

ISHARA  
ART FOUNDATION



## **GROWING LIKE A TREE**

20 JANUARY – 20 MAY 2021



## GROWING LIKE A TREE

*Growing Like A Tree* marks Sohrab Hura's inaugural curatorial project as a photographer and filmmaker, along with the presentation of several artists and collectives never before shown institutionally in a regional and international context.

Hura's individual and collective journeys through photography and moving image over the years have presented both a form of rooting and uprooting of places as markers of identity. Through this exhibition, he maps a network of past and present collaborators with 14 artists and collectives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Germany, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Singapore, seeking to expand the framework of boundaries set out by the geographical context of South Asia. Together they create a space where multiple voices and experiences are brought into dialogue with one another. The artists represented in this exhibition tackle themes of changing cities, collective memory, the environment, public spaces and the archive through works that sit at the intersection of documentary and fiction, image and object.

Referencing the interconnected spheres of contemporary artistic practice, this show considers photography as a locus in an expanded field of art that includes videos, books and sound installations. The ensemble of artists and collectives in the exhibition includes Aishwarya Arumbakkam, Anjali House, Bunu Dhungana, Farah Mulla, Jaisingh Nageswaran, Katrin Koenning, Munem Wasif, Nida Mehboob, Nepal Picture Library, Reetu Sattar, Sarker Protick, Sathish Kumar, Sean Lee, and Yu Yu Myint Than, and a citation of Dayanita Singh along with site-specific interventions by Sohrab Hura.



Sathish Kumar, *Somewhere in the village* (detail), from the *Town Boy* series (2011-2020). Archival pigment print, 34.3 cm x 29.2 cm. ©Sathish Kumar. Image courtesy of the artist.



**SHANTA MANAVI COLLECTION**

(1976)

Image courtesy of Nepal

Picture Library

©Shanta Manavi



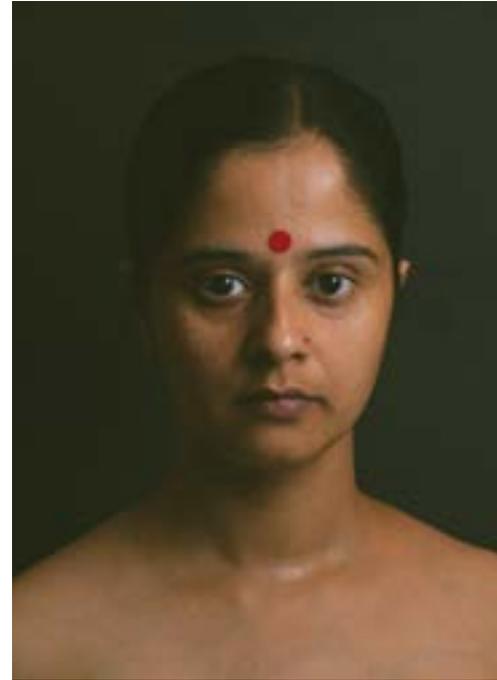
**ANJALI HOUSE**

*Sockchan*, (2008)

Archival pigment prints, 30.5 cm x 40.6 cm

Image courtesy of Anjali Photo Workshops

“My work attempts to explore my sense of self in relation to society by saying things I’m not supposed to say, by making visible what is meant to stay out of sight. I use the color red to question what it means to be a woman in my society. The color red is significant in a Nepali woman’s life: it indicates marital status, symbolizes auspiciousness, sexuality, fertility, and life.” – BUNU DHUNGANA



**BUNU DHUNGANA**

From the series *Confrontations* (2017)

