Postnational Perceptions in Contemporary Art Practice

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Cover illustration: Give me your blood and I will give you freedom, Documentation of a live performance by Nikhil Chopra, Commission 2014 Singapore International Festival for the Arts, Costume Loise Braganza, Photography Shivani Gupta, Image courtesy the artist.

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Introduction

My journey towards art began in the 1990s in Stockholm. Seeing shows on modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec opened out a world that had been out of reach to Indian audiences in those decades. On returning to India, working in an auction house with an impressive art archive exposed me to modern Indian artists and their works. Writing about artist works in catalogues for art auctions while being surrounded by those same works brought a hands-on experience that no purely scholarly work could match. The Indian art market was at its high point in the first decade of the twenty first century. The constant push and pull between the pricing of an artist's works, and the positioning of the modern artist within styles and themes, became dead serious when the *Hindu Janjagruti Samiti* (a right-wing Hindu organisation) protested the sale of M. F. Husain and later Tyeb Mehta's works in 2007, claiming them to be anti-Hindu.[1] This was the first time that I saw an artist's identity appear to be in direct conflict with the tangible reality of the nation. Driven by the need to understand and contextualize the goddess iconography that lay at the bottom of such a conflict, a close reading of modern representations of the goddess Durga in modern Indian art became the first topic for my thesis. The focus was on line drawings that had so offended national sentiment (Husain *Durga* 1956, *Saraswati* c.1970), the *Mahishasura* legend in flat, solid colors emphasizing the dynamic relationship of the demon with the goddess (Tyeb Mehta *Mahishasura* series 1996) and on photo-real portraits of real women who were surreally given a third eye and designated as goddesses (Bikash Bhattacharjee *Durga Series* 1980s). Clearly the goddess iconography appeared to be closely intertwined within a more complex understanding of

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1   Accessed on June 15, 2016. https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/7123.html. The work in question was from Mehta's *Kali* series created in 1989. https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/4064.html. Husain's work was from his *Mahabharata* series created for the 11th Sao Paolo Biennial in 1972, titled *The Battle of Ganga and Jamuna.*

the Indian feminine. It became increasingly clear to me that there were broader contemporary questions that urgently needed to be addressed around issues of sexuality, identity and gender politics *vis-à-vis* the nation, and that my research needed a concerted and direct engagement within contemporary artistic practice itself, where these ongoing dialogues continue to occur.

In order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of this engagement within an area as heterogeneous, multi-faceted and vast as contemporary art, where no complete over-view is possible, it appeared that the only way was to narrow the focus of my research. Concentrating on the tension between cultural specificity and claims of universality on the one hand and a similar pull between nationalism and critiques of nationalism on the other, offered a direction. The category of the postnational—taking the postnational to mean not 'after' or 'beyond' the nation, rather to transcend a normative sense of national belonging, and with Menon, taking the 'post' in the postnation to be understood as having *passed* through the nation[2]—it is this definition of *passing through* the nation that drives the understanding of the postnational as I explore these contradictions through the work of three contemporary 'Indian' artists as case studies.

The initial impulse towards the selection of the three artists began with a few fortuitous encounters with their works. My first encounter with diasporic artist Chitra Ganesh's (b. 1974, New York) comic-based collages occurred in Gothenburg, Sweden at the Gothenburg Konsthalle in 2012. The gigantic banner proclaiming her solo exhibition *She the Question* displayed a colored nude woman sitting in a yogic pose with her head aflame. The banner made an emphatic statement not only about women and identity in general but also about color and the possibility of imagining alternative worlds. Here was an image that was not only proclaiming the presence of queer feminism, referencing science fiction but also simultaneously claiming a connection with India through its yogic pose. After I had viewed Ganesh's works in the exhibition, I too had some questions of my own, the images were familiar, the figures had clearly been sourced from Indian comics—but their queer performative gestures and their unfamiliar words were not. The violence in the works was repeated panel after panel. Just a few months earlier I had viewed Tejal Shah's (b. 1979, Bhilai) multiple media installation work *Between the Waves* at Documenta 13, in which the colored 'Indian' cyborgian[3] bodies, located in precarious,

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2   Nivedita Menon, "Outing Heteronormativity: Nation, Citizen, Feminist Disruption," in *Handbook of Gender*, ed. Raka Ray (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138. Menon clarifies that she uses the term both to build upon and depart from the scholarship that has problematized the nation in various ways.

3   The cyborgian reference coming from Donna Haraway's 1985 essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, with its rejection of rigid boundaries between human-animal-machine provides

endangered landscapes performed an aggressive and explicitly queer sexual narrative. Around the same time, early 2013, Nikhil Chopra (b. 1976, Calcutta) performed as *La Perle Noire* at La Marais, Paris, the quixotic Indian Raja furiously transformed the gallery walls into a "sea of blood-red," in a 50-hour performance.

Ganesh, Shah and Chopra form an interesting trio to interrogate the relationship between contemporary art and the nation, as they are located in a post-national context in interesting ways. Geographically in the diaspora (New York) and away from mainstream art centers in India (Goa), both Ganesh and Shah politically identify themselves with the global queer community.[4] As artists who travel, exhibit and perform their art on the international exhibition circuit, they provide this study with a materially rich practice to analyze the questions of belonging and locatedness *vis-à-vis* the nation.

All three employ different mediums, digital collage, video, live performance in their art practice, even with their employing of diverse mediums, I could discern common threads in the practices of the three artists and how they centered around the performative 'Indian' body, this intersecting of 'national' identities and contemporary art in a globalizing world seemed propitious at a moment when the idea of the nation itself was undergoing several iterations ranging from the postnational and the transnational on the one hand and on the other, signalling towards a return to the nation with the rise of neo-nationalism in different corners of the globe. The nation is a crucial framework for mediating identities within socio-cultural contexts. Our sense of belonging still stems from the nation state and in the case of India, a nation that emerged under the aegis of colonial modernity, it acquires an even sharper valence for the Indian artist. When nation, gender and sexuality intersect, the body becomes an important marker for the nation. My aim in this study is, therefore, to focus on the complex ways in which contemporary Indian artists negotiate their identities through engaging with the concepts of nation and the "postnation" using the queer performative body (often the artist's own).

The understanding of the term 'queer' that informs this study begins with Sedgwick who defines queer as an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resources, when the constituent elements of anyone's gender

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a significant entry point into Shah's work which essentially draws upon a rejection of binaries, identity politics and notions of affinity — moving onto greater interdependencies.

4   Ganesh and Shah have also shared exhibition space in some early exhibitions such as at Thomas Erben Gallery New York in 2006, in *Subcontingent – The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art,* Torino (2006), *Shifting Shapes – Unstable Signs* at Yale University School of Art Gallery (2009), *Lighting the Way: Artists' Short Films from India,* Glasgow Short Film Festival (2011), to name a few.

or anyone's sexuality are not made or cannot be made to signify in a monolithic manner,[5] and moves beyond it towards the term's indeterminacy and elasticity[6] that allows for a wide range of possibilities as to its applicability. While an understanding of queerness is crucial to this work, this is not a study about queer artists or queer art, queerness works rather in opposition to the stereotype and as a heuristic device that transcends the zone of identity.

The Contemporaneity of the Art World

The period that this study focuses on is marked by the pervasiveness of the phenomena of globalization—1990s was a decade when transnational capital made its way into India and the nation became part of a global geo-political unification process. With the onset of globalization processes, fears of cultural homogenization lead to questions of the nature and survival of social and cultural identity. Therefore, the process through which external and internal forces interact to produce, reproduce and disseminate 'global' culture within local communities became the most active area of debate in globalization.[7] In the artworld, this is when large scale exhibitions began to take place with more frequency, the art market's mechanisms infiltrated many parts of the world and when museum spaces and policies also adopted a more self-reflexive mode. Globalization and its concomitant issues formed a focal point for artistic discourse in practices from various regions and diverse cultures, bringing contexts together in single exhibition spaces. Arjun Appadurai names the impact of electronic medias and mass migrations as two connecting diacritics that have shaped the cultural dimensions of globalization, as global media has had the effect of blurring the divisions between the realistic and the fictional. Within contemporary art practice, borders and territories and nations recede as media and the virtual begin to play a key defining role as on the one hand, an increased circulation of images now assumes a non-grounded form of visuality via social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram and on the other, as artworks constantly move from one continent to another, (sometimes being shown simultaneously), they lead to forms of deterritorialisation with a sense of affinity and interconnectedness. Media facilitates not only this increased circulation of images but also the ideas

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5   Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 18.

6   Anna-Marie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

7   Bill Ashcroft, "Glocalisation," in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Griffin et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 102–104.

and discourses surrounding them, and it is as part of this that the perception of the post-national is reinforced.

The contemporary art world, marked by rapid biennialization and the concomitant emergence of an international job market for artists and curators with a growing number of international residencies and exchange programmes,[8] has seen a growth in prosperity of a large number of art centers, biennials and art fairs taking place beyond the western art world, all of these developments have facilitated a simultaneous movement of young artists from the peripheries towards mainstream western art centers.

Addressing the problem of defining the contemporary as a critical category, Peter Osborne argues that rather than as a spatially imagined conception, the contemporary functions critically and is posed within an ongoing temporization of histories in a dynamic process. He terms contemporaneity as the form of temporality that best describes the historical present. The idea of contemporaneity assumes a significant position as, with the geo-political unification of the globe, multiple social forms of time in different places are in some senses forced into contact with each other out of a compulsion of globalization of capital, and new forms of contemporaneity are produced every time there are new and forced conjunctions between different social spaces. Contemporary art, critically understood therefore, is standing at the conjunction of two intertwined temporalities, firstly the temporality of the history of twentieth century art that is an ongoing narrative of retrospective unification, and secondly, the temporality of the historical present, that present in which the contemporary has itself become a historical category.[9] The retrospective unification of art practices within a universal western modernist canon has been superseded in contemporary art by a desire to find a universal common language for art practices from all corners of the globe, gesturing towards the growing importance of contemporaneity.

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8 Charlotte Bydler, *Global Art World Inc: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004), 53. Further, discussing the globalization of art, Allan Cochraine and Kathy Pane cite three features that support this view—the dissemination of new art biennales in non-western countries, and international spread of art institutions such as the Guggenheim, secondly the heightened mobility of artists and curators, emerging worldwide communication network, and thirdly the fact that non-western artists and curators have been more and more included in mainstream exhibitions during the last two decades. Accessed on August 2, 2018. http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm.

9 Peter Osborne, "What makes Contemporary Art Contemporary? Or other Peoples' Lives." A talk given at Nottingham Contemporary on May 14, 2014. Accessed on June 5, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KI7zNsZjreo.

This discussion about contemporaneity and its importance to contemporary art is useful to understand how an intensified planetary interconnectedness of different times and experiences of time functions, acknowledging that different people maybe inhabiting different temporalities with differing pasts and presents while being contemporary to each other. The artists in this study contemporaneously connect their works through layers of time—mythological, colonial—as all become part of their lived realities. These 'lived' times in different locations across the globe, however, closely engage with local knowledge and are not merely passive receptors of applying western ideas. Nikos Papastergiadis, gesturing towards this interconnectedness, states that anyone who enters the context of contemporary art is already part of the complex process of intervention and feedback that now cuts across the world, there are many parallel stories and competing genres which are being constituted out of a shuttling between the discourse of art and the cultural politics of everyday life. Hence for him, art cannot be explained as a social activity that fulfills the stated goals of a national agenda or an economic order. The specific place of art is now increasingly located in networks that are both above and below the reach of the nation state, through the process of collaborating with community networks in local places, providing artists the opportunity to uncover counter cultural pockets and forging new transnational diasporas that would defy the hegemonic order of the nation.[10] Papastergiadis's argument is very useful to understand the work of the three artists, and how they circulate globally through exhibition and gallery spaces, and biennials where their works are temporarily embedded and where issues of national identity are often part of the art discourse, for example when they participate in country specific shows like *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (2011), or *Indian Highway* (2009–2012).

Shared Discourse

Contemporaneousness is also visible in the dialogic relationship between global forces and local experiences, Papastergiadis argues that there is a significant conjunction between artistic practices and curatorial strategies—citing examples in art practice from Latin America by Medina, from South East Asia by Wong Choy Lee, and from India by Ranjit Hoskote, he comments on how these writers and curators through attention to the edges of local encounters, observe the ways

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10   Nikos Papastergiadis, "Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the Contemporary," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, eds. Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 364 & 373.

in which artists throw themselves into extreme conditions, act as mediators in complex cultural crossroads, give form to nebulous threshold experiences and create situations in which imaginations can take the participants into unknown worlds, picking up on Hoskote's view on how artists do not confine their imagination to their place of origin alone.[11] Irit Rogoff too comments on the sharing of issues and urgencies, pinpointing towards,

> [A]a certain critical currency, but perhaps most importantly a performative *enablement*—a loosening of frames all around us, which means we can move around more freely, employ and deploy a range of theoretical, methodological and performative rhetoric and modes of operation, inhabit terrains that may not have previously made us welcome.[12]

Artists all over the world directly and strategically engage with human, political and queer rights and ecological concerns that increasingly transcend national borders, demanding for a concerted international effort and focus. These can all be termed as postnational issues that cannot be subsumed within nations and treated as national concerns, even as they occur at the local and national level.

Political and queer rights come into the frame with works such as *What are you?* as Shah foregrounds the absence of equal rights to the transgender community in India, with *Tales of Amnesia,* as Ganesh focuses on the marginalization and patriarchal violence against women apparent in the narrative of the original *Amar Chitra Katha* comics. Human rights and growing economic inequality enter the frame in this era of *crisis globalization* (Demos 2012) that is marked by an increasing influx of migrants and refugees into the affluent North as they seek decent standards of living escaping from the repressive regimes and zones of conflict. Chitra Ganesh's work on *Index of the Disappeared* in collaboration with Mariam Ghani focuses on such migrants as it archives the absences and disappearances of thousands of South Asian Muslim immigrants from the United States after 9/11,[13] while Chopra's incessant travel across sites and histories addresses migration histories following the apolitical route, as artist and draftsman he not only memorializes site-specific landscapes but also marks them with his ephemeral presence.

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11   Nikos Papastergiadis and Gerardo Mosquera, "The Geo-politics of Contemporary Art," *Ibraaz Foundation* 2014. Accessed on June 12, 2017. https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/109.

12   Irit Rogoff, "Academy as Potentiality," in *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, eds. Angelika Nollert and Irit Rogoff (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver Verlag, 2006), 19.

13   For a more detailed analysis of this project please see Bindu Bhadana, "Index of the Disappeared: Representing the Invisible South," *Artl@s Bulletin* 5, No. 2 (2016) Article 9.

Introducing the 'Indian' Artists—Why Them?

Chitra Ganesh

Chitra Ganesh, a post-graduate in Fine Arts from Columbia University (2002), keenly felt the absence of any courses on the Indian contemporary art scene during her course of study. A desire to bridge absences has largely driven her art practice. Living and working in Brooklyn (New York) she works across mediums, from installation, works on paper, paintings, photo, digital collages, murals, animation. In her projects she eclectically draws from Indian, Buddhist and Greek myths, from local street art, graffiti, from comic books and from the zine culture. Her queer activist practice centers exclusively on the female queer performative body, the female body that, in India, occupies a clearly gendered space and, in some of her works, Ganesh's critique of this gendered space queers the female category itself. From within her large oeuvre of works, this study focuses upon two sets of digital collages, *Tales of Amnesia* (2002–2007) and *She the Question* (2012). While *Tales of Amnesia* draws almost exclusively from the Indian *Amar Chitra Katha* comics—a materially rich resource that visualizes the nation's histories and visual presence through mythological narratives—the next set of collages in *She the Question*, this study argues, moves away from this nation-centered focus. Ganesh's positioning as an artist from the South Asian diaspora not only provides this study with an in-built postnational framework to engage with the relationship between art practice and diasporic belonging but also to draw upon the tension between national and diasporic identities, positioning Ganesh as the queer resistant "impossible subject."

Tejal Shah

Tejal Shah, an undergraduate in commercial and illustrative photography from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (2000) spent a year as an exchange student at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago where a concerted engagement with mediums other than photography marked a shift in their practice. Shah works mainly with video and multi-media installations and their practice continually resists the binary in all its forms, and centers on the queer, and variously gendered 'Indian' body. This study focuses on the following works: *Chingari Chumma* (2000), *What are you?* (2007), and a photographic archive, titled *Women like Us* (2009). Later works in video, *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013), mark the changed direction in their practice towards queer ecologies. Shah's critique of the national body runs the gamut of bodies that are "different,"—from the transgendered body *(What are you?)*, to

"masculine" female wrestlers *(Women Like Us)*, and the "ideal feminine" from Indian Bollywood cinema *(Chingari Chumma)*—all are examples of bodies that defy a national logic of identity.

Nikhil Chopra

Nikhil Chopra completed a master in Fine Arts from the University of Ohio (2003), where he performed live for the first time and adopted his first persona of *Sir Raja*.[14] Back in India, as a post-colonial traveller / explorer donning a semi-autobiographical character, *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007), Chopra has travelled and performed at sites[15] all over the world.[16] This study analyzes Chopra's perceptive shift from an identity-based *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007–2011), towards notions of color as *La Perle Noire* (2013). Chopra's performances span a few hours to a few days as he engages with site-specific histories across the globe. Chopra's stringent critique of pretentious Indian royal portraiture in the colonial period that began in *Sir Raja* continues with *Yog Raj Chitrakar* in the guise of a colonial explorer and takes on an even more extreme form of post-national subversion as he recreates his persona into a Victorian queen[17] or an English noblewoman.

The three artists are united in their poststructuralist view of gender and focus their practices on the 'Indian' body, the queering of this 'Indian' body

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14   *Sir Raja II* Ohio 2003; *Sir Raja III What will I do with all this land* 2005; *The Death of Sir Raja III* Mumbai 2005; *Sir Raja visits Khowaja Press* New Delhi 2007; *Sir Raja III visits New York City* New York 2008.

15   'Site' in the context of the art world is a loaded term, it relates not only to the particular aesthetic experience constituted by social, political, racial and economic contexts at play but is also exemplified through the circulation of art and artists between art residencies, art biennials and art fairs. For the purposes of this study the word is often used in its simple definition as the location where Chopra performs.

16   *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing I* 2007; *Yog Raj Chitrakar visits Lal Chowk* 2007; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing II* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing III* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IV Yokohama Triennale* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar and Tokyo Mori Museum* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part I* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part 2* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VI Brussels* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VIII Manchester* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX New York,* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing XI Chicago* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing X Part 2 Mumbai* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part 3 Lyon* 2011.

17   *Yog Raj Chitrakar and Tokyo Mori Museum* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing II* 2008.

becomes the central lens to study their work. The performative body is always in a flux, constructing gender and selves, distancing itself from the normative nation with the acting out across the surface of the body through practices ranging from photography, video and live performance. As these mediums engage with the complex ways of representation of the queer body this engagement with technology in diverse ways builds a contemporaneous dialogue between live and virtual, time-based and static imagery.

Research Questions

While geographically the concept of identity is closely connected to a place and is often expressed by assumptions of ethnic or racial homogeneity, the category of 'belonging to a nation' is constructed at a political and legal level and continues to exercise authority through citizenship rights and institutional structures connected to the modern state. In a post-independent India, the modern Indian artist occupied a critical position with the project of nation-building, but this frame of reference started to unravel with some characteristic features of globalization entering India in the 1990s. With increasing mobility and interconnectedness identities are being formed not only as a result of the cultural and national history one has inherited, but rather as a result of the different spaces through which one travels, and identity is no longer seen as an inherited construct but rather as a more flexible construct that changes as one moves through spaces and internalizes a mix of the different cultures and ideas one encounters. Negotiating between the local and global meta-narrative, the process of identity formation becomes a flexible, open-ended questioning and de-limiting of oneself, as the 'Indian' aspect in this identity is in a continuously dialectical relationship with broader notions of belonging.

The presence of this broadening dialectic comes into a sharper focus in the works of the three artists in the second part of this study. Shah fuses their narrative with Charcot's archive in Paris (2007), with that of Rebecca Horn's *Einhorn* for Documenta at Kassel (2012), Ganesh's multi limbed amnesiac woman / goddesses surreally mouth dissonant disjointed phrases infused with historical references across cultures and continents from Hindu, Buddhist and Greek mythologies, from Catullus and Sappho to Pandora, and combine with graffiti and street art, with science fiction and 1960s psychedelia, Goya, Dürer[18] and Roy Lichtenstein,

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18 Ganesh's *Melencolia* directly references Dürer's work, for further detail, please see Bindu Bhadana, "Transculturality," in *Twentieth Century Indian Art,* eds. Partha Mitter, Parul Dave-Mukherjee and Rakhee Balram (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022).

all come into her work. Chopra performs 'inside and outside' cultures, between capitals and continents employing the politics of representation through the critiquing of racial stereotypes—that attempt to reduce members of social groups to their racial features—drawing on a complex history of these stereotypes as he switches guises to transform into a Turkish gentleman in Berlin or a flamboyant colored showgirl in the style of Josephine Baker at Centre Pompidou, (April 2011).

How do we characterize this broadening of frames and transcultural exchanges in contemporary art practice?

Rather than relying on pre-constructed notions such as national 'gendered' belonging, their positionality connects with the meta-narrative of a collective past that partially draws from memory and narrative. In an age marked by displacement and deterritorialization in which fixed associations between identity, culture and place are being sundered and existing nationalist narratives are being brought under scrutiny by those marginalized and excluded from them, postcolonial studies certainly brought in critical voices that questioned the mainstream narrative, however, the guiding historical framework was, still determined by the territory of the nation state. With the continuing processes of globalization, "… for many national citizens, practicalities of residence and the ideologies, of home, soil and roots are often disjunct," and often the territorial referents demonstrating civic loyalty can be divided within different spatial horizons—work loyalties, residential loyalties, religious—all as different registers of affiliation. In fact, as Appadurai argues, ideas of nation are more often driven by other sorts of affiliations—linguistic, racial, religious,—but rarely ever *territorial*.[19] The postnational, understood as *passing through the nation*, therefore, provides us with the setting to engage with this shift and look for answers to some key questions such as,—i) Is there a shift away from the nation in artistic discourse in India? ii) If there is, where does this shift "locate" itself? iii) How do contemporary artists respond to this situation from various locations?

Research Framework

The research framework for this study is inter-disciplinary and draws from a range of disciplines and theories—post-structuralism, postcolonialism, queer theory, political science and histories and narratives of contemporary art. An interdisciplinary approach is essential not only to find answers to questions

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19 Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Post-national Geography," in *The Geography of Identity,* ed. P. Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1996), 40–58.

dealing with contemporary art, a field too broad and complex to be encompassed within a single discipline, but also in order to contextualize the common thematic of this research—the performative body, which largely drawing from queer theory also draws from socio-religious understandings of the body. To investigate the body and its relationship to the nation, viewpoints from various aspects of the humanities and the arts are brought together in order to construct a complex understanding of the broader cultural and social meanings of the queer body and its positioning in contemporary art.

It has been successfully and numerously argued that modes of binary thinking are not useful in looking at either an "imperialized past" or a globalized present. My analytical framework in the first instance draws from scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kofosky-Sedgwick who critique such essentialist modes of thinking. Drawing from queer post-structural understandings of the body as a transparent subject, from the understanding of "woman" as a construct, Butler argues that the category of "woman" only finds stability within the context of a hetero-normative matrix—normative sexuality fortifies normative gender and that one is a woman, "to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender." Therefore "gender trouble," states Butler is the fear of losing one's place in gender, and this is a "crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language."[20] Questioning the feminist view of sex as biological and gender as cultural, Butler advocates of reuniting of the two discrete units, claiming both as constructs.[21] Butler's arguments, though widely critiqued,[22] also brought the body back into feminist discourse which was a welcome shift.[23]

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20   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), xi–xii.

21   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10.

22   Butler was termed as a Foucault flunky by Camille Paglia, accused of displaying a 'hip quietism' by Martha Nussbaum. Susan A Speer and Jonathan Potter consider Butler's theoretical language-based approach too abstracted to be applied to 'real-life' situations, Susan Bordo also criticizes Butler for reducing gender to language and ignoring embodied reality. Mark Hansen, critiquing her theory of performative iteration says it subordinates the agency of the body to the content of social images, whereas what matters about the body is that which is material *to* the body. Peter Digeser argues that Butler's focus on language in the performative body is 'too pure' to account for identity. In viewing the gendered body as purely performed, Digeser says Butler ignores the gendered body. Accessed on June 5, 2018. https://judithbutler.wordpress.com/category/criticisms.

23   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv–xvi. *In Bodies that Matter: The Discursive Limits of Sex,* Butler more or less accepts that there is such a thing as 'the physical body.' 61.

By bringing in the notion of performativity Butler stretched the notion beyond J.L. Austin's speech acts to include not just words but all sorts of assigned behaviors along with words that when they were reproduced over time, created a gendered identity. Challenging us to rethink gender outside the categories of the metaphysics of substance Butler argues that: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results."[24] If gender is a "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being,"[25] what subversive repetitions could be put in place to question the regulatory practice of identity itself ? Butler suggests that the possibilities for gender transformation and subversion lie in the arbitrary relation between the "bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds," that constitute performativity. These acts include visible markers such as makeup, dress and comportment, which taken together convey a constituent gender. The idea of performativity is useful for the queer body since it suggests that subjectivity is always de-centered and never fixed. Despite its various critiques,[26] Butler's understanding of performativity provides this study with a productive framework to apply to its analysis of artworks, as it is via the practices of dis-identification with regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized and both feminist and queer politics mobilized.[27] Dis-identifications characterize the work of all three artists in this study as they performatively engage with aesthetic representations of the body to contest arbitrary notions of gender that are imposed on the field of appearance.

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24   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31–34.

25   Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2010), 415.

26   Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, 2002, 149. Salih discusses Butler's key concepts and how her notion of performativity has been critiqued by various writers and theorists. Among these, Jay Prosser rejects the notion of the performative claiming that, 'there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be non-performative' (1998: 32). Martha Nussbaum does not regard parody and drag as viable alternatives for certain classes of oppressed women, McNay regards performativity as inadequately historicised and contextualised, Susan Bordo too, argues that Butler's notions of the body and gender are too abstract. However, Butler's concept of performativity forms a suitable framework for this study to engage with the works of all the three artists.

27   Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 4.

Performativity and the constructed-ness of gender as a resistant practice frames almost the entire set of works that forms part of this study but in differing ways, Chopra effectively builds up and constitutes gender materially in his performances that not only heavily borrow from theatre but are also spontaneous/partially choreographed role-play, he actively engages with visible markers of gender performativity, make-up, dress, comportment, to critique not only gender but also particular postcolonial personas such as the Indian royal and the British queen. Shah highlights the instability of genders through their work on transgenders variously, including through a documentary on surgical 'mtf' (male to female) procedures and through drag performances. Shah's engagement differs from Chopra's in its focus not only on the transgendered body but on the deliberate foregrounding of the attributes of femininity and masculinity as essential characteristics of gendered selves. Both Chopra and Shah employ drag in their works and these methods of dis-identification trouble the gender binary. In the case of Ganesh, the construct of the woman itself becomes a masquerade of performing a social role that is 'woman.' Here, Riviere's 1921 essay on masquerade proves to be a valuable resource to engage with the idea of 'woman' as sign and the 'true' image of femininity, the performance of 'womanliness' in a social role deconstructs essentialized notions of femininity and of costuming as a superficial masquerade of 'womanliness.' Ganesh's performative women not only engage with womanliness through a familiar historicized comic genre, but also subvert the sanctity of the mythological narrative through queer performativity—these are queer abject bodies awaiting recognition in the contemporary world.

