

AVANT-GARDE Aesthetes

As genres are getting redefined, the Indian art scene is being restructured using exciting new forms and cultural codes. Speaking about the latest developments in two contrasting, yet correlative, experiences, Jagdip Jagpal, director and re-inventor of the India Art Fair, and Tarini Sethi and Anant Ahuja, founders of The Irregulars Art Fair, each curate a list of innovative multidisciplinary artists

TEXT AND INTERVIEWS BY TINA DASTUR AND PREKSHA SHARMA

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT MAKE UP A WELL-ROUNDED ART FAIR AND HOW HAVE YOU TRIED TO INCORPORATE THEM IN THE INDIA ART FAIR (IAF) TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE MORE HOLISTIC?

It's important to create the right experience for visitors. There needs to be high quality and diverse art supported by the right kind of physical infrastructure to make an environment conducive to viewing and buying art. In 2018, we made some small changes to the IAF that made a lot of difference – the fair this time around saw broader aisles, an increased wall height and more glass in the structures to let in light. This refreshed and improved design enabled easier navigation and was appreciated by our gallerists and visitors alike. I've also been wanting to develop the fair's curatorial focus. Going forward, we will encourage our galleries to showcase works by artists who have never exhibited at the fair before. This is both a way of promoting newer names and building a sustainable ecosystem while also encouraging that sense of something new and discovery. We will also be reimagining our collateral events programme to encourage our visitors to discover standout exhibitions and events taking place in New Delhi around the fair in January 2019. The next edition of the IAF opens on January 31 and will be on until February 3, 2019.

THIS YEAR, THE IAF INTRODUCED 'I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER', A SECTION THAT GAVE THE PUBLIC THE OPPORTUNITY TO VIEW ART MADE BY INDIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN ARTISTS ABROAD. WHAT DRAWS YOU TOWARDS INDIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN ART?

Prior to joining the fair, I was lucky enough to have had the opportunity to interact with some leading artists and arts professionals from South Asia. I was impressed by the amount of activity taking place. As a person of Indian heritage, I feel so proud of the quality of art and ambassadorship demonstrated by our artists. I am keen that local audiences get the chance to engage with some of the works that they are exhibiting across the world.



INDIA ART FAIR

JAGDIP JAGPAL

Building A Sustainable Ecosystem

HAVING SPENT THE BETTER HALF OF YOUR LIFE IN LONDON, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENTIATING FACTOR AS FAR AS THE ART SCENE IS CONCERNED IN INDIA VERSUS THE UK?

There are far greater opportunities to make new discoveries in India. The artists have a background in multiple disciplines and are constantly developing their practice. I see them supporting and mentoring each other, often pushing the next generation to have the same opportunities that they did. There is a sense of community here, and this can only be good for the sector as a whole. The galleries and collectors are also demonstrating greater curiosity and encouraging new talent in different ways.

ART HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN USED AS A MEDIUM TO REPRESENT AND CONVEY THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE OF THE MOMENT. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES THAT YOU FIND YOUNG INDIAN ARTISTS FOCUSSED ON? IN TODAY'S DAY AND AGE, DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ART TO SAY SOMETHING RATHER THAN JUST BE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL TO LOOK AT – OR DOES THAT INTERFERE WITH THE VISCERAL EXPERIENCE OF VIEWING ART?

As a viewer, I tend to instinctively differentiate between purely

decorative and conceptual works – and I have a preference for the latter. At the fair itself, you'll find plenty of contemporary artists addressing some of the most pressing issues of our times. Some examples from this year include Rithika Merchant's new and beautiful drawings that capture the very essence of migration; a film by Hetain Patel, where he makes clever use of thrilling costumes and sensational soundtracks to question existing notions of gender, race and identity; and the large and seductive architectural paintings by Tanya Goel that make a strong statement on urbanisation. Personally, I really enjoy and appreciate performance art.

HOW IS THE ART SCENE EVOLVING AS THE INTERNET INCREASINGLY PROVIDES A PLATFORM FOR INDIVIDUALS TO SO EASILY DISSEMINATE THEIR ARTWORK?

The internet has vastly transformed the art world and some consider it as significant a technological medium as the camera was for the last century. The young generation is experimenting a lot with the medium to produce really high quality, interactive digital works. Of course, there are many others who do not only work with the internet but instead, use it to find inspiration or share glimpses of their practice. Many of them are being discovered online by galleries, dealers and collectors.

SAHIL NAIK, 26



CURATOR-SPEAK

“He is a sculptor, but not in the traditional sense. I really appreciate his attention to detail when creating a narrative around spaces.”

