

SUDEEP SEN

**Paper Trails
&
Grace Notes in Colour**



"crisp, letter-strewn, bookish, word-wedged ...", 2012. Archival Digital Print

SUDEEP SEN

The Poem

PAPER T[R]AILS

Paper dreams within the cover of a book,
book binds itself with the glue of a spine,

spine weaves together — dovetailed
by the grace of words — words of passion,

words of grief; words of love, hate, wisdom.
Paper crafts its papyrus origins

journeying from tree to table
through clefts, wefts, contours, textures —

transforming from wood to sheet —
white sheets born of unbleached

natural shade — a tabula rasa waiting
for ink, graphite, or sable-hair touch.

*

Old-fashioned switches — dormant —
now spark static electricity. Paper imagines —

crisp, letter-strewn, bookish, word-wedged.
Phrases elegantly poised, ready to trip off

a palette, exposing photographic plates —
bromide undulations of an untold story —

a narrative to be matted and mounted —
a frame freeing open its borders to dream.

*

Ilhan's weathered hands, its bulbous veins
hold time and text beautifully phrased —

he is a poet and painter, lover of the sea,
light, silverfish, a sculptor of history.

Like a musician recording his lyrics —
magnetic forces marrying science

and arts — he swims on crest-troughs
of sine-graph modulations, through

physics' precision of arithmetic and tact.
Paper dreams in stacks, between covers,

among notes left surreptitiously
between pages for someone else to read.

A stray reader may find the letters —
electric text — unframed and borderless.

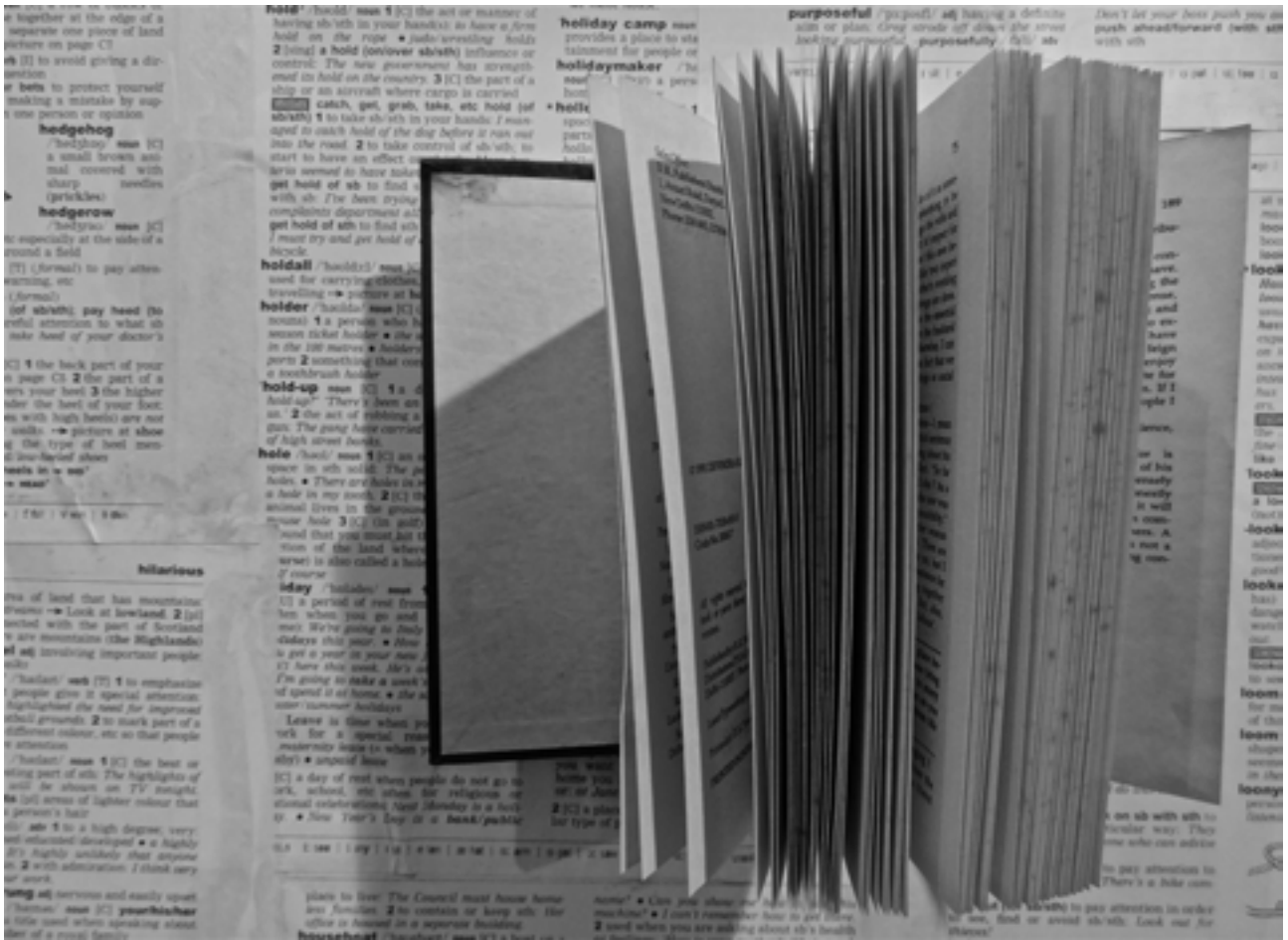
Paper Trails is a series of tightly wrought images — set in diptychs and triptychs — that charts ‘paper tales’ through the journey of birth, growth and creativity. With subtle use of natural light and controlled framing, material textures and contours, lines and phrases from the original poem as photographic titles, the black-and-white panorama unravels a narrative that is often hidden to an everyday eye.

