

ART & DEAL

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DHAKA ART SUMMIT

- UMA PRAKASH



LIVING A LIE

An interview with **RINUS VAN DE VELDE**

- RAJESH PUNJ

GYARASPUR....

A REMINDFUL HISTORICAL LORE....

- APURVA SINHA

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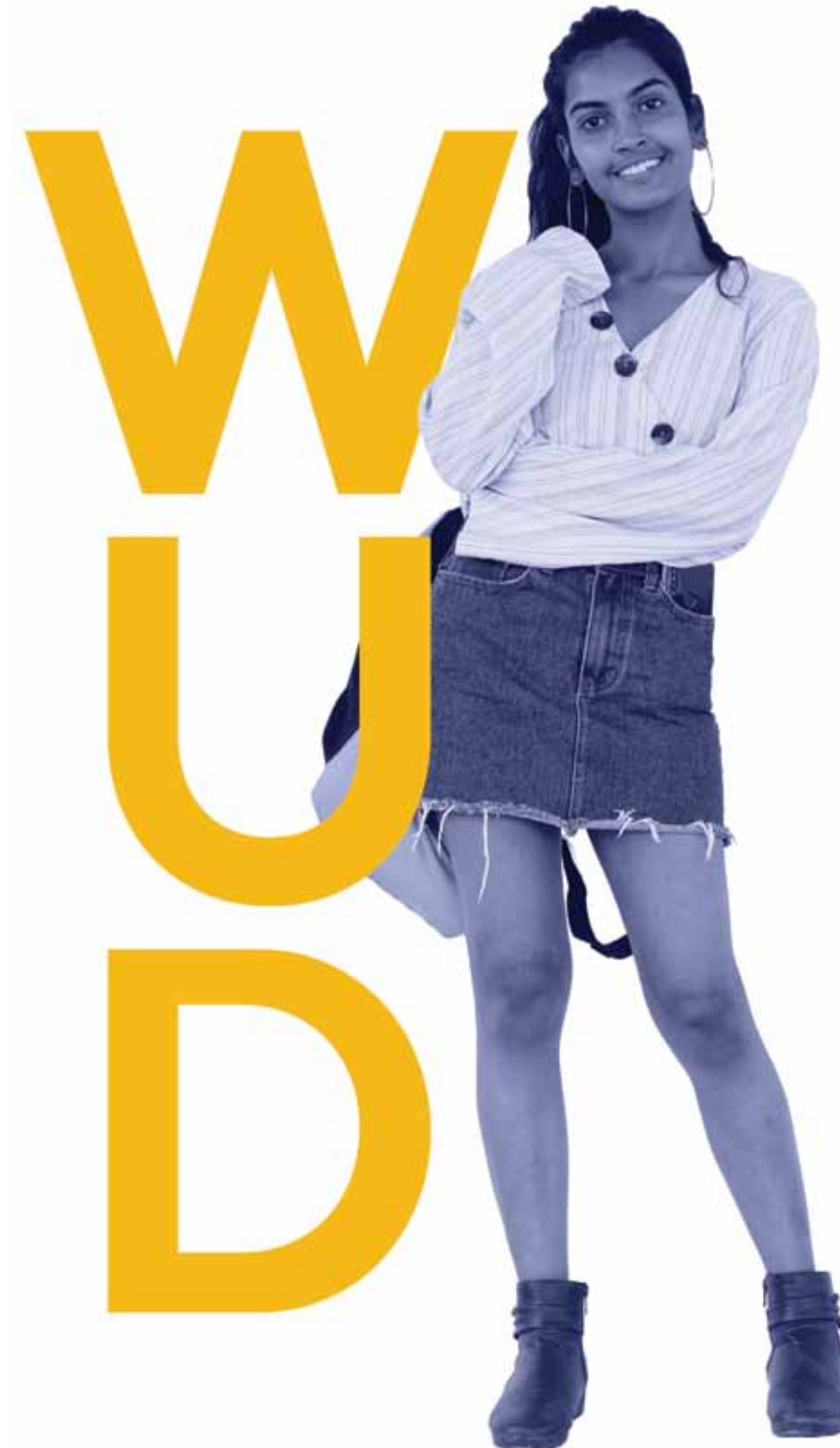
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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Awaiting the change of seasons, spring breaks in as we tackle a pandemic as a community. As panic sets in with the coronavirus spreading, for the first time in a while we have hit the pause button on our constant hectic schedules, in these depressing times exhibitions have had to be closed for safety. Recently, a major exhibition by Pooja Iranna took place at the Bikaner House and I had the chance to catch the show this morning. The exhibition, although phenomenal, has unfortunately been put off for now due to safety measures being set in place to slow down the coronavirus.

In this issue, the cover story by Uma Prakash revolves around the 'Dhaka Art Summit 2020: Seismic Movements', an international and non-commercial research platform for art and architecture, hosted every two years at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Shaking our perception of the past and the present, to create new opportunities for us to come together and make/write art history from a fresh perspective, DAS 2020 impelled by intellectual and curatorial benefaction is the epicentre of progressive upheaval of how we absorb art. The Summit is not just an exhibition but rather a movement, focused on igniting one beyond the confines of an art exhibition. It takes us on a journey of planetary movements, geological movements, colonial movements, independence movements, social movements as well as feminist movements.

In the heart of the summit was an immersive installation "New Mutants" by Adrián Villar Rojas, where moroccan marble floor tiles are encrusted with 400 million year old ammonite and orthoceras fossils. Their geographical proximity in the Himalayas highlight the fact that these melting peaks were once under water.

A compelling interview with artist Rinus Van De Velde by Rajesh Punj brings out the brilliance behind his works. We peek into the artist's mind to gain insights of his artistic process and the philosophy behind his works. Wrangling in a maze of lies, the artist plays with the viewer's mind making them question the "Truth".

Preeti Kathuria reviews two parallel exhibitions of legendary artists Haku Shah and Mahendra Raj, hosted by Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Haku Shah's approach pre-dates most contemporary theoretical lenses and fleeting Zeitgeist movements. Exhibiting a variety of works like paintings, terracotta sculptures, textile scrolls, journals, books and periodicals. We find the dramatics of everyday life represented through a rare sensitivity and naturalness in his works.

Apurva Sinha explores the historic lore of "Gyaraspur", belonging to the era of pratiharas Gyaraspur is located approximately a hundred kilometers North-East of Bhopal where he explores and visualizes the events and happenings of 7th century CE.

We Pray for everyone as we battle through this pandemic and hope for things to go back to normal soon.

Hope you enjoy the read.

Do share with us your feedback at artanddeal@gmail.com

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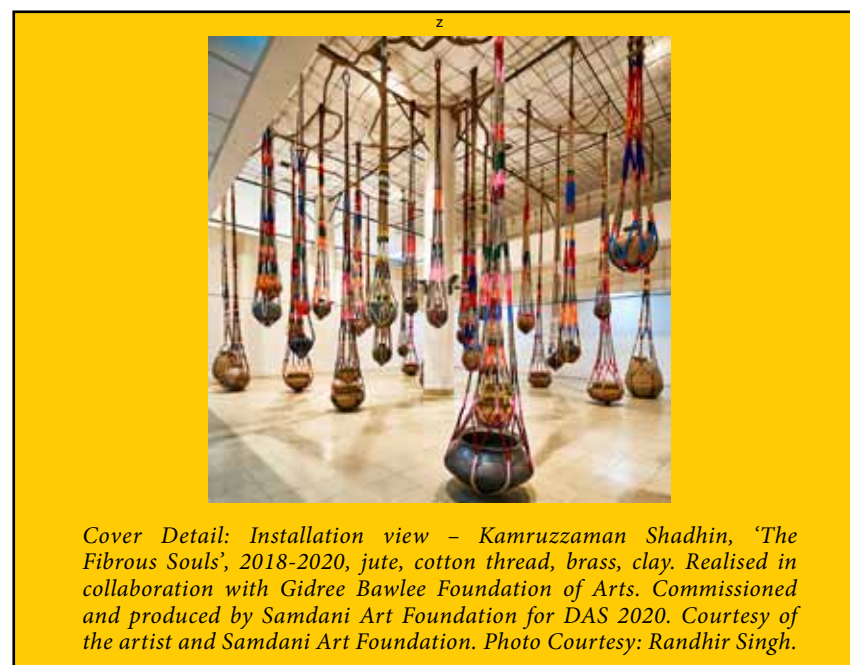
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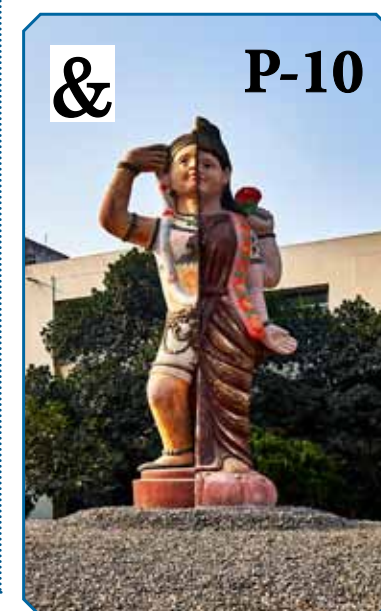
Cover Detail: Installation view – Kamruzzaman Shadhin, 'The Fibrous Souls', 2018-2020, jute, cotton thread, brass, clay. Realised in collaboration with Gidree Bawlee Foundation of Arts. Commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Samdani Art Foundation. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.

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DHAKA ART SUMMIT

- UMA PRAKASH

The fifth edition of Dhaka Art Summit featured the works of artists from forty-four countries around the world at the capital's Shilpakala Academy. It showcased solo art exhibitions, public art projects, curated exhibitions, seminars, symposiums and live art performances. Dhaka Art Summit has become an important event in the contemporary art circuit, and has created a platform that explores ideas and histories outside western narratives and challenges colonial frameworks. Furthermore it welcomes middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The title “*Seismic Movements*” for the latest Summit is drawn from art historian Zahia Rahmani’s “The Seismography of Struggles.” It was an inventory of non-European critical and cultural journals produced between the end of the 18th century and 1989. The seismic movement, are the waves of energy that creates ripples across the earth when an earthquake strikes. The summit curated by Diana Campbell Betancourt, invites artists to examine artistic, social and political colonial movements that have affected the world.

Two artists whose works relate directly to the theme are Adrian Villar



Bharti Kher’s large painted clay sculpture Intermediaries reminds us about the multiple selves that inhabit our very being. She believes in the transitional state and has created unlikely hybrids like these half female forms in the process of becoming snakes.

Rojas and Damien Ortega. Adrian’s *The Theatre of Disappearance* is an immersive installation that the visitor walks on when entering the Summit. It is created over a marble floor encrusted with four hundred million year old ammonite and orthoceras fossils. It shows both organic and inorganic materials that underwent change over for 300 million years, tracing the seismic shift that occurred in the evolution of humanity and our planet.

The other installation Damien Ortega’s *Sisters; Hermanas* is located in the open. Here in an empty, uninhabited lot covered by wild weeds and grass, a big conical figure is raised. It is made of red bricks and can be described either as a stupa, or a pre-Colombian pyramid. It is a sculptural silo, containing an offering with a sample of one of the native corns of Mexico, a single seed. Damián Ortega explains “A diverse ecosystem working in solidarity to produce corn, beans, squash and chilli. This ecosystem, to a certain point is what has fed us. I could even say that it is the best we have as a country, that’s why I want to share it. Limitations of private property are tested when rituals, knowledge and products are taken from one place to another”.

^ Héctor Zamora, ‘Movimientos Emisores de Existencia (Existence-emitting Movements)’, 2019-2020. Performative action with women and terracotta vessels, Courtesy of the artist and Labor. Photo: Randhir Singh

< Installation view – Bharti Kher, ‘Intermediaries’, 2019-2020, commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist, Samdani Art Foundation, and Nature Morte, realised with additional support from Nature Morte and Perrotin. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.

Artists created works under several themes such as geological, colonial, independence, collective and spatial movements. There were several artist-based organizations like Drik, Pathshala, Chobi Mela, Britto Arts Trust, RAW Material Company, Hong



Kong Artist's Union and others that contributed greatly to the success of the Summit.

Colonialism is naked capitalism under the guise of religion and development aid that control huge portions of the world. Certain artists bring to life the narrative of suppressed people from all over the world in their art. There appears to be a similarity in the tales of the slaves of America and the poor workers in Asia.

Adebunmi Gbadebo's *True Blues: 18th Hole edition III* consists of a large network installation of handmade papers in the color blue that explore themes of land, memory, and erasure. "In this series, I use human black hair sourced from barbershops, cotton, indigo, denim, "Indigo Blue" hair dye, and rice paper as a way of processing the transformation of the land from a plantation to an exclusive golf club. The images embedded in the sheets are silk-screens on rice paper of the architectural drawings converting the land into a golf course. I also printed a page of the will of the slave owner of True Blue Plantation

^ Installation view – Adrián Villar Rojas, 'New Mutants', 2017-2020, Moroccan marble floor tiles encrusted with Devonian period micro Ammonite and Goniatites fossils; blue chroma key paint, plant-based pigments (indigo, sindoor, alta), gouache; sand; and coal, on aggregate rammed earth walls. Commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist, Samdani Art Foundation, Marian Goodman Gallery and kurimanzutto. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.

> Installation view – Marlon de Azambuja, 'Untitled (from the Brutalismo Series)', 2019-2020, industrial metal clamps, building material sourced in Dhaka. Commissioned for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Samdani Art Foundation and Instituto de Vision. Realised with additional support from Acción Cultural Española (AC/E). Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.



from the 1700s listing his human "property" by their name, age, duties, and value that was \$2000 USD per person," said the artist.

Candice Lin shows another instance of dislocation. She refers to the horrors of life in the Caribbean for Asian and African workers brought from their original homes to grow commodities for imperial consumption. A tapestry where a man is ravaged by snarling beasts in *Papaver Somniferum* says it all.

Furthermore the Faiham Ebna Sharif shows the plight of *Baganiya* communities who moved as indentured labourers for the tea gardens in Sylhet, only to become citizens of Bangladesh, and completely lose touch with their ancestors. In *Cha Chakra: Tea Tales of Bangladesh* the artist employs old printed materials, advertisements, historical documents to show the inequality and exploitation. Internationally acclaimed Bangladesh artist Mahbubur Rahman's two channel video *Transformation* was created from his performance with Bangladesh's indigo workers, Bihari migrant rickshaw pullers in Kolkata, and horse riders in the bank of the Padma River in Bangladesh, linking the two countries.

Somnath Hore's *Wound Series* echoes the famine of 1943, the communal riots of 1946, and the devastations of war. "All the wounds and wounded I have seen are engraved in my consciousness." the artist reflects. The impact of the scarred tree, a man knifed for no particular reason impacted him deeply,

and he converted handmade paper into scarred, blistered, pierced and wounded surfaces, evoking memories of human skin in the aftermath of trauma.

The Summit was a tribute to the artists, architects and thinkers who have shaped Bangladesh. Most noteworthy was Muzharul Islam, who created a language of architectural modernism in South Asia. Cultural, social, political pressures as well as personal experiences played crucial roles in executing his works.

Several artists have created works to align with his philosophy like Rana Begum, Shezad Dawood and Dayanita Singh and others. Rana Begum has created an installation on the central staircase of Shilpakala Academy, the venue of the Dhaka Art Summit. It consists of handprints on the winding wall, endorsing what hands can achieve together. They are the fingerprints of Bangladeshi collaborators of the summit from the beginning to present day. There are similar traces on the terracotta screens and bricks of Muzharul Islam's art school *Charukala*, now the faculty of fine art university of Dhaka.

"It was great to participate in this year's DAS, and as usual Diana Campbell Betancourt has out done herself! The energy and ambition was incredible. It was wonderful to create something that really draws on my experience in Bangladesh and reconnects me to the people and community in a way that I don't have anywhere else," was what Rana Begum said



Nilima Sheikh's new work on Kashmir, "Beyond Loss (2019-2020)" takes the form of narrative scrolls that show different aspects of mourning, while endorsing the courage of the women of Kashmir in the face of an oppressive world outside. She shows the stark realities with a lack of pretension in the narrative.

audiences. Singh is against the elitist attitude of exclusiveness of the museum and feels it should be open to all. She has created moveable museums with her photographs, of interiors and spaces that unfold stories that are easily accessible.

Social Movements and Feminist Futures address the unfairness in this world when it comes to protecting the human rights of the citizens. People of color, indigenous people of diverse sexual and gender orientation become easy victims. Artists like Bharti Kher, Nilima Sheikh, Hector Zamora, Saskia Pintelon and others have addressed them in their works.

Nilima Sheikh's new work on Kashmir, "Beyond Loss (2019-2020)" takes the form of narrative scrolls that show different aspects of mourning, while endorsing the courage of the women of Kashmir in the face of an oppressive world outside. She shows the stark realities with a lack of pretension in the narrative.

Hector Zamora's *Movemnetos Emisores de Existencia* is an installation made from hundreds of raw clay vessels, in different shapes and sizes, akin to the ceramic traditions of Bangladesh and Mexico. Instead of the traditional vessels of food and water carried by the women on the head, the artist lays them on the ground, liberating the women. During the performance a group of women walk directly on the installation, breaking the vessels, as a revolt from the human bondage of the past.

Saskia Pintelon's *No News is Good News* rearranges text in English, Flemish and Sinhalese to create her own visual language in a positive vein. She defies the old rules of beauty, success and happiness for women and creates her own subjects ranging from romance, gender and love.

about her participation in the Dhaka Art Summit.

Shezad Dawood also gets his inspiration from the legacy of Islam as he creates an adaptable stage set. Tapestry takes the form of rooms. There are several woven screens with abstract images greeting the viewer. As you go past them and turn around another a set of tapestry with Mughal designs beholds you. He has created them by collating and sewing different textiles sometimes incorporating the Kantha techniques. The artist allows the viewer to interact with his work. He wanted to create "A building like a garden, with bricks as tapestry and with a sensitivity that is not western, but brings alive the Mughal architecture", said the artist.