Archival pigment print, 30.5 cm x 45.7 cm each

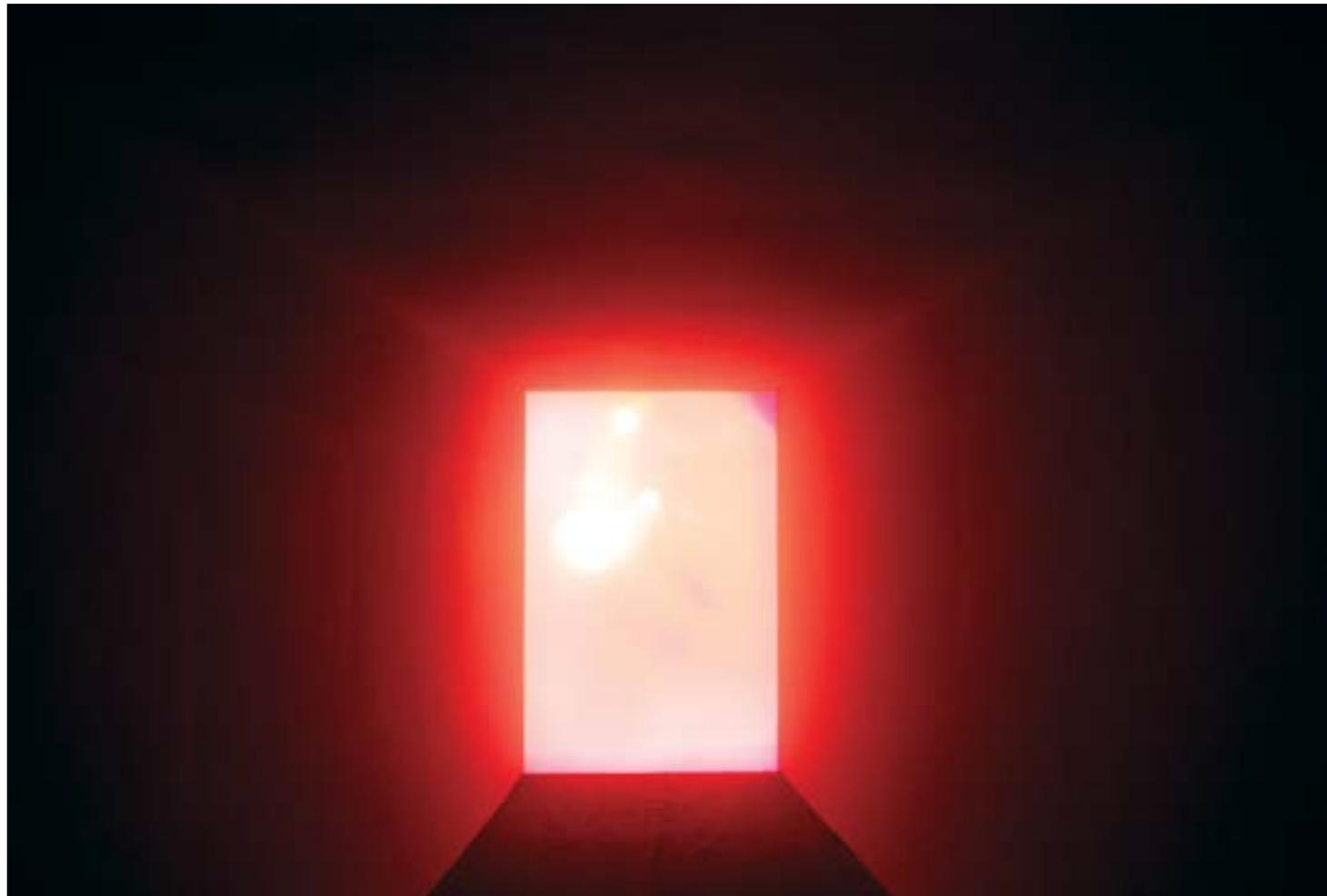
©Bunu Dhungana



**NIDA MEHBOOB**  
*Shadow Lives*, 2020 (ongoing)  
Archival pigment print, 23 cm x 15 cm  
©Nida Mehboob



**SATHISH KUMAR**  
*Portrait of a boy near my hometown*,  
from the *Town Boy* series (2011-2020)  
Archival pigment print, 34.3 cm x 29.2 cm  
©Sathish Kumar. Image courtesy of the artist



**SARKER PROTICK**  
*Origin* (2016)  
Single-channel video (vertical  
projection), 07:07 mins, edition of 3  
©Sarker Protick. Image  
courtesy of the artist

"*Origin* hovers between corporeal and metaphysical. It is composed of light projection and sound often within an altered space. The use of light as protagonist, combined with deliberate monochromatic arrangements, and the distorted soundscape is rooted in classical arrangement; yet it seems wholly instinctual and formless. The slow, steady transition of red light moving across night skies hypnotises as the orchestration lulls us slowly. The viewers are firmly in an organic atmosphere, witnesses to a seemingly infinite transition. Akin to the slow dissolve of breath, each inhale and exhale guides the rhythm of our presence in this room, in this moment."

