

FILE MUSEUM
INTERVIEW

Speakers:

HUO: Hans Ulrich Obrist

DS: Dayanita Singh

UM: Unnamed Male(s)

Part One

HUO I remember that you had just started to photograph archives when we did the *Indian Highway* exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2008; which was the first picture you took?

DS Actually the ‘archive work’ was found by Sunil Khilnani in my own archive. He was coming to see my work after a long time and I wanted to show him work that no one else had ever seen. So, I made 200 prints somehow related to paper, and he ‘found’ these 24 images among them. He called them *File Room*. I found that time and time again I had been photographing rooms full of paper, with a table and a chair, for over a decade!

HUO It just happened, unconsciously?

DS Yes, I would go to a factory and pass by their record room or to someone’s house with a great library, or a government office, I could not resist photographing it even though I may have been there for a completely different reason. And then I became obsessed with this, going to every file room that I could gain access to.

HUO So you did it actually *before* you did it, in some kind of way?

DS Right, so to me it’s like a tribute to the analogue archive, and thank god that I had contact sheets and I hadn’t deleted anything, so it was all there to find again.

HUO Which of the archive photographs here is the oldest?

DS This one.

HUO This woman in her archive?

DS In the tram depot in Calcutta. That, I remember, was a photograph I made just to please the woman to give me permission to photograph from the booth or ferry services in Calcutta.

UM So it started with this accident?

DS Yes, most of my work starts with accidents. Of course they’re not accidents but...

HUO When I first saw your work with archives, it reminded me of a very strange experience I had. On my first visit to Dakar I went to the Palace of Justice, which contained all the legal archives of the country of Senegal, but it had been abandoned so really became an example of extreme entropy. The interesting thing here is that you’ve got also a certain entropic element in your work, the order goes into a disorder in some way, it sort of dissolves.

DS Exactly, but there is an order, there is one person who knows where each paper is. All the archives here are working archives, they’re not abandoned.

HUO Very often each has the same principle, as you say there will be a shelf, some files, a table, and a human being—these are the very simple ingredients.

DS Yes, and I think one of Talbot’s first pictures was also the library table, and then in *Austerlitz* as well, right at the end, Sebald talks about that big filing cabinet, or I forget what he calls it. So I guess these things just lodge themselves in your head somewhere.

HUO Here there are also some maps.

DS Yes, that’s in the Survey of India, where all the government maps of India are printed. You remember this, how it’s going to open and all that. (**DS** showing **HUO** the 30 cm high maquette of her File Museum.)

HUO Yes very much so, it’s very exciting, it’s a portable museum.

DS Yes, I have now decided that inside it will be three shelves, and they will have more of the *File Room* pictures.

HUO So the shelf will also include photos of files?

DS Yes, and then you can change the pictures also, because of the way it’s made. It will be a large structure.

HUO So this is the maquette really?

DS Yes it is the maquette, the actual museum will be 150 cm high.

HUO It’s amazing. So there are different steps in this archive adventure, the first being this chance discovery that you had already been doing it without realising. From then on you did it consciously and proactively.

DS Yes. I had never been obsessed in that way with anything, it was bordering on madness, and the excitement for me when I walked into a room was almost like a sexual excitement, or beyond a sexual excitement. Just to see that room full of secrets, where one fact and one file could make such a difference to someone’s life, but they are just lying there dormant until the right person comes in. For example, I went to the land records department, which looked a mess and I thought it would be impossible to find anything there. They said, “Tell us your father and grandfather’s addresses.” So I told them my grandfather’s address and beyond that I didn’t remember anything. From this they told me that my great-great-grandfather had been adopted by such-and-such a Hindu family, so I’m not quite the lineage that I thought that I was, and I said, “Stop it, I don’t want to know anything more!”

UM How amazing.

HUO It’s obviously all pre-digital also. The fascinating thing is, while we think that paper is disappearing in the digital age, isn’t actually disappearing, paper is still very important.

DS But it will disappear.

UM When that person who knows is gone, no-one will know how it works.

DS Also when they’re scanning, they’re doing it in a very unthinking way where they’re just scanning the full page, so how would you ever be able to search.

UM Or using Microfilm which is the most inefficient method.

DS Yes.

HUO At the same time one doesn’t have the feeling that paper will disappear entirely. If one looks at the piece Hans-Peter Feldmann has made with women’s handbags, we see that these handbags are full of paper: theatre tickets, subway tickets, or photographs of friends. There may be an iPhone also, but paper hasn’t disappeared completely, although probably this form of archive will disappear.

