

PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME III

Research and Writing From SAF 2017

commissioned by



SERENDIPITY
ARTS
FESTIVAL
2017



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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The Ground Beneath My Feet

Presented by Serendipity
Arts Foundation in
collaboration with Asia Art
Archive in India and HH Art
Spaces

Mise-en-scène Director
Vishal K. Dar



Curatorial Note

The Ground Beneath My Feet is an exhibition of cutting-edge performance art by artists from around the world. Situated on a barge docked on Captain of Port Jetty on the Mandovi river in Goa, the exhibition explores the rapidly transforming relationship of human bodies with their natural environments and technological infrastructures.

Barges in Goa transport large cargo of iron ore and minerals across inland waterways and ports as far as the Arabian Sea. As fragments of landscapes and bodies get hauled along the swelling rivers and rising seas, the performance artworks and barge that come together in this exhibition pose to us the question: what is the ground beneath our feet?

The performance artworks in the exhibition are unique pieces composed and executed live, in-situ, by each artist.

The Ground Beneath My Feet is part of 'After Event: Performance Art and Its Mediations', a collaboration between Serendipity Arts Foundation, HH Art Spaces, and Asia Art Archive in India.

Artists Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty, Anja Ibsch, Yuko Kaseki, Regina Demina, Diptej Vernekar, Bhagwati Prasad, Hemant Sreekumar



The Ground Beneath My Feet

Sabih Ahmed

A frequent image: that of the ship *Argo* (luminous and white), each piece of which the Argonauts gradually replace, so that they ended with an entirely new ship, without having to alter either its name or its form. This ship *Argo* is highly useful: it affords the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught in any mystique of creation): *substitution* (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and *nomination* (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts): by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing is left of the *origin*: *Argo* is an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form.

-Roland Barthes, *The ship Argo* (1975)

A black-as-coal barge is docked on a naval jetty on the Mandovi River. Its dimensions, approximately 230 feet long and 35 feet wide and a cargo capacity that hauls up to two thousand tons. To bring some perspective to those numbers, the cargo capacity figuratively adds up to over 250 grown elephants.

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Docked on the Captain of Ports jetty, established in 1912 and formerly known as *Capitao dos Portos* by the Portuguese, the barge appears like a permanent shadow, forebodingly still, cast over the busy river for eight consecutive days and nights. The body of the barge facing Panjim city has in bold white print the title of the exhibition, *The Ground Beneath My Feet*.

Unlike the rocking experience one has on smaller vessels that move along water bodies, standing on a barge feels assuringly stable. Nothing seems to move when you're on a barge, even as it rises and rests with the changing tides. Nothing seems to move no matter how many people gather inside it. Nothing seems to move when its engines run full blast during its freight duties. Its body seems impermeable to any of the forces around it. As a site for an exhibition, it seems like nothing but what one expects of built architecture. However, in the course of eight days of the exhibition, the body of the barge was anything but stable. When over 110 decibels of sound passed through it like current through live wire, it trembled like a leaf. When over 50,000 lux of light beams scissored inside its cargo hold, its scale expanded and contracted like an accordion. Or when the single body of a Butoh practitioner tossed along its expanse in pitch darkness, it opened itself out completely into the vast darkness of the water and sky of nighttime Goa. In an exhibition dedicated to contemporary performance art by eight artists, the body of the barge was decidedly the ninth body.

The Ground Beneath My Feet opened at Serendipity Arts Festival 2017 in Goa, from the 15th to the 22nd of December. Curated by HH Art Spaces, an artist-run residency space in

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Goa founded by Nikhil Chopra, Madhvi Gore, and Romain Loustau, the exhibition featured cutting-edge performance artworks by artists from around the world. In the broadest sense, the exhibition asked of the artists as well as of the visitors: what is the ground beneath our feet when standing on a barge? More specifically, each performance work presented a very particular expression and scenario that captured the rapidly transforming relationship between human bodies, the natural environment, and technological infrastructures. The barge seemed to be a powerful point of intersection of those changing relationships, being an instrument of the industrial revolution that has been at the service of transporting large quantities of “resources” extracted from the earth, depositing them into new sites for human settlement. The barge emerged as a motif, a site, and a kinetic object all at once for every performance that took place on it during the exhibition. Barges in Goa typically transport large cargo of iron ore and minerals across inland waterways and ports as far as the Arabian Sea. Against a backdrop of the corroding history of industrialisation and the reverberating sirens of maritime trade, the exhibition reckoned with the turbulent waters of geopolitics today. With human lives being precariously hauled along the rising seas and fragmented landscapes, the project since its conception knew that performance art and the barge were going to come together to pose multiple questions as to how we think about the body and the ground we stand on in the 21st century.

As Nikhil put it in an interview published before the exhibition:

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The desire to place performance in different contexts is not just coming from artists. It's also coming from institutions, it's coming from museums, from festivals, from organisations, all of whom seem to have this desire to bring performance into different contexts. While it has a lot to do with the presence of the artist, this desire really extends to the politics of the body. It is something that today we all feel the urgency to call out to, to ask, "what is the role of this body that we are all in?" and "what emanates from that body?" I think I feel this more now than I did even five years ago.¹

Emerging from a collaboration between Serendipity Arts Foundation, Asia Art Archive in India, and HH Art Spaces, *The Ground Beneath My Feet* was part of a tripartite project titled *After Event: Performance Art and its Mediations*, which included: a digitisation project (led by Asia Art Archive in India) of an archive of experimental performances from the late 1970s and early 1980s; a performance art workshop in Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda conducted by Chopra, Gore and Jana Prepeluh; and the eight-day exhibition in Goa. The exhibition in Goa brought together eight artists, Anja Ibsch, Bhagwati Prasad, Diptej Vernekar, Hemant Sreekumar, Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty, Regina Demina, and Yuko Kaseki to create new performance artworks, and artist-architect Vishal K. Dar as mise-en-scene director for the exhibition. To curate the exhibition, Nikhil and Romain recount how:

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When we invited the eight artists, we sent them a curatorial note—a list of provocations and critical ideas—and shared with them what we thought was the scenario we were going to be putting our artists in. This was to give them a sense of how they might like to approach their pieces. It was also asking of the artists to see past the veneer of the tropical paradise that we're all familiar with when it comes to Goa and get to some really strong issues. Not that these are the issues that artists necessarily have to respond to, but at least we start to inform them in the way where they are able to conceive of their pieces.

A lot of the proposals that came back to us from their artists were dark. Quite literally. They were nocturnal. We knew from their responses that we were dealing with dark moments and those hours in the day when light is escaping and day is transitioning into night. We in turn reacted to that. Every artist invited has a very different approach to performances, space, and materials, and in curating we are responding to those.²

The performance pieces that were to be situated in the barge would also respond to a barge that was itself transforming in the course of eight days through interventions made by Dar. What emerged included solo and collaborative performances, long-duration endurance performances, kinetic sculptures and installations where objects and the site seemed to be performing, electronic and live arts, spontaneous participatory work, and a barge that kept changing. If performance art

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since its inception has been about the politics of the body in all its dimensions—temporal, spatial, aesthetic, social, and ontological—the question that beckoned of this project was how one may register the shifts that have been inscribed onto the body today. Whether it is the recognition that the human body is no more detachable from its technological milieu, be it the increased saturation of data and devices that govern our habits and survival, or how deeply the planetary elements are now wired and coded with centuries of human civilization’s interventions onto all the species as well as the land, seas, and skies. The human body may then be a presiding myth (with an age-old image and set of functions) that conserves our notions of who we are in relation to the world outside of our bodies. In actuality, we might be no different from the ship of Argo as Barthes described it, “a dint of combinations made within one and the same name,” and “an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form.” What then is that new image of the social, political, technological, planetary, and gendered body that art can make us see? Where best could one possibility situate this question than on a barge that has been moving along rivers and oceans like a whale that had come into being with the industrial revolution and withdrew itself from the imagination of technocratic progress of 20th century but continued to serve its purpose with no interruption?

On the third day of the exhibition, an 89-foot long, black matted ramp cut through the length of the cargo hold, dividing

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the space into two and introducing a new diagonal surface ascending out of the deep vessel. The ramp was one fathom wide, six feet in nautical units, and it was the first artistic intervention and mise-en-scene by Vishal K. Dar. The work was titled 'Fathom.' With a scaffolding underneath it left bare, visitors would walk into the barge through those scaffolds. This mise-en-scene by evening time coincided with the introduction of the second intervention by Dar titled 'Time-Oars,' producing a density of lines inside the hold with intense beams of light criss-crossing each other at a slow rhythmic pace. The scale of the barge seemed to expand and contract with these moving beams.

In the midst of this was situated the first of a four-part performance produced collaboratively between Hemant Sreekumar and Bhagwati Prasad titled 'Bellow'. Hemant and Bhagwati have been collaborating in the past years on a work where they use electronic media and live performance to create aural environments of what seems to be the bellowing of the earth, the grinding of machines and churning of human bodies. In other words, a gradually erupting amplification of what construction sites, especially those that build metro tunnels and underground systems, would sound like were we to lend our attention to these processes that surround us in urban environments. When approached by the curators for *The Ground Beneath My Feet*, the question put across to Hemant and Bhagwati was: "Your work often evokes the terrestrial. What would the bellowing of the sea sound like when churning with machines and the body?" Their response was a resounding bellow that drew upon their research during a two-week

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residency at HH Art Spaces, where they recorded the sonority of the Barge's surface, the movement of water in Goa, and poetry that touched water, coal, and light. It is said that sound travels fastest through solids. The medium for their work over the four days became various elements of the barge and the mise-en-scene through which the sounds travelled and layered themselves onto other bodies.

Layering the works, the highly charged sensorium, and the possible meanings that the works evoked were integral to the project. As Raqs Media Collective once invoked in a conference on curation in 2011³, how might we think of curation where works don't appear like an inventory but like seaweed—that even if you tried to pull one out, an entire mass comes out, entangled with it. While there was an itinerary of performance artworks scheduled throughout the eight days, the overlaps between them and the mise-en-scenes became inextricable. This created an environment where if one needed to isolate a performance artist's work, the condition for that isolation were not a given the way they are in usual exhibitions. On the contrary, that condition to isolate works had to be produced when it was required.

So, when Yuko Kaseki's performance seized the entire cargo hold of the barge on the opening night of the exhibition, it was statement that demanded an isolation not coming out of wanting to be singularly visible but an ambiguity whether at all to be visible. For almost two hours, Kaseki manoeuvred around the entire hold of the barge that was rendered completely dark except for one single spotlight. Her performance involved her own body captured in a soundscape that evoked everything

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from planetary storms to the storm of mass media, and herself appearing and disappearing into the darkness. The search light roved around the space trying to stay on her. In today's era, where the body of the migrant, the refugee, and the exiled appears to the world as locus of geopolitical crisis rather than an exception, the search light can be both the saviour as much as the perpetrator of violence. Those who are abandoned at sea are caught in a precarity where to be caught in the search light might be more detrimental than not being caught. To be singularly visible today might be as disempowering if not more than to be made visible.

On the other hand, when Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty performed his work over the course of four days enclosed inside a six-by-four-foot wooden crate filled with red soil sourced from Goa, it was anything but being closed off from various works that were outside of it, simultaneously impacting it and changing the semantics of it. Masum would enter bare bodied into this wooden crate and slowly submerge himself in the soil, churning inside it for five hours non-stop on each day, almost as if his body were disintegrating and reintegrating in and with that soil. This extreme endurance work, titled after the exhibition, invoked the inseparability of the bodies from the goods that their labour produces and then circulates around the world. Masum's work evokes his place of origin, Bangladesh, which, like many other countries in Asia, is home to factories of large, multinational brands. He suggests that the goods produced in these factories are not just raw material circulating the global market, but bear the mark of the very bodies that produce them, which often meet dark ends

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in the fatal conditions of their work environments. Masum's work over the four days came into contact with vibrations of Hemant and Bhagwati's 'Bellow', Vishal Dar's 'Fathom,' 'Time-Oars,' and 'Azimuth,' and the collective performances by Nikhil Chopra, Madhavi Gore, Romain Loustau, and Yuko Kaseki. Such layers only amplified the multiple meanings that the works stood for, but also the very condition of our times where every object, every space, every body is subjected to multiple layers, entanglements, and configurations. Absolutely nothing is a stable site.

Diptej Vernekar, an artist from and based in Goa, immersed himself deep into the engine room and the staying quarters of those who navigate the barges. Instead of spending the residency period at HH Art Spaces, he practically subjected himself to a kind of solitary abandonment on the barge for over 20 days before the opening of the exhibition. This led to the barge and its various accoutrements turning into beings with lives of their own. Tentacle-like forms emerged out of the staying quarters, moving with engines on their own, steam irons started performing chores uncannily out of their own volition, a massive pile of ropes got coated with layers of wax, fungi, and salt that made it appear like the entrails of the barge, as if it were a creature. Vernekar himself lay inside a bath tub inside the engine room, with a chandelier of burning candles looming, covering him and the water he was immersed in with wax. Vernekar's work extended itself throughout the entire eight days of the exhibition, becoming almost embedded into the barge itself.

