PRINCE CLAUS FUND
AND BRITISH COUNCIL
2017 CALL FOR PROPOSALS
CONTEMPORARY TAKE,
BEYOND CULTURAL HERITAGE
Disappearing Roots
Bangladesh
2018
Two Sisters’ Portrait © Samsul Alam Helal
Oral History Project
Bangladesh
1960s, Studio portrait of a woman in Avishar Studio, Khulna © Tushar Roy Chowdhury
Disappearing Roots
Bangladesh 2019
Portrait of Halameshing Marma (6), Bandarban, Chittagong, Bangladesh © Samsul Alam Helal
Disappearing Roots
Bangladesh 2019, Symbol of Violence © Samsul Alam Helal
Sniffing out the Differences!

India 2018, Experimental art installation Identity Stories © Charuvi Agrawal and Kadambari Saha
Re-Aligning Goan Heritage Through Mixed Reality
India 2019, AR Architecture, 3D model of St. Cathedral © The Greenhouse
Audience interaction during exhibition of selected young photographers who attended the project’s workshop and photo walks © Zeeshan Naveed/The Little Art
CONJECTURAL RESTORATION OF THE COMPLEX AT THE END OF KHALJI’S REIGN - 1316

Complex Layout Since - 1915
INTRODUCTION

Clay pots and rock carvings, statues and dusty documents, ancient temples and historic hammams; we all recognise these as cultural heritage. But our heritage also includes intangible things, like food or music, the ways we dance or the stories we tell; in short, the rituals and traditions that made us who we are. In this age of rapid growth and digital distraction, memories of the past are fading and physical objects from the past are rapidly being lost or destroyed. It happens through conflict or looting, also by extreme weather and earthquakes, or by unchecked growth or simple neglect. How can we save our memories of the past, our irreplaceable heritage, for future generations?

This is an issue of urgent concern to both the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council. Through the Cultural Emergency Response programme (CER), the Prince Claus Fund has been supporting the rescue and safeguarding of cultural heritage since 2003 and is now scaling up by training local heritage rescuers and linking them up across the globe. Similarly, the British Council administers the Cultural Protection Fund, which supports efforts to conserve and restore heritage and to raise awareness about its importance. So our two institutions are natural allies. A recent study by the British Council documented that engaging communities with their heritage can have a beneficial and inclusive effect on society and improve development at all levels.

It can be a challenge to interest young people in reminders of the past. Appropriately, they are busy embracing the modern and forging their own paths into the future. But especially for the young, it is important to preserve cultural heritage, as it can give an explanation of where their communities have come from and provide a foundation for their own identity, a strong base to build on. It is also vital that they eventually become the guardians of heritage themselves.

The Prince Claus Fund and the British Council decided to join forces and issue a joint call for proposals that would enable young people to engage with diverse cultural heritage within their own context or across borders. Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage invited people to submit creative project ideas relevant to young people. It focused on countries in South Asia, all with rich, multiple, overlapping cultural histories. The projects could find expression in contemporary art forms and new media interventions that included photography, theatre performance, installation, audio-visual, digital art and game.

The response was enthusiastic and the ideas that came in were exciting! We received 151 proposals. Many combined various art forms. A rigorous selection process followed and a joint selection committee from the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council produced a short list that was further researched. Second opinions were solicited. The selection criteria included originality, creativity, viability and the potential for engaging young people. Consideration was also given to gender balance and a diverse range of ideas.

Selection Process

The Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage call for proposals considered 151 proposals in 2017. Of these, twenty-one reached the research phase and thirteen projects were ultimately supported. Selection decisions were made according to a number of criteria: quality, innovation, contextual relevance and cost effectiveness. The Prince Claus Fund and the British Council selected proposals through detailed research and gathered advice from independent experts in the local context. In addition to the references provided by all applicants, independent and objective opinions were sought. This rigorous assessment was the basis for the decision-making for the final selection of grantees. For Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage, each grantee was offered a year-long grant with a specific amount of financial support and contact was maintained throughout its implementation. Upon completion of each supported project, Prince Claus Fund and the British Council evaluated how objectives were met and documented their impact. Exemplary projects arising from this call were then shared across the Prince Claus Fund’s and the British Council’s international networks and publicised on their social media channels.
Ultimately thirteen outstanding proposals were selected from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The successful projects testify to the creativity that can be brought to this urgent task.

Just a few examples: In Bangladesh, young journalism and photography students recorded the stories and researched the archives of small town, or mofussil, photographers for a unique archival website that captured images of a disappearing rural culture.

In Pakistan, young people are familiar with western science fiction, but that genre has little to do with cultural heritage. Visual artist Omar Gilani designed a more plausible future using digital illustrations, animation videos, ambient sounds, 3D installations, interactive art and virtual reality displays. His multi-media installation integrated select Pakistani traditions with a fantasy high-tech experience of an imagined future Pakistan.

In Nepal, the media production team Fuzzscape travelled around the country recording local music and stories and organised workshops for young people that connected them with older musicians and storytellers. Participants thought of ways their heritage is relevant to current times and selected an element from their heritage that was then reimagined in a modern form.

In India, designers and animators integrated the stories of local traditional communities into a virtual reality tour of the streets of Mumbai appealing to both locals and tourists.

In this Review, you will find the details of these projects, and others, and read reflections on various issues raised in connection with cultural heritage, from how it is defined and re-imagined, to the role of women in building heritage. We hope you will find it a thought—provoking and inspiring collection.

Joumana El Zein Khoury, Director, Prince Claus Fund
FOREWORD
CONTEMPORARY TAKE BEYOND CULTURAL HERITAGE, JOINT LEARNING REPORT

From archiving to music to virtual reality, there is proven value in exploring a contemporary take on cultural heritage and the role of new media and technology in supporting new narratives of heritage and identity. What’s more, there is evidently demand for this, with our joint open call Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage with the Prince Claus Fund proving one of their most competitive calls ever: 151 organisations applied, and thirteen grants were awarded to a range of innovative projects.

I would like to congratulate all successful applicants: Thank you for helping to explore the interplay between heritage and technology, and thank you for helping us understand the impact this has for young people across South Asia.

As the UK’s cultural relations organisation, the British Council has an integral part to play in today’s rapidly changing world. In recent years, cultural heritage has become a particular focus for us due to our management of the Cultural Protection Fund, in partnership with the UK’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Heritage, if properly managed, can be instrumental in enhancing social inclusion, developing intercultural dialogue, shaping the identity of a territory, improving the quality of the environment and supporting social cohesion. This work has particular value in South Asia, a region home to diverse communities, where historically cross-cultural interactions have formed the social fabric of the region. However, current and recent conflicts, inequality and social exclusion are threatening the value of this diversity and limiting freedom of expression. I am delighted that through partnership with Prince Claus Fund we are able to add to an important body of research and share our findings with you, through this report.

We want this report to provide practical examples of project delivery and methodology, inspiring wider thinking about the value of heritage to young people. Through projects such as SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES! and DISAPPEARING ROOTS, grantees have paired creativity with a deep understanding of identity and belonging in a South Asian context. Projects such as DISCOVER AHMEDABAD have applied digital mapping and gamification to reveal heritage in India, with activity in Nepal building connections between young artists in Kathmandu and artists outside of the city centre to explore their shared cultural heritage. Our shared agenda with the Prince Claus Fund is about supporting initiatives like these, with the wider goals of strengthening social cohesion, inclusion and equality, with an emphasis on creating access to different cultures, dialogue between communities, and critical reflection.

I am particularly proud of the impact projects such as RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY have had in encouraging young audiences to visit museums. Activities have reminded us of the importance of youth-led programming and working with youth communities in spaces that are welcoming and attractive to young people. We are delighted to develop this even further through Our Shared Cultural Heritage, a programme supporting young people across the UK and South Asia to develop skills, explore their heritage and influence museum programming.

We have sought to present a wide range of cultural heritage and creative approaches in this report—approaches which don’t simply involve looking backwards and reflecting on history. As one project in Bangladesh has highlighted, by exploring the intersection of technology and heritage, we can make essential additions to national art collections and ensure new and existing heritage content is available digitally for future use.

You can read more about the relationship between cultural heritage and inclusion in the British Council’s 2018 report Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth. We hope that this report awakens your need to share more stories, inspires you to reflect on your own and others’ identities, and provokes new thinking about how—through cultural heritage—this can be understood and celebrated.

Kate Arthurs, Director of Arts, British Council

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REFRAMING HERITAGE
Through the use of new and unconventional media, these projects reframed cultural heritage as a way to bring the past, present and future into dialogue, using immersive and sensory experiences to encounter heritage from new perspectives:

- HERE-IN-TIME
- PAKISTAN+: EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE THROUGH FUTURISM AND FANTASY
- RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY
- SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES!

SHARING HERITAGE
These projects encouraged new connections between various communities by focusing on community building and the documentation of intangible heritage. By bringing people together to share heritage and create new work, they placed emphasis on community dialogues, working collectively and creating cross-cultural archives:

- FUZZSCAPE
- THE MUSEUM OF FOOD: A LIVING HERITAGE

VOICING UNTOLD NARRATIVES
Working against dominant discourses by critically re-examining and re-telling historical narratives, these projects amplified forgotten and marginalised voices, giving priority to indigenous, intangible and vernacular heritage:

- BAMBAYYA VR, INDIA
- DISAPPEARING ROOTS, BANGLADESH
- iDISCOVER AHMEDABAD
- ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: MOFUSSIL PHOTOGRAPHY IN BANGLADESH

ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION
Bringing together heritage and new media, these projects used the intersection of historical and contemporary culture as a way to engage young people with heritage. With a focus on education, they helped youth gain new skills and encouraged collaborative dialogue and creative engagement with diverse cultural narratives:

- CULTURE CONNECT
- CULTURE CONNECTORS
- IMAGINE

THEMES AND ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES
Through the Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage call, conducted over two years, the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council supported a wide variety of artists, cultural practitioners and organisations based across four countries of South Asia (i.e. Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan). With their projects, our partners worked to enable young people to engage with diverse cultural heritage through contemporary artistic and new media interventions. While not wishing to conclusively categorise these projects, the following themes and artistic disciplines serve as an indication of how these projects related to each other and shaped the overall call. These themes, as well as artistic disciplines, are indicated by an icon below each project description.

Distribution of themes
- Framing Heritage
- Sharing Heritage
- Voicing Untold Narratives
- Encouraging Creativity Through Participation

Distribution of disciplines
- Audio-Visual / Documentation
- Installation / Community Engagement
- Mixed Media
- Photography / Memory
**Audio-Visual / Documentation**
- Culture Connect
- iDiscover Ahmedabad
- Fuzzscape

**Installation / Community Engagement**
- The Museum of Food: A Living Heritage
- Sniffing Out the Differences!

**Mixed Media**
- Bambaiyya VR
- Culture Connectors
- Here-in-Time
- Pakistan+: Exploring South Asian Culture through Futurism and Fantasy
- Re-aligning Goan Heritage through Mixed Reality

**Photography / Memory**
- Disappearing Roots
- Imagine
- Oral History Project: Mohussil Photography in Bangladesh

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**India 7**
- Bambaiyya VR
- Culture Connectors
- iDiscover Ahmedabad
- Here-in-Time
- The Museum of Food: A Living Heritage
- Re-aligning Goan Heritage through Mixed Reality
- Sniffing Out the Differences!

