



Follow Mother

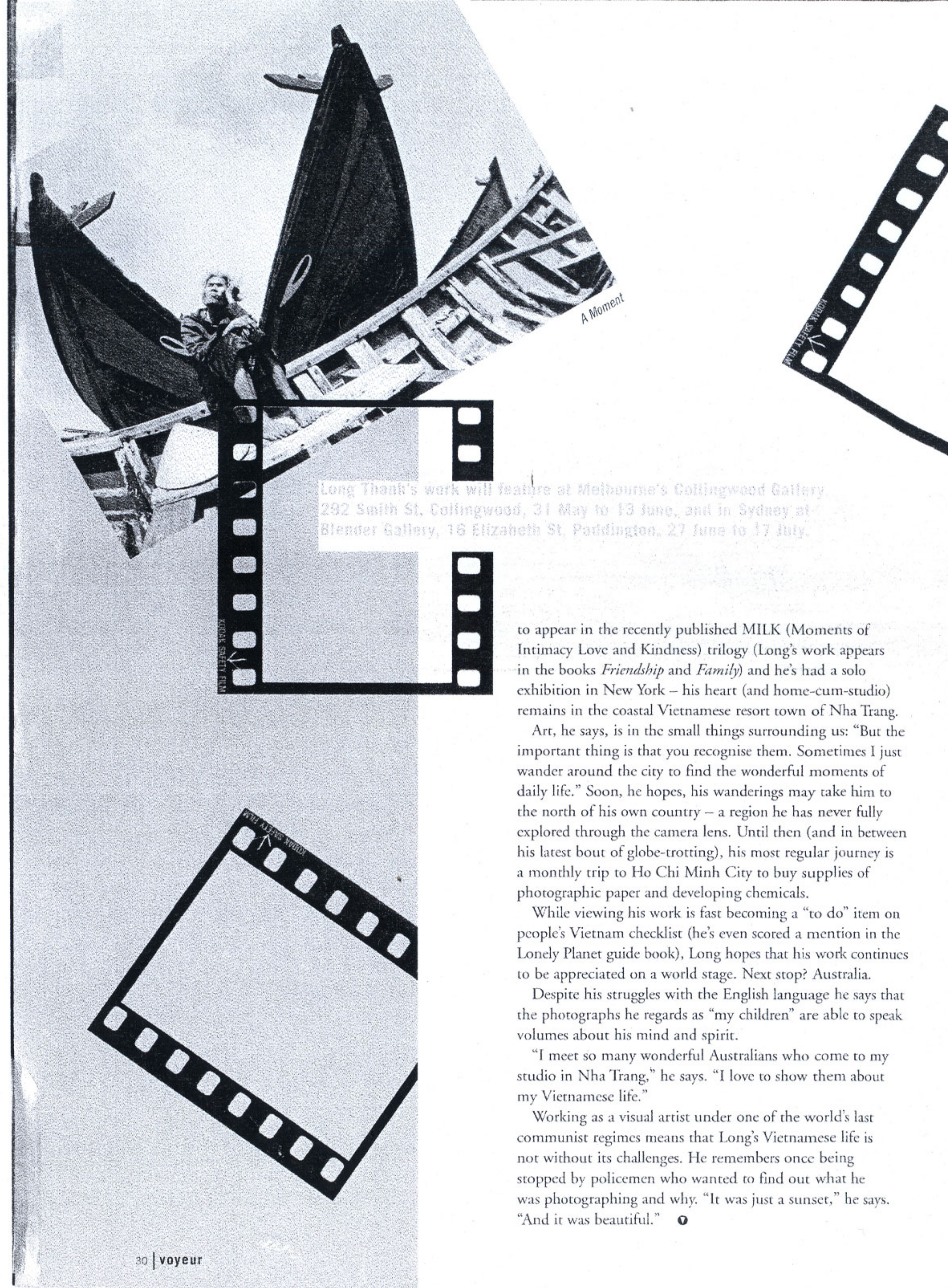


Under The Rain

THE IMAGES ARE EVOCATIVE. Steamy, pouring rain... the faces of homeless children... the weathered skin of experience. Vietnamese photographer Long Thanh, 51, finds inspiration all around him. Forget elaborate studio set-ups and awkwardly posed models. Look at a photograph taken by Long and it's more likely you'll see the toothless, betel nut-stained mouth of an old woman or a street seller weighed down by a load of bananas. You almost experience the heat, sounds and smells of South-East Asia.

Since developing his first black-and-white photograph at the age of 13 and choosing photography as a career at 20, Long's success has been slow but steady. The Vietnam War and an obligatory stint as a soldier in the years immediately after interrupted his professional life, but since then, and particularly in the past decade, he has claimed a swag of international medals and exhibited his works in a veritable United Nations of countries, including Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the United States.