By the last three days, the cargo hold was filled up with water

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as part of Dar's final artistic intervention and the final mise-en-scene 'Azimuth,' which made the ground beneath one's feet quite literally disappear. There was very little that could differentiate the water body outside of the barge from the water inside it. With 'Azimuth,' the performances by Masum Chisty; Nikhil, Madhavi, Romain, Yuko, and Anja Ibsch took on new meaning, and the remnants of Diptej Vernekar's and Regina Demina's performances were given a new charge. In the words of Vishal:

This was the first time I could see how, when you make a mise-en-scene that is not locked into a particular kind of narrative, or a particular kind of image, it could actually become part of many languages, images and landscapes. Masum, who hails from Bangladesh, started walking in the water-filled barge, swam to the deep end and back and finally climbed into the box filled with earth. It was a very strange but a very clear and contemporary image. It spoke of migration and a loss of land, a loss of citizenship and also a persistence towards saving what is the most precious to oneself which is life and a will to keep moving on.

And then came Anja's performance where she dressed in black with a white crochet mat that she used as a veil to cover herself and started walking to the centre of the barge, into the 'Time Oars,' and the image for me became very Christian. These light beams, which were rhythmic and structured in a mirror-like way, transformed the site into a church-like space with her

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performance. She walked in a straight line when she was inside the water—a very centralised composition—whereas Masum stayed off-centre entirely because his box was also placed off-centre. And then she threw out at you many images like those of Ophelia and Virginia Wolf about to commit suicide. That sits very interestingly with Masum’s perseverance to escape water to save his life.

And then the third performance work was by Bhagwati Prasad and Hemant Sreekumar that began while Anja was halfway through her piece. Bhagwati started randomly surveying the site. The previous two performances before Bhagwati’s were not surveying, but with him it was clear that he could be an instrument of the state as he was in a hard hat and a jumper suit costume, wading through the waters of what could have been an underground pipeline. So, even though the structure and rhythm of the mise-en-scene—the lights of ‘Time Oars’ and the water of ‘Azimuth’—did not change, but constantly transformed.⁴

These are only some of the directions that opened up with *The Ground Beneath My Feet*. While there was plenty more that could be laid out, both of the residency at HH Art Spaces that preceded the exhibition as well as the exhibition itself, what has not been addressed in this report so far is the audience, of this exhibition as well as of performance

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art more generally. The history of performance art carries some of the most poignant instances of how vastly diverse the practice is and can be. With every instance, if there is one certainty about this art form, it is that its configuration between the performer, her body, space, and the spectator are never a given. Each performance artwork demands its own set of rules around those elements. One performance artwork can expect complete separation from the audience, another may require complete participation. One performance artwork could demand a complete suspension of meanings around the performer and her surroundings, another could demand that every marker on the body, the space and the spectator be recognised for what it is. We can expect absolute incompatibility between one work and another. So, the question is: how is an audience, that too an audience that might be encountering this art form for the first time, to receive and partake of this kind of practice? That was the scenario in the extraordinarily attended Serendipity Arts Festival last year, with a record footfall of approximately 300,000 visitors. With a curatorial mandate that set the highest bar for this kind of practice at the Festival, HH Art Spaces proceeded with the question of reception in an interesting way, through the idea of multiple scales that one is encountering. From the sense of time one spends in a residency to the very specific duration of a performance, from the scale of a human body to the scale of a barge, from the scale of a single performer to that of a crowd. As Romain Loustau put it:

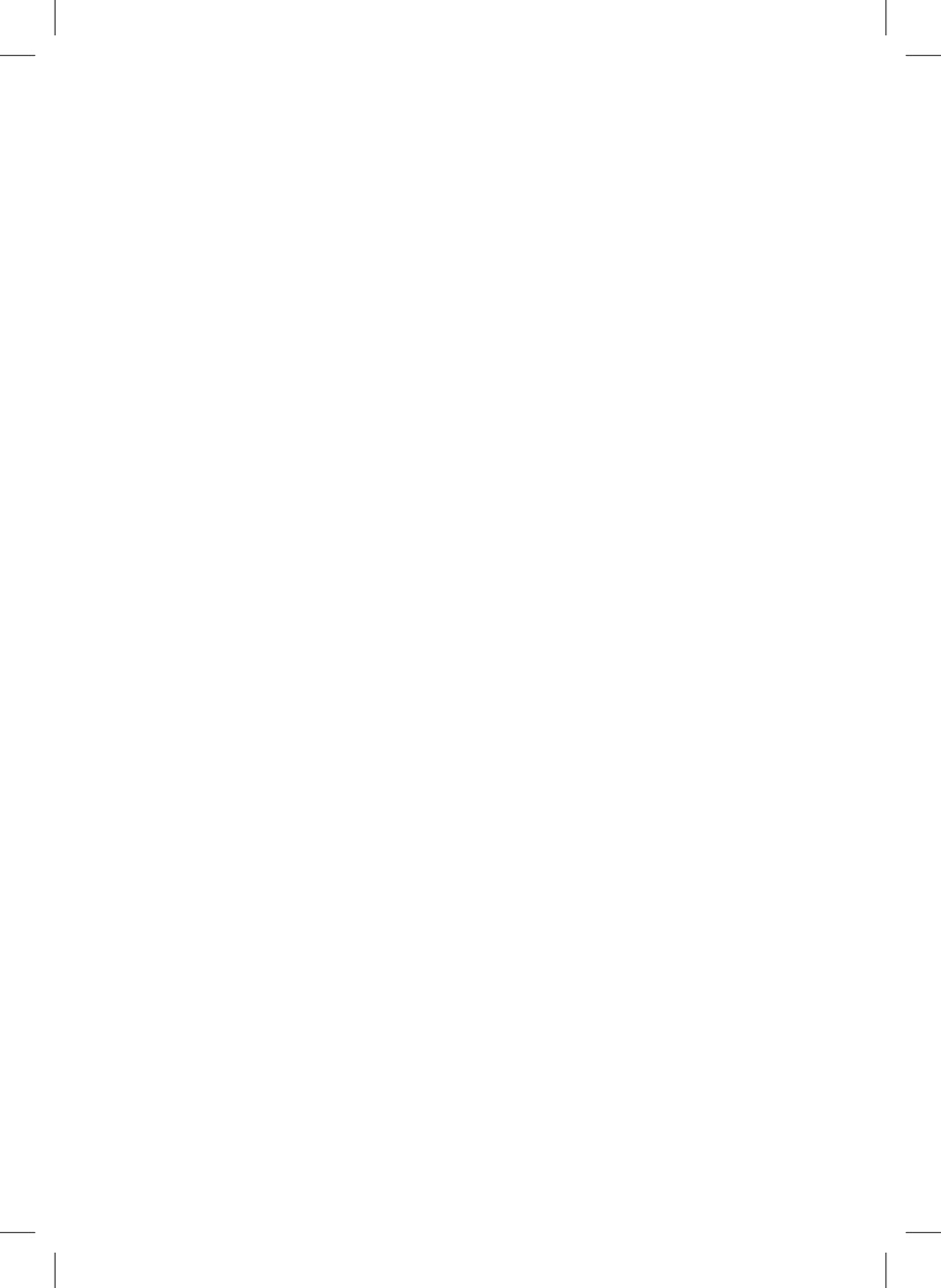
It's very important to recognise this conversation

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between the scales. It's important as well to understand the kind of double language—of systems and of people. To understand that actually people inside systems are still people. And there's a certain honesty one is looking for when one comes to a residency like ours. These moments of coming together for the project are a fantastic adventure because you come to realise that art means something else. It's not captured in a note or a concept. You go on-site and constantly calibrate and converse... In a sense, it [the exhibition] is so specifically located. But in another sense, it is way bigger, and connected with so many things that are anything but local, yet they make the local and the present. The exhibition, the site, the ideas are going to be about that. It's very representative of the state we are in. This barge [provides] endless material to think about. I can't wait to just be there and think about things. Think actively, as an act of performance.⁵

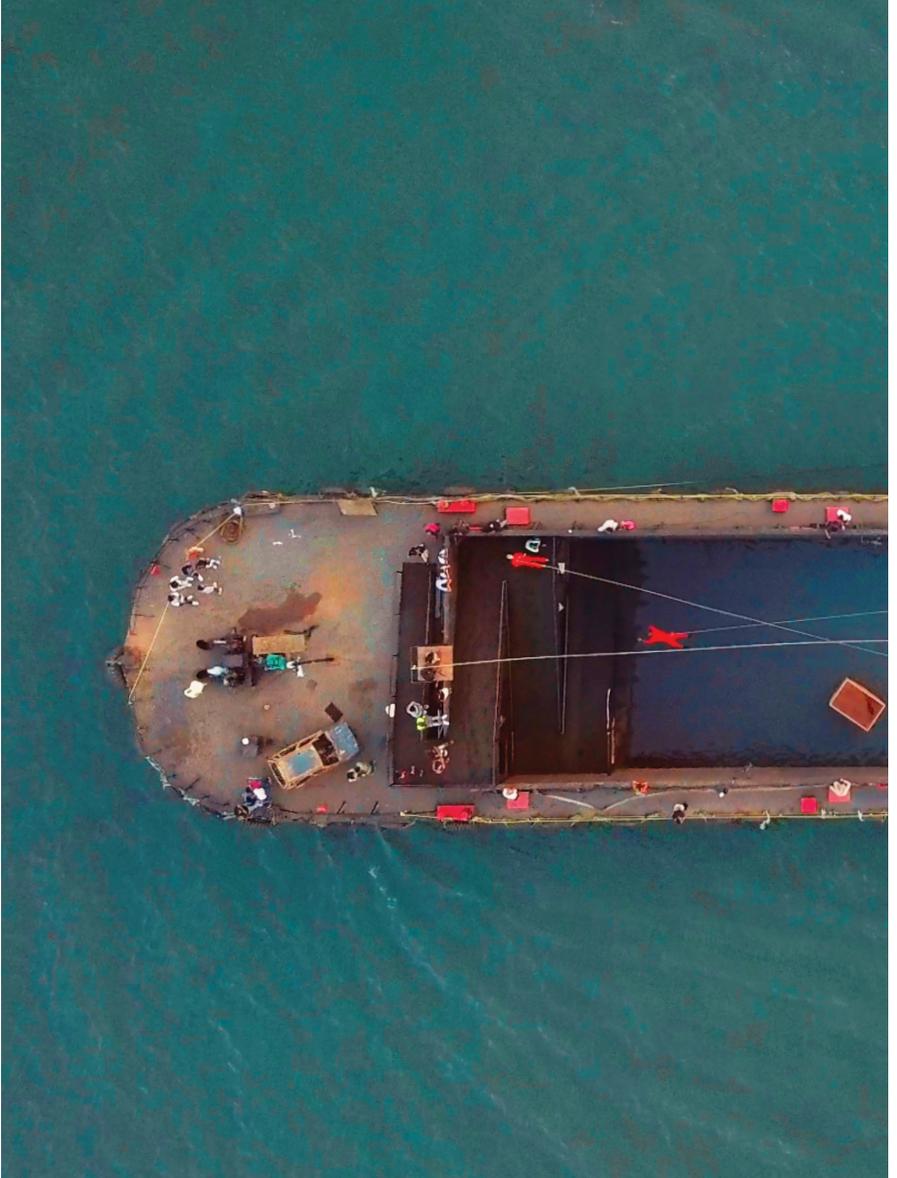
One can only imagine that the approximate figure of around 12,000 visitors who came to see the exhibition would have necessarily had to recalibrate themselves and their presence vis-à-vis those scales in question.





Notes

1. Sabih Ahmed, 'The Ground Beneath My Feet: In Conversation with Nikhil Chopra and Romain Loustau', published in *IDEAS*, Asia Art Archive, November 2017. Link: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/the-ground-beneath-my-feet-in-conversation-with-nikhil-chopra-and-romain-loustau> Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Narine, ed. *Thinking About Exhibitions* (Routledge, 1996)
2. *ibid.*
3. 'Work in Progress: Dialogue on Curation (Part 1)', organized by Vidya Shivadas and Natasha Ginwala, organized by Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, New Delhi, 18-19 January 2011.
4. Sabih Ahmed's interview with Vishal Dar, to be published (2018)
5. Sabih Ahmed, 'The Ground Beneath My Feet: In Conversation with Nikhil Chopra and Romain Loustau', published in *IDEAS*, Asia Art Archive, November 2017.



