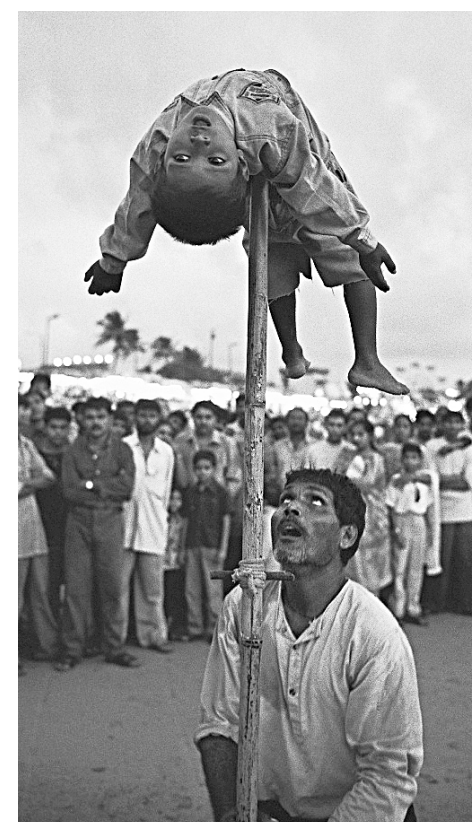
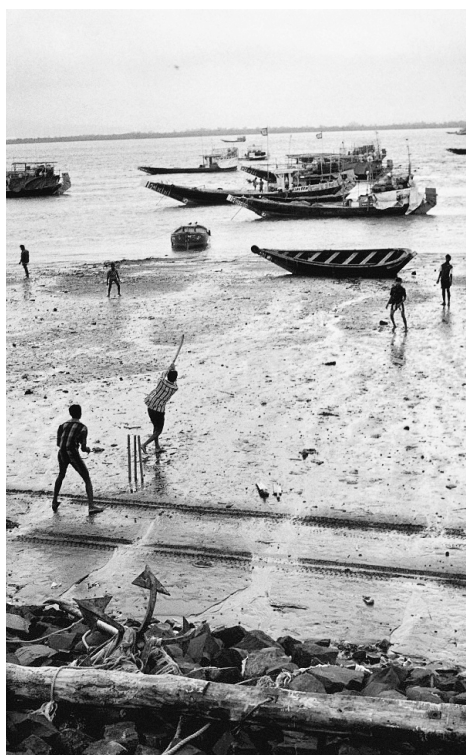
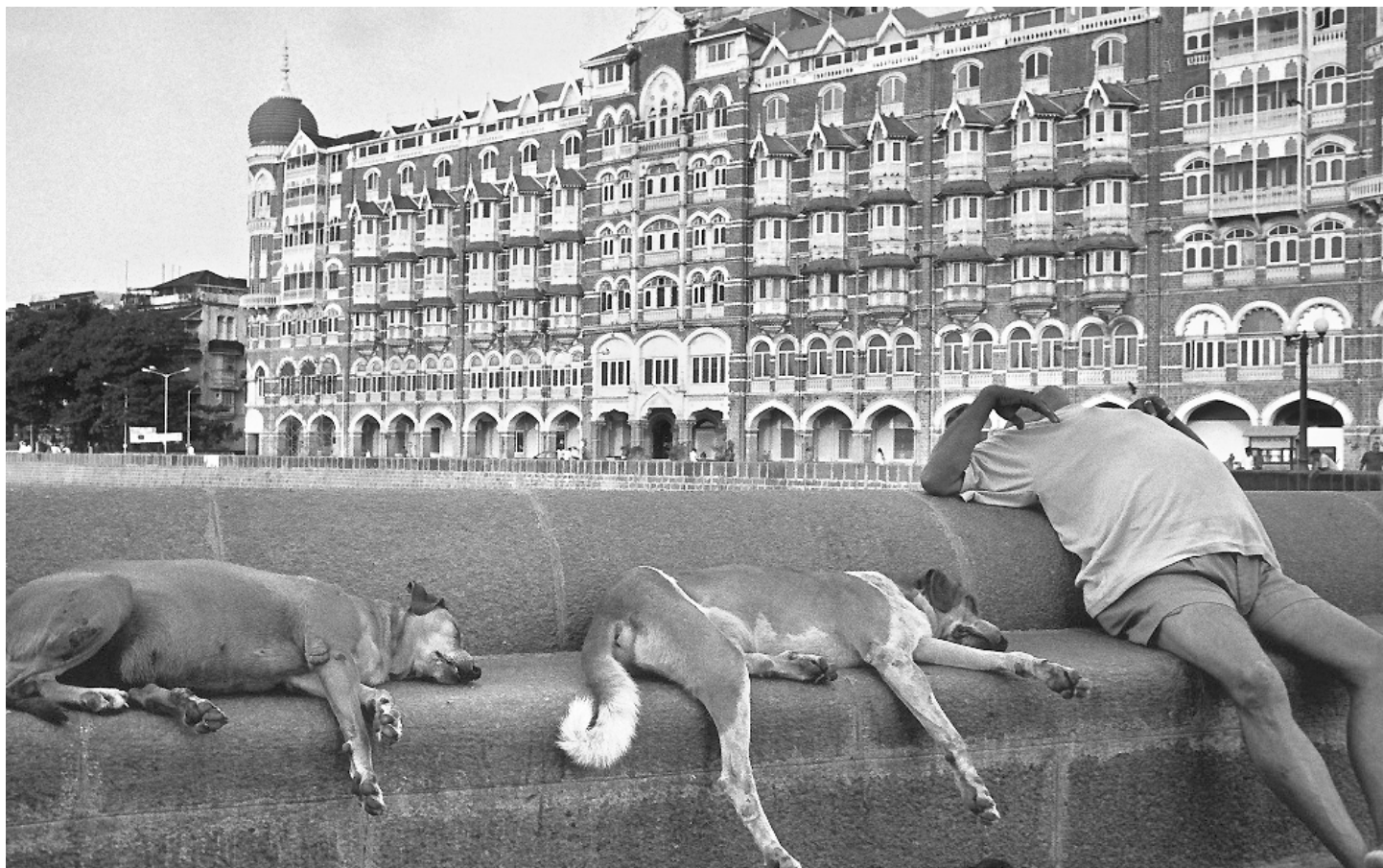


