



Editorial

As an amateur singer I deal with counterpoint and harmony all the time: counterpoint as the *interweaving* of distinct lines of melody, and harmony as the *superposition* of sounds to form interesting or attractive sequences of chords. They are not opposites, but rather different standpoints from which to compose music.

Is there an equivalent in photography? I think so – not an exact one, but perhaps one worth considering. Others have written about harmony and counterpoint in graphical design, but I was thinking rather about how they can be used to convey ideas and tell stories.

Take Teresa Eng's *Self/Portrait* series. Each pair of images stands alone; the interest is in the comparison between the two (the harmony) and not in the sequence or links between the pairs of images (the counterpoint), although spending time looking at each pair builds up a sense of how young people in China perceive themselves.

Judy Goldhill's and Fay Ballard's *Travelling Companions* is different. There is no storyline connecting the images in a particular order, but the connection between them is by two lines of subject matter (counterpoint): small domestic objects of memory and grand celestial scenes. One could look at Luis Cobelo's *Chas Chas* similarly. Let your eye and mind see his images at different levels: the Parque Chas streetscape, the human inhabitants and the disturbing, surreal elements lurking in the corner of your eye – they are all equally important threads running through the work.

In Agnieszka Sosnowska's *Myth of a Woman* one can see that harmony and counterpoint are not antonyms but depend on your eye and mind. From one standpoint these are beautiful images, each one a harmonious whole where one cannot imagine the landscape without the person and vice versa. One could envisage them as a simple sequence in a book or exhibition. But then you read Agnieszka's story, and your mind can find distinct themes: the Icelandic woman, the photographer's own journey, or the farming seasons.

We were unable to show the full scope of Bharat Patel's work here, but perhaps that is where my harmony/counterpoint analogy has to be stretched too far. He tells the story of the Hijras of India in a straightforward manner, looking in turn at the red sari and white sari Hijras, and gurus and chelas. Analysing it in musical terms seems unnecessary and pretentious!

Paul Ashley, Editor

Cover: © *Mujer laberinto*, by Luis Cobelo

Back cover: © *Self Portrait. My Belt. Heradssandur, Iceland. 2011*, by Agnieszka Sosnowska

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Contemporary Photography

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59 Gilbert Road, Cambridge CB4 3NZ

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**Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought
and encourages interpretation; photographs 'about' rather than 'of'.**

Travelling Companions

Judy Goldhill & Fay Ballard

Travelling Companions builds on the success of *Breathe*, an exhibition partnership between the two artists at the Freud Museum London in 2018 and subsequent conversations with Ro Spankie. Both artists had been investigating memory, home, spirit of place, and the role of personal objects in people's lives. Fay draws the belongings she retrieved from her father's house after his death. Judy photographs the night skies, together with the massive observatories and telescopes that allow us to look beyond this world.

The importance of an object as an emotional companion can be traced back to the toddler's 'transitional object' as defined by the psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott. He believed the toddler reaches a stage in its development when it realises mother and baby are separate beings rather than one omnipotent self. At this stage, the toddler uses an object e.g. a teddy bear or a cloth, as an emotional bridge to enable it to separate from the mother. It is partly toddler, partly mother and partly external object. With it, the toddler is to travel to its next stage of infant development.

Daniel Miller, in his book *Stuff* writes that objects not only represent us but also create us; they are our autobiographies. And in homes, people create themselves through stuff. Moving home "allows people to reconstruct their personal biography as represented in memories of associated objects. Certain relationships with other people get discarded along with the objects that memorialized them, while others come to the fore and are used prominently in the decoration of the new home". Moving house becomes a means to reshuffle relationships and memories by bringing them back into consciousness, by making them explicit and for deciding which ones to reinforce, which ones to abandon or put on hold. The paring down of objects transforms the memory from a more actual to a more idealised one.

The artists explore how familiar objects act as travelling companions, both in actual time and as remembered (internalised) objects, their function and the stories they tell changing over time.

Each object Fay draws tells a story: an old blue flipper covered in dust and used by her father as a doorstop for decades began life as her brother's, used on summer holidays to swim across the bay at Rosas in Spain. Over the years, as it took on its patina of dust, it was transformed into a practical household tool but also provoked memories of early family holidays, of children leaving the nest, of home and the passage of time. It is recorded that Freud used to take some of the objects from his consulting desk away with him for the summer because he couldn't write without them. Perhaps Fay's objects act in a similar way and she has held on to these particular things as thinking and drawing tools; her travelling companions through life.

