

# PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME II

Research and Writing From SAF 2017

commissioned by





## About **Projects/Processes**

**Projects / Processes** is a new initiative to publish commissioned research essays, longform writing, and in-depth criticism that explore the ideas and processes behind select curatorial projects at Serendipity Arts Festival. Over two years, the Festival has accumulated a rich database of creative energies and partnerships. As an eight-day long event, the Festival is a platform for multidisciplinary collaboration and cultural innovation, and has commissioned over 70 new works across the visual arts and performance since its inception in 2016. The **Projects / Process** series offers an opportunity to give some of these works and the stories that they tell an afterlife, through a deeply engaged look at how they came together and their significance to the discourse of contemporary art in India moving forward. Each volume comprises essays covering distinct projects that stand in some dialogue with each other, through the questions they raise and the thematic landscape they cover.

## About Serendipity Arts Festival

**Serendipity Arts Festival** is a multi-disciplinary arts event set over a period of eight days in December in the vibrant settings of Panaji, Goa. Curated by a panel of eminent artists and institutional figures, this festival is a long-term cultural project that hopes to affect positive change in the arts in India on a large scale.

Serendipity Arts Festival 2017 experimented with site, form, scale, and display, featuring over 70 projects including more than 40 projects commissioned specifically for the Festival, alongside a line-up of scintillating programmes spanning music, dance, theatre, visual arts and culinary arts. In addition to the curated events, we believe in collaborations that can give the Festival varied perspectives. As a result, SAF 2017 saw an exciting array of Special Projects which highlight our institutional collaborations.

The Festival also attempts to address pressing issues such as arts education, patronage culture, interdisciplinary discourse and accessibility to the arts. This intensive programme of exhibitions and performances is accompanied by spaces for social and educational engagement.

## About Serendipity Arts Foundation

**Serendipity Arts Foundation** is an arts and cultural development Foundation created to encourage and support the arts as a significant contributor to civil society. It aims to promote new creative strategies, artistic interventions, and cultural partnerships that are responsive and seek to address the social, cultural and environmental milieu of South Asia. Committed to innovation, SAF intends to promote and create platforms creativity, providing the wider public with a unique source of contemporary art and culture. SAF programmes are designed and initiated through collaborations with partners across a multitude of fields, each intervention created using the arts to impact education, create social initiatives, foster community development, and explore both interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary in the arts, with a special focus on South Asia.



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**Anti-Memoirs: Locus,  
Language, Landscape**

*Curated by* Ranjit Hoskote



## Curatorial Note

They tell us that we have a single past, a past painted in one colour. They tell us that we have a single future, a future painted in one colour. But the present troubles and perplexes them. Because the present refuses to be painted in the one colour of which they approve. It resists being constrained into dogma. It rejects the one-way street of ideology. The present, especially in India, is a crucible where many pasts spark together, are reshaped, and allow for the articulation of plural futures. How do our artists address the rich challenge posed by these many pasts? How do they work with, celebrate, and renew memories that are embodied in the vigorous inheritances of artisanal lineage, poetic idiom, livelihood, folk wisdom, urban legend, pilgrim testimony, rite of passage, print modernity, the stylisation of place in image, poetry and song? Memory, in this context, is not reducible to simple memoiristic remembrance or anecdotal recalling. Rather, it is an urgent form of recollection that may be figured as premonition, prognosis or agency. It is an act of looking back to look forward – closely akin to Walter Benjamin’s conception of history, which he sees as a memory to be “seized, as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”

And so I have named this exhibition *Anti-Memoirs*. The title is that of the legendary 1967 book by the writer, soldier, diplomat and politician André Malraux, which traverses his 1965 journey to the East: to Egypt, India, China, and South-east Asia. Of this work, Malraux wrote: “I have called this book *Anti-Memoirs* because it answers a question which memoirs do not pose and does not answer those which they do.” As the critic Roger Shattuck observes, *Anti-Memoirs* is not concerned with “events exclusively but with a particular relation between them: privileged

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moments”. In this spirit, the exhibition will essay a “creative autobiography” of contemporary India, by transverse means. In *Anti-Memoirs*, we present artistic practices in which three distinct emphases come into play interlocking in varied combinations: locus, language, landscape. These are not identical archives of association and nuance, nor do they dredge up the same time horizons as incarnated in technology, literary manner, or iconography. Locus can manifest itself as ritual, season or debate. Language can appear as a measure of silence or music. Landscape can insist on its deep geological or oceanic strangeness, like the tidal sand that pulls away from under our feet.

**Curatorial Assistants** Khorshed Deboo, Prarthana Tagore,  
Priyanka Tagore

**Artists** M V Dhurandhar, Philip Rawson, Ravi Agarwal, Elmer  
& Bert Elias Underwood, Veer Munshi, Zarina Hashmi,  
Vishwajyoti Ghosh





# **The Grammar of Reversal: An Essay on *Anti-Memoirs: Locus, Language, Landscape***

**Khorshed Deboo**

The exhibition *Anti-Memoirs*, curated by Ranjit Hoskote, brings together seven artistic practices in which the migration of images across three distinct tropes come into play -- those of locus, language, and landscape. The title of the exhibition is derived from the legendary 1967 book by the writer, soldier, diplomat and politician André Malraux. Of this work, Malraux wrote: "I have called this book *Anti-Memoirs* because it answers a question which memoirs do not pose and does not answer those which they do." As explained by the curator in the introductory text to the exhibition, "...the exhibition will essay a 'creative autobiography' of contemporary India, by transverse means."

## **I**

I happened to be reading *That Which Is Not Drawn* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), as we went along installing *Anti-Memoirs* in Panjim in December 2017 as part of the second edition of Serendipity Arts Festival. The book is a compilation of freewheeling yet intensely engaging conversations between the artist William Kentridge and cultural critic and filmmaker

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Rosalind C. Morris, in which Kentridge expounds on his artistic practice, the key concerns and underpinnings of his work, the ethics of provisionality, and the significance of the role of the viewer or the exhibition-goer. Parts (or even certain keywords or phrases) of the book fortuitously resonate with—and lend themselves to—the various stages of the process of putting together *Anti-Memoirs*. These keywords, used as sub-headings in this essay, almost vividly exemplify a vocabulary for the exhibition. They rupture the flow of the essay by what seems to be a lexicon of concurrence, an exploration of the idiom of encounter. This essay attempts to develop a roadmap towards the making of *Anti-Memoirs*, integrating the works of the artists, each powerful enough to represent the overall idea of the exhibition, its content and form. It also tries to establish and then assess the various elements of the exhibition layout and design, its spatial vocabulary, and tangential elements. The latter part of this text is an interview with the curator Ranjit Hoskote, conducted in two parts: in person [January 2018], and over email [March 2018].

### The Visible Excess

The exhibition began to germinate with an email Ranjit Hoskote wrote to the team in April 2017, and eventually a narrative emerged as we went along contrasting, calibrating, and juxtaposing several fragments. It also seemed to begin, rather nascently, with a single idea, or maybe a dominant image. A few weeks into the project, what the curator initially had in mind was to construct the tradition of the watercolour as an

essential component of artistic practice at the Sir J J School of Art in Bombay, especially concomitant with artist-pedagogues such as Cecil Burns, Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar, Gladstone Solomon, J M Ahivasi, and R D Dhopeshwarkar, as well as their expanding circles of students, many of them associated with the so-called 'Bombay School'. The term 'Bombay School' was used evasively and was, at times, read or interpreted as comprising only a certain group of J J alumni or a loose confederation of warring painters active in Bombay during the 1930s and most of the 1940s.

The narrative-in-progress would then perhaps turn away from a formalist, watercolour emphasis towards a more historical Bombay School emphasis and ask, what really was the Bombay School? The aim, thus, was to present and develop the rich and multifarious history of art in Western India, with Bombay as the key focal point, preceding the emergence of the now almost-mythic, and overly ubiquitous Progressive Artists' Group.<sup>1</sup> The time period under consideration would then have been between 1865 and 1952, for a variety of reasons.

In 1865, John Griffiths became the principal of the Sir J J School of Art, thus inaugurating a certain momentum of pedagogy and art-making that was to continue across several decades, as well as academic leaders and paradigm shifts in the curriculum, until the late 1940s. On the other end of the timeframe, in 1952, the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay is thrown open to the public, thus putting an end to an epoch of annual salons, or public exhibitions held only once a year by the Progressive Artists' Group, as standalone moments in the city's art calendar. The preliminary idea was to use several works from the

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Noida-based Swaraj Art Archive --- a vast repository of a private collector, Mr. Vijay Aggarwal, consisting of works spanning both pre- and post-Independence periods, and hence instrumental to the exhibition under consideration. In addition to artworks, these would include books, ephemera, and epistolary material such as posters, handbills, invitation cards, exhibition or salon brochures, catalogues, and price lists. The possible photographs by contemporary figures and institutions would perhaps include works by practitioners active within that period, such as the Bourne & Shepherd Studio, Raja Deen Dayal, Darogha Abbas Ali, Sukumar Ray and so forth. The prospect of including albums such as 'Caste and Occupations'; 'Costumes of India'; and those associated with the Survey of India, including James Waterhouse's photographic works was also discussed. There would also then arise a possible section on the Ajanta Caves, especially the works of painter and photographer Robert Gill (1804-1879), as well as an emphasis on the importance of Ajanta as a historical site and a source of inspiration and academic engagement for the students of the Sir J J School of Art, Bombay.

### **Erasure As Construction**

Once the overarching theme of the exhibition was finalised, the next step was to shortlist the works to be included. However, the initial idea of building upon the tradition of the watercolour underwent a complete overhaul. The final list comprised largely of extant works, save for those of artist Vishwajyoti Ghosh which were executed for the first time for

*Anti-Memoirs*. With the works from the Swaraj Art Archive at our disposal, the team was perhaps spoilt for choice. The works of Philip Rawson, which were nowhere on the initial outline drawn up for the exhibition, cropped up as we made our way through the Archive, and then became a crucial component of the show's narrative. On the other hand, a few works by the Sri Lankan painter and poet George Keyt, whom we, at this stage, considered key to the exhibition's narrative, were eventually edited from the roster after much back and forth. This process subsequently formed the building blocks for the further selection of works and material that followed. The visit to the Archive was followed by visits to the studios of the participating artists—Vishwajyoti Ghosh in New Delhi and Veer Munshi in Gurgaon, in addition to a pit-stop at Gallery Espace, also in New Delhi, to confirm the selection of the works of Zarina Hashmi.

### **Erasure Versus Construction**

In the book *Thinking about Exhibitions* it is stated that “exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constricted, maintained, and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions—especially exhibitions of contemporary art—establish and administer the cultural meanings of art.”<sup>2</sup> The effect of spatial exhibition design is a key element of the curatorial narrative and can be an independent entity for the construction of meaning. Familiarising one's self with the characteristics of the

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space was crucial in order to arrive at the final *mise-en-scène*, and to hence lay emphasis on the spatial predictors such as the placement of the objects, the lighting, gauging the movement and flow of the visitors, identifying certain works as reference points, and creating zones of intensities. It was then important to arrange the works in a way that viewers are able to explore new spaces, revisit spaces, and find their way through the many threads of the exhibition.

The anatomy of the exhibition was constructed by the need to showcase the simultaneity of diverse artistic expressions— unfolding over time, space and locale— and a shared discipline to engage with a collective transgression of the boundaries of artistic language. The trajectory of the placement of the works eschews linear narratives and unfolds, instead, as a palimpsest of anchored yet interconnected tropes such as home, belonging, exile, survival, and remnants, all held together firmly by the primary motifs.

A visual balance was achieved by making use of the existing division and partitions as well as through practical interventions. The production process involved the preparation and development of the detailed specifications so as to facilitate fabrication, installation, and timescales. The choice of texts was designed to create a mix of dialogues, previously published essays, analyses, and annotations. The key gallery of the space, which the viewer first steps into, was intended to be representative of the works of all the artists, just enough to be illustrative of their practices, yet not completely revelatory of what lay further in the exhibition. Veer Munshi's strikingly powerful 'Country Without a Post

Office' occupied the wall in the immediate sightline of the viewer who entered the space. Inspired by Agha Shahid Ali's eponymous poem, the work throws light on the plight of the Kashmiri Pandit refugees who had to flee the state en masse in the early 1990s, owing to the militant movement for an independent Kashmir. It 'invokes the missives unsent, the appeals unheard, the letters unread in a situation where rhetoric and violence have overtaken the possibility of establishing common ground and restoring human communion.'<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the remaining walls held crucial works of the five other artists, not including the stereoscope from Underwood & Underwood, as it was intended to be an element of 'surprise' in the passage of the exhibition. This particular stereoscope, a handheld Holmes-Bates, was manufactured by Underwood & Underwood, the largest publisher of stereographs in the world, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When two almost-identical photographs, placed a few inches alongside each other, are viewed through two lenses set 2.5 inches apart, the result is an illusion of a three-dimensional image.

The meandering room was split into five alcoves, each weaving a narrative by aligning the works a particular artist with those of another. Each area, primarily occupied by a particular artist's work, was identified as a zone of intensity, around which several other works were then arranged to resonate with them and attempt to generate a spatial dialogue. The blueprint abandoned a conventional chronological or geographical argument; instead the flow of the works was such that they speak to each other. For instance, one of the alcoves which housed the stereoscope

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along with the stereo-views also contained the mixed-media works of Vishwajyoti Ghosh, wherein fragments from the works of Nripendra Kumar Basu—published during the mid-1930s to late 1950s—were used by Ghosh to create palimpsests of texts and imagery. Basu was popular for writing detective novels, and developed intellectual theory on private, even intimate life, challenging the existing moral proscriptions, social taboos and societal norms. The juxtaposition of the stereoscope and Ghosh's works is perhaps hinged on the underlying leitmotif of the voyeur. [Fig.1]

Understanding the armature of the space was crucial in constructing an exhibition to bring out a certain rhythm. It is not the space that is host to the works but rather the works that host the space. The spatial layout then, in fact, becomes a curatorial tool.

