

## NEPAL AT RECON

Across films, archives and testimonies, we will surface the negotiations of gender, body and belonging shaped by context, community and constraint.

### Voices from Nepal

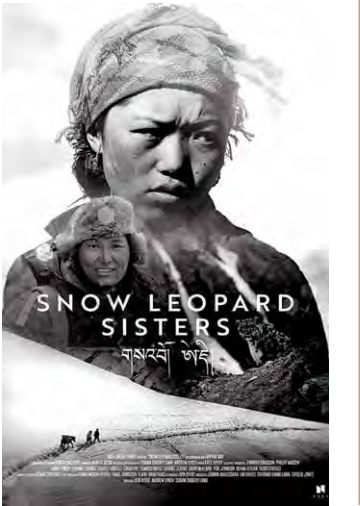
Opening remarks feature voices from Nepal, including Manisha Dhakal (Blue Diamond Society), Pratima Gurung (National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal) and Roman Gautam (*Himal Southasian*).

### Lightning Talks

Gauri Nepali, Sarita Pariyar and Sona Khatik from Just Futures Pahal bring Dalit feminist and queer narratives in Nepal and globally into focus, questioning whose stories take centre stage. Shuvangi Khadka and Nangsel Sherpa of The Pomelo will reflect on *In Her Footsteps*, a feminist archive carried through intergenerational memory.

### Films

The documentary *Nepali Women Reclaim Their Bodies* by Nirvana Bhandary examines how young women navigate colorism, fatphobia and discrimination, while *Silent Flow* by Pushpa Joshi follows two trans men moving through the emotional and social complexities of menstruation. In *Snow Leopard Sisters*, Sonam Choekyi Lama, Ben Ayers and Andrew Lynch accompany conservationist Tshiring Lhamu Lama and Tenzin Bhuti Gurung across the Himalaya, where mentorship, survival and resistance unfold against breathtaking terrain.



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### CONVERSATIONS

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# REACTIVATE

8 – 10 DECEMBER 2025, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

creaworld.org

## Why are we here again?

The much-loved RECONFERENCE comes back to life in Kathmandu, the ground of earlier gatherings. The place is the same, but the times so different. At the first edition of the global convening, in 2019, hundreds of activists, scholars, artists, filmmakers and other people with consciences in working order gathered to rethink their own areas of work. This time, we meet with the resolve to rethink, rework and reclaim our spaces, strategies and narratives in a convulsing world.

After its own protests and upheaval, Nepal is also finding its way to a new equilibrium. Meanwhile, all around the world, feminists and those committed to social justice have found ourselves in limbo, lashed by conservative forces. An old order is cracking. Tomorrow is ours to make.

There couldn't be a better place for us to renew our bonds and energize our resistance.

Bringing a global gathering of this scale to Nepal after recent events was not an easy call. We sought advice from our partners and made a considered decision: That we could not but stand alongside our friends in Nepal, as they have stood with all of us.

Nepal has always been a hub of regional solidarity. It has hospitably allowed Pakistanis and Indians, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans to meet across the hostile walls of their own nations. This is the first country in South Asia to decriminalize sexual minorities (Sunil Babu Pant, who founded Blue Diamond Society, was the first openly gay national-level legislator in Asia). Nepal's progressive Constitution defends gender and sexual

minorities, social justice and federal harmony. It continues to be a reminder that no gains are granted to us, they are wrenched of our own struggles. Mere months ago, young people in Nepal expressed their hunger for change through an irrepressible protest.

And for decades, this nation has been an inspiration for social movements around the world. Whether it is sustained organizing for gender or caste equality, grassroots mobilizations for democracy and ethnic and indigenous rights, or land and environmental struggles, there could be no better place to understand these interlocking systems and intersecting resistance.

As CREA marks its 25th year, it is only fitting to return to this place that's been so special in our journey. Kathmandu is where we organized our first global convening, the Count Me In! conference in 2011, to address violence against structurally excluded communities, such as queer and trans women, people with disabilities, and sex workers. We exchanged ideas, shared experiences and learned from each other — not through lectures and panels alone, but through creativity and playfulness too.

Just last year, Kathmandu is where we held renew: South Asia Sex Workers' Summit, another affirmative gathering that resulted in the Kathmandu Declaration by and for sex workers (see pg 6). Joy and pleasure are integral to our politics at CREA, it connects us to our source and strength. The march and the dance, the rally and the poem are all part of the activist repertoire. Art is not a frill, but a galvanizing force for social change.



Richene Singh, Kalamati

Nepal's inclusive spirit is evident all around us. Starting with the very hotel that is hosting the conference, the Soaltee Kathmandu: when CREA drew up accessibility requirements to organize the

massive event in 2019, the hotel not only delivered, it made the change permanent. If tomorrow is to be more than just another word for today, we will need all our wits and imagination to get there.

## What to expect at RECONFERENCE 2025

500+ Participants from across the globe

40+ Movement Builders

30+ Artists

20+ Films & Stories

ART. BOOKS. BOOK LAUNCHES. COMICS. CONVERSATIONS. CURATED SPACES. EXHIBITS. FILMS. INSTALLATIONS. LIGHTNING TALKS. LIVE ART. MUSIC. PHOTOGRAPHS. PLENARIES. QUIZZES. STAND-UP. STORYTELLING. STRATEGY CIRCLES. TEACH-INS. THEATRE. VIDEO LOOPS. WORKSHOPS.

Over three days, we will dive deep into nine themes, through art, teach-ins and other formats. Our themes are: Ableism; Caste; Decriminalization and Anti-Carcerality; Gender-based Violence; Sexuality and Sexual & Reproductive Rights; Technology; Climate Change; Conflict, Migration & Refugee Rights; and Collective Care.

There will be translation and

interpretation in English, Hindi, Nepali, Spanish, French, Bengali and Arabic, and selected sessions in International Sign Language and Indian Sign Language. The Soaltee Kathmandu — already a very accessible venue — will be further enhanced for accessibility by the organization Access for All. And this time, find all the details in our small but sharp catalogue!



CASTE

Across the conference, themes of caste recur: who is heard, who is desired, who moves freely and whose struggles remain unacknowledged. Sessions examine caste not as back-drop but as a force shaping intimacy, labour, mobility and knowledge.

Teach-In

‘Upper-caste Ideals: How Caste Determines Desire’ with Christina Dhanuja examines how caste determines not only material access and social status but also the very imagination of intimacy, aesthetics and liberation. It invites the audience to consider a Dalit feminist standpoint and to envision a feminism that interrogates caste as critically as it does patriarchy.

Lightning Talks

Talks by Sarita Pariyar, Gauri Nepali and Sona Khatik, of Just Futures Pahal, place Dalit feminist thought at the centre. Pariyar rethinks feminism through the lens of caste globally. Nepali asks whose narratives shape our understanding of Dalit sexual minorities. And Khatik highlights the next generation of Dalit women as thought leaders.

Film

Homebound follows two friends – one Dalit, one Muslim – travelling through policing, migration and pandemic precarity. Their pursuit of dignity reveals the quiet and overt ways caste determines visibility, belonging and survival.

Art

In Soil, Skin, and Song: Tapestries of Caste, Body and Defiance, Osheen Siva reimagines Dalit women’s resistance through scenes of violence and endurance. Drawing on Gogu Shyamala and Bama, the tapestry holds wound and weapon, ritual and resistance, illuminating how caste and gender shape harm and defiance.



# “Feminism must interrogate caste as much as it does patriarchy”



What has been your journey into activism, what shaped your political consciousness?

What I do isn’t activism. I see myself more as an enabler, a facilitator, if you will. And while it is tempting to term anyone who works with marginalized groups as an activist, there are some of us – many more are needed – who support in building connections and conditions required for grassroots leaders.

My political consciousness emerged from my lived reality: I grew up Dalit Christian in a lower-middle-class family, who could see the injustice around but wasn’t fully able to understand the hierarchies that sanctioned it. I didn’t even know I could identify as Dalit. In college, I joined the Student Christian Movement, a progressive student-led group that helped me articulate my politics in a way that felt authentic and refreshing. Whatever dissonance I had felt earlier, I was now able to understand its systemic underpinnings: caste, class, patriarchy and religion.

Could you situate Dalit feminism within the wider feminist movement and the wider anti-caste struggle?

Dalit feminism emerges from the everyday realities of caste-oppressed women, who find that neither mainstream feminisms nor male-led anti-caste politics fully capture their perspectives.

But how they specifically challenge these two movements is not always a clear-cut binary. Because they benefit from and are ignored by these movements, and several other variations that have emerged. In simple terms, Dalit feminism recognizes that caste is the dominant coordinate that determines the lives of South Asian women. It says that the woman who is harassed inside a home and the woman who cleans the former’s toilet is not always the same woman. It insists that feminist discourses be centered around those at the sharpest edge of caste and patriarchy. To anti-caste movements, Dalit feminism makes a parallel demand: that the annihilation of caste proceed alongside the dismantling of patriarchy.

What misconceptions or misrepresentations that arise when feminist discourse fails to interrogate caste?

When feminist discourse ignores caste, it often treats upper-caste women’s experiences as the default template for ‘South Asian womanhood’. Glass ceilings, work-life balance or the right to self-expression are real, but they look different if one is also dealing with intergenerational trauma and resourcelessness or the constant threat, and reality, of caste-based sexual violence. It also doesn’t take into account how feminist (or female) empowerment takes place. The

image of the ‘modern, sexually liberated, financially independent woman’ appears progressive, but at whose expense is that progress being achieved? Whose subjugation is her freedom resting on? When caste is not interrogated, feminism gets to celebrate the autonomy for some women while leaving intact the very hierarchies that make that autonomy impossible for others.

How are desire and sexuality conditioned by caste? How are Dalit women pushing back?

Desire has never been purely personal. It is often, if not always, shaped by structures of power that determine who is considered desirable, who may desire, and who can act upon that desire. Brahmanical patriarchy – a system in which caste and patriarchy are intertwined – authorizes upper-caste women to embody characteristics of an ideal womanhood. And this ideal, over time, has undergone several transformations. Political reform, education, access to wealth and property, and global exposure have helped upper-caste women redefine the very concept and expression of womanhood. Yet these transformations have only integrated feminist aspirations with enduring Brahmanical codes, allowing upper-caste womanhood to evolve without dismantling caste. The result is an archetype that remains desirable

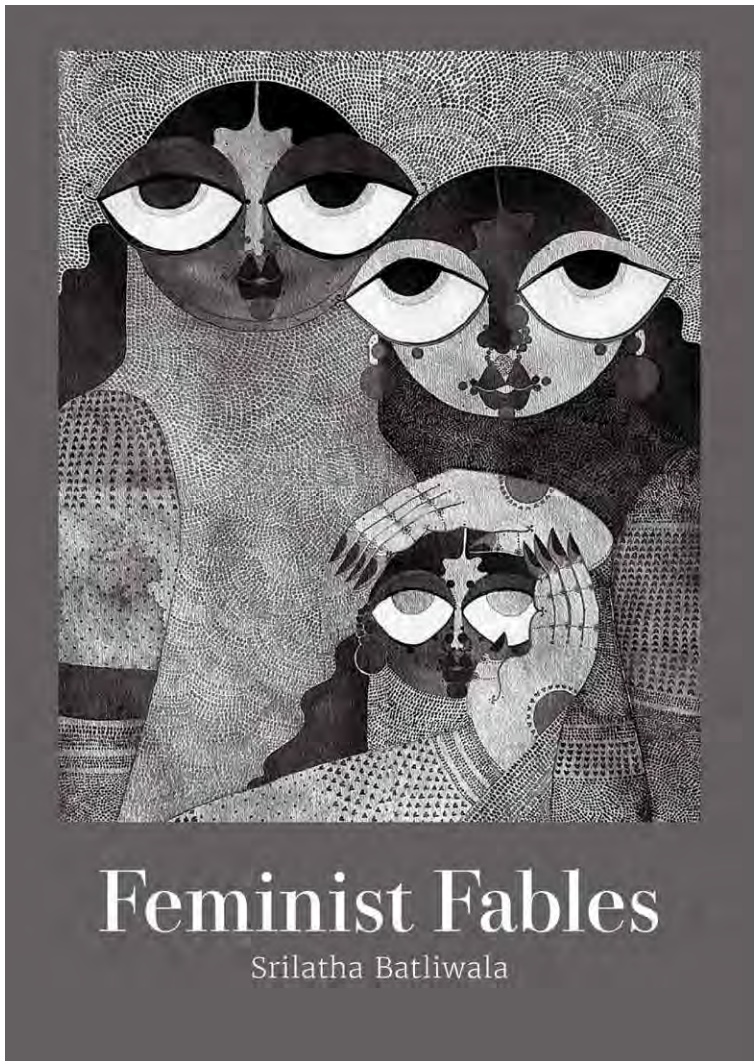
and aspirational, while cloaking it in the language of progress and cosmopolitanism. In sharp contrast are Dalit and other caste-marginalized women, whose existence continues to be framed through stereotypes.