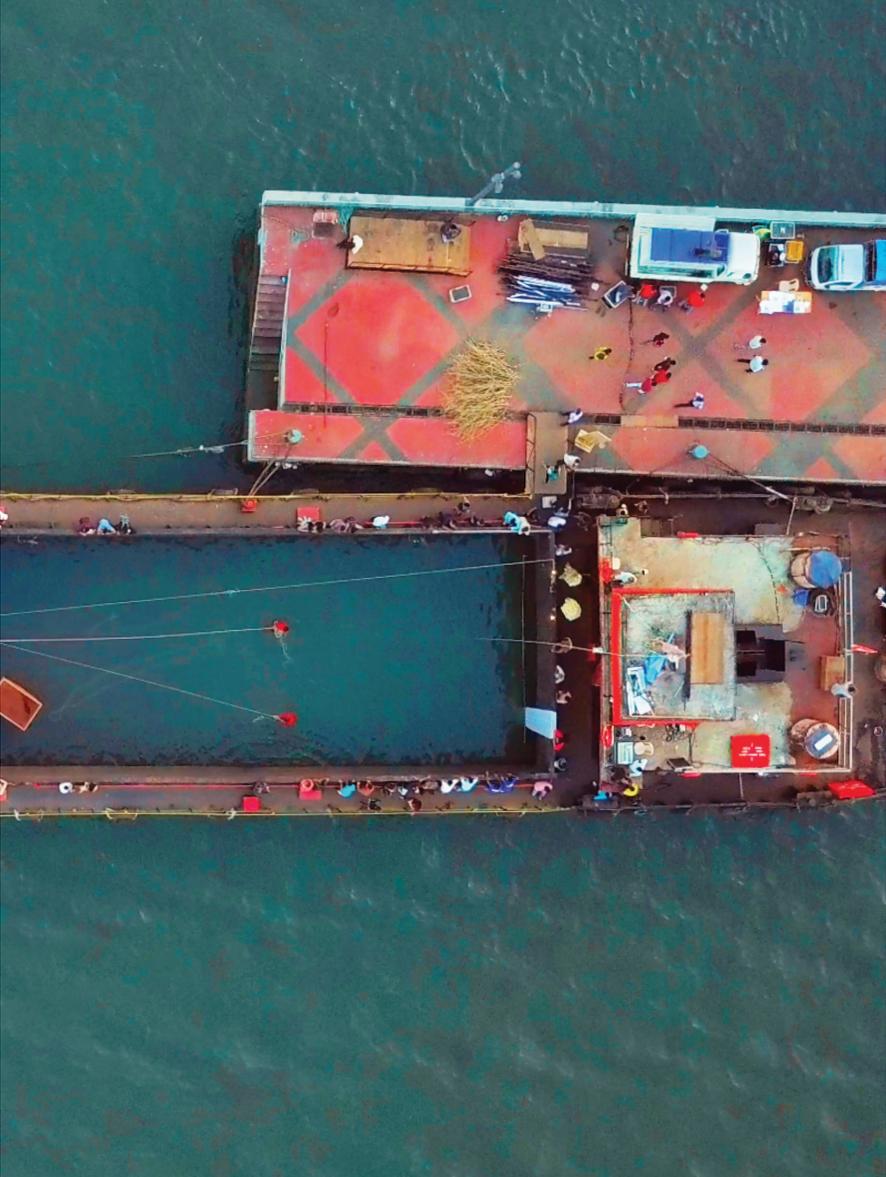




Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5







Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

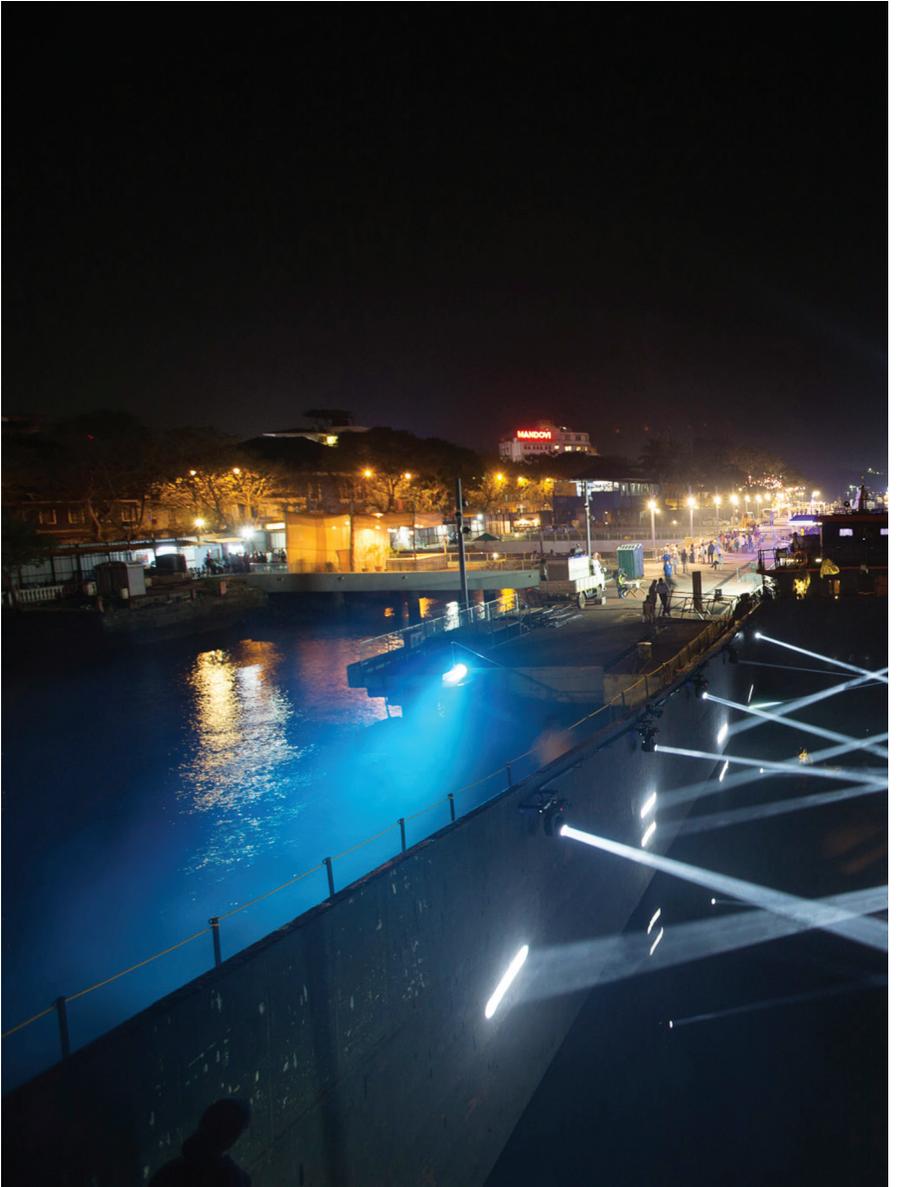






Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

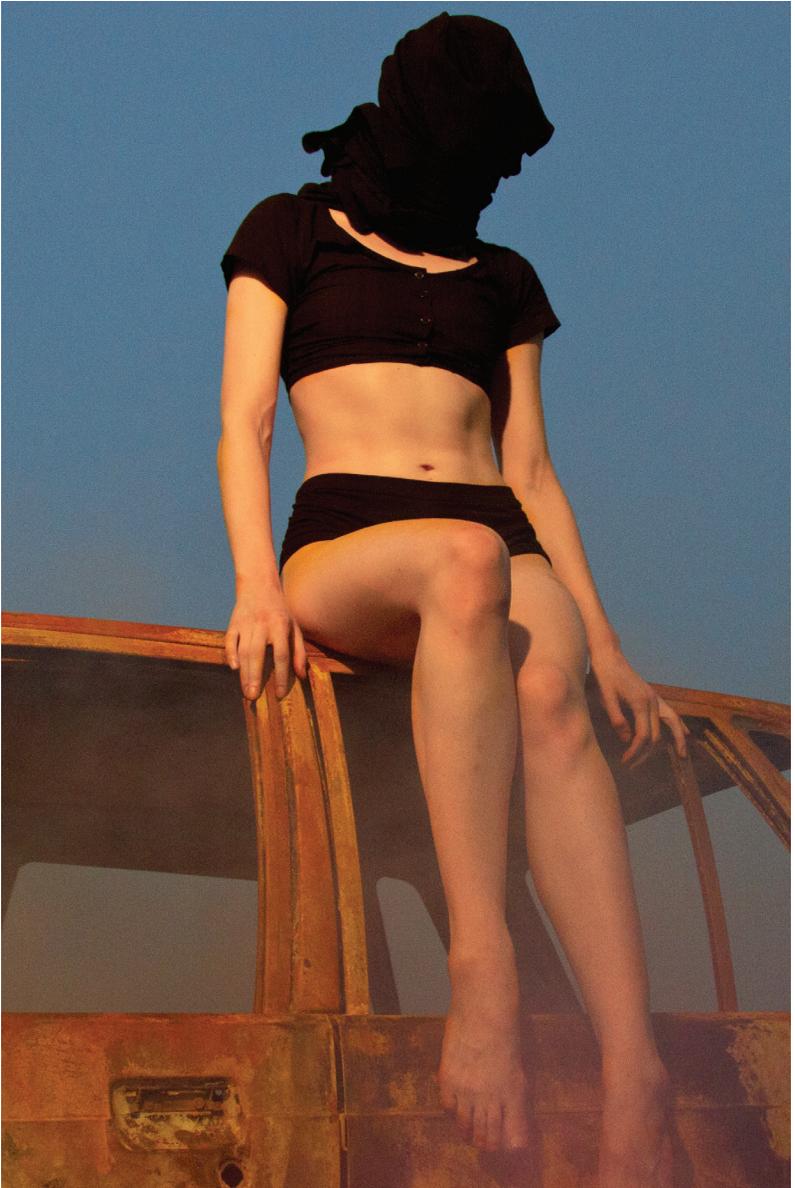




Fig.17



Fig.18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Serendipity Arts Festival
presents

The Ground Beneath My Feet

Live Art curated
by HH Art Spaces

On a barge
Docked on the Mandovi River,
Captain of Ports Jetty
Patto Colony,

**Panjim,
Goa.**

featuring artists

K. AHMED MASUM CHISTY
REGINA DEMINA
ANJA IBSCH
YUKO KASEKI
BHAGWATI PRASAD
HEMANT SREEKUMAR
NICO VASCELLARI
DIPTEJ VERNEKAR
VINYL AMBULANCE

mise en scène

VISHAL K. DAR

**15
-
22 dec
2017**

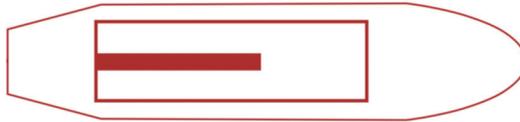
 **SERENDIPITY
ARTS**
A TRINJAL INITIATIVE FOR CREATIVITY

ASIA
ART
ARCHIVE IN INDIA



Fathom

15-17 DEC 2017



Time-oars

17-20 DEC 2017



Azimuth

20-22 DEC 2017





Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Captions

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External view of the barge at Capt. of Ports Jetty.

Fig. 1

Aerial view of the barge. Collaborative performance by Nikhil Chopra, Madhavi Gore, Romain Loustau and Yuko Kaseki. Crate with soil as part of *The Ground Beneath My Feet* performance by Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty and burnt car chassis as part of *Crush for Crash* by Regina Demina. Mise-en-scene by Vishal K. Dar titled *Azimuth*. Photograph by Elefante.

Fig. 2

[December 15, 2017]: Yuko Kaseki's solo performance titled *Shoot Jeez My Gosh!*, with Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scene titled *Fathom*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 3

[December 15, 2017]: Yuko Kaseki's solo performance titled *Shoot Jeez My Gosh!*, with Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scene titled *Fathom*. Photograph by Sabih Ahmed.

Fig. 4

[December 15, 2017]: Yuko Kaseki's solo performance titled *Shoot Jeez My Gosh!*, with Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scene titled *Fathom*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 5

[December 15, 2017]: Yuko Kaseki's solo performance titled *Shoot Jeez My Gosh!*, with Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scene titled *Fathom*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 6

[December 17, 2017]: First day of Bhagwati Prasad and Hemant Sreekumar's collaborative performance titled *Bellow*, with Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scene titled *Fathom*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 7

[December 18, 2017]: Second day of Bhagwati Prasad and Hemant Sreekumar's collaborative performance titled *Bellow*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 8

[December 18, 2017]: Second day Bhagwati Prasad and Hemant Sreekumar's collaborative performance titled *Bellow*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 9

[December 18, 2017]: First day of Anja Ibsch's solo performance. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 10

[December 18, 2017]: First day of Anja Ibsch's solo performance. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 11

[December 20, 2017]: Vishal K. Dar's overlapping Mise-en-scenes titled *Time-oars* and *Azimuth*, with Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty's solo performance inside the crate titled *The Ground Beneath My Feet*. Photograph by Elefante.

Fig. 12

[December 20, 2017]: Fourth day of Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty's solo performance titled *The Ground Beneath My Feet*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

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Fig. 13

[December 20, 2017]: Fourth day of Bhagwati Prasad and Hemant Sreekumar's collaborative performance titled *Bellow*, overlapping with Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty's *The Ground Beneath My Feet* and Anja Ibsch's untitled solo performance. Vishal K. Dar's Mise-en-scenes titled *Time-oars* and *Azimuth*. Photograph by Elefante.

Fig. 14

[December 20, 2017]: Fourth day of Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty's solo performance titled *The Ground Beneath My Feet*. Photograph by Shivani Gupta.

Fig. 15

[December 19, 2017]: Collaborative performance by Nikhil Chopra, Madhavi Gore, Romain Loustau, and Yuko Kaseki. Crate with soil as part of *The Ground Beneath My Feet* performance by Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 16

[December 15, 2017]: First day of Regina Demina's solo performance titled *Crush for Crash*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 17

[December 20, 2017]: Fourth day of Regina Demina's solo performance titled *Crush for Crash*. Photograph by Taira Malaney.

Fig. 18

[December 20, 2017]: Fourth day of Regina Demina's solo performance titled *Crush for Crash*. Photograph by Shivani Gupta.

Fig. 19

[December 21, 2017]: Diptej Vernekar's solo performance titled, *Remembering Ophelia* performed inside the barge engine room. Photograph by Shivani Gupta.

Fig. 20

[December 21, 2017]: Detail of Diptej Vernekar's kinetic installation work titled *Archaeology of the Barge*. Photograph by Shivani Gupta.

Fig. 21

[December 21, 2017]: Diptej Vernekar's solo performance titled, *Remembering Ophelia* performed inside the barge engine room. Photograph by Shivani Gupta

Fig. 22-23

(L) Poster of *The Ground Beneath My Feet*, graphic design by Anna Lemoine; (R) Diagrams of Vishal K. Dar's three Mise-en-scene propositions *Fathom*, *Time-oars*, and *Azimuth*.

