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Portraits of Contemporary Fashion Jewellery Photography

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Interviews

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INTERVIEW WITH ESA EPSTEIN - sepiaEYE gallery



Please, could you introduce yourself?

My name is Esa Epstein, I'm the Owner/Curator of sepiaEYE gallery in Chelsea, New York.

How did it come up with the idea of establish a specialized gallery in contemporary photography/video from Asia in the heart of New York?

I began working with photography at Aperture in the 90s, although my background is in archaeology and museology. My career path drastically changed when I met Ebrahim Alkazi, a well-known art collector and theatre director from India and worked with him and Bhupendra Karia, the artist/curator, at the Center for International Contemporary Arts (CICA). Alkazi later hired me to put together his 19th century photography collection on photographic works from and on India. What I thought would be a small project took over fifteen years to establish in three centers, New York, London and New Delhi (currently the photography archive has been consolidated with the Alkazi Foundation of the Arts in New Delhi). In tandem with the 19th century photographic works, we began a contemporary gallery (Sepia International) that would play off the older works, and the idea of specializing in contemporary photography and video from Asia arose from that dialogue.

When did you become interested in the field of photography? and Why is photography important for you?

I took photography classes in college but truly "got the bug" after working at Aperture. The powerful thrill of connecting with an image hasn't waned and working with the artists and the development of their work has kept me in the field.

How do you think you can contribute to the photography growth?

As with fine art we are familiar with the western history of photography and, although this is improving, the same history and culture of photography is just as rich but not as studied or explored. The exhibitions we mounted over ten years at Sepia International juxtaposed the past (19th century) with the present (commercial artists) and also posed many questions about the photographer's intent, the photographic process, and photography as an art form. With sepiaEYE, I'm continuing to work with contemporary works and provide a venue for these not often heard/seen voices, histories, and processes.

What photographers are you involved with?

I currently represent two estates, Raghubir Singh and Bhupendra Karia, as well as 17 artists who are a mix of mid-career and emerging.

What kind of requirement needs a photographer to be in your gallery? Could you explain the process of artist selection?

In one review the critic suggested that I look for "humanistic" photography. I'm not sure, if that is completely accurate but I do think that I need to "be moved" by the work or respond to what the artist is saying. We all bring our own experiences and perspective to looking at art and the connection and/or dialogue with the object is what interests me.

Why did you focus on photography/video from Asia and how do you see photography nowadays as a medium of Art?

As I've mentioned, the focus on photography and video from Asia stemmed from my involvement with the Alkazi Collection of mostly Indian photography from the 19th century. A few of my photographers work in other mediums as well: for example, Vivan Sundaram, one of the key contemporary artists working today, began working as a painter in the late 60s and is known for his sculptures and installations as well. He views photography and video as just another form of image-making—of expression—and so do I.

What would you say are the best spots not to lose? Or in other words what would you say are the best spots in the international panorama about photography?

I'm not sure what you mean... I think we are seeing more work from geographical regions that have been marginalized in the past that are now being placed into a wider discussion within contemporary art. With the ease of searching the internet, social media, and international platforms such biennials and fairs we have more space for exchange, research, and review. Ironically, as the internet makes it easier to share images and discuss images, I think the actual physical monetary cost of making images and going to see images is becoming prohibitively expensive—it's harder for smaller galleries with unique voices to survive in cities with ever increasing rents (like New York City) and for those same "voices" to be represented at international fairs. We are "losing" those venues as they cannot survive economically, and the audience loses them as well as they can't access them—due to high admission costs as well. We're losing actual physical places to discuss and view photography, offline. (my two cents!)

What are your short term and long term goals?

Short term: surviving, getting the word out about the gallery and long term: exposing my artists work to a larger public, both critically and commercially.

Why do you think we have to Invest in photography/video from Asia?

Because it's good! As in any case, you can't generalize with an entire region, but I firmly believe that the quality of the work stands on it's own. If the artistic expression is relevant to the viewer—if it connects with them—it is collectible.

What do you like the most about working in this kind of project?

I love the opportunity to cultivate my artists' work along with the process of working with them on various projects, including books, exhibitions, and trade fairs. It's a very collaborative process between two people, discussing the work and how best to convey the message. Photography is changing and the traditional mode of framed work on the wall and in books form is rapidly expanding. Artists are finding new ways of expressing themselves through the medium, combining technology with their unique vision. There is constant growth in the photography world that keeps you current in the understanding the artists' process and how best to exhibit the material.

What are the expectations of someone who visits sepiaEYE?

I am fortunate to represent a wide variety of artists and media. Each exhibition has its own story to tell and its own challenges. I hope the visitor is intrigued enough by the exhibition to leave with a greater understanding of the artist's work and to appreciate the ideas.

Where would you like sepiaEYE to be in 10 years?

I would like to see sepiaEYE's artists well-placed internationally in the current dialogues of today's issues. Whether it be in the gallery space, public spaces, museums, private collections, or in the public's mind.



