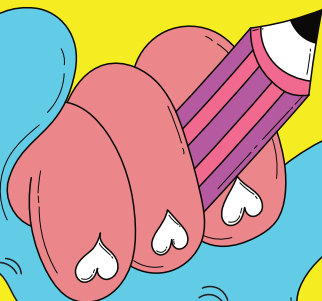


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# GENDER BENDER 2019









# GENDER BENDER 2019

Gender Bender is a joint project of the  
Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan and  
Sandbox Collective. The project is conceived,  
conceptualised, and curated by Sandbox  
Collective



**Venue: Bangalore  
International Centre**



## Sandbox Collective

Through Sandbox Collective's journey of nearly six years, our approach towards the works we produce and curate has seen a marked evolution. What is clearer than ever is the fact that art is at the crux of bringing positive change and increased empathy. In this, we have gravitated organically towards the link between art and gender, which also resulted in the creation of Gender Bender four years ago. The festival invites applications from artists and individuals around the world, for works that play with innovative and novel ideas around issues of gender. Each project created for Gender Bender since its inception has resulted in impact far beyond the festival. The conversations that emerge as artists and audiences meet and interact in this space are of immense value to the discourse on Gender.

In addition to showcasing the work of grantees, this year's festival includes a set of curated displays, performances, and talks. There will be photography exhibits, lecture-demonstrations, a stand-up show, Feminist and Queer pop-up libraries, a talk on women in comics, a workshop on zine making and much more. Gender Bender 2019 promises to be a colourful, exciting and celebratory exploration of gender and art.

We are proud to continue our partnership with the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan on this edition of Gender Bender, as with the previous four. Gender Bender would not be what it is without the help, support and encouragement of the jury, grantees, friends and supporters from the extended arts community.

Team at Sandbox Collective  
Bangalore



## **Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan**

Dear Friends,

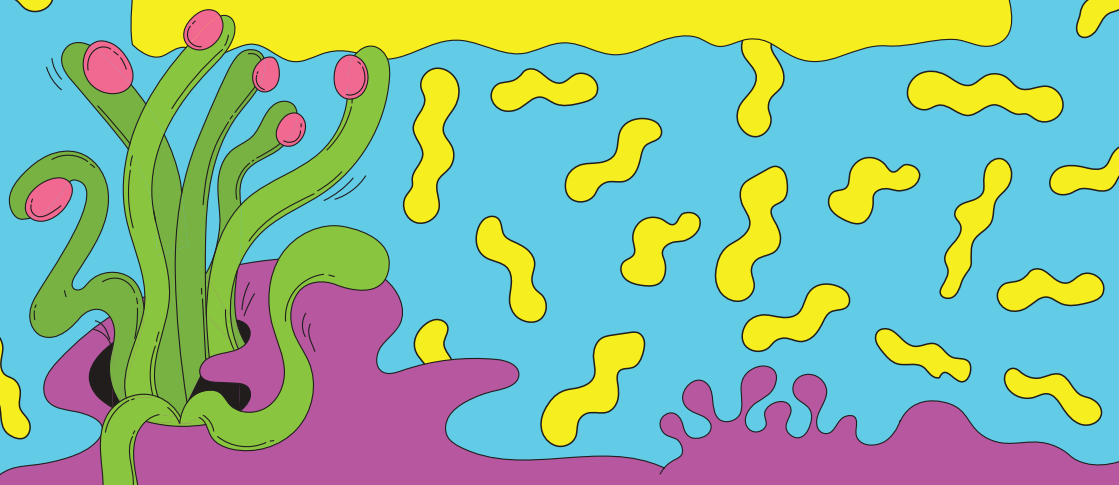
We are honoured to present the fifth edition of Gender Bender, for the first time at the Bangalore International Center (BIC). As the initiative grows with every year, so too does our appreciation for this arts festival which focuses on questions that deal with gender, sexuality and identity. This is not only because the participating artists, our partners and the audience are creative and committed, but also because the festival becomes its own generator of artistic work and activist energy. Projects first presented at Gender Bender have grown and developed immensely over time. I am sure many of this year's grantees will experience the same because their works are truly stimulating.

