

# camerawork delhi

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Janah with Margaret Bourke-White and Comrade Rangnekar, 1945 © Sunil Janah

"A kind of golden hour one remembers for a life time... Everything was touched with magic." Margaret Bourke- White (1904-1971)

**SG: So how did you get involved with organising exhibitions?**

**URS:** I was working as an art critic for contemporary art. I started teaching history of art, specifically history of photography. It was a weird course because I also had to teach Language. The photographers needed language to get knowledge of art to get knowledge of photography. Whilst writing and teaching I started to do my first exhibition, I was starting to specialise in contemporary photography as a curator and a critic.

**SG: Where were you showing your exhibitions?**

**URS:** I did ten huge shows in the Museum of Applied Arts in Zurich on Swiss Photography and with those exhibitions my life changed completely. I was asked to join a group. We were thinking about the possibility of a photography museum. It was Walter Keller of the publishing house Scalo, and George Reinhardt of the Reinhardt family in Winterthur and I. We had the first meeting in summer 1990.

**SG: So what were the consequences of the first meeting? What happened after that?**

**URS:** If we succeeded I was happy to do that because by then I was writing and teaching and making exhibitions. My idea of a museum is that it should be expected to do these three things. I travelled in '91 to America to see how they deal with photography in classical photo spaces or in art spaces. It was January 29, '93 that we opened up the museum.

**SG: So were you already acquiring photos? Was it always the plan to have a collection?**

**URS:** Yes! It was always the plan that is why we also called it the photo museum.

**SG: That seems more ambitious, financially and...**

**URS:** But we said from the very beginning that we will do it step by step. What we want to do first is, we want to create an interesting place where there is photography constantly shown and constantly debated. I was criticising at that time that a museum of photography in Lausanne that only shows photography... they put up masses of photography on the wall with no debate, no discussion, no questioning. Why are they showing it? Nothing!

So I thought ours should be an interesting place where you hopefully not only get to see interesting photography but there is always debate. We do lectures, we do discussions, we do symposiums. We said we want to concentrate our finances and resources on that. We knew that the collection might kill us, because a collection always takes energy into the cellar, it takes energy into storage, and you put a lot of money where you don't see it. Then you have to activate the collection to make it visible, to make it part of culture. So in the first five years we didn't buy nearly anything. But we were astonished about how many donations we got.

**SG: Was there a premise to the collections; European, Swiss?**

**URS:** No. The collection is international photography and photography done by artists, no limits.

**SG: So historical and contemporary...?**

**URS:** We collected from 1960 onwards actively. Doesn't make sense on a practical level to collect historically and look for \$300,000 to buy one Paul Strand. When there are museums in the world having 50 Paul Strands because they started fifty years earlier. Our collection was strong on documentary also in the conceptual documentary tradition-like, Lewis Baltz. I was always thinking that we don't have conceptual artists and we had a chance three-four years ago to buy a private collection, from the '60's 70's and 80's John Baldessari, etc, all the American conceptual artists, land-art artists, minimal artists, research artists and artists who used photography into the first media debates of the 80's like Cindy Sherman, Annette Lemieux etc. We found the money and it was the biggest purchase we ever did.

**SG: And publishing catalogues?**

**URS:** For each show we make a little leaflet on the collection so we didn't make a big book, but we make continuously every year little leaflets and after ten years we make a box with these ten leaflets

**SG: Those are those sets?**

**URS:** Yes, So you have them?.. Then you have an idea. Three years ago we started to put our collections online. I absolutely want to get away from the big problem of collections that are hidden in a box in the cellar. Yes, they have to be hidden in a box in the cellar for safety reasons, but if the images can be put online, someone in Tokyo should have a chance to see them, someone in Delhi will have a chance to see what we have. Our collection is maybe 80% is online, and we are still working on it.

**SG: Do you tour your collection beyond Winterthur? Do you loan the pictures?**

**URS:** Yes, we are having a show out of our collection in Hamburg, and elsewhere. Its not a very huge collection yet, but its an active collection

**SG: Thats interesting, maybe then you can show something in Delhi.**

**URS:** We would only ask for that there is a climate-control on because we don't want to destroy our collection.

**SG: Its interesting you a have an international mix, like a global approach, many institutions have a nationalist mandate.**

**URS:** I had to talk on Swiss Photography, I said, "in 2009, it's a bit of a bore," I would not like to make a show on it.

**SG: So you have been doing this for over a decade now.**

**URS:** 16 years. In January 29, the Museum is 17 years old. So I have been doing it for 17 years, thats quite a while.

**SG: I wanted to ask you then has your perspective changed on the idea on Photography?**

**URS:** When I was asked to make a photo museum, I asked myself, OK, why a photo museum? In a time when art spaces have started to show photography, when contemporary art museums start to show photography, why make a photo museum which is a ghetto? So I make contemporary photography and I show once in a while a reference to the past showing Wegee or showing Edward Weston or Lisette Model like what we did last year. Walker Evans, more from the point of view of today, what is still interesting in showing Walker Evans today? Not just in the straight idea of showing history, why is it interesting to look at Atget today?

The third one that might be the most interesting is to say that I am curious about looking at the dichotomy of an artist, between art and reality, in this friction, there is the genesis of an art work — I love that, but I love also all the other photography that is done anonymously over the last 150 years, in every corner of the world, photography has changed our perception much more than art. In all this, photography plays a role from the production, to the distribution to the metamorphosing, fetishising of the object.

**SG: Yes, photography is also about creating desire.**

**URS:** I am very much into this kind of exhibitions. We did shows on, industrial imagery, medical photography and trading. No art institution will make an exhibition on industrial imagery, no art institution will question the production of things, unless an artist brings this into his practice, like Thomas Ruff did. Then they show it and still they will not take it on its own terms. The museum is an instrument to talk about the world in a way which is not possible elsewhere and that's why I started the Fotomuseum.