– SARKER PROTICK



REETU SATTAR

*Lost Tune* (2016)

Single-channel video with sound, HD, colour, 03:15 minutes, edition of 4, 1 AP  
©Reetu Sattar. Photography by Farhad Rahman

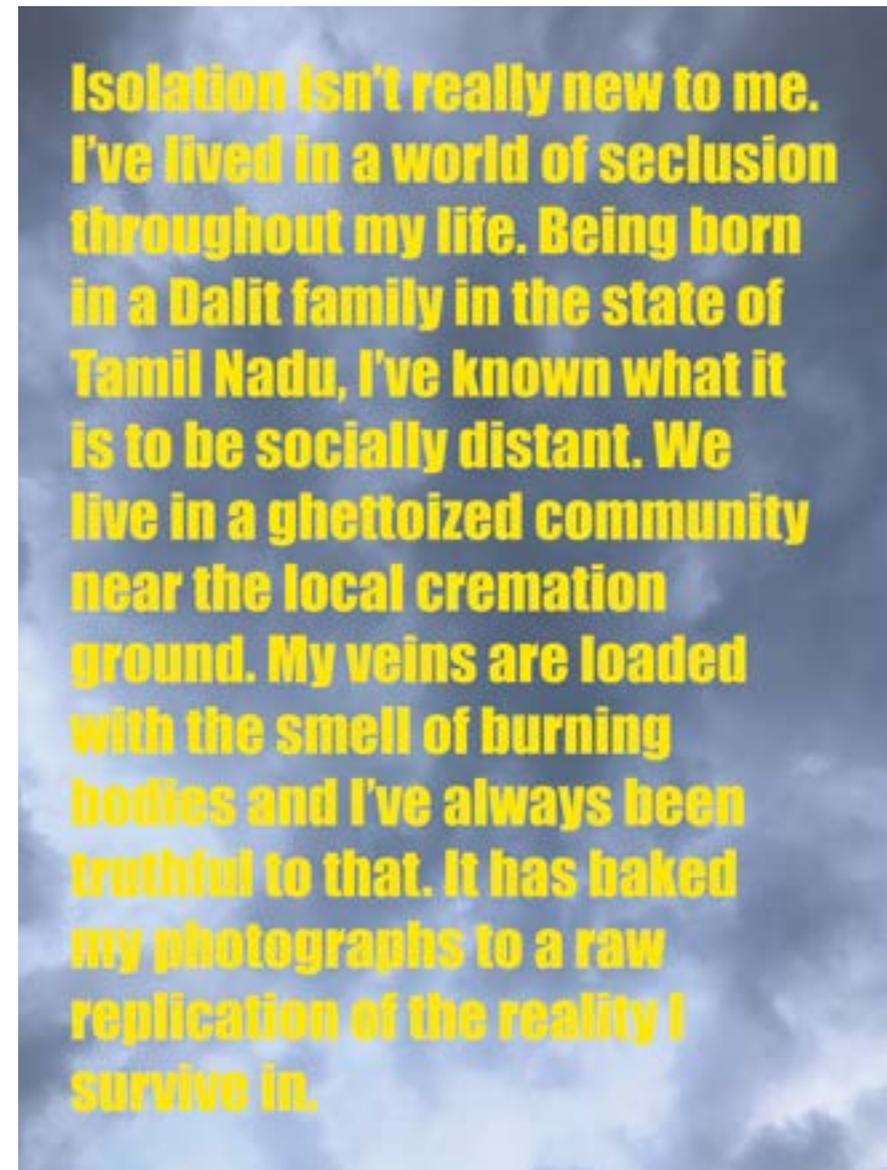


YU YU MYINT THAN

*Sorry Not Sorry*, (2019)

Book comprising Art, Sakura and Blue Jeans paper, 13 cm x 18.5 cm x 1 cm  
©Yu Yu Myint Than. Image courtesy of Singapore International Photography Festival 2020

"...In 2046, nothing changes. But nobody knows if that is true or not because no one has ever come back [extracted from the movie 2046, directed by Wong Kar Wai]. I wished I could forget him. I believe I will because forgetting is the work of memory. For me, the making of 'Sorry, Not Sorry' is a slow personal process of forgetting and moving on following the breakdown of my relationship. It's actually a healing process for me but later this book replaced the man finally. This book was produced as my first dummy during the workshop 'From Theory to Book' conducted by Valentina Abenavoli in 2019." – YU YU MYINT THAN



JAISINGH NAGESWARAN

*I FEEL LIKE A FISH*, (2020)

Archival pigment print, 46 cm x 61 cm  
©Jaisingh Nageswaran

"I first began photographing my parents 10 years ago. Whatever reasons I had for doing so at that time, they are now no longer important. I do not think that we really need a reason to photograph anyone or anything. It is the way that photography finds its place in my life and relationships that mean the most to me. I have found that over time, the photographs we make come together to form worlds of their own. This work, is one of those worlds."

