



# ARTS ILLUSTRATED

Death by Wool

Death by Caption

Death by Freezing

Death by 3D

Death by Candlewax

Death by Caption

Death by Overdose

Death by Xerox

Death by Sharpener

Death by Stencil

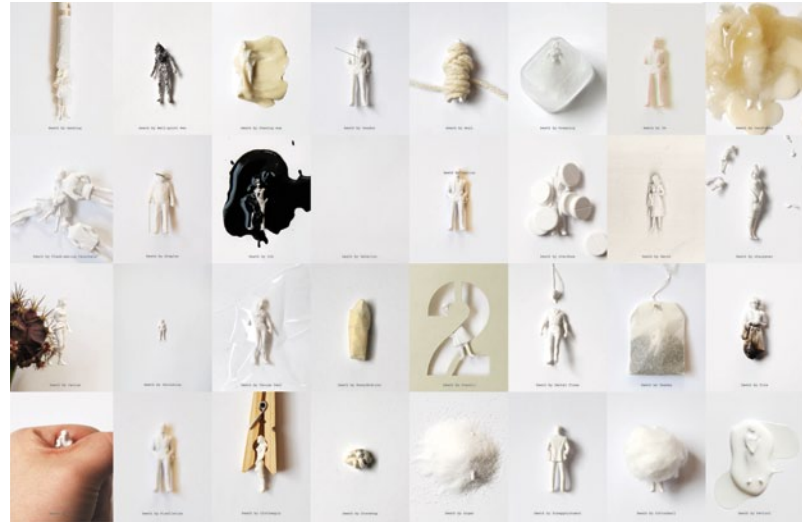
Death by Dental Floss

Death by Teabag

Death by Fire



## Cover Artist



'Death By...' is a project Tara initiated while she was at Yale. 'I found these small plastic architectural figures in a New Haven art store, and amused myself by destroying one of them in a new way, every day, for a period of three months,' she says. This resulted in a series of images of these tiny 'people' dying in immediate ways ranging from being sharpened in a sharpener, taken apart with pliers, to the more metaphorical like 'disappointment', and 'deletion', and elaborate ones, like 'electrocution' and 'freezing'. This was a quick and spontaneous process for Tara, and a lot of the 'ways to die' ended up being things that she found around in her apartment. She recalls 'When I cooked one of the figures on the stove, tiny bits of plastic flew up in the air and straight into my nose...it was almost death by inhalation, but this time for me and not the figurine!'

For the cover of this issue on Humour, Tara chose 32 images from the original series of 95. 'I was able to quickly narrow it down to my favourite 32, but I always find the act of sequencing quite daunting and I can be a bit obsessively compulsive about trying every possible option before

deciding. I thought about how many possibilities there must be mathematically.' Tara actually asked a mathematician friend and when she learnt that there are approximately 260-billion-trillion-trillion possible ways to combine the 32 images (that's 26 plus 35 zeroes), she was hoping for us to give her the time to try each of those. But when that was not possible, she just used instinct and arranged them quite quickly, visually.

The size of the figure within the frame is kept consistent across the series. She consciously uses a limited and neutral palette. While most of the 'deaths' were analogue, they were broken up with some digital gestures like 'Death by Pixelation', 'Death by Blur', and 'Death by Caption'.

'Death By...' seems quite removed from the rest of Tara's practice, but on a closer inspection many parallels are found, like the incorporation of both the analogue and the digital, and blurring the line between humour and darkness, something that can be observed throughout her work.

Conceptualisation of the cover and text above by Rahul Kumar.

## Contributors



**Abha Iyengar** is an award-winning, internationally published poet, author, essayist, editor and British Council-certified creative writing mentor. Her published works are *Yearnings*, *Flash Bites*, *Shrayan*, and *The Gourd Seller and Other Stories*.



**Appupen** is a comics creator, visual artist and musician who tells stories from a mythical world called Halahala. Appupen launched his online comic series *Rashtraman* in early 2016, and is the founder/ editor of *Branded India*. [appupen.wordpress.com](http://appupen.wordpress.com) & [branded.in](http://branded.in)



**Arti Sandhu**, Columnist  
She is an Associate Professor of Fashion Design at Columbia College Chicago and the author of the book *Indian Fashion: Tradition, Innovation, Style*



**Daniel Connell** lived in Jaipur for three years (2007-2010) and returns to India, North and South, every year. He is a practising artist, a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia and teaches at the Adelaide Central School of Art.



**Debasmita Dasgupta** is a freelance illustrator, specialising in drawing for children of all ages. Those who appreciate her artwork are fond of bright colours, big eyes and shining smiles. She is an arts fellow under the National Arts Strategies (USA) and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in the United Kingdom.



**Gautam Bhatia**, Columnist  
He is a Delhi-based award-winning architect, artist, and writer. Besides a biography on Laurie Baker, he is the author of *Punjabi Baroque*, *Silent Spaces* and *Malaria Dreams* – a trilogy that focuses on the cultural and social aspects of buildings.



