

Transitions and Trajectories

The Photographs of Bhupendra Karia

In association with the Focus Festival in Mumbai sepia EYE is delighted to present a solo exhibition *Transitions and Trajectories: The Photographs of Bhupendra Karia*. The 18 black and white photographs taken in the 1960s and 70s are deeply steeped in both cultural awareness and personal vision, reflecting Bhupendra Karia's ethereal yet formally rigorous photographic eye.

Bhupendra Karia (1936-1994) was known not just as a photographer, but also as an artist, teacher, theorist and curator. Following his graduation in 1956 from Sir J.J. College of Art in Bombay, where he concentrated on painting, graphics, and history, he studied history and aesthetics at Tokyo University of Fine Arts. It was in Japan that Karia received his photographic education, along with a strong understanding of Ukiyo-e woodblock printmaking and Japanese architecture. He returned to India as a well-versed photographic image-maker. With a keen interest in traditional craft traditions and village culture, Karia spoke of "listening to India with one's eyes."

After teaching in and heading photography and graphic arts departments at the University of Southern California and the University of Baroda in the mid 1960s, Karia began to focus more and more exclusively on photography. Echoing earlier trips he had taken in rural India to make stone rubbings, Karia undertook extensive photographic journeys in the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s, traveling for weeks, sometimes months at a time, covering, by his accounts, some 80,000 miles across India's rural landscape. Karia's early motivations for these trips seem to have been fueled by an anthropological impulse to explore and record rural India and its native creative traditions—textiles, pottery, architectural decoration. As he spent more time in the villages and countryside, Karia began to broaden the context of his work, weaving together observations of rural and small town Indian life with larger concerns about social, political and environmental challenges facing contemporary India.

Drawn to a like-minded photographer, Karia sought out Cornell Capa, who would become his mentor and friend. Capa enlisted Karia's collaboration in establishing the International Center for Photography in New York in 1974. Karia held many positions at ICP including Curator, Director of Special Projects, and Associate Director. Ultimately, Karia would published over 15 titles and curate over 45 exhibitions.

Applying his curatorial eye to his own work in the mid 1970s, Karia painstakingly winnowed his oeuvre of a quarter million images to a selection of 74 photographs (from which the 18 in this exhibition have been chosen) that he called, with uncharacteristic humility, "the meager harvest of my first 20 years in photography." No longer were the photographs understood within the context of social analysis, nor were they intended to appeal to primarily photojournalistic narrative expectations. Instead, they were chosen and printed to meet aesthetic standards and to reveal what Karia felt was his unique understanding of India. The resulting portfolio reflects his struggle to reconcile the photograph's communicative role and its aesthetics; the reproducibility of the photograph and the singularity of the fine print; a truthful expression of India and his own unique subjective vision.

Karia's photographic works have been collected by the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi; Museum of Contemporary Art, Milan, Italy and private collections internationally.



Bhupendra Karia, *Hand Print on Wall*, 1968
Courtesy Bhupendra Karia Estate and sepiaEYE

EXHIBITION LOCATION

Lakereen Gallery
6/18, Grants Bldg, 2nd Floor
Opposite Basilico Arthur
Bunder Road
Colaba, Mumbai 400005

EXHIBITION DATES

March 12 – April 4th, 2015

RECEPTION

Thursday March 12, 2015
7:00-9:00pm

LECTURE

with Paul Sternberger:
Monday, March 23, 2015
6:00 – 7:30
The Muse, 1st Floor,
46 V.B. Gandhi Marg

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Photography Festival
MUMBAI, 2015