



“In-Conversation”

May 2009

Featuring

Chua Swee Ping
Award winning Photographer
Fellow of PhotoVivo (FPVS)

Interview conducted by

PhotoVivo.com

ABOUT CHUA SWEE PING

Born in 1947 in Cheng Hai, Guangdong, China, he migrated to Singapore in 1957. Mr Chua has won many awards in international awards and regularly being appointed to the judging panel of many international photography competitions. He is also the photography mentor of Steven Yee.

Mr Chua is well known for his bath relief works in the old film days. Today, he has switched to digital photography. He is also a Fellow of Photovivo Singapore (FPVS).

Getting Started

“I started taking up photography in 1967 during my school days. A few classmates are interested and we form a photography club. The school provided us with much support, provided us with film, processing fees as well as some remunerations from the principal when we covered school events. We were self taught, and often involve in group discussions. We experimented in the darkroom on our own based on what we read. There are not many photography classes around those days, hence the learning journey is tough.”

“In 1973, I joined a photographic club. By then, I was working as a lab technician in Catholic School. I helped formed the school’s photographic club.”

Favourite topic/specialization in photography

“I like to shoot different types of subject. My specialization is in wet darkroom technique using colour slides, especially Bath Relief using Diazochrome. In the early days, we do not have Photoshop software to do enhancement to create visually powerful images. Darkroom techniques allowed me to create visually powerful images with what I have shot. Today, I am using Photoshop and it can give me similar and better results, without the need to endure the hours spent in the darkroom and less failure.”

Preparing for each photography competition

“One has to understand the art of competition, be it local or international competition. Know what the organisers want. Try to look at the previous winners’ works. Try to find out who the judges are if you can, as it help you to understand

their style. Try to be different, and submit something that judges in other countries hardly see. It is good to give the judges some element of good surprises. Know the country's culture. If you submit for colour, make sure the colours are good. If you submit B/W, make sure that the tone is good and clear."

Equipment for the photography shoot

"In the beginning, zoom lenses are not popular. Fixed lens like 50mm and 135mm are what I have. I do not have good lenses and I make do with what I have. These lenses have won me many prizes.

Now, I have the flexibility of zoom lenses like the 18-200mm VR, which gave me much convenience."

What do you want people to see in your photograph that make your pictures different from others?

"When we take a photo, we conceptualise the scene with an object. People who knows photography well knows how to spot a subject. It is not just taking snap shots. Photography can be subjective. Some like my pictures, some don't. Fundamentals is still important.

I like to shoot people at work, candid shots, playing with patterns. With effort, in the darkroom, an image can be enhanced, be it burning, dodging etc. People today have the luxury of Photoshop, which made photo enhancing easy. Darkroom technique helps to make the picture more perfect. In the past, we use wet darkroom. Today, it is electronic darkroom. The darkroom fundamentals are very much the same."

Most interesting experience during the photo shoot

"When I was at my peak, I take photograph almost every week. There are occasions I revisited a location more than 10 times in a month, yet everytime, I see something different. Here, I appreciated that things keep changing. It is good to explore a place more in-depth."

It is quite sad to see some people who said "I have been there before, why go again."

Getting inspiration

"I get my inspiration "at that point in time" when I go shooting. If we are talking about getting inspiration for photo competition, I will look at past winners' works and seek some inspiration. Know yourself, know your enemy, a hundred battle won. Know what the organisers and judges want, their culture. No point submitting something that you know they will not like."

Which quotation inspired you most?

"If you take so many photographs, yet you refuse to exhibit or show people or join competition, you will not improve." I have heard many people telling me that they take pictures for themselves to enjoy. As long as they enjoy it, they like it, it is OK. But if they are not keen to improve, it is likely that they will give up photography in no time. It is good for one to set their objective.

"Who knows, you can probably earn money from photography one day? Probably this is one of the better motivating factor today."

How does photography enrich your life?

“Photography helps me to cultivate my mind and make my temper less fury. It certainly builds a lot of patience in myself. Patience is one of the most important factors when it comes to taking good photography. Photography also allows me to appreciate failure better. Sometimes, it will take me several visits to capture the right subjects. In the old wet darkroom days, it is not hard to make a slight mistake to have the whole picture ruined.”

What would you say is the new challenge for photography as a whole?

“Up till today, photography in Singapore still does not achieve the same level or status as other visual art forms like painting, calligraphy etc. It is very hard to find local photographers’ works being sold at a price comparable as those of the artists of the various art forms. It takes time for people to appreciate picture collecting as art collection.”

