

# Aesthetic Bind

Five exhibitions curated by Geeta Kapur

50

1963 ■ 2013

Chemould Prescott Road celebrates  
50 years of contemporary art with

Five exhibitions curated by Geeta Kapur

## Aesthetic Bind

September 2013 - April 2014

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Subject of death

second

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Phantomata

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Cabinet Closet Wunderkammer

fifth

Floating World

First of five exhibitions

**Aesthetic Bind:**  
Subject of death

September 3 - October 3, 2013

**Bhupen Khakhar**

Anju Dodiya

Mehlli Gobhai

Gieve Patel

Sudhir Patwardhan

Srinivasa Prasad

Gargi Raina

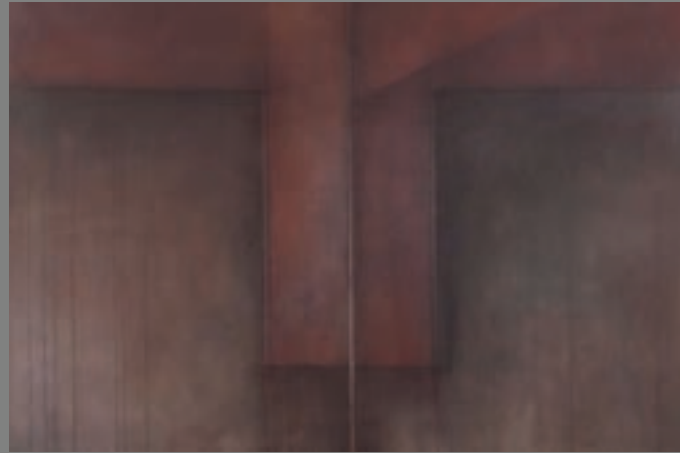
Mithu Sen

Sudarshan Shetty

Aditi Singh



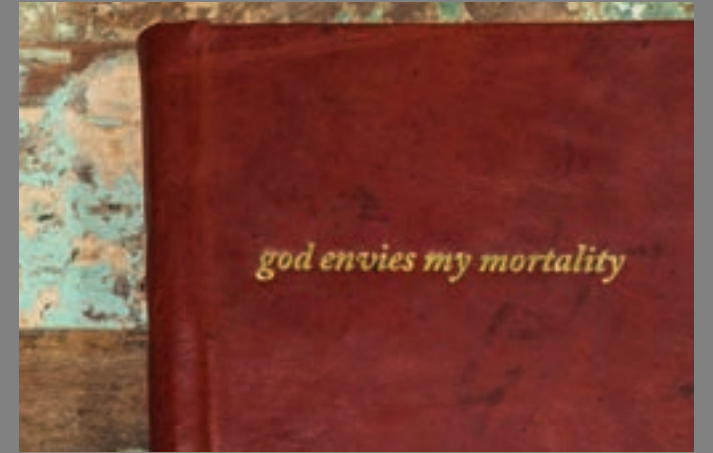
Bhupen Khakhar



Mehlii Gobhai



Gieve Patel



Sudarshan Shetty



Anju Dodiya



Gargi Raina



Aditi Singh



Sudhir Patwardhan



Mithu Sen



Srinivasa Prasad

## Subject of death

It's best to anticipate the question. Why inaugurate 50 years of Chemould's exuberant life with the motif of death? This is not some curatorial game of inversion – the reason is simple. It is the tenth death anniversary of Bhupen Khakhar, the preeminent painter of our times supported by Chemould from the start of his uncommon career.<sup>1</sup>

This is also in remembrance of Kekoo Gandhi, Chemould's founder, who died just before the year of celebration. He was a confirmed socialist, he had Gandhian ethics, he was a fearless activist in moments of political crisis. He was an eccentric and a comrade of artists across three generations. Chemould's 50 Years celebration is dedicated to him.

Even though it is curatorial protocol, I am disinclined to offer a concept note. There is, nonetheless, a compulsion for words. Death's affect materializes in the body as immanent mortality but its existential meaning is speculated in philosophy, unravelled by poetics; there is rhetorical cadence in the very utterance of the word, *death*. The reality of death comes alive in its enunciation, as it does in image and experience; I have chosen, therefore, to embed brief texts in the exhibitory space – artists' titles and notes, and, in a couple of instances, my annotations.

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<sup>1</sup> See Geeta Kapur, 'The Uncommon Universe of Bhupen Khakhar' in *Pop Art and Vernacular Culture*, ed Kobena Mercer, Iniva, London, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2007

An exhibition must, however, speak through the image that is an embodiment of such poesis, knowledge, premonition. The image immortalizes absence; it promises presence as a preemptive move against nothingness. Thus the obsession with sacralization, representation, sexualization of the dead body; and, conversely, with metaphysics that abstracts the living body into soul.

Bhupen, the protagonist of this exhibition, is featured with paintings from the last two decades of his life, cut short by cancer. Here, in these paintings, he offers himself as (a) reluctant subject in the province of death. If death's gaze shapes and marks Bhupen's queer bodies, there is also a peculiar mimicry at work. He wrests death's agency and struggle on the very ground of painting. More cannily, he exposes such diverse forms of subjection that are reproduced in death's name by sacred, sovereign and aesthetic regimes.

Because death came so rapidly to Bhupen, he addressed it every which way – with rage, with pleas for compassion, with unconcealed terror. What he also confirmed is that disease ignites desire. Bhupen's 'late style' releases images cathected in the figure of death and yet bestowed with such erotic power that they produce a contrarian affect: refusal and sublimation, each equally uncompromised.

The exhibition as a whole is a reticent take on (the) subject of death. It is predominantly a show of paintings and it narrativizes extinction. It seems death's subject is the self after all.... The work of Gieve Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan signify a slow surrender to mortality. Under the ruse of painting 'family' – of very old men who are real and possible fathers – the two artists, each in his own way, fuse affinities

with estrangement to prefigure the end. In my curatorial relay, such vulnerable imagery asks to be redeemed. A senior colleague, Mehli Gobhai, offers the protocol of *erasure*; his three paintings appear like panels of a chapel where the invisible supplicant kneels.

The much younger Sudarshan Shetty offers two simple objects and a line of text that spells hubris in the style of the Greeks, or, *contrarily*, the humblest of Buddhist monks: 'god envies my mortality'. A form of 'self-naughting' (Coomaraswamy's favoured concept, *akimcanna*), this is an atheistic but equally an aesthetic claim: a mere mortal mocks god and 'his' laws of life and death.



The Greeks feature in Gargi Raina's work. Her glass boxes filled with feather-sprouting seeds disperse with a breath but bear a heraldic title. Words from an epitaph to Heraclitus retrieve from death her slight samples of illumined life. This object-text is curatorially framed by two more works of Gargi: the plainest of (threaded) discs annotated with the words of Akka Mahadevi valorizing her birth from a thousand wombs; and a video-still recalling unmarked graves in her beloved Kashmir. The artist's snowed-in body is flanked by a blanched double-image of (Holbein's) 'son of god' suffering death *in extremis*.

Beside this ensemble is placed Srinivasa Prasad's photo-text documentation of his performing body. In one, the artist brings home ash from the cremation of an unidentified body and hand-prints with his finger a veil of ash on the walls of a room: the '*ethics of dust*'. The ritual is humbling. The reverse of the wall pictures a nomad: the artist's journey as a black-clad 'anarchist' walking his dog in the woods and across streams to a utopian destination that may be death's lair.

Anju Dodiya's 'diary' pages offer a concentrated act of mourning (her own) death where each visage signals fateful stigmata. Mourning is also an act of healing the narcissistic wound, but that healing is here annotated with 'medical' diagrams that will, with some irony, treat 'to the end' her eruptive selves – always so vivaciously alive and stubbornly dead. In a fortuitous conjunction, Aditi Singh opens the wound. The paper bleeds, you see a flatbed of (what look like) poppies crumpled in the bud or full-blown with stamens in a whorl. The pollen of the oriental poppy is dark blue....

Back to the beginning of the gallery, and in a closed room occupied by Mithu Sen you see 'shadowlines' of the tenderest bodies in Bhupen's oeuvre. Mithu extracts and etches on acrylic sheets Bhupen's (now orphaned) figures; she backs these with her own minute watercolours on paper that align with the 'master' image by a trick of light. This is homage and play; the delicacy of Mithu's gesture hides her claim as legatee of Bhupen's promiscuous and perverse aesthetic. And to win her place, she adds what he 'lacked': *virtuosity*. No virtuoso himself, Bhupen is the mad 'game master' who puts us all on trial.

But today, here, this is Saint Bhupen hanging resplendent in his gallery and among friends.

Geeta Kapur  
3 September 2013  
New Delhi



Srinivasa Prasad  
Known to Unknown, 2008

Photo-documentation of the site-specific, ash-on-wall performance-based installation first produced in 2006.

Ash is symbolic of the remains of a human body after cremation. It also brings to mind the powder left behind after something has been burned. Ash is linked to death and annihilation. It symbolizes the perishable and impermanent side to existence. Yet this is followed by resurrection, a new beginning where one evolves from a condition of imperfection into a finer state.

“Is ash the ultimate end or is there something beyond?” “Why do people desire to die in Benaras?” “What is the meaning of life?” “What is the process of death?” these queries led the artist to explore a path that resulted in four months of inundated inquiry. His search first directed him to the desolate burning ground of Harishchandra ghat in Bangalore. Once he was able to convince the keepers that he was not a sorcerer he was allowed to carry back the ashes of an unclaimed body. By transforming ash into a work of art the artist pays homage to the unknown spirit. As a motif of art it yields itself to the temporal and timeless quality of creativity. According to the artist, ‘the process of death seems more interesting than life and once you realize this, all aspects of life seem meaningless.’

‘Known to Unknown’ was initially inspired by a dead insect stuck to the interior of his studio wall. The artist discovered the only way to use ash (a mix of human remain and wood) skillfully, was to dab the material onto the wall with the index finger thereby creating continual textured impressions in varied tone. One dot was identical with one family. The homage extended to four walls and gradually a 2000 square feet surface area was covered with 48,40,000 dots. The formless images settled within a framework that established an identity, a local habitation to nothingness. In a labyrinth of movement, the artist conveyed the pulse of life, happiness and grief.

If the artist is the creator, destroyer and ‘resurrector’, every act is a ritualistic submission to the demands of the process. This includes the practice of meditation – the artist wore a traditional dhoti during work every day. In the first stage, action revolved around the feat of matter – the material and individual energy where touch and texture are repeatedly performed as a ritual. The four walls are transformed into a sacrificial ground where illusion and deeds are burnt away. As the eternal rhythm of life and death pulsates on the surface of walls, each mark is an offering; the symbolic ecstasy of *mukti* or release. It negates all multiplicity of forms, of life.

This leads to the next stage where the entire creation is viewed as a merging of light and shadow. By converting the wooden handle of a spade into a torchlight lit on one end, the artist invites the viewer to discover the work in segments. The spade is a tool used for harvesting. Fire is believed to have three purposes: as generator, purifier and destroyer. Through fire the artist performs an *arati* or sacred offering to the unknown.

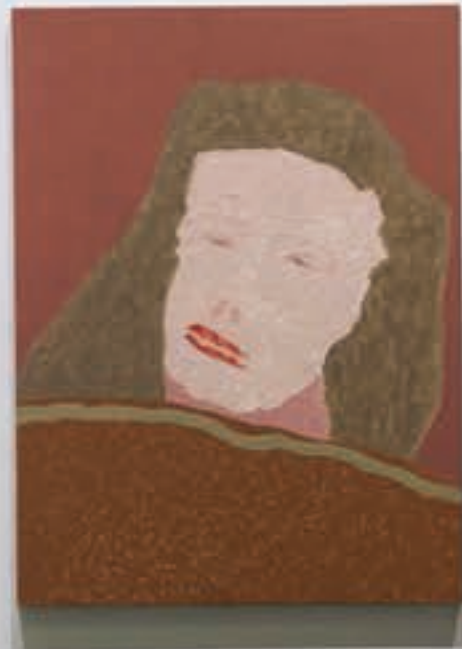
The last stage dissolves the entire creation. Seen in this light, sacrifice is a progression towards truth, compliance with divine will. The walls are whitewashed. This proclaims a fresh beginning and peace for the departed souls. In the process, the grandeur of this conception unlocks the complex issue of life and death. Every part of such a work is directly expressive of pure energy. It reconciles time with eternity.

Text drawn from the artist’s note.









Gieve Patel  
Four meditations on old age, 2013



Mehlii Gobhai  
Untitled, 2007 & 2010



Bhupen Khakhar  
Seva, 1987





Sudarshan Shetty  
*god envies my mortality*, 2013 (*detail*)



Mehli Gobhai  
*Untitled*, 2007





“FOR DEATH HE TAKETH ALL  
BUT THESE HE CANNOT TAKE AWAY”

EPITAPH TO GREEK POET HERACLITUS  
2007



Sudhir Patwardhan  
Sick-bed I, 2010

Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*Dylan Thomas from Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*









Bhupen Khakhar & Srinivasa Prasad



Srinivasa Prasad  
Walk (from the 'Payana' series), 2008-2009

The series of works by Srinivasa Prasad titled *Payana* (a word in old Kannada which means 'journey') stages a performance with resonances of a spiritual journey from birth to death. The works construct an implied narrative of the desire for a journey – not just a physical one that covers geographical spaces but also ones at a more metaphysical level – the psycho-emotional journeys one undertakes in the span of one or several lifetimes. While documentation features the artist performing the journey, there are artifacts, for example the man's personal belongings, produced alongside; when these are displayed, the traveler is conspicuously missing.





Anju Dodiya  
The Book of Endings I - VIII, 2013





Aditi Singh  
Untitled, 2013







Gargi Raina

"NOT ONE,  
NOT TWO,  
NOT THREE,  
NOT FOUR ...  
I COME FROM  
A THOUSAND WOMBS"

AKKAMAHADEVI 12 C B.C.  
2013



Mithu Sen  
The same river twice, 2013 (*detail*)





Mithu Sen  
The same river twice, 2013

Second of five exhibitions

**Aesthetic Bind:**

Citizen Artist: forms of address

October 14 - November 15, 2013

CAMP  
Gauri Gill  
Shilpa Gupta  
Arunkumar H G  
Tushar Joag  
Jitish Kallat  
K M Madhusudhanan  
Pushpamala N  
Ram Rahman  
Rashid Rana  
Inder Salim  
Gigi Scaria  
Raqs Media Collective



Rashid Rana



K M Madhusudhanan



Jitish Kallat



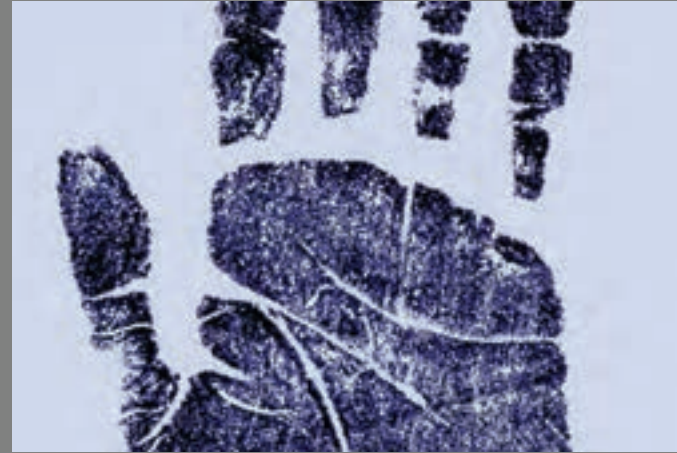
Shilpa Gupta



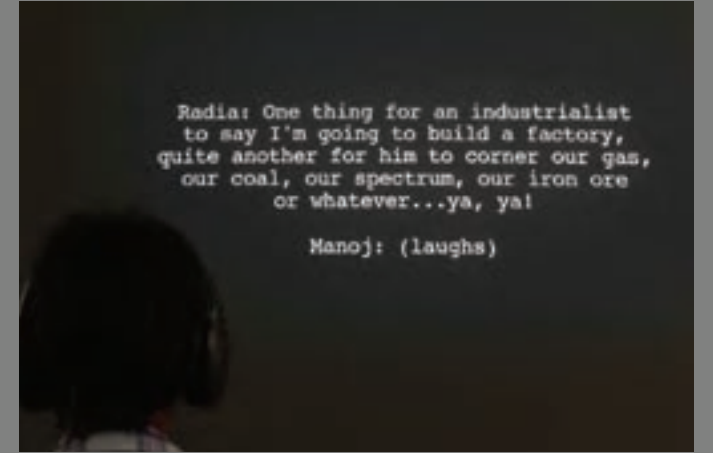
Arunkumar H G



Gauri Gill



Raqs Media Collective



CAMP



Tushar Joag



Inder Salim



Pushpamala N



Gigi Scaria



Ram Rahman

## Citizen Artist: forms of address

The regime of the nation-state commits the citizen to the ethics of a civil society determined by the Constitution and hinged to the state. The concept of the citizen *subject* implies both 'subjection' to the state and a subject position whereby individuals inscribe their own political tendencies within the social and constitutional order. This should include anarchist dissent and organized resistance.

