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Visual Activism: Voices from Nepal

Nandita Jaishankar

In April 2016, PIX published a special edition on photography from Nepal. Our call for submissions came in the wake of the devastating earthquake of 2015, which was followed soon after by border agitations and blockades that led to massive economic and humanitarian crises, as well as amendments to the constitution associated with social justice in January this year, which were then rejected by minority groups, including the Madhesis. Consequently, a majority of the work we received cited socio-political issues – a journalistic sense of narrative building, which welded the many voices that responded to recent events through personal commentary.

In contrast, this Newsletter tracks the thematic, *scope*, not only through traction generated in social media, but a visual arts practice within photography, investigating a conceptual space which uses the medium as a tool to explore history, autobiography and subjectivity.

Our first volume titled *Suburbia* featured the work of Shilpa Gavane, whose photographs of a barren, desolate Gurgaon landscape were overlaid with sketches of an imaginary environment born out of ideas of sustainability (“Ecological Utopia”; *Suburbia*, PIX Vol. 1 Feb 2011). In our third issue titled *Imaginaires: Exploring Photo Art* (2012), we had looked at similar interventions of photography and art practice with practitioners working in deeply hybrid realms, further experimenting with photography and its interplay with ceramics, video, painting and collage. However, the visual artists featured in this newsletter use installation and mixed media to make potent statements on society through an intermedia practice – hardships faced by migrant labour; awareness for the differently abled; gender inequality as well as environmental concerns.

The texts in response to the featured photographers’ works vary from the

Rohan Thapa
From the series *In Visible*
Nepal, 2013
Digital

descriptive to the responsive, examining emerging ideas and nuances. Latika Gupta finds a resonance with the photographs from Rohan Thapa’s *In Visible* and the images of pellet riddled Kashmiris which recently flooded social media, while for Lola Mac Dougall-Padgaonkar, Sudeep Balla’s medicine bottle installations are reminiscent of museum specimens, suspended in formaldehyde. Sangeeta Thapa closely examines the deeply political work of Hitman Gurung, while Paroma Mukherjee discusses the relevance of Manish Paudel’s photographs of waste. Offering a playful critique of the consumerist culture we are part of, Paudel wonders whether we will ever see how garbage leaves an indelible trace of the human footprint – shot here in an immaculate manner, it seems that waste can indeed, be beautiful!

The artists Hitman Gurung and Sheelasha Rajbhandari tackle civilian, or local issues of particular resonance in

Nepal. Gurung's melding of paintings, photography and installation art fosters a powerful statement about the miserable state of affairs of many migrant workers abroad, and how many return to their country, dispossessed, often in coffins, with their identities reduced to their meager belongings. When a citizen dies abroad, there are many delays in repatriating the body and no attention is paid to last rites, and so the work attempts to give those silent workers, presence. On the other hand, Rajbhandari examines the deep-rooted patriarchal ills embedded in the resident Nepali society which propagates gender inequality in the country – such as the existence of child brides.

A rupture in our reading of the world is reiterated by Rohan Thapa's work. *In Visible* uses a symbolic sensibility associated with portraits of people with vision impairment in Nepal. He says, "The project is an experimental initiative to raise consciousness on perceptual awareness of sight and touch through the use of blur and braille on the images..." deliberately blurring the visuals as "...the use of blur on the

photographs limits visual interpretation thereby breaking the aesthetics of the image." An exhibition of this work was held in 2015 at the Nepal Arts Council in Kathmandu to help raise funds and consciousness for the differently abled.

In post-earthquake Nepal, amidst the chaos, normal daily life was one of the casualties. Taking such dystopian visions as a baseline to the work, the artist Anil Shahi created *You and Me*, photographs of the city juxtaposed against a shattered mirror, where we find ourselves reflected amongst the debris, creating a moment of reflexivity as the viewer sees himself in the disorder. In contrast, the familiar backdrops of Bhaktapur and Patan in Shushank Kalapremi Shrestha's series *Voluntary Grotesque* are overrun with maniacal aliens, making for a tableau that is playfully bizarre and startling.

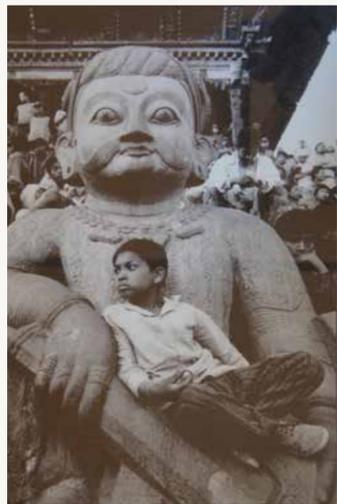
Moving away from the exterior, we come to the intimate and secluded world of Sudeep Balla. In *Inside 1* and *Inside 2*, Balla deals with memories and emotional residue. He says "I use normal plastic lamination to protect photographs. And it has become my

default process. That's why there are odd stains and blemishes on my photographs – ironically, though I found a better way to protect them. I simply print them on a white plastic sheet, and then cover them with waterproof lamination." A glimpse at his multitude of pock-marked, blurred and layered images is perhaps a reflection of the way each of our memories rise to the surface, laminated and altered with time, and often embellished by the ways in which we recall them.

This newsletter presents but a selection of the burgeoning contemporary arts scene in Nepal, and we are grateful for the advice here of Sangeeta Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery. Photography seems to have found a renewed context and boundary to explore, even with the rise of social awareness and events through Photo Kathmandu, the second edition of which occasions this newsletter. Furthermore, with a space like Taragaon Museum as our host, there could now be an institutional fora in which images will find alternative ways to engage with different communities.