As an advice to beginners, how can they improve in their path in photography?

“Send your works for exhibition, distinction judging and competition. Going for Distinction titles like Associateship or Fellowship will help one to improve, as you will push yourself harder to take more pictures and improve on them. You will find yourself a different person and looking at things differently. You appreciate life better. The criteria for the Associateship and especially Fellowship, requires you to have in depth knowledge of some particular subject which is also likely to be one’s specialization.”

Selected Works















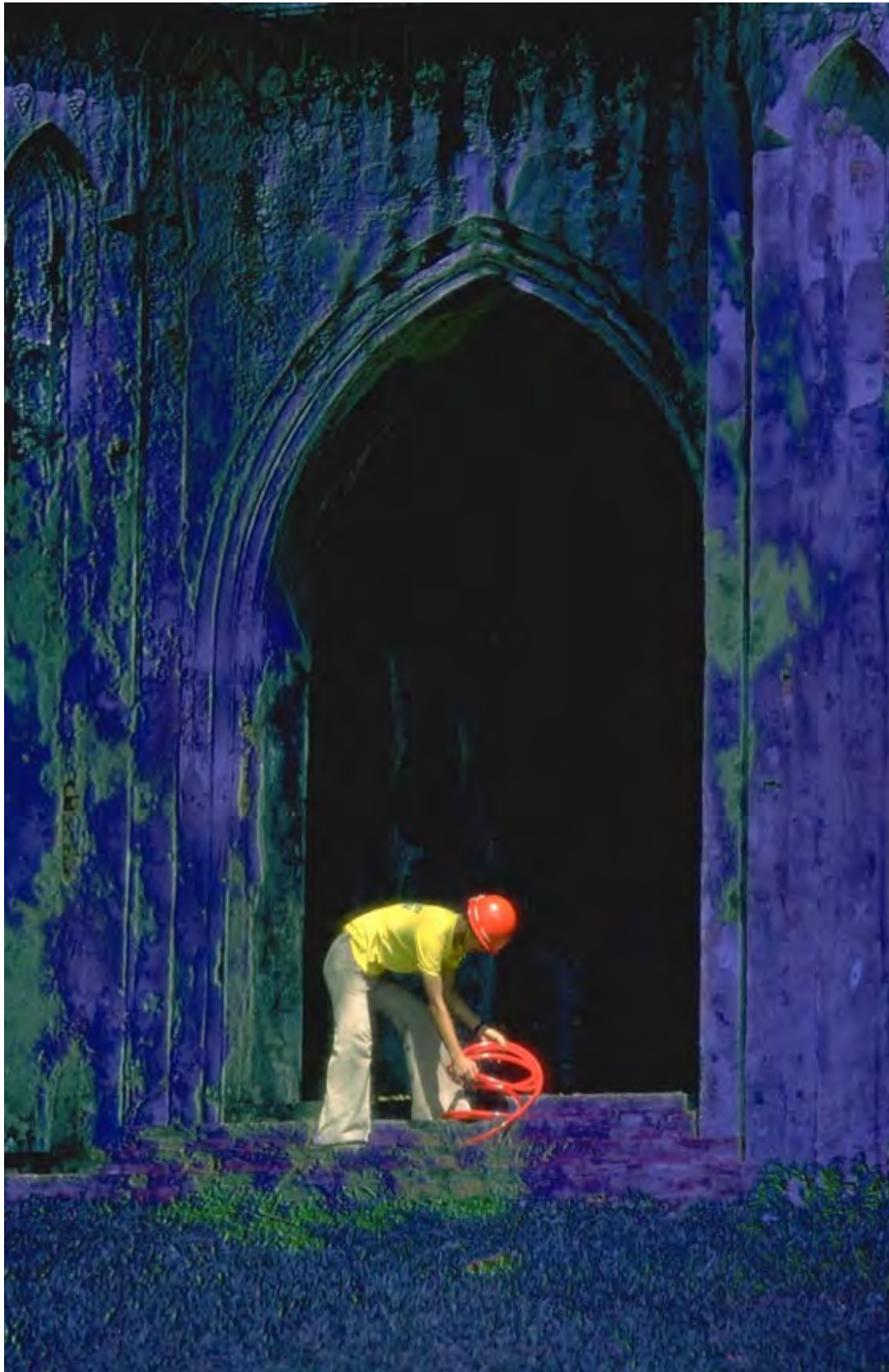














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