

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Refugees Telling Their Own Stories in Photographs

ANNAPOLIS ROYAL, Nova Scotia, September 25, 2024 – In collaboration with five young people *from Karen Womens Youth Organization* on the Thai/Myanmar border, Nat and Susan Tileston started the MY STORY photo project (msppa.org) in 2006; their idea was to give locals the tools to document their lives on the border through photography.

Between them, Nat and Susan had over 5 decades of experience working as professional photographers in New York City and Nova Scotia, and they were looking for a way to share their skills and learn about a different culture.

MSppa raised funds, bought entry-level digital cameras, talked to community-based border organizations, and the team went to work. Each photo workshop ran for 7 to 10 days and included basic photo skills, shooting assignments, and instructions on editing photos. Each workshop concluded with an exhibition of the images; photos were sold with 50% of the proceeds going to the photographer and 50% going back to the project for the purchase of new cameras.

Since its inception, the MY STORY photo project has run photo workshops in Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India, Mexico, the US and Canada. For 17 years over 700 refugees have been able to document their lives using cameras provided by the project and kept by each participant. The upcoming exhibition at ARTSPLACE Gallery will be the 18th year for the project.

The sense of urgency persists. “With increased fighting on the Thai/Myanmar border at Mae Sot, SAW (Social Action for Women) is struggling to keep their GED (high school equivalency) program going for an increasing number of young refugees. In 2024, workshop participants came from the refugee community and are elders, women from safe houses, and youth at risk,” explains founder Susan Tileston.

“MSppa’s mandate is to give a voice to those who might not be heard, and we’re honoured to be able to showcase this work for the 18th year,” said Sophie Paskins, ARTSPLACE Gallery Director.

MY STORY photo project #18, Images by Myanmar Refugees and Cambodian Elders opens September 28 and runs through October 19, 2024. Opening Reception, October 5, 12-2pm.

Since 2006, MSppa has worked in Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, India, Sri Lanka, and Mexico. MSppa is a registered Canadian charity.

ARTSPLACE is a public Art Gallery that is operated by the Annapolis Region Community Arts Council, a registered charitable, community organization dedicated to encouraging and promoting the arts. Supported through the Province of Nova Scotia and the Canada Council for the Arts.

ARTSPLACE Gallery is located at 396 St. George Street in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia

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