



Vasantha Yoganathan. A Myth of Two Souls

From February 20 to May 5, 2019

With the aim of supporting and promoting contemporary institutional creation, the Musée de l'Elysée is presenting the first personal exhibition in a museum institution of Vasantha Yoganathan's project *A Myth of Two Souls*. Born in 1985, the self-taught French photographer belongs to a generation that likes to blur the lines between fiction and reality. This series was inspired by the *Ramayana*, a fundamental epic poem from Hindu mythology written in Sanskrit somewhere between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE.

For six years, Vasantha Yoganathan made regular trips to India and Sri Lanka to complete his project, of which the greater part of the seven chapters are exhibited together for the first time. A specific area for each chapter is set up on the lower level of the Musée de l'Elysée, creating a particular atmosphere specific to each of the stylistics called upon by the artist to develop his story. While the first few rooms – and indeed, chapters – are relatively traditionally laid out, exhibiting framed prints on the wall, the following rooms make it possible to showcase alternative systems of exhibiting, such as screening, paperhanging and installation.

The artist indeed develops different aesthetic treatments and explores, or revisits, ancestral techniques. This is particularly true for the inaugural section of *A Myth of Two Souls*, made up of black and white photographs taken with a view camera and then coloured by hand by an Indian painter in keeping with the 19th century tradition before the advent of colour film. Vasantha Yoganathan reclaims this technique while at the same time modernising it, taking his photographs outside the studio and using passers-by as actors. The field of domestic portraits is thus expanded to cover society as a whole – with no class distinction – as well as the entire land, from huge cities to the depths of the countryside.

The seven chapters exhibited – *Early Times*, *The Promise*, *Exile*, *Dandaka*, *The Quest*, *Lanka*, *The Epilogue* – offer visitors the chance to wander through both time and geography whilst introducing them to rarely used photographic techniques and an original scenography. The exhibition includes photographic works, repainted prints and a multi-channel video installation.

Curation

Vasantha Yoganathan and Lydia Dorner, Musée de l'Elysée, in collaboration with the Studio Kummer & Herrman



Biography

Born in 1985, Vasantha Yoganathan lives and works in Paris. His photographic practice addresses the space between documentary and fiction.

His projects are developed over long periods of time and he only works analog – with both large-format 4x5 and medium-format 6x7 cameras. Besides the aesthetic, he is deeply attached to film photography for its slow – almost philosophical – process.

Over the years, Vasantha Yoganathan has developed a distinctive colour palette solely based on natural light. His interest in painting had led him to work around the genres of portrait, landscape and still life. In his project *A Myth of Two Souls*, started in 2013, he has been working with a local Indian artist to revive the tradition of hand-painting. The more his practice grows, the more he perceives photography as a malleable material open to interpretations.

The book form has been central to his work since the beginning. In 2014, he co-founded the publishing house Chose Commune and published his first book, *Piémanson*. In his books, he interweaves staged photography with scenes from the everyday life, thus exploring different forms of photographic storytelling. His project *A Myth of Two Souls* will be published into seven books (2016-2020) by Chose Commune. The first four chapters, *Early Times*, *The Promise*, *Exile* and *Dandaka* have already been published.

Vasantha Yoganathan has received several awards, among which the IdeasTap Magnum Photos Award (2015), The Prix Levallois (2016), an ICP Infinity Award as Emerging Photographer of the Year (2017) and the Prix Camera Clara (2018). He was also selected among the 20 FOAM Talents 2017.

Vasantha Yoganathan is represented by The Photographers' Gallery Print Sales (London, UK), Espace JB (Geneva, CH) and Jhaveri Contemporary (Mumbai).



Publications

Each chapter developed in the exhibition is also accompanied by a publication. To date, the following have been published by Editions Chose Commune: *Early Times* (2016), *The Promise* (2017), *Exile* (2017) and *Dandaka* (2018), all of which available at the museum's bookstore.

