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ISSUE IN FOCUS

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RECONFERENCE DAILY, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

reCO  
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rePRINT

ISSUE 3 12 APRIL 2019

reTHINK reIMAGINE reBOOT

WWW.CREAWORLD.ORG

CREA'S RETHINK EVENINGS

#rethink evenings feature activists, artists and thinkers to advance bold, feminist and intersectional ways to rethink, reimagine and reboot their ideas, politics and practices on gender, sexuality, consent, pleasure, disability and more.



CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSITIES Resistance through Art

Nairobi, Kenya · 3 April 2019 · 70-80 participants



\* Beauty has aspects of culture and Ugandan heritage. Miss Curvy is a space for Ugandan Plus Size Women to celebrate their bodies & defy narratives not objectifying. Annie Mungoma

CONSENT, BODILY INTEGRITY AND CHOICE The Miss Curvy Pageant in Uganda

Kampala, Uganda · 26 March 2019 · 80-90 participants



BETWEEN 377 AND #METOO A Cross-regional and Inter-generational Conversation between Queer South Asian Feminists

New York, USA · 13 March 2019 · 50-60 participants



A CONVERSATION ON DESIRE Madhavi Menon with Shohini Ghosh

New Delhi, India · 22 December 2019 · 110 participants



CLOSING PERFORMANCE 7

Thank you, deeply

Geetanjali Misra EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CREA

CREA has never shied away from big ideas, which is how we arrived at the dream of creating an event which combines deep scholarship and critical thinking with creative representations of pressing socio-political issues intersecting with art, technology and feminism.

The pedagogy of film and art has always been a part of CREA's work, but the scale of #recon2019 – with curation, installation, and screenings alongside critical fault-line discussions is unprecedented. Since its inception, CREA has used art to influence different ways of thinking. Today, we need to extend

a special thank you to all the people who envisaged and executed an experience in which the form of expression has been as critical and impactful as the content.

The spark for #recon2019 began in July 2018. This boundary-pushing event is the culmination of eight months of in-house work by an incredible team which ran with the idea of creating a feminist expo that was part film festival, part art installation, and part theoretical deep dive.

As CREA has undertaken the effort to build #recon2019, we have also learned and reflected – identifying issues such as technology and

environmental justice – which will become more foundational parts of all of our work going forward.

Ultimately, #recon2019 has been a part of our overall goal to not only change the way we think, but also the way we act. I am so proud to have worked beside brilliant teams to build this bold and radical event, but #recon2019 is only the beginning. The drive to rethink, reimagine and reboot has already inspired new streams of engagement, such as rethink evenings and tweetathons.

None of #recon2019 would have been possible without the dedicated support of several teams

including the creative and strategic guidance of CREA board members, CREA advisors and working group members, the passionate participation of many constituencies and collaborating organizations, the inspired and devoted efforts of CREA staff and consultants from the design and production team, the communications team, the film and media team, and the logistics and event coordination team, as well as committed volunteers, our encouraging donors, and talented translators.

Thank you all for joining us to rethink resistance, reimagine change, and reboot our movements.



AZADEH AKHLAGHI in conversation with Sabeena Gadihoke

New Delhi, India · March 2018

SOHAILA ABDULALI'S BOOK What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape

New York, USA · 28 November 2019

Our first #rethink event, an illustrated talk on one of Iran's foremost artists, photo-historian Azadeh Akhlaghi was organized in March 2018 in New Delhi, India.

These evenings began as a series of gatherings leading up to #recon2019 and have proven to be an important opportunity to advance intersectional feminist discourses through art, media, performances and seminars. To date, these boundary-pushing dialogues have taken place in Delhi, Kampala, Nairobi, and New York.

Recognizing that hard ideas take time and continuing with the aim to change public attitudes, judgment and thoughts on complex topics, CREA plans to support the ongoing occurrence of rethink evenings long after #recon2019 – providing a critical space to further these conversations and seeding ways to think differently about these issues.

JUSTICE

ENVIRONMENTAL

TODAY'S PLENARY

Our Bodies, Our Territories: Feminists Defending the Environment

CO-MODERATORS: Laura Carvajal, UAF-Latin America | Daysi Flores, JASS | Srilatha Batiwala, CREA



Laura Carvajal



Daysi Flores



Srilatha Batiwala

This plenary will focus on connecting women's struggles to protect their lands, habitats and natural resources to their struggles for the integrity, security and autonomy of their bodies and identities.

It will connect the issues of consent, criminalization, pleasure and danger, sexual expression and gender identity to the degradation and exploitation of the natural environment, and highlight the nature of the intersecting power structures that create the oppressions we are all experiencing. It will offer an integrated feminist approach to the protection of our bodies, our lands and habitats that could help build greater solidarity and alliances with movements for sexual, reproductive, economic, social and cultural rights.

We will explore the emerging environmental issues of our times, including climate change, displacement, migration, and delve into their impact on the bodies, lives, lands and livelihoods of people on the margins.

Let's **rethink** issues of gender, sexuality, disability, health and human rights, drawing upon the intersections that exist with the environment.

Let's **reimagine** models of resistance and leadership inspired by the collective power of women in environmental activism.

