

camerawork delhi

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Sindur-Khela at Mitra-Bari, Kolkata 2005 © Jayanta Saha

"...indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination." Susan Sontag 1979

Alexander Keefe

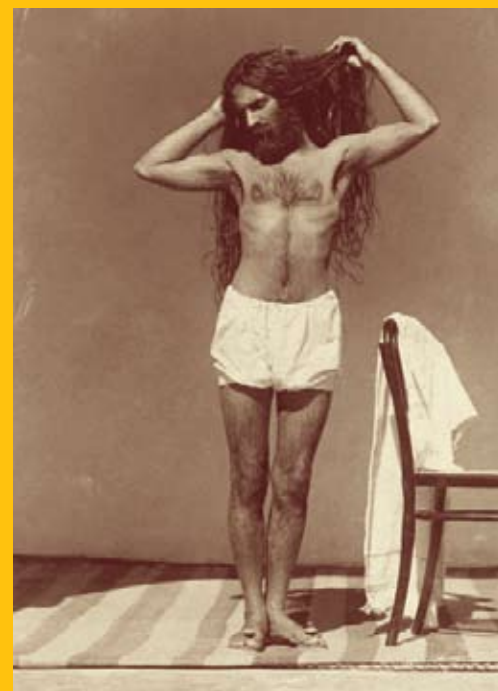
SOMEONE CLICKED THE SHUTTER:

Indian photography on
display in Delhi, 2007-2008

Contemporary Indian photography finds itself navigating strange waters in this first decade of the twenty-first century: at a time when young Indian painters and installation artists are increasingly dependent upon digital media and software for the production, if not actual display, of their works, photographers are struggling to carve out a separate space for their chosen medium, even as its once secure boundaries dissolve. And it is a time when an astonishingly diverse range of photographic approaches coexist, offering divergent answers to questions that have preoccupied the practice of “fine art” photography ever since the term was first used: the distinction of the photojournalist from the fine art photographer, the status of the photographic print as a saleable art object in an age of mechanical reproduction, and the indexical promise of the photographic image, its effet de reel that nineteenth-century artists and writers feared would make their work irrelevant. Add to these perennial questions the particularly Indian ones relating to questions of nation and culture in a postcolonial world, mix in the note of urgency lent by a booming art market together with the democratizing impact of digital photography, and you can begin to understand the overlapping pressures that together condition the hothouse atmosphere of what is beginning to look like a watershed moment in contemporary Indian photography. Fittingly, the 2007-2008 season in Delhi saw a flurry of photography shows at private galleries and major museums.

The National Gallery of Modern Art hosted a mega-show in February that included a pair of exhibitions--one organized by the Alkazi Foundation, the other by PhotoInk--taking viewers through some relatively unexplored areas in the history of Indian photography. The Alkazi Foundation took over a wing of the museum to display a selection from their archive, including a stunning set of painted images. The earliest examples, dating from the 19th century, closely mimic late Mughal and Rajput painting styles, demonstrating the way in which the rulers of the “Native States” adapted photographic technology to their

After a bath: self-portrait 1904, Lawrence Road house, Lahore, India Inscribed on reverse by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil: USG 1904 Lahore



own ends, striking an uneasy--and ultimately unstable--balance between two distinct means for the discursive representation of power. The photos point to the peculiar double duty that the British imposed on their “native princes”: compliance with an explicitly colonial form of technological and political modernity alongside an anxious and self-conscious display of reified pre-colonial “tradition.” As the nineteenth century gives way to the twentieth, we see a shift away from strictly “royal” patronage; the photograph escapes the palace to become the frame for a potent form of bourgeois cultural hybridity.

“Umrao Sher Gil, His Misery and His Manuscript. A Retrospective, 1889-1949”, curated by Vivan Sundaram and Devika Daulet-Singh, digs deep into another early, unusually personal archive of Indian photography, that of Umrao Sher Gil, who used his camera as a means of radical experimentation and self-fashioning, working through the many tangled threads of his personality: he was a philosophically-minded scholar, a student of yoga, a technophile tinkerer, an aesthete married to a Hungarian opera star, and a man with ties to the banned revolutionary Gaddar Party, ties that resulted in the confiscation of his lands by colonial authorities. The camera becomes a tool for the self-presentation of a forced recluse: alongside a fascinating series of self-portraits, we see images from a cultured, self-contained and theatrical family life, including wonderful shots of his tragically doomed daughter Amrita Sher-Gil. What emerges through Sher Gil’s lens is the imagination of an alternative modernity, one struggling to come to a separate peace with technologies otherwise associated with the exercise of colonial power.

Two other institutional shows move things much closer to the present. Pablo Bartholomew and Ram Rehman are both names that should need little introduction to anyone acquainted with photography in Delhi. Both men came of age in the 1970s in familial and social milieus closely connected with the arts, and both turned early to photography, developing idiosyncratic styles of candid, informal camera work that sought out quirky juxtapositions and intimate angles. Pablo Bartholomew’s “Tale of Three Cities” at the National Museum in February, showcases the black-and-white early snapshots of a photographer whose preternatural eye and insouciant disregard for conventional propriety turned him into one of India’s most accomplished and edgy photojournalists. The same month saw Ram Rahman’s “Bioscope” at Lalit Kala Akademi, a massive retrospective of some 190 images, tracing over thirty years of rampant photophilia. It was hard not to be charmed by this show, especially by the shots of Delhi. Rahman’s lens is profoundly extrovert, especially in comparison with his contemporary Bartholomew’s, and humane.