DS I think so. I think I was already a little late because a lot of them didn’t give me permission and said, “Come back in a year because we’re just finishing digitising,” and I said, “No, no, no, I want it *before* that.”

HUO Pre-digital.

DS Yes, yes.

HUO What’s interesting is that you are documenting the archive just before it disappears, like the Bechers did with industrialised architecture.

DS Yes, but to me it’s also more than the archive, it’s the idea of the secret and there are so many secrets lodged in all of us in all our stories. Often they are secrets because we don’t even remember them, but all it takes is for one flash and it can change your entire life.

HUO That’s also very beautiful. Who is he?

DS That’s again in the Survey of India, he’s the file-keeper.

HUO And that as well?

DS Yes.

HUO These are like scrolls.

DS Those are maps. That’s the file-keeper’s bicycle.

HUO You have obviously worked a lot with the archives in India, but you’ve also looked beyond India, I remember you went to Italy?

DS I went to Italy, but I stopped because my interest lay in the chaos and the disorder and it wasn’t the same kind of chaos there, it was a more planned chaos and that was not interesting to me. It wasn’t just about documenting the archive, it had to be exciting for me as well, for me to feel like somehow I couldn’t see everything, that I couldn’t find the order. So the moment I could classify it—

HUO The interest was somehow lost?

DS Yes.

HUO The amazing thing here is that it is impossible to understand the system.

DS Right. And these are the tide maps of India.

HUO Tides like of the floods?

DS No, tides of the sea, the moon tide.

HUO And these are stripes.

DS These are family histories, so you go there and you can trace your family because this is where you go when someone dies. For example they would write down, “Hans Ulrich came with Dayanita when her father died in such-and-such year” and then your great-grandchildren will go there, and then somehow because you visited with me that record will continue. So these are family archives.

HUO They are like bands of DNA.

DS I can’t remember which archive this one was in, but these Godrej cupboards are really a symbol of the archive. As are the bundles.

HUO They also become like cloth, I mean they are not only wrapped in cloth but there is something very cloth-like about them.

DS These bundles, Hans Ulrich, are to me like bodies, they are like families. For example, the one you just saw was the Maharana of Udaipur’s archive, going back to the fourteenth century where everything that the Maharana did, every day, is recorded. I’m not going to give captions to the pictures

HUO No captions, no. What are these?

DS This is also another Maharaja’s archive.

HUO So these are like Warholian time capsules.

DS Yes, exactly, exactly! So really forty years of one Maharaja’s life is one bundle.

HUO It’s a time capsule. These are the bands again?

DS Yes. When you go into this archive it’s overwhelming and you

say, “Oh my god!” and I want the book to have that kind of quality, to be very beautiful but at the same time not just 60 images beautifully edited, but at least 120 images and you can’t look at it at one time.

HUO And here it’s like when you go to a shop to make a suit, these are like shoes?

DS (laughs) Yes. It’s beautiful paper that has become all brown now.

HUO Here it becomes like a morgue, or there’s something very death-related about it. The bundles make it related to death. And what is in these suitcases? They are like big travelling suitcases.

DS Albums.

HUO Albums of people?

DS Yes.

HUO Do you understand the codes on them? JUF and COF and BOF and ARC.

DS No.

HUO There’s a strange coding system in place which is like a secret code.

DS Yes, because there is no single system everywhere, the archivists make their own system. There is no Ikea, so there is no standardised furniture, and furniture in these archives is also very interesting. There is no one museum course that tells you how to archive, so very often the archivist is a woman who has gone into this institution, looked in the back room, found all these mountains of paper and decided that she’s going to organize them. When I went to explain to one of these archivists what I was doing, given that permission was very difficult in all those situations, I took her José Saramago’s *All The Names* and I thought maybe this would give her an idea. She read the first page and said, “if you ever make a book you should use this first introduction where he talks about this archive smelling like chrysanthemums,” and then she said, “Oh don’t worry, I understand what you’re doing; you’re trying to make monuments of knowledge.”

HUO So this is very exciting, to see them altogether. These are all black and white.

DS Yes, they are all black and white. I wanted to have two or three texts that approach it in very different ways, not from a historian’s perspective, because it’s not just about that. People’s lives get determined by files. My house was a mausoleum of files. Since my mother became a widow, her life has just been about going to court, carrying bags and bags and bags of files. She still sleeps with bundles of files below her bed.

HUO So they are the files of your father?

