

ATTN: News and arts desks

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Contact: Aideen McLaughlin, 5365 7654, aideen@justicecentre.org.hk

Winners of Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize announced

Exploitation of Hong Kong's domestic workers a dominant theme

An artwork exploring the 'neglect, abuse and obscurity' of Hong Kong's domestic workers has won the **Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize 2014** in the week that the high-profile case of alleged abuse of domestic worker Erwiana Sulistyaningsih has come to court in Hong Kong.

Can you see me yet? by Katie Vajda, is a series of two photographs featuring former domestic worker Efa Sultiane in a piece which questions the treatment and visibility of domestic workers within the social fabric of Hong Kong's middle class households.

Vajda, an Australian-born artist now based in Hong Kong, says the piece was inspired by Efa's own stories of when she worked as a domestic helper and also by the high-profile case of Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, an Indonesian domestic worker whose employer is currently being tried in Hong Kong for over 20 charges, including allegedly assaulting and criminally intimidating Erwiana and two other Indonesian domestic workers, and failing to pay wages and grant time off.

Vajda says: *"The enabler of this work and the model is Efa Sultiane, a friend that I met five years ago when I first moved to Hong Kong. Efa's own stories of when she worked as a domestic helper and those of many others I researched, such as Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, fuelled these provocative pieces.*

I play with the recognisable and repetitive prints of an international luxury brand as the backdrop and landscape for this narrative of neglect, abuse and obscurity. Pattern on pattern on pattern, is Efa seen now or does she disappear into the frenzy of a consumer-driven society?"

The theme of exploitation amongst Hong Kong's domestic workers also features in Xyca Bacani's *Burn*, which was awarded the Justice Centre Choice Award.

Bacani is a 27-year old domestic worker by day, documentary photographer by night. Her piece ***Burn*** documents an anonymised domestic worker who received third degree burns while at work and was denied medical treatment by her employer.

Bacani says: *“This case is about ‘Maria’, a domestic worker who got third degree burns on her back and arms from hot boiling soup that her employer put on the shoe rack. Her employer did not give her proper medical treatment, made her work in pain and kicked her out of her job even with her sufferings. A modern slave in a first world city fighting for her rights hoping to get the justice she deserves someday.”*

Bacani is currently doing a long-term photography project on the abuse of domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong’s domestic workers were also featured in other works shortlisted for the Prize including ***Helping Hands*** (Rob Godden), ***The Worker and The Doll*** (KyroKaruna) and ***Human Exports*** (Stefan Irvine). Other pieces in the running for the Prize explored issues such as the global sex trade, the fashion industry, cocoa production and Japanese ‘Comfort Women’.

Established in 2013 and organised by Justice Centre Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize aims to harness the power of the visual arts to promote awareness, provoke dialogue, inspire action and ultimately, bring about change in the area of human rights.

This year, artists were invited to submit works on the theme of modern slavery and human trafficking. Over 40 entries from Hong-based artists originating from countries as diverse as the Philippines, UK, Australia, USA, Hong Kong, South Africa and India were shortlisted to sixteen pieces by an eminent panel of prominent art experts and human rights specialists, including: Umbrella Movement artist and activist Kacey Wong; Claire Hsu, founder and director of Asia Art Archive; and Judge Kevin Zervos, a judge of the High Court in Hong Kong.

The shortlisted pieces include painting, photography, video, digital and mixed media works. The winners were announced and auctioned on the night of Wednesday December 10, International Human Rights Day, at an exhibition and Christie’s auction at Sundaram Tagore Gallery on Hollywood Road. The overall winner was awarded HK\$ 30, 000. All artists generously donated their works to Justice Centre Hong Kong and all funds raised on the night will go to support the charity’s work to protect the rights of refugees and survivors of modern slavery.

Aleta Miller, Executive Director of Justice Centre Hong Kong, said:

“The exploitation and abuse of domestic workers has hit the headlines in Hong Kong over this past year with the much-publicised cases of Erwana Sulistyarningsih and Kartika Puspitasari. It is not surprising that this issue has been reflected in a number of the pieces shortlisted for the Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize, which invited works on the theme of modern slavery and human trafficking.”

Modern slavery and human trafficking is on our doorstep: as an important regional hub and both a destination and transit territory for human trafficking, Hong Kong is currently failing to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Through the Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize, we want to use art to raise this issue amongst the Hong Kong public, inspire action and ultimately, bring about change in the area of human trafficking and exploitation.”

All winning and shortlisted works, with information about the artists and the pieces, can be viewed at www.justicecentre.org.hk/artsprize.

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Notes to Editors

The winners of the Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize were:

Overall winner: Katie Vajda, *Can you see me yet?*

1st Runner Up, Siddharth Choudhary, *My Family*.

2nd Runner Up, Tiff Chan and Shawn Griffin, *Bless the Souls who made our clothes*.

The Justice Centre Choice Awards went to:

Xyca Bacani, *Burn*.

Marc Standing, *Seeker*.

Hi-res images of all the works can be downloaded [here](#).

Listings Info:

What: Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize. Justice Centre Hong Kong's annual event to engage the Hong Kong Arts community and public in human rights.

When: Wednesday December 10, 2014, International Human Rights Day, 7-10pm.

Where: Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 57-59 Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong.

Enquiries and information:

3109 7359; artsprize@justicecentre.org.hk; www.justicecentre.org.hk/artsprize

Justice Centre Hong Kong is a non-profit human rights organisation working fearlessly to protect the rights of Hong Kong's most vulnerable forced migrants - refugees, other people seeking protection and survivors of modern slavery. Launched in 2014, Justice Centre Hong Kong was formerly Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre (HKRAC) which, over a period of seven years, helped more than 2,000 refugee men, women and children on the road to a new life. www.justicecentre.org.hk.

The Hong Kong Human Rights Arts Prize 2014 is generously sponsored by Sundaram Tagore Gallery, La Cabane, Jump, Ticketflap, Bread Elements, Christie's, Dood, Pyjama and Celtic China Group.