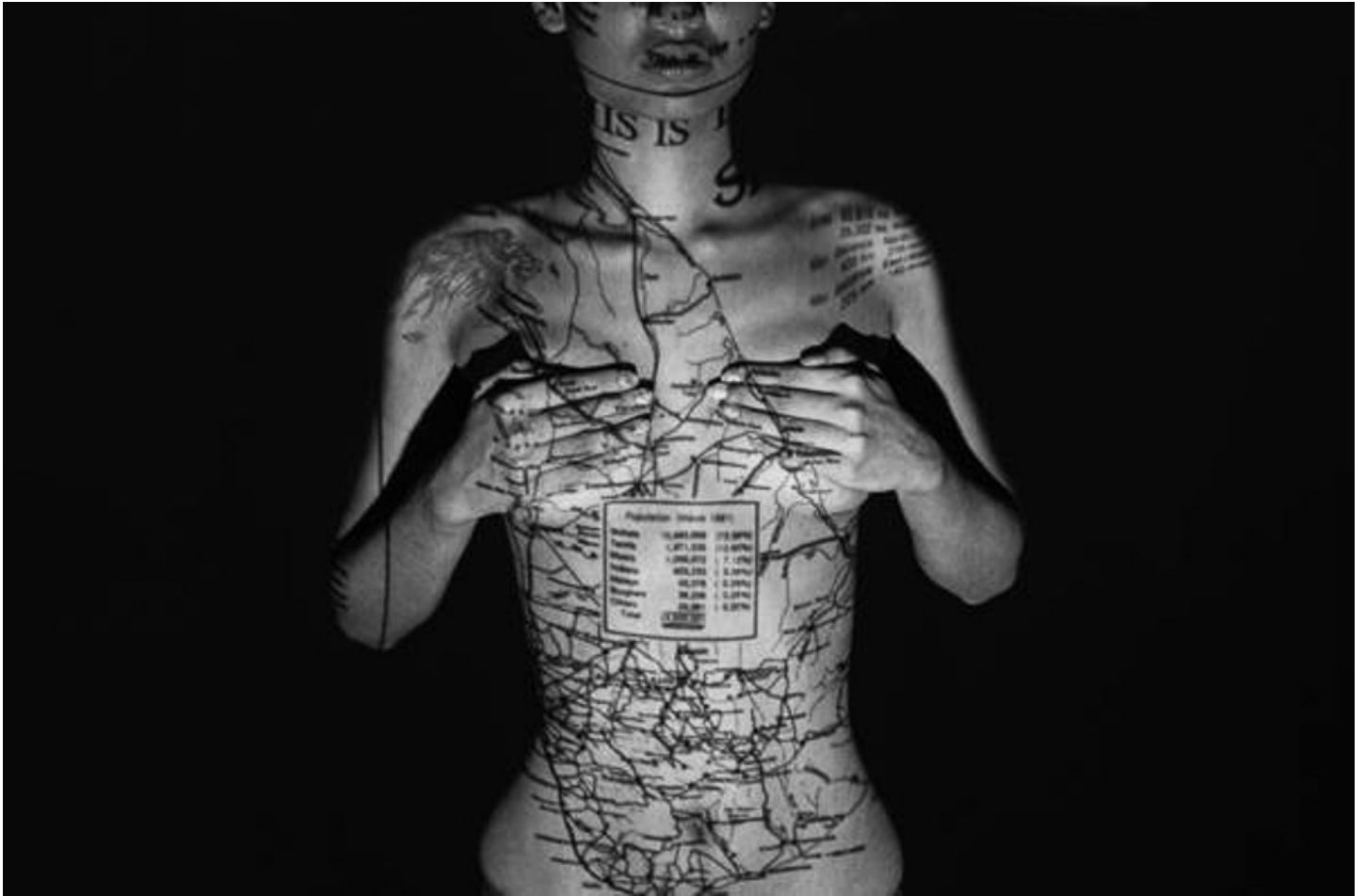


# CURATING PHOTOGRAPHY: RAVI AGARWAL



Using photography to document the every day is becoming a fundamental gesture. Making notes, recording textual pieces of evidence and capturing visual experiences is being realised today with the basic use of the camera. Fulfilling both social and personal intentions, this contextualised and documented information becomes a visual reference that survives for a later date.

Curator Ravi Agarwal brought together seven photographers for his curatorial intervention at the Serendipity Arts Festival's 2018 edition, showcased at the Adil Shah Palace. Titled 'Intimate Documents', Ravi Agarwal was interested in making a proposal to observe the direction contemporary photography is taking, and to get one to think about what is happening in photography today, over other forms of curatorial intent.