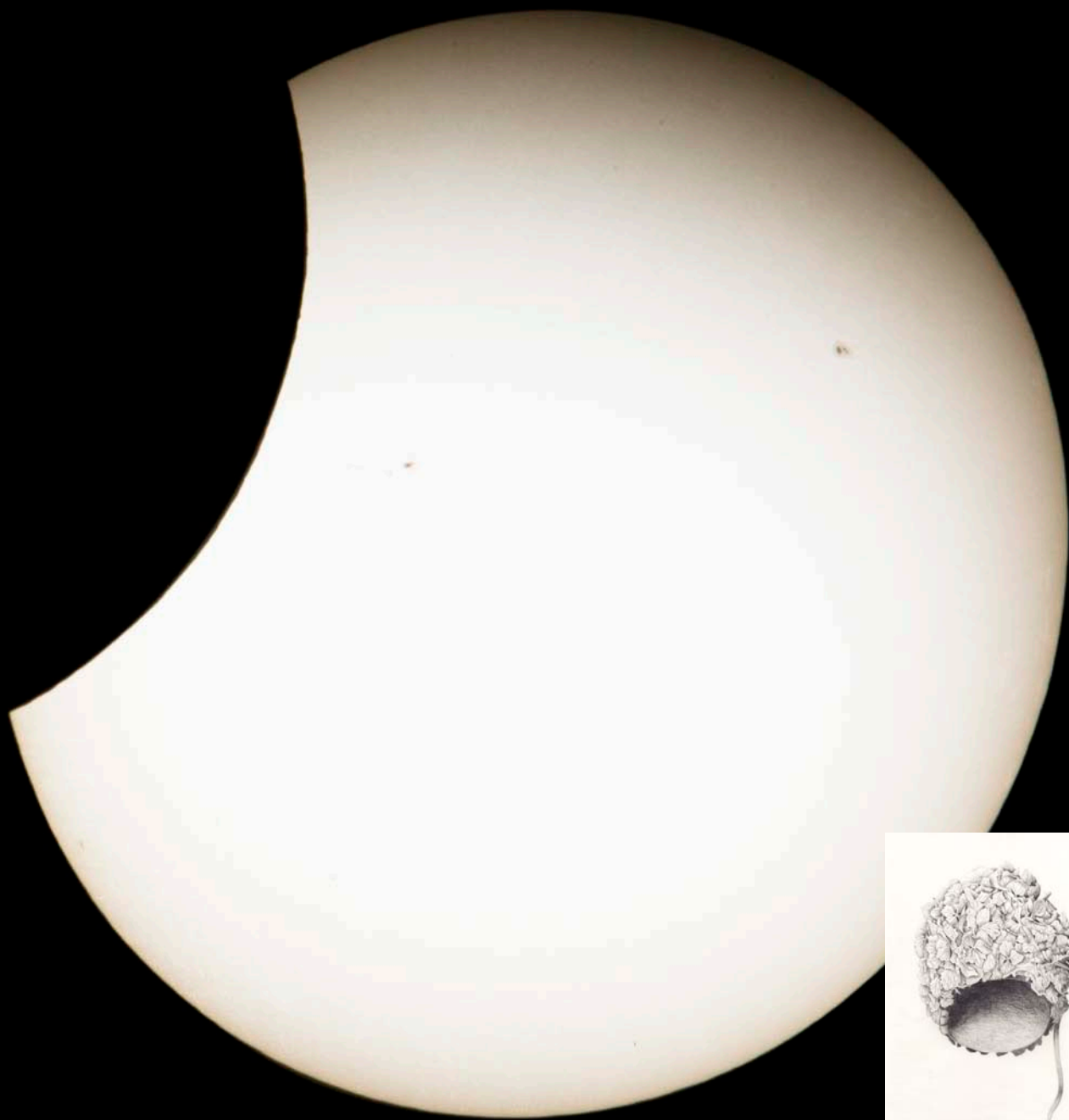
During a series of artist residences Judy photographs the night sky. The skies offer sites of wonder – and a sense of far away, but also a familiarity of home. Traditionally constellations of stars

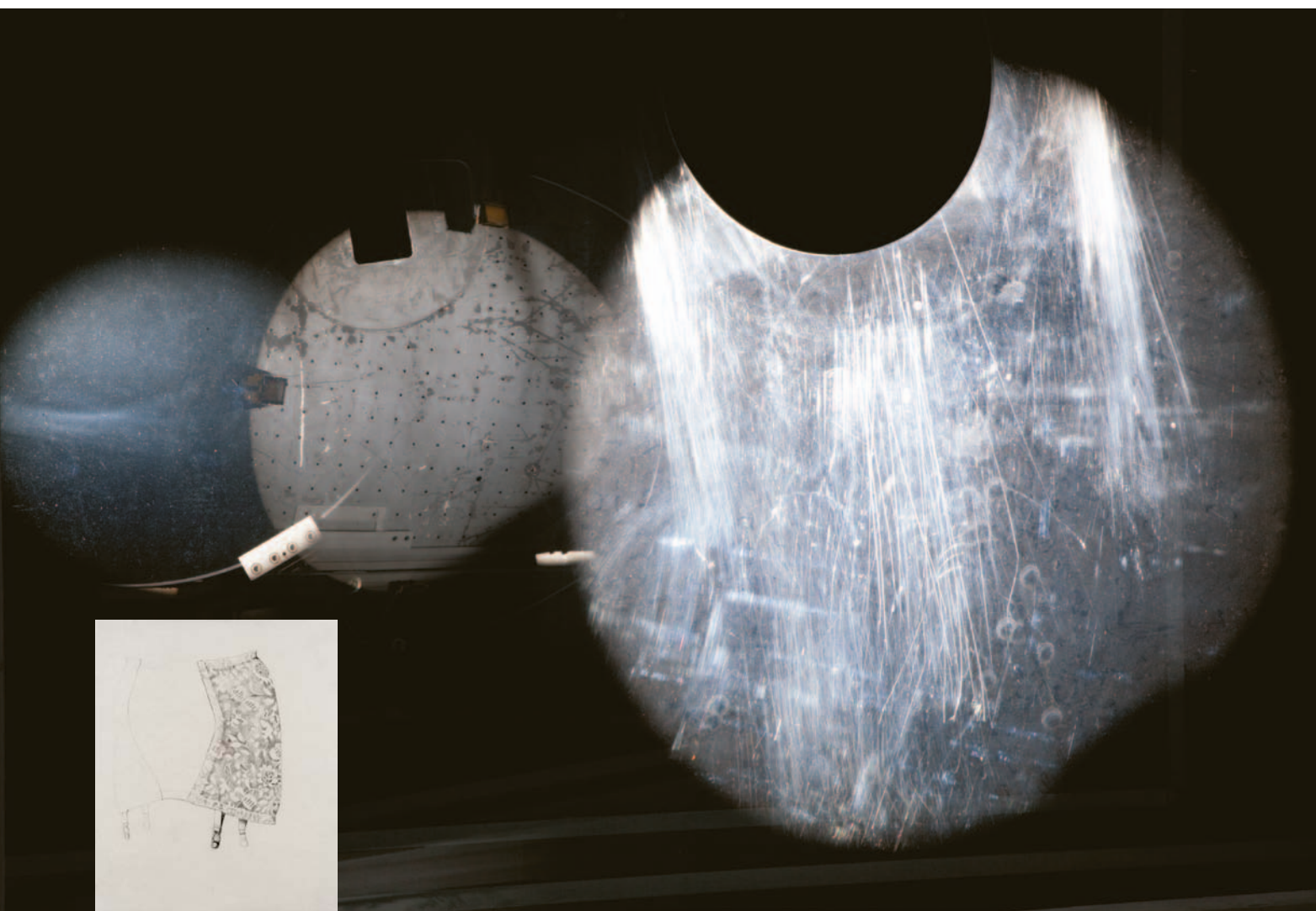
The exhibition presented an arrangement of travelling companions, contrasting the characters and scales implied in both artists' work: Judy's photos printed huge, covering a wall, and contrasted with Fay's drawing of her mother's fan. Such juxtapositions offer up new meanings to the viewer. Ro Spankie believes the conversation between the work will come (like all conversations) in how the work is positioned in the physical space of the gallery. A dreamlike montage of associations and ideas that provokes the audience to consider their own travelling companions.