Bhupen Khakhar, Delhi 1995 © Ram Rehman



Nomita and Bina, New Delhi, 1976, © Pablo Bartholomew



Robes 2, Moving image lightbox, 40" x 20" detail from "Winged Pilgrims: A Chronicle from Asia", 2006 © Sheba Chhachhi



Unknown photographer and artist Maharaja Venkat Raman Singh of Rewa (1876-1918; r. 1880-1918), gelatin silver print and oil painting, 1899, 302 x 250 mm courtesy of Alkazi Collection of Photography

Both photographers featured in "Click! Contemporary Photography from India," at Vadehra Gallery in March. So did everyone else. The show, curated by Sunil Gupta and Radhika Singh, was a well-meaning, quixotic attempt to create a representative, unbiased survey of contemporary photographic practice in India. The challenge the curators set themselves was formidable, given their criteria for inclusion: "Whether they were taken for an expensive commercial client or on a Sunday stroll... all that mattered is that someone had clicked that shutter and wanted to show us the result." This may sound more like a description of what happens on the internet than it does a recipe for a compelling photography show, but the results were rather more carefully selected than the curators' statement would suggest. A show like this--like it or not, a canonical gesture--is bound to attract complaints and accolades in equal measure: it presented a dizzying array of occasionally incredible photography, but at the same time inevitably privileged the one-off dazzler over works that are best approached serially.

The problem is that some of India's best photography belongs to the latter category: with a nod to Robert Frank's 1955 book of the same title, Gauri Gill's *The Americans*, at Delhi's Nature Morte Gallery in March, documents the anxieties, excesses and suburban dreams of Indians living in the United States. Drawn from a body of images shot over the course of seven years, the results are arresting, collected in an evocative show that echoes her predecessor's commitment to the narrative power of the still image. Gill brings an outsider's lens to bear on a community of people who are themselves poised near the threshold, forging individual and group identities amid the manifold forces of memory, tradition, displacement and change.

Sheba Chhachhi, who was responsible for a few of the "Click!" show's finest images, takes her work in an entirely different direction with "Winged Pilgrims" at Nature Morte. Formally, the show is ambitious and hybrid, replacing the exquisite portraiture of her earlier work with a set of scrolling lightboxes consisting of layered screens



printed with original photographs and found images. Thematically, the show traces connections between ascetic robes and contamination suits, avian flu and mythical menageries of fantastic birds, sick bodies and souls in flight, civilization and collapse.

A related set of post-industrial concerns runs through "The Spaces Between," Bharat Sikka's show at the National Gallery in February. Sikka uses talents developed as a successful commercial photographer to create large-format images, often beautiful images, of unbeautiful, marginal spaces and monstrous architecture, desolate landscapes that--barring the artist's intervention--are more likely to avert the gaze than attract it.

If, as critic Deepak Ananth has written, the camera is "modernity's most important invention, its mirror," it remains to be seen what happens to the looking glass as many of the once apparently stable dichotomies that structure our understanding of modernity crumble. Not the least of these is the distinction between photography and the other media of art, a separation that intersects with one of modernity's bedrock assumptions: the ability to distinguish between reality-as-it-is and reality-as-it-is-represented, between fact and fantasy, history and myth, science and quackery. Perhaps it is not surprising that at a time when so many of the last century's facts have turned out to be fantasies, its historians myth-makers, and its science the most dangerous form of world-destroying voodoo, its medium par excellence for the objective representation of the world--photography--is fast becoming indistinguishable from art.



Nagpur Theme Park 2007, © Bharat Sikka



Halloween Party. San Francisco 2000 © Gauri Gill

Director, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
talks to Radhika Singh

PROF. RAJEEV LOCHAN



Man In Search Of Utopia, 2007 © Rajiv Lochan

This year (2008) started with a flurry of very significant photographic activity in Delhi, much of it staged at the National Gallery of Modern Art. India's premier museum and gallery devoted to art, the NGMA(under the Ministry of Culture) has hosted many exhibitions over the last 50 years showcasing the work of eminent artists from India and abroad. But photography as a visual art medium was still being treated as a very poor cousin. Therefore the 4 spectacular photography exhibitions hosted in collaboration with the Embassy of France in India brought excitement and hope that photography had finally come of age with the Government of India. Following closely on the heels of these shows, the NGMA hosted Raghu Rai's retrospective 'The Journey of a Moment in Time', covering the entire ground floor of the building. This led camerawork to the office of the Director, NGMA, to understand the position of this august institution with regard to photography as an art form. Prof. Rajeev Lochan turned out to be a delightful surprise with as compelling a personal interest in photography as in relating his life's journey through the travails of the artistic impulse that had brought him to the chair he now occupies as head of the NGMA .



RS: How has NGMA placed the recent phenomena of the success of photography as an investable art form, and what is your personal contribution to this phenomena as an artist ?

RL: Thank you for giving me an opportunity by raising questions which transcend my position and allow me to travel to those spaces which are actually responsible for my own personal growth as an individual, and which allow me to give the vision and direction that I would like NGMA to take. For me, these two positions, the personal and official are intertwined.

Rajeev Lochan saw the 'Family of Man' exhibition as a child, when it travelled to his hometown, Dehradun, in the early 60's. He retains a portfolio from that exhibition which he has kept "very carefully". His father was an artist and counted many outstanding photographers amongst his friends. Growing up

with a fascination for photography, Rajeev saved money to buy a Zorky for Rs.200/ in Class VIII. He joined a photography club, participated in photo exhibitions, and learned processing and printing from an old studio hand. Dehradun was the hub for different survey institutions, and Rajeev persuaded the chief photographer of the Botanical Survey of India to take him "under his wing". His next acquisition was an Alpenflex, a camera that he still preserves. While in Class X, his cousin flew into India from a foreign assignment and introduced him to a Nikon F. Rajeev was allowed to handle the Nikon and learned well enough to become the chief photographer for his cousin's wedding. In his own words he "shot and shot and shot and shot".