But even with his most recent and visible success – two of his photographs were selected from thousands worldwide



A Moment

Long Thanh's work will feature at Melbourne's Collingwood Gallery, 292 Smith St, Collingwood, 31 May to 13 June, and in Sydney at Blender Gallery, 16 Elizabeth St, Paddington, 27 June to 17 July.

to appear in the recently published MILK (Moments of Intimacy Love and Kindness) trilogy (Long's work appears in the books *Friendship* and *Family*) and he's had a solo exhibition in New York – his heart (and home-cum-studio) remains in the coastal Vietnamese resort town of Nha Trang.

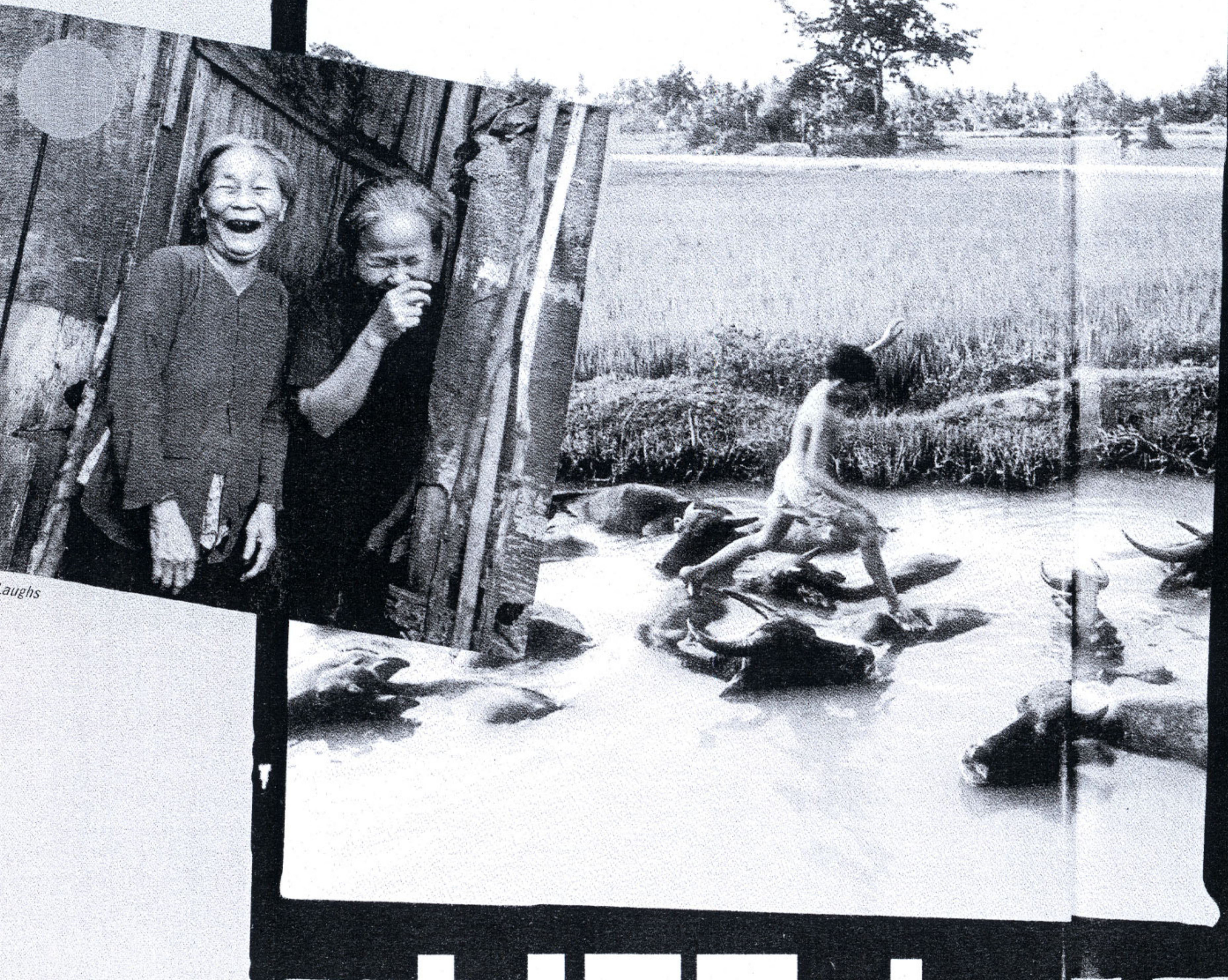
Art, he says, is in the small things surrounding us: "But the important thing is that you recognise them. Sometimes I just wander around the city to find the wonderful moments of daily life." Soon, he hopes, his wanderings may take him to the north of his own country – a region he has never fully explored through the camera lens. Until then (and in between his latest bout of globe-trotting), his most regular journey is a monthly trip to Ho Chi Minh City to buy supplies of photographic paper and developing chemicals.