Empty shelves dream of words it may have contained, the history of its making, the music that lies therein, lover’s clues to be chanced upon and uncoded.

The writer is a poet, the photographer a painter, and the viewer a lover — he is also the creator, preserver and destroyer — alluding to the triadic Hindu myth of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

However, the palette is secular in nature, precise like architecture and arithmetic, fluid and spontaneous like a song and a story.

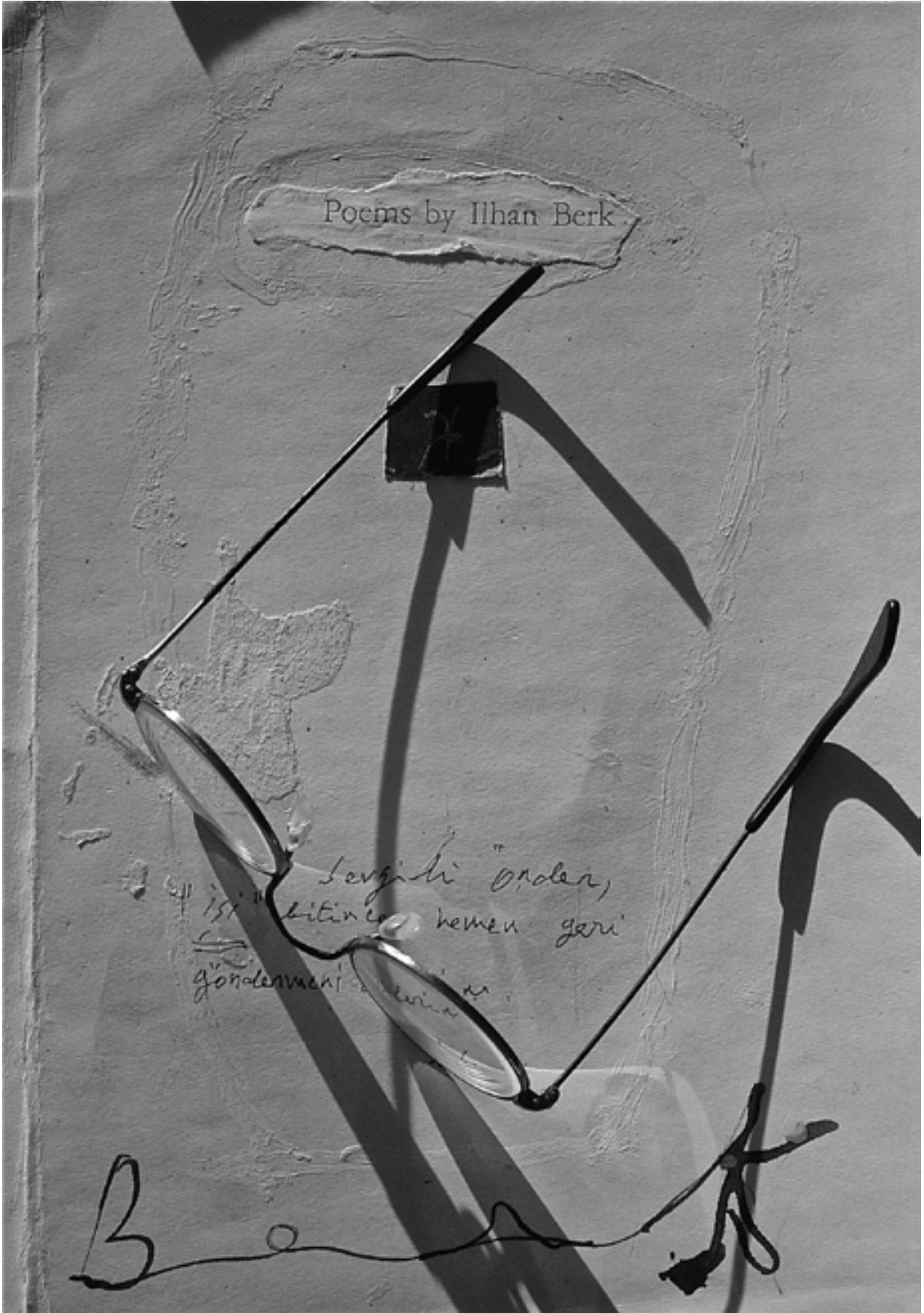
Sudeep Sen



“paper dreams withing the cover of a book ...”, 2012. Archival Digital Print



"Ilhan's weathered hands, its bulbous veins / hold time ...", 2008. Archival Digital Print



"through clefts, wefts, colours, textures ..." 2012. Archival Digital Print



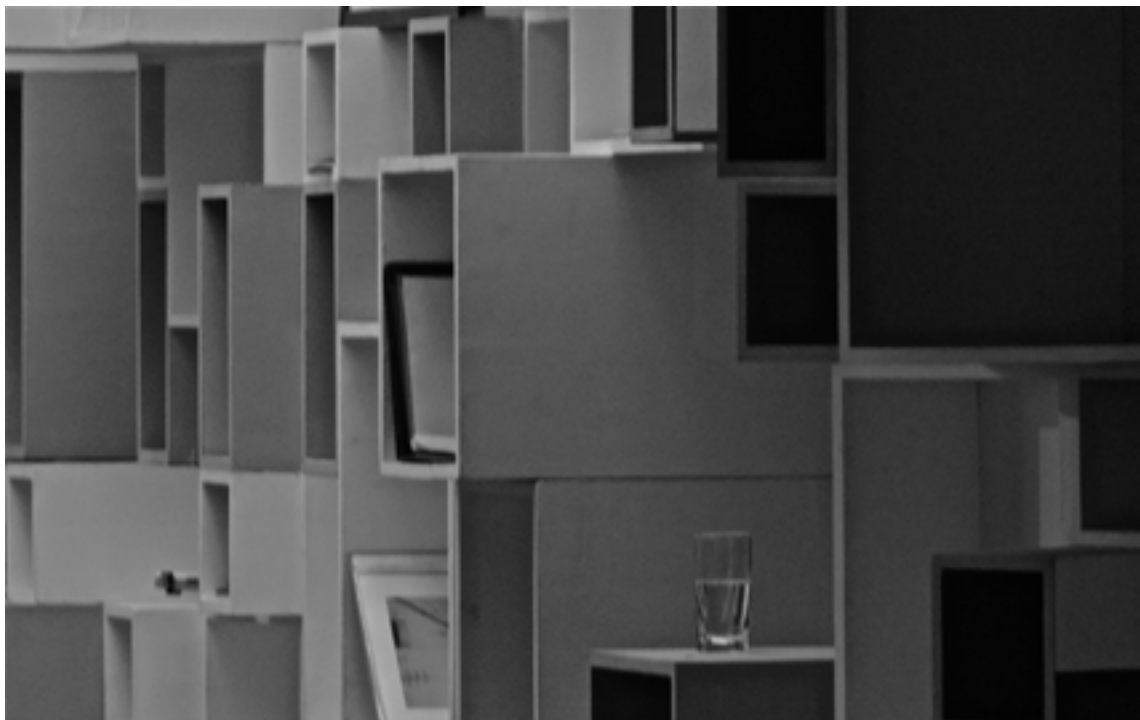
"paper crafts its papyrus origins ...", 2012. Archival Digital Print