DS Of my father, of the legal system in India; if my mother hadn’t given it all up I would have inherited it. That was my biggest nightmare in life, no more photography, just files and courts.

HUO So that’s a bureaucratic process which sets in?

DS Usually it’s not so bad, but if there is any property this means there will be fighting, and if there’s fighting there’s litigation.

HUO So it’s actually biographical. How old is your mother now?

DS I think 76. She is just digitising her whole photographic archive now.

HUO Who is this man?

DS This is in one of the lower courts.

HUO These are court archives?

DS Yes, they are all different, this is the district court. The symbol is really that Godrej cupboard, the tall metal cupboard. If you had to talk of the two or three symbols of India, there is the Ambassador car, and there's this Godrej cupboard. But this company called Godrej is synonymous with these tall cupboards, so you don't even call it a cupboard you just call it a Godrej. They're supposed to be very safe.

HUO These bundles are amazing. Here they correspond to months: August, September.

DS And you see those cupboards again.

UM They're not new cupboards are they, they're sort of Fifties or Sixties?

DS There are about sixty images of these cupboards in here, however I thought I would mix them all up, I didn't want to make it too classifiable for people.

HUO There are also often calendars.

DS Yes, yes, always in government offices.

UM "Come back in 28 days and I'll find that piece of paper."

DS (Laughs) Yes, or "When's the next holiday?" With bureaucrats it's always Mondays or Fridays; on Friday they say come back on Monday, on Monday they say come back on Friday (laughs).

HUO And what about these trophies?

DS Those are the offices of the government official; his office had won all these trophies. And that's my lawyer's office in Goa.

UM That's a very neat office.

DS (Laughs) Yes, he tidied up!

HUO And this one?

DS I wanted to have some other kinds of archive. So, this was an archive of national leaders in the National Library in Calcutta. And these are very, very old manuscripts.

HUO This one is like a Franz Erhard Walther work. Walther was a student of Beuys in Germany from the Sixties, who did a lot of folding in his work; if you would see this in a gallery you would think it was a work of his.

DS The corners are beautifully folded, as though you're making a box for something, but out of cloth. I forget why, but they're always red.

HUO Red cloth.

DS I'll find out why.

UM Is it to do with 'red tape' in the legal system?

DS No, I think this red is something to do with the archival quality of that particular vegetable dye, but I have to just check it.

HUO Here are vitrines of some statues?

DS Statues of leaders again. We are obsessed with our leaders, so the house museums always have the national leaders.

HUO A secret archive?

DS Yes, secret archives.

HUO It's got a lot to do with secrets.

DS Yes, and there's a picture we will come to later which just says "Secret", which I thought should be the cover.

HUO This is extraordinary here.

DS Do you find it quite moving?

HUO Very much so, it's unbelievably moving, of being obsessed by archives. Also, because it's black and white it doesn't look at all like paper. This could be a completely different material.

DS Yes.

HUO Sometimes they look like textiles, sometimes they look metallic; these could be lead. It's extremely moving as you say, in five years it will no longer be here..

DS No. I wrote to the cultural minister to make a file museum.

HUO It's interesting that there are these connections to contemporary art: some look like an Anselm Kiefer bookshelf; some look like Franz Erhard Walther foldings; and this one looks like a Kounellis. It's very connected to a lot of art history although obviously it wasn't consciously done, it just happened.

DS Yes. This work has really been possessed by some other force.

HUO Here it's a whole other system.

DS Wooden pieces, between two wooden planks there is a rope.

HUO Here it's an archive of cupboards.

DS It's too much to see all in one go, but I want the book to be like that, so that you just feel you can't see it all.

HUO This one takes the form of piles. It is some form of architecture.

DS Yes, yes.

HUO You might want to have an extract of the great novel by Anthony Powell, *Books Do Furnish a Room*.

DS Yes. This is what I thought I would use for the cover, which just says "Secret".

HUO 'Secret files of 1908', that would be an amazing cover. The book is also like a treasure that one can return to and each time find a different meaning.

DS Yes, these archives are just waiting for someone to come with the key.

HUO Here they become like skyscrapers, with the floors in-between. It's architecture.

DS Yes, architecture and gradually you see the furniture comes out.

HUO This I saw in the exhibition at King's India Institute in London. The form of the work is multiple, it's an exhibition, a slide-show, a book, but it's also going to be a portable museum. When did the idea of the portable museum first come up?

