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VIEWING THE AXIS IN BOMBAY ART SOCIETY'S PROJECT AT KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE

Abhijeet Gondkar investigates the idea of legacy through a predictive transformed image of the Bombay Art Society, extending its presence during Kochi Muziris Biennale 2016 through an emblematic display curated by Ratnadeep Adivrekar with seven artists

Kochi the quaint coastal town is converted and decked up for the Bi-Annual International Art event with every corner of street leading to a site-specific art. I am at a former spice warehouse located in the historical Jew Street in Mattancherry - the trading hub for foreign settlers, such as Jews, Arabs, and Armenians as well as for merchant communities from India. Artist - curator Ratnadeep Adivrekar has transformed the space for the Bombay Art Society a 127 years old artist organization, which has been like God Chronos hence for Ratnadeep to play with the thought of demystifying history for this interesting project "Axis of Secret Histories / All this Comes Back" (A secret or shadow history in a revisionist interpretation of either fictional or real history which is claimed to have been deliberately suppressed, forgotten, or ignored by established scholars) Secret history is also used to describe an alternative interpretation of documented facts that portrays a drastically different motivation or back-story from established historical event.

When I asked Ratnadeep about the concept of curating secret histories, He says -'I was in Kasol (Parvati Valley-Himalaya) when I came across a Book Crossing in lodge where I was staying by Giles Milton called "When Hitler took cocaine and Lenin lost his brain"...it was a light read on so called revealed myths of histories. It was entertaining and brut book. But as I looked deeper into the concept it became more and more serious. I looked to engage with history and some fundamental questions about our society, the formalisation of its values. The Bombay Art Society is also entering into its new phase, with new infrastructure of art complex,



Nilesh Kinkale, Medium Coal, Tar, Pipes Installation, Size Variable, 2016

more facilities. With this collateral project it firmly bridges the old with contemporary."

The project is artist-led, which sets a base for an approach and provides an alternative to the established hierarchies of the art world. Sometimes artists work simply isn't as highly regarded by people during their lifetime as it is by those in the generations that follow. Artists can all fall into this phenomenon, robbing them of the credit they deserve in their time like Bach, Keats or even Kafka. The selected Seven artists represent a generation, include both internationally and locally acclaimed artists that have been invited to resonate with this subject to create new site specific works. This involves questioning the idea of legacy, not in the sense of an unambiguous transmission, but rather as a releasing of multiple processes, giving rise to a transformative and retroactive action. The curatorial concept makes reference to the secret history theme and content, presenting the artists' thoughts on their own history and external reality. The curatorial

approach seeks to pass through memories and perceptions of history, interweaving installations acting as guides inviting the audience to wander or immerse themselves in the site. By stimulating our personal and collective memory, these works show us how history agitates and causes concern in our personal lives and in the socio-political realm as they will reveal the fact that spiritual identity is not an essence or a state of being, but a "becoming," a process whereby subjectivities are formed in the openings between such binary oppositions as us/them and that it is in those in-between spaces that marginalised people are the agents and subjects of many possible futures, imagined or real. The project offers an open-ended inquiry into history and the prospect of imagining new possibilities, suggesting that we are at a crossroads in our society. The resulting artistic interventions are from elaborate and evocative installations to intimate moments of human connection.

On entering the old transformed warehouse we are greeted by a bright yellow wall which hangs cluster of old black and white photographs of old exhibitions openings from the archives of the Bombay School. In contrast the neighbouring wall has dark works of Prashant Salvi much to do with the body as landscape and symbolism in reference to his dreams and lexicon of symbols notating the body, landscape, sex, cosmos, moisture, dilating, flora, etc. Looking at Clouds, Cactus and Sun one sees a bizarre, arousing composition of two clouds a cactus, and a sun which are simultaneously two hands spreading apart a figure's bent-over ass. There's a mysterious sexuality hidden, which folds in and out of landscape, creating a low-key

expectancy. The anticipation and ambiguity sustains a number of narrative possibilities at play with the works' structure, symmetry and concise divides of form and colour. The strong sense of clarity and design make these images approachable, while the metamorphosing forms keep the viewer transfixed.