**SG: I like the succinct analyses in your book about some of the different kinds of changes and especially about the shift from the 19th century towards closing the distance between the camera and the subject. The camera is getting very intimate now... people take it to bed with them.**

**URS:** Yes, they photograph themselves and there is a new exhibitionist with these photographers—you are not only taking pornographic photographs in your own bedroom while making sex and then you put it on Facebook, you put it online, you show it to the world, you want everyone

# Urs Stahel

Director, Fotomuseum  
Winterthur, Switzerland  
in conversation with Sunil Gupta

immediately to know. This is this twist which is unbelievable I think, I cannot fully understand it as yet, you are constantly photographed, everybody is photographed. Before, nobody saw the photograph until someone went in the darkroom and made a print, now because it is digital everyone can look at the screen say "look, look, look,"...we don't know where we are living, and on which level? The border between reality and fiction / virtuality has clearly changed. Before it was a very clear border, the other side was ideal fantasy or psychoanalysis but now we can shift the borders constantly... how old are you?

**SG: I am 56**

**URS:** Oh you're 56, I am 56, we are the same. You are born in '53 like Nan Goldin, like many other people, I always thought it to be an important year.

We still have our identities built up completely different, if you look at the guy who is twenty now he doesn't know where reality ends and where fiction starts, because reality has completely shifted. Photography will always play a role. Photography is such an important trader, its trading all these things.



THE MISSING PHOTOGRAPH  
BY ASAD UR RAHMAN KIDWAI

2nd July 1991.  
It was an ordinary day.  
Like the day before.  
Or the day after.  
But snatches of that Tuesday have remained in my memory.  
Perhaps they will for the rest of my life.  
All because some moments of that day are frozen as images.  
An ordinary day produced extra-ordinary visual memories.

For, photographs are perhaps the greatest tool of preserving and passing on memory.

Abbu sensed that I had come and sat on the takht right opposite him. He closed the book he was reading and without looking at me started putting the extra glasses in its case.

I clicked.  
He started talking about something.  
What it was, has slipped from my memory.  
But it was obviously something which amused him, he finally looked at me. Face lit with laughter.  
I clicked again.

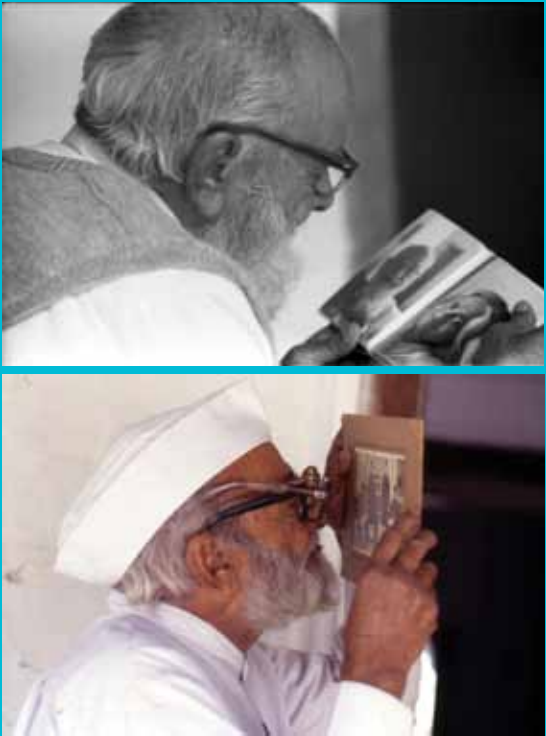
We spent some time chatting.  
After a while, and three frames of exposed negatives, I went inside the house. Ammi was about to begin her daily routine of applying coconut oil in her hair before the inevitable umpteen attempts at mastering the perfect middle parting.  
I must have asked her to leave her comb aside for just a moment, and look at me. She did, and I clicked.



These two images: one of Abbu and one of Ammi, taken a few minutes apart on the same day, have for me, become the defining images of them. Ammi and Abbu usually were the only occupants of Naya Ghar in Baragaon. Others were in different towns and cities, studying or making a living. So, when Abbu missed his children he asked Ammi to take out the albums, which had our pictures and would gaze at them.

When I was with him, however the photographs he showed me were not stored in neat little albums. They came out of large rusty trunks. Were mounted on cardboards and were yellow with age. Looking at photographs was in fact part of a larger narrative. Abbu relished narrating the oral history of our Family. Anecdotes of his elder brother and sisters, uncles and aunts, father and grandfather, and other ancestors.

Times were changing and women too were getting their faces recorded for posterity. The youngest brother of Hasan ur Rahman, my Nana Fazl ur Rahman after getting numerous pictures clicked in Aligarh Muslim University (one in a group which had Sarojini Naidu as the lone woman!), now posed with his wife Waseem un Nisa. His hand on her shoulder. There is another set of fingers, those of the person holding the durree as a perfect backdrop. A pity, the photographer did not get the perfect frame.



Caption: Glass Tears (Variant) 1932. © Man Ray

Lying Together

Aveek Sen

The extent to which the battle to get photography admitted into the Palace of Art, at least of Western Art, has been quite gloriously won was driven home to me by an exhibition that I found myself visiting thrice when I was in Madrid recently. It was called *Lágrimas de Eros* (Tears of Eros) and was installed in two Madrid venues, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum and the Caja Madrid Foundation, and was curated by Guillermo Solana, the artistic director of the former. It was an exquisite show about the pain of love and the love of pain. In its effortless sweep from Bernini to Bill Viola, it dissolved the boundaries between periods, nations and media in Western art to bring together a history of what Solana, invoking Freud and Bataille, calls the “*perverso polimorfo*” – the phrase taking on a sort of baroque magnificence in Spanish that its English, German and French versions, with their inevitable note of sleaze turning into psycho-babble, sadly lack.

What struck me particularly about Solana’s learned, eccentric yet unfussy curation was the way it used photography with a kind of unabashed, operatic abandon. The signature image for the show was Man Ray’s 1932 photograph, *Tears*, of five evidently fake celluloid pearls stuck around a woman’s upturned and mascara’d eyes in brutal close-up. The image was blown up to cover the entire facade of the Caja Madrid building, opposite which was a Counter-Reformation convent still inhabited by nuns – a very Hispanic coincidence straight out of Almodóvar’s *Dark Habits*. Inside, next to the Man Ray photograph and on a pedestal, were Kiki Smith’s five glass tears. As you peered into each giant droplet, you saw yourself bizarrely disfigured in its clear, but claustrophobic, world of glass. Then, as you lost and found yourself in the show’s visual and thematic labyrinths, you would have run into a bikini-clad teenager on the beach shot by Rineke Dijkstra hung close to a Rodin *Birth of Venus*, Richard’s Avedon’s Nastassja Kinski cuddling up with a cobra next to a Toulous-Lautrec lithograph of a snake-woman, Philip-Lorca

diCorcia’s upside-down pole-dancer rubbing shoulders with a Surrealist nude, a Nan Goldin kiss against an Edvard Munch kiss, Sam Taylor-Wood’s Beckham sleeping with Canova’s Endymion, or cibachrome Pietás and Ophelias by Taylor-Wood, Marina Abramovic, Gregory Crewdson and Tom Hunter covering theatrical sweeps of museum wall.

