

LIFE&TIMES **ART**

Arctic quest

Photographer Bonnie Yap captures the magic of the Arctic in her latest photography exhibition, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

DO you know that polar bears never meet penguins? "Polar bears can only be found in the Arctic and penguins in the Antarctic," says freelance photographer Bonnie Yap, 43.

Selected photographs from a trip she made recently to the Arctic are featured in her latest photo exhibition, *Jewel Of The Arctic* in conjunction with the upcoming Earth Hour 2014. Her objective is to raise awareness about global warming and proceeds from the sale of her photographs will go to children in urgent need of financial aid for medical procedures.

"When I was 16," says this Kuala Lumpur native, "I was at a party when someone gave me a compact camera and asked me to take some photos. When the photos were printed, people complained that some of these were slanted and someone called me a lousy photographer. I was upset and I wanted to study photography. But my mother was not for this because she thought I couldn't earn a living with it. It also didn't seem like a job for a woman."

Her brother did a little research and realised it was possible to earn a living as a photographer. They managed to convince their mother and so Yap was all set to pursue her dream. "After Form 5, I went to the Malaysian Institute of Art to study photography. I also worked part time at a camera shop and an advertising company."



Jewel Of The Arctic

Photo exhibition by Bonnie Yap
Where: Ground Floor Lobby, Traders Hotel, Kuala Lumpur City Centre, KL
When: Ends March 31, 2014
Tel: 03-2332 9888



Mama bear and baby bear taking a nap.

Pictures by Bonnie Yap

A MAN'S JOB

Then came an opportunity to work in one of the local papers. "The man who interviewed me wondered if I could do this. You see, it was usually men (and tall men at that) who were hired as photographers then. Even though I'm quite tall, it's still a rough, aggressive job. You need to push your way to get the pictures you want," she says.

In spite of these challenges, Yap considers herself lucky. "Because I was the only girl in the photo room, all the others used to *sayang me*'. There were also benefits. For example, if a resort wanted the paper to write about it and the writer chosen was a woman, they'd want a woman photographer. This way, we could share a room," she says.

Her most memorable experience as a newspaper photographer was being able



A seal poses for the paparazzi.

to photograph the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

"I wanted to capture this moment in history. I told my boss I would pay for this trip myself, but I wanted to apply for the Press Pass under the paper. I put in my application a year in advance and in the end, I was the only photographer from the Malaysian team with a pass to go inside the Convention Centre," she says. "It wasn't about the money. I got to witness something that money couldn't buy."

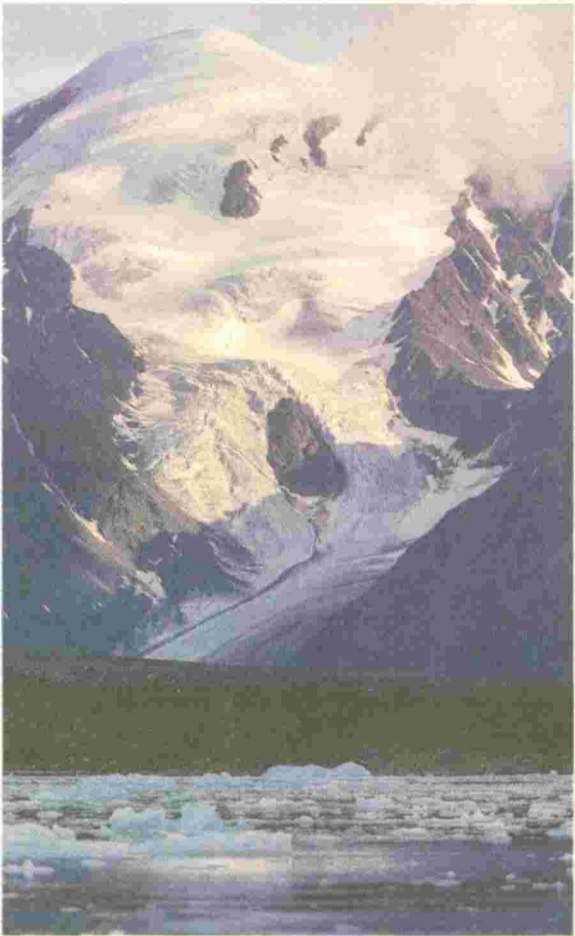
This was certainly the underlying philosophy of her recent trip to the Arctic. "I wanted to see a polar bear. I wanted to see icebergs. Not just mountains. Real icebergs. It was my dream. So, I searched the Internet for information and got into a conversation with the organiser of a photo tour in Australia."

