



Digital Dialogues

DANIEL OPPENHEIM RELIVES HIS INTERACTIONS WITH THE PEOPLE OF KOLKATA AND BANGALORE THROUGH AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN NEW YORK

NIKITA PURI

A BUSINESS trip, that is what it essentially was. But New York-based Daniel Oppenheim managed to steal a few hours from his official and maiden trip to India, the offshoot of which is now seen at the Ossining Public Library in Ossining, New York. When Oppenheim carried his camera along for the trip, his intention was to indulge in some nature photography; instead he went home with images of people who looked straight into the camera.

In the show titled "Kolkata-Bangaluru

niques. He also tried teaching me studio techniques for shooting models, often nudes, but I was too shy to follow through. So I'd give him my camera and learn later, while developing his shots in my darkroom," says the photographer, who has worked with IBM Research for more than 20 years and holds three degrees in music.

DISCOVERING INDIA

THE marketplaces in Bangalore were not different from the type I knew well in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, in my home country of Israel. However, my experi-



(Clockwise from left) Photos of a merchant in Bangalore; Daniel Oppenheim; girls in

tracted me, and is something I will now be on the look out for in the future," he says.

REALITY CHECK

A RECENT exhibition Oppenheim saw, "Eyes Wide Shut" by photographer/filmmaker Stanley Kubrick in Vienna, stuck a familiar chord. "The images were made well before he got into filmmaking, but one can trace a direct path from his photographs to his movies. Kubrick was praised for capturing realistic images of people when, in fact, his approach wasn't realism at all. To paraphrase him, 'Reality is good, but stories are more interesting'. His photographs were meticulously

SHOW Stealers

DELHI
Step in Time



THE teachings of eminent Kathak dancers Pandit Birju Maharaj, Saswati Sen and Molly Roy can be seen in the style of their student Dwaipayan Das. Das will present a Kathak recital at India Habitat Centre on August 21. Contact: 43663169

Key Notes



KEYS TO India: When the Piano Meets the Piano is a jugalbandi between Sharik Hasan, an eminent jazz pianist, and Anil Srinivasan, a Chennai-based Western classical pianist. At India International Centre on August 25. Contact: 24619431

MUMBAI
Engaging Dance



maiden trip to India, the offshoot of which is now seen at the Ossining Public Library in Ossining, New York. When Oppenheim carried his camera along for the trip, his intention was to indulge in some nature photography; instead he went home with images of people who looked straight into the camera.

In the show titled "Kolkata-Bengaluru Journal", which is on at the library till the end of August, images of bazaar and slum inhabitants from across the two cities make their presence felt through prints measuring between 30x30 to 40x40 inches.

TOTAL RECALL

AS A teenager in Jerusalem, Oppenheim remembers building his own darkroom. "I had a neighbour who was a professional photographer. He taught me all about composition, light and darkroom tech-

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DISCOVERING INDIA

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knew well in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, in my home country of Israel. However, my experiences there were unlike anything I'd seen in Israel," says Oppenheim. "One hears about and sees much

of the exotic colours, sounds and scents of India, but what deeply moved me were the people. What they lacked in material possessions, they remediated in humanity. I found Bangalore to be a modern city. They did not treat me as a foreigner with a camera, but as a fellow human being. I found a mutual curiosity, and a sincere desire to connect; there was always a dia-



(Clockwise from left) Photos of a merchant in Bangalore; Daniel Oppenheim; girls in Kolkata; Young Men

logue," he adds.

The scenario was different by the Hoogly. As he discovered Kolkata's flower market just south of the Rabindra Setu aka Howrah Bridge, Oppenheim's lens found what it was seeking. "I was looking for honest, raw connections. One doesn't easily get that in a business or affluent environment. There tend to be some barriers that people hide behind, perhaps trying to project an image that is closer to marketing or

branding than the true honest self," he says. It was while printing an image called *Young Men* that Oppenheim was sure that certain moments wouldn't fade away. "The men's eyes from the image stared right at me with a calm confidence that completely engaged me. I sensed a fresh dialogue beginning with their image. This was a different interaction, a new surprise. I didn't realise that at the time but I think that this intimacy and directness of dialogue is what at-

tracted filmmaker Stanley Kubrick in Vienna, stuck a familiar chord. "The images were made well before he got into filmmaking, but one can trace a direct path from his photographs to his movies. Kubrick was praised for capturing realistic images of people when, in fact, his approach wasn't realism at all. To paraphrase him, 'Reality is good, but stories are more interesting'. His photographs were meticulously staged and preconceived to fit his storyboard that later became central to his films," says Oppenheim. He says this has a direct relevance to his work. "The images are about a very direct and intense connection that formed in the moment the image was captured. This connection is relived when the printed images are viewed," he adds.

