

PUBLICATION »BAHAK - THE BURDEN OF THINGS«



The bengali term for carrier is BAHAK, which means a life as a day labourer living at the bottom of the social pile. Exploitation and drudgery for minimum pay; dicing with danger in a daily struggle with the Kolkata streets; little or no appreciation for vigorous physical effort, which can all end in total exhaustion. No load seems too heavy or too large to be manhandled through the narrow, crowded streets of Kolkata (Calcutta). Whether their burdens are carried on their heads, or on a yoke over their shoulders, on two- or three-wheelers or on a hand-drawn rickshaw, all manner of goods and essentials – furniture, building materials, groceries, books and coal – are all humped, hauled or carted as they are shifted from one place to another. *Revolver Publishing, 2013*

IN THE PRESS

Anja Bohnhof did not take any snapshots of these people; instead she photographed the carriers who only get little appreciation from society in dignified individual portraits. RHEINISCHE POST, Peter Klucken

[...] Much like the photographs of August Sander or more recently of Ken Hermann, Bohnhof's work consists of a series of photographs taken with a sociological aim in mind. Her images of Bahaks are marked by a determination to produce "objective photographs". The resulting book is actually the "matrix" of the work and thus assumes a binary quality, at once original and typological. [...] Another noteworthy aspect of Bohnhof's photographic work is its systematic character, reminiscent of the archival work of Walker Evans, for example. The execution and the intention behind it are highly crafted to create an artistic panorama in sixty-one pictures that show the carriers in all their diversity. The visuals are unambiguous: a socio-cultural study and critique of capitalism mediated by photography. These portraits of Bahaks have significant sociological value as a visual embodiment of a job that carries symbolic weight in Kolkata. Bohnhof's photographs are not without artistic sensibility. These images would not provide productive sociological information if they did not also feature certain artistic qualities. "See, think, understand." This would be one way of summing up Bohnhof's photographic approach. She makes no concession to the anecdotal and demonstrates, first and foremost, her interest in capturing only what is essential—by seeking out the particular character that reveals her Indian subjects. Some of the pictures bring a smile to the face. The grotesque, comical detail that is a core feature of the Bahak's job is the enormous burden they carry, an extravagant contrast to their modest physical condition. Laughing at the absurdity of our consumer society and telling ourselves "it's totally nuts" gives a measured sense of how to effectively convey social criticism. HASARD, Serge Bouvet



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