Fig. 24

[December 22, 2017]: Collaborative performance by Yuko Kaseki, Nikhil Chopra and Romain Loustau.

Fig. 25

[December 22, 2017]: Still of Romain Loustau from collaborative performance by Yuko Kaseki, Nikhil Chopra and Romain Loustau.

Fig. 26

[December 22, 2017]: Collaborative performance by Yuko Kaseki, Nikhil Chopra and Romain Loustau. Mise-en-scene *Azimuth* by Vishal K. Dar.



Biographies

Sabih Ahmed is a Researcher at Asia Art Archive based in New Delhi. He conceptualises and leads research initiatives on modern and contemporary art, has led projects digitising artist archives and creating digital bibliographies of art across multiple languages, and has organised colloquia and seminars around archiving and educational resources. Ahmed has been a Visiting Faculty at School of Culture and Creative Expression, Ambedkar University, Delhi. His recent writings have been published by Mousse Publications, The Whitworth, and Oncurating. He was a member of the Curatorial Collegiate of the 11th Shanghai Biennale curated by Raqs Media Collective.

HH Art Spaces is an artist-run residency space established in October 2014 in Siolim, Goa by Romain Loustau, Madhavi Gore and Nikhil Chopra. It is part of a movement of artists from the big cities to Goa, as an environment that offers space, time, an international community and an increasingly critical audience. The program focuses primarily on live art and performance with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary and collaborative work. HH Art Spaces is a place for reflection, inspiration and creation; a place where artists come together, make and share their ideas, processes, experiments and collaborative efforts with one other and the community. Through the overlapping and interweaving of different practices and disciplines there is an inherent desire to create new languages and ways of making and receiving art. Every residency term ends with an OPEN Studio, when the house and gardens are transformed in to a public exhibition to connect us

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with the larger community of Goa. We are currently located in an old Indo-Portuguese house in Arpora, Goa, India.

Asia Art Archive (AAA) is an independent non-profit organisation initiated in 2000 in response to the urgent need to document and make accessible the multiple recent histories of art in the region. With one of the most valuable collections of material on art freely available from its website and onsite library, AAA builds tools and communities to collectively expand knowledge through research, residency, and educational programmes.

AAA in India (AAA in I) was established in 2013 reflecting the organisation's widening scope of activities in India. With an on-site digital collection housed in New Delhi in a space that is open to visitors, AAA in I organises a range of projects, workshops, and programmes with a mission to build archives and instigate dialogue and critical thinking around contemporary art from India. The organisation works in partnership with various individuals, organisations, and institutions in the field that share AAA's values.

Vishal K. Dar

(b. 1976, India)

Vishal K. Dar is an artist/architect known for his projects in large abandoned sites and computer controlled lights that invoke the vastly mythic and the deeply personal. Dar's art practice is diverse in terms of media, where transformations and the nocturne are some of the recurring themes. His recent works include *NAAG-XY* in 2015 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, *Maruts* in 2015 in an abandoned

40,000 sq.ft. storage facility outside Pune city, *Storm Deities* as part of the 11th Shanghai Biennale in 2016, and *Antraal/ Intermission* in 2017. His site specific works create experience territories and hallucinatory zones that incorporate both latest technology and earthly elements ranging from oscillating beams of light, varying metronomic meters, and vast reflection pools.

Anja Ibsch

(b. 1968, Germany)

Anja Ibsch has been actively practicing as an artist and curator dedicated to performance and installation art since 1993. Currently based in Berlin, she creates artworks that explore personal, cultural and social aspects of human presence that connect with and extend to the earth. In her works, Ibsch characteristically tests her bodily limits by creating images that combine conceptual concerns with the palpability of physical endurance and strength. Ibsch is inspired by myths of sainthood, sacrifice and release. Her works have included among other actions her eating dust, offering the surface of her skin as a nesting ground for worms, and melting ice on her eyes. Over the years, she has performed in various cities in Asia, Europe, North and South America. Ibsch is a member of various organizations such as the Rheinische Fachhochschule Köln, the Performersterstttisch, and the APAB (Association for Performance Art in Berlin).

Bhagwati Prasad

(b.1976, India)

Bhagwati Prasad works with performance, sculpture, video, graphics and research to refigure ways in which humans, machines and infrastructures intersect to perform the

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subterranean operations of a city. His works track the circuitry of water lines behind concrete walls, the bellowing of the earth in dug up metro lines, and the insurgency of tools when factories are asleep. Prasad is the author of the graphic book, *The Water Cookbook* published in 2010. He started researching popular culture and media life and histories in Delhi, which resulted in him co-authoring *Tinker.Solder.Tap* in 2009, a graphic novel on the history of media piracy in Delhi. His recent performances include the 'Theory Opera' in the 11th Shanghai Biennale, 2016, and *Shit* in 'Talking Shit', Delhi, 2014. Prasad works out of New Delhi.

Diptej Vernekar

(b. 1991, India)

Diptej Vernekar's art practice extends across different mediums that include performance, charcoal drawings, video, sculpted and found objects. His interest lies in exploring the different ways by which objects, spaces and surroundings become part of our identities. By stitching together faint memories of day-to-day occurrences with personal myths and collected stories, Vernekar attempts to weave a delicate web of visual poems with every work. Believing that stories can never be recalled in entirety, his performances play with the audience's memory as he employs mechanical repetition of gestures, simple acts of drawing and erasing, and scratching and unearthing surfaces. Born in Kumbharjua village in Goa, he hails from a carpenter family. His works in the past have been shown in Kochi, New Delhi, and in Goa where he participated in the artist residency programme at HH Art Spaces.

Hemant Sreekumar

(b.1980, India)

Hemant Sreekumar is an artist & technologist. He performs synthetic audio compositions using principles of emergence and noise. His works respond to notions of decay, generative bias and loss of semantics. He has been tinkering with radio frequencies, broken appliances and crushed magnetic tapes since a very young age. Since the last five years he has been employing codes and data mediated processes to construct time based environments that fluctuate in textures. Since 2013, he has been curating 'Disquiet', a sound/noise programme. Sreekumar is based in Bangalore.

Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty

(b. 1976, Bangladesh)

Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty works with performance, poetry, drawing and animation. Based in Narayanganj and Dhaka, he explores through his art the depths of human psyche. Often working through the intricate meshwork of the relationships between mind and body, body and matter, myth and reality, time and space, his practice attempts to install in everyday surroundings a window into imaginary spaces, dreamscapes, and parallel realities. In the past he has presented his works in Asia, Europe and North America.

Regina Demina

(b. 1988, Russia)

Regina Demina is a trained actress and dancer and also practices as an artist. Her works tend to come alive at night as she explores sensations that border on eeriness and morbid

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romanticism. Demina draws inspiration from East European mythology, Internet hyperactivity, Hollywood's glamour, and rave culture that she discovered as a teenager in the Parisian Banlieue. Since her recent graduation from The Fresnoy National Studio Of Contemporary Arts, her works have focused on sound design and installation where she sings and collaborates visually with the experimental group 'Music for Eggplant'. Demina performs for the House of Drama troupe and La Horde, a collective of choreographers and directors in France. Regina Demina moved to France in 1993 and grew up between two cultures as her mother is Ashkenazi Jewish from Uzbekistan and her father Siberian Orthodox.

Yuko Kaseki

(b. xx, Japan)

Yuko Kaseki is a Butoh dancer, performer, improviser, choreographer and teacher based in Berlin since 1995. Her solo and ensemble performances and improvisations have been held throughout Asia, Europe, Russia, North and South America, and Australia. Her works incorporate Butoh dance as well as performance art involving objects, texts, and soundscapes. Kaseki has had a long-standing interest in breaking borders of physical possibilities as she collaborates with mixed ability artists and performers. She performs and organizes a dance-music improvisation series "AMMO-NITE GIG" (Vol.1 - 48 and on going) with international performers and musicians in Berlin that started in 2004. In 1995, Yuko Kaseki along with Marc Ates founded the dance company cokaseki.





Detritus: Matter Out of Place

Curated by Vidya Shivadas



Curatorial Note

“What disgusts, startlingly, is the capacity for life”¹

William Ian Miller, when exploring disgust, notes that the powerful emotion arises not just because life implies decay and death, but rather because decay seems to engender life.

“Death thus horrifies and disgusts not because it smells bad but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of a cycle of eternal recurrence. The having lived and the living unite to make an organic world of generative rot—rank, smelling and upsetting to touch,”² he writes.

Miller describes in graphic detail the acute sensations that these out-of-place animate beings and inanimate objects produce, with their persistent journey towards life. They upset our sense of order and classification, restructuring our very ideas of life itself, forever caught in this double bind with the other—death.

Detritus: Matter out of Place is inspired by the “generative rot” that Miller speaks of; the word “detritus” itself is quite literally defined as waste and dead matter derived from the grazing food chain. What is important to note is that the energy contained in detritus is not lost to the ecosystem as a whole, but serves as a source. The exhibition, which was a part of Serendipity Arts Festival 2017, is not a thematic exercise in representing the issue of waste, but rather exploring it as a palimpsest, a layered artifact subject to a multiplicity of interventions and interpretations. What is of

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particular interest to us in the making of this exhibition is the aesthetics detritus can produce—its materialities, its stubborn transformations, and its generative afterlives.

The subtitle of the exhibition is a direct reference to the anthropologist Mary Douglas's famous dictum that "dirt is matter out place". Douglas made this statement in her seminal 1966 work *Purity and Danger*,³ where she expounded on dirt as an outcome of ordering and classification of matter. Douglas's work on waste as a product of cultural systems of structuring and signification is an interesting starting point to explore the strategies of artists who also work with this principle idea of displacement.

Detritus brings together some critical explorations produced over the past decade, with waste foregrounding its materials and politics. Working with "poor resources," the twelve artists here present the gathering of precarious materials and the act of crafting and recycling them as powerful alternative models. These marginalised, unfashionable materials take centrestage, they rise and speak in different tongues and force us to acknowledge their presence. Together they produce another story of the past seventy years of post-colonial urbanity and modernisation in our part of the world via an archaeology and a recuperation of the trash it has produced.

Artists Ruby Chishti, BV Suresh, Moonis Ahmad Shah, Babu Eshwar Prasad, Jahangir Asgar Jani, Kausik Mukhopadhyay, Vivan Sundaram, Benitha Perciyal, Sudharak Olwe, Priya Ravish Mehra, Sheba Chhachhi, Susanta Mandal





Detritus: Matter Out of Place

Vidya Shivadas

Approaching the Subject of Waste

There is an unstoppable material presence that has overtaken our cities—garbage, trash, debris, and detritus—circulating alongside the transnational flow of goods, people, capital, images and data that the sociologist Arjun Appadurai considers constitutive of globalisation.⁴

Today, garbage is an overwhelming problem and equally a commodity, and lies at the heart of many pressing debates on globalisation and the environment. Theorists Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner make note of the diverse approaches of scholars and researchers working across disciplines on this issue of waste: the urban planners and environmental scientists who study impact of garbage proliferation and seek local solutions; the economists who look at it in relation to issues of global economies and politics; the sociologists and anthropologists who explore the material practices and attitudes of people in signifying things around them; and the philosophers who problematise this notion of garbage beyond its negative connotations to ask why it eludes classification and value.

To this list they add artists and their longstanding

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engagements with waste via the avant-garde practices of the readymade, assemblage, bricolage, and installation. Here the focus is on transgressing and subverting given meanings, usages, and functionalities. The interest extends from objects to spaces and our contemporary obsession with occupying and rethinking our built and natural environments has many obvious political ramifications. There is a growing consensus that artists, with their chaotic and strange appropriations, seem to provide significant answers on how to deal with these entangled and at times disjunctive histories. The affective, emotive, obsessive, and eccentric trajectories that artists propose through their works capture the layered social, material, and symbolic life of things.

While Douglas's theorisation on waste as a system of social signification remains seminal, especially in our postcolonial context, one must also acknowledge the upgradation of this theory by others who posit that Douglas's formulation still defines waste within the ambit of human imagination. One such scholar is Joshua Reno, who argues that "to suggest that waste is also material after it has been categorically rejected is an important first step, but not entirely satisfactory if its anthropocentric origins remain unaddressed."⁵ He calls for challenging this social constructivist paradigm to speak of waste "first as a set of objects in the world that pre-exist symbolic categorisation, and, second, that as a consequence waste is not only a mirror of human culture, but also a sign of and for other-than-human beings."⁶

The exhibition is about exploring this altered topography littered with objects that speak of radical indeterminacy. It

is about detritus that declines to fall into place, refuse that refuses to be disposed, and signs of life that spring forth from broken bodies, to break their silence and speak in foreign tongues, to claim their place under the proverbial sun.

The Classification Process

Many urban researchers acknowledge the paradox of knowing that the complexity of the waste materials produced today far exceeds the capabilities of the classificatory systems that struggle to contain and define it. Sociologist Zsuzsa Gille notes that “there are no statistics on overall waste volumes. Instead data are published in seemingly distinct categories such as municipal waste, manufacturing waste.”⁷ These classification systems are continuously changing and are always inadequate to cope with materials themselves and the rate at which they are growing and accumulating around us.

