

# Magnum to mentor photographers

Renowned photography collective to coach Singapore photographers at photo festival

**Akshita Nanda**

Photographers from renowned photography collective Magnum Photos are mentoring 10 Singaporean shutterbugs in the third edition of the biennial Singapore International Photography Festival.

Magnum Photos cultural and education manager Fiona Rogers says it is the first such partnership in Asia for the collective, though other mentorship programmes have been held in Europe, the United

Kingdom and Australia since 2007.

She says over the telephone from London: "It's no secret that Magnum has a lack of Asian photographers and we wanted to expand the search in the region."

The festival programme, from Oct 5 to Nov 17, includes photography exhibitions and a mobile darkroom at the National Library Board Building to teach enthusiasts to shoot and print. The darkroom will run for two years, moving around the island, such as to Jurong Regional Library in November.

The displays at venues such as Alliance Francaise, the National Library, Singapore Management University Gallery, The Substation and the Art-Science Museum will feature 414 images by 50 photographers from around the world. These were selected from 9,000 pictures submitted during an open call from last November to this April.

Submissions came in from people such as award-winning American photojournalist Justin Maxon and Italy's Carlo Bevilacqua, who is on a mission to document the lives of modern-day hermits.

China's Wang Qing Song, who is known for his large-scale photos of more than 40m in length, will be here from Oct 4 to 11 to give a talk at the Singapore Art Museum. His 42m-long The History Of Monuments will be displayed at the SMU Linkway.

Photographers can sign up for workshops with professionals such as Italy's Andrea Botto, artistic director of the Rapallo Contemporary Photography Show and French curator Alain Jullien.

Festival director Gwen Lee, 36, says: "The festival is really gathering more and more people for the love of photography. Next is to nurture people and provide them a platform to go international."

The Magnum Mentorship programme is a key step in that direction. For this programme, 23 aspiring photographers, including 10 Singaporeans, were selected from 45 applicants around the world.

Three mentors from Magnum then took on eight students each between July and October. Mentors critique work in an online forum and have one-on-one chats on Skype with their students. They will meet in person for a five-day workshop between Oct 9 and 13, ending with a display of the apprentices' work at The Arts House from Oct 14 to 20.

Successful applicants pay \$2,800 each for the course, and travel and accommodation costs, if needed.

The roster initially included Americans Alec Soth, Jim Goldberg and Susan Meiselas, but they were called away on other assignments in mid-July. They were replaced by British photographer Stuart Franklin, who shot the celebrated 1989 picture of a man defying a tank in Tiananmen Square; award-winning British documentary photographer Mark Power; and Danish photographer Jacob Aue Sobol, who is known for intimate black-and-white portraits and is the newest member of Magnum.



The festival will showcase the works of 50 international photographers, such as Buddhist Bug Project (above) by Cambodian Anida Yoeu Ali. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANIDA YOEU ALI

Photographer Andrew Chew, 38, is among the Singaporean participants and had no issues with the replacement. The former film and TV producer, who turned full-time photographer six years ago, says: "As a wannabe starting out six years ago, the people who really inspired me to give this thing a go were the Magnum photographers. When I heard about the festival offering the programme, it was a dream come true, a chance to learn at the feet of these guys."

Initially slated to work with Goldberg, he was even happier to work with Sobol, since he too prefers to shoot in black-and-white.

He adds that he has already learnt much from the Dane, who is pushing him to take intimate portraits of family and strangers rather than capture events at a distance. Chew enjoys documenting social issues with the lens and has had three shows here, most recently Off The Wall, a collection of Australian graffiti at the Cathay Atrium in 2010.

"One of the things Jacob said about my photographs was: 'You know how to create a sense of distance and isolation in your pictures but intimacy and connection is something I don't see'. He turned my world on its head," says Chew.

"But now, taking pictures of my family, cousins and good friends, I've discovered that the camera can really be a tool for creating intimacy. It's been a phenomenal challenge but I'm really happy that he pushed me in this direction."

The festival is a non-profit event organised by local enthusiasts and supported by funding from statutory boards and corporate sponsors. It was first held in 2008 by 2902 Gallery at Old School in Mount Sophia.

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The Singapore International Photography Festival runs from Oct 5 to Nov 17. Go to <http://siph.sg/> for details.