A good science student, he insisted on completing his studies with art, geography and psychology, and was admitted to the Baroda School of Art at the age of 16 with a portfolio of 10 photographic prints.

RL: *Fantasy is the basis of all hypothesis as much applicable to science as it is to art because creativity is the common denominator. All my work evolved around the correlation between photography, the moment, the psychological, the introspective, the perceptive and how it could be amalgamated. In those days it was not clear how painting and photography were bound together.*

Rajeev set up the Jamia Mass Communication Centre with Anwar Jamal Kidwai, and has taught there for the past 27 years. Many of the leading cinematographers today, including Kabir Khan and Hemant Chaturvedi, were his students. This teaching is what he counts as his "real earning".

He joined the National Gallery as director in 2001. At that time the NGMA had started collecting photography and had acquired some period prints, some Raja Deen Dayals, and some Kishen Khannas. It was a small collection and the new director had a big dream.

RL: *The NGMA is a repository of the people, it stands for art that has arrived and that is in the process of arrival. It also has an important role to educate and build a platform for the larger understanding and acceptance of art. Obviously I had this dream in my mind to do large photography exhibitions and build a good collection. The first time in 7 years that I got the opportunity to acquire work, I bought Vivan Sundaram's portfolio of Amrita. I have Raghu Rai and Dayanita Singh's work. My association with Alkazi is also very long. I have looked at his collection very closely, and he is also very aware of my interest in 20th century photography.*

RS: What is the process through which the NGMA acquires work ?

RL: *There is an Art Acquisition Committee duly appointed by the Government. Regular advertisements are placed in all the national dailies across the country. There is a process of short-listing and final selection where the art is brought in and evaluated before being accepted.*

RS: Are you planning to do anything special for photography?

RL: *Of course, I am very clear about photography. I interpret the creative interpretation of the medium of photography as a means of expression. My duty is to ensure that this nation honours and celebrates its Masters, those who have spent a lifetime creating a platform for the visual arts.*

I am happy to say that we have held 7 retrospectives over these last 7 years. As you know, Raghu Rai's exhibition was on a while ago. There has been nothing to match it in magnitude, dimension, scale and diversity. I am also equally clear that when I have my new museum there should be a completely dedicated section to photography. Within the 7 acres of land that the NGMA stands on we are building 24,700 sq.metres of new international quality space. The world is waiting for it. But everything takes time and it is a very lonely journey...

an interview with **VICKY**

SV Photographic . New Delhi

What does SV Photographic stand for? How old is your lab, and what is the kind of work you do?

SV stands for Satish and Vicky. We started our lab in March 1994. We are doing film processing (C41, E-6, B/W) upto 4"X 5" size and B/W hand printing on R.C. and fibre paper, scanning and system work on digital images. We also rent out medium format digital cameras.

What is your market, in terms of photographers? How has your clientele changed, over the years?

Market has suddenly changed in recent years. Earlier we used to do more work for advertising agencies but now we are doing more work for fine art photographers, advertising photographers as well as advertising agencies.

You have been moving towards digital prints. Can you talk a bit about that. And will you continue to make silver and C prints as well?

We started digital printing 5 years back with Epson inkjet printer, Nikon 9000 ED cool scanner and 2 mac systems but we are gradually upgrading our digital systems. Now we have Hasselblad flexilight X5 scanner, Epson stylus pro 11880, 9800 printers to cater to our photographers and artists. We are also doing silver prints (B/W only) and film processing upto 4"X5" because these handmade prints are very rare. Very few people are doing it across the world so they are more in demand.

Prices have been going up recently, and making prints here is becoming quite competitive with the rest of the world. Yet some of the facilities are still missing. How will you address this?

We are doing more work for foreign photographers from UK, USA, Australia and they are satisfied with



By Gauri Gill

the quality of our work and are not complaining about the prices. So we are still charging less for facilities which are of world class standards.

What do you aspire to be, as a lab, in the future?

We want to be digitally better equipped in the future but still we want to carry the legacy of traditional hand printing and film processing. We want to cater to more photographers and artists in future.



