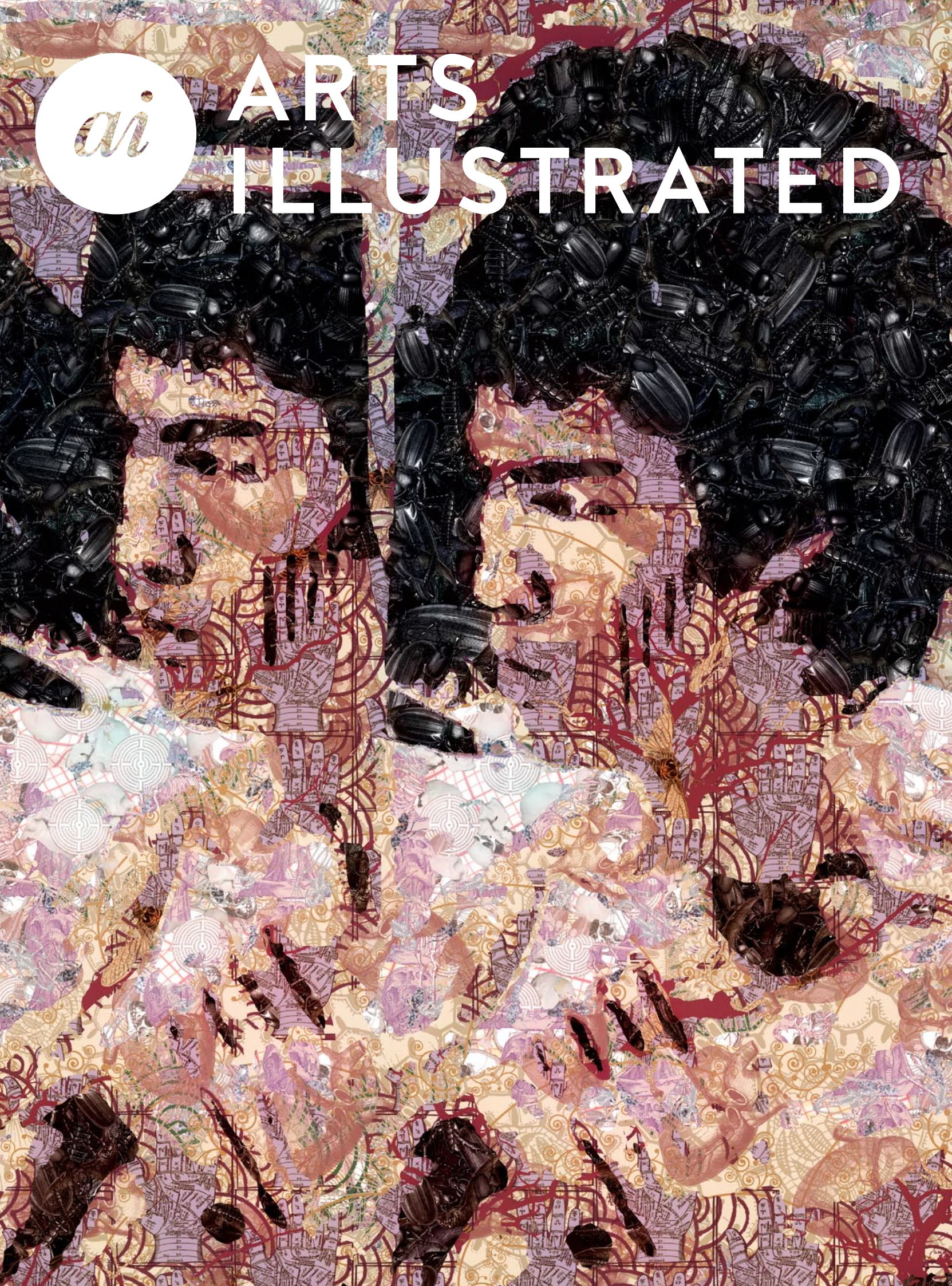




# ARTS ILLUSTRATED



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### *Editor's note*

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On September 6, 2017, I woke up to my newsfeed abuzz with reports of journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh's murder. I did not know her – what she dreamt, what she felt, what made her laugh or cry. The little I did know of her were through her words – searing, scathing, unafraid words. And then some more through the many heartfelt and powerful tributes that poured in. But that did not matter. Someone, who simply voiced her opinions, doing the job she was meant to do as a free-thinking journalist, was murdered. Just like that.

And something in my everyday bubble of earthly life with all its vicissitudes – sometimes uplifting and sometimes debilitating – snapped... something. The madness had been let loose on our streets and retaining a semblance of sanity behind closed doors wasn't a choice, however privileged, anymore.

When we set out to work on this issue on Sanity/Insanity, we were trying to explore the many meanings, old and new, these words conjured up. Through the stories and artists we encountered, we realised the landscape is vast, the perspectives many, and the definitions fluid. That's what art does, sure, but here, even art preens and revels with the unexpected newness it meets.