The queer performative body connects with the nation in the writings of political scientist Nivedita Menon who locates the presence of the postnational in the queer body. In the world of "transnational and corporatized flows" which has superseded the static organisation of the nation states, Nivedita Menon attributes the postnational with the two following dimensions—one, "over" the nation, across national borders and two, "under" the nation, resisting inclusion into the 'larger' national identity. Regarding the first as an example of subversive strategy interrogating the nation, she cites the activities of Black Laundry, an Israeli anti-occupation queer group. Through breaking down hierarchies of both the nation and sex, the group employs twin strategies of national betrayal and sexual depravation, using slogans such as '*Free Condoms Free Palestine*', '*Transgender not Transfer*'—to deliberately situate itself outside the framework of Israel/Palestine as well as that of the hetero/homosexual. Menon cites a diasporic location as an example for post-nationalism "over" the nation in the Indian context, referring specifically to the relationship of gay and lesbian people of Indian and South Asian origin in the US to the National Federation of Indian Associations, a private organization dominated by Indian businessmen in the US. The Federation

refused the *South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association* (SALGA formed in 1992), permission to march in the Indian Independence Day parade in New York in 1997 on two grounds, firstly that a south Asian identity would have allowed non-Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis to march in the parade and secondly, that gay and lesbian identities could not by definition be 'Indian' since homosexuality did not exist in India. Similarly, *Sakhi,* an organization that addressed the question of domestic violence against women in the South Asian community was also refused permission, since it exposed dis-junctures in the family system which is the cornerstone of the Indian nation. After sustained pressure *Sakhi* was allowed to join but SALGA could only join the parade as late as 2000.[28] As Menon states, "The presence of these two organizations is a constant reminder of the inherent conflict between national and diasporic identities, demonstrating how the idea of a unified and homogeneous nation has the potential to unravel through feminist, queer and counter-nationalist politics."[29] This view has been corroborated in the work of Gayatri Gopinath (2005)[30] and Svati Shah (2001). Gopinath further emphasizes the male bourgeoise construct of the National Federation of Indian Associations that classified India as Hindu, patriarchal, middle class and free of homosexuals, arguing that within the patriarchal logic of the Indian immigrant bourgeoisie the "non-heterosexual Indian woman," occupies a space of impossibility.[31] This classification of the Hindu diaspora is useful to understand its role in the nation-building process itself, both as a contributor towards India's financial health and through indirect interventions such as its diaspora standing in for the state in national identity construction—and even more specifically the assertion that queer diasporic identities can serve as a threat to the idea of a united nation—views that further highlight the legitimacy accorded to the construct of heterosexual normative identities within the national matrix.

As Myra A Waterbury's discussion of the Hungarian state's politics towards its diasporic population argues, it is the reframing of national discourse that invokes those beyond its borders that can provide a form of legitimacy to new political actors who position themselves as "nationalizing elites," as saviors of

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28   Please see the following link for a potted history of exclusions and inclusions over the years. Accessed on June 25, 2017. http://theaerogram.com/when-gay-pride-was-excluded-from-india-pride/.

29   Nivedita Menon, "Thinking through the Post-nation," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, Issue No. 10 (March 2009), 70–77.

30   Gayatri Gopinath highlights the two incidents in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 16.

31   Gopinath, 18.

the nation who can right the wrongs of the past,[32] and Waterbury's argument can be supported by many examples of transnational entanglements from India itself that demonstrate the intimate connection between diaspora and nationalism,[33] and how the two support each other.

Nivedita Menon's insights into the postnation that foreground the queer body as a resistant framework provide this study with an inbuilt example of how the presence of queer identities can not only counter a nation's politics but also the functioning of queerness as a resistant practice. The artists in this study especially Ganesh and to some extent, Shah, operate with and utilize these resistant frameworks.

The Birth of the 'Idea' of India

Before the nineteenth century a classificatory identification as 'Indian' did not exist, despite a shared narrative of structures deriving from epics, myths and folk tales and a resemblance in art and architectural styles that was in existence through centuries. 'India' was defined as a precise territory by a British Act of Parliament in 1899. While Gandhi's invocation of an Indian identity turned towards stories from popular religious traditions, it was Nehru who installed an "intricate, pluralist definition of Indianness," creating an imaginary of an Indian past as one of cultural mixing and of a people coming together to determine their own futures and benefit from economic progress.[34] The creation of a historical narrative that was not exclusively Hindu, but secular in nature, was a deliberate move in order to create the modern nation state. It was enunciated powerfully by Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru that India had to open itself to western modernity, tempering it with traditional social understandings.[35] And Nehru's idea of India tried to follow the form of a modern nation state and its values—democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism. It steered towards a "layered adjustable and imagined Indianness," that

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32   Myra A Waterbury, "Bridging the divide: towards a comparative framework for understanding kin state and migrant-sending state diaspora politics," in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, eds. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 140.

33   See Latha Vardarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* 2010, for example.

34   Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 154–167.

35   Prasenjit Duara, "Historicizing National Identity," in *Becoming National*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Gregor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 160.

was based on a commitment towards protecting religious and cultural difference convinced that such a model could only emerge within the institutional framework of a modern state. No attempt was made to impose a uniform 'Indian' identity upon the new nation and citizenship was based on a universalist criterion, rather than ethnic, guaranteeing all an inclusion into the democracy.[36] Therefore the "idea" of India that existed after 1947 was based on the recognition that diversity was the source of its strength, a source of innovation and creativity. National identity was almost postnational,[37] as it was layered and multiple, one that acknowledged regional belonging to be as important as national belonging. Indian-ness as an identity along with being Tamil or Bengali was more robust than an exclusive thin Indian-ness.[38]

With the Indian-ness of identity further complicated with categories such as class, ethnicity, gender, religion and caste, India's success as a nation state, therefore, depended on its capacity to recognize and sustain these different types of diversity—religious, ethnic or linguistic—and this recognition has been the corner stone of Indian democracy. Thinking about regional and class variations and the need to de-link factitious constructions of Indianness, Bharucha wonders whether an "Indian culture" really exists outside the boundaries of a given state. Rather than accentuate religiosities through an institutionalization of secularization, and prevent a communalization of public culture that defines *Bhartiya Sanskriti* within the confines of Hindutva, Bharucha suggests that a closer attention to intracultural consciousness as a practice can provide a possibility to negotiate and share differences across languages, regions, genders and professions so as to develop a more reflexive perspective and a reading of diversities through regional and class variations, and a reimagining of the

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36 Khilnani, 12.

37 Menon, 2009. The idea of the post-national has been in some ways present with the national formation itself. Menon reminds us that the idea of the nation has not been an unchallenged one, even from the initial period of nation-building when certain princely states negotiated relationships with the British government. The north-eastern part of India, with its majority borders being international is a case in point with its armed insurgents who consider India as an occupying power rather than connect with it nationally. (Manipur, Nagaland, ULFA) Right from the forced linguistic reorganization of the Indian states to water-sharing disputes between in the south and continued dissension at the two flashpoints, Kashmir in the north and the north-eastern part of India, the 'idea' of India cannot be assumed but subjected to a 'daily plebiscite.' ('daily plebiscite' are Menon's words).

38 Sunil Khilnani, "Balanced on a Billion: The idea of India in the era of globalization," *The Little Magazine*, 2004, Vol. 5.

nation beyond "Unity in Diversity."[39] In this diverse space of Indian democracy—electoral politics, inequal opportunities and innumerable caste and class hierarchies govern the space of proliferating voices that is a "secular" India. Given this fairly recent yet complex construct of 'Indian-ness,' in what ways does the body's gendered identity cohere or alternately conflict with the national imaginaries?

Research Contribution

Although engagements with the body and its identity have been widely researched across disciplines, periods and regions, in the field of contemporary art, engaging with representations of the body is much more complex in the present than it was in the period of visible body politics in the 1990s when marginal bodies and their representations occupied center stage with the works of women artists such as Carolee Schneeman, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, Kara Walker, Louise Bourgeois, VALIE EXPORT, Marina Abramovic among many others. Today, audiences for art are much more aware about 'difference' and the politics of marginalized colored and queer bodies are more visible.[40] In India's engagement with the body in modern Indian art, I will go back to its close resonance with the nation's history to demonstrate how the body as such has been imbricated in the national discourse since the independence movement, in these narratives the nation is virtually always feminized and characterized in need of protection. The presence of these deliberate constructs has been featured in other parts of the decolonized world where women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, "pure" and "modest," with men defending the national image, the territory and womens' "purity" and "modesty."[41]

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39 Rustom Bharucha, "Thinking Through Culture," in *India: Another Millenium,* ed. Romila Thapar (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), 73–82.

40 Jerry Saltz and Rachel Corbett, "How Identity Politics Conquered the Art World: An Oral History," April 21, 2016. Salz discusses this with some examples, in 2007 both Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson held retrospectives at the Whitney. The 2010 Whitney Biennial featured a majority of women artists for the first time and Glenn Ligon's retrospective opened at the Whitney in 2011. In 2008, '30 Americans,' a show from the Rubell family collection included works by David Hammons, Kehinde Wiley, Renee Green and other black artists. The Brooklyn Museum mounted a Kehinde Wiley retrospective in 2015. Accessed on June 18, 2018. http://www.vulture.com/2016/04/identity-politics-that-forever-changed-art.html.

41 Tamar Mayer (2000), Anne McClintock (1999), and Yuval Davis (1989), in their case studies from various parts of the world have also demonstrated how the female body

The connection between the gendered female body and its unique status as the "bearer" of inner spiritual values had formed a necessary part of the India nationalist discourse, re-inscribing a traditionalist role for the nation's women even while espousing a counter-colonial agenda. Partha Chatterjee, in his discussion on the Indian nation and its women, argues that the specific ideological form in which the "Indian woman" was constructed in modern literature and the arts of India, is "wholly and undeniably a product of the development of a dominant middle-class culture coeval with the era of nationalism," a period when "woman" as a sign for the "nation" was imbued with the spiritual qualities of "self-sacrifice, benevolence devotion and religiosity."[42] The best visual example of these qualities can be exemplified in *Bharat Mata* (1905) Abanindranath Tagore's iconic work on the creation of the nation Bharat as a simply garbed virginal figure holding the *Veda*, *Māla*, *Paddy/Wheat* and *Ambara*, re-inscribed women in a traditional role as child-bearers and the repositories of spiritual values. These stereotypes were likewise imprinted on the popular Indian imagination through cinema, where films like *Mother India* positioning the nation as mother, foregrounded the enduring strength of the woman as the 'bearer of the nation' and its injustices. Tagore's iconic representation was brought back into contemporary artistic discourse by Pushapamala N. once again in 2011, when the artist enacted a photo-performance at Khojlive, dressed as mother/icon/goddess and accompanied by poet Mamta Sagar reading a text by Kannada writer and nationalist Nanjangud Thirumalamba.[43]

The gendered body has often featured directly in the work of women artists in post-independent India including works by Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Anjolie Ela Menon among others who have variously addressed the female gendered body in differing social contexts, following a politics of subjectivity. However, it was with M.F. Husain's *Bharat Mata*, (2004) that the conflation of gender with nation—the configuring of a nude body of a woman on the map of India that single-handedly invited an immense right-wing backlash and entangled with the artist's Muslim identity questioning his temerity to 'speak for the nation' ultimately leading to the

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has been used as the favored site for representing diverse political agendas out of which nation building occupies a significant place.

42 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton, 1993), 237–239.

43 A nineteenth century Kannada author and writer who constantly strove for the upliftment of women.

artist's exile from India in his last years.[44] The ensuing years have seen a gradual shift in the ways that contemporary artists engage gendered bodies with the nation, however critical writings on the gendered body in India are limited. While writings on modern art [45] have contributed immensely to an understanding of modern art practice in India, there is considerably less scholarly work undertaken towards theorizing the body in contemporary art and the focus has been within the nationalist paradigm. (Vidya Dehejia 2009; Geeta Kapur 2003, 2007). Essays in exhibition catalogues on artists participating in group exhibitions or having solo shows discuss specific works and styles thematically and usually with a focus around the curatorial selection. Monographs written by art critics/curators—a role that often overlaps in the Indian art world—are valuable resources for individual artists, but are limited in their scope to only a few artists and published by galleries[46] with commercial interests. Studies on queer histories stemming from other disciplines have either focused on historicizing the presence of queerness in India through history (Vanita and Kidwai 2002, 2005), or on narrating personal experiences from the queer community, (Narrain and Bhan 2006). But these writings while remaining informative, offer little direction to this study.

Conflating the relationship of the queer body with identity and belonging *vis-à-vis* the nation has not received attention in writings in Indian contemporary art and it is this gap in the existing scholarly literature that this study attempts to address.

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44 For a detailed and critical reading on this issue please see Sumathy Ramaswamy, ed. *Barefoot Across the Nation: M.F. Husain and the Idea of India* (London: Routledge, 2011).

45 These include Partha Mitter (2001, 2007), Gayatri Sinha (1996, 2003), Yashodhara Dalmia, (2001, 2002, 2011), Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh (1989, 1997), K.G. Subramanyan (1987), and R. Siva Kumar (1997), Shivaji K. Pannikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (2003).

46 Publications by Vadehra Art Gallery include Nancy Adajania's monograph on *Shilpa Gupta* (2009), Ranjit Hoskote's monograph on *Tyeb Mehta* (2005), and *Atul Dodiya* (2014), R. Siva Kumar's monograph on *Jogen Chowdhury* (2005) and *A. Ramachandran* (2019), Deepak Ananth's monograph on *Arpita Singh* (2015), and Chaitanya Sambrani's work on *Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh* (2019).
The Art Alive Gallery's publications include *K.S. Radhakrishnan* (2004), and *A Life in Art: Raza* (2007), *Faces of Indian Art: Through the lens of photographer Nemai Ghosh* (2007), *An Enchanting Journey: Paresh Maity's Kerala* (2008), and *Sakti Burman: A Private Universe* (2015).
The Guild Gallery has published monographs on *Sudhir Patwardhan*, *K.G. Subramanyan*, *G.R. Iranna, Riyas Komu* and *N.N. Rimzon*, among others.

Review of Literature

This study is indebted to a vast array of scholarly literature on modern Indian art, works by Partha Mitter (2001, 2007), Gayatri Sinha (1996, 2003), Yashodhara Dalmia (2001, 2002, 2011), Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh (1989, 1997), K.G. Subramanyan (1987), and R. Siva Kumar (1997), Shivaji K. Pannikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji, Deeptha Achar (2003), Karen Zitzewitz (2010), and Sonal Khullar (2013), have been very useful for an understanding of the decades leading up to the last decades of this study, especially so Geeta Kapur's contextualization of the national modern as a defining practice for Indian art post-independence in *When was Modernism* (2001). These provided this study with an overview of the historical framework that was in place. However, most of these deal with modern art practice within a national framework and present Indian art and artists within a broad national overview. Scholarly writings on contemporary Indian art, often analytical essays on artists and art works in exhibition catalogues, proved a good information resource and they remain the single most important source of an exhibition's history,[47] but while they do provide some insights into the curatorial selections a broader understanding of the field of contemporary art practice in India is still limited. Ranjit Hoskote's arguments however, have proved useful for this study, Hoskote suggests that rather than repeating the exhausted question of what makes certain artists definitively or unmistakably Indian, we can reflect on their work and reframe our question in order to ask what sort of resemblance, if any, we can trace among artistic practices that emerge from within a shared history or a common set of political, cultural and institutional circumstances.[48] Hoskote and Adajania propose a new cartography based on the mapping of continents of affinity and a search for commonalities based on jointly faced crises and shared predicaments and a move towards a 'critical transregionality.'[49]

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47   For example, *Body City: Citing Contemporary Culture in India* (2000), *Indian Highway* (2008–2012).

48   Ranjit Hoskote, "Kaleidoscopic Propositions: The Evolving Contexts of Contemporary Indian Art," in *India: Art Now*, 2012.

49   Accessed on May 12, 2017. http://www.chitraganesh.com/5118-2/. An example of this kind of critical transregionality was perhaps foregrounded at the Dhaka Art Summit in 2016, when part of Ganesh and Ghani's ongoing *Index of the Disappeared* (2004) project, titled *Black Sites I: The Seen Unseen,* focused on the post 9/11 impact on Afghanistan, while works such as *Lost and Found* (2012) by Hema Mulji focused on state violence, Hitman Gurung's *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family and My Country* (2013), recorded the plight of Nepalese migrant workers and Amar Kanwar's *The Torn First Pages* (2004–2008), documented Burma's struggle for democracy.

No understanding of contemporary art as a frame would be possible without relating with the processes of globalization. Contemporary globalization has reconfigured relationships of societies and territories by moving power and influence away from nation states (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1999; Young 1999; Habermas 2001; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002; Held 2002, 2010; Held and McGrew 2003), and created a postnational sense of belonging. (Menon, Appadurai). Appadurai's writings on the processes of globalization and how they have altered the equation between the global and the local via the internet and media culture have been very useful in framing the shift away from the nation towards the postnational for this study. Writings on contemporary art, (Harris 2011; Groys 2014; Nicholas Bourriaud 1998; Claire Bishop 2012), particularly the insights offered by Peter Osborne (2013), and Terry Smith (2011), on defining contemporaneity as the simultaneity of shared times through different lives, have foregrounded the challenges that defining contemporary art has posed to the discipline of art history as a closed discipline. Papastergiadis (2012) argues that in contemporary art, there is a dual level of commitment to the aesthetical and the political, and that artists now adopt strategies that are more cross disciplinary and operate in an expanding field. Travel, migrations, nomadic lifestyles are the ways in which Papastergiadis links ideas of hospitality and the stranger with concepts of cosmopolitanism that resonate closely with some aspects of this study.

An insight into global exhibitions and how the contemporary art world works through and with them is essential to understand art practices of these three artists as well and Charlotte Bydler's (2004) work provides some key insights. Of particular interest here is her statement that while globalization processes have perhaps exploded the idea of national borders delimiting a single community—but national representation is not a thing of the past—as individual artists with deviant passports continue to participate in representations of national pavilions other than their own to represent local art scenes[50] this is yet another example of a move away from the nation.

Postcolonial studies critically challenging the Enlightenment project as value-laden and dependent on west-centric assumptions, especially those addressing the particularities of 'difference' have been extremely useful in understanding the homogenizing effects of utilizing the western art historical frameworks. The most productive example for my study would be Homi Bhabha (1991), especially Bhabha's argument on mimicry and the subversive power of its articulation that offered an insightful analysis for Chopra's performances.

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50   Bydler, *Global Artworlds*, 390.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2007) highlights concepts of belonging among home and communities in the diaspora through a different lens—the lens of the Asian-American diaspora. For the diasporic artist-intellectual, the limitations of nationalism as a space to articulate rights and demands of inclusion are fraught and plural since there is more than one nation at stake, more than one history and more than one community to belong to. Mohanty argues in favor of a transnational approach that is critical of the nation state as a unit of analysis and instead is attentive to the links, similarities and power differences that exist across cultural settings within and across nation states, (for example. queer Indians from Delhi and queer South Asians from New York).[51] An awareness of the limitation of the nation as a framework in these last decades, has been exhibited by both Ganesh and Shah who are more at ease exhibiting their work in a global queer setting rather than being part of an India specific showing.[52] Mohanty's argument for adopting a transnational approach is further corroborated by Nivedita Menon who argues for a similar kind of postnational solidarity exhibited by diasporic queers "over the nation."[53] An understanding of the diasporic condition *vis-à-vis* the nation is applied though Brah's focus on home as a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination," and also the site of everyday experience. For this study the inbuilt tensions between home and diasporic belonging *vis-à-vis* the nation play out as key signifiers for the diasporic condition, Gayatri Gopinath's definition of diasporic queer sexualities as "impossible desires," is useful to critically interrogate nationalism and cultural identity within diasporic configurations. While post-nationalism as a condition and context has been explored in various studies,[54] Demos's attention towards the processes of globalization and concentrated attention towards ecology as he examines the aesthetic and political engagement of

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51   Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2*, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism (Spring–Autumn 1984), 333–358. Accessed on January 5, 2017. http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_5/under-western-eyes.pdf.

52   Artist interview 2014, Goa.

53   Menon, *Thinking through the Postnation*, 76.

54   *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins 1998), *The Postnational Constellation Political Essays* (Jurgen Habermas 1998), *Post-national Enquiries: Essays on Ethnic and Racial Border Crossings* (ed. Jopi Nyman 2009), and *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity* (eds. Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort 2002). In contemporary art discourse significant studies are those by James Elkins (2007), T.J. Demos (2013), and Kit Dobson and Aine McGlynn (2013).

contemporary artists with environmental conditions and processes have provided this study with keen insights on the ways in which artists engage with ecological concerns in different parts of the world including South America, Africa and Asia.

Feminist and queer theory have played a key role in visual art studies since the 1980s. Butler's theory of gender performativity and her perception of a "true," "stable" and "primary" gender as a fictitious concept is a defining trope for this study. Feminist and queer theory, drawing on Foucault's writings on sexuality, and on the notion that bodies are given meaning by discourse and social structures of knowledge and power, specifically so in the writings of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), demonstrate how heterosexuality and homosexuality mutually define each other. Gender performativity as a fictitious concept is practically applied by all artists of this study in their art practice. Amelia Jones' (2011) argument that we must acknowledge the way our bodies are identified and positioned in the world without allowing our assumptions about identity to congeal into fixed binaries,[55] further reinforces the need for utilizing and engaging with concepts of queer subjectivity that have been instrumental in framing Shah's continued resistance of a simplistic binary framework—with reference not only to gender, but also to the ideas and practice continue to guide their work.

The excavation of local cultures and traditions through foregrounding the presence of queer histories and subjectivities in literature and narrative in pre-modern India, extensively researched by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2000), the focus on the politics and queer lives to pinpoint the reality of queer spaces and experience of queer lives in contemporary India in Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan (2005), have been important interventions to contextualize the reality of the existence of queerness in India. Often the writing of art histories has been linked to the nation, but, within the context of a globalizing world, this idea of representing a local place or reacting to local issues can no longer be isolated from global concerns as the links to global debates and transnational dialogues on art practices are as important as their being located. This is a practice that artists all over the globe increasingly follow and specifically so the three artists in this study whose work forms a part of these transnational dialogues.

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55   Amelia Jones, *Seeing differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

Disciplinary Concerns—Locating the Study Within the Discipline

As these three artists engage with their 'Indian' identities in disparate ways, the diasporic location becomes a valid point for all three artists, given their practices and their outreach. Where then, would such a study position itself? My disciplinary concerns stem both from the relationship between the postnation with global processes and the writing of "inclusive" global art histories from the "margins." The contemporary art world with its extraordinary mobility between people, places, and times, has increasingly brought art from the margins into the mainstream. Discourses emerging from multiculturalism and postcolonial studies—all of which question Eurocentric discourse in the writing of a traditional western art history, have gathered pace.[56] The writing of "inclusive" art histories that include art practices from all parts of the globe, therefore, has increasingly become a concern of art historians from all over the globe.

One of the early manifestations of this concern was in the work of James Elkins. Critiquing the claim of a universal competence for western art history for every part of the world in his edited volume *Is Art History Global*? Elkins advocated for the use of a given tradition's core concepts and indigenous terms as an appropriate form to define art from that particular region. In the case of Indian art, his proposal of the adoption of pre-modern models such as *Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa* to understand Indian art was critiqued by Monica Juneja and Parul Dave-Mukherji with regard to its unsuitability as a frame for the writing of a modern Indian art history.[57] In a different context, Hans Belting, proclaiming the end of art history, argued that the globalization of art represents "a new stage in art's exodus from the patronage of art history" as it becomes increasingly apparent that art flourishes in parts of the globe where art history has not been a concern at all. According to him, the "crisis of the master narrative" does not necessarily help the former periphery countries to reinvent an art history of their own. Belting agrees that art history is an outmoded model

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56   The academic and institutional discourse was taken forward in the 1990s through the work of David Summers (2003), Thomas da Kosta Kaufmann (2009), John Onians (2004; 2006; 2007), Julian Bell (2001; 2007), James Elkins (2007), David Carrier (2008), and Hans Belting (2009), among others.

57   Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the "Burden of Representation," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 279–280. Juneja argued that the whole debate around the applicability of art history as a global concept could not be separated from its origin and recognizability in a certain way due to its western origins, the ways in which it is practiced itself is an impediment to the thinking of the telling of a world-wide history.

and no longer valid for discussing the art of our time. He instead offers the term "post-ethnic" as an analogy with the post-historical, since artists now view their ethnicity as an unwelcome burden and the exoticism of the "other" is outdated. Belting argues that with new medias, art has entered the realm of public communication, removing not only geographical but cultural distance between the center and the periphery, and artists have taken a step towards global art with statements that are now rooted in their own world experience.[58]

Kitty Zijlmans argues in favor of an "intercultural" perspective to study world art history to connote a two-way process of artistic exchanges in socio-cultural settings, which as she herself admits, can involve conceptual, epistemological and methodological problems and many theoretical challenges,[59] while Juneja is particularly sharp about the potential for world art history to slip into a "conceptual imperialism" which she thinks might be avoided by global art history viewed through a transcultural perspective, tracing some of the genealogies and the premises on which they rest. She argues that looking at past histories we encounter moments of tension but "the process of framing those moments is far from teleological," it is important she says to recover those to investigate their dynamics and that in such moments, recourse to the world becomes a need.[60] This is a useful frame with which to understand the connected-ness and links between art practices from various parts of the globe over the past centuries.

Critiquing Belting's position citing *Magiciens de la Terre* as marking the end of art history and Elkins' attempts to incorporate pre-modern forms of regionalism and globalism into a globalized form of art history, Farago finds Juneja's argument in favor of a transcultural framework of analysis more suited towards the creation of a global art history—an analytical model that, according to Farago does not take "historical units and boundaries as given, but rather constitutes them as a subject of investigation." The category of Universalism—a heritage of

58   Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World* eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 73–79. Belting proffers the example of the conference panel in India in 2008, during which the global competence of an implanted model of art history was denied, it was he says, generally agreed by the participants that colonial history still dominates the cultural topics and guides the attention to long time experiences with foreign art.

59   Kitty Zijlmans & Wilfried van Damme, "World Art Studies in Art History and Visual Studies in Europe," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe. Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, eds. Mathew Rampley, Thiery Lenain, Hubert Locher et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 6.

60   Monica Juneja, series of lectures on *Global Art History* at Karl Jaspers Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context, Heidelberg University 2011.

Enlightenment metaphysics, demands scrutiny and reconceptualization rather than being taken to be self-evident. If the category of art or the discipline itself is the product of a particular history then, Farago says, "we all share the ethical responsibility as producers of knowledge to understand how our knowledge shapes the institution." She observes how postcolonial and transcultural approaches "admit history through the front door, calling attention at the local level to the uneven playing field, speaking back to the empire, asking difficult, previously unasked questions of the historical records that survive." Farago insists that it is precisely for this reason that historical understandings belong in discussions of contemporary global art, rather than limiting the frame to discussions around the nineteenth century.[61]

Piotr Piotrowski too finds that postcolonial studies offer us a suitable model/impulse with which to engage with global art history writing.[62] However for him, rather than engage with the notion of the margins and their relationship to the centers, the best way for moving towards a new paradigm of global art history would be through comparative studies.[63] Postcolonial scholars have argued that the practice of traditional art historical method is itself a colonial practice. Dave-Mukherji has critiqued such sweeping assumptions that it is possible to have an equal dialogue between the west and its ex-colonies while disregarding the implicit politics of power that have created modern speech and still render it legible.[64] Enwezor claiming that "the constitutive field of art history is a synthetically elaborated one, that is, a man-made history," argues that the writing of a global art history has to draw therefore, from specific contextual, historical and sociopolitical contexts rather than from a diffused universalism as there is a need to historicize art historical terms within their temporal-contextual usages

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61   Claire Farago, "Cutting and Sharing the 'Global Pie': Why History Matters to Discussions of Contemporary Global Art," *On Curating*, Issue 35. Accessed on July 1, 2018. https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35-reader/cutting-and-sharing-the-global-pie-why-history-matters-to-discussions-of-contemporary-global-art.html#.Y0iGaC1Q3q0.

62   Piotr Piotrowski, "From Global to Alter-Globalist Art History," *Tetsky Drugie* (2015), 118. He cites examples from Partha Mitter's *Triumph of Modernism* to support his argument. Nevertheless, the western interpretative methods continue to dominate research frameworks. Can art history be studied through native intellectual frameworks, and this is a question that continues to dog debates on art history writing in non-western contexts.

63   *A Way to Follow: Interview with Piotr Piotrowski*, written by Richard Kosinsky, Jan Elantowski and Barbara Dudas (Lublin). Published January 2015. Accessed on May 1, 2017. https://artmargins.com/a-way-to-follow-interview-with-piotr-piotrowski/.

64   Parul Dave-Mukherji, "Whither Art History," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 96, No. 2 (June 2014), 151–155.

in specific contexts.[65] The global turn is clearly a paradigm shift that involves a shift towards broadening the scope of art practice towards multiple ways of developing art history from a global perspective.

It is with an understanding of these approaches that I position this work within the framework of global art history as it engages with the complex layers of the 'Indian' identity within a postnational context, keeping the category of the nation as a contested site. The 'Indian' identity works as a connecting thread through the case studies of the three artists and this study pays particular attention to the transcultural (with Juneja) processes at work, an approach that helps me to move across regions / nations / cultures in multiple ways to foreground a sharper and more nuanced understanding of their works.

The 'global' can also serve as a critical tool to bring in the transcultural perspective. If we look at transcultural as something that is being constituted through relationships with outside cultures and which the nation then tried to give a mono-lingual tone, then it becomes clear that this has to be resisted.[66] Therefore transcultural research, initially taking its cue from writings on globalisation, migration and modern medias, foregrounds a world of flows—and aims to investigate the multiple ways in which difference is negotiated within contacts and encounters through a selective appropriation, mediation, translation, rehistoricizing and re-reading of signs. Transculturation as an analytic method looks closely at transformations that unfold *within* the dynamics of actual encounters at the micro-level.[67] Following the transcultural approach it is the dynamics at the micro-level that point towards new morphologies—local, national, transnational, geo-political, demonstrating a synchroncity and coevalness,[68] and given the extraordinary connectivity of our world today it is only through a closer look at the transformations being wrought through these mediations that some understanding of the contemporary and its dynamics with the nation can emerge.