Let's **reboot** our activism, struggles and practices to understand and address social and gender inequalities faced by people on the margins because of environmental trends.

The Shore Line Project

An exhibition by Elizabeth Miller



The Shore Line Project is a storybook for a sustainable future. Meet 43 people from 9 countries discovering solutions. This is an interactive storybook, featuring stories from individuals across the globe

– people who are working to protect the world's oceans and coastlines. The project features over 40 short films organized into six chapters plus interactive maps, data visualizations, soundscapes and

educational resources. It is a collaborative web documentary project across nine countries confronting the threats of unsustainable development and extreme weather with persistence and imagination.



Up Down & Sideways

by Iswar Srikumar and Anushka Meenakshi

Close to the India-Myanmar border is the village of Phek in Nagaland. Around 5,000 people live here, almost all of who cultivate rice for their own consumption.

As they work in cooperative groups – preparing the terraced fields, planting saplings, or harvesting the grain and carrying it up impossibly steep slopes – the rice cultivators of Phek sing.

The seasons change, and so does the music, transforming the mundane into the hypnotic. The love

that they sing of is also a metaphor for the need for the other – the friend, the family, the community, to build a polyphony of voices. Stories of love, stories of the field, stories of song, stories in song.

Up Down & Sideways is a musical portrait of a community of rice cultivators and their memories of love and loss, created from working together on the fields.

It is the first feature film from the u-ra-mi-li project, a larger body of work that looks at the connections

between music and labor.

In a note on the film, the filmmakers say, "Why do people sing when they work? Why have communities around the world relied on music to transform their experience of the everyday? The answers to such questions are not as satisfying as one would expect. What began as a research project very soon turned into an artistic enquiry and we felt the answer needed to be experienced rather than understood."

Sweet Crude

by Sandy Cioffi



Sweet Crude is the story of Nigeria's Niger Delta – the human and environmental consequences of 50 years of oil extraction, the history of non-violent protest, and the members of a new insurgency who, in the three years since the filmmakers met them as college students, became the young men of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Set against the stunning backdrop of the Niger Delta, the film

gives voice to the region's complex mix of stakeholders and invites the audience to learn the deeper story.

Beginning with filmmaker Sandy Cioffi's initial trip to document the building of a library in a remote village, Sweet Crude is a journey of multi-layered revelation and ever-deepening questions. It's about survival, corruption, greed and armed resistance. It's about one place in one moment, with themes that echo many places throughout history.



# Movement building in a digital age

JAC SM KEE

Networked technologies have significantly impacted the characteristic of movements worldwide, writes APC's Jac SM Kee.

"Digitally networked technologies have seeded and enabled the proliferation of feminist expression in multiple spaces, from online journals to podcasts, digital archives, the humble comments section, digital storytelling projects, social media engagement and more. This has contributed to the most stubborn and invisible quadrant of change in the classic framework of how change happens: that of culture and norms, and in behavior, thoughts and attitudes.

There are people who engage on social media as a political site of their everyday activism in pushing back against patriarchal discourse

and norms, who face serious and critical backlash in response. Yet, women's movements tend to instrumentalize our engagement with digitally networked technologies. There is an approach of 'using social media to reach out to more people,' instead of seeing it as a space of activism in and of itself.

In an age of unprecedented circulation of information, discourse, visuals and knowledge, there is a need to reimagine and understand better discourse as a site of activism, in and of itself, and its potential for deep transformative change.

In the digital age, we see new and emerging actors who are part of feminist organizing, but remain outside of the more familiar format of organizations. Some of them are content creators, some are social media activists, some are part of

interest-driven collectives, some are feminist techies, and some are what I like to call 'free radicals' – nodes that connect between formal organizing and informal networks who act as key bridge builders and interlocutors of different actors and different spaces. The internet and its capacity for anonymity and distance has also enabled actors who are diffident of visibility for various reasons (e.g. risk, introverts, etc) to participate actively and expressively in organizing for change.

The movement is, in fact, much more diverse and broader than imagined."

*This is an abridged version of Jac sm Kee's article, published on genderit.org. The full text can be accessed at: <https://www.genderit.org/editorial/making-feminist-internet-movement-building-digital-age>.*

1985. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway wrote her iconic essay, *The Cyborg Manifesto*. Locating herself as a human-machine hybrid, she famously declared that "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess." What do we make of this claim? Is it rhetorical? Is it real? Is it a provocation? What does it even mean?

1997. Writer Hari Kunzru grappled with the cyborg in a *Wired* article. "When Donna Haraway says she's a cyborg, she's not claiming to be different or special," wrote Kunzru. "For Haraway, the realities of modern life happen to include a relationship between people and technology so intimate that it's no longer possible to tell where we end and machines begin...If this sounds complicated, that's because it is. Haraway's world is one of tangled networks – part human, part machine; complex hybrids of meat and metal that relegate old-fashioned concepts like *natural* and *artificial* to the archives. These hybrid networks are the cyborgs, and they don't just surround us – they incorporate us. An automated production line in a factory, an office computer network, a club's dancers, lights, and sound systems – all are cyborg constructions of people and machines."

