



ARTIST

Sunil Gupta

TITLE

Queens, New York/Lambeth, London'

DATE

2001 – 2003

DIMENSIONS

24.5" H x 49.5" W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

Framed

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2004.062

CURRENT LOCATION

Warehouse

SUNIL GUPTA

BORN

1953

BIRTHPLACE

New Delhi, India

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

Canada

CULTURAL HERITAGE

British, South Asian

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2003

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 127

BIOGRAPHY

For a more recent CV or bio please visit the artist's website, www.sunilgupta.net/

Sunil Gupta lives in London, UK. He has received numerous awards and recognitions and has exhibited extensively around the world. He participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in April 2003.

Circa 2018

ESSAYS

Homelands, the most recent chapter of Sunil Gupta's twenty-year photographic odyssey, not only carries forward themes explored in earlier projects, but brings to them a palpably different feeling. Gupta has always put his own life at the center of his work, using it to illuminate the larger social relations that structure our responses to the image-world around us. Gupta was still a teenager when his middle-class family emigrated from Delhi to Montreal. Leaving behind the extended familial networks of northern India, the Guptas were thrust into an alien world of frigid winters, isolated nuclear families, white privilege, and limited employment prospects. As the only son on whom the family's fortunes depended, Gupta studied accounting in college, and in the mid-1970s left for New York to pursue a business degree. He arrived in New York at a time when street photography was sweeping the art world. It was an electrifying time to be a young artist—Manhattan rents were cheap, the streets and piers teemed with gritty life, underground filmmaking was flourishing, and social and artistic revolution crackled in the air. "New York felt like home," Gupta recalled. New York has always felt like home for exiles, not only those seeking economic opportunity, but exiles of the mind. Gupta's decision to abandon business school for photography classes at the New School, then bringing home a white boyfriend instead of a fiancée from a respectable Indian family, could only have been devastating to his parents. The traditional intergenerational identity of the family, the glue of Indian society, had failed to hold. In turn, the closeted life of marriage-with-children with sexual trysts pursued in shameful silence was not acceptable to many gay men in the 1970s. With his lover, Gupta left to pursue photography studies at the Royal College of Art in London. Delhi, Montreal, New York, London, and more homelands waited. After photography studies, Gupta made his living as a free-lance editorial photographer, hustling jobs by day and engaging in social activism at night. During the heady days of the Greater London Council when public money flowed to grassroots art projects, Gupta threw himself into organizing opportunities for black artists to produce and exhibit their work. He co-founded Autograph, a black photographers collective and archive. Even though Margaret Thatcher abolished the GLC in the 1980s, Gupta persisted in his chosen vocation as a public organizer and curator, founding the Organization for Visual Artists, an organization dedicated to commissioning and exhibiting new works by non-white and queer artists from around the world. Having spent most of his life at the geographical centers of global power, Gupta is well aware of the paradoxes in identifying as "black." On the two occasions he has returned to India, he is keenly aware of his distance from the India of his parents' time and his own childhood memory. In the Homelands diptychs, the photographer sets up a dialogue between himself as a cosmopolitan gay Indian who lives in the West and the Sunil Gupta he might have become had his parents never left India. But what lends the project its emotional impact is the appearance of the artist's own body—handsome, but aging, and gently marked by the stresses of living for many years with HIV. This consciousness haunts Homelands, where the photographer's own body is a "homeland" to a virus that survives by crossing the most intimate borders of all. Homelands juxtaposes photographs made in Gupta's ancestral India with scenes from his Canadian, American, and British worlds. Many associations are generated by these visual dialogues. Some are easily apprehended by western viewers while others require more local knowledge. Recognition that the Hindu deity Shiva embodies the cosmic forces of creative destruction illuminates the joining of Gupta's image of a Shiva shrine in Queens and one of a view along a Thames promenade where a yellow "Crime-Stoppers" sign announces a recent gay-bashing. At a time when so much photographic work has moved into the production of "global wallpaper" or large video installations, Gupta's images preserve that more humble sense of the photograph as an "incomplete utterance." Views are seized from the world, not as spectacles for passive consumption, but as visual texts that invite engaged reading. Deborah Bright Sunil Gupta lives in London, UK and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program from April 1-30, 2003. Deborah Bright lives in Boston, MA and teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design. She participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in 1996.