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65   Okwui Enwezor, "Post -Colonial Constellations; Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition" *Research in African Literatures.* Vol. 34. No. 4 (Winter 2003), 57–82.

66   Monica Juneja, "Salon Suisse," Panel with Monica Juneja and Jorg Scheller, Venice Biennale 2013, 1st June. Accessed on June 2, 2018. https://vimeo.com/67520781.

67   Monica Juneja in conversation with Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturism," in *Transcultural Modernisms Model House Research Group,* eds. Fahim Amir, Eva Egerman, Moira Hille, Christian Kravagna, et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 22–33.

68   Monica Juneja, "'A very civil idea…' Art History, Transculturation and World-Making, With and Beyond the Nation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* Vol. 81 (4), 2018, 469–470.

Research Methodology

As the performative bodies are in a state of flux forging new identities for themselves, a 'national Indian-ness,' is always in a dialectical relationship with the 'international' global. The role of the nation in shaping identity in the modern nation is generally implicit, becoming so ingrained that most do not take notice of its presence. Nationalist ideologies draw on social constructions of gender, race, sexuality and nation to generate a nationalist discourse, positioning the binaries of identity constructs in particular ways. Binary constructs around race, gender and sexuality break down into white / non-white, man / woman, heterosexual / homosexual—far too broad as categories and also contentious in the ways that they are applied to embodied objects—they leave out queers, transsexuals. But it is precisely these constructs that in some ways resist the "idea" of an India that was built on freedom and diversity, not on a narrow definition of culture and religion.

It is from these ongoing dialectics that the questions for this study emerge, asking whether the framework of the nation has outlived its usefulness and whether artistic discourse has moved away from the nation into a postnational space. The gendered body is at the base of the ways in which the body is shaped and constructed by way of a historical framework and through specific discourses. Butler's arguments in *Gender Trouble* are useful to perceive how the appearance of gender is often taken as a sign of an internal truth, since gender is prompted by a set of obligatory norms that we materialize, or fail to materialize, in our daily life. Obligatory norms usually demand that we become one gender or another within a strictly binary frame. For this reason, the reproduction of gender is always a negotiation with such obligatory norms and therefore an exercise of power. How do bodies that do not fit the norms of what a body should be—women, queers, transgendered, inter-sexed persons, living under precarious conditions as de-humanized subjects, suffering harassment and violence, emerge from the shadows into some kind of light? Butler, while expanding on conditions of livability for gender non-conforming people states that this recognition depends partially on presentations in media in which the body can appear in various forms. The aesthetic domain therefore becomes an important forum for contesting arbitrary notions of gender that are imposed on the field of appearance.

Menon argues that any idea that is counterhegemonic, referring to the development, sexuality, caste and community, can represent the politics of postnationalism. Menon's discussion provides this study with an in-built example of how queer sexualities critique the nation and also further an understanding of the Indian nation as a contentious space since its creation. The discussion around the writing of global art histories has been crucial in designating a space for this study. The global turn in the writings of Belting and Enwezor for example,

is a paradigm shift that acknowledges that there are diverse and heterogeneous spaces, subjects and objects that contemporaneously circulate and exist beyond the Euro-American paradigm and canons of Western art. It also postulates that the concepts of 'circulation' and 'networks' along with the transcultural and postnational are part of this new epistemic order. There are, therefore, multiple ways of understanding and developing a new art history from a global perspective. A transcultural framework that focuses more on mediation and transformative processes such as that outlined by Juneja, rather than on 'positions' and 'places' where actors are located, is a useful tool to surmount the conceptual limitations that attach to the strict local-global dichotomy. Adopting a transcultural approach both at the macro and micro levels offers a useful direction to analyze how global cross referencing, dialogic interactions, mobility and networking interweave in lifestyles and practices in a form of 'forward-looking'[69] translation during contact and exchange between cultures.

Contemporary art practice is an immense and highly dynamic and evolving field in our networked world. The decision on what research method to apply did not come easily, considering the vast amount of information available and to be sifted through. The closely guarded niche that is the artworld in India follows the same pattern of elite exclusivity that defines artworlds everywhere. Having spent many long evenings at lavish art auctions and previews in Mumbai where conversations were driven by commercial viability of artworks rather than the relevance of the discursive contexts driving their production, I chose to focus my research on the impulses driving the ideas underlying the creation of the works themselves—the discourse within the frame as it were—foregrounding the artist's voice and the surrounding milieu of transnational contexts, talking back to this voice.

My study has therefore limited its scope to a close reading of select works by the three artists at the site of **production and its contexts**, rather than the site of reception.

The structure of the analysis undertaken in this research at the macro level provides a broad understanding of the overarching phenomenas underlying the field of research that derives from the nation / postnation, the processes of globalization and the characteristic defining features of the contemporary art world. The next level comprises the thematics that unite the three case studies which provide the framework for this study, specifically the performative body in contemporary art and the fluidity of its gender, employing its queerness as

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69 I take 'forward-looking' to mean a visionary outlook towards planning for the future and this approach is adopted by all three artists in this study.

the heuristic concept. At the micro level lie the various discourses that emerge through a closer analysis of the artworks themselves—masquerade, postcolonial mimicry, queer utopias and ecologies, female masculinity, science fiction, the anthroprocene age and cosmopolitanism. Throughout the study, these layers interact with each other in dynamic ways to provide direction and possible answers for the questions being asked in this study.

Gerring defines a case study as an intensive study of a single unit, a spatially bounded phenomenon, for example, a nation-state, revolution, political party or person, that when observed at a single point in time or over a limited period of time, can offer the possibility to generalize across a larger set of units.[70] Though an intensive case study can be an effective methodology to understand and to investigate complex issues, it is limited in its reliability to offer an external validity as a generalization. How can one case study offer anything beyond the particular? Seawright and Gerring note that the solution to this limitation can be by the strategic selection of cases that offer a broader view of the phenomena being studied.[71] And my strategic selection of these three mid-level career artists for this study has focused both at the macro-level, seeking an understanding of the relationship of the nation with its diaspora with its inherent tensions and at the micro-level, through a study of contemporaneous discourses that cohere in the artists' practices through diverse mediums. The case study method has allowed me firstly to concentrate my analysis on the three artists and to conduct an in-depth analysis of their specific works, as well as to trace clear-cut connections between cause and effect from within the larger contexts of the art world. The rationale behind selecting this approach has partially resulted from my own experience of the professional artworld at a broad level and has been driven by a desire to understand the ideations driving artistic creativity at the micro level. The source of the primary data collection has been through direct interviews with the three artists themselves. The set of questions for the interviews emerged after studying their works and before meeting with the artists. This approach not only provided this study with first-hand information but also contextualized their art practices within their specific contemporary settings, both in the global and local contexts, their intense global connectivity also offered a glimpse into the ubiquitous presence of the artworld that functions across mainstream and peripheral locations. For example, the first time I witnessed Chopra's live performance

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70   John Gerring, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* Vol. 98, No. 2, 2004, 341.

71   Ben Willis, *The Advantages and Limitations of Single Case Study Analysis,* 2014. Accessed on April 1, 2017. https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantages-and-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/.

was when he performed as *La Perle Noire: La Marais* in Paris in 2013. The genre came alive for me in Chopra's studied involvement with his tasks, the curiosity and engagement of the gallery visitors streaming in and out of the performance space, as well as the post-performance exhilaration felt by the artist after he exited the performance space and mingled within a haloed and exclusive art circle of gallerists, sponsors and collectors. All of these highlighted the exclusively elite business that contemporary art can be, even within a non-commodified art form such as live performance. Shah's first solo gallery showing of *Between the Waves* occurred in 2013 in Munich after the work had premiered at Documenta a couple of months ago. This was a special preview showing where the artist guided some of us through the exhibited panels and videos on display. All of these interactions and the semi-structured conversations with Shah and Chopra at Goa that followed spontaneous trajectories were extremely useful to understand the artists' impulses and ideations guiding and sustaining their practices.

In fact, viewing Chopra's performance site at Sonaparanta Gallery in Goa with Shah in 2013, where Shah's own video work *Some Kind of Nature*, was on display, marked a transformational moment. *Rouge* marked Chopra's first performance on his return from a one-year residency in Berlin and it marked not only the transition of the artist's drawing tool from charcoal to lipstick, but also a move away from post-colonial histories, whereas *Some Kind of Nature* predicated Shah's shift away from the queer body towards queer ecology. These two transformative moments in their art practices were on display in the same space and time, and I could witness them for myself. I met Chitra Ganesh while the artist was visiting Delhi in 2013 for her show at Gallery Espace (*A Zebra among Horses*, September–October 2013), and once again when she and Dhruvi Acharya jointly worked on a series of panels at the India Art Fair in Delhi in 2015. Viewing the synergies in their collaborative work proffered insights into the open-ended field that contemporary art is, where even at a commercially driven public event like an art fair, it is possible to witness creative performative acts away from the studio space and in the here and now.

In terms of collecting data for my research, this monographic case study has followed a multi-pronged approach—the interview data from the artists, gallerists, curators has been supported by a vast amount of secondary information from multiple sources and the documentary analysis has involved a close and critical reading of the contexts and concerns displayed in their artworks. Among the materials available to this study, moving forward from the foundational texts that provided the scaffolding for creating the research framework, the scholarly analytical essays in exhibition catalogues or interviews with the artists themselves have been useful. These are artists who are regularly exhibiting and being written about constantly, in newspapers, magazines, journals and academic publications. A lot of this material is available online and also on their own websites,

and the internet has proved an invaluable resource since all three artists have a strong web presence. The artist statements on their own websites offered a quick and easy entry point into their ideation and inspirations. New media technologies through information retrieval systems and user-friendly interfaces have been extremely useful and instrumental in extending the reach of their art practices and it is sometimes possible to read a review or interview about an artist's exhibition almost the same day as it takes place. Moreover, social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram provided up-to-date information on their shows and projects instantaneously.

While this kind of connectivity is a very useful information gathering resource, the artist of today is an intensely aware and connected individual who is also a highly articulate and successful communicator aware of his / her / their publics and profile and this has served to constantly temper my analysis of the research materials and critical interpretation of their artworks. The chapterisation in this study follows a fairly simple structure since the focus of this study are the two different sets of works by the three artists that I analyze to demonstrate the transformational shift. In the first chapter I begin by providing the historical context through a brief overview of the background of modern art practice in post-independent India, marking this pre-contemporary moment and simultaneously highlight characteristic features of the contemporary—new medias and the forums for their creation and display. The second and third chapters entail a formal analysis of the two sets of works by the three artists along with the discursive contexts connecting with their production. Although the sets of works are sequenced chronologically, I must reiterate that this is not a linear interpretation, while the works in question were being created, the three artists continued to work with other thematics that are not part of this study.

Chapters

The first chapter provides us with a brief overview of modern art practice in the decades preceding the contemporary moment within which the three artists in this study, Chitra Ganesh, Tejal Shah and Nikhil Chopra began their practices. It briefly traces the presence of the 'national modern' and indigenism in post-independent India and signposts the *Place for People* exhibition—which took place at Baroda in 1981—as marking the pre-contemporary moment when art practice became increasingly located through the politics of place particularly within the practice of Bhupen Khakhar, India's first visibly queer artist. The nation's first steps towards neo-liberalization in the 1990s happened almost simultaneous to the rise of right-wing fundamentalist violence and tensions through communal riots in Mumbai and Gujarat. During this period, the new

mediums such as video and installation became the via media for articulating artists' voices against these disturbing developments. Early pioneering works by Vivan Sundaram, Rumanna Hussain, Nalini Malani and by Navjot Altaf in video, installation and performance marked these parallel moments of protest and the introduction of new technologies.

In the same decade the founding of Khoj in 1997 as an experimental art space opened up a space for frequent global transcultural dialogues with its international workshops and residencies. Both Shah and Chopra initially established their practices at different Khoj residencies in India after completing their art studies in the West. Shah and Chopra's participation in India-survey shows such as *Indian Highway* and *Paris-Delhi-Bombay,* as well as their participation in the exhibition circuit through other shows played an important role in establishing their presence internationally, while the career of the third artist in this study, Chitra Ganesh, followed a broader trajectory in establishing her presence within the contemporary art scene in the diaspora. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Hoskote's curation of the India pavilion at the *54th Venice Biennale.*

The next chapter begins with a short overview of the performative and gendered body and analyses the following works: Ganesh *Tales of Amnesia* (2003–2007), Shah *Chingari Chumma* (2000); *What are you?* (2006); *Women like us/I AM* (2009), and Chopra *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007–2011). The analysis employs Butler's poststructural approach towards the constructedness of gender for all the works, and Riviere's concept of womanliness as masquerade to deconstruct Ganesh's masquerade of the 'Indian' body. This body, with all its forms of experience—sensory, corporeal, and discursive—entangles with a specific sense of belonging, (especially so in the cases of Shah and Chopra) even as national discourses around gender, sexuality and colonial histories all come to play in their works. Contemporary mediums facilitate their articulation and it is through the 'live-ness,' of new mediums such as video and performance—and supported by the availability of a plethora of visual imagery deriving from camp, kitsch and the postcolonial condition—that Ganesh, Shah and Chopra create their versions of the queer performative body. Even as they almost succeed in resisting their 'Indian-ness,' the nation continues to feature as the central point of reference and critique, though the body is increasingly becoming a construct strange to the nation.

With the next and final chapter, the queer and performative body becomes the signifier for concepts associated with conditions of de-territorialisation and reterritorialisation. This chapter argues that even as the artists increasingly function within global spaces through their travel and residencies (Chopra in Berlin 2011–2012, Shah at Skømvaer 2016), their works also reflect these mobilities and the postnational context is reinforced in the next set of works as the performative body opens itself out to concerns shared across the globe. Ganesh's set of digital

collages in *She the Question* (2012), not only entangle with planetary vistas and employ tropes from science fiction but also gesture towards queer sexualities, Shah's cyborgian unicorns in *tranimal* drag draw attention towards the age of the anthroprocene as *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013) move towards an interspecies subjectivity and queer ecologies while Chopra's performances as *La Perle Noire* (2013–), reference racial histories of color and passing. Their use of medias and social networking sites like Facebook, spaces which these artists inhabit virtually, increasingly open up public dialogues in the virtual social sphere, dialogues that may be purely artistic (Chopra) or aggressively activist (Ganesh). Forging global connectivities through social networks and global discourses around queerness, ecology and hospitality, the artists' body increasingly functions in a postnational context. Seeking points of convergence and accommodation with others in this global world, it is a cosmopolitan outlook that registers and reflects on the multiplicity of issues, questions, processes and problems which affect and bind people together[72] that offers a useful direction.

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72   David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge / MA: Polity, 2007), 42.

1 Marking the Shift—
The Contemporary Moment

This chapter begins with a brief historical overview of modern art practice of the preceding decades within which the three artists in this study, Chitra Ganesh, Tejal Shah and Nikhil Chopra began their practices through a concerted focus on the following—new mediums, artist spaces and exhibitions that brought international visibility to Indian artists. After a short discussion of the period of the national modern (Kapur 2000) it moves onto the decade of the 1990s when neo-liberalization of the Indian economy brought in relatively newer contemporary mediums such as installation, video and performance art appeared in Indian art practice, discussing the pioneering works created in the new mediums, highlighting the disturbed politics of the nation. It then moves onto the spaces where some of the works in the new mediums were being created and signposts the founding of Khoj International Artists' Association in 1997, Khoj not only offered an experimental art space where global transcultural dialogues at its workshops and residencies facilitated innovative and collaborative experiments for artists, but also provided both Shah and Chopra with opportunities to introduce their practice in India through a Khoj residency after completing their art studies in the West. The contemporary exhibition space displaying contemporary works from India becomes the next point of focus of this chapter, especially the importance of curation and its ensuing dynamics via a discussion of two group shows of Indian artists, the *Indian Highway* (2007–2011) and *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (2010). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the India pavilion at the *54th Venice Biennial,* (2011), curated by Ranjit Hoskote, highlighting Hoskote's curatorial choices as an example of the first postnational critique of contemporary art from India.

1.1 The Post-independence Decades

The post-independence decades of art practice in India were marked by a need to 'catch up' with the modernism of the West as well as to simultaneously develop

a nationally conscious identity, these two concomitant moves underlay the creation of the category of the 'National Modern,' a term coined by Indian art historian and critic Geeta Kapur, this double discourse of the national and the modern couples nationalism with the category of tradition and modernism with internationalism. The national modern, therefore, did not simply create an Indian modern as a category but also functioned as a postcolonial critique to the West. Kapur further argued that the categories of modernism should not be viewed as a form of determinism to be followed to a logical end, rather as "trajectories crisscrossing the western mainstream."[73] In India, modern art had already made its presence felt in the 1930s in the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil, followed by the works of several artist groups in the 1940s and 1950s.[74] Some members of these groups had been educated at the Schools of Art established by the British at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, modeled on the Royal Academy School in London, these schools strictly focused on teaching academic naturalism and western classical art. The art schools were but one of the western institutions introduced by the Raj among art societies, art salons / exhibitions, art journalism and public patronage—all of which played a role in overturning pre-colonial systems of private patronage. The artist as genius now gave a new status to Indian artists, and modernism played an important role in the anti-colonial period by attacking the foundations of naturalism which was very much part of both the dominant culture as well as colonialism. Mitter claims that "the ambivalent relationship between modernity, modernism and the primitive allowed Indian artists to put forward anti-colonial strategies and thus fashion their national identity, which they would not have been able to do with academic naturalism."[75] The nation was naturally at the center of this resistant strategy and yet for some of these groups, subsequent engagements and experiments with western forms of modernism were driven as much by a resistance to their education as by a desire to catch up with movements in the west and the universal western modernist canon. In her publication on the Progressives, Dalmia states that it was the Progressive Artists' Group consisting of F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza,

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73 For an extended discussion around the usage of the term, please see *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 288. Kapur's categorization of parallel modernities, has, since then, been supported by similar analyses from other peripheral locations in the Global South.

74 These included the Progressive Artists' Group (1947), Young Turks (1941), Calcutta Progressives (1943), and the Delhi Silpi Chakra (1949).

75 Partha Mitter, "Reflections on Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: An Interview," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005), 24–48.

K. H. Ara, M. F. Husain, H. A. Gade and Sadanand Bakre that was most "correctly" modernist. Their exemplars originated from Paris, Munich, New York and London. This impulse could be discerned in Souza's use of the line clearly inspired by Picasso, Raza's use of color in his Kokoschka inspired landscapes and Ara's pre-occupation with the language of paint, reminiscent of Cezanne.[76] For modern Indian artists, including the members of the Progressive Artists' Group, these were the decades when they tried to come to terms with a century of development in European art, from Realism to Cubism, especially drawing from Expressionism. However, it was not only international modernism that was driving art practice in India at this time, some artists were also simultaneously drawing from indigenous sources. It was perhaps Husain more than any other member of the Progressive Artists' Group that exhibited the indigenous rawness and elemental life of the village with works like *Zamin* (1955), and *Spider and the Lamp* (1956). His desire to go back to his roots and a strong commitment to the nation was demonstrated in works such as *Zamin*. The panoramic painting includes a pack mule, a woman with a sieve, a man with a pair of bulls, featuring myriad aspects of India's rural life, the frieze included a laborer, a peasant, and the artisan—all essential symbols to the new secular nation in its building process.[77] *Zamin* was painted by Husain in 1955 for the Lalit Kala Exhibition in the same year and sparked a major debate against its 'modern-ness' and modern art in general.[78] The Progressive Artists' Group reduced in numbers when some of the original members, Souza, Raza and Bakre left for England and Paris, and the group itself disbanded in 1954. Indigenity concertedly entered the frame in the following decade when the shared artistic and intellectual vision of Mexican Ambassador Octavio Paz and artist J. Swaminathan led towards the formation of Group 1890 in Bhavnagar, Gujarat in 1962. The collective of a dozen artists—including Jeram Patel, Raghav Kaneria, M. Reddeppa Naidu, Rajesh Mishra, Ghulam M. Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt, Himmat Shah, S.G. Nikam, Eric Hubert Bowen, Balkrishna Patel and Ambadas—were led by Swaminathan. They proclaimed a strong desire to break away from the western academic realism being taught at the Schools of Art established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, as well as the "the vulgar naturalism of Raja Ravi Varma and the pastoral idealism of the Bengal School." The Group emphasized the importance of artistic practice born out of choice,

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76   For a detailed study of the group please see Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Art: The Progressives*, 2001.

77   Dalmia, *Making of Modern Indian Art: Husain, A Metaphor for Modernity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106.

78   Dalmia, *Journeys* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

rather than the accretions of a cliché that claimed the "Indianness" of identity, which had been a resistant strategy with the works from the Bengal School for example.[79] In his essay for the group exhibition catalogue in 1963, Octavio Paz commented that these young men had grasped the modern language and that the true subject of the exhibition was the confrontation of the vision of the painters with the inherited image,[80]—apparent in their critique of the traditions stemming from the Bengal School and Raja Ravi Varma's work. The formation of Group 1890 and its activities became an important intervention on the creative aspect of artistic choices born out of the artistic impulse rather than being driven by existing styles and canonical schools of thought in the west.

1.1.1 Locatedness and the Baroda School

While artists in India were referencing and creating parallel modernisms and seeking their own language in these decades, modernism had already been challenged in Europe and the US with the advent of Pop art and postmodernism. Through most of the twentieth century, Modernism in the west had been defined by tensions underlying both its acceptance and rejection of modern life, the coming together of aspects from high and popular culture, of traditional practices with the newly emerging mechanical means of production and the division of a formal modernism and a historical/critical/political avant-garde. It was during the middle of the twentieth century that these developments peaked and generated a productive synthesis that could be termed as the official beginning of contemporary art,[81] marking a conceptual shift in art-making. In India, a nation just emerging from colonial rule, governed by its own set of circumstances, there were no such clear-cut ruptures or concerted moves, rather the narrative and figurative modes continued to be employed by artists across genres even as characteristic features from pop art and the postmodern entered contemporary art practice.

In mid-twentieth century it was the establishment of a new art school at Baroda in 1949 challenging the curriculum of western art history being taught in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta that created a secular space in art practice for the first time. Contemporaneity entered the frame as wide-ranging national and

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79 Ranjit Hoskote, "Anxiety of Influence," *Art India* Vol. 3, Issue I, Quarter 1, (1998), 33. Hoskote comments on Swaminathan's work bearing the unmistakable franchise of Rothko and Newman.

80 Octavio Paz, *Group 1890*, New Delhi October 12, 1963. Exhibition Catalogue.

81 Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

international issues from modern to contemporary art were addressed through the writings of artist-teachers, K. G. Subramanyan, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh and Ratan Parimoo, as also through the lively discourse around developing art practices, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when artists from Baroda, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh and Vivan Sundaram travelled to the UK and interacted with artists involved with the British pop art movement, Peter de Francia and R. B. Kitaj. The locatedness of the artist increasingly came up as a question, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh returning from the Royal College of Art, London, and prompted by his own experiences, also questioned his choice of autobiography as genre as he said, "And then the question was—what image shall I paint? I like painting people but those I liked painting were people I knew: my family and friends [...] so I decided to paint my mother, the house I lived in, and the prophet too, why not?"[82] Later, painting *Returning Home After a Long Absence* (1969–73), Sheikh included motifs from Mughal painting, an image of the prophet Mohammed on *Buraq*, angelic figures and angular rows of houses referencing 14th century Sienese painting, as well as a black and white photograph of his mother. *Returning Home* represents differing structuring elements: the pictorial space divided by a wall separates the group of houses from a factory in the distance, the wall becomes an important marker as that of containing the artist's childhood world, floating above the blue mosque are some angels painted in the style of Persian painting, these are headed by a faceless Prophet on Buraq. At the bottom of the painting is Sheikh's mother's portrait. This painting serves as an inaugural image to his visual autobiography, an art historical narrative stemming from his own filial ties to the Persian and Islamic tradition of which he was a part.[83] Sheikh's works in the 1970s and 1980s experimented with modes of representation adapted from pre-Renaissance European, Mughal and Persian painting. They included "quotations," to use his term, from reproductions of works from those periods, copied in oil paint in his own hand. Sheikh's work, appropriating signs, re-historicizing narrative histories, can be cited as one of the examples of adopting a transcultural approach in modern Indian art practice.

In Bombay as Gieve Patel, Nalini Malani and Sudhir Patwardhan began to place the figure within a felt experience of their own environment, the narrating of locatedness acquired political overtones stemming from class (Patel and Patwardhan) and gender (Malani). Politically the period of the 1960s and 1970s

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82 Yashodhara Dalmia, *Indian Contemporary Art Post-independence: Essays by Yashodhara Dalmia, Ella Datta, Chaitanya Sambrani, Martha Jakimovicz-Karle, Santo Datta*, ed. Yashodhara Dalmia (New Delhi: Vadehra Art Gallery, 1997), 19.

83 Karen Zitzewitz, *The Art of Secularism: The Cultural Politics of Modernist Art in Contemporary India* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2014), 105–106.

was marked by border wars, the exercise of draconian state power through the imposition of the Emergency, the growing influx of refugees in the East of the country after the India-Pakistan war in 1971 and also by mill workers striking work in Bombay. And these artists responded to the changing scenario both as citizens of a democratic state and as private subjects.

Back in Baroda, the growing need to engage with immediate and necessary realities of society was signposted with the holding of the landmark exhibition, *Place for People* in 1981. The exhibition included artists Vivan Sundaram, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Jogen Chowdhury, Nalini Malani and Bhupen Khakhar and curator and critic Geeta Kapur as its core sixth member. Kapur's essay in the exhibition catalogue emphasized the artist's right and responsibility to address context specific human presence and engage with the current realities of society, she stated in the exhibition catalogue that figurative art could be a useful way to provide content to an empty notion of post-modernism.[84] An ideologically pitched exhibition, *Place for People* emphasized the *politics of place* with an insistence on figuration as against the formalist abstraction and neo-expressionism prevailing in the international art scene of the time. Works such as Khakhar's *Guru Jayanti* (1970s), Sundaram's *Guddo* (1980), Sheikh's *Waiting and Wandering* (1981), Malani's *His Life* (1979) series, and Sudhir Patwardhan's depictions of Bombay addressed the 'particular' of places and situations through a many layered 'reality,' in which were included the history of the world as a new lexicon of language, including the Italian Renaissance, western modernism and centuries old popular urban art from India. Rather than following a teleology of the modern, *Place For People's* significance lay in this break with Modernism, where instead of employing an exclusivist ideology linked with a particular and only valid form of history from where the 'national modern' could be frozen into its 'true' character in a homogenizing form—instead, for the first time the 'narrative' aspect of the telling was emphasized and particularized.[85] The narrative telling drew from the city as the new urban reality and fulcrum of modernity and it featured significantly in artworks in these decades across the country from multiple urban locations including Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi.

In Calcutta, artists Rabin Mondal, Jogen Chowdhury and Bikash Bhattacharya elaborated the social conditions of a city bursting at its seams, Ganesh Pyne, Paritosh Sen, Dharmanarayan Dasgupta and Ganesh Haloi used humor and satire to portray both the vulnerable and thick-skinned characters inhabiting urban

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84 Geeta Kapur, *Place for People*, 1981. Exhibition Catalogue.

85 Asish Rajadhyaksha, "The Last Decade," in *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, eds. Ghulammohd Sheikh and Belinder Dhanoa (Delhi: Tulika, 1997), 214.

spaces, while in Delhi Krishen Khanna and A. Ramachandran executed monumental murals focusing on the marginal plight of the migrant labor. For women artists the city offered a site of resistance, where they could claim autonomy.[86] The marking of the 'urban' location of the artist as subject and citizen became particularly significant with a sustained and concerted focus on local spaces and the forms of public inhabitation, especially the bazaar, where pictures of gods and goddesses, national leaders, film stars, shop signs, cinema theatres, restaurants, the streets with their shops filled with plastic wares, and cheap textiles, all comprised the growing urban narrative. In the light of a western pop sensibility that had arrived via the works of Hockney and Kitaj from Britain, the pictorial bazar aesthetic proved a rich resource. The registering of people's presence in the medium of oil painting itself became a political statement and provided visibility to the socially marginalized—the common *paan* shop owner, the wayside cobbler. This bringing of people back into the pictures[87] connected with India's rich visual tradition from the past, and with the Indian bazaar aesthetic, creating a dynamic and located contemporary narrative and Khakhar's pictoriality often drew from ordinary everyday life of the people who lived at the margins of representation, barbers, watch repairers, tailors.