In 2019, Gender Bender has also grown in size and scope. For the first time our building is too small to host the whole festival. So we have moved to the BIC and there Gender Bender will be on display throughout the entire space. This is an important step for everyone involved. Though the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan was the proud host of the Festival these last four years, we are equally proud to see Gender Bender becoming a grown-up amongst the arts festivals in Bangalore. A big thank you to the jury members and of course to our great partner - Sandbox Collective. Gender Bender is once again a highlight in our annual calendar.

Dr. Claus Heimes

Director

Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore



## **Who You Callin' a Lady?** **Stand up Comedy with Vasu Primlani**

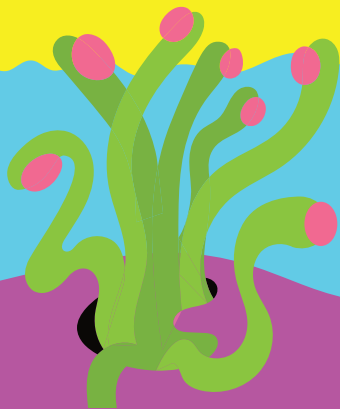
Vasu Primlani is a celebrated speaker, social entrepreneur, actor, environmentalist, professor, somatic therapist, triathlete, police trainer, and one of India's leading comedians.

She employs comedy to discuss issues of social messaging, particularly around boundaries, civic sense, gender equity, and the concept of consent. She has several viral videos to her credit, including A for Allahabad and the demonetization series.

As a somatic therapist she works with deep trauma: people who have attempted suicide, rape victims, as well as those who have committed sexual assault and other kinds of violence. It is her belief that we need to de-traumatize both victims and criminals if we want a safe society. She is also a trainer on rape sensitization and de-traumatization for the Indian police force.

Dude. See my feet? No heels. I am not a woman. I am not a man. I can be more graceful than a woman and tougher than a man. I am a functioning person. I am Vasu.

"Are you a girl or a boy?" Somehow we carry buckets, and have to put people in these. Not according to their abilities, their brains, their accomplishments, but their gender. And what do people do with that information? Do they want to know if they can hit on you? Do they want to look you up and down? Know if they can respect you? Vasu Primlani will explore gender in comedy format through her personal experiences. As Pat Parker once said, my lady ain't no lady. Which is fine by me, 'cause I ain't no gentleman. Don't put me in a bucket man. I take a bath in it.



## **A History of Women and Gender in Comics: A Talk by Kadak Collective**

Kadak is a collective of South Asian women, queer and non-binary folk who work with graphic storytelling of different kinds.

The talk presents insights from an ongoing research project by Arun Prasad and Aarthi Parthasarathy on the history of comics in India. The session would specifically look at the representation of women and marginalised genders in comics in India and the world - and talks about women, queer, and non-binary characters as well as creators. The talk begins with the emergence of comics in the late 1800s in the UK, post the advent of the printing press, and traces the history of the medium alongside the political movements of the suffragette era and modern feminism in the 1950s and 60s, culminating in the present day. It explores the links between politics, pop culture and representation as well as changing technologies and possibilities. Along the way, it touches on topics like the first black female comic artist Jackie Ormes and character, Torchy Brown and the creation of Wonder Woman among others.

## **In Search of Umrao: Exploring Desires and Destinies**

Arundhati Ghosh, Executive Director at India Foundation for the Arts, will be in conversation with Saba Dewan, filmmaker and writer, whose oeuvre of work challenges structures, rules, legitimacies and morality. Investigating the lives of women and their desires, her work provokes the statutes of both family and nation, to imagine what destinies of marginalised identities could be. From stigmatized female performers to members of her own family - Saba looks deeply into their lives to draw meanings that frame the larger stories of women in this country. Saba's life has also in unpremeditated but expected ways flowed into leading campaigns against the politics of hate and discrimination in the country over the past few years. The conversation will trace her journey, shedding light on her ruminations on the politics of body, histories of artistic practices, negotiations with power, and agency in transgressions.