See: www.judygoldhill.com and www.fayballard.com



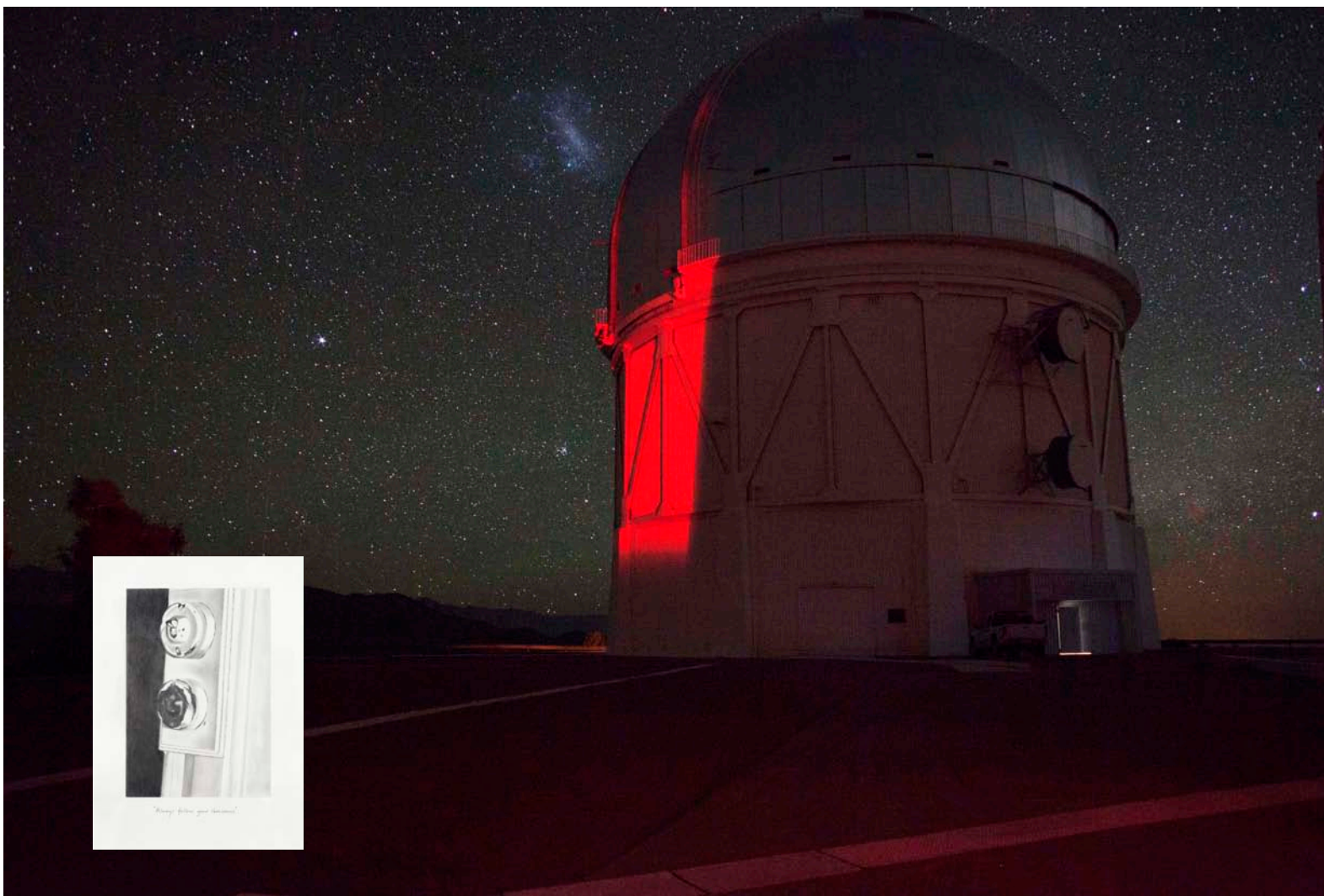












P5: 'Memory box drawn from life'

