

Tarq art gallery's new photography show delves into the anatomy of a rowdy

“Rowdies” are the gangsters, the trouble-makers, the anti-establishment—and they’re alluring as hell, finds Bengaluru photographer Clare Arni

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Bengal Lamp Gang, Clare Arni, Notorious Rowdies, Tarq

It is an unarguable fact that Indians in general have a penchant for grandeur. Films conflate every emotion with elaborate sequences of song and dance, and even low-budget productions don’t let their lack of funding hinder their larger-than-life characters and incredulous plots. We are a culture that relishes hyperbole and melodrama in fiction—and sometimes, real life tends to follow suit.

As Bengaluru-based photographer Clare Arni skimmed through the crime beat section of a local daily, she was more than a little amused at the sensationalist reporting style—where sordid tales of infamous gangsters are almost gleefully relayed in extravagantly gory detail. And then there were the outlandish aliases they adopted—the comically quaint “Daisy”, the ironic (whether intentional or not is unclear) “Chicken”, the cryptic “JCB.”



Cop Shiva, Clare Arni, Notorious Rowdies, Tarq

The term “rowdy” in south India denotes a very specific archetype—an unsavoury character, always looking for trouble, yet at the same time compelling in his bravado. Rowdies are the gangsters, the troublemakers, the anti-establishment—and they’re alluring as hell. Perhaps there is a rowdy in

all of us—and that unexpressed urge to be unabashedly bad is what compels our voyeuristic fascination with violence.

Clare began to photograph her friends in various avatars of the rowdy, inviting them to create extensive backstories and crime sheets for their nefarious alter egos. The performative photographs will now be exhibited at Tarq—as Clare’s third solo show at the gallery—along with a text by author Zac O’Yeah, who posed as one of Clare’s first rowdies.



Morticia, Clare Arni, Notorious Rowdies, Tarq

“Notorious Rowdies” will preview at Tarq on September 14 and will be on show till October 21.