Reviving Taragaon as a Centre for the Arts

Roshan Mishra,
Director Taragaon Museum Kathmandu



Taragaon Museum is one of the first modernist structures in Nepal but it also has a contemporary appeal. Designed by the Austrian architect Carl Pruscha in 1970, a group of women operated it as a hostel for foreigners in the subsequent years. Nepal during the 1970s and 80s was a haven for hippies and many of the foreigners made their way to Kathmandu residing in the premises – and it is still endearingly recalled as "Star-Village" or *Tara Gaon*.

In December 2009, Arun and Namita Saraf, patrons of the Saraf Foundation and Culture, expressed their wish to renovate and preserve the Taragaon Hotel and turn it into a Documentation Centre

–preserving the legacies of artists, writers, photographers, architects and anthropologists from abroad who had contributed in the second half of the 20th century to the identification, archiving and preservation of the cultural heritage of Kathmandu valley. Other than its permanent collection, today there is a Contemporary Art Gallery, Library, Archiving Centre, Amphitheatre, Café and shops within the museum premises.

German architect Niels Gutschow first travelled to Nepal in 1962, and returned in 1970 – and was also the Museum's original curator. Since then, he has been involved in restoration projects of Nepali heritage sites, and many of his architectural drawings are displayed in the Museum, together with books in the Museum's library. Benefaction has been one of the ways in which the archives have grown, including the works of some eminent photographers.

The museum finally opened its doors to the public in April 2014, showcasing ethnographic photography, architectural drawings of Nepal's heritage sites, maps, landscapes, urban sketches, historic drawings and 19th century etchings.

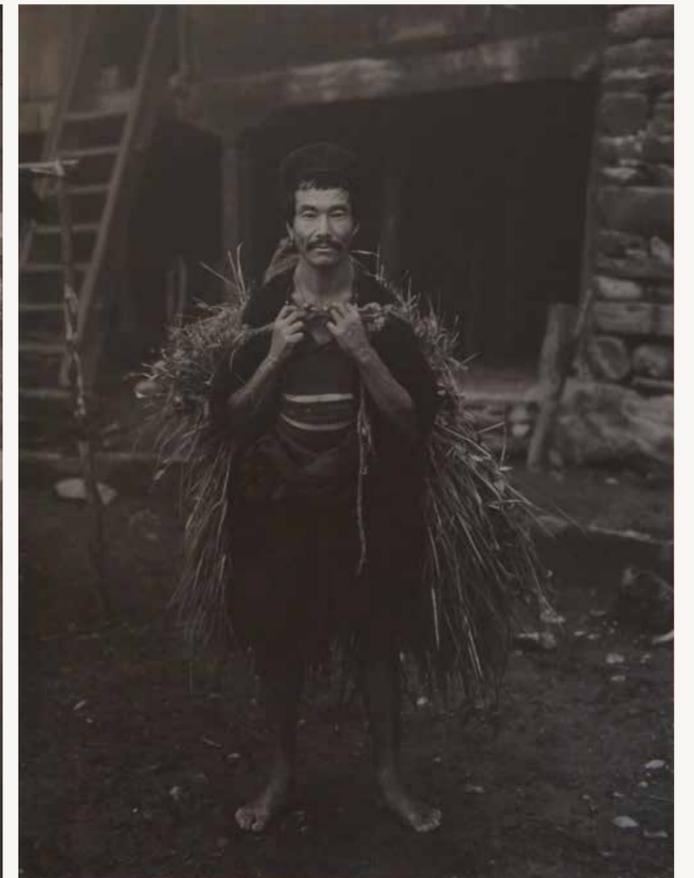
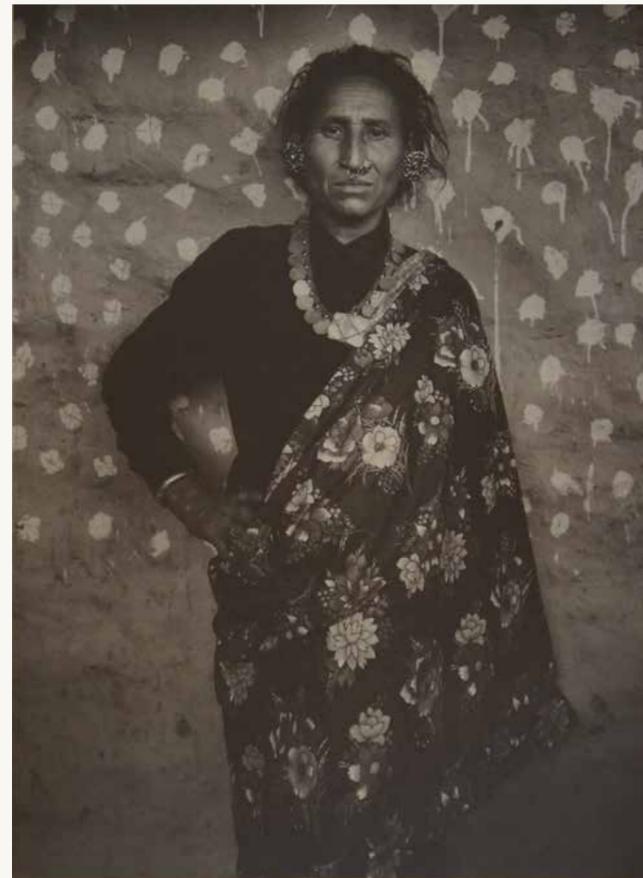
In the 1860s, when British Resident, Clarence Comyn Taylor arrived in Kathmandu, he captured the magnificent medieval town and its people through the lens. Looking at historical references, Taylor was the first photographer to capture and document Nepal at a time when very few foreigners visited the country or were allowed to reside here.

Taragaon Museum houses and now displays one of his images of Bhairava – the triple tiered temple and an old Bridge of Hanumanghat photographed in 1863 at Bhaktapur.