"paper dreams in stacks ...", 2012. Archival Digital Print



"like a musician recording his lyrics ...", 2009. Archival Digital Print



"a frame freeing open its borders ...", 2012. Archival Digital Print

GRACE NOTES IN COLOUR

1.

Even before I could barely babble, speak or talk, I could comprehend colour and complex shapes. I remember experimenting with the Lüscher Colour Test diagnostics when I was precociously young. Before I had any idea of what I would professionally pursue in life — I knew text, lines, hues inextricably moved me. Had I not followed what I am doing now — poetry and photography — I would have pursued a career in architecture. In fact I did four years of engineering and architectural drawing and the sciences, before moving to the liberal arts. So it is not unsurprising that architectural elements, geometry, colour palette, tonality, texture, light and fractals deeply interest and influence me.

Modernism and post-modernism in art and literature had their fair play on me. Artists like Mark Rothko and Piet Mondrian enormously inspired me; I admired the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn; I longed to shoot like Ansel Adams and Henri Cartier-Bresson; create filmic frames like Satyajit Ray, Alain Resnais and Jean Renoir. Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* had a big impact on me, both for their visual architecture, content and depth.

Closer to home (apart from Ray), I admired Sunil Janah's masterly socio-documentation of 1940s, 50s and 60s India and Indian realism in his inimitable gritty-grained black-and-whites — his near-perfect composition, stark play of light contrasts, haunting images of famine and death, intimacy of tribal life, industrial scenes with its strength and steeliness. I was also attracted to another Indian photographer, Dinesh Khanna, especially the images in his 'colour-block' phase as seen in his book, *Bazaar*.

2.

Minimalism equally attracted me for its sparseness and its sense of tabula rasa, as did frames that did not contain any colour but only contour, form and highlights. Often monochrome has infinite colours embedded in them — that is why white light is actually light that contains all the colour possibilities.

So the story in the following series of photographs is one of celebration, joy and introspection; of colour, shape and grace; and of how light and mood affects them. It is homage to the wonders of the macrocosm and microcosm, of science and nature and the human relationships that are contained in it.

Whether you are waiting for your lover, or lost in siesta's deep spectrum, or gazing at light creating wall paintings, or remembering forgotten stories stored in old letters after the night rains, grappling with emotions of loneliness, love, grief — you journey with the hidden characters that are embedded in the colour of that moment, the moment that subtly transforms as time lapses, passing from one spectrum to another.

So revel in the grace of colour, of the unexpected corners in our life that hoard colour, revel in life itself that blossoms in its many hues if one allows oneself to fly and dream in multi-colour bleeds.

