



SINGAPOREANS

Wesley Loh Kar-Wai

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To all Singaporeans

Without Masks

Introduction by Raphaël Millet

Since the emergence of both photography and sociology in the early 19th century, photographers have more or less consciously taken the documentation of the society they live in as one of their main tasks. Some have used especially methodical, almost clinical, approaches to portraying their fellow citizens. German photographer August Sander perhaps first best exemplified the use of portrait photography to document society in times of change; in his 1929 book *Face of Our Time* he documented post-WWI Germany hit by economic depression and about to enter the dark years of Nazism. Another influential reference that comes to mind is Robert Frank's seminal series *The Americans*, published in 1958, for which he photographed American society at all social strata.

This is the tradition that Wesley Loh Kar-Wai's *100 Singaporeans* partakes of. The fact that Loh has felt the urge to pursue this project now is a sign—it must be that the times they are a-changin'. In a few years, it is very likely that this series will be considered a milestone in the history of Singapore photography. The premise of *100 Singaporeans*—black-and-white close-up portraits, almost full frame, doing away with any background and context—seems simple. But the project offers a very rich and complex portrait of Singaporean society by focusing on what is at its very core: the Singaporean people. The subjects could almost be naked. (No, maybe not...the times they are not a-changin' so

fast in Singapore, yet!) But they could almost be on a white background, in the manner of some of Richard Avedon's most famous portraits in his book *In the American West*.

Looking at Loh's photographs, it is obvious that there is nothing simpler and richer than a face when stripped of all effects and affects, poses and postures, stances and pretences. The Singaporeans featured here are almost expressionless, as if the photographer wanted to leave us clueless about them. What do their faces tell us? Why are they so familiar? Why do we feel we know this auntie that we don't know? And this guy with the nondescript look? And this girl with no distinguishing mark? Have we met before? I am reminded of *You Have Seen Their Faces*, a seminal series shot by Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell in 1930's USA. The title applies to these 100 Singaporeans too; we *have* seen their faces. Where? Just around the corner. And lest we forgot to look, Wesley Loh Kar-Wai did it for us.

Look carefully, look them in the eye, and you'll see the photographer. He too is just one of them. And look again; look even deeper, and perhaps you'll see yourself.

Raphaël Millet is a writer and visual arts critic who has produced and directed for cinema and television. He has programmed several film and photography events including the Month of Photography Asia, an international photography festival held in Singapore.

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SINGAPOREANS











In Order of Appearance

NAME	OCCUPATION
2. Michelle Wong Yu Jin	Teacher
3. Balasingam-Chow Yu Mei	Writer
4. Nur Diana Yau Bte Shech Rizal Yau	Sales Associate
5. Nurshaqira Binte Raimi	HR / Studio Manager
6. Aaron Yeo	PR Consultant
7. Ho Chin Ann	PR Consultant
8. Donn Tan Zheng Yu	Student
9. Ivan Koh Wei Ming	Lawyer
10. Masi Binti Sufi	Housewife
11. Patricia Lock	Retiree
12. Ling Sing Yu	Doctor
13. Ho Swee Geok @ Aw Swee Geok	Housewife
14. Zhou Caiying Hazel	Circus Arts Instructor
15. Joyce Lim	Teacher
16. Vernie Alison Oliveiro	Researcher
17. Tan Mingwei Eric	Accountant
18. Smith Fiona bte Mohd Irwan	Senior Communications Manager
19. Sophina Smith	Business Director
20. Annabel Lim	Client Executive
21. Elizabeth Tan	Student
22. Dali Bin Meskam	Art Director
23. Hoh Min-Kean Guy	Company Director
24. Mun Qin Jie Ian	Student
25. Joel Ang Xing Zhi	Student
26. James Teo	Creative Director

NAME	OCCUPATION
27. Martin Lim	Art Director
28. Joseph Nair	Student
29. Joshua Nair	Public Servant
30. Wei Leng Tay	Photographer
31. Low Qing Yuan	Accounts Assistant
32. Roger Winder	Senior Lecturer
33. Koh Eng Song	Businessman
34. Liyana Dali	Student
35. Nadia Dali	Student
36. Lim Min Yu	Doctor
37. Jimmy Sng	Consultant
38. Lynne Huang	Civil Servant
39. Janice Koh Yu-Mei	Actress
40. Abby Chua Hui Kim	Administrator
41. Oehlers Kristine Ann	Teacher
42. Ho Yim Tee	Writer-Pastor
43. Lawrence Ellesia	Engineer
44. Lennard Low	IT Product Manager
45. Mark Gerald Ng Chih-Yuan	Teacher
46. Rasimah Jar	Managing Director
47. Lim Weixiang	Teacher
48. Er Ker Jia	Civil Servant
49. Xu Jian Yi	Fruit Stall Worker
50. Tien Cheng Hee	Retired Teacher
51. Lim Su Min	Doctor

