10 Year Book

Kriti Gallery

kriti

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Introduction by Vittoria Bonifati

Curator - 10 Year Book

10 Year Book is a visual documentation of the art that made its way through Kriti Gallery in the last ten years. Kriti opened its doors in 2004 with an exhibition of the works of Pichwai painter Raja Ram Sharma and greeted 2015 with Fazal Sheikh's photographic work, 'Ether'. In the interim, renowned international artists and local masters kept coming together in a space created for artistic and cultural interaction between people and art.

Varanasi, which Hindus call Kashi - the City of Light - is a captivating, challenging and endlessly fascinating city. Pilgrims and travelers from all over the world come here in search of liberation, or simply to experience the city, the ghats and its people. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, Varanasi played a vital role not just in the context of modern Indian literature, music and intellectual churning but also in the Indian independence movement. In the 21st century India received more and more attention from the international art world, focusing on the cities of Delhi and Mumbai, and later Bangalore. Varanasi doesn't appear in this picture. Besides Kriti Gallery there are no contemporary art galleries which also relate with international artists, and there is no contemporary art museum in the city. And yet, while Varanasi is not a commercial contemporary art center, for hundreds of years artists have come here for inspiration, inner dialogue and creative stimulation.

Alain Daniélou and Raymond Burnier came here in 1939 and for over twenty years photographed the beauty of the city and its people. Norman Smith's photographic documentation of the early 70's shows the life and culture of the city as it was before the unplanned urban development it is undergoing today. In 1997, Kenro Izu photographed Banaras and its shrines. In 2007, Robert Polidori chose to photograph Dashashwamedh Road, one of Varanasi's busiest streets, with its amalgamation of people, cows, shops, cars, bicycles. Between 2008 and 2012, Fazal Sheikh spent time in Banaras expressing through his photographs an inner dialogue on life inspired from the city. In 2010, Tatiana Musi created new landscapes from her memory and showed in her paintings an imaginary garden that resembles the ancient descriptions of Varanasi, also called the Forest of Bliss.

Artists with various backgrounds, working through different media, have come to Varanasi for their creative process, choosing Kriti Gallery as their exhibition space. This is not a commercial choice; Varanasi doesn't attract many contemporary art collectors nor has any particular visibility in the art world. But still artists have chosen to show their work here, in the place where it was conceived. Talking with artists via interviews and informal conversations, I understood how important it is for artists to have the chance to show their work in the same place where it was created, thus exchanging their creative knowledge with the city and its people. Kriti is here for this very purpose, to sustain artists in their projects, research and process of dialogue.

Also, the response of the public in a traditional city like Varanasi is very different from that in a bigger metropolis. Here, the exposure of people towards contemporary art and artistic interaction is very limited. By showing the work of

renowned international artists in Varanasi, Kriti Gallery wants to open the city and its people towards greater artistic dialogue and understanding.

In Varanasi many artists have been stimulated by the reaction of a public that doesn't have a socially determined and 'trained' response to art. Here people who view the exhibitions learn something new and this gives artists an immense satisfaction as well as the feeling of contributing a little bit towards the city.
In 2012 wildlife photographer Archna Singh showed her work at Kriti Gallery and found among her viewers local children who didn't know the basic differences between different animals. The sole purpose of her exhibition was to create awareness and the artist felt that this was fulfilled in Varanasi more than in any other city.

The works of Susan Aurinko, Robyn Beeche, Narayan Bohaju, Alain Daniélou, Raymond Burnier, Terry Burrows, Séverine Dabadie, Werner Dornick, Jessie La Free, Michael von Graffenried, Teresa Philo Gruber, Abhinav Goswami, Kenro Izu, Prashant Miranda, Tatiana Musi, Robert Polidori, Nandita Raman, Beatrix Reinhardt, Raja Ram Sharma, Fazal Sheikh, Archna Singh, Norman Smith, Louise Chappel and Sebastien Tickner act as an heterogenous narrative of a paradoxical and deeply resonant place showing the response of each individual creative approach. This space is creating something that didn't exist in Varanasi, opening up inner dialogue and creating connections between people and artists from all over the world.

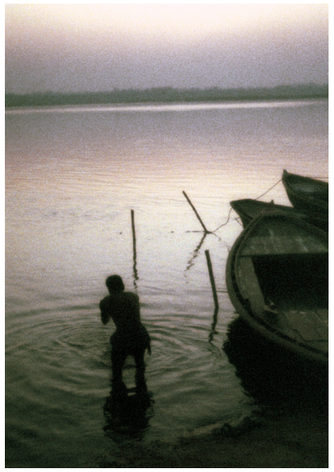
As a young art curator I feel proud and grateful for being part of this project, conceived by Navneet Raman and started together by the two of us in Basel in June 2014.

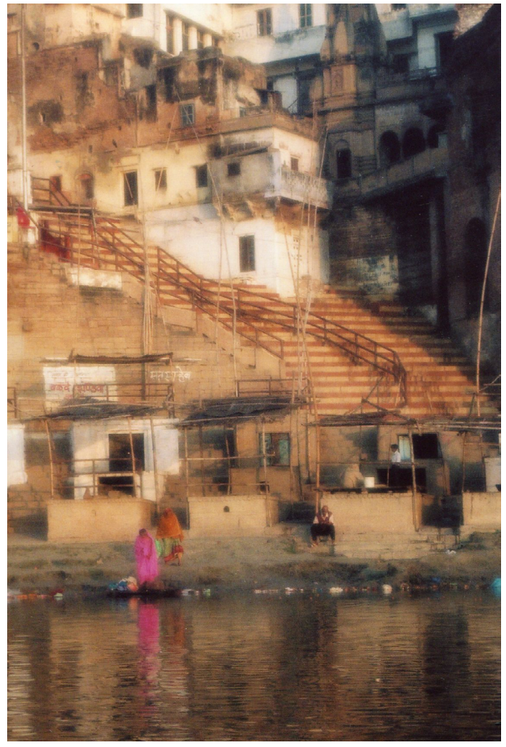
I hope it will give you as much pleasure and inspiration as it gave me.

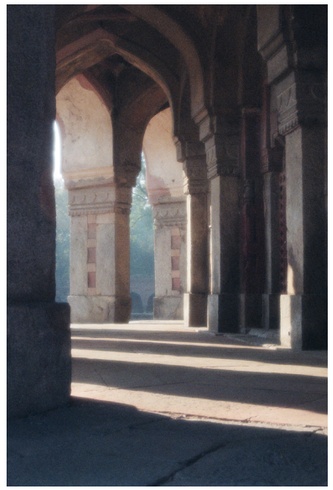
SUSAN AURINKO

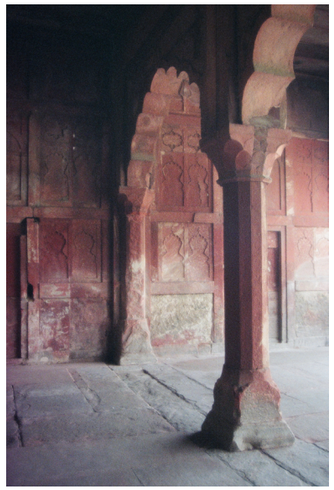
Susan Aurinko's photographs have a soft focus and a dream-like quality. Her images of Banaras are like a song in a dream: one tries to be present and fully experience it, and yet the desire seems impossible.

The following images are from the **Still Point India** series, 2007-2011.









When I traveled to India for the first time, in 2007, I was under the same misconceptions that most of the world holds about the Indian subcontinent. I prepared myself to create a body of work about the crowds and clamour, the cacophony, and the poverty. I packed my cameras, and imagined a series of black and white photographs overcrowded with life and noise.

Once in Banaras, I promptly fell in love with the city. I soon realized that the black and white film I was used to, would simply not do. I rewound the roll that was in my camera, inserted color film, did not shoot black and white in India on that or subsequent visits, and never developed that partial roll. My life as an artist was changed forever!

Over the years, on subsequent trips to Varanasi, I continued to capture the quiet beauty of the city and to work on my book, **Still Point India.** The book, although it contains a few images from Old Agra and Old Delhi, is largely a love song to Banaras. I grew closer and more intimate with the country, regarding things as lovingly as one might gaze at one's child or lover. What I saw was entirely different from what I had expected; I saw small, quiet moments, and beautiful calm scenes that captured my eye, lens and imagination. My concept of what this body of work would look like was completely turned upside down, and took on a life of its own.

In 2013, I had my show at Kriti Gallery. My friend, the writer Mridula Behari, and I, read out my poem India Song in Hindi and English. I remember it as a magical evening!

Knowing Navneet Raman and Petra Manefeld, with all their energy, passion and commitment, and meeting the whole Raman family, has been a wonderful experience. Kriti Gallery, as well as the artist residency at Kriti, is an example of what can happen for artists when they are supported, valued, and encouraged. It is my great pleasure to have been a part of the story, and I look forward to more chapters in the future.

Susan Aurinko

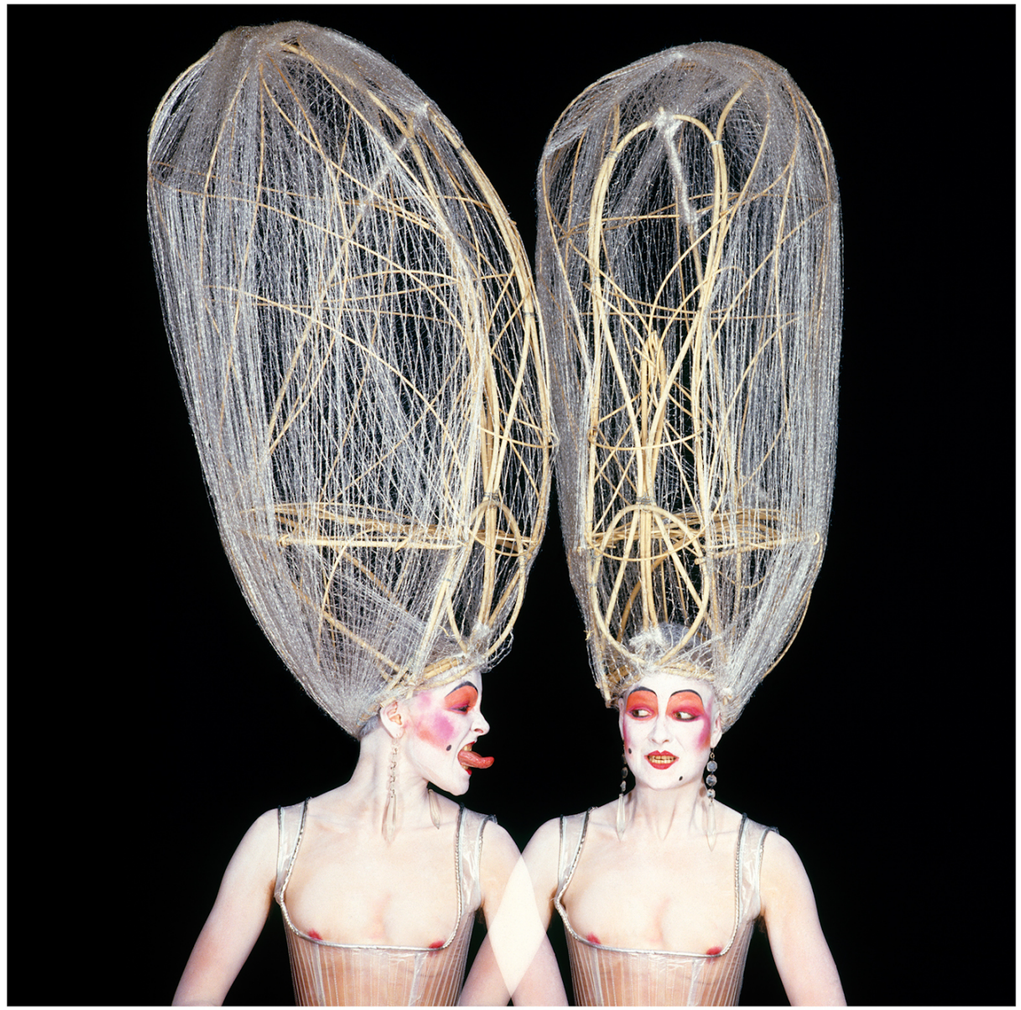
ROBYN BEECHE

In the 1970's and 80's, Robyn Beeche was at the forefront of the fashion scene in London. She created iconic images which symbolized the New Romantics era of the 80's. Together with friends and colleagues, Robyn Beeche created fashion portraits that had a surreal and abstract quality. She pioneered a technique of photography that used elaborate make-up, body paint, props and costumes to create intricate tableaux, in an age before retouching and digital altering became the norm.
Her images were often inspired by artists as diverse as Arcimboldo, Vasarely, Picasso and Dalì.

Vivienne - Look for the 80's, 1979

Sonia, 1983

ROBYN BEECHE



Rococo, 1984

Scarlett, 1986

ROBYN BEECHE

Tina, 1984

Andrew Logan, 1986

As one of the pioneering photographers to exhibit at Kriti Gallery, it gives me great pleasure to look back over the past decade and to realize that Navneet Raman's vision of creating a space for artistic exchange and cultural interaction has come true.

Nowadays there is access to worldwide photography but in 2004 this was limited and there were few galleries in India who would show photography as an 'art form'. Interestingly, it is only over the past five years, when lecturing at major art institutions in Australia, that I have noticed the shift in emphasis from viewing my photographs as 'fashion' to 'works of art'.

The experience of showing my work at Kriti Gallery in Varanasi was therefore a rare opportunity to create cultural interaction by showing my 1980's photographs. I realized that they could be an inspiration in India to artists and photographers alike.

One of the most relevant features concerning my photographs from that time is that there were no computers and the image was composed 'in camera', further effects being achieved during film processing and by using different techniques to meet my ideas of how the photograph should finally appear. After the exhibition, many artists said they were inspired to try different effects on canvas or on their own faces; they were happy to think 'outside of the box'.

I believe that my criteria at the time of creating these images – that they should have universal appeal and a timeless quality about them – has been achieved, as is evident when showing them after 30 years. In 2011, Kriti Gallery arranged for my work to be shown at the BMB Gallery in Mumbai. Many Indian photographers came to the workshops. I later met one who said "your talk changed the way I took photographs, I gave up commercial work and travelled throughout India taking portraits".

Kriti has become an exponent of very interesting and diverse imagery, be it photographic or painterly, within the deep traditions of the ancient city of Kashi. It is also a meeting place for like-minded people of all ages, whichever medium is their forte, and for many nationalities, via its residency programme. The discussion and the exponential effects of the space itself live on in the memory of those who experience it.

Above all it is the vision of its founder, Navneet Raman, whose curatorial skills of promoting contemporary art in India has no bounds, which breathes life into space.
May his example be replicated in other cities in India to help bring art to the people and to those talented younger generations who may not have had any opportunity to experience art.