Sudeep Sen



Incarnadine, 2011. Archival Digital Print



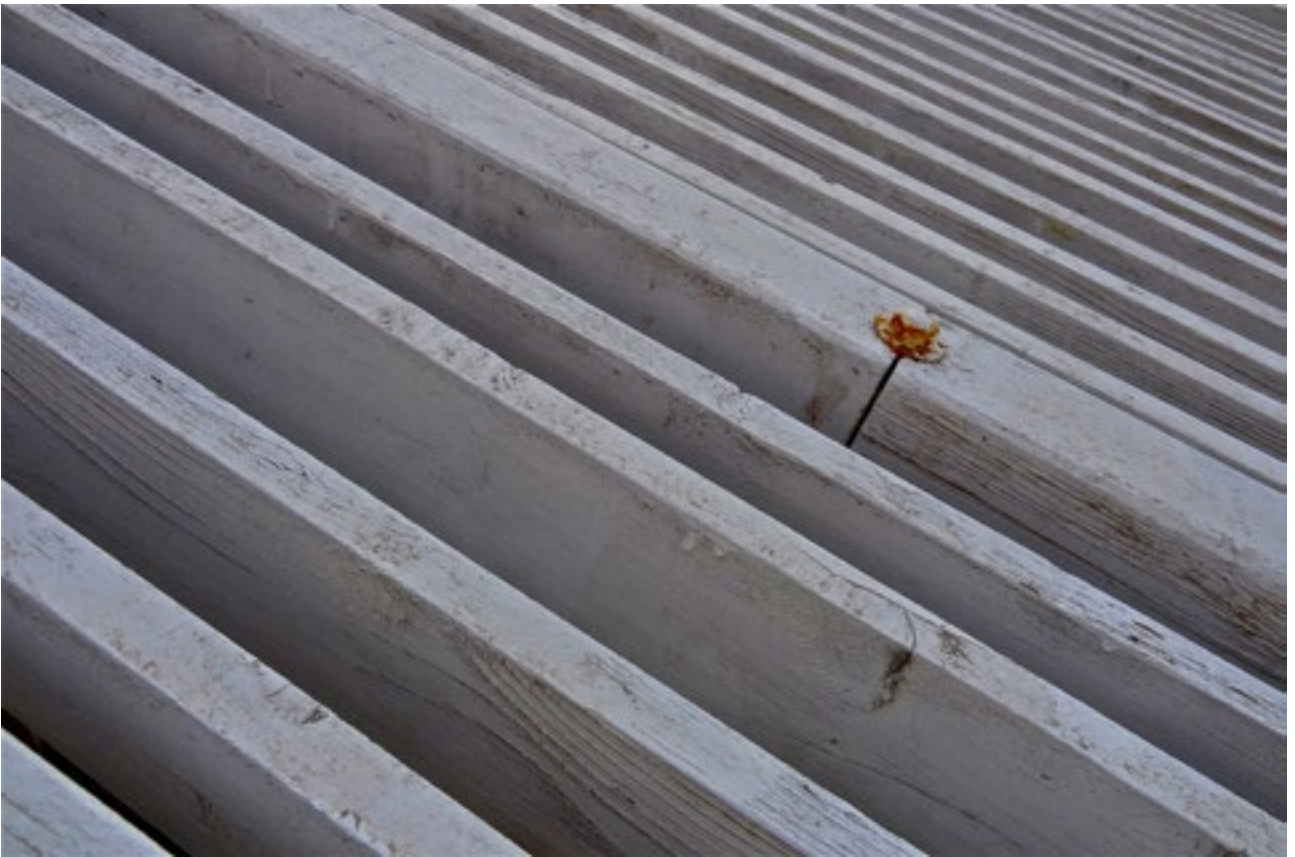
Night Rain, 2012. Archival Digital Print