DS I think this was a continuation of *Sent A Letter*, and those conversations about the "nanomuseum", and somehow I felt that this work couldn't be shown in a gallery kind of way, that it had to be not about "less is more" but "more is less". The structure came after the cart, first I made the cart to sell the *House of Love* books.

HUO The cart is your mobile bookshop.

DS Yes. It opens like that, and that, and becomes a wall, or a corner. I like it best as a corner. (**DS** showing the File Museum maquette to **HUO**.)

UM And are these made as framed photographs or are they printed straight onto the wall?.

DS No, each one of these will be individually framed. The frame is just for handling them, so you can put them in and out of the archive and keep changing them, because the archive will be inside.

HUO (Referring to photograph) He protests against forgetting.

DS Yes, with the typewriter. Godrej finally stopped making them.

HUO It's so interesting that on the one hand you have these archives, and on the other you have these call centres which are high-tech.

UM But of course these archives were for the country, whereas the call centres are certainly not.

HUO The calling centres also lead us back to books. When we went to see Tyeb Mehta, for our last visit to him, he couldn't move any more so we had to go to the suburbs to visit him at his house. We took a suburban train and it's quite an experience to take the suburban train in Mumbai, it's very dense.

DS Yes.

HUO And on this suburban train there were all these booksellers, selling books, and I didn't understand why they would sell so many books on the train. I asked whether they were selling coffee and they said, "No, not coffee, dictionaries!"

DS Yes, yes. In India, the way to gauge your success as an author is if your book is sold in Bombay at the red light, you know, the traffic light. I mean, my books will never get there, but that would be a dream to have those children running with these books. They read *God of Small Things* and *River of Smoke*.

HUO Also books by our friend, Vikram Seth.

DS Yes, Vikram Seth, maybe Dan Brown, they are in the top ten. They are pirated copies, badly printed.

HUO It could be a project to have the kids selling your books!

DS Yes.

HUO It could be a nice exhibition.

DS Yes, absolutely.

HUO So suddenly the kid would not sell Brown, the kid would sell Dayanita Singh, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Ed Ruscha in the streets of Bombay, it would be great.

DS Just at one traffic light. I even know which particular traffic light, where there is the sea on one side, and the mosque is inside the sea.

HUO That actually would be a very nice exhibition. It would be amazing to ask each artist to do a special book just for the streets of Bombay.

DS Yes, and available just at a certain time, like our calendar.

HUO Exactly.

DS We made a calendar of an image of Bombay, and there were ten copies sold at the Serpentine Gallery. The remaining 990 copies were sold in this big slum in Bombay, and you couldn't buy it anywhere else, so you had to go to that slum if you wanted to buy it.

HUO He's also one of my favourites here, this is amazing. What is he holding?

DS Wood. And the next photo is of the butterfly man, and the next one is all the woods of India, 20,000 samples. But I just want to slip it into the book, so that you think it's paper.

UM It makes me think also of the image library of the Courtauld. Before everything was digitised they created a photo library where people would gum pictures onto cards with all the provenance information and where they are and so on. They have images of every Renaissance painting. Of course it's now all irrelevant, but it is still there, it's amazing.

HUO It's a great book.

DS Thank you.

Part Two

HUO When we first met, you already had this idea of doing a portable museum, so when did this idea begin in your work? There are obviously different possibilities; either one can bring people to see the work, or one can bring the work to the people, which is something you've done a lot, isn't it?

DS I loved what happened with *Sent A Letter*, the fact that my little archive exists in your house and then when you feel like it you can have an exhibition of my work that is completely separate from the art world, the museum world, the gallery world. It's a very direct relationship and you can do what you like with the box, you can paste your own photos into the books because you could just buy another box. So, *Sent A Letter* showed me the possibilities, and then you sent me the text about the nano-museum, and then those conversations with you that gave me a lot of support that I wasn't completely out of my mind, and that there was this aspect to photography especially, no? And then we made the "Point d'Ironie" piece, which was disseminated, you remember, outside the Art Fair?

HUO Yes, hundreds or thousands of copies were printed.

DS And that night when we went to the car, we were giving them to the beggars on Lodhi Road. So that is the part of photography that excites me the most, I think, it's not the making of the pictures.

HUO And also disseminating your photographs among entire communities in Goa and having them in their houses.

DS That was in 2000.

HUO So that's earlier, you see?

DS Yes, I forgot about that.

HUO Where did that idea come from?

