CONFRONTING HISTORICAL RESIDUES FOR THE FUTURE

KRISHNAPRIYA C P
PROJECTS / PROCESSES
VOLUME III

Series Editor: Senjuti Mukherjee

Confronting Historical Residues for the Future
Krishnapriya C P
An installation as part of "Look Outside This House", at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.

Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
ENOUGH FOR ME TO BE SURE THAT YOU AND I EXIST AT THIS MOMENT.

Cordelia Gordon Morgan

If something is going to happen to me, I want to be there.

Albert Einstein

\[ \nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} + \mathbf{F} = \mathbb{G} \]

There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Shakespeare

...bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space.

Shakespeare

\[ p(x) \log p(x) \]

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Embossed with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light.
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But, I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W. A. Scott

...a remind myself to breathe -- almost to remind my heart to beat!

...quite cured of seeking pleasure in society, be it country or town.

...a sensible man ought to find sufficient company in himself.

Emily Bronte

\[ y = \log x \]

King as thou art, free speech at least is mine.
To make reply: in this I am thy peer.

Sophocles

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

E. E. Cummings

...something more than intelligence to act intelligently.

We believe it, but indeed, life will bring you through.

...what you need now is fresh air, fresh air, fresh air!
An installation as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
Look Outside This House

Venue Old Goa Medical College

Curated by Sudarshan Shetty
Curatorial Note

Curated by Sudarshan Shetty
Curatorial Assistant Shriraj Sagara
Curatorial Advisor Chinki Sinha

Innovations and Artists 100 Suns, Amogh Sahaje; 360 Degree Tractor, Bachubhai Thesiya; Agrocrete, Tarun Jami; Air Ink, Graviky Labs; Ashok Kamble, Bombay Lokal; Chamar Studio, Sudheer Rajbhar; CoolANT Coral, ANT Studio; Dalariti Gratel Kharnaior; English - The Dalit Devi, Dr. Chandra Bhan Prasad; From Destruction To Enterprise: A Clean Energy Innovation, Avani-Kumaon; Rajnish Jain; Goggles For The Blind, Anand Tadar; Groundnut Digger, Sanjaybhai Tilva; Gun Bazar; Jugnu, Naseema Khatoom; Kalpana Mali; Khaloom, Nanditha Sulur; Living Root Bridges; Megha Sriram; Miyah Poets Hafiz Ahmed and Ashraful Hussain; People... Not Just Faces, Aravani Collective (Poornima Sukumar); Sakhi Pads, Shyam And Swati bedekar; Spacial Constructions of Kamathipura; Staircase Illusion, Mileha Soneji; Stampede Mat, Nilay Kulkarni; Stumbling Through The Leafy Commons, Abhishek Hazra; Ukadla, Rajyashri Goody; Wello Water Wheels, Cynthia Koenig

What is the relationship between maker and object, between making and the categories of people and things?

The relationship between people, things, and the social properties that emerge from that relationship is a well-trodden field in philosophy and anthropology. Through their idea of homo faber, Roman philosophers declared an understanding of humanness intimately connected to acts of fabrication that put us in control of our environment and through this, in charge of our destiny.

Beyond the homo faber idea, certain recent schools of thought focus on making as a process of revealing embedded forms and liken the
activity of makers to interventions within the force fields that swirl around us, affording no primacy to either the maker or the object.

Yet the process of making itself continues to remain mysterious, and stepping aside from this discussion about recognition and from theories about objects and things, I wonder about the obscure origins of the act of making itself.

Action is an inevitable consequence of being in the world.

But what happens in contexts where such production is at once theatrical and responds to what we may perceive as a “real need”?

There are whole categories of objects that address social needs and are derived from older, artisanal forms of making, which have survived the onrush of commodification. The practices and objects gathered together for this edition of Serendipity Arts Festival share these qualities in common—of addressing “real” conditions and social needs by shaping materials at hand to perform at a local scale.