CAPTURING THE BOMBAY MAGIC



The photographs have been placed almost like a curator would at an art exhibition. Each photograph is like a vignette with myriad stories unfolding from it every time you look at it.

SUJEET RAJAN

New York

MUMBAI is a photographer's paradise. Just like Manhattan 'the city that never sleeps', Mumbai too has a multitude of masses—the rich and the poor sharing the city's space. For Betsy Karel, Mumbai comes alive in her mind when fact and fiction merge, and the city gets framed in her camera lens. This is what inspired her to write *Bombay Jadoo*.

Karel's remarkable collection of black and white photos in *Bombay Jadoo* have been inspired by the fiction and contemporary books about Mumbai like the works of Ardashir Vakil and Suketu Mehta.

Bombay Jadoo includes a personal essay about growing up in the city by Mehta, and a chapter from Vakil's *Beach Boy* has been reprinted.

"My gateway to India has been its contemporary writers and their passions for yester-

day's Bombay, a city now known as Mumbai," Karel writes in the foreword. "The humanity, humor, and psychological intensity of their stories fire my imagination. I challenge myself to try to find visual equivalents of the *jadoo*—Hindi for magic—found in their novels. I have fallen in love with the mythic mid-twentieth century Bombay."

Karel, 61, based in Washington DC, worked as photojournalist in the 1970s and early 80s. In 1998, after an absence of 15 years, she returned to photography to participate in *The Way Home*, a book and national exhibition on homelessness in America. During the past nine years, she has made numerous trips to Mumbai for *Bombay Jadoo*.

In the book, Karel selectively isolates scenes and moments that resonate with the books she cherishes by capturing the city as she imagines them a few decades ago. "It is a city of tolerance, civility, and generosity of spirit. The religious and the profane exist comfortably side-by-side," she writes.

The photographs have been placed almost like a curator would at an art exhibition. Each photograph is like a vignette with myriad stories unfolding from it every time you look at it.

Photos depict the mind-boggling metropolis with people and industries, who bulge and bludgeon your senses. Individuals, like a pretty girl daydreaming while standing at the door of a speeding local train going past dilapidated, matchbox houses and cramped suburbs, with two boys who are lost in their own world, standing near the girl, is placed with another photo that shows two little girls standing perhaps at those very houses in the suburbs from where the train is going past. The book ensconces visual drama with intrigue.

It also captures the many facets of the city: the craze for cricket, Bollywood mania, the religious and cultural tensions, which collude with the joys of celebrating one's faith, the romance that hangs pregnant in the air, the

sweeping onslaught of the summer monsoons.

As Karel points out, and which is the title of an ongoing exhibition at the Newark Museum in New Jersey (Public spaces/private places), 'public spaces become private places - island of intimacy.'

More than anything else, *Bombay Jadoo* is testimony to the rich imagination of a high caliber artist: the cavernous city's innermost secrets are revealed almost like a flower that opens its petals at night.

Bombay Jadoo by Betsy Karel

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