In post-independence Nepal, namely the 1960s and 70s, many Peace Corps volunteers arrived in Nepal to work in different geographical locations. In 1975, Kevin Bubriski, an American, travelled around Kathmandu to work as a water engineer. He also photographed the local villagers, producing an extraordinary series of 35mm and large format black-and-white images. For nearly four decades, Bubriski maintained his close association with Nepal and its people. His exhibition "Portraits of Nepal" was exhibited in the American Cultural Centre in Kathmandu in 1987. Three of Bubriski's works from Rasuwa District dated 1984 are on display at the Taragaon Museum, which were acquired as part of a growing modern collection. This repository also includes the works of European and Russian photographers such as Niels Gutschow, Jørgen Rahbek Thomsen, Stanislaw Klimek, Jaroslav Poncar and Ursula Schulz-Dornburg, among others.

Jørgen Rahbek Thomsen arrived in Nepal with a group of Danish architects in 1968, when they sketched and documented Bungamati village

Toziano Terzani
Guardian of the Nyatapola Temple
Bhaktapur, 1995
Taragaon Museum Collection



and the Machindranath Temple in the Lalitpur District. After more than four decades, he returned to Kathmandu and visited Bungamati, unfortunately now destroyed for the most part by the earthquake of April 2015. On this visit, he generously contributed his entire drawing and photography collection to the museum's archiving centre.

In an incremental manner, the collections being housed have become more comprehensive though the growth has been sporadic. Polish photographer Stanislaw Klimek first arrived in Kathmandu in 1992 to document the architectural heritage of Patan for a conservation and development project. Two of his photographs are displayed in the museum. Similarly, Jaroslav Poncar, a Czech photographer, came to Nepal in 1980, and took two panoramic photographs of Deopatan and Bhaktapur that have become representative of his iconic, sweeping style. Some of his

photographs of Mustang continue to be displayed as part of the museum's Mustang collection.

In contrast, Ursula Schulz-Dornburg, the German conceptual photographer from Dusseldorf came to Nepal in 1993, when she was invited by the Goethe Institut to document ecological changes and ongoing projects in the region. She captured various aspects of water culture of the Kathmandu valley along the Bagmati river. Four of her prints are displayed in the museum's 20th century photography collection.

Given these gradual, qualitative developments, Taragaon Museum is pleased to now collaborate with PIX, a South Asia oriented contemporary photography platform from India. It is important for cultural institutions and their dynamic ventures to continue cross continental exchanges at a time when the road to freedom and secularism is riddled with challenges.

Top left:
Kevin Bubriski
Laxmi Kami, Mother of Six
Gatlang Village, Rasuwa District, 1984
Taragaon Museum Collection

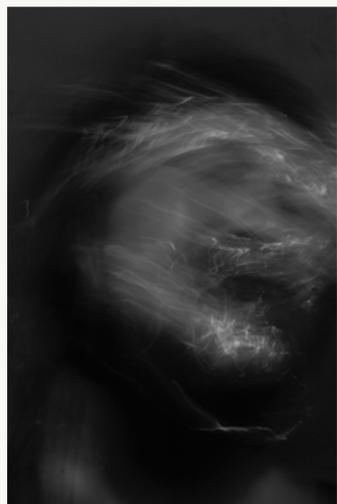
Top right:
Kevin Bubriski
Gyamja Lama
Haku Village, Rasuwa District 1984
Taragaon Museum Collection

Bottom:
Jaroslav Poncar
Pashupatinath Temple
Kathmandu, 1980
Taragaon Museum Collection



(De)constructing the Gaze: The Nepali Photographic Scene in 2016

Frédéric Lecloux,
with inputs from NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati



Above:
Nikash Yonjan
"Rain proof," 2016

Below:
Anjila Manandhar
2016

they contribute to newspapers and magazines while at the same time engage in personal projects – they shake the old codes of photojournalism, they attend workshops, travel around Nepal and overseas, and as a result, are deeply aware of the problems confronting Nepal in the 21st century."

Something was changing, even mushrooming within photography practice in Nepal. The risk of emulating and enforcing western norms and tropes was considered as a possible shortcoming, even if a decision was made to actively choose a particular style. However, four years have elapsed since that moment. Contrary to our apprehensions, they have followed their own path and evolved personal trajectories through experience.

Indeed, serious photographers in Nepal are not interested in becoming clones of their masters, whether it be Mani Lama or Bikas Rauniar as adept, local freelancers or assignment photographers; the renowned Australian photographer, Philip Blenkinsop or pioneering American documentary practitioner, Kevin Bubriski, to name but a few who have been directly linked. Teachers or mentors are celebrated and acknowledged for expanding a conversation with photography, but the generation today is guided by a personal vision too. Furthermore, the younger photographers are now growing through knowledge of the history of the medium in the Nepali context thanks to Nepal Picture Library, the digital archive created by photo.circle.

Photographers, a community growing in its ranks, know what they can find in photo.circle – a space for reflection, interrogation and a motivation to move forward with their projects – but that always comes with an incentive not to walk the easy path or to compromise artistic engagement. Hence, other groups of photo enthusiasts have emerged in the country, like Sanskriti in Birgunj.

Furthermore, two events recently gave many photographers from within and outside Nepal the opportunity to exert their freedom of expression and to confirm the need for a pre-emptive and future perspective on the medium. These can be regarded as event-based landmarks in the country, at a time when its global representation is rising.

The first was the earthquake of 25 April, 2015. Nepali photographers understood from the very next day that if they wanted to keep a track of their experience of – and in – the disaster, they would have to do the job themselves. That's how the Nepal Photo Project was born. This doesn't mean that the Nepali audience is not open to respectful and insightful visuals of



their country coming from elsewhere. It simply means that they too are able to view the world, even their own, with a critical eye.

The second event was Photo Kathmandu, Nepal's first photo festival, launched by photo.circle in 2015. Among the many lessons to be learned from that extraordinary week, was attention to an audience. With 18 exhibitions displayed on the streets of Patan, Photo Kathmandu demonstrated that photography can be put in conversation with the city's audience, regardless of their age, background or education.