We need a Dalit feminist standpoint that uproots the entire infrastructure around which ideas of desire are being built. We need a feminism that interrogates caste as much as it does patriarchy. Dalit women should be able to express their desire to anyone, without having to measure themselves against a savarna ideal – a radical Dalit feminist framework of desire would enable that.

You are a cofounder of Dalit History Month. How does this wave of organizing build on previous generations of Dalit activism?

I understand that there were articulations of April being Dalit History Month even before 2015 (when Dalit History Month was launched). A Mahar Dalit scholar told me that April had always been significant because it had both Ambedkar Jayanti and Phule Jayanti. But it was Thenmozhi Soundararajan who took the effort to rally a global community around it. She called me in December 2014 and said, “Christina, would you like to be a part of the Dalit History Month project?” And I said, “Yeah, definitely.” And what an honor it has been since!

# “We have to figure out guerrilla tactics for survival”



the women’s movement to address issues of gender discrimination and violence in a far more intersectional way. Since my own work at this time was with poor and socio-politically marginalized women (in rural Maharashtra and Karnataka, and pavement dwellers in Mumbai), I had been troubled by perspectives of the city-based women’s groups, which failed to address the class and caste oppression that were so central to the women I worked with. In fact, it was in the work of mobilizing women living in pavement slums in Mumbai that we saw how sex workers, trans women and women of multiple castes, religions, regions, occupations and language groups came together in the local women’s collectives, overcoming the hostility, stigma and biases that had initially divided them.

Are there lessons from past movements that we’re at risk of forgetting?

Two lessons: When your analysis of the issues, your strategies and tactics become cast in stone, when you will not tolerate any questioning, you have become the problem. Get out of the way.

Every empire rises, reigns, then falls. So when our struggles are being attacked or pushed back, we have to figure out the best guerrilla tactics for survival. Explore the best ‘holding patterns’ to survive and rise up again when the oppressors have fallen – because fall they will!

What victories do you feel proudest of? What have been the hardest lessons learned about power?

I feel incredibly proud of the contribution I made to building two powerful, large-scale grassroots movements of poor, excluded and stigmatized women, and supporting them to raise their voice, vision and capacity to lead their own struggles for social justice. This also taught me not only to acknowledge my own power and privilege, but how to cede power and space to those who had the greatest stake in the change they were seeking. I also saw how many activist leaders do not allow others to emerge in leadership, and how this ultimately defeats the very ideologies and goals they set out to achieve.

# The pioneering Carole Vance

An excerpt from Geetanjali Misra’s article on an enduringly influential figure

“The tension between sexual danger and sexual pleasure is a powerful one in women’s lives. Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency. To focus only on pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women’s experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live.”

With these words, Carole Vance opened her incredibly influential article in the collection of works *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, first published in 1984. Over the past 35 years, the book has been instrumental in catalyzing an entire generation of activists and academics to further research and debate this issue.

Through her scholarship and thoughtful leadership, Carole has taught us to think about sexuality not only as something to do with individuals’ feelings and choices but as a domain. This domain includes structures like law, religion, medicine, education, families, and communities through which control is exercised over our bodies. Carole has introduced us to feminist writings by Gayle

Rubin and Amber Hollibaugh that offer a more expansive and affirming approach to sexuality. This pioneering, provocative and visionary thinking has also deeply influenced our own work. CREA’s Sexuality, Gender and Rights Institute has been inspired by Carole’s immense contributions in this field.

Everyone who works with Carole instantly recognizes that she has an exemplary way of sharing her expertise and encouraging fearless examination of complex issues. “How does that work?” may be a simple question but when posed by the inimitable Carole S. Vance with a slightly arched eyebrow and a friendly but questioning look, it changes your work and your life,” recalls Alice M. Miller, of Yale Law School. Katrina Karkazis of



Amherst College concurs: “Her brilliant engagement...has given rise to a generation of scholars working at the intersection of sexuality, gender, health, and human rights—a new interdisciplinary field that she founded.”

## SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Across RECONFERENCE, themes around sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights recur: who gets to choose, who gets to desire, whose bodies are recognized, regulated, or ignored.

Teach-In

Andrea Cornwall’s ‘Sex and Gender: Contentions and Challenges’ explores “sex” and “gender” as concepts, unpacking the arguments and fault lines that shape today’s debates. Alice Miller’s ‘Sex, Gender and the Calls to Biology and Nature’ examines how science and state deploy biological claims, and how movements can challenge misuse without abandoning complexity.

Workshops

Mariwala Health Initiative’s ‘Gender, Sexuality and Mental Health from the Margins’ reframes sexuality through a “lens from the margins,” showing how service systems reproduce inequality and how reframing can expand justice.

Jaya Sharma’s ‘Pleasure and Danger: Through the Psyche Lens’ returns to feminist debates on sexual violation and pleasure, asking what it means to hold both in tension and reimagine desire beyond fear.

Performances

Sonia Wong’s ‘A Queer Pansexual Feminist Proposal’ blends lecture and performance to reflect on non-cis-hetero relationships, domesticity, guilt, desire and queer feminist futures.

Films

*Babli by Night* (Neel Soni) follows a Muslim transgender forest guard navigating misunderstanding, solitude and an HIV diagnosis. *Slut Club* (Zoey Black) documents a Cape Town pole-dancing show where women and LGBTQIA+ performers reclaim sexuality and performance.

Art

Robert Hamblin’s *Bower My Bae* plays with queer ecologies through the satin bowerbird’s flamboyant, non-heteronormative mating rituals, inviting audiences to question naturalised ideas about sex, reproduction and desire.



ABLEISM

Across the event, conversations on disability foreground how ableism is embedded in daily life, movement spaces and ideas of participation.

Teach-Ins

Rupsa Mallik draws on Anita Ghai’s work to centre disabled joy and pleasure as political practice. And Prathama Raghavan’s ‘Deconstructing Ableism’, led with Rising Flame, names ableism as a systemic force that shapes norms of productivity and “normalcy”.

Lightning Talks

Nu Misra asks how disability activists organize when existing tools collapse; Revita Alvi considers how justice systems might be transformed for women with disabilities; and Siddhant Shah’s ‘Access Unframed’ draws attention to art, allyship and inclusion.

Strategy Circle

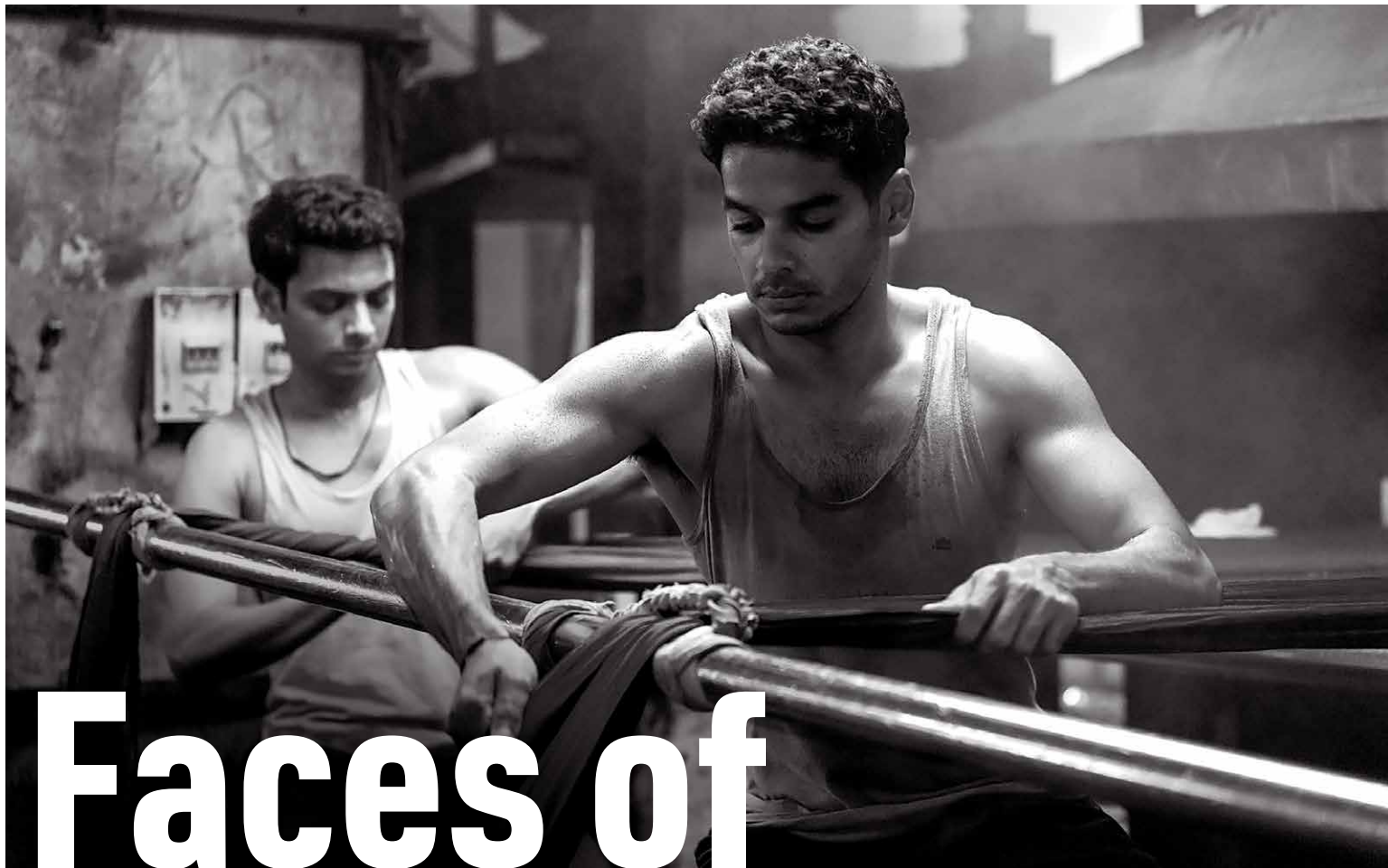
The Disability Justice strategy circle creates space to map shared values, identify barriers and develop collective strategies to counter ableism across organizations and movements. The Resting Museum’s rest lounge urges visitors to rethink the ableisms in the English language (‘spineless’) and how much a political ‘sit-in’ demands from the body as opposed to sitting for rest.

Art

Rising Flame’s ‘Still, We Rise’ centres disabled resistance and imagination through archival and new videos. ‘Disability Art: A Montage’ highlights the cultural work of disabled artists, challenging definitions of ability and beauty. Albright Ayoyi Alitisi’s ‘The World We Hold’ celebrates disabled joy through a tactile crochet installation.

Performance

*Vagina Manifesto* and *Mistress Asthma*, by Maria Palacios and Alex Cafarelli of Sins Invalid, center disabled sexuality, pleasure and agency, opening space for bodies to define themselves beyond inherited scripts.