**Bangladesh 2**
- Disappearing Roots
- Oral History Project: Mohussil Photography in Bangladesh

**Pakistan 3**
- Culture Connect
- Imagine
- Pakistan+: Exploring South Asian Culture through Futurism and Fantasy

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**Nepal 1**
- Fuzzscape
DISAPPEARING ROOTS was a project by emerging documentary photographer Samsul Alam Helal, which challenged the way indigenous Bangladeshi history is portrayed in mainstream media. The project focused on the indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, with the Kaptai Dam—built in 1962 and resulting in the displacement of 10,000 people—being the key point in addressing the violence and destruction that the state of Bangladesh continuously undertakes in the name of “development”.

Executed over a ten-month period, the project dove deep into alternative narratives surrounding the indigenous community. Through the use of multimedia research and organised discussions, Helal created meaningful relationships with youth organisations, research groups and journalists of the region, bringing together a variety of people to rediscover the forgotten histories of the area. The project was exhibited at Bangladesh National Museum in March 2019, with a panel discussion used as an active form to stimulate dialogue between students, artists, researchers, writers, journalists, anthropologists, teachers and youth from a variety of different class structures and generations within Bangladesh. Guest speakers included Rani Yan Yan, Queen of the Chakma Community and activist, Rahnuna Ahmmed, anthropologist, Sayeed Ferdous, professor and researcher, and Diana Campbell, curator; bringing together a diverse range of perspectives through which issues surrounding the indigenous histories and development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were unpacked. The topic is not one that is often talked about in Bangladesh and therefore, by bringing together those who had been toiling away at the topic on their own for years, these dispersed groups were given a chance to come together and share their perspectives.

Through the success of the project, DISAPPEARING ROOTS gained continued support, resulting in a second exhibition in May 2019, at the British Council office, and an invitation to Dhaka Art Summit 2020. This ongoing support helped continue one of the primary aims of the project: to give voice to the indigenous community and to shine light on issues that are being ignored by popular culture. By broadening the topic’s reception and concern across the Bangladeshi community, DISAPPEARING ROOTS revisited forgotten and untold narratives of the indigenous community, reframing them as an integral, and important, part of Bangladeshi history.

DISAPPEARING ROOTS made it possible to raise questions about gentrification, making mainstream society and the younger generation aware about the history of indigenous people in Bangladesh. The discussion was very inspiring for me and made me think about my own limitations, aesthetic selections and approach of photography. What was surprising for me was realizing that lot of the university students do not know about the displacement history behind Kaptai Dam. My effort is aimed at creating a counter argument for the ruthless way of invading the region’s culture and land.

Samsul Alam Helal

www.samsulalamhelal.com

Voicing Untold Narratives  Photography / Memory

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: MOFUSSIL PHOTOGRAPHY IN BANGLADESH

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT was a project by Drik Picture Library that aimed to revive the vernacular history of mofuscil (small town) photography in Bangladesh. Made under the umbrella of The Rural Visual Journalism Network (RVJN), Drik trained ten photography students and five journalists in the methodologies of visual research and the collection of oral histories, who then documented the life stories of twenty-five photographers from five different mofuscil towns, archiving approximately 500 photographs in the process. A selection of these photographs was exhibited in Chobi Mela X as part of an exhibition titled “Archives of Persistence”.

www.driklondon.com
The project covered two generations of photographers, archiving work from as early as the 1930s. With many of the early generation photographers having passed away, and with no institutional interest in archiving early photographs, **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT** responded to the urgent need to collect life stories and archive photographic materials. Furthermore, recognising patriarchal biases of society, the project gave extra care and attention to include women’s role in the history of photography, as well as the practices of subaltern photographers. In doing so, **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**’s critical strategy lead to the inclusion of women’s stories from the dark room, as well as box camera photographers, broadening historical narratives of male-dominated, studio-based Bangladeshi photography. By approaching *mofussil* photography as visual heritage, the project unearthed a regional tradition that developed in marginal spaces, raising questions about how it has contributed to ideas of history and memory, as well as conceptions of what constitutes Bangladesh’s “heritage”.

The positive responses the project received from the wider artist community, as well as the general youth population, indicated that there is an unattended yearning for knowledge of Bangladesh’s hidden vernacular visual heritage. This has encouraged *Drik* to continue the work, in which the rest of the fifty-nine districts of Bangladesh will be researched to bring out an anthology of vernacular photographic practices. The continued effort to archive the work and histories of *mofussil* photographers will encourage further engagement between young student photographers and journalists with older generation photographers.

This research is accessible to the broader public through an archival website, available as a research tool for anthropologists and researchers of any interested discipline. This is the only visual archive of *mofussil* photography in Bangladesh.

*Drik*, *since its emergence, has been working to establish photography as a form of art and link contemporary visual cultural tradition with its rich heritage in Bangladesh. The way elderly generations of photographers appreciated the endeavour, readily sharing their stories and collections, shows that there was a gap in our art history that this project has attended to, even if it is in a limited scale.*

Dr. Shahidul Alam

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**BAMBAIYYA VR, INDIA**

**BAMBAIYYA VR** was a project by Archit Vaze, Salil Parekh, Jyoti Narayan, Alap Parikh and Tejas Nair, in which a virtual reality journey was made through Mumbai, creating a testimony of Mumbai’s tangible and intangible heritage for locals and people abroad. Made as both a VR experience and as a book, the project was exhibited at various cultural events, during which visitors were given the opportunity to experience VR (sometimes for the first time) as well as engage with historical facts from Mumbai through dialogue-based narratives.

Initially, the team researched folk stories of various communities within the city, translating a selection of these stories into a virtual journey through the streets of Mumbai. The stories came from personal histories that together formed a collective story of shared space and time. The VR journey also allowed participants to experience places in which they might never have been before. Using warm and bright colours, and subtle animated details—such as the dog from the Parsi café, or a bee from Koliwada—in an illustrated style, the VR journey created a friendly and believable experience. This form of storytelling, unique to VR, created experiences in which participants could step into others’ shoes while still keeping their own sense of reality; a form younger audiences could easily respond to.

The approach taken by **BAMBAIYYA VR** was appreciated for its accessibility, and therefore the project could be repurposed as an educational tool. The use of VR helped the project extend its reach to young audiences, while people familiar with the histories told were brought back to memories of their younger years. These experiences provoked participants to narrate stories of their own, awakening their need...
to share stories, especially those concerning communities forgotten due to modernisation. This ability to stir memories in participants gave the project the possibility to grow, with the potential to incorporate a greater variety of stories. These positive responses, as well as its potential to expand, revealed **BAMBAIYAA VR** to be a generative project, one that actively used new media to share unique stories, reframing the history of Mumbai and reforming how it is seen today into an inclusive and nuanced web of narratives.

**BAMBAIYAA VR** has been exhibited at:
- Urban Lens Festival, Mumbai, India, December, 2018
- The Irregulars Art Fair, Delhi, India, February, 2019
- EyeMyth Media Arts Festival, Mumbai, India, March, 2019
- Future Fiction’s Immersive Futures Festival, Mumbai, India, March 2019
- Tales at the Museum, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum, Mumbai, India, May 2019
- Cyberia Festival, Pune, India, December 2019
- Magnetic Fields Festival, Alsisar Manal, Rajasthan, India, December 2019

While working with VR as a medium to share culture and heritage in India, we really did not know what to expect from the viewers. We were pleased to find how responsive and adaptive people were to the experience. It reinforced our belief that VR can be used as a medium to share cultural information in an interactive format.

Archit Vaze

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Archit Vaze

[QR Code]

Voicing Untold Narratives  Mixed Media

**CULTURE CONNECTORS, INDIA**

**CULTURE CONNECTORS** is an interactive educational programme developed by Flow Education and Culture Consultants Pvt. Ltd, in which virtual reality technology has been used to make cultural heritage accessible and relevant in an educational context. Designed as an app and webVR experience, accessible via a dedicated webpage, the programme explored a select cultural environment of New Delhi—the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Qutb Complex—with an implementation roll-out in other cities across India. In doing so, the programme moves cultural heritage out of the realm of museums and revamps the educational syllabus to include a more collaborative dialogue and enquiry into diverse cultural narratives. The programme is aimed at students between eleven to fourteen years of age.

The programme is based on Flow’s self-developed “creative enquiry” methodology, in which engaging stimulus and guided activity provoke personal connections and responses in students. This, paired with 21st century skills and technologies, has been used to redefine students’ engagement with heritage and cultural spaces, emphasising empathy, cultural engagement and problem solving skills. By pairing the VR experience with offline activities and toolkits, the programme promotes active learning and collaboration, providing opportunities for cultural self-awareness and understanding of how one’s culture shapes one’s identity and world-view.

Even though some students are familiar with VR, the implementation phase reveals that the use of new media increases students’ excitement to engage with the programme. By experiencing heritage in a contemporary and interactive form, students have been stimulated to talk about and reflect on their digital immersion, recalling what they liked, what they identified with, and what they further thought. Individual recall of the experience has ranged from noting visual details, such as the intricate architectural motifs and arabesque patterns within the site, to select segments of the narrative—such as the height comparison between the Iron Pillar and international basketball player Michael Jordan, the anecdotal storytelling of Metcalfe’s daughters picnic on the roof of the minar, and the unfinished grandeur of the Alai Minar. Certain students have also been able to reflect further on the complexity of cultural diversity, the need to engage with cultural heritage and the perils of not acknowledging cultural differences.

By moving beyond facts and mere appreciation of the past, **CULTURE CONNECTORS** redefines engagement with heritage by allowing students to make personal connections and gain a bigger picture of the past and present to understand continuity and change. With a view to promote a cross-cultural perspective, the programme helps students appreciate cultural pluralisms and begin to consider heritage from other perspectives and points of view.

*In this rapidly changing Age of Information, we live in a world that is increasingly interconnected, yet conflicted.* Technology
has transformed and continues to impact how people communicate and understand each other. While there is ease of access and faster dissemination of information, societies are plagued with debilitating suspicion, conflicts and violence. In order to reap the true benefits of multiculturalism and create an environment of tolerance and empathy, collaborative dialogue and deeper enquiry into diverse cultural narratives is crucial.

