

Scene Stealer -- Moving Images

Get serious about photography.



Despite being one of the most definitive art mediums of our time (think the likes of Andreas Gursky, Cindy Sherman and Wolfgang Tillmans), there has often been debate over the artistic merit of photography. A new photo exhibition, *TransportAsian*, at the Singapore Art Museum might just dispel the notion. Exploring the theme of transport in Asia's burgeoning metropolises, it features a host of talents from the Southeast Asian region, including internationally-acclaimed homegrown photographers John Clang and Francis Ng. We got them to share some insights on their craft.

What makes you reach for the camera?

John Clang: I only reach for the camera when I have something in my head to express. On my usual walks, I don't carry any camera or even a phone. I prefer to observe and experience whatever I see and register it in my head. I feel that when you try to capture the moment, you lose (the experience of) living it.

Francis Ng: Specific thematic concepts and concerns.

What subjects or themes fascinate you most?

JC: I'm always focusing on themes based on the urban environment. I grew up in Singapore and am now living in New York. I prefer to photograph subjects that are closely related to my daily life. Mundane things attract me. I walk a lot in the city and I see many things on a very constant basis ... there's a relationship.

FN: Concepts and notions of space, body and time.

How do you approach a subject or theme?

JC: When something strikes a chord in me. I want a photograph that portrays my just thoughts, helps me understand myself better and gives me new perspectives to see things, and not just a pretty image.

FN: As a metaphor.

What makes a photograph compelling to you?

JC: Natural and sensitive images compel me.

FN: The subliminal qualities and the concepts that drive it.

What do you have to say to people who think that photography is not strictly art?

JC: Well, they probably are very narrow-minded or not exposed to the right photography. Not all paintings and sculptures are necessarily art; some of them are merely crap or craft.

FN: This is a century-old debate. I guess these people have to rethink the world they are living in.

What kind of role do you think photography plays in our image-conscious society, apart from selling or marketing some kind of product or brand?

JC: Good photography, like any other good art, makes you think about your own existence, the beauties and the strangeness around us. It brings your life much closer to the person standing next to you. It can connect.

FN: Like any art form, I see photography as an art medium that has the ability to influence mindsets and challenge one's perception of the world.

Can you elaborate on the work you have done for TransportAsian?

JC: I didn't follow the theme literally. I see it as being an Asian transporting my thoughts and views from New York to Singapore. I made an installation of a telephone booth as my transporter. The viewer will have to step inside this transporter to view my world. Some of my work involves transporting people from one city to another.

FN: Changes in spaces interest me greatly. Where once was a building, there can be a void now. Out of nothing can monuments be constructed. The process of construction, including reconstruction and deconstruction, as well as spaces in transition are some of the recurrent themes that can be found in most of my works, including this one.—Baey Shi Chen

TransportASIAN is on May 30-Aug 11. Singapore Art Museum, 71 Bras Basah Rd., 6332-3222. \$8 (adult); \$4 (children and senior citizens).