

Training his lens on heartfelt Malaysian stories

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By Grace Chen



Dr Madhu Sudhan (second from right), who runs a street clinic for the homeless, was chosen as one of Loh's subjects in 'A Story of Kuala Lumpur'.

ASK photographer Kenny Loh what he had for breakfast two days before and he probably will not have remember. But ask the 56-year-old about the stories behind the photographs in his *Born In Malaysia* series and he is able to recall things that happened from as far back as five years ago.

Recalling the circumstances that had resulted in the publishing of his series of *Born In Malaysia* photography project books, Loh said his journey into the country's heartland to capture the diversity of Malaysians began after he returned from China in 2009.

Coming home and retracing the trips he used to take with his family, Loh showed these holiday snapshots to friends who suggested he publish his work.

The first series of *Born in Malaysia - A Photographer's Journey* was published in 2013. The work from this collection was featured in five exhibitions. In 2015, Loh published another book featuring a second collection of photographs titled *Seberang Perai - Across the Sea*.

This was published by *The Star* in conjunction with the company's 45th anniversary.

This year, *Born In Malaysia* goes into its second series with *A Story of Kuala Lumpur* which features images of the city's residents at work, play and rest.



Loh restamps his name in 'A Story of Kuala Lumpur' with his exhibition that showcases Malaysia's rich diversity and multicultural depths to the world.

Nostalgic. Heartfelt. Poignant. This is how critics have described Loh's work. His images capture the subtle, drawing the observer into the artist's world. For a fleeting moment, they see, feel and with a bit of imagination, even smell and hear what the artist is experiencing.

For Loh, he does not relish the idea of leaving his audience hanging to draw their own conclusions of the images he has captured. Thus, all his photographs are captioned, detailing the subject's name, location and their quotations.

On how he came into his present accomplishments, Loh revealed that it had everything to do with stepping away from his comfort zone.

A photographer by profession, Loh had ventured into other things midway.

His last position in China before coming home was as the general manager of Mei Xia, a US-founded, non-governmental organisation in Xiamen.

He was in charge of an outfit that built factories in remote areas so that families could be kept intact. Before that, he was designing eyewear in Shenzhen.



A blind woman's loyal visits to an old-world coffeeshop is one of Loh's delightful images featured in the heartwarming series displayed at the exhibition.

"I don't think I'd be able to do just photography non-stop from day one. I'd become very jaded if I did," he said.

Despite his travels and wealth of experience, Loh still gets nervous when it comes to making initial contact with his subjects.

"I'd walk in and out of a shop three or four times before introducing myself," confessed Loh.

But once the ice is broken, Loh can sit for as long as four hours with a subject, as he did with the owner of a rattan basket shop in Jalan Tun Perak, having lunch and sharing life stories.

"I only have a limit of 300 words for every picture's caption. But how do you tell someone, 'Stop talking. You've exceeded your word limit?'" he said.

And because he listens, Loh gets to make a new friend every time he clicks his shutter. That, he said, is his most satisfying work's reward.

A collection of 26 images photographed by Loh will be on exhibition until Sept 16 from 10am to 5pm at the 8 Conlay sales gallery, Bangunan KSK, 32, Jalan Yap Ah Shak, Kuala Lumpur. Loh's exhibition is supported by KSK Land in support of Malaysia's diverse multicultural background.