2018. Writer Jillian Heise, author of *The Amputee's Guide To Sex*, revisits the concept of the cyborg – from the point of view of a woman with a disability. Heise, who wears an artificial limb, writes:

"When I tell people I am a cyborg, they often ask if I have read Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Of course I have read it. And I disagree with it. The manifesto, published in 1985, promised a cyberfeminist resistance. The resistance would be networked and coded by women and for women to change the course of history and derange sexism beyond recognition. Technology would un-gender us.

Instead, it has been so effective

## Of cyborgs and disability

By Bishakha Datta, Point of View



*Cyborg*, by Lynn Randolph (1989). This image is the cover of Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*.

at erasing disabled women that even now, in conversation with many feminists, I am no longer surprised that disability does not figure into their notions of bodies and embodiment. Haraway's manifesto lays claim to cyborgs ('we are all cyborgs') and defines the cyborg unilaterally through metaphor. To Haraway, the cyborg is a matter of fiction, a struggle over life and

death, a modern war orgy, a map, a condensed image, a creature without gender. The manifesto coopts cyborg identity while eliminating reference to disabled people on which the notion of the cyborg is premised. Disabled people who use tech to live are cyborgs. Our lives are not metaphors."

Read Heise's full article at: [granta.com/common-cyborg/](http://granta.com/common-cyborg/)

### TODAY'S PLENARY

#### The pleasures and dangers of technology

SPEAKERS: Nishant Shah, ArtEZ University of the Arts | Jac sm Kee, APC | Sandy Cioffi, Fearless 360°

MODERATOR: Bishakha Datta, Point of View



Nishant Shah



Jac sm Kee



Sandy Cioffi

In the digital age, our lives are no longer 'physical only'. The tapestry of our lives today has shifted to the physical + digital, both of which weave in and out of each other in ways that are hard to untangle. Technology has become a site of multiple pleasures and dangers, from sexting to surveillance, virtual reality to facial recognition.

This plenary provides a crucial opportunity to engage with the formulations and contestations that technology has reinforced and enabled. Even as queer communities start online, the internet is used to target queer people, particularly in contexts where their lives are criminalized.

Under the neoliberal state, biometrics and data are used to track, surveil and gather information about people, with giant biometric systems identifying and classifying citizens.

But even as the digital becomes a space where inequalities are replicated, it also becomes – like the physical – a site of resistance and possibility.

Let's **rethink** the role of technology on our lives, and collapse binary understandings of the online and the on ground.

Let's **reimagine** the digital as a powerful political space of opportunities and threats, which is used to surveil, oppress and exclude, and also for struggle, resistance, and organizing.

Let's **reboot** our activism away from the false binary of physical only versus digital only, and think about how they are interwoven.

# TECHNOLOGY

The full technology track, including the space, *Tangled, Like Wool*, is curated by Point of View, a feminist non-profit based in Mumbai, India.

# Galaxies of Desires

"The taboo on investigating pleasure led to an abstract sexual theory which bears little relationship to daily life. If theory is to have any valid relationship to experience, we need to acknowledge that sexuality is worth talking about seriously."

Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*, 1984

Galaxies of Desires is a curated space that brings together two conference themes – consent as well as pleasure and danger. These form an integral part of human sexuality. Art and activism come together in this space to interrogate why pleasure has seldom been included in feminist movements, to reflect whether pleasures can be dangerous and dangers can be pleasurable, and to celebrate transgressions. It also explores the spectrum of consent. The space is imagined as galaxies – as limitless, feminist possibilities of how we understand, experience and express consent, pleasure and danger.



From *The Bird Box*

The ideas of consent, pleasure and danger are intricately linked, and the complex intertwining between the three ideas means that they are designed as one curated space. The space has messages, visuals and art, films followed by talks and interactive sessions that explore ideas of consent, pleasure and danger through different lenses.

An important criterion for the space is the idea of intersectionality

– to explore consent, pleasure and danger through the lenses of disability, abortion, intersex issues, sex work and sexual and gender diversity.

The visual space has creative work from around the world. There is a poster from the *Meet to Sleep* campaign. The poster is about women reclaiming public spaces to do pleasurable things. Khangas adorn the walls, and speak of transgressive love. Khangas are

traditional East African cotton fabrics printed in bold designs, usually with a message in Swahili that is typically heterosexual in nature. An artist takes this very traditional cloth and prints messages of queer love on them, thus making it a revolutionary project. A feminist board game shows inequalities between people based on their gender, sexual orientation, relationship status and disabilities. Photos of Pride from around the world have been displayed to celebrate same sex love and desire.

Other visual treats include postcards and a photo-book by the renowned American photographer, Robert Mapplethorpe, a photo book by Serbian photographer Slobodan Randjelovic that captures the struggles of LGBTQ people in Serbia, and a vibrant independent art publication by multimedia artist Martine Gutierrez. Or would you fancy looking at erotic playing

cards from the 1940s?

*In Plainspeak*, a digital magazine from India that explores issues of sexuality, intimacy and choice is on offer. It is also available in the form of giveaways that can be picked up at the space.

*The Bird Box*, an audio-visual installation, invites people to look into a hand-painted bioscope with recordings of young girls speaking about desire, shame and freedom. *The Bird Box* and other videos will also be a part of a session planned on consent.