What does it mean to give them the aura of a “work-of-art” through this curatorial act?
Look Outside This House, an exhibition curated by artist and curator Sudarshan Shetty for the Serendipity Arts Festival 2019, was installed in the Old Goa Medical College (Old GMC) in Panjim. One of the oldest medical colleges in Asia, the building was originally the Palace of Maquinezes, built in 1702. The restored building is now under the purview of the Entertainment Society of Goa and functions as a space for cultural engagements. It is a palatial building filled with warm sunlight falling through large glass-panelled doors and windows. Beyond the archway of the entrance, there is a grand central staircase, followed by long corridors and large rooms with most of the walls lined in milky white and glossy ceramic tiles with green borders. The variation in colouring and the soft cracks that are visible on the surface of the tiles makes one wonder if they were “handmade”. Look Outside This House occupied the regal expanse of this building with stories of “making” as resistance and silent assertions. As we were entering the spacious main hall, Shetty said that the exhibition has, “multiple narratives playing itself out and the core just being that these are all people outside of the art world”. He was talking about the people and projects featured in the exhibition, from which the show derives its title. He added that, “the way we see the world or live in a certain kind of world or the way we are taught to make art, there is a lot of dichotomy, very often at loggerheads, how do you bring in a life as it were”. For Shetty “this house” becomes a space or territory that we have inherited and belong to without questioning. Investigating the gaps that have been present in the “art world”, he proposes experiencing objects that have quite different scales of value from the objects in most other art spaces. “What does it mean to make
something that acquires a meaning that is referential in the object, you don’t have to unravel it through your knowledge of something?” he asks. Shetty is delineating functional objects as apposed to art that requires exposure to “modern” and “contemporary” art or history to arrive at meaning. He is asking for the windows of “this house” to be opened so as to let fresh air inside, along with the need to “look outside” and gaze at the expanse of the dynamic everyday, the struggles we collectively have with imagining the future, the hope for a sustainable conscience.

CHAMAR STUDIO: STITCHING THE POLITICAL INTO THE FABRIC OF THE EXHIBITION

Walking into one of the adjacent rooms from the hallway, one encounters a wide table with various tools—raw leather and a pair of wooden lasts, brightly coloured processed leather stretched on wooden frames. A strong smell of leather fills the room. The opposite wall has an enlarged photograph of fresh animal skin, exerting an overwhelming presence. The third wall in the room has a display of elegant handbags of different shapes, sizes, and colours. Shetty wanted this room to look like a “quasi studio” of “artisans” who traditionally work with leather. In India’s social structure artisans or craftsmen are seen as labourers without autonomy over their work, considered as efficient only in the reproduction and replication of certain patterns, whereas the artist is the one who is “educated” and exercises the freedom for conceptual experiments in the act of making. The conceptualisation of this room was an act of documenting human labour and knowledge by bringing to light the work and vision of Chamar Studio, a fashion brand creating handmade designer accessories like bags and footwear. Sudheer Rajbhar, an artist and designer based in Mumbai, is the founder of the Chamar Studio. His practice brings together various marginalised craftsmen working with leather from across Mumbai. Chamar Studio’s designs are minimalistic in style and use bold colours to celebrate the process of tanning leather and the labourers who work in the tanneries.
Installation view of the Chamar Studio showcase as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
They have a design range in bright blue identifying with the colour often associated with Dr B R Ambedkar. “Chamar”, a name accorded to lower caste communities that work with leather, is traditionally deployed in a pejorative sense to attribute an exclusionary location in caste-based hierarchies. Communities that work with leather, from killing of the animals to skinning, processing, tanning, and finally crafting the leather—are ostracised from the larger social structure of the country. This work is done by mostly poor Muslims and Dalits, who are stigmatised for performing what upper castes consider as “polluting” labour. The use of the word chamar to address anyone is considered a caste-based slur and is a violation according to the Supreme Court of India.