Early Times

This first book tells of the youth and education of Rama, son of King Dasharatha, and of Sita, daughter of King Janaka, who do not yet know each other but are destined to meet and fall in love. The Ramayana has been continuously rewritten and reinterpreted through time, and for Yoganathan's book has been retold by Indian writer Anjali Raghbeer.

The Promise

This second book celebrates the love between Rama and Sita, the two main characters of the story. Their union, a festive but challenging event, is strongly embedded in the collective imagination in India. For this chapter of the Ramayana, Vasantha Yoganathan collaborated with the Indian writer Arshia Sattar.

Exile

The end of chapter two announces that Rama is banished from the kingdom, forced to live in exile during fourteen years. The third chapter tells about Rama's life in the forest, where he is joined by Sita and his brother Lakshmana. For this book, Vasantha Yoganathan once again collaborated with the Indian writer Arshia Sattar.

Dandaka

The end of chapter three sees Lakshmana cut Surpanakha's nose off. After seeing his sister disfigured, Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka, starts to plot his revenge. Rama and Lakshmana have no idea that their barbaric act – the mutilation of a woman – has sealed Sita's fate. The fourth chapter tells about Sita's abduction by Ravana. This opus mixes extracts from the Ramayana comic strip, published in the 1970s, with photographs by Vasantha Yoganathan.



The photographs in the press kit are available for the press free of charge.

Their use is limited to promoting the exhibition *Vasantha Yoganathan. A Myth of Two Souls* at the Musée de l'Elysée. They must not be cropped or modified and no mention must appear on the image. Please use the captions provided.

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Vasantha Yoganathan, *Seven Lives*, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India, 2015



Vasantha Yoganathan, *Lovebird*, Ramtek, Maharashtra, India, 2015



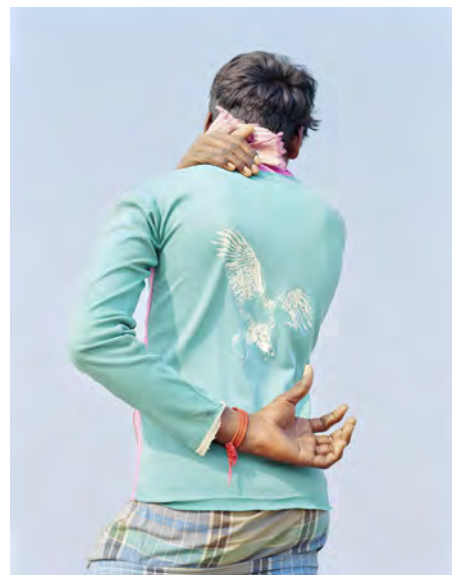
Vasantha Yoganathan, *Come With Me*, Tikarpada, Odisha, India, 2017
Black and white C-print hand-painted by Jaykumar Shankar



Vasantha Yoganathan, *The Horse From The Sea*, Danushkodi, Tamil Nadu, India, 2018



Vasantha Yoganathan, *Magic Jungle*, Jog Falls, Karnataka, India, 2016
Black and white C-print hand-painted by Jaykumar Shankar



Vasantha Yoganathan, *Ravana Fighting Jatayu*, Kodiyakarai, Tamil Nadu, India, 2018

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The Musée de l'Elysée is one of the world's leading museums entirely dedicated to photography. Since its establishment in 1985, it has improved public understanding of photography through innovative exhibitions, key publications and engaging events.

Recognised as a centre of expertise in the field of conservation and enhancement of visual heritage, it holds a unique collection of over one million phototypes and more than a dozen Collections and full Archives including those of Charles Chaplin, René Burri, Nicolas Bouvier, Ella Maillart or Sabine Weiss.

By 2021, the City of Lausanne and the Canton of Vaud will see three of their flagship cultural institutions brought together on a single site. The Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Design and Contemporary Applied Arts (mudac) and the Musée de l'Elysée will be housed just a few yards from the station in the former CFF locomotive hangars.

www.plateforme10.ch

Practical information

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#VasanthaYoganathan

Hours

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