



MEDIA RELEASE

Intangible Cultural Heritage Photographic Project, sanctioned by UNESCO, opens in Geneva's Cité du Temps

Leading Japanese photographer, Yoshi Shimizu, documents Bhutan's sacred mask dance, *Drametse Ngacham*

(Geneva, 31st March 2009) – On 1 April 2009, a special display of photographs by Yoshi Shimizu opens at the Cité du Temps in Geneva. The exhibition focuses on the Bhutanese sacred mask dance, *Drametse Ngacham*, proclaimed by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) as an intangible world cultural heritage and Masterpiece of Humanity. Yoshi Shimizu's photo essay presents the visitor with a unique behind the scenes tour of 'The Mask Dance of the Drums from Drametse', as well as vivid impressions of the Bhutanese landscapes and Himalayan Buddhism.

The Bhutanese saint Khedup Kuenga Gyaltshen initiated *Drametse Ngacham* in 1518. For almost five centuries the sacred dance, performed by sixteen dancers and accompanied by ten musicians, has been performed twice a year at three-day *tshechus* (festivals) organized by the monastery. Until the late nineteenth century, the Drametse community was the sole custodian of the dance but since then, versions have been performed at festivals in monasteries all over Bhutan. Spectators allegedly gain merit towards liberation or avoiding rebirth in the lower realms through watching the dance, which is reputed to bring peace, tranquillity, prosperity, and good fortune to the host location.

Yoshi Shimizu's exhibition includes shots of various aspects of monastery life, from prayer to debating, scenes of the inspirational surrounding countryside and a sneak preview of preparation for the dance's performance. Added fascination comes from subjects such as prayer flags, omnipresent across the Kingdom of Bhutan, and the intricately carved masks worn by the dancers. Yoshi Shimizu also documents the UNESCO-funded programme at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies at the Royal University of Bhutan where a visual database records information on the masks and costumes used in *Drametse Ngacham* in order to preserve this cultural wealth.

Yoshi Shimizu is photographing various 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' recognised by the UNESCO convention for safeguarding and protection. Finance comes entirely from private donations and self-initiated fundraising. Commenting on the project the photographer explains, "It has been my life's passion to travel the world to document the traditional knowledge of indigenous cultures. Studying and understanding cultures not only strengthens our communication skills but it also widens our personal visions of humanity. I hope to be able to test the boundaries of artistic expression by visually capturing the intangible and bringing it to life so that we can help protect our cultural heritage for generations to come."

Y. Shimizu is a Japanese photographer based in France who documents humanitarian aid activities, commercial and editorial projects throughout the world. Over the course of his career, which spans almost two decades, he has undertaken a number of assignments for a wide range of international organisations including United Nations Children's Fund, International Red Cross, World Wide Fund for Nature International, the World Health Organisation and The Global Fund. Over the last 10 years, a key focus for Yoshi's photographs has been on human suffering. Whilst acknowledging and accepting that suffering constitutes the stern reality of humanity, it has been his long-time desire to apply photography to convey the more positive, elements of humanity. According to Yoshi, in the absence of a witness, fact does not exist and his overarching aim is to capture rarely seen human dramas and livelihoods in order to bring them to life and safeguard their future.

Further information about Yoshi Shimizu is available at: <http://www.yoshi-shimizu.com>

Opening hours of the exhibition are from 9 am to 6 pm every day and admission is free.

The **Pont de la Machine** is at the heart of Geneva and has been one of the city's landmarks since the 1840s. It was originally built to supply water to new public fountains but through the ages has become a symbol of the city's industrial development. Since 2005 the building has been in the hands of the Swatch Group and houses the **Cité du Temps**, a unique, interactive venue for permanent and guest exhibitions.

For further information:

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