

Glimpse into the inner lives of the new generation at this exhibition in Mumbai

The team at TARQ presents 2024: Notes from a Generation, a multi-media collaboration between photographer Prarthna Singh and writer Snigdha Poonam. Curated by Skye Arundhati Thomas, the show comprises a series of portraits, accompanied by a special soundscape that gives a glimpse into the inner lives of the young individuals that are a part of the exhibition.

by Staff Writer | March 27, 2024 SHARE [f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [in](#)



Each is the outcome of a conversation, and a desire to build a multiform narrative of, and through, India's most precious and dynamic demographic: its youth, a generation that will both inherit and shape the decades to

2024 is a historic year for elections, nearly half of the world's population, in 64 countries, will head to the polls. India is one of them. Each individual in 2024 is a young citizen, a fresh, politicised, and sprightly protagonist of a tumultuous, chaotic and complex moment in the political and social history not only of India, but of the world. Through a years-long practice of dialogue, image-making, and analysis, 2024 brings together notes from a new generation of Indians.

Singh and Poonam travelled the towns they grew up in and the metropolises they now call home. Their work began during another major election year, 2019, and was carried out across the last 5 years – what has been a radically transformative period in Indian politics, and moreover a time that appears to have entirely reshaped Indian society.

After months of preparation, which involved working with local researchers, exchanging notes and establishing relationships, the two artists began 2024 in a tent in Jaipur, Singh's hometown, where they initiated their process of photographing and interviewing young individuals. People were invited through networks of NGOs, journalists and casting agents, and over the next four years, Singh and Poonam met them with the intention of understanding, and making a record of, what it means to be young in today's India. Through the vivid sharing of their lived experiences, their aspirations, and their rich inner worlds, the young

individuals included in this project deliver a unique portrait not only of themselves, but of the competing worlds of desire and dejection that make up the society we live in today.



Poonam writes, "Culturally, they are torn between the dreams unfolding on their smartphone screens and the realities of their families, communities, campuses, and coaching centres. Politically, they are expected to take positions before they can learn to tell facts from fake news and cast votes before they can form their ideas of nationalism." Singh was guided by a similar analysis: "I felt it was important to step out of our echo chambers and engage with people who will have the most to contribute to India's future. What are they thinking and feeling?"

Singh and Poonam's collaboration was seeded in exploring the intimacy and ambition set against the harsh realities of twenty-first-century India: economic inequalities, social divisions, and political turmoil. In their individual practices, the two continue to be engaged in a similar line of enquiry: Poonam has recently published a book that follows the aspirations of young men and women in small towns and villages but also the consequences of their dreams not being realised. Singh has been working on a series of portraits of young feminine athletes in Haryana. Together, they have profiled a rising TikTok star from an Indian village for *The Economist*. Individually and together, their work is a window into their sitter's quotidian.

2024: *Notes from a Generation* is a selection from their project encompassing portraits of people from diverse backgrounds, where each individual provides a glimpse into India's present day, even a possible future: that it is not limited to the confines of a single nation-state, or identity, but rather embodies a varied blend of interconnected desires, articulations, and ideals.

According to curator Skye Arundhati Thomas, "We live in an isolationist time – sectioned into silos of our class and social mobility – in India especially, we have retreated into ourselves, into small chambers of interiority, of loneliness and an extreme disconnect from the everyday. We misunderstand each other. And we do little to repair our misunderstandings. If we are to mend the torn social fabric of the nation-state we live in, we must begin by paying sharper attention, by listening to individual stories not simply as anecdotes but as historical and political records – the crucial evidence of the cultural, social and technological power structures that govern our everyday lives."

About the Artists

Prarthna Singh's work explores questions of feminine identity and gender, especially as it intersects with the fraught politics of nationalism in contemporary India. Her images reflect on India's economic and political trajectory, drawing an arc between precariousness and vulnerability. These narratives are constructed in tandem with India's own idiosyncrasies, poised between fragility and abundance. Her recently self-published book, *Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh: One Hundred Days of Resistance* was named one of the best photo books of 2022 by *LensCulture*. Her work has appeared in *TIME*, *The New York Times*, *FT Weekend*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian*, *Monocle*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The BBC*. In 2023 she exhibited at Rencontres d'Arles, France; Photo Saint Germain, Paris; Raw Photo Triennale, Wroclaw; Thessaloniki Biennale, Greece; and 12 Gates, Philadelphia. Her work is currently on view at The National Portrait Gallery, London.

Snigdha Poonam is a journalist and writer investigating trends in India's politics, culture, and society. She has worked for *The Hindustan Times* and *The Caravan* in Delhi, and *The Hindu* in Bangalore. Her articles and essays have also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *Granta*, *The Atlantic*, *CNN*, and *The Financial Times*. Released in 2018, her first book, *Dreamers: How Young Indians Are Changing Their World*, has won awards and nominations worldwide. Currently working on her second book, she divides her time between India and England.

About the Curator

Skye Arundhati Thomas is a writer and editor from Pune. They are currently a curator-in-residence at the Beaux-Arts des Paris. Their first book *Remember the Details*, on viral images, courtrooms, and a brief history of a protest movement, is out with Floating Opera Press. Their second, *Pleasure Gardens*, co-written with Izabella Scott, on constitutional law, military occupation and communications blackouts is forthcoming in 2024 with Mack Books, as is their third, on the painter Lalitha Lajmi, with Sternberg Press.