

In the recently concluded Art Appreciation Week, one of the resource persons was well known documentary filmmaker, Conrad Syiem. Syiem had written, directed and edited numerous documentary films both within and outside the state. The following are excerpts from the conversation between Conrad Syiem and our correspondent:

Q: How relevant is art in this busy, fast moving 21st century?

Conrad: I feel that art covers almost everything. Art is basically when you exercise curiosity for the world and you want to explore more about it. When you do this there's so much you can learn from everything around us. When you allow yourself to have an open mind you will look at things around you and question why and how, then you will imbibe all that and then put them together according to your own way of thinking. At times your creativity allows you to understand things in a certain manner or even create or recreate things in a certain manner, that is art for me. To me, art in various degrees keeps happening in each individual's life and this makes it relevant.

Q: What exactly do you choose as your mode of expression?

Conrad: I'll come to the context of the sessions that I have conducted and that has something to do with historical photographic processes. It is an old method of photographing or recording images in a permanent form. My area of interest is in observing things and documenting them in either the form of a video or a still photograph. However, it has less to do with my expression and more to do with recording my surroundings. However, if the output of my observation in a photograph or a video is interpreted as an expression, it then becomes an expression although to me it is merely a documentation and recording of facts and things around me.

Q: What is the main objective of this Art Appreciation Program and how much has that objective been realised through the four days?

Conrad: The cyanotype process of photography is what I tried to share with the students in this program. It is something that I myself learnt quite recently. It is an old process developed in the year 1842 and has been around for more than 100 years now. I taught myself this process probably 5 years ago and it was really exciting to see the image come out of paper after the development process. I discovered all that and just wanted to share the beauty of how the early photographs were created with those who were interested or with those were not aware of the existence of such a process. The opportunity that Martin Luther Christian University offered was something that I had looked forward to and it was an enriching experience for me as well. We all came here sharing something that we do either full time or out of passion and sharing that with the students was a learning process for me as well and I hope the students will go back having learnt something too.

Q: If we were to have more programs like these, what tips would you like to offer?

Conrad: That is something I'll have to go back and think over. Right now, I cannot offer many tips because I came with an open mind, I did not come with expectations. I just wanted to take it as it comes. I feel one important thing about life is to step out into the world with an open mind. We have the faculty to observe things in the way we can observe, the outcomes of which are entirely up to us.