Yet, as I got used to the jolts and thrills of these juxtapositions of painting and sculpture with photography, and started reflecting on what they actually made me see in deliberate conjunction or proximity, a peculiar sense of disorientation began to well up somewhere between my eyes and my mind that I still find difficult to pin down or explain clearly; it keeps eluding precise formulation, although, as a feeling in the viewer, it was strangely sharp. This richly disconcerting sense of something not quite fitting together has to do, I feel, with the fundamentally different relationships with the Real that paintings and photographs come to embody when they are installed for viewing in the same space, and on the same interpretative and cognitive plane – that is, when we are made to read them together. Paintings then seem to afford a purer fiction, for they make something out of nothing (as music makes nothing out of nothing, turning air into air), whereas photographs are doomed always to make **something out of something**. So, the fictions that photographs create seem corruptions of the Real – brilliant deceptions pulled off with varying degrees of ironic awareness – of the sort that would have made Plato angry. Hence, viewed side by side, paintings appear to be curiously more innocent or naïve as liars than do photographs, which, at their best, prey as much on art as on life, and with a newfound sense of entitlement that is at once exhilarating and vaguely disturbing.





## Mr Murthy, Framer

interviewed by  
Priyanka Oberoi



### PO: Describe what you do?

**MA:** I frame works of art. I do it only for professionals; for artists, photographers, painters and galleries. We here are always on the quest to introduce something new. Doing frames people are not familiar with. We do archival, custom frames for artists. The art of framing is about making a frame that compliments the artwork and does not interfere with the process of viewing.

### PO: Where and why do you work?

**MA:** Many artists whom I work with are close friends. They often come to the workshop and spend hours figuring out the kind of frame and so I prefer to keep a low profile in the busy market of Paharganj. I work with galleries in other cities like Mumbai and Kolkata. They want me to open up there too, but my work needs a personal touch.

### PO: Why and how do you work as a Framer?

**MA:** I naturally inherited it from my father. I have a passion always to do something new. To give a new look, to do the extraordinary. I sit with the artist and his/her work of art. We decide a colour and frame style, whatever is required we get it, even if it means importing it. Many artists leave most of it to us.

We take the suggestions of the artist, give our own and work as a collaboration. Dayanita Singh introduced me to archival, acid free material. She wanted museum glass, which is very expensive, so we imported it, she didn't want to compromise due to cost, she always wants quality which will last years and which is of international standard.

We take freshmen in the factory and train them according to our working styles who start with learning how to clean glass. We have an advantage over other framers because we import the most advanced precision cutters and other gadgets to get the neatest work done. The colour of the frames are made to the artists' requirement.

### PO: What are particularly important issues involved in framing a photograph?

**MA:** There are a lot of things that go into consideration, like how to handle the photographs. We have to be very careful about not getting dents or thumb impressions on the photographs. We use gloves and hold each photograph in the particular way it is supposed to be held. Many times the thickness of the photograph makes all the difference. I'll give you an example from the recent Dayanita Singh's exhibition 'Dream Villa'. Her photographs this time were very different from her earlier Silver Gelatin Prints. They were thinner which demanded different archival corners so as to match the lighting of the gallery. I went to the gallery and spent a lot of time there to understand the required framing. The prints should have archival frames. Frames should be seasoned and treated wood. Archival mounts, archival backing and archival corners to fix photographs. There are also stretchers aligned with the frame back to keep it away from the wall and also to hang it. Apart from that the backs sealing tape that should be used should be aluminium foil tape to protect it from moisture. Most of this is not available in India and so has to be imported. All that is used should be archival and acid free, PH 7. These are some standard requirements for museums and galleries, national and international.

Let us now imagine a relation between viewer and photographic project in which the producer actively shares a community with the audience in a different way from the community she or he shares with other producers. I will not make an argument here for a practice that comes far closer to this understanding of art and its place in the world. As a polar situation, we can imagine the disappearance of the idea of audience, along with, perhaps, the ubiquitous standard of the single producer. In the real world we can maintain the movement toward this pole as a tendency.

Imagine the implication of the audience in the formation of the work: it is just this implication of community that is profoundly embedded in the meaning of art. Its present lack of disconnectedness is more polemical than real, and it has left producers at the mercy of everyone but their wider — nonpurchasing—audience. It was art historian Arnold Hauser's observation that the doctrine of art's uselessness was the result of the fear of the upper classes after the French Revolution that they would lose control of art.

The lie of official culture is that socially invested art is sullied, deficient in its conception, deformed in its gestation, brutalised by the conditions of its birth, and abused in its lifetime. To rescue ourselves from this damaging fiction surely requires a new emancipation from market relations, and it demands a rethinking of all the facets of the production of art within culture. The levelling effect of money, of commodity relations, so that all photographs are equal regardless of what they depict and in which standards

of quality are external to the iconographic statement and intent, cannot go unchallenged:

"To supply a productive apparatus without trying... to change it is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature. For we are confronted with the fact... that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed, of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it." — Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer." in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (New Left Books, London, 1973), 93-94

To make this argument is not to call for artists to change masters but to affect a break with preceding practice in a strong and meaningful way. We are in a period in which oppositional practice is regaining strength and taking on international aspects. We must inventively expand our control over production and showing, and we must simultaneously widen our opportunities to work with and for people outside the audience for high art, not as annunciatory angels bearing the way of thought of the haute monde, but to rupture the false boundaries between way of thinking about art and ways of actively changing the world.— extract from "institutional critique: an anthology of artists' writings", edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 2009), 228-229

Lookers,  
Buyers, Dealers,  
and Markets:  
Thoughts on  
Audience (1979)

MARTHA  
ROSLER

Statue before Painting, Perseus with the Head  
of Medusa by Canova, 1982. © Louise Lawler







Ismat Barmer © Gauri Gill

In April 1999 I went out to photograph village schools in Rajasthan. I had seen a girl being beaten by her teacher in a small school in Narlai earlier that year, and had been thinking about it. I came back to Delhi and proposed the story to the news magazine where I worked at the time - I said that I wished to make some pictures about what it was like being a girl in a village school, but there didn't seem to be a suitable 'peg' for it. So I decided to take a month long sabbatical from work, and travel through rural Rajasthan.

