

Teacher Guide

Dissent and Desire

January 20–April 29, 2018



Ponnie and Indu #1, 2014. Archival inkjet print, edition of 2. Courtesy the artists and sepiaEYE, New York, New York.

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EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

- *Dissent and Desire* is an exhibition of photographs by artists Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh.
- The photographs chronicle contemporary LGBTQ+ life in Delhi, India and show intimate and ordinary moments in the lives of twenty diverse individuals.
- The photographs were all taken in 2014 and 2015, following a 2009 decision by the Delhi High Court to overturn an 1861 anti-sodomy law. In 2013, the 2009 decision was reversed in the Indian Supreme Court leaving the LGBTQ+ community feeling vulnerable. As of August 24, 2017, the Supreme Court gave the LGBTQ+ community freedom to safely express their sexual orientation under a right to privacy law, but it did not overturn any past laws.
- Sunil Gupta was working to take photographs in the 1980s and many of his subjects would not allow their faces to be shown or their names to be associated with the work for fear of the repercussions.
- Gupta and Singh are artists with individual practices. This project is their first major collaboration. They are not only artistic collaborators, but also romantic partners.
- Class and language play large roles in the divides within the queer communities of Delhi. Indigenous Indian identities often do not have lingual terms that equate to contemporary Western ideas of LGBTQ+. Consequently, the global movement for gender rights does not feel relevant to many people in India, as they do not associate with those words or specific categories.

- The Indian Supreme Court does recognize a third gender, stating, “it is the right of every human being to choose their gender.”
- The idea of a third gender, or *hijra*, is not equivalent to the Western concept of transgender. *Hijra* is used by those assigned the male gender at birth who do not identify as men. Many wear makeup and dress in clothing traditionally worn by women.
- Gender fluidity is an ancient idea in India.
- The photographs in the exhibition do not show just one point of view or narrative, but display a variety of perspectives and narratives.
- Each photograph is accompanied by first-person narrative texts in the voice of the subjects from the photographs. This gives the viewer a further insight into their lives and stories.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do you define a documentary photograph? Is it possible to capture a real-life moment on camera? Do people pose even for candid photographs?
2. How are issues of power and identity based in a society’s definitions of gender?
3. How do gender rights issues differ depending on where you are in the world?
4. What do past civil rights issues show us about current laws and debates?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Review the photographs in the exhibition and how they are accompanied with the short first-person narrative text. Using this as a model create a photo essay that focuses on an issue that you find important. How can the images tell your story? How do you create complementary stories and texts that add to the images?

CURRENT EVENTS and POLITICAL SCIENCE

What are the current laws in your state regarding LGBTQ+ rights? What are the different sides of the debate regarding these laws? How do these laws and issues differ in countries around the world? Do these differences surprise you?

GENDER STUDIES

Current members of the Indian LGBTQ+ community do not always associate themselves with global gender rights issues because the labels and categories they use are different. How do views of gender vary depending on history or culture? Research another culture that has a different viewpoint regarding gender identity, roles, or terminology—share your findings with your classmates.



Top to bottom: *Rizwan #2*, 2015. Archival inkjet print, edition of 2. *Deepti #1*, 2015. Archival inkjet print, edition of 2. Courtesy the artists and sepiaEYE, New York, New York.