If you have ever wondered what elements consent encompasses, be sure to engage with the playful consent blocks in the space – they will challenge you to think about consent differently.

The film and interactive space brings together various artists and activists over the course of three days to engage with subversive ideas of consent, pleasure and danger.

The interactions, presentations and films explore the nuances and the grey areas that are the very nature of these concepts. The space also explores the many meanings of consent through an interaction with a sex worker, an intersex activist and other activists. There are other conversations in the space – with the first Sri Lankan woman who climbed Mt Everest, a conversation with an artist from Kenya, and performances by queer and disabled activists. In the end, the curated space looks at consent, pleasure and desire through the lens of BDSM.

Do not miss out on experiencing this space – take a trip with us through the galaxies of desires!

## Proudly African & Transgender

An exhibition by Gabrielle Le Roux

"Transgender Africans have been silenced for a long time. We have been invisible as though we did not exist. Today, many of us speak, we show our faces, we write and we express ourselves openly.

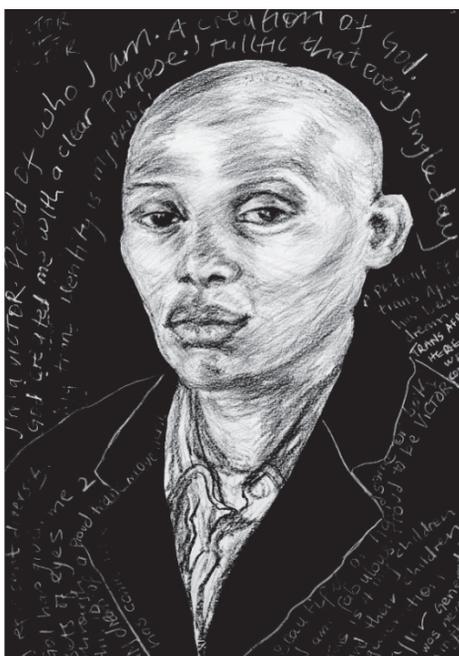
This exhibition is an extension of that. The portraits are our images and they speak our words, they tell our stories, they express our feelings, they exhibit our pride, even our fears, they are our history, they are us today and the history of the African transgender struggle in future. They are strength, hope and pride to generations after us.

I felt lost for a long time. I thought that there was no other like me. I thought I was abnormal, strange and this made me powerless. My transgender niece or nephew, grandchild or friend's

child will not feel lost. They will look at my portrait and they will gain power, hope, peace of mind and pride. They will know that another transgender [person] existed before and that it is okay to be gender non-conforming.

When the world sees our portraits, they will know that Africa has transgender people and that there is a struggle against injustices on our continent."

Thus wrote Victor Mukasa, expressing the vision and intention of the exhibition, both as the person with whom Gabrielle Le Roux envisioned this project for a number of years, and also as one of the



people portrayed in it.

*Proudly African & Transgender* is a creative intervention for social justice in the form of portraits and stories of ten transgender African activists who collaborated with South African artist and activist Le Roux to be portrayed in this way because they want to be seen and heard far and wide.



Portrait of Victor Mukasa, (left) by Gabrielle Le Roux (above).

### REMOBILIZE



Mitini Nepal is a lesbian rights organization in Nepal. It works and lobbies for LGBTI individuals and communities. It gives a platform for lesbian women to voice their issues and prioritize their concerns freely without these being diluted among the issues of gay men and transgender people.

Welcome to our lives in the digital age: online on ground physical digital. Phygital...or tangled like wool. In an earlier age, our bodies ended where skin touched air. Where do our bodies end now? Is our digital data part of our bodies? If so, how do we rethink bodily integrity? How do we reimagine sexuality? Consent? Sports? Justice? Really... almost everything?

# Tangled, Like Wool

## #100TinderTales



Indu Harikumar (India) uses digital platforms to create crowdsourced art projects on relationships, sexuality and bodies. Her latest series, #Identity, on view at #recon2019, features stories that women share about their breasts. This illustration from her earlier series #100TinderTales is based on a story that was crowdsourced online.

“I have been a loner all my life. Then five months ago, a colleague introduced me to Tinder, and I logged on. After looking at a few girls’ profiles, I switched to swiping on people from the same sex. I was just curious to see how it worked and how men initiate conversations with other men. I was amazed that every second person I was swiping right matched with me. I had several conversations with many men, but none clicked. Then one day, I happened to meet someone very interesting. Soon numbers were exchanged and we talked about cars, bikes, politics, sports and video games. I was confused—was this the reason I had joined Tinder? No. To have general, casual conversations with people around me? Not at all.

