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FIRST EDITION OF THE SHAH MARAI AWARD, LAUNCHED BY AFP, WON BY FARSHAD USYAN

FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER FARSHAD USYAN, FROM MAZAR-I-SHARIF IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN, HAS WON THE FIRST EDITION OF THE SHAH MARAI AWARD FOR HIS SERIES OF 15 PHOTOS OF HIS COMPATRIOTS' DAILY LIVES, WHICH VIVIDLY CAPTURE THEIR DESIRE TO LIVE FREELY AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES AS THEY WISH.



© Farshad Usyan

This award, entitled "[My Afghanistan](#)", was launched in honour of Shah Marai, chief photographer of Agence France-Presse's Kabul bureau killed in a suicide attack on April 30, 2018. Afghan photographers were invited to portray the reality their people face away from the tragic images of violence.

Farshad, 26, called his photo story "[The Pacifist](#)". His photos show veiled women laughing with friends in a 3D cinema, a female radio journalist or taxi driver, a young couple celebrating Valentine's Day in a chic restaurant or ballot boxes transported up a mountain by donkey. Summing up his work, Farshad said: "Peace does not only mean absence of war, it could also mean a safe environment, human dignity, right to education, right of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of choice and freedom of sexuality."



© Hoshang Hashimi

"I believe media, especially photography, is a very powerful tool to initiate positive movements within a society," said Farshad, a medical graduate who grew up under the Taliban and took over the job of photographer from his brother who passed away.

Second prize was awarded to Hoshang Hashimi, a photo stringer aged 30. Hoshang is from Herat in the west of the country and has experience working with the world's three biggest news agencies. The prize rewards a very beautiful series of photos, entitled "Afghan Life in the Middle of Conflict", portraying the difficulties but also the moments of calm in daily life.



© Mohammad Anwar Danishyar

Third prize went to Mohammad Anwar Danishyar, a 21-year-old freelancer from Jalalabad in the east of Afghanistan. Entitled "Bricks to Blackboards", his series of photos shows the hard labour carried out by families dependent on rich owners of open-air brick factories, with their children's classrooms set up in the middle.

The three prize winners were chosen from 56 entries by a jury of five people from the world of photography, based only on the series of images and their description.

The three prizes will be awarded at a ceremony in Paris.

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