Why was this bringing of people into the pictures such an important marker for contemporaneity? Possibly the viewing of a space *vis-à-vis* another, through the prism of differing narrative histories and geographies gestured towards an inter-connectedness that was beginning to define the globalizing world, a bringing together of different times and experiences of time within the same present—an instantaneous yet disjunctive 'living' unity of the historical present as termed by Peter Osborne (2009). This shift towards contemporaneity and located-ness in the everyday would best be exemplified in the work of Bhupen Khakhar, India's first queer artist who had the courage to "come out" in the 1980s and create artworks foregrounding the queer body. As Kapur states,[88] it was Khakhar who set the agenda to think differently, audaciously, about what it meant to belong to a place.

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86   Roobina Karode and Shukla Sawant, "City Lights: City Limits – Multiple Metaphors in Everyday Urbanism," in *Art and Visual Culture in India 1857–2007,* ed. Gayatri Sinha (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009), 192–197.

87   Parul Dave-Mukherji, "Horn Please," in *Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 29 -30. The Baroda School would later be critiqued by the Kerala Radicals for raising the level of aesthetics to political representation, there could be no place for people if nationalism as a discourse was not critiqued for its exclusionary practices and issues of class and caste inequality unaddressed. This critique would continue to dog artistic debates in the decades to come.

88   "Geeta Kapur: On the Curatorial in India Part II," in *Afterall*, October 3, 2011.

1.1.2 Bhupen Khakhar and the Queer Body

In the early 1960s, Khakhar began experimenting with collages, creating a series of works incorporating popular iconography employing materials that he continually collected and reconfigured in his works, following a cut and paste approach, there were "mirrors patterned with little divinities, cut from the lurid oleograph prints sold in the temple-bazaars," these were embellished with graffiti and some brushwork.[89] Kapur terms Khakhar a vanguard figure who employed neo-dada tactics to question the modernist aesthetic, adopting ethnographic modes of a nativist painter, he opened up local geographies with "allegorical narratives drawn from within the common culture."[90] In the 1970s, Khakhar 'performed' his photographs, his exhibition catalogue titled *Truth is Beauty and Beauty is God*, that was created for a solo show at Gallery Chemould in 1972 adopts self-parody to confront class and sexuality. With its tacky plastic cover, it included campy photographs of the artist as "a worldly man, spoofing commercial advertising," these photographs included him wearing sun-glasses, holding a cigarette, posing with tooth paste, with a toy gun.[91] And by the 1980s it was Khakhar who fashioned an "Indian" gay body, coming out through works like *You Can't Please All*, (1981) that showed as part of the *Place for People* exhibition in 1981. In this work, Khakhar employs the ancient fable of the man and the donkey in a form of an ongoing narrative against which a busy urban scene in a contemporary Indian town unfolds. It comprises myriad simultaneous actions set against varying tonal colored backgrounds—of a man repairing a car, another seated alone behind a grilled window, another man reaching out to pick mangoes from a tree. The lone watcher of these multiple scenes is the artist himself, the naked white-haired man dominates the right half of the frame as he stands on a balcony looking out, his back to the viewer and in a narrow cranny behind him rests a single mattress and pillow. Kapur describes the painting as "a replete illustration of a provincial civic life [...] the aesthetic referred to here is that of the Italian primitives and other early Renaissance painters, as well as the manuscript illuminations in albums and folios from the Mughal and Rajput schools." With the artist-surveyor at its head the town is presented in detailed fragments

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89   Timothy Hyman, "The Baroda Convergence (1964–72)," in *Bhupen Khakhar* (Mumbai: Gallery Chemould, 1998), 14.

90   Geeta Kapur, "The Uncommon Universe of Bhupen Khakhar," in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007), 111–135.

91   Nada Raza, "A Man Labelled Bhupen Khakhar Branded as Painter," in *Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All* (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 13.

and both men and beast in translucent grey float in a grey-blue space lifting the scene to the level of a dream,[92] the message in the title of the work connects with the fable itself and with the artist's personal life.

Hyman, marking Khakhar's coming out in the 1980s as the most courageous act of his life, attributes his art in this period a confessional tone through which the self as juxtaposed to the world as it "interrogates *and is interrogated by* the world."[93] With *Yayati* (1984) he draws on a myth from Mahabharata in which the son gives up his own vitality for the sake of his father, with *In a Boat* (1984), same-sex fantasies filled with explicit eroticism take center stage. Khakhar's lovers were often older ordinary men who he cared for with great devotion, in *My Dear Friend* (1983), and *How Many Hands do I Need to Declare My Love to You* (1994), Khakhar acted as both lover and beloved giving and receiving pleasure. In this decade, the staging of sexuality in Khakhar's paintings in religious settings such as mosques, temples and dargahs indicates a located-ness in his deliberate selection of sites where congregations served as pick-up spots for furtive couplings, as for example in *The Celebration of Guru Jayanti* (1980), *Jatra* (1997), and *Yagna/Marriage* (2000).

Writing to Timothy Hyman that these works were part of his effort to come out in the open, Khakhar mentioned that he had reached this juncture after spending a lot of time in England in the company of gay British artists such as David Hockney and Howard Hodgkin as well as R. B. Kitaj. Seeing homosexuality flourish in a normal community context in England gave him 'spirit and validation' which was further catalyzed by the death of his mother.[94] It is perhaps Khakhar's work that can be cited as the best example of the interweaving of the dynamics of the transcultural processes in these earlier decades as he engaged with Indian popular culture to create works inspired by styles in the West and participated actively in a transcultural dialogue with British Art.[95] Khakhar stated way back in 1978, "Human beings in their local environment, climate, provincial society; this should be the ultimate goal of the artist,"[96] Khakhar's words can be juxtaposed within the local/global debate to ask, "who can speak for a place or even speak the place? Is it the 'local' artist and/or community or is it conversely, the

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92 Kapur, Mercer, 120–122.

93 Hyman, 68.

94 Jyoti Dhar, "Love in the time of Bhupen," in *ArtAsiaPacific* May/June 2016, 104. Accessed on May 2, 2018. https://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/love-in-the-time-of-bhupen/.

95 For further examples of the ongoing transcultural dialogue please see Hyman, 1998.

96 Hyman, 78.

specialist cultural producer, dealing in intervention and / or site-specific strategies?"[97] Although Sheikh's question addresses the sense of place via the biennial and mega-exhibition spaces as interconnected relational spaces, I would apply it to Khakhar's work as it engages with this idea conversely as he **speaks** the place with his site specific strategies that gesture towards a belonging and yet, because of his queer positioning, is more of an outsider looking in as it were, the relationality of this belonging has as much to do with his own sexual orientation as with the everyday figures he chooses to represent.

With *Picture Taken on their 30th Wedding Anniversary* created in 1998, the staging of the male nude bodies in a homosexual marriage as if sitting for a wedding portrait follows the pictorial conventions relating to Krishna and his consort Radha in his choice of color palette. The impersonation through cross-dressing implying a fusion between male body and female soul mimics the traditions of open transvestitism in gay communities This work uses the popular convention of photography, a ritual celebration of eroticized worship and a folk-urban mode of painting to reiterate the presence of androgyny as part of Indian narrative.[98] Khakhar's work, therefore, not only foregrounded the queer body but also introduced androgyny in modern Indian art practice. And these artistic representations would not have been easy choices. His friend and mentor, Sheikh writing about Khakhar's double life says, "All day he played 'straight,' like everyone else around him, but he nurtured a secret world within. In the early 60s it was difficult to declare one's homosexuality—it would mean making an enemy of everyone—so he had no choice but to lead a double life."[99]

Kapur writes that "homosexuality in India is part of the ubiquitous system of lies and deprivation, part of religious performance, part of married life, part of popular culture […] the state of *abjection* is a marker of difference, but it is also a condition of being. It is the place where identity is recognized, but where categorical claims for that identity collapse. In a way, the space of difference is the space of collapse, of an encounter with the non-being. In that space between the pathetic and the spectacular—the well-known liminal space of the social outsider—also lies the space for *debonding* with the social order, for untethering the self, and thereby gaining a bid for transcendence."[100]

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97   Simon Sheikh, "Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility," *The Biennial Reader*, 160.

98   Kapur, Mercer, 126.

99   Sheikh, *Buddy.* Accessed on April 10, 2017. https://bhupenkhakharcollection.com/gulammohammed-sheikh-essay/.

100   Kapur, Mercer, 131–132.

Khakhar's works in the decade of the 1980s present that debonding as he occupies the space of the social outsider—looking in as it were, a feature clearly visible in his works.

In the later years of 1980s and 1990s [Khakhar] was the restlessly transgressive provocateur revelling in taboo subjects such as the pleasure of homoerotic life and opening up a path of self-articulation for gay artists in India.[101] Homoeroticism is a lived reality of contemporary life, but it is kept at a distance and not allowed to jeopardize the heterosexual, patriarchal social system. Discussing Khakhar's queer sexuality, Panniker states that though Khakhar denied himself the role of the political activist, his artistic legacy is appreciated for its artistic merit. However, he argues that Khakhar's self-disclosure was restricted to the exclusive space of art galleries, museums as against spaces of political struggle for gay people. Even as he explored themes of religion and sexuality centrally, he did so from his upper caste location.[102] The classed Indian queer male body would also surface in Indian born Canadian artist photographer Sunil Gupta's photographs as he began staging his photographs in various locations. (*Exiles 1980s Delhi, India Gate 1987, Jama Masjid 1987, Manpreet 2011* among others).

1.2 The 1990s—Articulating Politics

In the early 1990s, India's economic liberalization altered print and televisual medias at an accelerated pace. The engagement with mediums was already in a state of flux when the 1990s arrived, a decade when the global art world witnessed an exponential growth. Art markets grew, and as modes of circulation changed, so did professional and political attitudes towards art in tandem with the circulation of art in Biennials and art fairs, as artists strayed from the studio and integrated their mobility into their work, there were other changes as curators shed the historical baggage of the museum's archive. Art institutions started to reflect upon themselves as a critical space.[103] These impactful changes would only gradually be felt by India as its economy began to open up. The decade was foregrounded not only by the nation and its politics through the

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101 Ranjit Hoskote, "Visit to Sri Lanka," in *Bhupen Khakhar You Can't Please All*, 2016, 118–119.

102 Shivaji Pannikar, "Kinky Issues': Gay Identity and High Art," in *Articulating Resistance: Art and Activism,* eds. Shivaji Pannikkar and Deeptha Achar (New Delhi: Tulika, 2012), 257–278. Pannikar discusses the works of Jehangir Jani as another example.

103 Lars Bang Larsen, "The Long Nineties," *Frieze* Jan 1, 2012. Accessed on April 14, 2018. http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the-long-nineties/.

rise of Hindutva and communal tension, but also marked the problematizing of identity and gender through the anti-Mandal agitation and the violent reaction to the legal system and the judgement on the Shah Bano case. These were important developments and some of them would be reflected in the early art works that would be created in the new mediums as they became available. One of the significant markers of the 1980s was the problematizing and conflating of gender with religion and the 1980s marked the emergence of religion as a major factor in Indian politics. In April 1985, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Shah Bano, upholding the High Court's decision to award Shah Bano a monthly maintenance from her husband after his divorce or triple *talaq*. This landmark judgment was, however, quickly nullified by the passing of the Protection of Muslim Women's Right to Divorce Act in 1986 that nullified their right to claim maintenance after divorce by claiming that divorced Muslim women were only entitled to *mehr* and maintenance during their *iddat* period. This act was a real setback to the status of Muslim women in India and was followed by many protests across the country.

The controversy underlined the role played by the state itself in perpetuating patriarchal relationships and the community. By its decision, the Congress Party "legitimized communal identities in terms both of state policies and of strategies for political mobilization," and this was very much in keeping with the Congress's policy of minority appeasement.[104] The demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in the same year was followed by communal riots in Mumbai in 1993–94 and almost a thousand deaths, the majority of who were Muslims. The presence of divisive politics based on religion not only questioned the secularism of national identity that was enshrined in the Indian constitution but also led to more violence ten years later in Gujarat, in 2002, when riots and massacres left thousands dead and homeless.[105] The prioritizing of the nation's identity along religious lines aimed to vest national identity and power within one community. The *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement that gained pace in the 1980s was the brainchild of various seers supported by Hindutva forces such as the RSS *(Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)*, VHP *(Vishva Hindu Parishad)*, Bajrang Dal and BJP *(Bhartiya Janta Party)*. The movement enlarged the political base of the BJP and enacted a unifying role, forging a Hindutva identity across a vastly polarised Hindu society segregated along caste, class and gender with its patriarchal bias.

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104   Zoya Hasan, "Gender Politics, Legal Reform, and the Muslim Community in India," in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia* eds. Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (New York: Routledge, 1998), 71–72.

105   Please see Siddharth Vardarajan, *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), for further detail.

Bacchetta, discussing the queer formations of Hindu nationalism via her reading of the internal publications of the RSS and the BJP, states that the RSS employs masculinist terms to describe its citizen body as—"the men born in the land of Bharat," and as "sons of the soil"—in the words of M.S. Gowalkar the major RSS ideologue and second *sarsangchalak* or RSS supreme leader between 1940 and 1973. In its conception the ideal Hindu nationalist man is central to the Hindu People and is described as a virile, chivalrous Kshatriya warrior.[106] A successful outreach for Hindutva was aided by new media through a mass circulation of provocative audio tapes by Sadhvi Ritambhara and Uma Bharti that instigated incendiary sentiments. Interestingly Rithambhara's cassettes addressed men exclusively in the invocation to rise and fight: *Vir Bhaiyo jago* (Brave brothers, awake).[107] BJP leader Advani coopted Ram as the centrepiece of his campaign parallel to the broadcast of televised series of the epic Ramayana and right-wing fundamentalism configured multiple ideas around Ram to be presented as a symbol of one-ness. This cooption could also be evidenced in the careful handling of the *Ram Lalla* (the infant God Rama) legend and images.[108] The central strategy of the Hindu Right is to focus on religion and culture as the primary attributes of the nation and national identity, deploying the discourse of secularism, free speech and equality while at the same time pursuing an anti-secular agenda through the establishment of a Hindu state and pursuing the vision of casting the Muslim Other as intolerant and suspect in terms of his loyalty to the nation. Ratna Kapur also specifies how the womens' wing promotes a seemingly moderate position towards womens' rights, vocally opposing rape, dowry, sexual harassment while at the same time inscribing these roles within more traditional, culturally bound patriarchal family as wives and mothers who have to be honored and protected.[109] A detailed discussion of this highly charged politicised atmosphere is beyond the scope of this study, but suffice it to say that this was the complex and conflicted reality of the practice of politics in the Indian nation in the last decades as it opened up to new technologies of image production in arts practice and this was reflected in the artworks as well.

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106   Paola Bacchheta, "Queer Formations in (Hindu) Nationalism," in *Sexuality Studies,* ed. Sanjay Srivastava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–128.

107   Tanika Sarkar, "Heroic Woman, Mother Goddesses," in *Handbook of Gender*, 348.

108   Ibid, 347.

109   Ratna Kapur, *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism* (London: The Glass House Press, 2005), 44, 46 & 125.

1.2.1 1990s—Articulating the Nation's Politics Through New Mediums

The 1980s art movements in Europe and United States were dominated by neo-conceptualism and neo-expressionism—women artists such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger were critiquing stereotypes and consumer culture through the medium of photography, the neo-expressionist paintings of Georg Baselitz, and Anselm Kiefer in Germany and Julian Schnabel in US, while referencing the war-torn violence from the previous decades were working with materials and mediums creating distorted figural forms. In India on the other hand artist experiments with other mediums in the preceding decades could be termed as individual and sporadic. Nancy Adajania's essay on the overtures in new media art begins with the 1960s, with Padamsee's experimental film *Syzygy,* terming it as a gemstone without a setting, she goes onto detail how artists like Khanna, Padamsee, Husain and Mehta working in film and photographs projects in the 1960s and 1970s remained unacknowledged because of a lack of patronage and support.[110] Sundaram had experimented with pop art as early as 1965 in works such as *Elephanta* before he left for London. In the 1970s, in his series, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoise*, Sundaram used the medium of oil painting and yet, in creating an apparent visibility of sorts through painting the shattered, frosted windowpane, he referenced the existing political situation in India and the menace of authoritarian rule. Discussing overtures in new media in these early decades, Nancy Adajania states that no single official narrative or universal model can explain the variety of Indian experiments in new media art and that these practices could not be framed within textbook Western norms,[111] because of their dissimilar trajectory. It was the decade of the 1990s that brought about larger, impactful changes in artistic mediums and genres in India.

Video, with its infinite potential to recontextualize and reconfigure narrative histories offered immense possibilities to traverse and mediate experiences, possessing the cinematic ability to transport the viewer into a deeper temporal experience and installation, as an ensemble of elements functioning as a singular composite entity, allowed the visitor to physically enter the artwork and experience it in its totality. Performance, with its fluidity, was a pertinent vehicle with which to question the construction of identity and systems of representations—all were powerful and expressive genres for artists to engage with and articulate their forms of resistance in a dynamic format. Boris Groys states, modern art was

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110 Nancy Adajania, "New Media Overtures," in *Art and Visual Culture*, 270.

111 Nancy Adajania, "The Transfiguration of the Window," *Video Wednesdays@Gallery Espace* 29 July – 1 August 2009, 12.

working on the level of individual form, contemporary art on the level of context, framework and background—an installation piece would, therefore, demonstrate a certain selection, chain of choices and a logic in their exclusion and inclusion.[112] All of these mediums were free from the canonical traditions of western art history and played a key role in democratizing the production of images. Anyone could pick up a camera and make video art, video held the potential for cultural critique and was "understood as a technology for the production of anti-establishment imagery."[113] This democratization of the new genres played an important role in their adoption by artists. And in India, the foci of these early experiments were the nation and its politics as well as related socio-political issues drawing from gendered, classed identities within the nation.

1.2.2 Early Pioneers in Video Installation—Nalini Malani and Vivan Sundaram

One of the first artists to employ the medium of video as a cultural critique in India was Nalini Malani. Malani's shift to video-installation is particularly significant as it spans the generational shift that occurred with the artists working with modern traditional mediums to the next generation who worked increasingly with forms of new media. Malani's early work is particularly useful to understand how an artist working with traditional mediums, primarily as a painter, can move towards video and performance without losing one form into the other. Malani's first technological shift occurred as a reaction to the destruction of the murals at Nathdwara during the early 1990s at the height of the Hindu right-wing power. *City of Desires*, her first filmed video, was created at Gallery Chemould in 1992, where her work was continually being erased as she continued to work on it. The entire process was filmed and became in that sense her first video work. These were not Malani's first forays into film, before leaving for Paris, when she participated in the Vision Exchange Workshop in the late 1960s, Malani made three 16 mm films, including her first performance artwork *Onanism* (1969).[114]

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112 Boris Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, 76.

113 Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A sourcebook of artists' writings* (Oakland California: California University Press, 2012), 213.

114 Nancy Adajania, "New Media Overtures," 273–274.

With *Medeaprojekt*, her first multimedia installation created in 1993, Malani adapted one of Heiner Muller's stories in the Indian context. First staged when actress and director Alaknanda Samarth invited Malani to paint the décor for her performances at Max Mueller Bhavan Center in Mumbai in 1993, Muller's fiercely political text provided Malani with a series of historical contexts to work with—the Greeks and the barbarians, the holocaust and religious violence the world over—underlying all was the theme of power as global destruction. The "play became analogue for Malani," corresponding as it did to a series of tragic events in India such, including massacre of Muslims in Bombay in 1992–1993 following the demolition of Babri Masjid.[115] Malani's work in the new mediums continued to address the nation, *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1999) was Malani's response to the nuclear tests conducted by the Indian government, it was structured by Malani in a classical theatre setting with 4 video projectors, 12 monitors and a mirrored floor and the images were drawn from Hiroshima, Nagasaki as well as the partition of India.[116] In 2003 Malani's *Unity in Diversity* installation reconfigured Raja Ravi Varma's painting tableau in a *Galaxy of Musicians* (1889),[117] by adding images of violence referencing the recent religious violence in Gujarat in a painterly rendering of video animation of the original bejeweled tableau of female musicians. Malani's thematic focus on feminism, violence, politics, post-colonial legacies and social inequalities was once again apparent in *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* (2005) a work in a dialogical relationship with Veena Das's text, "Language and the Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," tracing the unprecedented collective violence against women during partition in 1947 to the continuing sexual violence in Gujarat in 2002.[118] The plight of women as bearers of extreme sexual violence is a recurring theme that continues to preoccupy much of Malani's

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115   Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika 2000), 23–37.

116   Johann Pinjappel, *Video Art since 2000*, Apeejay Gallery, 26. Exhibition Catalogue.

117   For an excellent reading of *Galaxy of Musicians* please see Geeta Kapur's essay on "Gender Mobility: Through the lens of five women artists," in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Merell with Brooklyn Museum, 2007). The original work is an allegorical rendering of a colonial style photography of a group of bejeweled women musicians creating the nation in the form of a tableau. They are all arranged for the male gaze—the artist and the nation as the audience.

118   Nalini Malani in an interview with Johan Pinjappel in the iCon catalogue for the 51st Venice Biennale emphasises that the focal point of the sound and text in *Mother India* is the disjointed manner in which women have expressed or not expressed as articulated speech the experiences they have suffered through the trauma of Partition and

work. Malani's projected images are like "skins stained with the bloodiness of history,"[119] her transcultural multiplicity combines contemporary histories with past narratives on different registers and mediums, this reconfiguring myths into new avatars that dialogue with current issues gives them new meaning in the contemporary context.

Almost around the same year that Malani was creating *Medeaprojekt,* Vivan Sundaram created his installation artwork, *Memorial* (1993) almost in a textbook case of an installation artwork that functioned, as per Boris Groy's definition—as a space of aesthetic control and unconcealment.[120] Created after the Babri Masjid attacks, *Memorial* was inspired by a photograph in a newspaper of a dead journalist that Sundaram, as an archaeologist "inventoried, categorized and sealed in neat vitrine cases."[121] The visitor was 'guided' along a ceremonial beginning at the tripartite barrier of iron pipes that marked the entry to the work, along a pathway of flagstones that ended at an archway made of two piles of tin packing trunks diminishing in size. The pathway between the two was interrupted by a large glass prism shaped vitrine in which lay the plaster cast of a fallen body, obscured with varying materials, a three-dimensional representation of the journalist's photograph of the bombings in Bombay, the only 'evidence' of the actual event. Sundaram's inclusion of indexical press photographs into which nails had been pounded, further highlighted the gravity of the violence.

Sundaram's non-documentary aesthetic strategy created an alternate view of an event that transcended documentation and voyeuristic empathy, triggering remembrance and mourning by juxtaposing the photograph with found objects.[122] Vivan Sundaram's commitment to political and social critique is integral to his art practice since its inception in the 1960s. He has been closely involved as founder-member of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT) founded in 1989 in solidarity against the murder of theatre activist and member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Safdar Hashmi.

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subsequent sectarian violence. Accessed on April 15, 2018. https://www.nalinimalani.com/texts/venice.htm.

119   Adajania, "New Media Overtures," 274.

120   Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux journal* Issue # 02 (January 2009). Sundaram's first installation / sculpture work, *House/Boat* created in 1994 had been a minimalist sculpture comprising of a steel armature covered by walls of handmade paper in a honeycomb pattern.

121   Ajay Sinha, "Envisioning the Seventies and Eighties," *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, 174.

122   Andreas Huyssen, "The Memory Works of Vivan Sundaram," *Disjunctures* (Munich: Prestel, 2018).

The platform mobilizes artists, academics, journalists and activists in Delhi and from other parts of the country to "articulate dissent in moments of crisis." (*Hum Sab Ayodhya* 1993, *Anhad Garje* 1993), Sundaram organized the Artists Alert in 1990 and also a series of events as Artists Against Communalism to protest communal violence in India, he has curated several exhibitions for SAHMAT, including 'Ways of Resisting' in 2002 that took place after the riots in Gujarat in 2002–2003 and memorialized strategies adopted by artists during the 1990s, it included installations by Sundaram himself, Rumanna Husain, Navjot Altaf and Tejal Shah among others. Dutta terms SAHMAT's operation as a case study of *an entire national dispensation* of artistic practice "fighting a rearguard action within a significantly transformed media and news environment," with historians like Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and artists such as Vivan Sundaram and Ram Rehman coming together and attempting to carve "a visual hagiography to build national consensus."[123] This building of a platform of solidarity among artists and intellectuals in defense of a secular cultural space *within* the nation has played a seminal role in Indian art practice.

1.2.3 Performing Gender and 'National' Identity—Rummana Hussain

While these first forays into the new mediums of video and installation by Malani and Sundaram brought together the nation and its politics, one of the first women artists to conflate gender, identity and the body with the nation in another genre new to India—live performance—was Rummana Hussain. As a secular Muslim from a cosmopolitan family with strongly political ties, Hussain suddenly found her 'Indian-ness,' in question by a hostile and discriminating society following the riots in Mumbai in 1992–93. She chose the genre of live performance to articulate her disquiet and performed *Living on the Margins* in 1995, in the open courtyard of the National Centre for Performing Arts, (NCPA) she stated that she wanted to "look at art as a vehicle for political action, to create a bridge from the seclusion of the studio and gallery to the real world, street and garden." Ritualistically coating her feet with indigo-colored Robin Blu, a washing detergent sold locally to whiten clothing, she walked around an inner square of the NCPA, cupping a halved papaya with its slimy black seeds exposed. After every few steps she stopped to emit a silent scream, through this gesture she highlighted the specific and victimization of women and children during

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123 Arindam Dutta, "SAHMAT, 1989–2004: Liberal art practice against the Liberalized Public Sphere," *Cultural Dynamic* 17 (2), 196–198.

periods of political instability, communal riots and a religious divide. Eventually she invited the gathering to splatter *geru* (fine red clay) and indigo powder onto the floor in a participatory gesture.[124] After the Babri Masjid demolition, Husain travelling [with Ram Rahman] to Ayodhya, photographed the residues of violence and mounted her installation piece *Home/Nation* (1996) at Chemould, combining various features and medias for this work. In a corner of the space, she placed a number of boxes labeled with individual words, 'Bind,' 'Bangles,' 'Peel,' and 'Ayodhya' and in another, a video of her performance played out. Architectural photographs mounted on wooden panels were placed next to sequenced black and white shots of a woman making chapatis or flatbread. On another wall, images referencing her earlier performance were interspersed with arched doorways from Mughal monuments. The space also included some unusual found objects evoking the intimate feminine, including menstrual pads, bangles and news clippings hung in plastic folders.[125] Hussain's installation combined objects from the inner space of the home to both emphasize and question the secular nature of female national identity.

In a later performance she would question her own identity as a woman as she revealed her mastectomy in *Is It What You Think*? which she performed in front of a live audience at Kaskadenkondensator in Basel, Switzerland in 1998. Hussain, casting off anxieties and inhibitions, sat in a chair wearing black lace underwear with a *parandhi* or long artificial plait, partially revealing the scars from her mastectomy and her prosthesis, underneath a black veil. As projected images of women holding guns flashed across her torso, she read a text slowly, as if chanting from a holy book, asking questions of the world around her.[126] Hussain made use of all her signs, her Muslimhood and scarred womanhood, as sites of resistance to societal concepts of nation and democracy[127] and continued to articulate her concerns for the changing political scenario through her performances and videos till her death in 1999. Hussain's performances problematized the politics of a gendered identity in direct conflict with the nation's secular politics.

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124   Swapna Tamhane, "The Performative Space: Tracing the roots of Performance-based practices in India," *C Magazine* 2011.

125   Jyoti Dhar, "Prescient Provocateur Rumanna Hussain," *Art Asia Pacific* (Sep–Oct 2014) Issue 90. Accessed on April 29, 2020. https://www.talwargallery.com/news/art-asia-pacific9.

126   Dhar, Ibid.

127   Geeta Kapur, *Rumanna's Question: Is it what you think?* Lecture, SAHMAT New Delhi 2009.

1.2.4 Video Installation—Navjot Altaf

Their contemporary, Navjot Altaf's artworks in the new mediums also reacted to the instability in the political situation but by circumventing the representational paradigm altogether in large-scale installations such as, *Links Destroyed and Rediscovered* (1994), created after the communal riots in 1992, and *Between Memory and History* (2001–2002), and *Lacuna in Testimony*, after the riots in 2001. For the first installation, Navjot placed two monitors running two political documentaries, '*I live in Behrampada*' by Madhushree Datta and '*Bombay A Myth Shattered*' by Teesta Setalvad, but without running their audio, she surrounded the monitors with meters of pvc pipes, plaster sculptures and heaps of soil, using just their powerful images to communicate with the audience. *Between Memory and History* comprised of a large metal structure of wire mesh containing paper ribbons containing notations from her personal file, plus various studies on the dangers of fundamentalism and dehumanizing politics that the public was asked to untie.[128] *Lacuna in Testimony* an evocative media installation comprised of three channels of video and 48 mirrors tries to portray the horrendous nature of the events by capturing the psychological block and recovering fragmented memory. For creating the work, Navjot spent six months in Gujarat after the riots and a week in a transit camp, talking to affected residents. She recorded conversations with their consent and consciously avoided use of the camera. In the three screen videos on display at the installation she included other images, for example the abusive scribbling on the walls and footage from events like the Holocaust and the Partition, the Delhi Sikh riots etc. following a conscious process of representing fragmented memory,[129] incarnating a desire to "speak about the political by making an attempt to transcend the political."[130] With Navjot, art and activism started to interweave in her practice as she moved towards interactive and collaborative modes in a new critical context. Her quest led her to Bastar in 1996, where she lived at Shilpigram at the invitation of tribal artist Jaidev Baghel, engaging with locality and site, situation and participation in order to build possible "communities," dislocating herself from the metropolis. Working directly with Adivasi groups of artists / artisans

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128 Johan Pinjappel, 25 & 31.

