

PROJECTS / PROCESSES

**DEAR BRENDAN, DEAR
ARUNA: THOUGHTS ON
DIASPORA, CULTURE, AND
BEING IN THE WORLD**

ARUNA D'SOUZA AND
BRENDAN FERNANDES

PROJECTS / PROCESSES VOLUME III

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

**Dear Brendan, Dear Aruna: Thoughts on
Diaspora, Culture, and Being in the World**

Aruna D'Souza and Brendan Fernandes





A selfie portrait of writer and critic Aruna D' Souza, with artist and performer Brendan Fernandes, taken in Goa, 2019.



Mundo Goa

Venue Institute Menezes

Braganza; Art Gallery, Maquinez

Palace; Camões, CLP

Curated by Vivek Menezes

Curatorial Note

Curated By *Vivek Menezes*

Curatorial Team *Daphne de Souza, Greig Fernandes*

Projects

Altar // Amruta Patil

Art, Race and Protest // Aruna D'Souza

Azulejo 2019

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Vista Mundo

The history of India's western coastline is written in the ebb and flow of ocean tides, and the constant passage of voyagers who profoundly shaped the history and culture of the ancient entrepôt called Goa. Today this tiny territory exists seemingly at the margins of the subcontinent's giant political alignments, as the insignificantly smallest state of India. But even until just a few decades ago, "little" Panjim sat centrepiece of the Estado da India which once extended from Timor (in what is now Indonesia) all the way across the oceans to Mozambique in East Africa. The island of Tiswadi on which the city is situated, with its twinned port cities on the Zuari and Mandovi rivers, has been known to the outside world as long as history has been recorded. At the very heart of the Goan civilizational experience is what we now call globalisation, on an epic and arguably unrivalled scale: unending confluential layers of meaning that extend back for millennia to the dawn of mankind and continue to accrue in new and unexpected ways in the wildly diverse contemporary experience that surrounds you in every direction at the Serendipity Arts Festival.

Mundo Goa highlights the infinitely varied ways of being and belonging that artists, writers, intellectuals—and every one else who seeks to belong to it—can derive from the unique cultural scenario of this blessed slice of the Konkan coastline, with its deep-rooted connections across the subcontinent, to Africa, South America and Europe, and more recently to the rest of the world as well. It is a profoundly significant homecoming for each of the participants: Antonio E Costa, Anjali Arondekar, Aruna D’Souza, Amruta Patil, Brendan Fernandes, Sergio Santimano, and Solomon Souza, as well as the 25 Goa-based artists under the age of 40 who comprise Azulejo 2019, the group exhibition seeking to reclaim and reinvent the iconic Islamic-Iberian ceramic form for the twenty-first century.

Beyond Boundaries

Artist *Antonio E Costa*

Shaman [shah-muh n, shey-, sham-uh n] – a person who acts as intermediary between the natural and supernatural worlds, using magic to cure illness, foretell the future and control Spiritual forces. Antonio E Costa is an undeniable force of nature: architect, artist, philosopher, polyglot, mercurial presence in multiple worlds at the same time. For decades before settling on the Nilgiri slopes, he has wandered between continents and countries, shedding skins and gathering colours and textures. His commitment to his practice is awesome, all-encompassing. Ranjit Hoskote strikes bullseye when he writes, “Antonio E Costa is an abstractionist of the highest calibre, with a visionary gift for compassing infinities into his

frames while never losing sight of the grain and weight of sensuous particulars. He gives Gaitonde and Ram Kumar a run for their money, and often - because he remains committed to formal and material experiment without settling into the fixities of style - outpaces them". Born in Kenya nearly eight decades ago, with only the glimmer of decolonisation on the distant horizon, this is an artist who has experienced wrenching loss and constant change in a peripatetic life's itinerary that zigzags from Africa to North America, then Europe and South America before homing into Goa and the "Blue Hills" just south of his ancestral homeland. This is an individual story, but perfectly encapsulates the diasporic wanderings of his people. At each individual step of the journey he stood out but also blended in, quickly learned the language of the people around him, but meticulously maintained the Swahili and Konkani of his childhood heart. Always, he painted. Always, he was acclaimed for his uncanny, incandescent work.