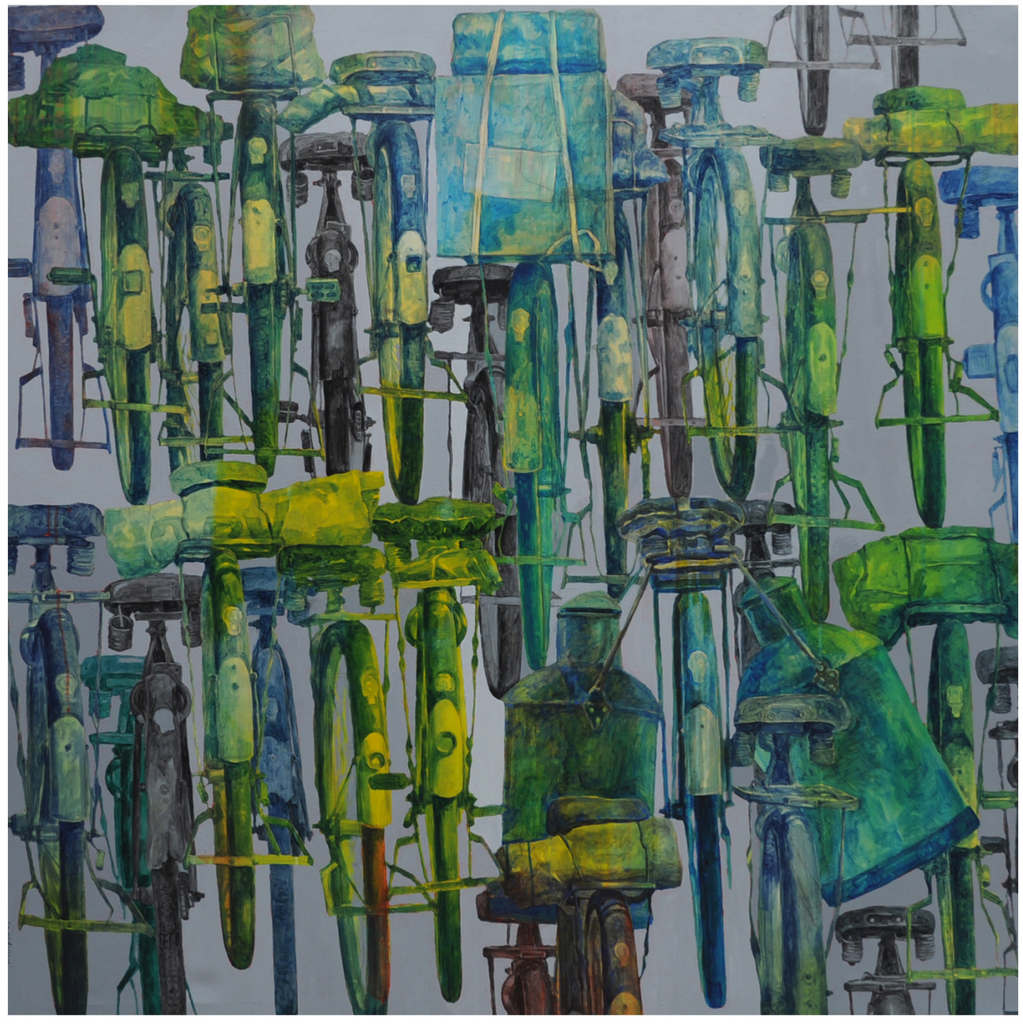
Robyn Beeche

NARAYAN BOHAJU

Narayan Bohaju is a young artist from Nepal who studied art at the Banaras Hindu University. He expresses his response to the world that surrounds him, and his interaction with that world, in the form of his paintings. Extremely sensitive to his environment, he uses his keen eye – indeed, all his artist's heightened senses – to absorb this world and translate it into visual representation. Narayan Bohaju's work is as if he is writing a daily diary that takes shape from everyday life, shapes, sounds, and objects.

Re- Presentation - IV, 2011
oil and acrylic on canvas

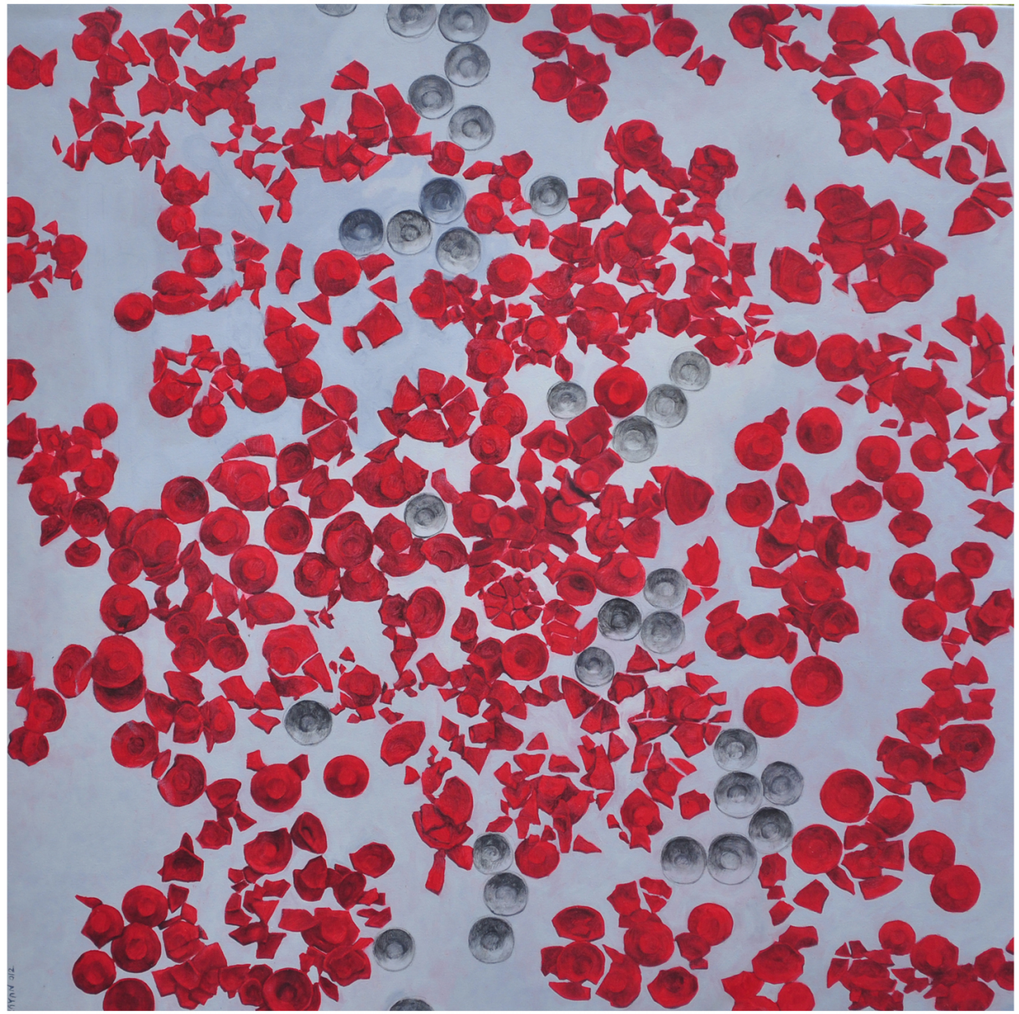
Re- Presentation - II, 2011
oil and acrylic on canvas



Re- Presentation, 2011
acrylic on canvas

Art About the Ordinary Object - III, 2010
acrylic on canvas

NARAYAN BOHAJU



After Celebration, 2012
oil on canvas

In 2012, when I was studying at the arts faculty of the Banaras Hindu University, I got the opportunity to meet Navneet Raman and was introduced to Kriti Gallery. He led me to Kriti's initiative 'First Light', under which emerging artists were being supported by offering them a solo exhibition at the gallery. Enthusiastically, I agreed to end my Master of Fine Arts studies with an exhibition of my work in Varanasi.

Presenting my work in a private gallery and exposing myself to a wider and international audience was a unique and exciting opportunity. Following the making of an exhibition – from the idea, the process of curation, to the opening – was a new world for me. I learnt a lot from Navneet on how to relate to a gallery and to the art world in general. This is helping me in my journey as an artist.

I collect material from my daily surroundings – objects from home, markets and public spaces – and blend these haphazardly collected images into compact compositions that represent the reality of today's life, what is all around me.

I want my paintings to feel like contemporary life, where we constantly see the clash between class, culture and old/modern objects.

I talk about loneliness, I talk about day dreams and I talk about freedom, people, places….
There is my own freedom in the lonely city; there is my own company in the lonely city.

I don't speak, nobody asks me to.

I can feel a song from all the sounds around me when I pass through local places and markets: tea shops, rickshaws, colorful hoardings, the speed of the train and the elevated handle of my bicycle are my inspiration.

I can perceive a song of relaxation from the chatter in the tea shop. I can feel a song of hard work from the ringing bell of the rickshaw.
I can hear a song of harmony from the local markets and sense a song of journey in the running trains.

All this surrounds me and is subject of my paintings.

Narayan Bohaju

ALAIN DANIÉLOU & RAYMOND BURNIER

Alain Daniélou and Raymond Burnier travelled to India in the 1930's, and settled in Banaras when it was still a flourishing cultural centre. Spending over two decades here gave them an insider's access to the beauty of the city and its people. Raymond Burnier was the first photographer to have exhibited in MOMA, New York, his show marking the formal acceptance of photography as a form of art.

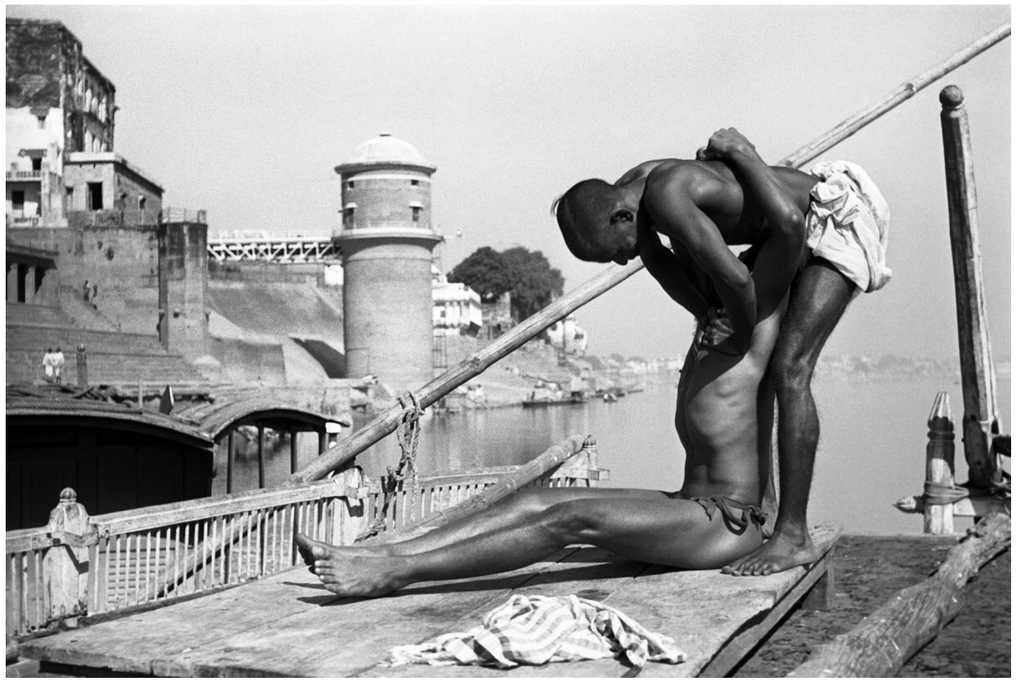
Pataila Boats of Banaras, by Alain Daniélou, 1939-1954

Ganga Mahal with two minarets of Aurangzeb Mosque, by Raymond Burnier, 1939-1954

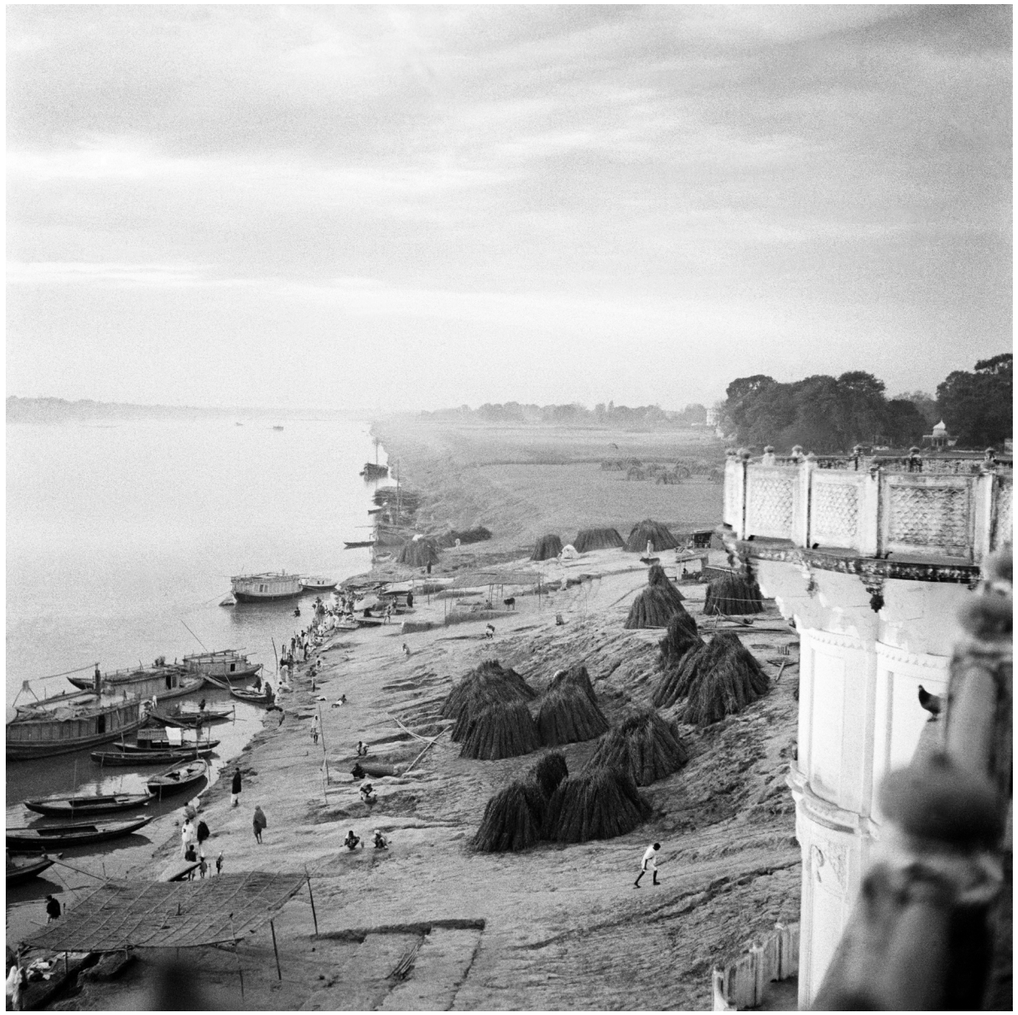
Pilgrims, by Raymond Burnier, 1939-1954

 Manikarnika Ghat III, by Raymond Burnier, 1939-1954

ALAIN DANIÉLOU & RAYMOND BURNIER



Malish (massage on the boat), by Raymond Burnier, 1939-1954



Scholar, Indologist and musician Alain Daniélou (1907-1994) and photographer Raymond Burnier (1912-1968) lived in India for more than twenty years, from the middle 1930's to the late 1950's, mainly in Varanasi. In 1932, the creative duo traveled by car to Afghanistan and onwards to India. In Shantiniketan, they were received by Rabindranath Tagore, thus starting a close relationship with the Indian writer. Daniélou and Burnier spent a fascinating and productive time in the subcontinent studying the country, its languages, arts and philosophy.

