

PICTURE PERFECT

Photographer Dayanita Singh's foray into photo fiction breaks new ground in visual storytelling

By Pramod Kumar K. G.



HOUSE OF LOVE

by Dayanita Singh

Text by: Aavek Sen

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BETWEEN THE COVERS

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Dayanita Singh's *House of Love* heralds an unusual new genre of photo fiction, following no chronology or allowing us the luxury of anticipating fixity. Here colour creates characters and photographs make the plot, with empty spaces and prose creating myriad situations, all animating the book with an ephemeral storyline.

The opening chapter *Continuous Cities* sets the tone of the book by its use of a fauvist palette of cities singed in blue. It is the subsequent use of a bluish-green shade in *The Ambulance* that sets us on a roller-coaster ride of photographs, both in colour and black and white, that populate the book. Colours are the characters of this novel. Moving intermittently from the azure blue that jackets *Departure Lounge* to the startling white of *Being of Darkness*, colours magnify the photographs and define the characters.

Those seeking a conventional narrative or a theme will seek but in vain; a folk tale would be our closest approximation. A plethora of characters and settings come together at the finale justifying their presence and very often their absence in the story. Her colour photographs in their varied hues are a result of a conscious effort to implement on paper the decisions envisaged in her mind at the close of the camera's shutter. Primacy is always given to the fidelity of the eye and not to pigments that colour paper.

House of Love perhaps comes closer in explaining the prodigious and fecund mindscape of Dayanita Singh. Her mulish abhorrence for captions finally finds a voice and clear reasoning in Aavek Sen's luminous text. It is almost as if the artist was waiting for a writer who journeyed with her, visibly and invisibly, through her work and her life, seamlessly jotting down her innermost thoughts.

Towards the end of the book, there is an apocryphal question and answer session between the artist and the writer. What is purported to be Dayanita's answer to a question on the importance of national or cultural context in understanding a photograph is nothing short of an artist's bold political statement. This slim volume packs myriad punches and brings to the fore the thinking artist and her determination to explain her vision through a photo narrative. Don't be fooled, this is the work of a very clever storyteller plotting a whodunit and in no hurry to help us reach the end. ■