JURY MEMBERS FOR THE 2017 UMRAO SINGH SHER-GIL GRANT FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Sabeena Gadihoke

Sanjeev Saith

Yasufumi Nakamori (Jury Chair)

The statement by the jury was read in parts by the three jury members and is represented below.

The Jury looked at a total of 26 projects of which it shortlisted four and eventually three to discuss at the awards ceremony. It has been a difficult process but we do feel that there needs to be a much greater engagement with and exploration of the constructed image. This includes not just questions of representation and reflexivity but also formalistic and conceptual intervention. Given the long history of the documentary as a major defining feature of post independence Indian photography, this may take time but we are hopeful that the awards initiated by the Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Grant will enable this in the coming years. We enjoyed looking at the work of all 26 candidates and wish them luck in the future. This now brings us to the winners of the grant for this year and I will let my colleagues read out the citations for the second and first runners up first.

(read by Yasufumi Nakamori)

An archive of Facebook conversations that the artist has with a stranger-friend, Tara. What begins as a casual chat between two photography enthusiasts soon enters a space of intimacy, confessions, distrust, and irony, preserved as a bricolage of screen shots. But who is Tara Banerjee... does she exist, or is she a lie on the Internet? The artist travels into the real world to find her.

This project is conceived of as a document that treads the fine line between fact and fiction, the emerging genre known as "para-fiction." The Jury was fascinated by the candidate's exploration of the space between the virtual and the real, of his engagement with performativity in social media, and of his idea and practice of collage as a social critique. Looking for an imagined person in the material world is a

brave endeavor. The artist's desire and search for an ever-elusive character made us wonder however, what, where and when would be the conclusion of this project, a question to which we could not find an answer. It is however, a project with a lot of promise and we look forward to seeing how it develops in the future.
We congratulate **Chandan Gomes** as the second runner up for his project, *People You May Know*

<div align="right">(read by Sanjeev Saith)</div>

An allegorical tale that explores man's relationship with nature in the face of environmental destruction, located in the Khasi community of Lama Punji in Jaflong, Sylhet, Bangladesh. The story staged in three parts uses fictive elements to track a young boy's search for a mythical ancient creature rumoured to have the power to restore balance in nature. To save his village, and life as they know it, Arlangki sets out on an adventure of discovery - where he learns more about his people, his land and himself.
The jury was impressed with the maturity of this project and the strong images. Its strength lies in its ability to be located within discourses of activism, discussing issues of marginalization, and giving agency and voice to the affected without using the traditional tropes of the documentary. These are issues relevant globally now. The jury felt however that despite the attempt to move towards the realm of myth and story-telling, the photographs were still located within realism. We wonder whether there could be a greater engagement with a poetic, abstract and dream-like imagination. As with the other runner up, we feel this project has great potential and look forward to seeing how it develops eventually. We would like to congratulate the first Runner up: **Aishwarya Arumbakkam** for her project *'ka Dingiei'*.

<div align="right">(read by Sabeena Gadihoke)</div>

The Award for this year goes to a two-part performance and photographic project, where the artist wishes to engage in the retelling of mythological narratives from a contemporary perspective. Revisiting the pre-existing oral and visual traditions of the

Ramayana, the artist collaborates with and photographs groups of masked dancers in the tradition of Chhau Dance on silver gelatin prints, as well as male and female theatre actors who perform the roles of various characters in the Ramayana on Ambrotypes. Paying attention to the genealogy of the two separate processes within photography and their histories, and the two different sets of performative interpretations, the project seeks to reframe the many narratives of the epic. It also aims to create an installation where various photographic images would interact, thereby offering viewers fresh and personal interpretations of the epic by the opportunity to participate by re-sequencing the photographs.

We felt this project was the best work in progress that would benefit most from this year's Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Grant for Photography for the following reasons: the artist's intent to enrich, transform, as well as offer a diversity of interpretations of traditional narratives; his interest in both photography and performance; and his attention to and curiosity about the materiality of two distinctly different photographic processes in the age of digital photography, namely ambrotypes and gelatin silver prints. The work is rich because of its fluidity in terms of gender-specific characters, the photographic processes, and the preconceived boundaries between the 'documentary' value of photography and performance. The artist's desire to make the work participatory, as it is installed, presents a new aspect of photographic art. As a jury, we sense in the project, a dynamic ambition to interrogate the medium of photography even as it attempts to revisit the socio-cultural past.

Although there are numerous areas in the project for the artist to still clarify and engage with critically, we felt that the work could take advantage of mentorship and discussions within the SSAF.

We are happy to award the Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Grant for Photography for 2017 to **Ashish Sahoo** for his project *Narratives-Flux.*

(read by Yasufumi Nakamori)