Rajbhar is repositioning the usage of the word “Chamar”. In Mumbai, Rajbhar has been working with cobblers who set up temporary pavement stalls to leather craftsmen in the workshops of Dharavi. They design and make products for Chamar Studios. In 2017 the Ministry of Environment, under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led ruling government, banned the sale and purchase of cattle. BJP’s aim was to stop the killing of cows, an animal considered sacred to the Hindus. This ban, followed by 29 Indian States, has made the work of marginalised communities who deal with dead cattle, their meat and skin, illegal. Rajbhar has been encouraging the leather craftsmen to use recycled rubber tyres as a possible alternate but this transition has not been easy. The “artisan’s quasi studio” is locating the dynamics and tensions of caste in certain “traditional” craft practices. Socio-political enterprises like the Chamar Studio pose questions about the structures of labour and power hierarchies embedded in categories like craftsmen, artisan, artist, craft, design, and art. As much as it is important to blur these categories or expand them, it is also significant to reflect on the social realities that these categories represent. Who are the craftsmen, artisan, and artist? And what are their roles in production and the market? Who can claim authorship to subvert stigmatised labour positions imposed on certain bodies? How do we understand the aesthetics of resistance? In my
conversation with the curator on how he stitched the political into the fabric of the exhibition he said, “In whatever object you are making itself you are projecting a choice, representing a certain erasure. That in itself is a critical choice, itself a political act”.

EXPANDING CONTEMPORARY ART AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL ASSERTIONS

At the time of the exhibition, a large number of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) had emerged across the country. A rhizomatic effect of state-sponsored violence had brought forth anxieties about belonging among the marginalised communities, dissenting students and women to the forefront. The present Indian political climate is witnessing rising communal tensions and a threat of erasure to the country’s nuanced diversity by a Hindu fundamentalist right-wing government led by the BJP. The exercise of the state’s power to make constitutional amendments that authoritatively homogenise every aspect of society has been at play. It raises the question of what ideas like “democracy” mean in the daily functioning of institutions with the power of police brutality becoming more authoritative. The eight-days-long exhibition manifested as a platform for many of these contested discourses, as a temporal staging of individual endeavors through its content, allusions, and the responses of the audience; not only as an isolated experience but as a glimpse into the challenges of contemporary practices of making. It was also about showcasing the makers who are otherwise invisibilised or not attributed authorship. In this context Look Outside This House is an experimental milieu, a space for contestations within the expanding location of contemporary art and its ability to assert itself socio-politically.

The “art world” Shetty speaks about and is a part of, comprises art galleries, markets, auction houses, and forums that social elites
An installation on the Kamathipura constructions as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
have access to. In these spaces of art production Shetty said that the, “artist in someway becomes an agent of a dystopic world or a broken world”. He also added that, “making something ‘new’ as a contemporary statement, removes it from the immediacy of things”. His critical approach has geared him towards expanding on the practices that artists have imbibed from the formal art education rooted in the colonial times. Most public fine art schools, located in metropolitan cities like Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai, were started in the mid-nineteenth century. These institutions were primarily industrial schools that focused on production of hybrid art objects that had the craftsmanship of local artisans and functional sensibility of western objects. These early institutions became sites for training and production of gold and silver jewelry, hand-weaving of textiles, dyeing, block printing, metal craft, and woodwork. These were produced largely for the consumption of the growing Indian middle class and exported to feed the British market. With the surge in the national movement for independence, these schools developed an “Indianess” in their individualised and local forms of production, witnessing unique trajectories in style. Today, they stand as fine art schools run by the respective regional Governments.

