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ND PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2021

Mauro De Bettio

ITALY



TITLE*LIFE IN BALANCE***ENTRY DESCRIPTION**

Wearing their precious bright-coloured dresses, children are dancing in the labyrinth of narrow alleys in between the shacks of Kibera, the largest slum in Africa.

With over 2.5 million people in around 200 settlements, the inhabitants of Kibera represent more than half of Nairobi's population, occupying only 5% of its area. A constant growing population automatically causes the increase of unemployment, poverty, crime, scarcity of water and infections.

In this tragic scenario, where education is a daily struggle, children are the only ones who can afford to dream.

Project Elimu community is one of the opportunities to fulfill their dreams. This non-profit organization, where instructor Michael has been teaching ballet since 2009, provides a safe space for children to grow and learn both dance and social skills. It offers an education to orphans and underprivileged children in one of Africa's most desperate areas. They become accomplished ballerinas and at the same time discover their own personal strengths.

Most of them didn't even know what the word "ballet" meant, but it didn't stop them from discovering their great passion.

Dance defined a special path in the life of these children who found a life in balance through their craft. It brought them immeasurable confidence and self-esteem.

Ballet is more than learning dance moves, it's as much mental as it is physical. It changes their perception of self-worth, helping them realise they can become anything they want to be.

The joy and focus in their faces tells a story far greater than words could ever describe. In spite of COVID complications resulting in occasional school closings, they continue their training and performing in the streets. Not even a pandemic can stop these children from pursuing their passion.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Mauro De Bettio is an internationally recognized photographer and storyteller whose work captures the heart and soul of some of the most remote and complex corners of the world.

Driven by passion and guided by an unwavering commitment to telling the stories of those who often go unheard, Mauro's journey has taken him to places of breathtaking beauty, raw reality, and intense emotion.

Among his most significant works are his powerful documentation of acid attack survivors in Bangladesh, the brutal reality inside Manila's prisons, the stark contrasts of life in Afghanistan, the dreams of ballerinas in Africa's largest slum, the struggles of sex workers in Asia's biggest slum.

His work is a dedication to giving voice to the voiceless and an unwavering commitment to showcasing the beauty and suffering of our shared existence.

In 2021, Mauro De Bettio founded the Malaika Foundation, driven by his deep desire to give back to the communities that inspired his work. The foundation aims to support food, healthcare, and create opportunities for brighter futures.

back to gallery

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