

Sunil Gupta

Vintage Photographs from 1982-87

Art | Basel

Hall 2, Booth D11

11 - 16 June 2024

 VADEHRA
ART GALLERY

About the curation

Vadehra Art Gallery is pleased to present at Art Basel 2024 a solo presentation of vintage photographs by Indian-Canadian, London-based artist Sunil Gupta. Sunil Gupta is a pioneering photographer, writer, curator and activist at the helm of post-colonial and post-modern identity politics and queer studies. Using photography, Gupta theatrically engages with the mores of the public sphere as well as the imaginations of the private and intimate, upholding a narrative focus on marginalized groups who navigate such thresholds through play and performance. These interventions often bear autobiographical weight thus nurturing Gupta's viewpoints with an exceptional sensitivity into mainstream cultural consciousness to re-center subjects such as racism, alternative sexuality, migration, queer issues and marginalia.

Our curation includes a collection of vintage prints from three important series in Gupta's oeuvre – *London 1982*, *Lovers: Ten Years On* and *Exiles* – photographed and produced over the 1980s in London, England, and Delhi, India. This special curation divulges the oppressive cultural apparatuses within which sub-cultures were overpowered and rendered invisible in the throes of mainstream society in London and Delhi in the 1980s. Whether visualizing the issue of invisible sub-cultures in London or the manufactured absence of gay Indian men, Gupta's approach to the public site and its impact on private experiences raises interesting points of similarity and difference between two historically connected countries and their social sciences. England's colonization of India left the latter with a kind of Victorian cultural hangover, where the act of labelling, of naming and shaming, has been promulgated for generations. Gupta notes the ruptures in such a shared legacy, drawing a parallel between the anxiety, oppression and threat of exposure in London with the more liminal yet equally insecure experience in Delhi in the 1980s. Moreover, in conversation with each other these bodies of work reveal the cyclical and prophetic nature of identity politics, which is experiencing a resurgence of a turn towards nomenclature and so-aligned definitions in contemporary times.

Exiles

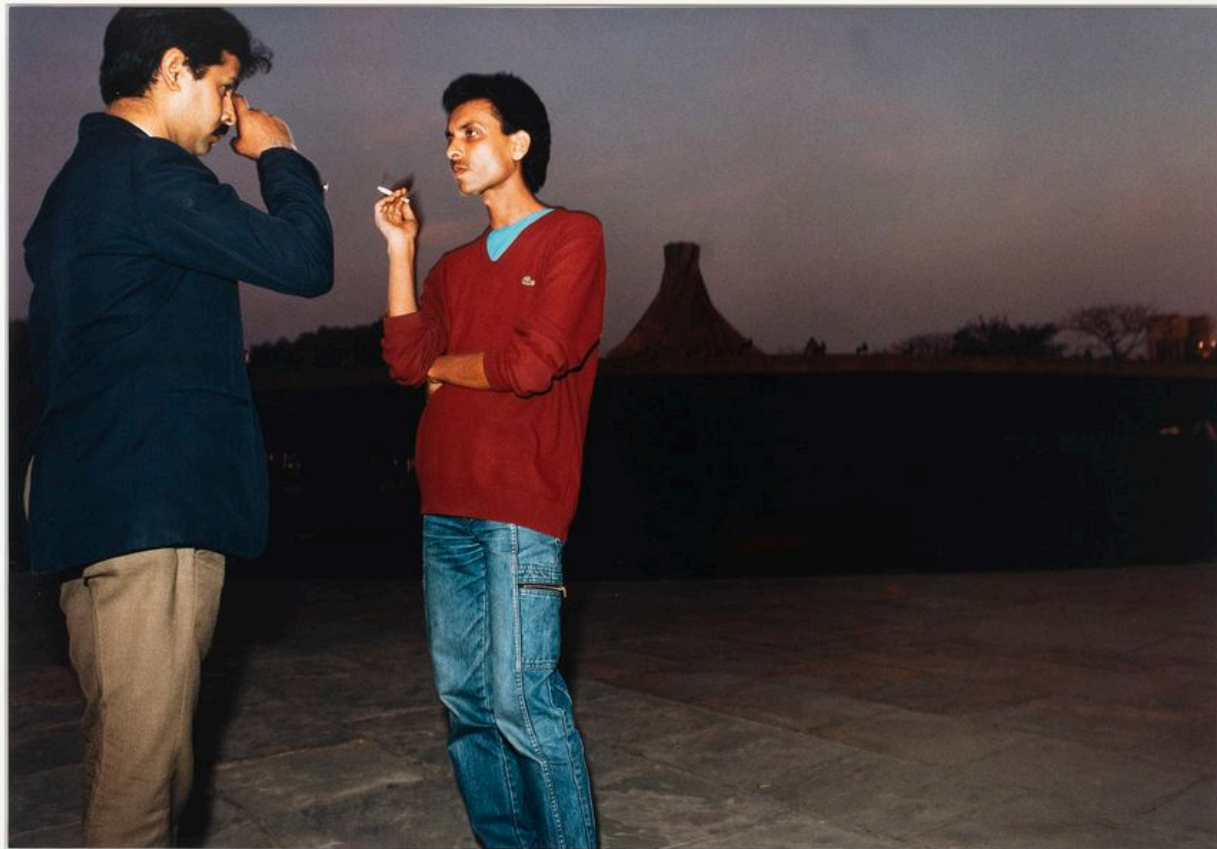
Exiles addresses the lack of cultural legitimacy surrounding gay culture and iconography in Indian art and art history, as well as the absence of gay men in public spaces. In the series Sunil Gupta finds himself questioning the specifics of his experience as a gay Indian man living in the West during the 1980s. Until the repeal of Section 377 criminalizing same-sex relationships in 2018, homosexuality was still illegal in India with many living a marginalized existence or yielding to communal and legal pressures to maintain a socially accepted front. Despite some progress elsewhere, the complexities of a large multilingual country bore limited cultural expression, fractured further by a deep-rooted caste system resulting in a lack of cohesion in Indian gay identity. Visualizing this issue of the invisibility of gay Indian men, Gupta set out to photograph various public sites in Delhi where gay men would briefly posit their self-actualizing identities in surreptitious encounters.