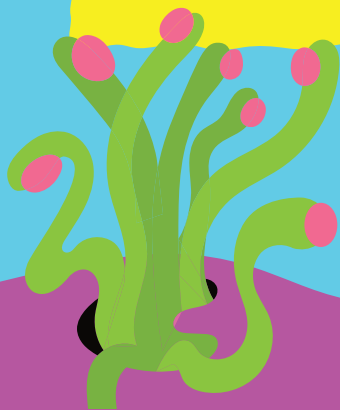
## Shudh Digital Romance

Dating apps have changed the way we meet people – but have they also changed the way we love? What are these changes? Are they the same in the heterosexual world and the queer world? Have they helped make unmarried sex less taboo, and sex for fun more accepted? Have they commodified people, paralysed us with endless choice, left us with more lovers but less love? More sex, but not all that much good sex? Have they liberated us or is the liberation something we have to find on our own once we've stepped through the portal of matches into the world of desire? A few years into the dating era, how have apps redefined our intimate lives?

Paromita Vohra, filmmaker, writer, antakshari player and agent of ishq will lead this conversation about love, sex, dating, mating and all things desire, along with Rashi Wadhera, Communication and Brand Manager of Tinder, India and Tejas AP, head of Research Communications at Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

## Raqs-e-Bender: An Evening of Fluid Movement

Raqs-e-Bender attempts to show that dance is beyond gender. 'Raqs' means dance and 'bender' refers to a person who bends the rules or norms of society. This truly defines Eshan Hilal who is a professional male belly dancer, fashion designer and gender fluid fashion model. The performance will take the audience on a journey of diverse dance styles, inviting them to join in and dance along.



# CURATED EVENTS AND DISPLAYS



## **Pop - Up Library**

The space is envisaged as a public arts installation. It aims to create a comfortable and welcoming space for community, allies and friends to gather and read. The Pop-up Library is a place for books and banter, conversations and camaraderie.

## **Sister Library**

Founder: Aqvi Thami

Aqvi Thami is an artist, activist, and academic, a member of the Himalayan Janajati Thangmi community who got an Indian passport by being born in Darjeeling. She uses art as a form of medicine to heal wounds caused by colonization and is interested in having conversations and creating spaces for reflection on marginalisation and resilience.

Sister Library is a travelling library powered by female excellence and supported by the Inlaks Fine Art Award 2018. It is an evolving and generative artwork that engages in in-depth reflection on the visual and reading culture of our times. The goal of the project is to bring together readers to explore the literary contribution, showcase the artistic quality and celebrate the contributions of women in the creative world as well as to foster interest and understanding of the accomplishments of women writers and artists.

## **Feminist Literature: Talk by Nisha Susan**

Well-known journalist, founder and editor of the feminist website The Ladies Finger will talk about the influence of feminist literature on her life and work.

## **Queer Library**

Curator: Rohini Venkatesh Malur

Rohini Malur is a queer poet, book reviewer, spoken word artist and writer based in Bangalore. A founding member of All Sorts of Queer, she regularly organises prose and poetry events for Namma Pride (Bangalore's Queer Pride March). And, when she remembers, she is pansexual.

### **Curatorial Note**

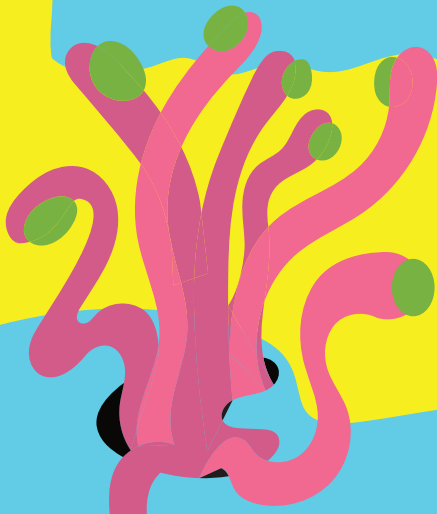
Not only is there not enough queer literature, in the spaces where it exists not everyone knows it is there or how to access it.

Libraries are one of our greatest egalitarian spaces. Public libraries are public spaces. They don't need us to follow any rules except these - to let people read, to read, and to return the books you've borrowed so someone else can share them too. Reading for pleasure is a solitary art that webs us into each other, highlighting our differences and binding us in our common humanity.

In this collection we include some theory, some analysis, but our priority is the human story - our struggles, our lives, our hearts, ambitions. Browse with us, and if we are silent in the library, let it be because we are all reading, not because we are shut away

### **Queer Literature: Talk by Kavya Murthy**

Kavya Murthy writes, edits and lives in Mysore. She is a book curator for Champaca Bookstore, and lives for and loves the mango and the tango.