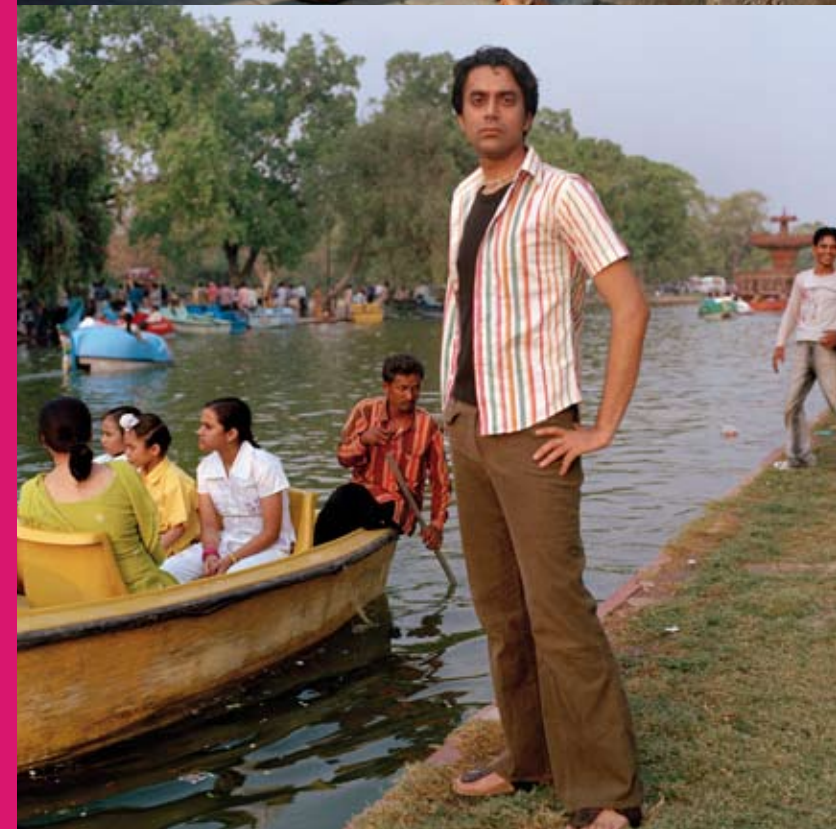
MALHOTRA'S PARTY

Sunil Gupta

In the 1980's Gupta worked on constructed documentary images of anonymous gay men in architectural spaces in Delhi (Exiles series). In today's India, gay men are lurking less in parks, and more on the net, and inhabit spaces like "private" parties. Gay nights at local clubs in Delhi are always sign-posted as private parties in a fictitious person's name to get around Section 377, a British colonial law which still criminalises homosexuality in India.

With these images, Gupta is trying to visualise this latest virtual queer space through a series of portraits of real people who identify their sexuality as 'queer' in some way. This time both men and women look straight into the camera and we see around them aspects of today's urban New Delhi. This time they are willing to identify themselves. They are guests of an imaginary party, which Gupta has called "Mr Malhotra's Party, named after the ubiquitous Punjabi refugee who arrived post-partition and contributed to the development of New Delhi. - (Photo London 2007)

The series is represented in "Street & Studio: An Urban History of Photography" Tate Modern, London and Museum Folkwang, Essen 2008



Pavitr 2007

Bikram 2007
© Sunil Gupta

What does the sex-life of house lizards have to do with reflections on photographic beauty? When my colleague, Bhaswati Chakravorty, showed me these images she had captured, with an ordinary digital camera, of what had been happening on her bedroom wall, my first reaction was, "How exquisite!" I do find the delicate arabesque of these translucent, cold, blank-eyed bodies intertwined in passion abidingly beautiful. But my other colleagues took one look at them and felt nothing but revulsion. None of them is a prude; they just hate lizards. Perhaps revulsion is one of those feelings that make most people forget the difference between a photograph and the real thing. But I wondered whether the revulsion, in this case, did have to do with the fact that the lizards were having sex, rather than doing something else, like gobbling up a moth. So is it all that easy to distinguish between feelings about sex and feelings about lizards in this particular instance of revulsion? And what then does my not



feeling revolted by the images, but finding them beautiful instead, say about my attitude to lizards, to sex, and to beauty? And are all three connected in some elusive, complicated and personal way that was brought to the fore in the act of looking at the photographs? Are our reactions to images, then, ever purely 'aesthetic'?

There is a tangle of practical and ethical problems with photographing sex that is instantly solved when the people having sex are not people but lizards. Lizards, unlike people, have no sense of privacy – at least, not in relation to the human gaze, or not in a way that they can communicate to human beings. (They just run away, presumably in fear, when they sense that human beings are after them.) So, the photographer can be shameless too. She can allow herself to not have any misgivings about violating the hallowed codes of human privacy. Politically – that is, looking at relations of power – nothing could be more incorrect than photographing lizards having sex. Think of how vulnerable the poor creatures are in relation to the powerfulness of the human photographer, of the terrible inequality of this particular relationship between observer and observed. Yet, the lizardness of lizards releases the photographer from that scruple too, unless she takes an extreme and absolute position about the nature – and therefore the rights – of animals. (What would Elizabeth Costello or her creator, J.M. Coetzee, think about all this?)

I asked Bhaswati if she would have felt just as free as she felt with the lizards to photograph dogs having sex on a busy street. She said that she would have felt equally eager to photograph the dogs, but would have actually taken the photographs from a place where other people would not see her. She is also sure that if she were a man, she would have felt freer about photographing the dogs openly.

© Bhaswati Chakravorty



Gecko Dekko

Aveek Sen

PETER NAGY

Interview



Peter Nagy in front of a photograph by Dayanita Singh, 2008 © Gauri Gill

By Gauri Gill

When and how did you start Nature Morte gallery? Whats it about? How is the one in Delhi different from its earlier avatar in New York? I had Nature Morte in NY's East Village from 1982 to 1988. I started it rather naively and spontaneously just one year after graduating from art school. But I was infatuated with art and galleries, so wanted to try to do it myself. I can't say the one in Delhi is any different, in theory or philosophy, than the one in New York but, of course, its in India rather than NY and I was 15 years older when I started it in 1997, so much more experienced. But both are commercial galleries and the only parameters of what I show is art that I like, though my own taste in art could be defined, I suppose.

What is Nature Morte's relationship with photography? What is the kind of work you're interested in? I've always loved photography, since I was a kid. Of course, going to art school in New York City (1977-1981) meant I had a huge exposure to photography in all its forms, which was a valuable education. By the late 70s there were many galleries in NY specializing in photography, mainstream art galleries accommodated photography into their programming, and specialized departments at the museums putting on big shows. The 80s was an amazing time for photography, with the parameters exploding and the definitions being radically re-evaluated. I was very influenced by (what is referred to as) the "Pictures School" of artists (Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, and others), most of whom used photography exclusively for their practice or combined photography with other mediums. I knew and got to work with these artists but Nature Morte was very much defined by the next generation (my own) who were influenced by this generation and tried to take things to the next step.

