

IN CONVERSATION

STEPHANIE ROSENTHAL AND DAYANITA SINGH

‘I’m sitting in Dayanita’s house in Goa, in the courtyard, waiting for her to arrive so that we can begin the interview. Dayanita will bring her *Museum* works to London for the first time in 2013 and I’m curious to hear more about how the whole idea developed. Spending time in her house by myself is a bit like wandering through her mind; the *Museums* seem to have roots here in this very place, because of how one moves – navigating through the space directed by wooden structures – and how the door and window shutters fold and unfold. Clearly, the *Museums* also have origins in her earlier work and bring together many key aspects of her thinking. We have decided to give ourselves three consecutive days for the interview – starting here in Goa and ending in Bombay, where Dayanita wants to attend Zakir Hussain’s concert. Each day I want to focus on a different subject: the roots of the *Museum* structures and their sculptural and physical component; Dayanita’s approach to photography; and finally the editing process.’

STEPHANIE ROSENTHAL

I

SR Perhaps we could talk a bit about where your thoughts are right now regarding your *Museums*, but going back as far as what you call your ‘Kitchen Museum’. When I walked into your kitchen, I found a shelf with lots of small Moleskines on it, and you pulled them out and explained to me that these were how you brought into a certain kind of order the photographs you took during your travels with certain people. What was your impetus in making these little books and how did you come to call them your ‘Kitchen Museum’?

DS You know, I’m not really a ‘family’ or ‘domestic’ kind of person. I want to just make books, and make work, and think about my work all the time. So it’s sort of a joke to have all those gadgets in the kitchen for

cooking, because I didn't really use the kitchen for cooking at that time. The little books started because I used to go on these amazing travels with friends: friends with great minds – some of them not even friends, just great minds. We would go to places – often the houses of famous people that have been turned into house museums since their death, because they were the interest of the friend I was travelling with, or my interest. That was how we ended up getting into Anand Bhavan, Allahabad, which was [Jawaharlal] Nehru's house. My friend was doing research there, and I was able to walk around and make photos. It was fascinating to think that the first Prime Minister of India had slept here, and *this* was the door that connected him to his daughter, who then went on to become another Prime Minister; to notice the Eagle flask that sat by his table. These houses were all museums before the time of curators. They would just have a keeper: someone who would make sure everything remains as it used to be.

SR 'Keeper' is such a nice word.

DS Yes. I want all my *Museums* in the end to have trustees and keepers. I haven't got to that as yet. Anyway, the travels would often entail going to house museums with these great minds and I wouldn't know how to respond to them after the travel. Then, when I came back, I would have these wonderful contact sheets of just 12 images on slightly-larger-than-A4-size paper, because I use a Hasselblad camera and medium-format film. The contact sheets were really like a diary of the time I had spent with the friends. But these were all such amazing people that I couldn't quite write a letter to them. So I thought, if I make books out of our travels, they might put them in their pockets and take them on their travels, and each accordion-fold Moleskine could, in turn, open out into an exhibition. As I started to make these books for various friends,

[author and editor] Liz Jobey said to me, 'you must keep a copy for yourself'. I showed one such book to [publisher] Gerhard Steidl, because he came to Calcutta with Günter Grass and I had made a book for him with photographs from that trip. I remember this was at the Frith Street Gallery, London. I had an exhibition going on downstairs, and upstairs, in the apartment where I was staying, I had my parallel show, which I would take a few people to see. I had the Moleskines opened out on the mantelpiece, on the windowsill, everywhere. That was my secret show. Secrets are very important to me and that's another reason why I think



I like museums – because they’re full of secrets and clues...

SR House museums especially...