“In my work, I constantly seek to draw correlations between myth, religion, history, facts and the internet. This also forms the premise for my current body of work. I am really interested in the politics of terror, the metaphor of the bomb and its position in the dichotomy of pleasure and fear,” says Goa-based artist Sahil Naik, who became interested in the idea of the bomb after a temple in his neighbourhood was subjected to threats and hoaxes.

In 2017, Naik exhibited *Ground Zero* at Kolkata gallery Experimenter; this project, he says, was born out of a constant reference to sites of trauma. Shedding light on it, Naik details, “The conceptual premise of this show looks at architecture from two positions: as evidence and as witness – both as a physical form and as a live entity with embedded histories. The work identifies potential ‘suspects’ based on certain iconographies formed by social, political, ethnic and religious characteristics.” For the exhibition, he created replications of familiar locations and subjected them to explosions, looking mainly towards the vulnerability of our everyday spaces and how we always think of terror as being at a distance from us – the ‘this can never happen to me’ mindset.

What’s more, *Ground Zero* looks at the role of the press and the internet

as well as the law. “A lot of the material that I collect is press coverage from the internet, footage, site mock-ups, news investigations, rumours, fake news, viral videos and WhatsApp forwards. *Ground Zero* follows the identification of potential ‘suspects.’ What makes somebody look like a suspect? Is there an iconography? Why do most misidentified suspects have similar social, ethnic, physical and religious characteristics? Why is it so easy to cast suspicion on the coloured body? Most of these are temporary narratives drawn out of situational evidence. The misidentification may be momentary, but its impact is not – there is a recurring rehearsal of trauma, fear and dehumanisation. Once this passes – and if it does – the misidentified is a victim who will forever be tied to the site. The law does very little to protect individuals from media trials and there are fewer forms of recuperation for the misidentified. How do you compensate trauma? How do you undo humiliation?” he questions.

This year, Naik, who is currently in residence at Aomori Contemporary Art Centre (ACAC), Japan, is working on a larger project that looks at the violence of the nation-building project in South Asia; he will be showing an early fragment of this project in a group show at the ACAC.



FACING PAGE: DETAIL, *PORTRAITS OF HOME/ EXIT WOUNDS*, 2018
THIS PAGE, TOP: INSTALLATION DETAIL, *LAZARETTO*, *GROUND ZERO*, 2017, EXPERIMENTER, KOLKATA
BOTTOM: INSTALLATION VIEW, *LAZARETTO*, *GROUND ZERO*, 2017, EXPERIMENTER, KOLKATA

HETAIN PATEL, 37



CURATOR-SPEAK

“From *American Boy* (2014), *Jump* (2015) and *American Man* (2016) to *Don't Look At The Finger* (2017), I have seen all his films and have always been amazed by his ability to transform himself into a range of characters. And what's more impressive is that he stitches his own costumes!”

“I'm a British artist born of immigrant parents. I grew up in a town where it felt as if we were the only brown people. That informs the core of a lot of my artworks. I went to art school at Nottingham Trent University, from where I graduated in 2003, and I have been working as an artist ever since – first in Nottingham and now in London,” says Hetain Patel, who is represented by Mumbai-based gallery Chatterjee & Lal.

Patel's art is all about making connections – between cultures, genders and generations. Since his process is largely collaborative and across different art mediums, he says that it enables him to practise what he preaches, and that involves “developing and fostering connections with people across a broad spectrum of backgrounds that are often different from my own. Collaboration between art and life is key to the possibilities of what we can be as humans”.

The UK-based artist's work explores the themes of identity, freedom and human connection; and while they are often political in nature, he also employs humour and popular culture as “passports for the work to travel beyond the rarefied world of politics”. His humour, also used as a tool for social commentary, makes his works more accessible and relatable on a personal level. Expanding on this, he says, “I employ humour by taking a

simple idea and then committing to it at an audacious level. 'I wonder what it'd be like to have a moustache like my dad's', 'I wonder what it'd be like to be in that kung fu film', 'I wonder what my car would look like if it could transform into a robot'. Because the initial idea is always identity-related, the result is funny. The feeling from the viewer is often, 'Why would someone do this?' And to leave that question out there is what's important for me.”

Patel dabbles in photography, video, sculpture and live performance, but admits he doesn't have a favourite medium. “They are all different ways to explore the representations of the body and to expand the ways in which bodies are read. I'm interested in freedom...and for the body to be free, it needs to exist in multiple formats.” That said, Patel says that he's keen on working with film for moving image works in the future. “I'd love to make film works with 35mm film,” he reveals.