JOURNEY STARTS

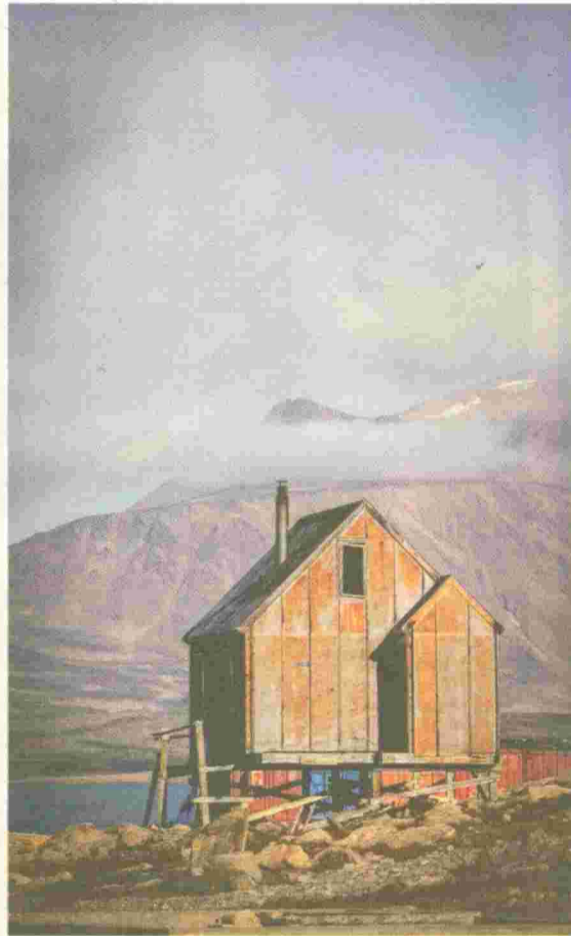
The planning process took more than a year.



Mirror Reflection: Birds having a good time.



Fog and Cloud: Effects of global warming.



A structure at Ittoqqortoormiit Village, Greenland.

Once her plans were secured, Yap embarked on her three-week adventure in early August last year, which would take her to latitude 79°55' North.

"We flew from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok and then to Oslo." Pursing her lips, she adds: "The Norwegians weren't very accommodating. They weren't too concerned about how much your luggage weighed. Here, we're worried about the weight. But there, one can only bring two bags. Doesn't matter if these weigh a tonne each. But only two. I tried to explain things to them, but they didn't want to understand."

Just how many bags did she have with her?

"Five," says Yap promptly. In her defence, though, she quickly adds that these included her laptop, camera equipment, a portable hard drive and many SD cards and her clothes. "I had to carry all this. Each photo I took was a RAW file and each photo was probably 40-50 megabytes," she says.

Yap was a little disappointed that it was "warm" in the Arctic. "It was about 2° Celsius," she says, shaking her head. "This is all because of global warming. I've seen it for myself. It should be colder but when I was there, I could hear the ice breaking all the time."

PERSONAL FAVOURITES

Some of her favourite photographs are of the Arctic Fulmar bird flying at an angle and touching the water with the tip of its wing. "They're playing all the time."

There is one of a fat seal balanced on a rock, looking straight at the camera. "He's posing," says Yap.