Exiles Series - Jama Masjid
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - The Wedding
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987

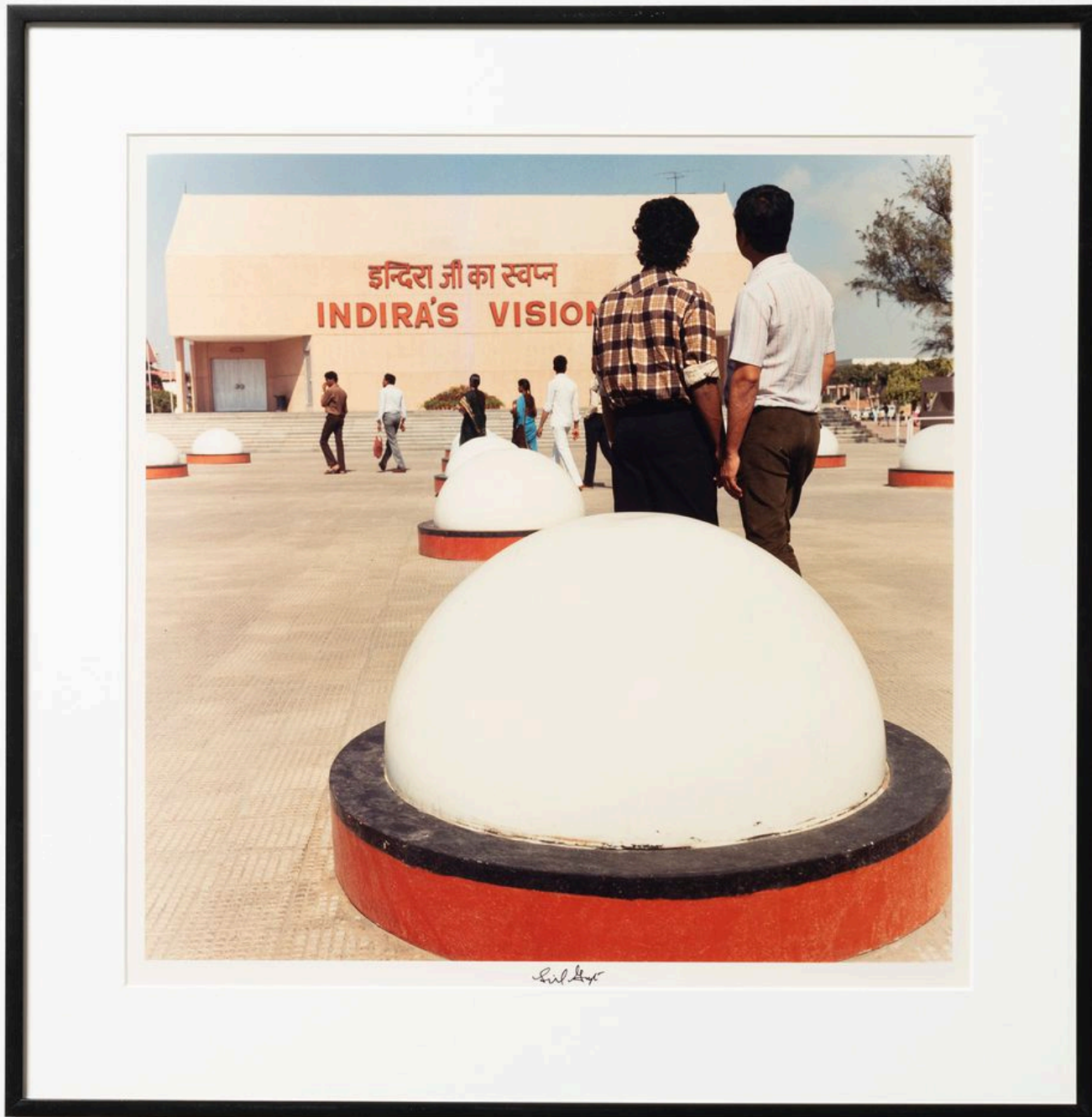