– SEAN LEE



SEAN LEE

From the series *Two People*,  
(2010-ongoing).

Archival pigment print, 21 cm x 29.7 cm

©Sean Lee. Image courtesy of the artist

AISHWARYA ARUMBAKKAM

From the series *ka Dingiei*,  
(2016-ongoing)

Archival pigment print,  
61 cm x 61 cm

©Aishwarya Arumbakkam.

Image courtesy of the artist and  
Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Grant  
for Photography 2019, SSAF



"*ka Dingiei* re-interprets an ancient Khasi myth to talk about environmental conflict and indigeneity issues. It's an allegory about the loss of culture, mythology, and identity that accompanies habitat loss. It's set in the Khasi village of Lama Punji in Bangladesh."

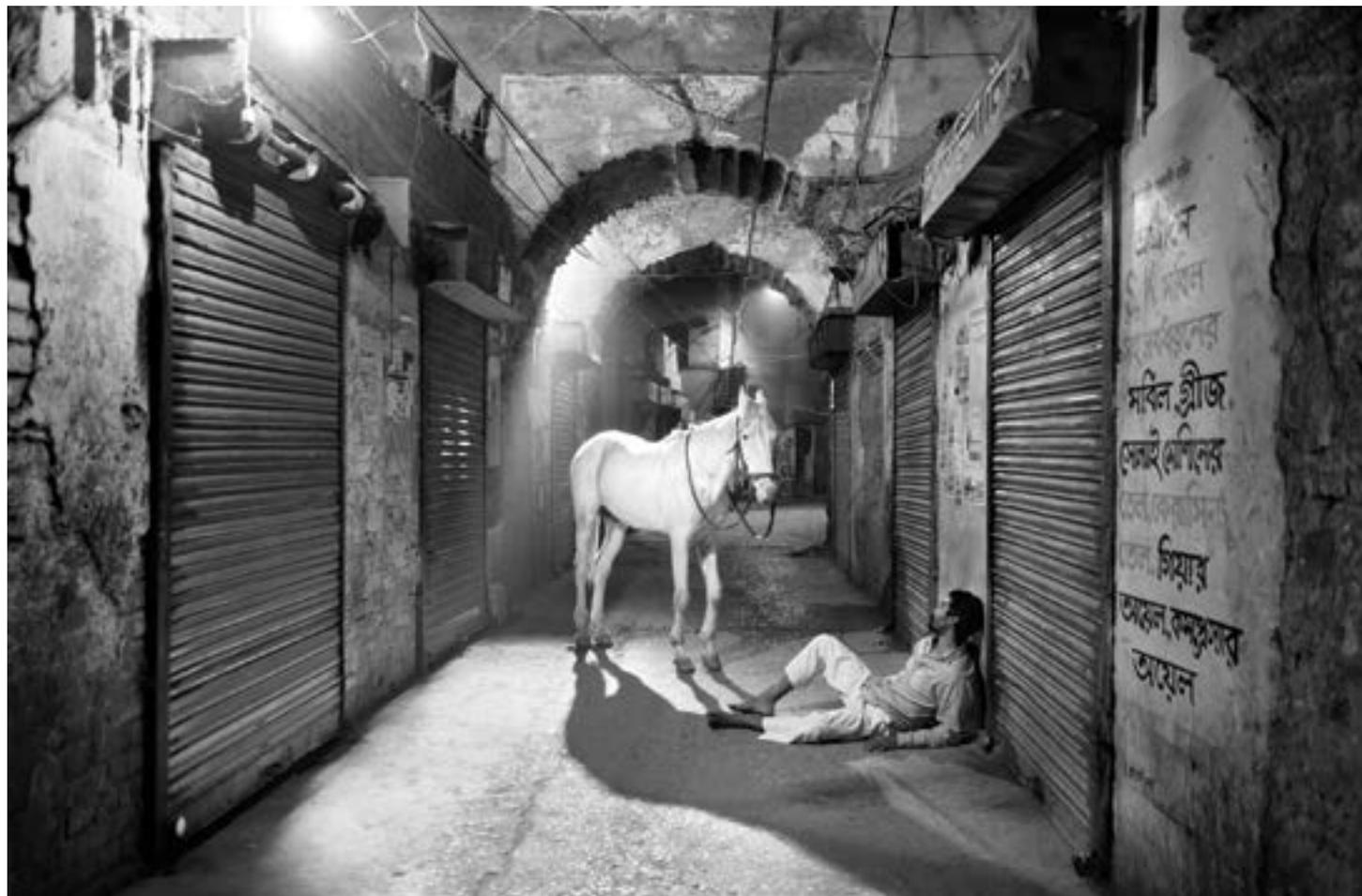
– AISHWARYA ARUMBAKKAM

**MUNEM WASIF**

*Kheyal*, (2015-2018)

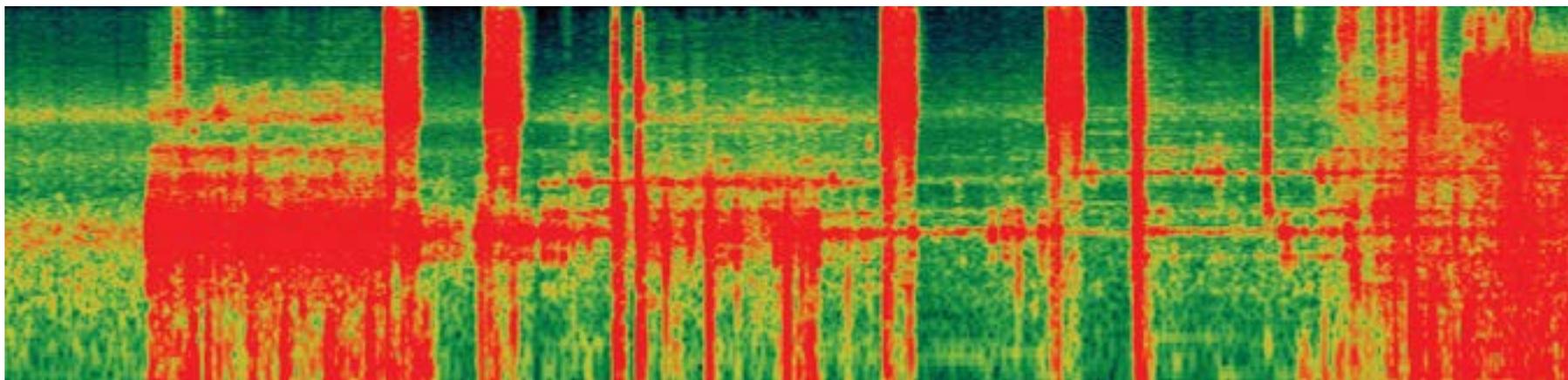
Single channel video, 23:34  
minutes, 16:9, black-and-white,  
sound, variable dimensions

©Munem Wasif. Image courtesy of the  
artist and Project 88, produced with  
support from Bengal Foundation



"When mirrors face each other, the objects reflected in them become smaller and less distinct until the mirrors merely reflect themselves. *Aural Mirror* immerses the listener in the echoes of their own sounds. As the listener enters, the installation space picks up the sounds of their movement and voice and plays it back into the space until they are abstracted into a drone that keeps looping back on itself. The tones layer over each other in increasingly dense structures and envelop the listener in sound, triggering a sense of depersonalization-derealization. By immersing the listeners within sound, it leaves the listeners unable to leave the auditory space and thus enables them to experience its most essential dimension that is time. *Aural Mirror* intends to steal your sense of time by slowing it down and achieving a state where sound floats and stands still at the same time."

