



Jason Thrasher  
Uncovered Perspectives: India 21 Years Later

October 10-27, 2019

ATHICA: Athens Institute for Contemporary Art is an independent, non-profit gallery promoting and supporting innovative contemporary art and artists through exhibitions, education, and events.

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# Uncovered Perspectives: India 21 Years Later

Photographs by **Jason Thrasher**  
October 10-27, 2019

Athens Institute for Contemporary Art  
Curated by Lauren Fancher





# Our Town and Jason Thrasher

Athens, Georgia is a small town with the eyes and ears of a big town. We revel in our rich music history, telling stories of who-was-where-when. We are fortunate to have ATHICA, a non-profit contemporary arts center thriving on 18 years of community support, along with institutions like the Georgia Museum of Art and the Lyndon House Arts Center, and a rotating cast of galleries, pop-ups, and hybrid music/arts venues. We have a Research I university driving the bus, which is loaded with artists and musicians and performers who live, visit, and create here. Our cultural appetite is omnivorous. What a gift it is to live in such an open-minded, thoughtful town. Our town. Where in the midst of these laudable aspects, we leave many of our own untended, unrecognized, and unsupported. We struggle with high poverty, low educational attainment, and low employment, and must account for and address these legacies on behalf of citizen descendants of enslaved people as well as our community-at-large.

*Our town. All of us.*

Jason Thrasher is well-known as a documentarian of Athens, most recently through his book project "Athens Potluck," which features portraits of musicians who chose each other for inclusion in a kind of Athens-music-tag. The book is a tender encyclopedia (still not big enough to capture everyone and everything) of so much that is dear about Athens. Thrasher has a knack for bringing forth the joy in the everyday, in community, in gathering, in celebration, and in stillness.

The photographs on exhibition in *Uncovered Perspectives: India 21 Years Later* were taken on a journey he undertook in 1998, looking for community in the vastness of India, where legacies of class, caste, and slavery continue today as they do in Athens. His goal at the time was to find commonality with the people he met and to answer the question for himself: *who would I be if I had been born here instead?* He answered the question in this way, through these photographs: he would be the same guy as he was in Athens. He would hang around in cafés, talking to the locals and getting to know the business owners nearby, the barbers and the grocers and the street vendors. He would slip unobtrusively into their lives and make himself a part of things as much as he could. He would appreciate the joy and the solemnity of ritual and the passing scene.

In this meandering way, he met the well-known Indian photographer and photojournalist Raghu Rai, who helped him out with needed supplies and challenged him to eschew any tendency towards touristic exoticism. India, after all, is a colorful trap for a photographer. Rai himself was mentored by Henri Cartier-Bresson, the grandfather of street photography. Thrasher's photographs echo the work of Rai in their humanism, generous spirit, and depiction of the sprawling traffic of humanity on the streets of India.

Photography, our storyteller, uniter, and divider, was once an alchemical mystery born of darkness and light and secret rooms; photography now haunts our every waking moment. Things change; changes happen at a certain time that we try to pin down and explain. Thrasher's journey coincided with the arrival of the Internet in India and the dawn of the massive changes across the country that would occur over the next two decades. In this pre-digital era, he shot over a hundred rolls of black and white film and he set up his first email account at one of India's few Internet cafés. On his return, he printed and exhibited a selection of these images, which became an enduring body of work.

Twenty years later, Thrasher pulled the negatives out and discovered things that had been edited out of memory or were made more fully-realizable through new digital techniques. He then digitally scanned the negatives, re-worked them with digital software, and printed an expanded collection of images that tells the story anew in this exhibition at ATHICA. These images of Jason Thrasher's not only capture a unique moment in India on the brink of technological change but also in photography itself. This exhibition is an opportunity to share in Thrasher's revisitation of his experience and his images. Our eyes are now accustomed to the infinite sharing of images through the Internet and to making a constant shallow pass over pictures from across the world. This is a deep look into a type of photographic journey that can't be replicated today.

*Our Town is world-wide and produces over one trillion photographs a year.*

When Thrasher and I first began to discuss this exhibition, the volume of possible images was almost overwhelming to consider: children, landscapes, animals, bathers, boaters, travelers, Hindus, Buddhists, merchants, and crowds. In so many of the photos, someone is returning the gaze of the photographer. To not include an image would be to delete an individual connection, a soul. The work brought forth issues of tourism, exoticism, history, and change. We looked and talked and considered. Eventually, we settled on themes of water, trains, women, the street, and Varanasi. The photographs of this famous city, among the oldest cities in the world, are arranged to show the images in procession through the streets of the city to the ghats on the Ganges, where life and death are ritualized through light, fire, and water. Thrasher honors the taboo against depicting these most sacred ceremonies and focuses on the hum and throng and individuality which rub up against the silence of the boats slicing through the river. These eternal traditions preceded us and will follow us. Varanasi today has 1.3 million people in 112 square miles. Athens has 127,000 people in 118 square miles—room to share. And Thrasher's Varanasi?