The range of artists in the art world that Shetty speaks of have mostly studied in these colonial institutions, with a few exceptions. They have gone on to dominate the art world, which is also exclusively part of an urban landscape of cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata. Liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991 had an impact on the Indian art market till it saw a slump following the 2008 economic crisis. The “art boom” period preceding the crisis saw the rise of the art market domestically and an international market for Indian modern and contemporary art. This has led to art galleries and art fairs becoming primary spaces where art is experienced or consumed. Art here is presented as a sophisticated intellectual exercise that is supplemented with literature, whereas the art and craft labour that supports the realisation of large scale art productions is invisibilised or the credit is taken by the “artist” who conceived the idea. S Santosh
in his essay “Mapping the Trajectories of Minoritarian Aesthetics and Cultural Politics”, investigates the dynamics of caste in the history of Indian modernism and modernity. Many artists and their merits are impacted by the conflicts of caste. He states that, “This history unfurls the ways through which the cultural elite in India have appropriated the material and cultural production of the subalterns while denying both the subaltern’s contributions and the elite’s own history of appropriation, thus reinforcing their own sense of self and glorifying their own cultural violence”. Referring to the production of art within these circumstances, Shetty feels that, “art has lost its function one of the reasons why I am looking at all this”, the experiences of “human enterprise”.

**SUBHEAD: SUBJUGATION, DOMINATION, DIASPORA, DISPLACEMENT**

Wandering through the numerous rooms and the corridors of the Old GMC, I was moving in and out experiencing objects, texts, and cultural productions that were designed for particular “social engagements” outside of this exhibition. Functional tools, socio-economic enterprises, and cultural productions for sharing were on display, including songs sung among local communities, music for protesting or spreading awareness about pertinent issues. The curatorial treatment engaged with revealing intimate narratives of labour and geographies in spaces emerging from social constraints. Among these are the pages of Jugnu, a handwritten and drawn zine, usually cyclostyled or xeroxed, and made for local distribution in the red-light district of Chaturbhuj Sthan in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. Naseema Khatoon, daughter of a sex worker, has grown up seeing women of her community being repeatedly harassed by the police. She has advocated for the sex workers as well as women from families of sex workers. As part of this work, she started Parcham with other women of the community. Khatoon has been convincing the young women in her community to pursue education and is working towards obtaining performance licenses for women dancers in an effort to legitimise
their work. With the women and children of the community, she initiated Jugnu, compiling articles and stories about and for the community. At Look Outside This House pages of Jugnu were presented both as original editions placed inside glass display tables and selected pages as scaled-up prints. The handwritten, drawn, and designed pages occupied the room as aesthetically patterned and long tapestries. The archive of stories, poetry, and drawings from the community constructed an intimate space of sharing silently reflecting social, political, aesthetic, and cultural struggles. Khatoon by sharing her imagination through the curatorial proposition was articulating resistance and endurance against larger questions of gender and social discrimination.

Homi K. Bhabha in “Location of Culture” (1994) writes, “In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality—as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms—transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside object d’art or beyond the canonisation of the ‘idea’ of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival.” The social experiences that Shetty has brought together investigate the fragmented “concept of culture” by invoking the significance of the stories that surround the presented objects, films or text. The alternate future presented here is not a singular idea but perhaps one that does not gloss over intimate values of identity, emerging from individual narratives and invested positions. The curatorial premise, in multiple ways, attempts to string these artistic social enterprises and propel art towards a different cultural language in the Indian contemporary art forum, shifting towards more sharing and equality. Shetty shared with me his belief that there is no way to “look forward
without looking backward” and for himself “raised questions about how to bring it into a space that is dedicated to contemporary art? How do you find these negotiations?” Reflecting on contemporary art as an expansive experience, Félix Guattari writes, “Viewed from the angle of this existential function—namely, in rupture with signification and denotation—ordinary aesthetic categorisations lose a large part of their relevance. Reference to “free figuration”, “abstraction” or “conceptualism” hardly matters! What is important is to know if a work leads effectively to a mutant production of enunciation.”