Arundhati Mitter

www.cultureconnectors.in
www.flowindia.com

Encouraging Creativity Through Participation

Mixed Media

IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD, INDIA

IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD is an app made by International Center for Innovative Developments (ICID) and Urban Discovery, consisting of illustrated maps of two neighbourhoods of the old city of Ahmedabad. Made in collaboration with local residents, and designed by local illustrators, the maps curate walking routes through the city’s oldest neighbourhoods, shedding personalised light on local stories, heritage sites, traditional businesses, food, cultural events, artists and emblematic characters. Through this collaborative approach, IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD is a poetic ode to the neighbourhoods, using a variety of media including photography, video and text to create digital experiences that interconnect tangible and intangible heritage, paying homage to the culturally plural microcosmic nature of the area. With the city of Ahmedabad becoming a growing tourist destination, ICID and Urban Discovery found a window of opportunity to help locals gain agency in the presentation and preservation of their city. Accepting tourism as an inevitable development, the project began by inviting locals of Ahmedabad to create a personalised guide for inquisitive travellers, highlighting and revealing that which is important to them as locals through “neighbourhood narratives”. In doing so, the project encourages residents, business owners and caretakers to present both tangible and intangible heritage of the area, deepening their own relationships with the city and developing an inclusive local narrative. With a strong focus on the inclusion of women’s and children’s perspectives, the initial research for the app was conducted through community consultation workshops and other local events, which gave opportunity for diverse voices to be heard, and enabled a variety of personal stories to be included as integral to the neighbourhoods’ identities. In doing so, IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD aims to amplify local voices and give direction to how their city will be developed by policymakers and experienced by visitors. This has been further developed by collaborating with local writers, researchers and artists, ensuring that both the content and form of the app has been produced by locals.

The app and map was launched as a series of locally organised events, making IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD come full circle, bringing the stories and work back to the neighbourhoods, celebrating and strengthening the local community. In doing so, the app and map have been used to catalyse positive, inclusive dialogues within the community, helping to create a personalised local narrative that presents Ahmedabad as a living city with a nuanced cultural narrative. IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD is part of the iDiscover Asia App, available as a free download in the Apple and Google Play Store. The maps are available at selected locations in Ahmedabad and can also be downloaded on www.i-discoverasia.com

Residents spoke freely and shared their views openly about things that are forgotten, deteriorating and also emphasised things that are close to their hearts, such as traditions, music, artifacts, instances / incidents and buildings that they feel proud of and are deeply associated with. Children shared places that are important to them. Markets, eateries and places that they visit; places where they play and places that they would like to show to people that come to Ahmedabad from other parts of the world! Women shared stories of community, how living in the old city is not only comfortable but has a sense of safety and belonging. Women also shared how proximity to various markets, temples, schools and institutions make their life easy and filled with purpose. Many residents shared stories of their childhoods and how intangibilities, age-old traditions and co-living of generations make the old city of Ahmedabad rich and unique.

Sameeha Sheth

www.i-discoverasia.com

Voicing Untold Narratives

Audio-Visual / Documentation
HERE-IN-TIME, INDIA

HERE-IN-TIME was as a treasure-hunt styled trivia game, developed by Akshita Mehta of the National Institute of Design in India, which used augmented reality to explore the Qutb Minar Complex in Delhi. It was designed as an on-site game, using players’ own smartphones as devices through which to play. The game was built around stories and legends of the complex, comparing the past and present and allowing players to experience them in an engaging way. The making of the game included a Mixed Reality Workshop, which took place at a local school.

The game was directed at youth, but was designed to be attractive for all those in possession of smartphones, and all those interested in heritage. Built as a learning tool that activated the imagination, the HERE-IN-TIME game brought architectural heritage back into popular consciousness in an active and present way. The multi-layered gameplay included information on architectural elements, comparisons between then (the era in which the monument was built) and now (how it came to belong in its place today), and other associated stories.

The AR component, in combination with the use of the first person perspective, allowed players to digitally travel back in time. Emphasis was placed on players’ experiences, ensuring that their engagement exceeded that of a passive observer. By bringing together technology and heritage, HERE-IN-TIME activated emotional connections between Qutb Minar Complex and the game’s users, deepening their engagement by reconnecting the site to the present time.

HERE-IN-TIME managed to increase engagement and curiosity towards Qutb Minar Complex, bringing new players of the game to the on-site location. It also managed to arouse interest amongst youth to revisit the site, with the game acting as a promise for a new heritage experience. While the target audience, the local youth, had no problems interacting with the new technology, the project also became a successful way of introducing new technologies to the wider public who were less familiar with these new media. Made as a pilot for a potential series that explores a number of heritage sites, HERE-IN-TIME sparked interest for future development, holding the promise of expanding into an on-going project that can fine-tune its form and further its potential reach.

HERE-IN-TIME was a very exciting journey for me. Sprouting from just an idea, PCF empowered me to further its execution and gather real-time feedback of an application that marries technology and heritage experience. Understanding this complex form of user-engagement, and studying its impact to derive nuanced insights, was the most challenging yet inspiring part for me. It was kind of like studying magic… Akshita Mehta

THE MUSEUM OF FOOD: A LIVING HERITAGE, INDIA

THE MUSEUM OF FOOD: A LIVING HERITAGE was a communal pop-up kitchen, organised by artist collective Revue (Sreejata Roy, Mrityunjay Chatterjee), along with young researcher Nian Paul, a social geographer, based in the multi-ethnic neighbourhood of Khirki-Hauzrani, New Delhi. The kitchen was active for one year, bringing together the diverse culinary heritages of the area and becoming a space for inter-cultural interaction. In keeping with REVUE’s previous projects, MUSEUM OF FOOD embodied a philosophy of community interaction, with sustained community dialogue as its main methodology. The kitchen was activated by weekly events, and was promoted through a bilingual magazine, Khanapados, which was distributed within the community at tea stalls, barbershops and cafes; and by Kiran Nadar Museum of Art and other organisations.

Throughout its year-long programme, the kitchen was open four times per week—which grew in attendance over time—and became a regular meeting place for young women from various ethnic and migrant groups in the area. Its workshops focused on the preparation of specific dishes for monthly events that, in turn, attracted inhabitants from throughout the area. In doing so, the kitchen created a community...
that shared and prepared a diverse range of culinary heritages, while also encouraging performances of narratives, songs and poetry concerning food, which were slowly gathered as material for a later exhibition.

**MUSEUM OF FOOD** was attended predominantly by women, who made up ninety per cent of its overall participants. With the aim to bring together diverse cultures, the kitchen’s participants included intra-national migrants from Bihar, Bengal and various South and North-Eastern states of India, as well as international migrants such as Afghans, Nepalis, Somalis, Iraqis and Congolese. Based on the fact that each community has their own quintessential cuisines, the project functioned as a living archive of these communities’ culinary heritages. Through the development of this archive, the kitchen became a space for inter-cultural interaction between the participants, allowing them to focus on their similarities by using food as a catalyst.

Growing from the kitchen’s activities, the women who participated in **MUSEUM OF FOOD** developed their own, self-sustainable ventures, including participation in food festivals, social events and engagement with food experts, which helped them connect with a wider public within the city. Furthermore, major newspapers and media houses, including Vice and DB Post, shared the project enthusiastically, with DB Post describing the project as “magic”.

At the culmination of the project, **MUSEUM OF FOOD** was documented in the form of a website that was created in collaboration with the community. The website replaced the physical magazine *Khanapados*, and continues to engage with a wide cross-section of the different communities in the area. Along with the histories of cuisines, ingredients and tools, the website shares narratives of journeys of food over time and space, continuing to act as a collaborative archive of the multi-ethnic neighbourhood of Khirki-Hauzrani.

The most important aspect was building up the community kitchen and the mutual relationships amongst women from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. As they would often say, they seemed to miss the kitchen and the conversations if they are away for a day.

Sreejata Roy and Mrityunjay Chatterjee

www.museumfood.wordpress.com
www.revue.network

**RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY, INDIA**

**RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY** was a year-long project by The Greenhouse, which used virtual and augmented reality to explore different facets of Goan heritage. The project was built from an initial research-phase of events, workshops and cultural activities, which encouraged Tandem Research, Houses of Goa, Museum of Christian Art, Tech for Wildlife and Fernando Velho to join as collaborators. These partnerships led to a number of VR and AR projects, as well as spinoff projects in media such as comics and film. Upon completion, each project was exhibited at cultural events, including Serendipity Arts Festival, Museum of Goa, Unbox Festival and Future Fiction.

Through the **RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE** projects, young Goans were given the opportunity to engage with their heritage via six different VR and AR projects, each of which focused on Goan architecture, landscape, history, the city Panjim or the Narkasur festival. The 3D models created for these separate projects were subsequently combined as an online repository, through which the range of Goan artefacts could be further explored. By taking Goan heritage online, **RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE** disrupted the notion that heritage can only be interacted with at museums, while the VR and AR projects enabled physical interaction with the objects, making the encounter with heritage a more immersive experience. Furthermore, these digital renderings of Goan heritage gave the Goan diaspora opportunity to engage with their heritage from afar.

The introduction of digital tools, such as photogrammetry and VR, were instrumental in giving The Greenhouse special permission to document various heritage sites from the area; and the successful use of these technologies led to various conversations, proposals and projects with multiple institutions to further document heritage sites across Goa. Additionally, the use of digital tools and techniques within the projects attracted interest from various educational institutions across the country, leading to two workshops held at the National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad). These workshops helped build a small community of artists, designers and new media practitioners,
some of whom went on to work on digital heritage projects of their own.

Through these multiple collaborations, spinoffs, workshops and events, the direction of the project, and the content of the outputs, was significantly influenced by the people of Goa. Their buy-in and support was invaluable in creating contextually relevant content, which continues to be disseminated through the project’s broadening reach. Not only did the project open up ways of experiencing heritage, its interactive and collaborative approach created a community around the project, bringing people together through the exploration of digital culture and the cultural heritage of Goa.

Bringing the voices of people into the design of future heritage experiences is key to the sustainability of culture, and our project explores various routes to participation in the design process. The artistic outcomes of this project live a parallel life as potential frameworks for collaboration that can bring greater vibrancy and sustainability of cultural heritage to the state of Goa.

Avinash Kumar

www.quicksand.co.in

Reframing Heritage Mixed Media

SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES! INDIA

SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES! was an experimental art installation by visual artist and designer Charuvi Agrawal, and designer and engineer Kadambari Sahu. The exhibition explored the olfactory (scent-related) heritage of South Asia, focusing on smell as a cultural factor that creates identity, as well as illustrating the cultural exchanges—made apparent through smell—between countries and religions.

The project explored the idea that smell could be used as an interactive medium to build narratives, and was rooted in the belief that cultural exchanges between different South Asian communities could be traced through the journey of a scent. The material for the project consisted of collected scents from several locations in India and were named: Diversity in Us (Nagpur, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad); Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) [Story of pre-independent India, history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh]; Mir Abdul Attarwala (Kashmir); Identity stories—The Story of Supreeth(Coorg, Bengaluru, Mangalore, Hyderabad); Identity stories—The story of Vivek Shah (Bengaluru, Kolkata, Tiruchirappalli); Xeno 500 (Bengaluru). Along with these, the scents of several cultural artifacts were recreated based on experiential qualities.