By substituting the subject in the compound designate of citizen subject, we may derive the category of the *citizen artist* whose ethics becomes prescient in the aesthetic bind. If the individual citizen is an enunciating and performing subject within a changing phenomenology of encounters, it is possible to hypothesize an 'artist' supporting the abstraction entailed in citizenship yet endowing it with an existential force unravelled in the creative act.

*'The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form.'* (Theodor Adorno)

In the twentieth century, and especially during certain decades (1920s through the 1940s; 1960s through the 1970s), political artists engaged directly with revolutionary and anarchist ideas, putting their stakes in vanguard as well as party-based communism, antifascism, decolonization, feminism. Today, propositions offering *'history as form'* are themselves historicized. Not any more the grand narrative, discourse-and-activism focuses on transactions around

citizenship in conjunction with a critique of the state and of particular modes of statist repression: nationalist, liberal and socialist.

Investigating conditions of citizenship takes us to populations excluded from the domain of human rights: subalterns, and citizens *in extremis*, who set the measure for empirical histories and ethical reflection. At the opposite end, the simultaneity and abbreviation afforded by current technologies turn human communication cool and viral; the overload of information facilitates finance capital even as it produces a mass of knowledge so condensed as to be material *and* theoretical. Criteria wobble when such disparate gains are weighed for their relative value on the scale of overdetermined globality.



This exhibition, *Citizen Artist*, starts with the nation-state, therefore borders. The Partition that marks the birth of India and Pakistan is signalled at the very start by Madhusudan's short film that 'locates' in the setting of a projectionist's workshop and damaged celluloid the face of a disappeared father. Shilpa Gupta's two works speak about anticipation and aftermath: she alludes to the aspirations for nation, state and citizenship in a Palestine cruelly denied secure borders and the status of a nation-state among others; the second work shows how, in Indian Kashmir, a stateless polity meets with relentless state repression. Shilpa indexes a regime of annulment not only of the citizen subject, but of actual persons, buried in nameless graves and considered martyrs by their kin. Situating a graveyard in the dim hollow of the exhibition space, the artist initiates a ritual in symbolic care of the dead.

Lines of control turn into transit queues with Jitish Kallat: a midget-sized pageant of (sculpted) figures in frisker/frisked pairs gives us a performative view of cosmopolitan travel

and forced migration, underscored by curtailed access to the global. This pageant is a sectional view of a populace designated variously as crowd, polity, multitude. Rashid Rana's *Crowd*, photo prints on wallpaper, is spliced versions of a mixed population and potential citizenry on global scale wherefrom we may deduce new forms of empowerment – the Occupy movement, and other agential gatherings in cities across the world. But this 'congregation' leads to other conjectures: will an image retrieved/reconstructed from, say, a million flashing mobiles, pixelate when scrutinized? Both Jitish and Rashid imply that citizens are desubjectified by the global apparatus.

We have other variations on the profile of the citizen. CAMP offers a theatric and absurdly predictable nexus between corporates and bureaucrats, negotiated through sound and text. *The players*: guardians of the state exchequer, a renegade bourgeoisie, an intermediary with a female voice, her monosyllabic words inviting an (always objectionable) voyeurism, and the telephone that transacts, despite surveillance, astronomical sums. As if to complement this high-voltage exchange conducted via phone tapping, we have a fortuitous inversion in Tushar Joag's telephonic relay. Here the conversation provides modest profit – a detour into the 'collective' unconscious via conditions of sleep, sleeplessness and waking and, with that, neighbourly goodwill. Except that Tushar overlays a surrealist text where the ruse of sleep affords a promiscuous take on democracy; a liaison between the listless citizen and a developmentalist state damming up rivers, drowning protesters.

To return to the force of the populace, civil-society politics shifts focus on India's deprived and deserted citizens, representing not so much an identifiable working class, but minorities and, by extension, tribal, nomadic and dalit communities. Arunkumar's frieze photograph of daily-

wage labour presents a class-defined polity. We can assimilate labour into migrant multitudes but only by taking into account rural dispossession in what was a peasant country along with the circumstance of contingent lives in metropolitan India. Gauri Gill takes us back along the same route to those who migrate from country to city; her photographs allow us to glimpse the lives of palpably individual, seemingly eccentric characters in the deserts of northern Rajasthan. Unrecorded even by BPL ('below the poverty line') logistics, the photographed characters offer prankster poses to a friend-photographer. What is transmitted is the *punctum* of the photo image; it unsettles middle-class protocols with unsolicited gestures of 'equality' by young players in the wilderness.

In a seeming jump cut, I go to the other aspect of the exhibition which is about iconic identities. To begin with, Pushpamala's studio photograph: her spectacular retake of Delacroix's heraldic history painting *Liberty Leading the People*.<sup>1</sup> The French Revolution presaged a class war culminating in the proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century and this image pushes into high rhetoric through and beyond the present argument on modernity, secular democracy and equal citizenship. Iconicity is brought nearer home by Gigi Scaria who compresses (with found footage from the internet) chronicles of recent history with Gandhi and Mao as unforgettable, if alternative, icons. Both leaders laid their stakes on the peasantry (and not on the bourgeois-proletarian axis); both envisioned what inevitably took the form of a nation – in one case by non-violent means, in the other through armed struggle. If anything unites them it is their unwillingness to succumb to the established order of the nation-state.

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<sup>1</sup>Painted in 1830 (the July Revolution), its republican iconography reaffirms the first French Revolution of 1879–94: a towering female figure, the flag, a mixed class of people (bourgeois and worker), barricades, the forward march.

There is an iconicity attributable to ordinary men and women; it is condensed in the body of the protesting citizen. Ram Rahman's top-angle photograph of Safdar Hashmi's cortège is iconic. The photograph enters a twentieth-century image archive: the slain body draped in a communist flag (of the CPI-M); the hammer and sickle characterizing, signifying, the dead revolutionary. Safdar's death marks the foundation of Sahmat (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust), a collective that galvanizes Indian artists to resist rightwing and antiseccular forces in Indian politics. Many of Inder Salim's performances have been at Sahmat; more recently on discursive platforms such as Sarai. He is everywhere in the national capital region; his choice of persona and issues mocks the state's assumed omnipotence. A polyvalent figure (like the change in his name from Inder Tikku to Inder Salim), he is dedicated to his native Kashmir. Through his identification with its travails he has found a politics of dissent and the poetics necessary for the performing subject.

Raqs Media Collective's animated facsimile of the handprint of a Bengal peasant, taken in 1858 by colonial state officials, prefigures identification technologies that have, since, multiplied the possibility, as Raqs says, of 'the state touching its subjects'. In this exhibition, Raj Konai's phantom limb, dipped in indigo blue and counting to infinity, becomes archetypal. It indexes the daily disappeared, the scrutinized, the desubjectified, the sleuths, their victims and our neighbours; it indexes the performers, the marginalized, the martyrs, peoples' leaders and formal icons. That is to say, it deconstructs the political on behalf of the citizen who is at the fulcrum of this exhibition.

Geeta Kapur  
14 October 2013  
New Delhi





Rashid Rana  
What Lies Between Flesh and Blood 3, 2009  
Crowd, 2013



Rashid Rana & Jitish Kallat

Usmanbhai's shop

A shack where tears and smiles, song and dance,  
crime and punishment, all flow together.

A hospital for mutilated cinema projectors.

A dilapidated house amongst thousands of others in Old Delhi.

The good old days of projector repairers is a thing of the past.

New projectors have replaced Pathe's and Bell & Howell's.

The old projectors have disappeared to the other side of history,  
spitting smoke from the past like old steam engines.

The projectors that came to Usmanbhai for repair often had newsreels with  
them.

Usmanbhai's father Kader Khan was also a projector repairer.

He disappeared somewhere in 1947.

Memories of the hands that taught him his trade flashed as he worked the  
projectors.

He amused himself watching film spools flapping their wings...

Great, great things.

Wars, Uprisings, Leaders, Revolutions.

The high tide of history lashed at the walls of Usmanbhai's shop.

Usmanbhai was a mute spectator to the biggest teardrop in history.

India-Pakistan appearing through the darkness of his shop.

Millions trudging towards the new promised land.

The long path where thousands lay dead.

Suddenly....

his father who disappeared years ago

"Yes. My father". Usmanbhai said.



K M Madhusudhanan  
History is a Silent Film, 2007 (video)





Shilpa Gupta  
1:128.4  
790 KMS OF BARRIER, WEST  
WEST BANK  
2012



Jitish Kallat & Gauri Gill

Jitish Kallat  
Circadian Rhyme – 2 & 3, 2012-2013 (detail)

'Circadian Rhyme' takes the form of a miniature allegorical theatre. The border, and with it elusive notions of territoriality, are animated through the trope of encounter. This absurd ceremonial choreography is perhaps also calligraphy reciting a cautionary tale, the cursive script hinged by probing touch. 'Circadian Rhyme' like much of my work comes from a desire to set afloat one's artistic investigations within the wider mysteries of planetary rhythms or cosmic cycles, to survey the terrestrial by correspondingly evoking the celestial. The bodies turn like hands on a dial face and cast shadows, their dimension diminished as if viewed from afar, in the order of a palindrome to be read from both ends.



Gauri Gill  
From the series Notes from the Desert, 1999-2010

I have travelled to rural Rajasthan since 1999. I visit the same friends, living in the high desert along the border. I have witnessed droughts and the great monsoon when Barmer became Kashmir, the building of new homes, the farming cycle, a flood, migration for work to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, NREGA, Mid-Day Meal and other government schemes, nomadic travel, malaria, tuberculosis, death from snakebite and from growing old in the desert. The death of a camel remembered as the 'year of the death of the camel', births, marriages, moneylenders, NGOs, rallies of people fighting for change, national and panchayat elections, schools, hospitals, festivals, prayers ... and through it all my friends. To live in the desert poor, landless and without regular employment means inescapable reliance on one's self, each other, nature. To sleep out on the cold sand-dunes at night in winter with only tarpaulin and old quilts for protection means that everyone, humans and animals, must huddle together and breathe into the quilt. The stakes are high, the elements close.





Arunkumar HG  
Country and City: Everyday Strangers, 2013

The photo frieze shows workers standing on foot-paths in urban space. This work-force assembles in huge numbers and then disappears within a short time. Everyday, at a specified time and place, they wait to be taken to an unspecified destination for work. They are migrants from villages who come to the city for temporary employment. The money earned helps to keep their meager farm practice alive. In cities their work is mainly hard labour; even so, I can no longer sense the pain and harshness of their lives in the word 'labour'. Perhaps I should call them 'toilers'. How do we identify this scene, this order, which is visible yet so transient as to become invisible?





Raqs Media Collective  
The Untold Intimacy of Digits, 2011

This is an animated facsimile by the Raqs Media Collective of the handprint of a Bengal Peasant, Raj Konai. The handprint was taken under the orders of William Herschel - scientist, statistician and at the time - a revenue official with the Bengal government. It was sent by Herschel to Francis Galton, a London eugenicist and pioneer of identification technologies. It is currently in the custody of the Francis Galton Collection of the University College of London. This is where the Raqs collective first encountered the image of Raj Konai's hand.

This handprint, taken in 1858, is one of the earliest impressions of the human body taken by a person in power with the explicit purpose of using the trace to identify and verify a human subject. It was taken in lieu of a signature, to affix the identity of Raj Konai (the owner of the now phantom limb) to a document. It was felt, at the time, that subaltern subjects were way too slippery when it came to the presentation of their identities to the authorities. This handprint became the cornerstone of the edifice of the identification technology that would in time, be associated with fingerprinting and various anthropometric operations. These technologies create the possibility of the state touching its subjects. The intimacy of this spectral caress, with the digits of the state getting under the skin of our bodies, is not very different today (for instance in the UID - 'Unique Identification Database' - which the Government of India hopes to make the basis for its biometric 'Aadhar' card) from what it was in Raj Konai's time.

The floating image of Raj Konai's handprint, counting, a ghostly reminder retrieved from a colonial archive, speaks from the vantage point an earlier moment in the history of the visceral power of calculation. It haunts its way into our imaginations as a countdown, a prelude to an imminent disaster, waiting to explode within the database of the future.