In the 80s, the photography we were involved with was more theoretical and even political, involved with the politics of representation and how that dove-tailed with Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism. It was also addressing the place and function for art in an over-saturated media environment and the definitions of authorship. I think many of those issues have been resolved but certainly continue to be relevant. Now I am interested in photography that shows me things I wouldn't see otherwise, develops an inquiry regarding specific content, or combines with other media so as to address issues of hybridity in both forms and subjects.

Is the recent 'photo - boom' exaggerated or is there really a large market for photography now? And if so, does it help the medium, or to build a critical culture? I certainly wouldn't call it a boom. More like the Indian art scene and market are finally waking up and taking photography seriously as an art form. We still have a very long way to go. Of course, more sales, exhibitions, publications and attention helps photography and photographers.

What about the dark side? How can it adversely affect photographers? As with the overall art boom, the danger is that artists will be tempted to overproduce to make quick money, the quality of their work will suffer, and the market will be flooded with mediocre (or worse) work. Gallerists and collectors have a role to play by not asking artists or photographers to make too much work or have too many shows, and therefore giving them the time they need to properly develop their work.

What do you make of the distinction between artists using photography and 'straight' photographers? As I said, my formative years in NY were all about challenging these distinctions. Of course, some photographers aren't interested in mixing with other mediums, which is fine, but, as far as I'm concerned, it's all a moot point. The important thing is the imagery, the technique, the content and the integrity of the artist or photographer, regardless of what materials they are working with. And that between 'art' photography and that which occupies other genres. Can it cross over? It seems to be doing that quite successfully. A picture is a picture is a picture. And we have so many uses and places for pictures these days.

Where would you situate Indian photography today with what is going on elsewhere in the world, and within the larger canon of photography? Obviously photography and India are closely linked historically. People have written books on the subject and it's still not exhausted. And, in a funny way, India might be the most over-photographed country in the world. I remember when the last Kumbh Mela happened, it seemed every photographer in the world was coming to shoot it. Christopher Pinney's and Kajri Jain's writings have illuminated just how intensely complex the function of photography is for the Indian mass psychology. As someone said (I wish I knew who): "India is overwhelmed by its own imagination." Indeed, and it now seems capable of overwhelming a global imagination as well. Finally, now, the world will see India photographed by Indians more than by non-Indians. As for elsewhere in the world and what is going on there? That's a big subject!

1947 PARTITION AND PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Sohail Akbar

Can personal photographs of not so public personalities convey a slice of larger national history? I think they can; because an era in which a person has been visually documented is also a time in which larger historical narratives have taken place which may be read if photographs are carefully observed. Whenever I looked at my father's photo album its pictures collectively spoke of times that I had only heard through anecdotes or read about in books. He is a man who was born in 1920 and has lived an active life throughout the last century. He saw and participated in the Freedom movement. Coming from a UP Muslim family he suffered the pain of partition which made all his family but him move to Pakistan. Throughout my growing up years I heard about stories of partition which seemed a distant happening. As a child what enamoured and fascinated me was visiting Pakistan which was the only foreign country I had been to for many a years. Grandparents, uncle, aunts and numerous cousins were a source of joy and I got all of their absolute attention whenever I was there. It was later on growing up and reading history, literature and personal narratives and seeing cinema like Garam Hawa and Tamas that one was made aware how depressing an episode partition was for people who lived through its impact. I also realise that its painful moments within the family were also never discussed openly.

My father's ideological nurturing happened in the shadow of the Soviet revolution as well as the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and Chandrshekhar Azad. He recounts the story when as a student he was taken from school to the Alfred Park in Allahabad and shown the spot where Azad had fallen to the British bullets. He joined the Communist party as a recent graduate in 1940. As the party was banned he had to be underground to evade arrest. It also meant leaving home without informing anyone and dedicating oneself to the activities of the Party. This itself was the first partition from the family. So in a way his contact with the family was reduced, especially with younger siblings who were still growing up.

"Father and the women of the family: mother Ahmad un Nissa and the two sisters"



"My father with his two younger sisters Saeeda and Azra"



This surely was a painful period for his simple middle class Muslim family where the eldest son was supposed to takeover responsibilities. The second and the more permanent separation came when he had to bid farewell to his four siblings and parents who left Allahabad for Karachi sometime in 1949. My grandfather had a well-established legal practice and he seemed in no mood to give it up and leave. He was an apolitical person, but like with many others, pressure from friends and relatives who had left for Pakistan combined with a certain personal family tragedy, the sudden death of his middle son, forced him to uproot himself and move to Karachi.

Painful as it must have been for him as well as for his parents it is fascinating to observe the photos taken of his reunion with the family on his first visit to Pakistan in 1952. Photographs give us the liberty to read what is going on within them, and information about the background makes the reading even more contextual, so I too read my fathers photos taken more than fifty years ago and placed them in reference to events in his life as well as of many others who faced partition. The three family photos which are taken on the same day speak of the relationship dynamics.

