

# TRASH TALK

His name is the Spanish translation of one of the greatest artists that ever walked this planet. So when Miguel Angel Garcia decided to pursue the cause of visual art, he had a lot to live up to, and boy, oh boy, does he live up

WORDS ANINDA SARDAR IMAGES MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA



**MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA**

Photographer

Born in 1952 in Madrid, Spain. Miguel Angel studied Economics, Agronomic Engineering and Graphic Design. He currently lives in Cantabria, Spain. Miguel's works have been world over.

**I**'VE NEVER REALLY GIVEN MUCH thought to trash. Certainly less than Marie Kondo has. Take it all together, put it in a trash bag, tie it up and bin it. That has pretty much been my modus operandi with garbage. Never had I ever imagined that garbage could be the subject of art. Until I found myself at the India Habitat Centre on the opening night of the month-long Photosphere exhibition, staring at two incredibly beautiful photographs, of trash. The tidiness of the lines, the colours, the deformed bottles, all compressed into a formless flatness seemed to be trying to tell me something. "Incredible, isn't it?" asks my friend Abhishek Basu, founder of the Basu Foundation that promotes Indian art both within and outside the country and also facilitates the exhibition of works of international artists here in India, on whose

invitation I had landed up at the IHC that evening. I nod mutely, still thinking about why these particular pieces were calling out to me.

"The series Compressed Life aims to show garbage not as something disgusting that we have to forget. I have tried to present it as something close, the waste of our own life, which, through the recycling process, returns to us in another way. It is necessary to "take care of it", treat it well, empathise with it, in our own interest," says photographer and visual artist Miguel Angel Garcia. What he says is probably one of the most poignant remarks on our wasteful lives. Miguel had travelled from his home in Cantabria, Spain to Delhi to exhibit his work through the Basu Foundation. "The Basu Foundation is doing a great job of promoting Indian art abroad and introducing artists

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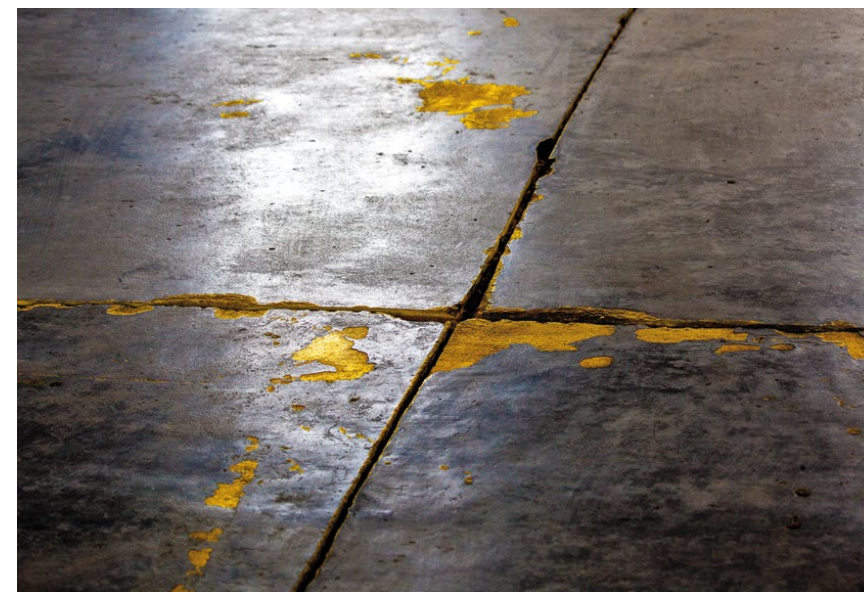
to India. This exchange is extraordinarily enriching because it allows us to share interests and experiences among artists from different geographical areas in a globalised world," he says in his Spanish accented English.

Born in 1952 in Madrid, Miguel's formal education was on Economics, Agronomic Engineering and Graphic Design and from that bio you'd expect a more mundane career. But these were merely the means to an end. Of being a photographer and a visual artist, because art is in Miguel's veins. "My father was an artist who chiseled metal and embossed leather and a great fan of photography and transmitted to me from a very young age the love for art and the photographic medium. My training has allowed me to get closer to social and environmental issues."

