

Lensing Lost Innocence

Indian artist Sunil Gupta imagines childhood in a moving group photography exhibit

BY KRISTEN V. BROWN

It feels like someone is watching us as I sit in the living room of photographer Sunil Gupta's South Delhi retreat. Then the realization dawns that someone (or something) is watching. We are indeed the focal point of multiple pairs of eyes, peering out intrusively from the glossy framed photographs that adorn the dimly lit walls. I squirm awkwardly, but like the stalking gaze of the Mona Lisa, the confrontation is unavoidable.

These images on Gupta's white-walled abode are the undeniably assaulting photos from his latest body of work, *Mr. Malhotra's Party*. The pictures, which immortalize the confrontational stares of the gay men and women of India's capital, are the sort of uncomfortable works of creativity usually reserved for modern art galleries. Decidedly not the sort of mild-mannered landscape portraits you'd expect in an otherwise modestly furnished house.

Then again, Gupta's personal living space has evolved into a sort of art gallery-cum-discussion forum. Friends describe it as the kind of place where art lovers as well as the movers and shakers of certain well-known social movements are frequently visiting.

"He doesn't separate himself from what we call issues, but for him it is his real living space. He takes everything out on the streets, he doesn't have a private [life]," explains



"Untitled #2" included in the Sepia Gallery exhibition, *The Intimate Line*.



Untitled #8 from Gupta's *Imagining Childhood* series.

Radhika Singh. She is a long-time friend who has curated many of Gupta's exhibitions, including his first in India, where homosexuality was—and still is—against the law, making Gupta an accidental crusader for an Indian

gay rights movement long overdue.

But Gupta's inclusion in the Sepia Gallery exhibition, *The Intimate Line*, in Chelsea steers him away from his habitual themes—gay identity and sexuality—to grapple with

AIDS, a subject familiar to his work (Gupta is also HIV positive) and another one more unfamiliar, childhood. Gupta's works, titled *Imagining Childhood*, is part of a group exhibition that opened March 5 and features photographs by Elinor Carucci, Angelika Sher and a video installation by Amy Jenkins.

It also places Gupta's work back in the context of the city where he first stepped behind the lens, photographing the gay lifestyles of the West Village as a student at The New School. Since then, Gupta has become an internationally renowned chronicler of an otherwise underground gay India.

In *Imagining Childhood*, however, Gupta steps outside his realm to document the lives of children living with AIDS at the NAZ Center in New Delhi. Gupta's images, which are innocent and personal rather than painful focus on the details of childhood: toys, clothing, afternoon naps. And in many ways, the images are a continuation of the larger

trend of Gupta's work: documenting his own personal wisdom.

"Childhood isn't sexual; you're not gay as a child," says Gupta, who at 55 has a silver coif but remains youthful. "So in some ways, my own childhood... you can't really deal with

"At a very basic level, gay men in India do not have an image. Literally," Sunil Gupta explains.

it because it's unspeakable. Capturing these kids, who share my disease, gave me a way of looking at my own childhood. That appeals to me."

Gupta sees modern-day New York as the perfect context for his exhibition. "I think this particular body of work belongs in New York right now, partly because the India thing

Go Global, Think Local

Upper East Side Asian art dealers collaborate to introduce a new, joint exhibition series

The cancellation of the annual International Asian Art Fair, which was scheduled to take place March 11-15 at the Park Avenue Armory, didn't stop 16 Upper East Side art dealers from banding together to exhibit their collections. Known as the Asian Art Dealers of the Upper Eastside New York (AADUENY), the galleries—including the Chinese Porcelain Company, M. Sutherland Fine Arts, Subhash Kapoor, Hiroshi Yanagi Oriental Art and Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller Gallery—are working together to present the inaugural Asian Art Exhibition Series.