129 "Navjot Altaf in conversation with Shaina Anand," *Khoj Book 1997–2007: Contemporary Art Practice in India* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2010), 226.

130 Nancy Adajania, "Piercing Reality, Interpreting Boundaries: Video as a Testing Ground for Ched/Bhed" in *Navjot Altaf: The Thirteenth Place* (Mumbai: The Guild Art Gallery, 2016), 144.

on a series of collaborative art projects involving functional, site-specific structures,[131] Navjot helped to create projects of self-emancipatory labor for women.

While Rummana's Hussain's response to right-wing violence focused on the performance of her gendered, classed identity, another artist from India's earliest forays into video art in the same decade used the medium to portray an anti-aesthetic, exploring taboo subjects such as gendered sexuality to confront the nation and its gendered imaginaries. Sonia Khurana created *Bird* (1999), while she was at the Royal College of Art in London. The video clip is about the failed attempts of a nude overweight woman (the artist herself), trying to fly, to attempt a take-off from a room without doors. Khurana "turns the performance into a tragicomic play."[132] The rolling of her body on the ground and the quick abstract montage of body parts turns her body into a weapon against the beauty contest economy[133] Swapna Tamhane likens its erratic, clumsy filming as the artist's reference to Artaud's theatre of cruelty and the abject body, and to Jenny Saville's studied paintings of flesh smushed against panes of glass.[134] Khurana's practice would continue to focus on inner experience and the polemics of being in the world through live performances as well as performative video.[135]

Some artists who began using new mediums like video, installation, live performance and so on in this decade had been exposed to the genre while being educated in the west, in Australia, the United States, or Europe, places where they had first encountered the art form.[136] Artists, critics and curators benefited

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131   Geeta Kapur, "Navjot: Holding the Ground," Lecture, *Critics on Art* at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. July 19, 2010. Accessed on February 2, 2018. https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/_source/digital_collection/fedora_extracted/20833.pdf.

132   Nancy Adajania, *Art and Visual Culture*, 276.

133   Nancy Adjania, "Rival Aesthetics of Solidarity: Indian artists and their public sphere," *Springerin* Issue 4, 2002. Accessed on May 25, 2018. https://www.springerin.at/en/2002/4/rivalisierende-asthetiken-der-solidaritat/.

134   Tamhane, 2011.

135   In *Flower Carrier* (2000–2006) Khurana travelled for six years in different cities all over the world while carrying a plastic flower, revealing every place in a visual and acoustic manner, through a cacophony of street noises. *Lying-down-on-the-ground* (2006–2012) invited people comfortable with the experience of lying down in an outdoor public space, as participants lie down, their shapes were traced with a piece of chalk in a simple, non-threatening form of social interaction to initiate some thinking about an awareness of the spaces we occupy.

136   The genre of video / installation was taken up by Sonia Khurana (Royal College of Art), Kiran Subbiah (Royal College of Art), Subba Ghosh (Slade), Tushar Joag (Rijksakademie), Ranbir Kaleka (Royal College of Art), Ayesha Abraham (Rutgers), Surekha and Eleena Banik

enormously from the cross-fertilisation of ideas that took place in residencies, workshops, conferences, collaborations and exchanges held in India and overseas. The most revolutionary outcome of these experiments was a total change in the perspective of these artists who abandoned the center-periphery model as being always recipients and imitators, permanently apprenticed to contemporary culture. Rather, according to Hoskote, these artists were socialized "into the world as an assembly of multiple, improvisational, self-renovating modernisms, a conversation among regional trajectories of the contemporary."[137] Some of these conversations had already begun in the Asia-Pacific region in the 1990s with the founding of the Asia-Pacific Triennale in 1995 and the emerging discourse around post-colonial and subaltern studies. Apart from individual experiments and initiatives that were being taken, what kind of institutional spaces were available to contemporary artists in India itself to create and showcase art in these new mediums?

The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) and Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA)—both centralized organizations—had been established in the early 1950s to provide sufficient infrastructural support to artist initiatives in post-independent India. Both institutions struggled to balance the contending claims of various artist groups and cliques. The NGMA retracted into an insular historical institution, suffering, especially in the first two decades, from a lack of direction in building a national collection and equally the lack of public interface via exhibitions. The LKA, on the other hand, given the task of making sense of the contemporary art movements and providing infrastructural support to artists, became an embattled site with artists and critics of various cliques trying to stake their claims on these organizations, cancelling each other's decisions, complaining about policies and programmes, budget allotments, exclusions and inclusions in exhibitions, among other things.[138] In a nation where state institutions and state initiatives were moribund, the possibilities to activate art practices could come only from private initiatives, and these included the establishment of galleries that encouraged the visibility of experimental art practices in the new mediums.

(Glasgow), and by Sheba Chachchi, Shilpa Gupta, Umesh Madanhalli, Subodh Gupta, Archana Hande, Shakuntala Kulkarni among others.

137   Ranjit Hoskote, "Signposting the Indian Highway," in *Indian Highway: Musee d'art contemporain de lyon, Indian Highway IV* (London: Koenig Books, 2011), 292–293. Exhibition Catalogue.

138   Vidya Sivadas, "Mapping the field of Indian art criticism post-independence." Accessed on April 27, 2018. https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/_source/Collection_documents/mapping-the-field-of-indian-art-criticism-01-progress-report.pdf.

American-artist-turned curator Peter Nagy reformatted his New York gallery, Nature Morte as a curatorial experiment in Delhi in 1997 and began showing photographs and installations along with paintings and drawings, bringing these new genres into direct conversation with prevailing art practice. Primarily showing lens-based and video works, the gallery brought international artist works to India and also brought the work of Indian artists to international attention. Recognizing the need to nurture a non-commodity art form, new gallery spaces like Apeejay Art were established in 2000. Negotiating the relationship between video and the art gallery / museum space itself involved effort in a country where the comfort zone of the moving image so far had been the cinema hall or auditoria. Sakshi and Chemould Contemporary Art, established in 2007 in Bombay began exhibiting works in new mediums. Gallery Espace in New Delhi hosted a year-long programme between 2008–2009 and called it *Video Wednesdays*, guest curators were invited to discuss and display their selection of video works once a week. Also in 2008, Lekha and Anupam Poddar set up the Devi Art Foundation, the first privately owned museum of art in India with a special emphasis on extended sculpture, inter-media installations and video art, showing works of artists not only from India but also from other countries in the region. These private initiatives brought in a more focused professionalism towards the arts and the desire to connect with the expanding international art scene. However, these initiatives were few and far between and mostly followed in the wake of the seminal role played by the founding of Khoj in 1997.

1.3 Alternative Art Spaces—Khoj

Khoj was established by artists Anita Dube, Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, Manisha Parekh and Pooja Sood at a workshop in Modinagar (near Delhi) with financial aid from the Triangle Arts Trust UK to "function as an experimental art laboratory that would bring artists together from different parts of the country, from the sub-continent and from around the globe [...] where dialogue, exchange and transfer of information, energy and skills could take place as an intensely lived experience." Gupta, describing the art scene of the time, says, "At that point, there was no real gallery system and hardly any kind of atmosphere. So little was happening on the contemporary art scene. Bringing a dozen international artists changed things. Everyone felt as if this was a place to do something."[139]

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139   Vandana Kalra, "Art Quest," *Indian Express*, April 20, 2017. Accessed on April 12, 2018. https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/art-quest-khoj-pooja-sood-eicher-gallery-4620148/.

Khoj "provided the possibility for young practitioners to create an open-ended experimental space for themselves on their own terms, a space where they could make art independent of formal academic and cultural institutions and outside the constraints of the commercial gallery. It offered the chance to establish international networks without institutional support."

Founded with support from the Triangle Arts Trust UK, Khoj receives funding from Hivos, the Ford Foundation and the Tatas (NSRTT) among others.[140] Functioning as "part laboratory, part academy and part community centre" with the artist squarely center stage as practitioner, curator, critic and friend, the Khoj workshops, usually comprising 20–24 artists and occurring over two weeks and residencies which were slower paced and lasted 6–8 weeks, began in 1997 at Sikribagh estate in Modinagar. The first Khoj workshop in 1997 had 22 artists, 12 Indian, 10 non-Indian, the second expanded to include artists from Japan, Singapore and Israel apart from continuing alliances with artists from Africa and West Indies. The venue of Sikribagh was retained till 2001. Keen to develop connections with the "Global South"—Khoj drew further on artists from mainland China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Japan, working from the beginning towards the empowerment of the so-called 'third world' artists.[141] As all of these artists foraged the local market for their modest manufacture of art works, an informal everyday practice took root. Kapur comments on the "consciously depleted objecthood of artworks with a quotient of wit," a quality missing in the Indian art world that created an alternate art practice. It was at Sikribagh that Australian indigenous artist Fiona Foley piled *neel*, turmeric and chillies to create an aboriginal earthwork drawing from the tantric mandala. In 2000, Tapfuma Gutsa from Zimbabwe covered a felled tree from the estate with cowhide to play a gigantic drum for his residency friends in a jam session organized by Indian musician Punita Singh and in 2001 Tania Bruguera fashioned herself a cape out of the workshop's used tea bags. Khoj inaugurated an art practice embedded in nature and communal culture, artists living in a temporary commune with basic facilities functioned in an environment where art experience inscribes itself within site and space, creating a "phenomenology of unexpected encounters."[142] The first Khoj workshop in 1997 comprised of a wide range of art practitioners working with diverse materials and mediums—Dube used enamel votive eyes, C.K. Rajan created photomontages, Prithipal Ladi worked with clay and fiberglass, Radhika Vaidyanathan with local wickerwork, Manisha Parekh with mirror, glass and

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140   Sood, *Khoj Book*, 5, 14 & 23.

141   Sood, *Khoj Book*, 7.

142   Kapur, "Phenomenology of Encounters," *Khoj Book*, 49.

acrylic, Walter D'Souza with woodcuts. The mediums and materials varied, sometimes the experiments undertaken by these artists at a Khoj workshop would also translate into the direction that the artist's practice would take. At this very first Khoj workshop Subodh Gupta made a pungent smelling enclosure / installation of cow dung pats, titling it *With my mother and me*, recalling "childhood memories of the gathering of cow dung cakes to make fire, a fire to cook frugal meals, achingly redolent of rural middle class imageries."[143] In India cow dung has very contradictory connotations, within spiritual belief it assumes the hallowed position of cleanser / atoner, whilst on the other hand its day-to-day associations are those of waste element / defiler. Gupta's early experiments in the Khoj workshops were driven by a desire to reconcile an understanding of this contradiction, asking, "Where does belief end and ritual begin?"[144] Two of his works at Khoj in 1999 centered around his own body—at the second Khoj workshop, Gupta smeared a bare patch of land as well as his near naked body with an ochre lining of mud and cow dung and lay down under a blazing blue sky, rigid like a corpse. The Khoj residency site at Sikribagh offered Gupta a propitious site "to flesh out his nativist metaphors,"[145] a direction that would dominate his subsequent art practice substantially. In another iconic representation at Khoj in a video performance titled *Pure* (1999) Gupta appeared in a shower with the video running in reverse, cow dung slapped onto his body completely covered him from head to toe as he walked out of the shower to enter an elevator. Using his body as the subject and the object of the scene, *Pure* played out the ritual of purification in an urban context.

Also in the 1999 Khoj workshop, artist Shilpa Gupta cleaned up an abandoned toilet for women workers in an outhouse and embedded on each side of an outer wall a row of tiny bulbs and cement casts of breasts covered with aureolic hair at the end of each row; while Sonia Khurana paired with Punita Singh to produce *Wailing Well* (2000),—a conceptual site-specific work willing the extension of her asthma-laden breath into the water-filled rotunda of the estate's community well accompanied by Punita devising recording techniques for its relay. Pushpamala N., using the aesthetic and ideology of photography to transform her practice, got herself photographed in a series of masquerading fantasies, producing a set of film stills titled *Sunehre Sapne* in 1998. The final picture in the hand-tinted frames portrayed her as a cornered vamp, her head topped with a sleek bouffant as she

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143   Caption text from Subodh Gupta's Retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 2014.

144   Subodh Gupta, "*Video Art in India*," (New Delhi: Apeejay Media Gallery, 2003), 76. Exhibition Catalogue.

145   Kapur, *Khoj Book*, 54.

arrived at a scripted denouement for the fake mystery and pointed a revolver at her assailant. Sheba Chachchi engaged actively with local history and interviewed dozens of unemployed steel factory workers before she installed *Itbari Khan ke Haath* in 1999—an installation with photographs of the workers surrounded with projected images of a ruined factory with its abandoned machines.[146] The possibilities to undertake these transcultural experiments at Khoj provided a space in this decade for artists to create, devise and innovate artistic experiments with fellow practitioners from India and internationally. Situating its practice within a neighborhood (Khirkee) and simultaneously within a wider network that spans not only South Asia but the whole world, Khoj played a key role in enabling the articulation of located and national histories and avantgarde performances. The activities of Khoj gradually extended into a series of collaborative workshops over the sub-continent and developed parallel artist initiatives in the *Vasl International* at Gadami near Karachi (2001), *Theertha International Artists'* near Columbo (2001), *Britto* at Tepantor near Dacca (2003), and *Sutra* near Patan (2004). Khoj also provided support to autonomous projects such as Periferry in Guwahati, (Desire Machine Collective), to CAMP in Mumbai (Shaina Anand) and to 1 Shanthi Road, Bangalore. The creation of an alternative learning space outside of formal learning educational institutions provided artistic communities with a platform. Supporting both emerging artists and emerging art with its slippages between dance, theatre and the visual arts, some radical performances and performative pieces have emerged at Khoj. In *Keywords* performed by Anita Dube in 2005, the artist carved out the words, "avant garde," "sexual love," "permanent revolution," from buffalo meat placed on muslin draped slabs in an almost ceremonial offering.[147] Dube's performative engagement with language as text was an important showcasing of the merging of conceptual art language with experimental art practices. The Khoj workshops and activities have, over the years continued to evolve and provide momentum to the weaving of the transcultural elements that underlies most contemporary art practices today.

1.3.1 Tejal Shah—Early Beginnings at Khoj

It was at Khoj that two artists from this study established their presence in the mediums of their choice as soon as they returned to India after studying abroad. Tejal Shah (b. 1979 in Bhilai, India), newly returned from Melbourne, collaborated with fellow artist Marco Rolla in 2004 to create a short video work, *Trans-*. The

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146   Kapur, *Khoj Book*, 51–52.

147   Kapur, *Khoj Book*, 59.

Fig. 1. Shah, Video Still, *Trans-*, Dual Channel Video Installation, 2004–5. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

focus in this work was the ambiguity of gender through facial transformations in every frame—Shah "grew" a beard using glue and fake hair and then shaved it much like Rolla. From certain angles, the two were indistinguishable (Fig. 1). Both artists faced the camera with their shaved faces, preened in the same props, first as a man, then as a woman—the two-screen video-mimes "wove a web of narcissism around the spectator." At the same workshop, Shah leapt briefly into live performance with *Sleep*. Though very few did, Shah's live performance in this homeless tramp avatar, remote yet connected to "the strangely sympathetic near-lumpen crowd walking about their business below, brought up questions about boundaries, about the outside / inside of art practice and the artist's experiments with self,"[148] that characterizes the genre of performance and its radical nature and precarity in contemporary art.

Tejal Shah took drawing lessons early in their school years in Bhilai—what they enjoyed working on most were the science diagrams, for their crisp sharpness, geometry and order (interests which would resurface later in their art practice). Shah's teenage years were also the years of the Gulf War, cable TV and the opening up of the Indian economy. Their shift to Poona when they were fourteen exposed them for the first time to metropolitan life. It was the move to Mumbai in 1995 that got them seriously interested in photography. They obtained a student

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148   Kapur, *Khoj Book*, 47.

membership at the National Centre for the Performing Arts, which exposed them to Hindustani and Western classical music, to experimental movement and performance work and to the genre of photography at the Piramal Gallery. The membership in general gave them a keen awareness of folk, modern and classical arts and crafts. Through meeting Simon Nathan, a photographer from USA specializing in wide-angle photography, Shah developed a keen interest in photography at a time when there were very few serious women photographers in India. It was also during this time that Shah started getting involved in feminist, lesbian and bisexual groups and officially 'came out.' Therefore, their understanding of themself as a queer-feminist and as a photographer came almost simultaneously. Leaving India in 1999, at the age of seventeen to obtain an undergraduate degree in commercial and illustrative photography at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Shah found themself not so interested in commercial or fashion photography. An exchange program that allowed them to spend a year at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago, played a key role in changing the direction of their practice. The flexibility of the American art education system allowed them to enroll in classes across a wide range of inter-disciplinary subjects, including film, video, performance, printing and art and technology, shifting their interest towards fine arts rather than commercial photography.[149] It was at Chicago that they started to conceptualize video, film, installation and performance within a postmodern framework and created *Chingari Chumma/Stinging Kiss* (2000), one of their earliest works, starring themself in the lead role, along with fellow artist Anuj Vaidya. In this 08:30 minute short work, the queer performative body took center stage for the first time as Shah and Vaidya dragged in a kitsch, campy style to deconstruct the gender binary.

1.3.2 Nikhil Chopra—Early Beginnings and at Khoj

Nikhil Chopra's (b. 1974, Calcutta) first live performance in India was also at an art residency at Khoj in 2007. For this six-hour performance, Chopra donned the character of *Yog Raj Chitrakar* for the first time, basing it partially on his grandfather Yog Raj Chopra who had studied art at Goldsmiths in the 1930s and had been an amateur painter of landscapes. He diligently researched through the family archives to pick out the costumes his grandfather had worn. Dressed in a tweed jacket, plus fours, tie, socks and polished shoes, beard trimmed, and moustache tweaked, from this very first performance Chopra emphasized the role that costuming played as a marker of the colonial encounter with its subject—the

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149   Interview with artist, 2013.

Fig. 2. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing I*, New Delhi, 2007. Courtesy the artist.

dressing serving as a boundary mechanism to connect with the Other. He entered the performance space, unwrapped a brown parcel under his arm and proceeded to copy his grandfather's landscape painting of a Pahalgam landscape onto the twenty-five-meter wall (Fig. 2). The ritual transformation of self that he followed in this first performance became an integral part of his later performances. After finishing the drawing, Chopra shaved off his beard with an old-fashioned razor and opened up the mysterious brown paper wrapped parcel he had carried into the performance space to reveal the next costume. Stripping down to his boxers, he changed into a tube skirt and a white blouse with puffed sleeves, dressing while posing coyly in front of the mirror (Fig. 3 & 4). The scarf around the neck, the black tights, the careful application of makeup and jewelry and finally the donning of a curly shoulder length wig completed the transformation of masculine to feminine as the crowning finale of his performance.[150] The gender transformation that he wrought highlighted the conceptual critique he was making, that identity itself is a construct and always in flux, that gender itself is performative and that clothes are an essential part of who we are or can become.

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150   Nikhil Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing I*. Accessed on July 3, 2018. http://www.nikhilchopra.net/home/?p=262.

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Fig. 3 & 4. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing I*, New Delhi, 2007. Courtesy the artist.

In November of the same year Chopra performed for three hours as *Yog Raj Chitrakar visits Lal Chowk* during another Khoj residency at Kasheer, Srinagar and made a charcoal drawing of the Clock Tower in the center of the city. The immense attention this simple act attracted, highlighted the inherent uncontrollable dynamics in public spaces which will be discussed in the following chapter in greater detail.

Nikhil Chopra's early life was typical of an upper middle class family life in a 1980s India, epitomized by idyllic family holidays visiting Europe, visiting art museums, this lifestyle was deeply ingrained on Chopra, who grew up with a strong sense of this western aesthetic. After doing a bachelor's degree in Commerce, Chopra began his art education at Maharaji Sayaji Rao University in Baroda, but left for the Maryland College of Art after two years to complete his undergraduate degree in fine art. The educational syllabi in Maryland allowed him to select a wide range of courses to broaden his knowledge-base and experiment with various art forms. During the second year of his Master of Fine Arts at Ohio State University he was assigned to assist artist Ann Hamilton. This provided him with a one-off opportunity to interact simultaneously not only with Hamilton herself but also with performance greats such as Coco Fusco, Elenor Antin and Marina Abramovic when they visited the university and Chopra's interaction with them was a significant event that propelled him towards live performance. Chopra's first performance was enacted for his master's thesis project and took place in an old warehouse in 2003. The adoption of the persona of Sir Raja as the first iteration of his persona was prompted by his study and critique of the Indian aristocracy as depicted in nineteenth century and early twentieth century British photographs. In their portraits, Indian royals, powerless bureaucratic puppets under the British rulers tried to project dignity and valor but appeared exaggeratedly overdressed and pompous instead.[151] Chopra, staged the performance with a careful selection of fabric and lights, wearing a rented *Sherwani*, fake moustache and turban fashioned out of an old saree, he positioned himself as *Sir Raja II*, posing still for five hours—as if for a portrait "silent and motionless at a chandelier lit dining table laden with food, fruit and wine, reminiscent of a Dutch still life painting"[152] (Fig. 5). Chopra's choice of persona emerged from his personal experience of studying in the west, ethnic stereotyping had sometimes been part of his graduation experience and reacting

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151   For an overview of photography of Indian royals during British rule, please see Julie Codell, "Photographic Interventions and Identities: Colonising and Decolonising the Royal Body," in *Power and Resistance: The Delhi Coronation Durbars* ed. Julie Codell (New Delhi: Alkazi Foundation, 2012), 110–141.

152   Nikhil Chopra, *Khoj Book*, 636.

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Fig. 5. Chopra,
Sir Raja II, Columbus
Ohio, 2003. Courtesy
the artist.
Fig. 6. Chopra,
Sir Raja III, 2005,
Courtesy the artist.

to this attempt at the exoticisation of his origins, he felt a need to connect with and critique those cultural origins. In 2005, on his return to India, his strong sense of nostalgia of childhood summers spent at his grandfather's cottage near the Lidder river led him to create a series of black and white photographs (Fig. 6), and one in color—titled *What Will I do with all this land?*—much in the style of eighteenth-century British photographer Samuel Bourne who had traversed the Kashmir valley, making the most exquisite colloidal prints of the magnificent landscape for their commercial sale back in England.

Chopra's next character *Yog Raj Chitrakar* would be inspired by his own family history and adding the epithet of *Chitrakar* or picture maker provided a clue to what would be the central act of every performance—the creation of a drawing. In contrast to Shah and Chopra, the third artist in this study born and brought up in New York comes from the diaspora.

1.3.3 Chitra Ganesh and the South Asian Womens' Creative Collective

Chitra Ganesh not only shares a lot with Shah in terms of her practice as a queer artist but also offers the perfect foil to the practice of the other two artists from India in terms of genre. Ganesh works across medias, with paper, large mural works, wall drawings, collages, animation, computer-generated imagery, and so on and among these, it is her work with digital collages that are the focus of this study.

The South Asian Womens' Creative Collective or SAWCC provided Ganesh an artistic platform to connect with her diasporic roots, Ganesh's involvement with the SAWCC occurred almost from its founding in 1997. Founded by Jaishree Abhichandani at a time when there were few resources for South Asian women artists to find themselves a voice in a predominantly white world, the Collective drew inspiration from other activist groups such as the Black Arts Movement in the UK as well as the progressive South Asian arts festival *Desh Pardesh* in Toronto. With a commitment to the advancement, visibility, and development of emerging and established South Asian women artists and creative professionals, it provided a physical and virtual space to profile their creative and intellectual work across disciplines. Over the years the Collective created a reputation for showcasing cutting-edge work dealing intelligently with issues of gender and cultural representation.[153] Ganesh became a Board Member of SAWCC between 1998 and 2003. It was

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153 South Asian Women's Creative Collective. Accessed on January 15, 2018. http://www.sawcc.org/about/.

through SAWCC that Ganesh was introduced to a network of peers and mentors that continue to be a part of her networks. Ganesh has shown with them often and participated in shows curated by the founder of SAWCC, Jaishri Abhichandani.[154] Ganesh also worked with the Sexually Liberated Asian Artist Activist People! or SLAAAP!!, a queer Asian arts-activist collective, right from its inception in 1997. The collective was active till 2001 and produced activist print media projects with camp and humor to engage issues such as HIV / AIDS, sexuality, immigration and homophobia in the Asian community. SLAAAP!! coordinated with many other community-based organisations like the Audre Lorde Project, Gay Asia & Pacific Islander Men of New York, South Asia Lesbian & Gay Association, Kilanin Kolektibo and the Queens Museum of Art. One of the earliest group shows that Ganesh participated in as part of SLAAAP!!, was in 2001—*Crossing the Line*—at Queens Museum. Spaces such as SAWCC and SLAAAP!! provided Ganesh to develop as an artist and experiment with a variety of visual languages and signifiers beyond the Euro-American context that had been a major part of her art education.

Chitra Ganesh's (b. 1974 Brooklyn, New York) childhood memories include an eclectic mix of reading influences, from reading Archie, X-Men, Doonesbury and *Amar Chitra Katha* comics from India. As a child of first-generation immigrant parents coming from a conservative Tamilian Brahmin background in India, Ganesh's growing years in New York were tempered with exposure to South Indian classical forms like carnatic music and Bharatnatyam and drawing *kolams* with her grandmother (Fig. 7),[155] her parents also encouraged her to take drawing classes at an early age where she learned to draw and paint and work with pastels and color pencils. She received her bachelor's degree in semiotics and comparative literature from Brown University in Providence, RI. In 2001,

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154 Ganesh has shown with SAWCC founder Jaishri Abhichandani in *(em) Power Dynamics* in 2015 and participated in exhibitions curated by her — *Anomalies: From Nature to Future* 2009 and *Stargazing* 2012 at Rossi & Rossi, London; *The Emo Show* New York 2013; *Her Stories* Fifteen years of SAWCC Queen's 2012. She has also exhibited with SAWCC regularly: 2007 *Sultana's Dream: Collaborative Art by S. Asian and Arab Women* (Index with Mariam Ghani 2004–); 2008 *Fire Walkers: Contemporary Artists from India and S. Asia* (*Untitled* mixed media installation 2008); 2013 *Be/Longing* (*Thirsted, Howling* photograph series: *The Awakening*); 2016 *Welcome to what we took from is the state* (*Index Light Box Index of Democracy is the Interval between Inquiry and Image* 2013, *Her Nuclear Waters* 2013).

155 Kolam is a traditional art form practiced in Tamil Nādu in South India, the geometrical line drawings composed of lines, curves and loops are created by women early every morning with finely ground rice powder to decorate the floors and thresholds of homes and temples, simultaneously providing food to the local ant population. These ephemeral patterns are erased under passing feet every day and are newly created early morning.

she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and received her M. F. A. in visual arts from Columbia University in New York, in 2002. Ganesh's study of semiotics in Columbia has helped her to draw her visual vocabulary from Surrealism as also from a broad range of material including the iconography of Hindu, Greek and Buddhist mythology, 19ᵗʰ century European portraiture and fairytales, archival photography, and song lyrics, as well as contemporary visual culture such as Bollywood posters, anime, and comic books.

Ganesh probes this visual and textual material to connect seemingly disparate narratives and reveal uncanny moments of absence and buried desire. Fragments of poetic language cohere with her visual iconography to produce nonlinear narratives of "unforeseen desire and untimely loss," offering audiences untold tales from both collectively imagined pasts and distant futures.[156] In most of her work, the female body becomes the site where social codes and ensuing conflicts get played out. Ganesh is very interested in the hand-made quality of her work. In her paper works and murals, Ganesh uses diverse materials from glitter, hair extensions braided into plaits, plastic eyes, fishing baits, fishnets, marbles and many others to denote the objectification of the feminine. Her wall drawings and installations often create a three-dimensional effect and spill out to the floor in the form of color, paint or textiles in an attempt to offer the viewer an entry point (Fig. 8).

Showing primarily in the US, Ganesh has built up a parallel trajectory of showing as an artist from India / South Asia,[157] along with her shows and collab-

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156 Artist website accessed on March 12, 2018. https://www.chitraganesh.com/artist-statement/.