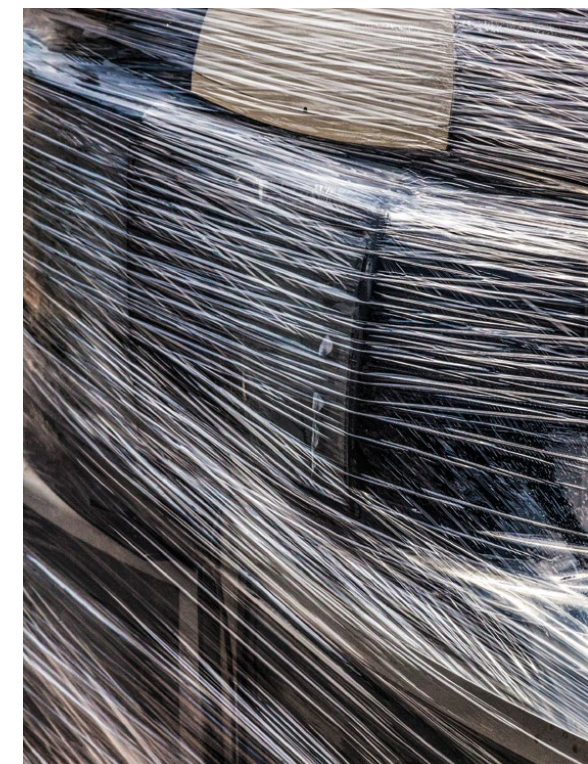
It's a subject that is close to him. In fact, he draws inspiration from the real

world and contrary to what you think, his art has very little of the abstract beyond representation. You can see that not just from his Compressed Life series but also from his other works. Take The Others for instance. A heart wrenching series, inspired by a trip to Auschwitz, on the discrimination and divisiveness that pervades humanity. "I wanted to express how those places had been 'impregnated' with the colours that the Nazis used to distinguish the different massacred groups; Yellow for Jews, brown for Gypsies, red for Communists, pink for gays, and so on. The colour thus became a sign of exclusion, marginalisation and extermination."

Back to Compressed Life, I ask if he notices similarities between consumption and discarding patterns between the developed and developing worlds. Our attitude to garbage, is there a common