The resulting exhibition emphasised connections between these different locales by weaving narratives of confluence of cultures, identities, perceptions and heritage. The translation of these histories and olfactory journeys into an interactive installation enabled a broad audience to experience cultural narratives, trigger their curiosity, and stimulate dialogue.

The use of scent as a medium was an experimental approach that sent Sahu and Agrawal into unexplored grounds. They were joined by other artists, designers and architects Sandeep Mulagapati, Gaurav Patekar, Archana Patil, Debanshu Bhaumik, Karan Dudeja and volunteers Anuja Thanawala, Chandrasekhar Katukuri, Prasanth Putchala, Naga Vyas, Udhayan R.M. While it was uncertain at the outset whether olfaction would be a viable medium through which a general audience could be engaged, the installation attracted a broad audience—spanning from ages four to seventy—and the overall response to the interactive artwork was enthusiastic and engaged. When questioned, the majority of the audience confirmed that the smell narratives presented within the exhibition evoked an emotional response in them.

Following the success of the installations, SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES! was offered new partnerships and collaborations from other designers and perfumer makers, such as Olfactory Studio, and ValueLabs, and were invited to speak about their work at several events, including leading international design conferences such as Interaction ’18 and Interaction ’20, conducted by IxDA, UXINDIA (2019), and IxDD (2019). Here they presented their work under the title “Designing for Social Change and Awareness Narratives with Smell”. They also won India’s Best Design Award for Sniffing out the Differences issued by Pool magazine (now called Design India).

While starting as an exploration into the unknown, these initial steps led to new opportunities to expand research and further develop the project’s form, allowing for further iterations of the project’s design, and an expanded research into the olfactory associations of various communities and people of India, which ultimately helped enrich the artwork greatly.
Most visitors felt an emotional connection to the different narratives presented in our exhibition. We had specifically chosen narratives which portrayed the shifting of identities over time and space within the cultural melting pot that is South Asia. We were pleasantly surprised when they were able to identify with all the narratives we had chosen and were engaged with the exhibits throughout.

Kadambari Sahu and Charuvi Agrawal

www.sniffingoutthedifferences.com

**FUZZSCAPE, NEPAL**

**FUZZSCAPE** was a project initiated by Rajan Shrestha, Nhoja Ratna Tuladhar and Fuzz Factory Productions, in which young musicians and filmmakers travelled to three marginal districts of Nepal to collaboratively make musical heritage relevant to younger generations. The project consisted of workshops for local youth, as well as the documentation of intangible Nepali cultural heritage through a series of videos shared online. Through interviews, audio and film recordings, the team documented a variety of traditional and contemporary music, ranging from religious to travelling-band songs, stemming from various backgrounds and traditions and sung in a number of languages.

During the three trips across Nepal, **FUZZSCAPE**’s workshops and talk programmes helped instigate discussions amongst students, journalists and artists, in which culture, preservation and documentation were explored. The workshops gave youth a platform to express their interest in traditional cultural heritage, and opened up pathways through which they could engage with, develop and preserve it. With lack of similar projects within Nepal, the project addressed the urgent need for the documentation of Nepal’s musical heritage. This led a variety of other organisations and individuals to reach out and invite Fuzz Factory Productions to future events to carry on with their work, while their direct engagement with local artists and residents led to more immediate and spontaneous collaborations, such as the recording of three songs and music videos for local musicians—including the inaugural music video of Barta Gandharba—as well as an impromptu workshop with art students from Banepa, as part of the Valley Music Festival.

Though it is predominantly men who practice music in Nepal, **FUZZSCAPE** managed, on one occasion, to work with a local women’s group. Their nomadic format made connections between artists and musicians from across the country possible, creating wider awareness, as well as further opportunities, for artists outside of the artistic centre of Kathmandu. Further events were then organised as part of **FUZZSCAPE**, such as a one-off concert in Palpale Bajaar, Bhojpur—enjoyed by a crowd of about one hundred people—and a talk programme on intangible cultural heritage at the British Council. Attended by journalists, artists, an ethnomusicologist, and art lovers, the talk encouraged a community dialogue about the issues that intangible cultural heritage faces.

Further invitations to expand their reach and broaden their output have been made, leading to more exhibition and discussion based outlets. The project has received wide media coverage, and their online following continues to grow. However, upon reflection, the team observed that it is still direct contact—by bringing their project to people around Nepal—that continues to be the richest, and most encouraging, aspect of the project.

The most important thing for us was that we were able to bring filmmakers and music artists together to travel to a new place for them to experience culture first hand. The idea that these two groups of creative professionals working together to respond and reflect to what they experience and how they do it is our most valued result. Not only that, these artists communicate and interact with creative people and groups in the areas they visit to be inspired and, in turn, inspire.

Prasiit Sthapit

www.fuzzscape.com

**www.fuzzscape.com**

Sharing Heritage  Audio-Visual / Documentation
CULTURE CONNECT was a photography and virtual reality project by The Little Art, which enabled youth to use existing cultural heritage spaces of Lahore artistically, creatively and recreationally via workshops, tours and on-site interventions. The programme consisted of heritage walks, photography workshops, an exhibition and a VR kiosk, each of which was supported by local organisations, such as Lahore Biennale, Alhamra Arts Council and community centre Faiz Ghar.

By focusing on creative engagement, the project acted as a facilitator between the city and the people, connecting Lahore’s heritage with contemporary media to lessen the gap between youth and culture. With a series of heritage walks organised during Lahore Biennale, CULTURE CONNECT offered a framework in which contemporary artworks and the artistic and architectural heritage of Lahore could be experienced side-by-side, using juxtaposition to teleport participants back and forth in time. The walks were lead by well-known experts, which meant that participants—including families, children and youth—were given the opportunity to explore heritage sites such as Lawrence Garden, New Food Street Route to Shahi Hammam, Delhi Gate & Walled City and Lahore Fort through a new lens.

Throughout the programme, digital media was used as an active tool through which to engage and connect with art and heritage. Photography workshops gave a basic introduction to photography, while a VR kiosk, set up at Alhamra Arts Council, widened the outreach of the programme by incorporating VR technology as a learning tool. As well as learning critical and photographic vocabulary to develop and polish their photography skills, participants were encouraged to share their work through a photography exhibition organised at Packages Mall, which was attended by a public audience.

Over the course of its programme, CULTURE CONNECT managed to develop the participants’ understanding of the evolution of art, photography and technology and its connection to history. While it was observed that youth had a good understanding of technology, connecting it with art and history through digital and physical expression still had room to develop. The programme addressed this by engaging participants in a number of active ways, with the workshops, and subsequent photo exhibition, playing a positive role in increasing participants’ creative development and personal self-confidence.

At the culmination of the CULTURE CONNECT programme, The Little Art created a subsequent platform to continue bridging the gap between youth and cultural heritage. “Lahore, I Love You” was launched as a platform for the city that celebrates art, music, history, spaces, design, architecture and social initiatives. Further photo walks have been organised through the platform and it will continue to seek partnerships to co-produce and promote citizens’ engagement with Lahore’s rich history, culture and heritage.

The most important outcome that we got out of the project was the participants’ understanding of evolution of art, photography and technology with its connection to history…From exploring flora and fauna at Lawrence Hall and Garden to translating emotions through photography at New Food Street; from digging the great architectural tactics of Shahi Hammam to getting inspired by the artists at Shees Mahal and discovering the Royal Kitchen that served royalty at its high time, every participant got a taste of Lahore’s inspiring and eloquent history.

Shoaib Iqbal

www.thelittleart.org

Encouraging Creativity Through Participation

Audio-Visual / Documentation
**IMAGINE, PAKISTAN**

*IMAGINE* was an installation-based project by Syed Mazhar Zaidi, in which historically and culturally iconic images of Pakistan were translated into movable set pieces that could be manipulated, and reinterpreted, by audience members. By turning rigid images into an interactive installation, this project stimulated discussion and promoted alternative narratives to counter dominant discourses around iconic imagery. The project engaged with a predominantly student-based audience, encouraging them to become active participants and immerse themselves with their cultural heritage.

The installation used various disciplines, from sculpture to set design and digital art, creating an interactive stop-motion set and a photographic exhibition. The set consisted of traditional handmade miniature sculptures, re-purposed as stop-motion props, while the photographic exhibition displayed the “alternative moments” created by the audience. The incorporation of traditional sculptures into an interactive, contemporary context rearticulated relationships between the objects and viewers, while the photographs encouraged visitors to engage with, and create, alternative narratives. In doing so, the project allowed viewers to critique historical events and subvert histories traditionally told from rigid, dominant perspectives, challenging dogmatic notions of history and heritage and uncovering embedded power structures.

By focusing on the things that are common across ethnic divides, the exhibition proposed new paths towards an inclusive societal narrative that focuses on commonalities rather than differences. In doing so, the project offered an opportunity to “remake” or “re-imagine” iconic imagery of cultural and historical importance, encouraging self-reflectivity and introspection that is usually absent from mainstream discourse. It was this generative aspect of the project that also offered further possibility for on-going dialogues between communities beyond the exhibition.

The core aim of the project was to redefine narratives that are traditionally and historically passed on as something sacred and unchangeable, using interactivity as a tool to negate passivity towards historical narratives. The design ensured that young people participated in the process of making, encouraging diverse narratives and interpretations of singular images. This challenged the notion of history as a static, impenetrable object, and engaged individuals as active agents in forming historical narratives concerning identity, geography, legacy and consciousness. In doing so, *IMAGINE* helped audiences translate historical abstractions into personal, emotional and critical narratives, encouraging history to be viewed as a dynamic space.

At the time of *Review*’s publication, there were no online platforms documenting the project.

*Pakistan is a country built on very rigid creation myths, which inform everything from masculinities, gender relations, political affiliations, democratic participation, academic work, religious practice and artistic practice. We propose to create a physical intervention which forces individuals to abandon this rigidity and impose themselves on history—triggering emotional and intellectual responses and criticisms which will no doubt lead, if momentarily, to a paradigm shift in understanding citizenship and storytelling as one that is manipulated, in flux and personal.*

Syed Mazhar Zaidi

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**PAKISTAN+: EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE THROUGH FUTURISM AND FANTASY, PAKISTAN**

*PAKISTAN+* was a mixed media project by visual artist Omar Gilani, in which digital illustrations, animation videos, ambient sounds, 3D installations and virtual reality displays were used to showcase Pakistan in a futuristic science fiction and fantasy setting. While science fiction tends to divorce itself from the past completely, Gilani’s conception of the future challenged dominant notions that progress necessitates a break from inherited cultural practices. By reframing elements such as the *dhabbawallas* (street food vendors), *galli cricket* (street or alleyway cricket) and *doodhwallas*...
gilani acknowledged vernacular heritage and contemporary characters as inherent to Pakistani culture. By diverging from mainstream western notions of sci-fi futurism, PAKISTAN+ presented a specific future for Pakistan that celebrated, but also responded critically to, local culture. Populated by diverse characters such as “Warrior Aunty” and a female cricket player, who portrayed strong independent women, as well as characters such as a cyborg beggar, who addressed persistent poverty and inequality, PAKISTAN+ highlighted often-unnoticed cultural elements, while also addressing contemporary social issues. In doing so, the project became a space in which elements of cultural heritage could be re-contextualised and examined, presenting a complex world which, rather than slipping into a one-dimensional utopia, questioned historical trajectories and exercised a cautious optimism towards a realistic future.

