



Born in New Delhi and educated at the Royal College of Art in London, Sunil Gupta's more than impressive photography has managed to honestly and boldly capture queer culture for several decades and continues to do so. Today, as an artist, curator and educator he successfully pursues the questions that trouble him most.





You are an artist and a curator. How does your work as an artist differ from the work you do as a curator?

Well, not that much in my mind, both arose from a political need for cultural activism. I began my interest in making pictures by photographing the beginnings and rise of gay public life and politics in the 70s. Then when it came to showing the work and there appeared to be no organisers willing to do this, I learnt to do this. My first proper curated show was an LGBT one at Camerawork, London called "Same Difference", a critique of the fashionable 'difference' theory of the time which we saw as primarily heteronormative and white. But both artists and curators start with the seed of an idea and have to do some research to bring the idea to fruition, so the processes are not too unlike each other. In the 1990s I separated my artistic practice from my curatorial practice, and no longer located my own art works into my curatorial projects. Since the 2000s I've been trying to more art and less curating.



You were born in India. Has India and Indian culture had an influence in the way you perceive art?

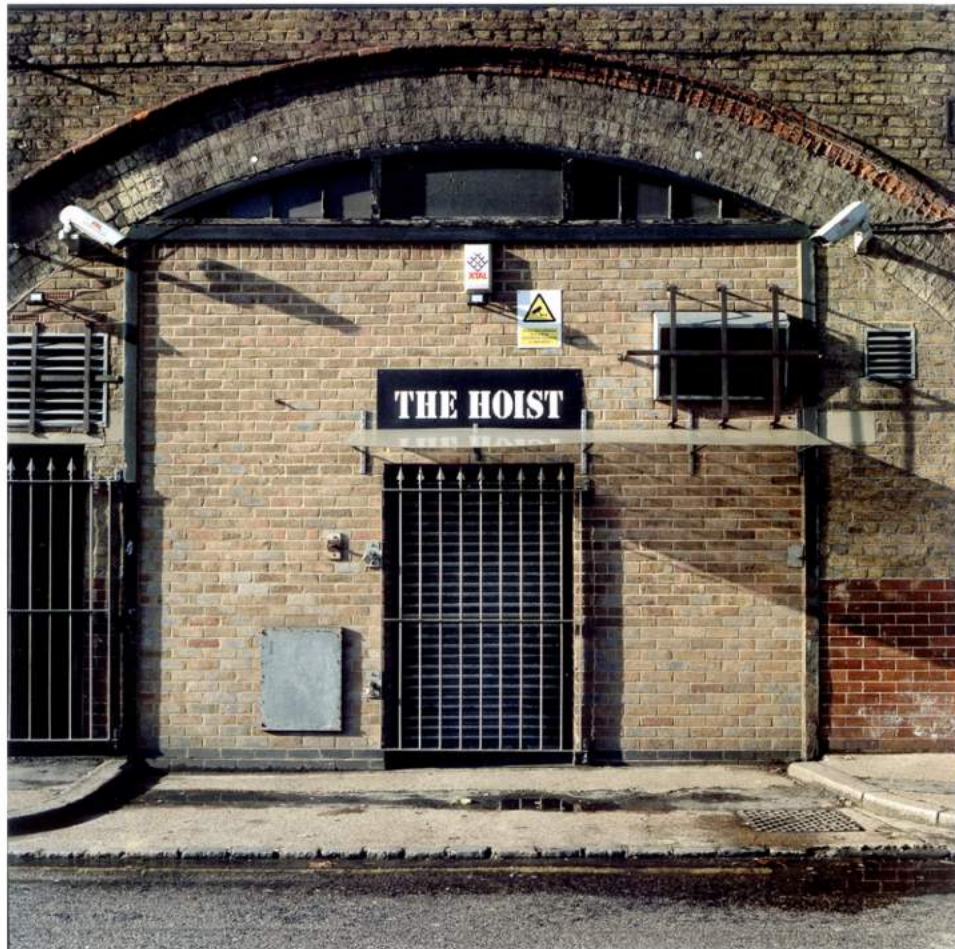
That's hard to tell as I was trained in British art schools, so people say my work is 'British' looking. When I was a student teachers used to say it looked Indian meaning it looked flat and had no perspective. And my decisive moments weren't really decisive at all. However, I grew up in India on a

diet of big overblown colourful Bollywood movies and they had a huge impact on me. I love melodrama, the narrative form and bright colours. But of course, all my formal art training was here in England.



What was it that first got you interested in photography and led you to pick up a camera and shoot?

When I was an undergraduate in Montreal, I had a friend and we were cinema buffs and saw every art movie possible at our college film club. But it didn't seem likely that we would ever be able to make movies, so one day we bought still cameras and he wrote poems and I took some snaps and we started to thread them into little narratives of stills and poems. I also bought an enlarger and made elementary prints in the loo at night. So had a process going. It was very exciting, except he went back to literature and I kept going with the camera but no script writer.



How is the lgbt situation in India at the moment?

The LGBTQ situation is in a watershed moment. After a decade of excitement that the law might be changed and sodomy and other so called unnatural acts between consenting adults be decriminalised, and seeing it change in 2009, the later reversal of the law by the supreme court in 2013 was a bitter disappointment. The current regime is not going to change the law, but it's not going after anybody either, it has all the power it needs and is busy harassing more obvious minorities. But if they were challenged they would react badly. So people are going about their business having Prides etc but not really mounting a challenge to the status quo.



A few years ago you published your book “Queer”. Can you tell us a bit more about it?

it came after the change in the law, when it was legal to have gay sex and I was living in Delhi at the time making more and more explicit art work about queer people and their lives. One the very significant aspects of India’s post 1990s liberalisation was that I could have a leading commercial art gallery represent the work and also get involved in financially backing the making of a monograph called “Queer”. I think this was a first for India. Suddenly Queer felt all respectable and mainstream.



Today you are also a university lecturer. What is the most important thing you would like to pass on to your students?

That they should rigorously pursue those questions about their lives/interests that intrigue/trouble them the most. That they should be less conscious about success and fashion, their work might be successful because its suddenly fashionable, but that shouldn't be their short term goal. For some of us it's taken a life time to get noticed, but for me the question has always remained the same; what does it mean to be an Indian queer man?

<http://www.sunilgupta.net/>