In 1936, they embarked on a journey around the world, taking in North America, Japan, China and returning to India. It was in 1939 that they came to Banaras, rented the Rewa Kothi palace at Assi Ghat, and became residents. Daniélou started to study Sanskrit, Hindi, religion and philosophy with Indian pandits, concentrating on reading indigenous sources. He learned to play the Rudra Veena under Sivendranath Basu, and studied Sanskrit texts on the theory of music, later translating them.

The two friends travelled widely in India, including to Khajuraho and to other temple sites, taking photographs. Raymond Burnier captured these images with a Leica. His photographs of Khajuraho were some of the first taken by a western visitor and made the site internationally famous. They were chosen for the very first exhibition of photography at MOMA in New York.

In his work, Alain Daniélou retained an open, critical mind and maintained an irreverent attitude towards established schools of thought. His challenging of contemporary concepts, particularly in musicology and Indology, was not always accepted by academicians in these disciplines. Nevertheless, from 1949 to 1954, Daniélou was the Vice Principal of the College of Music and Fine Arts at Banaras Hindu University. Here he established the first institute of musicology in India, together with Omkar Nath Thakur.

In 1963, Daniélou founded the International Institute for Comparative Studies of Music in Berlin. A parallel institute was set up in Venice in 1970. He invited musicians from India, Asia and Africa for conferences and concerts. He was largely responsible for making Ravi Shankar and the Dagar Brothers known in Europe.

The images made by Alain Daniélou and Raymond Burnier are an integral part of Kriti Gallery's vision of creating a Banaras Museum, which will comprise a visual archives of the city. They are also an inspiring example of collaboration between Indian and international institutions related to Banaras and its culture and art. These images have been made available courtesy of FIND, a non-profit Swiss foundation founded by Alain Daniélou in 1981, to promote projects in the arts, music, photography, philosophy and the social sciences. The foundation is currently headed by its honorary president, Jacques Cloarec.

Alain Daniélou and Raymond Burnier

Rewa Kothi looking towards Assi Ghat, by Alain Daniélou, 1939-1954

TERRY BURROWS

Terry Burrows is a painter who decided to use the medium of photography for his work **Banaras Backs**. Walking on the ghats and observing people along the river, he was stimulated by the shape of their bodies and embarked on a Bauhaus-like project where he photographed people along the river every day between 1-4 pm. Terry Burrows's choice not to capture the faces makes these photographs very impersonal and yet deeply intimate. The contrast of textiles, patterns and language on these people's dresses depicts the cultural and economic contradictions of modern India.

The following images are from the **Banaras Backs** series, 2013.

Banaras Backs and the inaugural launch of **The Banaras Back Book** in November 2013 was my second exhibition at the Kriti Gallery; the first being a series of small works on paper called **Ghat by Ghat**. These were works painted in Australia sometime after my first sojourn to Varanasi in 2005, working from photographs taken on that trip.

While working on a new series of paintings during my first residency in 2010/11, I was taking photographs along the ghats for drawing and painting reference. Rather than just photographing objects and shrines, I found myself also training my lens on the backs of figures sitting or squatting along the steps. These 'torsos', predominantly facing the river, were amazingly relaxed and still, appearing very object or icon-like. This distraction eventually turned into a photographic project.

Over a five-month period, I would visit the ghats in the afternoons between 1 and 4 pm when the sun was behind the backs of the figures. Using a very compact digital camera and photographing surreptitiously from behind, I managed to capture over 4,000 images without any of the sitters being aware.

As Ann Finegan says in her introduction to **The Banaras Back Book:** "Photographing (shooting) from the back Burrows hasn't asked permission; one doesn't ask permission to photograph a back, simply because with the back there is no automatic social negotiation of the face-to-face. Also, by capturing the subject unawares, as Burrows has done here, is this photography by stealth? But is one's back indeed a subject? Do we have the same propriety over our backs? It's a curious point, given that we are creatures who cannot see out of the backs of our heads, is the back already, by default, in some sort of objecthood?"

Sitting in the Kriti garden one day, toward the end of the first residency, I asked Navneet Raman if he would like to co-publish a limited edition book of these 'back' photographs. He responded positively and I started preparing. I returned to the residency in October 2012 to continue the project and research the printing possibilities in India with Navneet.

I decided on 1,008 images for the book and 56 for the accompanying large photographic prints in the exhibition. Again in early September 2013 I returned to India and after lots of proofing, printing, binding and mounting, the show was ready to open on November 10, 2013.

Banaras Backs, accompanied by a preview of **The Banaras Back Book**, has now had three exhibitions: at Kriti Gallery, at Lalit Kala Akademi of Fine Arts in Delhi and at the Australian Center for Photography (ACP) in Sydney. Another exhibition is scheduled at the RMIT Gallery in Melbourne from the 26th March, 2015.

All exhibitions in India were directly related to my work at the Kriti residencies, with Navneet Raman being closely involved with all of them, from organization to curation to hanging.

Terry Burrows

SÉVERINE DABADIE

Séverine Dabadie captures Banaras via reflections, conveying the magical light of the city through her photographs. Séverine Dabadie breaks the clichés of capturing the riverfront of Banaras by photographing its ephemeral and elusive reflections and not the object itself. Her interpretation adds another layer to the mystique as well as meaning of the city.

The following images are from the **Réflections** series, 2003-2012.

When I arrived in Banaras for the first time in 2002, the city lacked galleries and places where art - outside of mercantile constraints – could be freely expressed. Kriti Gallery began two years later, a space dedicated to contemporary art in a city as traditional as Varanasi. I came across it by chance; a poster caught my eye. I do not remember who the artist presented was but I experienced my first visit to Kriti as a breathless one. I realized that this place would house daring works and unusual routes. It would be the center of a bustling life full of vibrant artistic processes.

I visited Varanasi several times and was dazzled by its singular beauty, depth and most of all by its creative spirit. Each visit was also an occasion to visit Kriti and to discover Indian artists.
For me, this was the true meaning of travel.
I discovered the country of my dreams through the eyes of its artists, discovering their India, and not some cheap aesthetic imposed on visitors who have no time.

Their creative process opened in me the possibility to see and feel the true vibration of Banaras which sometimes haunted, sometimes mystified me. It was necessary for me to observe how other artists reacted to the city. How can artists translate the cataclysm caused by Banaras in their art? I realized that my link with the city was becoming stronger more intimate, and more exclusive. I found myself cringing when some artists looked 'settled' in the city.

In 2006, I published my first book **A Day in Kashi,** written by Christiane Etchezaharreta. The book was published in Varanasi and dedicated to all Banarsis. Then came **Kushti, a Homage to the Gods** - a publication about the wrestlers of Banaras.

In November 2012, my exhibition 'Reflections' was shown at Kriti Gallery, 10 years after my first visit. The exhibition was called 'Reflections' because this was the concept moving my creative process. Focusing on reflections was like meditation for my creative thought. The concept of 'maya' (illusion) is very much present in my work and in my understanding of my Indian photographs. Reality doesn't find a place in my work as a photographer. For me India is not a country, instead, it represents the country of my dreams and my secret thoughts.

In keeping with this instinct, I wasn't trying to show Banaras and its people as they are, but instead as a reflection of the image transmitted to me by the city and imprinted on my being.
I wanted to show everything except reality.
As advocated by Arthur Rimbaud, it is imperative to be a "voyant" and turn our attention beyond appearances. I consider photography as an inner journey, a personal quest, openness to the world and people, a way to escape from Plato's cave.

Over the years, none of the shows at Kriti Gallery have left me indifferent. I have loved or hated, but never got tired of what Kriti was offering me. I want no other place to hang my photographs, which are the intimate reflection of my love towards India. I see myself sitting on the red stone benches in Kriti's garden, absorbed in contemplation. Kriti is now a necessary place for contemporary art in Varanasi, with its message of a living contemporary art, powerful and creative. Art in motion...

Séverine Dabadie

WERNER DORNIK

Werner Dornik is primarily an activist who uses art as a medium. His art activism has taken the form of the Bindu-Art-School, on the outskirts of Chennai: a painting school for leprosy patients which encourages their creative process.

In 1999, Werner Dornik's artistic journey in India took the shape of his work **The Journey from: Technic to Techno**. Travelling through India, he had been overwhelmed by the massive number of Indian travellers on the railway. He turned this visual and sound experience into a dialogue which created his photographic body of work.

The following images are from **The Journey from: Technic to Techno** series, 1999.

EMERGENCY EXIT

From the project From Pain to Paint
This painting was made by a senior student of the Bindu Art School

It was the year 2007 when I first met Navneet Raman. A good friend of mine told me that he ran the best art gallery in Varanasi. I didn't expect that I would have found an open door for exhibiting paintings from the Bindu-Art-School. This school is located in the south of Chennai and teaches people, affected with leprosy, how to paint, with the aim of taking them away from begging to a new life of respect and dignity.

Navneet and his wife Petra Manefeld came along to the Bindu-Art-School exhibition in the Indian Embassy in Berlin, and I saw their real interest in the Bindu project and my social/art activities. Navneet was very touched by the works and the cause and agreed to do a Bindu-Art-School show at Kriti gallery in 2009. The opening was on the 150th birthday of his great grandfather who helped leprosy-affected people by giving land in Sarnath to build a hospital for them.

The second encounter I had with Navneet and Petra was during the exhibition and film presentation, at the National Rail Museum in New Delhi, of my multimedia-project **The Journey from: Technic to Techno**, which had been also shown in many European countries. Navneet and Petra organized this event perfectly. Besides their professionalism, there was always the beauty of humanity, spirituality and humour in how to see the world.

It is today rare to find such people in the field of art, with so much passion for their work and a great sense for modern and traditional art, culture, and humanity. They are not those kind of people doing everything for money and prestige, they initiate projects with their soul and with a high level of art-understanding.

To build up an art gallery like Kriti in the most Indian traditional town is such hard pioneering work; I know how difficult it is to create something new away from thousand of years of tradition.

Werner Dornik

MICHAEL VON GRAFFENRIED

For the past twenty years, Michael von Graffenried has been using his panorama camera to enter scenes of daily life. Keeping his camera discreetly close to his chest, he captures candid moments of the world. His photography is a confrontation with the world around him, creating a contrast between the observer and the observed through the questioning of personal boundaries. These are private moments captured and exhibited without the knowledge of the subject. His attempt to understand the world around him is explored by the provocative images he displays, anticipating a public dialogue through which his understanding can be enhanced.

The nature of his work **On the Edge** required a large public space for exhibiting. For this reason, 20 panoramic works, 6 by 3 meters, were displayed on public billboards on a 125 meter long wall at Rathyatra Crossing, in the centre of the city of Varanasi. **On the Edge** was the first public art installation in Varanasi and one of the first in India.

The following images are from the **On the Edge** series, 2012.

VESTS

OF TOP GANGES VIEW
OME AWAY FROM HOME
गंगा भगाओ
काशी बचाओ

TERESA PHILO GRUBER

In the project **Tree Portraits**, Teresa Philo Gruber has highlighted, through her photographic observation, the individual personality of small plants growing in the forest and their role in the ecosystem. Teresa Philo Gruber has taken portraits of these plants in a natural environment, but reproducing the setting of a proper studio. In this way she has underlined the importance of each subject 'posing' in front of the camera.

The following images are from the **Tree Portraits** series, 2010.

The **Tree Portraits** were photographed during my study of photography at the School of Applied Arts in Bielefeld. The concept grew out of the wish to capture a quality of the forest that might not come to your mind when you think of it in the first place: The concurrence of different generations of plants. My pictures aspire to bring into the limelight the children of the forest, the overlooked undergrowth. They were taken outside using a portable white background and natural light, instead of digging them up and bringing them into the photo studio. The result was a group of very calm compositions.
They are portraits of individual characters, which I sometimes revisited and re-photographed in different seasons, but they also resemble landscapes, with a low horizon and a graphic accent.

Having presented them once, I didn't think too much of the **Tree Portraits**, until Navneet Raman discovered them. We met in Winterthur, where Navneet spent two months in 2009 to accompany and observe the everyday routine at the Fotomuseum Winterthur to gather insight for his own exhibition spaces. I was working at the Museum, following my plan to earn a living with a job that is about photography. As soon as Navneet and I made friends he charmingly and subtly but stubbornly persuaded me to show him my own images. And when he saw the trees he decided on the spot that he wanted to exhibit them in Varanasi. Suddenly the show was scheduled and my partner and I, who never had dreamt to travel to India, booked our tickets.

It was a wonderful experience to have a show at Kriti, and there are many reasons for this. First of all it was the perfect occasion for me to get a glimpse of this enigmatic place – Varanasi.

And then, to do something there. It started with the production of the prints and the frames in Delhi, all taken care of personally by the gallery director. I came to see workshops and studios I would never have visited as a tourist. Then we brought the big wooden boxes with the framed work by train from Delhi to Varanasi, where we discussed the hanging and enjoyed a sociable opening with many memorable encounters.
I experienced that at Kriti the **Tree Portraits** were appreciated in a whole different way compared to Germany. Probably the viewing patterns are different and the audience is not as saturated with artistic photography as it might be in Europe.

Navneet's engagement in Varanasi is invaluable. Contemporary art provides objects to contemplate and to question. Exhibition spaces are schools where you can practise looking, seeing, thinking and judging. Sometimes you don't understand what you see, sometimes you don't like it, but it challenges you and you expose yourself to this challenge, which you might not have the time or the muse for outside of the exhibition space. It adds to the quality of a city to gather these institutions, not only the official museums but independent galleries, which show what they think should be shown.

