

## PRESS RELEASE

# OUR SONGS FROM THE FOREST

By Uma Bista

### Exhibition details

5th Floor, Chhaya Center, Thamel | 16 March - 10 April

Official opening on Friday 15th March | 5:30pm

The exhibition is on view every day from 11am - 7pm | Free and open to the public

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**photo.circle** in collaboration with the **British Council** is happy to launch a photo exhibition titled **Our Songs from the Forest** by photographer **Uma Bista** on 15th March 2019 at Chhaya Center, Thamel.

Our Songs from the Forest is a tender solicitation by photographer Uma Bista into the hills of Achham, where we meet a chorus of young women coming of age in a fast-changing society. These young women are learning how to navigate severely oppressive cultural practices alongside new aspirations of equality. Little by little, they are beginning to ask questions and push boundaries.

Without a doubt, life in Achham is not easy, and the patriarchy unabashedly cruel. Women are considered impure while they menstruate, and are banished to a rudimentary shed, the infamous chhau-goth, for 7 whole days of every month. For 7 days of every month, women are deemed untouchable.

It is believed that the gods are angered if women break the rules of chhaupadi: *deuta risauchan*. The women are then held responsible for all possible ills that might befall the family, especially the menfolk, including accidents, illnesses, deaths, poor harvests, failures in school exams: anything that may bring hardship, sorrow or shame to the family.

Despite new laws that criminalize these practices, fear runs deep: fear of angering the gods, fear of being labeled immoral, fear of being ostracized by the community, fear of change.

Can such fears be replaced by the fear of legal consequences? Will destroying the chhau-goth free us of the traditions associated with it? How to push for freedom from the everyday chhaupadi?

Uma Bista takes us into the forests around Oligaun, where our young friends seek freedom from the daily oppression. In the forest, the skies are open. In the forest, they feel no fear. In the forest, they sing and laugh as loudly as they wish.

May their fearless songs forever resonate louder.

About the Artist:

**Uma Bista** is a photographer based in Kathmandu. She works on visual narratives that focus on women's issues, which are close to her heart. She is a graduate of the International Photography Program run by Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Uma is currently working as a Deputy Photo Editor at Annapurna Post, a leading daily newspaper in Nepal.

The exhibition has been curated by **NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati** and produced by **photo.circle** in collaboration with the **British Council** and its projects Connecting Classroom and Rivers of the World program.

## NOTES TO THE EDITOR

### About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. Using the UK's cultural resources we make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Arts is a cornerstone of British Council's cultural relations work. We work across seven different art forms and several focus areas including women/girls, social cohesion and cultural skills.

Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. British Council Nepal was established in 1959, it turns 60 years in 2019.

[www.britishcouncil.org.np](http://www.britishcouncil.org.np)

### About photo.circle

Established in 2007, photo.circle is a platform for photography in Nepal. Through workshops, publications, exhibitions and commissioned assignment work, photo.circle strives to bring together photographers and other visual storytellers to nurture unique voices that document and engage with social change in Nepal.

In 2011, photo.circle set up Nepal Picture Library, a digital photo archive that hopes to contribute to the study of Nepali photography, generate knowledge and raise questions about how we can explore issues of memory, identity, and history through images.

In 2015, photo.circle organized Photo Kathmandu, Nepal's only international photography festival, which serves as an alternative platform for conversations between visual storytellers and local audiences.

[www.photocircle.com.np](http://www.photocircle.com.np)

### For more information

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