How can it be that such an immensely significant artist is barely known in his homeland? Why is it that *Antonio E Costa: Beyond Boundaries* is the first-ever retrospective of this obviously globally significant oeuvre? These are pertinent questions that pierce directly to the core of the Indian art world, and the way it has constructed itself on swelling balloons of hot air and very little else. As Hoskote indicates, there are very few bodies of work anywhere that can be adequately compared to what you see on display here in Goa. This is the work of a grand master of our times, never mind if you have never heard of him before.

Those of us who have been privileged to see Antonio at work, know that here is the very rare case where one plus one does not yield the usual result. This is an artist who absorbs energies, light and shadow, literally picks up things from the roadside, and then everything emerges on canvas in an uncanny assemblage that is unerringly true to the place and times. This is more than a retrospective, it is a powerfully evocative tour of the world without the inconvenience of jet lag.

Icon

Artist *Solomon Souza*

Seven decades after his grandfather—the seminal Indian modernist painter Francis Newton Souza—left his homeland to live in London, Paris, and eventually New York, the brilliantly talented Israeli-British-Goan muralist and painter Solomon Souza arrived in Goa for the first time in mid-November 2019, to complete one of the most unlikely plot twists in Indian art history.

At 26, the younger Souza is already internationally renowned for spectacular street art portraits. From 2015 onwards, he worked on series of striking tributes to contemporary and historical figures on the shutters of the gritty Mahane Yehude Market in Jerusalem: Golda Meir and Menachem Begin, but also Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein and Bob Marley, as well as an appreciable cohort of Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. These have brought him other projects in the USA, Australia and the UK.

In Goa, Solomon has painted over 20 monumental murals to pay tribute to his grandfather (that specific part of the project will remain a work in progress), as well as many other relatively unsung and unrecognized icons who have largely failed to find suitable recognition from state or society. These underline the extraordinary transnational identity of the Goans—who retain remarkably durable ties and connections through generations in diaspora—even while living, working and representing many other countries in a scattered arc from South America through Africa and—as in Solomon’s case, even Israel.

Thus, there have been marvelous tributes to Sita Valles (the Marxist revolutionary anti-colonial freedom fighter of Angola) and Anthony de Mello (who was Karachi-born, and founded the BCCI and Asian Games), as well as Dilip Sardesai (he remains the only Goa-born male cricketer to play for India) and Seraphino Antao (“the cheetah”

was one of the fastest sprinters in the world, and won two gold Commonwealth Gold medals for Kenya in the 100 and 200 metres). Over the span of just a few weeks, Solomon became a popular neighborhood fixture and fully absorbed into the community of Goan artists.

Let there be love

Artist *Brendan Fernandes*

At the very end of an excruciatingly painful year punctuated by mass protests and the hateful politics of exclusion in so many places across the world, this very beautiful multidimensional artwork in Goa reminds us there still remain viable alternative ways of being and belonging. It is the India debut of Brendan Fernandes, capping an extraordinary year for the 40-year-old Kenya-born Canadian-Goan.

Earlier in 2019, the New York Times described his work at the Guggenheim's Young Collectors Council spring gala as a "genre-bending and boundary-pushing method that melds dance with visual art". Soon afterwards, his show-stopping "The Master and Form" at the Whitney Biennial—50-minute installation-performance featuring trained ballet dancers - yielded long moments of breathless tension interspersed with surpassing beauty, and also invited persistent questions about where power lies in the art world.

This first-ever artwork for India digs deep into the artist's Konkani-Goan ancestral culture, and derives inspiration from the affectionate Konkani greeting (most often used in farewell)—Mog Asundi, which means "let there be love (between us)". This message of acceptance and inclusion is spelled out in each of the five scripts regularly used to write Konkani: Devanagiri, Roman, Kannada, Malayalam, and Perso-Arabic (it is the only language in the world in regular use in so many different forms) on thousands of posters, tiles and t-shirts, which

are to be distributed freely in Goa, especially on the sidelines of the choreographed interventions at four different festival venues. In each of these, dancers spread out to express themselves individually, even while onlookers gather, and many more people wind their way through the area, then they begin to move as one, surging in one direction and then another—but still carefully leaving ample room for everyone else to do whatever they want, all around them. It is an acute metaphor and lesson about how we can find space for each other, in some kind of self-respect and harmony. A message from Goa to the world.

