National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
Ministry of Culture, Government of India
and
Swaraj Art Archive
cordially invite you to the inauguration of the exhibition
VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHS, 1940 - 1960 of
SUNIL JANAH
Curated by Ram Rahman

Dr. Pheroza J. Godrej
Chairperson, Advisory Committee, NGMA, Mumbai

will inaugurate the exhibition
on 1st October 2015 at 6.00 pm
at the
National Gallery of Modern Art
Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India
Sir Cowasji Jehangir Public Hall
Mahatma Gandhi Road, Fort, Mumbai - 400 032

Curator walk - 6.30 pm onwards

Exhibition:
On view daily from 2nd October to 8th November, 2015
from 11.00 am to 6.00 pm (Closed on Mondays & National Holidays)
Sunil Janah's vintage photographic prints in the Swaraj Art Archive

This set of photographs by Sunil Janah is important for many reasons. The collection, purchased as a "lot" of vintage prints made by Janah very soon after he took the photographs, reached a large number of prints of his images mainly because he couldn't afford to. There are only a handful of vintage prints by Janah in private hands as he almost never sold any prints. His vast output remained with him till he died in Berkeley in 2013. The images in this collection are of varying quality and importance. Many have not been flattened - they were not jointed or touched up. Others were quite finished. Some bore the marks of the very heavy surface retouching which used to be done by Sunil's wife, Subhe (his own eyesight was always bad and he had to hold prints very close to his face to see the details). Many of these images are not in Janah's own archives any longer.

One image of the Malabar peasant woman was published in 1943 on the front page of the Communist Party newspaper People's War. Many others are images from his first book of photographs, The Second Crease which had been published in Calcutta in 1948 and was designed by Satyajit Ray, long before Ray became a film director. It is quite possible that the set in this collection were used to make the black for that book as the cropping is identical. I have hung these images and others from the same locations together in the right-hand gallery.

This set of photographs are primarily of the peasants and tribal communities. There are a few photographs of dancers from the late 1940s - early 1950s, and a set of his industrial photographs from the 1960s. While the collection does not have his political photographs from his Communist Party days, or his portraits of the figures of politics and culture from the 40s and 50s, it is representative of three bodies of his career. Many of the smaller prints were made for publication and made on different painting papers - warm toned Agfa Portriga and many others. A careful print, Janah also used different tones while finishing prints. These prints had many different colour tonalities, tones and textures. One of the many unfortunate problems with all of Janah's work which survives in printed reproduction is that the reproductions never captured those colours, tones and patina of the originals. This exhibition in Delhi is important because Janah's vintage prints have not been seen here since his exhibition in 1965.

Partly because he became a recluse and was very protective of his work, Sunil Janah's work had vanished from public view and was not accessible in books. The recent posthumous publication by Oxford University Press also does not do justice to the richness of the original vintage prints. The importance of vintage photographic prints has not been fully understood in our photo culture. These have not been retouched or restored in any manner and have been reproduced in the book with care to match the tones and colours of the originals - for the first time in Sunil Janah's career. This tome of prints is therefore a revelation to a new generation and will give viewers a unique chance to see the work of a major photographer in the way he intended it to be seen. The book is also available there.

Ram Rahman

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