

Exhibition aimed at breaking moulds

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Untitled, Asanka Dharshana

45 photographers aim to break the stereotype of representing women in media.

Words Mamduh Waheed

Designed to provide photographers in Sri Lanka a platform to present images that 'go beyond the traditional, objectified and stereotypical portrayal of women common in mainstream media,' Women - Out of the Frame is a photography exhibition featuring the works of 45 photographers that include professionals, amateurs, students and enthusiasts.

Conceived by Menika van der Poorten, herself an accomplished photographer with a practice spanning several years, the exhibition will be held from July 5-10, 2013 at the Lionel Wendt Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka. "I thought it may be interesting to start a debate on the myriad ways in which an image is conceptualised, interpreted and read," explained Menika, on the initial motivation for the project. "I was also keen to see how photographers and enthusiasts would respond to the theme across the Island.

The exhibition will be accompanied by workshops and presentations for participants and enthusiasts. A total of 80 photographs from 45 photographers, both men and women, will be exhibited. The photos that will be exhibited were selected from over 500 entries sent in by 80 photographers based throughout the Island including in Hambantota, Kurunegala, Kandy, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa as well as several entrants from the Colombo area.

Initially the organisers put out an open call for submissions through advertisements and a network of contacts spread across Sri Lanka. After extending the initial deadline of two months, the 500 photographs sent in by participants were selected by Menika van der Poortan, Pradeep Chandrasisi, a fine artist primarily working with the Theertha Artist Collective, and Sunila Galappatti, a photographer with a background in theatre.

According to the organisers, one of the objectives of the project was to reach out to photographers countrywide, particularly those who, due to the war, had limited access to cultural exchange projects.

The organisers have also expressed the view that in a country emerging from a thirty-year conflict, visual media is pivotal in shaping opinions and perceptions. Hence, 'Women - Out of the Frame' aims to challenge stereotypical views of women in Sri Lanka.

A catalogue will be published documenting the project and a special website will be launched to coincide with the opening of the exhibition.

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