

***Visions of India* is the first major survey exhibition of Indian photography in Australia**



Image: Karen KNORR *The Queen's room, Zanana, Udaipur City Palace, Udaipur* 2010 pigment ink-jet print courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) (Bengaluru)

Visions of India: from the colonial to the contemporary

Monash Gallery of Art | 17 December 2021 – 20 March 2022

Curator: Nathaniel Gaskell

Monash Gallery of Art (MGA) announce the upcoming exhibition *Visions of India: from the colonial to the contemporary* featuring works from the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru.

Since its invention in Europe in the 1840s, the genre of photography has played an integral role in the course of Indian art history. Although it is often quoted that India is the most photographed country in the world, the history of its representation is more complicated, and more political than initially meets the eye.

Within just a few months of its invention, the camera arrived in the subcontinent at the height of British colonial rule. Photographs from the time typically served the colonial purpose of

administration and control, and thus, often reflected colonial views. Over the subsequent few decades, and at an unprecedented scale, India – its landscapes, people, traditions and archaeological history – was catalogued for the colonial eye and transformed into a governable ‘object.’

Visions of India: from the colonial to the contemporary will be the first major survey of Indian photography in Australia, and all artworks showcased will be from the collection of Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru, which is one of the most celebrated photographic collections in India. The exhibition will be on view at MGA until 20 March 2022.

‘While this exhibition takes the context of colonialism as an entry point – both chronologically and conceptually – the historical arc of photography in India extends far beyond this initial point of contact, encompassing a range of shifts in artistic, cultural and political attitudes, and other voices who exist outside the traditional canon.’

‘With this exhibition, we will uncover not only the primary history of the genre, but also the multiple parallel and lesser-known photographic practices in the subcontinent that re-emphasise the diverse and socially significant story of Indian photography.’ – Nathaniel Gaskell, curator



Images: Samuel BOURNE **Taj Mahal, Agra** c. 1860 albumen print and JOHNSTON & HOFFMANN **Maharaja Sir Bhagwati Prasad Singh** 1915 hand-painted albumen print courtesy of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) (Bengaluru)

One such narrative will be highlighted through a section looking at the work of Suresh Punjabi, the photographer and owner of the Studio Suhag in Nagda, Madhya Pradesh, established in 1979. Punjabi made portraits for a broad set of purposes, from wedding and family albums to passport photos to personal souvenirs. Working at the time in a small 10 x 20 feet studio. His photographs chronicle the human drama of life in a small-town in the heart of India; a history told through faces and attest to the existence of vast and distinct photographic histories that extend beyond formal archives and institutions.



Images: Suresh PUNJABI *Untitled (Portrait of a man holding a bird)*, Suhag Studio, Nagda, Madhya Pradesh 1987 and *Untitled (Full-length portrait of a man)*, Suhag Studio, Nagda, Madhya Pradesh 1985 pigment ink-jet prints courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) (Bengaluru)

‘Visions of India: from the colonial to the contemporary offers a journey through one of the most complex and photographed countries in the world. This ground-breaking exhibition is curated by Nathaniel Gaskell from MAP’s unique photographic collection specifically for MGA. For many of our audience members, this may be their first encounter with these artists, their works and even with the history of India, while others may recognise places or feel resonance with their Indian cultural heritage.’

‘The exhibition draws together an array of unique and fascinating works from the earliest days of colonial India through to some of the nation’s most remarkable contemporary photographers, in the first survey of its kind in Australia.’ – Anouska Phizacklea, MGA Gallery Director

The exhibition will begin its journey from 1860 onwards, displaying portraits of India’s ruling elite by pioneering photographers and studios of the time, such as Samuel Bourne, Francis Frith & Co., Felicé Beato, Willoughby Wallace Hooper, Lala Deen Dayal and Khubiram Gopilal, as well as looking at some more creative, non-commercial studios, such as that of Maharaja Ram Singh II, ‘The photographer Prince’ who had established a studio at his palace in Jaipur.

Entering the decades following India’s independence in 1947, the exhibition will showcase works by well-known mid-century European photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson to reveal how photography remained entrenched in orientalist ways of seeing, for the benefit of Western media. However, a number of Indian photographers, such as Mitter Bedi and Jyoti Bhatt, were also using photography to represent tradition, inequity and modernity in a changing world, responding to the industrialisation and the economic progress of the country.

The third section, featuring photographic practices from the 1990s onwards, will highlight themes of Western hegemony, postcolonialism, identity politics and the ethics of representation through the works of celebrated contemporary photographers, Pushpamala N and her collaborator Clare Arni, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Anoli Perera, and Michael Bühler-Rose, an American ordained Hindu priest who pledges spiritual allegiance to India whilst working from his studios in both Mysore and New York.

Over the century-and-a-half since it was introduced in India, photography has lived many lives, yet its commercial and artistic trajectories remain deeply influenced by its colonial origin. The exhibition divided across three broad periods — the colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary — will allow viewers to see photography in the subcontinent as not just a product of political, cultural and material transformations but also as a space where centuries-old biases are reflected, countered and contested.

Artists: Darogah Abbas Ali, Indu Antony, Felice Beato, Mitter Bedi, Jyoti Bhatt, Bourne & Shepherd, Samuel Bourne, Michael Bühler-Rose, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Chunni Lall & Co., Lala Deen Dayal, Francis Frith & Co., Gauri Gill, Khubiram Gopilal, Hamilton Studios Ltd, Johnston and Hoffmann, Willoughby Wallace Hooper, William Johnson, John William Kaye and John Forbes Watson, Karen Knorr, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Steve McCurry, Saché & Murray Studios, Pushpamala N with Clare ARNI, Nicolas & Company (attributed), Norman Parkinson, Anoli Perera, Suresh Punjabi, Marc Riboud, John Edward Saché, Charles Scott, Sawai Ram Singh II, Maharaja of Jaipur, Edward Taurines (attributed), Waswo X Waswo, Wiele and Klein Studio, Wilson Studios Bombay

Curator: Nathaniel Gaskell is a curator, writer and director of the MAP Academy, Bengaluru, and the former director of the Tasveer Gallery. He is the author of *Photography in India: a visual history from the 1850s to the present* (Prestel, 2018), and editor of several other books on photography in Asia, including William Dalrymple's *The historian's eye* (HarperCollins India), Derry Moore's *In the shadow of the Raj* (Prestel, 2017) and Karan Kapoor's *Time & tide and Hikari: contemporary Photography from Japan*.

EXHIBITION LAUNCH | Saturday 18 December 2021

An exhibition launch will be held at MGA, 2-4pm.

For more information visit: [Visions of India: from the colonial to the contemporary | MGA: the Australian home of photography](#)

Please contact mga@monash.vic.gov.au for further information, images or to request interviews.