Vista Mundo

The practice of using found objects to create a work of art finds its origins in Dadaist art movements of the twentieth century and was perfected by Marcel Duchamp with his pioneering “ready-mades”. Avant-garde film-makers adopted the practice of using found film footage. The process of assemblage became a means for film-makers to critique the spirit of their time. This is a completely “jugaad” workshop without institutional rules, allowing participants anarchy in form and concept; to open their minds to the medium and to the ideas it evokes. The films being made as part of the workshop will be screened on the last day of the Festival.

O Retorno

Artist *Sergio Santimano*

Just across the road from this lovely heritage building, the Mandovi River estuary ebbs and flows towards Aguada and the open invitation of the Arabian Sea. Stay that course long enough, heading due south-east across the Indian Ocean, and you will arrive directly at Maputo, the capital city of modern-day Mozambique, where the rivers Tembe, Mbuluzi, Matola, and Infulene similarly converge into an estuarine

bay. These two locations are over 6000 kilometres distant from each other, but remain inextricably linked in powerful, profound and complex dimensions. For over 200 years, they belonged to the same Estado da India Portuguesa, with its capital in Goa. And even after that, right into the twenty-first century, many thousands of Goans remained and remain committed to Mozambique. That is the story of Sergio Santimano.

Born in the city then known as Lourenço Marques in 1956 into a family with deep roots in the coastal South Goan village of Colva, Santimano grew up in the decades when Mozambique was torn by incessant violence. Conflict was his first and primary subject material when he began his career as a photojournalist for the newspaper Domingo. He spent the following years covering civil war, famine, and nascent nationalist politics for Agência de Informação de Moçambique (the country's premier news agency), and after the cessation of hostilities in 1992 (negotiated with substantial contributions by another Goan, Aquino de Braganza) switched to freelancing, and in-depth reportage of reconstruction and the aftermath of war.

Dear Brendan, Dear Aruna: Thoughts on Diaspora, Culture, and Being in the World

ARUNA D'SOUZA AND
BRENDAN FERNANDES

We had met once or twice in person before we arrived in Panjim for the Serendipity Arts Festival, and it was there that we spent time together properly—the artist (Brendan) and the art critic (Aruna), both “Canadian-by-way-of”, both having lived for some significant time in New York, with many common friends and colleagues. Our geographical trajectories couldn’t have been more different, but our simultaneous thrill and uneasiness at the notion of “homecoming” was profoundly similar. Our time in Panjim was saturated with thinking through the meaning of origins, thanks to our participation in Vivek Menezes’s curatorial project Mundo Goa, which gathered the work of six artists with ties (direct and circuitous) to the former Portuguese colony. After we left Goa, we entered into a correspondence, trying to make sense of our time in this strangely familiar place—Aruna had visited a few times before, solely as a tourist; Brendan had never been in Panjim, though he had family members there—and thinking about what it might tell us about how to be in the world. Somehow, it seemed more important to talk about food and family than about art per se—but all those things are of a piece, in the end.

January 2020

Dear Brendan,

It's been a couple of weeks since we left Goa. I went to Bombay then New York before going home to my tiny village in western Massachusetts. You went to Toronto then Amsterdam and Rome on your circuitous route back to Chicago. This seems perfectly apt in the aftermath of our project that was about diaspora and the long *durée* of globalisation.

Maybe it makes sense to start our conversation about our experiences of *Mundo Goa* with curator Vivek Menezes's description of the project that brought us there:

The history of India's western coastline is written in the ebb and flow of ocean tides and the constant passage of voyagers who profoundly shaped the history and culture of the ancient entrepôt called Goa. At the very heart of this civilisational experience is globalisation on an epic scale: confluential layers of meaning that extend back for millennia to mankind's earliest recorded history and continue to accrue in the wildly diverse contemporary experience.