# Faces of RESILIENCE

The pandemic left an imprint on cinema around the world. Films like *International Dawn Chorus Day* and *Homebound* exposed very different realities, both just as haunting

March 2020 will never be forgotten by those who lived through it. The last Reconference was held in 2019, before the universal shock of the pandemic. This one is being held in a dramatically changed world. The pandemic was a paradox; it revealed, at close range, the tenacity of life and the sickness of our societies. It intensified inequalities and turmoil. It also brought us an awareness of our interconnected fates. It fed the desire for strongmen and autocrats, and also a yearning for solidarity. Two films at Reconference – John Greyson’s *International Dawn Chorus Day* and Neeraj Ghaywan’s *Homebound* – reflect these truths in an especially acute way.

Greyson is a Canadian activist, filmmaker and video artist, whose work speaks for human rights and against state repression, especially as they connect to queer lives. *International Dawn Chorus Day* is a short documentary that goes from quirky to devastating in minutes. At the hushed start of the lockdowns, many of us heard and marveled at birdsong. Greyson’s film first plays out the global celebration of morning birdsong, but soon tells a different story. The action takes place on a Zoom screen, each little box with its own jailed bird, chirruping of freedom and confinement.

*Homebound* emerged from a news photograph: of a migrant worker, Mohammad Saiyub, cradling his parched and fever-stricken friend Amrit Kumar by the side of the highway. It is a fictionalized true story, of India’s harsh 21-day lockdown that left low-wage workers stranded, forced to walk or hustle their way back to distant villages. It is a story of friendship and care between a Muslim and Dalit man, both shackled and demeaned by India’s social and political order. The film brings the weight of this oppression through small, telling details – a cracked heel, a pause before declaring one’s last name. Grounded in India, it has touched audiences around the world, receiving a nine-minute standing ovation at the Cannes festival. It is also India’s official entry for the Oscars.



Top: Homebound  
Above: International Dawn Chorus Day

for a fairer world. From activist dissidence to ordinary people giving each other strength, they etch a picture of human vulnerability and show us the stakes of our struggle.

## Fellow Traveler



What drew you to CREA in the early years and what kept your long association going? We formally collaborated in 2002, when TARSHI and CREA invited me to teach at the first Sexuality and Rights Institute (SRI) in Pune.

I was working on the final cut of my film *Tales of the Night Fairies* on the sex worker rights movement in Calcutta. At the time the majority of feminists were demanding abolition of sex work. CREA and TARSHI had positions on the issue that coincided with my film. That was such a relief. At the time I had been teaching at the Mass Communication Research Centre (MCRC) in Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. While I greatly enjoyed teaching at this excellent film school I missed not having a space to explore and reflect on the intersections of gender, sexuality and the media, which was the primary focus of my academic work and on which I had collected a vast archive of material and a sizeable library of books and

films. The SRIs and, later, the SGRIs [Sexuality, Gender and Rights Institute] gave me a space where I could think, reflect, discuss and teach in this area. I was also delighted to meet Carole Vance, whose writings, especially the anthology titled *Pleasure and Danger*, had always been a source of great inspiration. So CREA and I turned out to be a perfect match. Since then I have taught at every SRI and SGRI.

Geetanjali Misra and Radhika Chandiramani [of TARSHI], who were spearheading the project, were exceptional in their openness to discussing any contentious issue. They were particularly good about encouraging conversation about issues that divided feminists. This was rare because in most other spaces where I was invited to speak there seemed to be an invisible threshold that one could not cross. I had grown tired of these censoring impulses and the intellectual space that offered CREA/TARSHI came as a breath of fresh air. Because of this space and the people I was lucky to meet here, my scholarship became more robust and I gained greater clarity about a number of divisive and complex issues.

CREA has benefited immensely from the association, but what would you say you derived from it? I have derived a lot from the unique space that the SRIs provided and the SGRIs continue to provide. It was a space where difficult and complex issues could be discussed.



INFINITE JESTS

Globally, anti-trans rhetoric is on the rise, flattening trans lives into caricatures of tragedy or danger and fueling endless debates with and about trans people. In a climate that demands seriousness from trans communities while offering little recognition, ALOK’s work feels subversive. They refuse that script entirely. Their performances do not avoid the hard questions of racism, transmisogyny, beauty norms, trauma or the policing of gender. Instead, they meet them with incisive, disarming humour. ALOK’s work shows how joy can carry political weight. Their comedy turns advocacy and protest on their head, transforming them into laughter and resistance. It exposes the contradictions of the world while insisting that trans life holds tenderness and imagination. ALOK creates a space where trans people are seen as fully human rather than as symbols or debates. The same questions shape their writing too. In *Beyond the Gender Binary*, ALOK draws from their own life as a gender-nonconforming artist to show that gender is not a restriction but an imaginative practice. *Femme in Public* imagines what it could mean to celebrate transfemininity without

fear, and to reclaim public space as somewhere desire and dignity can coexist. Their comedy special *Biology!* continues this work through a different register: ALOK argues that the real biology we refuse to confront is not gender but mortality, and that when we remember our lives are finite, the absurdity of hatred becomes its own punchline. Blending stand-up and poetry, they challenge the binaries that limit us – sorrow and joy, grief and gratitude – and invite us to consider what it means to hold both at once. At RECONFERENCE, ALOK presents their new show *Hairy Situation*, a gloriously chaotic set that follows them through a series of “hairy” encounters: being mistaken for a wildly famous Brazilian DJ, accidentally signing up for a body-wax appointment or disastously attempting TikTok makeup tutorials. Each story is delivered with their signature blend of sharp observation and playful irreverence, turning everyday absurdity into something deeply human and unexpectedly tender. *Hairy Situation* continues ALOK’s practice of using humour to expose the non-sensical rules that shape our social lives and our ideas of gender. As we laugh, let us reclaim the joy in our fights and celebrate in solidarity.

# THE STAGE IS SET



TWO COOL QUEENS

Las Reinas Chulas, a Mexican cabaret and theatre collective, is all about nerve and verve. Formed in 1998 by Ana Francis Mor, Cecilia Sotres, Marisol Gasé and Nora Huerta, the ‘four queens’ are now two. But they carry on the teatro cabaret tradition – defiant, free to question and generally take the piss. Internationally beloved, they remain rooted in Mexican realities. In *La Banda de Las Recodas*, they take on the narcocorridos (drug ballads), sending up the genre with spoofy costumes and mimicry.

They challenge norms, punch holes in official concepts of national identity, bring up questions of gendered violence and queer and trans struggles, all delivered with sassy humor (‘chula’ is also a nod to the word for sassy). Now, Las Reinas Chulas brings a whole new show especially for this conference, featuring Nora Huerta and Cecilia Sotres, and music by Claudia Arelano. Expect their feminist manifesto to be delivered with energy, wit and glitter.



SPIRIT SONGS

In 2002, shaken by the communal violence in Gujarat, Shabnam Virmani founded The Kabir Project. Kabir, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century mystic poet of North India, transcends religion and speaks directly to the spirit. With his example of inner inquiry and radical equality, he is equally resonant in Hindu, Sikh and Muslim traditions: ‘If you want the truth, I’ll tell you the truth:/ Listen to the secret sound, /the real sound, /which is inside you.’ And so, Virmani, a feminist, filmmaker and human rights worker, was called to learn and spread this tradition of folk and mystic poetry. She journeyed across North India and Pakistan, following Kabir’s songs as they are sung and recited by diverse communities – folk singers, Sufis and lay devotees. She then brought these varying traditions to a wider public through festivals and to school-children. This healing tradition of music is a reminder that social, creative and spiritual consciousness cannot be severed.



QUEEN, MOTHER

“Music is an act of communication as well as self-discovery,” says Ma Faiza, better known as the ‘Queen of Electronica’. She is partial to the appellation ‘Mother of Electronica’, though: “I feel loved when people refer to me by that special title.” “I am a woman who wants to be seen as a woman. But my existence has never been without questions about my gender which really bugs me,” she says, recounting countless instances, including DJing gigs, when she was mistaken for a

man. But all of that disappears once she is behind the deck playing a high-octane mix of electronic dance music. “There are no boundaries when the crowd is bouncing on the floor. Music becomes your friend, cutting through gender, sexuality, shape and colour.” “Women, we are marginalized everywhere, even in the queer pecking order. LGBTQIA+ visibility tends largely to gay men,” she thinks. “I am proud to be a woman and a lesbian. We live our queer lives every fucking day!”

CLIMATE, CONFLICT, MIGRATION

Increasingly, climate change, conflict and displacement are being understood not as separate issues but as overlapping conditions that shape many of our lives.

Lightning Talks

Our line-up speaks to this, with Bharati Chaturvedi tracing how circular economies and urban inequities deepen climate precarity, and Dipika Lama highlighting young Indigenous disabled women leading climate advocacy from the front.

Film

Films such as *Gold Mines Damage Green Goals* and *The Ice Builders* expose the contradictions between global climate promises and lived realities, from mining permits in protected forests to Himalayan communities constructing artificial glaciers to survive water scarcity. Saro Imran’s *In Their Shoes* reveals the intersections of climate crisis and identity, showing how transgender communities were further marginalized during Pakistan’s 2022 floods. Petna Ndaliko Katondolo’s *Mikuba*, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, takes the viewer on a journey deep into the cobalt veins of Kolwezi, where the battle for a sustainable green energy future unfolds amid dust and heat.

Art

The art works inquire deeper: Apnavi Makanji subverts colonial cartographies and examines altered migration patterns shaped by climate change; Jeem e.V.’s comic maps generated climate hardships across the SWANA region; and Ta Mwe and Varsha Nair trace resistance, memory and migration across bodies and landscapes through photographs and palm-leaf drawings.

Peformance

Sealing Cheng’s solo show, *Managing Death in Exile*, confronts the care demanded in displacement.





## DECRIM

Decriminalization and anti-carcerality appear here as a set of provocations: What do feminists risk when we rely on prisons, police and criminal law to deliver justice? What might we gain by imagining safety outside punishment?

## Workshop

‘Questioning Our Punitive Vision of Justice’ with Estefanía Vela Barba examines why punishment is so deeply woven into our understanding of justice. It traces the assumptions that made criminal law seem inevitable and asks whether these systems reduce harm or quietly reproduce it. The workshop invites participants to confront feminist investments in punitive responses and to consider what justice could look like when not built on carcerality.

## Strategy Circle

‘Feminist Faultlines: Rethinking punitive approaches to addressing gender-based violence’ brings together advocates to reflect on the limits of relying on police and prosecution. It creates space to map tensions, imagine rights-affirming alternatives and collectively explore how movements might shift away from criminal-legal solutions without abandoning the pursuit of safety.

## Installation

‘Guess Who?’ by Intersecta reveals how feminist and conservative narratives can converge around punishment. By placing their arguments side by side, the installation urges viewers to question how criminalization becomes common sense, even within movements committed to dismantling oppression.

## Lightning Talk

Maira Pérez’s ‘The Emotional Life of Punishment’ draws on her work on intersectional queer perspectives on criminology, anti-punitivism and prison abolition.

## Film Loop

A curated film loop on decrim examines incarceration, state power and feminist organizing, highlighting how communities resist carceral logics and imagine justice beyond punishment.



Farida Parvin, Bangladesh

# Liquid Borders.

Photographer Anita Khemka is known for her work on gender and sexuality. In a collaboration with CREA, she traversed South Asia to create portraits of sex workers, all authors of a remarkable movement. They live precarious lives but their stance is defiant and their victories manifold. The story of the photobook that resulted from the collaboration, which will be launched at the conference.