Pushpamala N  
Liberty (After Delacroix), 2009 (*detail*)



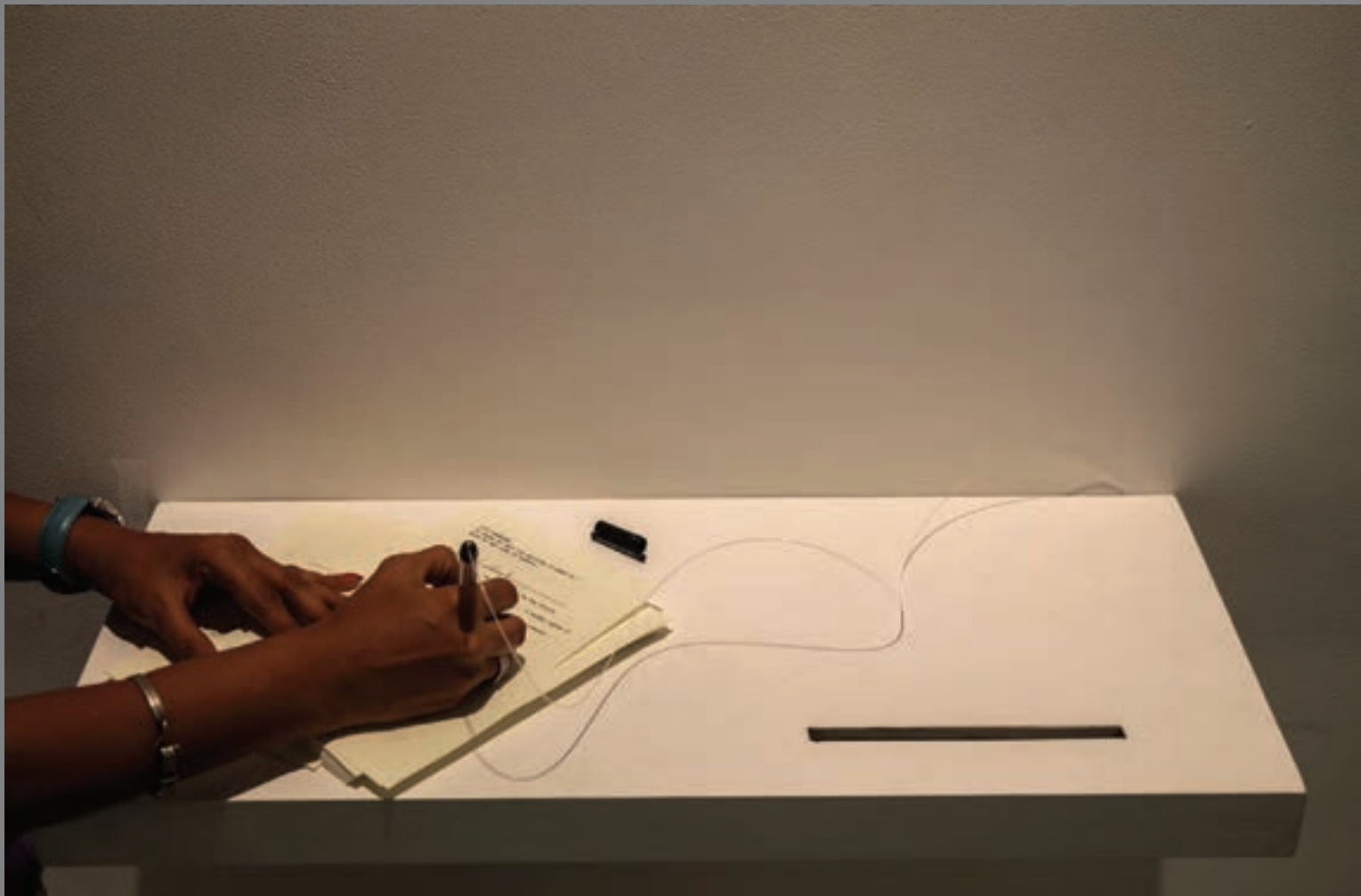
Gigi Scaria  
No Parallel, 2010 (video)



Pushpamala N & Shilpa Gupta



Shilpa Gupta & Gigi Scaria



Shilpa Gupta  
1278 unmarked, 28 hours by foot via National Highway No 1, East of the Line of Control, 2013 (details)







Ram Rahman  
Safdar Hashmi's Funeral Procession, 3rd January, 1989

The murderous attack on Safdar was a shocking event. I could not believe that this young friend – so full of creative fire – could have been killed so brutally. A huge crowd started gathering at Vitthalbhai Patel House on the morning of 3rd January 1989, for the funeral procession. The swelling scale of the crowd was stunning and many who came had not known Safdar. It was an emotionally charged morning and I rushed up an open staircase to make this picture from above. My large format 120 negative captured enough detail to identify individuals in the gathering. As Safdar's body was borne through the throng and I clicked the shutter, I knew instantly it would be an iconic image – of a moment in death that had galvanized an entire populace in anguish and protest. That funeral was the beginning of Sahmat.

#### **SAHMAT**

SAHMAT (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) has supported Indian artists in claiming their democratic freedoms within civil society. Sahmat's first open call in April 1989, 'Artists Alert', was followed by a nationwide campaign, 'Artists Against Communalism'. Sahmat protested the demolition of the Babri Masjid (6 December 1992) with daring projects: during 1992–93, it defied bans and took exhibitions, music, film and street theatre to embattled grounds across the country (including Ayodhya under curfew). Travelling performances over the decade included 'Anhad Garje' and 'Muktanaad' (1993); exhibitions included 'Hum Sub Ayodhya' (1993), 'Postcards for Gandhi' (1995) and 'Ways of Resistance' (2002).

During the BJP-led rule of 1999–2004, Sahmat hosted symposia on economic and education policies, expanded its publication and poster campaigns, and curated exhibitions. Crucially, it stepped up public enquiry platforms after the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat. Over the last 25 years Sahmat has organized several interventions to secure the rights of minorities within a secular nation-space, including solidarity campaigns for M.F. Husain and Habib Tanvir. By challenging the government and parliament, the judiciary and the media over issues of constitutional rights and social dignity, Sahmat has given the artistic community a place and a rhetorical form of address within the public sphere to both critique and reshape the national imaginary.

Geeta Kapur





Inder Salim  
Performance documentation

# Against Death Sentence



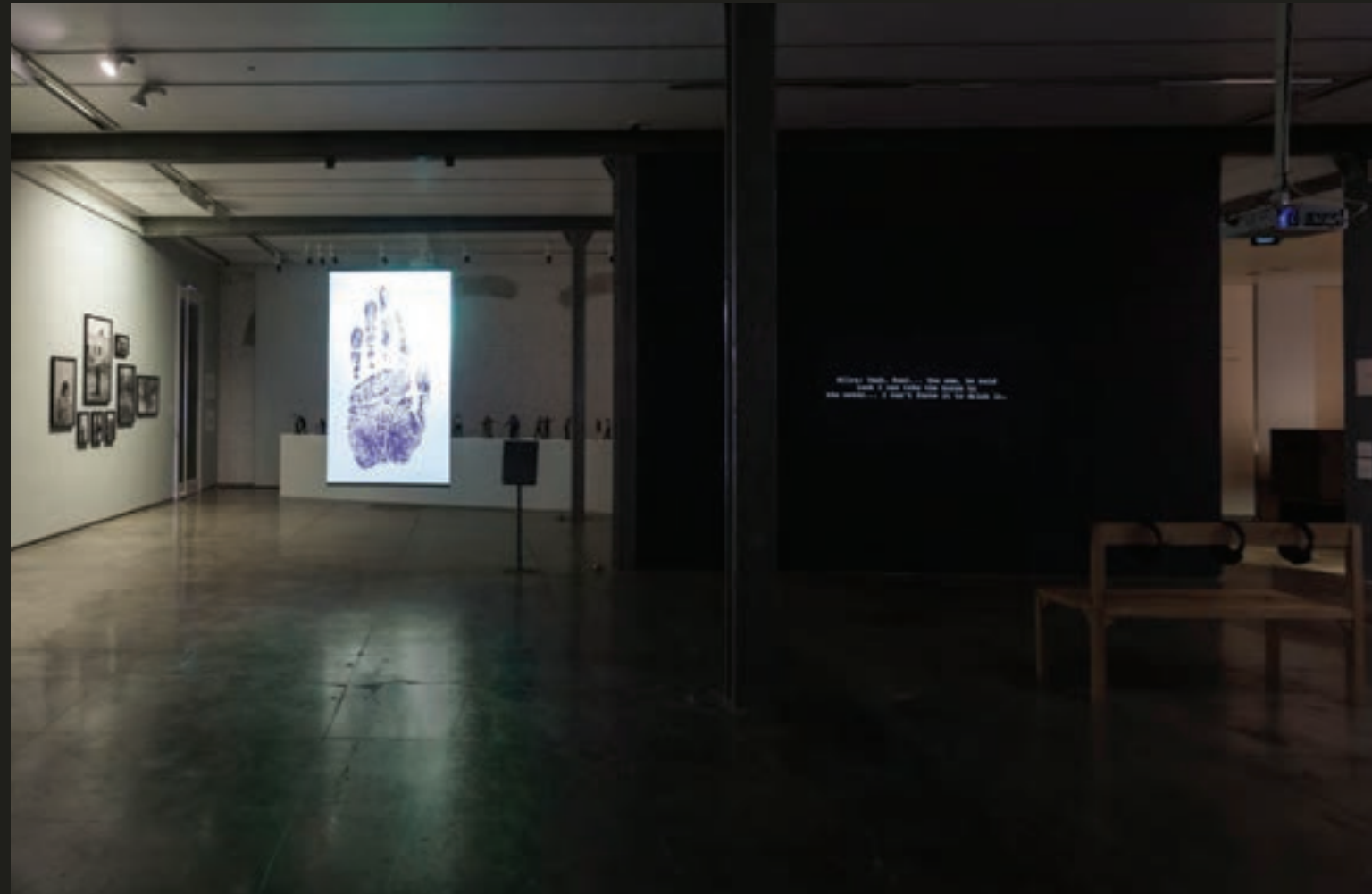
Performance at Amnesty International, an event at  
India Gate, New Delhi, 2008



## AFSPA YOU KILL

Meeting to protest AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), passed on 11 September 1958 by the Parliament of India.

I mixed names of Manipuri and Kashmiri persons killed in fake encounters under AFSPA. I played dead, while a Manipuri youth read out the names. The words AFSPA YOU KILL illuminated with LED electronic device was spelt out repeatedly on my body.



Srinath: Yeah, the only thing that I worry about getting SEBI into it, is given that we're NYSE listed, I have to do the same with SEC as well. It opens up a completely different can of worms for us.



CAMP  
Act II, Hum Logos, 2012 (video)

**SWEARING-IN WHISPERS**  
 A SCENIPLAI  
 BASED ON THE SACCA COLLAPSE 1982-83  
 OF MAY 1981

Act I, Swearing-in-Whispers, 2011. A long wall display of numerous white panels containing typed text, arranged in two rows that recede into the distance.

Additional text panels displayed on the adjacent wall, arranged in two rows.

CAMP  
 Act I, Swearing-in-Whispers, 2011



CAMP  
Act I, Swearing-in-Whispers, 2011 (detail)



CAMP & Tushar Joag

What colour should this wall be, they asked me. ... As I lay sleepless in bed with a stranger otherwise called democracy, I lit the post-coitus cigarette. Wanting to know her opinion, I asked, "Are you awake?" In a state more asleep than awake she opened her mouth as if to say something. In the luring light of the billboard I saw a fly entering her mouth. She swallowed it with a twitch ... Beelzebub, the Lord of the Flies, trapped by her Venus lips. I could see it through her tender transparent skin as it struggled in the trachea. I flicked the ash under the bed. Under the bed where I kept my stethoscope and bag ready for a house visit in case anyone called. To hell with humanity ... I followed the fly as it came to the carina and stood at the bifurcation. One bronchus had a sign saying 'greater common good', the other 'individual rights'. Quickly the fly split into two and entered each of the lungs.

I turned on my side and tried to sleep, my mind drifting through the streets of Bombay from Nariman Point to Borivali ... replaying the various conversations about sleep and sleeplessness and waking I had had with the Voices in my mind.

I still couldn't sleep and turned to look at her.... The infection was filling her lungs with water. Its level rose steadily ... immersing the populace neck-deep. She looked even paler now as the city lights had gone off except for the billboard.

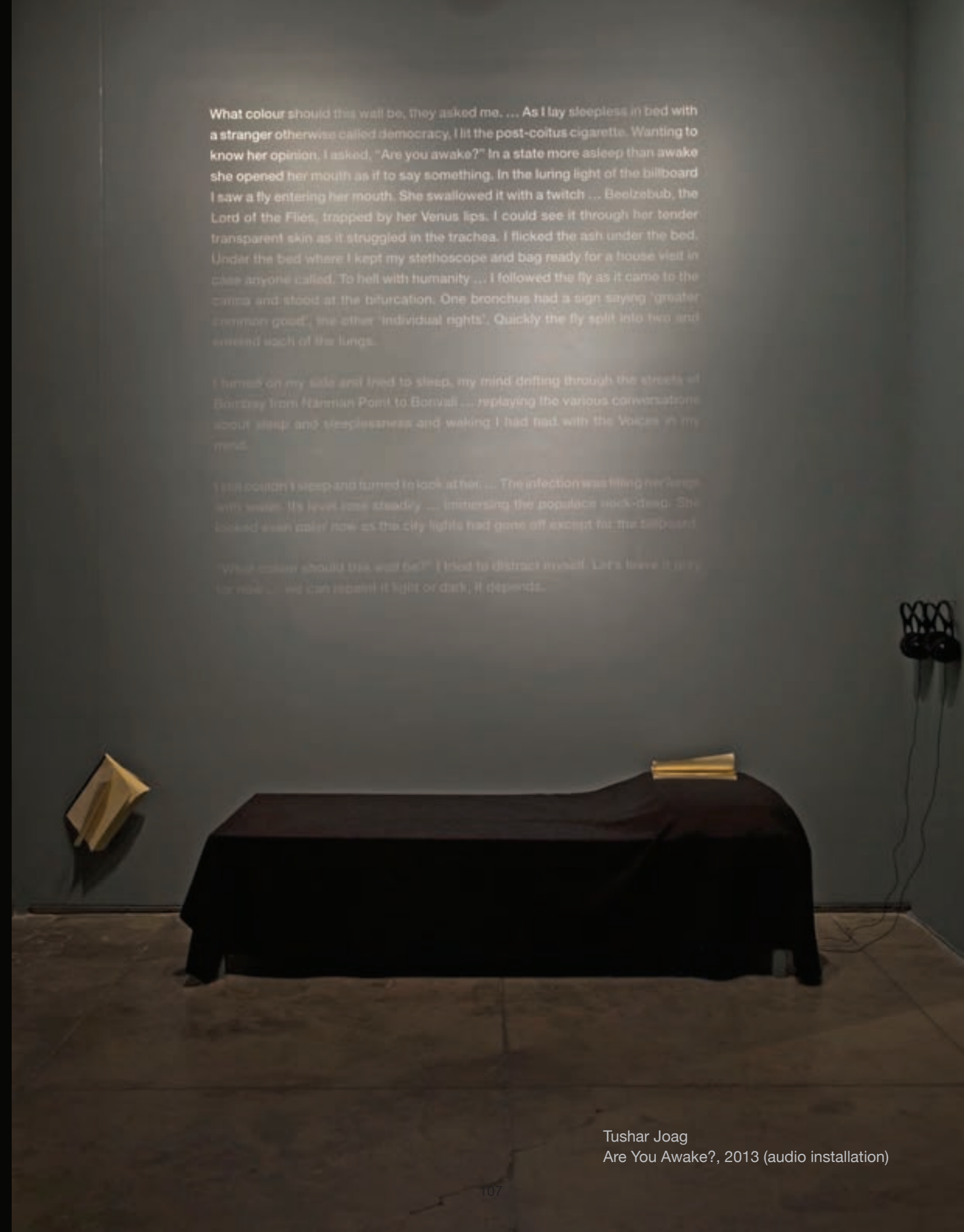
"What colour should this wall be?" I tried to distract myself. Let's leave it grey for now ... we can repaint it light or dark, it depends.

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"What colour should this wall be?" I tried to distract myself. Let's leave it grey for now ... we can repaint it light or dark, it depends.