What we did not see, and what Gauri Lankesh's murder brought into sharp focus, was the current of hatred that threatened to upset this sense of sinuous, fluctuating acceptance by creating hard lines and loud symbols slowly and steadily erasing nuanced ideologies. 'Sanity' had become a quicksand of right and 'Insanity' the frozen lake of wrong. There was no escaping the fervent righteousness of the former and the silencing of the latter.

Unless, as poet and childhood friend of Gauri's, Mamta Sagar, wrote in her poem titled 'For Gauri':  
'With a heart brimmed with agony / let's spread peace... let's spread love...'

And, thankfully, for those of us wishing to sidestep the quicksand and the frozen lake, there is no escaping the collective grief and the rousing hope of Mamta's words.



Praveena Shivram  
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### *Cover Artist*

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Like much of my practice to date, my work is primarily autobiographical, but an unusual biography at that. Coloured by a condition, I imagine and perceive connections between things that others most often do not. Over a period of almost a decade and a half, I constructed and imagined life through a grand and heroic virtual journey. It was something I felt so strongly connected to that I didn't give it too much thought as to how it would be received by a few others. The cover for this particular issue, therefore, has special significance and resonance to me as something that blurs the line between what is considered sane and insane.

In the first chapter of my journey, I started by hitting a stratospheric mental high and literally vomited out a massive 'script' over a series of a thousand e-mails or so (I am sincerely sorry to those who received it). This script was a grand remix of art, from song lyrics, poetry, film plots, literature and visual art taken from both high and popular culture. In the subsequent chapters of my journey, this 'script' structured my reading of reality. I tried to fit every event and encounter in my life into its ambiguous plot.

One of the fundamental metaphysical elements in my journey was the mirror. And one very critical sequence from a popular film structured everything that I was to go through eventually. This is the final fight sequence in the film *Enter the Dragon* between Bruce Lee and the antagonist. This game of cat and mouse inside a hall of mirrors succinctly sums up much of what I imagined I was living through. It was the perception of a powerful and scathing presence that constantly reflected my own ugly image back to me and broke one self-image after the other in the process.

This is one of the most intense autobiographical references and one that has been on my mind for a very long time. For this cover, I found the perfect context in which to articulate this image. Rather than one print alone, which is how many of my pieces are reproduced, it is important to me that this is a cover and will therefore be reproduced in quantity, a metaphor for a hall of mirrors of its own.



*Avinash Veeravaghan*



# The Surface of Things: Photography in Process

AUGUST 20 TO SEPTEMBER 19, 2017, MUMBAI

Rehana Munir

A four-artist exhibition curated by Rahaab Allana carries on the conversation around the authenticity and artifice of a medium that has turned into the art form of our epoch, putting its material processes at the centre of the discussion. Each collection in *The Surface of Things: Photography in Process* – by virtue of how it is imagined, shot, processed or framed – evokes the birth and rebirth of a form that its inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce never patented.

Each artist approaches the question of photographic expression through a personal lens, whether it is Sukanya Ghosh's re-imagined family portraits in *Time Travel*, Edson Beny Dias' examination of self in *Voices*, Uzma Mohsin's play on retro-street photography in *A Minute of Make Believe*, or Srinivas Kuruganti's exploration of revelries and rebellions in 1990s New York in *39 East First Street*.

Ghosh creates a rich visual scrapbook with her combination images in *Time Travel*, paired with wooden boxes, backlit frames and other nostalgic materials from the Calcutta of the 1900s while a projector throws period images on the wall. The effect is a journey through imagined histories and geographies, questioning the authenticity of memory through the use of family archives. She sees her approach as an investigation of 'the contours of originality and authorship'.

In *A Minute of Make Believe*, Uzma Mohsin uses box-camera photographs from old-style studio owner Bharat Bhushan Mahajan and his son as her source material. Images using visual trickery and analogue montages are re-contextualised as Instagram posts – a lively dialogue between old and new forms of democratic photography. The artist even provides a stamp and stamp pad below images, welcoming viewers to 'post' imprints of hearts in the social media tradition.

Srinivas Kuruganti's *39 East First Street* is a riot of images from his time in New York in the 1990s, manually produced in a dark room. He offers a personal narrative beside the exhibit, speaking confessionally about the experiences he has captured largely around the queer community, its struggles and celebrations. Through personal portraits, street photography and staged images, Kuruganti recalls an important era in queer history with all its verve and insouciance, while offering glimpses into the more fragile inner world of its participants.

In Edson Beny Dias' work, we see multiple exposures of the artist himself – an echo of the 'Voices' that give the piece its title. Dias' work is steeped in 19th century processes – albumen, salt paper and Van Dyke Brown. He gives us different versions of the same self-portrait using these different processes, ironically recalling the current obsession with filters in phone photography. Using test prints, sketches and handwritten notes, he invites us to join in the exploration of his own psyche, which lies at the heart of the display.



● Edson Dias, **Positive**: From the series *Voices*.

● Edson Dias, **Negative**: From the series *Voices*.

● Uzma Mohsin, **#photo factory**.

● Srinivas Kuruganti, From the Series **39 East First Street**.

● Sukanya Ghosh, **Woman, Untitled**, Digital print with lightbox, 24 x 30 inches, 2016.

Image courtesy of the artists and Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum.