# CURATED EVENTS AND DISPLAYS

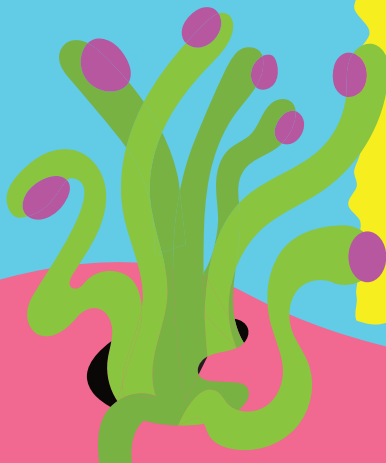
## ManiFest

Indu Antony was raised in Dubai in a conservative Indian family originally hailing from Kerala, India. She has been working with individuals from the fringes of the society. Her works predominantly depict human vulnerability and examines identity, gender and intimacy. She uses a variety of media to explore her anthropocentric work. Indu also harbours a keen interest in public art and practices that involve local communities. Besides having extensively shown in India, her works have been exhibited in London, Buenos Aires, New Mexico, Munich, Berlin, Kathmandu and Colombo.

ManiFest is the story of how thirteen queer women sneaked out of their female bodies. They dreamed drag to bend gender. Becoming a drag king was more about erasing restrictive gender boxes. The idea of drag, on paper, can seem like a fancy dress parade. But in reality, being a drag king involves both a physical and psychological shift. Men and women walk, sit, stand, and have different mannerisms. Men tend to throw back their shoulders and stand more upright. They walk with their legs apart. Women tend to sit quite neatly. Men take up a lot of space. To capture these subtleties on camera is tougher still. That these gender-bending rebels is a bunch of female-identified women playing at being men is a mere backdrop to the movement that they have launched - a revolution of sorts.

## Around the world in 50 posters

Artists from across the world were invited to send in artworks related to gender resulting in a surge of entries from Mexico to Mumbai. These 50 artworks including photographs, text, illustrations and paintings create the perfect backdrop against which this years festival will unfurl.



## **Zine workshop**

Aarthi Parthasarathy from Kadak Collective and Rachita Taneja of Sanitary Panels will conduct a two-day zine making workshop. Kadak is a collective of South Asian women, queer and non-binary folk whose stories and narratives move between the personal and political, question culture and examine subculture. Rachita Taneja is the creator of Sanitary Panels, a feminist webcomic that comments on society, culture and politics.

The zine workshop will introduce the participants to the world of zine making. Zines represent an informal/guerrilla mode of publishing which is geared towards accessibility, independent voice and DIY culture. Most importantly, zines have been a very successful tool for information dissemination for the disenfranchised groups and for celebrating lesser-told narratives.

During the workshop, the group will produce a wide array of zines in their own unique voice and style.

## **Zine Activity Corner**

The activity corner is a space for anyone who wants to try their hand at making zines. One half would be on the topic of 'Gender' and the other on 'Bender'. These zines will be on display and will later be collated into a single book as a festival zine. Also find a selection of Kadak's zines for reading and reference.

## **Film: Body Electric**

94 minutes | Portuguese | Brazil

Corpo Elétrico (English title: Body Electric) is directed by Marcelo Caetano.

Body Electric is a boudoir film. In each bed that Elias lies down, a new universe opens up from the narratives of the characters.

Bodies embracing and caressing each other, voices that speak softly and quietly, lovers who talk about their encounters, sexual adventures, dreams.



Aqui Thami



Saba Dewan



Rohini Mohan



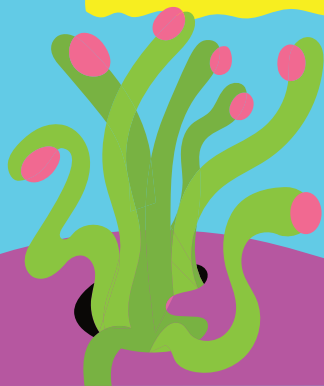
Mandeep Raikhy

The jury to select the 2019 grantees comprised, documentary filmmaker and writer Saba Dewan, artist, activist, and academic Aqui Thami, journalist Rohini Mohan and dance practitioner Mandeep Raikhy.

