

Borrowed Futures

A travelling photo studio at the mela

The house is cardboard.
The garden has no soil.
The flowers have never known rain.
Still, people enter gladly.

Travelling Dreams

The mela (carnival) arrives
in a small town of India
like a bright bird
carrying music in its wings.

It opens its coloured tents
beneath the Indian sky,
and for a little while
the ordinary world loosens its grip.

Inside the travelling photo studios,
nothing is what it claims to be.
The house is cardboard.
The garden has no soil.
The flowers have never known rain.
The motorcycle waits
without a road.

Still, people enter gladly.
They live their dreams
Dreams they can't afford

A woman places her hand
upon the handlebar
and feels the wind
before it has even begun.

A family gathers
inside a garden that cannot die.

A child wears a crown
and becomes larger
than the life waiting outside.

A cardboard of Katrina Kaif (an actress)
stands before a painted forest,
holding all the gold of an imagined morning.

These rooms travel
from one mela to another,
folded into trucks,
carrying their cardboard houses,
their permanent roses,
their borrowed skies.

Here, aspiration does not ask permission.
It takes a seat.
It looks into the camera.
It becomes visible.

For the brief opening of the shutter,
a dream acquires a body.

And even when the tent comes down,
even when the painted world is packed away,
the photograph remains—

a small, shining country
where the impossible
once agreed to be true.



01

The Licence to Imagine

WOMAN ON THE MOTORCYCLE

Her hand finds the handlebar
the way a hand finds
something it has been waiting for.

There is no road.
There has never been a road.

Behind her, a painted house,
its windows painted open.

She leans into a wind
that has not begun.

I open the shutter.
For that length of time
she is going somewhere.



02

A Family Arranges Itself

FAMILY ON THE FLOWERED SWING

They arrange themselves
before I lift the camera.

Father standing. Mother standing.
The children in the middle
where children are put.

The swing is chained.
The garlands are cloth.
The house behind them
will be folded into a truck tonight.

The small one wears a crown
and is, for this minute,
larger than the life
waiting outside the tent.



03

Composing Kinship

MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY

Six of them.

One small frame.

They solve it without speaking —
who sits, who stands behind,
whose hand rests
on whose shoulder.

Then they stop arranging
and look at me.

That is the photograph.

Not the roses.

The roses will never wilt.

No one asked them to.



04

The Architecture of Make-Believe

GIRL IN THE TOY CAR

Her hands are on the wheel
in the correct places.
No one told her.

From here you can see everything —
the roses wired to a frame,
the leaves that have never turned,
the car that will not move.

It changes nothing.

She is driving.



05

Borrowing the Face of Cinema

CINEMA CUT-OUT

A cardboard woman
in a painted forest,
holding all the gold
of an imagined morning.

She has stood here
longer than anyone.
Her face has begun
to lift from the board.

Here the cinema
steps down off the screen
and makes itself available.

Anyone may stand beside it.



06

Selecting a Future to Keep

CHOOSING THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The prints come out
onto a red table.

This is the part
I did not expect.

They lean in. They compare.
Someone is holding a pen.

They are choosing
which of themselves to keep —
which face goes home,
which one is looked at
in forty years
by someone not yet born.

I stand back.
It is not my decision.



07

After the Mela

PHOTOGRAPHS LEFT BEHIND

Green cloth on the ground.

Wrappers. Petals.

The photographs in the dust.

Faces I watched
being arranged.

Someone's whole family,
face up in the dirt.

They cost very little.
They were wanted very much.

The second is not cancelled
by the first.

COLOPHON

Seven photographs from *Borrowed Futures*. Part of a long-term project.

The series was edited as a sequence rather than as single frames. Photographs 01 to 04 build the proposition, 05 shows where it comes from, and 06 and 07 return authorship to the subjects before showing what it costs.

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