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**Atul Bhalla**  
Atul Bhalla has explored the physical, historical, spiritual, and political significance of water to the urban environment and population of his city (New Delhi) through artworks that incorporate sculpture, painting, installation, video, photography, and performance.



**Martin Brading**  
Martin Brading invites the viewer into the extraordinary world of India through vibrant colors and rich symbols. In his series of work entitled India Inside Out, photographs of Indian and Nepali interiors and exteriors explore the transcendent nature of life there as well as celebrate the rich heritage of Eastern values and representations.



**Serena Chopra**  
Serena Chopra offers the viewer a portal into the lives of her subjects. Chopra spent five years in Bhutan photographing a community as it experienced a shift towards modernity. In her most recent project, Chopra is exploring the lives of residents of Majnu Ka Tilla, a Tibetan community in Delhi.



**Sunil Gupta**  
Sunil Gupta is an artist, writer, activist, and curator. In a recent series entitled, Imagining Childhood, Gupta focuses on children diagnosed with HIV who are in the care of the NAZ Center in Delhi. By not stressing their pain or the nature of third world health care, Gupta instead creates images of an unsettling yet still innocent childhood.



**Minoru Hirata**  
A freelance journalist since 1955, Minoru Hirata is best known for his work on the Okinawan people and the region's turbulent geopolitical history (1960s to the present day) as well as his capturing of seminal moments in the "Anti-Art" performance art movement of the 1960s.



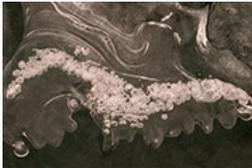
**Miyako Ishiuchi**  
The images of Miyako Ishiuchi present us with the bittersweet residue of inevitable change. Her photographs serve as containers of accumulated memories twice removed—bookmarks placed by an unknown reader in a book which, if found later, may not be read again.



**Bhupendra Karia**  
Karia's thoughtful and luminous photographs, created primarily in India and Israel, reflect a distinct approach separate from the popular photographic trend of street photography in India during 1970s/1960s.



**Sookang Kim**  
Sookang Kim photographs small, ordinary things present in her everyday life—saucers, baskets, socks, as well as a series of traditional Korean wrapping cloths, bogaji's.



**Koichiro Kurita**  
Koichiro Kurita's enticing photographic works invite the viewer into a meditative dialogue between nature and self. At age 40, Kurita shifted to fine art photography and began to master early photographic processes. In 1990, an Asian Cultural Council grant resulted in his first solo exhibition in the U.S.



**Jungjin Lee**  
Breathhtaking in their totality and balance, the images of Jungjin Lee present a self-contained world of stillness and wonder. Just as her photographic gaze is insistent and transforming, Lee's images draw the viewer into a realm where the ecstasy and fullness of vision becomes the primary subject matter.



**Annu Palakunnathu Matthew**  
Annu's photographic work addresses the political, social, transformative issues stemming from her own experience of living between three cultures. These cultural "overlays" and shifts use a framework of visual juxtaposition and the construction of parallel realities, identities and histories.



**Derry Moore**  
Moore is best known for his portraiture as well as architectural and interior photographic work. His photographs have been reproduced in numerous magazines (including Architectural Digest, Mens Vogue, and Nest), and he has published over a dozen books.



**Osamu James Nakagawa**  
Osamu's work moves seamlessly from direct black and white photographs (Kai, 1998-2001) to large color "paintings" (Banta, 2008) pieced together from hundreds of digital files. His accomplishments in the technology of new media and digital photography meld with his unique, personal visual language.



**Katsumi Omura**  
With a penchant for the vantage point which rarely and reluctantly remains parallel to the ground, the work of Katsumi Omura is both quick-sighted and decisive. Omura creates a distinct vision within an oeuvre of diverse subject matter, including intimate architectural studies and an extended series on birds in flight.



**Yukio Oyama**  
The work of Yukio Oyama is one of tracks, traces, and exquisitely distilled moments, suspensions of time. Paramount in his images is an overwhelming sense of stillness and certainty, an innate feeling of completion and a sense that the heart has found its home.



**Angelika Sher**  
Angelika Sher's series 13 is steeped in vibrant color and uncanny hues; these photographs draw the viewer into playful staging, tableaux vivants, populated by her children and their friends.



**Pamela Singh**  
The images of Pamela Singh continue to explore feminine existence through the relationship between her own body and the social landscape, as both an insider and an outsider of contemporary Indian society.



**Raghubir Singh**  
Raghubir Singh was a self-taught photographer. Considered a pioneer of color photography, Singh published his first book, Ganga in 1974. Over the course of his career he published over 14 monographs.



**Vivan Sundaram**  
As one of India's most prolific artists Sundaram's work refers to perception, memory, history and their intersection with social problems and popular culture. Several of his recent collaborative projects, although very different in aesthetics, involve the use of photographs, found objects, video, and three-dimensional constructs.



More Info: <http://sepieaye.com>

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