I started by traveling around from school to random school, from Jaipur to Jodhpur, Osiyan, Bikaner, Barmer, Phalodi, Baran, Churu; from Government schools to NGO run schools, Balika Shivirs to Marushalas to Rajiv Gandhi Pathshalas; I met students, teachers, officials, NGO workers. They were tolerant of my ignorance and happy to show me around, to answer all my questions. I was an English speaking person from Delhi, a distant world. In Lunkaransar town I went to visit a Marushala run by the NGO Urmul to try and educate nomadic Jogi

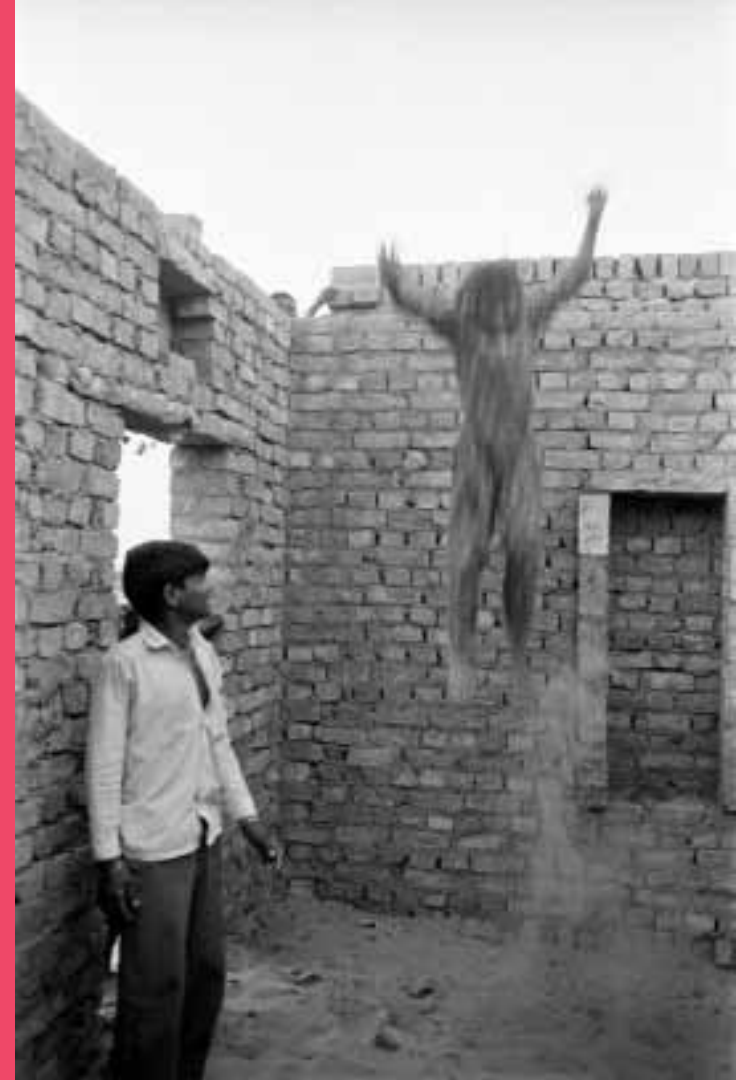
children. I met Urma and Halima, who took me home, and I was introduced to the family of Bhana Nath ji. We sat in their hut, on the bed with the snakes and chameleons and rooster underneath it, with her brothers and their dogs, and they invited me to travel with them. In Barmer district, lost, I came upon a group of women fully covered in large black ajrak shawls standing around the corpse of a little girl. They looked intimidating but when I ventured to ask for directions to the school, I was interrupted by one who told me what was wrong with her life, and with great conviction impressed upon me that I should come to Delhi and tell people of the troubles of people in Barmer. Her daughter Janat was terrified of me in my jeans with my camera. But Ismat asked me for my address, and wrote to me, and asked me to return. I did.

Schools opened a world. Over the course of the past eleven years the work has grown to encompass various parts of life, and changes that have occurred over time. I have witnessed various seasons, drought years and the year of a great monsoon – when Barmer became Kashmir, a



Karema and Friend, Lunkaransar © Gauri Gill

flood, the building of new homes, followed the farming cycle, migration, working as labor in Rajasthan and Gujarat and Maharashtra, Food for Work programs, NREGA and other government schemes, nomadic travel, malaria, tuberculosis, epidemics, death from snakebite, from accidents, from growing old in the desert, the death of a camel in a year that is remembered as the year of the death of the camel, births, marriages, moneylenders, NGO interventions, dharnas and rallies, people fighting for change, national and Panchayat elections, festivals, prayers, celebrations.. and through it all my friends. To live out in the desert as a poor, landless person without a regular job amounts to an inescapable reliance on one's self, on each other and on nature. The stakes are high, the elements close and life is as cheap as jokes are rampant. To sleep out on the icy cold sand dunes at night, in the winter, with only some tarpaulin and heavy old quilts means that everyone must huddle in together, along with the dogs, and breathe into the quilt. One isn't quite sure what is what or who is who, in the huddle.



New Homee after the flood, Lunkaransar © Gauri Gill

# Gauri Gill

## Notes from the Desert



Jogi home out in the country, Bikaner © Gauri Gill



© RITESH UTTAMCHANDANI





# SUNIL JANAH:

## A world in black and white (part 1)

By Ram Rahman



Jawaharlal Nehru, Anand Bhavan, Allahabad, 1939 © Sunil Janah

Among the many unwritten histories of modernism in the arts in India, photography has been more neglected the most. One figure who stands out in this history is Sunil Janah from Bengal, now 93 years old.

As a student of English in Calcutta's Presidency College, Janah had plunged headlong into leftwing politics on the campus and had joined the Student Federation. 'Photography was my hobby and I was good at it', says Janah, who was photographing party activities at the time with his own Rolleiflex camera. Intending to become a journalist, he had never thought of becoming a photographer. He came under the influence of P.C. Joshi, secretary of the Communist Party, who became both a mentor and a close friend. In 1943 Joshi approached him to photograph the famine while he was studying for his MA at the University.

