

Transportraits

Women And Mobility In The City

Curator's Note

In June 2010 Jagori asked me to curate an art exhibition on the theme of women and safety in the city, as well as broader issues faced by women in the course of navigating the city. This was to be held during the Third International Conference on Women's Safety, in Delhi, from November 22 – 24, 2010. Two international conferences have been held prior to this to look at issues of women's safety in 2002 and 2004. Each conference resulted in the creation of a Declaration on Women's Safety (Montreal Declaration on Women's Safety 2002 and Declaration of Bogota Safe Cities for Women and Girls 2004). The theme of this conference is 'Building Inclusive Cities', and the aim is to bring together a diverse international community that is working in the fields of safe cities for women, women's rights and violence against women.

I wondered how I, as an artist, and someone who is used to raising ambivalent questions rather than offering any kind of solution, could work with a feminist, activist group. One that I respected highly, but also one that by the very nature of its work, was quite unequivocal in its stand. At the same time, as a woman living and working in Delhi, and traveling across India, I could not deny that I had faced some of these issues myself, and that if I had not it might be a matter of luck or privilege. The world might look quite different to a woman hawker or a domestic worker; a homeless person or an elderly woman; or a woman with a disability. Or, it turns out, a woman from the North East. I could not deny the existence of the fact that where I live, right in the National Capital, the sex ratio is 821, the child sex ratio is 865 and the gender gap in literacy is 12. I won't even go into the statistics for rape, kidnapping and dowry. In 2002, Delhi reported almost half and in 2003, 35% of all abductions among mega cities. In 2006, the rate was again 34%. At the same time, I was amazed at the tremendous work Jagori had done over the years. I had never seen a Safety Audit map, or known that a neighborhood could be mapped out on the basis of how safe it was for a woman walking through it – there's a street light, then a broken pavement, a missing toilet or a paan ki dukaan with mostly boys hanging around outside..surprisingly, these maps were also beautiful objects! I decided that it would be well worth my while to find out more about women's terms of engagement with the city, and to work with artists to evoke a creative response to it.

Although I work primarily with photography – a medium well suited to both working with, and circumventing reality, we decided to work with artists across a range of disciplines. There is a graphic novelist and a filmmaker in the show, published writers, photographers and two independent collectives. We also wished to include voices from those not used to expressing themselves in the way we might be, but with a lot to say – so the seed of the workshop between Lucida and the young people in Madanpur Khadar was laid. It is always tricky when one set of people has the language and the other does not, at the same time I believe that at worst a transparent dialogue cannot be harmful, at best, it might open up new possibilities. We also decided early on to broaden the exhibition to include amateurs and people from all across India, hence the open entry call – the response has been quite overwhelming, and comes from both women and men.

I hope the space of the exhibition is one for sharing experiences and for questioning, commentary and humor. In the age of homogenising Capital and Markets; of Art from Nowhere, applicable to Anywhere – and frequently about Nothing; it is a privilege to have had the opportunity to work with local groups and be thinking of local audiences, and to respond to a specific issue that effects a lot of people right here. I would like to thank all the artists in the show, many of whom contributed their work for free; Subir Dey for his assistance, especially with all the tedious parts; Lucida for designing the catalogue and poster; Alliance Francaise for giving us the space at short notice and discounted rates; FabFotos for making the prints; and Jagori for their tremendous open mindedness and support.

Gauri Gill
New Delhi 2010

Upon overhearing their parents' plan to abandon them in the Black Forest, young Hansel went in search of his jack-knife, while Grethel, his sister, went in search of pebbles to strew along the way so they could find their way out of the forest again. She carried these pebbles in her apron pocket and it is only well that there were no streams to cross en route.

Next time the siblings overheard their parents' plan to abandon them, Grethel, who had run out of pebbles, filled her pocket with stale bread crumbs instead - a plan that was lightweight in more ways than one, and was doomed to fail on account of avian intervention. We needn't dwell upon the rest of the tale - it ends reasonably well, with one evil stepmother and one wicked witch dead, and no main protagonists harmed.

