

A photograph of a red carpet laid on ancient stone steps. The carpet is a vibrant red, contrasting sharply with the dark, weathered stone. The steps are wide and lead up a hillside. In the background, a small yellow building is visible on the top of the hill under a clear blue sky.

THE RED CARPET

Marlene Apmann

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A PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

7 DECEMBER 2017 - 6 JANUARY 2018



RC01 I
C-print on archival paper
50 x 75cms

THE RED CARPET

A FRUGAL PATH; AN EVIDENT STEP

Marlene Apmann's images appear deceptively simple. Only on a deeper examination do they reveal levels of socio-cultural engagement and political reverberation.

At first glance, the current series of Marlene's photographs features young girls in their teens or thereabouts, looking directly into the camera. They are generally decked up in colourful attire for the occasion of being photographed. Their postures do not vary much, but it is the expression on their faces which immediately draws close attention. As important are the surroundings and backdrops in which they are situated: a public bus stand or railway station; a non-decrepit street; a wayside shop; a marriage hall; a temple tree; a street art mural; a local park; and so on. And then comes the most unexpected twist to the tale: all the protagonists are standing on a red carpet!

It is this act of subversion - placing a red carpet, traditionally used to sketch the path taken by VIPs on ceremonial occasions, in the most ordinary of situations - that brings a sense of mystery and intrigue to Marlene's images. In her pictures, it is not the VIP but a commoner who takes the centre stage. The focus of the camera lens never wavers from this 'honoured individual' drawn from diverse echelons of society; and depicted with beautiful stark austerity.

Through this simple act of laying down a long, red floor covering for the girl to step on, Marlene is alluding to different layers of an existing social and cultural order. By not allowing her protagonists to be isolated from their context or freed from their daily associations, she is profiling them in a natural and clearly distinctive manner. In doing these, she is also hinting at aspects inherent in a mundane, local and sub-sectoral landscape often hidden in the underbelly of an otherwise burgeoning metropolis like Bengaluru. By posing them in a deliberate staged and straightforward manner but adding the mysterious mark of the carpet, she is infusing a sense of theatricality to the whole situation as well as the creative process. Pictured in the way Marlene does, the young girls do not come out as static cut-out figures but dynamic representations of a reality which is well known but often veiled and barely recognised. In Marlene's work one can see an interweaving of creative strands such as minimalism and conceptual art. Her disciplined commitment

to develop a singular vision through a series of images, in some ways, brings to memory the work of her illustrious countrymen, Bechers [*] who proposed a unique understanding and presentation of patterns of 'rhythms and repetitions'. But unlike the Bechers whose standardised format involved a consistent human 'absence', Marlene's work is dedicated entirely to the appreciation of human 'presence'. Seen from that point of view, she seems closer to the American photographer Richard Avedon (1923-2004) whose forthright pictures of people were motivated by intimacy and accuracy of representation. But where Marlene differs even from him is that in his best pictures Avedon unfailingly removed every hint of the background by setting a white screen behind his posing figures. As could be seen in her series of photographs, Marlene does anything but hide the background. In fact, in her pictures the backgrounds help expose the multiple layers of human condition as much as the posing figures themselves.

Marlene's art, thus, seems to absorb and even pay homage to ideas of great artists, even as it follows its own private trajectory. Uniquely combining elements of street photography, documentary, portraiture and other genres, her series is formed and informed by her own brand of 'straight photography' in which the protagonists - silently but staunchly gazing at her lens - reveal as much as they hide facets of personal identities. Their striking presence and postures underscored by the intrusion of the ubiquitous red carpet blur the borders between the real and the fantastic; familiar and the unknown; clear and the contradictory. In Marlene's art, the 'symbolic' carpet becomes at the same time a venue, a battleground, and a surreal edifice set in a locale where the logical merges seamlessly with the ludicrous.

Giridhar Khasnis
Art Critic and Curator
November 2017

[*] German photographers Bernhard Becher (1931-2007) and Hilla Becher (1934-2015)



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RC05
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RC13
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RC15

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THE RED CARPET

RC08

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THE RED CARPET

RC10

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THE RED CARPET

RC16

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40 x 60cms



Marlene Apmann

Prolific in her practice, Marlene Apmann has made remarkable inroads into the Art of contemporary Film and Photography. Her astute mind and approach, that cuts to the chase with great clarity, defines Apmann's works which are at once, works of art and an incisive mirror on society, besides being vivid reflections of her strong belief in gender equality.

Apmann studied the science of pedagogy and art in the historical town of Aachen, land of Charlemagne and the hottest springs in Europe, moving on, to her passions Film and Photography in Berlin and Bremen in Germany. Her early years after art school were spent working as a filmmaker, creating film essays on contemporary art for broadcasting stations such as SR, SDR and Arte culminating in the Journalist Prize of the German National Committee for Monument Conservation in 1992.

Her films were presented in Art Museums in Düsseldorf, Emden in Germany and Vancouver in Canada. She has lived in the US, taught art at schools and the Art Academy in Saarbrücken.

Her Photographic works have been presented in several exhibitions and as photo installations in urban public spaces both in Germany and Sweden. In 2012, a major photo project on waste recycling in the Island of Helgoland, Germany won her a nomination for the Art and Environment Prize and was shown in Güstrow, Germany. Her most recent exhibition "*Love Comes Later*" in March 2017, at Art Corridor, Taj West End in Bengaluru along with writer Anita Nair, delved into the subject of arranged marriages and the wedding industry.

The Red Carpet has been her labor of love, whilst living in Bengaluru since 2013. With her customary straight forwardness, she has explored local cityscapes, complete with a red carpet and camera in tow, creating brilliant compositions capturing the endearing personalities of ordinary young women and their Red Carpet Moments. Here, Marlene Apmann delves into areas of gender perceptions, social fabric of family values, pondering on future aspirations and opportunities for young women in India.

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