This year, Patel, who is a New Wave Associate at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, is collaborating on performances with dancers, actors, musicians and amateur choirs. This will be research for a project he's planning for 2020 – it will incorporate film, sculpture and live performance for galleries. “I'm also doing research for my first feature film, a development of my most recent short film, *Don't Look at the Finger* (2017),” he concludes.



DON'T LOOK AT THE FINGER, 2017, SINGLE CHANNEL FILM

SAHEJ RAHAL, 29



CURATOR-SPEAK

“Not unsurprisingly, his clay and ceramic sculptures were the most attractive and popular amongst the art crowd as well as the general public at the Liverpool Biennale 2016.”

“I had a dream once in which Momus, the pagan god of art criticism, came and told me, 'A lie creates another world, one in which it is true'. I kind of took that to heart a bit too strongly, I think,” quips Sahej Rahal, whose art is inspired by the mythological and the bizarre. “I make things and pretend that they belong to ancient civilisations or have travelled back to our time from the future...and sometimes, people believe me,” the artist states.

Mumbai-born Rahal graduated from the city's Rachana Sansad Academy of Fine Art; and his hometown no doubt inspires a large chunk of his works. “For me, Mumbai has always been a city that comes together like a massive bricolage of the past, present and the future that is constantly reassembling itself. For example, you see Victorian architecture juxtaposed with art deco structures – and when viewed together, it resembles a postmodern mishmash of glass and chrome. This non-linear experience of time is something that I think echoes in my work,” he elaborates.

Rahal says that he's interested in “figuring out new ways of telling this massive tale of absurd objects entering our world”. And so, he doesn't really stick to one medium for too long, but instead experiments with various mediums – these include drawings, sculpture, performances and moving images. “Right now, I'm working on the second episode of a video game that is populated with my sculptures and with levels designed with objects that were 3D-scanned in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai. I trained as a painter in art school and I've been getting back into making paintings again recently,” he says.

As for what's in the pipeline, Rahal reveals, “I've just come back to Mumbai after a fairly long time. And I'm slowly getting back to working on ideas that I'd put on the back-burner for a while. I'm also prepping for my next solo show, which opens at Chatterjee & Lal in January next year. Following that, I'll be taking off to Canada, where I'll be participating in the Vancouver Biennale.”



DRY SALVAGES, 2017, FOUND OBJECTS, POLYURETHANE, ACRYLIC PAINT, PRIMARY NOTTINGHAM, UK

SAJAN MANI, 35



CURATOR-SPEAK

"I first saw Sajani perform at Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, and later, at the Dhaka Art Summit. I admire the simplicity and bravery with which he is able to make strong social statements about modern India."

Growing up in Kannur, Kerala, in a family of rubber tappers, Sajani Mani never imagined going to art school even though he would frequently sketch as a youngster. Armed with degrees in fine arts, English literature and journalism, Mani worked as a migrant labourer for two years in the Gulf. After a period of extensive travel, he decided to participate in the very first edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which is where he moulded and honed his artistic practice. Speaking about his experience at the Biennale, Mani states, "The 2012 biennale was like a university for me, where Bose Krishnamachari mentored me and Nikhil Chopra guided me in the nuances of performance art."

As a postcolonial Dalit who uses his body to move into varied public spaces and portray the struggles of the marginalised body, the artist explains, "I am interested in the body and the concepts of time and space – the body and its limits, endurance and a black Dalit body's existence. I'm trying to create new languages to address the idea of possible collective futures. My body is a site for the powerless, the untouchable. My performances attempt to evoke pain, shame, power and fear."

Currently, Mani is pursuing a master's degree in 'art in the public space' at the Weissensee Academy of Art, Berlin, where he is busy researching subjects like spatial justice and spatiality.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROAMING-THE-PLANET
IMAGE COURTESY: VANCOUVER BIENNALE AND ARTIST



CITIZEN SHIP BURN IT DOWN!, LIVE PERFORMANCE, VANCOUVER, CANADA, VANCOUVER BIENNALE, 2014



PHOTOGRAPHY: NOOR PHOTOFACE
IMAGE COURTESY: THE DHAKA ART SUMMIT AND ARTIST



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARION VOGEL
IMAGE COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND HAUS DER KUNST

TOP: #MAKEININDIA, LIVE PERFORMANCE, DURATION 8 HOURS, 4 HOURS EACH DAY, DHAKA ART SUMMIT 2016, DHAKA, BANGLADESH
BOTTOM: 'CASTE-PITAL', DURATIONAL PERFORMANCE 9.30 HOURS, "SPECTERS OF COMMUNISM. A FESTIVAL ON THE REVOLUTIONARY CENTURY", HAUS DER KUNST, MUNICH, GERMANY, 2018

ANDREW ANANDA VOOGEL, 34



CURATOR-SPEAK

"I was immediately drawn to his work, which was exhibited at the Khirkee Festival organised by Khoj in New Delhi last year, and have been following his career since."

