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The Next Generation

What do changing rules mean for Hong Kong's journalism students?



RTHK: Could the public broadcaster lose its independence? pg. 18

How to make Twitter work for you amid information overload, pg. 22

Asia's press clubs flex new muscles during Covid-19, pg. 26

Track of Time

Patrick Dransfield's black-and-white photography series depicts a bygone era in China.

Held at the FCC in October 2020, the “Track of Time” photography exhibit almost didn’t happen. Lawyer and FCC member Patrick Dransfield took this series of black-and-white images during the summer of 1986, when he was working as a teacher in Beijing. For decades, the photo negatives lay forgotten in a plastic bag in his Hong Kong apartment.

Dransfield stumbled upon the negatives while cleaning. “I immediately realised that this was a treasure trove of memories and a time capsule of a Beijing which couldn’t feel more far away today,” he says.

Shot with a 1960s Shanghai-

manufactured Seagull, the images provide a peek into a bygone era. “I spent three months taking pictures, cycling daily through Beijing on a 30-kilometre route,” he recalls. “I would pass the Forbidden City, Lama Temple, hutongs and the diplomatic quarter, where I also earned some extra cash as a researcher for *Newsweek*. Along the way, I would stop, shoot, then start off again.”

Dransfield’s meandering, documentarist style resulted in natural, unstaged photos that depict camaraderie, labour, curiosity, pride and humour in the face of staggering poverty. He also shot images on a short trip to Datong, famous for

its 5th- and 6th-century Yungang Buddhist caves.

“Those scenes spoke to me of a certain innocence, obliviousness even – of a country that was just beginning to reopen, and that for many years had tried to discard its past,” Dransfield says. “Everyone showed me immense generosity in giving me their time. That’s what has stayed with me all these years.”

As part of the “Track of Time” exhibit, Dransfield raised HK\$10,000 for the Children’s Cancer Therapy Development Institute. His book, “Track of Time: Moments of Transition”, is available here: bit.ly/2LjBrzz



PHOTOS: PATRICK DRANSFIELD