

The Gallery @ Idea Store Whitechapel



Sultana Miah: The Waste 6 May - 17 May 2011



Sultana Miah reveals an honest portrait of Whitechapel Road Market in her latest photo-exhibition: *The Waste*.

Like goods on show, the images function like their own stalls and windows, welcoming voyeurs into an array of market moments that capture the sight and smells of the East End: from a glamorous sea of shimmering bracelets to the severed head of a dead fish.

A basket of green peppers sit ripe and primed like green grenades ready to blow. An exposed pumpkin heaves open its seeds, code orange amber, entering its final hour of labour.

In a lost foreground, a fluffy toy dog stares with panting eyes for attention, whirring would-be passing children into a tug-of-war with their parents' arms, as well as their wallets, just in case it gets missed.

Other explorations include the expressions of mannequin heads adorned in hijab, unveiling an undertone of integration, cultural currents and migrating communities.

Historically in another era, the very same location where Whitechapel Road Market currently exists was once called "The Waste".

Aside from this historic reference, the title may on face value appear to suggest that marketplaces are only for materialism: from the cheap escapism of scanning stalls with immodest eyes, to the parting of hard-earned cash for the quick fix that comes with netting a bargain.

However, the photography reveals roads for a very different narrative; that these bargains and bartering moments are anything but "cheap". Instead, what we witness on display is a noble tapestry of the rites of hardworking traders and merchants delivering presentations of colour, shape, form and dialogue to feed their families and drive community economy.

It is this formula of social and sensorial experience plus financial exchange that forms the bricks and mortar of real business: that the real value is not in the price, but in the culture and feeling you walk away with.

Copper coins and crumpled notes fund this tradition, which after many years mature our investments into market day memories that are nothing short of priceless.

On reflection, perhaps the real "waste" is our fleeting inability to fully appreciate the timeless tradition of market trading. Just like the image depicting a subtle reflection of street buildings in sunglasses, hidden in every market stall is an interconnected eco-system that not only builds lives but enriches the character, culture and social capital in the local community.

Like the consumer who buys a stall item and takes it home, every viewer is invited to roll up, savour the sights and walk away with a small memento of an authentic East End.