DS So I invited Steidl to come upstairs. I wanted to give him a book, but somehow I feel the book either has to go casually in the post or I like to improvise a ceremony around the giving of it. So I had to call him to the apartment, show him all of the books and then give him *his* book. And he said, ‘we must publish these books’. ‘I can’t’, I said, for they were



like private letters to people. That brings me to the addressee, who is also very important. If I had to start making a list of the things that are really important to me, it would list secrets and the addressee. I picked seven books, including one that I had made for my mother of her own pictures, and went to Steidl press and printed them. We were going to call it, I can’t remember, *Museum Story*? They were called *Sent a Letter* [2008] in the end. Did you know that the box in which the seven volumes of *Sent a Letter* are kept was made in India? I designed the box. You could say that it was my first structure. It’s actually so similar to what I’m making now – a giant *Sent a Letter*. I was saying to you that the bed [at Hayward Gallery] should fit over *Museum of Chance* [2013]; that’s the same thing, because I have a box and it opens...

SR ...and inside, you have seven mini-structures.

DS And now I have seven *Museums*. So, this box was made in India and 3,000 empty boxes were shipped to Steidl in Germany. Both of us knew that we could make this into a limited edition and price it as low as we could. Nothing like this had existed before. So it was, dare one say it, a new form.

SR So the book feeds the *Museum* structures?

DS Yes.

SR How would you see, then, the development of the book cart? The first book cart that you did was for the *House of Love* book [2011], right?

DS Yes. The thought actually started during the *Indian Highway* show [2008] at the Serpentine Gallery, London, for which I had a design

for a structure. But, at that time, I didn't have the courage to follow it through. It was a trolley for photographs, with lots of little drawers that you could pull out on different sides, which I would move through the exhibition, and it would be parked in different places and I would then come and decide which drawers need to be opened together.

SR So you were always driven by this idea of showing your photographs differently, not just framing them on the wall?



DS You know this is where context comes in – and I'm scared to even mention it because that then becomes another 'category' – but, in India, the relationship with the image is very different from anywhere else in the world. The Indian Museum in Calcutta is the most beautiful museum, with incredible vitrines. I never tire of going there. Outside the museum, on the footpath, posters are sold of the Swiss Alps, of Kashmir, of film stars and cute babies. I thought: if there's any merit to what I do, then my images should be selling on the footpath. That became my dream, to be able to sell a poster of one of my images on the footpath in front of the museum in Calcutta. So, someone who is interested will look at the *Museum of Photography* [2013] and understand that there is a different approach to the image there. Then, in 2008, I was in Calcutta for my *Ladies of Calcutta* exhibition, and I was walking on Park Street with *Sent a Letter* in my hand, because I was going to display it in the gallery. I walked past this jewellery store and the vitrines were empty, beautiful vitrines of dark wood – for me it has to be a certain kind of dark wood, a certain oil finish, certain accidents of making. That would be another key word for me – accidents; being open and always ready for the accident. Anyway, I go into the jewellery shop, meet the owner and say, 'if you give me your vitrines, I could put my little books there.' And he agreed. That was 2008, January, and the books are still there in 2013.

SR A permanent exhibition!

DS The book is at the heart of my work. To me, the exhibition is the catalogue of the works in the book. I have this category of the mass-produced artist's book. I don't think an artist has to be unique. I think a mass-produced book can also be an artist's book; Gerhard [Steidl] makes mass-produced artists' books.

SR So, the book is your way to be on the footpath and out, and allow a lot of people to see your work, instead of saying it's just for a few people to buy.

DS The bookcart was also a way to make my work accessible to people. I thought, I'm going to sell the books myself and I want people to understand that this is at the heart of my work. With *House of Love*, for example, I was already selling my books myself. I would do book tours, like my writer friends. My airfare would cost me more than all of these books together, but with *House of Love* I succeeded, because I sold 400 books in six weeks. I took the cart through the art fair in Delhi and more people bought, because I was there with the work, saying 'Buy my work!' I had money coming out of my pockets. It was all cash and was more satisfying than any print sale.

SR So, you work out variations on being able to bring something somewhere easily, having a personal approach to something, opening it up.