*“No matter where they are in the world, sex workers live along the edges of liquid borders. The invisible lines demarcating legality, morality and respectability run through their bodies. Given the precarity of the historical moment, the active participation of sex workers and their allies in the creation of this book remains a testament to friendship and solidarity in the face of adversity.”*

From Shohini Ghosh's Introduction to the book

Sex worker movements in South Asia have led transformative processes of mobilization to demand rights, freedoms, justice and recognition – all the more remarkable considering the political and legal challenges, including from the anti-trafficking industry. However, the support and resources that the movements need remain inadequate and uneven. Believing that it was crucial to once again train allies' attention to this important work and reaffirm our commitment, CREA convened renew: South Asia Sex Workers' Summit in May 2024 in Kathmandu, Nepal, which was

attended by over 200 sex workers and allies.

Over three days, old friends and new met to discuss: the reason for this summit; allyship journeys; accompaniment practices; countering harmful ideas at the United Nations Human Rights Council; sex work in an online world; rights rather than rehabilitation for sex workers; how to get the law to help with social movements; and more. These discussions took place at plenaries, round tables and workshops. The plenaries also featured film screenings and music, dance and theatre performances.

all by Srilatha Batliwala; a primer titled *Flaws in Laws: Sexual Rights and Social Movements in India; Listening to Each Other: A Multigenerational Feminist Dialogues*; and more. There will also be a selection of our ground-breaking publications in Hindi, which took sophisticated politics and thinking out of ivory towers, including translations of Batliwala's primers and the journal *Reproductive Health Matters*. Some have become limited editions – please see, but don't take! – but do feel free to take home any of the others that may be of interest.



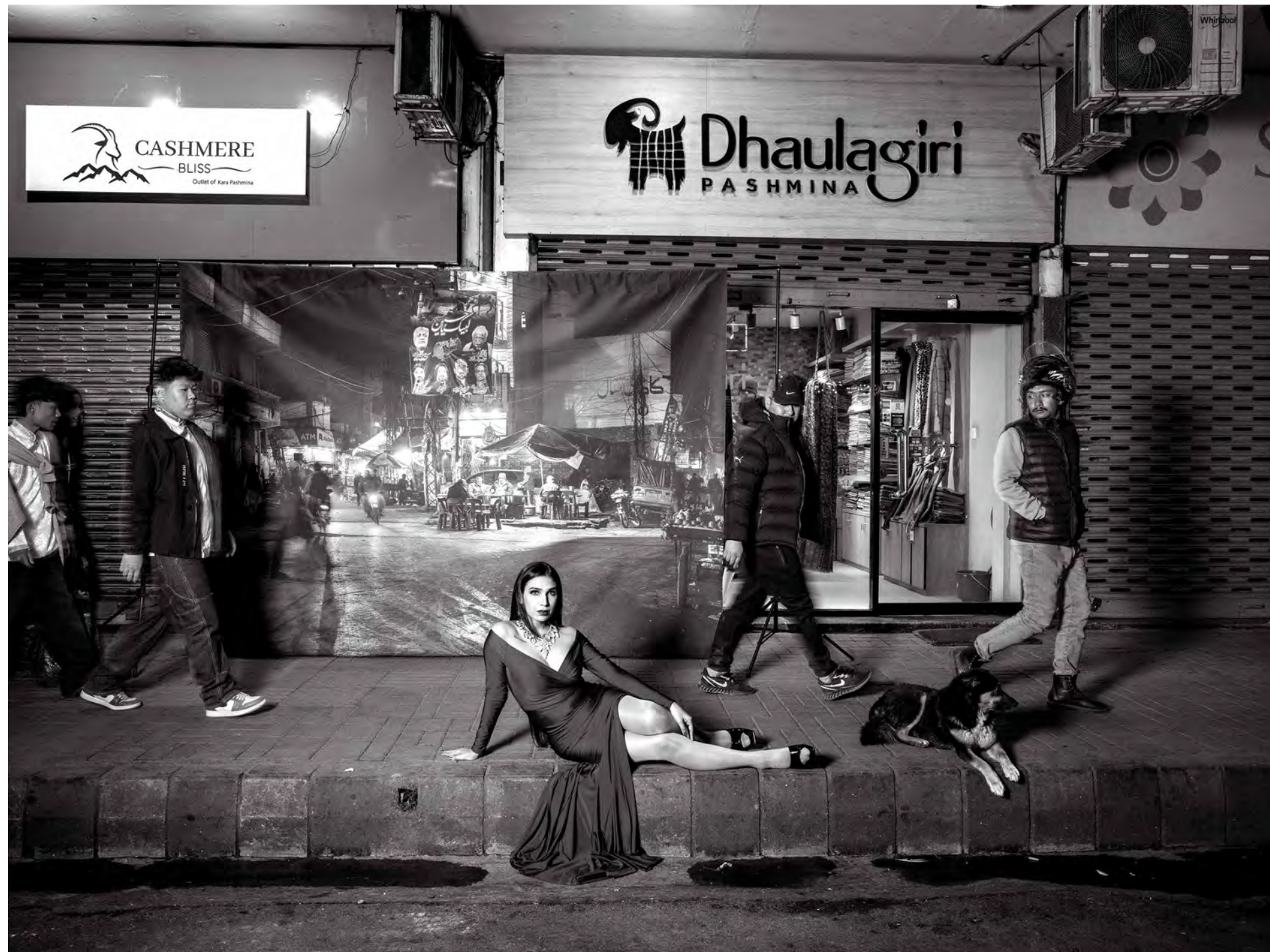
## The Gift of Knowledge

CREA was founded in 2000 to address gender and sexuality, reproductive health and rights, women's leadership capacities, gender-based violence and disability justice. Our vantage was rights-based, intersectional and Global South, our mission to change how people thought, which could change the way they act. One of the ways in which we did this work was to harness the power of narrative.

Over 25 years, CREA has become

well-known for its beautifully designed and carefully produced knowledge resources, ranging from concept papers that explore ideas and intersections, to toolkits and frameworks to strengthen feminist leadership, to articles, case-studies, podcasts and videos.

At the CREA@25 space, a publications display will showcase a selection of our popular titles. The primers *All About Power*, *All About Movements* and *Feminist Allyship*,



Sarah Gil, Pakistan

# Dissident Bodies

A highlight – and act of solidarity – was photographer Anita Khemka's 'Photo Studio', which ran for all three days of the summit. In her words, “My earlier documentation on sex workers was a response to seeing sex work as an exploitative industry. It looked at issues related to their health and physical safety, economic exploitation, and their living and working conditions. The consent was implicit and the intent was to give them dignity and avert voyeurism which was the dominant gaze at the time. With the Photo Studio, the approach towards making the

portrait is going to be collaborative. For each sitter, the intent will be to find strength, poise and aspiration in the ‘moment’ and see beyond their persona defined by sex work. The result will be a staged portrait with each individual directing their own performance.”

A few months later, scholar-filmmakers Sabeena Gadihoke (who had been in conversation with Khemka at a plenary at the sex workers' summit) and Shohini Ghosh initiated an ambitious project: creating a photobook. Khemka responded enthusiastically, first photographing sex workers in

Kolkata's Sonagachi during the Durga Puja festival in 2024 and later crisscrossing the South Asia region. Because of intractable border issues, Khemka made photographs of Pakistani sex workers in Sri Lanka. Graphic designer Sukanya Baskar then worked with Khemka, Gadihoke (who interviewed the photographer), Ghosh (who wrote the Introduction to the book) and CREA to create the beautiful photobook, *Liquid Borders. Dissident Bodies*, which will be formally launched during this conference.



Anita Khemka studied at Delhi University and at Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore, before beginning her photography practice in 1996. Her oeuvre has largely dealt with gender and sexuality. Her work on alternative sexuality was made into a German film, *Between the Lines: India's Third Gender*, in 2005. After a six-year hiatus, she began collaborating with her partner Imran Kokiloo in 2017, with a shared focus on Kashmir. Her work has been exhibited widely in Europe and she is represented by PHOTOINK, New Delhi. She is also the Head, Projects India at PhotoSouthAsia.

## The Kathmandu Declaration

This statement was issued by over 200 sex workers and allies from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who gathered for renew: South Asia Sex Workers' Summit from 29 to 31 May 2024 in Kathmandu, Nepal. This Declaration calls upon governments, multilateral agencies, the United Nations, civil society organisations, and law and policy makers to: COMMIT to advancing sex worker rights and respect the voices of

democratic and inclusive movements led by sex workers over the last 30 years across these countries. RECOGNISE sex workers' consistent, creative and sustainable contribution in reducing HIV, STIs and trafficking in South Asia. RECOGNISE that sex workers' rights are human rights. Sex workers at the summit asserted that what they need are rights and opportunities, not rehabilitation or rescue. Rescue and rehabilitation

are stigmatising and disrespectful because sex workers are not treated as having individual will or agency. Sex workers' rights should go beyond the right to access/receive services. They must include the right to practise their profession free from harassment and stigma. RECOGNISE sex work as work. We reject the consistent conflation of sex work with trafficking, and sex work with violence. RESPECT the dignity of labour and ensure safe working conditions for sex work. Sex work needs a space, a client, a third party and

the sex worker. All of these should be able to operate in safe and private spaces, online and offline. ENSURE that laws and policies reflect the lived experiences of sex workers, including decriminalisation of sex work. The laws on trafficking, vagrancy, loitering and others which are used by law enforcement to harass, intimidate and violate sex workers' human rights should be repealed. SECURE available, accessible, acceptable, and quality health services for all. Sex workers must have access to free health care services,

including access to safe abortion and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. ENSURE equality and non-discrimination for children of sex workers. Children of sex workers recognised the labour that their mothers put in to raise them and are proud of their contribution. COMMIT to active solidarity with sex worker movements. The summit recognised the extraordinary contribution of sex worker movements in realising civic rights and entitlements for sex workers and breaking systemic and structural barriers.





# They tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds

If you're on social media, you know this line. If you aren't on social media, you should know this line. And by the time you leave this conference, you will be intimately acquainted with the worlds of possibilities it invokes.

There are many origin stories. One is that it is a Mexican proverb, another that it was coined by the Zapatista movement, yet another that it was created at protest events in the US. All are apocryphal. The

line is in fact a paraphrase of a couplet from a poem.

In 1978, a Greek poet named Dinos Christianopoulos wrote: *what didn't you do to bury me / but you forgot that I was a seed*. The 'Poet of Thessaloniki' was ostracized, it is said, for being gay. His riposte was to write bitter poetry, and gain fame for a line that has entered the canon of resistance literature.

Meanwhile, in the CREA office, as plans for the conference were

being discussed, a tiny team wrestled with what the visual identity should be. Preeminent here were Geetanjali Misra, CREA's executive director, and Sherna Dastur, an independent designer and filmmaker who has been a long-time associate. CREA may be well-known for its cutting-edge politics, arresting campaigns and influential knowledge resources, but barely known is Dastur's crucial role in creating this body of work.

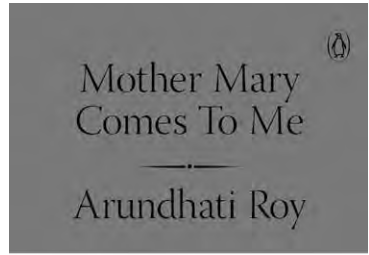
Here's our chance to correct this oversight. As we debated a seeming impossibility – creating a conference that didn't submit to the despair flooding the world – Dastur suggested that we work with this line. Hope flared before our eyes. Not merely for a relative triviality that is a conference's visual identity, but also for all those who had spent long years fighting for a more just world or those setting out to build one with fire in their bellies

and stars in their eyes. Defeat is not an option, we heard.

We then invited illustrators to give us their visual response to the line. We finally chose 22 artworks by 12 artists. These are the artists, from Kenya, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka: Aaliya Luthra, Alia Sinha, Alina Chhantel, Ayeshe' Sadr, Danushri Welikala, Lakheni, Manasvini Supraja, Nzilani Simu, Priyanka Kumar, Richene Singh, Shubha Joshi, and Siddhesh Gautam.