157 Ganesh first showed internationally in 2001 in a group show titled *AlieNation* at Quay Gallery Toronto (a show at which Indian artist Dhruvi Acharya was also exhibiting, she would later collaborate on a work for IAF with Dhruvi Acharya in 2015), she showed along with Tejal Shah in two shows on Indian art in 2006 and 2007 (*Subcontingent: The Subcontinent in Contemporary Art* at Turin, and *Contemporary Indian Art: Between Continuity and Transformation* at Milan). The latter shows were perhaps the first few larger shows featuring contemporary artists from India, and the inclusion of Ganesh's works in them connected with her peers in India. In 2007 Ganesh showed as part of a group show at Nature Morte in Delhi. The following year she showed at Bodhi Art Gallery also in a group show, *Everywhere is War and Rumours of a War*. In 2009, she showed once more as part of a group show with Tejal Shah in *Shifting Shapes Unstable Signs* at Yale University. The same year also saw her participate in *Hotter Than Curry* at OED Cochin and as part of a collateral event for the Indian Art Summit in 2009, in an exhibition titled *Moment to Monument*. She was part of the huge Saatchi Gallery show, *Empire Strikes Back* in 2010. In 2011 she was back in India with two shows—with Nature Morte as part of a show *Seduction by Masquerade*, and at the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai as part of *Future of the Past*. The same year saw her take part in *Concurrent India*

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Fig. 7. Ganesh, *Kolam Views.* Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris. **Fig. 8.** Ganesh, *Ramp Drawing,* 2005 (Detail). Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

orations locally in the US. Ganesh's diasporic upbringing allows her to identify with diverse groups and identities, from Asian-American to Black radical feminist artists who have undergone experiences similar to her own while growing up. For Ganesh, concepts of belonging, home and communities are plural—there is more than one nation at stake, more than one history and more than one community she belongs to. (Mohanty 2011) From among the wide selection of mediums that Ganesh works with, this study focuses specifically on two sets of graphic collage works stemming from the comic genre, the first of which is *Tales of Amnesia* (2002–2007), a series of 21 digital c-prints that were created when she returned to the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics as an artistic resource.

Ganesh, Shah and Chopra began their practices almost around the same period, the first decade of this century, and by this time, other artists from India had gradually begun to show on the global art circuit, also in India specific survey shows, Shah and Chopra also participated in some of these shows. These carried with them their own dynamics of curatorial selections and dialogic interactions that underpin the global artworld everywhere but before discussing their participation, an understanding of these new developments will provide a suitable context.

1.4 International Visibility

In India, international art officially entered with the First Triennale held in 1968 at the Lalit Kala Akademi that brought in artworks from 40 countries, since 1992 the Festival of India was flagged off in the Royal Academy of Arts in London, beginning a series of exhibitions showcasing Indian art. Artists from India had already been part of the international exhibition circuits, often in their individual capacities,[158] Husain for example had been a special invitee at the Sao Paulo

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at Helsinki and in *India is Now* in Göttingen Germany. In 2013 she was part of a show in Philadelphia titled *Salaam Bombay,* in 2014 she showed in Bochum *Sensual Wisdom, Hindu Ritual and Contemporary Indian Art.* In 2015 she was back in India at Chennai with *False Alternatives* and in an IAF curated project at the India Art Fair with Dhruvi Acharya. This is but a select overview of Ganesh's India-related showings, for more detail, please see the artist's website.

158   Artists from India had already held solo shows for example, Prabhakar Barwe in 1963 at Wisconsin, Narayan Bendre had a solo show in Windermere gallery New York 1948, Bikash Bhattacharya had participated at the Paris Biennale in 1968, Jatin Das showed in Paris in 1971, in Venice in 1978 and at Documenta in Kassel in 1975. There had been a group show on *Ten Contemporary Indian Painters* at Trenton US in 1965, of *Seven Indian Painters* in Gallery One London 1958, and *Indian Painters* in Zurich 1970. Husain

Biennial in 1971 along with Pablo Picasso and had won international acclaim at the Venice Biennale way back in 1954.[159] In the last decade of the twentieth century regular artistic exchanges increased and artists from India and their works opened up to the West and to global networks. In the global artworld, a growing infrastructure of artists, curators, gallerists, buyers and collectors from the global art circuit brought in art professionals with specific socio-political agendas[160] who would not only play a key role in establishing public profiles of some Indian contemporary artists, but also position them in the international art market. As artists started showing simultaneously across locations and became far more mobile, the group exhibition space became the main space for curatorial experimentation, country specific shows became hugely popular in these last decades of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the twenty first. As the curatorial role in this decade also expanded to become a more critical one, it was these curatorial initiatives that provided the spectator with some directional clues to decipher the object signs employed as representational strategies by artists at international mainstream locations.

Curators emerged as 'global agents' in this period as they presented international, even regional contemporary art to a travelling, cosmopolitan audience in increasingly new venues, this was the new professional image of the curator who as Belting states, was realizing "projects."[161] The curator's role as the conceptual organizer of these mega shows was charged with the responsibility of not only situating them within particularized interpretative systems already in place, but also with providing them with a legibility related to local issues, negotiating the distance between "the value system traditionally established by critic and art historian, and on the other, the ideological pressures and practices corresponding to the institutional setting in which such events emerge."[162] In her study of the global art world, Bydler also acknowledges that in these international presentations of artworks the audience lacks knowledge about the conception and production of the works and knows little about their geographical, social, political and inter textual relations to various cultures and it is the

was a special invitee with Picasso at *Sao Paulo Biennial* in 1971, Tyeb Mehta showed at *Deuxieme Biennale International de Menton* in 1974, *Modern Indian painting* showed at Hirschhorn Museum Washington 1982. For a comprehensive listing, please see *Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art* 2007, 65–77.

159   Dalmia, *Making of Modern Indian Art*, 107.

160   Bydler, 68.

161   Hans Belting, "Introduction," in *The Global Contemporary*, 7.

162   Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," in *The Biennial Reader,* 131.

curatorial framework that provides the key towards creating an understanding and interpretation of a work's value within the art world system.[163] The curator therefore served as an informed mediator to interpret art from art from various parts of the globe and the exhibition space foregrounded this space of mediation.

The visibility of the artist in a global art world is intimately tied to his/her being embedded in its networks, and the exhibition space becomes the single most defining feature of this visibility. It is the core space for the distribution and reception of an artwork, the space where art is mediated and experienced. The proliferation and mutation of the exhibition form has been almost the single most transformatory feature of contemporary art practice across the globe. Enwezor, discussing the frightening *Gesamkunstwerk* evident in mega-exhibitions, delineates certain historical effects that have accelerated since the 1990s.[164] In the postcolonial art world, the proliferation of exhibitions has enlarged the knowledge base of contemporary art, creating new networks between hitherto separated spheres of art productions, both in everyday engagements with the art world and in its texts, images and narratives, creating "new geographies of culture."[165] Enwezor states that a clear impetus for many large-scale international exhibitions has been to propagate a certain "will to globality." By so doing, such exhibitions seek to embed the peripheral spaces of cultural production and institutional articulation in the trajectory of international artistic discourse.[166] Along with the exhibition spaces, the infrastructure of artists' residencies, the freelancers, educational exchange programs, occasional recruitment of non-citizen curators or directors at prestigious art institutions—all constitute a globalized professional

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163   Bydler, *Global Art Worlds,* 70.

164   In the years between 1980 and 2005, the number of large survey shows, including Documenta, biennales and triennials grew from six to forty-nine. The Biennial foundation directory lists the number of biennials happening across the world as around 235 in 2018.

165   Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellations: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition" *Research in African Literatures,* Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 2003), 57–82.

166   Okwui Enwezor, "Biennials of Resistance: Mega-exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Forum," in *The Biennial Reader* 2010, 437. Enwezor's argument on the phenomena of mega-exhibitions has been critiqued by Baker in the same volume (448–452), who claims that the mediation of art actually bars access to local audiences and provides full access to an increasingly narrow cadre of experts and professionals. Baker asks who and where is the audience for mega-exhibitions and dismissing the Trauma and Nation model concepts, claims that shows like Documenta existed for years mainly as forums for exported American art, Baker also questions how the same works being shown and repeated in biennales, now become new models for counter-hegemonic spectatorship.

network in which new examples and references to authoritative literature and art works unfamiliar to the western art concept are constantly supplied.

Although exhibition practices, texts and even casual talk on the globalization of contemporary art have universalized particular art definitions, artistic practices, audiences and art history from the west, the event horizon of institutions in the European and US core avant-garde has nevertheless expanded, placing new regions on the map as it were.[167] This claim can be substantiated with a few examples of the appointment of non-western curators in the first decade of the twenty first century, primarily Okwui Enwezor's curation of Documenta 11 in 2002 that followed a method of diffused curatorship—working closely with a team of collaborators that included Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya—Enwezor consciously affirming his post-colonial position as a critique of the west emphasized the geographic dispersal of art through a series of "Platforms" in which international debates, conferences and closed seminars took place over two years in Berlin, Vienna, New Delhi and Lagos. Further, the appointment of Ranjit Hoskote with Hyujin Kim to co-curate the Gwang Ju Biennial (2008) with Okwui Enwezor as Artistic Director. Four authors of the so called "Position Papers" and "Insertions," based in Korea, the Phillipines, Morocco and New Orleans, selected works from all over the world, this curatorial strategy to open up the structure of the exhibition was very much in line with Enwezor's at Documenta 11. A series of selected traveling exhibitions were invited to use the biennale as a destination which was divided into three strands: "On the Road" a collection of traveling exhibitions that were produced elsewhere in 2006/2007, "Position Papers" that involved curators in dialogue and "Insertion" that featured works specially commissioned for Gwangju. This "parliament of narratives" had unexpected starting points co-produced by actors "working not only in New York, Berlin, Tokyo, Singapore, Delhi and Vilnius, but also in Asmara, Jogyajakarta, Alexandria and Isfahan" and acted as a platform for interpretations in its reading across cultures, as a translation platform for transformatory experiences.[168]

It was in these decades that the continent of Asia, which had been far from the mainstream art world operating out of New York, Paris, London and Berlin, now became visible in this art world system through its participation in exhibition spaces, including biennials, art fairs and festivals. New definitions of 'contemporary' Asian art were tested in various fora including conferences,

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167 Bydler, *Global Art Worlds*, 243.

168 Ranjit Hoskote, "Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader*, 314–315.

symposiums, exhibitions and publications, some important biennales and triennales included The Indian Triennial (1968), Bangladesh (1981), Gwangju, South Korea (1995), Shanghai, China (1996) and Taipei, Taiwan (1998), the Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (1993) and the Fukuoka Triennale (1999).[169] And these spaces became the frames within which Indian contemporary art initially circulated. The Japan Foundation and New York based Asia Society played a significant role in creating this initial visibility and it was through or as part of one of these institutions that the first group of Indian artists showed at New York—significantly, in the first instance, it was the regional that defined the global. Till that time there was an almost total lack of awareness of Asian art biennials.[170] One of the earliest shows to display Asian art in mainstream New York was *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia* curated by Thai curator Apinan Poshyananda in 1996 and organized by the Asia Society. The timing seemed fortuitous and in tandem with the powerful international trade winds blowing from an Easterly direction, all things Asian had now become hot property to Western cultural institutions with Asia's integration into a global market economy, generating vast new wealth and accelerated urbanization. *Tradition/Tensions* was the first major exhibition of contemporary art from Asia shown in the US featuring the work of 27 artists from five countries, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. The objective of the exhibition was to generate greater awareness, information and scholarship about contemporary Asian art in America through exploring a series of intersecting, and often competing issues that find common ground between cultural regions. The works of Indian artists displayed in this exhibition included Bhupen Khakhar's iconic *Old Man from Valsad* and *Sakhibhav* with its radical overtones highlighting gay sexuality and the transgendered body, also Sheela Gowda's *Work in Progress* (1996) an avant-garde experiment with cow dung as an artistic medium, a highly unprecedented gesture emanating from a nation where the material possessed purifying sacred properties. Both these works were far removed from any references to the nation's tradition, to a civilization mired in an art from the past that was mostly the only kind of art displayed in museums in the west and they simultaneously signaled the juxtaposing of the modern medium with contemporary art forms.

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169   Caroline Turner, "Critical themes: Geopolitical Change and Global Contexts in Contemporary Asian Art," in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-making*, eds. Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 13–14.

170   Gardner & Greene, *Biennials, Triennials and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (West Sussex / Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 112.

In this same decade, the Asia Pacific Triennale held its first exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1993. Economic changes, the same pragmatic impulse that had driven *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions Tensions*, clearly led Australia and New Zealand to promote the idea that they were part of the "Asian family" marking the beginning of a new era that also encouraged "Asian band-wagonning," from nations in Europe and America, with art functioning as a "slippery lubricant" making political mechanisms function with greater ease.[171] Turner reminds us that the term Asia Pacific was used in a purely geographical sense, there was no collective identity called Asia, let alone Asia Pacific. However, considering the global importance of this part of the world from a strategic, political, social or cultural perspective—such a grouping extended the regional focus *outwards*, rather than *inwards*. Turner further observed that the issue of colonialism was no longer seen as central, rather the focus was on environmental and ecological issues, issues of participation and democracy, of women in society and other important issues relating to religion and spirituality which had long been absent in the western art tradition. Claiming that artists are no longer between two worlds as in colonial times, Turner claimed that, "Today regionalism (in terms of locality) emerges as something to be proud of [...]and an appropriate starting point for new definitions of national and cultural identity."[172] The Asia Pacific Triennial's aim in 1993 was to "provide a forum of discussion of diverse practices, experimentation, as an intellectual platform for the presentation of local and regional perspectives." It provided a platform at a time when there were very few biennales or forums to debate the development of Asian contemporary art in the world.[173] Nalini Malani, Mrinalini Mukherjee, N. N. Rimzon, Nilima Sheikh and Vivan Sundaram represented India in the Second Triennale, from the Third Asia Pacific Triennale, all of South Asia entered the frame, including Sri Lanka and Pakistan. One of the Triennale's most distinctive features was that artists and scholars from the region itself selected and curated and wrote about the artworks. The selection of works was guided by a coterie of university based or free-lanced professionals, intellectuals including Jim Supangkat in Jakarta, Geeta Kapur in New Delhi, T. K. Sabapathy in Singapore and Somporn Rodboon in Bangkok—who with their knowledge of cosmopolitan local artists

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171 Apinan Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Postmarginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)," in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the* Pacific, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 4–5.

172 Caroline Turner, "Internationalism and Regionalism," *Tradition and Change,* xiii–xviii.

173 Michelle Antoinette & Caroline Turner, *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions*, 20.

decided whose works would be most 'legible' to roving curators and who were most often consulted.

As art from India began to show in the West, the interest generated about Indian art culminated in numerous exhibitions.[174] Among them, some were fashioned to provide an overview of the art scene in India, while others like *Body City: Citing Contemporary Culture in India*, dealt with specific themes.[175] In her essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Kapur situated Indian artists in an uneasy 'subterrain,' in the 'dug-outs' of the contemporary, positioning the body in a contiguous relationship with the city in metonymical and indexical ways.[176] I draw upon two specific shows to discuss this international visibility of Indian art—*Indian Highway*, a series of travelling exhibitions on Indian art between 2008 and 2012 and *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* in 2011, both these shows included works by Tejal Shah and Nikhil Chopra though they were not the only international shows in which these artists participated.

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174   Exhibitions on Indian art in the first decade included *Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Art,* Bern Museum (2007–08); *Tiger by the Tail! Women Artists of India* Rose Art Museum Brandeis University (2007), *New Narratives* Chicago Art Centre (2008), *Public Places Private Places: Contemporary Photography and Video Art* Newark (2007), *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* Whitechapel Gallery (2010). There were some specifically on video art *SELF* at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane (2002), *Indian Video Art: History in Motio*n (2004), at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan.

175   The first decade of the new millennium opened with *Body City: Citing Contemporary Culture in India* in Berlin 2003, with works like Nalini Malani's *Remembering Toba Tek Singh*, N. N. Rimzon's *Speaking Stones*, Navjot Altaf's *Lacuna in Testimony*, *Between Memory and History*, and Atul Dodiya's *Broken Branches*, addressed the nation allegorically, photo-documentary images by Jitish Kallat documented the city of Bombay's growing violence and tragedies, Subodh Gupta critiqued notions of purity with *Pure* 1998, and sexuality with the photo-based installation *Vilas* 1999. *Edge of Desire* in 2005 exhibited works that were still closely entangled with the nation and its histories. Vivan Sundaram's *Memorial*, Nalini Malani's *Unity in Diversity*, Atul Dodiya's *Tomb's Day*, derived as much from present-day politics as did Pushpamala N's *Native Women of South India*, and L. N. Tallur's *Made in England* from the thematics of postcolonialism. Subodh Gupta's *Bihari* and *Vilas* were staged as significant interventions of an aggressively raced and sexualized performative 'Indian' body.

176   Geeta Kapur, "Sub-terrain: Artists Dig the Contemporary," in *Body City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India,* eds. Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C. Seel (Berlin and Delhi: House of World Cultures and Tulika, 2003), 46–83.

1.4.1 Shah and Chopra—Indian Highway 2008–2012

In the traveling exhibition *Indian Highway*[177] showing at various venues between 2008–2012 at London, Oslo, Lyon, Rome and Beijing,[178] both Shah and Chopra's artworks were on display. National histories were in the central frame with M. F. Husain's *Rape of India* (2008) dedicated to the 2008 terror attacks, the work was made specifically for the show and covered the entire external façade of the Serpentine gallery in the first iteration of the exhibition. The nation continued to occupy center stage with works like *National Highway No. 1*, *Tryst with Destiny*, (Shilpa Gupta 2008, 2007–2008), *Reversed Gaze* (N. S. Harsha 2008), *Tales of Good and Evil* (Nalini Malani 2008), *Dream Villa II* (Dayanita Singh 2007–08), *Nemesis of Nations* (Bharti Kher 2008), and *Lightning Testimonies* (Amar Kanwar 2007). The term 'highway' in the title reflected artistic pre-occupations towards a greater engagement with their environment, migrations caused by rapid urbanization accelerated by superfast technologies, the importance of the road in migration and movement and as the link between rural and urban communities, others referenced technology and the 'information superhighway,' central to India's economic boom.[179] The first *Indian Highway* exhibition showcased Chopra's first considerably long performance in Kensington Gardens lasting 57 hours in the thick of winter. He spent two nights in a tent outside the Serpentine gallery he had set up at the beginning of the performance, Chopra's oilskin costume referenced the histories of explorers from the early part of the century

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177 Curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran together with Giulia Ferracci, Assistant Curator MAXXI Arte, *Indian Highway* was organised in collaboration with the Serpentine Gallery, London and the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway and produced in conjunction with the Serpentine Gallery in London. The exhibition was the second chapter in the gallery's focus on three major cultural regions, China, India and the Middle East, it followed *China Power Station: Part I,* presented in Battersea Power Station, London in 2006 and at Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo in 2007.

178 For a detailed ethnographic investigation of this series of exhibitions, please see Catherine Bublatzky, *Along the Indian Highway: An Ethnography of an International Travelling Exhibition*, India: Routledge 2019.

179 Works such as Subodh Gupta's *Across Seven Seas* (2006), *Everything is Inside* (2004), Jitish Kallat's *Autosaurus Tripous* (2008), Sheela Gowda's *Dark Room* (2006), referenced migration and movement, while works such as Ashok Sukumaran and Shaina Anand's *Everything is Contestable* (2006), *Khirkee Yaan* (2006), Kiran Subbaiah's *Use_Me.EXE* (2003), foregrounded India's economic boom and its growing international presence as an information superhighway. Works such as *Immersion. Emergence – 24 Images* (2007), explored artist Ravi Agarwal's relationship with the Yamuna river in Delhi.

(Fig. 9). Chopra made a drawing of the Serpentine gallery from the surrounding park in Kensington Gardens (Fig. 10), over two cold days in December—battling the elements—and the canvas was displayed as part of the first group exhibition. Chopra's next iteration as *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing V Part 2* (2009) was considerably shorter and lasted for 8 hours at the Astrup Fearnly Museum Oslo. In this performance, he walked from the museum to the pier on a chilly but sunny spring morning, his canvas in a sack on his shoulder (Fig. 11) and made a drawing of the harbor and its buildings. This performance was a test in endurance as he worked in sub-zero temperatures outdoors, executing a near perfect replica of the sea harbor in view (Fig. 12).

In 2011 in *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part 3* at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, he performed as part of *Indian Highway* for the last time for 48 hours. In this performance he drove to a village in Lyon with his supplies and pitched his tent on a rise overlooking the river and created the landscape in color with the river a vivid blue (Fig. 13 & 14). He came back to the museum with the completed drawing and hung it between the other two landscapes, completing the series. At the end of this performance he transformed into an androgynous gentleman, replete with top hat and makeup as he posed on a chair in front of his work (Fig. 15).

In this image can be seen some of the composite elements of each performance, the steel bucket and basin, part of the washing up process that transform the 'picture-maker' as he changes into his formal attire. In the three performances during the *Indian Highway* exhibition, he used the same costumes for all three performances and these almost covered the gamut of his persona as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, the explorer, the draughtsman, the hardy adventurer, his final transformation focused on the visible ambiguity of gender, sharpening the post-colonial critique even further. The thematic connect with the series of exhibitions was clear, the Indian highway as a road to travel, migrate and create vistas of his travels in his post-colonial persona. In this series of performances, the choice of sites offered vantage views, a famous English park in the heart of the Empire, a bustling sea-port in Scandinavia, and a body of water in an idyllic French country town, all of these became spaces for his post-colonial body to inhabit and re-create into ephemeral vistas.

In the series of *Indian Highway* exhibitions, Tejal Shah's iconic and contentious work critiquing democracy *I Love My India*, created after the Gujarat riots was on display. The 2002 Gujarat riots were a three-day period of inter-communal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat. According to official figures, the riots resulted in the deaths of 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus. Other sources estimate that up to 2,000 Muslims died. In the 3 years following the Gujarat riots more than 22 short films and documentaries on the communal riots were produced. The work was exhibited at all venues. Shah filmed *I Love My India* at
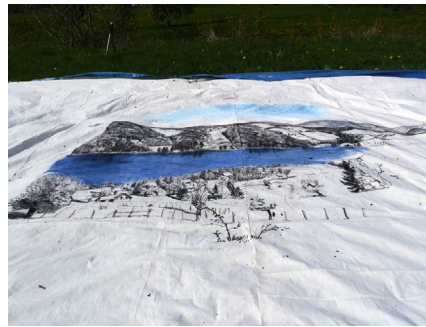
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Fig. 9. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing V Part 3,* Lyon 2011.
Fig. 10. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing V Part 1,* London 2008.
Fig. 11 & 12. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing V Part 2,* Oslo 2009.
Fig. 13, 14 & 15. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing V Part 3,* Lyon 2011. Courtesy the artist.

Fig. 16. Shah, *I Love My India,* Single Channel Video, 2003. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Mumbai.

a recreational public space close to the sea in south Mumbai. It engaged visitors by having them, as a game, shoot popguns at balloons designed to spell *I Love My India* (Fig. 16), and then asked them questions related to the state of democracy in India. This video work travelled to London, Oslo and Rome as part of the Indian Highway show. However, when the show was inaugurated by the Indian Ambassador in Beijing on June 23, the video was removed from display after 4–5 days citing technical problems. It was officially believed that the video had some "politically controversial overtones."[180] The responses to the work effectively demonstrated not only the existing apathy towards everyday violence in contemporary India but also raised questions around the relationship between politics and contemporary art and how the two fields align so closely in contemporary culture.

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180   Accessed on May 15, 2016. https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/beijing-art-gallery-removes-godhra-video-installation/story-APpgQ6YuiM489UyTaZ6bjK.html.

1.4.2 Shah and Chopra—Paris-Delhi-Bombay 2011

That these large-scale survey exhibitions also became spaces for promoting discursive polemics and reflexivity was demonstrated by the highly debated and critiqued *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* exhibition held at Centre Pompidou Paris in 2011. Curated by Sophie Duplaix and Fabrice Bousteau, it placed an almost exclusive reliance on social and political themes to present contemporary Indian art, establishing the show as an ethnographic display. One critique stated that entering the central space was somewhat akin to wading through a cobbled-together Wikipedia entry.[181] The entire exhibits were fashioned in concentric circles around Ravinder Reddy's *Tara* (2004), a gigantic golden head at the epicenter and surrounded by the introductory text panels for the six main social and political themes which were not intended to introduce the history of Indian art traditions or artists, rather to 'set out to depict society in India.' The six main themes were, *Democracy, Environment, Religion, Domestic Space* or *Home, Identity* and *Craft* and this "sensory experience of materials, textures and colors," mapped out a western understanding in line with the stereotypical narrative in which India was depicted in the exhibition's literature as an exotic resource that the French artists accessed and responded to. Introducing India via themes and then encountering works that only speak to those themes, the exhibition packaged a product 'India' that, despite its dynamism, acts in predictable ways.[182] While national, political and social histories were very much in evidence, it was Pushpamala N's photographic take-off on Delacroix's nineteenth century painting that defiantly reversed the colonial gesture as the artist defiantly held aloft the French flag recalling Marianne's pose from the original work by Delacroix. Within the section on **Identity**, violence against the transgender community received a voice with Shah's powerful portrayal of the community in *Untitled (-On Violence),* raising disturbing questions around the marginalized status of the community and their rights as citizens,[183] in this exhibition, Chopra closed himself off in a small room for 54 hours and over the course of this duration he created charcoal drawings on the walls of the gallery in an attempt to capture the typified cityscape of Paris, as viewed from a small aperture cut into the wall (Fig. 17). The deliberate creation of an aperture as the only viewing vista referenced the narrow-ness of

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181   Chanchal Dadlani, "Paris-Delhi-Bombay…" *Art Forum*, 50 (2) October 2011. Accessed on April 21, 2016. https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201108/paris-delhi-bombay-29037.

182   Tracy Buck, "Framing India: Paris-Delhi-Bombay." Accessed on May 21, 2017. https://recollectus.berghahnbooks.com/exhibit_reviews/files/assets/basic-html/page9.html.

183   For a detailed discussion of this work please refer to Chapter 2 of this study.

the colonial gaze, a viewpoint that the exhibition itself foregrounded. At the end of the performance, he dressed his "black" charcoal covered body in the style of a flamboyant Paris showgirl, aka Josephine Baker and walked out into the main square and foyer of the building, striking poses for audiences with cameras, transforming himself into an exotic object, just as Josephine Baker had, many years ago (Fig. 18). It was also during this performance that cloaked himself in anonymity wearing a white body suit, simultaneously paying homage to Yoko Ono's *Cutpiece* performance as he concentratedly snipped off pieces from the white body suit to reveal another orange-hued body suit below.

While Chopra engaged with the reality of French history and the city landscape, Leandro Erlich's installation *Le Regard*, offered parallel views of India and France, recreating a French room with a bourgeois setting lit by two windows (one showed a view of Paris from Gallery 1 of the Centre Pompidou, the other overlooked a lively street in Bombay). This installation amplified the problems with this exhibition, as the two differing viewpoints remained distinct, the juxtaposing of artist works did not encourage a dialogue. Even though the exhibition spoke of globalization and mobility, as also the ease and rapidity of cross-cultural influences, the structured themes allowed no space for artists from the diaspora and made the experience a territorially bound one, denying the experience of permeability that is such an important part of the experience of globality. India was positioned as other, a 'mystery' waiting to be explored by the French and explained by the Indians.[184] The most outspoken exhibitors made no secret of their distance from the core subject and their distrust of the commission. Stéphane Calais turned down the invitation to travel to India, ensuring that his drawings retained all the exotic spice of popular fiction, deliberately conjuring up a wholly imaginary vision of India.[185] This vision of attempted transcultural multiplicity remained one-sided.

Writing in the Arken Museum catalogue in 2012, Hoskote expresses a "productive disquiet with regard to the exhibition form of the national survey," claiming that, the limiting of defining within a "particular representation of a nation premised on such pseudo-primordial notions of identity" if done uncritically, could lapse into an ethnographic mode,[186] and this view aligned closely with

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184 Dadlani, 2011.

185 Harry Bellett and Philippe Dagen, "Paris-Delhi-Bombay Review," June 14, 2011. Accessed on May 15, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/jun/14/exhibition.

186 Ranjit Hoskote, "Kaleidocopic Propositions: The Evolving Contexts of Contemporary Indian Art," in *India: Art Now* (Ostfildern / Ishøj, Denmark: Hatje Cantz / Arken Museum, 2013), 54. Exhibition Catalogue.

Fig. 17 & 18. Chopra, Broken White II, Paris 2011. Courtesy the artist.

critiques of the *Paris-Delhi-Mumbai* exhibition in the previous year. Clearly in these decades, country specific shows seemed to have been curated according to western expectations of 'Indian-ness,' reflecting well-known conditions and of concern to the west. A similar model also applied to works from China, wherein political repression, economic growth and consumerism, subjugation of women, and control of family size—overtly 'Chinese' conditions expressed in recognizably Western modes produced a manifestly hybrid object. Stallabrass claims that "*the Western gaze is only comfortable with otherness as long as it is not really other,*"[187] and this is a view that can well be applied to the reception of exhibitions such as *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* and other shows in the West in this period.