The challenges ahead are immense, though. First, the actors of photography in Nepal have to consolidate these achievements for the future, even in a country without proper statecraft. The second edition of Photo Kathmandu, (October 2016) will be an important test in that respect. It will also be an opportunity to raise, once again, the question of the dissemination of the

pictures. After having contributed to the rise of an entire generation of photographers driven by a powerful vision, there still lacks a permanent or continuing space, both on and offline, to show work. Photo Kathmandu is one such space, and the national press is another, but this is not enough. Given the many stories which deserve to be told and the talent that grounds it, there is a need for newer platforms.

Finally, as circumstances which prevail, subjugation to social media, and the fabrication of meaning in an era of overabundance, the fast-moving boundaries of a medium that is still in its infancy – are all important concerns. As Jörg Colberg recently put it, "how or where what one does is located in the vast continuum of all the work that already exists and/or is being made". Contemporary realities of the medium will require Nepali practitioners to remain open to the world while arriving at a space that is of their own making.

The selection of images come from recurring "Photographing the Everyday" workshops conducted by Frédéric Lecloux since 2010 in Kathmandu, Pokhara (2013) Birgunj (2016) and a special workshop with Kathmandu University students (2016). By inviting them to change their way of looking at very simple objects as well as events that occur every day around them, he works with them to build a meaningful photographic story with those elements through which they can express their own sensibility.

Clockwise from top:
Karma Tshering Gurung
2015

Marina Menuka Lama
"All tomorrow's parties," 2012

Nikash Yonjan
"Red hood," 2016

Hitman Gurung | I Have to Feed Myself, My Family, My Country



The Angst of Nepali Migrant Workers

Text by Sangeeta Thapa

The artist Hitman Gurung is well known for his powerful socio-political artworks, and in this case, with photography. His paintings have drawn attention to the corruption in the country and to the plight of migrant workers, which is a topic that he has been passionately documenting over the last three years. The issue is also a very personal one for the artist as traditionally the Gurungs, as with some other Nepali ethnic groups, have a long history with joining foreign armies and Hitman himself has been pressured by his family to work abroad.

The artist states "For me different genres of art, material, and medium have their own characteristics and essence. In the process of my work, I choose the genre which relates to my concept the most. I have used photographs with different approaches such as photo collage, photo montage, installation and I also have merged it with other mediums of art".

Over the last twenty-five years, political turmoil and lack of economic opportunities in the country have propelled an exodus of Nepalis. While looking for foreign employment and better pay, many have experienced exploitation and abuse. And yet, international labour migration has grown exponentially over the past

decade. According to Nepal's Foreign Employment Promotion Board (FEPB) around 1700 Nepali leave the country each day – sending back their income to families they have left behind. According to the World Bank, remittance to Nepal is one of the highest in the world.

Sadly, migrant labourers are often subject to exploitation – abuse, slavery and untimely deaths are hence, common among migrant workers from Nepal. FEPB estimates 726 migrants perished overseas in 2012, an increase of 11% over deaths in 2011. Contrary to these nationally accepted figures, the advocacy group, Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee (PNCC) claims the real death toll to be around an astounding 1,300 people. Incidentally, the number of deaths among Nepali migrant workers remains the highest among Asian countries.

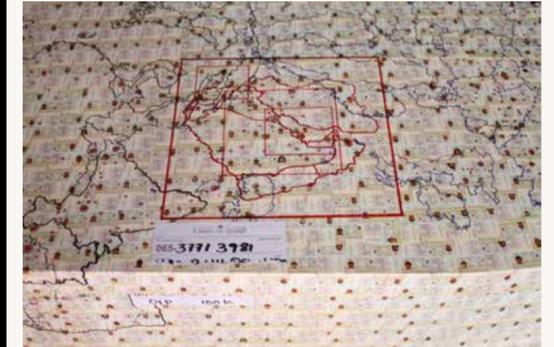
Migrants dream of better lives. Some never return from working towards this dream. Depending upon the company, it can take up to 3 years for a dead body to be parceled back to Nepal. Still 3 to 4 coffins arrive at Nepal's international airport each day. Hitman's artwork *Everyday at the Airport* uses a coffin that brought back the body of migrant labourer and was sourced from a crematorium. This work is part of a

Hitman Gurung
"9:11 am"
From the series *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family, My Country*
Kathmandu, 2015

powerful larger body titled, *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family, My Country*.

In multi-cultural Nepal, divergent yet vigorous last rites are observed. For workers that die abroad such considerations are never made, their backgrounds are ignored and their identity is reduced to contents of a wooden box. The interior of the installed coffin in this artwork is painstakingly lined with a selection of photographs of men and women who have applied for work visas.

Their nameless portraits and identities are deliberately obscured by calligraphy which indicates the destination that migrant labourers journey to. This information is handwritten in the lingua franca of that country and is strategically placed on their forehead or cranial region. The country of origin of the migrant labourer *Nepal* is written in bold Nepali. This text occupies the middle or the heart of the photo portrait, while the place of birth of each "worker" is written out on the bottom half of each photograph, as if to signify that the place is where all hopes and dreams are born. Each of these photographs have been carefully collected, cut, pasted, written upon and laminated with fiber glass, charting a national narrative. On the exterior of



"Everyday at the Airport"
From the series *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family, My Country*
Kathmandu, 2013-2015

the coffin, tiny prints of passport photos belonging to the same people have been used. A distorted map of the world hand drawn in red by the artist highlights the countries where large numbers of Nepali workers have perished. This installation reflects the hopes and aspirations of migrant workers as well as the misery of death often experienced by families of those who never return.