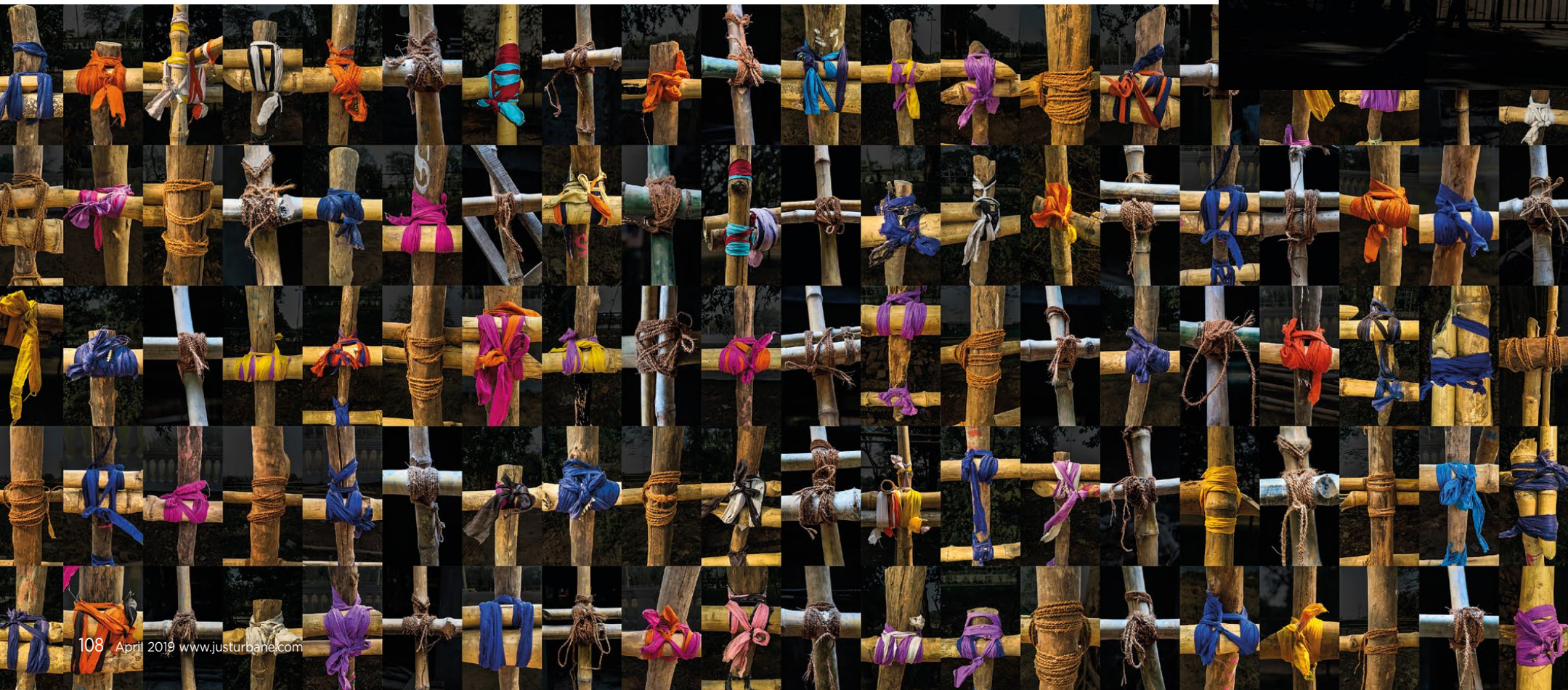
**Above and below:** Through the Compressed Series, Miguel tries to show that although we all discard garbage, it is actually memories that we no longer think of as important. **Below left:** In The Others, he shows how colour was used to segregate races and colour in German concentration camps like Auschwitz





**Left, below and facing page:** The photos in the series *Unfinished Landscape*, was shot in Kolkata when Miguel was on a trip to India

thread among people from Spain and India? "Actually, the process of global homogenisation is becoming faster and faster. The local, cultural and sociological factors are rapidly being minimised by the overwhelming presence of a consumerist society, and garbage is the most obvious consequence of this," he says. Clearly, Miguel doesn't see things with the same lens as I do, for I wouldn't hesitate to come back from a trip to Spain and then tell all my Indian friends and family members what a clean nation Spain is compared to our own. "At the level of everyday life are increasingly similar consumers in different parts of the world. We consume the same products, from the same brands, seduced by similar advertising. In the end, we generate a similar garbage that moves around the planet and returns



to us, regardless of our language or skin colour. Thus, the paradox occurs that it is the waste that generates what unites us," he says, before adding, "That is why it is important to look for global solutions."

Such thought, expressed so poignantly through Miguel's art, can only come through personal experience. "I dedicate a lot of time to delve into the subject, to document myself about it and to look for a plastic formalisation that moves away from the topic. I try to express it in metaphorical terms, distancing myself from the documentary aspect of photography, generating a question in the viewer from a seduction for the image."

Such is the seductive nature of his art that Miguel's work has been exhibited around the world. His photographs have been presented at Paris Photo, Madrid Photo,

MiArt in Milan, ARCO Madrid, Art Beijing, Hot Art Fair Basel, and Art Miami. He has been the recipient of the Arte Laguna Prize in Venice, the 1st Prize Photo Award in Santander City, artist shortlisted in Syngenta Photography Award, and was a nominee for the Prix Pictet in Switzerland. His works take pride of place on the walls of public as well as private collections in Spain, Switzerland, Portugal, France, India, Chile, El Salvador, the UK, and the US and most recently, ten of his works from *Compressed Life* are on display at the Photosphere. Clearly, the soft spoken, bespectacled man in the checkered shirt I met that night is a celebrated artist, as he should be. Michelangelo, whose name Miguel bears albeit in Spanish, would have been proud. As for me, I'll never look at trash in the same way ever again. 