DS Well, I wanted to make family portraits but I had no idea whether anybody would be interested in them. What could I do with them? So, when I started making the family portraits my thinking was that if, at the end of my life, three hundred families in India have my photographs hanging on their walls, then that exhibition is more meaningful to me than the biggest museum exhibition, because that archive will live forever. Nobody will throw their family portraits away. There are some in my village in Goa, and there was the exhibition in Calcutta, where 108 prints were taken off the walls by the sitters themselves in Calcutta and hung in their homes. Those images now hang in 66 homes. Then when I made *House of Love* I had the idea that, like the boys at the street corners in Bombay, I wanted to sell my book myself. Of course, people thought it was a terrible idea that the artist should be selling, also I wasn't just selling my book I was forcing people to buy two copies.

HUO So basically it's a little portable bookshop.

DS At the art fair, I had this *House of Love* cart, which was the first cart idea. As long as the exhibition is on the wall, Peter is game with whatever else I do, so I made this cart and then when Ullens wanted a different work I said, "No, you can have this story,

‘Continuous Cities’, but you have to also have my cart.”

DS I think it’s a very important work. Then, when I came to making the *File Room* work I wanted to make a museum for those files, so that you can change the photos, and even when they’re on display the full storage will be displayed as well.

HUO In addition, these huge piles of files are like a form of architecture, similar to how in my Berlin flat, when I pile books on top of each other into these towers I always think it’s like a city. The architectural dimension of the fragile construction, which always collapses, is also like a building, and then with your portable museum you make it again into architecture, you bring photography back into architecture.

DS Yes, and that is really the part that interests me the most, I cannot stop it now, it’s out of my hands, my house is full of these structures, there are four of them, which could always be in my house; my house can just be a labyrinth of these mini museums. This is the work, my work is no longer that one print on the wall.

HUO But that micro version could also be the work.

DS Yes I know, but there is something about being forced by the art world to make a single print that I think is artificial. It’s fine, however it’s just not my way anymore, I don’t think like that, I see it all as one work.

HUO So it’s one work and it can have different forms or appearances. Do you have any unrealised portable museums?

DS My dream would be to have a warehouse like this, and within that there are museums of different sizes. In my room right now there are three boxes.

HUO So to have a gigantic warehouse where the museum hides many other museums.

DS I have to show you something, so you can see the extent of the madness. I’m going to run to my room and back, I’ll be back in two minutes.

[pause]

DS That’s my next project, which nobody has seen.

HUO Can I have a look?

DS Yes.

HUO Its amazing.

DS The box will be designed in such a way that you can take out one at a time.

HUO So one takes out just one and then puts it back.

DS Yes, and the order keeps changing, the box design has to be improved.

HUO Where are these pictures from, are they from your archive?

DS They are all from last year. I wanted to make it like a newsletter. For instance, I would find ten or twenty people or institutions and every year this newsletter goes out, just pictures from the year.

HUO So it’s something you could do every year? And then it could be printed like *Sent A Letter*?

DS Yes. And because they are on this slightly thicker paper, you can decide that today because so-and-so is coming to your office, you want to put these five pictures out, or you want to take all the

Mona pictures out. So it’s a little box that you can curate yourself.

HUO So each person makes his or her own show?

DS Yes.

HUO It’s beautiful.

DS And unless you lay it all out, you don’t even see the full show.

HUO They are like mini sequences within the sequence. They are just pictures of a year, so it’s a chronicle of some sort?

DS Yes.

HUO This is beautiful, what a great idea. Will you print it with Steidl, will it be an annual thing?

DS No, I want to do it like this with actual prints, because as Hans-Peter Feldmann was saying in his interview with you, I love the cutting and the pasting.

HUO So you want to do it yourself, you’ll self-publish it?

DS I won’t self-publish it because I’ll only make ten or fifteen copies. And I have to tell my gallerists that for me the selling of it will be part of the ‘work’ also, so if I’m making ten copies then that somehow is part of the process for me; I don’t want another person to be selling.

HUO So in this sense it is like the books that you sell yourself?

DS Yes.

HUO And when will you start it?

DS I don’t know, I have only just made this. I have to make a list of people, I think there are a few I would think of, including some friends in Tokyo, and then I have to send it out. I think I could do it by the end of this year. I want to do it with actual prints because it doesn’t make a difference anymore now that everything is digital. I think the market is quite naive in trying to say that a print on the wall is an original and a print in a book is not an original.

HUO It’s extremely intimate!

DS Yes, you have to hold it in your hands, no?

HUO Beautiful trees. And this?