First of all, all photographs are in one way or the other performative. People being photographed pose in a manner in which they want to be captured for posterity. Even the most candid photos reflect the mood of the persona that is being photographed. In that light I see my father's posing in a way very characteristic of his carefree personality. It is amusing to see his attire which is most probably a night suit, so one can immediately judge the nature of time when the picture was made. It is as though his younger brother who is not in any of these pictures pulled out his camera in the morning and barely gave anyone time to spruce themselves up for the moment and yet the first picture where my father is with his two sisters shows the ladies casually wrapped in their duppattas whereas the man is in a carefree pose. Further the picture has deeper reading in terms of the relationship with the two younger sisters. As my father had left home in 1940 I am made to



"Father and son, Zameer ul Haq and Zia ul Haq"

understand a certain lack of sibling affinity between him and his two sisters as both are ten years younger to him. As I have mentioned earlier he was away during their formative years being a visitor to his parent's home and then after partition he saw them after a gap of almost three years. Further it is interesting to note that it is my father whose habits and ways I am so aware of looks and feels the almost same way now fifty five years later. Whereas I cannot comment likewise about others; I barely interact with my aunts who have lived in Pakistan and my grandparents are a distant memory as they passed away in my adolescent years.

The second picture which is the larger group shows his physical distance from both his parents and makes me wonder whether both his father and mother were happy with a son who had left them and stayed back in India because the course of life that he had chosen to lead was at total disjuncture with what they thought was right and maybe they still expected him to change his mind and come home to help them in their days of hardship in a new city that was swarming with refugees. I am also drawn to my grandfathers performative persona in both the pictures that he figures in. As I am told that he was a lawyer with certain respectability and command over his profession, he gave up a set practise and clientele. Yet after having lost all that, his picture oozes a kind of confidence that one naturally expects of people who are professionally sound in life. His seated posture with deep set eyes and upright collar looking into the camera as well as the other picture where his one hand is on his hip exudes a definitiveness.

As the baggage of my fathers past makes me attempt to read meanings in these three simple pictures I must also make an alternate reading where I could say that it was a stiffness and lack of comfort in facing a camera combined by a cultural thing within this particular family where it was not a done thing to be visibly expressing a sense of closeness in public that gives the pictures the available look. But still I am inclined to draw the former conclusions and they are drawn from journey of events that shaped the times in which these pictures were made.

The Bangladesh war of independence in 1971 was one of the bloodiest conflicts in living memory. In an attempt to crush forces seeking independence for what was then East Pakistan, the West Pakistani military regime unleashed a systematic campaign of violence that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Bengalis. Many of the photographs from the unique collection of the Drik archives will be shown in the UK for the first time.

In 266 days Bengali, hill people and Adivasi resistance fighters and their allies defeated the military forces of Pakistan. The result was the birth of a new nation - Bangladesh - and the dismemberment of Pakistan.

It was only after the 16th of December 1971 when Pakistani troops surrendered in East Pakistan, that Bangladeshis began

to realise the scale of the atrocities committed during the previous nine months.

1971 was a year of national and international crisis in South Asia. The history of Bangladesh is implicitly tied to the partition of India in 1947 and therefore the tragic events of 1971 are linked to Britain's colonial past. For Bangladesh, ravaged by the war and subsequent political turmoil, it has been a difficult task to reconstruct its own history. It is only during the last few years that this important Bangladeshi photographic history has begun to emerge.

Now decades after the war, autograph ABP in collaboration with Drik presents a historical photographic overview of Bangladesh 1971 at Rivington Place, London UK.

'a visual testament to the trauma and hope of independence'. (Guardian, G2, 10 April 2008)

1971 Bangladesh

A photographic exhibition and film season that focuses on one of South Asia's most significant political events: the foundation of Bangladesh as an independent state.

4 April - 31 May 2008



1

1. December 16, 1971: General Niazi of the occupation forces was the first to sign the document of surrender, sitting beside him was General Arora of the Indian army. They are flanked by the commander of the Bangladesh Air Force, A.K. Khondokar and Indian Army officers. Bangladesh. © Aftab Ahmed



2

2 Torture on a suspected collaborator or 'Rajakar' by Kaderia Bahini; a faction of freedom fighters under the command of Kader Siddiqui during the liberation war. Dhaka, Bangladesh. December 1971. © Rashid Talukder



3

3. A street child leading a procession during the mass revolt of 1969. Dhaka, East Pakistan. © Rashid Talukder



4

4. During the war, female freedom fighters would smuggle grenades in baskets covered with water hyacinth. Bangladesh. 1971. © Mohammad Shafi



5

5. Bangladesh: Shaikh Mujibur Rahman on his return from Pakistani imprisonment. January, 1972. © Rashid Talukder

1 I took this picture in front of the gorgeous building called the Rose Garden (a pleasure lodge built by a Hindu zamindar in the late 19th century at K.M Das lane in the Narinda quarter of Old Dhaka and later purchased by Khan Bahadur Abdur Rashid) now used for filming of movies. It is one of the historical buildings of old Dhaka

2 A joint family is ecstatic while celebrating Holi (the colour festival). Brother-in-law, Sister-in-law and wife of the house all celebrate showcasing the feeling of togetherness during a festival.

3 A mixture of the old and new. A butcher smiles as a dealer advertises his products in Koshaitoli, a local hangout for butchers. Also pictured here are the youngsters who seem strangely smitten by it all.

1



2



3



portfolio
Munem Wasif,
DHAKA, BANGLADESH



Rajghat, Delhi © Devi Prasad 1950

The exhibition, Ramkinkar in Focus, through the eyes of Devi Prasad at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, JNU (on public view from October 8 – November 14, 2007) was more than a mere exploration of Devi Prasad as a sophisticated collector of Ramkinkar, but examined one artist's active participation in his master's work by both helping him make the sculptures as a student and then photograph them exquisitely 40 odd years later. Thus, the exhibition presented for me, as the curator, a curious stereoscopic focus: Ramkinkar and Devi Prasad. Ramkinkar's sculptures and works were being seen literally refracted through the lens of Devi Prasad making the show one that was equally about both artists. The exhibition was also an opportunity to train the MA students at JNU in the discipline of curating. The many academic

debates that ensued before the show were reflected in the unique design and display of the artworks. Further intellectual deliberations and the varied public responses to the artworks during the exhibition were highlighted in a conference hosted by the University titled, 'Ramkinkar in focus: Contextualising the Indian Modernist'. The exhibition travelled to Anant Art Gallery, Kolkata from January-February 2008.

