



/ Beautiful People /



# The



# Others

In which Olivier Culmann delves into the links between social status and self-image

OLIVIER CULMANN presents us with a curious portrait gallery. In *The Others*, the Indian man appears in many forms before our eyes without ever revealing his true identity. As an examination of the codes of Indian society and their modes of representation, these portraits are a collection of short stories, no less.

Olivier chose to use his own image as a tool to explore social fantasies and the questions of self and otherness. Fascinated by popular imagery and codes of staged photography, he uses a series of self-portraits as base material to render a variety of factors that contribute to building an individual's identity: Religion, caste, social class, occupation and regional origin. The portraits are subsequently transformed using the various

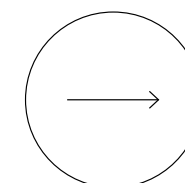
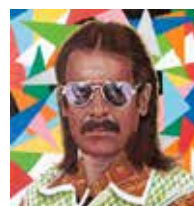
techniques of iconographic creation commonly used in India. These techniques range from the neighbourhood photo studio (see Phase I), to digital lab alterations using software applications similar to Photoshop (Phase II), portraits recomposed and coloured based on photo fragments (Phase III) or portraits that are painted from photographs (Phase IV).

Free will and social conditioning are core questions in Olivier Culmann's work. A photographer since 1992, he is a member of the Tendance Floue collective. Olivier shot for *The Others* series between 2009 and 2011 when he was living in Delhi, and kept shooting until 2013. In the series, that has over 130 photographs, the photographer questions the way in which social status is elaborated through the construction of self-image and explores the limits of the photographic medium.

As the author, director and actor of this series, Olivier delves into the confines of photography by questioning the construction of social status through practices of self-representation and wins us over with his humour and talent for narrative.

*The Others* series was shown at Musée Nicéphore Niépce in France and at the recently-concluded Delhi Photo Festival. The book *The Others* has been published by Éditions Xavier Barral.

