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Find a Fallen Star

Text and interview with Regine Petersen by:
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6 साल पहले गिरे उल्कापिंड को अब तक नहीं मिली पहचान
 भैंसरोडगढ़ के पास कंवरपुरा गांव पहुंची जर्मनी की रिसर्चर

शहर से 125 किमी दूर भैंसरोडगढ़ के पास कंवरपुरा गांव में 29 अगस्त, 2006 को गिरा उल्कापिंड 6 साल बाद भी अंतरराष्ट्रीय पहचान नहीं बना पाया है। यह तक कि देश के इकट्ठीये उल्कापिंड संग्रहालय, कोलकाता में नहीं पहुंच सका। पहले तो समाचारपत्र ने इसे पत्थर बता दिया था। बाद में पता चल कि यह मिनेसोटासिक्ला सनै ऑक इंडिया, जल्दूर के पास रहा है। आज तक इसकी कोई रिपोर्ट या पैपर सामंजसिक नहीं किया गया। 6.8 बिलीन वर्षों इस उल्कापिंड पर देश-दुनिया के क्वांटर विद्वानों का ध्यान आकर्षित है।

रविवार को देवदूरा पंचायत के गांव कंवरपुरा का दौरा करके लौटी जर्मनी की उल्कापिंड रिसर्चर रेगिना पीटरसन ने अनेक पर्यटकों को देखा गया कि अदुसरे, जिस जगह यह उल्कापिंड गिरा उसके अक्षांश व देशांतर का निर्धारण करना गया है। उनका कहना है कि 1901 से अब तक देश में 200 उल्कापिंड गिरे हैं, उनमें राज्य में यह 20वां है। 16 देशों के सौधकर्तव्यों ने इस उल्कापिंड के टुकड़े गिरे थे, लेकिन जर्मनी के कंवरपुरा में गिरे हैं, लेकिन पता नहीं कि आगे इस पर जांच चल रही है। रेगिना इसके फोटो लेकर इंटरनेट पर जारी करना चाहती है।

ग्रामीणों ने खूब हथौड़े मारे थे
 पत्थरी से जंगलों में पेड़ चरने निकले रेगिना टोकम राज व हमीरा ने 29 अगस्त, 06 को दोपहर 2 बजे उल्कापिंड के टुकड़े को जमीन पर गिरते देखा था। वे इसे खाल के पत्थरी में डंडा करने के लिए क्लिफर चल दिए। बाद में 4 बजे गांव के किसान बंधुओं व सहोदर बंधुओं उस गांव उल्कापिंड को उठाकर गांव में ले आए। ग्रामीणों ने उसे खराना समझ कर हथौड़े के धार से तोड़ने की कोशिश भी की लेकिन यह नहीं टूटा। बाद में जर्मनी के कंवरपुरा गांव में उसे कब्जे में ले लिया।

यसा होता है उल्कापिंड
 आंतरिक्ष में गुरु और उन गुरु के बीच पत्थर और धनु के छोटे-बड़े पिंड भ्रमते रहते हैं। वे अपना रास्ता बदलकर तब पृथ्वी के वायुमंडल में आते हैं, वे वायुमंडल की विभिन्न परतों के घर्षण से जल हो जाते हैं, लेकिन कई बड़े पिंड पृथ्वी तक आ पहुंचते हैं, जिन्हें उल्कापिंड कहते हैं। सामान्य मोलराल में इसे लघु टूटन भी कहा जाता है।



Meteorites are fragments of rock and metal left over from the formation of the universe billions of years ago. Occasionally these ancient objects, shrouded in myth and mystery, fall to earth causing ramifications far beyond their physical impact. It is this moment of contact, this collision between ancient object and everyday life on earth, which excites Regine Petersen (DE, 1976) and acts as the starting point for her photographic project Find a Fallen Star.

Each chapter in this three part project is equally complex with multiple trajectories investigating the lives of those affected by the fall. Evolving over a four-year period, Find a Fallen Star saw Petersen travel to many often obscure locations, their randomness mirroring the arbitrary nature by which meteorites fall to earth. Stars Fell on Alabama takes us to Oak Grove Alabama, 1954 and chronicles the story of Ann Hodges who was struck when a meteorite came crashing through the roof of her house. Fragments transports us to Ramsdorf, Germany 1958, and investigates the account of five children who discovered a meteorite and divided it between them. The Indian Iron is played out in Rawatbhata, India 2006 where a meteorite was found by two nomadic shepherds.

Artist often delve into archives to uncover new perspectives on past events, however what stands out about Petersen’s project is the overall clarity of her conceptual approach. For Petersen these instances of human encounter with meteorites are not

just the subject but something that fascinates and provokes further investigation, a gateway into a particular time and place from which to uncover a complex narrative and reveal what lies beneath. In Find a Fallen Star archival material, documents and found photographs are carefully selected, edited and placed alongside Petersen’s own images, each fragment playing an equally important role in the larger narrative. Each chapter is succinctly assembled to reveal a unique perspective on the past and present, balancing layers of history and intertwined stories that are often rooted in failed memory and myth.

Meteorites have intrigued humans for thousands of years. How did your fascination with them come about?