He was surrounded by art as a child. His father's grandfather was a Dutch impressionist, and so his home was always full of oil paintings, pastoral scenes and portraits. "I began scribbling quite early on in my childhood and, in some way, that process never really stopped. I've always been a very quiet person, but art has provided me with a platform through which I could explore those particular moments in life which I found extremely challenging to articulate through mere words," says Andrew Ananda Voogel.

A recurrent theme in Voogel's works is the idea of the 'weight of memory' – this was inspired by a visit in 2007 to his mother's home in former British Guyana, where the population is split between the descendants of West Africans and Indians who were brought to work in the sugarcane plantations of the former British Empire. "On that particular visit, I was deeply affected by the weight of memory and history. I began researching the colonial archives in Guyana and started making sense of my family's own history for the very first time. Since then, the themes of sea crossing, exile, memory and historical trauma have had a major influence on my art practice," details the artist.

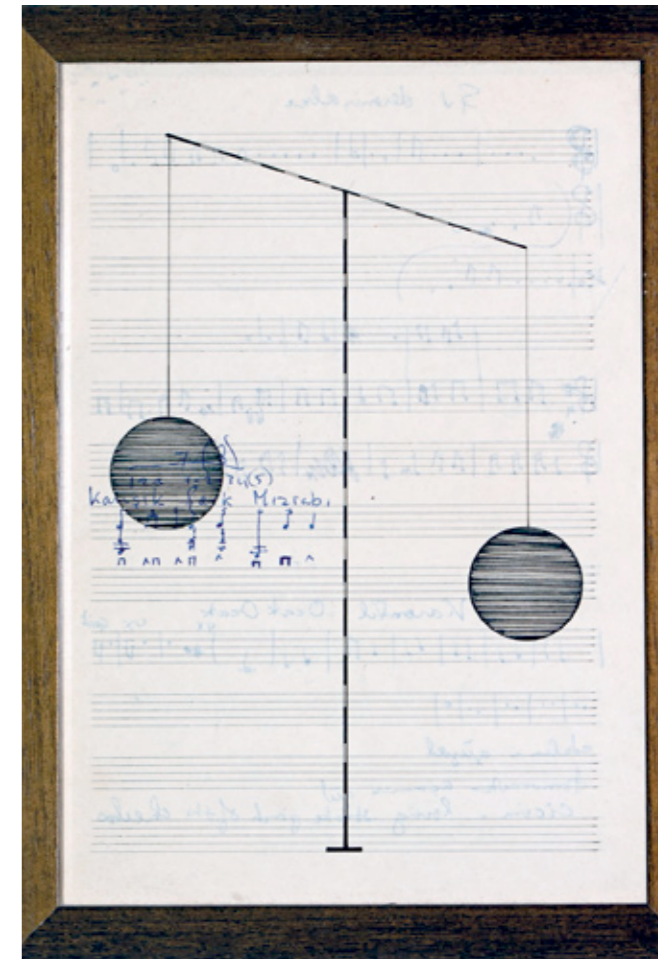
One particular exhibit of Voogel's that explored this theme in great detail was *The Weight of Separation* (2017), which he began working on at Khoj in 2016. However, the story behind the work began in the early 1900s when his grandfather's mother was forcibly separated from her family in Uttar Pradesh and brought to the Caribbean via Kolkata. "There's so much immeasurable trauma that history enacts upon all of us. This

exhibition was an attempt to explore that trauma through various materials and historical objects. The exhibition, more broadly, attempted to measure the various forms of separation that we all feel. The separation from loved ones, the separation of labour from profit, the separation of the self in time and the separation of nations from each other – something we're seeing too much of these days. Through *The Weight of Separation*, I wanted the materials to express their own forms of trauma, whether of threads being pulled apart or of a paper sculpture succumbing to the weight of its own gravity. Regardless of the medium, the focus of each piece is the influence of time," he explains.

Voogel's works leave themselves open to interpretation, but that doesn't mean that they don't have an underlying meaning. "There is definitely a specific meaning to each of my works. I tend to work on the premise of what I call the 'expanded moment'. In this way, the viewer completes the piece and not the other way around. It's important for me as an artist to create spaces for the negotiation of meaning and not to fully define or control the interpretation of the work. Visually, I hope to cultivate a curiosity, but also nurture a sense of the unknown, which allows the viewer a certain sense of exploration," he frankly states.

