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Changing the lens' eye

Karen Knorr's way of seeing is unique. An exhibition of her photographs, Transmigration, locates India's Mughal and Rajput past in an intriguing manner

Photo: Sampath Kumar G.P.



Feminist approach To architecture

If you peer deeper, you'd be able to discern the multi-coloured, engraved stones and gems in the walls of a palace or a dome, the slight crevice on imposing pillars. And the fine lines that mark one block of work from another. "A photograph allows you to see the world in detail. Sometimes, we take a snapshot of what is around us, to really see the world," says the American photographer, Karen Knorr, whose exhibition "Transmigrations" is making waves in the city.

Inside view

You may have seen numerous photographs of Mughal and Rajput architecture. Karen, however, has captured them differently. Most images of monuments and palaces are taken from the outside; very few depict its interiors. Karen has photographed the indoors of the Mandore, Samode, Dungarpur and Udaipur Palaces. "It's a feminine way of looking at the inside instead of the masculine outside." As an afterthought, she says: "You might even say I have a feminist approach towards architecture."

Karen Knorr's photographs are works of art, carefully crafted to address diverse and complex issues, from feminism to the politics of representation. "Transmigrations", features two new series, "India Song" and "Fables"; Karen's photographs are reminiscent of Mughal miniature paintings.

The images of the palaces, in striking purple, turquoise blue and faded grey,

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[Front Page](#)

[National](#)

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- [Andhra Pradesh](#)
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- [Kerala](#)
- [New Delhi](#)
- [Other States](#)

[International](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Business](#)

[Sport](#)

[Miscellaneous](#)

[Index](#)

Advts

[Retail Plus](#)

[Classifieds](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Obituary](#)

are arresting. All the images were shot in natural and available light. Knorr, using Photoshop, has placed cheetahs, monkeys and elephants within these royal spaces. What's the connection, you may wonder. Knorr explains: "The cheetah, for example, was a pet of the Mughal Emperors. By bringing in these animals into majestic spaces, I attempt to show what the past may have been like."

Karen was born in Germany and raised in San Juan Puerto Rico. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. In the mid-1970s, Karen studied at the University of Westminster that addressed debates on the "politics of representation" in cultural studies and film theory. All her works question the majoritarian understanding of the world.

Her interest in India developed from reading about history. "I have read many books on Indian history, which gave me a sense of the historical space in this country. For 'Transmigrations', I identified 15 places I would like to photograph and ultimately, narrowed it down to five."

She zooms in on a photograph of Akbar's tomb and says with feeling: "Even the cracks on the monuments look aesthetic." She moves from this point of explanation to another, completely different one.

"It's fascinating how Mughal and Rajput architecture is a combination of Hindu, Islamic and Jain architecture." She relaxes for a bit and asks, a hint of enthusiasm in her voice: "Have you seen Humayan's tomb?" I nod a yes. "It's something you see everyday, but for me, each time I see it, I can't help marvelling at its beauty."

Her next project will look at Islamic and Hindu architecture separately. "I want to photograph temples and mosques now," Karen says. We look forward to a new way of seeing.

"Transmigrations" organised by Tasveer, will be on display till November 30 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., except Sundays, at Pause, 11 Walton Road, off Lavelle Road (above Cinnamon). Call 40535212.

SRAVASTI DATTA

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