The Park, Exiles - 1987

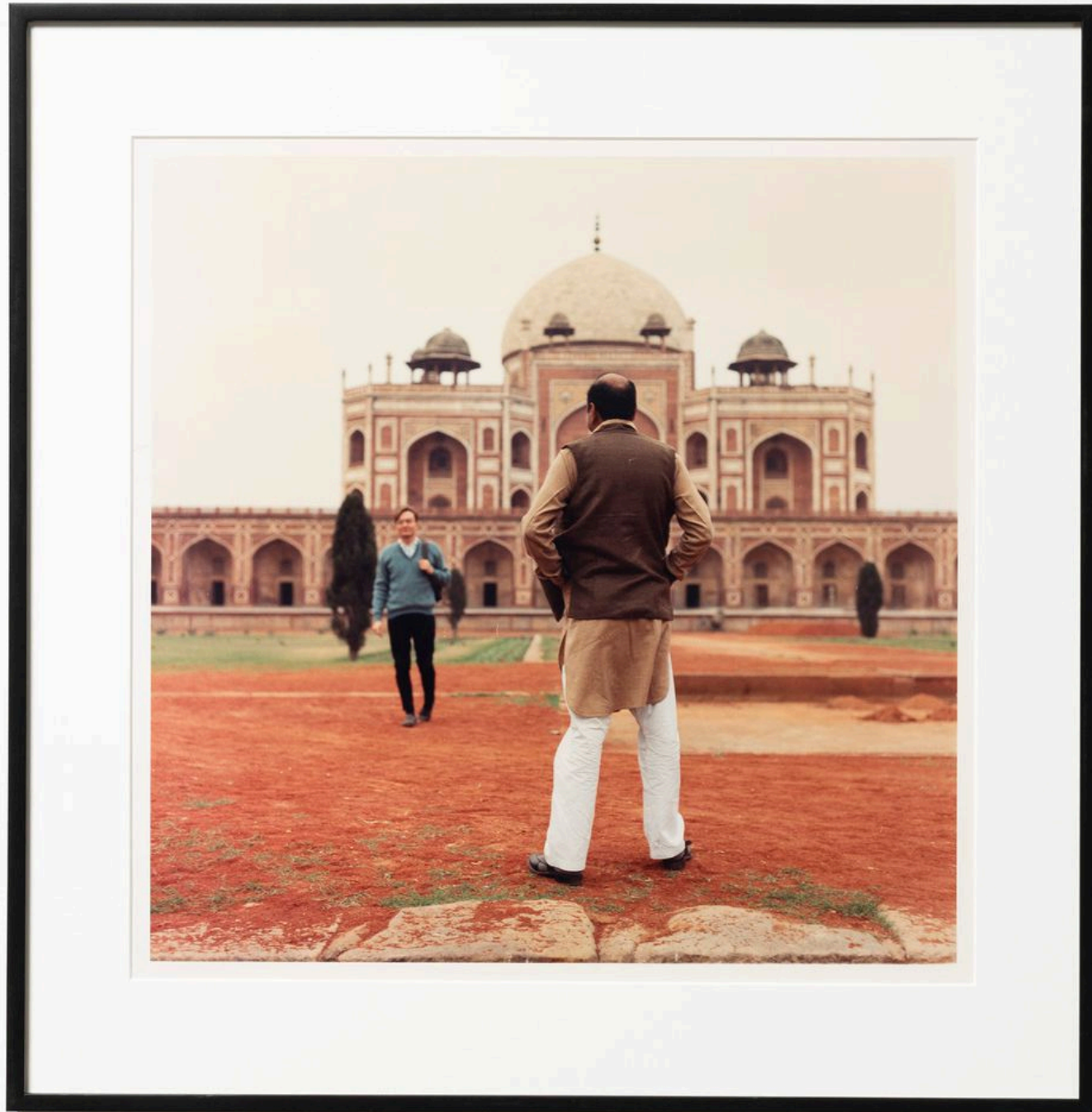
Exiles Series - Connaught Place
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - The Party
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