The other work titled *9:11 am* is also from the series of *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family and My Country*. The painting refers to the time difference between Nepal and Qatar which is 2 hours and 45 minutes. When the first massive earthquake hit Nepal it was 11:56 am in Nepal and 9:11 am at Qatar.

On 25 April, 2015 and 12 May, 2015 two earthquakes struck the Central Region of Nepal in which 8969 people lost their lives, 500,000 homes were destroyed and more than a million people displaced.

Half a million Nepalese migrants are

working and living in Qatar. Many of them are involved in building structures for the upcoming World Cup 2022. After the earthquakes and 300 aftershocks hit Nepal, many migrant workers lost their loved ones and their property. Some were traumatized to learn that their entire village had been leveled by the earthquakes. But even in this time of emergency, massive loss, trauma, insecurity and panic – these migrants were not allowed to return to their country, to their loved ones. Nepal was in desperate need of help. Hundreds of lives could have been saved in Nepal had there been enough manpower on the ground to help. The irony is that these grief-stricken migrant labourers were instead working to build the ultra-luxurious stadium for the world cup.

To narrate this bitter and tragic story Hitman uses multiple photographic images of the devastation caused by the earthquake that are scanned and digitally printed in black and white on

canvas. These stark photographs expose us to a backdrop of devastation and tragedy. The backdrop also pays homage to the dead and to the resilience of the Nepali people. Against this narrative of sorrow is a self-portrait of the artist standing at the very centre of the maelstrom.

Dressed as a construction worker, the artist visually relives the agony of the Nepalis working in Qatar. Though his hands and face are deliberately rendered in black and white, in acknowledgement of the devastation captured in black and white in the background, the artist's eyes, red-rimmed with grief, are intended to unsettle the viewer. The black and white portrait of the artist is in stark contrast to his work uniform, the hard yellow hat, blue shirt and fluorescent vest and more importantly, the football with the logo of the World Cup 2022, is symbolic of the blood sweat and tears shed by Nepalis to bring home money at the cost of losing lives or being unable to save any.



Rohan Thapa *In Visible*



world that at once had a semblance but now is left in the shards of its former self. The anatomy of the city, broken, upturned and severed. Following one of the most catastrophic earthly events known in modern history, how does the city react to its own disintegration through the works which clearly play with the jigsaw language of ruin, and the salvaging of its pieces on a board? The artist here sees the chequered life of the self and the city as one organism – a personal, inner journey of living through the earthquake, while the mirror will always represent what is in front of it. The present edging into future after future... as he states, '... these entire situations rotate like the hands of time.'

But maybe it was not a natural disaster but an alien invasion? When

the world began to think that nature would never retaliate, gigantic creatures descended from the sky and bored out from the earth... a homegrown alien species devouring the perpetrators, humans. In the series *Volitary Grotesque*, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan, metro sites most affected by the devastation, show an infestation of animation attackers. And this is narrated not as a comic strip, but as a journalistic feed – televised almost in the citizen-reporting mode, wherein real locations are backdrops to the drama, and the city becomes a movie studio in which the action takes place. Shushank Kalapremi Shrestha sees himself as a documenter, a witness, a cameraman and a brave civilian.

Both series together make us search beyond the frame, and to think around

the current situation. An invasion of space can be personal, the damage is not only societal but in the psychology of a people who need to surmount/outlive how one circumstance can change the course of life overnight, and the only recourse to memory, is what 'I' make of it. What 'I' remember. But what comes after the invasion is not submission, it is a fight for freedom, a struggle to live and the ability to reconstruct what is damaged. The casualties of time are those who survive, but they are also the hope, as they carry the legacies of those who have not.

Shushank Kalapremi Shrestha
Volitary Grotesque
Acrylic colour on photograph
Kathmandu, 2016

In Visible: A Response Text by Latika Gupta

When I first saw *In Visible*, Rohan Thapa's series of black and white photographs, I immediately recalled images circulating online over the last couple of months of men, women and children from the Kashmir Valley – eyes bandaged, the surfaces of their bodies and faces pockmarked with the impact of hundreds of lead pellets, each no larger than a mustard seed.

Thapa's subjects are patients who recently underwent surgery in the Tilanga Institute of Ophthalmology in Kathmandu. The blurry black and white images of men and women are overlaid with braille lettering; words from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are spelt out across the surface, puncturing the paper.

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed, by the UN General Assembly Resolution 217 (III) A, states unequivocally that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." September 6th marked the 60th day of state-imposed curfew in the Kashmir Valley. Official figures estimate that, since July 9th, around 8904 civilians (others put this number at over 10,000, with more than 73 dead)¹ have been injured. More than 664 people have been admitted to the Ophthalmology Department of Sri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital in Srinagar.² Of these, at least 60 have been completely blinded.

Manufactured in the Ordinance Factory in Ishapore, pellet guns fire cartridges, each with around 635 lead filled balls that penetrate soft tissue upon impact, shattering nerves and muscles.

Recently, black and white photographs of famous actors, politicians, industry magnates and sportsmen circulated on social media sites. The faces of all these 'celebrities' were morphed to bear injuries inflicted virtually by pellet guns; faces punctured, eyes black and swollen.

Susan Sontag wrote of "the image as shock and the image as cliché (as) two aspects of the same presence." On the one hand, *In Visible*, as photograph and tangible object, evokes contexts beyond its own. On the other, the morphed photos (made by Pakistani lawyers Mohammed Jibrin Nasir along with Batool Aqeel and Murtaza Abbas³) were intended to provoke these celebrities into publicly responding to and condemning the on-going violence in the Valley; ironically one of the portraits was of the leader of a government which sanctioned the wide-spread use of these 'non-lethal' weapons that were maiming, blinding and killing hundreds. Another was of the owner of the largest social media platform in the world, who ratified the relentless censorship of testimonies, both written and visual, that were being posted on his website in support of the victims of police action in the Valley.