As they travelled through Bengal, Janah's photographs appeared with Joshi's reporting on the famine in the pages of the party journal People's War. These pictures were also produced as postcards which were sold to raise funds for famine relief.

After this, Joshi persuaded Janah to quit his MA, move to the party headquarters in Bombay, and live

in the party commune for the next six years. The party bought him a 35mm Leica, and gave him a membership card. 'I was a non-joiner -- I didn't join photographic societies, join this, join that. When I was accepted as a member and the card was given to me, I didn't resist!' About his politics Janah says, 'Practically every intelligent creative person back then was a leftist... it was in the air.' He felt that the Congress represented the tradition of liberal humanism... which was not enough to bring justice to the poor. I felt that with the Congress the power would just be transferred from the British capitalists to the Indian capitalists... which is exactly what happened.

In Bombay, Sunil Janah published regularly on the back page of People's Age, his writing accompanying the photos he took all over India. He credits People's Age for pioneering work in India in its extensive use of photography, unusual for a paper cheaply produced with party funds. It was during this period that he documented all the political actions and meetings of the Congress, the Communists and the Muslim League.

Sunil Janah gained quick recognition outside party circles for the quality of his work, which started appearing regularly in The Statesman and the Illustrated Weekly of India, other than the party publications. Much of the work published in the Weekly came from the various photographic societies all over India, the members of

which followed a romantic, pictorial style of work strongly derived from similar work being done in Britain.

In terms of style, much of this work was in the 'heroic left' mode -- shot from a low angle looking up, which tended to give a mythic dimension to the subject. Janah says that the twin lens Rolleiflex camera itself dictated this style which involved shooting from the waist up. But he had also seen the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin and the German filmmakers. A turning point was his meeting with Margaret Bourke-White, who came to India for Life magazine.

'P.C. Joshi teamed me with her to travel all over India in 1945-46, and I worked with her again during the Partition when she returned. On her second trip I had gone to Noakhali and we photographed the Calcutta riots -- she took me into the Muslim areas in the middle of the riots and said she would pass me off as an American Black in case we were questioned, and not to speak Bengali! In fact, until I worked with Bourke-White, I always had a regret that I was turning into a photographer in spite of myself. I had half an eye towards journalism. She made me realise that photography could say something equally strong. In fact I was saying it already, but I didn't know I was! Her enthusiasm for the medium was infectious, and after that, there was no turning back. When we met we immediately became very close friends because I found I had a similar style and approach -- I felt she was an advanced replica of me -- she had done it longer, she was more famous, more successful. In fact she was the most famous photographer of her time. She was 36 and I was 26.'

To see Janah's pictures and those of Bourke-White side by side is a revelation. The astonished reaction of ordinary Indians to a young, attractive, short-haired white woman in pants and boots is apparent in every picture of hers. Standing aside, Janah captures a totally different mood. These paired pictures are worthy of a show and a book on their own. Janah developed distaste for continuing to photograph disasters like famines. He began to feel that it was an intrusion into the grief of the victims. He was also becoming increasingly disillusioned by the party, reacting to the more doctrinaire elements within it. 'As long as I was left alone to do my back page, I was fine, but then when they started demanding a red flag waving in every picture, I got very annoyed. The last straw came when they actually cut out flags and stuck them on the pictures!' Janah started spending more time in Calcutta towards 1946-47 and finally moved back there. He had also left the party by this time. Janah feels that whatever assessment has been made of him as a photographer has overemphasised the forties phase, which actually is only a part of a much larger body of work.



(To be cont'd. Edited from an article in seminar, march 1995)



