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Xu Haifeng
Photographer



Photographer Xu Haifeng adds government slogans — “Better City, Better Life; Earlier Expropriation, Earlier Life Improvement” — to the picture of a discarded aluminum pot.

Xu Haifeng is one of the photographers of the exhibition. His works mainly focus on old items he collected from homes about to be demolished. They include an old Hitachi TV set, a pair of women’s sandals and an old videotape.

“Residents are gone, but their breath of life remains in the houses as if they never left,” he told Shanghai Daily. “I took the articles back to my studio to photograph, with a projector shining light on them. The lighting has two different meanings. One is that this is the twilight of these articles because their usefulness is over; the other is that maybe they can glow with a brand-new life.”

Xu, however, said he still felt there was something lacking in the photos and he wanted to give them some complexity.

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itself,” he said. “Some people fully embraced a new life and left all their old things behind; others decided to take at least part of their lives with them. The relocation evoked all these emotions.”

Xu added to his pictures some of the government slogans encouraging residents to move from their old homes. For a picture of an aluminum pot, he added: “Better City, Better Life; Earlier Expropriation, Earlier Life Improvement.” To a glass painting, he added: “Harmonious expropriation benefits both the nation and the people.”

Another photographer Qu Kailun captures the vitality of city life. In his pictures, there is always a sense of motion.

One of his works shows a table of food next to two fish tanks. The light is dim, and there is no human in picture, but it still feels alive as colorful goldfish swim around the dishes, seemingly curious about what their owners are eating for dinner.

“All my pictures are taken by chance, and this one was no exception,” Qu said. “It was before relocation in Laoximen began. One day when I was roaming through the lane, I saw a family that had just finished cooking a meal. They had their door open, and the dishes had just been put on the table next to two fish tanks. I asked them if I could take a picture, and they agreed.”

Qu said he once lived in an old area of Shanghai for more than six decades and knows what it means to say goodbye to the old and embrace the new.

“It is indeed difficult to leave everything behind, but most residents were eager to embrace better living conditions,” he said. “The old houses look good from the outside, but inside many families still had to share kitchens



A photo taken by Qu Kailun shows a home-cooked dinner next to two fish tanks in a cramped room where a family once lived in Laoximen before relocation.



Another photo taken by Qu features an old barbershop. The faces of the two people inside are hidden in shadow, making viewers curious about their stories.

and bathrooms. Living there was even more difficult in bad weather.”

More than 8,000 families have been relocated in Laoximen in the past two years, and many old compounds have been sealed shut.

“The pictures are about the size of a door or window,” said Wang Yimin, an official with the subdistrict. “They fuse well with the original buildings, giving visitors an immersive feel.”

Wang said the subdistrict will promote more events to showcase the

heritage of the area, even after residents have been moved and many buildings torn down.

He cited as one example the Longmencun neighborhood, which dates back to 1935. The lanes resemble an architectural museum of residential buildings, including a Slovakian style rarely seen in Shanghai.

“Laoximen will one day return in a new format, but we will do our best to protect its treasures of the past,” Wang said.