

MARCH 3, 2013

# LIFE & TIMES

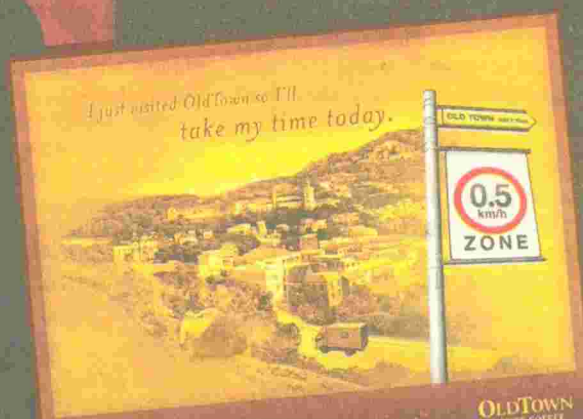
NEW SUNDAY TIMES

BROWSER



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## LIFE&amp;TIMES ART

# You're special!

Photographer Shuhada Hasim captures the inner beauty in every woman. **Aneeta Sundararaj** hears the stories behind the portraits



Shuhada Hasim

YOU look at a faded photograph of your child, remember the day you took the photo years ago, and smile. Then, someone leans over your shoulder, looks at the photo and says, "Oh, it's a bit crooked. Why didn't you make sure the baby was in the centre?" Disappointed, you put the picture away.

"If you know exactly what you want in a frame, you don't have to listen to others because what's in a photo is very subjective," says Shuhada Hasim, 36, a professional photographer.

With an upcoming exhibition at Alliance Francaise Kuala Lumpur to celebrate International Women's Day, this former auditor says: "I've loved cameras and taking photos since I was young. Once I left the corporate world, I took up a course called Executive Diploma in Creative Photography and Digital Imaging. It was then that I became interested in portraits."

At the studio she set up, Neur Maya Photography in Wangsa Maju, Shuhada concentrates on portraits of people she refers to as, "everyday people, doing everyday things".

She elaborates: "Mostly with expatriates, the mother encourages the daughter. When I ask the mother why, she'll say, 'I try to encourage my daughter. She's beautiful, but she doesn't know it'."

With tears in her eyes, Shuhada adds: "I never had that. My mother never said those things to me. I suppose Westerners are more open with their emotions. They have a different kind of relationship with their children."

She reaches into her bag to pull out a pamphlet that showcases some of the photos she's taken before. "Many of the people I photograph don't see

THE Alliance Francaise Kuala Lumpur (AFKL) will be presenting two significant events in conjunction with International Women's Day on March 8: A photography exhibition by Shuhada Hasim titled *The Beautiful Truth* and a fashion show by Balo Association. Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the guest of honour, will officiate the opening of the International Women's Day.

**What** International Women's Day — Photography Exhibition and Fashion Show  
**Where** Alliance Francaise de Kuala Lumpur  
15, Lorong Gurney, KL  
**When** March 8, 7.30 pm

their inner selves. They grow up not knowing who they are. Just when they want to express themselves, the emotion is stopped."

Looking at some of the photos she's taken, she adds: "To get that great photo, feeling beautiful is a must. It's compulsory. If you don't feel good, you won't have the confidence and that inner motivation."

Shuhada then tells the stories behind four of the photos in the exhibition. The first is a photograph of two Japanese women: A 93-year-old artist specialising in oil paints and her 15-year-old granddaughter who's a ballet dancer. Shuhada smiles when she says: "You know, even at that age, with people having to help her with everything, the grandmother had so much fun when her make-up was being done. She showed me that it doesn't matter what your age is or what your health condition is. You can still enjoy your-

self."

When she photographed the granddaughter, Shuhada fulfilled one of her own wishes: "I've always wanted to photograph a ballet dancer. This girl is conscious of how she looks. But, when you see her perform, there's a different kind of energy. You know she wants to dance. From head-to-toe, she's performing, she is connecting with herself."

The next photograph, of three breast cancer survivors, is a subject that's close to Shuhada's heart. "My mother is currently undergoing



Grandmother and granddaughter.



Breast cancer survivors.

treatment for breast cancer. So, when I took these photographs, I was trying to understand what she must be feeling. One of them has had a mastectomy. And I think two are bald."

Taking a deep breath, Shuhada adds: "It's like magic for them when they see themselves. And that's what I try to capture. That moment when they think and feel, 'Look World, I'm still beautiful!'"

The third is a story that surprised Shuhada. "This one is of my make-up artist. I've always thought she was very pretty. Like Katy Perry. Still, she told me that she's always been the kind of girl who never bothered about eating. Then, one day, when she turned 15, she went for a casting and the photographer gave her the photo he took. She saw that she had ballooned. Can you believe she

burnt the photo? In a year, she lost all the weight she gained. But, now, when someone compliments her, it's not easy for her to accept the compliment. Instead, she'll think, 'No, I'm not pretty. I'm still that fat girl!'"

Shaking her head, Shuhada adds: "She's putting her potential down and it surprises me. But, it also makes me think of a story an African American once said to me: 'If I talk to you, I look at your face. Not at how you look.' People, even men, are interested in how you look are probably only interested in sex."

The final photo Shuhada chooses to share is of an Iranian woman. "She's my friend and she's very voluptuous. She had no problem with me photographing her and publishing it on my blog. I wanted to include her in this

exhibition because of her story. She said that in Iran, if you have looks, people will deny you a job. I couldn't understand it at first. Then she said, it's like the dumb blond jokes. People think that if you're beautiful, you can't be brainy as well. She's been on a roller coaster of emotions and it's affected her relationships. She was always seeking people's approval."

As she thumbs through the list of women she's photographed for this exhibition, it's obvious Shuhada is certain of her choice to specialise in digital portraiture. She confirms this when she says that more often than not, while people like to hear stories of others in their family, they have a problem remembering them.

"Portraits," she concludes, "are used to show the younger generation how their ancestors looked."