1 <http://thewire.in/64045/in-kashmir-doctors-bear-witness/>

2 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/kashmir-pellet-guns-chilli-based-shells-burhan-wani-killing-mehbooba-mufti-3011541/>

3 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pellet-hit-images-of-leaders-and-stars-go-viral-in-valley/article8898532.ece>



Rohan Thapa
From the series *In Visible*
Nepal, 2013
Digital



Unequal Affiliations Text
by Nandita Jaishankar

The face of a young girl stares at you, her Kohl-rimmed eyes haunting in their vacancy. This young girl is anything but the vision of a blushing bride, and yet here she is, on her wedding day, at age 16. The statistics are grim: in Nepal approximately 41% of girls under the age of 18 are married off. Despite important steps being taken to promote gender equality, as well as government commitment to ending child marriage – the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare finalised Nepal's first national strategy on child marriage with support from UNICEF Nepal and Girls Not Brides Nepal – the post-earthquake environment has meant slow progress and the development of a national implementation plan has been further delayed.¹ Adolescent, virginal brides are prized 'commodities,' and yet, a high percentage of these girls are also victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, often having little or no power over their reproductive rights.

Since 2008, installation artist Sheelasha Rajbhandari's work has dealt specifically with women's issues. Looking at provocative topics such as abortion and menstruation, the artist's latest work deals with child brides and other taboos built within the construct of marriage. In her series *Agony of the New Bed*, portraits of child brides (some of which have been shot by Stephanie Sinclair/Too Young to Wed²) have been re-appropriated as

screen prints on cotton and placed on a constructed marital bed – the face is obliterated with golden embroidery, erasing her identity while cossetting her in the 'safety' of her husband's home and stifling her voice at the same time. The tender age of the girls and the heart wrenching isolation away from their homes and families translates into an often terrifying and agonizing experience.

The artist also examines the imbalance within a marriage. As Sheelasha says: "[Marriage] is a union between two individuals, but not everyone acquires equality within this relationship. *Pativrata* is the Sanskrit word used to describe a loyal dutiful wife, who is subservient to her husband and protected by him in return. A woman has to transform her identity from being a daughter to being a wife – men do not have to go through such identity alteration. This practice has contributed to the preference of sons over daughters, as daughters are supposed to go to the 'other's' place and sons continue the family lineage. This patriarchal system is a socio-political construct, as is a woman's post marriage identity which is recognised as her 'fate.'"

In the series *My Line of Fate*, Sheelasha uses photographs of the palms of different women on which lines of maps are drawn. These lines are then embroidered, tracing each woman's

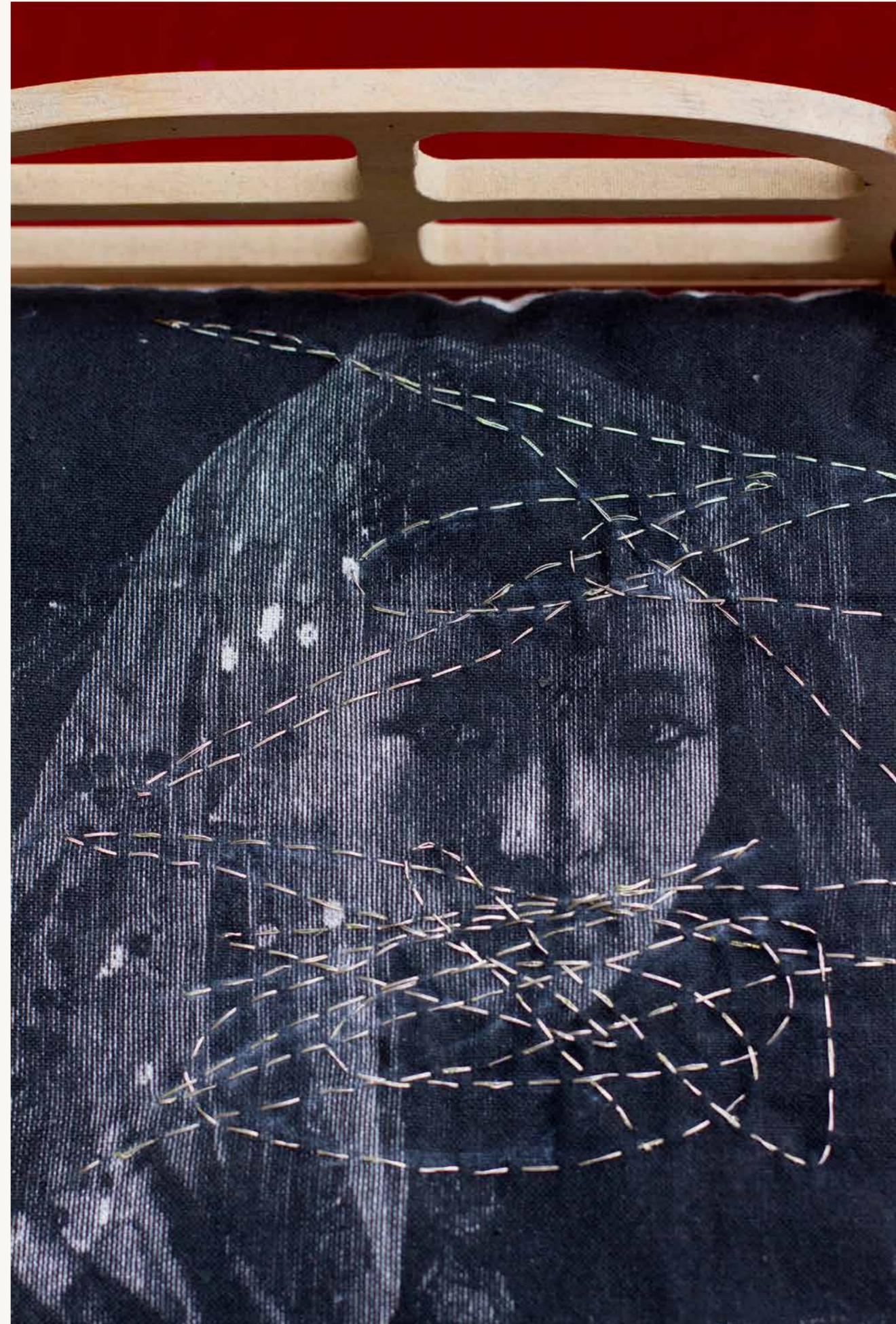
personal history. On the left palm, the embroidered word *ghar* (home) has been cut and replaced with word *maiti* (parental home). The word *ghar* then becomes permanent in the right side of the palm, denoting her relocation from her own house to her husband's house after marriage. But the question of belonging and identity is left unanswered, where perhaps a woman can never fully be at ease after marriage, either at home, or at her *maiti*.