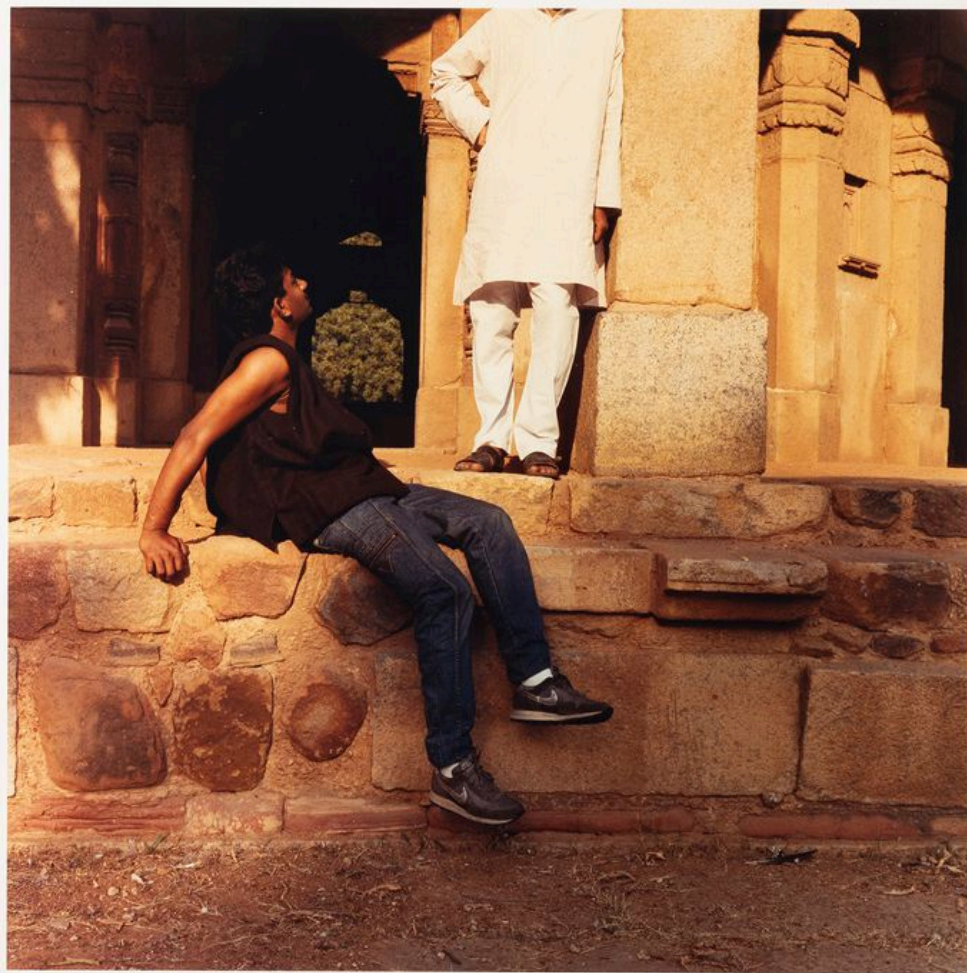
Exiles Series - Indira's Vision
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



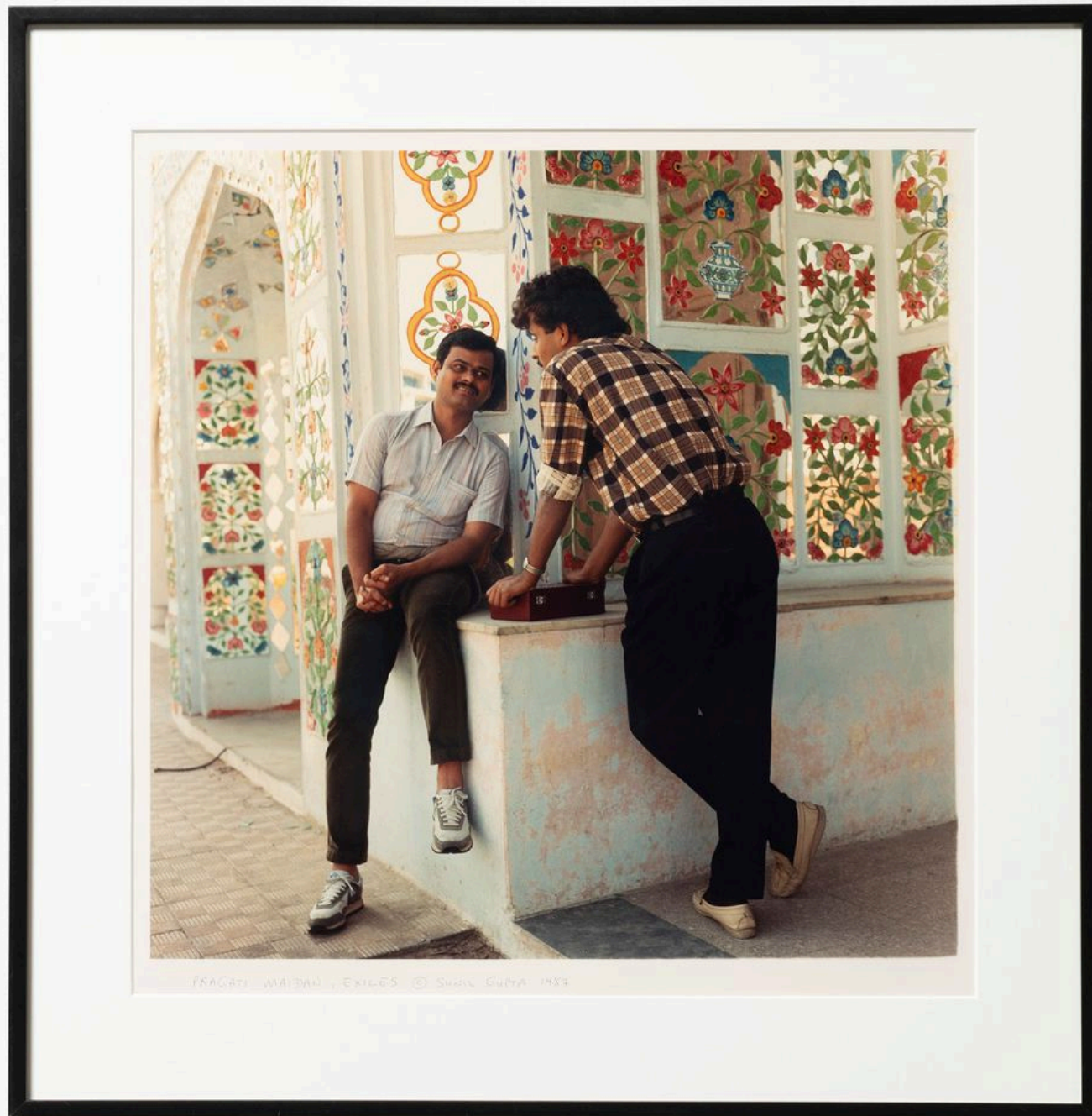
Exiles Series - Humayun's Tomb
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