Mundo Goa highlights the infinitely varied ways of being and belonging that artists, writers and intellectuals derive from this unique cultural scenario, with its deep-rooted connections across the subcontinent, to Africa, South America and Europe, and more recently North America and Australasia. *Mundo Goa* will have separate constituent parts, each reflecting identity as it is refracted, contested, alienated, and reconstructed via diaspora, migration, and other profound processes of change.

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All of us who were invited to participate by Vivek—you, me, Amruta Patil, Antonio E Costa, Anjali Arondekar, Solomon Souza, Sergio Santimano—were understood by Vivek to be part of a Goan diaspora, our migration stories sometimes unfolding over generations. In my case, I laughed when Vivek invited me. My father's family is Mangalorean, not Goan, I said. *Oh, but Mangaloreans are the first Goan diaspora!* replied Vivek, referring to the idea that my ancestors left in the aftermath of Portugal's arrival in Goa to our eventual homeland further south. Perhaps that's true. It's certainly a seductive idea, especially when I recognise all the common threads shared by Goans and Mangaloreans. But given that the migration would have occurred some 500 years ago, it's a bit complicated for me to think of Goa as a point of origin. When does origin begin?

What about you? What's your connection to Goa?

Love,
Aruna



Photograph of a thali consumed by Brendan Fernandes.
Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.

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January 2020

Dear Aruna,

It's great to hear from you. As I look back on our experiences in Goa, they seem so much longer ago than just the few weeks back that they were. Being "home" in Chicago, I can now settle, think, and process the journey. This was a journey that brought me to another "home"—one that I had never been to before, but one that welcomed my return nonetheless. Goa was both so familiar and foreign at the same time. It was many things for me, and all at once.

Growing up in Kenya, my family always identified as Goan. My sisters and I were the fifth generation to be born in Kenya, but we were still identified as Goan. British colonialism divided and set up hierarchies between the communities on the Swahili Coast, and my parents and their parents took pride in tracing their origins to India. It was only when my family immigrated to Canada in 1989 that I was deemed Kenyan because of my birth there. Later, when I moved to the US to study, I became Canadian. After years of living in Canada, it was only when I left that I was identified with the country.

So my identity has always shifted and been in a state of flux. I identify with all these places, but my "Goan-ness" is somewhere at the root. People often ask me: *Who are you? Where are you from?* My reply is always, "That's a loaded question, are you sure you want the answer?" If they tell me that they do, I tell them, "I'm Goan", and they reply, *Where are you going?*

Which is kind of the point. My identity always seems to shift when I go to the next place. I think that's a part of understanding diaspora that still needs to be unpacked.

Coming to India to be part of *Mundo Goa* was an exciting moment. I was coming to discover another part of who I am. I was coming to have my eyes opened, and I was eager to take in all that would be new and all that would be familiar. One thing that impacted me was the food

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culture. My mother cooked Goan food, but all my experiences of Goan food were from outside of Goa. While eating I was excited to see foods my mother made on restaurant menus. The most wonderful thing of all was that they tasted like hers. “Mother tongue” became a new way of thinking through this experience of diaspora. My mother learned tastes and dishes from my grandmother, as she had learned from her mother, and even though they were all born in Kenya, they picked up, gathered, and passed along these traditions through exchange and memory. This connection to food was a vital part of my trip and one that did much to make me feel at home.

Thinking about food, we ate many meals together and shared many stories and cheer. How was food cultures a part of your trip?

Sending much love,
Brendan



Photograph of a thali consumed by Brendan Fernandes.
Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.

January 2020

Dear Brendan,

I cracked up at, *where are you Goan [going]?* because of course, that's one of the things that was most contradictory about the experience of "homecoming" to me. *Mundo Goa* was framed for all of us as a way of thinking about where we went as much as where we were coming back to. Perhaps that's the essence of a place like Goa—a place that was a hub for a global empire, without being a metropole: origin is a moving target, ever shifting, always here AND there, or perhaps even neither here NOR there.