*Just another town, not too long ago, almost just like ours.*

—Lauren Fancher, Curator, October 2019

*Water*



*Laundry*  
Mumbai



*Bathers*  
New Delhi



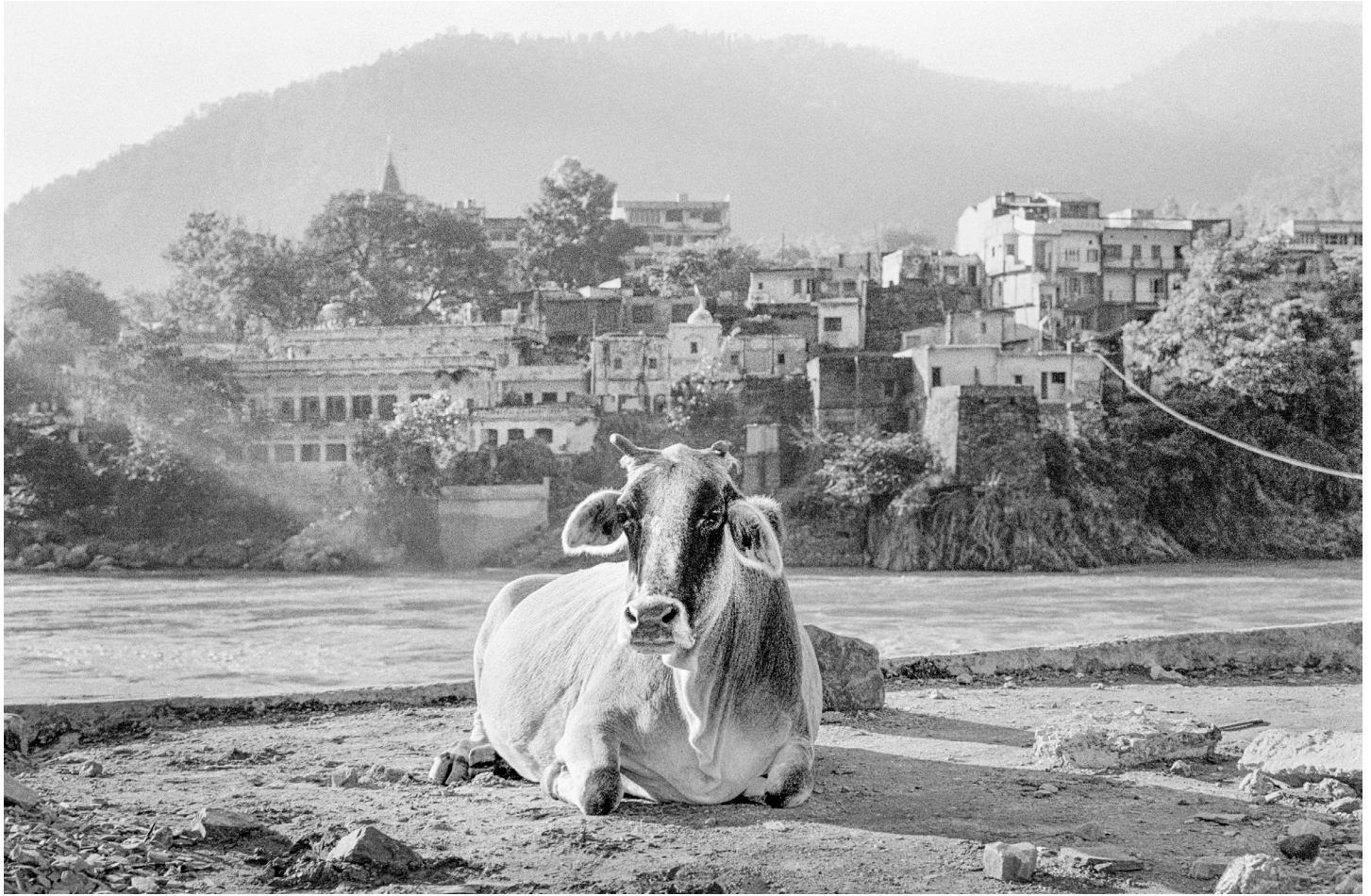
*The Ganges*  
Rishikesh

*Hanuman*  
Jaipur

*Monkey at the Sacred  
Pool*  
Jaipur

*Shiva's Locks*  
Rishikesh





*Sacred Cow*  
Rishikesh



*Catch*  
*Juhu Beach*  
*Mumbai*



*Fortune Teller*  
*Juhu Beach*  
*Mumbai*

*TRAINS*



*School Children*  
Mumbai



*Sleepers*  
Mumbai, Station  
Mumbai





*Sleeping Daughter*  
Rajasthan

*Father and Son*  