# The Storm-savaged Shelter

Arundhati Roy's newest book reminds us that writing and activism, the political and the private, systems and psyches, are not separate things



Mothers are people too. And sometimes, they're 'gangsters'.

Arundhati Roy, who has always written of power and powerlessness, love and lovelessness, through four decades of scalding non-fiction and two novels, has now brought that attention to her own author – the late Mary Roy.

She has described her memoir *Mother Mary Comes To Me* as "reportage of the heart". The story of Mary and Arundhati is not just "the very respectful relationship of two nuclear powers"; it is also about the struggles between love and domination, generosity and meanness, that run through hearts and societies.

Or so it was with hers. Escaping a violent father, Mary Roy then left a "nothing" marriage to make her own way in patriarchal Kerala. She fought her brother to win equal inheritance rights for Christian

women. And she was not above humiliating those she had intimate power over, including the two little children she "double-loved" and demolished at will.

On a rocky hill, Mary Roy set up a remarkable school, one that freed boys to be decent people and gave girls spine, as well as wings. But she left a teenaged Suzanna Arundhati no choice but to struggle away from her, to excise her first name and write herself into a new life.

Societies that devalue care and vulnerability have always held up mother-love as the one impossible, sustaining ideal. But mothers live in that same cruel world, and often bring all its ambivalence and anger into their mothering. Arundhati Roy's memoir attends to that complexity, without trying to resolve it.

*Mother Mary Comes to Me* also gives us an inside-out view of her own politics and writing. It's obvious that Roy's distance from phoney norms, her instinctive "underview" of the world, her undomesticated spirit and dark humor could only have sprung from the childhood and the mighty mother she had.

If a writer is someone on the side of "undeceiving the world", Roy is one of the few who has always been doing her job. After *The God of Small Things* became a phenomenon, Arundhati Roy refused to stay in the gilded cage of literary celebrity. She observed, learnt, wrote.

Through three decades, her essays have called out her country's swagger and its extractive visions of progress – nuclear bombs, dams, and repression. She has outlined the global architecture of tyranny,

post-9/11 America and its surveillance empire, Israel's genocide in Gaza. She has brought stories of survival, dignity and comradeship of those who resist.

Writing and activism, the political and the private, thinking and feeling, systems and psyches, are not separate things, she has always pointed out. From her earliest defence of Phoolan Devi, the caste-marginalized outlaw whose trauma was turned into cinematic spectacle without her consent – to *The God of Small Things*, a story about devastating social forces blowing through the lives of twin seven-year-olds – Roy is attuned to the frequencies that brute power silences. In the novel, their mother Ammu imagines her twins "lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs".

In *The God of Small Things*, patriarchy and caste bare their teeth and claws as Ammu transgresses the Love Laws by desiring a man from a subordinated caste. However, in response to this novel and later, her introduction to the *Annihilation of Caste*, by BR Ambedkar, some anti-caste critics reminded Roy of her own privileged vantage. While acknowledging their critique, she has pointed out that she writes not from authority, but engagement with things that matter to her and the society she lives in.

Roy never blunts the truth about injustice. Not for her the numbing third-person language of 'experts'. She tells the big stories and their minute effects. She implicates us, pulls us in.



She says the unsayable; about the left-wing insurgency in Central India that looks nothing like Gandhi's peaceful resistance, she asked: "Can the hungry go on a hunger strike? Non-violence is a piece of theatre. You need an audience. What can you do when you have no audience? People have the right to resist annihilation." And always keeping it real, she also points out that violent resistance harms women physically and psychologically.

Roy is loved and admired by

like-hearted people around the world, in India, the condescension of elites has turned to active demonization in the last decade. But she knows that in "other places – let's call them places off the highway", in villages under attack, on besieged campuses, her words are translated and read.

As she writes, "the place for literature is built by writers and readers. It's a fragile place in some ways, but an indestructible one. When it's broken, we rebuild it. Because we need shelter."

## Getting Serious about Care

Wellbeing and FHP need to be built into our feminist practice

Several sessions at the conference will offer space to explore the hitherto neglected but increasingly important aspects of our feminism. Collective care often remains at the level of abstract noun or idea and is too rarely built into 'serious' feminist practice. Here's a selection of three sessions that will offer participants the opportunity to rectify this.

Hope Chigudu is co-founder of the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network, HopeAfrica and Just Associates. Though listed as a workshop, her session titled 'Four Rooms and a Riot: Feminist Wellbeing as Political Practice' isn't one, she says. Read about what she'd rather describe it as: "This session is not a workshop. It's a riot.

A ritual. A reckoning. Guided by the metaphor of four rooms – each representing a dimension of our activist lives – move through spaces of comfort, disruption, reflection and collective fire. Expect embodied exercises, poetic provocations and mischievous magic as we reframe wellbeing not as self-care alone, but as a deeply political, feminist practice."

Short on time but still interested in understanding these ideas? Consider attending the lightning talk titled 'Reimagining feminist leadership development'. The speaker will be Eunice Musiime, an African feminist activist, leadership development builder, lawyer and Executive Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika.

CREA's partner in Mesoamerica, IM-Defensoras, has been working extensively on Feminist Holistic Protection (FHP), which they define as the pact of caring among

ourselves as women defenders against all forms of violence that affect us. Excellent reason to make it a point to attend a teach-in by Jelena Dordevic, co-coordinator of the Regional Self-Care, Collective Care and Healing Strategy of IM-Defensoras in Mexico. Her teach-in is titled 'Sustaining Our Lives and Our Movements: Experiences of Protection and Care from Mesoamerica'. In times of multiple crises, shrinking civic space, deepening authoritarianism and advance of the extreme right, women and LBQT+ defenders and their organizations are committed to developing their own strategies to protect their lives and struggles.

Dordevic will explore cases of responses grounded in feminist holistic protection and collective care for human rights defenders and their collectives in countries facing very high levels of risk and of violence.

### SIMPLY RESIST

There's more to Gaza than the horrific headlines, asserts a museum with a difference

Some stories cannot be made to disappear, no matter how violently the world tries to silence them. The story of Palestine is one such. Even under siege, it holds centuries of memory and culture that continue to make themselves visible despite attempts at erasure. The Palestinian Museum refuses to reduce Gaza to a single storyline of brutal expansionist violence. Instead, it lets the story travel through its ready-to-download exhibition, *Gaza Remains the Story*, open-sourcing this material for anyone willing to engage with it. Parts of the exhibition are on view at the conference.

*Gaza Remains the Story* is not a traditional exhibition. It is

designed to be hosted anywhere in the world, and its simplicity becomes its resistance. In a world of voyeuristic headlines and dehumanizing numbers, where Palestine is routinely misrepresented, the Museum counters with radical accessibility.

The exhibition spans wide themes. It situates Gaza within Palestinian history, highlights art and culture, and traces global solidarity movements from the 1920s to BDS today. It offers glimpses of Palestine before borders and the political ruptures that reshaped it. The section on Wars on Gaza includes testimonies from children, women, and men, stories from a city transformed by siege.

By open-sourcing this material, the Palestinian Museum offers a form of resistance based not on scarcity but on multiplication, ensuring that *Gaza Remains the Story*.