## II

### In Conversation With Ranjit Hoskote

**Khorshed Deboo:** The anatomy of the exhibition underwent several changes, right from the time of shortlisting the works to be included, to the installation stage. How do you see the process unfold, between what you initially envision and what the exhibition eventually manifests into?

**Ranjit Hoskote:** There is no single one-size-fits-all template for curatorial practice. As a curator, you should cast your net wide, and be open to surprise. There is always a strong, intuitive element to curation. The more you think about the

material you are working with—the artistic practices, the archive—the more actively, and unpredictably, you begin to see a set of emergent themes. There is an ongoing thematic on the one hand, and a set of artistic practices on the other, and the two meet at some point during the curation process. Also, remember that, as a curator, you carry a floating archive of all your own obsessions, leitmotifs, formative and transformative experiences, ongoing currents of preoccupation, with you -- and these, also, will find articulation, to one degree or another, in each successive project.

For instance, with *Anti-Memoirs*, you will recall that the very first email I wrote [to the team] made mention of the prospect of including the paintings and photographs of the Ajanta Caves by Robert Gill. I was thinking of a possible section on Ajanta, given how important it was, as a site, a source of inspiration, and pedagogical occasion for the J J [the Sir JJ School of Art, Bombay] academic system. However, as we worked with the Swaraj Art Archive, the work of **Philip Rawson** cropped up, and that was absolutely marvellous. We chanced upon Rawson's archival photographic documentation of a variety of Indian monuments as well as artefacts, work that was intended as preparation and illustration for publication projects, and which had never been exhibited before. I was hugely excited by this, and, as you know, we wove it integrally into our *mise-en-scène*. [Fig. 2] I am greatly preoccupied with elements that are under the radar, that aren't sanctified as 'art' in the gallery or museum context, and which retain their sense of strangeness, claiming our attention in ways that have not yet been explained, and domesticated within the discursive system of

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the art world. The inscriptions on the reverse side of some of Rawson's photographs were equally fascinating. [Fig. 3] With **Ravi Agarwal**'s photographic works—'Sangam Engines' in particular—the notions of landscape and language came together very well and were intimate starting points eventually building towards a larger idea. [Fig. 4] Meanwhile, a parallel thread with the work of artist **Veer Munshi** was growing; this came out of Veer's collaborative practice of sculpture with the community of Shi'a papier-mâché artists in Srinagar, which has preoccupied him during the last five years or so.

Likewise, I was fascinated by the works of **M V Dhurandhar** that we included: his work for a sociological study of the women of India, his sketches and preparatory watercolours for that project, but also his illustrations for society and detective stories that appeared in popular Marathi and Gujarati magazines, which offered us an illustrated social history of metropolitan modernity in late 19th and early 20th century western India. [Fig. 5] I'm particularly close to Dhurandhar's work because, as I explained in some of our email exchanges, my mother took me as a child to see his daughter, Ambikabai, who was our neighbour in Khar [in Bombay]. I still recall, vividly, as though in some *Arabian Nights* fantasy, the beautiful old mansion with the maestro's marouflage paintings mounted on the walls. And, from a completely different sector of my experience, I wanted to bring into our exploration the splendid work of **Vishwajyoti Ghosh**, who works at the cusp between the painted image, the literary text, education, provocation, and historical research, all brought together into a compelling visuality that makes witty, elegant play with the poster, the

advertisement, the pamphlet, the gazette. [Fig. 6]

I've always loved **Zarina Hashmi's** work. I've presented her in several of my exhibitions, including *Everyone Agrees: It's About to Explode*, the first-ever Indian national pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which I curated in 2011, as well as in *Zameen*, which I curated for Art District XIII, Lado Sarai, in 2014. For *Anti-Memoirs*, I wanted to bring her very special work in print-making, which combines, in varying degrees, the visual image, text, and collage, into a space of dialogue with some of Veer Munshi's work with poetry and Shi'a imagery. In one of our rooms, the one dedicated to Zarina's work, and with Veer's horse sculpture in the centre, a number of connections get sparked, such as the moment of viewing when you see Veer's 'Zuljanah', Imam Hussein's horse, in close proximity with one of Zarina's prints, which depicts the *panja*, a symbol of the presence of the Imam and his family. [Fig. 7]

And then, as a gift from heaven, we learned that our colleagues, Priyanka and Prarthana Tagore, were working with an **Underwood & Underwood** stereoscope and set of stereoscopic slides, which Mr Vijay Aggarwal of the Swaraj Art Archive had acquired recently. I incorporated this into the exhibition, as it spoke so eloquently to Rawson and to Dhurandhar, and by extension, to the other artists and practices in our ensemble. Again, it was a delight, for me, to bring into the exhibition a practice that does not find inclusion in the realm of 'high art', but inhabits an intermediate and interstitial space of photography, documentation, ethnography, exoticism, entertainment, and transcultural encounter.

As you see, I don't proceed from pre-processed ideas. Quite

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often, I proceed from spatial impulses; what is vital to me is the way in which ideas, spaces, the interrelationships among objects, the connections among the practices being shown, all come together as a constellation. To me, the process of curating is like mapping, things come together, move apart, and the scenography emerges from several convergences and divergences. The shifting geographies of the exhibition space are also fascinating and productive. For *Anti-Memoirs*, our method was to mark out and identify a zone of intensity for each artist within the larger space, from which that artist's work could extend outwards, make contact with the work of the other artists, and disperse into the larger system of the exhibition.

**KD:** How did the final selection of works for the exhibition come about? Did you first establish a central theme and work towards finalising the artworks or was it the other way around? What governs your decision of excluding some works over others?

**RH:** I was reading the critic Roger Shattuck's beautiful, idiosyncratic, and mysterious book of essays, *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (1984), and his account of Andre Malraux's idea of an imaginary museum, or a museum without walls, stayed with me. Malraux is another constant presence in my thinking, and while we could criticise some aspects of his thinking from the perspective of our technologically advanced historical moment, his vision retains its relevance, in terms of its cosmopolitanism, as well as its key understanding of how the zoomed-in photographic fragment informs our understanding of material culture in a radically different way from that of any previous generation, which depended on *paideia*, ekphrasis, reproductions and artists'

conceptions, to understand the art of the past. Shattuck's interpretation of Malraux's notion of the construction of an autobiography through key moments rather than the diligent assembling of everyday information, through saltation rather than continuity— in that quintessentially Malrauxian book, *Anti-Memoirs* (1967), after which our exhibition is named— is one that I find resonant and rewarding. How do you account for a life? What kind of pivotal intensities do you reach for? With M V Dhurandhar, certain tremors are elicited from the metropolitan culture in his work, and juxtaposing it with Rawson's photographs meant using scenography as a way of creating collisions. The way the hang of certain walls shaped up then pushes the viewer to think about a social history, or a particular political moment. An exhibition, then, is a form of life. A certain type of hang is premised for individual works, like what Alfred Barr had conceived for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MoMA) in New York. But that is only one among a whole range of hangs. For instance, the salon-style hang allows you to weave narratives; what we did with Vishwajyoti Ghosh's works was to essentially suggest a wall of posters; and with Ravi Agarwal, we aimed at a more photographic installation. This is important as it allows viewers to immerse themselves in the exhibition, while also keeping them constantly alert, as the exhibition shifts shape and scale, calling for different levels of viewerly involvement. I love the photograph we have, of the viewer who bends down to look through the Underwood & Underwood stereoscope, as it demonstrates this playful shift of focal length and format so perfectly! [Fig. 8]

For me, the detour and the non-sequitur are very important

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forms of proceeding. They are central, if such peripatetic, marginalesque tropes could be said to be central, to how I conceive and install an exhibition. You let the viewer meander, wander, and then return, perhaps having learnt or stumbled upon something new along the way, or even making a leap whilst viewing the works.

**KD:** The space where the exhibition was held—the Palacio Idalcao in Panjim, now the Adilshah Palace—holds great significance, both architecturally and historically. Previously known as the Old Secretariat, it was the centre of power in Goa for centuries: once the Palacio Idalcao from where the Adilshah of Bijapur ruled Goa—when it was fortified and surrounded by a saltwater moat—and later, the stronghold of the Estado da India, the official residence of the Portuguese Viceroy. Does the space in any way then make much stronger demands of the curator than an average white cube? What do you think were the challenges posed by the space?

**RH:** With *Terra Cognita*? [the exhibition curated by Hoskote in the same space for Serendipity Arts Festival 2016], I attempted to render homage to the history of the site. This time around, with *Anti-Memoirs*, notions of multiple languages, the presence of the ocean, of cultural conflict, of lively public spheres marked by bulletins and gazettes, were all important. The space allows you to have the invisible advantages of a historical site along with the advantages of a white cube. While there was no obvious, explicit link with Goa, in some cases, there emerged a visual rhyme with the hang I adopted for *Terra Cognita*? which was otherwise more immersive, had several wraparounds. There is an inner, invisible logic to exhibition-making. One

is often secreting things into an exhibition that may not even be obvious to people. I also wanted to do away with the use of unproductive notions of the pre-Modern, the Modern, and the contemporary, all of which are based on a slippery chronology. I do not believe that art and aesthetic experience are premised on any kind of *telos* or ultimate goal towards which their progression is inevitably geared!

**KD:** While planning the *mise-en-scène* of the exhibition, how important do you think is it to involve the participating artists in the decision-making process?

**RH:** While it is the work of the artist that propels any exhibition, it is the curator's responsibility to bring the works together in a space. 'Consultative dictatorship' is perhaps a reasonably useful definition of a curatorial practice. However, one should be open to suggestions from the artists, and there is always a sense of mutual generosity and collegiality that comes into play. For instance, Veer's [Munshi] suggestion of not having his installation work in the very last room worked well for us. Things are constantly changing as you go about installing an exhibition; there is a ripple effect at work, and sometimes you wake up and realise that it is a butterfly effect!

**KD:** While constructing the exhibition design, how did you go about creating a balance between the visual and the verbal, the photographic and the typographic?

**RH:** As opposed to *Terra Cognita?*, where the texts were annotative and also played a connective role, *Anti-Memoirs* called for a restrained, minimal use of text. With the exception of Veer's work, which embraced poetry, so to speak, an artist biography and an accompanying statement sufficed. One

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should also leave the visitors to do their own share of work—the beholder’s share—as they view the exhibition.

To me, an exhibition is a discovery process, an inquiry, and each exhibition summons forth a different relationship and set of interlocking combinations among the four elements you have invoked. This is how one invokes, in different ways, different kinds of lifeworlds and contexts that a set of objects or exhibits might inhabit. I agree entirely with the very fine curator, Massimiliano Gioni, artistic director of the memorable 55th edition of the Venice Biennale (2013), when he recalls the curators Jean Clair and Harald Szeemann, for whom exhibitions were “investigative studies through which they could bring works of art, unusual objects, posters, advertisements, documents and books to a convergence point.”<sup>4</sup>

**KD:** In an interview with curator Walter Hopps, conducted by Hans Ulrich Obrist, and published in the book *A Brief History of Curating*, Hopps mentions that [Marcel] Duchamp taught him the cardinal curatorial rule: *in the organisation of exhibitions, the works must not stand in the way*. Were there times when a work did prove to be a hindrance and brought the installation process to a momentary halt?

**RH:** You certainly need a working concept and a strong understanding of the flow of the works and the space, but beyond that, you cannot really pre-plan the installation of an exhibition to perfection. The scenography of any show consists of the display, the objects, the relationship between the objects, the objects’ responsiveness to the space, and the movement and traffic of the viewers. Elements such as sightlines and viewing distances have to be assessed constantly

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and carefully. Plotting in sequences as well as surprises for the viewer is a key element of exhibition-making strategy too. For example, having the stereoscope with the Underwood & Underwood prints against a wall largely composed of Philip Rawson's photographs created a sudden shift of optics. [Fig. 9] In a subtle way, you can invite the viewer to change the visual format of the exhibition. While installing the exhibition, there was a constant calibration of the relationship between detail and scale, the grid or ensemble of works and the isolated work. The kind of hang that we used for *Anti-Memoirs* is not a flat, equidistant Modernist gallery hang, so to speak, which doesn't usually provoke an understanding of how people comprehend certain works in context with other works.