For me as a half-Mangalorean whose ancestors might once have been Goan (though this lineage is as much myth-making as history, as far as I can tell—my family speaks Konkani, but my ancestry is not as clear as anyone would like to believe), my experience of the former Portuguese state was as much about first contact as return. (I saw this same attitude reflected, I think, both in your performance work at Serendipity and in the mural project of Solomon Souza, in which he painted on the sides of historic buildings of the Latin Quarter of Panjim famous figures from history—that project seemed as much about his own curiosity and wonder about the place as much as anything else, a sense of discovery.) The food experiences were fascinating. I used to write a food blog where I talked a lot about foodways and the translations that occur when people move from one place to another and try to recreate taste memories in wildly different contexts. I was thinking about how my parents had to find creative ways to recreate their respective home foods (Mangalorean for my dad, Sindhi for my mom) all the way in Canada back in the 1970s and 1980s, before this latest era of globalisation, when you couldn't find Indian ingredients so easily. I call it translation, but it could as easily be thought of as a game of telephone. With each iteration, the message is morphed into something else. The changes shouldn't be thought of as degradation, of course—more like remixing, a game of culinary exquisite corpse where the result is a wonderful new whole. I had spent my whole life eating my dad's Mangalorean food and then going

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back to Mangalore to taste the “original”—but coming to Goa gave me another “original” to consider: sorpotel, vindaloo, xacuti (we call it something different in Mangalore, I believe), and so on. The spices and combinations and cooking methods were all the same, but there were differences, too.

Xo

Aruna



Photograph of a local vegetable market in Goa. Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.

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February 2020

Dear Aruna,

It has been some time and I hope you are well.

I love the way you talk about food being “by-way-of...” and add the notions of “foodways” and “taste memories”. These so beautifully situate food within a trajectory. They make food into a more connected experience. Even though I think of my mother’s cooking as “authentic” it did have influences from our Kenyan experience. So it was Goan, but also Goan-by-way-of. . . Kenya.

My mum’s dal has always been my favourite, but she recently told me that she learned how to make it from our Hindu neighbour in Nairobi. I always assumed she learned it from my grandmother, but I’ve learned now that dal is not a particularly Goan dish. Although, it’s still the food I want to eat when I visit home.

My family lives in Canada and cook Goan food especially during the Christmas season. It is common to hear an older family member say, *it’s tasty but not the same as it was in Kenya*. I find that interesting. They have never had Goan food made in Goa. Their taste memories extend back to Kenya, where, for them, the food was at its most “authentic”. Authenticity is a fickle term. How does it apply to making family foods from places you have never even been?

There is a Goan dessert called bibik that my mum would make. It’s also called bebinca. It’s a type of pudding made out of baked layers and rich with flour, sugar, ghee, egg yolk, and coconut milk. In Kenya, she would use fresh coconut milk to make the sweet pudding. Coconut flesh was ground and pressed. In Canada, we don’t have access to fresh coconuts, so she used canned coconut milk. Even though the sweet is still delicious, it loses something in the “by-way-of. . .” experience. Our taste memories go to the fresh milk, but we experience it through the Canadian version.

DEAR BRENDAN, DEAR ARUNA

When in Goa with you, I was told that bibik is part of a Filipino tradition carried over from the Portuguese. When doing some research I couldn't find any specialities, which made me question the notions of lore on food cultures via the passage of travel, cultural exchanges, and colonisation. While the Philippines does have a baked rice cake tradition of its own which is also named Bibingka, nobody has established any tangible connection with the Goan pudding as yet. Some authors have claimed that the traditional Goan pudding by way of Portuguese colonists might have reached the Philippines and others have dismissed the claim as neither Philippines nor Indonesia have ever been Portuguese colonies, making this trajectory of travel unlikely. I always thought of it as the quintessential Goan dessert. I shared this foodway with my mother when I returned home to Toronto for Christmas. She hadn't known either. The Filipino version is baked plain and the pudding takes on a yellow hue, where in our family's version they use dyes to make the layers red, green, and yellow. That said, in Goa, I only ate the plain version. My mum and other Kenyan Goans seem to all make theirs with the colours, so I wonder if this is another by-way-of-Kenya tradition?

Sending by-way-of love your way,
Brendan



Photograph of Brendan Fernandes at the Insta Studio, curated by Hanif Kureshi and Jyotindra Jain at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Aruna D'Souza.