– FARAH MULLA



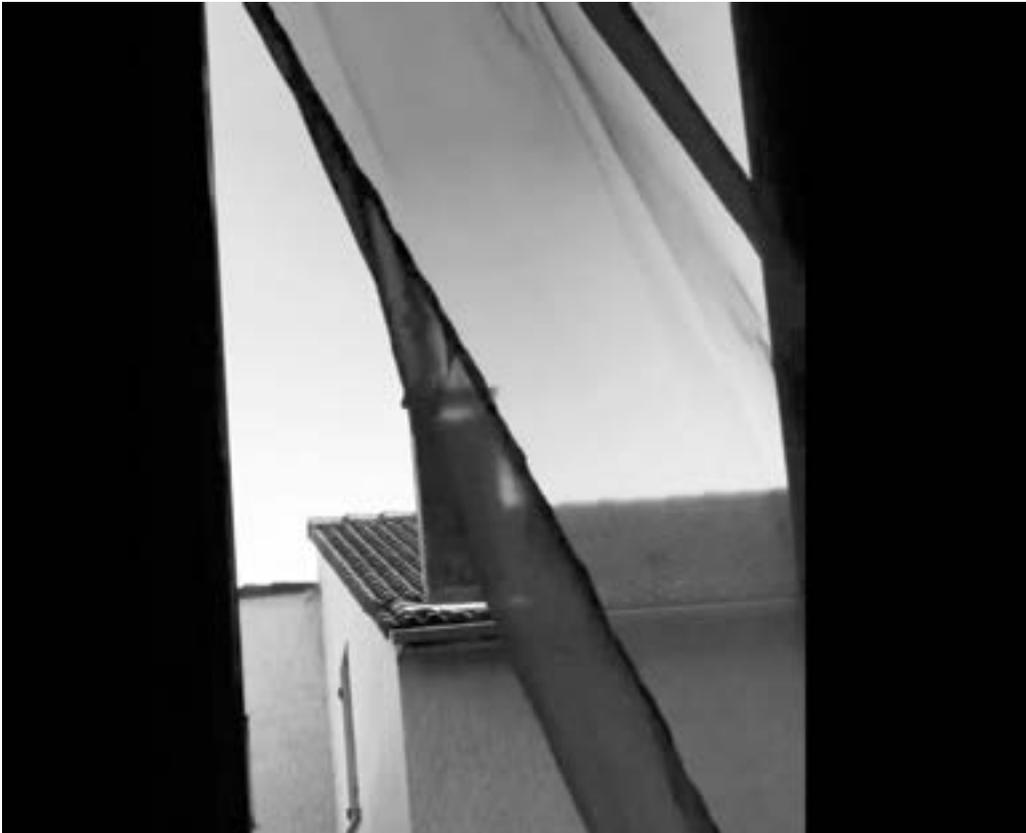
**FARAH MULLA**

*Aural Mirror*, (2013)

Sound Installation, laptop,  
speakers, microphones, mixer  
variable dimensions and duration

Image courtesy of the artist  
photography by Farah Mulla  
©Farah Mulla

"Made across numerous years and environments, the fragments that form collisions respond to the present. In a time of acceleration, fast burns and extinctions, the work seeks to echo our state of clash and rupture." – KATRIN KOENNING



KATRIN KOENNING  
*Collisions*, (2015-2020)  
Video still, 9:19 min, edition 5+2AP  
©Katrin Koenning. Image courtesy of the  
artist and ReadingRoom

## ARTIST BIOS

**Aishwarya Arumbakkam** (b.1988) is an artist from Chennai, India, currently based in Austin, Texas. Arumbakkam works across multiple media including photography, filmmaking and drawing. Her work is centred on cultural narratives and identity, and finds expression in mythological and personal narratives. She has exhibited her works in India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, China and the U.K. In 2020, she was awarded the Magnum Foundation Photography and Social Justice Fellowship. She was selected as one of the 'Ones to Watch' by the British Journal of Photography in 2019. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Studio Art at The University of Texas, Austin.

**Anjali House** – The Sanskrit word *anjali* translates to 'offerings' in English. Anjali House is a house of offerings for over 200 children from poor families in Siem Reap, Cambodia. A locally registered non-profit organisation, Anjali House began as a project of the Angkor Photo Association through its photography workshops for children and is a sustainable, transparent charity providing a safe space for children so that their parents can work, and enabling every child to access the same educational opportunities as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds through its various programmes.

**Bunu Dhungana** (b.1981) is an artist based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She uses photography as a medium to explore and question the world around her. Her background in sociology informs her photographic work, questioning notions of gender and patriarchy. While her personal projects centre around gender, she has worked in a wide range of fields from visual ethnography, NGO/INGO work, to commercial and journalistic work. Her work has been exhibited in Photo Kathmandu, Dali International Photo Exhibition, KunstKasten, Serendipity Arts Festival, and Mannheimer Kunstverein. She is associated with photo.circle and Nepal Picture Library in Kathmandu and is currently doing her fellowship at The Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University.