DS This I can’t remember, Calcutta I think, after a concert.

HUO Also the arrival of colour here is interesting; there are very few colour images in the sequence.

DS Yes, and then the movies get mixed up, so the woman in *8¹/₂*, Saraghina, turns into the Indian actress, Helen. So that’s one. And then this is the other format I’m thinking of, which is even smaller. This is really for myself so that even on a plane if I want to be making sequences, I can be doing that. And this is called, *What Happened Is This*, that’s the cover and the heart of everything.

HUO That’s the cover of the little box. And where is it from?

DS It’s the subtitle in one of Fellini’s movies.

HUO So Fellini is really important for you?

DS Yes, because I think he appreciates that madness I was speaking of earlier.

HUO Which are your favourite films of Fellini?

DS I think *Roma*, I’m trying to remember. There’s one where there’s a fire, then they’re all driving on the road, then suddenly you see some factory. I’ll have to check but it’s either *Roma* or *8¹/₂* and it was a very humbling experience to watch that because every interest of mine was in that film, even the archive was there.

HUO This is also nice.

DS My friend Adam had turned fifty so I wrote it myself.

HUO Is he based in London?

DS New York. He’s a true character, unique.

HUO These are amazing, can I have a look at this one? The form of the boxes is also great.

DS Yes, and that’s properly sealed.

I love the way photos can just really fly away in the wind and you don’t know where they’ll reach. You might then see someone on the plane and you could pass it. I like that, what is it called?

HUO Serendipity?

DS No, where it goes bigger, bigger, and bigger. So I give this to you, and then it goes to Hans-Peter.

HUO So it’s like a butterfly effect?

DS Yes. This was for me to see whether I want to mix the rectangle and the square…

HUO And where is this?

DS Tokyo.

HUO It’s a performance?

DS Yes.

HUO There are also quite a lot of pictures from the archive.

DS Yes, that’s the thing, that everything overlaps, and once I’ve made *File Room* for instance, I don’t see why I should have to stop using that picture.

HUO It can appear again. What is this?

DS Oh this is beautiful, you’ll see this again and again. She is the goddess of fertility and if you don’t have a child you have to go to her and rub milk on her vagina. The most powerful of the god sculptures I have ever seen.

HUO And where is this?

DS There are five of them in Badami, near Hampi.

HUO And what is this?

DS This is a model of Badami

HUO This is amazing.

DS Photography has so much to do with whom you are in conversation with. Because I was with my friend, Anish, we found three of those goddesses, and we went back to find the others.

HUO This is also very beautiful.

DS The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. And there the goddess is again.

HUO And where is this?

DS In Amsterdam.

HUO Trains.

DS Yes. So you know that the art world would like you to make fifty images in a year and that’s it. However, there are some years, for instance, this is also from last year…

HUO There can be so many more than fifty of course.

DS Yes, and the file work.

HUO It’s also interesting because the experience of looking at the print in an exhibition on the wall or seeing it in a bigger printed book, or looking at it here so intimately, it’s such a different experience of the same thing.

DS Yes, and I quite like the perverseness of only showing it to you in this form, just because you want to see it bigger, it doesn’t mean that I have to make it bigger in the way that you want. I thought I might enlarge it as a wall-paper or a projection.

HUO Where is this?

DS Istanbul airport.

HUO It’s also so amazing to watch this in this light, it’s very lucky.

DS I know! See I bring my whole world to you in this little bundle. Or at least last year’s world.

HUO So in this sense it’s very connected to the time capsules of the bundles in your photograph.

DS Yes, yes. And you can keep shuffling them and hopefully you’ll never see all of them.

HUO And you’ll make new sequences?

DS Yes, and then maybe if this becomes my format, then every year you’ll get a box like this.

HUO So it’s like subscribing to a magazine.

DS Yes, exactly.

HUO Fantastic.

DS And you know, there might be a desert year where there are only two or three images in a box.

HUO And according to how one looks there are also different sequences.

DS The test of it for me is that all the sequences should work, so if you take out five images randomly, there should be something to that sequence.

HUO Who is this?

DS This is the father-in-law of my wonderful friend, Nandita. He loves making machines outside Calcutta, so they asked me to come and document the machines for him.

HUO And this photograph is also him?

DS No, this is not his machine, but an old printing press.

HUO But they’re very connected.

DS Yes, exactly.

HUO This is amazing, congratulations.

DS So may I ask you to be one of the trustees of the File Museum?

HUO It’s a pleasure and a privilege.