DS Also, it's important that I can do things myself. I was so disappointed that I couldn't carry my cart in a suitcase to Venice [Biennale, 2013], and I'm still determined to make a cart that I can carry in three suitcases.

SR All of these ideas seem to culminate in the *Museum* structures.

DS Absolutely, which is why I said to you that, if you want to call this a retrospective, you can, but, for me, it's my first show. It's the beginning for me.

SR Could you describe what the structures are, how they look, coming from *Sent a Letter*, the Moleskines and the carts?

DS They are a kind of photo-architecture, if I could dare to say that. I would hesitate to use the word 'sculpture', but they are three-dimensional forms that you have to come to and engage with. What is key to my *Museums* is that they have storage built into them, with the possibility of changing them. Every month or every week you can invite someone to re-edit, say, the *Museum of Chance* [2013]. The *Museum of Furniture* [2013] might eventually contain 80 images, but we can only display 40 images at one time, so 40 are in storage. The *Museum* keeps changing the images it shows you, but you always know there're more,



and that's the 'secret' aspect. I don't like it when you take those images out and put them on the wall, which is why I've made little structures inside the museum. You put an exhibition together, you've spent two years working on something, and then people come to look at the work on the wall in the most passive way. If you don't have the time to engage with me, then I have nothing to offer you either. I think that's a little bit about curating as well. Not so much now, but earlier, I was not at all comfortable with the way my work would be curated and the context it would be put into. It's photography, so it can be



used as an illustration of your ideas about what you think upper-class Indian life should be, or whatever, and I don't want to give you that. I don't need a curator to come and tell me the context of my work. The work is not about making photographs, it's about editing and sequencing, and when somebody else does that for me, the reason I make my work is taken away.

SR *File Room* [2013] was also about storage – the archive.

DS These structures would not have emerged in the same way if I hadn't had those two or three years of obsession with archives. In India, there's no one, single format for the archives. Archivists design their own structures, whether it be metal or wood, and most of the time also design their own catalogue systems. So there is great individuality there, and I love that.

SR So your *Museums* don't work in the way where you do the drawings and then anybody can make them from the drawings; it's much more like a developing process, like sculpting something with help from your carpenters?

DS This is something that is going to be in a 'Memorandum of Understanding' I'm making for my curators: this organic way of working which is, I think, difficult to explain to some people. Things evolve, things change – they must, and thank God that they do! So don't try and box me in, I can't bear that. I want to play with you, I want to be mischievous.

SR Is it important that we also talk about the form of the contact sheet in relation to the *Museum*?

DS The contact sheets, with boxes that were specially made for them, are my unending archives. I did *File Room* and thought I had exhausted those contact sheets. Then I start to work on the *Museum of Furniture*, and

find all those desks in them. Five or six years later, I return to the *Blue Book* [2008] contact sheets, and find all the machines. You keep finding new things on a contact sheet, depending on what sort of glasses you put on when you look at them. When I put on my 'Furniture' glasses, I'm looking at them a certain way, but then, when I think of 'Chance', I find that there are accidents happening here and there.

SR The *Museum* structures make you look at your own work in a similar way to contact sheets, and they are portable and changeable, so they bring all these different levels of your work together. What is the future of the *Museums* when they come back to your house?

DS Every full moon they will be open to the public. I'm waiting anxiously for the *Museums* to come back because all my furniture, then, will go out – I'll have a big sale – and all the *Museums* will be placed against the walls. They might even have slip covers, as you would have for furniture, so you can't see them all at the same time, or perhaps not. Then one *Museum* would be opened up; you could come, look at it, sit down, read something around it. It would also have an ongoing catalogue with an editor. If he feels that you could write something in it, he might ask you to do so, and the catalogues would build up over time. My bedroom could accommodate an archivist-in-residence, who could be a curator, writer or artist. The kitchen could become the office and reception area. So the entire front section of the house would be the 'museum' space, but with the possibility of having dinners in there – a reading space, and dinners. I would then move upstairs. In time, I might add other people's photos, or the *Museums* could grow organically. Maybe there could be a baby *Museum* fitted inside, say, the *Museum of Chance*, which then becomes my suitcase when I go to Kyoto. Everything should keep changing, and the *Museums* would allow that.