In Focus:

DEVI PRASAD

Dr. Naman P. Ahuja
Associate Professor
School of Arts and
Aesthetics, JNU

Renowned artist, potter and photographer Devi Prasad met Ramkinkar as a student in Santiniketan between 1938-1944 and was close to him for all of his adult life. Devi Prasad carefully dug out many broken and forgotten sculptures from the Kala Bhavan studios including preparatory maquettes which made for a comprehensive study of Ramkinkar's sculptural work before it was dispersed between

various private collectors, the NGMA and Santiniketan. The angle of each large black and white print with its sharp contrasts reveals an acute sensitivity towards the spirit of the sculpture. The essence of monumentality is enhanced as one looks up at the woman in the migrating / displaced Santhal family group, intimate as one looks straight at the Fruit Gatherers and many Mithunas, exaggerated as one looks sharply up at Subhash Chandra Bose and almost pitying as Devi makes us look down at the lamb being led to sacrifice (symbolic of the child being educated by the dogmatic) or at the starving beggars made in response to the Bengal Famine. Devi is also acutely sensitive towards the medium of Ramkinkar's work, and is careful about his choice of lighting for each sculpture in order to best bring out the softness and immediacy of clay, the coarse texture of Ramkinkar's famous and preferred 'cement fondue' and the strength and smoothness of his work in bronze.

The Ramkinkar photographs are controlled still-life studies, mostly taken by night. By removing each carefully floodlit gigantic outdoor sculpture from the noise of the buildings and trees that surround it, the photographs permit an incisive appreciation of the formal qualities of the sculptures. Only occasionally has Devi Prasad permitted a daylight view into the context in which the sculptures stand, thus fulfilling the other art-historical need to view them in the landscape for

Hands, Sevagram, © Devi Prasad 1952

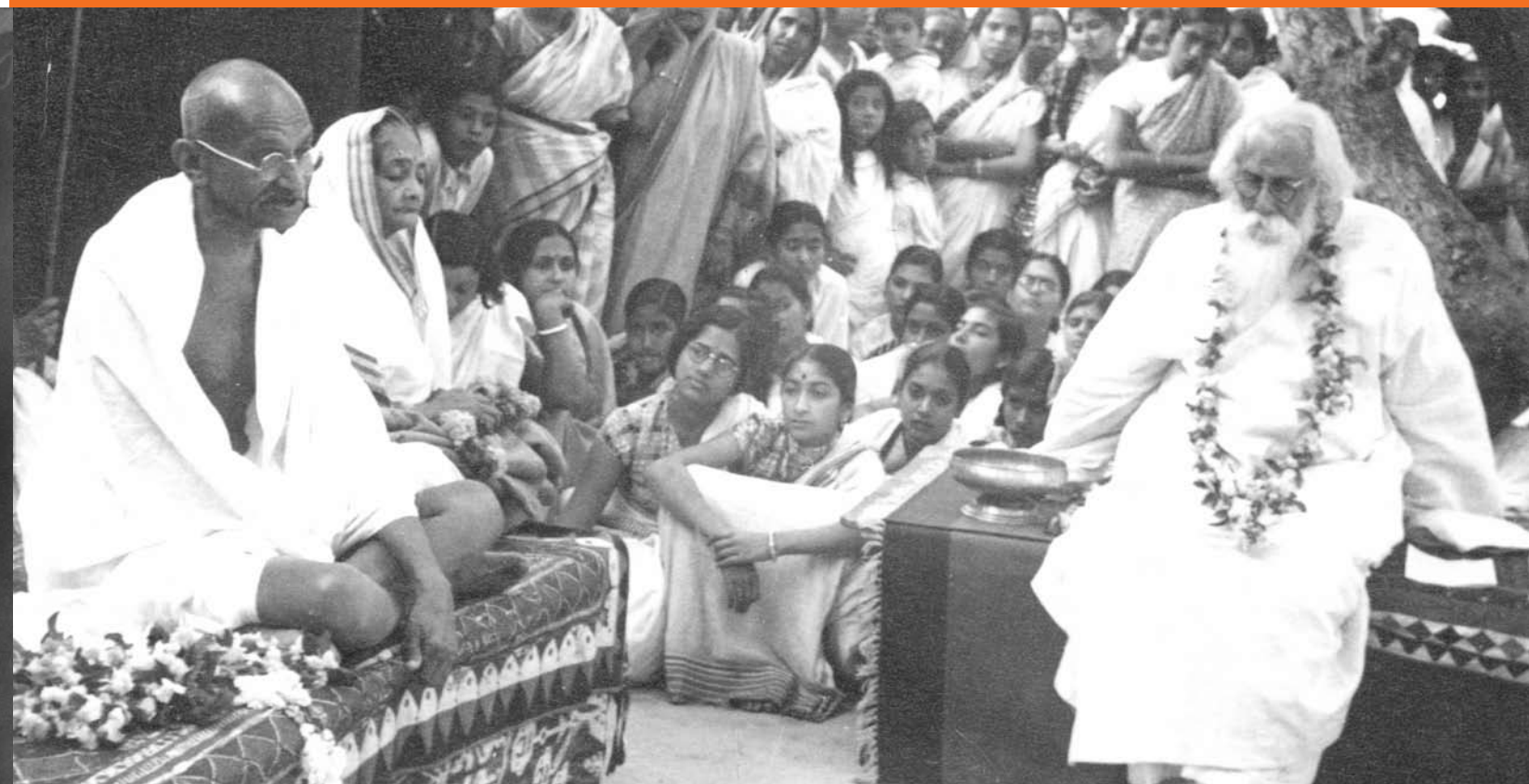


which they were created. These photographs were taken in 1978, just two years before Ramkinkar died. They were processed in the lab in Santiniketan and Ramkinkar was delighted when he came for their first unveiling. Today, to protect the sculptures from the vagaries of the climate they been shielded under canopies making the photographs an invaluable archive of their true place in the Santiniketan campus.