**Meera Rajagopalan** is a Chennai-based writer who has worked for publications in India and in the United States. Her work tends to focus on the intersection of culture and identity, and she believes in ghosts.



**Rehana Munir**, Columnist  
She is a Bombay-based writer/ editor. She set up and ran an independent bookshop for a few years, has run cricket websites, and loves ginger tea, plotless novels and The Beatles.



**Shakti Maira** is a critically acclaimed artist-philosopher from India. He has written extensively on art and design, including two books – *Towards Ananda: Rethinking Indian Art and Aesthetics*, and *The Promise of Beauty & Why it Matters*



**Siddhartha Das**, Columnist  
He is a designer and visual artist who uses culture for socio-economic change, and was the recipient of the British Council International Young Design Entrepreneur Award in 2009.



**Supriya Sehgal** is a serial travel guidebook author with words in over 30 Lonely Planet Guidebooks. Supriya likes to think of herself as a seasoned chronicler of the unusual. More about her on [www.supriyasehgal.com](http://www.supriyasehgal.com).



**V.R. Devika**, Founder and Managing trustee of The Aseema Trust, a non-profit organisation for linking traditional performing arts and education and Mahatma Gandhi and education, is a well-known cultural activist, writer and teacher.

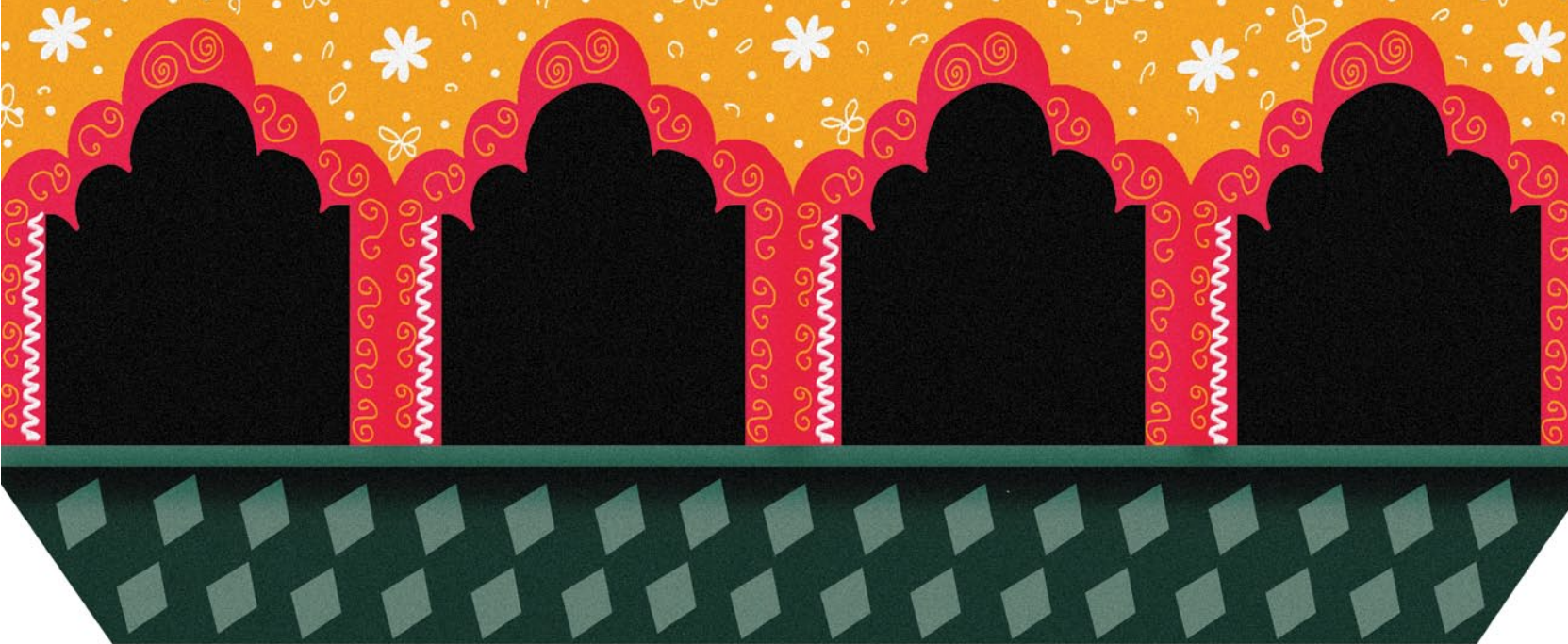


## A Toast to an old Roast

Featuring Gaali Baazi, the scathing folk roasts of Jaipur – richly abusive and colourfully insulting. Need we say more?

SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Illustrations by Debasmita Dasgupta



I was ready to take on Jaipur's stifling heat of June and the cacophony of the chaotic traffic, but then came something hurtling in as a considerable surprise – an odd verbal assault, laced with such evocative prose and style, that I barely fathomed what hit me. I was standing in the courtyard of Kailash Gaur Ji's cosy home in Khutainton Ka Rasta, a slim brick lane that mirrored hundred others, criss-crossing against each other to form the disorderly labyrinth of the blush-pink old city. From where I stood, a pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses of all shapes, sizes and textures, dressed in shimmering clothes, looked beatifically at me. Perhaps, they knew what was coming my way. The clutch of idols made the home resemble a temple. The already religious vibe was topped up with a *tulsi* plant propped right in the centre of the courtyard, and a small shrine by the main door homed a statue of Prahlad Maharaj – I was yet to find out about the illustrious man. To my right was a small bedroom, barely enclosing a *diwan* and a single chair, ready to spill out of the embrace of the walls.

