

Shooting Kabul

Armed with cameras, a group of young Afghan girls took to the streets of their capital – the same streets on which they work to earn a living – to document life in Afghanistan as they see and understand it.



'Shooting Kabul' is an exhibition at the Spitz Gallery, in London, of the photographs taken by those thirteen girls (aged 10-14) - images that contain themes and highlight issues that both reflect and impact on their everyday lives.

There are currently over 37,000 children working and begging on the streets of Kabul and it is estimated that over 7,000 of those children are young girls selling fuel that they have collected, water and other small goods. Many of these children are the sole or primary income generator for their families who have often lost everything (home, jobs, health, family members) as a result of the years of fighting in Afghanistan.

The aim of the PhotoVoice initiated project was to provide a small group of these girls with the skills in a new medium – one that was effectively banned during the Taliban – through which they could directly voice their fears, frustrations, needs and aspirations to local, national and international audiences.

The group was encouraged to use the camera as an alternative tool for self-expression and communication through which they could share their experiences of growing up in Afghanistan, working on the streets of the capital. The resulting images give us, as the viewer, a unique and often intimate insight into the girls' lives and their views on many issues including peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and women and working children's rights.

Their images do not offer us an objective comment on the state of Afghanistan and its people - they are not the record of a photojournalist or an artistic response to the aftermath of war, such as Paul Seawright's photographs commissioned and currently exhibiting at the Imperial War Museum. Indeed the strength of the photography and accompanying captions in 'Shooting Kabul' is rooted in the very nature of their subjectivity – and, as such, they serve as a reminder of the human stories that exist behind the media headlines and the political rhetoric.

These street-working children have not documented hard news stories but have captured their everyday existence on film, and through that they have perhaps taught us more about life as it really is in war-ravaged Afghanistan than through any previous images we may have seen.

"The most important thing is peace because then we can study and people can work. People can walk freely and live good lives. People who live in peace should be happy for they have never known the hardship that comes from war. I know nothing about peace. Since I have been aware of who I am there has been fighting. We can show people in our pictures that war is very bad because we lost our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, hands, legs, arms, heads – everything. Peace is the most important thing to Afghan children." (Sakina, 14)