If we reflect on our public art institutions, then we realise that the beginnings of these systems were equally tenuous. When the National Gallery of Modern Art was set up rather urgently in New Delhi in 1954, it struggled with its own identity as a state-driven modernising project. It found no easy answers for how it would define this experience of modernism to its citizens, and how to create and order its collection to this end. In those initial years, the museum made the choice to focus on a handful of artists anointed as pioneers of the modern art movement. It insulated itself into an institution that upheld a historical modernism, remaining slow to respond to contemporary artists and art movements, shifts in mediums

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like photography, installation, and performance art, and political questions of allowing tribal and folk artists, even as other public institutions like the Lalit Kala Akademi and Bharat Bhavan raised these issues. Until the 1990s, in fact, apart from a few stray examples, the NGMA refused to hold solo exhibitions of living artists.⁸

Against such an insulated notion of the mid-20th century public art museum we see a new landscape of private art museums emerging in the 21st century, with collections like Devi Art Foundation, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Piramal Art Museum, etc. opening to the public. The NGMA itself has somewhat reshaped its agenda in this new liberalised, privatised milieu, holding mid-career survey shows and retrospectives of artists, and increasingly entering into private-public partnerships.

This new private museum has to reimagine its relationship with the public, contending for complex identity formations taking place far beyond and below the radar of the framework of nationhood. It has to think through its relationship with capital, how it mobilises its infrastructure, and how it frames the discussion on the contemporary.

In 2013, when Deeksha Nath, Akansha Rastogi, and I were invited to curate an exhibition at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Noida, we decided to raise some of these urgent questions about the contours of the art museum today. Titled *Zones of Contact: Propositions on the Museum* (we took inspiration from James Clifford's formulation), the exhibition recast the contemporary museum as a meeting ground, a social space activated by the complex interplay of cultures and

communities coming in contact with each other. The zones were equally zones of conflict, ongoing contestations between the state and various communities and subjects, over memories, histories, and social action itself.

If contemporary art can locate itself within these struggles then its institutional and exhibitory structures must find adequate forms to explore this as well. *Detritus* is a continuation of my curatorial exploration in thinking about an exhibition or a public collection that can open itself to the deeply political question of what is at stake: the making of a fragile public sphere that engenders dialogue on pressing issues of identity, visibility and belonging, and the role art has in making these conversations possible.

At Serendipity Art Festival, *Detritus* was housed in the charming heritage site of the Old Goa Medical College. This impressive mid-19th century structure, built by the Portuguese, was one of the earliest hospitals set up in Asia and was only recently converted into a government office for the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG). Beautiful green and white tiles flank the walls of the large airy wards (now exhibition spaces), creating a moving association with the artworks on display, which also speak of illness, fragmentation, care, and reconstitution, a choreography of the rising and falling bodies that ran through the building.

Culled from the everyday, the artworks seem to settle into the evocative edifice, to speak of bodily existence, totalitarian structures, systems of production, spaces of transcendence, and equally, subversion, taxonomies of terror and violence. Turned into coded signs, couched in the everyday, these

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objects pulled in different directions towards the erotic, the therapeutic, the divine, the vulnerable, and the marginal. They asked for different kinds of attention, standing in for the lives, processes, and relationships that they extend from.

Points of Entry

There were two possible ways to enter *Detritus* as a viewer. The narrative could open in a small room on the left of the main entrance with the installation *Free Hugs* by Ruby Chishti. Here, ten clusters of hugging female bodies stand on rusted trunks. Crafted from discarded garments and household fabrics, the figures are at once stoic and moving in the way they anchor each other, the soft folds of their bodies creating an indelible impression on the viewer's mind. For Chishti, they belong to a series of works that emerged when she turned her sculptural language away from conventional mediums towards childhood practices of doll making and stitching. They became her way of dealing with the intense experiences of being a care-giver for more than a decade and surviving the loss of close family members. Taking care of her invalid mother, Chishti explores the connection between the castoffs and the ailing body, her sculptures an act of therapeutic revival. "We will continue to struggle for survival, repairing the scars, absorbing the love as well as the hostility," says Chishti⁹

Another way into the exhibition would be to head straight through the foyer, where an installation by B V Suresh called *Once Bitten Twice Shy* stands in this interim space, a rudimentary wooden structure with a rotating bamboo pole

and a loudspeaker attached to it. We hear snatches of distorted words like “shrinking cultural spaces,” “self-censorship,” and “the dark times we live in.” A rag rotates alongside the loudspeaker, periodically sweeping a circle of black coal dust on the floor. In a video projected onto the floor, we see portions of the map of Vadodara, the city where Suresh lived and taught for a long time, appearing fleetingly. A set of mall placards in Gujarati repeat a public service message about the menace of crocodiles in the city of Vadodara. Signs such as these have sprung up near every bridge in the city, warning citizens that the river waters are crocodile infested.

With this dressed down version of a war siren, we are being broadcast the news of a shifting terrain that creative practitioners must now occupy. The sinister overtones in the everyday and the subterfuge are at play where the rhetoric of care and concern for citizens is used to police them. The artist’s zone of autonomy is under question and there is a redrawing of the boundaries within which he or she must function.

So, we make our way through these maternal bodies that find strength in their coming together and the shifting, shrinking terrains. The gestures of care and compassion as well as an understanding of the circumscribed boundaries become important to locate our next move.

Landscape Under Siege

Two kinds of landscapes present themselves to us in the works of B V Suresh and Moonis Ahmad Shah. The dystopian

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battleground that Suresh constructs, an agrarian production unit gone berserk with crashing weights, mechanised cotton gins, modified versions of rotating grain separators, cotton beaters, battered transistors, and scarecrow figures fitted with small speakers.

Shah's condensed avian portraits, more accurately forensic reports, extend from a web-based archive made by the artist titled thebirdsarecomming.info. Working with layers of drawings and digital prints which have been subject to various distortions, the portraits have their starting reference point in migratory birds which travel to Kashmir. Mostly, these birds are from fictional places trying to intrude into "here," which is not defined or called by a name.

For more than a decade, Suresh has reflected on the voice and aesthetics of the marginalised in his work. Cotton "as object / as material / as subject"¹⁰ has been Suresh's preoccupation for some years now. He is particularly drawn to the people closely associated with it—the cotton farmers, those who prepare cotton products from the crop and the traders who distribute it—many of whom come from marginalised Muslim communities in Gujarat. Here, the material and the tools used by the workers become starting points for the sculptures—the rudimentary, assembled kinetic objects laid bare speak to us about the state of our modernity and our relationship with the life of the subaltern. The central figure on which this installation converges is an albino peacock with a severed plumage, an aberrant national symbol on whose body are projected flickering video images. A sea of broken transistors emits all kinds of sounds from the signature tune of the national

broadcasting system and programmes addressed to them on the radio, to the farmers sharing their anguish punctuated by a nervous repetitive chant of *kisan mra gaya na* (the farmer is dying no) As Rakhi Peswani notes in her text on the various kinds of ambiguities this work produces,

To decode this language, the signs are discrete and often dubious. As one navigates in Suresh's labyrinthine assemblage, these codes become evident; independent forms hinged interdependently with the material culture of streets, all cogs in a farcical narration, conjoined. The works, taking cues from our street life, possess bare, open construction, showing bolts, clogs, motors and structural undertones of the mechanism.¹¹

In Moonis Ahmad Shah's series, another set of evidence is presented to us. Shah remains interested in fictionalising archives and here, he puts together an elaborate website on the "captured and neutralised" birds accused of espionage by various nations. Each portrait, a lightbox in the exhibition, has a QR Code with it which leads us to the website with extensive phrenological documentation on the birds, from their physiology and habitat to how they were shot down, what kind of injuries they sustained, and how their capture was justified. The birds have been killed but now their ghosts re-emerge through this archive, threatening an insurgency, and making visible the proliferating taxonomy of terror. The anguished, cacophonous soundscape of Suresh's installation

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is replaced with an inaudible high-frequency sound in Shah's space that create an immersive and uneasy environment for the viewer. On the website, a report speculates on the catastrophic effects of the ultrasonic bird sounds that have caused vegetation to rot. Shah plays with this threat—the bodies of the birds have been impaled but the sounds indicate their impending return. Between their different strategies of condensation and proliferation, both Shah and Suresh create powerful equations between the embattled body and the besieged landscape. In the case of Suresh, the body is literally crafted from the materials of production, reduced and subject to its relentless cycle, its now inhuman and senseless rhythms. In Shah's project the birds are enemy agents from suspicious territories that need to be dissected for evidence. Their corpses become the starting point to build a retroactive case for these "malevolent and dangerous criminals" that come from some places, already and forever condemned. "While all these spies are being investigated, make sure you remember they are fucking spies," Shah's site reads.¹² An interesting counterpoint to this menagerie of "deviant" birds that Suresh and Shah present are Ruby Chishti's crow sculptures. These commonplace, often unwelcome birds, found around human habitat are the artist's companions. They first appeared as motif in 2001 when Chishti was at a residency in Karachi and their audible presence filled the cityscape. With the care and expertise of a taxidermist and sculptor rolled into one, Chishti fabricates these realistic forms, capturing their unique stances and personalities. She makes them from the very straw and chaff that they collect to make their nests and mines their ordinary and sometimes even ominous associations in folklore

and myths to speak of home and belonging, of both the resilience and precarity of marginal and invisible lives.

Fragments of the Past Contain Signs for the Future

In the works of Babu Eshwar Prasad and Jahangir Asgar Jani, there is a close examination of the surface—whether of soil or abstracted fragments of the ground or wall—to read signs of what has transpired. They bear witness via their materiality to reflect on things past and things to come.

In the case of Prasad, we see three interlinked representations of a mining site. The denuded mines of Karnataka like Bellary, Vijayanagara etc., which have generated so much controversy in recent years, have been of particular interest to Prasad. Here he brings into focus the Kolar Gold Fields, one of earliest mines in India and a key site since the 19th century and earlier. The Kolar mines were closed down briefly in 2001 and in 2010, the Supreme Court approved their reopening.

The layers of soil that are culled from underground and chemically treated, are referred to by the locals as cyanide *betta* (cyanide mountains). For Prasad, encountering this landscape presented a surreal moment, the differing shades of each layer of soil were clearly visible on these artificial mountains where not a blade of grass grows. A digital collage shows this surface up close, the textures and hues of the soil stitched together in one long print. The landscape reverberates in a drawing and sound work which explore the relationship between the aural and the visual. The drawing, made from abstract notations, scans the surface and its many underlying layers. The

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soundscape creates another version of the landscape, bringing out the sounds of the underground. All three entities are locked in an endless loop of mirroring and producing variations.

In Jani's case we see a row of cement slabs that are worn down at points to expose the metal armature underneath on one hand, and delicate colour pools of enamel shining through on the other. This unsettling juxtaposition of contrary elements is further brought into play in their naming. Titled *Batin*, after a key concept in Islamic theology, they refer to that which is hidden, inner, inward. *Batin* is said to stand in for the soul, the inner spiritual self which is cleansed with light as opposed to *Zahir* which represents the external world. But you also see numbers like 23B, 37A, 73J etc., inscribed on them, giving them the anonymity and severity of court documents submitted as evidence.

Materials coalesce into ciphers; the cement tablets are littered with half submerged, abstract symbols that seem to straddle the sacred and the profane. Multiple associations of the sacred amulet or *taveez*, an inscribed tablet, modernist grid, the roadside debris, a fragment of a torn down wall whether resulting from a violent attack or the outcome of redevelopment, are further explored in the video accompanying the sculptural pieces.

Locating Jani's practice between the "architecture of belief" on one side and the grammar of universalizing abstraction on the other, art critic and curator Nancy Adajania writes evocatively that "Jani's morphed forms that propose an alphabet of thingness and uncertainty, wound and healing, belief and doubt, which invites us to decipher it."¹³

Lessons on Disintegration and Reconstitution

With the practices of Benitha Perciyal and Priya Ravish Mehra, we shift gears to explore our relationships with traditional fast-disappearing craft and art practices. Both artists have developed their engagement via long-term research. In Mehra's case, she spent 20 years documenting the marginal art of the traditional darners (or *rafoogars*) across North India, and in particular those working in Najibabad, her home town. With Perciyal, it emerges from her ongoing research on the technique of stucco or *suthai*, a traditional alternative to stone in the sculptural traditions of Tamil Nadu, as well as working with wood carving clusters and vahana makers in Thanjavur, Papanasam, Cuddalore, and Nagercoil.

These are not nostalgic exercises in upholding tradition; what is of prime interest to the artists are the values and relationships they engender with materials, the environment, our own bodies, and the process of making.

Mehra presents a series of works from different periods, all infused with the dictum of "invisible repair" that she received from the *rafoogars*. There are collaborative samples which make visible the complex mending and restoration process usually undertaken. Mehra often speaks about how this research took on a deeply personal quest when she was diagnosed with advanced cancer more than a decade ago:

I am still under treatment; and in this context the role of the *rafoogar* committed to preserving the unique

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life of a fragile, damaged Kashmiri *Kani* shawl has great metaphorical resonance for me. As does the very the action of *rafoo*, with the darning continuously aligning the edges of gashes and holes in the vulnerable weave, all margins firmly yet delicately gripped, and sealed stitch by careful stitch to prevent further ripping and other damage, and to render the cloth intact and whole.¹⁴

An old rejected woven tapestry that Priya had made fifteen years ago also makes its way into the exhibition, refreshed and strengthened by combining it with paper pulp. Also on display is a cluster of sculptures that emerged from the continuous process of unravelling fibre from Daphne, a plant from the high altitude Himalayan regions used to make paper pulp. For Priya, opening up the bark of the plant and realising that the structures and patterns within were very similar to her own body, was revelatory. It was as if she was coming in touch with the woven patterns that seemed to permeate all living beings. There is both careful design and continuous disintegration at the core of any life and object. Through a radical reengagement with her previous aesthetics, she symbolises the journey of any life as a stitched or “darned” collage of elusive, interstitial, transitional, liminal interfaces—always subject to visible and invisible trauma, always evolving, and always a reminder to accept and adapt whatever offers itself for modification. Benitha Perciyal’s practice emerges from her sustained engagement with materials and their unique cultural lives, and her own journey to discovering the multiple facets of faith and its material manifestations. She is particularly engaged with

exploring the vernacularisation of the Christian faith in India through architectural forms, traditional arts and symbolism. This particular sculptural installation was developed while apprenticing with craftsmen that work with stucco and wood in different parts of Tamil Nadu. Perciyal's abiding interest remains in the relationship between the ordinary and the divine body in the way that they age and decay. The body is constituted from its parts and materials, and for Perciyal, the artworks also become a way to closely study these living, breathing materials going through their own life cycles. The artist notes that in conventional art training we just draw the surface, we don't always deal with the flesh, the skin, or the body. This is what some traditional practices allow her to explore.