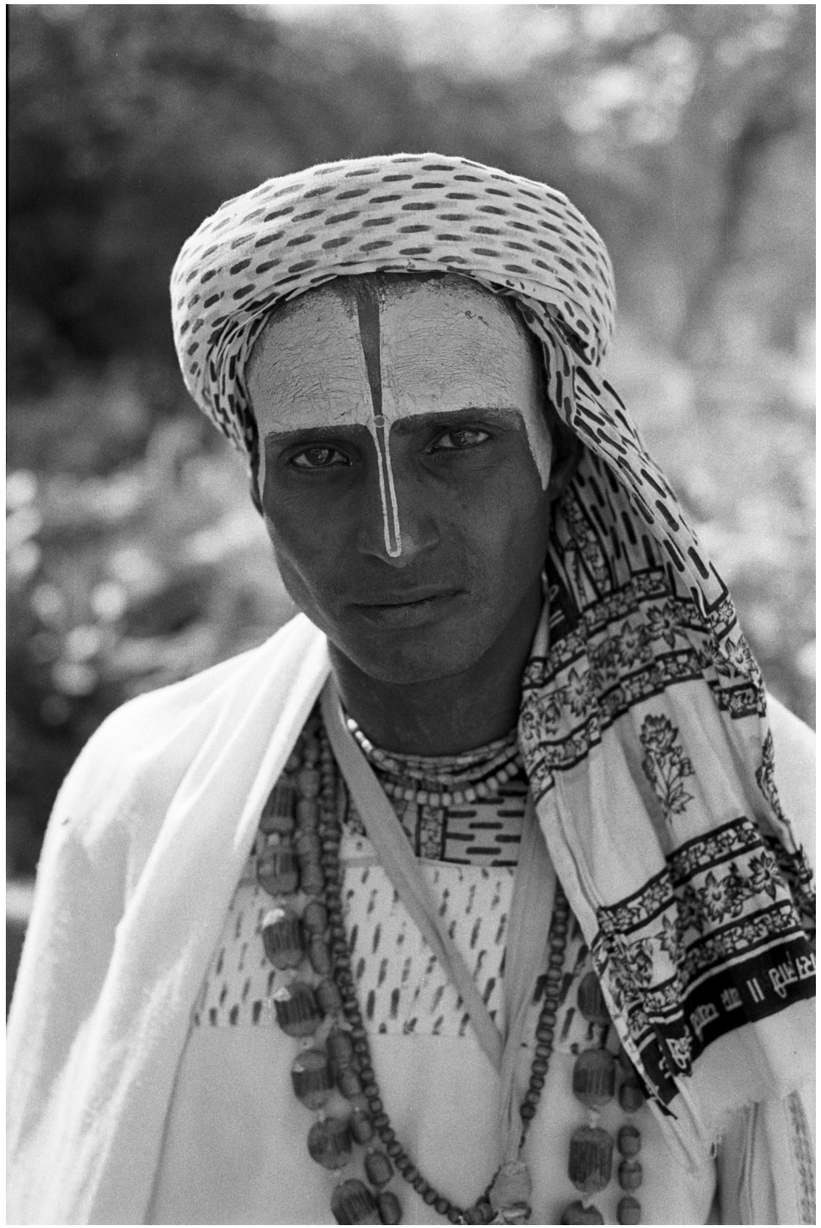
Kriti Gallery makes a difference because it brings something to Varanasi which cannot be taken for granted: A platform for Indian and international artists, a venue where people can come and share their interest – from around the corner or from another continent.

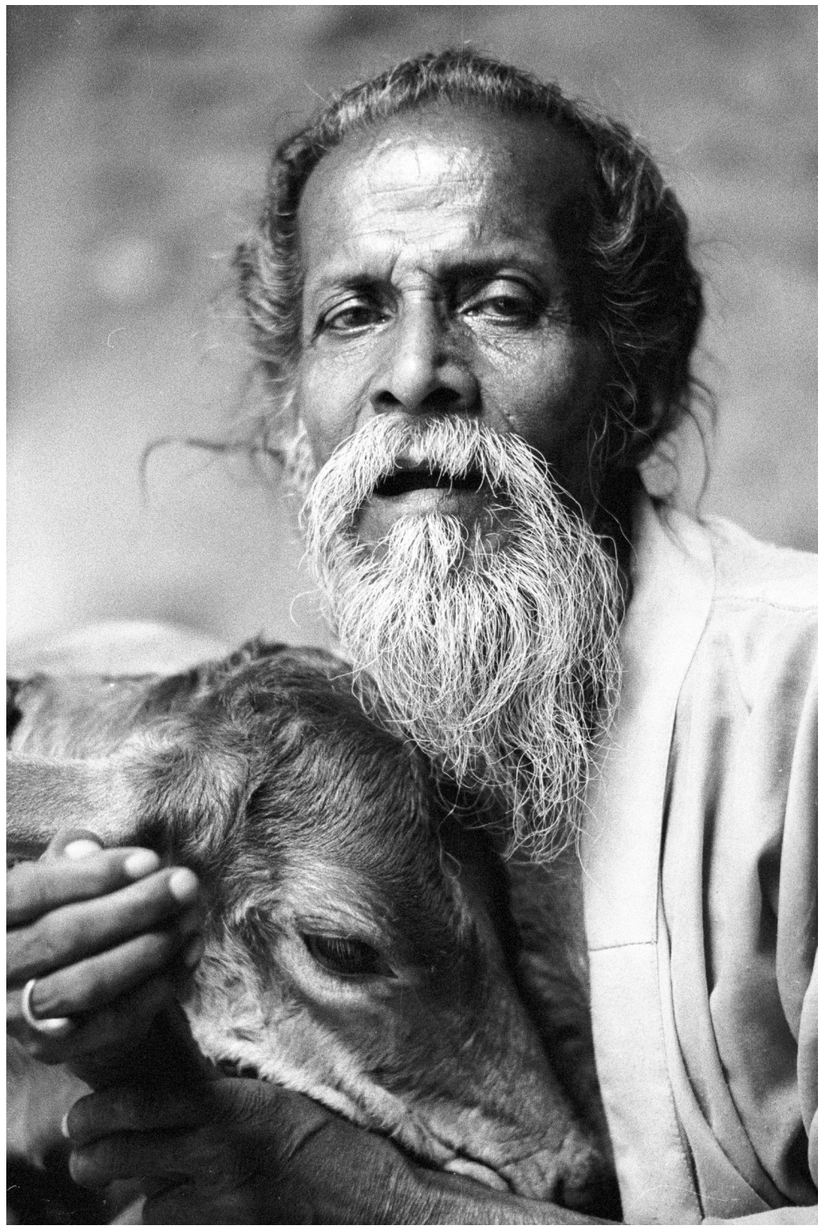
Teresa Philo Gruber

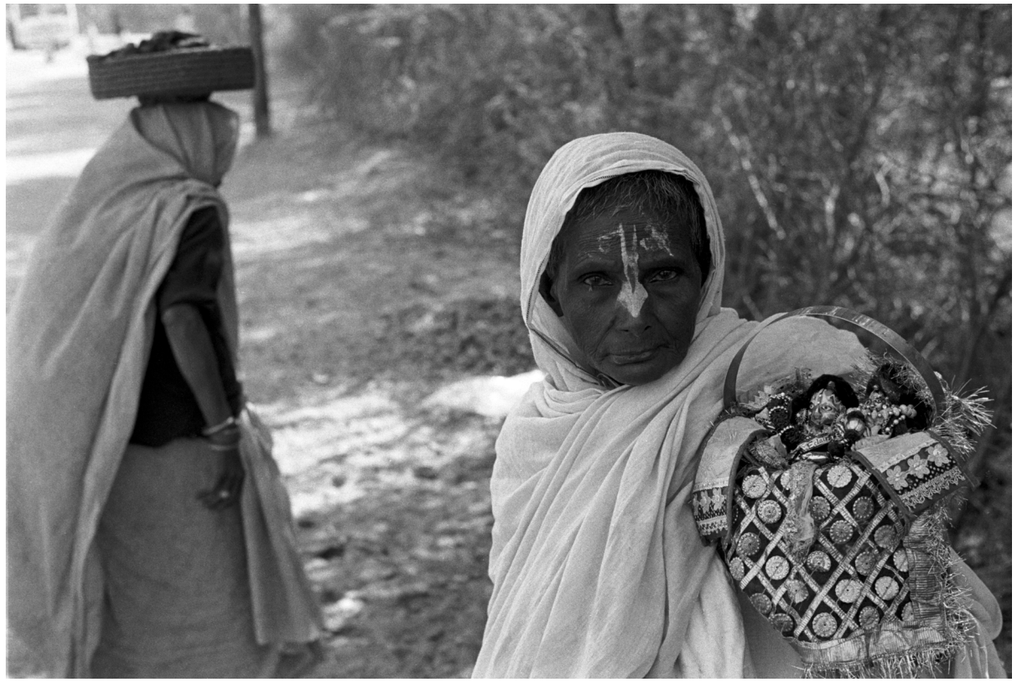
ABHINAV GOSWAMI

Abhinav Goswami comes from a 600-year old temple tradition in Vrindavan. His reportage photography is documenting the Vrindavan of our times with a very personal statement on the life of the city. He is part of the cultural modus of Vrindavan and his point of view is one of an insider rather than one who observes from the outside.

The following images are from the **Timeless Vrindavan** series, 2000-2008.







It was a privilege to show my early work at Kriti Gallery in 2008, as, like Vrindavan, where these photographs were taken, Varanasi too is an ancient city with deep religious and cultural roots in Hinduism. Similarly, both Vrindavan and Varanasi are situated on two of the most sacred rivers in India, the Yamuna and the Ganges. The proximity of the two rivers has given birth to the famous Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb (Ganges-Yamuna culture). This term is used for the culture of the central plains of northern India, especially the doab region of Ganges and Yamuna rivers, which is regarded as a fusion of Hindu and Muslim elements.

The photographs exhibited capture the timelessness of Vrindavan town. They also conjure the unique richness of Krishna-devotion, which pervades every aspect of life in that vibrant pilgrimage destination. Since this exhibition I have had the opportunity of shooting in Varanasi on many occasions. My portfolio has therefore extended to include a thorough-going appreciation of the culture of each city.

I would like to share a critique of my work by Paul Wakefield, London photographer:

"Abhinav's style is a combination of classic documentary photo-journalism and a more modern edgy viewpoint that creates a balance of harmony and unease in his photographs. There is a strong feeling of a story being glimpsed and illuminated allowing the viewer's imagination to follow a personal thread beyond the image frame. The special awareness and juxtapositions of elements and figures also help to heighten the illusion of passing by and peering into this other world, a fleeting filmic moment that will never repeat itself, the facial expression of the people in his images and in his portrait subjects have a very natural unposed character which adds to the impression of a moment lived and captured by an insightful eye."

Abhinav Goswami

KENRO IZU

"I like the quality of platinum prints; using a large-format camera I can obtain large negatives (without the aid of digitalized large negatives) which are needed for the contact printing process. To capture the atmosphere of a sacred place, the large camera and large negative have been essential for me. To me, such photography is a process of trying to establish a relationship and communicating with the sacred space, in order to concentrate my mind and start to sense the spirituality that surrounds me."

Kenro Izu

Agra #43, India, 2008
platinum prints

Agra, India, 1997
platinum prints

Khajuraho #129, Indian, 1997
platinum prints

Varanasi #105, India, 1997
platinum prints

Sarnath, India, 1997
platinum prints

Hampi #15, India, 1996
platinum prints

Trichy #615, India, 2012
platinum prints

Amritsar #376, India, 2009
platinum prints

I have been working on the series **Sacred Places** since 1979, and have travelled around the world to photograph a number of locations which are considered holy. I visited India several times between 1995 and 1999, and have visited every year since 2008, to photograph this country's sacred sites and the people in them.

During my first visit itself, Varanasi left a deep impression on my heart. I was especially moved by the scenes I saw along the River Ganges, of the people, and of the entire life cycle from birth to death. It was a profound experience of witnessing human life integrated with faith.

I believe that a sacred place is as sacred as the heart of the people who believe in it, maintain it and hand over its spirit to the future generation. It is my hope that my project, **INDIA: Where Prayer Echoes**, provides an opportunity to the viewer to think about the true value of life.

Further, I hope this project contributes to a society which is changing at a speed that seems beyond humanity's tolerance, in creating a humane environment for all people.

In these last 7 years, Kriti Gallery has been supporting my project in various ways: from coordination and obtaining photo permissions to providing assistants and transportation.
I would like to express my gratitude to Nandita and Navneet Raman, and Petra Manefeld for their help and providing me a comfortable residency that is a home-away-from-home, where I have been able to concentrate on my work.

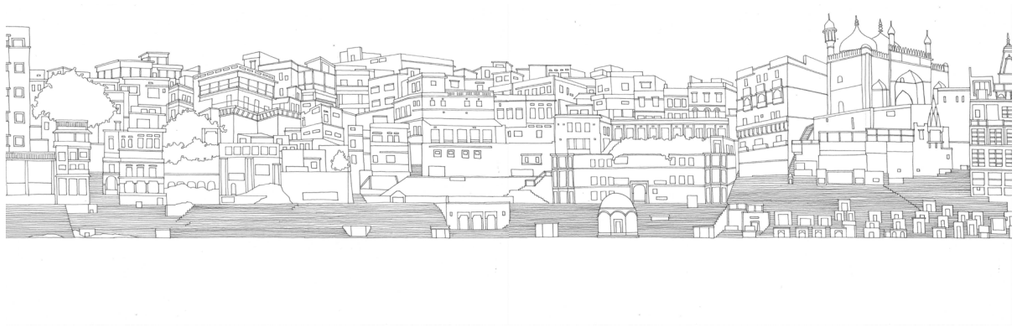
Kenro Izu

JESSIE LA FREE

Jessie La Free's training in architecture and her broader understanding of art has resulted in this series of sketches and mixed media, where she uses the gold thread of Banaras to embroider over her architectural sketches. The entire 6.8 km of the riverfront of the city of Banaras has been drawn in scale by the artist, using an ink pen.

Manikarnika, 2013
embroidery thread, ink pen and fabric

JESSIE LA FREE



Varanasi by Line, 2013
ink pen and paper

Kashi, 2013
zari (gold-wrapped thread made in Varanasi), pen and paper

My relationship with Kriti Gallery began with Navneet Raman's efforts to engage the art students and faculty at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, through a study-abroad programme he helped organize a few years ago. Initially a group of twenty artistic strangers, we were introduced to India and invited into his home and his gallery as guests.

Kriti Gallery is a special and memorable place for the people who have been able to spend time there. What Navneet and Petra Manefeld have created is, among other things, incredibly peaceful as well as inspiring: a place to work, but also a place to explore new ideas and expose yourself to others' viewpoints and perceptions. In the midst of the hum of the city, the gallery and grounds provide the space needed to reflect on the unforgettable experiences gathered just outside the garden walls.

For me, it was the time I spent at Kriti that likely led to the creation of much of my work and studies following my first visit to India. Though I was inspired by the city of Varanasi and the ghats along the river, I believe that the few days I spent working at the gallery were equally as important to my art; allowing me to translate the raw experience of the city to the plane of paper, while still under the influence of the City of Light itself. Had I not been able to digest these feelings before returning to the US, I feel that I would have lost much of the emotional connection to the riverfront that kept me at my work months later.