March 2020

Dear Brendan,

By now in our conversation we're firmly in the grips of a viral pandemic, sheltering in place. Our time in Goa seems so long ago—a lifetime ago.

I think all this talk of food has raised a really important point, one that *Mundo Goa* danced around but perhaps never addressed, namely the instability of the idea of origin itself. All those dishes we savoured so much at the Goan table were themselves the product of their own moments of global contact. The red chillies in sorpotel, the vinegar in vindaloo, the tomatoes in Goan shrimp curry—all those things came to India via the Portuguese and other traders. Even the pork that is ubiquitous in Goan food was imposed on them, as it were, by colonisers, who associated pork-eating with Christianity.

To me, this realisation that the idea of a stable origin is impossible to pinpoint—that things and people and experiences always come from somewhere else, no matter how far back you go, is a comfort. It turns the idea of origins, the idea of home, the idea of culture into an always moving target. In a sense, I think that's what makes us human: our culture and our forms of life are not tied to a place but to the idea of mobility itself. We are sent off into diasporas (or visited by diasporas) and we find ways to make something new. This, it seems to me, is a radical message at this moment in our political history. Ethno-nationalists around the world are trying to make the case that they have sole claims to land, resources, capital, even life by virtue of the fact that they were here first (wherever here is for them); the years, decades or centuries even, of xenophobia that has adhered to such nationalisms is now conveniently applied to the circulation of a virus. Did it start in China or Europe? What is its origin?²¹ It feels like in this context, an origin that isn't originary—which is what *Mundo Goa* revealed, perhaps subtly—feels precisely how we need to be thinking today.

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I'm wondering if we can apply these ideas about memory, belonging, movement, mutable origin stories, to thinking about your project for *Mundo Goa*, which had many parts but at its heart involved your work with local dancers, creating dance performances in public spaces around Panjim?

Sending virtual hugs from my place of shelter,

A.



Photograph of the day's specials at a restaurant in Goa. Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.

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April 2020

Dear Aruna!

I hope you are well and staying safe and healthy. I welcome and embrace your virtual hugs and look forward to a day when we can travel, eat, and be with one another again. I am reflecting on our time in Goa now more than ever.

I am really compelled by the ways that you are articulating a new and challenging kind of identification with movement in diaspora, rather than fixity in an origin. I feel like this is a big part of what my work and identity is about. I feel I am made of many places and experiences. I am in flux, and continue to develop. In the past this has also been how I have defined “queerness” and “queer space”—space(s) of non-defining, challenging, and becoming many things at once.

I get asked often what my cultural identity is (just today applying for the Artist Relief Fund, I was asked again which box: “Asian/Southeast Asian” or “Black/African-American” I fit into). There is a want for that to be a singular definition. My cultural trajectory—Goan, Indian, Kenyan, Canadian, American—make my definition more complex, similar to the “by-way-of” process—we talked about with food. I am a bit all of them, just like how food can have traces to many places, so do I. And of course, my ethnic and cultural trajectories are not the only ways I define my selfhood. For example ballet and punk-rock music have both been sub-cultural spaces and communities that I have been a part of and continue to think and live through.

I am now thinking about how I came to Goa to find a sense of myself. This place seemingly holds traces of who I am. I began “Mog Asundi” with intimate dialogues with the curator Vivek Menezes months before. Together we began to think through my “Goan-ness”. He told me many things about the cultures of food, languages, the histories of religions, the Portugese, and much more. Some of these things I knew and some I did not. When we finally met in Goa it was a homecoming of sorts. Vivek kept saying “you are home, welcome”. It was wonderful



Goan crab curry at one of the many meals consumed together by Aruna D'Souza and Brendan Fernandes. Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.



A feast at Viva Panjim!, a restaurant at which D'Souza and Fernandes ate many meals together.
Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.

to be immediately part of a place and community, but at the same time it was unfamiliar. One of my distinct conversations with Vivek was yet again about food, as I kept asking about different Goan cuisine my family would cook; he said to me “you are more Goan than us”.