Curated by MADHU KAPPARATH



# Phase I

## PORTRAITS TAKEN IN A PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO

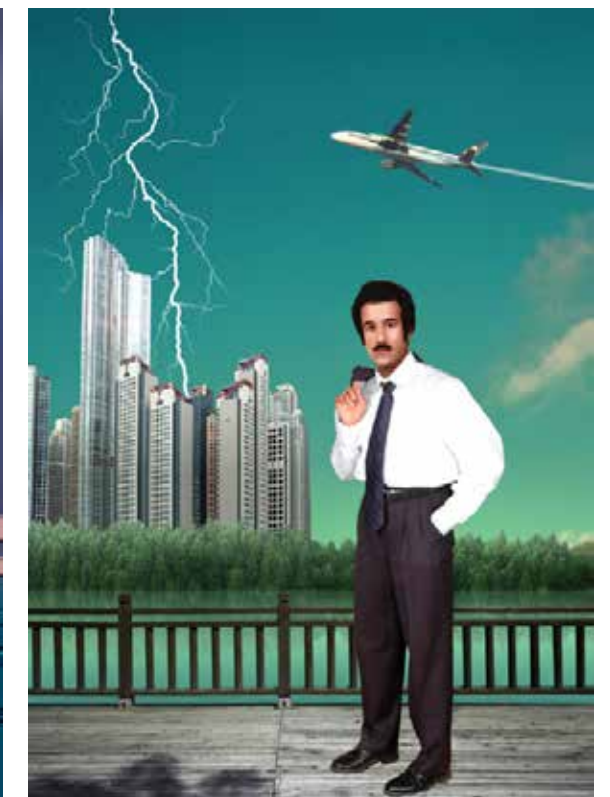
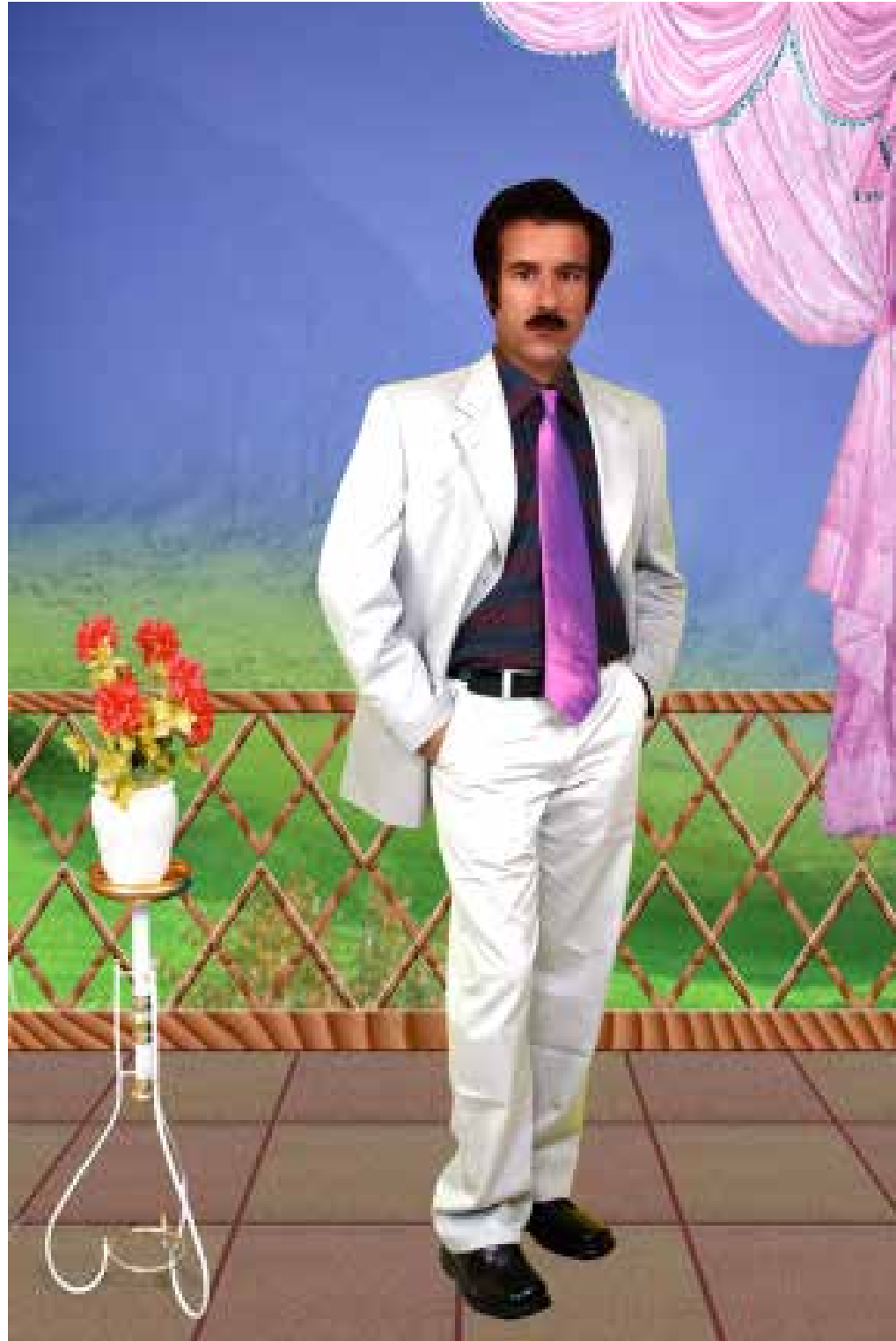
The studios represented in these shots are neighbourhood studios in different Indian cities, notably Delhi but also Chennai, Puducherry and Mumbai.



# Phase II

## PORTRAITS USING DIGITAL ALTERATIONS

Neighbourhood studios can now create backdrops easily with a computer. The client, whose silhouette is cut out in advance, can choose any backdrop for his portrait—the Swiss mountain scape or the Taj Mahal. There is also the option of reposing the client's head on a well-dressed figure.



# Phase III

## RECOMPOSING AND COLOURING DAMAGED PHOTOGRAPHS

Repairing family photographs that have been damaged is common practice in India. When someone dies, an emblematic photograph of the deceased is often restored. The photo is usually hung on a wall at home or in the family business. It is a guarantee of filiation and its symbolic meaning seems more important than the faithful reproduction of the ancestor's physical traits.



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# Phase IV

## PAINTINGS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

Painting on photographs is common in India, especially for shop signs and more traditionally for film posters. Using this skill set as a base, Olivier Culmann gave a Delhi painter a number of black and white photographs and asked him to paint them in different styles (mostly like film posters). Just like with the repair work, he let the painter choose the backdrop and the colours.



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