Down one of the corridors, open on one side to light and fresh air, one of the rooms laid bare the geography of food, hunger, eating, and drinking. The writings of authors like Babytai Kamble, Daya Pawar, Laxman Gaiwad, Laxman Mane, Omprakash Valmiki, Sharankumar Limbale, Sujatha Gidla, Urmila Pawar, and Vasant Moon were brought into the exhibition in Rajyashi Goody’s installation, *Ukadala* (2019). A contemporary artist based in Pune, Goody compiled translated poetry by the authors into a carefully selected archival zine, “Let Every Body Feast”, which was displayed for visitors to browse and take with them. The collection of poems in the zine paint a vivid landscape of the culture of food practices, collecting, hunting, begging, and assembling a meal. It is also a poetic documentation of social discrimination. “Think about what might happen/ if the village finds out/ that you have polluted/ a brahmin”⁴ a line from Daya Pawar’s Marathi autobiography *Baluta* written in 1978 asks. A series of more such zines with distinct colours as their cover were presented on a shelf for reading, titled as “Is the touch upon your tongue wonderful?”, “Are you the master of dead animals?”, “Do you have the courage to drink from the pond?”; “Does an ox dash against the insides of your belly?”

“The spoilt food / with a sour taste / is called ambuda. / Once it is cooked / it becomes ukadala.”⁵ These lines are taken from *Jina Amaucha* by Babytai Kamble, the first autobiography written by a
Installation view of “Ukadala” by Rajyashree Goody as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
Dalit woman in Marathi and published in 1986. The title translates to “The Prisons We Broke”, a book on Dalit women and their struggles with a patriarchal system and the practice of untouchability. Babytai Kamble was a significant Dalit writer and activist from Maharashtra. *Ukadala*, the title of Goody’s work is a meal prepared from boiling the entire town’s spoilt food that has been collected by begging. Along with the zines Goody had laid out a mosaic of textured and organically shaped ceramic pieces on the floor. The circular arrangement of the brightly coloured glazed surface of the ceramic stood out in contrast to the deep grey floor carpet. The crafted pieces were Goody’s representations of some of the food recipes described in the poems, like physical fragments of a collective memory. Goody juxtaposes an archive of Dalit literature with an intimate model of the notion of food, evoking the conflicts in claiming one’s identity and the making invisible of Dalit practices by dominant cultures.

Dr B R Ambedkar wrote, “given the existence of the governing class what matters most in the consideration of any scheme of democracy and self-government is the social outlook and social philosophy of the governing class, for so long as the governing class retains its means to capture the power to govern, the freedom and the well-being of theservile classes must depend upon the social conscience of the governing class and its philosophy of life”.