I sometimes feel that immigrants or the generation outside of the space of origin tend to hold onto traditions and can become more dogmatic than the people living in the space. They hold onto a past whereas in the space of the origin the traditions grow and develop; they continue to be in flux. With that in mind, I wanted my work to challenge ideas of the familiar and delve deeper into unknown territories to immerse and become part of the culture.

I began to walk the city, to see its sights and to take it all in. Context is always important to the ways I make. I have to be engulfed in thought before making. My experience of Goa, led to a dance that explored the city. It was confrontational and playful and fun. The dancers collaborated with me in motions. Flocking became the main action we based the dance on. Where one dancer leads, and others build on their gestures by following and repeating. In this work they presented themselves unannounced disrupting the normal functions of the urban spaces they intervened in. The audience (passers-by) would stop and watch, and at times would begin to mimic and participate in the dance. Contemporary dance or these types of performance interventions are relatively new in an Indian context and so there was a lot of puzzled apprehension but also intrigue and ultimately, unexpected participation.

Collaborating with the dancers was one of the most familiar aspects of this project. As dance-makers we shared an understanding of how gestures are developed into dances. We had shared knowledge, despite being from unfamiliar spaces. Dance was the connecting language that allowed us to move as one and to find new ways of functioning within the architecture of the city.

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In one sense the work was ephemeral. After the dances were performed, we left the architecture itself unchanged. But there are other kinds of traces that were made: memories and new ways of seeing the spaces that we danced in. As I have mentioned I am from one of five generations born in Kenya, but my family always kept a tie to the notion of Goa being a “home”. So coming to Goa was a homecoming, it brought me to a place that I bear traces from. These traces are not unlike those that we made and left in Goa: memories, stories, and ways of seeing. I left Goa soon after the project ended, but I bring these memories with me and know that they will also remain in place—free to change there as they are remembered and retold.

Mog Asundi was a homecoming but also a farewell, one that I know I will return to relive and experience again. It adds to my complicated sense of identity, being in a space of becoming and the constant negotiation between memory, place, and this notion of “authenticity”.

I sign off with much adoration. “Let there be love between us.”

Xox,
Brendan

May 2020

Dear Brendan,

“Let There Be Love”—the title of your performance project, printed in the five main Goan languages on t-shirts that could be glimpsed around the festival—was so perfect: it was a call for a kind of anti-sectarian mutual care that seems in such short supply in the world, but that Goans embrace as a point of pride. And the wording of your call was so subtle, too—asking us to make space for love, to allow it to flourish. It’s different from telling people to love each other. It assumes that love is our natural state, if we don’t crowd it out.

And the multiple languages, and the problems of translation that were involved in finding the right words in each of those languages—that seems so telling, too. One of my favorite books is Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, which is incredibly witty and a ripping fun read, but also makes a profound and quite inspiring point: that we don’t need to speak the same language to form collectivities, and to rise up in something like revolution. (The book’s whole narrative is driven by the misprisions by people who don’t entirely know what others are saying because of differences in language, culture, class, and so on. And the author doesn’t translate for us, so really we’re in the same boat as the characters.) We can do that even with only partial, fragmented comprehension. I think there’s something really urgent about that idea—that we can love each other without having to understand each other.

It felt, in some ways, that the artists involved in *Mundo Goa* were all speaking different languages—all of you came from such different geographical locations, you were all working in different media, had different formal and conceptual concerns, and sometimes literally spoke in different tongues (as with Sergio Santimano, who lives in Angola and prefers to converse in Portuguese). What united you all was not necessarily your Goan “origins”, but your commitment to a sort of contingent plurality—a willingness to speak across divides.



The dance troupe for "Let There Be Love" at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.
Photograph by Brendan Fernandes.



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Living in a place like Goa—really, any port city, or any colonial hub—necessitates such a willingness. It’s a survival skill. But it’s also a survival skill for immigrants and émigrés and refugees and so on. We all risk being misunderstood, or misunderstanding, in our quest to create new forms of community wherever we are.

