

WOMEN IN FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY *BODIES*

EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE 2023

Using This Guide

This Education Guide accompanies the *BODIES* exhibition at Objectifs. The introductory questions invite you to think about the works and some of the themes explored in them. If you are unable to view the show in person, please scan the QR code on the right to review the artists' works and profiles, or visit <https://www.objectifs.com.sg/wifp2023/>.



BODIES
WOMEN IN FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY 2023
14 Sep to 5 Nov 2023

The seventh edition of Objectifs' Women in Film and Photography explores the theme, *BODIES*, through the works of artists from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. Seeking to preserve and illuminate, these layered narratives reveal intimate and powerful moments of loss, community, resilience, imagination, and empowerment. In doing so, the artists in this edition have adopted different approaches which incorporate documentary, autobiography, archives, constructed tableaux, as well as dance and movement.

By navigating geographies of the body, ambiguities of tradition, and contestations of territories and histories, *BODIES* foregrounds both personal identity and collective existence, inviting us to relook at the world we inhabit.

A Short History of Objectifs' Women in Film & Photography Programme

Objectifs started the Women in Film & Photography showcase in 2015. The programme was conceived to spotlight artists, photographers and filmmakers who have created works that tell stories with impact, break boundaries and inspire us. Over the last few years, we have explored different themes, sharing intimate yet powerful stories about communities that deal with critical issues ranging from social inequality, gender disparity, to the body and self.

Although much progress has been made in the arts and media industries, gender disparity continues to exist in many areas. For example, women made up only 25% of behind-the-scenes roles in top U.S. films in 2021.¹ 70-80% of photography students globally are women, yet they account for only 13-15% of professional photographers.² UNESCO's *Gender & Creativity: Progress on the Precipice* report highlights reasons backed by data including, "unequal access to decent work, fair remuneration, and leadership positions."³

While the programme offers a platform to elevate talent and present a diversity of voices, the Women in Film & Photography showcase is also about dialogue and connection: asking questions, being open to change, sharing ideas, building community, representation, and making space.

¹ From Forbes "From The Screen To The Corner Office: What's Happening With The Gender Disparity In Hollywood?", 2 Dec 2022

² British Journal of Photography. <https://www.1854.photography/awards/female-in-focus/>.

³ <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-reports-persistent-gender-inequalities-cultural-and-creative-industries>

Jottings of an Unloved
Brindha Anantharaman



“After not seeing or speaking to my abusive parents for over a decade, I got a call saying my father was terminally ill. I made the choice to visit them, but had to endure mental torment afterwards for allowing myself to go back to the hell that was my parents’ house. One can divorce a loveless partner, but what about children who grow up in loveless homes?

After escaping the house for the second time, my repressed past started to play havoc with my present, opening a floodgate to a whirlwind of emotions that I did not know how to cope with... In the days after, all I did was traverse the depths of my mind, perceiving happenings around me through my own emotional filters. I think I might have taken pictures whenever I visited a new and unknown landmark in my mind, unknowingly creating a map of the bewildering personal journey within myself.

The photos are cohesive not by genre, but in character, and by source, presenting my deeper emotions. These are not just images - they are more like markers and jottings forming an extensive map of my mind. That’s perhaps why I could never locate my entirety as a person in any of them; they’re a reflection of the space my mind was at that very moment. They are all me, just very different bits and fragments that I never knew I contained.

It felt cathartic to capture these inner experiences and moments, and they formed a personal means to communicate with myself. I now understand that I will never be rid of my past or the emotions that come with it, but it is ok to acknowledge this. It is ok to be vulnerable and damaged, and here I am regardless, still enduring, living, and thriving in my own beautiful way.”

Brindha Anantharaman is an independent photographer from India. Her work tends to focus on personal narratives, gender issues, mental health, and the environment.
brindhaa.com

Questions to Consider:

- What emotions are evoked by the images, both singularly and collectively?
- How does the artist use animals and insects to allude to her emotional journey in her images?
- In what way can photography act as a means of catharsis for survivors of trauma and abuse?

Live-in (Mattress provided)
Geraldine Kang



“Live-in (Mattress provided)” is my photographic and textual response to the act of hiring live-in migrant domestic workers (MDW) in Singapore. Early stages of the project were spurred by the live-in rule which mandates that all MDW live with their employer throughout their stay. The rule is sometimes criticised for conflating living and working spaces for the worker, which leaves her vulnerable to various types of exploitation and isolation. The present system leaves little recourse to women who struggle with adapting to a new environment alone, or who chance upon abusive or oppressive employers.

To spark a larger conversation about these helpers’ complex role and presence in our homes, I have drawn visual focus solely towards their beds/mattresses and the immediate area around them. This serves as an entry point beyond closed doors, while also responding to existing types of images already in circulation, especially in the realms of advocacy work, documentaries and fictional films.

