

*The New Yorker*

September 24, 2012

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART, FAZAL SHEIKH

Vince Aletti



From his earliest work, portraits taken in a Kenyan refugee camp, Sheikh has epitomized the “concerned photographer”—the phrase coined by Cornell Capa to describe photojournalists whose impulses are as humanitarian as they are documentary. Sheikh continues to work among the dispossessed, most recently in India; the pictures here were made in Varanasi, the city on the Ganges where Hindus believe it is auspicious to die. As usual, his photographs are modestly scaled but for the first time most of them are in color—a rich range of dusty beiges, deep browns, and tarnished golds. Sheikh’s subjects are both the living and the dead, including a number of sleepers and blanket-shrouded bodies that suggest an interim state of existence. The work is unsentimental but deeply felt and quietly affecting.