

FRAMEWORKS

Positions and Practices in Photography

The understanding of photography for over 160 years has been informed by practices, technologies, curation, circulation and collection. In the current scenario, further media advancements have led to unprecedented changes in its overall definition due to the way in which this hybrid tool/object is used and deployed. Documentary practices as well as artforms have therefore ‘migrated’ across fields, leading to a renewed language of tradition, encounter, training and even display.

Photography in the present can be viewed as a means of the everyday, in possessing the power to influence us and even lead us astray - often reorienting our sensibilities and what we desire. Images are now animated not only by events or contexts, but their very nature as objects of citation - affecting iconology and transforming the domain of visual culture. As a result, the current series of talks aims to explore not only the production, exposition and thinking about images by practitioners, gallerists, curators and writers, but their construction, treatment and re-appropriation. Where do we draw the line between a public and private appreciation in todays context? To what extent can cultural engagements or aesthetic considerations be stretched?

To reflect on ways of encountering images presented in different manners, we need to consider how the future of appreciating, taking and archiving images will be dependent on consumption as well as mass media technologies. The use of various format cameras therefore allows for an expansion of the medium, from an exploration of personal narratives to the visualising of political statements. Does this alter the realness of representation? How have exhibitions in the last 10 years transformed ways of viewing or showcasing photography? Does the emerging generation of photographers provide an alternative form of expression? How have we defined ‘practice’ and what are its repercussions? The seminar seeks to address some of these aspects as an inter-disciplinary foray into the growing concerns around the medium.

SEMINAR

TIME & PLACE : 15 & 16 February, 2014

Goethe-Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan, Mumbai

15.02.14 // DAY 1

- 10.00 - 10.30 - Tea
- 10.30 - 11.00 - INTRODUCTION by PIX

11.00 - 12.30 - SESSION #1 // ‘Not Just Documents’: Photography and Art Practices

The meditation, writing and overall deliberation on photography has been re-inscribed in the present based on technologies, motivations and working practices. To consider the semiotic turn on the conventions of imaging – we may think of *metaphor* and *metonymy* as the two most important analytical tools as they account for slippages in the language of expression – ones that open up new dimensions of meaning. Can we therefore suggest that images resonate with unintended meanings? Photography as an art practice is therefore constantly evolving, not only in terms of the way in which it is used by photographers but also the manner in which it is discussed, exhibited, edited, critiqued and located. Hence, with the passage of time, some commentators have drawn a line between ‘art photography’ and the ‘photography of artists’. Would this distinction be relevant in the present time with the transformation of cultural engagement in a growing art world?

- Panel Moderation - Gitanjali Dang
- Panelists - Aveek Sen, Arshiya Lokhandwala, Andrea Fernandes
- Discussant - Niyatee Shinde
- PHOTO PRESENTATION
- 12.30 - 1.00 - Mansi Thapliyal in conversation with Kaushik Ramaswamy

- 1.00 - 2.00 - Lunch

2.00-3.30 - SESSION #2 // The Need for Curation: Supporting Photography

With the advent of festivals, grants, schools, publications and other platforms catered to photographers/visual artists over the past few years, there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of photography or lens-based media in India. However, in the absence of any significant cultural policy and support from the national or regional state(s), photographic culture is still mostly relying on the goodwill of private sponsors and voluntary work. This session proposes to look into the initiatives of the past few years, and how can we create a healthy and supportive environment in South Asia? Can we develop further partnerships with private institutions while maintaining the absolute freedom of expression?

The genesis of contemporary photography as a ‘democratic’ form, is also about diagnosing and gauging levels of practice primarily outside mainstream culture as developed in commercial galleries or museums. The sheer number of ‘citizen’ photographers in the world, changes the ethics of engagement with photography as a mass/social-media tool, wherein the borders of high and low art go completely out of focus. Hence, there is also an urgency to examine the state of photography education and expertise. How can we go beyond simple technical training? Where do we learn the art of editing or of the of reading an image? How can we foster a critical discourse on photography and visual culture, which is not only the fruit of institutions abroad?

- Panel Moderation - Tanvi Mishra
- Panelists - Aparna Jayakumar, Sree Goswami, Lola Mac Dougall, Matthieu Foss

PHOTO PRESENTATION

- 3.30 - 4.00 - Aishwarya Arumbakkam
- 4.00 - 4.30 - Tea

4.30 - 6.00 - SESSION #3 // Archives of a City: A Visual Heritage

The unearthing of a South Asian visual heritage has been gradual, while a good part of it still remains to be discovered or examined. However one may not only consider this growing archive as a static stock of images but rather as material in constant flux, especially in an age of the democratisation of the photographic/visual medium. Who and what then are the agents of archival work? What is the responsibility of private collectors, public institutions, and artists/collectives? What are the imperative sites of the archive in today’s context?

