



ARTIST

Sarker Protick

TITLE

Untitled

DATE

2019

DIMENSIONS

28" H x 22.5" W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2019.016

CURRENT LOCATION

NA 16

SARKER PROTICK

BORN

1986

BIRTHPLACE

Dhaka, Bangladesh

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

Bangladesh

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bengali

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2019

BIOGRAPHY

Sarker Protick (b. 1986, Bangladesh) makes work that explores the possibilities of time, light and sound. His portraits, landscapes and photographic series engage philosophically with the specificities of personal and national histories. Incorporating detail observations and subtle gestures the works enter into personal spaces, often minimal and atmospheric.

Protick was named in British Journal of Photography's annual 'Ones to Watch' and PDN's 30 emerging photographers of the year. He is the recipient of Joop Swart Masterclass, Magnum Foundation Fund, World Press Photo award, Australian Photobook of the Year grand prize. His work has been shown in museums, galleries and photo festivals including, Art Dubai, Paris Photo, Singapore Art Week, Dhaka Art Summit, Latvian Contemporary Museum of Photography, Chobi Mela International Photography Festival, Noor der licht etc.

Protick is a faculty member at Pathshala-South Asian Media Institute and currently represented by East Wing Gallery.

Circa 2019

ESSAYS

Now I am quietly waiting for the catastrophe of my personality to seem beautiful again, and interesting, and modern. The country is grey and brown and white in trees, snows and skies of laughter always diminishing, less funny not just darker, not just grey. It may be the coldest day of the year, what does he think of that? I mean, what do I? And if I do, perhaps I am myself again. —from Frank O'Hara's "Myakovsky," *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957) Bangladeshi photographer Sarker Protick's great theme is the passage of time. His subjects ostensibly range from individuals to human artifacts great and small to the natural world, but his overarching genre is really portraiture. So tender is his attention and so patient his eye, he is willing to return and to wait. This is not a matter of temperament. Instead, music had already long occupied him when he came to photo in his mid-twenties. "Learning an instrument, playing correctly, and composing required a high degree of attention," he explains. "I had that for eight years before I moved to making images, so I was already disciplined." Here is a sample of the ways that impermanence pervades his images in their content and their making. Most projects take years and include extensive revisits. *Exodus* documents abandoned feudal-era Hindu estates across Bangladesh. These (and indeed all vanishing things) he calls "relics." His long exposures audaciously oversaturate the light: a luminous presence invades his frame—time dilated, infinitely malleable as gold—even alongside his blackest silhouettes. His 2016 photobook, *Astres Noirs* (with Katrina Koenning), pushes this to reverse silhouettes: beings of light. A writer might liken such blooms to white space in text, but his context is adamantly music: this is work "in a high key." Sometimes light appears disguised as white foliage in a brooding forest. Most work is entirely black-and-white. Two series do employ color so restrained it recedes before our eyes—*What Remains* relates a year of visits to his elderly grandparents and *Of Rivers and Lost Lands* chronicles the Padma's tide-like seasonal flooding and bank erosion that eats whole farms. (The outlier *Love Kill* depicts movie sets in blazing right-now hues). Finding still images inadequate to the suddenness of monsoons, he started making videos. He composes and records the music first, editing his images to fit. His latest video, *Rašmi / Ray*, makes us wait a third of the way in for color—bare wisps of gold hair—laying a tripwire in our eye for a sudden pink explosion later. He calls this "slow looking and deep listening." In Protick's case, an identifiable "eureka moment" occurred and its images survive. Some years ago, he was getting reacquainted with his grandparents whose health brought them to Dhaka. Snapshots prolonged his daily visits. One afternoon, he noticed the loveliness of his grandmother's hair down her back. "Then, I saw the door slightly open"—it has a calligraphically delicate pull-handle and slide bolt—"and I saw this light coming through the door, washed out between the white door and the white walls. I felt something. It reshaped the whole work with my exposure. I used a tripod for the first time and this palette of color was something I'd never seen before. From that point on, I understood where I wanted to go. I knew the words—then I learned the notes." In Syracuse, Protick first walked all day through Oakwood Cemetery's unmown back hills and cherry blossoms with "so much life and death all around." Oakwood isn't truly ancient, despite some broken monuments. But young cultures have their ruins too—a small, forgotten chapel discarded like a toy. (Elsewhere, a toy lies discarded in bedsheets vast as a river delta.) He visually swaps the monumental and the tiny often, jarring our sense of the long view and loosening other associations in turn. He photographed two older local artists at their piano—remember music manages time—from the same vantage he used long ago for his grandmother and again for the child of the young couple who took him home after church his last Sunday here. The wet weather helped too. Syracuse has plenty of the element of transformation—fog rising from trees and Cazenovia Lake, a persistent cold rain at Stone Quarry Art Park, gushing streams, and flashing wet windshields. Protick says O'Hara's poem caught what being here was like. When he arrived, he'd been travelling a long time. Life was—and remains—uncertain and dangerous in his own country. The solitude here "was like falling in love. You just go with it. You are na.ve. This was very crucial for me." At home now, he still teaches at Pathshala South Asian Media Institute and works through the weirdly different solitude of pandemic. Music remains his indispensable antidote. You begin to see we are all relics-in-waiting. Nancy Keefe Rhodes Nancy Keefe Rhodes is a writer, editor, curator, and teaches in film studies in Transmedia at Syracuse University. — Sarker Protick lives in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and completed his residency in May 2019.