Later, it came to light that Hansel, who'd been preoccupied with whittling sticks and clearing undergrowth with his jack-knife, had noticed neither pebbles nor crumbs, and ascribed their navigation through the forest to his own fine animal instinct. Grethel declined to comment.



About the work:

Through labyrinths, forests, battlefields, predatory wastelands - women have always laid out private, particular trails by which they hoped to find their way home safely. 'Navigation and Safe Passage' is about four such journeys.

About Amruta Patil:

Amruta Patil is a writer and artist. Author of graphic novel 'Kari, (2008), and co-editor of Mindfields - a journal about ideas and alternative education; Amruta has an abiding love for mytho-history and a growing interest in simple, sustainable living. You can view Amruta's writing and artwork on <http://amrutapatil.blogspot.com/>.

**About the work:**

Moments of a Long Pause is a 2 channel video installation based on interviews with men and women on the streets of 5 cities in India (Delhi, Agra, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Calcutta). The video bring men and women in a conversation. The conversation is built on the personal street experience of fear, sexual harassment, sexual violence, flirting, wooing, 'teasing'.

Author: Blank Noise
Duration: 19 minutes
Year: 2008

Directed by Jasmeen Patheja

Credits: Camera-Nupur Mathur, Edit assistance-Timo Boeker

The exhibit includes 'Y R U LOOKING AT ME' as well as 'Step by Step Guide to Unapologetic Walking' and the 2 channel Video installation, Moments of a Long Pause.

About Blank Noise:

Blank Noise is a volunteer led collective seeking to trigger public dialogue on 'eve teasing' via events both on the internet and on the street of different cities. Volunteer participation shapes the collective. Volunteers/ participants are celebrated as Action Heroes. <http://blog.blanknoise.org>



Jaya Das going home after her days work, Madanpur Khadar, New Delhi

About the work:

"Street Lights"

The series of pictures highlights the effect a basic civic infrastructure like streetlight or lack of it thereof has an on the issues of women safety and mobility. This series of portraits of women who were out in the night were made under the streetlights, literally bringing into light a pocket of perceived safe space beneath these lights. The function of the streetlight could thus be deemed empowering, but even in this space we see overt glances and encounters being played out.

The complete work in the show is a series of portraits.

About the artists:

Lucida is a photographers' collective, aiming to develop and support a range of independent and critical photographic practices, that focus on research and education. Lucida endeavors to influence photographic thinking through a design oriented approach in photography services. Lucida was founded in April 2010 by four Post Graduates of the Photography Design program at the National Institute of Design.

The founders are; Arunima Singh, Mridul Batra, Pradeep Kumar and Suruchi Dumpawar.



"You see a guy in this photo wearing a stylish vest. The guys here will buy the same clothes and then they will roam around winking and whistling at girls. People should be in style, but keep it to themselves." – Sharmila

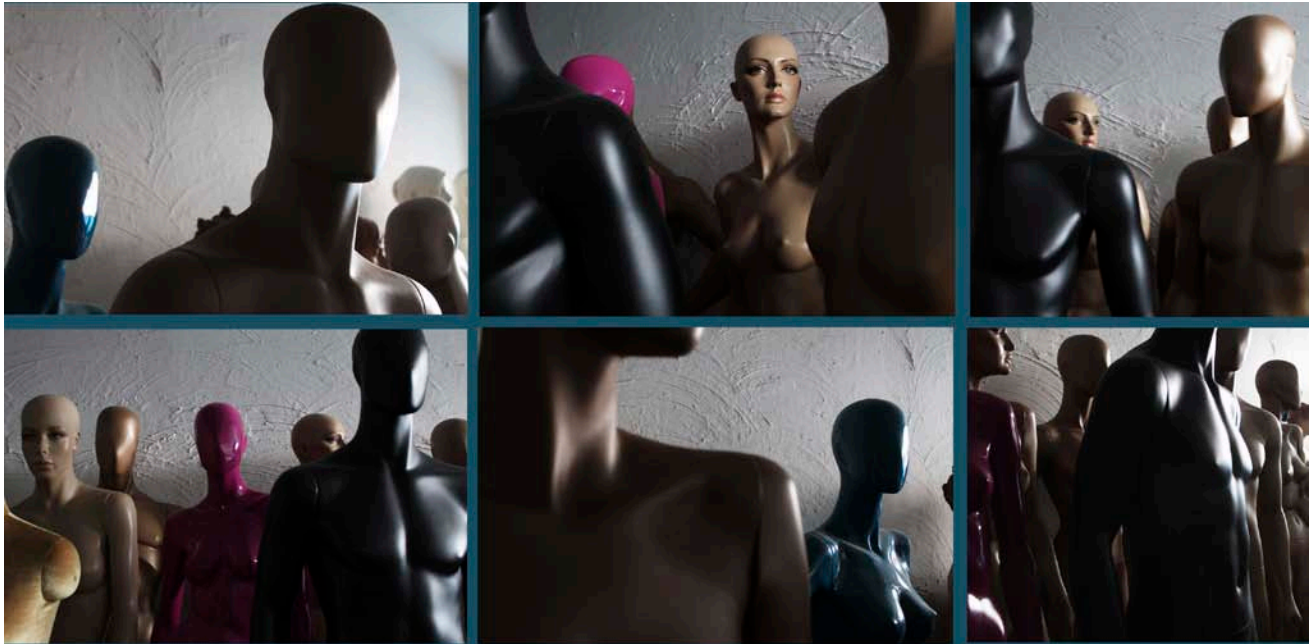
About the work:

"Safe in the City" – Photographs by young residents of Madanpur Khadar

The workshop "Safe in the city" conducted on 14th – 15th Aug, 2010 was aimed at generating self expressions from the participants on the issues of safety and mobility that they face in their daily lives through the medium of photography. The workshop conducted by LUCIDA had participants from Madanpur Khadar area in New Delhi, a mix of young boys and girls their ages ranging from 13 to 18. The workshop brought out unique perspectives that exploited their local knowledge of their area. A selection of their pictures will be exhibited at Transportraits.

About the artists:

The participants from the workshop are
Amresh Chand, Baby, Gita, Gulbahar, Laltesh, Naveen Kumar, Nilima, Pooja, Preeti Das, Rahul, Rohit, Sanjay, Sarita, Shaistha, Sharmila, Shashikala, Sunita, Veeru



Fear spreads among the echelons of nobility in many parts of the city.

"They have taken over our streets, our homes, our days, our nights, our hearts and our minds." says one newspaper report.

"Everyone's involved. It's the way we are", say the analysts.

"It's in everything, and because of everything, it's in what is behind us and in our future", say the artists.

BEWARE! OUR NUBILE MISCREANTS

Excerpted from the complete work, a story in six parts.

About the work:

Beware Our Nubile Miscreants*
This is not entirely a work of fiction.

[* Borrowed from a song title by 'Of Montreal']

About the artist:

Priya Sen works as an artist and filmmaker in New Delhi. She is considering long expeditions on slow moving transportation as her next big career move.



8:57 PM

About the work:

‘Her walk home’

Soon after daylight fades in the busy metropolis of New Delhi, something else begins to swirl over its neon-lit roads. An uneasy disquiet, a sense of foreboding that casts a shadow behind the lone women traveling back home. Being a woman myself, it seems a bit strange to be almost stalking them on their journeys. Little things catch my eye. Their hurried, urgent stride.

A protective holding of hands. That naked feeling of exposure. The loneliness of one against many. A desire for anonymity. And even as early as 9 pm, I can barely spot a woman out on the street. It's time for me to get back home...

The complete work in the show is a series of portraits.

About the artist:

A National Foundation for India Fellow in 2005, Ruhani Kaur's photo-story on 'India's Invisible Women: Repercussions of Female Foeticide' won her the Days Japan Grand Prix award. This work was exhibited in the Daegu Photo Biennale 2006 at S. Korea and India Habitat Centre, published in Gulf News, El Mundo, Voices Unabridged, Platform and Civil Society, and taken up by UNFPA. Presently a photographer at a national weekly magazine called Open, she has worked with The Indian Express, Down to Earth and First City. In her eight-year career, Ruhani has followed stories that range from the Samjhauta train blast, Orissa's receding coastal lands, archery betting in Meghalaya to the burkha rapper.