New Delhi

*Mumbai Station*  
Mumbai

*Family on the Way*  
to Jaipur  
Rajasthan

*Roof Riders*  
Mumbai





*NCC Girl*  
On the Way to Delhi



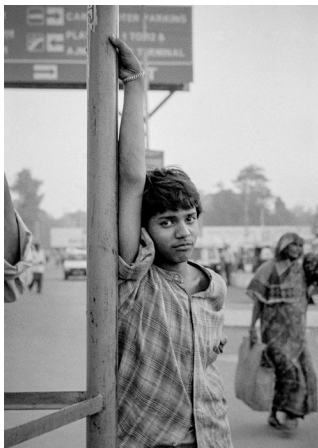
*Trains*  
Outside of Mumbai

*Train Rider*  
Outside of Mumbai



*Couple on Tracks*  
Mumbai





*Street Kid*  
New Delhi



*Space Gun*  
New Delhi



*NCC Girl*  
Outside of Delhi

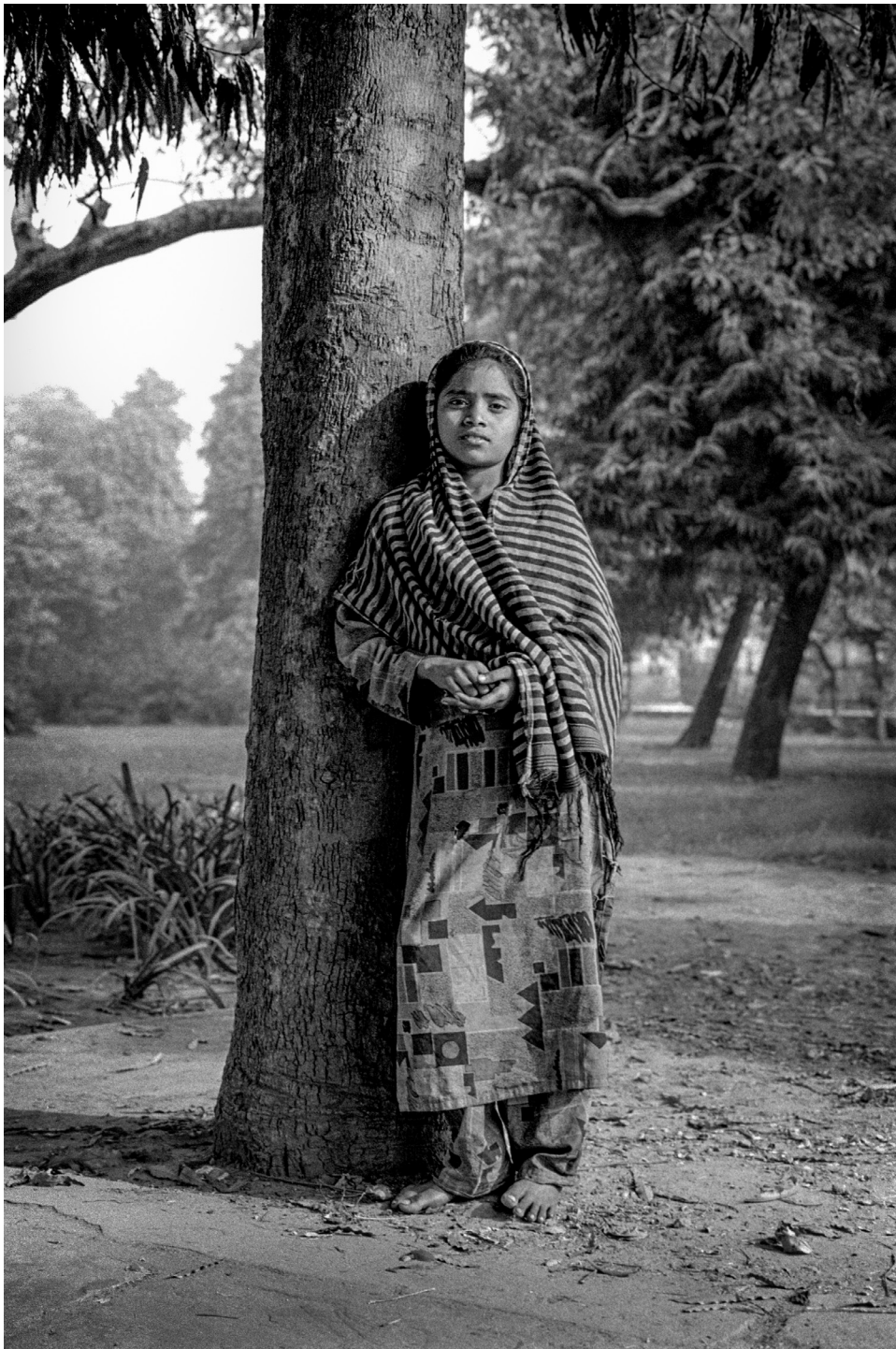


*Mumbai Station*  
Mumbai



*Lost Child*  
Mumbai

*WOMEN*



Young Woman  
New Delhi





*School Children*  
New Delhi



Suenendra  
Goa

*STREET*