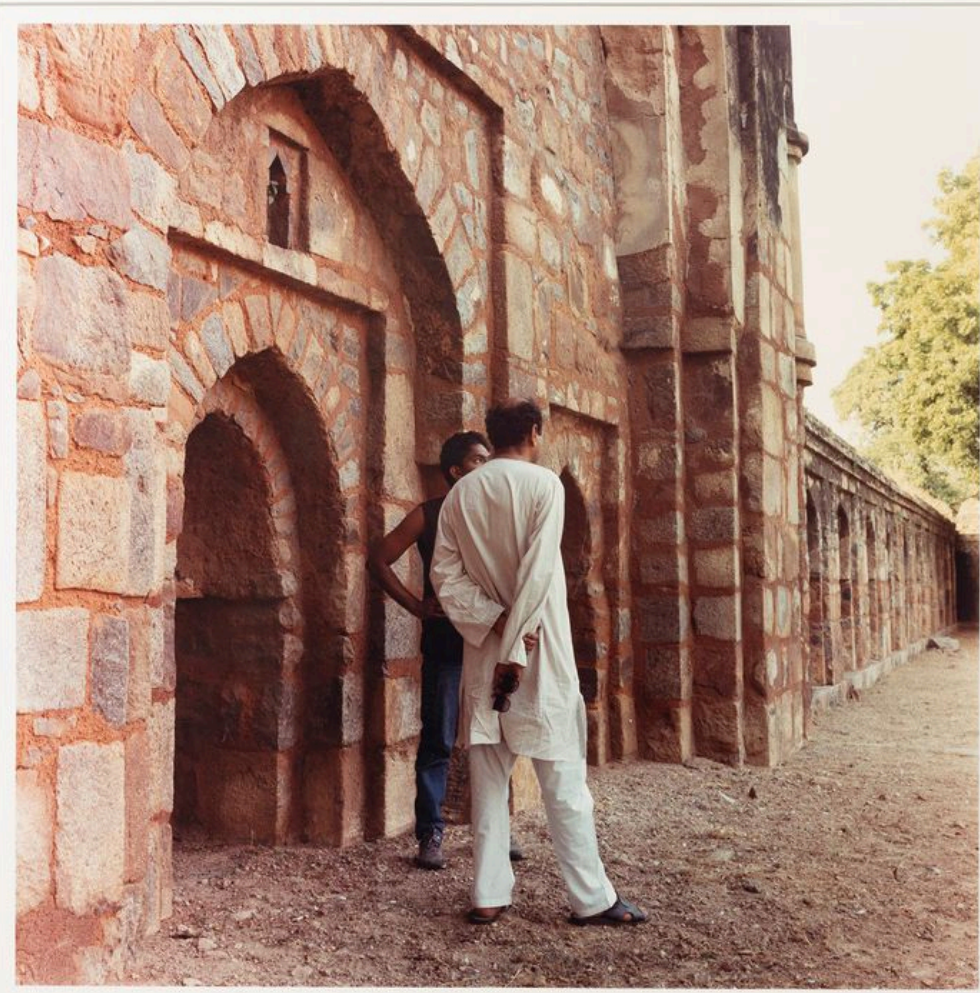
Exiles Series - Jangpura
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - Lodhi Garden
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - Pragati Maidan
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - Jamali Kamali
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - Connaught Place
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987



Exiles Series - Jama Masjid
Colour "C" type print
15 x 22.5 in
1986/1987

London 1982

Art, lived around the bustling areas of Fulham, King's Road, South Kensington and the West End in London. With his camera in tow, Gupta traversed these boroughs exploring and photographing the uncanny differentiation in the "look" of things compared among the cities he had already lived in, while also reconciling the personal geography of who he was and how he related to this new city. In London in the eighties, these dissensions were particularly pronounced as a lack of visibility in other-ness in public spaces, with queer and also immigrant culture appearing to recede into hiding even as these locales represented capitalistic corners and were considered the so-called gay areas of the time. The energy of "outsiders", or anyone who fell out of step with belonging to mainstream identity, seemed focused on acclimating or disappearing altogether, with reserved English culture, low population density and criminalizing laws all contributing to the politics of what was visible and what was actually seen.