Notes

1. Ranjit Hoskote, *The Disordered Origins of Things: The Art Collection as Pre-canonical Space*, in *Abby Grey and Indian Modernism: Selections from the NYU Art Collection* (NYU/Grey Art Gallery, 2015), pp. 45-50
2. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Narine, ed. *Thinking About Exhibitions* (Routledge, 1996)
3. Ranjit Hoskote, Exhibition text for *Anti-Memoirs*
4. Massimiliano Gioni in conversation with Cristina Baldacci, in C Baldacci, *Sogno di sapere tutto/I Dream of Knowing Everything: An Interview with Massimiliano Gioni o the 55th International Art Exhibition* (Venice: Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, 2013), p. 70







Fig. 2

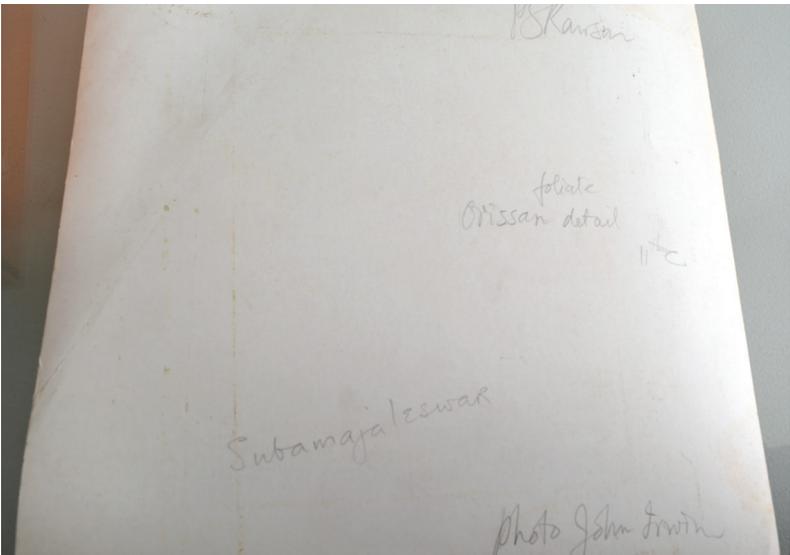


Fig. 3

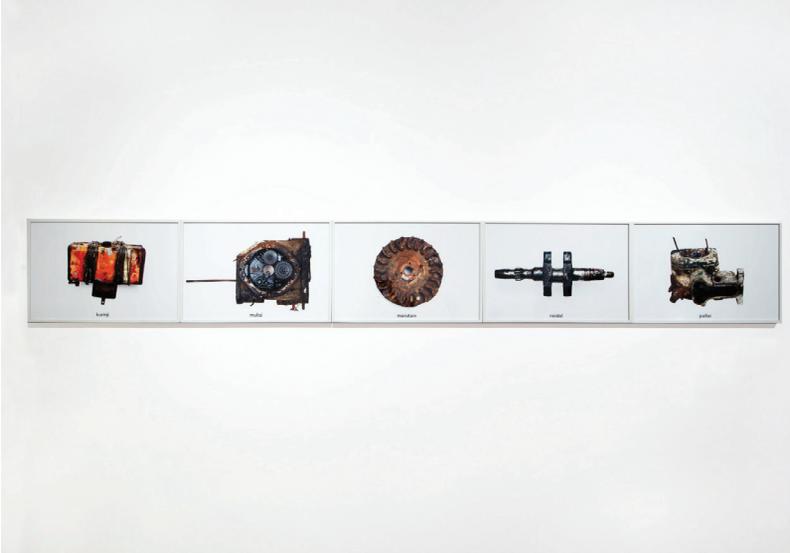


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

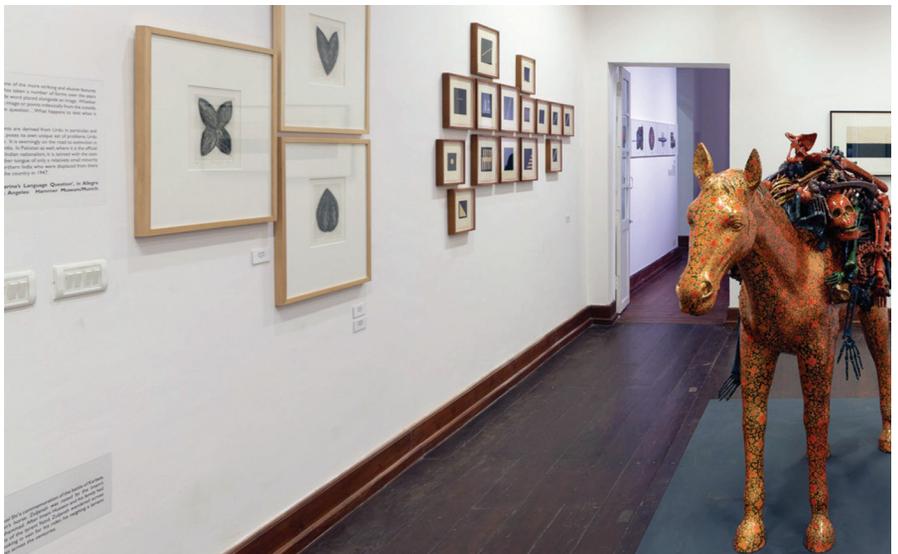




Fig. 6



Fig. 7

ity is derived from Greek στερεός (stereos), meaning 'firm, or (skopeō), meaning 'to look to see'. It is a technique for creating the illusion of depth in an image by means of stereopsis in using two nearly-identical images, each taken a few inches or other. When viewed through two lenses set 2.5 inches apart, the space between the eyes, the result is the illusion of a 3D picture.

view photographs or stereographs was hatched long before it even well prior to the first photographs. In the early 17th century, Giovanni Battista della Porta, Jacopo Chamard, and Niccolò d'Agulion, made drawings, or allusions to what would be the stereoscopic or stereo viewer. The first stereoscope nearly 200 years later in 1833 by Sir Charles Wheatstone in that time, photographs did not exist, so drawings were used.

to display here is a typical handheld. Holmes/Bates invented by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. in 1859, later by Joseph L. Bates in Massachusetts. This particular piece was made by Underwood & Underwood, the largest publisher of the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Founded in Kansas by two brothers, Elmer and Bert Elias Underwood, James a pioneer in the field of news bureau photography. The views were predominantly taken by James Rication in 1899/1900 comprehensive guide books with maps to complement the these views have a full text description on the back. Since preceded the publication of photographs in newspapers and were used mainly as a form of entertainment.

(43) -8452- Bathing at a ghat on the Ganges near Howrah Bridge, Calcutta, India.

"We are looking up the river and westward... Much bathing does not signify great cleanliness any more than much praying denotes great sanctity. This bathing is ceremonial rather than sanitary. With the Hindus, bathing is the only means of effectually counteracting or removing ceremonial pollution; it is necessary that there should be complete immersion, so the regulation method is to close the nostrils with thumb and finger and plunge; one hair left above water might bring spiritual disaster. The bath is necessary before eating before entering a temple, or before crossing a street. The polluting touch of the most friendly Hindu is sufficient to render a person unclean."

There are many bathing places along the river, but at least seven beyond this on the opposite bank. In some of these, the men and women see those bathing extending down the river. On certain days, the men and women would be found here, and the women are lined with bathers' goods.

You may see some of the men pouring water over their heads. The Howly also has a bridge above the river, which is lined with bathers' goods.

(Extract from the book "The Howly" by James Rication, Underwood & Underwood.)









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### Captions

**Page 8**

Veer Munshi; Detail of *Zuljanah*; Fibreglass, resin, and papier-mâché; 2015-17

**Fig. 1**

Vishwajyoti Ghosh's works [in the foreground, right] viewed against the stereoscope [in the background] manufactured by Underwood & Underwood, the largest publisher of stereographs in the world, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries

**Fig. 2**

Works by Philip Rawson [photographic prints; undated]

**Fig. 3**

A pencilled inscription on the reverse side of one of the photographic prints belonging presumably to Philip Rawson mentions the name of John Irwin, noted academic and Keeper of the Indian section at the Victoria and Albert Museum between the 1950s and the 1970s

**Fig. 4**

Ravi Agarwal; *Sangam Engines*; Archival photographic prints; 2015

**Fig. 5**

Works by M V Dhurandhar; *Untitled*; watercolour on paper; undated

**Fig. 6**

Works by Vishwajyoti Ghosh. From left to right:  
-*The Right Age*; Print-based collage and hand stitches on

- archival paper; 2017
- Stay Safe, Stay Wise*; Print-based collage and hand stitches on archival paper; 2017
- Towards Retirement*; Print-based collage and hand stitches on archival paper; 2017
- No Sex Please*; Print-based collage and hand stitches on archival paper; 2017
- Consent*; Print-based collage and hand stitches on archival paper; 2017

**Fig. 7**

Centre:

-Veer Munshi; *Zuljanah*; Fibreglass, resin, and papier-mâché; 2015-17

On the walls, from left to right, works by Zarina Hashmi:

- By the Mango Tree*; Etching on paper; 1988
- Untitled*; Collage with BFK light paper printed with black ink and gold leaf; 2015
- Horizon*; Woodcut with Urdu text, printed on handmade Nepalese paper; 2001
- Home Town*; Etching on Chine Collé; 1987
- Urdu Proverbs*; Portfolio of 10 woodblocks printed in black on handmade Nepalese paper; 2011

**Fig. 8**

A visitor looks through the stereoscope

**Fig. 9**

Photographic prints by Philip Rawson juxtaposed against the stereoscope manufactured by Underwood & Underwood, along with a set of stereoscopic slides



## Biographies

**Khorshed Deboo** is an independent writer and text editor based in Bombay. She writes on art and culture and enjoys making photographs. Her writing has appeared in publications such as *The Hindu*, *Scroll.in*, *Roads & Kingdoms*, and *Mint Lounge*. As a text editor, she has worked on exhibitions such as *State of Housing* (2018) and *Sakti Burman: In The Presence of Another Sky* (2017), among others. Her previous stints include working at Tarq, a contemporary art gallery in Bombay, and *BBC Good Food India* magazine. She currently works as Contributing Copy Editor at *Domus India* magazine, and is Curatorial Assistant (Visual Arts) for Serendipity Arts Festival.

**Ranjit Hoskote** is a poet, cultural theorist, and curator. He has been pivotal to shaping contemporary art discourse in India, and in registering multiple cultural issues, artistic domains, and moments of history.

In his role as an art critic, Ranjit has authored a critical biography as well as a major retrospective study of the painter Jehangir Sabavala, and also monographs on the artists Atul Dodiya, Tyeb Mehta, Bharti Kher, and Iranna GR.

Ranjit was co-curator of *Former West: Documents, Constellations, Prospects*, Berlin, 2013. His other curated projects include, *The Needle on the Gauge*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, *Parkside*, 2012; *Everyone Agrees: It's About to Explode*, Indian Pavillion, 54th Venice Biennale, Venice, 2011. Ranjit's latest book of poems titled *Jonahwhale* (Penguin Books India) released in 2018.

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**Ravi Agarwal** has an inter-disciplinary practice as an artist, environmental activist, writer, and curator. He explores contemporary questions surrounding the ideas of ecology, society, urban space, and capital, and is also the founder-director of Toxics Link, an NGO that has pioneered work in waste- and chemical-management in India.

**Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar** (1867-1944) received his training in art from the Sir J J School of Art, Bombay. Perhaps one of the most illustrious academic Indian artists during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, his work—largely watercolours—revolved around the themes of religion, mythology, fantasy, and everyday life.

**Vishwajyoti Ghosh** is a New Delhi-based graphic novelist and artist working in the realms of social, educational, and political tropes. He is the author of the graphic novel *Delhi Calm* (2010). Set in the 1970s, it brings together realistic comic passages with political commentaries and fantastical elements to recall what is referred to in India as ‘The Emergency’.

**Zarina Hashmi**’s works on paper embrace a variety of media and treatments, including graphite, puncturing, stitching, and the use of collage elements. While she works in intaglio, woodblock, lithography, and silkscreen, her practice also includes sculpture in metal, maplewood, and goldleaf. Hashmi’s key themes encompass home, displacement, quest, the wages of historic violence, and the vexed persistence of memory.

Born in Srinagar, **Veer Munshi** primarily addresses the tragedy of Kashmir in his work, embracing varied media and subjects. He studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Baroda (1981), and has had more than a dozen solo exhibitions across India, Australia, Switzerland, and Scotland.

**Philip Stanley Rawson** (1924-1995) served as Keeper of the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art at the University of Durham and Dean of the School of Art and Design, Goldsmiths' College, London. He was not only a distinguished academic but also a practising artist who produced a rich opus of sculptures, ceramic works and drawings over a period of five decades. He had also authored influential books on the East and its arts and cultures.

**Underwood & Underwood** was the largest publisher of stereographs in the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Founded in 1881 in Ottawa, Kansas, by two brothers, Elmer and Bert Elias Underwood, the company became a pioneer in the field of news bureau photography.

Established in 2013, the **Swaraj Art Archive** was created to document, preserve, and exhibit the collection of New Delhi-based Mr. Vijay Aggarwal's family. The mission of the archive is to promote the arts by sharing the collection with scholars, academicians and art lovers for the purpose of research through letters, paintings, photographs, and books on Indian art. The works of M V Dhurandhar, Philip Rawson, a few of Zarina Hashmi's, and the stereoscope—displayed as part of *Anti-Memoirs*—were borrowed from the Swaraj Art Archive.



