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City of champions © Mary Beth Meehan

Biannual French magazine offers different approach to photography

In less than two years, 6Mois has established itself as a high-quality French magazine that uses photography to tell the story of today's society. But, for photographers, it's even more than that. Olivier Laurent speaks to editor Marie-Pierre Subtil.

AUTHOR : OLIVIER LAURENT – 24 SEP 2012

6Mois' goal is simple : to portray the 21st century with images. Launched in early 2011, the French magazine is the spin-off of another magazine called *XXI*. « In *XXI*, you can find long-form articles illustrated with cartoons and sketches, » says Marie-Pierre Subtil, who heads up *6Mois*. « The people behind *XXI* believe photography shouldn't be used to illustrate an article, it should be used to tell a story. » That's why, she says, *XXI* only has one portfolio of images composed of 20 pages to tell one story.

Each time *XXI's* editors were putting together these portfolios, they found themselves submerged by the enormous number of stories produced. « Most of these productions stay unpublished, » says Subtil. « And since *XXI* was successful, the publishers started to wonder if it would be possible to produce a spin-off using only photographs. »

The concept behind *6Mois* is simple : to publish twice a year a 350-page magazine made up of eight or nine portfolios of images. « We usually give 25 to 30 pages to each portfolio, and we even gave

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50 pages to Darcy Padilla for her Julie Project, » says Subtil. « There are no ads, and we are only sold in bookshops – especially independent ones – or by subscription. »

The magazine, however, isn't targeted at photographers, says Subtil; instead, it's made for the general public – people who are interested in stories. « We use photography as a tool to document the world – we're not looking for beautiful images. We're looking for journalistic stories about today's world. We want to show how human beings live on the planet today. We tend to publish portfolios that look at people's everyday lives. »

The magazine has been a success, with more than 40,000 copies sold twice a year. « When we launched our second issue, we expected a 50 percent drop compared with the first one, but we sold almost as many copies. It was a surprise, » says Subtil.

But the real surprise is for photographers themselves. At a time when it's harder to get published and get paid at the same time, *6Mois* pays each photographer €120 per page, or €90 per image if they appear in smaller introductory articles. « We're very transparent about our rates, » Subtil tells BJP. « When we launched, we met with agencies to let them know that in the event the magazine was a success, we would look to increase these rates. »

Right now, however, *6Mois* is keeping the rates stable – not because it doesn't have the budget, but because it's looking to expand its operations to other countries. « We want to translate the magazine in English, German, Italian and other languages, » says Subtil. « If we're able to, that means we'll have to start buying international rights. »

At the moment, these plans are in their early stages. « We're a small team, so we're looking for partners. We've started talking with publishers around the world, and a lot of them are enthusiastic. They love *6Mois*, but with the economic crisis they are really cautious. Some of them want to edit just a few thousands copies, when we want someone who would really commit to it. In France, we publish 40,000 copies of each issue. We believe we have taken a risk and expect other publishers to do the same. »

In France, *6Mois* was able to receive the support of independent booksellers: « They are our best ambassadors, » says Subtil. But in the US and the UK, Amazon and Barnes & Noble have effectively killed this network of small and independent bookshops. « It would be more difficult to be distributed in these countries, especially since we're hard to classify. We come out every six months and we're not a photography magazine. So, where does that leave us on the shelves? »

But despite being available just in France at the moment, the magazine has still achieved near-cult status among photographers. Its team of editors and journalists receive an increasing number of submissions, and earlier this month were some of the most popular photo editors at the Visa pour l'Image photojournalism festival. « We do get a lot of submissions, and I make it a point to look at each one of them. But, there are only eight spots in each issue... »

For more details about *6Mois*, visit www.6mois.fr. The magazine's fourth issue was released last week and features portfolios by Lauren Greenfield, Craig Walker, Mary Beth Meehan, Yuri Kozyrev, Espen Eichhöfer and Kenneth O'Halloran, among others. Issue 5 will be released in March 2013.