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Horn Please: The Decorated Trucks of India

Dan Eckstein

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“Horn Please” could be considered the mantra of the Indian highway, and some version of the phrase is written on the back of practically every truck on the road in India today.

One unmistakable feature of the Indian highway is the presence of these brightly decorated trucks that ply the country’s roads. The men who drive these trucks spend long hours on the road and can be away from their families for weeks at a time, so their trucks act as a second home and they take great pride in them. The interior and exterior of the trucks are colorfully decorated with paintings, stickers, garlands, tassels, and shrines, which are not only a unique form of folk art but also an expression of individualism.

Photographer Dan Eckstein traveled over 10,000 km across India's byzantine and burgeoning road network documenting these elaborately decorated trucks festooned with lights, brightly colored text, paintings of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian deities, pop cultural fixtures, and geometric patterns—symbols representing a blinding mashup of new and old India. What Eckstein produced is a singular portrait of the subcontinent: distinctly Indian, and a vividly colored reflection of this country in flux between tradition and modernity. ***Horn Please*** serves as a psychedelic guide to design in India, from the hand-painted lettering covering the trucks, to the mindboggling use of color, to the specifically Indian patterns and motifs, and a showcase of the visual vernacular of the subcontinent.

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