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Student Ng Guang Ze wins two awards for tranquil shot of winding stream near China's Wenhai Lake

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A whole lot of patience and a stroke of beginner's luck. Singaporean photographer Ng Guang Ze attributes these two factors to his double win at the recent Sony World Photography Awards.

The fourth-year architecture student from the National University of Singapore impressed with his other-worldly Curved Stream image.

It is a tranquil black-and-white scene of a stream meandering through the grasslands of Wenhai Lake in Lijiang, in China's Yunnan province. The Yulong Snow Mountain looms on the horizon.

Curved Stream clinched the 25-year-old the national award for Singapore, plus a second award in the landscape category in the open competition. His photo trumped 419,000 other images from more than 200 countries and territories submitted for the prestigious contest, now in its 18th year.

The journey to create the photograph spanned far and wide. It began in September 2024 when Mr Ng travelled to Beijing for a four-month exchange semester at Tsinghua University.

While in China, his love for photography and travel took him to the beautiful landscapes of Urumqi in Xinjiang, as well as Lijiang in Yunnan.

He decided to visit Yunnan in December 2024 after noticing on Chinese social media that the south-west province was trending as a tourism hot spot.

He chose to explore the Wenhai area instead of hitting the Yulong Snow Mountain trail, the usual tourist route. He knew he wanted to include the mountain in his photograph, rather than shoot from it.

Mr Ng usually plans his shoots based on the best times of the day, when the light is gentle. He then organises his itinerary around this, arriving at his destination to scout for the best spots and compositions, decide on the camera settings, then wait for the best light to fall – and hope for the best.

Armed with three camera bodies – the Nikon Z6II and FM2, as well as the Leica M6 – plus a couple of lenses and a tripod, he began exploring the vast area, about twice the size of Bedok Reservoir. Arriving after lunch, he took his time to discover interesting angles and compositions at the deserted lake.

He was at Wenhai for two days, and discovered early the spot where he shot his winning photo.

It was towards the end of his first day, after scouting for about three hours, that he found the scene that he had envisioned, while he was making his way back to his Didi rental car.

An excited Mr Ng set up his tripod and camera to capture the stunning scene before him, but when he released his grip on the three-legged support, fierce winds knocked it over, along with his camera. Fortunately, the metal bracket fixture on the camera body protected it from damage.

It was smooth sailing after that, with Mr Ng spending the next two hours making 30- to 60-second exposures to capture the perfect shot. The use of polarising and neutral density filters produced the smooth water surface, while underexposing the shots between half and one f-stop retained colour and vibrancy.

Eventually, he decided to turn the colour image to black and white because he felt the colours were not flattering, while the monochrome option gave it a "hand-sketched with a pencil" look, he said.

Little post-processing of the image was done, and the scene was immortalised on his Nikon Z6II with a 28-75mm f2.8 lens, shot at f13 for 60 seconds, at ISO100 and 42mm focal length in raw format.

The next day, Mr Ng returned to Wenhai for another four to five hours to cover the remainder of the banks surrounding the lake, hoping to capture even better shots. But the winning image had already been made.

At his friends' encouragement, he decided to submit three photographs for the free-to-enter Sony World Photography Awards.

Ms Claudia Grimaldi Marks, one of the judges of the open competition, said: "This image by Ng Guang Ze stood out to me the moment I saw it. It is so beautiful and magical that it was a clear winner in its category.

"The light and curved lines in the landscape transport the viewer to what seems like an other-worldly and peaceful space and time."

Mr Ng is the first photographer from Singapore in recent years to win both a national award and the landscape category in the open competition. The last time this happened was in 2013, when photographer Yeow Kwang Yeo won the open panoramic category and the Singapore national award.

On capturing the winning image, Mr Ng said: "You have to orchestrate it very well, compose it and then let nature do everything."

He added: "I like the experience of spending time by myself, just taking photos of random spots for one or two hours, with no tourists in sight. When I came across the meandering stream, I got excited because it was what I was looking for. The curves were just perfect. It was like it was calling out to me in some sense."

On his win, he said: "I didn't expect it. This was my first competition. My friends said, 'Why not try your luck?' I did and I got lucky."

The prize for his national award is a set of Sony digital imaging equipment, global press exposure across various platforms, inclusion in the annual awards book and an exhibition at Somerset House in London from April 15 to May 5. For the landscape award, there is a choice between two sets of digital equipment.

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Sony World Photography Awards 2025

S'pore shutterbug strikes gold

Photographer Ng Guang Ze (left) created his award-winning photo, Curved Stream (above), on a solo hike in Wenhai, China. PHOTOS: © NG GUANG ZE, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025, STEPHANIE YEOW

Pensioners Table Tennis Club by Rahsan Firtina from Turkey, winner in the national awards. In this work, retired soldiers play games at this club in Hanoi, Vietnam. PHOTO:© RAHSAN FIRTINA, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

Breakfast At The Paddy Field by Zay Yar Lin from Myanmar, winner in the national awards. In this work, a local farmer and his family in Old Bagan, Myanmar, have breakfast, having worked since the early morning at a paddy field. PHOTO: © ZAY YAR LIN, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

The world seen through a camera lens

Beautiful images of people and nature were unveiled when the winners of the Sony World Photography Awards 2025 were announced in late February.

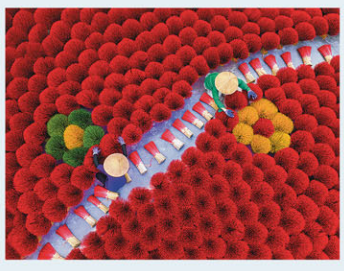
This annual free-to-enter competition is internationally renowned and competitive, with 419,000 images from more than 200 countries and territories sent in for the 2025 edition.

Singaporean architecture student Ng Guang Ze, 25, won the national award for Singapore, as well as the landscape category in the open competition.

The four categories in the contest are: professional, open, student and youth. There are also national and regional awards that support local photographic communities. These winners are picked from the open competition, which champions the best single images.

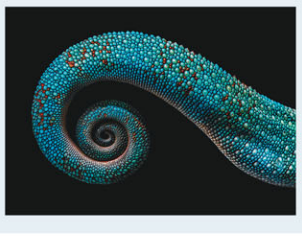
Here are some of the winning images. **Stephanie Yeow**

Spider-Verse by Wan Yong Chong from Malaysia, winner in the national awards. A group of freedivers defy gravity, suspended upside down beneath a boat in clear water. PHOTO: © WAN YONG CHONG, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025



Incense Flowers by Chim Oanh from Vietnam, shortlisted for the travel category in the open competition. Workers dry colourful incense on the ground, where it takes on the form of beautiful flowers. The incense is then taken to the market to sell. PHOTO: © CHIM OANH, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

Soaring Flames by Chen De-Huang from Taiwan, winner in the national awards. The world-famous Coming True Fire Group put on a free performance of its Firemosa tour for a group of local children. PHOTO: © CHEN DE-HUANG, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025



Vortex by Pedro Jarque Krebs from Peru, second-place winner in the regional awards for Latin America. The fascinating tail of a chameleon – a master of camouflage – reflects nature's complexity and beauty. PHOTO: © PEDRO JARQUE KREBS, SONY WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

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