The conversations that we took part in, in various combinations and permutations—Sergio and Antonio and Vivek, Amruta and Vivek, you and me and Vivek, and so on—were interesting as much for the fact that we often seemed to be talking at cross purposes or across chasms of meaning; I was struck at one moment by Sergio refusing even the premise that he was Goan at any level. By contrast, Amruta Patil, who had grown up in Goa and eventually moved to France, seemed to have no particular anxiety about setting aside her Goanness per se in her graphic novels so she can focus on other aspects of her subjective experience. What resulted from the gathering was not the emergence of an identity, but the very decentering of identity—one that was achieved the more we told our own stories of diaspora.

In “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said wrote about the ways that the loss of homeland and the scattering of a people, even through unbearable trauma, could be imagined as a critical position or even a moral imperative. But this can only happen as long as we are free from a too-fervent identification with the trauma of unbelonging and the fetishisation of the idea of “origin” itself—turning it into a nostalgic or compensatory fantasy “designed to reassemble an exile’s broken history into a new whole”.²

None of us were exiles, per se—or perhaps, in our deep pasts, we were, perhaps my half-millenia past ancestors felt forced from their places under the pressure of colonial violence, I don’t know, but I certainly don’t carry that scar or burden. But it seemed to me so telling that in our gathering, the constant theme was the lack of one—a decentering of what it meant to be Goan, a decentering of how Goanness could be thought in the diaspora, or whether it even needed to be thought in order for us to do our work. It felt, in the end, like our movement,

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rather than our origins, was at stake—the critical lens that allows each of us to make and think, floating on the waves of our journeys and their histories.

Love,
Aruna

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NOTES

¹ The parallels to the 1918 flu epidemic, which was called the Spanish flu despite any data that identifies Spain as the geographic origin of the disease, is illuminating. Even more suggestive is the long history of colonialist thinking around contagion, which infected both medical discourse and imperialist expansion. See Anjali Fatima Raza Kolb, *Epidemic Empire: Colonialism, Contagion, and Terror, 1817-2020* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

² Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," *Granta* 13 (Autumn 1984), 163.

Biographies

Aruna D’Souza is a writer and critic based in the US. Her most recent book, *Whitewalling: Art, Race, and Protest in 3 Acts* (Badlands Unlimited), was named one of the best art books of 2018 by the *New York Times*. Her work appears regularly in 4Columns.org, where she is a member of the editorial advisory board, and she is a regular contributor to the *New York Times*. She is currently editing *Making It Modern: A Linda Nochlin Reader* (Thames & Hudson, 2022), and recently edited Lorraine O’Grady’s *Writing in Space 1973-2018*. She is the co-curator of the retrospective of O’Grady’s work, *Both/And*, which opened in March 2021 at the Brooklyn Museum.

Brendan Fernandes is an internationally recognised Canadian artist working at the intersection of dance and visual arts. Currently based out of Chicago, Brendan’s projects address issues of race, queer culture, migration, protest, and other forms of collective movement. Always looking to create new spaces and new forms of agency, Brendan’s projects take on hybrid forms: part Ballet, part queer dance hall, part political protest. . .always rooted in collaboration and fostering solidarity. Brendan is a graduate of the Whitney Independent Study Program (2007) and a recipient of a Robert Rauschenberg Fellowship (2014). In 2010, he was shortlisted for the Sobey Art Award, and is the recipient of a prestigious 2017 Canada Council New Chapters grant. Brendan is also the recipient of the Artadia Award (2019), a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2020) and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant (2019). His projects have shown at the 2019 Whitney Biennial (New York); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York); the Museum of Modern Art (New York); The Getty Museum (Los Angeles); the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa); MAC

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(Montreal); among a great many others. He is currently artist-in-residency and Assistant Professor at Northwestern University and represented by Monique Meloche Gallery in Chicago.

Projects / Processes 2019

Dear Brendan, Dear Aruna: Thoughts on Diaspora, Culture, and Being in the World by Aruna D'Souza and Brendan Fernandes

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

Managing Editor: Nandita Jaishankar

Copy editor: Arushi Vats

Cover design: Aman Srivastava

Layout: Aman Srivastava & Mallika Joshi

Projects/Processes as an initiative is conceptualised and supported by Mr. S. K. Munjal, Founder Patron, Serendipity Arts Foundation and Ms. Smriti Rajgarhia, Director, Serendipity Arts Foundation.

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Published by



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