Bengal Famine, 1943 © Sunil Janah

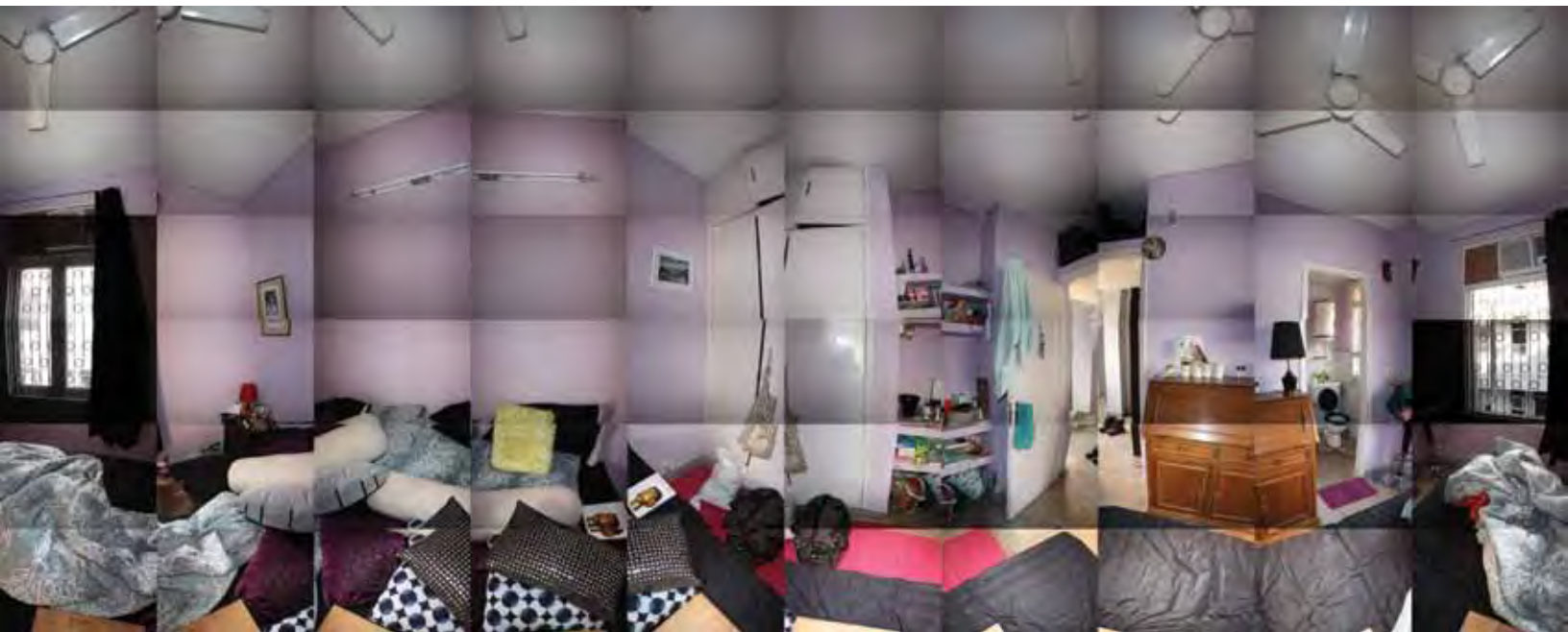




Hustle & Bustle © Akshay Rathore



It's a dog's life © Akshay Rathore



When she is away © Akshay Rathore

**‘When She is Away’ is a set of photographic light boxes titled ‘the eyes are the window to the soul’ which show various spaces Rathore has inhabited, rooms in his house and neighborhood – the bedroom, the kitchen, the pet shop. The work, presented as a fractured or pixilated vision, reproduce personal living spaces and spaces of contemplation where much of ones daily life is spent and where the seeds of many ideas germinated. These spaces are bubbles of perception and mental introspection.**

**AKSHAY  
RATHORE**

**portfolio**

*(Part carried over from the last issue)*

One must keep in mind when looking at Moholy-Nagy’s work that he had had political ambitions for art and design: and we may be sure that the development of visuality through the 20th century and onward, which has so much shaped the social world we now inhabit, would hardly have answered his desires. From what he wrote one gathers that Moholy- Nagy valued art and design for two functions that they, he supposed, could actually perform: he required that they extend and refine human visual capacity, and that their practice enable the discovery of their own laws. Moholy-Nagy had taught and worked at the Bauhaus, where the distinction between art and design was not insisted on. That there could be laws of art or design will seem a naive belief to post-modern readers: especially to such as have encountered Foucault’s argument that pictorial meaning is unstable because there are no relations of resemblance, only relations of similarity, between images. Those who are persuaded by this piece of reasoning might do well, however, to consider the cognate argument that would result if one substituted the word “geometrical” for “pictorial” in the conclusion, and the phrase “geometrical figures” for “images” in the premise. These desiderata derive from Moholy-Nagy’s politics, which were at once evolutionary and utopian. He believed with many of his fellows that human society could, or naturally would, evolve toward the sort of utopia Marx seems to have envisaged in his more optimistic moments. But he seems also to have believed - as did Lissitzky and Tatlin, notably, in the heady years immediately following the October Revolution - that our social evolution could or would be physiological also: society was to perfect itself through the improvement of our senses - as well as, presumably, our morals and our ability to reason - and art and design were to play a primary role in this progressive development of human aesthetic competence.

The requirement that art and design extend human visual capacity would sort uneasily, one thinks, with the demand that these praxes make their own laws discernible: unless these laws were developmental ones: because, once discerned, laws determining visual character might well preclude any extending of visual capacity. These sorts of conceptual complication seem endemic, however, to utopian projects: and to get around them one would probably have to wheel onstage all the machinery of Hegel’s Logic. But imagining social utopias even - much less working toward them - seems a risible thing to do at the beginning of the 21st century; and supposing that art and design could at all extend human visual capacities - rather than channel them, merely, this way or that - seems more than a little simple now. These are considerable obstacles in the way of our looking with any understanding at Moholy-Nagy’s experiments: and especially at the more ambitious ones. I have termed these “photogrammata” because the assembly of visual elements there appears to follow the combinatorial impulses of verbal syntax, more than the compositional dictates of graphic design. But tracking such impulses as they work themselves out in any such work would require us to entertain the utopian beliefs and desires modernist art and design had acknowledged and fostered: and with much more energy and discipline, one feels, than we can manage nowadays. One might well suppose the effort wasted therefore: but let us all the same take a look at one or other of these audacious experiments. A piece titled Leda and The Swan seems a good example now. One way into the work is to ask what use Moholy-Nagy could have had for myth: and we may assume that he did not look to myth in the way poets like Yeats or Eliot did, for instance, or as painters like Beckmann seemed to. What we see is a

## The Photogrammata of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy (Part 2)

Hans Verghese Mathews, Bangalore 2009



body arcing in a swan dive toward a point where lines meet like rays: and a swan tumbled on its back, seemingly, takes up the foreground. Given Moholy-Nagy’s politics, one might hazard now that the picture means to at once admit and overcome the imaginative power that myth still had over him: and unabashed Hegelians might take this for an attempt at visually ‘sublating’ mythopoieic thought. But the earlobe and the two seemingly ancillary figures, one seeming to ride the rayed lines, and the other to climb them, should give us pause: and I shall now wager, further, that Moholy-Nagy is using myth itself to inoculate imagination - to prophylactically infect imagination, as it were - against its own persisting power. Regarded so, the fact of the picture’s constituent images being photographic - the fact of their production having been mechanically immediate, and not manually mediated - seems central: and one is tempted to say that the work could have had no prophylactic success at all otherwise.

It is one thing to regard Leda and The Swan thusly, however, and quite another to actively sense its visual surface in any cognate way: and I suspect that our sensoria are apt not to feel, at all, its once inoculatory jab: trained as our eyes have been to Appearance in the tenor of the Photograph, so to note the circumstance again, by the sort of social praxis that photography became through the course of the last century. So, though Leda and The Swan seems to let our eyes into its workings rather more than the photo-grams we began with, it is very likely as remote an object of visual attention as any of the latter: and only some effort akin to the iconological exertions of Panofsky, one thinks, would let us see the work at all as its intended beholders must have seen it. But one may quite properly doubt even that. Recovering how the photograph made its shaping way into art might be just as impossible, actually, as recalling how we groped our way as children toward speech: and it is tempting now to let oneself think that the awkwardness and seeming lack of finish in these experiments of Moholy-Nagy’s - which may be what we are most able to train our eyes at - was a like natal straining, toward a perceptual equilibrium which, as a perfected condition of awareness now, we can no more sense than gravity. In one of his later essays, adumbrating a ‘short history of photography’ on terms peculiarly his own, and having noted that “the theoreticians of photography have had to do battle thus far” with “a fetishistic conception” which could not admit photographs as works of art, Benjamin asks when we will come, rather, to understand “all art as photography”: it would be a properly dialectical irony if, art having indeed become photography, we are simply unable to see how it did so. With practice in a condition of complete aesthetic entropy, works of art may be, Danto suggests, anything at all that artists and patrons want them to be: meaning thereby that they could come anyhow at our senses - as if their embodying of meaning were not impeded, at all, by the history of their material means: just as, one is tempted to say, a photograph is not impeded at all by any prior pictorial representation of its object - which is one reason to think that art has actually ‘become photography’.