The marginalised body is consistently framed and compartmentalised as the artisan, craftsman, and labourer within a socio-economic structure. Similar categories and hierarchy remain in the “art world”. Investigating art as the outcome of such bodily labour in the exhibition yields several meanings that exit and refuse the aesthetic constrains of categorising art. Within the spatial and temporal possibilities of this exhibition, a stratified Hindu identity based on brahmanical imagination of ancestral glory by right wing forces was being sensitively challenged by artists.
Speaking to me about one of the approaches in his curatorial choices, Shetty mentioned that it “started with my interest in innovations and I find that, that has a place”. In the exhibition some of the presented innovations can be perceived as “alternative technology”. It is defined as technology that is less harmful to the environment and more labour intensive in a way that it does not consume as much of the conventional sources of power the we use today like fossil fuels, electricity produced from burning coal, lignite or from nuclear energy. To tackle the environmental and economic costs of industrialisation and given the high populations of countries like India, British-German economist E F Schumacher developed the idea of “Intermediate Technology”. Schumacher, as a UN economic consultant, visited Burma in 1955 and drew up principles called “Buddhist Economics”, influenced by Buddhism and Gandhian approaches to life and resource use. He recognised that fossil fuel is not a renewable resource and future industrial development cannot rely on it. He was deeply critical of the West for its massive consumption of resources and wary of nuclear energy as being the next possible source for power. In the book Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered (1973) he reinforces the idea of decentralisation as the way for communities to benefit. In 1962, he was invited by India as a consultant of the Indian Planning Commission that designed the Five Year Plans—the post-independence documents for economic growth. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha state in Ecology and Equity (1995) that: “This strand of the environmental movement strives for a working synthesis of agriculture and industry, big and small units, and Western and Eastern (or modern and traditional) technological traditions. Both in its ambivalence about religion and in its criticism of traditional social hierarchies it is markedly influenced by Western socialism. Yet in its practical emphasis on constructive work, it taps another vein in the Gandhians’ tradition. Thus appropriate technologists have done pioneering work in the generation and diffusion of resource-conserving, labour-intensive, and socially liberating technologies.”
An installation on Jugnu by Tahira Khatoon as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
Look Outside This House also featured a collection of handmade electronically and manually operated machines. Building and architectural materials made from organic sources emphasise alternate technology and recycling. Bachubai Thesia, a small-scale farmer and innovator from Jamnagar, Gujarat has been working with low technology mechanical agriculture tools and machines. A “360 Degree Tractor” assembled by him was one of the machines on display. Walking up the grand central staircase leading to the hall, one caught a glimpse of this machine. The minimally wielded joints of this functional tractor are a stark contrast to the interiority of the space it was occupying. Placed on a low wooden pedestal, the tractor is designed as a small machine with the capacity of one. A diesel engine of a motorbike is attached to the front and is covered with a red wielded “body”, with a lever for manipulating the vehicle. The use of expensive and large mechanised equipment is not a practical option for many farmers in India. Thesia’s design is a response to the everyday challenges of his work in an agricultural field. The lack of availability of alternate technology in the market has led him to assemble a tractor that caters to his specialised needs. His creative approach to functional engineering is one that is low-cost, practical, and in service to his immediate community. Local entrepreneurship and social ownership is shaping sustainable agricultural produce, the conscientious use of material in construction and architectural design, and the development of alternate education. The engagement with the “alternative” has been happening in small pockets of India, as a way to survive with available resources and also as a response to finding ways to survive “outside of the grid”. Many narratives in this exhibition address the socio-economic challenges that innovators, artists, designers, activists, and cultural producers are taking up.

A designer’s solution to a real-world problem was putting Schumacher’s approach to action, and supporting it with ground research. Even though Schumacher was an influential thinker, he has failed to leave a lasting effect on the modes of industrialisation that India has pursued since its independence. From a socialist
democracy to a neoliberal democratic state, the privatisation of government sectors or the government’s inability to support healthy farming practices has created a deep crisis in India. The adaptation of individual design aspirations is based on empirical data and controlled by factors of market forces, along with the complexities of finding investors for research, production, and marketing. The ambivalent nature of some the works in the exhibition calls for a closer look inviting a discursive space of social, political, and economic complexities beyond the limitations of a design fair. Most of these entrepreneurial artistic endeavors are functioning at the, “periphery of the whole world of mass production and consumption”, Shetty noted. “What is the function of art to begin with? I am also interested in what does it mean to make something for someone? Whether it is for the artist or anyone to act out in the world…”, he questioned. The act of making is about building and extending social relationships—this exercise is not an isolated experience. The curatorial note reflects this concern: “Yet the process of making itself continues to remain mysterious, and stepping aside from this discussion about recognition and from theories about objects and things, I wonder about the obscure origins of the act of making itself”.

As audiences, do we just play silent witness or are we implicated more actively in every action that we “see” and experience? Do we close our windows in fear or question our own beliefs and rationales? How do we initiate discussions to share a nuanced narrative of our anxiety without presenting monologues?
An installation view of a video on the Living Roots bridge as part of “Look Outside This House”, at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.
SELF-REFLECTION AS A POLITICAL TOOL