# **Young Subcontinent**

***Curated by*** Riyas Komu



## Curatorial Note

The *Young Subcontinent* is a long term curatorial project that intends to bring young artists from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Maldives in conversation with each other to self reflexively engage with their histories and with contemporary hostilities within them. Shaped and settled over and over by waves of inward and outward migrations through centuries, the Indian subcontinent's culture continues to hold together great diversities in its language, ethnicity, faith, food, lifestyle, and art forms, all of which meld into and influence each other. In spite such a long history of cohesion and fusion, the contemporary cultural landscape of the South Asian subcontinent is restive, often brimming with tensions that have civilizational, colonial and political dimensions and undercurrents. Decades after the separations and partitions imposed by the colonial encounter, the *Young Subcontinent* project seeks to challenge such divisive imaginaries and to explore and reassert the 'tangles of our common roots', and to create capacities to relate to the "othered" cultures. *Young Subcontinent* aims to catalyze channels through which the continuum of intellectual and material cultures within this geography can be reestablished and reinforced through re-imagining and re-imagining. During the last cycle, several artists and intellectuals from the different countries of the Indian subcontinent came together at the Serendipity Arts Festival to exhibit their multi-disciplinary works, opening up questions that grip cultural production

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and practice in the subcontinent today. What are the potential ways in which art can undermine monolithic imaginaries, by excavating, celebrating and staging the nuances and subtleties of one's complex heritage and tangled histories? What are the languages through which the ethics of operating in a complex and globalizing political economy be articulated? How does one work one's way through the asymmetries within the art historical narratives of the subcontinent? Lastly, how can we deal with a civilizational memory that requires both remembering and forgetting, mourning and forgiving? Many of these questions resurface as we cross internal and external borders in order to navigate new landscapes and shifting tectonics of art and culture.

This project has a multi-pronged method of research, travel and exhibition as a way of productively engaging with art that open windows to see/k new horizons of cultural mediations and trajectories of belonging with/to each other. The cross border journeys in search of new artists collapses the artist/curator divide into a mode of mentorship, triggering new creative processes on both sides. Adoption of such a non-conforming position has often helped artists to share their inner concerns, releasing the tension between the intellectual and the experiential, thought and action. While issues of infrastructure and patronage in the arts continue to dominate the artists in the subcontinent, the project is sensitive to the young artists' search for promising platforms and opportunities to express their concerns. Through the generous support of the Serendipity Arts Trust, the *Young Subcontinent* project aims to build a platform, a framework for vibrant and open discussions to take place. We

foresee new friendships, partnerships and collaborations among young artists from the subcontinent as the future prospect of this process.

**Advisors** Amrith Lal, Dr. C S Venkiteswaran

**Curatorial Assistant** Anuj Daga

**Artists [2017]** Aditi Shankar Sharma, Ahmed Rasel, Biju Ibrahim, Jagadeesh Rao Tammineni, Jasmine Nilani Joseph, Karan Shrestha, Kiran Maharjan, Latifa Zafar Attai, Mariyathevathas Vijitharan, Nadya Bhimani Perera, Reetu Sattar, Sajad Malik, Sheelasha Raj Bhandari, Sher Ali, Shreya Shukla, Sounthiyas Amarathaas, Sunita Maharjan, Tashi Dendup & Ugyen Samdrup, Umesh PK, Yeshi Pelden, Zimbiri

**Artists [2016]** Abdul Halik Azeez, Aman Wadhan, Anupama Alias, Anuradha Upadhayay, Farzana Urmi, Isuru Kumarasinghe, Jeanno Gaussi, K L Leon, Kabi Raj Lama, Kedar Dhondu, Kishor Kayastha, Mekh Limbu, Parag Sonarghare, S P Pushpakanthan, Saju Kunhan, Shrimanti Saha, Susiman Nirmalavasan, Teja Gavankar, Zainab Haidary



# ***The Young Subcontinent Project: An Intermediate Analysis***

Anuj Daga

## **1. Boundaries *Lines of Control***

A few minutes before the opening of Serendipity Arts Festival 2017, while all venues were being cleared up for the reception of invited guests and the public, artist Sher Ali, from Kabul, Afghanistan, was meticulously planning how to erect a wall in the courtyard of the Public Works Department (read: a Government owned authority in charge of maintaining public sector works), the venue for the second edition of the *Young Subcontinent* project. The freestanding wall was to be constructed out of massive ice blocks, diagonally placed so as to screen as well as allow access between the different wings of the PWD building. The construction of an eight-foot high dissolving wall, with its placement and temporal performance in space, was a signifier of several aspects that underpin the issues that the *Young Subcontinent* project, curated by Riyas Komu for Serendipity Arts Festival. The *Young Subcontinent* is a long term curatorial project that intends to bring young artists from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Maldives in conversation

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with each other to self-reflexively engage with the histories and hostilities between their peoples. The project is structured around a unique template of research, travel and short term artist residency that, on one hand, attempts to chart a map of a cultural landscape of the region, and on the other hand, establish a network of cultural experts and artists within the South Asian countries in order to initiate and foster dialogue. Sher Ali's endeavour at the Public Works Department sought to ask: What is it that makes people from the same place stand against each other? While his question principally emerges from the regional crisis of Afghanistan tangled within internal communal hostilities, it could as well refer to the larger condition of the South Asian subcontinent. If the notion of "place" in his inquiry can be expanded to mean geography of shared ethos, myths, histories and culture, the entirety of South Asia could then be considered one *place*. With this understanding, what precisely has set parts of this same place in conflict with each other in recent times? Sher Ali briefly articulates through his work that "it is merely the difference in ideologies that creates different notions of national identity. Ideology gets formed over a gradual process, just like a wall of bricks. Once created, it often becomes a barrier, and needs to be questioned." [Fig. 1]

The formation of nation states in South Asia is in fact a condition left to us as a colonial legacy. The polarization of ideologies was also one of the divisive strategies employed by the British to gain a stronghold over the culturally and economically fertile land of South Asia. "South Asia" thus is a constructed identity. We are aware that, historically, India

comprised of a much larger territory than its present political boundaries. The constitution of an “Indian” State became imperative in order to defend against the exploitative regime of the British. The ossification of this larger India into smaller nations based on communal identities and insular ideologies may be understood as a residue of colonial imagination. The British created a unique condition of political boundaries of the nation-states which restricted free movement of people (and thereby cultures) between different regions within South Asia. The earlier power invasions in the Indian subcontinent did not hamper people traversing from one region to another within this vast stretch of land that extends from the Indus River in the west to the Himalayas in the east and down south, to what is now called the Indian peninsula. The drawing of these hard boundaries at once truncated routes of trade, travel or pilgrimage. While the maps were primarily created to demarcate administrative territories, these have become the principal instruments of war, conflict and tension over the post-colonial period in South Asia. The lines of control between present-day South Asian nations have created new insecurities around culture, identity and resources that have resulted in the insulation of countries and world views instead of a dialogue towards mutual exchange and growth. Similar to Sher Ali’s experiment, *Young Subcontinent* 2016 hosted at the Adil Shah Palace in Panjim, Goa during last year’s festival also greeted the visitors with a wall, this one made from burnt clay bricks. This work was an on-site installation called ‘Disturbed Corner’ by the artist Teja Gavankar (YS2016)<sup>1</sup> from Mumbai. In her decision to use one of the oldest materials

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through which civilizations have been built, Teja presented the brick wall as an apt metaphor for humanity—fired and hardened over years of edification pressures. While regimental courses set in history can create tough edges, without any room for negotiation, Teja twisted and folded the corner of the walls and made the unsettled border geographies of the subcontinent more apparent. She invited the viewer for a close observation of the disturbance of the corner; “That which distorts, deforms and ultimately becomes the impression of the changing identity in the way it is occupied,”<sup>2</sup> notes the artist. [Fig. 2]

The ruffled boundaries between the nations create a space of tension within which many kinds of microcosms flourish. In the architecture of political boundaries between South Asian nations, one may read stories of displacement, refuge, resettlement and longing. These are sites where religious and nationalistic sentiments take perfunctory center stage. Such sentiments have not only shaped nations, but also percolate into the everyday lives of people who struggle through ethnic and communal conflict within their political boundaries, which restrict our sense of space, as well as imagination, until one seeks ways to inhabit and read another world within them. For example, Sri Lankan artist Jasmine Nilani’s work ‘Traces’ (YS2017) is a series of twelve intricately sketched fences occurring between her hometown of Vavuniya and Jaffna, where she kept returning to due to the civil war. In Jaffna, there is a long history of neighbours and relatives fighting with each other over disputes of making and maintaining fences, but the relationship between the fence and herself became personal when her family

was expelled from their native village of Vasavillan due to the expansion of the military's high-security-zone boundaries. Jasmine was compelled to live between different kinds of fences from the age of five due to the ancestral dispute over land ownership in Jaffna. These include Fence of Higher Security Zone, Refugee Camp fence, various types of temporary fences made by the refugees of the camp and so on. Maintaining fences, those constructed in a range of materials including traditional palms, coconut leaves or even barbed wires, is a serious activity in this region often accomplished at the cost of dismantling the roof of one's own house to secure personal territory. Jasmine's works trace not only the nature of such (in)security around her region, but also its transformation, seen in new life forms like grasses and shrubs shooting from within the crevices of these boundaries. [Fig. 3]

This negotiation with boundaries seems to be a consistent preoccupation in several artists' expressions within the subcontinent. Whether material or ideological, political or personal, the need to challenge the existing fault lines between cultures and geographies has remained a sustained question in the practice of South Asian artists. The issues of borders, their occupation and evasion, have deeply impacted the curatorial process of the *Young Subcontinent* project. The ongoing political tension between India and Pakistan restricted us from the inclusion of artists as well as their works from Pakistan. Visiting many of India's neighbouring countries or vice versa are needlessly interrupted by visa and security processes. On the other hand, conflicted zones have also pushed out several artists from practicing within their own lands. The

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case of Afghani artists is particularly severe and evident in their strained legal domicile. These are issues that the project aims to interrogate and intervene. Back in the courtyard of PWD, as the ice melts, Sher Ali's wall begins to dissolve and disintegrate, opening up new possibilities of looking beyond.

### 2. Migration *Osmosis*

My understanding of Nepali artist Mekh Limbu's work 'Invisible Connection II' (YS2016) deepened over my research visit to Kathmandu in 2017, in preparation for the next cycle of *Young Subcontinent* project. Limbu's installation was a collage of more than a hundred light boxes put together using archival photographs, videos, construction tools, personal letters, legal documents that attempted to describe the long-distance relationship between him and his father who has been a migrant worker in Qatar for the last twenty years. The underlying magnitude of this personal narrative dawns only when one encounters the endless, shapeless packages on the conveyor belt while waiting for one's baggage to arrive at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu. Large and small parcels haplessly taped, tied and labelled with addresses "From" and "To" written in bold letters shout the afield native inhabitants who would have otherwise carried these goods to their destination personally. Needless to say, these are things of utility or gifts sent to dependents and loved ones back home from countries primarily in the Gulf. The conveyor belt soon transforms into a conduit of emotions when one thinks of

these moving objects through the lens of Mekh's work. [Fig. 4] Mekh's work strongly foregrounds the issue of international labour migration from Nepal to countries in the Gulf and the Middle East due to insufficient economic opportunities in the politically unstable native land. Back in Kathmandu, long queues of people at currency exchange centres are a common sight. Mekh informs us that as of 2016, everyday almost 1,700 people, most of whom are young, leave Nepal for work to other countries. This drift of people creates severe situations of longing and disconnect with the land and loved ones. For example, in his twenty years in Gulf, Mekh's own father visited his hometown only four times a period over which Nepal's political and social structure underwent major transformations. The detachment that migrants feel is obvious, for the culture and land they once occupied has no longer remained familiar to them. On the one hand, leaving one's land may have once been a compulsion, but has more recently become a conscious choice for many youngsters. A lack of socio-political stability forces natives seeking steadiness within the land to migrate out for economic and personal reasons. Mekh's installation at YS2016 thus became a rich archive representing many such individuals who have lost connection with their native lands due to exigencies of migration.

Saju Kunhan's paintings (YS2016), exhibited within the same room seemed to rather dialogue with Limbu's installation quite cleverly. In his two montage constructions,<sup>3</sup> Saju presented the map of the world and that of South Asia, surrounded by a sea of people of different origins who have migrated and come to culturally shape the subcontinent.

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Using the technique of print-transfer and staining over recycled, centuries old natural wood panels, Saju's works raised questions of cultural insularity, purity, essentialism and nationalism that occupy the socio-political imaginaries across the subcontinent today. If understood as metaphor, "staining" may come to describe the present-day geography of the subcontinent effectively, as one that reflects in our everyday lives within which numerous ways of living have been infused and consolidated.<sup>4</sup> Saju presents the world and its constituent parts as large map-stains that have been shaped by communities from different cultural backgrounds. [Fig. 5] Saju's proposition finds visual evidence in the photographic archive of Biju Ibrahim (YS2017) who visually documented about thirty-eight communities living within a four-kilometer square area of Fort Kochi in Kerala. In his concept note, Biju informs us:

Traders and travelers were not the only classes of people that arrived here [Kochi]. Some of them reached Mattancherry as political refugees. Some fled atrocities committed on them by the by the colonial forces in the name of religion back in their homelands. It was these series of migrations ... that led to the formation of the diverse cosmopolitan society in Mattancherry.<sup>5</sup>

Biju's note indicates how a number of religious, economic and political forces cause migration, but also give rise to a productive, cosmopolitan environment. Living together in close proximity allows inter-communal exchanges, imparting values of tolerance, harmony and brotherhood. In gathering family

portraits of all generations of each surviving community in historic trading port of Kochi, Biju creates an invaluable human document of a depleting past and urbanity that was shaped by, as well as celebrated cosmopolitanism and heterogeneity.

