

Photos by Rammy Narula.  
Below: 'Morning News' and  
'Umbrella' from 'Life is an Act'  
series.

# A Narrative of His Own

Rammy Narula gets candid about his  
passionate hobby and his fascination with  
faces. *By Reena Karim*

Rammy is not the kind of guy you will find on the streets of Bangkok with his Leica strapped to his wrists. After his first series of photographs on Hua Lamphong station which took two years in the making, he is no longer impressed by cityscapes. In fact you will rarely see him taking photos here. When travelling abroad though, he makes sure to pack in as many hours of photography as possible, sometimes to the point of exhaustion and a torn ligament.

Rammy found photography when he was at his lowest ebb; encouraged by his brother, he picked up a camera four years ago and has never put it down. He developed the necessary skills for serious photography through workshops and well, just going out there. He is also a part of a collective of 11 photographers who form the APF (Art Photo Feature) group; together they mentor budding photographers and hold workshops.

The 33-year old photographer is entirely self taught and, while accepting he has a knack for fine art, is also deeply critical of his own work, often times fretting over moments he missed capturing.

We catch up with him just days before his latest exhibition 'Life is an Act' held at Exhibit Cafe last month.

## Tell us a bit about your style of photography.

This is my second series; my first was on the Hua Lamphong train station in 2013. I started shooting at the train station because I love doing portraits

of everyday people. I wouldn't call my pictures street photography; I would say they are candid street portraits, because these are still portraits, I don't ask people to pose. It revolves around showing people in their environment and how they exist in that space. There are certain elements that speak to me. I started taking portraits because I was very drawn to emotions.

## How comfortable are you getting so close to a person?

Extremely! I have dealt with this very early on; the fear of not being sure whether I could take a picture or not, whether they are going to say 'no.' I had an incident once where a person came up to me and asked to see the photo I had just taken of him. He saw the picture, said it was nice and just walked off. I think as long as they are not caught in a compromising spot, they are OK. I don't shoot offensive pictures or exploit people. I am just a guy on the street and I am just taking pictures of the situation. They are environmental portraits. I am not showing them in a bad light, if anything, they are being incorporated in art.

## Do you have any favourites in this series?

I get to travel because of my work and in my free time, I hit the streets. These 19 photos are some of the best moments I have captured in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Paris, Bangkok, and

London. There's one called 'Morning News', it sets a tone for this whole 'Life is an Act' exhibition. I feel like life really is an act. The girl on the paper is just posing, while the guy reading it is not really reading it, he was looking somewhere else. He wasn't in that moment; he was lost. That is probably my most favourite picture. I felt it was me. I am not where I am supposed to be, my mind is always somewhere else.

## How has your photography style and method evolved over time?

It has changed a lot. I never used to take colour pictures and now I do. I am taking pictures that are more composed than emotional. For instance, when I was doing my first series, I was taking pictures of people's faces. They were close ups that were just telling their facial story, their emotions. So I stepped back and started including the environment with the people, it helps [set] the mood of the [shot]. It helps me explain even better what I am saying without using words. For me it's a narrative on its own. I am also drawn to lines, patterns, shapes [just] as much as I like [details] of faces and hands. I love people's hands and the way they're placed. I also like the side profile of people, I am always curious about what I don't see.

## When you are out shooting—how much of it is instinctual versus planned?

I never plan. I don't know what I will

get today. I don't go out thinking that I will get a picture of a guy in an umbrella today (referring to one of his pictures). I just look for things that catch my eye. As soon as it does, I take the photo.

## How does black-and-white versus colour play into your work? Do you think they are totally separate or complementary?

I don't purposely separate them. When I started taking pictures I thought black-and-white (b/w) was cool because everyone takes pictures in colours. Then I realised that taking colour pictures were actually more difficult because when you are shooting colours you have more elements for your composition. In b/w you are only playing with grey tones. When you do colours, you have to make sure the colours on the scene go well together and don't disturb the subject. So I started learning colour theory, what goes well together, hot and cold colours etc.

## Do you take photos for yourself or for others?

For myself, so far. I have started taking pictures for others, such as family portraits. This is embarrassing, but a lot of family and friends come up to me and say, 'Rammy you are a really good photographer, can you take my picture?' And I am like, I am sorry but I only take street pictures. I don't know how to take [posed] pictures to make people look good.

## What do you want your viewers to take away from your work?

I have been thinking a lot about this. I want people to realise that everyone can have a voice and in order to express yourself, you don't need to be a good talker. There are ways to communicate. For me life is just an act because every moment that I look at, it's a scene of something I can relate to it. All the words that I use to describe the photos are at one time or another, things that I felt. I believe we all have roles in our lives that we play to be a part of our environment or part of where we are. They all try to say something to me. I hope they speak to the audience too.