P6: 'Mothers shade / Transit of Mercury'

P7: 'Swimming cap / Solar eclipse'

P8: 'Playtex girdle / Interior of solar telescope, Arizona'

P9: 'Fan / Milky Way, Chile'

P10: 'Home / Milky Way, Suffolk'

P11: 'Always follow your obsessions / Large Magellanic Cloud, Victor Blanco Telescope, Chile'

Hijras – Red Sari White Sari

Bharat Patel

During the British rule an act was passed declaring almost 200 tribes as criminal tribes. Hijras were one of the communities criminalized ('notified'). Though after independence all these tribes and communities have been denotified, the stigma is difficult to eradicate and Hijras have continued to suffer discriminations and marginalization.

With a reputation for colourful saris, playful personalities, and brash singing and their trademark loud clapping, Hijras make their presence known on streets across all cities of India. They scratch out a living blessing new born children, newlyweds (in return for payment), unfortunately often by means of harassment, by begging on streets and trains or demanding money from shopkeepers and passengers on buses or through sex work. For income they roam the busy streets in groups with excessive makeup, striking lipsticks and dressed in multicolour saris. Together with their loud personalities they become centres of attention, but ones which often make the public rather uncomfortable.

For time immemorial Hijras were revered and respected as spiritual figures in the Hindu society. They were considered to have special powers and were sought after when a new born or a newly married couple needed to be blessed for prosperity and fertility. Most Hijras are themselves devotees of the mother goddess Bahuchara Mata, a Hindu goddess of fertility and chastity. Her primary temple was built in 1152 in Becharaji town in the Mehsana district of Gujarat.

They draw only a lingering respect for being auspicious, and in most cases are discriminated and

scorned almost everywhere. To escape from this constant discrimination and abuse they tend to live in well organized and tight-knit small communities which give them protection. In Gujarat these community homes are known as 'Akhadas'. Here Hijras live within a strict social structure, consisting of a 'guru' and her 'chelas' (followers or disciples). Gurus act as household heads and are guardians of all properties pertaining to their Akhadas. They may have anywhere from 5 to 15 chelas under her. All gurus link up to handful of main gurus - the 'nayaks'. It is a kinship hierarchy with a pyramidal structure, with the more spiritual Hijras promoted up the hierarchy. A guru will collect all income brought in by the chelas on a daily basis. This is then redistributed to pay for their day to day living including providing them homes and paying for the rents. In return chelas are expected to be obedient to their guru who will guide them through their life. Under this hierarchical structure the lives of the 'true' Hijras (white saris) are governed by rules and regulations laid down by their immediate superiors. For example, a chela under one guru may not switch to another guru without the second guru paying a premium. This is a fee for having trained the chela and for the loss of income for the Akhada. Serious fights and even murders have been committed for breach of rules. Added to this there is also jealousy and competition between chelas and between the communities. Each guru has her own territory within which her chelas can move freely and raise funds. Moving into someone else's territory can have dire consequences. Disputes between chelas and gurus are escalated upwards and a group of specially appointed

high-ranking gurus would be asked to resolve the matter, normally by way of a fine. These rules are agreed by all gurus and are strictly obeyed.

To be part of this special Hijra community and to 'qualify' to live in Akhadas, individuals must renounce all relationships with families and friends. The joining initiation is marked with special celebration. Hijras going through this ceremony then consider themselves to have stopped being a notional 'red' sari dresser, the ones who lived a life in the community at large, to one as a 'white' sari dresser who commit to living in Akhadas. This crossover of 'Hijrahood', is a proud moment for those who take abode in an Akhada under one guru. For these dedicated white sari Hijras, all other Hijras (transgenders, bisexuals, homosexuals, cross-dressers) who still live with families and the society at large are red sari dressers and are as such 'false' Hijras.

As a sign of total commitment white sari Hijras are also more likely to undergo castration at considerable risk to their life. Previously, castration was undertaken by other Hijras after a long ceremony lasting several days. Though a safer route is now available through hospitals, it remains a costly privately funded operation.

To a large extent today Hijras live a life they are seldom willing to share with others. As part of my work on nomadic and 'denotified' tribes, I was fortunate to be introduced to several Hijra communities in Gujarat. Most of what I have learned about them has been by spending time with them and following them as they went about their life. My approach to photographing them has been direct, and a deliberate record of their life. I photographed them in their Akhadas, on the streets and in temples. Most of them were outgoing, flirtatious and jolly, loved to dress up, perform, and have their photos taken.

See: www.bharatpatelphotography.co.uk





Hijra and her goddess



Chela love



Receiving blessings - opening new business



Receiving blessings - getting blessed



White Sari - senior most spiritual Hijras



White Sari - guru (second from right) and her chelas

Self/Portrait

Teresa Eng

Self/Portrait is about contemporary China and its millennial generation. This generation's outward presentation of 'self' contrasts with their parents' and grandparents'. Not only have they grown up as digital natives, they are also the first generation in China to be born into a society already transitioning to capitalism.

Using technology, the selfie is an idealised portrait where anything is possible. With collage and beautifying apps, wrinkles can be erased, eyes can be enlarged and skin can be whitened and made blemish-free. All of this perfection, can then be projected back onto the world.