Secret Reading, 2010. Archival Digital Print



Siesta 1, 2011. Archival Digital Print



Rusted Bolt, 2013. Archival Digital Print



Abandoned Journey, 2010. Archival Digital Print



Still Life 1, 2012. Archival Digital Print



Waiting for my Lover, 2011. Archival Digital Print



Waiting, 2011. Archival Digital Print

Sudeep Sen

[www.sudeepsen.net] is widely recognised as a major new generation voice in world literature and 'one of the finest younger English-language poets in the international literary scene' (*BBC Radio*). Sen's prize-winning books include: *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Distracted Geographies*, *Rain*, *Aria* (A K Ramanujan Translation Award), *Ladakh*, and *The Harper-Collins Book of English Poetry* (editor). *Blue Nude: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1979-2014* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) is forthcoming from Partridge | Penguin Random House. His poems, translated into twenty-five languages, have featured in major international anthologies. His words have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Newsweek*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Herald*, *Harvard Review*, *Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Outlook*, *India Today*, and broadcast on *bbc*, *pbs*, *cnn*, *ibn*, *ndtv*, *air & Doordarshan*. Sen's newer work appears in *New Writing 15* (Granta), *Language for a New Century* (Norton), *Leela* (Collins), *Indian Love Poems* (Knopf/Random House/Everyman), *Out of Bounds* (Bloodaxe), and *Initiate: Oxford New Writing* (Blackwell). He is the editorial director of *aark arts* and the editor of *Atlas*.

As a photographer and graphic artist, his work is part of art fairs, exhibitions, professional print portfolios, magazine and newspaper pieces, book jacket covers, record labels, and private collections. His publications credits include: *National Geographic.com*, *Hindu*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *New Indian Express*, *Swagat*, *Gallerie*, *Biblio*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Molossus*, *World Literature Today*, *Indian Design & Interiors*, and others; plus books covers for publishers such as HarperCollins, Peepal Tree, Mulfran, Wings Press, Women Unlimited, Gallerie, Aark Arts, UPL, Bengal Gallery, and many others. He has also published two books of photography, *Prayer Flag* and *Postcards from Bangladesh*. Sen lives and works in New Delhi.

Sen is the first Asian to be honoured with an invitation to participate at the 2013 Nobel Laureate Week in St Lucia, where he delivered the Derek Walcott Lecture and read his own poetry. A special commemorative edition of his work, *Fractals: New & Selected Poems/Translations 1978-2013*, was released by the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott himself in the presence of H.E. Dame Pearlette Louisy, Governor General (President) of St Lucia. That year, the Government of India's Ministry of Culture awarded him the senior fellowship for "outstanding persons in the field of culture".

Selected links:

Nobel Laureate Week

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sudeep-sen-to-address-nobel-laureate-week/article4185443.ece>

Jaipur Literature Festival

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=tIAigwTR1JI

British Council Contemporary Writers

<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/sudeep-sen>

The Best American Poetry interview

http://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2013/02/interview-with-sudeep-sen-in-new-delhi-by-catherine-woodard.html

Poetry Foundation (USA)

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/sudeep-sen>

World Literature Today interview

http://www.ou.edu/worldlit/11_2010/sudeep.html

Europalia Festival (Belgium)

http://www.europalia.eu/en/article/sudeep-sen_362.html

National Geographic

<http://yourshot.nationalgeographic.com/photos/2832474/>

Selected Comments/Reviews of Sudeep Sen's Books

'The breadth of The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry by Sudeep Sen [is] seriously impressive. [A] major book that could constitute a poetry masterclass'.

— Supriya Nair in *Mint Lounge / The Wall Street Journal* 'Best Books of the Year'

'I read *Rain* with considerable admiration and pleasure. It is a word-perfect collection and its subject matter is both the measure of the rain and the spoken line'.

—Amit Chaudhuri in *The Statesman* 'Best Book of the Year'

'Sudeep Sen's poems are a present which bring — like all true poetry — so much companionship'.

—John Berger, Booker Prize Winner and author of *The Ways of Seeing* (Penguin/BBC)

'A wonderful poet'. — Yehuda Amichai, *Selected Poems* (Faber & Faber)

'A highly sophisticated poet'. — Kaifi Azmi, author of *Selected Poems* (Viking Penguin)

'A gifted poet I think everyone who works in Indian literature in English should thank him for all he has done'. — Dom Moraes in *Sunday Middy*

Prayer Flag is an unique object of art that reveals two intrinsically linked artistic sides of Sen's work and talent: words and images. Perfection of musicality, tone and cadence is tuned to produce the finest resonance... a gift to treasure from a master artist. — Tom Alter in *Biblio*

'A rich, fluent, cosmopolitan voice'. — Peter Bradshaw in *London Evening Standard*

'Sen has emerged as a leading poet of the English language — has a painter's eye when depicting a scene [commands] superb skill'. — Khushwant Singh in *Sunday Observer*

'A poet of technical facility ... has produced a large body of work'.

