



*Nostalgie* – an exhibition of art photography

# Nostalgia Review through the lens



BY RANGA CHANDRARATHNE

Kumar de Silva captures the defining cultural landscape in and around the city of Paris. They are the signposts of memories encapsulated in black and white images. They are also the sharp images that represent slices of rich French cultural life; moments captured from Montmartre to Brittany. As Kumar celebrates his longstanding relationship with France as his second homeland, the nostalgia captured through lens will stand the test of time and will serve as memoirs in images and time capsules which define the salient features of French cultural landscape.

One of the striking images of the exhibition was the one entitled 'Alfresco lunch by the canal St. Martin Paris'. The frame captures a youth having lunch by St. Martin canal. There is a dog near the youth. It seems that the youth is thoroughly engrossed with tasting the lunch quite oblivious of the environment. One of the salient features of the photograph is that Kumara has really captured the quietude of the evening and the dying sun which casts its slanting rays.

The picture entitled 'Chill wine on a hot summer day' is an attractive picture which captures an important facet of French life. Everyone who has tasted wine in hot summer would remember happy and quality times they shared with their friends or relations. A glass of chilled wine would have been nectar for such times. The middle of the frame is the sign-board of the restaurant and the cane-chairs actually invite customers. Dine and wine is part and parcel of rich cultural life of France and Kumar has captured it in a memorable shot. The photographs in the collection make up a photo essay, not in the strict sense, of Kumar's nostalgia of France.

'Signs' is one of the insightful pictures which are signs of different service providers. For instance, one sign is Café. Café is an important public space in France and is one of the important facets of European culture. In fact, Café has a sub-culture. Another sign is a restaurant. One of the important aspects of France is that it is one of the prime tourist destinations where at any given time, there are a large number of tourists from diverse parts of the world.

'Westside Artist Montmartre' captures a fascinating aspect of French cultural life. While the people are having coffee in the café, a street artist is drawing on. The picture captures the side glance of the scene. Again, Kumar's sharp eye is seen behind the lens.

'Eiffel Tower' is a picture which is one of the most prominent landmarks with which France is identified. 'Chapel turned boutique hotel', itself, is an innovation. The hay in the backyard of the chapel indicates the 19th century agricultural France. The chapel which was converted into a boutique hotel is a potent symbol which bridges the past and the present. It is obvious that the 19th century ambience would evoke nostalgia of the past and the agricultural lifestyle in France.

France is famous for its old architecture. There are hotels, buildings and churches which are more than centuries old.

One of such hotels that Kumar captured is the 'Hotel du Nord'. The camera is behind a leafy tree and the sun rays filtering through the foliage have added texture to the frame. The old tree and the partially visible chimney would further enhance the oldness of the building. The picture evokes strong feeling of the bygone era.

Culinary styles differ from one nation to another. Apart from the diverse variety of dishes served in different countries, the dishes and the very manner of their preparations would bear the hallmarks of one's culinary culture. Sometimes the same food in two cultures is served in a different manner. For instance, the potatoes served in India is different from the manner in which it is served in the Netherlands, Germany or in France. 'Escargots for dinner' is a picture which epitomises the culinary habits of France. 'Escargots' is served on a white plate with a stick.

'Jeanne d'Arc charges towards the Louvre' is another historical place that Kumar's camera captured. 'Moulin Rouge' is an important landmark in the cultural landscape of France. It is a cabaret built in 1889 by Joseph Oller. The picture shows the interior of the cabaret with people dancing and enjoying an evening. The cabaret is situated closer to Montmartre in the Paris red-light district of Pigalle on Boulevard de Clichy in the 18th and has a red windmill on its roof.

The Moulin Rouge is now known as the spiritual birthplace of the modern Can-Can dance and is a major tourist attraction and offers musical dance entertainment to visitors across the globe. However, the club still retains its old glory in its décor.

"Canal St Martin Paris" is another landmark destination whose history goes back to the Napoleon era. The photograph captures silhouette of men and women enjoying the evening on the bridge. In 1802, the canal was constructed by Napoleon to create an artificial waterway to supply Paris with fresh water and to help avoid diseases such as dysentery and cholera.

In the photograph 'Lunch at Maison Ravout' Kumar captures the ambience in a restaurant. An old couple is about to dine. It seems that Kumar has used only the natural light and the glare from the window is quite visible. The glare has partially lit up the faces of the couple.

A significant aspect of Kumar's photography or in this instance, a photo essay on France, is that he tries to capture the diverse aspects of rich French cultural landscape with living monuments whose history goes back to the Napoleon era. His selection of sites for the photographs not only suggests Kumar's eye for details but his comprehensive knowledge of France, the French language and the history of the land he considered his second home.

The exhibition 'Nostalgie' was recently held at the AF de Kotte at 139, Jawatte Road, Colombo 5. AF de Kotte is Sri Lanka's newest French language and cultural centre serving the Colombo and Greater Colombo areas.

Affiliated to the Foundation Alliance Francaise in Paris, it enjoys the full patronage of the Government of France and the Embassy of France in Sri Lanka.

