

VASANTHA YOGANANTHAN – A Myth of Two Souls

The series A Myth of Two Souls is inspired by images drawn from the myth of Ramayana and its pervasiveness in the everyday life in India. Written in Sanskrit over two thousand years ago, and ceaselessly modernized, the Ramayana is an invitation to consider India beyond the exotic. Retracing its itinerary from the North to the South of the country, Vasantha Yoganathan offers a modern rereading of the myth, centered on the notion of journey in time. A Myth of Two Souls is composed of two series of images: landscapes—which have become mythical because of their connection to the Ramayana—dialogue with the scenes enacted by the inhabitants. In these staged portraits, the locals interpret before the camera passages from the Ramayana that have left a mark on their imagination.

Shot in black and white using a large-format camera, these theatrical portraits have been subsequently hand-colored by an Indian painter in the tradition of “hand-painting”, developed in the nineteenth century before the invention of color film. Vasantha Yoganathan has appropriated and modernized this unique technique: his photographs are shot outside the studio, using passersby as actors. The field of household portraits has been thus expanded to include the whole of society—without caste distinctions—and the whole of the territory, from the metropolitan centers to the remote countryside.

A Myth of Two Souls builds a link between fictional and historical stories, through narration that associates color and black and white photography, colorized photography, illustrated photography and vernacular images.

The project’s schedule is ambitious – spanning over 3500 miles. Since 2013, Vasantha Yoganathan did 5 trips in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Five more trips are planned to complete this project by 2019. A dedicated website will be live in 2016 while the project continues. Seven photobooks – one per chapter – will be published from 2016 to 2019. The photobooks as well as the exhibitions will encourage dialogue between India and Europe through the discovery of one of the greatest treasures of Indian literature.