*Street Scene with  
Bollywood Pose  
Mumbai*



*Morning Chores  
Udaipur, Rajasthan*

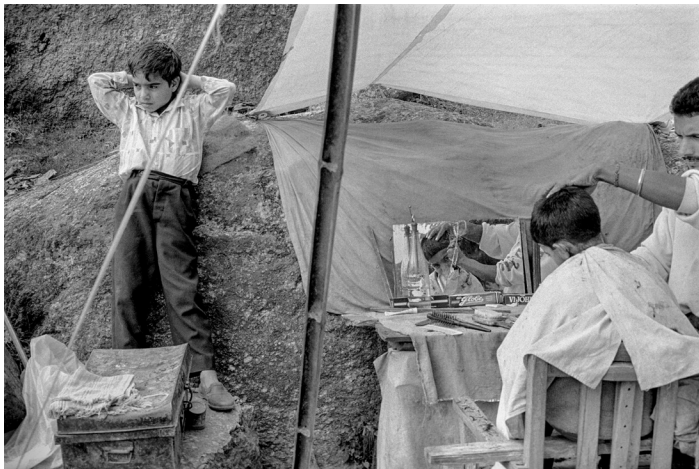
Street Scene  
Mumbai



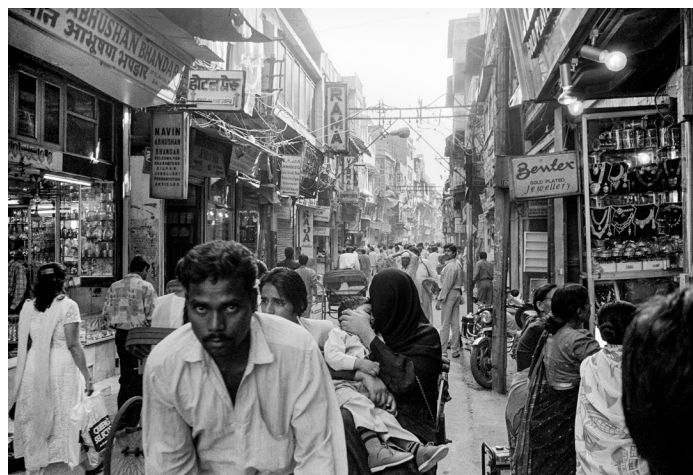
Two Much On  
Two Wheels  
Rajasthan







*Haircut  
Dharamkat*



*Ricksaw Wallah  
with Family  
New Delhi*



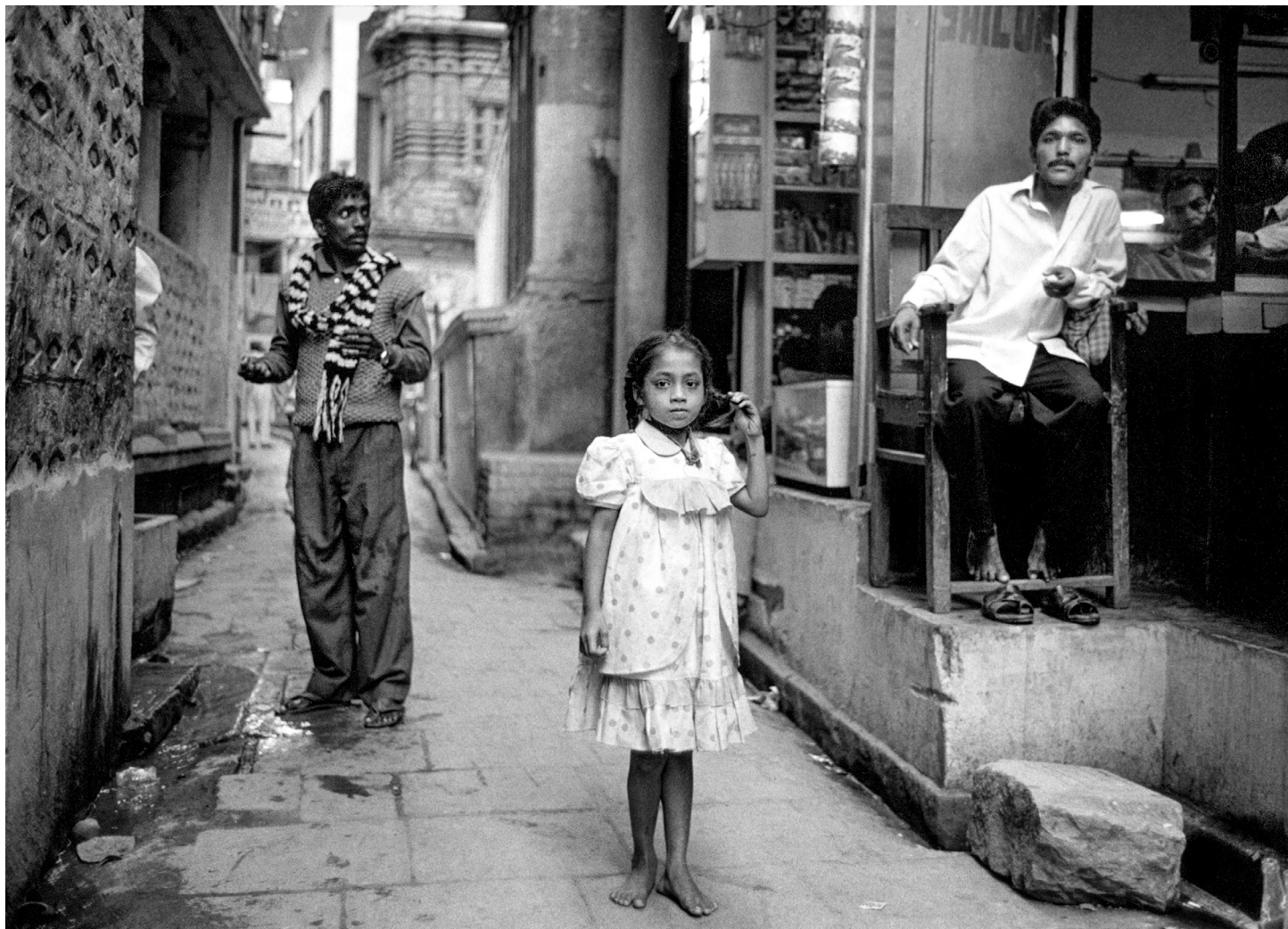
*Krishna Brothers  
New Delhi*

*VARANASI*



Street Fight  
Varanasi





*Rahel with Men*  
Varanasi



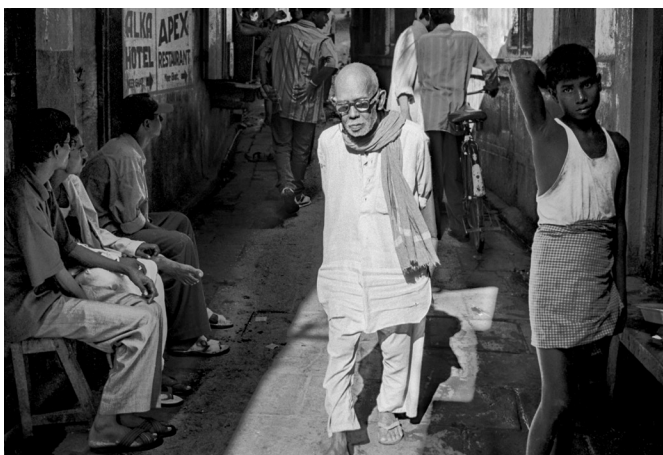
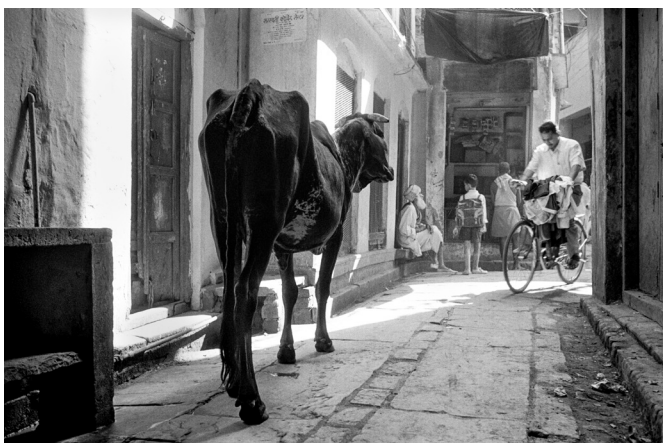
*Street Scene*  
Varanasi