The project’s text aims to make my connection with participants and my position as artist more transparent. It reveals the relationships, warmth, generosity, and liberty that aren’t indicated in the images. I hope to offer some reflexivity about my own challenges navigating this terrain and the choices made. The main driving force of this project is to articulate complex sentiments about living, familial dynamics, care work, and the support systems in place for a country’s residents.”

Geraldine Kang is a Singaporean artist who uses a mixture of photography, writing, and objects to create installations that address topics such as family, community, mental illness, as well as the undercurrents and ambivalences of familiar places.
geraldinekang.info

Questions to Consider:

- Why do you think the artist chose to omit human figures from her images?
- Observe the images first without reading their accompanying vignettes. Make a note of your initial responses and impressions.
- Now read the accompanying vignettes. How have your initial responses changed or remained unaltered? Why?

Reborn
Khin Thethtar Latt



“This is my performance to counter what is happening.
There are many things in which we aren’t given a choice.
We have to accept what we have.
I carry myself in my womb to be reborn again and again,
In order to leave all the pain and trauma which was born together with me.
Even though we can’t choose, I wish to have the chance to be reborn as who I would like to be.
This is the process of our nature as well.
It is the path through which life comes.
It is also the beginning of emotional trauma.
This is the beginning of the war.
This is a genocide.
This is racial discrimination.
This is also happiness.
This is also peace.
This is also love-kindness.
This is a unification.
It’s alive again.
It’s a healing process.
This is the cycle for everything.”

Khin Thethtar Latt is a multimedia artist from Yangon, Myanmar whose work explores the relationships between society, culture, gender, class, and politics. She sees herself as a storyteller, exploring and reflecting on her own roots and her own voice through the medium of visual language.
khinthehtarlatt.com

Questions to Consider:

- In what way is the work’s title significant to its moving image and accompanying text?
- What visual metaphors does the artist make use of in the performance? How does she use them?
- How does the use of moving image (as opposed to a static one) impact your understanding of the work?

Dear Lisa
Lisa Peh



“Dear Lisa is an open letter to my past, present, and future self. Built upon my experiences in Singapore’s education system, I revisit its role in promoting individuality within the constraints of a collective identity. I relook at how I navigated themes of conformity, obedience, and self within these confines. Through the process, I gained newfound insights and learnt what it means to break away from the mould of fulfilling external expectations.

Inspired by the strictly enforced rule of hair braiding in my primary and secondary schools, I use my hair in this project to represent the calculated structures I was placed in to achieve excellence. My work features 72 ways to tie a braid in 24 different hairstyles that are deemed acceptable in school. However, while there are multitudinous methods to braid hair, a braid is ultimately still a braid.”

Lisa Peh is a Singaporean visual artist who is intrigued by the relationship people have with their immediate surroundings. She primarily uses photography and the moving image to articulate this stream of interactions.
lisapeh.com

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist “navigate themes of conformity, obedience, and self” through her work?
- Which physical element of this installation do you find most visually arresting? (i.e. the life-sized image of the braid train, the accordion rows depicting braiding methods, the images of cut hair on the ground) How is this element effective in conveying the work’s intention to you?
- Can you think of other symbolic practices that can be used to “represent the calculated structures” Singaporean youth are “placed in to achieve excellence”?

The Future of (a Work that is Buried in a Hard Disk)
Low Pey Sien



“In 2020, during the lockdown, I spent about two solitary months in a warehouse-turned-arts space, where I began making a visual diary of myself. It started as an exercise to express myself through my body and my flesh, with the use of different movements, framings, props, sets, and lighting. I had fun making these self-portraits, but many questions emerged for me as well: Why the feeling of shame? Why was there this desire to be naked? What was I examining? The diary felt shameful, and I did not have the courage to share the images – they remained a work-in-progress, buried inside the hard disk.

Coming from a traditional Chinese-Malaysian environment, I’ve grown up associating nudity with the negative connotations of lust, shame, and immorality. However, I still feel conflicted. I believe that the revealing of bare skin should be associated instead with universal humanity, beauty, and self-empowerment.

During my period of isolation, I found freedom and safety as I was away from the confines and expectations which come when living with others. Putting aside my shame, I have perhaps found the courage now to bring this further.”

Low Pey Sien is a Malaysian artist who works in photography, film, and graphic media. Trained as an architect, her works observe the relationship between space, place, and people.
instagram.com/playstesien

Questions to Consider:

- Examine the different types of framings, props, sets, and lighting used in the images. How are they used to impact the viewer’s perception of nudity?
- How does the artist portray a sense of “freedom and safety” in her images?
- As an individual from a traditional background, Pey Sien’s project is her way of expressing herself away from its “confines and expectations”. Do you face “confines and expectations” from your own environment? How would you depict your own journey of self-empowerment visually?