So, it was not surprising that one part of the installation pays homage to the materials used in the making of the stucco works. These range from wood, sea lime, rock lime, myrobalan seeds, jaggery, copper and brick, and are arranged in small vessels like the *navagrahas*, or the nine celestial bodies, lunar nodes and planets. Working with such materials is not a one-time process, rather an ongoing experimentation, and that interests Perciyal the most. For example, the wood used for the mother figure is from the fig tree, a traditional material used by the *vahana* makers because it grows lighter with each passing year. The stucco lion busts flanking the matriarch are reminiscent of *Yali* figures that are popular temple motifs, especially in south India. The hybrid creatures ward off the evil eye and offer protection. Sculpted from sea lime and rock lime, they have different properties and take a long time to cure. Even during the exhibition, the figures were being coated twice

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a day with myrobalm and jaggery paste to strengthen them. The fermented odours became part of the installation, part of Perciyal's ongoing interest in exploring "smell" and the strong associations they evoke.

The central figure could be a fertility goddess proudly proclaiming her attribute, the trail of rice crop she holds, or a farmer woman working in the fields, or a mother who nurtures and nourishes her family. She is draped in a sari, made over a decade by the artist by staining it with tea, which again speaks of time and labour, and equally bodily processes like menstruation. This relationship between the divine and the ordinary body can be understood via this deep receptivity to the materials from which it is moulded. The divine body makes no claims to abstract notions of perfection, transcendence or permanence; it remains transient, vulnerable, and firmly tied to the corporeal.

Another body rises and falls rhythmically in a video projection nearby to speak of this connection between the celestial and the mortal. In Vivan Sundaram's 2005 video *The Brief Ascension of Marian Hussain*, we see a figure rising from a bed of waste and leaping upwards in a graceful ballet like motion for a brief moment. The short video on loop endlessly plays out this ascension and descent – speaking in both jest and wonder – about the possibility of social mobility and transcendence. Marian Hussain, incidentally, was a young boy associated with the NGO Chintan, who assisted Sundaram in the making of his series *Trash*, of which this video is a part.

Making Strange

To make strange is a suitable framework to look at the works of Kausik Mukhopadhyay and Vivan Sundaram. A direct reference to the subtitle of Sundaram's series on display, it refers to the aesthetic manoeuvre deployed by early-20th century avant-garde artists, in particular Russian formalists, of subversion and distancing. Both artists are drawn to these playful strategies via their eccentric assemblages that turn familiar associations with objects and materials on their heads.

Sundaram's sculptures are part of a larger series consisting of around thirty wearable sculptural garments made from recycled materials and medical supplies that gesture at the relationship between fashion, the body, and art. The title, *Gagawaka*, alludes to popular references of musician and style icon Lady Gaga and the 2010 World Cup Football theme song "Waka Waka" by Columbian singer Shakira. Made from repurposed and recycled materials, the costumes were meticulously designed in collaboration with fashion designer Pratima Pandey, and take on every convention of fashion. As critic Rakhee Balaram puts it, the "readymades become ready to wear"¹⁵ and move from the realm of the discarded and the everyday to the world of art and couture.

The process of excavating and recycling have always been the mainstay of Sundaram's practice and through this he explores what art critic Chaitanya Sambrani calls, "the relationship of alienated bodies to the totalising fiction of the urban."¹⁶

The *Gagawaka* series is a departure from this logic where

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the garments forcefully assert their presence as objects of spectacle, seduction, and life itself, taking their cue from Marian Hussain's upward plunge away from the filth and squalor. The artist channelled the personal experience of illness to construct these energetic, provocative and playful costumes. The death drive evoked through the materials that reference illness with its use of surgical masks, back support belts, and x-rays, along with materials of industrialisation like corrugated sheets, rubber tyres, and consumer products (leather bags, shoe lining, laces), are turned into a celebration of the erotic.

Working with various mechanical contraptions, Kausik Mukhopadhyay assembles his sculptural objects from essential machine elements like gears, levers, pulleys, and motors. His objects of consideration remain discarded household items and refurbished consumer goods that he keeps collecting in the local markets and streets of Mumbai. Collaging these different mechanical parts and discarded articles, Mukhopadhyay creates delightful assemblages that are about the "home." Playing constantly between the boundaries of the private and political, the home in its miniaturized scale has been a site through which the artist speaks of world making at large. Some like *Mother's Home*, *Music Lover's Home* and *Father's Home* are intimate, jewel-like portraits that also lend themselves into larger readings of power dynamics, personal obsessions, roles and relationships and gendered spaces for example, while others like *Green Home* and *Cloud Home* mock at the real estate aspirations and desires that circulate in a city like Mumbai. The last work, *Small, Medium but not Large* presents us with

an explosion of electronics placed on three large tables. We could be in a storehouse, a junkyard, an archaeological site, a laboratory or a local workshop where obsolete and defunct objects are stacked and recycled. The tables jut out of the doors on both ends, as if the room cannot contain the overflow. Here computer screens face each other, kettles, ovens, printers, mixers all continue to rotate and move in an erratic manner. The strange and unsettling choreography of these interconnected machines is interrupted from time to time with an alarm system that goes off. Toasters lined with furry cloth or a scanner that sloshes with soap water create uncanny associations even as crudely constructed cameras periodically come to life triggered by sensors and remind the viewer that this playful environment is also a fraught and controlled one. As Ranjit Hoskote notes on this body of work:

Exposing the innards of the machinery at his disposal, rendering these everyday objects startlingly unfamiliar, Mukhopadhyay celebrates the latent, too-naturalised magic of the mechanical: invisible waves and fields, signals passing through the ether, forces at a distance.¹⁷

Looking at the Overlooked

Another conversation is set up between the practices of Sudharak Olwe and Susanta Mandal – this time around the medium of photography. In the hands of Olwe, it turns into a powerful tool for advocacy, to highlight the plight of Mumbai

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conservancy workers working under subhuman conditions. This stark documentary insertion into the exhibition becomes crucial to bring the focus on the human dimension in all this waste generation and to address the exploitative systems at work. Against this assertion that forces us to take cognisance of marginalised people are Mandal's experiments with 19th century technologies. The focus shifts from the subjects of representation to the apparatus itself. Working with pre-industrial photographic technologies, he sets up a dialogue with the viewer on the contingent nature of the image, on memory, visibility and invisibility, and erasure. Here too another kind of portrait is formed in the intersection of two shifting lens—a meditation on becoming, on identity formation.

Sudharak Olwe's powerful images of the Mumbai conservancy workers brings us face-to-face with their lives and inhuman working conditions. Olwe has spent close to two decades photographing some of these 38,000 conservancy workers, most of whom are from Dalit communities, employed by the Greater Bombay Municipal Corporation. Olwe wryly comments that "this is a job with one hundred percent reservation for them!"¹⁸

These black-and-white images of workers entering or coming out of manholes, bodies caked with sewage, endlessly sifting and sorting through garbage, cleaning choked gutters and streets, working in dumping grounds, and living in congested homes are presented starkly without mincing words. They are, as Olwe states, a "direct call for reflection." It goes without saying that to succeed, national campaigns like the Swachh Bharat Mission must tackle working conditions of conservancy

workers across the country, and explicitly address the deeply entrenched caste hierarchies at play.

Mandal's portrait that he constructs via his version of the magic lantern (a device for optical projection from the Victorian period), is in interesting dialogue with Olwe's images.

In the work titled *Naukar Ki Kameez*, two machines stripped bare with their exposed structures and wires project overlapping images on the same screen. The moving lenses create slippery zones, where images overlap and the portraits are in the constant process of formation, dissolution and reformation. They produce a different understanding of duration, space, perception, and reality. The title alludes to a film of the same name by Mani Kaul, which in turn is based on a literary work by Vinod Kumar Shukla. The work was made from Mandal's experience of observing the process of hiring a new peon in the school where he teaches. Mandal observes, "New faces don't fit well with the old one, even as the shirt fits perfectly."¹⁹ Like in earlier projects, the work captures portraits of people employed as domestic help or clerical staff. The tentative images appear and disappear as an account of the invisibility of these figures, a prolonged cinematic moment that looks at memory and erasure.

In another work, Mandal mobilises the wet plate collodion process, and sees a series of blurry, atmospheric aluminium sheet prints that captured the space once occupied by an object at different points of the day. Interestingly, it was with the wet plate collodion process that outdoor shooting was made possible for the first time in 1851. A portable dark room had to be taken to the shoot, because the photographic material

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needed to be developed within 15 minutes. The collodion process itself had a very short life and was replaced in the 1880s by dry gelatine prints. The technology has since disappeared, what it was capturing is no longer there as well and, in the end, we are left with traces.

Alchemy

Sheba Chhachhi's installation *Neelkanth (Blue Throat): Poison / Nectar* offers a climactic moment in the exhibition. The work relocates the mythological figure of Neelkanth, the blue-throated god who swallowed poison, to the Indian metropolis, where the elements of earth, fire, water, air, ether—and the homologous five senses of smell, sight, taste, touch, hearing—are in a state of toxicity.

The myth of Neelkanth, mentioned in the ancient texts of the *Mahabharata*, Markandeya Puran, Skanda Puran and others, tells us the story of the churning of the ocean that the gods and demons undertook, and which threw up the terrible black mass of Time or *Kalakutta*.

The God Shiva, in his compassion, swallowed this black mass, that would have otherwise destroyed the world. He held it in his throat. The *Kalakutta* did not harm him, but left a dark blue stain. He became Neelkanth, the Blue-throated One; the peacock stain, an ornament, as though a serpent had kissed his throat. With her beginnings in documentary photography, Chhachhi shifted to working with immersive installations. *Neelkanth* remains one of her most significant works from 2008 where she brings together her preoccupations with the city and the

body in a state of convulsive consumption. “The city, once an exhilarating sensorium emblematic of modernity, deforms in late capitalism into a metabolic city,”²⁰ writes Kumkum Sangari when describing the setting of many of Chhachhi’s works. Here we enter a complex of high-rise buildings arranged in four triangles that converge on a screen in the centre. A city unfolds below us, reminiscent of an elaborate mandala; the towers made of different heights have illuminated images of one of the five sense organs and together they form an image of a sensing, seething body that is feeling the urban environment. We are led to the centre of the installation where a blue screen flickers with a somewhat undecipherable image. On closer inspection, we realise we are gazing at an image of a throat that is constantly trying to swallow even as images of garbage are projected on it. The artist poses the question on the absorption, containment, and transformation of this ever-increasing toxic environment around us.

The title *Poison/Nectar* brings to mind another binary of whether we are ingesting or choking. As Chhachhi writes,

The allegory is a reminder of alchemical principles; that opposites partake of each other, that poison judiciously used can be medicine; that nectar can turn into poison; and that, in turn, every poison contains the possibility of nectar.²¹

Neelkanth, like the other works in the exhibition, leave us with this question of the relationship between the fragments and the whole. The process of reconstitution has to account for

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and work with these urban manifestations of residue and accumulation. This exhibition is a multi-layered conversation about detritus, the artefact of globalisation which signals both ruination and excesses of development. In this reworking of the artist figure at large in the world, scrounging through the material remains of our times, we have an alignment with other workers and communities out there who sort, clean and recycle things. Together they join forces to circulate these objects that tell their unfinished stories, that cling tenaciously to life itself.



