

## Gauri Gill & Rajesh Vangad

*“As someone put it to me: ‘It’s as though you were photographing an old home, and the resident of the house came out, and began to speak.’”*

*--Gauri Gill*

The work of art featured on this card (full image in front, two details on the back) is the joint work of two artists working collaboratively: photographer Gauri Gill and the Warli<sup>1</sup> artist Rajesh Vangad. Although they also work independently, since 2013 Gill and Vangad have collaborated on a series of works titled *Fields of Sight*, with Gill making photographs and Vangad laying drawings over them, as by-products of a close and ongoing dialogue.

The series arose from an NGO-sponsored trip Gill made in 2013 to a village in the west of India. Invited by a local arts festival, Gill created a photography studio in the village primary school and then had an exhibition at the same site. During the trip, Gill lived in the home of Vangad and his family.

During Gill’s time in the village and surrounding area, Vangad sometimes accompanied her on walks and told her stories about the places they visited and that he knew intimately.

Initially drawn to the landscape for its beauty, Gill slowly began to make photographs of places that were important to Vangad. She would include him in her photographs of places significant to him. Over time, though, she felt that these images were devoid of the magic the places contained when Vangad told stories about them.

Gill attributed part of the problem to the limitations of photography as a medium, since photography depicts the present moment (the moment the photograph is taken), and is unable to also include what came before. Gill also recognized that, as a stranger and city dweller from a major population center (Gill is from New Delhi), it was difficult for her to capture the essence of a place that she knew only recently and superficially. How did she deal with this dilemma? As Gill describes in an essay in a recent book about the *Fields of Sight* series:<sup>2</sup>

I had an idea. We would extend our collaboration to make it more explicit: [Vangad] would inscribe his drawing over my photographs, meet my visual text with his own graphic response. As Warli art is monochromatic, and in order to make the encounter intense and precise, we decided to restrict our work to a black-and-white palette. ...

This [series of] commingled work may be seen as an encounter between two artists, of about the same age, using entirely different languages—one with ancient antecedents, the other with more recent origins. ... [Vangad’s] language, constructed with stick and brush, unfolds entirely from an encyclopedia of forms in his mind, which emerge to reflect the world, memory and myth... In my own language, constructed by camera and negative, the world itself is the encyclopedia, and I recognize and edit existing structures to reflect what arises in my mind.

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<sup>1</sup> A general term for the many Indigenous peoples of India.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 2022 by Edition Patrick Frey.

In the Edition Patrick Frey book about the *Fields of Sight* series, Gill and Vangad also provided an explanatory text regarding the specific work featured on this card, *Small Fish, Big Fish*:

Gross inequity is entrenched in our society and across the planet. Rich, upper caste people are supported in every endeavour, from childhood to old age. Poor people have to struggle for every small thing. And all that the poor create through their labours is taken over and ultimately owned by the rich. [In *Small Fish, Big Fish*,] [w]e have shown six instances of this contrast between the poor and the rich, embedded in the waves or layers of the sea.

In their text, Gill and Vangad then describe each of the six “instances” (examples of inequity between rich and poor) that are part of the work. For example, as to the two details shown on the back of the card:

Peasants toil day and night in their fields. Produced through hard-earned labour, the farmer sells flowers, fruit, vegetables and grains to the trader. But the trader does not offer a fair price, often hoards the produce and in time sells the very same produce for much more than he buys it for. As the middleman he keeps growing richer, without expending as much effort. The same produce is later sold in the cities for exorbitant amounts, but the farmer remains poor.

And

Fisherfolk with small boats put their lives at risk to go out into the fast-changing, dangerous sea. Multinational corporations send out large and mechanized ships which can gather many fish at a time, and that they then sell for many times the price of what a poor fisherwoman charges.

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**Gauri Gill (b. 1970, Chandigarh, India)** is based out of New Delhi and creates work rooted in collaboration, documentation, and photography as a way to resist dominant structures of power and to preserve individual memory as a form of resistance. She has explained she is “interested in the human strategies through which people survive the precariousness: expressions of humor, resistance, and uncanny beauty.” Since 1999, Gill has focused intensely on marginalized rural Indian communities. There, she has built long relationships with her subjects over an extended period of time in an intimately collaborative effort to document their struggles as well as their ways of being. In her project *Fields of Sight*, which began in 2013, Gill collaborates with renowned Adivasi artist Rajesh Vangad to combine her own contemporary photographic practice with Vangad’s knowledge of ancient Warli drawing. With Vangad recounting the complex history of his hometown of Ganjad, and his people, the resulting layered photographs present the artists’ connection to landscape and time, both physically and spiritually.’

**Rajesh Vangad (b. 1975, Dahanu, India)** is a Warli painter from Ganjad, Dahanu, a village in coastal western India. Warli painting is a folk-art form that Vangad’s community became revered for, with Vangad eventually developing his own successful studio practice. The land rights of India’s indigenous peoples have been under constant threat, beginning with British colonial rule and continuing into the present day, due to both political and environmental chaos. In recent collaborations with photographer Gauri Gill, Vangad’s Warli iconography lends Gill’s landscapes a prolific intimacy and historical grounding in the cosmology of his community. The obsessive intricacy of Vangad’s brush strokes lays brilliantly atop Gill’s quietly profound photographed landscapes. Vangad describes that his detailed figures demand patience and persistence from viewers, leading us to study, listen, and practice decolonization through looking.