



# PRESERVING DECISIVE MOMENTS

## THE WORK OF SHALINI NOPANY

By Bruce Helander

We live in a computer-based electronic digital society, where almost everyone carries in their back pocket a thin camera (as part of a compact multi-functional mobile phone) that is fully charged, ready to aim, and armed with automatic exposure and a sharp focus that simply was unimaginable just twenty years ago. The term “selfie” is the new version of a self-portrait. The constant availability of immediate documentation has revolutionized the way we communicate with each other, whether through Instagram or an emergency post to a news organization or to a network of friends and associates. We now take photography for granted as a basic right and an essential tool in almost everything we do. Because of this relatively newfound uncomplicated creative apparatus, there has been an encouraging and natural evolution that centers on contemporary photography as a continuing legitimate form of fine art that is exhibited at prestigious museums and galleries. The interest in collecting and showing modern photography is remarkable, and the advances of professional camerawork has resulted in auction records that are at an astonishing all-time high. Perhaps most surprisingly, museum curators finally have

method to permanently fix the results so that they wouldn't disappear was not developed until decades later. Then came along the metal-based daguerreotype in 1839, a date generally accepted as the birth of practical photography. In due course, new materials reduced the required camera exposure time from hours, to minutes, and ultimately to mere seconds, and along with film rolls for casual use by amateurs, the art of photography blossomed. Suddenly, significant historic events could be witnessed by the general population for the first time in newspapers, from gut wrenching images of the Civil War to President Lincoln's funeral to the Hindenburg airship disaster, as it burst into flames and crashed to the ground as it was landing. Prior to this period, national publications had to rely on craftsmen to engrave illustrations slowly on copper plates based on verbal reports that often were exaggerated or inaccurate. Nowadays, with the commercial introduction of digital cameras taken for granted, which are now a standard feature on smartphones, taking photos and promptly uploading them online millions of times per day has become an omnipresent practice around the world.

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positioned photography as equal to other art forms such as painting and sculpture, and it has helped make celebrities out of prominent picture-takers such as Diane Arbus and Cindy Sherman, and modern masters like Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, who now are represented around the world by leading art dealers like Gagosian, who sell grand-scale prints for hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

So, it's pretty amazing that the basic concept of photography really hasn't been around that long. Although its background is rooted in remote antiquity with the accidental discovery of the camera obscura projection and the knowledge that some substances are visibly altered by exposure to light, it wasn't until 1800 that the first reliably documented, although unsuccessful, attempt at capturing a lasting likeness was tried (and which eventually produced photographs), but a

While the masses now may possess the technical tools to take camera phone photographs without delay, thank goodness there still remains a lively and important segment of picture-taking by professional photographers who continue to follow the strict criteria and inventiveness of individual printing on paper with the age old quality from darkroom activity, where a perfect specimen, whether black and white or multi-hued, can be created that succeeds as a non-electronic singular museum quality image. The respect for pictorial integrity in photography has intensified as hand-crafted printed imagery becomes more of a novelty in an age of instant gratification and mass communication. Consequently, we need to be on the lookout for new photo-based imagery that incorporates a recognizable personal style and still celebrates the great, age-old ritual of picture-taking.

Shalini Nopany, *A Peek*, 2014, digital photograph, edition of 7 + 2 AP in 3 sizes. A beautifully adorned doorway to a mud home in a village that gives a peek to life inside, and on the outside; for example, the cow dung cakes drying on the tree that will be used as fuel.

Shalini Nopany, *Self-Portrait*, 2018. Taken by the artist as she was shooting on the streets of Kolkata, attempting to capture the 'decisive moment.'



India has an impressive group of courageous pioneering women photographers who have contributed a distinctive journalistic style that captures the visual style of India's multi-cultural society. Shalini Nopany is an exciting photographer who lives in India and has great respect for this time-honored method, and she recently exhibited her photographs in Miami and West Palm Beach, most notably in the annual members exhibition at the Palm Beach Photographic Centre. On display were several prints that communicated a provocative personal perspective, depicting profound evidence of the artistic merit in detailing the contemporary landscape in a conventional sense. Born in New Delhi, Nopany is a devoted photographer known for both color and black and white images of people and places. Her latest series of work is an engaging composite of memorable environments, from urban centers in her native India to enchanting visual accounts of ancient façades, doorways and buildings that are compelling and memorable photographic compositions. She comes from a country with extraordinary customs that have been preserved along with the cachet that this ancient nation is among the most vivid in hue in the world, and accordingly, a virtual paradise for a photographer. There are not many other recognized contemporary women photographers from India, though Dayanita Singh, to name one, is truly accomplished and has shown independent vision and creativity and follows a respected tradition. It was in 1840 that British photographers traveled to India for the first time to record notable monuments and heritage sites, along with the colorful and mysterious landscapes of the countryside. In 1868, Captain Philip Meadows Taylor captivated by his alluring surroundings, published "People of India," which consisted of eight volumes and 500 original photographs that likely encouraged an interest in the photographic image as a perfect vehicle for permanent documentation. The shutterbug caught up with Shalini when she traveled to China on business and while there became fascinated with a friend's new DSLR camera, which persuaded her to seriously study and attend various workshops in Kolkata and London, and the rest is history.

Among the photographers she admires as inspirational visionaries are Henri Cartier-Bresson (an innovator in photojournalism who traveled to India in 1948 to photograph Mahatma Gandhi), Garry Winogrand (who recently had a retrospective at The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Sebastião Salgado (the well-traveled and notable Brazilian social documentarian and photojournalist), among others. Cartier-Bresson's book, "The Decisive Moment," likely has been an important resource that expanded into her own idiosyncratic style, which radiates a woman's sensibility and includes themes of emotion and candid snapshots of people's activities in memorable settings. Like a painter who picks up steam and energy as they develop individual skills and approaches, Shalini's work conveys a natural confidence and a technique of allowing her subjects to feel comfortable and expressive of their own individuality. Creating great photographs is very definitely a learned ability that continues to be refined as the artist investigates the urban and rural environment. Shalini Nopany's work shows a dedication to exploration and excellence, not only in composition, but in the exceptional printing quality of her astounding portfolio. In recent exhibitions she portrays a consistent sharpness of vision and perception, and like legendary photojournalists Harry Benson and Weegee, she finds a way to get the best shot within her own "decisive moment."

For more about the artist: [shalininopany.com](http://shalininopany.com)  
**Current/Upcoming exhibitions:**  
 Palm Beach Photographic Centre, West Palm Beach (through October 27, 2018)  
 The Gallery, Center for Creative Education, West Palm Beach, March 2019  
 Coral Springs Museum of Art, Coral Springs, September 21 – November 16, 2019

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Shalini Nopany, *Excitation*, 2015, digital photograph, edition of 7 + 2 AP in 3 sizes. A celebration of the monsoon rains in India that offer respite after the dreaded summer season and cause much joy.  
 Shalini Nopany, *The Bari*, 2017, digital photograph, edition of 7 + 2 AP in 3 sizes. In Bengal, the bari is the home, and here is a gorgeous abandoned old home.

Shalini Nopany, *Sankranti*, 2013, digital photograph, edition of 7 + 2 AP in 3 sizes. From the Indian festival to celebrate the Hindu new year, people all over the country celebrate by flying kites.  
 Shalini Nopany, *Calm*, 2014, digital photograph, edition of 7 + 2 AP in 3 sizes. A picture that shows everything that is important to a Christian living in Kolkata: a statue of Christ, a cross on the wall and an image of the Saint Mother Teresa.