

**‘subTerrain: artworks in the cityfold’, in *body.city: new perspectives on India*, House of World Cultures, Berlin, 2003**

**Captions and wall-text/artist-statement for 9 artworks**

**Vasudha Thozhur \*1956**

Secret Life- I (triptych), 2000

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of: Vikram Sardesai, Design Core, Bangalore

“How does one edit life? What are parameters of retention or erasure? Obsession, as an editing tool: the most stringent, the acknowledgment of which means its cultivation and the inherent dangers therein. But when one works with something as large as life, there is no other choice. The origins of obsession are traced back to the self; without its inclinations and impulses there would be no concept and no form, no ideology or attitude. One does not adopt these things as intellectual choices, they have their origins in desire. And therefore I place myself at the heart of my narrative, and my story stems from desire.” – Vasudha Thazhur

**Raghu Rai \*1942**

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy (selected from a series ) 1984-2002

Black and white photographs

Courtesy of: The Artist, Delhi

*Exposure: Portrait of a Corporate Crime*

On a night in December 1984, a lethal gas leaked from the Union Carbide/DOW factory in Bhopal (India), killed 8000 people within days and injured half a million. Since then, thousands more have died a slow death and 1,20,000 are chronically ill. The impact of that event continues to destroy lives. The gas inhaled that day, 19 years ago, continues to corrode the vital organs of many second-generation and an increasing number of third-generation victims. The criminal neglect by UC/DOW along with the government’s apathy to the issue of rights compounds the tragedy of the largest industrial disaster in the world.

Raghu Rai was on the scene the next day after the disaster. He revisited Bhopal in 2001-02 and shot extensively, telling the story of the survivors’ struggle for justice.

Greenpeace International, dedicated to the global fight against corporate crime, has traveled this exhibition to various venues in the world.

**Sheba Chhachhi \*1958**

Neelkanth: poison/nectar, 2000-02

Installation with 1 LCD projector, 1 DVD player, 174 aluminium boxes each with light bulb, photographs, 4 light dimmers, 4 translates

Video loop 5.5 minutes(silent)

Courtesy of: The Artist, Delhi

Poison in the air, the earth, and the water.

Poisoned minds, bodies, psyche, societies.

In an ancient yet still popular story, Shiva swallows a mass of poison which had threatened to destroy the universe. Storing the poison in his throat, he become the blue-throated one, *Neelkanth*.

This work relocates the archetypal/mythological figure of *Neelkanth*, in the contemporary Indian city. The installation is an inquiry into the possibility of transformation of toxins, it seeks to reflect upon our fragility and power as human beings at this juncture of history. Simultaneously, the installation acts as a reminder of alchemical/philosophic wisdom that every poison contains the possibility of nectar, that medicine injudiciously used becomes poison.

Can we, like the archetypal *Neelkanth*, find means of containment and transformation?

Can we make nectar from poison?

**Shilpa Gupta \*1976**

Untitled, 2001

Interactive installation with sound, lights, sensors, bulbs, speakers, wood, 4 brass plates

Courtesy of: the Artist, Mumbai

“This work mimics the loop of comments that form the common soundscape of women, of ‘foreigners’, of ‘outsiders’ in the city. The anonymous voice and unprovoked phrase whispered (or hurled) at the passerby in a public walkway catches the citizen in a game of abuse. You press the button and come to guess how often we act as agents in a system triggering social prejudice. You, Me, and You!” - Shilpa Gupta

### **Vivan Sundaram \*1943**

New New Delhi: Room with Bed (participation: Romi Khosla, Ram Rahman, Raqs Media Collective, Shantanu Lodh and Manmeet), 2003

Architectural installation of four rooms with wood, mixed metals, acrylic sheets, rubber, leatherite, vinyl, polycarbonates, paint, digital print-out on back-lit film, photographs, two monitors, speakers, lights

Video loops each 20 minutes and 2.25 minutes

Courtesy of: The Artist, Delhi

### CREDITS

“The prefix ‘New’ added to New Delhi signals the city’s push towards becoming a global mega-city, where, ironically, 60% of the built-up area is ‘unauthorized’. I construct rooms, a basic architectural unit of habitation, for four Delhi residents, engaged with art and with urban issues. The differences and overlaps, the shape of their space with new framing devices, become ‘portraits’, *re-presentations* of persons/art forms.

The room of architect Romi Khosla, a pavilion on wheels, invites the viewer to a moment of leisure. You look up at the suspended bed holding the architect’s plans for old cities, new cities and for environmental ‘utopias’ within a globalized world. The floating Buddha’s, reflecting Khosla’s interest in the Buddhist heritage, bring a remote peace in a context where entropy is inevitable.

The Raqs Media Collective( Shuddhabrata Sen Gupta, Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Nirula ) now relocate their documentaries in the space of video installation. Their room is a metal container (the work-bench is the bed), a metaphor for their movement across the globe as new-media artists, and a reference to their videos which are about satellite communication, about new ‘middle-class workers’, selling their English-speaking skills around the world. ‘New’ New Delhi is one of the nodal points for the invisible factory-floors and ‘call-centres’ for multinational business.

Residence in two cities across continents is where the new global artist will increasingly operate from. Photographer Ram Rahman from Delhi and New York is among them. My selection of his photographs focus on Delhi artists and intellectuals in their social setting interspersed with portraits of his men friends from the working class. A ramp-floor provides an open invitation to enter the modernist studio with a bed/bench adjacent to a private darkroom.