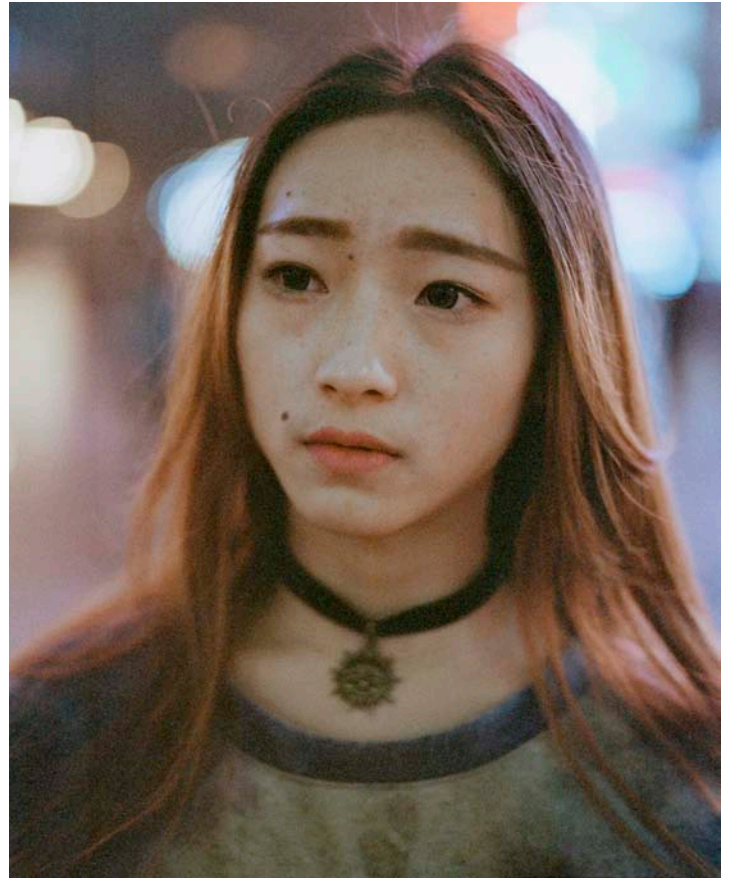
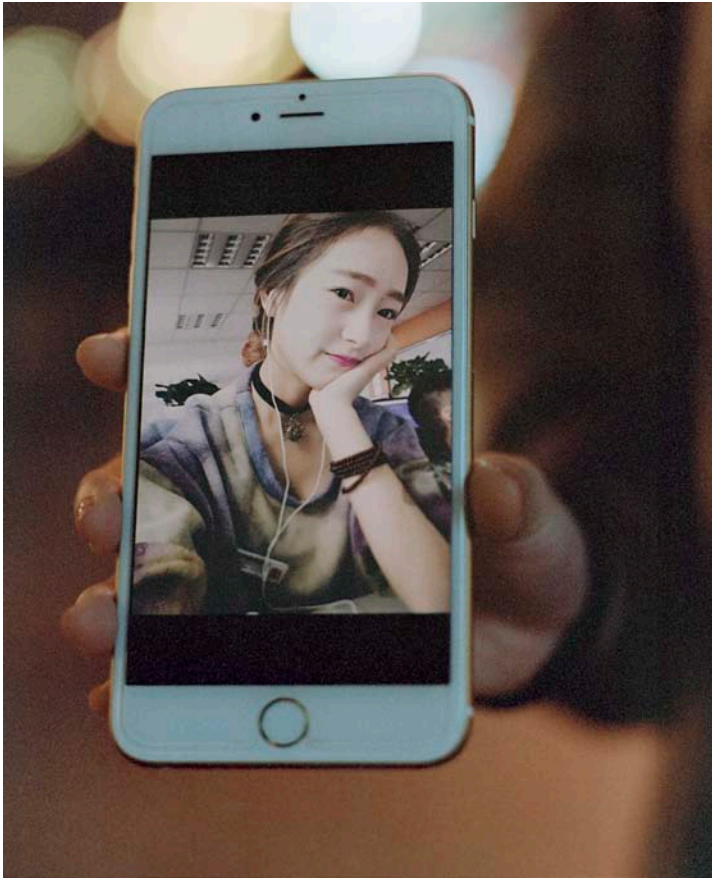
I was interested in how this projection expresses this notion of 'self' in this newly individualised society. Identities are shaped through experimentations in clothing, hairstyles and poses. Underlying this self-discovery is also the need to belong. By adhering to a specific style, one can become part of a tribe.

I approached strangers in a commercial shopping centre in Chongqing to photograph their portrait. The immense ever-changing LED advertisements provided the lighting. Each title originates from the subject's QQ user handle. QQ is a Chinese messaging software platform that allows users to connect online. Unlike Western user handles which can be personalised, QQ assigns each user an ID number of 9 - 10 digits.