SR So your work is very much like making a house. With the *Museum* structures, you're actually building these houses; you are creating spaces for people to look and move in. You choreograph people through a space, and photography, for you, is an act with a physical impact.

DS If I go to a hotel room or someone's house, I immediately think of how I would rearrange the room. I'm fascinated by chairs, by beds, and how we use these things in our spaces – hence, by architecture. The home, to me, is the beginning of architecture, of engagement with space. If you go



to a really tiny home—whether in Japan or a slum in Mumbai—observing the maximised usage of space in it, and the notion of privacy, becomes a fascinating exercise: a study in the ingenious ways in which people live in small spaces. When I bought this house in Goa, my scale changed because, although I grew up in a very large house, it was a house where rooms were added on as and when they were required. My father was always breaking rooms and building rooms, and my mother’s nightmare was coming home to find that there was suddenly a wall in the middle of the bedroom, because he had the idea of making a closet for the other side. I grew up in a very organic house, where things kept changing, so, for me, the home and its architecture are about being able to change the space according to need, moods, or even the changing light. Then I got the house here in Goa and, once I removed the false ceiling, the scale was incredible, and, since that time in 2001 or 2002, I had the idea that in this vast space, I wanted to have smaller spaces, like little caves that I could go into. I tried to make these conversation corners. Everything was around conversations and beds – I think you can have the best conversations when you’re horizontal. Conversation is key, so the architecture has to allow for that, as well as privacy. After ‘secrets’ and ‘accidents’, I would add ‘conversation’ and ‘privacy’ to my list of keywords.

SR The *Museum* structures allow you to rearrange the space in which you show your work in many different ways.

DS The work emerges over time, and whenever I try to push it towards something it doesn’t work. It has to evolve through its own organic process. It has to allow for change. Just as I thrive on conversation, the work thrives on conversation with me; I make it, put pictures into it, walk around it, have coffee or read in front of it. I have a picture on my phone of my two little friends from Ahmedabad who came and

made their houses on either side of *File Museum* [2012] with cushions from my sofas, and the middle area became their table; I thought, that’s an interesting concept for two beds. I have to be free to have such conversations around the work.

SR Sometimes, when you meet a new person, it’s like adding a room to your mind. Similarly, walking through a house is sometimes like walking through somebody’s mind. When I wander through your house, it’s very much like walking through your mind, because the things you are



influenced by and refer to are all around.

DS People tell me, I've seen this house before, I've seen it in your pictures – but I have never photographed it. So I found a house that looks like my photographs.

SR Yesterday you said that the house was a very important influence on you. But I also think that your work was a very big influence on your finding the house.

DS My work, and my boyfriend at that time. I did an exhibition in this village and I called it *Demello Vado* [2000]. It was for the villagers and they could take the pictures home with them. At that exhibition, somebody said to me, 'You've called your exhibition *Demello Vado*, you must now buy Dr Demello's house.' I said, 'Don't be silly, property means litigation and I don't need a house.' Then my boyfriend said to me, 'Why don't you at least go and see the house?' I came to see it, went to the upstairs room, and felt that this place was meant for me. I had to have it, and today my address is 'Demello Vado'. That was the great accident. The house sort of found me, and I lost the boyfriend. I'm very grateful, not just for the effect of the house on my work, but also for the luck of having met him. He brought incredible gifts to my life, and incredible pain. He opened up a Calvino window, a Mahler window, an Ondaatje window, and, by chance, or fate, or an accident more absurd than I can explain, a Geoff Dyer window.