The strongest part of a photograph is its ability to document. Photography is playing with the idea of an inescapable reality: it may be a staged photograph or even a digitally manipulated image, yet it is positioned in a real space, time and context- making a reference to some form of reality, he explains. Even if the idea of the truth of a photograph is debatable, one cannot argue with the truth about another's relationship with an object photographed; only the 'claim' to truth can be challenged. These are stories carved out of one's reality, experiences and "a person's relationship to a certain kind of mapping to certain landscapes, a relationship that only the person knows", within which another can only visually participate in a given space of interaction.

While photojournalism is a type of documentation that covers larger public spaces and stories, there has been a reluctance to photograph more intimate, private spaces for a public audience- a practice being reconditioned over the past few years. With this show, each image in the series has an intimate story to tell where the group of photographers are observing events affecting their personal lives. These become small "proposals for the relocation of photography" that draws from new and personal references and practices, facilitating them to "carve out their identity."

While Sohrab Hura talks of his mother's illness and an attempt towards a reconciliation with his own life with his 'Life is Elsewhere', Chandan Gomes recreates through his photographs, the hand-drawn reveries from a child's drawing book he found abandoned in a hospital in his 'This World of Dew.' In another series 'There Are Things I Call Home', as an outsider, Chandan revisits his home to redetermine relationships with his family members through photographing objects of association. Indu Antony through her series of

photographs captures the legs of 'Vincent Uncle', putting together a recollection of her memories as a form of rediscovered evidence. Chinar Shah with 'The River' organises the last remaining traces of life from the Sabarmati river passing through Ahmedabad in the form of photograms within a train of light boxes, while Anoop Ray with 'Friends and their Friends' proposes a kind of diary wherein he has developed a new way of perceiving relationships through photographing people directly from his world. 'Snapped Rope and Other Stories from the New Bangalore' is a personal collection of local stories narrated through photographs and objects by Avani Tanya. The duo Natalie Soysa and Sachini Perera from Sri Lanka use photographic prints and projections in their video installation 'Projecting the Sri Lankan Woman', that comments on the condition of the women through the eyes of the print media since Black July of 1983. "To me, it is a very precisely crafted show. These are much larger bodies of works, but I'm not displaying the photographer, I'm only making suggestions", says the curator.

Developing a fellowship with the artists over the course of the collaboration becomes important. Himself a practitioner, Ravi Agarwal ensures he is only a guiding voice, so as to allow the artists to articulate their thoughts. Taking inspiration from photographers like Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin along with the typography of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Ravi Agarwal likes to keep his curations and visual aesthetics minimalistic, decluttered and reduced to the bare minimum, so as to be able to sit back, breathe and simply watch the display against a white wall.

"I am curating a contemporary show and two or three things I'm averse to personally is asking somebody to read an image or telling them what to read. If it's visual grammar, then we leave it at that." If one takes the name, the narratives, or even the text



(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Uncle-Vincent-Indu-Antony2.jpg>).

Uncle Vincent – Indu Antony



(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Sweet-Life-Sohrab-Hura2.jpg>).

Sweet Life – Sohrab Hura 2

while the intellectual shift in the process conveys a post-traditional idea. Even the show adds to the making of these documents.

Aren't these proposals and photographic documents intervening in the course of history to form individual 'truths' in contrast to fragmented historical 'facts'? With the coming of precise modes of technological documentation, the idea of one history is almost

away, what one encounters is a story that one has to interpret through visual comprehension: who is the person? what is the subject? What is their gender; their socio-economic background? Where is the subject located? These become "scents of narratives and of a particular language." These stories may then lean towards a form of political document that locates these subjects within this context. The political being referenced here is not of the classical sense but an idea that leans to define a political sensibility as a result of the position of the lens, a thought process or the underlying conceptual aspects. These are intentions embedded into photographic practices today, and the political awareness imbibed by the people is what generates different meanings.

