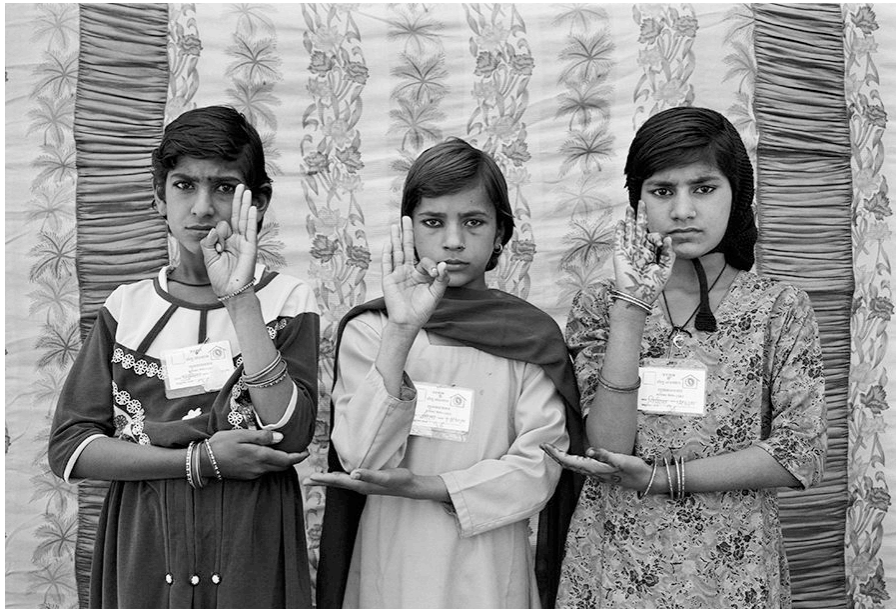


Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



Sunita, Sita and Nirmala, 2003. Archival inkjet print, edition of 7, 28 x 42 in.

Gauri Gill

'Balika Mela' and 'Jannat'

February 27 – March 29, 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, February 27, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben is pleased to present the gallery's first solo exhibition with New Delhi based photographer **Gauri Gill**. Combining formal clarity with a strong compassion for her subjects, Gill gives us a personal and straightforward view of the girls she portrays.

Gauri Gill's work is built upon a sense of trust and kinship, achieved through long-term relationships with rural Indian organizations, communities, and families. For the series *Balika Mela*, she traveled to a village in Rajasthan – where she has been photographing since 1999 – as a local educational organization had invited her to “do something with photography” at a Balika Mela, a fair for girls. Wanting to give them substantial influence over how they were represented, Gill set up a tent at the fairground where these girls could have their portraits taken, providing basic props and backdrops. The images were composed in collaboration between everyone involved – the subjects, the photographer, the bystanders – producing striking black and white photographs where the girls pose alone or in groups, often looking straight into the camera. In a patriarchal society where the freedom of girls and women is constantly restricted, this process – as well as

continued...

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Gill's photography classes where the girls learn to take their own pictures – gave them a chance to reflect on their own situation and experience a higher degree of independence. Meeting their intent, sometimes almost defiant eyes, we witness a moment of nascent self-determination.

Visually, the artist does a lot with only a few simple elements. The girls in *Balika Mela* are posed in front of fabric backdrops, using various props of their own choosing: wearing paper hats, holding flowers or cameras, relating to each other and the viewer through touch or gestures. The interplay between subjects and background fabrics creates a delicate balance, where figuration intersects the abstraction of contrasting patterns, lines and shapes. These works are complemented by a more documentary series, *Jannat*, where Gill photographed a girl and her small, imperiled family in a Muslim hamlet in remote and rural Western Rajasthan, over the course of eight years. Here, the structure is narrative rather than conceptual, offering intimate glimpses into everyday life by erasing the line between photographer and family members.

Gauri Gill (b. 1970, Chandigarh, India) received an MFA from Stanford University in 2002, following two BFAs: Delhi College of Art (1992), and Parsons School of Design (1994). She has had solo exhibitions at such venues as **Nature Morte**, New Delhi (2012, 2010, 2008); **Green Cardamom**, London (2011); **Bose Pacia**, New York (2009) and Kolkata (2008); and **Chatterjee and Lal**, Mumbai (2008). Curators such as Iftikar Dadi; Betti-Sue Hertz; Ranjit Hoskote; Geeta Kapur; Deeksha Nath; Raqs Media Collective; Gayatri Sinha; and Robert Storr, to name a few, have included her work in group shows. Selected exhibiting institutions are: **Indira Gandhi National Center**, New Delhi; **Rote Fabrik**, Zurich; **The Contemporary Art Institute of Southern Australia**, Adelaide; **Art Gallery of Ontario**, Toronto; **Asia House**, London; **Yerba Buena Center**, San Francisco; **Devi Art Foundation**, New Delhi; **Whitechapel Gallery**, London; **Fotomuseum Winterthur**, Switzerland; **Yale Art Gallery**, New Haven; and **Musee Quai Branly**, Paris.

Edition Patrick Frey, Zurich, published her photo book *Balika Mela* in 2012, launching it at the Fotomuseum Winterthur.

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