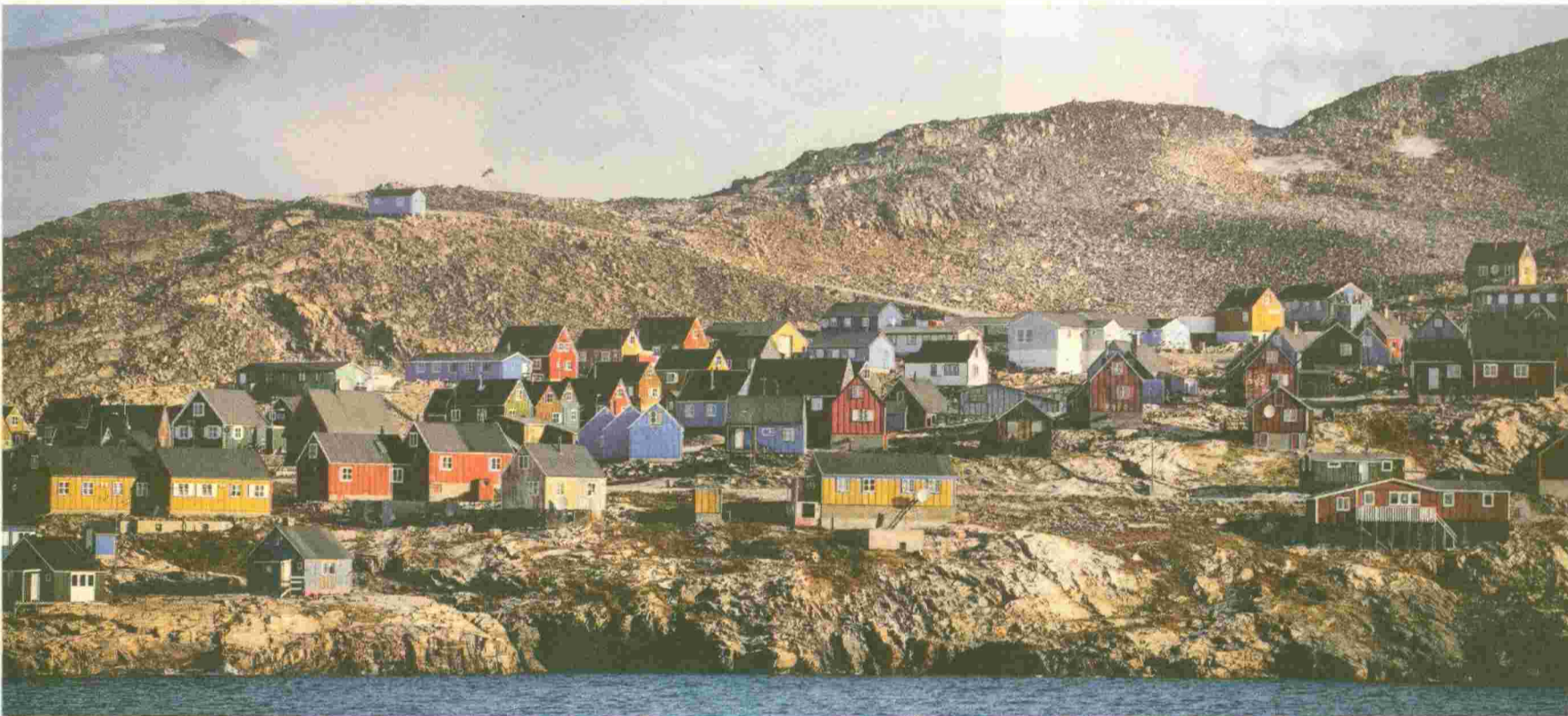
"Look at this one," she says, pointing to a picture of a puffin. "They run on the water before they take off and land." As she enlarges the digital image, I can see that the puffin is carrying its dinner in its beak.

Her masterpiece is a panoramic shot of a bird in flight set against a series of majestic icebergs.

"You know," says Yap animatedly, "I almost drowned. It's part of the culture that before we leave, we have to jump into the sea. When I said I wasn't a good swimmer, they didn't believe me. When you put your hand in ice and it turns numb, you can still take your hand out. When I jumped into the sea, my whole body turned numb and they had to send a rescue boat to pull me out."

Would she do this again?

"Of course. When I go to the Antarctic to see the penguins next year, I will jump into the ocean there as well," she says and pauses before adding: "Maybe this time I will wear a life jacket."



Ittoqqortoormiit settlement in Greenland.

THE A-LIST

COMPILED BY SAMANTHA JOSEPH

19TH RIMBUN DAHAN VISUAL ARTS RESIDENCY EXHIBITION

Where: Rimbun Dahan, KM27 Jalan Kuang, Kuang, Selangor
When: Ends March 30. Saturday to Sunday (10am to 6pm). Monday to Friday (by appointment)
Admission: Free
Contact: www.rimbundahan.org/
 THE arts residency exhibition promises to be interesting. Sabri Idrus, Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro will show the results of their year-long residency, emphasising on structure plays and Lego seals.

THE NEW OLDS: DESIGN BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Where: Lot 341-343, Level 3, Suria KLCC, KL
When: Till March 30
Admission: Free
Contact: www.galeripetronas.com.my
 THE travelling furniture exhibition from Germany features 45 designers and their 60 displays, The New Olds.
 It aims to explore the relationship between tradition and innovation in modern furniture design.

THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING

Where: Wei Ling Contemporary, Ground Floor, The Gardens Mall, KL
When: Till March 31
Admission: Free
Contact: weiling.shaz@gmail.com
 Contemporary artist HH Lim captures moments inspired by the Eastern circle of life.
 The idea that beginnings already have their endings at the very moment they start, has inspired Lim's capturing of the moments where man seeks to find a balance between the opposing poles of life.



Lego seal from the Rimbun Dahan Visual Arts Residency Exhibition.