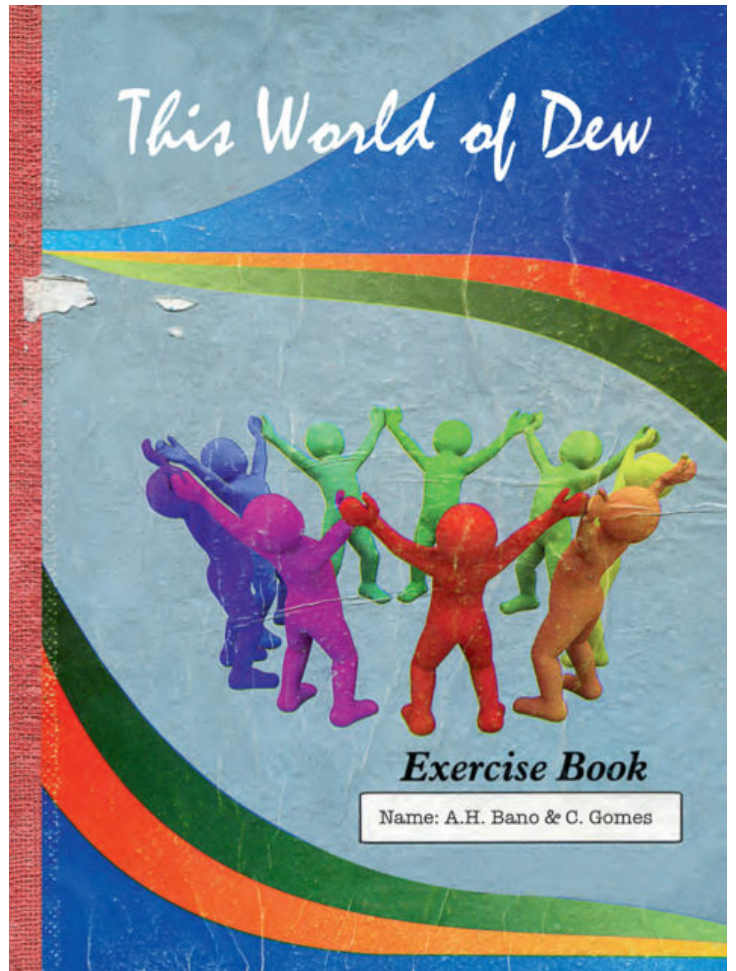
"A document is a particular word about photography I like; it is what distinguishes a photograph from other visual prints." With the visual and text more interlinked today, a document becomes like a note, and photographs have become everyday notes now. It develops into a dispassionate idea of a document

dissolved. Today, state powers and political powers are trying to regain authority by controlling what goes out in history by influencing it through social media. Who is responsible for these histories and who is reading them in order to maintain these continuities? The debate then rests on changing multispecies perspectives, he elucidates.

Moreover, it becomes difficult to separate visual anthropology from culture. These disciplinary constraints seen a lot in anthropocentric studies are now becoming productive with people collaborating on new ideas. The economist, anthropologist, photographer, amongst others, each contribute with their own set of ideas, leading to a multiplicity in questions. These issues deeply influence art practices and how one engages with it. This outflow from society is a visible facet in Intimate Documents.

Ravi Agarwal curated three other projects within Serendipity this year. Under his guidance, 'Conceptual Photography as Artistic Expression' was a workshop conducted by Chinar Shah where she suggested people should begin thinking outside the camera. A camera is a device used for the final production, but before arriving at that, what is the art of looking? The experiment brought the participants to unload thinking processes and make new interventions.

'The Urban Reimagined' involving artists Gigi Scaria and Pooja Iranna was executed to make a comment on the city and its social hierarchies. The Mandovi bridge in Panjim still under construction with a high court order against it at the time, gave way to the tempting gesture of putting Gigi's image on the promenade with the bridge for a backdrop.



([http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/THIS\\_WORLD\\_OF\\_DEW-01-COVER-Chandan-Gomes.jpg](http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/THIS_WORLD_OF_DEW-01-COVER-Chandan-Gomes.jpg)).

THIS WORLD OF DEW- COVER – Chandan Gomes



(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Friends-their-Friends-Anoop-Ray2.jpg>).

Friends and Their Friends – Anoop Ray

The fourth intervention 'Ecological Spaces: Exploratory Walks' is more closely related to Ravi Agarwal's role as an environmentalist. His concern and long relationship with ecology opened channels to an attempt at bridging ecology and art through site-specific interactions. With Goa being a biodiversity hotspot set in the foothills of the Western Ghats and with the festival operating within this landscape, he felt it was imperative to acquaint and educate the visitors through the week. Collaborating with Vishal Rawlley and Tallulah D'Silva to organise exploratory walks, issues of the nature-culture divide, identity and boundaries were re-examined.

"All these are tentative proposals and threads I'd like to take forward sometime to see where it goes. It's no fun otherwise."

Cover Image: Projecting the Sri Lankan Woman – Natalie Soysa

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(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Face-to-face-digital-print-on-archival-paper-size-44-inches-x-64-inches-2010-Gigi-Scaria.jpg>)

Face to Face 2010 – Gigi Scaria

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By Shalmali Shetty