The nature of migrations that characterize the subcontinent today are more exigent than opportune. A strange osmotic process, regulated by layers of insecurities bring cultures into reluctant confrontations. Sri Lankan filmmaker Nadya Bhimani Perera's film *While She Slept* (YS2017) demonstrates this aspect with extreme sensitivity. Perera informs how, "[w]ith the end of the [Civil] war, there's been a substantial rise of Chinese investment in Sri Lanka. Hambanthota, in the South of the island, was seen as a strategic centre and witnessed a sudden influx of Chinese male migrant labour."<sup>6</sup> Against this background, the film shows the subtle transformation of protagonist Pinky, who works at a massage parlour and extends services to Chinese customers. While Pinky tries to make herself up as Chinese to become more desirable to her customers, her act turns into an obsession after she fears becoming redundant after the management hires a Chinese woman. The film portrays how construction of one's identity and personhood is entangled within larger geopolitical forces of migration.

Works from different countries and varying mediums allow us to investigate migration politics within South Asia from diverse standpoints. How does South Asia become the victim to supplying cheap physical labour all across the world while it needs to still build itself? How has the system not accommodated its people within its own work regimes? What

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kinds of identity formations take place within the intertwined forces of geopolitics and migration? What kind of exchange currents are triggered by emerging geopolitical interests across the world? How do we preserve the value in cultural assimilation and diffusion? How do we create capacities to absorb other cultures? Can strategic orchestration of migratory flows within the subcontinent bring political unification within the overall region? Many of these questions are embedded in several artists' works that document new patterns of migration presented over the last two years of the *Young Subcontinent* project. Instead of peaceful settling, these processes often get politicized as issues of human trafficking, border security or refugee crisis over borders between different countries today.

### 3. Myths *Dealing With Modernity/Identity*

Baul singer Mohammad Aruj Ali from Dhaka, Bangladesh, who was an intrinsic part of Reetu Sattar's performance (YS2017) kept repeating a few lines over the four days of the act presented for *Young Subcontinent* 2017. As Reetu quietly manifested an inner geography of "truth" and "being" within her performance space, the outer space (of the venue) resonated the following words sung loud and bold by Aruj Ali:

*Apnare apni chini ne  
Din Doner Por Jar Nam Odhor  
Tare chinbo kamone?*

I do not know myself  
the one beyond day and night, whose name is  
unseizable,  
how would I know Him?<sup>7</sup>

Reetu's work titled 'Isn't it time you let me go?' raised the question of identity and selfhood by enacting this traditional Baul song. In her explanation, she asserts that Baul songs are not simply music in the manner they are consumed today, but philosophical discourses in themselves. Many Baul songs are a confluence of thoughts from Hindu, Vaishnav, Islamic, Sufi and Buddhist ideologies that informed each other over the entire Indian subcontinent. The above verse is one of the teachings from the few surviving, orally passed on, poems of Lalon fakir, an 18th century wandering mystic considered one of the greatest forerunners and exponents of the Baul tradition, which itself dates back to the 15th century. The drifting groups of Bauls preached ideas of universal brotherhood, humanism and oneness within all religions, allowing people to listen to the call of "divinity," which must not simply be understood here as something larger than life, but as a heightened form of being which untangles the method of connecting with the outside world. Several such oral instructions have been woven within music infusing ethical and moral codes of responsibility towards fellow humans and the environment, through what eventually became everyday discourse over the landscape of South Asia.

Umesh P K's photorealistic rendering of a primordial forest fire in his work 'Let there be fire' (YS2017) seeks to expand the

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above notion of the self into the environment one inhabits. This idea resonates with the ancestral understanding of the constituents that make up the world as a single unit or system. While the modern European conception of the world we occupy is based on categorical separation between man and nature, Umesh's work attempts to re-attune this understanding to the mythic wisdom of thinking of the world through integration rather than differentiation. Many religious teachings and practices within the subcontinent were instituted to regulate people's relationships and attitudes to their immediate, natural surroundings. As the original intent of these practices got buried over the process of ritualization, they became mere symbolic and superstitious in the eyes of the British colonizers who came with their own scientific understanding of nature. Thus, indigenous practices originally meant to preserve such ecosystems came to be viewed with suspicion and were completely abolished, eventually resulting in disharmony. Umesh's painting attempts to evoke mythical memories of the origin of life in his depiction of an egg-shaped void caused due to an expanding forest-fire. In doing so, it demonstrates the tension between man and nature, religion and science as well as myth and modernity. [**Fig. 6**]

The presence of mythic imagery is most evident and pronounced in the works of Bhutani artists Yeshi Peldhen (YS2017) as well as Twinz, twin brothers Tashi Dendup and Ugyen Samdrup (YS2017). While Yeshi invokes the structure of hell using traditional Bhutanese imagery, Tashi and Ugyen present guardian deities who are believed to be protectors of the land they live in, often depicted as forms of Buddha wearing heavy masks and layered armoured

clothings. The figures were drawn in order to ward of evil spirits and at the same time, remind people to be respectful of their immediate surroundings. The persistence of traditional values in Bhutanese artworks speaks of their reverence towards nature and environment. The celebration of the abundance and richness of biodiversity in Bhutan as a result of these teachings is demonstrated in the delicate paintings of Zimbiri (YS2017) as she draws the real and mythical animal figures using earth paint on Bhutanese “rhay-shing” cloth strung on wood. [Fig. 7]

Shrimanti Saha from Baroda, India (YS2016) harnesses mythological and historical references in her work in order to interrogate and explore the “present as a consequence of the past.”<sup>8</sup> Her work was presented as fragments of collaged drawings that depicted allegories from history mingled with personal experiences. Her drawings articulate the strangeness and uncanniness of the historical encounter of myth and modernity within the subcontinent, and their co-existence in our society even today. As an artist, Shrimanti is deeply fascinated with “nonsense literature,” which she employs in simultaneously owning and disregarding stories from different contexts and time periods. Shrimanti demonstrates beautifully, the possibility of modern appropriation of myths, and further interposes it with historical facts, thus triggering a productive dialogue in raising questions of identity and exploitation that lie within the collective memory of the Orient and the West. [Fig. 8]

Historical migratory flows have helped coalesce much belief and the notion of truth for a large part of the South Asian population. For many years, Oriental systems of thinking

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and practicing life have been overlooked and disregarded as unscientific or irrational. I do not intend to pose the Orient in opposition to the West. Rather, I would like to propose that scientific thought must be considered in continuum to the “mythical” ways of thinking, for these systems have regulated the historical relationship of humans and their environment far longer than the modern epoch. Several traditional practices of the South Asian Subcontinent have been fundamentally reoriented in the wake of theories of European Enlightenment. How do we find ways of engaging with our traditional knowledge systems that were nurtured and consolidated over years of scholarship? How can we reclaim these from the past and mobilize within our present? How do we own our own beliefs and make them relevant for the contemporary world? The thrust of these inquiries is not nostalgic, for these may lead to a frantic urge to conserve, protect and create boundaries around our culture and make it insular or static. Rather, we need to ask these questions with the hope of finding alternatives to prevailing hegemonic modes of thought. The opportunity at hand for the South Asian subcontinent is the already existing common cultural ground that comes to be easily revealed in the shared legends, customs, folklores, food habits and architecture across its entire geography. Mythifying the present may perhaps also be a way of reconciling difficult historical events that could help ameliorate the asymmetries of the past towards reimagining a new future.

#### 4. Politics

##### *Talking to Power*

The political landscape of South Asia has largely remained turbulent over the last seven decades after the end of British rule. Different countries within the ensemble operate through different forms of political governance. It is such unsettled political mood within which the life of people here unfolds. The everyday insecurity of people related to accessing basic resources and infrastructure largely indexes the weakness and failure of state institutions in instilling a sense of assurance and confidence within the public. The political restiveness of Nepal over the last decade, where the country has transitioned from monarchy to democracy to a republic has created an upheaval in the present everyday of the place. For many years, Nepal continued to remain under monarchy that was understood as one of the key problems in the development of Nepal and coming to terms with the modern world. Feudal practices of monarchy continued to allow exploitation, creating a situation where a medieval Nepal lived in the modern world. Around 2005-07, the country underwent a political transformation through people's movements where already existing major political parties come together to form the new Republic of Nepal and join together for election. Now, there is a demand for a new constitution of the country that shall include the rights of all kinds of people who live in Nepal. Situating his work in the background of this flux, Kabi Raj Lama (YS2016) prefaces how, "[s]ince 1990s, Nepal has seen

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countless coalition governments fight over the nation's direction. Change in political office has been so often that most Nepalis are unable recall all Prime Ministers of the past two decades.”<sup>9</sup> In his work ‘Irritating Machine’ Kabi Raj presented a series of woodcut portraits of thirteen Nepali politicians who have held office of the Prime Minister over the past 25 years. The works were presented as lightboxes carrying individual prints in a dark space – almost like propaganda images. Each box further carried a vocal clip that activated as the viewer approached closer to the images. These voice clips, essentially a collection of political speeches delivered by the respective politicians during the elections create a cacophony of promises which were never delivered to the public. The artist brings out a strong critique of the political system that had hollowed out internally creating only noise resulting into hopelessness and frustration. [Fig. 9]

On the other hand, Sheelasha Rajbhandari (YS2017) from Kathmandu, brought out the challenges Nepal faces as a landlocked country between the two emerging economic superpowers of India and China, in her work ‘Treaty of Peace and Friendship – This is What Friends are for’. While Nepal has maintained cordial relationships with India, reflected in the friendship treaties signed during 1950s<sup>10</sup>, the affairs became strained after India decided to block basic supplies of fuel and medicine post the earthquake of 2015, fearing Nepal's alleged leveraging of India-China rivalry. Sheelasha traces the recent political history as follows:

Nepal went ahead to sign the Transit and Trade Treaty with China in 2016. China further opened combined transport service (rail and road) to Nepal which would connect Lanzhou, the capital city of northwestern China's Gansu province to Kathmandu. In 2017, Nepal officially became part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also referred to as the Silk Road Economic Belt, despite India's reluctance to join it.<sup>11</sup>

Sheelasha's work traces the maps of Delhi-Kathmandu-Lhasa in the manner of a Lichhavi dynasty penny on a coin-disc, reminding us that Nepal was an important ancient centre of trans-Himalayan trade. Visually stitching these maps together is a railway track that harks at the speculation of a territorial connection between India, Nepal, China, and Tibet. However, what runs over this track in Sheelasha's installation is a winged horse with two heads on opposite sides that gets pulled between the powers on either sides but is unable to go anywhere. The predicament of power and its geopolitical enmeshment is a bold attempt in Sheelasha's installation. [Fig. 10]

Afghani artist Zainab Haidary (YS2016) showed her documentary *Maybe Politicians*, filmed in Kabul during 2015, framed in the background of the polarization between nationality and religion maps the expectations and hopes of people from their politicians in Afghanistan. The film finds its subjects expressing discontent over the country's insufficient attempts of bringing economic stability at the cost of human security over its internal conflicts. The civil wars have been the central subject in several works of artists from Sri Lanka over

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

the last two years. Charcoal drawings of war widows on cloth by Susiman Nirmalavasan (YS2016), the struggle for survival and precariousness of people's lives in the war zone during the Eelam war meticulously drawn on paper by artist Vijitharan Mariya Thevathas or the annals of wartime photographs of the Sri Lankan Civil war by Sounthiyas Amarathaas - all bring out the loss and pain of human life due to the political bitterness between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. The lives of all the above artists have been personally affected by such events of political distress. [Fig. 11-13]

In his work 'The Birth of a Nation series,' artist J D Rao Tammineni from Visakhapatnam, India (YS2017) presents large- woodcuts, parodying the rise of right-wing politics in India after the appointment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has often appropriated the symbolic significance of Gandhi's imagery in his political propaganda. Using the motifs of the tiger, cow and the peacock juxtaposed with the figure of Mahatma Gandhi, Tammineni's work polemicizes the idea of nation-building in the contemporary political landscape of India. Gandhi, the artist believes, was someone who could hold the nation together after independence. His ideas of non-violence seem as valid in the 21st century, as we are faced by sectarian violence. In his conscious choice of the animal figures that undoubtedly gesture at specific events of political violence aimed towards "saffronization" of Indian politics during the tenure of the current Prime Minister, Tammineni brings out the pitfalls that lay in the act of building a democratic, liberal nation. [Fig. 14]

Opening up through Tammineni's humorous yet powerful

imagery, senior journalist Amrith Lal explains how “using” Gandhi, we come to speak to the world in a certain rhetoric of hope and peace. Mr. Lal further recalls Rammanohar Lohia who wrote of three kinds of appropriation of Gandhi in our times. The first is the “Heretic Gandhi” that is often used to in order the challenge the system or demonstrate an “anti-State” stance. “This was a radical Gandhi, deeply critical of the nation-state, capitalism and western modernity, spiritual while eschewing religious institutions, who has survived the onslaught of time and state appropriation.”<sup>12</sup>, Lal explains. The second is what he calls the “Governmental Gandhi,” an image portraying the use of khadi cloth spun on hand operated mechanical spinning yarn imbuing the spirit of patriotism, peace and love for one’s land. The third is the “Priestly Gandhi” whose image is often invoked during the times of disturbing or challenging presence of internal or external insecurity. While Mr. Lal leaves us with the question of what is to be retrieved of Lohia today, he also indicates that when one does not have the means to talk to the big, powerful people, the only way to talk to them is through humour and satire. Its artful use may completely undermine the political process and bring about some subtlety towards initiating a conversation. Subtleties of political debate can only be conducted and mediated through art, suggested Mr. Lal.