The work I exhibited at Kriti served two primary goals: those of reflection and conversation. The reflection of the work was personal and working on these pieces, in the months following the trip to India, became my own form of daily meditation. It gave me time to think about my experience of the ghats and what my time there meant to me as well as what it might mean to others around the world.

Displaying the work, both at Kriti and in Chicago, became a foundation for discussion of the ghats as well as the experience of them that is, in many ways, an ineffable or indescribable one. The pieces became a projecting point for the questions, observations and conversations of those who came to see them and hopefully presented new perspectives on the subject, both in India and abroad.

I think that Kriti occupies an important niche in Varanasi as well as the larger art world. Kriti is a place to work as well as a place to listen and perhaps one of its most valuable assets is the takeaway artist and guests receive from the conversations that the gallery promotes. Here, the local and the global can come together in a productive and meaningful way. I can personally say that being given the opportunity to display one's work within the very setting that inspired it is an invaluable experience for any artist and one I hope to share with others.

Jessie La Free

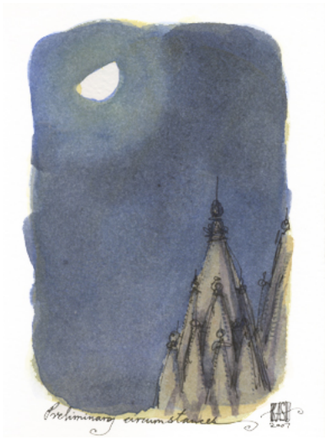
PRASHANT MIRANDA

Prashant Miranda keeps a visual journal of his life through his watercolour paintings and sketches. His training as an animator is visible in his work. Combining image and text, Prashant Miranda's paintings narrate a story and become visual poetry. His journals resemble the concept of the great Mughal-nama texts, which combined paintings, drawings and impressions of their times.

The following images are from the **28 Moons of Banaras** series, watercolour on paper, 2007.

Amavasya

Beyond faith


Preliminary circumstances

Notions of being

The other side

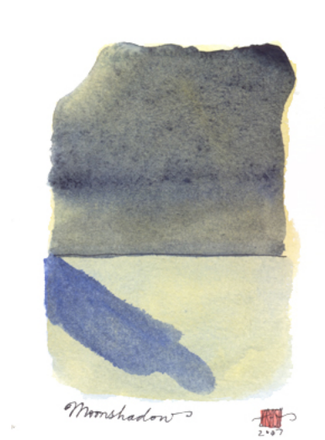
Occasional thought

Understanding moonlight

Stairway

While she rises

From Satyanaj ghat


Moonshadow

Accustomed to her...

Subtle discrepancies

Mesmerising eyes

Nocturnal inclinations

Lunar unlimited

Blue

Banaras has always been a source of inspiration for me. I find this space powerful, magical and fascinating, and my long walks along the ghats have provided ample insight into the sublime forces that work in this ancient city.

It was during my 6 months of working with a literacy organization in Banaras, in 2006, that I met Navneet Raman while I was painting on the ghats and was introduced to Kriti Gallery.

I am a Moonatic! And my nightly walks along the Ganga triggered off the **28 Moons of Banaras** works for my show at Kriti Gallery. Some of these watercolours were not only painted but also dried under the moonlight of Banaras. Sadhus, architecture, the Ganga, the ghats, abstractions, reflections and text all seemed to make their way into these postcards works.

As an artist from Canada, I had just begun my foray into the annual migratory pattern of spending half my year in India. This show provided a perfect opportunity to share my work in a space that was meaningful to me. Navneet even organized moon-themed events on new moon and full moon nights.

My show culminated on a full moon night with a total lunar eclipse, such that the moon cycle, which usually takes 28 days, effectively happened on that one auspicious night. It is under these cosmic circumstances that I see Kriti Gallery grow in its ability to bring great artists – visual artists, musicians and dancers – from around the world to share talent, work and ideas; to create and continue to inspire.

Prashant Miranda

TATIANA MUSI

Tatiana Musi expresses her love for nature through her work. Coming from a background of painting, she has transformed herself into a mixed media artist, working with site-specific sculptures and video installations. Her delicate and detailed approach has similarities to miniature painting. Tatiana Musi's installations are an extension of her painting style; the care and attention to minute detail that goes into making them is as if she is making a three-dimensional painting.

Imaginary Garden, 2009-2010
watercolour on cotton paper

An Ordinary Garden, 2010
Plants and collected objects, installation of variable dimension

Residency Garden, 2010
watercolour on Japanese paper

My work produced at Kriti Gallery was about memory, nature and experience. **Mind Fills** was about how I related to Kriti's space and the Raman's house, which I had visited 3 or 4 years before. What did I remember about its landscape? How did I experience it in my memory? How would the memory be confronted by the present reality? Using these questions as a departure point, I created new landscapes. The title alludes to a default setting of the mind that when we have a gap in our memory we immediately make something up to fill it up. In this way I aimed to construct images from a delicate and complex exchange between my inner and outer worlds.

Thanks to the support of Kriti I could take my work further, by being advised on how to solve the problems I faced in production. Kriti was the first residency I have ever done, and it was a very productive time. It was a great opportunity to have my own studio and receive support and advice for the production process of my work, so the artist can just focus on its creation.

I had visited India and Varanasi before and felt that I wanted to submerge myself in the culture and place in a deeper way. Producing work in Banaras gave me the opportunity to go deeper into my perception of the place and culture and see how this would, in return, affect and change me. This is something that happened almost through instinct. But the way I related to the process of creation changed.

I remember getting dengue fever while I was in Varanasi and ending up in hospital. Those days were very intense and of deep questioning, going through a small hell while having paradisiac dreams. I felt a fierce and clear determination that I love painting, and in that sense the sole purpose of creation was doing what I love, because of love and no other expectation. By dropping all expectations, and unnecessary pressure, I could trust that whatever is created is what it has to be; not every work is going to be a masterpiece, but every work is perfect just as it is.

Varanasi is inspiring as a very unique place that brought out of me things that could not come out in any other context. I feel that even if I was showing my work I was still giving less than what I was receiving from the whole experience. But then, there was the opportunity to teach a workshop for kids at the Krishnamurti School. This was a beautiful exchange, where I could share my visions about the freedom of art and my relationship with nature in a more precise way.

Kriti is a dream that has materialized slowly through a lot of work. Navneet is a dreamer and has made the dream come true.
The gallery has a very interesting flow of artists, mainly international but also local. I picture Kriti partnering with other galleries in India to become stronger within the local scene and eventually taking this unique product (works produced by a mixture of cultures in Varanasi) to an international art context. I hope Kriti grows in commercial terms as a gallery that focuses on creating a collectors' network for its unique product, which may help artists with fewer resources pursue their work.

Tatiana Musi

ROBERT POLIDORI

"I'm interested in the traces left by the passage of time in a room, a building or a city."
Robert Polidori confronts the phenomenon of the rampant growth of the so-called **cités sauvages**, whose uncontrolled spread around the edges of major cities follows no principle of urban planning, but is rather a direct result of socio-economic conditions. Robert Polidori is fascinated by such cities which "spring up suddenly and disappear again after 50 years. They are temporary structures that grow up out of necessity."
In contrast to his interiors, which are shot with a long exposure, these images are composed of many individual short-exposure photographs, which he pieces together into a composite image. Robert Polidori does not select just one decisive moment, but gives equal value to multiple "decisive moments".

Hotel Petra, Beirut, Lebanon, 2010

 2732 Orleans Avenue, New Orleans, 2005

Unknown location on the 800 block North Robertson Street, New Orleans, 2005

Downstairs from the paladar La Guarida, Concordia #418, Centro Habana, Havana, 1997

View from Vidya Nagar Slum of Chatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, 2009

Dashashwamedh Road, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India, 2007

Dashashwamedh Road, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India, 2007

I first started coming to India in late 1980's. It became immediately clear to me that photographing people in India was so much easier than practising photographic portraiture in the neighbouring countries. I was overwhelmed by the reaction of the people in the streets. I would just put the camera in my hand and look through its viewfinder and people would simply stop and pose. I had never experienced anything like this in any other country I had ever visited.

However, getting access to building locations for street-view photography proved to be a different matter altogether. The Indian urban space, being so tight and congested, needs some elevation which is best provided by roofs, so that you can visually describe the urban Indian cityscape in a photograph with some breath of perspective. Gaining access to these desirable locations is a very complicated and time-consuming activity in India, especially for a foreigner.

So, on a personal note I would like extend my thanks to Navneet Raman, director of the Kriti Gallery in Varanasi, for his dedicated and constant efforts in the procurement of these "points of views" for my photographic panoramic composites. I am especially grateful for his sustained belief in my vision of the contemporary Indian landscape, which does not try to avoid the obvious scars of recent industrialization.

I am not insensitive to the fact that I photograph what most Indians would like to forget about their daily surroundings. I understand this reaction, but hope that in the future, when many societal and cultural transformations have finally run their course, Indians will see the benefit of having high-resolution photographic documents tracing the urban transformations their cities have undergone during our contemporary era.

In closing, a special mention should be made of Kriti Gallery's cultural mission. With an aspiration surpassing the usual goal of just financial gain, its sense of purpose in promoting activities of cross-cultural pollenization charts an example for others to follow.

Robert Polidori

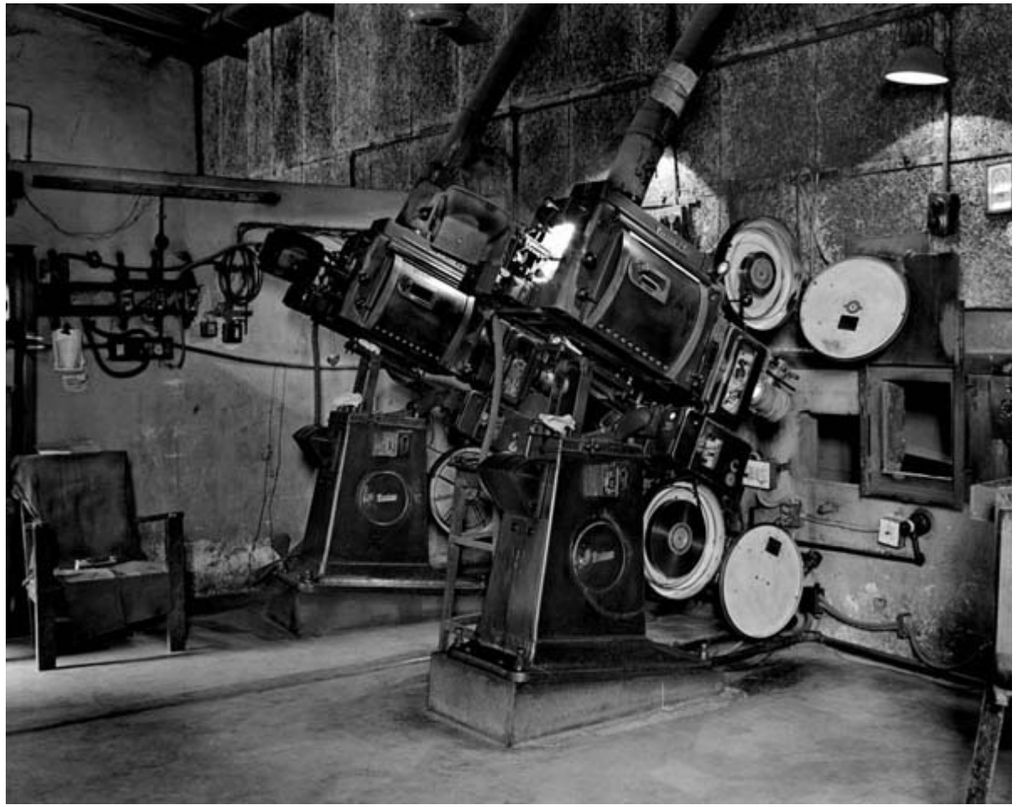
 Gupta Brothers, Azmatgarh Palace, Varanasi, India, 2007

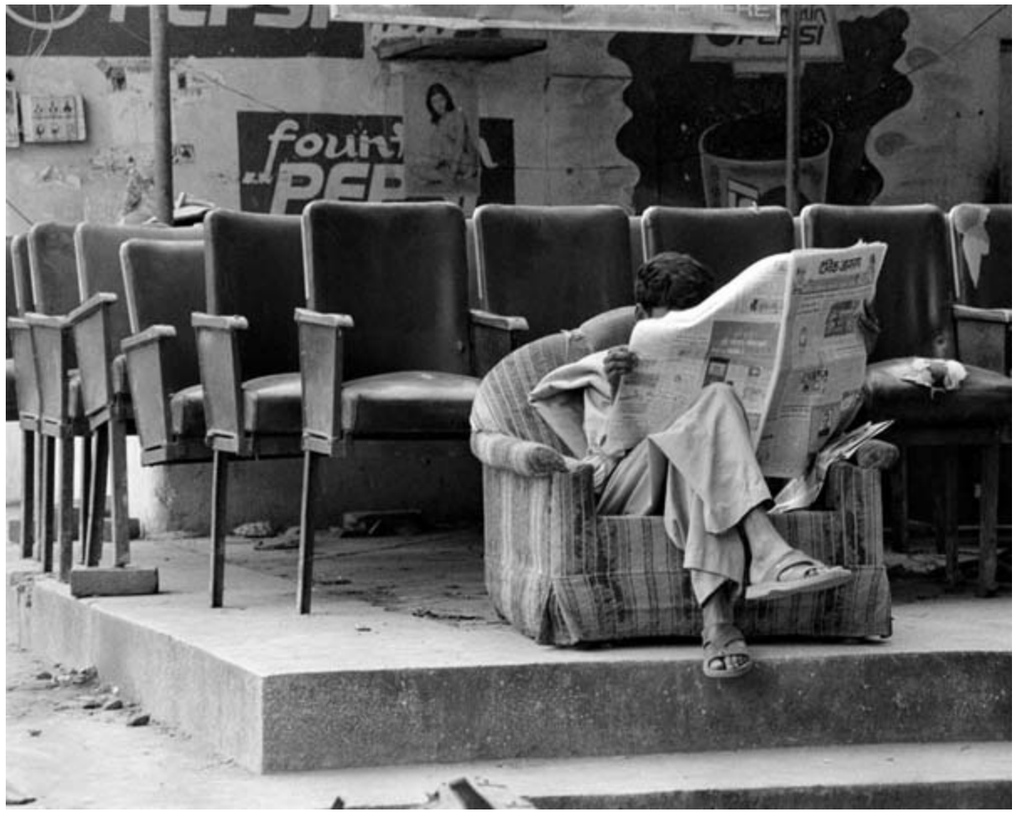
NANDITA RAMAN

Nandita Raman's photographs are quiet, meditative images about spaces that are filled with sound, light, drama and people. **Cinema Play House** is a visual document of the fast disappearing single-screen cinema theaters and the people who inhabit them. These shrinking spaces and the characters that inhabit them are captured, as is the passage of time.