UP AND COMING

AFTER several nature and abstract photoshows, Oppenheim is consciously moving towards portraits and causes.

Engaging Dance



TRAINED in Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam, Shantha Rathi has performed in India and abroad. In *Moksha Katha*, the storytelling aspect of Indian classical dance takes on a new dimension, where the dancer bridges one classical idiom to the other, engaging multiple histories. At NCPA, Nariman Point on August 22.

Revisiting Varma

THE GALLERY will hold an exclusive exhibition and sale of Raja Ravi Varma's lithographs that have been revived by Rashme Mehta. Mehta had access to the artist's press as a family heirloom and set upon a journey to recreate his art on the stunning limestone. The show will be held at Cosmic Heart Gallery, New Marine Lines, till October 9.



Figuring the Abstract

More than 350 abstracts trace the journey of the genre in India

VANDANA KALRA

LAYERS of dark browns and ochre envelope the ethereal white, like mountains that surround the snow-capped hills of the Himalayas. The outlines form the landscape—a work typical of the period when Ram Kumar had withdrawn from figurative and moved to more abstract depictions, where jagged lines and a colour palette would suffice to represent a place, from the pines of Shivalik to the ghats of Varanasi or the foothills of Himalayas. This 1972 canvas titled *Ruins* is on the back cover of the publication *Indian Abstracts: An Absence of Form* (DAG, Rs 5,000). It also occupies a central place in the accompanying show at the Capital's Delhi Art Gallery.

Kumar belongs to the small group of Indian artists who abandoned figurative to adopt abstract, never to revert to the narrative mode. He had for company the likes of VS Gaitonde, Mehli Gohhai and Nasreen Mohamedi. If Gaitonde was to discover his language in Zen philosophy and ancient calligraphy, Mohamedi found hers in the mathematical precision of spare lines that



(From left) Ram Kumar's *Ruins*; an untitled acrylic-and-marker work by FN Souza; SH Raza's *Zamine*

also expressed personal grief and turmoil. "It is odd that she should choose so unsparing a style to mark her emotional highs and lows," writes Kishore Singh, head, publication and exhibition at Delhi Art Gallery (DAG).

Curator and art critic Meera

Menezes challenges the popular belief that abstraction originated in the West in the 1900s. "Think of the rocks or cave walls dating from prehistoric times, such as the Eddakal Caves in Kerala or Ayers Rock in Australia. They are adorned with drawings of spiral forms, straight



and meandering lines which attempted to fathom the mysteries of the universe," says Menezes.

She classifies the abstract in India according to its characteristics. Comparison is made between Kumar's planar abstraction and that of Surya Prakash's works. Though both broke up the pictorial surface, the latter derived from machines and not nature.

The display has geometric abstractions—where natural organic forms were rejected for restricted pictorial elements—of SH Raza and GR Santosh. If Jeram Patel pursued abstract expressionism, with emphasis on gesture and lyrical possibilities of nature, the likes of Ganesh Haloi represented landscapes in abstract. Ambadas sought spiritual upliftment through his work, while others such as J Swaminathan incorporated visual elements of tantric art.

A separate segment celebrates the abstract in printmaking, from the times of Nandalal Bose and Benode Bihari Mukherjee to Lulu Prasad Shaw and Krishna Reddy. One wonders if there is any singular definition of abstract. Perhaps not.

PUNE Shades of Love



NIVAS GOVARDHAN Kanhere is presenting a series of artwork titled, *Lord Ganesha & Radha Krishan*, depicting the varied shades of love in bright and vivid colours. At Malaka Spice, Lane - 5, North Main Road, Koregaon Park, till August 31. Contact: 9665904250

CHANDIGARH Candid Camera

THE PHOTO Artist group of Chandigarh is celebrating the eighth World Photography Day with a show by 20 sharpshooters, each inspired by a different subject and theme. The exhibition is on at Punjab Kala Bhawan, Sector 16, till August 19.