II

SR I remember you said during my last visit that photography is just ten per cent of you.

DS I must say that I get a slight twinge when I read, 'Dayanita Singh, photographer', because of course I photograph, but so do you and so does everybody else in this village. Photographs are my raw material. If I say that, in September, I want to go and make photographs, it's because I want to make more *Museums*; I'm not photographing just to make photographs. I think that is the big difference. To collect raw material, also, I can't just say, 'I'm going off to Calcutta now.' There's a whole process of preparation, involving reading from that inspirational bookshelf that I showed you in Delhi, and listening



to music. Only then can I go out and photograph. Just as writing down words doesn't make you a writer, making photographs doesn't make you a photographer. That's why I call the *Museums* photo-architecture. Why is it so difficult for people to accept that I make photo-architecture? Of course, I *love* photography; I've been making photographs for 30 years. Obviously, if I'm photographing, say, plants, there will be something more to those pictures than what is in front of the camera; that's all my life experience – the books I've read, the music I've listened to. But that's not enough. I didn't want



to keep making family portraits all my life. I want to move on, and I can't let categories hold me back.

SR What is the nature of your interest in the relationship between the book and photography?

DS The form of the book is a very intimate form. To me, it's the best way to look at photography. I would rather give up on print quality, but I cannot bear the glass that comes between the print and me. So I love the book, I love that you can handle it, and that I've been able to find a way that the book can be on the wall as well. When I can have a book doing so many different things, I don't need to make single prints. Now, with the *Museum* structure, I've made what might be called a giant book, but I am unwilling to fix it at that. We will see what terminology we come up with for them, but the structures are also very much part of my book thinking. If you have a mother who's an obsessive album-maker, always putting photos on and in every possible surface she could find in the home, you don't have this idea, which other people have, of photography being just made up of photographs.

SR *Go Away Closer* [2007] was a kind of breakthrough for you in relation to this.

DS When I photographed that girl on the bed, I recognised that this is an emotion that I have photographed with before: a feeling, this *Go Away Closer*. It was like a flash, and it's from that time on that my work shifted so drastically. But it wasn't prints, it was the book, and the prints were just the extension of it.

SR So the book is the starting point for *Go Away Closer*?

DS Yes, absolutely. Because I took one picture, I recognised it as *Go Away Closer*, and flew back to Delhi, because I couldn't stop myself. I knew I had done this many times before – I recognised the déjà vu – and then I came and I looked in my contact sheets, and I found the images, one after another. All things that, at that time, I had thought, I don't need this, I don't need that.

SR So did you develop the film in Bombay then? Or where did you see the photograph developed for the first time?

DS I didn't have to develop the film, I knew it when I made the picture. Yeah. I recognised it; the déjà vu often gives you a slightly sick feeling.

SR And you felt like it's been there before.

DS I'd been there before. And that's when *Go Away Closer* came into my mind.

SR This is a bit like what you're doing now with the *Museums*, where you see one thing, you feel, 'it's in my work,' and then you go...

DS ...and excavate in my own archive, and I find it and I put it together. So each one of those *Museums* could actually make a beautiful book, but I don't want to do that, because I want the structure to be the form, and maybe they won't have books, because they only have to be in the structures, and maybe the book will just be the texts that could be written around them or that I might collect from various books. *Zakir* [Hussain, 1986] is the best example of that, in that I've never shown the prints; the book is the work.

SR So, in a way, you edit your work now in the way you would edit a book

– the edit for the *Museum* structures is like that which you would make for... No, that's not it, because I think the interesting aspect of the *Museum* structures, the photo-architecture, is that you provide a sequence, but you open it a lot up, so you share...

DS ... Yes, I share with you, but it's a controlled sharing. So, I give you images that should work in any combination. I'm not allowing you to say, 'I want a *Masterji* here and I want a sex worker there, and I want...' – you can't do that. *Museum of Chance* I had to play with very carefully – like, one



Interior Landscape or two incorporated – because I will not always be there to install. The idea of the *Museums* is that they will go on tour.