Voogel, who divides his time between Northern California and Taipei City, recently participated in an exhibition titled *New Traditions: Influences and Inspirations in Indian Textiles, 1947-2017* at the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, curated by Mayank Mansingh Kaul. Presently, he is working on a solo exhibition that will open in Vienna in 2019.

IMAGES COURTESY: ANDREW ANANDA VOOGEL/PRAKASH RAO/PROJECT 88



ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT): *WEIGHT III*, FOUND OBJECT, 2016;
DIAGRAM II, INK ON PAPER, 2017

YASMIN JAHAN NUPUR, 39



INDU ANTONY

CURATOR-SPEAK

“Yasmin is a formidable performance artist. Her research, process and quality of performances engender empathy for the plight of the marginalised and set her apart from the others.”

Born in Chittagong, Bangladesh, her interest in art was sparked by her father. As Yasmin Jahan Nupur puts it, “I learned how to draw even before I knew how to spell.” After completing her master’s in drawing and painting from the University of Chittagong in 2004, she moved to Dhaka two years later to start her career as an independent artist. And, since 2009, she has been a member of the Britto Art Trust in Dhaka.

Nupur’s performative practice is known to tackle and challenge a number of political issues, paying close attention to their impact on humanity. “My work is situated within socio-political, cultural and ecological conditions, and I produce objects and installations and prepare activities that take on wide-ranging themes such as feminism, country-wide identification, climate change, war and the economic crisis. I am also constantly thinking about boundaries — not just in terms of a ‘physical’ boundary but also those within the mental space of individuals,” she explains.

Detailing why the themes of migration and human relations are so personal to her, the Dhaka-based artist says, “My work *Crossing the Border, Being Together* (2013) invites people to cross the border to be together. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan once formed a single population, but now it is difficult for the citizens of these countries to cross these borders. Nationalism unites people into a coherent whole, a nation. But this nation can be the product of a more or less arbitrary carve-up. Born in a country whose borders are both recent and sources of extremely complex and tense relations between neighbouring countries, I understand the degree to which borders solidify the will of those in power.”

Her performances aside, Nupur also creates installations that work with fabrics and hand embroidery. One of her standout projects is *Patterns of a Tactile Score* (2018), where she has employed the ancient weaving technique of *jamdani*. “I used woven textile forms and drawings that were inspired by the weaver’s array of floral and geometric motifs. They reflect my interest in pliable sculptural

forms and explore the dialectic of tension as language. *Patterns of a Tactile Score* is based mainly on my childhood memories of my mother embroidering. A translucent cotton cloth from Bengal, muslin embellished with *jamdani* has been celebrated for its mesmerising allure and feather-light texture. Growing up in Bangladesh, I knew the history behind how it was celebrated, but at the same time, I was deeply affected by the legacies and impact of British colonialism. Generations of Bengalis have grown up with stories of how the British cut off the thumbs of weavers so they could no longer produce muslin and were forced to buy British goods. This history haunts me. I use muslin/ *jamdani* as a medium to locate and express the individual and collective memories across time and place. The act of weaving is meditative and emotional. The entire body of the weaver is invested into its formation and the fineness of muslin forms a second skin, connecting our bodies and spirit with the woven structures of the universe,” she elaborates.

Nupur, who is presently working on ideas around mapping, war and migrant workers, says that she’d like to do a performance pertaining to the politics of food security. “Dhaka’s brouhaha over contaminated fruit speaks about a growing chasm between the urban and the rural. As we become more removed from the traditional modes of food production, the agricultural hinterland is being treated as nothing more than the food source for a hungry city. The practice of spraying fruit with chemicals is one problem, but more worrying is the possibility that the entire food chain is being compromised and the soil itself is contaminated by toxins that are almost impossible to eradicate,” she expands. She is also working on a project that focuses on her father’s land, which was recently acquired by the government. “At some point, we are also going to be landless. So, I’m building a body of work that looks at the land and landscape — how land is losing its sense of ancestral history and how it is making way for cities and factories...and hence, what impact that will have on humanity,” she concludes.



IMAGE COURTESY: EXHIBIT 320



PHOTOGRAPHY: DHEER KAKU

TOP: PATTERNS OF A TACTILE SCORE
BOTTOM: OUR OWN PRIVATE ANTHOLOGY,
PERFORMANCE, 39 HOURS, SERENDIPITY 2016,
ONGOING

TANYA GOEL, 32



VAIBHAV RAJ SHAH ©TANYA GOEL

CURATOR-SPEAK

“We were lucky to have one of her beautiful *neel* pigment wall drawings called *Index* as a solo project at the last edition of the India Art Fair — this was a standout work.”