Tushar Joag  
Are You Awake?, 2013 (audio installation)





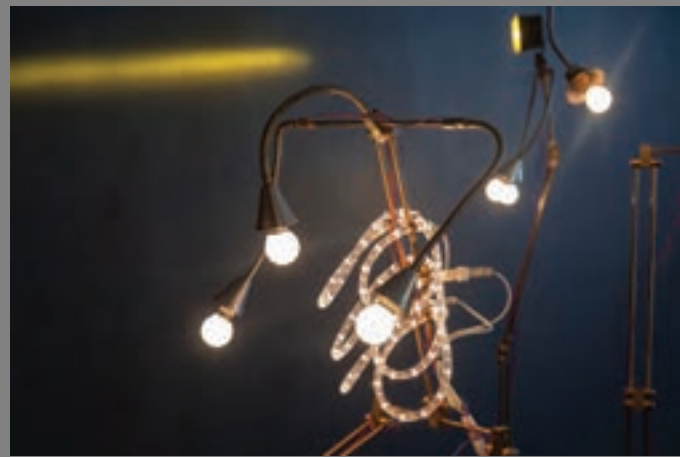


Third of five exhibitions

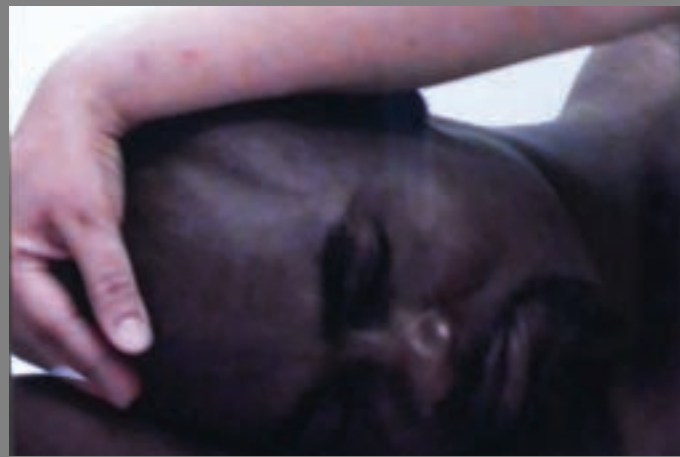
# **Aesthetic Bind:** Phantomata

November 29, 2013 - January 4, 2014

Nikhil Chopra  
Pratul Dash  
Tushar Joag  
Ranbir Kaleka  
Sonia Khurana  
Susanta Mandal  
Pushpamala N  
Baiju Parthan  
Mithu Sen  
Sudarshan Shetty  
Kiran Subbaiah  
L. N. Tallur  
Raqs Media Collective



Tushar Joag



Sonia Khurana



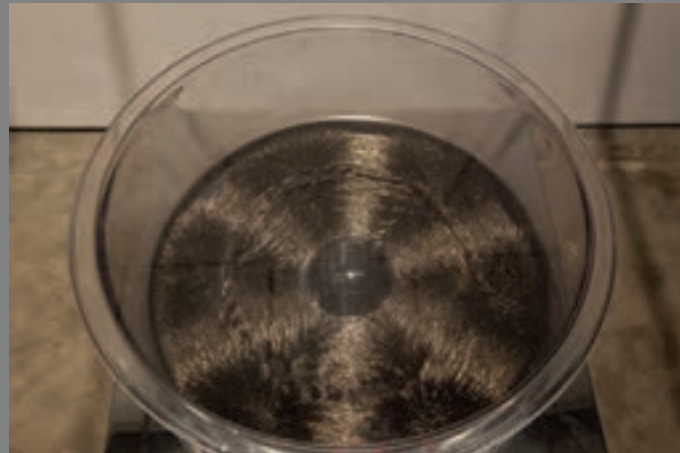
Sudarshan Shetty



Kiran Subbaiah



Nikhil Chopra



L. N. Tallur



Pushpamala N



Raqs Media Collective



Ranbir Kaleka



Susanta Mandal



Baiju Parthan



Mithu Sen



Pratul Dash

## Phantomata

A monumental photograph condenses Nikhil Chopra's five-day 'pilgrimage' where the artist, dressed in a peasant smock, moves from his cloistered abode into the fields to paint the medieval Tuscan town of San Gimignano. Mimesis is at the heart of this performance: he gradually costumes himself in a manner resembling the figural imagery of Benozzo Gozzoli (from his fresco cycle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, located in San Gimignano and from his most acclaimed *Procession of the Magi* in nearby Florence). Indeed, he virtually 'incarnates' the great artist's pensive self-portrait in red cap. The performance ends with Nikhil, wrapped in the large painted canvas, walking back into the town, whereupon the gods prompt a downpour. The painter's robe is heavy with mud and he himself, weary and bedraggled. This confirms the allegory of Virtue that the performer quotes, but produces – as performance – splendid vanity. Nikhil turns mimesis 'inside out' to become a phantom of art history: nascent realism of the Renaissance (his pale face borrowed from fifteenth-century painting); performative narcissism of the Romantics (he is like Pierrot, Europe's tragic clown); esoteric codes of Japanese theatre: the supernatural presence of the Noh actor, body torture in Butoh. In this photograph, Nikhil turns around, and his spiritual propulsion freezes into mannerist pose: he becomes a marionette fulfilling (the conceit) of my present thematic: phantomata.

There is a pair of works in the show that show the artist disembodied. The video works of Sonia Khurana and

Kiran Subbaiah are, as if by a prior pact, the recto/verso of a performative stance: one is about touch, the other about rebuff. Sonia caresses a black man's Brancusian head with her own 'child' hand. Kiran is a malign comic who doubles himself so that his suicide counts for murder. Her teasing, dexterous fingers draw a calligraphy of desire; his anomie forces us to become an unwilling third antagonist in the game. They are phantom-like because both are in different ways dispossessed of their bodies – Sonia Khurana's body is sensuously signalled but actually absent; Kiran Subbaiah's is present but twinned in the way of a doppelganger and therefore dislocated. The sense that these flesh-and-blood persons may be automata is enhanced by the suppression of speech. Mute players, she gives us the poetics and he the mechanics of the uncanny.

There is Ranbir Kaleka's much remembered *Man Threading a Needle* – a 'poor' painting in that it is only a brushed-in base to receive the luminosity of the video projection in which the man, a neighbourhood carpenter working for Ranbir, tries to thread a needle. This good man is imbued with slow – *slowed* – time; diligent repetition makes his action sublime and indifferent. Is it the barely blinking eyes; is it the peacock's cry outside the window that shudders through him and makes him lose the 'eye'? We do not know if it is the painting or the video that makes the man spectral. The 'truth of painting' and the untruth of digital data: this adage serves here as a paradox of the nature of representation itself.

Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Monica Narula) present more purposefully diligent men at their desks in a silent, looped video projection that animates an archival photograph taken in 1911 by James Waterhouse, titled *Examining Room of the Duffin Section of the Photographic Department of the*

*Survey of India*. Raqs, who implicate themselves in far-flung archives as voyeurs, actors, witnesses, embed in this 'classic' photograph, fleeting codes: a man in yellow helmet (labour/hazard fighter?) walks across the window; the skewed fan grinds time. On the lighting up of a starry triangle on a *Survey* document, they say: "What the gentlemen in the photograph are doing is probably refining the data produced by trigonometric surveys into maps and charts." A found image has an ontology; recognizing this, Raqs put in balance institutional 'apparatus' and mediatic manoeuvres. Subliminal happenings induce a seismic metaphor: the work is titled *An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale*.

Subtle animation, and we move back in time to the magic lantern. Susanta Mandal makes a rudimentary steel projector where you look at celluloid slides using candle-light – soft and slipping away from the optical centre of the lenses. You make delicate manoeuvres to adjust flame and image. Yet clarity is in itself inconsequential. If earlier uses of the magic lantern induced fearsome ghosts, Susanta's imaged objects are redundant. In his second 'invention', referencing cinematography, the lenses move automatically to sharpen and blur the images that are but five modest portraits of working people who come and go in our lives. Susanta's work is anachronistic. Moving through a modernist maze, he retools himself to ask philosophic questions; and by recalling a more direct continuum between perceptual inquiry, aesthetics and the machine, he seeks to regain the image seeker's phenomenological positioning.

Indian art has two 'masters' of automata; both in their own way capture phantoms. Sudarshan Shetty makes objects that are fetishistic, reified and magically motored to perform both caressing and violent acts. His phantoms are equipped

with limbs that keep alive memory in dedicated and macabre ways. He baits mortality; in that manoeuvre there is futility that is also a promise. A shelf with jars pouring over with 'milk' – pure plenitude! A feather brushing clean an empty vitrine performs fragility, therefore virtue. The Braille typewriter is a blind messiah's toy programmed to type only LOVE. In a new set of photographs, Sudarshan stands at dawn in front of the Gateway of India (a monumental relic) and breaks a clay-pot over his shoulder. He releases the soul of a departed ancestor, but the pot reappears in a vitrine, its shards patched together to make another relic. There is an aesthetic of loss here; it puts in balance the artist's many flamboyant gifts.

Tallur, of course, is a prolific 'manufacturer' of self-operating machines that grind the face of the goddess, produce barbed wire and nails. One of the works in this show is a slick coin-polishing machine that promotes faux virtues, perversely called *Apocalypse*. His new work for Phantomata is, in keeping with his ironies, an object that is solid, iconic and obtuse: a *lingam*-like sculpture that must be hand-cranked to test muscle and endurance in the manner of Hatha Yoga. Yet the sculpture is called *Karma Yoga*, and it allegedly promotes the will to act appropriately unto the law and without greed for personal gain. It may equally be a means to subject such manly ambition to a Sisyphian curse.

Curses often animate high performance. In her video *Indrajaala/Seduction*, Pushpamala draws from an anthropological substructure images that are epic, mythic and theatrical. The action is choreographed to resemble a life-size puppet performance: Lakshmana displays his martial prowess and cuts off the nose of the seductress Surpanakha, arrayed in her phantasmagoric hybridity, like demons the world over. Pushpamala then reveals herself to

be Surpanakha, and in the narrative denouement, ethical command gives way to sensuous affect. Her face in close-up resembles Mexican Madonnas and Joan of Arc; her profusely bleeding nose is an epiphany. The looped video recalls the naïve bid for magic that inspired early cinema, then developed a genre of phantom fiction: remember Pushpamala's suite of photographs in the mode of a doppelganger narrative – *Phantom Lady*.

Before we end with the more historically sombre motifs, I introduce two works that are the minutiae of this exhibition. Pratul Dash's animation video miniaturizes a city landscape of mountainous garbage, smouldering land-fills, and offers a barely perceptible glimpses of human life – how it crawls and dies. This is a social critique, but more a scene of terminal disintegration seen under a microscope. As much as Pratul's humans are diminutive, Mithu Sen's dead bird is a manoeuvrable 'giant': the newborn's wings rotate as ants carry the carcass with Lilliputian effort. Mithu, who chanced upon this abject acrobatics, gives the bird the dignity of myth: here is infant Icarus moving arduously on its prosthetic wings. It will not reach the sun.

Two artists in the exhibition announce menace. Tushar Joag's *The Enlightening Army of the Empire* refers to assaults by the United States on Iraq purportedly in search of 'weapons of mass destruction'. The US openly hoards and uses these weapons, and the enlightening army continues anon – to devastate Afghanistan, dispossess Palestine. Contemporary imperial powers use not armies but missiles, and Tushar's manufacture of low-tech 'robots', a glowing troop of hell's angels that light up into a marching spectacle, mocks precisely the gargantuan weaponry deployed against the world's unprotected citizens.

Baiju Parthan's stunningly constructed lenticular prints

seem, at first, to be scenes from a 3-D science fiction film where secrets are incubated and planetary destinies plotted. The artist designate these on a more personal, persecutory register: if the current digital technology facilitating absolute surveillance comes of age, "it could generate a feedback loop that would erase and remodel us according to the diktats of profit-generating mega corporations". In one of the images, Baiju constructs what he calls "a fractal eyeball or a compound eye with each shiny globe mapped with my portrait". The image is dense; it mutates in response to the viewer's volition but refuses to yield its controls. The two artists, Tushar Joag and Baiju Parthan, recognize the command: Search and Destroy. Here corporate and state surveillance lock together in a self-generating apparatus, and define the magnitude of our historical dystopia.

Geeta Kapur  
29 November 2013  
New Delhi



Tushar Joag  
The Enlightening Army of the Empire, 2013

Tushar Joag  
The Enlightening Army of the Empire, 2013

This work was first conceived during the American invasion of Iraq. In the name of deliverance, the war sought to bring “refinement and illumination” to unknown citizens. The comic army is made up of lights to enable a search for those imaginary ‘weapons of mass destruction.’





Sonia Khurana  
Head-Hand, 2004 (video)





Sudarshan Shetty  
Untitled (from 'this too shall pass'), 2010 (*detail*)

The tableau vivant vivifies difference frozen in time – it is at once the death of difference created by marking a space between past and present and a difference that is captured and frozen in place. (...) a feather rotates lightly brushing the insides of a vitrine like a clock endlessly moving its hands, brushing against an invisible flow of absent matter.

Text by Vyjayanthi Rao  
From the catalogue essay for the exhibition 'this too shall pass' 2010

Sudarshan Shetty  
Untitled (from the series eight corners of the world), 2006

“Circulations without bodies and transformations from the ‘natural’ to the ‘artificial’ invoke and activate the spectatorial imagination. These circulations and transformations are closely connected to Sudarshan’s interest in absence as an affect produced through repeated interactions with mechanical beings and processes. Mimicking the circulation of things in the world, Sudarshan’s objects (...) seek to transcend and annihilate the boundary between inside and outside and to substitute icon and thing for organic connections, put in the place of inner experience, affect, sentiment and feeling.”

Text by Vyjayanthi Rao  
From the essay ‘Object Lessons’ 2011





Sudarshan Shetty  
Untitled (from the series eight corners of the world), 2006 (detail)



Nikhil Chopra  
Inside out, 2012



Small text label next to the digital display, likely providing information about the artwork.





Kiran Subbaiah  
Suicide Note, 2007 (video)



Raqs Media Collective: Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Jeebesh Bagchi and Monica Narula  
*An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale*, 2011 (video)

*An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale*, is a silent, looped video projection that reworks an archival photograph by James Waterhouse in Calcutta, entitled *Examining Room of the Duffin Section of the Photographic Department of the Survey of India*. A photographer employed in the Survey of India, Waterhouse was responsible for introducing to the colony a variety of photographic techniques. The New Photographic and Lithographic Office of the Survey of India, was in fact one of the largest and most advanced photographic and photo-reprographic establishments in the world. The refined reproduction of maps and scientific illustrations was especially important as a time of political turbulence in the region of Bengal.

A number of surveyors are seen inspecting some maps positioned on pristine glass boards; in the foreground, two bureaucrats transcribe information onto the pages of voluminous tomes. Two kinds of recordings are at hand: the writing of information for the purposes of colonial administration; the writing with light through the medium of photography. Raqs Media Collective add the third layer through discreet video animation.

“We found the image in ‘The Waterhouse Album’, which is in the custody of the India Office and Records Collection of the British Library in London. Working on ‘Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale’ we were trying to understand the idea of a loop itself, a repetition that seemed endless, a timelessness disturbed by the tremor of a few incidental details.”



Ranbir Kaleka  
Man Threading a Needle, 1998-1999 (video)

*Man Threading a Needle*, was conceived in 1998-99 as Ranbir Kaleka's first multimedia installation. A video loop of a man tensed in concentration is projected on a painting on wood, placed on an easel. The image occasionally twitches, it responds to a periodic sound that punctuates and penetrates the image as the man makes occasional attempts to thread the needle. The man represented in the image is a local carpenter who is videoed and painted, gelling the two mediums of light and pigment into an indeterminate medium that draws attention to the artist's subversion of demarcated mediums.