Fulham Broadway, London

Sunil Gupta '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



South Kensington, London

Anil Gupta '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Piccadilly line Tube, London

Samuel Hopta '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



"World's End" Chelsea, London

Samuel Hopton '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
11.5 x 15.5 in
1982



Covent Garden, London

April 1982

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



West End Pub, London

Anil Gupta '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Alan Brien, Sunday Times film critic, Oxford

Anil Gupta '82

Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Mayfair, London

Samuel Hopton '82

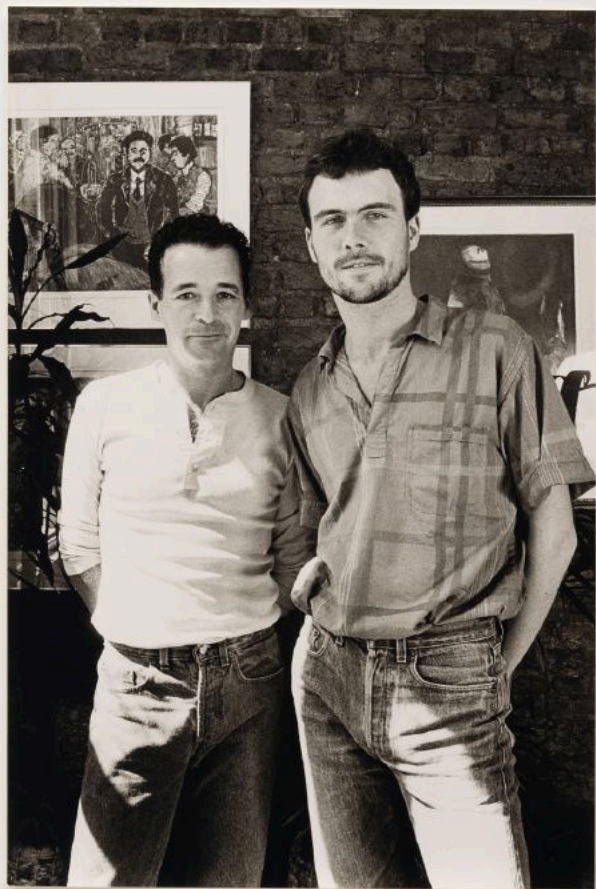
Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
8 x 12 in
1982



Untitled, London 1982
Colour "C" type print
12 x 18 in
1982

Lovers - Ten Years On

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Sunil Gupta's series *Lovers: Ten Years On*, which he embarked on shortly after a personal break-up with his partner of 10 years. In an effort to acquaint himself with as many gay couples as possible, Gupta met with people through his social network and the localities of West London, where a high density of queer people also inferred as an HIV hub back in the mid 1980s. He took to creating portraits of almost 30–35 couples in their shared homes, guided by a curiosity and more so sincere hope of discovering the latent truths of what makes relationships work. By focusing on ideas of love, habituation and commitment, Gupta sought to move away from the overtly sexualized narratives surrounding queer relationships and explored the intimacy complexity of same-sex relationship dynamics, while also imbuing these domestic partnerships with sociological resonance.



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Addie & Nick)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Andrew & John)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Bruno & Daniel)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (David & Peter)

Silver gelatin print

19 x 13 in

1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Eddie & Jeff)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (John & John)

Silver gelatin print

19 x 13 in

1984-85

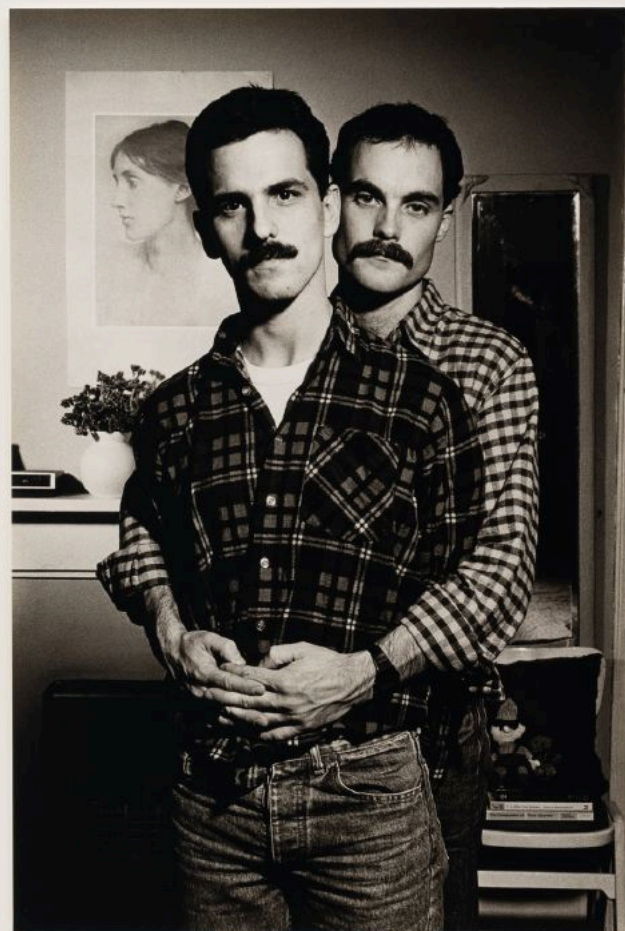


Lovers - Ten Years On, (John & John)