Dayanita's *Museum of Shedding* is like Muzharul Islam's open structured frameworks, open to multiple

^ Installation view - Kamruzzaman Shadhin, 'The Fibrous Souls', 2018-2020, jute, cotton thread, brass, clay. Realised in collaboration with Gidree Bawlee Foundation of Arts. Commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Samdani Art Foundation. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.

> Installation view - Nilima Sheikh, 'Beyond Loss', 2019-2020, Casein tempera and canvas scroll. Commissioned for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Chemould Prescott Road. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.





Bharti Kher's large painted clay sculpture *Intermediaries* reminds us about the multiple selves that inhabit our very being. She believes in the transitional state and has created unlikely hybrids like these half female forms in the process of becoming snakes.

Several artists recorded the spirit of resistance and struggle for freedom when Bangladesh fought for its independence. Rashid Talukdar's *Arms Drill by Women Members* of the chatro Union (students union) 1st March 1971 and other photographs endorse the liberation war that took place when West Pakistan refused to hand over power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1971, despite getting majority of the democratic votes in Pakistan. Rahman took over the cause of creating an independent nation. This inspiring image of empowered women marching greeted the visitors at the entrance of the Summit; revealing their sense of pride for the nation.

Maryam Jafri's Independence Day 1934-75 work presents over sixty images culled from the first Independence Day ceremonies of various Asian, Middle Eastern and African nations. On view are relevant documents, VIP parades, the stadium salute and the first address to the nation organised by the outgoing colonial powers.

Collective movements were obvious in Olafur Eliasson's *Your Uncertain Shadows*. Can art change your perception? The artist Olafur Eliasson's *Your Uncertain Shadows* definitely tries. First, several spotlights project light on a white wall, as the visitors enter, their presence fills the void of the room with their shadows. The moving shadows rise above race, religion, age and class, showing the sameness they possess. He urges the visitors to realize this and engage with all those around. This art piece lingers in the mind's eye.

Geological Movements saw Karan Shrestha's three-channel video installation. It was accompanied by a large ink drawing. There are several layers in this work. The central video shows natural disasters, political instability, revolutionary upheaval, and state-sponsored violence in Nepal. The other two videos show traditional practices that deal with contemporary violence like pig sacrifices and Buddhists performing chhakk (prostration)

Art educator Biswajit Goswami curated the exhibition titled *Roots*. It is a tribute to artists and art educators like Zainul Abedin, S M Sultan, and Safiuddin Ahmed. They were pioneers who, through their teachings and works, influenced the artists of Bangladesh to shed their colonial phobia and create their own identity.



They show a wide range from paintings, print making to sculptures. Zainul Abedin, set up the Faculty of Fine Art in Bangladesh. Famine is a part of the series of sketches on the man-made famine that had spread throughout Bengal. He also realized the significance of folk art and upheld their traditions.

SM Sultan's painting of the farmers made with natural pigments on un-primed jute canvases, reveal the strength of Bengali peasants, in their struggle against colonial and ecological disasters as seen in *First Plantation Sketch*.

Safiuddin Ahmed was known for his contribution to printmaking in Bangladesh. He began by focusing on Adivasi women but moved on to abstract art as is evident in *The Angry Fish* Jamal Ahmed's work *Bather* reveals a two-dimensional painted figure against pastoral and urban scenes. The drama and tension he evokes in his textured work makes them unique. The delicacy in this work reinforces the physical and cultural landscapes of Bangladesh.

There were other jewels like Otobong Nkanga, *Landversation*, Korakrit Arunanondchai's *Naga Yasmin* and Otolith's Group's *O Horizon*.

Otobong Nkanga, *'Landversation'*, (2016, Beirut,

^ Installation view – Huma Bhabha *'Cowboys and Angels'*, 2018, Cork, styrofoam, acrylic paint, oil stick; and *'Untitled'*, 2014, ink and collage on colour photograph. Both courtesy of the artist and Samdani Art Foundation. Photo: Randhir Singh. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.

< Installation view – Chitra Ganesh, *'Sultana's Dream'*, 2018, portfolio of 27 linocuts *BFK Rives Tan*; and *'Totem'*, 2018/2020, brick, bamboo, clay, mud and straw, Commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Both courtesy of the artist and Samdani Art Foundation. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.



Lebanon) was a site-specific installation with various materials in variable dimensions. Through Otobong Nkanga's month-long residency in Dhaka, she interrogated "the complex relationship between the human subject and land, dealing with the contradictory ways in which we inhabit the world and are dependent on it."

Korakrit Arunanondchai's huge sculpture of a Naga (a reincarnating deity found across the mythology of South and Southeast Asia that shifts between snake and human form) transformed into a stage for the artist's newest performance work in collaboration with Alex Gvojcic that connects the river-based histories of Bangladesh and Thailand. Arunanondchai recreates the concept of Ghost Cinema, a post-Vietnam War ritual in Thailand. It was felt that during the outdoor screening functions there was communication between the audience and the spirits. When the American soldiers stationed in Thailand screened films in the forests, the locals attributed them to ghosts, lost in their folklore and rituals.

The philosophy of self-belief expounded by poet Rabindranath Tagore was omnipresent at the Summit especially in Otolith Group's (founded by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar) latest video, *O Horizon*, 2018. This video comes out of a long-standing research interest in Rabindranath Tagore and his founding of Visva-Bharati, a school in Santiniketan, West Bengal, India, that served as a living laboratory

"It was a rewarding experience to welcome nearly 75,000 people over the first two days of DAS to experience a sense of togetherness woven together by art, artists and their ideas. We find common ground with the rest of the global majority world from Bangladesh, and work together to shake up western centric art histories", said Diana Campbell Betancourt, chief curator of Dhaka Art Summit.

^ Installation view - Clarissa Tossin, 'A Queda do Céu (The Falling Sky)', 2019, laminated archival inkjet prints and wood. Commissioned and produced by Samdani Art Foundation for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist, Commonwealth and Council, and Samdani Art Foundation. Photo Courtesy: Randhir Singh.



in art, life and craft. Tagore was a highly prolific poet, philosopher, writer, and educator who wrote novels, essays, plays, and poetic works in colloquial Bengali. He was a key figure of the Bengal Renaissance, a cultural nationalist movement.

Dhaka Art Summit is run by Samdani Art Foundation, a private art trust created in 2011 by art collector couple Nadia and Rajeeb Samdani. They have worked tirelessly to put Bangladesh artists on the international art map. This year the Samdani award went to Soma Surovi Jannat whose installation *Into the Yarn, Out in the One*, in wood pen and wall. She has drawn several stories along the walls and on the wooden spirals she has created. "My work is inspired by nature, particularly the spirals of the milky way," said the artist.

Bangladesh was celebrating the founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's 100 years birth. His image appeared in all the billboards in neon lights and posters in Dhaka city.

The Summit has taken the celebration to a higher level. An impressively large exhibition titled *Lighting the Fire of Freedom* pays a tribute to him. The intimate details followed the chronological journey through his life and the way he addressed the challenges, are on display. Through archival and contemporary materials including personal photographs, newspapers, videos and works of art,

the exhibition showed the love and reverence he enjoys in his country. The exhibits marked the time of the Bengal Presidency under the British rule, to East Pakistan and finally Bangladesh's challenges during the partition in 1947, the famous Language movement in 1950 and finally the battle for country's independence in 1971. The exhibition paid a fitting tribute to Bangabandhu as Sheikh Mujibur Rehman is affectionately called.

"It was a rewarding experience to welcome nearly 75,000 people over the first two days of DAS to experience a sense of togetherness woven together by art, artists and their ideas. We find common ground with the rest of the global majority world from Bangladesh, and work together to shake up western centric art histories", said Diana Campbell Betancourt, chief curator of Dhaka Art Summit.

^ Installation view - Right: Yasmin Jahan Nupur, 'Let Me Get You a Nice Cup of Tea', 2019-20, antique furniture, antique tea set, embroidered textiles, tea, performance. Commissioned for DAS 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Exhibit320, with support from the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Left: Elia Nurvista, 'Sugar Zucker', 2016-2020, crystallised sugar, mural. Courtesy of the artist



The delineation of figures, portraits and landscapes may appear different, but for Harshdeep all forms derive from the same creative process. A process that does not distinguish between what manifests on the outside and the interiority of the subject, rather she sees all forms as emerging from a common creative matrix and where the depth is in the surface itself.

< Harshdeep Kaur,
The Saint on the Horse back,
Acrylic paint, ink and charcoal on canvas,
60 x 36 inches

AMID DEEP SILENCES AND SINUOUS MOVEMENTS: THE ART OF HARSHDEEP KAUR

- PROFESSOR SEEMA BAWA

Harshdeep Kaur's recent body of work is refreshingly bold and honest in its essence, going back to the fundamentals of art, she delves into figurative and landscape paintings. A rare attention to the craft of image-creation tries to not look just for the inner meaning but also the outer manifestation of the object/subject of the painting. This semiotic synchronicity between layers within the image is significant not just for viewing the work but furthermore to experience it.

Perhaps her most experiential works are the ones derived from Sikh heritage, with its distinct cultural and visual world that is both a spectacle and a lived creed. She avers "Sikh people and rituals inspire me to create a new dimension in Sikh art. The Khalsas wearing kesari turbans; engaged in meditation, working the fields or horse riding soldiers, skilled in warfare have left a lasting impression on my art and me".

The distinct sect of the Nihanga warriors within the Sikh community are trained in five weapons, the pancha shastra which is also symbolically represented on their steel reinforced tall turbans, the dastar bunga. They are usually clad in electric blue chogas and it is believed that Guru Gobind Singh ji himself initiated the Nihangas. Seen in their full glory annually at Holla Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib, Nihang Singh's practice gatka and other equestrian and martial arts all through the year. Harshdeep captures the arresting spectacle embedded in this performance full of military regalia of the Sikh warrior astride the horse in full gallop as well as the seamless relationship between the man and horse, in service of the creed they serve together.

Movement of the body, its flexibility and ability to suggest not just flexion but also emotions in ballet, have inspired many artists, like Edgar Degas who engaged with dancers and their practice deeply and familiarly. Harshdeep has worked with the figures of ballerinas who she studied while her daughter was learning ballet. Unlike the frenetic action of the Nihangs, here she dwells on the graceful and expressive curves of the dancers.

The attire of the Sikh men and women not only proclaims their commitment to the faith but also reinforces their individual and communitarian identity. The turbaned man, distributing prashad to the many upraised hands, the utter quietude in which an elderly person reads the gutka or the holy word. The artist has explored the turban, especially the Dumala or domala, a turban wound with lesser number of folds, worn by devout members of both genders in her works. The ability of the community to adapt to the times is reflected in studies showing a combination of the dumala with western wear and dark glasses that is increasingly



becoming visible amongst the Sikh diaspora. Many of the works are done in charcoal, giving it a raw and smoky feel, through the blending of charcoal along with the dripping effect of ink.

The artist's engagement with humanity is extended to small format portraits in pencil. Most of these are intimate studies of people close to her; her children, teachers, and friends. Harshdeep says that her art tries to bring out the soulful and intimate connection between the human and personal with the universal. One of the ways to achieve this is to paint the daily, mundane and yet magical world, of children who constantly find wonder in the ordinary, in work and in play, in objects and in abstraction, in solitary dreaming and in playful togetherness.

The delineation of figures, portraits and landscapes may appear different, but for Harshdeep all forms derive from the same creative process. A process that does not distinguish between what manifests on the outside and the interiority of the subject, rather she sees all forms as emerging from a common creative matrix and where the depth is in the surface itself.

She draws inspiration not only from different figures that dwell in her consciousness but also from landscapes embedded in the subconscious. These take the form of colourful mountainscapes in circular formats on small plates and monochromatic studies on paper. For her "there is an intrinsic relationship with nature in its myriad colours and repetitive forms

She focuses on spaces, mainly still silent spaces; here the absence of humans help build grand narratives based on nature, where the trees, birds, lakes and waters tell stories of peace. These evoke memories not just of mountains and lakes but also the rolling of the English countryside. Then there are the short poesies painted into a bunch of flowers in bloom or a pair of trees conversing in the shadows of dusk, in reflections of forms in still waters.

^ (L) Harshdeep Kaur, Khalsa wearing Dumalla (headgear-turban), Ink and charcoal on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.
(R) Harshdeep Kaur, Untitled, 15 x 10 cms, Watercolour on Paper

reflected in my art be it mountain ranges, hydrangeas or structured, thick foliage."

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The natural world with its varied palette has been amplified in many of her paintings but it has also been abstracted in her ink on paper. Light for her is intrinsic to experiencing form. Here she has delved into the play of light between various forms, trees and waters, spinneys and sky, birds and reeds. The use of Chinese ink attracted her with its versatility after a visit to Hong Kong. Beginning her journey into monochromatic tonalities of ink, that allows one to bring out the quintessence of many forms, creating lots of depth in both figures and landscapes, allowing some forms to stand out. The visceral feel of the thick handmade paper and canvas surface, splattered with ink and water brings certain playfulness as well as a sense of peace in the works.

However, ink and paper are not the only constant medium, some of the works need more acrylic and other combinations, as the medium responds to the needs and rhythms of the works.

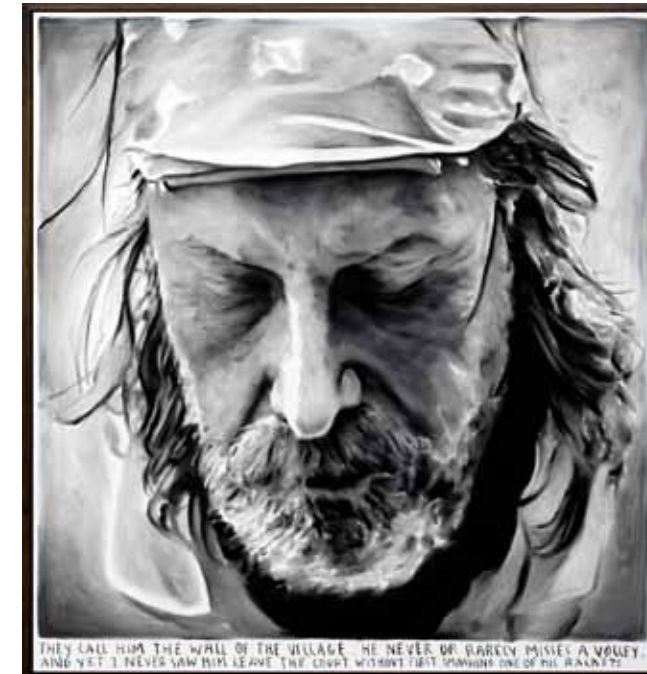
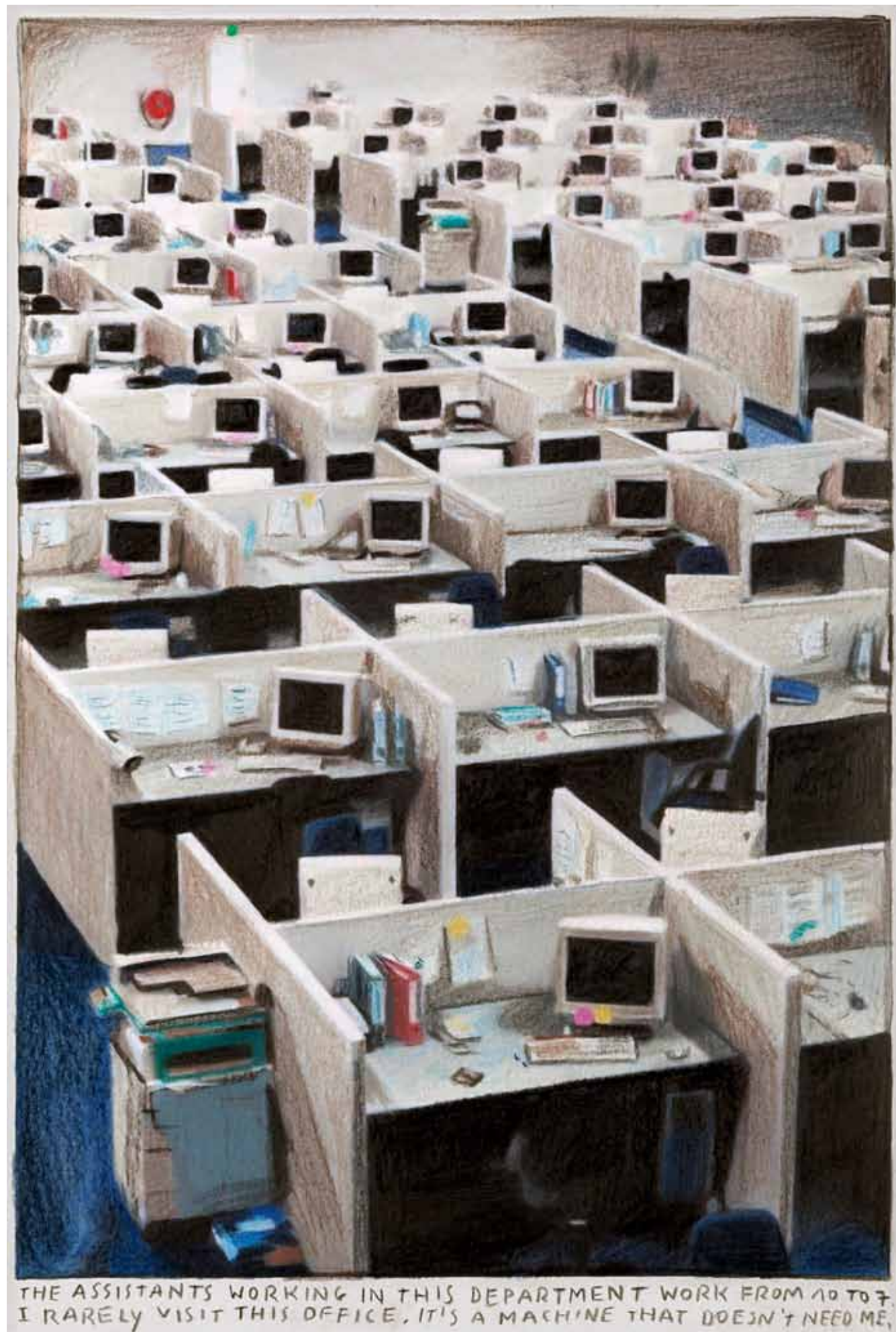
The current body of works are informed by the artist's personal and meditative self, a self that is still, calm and quiet, reflecting a deep and contemplative emotional wellspring that is intimately connected with Ultimate Energy.

