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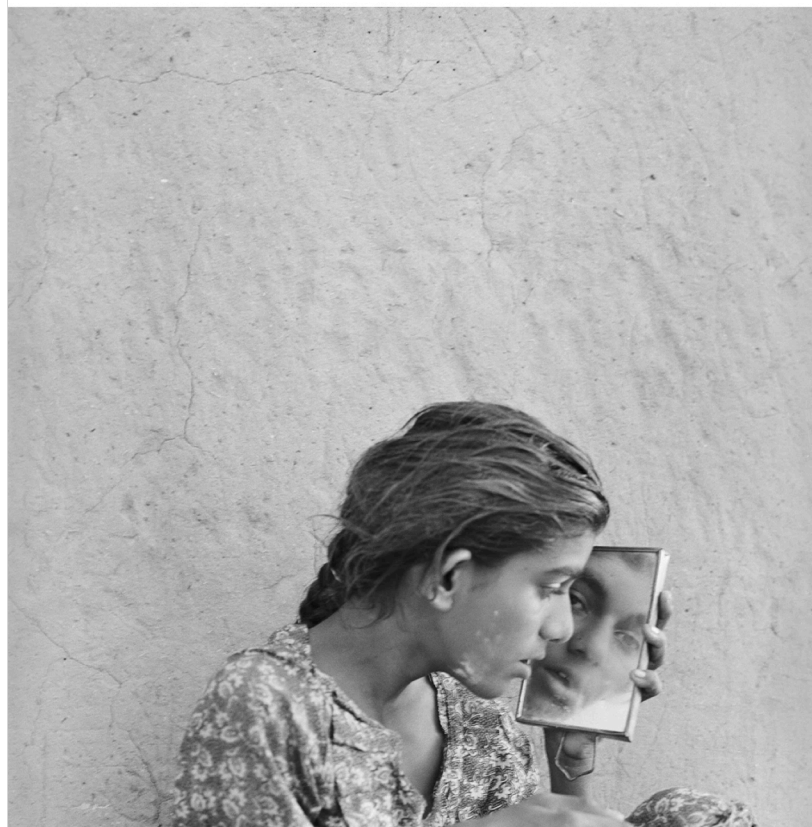
Photographer Gauri Gill wins Prix Pictet 2023

The photographer took a rejected newspaper pitch and transformed it into a compelling portrait of life in western Rajasthan over the course of nearly 25 years

By **Megan Williams** 03/10/2023

“In a world facing unprecedented challenges, from social inequality to environmental crises, it was crucial to turn the lens towards humanity itself,” said Isabelle von Ribbentrop, executive director of Prix Pictet. The prestigious photography prize, whose past winners include [Nadav Kander](#), [Sally Mann](#), and [Richard Mosse](#), celebrates projects that deal primarily with sustainability and environmental issues.

While the description of this year’s theme, Human, might evoke images of suffering and destruction, the shortlisted works say as much about strength and joy as they do about catastrophe. As von Ribbentrop says, the theme opens up the floor to “the stories, struggles and triumphs of individuals and communities around the globe”.



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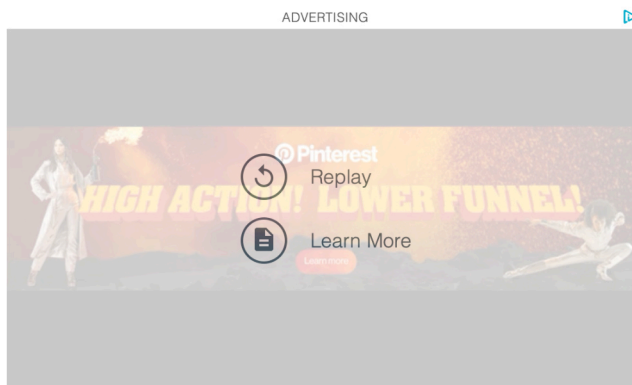
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Top: *Waterwells*; Above: *Jannat, Barmer*. Both images from the series *Notes from the Desert* by Gauri Gill, 1999-ongoing. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York

Among the 12 artists shortlisted for 2023 were Hoda Afshar, Siân Davey, and Vasantha Yoganananthan, all of whom are known for an involved approach to documenting people and subjects over extended periods of time. The overall prize winner, Gauri Gill, elevates the idea of a long-term project to new heights with her ongoing body of work, *Notes from the Desert*, dating back as far as 1999.