Nilesh Kinkale's installation has network of pipes that slithers onto surface discharging material that they are made up of. Inspired by artist Prabhakar Barwe his objects have become increasingly arrayed with symbolic resonances. Objects, symptomatic of the 20th century, it is thoroughly restored to its macabre aspect by its accumulation and enclosure/disclosure. He finds these objects intriguing, which store and translate energy. He looks at Energy resources as the *cassis belli* in history where the struggle over energy resources has been a conspicuous factor in many recent conflicts. Tanujaa Rané's ambitious 4-channel animation consists of continuous video projections work represents a major shift in her practice as a print maker. The illusion of physical and the painted add to the psychedelic nature of the works. It is nearly impossible to decipher, even when viewing in person. The seamless transition from dream to physical representation also points toward the micro/macro quality of these images. She finds comfort hanging in the ever-evolving place between these barriers to show us the value and richness of undefined, ever-evolving territory. Ashish Thakur's fictitious scenario resonates with our recent investigative history, the lost antiquity of secret chambers of the Padmanabhaswamy temple's six previously known vaults (Kallaras). He questions whether finding is the answer for us being spiritual. Illuminated by lights installed at its bottom, the somewhat abstract, minimalist Door is neither pristine, nor like so many of the other objects in the show rough-hewn—unique in its form and materiality, it duly stands on its own. Given its title, neither referent rings true, however. These are, instead, the doors of perception through which one passes in the quest for awareness and transcendence. This structure, placed on the diagonal, occupies the center of the gallery, throwing shadow of curtain of keys.

Anand Prabhudesai creates theatres with linear lines of lost civilization through brick wall that forms a boundary. Map is not territory and hence cultural heritage is lost to our



Installation View at Mattancherry, Kochi with works of Ashish Thakur, Nilesh Shilkar and Smita Kinkale

preoccupation of geographical land division. By using parts to designate whole concepts, and things, Anand's sculptural hieroglyphs can be said to constitute visual shorthand. He has embedded into an irregular brick structure, a time honoured lawn ornament in working-class, and neighborhoods. The work is in the powdery red colour associated with the revolution and rituals. In this manner, Anand joins together the sacred and the profane. Reciprocally, raising questions about its possible referent, this game of associations and connections runs through Anand's work, bouncing back and forth within each piece, and between them. Smita Kinkale's work is reconceptualising modernist collage using unconventional materials, offers a colourful critique of capitalism, consumerism. The luxurious cities built by labours, which the society blind sights live in shanties covered with plastic is an aerial landscape which blurs out like abstract expressionism. The colours affected in her painting reinforce their spellbinding nature. The purples, reds, and yellows aren't readily nameable. Rather, they feel extracted directly from a desert sunset slipping into a blue, green night. In the end, in part because of Nilesh

Shilkar's crude or improvised manner, I could not resist thinking of this installation as being a post-apocalyptic society's display of objects representing its mythic history and origins. In both cases, totally misunderstood narratives come to serve as models not only for cautionary tales, but also for the reconstruction of society. This interpretation corresponds to Shilkar's project; central to this endeavour is an attempt, on his part, to make sense of the existential appeal of the ontological and the mythic.

The artists have approached the subject which calls up history and self-construction within the economic, spiritual, social and political contexts. The thread that connects all these art works is the artists' involvement with the significant social issues confronting humanity today and their profound desire to push formal boundaries in order to tackle them. Alongside this geopolitical development, mindboggling technological progress has raised the issue of what it actually means to be human. Global digitalisation has fundamentally changed our way of relating to the world around us and to each other. With every act today is recorded it is bound to be history tomorrow.