

Smile, please

Check out the works of famed American Waswo X Waswo, whose chemical process sepia-toned photos evoke nostalgia of the photo studios of yore



(Clockwise from above) The flower seller; Waswo X Waswo and Night Prowl

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AT FIRST glance, the photographs look like they date back several years, emanating a photo studio feel. On closer inspection, though, you realise there's something modern about them. It's this surreal quality that makes Waswo X Waswo's work so intriguing. TARQ, in association with Tasveer, is bringing some of Waswo's pieces to the city as part of the Focus Photography Festival.

The US-born photographer and writer first visited India in 1993; after several trips in the intervening years, he decided to settle in Udaipur, where he rented a home and built a studio in 2006. Over the years, he has created a stunning body of work, using this studio as his playground.

His photography walks the line between the ethnographic photograph-as-document that is linked to the colonial era, and the fantasy-inspired make-believe that emanated from traditional Indian portrait studios in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Ranging from shots of single figures to theatrically-arranged tableaux, these photographs feature everyone from Gauri dancers to flower sellers, the incarnations of mythological figures, farmers and schoolchildren. After the photo-



Bike boys. PICS COURTESY/TASVEER

graphs have been printed, they have been tinted by a hand-colourist and Waswo's longtime collaborator, Rajesh Soni.

Waswo says, "I embrace a certain element of nostalgia in my work, which is quite a daring thing to do when the very word 'nostalgia' is thought of as negative in the world of contemporary art. But for me, we must always look backwards as well as forwards, and nostalgia does play a role in helping us remember the positive in the past that we may have forgotten in our present, so we don't lose to total obliteration in our future. So, for me, nostalgia becomes just another tool for making contemporary art."

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