In an effort to gauge how objects become repositories of meaning and power, one may consider the bounds of private collection as well as public appraisal. This fundamental difference is significant as we encounter the debris of photographic excesses from opposite ends of the scale – but plausibly with similar intent, i.e. to showcase ‘representative’ works over broad spans time. Consequently, how does the archive inform the creativity of artists but also our stance as citizens?

- Panel Moderation - Kaiwan Mehta
- Panelists - CAMP, Puja Vaish, Pablo Bartholomew
- Discussant - Rahaab Allana

PHOTO PRESENTATION

- 6.00 – 6.30 - Akshay Mahajan

16.02.14 // DAY 2

- 10.00 – 10.30 - Tea
- 10.30 - 11.00 - INTRODUCTION by PIX

11.00 - 12.30 - SESSION #4 // Are Photographs Mutable Objects? Craft as a Changing Language

Photography has been traditionally shared in the form of a single print in a publication or framed on a wall. However, contemporary practitioners have shown that the format, presentation and scenography could be almost as crucial to the message as the depiction of the picture. Photographs are now cut, pasted and stretched till the point they even become part of an installation or performance.

The aesthetic potential and extendedly, the inference from display practices has become an essential means of encounter. In a similar vein, this session seeks to locate instances of departure from the norm of ‘straight’ photography as strictly documentary practice. In doing so, the panel could scout for discursive positions that directly or indirectly explore narratives in images, or even theme-based applications rather than the ‘citation’ or ‘history’ image which may be read as a simple portrait or a landscape – direct reference to a subject. This session will thus explore the craft of displaying, sharing and appropriating photographs in the light of contemporary practice and allied artforms.

- Panel Moderation - Roy Sinai
- Panelists - Neha Choksi, Zishaan Akbar Latif, Suryanandini Narain
- Discussant - Tanvi Mishra

PHOTO PRESENTATION

- 12.30 - 1.00 - Chirodeep Chaudhuri
- 1.00 - 2.00 - Lunch

2.00 - 3.30 - SESSION #5 // Photography Not Allowed: Shooting and Exhibiting in Public Space

Public space has never been as inundated with photographs but neither has it been as challenging for the photographer to shoot freely. Hovering between state censorship and corporate propaganda, the photographer is often singled out as a potential source of disturbance. The panel attempts to assess the state of the freedom of expression through the prism of the (legal) rights the photographer. All photographers go into the world confronting its politics, empowered by the vicissitudes of their practice. Often, their acts, subversive or otherwise, are intellectually driven, aesthetically tuned, and overtly discreet, when compared with the journalistic, or in fact, plainly documentary.

This session will also look at the possibilities of showcasing work in public space, drawing from initiatives in India and around the world: what are the specificities of the Indian public space? What sort of engagement do we get with the viewer by pasting photographs outdoors? Is this a new fashion or a real democratization of the practice? How do we put this in perspective with the growth of public art and street art in India?

- Panel Moderation - Philippe Kaalia
- Panelists - Abhijit Patil, Ritesh Uttamchandani, Dhanya Pilo, Rajeev Thakker

PHOTO PRESENTATION

- 3.30 - 4.00 - Arko Datta in conversation with Kaushik Ramaswamy
- 4.00 - 4.30 - Tea

4.30 - 6.00 - SESSION #6 // New Ethnographies: Contemporary Conventions of the Image

This session addresses aspects of contemporary documentary/art related work in India, and the adoption of original visual strategies, such as the migration from the still to the moving image. This conversation could range from addressing the notion of authorship to the position of the photographer as the new ‘ethnographer’, a challenger of traditional norms given the growing contribution of the gallery world as well as independent collectives.

This session also aims to locate instances of ‘connectivity’ between past and present image-making practices in conscious ways in order to develop a sense of stylistic lineage and creative departure. In doing so, the speakers may attempt to scout for positions and practices that directly or indirectly explore ways in which the ‘citation’ or ‘history’ image can be as much a point of initiation (inspiration). Furthermore, this kind of an ‘inter-visuality’, as cultural theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff termed it, may lead to evidence of evolving patterns of imaging modes and highlight future developments in the art practice of lens-based media.

- Panel Moderation - Goa-CAP
- Panelists - Amit Madeshiya, Fabien Charuau, Ronny Sen
- Discussant - Nishant Shukla

PHOTO PRESENTATION

- 6.00 – 6.30 - Sooni Taraporevala