*Haircut and Shave*  
Varanasi

*Storyteller*  
Varanasi

*Old Man  
and Young Boy*  
Varanasi

*Woman with Yarn*  
Varanasi

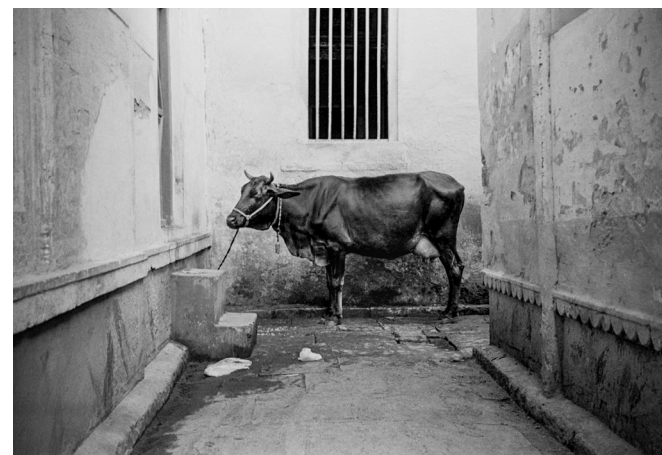




*Two Boys*  
Varanasi



*Street Scene with Woman*  
Varanasi

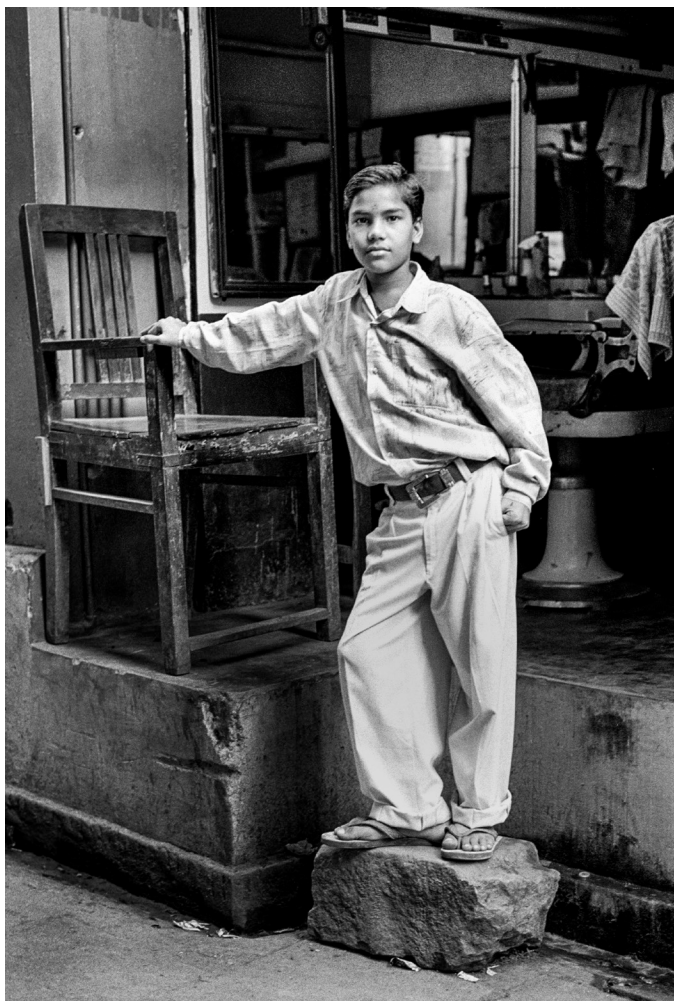


*Prized Bull*  
Varanasi

*Toro*  
Varanasi

*Vicki with Friends and Funeral March*  
Varanasi





14-Year-Old Barber  
Varanasi



Anklet  
Varanasi





*Mask*  
Varanasi



*Father and Daughter*  
Varanasi



*Woman with Toy Boat*  
Varanasi



*Woman and Bull*  
Varanasi



*Cricket Wicket*  
Varanasi



*Rahel with Friends*  
Varanasi

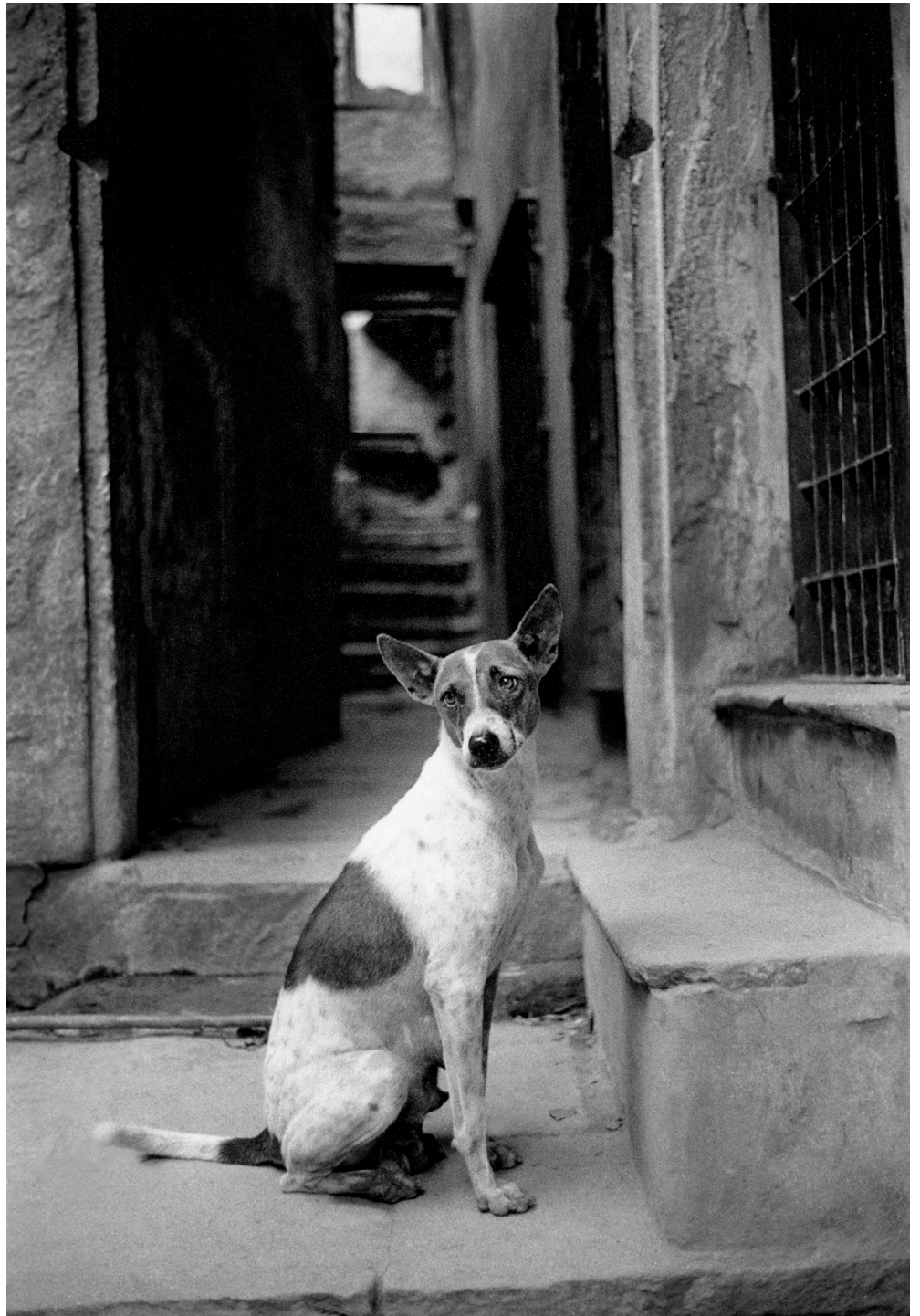


*School Boy*  
Varanasi

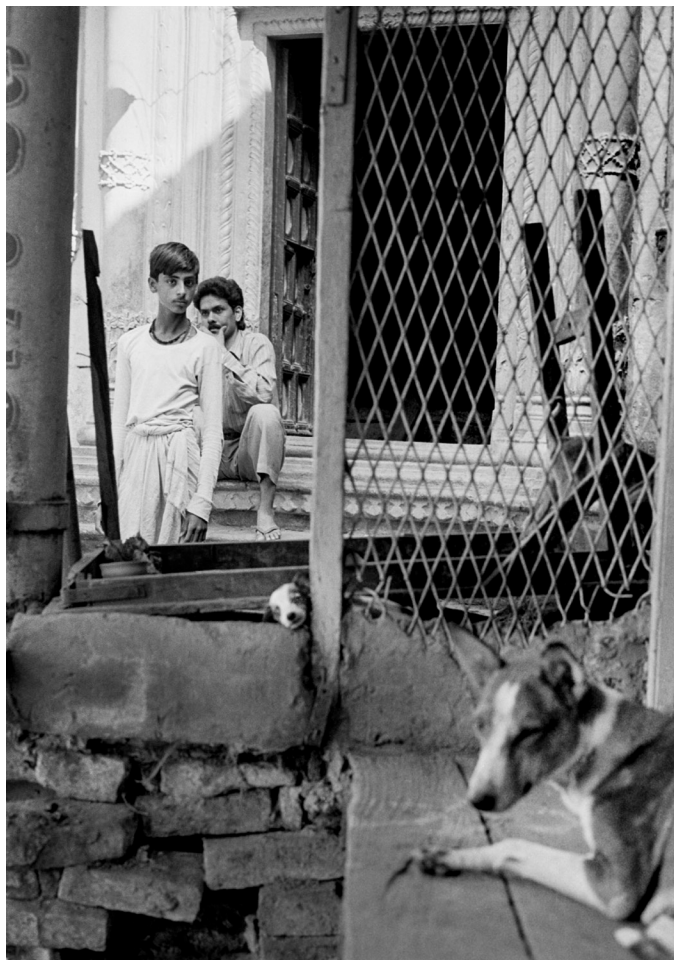