^ Harshdeep Kaur, Unspoken, 9 x 12 inches, Watercolour on paper, 2018

LIVING A LIE

An interview with RINUS VAN DE VELDE

- RAJESH PUNJ



As for my work, it is more about storytelling, about a narrative. I always refer to my work as a 'fictional autobiography'. I am making a story about a life I have never lived.

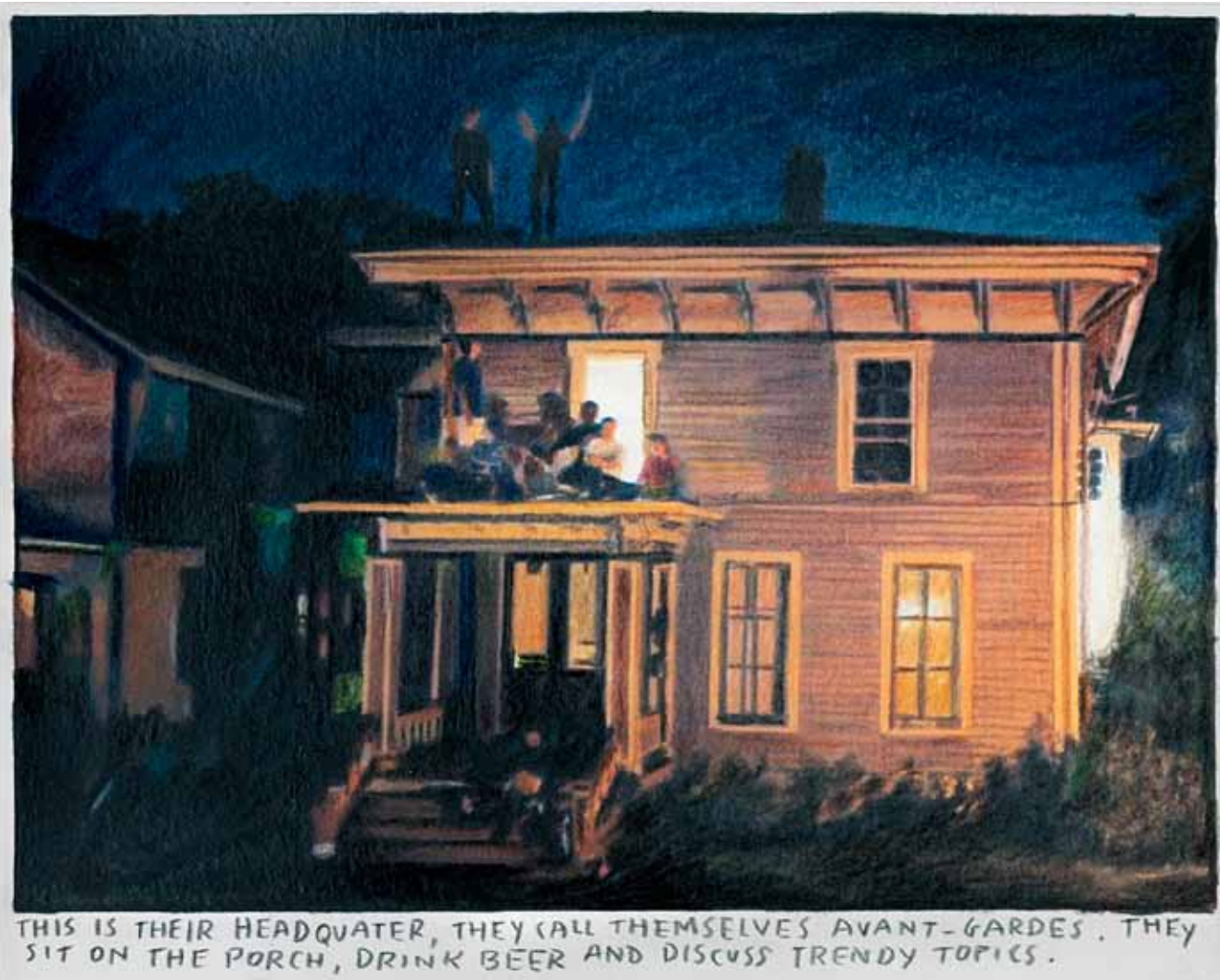
^ Rinus Van De Velde, *They call him the wall of the village...*, 2019, Charcoal on canvas, 159 x 153 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

< Rinus Van De Velde, *The assistants working in this department...*, 2019, Colored pencil on paper, 23.6 x 16 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

Drawing to define his alter ego, Belgian artist Rinus Van De Velde appears intent on subverting the original sentiments of art and language - of an image and narrative supporting one another and vice versa - by critically, casually and very comically upending them, as individual entities play off one another. In a way that has his audience endeared by his attitude to the image as art, as we are perplexed by where the truth lies in his work. (Pablo) Picasso churlishly explained away the authority of truth, saying, "we all know that art is not (about the) truth and that art is the lie that enables us to realise the truth", and seeing as French writer André Maurois did, that the lie was central to arriving at the truth. Such penetrating parables reappear in the work of Van De Velde. Who sees everything as open to interpretation, and that the image, far from being born of the truth, is a template for a whole series of truths, some more convincing than others.

For the artist, his intention has always been to allow drawing to stand alone and to alleviate whilst elevating it of its onerous role in support of painting, and to let drawing be a measure of how we think now. Van De Velde's explains how he has made drawing his medium of choice, to easily visualise his ideas in the moment, as images that appear to settle on paper as these 'instagramable' apparitions of his mind. Seeing that instead of the heavy-handed attention of painting, whose nuisances are more about painterly techniques and not behavioural tendencies - of drawing being about the ability to capture the atmosphere of an idea, and not be obligated to have everything entirely permanent on canvas, as with a painting. In conversation, Van de Velde is convinced that painting doesn't have the same lightness of touch or looseness of adventure that drawings offer, which is why he emphasises the reward of reducing his process down to pencil and paper. That for him, as a model way of working, has transformed in the last decade into a medium entirely of its own. And has artists such as Raymond Pettibone, Paul McCarthy and Phillip Guston among them, who see drawing as a measure of their mischievous minds - schizophrenic, anecdotal and chaotic. This has Van de Velde perceive drawing closer to his alter ego.

Tellingly, if McCarthy and Guston use drawing to divulge a whole host of visual dichotomies, littering



the picture plane with a multitude of gestural expressions and comic icons, Van de Velde's use of charcoal and coloured crayon is far more considered, closer in appearance to a photograph. Which, for their accuracy of the real, conjures the conundrum of 'truth' in them, and the strength of the image stands for the truth; we understand photography in the same way. And by reinventing an image of an event that already exists in time and space as an extension of him-self, leaves the audience grasping for the truth in them; and that his images as artworks must surely have a level of reality, for their being so real.

It becomes perverse and positively problematic when we realise that what we are looking at is essentially unimportant. The artist absorbs the nothingness of something to remove it of its original meaning and value, in favour of introducing a new narrative. Which for his brilliant ability to sabotage stock reality, has us see his drawings as both arbitrary and essential to how we see the world. Such decisions of the choice of image have proved crucial to the works of many of Van de Velde's contemporaries. Artists Luc Tuymans, Gerhard Richter, Robert Longo, and Sigmar Polke before them, intended the picture plane to involve the influential as well as the accidental. Granted

The beauty of a drawing is that it has a narrative all its own. That you start drawing somewhere, and at a certain moment the paper is entirely covered, and you can only erase or apply another drawing on top of it, which leads to a very specific end.

^ Rinus Van De Velde, *This is their headquarter,...*, 2018, Colored pencil on paper, 15.5 x 19.4 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

> Rinus Van De Velde, *What are we looking at? ...*, 2019, Colored pencil on paper, 14 x 18.7 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

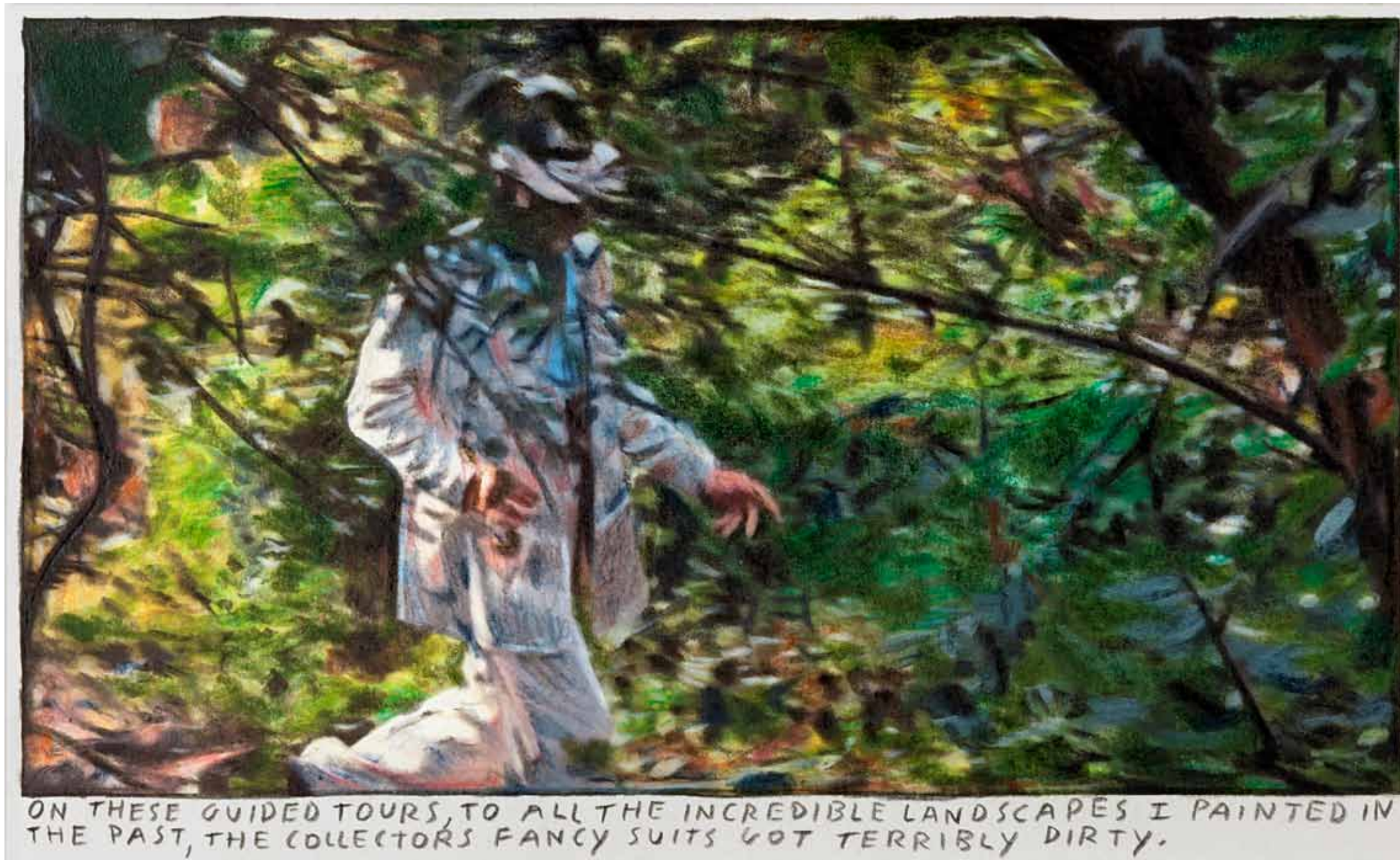
they are painters and Van de Velde a dedicated draftsman, but in their collective approaches there is an appreciation of the significance of the image, as delivering a greater reality back to us, as context appears influential to Van de Velde's work, but not central to it.

If the truth paralysed, painting before the invention of photography, then post-camera, painting in the modern period, under the influences of the abstractionists and avant-garde alike, became an unfettered platform for free expression. That has seen figuration reintroduced to painting as a device for dealing with reality anew. The liberty of Van De Velde's art, bearing in mind the rise of the irrational in art, is that instead of his images being fixed, as in painting, he can reincarnate them many times of their meaning. Faithfully recreating a scene from instagram or international press in coloured pencil and repositioning it, he claims it as his own. As though the attention and time applied to copy something in colour pencil, entitled him to include something of himself in the image that wasn't there before; as he does with his Dada like one-liners. (Raymond) Pettibon himself explains the relationship of image and language when he says "there's always a latent or inferred image in my writing, and I can almost always assume if I do a drawing that I will eventually have text." And for Van De Velde works like "Joe while you

were shopping for groceries... 2018", or "He always put the towel in the exact same spot... 2018", are preoccupied with his own way of introducing some kind of story to an image. Like Pettibon, Van De Velde's image explains one thing, whilst the words are a snapshot of something else entirely. This instantly removes the image as we understand it, from reality, explaining it as nothing more than an illusion of light and shade.

The inventiveness of the artists' work is in his ability to successfully subvert something of its original meaning, to reclaim and recreate it, and then remove his new aesthetic value from it, by introducing words or phrases that seemingly hijacks the images of their original meaning. Saying that, there is as much truth in his works as there is in reality. Which makes for a remarkable juxtaposition of the fictional acting as fact, only for the facts to become fictional again. It is about the transformation that occurs in Van de Velde's work that alters one's perception of everything in real-time. As his decors or props become sculptures that are arranged in such a way to create a set that serves as an installation, whilst also acting as a walkway into his short film, in which Van de Velde films these objects as a 'sequence of shots'. Add to that his colour drawings, seen in a more conventional gallery-like setting, that initially appear as these isolated images, which after the film have their own





particular association to the artist's cinematic styled narrative. All of which proves compelling for his revising reality several times over.

Interview

Rajesh Punj: It would be interesting if we could open the conversation by talking about your current exhibition at Tim van Laere Gallery, here in Antwerp.

Rinus Van De Velde: You came to the opening?

RP: Yes, and I joined you at the gallery dinner after. The exhibition was my first baptism, if you like, of your work.

RVDV: Okay.

RP: When I look at your work now, with the large

drawings that are leaning up against the wall behind you, and of the works I saw at the opening, for your technique and use of material, they recall the arresting images of American artist Robert Longo. Whom I was aware of at art school as an artist of interest, and whom I was fortunate enough to interview in Paris. Which has me thinking about his 'hyper-realist' images and monotone palette. As with his works, when you get up close to your drawings, they have that same kind of abstraction about them, whereby their detail is essentially made up of a whole series of abstracted and tonal arrangements of light and dark colouring. Your 'Seascape' work, for example, appears as this almost photo-real image of the sea. Capturing so collectly the weight of water, that as the audience we gaze at and into the work in a kind of wonder.

RVDV: I once met Robert Longo in New York at this studio, and it was a wonderful moment because obviously we are compared for our same use of materials. His are charcoal, and black-and-white drawings, many of which are on a large-scale, as are mine. But for me, it is important that I see my work as 'drawings', which we can come back to. I am not a painter; I am drawing for very specific reasons. But dealing with your reference to Longo, I think he is a much more of a conceptual artist. When I was at his studio, I saw him working with his assistants, with possibly five or even ten of them working on each of the pieces, to have them as realistic as possible. And also, as you know, the images he uses or claims as his are very iconic and politically charged. As for my work, it is more about storytelling, about a narrative. I always refer to my work as a 'fictional autobiography'. I am making a story about a life I have never lived. So it is much less political than Longo. So obviously in a formal way, there is a close connection, I think (as well) my work is less hyper-real. I am a little bit against the idea that I am into this tradition of hyper-real artists. The studio is not full of books referring to photo-realism. I think what you describe of coming closer to the piece, to see a greater level of abstraction, is incredibly important to me.

RP: Which then leads me to think of German painter Gerhard Richter - of figuration becomes false or abstracted.

RVDV: That there is a kind of speed to the drawings as well. Because I am aware that Longo spends a great deal of time on one drawing until it is perfectly done. For me the notion of speed, to delivery something in the moment is as important, and that the work, like a sensation, has its own endpoint. As opposed to a painting, which in my option is endless, because you can always rework it, and overpaint things. The beauty of a drawing is that it has a narrative all on its own. That you start drawing somewhere, and at a certain moment the paper is entirely covered, and you can only erase or apply another drawing on top of it, which leads to a very specific end. And you step back and see the drawing finished. So Robert Longo is someone who is at the back of my head, and there are many other artists that like.

RP: I want to ask about the seascape. And again I refer to (Gerhard) Richter, having recently seen a whole series of his waterworks at the Guggenheim Bilbao.

RVDV: I think the seascape is becoming a major theme for the contemporary artist. Because you have (Raymond) Pettibone, you have (Gerhard) Richter, you have Thierry de Cordier who make unbelievable seascapes, and now I made a couple of them. But in my work it has a different meaning to how they use it, I think. I made this exhibition The Villagers, about a

^ Rinus Van De Velde, *On these guided tours, ...*, 2018
Colored pencil on paper, 12.2 x 19.9 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



THEY'RE AN ARTIST COUPLE WORKING WITH THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST LEGACY. THEY SHARE A SMALL STUDIO IN THE LITTLE VILLAGE. THEY DON'T TALK MUCH, THEY PAINT.

state village in the middle of a mountainscape, where I am one of the inhabitants. Which is part of a chapter of this fake autobiography, and the seascape for me is a summary of the whole exhibition.

It says something about being isolated in this little village of elves, and it is about the notion of authenticity - and a search for authenticity. I pretend to be living in this village far away from everybody, surrounded by the sea, looking for something genuine, and at the same time it is the least authentic thing you can do, is to try to imagine you are somebody else. And that summarising the great paradox in my work that I really like so much. That is it always about people looking for who they are in an authentic way, but it is really about creating this alter ego. So I become this schizophrenic guy who is desperately trying to look for the truth.