We decided to meet for beer and the agenda was to have a detailed debate on the current political situation. Imagine! We got very drunk, had heated arguments, and ended

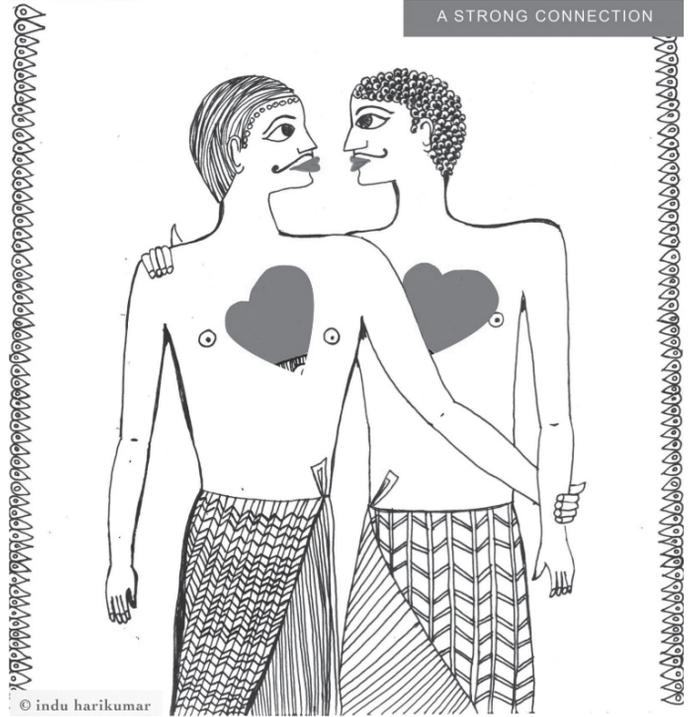
up becoming great friends. He was extremely good looking, neat and balanced—and so am I, I believe.

At around 2 am, we sat in our respective cars and said goodbye. At the traffic signal, I got a call from him: ‘My car is behind yours, and if you didn’t mind the arguments, let’s talk for some more time.’ We drove to his apartment for another round of beers.

And then came a tight hug, followed by a kiss.

It was the first time I was kissed by a guy and I lost myself in him. It was followed by very passionate sex. Though it was slightly painful, I loved it. I never thought my first Tinder date would be so pleasurable!

I stayed with him for one full day and night, as it was the weekend, and we loved each other up like anything. There was sex and conversations on the sofa, in the kitchen, in the washroom, on the carpet, and in every possible place in the apartment. He didn’t want me to leave. The best part was that there was a lot of respect and genuine love, which reflected in our



attitude towards each other.

We met several times after that, and we still meet: the connection has grown stronger. There is no

commitment but just good vibes, and of course, great sex.”

All the #100TinderTales can be viewed on Facebook and Instagram.

## The biometric trap

Here are four stories on the dangers of biometrics from the People’s Archive of Rural India (PARI).

### INDU

“My name is Indu, but my first Aadhaar card made it ‘Hindu’. So, I applied for a new card, but they made it ‘Hindu’ again.”

Because of a spelling error, J. Indu, a 10-year-old Dalit girl won’t get her school scholarship this year. Without an Aadhaar card with a correctly spelt name, Indu’s school cannot open a bank account on her behalf – and cannot deposit the scholarship money that she is entitled to for her school provisions, books and clothes.

### PARWATI

“I am told that my hands are not fit to be placed on the [finger printing] machine. ...

This Aadhaar must be a good thing. But why must it not be given to people like me whose hands god takes away for no fault of theirs? Are



we not the ones who need it most?”

51-year-old Parwati is a migrant waste picker in the north of India. For the past three years, her fingers have been stumped by leprosy, so she cannot get an Aadhaar card. Without this, she cannot get the

disability pension that she is entitled to. Nor can she get rations, because she now needs an Aadhaar card to verify her credentials at the ration shop.

The ration shop owner has known Parwati for years, but what

can he do? “We have to do as the machine says,” he sighs.

### DHARI RAM

“It takes more than 500 rupees to travel, spend a day there and then

come back. How can I afford that? It’s better I die here without an Aadhaar card.”

Dhari Ram, a 67-year-old former laborer depends entirely on his old age pension. But his pension has stopped; the government stopped giving it to those who did not submit their Aadhaar details. Dhari Ram did register his details. But the name on his Aadhaar card does not match the name in the records. To get this corrected, Dhari Ram needs to travel to the nearest Aadhaar centre – 146 km away from his village.

### LAKSHMI

“They keep saying that there is some ‘technical problem’ but don’t explain what that is.”

T. Lakshmi has not got her wages for several months. Nor has P. Lakshmi, who lives in another village nearby.

Both women are Dalit, have no land, and work as laborers. When the government insisted on linking Aadhaar cards to employment scheme cards, a processing error led to the women’s payments getting swapped. And because their bank accounts are also linked to their cards, neither can withdraw the other person’s money.

### LET’S RETHINK ONLINE SPORTS

Here’s a one-question quiz that we’d love you to answer. Or think about.

Online sports should not be segregated for men and women.