Several artists, including Instagrammer and photographer Abdul Halik Azeez (YS2016) from Colombo, Sri Lanka, graphic novelist Sajad Malik (YS2017) from Srinagar, India, and photographer Aditi Sharma (YS2017) from Bhopal, India and photographer Ahmed Rasel (YS2017) from Dhaka,

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Bangladesh, have used their art forms to address socio-political issues within their respective regions, documenting the stories and of people living in contested environments overlooked by the state. It is clear that *Young Subcontinent* has remained an important platform for staging dissent. Sangeeta Thapa, founder and director of the Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu, and one of the important cultural ambassadors of Nepal has articulated such artistic engagements towards political activism as “artivism”. Artistic processes may pave the way to initiating discussion outside the frame of political diplomacy. While artists may not be able to offer solutions to such issues, their stories and documentation certainly help in articulating the political predicaments that grip the South Asian subcontinent in the contemporary moment. [Fig. 15]

### 5. Art *Challenges and Opportunities*

Artist Latifa Zafar Attaii (YS2017) recalls her days of growing up in conflict-stricken Afghanistan, which compelled her family to migrate to Quetta in Pakistan. Her childhood was spent in the refugee town of Hazara where her family’s existence was restricted to a few streets and houses. While in Pakistan, her world was limited between her home and school. As her father left for Iran for work, she spent half her time weaving carpets with her sister and mother earning small amounts of money for everyday survival. “I don’t remember much from those days, like the fun days ... I never had them,” she says. When she went to art school in Lahore, she decided

to base her final-year project on her own personal experiences and her struggle for identity. However, her instructors felt that the subject was too conventional for a final year project, and her mentor suggested that she instead choose from a hobby, TV shows that she was watching, or books she was reading. However, Latifa did not have a conventional childhood; she had never watched TV, or read stories through which she could imagine art. Since she had nothing else to talk about, she decided to work on the question of why she did not have a childhood like other kids in her class. The question of discrimination and identity became the central issue that she came to deal with in her work.

Listening to this anecdote is disturbing, and it acutely hints at how South Asia may not be a comfortable place to practice art. Several artists have to move away from their place of origin to be able to study and practice art. Further, curator Riyas Komu remarks that a majority of art students in the subcontinent give up producing art due to lack of adequate infrastructure. In a limited discursive space, with little encouragement from native veteran artists or the state, younger artists from Bangladesh seem to prefer moving out to other countries where their work is appreciated and where it finds more support.<sup>13</sup> In Kathmandu, the Arts Department at the University is considering removing the sculpture program completely from 2018 since there were only two enrollments in the preceding year. This would mean the extinction of an art making technique that has been practiced in Nepal since first century AD. Artists from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh frequent

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Indian universities for post-graduation education in the arts. On the other hand, realistically speaking, the state-run art institutions in India have not managed to keep themselves up-to-date with either intellectual or infrastructural facilities. Marked by a series of incongruities of inadequate infrastructure, lack of discursive environment, feeble encouragement and limited financial support, artists wade through myriad challenges in order to find their voice and create art in much part of the subcontinent. Over one of the *Young Subcontinent* symposium discussions, noted film critic, filmmaker and curator Dr. C S Venkiteshwaran, expressed how the experience of looking at the kind of art being produced in different countries of the subcontinent living in so much conflict is extremely humbling. What does it mean to produce art in the socially, politically and culturally incongruous region of South Asia today? The incongruity here is not merely a colonial inheritance, but further widened due to the rise of globalization forces in the contemporary times. What could be the role of art in addressing such asymmetry? How can art mediate the crisis that emerges from a country's urge to expand its economic might in its surrounding areas? How can we utilize shared memory in order to strengthen historical ties, or resist emerging authoritarianism within the subcontinent? Such inquires hint to the potential dimensions and directions that artworks and artists can take respectively in the near future. It is imperative for many artists practicing in the region to take up the roles of social commentators or archivists of their times. Art has the potential to record difficult political histories into forms that critically and continually address the

decisions of the future. [Fig. 16,17]

It is here that the *Young Subcontinent* project aims to intervene into the cultural sphere of the South Asian region. Serendipity Arts Festival supports artists by means of extending production and travel grants and offering them a platform to exhibit their work to a wide range of audience in India. Since its inception, the initiative has supported more than forty artists from six different countries who shared space and time for two weeks of the festival in Goa, India. This has given them an opportunity to position themselves within the broader art scene, exchange notes and ideas with each other, build new networks and dialogue with international experts and cultural practitioners. Over the last two years, several *Young Subcontinent* artists have become recipients of prominent fellowships across the globe and have been invited exhibit their works at important cultural institutions of the world. For example, photographer Kishor Kayastha's film *The Shifting Valley* (YS2016) on Nepal's 2015 earthquake, first shown at the Festival in 2016 was procured by National Geographic last year; Kabi Raj Lama (YS2016) from Nepal was awarded the arts fellowship by the Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute at the Harvard University for 2018, Sri Lankan artist P. Pushpakanthan has been selected to exhibit his work at the Cornell University in 2018, and so on. Many artists have collaborated across their countries to conduct art workshops for native communities. These instances indicate the preliminary success of the curatorial endeavour of *Young Subcontinent*. Over the long-term trajectory of this project, Riyas Komu envisions building effective arts infrastructure for the entire

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South Asian region through the patronage and support of Serendipity Arts Foundation in addition to establishing a network of cultural practitioners and artists who may forge stronger ties between its different nations. *Young Subcontinent* believes in establishing a mechanism of patronage that can inculcate confidence within a community of artists and intellectuals who are serious about issues and challenges that the present beholds, yet whose artistic futures are uncertain. From excavations to archiving and exhibiting, our times call for a new phase of intense thought and action. *Young Subcontinent* ought to be that platform which will nurture and nourish the new expression in addressing and instrumentalizing the representational future of South Asia. [**Fig. 18**]



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### Notes

1. I shall use the abbreviation 'YS' for *Young Subcontinent* followed by the year in order to identify the participating artists from the distinct cycles of the curatorial project
2. Teja Gavankar's concept note for the project 'Disturbed Corner' submitted for YS2016
3. Saju's works were titled "History Always Repeats" and "United We Stand, Divided we Rule"
4. Refer catalogue essay "Stained Geographies" by Anuj Daga on Saju Kunhan's first solo show at Tarq Art Gallery, Mumbai, that opened in November 2017.
5. Biju Ibrahim's concept note for his project 'Transcendence' presented at *Young Subcontinent* Project in Goa, 2017
6. Extracted from the abstract of the film *While She Slept* by Nadya Perera.
7. English Translation of the Bengali verse of Lalon Fakir's poem by Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya
8. Shrimanti Saha's concept note for her work 'The Land and the Lore' presented at YS2016.
9. Refer to concept note of Kabi Raj Lama, Nepal for his work 'Irritating Machine'
10. Several treaties were signed between India and Nepal in 1950 – including Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship and Treaty of Trade and Commerce that aligned Nepal politically and economically to India.

11. Refer to the concept note of Sheelasha Rajbhandari's concept note for her work 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship – This is What Friends are for'
12. 'Rammanohar Lohia: In his times and in ours' by Amrith Lal. October 12, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/rammanohar-lohia-death-anniversary-quit-india-movement-go-a-liberation-lohia-in-his-times-and-in-ours-4885881/> as accessed on 22nd March 2018
13. These observations have been summarized over discussion with industrialist and art patron Rajeeb Samdani during our research trip to Dhaka in 2017. The detailed report can be accessed at <http://youngsubcontinent.blogspot.in/2017/09/research-trip-to-dhaka-bangladesh-2017.html>



*Fig. 1*



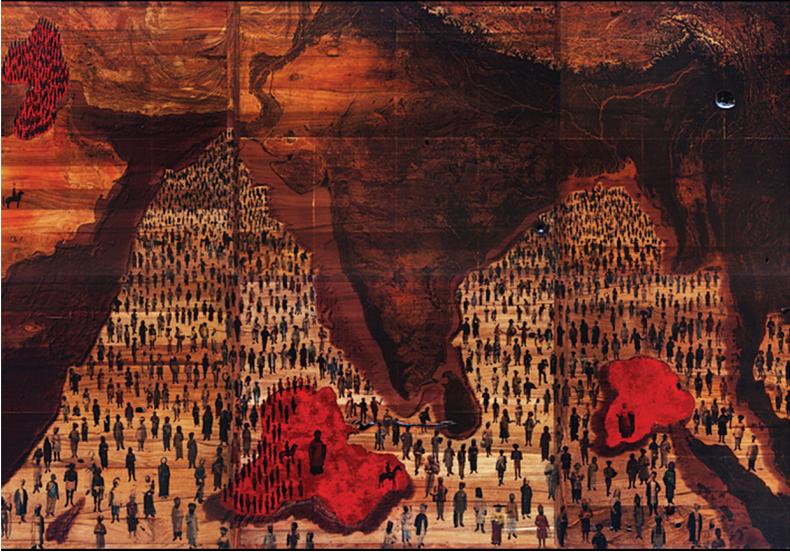
*Fig. 2*



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

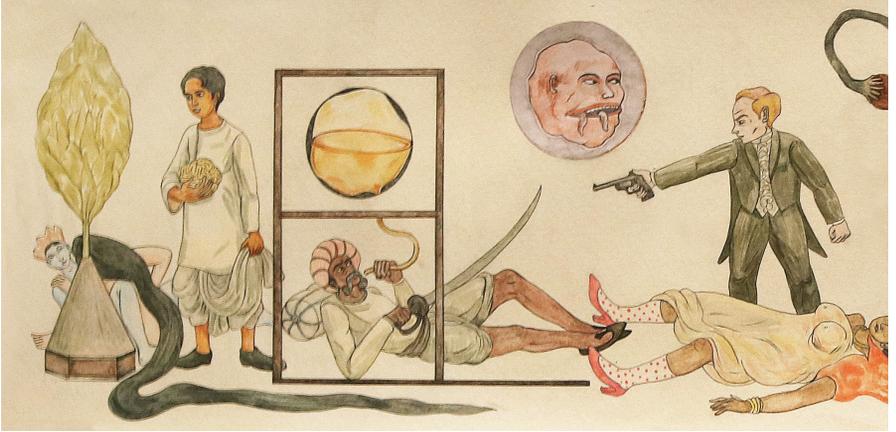


*Fig. 5*



*Fig. 6*





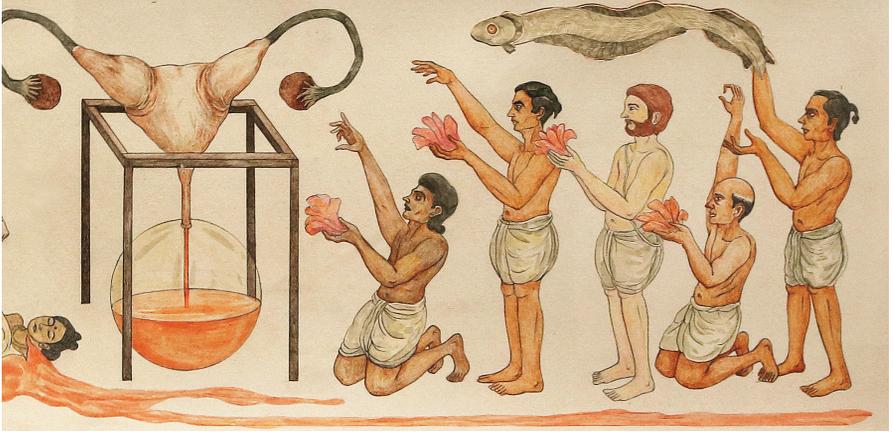


Fig. 8











Fig.12



Fig.13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17





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### Captions

*Page 50*

*Latifa Zafar Attai*

'Thousand Individuals'

1.5" x 2" MDF photo-blocks set in custom made box

Thread on digital print

*Fig 1*

*Sher Ali*

The Embodiment of Immateriality

8' x 16' x 16"

Ice cube wall

Installation

Image courtesy Anuj Daga

*Fig 2*

*Teja Gavankar*

Disturbed Corner

Installation

Bricks, cement and other construction material

Image courtesy Teja Gavankar

*Fig 3*

*Jasmine Nilani*

Traces

3' x 2'

Rotring pen on acid-free paper

Drawings

Image courtesy Anuj Daga

*Fig 4*

Invisible Connection II

Installation (photographs, light box, video, construction tools, printed passport, mirror box)

Various

Image courtesy Abdul Halik Aziz

**Fig 5**

**Saju Kunhan**

United We Stand Divided We Rule, 2016

9' x 5' (6 panels)

Mixed medium on wood

Image courtesy Saju Kunhan

**Fig 6**

**Umesh PK**

Attention is the Fire

60" x 96"

Oil on Canvas

Image courtesy Umesh PK

**Fig 7**

**Yeshi Pelden**

The Hell Wheel of Life

5' x 4'

Stone colour on canvas

Image courtesy Biju Ibrahim

**Fig 8**

**Shrimanti Saha**

The Land and the Lore

Variable (within 8 feet approx.) installation of 12 pieces

Graphite, pencil colour, water colour, casein, collage on paper and wood

Image courtesy Shrimanti Saha

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### *Fig 9*

#### ***Kabi Raj Lama***

The Irritating Machine

76 cm X 61 cm, 13 pcs

Woodcut print on paper, sensor with audio and lights (light box)

Image courtesy Kabi Raj Lama

### *Fig 10*

#### ***Sheelsha Rajbhandari***

Treaty of Peace and Friendship: This is what Friends Are For

Installation

### *Fig 11*

#### ***Susiman Nirmalavasan***

White Curtain and Women (installation art)

60" x 96" cloth (12 pieces) & 21" x 60" Burnt wood

Charcoal, acrylic on hand loom cotton cloths and burnt wood

Image courtesy Abdul Halik Aziz

### *Fig 12*

#### ***Vijatharan Marya Thevathas***

Last Moments

39.3" x 28.3"

Drawings on archival paper

Image courtesy Anuj Daga

### *Fig 13*

#### ***Sounthiyas Amarathaas***

Fire zone of Srilanka : Tears of Tamils

16" x 20"

Photographs on archival paper

Image courtesy Sounthiyas Amarathaas

**Fig 14**

**JD Rao Tammineni**

The Birth Of A Nation Series

3' x 4'

Woodcut print on paper

**Fig 15**

**Aditi Shankar Sharma**

Transit

16" x 24"

Photograph on archival paper

Wall drawing, A2 portfolio

**Fig 16**

***Young Subcontinent Artist presentations to the invited scholars and cultural practitioners, 2017.***

Image courtesy Anuj Daga

**Fig 17**

**Sher Ali**

Dissolved Ice cube wall in the PWD courtyard, Panjim, Goa

Installation

**Fig 18**

T Sanaathanan (Colombo), Dr. C S Venkiteshwaran (Trivandrum), Omaid Sharifi (Kabul), Amrith Lal (Delhi), Riyas Komu (Mumbai) and Sangeeta Thapa (Kathmandu) discuss on 'Art as a Catalyst for Change', Adil Shah Palace, Goa, 2017.