**Farah Mulla** (b.1988) is a multimedia artist based in Mumbai, India. Her background in science overlaps with her art practice to explore the perception of sound and its effects on human neurology and subjectivity. Her current research experiments with sensory overlaps and materiality through different texts, sounds, and circuits. Mulla completed her MFA from the Cambridge School of Arts, U.K. Her works have been exhibited in solo exhibitions in Mumbai at Jehangir Art Gallery and Zenzi. Her participation in group shows include Sakshi Gallery, Ruskin Gallery, Changing Spaces (Ark). Mulla was a part of the Dharti Arts Residency and has presented her work at the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa.

**Jaisingh Nageswaran** (b.1978) is a self-taught photographer from Madurai, India. Born dyslexic to working class parents, he was taught by his grandmother at home, and went on to do his Masters in Mass Communication. Jaisingh Nageswaran's practice revolves around documenting socially vulnerable communities in India, issues of rural life and his family. He is a grantee of the Serendipity Arts Foundation and Les Rencontres d'Arles grant, has won a prize at the 9th "Rencontres Cinématographiques de Cerbère-Portbou" in France, and his work has been presented at 'Then the Night of the Year' at Photo Phnom Penh. He is an active member of two artist collectives, 13JARA and Guldasta, and also works as a photographer doing stills for films.

**Katrin Koenning** (b. 1978) is an artist from the German Ruhrgebiet, currently based in Naarm, Melbourne, Australia. Situated in documentary, her work explores stories and experiences through an engagement with the everyday. Koenning's photographs have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions that include Centre for Contemporary Photography, Paris Photo, Chobi Mela, Peckham 24, Chennai Photo Biennale, Australian Centre for Photography. She is a recipient of the Bowness Photography Prize and The Daylight Award. Her work is published in The New Yorker, The New York Times, British Journal of Photography, The Guardian and Der Spiegel. Koenning's regularly teaches workshop intensives in photographic practice and thinking. She is represented by ReadingRoom Melbourne.

**Munem Wasif** (b. 1983) is a photographer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His photography and films investigate complex social and political issues with a humanistic language, by getting close to the people, both physically and psychologically, and dealing with multiple questions and contradictions. He was one of the curators of Chobi Mela VIII – X International Festival of Photography. His last book on Old Dhaka was published by Clémentine de la Féronnière. He has had exhibitions worldwide including Centre Pompidou, Whitechapel Gallery, Kettle's Yard, Victoria & Albert Museum, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Para Site, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Gwangju Biennale, Singapore Biennale, Sharjah Biennial, Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, the Dhaka Art Summit and Chobi Mela.

**Nepal Picture Library (NPL)** is a digital photo archive run by photo.circle that strives to create a broad and inclusive visual archive of Nepali social and cultural history. Since its inception, NPL has collected over 120,000 photographs from various private and organizational sources across Nepal. The archive serves as a safe and open repository for materials that can secure a multicultural and pluralist representation of Nepali history. It also functions as a medium for active public engagement through which Nepali people can deepen meaningful connections with the past. NPL has created a network of professionals with an interest or specialized knowledge in various museum, design, academic, publishing and artistic disciplines.

**Nida Mehboob** (b.1985) is a photographer and filmmaker based in Lahore, Pakistan. She graduated as a pharmacist and went on to pursue photography. Her topics of interest include themes of social injustice varying from religious and gender discrimination in Pakistan. Through her documentary work, she has been invited to several international workshops and received fellowships over the years including a one-year long filmmaking workshop by Goethe-Institut, Angkor Photo Workshop and Social Justice Fellowship by Magnum Foundation. Mehboob attained a diploma in photography from Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, Bangladesh. Her short films have screened at international festivals including Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland.

**Reetu Sattar** (b.1981) works between Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Berlin, Germany, with an interdisciplinary practice that encompasses live performance, documentation and objects as archival memories in an effort to re-examine history and human perception. Her work has been presented at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Liverpool Biennial, Dhaka Art Summit, the British Film Institute, Alserkal Avenue, ArtSpace and Palais de Tokyo. Her performances have been staged internationally at venues in London, Birmingham, Bangkok and Goa. Sattar's performance installation programmed in Spring 2020 was presented at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**Sarker Protick** (b. 1986) is a photographer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His practice combines the roles of an image-maker, a teacher and a curator. Protick is interested in themes such as altering of lands and borders, colonial relics and contemporary ecological emergencies. He is the recipient of Light Work Residency, Magnum Foundation Fund and the World Press Photo Award. His work has been exhibited in museums, galleries and festivals including Yokohama Triennale, Triennale der Photographie Hamburg, Paris Photo, Singapore Art Week, Riga Photography Biennial, Dhaka Art Summit and Art Dubai. Sarker Protick is a faculty member of Pathshala South Asian Media Institute and co-curator of the upcoming Chobi Mela International Festival of Photography 2021.