Silver gelatin print

19 x 13 in

1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Jonathan & Kim)

Silver gelatin print

19 x 13 in

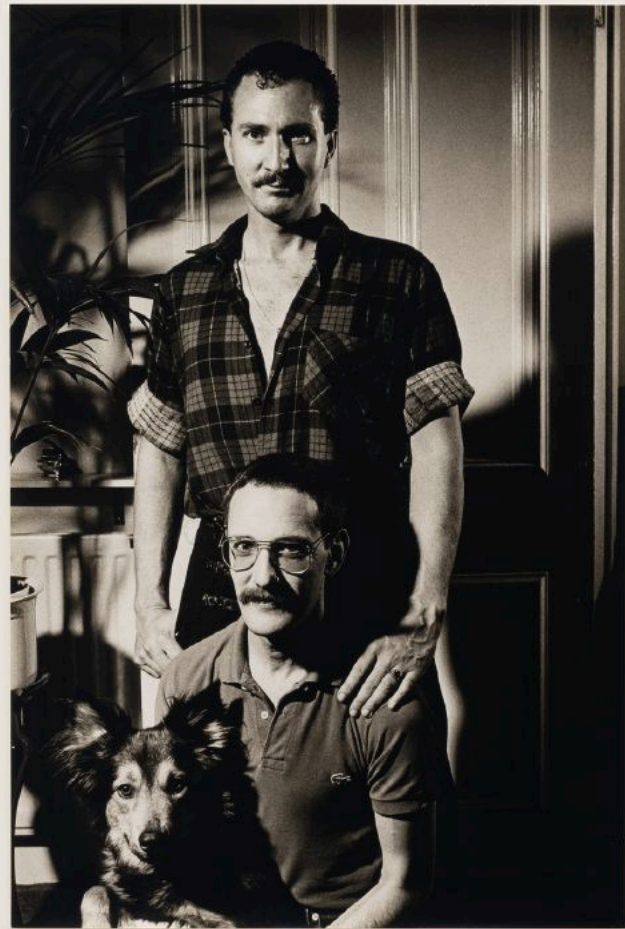
1984-85



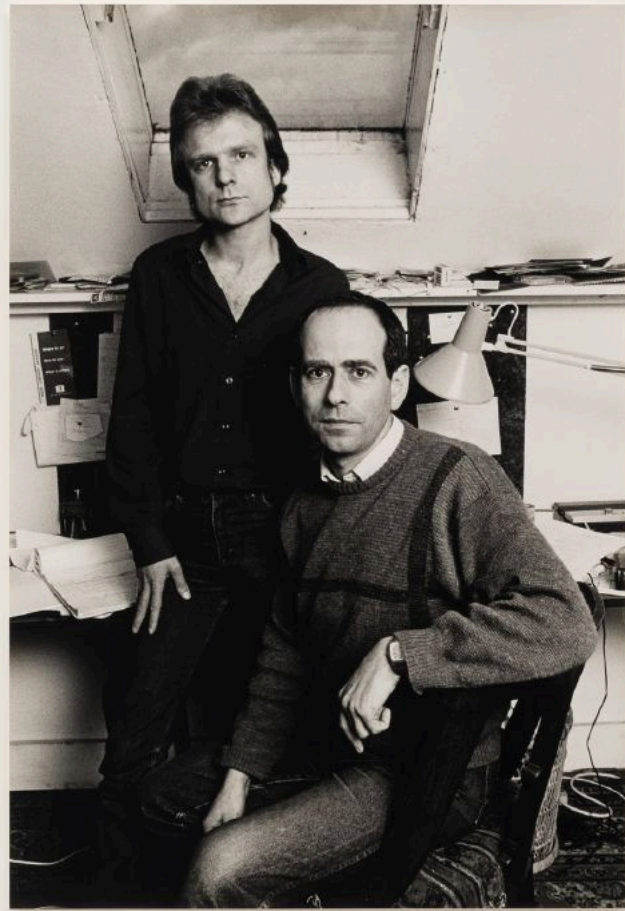
Lovers - Ten Years On, (Keith & Ian)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



