

Fact Sheet: Indian Photo Festival 2026 and the photobook Jerusalemites

Selected by an anonymous jury, publicly listed, then removed.

Updated 22 September 2026

Summary

The photobook Jerusalemites by Israeli photographer Sharon Gabay was selected for the Photobook Exhibition of the 12th Indian Photo Festival (Hyderabad, 26 November 2026 to 3 January 2027). The festival states that all submissions were reviewed anonymously. After the selection was published with the line "Sharon Gabay / Israel", the name was removed from the public list and the selection was cancelled in writing. The festival states that the decision is separate from the artistic evaluation of the work. Of 24 selected photobooks, this is the only one removed.

Timeline (Israel time)

23 Aug 2026	Submission confirmed.
18 Sep 00:54	Festival newsletter announces selections: 1,020 submissions from 66 countries, all reviewed anonymously.
18 Sep 01:46	Official selection email with a Selection and Participation Agreement; acceptance by 24 Sep, materials by 2 Oct, physical book by 15 Oct.
18 Sep	Website lists "Sharon Gabay / Israel" under PhotoBook Exhibitions; a PDF copy saved.
18 Sep by 13:05	Name no longer on the list; Gabay asks for clarification.
18 Sep 20:39	Festival email cancels the selection.
19 Sep 07:48	Gabay sends six written questions and asks the festival to preserve all records.
19 Sep	Website shows 23 names, all others identical.
19 Sep	Festival publishes a public statement on Facebook: the selection was anonymous, "we have removed the artist", and "we stand against genocide".
20 Sep 05:40	Festival acknowledges receipt and says it will respond in writing.
20 Sep 07:23	Gabay clarifies he is not asking to be reinstated, only for a full explanation, by 22 Sep 12:00.
22 Sep	Festival sends a formal written response in legal language; decision final, "matter closed".

The festival in its own words

Selection announcement, 18 Sep

"To ensure an equitable and fair opportunity for every photographer, all submissions were reviewed anonymously. We believe that the work should speak for itself, and we are committed to creating a platform that supports diverse voices and perspectives in photography."

Selection email, 18 Sep

"We are pleased to inform you that your photo book has been selected for the Photo Book Exhibition at the festival."

Cancellation email, 18 Sep

"Following the selection, certain concerns were brought to the festival's attention regarding the inclusion and after careful consideration of these concerns and the broader context in which the festival operates, we have decided that it would not be appropriate to proceed with the exhibition in this edition." and "We would like to emphasize that this decision is separate from the artistic evaluation of your work and is not a reflection of its artistic merit."

Public statement on Facebook, 19 Sep

"follows a 100% anonymous selection process, where submissions are evaluated solely on the work presented, without access to the photographer's name, nationality, or background" "Following the concerns raised, we have removed the artist from the exhibition selection." "against genocide, violence against civilians, and all forms of human rights violations" "additional measures to ensure greater alignment with IPF's vision, values, and commitment"

Formal written response, 22 Sep

"The absence of your name from the public list was not a temporary editorial or technical error that the Festival intended to correct by putting the name back." "They did not come from the jury as part of the artistic review. They came after the announcement, from persons outside that jury process." "Those objections, and the likely effect of proceeding in the face of them, formed part of what the Organiser considered." "The festival does not operate a rule that an artist is ineligible, or later to be removed, because of nationality alone." "The book was selected on the published artistic criteria. After that selection became public, concerns were raised about inclusion in this edition. The Organiser then decided not to proceed."

What the published rules say

- Submissions open to photographers "from anywhere in the world", no thematic restriction.
- Stated criteria are artistic merit, originality, coherence, visual quality, storytelling, conceptual strength and potential impact. Nationality is not a criterion.
- Stated grounds for rejection are incomplete or late submissions or failure to meet requirements. None applies.
- The Selection and Participation Agreement has no clause allowing the organiser to withdraw a selection.
- The festival describes itself as "a platform for untold stories and diverse voices".

What the festival still refuses to say

- Who raised the objections ("the Festival will not name private individuals").
- What they said ("will not reproduce those communications, will not quote them").
- Who took the decision, beyond "the Organiser".
- Whether the jury was informed.

"Broader context" is defined by the festival as the "orderly and effective staging of the programme" once objections had been raised.

Festival facts

- Organiser: Light Craft Foundation, Hyderabad.

- Venue: State Art Gallery, Hyderabad, a Telangana state gallery.
- All emails signed by Rohit Reddy, Program Coordinator.
- Published panel: Indira Williams Babic (Senior Photo Editor and Curator, National Geographic), Julie Hau (Photo Editor, National Geographic), Avi Gupta, Miriam Chandy Menacherry, Gopal MS.

About the book and the photographer

Jerusalemites (2026, ISBN 9789655977875) is a trilingual photobook in Hebrew, English and Arabic: fifteen years of Jerusalem seen through its people rather than its monuments. It portrays Jerusalemites of all three faiths: Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Sharon Gabay, born in Jerusalem in 1974, is the author of six photography books. His work has been shown at the United Nations in New York, the United States Congress and the Knesset. The book received an official greeting from the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog.

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