

The memories will remain

The Print Room, an independent studio specialising in film photography, says goodbye with its last and biggest exhibition.

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AFTER eight years of film photography classes and exhibitions, The Print Room bids us adieu with its final exhibition *Fin* at its leafy studio and gallery space in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. It is a bittersweet farewell but also, at the same time, a celebration of a journey.

Fin features over 100 images from 21 photographers, a combination of selected work from past exhibitions, with some previously unseen works included.

"From the eight years we have been around, we tried to cover most genres of photography, so you can expect a little of everything, from documentary photography to still-life, street to abstract. This is definitely the largest and most ambitious exhibition we have done. It is a shame that it is also the last," says British photographer Paul Gadd, The Print Room founder and director.

In his estimation, The Print Room has had a good run, and certainly a longer one than anyone would have expected.

When he opened the space in 2011, Gadd was thinking a three year lifespan, tops. It was also a time when digital photography in South-East Asia seemed to overshadow traditional analogue photography and The Print Room was never meant to have lasted as long as this, he says.

"My background in photography was before the rise of digital, and I thought it was quite sad that analogue was getting lost.

"Even if you want to shoot in digital, I always say to my students: First learn how to shoot with film. Learn the processes of traditional photography. Learn how to print.

"This will make you respect the art of photography. It will teach you to think before you shoot, as well as frame and expose the shot properly," he says.

What he did not expect with The Print Room was the small family of photographers it brought together.

"I say 'family' because that's what we were. We are individuals with little in common, barring a couple of exceptions. So, if we passed one another on the street, we might not have much to say, but The Print Room was what we had in common. Our shared passion brought this odd group of people together," he muses.

After almost a decade running The Print Room, Gadd, who now divides his time between Malaysia and South Korea, shares that a part of him is sad at this journey is coming to an end, but he is also quite relieved.



Shareem Amry's *If These Wings Could Fly #2* (2017).

"I have done what I set out to do, and it is time now to move on. The past couple of years especially were quite exhausting – people would book me for classes, and I would fly back from Seoul to take them, but they just wouldn't show," he says.

The past year, however, has been "pretty exciting" for him as a photographer: He had an exhibition in Seoul last October, then he showed in both Malaysia and Italy in March.

"It has been a bit of a non-stop rollercoaster. I don't think I want to teach anytime soon, I think I have given enough time to that part of photography that I now want to concentrate on my own work by doing more exhibitions and expos," he says.

Gadd notes that in almost 200 years, the principles of film photography have not changed and the cameras and the chemicals used today still hold a lot of the original functions. He still shoots with the same medium-format camera he bought when he earned his degree in photography about 25 years ago.

The Print Room, throughout its run, has presented 11 group exhibitions and five solo exhibitions.

In *Fin*, a section of the gallery is dedicated to the work of experimental-minded photographer Shareem Amry, who died last month from cancer. Her work is chronologically placed, from her first-ever print and tests that didn't quite work out, right up to the work that featured in her solo exhibition, *Redux*, which was held in July last year.

She joined The Print Room in 2013 and



Paul Gadd's *Inhabitants Of Fairyland* (2017). — Photos: The Print Room

was part of four exhibitions there.

Gadd recalls that the first exhibition Shareem was involved in was shooting still life, aptly named *It's Still Life*.

"After the initial classes, which involved shooting and film processing, I told the students they needed to bring in objects to photograph. Shareem brought a large blue-ish coloured crab and a knife and fork.

"She placed the crab on a plate, the knife and fork on either side, and began to shoot. When I saw what she was doing, I remember laughing and saying, 'What the hell is that?' I told her not to be so literal, to relax, and to have some fun.

"Then slowly, over a few weeks, her work evolved into sketch-like photographs of insects in glass jars shot on a white background. Her work was so beautiful," he says.

When it came to her photography, Gadd describes Shareem as a perfectionist. He recalls how when working on her *Afterlife* series, she would come in with her bugs and bottles, set up the shoot, and then disappear into the darkroom for the rest of the day.

"Because she was so disciplined, she managed to put together enough work for a solo exhibition. She was also a perfectionist, so this took her five years. I was very proud of her, although she thought I was completely mad when I first suggested she should do a solo. Unfortunately, a couple of weeks after

the solo, she was diagnosed with cancer.

"She hoped to get back into the darkroom, but it wasn't to be. I would much prefer to have Shareem still here today, rather than a room full of her work," he says.

Her work lives on in The Print Room and in exhibitions like *Fin*, a showcase of the best and brightest to emerge from its darkroom.

"*Fin* means 'end', and this exhibition is about what The Print Room and its students managed to achieve in the eight years we have existed.

"Analogue photography teaches you the process of photography, and more and more people are beginning to lean towards learning the process rather than bypassing it.

"Today, I think an increasing number of people recognise that film photography and the darkroom process constitute an art that can quite respectfully be placed next to sculpture or painting," says Gadd.

Fin might mark the end of The Print Room, but for the photographers that walked through its doors, the memories and spirit of comradeship will remain.

Fin is on at The Print Room, 49, Lorong 19/9E, Petaling Jaya in Selangor every Saturday and Sunday (2pm-6pm) till Sept 1. More info: www.theprintroomkl.com or call 012-337 2903.



Phoebe Wong's *Life On A Salt Lake* (2017).



Linda Chin's *A Storm Coming* (2017).