

To Be Separate, To Be *Together*.

GUNTAJ DEEP SINGH

We go to the mountains the way we go to everything, looking for one thing and finding another.

To Be Separate, To Be Together is a photo series made during the ELEMENTAL residency in the village of Prini, where the Beas runs cold nearby and the deodar forests hold the light in a way that makes you feel, briefly, that you have been forgiven for something. People come to be less known. They tell themselves this is what they needed - the distance, the quiet, the radical permission to be no one's anything for a few days.

And then something shifts. Not dramatically. The mountains do not announce themselves. They simply exist at a scale that makes the self feel both precious and unnecessary, and in that contradiction something loosens. The grip you have kept on your own solitude. The story you have been telling about what you need.

This is what the photographs hold: the moment a person stops being only themselves. When the vastness outside stops being scenery and starts being an answer to a question they hadn't known they were carrying. There is something that happens when you place a human being in a vast unfamiliar environment - not smallness exactly, but a kind of relief. The weight of individual life, held briefly by something larger and older and entirely indifferent to your particular grief.

And yet people reach for each other here in unspeakable ways. **They feel isolated from each other and connected to each other at the same time.** In the cold, in the silence, against all the solitude they came looking for. As if the mountains, in making them feel small, also make them feel less alone in that smallness.

That is the paradox this work lives inside. We are most ourselves when we dissolve in our environment a little. We are most human when we remember we are not the whole story, but only a moment in something that was here long before us and will remain long after.

PHOTOS HAVE BEEN TAKEN ON FUJIFILM-X100 & CANON G3X

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