The project was exhibited in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, with each exhibition organised in collaboration with a youth-oriented organisation. In doing so, the project was brought directly into places already familiar to local youth, with venues such as Daftarkhwan, a well-known youth-oriented co-working space in Lahore, and Peshawar Basecamp, a technology incubator and co-working space, being chosen over more traditional art galleries. In Islamabad, a partnership was made with MyArtWorld, who deal primarily with young contemporary artists, and in Karachi the event was part of School of Tomorrow, a conference on innovation and education in Pakistan.

By bringing the exhibition to local youth through a variety of locations, PAKISTAN+ came in direct contact with young audiences from different backgrounds and interests. While most audience members were interested in video games, animation and science fiction, the exhibition also attracted more traditional artists and art connoisseurs. Paired with a viral online presence, its reach continued to expand and, by the end of the project’s programme, had stretched from its target audience of youth and schoolchildren from underdeveloped regions, to dignitaries such as the President of Pakistan.

By fusing cultural heritage with a broad range of contemporary technologies, PAKISTAN+ captured the attention of Pakistan, offering a transformative experience to a wide audience. Combining intrinsic elements of local culture with art and science, science fiction became a viable medium through which audiences were able to re-engage with elements of their culture and see it in a new light.
Pakistan
2019, From the balcony of Masjid Wazir Khan, a marvel built in mid 16th century in the heart of old Lahore city © Shoaib Iqbal/The Little Art

India
2018, Experimental art installation Mr. Abdul Attarwala © Charuvi Agrawal and Kadambari Sahu
Reflections

Making Identity, Unmaking Heritage

Avni Sethi

I write this piece sitting at the Conflictorium, a Museum of Conflict in the walled city of Ahmedabad, a tier II city in the western region of India. Ahmedabad, which is an approximately 600-year-old city founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah, is home to several socio-political occurrences in the contemporary past. This city hosts several premiere institutions and centres of excellence of the country, like the National Institute of Design, Indian Institute of Management, Indian Space Research Organisation, Physical Research Laboratory, amongst others. It is also the city in which Gandhi chose to set up his ashram, forever entrenching the city in the “peace and non-violence” debate. Ahmedabad has also been a hub for a large textile industry that found dramatic closure in the 1980s, leading to the emergence of a massive informal sector. Also nested amongst these is its history of being witness to gross communal violence, internal displacement and imbalanced development agendas; its newest identity is that of being awarded the first heritage city of India by UNESCO.

My vantage point stems from a comparative socio-economic-cultural privilege, that I strive, everyday, to convert into a commitment to marginality. This also influences my particular relationship with heritage, recognising at every step that a large number of young people, belonging to a tribal community settled in Sundrav village in the Vagad region, who spoke passionately of a revival of their culture. They spoke of inclusion in a tenor that was often more poetic / pragmatic than mine. They spoke of a cultural heritage intrinsically attached to cycles of their land, of their seeds and their songs. They were essentially from a heritage that was forgotten, but acknowledged, revived and remembered.

Increasingly, “youth” as a social category is finding resonance in the larger discourses built around societies within South Asia. But the question still remains whether the category realises itself in mobilisation, in politics, in nation-building, in history-writing and, most importantly, as a public itself.

Young people, when translated into “youth”, run the risk of being read as a heterogeneous category, that which occupies youthfulness, that which can question and which can be instrumentalised. Amidst these expectations of youthful behaviour lies a possibility that young people crack open: the possibility of re-framing, of not necessarily offering a different solution, but viewing the problem itself differently.

In the deepening relationship with technology and the world wide web, young people are making their positions visible and laying bare the processes by which their own identities are generated, thereby overturning a longstanding -ism of choiceless identities. This, in my subjective understanding, is the fulcrum by which a new negotiation with heritage is being formed.

Heritage is no longer a category operating within its own past, benevolently reaching out in narratives of national pride. Instead it is being used as an active location where young people generate and deconstruct their caste, race, ethnic, religious, gender and sexual identities.

That “youth” is a revolutionary grouping is not a new idea, but young people—by the sheer circumstance of being in-between childhood and adulthood—have a unique transformative agency and it is this spirit that is being applied to reified structures and practices of history as well. Received notions of historical value are no longer enough until they significantly transcend into a relevance within the everyday. This kind of affinity with the here and now, as much as it is energetic and adrenaline-raising, is simultaneously dangerous to the narratives of selfhood that could be generated via isolated cultural practice.

The delicate shift from an outward-looking spectacle, that cultural heritage often is, to an everyday practice that informs our internal landscapes, is a journey that has begun but has not yet been significantly traversed. Our modes of living within our histories are changing: through Instagram accounts that record personal histories to museums that tell stories of everyday memory; from historical monuments being used as sites for children’s extra curricular activity and lovers’ nests, to songs of labour entering digital archives. We are producing environments that are immersive and hopefully more inclusive.

In contrast to some of these realities, not far from here—about 280km from Ahmedabad in the neighbouring state of Rajasthan—I met a group of young people, belonging to a tribal community settled in Sundrav village in the Vagad region, who spoke passionately of a revival of their culture. They spoke of inclusion in a tenor that was often more poetic / more pragmatic than mine. They spoke of a cultural heritage intrinsically attached to cycles of their land, of their seeds and their songs. They were essentially pointing out to my urban consciousness what the notion of sovereignty, as understood within nature, meant to them, potentially a sovereignty derived from a heritage that was forgotten, but acknowledged, revived and remembered.

Avni Sethi is an interdisciplinary practitioner with her primary concern lying between culture, memory, space and the body. She conceptualised and designed the Conflictorium, a Museum of Conflict situated in Ahmedabad in 2013. The museum has since been home to diverse critical explorations on conflict transformation and art practice. She currently serves as its Artistic Director.
The spiritual heart of the historic city

Want to find these places?

1. Sabarmati River
2. Ellis Bridge
3. Manek Burj
4. Ahmedshah Mosque
5. CNI Church
6. Bhadra Fort
7. Lucky Tea Stall
8. The House of MG
9. Bhadra Market
10. Premabhai Hall
11. Gujarat Chai House
12. Gandhi Faluda
13. Gujarat Dryfruit
14. Teen Darwaza
15. Bhole Tea Centre
16. Das Khaman
17. Kansara Bazaar
18. Kansara ni Pol
19. Manek Chowk Market
20. Khamasa Market + Parsi Temple
21. Noor Mohamad
22. Cattle Feeding
23. Nargji Bhudar ni Pol
24. Ramnath Mahadev Temple
25. Mandvi ni Pol
26. Bhatiyar Gali
27. Hussaini Bakery
28. Jama Mosque
29. Kandoi Bhogilal Mulchand
30. Mukhwaas Market
31. Rani & Badshah no Hajiro
32. Manek Chowk
33. Anjuman E Islam School
34. Magen Abraham Synagogue
35. Dhalgarwad
36. Bhadra walking route 4 km - 4 hours

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UNCONVENTIONAL TAKES ON CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THEIR IMPORTANCE ON BUILDING IDENTITY

Sandeep Mulagapati and Kadambari Sahu

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.
―Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking”

Cultural heritage, defined broadly, is something that someone considers to be worthy of being valued, preserved, catalogued, exhibited, restored, admired.

The power of new-media interactive installations is the ability to bring together tangible and intangible cultural artefacts by allowing the audience to “experience” intangible artefacts. These users, guided by the artist/designer, interact with the installation to produce the intended experience. The art itself cannot exist without its viewers, despite all its parts already being assembled. An important aspect of cultural heritage is the subjectivity of the value derived from preserved artefacts, especially in cases in which the original intangible artefact is reinterpreted in a different form. The value of an artefact increases because of cultural proximity and yet, reinterpretation aims to push the limits of the relevance of cultural proximity. Expanding these limits helps us better empathise with a wider range of people.

Unconventional takes typically have an advantage over conventional narratives in expanding cultural proximity. They are helped by the von Restorff effect—a bias towards remembering items that are unusual. When used as a tool for building identity, unconventional installations can take up mind space and ensure that they remain in the conversation for longer. Interactive installations are also very receptive to the mixing of multiple disciplines and are conducive to producing a highly subjective experience that can produce multiple meanings. This enables the artists to build unconventional experiences, which can help viewers relate to their own lives.

Our first exhibit, Identity Stories, flirted with the idea of a non-homogenous culture and ever-changing identities by the retelling of people’s stories using culture-specific smell associations to guide the audience. Each story was narrated in the voice of the protagonist and was associated with scents representing significant events in their lives. These stories were presented in an environment that was a literal representation of a dialogue with the protagonist—thus providing tangibility to the experience.

Olfaction (the sense of smell) is capable of evoking deep emotional responses and is linked to memory. Often spaces can be discerned through their characteristic odours. Some qualities of smell are very well coded in culture and have been internalised by societies. These qualities enabled us to engage users in a re-mediated story in which they saw how the change affected people yet helped them become better and forge unique relationships with these places.

One of our guiding principles for choosing cultural artefacts to reinterpret was to choose artefacts that the audience was familiar with. Most Indians have heard of the Jallianwala Bagh incident and this tends to unite people, despite its extremely brutal nature. It has also shaped our identity as Indians in several key ways: As one of the precursor-events for Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation movement, as a brutal display of Imperialism imposed upon subjugated people, and as a reminder of the depths to which people can sink because of their racial prejudices. In the reinterpretation process, we enabled the audience to experience the horrors of the event first hand but through the unconventional medium of smell. This helped the audience truly understand the horror of the colonial experience and, in many ways, helped them find their own identity in this post-colonial world.

Our exhibit Mir Abdul Attarwala was an attempt to enable a conversation about the lives of people in a conflict zone. This was achieved by producing a “beautiful” object, a wooden chest handcrafted by Kashmiri Artisans, placed in an environment that reminded viewers of the natural beauty of Kashmir, with music playing in the background. The primary artefact, the wooden chest, opened up to reveal mysterious vials consisting of scents which, upon further observation, revealed a story of a dichotomy between sweet memories and terrible realities of everyday oppression. This was further enhanced by written poetry associated with each of these scents.