Susanta Mandal  
from the series 'How Long Does it Take to Complete a Circle?', 2011

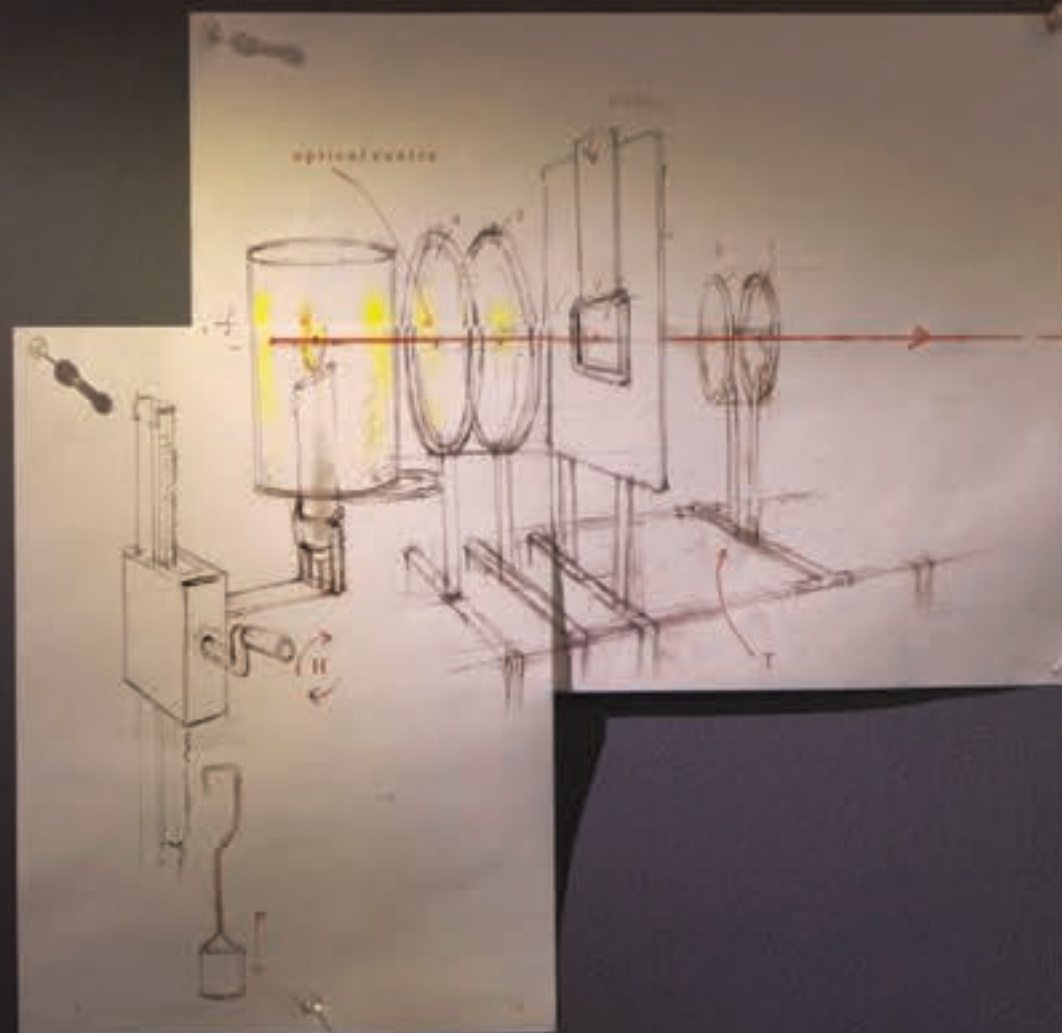
### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a few lenses in the structure; 1 and 2 are movable. You may hold the t-point (T) and slowly move that back and forth to get a blurred/focused image.

10 slides have been kept in an acrylic case. You may put these, one by one, into the specific space for slides to view them.

To get the brightest light of the candle, lift the candle slightly by moving the handle (H) and set it on the optical centre of the lens.

When not in use, please put the candle with the cap (P).



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**SUSANTA MANDAL**  
Concepts in Science (Class 7) Science (Class 7)  
© Susanta Mandal, 2011  
All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced without the prior written permission of the author.  
Susanta Mandal, 2011



Susanta Mandal  
from the series 'How Long Does it Take to Complete a Circle?', 2011







Baiju Parthan  
S.A.D. Algorithm (Search and Destroy), 2012  
Envelope, 2012

Envelope and S.A.D. Algorithm (Search and Destroy) is an attempt to explore the impact of surveillance on one's self-image and identity.

I have used photography and 3D graphics to chart the play between my life as an artist who works in isolation, and then chooses to expose the products of my studio activity to public gaze to be scrutinized, criticized, categorized, at times ridiculed and also appreciated.

I find this experience akin to being under a form of sustained surveillance, which then becomes a feedback loop that gradually erases and rewrites my self-image and identity.

My assumption is once the current digital technology with its unparalleled facility for surveillance comes of age, it could also generate similar feedback loops that could erase and remodel our self identity following the diktats of profit generating mega corporations, thus giving rise to a dystopian world.

Envelope and S.A.D. Algorithm (Search and Destroy) presents this condition of surveillance and erasure.



L. N. Tallur  
Do or Die (Karma Yoga), 2013

Raise both your hands and grasp the metal handle.  
Take a deep breath and walk the dowel as it moves around the structure.  
You may only perform the task at hand; you are not entitled to its result.



Sudarshan Shetty  
Untitled (from the series LOVE), 2006

“Blindness calls forth a paradox – how does one distinguish between the internal and the external in the solid darkness of blindness? Tactile language, a supplement like all language and symbolic form, is a powerful substitute. Through mechanical extensions of the body or poetical extension of machines, a grammar of love is reiterated in signs, symbols and icons.

Text by Vyjayanthi Rao  
From the catalogue essay for the exhibition ‘LOVE’ 2006



L.N. Tallur, Pushpamala N & Sudarshan Shetty



Pushpamala N  
Indrajaala / Seduction, 2012 (video)

Taking from early ethnographic and silent film, three frames simultaneously invoke the incident of the cutting of the nose of the demoness Surpanakha, by the Prince Lakshmana from the Ramayana.





Apocalypse, 2010

Apocalypse, 2010  
To be "polished" could also be a synonym for being "civilised" or "well-mannered".  
In polishing your money, we will also turn it into being both civilised and well-mannered.  
Please feel free to drop your coins into this machine to see an instant transformation.  
If in polishing these coins you have accumulated a large portion of money, you could place your order to buy this machine at the reception.

L. N. Tallur  
Apocalypse, 2010

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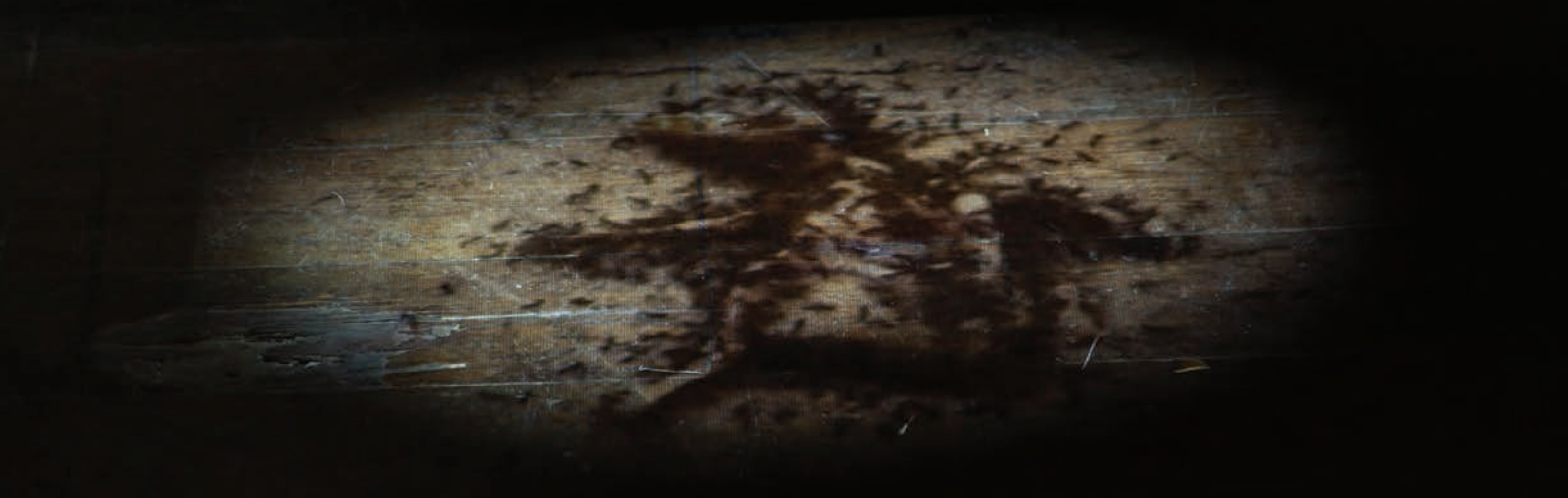
Pratul Dash  
A Landscape near the Commonwealth Games Village, 2010 (video)



Pratul Dash & Mithu Sen

Mithu Sen  
Icarus, 2006-2007 (made in Brazil)  
(video)

I came upon you by chance.



Fourth of five exhibitions

**Aesthetic Bind:**  
Cabinet Closet Wunderkammer

January 20 - March 1, 2014

Atul Dodiya  
Shilpa Gupta  
Archana Hande  
Anant Joshi  
Shakuntala Kulkarni  
Yardena Kurulkar  
Prajakta Potnis  
Mithu Sen  
Paula Sengupta  
Charmi Gada Shah  
Vivan Sundaram  
Suresh BV



Atul Dodiya



Paula Sengupta



Mithu Sen



Shilpa Gupta



Shakuntala Kulkarni



Suresh BV



Charmi Gada Shah



Vivan Sundaram



Yardena Kurulkar



Prajakta Potnis



Anant Joshi



Archana Hande

# Cabinet Closet Wunderkammer

[archive, vault, crypt, lab, cellar]

There are small exhibits within this exhibition compacted by a set of framing devices. The Closet holds intimate things: clothes, mementos, secrets about identity, fear and crime. Glass-fronted Cabinets display objects ranging from diagrams, maps, books and photos to magical and miscellaneous exotica referred to as 'curiosities'. The Cabinet of Curiosities can expand into a room: an aristocrat's private chamber; the archivist/voyager/collector's humbler storage space. From the 16th century, the Wunderkammer (Room of/for Wonder) appears as a prototype of the museum — crammed with objects, hung with pictures from floor to ceiling.

Museum histories include vastly varied themes, disciplines, cultural and conceptual propositions. Collections of local heritage gain national status even as they display the wealth of artefacts gained in good part from colonial conquests. The loot in the fold of Europe's 'age of discovery' becomes the encyclopaedic and ethnographic museum. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, the development of the public domain and the state's undertaking to offer culture as education, privately endowed museums take on the profile of a 'public' institution. But this is not the place for such elaborations; what is of interest is the constant cross-over between ethnographic, archival and art museums. This is precisely what shapes methodologies, criteria and value in art history.

More specific to our purpose, it bears directly on categories, canons, and their *systematic deconstruction* in modern and contemporary art.

A curatorial invitation to a set of artists interested in museum-like configurations or in cabinet formats led me to further invite artists who access grim rather than vivid aspects of the collection-container-display equation. This brought in the vault, crypt, lab, cellar and backyard: spaces that subvert pleasure, create claustrophobia and veer away from the Wunderkammer into darker zones. But we know that in the richly mixed desires of the unconscious, objects, artefacts, totems and *memento mori* produce peculiar morphologies. In Cabinet Closet Wunderkammer, I try to build an exhibition phenomenology with entangled frames, object spills and aesthetic overlays.

Atul Dodiya presents a room-size installation that properly realizes the overlapping resources of personal archives, art-history anthology and wonder-room. The signs emitted from this photo-image-object continuum are incremental. There is a corresponding escalation in the mode of self-inscription — holy alliance and mock-combat staged among a legion of artists from around the world. A miscellany of hero-'trophies' mounted on wall-shelves produce the aspect of the wonder-room. The viewer's gaze squints, then registers excess as spectatorial privilege and gift of the exhibitory mode itself.

There is a pact between art and enchantment via the fetish, especially dolls, puppets and marionettes (much interpreted by philosopher-poets and artists). Mithu Sen's collection is, as she says, an archive of vernacular culture — of unidentified deities who cannot be historicized; it is as much a nurturing lair breeding abject creatures who signal their unbelonging. The round vitrine (a circus ring and shadow play), holds her 'menagerie' of voodoo figurines, porno

trash, miniature monsters, skulls and all manner of *memento mori* that spell (an always premature) death. Mithu's indulgence, meets, here, with a quite different form of Wunderkammer aesthetic. Shilpa Gupta's mural in shallow relief presents the red velvet curtain of a midget theatre and the performative 'conceit' of a conceptual artist. The curtain is embroidered with the words, 'I will', which the artist turns into a seductive contradiction: the parted curtains reveal not a proscenium stage or a vivacious actress, but a flat mirror that reflects on your face the word '*die*'.

These two shimmering works lead to a museum vitrine, properly so called. Shakuntala Kulkarni houses life-size 'marionettes' that are simply cane armatures elaborated into arabesques to make up armour, cage and regalia. Extracted (as though) from a heritage museum, the sculptural ensemble borrows tribal forms and serves a double agenda: recuperation of humble and elaborate craft, and construction of 'combat costume' for a feminist/activist.

Back to toy-size miniaturization and Archana Hande presents, in illumined dioramas, a life lived as a 24-hour travel-log (/travelogue). The artist produces, in a blend of mediums, fluid landscapes, real and fictitious itineraries. Boxed as a peep-show, the aesthetic recalls doll-museums, theatre and architectural mini-models. Anant Joshi, decides to traverse time via the television, and serializes a year-long calendar of emblematic moments, real-life stories, and media events. Dystopia and surveillance, watching and being watched – this is compacted into 12 dioramas with everyday travesties performed in the absurdist style of pantomime theatrics.

As the preamble promised, there is a verso to the recto page of Wunderkammer.

There is a crypt in the heart of the gallery. Vivan Sundaram's ceremonially installed coffin – underground closet with interred bodies – holds a pair of amputated lovers, in embrace. Like in all crypts, there is a haunting: a ghost (/video) quivers on the wall. At the gateway: two stand-up benches – would-be cabinets – mounted with totemic heads: Narcissus and Echo, who failed love. Burial protocols are ornamental; Vivan's aesthetic spells a poverty of means, diminished craft and mortal remains. The figures are discarded mannequins; the body, three times dead, revives as 'sculpture'. Nearby, there is another allusion to the crypt, or is it a laboratory: Yarden Kurulkar arranges an iron-rack with 42 ceramic casts of her own head 'drowned' and 'sealed' in small water-tanks. She fights to draw breath, the sculpture petrifies – she survives? A grid of photographic self-portraits (a clay face-cast) and a gap of five seconds to map her dissolution: the experiment lies in reversing time. Yarden is dead before she breathes again. To suicidal mortality is added vegetal decay. In a cellar-like room, Prajakta Potnis 'embeds' refrigerator vaults where daily life blooms, and rots. Time moulders, lace sutures the walls, exotic fruit sit in vaporous glory – it's the light of the refrigerator translated into projected transparencies (/obsolete celluloid). Her diligent collection of decomposed ephemera is acquired, she says, through neighbourly goodwill.

In the exhibition's backyard is a litter of miniature houses wrecked by the realtor's axe or by mere disuse. Charmi Gada Shah's small squat models make iconic the memory of house, mother-of-all containers. She remains matter-of-fact: her cleaved constructions may enter the space of the museum as precious shells, urban ruins, no-place with place-histories; they are, quite simply, diminutive portraits of dwellings routinely erased by the expanded city.

From the gully enters a white peacock with feathers etched on its alabaster-like body. It wears the black hood of a culprit/victim on death row. B.V. Suresh's albino is the citizen whose belonging is denied and destroyed within a system of forsaken justice. He alludes to the symbolic 'sovereignty' of India's blue peacock; to the discrimination and displacement suffered by minorities, and, routed through courtroom and prison-cell persecution, a threat of the gallows.

I end by looping back to the beginning – to the museum/archive – with Paula Sengupta's homage to Tibet in exile. Transparent 'manuscripts' fitted into vaults hold life-'testimonies' of individuals who have lost their bearing. Ethnographic material includes lamas' 'haloed' robes, ceremonial scarves printed with texts and draped like museum objects. It includes stacked steel plates with Tibetan signs, the guiding principles of a lost way of life. Invited to occupy a tiny library, Paula conceived an elusive resource that emits a low hum of *withdrawal* and resonates with exile conditions worldwide.