# THE FABULOUS HYSTERIC

A.P. PAYAL

Tarot cards were created in the Italian Renaissance for the entertainment of aristocrats and later became associated with fortune telling. Since then the tarot has been regularly reinvented. Payal wishes to harness the tarot's innate ability to tell stories to produce a deck that is inspired by the female menstrual cycle. The cards will engage with themes like menstruation, endometriosis, PCOD, cervical cancer, childbirth, and menopause. Through the deck, Payal hopes for women to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and break through social constructs about their bodies.



GRANTEE SHOWCASE



**A. P. PAYAL** is a doctoral scholar researching the politics of gender in tarot cards at the department of English, University of Delhi. She creates comics and illustrations with a focus on feminism, body positivity, mental health, and nature. Her academic research and artistic practice inform each other. In 2015, her illustration was published by the Museum of Tarot and exhibited at the Bologna ARTE FIERA. Her maiden graphic narrative was published in *First Hand: Graphic Non-Fiction from India*. In addition to participating in the independent comics scene, she has conducted comics workshops at educational institutions and partnered with ILF Samanway (2016), Pachmarhi Utsav (2018) and TheaCare: Women's Health Companion (2019).



## ON HER OWN

"On Her Own" is a multimedia exploration through the landscape of women's experiences of self-discovery, self-reliance and self-assertion. It travels through familiar stories about women all of us know. It unravels our silent moments of rebellion and shows us that we are not alone in these. In a world where the non-conforming voice has to fight for space, it is time for the collective to create that space for everyday stories. How does someone's journey influence our own and of what consequence is someone's story to ours? The project attempts to document how listeners react to these stories with stories of their own. The artists hope that the stories that emerge will help our audience connect better with women's struggles and celebrate their own stories better.

ANJANA BALAKRISHNAN,  
SUNAYANA PREMCHANDER,  
THEJESH GN AND YASHODARA UDUPA







**ANJANA BALAKRISHNAN** is a short story writer and editor, working at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bangalore. Her latest short story, "For Chikki's Sake", has been published in Kitaab's anthology *The Best Asian Short Stories 2018*. She blogs at <http://fictionhead.in>.

**SUNAYANA PREMCHANDER** is a writer, theatre practitioner and facilitator from Bangalore. She co-founded Kathasiyah, a theatre group whose vision is to tell stories with perspectives and narratives not included in mainstream discourse. She has directed two plays, 3 (English, 2017) and Nagamandala (Malayalam, 2018).

**THEJESH GN** is an independent technologist, hacker, maker, traveler, blogger, info-activist, open data and open internet enthusiast. He blogs at <https://thejeshgn.com>.

**YASHODARA UDUPA** is a filmmaker whose work focuses on issues such as human rights, culture and the city. What draws her to filmmaking is the ability to depict and share an experience with audiences from distant geographical, social and cultural spaces. She has edited a feature length documentary called *Inshallah Kashmir*, which won the National Award for Best Investigative Film (2013) in India.

# KAHI SUNI

ASHMI MRIDUL AND SNEHA JOSHI

The project delves into the subject of marriage migration, a common custom followed by women in India. By engaging with women from different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds, the artists will collect personal stories of marriage migration to be presented to the audience at the exhibition. The stories will play out through telephones, the main medium of connection in a migrant's life. They will be brought to life through evocative objects situated in a space created for introspection and conversation.







**ASHMI AND SNEHA** met while at university in London and connected over their shared experiences of migration, culture and identity. Ashmi is an artist and interaction designer, passionate about making art more accessible by bringing it into the public realm. She has created participatory installations, performances and workshops across several local contexts.

Sneha is an artist who enjoys questioning societal norms through her practice while investigating the creation of inclusiveness through her work. Her works take the form of participatory and interactive art projects and performances. They were drawn to work together as a result of their joy of engaging with communities and creating spaces for dialogue. The project, कही-सुनी (Kahi Suni) emerged out of the anecdotes of marital migration they heard from their mothers and shared with one another.



## CAMP: NOTES FROM BANGALORE

ASHOK VISH AND JOSHUA MUYIWA

Camp: Notes from Bangalore borrows gestures from camp men in the city to create how-to-videos influenced by the aesthetic of iconic exercise videos from the 80's (Think: Jane Fonda). The artists intend to pay homage and honour these gestures - but also, remind the audience that the underpinning of camp is: don't take yourself too seriously.





