Maw Om Aw / Mortar Pot

Site of Documentation
Ban Nayang Tai, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Description

*Mortar Pot* is a creative game played by children living in Ban Nayang Tai, near Luang Prabang. A test of a player's artistic skill, in this game, two participants compete against each other to mould a ‘mortar pot’ from wet earth. The player that can sculpt the most beautiful pot wins.

Who Plays?

The game requires two players and is most suited to both boys and girls aged under 10 years.
Accessories/Equipment

To play the game you need a small pile of earth and a cup of water.

Time and Place

This game requires children to use dry earth, so it is best to avoid the wet season and play outdoors when the weather is fine. The game takes around 10 minutes to play, depending on the skill of the players at sculpting their pots.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

This is a game of artistic skill. The best players are those that are good with their hands and know how to gently mould the wet earth without breaking their pot. It is possible for children to develop these skills over time if they have frequent experience of the game.

Popularity

This game is most popular with children under 10 years of age. Those that consider it their favourite game play it the most, competing with friends almost every week. Older children still enjoy the game, but are only likely to play it once every few months. Played for fun or to imitate the skills of their parents, children tend to learn the game from peers, parents or teachers at school.

History of the Game

Although the origins of the game are not easily traced, the game was played by members of older generations when they were young. The game has not evolved significantly over time and is played today much in the same way as it always was, although these days children play in pairs rather than small groups.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First, each player must fill a small bag with earth and pour a glass of water.
Step 2. Next, players need to pour out the earth onto the ground to form a small mound.
Step 3. Each player needs to make a small, shallow hole in the top of the mound using their elbow.
Step 4. The players should then slowly pour a small amount of water into the hole, and wait for a couple of minutes for it to sink in.
Step 5. Next, the players should carefully move the dry, loose earth from around the hole and edges of the mound to reveal their hardened ‘pot’.
Step 6. Each player scoops their dry earthenware pot from the ground and holds it in their hands. They can use their fingers to gently sculpt the pot into its final shape. It should be round, with thick sides and resemble a mortar pot used to ground spices.
Step 7. The process should take only a few minutes. The player that produces the most beautiful pot, without breaking it, wins the game.

Rules

1. If a player’s pot breaks while they are trying to mould it or when they pick it up, they lose the game.