Apart from these large-scale exhibitions that took place in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, there were smaller initiatives as well as artworks from India itself became part of the larger circulation as auction houses from the west arrived in India, creating an emerging market for the works and a coterie of art collectors from India and the west that drove their value. In other words, a mediated artworld was already falling into place. However, despite the pitfalls of thematics, curatorial vision and other factors within the limited shelf-life span of an exhibition, when art works are collectively viewed, however briefly in an exhibition, they supposedly contextualize the region, the nation, the locality as the site of a transcultural artistic discourse.[188] This contextualization in the case of India came into the frame with Hoskote's curation of the Indian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011.

1.5 Curation as Postnational Critique

Among the best-known large-scale exhibitions that utilize the nation as a framework and dominate the global artworld, the *Venice Biennale*, founded in the 19th century with its country pavilions, offers a prime example. The representation is underscored by each represented country's national economic interests, budgets, and organizational structures. Once again, I quote Bydler's study who argues that the economic strength of nation states determines who can dispatch representing artists to international exhibitions, studio programmes and residencies and their cultural budget also allows for the possibility of high-profile

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187   Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63 & 70.

188   The exhibitions as contextual spaces feature at various points in this study later on, as well in conjunction with the works of the three artists as and when required to reinforce the argument being made in this study.

events, placing a country on the contemporary art world map.[189] In the case of India, artists have participated in the Venice Biennale as individuals rather than as part of a country pavilion. Hoskote who had previously co-curated the 7th Gwangju Biennial in 2008, was invited to curate India's first official pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale by the Lalit Kala Akademi and the National Academy of Fine Arts. This was for the first time that India was represented as a nation in a professionally conceived and curated exhibition.[190] In a country where Indian art had been internationally recognized mainly through gallery, individual artists and private initiatives, this official bid for international participation was a brand-new initiative. Prior to that, India's exhibitions at the Biennale were mediated through the Embassy in Rome and presented an 'official' view of Indian art as part of the Italian display. For the choice of representation for the exhibition, there was no interference from the government agencies and the idea of what kind of art should be presented was not a fleshed-out concept.

This raised the question of defining 'national' culture, in a country as diverse as India, taking up Khilnani's "idea" of India as a proposition rather than as a territorial entity, Hoskote sought to address and broaden the sense of belonging, referencing Bhabha's contention that artists work within a "nation space,"[191]—therefore the affiliation to a nation could be understood to imply a matter of choice, Hoskote's curatorial idea chose to explore how would diasporic imagination conduct itself in relation to a place with which it has a certain connection. Hoskote focused on India as a "proposition" rather than a territory traversing diverse economies of image and narrative, asking what commonalities can be traced between art practices marked by shared practices, especially in moments of transcultural encounter and collaboration.[192] His position was marked by a refusal to be interpellated by entities such as nation state, religion or region, the emphasis was on floating contexts and enduring collaborations[193] within transcultural contexts, implying a fluidity in curatorial choices. Questions

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189   Bydler, *Global Art Worlds,* 208.

190   This view has been disputed by Manuela Ciotti who, at a talk at the Foundation for Contemporary Art in Bangalore on August 8, 2013, demonstrated the presence of an Indian pavilion at Venice, inaugurated by Sir Ronald Adam in the presence of Luther Evans, then Director-General of UNESCO, she states that nearly 40 Indian paintings were sold at this event- a retrospective of 59 paintings by 32 artists, including M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gil and F. N. Souza. Accessed on April 12, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/events/217659738390966.

191   Hoskote, Arken Museum, 56.

192   Hoskote, Arken Museum, 57.

193   Hoskote, "Biennials of Resistance," *The Biennial Reader*, 308.

that guided Hoskote's choices stemmed from India's specific context—in terms of how the art world becomes available to the audience in India, the roles that the auction house and gallery system play in creating a certain narrative of arrivals, recognition and success, how the selections for exhibitions and the programming cycle of galleries rely on the pricing index—all of these guided his desire to critically engage with the field through the idea of the *non-sequitor* in order to insert a break in this art world conversation.[194]

The India pavilion was given space in the Arsenale area, one of the most visited parts of the Biennale. Rather than presenting a large number of artists to 'illustrate the burgeoning art scene' as India survey shows had been doing, Hoskote instead decided to present four artists—Zarina Hashmi, Praneet Soi, Gigi Scaria and the Desire Machine Collective—forming four powerful positions, working across New York, Amsterdam/Kolkata, New Delhi/Kerala and Guwahati, to demonstrate the linkages between Indian contemporary art and the global art world. This curatorial proposition of creating the pavilion as a laboratory for exploring, opening up 'the idea of India' as against received notions of Indian-ness as a fixed *apriori* national identity allowed an expansion of the notion towards "plural anchorages of belonging." Hoskote's choice of Hashmi was a deliberate interjection into the association of the contemporary with a certain younger generation of artists and their engagement with new mediums. Hashmi's work, signaling both independence and partition also brought in questions of the legibility of language, her diasporic experiences of identity, living in New York as an American citizen, brought up questions of cultural citizenship and how displaced individuals respond to the predicaments, anxieties and urgencies of what it means to be Indian. As a South Asian Muslim, she makes the journey and the border her recurrent motifs, holding onto memory through naming with works like *Home is a Foreign Place* (1997), *Noor* (2008), and *Blinding Light* (2010). Praneet Soi's transcultural practice consisted of fluid situations and multiple interactions across locations in Europe and Kolkata, working with local craftsmen in the marginal economy of Kolkata, pre-occupied with war as an existential condition through figures of refugees, people escaping catastrophe. For the Biennale his slide projection work *Kumartuli Printer* (2010–11), was accompanied by a 54-foot, L shaped mural painted on site. Gigi Scaria incarnated the predicament of "the internal migrant." Coming from Kerala in the deep south, but living in Delhi, he encountered a variety of social, linguistic and existential questions on which he based his sculptures, installations and videos. His

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194   Hoskote's talk at Asia Art Archive. Accessed on May 23, 2018. https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/everyone-agrees-its-about-to-explode-curatorial-reflections-on-the-india-pavilion-54th-venice/search/actors:wang-molin/period/past/page/14.

reflections on the complexities of everyday life across social strata were visible in his video works like in the three-screen interactive video installation *Elevator from the Subcontinent* (2011). The last part of the curatorial selection included the Desire Machine Collective, comprising of Mrigank Madhukaillya and Sonal Jain, who originate from the Northeast of India and work across film installation and public space projects. The Northeast is a region that has always been considered as removed from the mainstream, it has been under effective military rule since the mid-1950s. Working with video and still photography, the duo reinterpret Deleuzian ideas on the 'desiring machine,' working "within the fabric of the North-East's broken down assemblage, putting together things that have been scattered because of newer constructions of nationhood and autonomy."[195] Self-consciously connecting their work to Southeast Asia, they reformulate the notion of where India belongs. But rather than creating overtly political art, they layer the viewing encounter with "intensities of awareness and sensation," inviting viewers to be more acutely aware of the sensorial environment through sound installations, with, for example, *Residue* (2011/2012), a film based on a power plant. All of these artists, states Hoskote, return us to starting points, to see if we can re-imagine what it means to belong to India, not merely as citizens but as participants and contributors—without being constricted by the narrow ideology of the nation.[196]

Hoskote's curatorial choices represented art practices that were increasingly part of a larger move in contemporary art practice, his curatorial position was significant due to its perceptible shift away from the nation and for practically articulating that the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained within the boundaries of the territorial state was now itself diasporic.

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195 Shaina Anand, "Desire Machine Collective Interview," *Khoj Book*, 518.

196 Ranjit Hoskote, "Everyone agrees it's about to Explode," Accessed on May 23, 2018. http://www.india-seminar.com/2014/659/659_ranjit_hoskote.htm.

2 Deconstructing the 'National' Body

The previous chapter provided an overview of the preceding decades when the artists in this study began their practices, demonstrating how the nation was very much in the forefront when contemporary mediums arrived in India. This chapter will directly engage with the first of the two sets of works that underlie the argument that I make to signpost a shift towards post-national perceptions in this study. Through a close reading of the themes and concerns foregrounding this first set of works, I will demonstrate how they cohere around the nation via a performative critique of the 'national' body. This material, sensory and corporeal body[197] closely aligns with national discourses around gender, sexuality and colonial histories which come to play in these art works. The use of new mediums lends this critique a sharper edge, right from the c-digital collages created by Chitra Ganesh's *Tales of Amnesia* (2003–2007) to video installations in Tejal Shah's works *Chingari Chumma* (2000), *What are you?* (2006), a photographic archive in *Women like us/I AM* (2009), and live performance with Nikhil Chopra as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007–2011). I begin with a short discussion of the performative body and align the performative body with the notion of masquerade in art. Performativity and masquerade work closely together in the set of works that I am analyzing. In the following sections I examine firstly some frames from Ganesh's *Tales of Amnesia*, emphasizing their connect with the role play of femininity and masquerade of womanliness and what they translate into within the Indian context. This is an especially critical translation because of Ganesh's appropriation of frames from an existing popular resource in India, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic. Next, with Shah's works in video and photography I locate the discussion within lived transgendered and queer lives in India and the marginalization of their status within the Indian nation state. With the third artist,

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197   Amelia Jones, "Body Art: A Survey," in *The Artists' Body (Themes and Movements)*, ed. Tracy Warr (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 29.

Nikhil Chopra, I analyze some aspects of his live performances to demonstrate how India's colonial history provides Chopra with a fertile resource to critique national histories as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*.

2.1 The Performative Body

The decades of the 1980s and 1990s were underpinned by 'liberation' movements in the west—feminism, black and civil rights, queer rights movements resulted in new perspectives on sexuality, and gender, race and ethnicity that were also closely associated with the postcolonial (Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994), postmodern (Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1989), and poststructuralist (Foucault 1976; Butler 1990) writings. When in 1989 Spivak asserted that "The body as such cannot be thought," it implied that there was no one universal category of the body. This discursive shift away from a universal category of the body implied that the conventional binaries of gender, sexuality, race or class that had been marking and situating positionalities were no longer as central and that the dispersal of the normative body was a given, indicating a fluid and open embodiment.

Haraway (1985) had already claimed that this was the time to confront the dominations of 'race,' 'gender,' 'sexuality' and 'class,' and argued for a politics rooted in bringing about fundamental changes in the world order and the need for a cyborg theory.[198] The performativity of the body became a central concern of queer theory as, emerging in the 1990s, it built upon the concerns being raised by feminism on the challenges of gender being an essential part of the self, and of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. Butler's critique of feminism argued that feminism should analyze how the category "woman" is produced and restrained by power structures, rather than looking at those power structures themselves for emancipation. Contesting categories such as gender and sexuality, queer theory put into question the stability and fixedness of the categories. Butler argued that gender is not something one 'is,' it is something one 'does,' an act or sequence of acts, a 'doing' rather than a 'being' and that in understanding the construction of the gendered subject, performativity becomes the key analytical perspective. She stated that gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this case, a 'masculine' man or a 'feminine' woman.[199]

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198   Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–181.

199   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990.

This notion of performativity, as also Butler's subsequent work on processes of materialization and the ontological creation of the material self resonates with the work of the three artists in the study as they actively resist dominant national discourses around gender and sexuality and masquerade in their multiple performative selves.

2.1.1 From Performativity to Performance in Art

The performative body as such had been at the center of works for many artists in the west since the 1960s. As early as 1963, much before the establishment of feminism as a coherent movement in the visual arts, artist Carolee Schneemann performed her eroticized body in *Eye Body,* establishing her body as a 'visual territory' as she pitted it against masculinist assumptions. Performing *Interior Scroll* in 1965, in an outrageously bold act, Schneemann challenged the fetishist and scopophilic male gaze. Jones argued that it was through these exaggerated performances of the sexual, gendered particularities of the body / self by body artists such as Carolee Schneeman, Yayoi Kusama and Hannah Wilke that "explode[s] the myths of dis-interestedness and universality that authorize these conventional modes of evaluation." Reading the works of artists such as Ana Mendieta, Jackson Pollock, Vito Acconci, Hannah Wilke, Laura Aguilar, Lyle Ashton Harris, Orlan and Bob Flanagan, Jones demonstrated that the decentering, dislocation and fragmentation of the self is played out through body-oriented practices, and that specially where it engages with phenomenologically informed feminism, it can encourage the development of a new reading praxis acknowledging the masculinist, racist, homophobic and classist assumptions that underlie the disciplines of art history and criticism.[200] Jones' view and analysis of these pioneering performances of body artists is extremely useful to understand the ways in which they confronted issues of particularized identities in the decades marked by identity politics.

Already by the 1970s the feminine body had been deeply imbricated in performance, with Yoko Ono performing *Cutpiece* (1964), while Marina Abramovic, foregrounding the body's corporeal aesthetic experience, stated: '*it is real, I can feel it, I can touch it, I can cut it...*' in *Rhythm O* (1974). The performativity of gender highlighted disciplinary regimes and its accompanying discourse through some iconic performative pieces, however it was Cindy Sherman's work

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200   Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 10–13 & 199.

that traversed many roles and personas in the 1970s with a series of black and white photographs in *Untitled Film Stills* as both actor and producer that deeply engaged with Joan Riviere's concept of 'womanliness as masquerade,' challenging the presence of femininity as the marker of a 'real' woman. Joan Riviere's famous and widely discussed essay of 1929 draws attention to the fictive nature of femininity, arguing that there is no difference between masquerade and womanliness, as she says,

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it [...]. the reader may ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.[201]

Mary Ann Doane's engagement with this psychoanalytic reading in an essay on the female film spectator (1991) further emphasizes its effectiveness as a powerful tool to create "a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by woman." Riviere's essay has been productively engaged with since the early part of the last century, especially by women seeing femininity as a construct apart from themselves and how it can be employed to their advantage in multiple ways as a veiled mechanism in their struggle for survival against misogynistic perceptions of their position by patriarchal men. The notion of masquerade as role play allocates it a performative aspect and can be closely aligned with the work of the artists in this study as they engage with the constitutive aspects of the body and its identity. It is via the constructed-ness of gender performativity itself that masquerade serves as a performative tactic in the work of these artists as their bodies become the quintessential tool to destabilize categories and problematize the certainties of established meanings and categories such as the national 'Indian' body.[202]

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201 Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psycho Analysis*, 1929, Vol. 9, 306.

202 Indian artist Sonia Khurana's *Body Series* can be cited as a fairly contemporary example of the performative 'Indian' body with her performances such as *lying down on the ground* (2006–2018), and *Logic of Birds* in Barcelona in 2006. Khurana's prone body occupying public spaces in the act of negotiating the presence of self in the world also occupied a space of gendered resistance through her symbolic act, especially in cultures where women's access to public spaces is restricted. Accessed December 20, 2018. https://www. knma.in/bird-and-other-body-events-sonia-khurana-supported-kiran-nadar-museum-art.

2.1.2 The 'Indian'/Indic Body

But is there even an 'Indian' body? Does it have a specific gender, a specific set of signifiers that indicate an Indic appearance? The forms of an 'Indian' national body in existence are multiple and masquerade in many guises, but they have one common and important feature that is directly relevant to this work—they function within the bounds of sexual orthodoxy and hetero-normativity. In the case of India this feature is further emphasised in the discourses that are laid out, enumerating a certain set of behaviors and the presence of certain stereotypes. While the modern Indian nation during its founding delineated its values—secular, liberal, in keeping within an ethos of modernity—and focused on equality for all—the gaps and discrepancies clearly in existence such as women and queer, among others remained at the periphery. These are the discrepancies that all three artists appropriate as they uproot national visual stereotypes from their original contexts and proscribe them with new meanings through their work, the critique of the body is articulated performatively at the level of the formal iconography employed by them.

Of the three artists it is Ganesh who travels the furthest backwards into Indian narrative religious traditions as she foregrounds the 'Indic' body,[203] and invokes the larger civilizational discourse stemming from Brahmanical texts representing the essence of Hinduism. The scantily clad spouses of the gods and consorts of Gods *Shiva/Parvati* and *Satyavan/Savitri* from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics formulate one example of the visualization of this Indic body. With *Tales of Amnesia* Ganesh critiques these bodies by fleshing out erased moments in Indian history and mythology, re-imagining them as masquerading queer bodies. Shah's work with video appropriates and frames yet another body from mass popular culture—the quintessential Bollywood heroine, demure, shy and alluring. In *Chingari Chumma*, the masquerade not only overturns the body residing in the national cinematic imagination but positions it further into post-porn territory. And Chopra in the persona of *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, masquerading as explorer, draughtsman and Victorian queen frames an androgynous post-colonial body as it entangles with and critiques the nation's past.

All three artists have a diasporic (Ganesh) and almost diaspora-like experience (Shah and Chopra) with the nation through living and studying in the west as they operate within transnational spaces. Theories of diaspora by Gilroy and Hall turn away from its conventional understanding of homeland/exile towards

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203 With the term 'Indic' I understand that there are different knowledge traditions within the Indian traditions to include among others, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain from which the Amar Chitra Katha narratives are drawn.

living with, and through difference and this is the direction claimed by both Puar and Gopinath. Puar claims that the genealogies of "queer" and "diaspora" share a complicit absence with the concepts of the nation state.[204] Gayatri Gopinath argues that employing the queer diaspora as a critical framework can challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring their "impure, inauthentic, non-reproductive potential," the suturing of queer with diaspora thus "recuperates those desires, practices and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries,"[205] and Ganesh's positioning of the queer body as an "impossible"[206] female subject following Gopinath's diasporic queer lens provides this study with the resistant potential to confront the hegemony of masculinist diasporic subjects and their complicit power. Further, defining the nation through a media shift highlights the effectiveness and quality of masquerade via the digital play they employ in their works perhaps resonating with McLuhan's contention that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change [...] it introduces into human affairs..."[207] and this first set of works by Ganesh demonstrates a similar engagement.

2.2 Chitra Ganesh

Ganesh's work across medias and genres closely aligns with pop art, taking forward a genre that connects her with her land of birth rather than the land of her ancestral origin. The central trope in Ganesh's work centers on the female figure—indexical, signifier, signified—sometimes it becomes a metaphor for the feminine through the material she engages with, which includes fishnet stockings, beads, plastic eyes, glitter and hair she uses to construct her works that itself denotes the feminine. Sometimes the coding is apparent within her selection of certain tropes that provide a point of reference and signify a particular quality or state. Her use of coded signifiers indicates the complex inter-relationships between the gendered feminine and society. She draws heavily from street and pop culture,

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204 Jasbir K. Puar, "Transnational Sexualities South Asian (Trans)nation (alism)s and Queer Diasporas," in *Q & A Queer in Asian America*, eds. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 406.

205 Gopinath, 2005, 11.

206 I draw the term from Gopinath (2005) who uses the term "impossibility" to highlight the unthinkability of the concept of queer female subjectivity within the mappings of nation and diaspora, 15.

207 Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

from mythical histories spanning the globe, from narratives of Salome, Judith and Holofernes, to Scheherazade and the Arabian nights and to the Iliad and the Odyssey, Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahāsiddhas and the Yoruba pantheon, all of which come into her work. Ganesh's engagement with the comic genre is the focus of this study.

2.2.1 The Comic Genre

The comic is commonly defined as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and / or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer, comics are considered to be a blend of word and picture—not a simple coupling of the verbal and the visual, but a blend, a true mixture,"[208] and this definition by Harvey offers a useful direction as a starting point to understand Ganesh's engagement with the genre. In terms of some general aspects of the genre it is clear that various constitutive aspects such as style, mise-en-scène, the combination of verbal and visual elements, the breakdown of the story into distinct panels, the interaction between panels, page layout and the plot structure—all play a key role in creating the work. Mise-en-scène in the comics is organized through a specific organization of its figurative elements—the décor, props and characters. The positioning of the characters, the way that they are dressed, their facial expressions—all of these can strongly influence how the scene is perceived.

The genre of the comic entered the contemporary art scene in America with Roy Lichtenstein's appropriation of the Mickey Mouse and has, since then, received a fair amount of attention in the west. Contemporary artists such as Ida Applebroog and Oyvind Fahlstrom have worked with the comic form in multiple ways, while Applebroog effectively pared down the images in her comic strip works, Fahlstrom's 'poetic visual' arrangements incorporated pop imagery with poetic vocabulary in a radical way. Some of the artists working directly with existing comics include Sue Williams' improvisations from MAD comics, Gary Simmons' use of racially loaded Disney characters as he draws then smudges them and Rivane Neuenschwander's edited panels from a Brazilian Disney comic book.[209] The appropriation of the comic format allows an artist to exercise

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208   Robert C Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississipi, 1996), 14.

209   Amy Peltz, "A Visual Turn: Comics and Art After the Graphic Novel," *Art in Print*, Vol. 2, No. 6. Accessed on June 1, 2018. https://artinprint.org/article/a-visual-turn-comics-and-art-after-the-graphic-novel/.

an almost complete control over the verbal and image track and to play with the juxtaposition of seemingly interconnected words and pictures.

Living and working in a multicultural society like the US, Ganesh's inspiration stems from a plethora of resources. Yet, for creating the *Tales of Amnesia* she chose the popular *Amar Chitra Katha* comic as resource—a visual inspiration that itself came through the nationalist period, through Raja Ravi Varma's lithographs, popular calendar art and from the "bazaar artists." The transgression effected by Ganesh therefore, appears even more violent as she creates queer polymorphic bodies that erase all signs of national identity in the disjunctive frames of *Tales of Amnesia.* Ganesh's own interest in the comic genre stemmed from the narrative commonalities between the Grimms' fairy tales, Greek myths and many other stories where women were introduced as wife, mother, sister or daughter, more often in need of completion and rescue by a heroic male character (*Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella* for example). She was particularly drawn to the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics that were widely believed to be keepers of national values and to how their ubiquity added to the collective memory bank of images that were imprinted early in childhood minds both in India and in the diaspora.[210] Mitchell terms the comic as transmediatic "because it is translatable and transitional, mutating before our eyes into unexpected new forms." As the artist draws and walks a familiar style, the possibilities for multiple temporalities and alternate pathways open up through sequences of words and images.[211] Ganesh, by taking up a recognizable coded object such as the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic pays close attention to the recoding of the icon and indexicality, deconstructing the relationship between image and text, and allowing for multiple readings of alternative realities. She builds up an alternate narrative through many complex layers inspired by surrealist writing and experimental fiction.

Before discussing Ganesh's collages in *Tales of Amnesia,* it would be useful to gain an overview of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics and understand the ethos and context that underlay their creation so that the changes wrought by Ganesh in her critique of this highly popular series and its exalted status can become clearer.

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210 Her interest in the comics is echoed in the work of another Indian artist, Dhruvi Acharya, who erases the text bubbles in each image, playing with its textual normative aspect.

211 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Comics as Media: Afterword," *Critical Inquiry*, 40 (3) 2014, 255–265.

2.2.2 The Amar Chitra Katha

Structurally similar to the American comic form inspired by *Tarzan, Phantom* and *Mandrake* series popular in India at the time, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics began publication in 1967. The decade of the 1960s was significant, it had seen some major upheavals in Indian politics marked by a rapidly urbanizing and modernizing state, resulting in the weakening of the social structure of the joint family system that had formed the backbone of the Indian social structure.

The publication of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics focusing on the strength and heritage of 'Indian' values such as spirituality and moral righteousness, offered a pedagogical tool replete with inspirational tales from Indian mythology and filled a void that was increasingly being felt as links between the generational relationships of children and their grandparents began to loosen, leading to an absence in the passing on of such stories.[212] Especially for a child growing up in the diaspora, the comics became a significant gateway to India's cultural heritage—functioning "both as a transmitter of cultural values and a mnemonic device,"[213] with messages from religious texts like Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata translated into an easy picture format for the young reader. The comics followed established story lines in a definitive manner wherein each mythological character was portrayed as morally upright and kind, using their power for the good of all. The pedagogic message in them was clear—the defeat of evil and the triumph of the good and the right. These messages became part of the construction of the modern national narrative, providing markers of proper behaviors for the nation's citizens. Published in more than 400 titles (out of which approximately a 100 were based on the epics and the *purāṇas*), this collection played a role not only in creating a visual history for a fledgling nation but also contributing towards establishing the nation state as a modern institution, seeking to unify its citizens through a sense of shared heritage by including titles on freedom fighters like *Bhagat Singh* and *Subhash Chandra Bose*. The *Amar Chitra Katha* creators diligently drew from the history of the early nationalist movement to support and emphasize an inspirational nationalist ideology necessary in the formation of a young nation.

That the publication of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics was a project stemming from the nation's elite middle class whose aspirations it represented is

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212   Nandini Chandra, *The Classic Popular: Amar Chitra Katha 1967–2007*, (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008), 53.

213   Frances Prichett, "The World of Amar Chitra Katha," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, eds. Babb & Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 96.

borne out by its affirmation in the studies of scholars such as Prichett (1995), Mclain (2009), and Chandra (2008), on the comics. There were many reasons why the *Amar Chitra Katha* became such a popular genre, the familiar iconography played an important role. Sourcing their images from bazaar and calendar art, the drawing artists tied them in with the popular bazar aesthetic and created the gods to look much like those from the popular calendar art ubiquitously displayed in mass media. These factors played a key role in connecting the comic's visual iconography easily in the mind of the reader. 'Political correctness' guided the portrayals of gods and goddesses. In popular Indian imagination Gods such as *Rama*, *Shiva* and *Vishnu*, served as models of courage and heroism, with their devoted consorts, *Sita*, *Parvati* and *Lakshmi* by their side. The *Amar Chitra Katha* scriptwriters referencing Moti Chandra's manual, *Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics and Coiffure in Ancient and Medieval India* (1973), went back to the classical period for the dress of the women, portraying a modified costume for women which draped down from the hips, with a covering on the top was dressed with ornaments such as the *antariya* and *uttariya*, a waist chain called *prapata*, the same costume coming through from the Vedic to the medieval period. The portrayal of the female body centered around visibility and careful costuming, citing ostensibly that there was no concept of stitching in those times, therefore tying the clothes above the waist, above the breasts, "to enhance the importance of covering those regions and thus uncover them."[214]

Ganesh noticed how the women were quite "scantily clad but pious at the same time. The *rakshasis* were portrayed as dark and the *devis* were super fair." Women were often defined relationally to men, as someone's mother, wife, sister, but not as actors in their own right.[215] Observations made by post-colonial scholars on pre-independent India had also pinpointed this narrow portrayal of women, Partha Chatterjee in his discussion of the nation and its women, attributes this ideological construct of the modern Indian woman to the colonial period, when the "woman" standing as a sign for "nation" was imbued with the spiritual qualities of "self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion and religiosity," and the protector of the inner domain against the civilizing mission of the colonial administration.[216] This resonated with the ethos that the *Amar Chitra Katha*

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214 Both Mclain and Chandra's studies on the comics address the portrayal of the female body fairly comprehensively.

215 Accessed on May 17, 2017. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/stoi/all-that-matters/I-dont-believe-in-using-LGBT-themes-for-shock-value-Chitra-Ganesh/articleshow/24070715.cms?referral=PM.

216 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 119 & 131.

creators picked up and tried to re-create in a 'sanitized' version of the feminine 'Indian' body that continued to uphold virtues such as spirituality and sacrifice.

In a comic, both narratives and cultural codes are employed to make sense of the action. The genre of the comic strip cannot work without a code. A character is fairly recognizable as it is coded through the panels and a visual code works by convention and analogy, stressing the similar, banning the difference. Characters are often easily recognized because of their coded repetition.[217] Ganesh while creating *Tales of Amnesia* (2002–2007) draws from these recognizable cultural codes as she critiques prevailing specific social practices against women in India through a process of semantic deconstruction. The narrative in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics capitalizes on the parodic form of the genre visible in the extremely stylized lavish cinematic frames of opulent palaces, and lush forests, visuals that are imminently detachable and open to re-codification and re-configuration—a feature that Ganesh utilizes productively in the creation of the collages that work as prototypical examples of her surrealist portrayal.

2.2.3 *Tales of Amnesia*—the Collage Process and the Panels

For the digital collage creation, Ganesh takes part of the background from the original comic, makes a brush and ink drawing on it and then scans it onto the computer. She erases the white space and adds color to the whole to create a seamless-ness between the characters and the background. This in-distinguishability between the source material and her alterations gives the images their powerful ability towards a deconstructive dissonance.[218] The technological manipulation of the visual imagery not only serves as an aesthetic strategy to re-tell the stories but also molds it into another virtual reality even as it retains its original connections with costuming and physiogonomy. The collage process allows Ganesh to bring different references, different kinds of visual languages formally together. A key part of her intervention is the addition of surreal texts that are introduced as thoughts or as actual speech which sometimes support the recoded images, sometimes not. The image-text relation rather than being duo specific, additive or intersecting, follows parallel combinations as

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217   Tom Lambeens and Kris Pint, "The Interaction of Image and Text in Modern Comics," in *Texts, Transmissions, Receptions: Modern Approaches to Narratives*, eds. Andre Lardinois, Sophie Levie et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 246.