Major photography exhibitions at London's more prominent art galleries are rare events, which given its immense popularity and public appeal is strange.

One of the strengths of the show is the placing of archival, modern and contemporary works in close contact with each other allowing for a more thorough reading and questioning of each body of work and its relationship to the others. The sparseness of textural interpretation makes a refreshing change, inviting the viewer to develop questions and make connections based on their own experiences and response rather than yield to the voice of the expert.

## JOY GREGORY, LONDON 2010 Three Dreams at the Whitechapel Gallery



Bijoy Chowdhury / Boy with a Mask [imitated by a Bohurupi (polymorphic) artist] 2004

The exhibition opens with the Portrait and Performance revealing a great deal of crossover between the two areas, perhaps because both genres are concerned with putting on a show and notions of display. The studio portraits of Babba Bhutta, Gauri Gill, D. Nusserwanjee, Sanyeeda Khanna and Umrao Singh Sher-Gil are all performative the difference lying in the intended audience. Sonia Khurana's "Bird Retake II" is performative portrait - representing not just herself but also the pain of failed dreams. This startling and compelling piece also raises issues of current relationship between photography and the female body.

It is rare that we see any woman in the media that surround us who has not been retouched to the point of total fiction.

The strongest segment of the exhibition is The Family, challenging many preconceptions around this institution along with past traditions and present values on the subcontinent. The portraits from the albums of the Alkazi and White Star archives depict a vision of family that is meant for consumption across the generations. Exquisite renditions of courtesans point to elements that have always been kept from view like the painful diaristic pieces by Bobby from the project "Beyond Gender." He cuts a small vulnerable figure within the wider frame and reveals a less comfortable face of the family unit. The theme of performance once again comes to life in Swaranjit Singh's theatrical photographs of Prem bringing to mind those of Frieda Kahlo from a slightly earlier period and the Anay Mann's intimate windows onto home life. The notion of family is presumed to be universal but it is presented here with its many conflicting contexts a few of which may spark some local debate. Some aspects point to cultural difference but in truth the family has always been a contested space.

Like the first two areas there is much overlapping between the Street and The Body Politic, which are crammed with amazing and unforgettable photographs many of which I will never forget like Mohammed Arif Ali's - "Crowd Spectator" & "Rainy Day" in Lahore, Farida Batool's lenticular print of a girl skipping and Homai Vyarawalla of Nehru with his grandsons. A photographer today could only dream of getting as close to a politician or contemporary icon as Raghu Rai is in his depictions of Indira Gandhi. However, these two sections were also the most difficult to grasp - it might be because the groupings reveal much more about the photographers and the medium of photography rather than the subjects in the frame. As a medium photography is about ideas, dreams and spontaneous moments, not all of which is easily contained in any box.

As an exhibition "Where Three Dreams Cross" because of the density of work is seemingly quite daunting but ultimately one the most rewarding photography shows I have had the pleasure to see.

**"Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh" was on show at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. 21 January — 11 April, 2010.**



## APEX SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Rishi Singhal



Visual imagery, over the years has become an integral part of our lives today. Whether we consciously observe, marvel, analyze, or tend to maintain an indifference, we simply can not escape the lure and onslaught of images in our daily life.

Today, photography is undoubtedly one of the most well known mediums of generating visual information. It is becoming a popular profession of choice, apart from being a gripping leisure time activity for many. The technology and accessibility have also made image making a very democratic process. Photography now is no longer an exclusive domain of professional photographers. Anyone with a basic snapshot camera, or even a phone camera and an intent can create their own personal narratives and poems. Professionals, at the same time, are increasingly committing themselves to redefining their processes and the resultant outcome. This is undoubtedly a very interesting time in the history of photography, especially in the subcontinent, which is laden with layers and layers of text and subtext, waiting to be rediscovered and re-contextualized.

We at the academy for photographic excellence (apex) are striving to become a resource centre for photography at the regional level and impart photography education and facilities to any interested members of the community. We offer a wide range of programs covering various aspects and genres of photography, both theoretically and practically. Our programs cater to all photography enthusiasts ranging from beginners to advance level practitioners of the medium. Apex was founded in 2006 with the concept of providing photography education to both, amateur and professional photographers.

Since its inception, apex has been offering various long-term & short-term courses in photography. Located in vasant vihar, near pvr-priya cinema, the academy has three floors consisting of spacious, air-conditioned classrooms, a 150 sq ft fully equipped b&w darkroom, a digital lab equipped with 10 mac stations, scanner & an Epson Pro 4800 printer, a fully equipped lighting studio, a well stocked library and a 1200 sq ft gallery space for exhibitions. We are also affiliated with Canon India and have a range of Canon equipment available for student's use.

Starting with 2010, we have revised our approach and pedagogy to make it more congruent with the contemporary standards in the photography industry and education. In view of our new ideology, we are also in the process of revamping our facility and infrastructure.

Along with our new programs, we will also be making our b&w darkroom, lighting studio & the gallery space available to the community at very nominal charges.

Currently we are offering a 1 year diploma in professional photography, a 3 months duration intensive course, a 1 month duration evening course in foundation, and various weekend workshops in portraiture, fashion, advertising, food, travel, and documentary photography. We also offer one on one mentoring sessions on various topics.

For more information, visit our website at [www.Apexindia.net](http://www.Apexindia.net), or Email us at [photo.Apex@gmail.com](mailto:photo.Apex@gmail.com)



It was not until 1993 that the General Assembly of the United Nations finally adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Article One reads:

“ For the purposes of this Declaration, the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” Human trafficking has for centuries been a lucrative business and is currently estimated to have a market value of over 32 billion US dollars. Forced prostitution of women is the most widespread form of human trafficking today.



© Dona Popa

According to professor Kevin Bales – the world’s leading expert on contemporary global slavery – poverty, deprivation, the desire for a better life and the need to escape conflict and oppression are all vital elements that bring people into contact with traffickers. Deception and false promises are important strategies employed by traffickers. Gaining the confidence of the targeted individuals and their families is an essential part of the trafficking process.

