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THE SECOND EDITION OF THE SHAH MARAI AWARD, LAUNCHED BY AFP, IS WON BY NAIM NADIR

PHOTOGRAPHER NAIM NADIR, FROM KABUL, HAS WON THE SECOND EDITION OF THE SHAH MARAI AWARD FOR HIS SERIES OF BLACK-AND-WHITE PORTRAITS OF MEN THAT REFLECTS THE SPIRIT OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE IN ALL ITS ETHNIC DIVERSITY.



© Naim Nadir

The award, entitled "My Afghanistan", was launched in honour of Shah Marai, chief photographer of Agence France-Presse's Kabul bureau, who was killed in a suicide attack on April 30, 2018. For the second year running, Afghan photographers were invited to portray the reality their people face away from the tragic images of violence.

The 11 faces are captured in close-up and are clearly marked by life's experience. Some pierce the viewer with a stare that is almost unbearable, while others seem more pained, gazing into the distance. "I tried to isolate the subject's eyes, letting their look and expression tell their story," explained the photographer.

The series portrays a striking variety of features and Naim Nadir, born in 1965, said he wanted his series -- entitled 'The Afghan Spirit' -- to showcase national unity by portraying all the main ethnic groups that call Afghanistan home.

Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and 10 or so smaller ethnic groups make up an Afghan mosaic united by "the same struggles and hopes" and their "spirit and resistance."



© Mohammad Ismail

The second prize was awarded to Mohammad Ismail, a photographer at the Reuters news agency born in 1979, for a series of 15 pictures of the bird market in Kabul where "Afghans weighed down by decades of war and struggle find a little comfort and distraction" by indulging their passion for birds.

Partridges, finches, parrots, larks, canaries, quails and fighting cocks are an excuse for old friends, mainly men, to meet up in the narrow market streets bordered by mud-wall houses.



© Mohammad Aref Karimi

Third prize went to 34-year-old Mohammad Aref Karimi, an AFP stringer in the western Afghan city of Herat, for his energetic and colourful series of images portraying mainly women and children, which he said demonstrate that "hope for a good life and finding moments of joy between war and life never left the Afghan people."

The three prize winners were chosen from 39 entries by a jury of six people from the world of photography.

The winners will be presented with the awards at a ceremony in Paris at a date yet to be determined, given the current travel restrictions due to the pandemic.



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