RP: Like putting on a suit.

RVDV: Yes. So that's why in many ways I feel closer to the ex-wife of Longo, Cindy Sherman, than I do to Robert Longo; because she is more literally dressing up, and taking on a role as somebody else. Playing with icon Hollywood clichés, with works that are talking much more about identity. And I do see a closer relationship to her work, thinking about identities and narratives, than to the political imagery of Longo. Not to say that I don't appreciate Longo, I have enormous respect for his work, but I feel, as I say, something entirely different.

RP: Longo with his studio and assistances, is working towards a 'machine aesthetic', that intentionally and successfully tries to eliminate the traits of the

In a very traditional sense, you could say that a painting is like a vertical surface, that is a window to the world. And as for drawing, Walter Benjamin once said, you look at a drawing on a horizontal plane because it functions much more as a design or a map of some kind.

^ Rinus Van De Velde, *They're an artist couple working with the abstract expressionist legacy...*, 2019, Colored pencil on paper, 11.7 x 29.7 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

> Rinus Van De Velde, *He is on his way to steal an interesting identity...*, 2019, Colored pencil on paper, 12.1 x 24.7 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

medium that he employs. To arrive at something that surpasses that.

RVDV: So do you wonder why he is doing that with the medium of drawing? Which is something I always wondered about his work? I think to make statements like his of a shark for example with its mouth wide open, with all of its teeth exposed, it is an incredibly strong image, and I think of it as a painting. Making such strong statements for me belongs to painting. As for drawing, it is much more subtle I think.

RP: Drawing then allows for more possibilities.

RVDV: It is much more a 'medium in the margins', how to say. It was always considered the preparation tool for the painting. It is this private character, and that with the drawing you could easily see the hand of the artist because they were sketching. For example, the Carracci family of the Renaissance period, who were known for their beautiful paintings, introduced to their drawings little jokes, if you like, that appeared as cartoons in a way. So you witness a greater freedom with the medium of drawing, and this was what interested me. Also in a very traditional sense, you could say that a painting is like a vertical surface, that is a window to the world. And as for drawing, Walter Benjamin once said, you look at a drawing on a horizontal plane because it functions much more as a design or a map of some kind.

For example, if they design this cup (that I am holding), they would first have to make a drawing of it. Therefore it is much more related to the designing of your world and to designing your own narrative - an object. This is why drawing was so important for me and still is, because it is about designing or creating this other universe. As for painting, it is much more about saying 'this is what I think about

the world', or that this is my statement. Which is why I am drawn to drawing.

RP: Bearing that in mind, besides the charcoal seascape, the works that were as visually arresting were the series of smaller postcard-sized images, executed in coloured crayon, for their ability to successfully create a world within a world. Cinematic scenes that feel as imagined as they are incredibly real. I sense that they successfully exemplify your ability to create a compelling narrative within the boundaries of the image, to which, as has become your signature, you add a concurrent or conflicting narrative- as drawings are they independent of everything else, or integral to it?

RVDV: This is something I started doing two years ago. Again because I made these small drawings when I graduated from high school. At the time I didn't have a studio and was very limited with space, so I deliberately started making these small drawings, which I would stick to one wall, to have an overview of everything I have done of the past months. But then, of course, I was thinking about the medium of drawing being very marginal, and I thought to get rid of that and treat it as an autonomous medium. So one strategy could be of scaling or 'blowing up' the drawing. But then practically with coloured pencils, I couldn't very easily fill these giant sheets of paper with colour, so I started using charcoal, because it goes quicker onto the surface, and was easier to apply to a large-scale work. Which led to my making many charcoal drawings works in this way, for more than ten years, until at a certain point I was with Tim (Van Laere), and we were looking at some older works, and by chance, a colour drawing appeared, and I wondered why I had stopped making them. Sometimes you have an idea ten years ago and you believe it is stupid, and



HE IS ON HIS WAY TO STEAL AN INTERESTING IDENTITY BUT HE HAS SOME BAD LUCK EN ROUTE.

I had stopped doing it only because I wanted to make the medium more autonomous. And of course, in the last ten years, a great deal has changed in the way we look at drawing. Since then drawing has become independent and self-sufficient if you like. And I feel like it is not as much in the margin of painting anymore.

RP: *Less at the service of painting and more its own entity.*

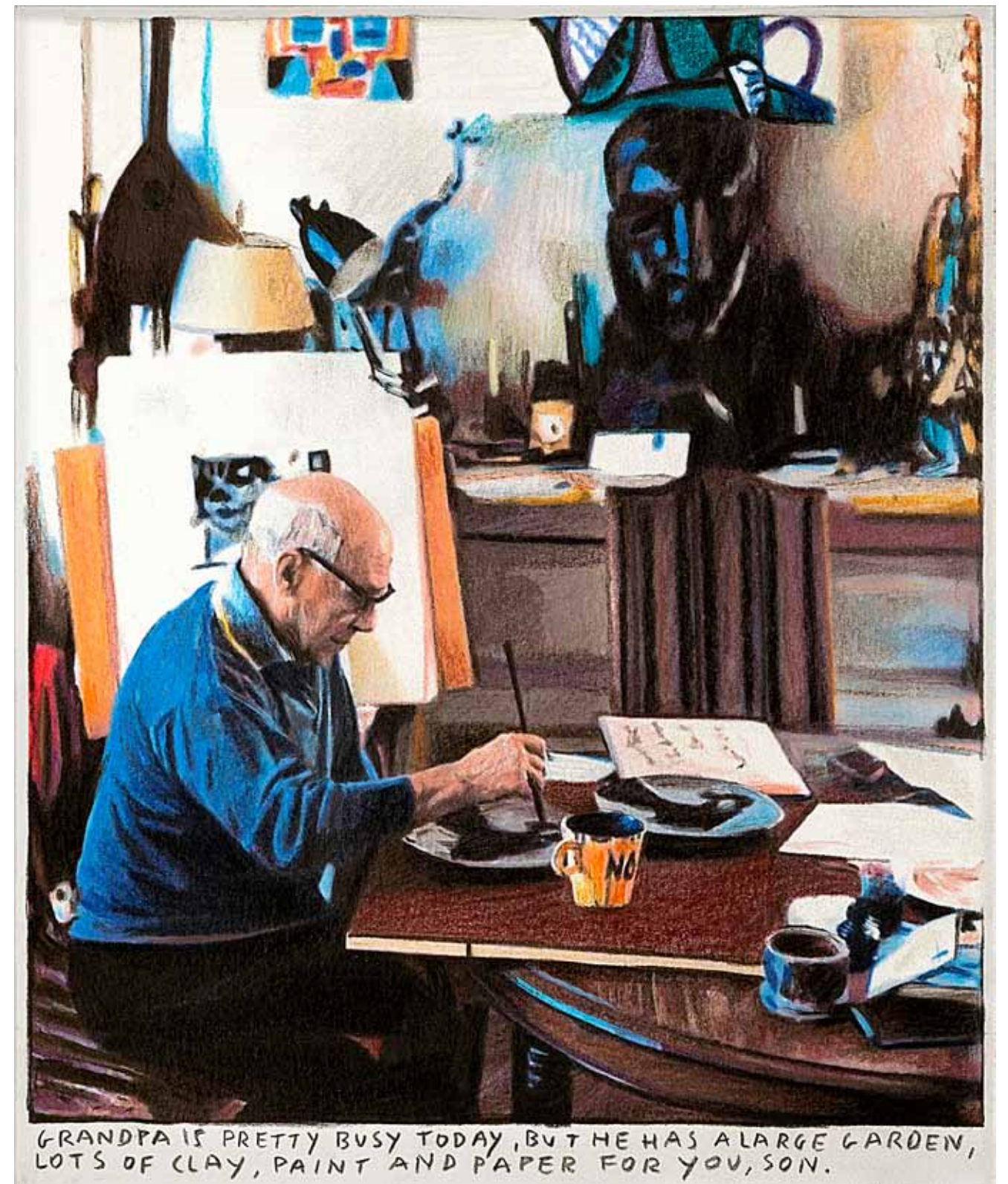
RVDV: Now you have artists like (Raymond) Pettibon, who are drawing all the time. For example, you can see shows of Paul McCarthy, entirely of his drawings. Which are fantastic. So it is not that there is a clear division now. But I believe ten years ago it was a little bit different.

RP: *Likely a drawing show then would have merited a great deal of attention.*

RVDV: And as well now you can study drawing at high school - sculpture, painting, but also drawing. Which says a lot I think. So I started making these small colour pencil drawings two years ago, and I really enjoyed it because it gave me this kind of freedom to do it wherever I wanted, not only here in the studio. I could also work again with this found-footage imagery. Of images that I find on instagram or the internet, and be much more free about it. Because with the charcoal drawing they too started out as found-footage, whereby I was trying to inhabit these images, but then it became too much about appropriation, so I started physically building these décors in my studio, from which I took a picture from a décor, with me standing in the picture, and then that picture I used as a sketch, as a traditional painter would make hundreds of sketches before they would work on a bigger canvas.

I made a whole décor or installation and placed myself in it, I took a picture, and from that, I had a guide of how to make my drawing. But then, of course, it took many months to finish one drawing, because I had to build the thing, and preparing the canvas took a lot of time, which made me realise I had lost a little bit of the freedom, and the lightness of the medium of drawing which I liked so much; and all of this I found again when making the smaller coloured drawings. Because I can start making one, and just throw it away if it isn't working, and to throw away a much larger canvas is way more difficult than getting rid of a piece of paper. And I realised, as I said, I was looking for this kind of freedom again, and of mixing all of the images up a little bit. Because I was making these décors, which I still do, but now I am filming them instead of photographing them, and I can also make a film because I wanted to create a film as an autonomous work. And I don't want that I use too many of the film-stills, towards my drawings, and as preparation for them. Because you can imagine then you have this weird exhibition where we show

I don't think it is as interesting to say (what is and isn't real) this is the truth. I don't wish this, because I am not an authority on the truth. I don't want to be in that position, and the same of what I said about making statements in painting, I am not that kind of artist who is going to make an assentation and say that this is how the world is now. I like that everything is much more ambivalent and that there is hesitation, it is false or fact? The lie is much more interesting I think then telling the truth.



^ Rinus Van De Velde, *Grandpa is pretty busy today, ...*, 2019 colored pencil on paper, 20.8 x 16.7 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

the film, and then all of the drawings appear as stills from the same film, and then you feel that they are financing the film, just by selling the drawings. Which for me is a little stupid. I want the drawings to add another layer to the whole installation.

RP: *So the drawings go from being images to cinematic stills, and back to individual images.*

RVDV: Yes, the drawings can be stills from the movie, sometimes scenes from films I have seen online. Other



times they are pictures I have taken from my iPhone or something that appears in the newspaper. And for all of that, I like that it is all mixed up and that there is no clear strategy about it, because otherwise it becomes too formulaic, and forced. I once made this exhibition at SMAK, in Ghent, and every drawing was based on the décor we had built, and then those objects were also included in the exhibition. So we had this show of all of the cardboard props, which were surrounded by all of the drawings. And that, when I think about it, was too obvious and easy to understand. You saw a life-sized boat made of card together with the drawing of the boat, and it was very much one-on-one, too didactical, in that I was explaining too much of the way that I work. Which is much less interesting I think.

RP: *The irony is that when you see something so well produced, so beautifully executed, we assume to think that it represents the truth, in a similar way to our accepting the word in print as explaining the truth. As we endeavour to look for the truth in everything.*

^ Rinus Van De Velde, *I was in charge of all the outgoing invoices...*, 2018, Colored pencil on paper, 15.7 x 18.5 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

> Rinus Van De Velde, *In this small town...*, 2019, Charcoal on canvas, 86 x 103 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

RVDV: This is an important point about what is the truth? My work is always based on fiction, placed alongside reality. It is about the truth and a lie. Where is the real in all of it? And this is interesting I think, for me to mix it all up. I don't think it is as interesting to say (what is and isn't real) this is the truth. I don't wish this, because I am not an authority on the truth. I don't want to be in that position, and the same of what I said about making statements in painting, I am not that kind of artist who is going to make an assertion and say that this is how the world is now. I like that everything is much more ambivalent and that there is hesitation, it is false or fact? The lie is much more interesting I think than telling the truth.

RP: *It is interesting to understand the truth, or truths, as being the basis for so many ways of looking at the world. In terms of the order and disorder of social media, and the role that reality plays on our lives as living machines almost. I think it important as well to acknowledge that we of a post-modernism era, with as many narratives as there are truths, and the moment of the master narrative or the definitive truth having disappeared as out-dated. So therein lies the idea that everything engenders something different for everyone.*

RVDV: I think as an artist it becomes even more important to create your own narrative. I am not so much interested in showing you that there are different narratives, one from another. I also approve of this 'post-post-modernist' moment we are in, as you say, and that there is no one narrative anymore, but that everything is fragmented. This we know, and now the question is how are we dealing with this fractured world? And I think one way of coming to terms with it, is of telling stories, and of telling lies possibly as well. But also of trying to structure this whole moment of fragmentation, wherein lies a potential and very powerful beauty. If somebody tries to give meaning to this fragmented world, they are applying meaning to something fictional. It cannot be the truth, we realised after modernism that there is no such thing as a defining truth. There is your truth and my truth. But is as interesting to think about your truth alongside my truth, and see that we believe in different kinds of facts.

RP: *But again when we look at your work, not as a critic or connoisseur, we are determined to find fact in them, and it is as though these works should deliver that, or why do they exist?*





RVDV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, (they think) it has to be true. That is interesting I think. I understand what you mean by that. If something is well-produced, that it then leads one to think it must have truth to it.

RP: Interestingly I think anything that requires of us a level of commitment or engagement, has to result in something real. I think as humans, as a society, we have for better or worse programmed this into our psyche. And for you to easily create a convincing persona turns everything we understand of reality on its head. With your work, we are invited to live out your lie, in a way that has us question what we believe in already, which is rewarding.

RVDV: That is beautiful.

RP: In terms of the images that stand as your work, obviously many of them have no real relationship to you, other than your having chosen them from the news paper or instagram, and that they become part of your life, for the time that you reproduce them in coloured pencil. That they then become part of your life, involves your alter-ego.

RVDV: Yeah, that's nice. I never thought about it in that way. That makes sense I think like the audience.

RP: And of course I am interested in the other element, like an opposing force within the work, of the narrative, and its location and association to the corresponding image.

RVDV: Crucially for me, the work cannot exist without the introduction of words as sentences, because I tried it many times, of having the works without words, but it becomes too much like an

But I also like what language can do in a non-visual way. With an image, I can tell you one thing that it comes from reality or a décor, but with a text, I can go so much further. I can have a monkey suddenly fly over the mountains for example, and I could never draw that because then it becomes fantasy. In writing there is so much more freedom I think, you can go in any direction with words. So for me, I cannot imagine the drawings now without their text.

^ Rinus Van De Velde, During those years..., 2018, Colored pencil on paper, 12.6 x 22.2 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

> Rinus Van De Velde, He constantly watches sport on television..., 2018, Colored pencil on paper, 13.9 x 26.8 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp



^ Rinus Van De Velde, Hey Joe, could you bring me two cokes..., 2019, Colored pencil on paper, artist frame, 20.3 x 16 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

image. You can have your interpretation and I can have mine. But it is very important for me that when the work leaves the studio it has a place in a larger narrative. And I realise I can only determine the specific place of the drawing in my narrative by adding the text.

RP: Almost like a graffiti tag, of ownership if you like.

RVDV: I don't know how I can do that in any other way? For me when I make a drawing, while I am making the work, I am constantly thinking about the drawing behind the image, as applied to my bigger story. And then when the drawing is complete I come up with a line, which most of the time I have already decided before the drawing is done, and that becomes the last thing to do. It feels like with that (the wording) I am finishing the drawing, because then in that action it becomes part of my bigger narrative.

RP: By introducing script or text to the image, I see it as sealing it into its situation of becoming an artwork.

RVDV: For example, if you look at this work of two people in a snowstorm, and you will likely see them as two people isolated by the weather etc., and then I have written underneath the image 'determined to visit every museum on the list, I was pretty sure that the last one was somewhere here'; so suddenly it becomes about me, and about old museums, I would like to show at in the world, which becomes the story, and which gives the work meaning.

RP: Or not, if we consider the wording has no relationship to the image - each to their own.

RVDV: I don't know, as I said to do it to arrive somewhere else.



RP: So you are conscious that the image changes irrevocably when you introduce sentences and script to them. Because appears to set so many things in motion, including changing the status of the image from photographic to representational, and of making the work about non-reality, and the non-relationship between what we see and what we read. Essentially you create something so strong, only to undone it of its visual strength. Which is about the artist in you. But then if I think about it deciding on 'the line', the verse that goes beneath an image must be quite precious.

RVDV: Yes it can become quite precious.

RP: How does it come about?

RVDV: It happens sometimes that I write a line down, and then I think it doesn't work or that it isn't appropriate, but then I have to throw away the drawing because you cannot erase it. I can never change a line. So this is the final part of the process.

RP: Your script has an almost visual quality about it, not just in terms of how you write it out in charcoal, word for word, but also of the additional imagery that the phrase conjures outside of the central image, as an opposing force, or idea. Which becomes the basis for many of the contradictions in your work - firstly of the image's credibility as yours, of the level of reality inherent in your work, and the significance or otherwise of the phrases that introduce opposing narrative; and of the value of image and text to the overall experience.

RVDV: It becomes a huge step, a final act in finishing a work. It is comparable to (Peter Paul) Rubens, who produced many of his paintings from his studio in Antwerp, with his assistants working on them for a very long time, and then he would come in and introduce his highlights. It was the most important part of the process, as it made a 'Rubens' a 'Rubens' painting if you like. It is the finishing touch that I feel comes with the text, and as you say, I also like it visually, without even reading it, that you feel that there is information there.

RP: Evidence of some kind of you.

RVDV: There is something that the author wished to tell you, or there is a fable or fact to be had from the painting.

RP: The work as an image is two-dimensional, but when you introduce text, as you do, it takes it to another plane. As if there is more to be had in our minds than what is in front of us. Which has to do with the image being about you, when in fact it doesn't, or in other words, that there is a truth to what we see.