While viewing his work is fast becoming a "to do" item on people's Vietnam checklist (he's even scored a mention in the Lonely Planet guide book), Long hopes that his work continues to be appreciated on a world stage. Next stop? Australia.

Despite his struggles with the English language he says that the photographs he regards as "my children" are able to speak volumes about his mind and spirit.

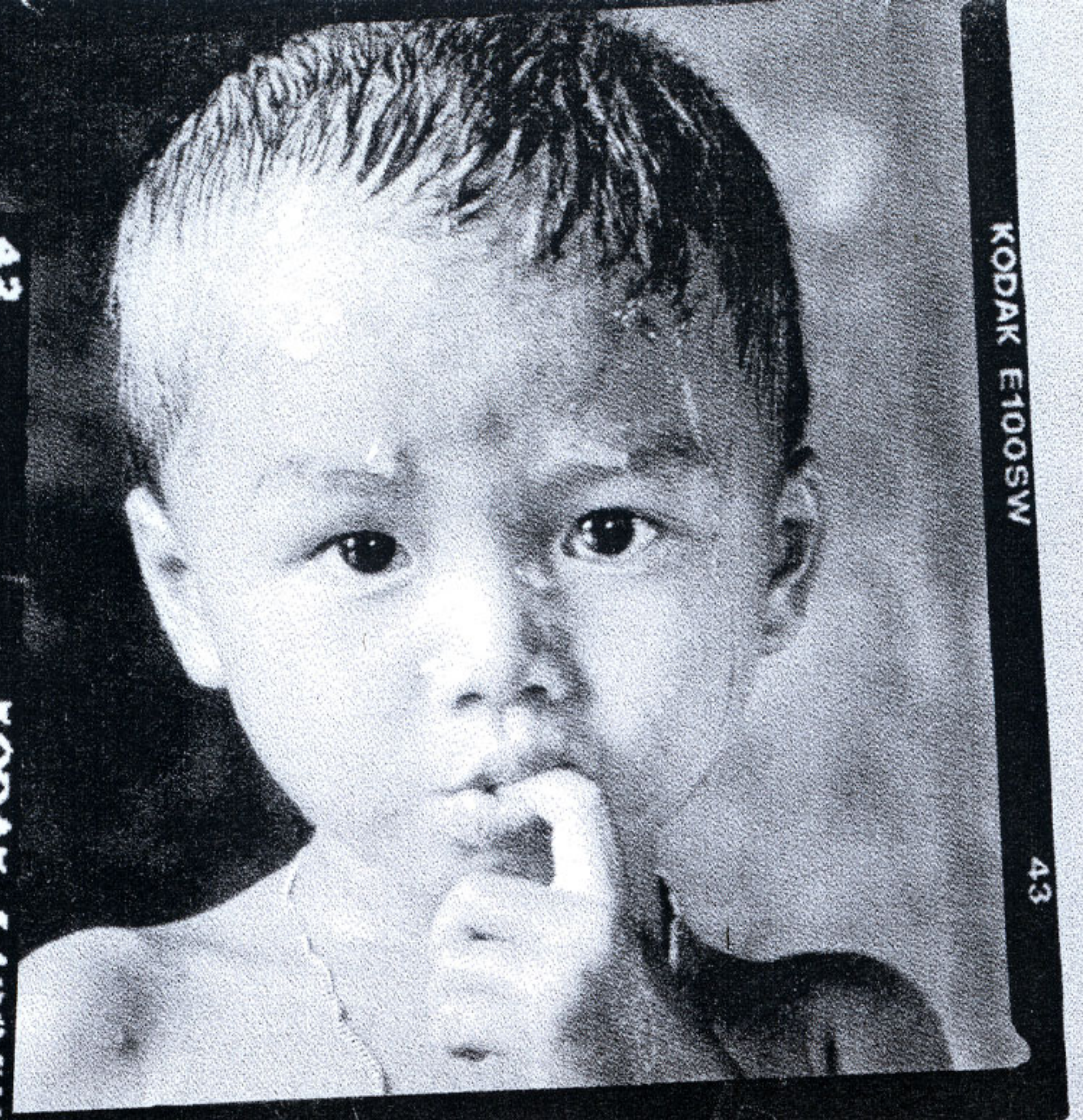
"I meet so many wonderful Australians who come to my studio in Nha Trang," he says. "I love to show them about my Vietnamese life."

Working as a visual artist under one of the world's last communist regimes means that Long's Vietnamese life is not without its challenges. He remembers once being stopped by policemen who wanted to find out what he was photographing and why. "It was just a sunset," he says. "And it was beautiful." ❶



Laughs

Afternoon



Silence



They capture the minutiae of life and, as a result, Long Thanh's images have touched millions. Now, his work arrives in Australia. By **Claire Halliday**

LIFE is beautiful