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'Everyone used to think I was a gangster girl': using art to break down stereotypes

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Exhibition in Sham Shui Po features work of ethnic minority teenagers commenting on Hong Kong life

Doel Kulbir stands in front of a photograph she manipulated digitally to feature herself dressed in red sinking into water in the depth of a forest.

"The dress I'm wearing is bright but when you're in a dark place you're still drowning," she says.

Sixteen-year-old Kulbir's photograph hangs in a newly launched exhibit in Sham Shui Po featuring the work of ethnic minority teenagers reflecting upon Hong Kong life, integration and identity.

"Everyone used to think I was a gangster girl, and I don't know how that happened, that's not who I am," says Kulbir, of the memories this image raises. Kulbir was born in Hong Kong, though her parents hail from Punjab, settling in the fragrant harbour in the '90s.



Doel Kulbir with her photo 'Game of Mystery' at the exhibition.
Photo: K.Y. Cheng

finds herself fighting against the presumption that she affiliates with that particular strain of life as a second-generation ethnic minority youth.

Kulbir says people, especially her peers, have a habit of typecasting her into roles she does not want to play, and expresses feelings of engulfment under others' expectations. She describes herself as traditional and enjoys being Indian, saying it makes her feel unique in a diverse city that is like a "small world".

In Kwun Tong, which Kulbir and her family call home, gangs get into scuffles near school gates. Kulbir

"Many people in Hong Kong don't know about Indians here, like they don't know about Pakistanis," she says, pointing at a picture of a fellow fledgling photographer featuring a young woman in a burka holding the sign that reads: "I am not a terrorist."



"Girls in ethnic minority groups are the least understood sector in Hong Kong, and they shy away from exposure," says Dr York Chow, Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission who attended the opening ceremony of the exhibition, "All of ME - Self, Experience and Stereotypes: Perspectives from Ethnic Minority Youth".

Dr York Chow Yat-Ngok, Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), in front of a photo 'The Blue And Brown Eyes' by Navneet Brarkaur. Photo: K.Y. Cheng

Chow described the need to push for better integration and stronger

preventative measures against harassment within schools as a crucial factor in creating a more cohesive and equal society.

The exhibit, featuring the images of 35 students of St Margaret's school, will be on display at Gallery L0, Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre until January 28. It is the culmination of a project led by youth charity KELY support group and funded by financial services company Moody's.

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