Devi Prasad, known more to us as a potter, was in fact trained at Santiniketan by Benodebehari Mukherjee as a painter. He brought his first five Rupee Kodak box-camera at a discount for three Rupees and fifty paise as a teenager in Dehradun in the early 1930s. Although his photography stopped when he joined Santiniketan; he picked it up again in the later part of his days there as a student when he bought himself a double-extension quarter size Maximar plate camera with which he began photography again. With this he took photographs of his student life, the teachers and visitors to Santiniketan in the early 40s. The extensive documentation of the Jaipur Congress and the early years at Gandhiji's Ashram, Sevagram were also taken with that camera. Within a few years of joining Sevagram, Devi expanded his studio there to incorporate photography. Although his work on child education was primarily through painting, photography became his personal passion. It was then, in the early 1950s that he began his own processing and printing and bought his own enlarger. He became an active member of many photography associations such as the World Photography Society and the Indian Photography Federation. These amateur and professional clubs and associations held exhibitions across India and the rest of the world. Devi's works began to be increasingly selected from hundreds for display in photography clubs in several Indian cities and at large international venues. Just looking behind the prints in his archive one sees a series of stamps and stickers of every exhibition that that photograph travelled to - revealing a fascinating history of the forums available for the exhibition of Indian photography in the 50s and 60s.

The Ramkinkar photographs are markedly different from Devi Prasad's equally famous works from the late 1940s, 50s and the early 60s. Those large black and white and colour prints preserve histories of important moments and personalities in the history of Santiniketan, the Jaipur session of the Congress, Sevagram, unspoiled natural landscapes in places that are now completely unrecognisable urban jungles. His studies on still-life were mostly in the form of documenting Indian statuary at Ellora, Konark, Mahabalipuram and other famous sites. His vision was strongly guided by what can be called a Santiniketan aesthetic, the picturesque and the epic proportions of man in nature, a rural idyll, personal portraits and the homestead. These are each marked by classically lyrical compositions. Studied together with his paintings, pots and prolific writings they reveal much about what captured his imagination and the common element of humanism that underlies all his work. In the photographs, perhaps more than the deliberated paintings lies a spontaneity of composition and line that explains the spirit of his philosophy of art and education. Equally, this large archive captures simple joys and an artistic spirit for which he is so well known.

Gandhi's last meeting with Tagore, Shantiniketan, 1940



Info

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Grants

'Fellowship for Photography 2008.'

The "India Habitat Centre Fellowship for Photography 2008" Winner will be awarded a citation along with an amount of Rs.1.20 lakhs, and his works will be showcased in a week-long photography exhibition at the gallery in the summer next year. Last date of submission: September 31, 2008

For Application and other details contact Visual Arts Gallery: India Habitat Centre . Lodhi Road , New Delhi - 110003.
Tel: +(91) 11-43662024 - 25 . www.indiahabitat.org

PERIFERRY 1.0

Periferry 1.0 is a project initiated by Sonal Jain and Mriganka Madhukaillya, artists and filmmakers from Northeast India. It is a partnership between Desire Machine Collective Guwahati and Khoj Delhi. Periferry 1.0 creates a discourse on the notion of borders and explores an alternative imagination of cross-border transaction along South/ Southeast Asian borders through cross media intervention. Situated on a ferry on the river Brahmaputra, it creates an important historical network for the constant flow of people, goods and ideas.

Shows

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY

Artists · Bernd und Hilla Becher · Andreas Gursky · Candida Höfer · Axel Hütte
Simone Nieweg · Thomas Ruff · Jörg Sasse · Thomas Struth · Petra Wunderlich

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY is dedicated to the clear, even austere, vision of Bernd and Hilla Becher and their former students of the art of photography at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art.

Bernd Becher, from 1976 to 1996 professor at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, Hilla Becher and a number of their former students are the most influential photographers of our time, and major artists on the international scene. The exhibition presents 76 works, some of them extra large. The selection reflects both the artists' shared approach to the chosen motifs and their artistic position.

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY is part of the exhibition series, 'Photography in Germany from 1850 to the Present', conceived and organized by curator Wulf Herzogenrath and Ifa. It is a history of German photography in independent sections documenting important aspects of the development of this technical and artistic medium. The various subject exhibitions document different photographic approaches and stylized artistic stances.

July 12-July 31, 2008 Seagull Arts and Media Resource Centre Kolkata, in cooperation with Goethe-Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan Kolkata

July 12-July 31, 2008 Vadehra Art Gallery New Delhi, in cooperation with Goethe-Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi



Neues Bild 3 . University of Bochum 1988 © Andreas Gursky



A CRITIC'S EYE RICHARD BARTHOLOMEW

May 17-June 28, 2008

A Critic's Eye.
An exhibition of
photographs by
noted Indian art critic
Richard Bartholomew
(1926-1985)

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