

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN:

An unconventional 'receptacle of memories'



The exhibition displays portraits of some Laoximen residents who have been relocated. — Jiang Xiaowei

Lu Feiran

Penglai Road, a lane in Shanghai Huangpu District where residents have been relocated for urban renewal, is sporting “natural art gallery” of photographs displayed across the facades of old houses.

Some of the 129 pictures were created by seven Shanghai local photographers; the rest came from participants of a photography contest organized by the subdistrict of Laoximen.

“Photos are receptacles of memories,” said professor Gu Zheng, the Fudan University academic who organized the exhibition. “These photographic works not only revive our memories but also broaden our perception of the city.”

In *laochengxiang*, or literally “old town,” the Laoximen area is close to the City God Temple and Yuyuan Garden. Laoximen is home to Wenmiao, the oldest Confucian Temple in Shanghai, and Shanghai Jing Ye High School, the city’s oldest school, with a history dating back to 1748.

In recent years, residents who lived in the century-old lanes in Laoximen have been gradually relocated to make room for urban redevelopment. The Confucian Temple was closed for restoration in 2021, along with its popular weekend secondhand book market.

“No Shanghai native would not know about Laoximen,” said Zhang Li, an exhibition visitor from a nearby neighborhood.

“Wenmiao and its surrounding area were the childhood ‘holy land’ for us who were born in the 1980s. I often bought CDs, stationery and cartoon stickers in small shops, and there were so many snack shops that you can feast for an entire afternoon.”

The pictures on display, however, reminded Zhang more of her old friends than anything else.

“I once had many friends living in the area, but now they have either moved or been relocated,” she said. “The city is so big, and lives are so much busier. It’s not easy to get together anymore.”

If the exhibition evokes memories of something or someone, then it hits the right chord.



Photos are spaced along lanes so that visitors can pose with them. — Jiang Xiaowei