These experiments have helped us understand the impact of such unconventional interactive methods and how they get an audience to empathise and identify with subjects, pushing their own cultural boundaries. We are confident that such experiments in other contexts will yield great results and should be pursued to help people identify with others and enhance their cultural sensitivities.

Kadambari Sahu is head of the design team at ValueLabs and holds a MA in New Media Design from National Institute of Design. Her practice in design allows her to work in different media where storytelling and interaction design create engaging and meaningful experiences with a responsibility to bring about positive change.

Sandeep Mulagapati is a Product Manager at Fanatics who is interested in design, art, and technology. This has led him to explore various aspects of sensory design. He has previously worked as a UX designer and holds an MBA from Georgetown University and a BA in Design from IIT-Guwahati.
Everywhere, cultural heritage—tangible and intangible—links us humans to our past, provides individuality to our communities, and is a “comfort companion” that allows us to contemplate a future when our individual lives evaporate. Providing society with personality, cultural heritage allows both individuals and communities to tackle turmoil, polarisation and uncertainty.

All facets of culture are ever-transforming, but there has been a deliberate pace to changes over the millennia and we are now arriving into a drastically altered era. From innovations in mechanics a couple of centuries ago, today we have accelerated into the age of artificial intelligence and the Anthropocene. Our rush into the future is now headlong. Amidst this crazy, rushed makeover, heritage is being discarded like an old, unfashionable jacket. And as psychiatrists and psychologists both will tell us, something about being human is lost in the process, or we are evolving into a different kind of species.

Evolution has not wired the human brain to manage the great technological turn we have been taking, and the same must be said for cultural heritage—in the span of half a century, in my own personal and cultural journey, I have seen this happen in Kathmandu Valley. While the headlong rush is everywhere, Kathmandu’s experience is more startling because much of it happened within the last three decades.

The Valley has seen a rapid erosion of cultural heritage, weakening its ability to provide stability and confidence amidst confusion and commotion. The turbulence I see around me is linked to an array of triggers that are global—economic, geopolitical, infrastructure-related, climate crisis pollution, urbanisation, migration, livelihood-loss, and so on.

Even the term “Kathmandu Valley” represents violence on the historicity of this fertile bowl carved out of the mid-montane Himalaya. The classical name is Nepal Mandal, a place where fertility of the soil and profitable trade led to great prosperity and cultural accomplishment, energised by competition amongst various city-states within the area. The British colonialists of India, who trudged up a century-and-a-half ago, wanted a name for the whole valley, and used the name of the largest city-state within Kathmandu. Earlier, the Valley’s culture had been rudely disturbed by the invasion of Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha. He wanted Kathmandu as the capital of the country he was unifying in the mid-1700s and, in the process, outsiders took political and economic control of the Valley away from the original inhabitants, the Newar.

Still, much of the Valley’s Hindu, Buddhist and syncretic Tantric culture—with associated festivals, rituals and life-cycle activities in towns and villages—remained more or less intact till as late as the 1980s. Many valley master plans were built to try and regulate the urban expansion, but there was no political-will amidst a continuous surge in migration. By now, the Valley’s rice paddies and sand plateaus alike have almost entirely been filled with unplanned brick and cement. People migrated because it was the only place that offered urban services worth the name in the entire country, and there was also the search for security amidst the Maoist conflict (1996-2006). With the national economy in constant doldrums, it was only the Valley’s real estate market that escalated as people had few places to invest. “Plotting” soon entered the Nepali lexicon, denoting the conversion of fields and paddies to small housing plots.

The loss of culture continues in myriad ways. The deep foundations of multi-storied buildings cut groundwater conduits, so the artful step-wells that are a part of the Valley’s architectural heritage no longer provide their gushing flow. Groundwater recharge is reduced because now there are pavements of brick or concrete everywhere.

In the 2015 earthquake, it was the traditional buildings of wooden rafters, bricks and mud which fell, and the new buildings that replaced them are taller, with extended ceiling heights. Signature tiled roofs are disappearing, even in the town of Bhaktapur, which held on to them the longest. The tall multi-storied structures have increased comfort for residents and reduced maintenance costs. But at street level, the traditional rest platforms (patis) no longer serve their function as community gathering places—the slanted rays of the winter sun can no longer make it to ground level to radiate warmth, and so no one gathers.

The Valley no longer experiences its age-old winter fog because the presence of moisture on the ground is low. Meanwhile, the dust and smog from the Indo-Ganga basin from Pakistan and North India are brought over by westerly winds, which means that the view of the Himalaya is disrupted for most of the year, impacting tourism. Furthermore, the carbon particles settle on the high glaciers, absorb more sunlight, and therefore accelerate snowmelt. The revered tradition of the Valley is to cremate the dead on Arya Ghat, by the Bagmati River, but what used to be a river is now a sewer.

The attraction of western style nuclear living has weakened family lives, as well as the traditional trust system (guthi) that governed all cultural aspects, from festivals (jatras) to death rituals. The disappearance of traditional family ways of looking after and stimulating
Fuzzscape Nepal 2018, Barta Gandharba, folk singer/songwriter and sarangi player at her home in Mangding, Bhojpur with her father, legendary Sarangi virtuoso and singer Dambar Bahadur Gandharba © Nirman Shrestha/Fuzz Factory Productions
Fuzzscape Nepal 2018, Fuzzscape Bhojpur artists (L-R) Barta Gandharba, Rajan Shrestha and Rohit Shakya walking to Barta’s home in Mangding Bhojpur © Nhooja Tuladhar/Fuzz Factory Productions
infants has impacted brain development in the very young. Furthermore, as families become nuclear, grandparents are left to fend for themselves, and job migration takes young parents (mostly fathers) overseas. The rigorous massaging of infants with mustard oil, which is a cultural heritage of the Valley, has mostly disappeared.

Traditional cuisines have been displaced by modern meals, instant noodles packed in plastic and laced with monosodium glutamate are the choice of the children instead of traditional snacks. Trailside bushes of ainselu (raspberries) and trees laden with succulent lapsi fruits (hog pear) are no longer raided by village kids, whose tastes have been diverted to candy and chewing gum. For that matter, village trails are converting to bush as people take motorcycles, even for short hops between villages, on newly built roads. Those terraces that are not converted into urban housing revert to forests after centuries of farming. Meanwhile, the custom of hand-tilling the rice paddies, with the use of the kodalo plough, has disappeared within a decade, as power-tillers take over.

Every step of the way and every day, the cultural heart-beat of Kathmandu Valley is weakening. The delays in rebuilding temples after the April 2015 earthquake has meant the weakening, or disappearance, of rituals and processions associated with them. The vibrant and indigenous Newa language is under threat as youngsters turn to Nepali and English, and as the government fails to promote the dual language instruction at school level.

The social and economic forces that are causing the cultural loss are so powerful that this has eroded the foundational resilience of the society. Much of the transformation can be placed at the door of land values, with the sale of plots feeding the demand for consumer goods, motorcycles and bungalow living. There is less and less binding people together, which is why communities cannot generate cultural energy to challenge municipalities when they want to destroy thousand-year-old shrines to make way for roads to housing enclaves.

Elsewhere in South Asia, the loss of heritage and culture has been a slow movement that started during colonial times, whereas in the case of the Valley, it has been so swift that this is a swamping tsunami. As Nepal Mandal loses its cultural mooring, the sociological impact will be seen countrywide, such is the centrality of the Valley. When the power to hold an idea is lost even as learning, opinion-making and a sense of history evaporates, the binding element disappears—and that is when syncretism loses ground to harsh certitude.

It is true that culture helps society tackle turbulence, which is why the focus in the Valley—and in Nepal as a whole—must be to try save as much of the past even as we open up to new mores. The only way to make up for the loss, while trying to save what is left of language, townscape and rituals, is to work on developing “new culture” through education, promotion of theatre and film, and empathy for the past through museums and exhibitions. We are asked to try and create conditions for cultural creativity to spark and multiply using the old to build a base to create new, fulfilling avenues for new generations.

Kanak Mani Dixit is a writer and editor, as well as a civil rights and democracy activist. Believing in the power of non-fiction film, he started and heads Film South Asia Festival of Documentaries. Dixit has received the Prince Claus Award.
The land where Pakistan sits today has been home to many civilisations, from the Harappans, Aryans and Persians, to the Mughals and Arabs. However, this richness of heritage and culture has been erased from the memories of much of the youth. This is partly due to poor documentation in general, and partly due to poor representation. Tangible heritage sites, such as museum exhibits and architecture, still exist, but their facades are in poor condition, and information about them is scarce, further dividing present generations from their rich history. Intangibles, such as customs, culture, music, and written and oral traditions, are slowly being lost too, as there is very little emphasis on archiving and documentation. As a result, generations are now growing up without an understanding of their heritage beyond occasionally seeing interesting relics in the inner cities or in museums. This often leads to misinformation about history—as in the case of our fraught relationship with India—and the adoption of more regressive values that have been imposed by recent waves of Islamism, instead of the inclusion of progressive values that were once a part of our history.

Consequently, in today’s hyper-connected era, the youth often see their heritage as containing problematic cultures and customs—patriarchy and religious intolerance for example—that are incompatible with a progressive and inclusive future. This dichotomy between what they want and what they see isolates them further from their cultural heritage. What is forgotten are the progressive values and colourful customs from our past that the youth have been isolated from, or are oblivious to. These values and customs can, and should, be taken forward as they move into the future.

As much as one’s cultural heritage has the potential to inform the future, the converse is also true: the future can be seen as an inspiration for reimagining cultural heritage, particularly in light of the radical transformations that societies are undergoing in the present technological era. As a creative, the future is an inspiration for my art because it allows me to paint a picture of tomorrow that I want to see, a picture that isn’t so starkly divorced from some of the more colourful aspects of the past. This exploration culminated in a visual project, a presentation of these themes of the future, the past, and how they relate to each other in Pakistan. Through the project Pakistan+, I produced a series of new media exhibitions that explored Pakistan’s cultural heritage in an imagined future. The works portrayed not only the tangible aspects of heritage, such as the architecture, but the intangibles as well, like the culture and customs, both positive and some certainly negative, and how they may manifest in an imagined future.

Through this exercise I wanted to show people the culture that they had inherited, for better or worse, and to try place it squarely in any conversation they were likely to have about their future as a society. Using the future as a lens to reimagine our culture, particularly through new media formats, allows us to tell powerful stories in an engaging manner that resonates with youth. This project—and the significant interest that it garnered—proved as much, and created an accessible new format within which to present heritage and bridge the gap that youth often feel between themselves and their past.

Although the series was limited in scope, it entered a broader conversation about the link between the future and heritage. Exploring this link has two components: one, envisioning a future worthy of aiming for; and two, a solid understanding of one’s heritage so that the aspects which are preserved retain compatibility with, and can inform, the envisioned future. Heritage is, after all, a history of what is deemed important enough to preserve and, although certain elements may be problematic, it should nonetheless be explored, improved upon, and taken into the future in its best possible form. Otherwise nations, communities, or cultures run the risk of losing sight of their past and moving into a future not of their own design; which is a loss not only for them but for humanity at large.

