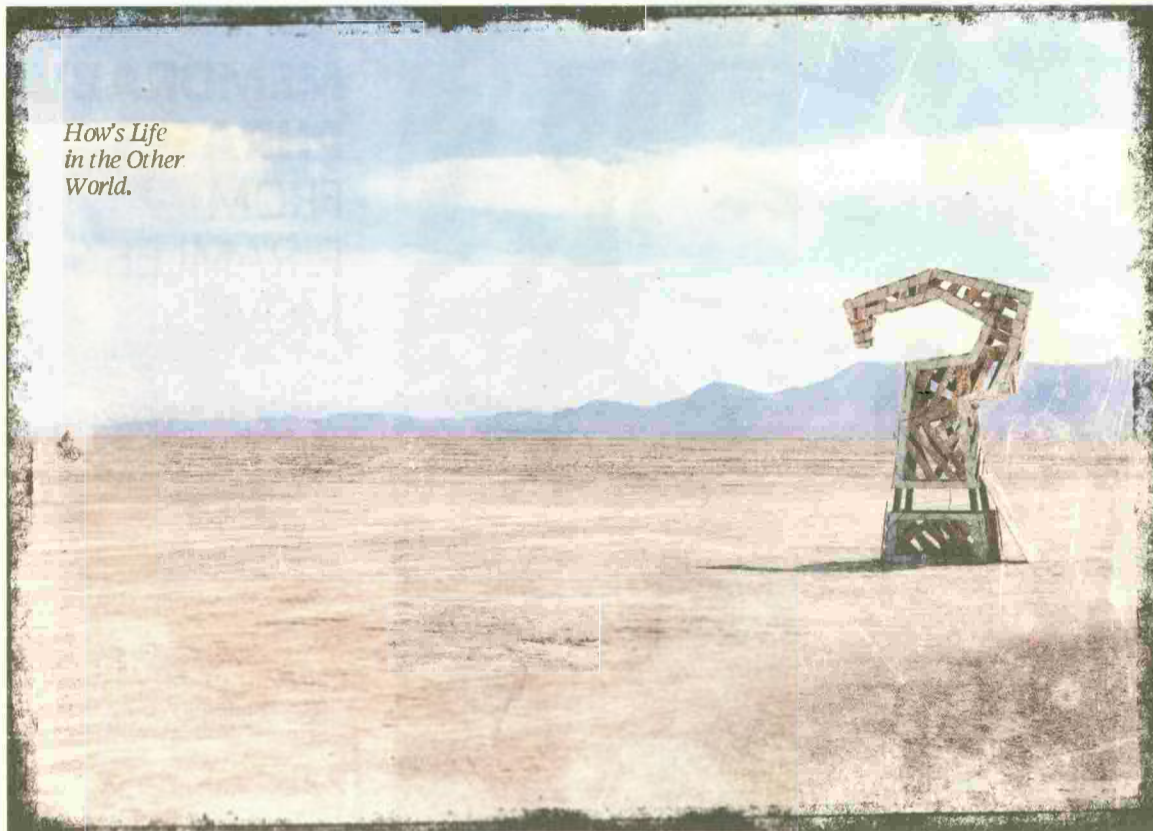


LIFE & TIMES **ART**

How's Life  
in the Other  
World.



Embrace



Infinity is Always Longer.

# Not what it seems

A photography exhibition perplexes **Aneeta Sundararaj**, which is exactly what the artist wants

CHOOSING the title for a work of art can sometimes be very difficult. It has to attract your audience to want to engage with your work. Can You See The Elephant, the title of Arnaud Humbert's first solo photography exhibition certainly does that but it also gives you an insight into how this 40-year-old Frenchman thinks.

Humbert explains that the title came to him after a trip to the National Museum. A particular artefact made him and his wife, Josiane, ask each other, "Can you see the elephant?" This led them to remember a story in a book titled *The Little Prince* by French author, Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

As a child, de Saint-Exupery



Arnaud Humbert aims to confuse people a little.

read, in a book about the primeval forest, that a boa constrictor swallowed its prey whole. He pondered over this and drew a picture. The adults assumed he'd drawn a hat. In fact, he'd drawn a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. He didn't pursue a career in art but kept this drawing. As an adult, he'd shown it to people and if they said that it was a hat, he'd never talk about "boa constrictors, primeval forests or stars". Instead, he'd "bring himself down to the other person's level and talk to them about bridge, golf, politics and neckties and they'd all be greatly pleased".

