

# 1. Portfolios

The main Bird in Flight rubric that I liked right away. It's a profile of a photographer in which he or she talks about his or her photographs in the first person: Akkara Naktamna, Chu Việt Hà, Eric Kogan, and others. My favorite signature thing of the magazine is the dash opening the hero's speech. To help the character talk about his or her work, the journalist asks leading questions while building a coherent story. The questions are removed. What remains is the hero's monologue. But that's how it looks in Bird in Flight and many other publications. For this book to be called a "collection of interviews," I decided to publish them in their original Q&A format. I usually asked five to seven questions.



# Akkara Naktamna, Thailand

Akkara Naktamna lives in Bangkok, works as a computer engineer, and raises a daughter. He takes pictures of hometown residents in the most ordinary situations in the mall next door to his office, but from the outside it looks like something extraordinary is happening to them. For example, a man is cleaning the red tongue of a huge inflatable figure with a glass-washing brush. Try to see the hidden meaning in this.

- **Age and place:** born in 1979 in Bangkok; lives there.
- **Education / job:** started doing photography inspired by the Elliott Erwitt's book [a photographer from the famous Magnum Photos photo agency] and the comedy movie about photography "Pecker" (1998) directed by John Waters.
- **Awards and exhibitions:** he held a solo exhibition at Photo Bangkok Festival (2015). Finalist and honorable mention in NYC Art Book Fair (2016), EyeEm Awards (2014), IPA (International Photography Awards) Street Photography Asia Awards (2013). He

has also presented his work in 20 other festivals and exhibitions.

- **Publications:** Wallpaper, Bangkok Post, Esquire Thailand, iGNANT. He has published three photo books.
- **Cameras:** Fuji XPro-1, Sony RX100 M2, Google Pixel 2.

“‘Lucky’ is the key to this, but there are two things behind ‘lucky’: a good eye and a good mind.”

— **There are many genres in which a person can take photographs. Why did you choose mostly street photography?**

— It is like a cartoon of Jean Jullien or Joan Cornellà [French and Spanish artists]: simple, weird, and clever which is similar to my way of life. Besides that, it is easy to produce. But difficult to make it good, which pretty much challenged me first.

— **What are your favorite places in Bangkok to go with a camera? I noticed you shoot in shopping centers a lot.**

— My workplace is near CentralWorld [the largest shopping mall in Thailand], so that is why some street photographs of mine were produced there. Other favorite places nearby are Siam Square or Bangkok Art & Culture Centre (BACC). Areas around the Grand Palace are also interesting places for shooting because there are many tourists and a combination of old and modern Thai culture in the same area.

**— In many of your photographs, you capture maybe less than a second of some moment. I mean, the moments themselves don't last long. How did you catch these moments?**

— “Lucky” is the key to this, but there are two things behind “lucky”: a good eye and a good mind. A good eye means that I have to see a lot of things surrounding me and quickly respond to them with knowledge, experience, and instinct as quickly as possible. A good mind means preparing myself before going out to shoot. Seeing various photographs and other genres, and learning from them both horizontal and vertical concepts, I think about how I would adapt/mix these kinds of knowledge to be my style.

**— But to find these moments I need to look at the photograph for some time. Then — to find some meaning in the moment — I need to look much longer. Do you see any meanings in your photographs?**

— Of course, there are meanings in each of the photographs but each are different in the level of profound meaning. Some work is just a simple juxtaposition, composition, and funny. Some are deeper and send out a message reflecting a particular story.

For example, a picture of a man sleeping on the footpath (his gesture is like flying) and other people are walking in different ways. If we look at it just as a comedic work that is okay — you would get a strange picture and be done. But if you look deeper and interpret what is underneath, we possibly get social conflict issues or maybe get an interesting idea like “Why must we follow other people? We should have our own way of creating new work. Stop being a follower right now!” Something like that.

**— You founded and cofounded several projects like Streetphotothailand.com, CType magazine, and Good Art Book book store. Do you feel like a leader (or organizer) of the Thai street photography**

**community? Why is it important for you to represent other artists?**

— I am not a leader, obviously, just a worker or creator who wants to see more new artists and their photographic works in my country. This requires encouraging and promoting those who photograph well and work hard.

I remember many years ago trying to find places to present my work. You know, it was pretty hard at that time. In some places, they would provide only for “somebody,” not a “nobody” for some reason. But fortunately, there were a few places giving chances to unknown people like me.