The following images are from the **Cinema Play House** series, 2006-2009.

FILM
STORAGE





India has a long association with cinema. The first Indian feature film was made in 1899. Today the country is one of the largest film producers, making more than a thousand films a year, for an audience of 3.6 billion. The photographs in this series are shot in the old cinema halls in India built between 1930 and 1960.

My mother's family owned the first talkies cinema in my hometown, Varanasi, India. As a child a trip to the cinema was a big incentive. With my cousins, I would venture into the auditorium, explore the box office, projector rooms. I would collect the used bundles of tickets, posters, rejected film... almost anything that was part of the theatre and could be spared.

In the nineties, home video became popular in India and movie theaters struggled for business. Many theaters, including my family's, closed down. The turn of the century saw a come back of cinema halls, this time with smaller auditoriums and multiple screens. These theaters aimed at a standardized experience regardless of the cultural and aesthetic distinctness of the regions in India.

I am interested in the idiosyncrasies that exist in the cinema spaces. Most of the older single screen theaters were designed by the owners themselves. Some were designed to cater to the practical needs of the space while others were an opportunity to express their fancies. Either way, they didn't follow a template and each cinema was unique. These theaters seemed to contain cues to the psyche of the people who built them and who occupied them. As if the space and how it was arranged was an extension of the occupier's interior. For example, a ladder in place of the screen or chairs with the seating sequence broken and bubbles emerging from the crack in the upholstery. It is these reflections, these cues that I'm interested in; manifestations of interaction between the space and the people, over time.

Nandita Raman

BEATRIX REINHARDT

Beatrix Reinhardt entered an entirely masculine space in Banaras and was able to drop the boundaries of gender and culture to photograph the ancient wrestling tradition of the city. Her warm personality and deep engagement resulted in a meaningful relationship with the wrestlers and trainers, enabling the close proximity required to photograph. Her work is a study of the human body in both isolation and interaction. Beatrix Reinhardt has portrayed the sensual aspect of bodies in conflict.

The following images are from the **Ertüchtigung** series - **Chapter V, Mitti Kushti**, 2013.

The work I showed at Kriti Gallery is **Chapter V of the Ertüchtigung series** (German term for 'strengthening'). The 'modes of strengthening' that emerged over the centuries are based on belief, science, culture, crisis or development of thought... the list is endless. The series explores modes of 'strengthening', bodily or mental, in different parts of the world. The fifth chapter, 'Varanasi', investigates Indian mud wrestling or **mitti kushti**. Wrestling in India, particularly in Varanasi, goes back to ancient times. A certain form of wrestling was practiced before the one brought with the Mughal empire in 16th century: Bharatiya **kushti** (Indian wrestling) or simply **kushti**, as it is called.

In this country, where religion impregnates each act of everyday life, **kushti** has blurred the religious borders, just as music has done. Even though the Mughals brought it as a strong print of their identity, Hindus adapted to it by introducing religious rituals and dedicating the sport to their deities. Indian wrestling is also a way of ascetic living, implying not only intensive physical training, but also a code of ethics, hygiene, diet, sexual abstinence, devotion, discipline and a multitude of other moral values. This unique sport requires balancing of the body and spirit – it is a worship offered to the deepest human values, to the world of gods, to an ideal. The daily training takes place in an arena called **akhara**. A Guruji directs an **akhara**, dictates its rules. He is the backbone of the place. He defines the objectives and sanctions if they are needed. He is the coach, and also the leader.

The images were taken at the Akhara Bara Ganesha in Varanasi. While **kushti** is a sport that is heavily rooted in Hinduism and its values, what makes this **akhara** special is that both Hindu and Muslim men can train and fight here. Only a few **akharas** welcome Muslim fighters.

The project was developed in Varanasi and I wanted to share it with the people who I photographed and an audience who knew about the subject matter. This brought me back to my roots. I have done a variety of community-based projects in the past with populations such as gang members, rattle snake communities, farmers, or church communities.

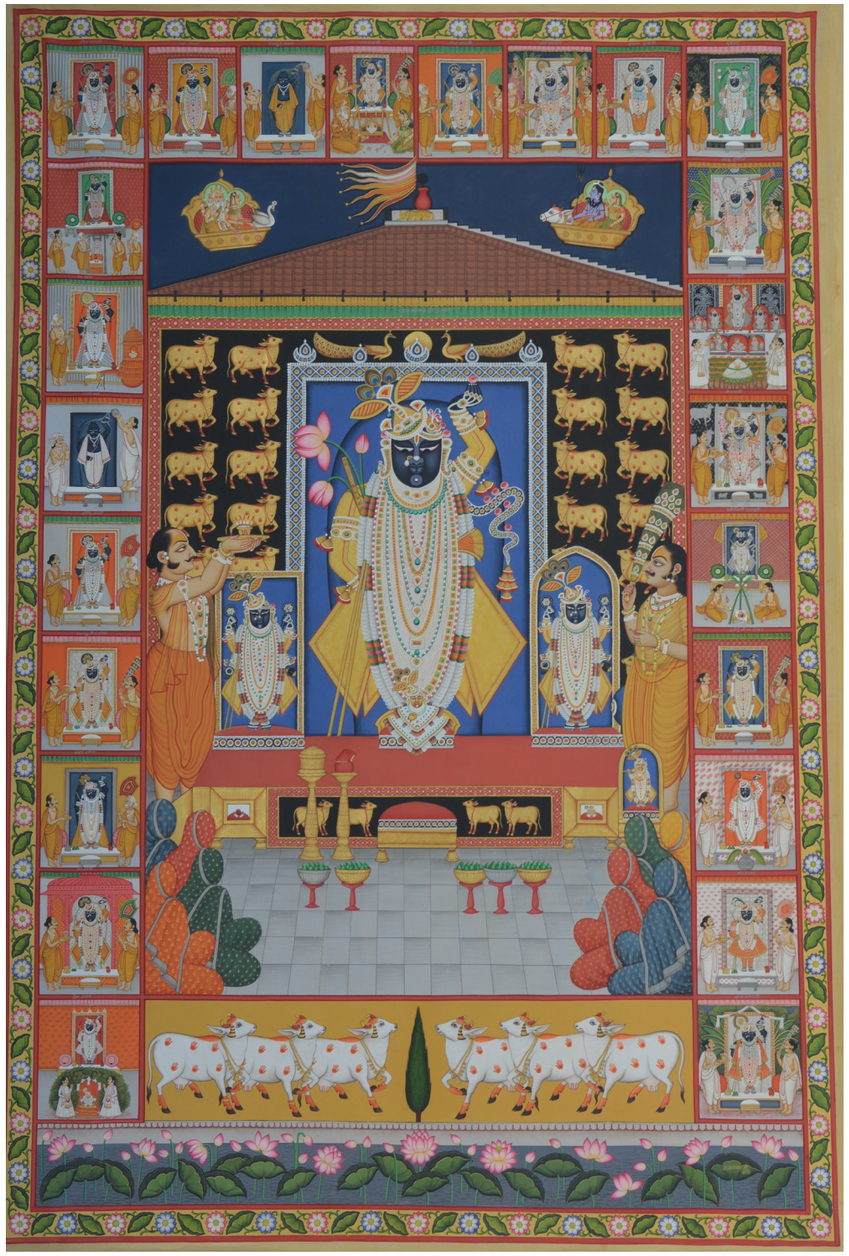
The interaction between my subject and myself took on varicoloured forms – such as giving disposable cameras to my 'sitters', living with the subject community, staying in letter exchange with the photographed after s/he receives a copy of her/his photograph or asking for a written response about photo exhibitions. The created and shared space between the communities and me is as important a component as the exhibition itself. The process of action and reaction is reflected in the work but also in how I photograph, and it has become essential in my choices of what, how and where I exhibit.

The mission of the art space that Navneet Raman created is an honest, brave, humongous and culturally important endeavor. Kriti Gallery is a place that advocates and hones cultural and artistic exchange. It dares to combine multiple difficult tasks in one space: exposing Varanasi to unfamiliar concepts of art, and cultivating and engaging an audience that is not accustomed to certain notions of art production and art consumption. At the same time, facilitating Western artists with diverse artistic approaches and processes, realizing their artistic projects. It is exactly this facet that makes Kriti exciting: The mix of these different people, motivated by very different modes of curiosity produce a unique and manifold discourse about art and life. It makes Kriti special and fresh.

Beatrix Reinhardt

RAJA RAM SHARMA

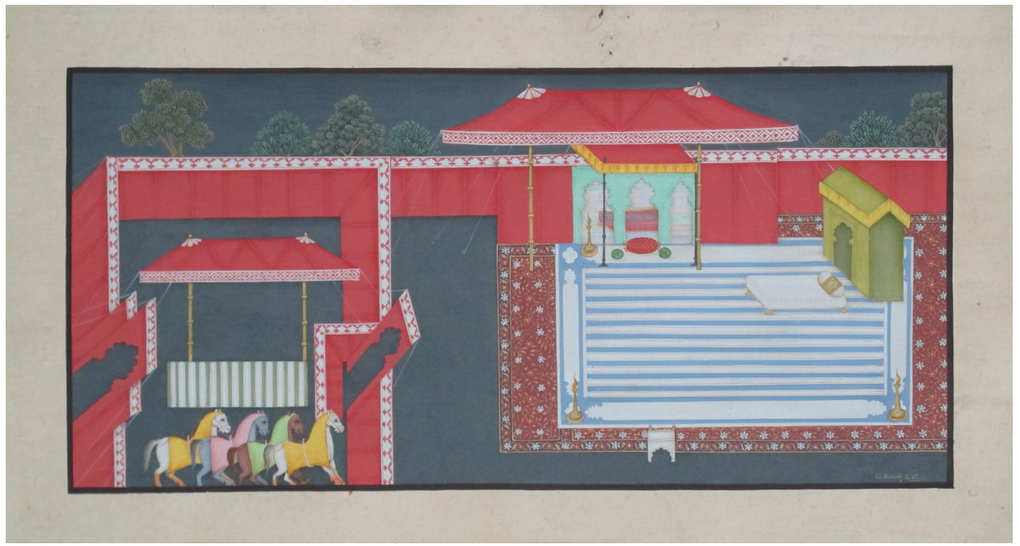
Raja Ram Sharma comes from the traditional school of Indian miniature paintings of Nathadwara. Studying with the great mentors of the school, he mastered the technique and developed a great eye for detail and observation of the world around him. His contemporary miniatures are a coming together of traditional techniques and a modern conception of society. Raja Ram Sharma has responded to contemporary realities via his own artistic sensibilities. In many of his paintings, it is the absences that speak volumes.



Gopashtami with twenty-four Swaroop, 2013
natural pigments and gum arabic on cloth

Held Back, 2014
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper

Held Back is Raja Ram Sharma's interpretation of the energy of the youth of the country being held back by invisible forces, like the near-invisible strings holding back the strong animals ready to march.



Ego, 2014
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper

In **Ego**, Sharma is evoking the fragile nature of the human ego, equating it with the impermanent structures he depicts

Emissaries of Peace, 2014
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper

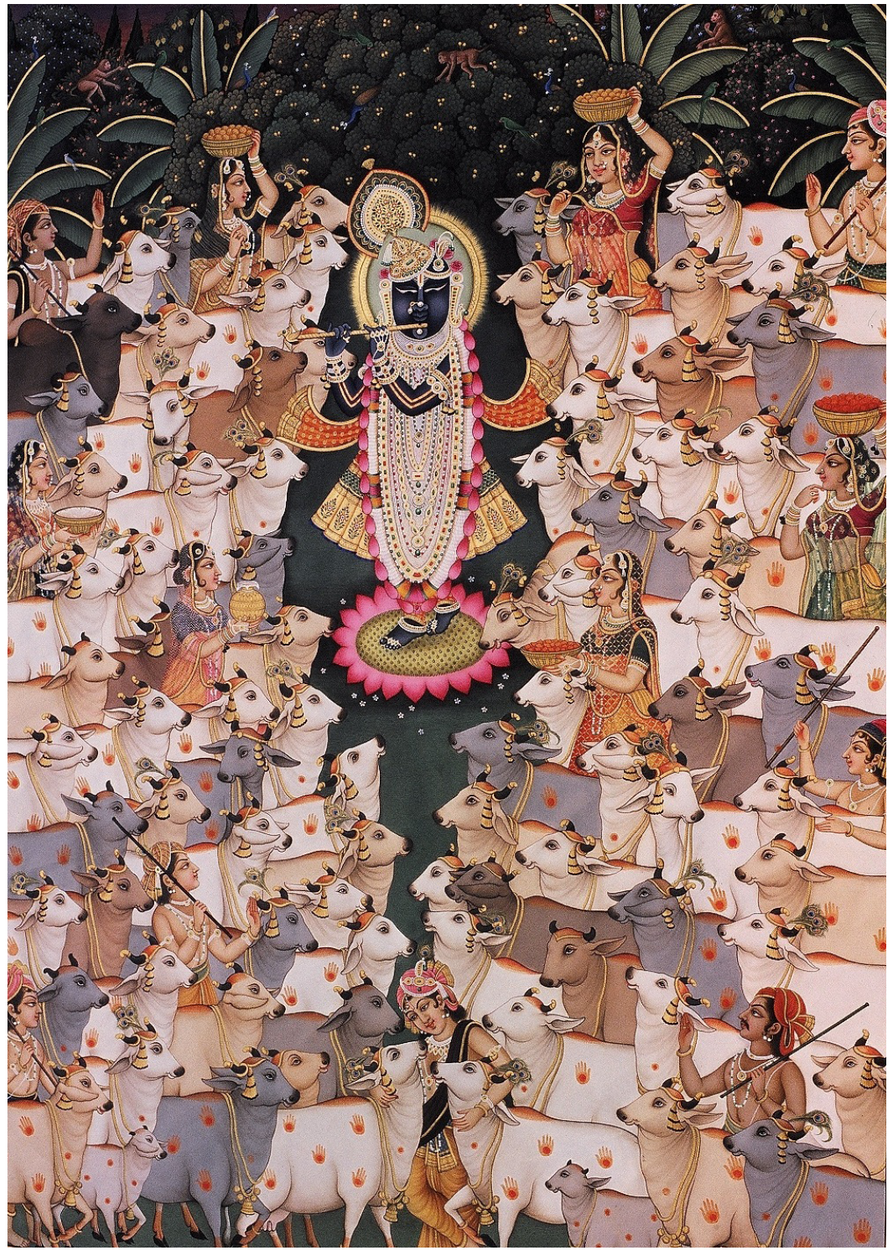
In **Emissaries of Peace**, Sharma is expressing the anguish and utter chaos in the formal peace process. The disoriented doves signify the haphazardness of peace talks around the world

Meeting for Two, 2014
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper

Sharma has painted all the paraphernalia of a meeting for two, but with the absence of the individuals in conversation, and with the various layers of walls, he suggests that the meeting is not actually meaningful. The real meeting is not even happening; it lacks creative ideas, a free flow of thoughts, or an attempt to arrive at solutions. The surroundings of the meeting are more important than the meeting itself.

