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This body of work culminates paintings created from personal encounters with marginalized communities during the last 4 years. The paintings were made in neighborhoods of Bangladesh construction workers in Singapore, and in the brothels of female sex workers in Kolkata India. The traditions of perceptual painting and Western figure painting, are a means of communicating with communities where there is no infrastructure for such communication. Perceptual painting directly looks, studies, and maps visual forms. I am mapping forms of the body over and over again while spending time with the subject. It is an intimate relationship; such scrutiny requires trust. The relationship is centered on the artifact that traces in time the briefly joined experience that often extends to new friendships.

In Singapore the Bangladesh construction workers are supplying the human energy vital to the creation of Singapore's impressive skyline. I am also a "foreign worker" in Singapore, yet our capacity to interact with society is very different from each other. I can legally bring my family with me and I am paid a wage that allows me to rent a flat at market rates. In contrast, the Bangladesh worker is living "single" in over crowded spaces specifically allocated for them with very limited social and economic rights.

Coming up from the underground metro one might think they are in a South East Asian town. I frequent a small public square where rhythmic music vibrates from storefronts and workers congregate in the evenings. The men are in a public space yet spending more time talking on their hand-phones than with each other. As I set up my easel everyone comes by to investigate what I'm doing. The Bangladesh men are gracious, and immediately willing to participate. I tell them where to be if they want to be in the painting. They are willing to share their stories of their country, their struggles and above all their hopes. Many of the workers cannot speak English but give a robust response to the visual language of painting. There is a sense of pride that I have chosen to paint them as my subject.

I also spent time working with the female sex workers in the brothels of Rabindra Sarini, Kolkata India for three consecutive winters. Amitava Malakar introduced me to Shikha Das, a sex worker who was born in the brothel. After getting to know each other Shikha decided to take on my project. I paid all the women for posing; a 500 Rupee note which is about 15 US dollars for an hour, Shikha set the price.

The women dressed to have me paint their portrait, wearing sari and bindi dot on their foreheads as proper Hindu married women. I painted them, as they want to be seen often times not recognizing them on the street. The majority of the women were telling a similar story of being driven to the brothel, running away from a husband who terrorized them. Their families, immersed in poverty cannot take the woman back and risk having one more mouth to feed.

Shikha was born in the brothel and proud of being a sex worker. As part of managing my project she cooked for me, delicious Bengali delicacies of fish, mutton, and chicken in sauces with the uniquely Bengali mustard. One day I said I would be happy with just rice and dhal. Shikha gasped, "That's the dinner of a married woman! I didn't become a sex worker for nothing!"

December is winter in Kolkata. The pollution is trapped under the low clouds giving a soft grey tone to everything, adding to the surreal atmosphere. I walk the narrow smoky alley to the black doorway of the brothel that has no actual door. I feel my way with my feet and hands through the wet floor and damp cement walls. It's as if I am moving through a cave, pitch black then suddenly light. I've reached the center of the brothel. It's open air with no roof. The sudden light gives way to women bathing and washing clothes. The perimeter is a square with rooms off the outside of the square. Shikha lives in a room on the third floor. As soon as I walk around to the narrow winding stairway, it's pitch black again. I feel my way up the steps of loose brick, finally reaching the next floor saying "Namaste" to the women who recognize me. There is no running water in the brothel. To cook and clean, the women must haul buckets of water up these same crumbling stairs in the dark.

Shikha was in her room with a man selling Kashmiri shawls. I drop my easel and began to make my way back down, stepping in between women cooking outside the doors of their rooms on makeshift stoves as the smoke goes up the center of the brothel. I saw another woman I painted last time. She was making food in a niche in the wall outside the building in the narrow alleyway. I could see her through the smoke. There was a noise, I looked up and out of the smoke came a stretcher held shoulder height with a man laying flat on his back, filled with flowers. The dead man was almost pushed into me. His body swiped under my nose. Disoriented I went back up with the rest of my things. I enter Shikha's room, cozy, colorful deep greens and ultramarine blue walls, full of memories. She has a bed and enough room in front of it for a refrigerator and a chair. Most of the rooms open to the edge of the bed and the women store all her things under the bed. *Chai* first, of course. She hands me a small handmade smoke fired terracotta cup of tea. The maker's hands in mine, the aromas of cardamom and the wood of the kiln hit me all at once.

Shikha says I'm painting her today. I'm sitting on the bed and she stands in front of the door about four feet from me. She said, "start." She wanted to know if I wanted her in a sari. No, I want her to be the way she is comfortable. She had on a bright pink sack dress. The sex worker I had recognized downstairs came up and poked her head into the room. Her shape was interesting with half her body in the room as she spoke with Shikha. I asked her to pose too. Both women are posing. I draw her into the painting.

A short while later Shikha went out to the hallway. I could tell by Shikha's tone something was wrong. A man entered Shikha's room. He is representing an NGO. He came in the room to see my painting. Shikha said he was married to one of the sex workers. He made his purpose clear. The people on the ground working for the Durbar Mahila Sammanayee Samiti NGO wanted me out. He declared the women can make money through sex anyway they want but they can't make money posing for a painting. I was painting Shikha's face when we were interrupted. She had looked proud and happy but coming back to the pose she was different. Her features were enraged. Her nostrils were swollen as if she could have blown smoke. I tried to do her face over again, now she was moving a lot. I wanted to capture the angry expression. I kept trying. She was now tilting her head up in defiance. I had to keep changing it. We decided to take a lunch break. After lunch I got back to work again. Her expression was again different, now one of resignation.

As a result Shikha organized sex workers in neighboring buildings. We relocated to the rooftop of another brothel each day. The women primed my canvases, stored the wet paintings in their rooms, and prepared meals. The NGO eventually discovered us. They told Shikha I would take their images to the press and their families would be publically humiliated. The NGO representative called Shikha at night telling her that on the way to my guesthouse I was robbed and beat up. As an outsider I cannot understand the complexity of the social order. I didn't interrupt the work but, I became very careful. Just before the last month of work I made contact with the President of the NGO, Dr. Jana. He immediately responded. Dr. Jana's letter gave complete autonomy to Shikha to decide how she wants to handle our work. We were able to end the work in peace. We had a real community working together. The women also signed all of their painting, some on the back and some on the front. The final day when I came to get the last of my paintings all the children were running down the alley to the street to meet my cab. My paintings were in their arms and over their heads. The women gathered in the street in front of the cab. Everyone was hugging each other. No, I don't have many photographs. The women were very sensitive to photographs.

I'm left with a deep sense of connection and bridges crossed. We are all urban women using the resources we have to survive. We were born in different places and as a result have different opportunities. Shikha and the rest of the women are intelligent and talented. Imagine the organizational and communication skills Shikha drew upon to make this work under the complexity of the circumstances. I hope the paintings can be a testament to the real people behind the statistics; numbers and bar graphs that are the only experience most of us have with human beings that have been cast out of society yet have vibrant capabilities and imaginations.