SR But it feels like you give someone a contact sheet, and you say, ‘if you look from left to right, or if you go across or if you go down, that’s your thing’. Whereas, in the book, you can arrange a certain sequence.

DS The sequence is very important to me, as are the pacing and the texts that go into it. Every little detail in the book is very important to me.

SR You seem to have found a new form with *File Room* [2013]. The book has an image on the cover and, with the little structure into which the book fits, you have found a way of allowing people to hang the book as a work on the wall and still have an image to look at.

DS With *File Room*, yes, I’ve been able to make a form, find a form. It’s also about having the conviction to say, this is it, this is the work. I’m not doing anything that different from the *Zakir* book. There is another shift I’m trying to make: I want to be able to change my work all the time. I can make *Dream Villa* posters and sell them in the bookshop if I want, that would be my work. What is this rule in the art world that you make an artwork and that’s it? I don’t agree with that. Like fungus or mushrooms, the work can keep growing or changing. My structures allow me that. I don’t want anybody to tell me what I can and cannot do with my images.

SR When you say that photography is your raw material, you are saying that it is more like paint. It’s not a painting, but just paint.

DS Hmmm, a good one! Yes, I know how to make good paint. I can make a

paint store, but I don’t want a paint store. How am I going to put something more into it? I have to put myself into it. Perhaps somebody else may not be able to make good photographs consistently, but being able to do that is hardly anything to write home about. It may be fine for everybody else, but it’s not enough for me. The art world is wonderful, and the institutions are fantastic. Who would not want to be there? But if no museum is interested in my work, I still have the jewellery store in Calcutta. I still have my own structures. I will always be able to find some museum that will be happy to have my structures, or I can give



them to a library. I want everything to be archival, I want them to have a home. I'm always thinking, 'where can I park my *Museums* when I'm not there?'

III

SR You have said that editing is the way of transforming your photographs into how you are going to show them in a book or structure. What is the relationship of that process to literature?



DS I think making the photographs is, as I said before, like gathering the raw material. I used to think of it like gathering words: having a big desk or a big board full of words and then seeing where the connections are – where one wants to break the connections, where one wants to make less of a connection, where one wants to withhold, where one wants to add. That is when the photographs really come alive, because they need to be transformed. Photographs on their own are just not enough and what you said about 'paint' was even more interesting: you know how to make beautiful paints, but then you have to make a painting, and only then will the paints realise themselves. Only when I make the form does the work really realise itself. I often say that a photograph has two dates, like the photograph of *Zeiss Ikon 1996* [2013, opposite]. That was made in 1996 but it's really gaining its form now – it's my image for this entire show. Photographs get a life when they have a form, and then that form has to be allowed to change. If the publisher, the institution, the curator, do not allow me that change, then I'm going to have to fight for that. The primary resource, for me, in doing this editing is the training in music – not my own training but just from being around musicians for such extended periods. Yesterday, when I was photographing Zakir, I was sitting on stage and I thought, when you're 18 and your mentor is an absolute genius of rhythm, how can you not do something special with that? The other thing my mother pointed out to me at the concert is the rigour and restraint in Indian classical music, in the rhythm and the *raags*. You have a configuration of notes to work with, whether you're singing or playing the tabla. It's not free-floating, and you can't just keep elaborating, yet, you must elaborate. So, unlike Western classical music, where all the notes are fixed and you interpret rather than elaborate, here you have these fixed notes on which you have to elaborate. It's a question of how you combine those notes, and that's

your genius. While I'm editing, I like to have restrictions. I like to have certain set notes and then I play with them. I think of a tone, in the sense of a musical tone – or I think, this is not the right tone. If I want to create a disharmony, it's very deliberate. When I put one image from *Interior Landscapes* [2005] into the *Museum of Chance*, it shakes up the whole piece, but if I were to put six *Interior Landscapes* in there, it would no longer have that power. It's knowing when to continue in the harmonious way, when to break that, and then to come back to the harmony. It goes back to the idea of informed intuition, a dreaded word in the Western world, for some reason.