RVDV: Because the signs are supposed to stand for it. But I also like what language can do in a non-visual

way. With an image, I can tell you one thing that it comes from reality or a décor, but with a text, I can go so much further. I can have a monkey suddenly fly over the mountains for example, and I could never draw that because then it becomes fantasy. In writing there is so much more freedom I think, you can go in any direction with words. So for me, I cannot imagine the drawings now without their text.

RP: They are 'mute' drawings otherwise.

RVDV: When I started looking at art, the very first exhibition I saw was almost twenty years ago now at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. It was a show about Fauvist painters, and at the time I didn't know anything about art. I was a young guy, seventeen years old. I just went into the museum, and remember being mesmerised by the works. I remember asking myself, 'what are these people doing representing the world in such strange colours?' That was my only idea, and then I thought to read about it because I wanted to understand it better. So I bought the exhibition catalogue and I read it, which led to me acquiring another book about eternal beauty, by Ernst Gombrich I think. So I read art history just to understand. Which shows that reading was always an important part of the process of learning for me, and not as much about looking at works. It was about the lives of the artists as well. Reading about a work's context was initially how I trained myself to look at art. And it was only after seeing that exhibition, that a couple of years later I started thinking maybe I should as well, and I started drawing.

So it comes from reading with me, from understanding and from reading the title, specifically of who made the work, and of the work's title. Titles themselves are very important for me, to have a better understanding of a work. Despite that, for my work, I didn't want that everything rested on the title, so I thought I would write what I wanted to say on the work itself. And in that way you weren't able to and cannot disconnect it from the image. That is how it started, and I would write the title of the work on a piece of paper, and attach it to the drawing, and that created the kind of narrative I was looking for.

RP: But then your titles are based on lies if you like.

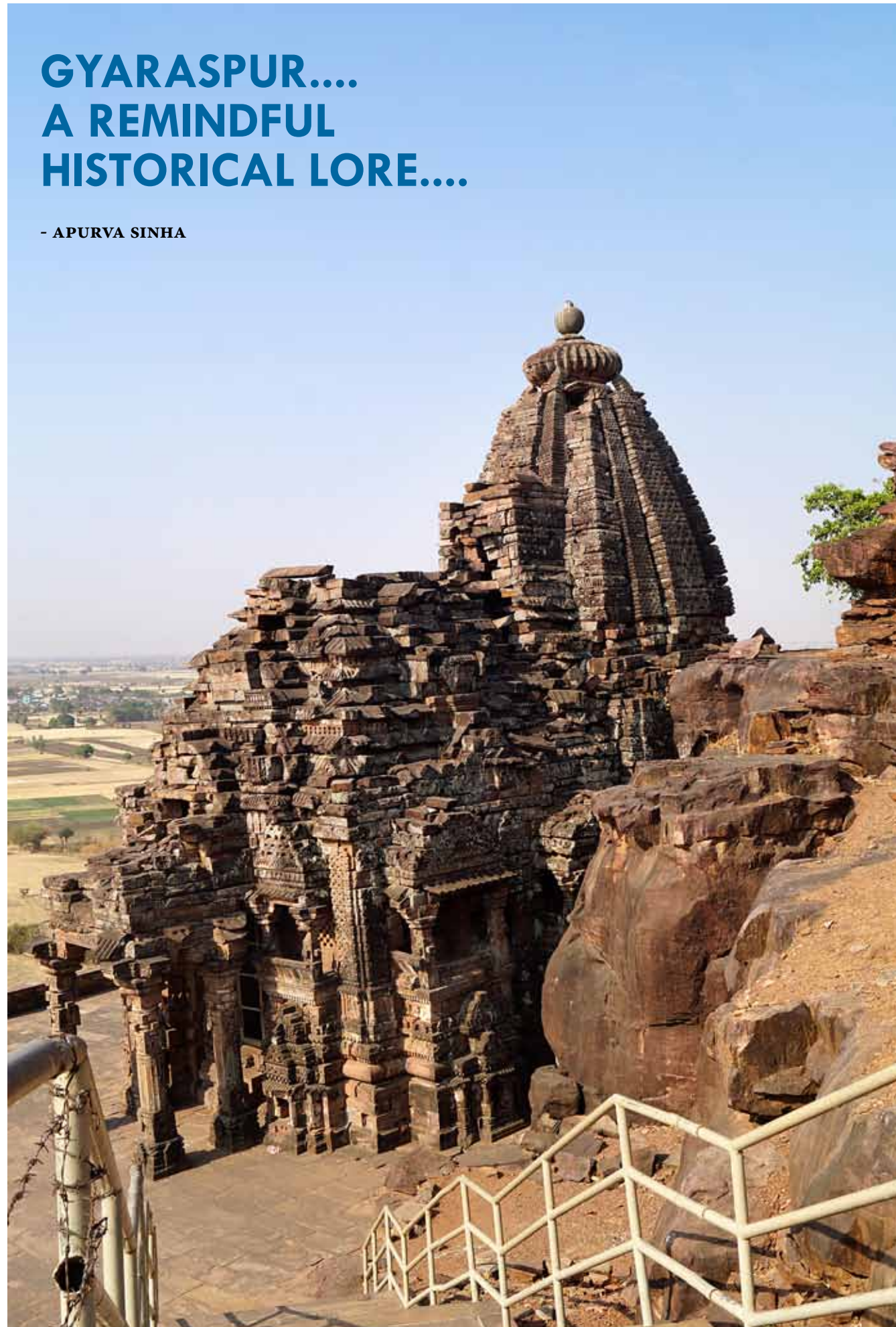
RVBV: Yes. It explains something, but it is a lie.



> Rinus Van De Velde, Please, come back next Thursday., 2019, Charcoal on canvas, artist frame, 103 x 76 cm, Courtesy of Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

GYARASPUR.... A REMINDFUL HISTORICAL LORE....

- APURVA SINHA



A worth mentioning period is of the Pratiharas; an age when political dominion was victimised by various attacks, religious zeal the support system, Sastras followed to build temples and architectural fervour was at its zenith. Gyaraspur town, which belongs to this era topped my travel list and with a deep sense of adoration for the cultural legacy; the Archaeologist in me had to commute nearly a hundred kilometres North-East of Bhopal to the old town to explore and visualise the happenings of the 7th to 11th century CE.

^ Adi Nath shrine, Maladevi Temple, Gyaraspur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha

< Maladevi Temple, Gyaraspur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha



Waiting for the break of dawn I checked my alarm several times. As time passed by, my mind and soul wandered through the imagination of the bygone eras. Cultures, traditions, history and communities are all woven together with the thread of ideas, interactions, ingenuity and evolution. It is for culture, that the communities developed and prospered and here we are defining culture in our own style. The Indian sub-continent has experienced centuries of cultural ideation; right from the birth of civilisation to the modern times. A worth mentioning period is of the Pratiharas; an age when political dominion was victimised by various attacks, religious zeal the support system, Sastras followed to build temples and architectural fervour was at its zenith. Gyaraspur town, which belongs to this era topped my travel list and with a deep sense of adoration for the cultural legacy; the Archaeologist in me had to commute nearly a hundred kilometres North-East of Bhopal to the old town to explore and visualise the happenings of the 7th to 11th century CE.

Driving down The National Highway and beaming with vigour, the only thing that crossed my mind was a quote by Van Gogh, 'If you truly love nature you will find beauty everywhere'. The tinselling beauty of the landscape was enthralled with liveliness as the hillocks of sandstone gleamed with the first rays of the rising Sun. Birds chirped and welcomed the new day. Cattle grazed in the fields lazily with their younglings beaming with excitement at the prospects of a new day. Such was the enchantment of the moment. While crossing the river Betwa, I visualised the importance of the ancient trade town of 'Vidisa'. As my destination came closer; the passion to unravel the religious leanings of Gyaraspur became more intense, and I wondered to myself as to why was the town called Gyaraspur? Gyaraspur, a small township in Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh derived its name from a fair that was held here in the medieval period during the eleventh month (or Gyraras/ Magha) of the Hindu calendar. A mind boggling thought to ponder over is that in this month, the Sun ends its journey at the Tropic of Capricorn and starts moving towards the Tropic of Cancer. Were the ancients celebrating this astronomical event since the Tropic of Cancer passes close to Gyaraspur?

'Art ignites vision and illuminates life', is what my mind exclaimed after seeing the marvellous wonder of the 10th century CE,



'Hindola torana'; Highly ornamental, the Torana must have been a gateway to a huge temple of which the plinth and various architectural components remain. Intricately carved out on sandstone, the two pillars depict the 'Dasavatara' (The Ten incarnations) forms of Vishnu i.e. Pasurama, Rama, Buddha, Kalki & Krishna on one pillar, while Narsimha, Varaha, Vamana, Matsya & Kurma on the other. The pillar is adorned with motifs of amorous couples, Kirtimukha & Gavaksha. Close to the Torana is a roofless pillared Mandapa that throws light on the architectural ingenuity of the artisans. The premise is a collection of architectural members and one can take a close look at the carved stones.

Though Man has created marvels throughout the world, nature still amuses and its acts are not just unbelievable but also fascinating. One of the best examples of this is the Maladevi Temple. Located at a distance of approximately one kilometre from the Hindola Torana and situated at the slope of the hill; this mesmerising temple is partly rock-cut and has survived centuries of natural vagaries. Situated in the Eastern direction, the temple overlooks the Mansarovar Lake. Initially, a Brahmanical temple, the temple portrays Jaina impact as the latterly feature. The temple constructed in Nagara (North Indian) style on plan, has a porch, a pillared Mandapa and a Garbhagriha (The Seat of God). The architectural splendour reflects a balance of proportion & beautiful art embellishments. The four

'Imagination is the beginning of creation' and these edifices epitomise the conception of idea along with deep contemplation that was brought to reality. The historical remains at Gyaraspur represents the three main sects, that are; Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism and illuminates their importance from 7th to 11th century CE. I will now leave my readers with a thought provoking fact which will make them think as to why the temples were built overlooking the Mansarovar Lake?

^ Athakhamba, Gyaraspur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha

> Bajramatha Temple, Gyaraspur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha



pillared porch is beautifully decorated with delicate carvings depicting foliated motifs, and the doorway to the temple is flanked by the figures of Yakshinis (female guardian deities, angels who are true devotees of Jaina Tirthankars). The creators of this temple were so passionate, that even the door lintel is decorated and depicts Yakshini Chakreshwari, who is an attendant of Lord Adi Nath (Rishabhdev). The pillared Mandapa has two niches on each side and two on either sides of the door. An interesting feature is the south facing standing figure of Jaina Tirthankar. The Mandapa opens into Garbhagriha that has Adi Nath seated as the presiding deity. Apart from this there are three other Jaina sculptures present. The Garbhagriha rises to form a Shikhara surmounted by Amalaka and Kalasa. Unique architectural elements are the Kakshasana balconies and the Bhadra niches that infuse exuberance in temple architecture. The temple belongs to 9th century CE, and is an extraordinary example of Pratihara style. Another thought provoking element which one observes, is the reddish 'Vajra Lepa' (ancient pigment) that was once applied on the exterior walls to give a metallic look. The Brihatsamhita of Varahamihira gives a vivid description of the preparation of these kinds of 'Vajra Lepa'. Now the question is what could be the possible factor responsible for such a creation? To answer this, one needs to delve deep into the Jaina philosophy and know about the Jins (Jaina tirthankars). The Jin is a liberated soul, freed of its material body and resides on the top of the universe,

at a place called the 'Siddha-loka'. This hill probably was the depiction of 'Siddha-loka' that acted as an abode of the Jins (Jaina tirthankars).

Feeling liberated and high spirited, I moved towards the town to visit 'Athkhamba'. As the name suggests, Athkhamba denotes eight pillars that probably were a part of a temple. And judging by the remains, the temple belonged to Siva of which only pillared Mandapa, Antarala (vestibule) and doorway of the Garbhagriha can be seen. A few scribbles on the pillars in Brahmi script recorded by the ancient pilgrims can also be seen. Another interesting feature is the 'Makara Torana' of the Antarala that depict minuscule sculpted figures of amorous couples, flying Vidyadharas. The Chandrasila of the Garbhagriha invites you to enter the dark and dingy Garbha that can only be visible through the mind's eye.

In close proximity with Athkhamba is 'Bjramath', a Jaina temple. The Nagara style temple facing east is unique in its own sense, as it has a pillared Mandapa followed by three Garbhagrihas. The central shrine belonging to The Jaina shrine has traces of Brahmanical deities that can be seen around the temple. While taking the Pradakshina, on the West wall one can see Ardhanarishwar, Narsimha & Varaha incarnations of Vishnu and depictions of Nayikas. On the wall facing south is the sculpture of Ganesha along with Jaina Yaksha & Yakshini figures. The temple has been dated to 10th century CE and an interesting feature is an old tank in the premises.



While moving towards the West end of the town, my ears were ringing with *'Buddham sharnam gachchami'*, and my eyes caught a glimpse of a Buddhist Stupa dated to 7th century CE. The domical stupa popular by the name of 'Dhekinatha' is devoid of any decorations presently, but once it had three Buddhist sculptures on a platform facing East, West & North directions. Lying around were architectural components carved with floral motifs. Close to the stupa, is a cave that was once used by monks to meditate & practice penance.

The Southern side too, actively participated in the temple building activities. Overlooking the Mansarovar lake and locally known as *'Thuar Beta'*, are the remains of pillared *mandapas* of a temple.

'Imagination is the beginning of creation' and these edifices epitomise the conception of idea along with deep contemplation that was brought to reality. The historical remains at Gyarpur represents the three main sects, that are; Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism and illuminates their importance from 7th to 11th century CE. I will now leave my readers with a thought provoking fact which will make them think as to why the temples were built overlooking the Mansarovar Lake? Was it symbolically pointing towards religious leanings or were the constructions made just to enhance the cultural landscape? As the day advanced towards dusk, the cattle returned to their shed and their younglings now tired started

their dreary walk back home. The setting sun cast the last golden rays divinely atop the hills. The chirping birds had gathered and were singing a melodious tune which soothed the ear. The atmosphere became ever so serene and calm. My body was weary with the heat and journey, my mind was overwhelmed with the beauty of the town but my soul had captured a piece of something that would be with me forever. Closing my eyes I took a long breath and smiled to myself thinking *'Ek umra guzar jati hai zindagi ki kashma kash se joojhne mei fir ye, toh sadiyo se badlte dastoor ke yadgaar hain...'*

^ Dhekinath Stupa, Gyarpur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha

> Hindola Torana, Gyarpur, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh, Image Courtesy: Apurva Sinha



Delhi

**TRANSLATING MODERNITY –
SCULPTURES BY PRODOSH DAS
GUPTA**

Curator: Uma Nair
Akar Prakar



Mapping a pedagogic journey from the Lucknow Government Arts School, followed by Madras School of Arts and Crafts, leading to the Royal College of Art in London as well as the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, can be a heady lesson. Studying bronze casting at the L. C. C. Central School, London, became an impeccable legion of sculptural practices for Das Gupta. His sculptures reflect at once, his interest in art history, his inherent perceptions, of the materiality and density of bronze to examine the role of everyday reality and the human narrative, to create contemporary moments that defined his evolution over a period of more than five decades.

In a timeline that runs the gamut of years 1947-1990, through these sculptures we glimpse an intellectual who was an inquisitor of structural form, a thinker of verbal analogies, and an aesthete who translated the rhythms of the earth in idioms that explored the resonant code of contours and benchmarks to find an alchemy that celebrated and refracted the romantic pole of his sensibility. His writings and musings on his own sculptures tell us that he took a passionate and unabashed delight in the physicality of

the forms he created, as he exploited in bronze, its capacity for moodiness and melancholic beauty.

When you run your eyes over these sculptures, you know at once that it's an odyssey that is built on the hinges of honesty and verve. Feminine fervour

vies with masculine muscularity, hints of Rodin's rudiments are as familiar as Henry Moore's masses. But that is where the similarity stops because the works talk to us about incidents and events that happen on the firmament of Indianesque intentions. Whether it is the poise of female figures reclining in pastiche sensuality or sometimes echoing a pristine yogic poise, as in *Bride*, with her knees hunched, we know that Das Gupta was always interested in a language that was preoccupied by the expanded volumes of sculptural geometry that would retain its character even as he dipped into the matrix of the elemental, everyday existence.

Das Gupta was a voracious reader and an impassioned writer. He had the eye of an epicurean. Criticism in varied subjects came to him effortlessly. His reflections written over the years present the punctuations that must add to our understanding of his sojourn that strove to amalgamate all influences and finally find the stamp of a rustic rhythm. In a nation where the British had left behind their brand of academic realism, he had to forge his own identity in the alchemy of blending abstraction into the mode of

naturalness. His journey to London, to the Royal College of Arts, and then to Paris, became a turning point in his vision of what sculpture could be, in the language of objectivity. One of India's pioneering modernists, he was creating works on the cusp of a new tide. Contemporary India for him was not just a moment, instead it was a phenomenon that was defined by a summation of associations and experiences. Thus came his question many moons ago:

“What is this ‘Contemporary India’? Has it any character of its own, a definite identity to distinguish from other nations of the world? The answer to this question is obvious, in as much as its own character in faith and beliefs, its religious practices, its age-old customs and rituals, its manners and habits, and in short the way of life of its people, though apparently looks somewhat diffused in the contemporary world. The major factor that governs or moulds the character of the people in no uncertain manner is no doubt the geographical situation that is responsible for the climatic conditions. The sap of the organic life of flora and fauna gets its sustenance from this peculiar phenomenon, which is basically tropical. The basic concept remaining the same, Indian sculpture, has through the ages, entered new phases evolving new styles and forms and characters in different localities under the patronage of different kings in different periods inspired by divergent religious ideals.”