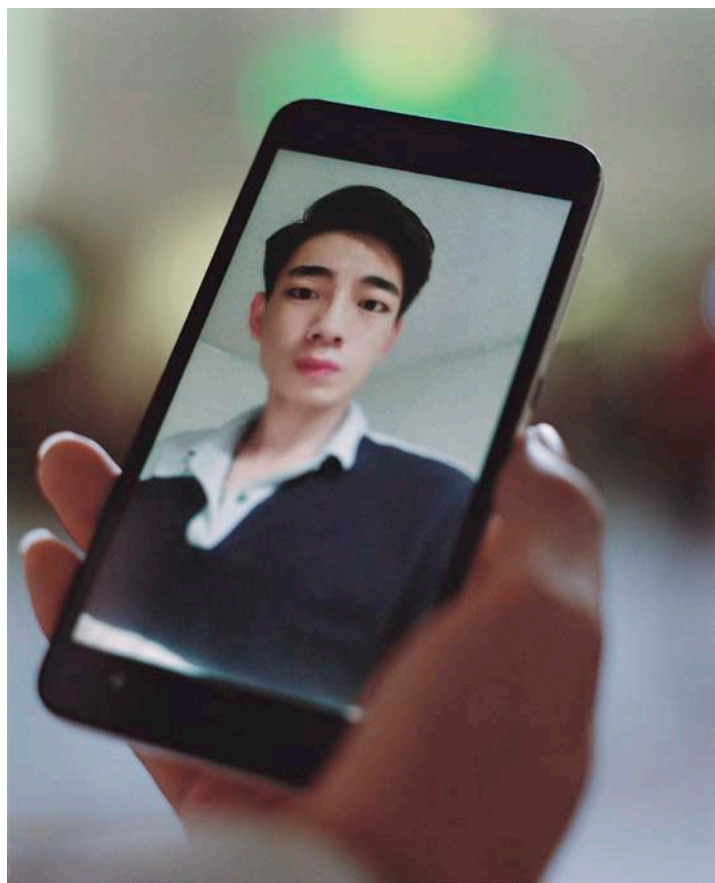
See: www.teresa-eng.com



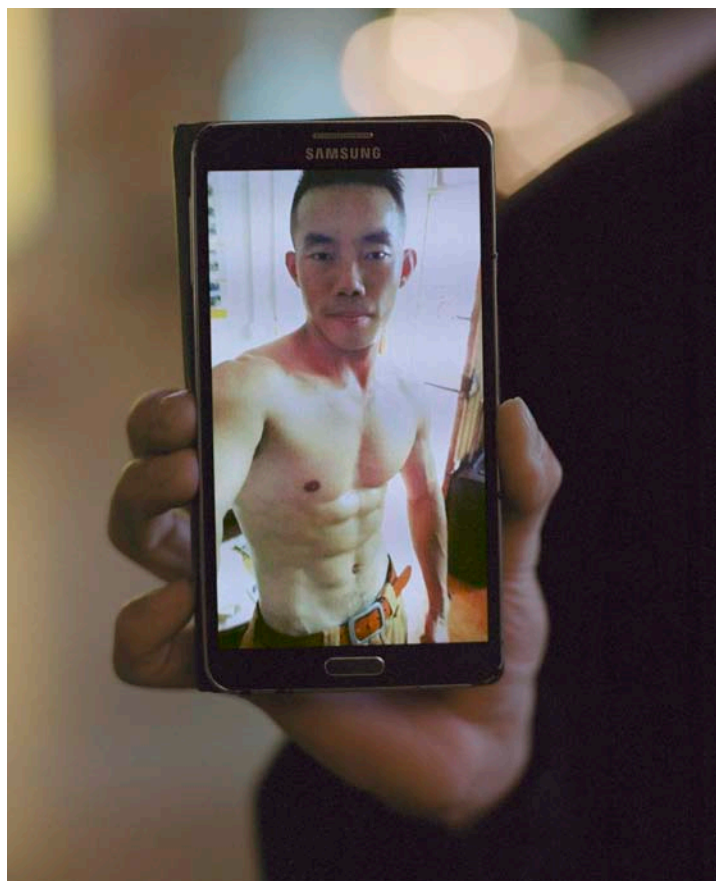
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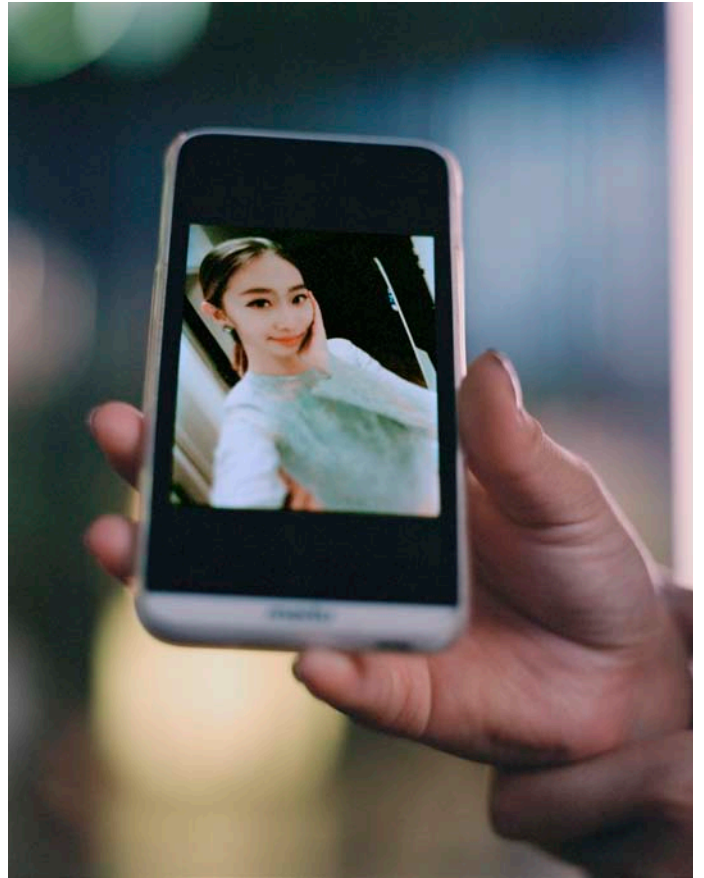
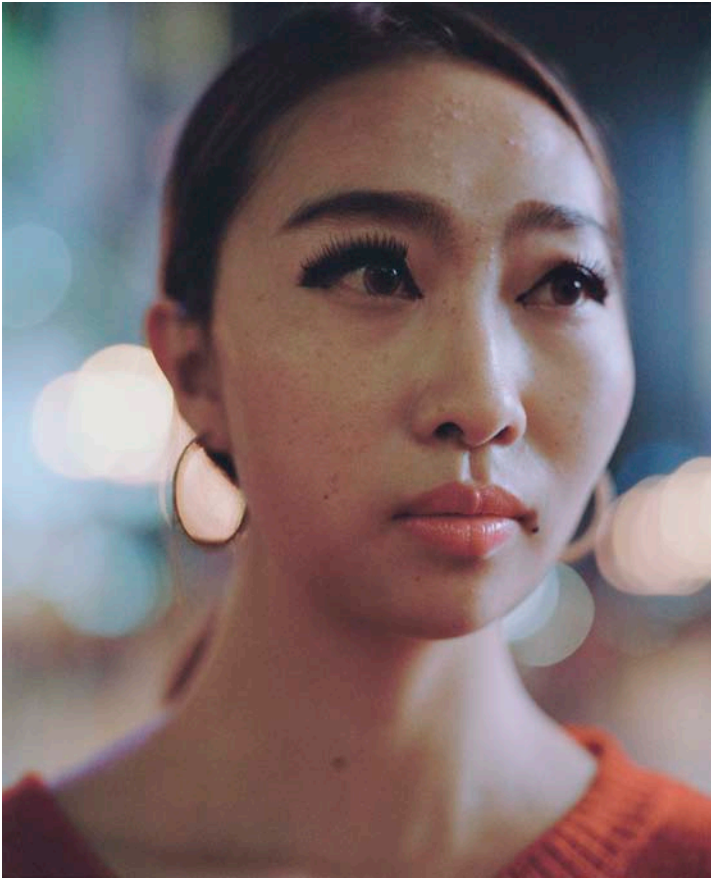
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Chas Chas