Born in New Delhi, the artist graduated with a bachelor of fine arts from The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and then proceeded to attain her post-baccalaureate certificate in studio (PBS) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), topping it off with a master’s in fine arts from the Yale University School of Art, Connecticut. After living in Chicago and New York, Tanya Goel returned home to New Delhi, only to find dramatic shifts in the use of industrial materials for construction, with glass and steel replacing iron and brick.

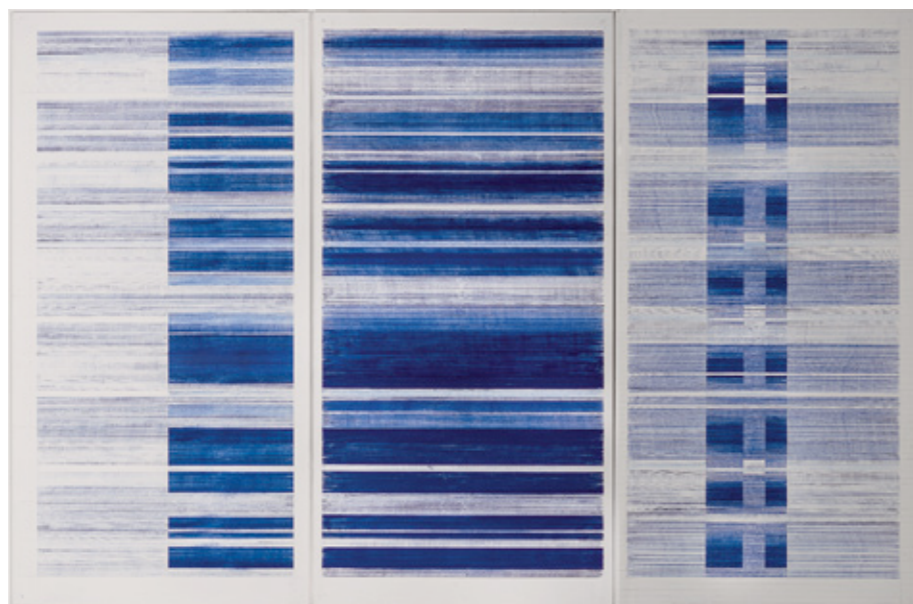
Through her works, Goel attempts to make a material record of a swiftly disappearing period; and so, her paintings see her create her own pigments from an array of materials ranging from charcoal, glass, soil and aluminium to graphite, concrete, foil and mica, all of which are sourced from sites of deconstruction. Talking about why the construction and deconstruction of cities interests her, she states, “How we shape and build what we live in is becoming more and more intriguing. But what’s most fascinating is the constant flux.”

Goel’s works are known for their geometrical compositions. Explaining her affinity for symmetry, she says, “I

am intrigued by how geometry, which is static in nature, is juxtaposed and imposed with and upon a ground that is constantly shifting.” Having lived in three major metropolises over the course of her career (New Delhi, New York and Chicago), her experiences and observations — and particularly the concept of the grid — plays an important role in her creative process. “Living in different cities, what I became most sensitive to was the presence and, more importantly, the absence of a grid: the abstract geometric system of right-angled streets that completely disregards what is on the ground. The grid of a city is envisioned by urban planners and city cultures are defined by their plans. Los Angeles is made up of subdivisions, Paris has broad boulevards and Vienna is known for the Ringstrasse. While New York is a rectangular grid, Chicago’s grid system is more rectilinear and rigid, and Delhi, a circle of sorts, has a more organic and patchy presence of right angles,” elaborates the New Delhi-based artist.

Goel’s work is up at a show called *Waste Land*, curated by Birgid Uccia, at Tarq, Mumbai, on till the first week of August. Later this year, she will be showing her work at the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea.

TANYA GOEL, *INDEX II*, 2018, NEEL PIGMENT ON WALL, 244 X 122 CM / 96 X 48 IN EACH PANEL (TRIPTYCH)



ALL IMAGE COURTESY: ARJUN MAHATTA ©TANYA GOEL

TANYA GOEL, *INTERSECTION (RED, BLUE, ORANGE) II*, 2017, OIL ON CANVAS, 56 CM X 46 CM / 22 IN X 18 IN

ROHINI DEVASHER, 39



CURATOR-SPEAK

"I am a science fiction buff and so, her subject matter has always fascinated me. I can't wait to see some new works following her expedition and residency at sea with The Owner's Cabin."

