

Capturing child birth on camera

BY SANDRA MATHIEU
STREET NEWS SERVICE

French photographer Thierry Quenette is on an extraordinary mission: to photograph women giving birth around the world. He set up a foundation to expose, and improve, the harsh conditions in which so many babies are born.

To express himself through his photography; to uncover great beauty or perhaps reveal the ugliness of mankind; to change the world in his own way; these are the goals Thierry Quenette sets himself every day.

The French photographer, who is based in Montreal, recently created the Naitre dans le Monde (Born into the World)

"The right to give birth should not be a privilege reserved to those living in rich countries"

— THIERRY QUENETTE
PHOTOGRAPHER, NAITRE DANS LE MONDE

Foundation. His plan is to travel extensively, to places as varied as Hungary, Senegal and Morocco, with the aim of capturing the many different aspects of our first experience in life: birth.

As he photographs unsanitary hospital conditions and school desks pushed together to create a makeshift hospital bed, the artist uncovers an uncomfortable truth about the quality of health care provided to women in different countries. The photographer hopes that he will thus help to improve conditions in countries in which childbirth still poses a real risk to the lives of both the mother and the newborn child.

Every year, more than half a million



PHOTO: THIERRY QUENETTE

women across the world die as a result of pregnancy- and birth-related complications. These deaths are due to both a shortage of hospitals in the regions in question and the high cost of obstetric care for populations with an extremely low income.

"The right to give birth should not be a privilege reserved to those living in rich countries, but should be accessible to all. It should not depend on the financial resources of women and their families. If giving birth really is a right, then it is our duty to fight for it to be recognized worldwide," insists the photographer, his passion ringing clearly in his voice. His French accent shows traces of the 20 years he has spent in Quebec.

With a worldly wisdom that sets him apart, and a spark of intensity in his piercing blue eyes, Thierry Quenette describes one of his experiences:

"The baby is just born. He is blue. The new mum seems to have lost consciousness. My lens is fixed on the rusty retractors and the midwife's worn surgical gloves. I am crouched in a corner of the room; I try to make myself invisible. Should I put away my Canon? Or should I continue to photograph the birth... or the death?"

The Naitre dans le Monde Foundation informs and raises awareness among the

general population, universities, companies and influential leaders through conferences, traveling exhibitions, information sessions and joint projects. Donations made to the foundation go towards providing health centers and hospitals with much-needed basic medical supplies and equipment. This equipment, which includes gloves, speculums, stethoscopes and non-perishable medicines, is distributed by local nonprofit organizations and helps to prevent the spread of illnesses and infections both during and after childbirth.

It's all go for Thierry Quenette. Recently he organized a photography exhibition in Montreal's Bain Mathieu and a charity cabaret evening in the town's Theatre Plaza, and he is preparing his next trip to Senegal in October. The aim of this trip will be to supply medical equipment and to sign distribution agreements with local organizations. Moreover, in the long term, he is entertaining the idea of writing a book and he hopes to visit about 10 more countries in the meantime. Follow his progress and find out more about the foundation's upcoming events at www.fndlm.org.

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Photographer Thierry Quenette wants to document the difficult labour conditions faced by many women worldwide.



Far away

By Jason Wolf

Take me to that place where there's love in the air
Take me to that place where no one judges and everyone cares
Take me to that place where there are beautiful clouds and beautiful skies
Take me to that place where no one ever dies
Take me to that place where it's never cold and never hot
Take me to that place where no one has a little and everyone has a lot
Take me to that place where there's no getting high
Take me to that place where there's no such thing as a lie
Take me to that place where there's no pain
Take me to that place where there's nothing to lose and everything to gain
Take me to that place where no one sheds a tear
Take me to that place where there is no fear
Take me to that place where everyone has a home
Take me to that place where no one's ever alone
Take me to that place.

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