Date: Till 28 March, 2020

Venue: Akar Prakar

D 43, Defence Colony (First Floor)

New Delhi 110024

T: 011-41315348

Email: contact@akarprakar.com

www.akarprakar.com

Timings: 11.00 am - 7.00 pm

**N.N. RIMZON
THE ROUND OCEAN AND THE
LIVING DEATH
Talwar Gallery**

Talwar Gallery is pleased to announce *The Round Ocean and the Living Death*, an exhibition of new works by N.N. Rimzon. The exhibition opens January 29, 2020 and will be on view until April 11, 2020.

The works in *The Round Ocean and the Living Death* emerge from Rimzon's career-long effort to craft an artistic language that speaks with the still,

timeless power of India's centuries-old belief systems and making traditions—and yet speaks to the complexities of Indian life today. In the direct, unadorned markings of his works on paper and canvas, or the quietly evocative forms of his sculptural works, Rimzon creates a deeply meditative space for contemplation—a space not removed from the world, but that offers a slower, more considered, and definitively less polemical take on it.

The sculpture *Blood Rain*, for example, draws on the suggestive, almost totemic form of the vessel, whose connotations of plenitude and fullness make poignant the delicate, blood-red rupture of the thread that spools out from its side. Without making explicit or narrative reference to violence in the north of Kerala, Rimzon's home state, *Blood Rain* strikes a deeply mournful tone, which is only underscored by the blurry photographic images that are woven into the sculpture—drawn from the identification cards of recent victims of such violence. A monumental sculpture, *The Round Ocean and the Living Death*, similarly deploys a recognizable form: a mother-goddess figure, seated and cross-legged at the center of a circle, still power. Like the gentle, belly-like swell of *Secret Body*, punctuated by the recess of the navel, the seven-breasted deity figure evokes a quiet yet commanding power—generative as well as protective. Her outstretched blood red palm and eyes seem to hold life, balanced, over a circular abyss. This deity figure appears also in the exhibition's painting, whose simplicity belies a complex interweaving of multiple perspectives and deeply mysterious iconography—set, like other cosmological drawings, within a circular frame. As in all of Rimzon's work, these works demand no particular creed or set of knowledge to engage with them. Open-ended and multivalent, they reference a moment before man-made divisions of color, religion, and nationality separated humankind.

Rimzon's many-decade career has been devoted to work across media, including installation, sculpture, painting, and drawing. His early artistic formation, in conversation with the tenets of minimalism and conceptualism, set him apart from a narrative tradition of painting in India,



leading to a concern both with form and with art's relationship to lived experience. Evolving through his deep interest in and respect for materials, Rimzon's work balances recognizable representation with a profound sense of mystery. Disarmingly straightforward, even familiar, his forms reveal an inexhaustible potency—a deep and seemingly bottomless well of renewing symbolic power.

N.N. Rimzon's works have been exhibited at institutions worldwide including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea; 5th Beijing International Art Biennale, National Art Museum of China; Museum of Modern Art, (MuHKA), Antwerp, Belgium; 2nd Asia – Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), Queensland

Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), Delhi, India; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO), Mexico; Berkeley Art Museum (BAM), Berkeley, CA; Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney, Australia; Busan Biennale, South Korea; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Asia Society, New York, NY; Queens Museum of Art, New York, NY; Singapore Art Museum; Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan; National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai, India and The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Date: Till 11 April, 2020

Venue: Talwar Gallery

C-84, Neeti Bagh, New Delhi – 110049

T: + 91 -11 4605 0307

Timings: Monday – Saturday

11:00 am – 7:00 pm

Kolkata

**PRABHAKAR PACHPUTE
BENEATH THE PALPABLE
Experimenter**



Experimenter presents Beneath the Palpable, Prabhakar Pachpute's solo at Experimenter - Ballyunge Place. Reflecting on complex relationships between human, social, economic and political crosscurrents that are at play in the battle for resource, ecology and power, the show furthers Pachpute's ongoing interest in mining politics, farmers' movements and human conflicts with nature, at his third solo at Experimenter. The exhibition will be on view until 4 April 2020.

Over the years, Pachpute's practice has explored critical and ethical enquiries of human society in peril, the accelerating decline of the ecosystem, and its repercussions. Whether personal, geographical or environmental, humankind is at the edge of an imminent catastrophe. In Beneath the Palpable, new bodies of sculptures, works on paper, paintings and immersive installations, present Pachpute's disturbing view of a dystopic, barren, postindustrial landscape, cohabited by metamorphosed animals, dysfunctional machines and headless humans that feel burdened by the weight of our actions.

The exhibition confronts viewers with questions that are difficult and urgent, an impending tipping point in the not so distant future. Like saplings

sprouting forth in that desolate landscape, fisted hands rise up, at first sporadically and eventually in organised forms. Pachpute has been participating and documenting the several long marches by farmers from rural India into its cities witnessed over the last few years as indicators of hope and the coming together of landless, disenfranchised masses of people who have used their own bodies as a last resort to register their protest and express their concerns.

Pachpute uses personal experiences, research and observation to create characters that represent metaphors, stories and evidences. These characters confront, subsist, or even succumb to acute exploitation of land and mineral resources. Beneath the Palpable proposes as much a state of disarray as it indicates a chance of optimism. A possibility that something is about to change and that in the afterlife of objects and people who inhabit the landscape today, maybe an alternate legacy exists.

Date: Till 04 April, 2020
Venue: Experimenter
45 Ballyunge Place,
Kolkata-700019
T: +91-33-4602-6457
Email: admin@experimenter.in

**MEMORIALISING GANESH PYNE:
PHOTOGRAPHS AND PHOTO
COLLAGES BY VEENA BHARGAVA
Akar Prakar**

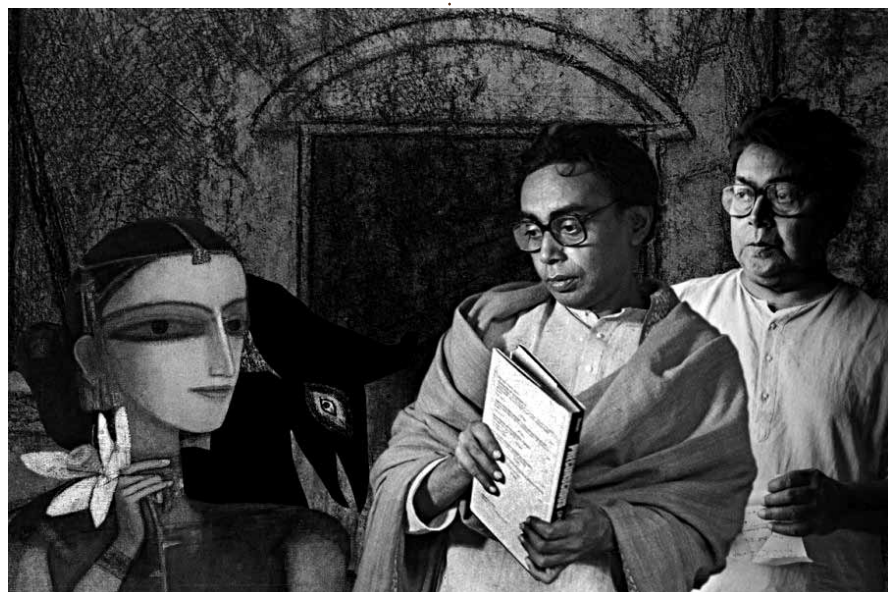
"This collection of photographic portraits is an artistic project of immense value. It is an unparalleled

archive, which memorializes Ganesh Pyne, one of the foremost artists of post-independent India. It also foregrounds Veena Bhargava's sensitivity towards her subject. Her representation of Pyne as a thinking person with a great deal of emotional empathy arouses a rush of nostalgic memories and prompts us to see him as the cultural icon that he is."

Ella Datta, critic and author, in her essay, "Memorialising Ganesh Pyne: the artist and his laboratory of lines", in the forthcoming book.

Taking the form of an exhibition and a companion publication for the first time, the entire collection is probably the only available photographic archive of Ganesh Pyne from his earlier days. The photographs were shot by Veena Bhargava in 1984, when Pyne had begun to receive national and international recognition; and later in 2004, when he was a famous artist. Shot with a hand-held camera and a light meter, the archive is a sensitive portfolio of portrait images and an invaluable archive unique to the cultural history of Kolkata. Taken during different phases of Pyne's life, these include eloquent portraits shot at his Kaviraj Row ancestral residence in central Kolkata; and the building at Cornwallis Street, the location of Mandar Mallick's studio, where he worked as a part-time illustrator.

Recalling a visit to the Mandar Mallick studio in Cornwallis Street, Bhargava, in her introduction to the publication, writes: "A perfect setting for a secluded alchemist, his private universe of myth and make-believe, fantasy and fable, memories, and imagination. The small



room with darkened, flaking walls led through a shuttered door to an open terrace. A heap of abandoned metal pipes and twigs lay neglected, creating a mysterious surreal ambience, in tandem with Pyne's imagery."

Veena Bhargava's journey into the personal world of Ganesh Pyne began in 1984, when she began working as a photography apprentice at Kolkata's Chitrabani media institute. Critic and author Ella Datta, then a journalist interviewing Pyne for The Illustrated Weekly of India, commissioned Bhargava to work on an accompanying photo feature.

In 2004, Bhargava reinvented her portfolio of Ganesh Pyne's portraits by experimenting with photo-collages, which involved using multiple images of the artist, along with appropriations from his work, such as the famous painting, Queen. For Bhargava, this new direction in her photographic documentation of Pyne was, in her own words, "an unknown journey and an adventure", through which she brought out the spirit and persona that was Ganesh Pyne. The photo-collages stand out as the work of a stage designer or scenographer, reflecting Bhargava's ability to explore the possibilities of a new medium with great ingenuity and originality.

Date: Till 31 March, 2020
Venue: Akar Prakar
P 238 Hindustan Park
Kolkata 700029
T: +91-33-2464-2617
Email: contact@akarprakar.com
Web: www.akarprakar.com/

Mumbai

**POINTS OF DEPARTURE: THE
FAMILIAR AND THE STRANGE
Curator: Lina Vincent
Piramal Museum of Art - Mulund
Gallery**

Sayantana Samanta, Meenakshi, Nilesh Shilkar, Parag Natekar, Satyavijay Singh

Piramal Art Residency, through its regular cycles of thematic programming, has given the opportunity to numerous artists from across the country to benefit from the context of a streamlined studio atmosphere, peer reviews, and individual mentoring from experts in the field. The Artist Incubator Programme (AIP) wanted to take this several steps further, by



questioning the long-term effects of the residency on the artist's careers, and looking at the possibility of enhancing the artists' comprehensive growth through an extended engagement. We invited applications from all past residents, and based on a series of responses and comments produced, 5 were selected for the year-long mentoring schedule. Our jury considered the applicants' past work produced at the residency attended, the current capacity of the individual, the areas in which mentoring was required, and the personal aspirations of the applicant, at equal levels while making the selections.

The artists come together as a culmination of this curatorial and pedagogic exercise that explores the possibilities of extended dialogue towards holistic artistic advancement. With varied concerns and stories to tell, Sayantan, Meenakshi, Nilesh, Parag and Satyavijay have attempted to engage in different ways with their personal processes in order to assess new ideas and methods of making. The exhibition traces subtle shifts in the evolution of the artists' visual languages and articulation of concepts, on the basis of the multilayered resources made available to them during the programme.

Points of Departure marks a symbolic overture by the artists into spaces known and unknown, with each of them exploring trajectories from a fresh perspective. Broadly, their concerns coincide within a space of ecological consciousness, and awareness of the context of loss in a realm of urban

excess. Globally it is a period of disorientation; a day and age of conflict in which notions of roots and ancestry, identity and belonging to a land, connections between past and present, are embedded deeply in narratives of cultural production. The artists have channelized their experiences diversely, elaborating personal challenges and epiphanies while evaluating their practices formally and ideologically.

Meenakshi creates tactile associations with her familial heritage, employing traditional lamani embroidery, rituals and folklore that are fast disappearing, in order to address contemporary experiences of womanhood, desire and social aspirations. Her explorations have led her to include elements of sound and performance in her repertoire.

Reacting to geo-political history, and fluctuating power-hierarchies, Sayantan Samanta has been forging a new relationship with materiality and meaning. Harking back to his ancestral connections to the soil, he sculpts commentaries on human rights and the need for social justice in an increasingly imbalanced world. His work moves between a deeply personal and collective voice, presenting choices to the viewer.

Nilesh Shilkar reinforces his innate response to the natural world through spontaneous textural manifestations; the surfaces of his works become metaphors for life, sensation and existence itself. Following on from experimentation with the visuality of braille, his current process celebrates

nuances of revelation and concealment, interpreting cycles of birth and death, and the relationship of microcosm with macrocosm.

Through his art, Parag Natekar correlates as much with the mundane, everyday world as with a philosophical plane. He seeks to resolve the paradox through the fluency of abstract forms and the simplification of life to an essence of organic flow – in the physical and psychological realm. The notion that art can interact, communicate and become an interface for aesthetic and cultural dialogue is something that drives his practice.

Embracing a spiritually oriented stand, Satyavijay Singh dissects primarily urban surroundings through his imagery; he condenses an expansive worldview into succinct narratives, extending critical commentaries on the destructive nature of consumption. He has introduced the performative and sculptural self into his language, allowing two dimensional forms to activate themselves in new dynamic iterations.

Date: Till 09 May, 2020
Venue: Piramal Revanta
Behind Nirmal Lifestyle Mall,
Moti Nagar, Mulund West
Mumbai-400080
Web: www.poramalmuseum.com

THE WITNESS BY NALINI MALANI
Curators: Tasneem Zakaria Mehta and
Bhau Daji Lad Museum
in association with Goethe-Institut /
Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai
Supported by Volte Art Projects



In this exhibition, Nalini Malani explores concepts and concerns that have preoccupied her for decades – notions of oppression and dominance, of freedom and justice. Her art pushes the boundaries of the visual and engages in an optical theatre that is a

commentary not only on the present but also on who we are, where we come from and where we are going. As the pioneer of experimental art in India, she creates immersive installations, ephemeral wall drawings, erasure performances, animation chambers and her signature video/shadow plays. Her work questions the profound certainties of life, of society, of experience-persisting 'evidence', which is encountered and felt. In her practice, Malani, as an engaged witness, exerts an artistic pressure on inherited iconographies and cherished cultural constructs.

Nalini Malani secured a Diploma in Fine Arts from Sir J.J. School of Arts, Bombay, 1969 and the French Government Scholarship for Fine Arts to study in Paris from 1970 to 1972. In 2010, she was conferred an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute. In 2013, she won the Fukuoka Prize for Art followed by an exhibition at Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum. She received the St. Moritz Art Masters Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014, the Asian Arts Game Changers Award Hong Kong in 2016, and the prestigious Joan Miró Prize in 2019. Malani has had 15 International museum solo exhibitions and her works have been acquired by 30 museums including MoMA, MET, Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou. Her latest critically acclaimed retrospective 'The Rebellion of the Dead', 1969-2017 was shown at the Centre Pompidou and Castello di Rivoli.

Date: Till 31 March, 2020
Venue: Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum
91 A, Rani Baug
Veer Mata Jijbai Bhonsle Udyan
Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar Marg
Byculla East
Mumbai, Maharashtra- 400027
T: +91 22 2373 1234
Timings: 10.00 am to 6.00 pm

Hyderabad

ENTWINED
STORIES IN THREAD AND WEAVE
Curator: Lina Vincent
Shrishti Art Gallery

Paula Sengupta, Alpana Vij, Seema Kohli, Jagannath Panda, Lavanya Mani, Gopika Nath, Sanjeev Khandekar & Vaishali Narkar, Pranati Panda

For centuries, textiles and their embellishment have been considered

a craft oriented practice and not art. Embroidery, the world over, was attributed to the feminine domain until certain global movements of artists established the art-form outside of domestic spaces – moving into arenas of individual expression, protest, and artistic commentary. In the Indian context, the significance of hand-crafting traditions is enormous, with each region exhibiting an indigenous lineage of technique and design. Viewed from the pre-colonial perspective, blurred boundaries exist in the sub-continent between high art and artisanal craft-making, as the processes and aesthetic tenets overlapped in their very essence. These mediums are now finding fresh relevance in the trans-disciplinary space of contemporary art.

Entwined is a compilation of work by Indian artists who have been exploring and contextualizing the legacies of stitching, embroidery and textile within personal and expressive spheres. The artists, in choosing to use thread and fabric, primarily showcase a love for the textural and tactile, underlying which a number of other concerns and preoccupations manifest. Their approaches are eclectic – so are the subjects they investigate – and yet at a symbolic level they remain connected, their languages presenting an intersection of personal stories with larger historical and universal narratives. The exhibition encompasses trajectories of thought that touch upon notions of the body and mind, personal space, identity and belonging, gender and nationhood, socio-cultural and geo-political commentary, as well as spirituality and philosophy. The works in the show engender deep contemplation – the viewer is led through a plural world of yarns and fibres, warps and wefts, knots and stitches, markings of paint and other pigment, the whole assuming the significance of a complex space that has the capacity to transcend time, connect the real with the imagined, and the private with the universal.

Contrasting ephemerality with permanence and elaborating on the Japanese art of Kintsugi, Alpana Vij repairs preserved leaves with delicate gold weave. For the artist making this work is reflective of a meditative act, with deep awareness in the gestures and movements.

Seema Kohli's work identifies with the golden womb or Hiranyagarbha, the all-pervading feminine consciousness.



Her work explores personal myths and the journey of the self through a collaborative artisanal process that allows embroidery to transform her fluid lines. Thread for her indicates the continuum of life, and cloth, the symbolic sheaths of the body that unravel to reveal new truths.

Interpreting and visualizing an autobiographical exploration, Gopika Nath relates to the symbolic act of visarjan and contemplates the process of letting go. In her work, the layers often bind memories and metaphors. Gathering washed up tokens from the beach, she embellishes them in cocoons of yarn, setting them against the backdrop of their existence in a bid to heal and immerse the complexities that life throws up.

Formally and conceptually, Paula Sengupta's art-making is deeply embedded within multidisciplinary streams of research. The two series presented in Entwined are broadly connected within the realm of reclaiming lost and displaced historical narratives through techniques of mapping and drawing, articulating both personal experience and collective memory.

