



“Check out these amazing aerial photographs of Singapore’s playgrounds ; and meet the man who took them using drone photography.” By Mrigaa sethi, SG Magazine, 10.07.2015

Globe-trotting photographer Stefen Chow has taken pictures of billionaires, Ai Wei Wei and the world’s poorest people (the latter through his ongoing work with economist Hui Yi Lin at www.thepovertyline.net). But his latest project in Singapore is about something quite different: playgrounds. In collaboration with local company Avetics and Void Works, Chow shot 100 playgrounds across the island using drone photography. The result is The Play Project, an interactive website inviting users to share their memories, partially financed by the SG50 fund. Here, he talks about what adults fail to see as we get older, Singapore’s amazing playgrounds and the similarities between the rich and the poor.

Drones are politically loaded, and in Singapore have a mixed reputation, even recreationally. Were you thinking about this as you started your project?

Actually, no. My angle about drones shows how much the photographic climate has changed in a short period of two or three years. I used to photograph for assignments from helicopters, and budgets of this nature would cost the client an arm and a leg. Today, drones have pretty much eliminated the need for an aerial photographer, and it has also opened up a lot of possibilities, including photoshoots that were not possible from a helicopter point of view, regardless of budget. I have always been fascinated with understanding playgrounds, a feature so connected to our childhood but in a different way. This is one way to do it. There is no way you would fly a helicopter over a playground to document it, so this is a real first in many ways.

From that far up, the playgrounds appear empty.

There is a real practical explanation. I work with Avetics, and they are a passionate and professional bunch. When we set out to photograph these playgrounds, they refused to photograph above humans because of safety issues. For me, there was no need for the playgrounds to be filled with people, as the connection with the environment is rather immediate and intimate at the same time.

Playgrounds are not just our past, but possibly the past, as kids spend more time with screens. What do you think?

Disagree! They appear nostalgic to us because many of us looking at playgrounds tend to be adults, and I realize things like these become invisible once we are past that stage. I did an interview with a local radio station, and just before I went into the interview, the DJ said, "Playgrounds have become so rare nowadays—only the Toa Payoh Dragon, and not much else right?" I found that very revealing of adults. Playgrounds in Singapore aren't rare. There are nearly 1,500 of them in this small nation. This would rank Singapore as perhaps having the most playgrounds per square acre. We photographed 100 and less than 10% of the total playgrounds across Singapore.

Are they all the same?

No, I found that the playgrounds are really very sophisticated. There are playgrounds for three to four year-olds, five to ten year-olds and even playgrounds specifically made for teenagers. Not one single playground is the same. We also find many of these playgrounds very crowded during the later part of the day and on weekends, so yes, children still play playgrounds. Computer games are cool, but I also think the government has done a more than admirable job of keeping physical fun a serious business for their residents.

What has the response been from the public so far?

It has been incredible. We had lots of children who knew exactly what we were doing when we were on site, and I had members of the public contacting me saying they want to see their immediate playground in their neighbourhood. A minister mentioned to me that he was touched he has never seen the heartlands this way.

Do you have a favorite playground from the collection?

That's like asking which child you like the best. But there are a couple of memorable ones. One is situated near Commonwealth, at 8 Jalan Rumah Tinggi. As we flew the drone up, we didn't realize we were staring at a friendly lion staring back at us. That really made me smile. The other one is the one near Choa Chu Kang, of Tembusu Park, where the landscape just looked like it popped out from a fairy tale. The trains just added fairy dust to the magic. We were also in the presence of a group of very enthusiastic children. They represent all the racial groups in our country, and I was thinking: See, playgrounds help nation building!

You've photographed billionaires as well as people living below the poverty line around the world.

Thanks for pointing this out. I think in the end, billionaires and people living at the poverty line are more similar than we think they are different. They both tend to be insecure about their immediate future, and I rarely meet people at these opposite extreme ends who are truly happy or satisfied. At the very core, they are also very human and genuine when you show earnest interest in what they do. However, my heart is with the people who live at the poverty line.

link to the original article: <http://sg.asia-city.com/city-living/news/check-out-these-amazing-aerial-photographs-singapores-playgrounds>