**ASHOK VISH** is an artist whose practice draws from his training as a filmmaker and other aspects of image-making such as video and photography.

**JOSHUA MUYIWA** is a poet, writer and columnist, who occasionally works with artists to make collaborative work. The duo live and work in Bangalore.



# WOMEN AND CASTE IN INDIA

DISHA ARORA

For Gender Bender Disha will create the first episode of her web series "Women and Caste in India". This series will focus on the impact of caste structures on Dalit women in the country. Caste, as a social denomination, has a huge role to play in deciding the socio-economic status of a woman in Indian society, which is highly patriarchal. Dalit women, being on the lowest rung of the caste-based hierarchy, have to pay a heavier price for being a woman. The first episode highlights the status of Dalit women's health in Rajasthan with a focus on their access to health-care facilities.





**DISHA ARORA** is a development communication specialist and documentary filmmaker. Over the past eight years, she has worked with several local and international nonprofits addressing social issues such as violence against women, rural education, climate change, and animal protection. Driven by the passion for creating a stronger focus on women's rights in India, Disha independently shot and directed *Women and Religion in India*, an award-winning documentary that highlights how women's rights are weakened under the guise of religion.



# AGUEBAO

VAROON P. ANAND AND GAURAV SINGH

Aguebao explores the value of human identity, especially gender, as commodified by data. This project is presented as an installation, and a 15 minute performance. Aguebao uncovers how our present relationship with technology reveals more than we intend.

At the core of Aguebao are conversations between two cis-gendered men somewhere in cyberspace, struggling with modern masculinity. One of the characters, a data professional that fits the present definition of 'woke', mines user level data to build products. The other is an overgrown man-child who's given up on the idea of understanding the opposite gender. He collaborates with the former to create a mobile app that can accurately predict a person's gender using a few inputs. What the two discover while building the app reveals far more about the intersection of technology and gender than what they'd expected.



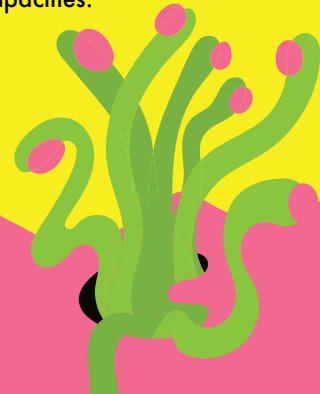




**VAROON P. ANAND** and **GAURAV SINGH** are principal collaborators at Kaivalya Plays, a Delhi-based independent theatre group.

Varoon serves as Artistic Director of Kaivalya Plays, its improv troupe CueLess Improv, India's only Spanish theatre group El Clavileño, and the Little Theatre Group (LTG) Repertory. He created Unravel, an improv show about mental health, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan.

Gaurav Singh is an actor, marketing consultant and production manager working in the independent and collegiate theatre circuit for the last 6 years. Having been part of youth theatre festivals like Thespo and Old World Collegiate Festival. Gaurav currently works with Kaivalya Plays, Little Theatre Group (LTG), El Clavileño and the Living Room Collective in various capacities.



## WHILE BEING AN OCTOPUS

RANIA ATEF

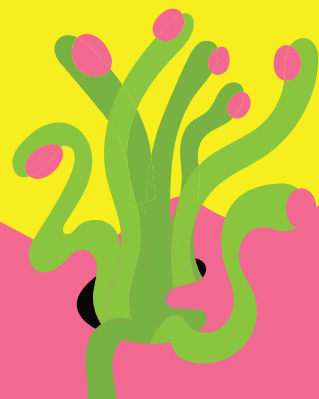
"While being an octopus" examines the position of women in the Arab region through the concept of "balance" required by women in general and mothers in particular. The project comes as an extension of Rania's research on the experience of maternity, especially from a social point of view. The project aims to represent the endless trials of creating balance between all the tasks and elements, while expressing the relation between her and the object in this context.