**Sathish Kumar** (b.1986) is a freelance photographer based in Chennai, India. A large part of his school vacations growing up were spent at his uncle's photo studio, which became an inspiration for him to pursue photography. With his photography, he records everyday reality, all his encounters and journeys that create an expression of himself, of his life and of the world around him.

**Sean Lee** (b.1985) grew up in Singapore. His first body of work *Shauna* made between 2007 and 2009 was nominated for the Prix Découverte on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Arles Photography Festival. Since then, Sean has gone on to make other stories through the medium of photography. His ongoing work, *Two People*, received the 2011 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu award. Much of Lee's work can be found in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum. Lee's first book, 'Shauna', was released in September 2014. It was collected by the Library of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**Yu Yu Myint Than** (b.1984) is a photographer based in Yangon, Myanmar. Her work focuses on personal photo documentaries. She works with Myanmar Deitta, a non-profit organization which develops resources for photographers and filmmakers in Myanmar, and is one of the founding members of Thuma women's photography collective. She has won several international scholarships and fellowships such as the Magnum Foundation Photography and Social Justice Fellowship. Her ongoing work *Living Statues* was recently shortlisted for Serendipity Arles Grant 2020. Than is keenly interested in photobook making as another layer of storytelling besides taking photographs. She self-published her debut photobook 'Memory Lane' in 2017.

## CURATOR BIO

**Sohrab Hura** (b.1981) is a photographer and filmmaker. His recent exhibitions include *Companion Pieces: New Photography*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organised by Lucy Gallun, *Searching for Stars Amongst the Crescents*, Experimenter, Videonale, Kunstmuseum Bonn, *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan*, curated by Devika Singh, Kettle's Yard, *Eyes Wild Open: Life is Elsewhere*, Le Botanique, *Sweet Life*, Experimenter, the 11<sup>th</sup> Shanghai Biennale curated by Raqs Media Collective, among others. Hura's work has been widely shown in international film festivals and was awarded the 2020 Principal Prize of the International Jury at the 66<sup>th</sup> International Short Film Festival Oberhausen Online for *Bittersweet* and The Paris Photo-Aperture PhotoBook of the Year Award for *The Coast* in 2019. His work can be found in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, Ishara Art Foundation, the Cincinnati Art Museum and other private and public collections. Hura lives and works in New Delhi, India.

**Ishara Art Foundation** was founded in 2019 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to presenting contemporary art of South Asia. Located in Dubai, the Foundation supports emerging and established practices that advance critical dialogue and explore global interconnections.

Guided by a research-led approach, Ishara realises its mission through exhibitions, onsite and online programmes, education initiatives and collaborations in the UAE and internationally. The Foundation facilitates exchange between South Asian and international artistic networks that include museums, foundations, institutions, galleries and individuals.

The Ishara logo, a synthesis of a square and circle, is based on an ideogram by Zarina to convey the word 'آسمان' ('Aasman'), Sky. It forms one of 36 images from 'Home is a Foreign Place' (1999), a work in the collection of Ishara's Founder and Chairperson, Smita Prabhakar. Ishara signifies a gesture, a signal or a hint, and is a word common to several languages including Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Swahili and Urdu. Ishara is grateful for the generosity extended by Zarina and her family to use the ideogram in the Foundation's logo.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.

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#### **SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Anjali House

Dayanita Singh

Diwas Raja Kc

Jessica Lim

NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati

Shikhar Bhattarai

*"Growing Like A Tree lays out an incomplete blueprint of my experience of community and friendship with photography forming the nucleus of this large animated nervous system.*

What I've been seeing over the years are collective flows in terms of movement and exchange of photographers across political, geographical and cultural boundaries. An osmosis-like relationship with photographers across borders has started to seep through with each one searching for new ways to grow as artists and having at stake something in common that is far more urgent than photography."

– SOHRAB HURA

