

# The New York Times

## Mumbai's 'Focus' Festival Showcases Women Photographers

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A photograph by Mohini Chandra titled "Mt. Glorious," from the series "Photos of my Father/Imaginary Edens" (2007). Courtesy of Mohini Chandra

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A photograph by Emily Andersen titled "Dusk," from the series "Bird's Eye View from Trellick" (2003). Courtesy of Emily Andersen

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A photograph by Joy Gregory of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, from the series "Cinderella Stories" (2001). Courtesy of Joy Gregory

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A photograph by Shilpa Gavane titled "1 Clear, when caught, only a sound of it fluttering, comes a whispering, a song of holocaust," from the series "Clear" (2012). Courtesy of Shilpa Gavane

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A photograph by Nandini Valli Muthiah titled "Mrs. And Mr. M. Ct. Muthiah," from the series "Family Portraits, April 2005." Courtesy of Nandini Valli Muthiah

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A photograph by Anusha Yadav titled "Sanjana," from the series "In Tune for Fame" (2011). Courtesy of Anusha Yadav

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A photograph by Chino Otsuka, titled "Kamakura, Japan, 1976 + 2005," from the series "Imagine Finding Me." Courtesy of Chino Otsuka

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Without trying to sound  
too much like a  
contestant at a beauty pageant,  
Women all across the Globe  
should be Empowered  
through Education and Culture.  
Knowledge is Power.

A photograph by Karen Knorr titled “A Beauty Pageant,”  
from the series “Ladies, 2011–12.” Courtesy of Karen Knorr

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MUMBAI— A family picture set against an idyllic countryside with the figure of the father cut out, replaced by a studio backdrop. A panoramic view of a city in flux, taken at different times of the day. An ethereal image of a translucent plastic bag caught on a tree, fluttering in the wind. A family portrait dominated by the figure of a woman standing straight and tall, front and center.

At a time when much attention is being paid to [women’s rights in India](#), the [Focus](#) photography festival in Mumbai is putting the female perspective on full display in a show titled “A Photograph is Not an Opinion.” Curated by the photographer Sunil Gupta with the art writer Veeranganakumari Solanki, the show features emerging and established contemporary female photographers from around the world, like Gauri Gill, Mohini Chandra, Chino Otsuka and Emily Andersen.

“Gathering images only taken by women photographers is a political act in the sense that it forces the general audience, men and women, to look at things from a women’s viewpoint and rethink the usual aesthetic,” said Matthieu Foss, co-founder of the Focus festival, which began Wednesday and runs through March 27. “Many of the works deal with free speech, emancipation and saying, ‘Enough is enough.’ ”

He said he would like visitors to the show to walk away with “the fact that you can find ways of expressing anger and discontent through ways other than violence.”



The exhibition also reflects a range of international photographic practices. “It is important to understand the varied practice of women photographers all over the world,” said Elise Foster Vander Elst, co-founder of the Focus festival and founder of Asia Art Projects. “They are all quite feminist works in that they are all very bold and have something to say.”

While the show is diverse in its context and approach, some of the underlying themes running through the images are gender, urbanism, identity, the family and loss.

One of the most remarkable works in the show is Ms. Chandra’s work that looks at her family’s migration through family portraits in which the image of her father is cut out, with studio backdrops taking the place of the missing father. In a very different context, Kaucyila Brooke documents lesbian bars in San Diego, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Closer to home, Saadiya Kochar deals with loss in the conflict in Kashmir, and Ms. Gill examines the impact of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms in New Delhi.

“There is a kind of silence around what happened in Delhi in 1984,” she said. “I wanted my photographs to trigger a conversation about what happened in the city and what it means to all of us.”

This multiplicity of viewpoints is important to the exhibition, which borrows its title from Susan Sontag’s essay “A Photograph Is Not an Opinion. Or Is It?” from the book “Women.”

“The book implies that while men are under pressure to produce one strong opinion, the strength of the women’s point of view it accommodates many viewpoints,” said Mr. Gupta, the show’s co-curator. What I am trying to say in the title is that there are variations of the truth being presented in this exhibition.”

Mr. Gupta, who often teaches at the National Institute of Design, lamented the lack of support for noncommercial photography in India, which makes it difficult for women to “step out of the social norms and pick up a camera and then fight for the space in which to develop their thinking.”

Yet it is often women who have collected and organized much of the history of photography in South Asia, Mr Gupta said.

“The family album is often guarded and looked after by the women, who are the repository of a family history,” said Mr. Gupta. “Similarly in India, I think a lot of women have worked in the industry end of photography, doing the research, maintaining archives and facilitating dialogues. The handful of photo-specific agencies and galleries that we know of in India were started by women.”

*“A Photograph is Not an Opinion” is on until March 27 at the Terrace Gallery in Mumbai’s Jehangir Art Gallery located at 161 Kalaghoda.*