

Student photographers document Serangoon Road



Junior college student Jewelle Woo's shot depicts how people cross the road in Little India (above);
PHOTO: JEWELLE WOO

The works of more than 40 student photographers offer rich insights into the hustle and bustle of Serangoon Road

When the green man appears at traffic lights in Little India, many people cross Serangoon Road at any place other than the traffic crossing.

The common sight, which few pay attention to, comes to life in a photograph snapped by junior college student Jewelle Woo.

She and 23 other student photographers captured the hustle and bustle in the area for an ongoing photo exhibition called Documenting: Serangoon Road.

Jewelle, 17, a second-year Victoria Junior College student who got into photography in Secondary 2, is stoked to see five of her pictures displayed in public.

"Every time I went down (to Serangoon), I discovered something new. The area has heritage and a vibrant culture. I hope my pictures embody that."

The exhibition, which emerged from a collaboration between the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the National Youth Achievement Award Young Photographers Network, is on until April 29. It is held in the atrium of The URA Centre in Maxwell Road.

The students, who are from secondary and tertiary schools, answered an open call to take part in the exhibition.

They spent about a year photographing the Serangoon Road area, under the guidance of professional photographers Darren Soh, Bernice Wong, Philipp Aldrup and Chia Aik Beng.

Photographs by the four professional photographers taken in the last few years, and 46 photographs shot by the late shutterbug Lai Chee Weng, who worked for the URA, are also on show at the exhibition.

Mr Soh, a 41-year-old architecture and landscape photographer, says the project shows another side to Little India, beyond clichéd impressions such as how it could be dangerous to venture there on weekends, especially after the 2013 riot that took place in Race Course Road.

He says: "A lot of people treat it as an area where migrant labourers hang out. But there's more to the area than just its labels, which is why we avoided naming the project after Little India. It's rich in many other ways."

The students, equipped with a variety of devices from DSLRs to mobile phones, went on their own to photograph images.

Every two months, they would convene for a critique session with the mentors. There were no restrictions on what the students could photograph.

Institute of Technical Education student Khairul Arifin chose to feature the people who worked and lived there.

One of his pictures on display is a black-and-white image of a long-time tailor, whose sewing machine work station is next to a road.

The 18-year-old, who studies visual communications, says: "I was surprised that people would smile and let me photograph them. They would give me the thumbs-up after I showed them the picture I took."

Mr Soh says it was a good project to work on as the pictures of the young, aspiring lensmen come with "no baggage".

He says of the students: "They have no preconceived notions of what the area should be. They would knock on doors, interview people and take pictures with no reservations. You get a refreshing take on the area."