Image courtesy Anuj Daga

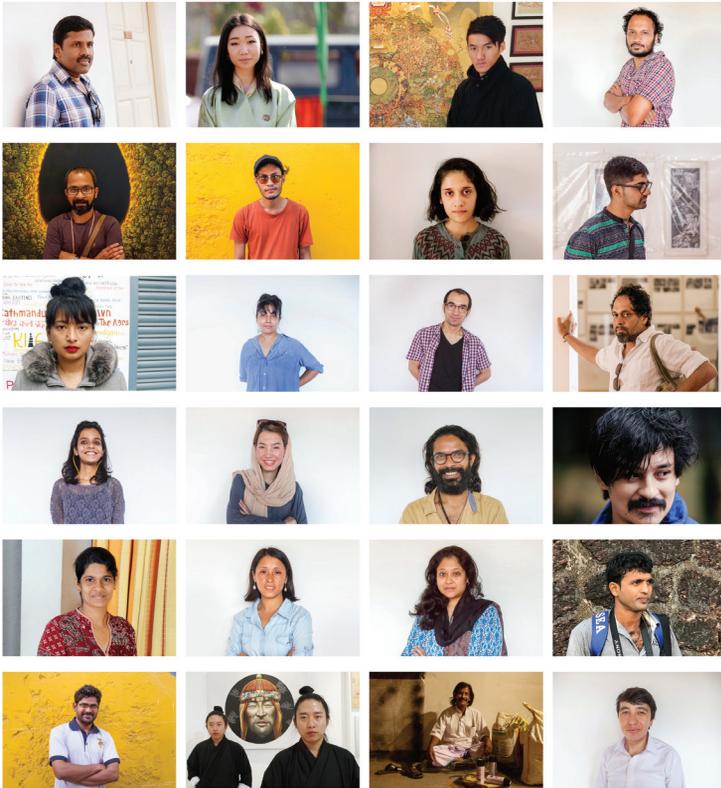
## Biographies

**Anuj Daga** graduated as an architect from Mumbai University (2008) and went on pursue his interests in History & Theory of Architecture as well as design research through the interdisciplinary Master of Environmental Design program at Yale School of Architecture, USA (2014). His practice is informed by his diverse engagements in fields of design, research and academia that have resulted into numerous roles of writer, critic, commentator, theorist or interlocutor in the cultural field. Anuj has worked with several cultural institutions as well as research & artist organizations including Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai, Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT) - Mumbai, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) - New York and Critical Art & Media Practices (CAMP) - Mumbai in different capacities. He has keen interest in studying the visual culture in art & architecture and the way different visual media tie into the expression of contemporary built environment. He has been a consulting architect & strategist at the Godrej Innovation Centre, Mumbai. He is the Curatorial Assistant to Riyas Komu for the visual arts project “Young Subcontinent” since first organized by Serendipity Arts Trust in Goa in 2016. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor at the School of Environment & Architecture, Mumbai.

**Riyas Komu** is the co-founder and secretary of the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF), and a multi-media artist and activist working towards encouraging art education and developing art infrastructure in India. His critically acclaimed political works have been exhibited extensively in India and abroad, which include several key works that focus specially on the political and cultural history of Kerala. Riyas, who shuttles between Kerala and Mumbai, was one of two artists from India to be selected by curator Robert Storr for the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 and he represented the Iranian Pavilion at Venice Biennale in 2015.

He is currently a director of programmes for KBF, and also develops projects focusing on art education in India.

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SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL

YOUNG SUBCONTINENT 2017

2017 Artists

**Aditi Sharma**

**Bhopal, India (b. 1990)**

Aditi Sharma (b.1990) grew up in Madhya Pradesh, India. She is intrigued by the art of narration with photography and its evasive nature. She finished her Masters in Photography from the National Institute of Design, Gujarat, India in 2017. At present, she is based in New Delhi.

**Ahmed Rasel**

**Dhaka, Bangladesh (b. 1988)**

Ahmed Rasel (b.1988, Barishal) is a faculty member of the Dhaka-based photography institute, Counter Foto. He earned a Masters in Bengali Literature from the University of Dhaka (2013) with the ambition of becoming a poet, before realizing that photography could better blend his poetic feelings with his inner vision, memory, and personal history. His work has been published in *Trouw*, *Private* magazine, *F-stop* magazine, *Clove* magazine, and *The Daily Independent*, among others, and has exhibited in photo festivals in Bangladesh and India. He is one of the finalists for the Samdani Foundation Art Award 2018.

**Biju Ibrahim C P**

**Kerala, India (b.1982)**

Biju Ibrahim is a self-taught photographer specializing in architectural photography with an interest in documenting local cultures and traditions. From the Himalayas in the north

## **PROJECTS / PROCESSES**

to Thiruvannamalai in the south, he has traveled extensively across the country reflecting on architectural marvels while unearthing traditional roots of diverse locale through photography and film. He has worked as Assistant Director and Assistant Screenwriter for award-winning Malayalam feature films and is a member of the Film Employees Federation of Kerala (FEFKA).

### **Jagadeesh Rao Tammineni**

#### **Andhra Pradesh, India (b. 1988)**

J D Rao Tammineni pursued his BFA in printmaking from Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam. He went on to his MVA in printmaking from M S University, Baroda. Tammineni has been teaching at the Govt. Of National Capital Territory of Delhi College of Art as guest faculty and assistant professor in the Print Making Department in 2016-17. He has been working at the Department of Fine Arts, Andhra University as a teaching assistant since 2017. Jagadeesh has participated in a number of shows, camps, and residencies including ‘The Emergency Canvas II’ at the Indian Art Museum in Korea (2013), ‘Between the Lines’ group show NGMA Bangalore and Mumbai (2013), 57th Lalit Kala Akademi National Exhibition at Lucknow (2016), and many more.

### **Jasmine Nilani Joseph**

#### **Vavuniya, Srilanka (b. 1990)**

Jasmine Nilani was born in Jaffna and studied at the University of Jaffna. After her graduation, she worked as a temporary lecturer at the University. Jasmine has been exploring

drawing in pen and ink over a few years now and she finds pleasure in narrating stories through depiction of objects and architectural elements. Her first ambitious exhibition 'Self Portrait' was held in 2017 at the Saskia Fernando Art Gallery, Colombo. Her subsequent works have been shown at the Human Rights Arts Festival 2017 at JDA Pereira art gallery, as well as at the Dhaka Art Summit in 2018.

**Karan Shrestha**

**Kathmandu/Mumbai, Nepal/India (b. 1985)**

Karan Shrestha's practice incorporates drawings, sculpture, photography, film, and video. His work seeks to blur opposites that build and define our individual and collective identities, presenting them as flawed, and effectively human. In short films and videos such as *Abarohan* (2013), *let's build a home mother* (2015), *padkincha barood* (2016), and the photo-essay "Waiting for Nepal" (2011 – 2012), he investigates parallels between the political climate and social fabric of the new Nepal that was declared a secular, federal republic in 2007. In 'My friends I lost to imagination' (2012 – 2015) - a suite of twenty ink drawings, he references melancholia and how in fantasy, emotions morph into landscapes.

**Kiran Maharjan**

**Kathmandu, Nepal (b. 1990)**

Kiran Maharjan (H11235) is a street artist whose works revolves around the idea of contrast and contradiction. Maharjan completed his BFA from Kathmandu University Centre for Art and Design in 2014. His work can be seen in the streets of Nepal

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and also in Denmark and Finland. He was one of the exhibiting artists for the Kathmandu Triennale in 2017.

### **Latifa Zafar Attai**

#### **Kabul, Afghanistan (b. 1994)**

Born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, Latifa Migrated to Quetta, Pakistan, in 1999, and completed her BFA from Beaconhouse National University of Lahore. She has participated in several collective exhibitions in Pakistan, Iran, Dubai, and Afghanistan.

### **Mariyathevathas Vijitharan**

#### **Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka (b. 1985)**

Mariyathevathas Vijitharan graduated with a BFA from the University of Jaffna in 2014. His works deal with the experience of civilians of the Vanni in the north of Sri Lanka during and post war. His first exhibition was in 2013, for a collaborative project of Asia Art Archive and Raking Leaves. In 2015, he displayed his works in a group show called *Seven Conversations* at the Saskia Fernando gallery. He also participated in the Colombo Art Biennale in 2016, and in a group show at Aicon Gallery in New York in 2017.

### **Nadya Bhimani Perera**

#### **Colombo, Srilanka (b. 1981)**

Nadya Perera is an independent researcher and film maker from Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 2008, Nadya got the opportunity to work as assistant and translator to Italian director Uberto Pasolini on his directorial debut *Machan*, shot in Sri Lanka and Germany. Her documentary film *4th of February* (2014) focuses

on women who left Sri Lankan shores to work as housemaids in the Middle East, and was nominated for the Sunila Abesekera Human Rights Award at the Agenda 14 Short Film Festival, 2014, Sri Lanka. The film was also screened at festivals in France, USA and India.

**Sajad Malik**

**Srinagar, India (b. 1987)**

Sajad studied at the Institute of Music and Fine Arts in Srinagar and currently works as Daily Editorial Cartoonist of the *Greater Kashmir Newspaper* and its Urdu-edition *Uzma*. He has designed the cover for *Combat Law*, an international human rights magazine, and has worked as a cartoonist- animator and designer for Doordarshan in Kashmir and *Al-Safa* newspaper. In 2008, Sajad participated in the South Asian Cartoon Congress organized by *Himal Southasian* magazine in Kathmandu. His film *Kashmir in Black and White* showed at a national students' film festival organized by Anhad, an NGO in Gujarat and Kashmir. His work was also exhibited at the Zemex Museum. Publications include *Identity Card*, a non-fictional graphic novel and *Snowmen and Kalashnikovs: An anthology of dispatches from Kashmir*. Currently under publication is *Terrorism of Peace*, a non-fictional graphic novel.

**Shahnaz Zarin Sattar**

**Dhaka, Bangladesh (b. 1981)**

Reetu Sattar is a Dhaka-based theatre actor, director and performance artist working with performativity, video, text and objects. Her time-based work explores presence and

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absence, memory, loss, resilience and the ephemerality of existence. She is interested in the similarities, overlaps and clashes of forms in theatre and performance art and the relationship between the body and ego. Sattar plays with the traditional tropes of theatre through the voice, conversations, sound, props, costume and sculptural elements.

### **Sheelasha Rajbhandari**

#### **Kathmandu, Nepal (b. 1988)**

Sheelasha Rajbhandari is an interdisciplinary artist based in Kathmandu. She completed her MFA in sculpture from Tribhuvan University's Center Department of Fine Arts in 2014 after receiving her BFA from Kathmandu University's Center for Art and Design in 2010. Her mixed media installations explore the parallel—yet, often contradictory—existence of traditional beliefs and historic ideas with contemporary events and evolving lifestyles. Rajbhandari is a co-founder of and the sole woman artist in the artist collective, Artree Nepal, established in 2013. She worked as an instructor of Sculpture at Lalit Kala Campus, Tribhuvan University from 2012 to 2014. Rajbhandari was artistic director of 12 Baishakh, Post Earthquake Community Art Project 2015.

### **Sher Ali Hussaini**

#### **Kabul, Afghanistan (b. 1983)**

Sher Ali attended Art High School of Kabul in 1997-2003. Between 2009-13, he completed his BFA at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan on a South Asia Foundation scholarship. His works, spanning performance,

poetry, and installation, have been exhibited in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sweden, Australia, Hong Kong, and Iran.

**Shreya Shukla**

**Baroda, India (b. 1993)**

Shreya is currently a final-year master's student at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M S University, Baroda. Her works attempt to document and archive herself through self-portraiture. She has participated in different exhibitions in India and has been the recipient of the Best Artist Award at the Students' Biennale 2016 in Kochi.

**Sounthiyas Amarathaas**

**Srilanka (b. 1976)**

Sounthiyas Amarathaas is Sri Lankan Tamil. He is a visual artist with an interest in drawing and painting. Amarathaas has been an independent journalist during the civil war, and was a lecturer on photo journalism. He has published a book of poetry and a photobook; many of his war photographs have been published in various magazines. His solo photo exhibition was called *Living Moments*. He has also worked on many films and now in independent film ventures. He currently lives in Switzerland.