These three rooms allow a walk through, the fourth ‘room’ is the space of the gallery-floor or it could be the pavement, but the viewer must stand ‘outside’ . The ground is reserved for the ‘new migrants’ Shantanu Lodh and Manmeet, young artists who use photographs to foreground their bodies in their small middle-class home, in front of Lodh’s father. The only ‘support’ for the room is a board leaning against the gallery wall with a blown-up photograph of Lodh ballooning a lung.” - Vivan Sundaram

**Sharmila Samant \*1967**

Hand-picked Rejects, 2003

Installation with fabric (garments), objects, clothes-hangers

Courtesy of: The Artist, Mumbai

“Imagine an anorexic 'model' sashaying down the ramp in one of the four fashion capitals making more money per minute than the twelve-year old *karigar* will make per year in the manufacture of her outfit in one of the Asian sweat-shops. The fashion highway has assimilated the bylanes of Jari Mari, and Dharavi (the largest slum in Asia).

And then one day that young worker stitched a stitch too tight or a button too high or failed to match the thread, or maybe the garment arrived after the deadline ... And you have boxes full of REJECTS. The contractor sells these clothes by weight to an impoverished hawker on the metro-streets of India. The Bill Blass, Calvin Kline originals/ rejects end up on 'Fashion Street' of Mumbai at a 300% reduction.

The installation is a kind of nemesis where the premium is placed not on the designer but on the fact that I, a third world artist, by embroidering 'This is an original' on the garment and placing it within 'The House of World Cultures', plagiarize and hack, turn the designer-label into a ready-made and re-authenticate the rejected object as my original artwork.” - Sharmila Samant

**Jitish Kallat \*1974**

Tragedienne (Taste, Lick, Swallow and Speak), 2002

Mixed media on canvas

Courtesy of: Ms. Shalini Sawhney, Mumbai

“I retain the history painter's impulse for registering the moment through a string of allusions and metaphors; however the laws that govern my processes are derived from the low-brow channels of mass media. The lens becomes my first low-tech collaborator followed by the fax and photocopy machine. Thereafter the brush takes over.

Mumbai where I live and work is India's *big city*. Even as it entertains and provides opportunities, it becomes a site where the tournament of survival, pushed to severe extremes, is acted out. My paintings appear graffiti-ridden and pop-infected, simulating the wall as public pin-board where the community displays its emotions and deposits notices of dissent. They function as a first information report of the site of conflict, and they act to measure the extent of fear held within the struggle of existence.

In *Tragedienne* the elderly protagonist is seen leading a group; her enormous tongue extends provocatively like a weapon, even as it recoils, pressed by the mute symbol that rests at its tip. The translucent tongue reveals within it a string of coffins, a tubular graveyard of a lost family, a lost voice and speech.” - Jitish Kallat

**Nalini Malani \*1946**

Hamletmachine, 2000

Video installation with 4 LCD projectors, 4 DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, salt

Courtesy of: The Artist, Mumbai

Video Play 20 minutes

Directed by Nalini Malani

Camera by Kanemitsu Hiroaki, Ishikawa Seiji, Nozaki Shiro, Nalini Malani

Editing Nalini Malani, Kuroiwa Toshiya, Nandini Bedi

Sound design Nalini Malani

Video clips 'I live in Behrampada'

Courtesy Madhushree Dutta and Majlis

'Father, Son & Holy War'

Courtesy Anand Patwardhan

Performer Harada Nombuo

Narration Nandini Bedi

Produced by Fukuoka Asian Art Museum,

Fukuoka City Foundation For Arts and Culture Promotion

Supported by Max Mueller Bhavan Bombay, Tate Modern, London

“Based on the text of Heiner Mueller's ‘Hamletmachine’, the video play, carrying echoes of German and Japanese fascism, manifests the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India. This peaked with the frenzied violence of fanatics who brought down the 16th century Babri Masjid (mosque) in December 1992. The growing unrest that followed this destruction provided the Hindu marauders with an opportunity to attack the shanty- towns of the minority Muslim population in a clear case of land grab in Mumbai. Overnight slum colonies were burnt to cinders. The railway stations were filled with Muslims trying to catch any train that might take them away to the safety of their villages.” - Nalini Malani

The voice of the woman protagonist from Madhushree Dutta's film, *I live in Behrampada*, is looped in the video play to repeat a cry:

*"We are brothers and sisters*

*How long will you keep up this hostility.*

*Tell me why are you bent upon destroying this country.*

*I want an answer !"*

**Navjot Altaf \*1949**

Lacuna in Testimony, 2003

Video installation with 3 LCD projectors and 3 DVD players, speakers

Courtesy of: The Artist, Mumbai

Video loops each 7 minutes 21 seconds

Direction Navjot Altaf

Camera Rishi

Stills Navjot Altaf

Editing Rishi and Anthony

Studio Samudra Tulika, Santacruz, Mumbai

Sourced material to create collages includes stills from various national and international publications

Sound exact from 'Ahmedabad Testimonies' recorded by Navjot Altaf, 2002

“This work is about *attempting* to listen to the testimony of witnesses involved in a human catastrophe. Though we think we can enumerate and describe these events in their historical dimension, all testimonies contain a lacuna, a threshold of indistinction between inside and outside. These I see as broken sentences, as potential dialogue. Most of the material abstracted and superimposed on the image of the ocean is archival, drawn from images and commentaries about violence in India and other parts of the world. The sound repeated in the sequence where the ocean (the Arabian Sea) lapping the western coast of India turns red is the voice of a child playing a private game in one of the refugee camps set up for Muslims in the city of Ahmedabad after the communal carnage of Gujarat in 2002.” - Navjot Altaf