1. ANJU KSHETRIMAYUM, 23
Meitei from MANIPUR • In Delhi for 3 years

An MBA graduate, Anju (seen here with her brother) says that the city has much to offer in terms of economic opportunities but it is the mind set of the people that bothers her. "Even though I come from a small town, back home women are treated with much more respect and dignity" she says. "Delhi despite being a 'modern city' is different, here men look down on women and harass them, especially if one looks different. I dress conservatively, often in salwar and kurta, but that does not stop men from passing lewd remarks."

Excerpted from a set of six diptychs.

About the work:

In documenting the lives of young women from the Northeast in Delhi, I was confronted with a two-fold dilemma that the women face: gender inequality and racial discrimination. A big city usually provides possibilities of integration into modern society free of social structures and prejudices. The anonymity it offers not only empowers but also enables the evolution of one's identity and dreams. This is not true for majority of the women of the Northeast staying in the city.

To come and live in the city is an ordeal that they say robs them of their 'dignity'. Where belongingness to a metropoli is stolen by their distinct looks, always caught up in labels - 'exotic', 'chinky' or 'available'. They live in constant fear of being targeted as the 'other'. Lack of knowledge about their culture further compounds matters.

The diptychs have emerged out of stories these young women have shared with me, providing a glimpse into their life and longing to be accepted no matter how they look. In this project I have tried to capture the spaces where they feel safe, free to be themselves. And other spaces, where they feel threatened and trapped by their distinctiveness or 'face'.

About the artist:

UZMA MOHSIN graduated from the National Institute of Design in 2000, specialising in graphic design. She has been the art director of Tehelka – a weekly news magazine for over 3 years. She is also pursuing her keen interest in photography, in the form of several independent projects. Her work has been published in various publications including Tehelka, Sports Illustrated and Outlook Magazine: as well as being included in Click! An exhibition on contemporary Indian photography produced by Vadhera Art Gallery, New Delhi and London. In 2010, she assisted Martine Franck (Magnum) on a book project.

Open entry call includes:

Aashini .M. Shah . Abhilasha Agarwal . Akash Bhattacharya . Alain Willaume . Amruta Patil . Anna Fox . Annie Zaidi . Aparna Rajgopalan . Bedatri Datta Choudhury . Bindi Parekh . Britta Evans-Fenton . Blank Noise . Camino Laguillo . Chandni Dossani . Dayanita Singh . Fanie St. Michel . Heaven Muecke . ICNIC-Tanzania . Krati Sharma . Lakshmi Prabhala . Lucida . Mahesh Shantaram . Meghna Amit Pinjani . Mehjabeen Jagmag . Mirza Fahad Beg . Mithun Kumar . Nikita Dutt . Nilanjana Roy . Payal Anil Padmanabhan . Priya Sen . Ramit Batra . Ram Rahman . Ruchika Chanana . Ruhani Kaur . Sanjiv Valsan . Santosh Namby Chandran . Shakti girls for Aangan . Sharan Goel . Shilpi Singh . Sonali Dalal . Sunil gupta . Tony Ellis . Uzma Mohsin . Vasvi Oza . Vinay Panjwani . Yashas Chandra . Yashada Kulkarni . Zara Katz

About JAGORI

JAGORI (meaning “awaken women”) founded in 1984 is a feminist documentation, training, communication and resource centre. Its main objective is consciousness raising, awareness generation and production of creative advocacy material on women’s rights. JAGORI has sought to address violence against women (VAW) through direct interventions, campaigns and institutional and legal changes. The Safe Delhi Campaign launched in 2004 has been aimed at challenging the gender exclusions and violence that women (especially poor women) face in the city.

About the Curator:

Gauri Gill is a Delhi based photographer. Her work includes series such as ‘Notes from the Desert’, drawn from a decade of visiting her friends among nomadic and rural communities in Western Rajasthan; and ‘The Americans’, a retelling of Robert Frank’s book of the same name made in the fifties, but this time with South Asians at the heart of it. Her works have been exhibited in group exhibitions all over the world including the White chapel Gallery, London; Yale Art Gallery, New Haven; Musee Quai Branly, Paris and Newark Museum, New Jersey.