1 <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/nepal/> Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 600 civil society organisations from over 80 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential.

2 http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/04/24/opinion/24exposures.html?_r=0

Sheelasha Rajbhandari
"My Line of Fate"
From the series *Marriage Taboos*
Digital print on canvas, embroidery thread
Kathmandu 2016
Produced in collaboration with
Kireet Rajbhandari

Facing page:
"Agony of the New Bed"
From the series *Marriage Taboos*
Screen print on cotton fabric, wood, gold
embroidery thread
Kathmandu 2016
Produced in collaboration with
Kireet Rajbhandari



Sudeep Balla

Inside



Through a Glass, Cloudy Text

by Lola Mac Dougall-Padgaonkar

The body of work known as *Inside* is a heterogeneous collection of photographs by Nepalese artist Sudeep Balla: family snapshots, selfies, observations of mundane objects, distortedly trippy portraits, hand-painted photographs...an assortment pieced together with autobiographical intent.

More than the imagery proposed by these brightly coloured prints – which the artist describes as “his” memories, what captures this observer’s imagination is the way the work is presented. The installation shot shows three neat rows of shelves that display medicine bottles filled with a formaldehyde-like liquid in which images have been immersed, trapped in suspension. It reminds me of a medical museum where anatomical curiosities are showcased and made apparently imperishable in transparent glass jars.

In analogue photography, formaldehyde was used as a fixer, while its qualities as an embalming agent made it desirable to anatomists. However, isn’t the visitor to the exhibition, by seeing unsteady

photographs floating aimlessly, reminded precisely of the opposite? Indeed, the de-stabilization effect is enhanced as we all know the damage liquids can cause to paper.

Susan Sontag thought that one of the reasons for our *clinging* to photography was that it offers “a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it”. But memories, just as “memory-freeze frames” (as Sontag called photographs) fade, despite the efforts of embalming them.

Will the family portrait be saved from oblivion because it has been immersed in the fixer? Or is it a memory that has been transformed into a specimen, a fossil? Is it an act of preservation or an act of transformation?

These *memory-freeze frames*, placed in a clinical environment, will nevertheless be overrun by time: be they double headed elephants, banal snapshots, mermaid foetuses, a tumour extracted from an American president’s jaw or a conceited self-portrait – all will be treated with the same democratic detachment: as matter to be only temporarily preserved.

Sudeep Balla
Inside 1
Kathmandu, 2013
Digital

Top right:
Installation image uses prints suspended in medicine bottles Bottom right:
Sudeep Balla

Inside 2
Kathmandu, 2013
Digital photo print with plastic lamination



Photographers

Anil Shahi is currently pursuing his Master's in Fine Art (Painting) at Tribhuvan University. He has exhibited with his peers from Kathmandu University at the Nepal Art Council. In 2011 and 2012, he took part in the National Art Exhibition. He participated in the collaborative installation 'Resting Stops: an alternative pilgrimage,' with Pepon Osorio (2012); Artists Unite: Support of Flood Relief (2014) at Siddhartha Art Gallery. He is a recipient of the Prashanta Memorial Scholarship Award (2014); the Australian Himalayan Foundation Art Award and has held a solo exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in 2014.

Hitman Gurung is a Kathmandu based interdisciplinary artist. He received his MFA from the Central Department of Fine Art, Tribhuvan University in 2012. In 2013 he was nominated by the Siddhartha Art Gallery to participate in an international residency program at the 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, USA. He was invited to be a part of the International Art Festival (Image Festival) in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2013. In 2014 he participated in the 2nd Dhaka Art Summit represented by Siddhartha Art Gallery. His work was selected for the 8th Asia Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia in 2015 and for the Dhaka Art Summit in 2016. He is the co-founder of the artists' collective ArTree Nepal based in Kathmandu and led the Camp Hub community art initiative in Bhaktapur after the earthquake in 2015. His work will be shown in the exhibition Parallel Realities at the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark and at the Yinchuan Biennale in China this year.

Manish Paudel is a photographer based in Birgunj, Nepal. He earned a Diploma in Electrical Engineering from Birgunj Institute of Technology (BIT) in 2008. His work has been featured in local, national and international media such as *Himal Khabarpatrika*, *Kantipur Daily*, *Nepal Weekly*, *The Kathmandu Post* and *Agence France-Presse* (AFP). Paudel is the recipient of numerous awards including the Subodh Memorial Photo Journalism Award of 2012 and Sano Paila's Bravery Award of 2012 & Second Prize in Photo Story, Nepal Photo Contest 2014.

Rohan Thapa is a graduate of political science who is currently working as an independent visual artist based in Valencia, Spain. His works mainly focus on social and political identities, with a strong emphasis on the natural environment.

