

Slow Looking: Pranav Lal

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A Headless Shadow

Pranav Lal

India, 2017

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Digital Photograph with an aspect ratio of 1.2 to 1 or approximately the shape of a passport with a landscape orientation.

This colour photograph features a long mid-blue shadow stretching halfway across the bottom of an outdoor swimming pool on a sunny early evening.

A curved section of a kidney-shaped swimming pool is filled nearly to the top edge with water. Taken from the pool's edge, its blue interior fills the majority of the photograph. There is a long shadow of a headless figure cast onto the bottom of the pool floor on the lower left of the photograph. It shows the legs and torso, presumably, of the photographer with the sun at his back and head leaning forward. The legs begin near the bottom centre of the image, and stand apart just beyond shoulder width. Moving upward on an angle to the left, the torso ends without a head. On the right side of the figure's shadow, a strap or stick hangs down from the shoulder to around hip level. At about knee height there is a smaller shadow jutting in from the lower left edge of the photo, which, in relation to the larger figure is roughly the size and shape of a bicycle saddle pointing downward. At first glance the shadow of the figure is the only human presence in the photograph and so holds a somewhat curious, or possibly ominous, stance.

On the lower right of the photograph is a powder blue and white-tiled border, which presumably encircles the pool and on which the headless shadow stands. It casts a sickle-shaped shadow on the pool floor.

The bottom of the pool is patterned by a grid of blue square tiles which are most evident in shadow. The rest of the pool's surface reflects sunlight in circular ripples that spread outward from the pool's edge indicating a slight breeze coming up from behind the photographer and blowing the water from the lower to upper part of the pool.

At the upper right the water blues darken with what is presumably the shadow of a tree. It cuts across the pool and spills onto a sandy brown coloured walkway which follows the pool's edge on the opposite side from where the photographer is standing. There, at the top centre of the photograph, two metal handrails descend into the waters of the deep end.

Just beyond the walkway, at the top edge of the photograph, is a tall trimmed box hedge that acts as another border of the pool. The hedge has an opening, for people to pass through, near the centre of the upper edge of the photograph. A walkway flows through it and curves acutely to the left, out of sight. In the gap a pair of shoes resting on their heels peek out seemingly indicating a person waiting just on the other side of the hedge or perhaps sitting on a bench nestled within the hedge.

The hedge has two small cut-outs at ground level with low box shaped objects. Their terracotta colour is vivid against all the greens and blues within the photograph. The water in the upper part of the pool reflects the colors of the hedge and shape of the metal handrail.

A sliver of greenery is beyond the hedge, from the left: there is tall grass, shrubbery, a flowering tree and a palm frond and against what is presumably another building's wall, a portion of a brown sign with white letters.

The horizon of the photograph is tilted to the left at about a 10-degree angle, tilting the figure's shadow.

In Pranav Lal's Blog, at techesoterica.com, in February 2017, he wrote a caption to accompany this photograph. It reads:

A headless shadow in the Pushkar Resort swimming pool: Don't worry, I am not the executioner.

Pushkar is an ancient city in the Indian state of Rajasthan, to the south west of New Delhi. Other photographs of the pool at this resort show it to be surrounded palm trees, deck chairs and a range of entrance ways cutting through the box hedge, surrounded by a crisp well-kept lawn.