



The Cinderella Artist

Description



Modest stories, humble beginnings, but a penchant for reaching the extraordinary – these are some qualities present in some of the greatest characters that we have ever come across, in fiction or in real life. The story of Olya is not much different. A young photographer of Ukrainian origin, Olya Morvan got noticed by Raghu Rai last year when she attended a Magnum workshop with him. Among many others who did, her photographs were the only ones to be selected by Rai to be published in the British Journal of Photography. Since then, for her there has been the proverbial no looking back.



Life like images adorning the walls of the dilapidated Old Distillery

“In the beginning it wasn’t about the children,” Olya says when asked about her subject. At first she was into documentary style photography. She just wanted to “show the truth” in an unbiased manner. And then, Kasha, the organizer of the event, told her that she was very good with children, and “that is how the project came alive.”

For Olya this is the second time in India. The first time around was quite a while back, while she was a student in New Delhi, and then she says, she “had nothing to do with photography.” She has been living in Chennai with her husband for the last two years and she will be going to France by the end of this month. She describes her second stay in India as really eye-opening. About the prospect of having a photography exhibition in Chennai she says.



Larger than life photographs of Olya Morvan

All the photographs exhibited were taken within a years' time from places in and around Tamil Nadu, except for the photographs of the Buddhist monks whom she photographed at Ladakh. Christina from France, who was with Olya on her trip to Ladakh said that it was fantastic to see the photographs here. "It was the most beautiful trip I did in Ladakh," remarks Olya about her experience with the Buddhist monks with whom she spent two weeks documenting their lives. Olya admits that it is indeed very exciting to have such a response for one year's worth of work. , "I hope they become more excited about photography and they do more shows."



Olya Morvan – The photographer with her chief attraction of the exhibition

"When I was learning photographs I was learning to see the light."

About her workshop with Raghu Rai, Olya says that she found the veteran photographer to be very honest and hardworking. He was very particular about the kind of work that he wanted which had to be something he had not seen before, and anything that he would not like he would just reject it straightaway. She says that even taking a single good photograph in a day was a big accomplishment.

As a photojournalist, Olya discusses the various problems she has had to face. “Can you get close to the subject? Are you comfortable? You have to be patient.” As a foreigner her status has proved to be both an advantage and a disadvantage from time to time. “The main art,” she says “is to become invisible.” She relates one of her most difficult experiences where she had to convince people for hours to be allowed in the community. She had to spend the night at a slum which she found really terrifying. She elaborated how problems come from both sides – news agencies take advantage of new photographers in the business and new photographers instead of improving their work jump into dangerous situations like the war ridden land of Syria. For her photojournalism means as much information as possible, but with that the emotions are also important. “Taking the photo of an event – seeing good composition, good characters, proper relationship... and it comes from the heart... you don’t have to go and speak.”

“It’s not just in India but in many countries it’s harder to be a woman photographer,” says Olya. She has encountered troubles in other countries as well as India as a woman photojournalist. For instance, not being able to find a public toilet for women for more than 12 hours on a shoot is one of them. A photographer’s job is to meet people and it’s harder with such prejudices up and about, Olya feels.

Olya who will be leaving India after a two year stay says that she found India very photogenic. “There is always something happening. In Tamil Nadu you have hundreds of festivals, if you are not interested in festivals, we have so rich life, different communities. You don’t like topic of religion, maybe fishermen, if you don’t like fishermen, maybe environment. I think photography wise it is a country of opportunities. So... good luck!”

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