmar by Shwe, has a predominantly Buddhist population of 48 million, and is located in tropical southeast Asia, bounded by China, India, Bangladesh, Laos, Thailand and the Bay of Bengal. It is approximately the size of Texas, and is currently under a communications lockdown as cellphones, internet, and email of its citizens have been shut down. By and large the people have rejected their country's new name.

Recreational tourism is encouraged by the regime, but Burmans are routinely jailed or executed for speaking negatively to travelers from abroad. However, large-scale resistance in the form of protests and clandestine opposition is ongoing in this country once prosperous due to vast rice exports.

Since taking power Shwe has ordered tens of thousands of protesters and bystanders to be shot to death, including elementary school children. Coupled with such natural disaster as last year's Cyclone Nargis with 146,000 fatalities and thousands missing, Burma's economy and quality of life is calamitous.

Joining the groundswell of outrage of people from democratic nations, Saturday's program featured exhibits of the Mirca Art Group. This was founded by Carla Goldberg of Philipstown, comprising 51 local and international artists benefiting Amnesty International through sales



Moderator Stacey Ward Kelly, with panel participants, former Burmese political prisoner Nay Tin Myint, and former Newsweek editor Maura Stephens at Mount Beacon Fine Art's "Freedom & Art" opening reception on Saturday.

--photo by Susanne Moss/Selah Studio

of artwork and a book, "Freedom & Art."

The objective is to free Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi, age 61, from house arrest, and install her as prime minister.

"This event is to increase awareness of what's going on in Burma, and to put the heat on the illegal government that this physical and psychological terrorism will not be tolerated by the rest of the world," said Goldberg.

Dr. Suu Kyi, who studied at Oxford University, handily won the election in 1990, on the National League for Democracy that she co-founded, but was prevented from taking office by the military government.

Under house arrest the prime minister-elect is denied any contact with her

family, friends and political associates. She is allowed to listen to radio, but her television, computer, and even her piano were taken away. Although she could have left the country, she chose to remain until the Burmese people are free. Subsequently, her husband, Michael Aris, a Briton, was denied a visa to visit her before his death. They are the parents of two sons.

A panel discussion was moderated by Beaconite Stacey Ward Kelly of the Beacon Art Salon. Panelists included American Press (AP) photojournalist, Stacie Freudenberg of Chicago, who has followed Burmese refugees fleeing across the border to Thailand.

"The rule of the military junta is that fear is to be respected at all

times, there is a ban on all opposition, and that it can kill at any time for no reason," she said.

"Only high ranking military staff are paid, and boys as young as ten years hold are recruited into the army. Even as we speak monks are jailed, beaten and starved, and women of all ages are under continual sexual attack."

The audience reacted emotionally to Nay Tin Myint, former Burmese political prisoner, co-founder of the NLD, and guard to Dr. Suu Kyi.

"I was a student at Rangoon University at the time and jailed in 1989 because I would not give the names of my associates in the NLD to Than Shwe. The first night I was iron-chained and left hanging. Afterwards I was imprisoned for 15 years, 7 of them in solitary confinement," he said. "I underwent physical torture

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## African-American art exhibit draws crowd

Beacon artist Richard Outlaw and his daughter Symantha pose with one of his paintings, which is currently hanging at the Howland Cultural Center as part of the annual African-American History Month art exhibit.