Luis Cobelo

Chas Chas is a magical journey. It can be read as a love poem dedicated to a neighbourhood in Buenos Aires, called Parque Chas. The project is inspired by an Argentinian comic book series of the same name that Luis Cobelo used to read 30 years ago. It narrates in several chapters the adventures of a writer who was told that fantastic and extraordinary things happen there; it's a place where wonderful magical people live.

The reason for its 'out of the ordinary' status is linked to the original urban planning of the neighbourhood, which was built in the form of a spider's web or a circular labyrinth. For this reason, the 'Chas-chasians' say that if you enter into that concentric form, you might never leave and exceptional things can happen to you. Essentially, in Parque Chas everything is possible.

Many years later, Luis decided to travel thousands of kilometres to see it for himself. But what really took him there was the desire to discover if the saying was true: "Everything you ever lost in life, exists in Parque Chas".

And yes, it does.

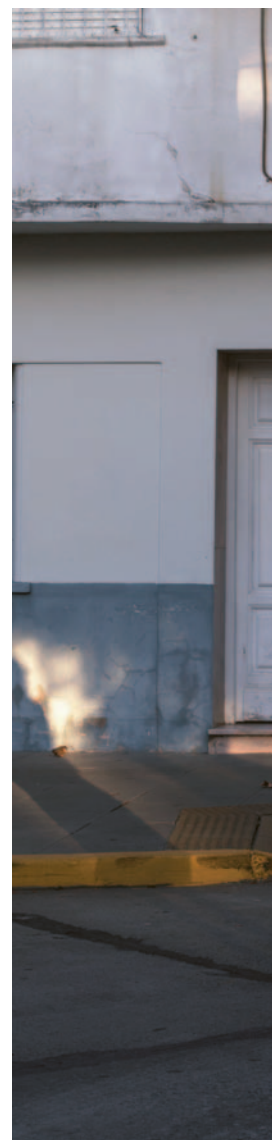
By wandering through the circular streets and getting lost in the maze, Luis Cobelo reaches the heart of Parque Chas, zigzagging through its myths and heroes, absorbing the passion and folly that runs about, while unfolding its mysterious and surprising layers.

Chas Chas is an intangible exploration of the intricate stories and amazing lives of a neighbourhood. Images, documents, drawings and magic create a world where imagination has no limits. And where whoever was lost, will be found.

Text by Arianna Rinaldo

See: www.luiscobelo.com; and for the Chas Chas photobook, see www.chaschasluiscobelo.com











Myth of a Woman

Agnieszka Sosnowska

"Wherever I go ... and wherever I am ... this is me ..." - Hannah Hauxwell.

When does history become myth? How does that myth record a truth?

Myths surrounding women in Iceland hold truth in poetry and song.

I immigrated to Iceland 14 years ago. I married an Icelander. We live on a farm called Kleppjárnsstaðir in East Iceland.

By taking pictures of my home, job place and new family I am documenting a path in life I never planned or expected. The inclusion of myself into these places represents a connectedness to a place.

I've been asked often, "Why did I choose to live in Iceland?" My reasons range from the rural lifestyle that I've adopted here, a good job, beautiful nature, and more often my response ends on the topic of Icelandic women.

