

# PERSPECTIVES V

## THE POLITICS OF PRETTY PICTURES

YOU MIGHT SAY THAT **SUBHANKAR BANERJEE** (RIGHT) HAS PURSUED A NON-TRADITIONAL CAREER PATH. WITH DEGREES IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING FROM HIS NATIVE INDIA AND BOTH PHYSICS AND COMPUTER SCIENCE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, BANERJEE LEFT A FAST-TRACK JOB AT BOEING A FEW YEARS AGO TO BECOME A FREELANCE NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER. WITHOUT MUCH OF A PORTFOLIO, HE DECIDED TO POUR HIS LIFE SAVINGS INTO A DAUNTING PROJECT: TO DOCUMENT THE REMARKABLE BIODIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS.

THE GAMBLE PAID OFF. BANERJEE SHOWED HIS PHOTOGRAPHS TO EDITORS AT THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, EXPLAINING THAT HE'D LIKE TO SEE THEM PUBLISH A VOLUME ON THE REFUGE THAT FEATURED HIS REMARKABLE IMAGES. AND HE HAD ALREADY CONVINCED AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF ESSAYISTS, INCLUDING THE LIKES OF PETER MATTHIESSEN AND PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE VOLUME. **ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: SEASONS OF LIFE AND LAND** WAS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR TO MUCH FANFARE FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY GROUPS, AND A SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF BANERJEE'S PHOTOGRAPHS WAS PLANNED FOR NO LESS OF AN AUGUST VENUE THAN THE ROTUNDA OF THE SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.

THINGS BEGAN TO FALL APART IN MARCH, HOWEVER, AFTER SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CALIFORNIA) INVOKED BANERJEE'S PHOTOGRAPHS TO ARGUE AGAINST PENDING LEGISLATION IN THE U.S. SENATE TO OPEN ANWR TO OIL EXPLORATION. SUDDENLY, THE SMITHSONIAN DECIDED TO ALTER THE CAPTIONS OF THE PICTURES IN THE EXPOSITION AND MOVE THE EXPOSITION TO A LESS PROMINENT PLACE IN THE BASEMENT OF THE MUSEUM. THE MOVE PRECIPITATED A HEATED SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE DECISION (RIGHT).

THE READINGS FOR PERSPECTIVE V PROVIDE A CONTEXT FOR A DISCUSSION OF THE SPECIFIC CASE OF BANERJEE'S SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT, BUT ALSO FOOD FOR THOUGHT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OR AGAINST ANWR DEVELOPMENT. SUBHANKAR BANERJEE WILL BE OUR SPECIAL GUEST FOR THE CLASS MEETING, SO BE PREPARED WITH QUESTIONS....