Aaliya Luthra · Aapurv Jain · Aaron Moises Bonete · Aarthi Pai · Abdul Mufeez Shaheed · Abdullah Anbar Anan Titir · Aditi Gogia · Afsana · Agatta Wanjiru · Aindriya Barua · Aishwarya Rajeev · Ajanee Pratheepan · Akhtari Begam · Akriti Bharti · Akshay Sakat · Akshay Sandeep Jadhav · Albright Alitsi · Alex Nelson · Aleyamma Mathew · Alice M. Miller · Alice Bordaçarre · Alison Eskesen · Alka Kumari Sinha · Alok Vaid-Menon · Alyaa Sirelkhatim Hassan Musa · Amanda Jane Clarke · Amaresh Gopalakrishnan · Amisha Kumari · Amit Saxena · Amith M Nayak · Amuda Meena Vasant · Amulya Gopalakrishnan · Amen Shah · Ana Calderón Salazar · Anamika Bhattarai · Ananya Patel · Andita Rao · Andrea Cornwall · Angela Sivathilothamai Forman · Anil Kumar Dhingra · Anim Dahal · Anisha BK · Anita Thapa · Anita Khemka · Anita Neupane Thapalia · Anja Kovacs · Anjaly S. Kumar Antonella Rizk · Anu Verma · Anugya Kunwar · Anuj Chopra · Anupama Chib Mallik · Anuradha Chatterji · Apoorva Aggarwal · Archana Dwivedi Archismita Choudhury · Arkina Singh · Arindam Datta · Arundhati Roy · Aseem Chhabra · Asha Basnyat · AshilaDandeniya · Ashmita Dhungana Ashrafun Nahar · Asma Khan · Asmita Basu · Asmita Nepali · Astherielribagiza · Audrey Mugeni · Ayesha Bashir · Ayesha Khaliq · Azadeh Akhlaghi Baaraan Ijlal · Babita Sinha · Babita Devi Khoisnam · Bandana Danuwar · Bandana Makhal · Bandana Sharma · Barnali Chakroborty · Beryl Opiyo Betty Sharon · Bhagawati Shrestha · Bharati Chaturvedi · BinduSingh · Binu Lama · Bishakha Laskar · Bishakha Datta · Blas Radi · Buyung Tanjung Camilla Daniele · Carla Akil · Carol Abi Ghanem · Carolina Manrique · Cassie Denbow · Catherine Silwatso · Cathleen Caga-anan · Cecilia Sotres Castillo · CesMillado · Charu Narang · Chiara Santoro · Chiara Passuello · Chithira Vijayakumar · Choosri Olakig (pe Prung) · Chris Chan · Chris Choueiri · Christina Dhanuja · Claudia Marcelo Arellano Larragoiti · Coco/AkekrinKerdsoong · Connie Nawaigo · Darcelle Lewis · Debasmita Ghosh Deepa Devi · Deepali Patairiya · Dennis van Wanrooij · Devashri Mukherjee · Devvratī · Deya Bhattacharya · Diksha Dubey · Dipa Nag Chowdhury Dipika Lama · Dipta Bhog · Ditilekha Sharma · Divina Lama · Doha Faraj · Easter Oketch · Eh Poe · Elawati KC · Erica Adhikary · Estefanía Vela Barba Ester Pinheiro · Eunice Musiime · Ezrena Marwan · Farida Begum · Farida Parvin · Fatana Kamal · Fatima Ismail Adam Abake · Fatma Mohaned Mokhtar Husain · Francesca de'Medici · Fizza Juddy · Gauri Nepali · Geetanjali Misra · Gema Hierro Lage · Grace Aumua · Grace Lucy Muma · Grace Moraa Areba · Habibullah Khan · Harjyot Khosa · Harmeet Singh Sidana · Harriet Alice Beavis · Harsh Mandlik · Hashem Hashem · Haseena Khan Hazra Kausar · Hajara Namutemba · Hiker Chiu · Hilal Tekmen · Himalika Mohanty · Ho Chi Minh · Hope Chigudu · Hridi Chisim Leya · Ika Ayu Kristianingrum · Imran Alam · InamahoroAisline · Anmol Rai · Priya Bartaula · Sanjiya Shrestha · Ireen Dubel · Iris Derbsch · Isabella Oh · Isha Shrestha · Ivens Reis Reyner · Issa Bisharah Suleiman Rabadi · Jackson Chekweko · Jaisy George · Jannat Fatima Farooqui · Jasmine Lovely George Javid Syed · Jay Abang · Jaya Sharma · Jayanthi Pushkaran · Jean Chong · Jelena Dordevic · Jewel Antoine-Burkett · Joana Varon · Joe Sacco Jonathan Gil Harris · Juliana Martinez · Juliet Kushaba · Jyoti Kainthola · Jyoti Mahalder · Jyoti Rana Magar · K Nandhnee · KalabiMeetei · Kalpana Chaudhari · Kalpana Khare · Kami Choudhry · Kanchan Pamnani · Karan Kumar Patel · Karanja Ng'endo · Karen D'Mello · Karishma Desai · Kashya Nouman · Katha Ray · Katiya Sakala · Kattyayani Kavitha Devadas · Kent Buse · Kgomotso Kgasi Kumari · Kiran Sardar · Km Smriti · Kopal Goel Laura V · Laura Laborra Velilla · Lavanya Snigdha Lewis Frost · Lilian Ajuang' · Lilian Ariri · Lilian Daniela Marin Platero · Lukas Das · Lydia Alpizar Madhavi Menon · Madhuri Adwani · Mahak Mahima Semwal · Mahy Hassaan · Maliha Khan Manavi Kapur · Mandy Chng · Manisha Biswas Bhattacharjya · Manju Yadav · Marevic Bing H Bennett Mullinax · Maria Melinda Ando · Maria Ni Martin Mugarra · Martina Mok · Martan Kaushik Hasan · Md Ahsan Fosiul · Md Sajib Mia · Meena Mazgaonkar · Misha Narang · Mohammed Suhail Moonis Ijlal · Monisha Choudhary · Most Israt Munni Kumari · Muskan Bhatia · Nadia Nowsher Najia Nuray Jarin · Namita Aavriti · Namita Assi Jaishankar · Nandini Oza · Nandita Shah · Nangsel Navoda Bennett Rathnayaka · Nayantara Patel Nawara Belal · Neel Soni · Neelam Patel · Nilam Mushtaq · Nidhi Arya · Nidhi Goyal · Niluka Gunawardena · Nirmala Gurung · Nirvana Bhandary · Nisha Rani · Nishant Shah · Nithila Kanagasabai Nityanand Bhatt · Niyati Shah · Njambi Wagacha · Noorzannat Husna · Nora Isabel Huerta Guajardo · Nu Misra · Nupur Goswami · Nur Jahan · Nusrat Jaha · Nuva Rai · Omar Mohammed Pabitra Thapa Magar · Padma Natarajan Pankaj Kumar · Partha Sarathi Satpathy · Passita Gonzales · Patience Iribagiza · Peninah Mwangi · Phoebe De Padua · Phylis Mbeke · Pooja Kagada Poornam Muttreja · Poornima Sukumar · Prachi Arora · Prachi Patankar Pradeep Barman · Pranom Somwong (Bee) · Prathama Raghavan · Pratima Puring · Preet Shah · Priya Das · Priya Nanda · Priyanka Samy · Pujanee Janega Galappaththi Guruge · Pushpa Joshi · Pukar Bista · Quimy de Leon · Rachita Sai Barak · Radhika Saxena · Rafiul Alam · Rainbow Kistiyaniti Raji Manjari · Rajina Shreshtha · Rama Vedula · RambishnuSasmal · Ramya Anand · Ratripuspita Noor Jasmina · Ravi Kumar Verma · Reakshar Chhorn · Reema Kumari · Remie Abi-Farrage Renu Addlakha · Renu Arya · Renu Sijapati · Renuka Rameshan · Revita Alvi · Rimjhim Jain · Rishika Kaushik · Rita Barotta · Rizalina Amesola · Robert Hamblin · Roma Kumari Mahato · Roman Gautam · Rosalia Sciortino · Rosana Miranda · Roshana Pradhan · Rozy Pun · Ruben Brouwer · Ruby Loretta · Rupsa Mallik · Sabeena Gadihoke · Sabika Abbas · Sabitri BK · Sadhana Shrestha · Sagri Singh Sahil Tandon · Sakina Bahora · Samantha Ainembabazi · Samina Yasmin · Samira Rupa · Samit Das · Samreen Khan · Sandali Thakur · Sanjida Jahan Habiba · Sanjog Thakuri · Santosh Kumar Giri · Sapna Maharjan · Sara Martinez · Sara Hossain · Sarah Crane · Sarah Hawkes · Sari Kamiyama Sarita KC · Sarita Thakuri · Saro Imran · Saru · Sashwati Banerjee · Satya Ramanayaka · Satyaprakash Bunkar · Saumya Bahuguna · Sealing Cheng Sergina Loncle · Shabnam Virmani · Shahid Pervez · Shale Ahmed · Shalini Singh · Shalini Kumari Singh Deo · Shalini Kapur · Shambhawi Paudel Shamim Salim · Shampa Sengupta · Shanti Tiwari · Sharmila Sriram Bhushan · Sheena Gimase Magenya · Sheikh Zubaer · Shelani Palihawadana Shirisha Yeotikar · Shirmin Akther Dolon · Shiva Santanam Swaminadhan · Shohini Ghosh · Shradha Shreejaya · Shreeparna Mitra · Shreosi Ray Shreyasi Pathak · Shruti Sardar · Shuvangi Khadka · Shweta Dhakal · Shyam Baliram Pujari · Sia Nowrojee · Siddhant Shah · Sikandar Khan · Sipee Kaphle · Smita MuruganandamVanniyar · Sneha Shrestha · Snehal Velkar · Solome Nakaweesi · Sona Khatik · Sonaksha Iyengar · Sonam · Soudeh Rad · Srijana Adhikari · Sriлата Batliwala · Srinidhi Raghavan · S Sanjay Rana · Stefania Aldini · Stu Dam · Sudeep Chaudhuri · Sulochana Peiris Sunita Kujur · Surbhi Saxena · Surbhi Taneja · Sushma Devi · Sushma Luthra · Swetha Uthayasuriyan · Syed Mohiuddin Daanish · Syeda Fasiha Naqvi Sylvester Merchant · Tala Abdul Ghani · Taruna Pal · Teresa Alarcón Rodríguez · Testia Fajar Fitriyanti · TheivanaiMaruthai · Tigist Hussen · Tilyan Aslam · To Tsui Ying · Tooba Syed · Trinley Athup · Tullika Srivastava · Unni Karunakara · Uzma Kazi · Vaishali Soni · Valleri Sharma · Vani Viswanathan Vanita Mukherjee · Victoria Page · Vikram Ramesh Shinde · Viviane Cruz · Vrunda Raval · Wanda Nowicka · Wong Yuk Ying · Yamini Perera · Yamini Mishra · Yasemin Bahar · Yashas Chandra · yasmineeid-sabbagh · Yogesh Vaishnav · Zara Rahman · Zeba Shahabuddin Kazi · Zeinabou Dioum Ziayan Javed Ahmed · Zoey Black · Zoya Sahira Misra · Zulaikha Shihab

# Coming together to rebuild feminist futures



From *By an Eye-Witness*

# BETWEEN HISTORY and memory

What is the connection between what is seen and what is believed, asks Azadeh Akhlaghi through her cinematic photographs

Azadeh Akhlaghi's conceptual photography bears ethical witness to unseen events that have smoldered in her nation's memory. Her large-scale tableaus recreate moments of rupture in Iran's past, from the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 to the 1979 Islamic Revolution. By reconstructing the 'disappearances' of revolutionaries and challengers, her work remembers what history has dismembered. In her latest work, *Witness: A Nation's Scars of Time*, past and present collide, evoking shock and recognition.

In 2009, ahead of Iran's elections, student protestor Neda Agha-Soltan was shot dead by security forces. Mobile phone images of the killing made it one of the most widely seen deaths in history. That event kindled Akhlaghi's political and artistic imagination: "I started thinking about others who had died in tragic ways, but whose deaths had not been recorded because there was no camera present."

Her famous *By an Eye-Witness* series recreated the 'mysterious deaths' of 17 figures — poets, activists, politicians, journalists, filmmakers, between 1906 and 1979. She makes these deaths come alive in terrible, unsettling detail. These key events shaped Iran's fate, but they happened off-stage, unseen by the world. They are a 'visual void' in collective memory. Akhlaghi's images stage these moments of personal and political trauma. They are scenes of violence, but suffused with human vulnerability, with dust, blood, frightened onlookers.

Her work combines recreated events with archival photographs, documents and witness interviews. The scale is monumental, with 500-600 figures in each image. They are not just about the public figures in the foreground, but also anonymous others who sacrificed their lives in the hope of a better future.

Unlike photographers who aim to catch life on the wing, in

a spontaneous instant where a scene condenses and composes itself, Akhlaghi works in a tradition more akin to art and cinema. Like Jeff Walls and Gregroy Crewdson, she constructs her own large-scale works, relying on staging, lighting and theatre techniques.

Akhlaghi grew up in Mashhad, Iran. She graduated from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, with a degree in computer science. However, her abiding interest has been art and photography. Returning to Iran, she worked as assistant director with the acclaimed filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami between 2005 and 2008. She also made several short films that were screened at global film festivals. In 2009 she moved to staged photography. As

she put it, "The most important lesson I learnt from Abbas Kiarostami was that you can never capture the truth because you can never know what really happened. As soon as you turn on the camera there is no truth anymore."

These hyper-realistic images are not aiming to present the exact truth. They are reconstructions based on imperfect testimonies and flawed memories. Akhlaghi inserts herself as the figure behind the camera, to point to the artifice. In art historian Christopher Pinney's words, "she deploys photography to illuminate key questions concerning national and personal histories, visual memory and evidence, and ultimately the manner in which humans construct their

histories." And yet, the photographs are 'true lies', because the murders are all too real, of people who fought for Iran's freedom, whose death marked a turn in its fate. "They emerged, as it were, from the ruins of history. Even though they died many years ago, their souls took part in the movement: you could feel their presence out on the streets of Tehran," said Akhlaghi about the 2009 uprising.

This is photography of remembrance and resistance. Akhlaghi speaks of the "often unspoken sorrow" around these deaths that connects generations of Iranians, and how she means "to make them as vivid as possible, to bring them into the present and turn them into an integral part of our lives today".

## Spring Flowers



In *Symbols of Presence*, Ta Mwe follows young people who took part in Myanmar's Spring Revolution, where dissent carries real personal risk. The series focuses on how these youths use their bodies to hold their stories, letting tattoos express what they cannot always say aloud. Some have faced punishment for these marks, yet they continue to carry them as quiet affirmations of conviction and identity.

Burmese photojournalist Ta Mwe creates a document of a new generation that resists despite the risks

Ta Mwe conceals each subject's face with flowers, a choice that protects them while shifting the focus to their defiance. The coverings safeguard their identities yet still make visible a generation that persists, even when the cost of being seen is high.

Ta Mwe is a Burmese photojournalist and documentary photographer. The name is an alias used for the photographer's safety.



## IN THE LINE OF FIRE

A page from *The Once and Future Riot*

"I'm doing the work I need to do to live with myself," says Joe Sacco, who virtually invented the genre of graphic journalism

Comics are a supple medium; they combine the interiority of a novel, the concreteness of journalism and storytelling punch of cinema. Joe Sacco's journalism focuses on conflict, human rights and political and social marginalization — focusing on humans with hearts and bodies in these large-scale disasters.

His breakthrough book *Palestine*, in 1996, was based on travels through Gaza and the West Bank.

Media reportage of the Middle East angered Sacco, and revealed the hollowness of 'both sides' journalism: "it's like watching a tennis game, where the ball is being hit back and forth by this spokesman to that spokesman...Clearly the Israeli point of view is very well represented, and the Palestinian point of view is not." Giving both sides equal weight in the name of objectivity was being unfair to the

more truthful side, he has said.

Sacco's parents are Maltese, and their memories of Nazi bombings during WW2 had seeped into his imagination. Conflict reportage, on television or newspapers, is abstract — or deliberately abstracted. It is in the realm of facts. By putting faces and names, people's presence and memories, into these events, Sacco changes the nature of the news, and its

emotional weight. Even in scenes of group violence or displacement, each person is individuated.

Sacco has worked extensively on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Bosnian war. *Safe Area Gorazde* was focused on the Muslim enclave of Gorazde, where he interviewed survivors of the Bosnian War. He has reported on torture and the Iraq invasion, on Syrian refugees. He has also trained his eye on capitalism, inequality, immigration, the afterlife of colonialism and the disfiguring of democracy. "A lot of subjects interest me, but I always look for those that hit me in the gut," he has said.