In Order of Appearance

NAME	OCCUPATION
52. Tan Chioh Hong	Housewife
53. Ruth Tan Gek Neo	Music Teacher
54. Tan Boon Liat Daniel C.	Pastor
55. Gilbert Quek	Chief Creative
56. Ang Nee Soon	Self-Employed
57. Wong Kok Choung Johnny	Freelancer
58. Tan Ngiap Heng	Photographer
59. Ng Keng Gim	Sarong and Textile Dealer
60. Lee Wuan See Vivian	Artist
61. Rebecca Khew Ming Chu	Student
62. Kevin Ang Keng Jin	Teacher
63. Tan Wah Jiam	Teacher
64. Jupri Arshad	Soft Skills Trainer
65. Edmund W. Rezel	Executive Training Manager
66. Karen Ng	Teacher
67. Lim Phuay Ee Sharon	Hawker
68. Chia Shi-Lu	Doctor / Member of Parliament
69. Kenneth Joel Phua Zayao	PR Consultant
70. Stefanie Jane Francis	PR Executive
71. Dawn Chin Wei Peng	PR Consultant
72. Muhammad Hafiz Azhari	Co-Curricular Programme Executive
73. Deanna Ng	Photographer
74. Effendi Baba	Project Manager
75. Koh Teng Koon	Bank Officer
76. Eg Ah Choo	Housewife

NAME	OCCUPATION
77. Chia Kok Sip	Housewife
78. Melissa Luo Shuhui	Auditor
79. Oon Shu An	Actress
80. Lim Ee Guan	Corporate Affairs Director
81. Lim Khay Tham Nehemiah	Chief Executive Officer
82. Lee Kwan Lim	Student
83. Lee Mun Wai	Dancer
84. Tay Jiamei	Senior Accounts Manager
85. Danielle Tan	Student
86. Chua Yong Sheng Ryan	Arts Manager
87. Amanda Lim	Student
88. Inderjit Singh	Teacher
89. Prvacki Milenko	Artist
90. Nabeel Azhar	Student
91. Issac Phoa Teck Shuean	National Serviceman
92. Sabrina Sng	Student
93. Julie Ho	Boutique Manager / Buyer
94. Loh Mei Loh	Housewife
95. Su-En Chua	Student
96. Lim Swee Lian Sylvia	Lawyer / Member of Parliament
97. Goh Shi Yun Jasmine	Retail Assistant
98. Len Jean Peen Phebe	Consultant
99. Amelia Lim	Student
100. Tan Wei Ping	Bank Clerk
101. Poh Ling Yin	Civil Servant

Author's Note

My photography is driven by a curiosity about people—who they are, what motivates them and what their fears and dreams are.

When I first took up photography, the camera was a bridge between a shy 17-year-old and the people he wanted to understand. The camera made me feel safe, and at the same time, empowered to peer into somebody's soul without wincing, or feeling shy about staring.

In portraiture, this authentic soul of a person is precisely what I seek, and the photographic portrait is the tool I use to seek it. I look into the subjects' eyes and wonder who they really are; I find I have a need to strip away the walls of identity that people construct, and to peer into them. I want to go to the place where they are really themselves—where they are most deeply human, in the most individual and personal sense of the word. In this manner, I see the camera as a bridge between people, the lens connecting the photographer and subject in one act of empathy.

And so with *100 Singaporeans*, I have turned to looking at what it means to be Singaporean, particularly with the rapid state of flux that Singapore is in today. I want to capture the people-scape that I remember, before it disappears or evolves into something very different.

Wesley Loh Kar-Wai

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All the Singaporeans who have gladly participated in this project. Thank you for being on the other side of the lens and for believing that it really is something to be a Singaporean.

What does it mean to look Singaporean? Is there a unique quality to our faces that transcends our ethnic differences and immediately identifies us as Singaporeans? In *100 Singaporeans*, award-winning photographer Wesley Loh Kar-Wai takes on these burning questions. Forgoing posed pictures and special effects for stark black-and-white close-ups, he documents Singaporeans from all walks of life. The result is a stunning collection of intimate portraits whose subjects bravely invite us to meet their unwavering, direct gaze. In so doing, we begin to discover commonalities that can be conveyed without the need for words.

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