Geeta Kapur  
20 January 2014  
New Delhi







Atul Dodiya  
Sleeping self with the Green Dragon, 2010



Atul Dodiya  
Falling Ancestors in Nauman's Land, 2012-2013 (detail)



Paula Sengupta  
Into Exile, 2014

This installation reflects upon Tibetans in exile, a deeply problematic situation, especially the eradication and sacrifice of habitats, lifestyles and cultures to inevitable transformations in systems of government and leveling of social structures that became a phenomenon of the modern world. Largely developed from stories of exiled Tibetans, this installation, reminiscent of a museum/crypt, dwells on memory as a repository and re-creation of a culture, and the struggle to hold on to a cultural identity that is today severely threatened by two generations of Tibetans in exile who have never been inside Tibet.

*Into Exile* draws on the indigenous craft and textile traditions of Tibet, as also the religious symbolism, rituals and practices of Tibetan Buddhism – all of which constitute the cultural pivot around which their society revolves. The Tibet plateau lies contiguous with the high altitude plateaus of the Indian and Nepal Himalayas, to which I am a frequent visitor. My interest in displaced societies, enforced migration, the retention of memory, and threatened identities (of which I myself am a victim due to the partition of Bengal in 1947) led me to investigate the Tibetan crisis.



Paula Sengupta  
Into Exile, 2014 (detail)





Shilpa Gupta  
I will die, 2012





Mithu Sen  
MOU (Museum of Unbelongings), 2011 (detail)



Mithu Sen  
MOU (Museum of Unbelongings), 2011 (detail)





Shakuntala Kulkarni  
of bodies armour and cages, 2013-2014









Suresh BV  
Albino : Irreversible, 2010-2013 (detail)



Charmi Gada Shah  
A House opposite Kailash Mansion, 2013







Vivan Sundaram  
Narcissus, 2013 (detail)



Vivan Sundaram  
Narcissus, 2013  
Echo, 2013



Vivan Sundaram  
Coffin, 2013



Vivan Sundaram  
Coffin, 2013  
Chainmail, 2013 (video)

*'In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life.'*

Georges Bataille quotes Karl Marx

I cut open inanimate figures on the 'operation table', a basic plyboard bench that is also a coffin, closet, frame and support. The *Coffin*—underground closet with interred bodies—holds a pair of amputated lovers. Two stand-up benches—would-be cabinets are mounted with totemic heads: *Narcissus* and *Echo*, who failed love.

The mannequin body is dissected, 'stripped bare'; the exterior is patched and painted the hollow shell packed with body samples. A series of postmortem procedures brings me to a surrealist recall. Organs, displaced from their functional locations, find new couplings. At close quarters, the gaze becomes the hand's touch. Walking around, the viewer trips over a thing that is 'real' in an obtuse and obscene sense.

The body, thrice dead, revives as 'sculpture'.





Yardena Kurulkar  
5 seconds later, 2009



Yardena Kurulkar  
Gap in the void, 2011



Yardena Kurulkar  
5 seconds later, 2009

By using my own body as an instrument of choice, I work with an earthy medium, that of clay. For me, clay is symbolic of transition, erosion and ephemerality. The bodily forms that I construct from this material are cast then re-cast, subjugated then reinvented, eroded into nothingness, then resurrected. I try to create moments of confrontations between life and death. My works are acts of surrender to the inevitability of an end and are presented as part of a cycle of continuous regeneration.

5 seconds later is created with a single unfired face cast, the frames timed with a gap of five seconds to map the slow but inevitable transformation.

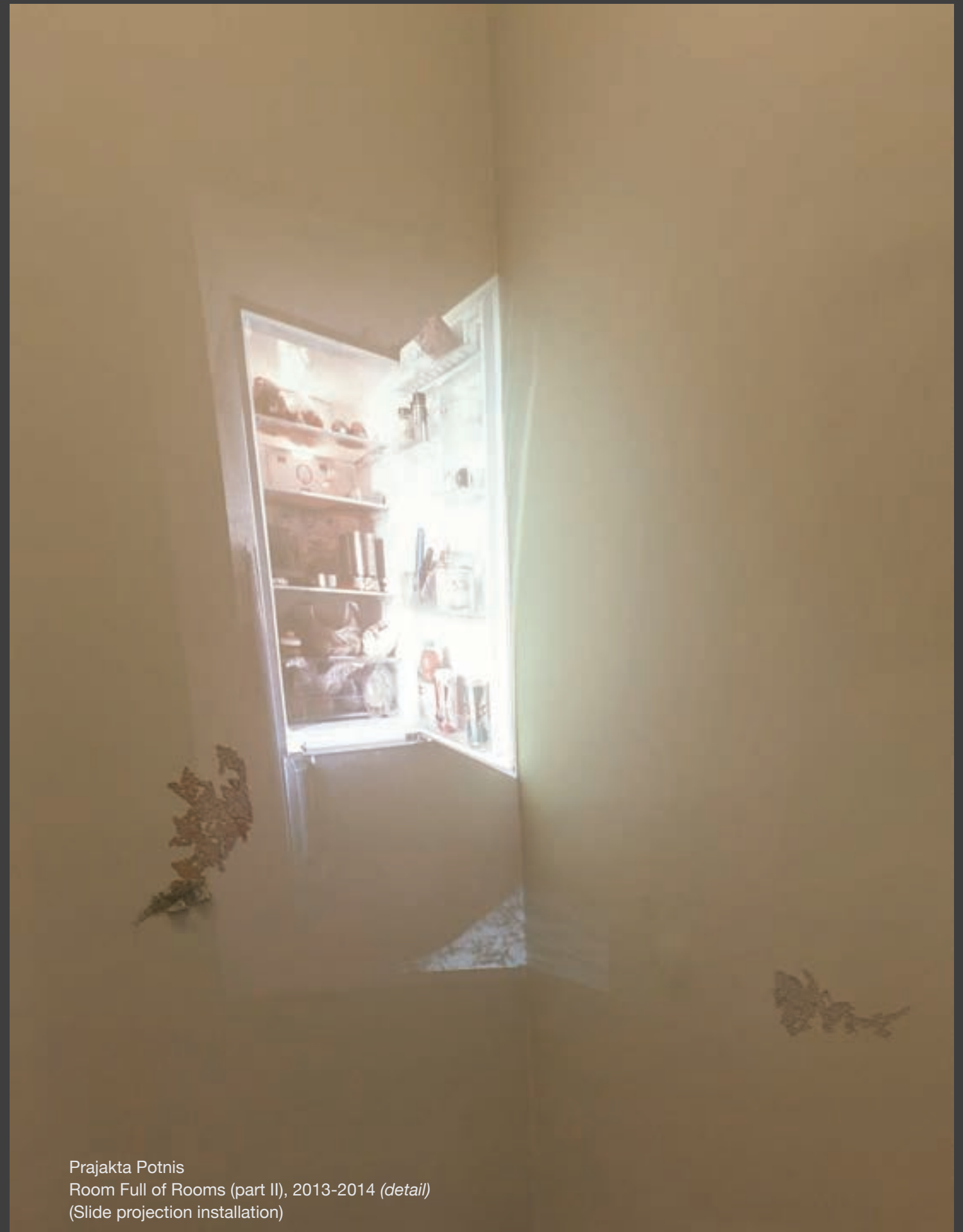


Gap in the Void, 2011

This work was created in an attempt to confront and accept death by controlling the fear of its eventuality. By yielding the physical body to its eventual demise and disintegration.

42 heads, each created by using a cast of my face, are submerged in water, which is sheathed with a layer of oil, not allowing it to evaporate, bringing near that sense of claustrophobia, of breathlessness. The work depicts various states of a struggle to survive, each face is contorted in the fight to draw breath and not give into suffocation.

Gap in the Void, 2011 (detail)



Prajakta Potnis  
Room Full of Rooms (part II), 2013-2014 (*detail*)  
(Slide projection installation)



Prajakta Potnis  
Room Full of Rooms (part II), 2013-2014  
(Slide projection installation)

I have been intrigued by enclosed spaces particularly the ones that bear the encumbrance of the everyday.

The inside of a refrigerator space, sterile, free from bacteria, is an artificial capsule of oxygen. With the right temperature control, the expiry date gets extended — it is a way of delaying putrefaction., Exotic fruits, genetically modified vegetables, travel from all over the world in sterile/shelled spaces and flood local markets. What is being consumed or its effects on consumers remains concealed. By photographing the insides of my neighbourhood refrigerators, I have documented what people store, consume or hoard.

The refrigerator transforms into a cabinet where food, drugs, cosmetics are arranged. Where the magical light from inside the refrigerator transforms mundane objects into mystical entities.

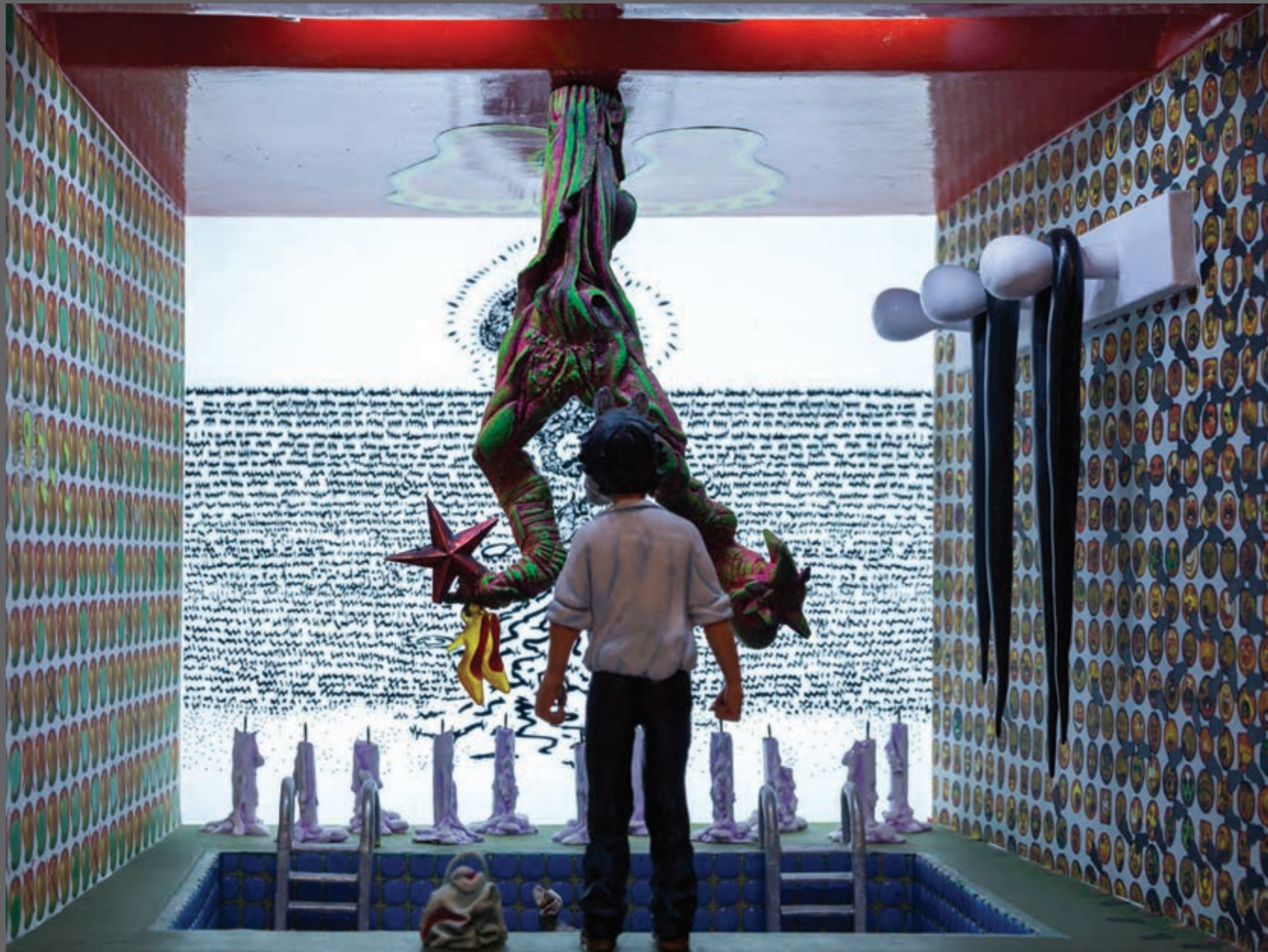
The sculptural wall installation with lace attempts to create a vaporous feeling of neglect and decay.



Prajakta Potnis  
Room Full of Rooms (part II), 2013-2014  
(Slide projection installation)



Anant Joshi  
Happy New Year, 2013



Anant Joshi  
Happy New Year, 2013 (detail)

These works are emblematic moments from television and newspapers spanning January to December 2013. The events become a trigger from day to day, month to month, and translated into this staged narrative. If the act of looking into the world is considered voyeuristic, there is also a poignant reminder: we are being looked back at, watched. This experience resulted in a year long project.





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Anant Joshi  
Happy New Year, 2013 (details)



Archana Hande  
Circle the World in 24, 2012-2013



Last of five exhibitions

# **Aesthetic Bind:** Floating World

March 19 - April 17, 2014

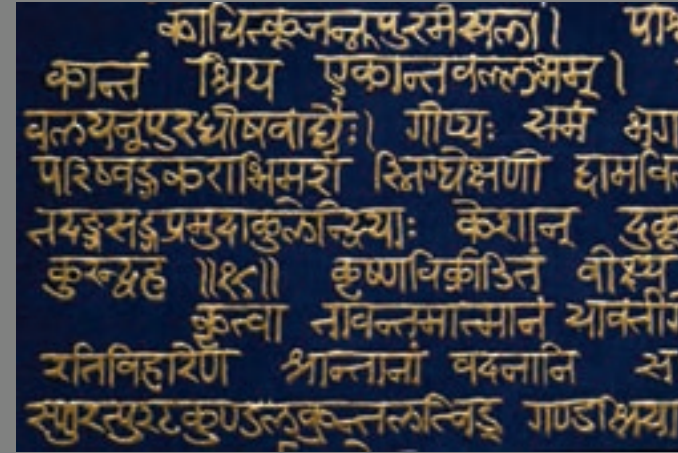
**Dhruvi Acharya**  
**Atul Bhalla**  
**Jayashree Chakravarty**  
**N.S. Harsha**  
**Reena Saini Kallat**  
**Desmond Lazaro**  
**Lavanya Mani**  
**Gulammohammed Sheikh**  
**Nilima Sheikh & Fayaz Ahmad Jan**  
**Hema Upadhyay**



Hema Upadhyay



Dhruvi Acharya



Desmond Lazaro



Gulammohammed Sheikh



Lavanya Mani



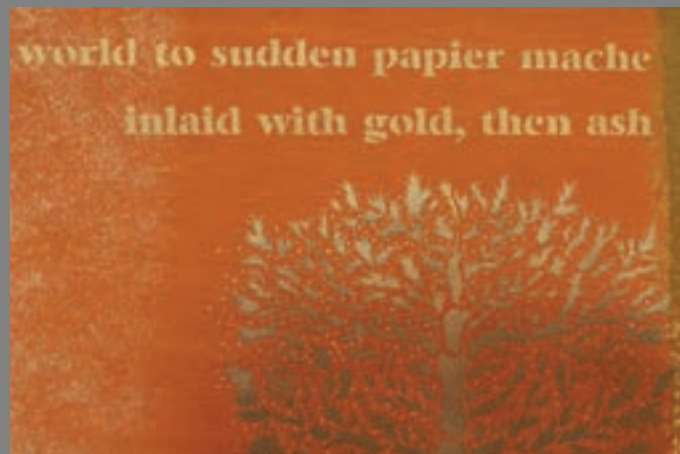
Jayashree Chakravarty



Atul Bhalla



Reena Saini Kallat



Nilima Sheikh



Fayaz Ahmad Jan

# Floating World

Among the several imaginaries conjured up by *Floating World*, there is cosmology and a revolving earth-world; oceanic flows and cartographic representation of the globe's topography; and an incremental growth in migration, transmission and transcultural traffic. There are vistas of turbulence, buoyancy, levitation, explosion – and passages across.