Garden of Solitude, 2012
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper

Sharad Purnima, 2013
natural pigments and gum arabic on paper



Gopashtami (detail), 2000
natural pigments and gum arabic on cloth

In 1998, when my teacher Shri B.G. Sharma asked me to follow my own journey as an artist, I started out on my own. I was not sure of the path I had to take, but had confidence, as I had left home at the age of 13 to learn painting.

I took the blessings of Srinath Ji[1] and started working on my first painting of **Gopashtami**[2], a 4ft x 6ft work. In 1999 this painting won an award at the district level, but I did not sell it. Pichwai[3] was going to be my only source of livelihood and in those days Pichwai paintings did not get a good price. I was torn between worries of how to sustain my family and continue my artistic practice.

One day, Yugal Kishore Sharma, another painter from Udaipur, called me and asked if he could bring some people over who were interested in Pichwai Paintings. Navneet Raman arrived with his two friends, Robyn Beeche and Michael Duffy, and liked the two paintings they saw, one of which was the **Gopashtami** painting. I quoted the price of Rs 60,000, and they came with the money the next day and bought it. This was the start of my professional career.

Navneet stayed in touch with me and organized my painting workshop in Jnana Pravaha Museum, Varanasi, the next year. This has now become an annual feature. A new chapter started when Navneet introduced me to Victoria Munroe who was visiting from Boston and wanted to work with an Indian painter. She gave me an advance to paint four paintings – her condition was, I must paint what I wanted and not copy from elsewhere. The four paintings were shown as a group show and sold well, and thus started a series of paintings which were shown in Boston and East Hampton. I felt a very special relationship developing between Navneet and myself, and his love for my work.

My journey is one that has several overlaps with Navneet and his journey in the art world. I received a call from him when he came back from Victoria Munroe Fine Art Gallery in Boston after training and told me that Kriti Gallery will start with a show of my works. Thus started the journey of Kriti Gallery and I became its first artist. Since then we have had three shows at Kriti and more than eight exhibitions in the USA at Victoria Munroe Fine Art Gallery and The Drawing Room.

When I look back at the fond memories of the beginning of my artistic voyage, I see the coming together of Navneet and myself forming the beautiful fabric of this journey. Kriti Gallery has come a long way from the first exhibition and I am sure the way ahead will be one as enjoyable as the past 14 years of our journey together.

Raja Ram Sharma

[1] The deity Srinathji is worshipped primarily in Rajasthan as a manifestation of Lord Krishna and the main Srinathji Temple stands at the heart of the small town of Nathadwara.
[2] A complex style of devotional painting from Nathdwara town in Rajasthan. The paintings depict images and stories of Srinath ji. The paintings are an offering of devotion to the god.
[3] This festival, for devotees of Lord Krishna, celebrates the day when the young boy Krishna was given the charge of herding cows. Cows are an important motif in the life story of the lord.

FAZAL SHEIKH

Fazal Sheikh's concern with international issues of human rights has led him not only to pictures of people living under conditions of displacement and duress, but to a larger process of meditation on how these kind of images may most ethically be conceived.

His work **Ether** is a collection of photographs made while walking at night in Banaras. It is a poem about sleep and death with a double approach, both visual and conceptual. It is Fazal Sheikh's first work in colour and even though the prints' are small in size, they have the capacity to pull the viewer inside.

The intense life of the city of Banaras, which contains both its own population and countless religious visitors, is invisible in these works. Instead, we find only those left in the streets late at night: corpses awaiting cremation, sleepers waiting to wake. The ambiguity is deliberate and irresolvable, and extends beyond the question of mortality. The bodies become sculptural volumes, enigmatic shapes…

The following images are from the **Ether** series, 2008-2012.

ARCHNA SINGH

Archna Singh is one of the few women wildlife photographers in India. Her understanding of wildlife, and the patience this field requires, leads to the opportunities for her photography. The artist's choice of presenting her work through life-size prints creates a different perspective for the viewer in an urban exhibition space.

The beauty of nature becomes much more accessible and easy to appreciate. Through her work, Archna Singh is creating awareness and sensitivity towards the importance, as well as sheer beauty, of nature in the wild.

Lion, Masai Mara, Kenya, 2012

Cheetah Eyes, Kruger National Park, South Africa, 2011

Leopard on Tree, Masai Mara, Kenya, 2012

My artistic journey has been one of inner discovery and has unerringly led me to combine a passion for photography with a deep love of wildlife. An expedition to the Kruger National Park in South Africa in 2011 led to one of my first projects; an audio-visual show, 'Beauty in the Beast', at the India Habitat Center, Delhi, in March 2012. It created awareness not only about the beauty that surrounds us but also brought into focus the various areas that need our immediate attention for wildlife conservation.

This was the journey that made me fall in love with Africa and its animals, and made me return there repeatedly. I began visiting different African countries every year and have extensively covered the major national parks in Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana. My love for tigers also keeps pulling me to the Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan. I have also shot at various remote and restricted areas in Ladakh. I hope to show the world my passion for photography through Orah Wildlife™, an amalgam of my desire to immerse myself in the world of wild animals and work towards raising awareness and participate in conservation efforts.

I showed my work at Kriti Gallery in 2013. This constituted selected prints from my Delhi exhibition. I was curious about Kriti and what it had to offer in a relatively small and conservative city like Varanasi. I was intrigued by the fact that a lot of foreign artists come here to work and show their work.

The reaction of the public in Varanasi was very stimulating. As a wildlife photographer, I'm interested in conservation and when I shoot a subject I'm trying to create awareness about that subject. For this, Kriti Gallery helped me approach schools and photography clubs. The response was fabulous. People would just walk in the gallery from the street and relate to the photographs, ask questions, and interact.

I felt that the connection was deeper than in a bigger metro like Delhi. In Varanasi, I could see that both adults and children were learning something new and this gave me immense satisfaction and a feeling of contributing a bit to the city. The children who visited the exhibition in Varanasi didn't even know the basic differences between a cheetah and a leopard or a lion and a tiger. The sole purpose of my exhibition was to create awareness and I feel that this was fulfilled.

I want to capture the intrinsic beauty and emotions of these animals through the lens by constantly pushing all the boundaries around me. I go to these forests alone because I like to do things my own way and with wildlife you have to be very patient. I hire a jeep exclusively for myself and work on my own. My work is not mere pictures recorded on film but an expression of my personal philosophy. Every photograph represents the refusal to be held back and to be shackled by any perceived constraints or norms. Through colour, light and shadows, I create my photography.

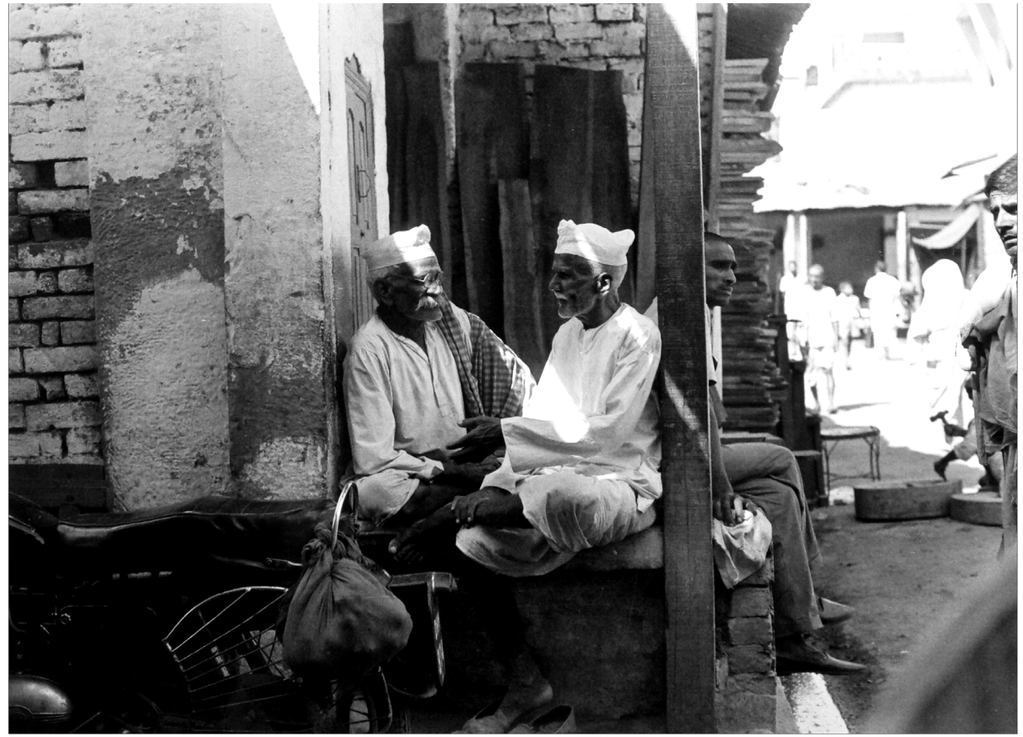
Archna Singh

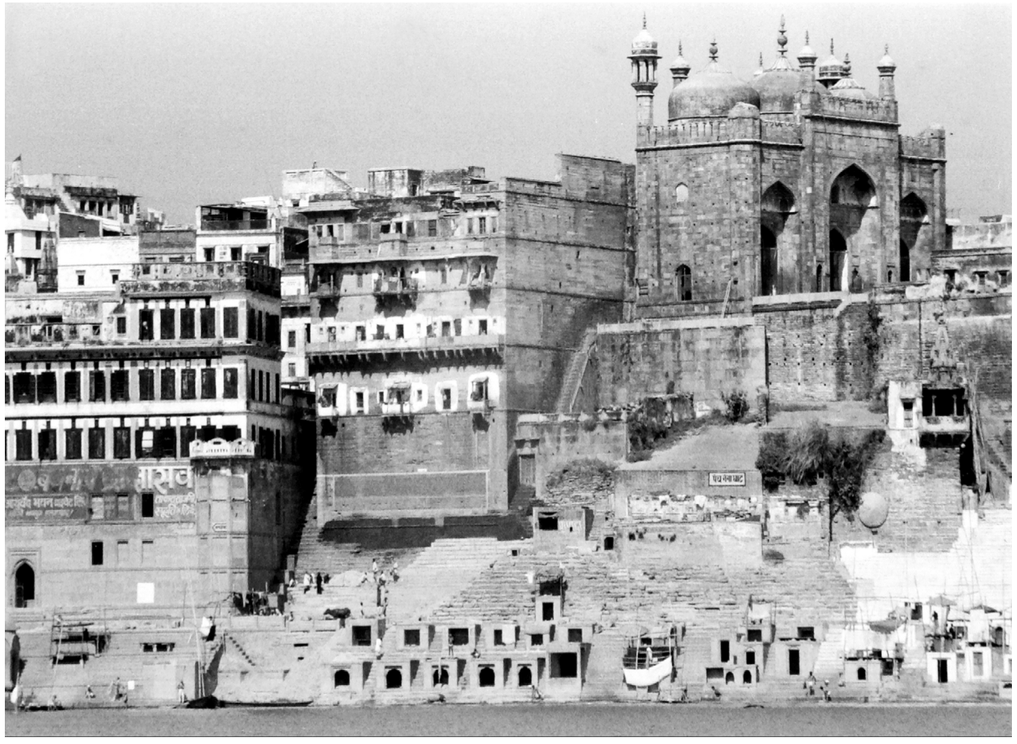
 Gerenuk, Samburu National Park, Kenya, 2012

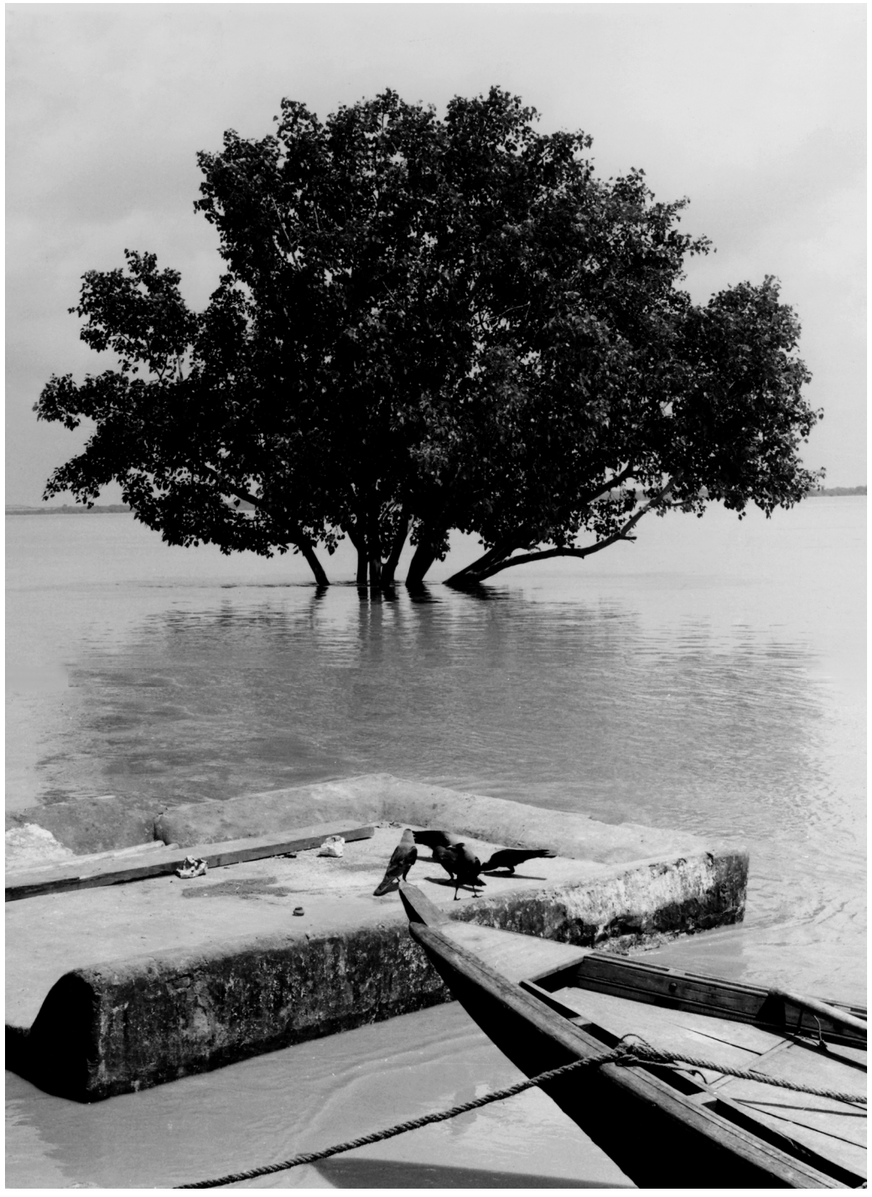
NORMAN SMITH

Norman Smith spent time in Banaras between 1971 and 1974 and through his keen eye and observation documented the life and culture of the city. His unassuming presence, deep enquiry, and understanding are clearly visible in his photographs, which are also a visual reference for the city. Banaras is going through a phase of unplanned development under which the city is losing connection with its history and culture. Norman Smith's images are a way of revisiting the past, and looking at what needs to be preserved and cared for. The poems of Kabir, values deep-rooted in Hindu traditions and beliefs, and the simplicity of the Banaras lifestyle echo in his photographs.

