

LIFE&TIMES **ART**

# Inspired takes

A photographer tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** why he wants to create pictures that educate and inspire

**A**RLES Photography Open Salon and Galerie Huit invited photographers from all over the world to submit their response to the theme Transience last year. The winners were Stefen Chow from Malaysia and H.Y. Lin (Singapore) for their concept, The Poverty Line And The Case Study For China. Their work was recently showcased at China House in George Town, Penang.

Born in Malaysia but brought up in Singapore from a young age, Chow has lived in New York and been based in Beijing for the last three years. Here, he reveals more about himself.



Stefen Chow

**You say that you are "grateful to be a witness through your camera". But, witness to what?**

The range of people, situations and moments that I have seen, simply because I have been behind the camera. My job is to take a picture,

tell a story. At the same time, as an individual, I have found it fulfilling to be able to engage with so many people with interesting personalities and stories.

**The collection of photographs on your website is a mixed bag of landscapes and people. Is this deliberate?**

When I first started, landscapes were what really moved me. Landscapes in extreme cold conditions or heavy industrial spaces excited me. However, as my career evolved, I find myself interacting with people more, and photographing them has also become an equal passion. I would say now variety excites me. I have no particular preference, as long as I find something new to photograph every day.

**As an "accomplished adventurer", what are your more interesting adventures?**

I find myself most inspired and at peace when I am doing an activity that makes use of everything I have as a human being. One of my adventures was training full-time for three years and then reaching the summit of Mount Everest. This was in 2005. It required a tremendous amount of stamina and perseverance, and trying to take pictures took that effort a level up.

In 2010, I did an unsupported and indepen-



TPL Malaysia: The Poverty Line Malaysia. RM4.17. Instant noodles

dent climb on Mount Denali, North America's highest mountain in Alaska.

**What do you take into account when taking a photograph?**

It is important that it feels right when I take a picture. Weather, lighting and other techniques are important factors, but I count the emotion within a picture as the most important. I find myself having a silent conversation with whatever that's in front of me, whether it's a situation, a still landscape or a person. There is an instance when the energy, timing and emotion come together to blend into an image that stays with you. That is of utmost importance to me.

**What is Poverty Line project about?**

It explores the question: "What does it mean

to be poor?" We take the poverty line in each country and use the amount to buy food stuff that represents the choices a person defined as poor can afford in a single day. The amount varies in different countries. In China, it is 3.28 yuan, Australia (A\$7.52), Japan (394 yen) and Malaysia (RM4.17). I am a co-artist in this project, and in charge of the photography. My partner, Lin, is an economist and she is responsible for the calculations and determining the poverty line.

**What do you hope to achieve through your photography?**

I want to create work that educate, inspire... for people to ask questions. My work is still evolving, but I see myself as a vehicle for people to look within themselves. Nothing more.

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**Fee:** RM180  
**Time:** 10am-5pm  
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All workshops are conducted at the: **NIE Training Centre, 31 Jalan Riong, Bangsar, K.L.**

For enquiries/registration, call 03-2056 9692/9615 (9am-6pm, Mon-Fri only) or email: [masturaelias@nstp.com.my](mailto:masturaelias@nstp.com.my) / [nymichael@nstp.com.my](mailto:nymichael@nstp.com.my) or download registration forms from: <http://niexus.nst.com.my/activity/school-holiday-workshop-form.jpg> and fax it to: 03-20567144. Payment to confirm must be made latest 5 days before the programme at: The NIE Unit, Level 2, Anjung Riong, NSTP Balai Berita, 31, Jalan Riong, Bangsar, 59100 Kuala Lumpur. Please do NOT post payment. All cheques, postal/money orders are to be made to: THE NEW STRAITS TIMES PRESS (M) BHD. Please indicate participant's full name, parents' contact number and workshop registered for.