*Stumbling through the Leafy Commons* (2019), a mobile and durational lecture performance by contemporary artist Abhishek Hazra, was structured as a guided tour of *Look Outside This House*. During the performance, his neck and arms were loosely bound together with bright-red dog leashes that stood out starkly, pulling him back if he stretched them too much. Reading out into a microphone, Hazra moved through the rooms and responded to the exhibits, trailed by an audience. Inside the room with Chamar Studio’s leather and tools, Hazra began by saying “Footnote 1: folding, footnote 2: spurious, footnote 3: vendetta” and so on. He was followed by two volunteers writing these words on portable blackboards, as *Tippani* 01, 02, and so on. The Hindi word *tippani* means reference or annotation. He superimposed a layered reading of what seemed like interpretations of the works, but were his parallel narrative response to the tensity of contemporary politics. He poetically strung together fragmented responses, and moved in liminal contexts, lending a new scale of comprehension to the display. His fictitious text focused on a “discipline called spotology”. The text sarcastically touched upon the current right wing government’s tendencies to cite all their references to ancient Vedic texts and using these works to legitimise the discriminatory varna system or caste-based practices. Hazra went on to playfully subvert his critical views about the ideological backing of the present government in power. The text was full of meaning and lingered to resonate with careful listeners, whereas for others it could have merely been a series random and disconnected sentences. Implicating his body, juxtaposed with the “commons”, playing with the notion of “freedom of speech” and what it means, Hazra’s texts and performance provoked audiences to build a layered interpretation of the objects and stories in the exhibition. His trigger words and text changed for each of the works as his durational performance stretched over the eight days of the exhibition.
However, functional objects, narratives, performances juxtaposed with a contemporary practice in the context of an art exhibition and the approaches to the curation of these lacked the attempt to build an entropic tension that could link the works in more ways than one. The anxieties of historically contested discourses of nation building, the experiences and consequences of neoliberal market relations, the challenges of decentralization, are all intertwined in the answer to the question of “how does one make an ethical choice?” *Look Outside This House* leaves me with questions about the propositions for the future in the midst of what was explored in the exhibition and generates residues which can be taken forward for further investigation.

As audiences, do we just play silent witness or are we implicated more actively in every action that we “see” and experience?

Do we close our windows in fear or question our own beliefs and rationales?

How do we initiate discussions to share a nuanced narrative of our anxiety without presenting monologues?

Joseph Beuys radically engaged with the “social” as art, bringing his entire self, implicated, as a political tool to confront the historical residues, writing: “We warn, however, against a thoughtless turnabout. Let us begin with SELF REFLECTION. Let us first look for the grounds which call for our turning away from the prevailing state of things. Let us seek the ideas which point in the direction of change.” *Look Outside This House*, for me is a political conversation touching upon several historical and present-day conflicts. Leaving some resolved and most unresolved. Emerging out of the cracks that are getting wider are narratives that are not moving in any singular direction. Can we embrace diversity and allow for the expression of free thought and will? And can this be done by negotiating and questioning the notion of “othering”? In the wave of political struggles, maybe we can stop to think outside the binaries of what
we believe in and what we want to counter. I am intrigued by Beuys declaring to begin with “SELF REFLECTION” in capital letters, he is asking us to look at the “grounds” for turning away, so we know more assertively what it is that we are resisting.
NOTES


4 Daya Pawar, “Baluta”, in Let Every Body Feast, a booklet compiled by Rajyashri Goody and presented at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.

5 Babytai Kamble, “The Prisons We Broke”, in Let Every Body Feast, a booklet compiled by Rajyashri Goody and presented at Serendipity Arts Festival 2019.


Biography

Krishnapriya C P is a practicing visual artist based in Chennai. She completed her Masters from the Govt. College of Fine Arts, Chennai.

Her work is multidisciplinary in nature; she uses paintings, drawings, collage, found objects and sculptural installations to engage with her concerns. The works primarily deal with the self and its relationship with the environment. History and local political discourses are also woven into the imagery that she creates.

She is interested in understanding the process of art pedagogy, contemporary art practices and transdisciplinary engagements. Her other interests are history, theatre and environmental studies. She has been part of numerous art exhibitions and art workshops.

She was one of the curators of the two editions of the Students’ Biennale, Kochi (2016-17 and 2018-19). She was a resident artist at University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 2017 and the summer 2019, supported by the South Asia Centre, Upenn.
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