YES

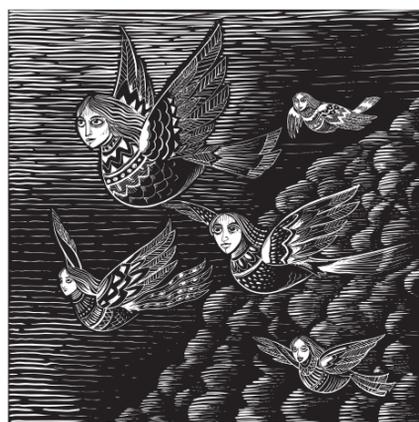
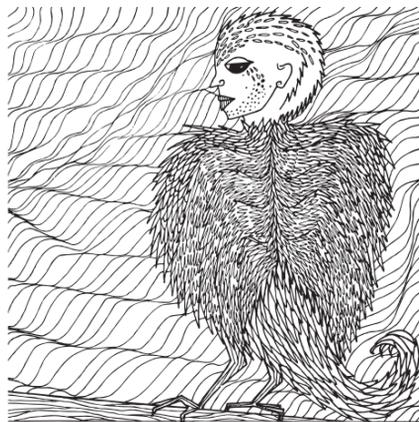
What a great idea! There aren’t any physical bodies online, so why segregate?

NO WAY

Please! Sports is about gender: men and women.

DON’T KNOW

New idea. Need to give it a think.



# Creating a flock of CREA birds

a fearless, interrogative, colorful, edgy, sexy flock of birds flying freely to explore, to imagine and to build freedoms together

During your time at #recon2019 you may have noticed the captivating woodcut bird-women incorporated into the design. These birds are a metaphor for this gathering, and for the way in which CREA undertakes its work.

Birds are colorful, diverse, and come in many forms. You can spot a vibrant toucan flying through the sky, or watch a regal blue jay strut through the garden from your kitchen window.

The birds symbolize embracing diversity and beauty in different contexts. For CREA, they are a metaphor for our organization itself, and the result of a yearlong visioning process in which the staff sought to find a symbol to encapsulate our work and ourselves.

CREA is a fearless, interrogative, colorful, edgy, sexy flock of birds flying freely to explore, to imagine and to build freedoms together.

The birds, each one unique and yet all moving together in formation, are a part of CREA's identity.

To create visual imagery which captured this symbolism, CREA commissioned independent artists to interpret the metaphor. In order to truly align with CREA's self-definition, the artwork needed to represent a distinct character and personality, while simultaneously avoiding heteronormative depictions of bodies or defaulting to stereotypes of diversity or disability.

The resulting birds are individuals, with each artwork depicting different bodies, plural gender identities, non-normative and

diverse sexualities and expressions. Each of these extraordinary birds is different, but every single bird can soar.

To date, the striking birds displayed at #recon2019 embody the creations of artists living and working in India, Nepal, Kenya and Sri Lanka. The aim of commissioning these birds was to enable these global artists to embrace the freedom of expression to allow everyone over here over the last three days to find something of themselves reflected back. The bird-woman amalgams defy conformist restrictions to ascend higher and higher.

Our dream is that you will also take flight alongside of us, and continue together with CREA in the ongoing creation of these symbolic

images and in carrying forward the metaphor these birds – always questioning and challenging conventional ideals of bodies, sexuality, gender, beauty, pleasure and people – represented during our time together at #recon2019.

## ILLUSTRATIONS OF BIRD PEOPLE BY

Afrab Shafiq (India)  
Anirban Ghosh (India)  
Kanak Shashi (India)  
Kawira Mwrichia (Kenya)  
Michelle Lama (Nepal)  
Osheen Siva (India)  
Pavan Buragohain (India)  
Priyanka Kumar (India)  
Shifani Reffai (Sri Lanka)  
Thilini Perera (Sri Lanka)  
Val Resh (India)

## CLOSING PERFORMANCE

# Burlesque by Millie Dollar and Edward Muir

Millie Dollar is Liverpool's supreme burlesque danger. With a mix of rock and roll, sleaze and a wink and smile she will entertain and tease to your heart's content!

An interview of Millie by Matt Ford

I first met Harriet Gould aka Millie Dollar in 2006 when we shot a burlesque story. She was studying for an arts degree with a mutual friend, but her paintings of bygone burlesque icons and her idols Betty Paige and Jane Mansfield didn't impress her tutors. Then during a trip to LA and the opportunity to perform amongst the greats, she decided to cut her losses to pursue the 'dream.'

**You've been performing for over five years, how did it start?**

I've been practicing in my bedroom mirror since I was young, in the style of old musicals that my mother and I used to watch. I never imagined what it would develop into. When I found out there was a whole scene, I was really excited. I thought, hey! It wasn't just me that [was] practicing strip tease in my bedroom at the age of twelve.

**Where does the name come from?**

Jonny Dollar, the 40s spy drama, referenced in the Marilyn Monroe film *The Seven Year Itch* was the first part of my name. But what would go with Dollar? Then it hit me, Millie, short for million. Finding out my granddad's headstrong sister was also called Millie and my burlesque idol shared my real name was a calling. How else could I take this?

**Are Millie and Harrie the same person?**

Not at all, but one girl blamed her alter ego for throwing pint glasses and cigarettes at the audience. You can't do this. An alter ego is still part of your own personality. Millie is more confident, it's not something to hide behind, but it's a confidence I wish I could always have. I'm quite shy really.