Acknowledging Otherness and the recognition of anomalies with regard to the body and its environment are subjects that recur in Lavanya Mani's work. Her process combines different techniques in textile traditions and references diverse visual and aesthetic vocabularies – bringing to the fore the role of cloth in colonial history.

Jagannath Panda defines his picture planes through a seamless restructuring of myth and reality, often commenting

on the conflict and conundrums of contemporary society. Through the distinctive use of brocade that formally contrasts with painted pigment, the artist arrives at an aesthetics that draws from the familiarity of cultural heritage and displaces it within alien narratives.

Commenting on the violence and conflict resulting from sectarian politics, and drawing parallels to the German Jewish persecution of 1938, Sanjeev Khandekar and Vaishali Narkar draw on traditional methodologies of embroidery to provoke thought on the plight of the Kashmir region and Islamic community in India. Their work studies and exposes truths of the anthropocene and the human condition.

Pranati Panda engages with an organic world, following its textures and rhythms with a combination of embroidery, drawing and paint. The microcosm and the macrocosm meet in potent explosions of colour, or mingle in symbiotic harmony of lightness and otherworldliness. The artist explores notions of identity and the self's relationship to an environment.

Date: 14 March - May, 2020
Venue: Shrishti Art Gallery
No: 267, Road no: 15
Jubilee Hills
Hyderabad 500033
Telangana, INDIA.
Email: gallery@shrishtiart.com
T: +91 6281400557

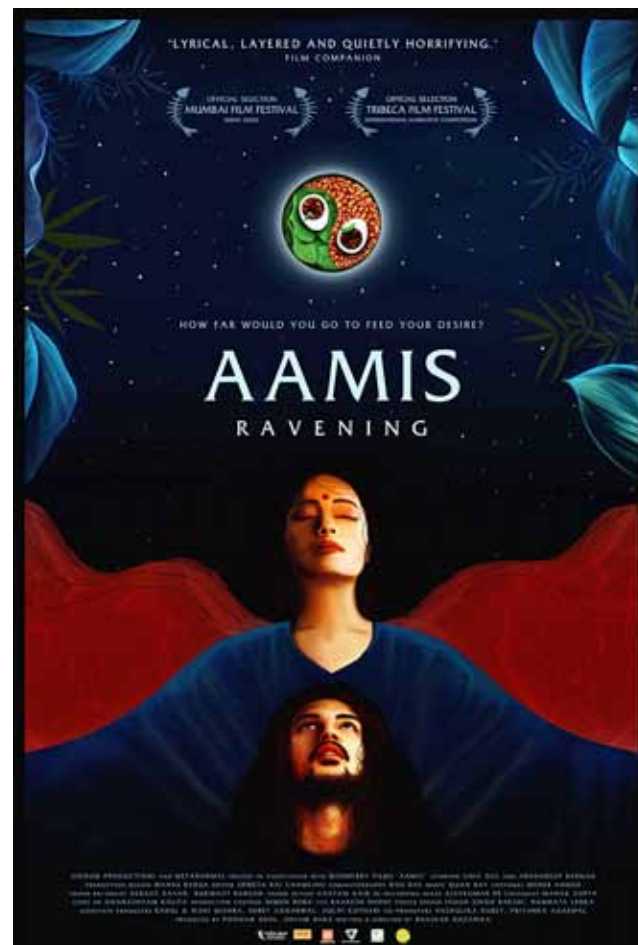
London

ATMOSPHERES:
ARTISTS OF THE TRANSVANGARDE
October Gallery

This February, Atmospheres, a group exhibition of contemporary art from around the world will open at October Gallery. The show will feature a wide-range of artists with highlights including works by El Anatsui, James Barnor and for the first time at October Gallery works by the artists Patrick Joël Tatcheda Yonkeu and Dadara. The exhibition will feature Time Space by El Anatsui as well as photographs by pioneering photographer James Barnor, whose life's work is currently being celebrated in James Barnor: A Retrospective at the Nubuke Foundation, Accra, Ghana. Patrick Joël uses painting to explore Zen in art and existence as a harmonious flow. The artist - whose work inspired the title Atmospheres - exhibited works at Dak'Art in 2018. Dadara was the first international artist to build an installation at Burning Man festival in the USA.

Date: Till 28 March 2020
Venue: October Gallery
24 Old Gloucester Street
Bloomsbury
LONDON WC1N 3AL
UNITED KINGDOM
Tel. + 44 (0)20 7242 7367
Fax: + 44 (0)20 7405 1851





THE DYSTOPIAN LENS

A case for the extremely human and raw by independent films *Aamis* (dir. Bhaskar Hazarika, pd. Anurag Kashyap) and *Catsticks* (for. Ronny Sen)

- JOYONA MEDHI

If we for a second just snap out of it, we can aptly surmise that each and every one of our todays, especially of late, are a dystopia. Sheer anarchy. I do not know whether it is because of us 90s kids being hit by the ages 30 and 35 like a bus, or it is that gnawing itch in my hand right after I have stopped scrolling through my 'positivity filled' feed. But in that small intake of breath that I lap up selfishly for myself for survival in these murky waters, my eyes dart through the sights of a crowded subway desperately craving to latch onto something other than a neon screen. A host of unwanted dystopian thoughts flash past my brain; My newly wedded sister counting the number of times she had orgasmed in the past 5 months, A classmate quitting

his travel café idea and joining a call center, The broken toothed smile of the priest performing the last rites of a childhood friend's mother by the garbage strewn ghats, Wine glasses clinking at pretentious art galleries, Shrinks doodling away time on their notepads, The community church's money collection bag nudging me awake from kneeling down for some hope, some respite during mass last Sunday.

Just when my fingers are inches away from reaching out to the bane of my existence, my android, to type out what felt like a very important "nothing much" to a "what's up", we are brought to a jolting halt. A subway announcement reminds commuters of just how disposable their lives and also routines were as another "victim"(read: of wretched life) had hit the bucket in front of our train. I secretly thank this good Samaritan for breaking the flow of chaos in my head and immediately booked my tickets for two back to back movies longing for fresh perspective to this everyday Gotham-like drear.

The elevator taking movie-goers to the evening premier of *Aamis*, a hard-hitting film produced by Anurag Kashyap, directed by Bhaskar Hazarika, was jam-packed with the Assamese *bhodrolok*/intelligentsia, each nose a little higher-than-normal inch up in the air with a sense of pride for something coming out of their region, 'Amader Axom'. These

were the people who are against the inclusion promised by the CAB because it goes against extreme exclusion- "Bengali kheda (Chuck out the Bengalees)" guaranteed by the highly favoured NRC. Such was the boldness guaranteed in the reviews, that one could feel anticipation nip in the air! Of, for, by *Aamis*, peppered with boldness.

But as 15 minutes of the film progressed, it became difficult to gulp down that extra large caramel popcorn. The maniacal in the characters makes you peel the skin off your lips, and the 'oh so great Assamese culture' off your VIPs. While chewing your fingernails too deep with a little bit of flesh getting exposed, some tiny part of you roots for the characters and their complete u-turning of 'ethics', 'morals' and 'supposed tos'. It annoys you that you can pinpoint which part of you though. You are the civilised liberal the film is talking directly to. It questions how far can you go without flinching?

The fake warmth of an empty hearth, and thus an empty soul, brought to their demise by mechanical routine, is juxtaposed with juicy temptations of longing, of instinct, of new, of love and of the raw. Asking questions very similar to the ones in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, reminding us that there are actually 4 fingers pointing at you when you fall into the trap of making a point. The underbelly of philanthropic doctors, socialisation centric parties, a jargon-filled academia, a seemingly demure wife back home and a happily married life - is all ripped apart and laid in front of the audience to turn their heads away from. In the journey through all this, you find yourself cheering for love even though an innocent life has

^ *Aamis*, Film Still, Image Courtesy: Bhaskar Hazarika

< Film posters, *Aamis*, Image Courtesy: Bhaskar Hazarika



^ *Cat-Sticks* Film Still (Sreejita Mitra as Orna on the left and Tanmay Dhanania as Byang on the right.), Image Courtesy: Ronny Sen

had to be sacrificed for it. But you look towards your left and right, moments after, to check on the fellow creeps, caught clapping too like a deer in front of headlights.

Unpacking the film's title 'Non Veg' or Aamis a little too seriously, the film unpacks our dear (deer) hearts too! Ones that take control of our heads, our consciousness, when no one's watching, when we're all alone in the darkness of our homes and psyche, ones that come from the space of an irrationality that humans can empathize with just by virtue of being human, but cannot for the life of them make sense of.

The same crowd exited the hall, packed into the same elevator going down, unable to meet eyes with each other. Someone had just called out humanity for exactly what human stands for, stripped off all the frills.

As the chaos relished me, wanting to mull over this feeling like sips of warm brandy burning down a coarse reality vouching throat, I entered Nandan to catch the premier of *Catsticks* at the prestigious Kolkata International Film festival.

The sight of more than a hundred black, slick umbrellas in the teeming qué in front of Hall 1, was testimony to film loving, breathing, beating hearts of the Bengalee cinema-goer willing to battle slashing rain and storm for a movie from home turf, on Kolkata, by one of us. And about Kolkata it was and how. It was almost like thrusting a mirror into the hands of an acid attack victim and asking her whether she still thought she was beautiful. Dying parents, unemployment, broken homes, the selling of skin for



^ *Cat-Sticks* Film Still (Sumeet Thakur as Ronnie on the left and Rahul Dutta as Pablo on the right), Image Courtesy: Ronny Sen



a price, religion being equated to a rehab, such is the space from where honest, unadulterated truth about the city and it's people is shot ever so cinematically by cameraperson Shreya Dev Dube.

In short *Catsticks* is the story of addiction, mainly brown sugar because of the respite it provided to youth during the late nineties, beginning 2000s, and also the sense of hopelessness that comes along with it. A young actress's Bollywood dream is contrasted with her bleak surroundings which is still much more endearing than her allowing a director to stick his tongue by her ear, down her throat post a disco party. The moments of brotherhood and togetherness before burning of the sugar together is contrasted with the moments of distance and everyone doing their own thing, right after. The opening shot of a broken down aeroplane, otherwise symbolic of economic stagnation like no other, becomes a haven for the addicts. A parents' disciplining is imagined as a nightmare in slow-mo with the adorable shot of the son searching for a set of keys below their pillows, making it a point to not shake them out of slumber in spite of his desperate times. An upper class man's accent is contrasted with his non-heroic deeds and ultimately a scathing similarity drawn between him and a stick-thin old man willing to smoke some with him. The death of a health inspector-turned-drug dealer is used as an instrument of humour reminding us of nostalgic influences like iconic cinematic moments like those of *Jaane bhi do yaaro!*

Basically the film is a celebration of chaos, that chaos of the fly which is normal for the spider, and that normal is an illusion. Few old couples in their sixties

and seventies couldn't stand their webs being torn down so ruthlessly that they just stood up shaking their heads and continued that motion right through the emergency exits. I still felt there should have been a Q n A session post the screening because the audience craves for insights into the making. I think it is a photographer's film because it has the element of someone taking a big needle and weaving this web together. Dissecting it is a task altogether.

I needed a big ice-cold sip of water after exiting these two movies. Judging from the audience reactions of each I felt anarchy had a chance. Wasn't it the same one Joker had always imagined and finally watched smiling out from the car zipping through the burning streets of Gotham? I don't know but what I do know is that my chaotic mind felt a little at ease knowing that I was not alone in calling out the irony for what it is, calling out hard-hitting reality, the instinctual, the raw, the inhumane. I think the thread I want to draw is that both these films come from a post truth phase where we not only invert reality but this time around, invest in it, vouch for it, live it, be it.

The subway train I was in, jolted back into pretentious routine-like motion after the long halt. I am snapped back.

^ *Cat-Sticks* Film Still (Tanmay Dhanania as Byang on the right and Sounak Kundu as Potal on the left), Image Courtesy: Ronny Sen



THE UNSETTLING OF ORDINARY

- SHRUTI RAMLINGAIAH

“It’s a Normal Day...” by Mahesh Baliga at Project 88 recently displayed remarkable and breathtaking results of unnoticed events from everyday life. Thematically, it analyses nuances and layers of things, people and places near and dear to the artist. All these except for people, are suggestive of another artist and self which recurrently form an undercurrent of his paintings.

Baliga’s fifth solo, strikingly has evolved and developed tools and palette amid this visual disquisition on the idea of ordinary. Besides the routine of deeper psychological context, he finds sanctuary in public and touristic places like the zoo, botanical garden, and parks. Twisting and alerting us to take part in slight scientific way. How likely or hastily are we to turn these pages (of things and objects) of visual discourse under

^ Mahesh Baliga, *Milk on Road, Casein on Board*, 12 x 10 inches, 2018-19

> Mahesh Baliga, *Reading Ramayana, Casein on Board*, 12 x 10 inches, 2018-19



Series of 72 small paintings, with a puzzle-like display, ready to argue ‘this’ or ‘that’ and makes up for light-heart viewers with delight and reason to chuckle. The articulated language of aesthetics renders ‘something’, questions you and me, of which we are accustomed of seeing.

the belt of semiotical (aptly political), are left to the interpretation on part of the viewer. They certainly in any decree aren’t usual things playing a twist in-between, visuals and viewer.

Mahesh appears to distance his subject from object in his single-title-series, on the way, staring at recognizably dead creatures in a staged land to defy, in transcending the passage of time between viewer and this episode. Such instances of fleeting odd references are core, dealt in clinical brushwork, often provoking events- Milk on road, After work, Reading Ramayana, Sad story, *Story from Ahemdabada* wildode to *Ahemdabad* today. As in linguistic repertoire dot-dot-dot or point of ellipsis that follows show’s title, an unfinished semblance to all but any day.

Series of 72 small paintings, with a puzzle-like display, ready to argue ‘this’ or ‘that’ and makes up for light-heart viewers with delight and reason to chuckle. The articulated language of aesthetics renders ‘something’, questions you and me, of which we are accustomed of seeing. In tightly-framed and



strict choices, the artist draws visuals of many obvious singular images of birds and animals. Do we connect in our imagination to these fauna from different regions? We all know them. Nebulous milky white, webbed foot Birds of Baroda stick out in the dark murky space. Fear finds a rendered twist in the black and whites of seated hare, a dancing peafowl backs to the viewer, Loneliness, Siesta we stare in from a distance in abiding to the grey bars, into a den of roaring inhabitant, lay quiet, almost invisible. Is it just about 'what' we see to 'how'(s), pertains to the viewers urgency to address the important and relevant.

Nothing is strict, yet the so called ordinary pierces our presupposed sense of right or wrong as we confront it. Baliga tweaks cleaving in allegory.

Is this *Butterfly* to be identified?

Are we cautious to off-water whale spout from its blowhole? obsolete myth. Pointing us to meditate on cultured frame work and knowledge we carry from past.

Mahesh asks us to realize pleasure in seeing things in critical purview with his punch of humor. It is about bringing ourselves out and giving time to grasp in leisure. One could even say it is not necessary to skin out of typical. Oft-absurdity and creepy humour are inherent to Baliga's visual framework—clingly snake coiled to the tail of white horse. He flips and transcends the reality pushing it further to the end and back, it's a boomerang intended to return. *Double Enders*, a helix shaped snake with heads on both sides, ends in conflict

Soaring consistencies of hue, in the splash and drips of paint, tireless brushstrokes, Baliga significantly acknowledges this insoluble and gluey ingredient called, casein in this paintings. He says, "They (casein) don't listen to you" that challenges him to keep on.

^ Mahesh Baliga, *Painted Strokes, Casein on Canvas*, 96 x 60 inches, 2017-19



of moving or either an effective device of combat.

Guards after the luncheon, astutely triggers us a laugh, as we discover relaxed, tie-tucked security, as though staring back or sheer boredom, if anything, the impact of failed governance. A pumped hippopotamus in the pool with bare water about to get hooked to crane- not revered choice. We also witness the artists' awkward yet intrinsic desire to become an 18th century miniature painter, a self-neering remark in *Trying to be Nainsukh*. Is it? Quite contrary, argues, in no attempt to restore past methods of old masters but grasp possibilities in making current techniques. Plays odd in hoping against hope: *Search, Conditioning, Curators' hand, Search for the Art world*—critical yet riding on tunes simply touches our pretentious world to review things deeply.

Pan view in *Sursagar*, with mauvish-crimson lake-scape yet fierce, undermines what is expected to our discernible eyes. Between images and its backdrop or land where visual rely—is a disowning relationship, modestly ready to shift meanings for the second time viewing. I am forced to ask myself, how I understand of everyday cliché and stereotypes of behavior, belief and superstitions of numerical, 13!

Is that what is read in media redresses our perception? How are we to comprehend of quality over anything else?

The show excuse label or title to series of paintings against those follows to make up with it in few larger

lots. While this show lacks in statement, a much hailed credo goes, "a picture speaks a thousand words", yet again—visuality is a faculty of individual's reception and rejection in questioning 'what'(in meaning) and 'how' (of making) in our times.

Soaring consistencies of hue, in the splash and drips of paint, tireless brushstrokes, Baliga significantly acknowledges this insoluble and gluey ingredient called, casein in this paintings. He says, "They (casein) don't listen to you" that challenges him to keep on.

^ Mahesh Baliga, *Waiting, Acrylic and Pigment on Canvas*, 48 x 72 inches, 2017-18



RUST IN THE SKY

- DHIRAJ SINGH

My familiarity with rural life is like that of a house-cat's familiarity with the jungle. Yet there is something that immediately drew me to Shambhavi Singh's artistic universe. Some years ago when I was in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, shooting for a documentary for my 'Fairs of India' series. I remember being blown away to learn how their paddy fields grow entire meals in them and not just the carbs that are part of them. The Apatani farmers of Ziro put fingerlings of fish in the paddy's water and as the paddy grows so do the fish, both ending up on the Apatani dinner table after harvest. These paddy-field food systems are not only fully organic—as no pesticides are used because of the fish—but are also remarkably self-sufficient. As my Ziro guide walked me around the fields I marveled at how beautifully they reflected the sky creating a kind of simulacrum of the farmer's life as air, light, water and earth came together in a scooped-out patch of land.