The following images are from the **Eternal Banaras** series, 1971-1974.







The first time I saw an exhibition in Kriti several years ago made me realize it was the only gallery in Benares that showcased art of an international standard. The exhibition was of a South American painter whose credentials were from exceptionally well known art schools in Europe. I inquired about the price of one of the paintings and wondered if anyone in Benares would pay such an amount, even for a highly talented artist.

Since then my association with Kriti has made me understand that it takes an individual with vision and disregard of finance to establish such a gallery. Perhaps it is due to Navneet's exposure to J. Krishnamurti's education, an apprenticeship in an American art gallery or visits to many European galleries and speaking with those curators and owners. Surely, he has been influenced by the traditional customs of his own family wherein artists were supported and encouraged to pursue beauty.

Having started such an art gallery 10 years ago, Navneet could have been criticized for being ahead of his time and out of step with the local community. However, now there is a growing awareness in Benares and other cities in India recognizing his forethought and contribution to the art scene. Kriti has become an established institution with many international artists now supporting and backing the gallery. The awareness in the community in Benares has grown so much so that all the numerous media outlets are vying to publicise news about Kriti.

There were 9 different newspaper articles about the most recent exhibition, as well as TV interest. I am reminded of an exhibition last year by an international artist that portrayed some aspects of the local community. I saw dozens of local people, who had never been to an art gallery previously, come along with their families. His dream from a decade ago has now become a reality.

I can say that for me, it has been a pleasure and honour to be associated with Navneet. I have learned a lot about how one selects work and curates to maintain high standards. Last year the gallery achieved a large number of sales to both local and international art collectors. Congratulations are in order for perseverance against all odds and remaining faithful to his vision for art in Benares.

Norman Smith

LOUISE CHAPPEL & SEBASTIEN TICKNER

Louise Chappel and Sebastien Tickner are a photographic duo that travels the world with a portable dark room studio. In Banaras, they photographed with a Rolleiflex and developed their photographs on site using a special technique of printing on hand sensitized watercolour paper. Their works are an amalgamation of watercolour and photographic technique, which gives texture and unique tone to their black-and-white photographs.

The following images are from the **Varanasi City in our Time** series, 2004-2010.

"To find peace one must understand beauty, that is why it is important, while we are very young, to have beauty about us. In understanding what beauty is, we shall know love, for the understanding of beauty is the peace of the heart."

J. Krishnamurti

Our journey with Navneet Raman and Kriti Gallery began as a chance encounter in the cold month of December when the fog settles on the Ganges and everyone is wrapped up in mufflers and shawls. For us it was the end of a long journey: eleven months on the road with all the trials and joys that brings; for Navneet a time of exhibitions to organise and plans to create the Banaras Visual Archive. In the moments that the month gave us, we shared ideas over tea on the lawn and strolls through the grounds of the Rajghat Besant School, exchanging ideas and coming to understand Navneet's vision for Kriti Gallery. And by the end of that month it was decided that we would organise an exhibition of our work which would become the first series to enter the Banaras Visual Archive.

For us, India was a home away from home - for six years we had been travelling the country extensively, always returning to Varanasi for months at a time to photograph and to rest, to stay still and enjoy the beauty of the city, and to appreciate the variety of life that the differing seasons bring. It was a city that had captured our imaginations, a place where the traditions of the past coexisted with the forces of modernity. Amid the chaos and the noise we saw beauty and peace, and it was these moments of calm that we sought to capture and share through our work.

Moments of everyday life caught our attention: a game of chess between friends, a newspaper read in the first warm rays of light, the simple experiences we all share beneath the bustle of first impressions. And alongside this simple beauty, the beauty of strength - the strength of those who make up the cast of our experience, of the devout in a changing world, of all of those who continue to survive in a harsh city. Varanasi is spectacular and to have exhibited these images in the place from which they were distilled could not have been more fitting.

Kriti Gallery – an oasis of calm in Varanasi's turmoil – provided the perfect opportunity to breathe and take a moment to reflect. To have been a part of Kriti was an exciting and rewarding experience. Varanasi must look to its future, and with such a long tradition as a place of learning and a centre of creativity, it must continue to give these ideals home in the modern world. At Kriti, they have combined an appreciation of historical artistic methods with an international platform for contemporary work that will, we hope, ensure Varanasi's continued importance as an artistic centre through the 21st century.

Louise Chappel and Sebastien Tickner

Navneet Raman interviewed by Vittoria Bonifati

VB **At what point did you get interested in art?**

NR When I was 12 years old, I started to get interested in photography and this became my entry to the world of art.

VB **Can you tell us about Kriti, your gallery, and your vision?**

NR The gallery is a place of interaction among people and between people and art; a place where art, artists, foreigners and locals can come together. We want people to feel comfortable. Anyone is welcome, whether they come in to look at art or to sit in the garden and just take some time for themselves. We would like to establish a literature cafè, where we have interesting talks, film screenings and workshops. It's not a profit-oriented idea, but it would give the place more atmosphere and invite people to spend more time here. That's when the real interaction happens. In India there are not too many places like this, especially away from the metros.
Furthermore, as Kriti means "creation", the gallery is also thought of as a place where people become more creative and, thus, less aggressive… I'm taking about violence in humanity. For example, if youngsters interact with art they might find another language to help them communicate emotions. I think this makes them "softer". I try to set an example and hope that it has a replica effect: from the gallery, to the neighbourhood, maybe the city of Varanasi and who knows… so many people from all over the world come to visit Banaras, they might take this back to their countries, as well.
Having said this, I have specific parameters for the gallery's programme: I will show the finest art that I can bring to Banaras. I look at art as such, and not as Indian Art, German Art, American Art and so forth.

VB **Through your gallery and the art you show you want to soften the soul of people that come and visit it. What do you mean by this?**

NR Yes, but without forcing them. The gallery is only there to create an opportunity. When I was at school and I learnt about art and crafts, I realized that I became much "softer" than my friends who didn't. When you start to work with clay or wood you start to work with nature and you start to be more aware of what's around you. Suddenly your senses open up and new dimensions unfold, even more so at an early age.
I especially realized this when I returned to Banaras to work with school children for 3 years on environmental, ecological and harvesting programmes. In some way I wanted to continue working with them and I thought since there are more than 40,000 students in Varanasi, if I create a place where they can come to, it would become much easier to approach them.

VB **What's your relationship with university students?**

NR Kriti offers residency programmes to artists who wish to experience and live in the city of Banaras. They are coming from all over the world to stay with us from

one-to-six months with a wish to develop their work. In exchange all resident artists offer talks at the Banaras Hindu University. We also organize open studio visits so that art students can interact with artists. But, university students are welcome at the gallery any time.

VB **What's the situation of art in India? Is there a true 'art scene'?**

NR I don't think so. This is a large country so I can't say there's no art happening, but there is no serious and meaningful 'art scene'. A 'scene' can only come to life when there is a broader audience of people using art to express themselves and their ideas, and when a lot of exchange and interaction is taking place. I don't see this happening in India.

VB **Do you think there is a reason for this?**

NR The art schools have very little idea of finding a way to nurture the scene. The root of the problem lies within the way art is taught. In our schools, students are denied the chance to learn about 800 years of Indian Art practices, including miniature paintings: its techniques, aesthetics and narrative drawings. Instead, they are given posters depicting the work of western modern artists, such as Monet or Van Gogh, in order to learn how to copy them. There are a few exceptions that stand out: Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, MS University of Baroda and JJ School of Arts, Mumbai.

In India, art is not considered a desirable profession because it's still very much related with crafts. If you look at university entrance programmes for art courses in India, the required standards for application are not very high, especially if compared with other courses. I'm making a very general statement but in today's world, where numbers matter more than quality, I would guess that from a batch of 200 students there may be only about 10 who really want to study art.
This is different for Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan; you don't go there unless you are motivated to study art and the entry criteria are much more stringent. Also MS University, Baroda, a much bigger university, has a seriously good art department. Serious artists teach the students, many of who stay in Baroda after they complete their masters. This creates a positive interaction between the alumni, who have the chance to visit studios of former students.
In my opinion Baroda is a very interesting city for contemporary art in India.

VB **How do these schools stand out, what makes them different?**

NR They are against a western structure, a western view of education and I suppose that's the reason why these two places try to do things differently. They have more Indian-ness in their arts education program. At Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, one doesn't only study Indian art but all aspects of Indian culture, like music and mythology. This gives students a much broader knowledge and stronger foundation, allowing them to draw inspiration from a much more rich background rooted in their own culture. It is a true treasure-house. Furthermore, art cannot be created under pressure. Art needs time and thought, as it's a manifestation of what one holds within. Thus, students also need to be taught how to question themselves, but this concept does not exist in the way we teach them.

VB **Between 2008 and 2011, Indian Art received a lot of attention both from international institutions and the art market. What happened since then?**

NR During those years the scene was not an art scene, rather it was a bubble of the art market. I think the art scene still needs to develop. The market can have ups and downs, but if there is a true art scene, it stays. Art in India is very self-focused and looked upon only as an investment. Only art that has a lot of depth, gravity and strength survives these shifts created by the art market. Suddenly the focus is on China, then on Japan, then the Arab Emirates, and tomorrow everyone would be looking at someplace else. If the art scene in a country has strength, even if the market attention shifts, there will always be people looking at it. And this did not happen to India.

VB **Can you tell us more about Kriti's residency program?**

NR A residency can be a great opportunity for artists who are interested in India and really want to experience and live Varanasi. While many Indian places have their own traditions of concerts and events, many do not, and also in a larger sense, it is very important that an interactive life grows around such events.
In Banaras, for instance, deeper cultural interaction, discussions, meeting interesting local people, getting a cultural flavour of the place… is often possible only in private events hosted by local families. For a foreigner – or even an Indian from another city – who spends a few months in Varanasi, accessing something like this won't be an easy task, since such events are not advertised. In Kriti's context, such possibilities are made real.

Artists can meet like-minded people, talk and work with other artists, and of course they can benefit from the gallery's ambience, as well as activities, workshops and lectures. We are open to every kind of artist: writers, painters, photographers, sculptures, visual artists.... The residency is what each person makes of it. We like to focus on the fact that there won't be a final exhibition at the end of the residency and the majority of the artists agree. I think that if the artists have to deliver an exhibition by the end, their mind will become anxious and preoccupied, and this will influence their work and experience.

The residency is an opportunity to give artists the time to interact with the city of Banaras and with Indian culture. That's why we don't want to impose too many criteria. We leave it to the artist and provide, more than anything else, the sheer luxury of time.

Afterword

The 10-year journey of Kriti Gallery would not have been possible without the helping hand of a countless number of people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all, and to try and find a way to mention them individually. This publication was conceived as a way to acknowledge the artists who have made Kriti what it is and who are the pillars and strength that holds Kriti Gallery together. This is a celebration of the friendships, collaborations, and coming together of people from around the world.

I would firstly like to acknowledge my family: my mother Aruna Raman, my father Shanti Raman and my sister Nandita Raman, for their support, belief and encouragement in this initiative. I would like to thank Robyn Beeche and Michael Duffy for their encouragement and invaluable introduction to the world of art. Brij Bhasin has influenced the way I look at things as he quietly guided and influenced my eye.

When the thought of the Gallery came up, it was Victoria Munroe and her generous motivation and support that became the foundation stone of the idea. Victoria Munroe Fine Art in Boston and Elizabeth Reluga guided me through the labyrinths of setting up a gallery. I consider myself a student of the Victoria Munroe School.

When the gallery opened its doors, several people came forward with their guidance and help. Dayanita Singh was among the first to extend her encouragement. Fazal Sheikh, with his soft, generous nature, was always present; his art and personality have been a source of constant inspiration. Robert Polidori has been a veritable pillar. His last 10 years of photography in India have been a great learning process for me and have helped start a process of reflection regarding my own country, India. His generous contribution to Kriti Gallery is an invaluable resource.

In 2006, the vision of starting an Artist-in-Residence programme took shape, but only thanks to the help and encouragement of Rashna Imhasly, O.P. Jain and Robyn Beeche. KSK Switzerland, which is now SKK Switzerland, and Eszter Gyarmathy were indispensable at this stage, being the first collaborators on this project, which lasted 6 years and enabled us to host 36 Swiss artists at Kriti Art Recidency. Chandrika Grover and Pro Helvetia supported the Swiss artists in Banaras and also gave me an opportunity to work with the FOTOMUSEUM, Winterthur in 2007. We are now hoping to be able to create a museum for the visual history of the city of Banaras together with a Museum of Photography. Urs Stahel, Thomas Seeling, Therese Seeholzer, Andrea Widmer, Oliver Gubser, and Teresa Gruber from the FOTOMUSEUM helped me understand the working of a museum in a short span of 2 months and continue to guide me in response to my queries.

Norman Smith came to visit the gallery in 2009 and became an integral part of it. I can only say that he is god's gift to Kriti Gallery. His quiet unassuming presence might not be felt by many but his contribution is unparalleled.

This acknowledgment would be incomplete without a tribute to Petra Manefeld, who has stood by me tirelessly, and who joined the Kriti Gallery in 2007. Her contribution to the gallery and the Artist-in-Residence programme cannot be described in words though I feel it profoundly every day. Her experience of working in a multinational environment has helped Kriti Gallery move to the next level. She has been my strength for the last 7 years through the ups and downs of my life and work.

Needless to say, it is the people who make an organization and it is the great team we have at Kriti that makes it what it is. Chinta, Anup, Subhash, Sonu and Gabbar are the force behind this organisation.

Vallery has been of great help with all the different designing projects of Kriti Gallery. Juhi Saklani is a dear friend and writer who wrote about our first exhibition years ago and continues to share her thoughts and words with great generosity.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Vittoria Bonifati for joining us in this project of celebration by accepting to curate the **10 Year Book**. The idea would not have taken shape if she had not joined the project.

One last point: In all the artists's statements, the names Varanasi and Banaras have been used interchangeably. This depicts the multifaceted nature of our city, as well as the sometimes official-sometimes intimate relationship that a visitor comes to develop with it. We have let this quirk remain.

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