Any discussion of the future is incomplete without a consideration of the past. Our past informs us of the traditions of our forefathers and all that they left for us. As we try and chart a path into an unknown future, we should make sure not to leave our heritage behind, but to carry it forward in a manner that is compatible with the future we envision, and honours the rich cultural traditions from which that future emerged as well.

Omar Gilani is a conceptual artist, illustrator, and creative director from Peshawar, Pakistan, who explores art and design across emerging media like virtual reality, augmented reality, and projection mapping. His works use new media art to explore themes of identity, culture, and futurism, particularly for his South Asian heritage.
THE DEPOLITICISATION OF CULTURE
Dr. Shahidul Alam

Culture has played an integral part in both the birth of Bangladesh and the establishment of its national identity. While we are all Bangladeshis by definition, not all of us are Bangalis or Muslims. The occupying Pakistani army justified the genocide against East Pakistanis by claiming we were Hindus. Our struggle for independence involved a cultural coalition where we were able to put aside these differences. Our resistance songs were in Bangla. The rebel radio station, Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, was aimed at the Bangla-speaking listener, though it was embraced by all who resisted. Post-independence hierarchies developed which went against the spirit of unification. The double whammy of being neither Bangali nor Muslim became, for the Paharis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a unique burden, and successive governments have tried to usurp their rights by a deliberate strategy of military occupation and displacement by the state-supported settlement of plain-land Bangalis.

A deliberate mechanism of the depoliticisation of cultural players—once radical champions of the rights of ordinary citizens—has led to their co-option into a regime where they can no longer see even the obvious indiscretions of what has now become, in effect, a police state. Artists, singers, writers, playwrights and other cultural players have largely become the mouthpiece of a rampant government that rules by selective dishing out hand-outs.

As a Bangali, I have identified with the struggle to speak my own language, but given the Bangla hegemony, do I lack legitimacy to campaign for the rights of hill people? Why must women artists get ghettoed into working exclusively on women's issues? Where do I position myself, as a man, within the feminist movement? Does being straight, or queer, affect how one's position is interpreted? One does not have a choice over one's ethnicity, or social upbringing, and one does not need to align oneself to a political position in order to justify its right to exist. It is the need to prevent the annihilation of diversity, the urgency to resist monoculture and to ensure there are cracks in the cultural concrete, that we need to recognise. The traditional taboos regarding the corporate sector, the developmental sector and the military have been broadened to include complete silence on the transgressions of both the government and the media itself. Self-censorship has become the new norm, and unabashed government rule seems to be the new standard that cultural players have set for themselves. The dispensation of state awards, the availability of funding and appointment to positions of power are all part of this process of co-option, and a pliant cultural community seems ready to bend over backwards to accommodate an increasingly authoritarian regime.

This process includes the role of foreign governments, who have found it convenient to espouse “freedom and democracy” in their rhetoric, but found it expedient to work with, and legitimise, pliant dictators. The delivery on the Rohingya crisis, and the bending over backwards on the “war on terror”, that the current regime has skilfully offered in exchange for turning a blind eye to the wanton human rights abuses in its own backyard, seems to be an arrangement that works well for both sides.

The clearly rigged Bangladeshi election of December 2018 seems to have been engineered without any serious repercussions. Corporate deals whereby national assets have been sold off went without significant protest from the cultural establishment. Embassy cocktail parties and state receptions for well-behaved cultural players provide the veneer, while dissenting voices are swept aside. Anyone questioning the blatant looting of state assets is labelled as being “anti-independence”/anti-liberation war. Having an independent mind is the biggest crime that a citizen can now commit. “Tribal” dances, nationalistic songs, idyllic landscapes and smiling, flag-waving children will usher in the new utopia. Crossfire deaths, disappearances and false cases will occupy the subaltern space that the elite will carefully step over. The politics of subservience, sycophancy and bootlicking are the new cultural norm. Neither looking away, nor denial, will make the politics of autocracy go away. The new citizen must look at this cultural space squarely in the eye and expose it for what it is.

Cultural hierarchies raise their heads too. Photographers are still the Dalits of the newsroom. My own struggles have involved attempting to provide legitimacy for the medium. In the rare cases where newspapers have photo editors, it is still the news editor who calls the shots. Until recently, photography and video were banned in the Asian Biennale. Photography is still not part of the curriculum of the Fine Arts Institute. It is only now, after thirty-five years of resistance—and only after Bangladeshi photography, the Chobi Mela festival, the Pathshala school and the Drik agency have attained global recognition—that photography is finally recognised, albeit reluctantly, as an art form. It hasn’t been easy, and I have been knifed and tortured and jailed, but I’ve also had the love of ordinary people. Knowing culture is a basic right, knowing one’s life has meaning is what makes it all worthwhile.

Dr. Shahidul Alam, Time Magazine’s Person of the Year 2018, is a photographer, writer and human rights activist. He obtained a PhD in chemistry from London University before taking up photography. In his pursuit of social justice, he has set up the award winning organisations Drik, Pathshala and Chobi Mela, through media, education and culture.
CREATING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH FILM
Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy

I believe an effective storyteller speaks to our emotions, elicits empathy and forces us to look at things differently. As a filmmaker in Pakistan, I look for stories that move people into action because, with the low levels of literacy in our country, I know that film has the potential to impact the way people perceive issues.

In 2017, we created a series of virtual reality films called Look but with Love, with the idea of opening up a new world to school children. Our films were about musical instruments that were dying out because no one knew how to play them, about dance forms that were no longer practiced and about women who were part of the country’s anti-terrorism police squad. What did they have in common? Nothing and absolutely everything. VR has the ability to make you walk in someone else’s shoes and that’s what our hope was. We wanted to preserve the sounds of our indigenous instruments so that they would be able to hear them long after the players were gone; we wanted children to see women as heroes not as victims, and we felt VR was the best suited medium for that.

In classroom after classroom, students took off their VR sets in awe. They had been transported inside a studio where they immersed themselves in dance, and inside a police-training academy where they saw women propel themselves from high buildings and scale great heights. They heard musicians play instruments out in the open desert, and all this whilst sitting in their classrooms in Karachi. The questions that followed—the discussions that ensued about identity and culture—left us with hope that children can be offered a competing worldview in their classrooms through film and be exposed to ideals of culture, shattering long held stereotypes.

That same year we designed a cinema on wheels called Dekh Magar Pyaar Se (Look but with Love). A large truck that was outfitted with screens, both inside and outside, journeyed across the country screening films in small towns and villages across Pakistan. In the conservative heartland where society is segregated, we encouraged men to sit and watch films out in the open, projected on a large screen, and women to sit inside the safety of the truck where we had constructed seating for them. We screened films where women were sporting heroes, showing them overcoming adversity and encouraging them to walk the path less travelled. When we moved films out of cinemas and television, they entertained audiences but they also offered them hope and a way forward to combat challenges. A film we screened about domestic violence opened up the audiences’ eyes to the fact that it is punishable by law—countering long-held beliefs that domestic violence is part and parcel of culture in their society.

My definition of cultural heritage broadens beyond the immediate art, music and film to include the culture of a society. My question has always been, how can film change the ethos of a society or set the narrative for future generations? Growing up in Pakistan, we seldom saw female heroes. Our history books were devoid of them and in popular culture the role of women was always relegated to the sidelines. When we began to curate the National History Museum, Pakistan’s first digital immersive museum of history and culture in Lahore, we knew film would play a critical role. We wove stories of women throughout the museum—from female poets and performers, to writers and women who played a major role in history. We highlighted their accomplishments to inform and educate and to preserve their contributions. That is the power of film. Once documented, it outlives all of us, ensuring our cultural heritage is left for the next generation, the way we want them to see and experience it.

Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy is the only female director to have been awarded two Academy Awards by the age of thirty-seven. Since 2001, she has made over twenty-four multi-award winning films in over sixteen countries around the world. Her films include Student Athlete, Girl in the River, Song of Lahore, Saving Face, Peace Keepers and Transgenders: Pakistan’s Open Secret.
Culture Connect: Pakistan 2019. Exhibition of selected young photographers who attended the project's workshop and photo walks © Mudassir Hussain/The Little Art.

2017 Number of projects per country

13 Projects from 4 different countries were supported
DIVISION OF PROJECTS ON CONTEMPORARY TAKE, BEYOND CULTURAL HERITAGE BY THEME

- CULTURE CONNECT PAKISTAN
- CULTURE CONNECTORS INDIA
- IMAGINE PAKISTAN
- ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION 23%
- REFRAMING HERITAGE 31%
- VOICING UNTOLD NARRATIVES 31%
- SHARING HERITAGE 15%
- HERE-IN-TIME INDIA
- PAKISTAN+: EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE THROUGH FUTURISM AND FANTASY PAKISTAN
- RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY INDIA
- SNIFFING OUT THE DIFFERENCES! INDIA
- DISAPPEARING ROOTS BANGLADESH
- IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD INDIA
- ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: MOFUSSIL PHOTOGRAPHY IN BANGLADESH
- FUZZSCAPE NEPAL
- THE MUSEUM OF FOOD: A LIVING HERITAGE INDIA
Most unconventional heritage sites in the region

- **GOL GUMBAZ**
  Icon of Deccan architecture

- **MUMBAI**
  - **GOA REGION**
  - **AHMEDABAD**
    - **RANI KI VAV**
      Solanki dynasty, 11th century architectural wonder
    - **MAKLI NECROPOLIS**
      Funerary site with over 10 km area near the city of Thatta, province of Sindh
    - **MOHENJO-DARO**
      ‘Mound of the Dead Men’ is an archaeological site in the province of Sindh
    - **UCH SHARIF**
      Historic city in southern Punjab
    - **MULTAN FORT (Fort Kohna Qasim Garden)**
      Ancient ruins of 1000 B.C. fortress
  - **ROHTAS FORT**
    16th century fortress located near the city of Jhelum, Punjab

- **Takht-i-Bahi Buddhist Monastery**
  Indo-Parthian archaeological site, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

- **Kutas Raj Temples**
  Complex of Hindu temples in Katus, Chakwal, Punjab

- **Sheesh Mahal**
  Palace of Mirrors in Lahore

- **Lahore Fort**
  Citadel in the city of Lahore, Punjab

- **Guru Bazar**
  Traditional market, Golden Temple, Amritsar

- **KESHTAVA TEMPLE**
  Hoysala architecture, 12th century

- **SHAKTIPEETH SHRI HINGLAJ MATA TEMPLE**
  Hindu temple in Hinglaj, Lasbela district of Balochistan, Hingol National Park

- **KANHERI CAVES**
  Caves and rock-cut monuments in the forests of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, on the former island of Salsette

