

Image 3: Audio Description Transcript

Sunil Gupta

From the series Mr Malhotra's Party, Bikram

(2009, 42 x 42 inches)

This photograph is a large-format portrait of a young man called Bikram, against the background of a river or lake busy with leisure activities on a summer day. Bikram stands in the centre of the image, looking straight at us, his body turned to the left. His feet are apart, the left leg coming slightly forward and his left hand resting on his hip, the elbow out and towards us. His gaze is direct, his expression serious. He has brown skin and short black hair, with one stray curl falling onto his forehead. He wears brown leather sandals, brown flared jeans and a black t-shirt under a jaunty short-sleeved summer shirt with broad stripes of pink, orange and green on a white background. It's accessorised with a bead necklace that rests above the collar of the t-shirt.

He stands on a grassy bank, close to a line of bricks that edge the water. The bank runs in a diagonal line from the bottom left-hand corner of the photo to halfway up the right-hand edge of the photo. The river or lake is perhaps 15-20 metres wide. The far bank is lined with trees, with a dozen or more row boats and pedalos in baby blue, turquoise and yellow plastic moored beneath. On the bank behind the boats, gathered under the trees, there is a crowd of people in brightly coloured clothes.

One of the boats is moving alongside the near bank, just a metre or two from where Bikram is standing. The boat is a sunny yellow with yellow plastic seats. The clothes

of the passengers tone with the boat: a woman with her back to us wears a sap green sari and, facing her, three children wear white and yellow – a teenage girl in white shirt and trousers, a small boy in a yellow shirt with a white-covered topknot, and another girl in white. They all gaze off to the left, in the direction the boat is moving. Behind the children, a boatman perches on the side of the boat, leaning towards the water to propel the boat with a pole held in both hands. He wears a long-sleeved shirt striped in red and orange and black trousers and looks warily towards the shore, as if watching something off the edge of the photograph to the right.

About three metres behind Bikram, two younger men stand on the edge of the bank. They both wear flared jeans of bleached denim and white trainers. One, wearing a long-sleeved grey top with orange motifs, faces us, standing close to the water; the other, wearing a green striped cotton shirt, faces him and is only partly visible, cut off by the right-hand side of the photo. The young man facing us seems to have positioned himself to get into the shot behind Bikram, copying his stance in a looser way. His feet are wide apart, his right foot pointing towards the water, right knee bent, left leg angled out, left arm bent so that his hand is at his hip. He grins at his friend. Behind them, further along the water and on the opposite bank, the structure of a monumental red and brown fountain is visible, with more pleasure boats in the water.

This work is part of a series called Mr Malhotra's Party depicting individuals in Delhi who identify their identity as 'queer' in some way. Gay nights that take place at local clubs in Delhi are often advertised as private parties, using a fictitious person's name to avoid detection under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code - a colonial-era law outlawing sexual activities 'against the order of nature' which was only repealed in

2018. Gupta says: 'With these images, I am trying to visualise this latest virtual queer space through a series of portraits of real people who identify their sexuality as 'queer' in some way'. The subjects look straight into the camera and are willing to identify themselves. Gupta sees them as guests at an imaginary party. He names it 'Mr Malhotra's Party', after the ubiquitous Punjabi refugee who arrived post-partition and contributed to the development of Delhi.

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