**Who are your idols?**

The graceful 20s star Sally Rand, and the raunchy 50s star Zorita



Millie Dollar, *Blue Martini*

– she was so wild. Zorita performed with snakes, but one day a snake pissed on her. Instead of toilet training them, she taped them up. Unfortunately, she kept them taped up for so long they often died. She was obviously controversial and a renowned lesbian, rumored to have a relationship with Marlene Dietrich. She was such an entertaining character.

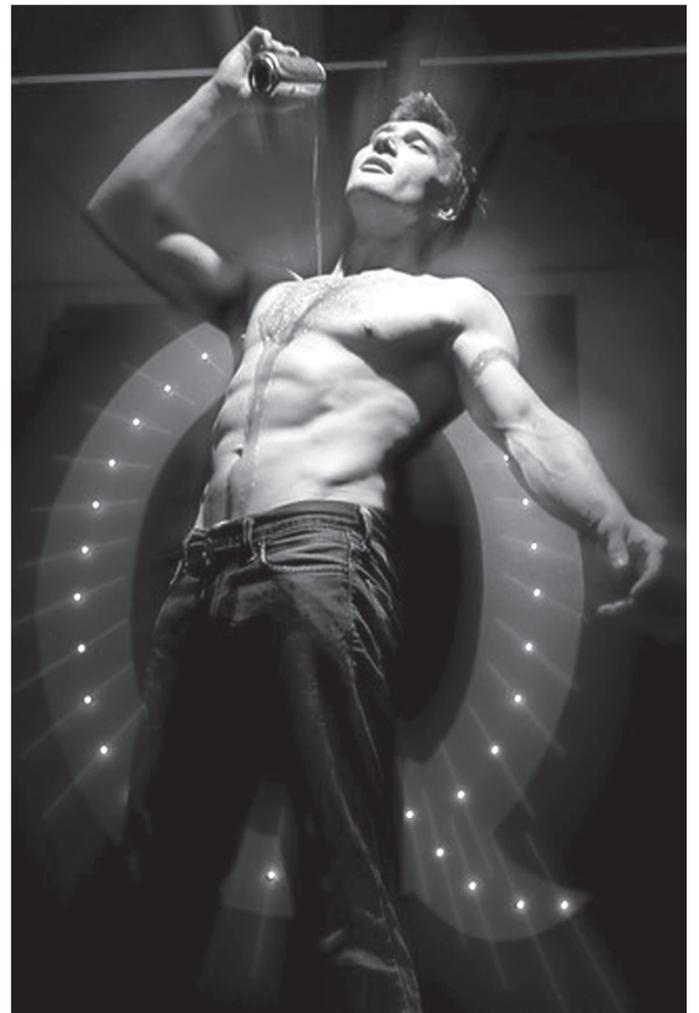
**How would you compare yourself to them?**

I started performing with classic burlesque like Sally Rand's feather and balloon dance. That involves

dancing inside a giant inflated balloon, quite a feat. However burlesque gets very bitchy and I kept finding my balloon slashed before I was about to go on stage. Now I perform to songs like Ram Jam's *Black Betty*, which is from the 70s but very modern for me.

**Burlesque put simply is stripping, do you think there's a difference?**

There is this infamous list that's been written, by a burlesque performer I worked with only last week – Jo Boobs. She lists the reasons why burlesque is different to stripping or lap dancing. Firstly



Edd Muir, *Diet Coke Man*

burlesque is for the audience, stripping is one-on-one. With burlesque you think about the full article or routine, [with] lap dancing you would be thinking about, well... just making tips. They make a lot more money than we do.

**Where has burlesque taken you?**

Geneva, Paris, Zurich, Milan, Croatia, Amsterdam... The best was LA. It was life changing. Apart from learning from the best and developing my act, it made me realize I wasn't missing my boyfriend. I could see my future. Unfortunately, that wasn't with him anymore.

**Tell me about your parents and upbringing, I mean it's not the average girl's dream job?**

They brought me up on the road in Australia and New Zealand as a missionary kid, but I never felt passionate about the church.

My mum now runs DADA, the disabled arts festival. She's seen me perform, unlike my dad who's coming to the next Martini Lounge.

That will be interesting.

Source: <http://firecrackerfashion.blogspot.com/2011/02/when-matt-met-millie-intimate-interview.html>

## Funding Feminist Futures

Supporting constituencies to demand their own rights involves funding their own priorities and projects. This is particularly true for young people, who may have less experience navigating donor landscapes, leading to a lack of funding for the very initiatives that will become the movements of the future.

Traditional donor-grantee relationships often fail to address new, lived realities and the innovative, grassroots ideas that can combat emerging risks and pressing

challenges. For that reason, we would like to take a moment to appreciate the work of our activist donor partners UHAI-EASRI, the Disability Rights Fund, the Red Umbrella Fund and FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund, for their flexible and forward-thinking commitment to funding young feminists.

The practice of activists embedded within participatory grant making has been growing in recent years. Though it has existed in various forms for some time, there has been mounting attention to the

reasons for and structures of participatory grant making over the past ten years, with these donor partners leading the way. While they have unique structures for peer engagement, each of these donors significantly includes the communities they support, in both governance and grants decision-making.

FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund is an entirely participatory decision-making process in which applicants work together to decide which proposed activities and ideas are ultimately funded.