"I have been a fan of science fiction and fantasy ever since my school days...and when I was in my second year at the College of Art in the capital, I joined the Amateur Astronomers Association of Delhi at the Nehru Planetarium with the idea that it might be the closest thing to a science fiction club or convention in the city. For the next four years, I was an active member, polishing mirrors for telescopes, going to Haqdarpur (in Haryana) in the cold, to a very wet field, to see the Leonid meteor shower in 2000 and learning a lot more about navigating Delhi's night sky, both in the planetarium dome and on field during our monthly 'star parties,'" says artist Rohini Devasher, whose work uses metaphor and projection as tools that link art and astronomy.

After studying painting at the College of Art, New Delhi, Devasher completed her master's in printmaking from the Winchester School of Art, after which she returned to Delhi to work at Khoj International Artists' Association from 2005 to 2011. Her artistic style, she affirms, looks at "speculations on the relationships between the human and the non-human". Expanding on the central themes she explores in her work, Devasher states, "More and more, it seems as if the interconnectedness of our relationship to the planet will be essential to our imagination of our future. Science and art both interrogate this condition and what it entails. I like working within different frameworks of science, art, fiction and speculation and what

these make possible. In the age of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, is there still room for wonder? I believe there is. I believe it is essential that we not only make room for it, but actively nurture and cultivate it — because wonder walks a fine line between beauty and the uncanny, both of which are central to my practice."

Devasher, who shuttles between Noida and New Delhi, has recently completed a residency at The Owner's Cabin on board The High Trust, an oil tanker that travelled from Fiji to Singapore, via Pago Pago in American Samoa, across the Pacific Ocean. "It's impossible to describe how significant this experience has been. It isn't just because of the horizon-to-horizon skies, the endlessly changeable ocean, the uncountable shades of blue, the near-perfect conditions for astrophotography and cloud-watching — things that I know will be material for years of work. With limited to no access to internet, it made for an intense period of observation, recording and reflection, one that I think, unfortunately, may be impossible to recreate on land," explains the artist, adding, "What it did make me realise was just how full of wonder this planet of ours is...how much there is to see and explore, both within and without."

Currently, Devasher is working on some new large print- and drawing-based works, which will be exhibited in Europe in autumn. A solo show at Project 88, Mumbai will open at the tail end of the year.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, ALL: *SPHERES*, SINGLE CHANNEL VIDEO WITH SOUND, DRY PASTEL, CHARCOAL, PENCIL, LEAD, GOLD PEN AND GILT CREAM ON WALL, 22 FT X 16 FT (VIDEO DURATION 22 MINS)



ALL IMAGES BY: ANIL DANE
IMAGES COURTESY: DR. BHAAU DAJI LAD MUSEUM, MUMBAI

WAQAS KHAN, 35



CURATOR-SPEAK

"I was fortunate enough to see his solo exhibition at the Manchester Art Gallery last year. There is so much to appreciate in his large-scale minimalist drawings – so intricate and impactful."