- **ART DECO ENSEMBLES**
  UNESCO world heritage tag 2018

- **GILBERT HILL**
  200 ft monolith black basalt rock

- **CHAWLS**
  Residential buildings found in the western part of India

- **FENI**
  (local alcohol) cashew feni and toddy palm feni a spirit produced in Goa

- **KESHAVA TEMPLE**
  Hoysala architecture, 12th century

Recommended Cultural Heritage Sites chosen by project partners
MANE CHOKPA
Festival, riotous celebration of life, spirits and sexuality, Timure Village

RAJSHAHI
Major urban centre of Bangladesh, also known as Rampur Boalia or 'Silk City'

CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS
Area within the Chattogram Division bordering India and Myanmar divided into three districts: Khagrachhari, Rangamati Hill, and Bandarban

SNAKE CHARMERS’ VILLAGES
Bangladesh has an estimated 500,000 snake charmers

MUKTINATH TEMPLE
Hindu temple, central mountainous, district of Mustang

RAJSHAHI
Major urban centre of Bangladesh, also known as Rampur Boalia or 'Silk City'

CENTRAL RIDGE RESERVE FOREST
Urban Forest, New Delhi

HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN AULIA DARGAH
The dargah of one of the Sufi saints, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya

KHARI BAOLI
Spice market, street in Delhi

JAHAZ MAHAL
Historical ruins built during the Lodi dynasty period

MEENA BAZAR
Resettlement colonies in Delhi

UNITED COFFEE HOUSE
1930s refined atmosphere located at Connaught Place

URBAN VILLAGES
Yamuna River

SATPULA BRIDGE
Ancient water harvesting dam integral to the compound wall of Jahanpanah

SANJAY VAN FOREST
Urban Forest, New Delhi

SUNDER NURSERY
16th century heritage park complex adjacent to Humayun’s Tomb

TANGULU HAOR
Wetland ecosystem in the Dharmapasha and Tahirpur upazilas of Sunamganj District

MADHUPUR RESERVED FOREST
National Park located at Madhupur Upazila, Tangail District

SONARGAON
Historic city and one of the old capitals of the historic region of Bengal
India is one of the oldest and historically significant countries in the world, but unfortunately safeguarding and promoting its unique heritage has not always been a high priority for the country’s policymakers. Many ancient temples and iconic street-scapes were left to crumble and fade and yet, in recent years, cities like Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Delhi, Bhubaneshwar and Varanasi have started to embrace culture and use it as a tool for urban renewal and community building. We hope more city leaders find value in their historic centres, heritage and culture.

SAMEEHA SHETH, IDISCOVER AHMEDABAD

Heritage of my country is under heavy threat due to rapid urbanisation and a misguided sense of development. Instead of maintaining and preserving heritage structures according to today’s needs, the common people are amazed by the marvels of tall concrete, steel and glass structures that are perceived as progress.

ARCHIT VAZE, BAMBAA VAY

Cultural learning, now perceived as a necessary component for ensuring global well being has drawn the attention of international leadership, who are actively fostering cultural linkages, dialogues and exchange. In these exciting times, Flow takes a lead in mainstreaming cultural education within the Indian learning eco-system, leveraging technology, facilitating diverse use-cases to widen access and engagement.

ARUNDHATI MITTER, CULTURE CONNECTORS
Pakistan has a great heritage potential that includes tangible and intangible heritage. We are a civilisation that has a recorded history of thousands of years. The most important step now is to engage children and youth in understanding heritage through new means and mediums. I imagine the future of heritage in Pakistan as a shared celebration of civilisation as a guiding light, through which we can see our future.

SHOAIB IQBAL, CULTURE CONNECT

Heritage governance is still a largely unattended concern for Bangladesh; the government initiatives focus on archaeological sites or heritage buildings, with a vast body of vernacular cultural traditions—as well as any living heritage of indigenous communities—being outside the purview of the existing heritage governance system. Therefore, the future of heritage depends on how promptly the system can attend to the existing policy fault-lines. A robust discussion on heritage would help expand our notion of it to include our forgotten heritage.

DR. SHAHIDUL ALAM, ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: MOFUSSIL PHOTOGRAPHY IN BANGLADESH

With most of the young population living or working abroad, the state of heritage in Nepal is very bleak. In the case of music, as it is passed down orally from generation to generation, there seems to be a vacuum now which hasn’t been filled by our generation. There are many economic and social reasons why here, which goes beyond plain negligence and apathy but might be a bit too long to discuss in fifty words.

PRASIIT STHAPIT, FUZZSCAPE

It’s simply bleak, as preservation of heritage is not a priority nor is it a part of any mainstream discourse. And above all, the very idea of what heritage might be is extremely contested.

SYED MAZHAR ZAIDI, IMAGINE

Cultural heritage is threatened as the hierarchical structure is not democratised while archiving memories or in writing histories. Therefore, public awareness is very important concerning the understanding of heritage.

SAMSUL ALAM HELAL, DISAPPEARING ROOTS

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Often past heritages are in conflict with living heritages. We would like to see that different forms of heritages are respected and maintained simultaneously.

SREEJATA ROY & MRITYUNJAY CHATTERJEE, THE MUSEUM OF FOOD: A LIVING HERITAGE

The future of Indian heritage will be characterised by a return to the vibrancy that has defined it for millennia. While we are presently in a cultural “flattening” process due to the effects of globalisation and capitalism, I am confident our cultural strength of plurality will overcome these in the future.

SALIL PAREKH, RE-ALIGNING GOAN HERITAGE THROUGH MIXED REALITY

With most of the young population living or working abroad, the state of heritage in Nepal is very bleak. In the case of music, as it is passed down orally from generation to generation, there seems to be a vacuum now which hasn’t been filled by our generation. There are many economic and social reasons why here, which goes beyond plain negligence and apathy but might be a bit too long to discuss in fifty words.

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PRASIIT STHAPIT, FUZZSCAPE
This Review has discussed the many dimensions of heritage within the context of South Asia. Back in 2017, when the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council set out to formulate the content, vision and aims of this specific call for proposals, Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage, we arranged to hold an expert meeting with young artists, cultural practitioners and technology experts from throughout South Asia. At this meeting, we looked closely at all the different aspects of what was laid down in the principal call document that was put together by the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council. For us it was vital to be able to share our own assumptions and perspectives with people who were actually working and living in South Asia. At these discussions we specifically focused on a broader understanding of the word “heritage” and the current socio-political developments taking place in the region.

The meeting saw a very insightful and detailed discussion on what exactly heritage means in today’s context of the countries of South Asia. We looked at how heritage in the past decades has gained new meanings—fuelled and shaped by specific political developments—and how this has given rise to different initiatives and collectives working on heritage in the region. We also considered how recent historic developments in the region, including the partition of 1947 and its aftermath, have shaped the perception of heritage in the different countries. Our discussions led us to conclude that, in South Asia, heritage more or less directly translates to identity. Additionally, we discussed the pivotal role the colonial imprint has had on how heritage is seen, but also politicised. This has often led to polarisations within the different communities of this region in the past, and continues to do so in the present. In more recent history, the region has been witness to new ideas and movements that have sought to look at colonial history to discuss broader power structures that still persist in society.

With Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage, and through the exceptional projects supported, the Prince Claus Fund and the British Council wanted to highlight the power of culture. We believe that culture initiates dialogue that, in turn, often touches on difficult political, social or historical issues, locally. Looking at the projects supported, one bears witness to how art can be a basis to critically engage communities in thinking along, participating, and contributing to a contemporary take on cultural heritage. The work supported through this call enables the reader to deconstruct identity and critically discuss common ground versus only highlighting differences; culture enables us to, instead of focusing on our differences, see ourselves through our similarities with the other.

Arts and culture enable us to rearticulate the value of cultural heritage and create new meaning and value within contemporary society through inclusivity and participation. This means empowering different people within society to take part—in an open, democratic, and civic manner—and including people from marginalised communities, women, youth, but also policy makers and savvy tech entrepreneurs and developers. These were exactly some of the main objectives for Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage, which we jointly developed within the expert meeting that took place in New Delhi. Consequently, the projects described in this Review bridge the differences between heritage that are often seen as anachronistic with a space that is relevant for understanding contemporary identities and societies in today’s South Asia.

The supported projects listed in this Review have shown us that heritage is absolutely worth supporting and nurturing because this very heritage is an inherent part of us as people who share common values. This Review is a testimony to how creativity can express different forms of values by simply representing the everyday, and working with all communities inclusively.

Equally, through the explanations given by each project, this Review uncovers the different political and social contexts as well as the potential difficulties in producing such work in South Asia. Work that often can be seen as politically or socially sensitive. Indeed, we are witnessing, more and more, how working in arts and culture translates into one holding a political stance and propagating specific social issues and human rights. It is through culture that communities express their particular identities—specifically when those identities defy the mainstream or the conventional in society. With this in mind I leave you with the following question to ponder on:

Who has the right or legitimacy to speak on behalf of others when it comes to heritage?

To finish, I would like to personally thank all those who took time to be part of this initiative. From my own colleagues at the Prince Claus Fund and our partners at the British Council, to the amazing expert committee who fed into the original call for proposals text, all the experts who gave their advice and second opinions on the projects submitted, and finally the amazing project partners themselves listed in this Review, who carried out these bold and daring projects in their own contexts.

You are all the heart of the work we do, and the work we stand for. Thank you!

Bertan Selim is Programme Coordinator at the Prince Claus Fund. He previously worked for a number of international cultural foundations and as a consultant in strategic management. He is currently pursuing a PhD at the Erasmus University Rotterdam in Cultural Economics under the supervision of Arjo Klamer.
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CONTEMPORARY TAKE, BEYOND CULTURAL HERITAGE
Heritage and arts have the potential to create dialogue between communities and foster mutual understanding. These opportunities for dialogue become even deeper, more inclusive and immersive when experiences are shaped by contemporary artistic and new media interventions. The call for proposals Contemporary Take, Beyond Cultural Heritage responds to the urgency to support ground-breaking, cross-disciplinary initiatives by individual artists, creative professionals as well as cultural organisations in South Asia working at the intersection between contemporary arts, cultural heritage and new media.

But if culture were a luxury, then why suffer for it?
If it were trivial, then why prosecute it?
If it were harmless, then why die for it?

HRH Prince Constantijn of the Netherlands
Honorary Chair
Fuzzscape Nepal 2018, Fuzzscape director Prasit Sthapit shooting Fuzzscape Janakpur artists Rajan Shrestha, Rohit Shakya and Ranzen Jha near Janakpur © Raywo Shrestha/Fuzz Factory Productions
Any discussion of the future is incomplete without a consideration of the past. Our past informs us of the traditions of our forefathers and all that they left for us. As we try and chart a path into an unknown future, we should make sure not to leave our heritage behind, but to carry it forward with us in a manner that is compatible with the future we envision, and honours the rich cultural traditions from which that future emerged as well.

Omar Gilani