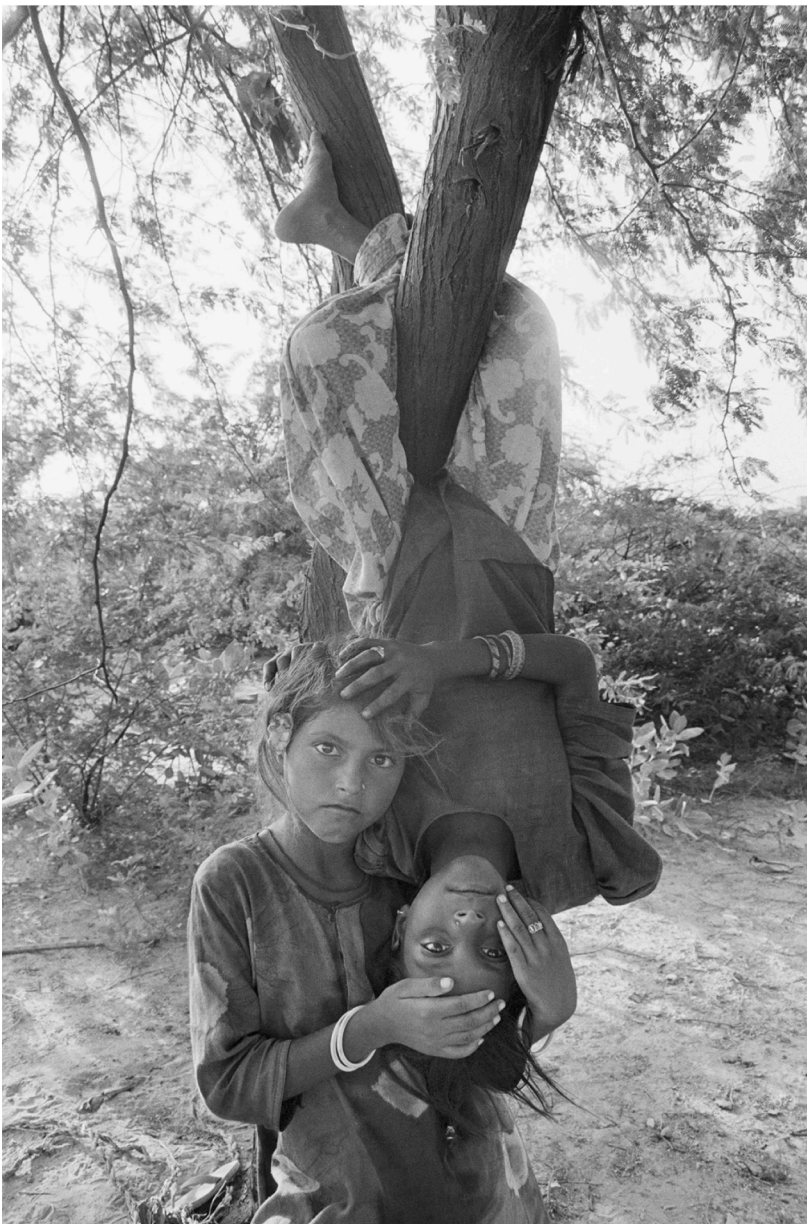
The New Delhi-based photographer began the project with the aim of documenting village schools in Rajasthan, India over the course of a month. She ended up returning time and time again to see people’s lives gradually unfold against a backdrop of health crises, scarce resources, and weather that fluctuates between extremes, capturing the trials and joys in between. “The stakes are high, the elements close, and life is as cheap as the jokes are rampant,” Gill says.

What’s remarkable is that the project stemmed from an idea she pitched to a newspaper but was rejected on the basis that it lacked a news hook. Gill took it in an entirely different direction, eschewing the urgency of the news cycle and instead cultivating relationships for nearly 25 years.





Jogiyon ka Dera, Lunkaransar, from the series Notes from the Desert by Gauri Gill, 1999-ongoing. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York



Urma and Nimli, Lunkaransar, from the series Notes from the Desert by Gauri Gill, 1999-ongoing.

“On my many visits to rural Rajasthan, I have witnessed a complex reality I knew nothing about as a city dweller. To live poor and landless in the desert amounts to an inescapable reliance on oneself, on each other, and on nature,” Gill said. “These fragments of shared experience now inhabit a large photographic archive called Notes from the Desert, encompassing different narratives and varied forms of image making.”

All of the winning and shortlisted work is currently on display at London’s V&A Museum, which is also giving visitors the opportunity to vote for the inaugural People’s Choice Award, and will be published in an accompanying book.



Lila by Siân Davey, 2022





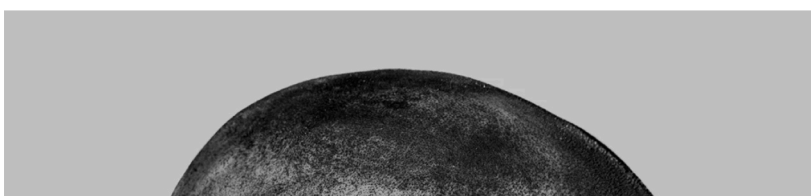
Untitled #1 by Hoda Afshar, 2015-2020. Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane



Untitled by Vasantha Yoganathan, 2022



Image by Alessandro Cinque, 2017





Miner by Michał Łuczak, 2017



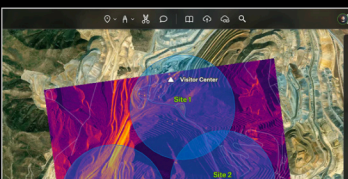
Abuelo Estrella by Yael Martínez, 2021. Courtesy the artist, Magnum Photos, and Patricia Conde Galería, Mexico City

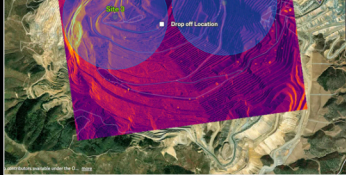
Prix Pictet is on display at the V&A, London until October 22; vam.ac.uk

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