The story of Ann Hodges is what caught my attention in the first instance and it was more the absurdity of the event that resonated with me. I then started to look more closely at the objects themselves, the meteorites, and I realised that they could not only be looked at in museums but that they were quite easy to get access to. I remember holding my first meteorite in my hands and recalling the sheer weight of it. There are several recurring expressions used by collectors and scientists, for example that a meteorite is ‘the oldest thing one can touch’, ‘the poor man’s space probe’ or ‘a window into the early solar system’. These notions all refer to the tangibility

of an object that originated so far back in time and at such a great distance that it is unimaginable for us. The most primitive of meteorites are made up of the first material that gathered in our solar system, and they haven't changed since. When we look at the inside of a meteorite we look at an index of something that happened more than 4.5 billion years ago.

Is it this expanse of time and space which adds to the mystery and myth that surrounds them?

Absolutely, and there are many other interesting perspectives. Meteorites are religious, scientific and historic objects, they are also objects of desire and projections of a various kind. They fall without warning and remind us of our place in the universe, and I think it is that interruptive force and randomness that has a lot of potential. It is almost as if they light up a stage at a certain place in time, putting random people in the spotlight and letting their stories unfold.

Over the years there have been many incidents where meteorites have fallen to earth, what was it about these individual stories that drew you in to investigate further?

Yes, there are many interesting stories surrounding meteorite falls and these three were not the only ones on my mind. I knew from the outset that it was important to make the work in disparate places, with different cultural settings, in order to position myself in several different ways and to look at some of the similarities and differences. But most importantly the initial story needs to somehow strike a chord with me, and then my choices are mostly intuitive, I go with what gets my thoughts moving and what has the potential to take me on a journey.

So you took a different approach depend-

ing on what struck you about each individual story?

Yes, Fragments developed in an interesting way when I realised how different the testimonies of the witnesses were. The official romantic story of five children finding a meteorite, breaking it into pieces and sharing them in a secret act suddenly developed other levels of meaning. For me it became a tale of hurt feelings among estranged friends, of the fallibility of memory, and of the way that history is constantly being constructed.

There is also a playful side to the project and an excitement in putting a finger on a particular spot on the map that I knew nothing about and pursuing to get there. Actually, the village in Rajasthan where I researched The Indian Iron cannot even be found on a map, it is so small and far off. The scarce documentation totally contrasted the amount of press coverage in Stars Fell on Alabama. I only had one newspaper article from The Hindu about two shepherds who witnessed the fall and beat the meteorite with sticks. I expected them to be superstitious, because I read of several cases where meteorites were thought of as demons. It turned out the shepherds had much more pragmatic reasons. I also felt India needed to be part of the project because there have been so many witnessed meteorite falls there. It's for the simple reason that there's less of a chance for a rock to land on uninhabited space. Most of these meteorites are locked away in an old colonial building in Kolkata and they are shrouded in mystery.

The unexpected random nature of meteorite falls means that there is no image of the fall itself, and your investigation always starts after the event, in most cases many years later. In Stars Fell on

Alabama and Fragments you are investigating events which happened more than fifty years ago, how does looking back into the past change the way you approach the story?

I was very aware of the passing of time in these two chapters. Many of the main protagonists in Stars Fell on Alabama are not alive anymore. Eugene, Ann Hodges' husband, died two weeks before I arrived in Alabama at the age of 89. This definitely affects the way I go about the research. The events lie in the past and have become part of a myth. People are elderly and don't remember things very well, and it became profoundly tangible for me how history is being remembered and what gets lost in the process. The work is as much about what is inaccessible than about what is revealed. But time is not the only obstacle I encountered, for example in The Indian Iron there too is absence and opacity. As it turned out the shepherds were nomads who were never seen again by the villagers. There are also the obvious barriers of language and translation I experienced. The information is there but it cannot be deciphered. But that is the way we experience the world, in a fragmentary and biased way, and complex histories get lost in time or translation.

There are many layers of the project: the meteorite fall is the common link between all three chapters, however the individual stories tell us much more about the specific location and society at the time. It is this complexity that, to me, makes the work so interesting. Some of them are quite personal stories, how did you go about what to reveal?

There were many decisions to be made. A lot of my time was spent reducing the material. But it is important for me to leave space for thought and to not expose

too much about the people in the story, it really is a balancing act. During my research I came across some deeply intimate documents and testimonies, some of which made me very sad and it just felt wrong to show them. There was also a lot of tension present between some of the witnesses and I decided to only occasionally hint to this.

Due to the camera's ability to record we often mistake photography as being able to stand in as evidence of an event. Are you contributing another layer of evidence to the stories and have you now become part of the story yourself? Particularly in relation to The Indian Iron where an article was published in a local newspaper about you that you then included in the work.

Yes, I'm very much part of the story, at least the one I'm telling. Taking photographs for me is a means to reflect my relationship to the world. The work is highly subjective in that it deals with the questions I became occupied with. It does provide a glimpse of what happened, but it's not a reconstruction of the past. The truth lies somewhere outside the frame. That is the problem and the potential of photography, too.

This exhibition has been organised as part of the the Outset | Unseen Exhibition Fund. The Outset | Unseen Exhibition Fund is a unique partnership between Unseen Photo Fair and Outset Netherlands, providing a new institutional platform for emerging talent. Scouting the fair before opening hours, each year the selection committee selects one artist exhibiting at Unseen for a solo exhibition at Foam. Regine Petersen was the selected artist of the Outset | Unseen Exhibition Fund 2014 and is rewarded an exhibition in Foam's 3h space for young talent.

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