— Bruce King in *The Oxford English Literary History* (OUP)

'Sen [has] extended the range of Indian verse in English to encompass a variety of alternative views of language, history and culture'. — Chris Cook ed., *Pears Cyclopaedia* (Penguin)

'Sen is an eclectic poet whose understated work eschews fashionable trends, while exhibiting considerable technical virtuosity and versatility'.

— John Thieme in *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (Cambridge University Press)

'Sen is amongst the finest younger English-language poets in the international literary scene. A distinct voice: carefully modulated and skilled, well measured and crafted'.

— Gregor Robertson on *BBC Radio*

'I've enjoyed reading *Distracted Geographies* — the spare language gives importance and adds significance to each word. In fact, the words ripple in the surrounding silence, like stones dropped into a still pond. The poem moves forward in a restrained, contemplative manner (a relief from much contemporary histrionics), and draws the reader into its emotional landscape. I especially enjoyed the images and references drawn from the world of science — as Calvino said: the literature of the third millennium must engage with science if it is to remain relevant and vital'. — Tom Petsinis, author of *The French Mathematician* (Penguin)

'From a wet Scottish morning to the lonely moment of self-discovery in a Gothic atmosphere symbolizing stillness, *Distracted Geographies: An Archipelago of Intent* captures all with the piercing precision of language, tonal lyricism, and unique scientific patterning of the book's architecture. Visionary, sensual and transcendental — we have to thank Sudeep Sen for a truly remarkable book — a *tour de force*'. — *The Independent*

Selected Comments/Reviews on Sudeep Sen's Translations in Aria

'In this artfully put together anthology, Sen translates from many languages. Sen's own translation of Jibanananda Das's Banalata Sen is luminous enough to carry the entire book.'

— Arshia Sattar in *Outlook* 'The Best Books of the Year 2009'

'Sudeep Sen's marvellous poetic career makes him the outstanding literary representative of his generation. The rich range and resonance of his work covers his poems, translations, editing, anthologizing, and discursive prose. An unerring poetic intelligence works here.'

— Dilip Chitre, *Tukaram: Says Tuka* (Penguin)

'These elegant and precise translations from various languages are like tying up a bunch of subtle fragrances. Common concerns of humanity are expressed differently by each poet so one doesn't feel a stranger among strangers.' — Gulzar, *Selected Poems* (Viking Penguin)

'Translation is a supremely hard task and often a thankless one. Sudeep Sen, a distinguished poet in his own right, accomplishes this task magnificently, translating as only a poet can, for to translate poetry, it should go without saying, one must be a poet of distinction.'

— Daniel Weissbort, founder-editor with Ted Hughes, *Modern Poetry in Translation*

'For Bengali poetry to take its rightful place in the international world of letters, it needs an international translator. Who better than Sudeep Sen? Add to the Bengali the translations from Hindi, Urdu and many other languages from all four corners of the world, and you have a wondrous, intricate embroidery — threads of many colours twisting and interweaving: a cloth that all nations can wear. Most impressive.'

— William Radice, Rabindranath Tagore: *Selected Poems* (Penguin Modern Classics)

'The work of translation is the work of comprehension, or rather the building up of a network of comprehensions. It enables people of different languages to share something that lies at the heart of human experience, which is the transformation of experience into language. Sudeep Sen has constructed a community of voices, a properly wide-ranging community, where true poems find proper echoes in the common cave of a new language — a mammoth work and a real achievement.'

— George Szirtes, *New & Collected Poems* (Bloodaxe)

'Prolific as a poet, ... and a dynamic presence on the literary scene ... [Sen has also done] vigorous work as translator.' — Arundhati Subramaniam on *Poetry International Web*

'In this superlative book of translations, Sen uses his gifts as a poet, linguist, cosmopolitan traveller and observer to conjure, in Coleridge's phrase, the 'best words in their best order' A fine collection of poetry which takes the best from classical and modern traditions and integrates them into a stunning whole.' — Jenny Lewis on *Molossus*



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