SR I don't think it's as dreaded as you think. Lots of painters would talk about intuition. Think of Francis Bacon; he spoke of accidents as well.

DS Yes, recognising the accident and knowing how to use the accident is perhaps the skill. Accidents happen to everybody, but maybe an artist is someone who sees the power of accidents and then makes something out of that power. The key to editing the *Museum of Chance* was to reduce, reduce and reduce, from 700 to 70-odd images. Then, if someone comes and says, 'I don't like this image, can we take this out, or bring this in', it disrupts the symphony created by the work. When I'm editing, I try not to involve anybody. The edit is in my head, and in my dreams, and I don't talk to anybody about it, because I don't want to give words to it. If you're lucky, there will be one or two people you can go to if you're really stuck. They might not even do anything, but just the conversation with them will release something. Yet 90 or 95 per cent of the editing is done by myself, based on my experience of the music I've been listening to and the books I've been reading. If I'm getting stuck, I just have to dip into Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* [1988] or Vikram Seth's poetry – just one poem, sometimes just a sentence.

SR It releases something.

DS It releases something and I say, I didn't think of that! How amazing that Geoff Dyer makes a book about [Tarkovsky's film] *Stalker*, or that he writes two parallel novels. In *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* [2010] it was as though there were two novels: he just hinged them together, and you're never sure if it is the same person in both, and I still don't know if it's the same story. Then there's *Zona* [2012], where you think he's talking about *Stalker* in that brilliant Geoff Dyer way, but then he has footnotes running below that are not at all academic, and it's as if another work has been composed there. For me, Calvino and Dyer make a form for everything they do. It's not even that you *decide* the form – it reveals itself slowly. It's about having patience and trusting your process. And how do you trust your process? Why is it that you may not trust your process at 18 and you do at 52?



SR There seem to be certain characters in your work who are sometimes more and sometimes less visible, but are essential to the editing process.

DS Yes: Mona, a whole family in Calcutta. By that, I mean that my original friend in Calcutta was the grandmother, then her daughter became my friend, and my latest friend is the grand-daughter. They somehow always appear. And the man that you see in the *Museum of Machines* [2013], who I said could be the keeper of the *Museum of Machines*, is actually the grandfather of the girl on the bed. And the girl on the bed is the



Calcutta friend's daughter, and the keeper is the friend's father-in-law. The *Museum of Machines* actually started because my friend's husband said, 'Would you mind going to my father's factory and photographing some of the machines?' I went to the factory and took some pictures and, when I came back and looked at the pictures, I thought, no, these are not just machines, these are sculptures. There is something organic about them: there's personality, there's gender. So it's about being open, trusting one's intuition. If I have the courage to say it, it's about trusting in life.

SR Were you always good at this kind of editing, or did it come to you later in your work?

DS I think the fundamentals of editing, in a larger sense, were all laid down in those years of travelling with Indian classical musicians and with Zakir – how they would put a concert, an evening, together; how a *raag* would be divided into different parts, and be a collection of fixed notes, yet your genius lay in how you played with those notes. You create something out of this restriction, this restraint. So, the larger map for editing was emotionally embedded in me by the musicians. But I also remember when I read Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* [1982], in 2001 perhaps, that I had this sort of flash moment when I said to myself, this is what editing is! Knowing when to stop, what to leave out. What you piece together doesn't have to be a linear story. You can't do it any other way. The one time I've had to work with someone else's interference, it was neither here nor there; I was left with this orphan child – neither mine, nor the other person's. It's important to trust your own editing process, fuel it with music, writing, conversation. But finally, you have to be completely alone with it.