I was strongly inspired to create CType magazine for “nobody,” or anybody who has brilliant works hidden in their portfolio box, but no chance to show their work. Not just having a lot of money, many friends, or a famous name as the main criteria.

**— Like many photographers, you have a regular job, as a computer engineer, to support yourself. What motivates you to spend your free time with a camera?**

— Besides loving the art of photography, I want to say something out loud. Photography is a powerful medium. For example, I want to criticize some issues in my country which sometimes (and with some issues) are hard to frankly speak out about. Photography can be a way out of this.

February 12, 2018

Akkara Naktamna became the curator of Kathmandu Photo Gallery, an art space in Bangkok. He made several new publications in media such as the Bangkok Post. In the summer of 2024, he participated in the exhibition “Photography Never Lies” at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center.



## Chu Việt Hà, Vietnam

Chu Việt Hà clearly separates the concepts of “hobby” and “passion,” referring to street photography as the latter. He interacts a lot with the heroes of his photographs in markets and other crowded places in Hanoi, Vietnam. All this helps him to better balance his life and understand his place in society.

- **Age and place:** born in 1987 in Bắc Ninh, Bắc Ninh province; lives in Hanoi.
- **Education / job:** graduated from Hanoi Architectural University, works as designer at a construction corporation. He learned photography from the internet.
- **Awards and exhibitions:** participant in several exhibitions, including “Like a Life” in Hanoi held by AIA, the largest insurance company in Asia (2016), and at Dong Xuan Center, the largest Vietnamese market in Berlin, Germany. He was a judge at several competitions and events such as “Photo Talk” by Fujifilm and the annual London Festival of Street

Photography. He is an official Fujifilm-X model photographer.

- **Publications:** Street Photographers Foundation, Invisiblephotographer.asia, Streethunters.net, Matca.vn, 121clicks.com.
- **Cameras:** Fujifilm X-Pro3 with 16 mm f2.8 lens.

“Every time I go out to take photographs of the streets, I consider it as a time for life experience.”

— **In Asia I was only in India. There is a saying about this country, that it is a paradise for photographers, because so many interesting things happen every minute on every corner in every city. Everything is so colorful and full of life, etc. What is Vietnam for street photographers? What one word describes it the most?**

— I have the same opinion as you about India. I think it is a very good place for street photography and so is Vietnam. If you come here, you will surely be impressed by the life and the people in Hanoi.

A special point in Hanoi is the pavement culture. You can sit on the pavement and see the people's lives and daily activities going on on the sidewalk. The old

cultural features, old houses, old streets, or old markets add unique color to the city. Moreover, Hanoi has four seasons, each with its very own features.

I believe that all of this brings a treasure of material for street photography.

Besides, every place you travel has very specific cultures that you can take pictures of, like Sa Pa, Ha Giang, and others [mountainous cities in the north of Vietnam].

**— What is the main idea behind your photography? What do you want to tell your audience?**

— Really, I do not think too much when shooting street photography. Every time I go out to take photographs of the streets, I consider it as a time for life experience. Everything is recorded from my feelings through my eyes and my heart. I want the viewers to be able to feel the human life that I record and also understand a part of me through each picture.

**— Almost all of your photographs are very different. I mean, you really rarely repeat yourself! Am I right or do you separate them carefully on purpose?**

— I remember a great quote from photographer Imogen Cunningham [a US female photographer born in 1883 and famous for her pictures of plants and nudity]: “If asked which photo was my favorite, the answer will be: the picture I will take tomorrow.”

I am passionate about learning and improving myself and do not want to stop at what I have. It urges me to make something else different from those of yesterday. I do not want to repeat myself.

In addition, I also always choose my photos carefully before sharing them on social networks. Street photography is my passion and interest, so I think I need to be serious with it. Each share is a best choice.

**— What are your favorite places in Hanoi for photography? What places do you avoid?**

— The Old Quarter [historical center], or around Hoan Kiem lake is certainly the place I usually choose to visit in early morning. Because in the morning, Hanoi is the real Hanoi, with peaceful life and activities.

The old markets Dong Xuan and Thanh Ha are also very interesting. In particular, at Dong Xuan when the sunlight combines with the architecture and people here, you will see a lot of things to explore as a photographer.

In Hanoi there is no place you have to avoid, because the people here are very hospitable and friendly.

