

Through Her Lens III: The Space Without

The Space Without engages with the themes of **Gender and Public Space** using the visual as a starting point. This edition of [*Through Her Lens*](#) attempts to look at space—public, private, temporal— as a site that gains meaning from the stories, questions, dialogues and negotiations that unfold within it, both shaping it and being shaped by it. Gendered battles to claim space—for women, queer and trans communities—were fought alongside larger questions of visibility, representation, or sometimes even for the joy of sipping tea at a roadside stall. This already difficult situation has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent national and state lockdowns, as a result of which even those limited spaces, which women, queer and trans people had access to, have disappeared.

The claiming of public spaces by those in power results in/creates the conditions for the oppression, silencing and forgetting of marginalized identities. The COVID-19 pandemic has, perhaps, made this even more clear. The nightclubs of Gangtok, where queer people could freely express their identities, have not opened since the first phase of lockdown in March. In Imphal the Nupi Keithel, both a place of trade and a political site, has remained closed for months. In Assam, women handloom weavers suffered setbacks as markets were shut during the most remunerative season of Bohag Bihu in April.

However, public spaces have also been claimed by these groups through various struggles—from shaping women's movements, ecological struggles to peacebuilding and organizing workers collectives. During the national lockdown and the subsequent selective 'unlocking', different communities in the Northeast continued to protest and demand their rights: we saw the road blockade in Tinsukia district by families affected by the Baghjan gas leak, demonstrations against the construction of a shopping mall at Barik point in Shillong and the sit-in at Itanagar showing solidarity and demanding justice in the Hathras rape case.

Balancing safety concerns on one hand and their need to approach state institutions on the other, marginalized communities are claiming public spaces in familiar as well as new ways. Yet, questions remain — how accessible, inclusive and representative are these gatherings? How do these public contestations affect the private space, or is there even space to bring them home? What does it mean for younger women, queer and trans persons to continue these movements for identity and representation — movements often born out of the activism of their mothers and grandmothers? How do older women relate to and remember their activism and struggles in light of the current mobilization through online methods?

The exhibition hopes to establish a closer understanding of gender, sexuality, power and spatiality in different societies and cultures in Northeast India and **enquire into the role of the visual in helping subvert the creation of this often biased and exclusionary space.**

- Has COVID-19 changed public spaces for marginalised groups?
- How do we remember public spaces before COVID-19?
- How do we reimagine public spaces after COVID-19?
- What are the memories of public spaces for older women in the family? What were the struggles, the pushback and the moments of joy they experienced while inhabiting public spaces?
- What has the loss of public spaces meant in terms of the private space for groups that are marginalized?

The idea is to look not only at how the visual medium can represent gender and public space, but also what it can do to transform this space into arenas of belonging and alliance. Participants are encouraged to explore the material and symbolic meanings of public space through an intersectional lens—access to and rights over these spaces is highly contingent on social, economic and cultural distinctions.

Objectives:

- To visually document the experiences of women and other marginalized identities within public spaces during and post COVID-19 in Northeast India.

- To use the visual medium to help build knowledge on the social construction of gender and sexuality in public spaces in different cultures/societies in Northeast India.
- To understand how the visual medium shapes public and private spaces and vice versa, and how it can be used to reimagine/re-construct public spaces.
- To build an online archive of women's memories of public spaces and create conversations around intergenerational struggles of claiming space.

What is the 'visual'?

We have used the term 'visual' to include media such as photography, photo collages, painted photographs, photo montages, edited audio-visual projects (3-4 minutes) and photo/video archives such as family albums*.

Who can submit?

- Applications are open to women, queer, trans and nonbinary individuals from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. Those from the regions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Kurseong are also welcome to apply.
- Applicants must be 18 years and above.

How can I submit?

- All submissions should contain the following information:

Name: _____

*Archival photographs and videos can also be sourced from groups such as the Northeast India AV Archive, the Confluence Collective, Sikkim Picture Library etc. Please get in touch with the curators for this.

State:

Email id:

Contact no:

Social media handles (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook):

- All submissions should consist of a short description of the work. (300 words)
- All submissions should consist of a short bio of the applicant. Please state your preferred pronouns in the bio. (100-200 words)

[Note: If you need help with drafting the description and bio please feel free to reach out to us via the given contact details. You can also reach out to the curators of this exhibition via email if you'd like to seek help regarding technical support, thematic support or both. If you have an idea in mind prior to submission that you'd like to discuss further, the curators will provide you with feedback.]

- Submissions and enquiries must be sent to :

— Email: herlens.exhibition@gmail.com, and cc projects@zubaanbooks.com

[Note: Please mention the subject line as 'Submissions for THL' if you are making a submission, or 'Enquiry regarding THL' if you have any queries.]

— Google Form: <https://forms.gle/FbB2Gi93YiP1FFm76>

What is the deadline?

The submission deadline is January 4 2021.

Guidelines for submissions:

- Final images should be low-resolution, not more than 1MB in size.
- Images should be in JPEG file format.
- Images should not have watermarks.
- Phone photography is allowed.
- Up to 15 images can be submitted.

Audio-Visual Submissions:

- File formats can be AVI, MPEG, MPG, MP4, MOV, XVID, MXF, FLV.
- File size should not exceed 1 GB.



- Recommended resolution is 780p-1080p.
- 3-4 minutes is the maximum per video*.

*[*THL is not responsible for any hands-on technical support. The curators will only offer guidance and recommendations, but for the final submissions, participants must send edited videos.]*

After selection

- Selected works will be displayed on the [Through Her Lens](#) website and [Zubaan Projects'](#) social media platforms.
- Selected participants will receive a small honorarium and letter of participation.

Copyright

- As per the Attribution NonCommercial 4.0 International Creative Commons License which rests with Zubaan Publishers, the copyright of the work displayed in this exhibition will be shared with Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd (ZPPL) and the participants.
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For enquiries:

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- 9811664209 / 9820791324

About Zubaan Publishers Pvt Ltd

Zubaan Publishers Pvt Ltd is an independent publishing house based in New Delhi and has been a participant and chronicler of the women's movement in India and South Asia. It was set up in 2003 as an imprint of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali for Women, and continues to publish books on, for, by and about women in South Asia. For more information, please visit www.zubaanbooks.com.

About Fragrance of Peace Project

Fragrance of Peace is a collaborative project between the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) and Zubaan Publishers Pvt. Ltd. This project started with the objective to build networks and nurture solidarity through dialogue, literary exchange and peace-building within the Northeast region. It also aims to build a platform for artists, writers, journalists and researchers from the region to discuss, ideate and work on their regional specificities, and support these conversations by participating in literary festivals, book fairs and cultural events in different locations across India. For more information, please visit www.zubaanprojects.org/projects/fragrance-of-peace/

Mridu Rai, Curator

Mridu Rai is an independent writer, curator and researcher based out of Sikkim, India. She is the curator of Through Her Lens, a visual research programme in collaboration with Zubaan Publishers Pvt Ltd and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, which aims to expand women's photographic practices in the eight Northeast Indian states and Darjeeling Hills. Mridu is an alumna of the University of the Arts London and has worked at various publications including India Today and ARTEM. She is a member of the Confluence Collective, a collaboration of photographers and research scholars from Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills.

Anushya Pradhan, Assistant Curator

Anushya Pradhan is the assistant curator of Through Her Lens. She has recently worked as art programmes coordinator at The People's Studio, ARTEM where she curated creative events such as film screenings, printmaking and zine workshops. At present, she is also involved in developing art, reading and education programmes.