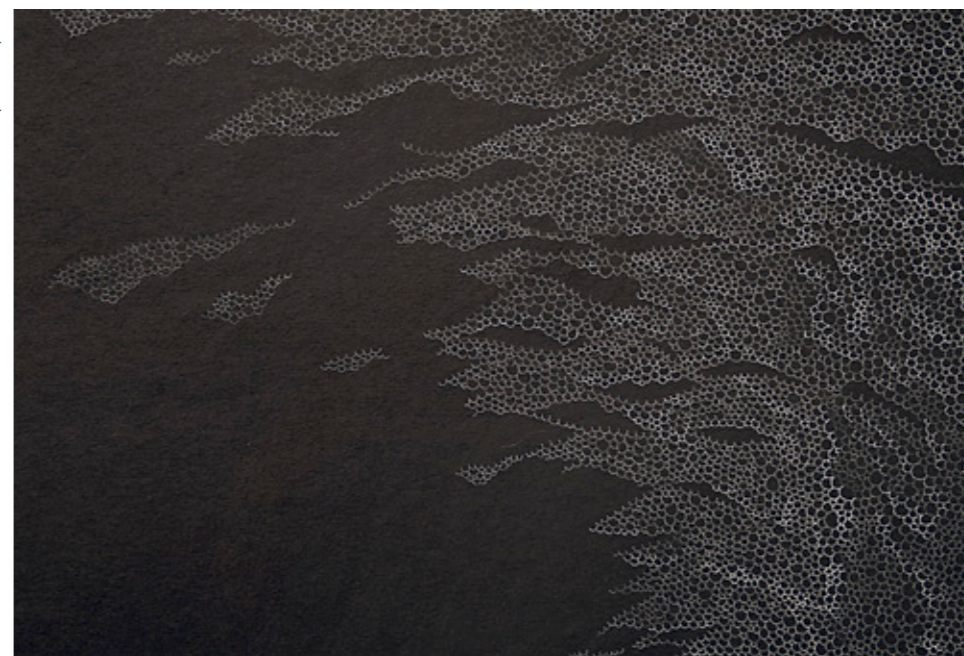
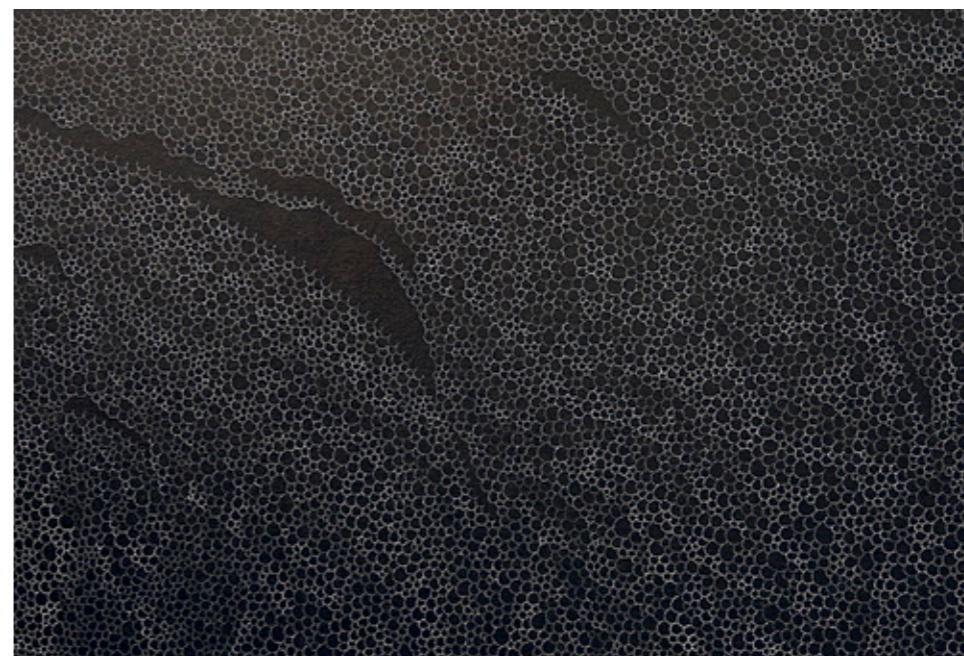
"My work is not directly inspired by Sufism or any of its particularities. While I thoroughly enjoy Sufi poetry, I am afraid that specifying any prose or piece of literature as inspiration would minimise the meaning of my work," says the artist whose practice took off after a bachelor's in fine arts from the National College of Arts, Lahore, where he studied Mughal-style miniature painting and printmaking. Waqas Khan's work, quite undeniably, amply proves the saying 'it's all in the details'. His massive monochromatic prints that resemble intricate webs and vast celestial bodies are the result of the intermingling of thousands of miniscule dots and dashes, inked with red, blue, black or white ink. Asked how his experience with miniature painting influences his work, Khan clarifies, "Miniature painting is an entirely different practice, with entirely different ethics. The smaller applications of my pen strokes are very tiny – and I suppose this is the only similarity between my practice and miniature work."

Even though his large-scale works draw viewers in rather hypnotically – in the manner an optical illusion would – Khan insists that he does not explore set themes in his works. "My

work is experimental and process led...and so, it is meant to evoke experience. I've never been compelled to over explain it or highlight any conceptual parameters." Having previously used ink pens for his printmaking work, the artist believes that his affinity for this medium comes from the level of control it affords him, but states that of late, he's been inclined towards the possibilities of extending his narrative in sculpture.

Last year, Khan's neon series that spelled the word *khushamdeed* (meaning 'welcome') in Urdu found pride of place at the entrances of three Manchester art spaces – the Manchester Museum, the Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery. The purpose of this project was to invite all kinds of people and offer them a judgment-free area to view art. Currently, the Lahore-based artist is working on his solo project at Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, which will open on September 7th this year, with another project due to open at the Asia Pacific Triennial in November this year. He will also be exhibiting at Frieze, London, the FIAC International Contemporary Art Fair, Paris and Art Basel, Miami Beach later this year.

-TINA DASTUR



ALL IMAGES COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND SABRINA AMRANI GALLERY (MADRID)

FACING PAGE, LEFT AND RIGHT: WAQAS KHAN, DETAIL OF *DOORS*, 2017, ARCHIVAL INK ON WASLI PAPER (DIPTYCH), 70 CM X 102 CM
THIS PAGE, BOTH: WAQAS KHAN, *ORACLE II*, 2018, ARCHIVAL INK ON WASLI PAPER, 244 CM X 132 CM