**— How often do you communicate with people in your photographs? If you have any stories, it would be great to hear them.**

— Of course, an integral part is communication when taking photographs. In my point of view, the image taken is only a result, and the process of taking and communicating with that character brings out a lot of emotions in street photography.

When I came to Doug Xuan market for the first time, I didn't take any shots. I decided to interact with people around me. It took me a few days to observe most of the people before starting to shoot. But now it is much easier for me.

What is more interesting, after that first visit, due to my busy work, I didn't come back to the market for half a year. However, when I came back, one man with whom I had talked to back then recognized me. He asked, "What are you so busy doing? Why have you been gone so long?" I was deeply touched by it. I didn't even realize he still remembered me.

But that's not always the case. Sometimes it's the other way around.

I once took a picture of a man pointing his finger at me at the same Doug Xuan market. I just saw a beautiful view and picked up the camera to catch a good moment. I mean, at this moment, he pointed to me but I still took the photograph. In fact, there were two men. After that, I stopped and talked to both about my photo shoot. I learned even more about the lives of the workers in this market.

**— Photography is an important part of your life, but for sure you don't spend 100 percent of your time with a photo camera. So who is Chu Việt Hà, if not a photographer?**

— I am a designer at a construction corporation. Photography is my great passion, it helps me express myself. It also helps me balance my life with work. It helps me understand my position and role in society.

December 22, 2019

Chu Việt Hà's photographs were selected in several more books, including "Reclaim the Street: Street Photography's Moment" by Stephen McLaren and Matt Stuart (Thames & Hudson, 2023) and "The Street Pho-

tographer's Manual" (Thames & Hudson, 2020). In the summer of 2024, he participated in APF magazine's Street Photography Workshop in Bangkok.

## Eric Kogan, Russia — USA

Eric Kogan, a minimalist artist from New York, unlike most street photographers, prefers to take images of objects, animals and plants, and other natural phenomena rather than people. This is how amazing intersections appear, which give birth to all new meanings. Their exact number is infinite and depends only on the imagination and interpretation of the viewer.

- **Age and place:** born in 1985 in Saint Petersburg, Russia; lives in New York.
- **Education / job:** bachelor of fine arts with a major in painting and a minor in photography. Works as an event designer.
- **Awards and exhibitions:** he clearly prefers his photography to speak for itself.
- **Publications:** NR magazine, UP Photographers, 121clicks.com, Booooooom, Colossal, DeMilked, PLAIN magazine, iGNANT.
- **Cameras:** Leica M.



“There are more questions than answers. The main one being: can you relate?”

**— Why do you love objects and not (mostly) people in your street photography?**

— It’s about their gestures. Some of their poses, though static and powerless, are so moving that I can’t help but feel blood running through their veins. In them I contemplate humanity, serving as a reminder of others, of their circumstances, of their memories, and of their art.

In one of my images, for example, are two garbage bags atop a trash bin that was their pedestal. Before taking the photo I remember seeing “The Kiss” by Rodin through their embrace [a marble sculpture by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin created in 1882].

**— How much time did you spend collecting “only” 15–20 photos, which I could see on your Instagram?**

— The earliest one, with a painterly ankle sock of vibrant red, came from November 11, 2015.

**— How often do you get comments on your photos? What do people usually say or ask?**

— Yes, there are some comments. I read them. Some of them come from individuals who have seen a lot of my work, and who I firmly believe have found them all valid. They often say something in a joking manner and I take it as a joke. But it is not always like this. I remember another particular comment stating that I rendered an airplane into one of my photos. It was so far from the truth that I simply couldn't take it to heart either.

**— I guess, every photo is like food for thought. You look and make some conclusions. What is this one about? Or choose another photo you like.**

— It is Brooklyn, New York.

The illusion: caution tape lined a subway system's tracks. On the scene was a pedestrian standing in tears, caught within the lines.

The reality: the figure wasn't real. She was an ad pasted to a surface. The caution tape served a purpose that was unrelated to her; roping of the subway tracks during routine maintenance work.

The best word I can use to describe this scenario is synchronicity, a happenstance of two separate instances, who, by way of crossing paths, take on a completely new journey.

**— What do you want to tell people with your photographs in general?**

— There are more questions than answers. The main one is: can you relate?

December 14, 2019

Eric Kogan added many new photos to his Instagram (and deleted some old ones). Now there are almost 10 times as many since 2019: 176 vs. 20. He also has a Flickr with almost 500 photos.