**Sunita Maharjan**

**Kathmandu, Nepal (b. 1986)**

Sunita Maharjan is a visual artist and art educator. She is one of the founder members of Srijanalaya, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to art and education, and Co-Founder of Drawing Room KTM, an artist-run studio and learning space

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in Kathmandu. She has participated in several exhibitions, workshops, and residencies, including the Kathmandu Triennale 2017, the first and second Kathmandu International Art Festival (2009; 2012), *Locus of Continuity* (2009) organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery in Hotel Annapurna, and *Structural Space* (2010) in the Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Center. She holds a BFA in Painting from Kathmandu University Center for Art and Design and an MFA from Tribhuvan University.

### **Tashi Dendup & Ugyen Samdrup**

#### **Thimphu, Bhutan (b. 1988)**

Thimphu-based contemporary artists Twinz are the twin brothers Tashi Dendup and Ugyen Samdrup, who completed their BFAs from Lovely Professional University in Jalandhar, India. Twinz make contemporary, realistic portraits and share similar techniques. Their solo exhibition *Invoking Identities* at Bikaner House in New Delhi, 2018, was inspired by spiritualism, the teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism, and shamanism, which connects humans to nature and all creations.

### **Umesh P K**

#### **Calicut, India (b. 1984)**

Born and brought up in Kerala, Umesh P K studied painting from College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum, in 2006, and completed a master's from Central University of Hyderabad in 2008. Umesh PK draws his artistic imageries from a world of mythopoeia—his effort is in creating visual works that transcend the limits of reason and structures of language allow

viewers to find their own reality within his work. His first solo show *Excavated Memories* was exhibited at Contemplate Art Gallery in Coimbatore in 2015.

**Yeshi Pelden**

**Thimphu, Bhutan (b. 1991)**

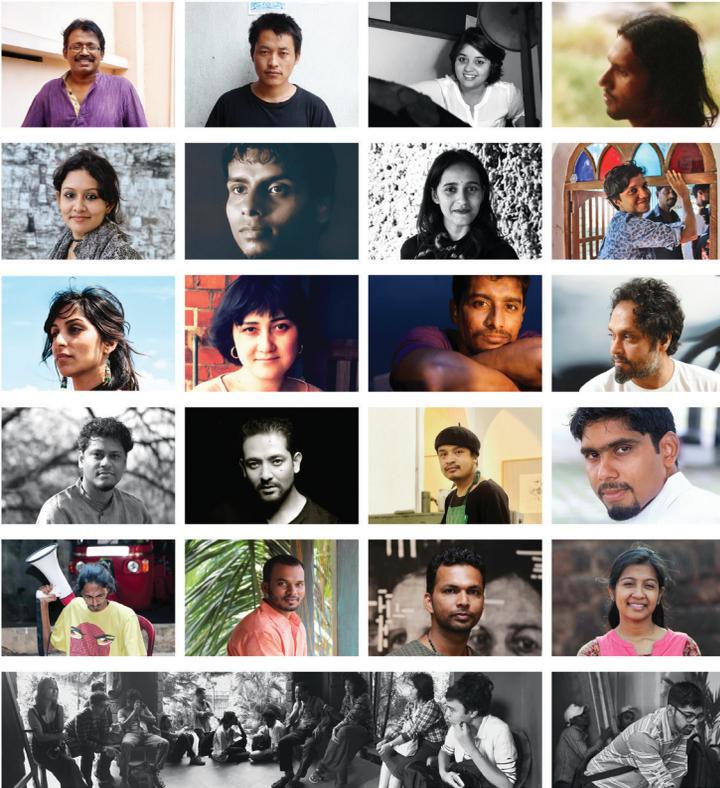
Yeshi Peldhen studied painting from the National Institute for Zorig-Chuksum (the painting school) in Thimphu. He is interested in studying the modes in which drawing and painting come together. During his six years at the National Institute for Zorig-Chuksum, he has served in various capacities, including as an institute councilor during his final year. In 2017, Yeshi exhibited work at the Nehru-Wangchuck Culture Centre, Indian Embassy.

**Zimbiri**

**Thimphu, Bhutan (b. 1991)**

Zimbiri, born and raised in Bhutan, finished her undergrad from Wheaton College, MA, with a double major in Economics and Fine Arts. She is currently working as the marketing director for Zimdra foods Ltd. and working on her art as well. Her first exhibition, *Faces*, was the first female solo exhibition in Bhutan. *Found Icons*, her second solo exhibition, is a series of paintings that are an exploration of traditional Bhutanese paint, saa-tshen, and other traditional arts. She is very passionate about taking the traditional techniques and icons of the past and bring it to the present.

PROJECTS / PROCESSES



SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL

YOUNG SUBCONTINENT 2016

2016 Artists

**Abdul Halik Azeez**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka (b. 1985)**

Abdul Halik Azeez is a photographer based in Colombo Sri Lanka. His work has been exhibited at the Saskia Fernando Gallery in Colombo, various other Sri Lankan spaces and internationally in Dubai and Greece. His work is often activist in nature, superimposing a surrealist, spiritual and decolonial lens on the political, economic and cultural. He has worked as a journalist, economist and a development sector consultant and is currently studying the use of language in new media.

**Aman Wadhan**

**Pune, India (b. 1982)**

Aman Wadhan is a filmmaker and cinematographer. He attended the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, receiving a post-graduate diploma in film direction. His practice is research-based, process-oriented and includes film, photography and text—an on-going exploration of living with awareness in light of transience.

**Anupama Alias**

**Hyderabad, India (b. 1990)**

Anupama Alias studied MFA Painting at Hyderabad Central University and did her BFA & MFA Applied Art from RLV College of Music and Fine Arts. Her artworks reflect the way of society transformation and addresses rapid shifts and infliction in everyday life.

## PROJECTS / PROCESSES

### **Anuradha Upadhyay**

#### **Baroda, India (b. 1993)**

Anuradha Upadhyay is an artist and performer. She completed her MFA in Painting and completed a Masters in Printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Anuradha likes to explore the concept of duality within her works. She attempts to capture not places but rather spaces that have a history and also a certain sense of mystery. It appears in variable combinations of drawing, printmaking, painting, photography, and performance art. Anuradha has participated in several workshops, art camps and group exhibitions in Delhi, Baroda and other towns in Gujarat.

### **Farzana Ahmed Urmi**

#### **Dhaka, Bangladesh (b. 1980)**

Farzana Ahmed Urmi's completed her MFA and BFA in printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. She has participated in several art camps and residencies in Bangladesh, Spain, and Japan. Her practice focuses on printmaking and painting. Farzana's work is heavily influenced by the people she encounters in her daily life.

### **Isuru Kumarasinghe**

#### **Sri Lanka (b. 1987)**

Isuru Kumarasinghe began delving in sonic artistry and music at the age of 13. From his early days creating original music with computer software, Isuru's interest later deepened towards the recondite nature of sound experience, acoustic potential and expanding the perception of listening. He

was a part of the Sri Lankan underground art scene as an experimental musician and a visual and sound artist. Isuru is currently part of the experimental, non-mainstream group Musicmatters Collective.

**Jeanno Gaussi**

**Afghanistan (b. 1973)**

Jeanno Gaussi is a Berlin based mixed media artist. She started her art career as a video and film artist and has been shown internationally in many festivals. Jeanno's works deal with questions of cultural identity and the storage of memory-scrap. Her multicultural background – born in Kabul in 1973, raised in Kabul, New Delhi and Berlin – has a major impact on her work. Since 2007, Jeanno has extended her art practice to include photographic artworks and installations (found objects) where she manifested many projects in her residencies in galleries in Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey and Germany.

**Kabi Raj Lama**

**Kathmandu, Nepal (b. 1986)**

Kabi Raj Lama is a contemporary printmaker. He is a graduate of the Kathmandu University Center of Art and Design and received training on woodcut and lithography the Meisei University, Tokyo under the tutelage and apprentice of esteemed Japanese printmaker Shibuya Kazuyoshi. Kabi Raj was part of the Steindruck Stipendium, Munich (Germany) and the Guanlan Printmaking Forum, Shenzhen (China).

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### **Kedar Dhondu**

#### **Goa, India (b. 1981)**

Kedar grew up in Mandrem village of North Goa. He did his BFA from Goa College of Art in 2005 and MFA from Sarojini Naidu School of Fine Arts, Performing Arts and Communication, Hyderabad Central University, Hyderabad in 2008. Kedar is interested in unpacking human conditioning and behaviour. He invites viewers to involve themselves empathetically in his works by using emotive images of animals as metaphors for human behaviour. More recently, he is interested in the relationship between this grotesqueness and beauty.

### **Kishor Kayastha**

#### **Bhaktapur, Nepal (b. 1978)**

Kishor Kayastha grew up taking pictures of the ancient Nepali town of Bhaktapur. His work has redefined the traditional landscape photography in Nepal. Kayastha's pictures deal with the transcendence of time and stand as the solicitor describing the past and documenting the future. He established K2 Art Factory intending to train the next generation of photographers in Nepal.

### **K. L. Leon**

#### **Kochi, India (b. 1974)**

K.L. Leon completed a BFA from the College of Fine Arts Thiruvananthapuram in 2001 and a Masters in Painting from Sarojini Naidu School, Hyderabad Central University in 2003. He also has a degree in Botany from Calicut University, Kerala.

Leon is a recipient of a merit scholarship and a gold medal from Hyderabad Central University. He has awarded residency with scholarship and studio practice at Kanoria Centre for Arts, Ahmedabad (2005-2007).

**Mekh Limbu**

**Kathmandu, Nepal (b. 1985)**

Mekh Limbu received his MFA from the Central Department of Fine Arts, Tribhuvan University. He was awarded the Kathmandu Contemporary Art Center's Residency Scholarship and created a body of work "Sequential Dissonance" which was exhibited at the Siddhartha Art Gallery in 2013. He is involved in activities of LASANAA - an alternative art space and with Artree Nepal. He is a lecturer at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University.

**Parag Sonarghare,**

**Baroda, India (b. 1987)**

Parag Sonarghare received his BFA in painting from Govt. Chitrakala Mahavidyalaya Nagpur University, Nagpur and an MVA in Art History and Aesthetics from M.S. University in Baroda. Parag's practice explores the crossings between painting and performance and attempts to bridge the gap between private and public, art and society and folk and contemporary practice. His experiments have included work in Indian tradition of body painting, taking inspiration from Indian mythological painting and turning it upside down into neo mythological visuals, engaging a live human being as the central figure.

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### **Pakkaiyarah Pushpakanthan**

#### **Batticalao, Sri Lanka (b.1989)**

P. Pushpakanthan received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka in 2014. Currently, he is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual & Technological Arts, Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies (SVIAS), Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Pushpakanthan works across a range of mediums, including drawing, painting, mixed media, installation, performance, and video art.

### **Saju Kunhan**

#### **Mumbai, India (b.1983)**

Born in Palakkad, Kerala, Saju Kunhan finished his Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Painting from the Government College of Fine Arts, Thrissur, Kerala in 2006. His mixed media works on wood deal with archiving and the interpretation of the image in a new context. His practice also focuses on the issues of urbanization and consumer culture. Saju has participated in various exhibitions, camps and workshops, primarily in Kerala.

### **Shrimanti Saha**

#### **Baroda, India (b. 1987)**

Shrimanti was born in West Bengal and completed her BVA and MVA from M.S. University, Baroda. Her practice is rooted in the act of drawing, storytelling, narrative and the creation of a personal mythology. She received the Inlaks Fine Arts award (2015) and has been part of group shows at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2016); Nature Morte, Gurgaon (2014); Gallerie 88, Kolkata (2014) and others. She has worked on illustration

projects at the Industrial Design Centre, IIT, Mumbai and with Scholastic Publishers, New Delhi; and has conducted workshops with students at M.S.U on story, image making and collage.

**Susiman Nirmalavasan**

**Batticaloa, Sri Lanka (b.1982)**

Susiman Nirmalavasan is a contemporary visual artist and activist whose practice looks at visualizing images which occur through his life experiences. He experiments with new approaches towards exhibiting and making visuals through conceptual activities.

**Teja Gavankar**

**Mumbai, India (b. 1986)**

Teja Gavankar is interested in subverting perceptions of mundane spaces through a nuanced understanding of their physical and psychological underpinnings. Her current experiments with spaces aim to look at them as “mental states” seen in pushing things from everyday situations and surroundings to an extreme, playing with the minds of the viewer. She believes that alteration, transformation and distortion will create these psychological states in actual physical space.

**Zainab Haidary**

**Afghanistan (b. 1991)**

Zainab Haidary received her BFA from Kabul University, Afghanistan in 2013. Currently, she is studying in the School

## **PROJECTS / PROCESSES**

of Art in Bremen, Germany. Since 2008, Zainab worked as an independent photographer and join APN (Afghan Photographers Network). In 2011, she was a teacher's assistant at Marefat Art Gallery and exhibited there at the same time. Later that year, her works were shown in the Culture House of Afghanistan. Zainab is an artist of documenta (13) and has exhibited her artworks in Kassel, Germany and Kabul in 2012.



## **Projects / Processes: Volume II**

The Grammar of Reversal: An Essay on *Anti-Memoirs: Locus, Language, Landscape*

by Khorshed Deboo

*The Young Subcontinent Project: An Intermediate Analysis*

by Anuj Daga

Project Head: Kanika Anand

Editors: Nandita Jaishankar & Arnav Adhikari

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