Beudoh Dara
Nisa Rizkya Andika



“In 2005, Aceh was granted special autonomy as part of a deal with Jakarta to end decades of separatist violence, and Sharia Law was implemented as a result. Under Sharia Law, amongst other changes in community life, women are expected to adhere to a modest dress code that includes the wearing of a hijab.

Growing up in a post-conflict generation, I have heard and read about the political situation during those tumultuous times, where women often ended up oppressed by those who fought over the ideology of power. Some saw the covering of women’s bodies as an ideological symbol representing the collective identity of the Aceh community, while others saw it as an act of control, and a means to spread fear in society. Women’s bodies are hence constructed as symbols of nationality and moral parameters. This tension continues to exist even today, as patriarchal power extends its reach into the current generation. Just as women’s voices have been muted throughout this history, our identities are thus also subsumed into nameless and faceless statistics, to be used for political power.

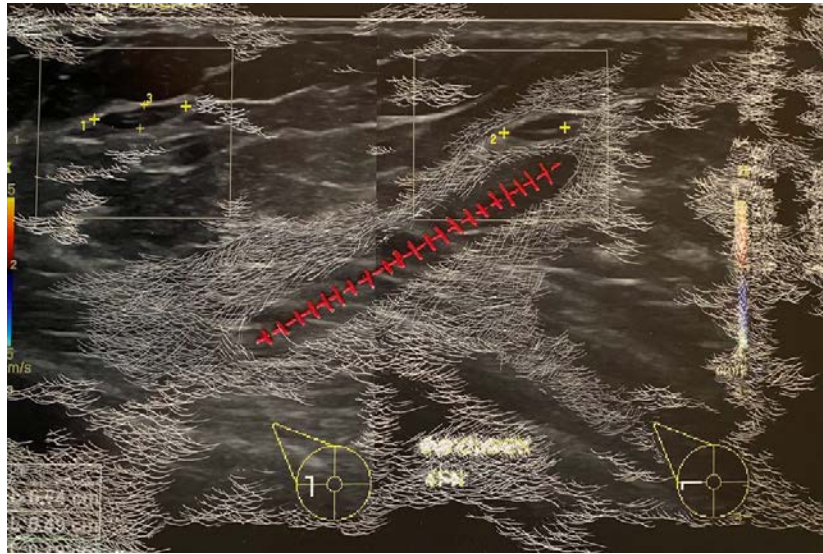
Beudoh Dara (meaning *Wakeup Woman* in Acehnese) is a self-portrait series, with accompanying images of my mother and sister from our family albums between 2009 and 2015. Through this project, and the use of personal archives, I articulate my belief that the ‘self’ is inextricable from the wider collective and history. It captures my attempt to situate my life and understand my ‘self’, as a woman born after the conflict, amidst the broader collective experience that it is connected to.”

Nisa R.A. is a multidisciplinary artist who is interested in women's issues and the intergenerational gap. She exhibits her work in various media such as visual art, photography and film.
nisarizkya.my.canva.site

Questions to Consider:

- How can the work’s title be interpreted in light of the artist’s intention (as stated in the last paragraph of the project’s description)?
- How does the artist make use of personal archives in this body of work?
- What emotions are evoked as you view these images?

Sharps and Such
Sunaina Bhalla



“I first shared *Sharps and Such* in 2020, where I explored my body as a landscape and battleground of memories, trauma, and aging, but also as a site of resilience. The show conjoined those otherwise distinct dimensions of my life – my practice and personal medical history – in the motif of the needle, which was the tool inflicting pain. In choosing to engage with objects that signify intense physical distress and emotional upheaval, I acknowledged the inevitable reality that confronts most patients with life-threatening conditions: the morbid dance between healing and harm, treatment and torment.

I used suture threads to embroider on the positives of my mammograms in the fifth year after my positive diagnosis of breast cancer. The work has since continued to signify a mental shift towards my memories of cancer. In order to ‘let go’ of these memories, and attempt to repair and regenerate through the act, I have scratched the prints of my mammograms after embroidering them with thread. These scratches, which represent the real and imagined scars of the body, ‘soothes’ the implied violence of the scratches. The transformative process that my body has undergone, along with the shadows and fear that linger, are reflected in the woodblock prints of my ultrasound scans, which are created through repetitive stamping of a single block to create the fluid movement that is visible in the scans.”

Sunaina Bhalla is an artist of Indian origin living in Singapore. Her work revolves around the repetitive and ritualistic nature of gestures and their traces. She explores the transformative effects of the deliberate infliction of pain on the human body during the curative processes that alleviate disease and decay.
sunainabhalla.com

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist communicate her emotional and physical journey as a cancer survivor aesthetically?
- The artist also mentions her body being “a site of resilience”. How is this conveyed through her work?
- Various textures are present throughout this work (e.g. thread, scratchings, fabric). Which of these do you find the most viscerally provoking? Why?