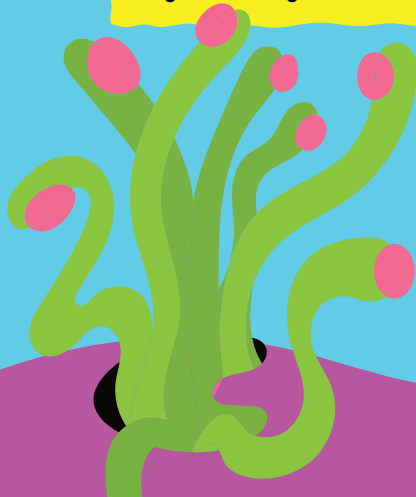
**RANIA ATEF** (born in 1988) is an Egyptian multidisciplinary visual artist whose work explores the notions of play and craft across a wide range of media including: painting, sculpture, installation and video. She obtained her BA in Product Design from the Faculty of Applied Arts (2011) and now she is enrolled in MASS Alexandria 2018/2019 program for Contemporary Art. Her practice started with the experimentation of three dimensional forms and installations using and combining different material. Her work mainly focuses on the infrastructure of social implications of life experience which affects human behavior and attitude. She has participated in a number of local/international exhibitions and festivals in Egypt, The Netherlands and South Africa.



## DECLARATION OF EMPATHY

SANDEEP TK

A few years ago, Sandeep met Annamma, and it was upon seeing her strength and courage that he was motivated to embark on this photographic project. Though the focus is on Annamma, the artist tells many stories about a sexual minority that is discriminated against, living on the margins of society.





**SANDEEP TK** is a practicing lens-based artist from Thalassery, Kerala, living and working in Bangalore. His practice includes moving images, documentary photography and fictional narratives that involve himself.



# THE RAINBOW BOOK

SANIKA DHAKEPHALKAR

This project aims to explore the relationship that non-binary, trans, and gender nonconforming people share with their clothes and expression by way of an interactive sticker zine made in collaboration with several queer people who currently reside in Mumbai. Readers would be able to 'dress' each collaborator in accordance with a context provided by them, by picking from stickers of clothing from their own closets. All the artwork will be made by hand and all the words and stories will belong to the people featured in the book. The project will offer a chance for readers to try to step away from a binary gendered view of clothing.





**SANIKA** is a queer artist based in Mumbai and loves to read, write and translate poetry. By day, Sanika is an educator and teaches art and English to children. Making wordpictures and picturewords is their most favourite thing in the whole entire world. They also love languages, plants, crows, lines and all kinds of green.





## FRAMED DESIRE

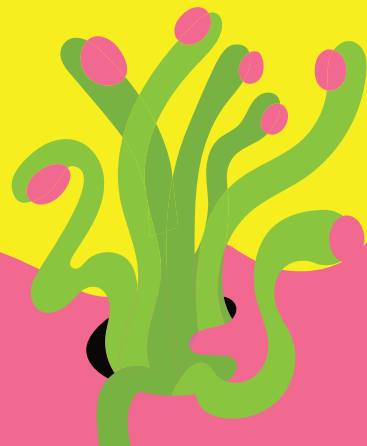
SROTA DUTTA ACHARYA

Photographs of prospective brides highlight the nuances of the marriage market. Certain feminine attributes are highlighted in most of these photographs, which in turn lead to questions like: Do these kinds of features make women appear more 'ready-to-get-married'? What kind of social norms are followed while clicking a picture for this particular purpose? Being a 'model bride' involves meeting certain requirements set by the society. A woman, posing for her 'bridability' has the desire to 'look better than what she is' in front of the camera. On the other hand, photographers, keeping the 'occasion' in mind attempt to make the product commercially and aesthetically successful. The artist's interactive installation is a glimpse into these desires, and a way to converse with the audience.





**SROTA** left professional journalism as Senior Sub Editor in 2013 and started to work as a freelance journalist. Simultaneously, she worked as a research assistant for a Norwegian installation artist. She also co-edited a yearly Bengali magazine on folk music for three years. Srota copy-edited a book on Leela Majumdar edited by singer-songwriter and an ethnomusicologist Moushumi Bhowmik. In 2016, collaborating with HAMDASTI, funded by IFA, she participated in the second edition of Chitpur Local, which culminated in a two day community art festival named 'Tales of Chitpur' in 2018





Sandbox Collective is an arts collective based out of Bengaluru that curates, produces and tours performances. It acts as a catalyst facilitating meaningful collaborations nationally and internationally between artists, cultural agencies and arts spaces creating an explosion of innovative artistic expression.

