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Issues of queer Southeast Asian youth in “we will have been young”

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Cover image from "7465" by Watsamon Tri-yasakda, photo courtesy of watsamontriyasakda.com

Youth, that period of life dedicated to possibilities, can also be the most repressive. Where there is a sense of discovery, there are dictates imposed by society. Where there is a feeling of limitlessness, youth itself can be bound by constraints such as time and livelihood. These tensions and the varied responses they inspire are present in "we will have been young," an exhibition featuring the work of 12 photographers from around Southeast Asia, on view at **Mabini Projects** until August 25.



"we will have been young," photo courtesy of dienacht-magazine.com

Palpable in the group show is the tenacity of identity amid oppressive realities. In Watsamon Tri-Yasakda's "7465," we see Thai trans and queer youth inhibited from expressing themselves due to school uniform policies that adhere to the traditional binary. Boys are required to wear shorts and get military-style haircuts while girls must keep their hair tied at all times.

Through "7465," a reference and perhaps a mockery of the identification number sewn on school uniforms, Tri-yasakda asserts the individuality of queer youth, unrelenting despite the regimentals thrust upon them.

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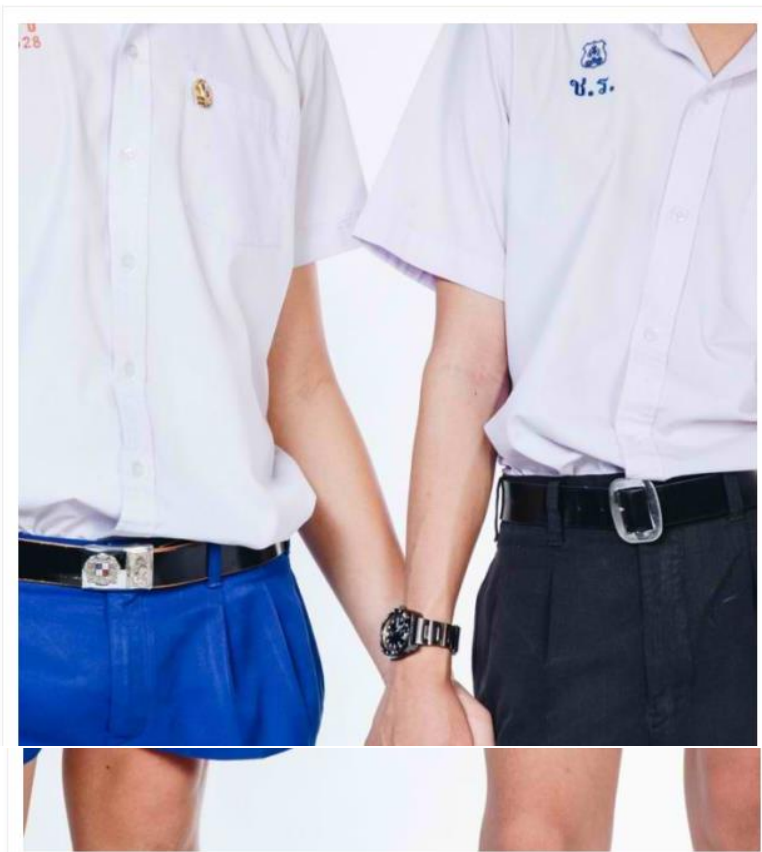
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Antiquated notions on gender and self-expression are more relevant than ever considering the recent uproar over **UST's student policies** banning such freedoms as "acts of indecency in electronic media" and LGBT relationships. Through "7465," a reference and perhaps a mockery of the identification number sewn on school uniforms, Tri-yasakda asserts the individuality of queer youth, unrelenting despite the regimentals thrust upon them.




From "7465" by Watsamon Tri-yasakda, photo courtesy of watsamontriyasakda.com



From "7465" by Watsamon Tri-yasakda, photo courtesy of watsamontriyasakda.com

Leave it to young people to create byways to being themselves even if a more conservative society strictly urges following just one route. That ingenuity is reflected in Singaporean Lee Chang Ming's "Until Then," a series that reveals the photographer himself exploring and coming to terms with his queerness through tender focus and intimate scenes.




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From "Until Then" by Lee Chang Ming, photo courtesy of leechangming.com

Possibility, as a reminder or prompt of youth, captivates in other works. In Yu Yu Myint Than's "Memory Lane," a woman in Myanmar who was severely abused longs to return to her home village, while Filipino photographer Geric Cruz's "Eva" revisits his grandmother's home, the place he grew up, and chances upon a young visitor who spurs many a memory in the process. There are dreams of what-could-have-been in fellow Filipino Dennese Victoria's construction of a fantasy family, or of aspirations fulfilled in Muhammad Fadli's portraits of Indonesians and their souped-up scooters. Rounding up other works from the Southeast Asian Photography Masterclass 2016-17, including those of Alvin Lau ("Is This What Love Is"), Amrita Chandradas (All is Not Lost"), Dwi Asrul Fajar ("A Stream Under the Table"), Elliott Koon ("Sons of the Soil"), Kanel Khiev ("Before the Raze"), and Linh Pham ("Until Then"), "we will have been young" captures a youth irrepressible with promise and a dogged need to identify, to belong, and to be.



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“Eva” by Geric Cruz, photo courtesy of dienacht-magazine.com



From “All is not lost” by Amrita Chandradas, photo courtesy of amritachandradas.com



From “Eva” by Geric Cruz, photo courtesy of gericcruz.com

“Youth is a universal subject; photography is a universal language,” says Jorg Bruggemann of Dienacht, who with Tobias Kruse published works from “we will have been young” as a book, also supported by the Goethe Institut. “Every viewer is or will have been young eventually and everyone likes to look at what might be the future one day. Images rendering this visible, remain forever present.”

“we will have been young” runs until August 25 at Mabini Projects. Its corresponding photo book is available for purchase through *Dienacht*.



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