[In art history, *Floating World* is the translated designation of Japanese Ukiyo-e woodcut prints produced during the 17th to 19th centuries in Edo/Tokyo for a wealthy trading class in liaison with courtesans, actors and eccentrics – with themes extending also to landscapes, mythic tales and historical narratives.]

In the present exhibition, the sense of being afloat is diversely manifest, and who better than Gulammohammed Sheikh to inaugurate the theme of traverse: he names his practice, 'walking the world'. Inspired by the medieval Christian tradition of constructing and containing the earth-world in a spherical map, Mappamundi<sup>1</sup> (at once body of Christ and a diagrammatic melding of sacred location and speculative 'knowledge' – of geography/cartography), Sheikh populates his own series of Mappamundi with epic and mythic, creaturely and human life-forms. He then lets their assignations weave a web of itineraries wherein the

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<sup>1</sup> Sheikh's interest was sparked when he came across a postcard of the Ebstorf Mappamundi, made in Italy circa 1234 and destroyed in World War I bombings.

artist, as the beguiled lover, must lose and find himself. What distinguishes Sheikh is the way he tracks vast and varied histories of art – live encounters supplemented by images culled from books and manuscripts, which he now 'animates' through painterly relay and digital cloning. Through the act of re-presentation and, more, through declaring the image as very nearly *constitutive* – in phenomenal and spectral ways – of the manifest world, Sheikh allows iconography another chance: magical reflection and recursive knowledge that are carefully wrought but forever deferred. You crack the maze and navigate the labyrinth to *emerge*, but in *Whose World*, he asks with the title of one Mappamundi, and then declares it *Troubled Terrains*. The world proceeds with its 'pogroms, ethnic cleansings and destruction...' he says; and he adds: 'As a lion roars and a bull charges, the dervishes keep whirling, invoking the sky with an upward and the earth with a downward hand.' This, I believe, is Sheikh's version of the secular citizen: dispossessed perhaps but evolving and steadfast.

I propose a paradox by placing before Sheikh's subversive Mappamundi, Desmond Lazaro's *Blue and Gold*: a block of gold lettering set within a deep indigo-dyed cloth mounted like a sacred backdrop similar to the Pichhvai (Lazaro apprenticed himself in Jaipur to the Pichhvai tradition). Here, he invokes '*Maha Rasa Lila*', the great circular dance in the forests of Vrindavana on a full moon night in autumn where the principle of divinity as singular/multiple is revealed by Krishna to his devotees. But it is a verse from the *Bhagavata Purana*<sup>2</sup> that is the icon here, and embossed gold lettering is the 'body' of the absent beloved. This is a formalist move, and very suggestive: the blue-and-gold is a 'universal' colour coda courting infinity (Krishna is blue, the figure

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<sup>2</sup> From the Bhagavata Purana: Chpt 33, Book 10.

of Mary is draped in a blue robe as though by the sky); hereon, Lazaro embarks on several acts of transposition. He references the medieval Christian aesthetic of illuminated manuscripts, Baptism records found in ledgers in local churches and thence to a communitarian ethos that offers belonging. While *Blue and Gold* poses questions – is the text enunciative? is it an iconic body to be touched and felt as much as read? is this the sacred or is it a form of *conceptual transcendence* where there may be aura without image? – Lazaro moves on to seek a humbler poetics; about which, later.

Placed nearby is Lavanya Mani's painted, printed, dyed 'sail-tent' that relates to the travelling/mapping impulse in Sheikh and complements the use of cyan in Lazaro – but less for symbolic purpose, more as an aesthetic developed in certain textile histories (especially Kalamkari that Lavanya Mani is trained to practice – though here it is not indigo but *cyanotype* on cotton fabric that gives her the blue). She is interested, she says, in correspondences between 'textiles' and 'text', and in metaphors such as 'to spin a yarn', 'to follow a thread of narrative', 'to embroider a tale' and to 'fabricate' – as a way of making 'history'. Her overall series, *Traveller's Tales*, develop visual narratives on the interest and acquisition of Indian textiles/spices/all-things-exotic by the imperial powers. Of equal interest is her construction of metaphor-laden drapes, demonstrating *craft as grammar; fabrication as art* – propositions which K.G. Subramanyan has made seminal in the discourse of Indian art.

And as to a webbed, navigated and much traversed world, there is, in the mode of cartography, a world map strung up by Reena Saini Kallat on a vast gallery wall. Knitted, knotted and crocheted with electric wires, the map shows routes of migration and lines of communication that link continents, cities and peoples. Like a nervous system under stress,

the wall-map hums and screeches; this hyperconnectivity, the artist says, is not only irreversible, it also offers the possibility that humans, once they pass through cruelly guarded borders, form new collectives. And that one day they will listen and thence learn a new and complex code that transforms wired connectivity into free speech.

If ever we speak of the earth-world today, there is inevitable reference to ecology and to entropy that are both cosmologically defined and guaranteed by our election of an exterminating angel named progress. So it is said. There are no doomsday oracles in the show but we have two artists who speak about the poetics of survival in a contaminated world. Jayashree Chakravarty floats an architectural earth-fold – monumental paper sculpture constructed layer by layer with clay, jute, cotton fabric, pigment, to resemble a landscape that is parched but luminous, arid yet protective. The fold, suspended with a cluster of glistening wires offers shelter: a fakir's cave that protects the insect-world and perhaps, by proxy, me – a solitary human. Atul Bhalla's photo-diptych is an emphatically *wet* image. His obsession with water-bodies, polluted rivers and underground waterways takes him on *walks* – most persistently along the Yamuna (whose banks supported the city of Delhi from ancient times). He once 'sunk' himself in the river slime like a large water animal. This double-image shows the Yamuna at dusk in a sublime blue-grey haze, and a solitary figure – in silhouetted profile and precisely duplicated reflection – standing waist-deep in water. The boy has taken a dip, performed a river sacrament; the river ripples and prompts my fantasy. Even as he rose from the water and pushed back his wet hair, two wisps stiffened to become tiny horns, turning him into a river devil.

There is a preponderance of horizontal works in the show and three of them offer transmitted/transmuted traditions

for contemporary purveyance. Taking inspiration from the Japanese Emakomino – horizontal scroll – Dhruvi Acharya draws/paints/collages a personal narrative notating twenty years of her life; though it could, like all scrolls, permit endless recount – erasing, stalling, overcoming a further encounter with death. Like the eastern scroll tradition, narrative is continuous but the imagery often sparse and held in place with intervals. Dhruvi works in several registers to release self-mocking pathos and ballooned utterances; birds, animals, foliage, city fragments; and, interstitially, a fractured doll-soul. The floating world is a fairytale as much as it is a confessional poem: she borrows from the Japanese art form, Kintsugi, and ‘inlays’ gold filling in the tears of an occasional photograph from her diary.

At the other end of the room is the sweep of Nilima Sheikh’s paint-laden brush – finely ground pigment and translucent surfaces of casein on board. There is characteristic iridescence in the lightly dragged colours, and just enough descriptive detail to turn painterly expanse into a mountain city. The work, titled *Route(s)*, makes subliminal reference to funeral wakes and mourners’ journeys in Kashmir. Over the last decade, Nilima has developed what may be called an ‘ethical’ transposition of available and invented iconographies that embody beauty and pain – and, likewise, fluid channels between formal conventions (including the artisanal) and untrammelled abstraction. Here she works with the Kashmir artist Fayaz Ahmad Jan, whose black-and-gold papier mache panels together with her painted passage produce a curious format: a sanguine spread of paint bordered with strict ornament (soft-hued painterliness with glossy relief). Mimicking the image–*hashiya* relationship in medieval manuscripts, the work introduces the difficulty of designating the inside–outside of a compound image. What we do get by a disjunct–junction of languages and motifs produced by two hands and two types of skills is a

version of a manuscript conundrum enlarged to the scale of an architectural frieze.

Desmond Lazaro has a long paper scroll on the same wall as Nilima Sheikh and Fayaz Jan, where he charts twelve miniature houses, centred and floating like clouds in the narrow running space, each inscribed with a fragment of a legend about the *blue house*. Here is an intimate, barely decodable metaphor of what a blue house might be, what it wants and does to survive and give shelter. Rather like Dhruvi Acharya, this is a delicately rendered fairytale to bewitch as to give succour; it is also a lexicon about home that may have archival value in community records and family lore.

From this set of horizontal works, we are invited to ‘surrender’ to N.S Harsha and his floor drawing. From lofty cities and suspended homes to sleepers on the ground, here is an itinerary for a monk who chooses to lay himself down – a bodily need bound by a modest gesture. Harsha is no monk, and his figures are not necessarily humble. They are common people who take their rest ‘*wahan se idhar, idhar se udhar*’. They are not socially marked as homeless – just sleeping gently and in gratitude for a space in the world. Harsha’s sublime drawing of sleepers perfects their ordinariness, and suggests without undue persuasion why hierarchy kills compassion and how a prone figure intimates in favour of a non-hierarchical world. A floating world?

Hema Upadhyay’s matchstick chandeliers are crafted by crisscrossing thousands of matchsticks with pale splints and blood-red tips. They turn into giant lilies with extended stamens pointing to the ground. A massed pendant of flints and fused splinters, the presence in this exhibition of ornamental explodable lamps triggers maverick speculation. Hanging behind Dhruvi’s Japanese-style scroll, they flaunt



a mannered affinity through their labour-intensive aesthetic. A double-take and they are cluster bombs suspended in a hostile world. They complement Reena Kallat's intricately hand-crafted world map which signals how connectivity and the communication buzz is equally a network of flashpoint battles. With these filigreed chandeliers that are potential fusillade – I introduce (somewhat inadvertently) a curatorial anomaly and a detonative effect in the phenomenology of an otherwise even-handed exhibition.

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With all its thematic allusions, *Floating World* is an exhibition calling attention to the surface of the image and image as surface; more precisely, to formal attributes of the artwork: surface, support, frame and structure.

The constellation of works in *Floating World* offers material fragility, subtle rendering, and a hovering between the *sacred* and the *profane*: a paradigmatic trope in civilizational histories as in structural anthropology and indeed psychoanalysis. Like other agnostic secularists, I regard the profane as *key* in that it prises open what the sacred codifies, thereby also reifies. This is precisely my 'aesthetic bind'. Possessed by the aesthetic (embodied in experience, object, image, but inclined always to exalt lightness of *spirit*, material *immanence* and sacred *gift*), I struggle to undo the bind. Not to auratize meaning, I try to face the upsurge of contradictions that continually reconfigure the world, return it to history. With the same disposition and along with discourse, I trail in the deep vein – and here is a contradiction – meanings forged in the 'smithy of the soul'.

Geeta Kapur  
15th March, 2014  
New Delhi





DECEMBER 4  
2010

helmet

BAM

I found a place  
in parliament where  
they make the  
helmet to supply  
to members

well  
I will go by  
these trousers  
& trousers

1000  
members' insurance?  
Parliament had an accident  
2010

How long?  
Forever,  
Papa died today  
Papa!  
Papa wake up  
Papa! Papa! Papa!  
Why did he die?  
Can we keep him?  
Can we keep his head?  
Can we keep his head?  
How long? Can't we still  
live and papa die?  
Are you going away again?

Wow!

Wow!

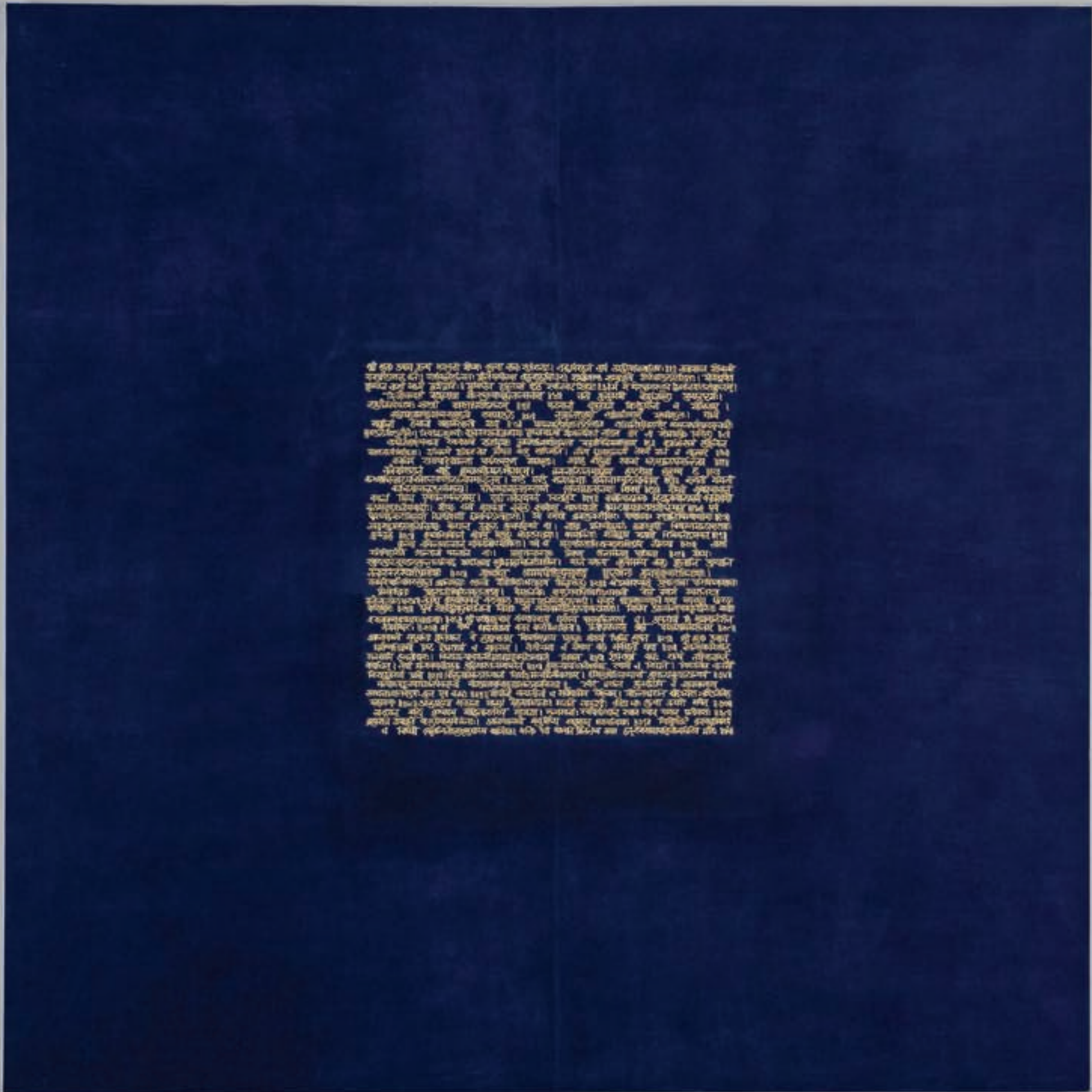
Dhruvi Acharya  
1993 - 2013, 2014 (detail)



Hema Upadhyay  
Loco-Foco-Motto, 2014

I was invited to an artists' residency in Karachi. It would be my first journey to Pakistan, the region my ancestors came from. It was 2003, around the time that the Bamiyan Buddhas were defaced. I wanted to respond by making a work that was architectural and majestic, but where beauty would be interposed with fragility. I made my first matchstick chandelier with the idea of how inflammable our world is today.