#### HIGHER LEVEL OF REALITY

Humbert says: "My objective is to confuse people a bit. I want them to think about a higher level of reality than the one contained in the appearances of the world. They should be viewed as "fragments", which are the result of the multiple sensations one can experience from reality."

Humbert wasn't always a fine art photographer, though. In fact, his first career was in engineering. He confides: "I knew from a very young age that I needed to give in to my artistic side. There was always this duality to my personality. The side of me that learnt mathematics and science developed the rational thinking part. But I had to do other subjects like Art and History to breathe. It gave me that balance that I needed."

Humbert, whose hometown is in Burgundy, France, chose to become a mechanical engineer when he

finished school. Nonetheless, working life wasn't all that he imagined. He says: "I was always surrounded by people with a rational mindset. There was no room for creativity because we were always technically focused. I had to demonstrate the choices I made and follow a track. I felt frustrated."

Adding, he says: "It all came back to me when I did an executive MBA course. I was 35 years old when I knew that something had to change. In the course, we had to learn about ourself and others. I returned to my past and rediscovered who I was. From there I decided I'd never lose it again and made a conscious decision to become who I am." He credits Josiane as the "catalyst" who helped him follow his passion.

#### LONG TIME PASSION

Although he still has one foot in the corporate world as a general manager, Humbert's focus is now more on his desire to be a fine art photographer. In the beginning, Humbert, too, was taking photos and having them printed normally. Then, something changed when he went on a trip to photograph an active volcano. "I wanted to express texture and colours. I realised then that the camera was more than just a tool to keep ephemeral moments as a souvenir. It became a vehicle to

help me express what's on my mind."

Describing his works, Humbert says that he doesn't ascribe to the notion that there's a message in the artwork. "It's a pure physical aspect. Similar to a painting or fine

#### Can You See The Elephant?

**When:** Ends March 28

**Where:** Project Room Fine Art Gallery, Lot 7, Level 4, Great Eastern Mall, Jalan Ampang, KL.  
**Details at** [www.arnaudhumbert.com](http://www.arnaudhumbert.com) or [www.projectroom.com.my](http://www.projectroom.com.my)

art medium — part of your personality is in that work. You don't just go online, download instructions on how to use the camera and click away. Instead, it's an artwork. Photography is my way of sharing with people my creative side — my 'gift'."

Indeed, his works aren't printed on the normal, glossy paper used in photographs. He uses what's called "archival paper" which is similar to paper used for watercolours. The pigment ink creates a 3D effect and hence, notion of reality. He uses a technique called "Daguerreotype" to achieve an effect like having placed a piece of glass between the photographer and the actual item being photographed. "I wanted to remind people what photography used to be."

#### ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY

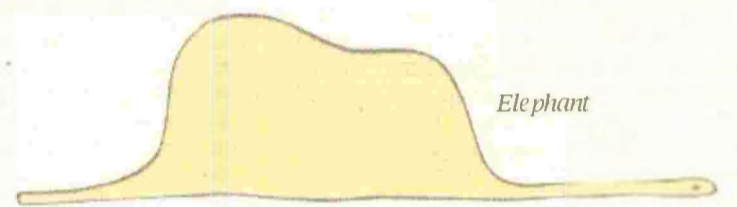
For this exhibition, he chose a set of 12 photographs he took last August when he attended an event called Burning Man in the United States. This event is described as follows:

"Once a year, tens of thousands of people gather in Nevada's Black Rock Desert to create Black Rock City, a temporary metropolis dedicated to community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance."

"All the works of art there are burnt the next day," he explains. Pointing to one of his favourite pieces — Object Of My Fascination — he says: "This one shows that reality is not static: It's a dynamic process in a constant evolution that no one can stop. It's like a symbol of the divine and infinity is emphasised by the horizon."

Of the one called Infinity Is Always Longer, Humbert says: "We're living in this digital world where everything happens so fast. As the caption for this piece says, sometimes things happen so fast that I couldn't even see it happening. But the results — sometimes scars — can last for a longtime."

Finally, describing the piece called How's Life In The Other World? — a favourite among many who attended the private viewing of the exhibition — Humbert says: "This one reminds me of all the possibilities we have. I don't believe in things like destiny. More on possibilities. We make choices based on these possibilities and they open up other possibilities. Life is a succession of possibilities. Some are more challenging than others. And in the end, you become who you are."



Elephant