

# INVogue

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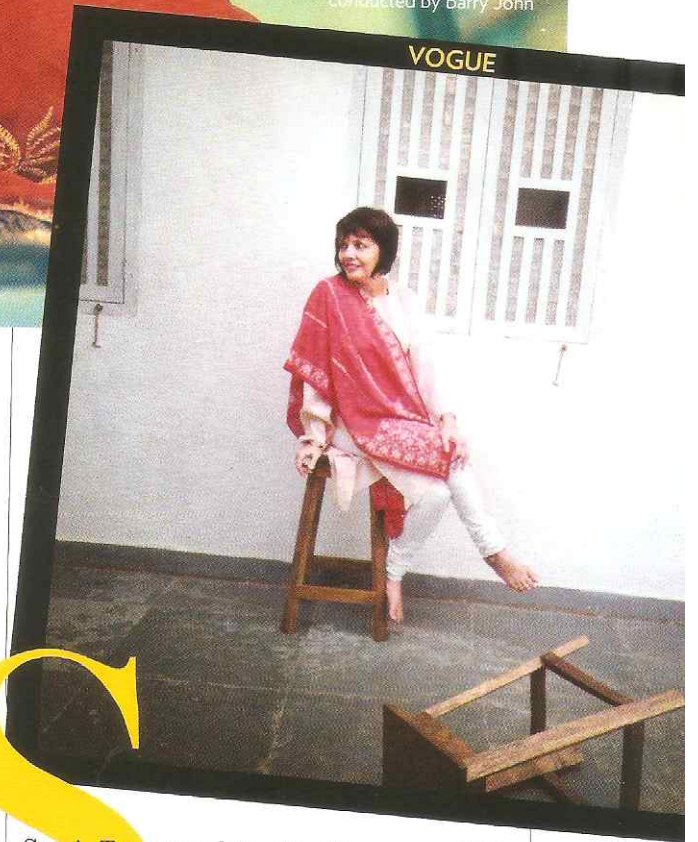


**FREEZE FRAME**  
From top: A still from *Salaam Bombay!*; Sooni Taraporevala; Irrfan Khan in a pre-film workshop conducted by Barry John

PHOTOGRAPHY

## Drawn from memory

Among the many things to look forward to at the inaugural edition of Sensorium, an arts festival in Goa, is a peek into **SOONI TARAPOREVALA's** hidden archive, says ANINDITA GHOSE



Sooni Taraporevala's identities as multiple award-winning screenwriter, the woman behind the singularly beautiful (and sold-out) book *Parsis: The Zoroastrians Of India* and the director of the National Award-winning film *Little Zizou*, tend to eclipse the identity that preceded them all: that of a still photographer.

When a young Taraporevala returned to India after studying film at Harvard—where >





**FUN AND GAMES**

From top: Chaipau fooling around with Chillum's boots between shots—this became the poster image; Keeda under the tripod at Grant Road station



**Is Sensorium loosely modelled on any festival you admire?**

The opposite: it came about as a counterpoint to many festivals I'd attended, where artists and authors (including myself) spoke about

she met her friend and future collaborator Mira Nair—and New York University in 1981, she started off as a still photographer for films, including Ismail Merchant's *The Perfect Murder*.

Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), for which she wrote the screenplay, was the only movie in which her role as writer and image-maker overlapped. The film went on to be nominated for an Oscar, won more than 25 awards worldwide, and also earned Taraporevala the Lillian Gish Award from Women in Film in 1988.

But *Salaam Bombay!* is special not just for this double credit or the glorious international recognition it brought her—it remains close to her heart because it was her first. And more importantly, because she was present throughout the shooting, all done verité-style in locations across Mumbai. "*Salaam Bombay!* wasn't like a professional assignment. It was a personal project... It is my baby as much as Mira's," she shares.

Though some of the stills have been used in a book published by Penguin and in an NFDC booklet to mark the 25th anniversary of the film, Taraporevala's staggering archive of behind-the-scenes images has never been exhibited before. This month, a selection will be on

public view for the first time at the inaugural edition of Sensorium, a festival to be held at Sunaparanta, a non-profit arts centre in Goa founded by Raj and Dipti Salgaocar. Apart from film stills, the exhibition will include gems like an image of a very young Irrfan Khan taking a pre-film workshop with Barry John and the movie's endearing child characters, Keeda and Chaipau, fooling around between shots.

Taraporevala's photographic journey flagged off in 1982, when during a break from college she met the legendary photographer Raghubir Singh, who, after looking at her photographs of her extended Parsi family, suggested she work on a book on the Parsi community. Her photographs have since been exhibited in India, the US, France and Britain, including London's Tate Modern gallery. She is presently working on her second film, a futuristic study titled *3 1/2*, to be produced by Nair. It will be "a love story set in the Mumbai of today and the Mumbai of the future," she shares.

With an emphasis on "original work," the two-month long Sensorium, curated by writer Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi and photographer Prashant Panjiar, will also feature presentations by photographers Dayanita Singh and Regina Anzenberger, artist Jitish Kallat, writers Jeet Thayil and William Dalrymple, amongst others.

Taraporevala plans to do something rather ingenious in terms of exhibition design. She will juxtapose relevant parts of the script with her film stills and behind-the-scenes photographs. It will be a true marriage of text and image by a woman who's managed to straddle both forms seamlessly. **Salaam Soon!** ■

**5 MINUTES WITH...**

Sensorium curator **SIDDHARTH DHANVANT SHANGHVI**

incredibly dull topics like 'Indian writing in English'. When Sensorium came about—organically, over drinks with close friends Raj and Dipti Salgaocar—I wanted friends to come out to Goa and make work instead of sharing an opinion. Sensorium is small but serious, with most artists making new work. The entire exhibition and talks, including bringing down folks from Europe and hosting them,

is sponsored by the Salgaocars, which is a gracious gesture for any patron of the arts in our country.

**What is the broad theme to your curation?**

Original work. How do you think about something, how do you make work, and how to writ this large as experience or in form? Opinions are insufficient, or decorative; for talks there's TED. Give me

experience, let me touch something, I want to return inspired, moved, fascinated. A lot of the curation is in the hands of our director, Prashant Panjiar, who is the most invigorating person to work with.

**Will there be interaction with the artists?**

Of course! Ritesh Batra does a digital show of his photos of the dabbawallas, for instance, explaining how films are made... the

scrapbooks over many years that finally lend themselves to work. Can you imagine how motivating this will be to a young filmmaker who comes to this thinking that his film can never be made and is met by a dazzlingly successful filmmaker who was precisely in his shoes... who worked eight years to have his debut film see light of day? *Sensorium will run from December 5-February 5 at Sunaparanta; Visit Sgcfa.org*