Desmond Lazaro  
Blue and Gold, 2014

The 'Maha Rasa Lila' – Krishna's great circular dance (*Bhagavata Purana: chpt 33, Book 10*) – recalls the story of how Krishna appears in multiple forms to the Gopis (individual souls) in the forests of Vrindavana on the full moon night of autumn. It is one of the most iconographic images in the Indian pantheon, depicting the universal principal of unity in multiplicity – multiplicity in unity – a tenant of all religious traditions.

Having trained as a Pichhvai artist, I had painted a version of this story in 1989 with my teacher and his family in Jaipur. Later, as I moved away from the Pichhvai imagery, the technique remained and the oscillation between image and technique has become a dialogue within my painting ever since.

In this new work, entitled *Blue and Gold*, I revisit Krishna's circular dance though it is to the Sanskrit text rather than to the visual image that I return. This time I also turned to the medieval Christian illuminated manuscripts tradition, prevalent from the 12th century onward. The technique allows more freedom when translating texts as it was mainly used for the opening or carpet pages of Christian bibles.

A certain history and mythology is invested in the juxtaposed use of Blue and Gold. These are colours which resonate in almost every culture and relate to both secular and sacred identity: from the blue of Krishna, to the Virgin Mary, to Christian Icons, to Yves Klein, and beyond.





Lavanya Mani  
The lost map - blue print, 2014

I have been trying to explore the multilayered role that dyed and printed textiles have played in the history of colonial trade, the establishment of colonialism and the economics of political domination and imperialism in India. I simultaneously draw attention to the historical context when 'high art' and 'craft' became opposing categories that needed to be defined against each other in order to validate their existence.

I have been particularly interested in correspondences between 'textiles' and 'text' and metaphors relating the two, such as: 'to spin a yarn', 'to follow a thread of narrative', 'to embroider a tale', 'to weave a tale' 'to fabricate'. And to then make a link with the construction of 'history', especially in the context of 'discovering' the East.

Early travellers to the East, disseminating 'information' about the new and unknown lands, succeeded in perpetuating numerous stereotypes on the marvels and wonders of the East. Western ideas of the orient consisted of a whole tradition of myths and fables which combined some truth with much fiction. In this ongoing series entitled *Traveller's Tales*, I have been attempting to 'fabricate' my own visual narratives on the arrival, interest and acquisition of Indian textiles/spices/and all things exotic by the imperial powers.





Gulammohammed Sheikh  
Mappamundi - Whose World ?, 2004



Gulammohammed Sheikh  
Mappamundi - Troubled Terrains, 2004

Gulammohammed Sheikh  
*Walking the world*

All maps are journeys of sorts, undertaken or imagined, dreamt or conjured, like the journeys of Marco Polo which Italo Calvino traces in the mappings of 'Invisible Cities'.

Traversing historical and mythical spaces and invoking them through paintings long admired and bringing these into experiential arena has been an old habit with me. Painted maps, charts, *vignaptipatras* (painted scrolls of a Jaina monk's travels on foot) and paintings depicting larger terrains invite negotiations, mediations and appropriations. The routes open trajectories beckoning to construe multiple and individual narratives.

In my search for the image of the whole world, I stumbled upon a picture postcard of the Ebstorf Mappamundi, a map of the world made in Italy around circa 1234. I was struck by the metaphor of the world visualised as the body of Christ, a veritable *vishwaroopa*. The circular image encompassed seas and terrains which spilled over the body leaving only head, hands and feet visible in the outer circle. Painted on thirty pieces of goatskin sewn together, this 'world' was last seen in Hannover until destroyed in allied bombing during World War II.

The idea of re-configuring the 'world' that had simmered for a long time was re-kindled by this discovery. Digital collaging facilitated the process of inventing and implanting sites of choice into the circuits laid out in the Ebstorf mappings. The process began with erasing the medieval Christian connotations but retaining hands and feet to leave the map as a physical entity. Now it was a 'world' waiting to be populated by journeymen and trespassers, wanderers and mad dreamers. The older image of Jerusalem as the centre of the earth was replaced by a series of imaginary invocations of the sacred; on other sites of unknown denominations stood the golden city of Dwarka; elsewhere paradisaical and earthly gardens as sites of tryst for Rama chasing Maricha in the guise of a golden deer; Madonna fleeing toward Egypt; Majnun looking in every corner for his beloved Layla; Francis preaching to the birds.

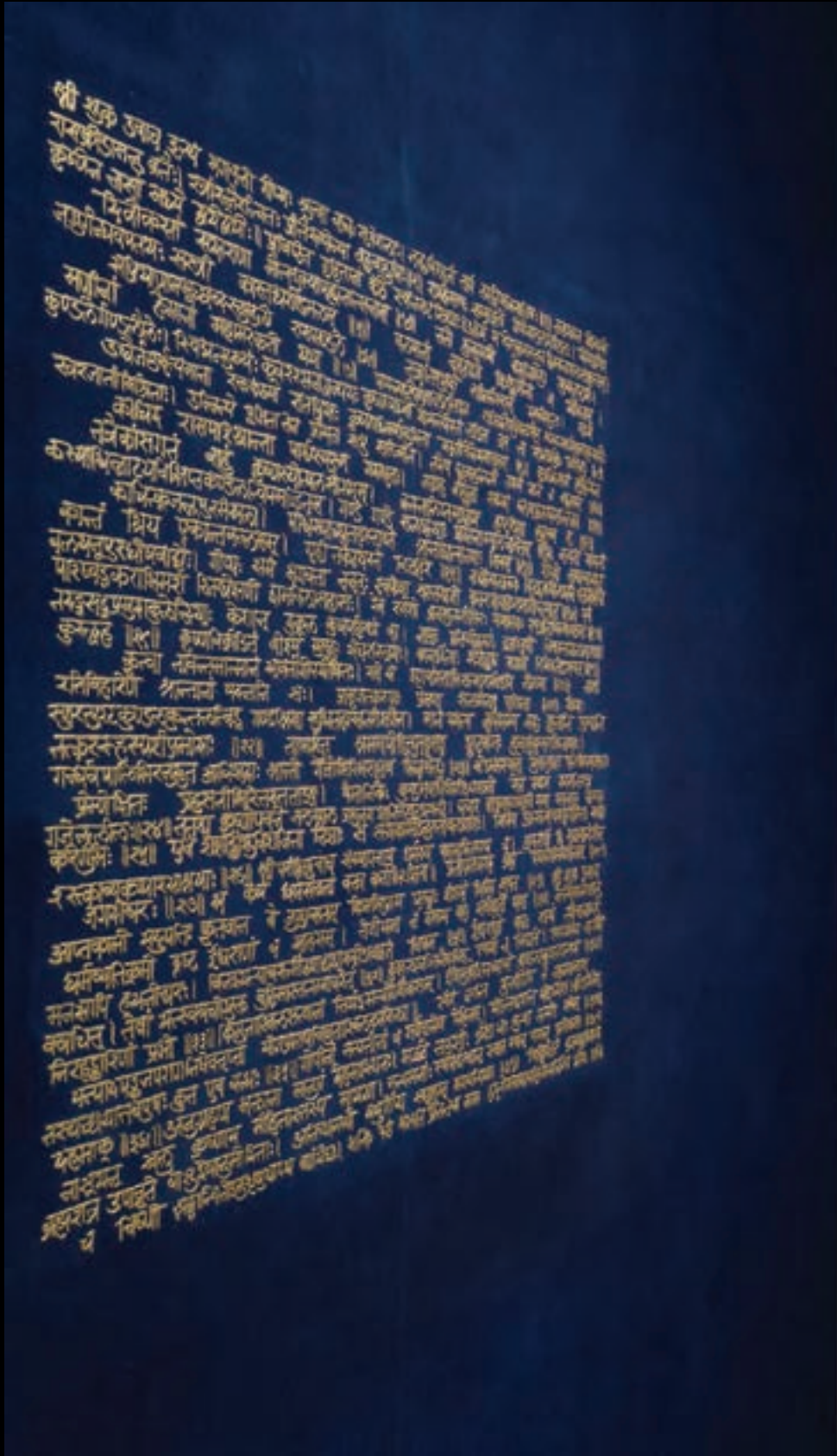
This emptying of old sites left the Ebstorf with a barren, skeletal form; simultaneously, a torrent of sites appeared in every corner of the empty terrains: the township of Siena jostled with the contested site of modern Jerusalem, the dreamt monuments of Duccio brushed sides with cow pastures of Mathura, Palladio's imaginary monuments sat in the company of a tranquil Kangra hillside where Krishna made love to Radha. As mother of Majnun visited her emaciated son in a solitary landscape, a group of six men huddled in the circular space to slumber—earlier occupied by the head of Christ.

The occupation of empty terrains continued as the world proceeded with its pogroms, ethnic cleansings and destruction of heritage sites. The destroyed Buddha of Bamiyan re-appeared alongside the view of hell the angel showed the Prophet on his miraculous journey; the hooded victim of Abu Ghraib stood within sight of the Massacre of the Innocents; the riots in Gujarat evoked the Flagellation of Christ.

As a lion roars and a bull charges, the dervishes keep whirling, invoking the sky with an upward and the earth with a downward hand.



Gulammohammed Sheikh  
Mappamundi - Troubled Terrains, 2004 (detail)







Jayashree Chakravarty & Reena Saini Kallat





Reena Saini Kallat  
Untitled (Map), 2014

The flows and movements of travellers, migrants, labour, across the world have produced major social and economic implications as well as new forms of cultural exchange. It has not only allowed us to free cultural identities from a physical place but to see ourselves entwined in a symbolic web, as it were.

I first conceived and exhibited this work at the Konsthall Goteborg, as part of the Goteborg International Biennale of Contemporary Art 2011. A multitude of actors interact without overall knowledge of the global situation; I decided to work with

wires and form a drawing that will trace migration patterns and transmit energy and information from one place to another. This linear formation often evokes barbed wires, barriers or different kinds of fencing. By changing the instrument of this quasi-cartographic drawing from a pencil line to a wire, I am interested in the map becoming dynamic: streaming and transferring data of global flows as well as energies of people as they travel and intersect.

There is an added layer of sounds: deep-sea ambient sounds, slow electric pulses, the hum of engaged tones coming from telecommunications, a mechanical-sounding drone, a factory siren and ship horns intermingled with migratory bird sounds.







Atul Bhalla  
Yamuna Evening-III, 2008



N. S. Harsha & Atul Bhalla

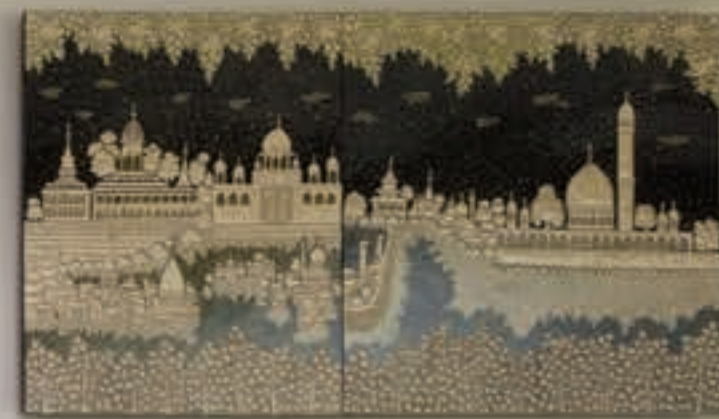


N. S. Harsha  
waha say idar, idar say udar...., 2014 (detail)



N. S. Harsha  
waha say idar, idar say udar...., 2014 (detail)







Nilima Sheikh & Fayaz Ahmad Jan  
Route(s), 2014

Inviting other image makers to share the process of making art opens up many routes to partnership. Awareness of the inequalities of collaborations complicate authorship: whose volition guides the process at what stage? Fayaz Ahmad Jan, master craft-person who paints on papier-mâché surfaces, has been a principal partner in the collaborative mural project choreographed by artist BV Suresh and myself for the Mumbai International Airport. The intelligence of the crafting hand led this effort from fashioning small scale objects to structuring large scale panels, observation and narrative decoding of life in his hometown Srinagar and flights of the imagination sparked by delving into historical pictorial conventions. And taught us valuable lessons in the gestalt of partnerships: visual, of material; and some day, beyond the caste-divides of craft and art that beset/ limit our worlds of making.

We revisit the routes of a loved Sheher, in the hope that this sharing from across grammars that seem at variance, will catalyze a functionality.



Nilima Sheikh  
Route(s), 2014 (detail)



Fayaz Ahmad Jan  
Route(s), 2014 (detail)



Desmond Lazaro  
Gated Community, 2014 (*detail*)

a somewhere-in-between house

spoke of contradictions

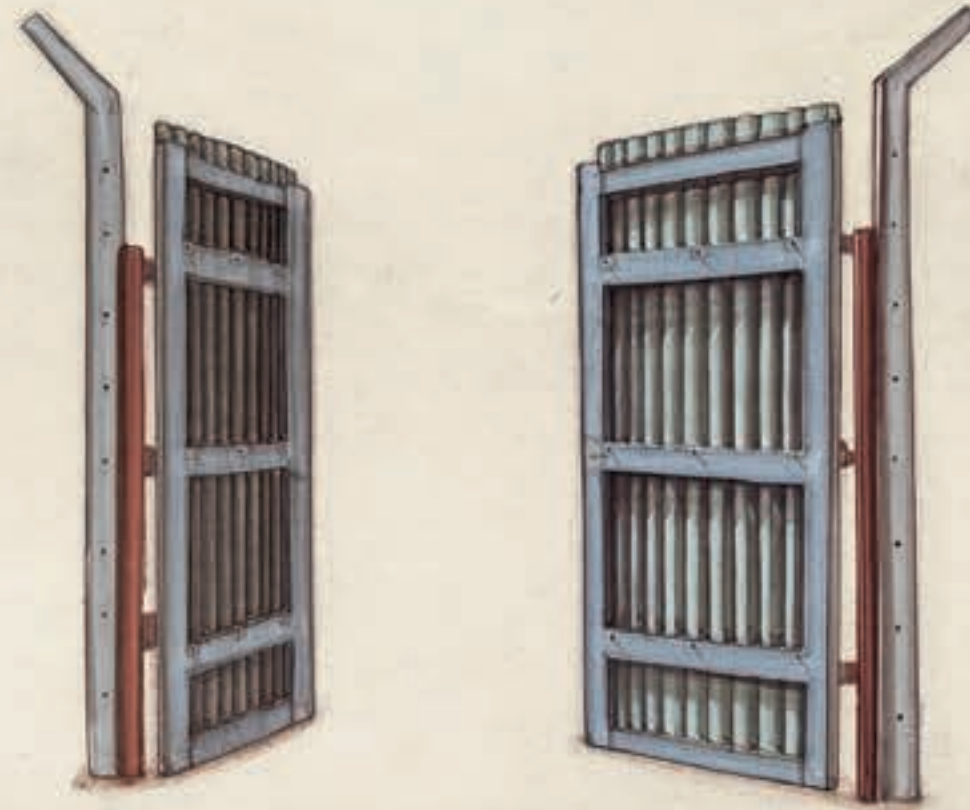
on many levels:

of improvisation

want, desire

necessity





Desmond Lazo  
Gated Community, 2014 (detail)

*the "blue house" a shack made of palm leaf*



50 YEARS OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART

1963 ■ 2013

Catalogue design: Priti Mishra Gaitonde

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