*Barber Shop Mirror*  
*with Funeral March*  
Varanasi





*Stray at Temple*  
Varanasi



*Young Boy  
Varanasi*

*Step to  
Ganges  
Varanasi*

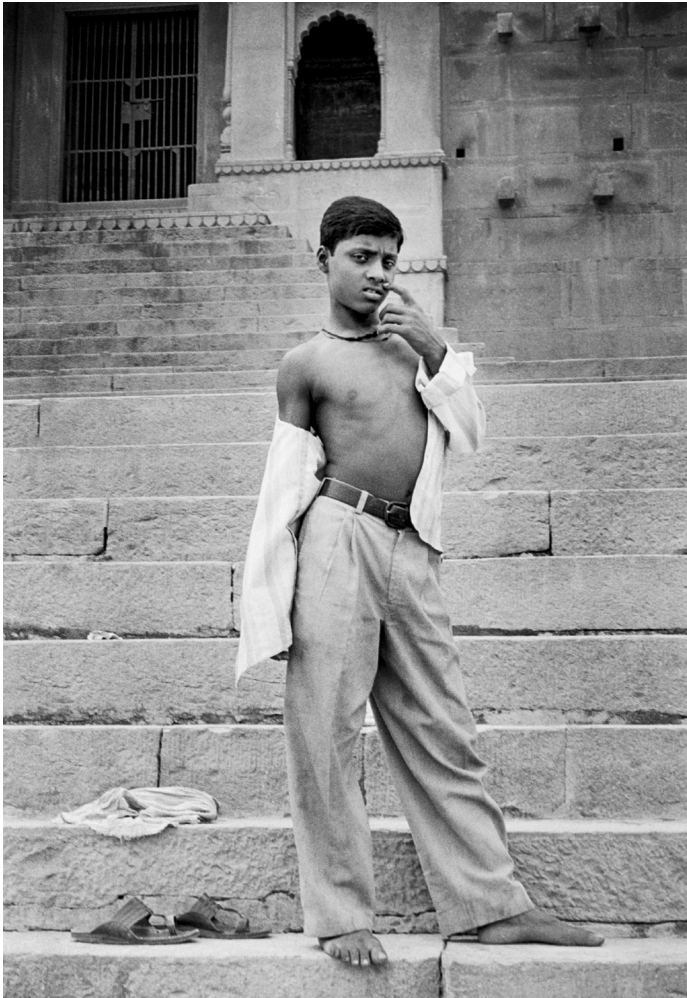


*Tabla Street  
Art  
Varanasi*





*Men, Woman and Sacred Cow  
Varanasi*



*Teenage Boy*  
Varanasi



*Couple with Boats*  
Varanasi

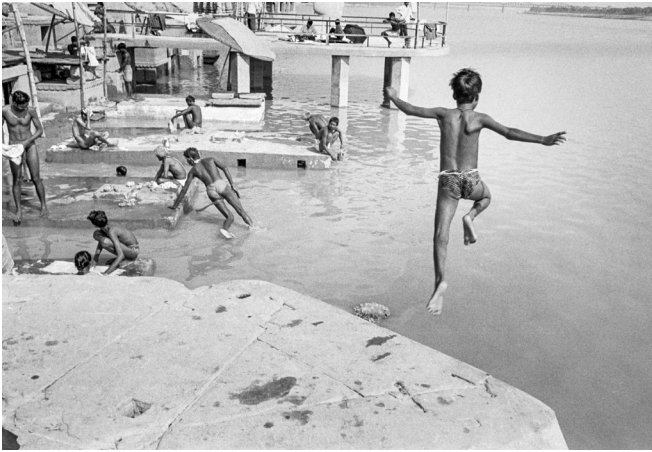


*Man with  
Water Buffalo*  
Varanasi



*Bathers*  
Varanasi





*Jumping into Ganges  
Varanasi*

*Young Men  
Varanasi*

*Kids with Napping Boatman  
Varanasi*

*Morning Bath  
Varanasi*



*The Evil Black Fluid of  
American Capitalism  
Varanasi*



*Young Boy at Ganges  
Varanasi*



*Buffalo at Ganges  
Varanasi*



*The Ferryman  
Varanasi*



*Morning on Ganges  
Varanasi*





*Family at Ganges  
Varanasi*



*Varanasi  
Varanasi*

## Artist's Statement

### *Reclining Figures* Varanasi

On August 15, 1998, I left Athens to embark on an adventure with a plane ticket to the other side of the planet, a Leica and 100 rolls of black and white film. My friends in Athens supported my trip by pre-buying prints—before they even knew where I was going. My wife likes to tell people stories of how, before we met and even years after, some of my India images are burned into her memory just from seeing them framed at friends' houses: the cow on the back streets of Varanasi, the dog sitting at a temple, the shawled woman leaning on a tree, the boys sleeping on a rickshaw.