For the victim, hope turns to tragedy once transportation begins. Kevin Bales states: “To be without documents while in transit is to be placed immediately in the control of the trafficker.”<note 1> The dispossession of identity is the first major act of violence aimed at the victim. Stripping away the subject’s identity prepares the ground for the subject to become a non-citizen, a person without rights or protection. It’s an act of violence that has similar echoes across the historical application of photography when focused on the ‘Other’. “The aim of the trafficker will be to disorientate the victim, to increase his or her dependence, to establish fear and obedience, to gain control.” <note 2> The more they resist, the greater the brutality, until – like most slaves

– their will to resist is finally crushed. The journey towards a hopeful future quickly turns into a journey of utter despair, violent degradation, and possible death. The key question of what happens to an individual once the traffickers have no value for them, is rarely considered. Comparatively the value of human life has become cheaper, as more and more people attempt to escape poverty and conflict the easier it is to exploit them.

Photography is most suited to forms of documentary commentary and has historically been used to portray, frame and display people in both their most glorious and debased conditions. Theoretical debates on photography are racked with issues concerning photography’s “indexical aspect, which comes from the fact that since a photograph results from exposure to a pre-existing entity, it directly bears the entity’s imprint and can therefore supply evidence about the object it depicts”.

<note 3> The production of photographic evidence opens up debates concerning power and privileging regimes of knowledge that are rooted in debates regarding state control over the individual subject, crime, punishment and societal classification coupled with enquiries into the nature of western scopic power. The photographs from Dana Popa’s series Not Natasha perform several tasks. As a body of documentary photographs they function to serve as a reminder of the wide reaching effects of human trafficking on the individual subject, the victim. Popa’s photographs work primarily within the classic tradition of the documentary genre where, “Causality is vague, blame is not assigned, fate cannot be overcome.”

<note 4> Her use of colour is a deliberate turn away from the gritty and distant realism associated with black-and-white documentary photography. Colour brings the viewer closer to the victim and effectively closes the distance between them and us.

Popa’s photographs are essentially an enquiry into an acute and pervasive form of violence against women. The loss and absence portrayed in Popa’s photographs resonate with the violence associated with forms of cultural erasure, in which names are changed, histories are re-written and deep rooted societal relationships are severed. Popa’s photographs are a tragic reminder of just how vulnerable and powerless women are globally, and the absence displayed exposes the futility of universal declarations.

Popa’s photographs act as metaphorical markers on the social conditions across cultures that have served to lock women into forms of masculine servitude. In an additional cruel visual twist, Popa invites us to recognise the other form of violence that is at play throughout this work; the ongoing misery of those who have been left behind to wait in the hope that one day the loved will to return home. The portraits of those who can only wait and the photographs they cling to – of those that have been trafficked – become tragic icons of hope, as the person who has departed will never again fit the image that is held up for us to observe.

The psychological damage inflicted on those who have managed to return home is beyond the spectacle of any one photograph. The photographic image in this instance cannot carry the burden of personal experience.

Popa represents the women who return home through a veiled sense of shame; their identities have to be altered for the sake of their own protection. Popa’s extensive project, which has been several years in the making, attempts to address the wider impact that human trafficking has on the family and extended social relations.

The photographs serve to memorialise those who have vanished. They also operate as tools of testimony for those who have returned. As documents, the photographs prove nothing. Instead they act as signifiers of emptiness, waiting, emotional damage and external harm.



© Dona Popa

Within this body of photographs, the doctrine of any decisive moment is clearly abandoned and what is revealed is the importance of time exchanged between the photographer and the subject. There is no critical moment of entrapment or release relating to the subject in focus. These photographs offer no reprieve from the violence experienced by these women and their families. The interiority of the photographic work, the empty rooms, the dark and claustrophobic spaces, portray a chronic condition of despair and highlight the catastrophic conditions that make it possible for human trafficking to thrive. Popa’s investment in the subject is therefore beyond the lens. Her photographs operate as

markers of her intention to take action and responsibility. “Catastrophe, as it is usually understood emerges, erupting as an event, sharply drawing the line between before and after, manufacturing its emergence as a riddle: How and why is this happening? Why now? Why in this manner? What to do about catastrophe requires exhaustive research that could bring to the surface more and more facts to explain its eventuation. But the verge of catastrophe, does not emerge, it is not exactly an event, and has no power to create a difference. It exists on the surface, completely open to the gaze and yet evading it, because there is nothing to distinguish it from the surroundings in which it exists.” <note 5> Popa’s photographic project focuses on two distinctive visual forms of violence that in essence should not be separated from each other: the violence of poverty and the violence of exploitation. By focusing on domestic interiors Popa signifies to her audience that it is not enough

# BEYOND THE LENS

Director, Autograph-ABP, London

MARK SEALY

## FOOTNOTES

<note 1> Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005, page 145

<note 2> *ibid*, page 141

<note 3> Tom Gunning, ‘Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detection, and early Cinema’, in *Cinema and the invention of Modern Life*, Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p.20

<note 4> Martha Rosler, *3 works*, The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p.76

<note 5> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Zone Books New York, 2008, p.291



## Info

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## SUBMISSIONS FOR THE 2010, 6TH ANGKOR PHOTO FESTIVAL 20-27 NOVEMBER, 2010. SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

For the 2010 program of exhibitions and slideshows please send a direct URL of your work at the email address - [apfsubmission2010@gmail.com](mailto:apfsubmission2010@gmail.com), accompanied by a clear description of the project and a short biography (maximum 120 words). Please note that we do not accept single image submissions. newsletter <<http://www.photographyforchange.net/newsletter.html>>. Work can also be submitted from Lightstalkers galleries, Photoshelter lightboxes, etc. URL links must be direct links to the story you want to show.

The deadline for submitting work is May, 28th, 2010.  
All photographers will receive an answer by the end of July 2010.

VIVEK SAHNI DESIGN



### UNSEEN UNHEARD UNEXPLAINED

By Pat, Mathieu Foss Gallery, Mumbai  
Mar 17 - Apr 13, 2010

# Shows

### WHERE THREE DREAMS CROSS

Fotomuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland  
12 June–22 August, 2010

### NOIDA SOLILOQUY

By Dhruv Malhotra at  
Photoink, New Delhi  
April 10-June 12, 2010



### FAITH

Fawzan Hussain at The Seagull Arts  
and Media Resource Centre, Kolkata  
17 - 27 April, 2010