The event aims to present an alternative and expanded format from the cancelled event, with coordinated openings, receptions and artist talks. Exhibits include diverse mediums: painting, ceramics, photography, calligraphy, metalwork, lacquer, tile, textiles, prints and sculpture with works spanning more than 4,000 years, from ancient to contemporary.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for sophisticated and new collectors alike, as well as general art enthusiasts to visit and learn from many of the world's top dealers in Asian art in a more intimate setting," said Joan Mirviss and Jiyoung Koo, the co-organizers of AADUENY.

The open house takes place March 14 from noon to 8 p.m., and organizers guarantee "museum-level" art exhibitions. These exhibitions are on view in the affiliated galleries as well as in other locations throughout the Upper East Side during Asia Week in March.

As opposed to frenzied and more hectic auctions and fairs, the AADUENY hopes to offer a more intimate environment without timing pressures. Each of the dealers involved is experienced with Asian art, with expertise ranging from Chinese, Indian, Himalayan, Southeast Asian, Japanese, Korean and Middle Eastern art.

"Despite the current economic climate," says Koo, "the Asian art market remains strong and vital on the global stage."

— Stephanie Lee

For complete details visit www.aadueny.com



"Standards of Beauty" by Yang Mian, one of M. Sutherland Fine Arts contributions to the exhibition series.

became fashionable over the past year and a half, and partly because the HIV-Aids thing has a great resonance in New York."

Esa Epstein, the director of the Sepia Gallery, first met Gupta 10 years ago. She says what first attracted her to Gupta's work was not just the content, but also the sheer power of his compositions.

"I think that at terms of the images, the compositions and the color are very strong," she says of their second exhibition together. "They're just very poignant images."

History, however, and not aesthetics, is what really draws Gupta to photography. Documenting history is what first inspired Gupta to take photographs, as a Canadian-born, New York-educated man who couldn't really find a space for himself amongst his traditional Indian family. (Gupta says when he came out to his parents, they asked if he would still be getting married.)

There are at least 2.5 million male

homosexuals in India according to National AIDS Control Organization estimation. Yet Gupta notes that maybe 10 percent of his gay acquaintances in India are "out," even within the gay collective he is a member of, Nagah. "That's why you only see me and three others talking about gay issues in the media," says Gupta. "No one else wants to publicly admit it."

"At a very basic level, gay men in India do not have an image. Literally," Gupta explains. "So at a very basic level photography has a big role to play in providing us with an image of ourselves. And as a maker of photographs I just see it as my role to make pictures that people can relate to."

The Intimate Line, group exhibition of works by Elinor Carucci, Angelika Sher, Sunil Gupta and Amy Jenkins, through April 18, Sepia Gallery, 148 W. 24th St. (betw. 6th & 7th Aves.), 212-645-9444.

Gallery Selections
Celebrating Ten Years
March 14 - May 1



Chang-an Street by Zhang Jian
(79 x 51") Oil on canvas

M. Sutherland Fine Arts, Ltd.

Bringing the very best of Contemporary Chinese Art to New York

Asia Week (March 14 - 21), open every day 12 noon - 6pm in conjunction with the Asian Art Dealers of the Upper Eastside NY otherwise by appointment

55 East 80th Street, Second Floor NY, NY 10075
212-249-0428 | info@msutherland.com
www.artnet.com/Msutherland.html

NYCITY CENTER **ENCORES!**
GREAT AMERICAN MUSICALS IN CONCERT
JACK VIERTEL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | ROB BERMAN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Finian's RAINBOW

MUSIC BY BURTON LANE | BOOK BY E.Y. HARBURG AND FRED SAIDY | LYRICS BY E.Y. HARBURG
MUSIC DIRECTOR ROB BERMAN
DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY WARREN CARLYLE

MARCH 26 - 29
THU-FRI 8, SAT 2 & 8, SUN 6:30
TICKETS \$25, \$50, \$95

NYCITY CENTER CATCH THE CURTAIN | CITYTIX® 212.581.1212 NYCITYCENTER.ORG WEST 55TH STREET (BTWN 6TH & 7TH)

2009-2010 Encores! Season Sponsor
NEWMAN'S OWN FOUNDATION
Stephanie and Fred Shuman Fund for Encores!