Sheelasha Rajbhandari is a Kathmandu-based visual artist. Rajbhandari is a featured artist in the Asia Contemporary Exhibition at Jeonbuk Museum, Korea 2016 and Parallel Realities at Moesgaard Museum, Denmark 2016. She has been represented by Nepal Art Council in the India Art Fair 2016. In 2014, she was selected for the Abhisaran, Vijaynagar Art Residency, organised by JSW Foundation, India. She has exhibited with Asian Art Biennale (Bangladesh, 2010). In 2013 she was invited by The Center for Culture and Development, Denmark for the Image Festival, Occupy Utopia 2013. Her solo show *In Between Uncommon Factors* was held at the Nepal Arts Council in 2010. She is a co-founder of the artists' collective, ArTree Nepal.

Shushank Kalapremi Shrestha is a student at Kathmandu University at the School of Arts, Centre for Art and Design. He recently did a graduating BFA group exhibition project, where his work titled *Volitary Grotesque* was shown.

Sudeep Balla is a multimedia visual artist from Bhaktapur. He completed his BFA from Kathmandu University, School of Arts,

Centre for Art and Design in 2014. He has participated in many different exhibitions including Re-Fuzed (Bhaktapur 2010); Under One Sun Festival (photo.circle 2010); New Expressions on the Block (Siddhartha Art Gallery 2011); No Name No Theme Just Art (Tings Tea Lounge 2012); A Federal Life (Yalamaya Kendra, Patan 2013); Amalgam 2014 (Siddhartha Art Gallery 2014); Song-Geet (Graduation Project 2014); Limbo Nepal (Tangalwood 2015); Something – Anything – Nothing (Tings Tea Lounge 2015); Brick by Brick (Park Gallery 2015) and 12 Baishak (Bhaktapur 2015).

Writers

Sangeeta Thapa, Director/Curator of Siddhartha Art Gallery (www.siddharthaartgallery.com) and KCAC (Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre), has been actively involved in promoting the contemporary art of Nepal for the last 30 years. Thapa has organised over 400 exhibitions of local and international artists. She is also Board Member of the Patan Museum Development Committee, bringing contemporary art events to this heritage venue in partnership with KCAC (www.kathmanduarts.org). Thapa received the Annapurna Award in 2006, and the Best Gallery of the Year Award presented by the Artists' Society of Nepal. She has received numerous fellowships and grants from international institution, including the De Vos Institute of Art Management at the Kennedy Center for Performing the Arts in Washington DC. She also organised the Kathmandu International Art Festival, 2009 and 2012 (www.artmandu.org) which has now been established as the Kathmandu Triennale. She curated the Nepali chapter for the Old Masters, Young Voices at the Alhamra Gallery in Lahore, the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh (2014) and at the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark (2016). Sangeeta Thapa lives and works in Kathmandu.

Latika Gupta has worked as a curator at the National Gallery of Modern Art and at KHOJ, besides curating several independent exhibitions including *Homelands: A 21st century story of home, away and all the places in between*, an exhibition of contemporary British art from the British Council and Arts Council Collections (2013-2014), *'Folk Archive'* by Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane (2015) and *Jeevanchakra* an exhibition of contemporary Indian art in Kolkata, for Wellcome Collection UK's 'Medicine Corner' programme (2016). She has received fellowships from the Charles Wallace India Trust and the Nehru Trust for research projects on Himalayan art; a Museum Fellowship from the India Foundation for the Arts and INLAKS to curate a permanent exhibition in a museum in Kargil, Ladakh. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Visual Culture Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU and is the Associate Editor of MARG Magazine. Recent publications include essays in *Journal of Ritual Studies* (2016) and *Postdate: Photography and Inherited History in India* published by the San Jose Museum of Art and University of California Press (2015).

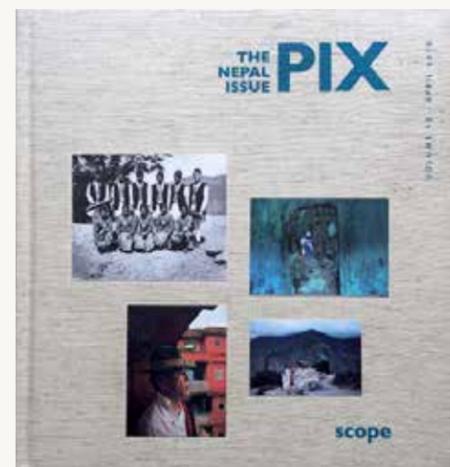
Paroma Mukherjee did her MA in Photography and Urban Cultures from Goldsmiths, University of London. She was photo editor at Time Out Delhi. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts, Japan. She is interested in the social and visual landscape of the present. Currently, she is the photo editor of Blouin ArtInfo Monthly Editions, and also curates India's first Instagram space in print for Mumbai Mirror.

Lola Mac Dougall-Padgaonkar has a Masters in Arts Management from the

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and a Masters in International Cooperation from the Complutense University of Madrid. She has worked as cultural adviser for the Embassy of Spain in New Delhi and co-founded with Frank Kalero the photography magazine *Punctum Asia*. She is one of the founding members of GoaPhoto (www.goaphoto.in) and the artistic director of JaipurPhoto (www.travelphotojaipur.com), an annual international photography festival presenting outdoor exhibitions in heritage locations. Lola is a PhD candidate in Barcelona's Pompeu Fabra University, working on a dissertation on Indian women photographers.

Frédéric Lecloux is a self-taught Belgian photographer, a workshop teacher at the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie in Arles, at photo.circle in Kathmandu and at the Maison du Geste et de l'Image in Paris. Lecloux's work is distributed by Vu' agency.

Roshan Mishra is Director of the Taragaon Museum, Kathmandu. He did his BFA from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu and his Masters in Digital Moving Image & Animation from the London Metropolitan University. He has worked as a graphic designer as well as a freelance interior designer for almost seven years. He returned to Nepal in 2013, where he manages the permanent collection, curates shows and initiates art and cultural events and programs at the Taragaon Museum.



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