Gaur Ji met me with a toothy grin, tinged with the nasty red of sustained betel leaf chewing. The lack of hair on his head had been astutely replaced with a cascading sheet from his chin. He looked like a man who hadn't quite grown into his own home. He hopped over some scattered utensils, awkwardly maneuvered past a bucket and mug, and brushed against the *tulsi* leaves, to take my hand for a good shake. *Aaiye Aaiye*, he almost sang his hearty welcome.

I was here to meet Kailash Gaur Ji to chronicle the fading skill of *gaali baazi*, the folk performance of 'competition in abuses'. Before I could launch into my string of questions, I felt his gaze stuck on an untimely ripe zit on my cheek. The kind that has the ability to strip

you of all confidence, despite its diminutive size. Long grey beard swishing in the afternoon breeze, smile still back-dropped with red teeth, he stopped me short in the middle of my introduction, and was already in motion for a preface of his own talent. It went something like this.

*"Thaaki sundarta par is muhaso nazar phirave hai, Aur danyee taraf muhaso bhatka ashubh batawon hai."*

My quizzical look and louty grin gave away the fact that I hadn't understood a word. 'Don't be too pleased. There is a visible blemish on your beauty,' pat came the Hindi translation. As if the taunt was not bad enough, he didn't hesitate to let me know that the older generation thought that a pimple on the right cheek was bound to bring bad luck.

'This seems to be it,' I thought to myself.



Over the next hour, his arresting voice gave me an untempered account of how *gaali baazi* came to be, stopping only to sing some of his favourite abuses. He explained that the folk tradition of this abrasive form of entertainment was more than three centuries old, and had migrated to Jaipur from Jodhpur. It grew popular during the reign of Maharaja Sawai Ramsingh (1835–1880). Gaur's own *gaali* Guru was his grandfather and then later Prahlad Maharaj, a proficient lyricist of cuss words strung to a tune. A shrine to the teacher now seemed legitimate.

Gaur took the baton from his tutor and was at the helm of the *gaali baazi* scene in Jaipur, for decades. His most memorable performances were during the annual competition during Holi, organised for professional singers only. The scene looked something like this. Teams of up to 30 sat on a low wooden stage from across each other in the heart of the old city. A soft background rhythm on their *daph/chang* (a round percussion) helped warm up their throats and then began the overnight musical battle. Eager ears were affixed to every word of the local Dhundhari language as the contestants hurled scathing, but definitely melodic abuses at each other. Every stanza closed with an eruption of laughter from the crowds, which further fuelled the participants to notch up their game. This humorous folk roast did not specifically cover social topics but was based on plain provocation. Now, the *gaali baazi* scene has dwindled into oblivion, barring a few years when a kind benefactor gets in touch with Gaur to round up the teams again.

Before *gaali baazi* became a bona fide event on the Jaipur entertainment calendar, it could be heard only during weddings. It was a time when women were barred frank expression in the family – this seemed to

be an ideal way to let them playfully showcase repressed talents of dancing, singing and sometimes mockingly getting back at the in-laws. The women would take to the wedding home courtyards to sing from a collection of traditional, raucous songs. The lyrics were anchored on themes that featured the groom and his sister-in-law. No matter how obscene, the occasion allowed for this harmless banter.

Tying in both Holi and the precarious relationship between young men and women, Kailash Ji belted his last and most vulgar composition for the afternoon. I don't think he meant to leave me jaw-dropped, but only wanted to elicit the point that profanity was traditionally not big a deal. He took on the roles of both protagonists and began.

The young man sings  
*Tuh maari bhaiyle hai. Mai thaaro  
bhaiylo,  
Aapa khailala holi, maon ghadon  
aaplo.*

The sister-in-law spits her reply  
*Mu ne pata hai, pyaara khel naahi,  
Paaylo lagata hi haat nhor,  
Jhat se jhand jhaaplo.*

His mellifluous ditty lacked the softness of folk tunes – after all, it was an ode to premature ejaculation of the young hero of the song, who is mocked by his sister-in-law, as she reaches out to rub the Holi colours on him.

By now I was only mildly bewildered and laughed heartily, half in appreciation of this incomparable talent, and half out of relief that he was sufficiently distracted from my zit.





Death by Smoking



Death by Ball-point Pen



Death by Chewing Gum



Death by Voodoo



Death by Flesh-eating Cannibals



Death by Stapler



Death by Ink

Death by Deletion



Death by Cactus



Death by Shrinking



Death by Vacuum Seal



Death by Mummification



Death by Glass



Death by Pixelation



Death by Clothespin



Death by Stovetop