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Underage: An Award-Winning Photo Documentary Of Young Male Prostitutes In Thailand



Synopsis

• is an award-winning photographic documentation aimed at understanding the minds of underage male prostitutes in Thailand in a most candid and visceral way. Photographer Ohm Phanphiroj uncovers the life, choice, and consequences that these young boys are experiencing. Underage prostitution results from several reasons, from being molested by family members and/or relatives, poverty, being a runaway, and drug addiction. In his book, he juxtaposes street light lit portraits of boys with biographical facts such as their age, reason for working the streets, number of customers, and aspirations. Thailand has long been known as the sex capital of Asia, and according to a survey in 2004, there are approximately 800,000 underage prostitutes in Thailand in a trade worth 4.3 billion baht per year or three percent of the Thai economy. This alarming number has put Thailand on the top of the list of underage sexual exploitation according to the U.N. • is multi-layered and complex in its nature. Psychologically, the documentary photography book offers provocative and haunting portraits of these lost souls. The visual is visceral and represents the ugly mess that is the manifestation of deep-rooted problems concerning family, teenage years in Thailand, and society. The personal data of each subject is included to offer an insight or a peep into their lives and journey to the opposite side of normalcy, tradition, and perception. In addition, sexual identification and orientation are being questioned and investigated. While all subjects identify themselves as heterosexual young boys who come to terms with having sex with gay guys for money, most of them have never had sex with females. Many of them reason that all men must go through having sex with gay guys in order to understand how to have sex with females when such time comes. Phanphiroj lets the images act as a mirror reflecting the rotten reality of child abuse and exploitation. They pose painful questions about life, choice, consequences, and of humanity. • aims at shedding light on this pervasive situation, raising questions about society, corruption, morals, and human treatment. • has been exhibited worldwide, among others at Newspace Center for Photography (2011), Sommerblut International Art Festival (2011), Noordelicht Photo Festival (2012), The Kinsey Institute (2013), Tally Beck Contemporary (2014), Miami Art Festival (2014), and Documentary Arts Asia (2014). The photographic project received multiple awards, i.e. Lightwork (2012), Newspace Center for Photography (2012), Documentary Arts Asia (2014), Columbia College fellowship (2015), Noor-Nikon (2015), Society for Photographic Education (2015).

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