

Cryptic & Outlandish

- Published : September 16, 2017

Print

Photos: Clare Arni

Text: TARQ Gallery

Notorious Rowdies, the show featuring a series of performative photographs by Clare Arni, is on view at TARQ gallery, Mumbai. This show marks Arni's third solo exhibition at TARQ.

The term “rowdy” has a particularly evocative quality in South India. A “rowdy” is an unsavoury character, an outlaw, with a strangely alluring bravado. Clare Arni's fascination with the figure of the “rowdy” began a few years ago while scouring the crime beat section of a local daily. This captivating section carried sordid tales of the nefarious activities of local gangsters, many of whom carried cryptic and outlandish aliases like Dairy, Chicken and JCB. The crime beat section and its sensationalist reportage style was for Arni, an echo of the garish aesthetic of film posters that are plastered across Bangalore, the city she calls home.

The posters glamorised violence, with larger than life characters in incredulous scenarios. Fascinated by the specific persona of the “rowdy”, Arni began toying with the idea that perhaps there is a violence and drama in all of us; a rowdy under the surface, waiting to leap out. She began her project by photographing friends—fellow artists and writers—in various modes of the “rowdy”. The participants were asked to delve into the inner life of the rowdy they had chosen to embody, creating elaborate back stories and crime sheets. What began as a fun project has turned into a series of performative photographs that are simultaneously humorous and macabre, with an aesthetic reminiscent of a low budget film. They unearth the dark fantasies of the subjects while also serving as a mirror to the universal voyeuristic fascination with violence. The exhibition is accompanied by a text by Zac O'Yeah, an author and one of Clare's first “rowdies.”

The exhibition is on view till 21 October at TARQ gallery, Mumbai