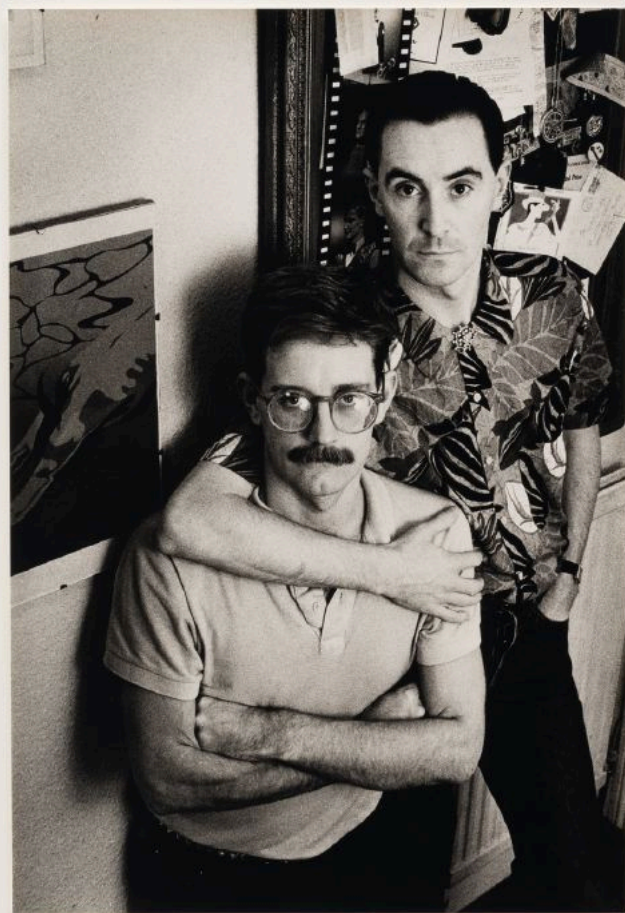
Lovers - Ten Years On, (Lisa & Emily)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



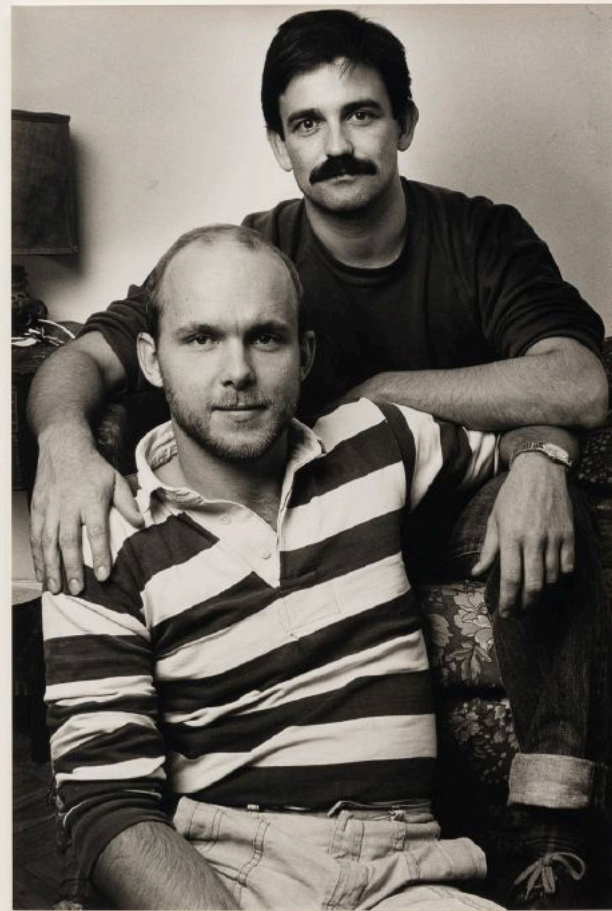
Lovers - Ten Years On, (Pablo & Charlie)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Peter & Keith)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Simon & Alan)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85



Lovers - Ten Years On, (Steve & George)
Silver gelatin print
19 x 13 in
1984-85

About the artist

Born in 1953 in New Delhi, Indian–British–Canadian photographer SUNIL GUPTA has a master's of arts from the Royal College of Art, London, and a PhD from the University of Westminster, London. Gupta has several solo shows to his credit, including an important retrospective first presented at the Photographers' Gallery, London, then travelling to the Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto (2022); as well as Charing Cross Hospital, London and Cambridge Wing Gallery, St. Mary's Hospital, London, + Studio Voltaire (2022); Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2022); Hales London (2021); Materia, Rome (2021); the Photographers' Gallery, London (2020); Brixton Tate Library, London (2020, 2019); Hales Gallery, New York (2019), to name a few. His group participations include the viewing room at Frieze, No. 9 Cork Street, London (2023); the National Gallery of Art, Washington (2023); Foundling Museum, London (2023); Tate Britain, London (2023); the Whitaker Museum & Art Gallery, Rossendale (2023); the Barbican Art Gallery, London (2020), among others. Gupta's latest publications in a long list of credits are *Come Out*, published by Stanley Barker, London, in 2023, and *We Were Here: Sexuality, Photography, and Cultural Difference, Selected Writings by Sunil Gupta*, published by Aperture New York in 2022. His work is in many private and public collections, including the Tokyo Museum of Photography; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of London; George Eastman House, Rochester, USA; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Royal Ontario Museum, Canada; Tate Modern, London; Harvard University, Boston; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The artist lives and works in London, UK.

About the gallery

Representing a roster of artists across four generations, VADEHRA ART GALLERY was established in 1987 with a passion to pioneer South Asian art around the world. Vadehra Art Gallery's active and comprehensive programming takes the form of carefully curated and frequent exhibitions at two prominent locations in Delhi, alongside art events, engaging conversations and a growing digital platform. With a maturing global presence, the gallery continues to present curated projects at prestigious art fairs and institutional venues around the world. The gallery ventured into publishing in 1996, in addition to contemporaneously producing literature on ongoing exhibitions and artist projects.



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