

# "A Hidden Sense" Photography Exhibition

Foundation for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions (FDDM) and The Arts Council of Mongolia (ACM) organized the third edition of the SMART programme in Valais and Ulaanbaatar. The goal of the program is to expand Mongolian and international artists' collaborations while building their artistic capacity and raising awareness of the challenges facing mountain regions through photography art.

In this year's program, photographer Byamba B. was selected for the residency of three months in Valais, Switzerland, to collaborate with international artists, to take photographs of nature, society, and people, and to work with curator Alfio Tommasini.

As a part of the third edition of the SMART residency programme, photographer Byamba B. presented his first exhibition, A Hidden Sense, between November 11-25, 2022 at Red Ger Creative Space.

Byamba Batkhuyag is a freelance photographer based in Ulaanbaatar. He mainly focuses on portrait and street photography. Most of his works captured everyday scenery of the Ger Districts which is the suburban area where he has lived for 16 years. His last project "The Door Monologue" was about the unique and beautiful doors located in the Ger Districts and he portrayed the residents through their doors. He did photography residency in

Switzerland, Poschiavo city with FDDM, SMART programme, Riverbero and Arts of Council of Mongolia collaborated also who exhibited his first exhibition which is "A Hidden Sense".

## A Hidden Sense

Byamba Batkhuyag, like many people of nomadic origin in Mongolia, lives in the chaotic suburbs of the big city of Ulan Bator. However, he retains vivid memories of his childhood summers spent on the steppes with his shepherd grandparents, where he learned to ride Zagal Tsagaan horses at the age of four. He will never forget those days on the grasslands, the fresh, wholesome food, the interaction with the five sacred animals: 'cows-goats-sheep-camels-horses'.

He grew up in the city, dreaming of being a pilot and travelling. Encouraged by his parents and without being too convinced, he enrolled in university and graduated as a mining engineer. When the time comes to put his studies into practice, he soon realizes the enormous lack of sustainability in that sector. He suffers when he sees large mining companies in action, violently erasing the traces of past life on his land. He understands that such operations are one of the reasons for the constant exodus of his people, who from the free and endless expanses of the steppe find

themselves stranded in the vast but bounded town, unable to keep alive a culture carried on for millennia. So he decided to make a change in his life and with the desire to communicate his feelings through images, he became a photographer. In his first projects, he chronicles the lives of the last nomads and his roots. Here he becomes aware of the importance of the elements, of their inseparable connection to the greatness of nature, which reminds us that: "we are as small and fragile as blades of grass".

Byamba, who believes in the communicative power of photography, wishes to meet those who practice sustainable agriculture in other places in the world. He hopes that one day some of his family members will be able to return to the fields, taking inspiration from their own past bases but also from other realities equipped with more advanced means and technologies. Somewhat by chance or perhaps by destiny, he discovers the Sustainable Mountain Art project.

He decided to apply for an artistic residency. Thus, at the age of 30, he has the opportunity to travel in Europe away from home for the first time. After a short stop at Zurich airport, we travel together through Graubünden. Looking at the Morteratsch glacier, he stops to contemplate, stating that we are a constantly changing whole; 'even our bones will



one day be stones sliding down the valley from the mountain peaks'. At the end of a long journey that began in North Central Asia, he arrives in Poschiavo, the first village he discovered on a continent new to him. Here he will reside for the following three months and open a personal photo exhibition.. Byamba wants to make the most of this initiatory encounter with the Alpine cultures and immediately establishes relations with the inhabitants of the region. Through the empathy he feels with the farmers, he is able to communicate and so language barriers also fall away easily.

He photographs people facing present and returning challenges from the past. He accompanies shepherds who protect their flocks to allow them to coexist with the wolf and farmers who seek solutions to the water shortage we are experiencing today.

In his poetic images taken in the Poschiavo valley, we meet cattle breeders and herb and fruit growers. People

linked to their land who value every gift of it, such as those small fruits or flowers that are transformed into food or medicine. He discovers a new world, but also realizes that the profound knowledge of the elements of those dedicated to a type of agriculture that respects biodiversity is universal. He introduces us to people who are closely connected to the landscape, who melt into its enveloping light. He believes that in addition to sight-taste-smell-hearing-touching, the farmer and the shepherd possess another mysterious sense, perhaps hidden in the genes, between heart and head.

A creative intuition that could explain the perseverance that still persists today in coping with activities that require unforeseen events, sacrifices and hard work, but which can once again lead to that feeling of independence and freedom, lost by some and dreamt of by all.

Alfio Tommasini, curator of the exhibition, Poschiavo, July 2022

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