

Eye-catching moments from the Month of Photography

by Sue Williamson

With more than 150 shows making up the current Month of Photography (MoP), an enormous enterprise covering wall space in every available venue in Cape Town, it is clearly impossible for anyone who doesn't have a week free to take it all in. Organised by the South African Centre for Photography under Geoff Grundlingh, this is the second manifestation of the biennial event. The following quick picks, then, are simply a few which caught my eye.

The opening event was held at the Cape Town Castle (mounds of mini bottles of Absolut vodka tied to boxes of Fuji film were on the drinks table) and after an introduction by young co-curators Claire Breukel and Kim Stern, Michael Lake, ambassador of sponsor organisation the European Union, told us how pleased he was to slip away from the international parliamentarians gathering at the Good Hope Centre and get back to "real life".

In the entrance to the Castle hang Jaishri Abichandani's enlargements of single frames from rolls of colour film, showing the artist and her friends at play in locations which move from New York to Bombay. "An American now, I was born and lived in India until I was a teen," says the artist, describing her work as "a modern documentary of the lives of the generation of new global techno-bohemians to which I belong." Richly coloured, often beautiful, the languorous and exotic images of 'Under the Western Sky' indeed have the narrative quality that suggests the cinematic; the artist presents her life as a movie in the making with shifting scenes and mutating identities. A few more of Abichandani's pictures are at the Zem Café, but there are not enough there to make the same kind of impact.

Downstairs at the Castle, a collection of small, precise images in black and white by Angela Buckland is entitled 'The Sleep Series'. Buckland has positioned her camera on scaffolding immediately above the bed of her subjects, so the viewer is looking down at the sleepers, caught in the act of sleeping, as it were. There is no other way to take a formal portrait of a person and still catch a moment of total and innocent unawareness. A large lady in late middle age lies on her back, the sheet which moulds her body pulled well up, the trace of a smile on her lips. This image was used for one of the MoP posters, and when I first saw it, I imagined the lady pinned to an upright board, like an insect, and photographed thus. In other images, a naked young couple lie facing each other and male lovers are gracefully intertwined. The light is always soft, and each image looks classic. A remarkable photographic essay.

'Sharp', the Market Photography Workshop exhibition, is over at the Cape Town Tourist Office, and definitely deserves a visit - and while you're there, pick up the fine catalogue edited by Brenton Maart and TJ Lemon, with an introduction by David Goldblatt which gives the history of this seminal project. The Workshop, which began operating in downtown Johannesburg at the end of the 1980s, gave mainly young, black photographers the opportunity to acquire skills which were available nowhere else. A couple of the images which came out of the Workshop went on to win international press awards. Themba Hadebe's mesmerising image of a robber being arrested in Hillbrow and Jodi Bieber's humorous photograph of three young ballroom dancing couples are just two of dozens of fine examples.

Dave Southwood's show 'Nothing in the Particular' at the Bell-Roberts Art Gallery has been [reviewed elsewhere in Artthrob](#), so let this serve merely as a reminder not to miss this collection of masterful, high-resolution colour photographs of odd corners of this country.

I hope I will not be accused of nepotism in including Tracy Gander's 'Flounce' at the Zem Café in my picks. Gander, who is the Artthrob website designer, presents a series of double images of a young woman "flouncing", I suppose, in a series of odd outfits, paired with images which extend the sense of place. For example, dressed in a wedding gown skirt and billowing veil, she hunches over near a subway entrance in Observatory. The paired picture shows the entrance

itself. Each image is titled by its location in the area. The photographs are funny and ravishing, and like Abichandri's, have a disarming sense of arrested narrative and place.

And if you like to encounter culture when you least expect it - while you are doing the weekly wash, for example - pop in to Joe Soap in Kloof Nek Road where Swiss duo L/B (lang/baumann) have hung up some photos of themselves "doing gym". In seeking a venue for their work, their brief to the organisers was to find a spot where their photos might not be noticed at first, as if they had always been there, or even look "a bit irritating". See what you think.

There is an excellent and very well designed catalogue on the MoP which miraculously came out in time for the opening, and even if you are not in town for the show, is very well worth having. Order your copy online from www.photocentre.org.za.

The Month of Photography runs until April 14. See [Listings](#) for a full programme of exhibitions, dates and venues

 SUBMIT Review