Nothing Left to Call Home
Taniya Sarkar



“Nothing Left to Call Home is an ongoing long-term visual research project centred on the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh. It focuses on unearthing women's narratives from the multi-faceted and complex communal events since India's partition and independence in 1947. The chapter presented at Objectifs explores how these events have historically manifested as patriarchal violence against women.

The 2020 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), known as “the anti-Muslim law,” sparked nationwide protests and communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Delhi. While covering the protest as a freelance photojournalist, I witnessed mobs attacking women and infants with acid bulbs, as well as targeting journalists. Later, massive communal clashes broke out in my home state. Again, women were targeted.

Since 2020, I have focused on collecting the accounts of women from Bengal who were disproportionately affected by communal polarisation, riots, and migration since the partition. Survivors of these clashes reveal that the actual narratives of Bengal's communal violence are more complex, arising at the intersection of politics, religion, and patriarchy. I hope to fill the gaps in official accounts with portraits and visual metaphors of women whose narratives have long been forgotten. In this work, memory is a form of resistance that will always be relevant as long as institutions attempt to marginalise certain histories and legitimise misdeeds.”

Taniya Sarkar is a photographer based in Kolkata. She started documenting the aftermath of the pogrom as an independent photographer in 2020 after witnessing massive communal violence in Delhi. In the same year, she started researching communal violence that has been happening in her home state, West Bengal, since Indian Independence in 1947.

tanyiasarkar.com

Questions to Consider:

- What is your idea of ‘home’? How has the notion of ‘home’ been robbed or deprived from these women?
- What are some of the prominent colours and motifs used throughout this body of work? How has the artist used them in her images?
- In what ways can art and photography “fill the gaps” that are present in official historical accounts?

As You Grow Older
Vân-Nhi Nguyễn



“While Vietnam represents for many in the West a place where a war was fought or athletic shoes are made, its people bear witness to a richer and far more complex reality. To expand and challenge the existing perception and notions of the past that clings to one, is to see and understand the unruliness of it. As a young Vietnamese, coming to terms with these contradictions has meant grappling with the traces of memories and multiple histories, visible throughout the country. Our bodies, both structural and physical, have become vessels for these layered stories.

It is necessary to question the notion of collective memory and its truth, done through the exploration of unusual and often overlooked places, as well as the people found within. Using the same gaze imposed on our bodies throughout our fraught national history, this project attempts to cut through the objectifying tropes assigned to colonial objects; it is to complicate these notions, it is to see better.

I felt it was necessary for *As You Grow Older* to take the shape of a family photo album. It presented an opportunity to photograph and remember people at their most vulnerable, in a space they can make their own, however they like. Through such visual language - neither for nostalgia nor sentimentality - a reflection on gender, race, sexuality, and belonging can be created. In this manner, *As You Grow Older* becomes a rejection of previous homogeneous notions of ‘family’, which came to hinder a nation.”

Vân-Nhi Nguyễn is a Vietnamese photographer and artist. Her work touches on cultural identities and social concerns via aesthetic research and theatrical staging, and in the process, proposes interpretations and challenges stereotypical assumptions.
vannhinguyen.com

Questions to Consider:

- Who (or what) do you think the ‘You’ in the title refers to?
- How does the artist subvert notions of the ‘gaze’ in her images? Why do you think this is important to her body of work?
- In what way does this project resemble a typical family photo album, and how does it differ? How do these similarities and differences help to convey the project’s intentions?

ABOUT OBJECTIFS



Established in 2003, Objectifs is a visual arts space in Singapore that is dedicated to film and photography.

Our goal is to cultivate original voices in visual storytelling, and to inspire and broaden perspectives through the power of images. We do this by presenting a year-round programme of exhibitions, screenings, workshops, talks, mentorships, and residencies, aimed at fostering dialogue about visual culture, and advancing the practice and appreciation of photography and film.

OBJECTIFS TURNS 20



Objectifs celebrates its 20th anniversary this year! We look forward to celebrating with you as we acknowledge our history and look towards our future, growing in size and spirit to carry out our mission of cultivating original voices in visual storytelling and inspiring and broadening perspectives through the power of images. Your support and generosity have been important for us through the years, and have allowed us to continue providing valuable resources and opportunities for audiences, photographers and filmmakers of all levels to learn, grow, and create. We hope that you continue being part of our journey. As Objectifs is a registered charity with IPC status, your donations will qualify for a 250% tax deduction.

Support us by scanning the QR code on the right, or by visiting
<https://www.giving.sg/objectifs>