In a conflict, he pays attention to situations and to moral ambiguities, to the way people present their own narratives, deliberately forget some things and focus on others. There are also stories of ordinary desires: in *Safe Area Gorazde*, a young woman asks him to get her the latest jeans, for instance. Or in Gaza, the pleasure of good coffee, or watching trashy action movies.

His early books are ground reports, his later work more contemplative. "I've picked the stories I wanted to tell, and by those selections my own sympathies should be clear. I chiefly concern myself with those who seldom get a hearing, and I don't feel it is incumbent on me to balance their voices with the well-crafted apologies of the powerful." A Sacco signature is to insert himself into the scenes he draws, to situate himself as a human with a point of view rather than pretend to be a transparent truth-teller.

He is a permanent resident of the US, pays taxes there and feels morally implicated in its actions. He has recently turned to the question of democracy, as so many countries like the US and India are drifting into autocracy. For example, his new book *The Once and Future Riot* is a story of Hindu-Muslim violence that had broken out in Muzaffarnagar, India in 2013. It's about the stories and justifications people spin around their actions, and how electoral politics can make strategic use of fear and violence, scapegoat some groups.

Democracies are self-evidently not more moral. So how can its promise be salvaged? Sacco's response: "What's ended is the fiction that we live in a world of human progress and greater enlightenment. I get the feeling now that all bets are off. The old rules are gone. What are the new ones?"

## Jeem e.V.

A collective that brings daring comics primarily to Arabic readers

Jeem brings two multimedia stories: *'The Climate is Changing, Will I Face a Natural Disaster* and *Laila Soueif*. In the first, artist Haya Halaw traces her path from Syria to Jordan and later to Germany. In Hamburg, she reflects on how climate and gender shape each other in everyday ways. Halaw places her story alongside the realities of women and girls in refugee camps, where storms

and heatwaves make precarious conditions dangerous. Contrasting the warmth of her childhood in her mother's village and her life in Hamburg, Halaw points to how unevenly climate change is felt. She asks: In such a world, who gets to feel safe and who does not?

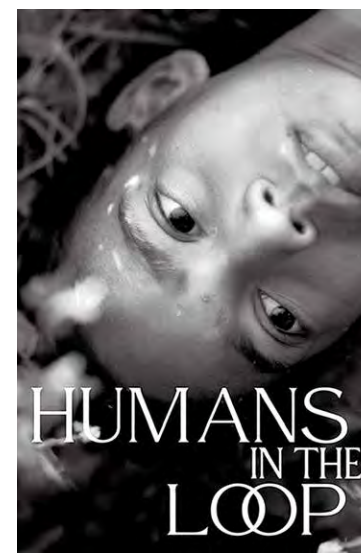
In *Laila Soueif*, Salma El Tarzi traces the life of Egyptian mathematician Laila Soueif, mother of imprisoned activist Alaa Abdel Fattah. Addressed to a child, Lana, the story introduces Laila not as a political figure but as the grandmother who blows soap bubbles with her. Lana learns of Laila's commitment to education, her activism, and her love of loving.



## FILMS THAT TAKE ON TECHNOLOGY

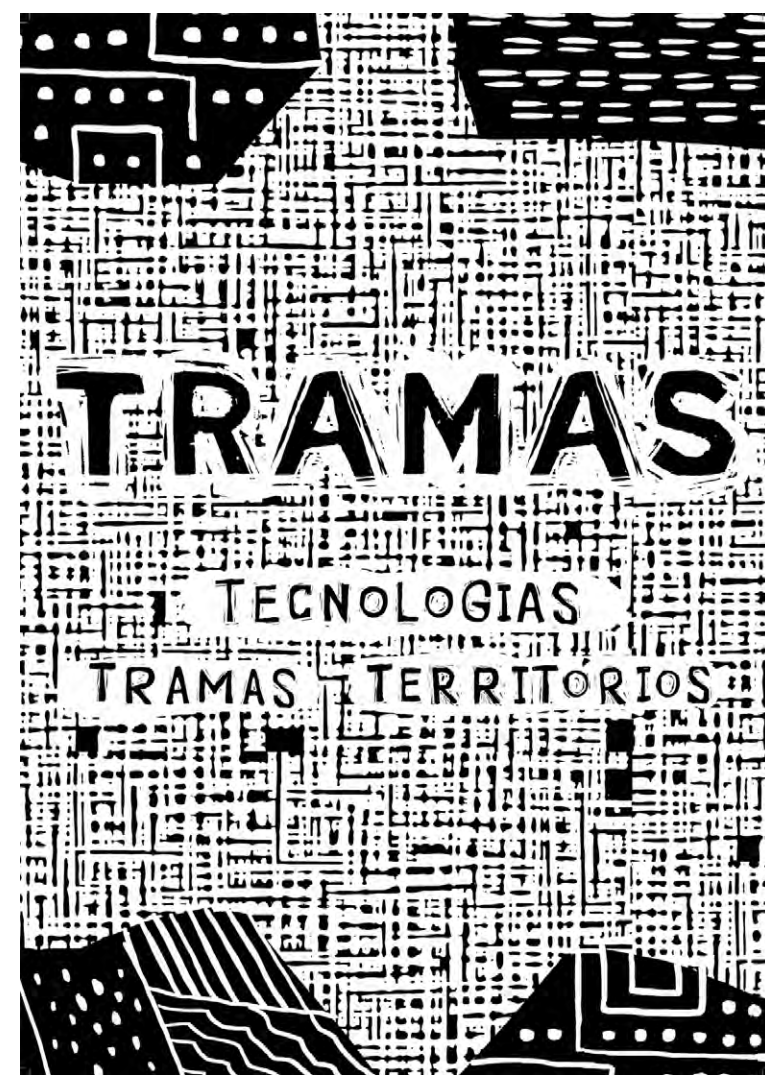
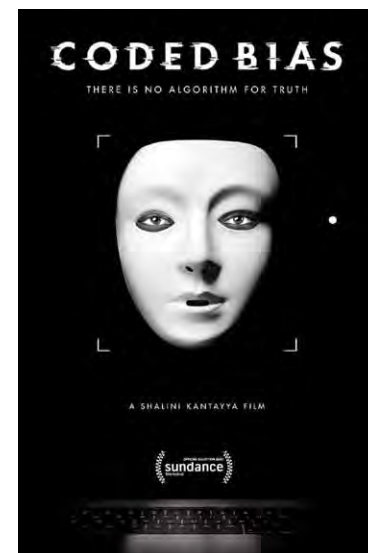
*Humans in the Loop* (Aranya Sahay): After enduring years of taunts that echoed deep-rooted biases against her community, Nehma returns to her village. To support her family, she works as a data labeler. She begins to uncover the human biases embedded in AI systems, leading her to ask whether tech can ever reflect an Indigenous worldview.

*Coded Bias* (Shalini Kantayya): As AI touches our daily lives, it is crucial to address its potential harms. This award-winning documentary sheds light on critical flaws in AI systems that threaten democracy and our rights, telling of Dr Joy Buolamwini, who uncovered biases in systems while at MIT and then founded the Algorithmic Justice League to combat AI-related harm.

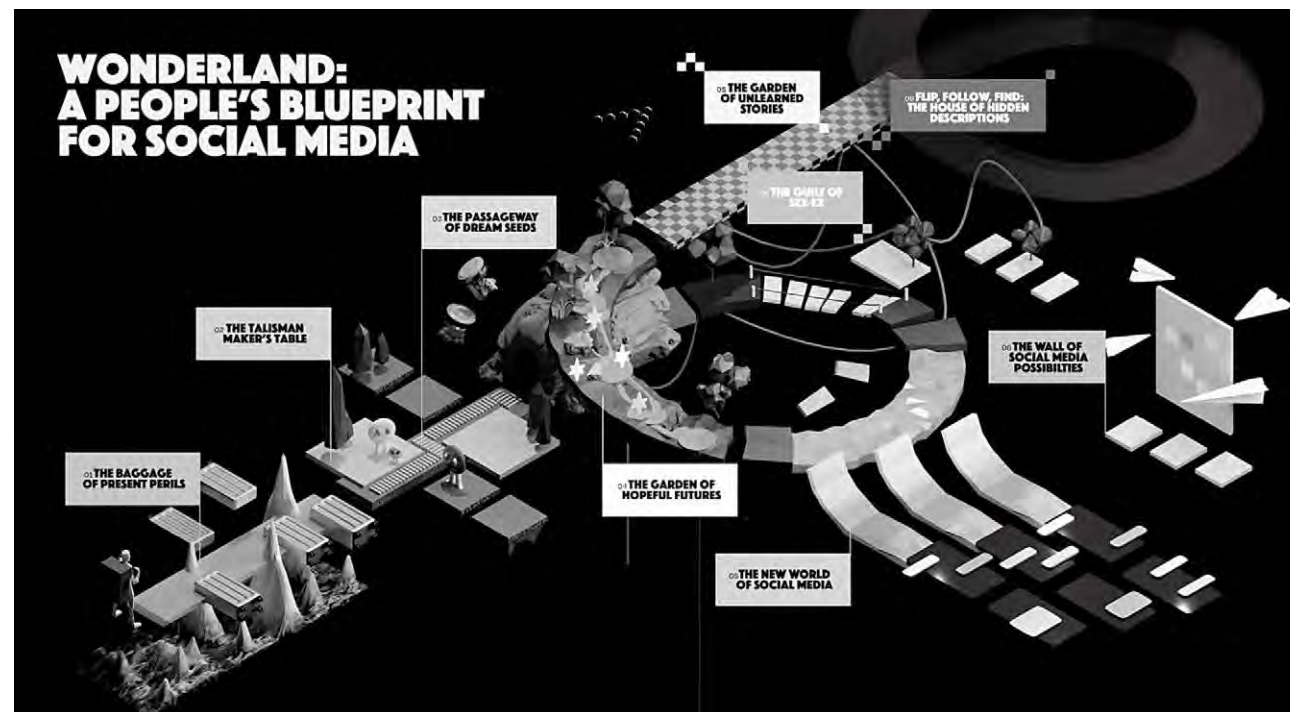


## TRAMAS - TECNOLOGIA TRAMAS TERRITORIOS

An action-research project by the Decolonial Feminist Coalition for Digital and Environmental Justice and co-created by Joana Varon, a Brazilian-Colombian researcher, founding director at Coding Rights. Through testimonies of resistance in various Latin American countries, the project seeks to unravel the complexity of contemporary processes of digital extractivism and thus show how the production chain of digital technologies generates multidimensional impacts on communities and territories. The project's outcomes include a dedicated website (tramas.digital) and various publications and toolkits that aim to translate imaginative exercises into tangible actions for social change.



## TECH and its TENTACLES



## WONDERLAND AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

We are in the midst of a giant technological shift, whose contours are only partly visible. From the era of 'surveillance capitalism', we are now moving to one of 'techno-feudalism', where Big Tech's power is structurally confronting our societies, worlds and democracies. The challenge for feminists is clear: It's time to rethink our relationships with digital technology. It's time to demand much more accountability from digital platforms. The technology space showcases artists' expressions of technology's entanglement in our social lives and physical environments. It also includes *Wonderland: A People's Blueprint for Social Media*, which invites visitors to shift the narrative

around social media, center lived experiences, explore co-creation as a political act and transform abstract demands to tangible solutions, with activities and displays curated by Point of View.

Activities include 'One Thing You Could Leave Behind: Rethinking Social Media', 'Talismans For a Better Internet: Reworking Digital Spaces', 'Dream Seeds: Reclaiming Digital Platforms', and 'The Social Media of Impossible Things: Reclaiming Digital Futures'. Activities around Recon themes include 'Flip, Follow, Find: Rethinking Disability Justice' and 'Swipe Right / Swipe Left: Reclaiming Sexual Expression on the Internet', where from safer sexting tools to how platforms police desire, collective opinions will be instantly visible, turning individual experiences into a shared snapshot.