Shambhavi Singh's show titled '*BHOOMI*' at Gallery Espace is like that simulacrum as it weaves a wonderful backstory of our civilizational experience. After all, it was the cultivation of land that gradually began to situate the early hunter-gatherers into permanent settlements

^ Shambhavi Singh, *Ghar Andar Bahar 4*, Paper pulp, colour pigment, 25.5 x 18.5 inches, 2016

> Shambhavi Singh, *Bhoomi* at Gallery Espace



thousands of years ago. Shambhavi transforms the farmer's tools and implements into reliquary objects in whose presence one is greatly humbled and forced to think about the larger questions of existence and survival; mankind's—especially the farmer's as developing economies stare with eyes wide shut at the future of farming. India's experience of 'farmer suicides' is now a pandemic reality as farmers routinely take their own lives in the face of rising debts, crop failure and climate change.

Shambhavi takes us into the subterranean regions of the farmer's dreamtime creating form out of the abstraction of the field. The sickle without its wooden handle becomes an engagement with creatures—worms and insects—that vivify the soil as it in turn germinates the seeds buried in its belly. There are giant criss-crossing sickles too that resemble a gateway standing over some holy ground or perhaps like dowsing tools looking for water. It is as if the earth has retched out the remains of a farmer's cocktail party, if there ever was one.

The colour that dominates is RUST, the closest one can come to the colour of soil and the closest material metaphor one can draw from the farmer's barn. There are also ginormous iron flowers or flies or 'flower-flies' that point to another important aspect of a standing crop's life. Insect attacks are no small part of the farmer's checklist of worries as pest infestations can destroy an entire season's work in a matter of days.

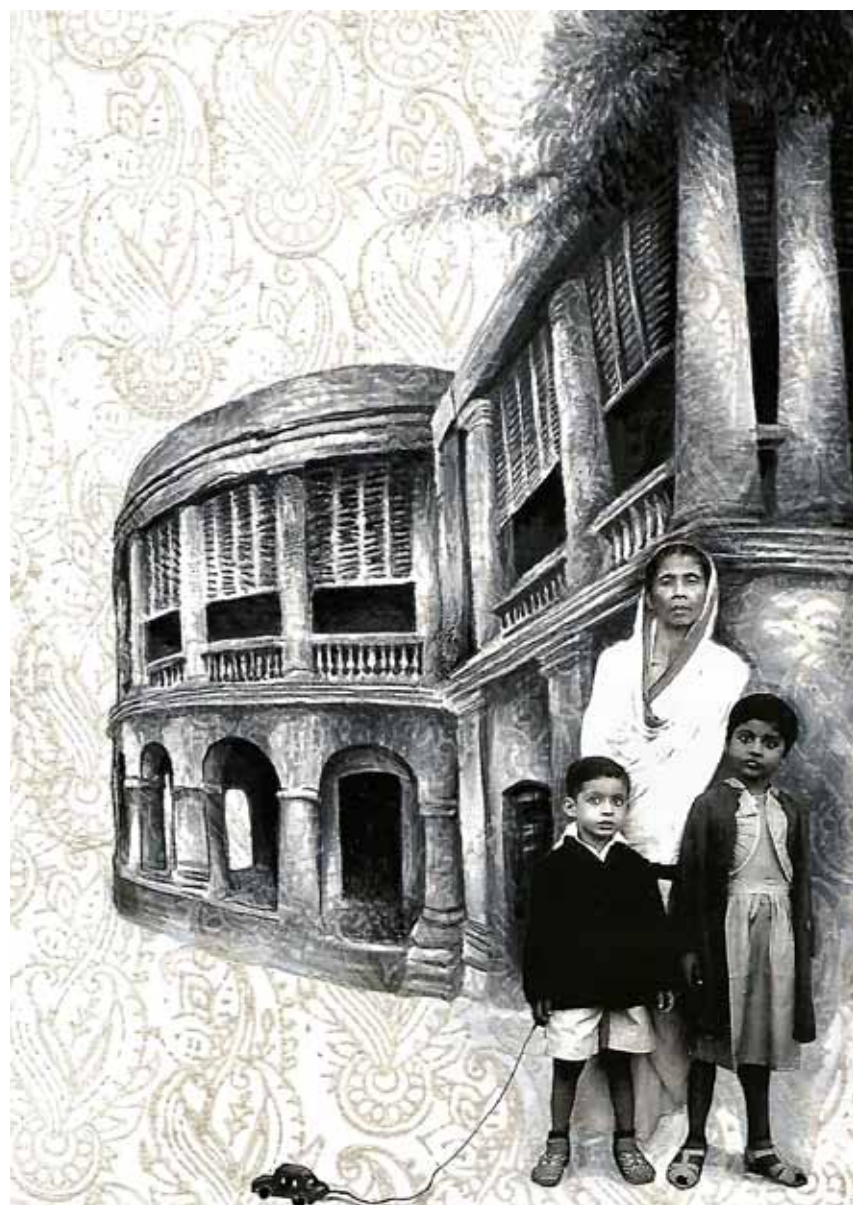
All the works in the *BHOOMI* show have been the mark of an artist who is also a seeker. Someone who

has mastered form but isn't quite satisfied with it and is therefore looking at ways to challenge it. And makes it speak in many different ways.

Shambhavi unchains the water-wheel to create an erect vertebra that connects the sky to the earth. It stands in the gallery as a telling metaphor of the farmer's existence: you take and give back to keep the cycle running. The farmer unlike most others best understands the delicate balance of nature. How what you get is never independent of what you have given: or to use the biblical reference 'you shall reap as you sow'.

In a parallel solo show titled '*BHURUKUWA*' at Shrine Empire Gallery, Shambhavi uses a new medium in her practice: paper pulp. She forms the paper pulp into tray-like objects that hang in the gallery, taking you deep into her life in rural Bihar, where mornings brought to life hundreds of clay 'chulhas' that used wood and coal to make the first meal of the day. 'Bhurukuwa' is the diminutive word for dawn with the '-uwa' suffix that conveys familiarity and indulgence that is often felt for a child. Dawn is after all a child of Day and therefore she embraces everything enthusiastically and innocently.

The pulp works have a freshness to them, both in terms of colour and texture but that's not all. They also conjure for you the singularity of purpose that exists in a farmer's life. The morning that begins with the first ritual of preparing (sometimes) the whole day's meals and its meandering through a maze of rituals and functions that are tethered to the idea of growing food, more food, day after day.



GENDERED NARRATIVES: BELONGING AND THE SELF

- LINA VINCENT

The India International Centre Delhi, in December 2019 hosted the solo exhibition of Kolkata based artist and educator Moutushi Chakraborty. The show titled 'Homelands', brought together a series of works that have been in development over the last three years, extending thoughts and preoccupations intrinsic to her previous repertoire and bodies of work. An artist who has always been concerned with investigations of the self, politics of gender and identity, and relationships of the past and present, Moutushi presents a strongly woven narrative that was as intensely personal as it was universal.

The 'Homelands' series project a rich and aesthetically pleasing interface, opening up multiple layers of interpretations and associations

^ Homeland 3, Collage and Acrylic on Fabriano paper, 9 x 11 inches



^ Memoirs as Letters 1, Collage, Ink, Acrylic, Beads and Cotton Lace on Post-Card pasted on Plyboard, 18 x 14 inches

for viewers. Moutushi's masterful engagement with printmaking techniques, drawing and historical block-printing, as well as archival photography was prominently visible; conceptually, the visuals were oriented towards notions of otherness, the mapping of 'home' within social history and ethnographic encounters, as well as sensitive and thought provoking representations of 'family'. An underlying theme was memory, both personal and collective, elucidated through an overlay of text, image and fragments of material, subtly employed to connect the past with the present and future.

In her note, Moutushi says, "The Womb is our first home, that warm throbbing sac that gives us life and nourishment, calms us with consistent heart-beats... the first music to a human ear. Yet, a time comes for this home to be dismantled and purge out into the outside world with a shriek... a world less cocooned. All our lives we shift through multiple homes, sometimes forcibly and sometimes by choice... redefining our identities with every shift, as we adapt to the unknown. Assembling and dismantling of homes have become a constant reality in the burgeoning city-lives. Older cities make way for Modernity, as we move out to weave new stories.

But what about those stories woven by the lives of our ancestors? Where do they fit inside our plush multiplexes? A stained old photograph perhaps becomes the only remnant of a once large household... yet it lives on, as a memory of that sacred space, warm and comforting truth like the womb we once

inhabited and left to claim a new identity beyond."

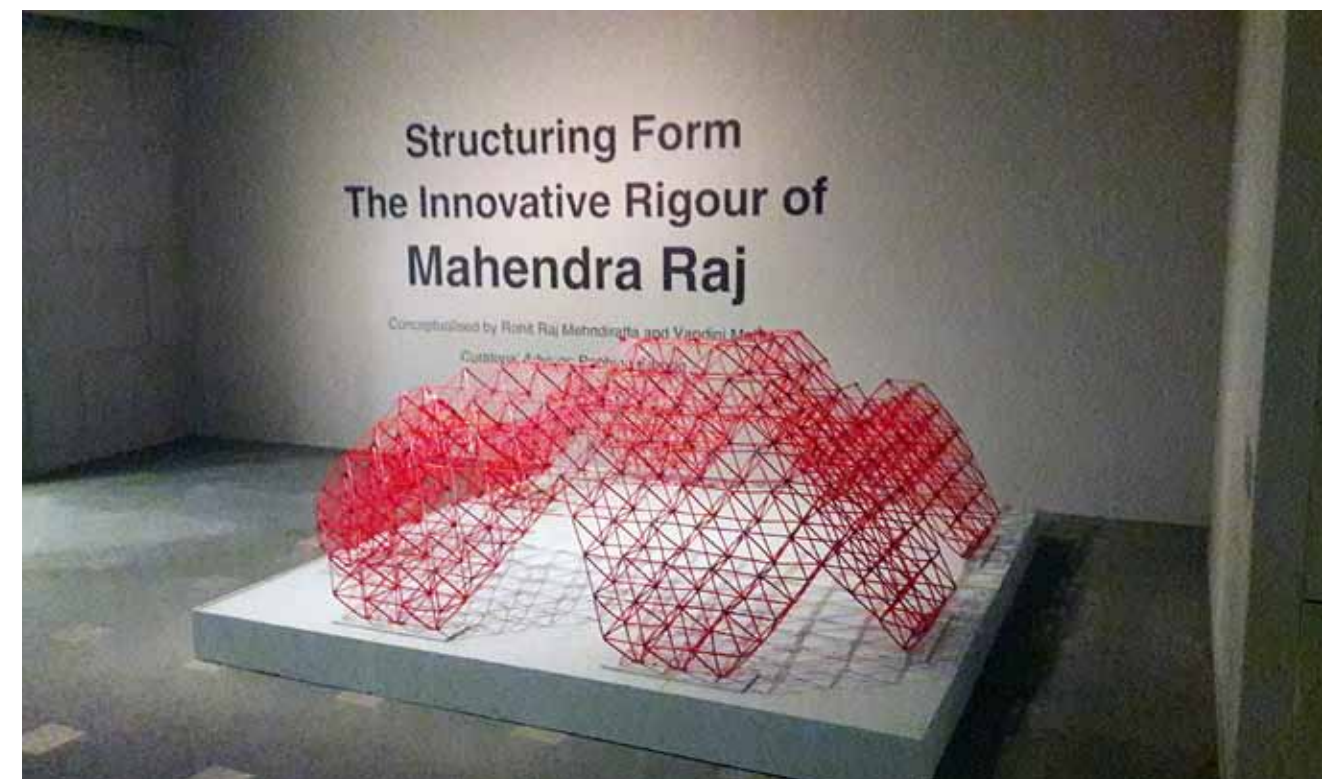
Constantly aware of the loss of history in the face of development, both physical and intellectual, and deriving meaning from yellowing and brittle images of known and unknown persons, Moutushi builds narratives that attempt to reclaim these histories and fill in the spaces left blank by willful and chance misinterpretations.

Subtly feminist in tone, the 'Aurat' series of works presents tongue-in-cheek commentaries on the complexities of gender discrimination and dark prejudices that hinder women's growth in society. As in all her works, Moutushi celebrates the woman, in form and in expression, making her both vulnerable and powerful – a mother, a lover, but also a formidable force of nature, a fighter and leader. Produced on formats that resemble the pages of a school notebook, the works bring about the illusion of a diary, a private space for dialogue and discovery – but also, to the seasoned eye, a politically and pedagogically charged space, that suggests the education of new generations in relevant ways.

In a contemporary world fraught with conflict, where identity and belonging are being questioned at every turn, and migration and displacement are causing rifts in communities and nations – Moutushi's work makes one stop and think. What is the very meaning of 'home', what constitutes this safe space in our minds, where the mind and body can be free, and the spirit unleashed?



^ Aurat 2 - Cotton-rag Pulp, Thread, Fabric, Collage and mixed media - 18 x 22 inches



THE HAKU SHAH RETROSPECTIVE: A CURATIVE MIST FROM A HASTILY COMBED ARCHIVE

- PREETI KATHURIA

A neoteric retrospective of the late veteran Haku Shah – Eighty works from his extensive archival collection were exhibited at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) in a show titled ‘Within the earthen vessel are bowers and groves’. With a career spanning over six decades, Haku Shah cannot just be viewed as another artist, rather he should be remembered and revisited as an institution; one that necessitates a deeper engagement, an empathetic viewpoint and socio-cultural inclusivity.

As a very spirited move, KNMA hosted parallel exhibitions of two legendary artists – Haku Shah & Mahendra Raj, both being extraordinary contributors to modern art and architecture. One cannot deny the courage and ingenuity behind this idea of juxtaposing these two veterans in the same space. The creative resonance of the two artists does hit numerous common chords but the exhibition design of the two shows could not deliver the sonority. For a viewer who is not equipped with a handy floor plan, the spaces did not synthesize and unfold in a methodical order. In terms of space, continuity and content, the Mahendra Raj exhibition titled ‘Structuring Form – The Innovative Rigour of Mahendra Raj’ stole the limelight. Exhibitions need not just be about developing spatial interventions, rather, they are spaces that create awareness, invite immersive experiences, promote dialogues and

carve memories. It is disheartening that one of the most important contemporary art museums in the country today, was not able to balance the ambition in presenting two great masters together in their true grandeur.

The Haku Shah exhibition showcased a variety of works including paintings, terracotta sculptures, textile scrolls, books, journals and periodicals. In his paintings we find life’s drama depicted with rare sensitivity and naturalness. Passing through a beautifully lit sitting area, the show begins with a small painting of a girl surrounded by birds, rendered with control and immediacy using crayons on paper. It was unusually simple work but it spoke volumes about the artistic temperament of Shah. Having an urge to know when this work was made, one took a step further to take a closer look at the captions, but the investigative glance found no relevant information. It became extremely difficult to assess the time-period of most of the artworks, as there was no press release to suggest if the exhibits had any seriation or thematic categories. Moving further in the exhibition space, were some books, catalogues, periodicals associated with Shah. One very interesting catalogue from Art Heritage dated 1978-79 carrying an essay penned by Shah, titled ‘Folk Myth & Tribal Ritual’. With its simple language and enriching articulation of the creative process, it was such an engrossing read that it felt precious. It is appreciable that there was unhindered access to these books and the viewer could flip through the pages to read.

The exhibits were spread out into four spaces. The

first space consisted of some small-scale works, terracotta pieces and publications. The second space carried works showing Shah’s preoccupation with the Nirguna & Sufi philology and the Gandhian principles. The third space reflected upon Shah’s use of commonplace material like textile shreds, handmade paper etc. The work ‘Bapu’s Bag’ (1996) had a pencil, a postcard and a torn piece of paper with ‘Young India – A Plea for Truth’ printed on it; sticking out from a handmade paper. It was a unique example indicating the symbiotic relation between tools and expressions; that was relevant then and is extremely relevant today. Roobina Karode, the curator, very aptly stated, ‘Moving away from hegemonic doctrines, Shah’s art and writings memorialize the many unconscious cultural inheritances that layer our existence today’. The last room also carried about fifteen works on the Gandhian theme with just one nomenclature of a series titled ‘Magic Words’. Other than a poem by Narsinh Mehta, there was no wall text indicating at any definable sequence or context. It was a rather abrupt and ambiguous end to a symphony one was just beginning to enjoy.

Wall text, being a compulsive, decorative element in Indian contemporary exhibitions, is hugely misunderstood and undermined. The wall text can be very useful and handy in providing information but if overdone, it may appear coddled and contrived; refraining the viewer from spending more time with the artwork; and/or even conditioning the viewers response and perception. One must not forget that ideas and language may not always cohere. The Haku Shah retrospective was brimming with wall-text carrying quotes and thoughts from Shah



himself, Roobina Karode, Kapila Vatsayan, Michael W. Miester, KG Subramanyan, Rabindranath Tagore, Jallaludin Rumi, Sharada Prasad and many others; but all that intense literature could not help the viewer contextualize the narrative of the show. There is no denying that volumes have been written on Shah, but how much of that content is actually needed to support the visual context of the exhibition, needs to be weighed. Allied to the problem of context is also the problem of coherence. The extensive wall text at the beginning of the show clearly states "The exhibition brings together works from several series and a few that are being exhibited for the first time. It includes his collaboration with vocalist Shubha Mudgal..." This text aroused sufficient curiosity in the viewer to take a closer look but unfortunately, the construct of the show did not highlight these facts.

The four spaces in this show may be regarded as uncategorized commotions of varying magnitudes and the culmination was much hazier than the beginning. In order to sustain interest, the viewing experience should comprise of curiosity, aesthetic and information. A seamless flow of these three potent aids within the exhibition's navigational realm is paramount. Ideally, the show should have emerged from a dense, uncompromising research on the precious fragments chosen from the prodigious archive of the great master. Entering the world of Haku

Shah should be nothing less than entering one's own depths and heights and the exhibition framework, like a tremendously significant threshold, needs to aid and expedite this transition.

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