The Disability Rights Fund is a collaboration between donors and the disability rights community. Grant and governance decisions are made by committees that include both donors and representatives from the community.

Red Umbrella Fund is a collaborative of sex workers and donors. Grant decisions are made by an International Steering Committee, two-thirds of which consist of sex workers. These decisions are supported by a Program Advisory Committee, 80% of who are sex workers.

UHAI-EASHRI is an indigenous activist fund, providing resources to sex workers and sexual and

gender minorities in East Africa. Many of their grants are made in an open and competitive process in which the applications are revised by a committee of activists drawn from their respective communities. UHAI-EASRI also has two other non-competitive funds.

Together, these funds represent the beginning of a new nexus in the donor-activist partnership in which the future of funding is reactive to, and led by, the constituencies it seeks to serve. By funding young voices, these donors support the building of feminist futures by including the younger voices that will be at the forefront.



# Arundhati Roy

Shohini Ghosh will be in conversation with Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy is a writer who was born in the tea plantations of North East India and grew up in Kerala. She studied architecture and urban planning at the Delhi School of Architecture. She wrote two screenplays for films directed by Pradip Krishen: *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*, 1989, which won the National Award for Best Screenplay and *Electric Moon*, 1991.

Her first novel *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997, won the Booker Prize and has been translated into 42 languages. Her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, written over ten years,

was published in 2017.

In the 20 years that lay between her two works of fiction, Arundhati Roy authored more than 50 non-fiction pieces. Her first major essay, *The End of Imagination*, was written in 1998 as a response to the nuclear tests conducted by the Indian government. In that essay, she cautions:

“If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements – the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water – will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible. Our cities and forests, our fields and

villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire.”

Rigorously researched and persuasively argued, Roy’s essays cover a vast terrain of issues – capitalism, imperialism, the war on terror, social and environmental justice, India’s caste system, and most importantly, resistance.

Her book-length essay *The Doctor and the Saint* is a deep and provocative engagement with the Ambedkar-Gandhi debate. Her many anthologies of essays include *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001), *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* (2005), *Listening*

*to Grasshoppers* (2009) and *Broken Republic* (2011). Taken together, Roy’s essays are a reckoning with the promises of democracy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which has been translated into 49 languages, Roy moves purposefully away from the literary style of *The God of Small Things* to tell an extraordinarily expansive story that

embraces a populous but vivid cast of characters spread across multiple geographic locations.

In lines from the book, now oft-quoted, she writes:

“How to tell a Shattered Story? By slowly becoming everybody, No, by slowly becoming everyone.”

Arundhati Roy lives in Delhi with her two dogs.

The sea was black, the  
spume vomit green.  
Fish fed on shattered glass.  
Night’s elbows rested on the  
water, and falling stars  
glanced off its brittle shards.  
Moths lit up the sky.  
There wasn’t a moon.  
He could swim, with his  
one arm. She with her two.  
His skin was salty. Hers too.  
He left no footprints in sand,  
no ripples in water, no  
image in mirrors.  
She could have touched  
him with her fingers, but  
she didn’t.  
They just stood together.  
Still.  
Skin to skin.

*The God of Small Things*

Sometimes I need to write  
to think. So I wrote it down  
for her on a paper napkin.  
This is what I wrote:  
*To love. To be loved. To never  
forget your own insignificance.  
To never get used to the  
unspeakable violence and the  
vulgar disparity of life around  
you. To seek joy in the saddest  
places. To pursue beauty to  
its lair. To never simplify what  
is complicated or complicate  
what is simple. To respect  
strength, never power.  
Above all, to watch.  
To try and understand.  
To never look away.  
And never, never, to forget.*

*The End of Imagination*

What is at issue now is the  
very nature of our democracy.  
Who owns this land?  
Who owns its rivers?  
Its forests? Its fish?  
These are huge questions.  
They are being taken hugely  
seriously by the state.  
They are being answered  
in one voice by every  
institution at its command—  
the army, the police, the  
bureaucracy, the courts.  
And not just answered,  
but answered  
unambiguously,  
in bitter, brutal ways.

*The Greater Common Good*

The question here, really,  
is what have we done to  
democracy? What have we  
turned it into? What happens  
once democracy has been  
used up? When it has been  
hollowed out and emptied  
of meaning? What happens  
when each of its institutions  
has metastasized into  
something dangerous?  
What happens now that  
democracy and the  
Free Market have fused into  
a single predatory organism  
with a thin, constricted  
imagination that revolves  
almost entirely around the  
idea of maximizing profit?  
Is it possible to reverse  
this process? Can something  
that has mutated go back  
to being what it used to be?

*Democracy’s Failing Light*

In that setting, Anjum would  
ordinarily have been in some  
danger. But her desolation  
protected her. Unleashed  
at last from social protocol,  
it rose up around her in all  
its majesty—a fort, with  
ramparts, turrets, hidden  
dungeons and walls that  
hummed like an approaching  
mob. She rattled through  
its gilded chambers like  
a fugitive absconding from  
herself. She tried to dismiss  
the cortège of saffron men  
with saffron smiles who  
pursued her with infants  
impaled on their saffron  
tridents, but they would  
not be dismissed.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*