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Notes

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http://orb.binghamton.edu/anthropology_fac/3,4
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16. Chaitanya Sambrani, "Tracking Trash, Vivan Sundaram and the Turbulent Core of Modernity," in *Trash Vivan Sundaram*. (Chemould Prescott Road, Project 88, Photoink, Sepia International, Walsh Gallery, 2008) 6

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17. Ranjit Hoskote. "The Animism of the Machine: Kausik Mukhopadhyay's Autobiography in Moving Parts." Essay accompanying exhibition *Squeeze Lime in your Eyes* at Chattejee & Lal, Mumbai, 2017. <http://chatterjeeandlal.com/shows/squeeze-lime-in-your-eye/>
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19. Artist note
20. Kumkum Sangari, "Cracks and Luminosities: Through the Anthropocene and Capital Matters", in *Arc Silt Dive The works of Sheba Chhachhi*, ed. Kumkum Sangari (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2016) 71
21. Artist statement on *Neelkanth (Blue Throat): Poison/Nectar* in *Arc Silt Dive The works of Sheba Chhachhi*, ed. Kumkum Sangari (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2016) unnumbered

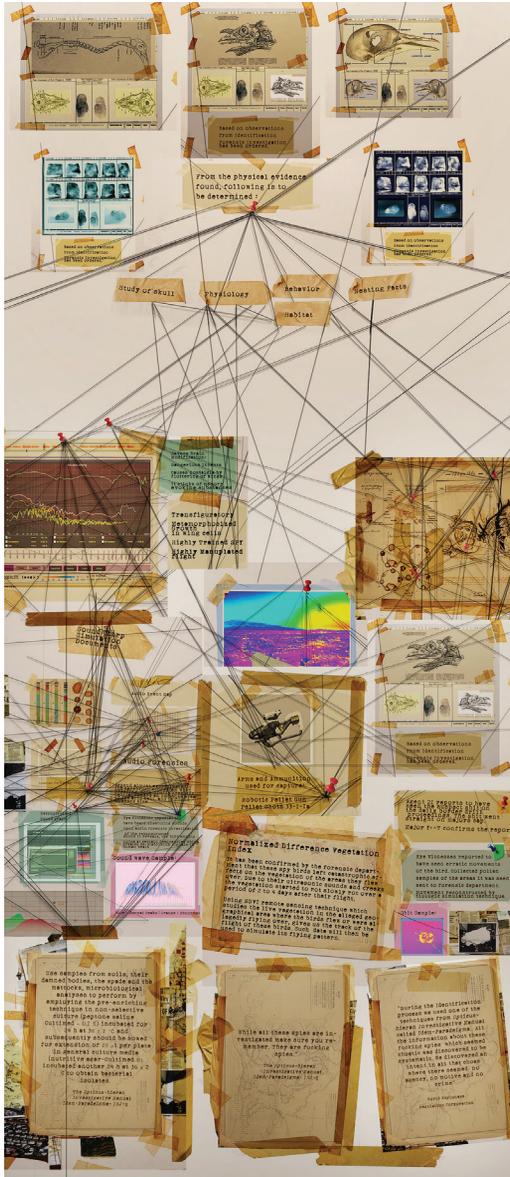


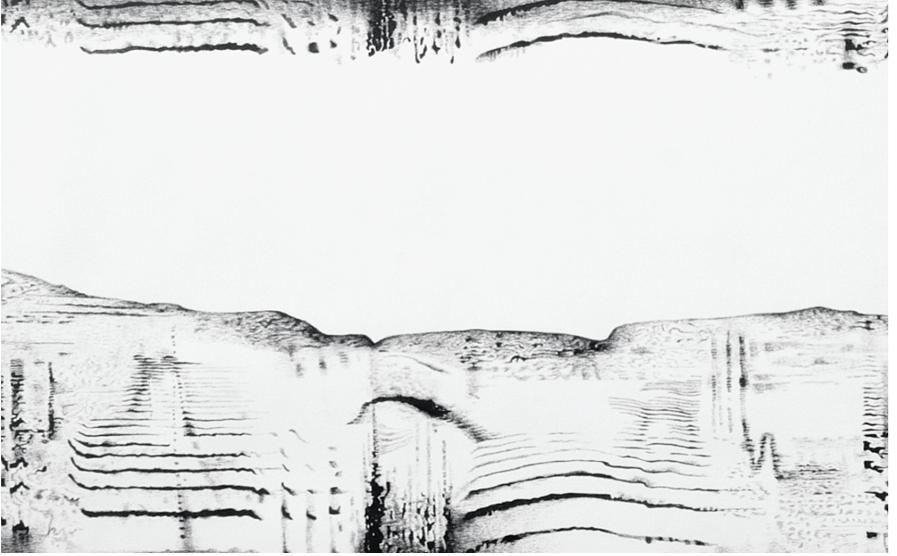


Fig. 1



Fig. 2





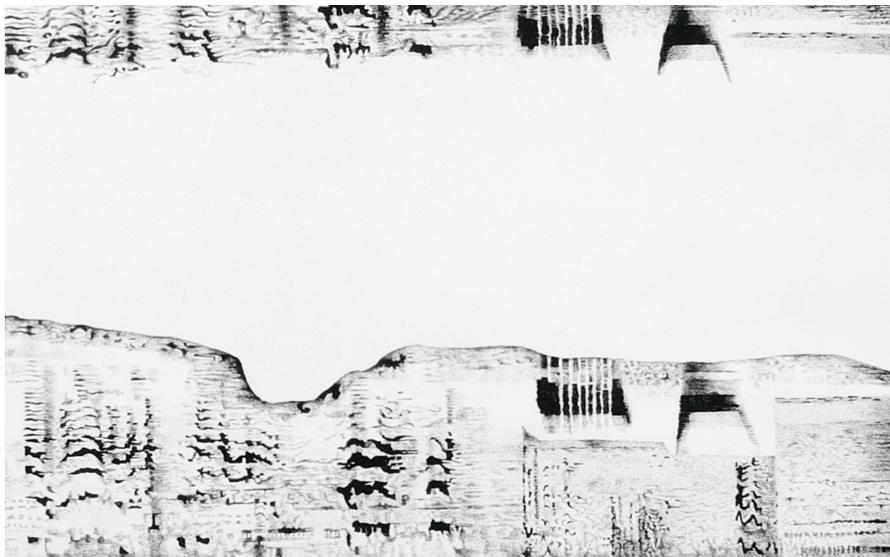






Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11











Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18







Fig. 20

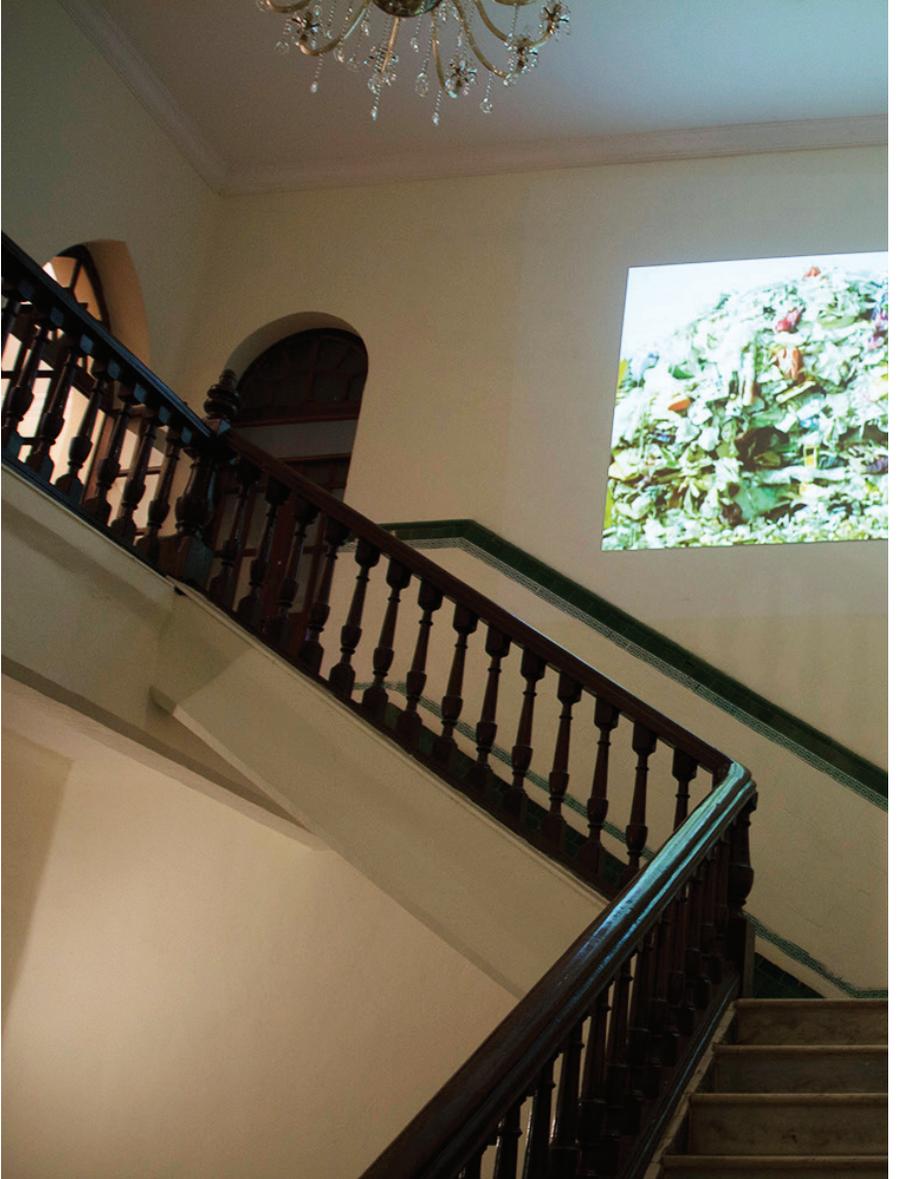




Fig. 22



Fig. 23









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Captions

Page 62

Ruby Chishti

Free Hugs

Fabric, polyester, thread, yarn and wood

2008

Fig 1

Ruby Chishti

Crows

Old cloth, metal wire, straw

2008

Fig 2, 3

Moonis Ahmad Shah

the birds are coming

Digital painting, clear print, web archive, light box, qr code

Sound design in collaboration with Zeeshan Nabi Wani

2017

Fig 4

Babu Eshwar Prasad

Notes from Underground

Installation with Digital print, drawing and sound piece

2017

Fig 5

Jahangir Asgar Jani

Ba'tin 24 D I

Mild Steel, Cement And Pigment

Size: 24" x 16" x 2"

2016

Fig 6

Jahangir Asgar Jani

Ba'tin 33 A

Mild Steel, Cement And Pigment

24" x 16" x 2"

2016

Ba'tin 37 A I

Mild Steel, Cement And Pigment

24" x 16" x 2"

2016

Fig 7,8

Kausik Mukhopadhyay

Small, Medium but not Large

3 table top kinetic installation with wood, metal, plastic and electrical components, electrical timer, computer monitors, light-bulbs, oven

From the series *Squeeze Lime in your Eyes*

2012- 17

Fig 9

Kausik Mukhopadhyay

From left to right:

Cloud House

Wood, metal, plastic,
electrical components, kinetic

71.5 x 24 x 24 inches

Music Lover's Room

Wood, metal, plastic,
electrical components, kinetic

81x 25,5 x16,5 inches

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Sneeze

CD player, speakers, PVC pipe

Centre:

Green Home

Wood, metal, plastic,
electrical components, kinetic
55x 24 x 9 inches

From the series *Squeeze Lime in your Eyes*

2012 - 2017

Fig 10

B V Suresh

Detail, *Chronicles of Silence* (*Khamoshi ki Daastan*)

Installation

2011-15

Fig 11

B V Suresh

Once Bitten Twice Shy

Kinetic sculpture, sound and video

2016

Fig 12

B V Suresh

Chronicles of Silence (*Khamoshi ki Daastan*)

Installation

2011-15

Fig 13

Priya Ravish Mehra

Impressions (set of 3)

Paper pulp and paper scraps from older works

2017

Tapestry 1

Woven textile with cotton, wool, paper rags

2002-14

Fig 14

Priya Ravish Mehra

Unravelling

Series of sculptures with Daphne Fibre

2016-17

Fig 15, 16

Benitha Perciyal

The Ordinary and the Divine

Wood, lime stucco, coconut leaves, myrobalan seeds, jaggery, sand, copper, brick, stone vessel, sea lime and rock lime.

Vessels holding raw materials of lime stucco

2016-17

Fig 17

Sheba Chhachhi

Neelkanth (Blue Throat): Poison / Nectar

260 Aluminium light boxes with B & W pigment prints, 4

translites, video 5 min 35 sec, silent, looped

2008

Fig 18

Sheba Chhachhi

Detail, Neelkanth (Blue Throat): Poison / Nectar

260 Aluminium light boxes with B & W pigment prints, 4

translites, video 5 min 35 sec, silent, looped

2008

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Fig 19

Sheba Chhachhi

Neelkanth (Blue Throat): Poison / Nectar

Still from video

2008

Fig 20, 21

Sudharak Olwe

In Search of Dignity and Justice

The untold story of Mumbai's Conservancy workers

Photograph series

1999 – 2017

Fig 22

Susanta Mandal

Naukar ki kameez

Steel structure, lenses, leds, transparencies, motor and timer

2015

Fig 23

Susanta Mandal

Untitled

Wet plate collodion on black anodised aluminium sheet, steel and iron

2017

Fig 24

Vivan Sundaram

The Brief Ascension of Marian Hussain

Video installation with single projection

2 min 20 sec

Set, direction and editing: Vivan Sundaram

Actor: Marian Hussain

Camera: Avijit Mukul Kishore
Music: Ricaro Arias
Action: Rashid Ansari
Assistant editor: Vikas Jaiswal
2005

Fig 25

Vivan Sundaram

(From L to R)

Flow Wrap

Corrugated sheet: plastic, with foam and cotton fabric lining

Cleopatra's Trail

Truck tyre-tubes, can-can: rubber, polyster net

Tubing

Bicycle tyre-tubes, rubber, synthetic stuffing

Snake-Shell

X ray films

from the series *Gagawaka Making Strange*

2010-2011

Biographies

Vidya Shivadas is a curator based in New Delhi. She completed her Masters in Art Criticism from Faculty of Fine Arts, M S University, Vadodara in 2000. She is currently the Director since 2011 of the not-for-profit Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA). FICA was set up in 2007 to support artists, art historians, curators, art critics, and other professionals devoted to the study of contemporary Indian art, as well as to conduct educational and art outreach programmes.