## GENERATIVE AI

Dr Nishant Shah is Professor of Global Media & Culture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and directs the Digital Narratives Studio and Masters in Global Communication. He is also a knowledge partner to feminist digital justice networks. Shah, who recently concluded anchoring CREA's pilot Institute on 'Possible AIs'. At the conference, Shah will deliver a teach-in, titled 'The Unbearable Oldness of Generative AI: Power, Habit and the Making of Meaning'. With Generative AI reshaping our worlds in ways we feel before we fully understand, this session explores how AI disrupts habits, restructures meaning and alters the conditions under which voices, bodies and narratives become legible. The session will examine the deeper transitions unfolding as AI enters our everyday lives and ask how these shifts reconfigure agency, recognition and belonging — and what forms of resistance, care and imagination feminists can bring to this unsettled technological moment.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Seeing gender-based violence as a systemic violation of human rights, not individual, private suffering.

## LIGHTNING TALK

Grace Areba's 'When the Silence Speaks' explores the experiences of Deaf women navigating gender-based violence based on her work in Deaf-led interactive theatre in Kenya.

## INSTALLATION

*Negotiations* by Mia Jose dissects the power of physical spaces like family homes and public transport to box queer bodies into the palatable. While using the lens of a transfeminine person, it also forces the audience, both cis and trans, to question the conditioned policing they do of themselves. Having different points of entry like illustrations, comics and dioramas, this work believes that trans bodies can only be free once cis bodies stop policing themselves.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

*The Revolution Had Faces*, curated by Ho Chi Minh Islam with photographs by Md. Sajib Mia, documents a defining moment in Bangladesh when transgender, hijra, intersex, non-binary and queer activists took to the streets during political and religious upheaval. The exhibition frames protesting bodies as sites where structural violence and collective courage meet.

## FILM

The Women's Storytelling Project for Sudan brings together shorts created by young Sudanese women in Sudan and in a refugee camp in Uganda. Their films speak to the entanglement of displacement, war and gender-based violence, and the fight for marriage and divorce rights amid the crisis.

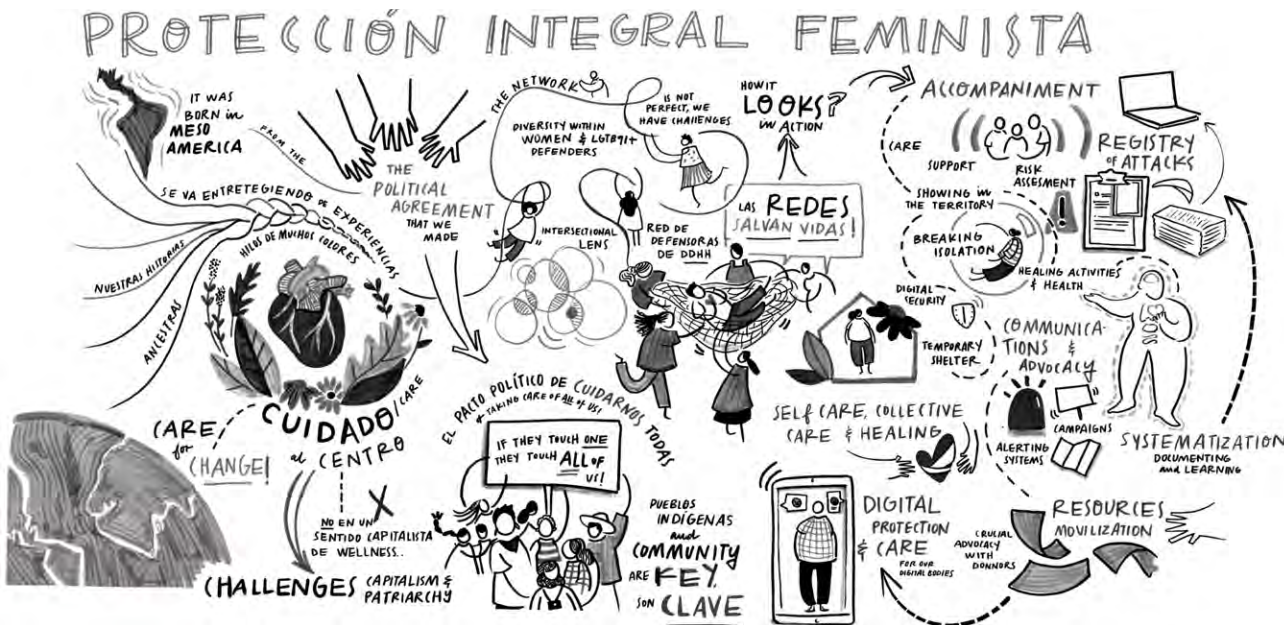
*After the World Ends... It Begins Again* follows three generations of Kheria Sabar women in West Bengal, shifting the focus from the widely documented violence against Sabar men to the wounds borne by women whose lives are shaped by ecological loss, state neglect and generational marginalization.







# The heart of



It's been annus horribilis for very many reasons for much of the world. And as the shape and scale of the year's enormities swam into focus, so did the need for a global gathering like RECONFERENCE. The imperative to think, review, reimagine and care collectively now finds expansive creative expression in our curated space.



Top, from left: An Aurat March poster; artwork by Laura V; a poster from #WomenLifeFreedom protests. Centre: Feminist Holistic Protection: A Graphic Display. Above, from left: Art by Ester Pinheiro and Luciana Mendes; and a work by Apnavi Makanji



# RECONFERENCE

This space sits at the heart of the conference, literally and in many ways metaphorically. It's a space that bring together the work of artists, activists, organizations and collectives from across the world and puts on display their responses to the urgencies, imaginations, contradictions and hopes that shape our shared present. We have designed this collection of art, installations, activities and exhibits to serve as a creative extension of the conversations unfolding around us at RECON.

The curated space also speaks to the long-standing role of creative expression in practices of resistance and collective action. Art has

the power to illuminate structural injustices, hold space for grief and solidarity, and build bridges across movements and communities. Here, artists show how creative practice becomes not just a form of reflection but an active tool for social impact – shaping narratives, shifting perception and imagining just futures.

Social change is vitally linked to the sensory, emotional and imaginative capacities as much as to intellectual understanding. Earlier in the year, CREA had put out an open call inviting artists and activists to submit their creative and critical work. Artists from around the world were selected and given

scholarships to attend RECONFERENCE; please delight in their work that is featured in this space.

In the Forms of Resistance section, our exhibit brings together resistance movements, campaigns and uprisings across different times and geographies to explore how people have continually organized, resisted and reimagined power. Through the display of posters, video loops, photography and artwork, this multi-media exhibit documents and captures the expressions and aesthetics of collective defiance against gender-based violence, control over sexuality and sexual and reproductive autonomy, ableism, authoritarianism, climate



Top, from left: Work by Aravani Art Society; a photograph by Md. Sajib Mia; and Negotiations by Mia Jose. Above, from left: A photograph by Mahmud Rahman; and works from Resting Museum



25 YEARS!

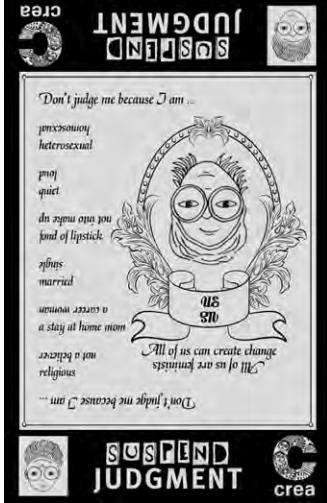
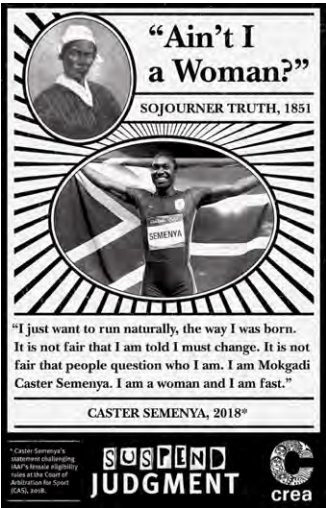
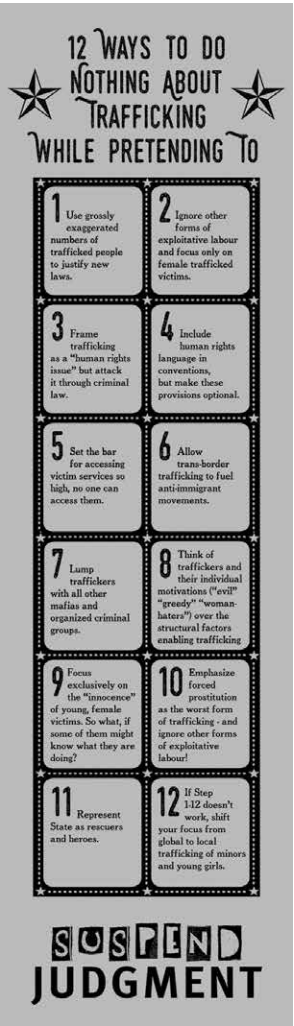
A quarter-century of work needs some spread. Visit our dedicated space to join our sessions, take in our installations, leaf through our publications. Thank you for celebrating with us.

At the CREA@25 space, we revisit our past work to rethink conversations and ideas, rework past approaches, and reclaim spaces and narratives to forge new pathways for the future. We have a range of installations, activities and knowledge resources in the space. After all, 25 years of work needs some spread – and celebration.

Here’s a summary of what’s in store in this dedicated space. We will launch two publications with pride: *Feminist Fables* by Srilatha Batliwala and *Liquid Borders. Dissident Bodies*, a photobook by Anita Khemka. Launched in 2019, *The Nairobi Principles* was a ground-breaking document that sought to foster cross-movement alignment between disability rights, reproductive rights and women’s rights movements. Over 25 years, we have organized, facilitated or been a part of important convenings all over the world, at different scales and with various partners over – revisit the ideas that emerged from those gatherings at our installation. Another installation tells of our Institutes; ever since the first Sexuality, Gender and Rights Institute broke new ground in 2007, our Institutes have ventured into newer and newer areas, including Disability and Sexuality, and most recently, Technology.

Believing in the power of compelling narrative to change hearts and minds has also been core to our work. From that belief followed innovative campaigns, publications and knowledge resources. Our Suspend Judgment installation, written with cheek and sass, will engage in serious business: spurring the visitor to rethink ideas of justice and reflect critically on deeply rooted assumptions that hinder inclusivity. At the L for Love photobooth, a recreated version of a popular 2024 CREA campaign, explore love in your own language – and walk away with your photograph. (Our serious work is fun too!) Installations on Consent draw on our writing and expert insights to explore complex conversations. For those who missed Recon 2019, the illustrated panels titled ‘Reflections on an Abled Norm’ ask: What if the society we live in is based on Disability as the universal norm? What if those who claim to be Abled had to respond to biases that the Disabled norm creates towards them?

We also go literal when harnessing narrative. Leaf through a sampling of works from the Storytelling Initiative, which attempted to draw out untold stories of structurally excluded groups. An article in the *New York Times*, ‘Disability, Sexuality and Consent: How Activists are Reshaping the Narrative’ opened windows into lives unseen in an ableist world. And last but not least, our past publications and knowledge resources will be on display – come take a look, we’re known for them. You may even get to take away some.



A selection of visuals from 25 years of campaigns: A painting by Kim Kaul commissioned for the article ‘Disability, Sexuality and Consent: How Activists Are Shaping the Narrative’, published in the *New York Times* (top); the graphic from the ‘L for Love’ photobooth, set up at the Sanatkada Festival 2024 in Lucknow, India; and a selection flyers from our ever-popular ‘Suspend Judgment’ campaign