For a few years after my trip, the India work defined who I was, but after I moved out of my black-and-white darkroom, I also moved on to new color work. I'd never really taken any time to look back at the India work beyond what I'd printed for friends on my return.

Last year, on the 20th anniversary of my travels in India, I started reflecting on what India has meant to me over time, and on how much my life has changed since then. Once you have a wife, kids and a business, opportunities to take a four month photographic journey don't really occur. But that's also the beauty of a significant trip like this—looking back is truly satisfying. On August 15th, 2018, I decided to post an image on social media every day from my trip to India along with a story about that image. On the third day, I discovered negatives I'd never printed and images I'd overlooked when I couldn't pull a good print in my darkroom back in the nineties. I started scanning the negatives and working on them in Lightroom. My digital skills have improved a lot since I made the changeover from film, and I was surprised at how I was able to manipulate the levels on some of these previously "lost" images—pictures that are becoming new favorites.

Looking back on India now that I'm approaching fifty, to a time when I was just coming out of my twenties—a time before cell phones and internet—I can see that not only am I older and changed by time, but India is vastly different from the India in my photographs. Almost immediately after I returned to the U.S., technology took over, and cell phones and outsourcing happened all over India.

My images were made in a sort of lost time—they could have been made in the '60s, '70s or the '80s—but 1998 was really the last moment before everyone around the world was hunched over a small screen. If you look at pictures from India now, cell phones and LED signs are everywhere. I think that's why I wanted to show this work now at a time when I'm trying to figure out my place in the world, where my past fits into my present. And to show my kids what life without technology really looked like. There's always a story to tell, but sometimes it's the overlooked story that is the most interesting.

My wife Beth bought the first image I printed after I returned from India at an art auction around spring of 1999. That framed print led to her meeting me a few months later, which led to her traveling to India, and then to our life together which includes our children and our family, our business, my book *Athens Potluck*, my new work in my Shed Studio, and my life in Athens, GA.

Last fall a friend pointed out that when I left for India I was poor and really had nothing except the camera around my neck and a few dollars. When I think back on it now, everything I have in my life today can be traced back to this pivotal time I spent in India, walking aimlessly through the streets of Varanasi.

*Self Portrait with Hanuman,  
Dalai Lama and Golden Temple  
Varanasi*

#### About the Artist Jason Thrasher

Jason Thrasher lives in Athens, Georgia, where he's been working as an artist and professional photographer for 25 years. His coverage of the Southeast's rich and varied music scene includes published portraits of the Drive-By Truckers, R.E.M. and the Elephant Six collective. His book *Athens Potluck*, about the Athens Music Scene, was published in 2017, for which he won the Georgia Writers Association award for Georgia Author of the Year in 2018.

Thrasher's photography has been published in *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, *New York Magazine*, *New York Times*, *The Bitter Southerner*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Paste*, *The AV Club*, *Salon*, *Pitchfork*, *Garden & Gun*, *USA Today* and *SPIN*.

His fine art photography has been exhibited at the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, ICA in London, Yerba Buena Arts Center in San Francisco, Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, Corcoran School of Fine Art in Washington, DC, and the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center. More information: [www.thrasherphoto.com](http://www.thrasherphoto.com)



## Complete Schedule of Events

**Artist's Reception:** Sunday, October 13, 2019, 5:00-8:00 PM

### **Experimental Music Coordinated by Kathryn Koopman**

Featuring Members of Thunder O(h)m!: Saturday, October 19, 2019, 7:00 PM

### **Music by Vimadean Duo**

Featuring Denis Petrunin on Marimba and Anastasia Petrunina on Violin:  
Tuesday, October 22, 2019, 6:00 PM

### **Jason Thrasher Artist Talk and Closing Event, in Celebration of Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights:**

Sunday, October 27, 2019, 4:00 PM

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## Exhibition Credits

Curator: Lauren Fancher

Preparators: Jason Thrasher, Lauren Fancher, Lilly McEachern, Tymbre Martin

Lighting: Jon Vogt and Jason Huffer

Graphic Design: Lauren Fancher

Catalog: Lauren Fancher and Lilly McEachern

Interns: Kathryn Koopman, Alden DiCamillo, Lilly McEachern, Carly Mirabile

## Support

*Jason Thrasher | Uncovered Perspectives: India 21 Years Later* is sponsored in part by

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## ATHICA Board of Directors

Margaret Anderson, John English, James Enos, Lauren Fancher, Camille Hayes, Joni Younkens-Herzog, Richard Herzog, Jim Moneyhun, Laura Straehla, Vickie Suplee, Jon Vogt

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The James E. and Betty J. Huffer Foundation.