She has curated a number of exhibitions at the Vadehra Art Gallery since 2002 which include *Off the Record: Meditations on the Photographic Image* (2015), *Porous* (2012), *The Seeds*, Yoko Ono (2012), *Something I've been meaning to tell you* (co-curated with Sunil Gupta, 2011), Faiza Butt, Ruby Chishti, Masooma Syed (three Pakistani women artists, 2009), *Fluid Structures: Gender and Abstraction in India, 1970s – 2008* (2008), *Objects: Making/Unmaking* (2007).

In 2009 she was a guest curator at Devi Art Foundation and worked on the solo exhibition of Bangladeshi artist Mahbubur Rahman. In 2013 she co-curated (with Akansha Rastogi and Deeksha Nath) the exhibition *Zones of Contact: Propositions on the Museum* at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Noida (January – November, 2013). In 2014 she was curatorial advisor for *Where Do I End and You Begin*, an exhibition on the theme of Commonwealth at Edinburgh in 2014 to coincide with the Commonwealth Games in Scotland.

B.V. Suresh was born in Bangalore and studied painting at Ken School of Art in Bangalore (1978) and completed his diploma and post-diploma at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, in 1985. He later went on to do an MA in painting at the Royal College of Art, London, on an Inlaks Scholarship where he studied under Peter De Francia and Ken Kiff (1987). A larger version of the installation on display was shown as part of his solo exhibition *Khamoshi ki Dastaan / Chronicles of Silence* in Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi and Sumukha Gallery, Bangalore in 2016. Earlier solo exhibitions have been held at Vadehra Art Gallery (2006), Gallery Chemould, Mumbai (1998) among others. His artistic life extends beyond studio practice into teaching, theatre design and children's book illustration. BV Suresh taught between 1992 and 2017 at the Painting Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda and is presently faculty at the Fine Arts Department, S.N. School of Arts and Communication, University of Hyderabad.

Babu Eshwar Prasad completed BFA (Painting) from Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, Bangalore and MFA (Graphics) from M.S. University, Baroda. He held his first exhibition *The Midnight Sun* in 1996 at Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore and since held many solo shows including *Still-Lives of Emptiness* at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, Bangalore, 1999, *Smiles and Shadows*, Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore / Bombay, 2002 and *Time Past, Time Present, Time to Come* at Bodhi Art in Mumbai, 2007, *Skin of the Earth* Gallery Sumukha, 2013. He has also participated in many group exhibitions at Vadehra Art Gallery,

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New Delhi, Gallery Espace, New Delhi, Phyllis Weston Gallery, Cincinnati, Sumukha, Bangalore, 1X1 Art Gallery, Dubai UAE and Galerie Christian Hosp, Austria.

Apart from painting, Prasad has sustained a deep interest in exploring other media like sculpture, video and photography. His short videos have been screened at various venues. His debut feature film *Gaalibeeja (Wind Seed)* released in 2015 and has been screened at many film festivals including Mumbai Film Festival 2015, Bengaluru International Film Festival 2016 and 3rd i, San Francisco South Asian International Film Festival 2016, Eighteenth Film Columbia Festival, Chantham, New York 2017.

Benitha Perciyal, B. 1978, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, completed her Masters of Fine Arts in painting and Printmaking from the Government College of Arts & Crafts, Chennai 2002. She began to exhibit in 1997 and over the years has developed a distinct sculptural practice which is based on her exploration of faith and belief systems. The sculptures are made from natural materials like herbs, oils that are made into incense: myrrh, cinnamon, cloves, Frankincense, lemongrass, bark powder, and cedar. Her solo exhibitions include *There is no forgetting from the lips of the people*, Nature Morte Gallery, New Delhi (2017), *Still and Still Moving Life*, Art*ry Gallery, Kochi (2015), *How come you are here?*, Bergamo Mall, Art Chennai (2014), *Re-birth*, The Noble Sage Gallery, London (2013) among others. Her recent group exhibitions include *Memoires des futurs: Modernities indiennes*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017), Yinchuan Biennale Yinchuan Museum of

Contemporary Art, Yinchuan, China (2016), *Diary Entries*, Gallery Espace, New Delhi (2016), *Whorled Explorations*, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, curated by Jitish Kallat, Kochi (2014), among others. In 2016 she was awarded the Amol Vadehra Art Grant, a production grant given by FICA.

Jahangir Asgar Jani is a self-taught, Mumbai based artist. He works with sculpture, installation, watercolors and film. He is known for his life size sculpture in various media and his works are in important collections. He is concerned with the making of culture and the socio-political consequences of its propagation. His work has been critically written about by respected authors and cultural theorists in India. He has had 17 solo shows since 1990, and participated in several group exhibitions in India as well as abroad. His short films *Make Ups* and *Urmi* have screened at various festivals in India and Abroad. He received the prestigious Max Planck-TISS fellowship in 2012 for a film under The Urban Aspirations in Global Cities collaboration. Mapin India has brought out a monograph, *Alternate Lyricism*, on him. He has been conferred the Diversity Leadership Award by the World HRD Congress, USA in 2016 for his work in the field of gender and sexuality diversity through his art practice.

Kausik Mukhopadhyay born in 1960 and completed his BVA at Rabindra Bharati University Kolkata in 1986 and MFA at Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal in 1989. His one man show includes *Squeeze Lime In Your Eye* at Chatterjee and Lal, Mumbai (2017) and *Guaranteed to work*

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throughout its useful life, held jointly at Pundole Art Gallery and The Guild Art Gallery in 2009. Other participations include *Making/ Unmaking Objects*, Vadehra, New Delhi, 2007, *Reverse Depth*, Tamarind Arts, New York, 2006, *Edge of Desire*, Perth, Australia, 2004, *Century City – Art and Culture in the Metropolis*, Tate Modern, London, 2001, *Collaborative Space*, Collaborative Work with Tushar Joag, 1997. He has held fellowships at the Kanoria Centre for Art, CEPT, Ahmedabad and the Inlaks Foundation. He currently teaches at the Kamla Raheja Vidyavidyalaya Institute for Architecture and Environment Studies.

Moonis Ahmad Shah, born in Srinagar Kashmir, is an interdisciplinary artist who works with hybrid practices involving mediums like video, photography, painting, programming and installation. He has held solo shows at Founders Gallery, Melbourne and Rohtas Gallery Lahore in 2016-17 apart from group Show *Sleepless Constellations* at 1x1 Gallery, Dubai 2017; Group Show *Past as Present*, at Gandhara Art Space 2017, Group Show *A Million Mutinies Later – India at 70*, at Turner House, Cardiff, UK etc. He participated in a residential programme at UNIDEE, Cittadelarte 2016, where he was fully funded by EU. Moonis Ahmad was a UNESCO, (United Nations Madanjeet Institute of South Asian Arts) UMISAA scholar at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore and graduated in Fine arts (BFA) majoring in Digital Arts. He was most recently awarded the FICA Emerging Artist Award 2017. He is currently a Research Candidate at the University of Melbourne and is a recipient of Australian Graduate Research and Training Programme scholarship.

Priya Ravish Mehra is a Fine Arts graduate (Textiles) of Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal. She studied tapestry weaving at the Royal College of Arts, London and the West Dean College, Sussex (UK) under the aegis of the Commonwealth Fellowship and Charles Wallace Trust (India) Scholarship. She was a primary research consultant in Bihar and Gujarat for the ‘Saris of India Project’, sponsored by the Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Ministry of Textiles. Her work has been featured as solo exhibitions, including at the British Council, Delhi (1993), Commonwealth Institute, London (1994), Harley Gallery, Nottingham (1994), Eicher Gallery and Jehangir Art Gallery, Delhi and Mumbai (1997) and Gallery Fernando Vilchis, Instituto de ArtesPlasticas, Xalapa (2016) and Gallery Threshold(2017). With the support of the *Khoj project Negotiating Routes: Ecologies of the Byways II*, in 2012 she was able to take forward her interest in supporting and projecting the work done by the Rafoogars of Najibabad.

Ruby Chishti, a Pakistani/American artist, is primarily a sculptor, her work is largely autobiographical in nature. Ruby was formally educated at the National College of Art in Lahore, Pakistan. Over the last 17 years, she has produced a series of lyrical sculptures and installations that touch on such issues as Islamic myths, gender politics, migration, memory, universal theme of love, loss and of being human. Her work has been exhibited at Taubman Museum, Queens Museum,. She has held residencies at Vasl in Pakistan, the Harris Museum in the UK, the Vermont Studio Center, Transparent Studio in

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DUMBO, NYC, Virginia center for creative Arts, Waste to Art Museum Baku, Azerbaijan and at Theertha, Colombo, Colombo Art Biennale 2016, Sri Lanka and recently at Asia Society Museum NYC. She has held solo shows in London, Karachi, Lahore and Vermont, her most recent being *We leave, we never leave, we return endlessly* at Twelve Gate Arts Philadelphia in 2015. Her work are found in the Collection of Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, India, Harris Museum Preston, UK, V& Albert Museum of Childhood London, UK, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK among many others.

Sheba Chhachhi is an artist, photographer and thinker who investigates questions of gender, eco-philosophy, violence and visual cultures, with emphasis on the recuperation of cultural memory. An activist/photographer in the women's movement in the 1980s, Chhachhi moved on to create intimate, sensorial encounters through large multimedia installations. Her work interweaves the mythic and the social, pre-modern thought and contemporary concerns, bringing the contemplative into the political. She has exhibited widely including the Gwangju, Taipei, Moscow, Singapore and Havana biennales; her works are held in significant public and private collections, including Tate Modern, UK, Kiran Nadar Museum, Delhi, Bose Pacia, New York, Singapore Art Museum, Devi Art Foundation, Delhi and National Gallery of Modern Art, India. Chhachhi speaks, writes and teaches in both institutional and non-formal contexts. She lives and works in New Delhi.

Sudharak Olwe has been a Mumbai-based photojournalist since 1988 and has worked as a press photographer with some of the leading newspapers in India. He is presently the Photo Editor of the country's largest read Marathi Newspaper, Lokmat. Sudharak has travelled the length and breadth of this nation and seen first-hand some incredible stories of resilience, courage and change. He has worked in tandem with many NGOs presenting their extraordinary work with both rural and urban communities. In 2016, Sudharak was conferred the Padma Shri, India's 4th Highest Civilian Award by the President of India. Sudharak's photography is that of empathy. It is a journey into the unseen perspective of the human condition. His photography cuts across all barriers and presents to you a moving story of individuals and communities.

Susanta Mandal studied painting at the Government College of Arts and Craft in Kolkata (BFA, 1990) and the Benares Hindu University (MFA, 1993). His work has been shown in several exhibitions both in India and abroad and acquired by prestigious art institutions, including the Guggenheim Museum, New York. He has had solo exhibitions at Art Heritage Gallery, New Delhi (1998); and GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore, India (2007) and Vadehra Art Gallery (2015) apart from participating in group exhibitions and biennales like Kochi Muziris Biennale 2014 titled *Whorled Explorations*, *The Contemporary 2, Who Interprets the World?*, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan, *Making History*, Colombo Art Biennale 2014, *50 Years of Contemporary*

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Art, 'Aesthetic Bind- Phantomata', curated by Geeta Kapur, Chemould Gallery, Mumbai. 2013-14, *Zones of Contact: Propositions on the Museum*, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi, *Room for Failure*, curatorial project by Meera Menezes in Sarai Reader 9. Susanta Mandal has been artist in residence at the Khoj International Residency, New Delhi (2007) and the Britto International Artists Workshop, Tepantor Film City, Bhaluka, Bangladesh (2008). In 2017 he collaborated with contemporary dancer Rajyashree Ramamurthi to explore the potential languages emerging at the intersection of contemporary art and dance.

Vivan Sundaram is one of Indian's most prolific artists and active political voices. His artistic practice has been crucial in the definition and development of installation as a practice in the country. Born in 1943 in Shimla, Sundaram studied painting at M.S. University, Baroda and The Slade School of Fine Art, London in the 1960s. Since 1990 he has turned to making artworks as sculpture, installation, photography and video. He has exhibited in the Biennials of Kochi (2012), Sydney (2008), Seville (2006), Taipei (2006), Sharjah (2005), Shanghai (2004), Havana (1997), Johannesburg (1997) and Kwangju (1997). His work been part of several important exhibitions in Tate Modern, London; International Centre for Photography, New York; Queens Museum; Mori Museum, Tokyo; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation, Vienna; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago; Haus der Kulteren Welt, Berlin among others. He has had solo shows in many cities of India as well as in New York, Chicago,

London, Paris, Toronto, Montreal and Copenhagen. His solo exhibition, *GAGAWAKA + Post-Mortem* (2015), was held at the Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles. Currently his retrospective *Step Inside and you are no longer a stranger*, is on view at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi.

In 2010, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-portrait* in letters and writings, edited and annotated by Vivan Sundaram, was published by Tulika Books, Delhi. More recently Sundaram worked toward a creative collaboration on the artist Ramkinkar Baij in tandem with theatre practitioners, in a project titled *409 Ramkinkars : Sculptural Installation*, IGNC, Delhi 2015. Sundaram remains committed to developing collaborative spaces for artists and intellectuals and over the years has spearheaded initiatives like Kasauli Art Centre in 1976 and later became the founder member and trustee of Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat) in the early 1990s. Vivan Sundaram lives in Delhi.

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The Ground Beneath My Feet

by Sabih Ahmed

Detritus: Matter Out of Place

by Vidya Shivadas

Project Head: Kanika Anand

Editors: Nandita Jaishankar & Arnav Adhikari

Design: Aman Srivastava/Serendipity Arts Foundation

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Published by



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