In my eyes the female spirit in Iceland encompasses strength and community. This strength has served as an inspiration in my life as an immigrant in this new land I now call my home.

These photographs are my myths. They are love, hope, desperation, and awe. They are my truth.

See: www.sosphotographs.com









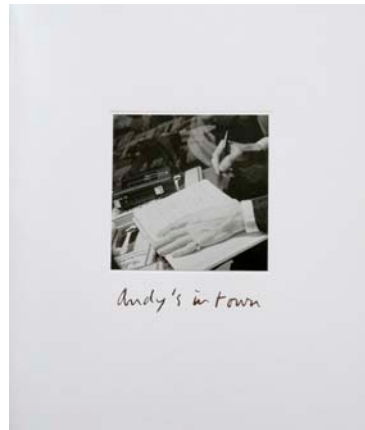


Andy's in Town, by Marc Camille Chaimowicz

Book review by Brian Steptoe FRPS

26 x 21 cm, 56 pages,
24 images, black & white.
Published by the Institute
of Contemporary Arts.

Andy Warhol came to London in 1975 to launch his book 'The Philosophy of Andy Warhol'. One signing took place at Foyles in Charing Cross Road, in a room which later became part of Claire de Rouen's photobook shop, run by Lucy Moore. Lucy Moore was one of the selectors for the RPS Photobook Exhibition in 2016. Marc Chaimowitz was in the queue outside the signing and exposed a roll of 24 photographs through the shop window whilst waiting, showing Andy Warhol signing his book. All 24 are in the book *Andy's in Town*.



View from the Vice Chair

Avijit Datta

I spent evenings with my father in the home darkroom as a child learning to develop negatives, dodging and burning, selective cropping and making prints. At university, I was fortunate to have access to the college darkroom. My tutor made lenses and had won the Nobel Prize; he taught me optics. After graduating I was taught photography by Bill Brandt. It's a legacy which I cherish and wish to share to some degree.

I'm now a trustee of a theatre which is heavily involved with outreach to children from underprivileged backgrounds. The Arts Council, via its *Evidence Review* for its ten-year strategy from *BritainThinks*, states that participation in the arts should not be dependent on where people live or their social, educational or financial circumstances. To encourage more people to take part, it will support artists, organisations and the public to help shape local arts provision in order to increase choice and opportunities for people to experience and be inspired by the arts. This social engineering enables young people to realise their potential and develop their critical thinking, imagination, self-expression and creativity. Furthermore it facilitates social inclusivity. These findings are supported by the recent report from the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education; this concluded that teaching for creativity in schools must be prioritised to equip young people with the skills they need in later life.

It is an endeavour the RPS, particularly the Contemporary group, is well placed to support by participating in cultural education partnerships. This is consistent with the RPS mission statement that "it exists to increase the knowledge and understanding of photography, to promote the highest standards of achievement in photography, and to encourage the public appreciation of photography". A personal example of such an educational partnership comes from my son. He runs pro bono workshops to enable disadvantaged children to make use of the well-funded facilities available in his (public) school.

Such activity has reciprocal benefits for the RPS and completes a virtuous circle. The age demographic of the society and falling membership of some SIGs demands recruitment of young photographers, not least for succession planning. Promoting participation and membership from those with less privileged backgrounds is beneficial to the RPS, and consistent with the RPS mission statement and Arts Council strategy and thereby UK government policy.

While you are in social isolation, please use the extra time available to plan which activities you could promote once the emergency is over, and online now.

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

Due to coronavirus restrictions, meetings will be held by videoconference where possible.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Postal Portfolio

The Postal Portfolio section welcomes new members. It consists of two circuits with four and five boxes in each. As each box goes round images, and often books, are put in by the members and commented upon by the others in a constructive manner. It is slow photography, requiring time to assess and comment upon the images, and takes about a year for a box to complete a circuit. During the current crisis we are also sending pictures to each other electronically. Occasional meetings are held for the members to get together (but not at present!). Contact Duncan Unsworth: duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com

Are you receiving us?

The Contemporary special interest group has two main publications: this Contemporary Photography, our quarterly publication of the best in contemporary photography, and Concept, a members' electronic newsletter distributed by email every two months. If you're not receiving Concept, or other Contemporary Group emails, and you're a group member, please check your RPS mail/email preferences or contact the group via contemporary@rps.org.

Archives

The archives for the group publications are available on the RPS website:

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/e-news-archive/>

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/journal-archive/>

Committee:

Chair and Event Organiser

- Alan Cameron LRPS

alan.cameron@me.com

Deputy chair - Avijit Datta

akd21@hotmail.com

Secretary - Romney Tansley

romney@tansley.co.uk

Treasurer - David J. Grimshaw ARPS

contemporarytreasurer@rps.org

Postal portfolio - Duncan Unsworth

duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com

Journal editor, Paul Ashley LRPS,

paultheashley@gmail.com

Webmaster, Sean Goodhart ARPS

sean.goodhart.contemporary@outlook.com

e-Newsletter (Concept) editor,

Romney Tansley romney@tansley.co.uk

Brian Steptoe FRPS

bsteptoe@compuserve.com

Adrian Hough LRPS

contemporarysw@rps.org

Patricia Ruddle ARPS

patriciaruddle@btinternet.com

Tom Owens ARPS tom@tjowens.com

Tessa Mills FRPS (co-opted)

tessamills@hotmail.co.uk

Journal editorial committee -

Paul Ashley, editor

Brian Steptoe, design

Proof reader, position vacant