218   Saisha Grayson, "Breathing Between the Lines: Re-Deconstruction in Chitra Ganesh's Tales of Amnesia," *n.paradoxa: International Journal of Feminist Art*, Vol. 29, January 2012.

inter-dependent, mysterious sentences reminiscent of écriture féminine spout forth subconscious and anxious thoughts that defy a logic of relationality. The general definition of the comic genre as an effective blend of word and picture would imply an inter-dependent relationship between the two, but with *Tales of Amnesia* this complex image-text relationality metamorphosizes the original narrative not only into another parallel story but also deliberately plays with this relationality. In the reading of some of the panels from Ganesh's *Tales of Amnesia* therefore, I will revert to the original panels in order to understand and contextualize this play.

The cover panel for the C-digital prints sets the tone of performativity and frames the direction that the deconstruction of the entire narrative adopts. Ganesh takes the splash page from *the Amar Chitra Katha* issue of the *Hanuman* comic where the monkey-god *Hanuman* is leaping towards the sun in child-like faith (Fig. 19). This image directly references the original *Puranic* legend according to which the baby *Hanuman,* mistaking the sun for a fruit, leapt towards it and was wounded, landing up with a disfigured jaw. In her cover page, Ganesh transforms *Hanuman* into *Amnesia*, a half-human, half-monkey *junglee* (barbarian) girl child, replicating visual elements from the original panel, substituting brighter colors, the sun in psychedelic pink for example (Fig. 20). However, in this almost faithful replication of the image there is a marked difference in the stance, while in the original image little *Hanuman* throws his head back, reaching out arrogantly to the sun, in the recreated image Amnesia does not display that arrogance, rather she looks towards the sun, very demure and feminine.

In the comic medium, the splash page is designed to grab the viewer's attention with a strong visual appeal and the text often introduces the main character of a story. As Will Eisner explains, "The first page of the story serves as an introduction [...] it is a launching pad for the narrative and for most stories, it establishes a frame of reference."[219] And on this splash page as well, issues of staging and framing come into question right away with its anchor text, *"How to stage her story? Her name was Amnesia and it fit her like a brand new boxing glove. From a lineage of monkey girls"* The phrases establish certain markers for the ensuing narrative—the foregrounding of Amnesia as the heroine focuses not only on the meaning of the word but simultaneously works as a feminist assault on normative behavior for young girls with its reference to the boxing glove. This demure surreal *Amnesia* represents women who as the succeeding panels show, transgress their established societal roles, masquerade as queer

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219 Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (Florida: Poorhouse Press, 2008), 62.

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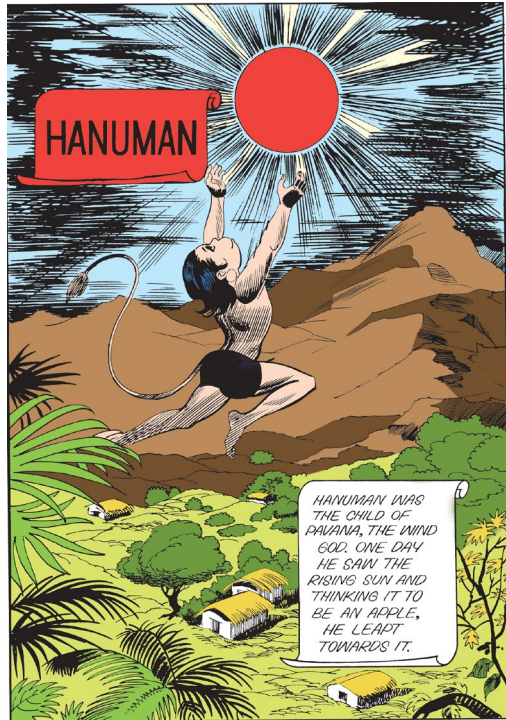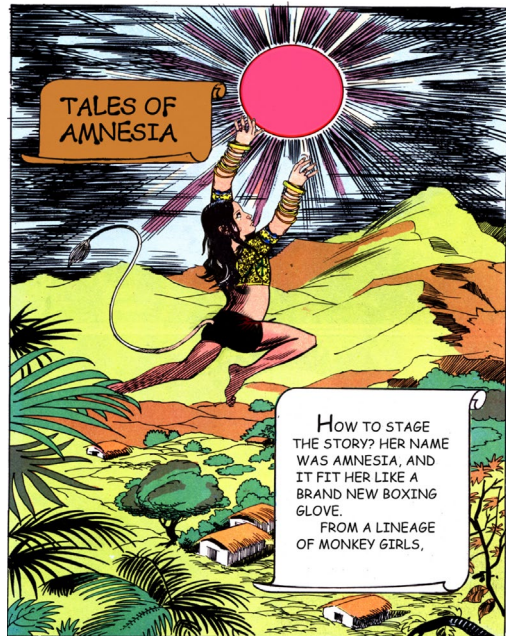
Fig. 19. Amar Chitra Katha, *Hanuman,* 1981. Courtesy India Book House.
Fig. 20. Ganesh, *Tales of Amnesia,* 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

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subjects and function as agents of their own stories (rather than being relationally defined as mother, wife or sister). Ganesh, re-framing the narrative through palimpsest rarely, if ever, invokes the original erased narrative—*'Hanuman was the child of Pavana the wind, so one day he saw the rising sun and thinking it be an apple, he leapt towards it'*—but it does depend upon it for its resonance. As Amnesia reaches out towards a psychedelic sun, touching it, the *Hanuman* myth retains a loose connection with the "monkey lineage," and an empowered Amnesia's challenging tale begins. The reference to the monkey lineage could also loosely connect with the well-known feminist group Guerilla Girls, an anonymous group of women artists founded in 1985 a highly vocal group that fights against discrimination of all sorts, staging protests against institutionalized racism and sexism.[220]

By foregrounding the concept of amnesia, Ganesh reminds us with Halberstam that the trope of forgetfulness can serve as a useful strategy to interrupt and challenge the traditional route taken by memorialization as a disciplinary mechanism. Halberstam presents forgetting, lack of discipline and losing as strategies of resistance against constraints of success—she argues that forgetfulness challenges the traditional route of disseminating knowledge that relies on positivism and its reliance on memory. "Forgetting allows for a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future." Through an extensive analysis of examples from animated cinema, Halberstam states that heteronormative society demonstrates its constructed-ness through laying down elaborate teaching mechanisms and says that " if we were all already heterosexual to begin with, we would not need such strict parental guidance to deliver us to all to our common destinies of marriage, child-rearing and hetero-reproduction."[221] A similar approach can be applied to the role played by the comic genre and Halberstam's argument of taking recourse to the power of forgetfulness in creating new futures is perhaps a useful trope to apply to Ganesh's work in *Tales of Amnesia*, as it attempts to break with the 'constructed-ness' of a self-authorizing national past as represented by the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics.

Continuing with *Tales of Amnesia,* references to the originary Hanuman myth surface now and again as Amnesia in the next panel appears as a young teenager with a burning tail framed against the sea. In the original myth—when his tail was set afire by demon warriors in the city of Lanka, the monkey god.

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220 For a larger discussion around feminism and art, please see Helena Reckitt, *Art and Feminism*, eds. Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 153.

221 Judith Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 15 & 83.

Hanuman used his extraordinarily powerful, ever lengthening burning tail, to set fire to the city in rage before taking back news of the kidnapped Sita (wife of Lord Rama) who had been kidnapped by the demon king of Lanka. In the *Tales of Amnesia* panel, Amnesia walks into the sea, framed against a burning city—the panel text voices an anxious resonant thought. *"But she was prompted by anxiety to chew her tail off at an early age,"* as yet another reference to a lack of empowerment for the young girl child in India. The violence continues in the frames that follow, a young and blissful *Amnesia/Parvati* engages in a game of frisbee with a blood-spattered feminine hand that wears bangles in another coded signifier of marital status. A subtle lurid line of red blood drips down from the corner of her mouth (Fig. 21), as she confidently proclaims, *"Godzilla, you don't stand a chance."* Through this textual reference Ganesh brings in contemporary narratives as well. Here Godzilla could very well be a reference to a New York-based Asian American arts collective of the same name established in 1990 in order to facilitate inter-generational and interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration for Asian American artists and art professionals. The collective provided visibility in local and national exhibitions, developed press outreach strategies, published newsletters, and sponsored symposia on Asian American art but was disbanded in 2001.[222] With Ganesh's reference, the context broadens beyond social issues in India to include art practices and the reception of Asian American artworks that continue to be marginalized in the Euro-American context. While in the original textual narrative, young *Parvati* reinforces the stereotype of a tame and demure femininity as she says, *'I have had enough of this game. Come let us go home and play with our dolls,'* (Fig. 22) in the panel recreated by Ganesh—the violence and the text combine to make a larger comment about the masquerade of femininity and importance of role play. The surreal pastiche continues in the ensuing panels with headless figures, flesh-devouring vultures resting on carcasses, sacrificial heads in ritual fires and battling horses smashing against armored heads.

In the next image (Fig. 23), *Parvati* standing in a pond of cold water, devotedly concentrates on God Shiva, with a masochistic devotion mouthing the following words, *'your image fixed in my heart will warm me.'* Two hermits furtively observing her from the bushes, describe her thus, *'truly she is the ascetic of ascetics'* the anchor text reads, *'many years passed but Parvati never once gave up hope,'* reinforcing the story of patient devotion. In popular discourse in India, the goddess *Parvati*, having failed to seduce the unruly and wild Shiva with her

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222 Accessed on September 5, 2017. https://apa.nyu.edu/the-godzilla-asian-american-art-network-records-mss-166/.
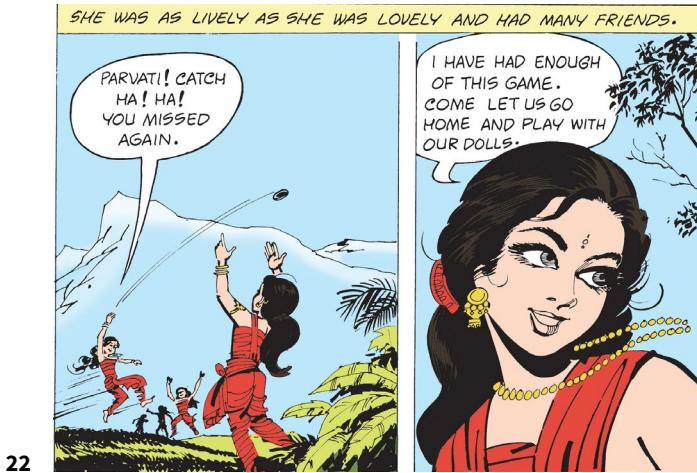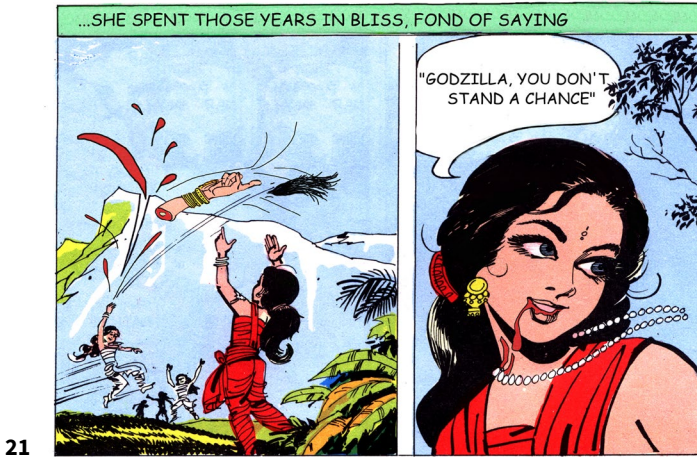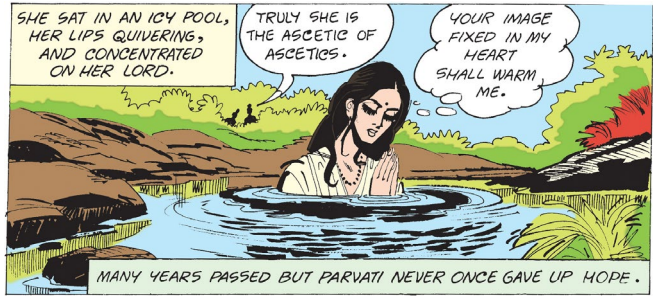
Fig. 21. Ganesh, *Godzilla,* 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris. **Fig. 22.** Amar Chitra Katha, *Shiva Parvati,* 1972. Courtesy India Book House.

beauty, resorted to prolonged *tapas* or prayer. She is considered a *pativrata* or dutiful wife par excellence, and the penance performed by *Parvati* is emulated even today in India to reinforce the desirability of the institution of marriage. Young unmarried women undertake various ritual fasts or *vratas* individually and collectively to obtain a good husband, clearly myths do not simply reflect dominant values but play a role in codifying those values.

Uma Chakravarti, discussing Brahmanical Patriarchy in early India, states that in Hindu society the caste-class structure laid out by the Brahmanas exercised its mechanism of control and subordination over women firstly through ideology and the *pativratadharma* (the dedication and duty of a wife towards her husband) was internalized by women who then attempted to live up to the

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Fig. 23. Amar Chitra Katha, *Shiva Parvati,* 1972. Courtesy India Book house. **Fig. 24.** Ganesh, *Aneurysm,* 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.
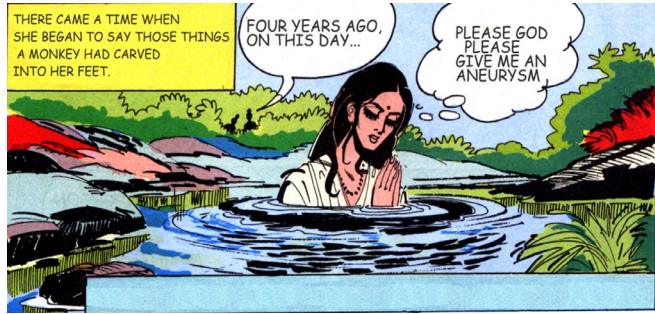
ideal notion of woman hood constructed by these ideologues representing society. Chakravarti terms the *pativrata* concept as a master stroke of Hindu-Aryan genius and one through which women themselves controlled their own sexuality,[223] and this form of indoctrination is quite apparent in the panel from the original comic. In the panel created by Ganesh *Amnesia/Parvati,* wishes instead for an aneurysm (Fig. 24). Despite the familiarity of the true-to-the-original visual presentation, the discordant words betray this masquerade of femininity as *Amnesia* prefers to move away from being viewed as an epitome of womanliness. Once again, as in the previous panel the mysteriously worded anchor text creates deliberate gaps and dissonances that allow multiple subjective readings of the frame and an extrapolation of other possible narratives. In this particular frame it is the subversiveness of the text alone that serves as the harshest critique of a form of indoctrination running through centuries.

Often the images that Ganesh employs are visibly erased and photoshopped, in the original frame drawn from the *Mirabai* comic, young Mira's mother leads her to an image of Krishna, telling her, *'There is your husband Gopala. Love him*

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223 Uma Chakravarti, "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in India: Gender, Class, Caste and State," *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 28 No. 14, 1993, 579–585.
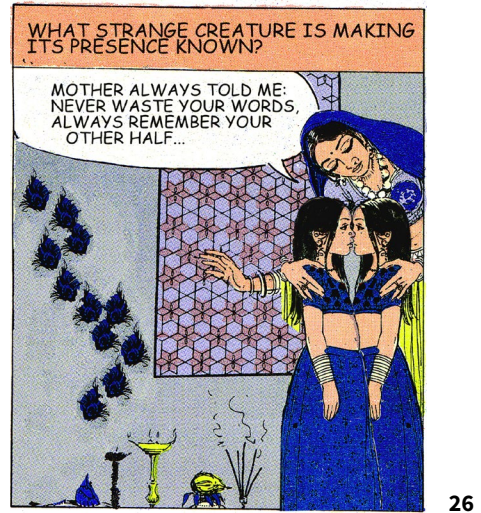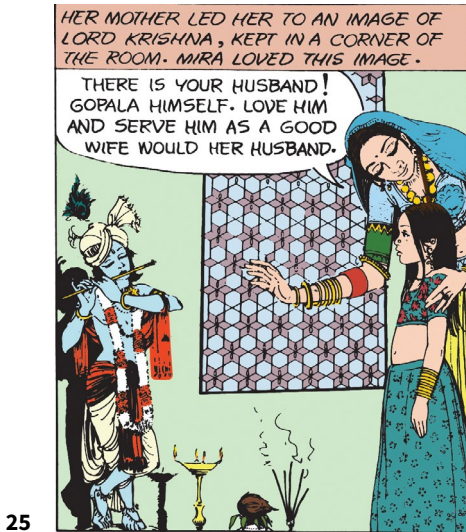
Fig. 25. Amar Chitra Katha, *Mirabai*, 1972. Courtesy India Book House.
Fig. 26. Ganesh, *Mother Always Told Me*, 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

and serve him as a good wife would her husband' (Fig. 25). Once again, as with the young *Parvati*, there is an emphasis on stereotypical feminine role-play, not only in reinforcing the importance of wifely duties of service and love for the husband (with a phrase like *'love him and serve him as a good wife would'*) but also highlighting the role of the mother herself in her supportive stance, guiding the daughter in performing her duties correctly towards her husband. Ganesh's re-configured image displays twin *Miras* as mirror images, the *Krishna* idol has been erased, all that remains is a trail of peacock feathers as a signifier of the God's presence (Fig. 26). The representation of the lesbian couple as mirror images of each other constructs the body as a reflection or an echo. Such an image is dangerous to society and culture because it suggests there is no way forward—only regression and circularity are possible. This image threatens because it suggests a perfectly sealed world of female desire from which man is excluded.[224]

The queer dual image created by Ganesh forms the graphic center of the narrative focus, accompanied by a surreal phrase, *"Mother always told me: Never waste your words, always remember your other half,"* the 'other half' in

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224 Barbara Creed, "Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts," in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, eds. Janet Rice and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 99.

heterosexual terms could imply the spouse, it is commonly inferred in popular understanding that a wife is considered to be the 'better half.' Ganesh draws attention once again to this form of indoctrination that often forms an indelible part of a young girl's adolescent years in a tradition bound society. With a phrase *"never waste your words,"* the connect can be made with Mirabai's devotional songs for Lord Krishna which are part of Indian popular culture even today. Mirabai, a young princess in Rajasthan spent her whole life singing praises of Lord Krishna, she defied the conventional role assigned to women in history by remaining single and worshipping a God legendary for his flirtatious behavior with women. It is worth noting that the mother continues to be a reference point even as the *pativrata* ideals remain as a sacred prescriptive textual model for girls to be schooled in as they grow into adolescence and later become wives, these ideals are internalized by them so that they can live up to the idealized notions of wifehood.

However, perhaps no other mythological narrative from India exemplifies the power of the conflicted nature of the feminine as clearly as that of the creation of the Goddess Durga. The narrative is of great complexity and impinges on the belief systems built around dominant male deities of the Hindu pantheon such as Shiva and Vishnu. The next panel in *Tales of Amnesia* I will discuss is based on this narrative.

2.2.4 The Creation of Goddess Durga

The original comic on this subject was titled the *Tales of Durga* in the *Amar Chitra Katha* series and the narrative referenced by the writers of the script was believed to have referenced *Devi Mahatmya*, the text that established the goddesses's supremacy in the pantheon of gods. The *Devi Mahatmya* is part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, one of the early Sanskrit Puranas composed probably in the 5th or 6th century. Its pre-eminent feature was understanding the Goddess to be the Ultimate reality. Structured within a narrative of three episodes, the *Mahatmya* first establishes her primacy in the cosmic context, the second as a more comprehensive account of her origin on the earth culminates with her conquest of the buffalo-demon *Mahisha*, while the third celebrates her various forms and their victory over demons *Shumbh, Nishumbh*.[225] However, rather than on the goddess, the frames in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic often focus

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225 Thomas Coburn, *Devi: The Great Goddess* in *Devi: Goddesses of India*, eds. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), 31–32.

instead on the villain *Mahisha* as the dominant figure, emphasizing his size and fearless charge in battle—yet another example of the bourgeois patriarchal project coming through to the modern period that has been so clearly visible in some of the narratives.

This particular frame from *Tales of Durga* (Fig. 27), displays the creation of the goddess *Durga* by the gods of the Hindu trinity – *Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva*—who are seated on the left side of the panel. Powerful rays emanate from the male gods and create the form of *Durga*, who, bejeweled and calm, stands in the center of the cloud, armed with the weapons bestowed upon her by the gods. The accompanying text states, *'It was joined by similar rays of light from Indra and other Devas and Lo! The next moment, out of that light a female form with a thousand arms came into being! It was Devi Durga.'*

The *Mahatmya* text describes it thus,

> ... from the face of Vishnu filled with rage came forth a great fiery splendor *(tejas)* [and also from the faces] of Brahma and Shiva. And from the bodies of Indra and the other gods came forth a great fiery splendor, and it became unified in one place. An exceedingly fiery mass like a flaming mountain did the gods see there, filling the firmament with flames. That fearless splendor, born of the bodies of all the gods, unified and pervading the three worlds with her splendor, became a woman. *(2.8–12)* (Coburn Great Goddess, 36)

This narrative account with its clear patriarchal bias recorded in religious history has been critiqued by Shivaji Pannikker for its incompleteness and the fact that its origin itself is constructed and willed into existence for the purpose of coercive action against the *asura*, so that the power-status of patriarchy can be restored.[226] Panniker's Marxist reading is closer to Ganesh's subversive visualization of the overshadowing patriarchal presence in this narrative. Ganesh's representation instead is a self-generated, self-pleasuring, self-empowered, and headless vision (Fig. 28). Ganesh further erases the images of the three gods, who are represented by white beams of energy that seem to feed into the goddess's multiple-armed body. Though the images of the gods have been erased, their weapons remain, perhaps indicating empowerment to the headless goddess. Her wrists are free from any feminine adornments, and garments are in a state of disarray. The Goddess's hand touches herself (in a gesture of autoeroticism) while a disembodied male hand accusingly points towards her from the left side of the panel. The mysterious anchor text gestures towards the possibility of the body
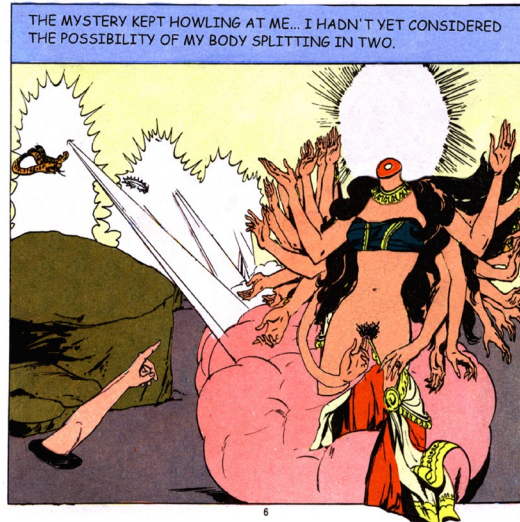
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226 Shivaji Pannikker, *Saptamatrika Worship and Sculptures: An Iconographical Interpretation of Conflicts and Resolutions in the Storied Brahmanical Icons* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1997), 171.
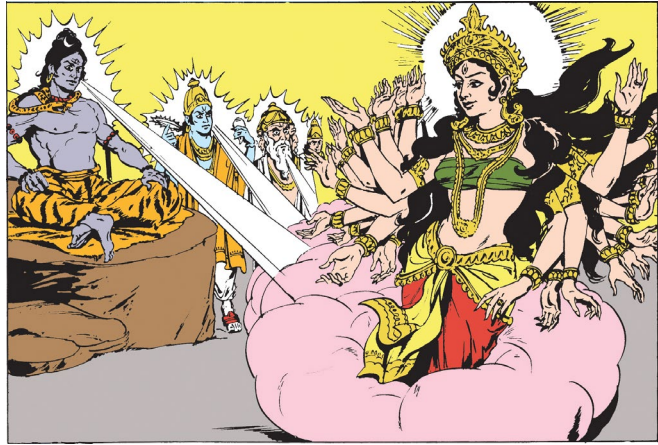
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Fig. 27. Amar Chitra Katha, *Tales of Durga,* 1978. Courtesy India Book House.
Fig. 28. Ganesh, *Kali Howling,* 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

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splitting in two, to multiplicity. The splitting could also refer to the double 'othering' of queer sexuality in a hetero-normative society.

The total queering of a mythical narrative that lies at the center of Hindu religious belief acts as a powerful and severe critique of Hindu orthodoxy as also of a nation in which the goddess tradition finds its echo in temple worship and celebration of festivals such as *Durga Ashtami*. With the rise of Hindutva in the 1990s the adoption of traditional icons like Kali and Shakti have played an important role in the parochial agendas of political parties like the BJP and Shiv Sena. During the demolition of the Babri Masjid Mosque in 1992, women participation was quite high, the *Durga Vahini*, the Women's wing of the Vishwa

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Hindu Parishad urged women to fight in the name of their religion, to become *viraganas* or warrior women and the *Mahila Aghadi*, self-styled incarnates of Shakti vociferously participated in the riots in Bombay following the demolition of Babri Masjid.

Tanika Sarkar's study of the women in the Hindutva brigade looks at the positioning of women at the intersection of politics, violence, the new middle class and religion. She argues that in moments of mass violence, the participating women have been from certain vulnerable communities, looking to empower and heal their community lives and that their participation has brought them a certain amount of confidence and larger solidarities while at the same time leading them to being complicit with fascist intolerance and an anti-democratic political order,[227] as an example of the aspirational caste class divide that often polarizes Indian politics. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated by various examples, the scriptural articulations of women's ontological value through history have been brought into existence through male interpretations and this is the belief that Ganesh challenges.

The head is a particularly rich and important site in the symbolization of gender and is that part of the woman's body that gives her a voice and her identity. Decapitation is one way of relieving the woman of both identity and a voice, reducing her to a mere sexual and reproductive body,[228] and in this panel Ganesh already deprives the Goddess of her constructed persona, a problematic construct with its patriarchal bias.

Kinsley describes the Goddess as one who "violates the model of the Hindu woman. She is not submissive, she is not subordinated to a male deity, she does not fulfill household duties and she exceeds at what is traditionally a male function, fighting in battle...she reverses the normal role for females and therefore stands outside normal society."[229] Ganesh's choice of the Goddess as the subject for this panel resonates with Kinsley's view and gestures towards the hidden presence of the extraordinary power that often remains repressed in women as they are constrained within socially demeaning roles.

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227   Tanika Sarkar, "Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses – Family & Organisation in Hindutva Politics," in *Handbook on Gender*, 337–363.

228   Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Introduction: The Spectacle of the Female Head," in *Off with her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, eds. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

229   David Kinsley, 97.

2.2.5 The Practice of Sati

The subordination of women features strongly in all the panels discussed, whether they are drawn from the mythological narratives of *Parvati, Mira* or *Durga.* In the concluding panels in *Tales of Amnesia,* Ganesh highlights yet another significant evil of the patriarchal system handed down through history—*sati* and its valorization through practices such as bride-burning.

The practice of *sati* was outlawed under British rule in 1829, it was not a straightforward reform as Lata Mani explains, the discourse of sati had very little to do with the women who burned and more to do with the implicit privileging of high caste Brahmin scripture as constituting authentic traditions, women merely served as the site where contestations took place,[230] but remnants of the practice continue in the present taking the form of heinous dowry deaths, bride-burning and occasionally the ritual of *sati* itself.

When Roop Kanwar died on her husband's funeral pyre at Deorala in Rajasthan in 1984 it sparked off a nation-wide controversy, it was found that there had been nearly 40 more cases of widow self-immolation in Rajasthan.[231] In the follow-up discussions after Roop Kanwar's self-immolation, four differing positions could be discerned, the first a liberal position, criticizing the custom as traditional and barbaric, the second a more conservative, pro-sati one that valorized the practice, the third position adopted by Ashis Nandy not only critiqued the modern liberal stance but also reaffirmed the presence of the dichotomy between tradition / modernity in the analysis of the practice, simultaneously referring to the colonial position of authentic / inauthentic sati—the former as a sign of women's sacred powers as against the contemporary widow burning as a "product of a dehumanized market morality"—the last position was the one adopted by feminists for whom the central point of discussion was the concern for women's lives and in the larger context, the subordination of women. Discussing these positions in detail, Mani adds that after Roop Kanwar's burning, widow burning is no longer a historical problem but has itself become "a charged and explosive contemporary issue."[232] Ganesh exposes its gruesome, misogynistic character in another panel (Fig. 29), the torso of an anonymous male figure, gestures at the

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230 Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1998), 152–153.

231 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge 1997), 69.

232 Lata Mani, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception," *Inscriptions* 1989, Vol. 5, 18–32.

Fig. 29. Ganesh, *Waterfall,* 2002. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

veiled maiden who gazes down at a disembodied female pelvis, saying, *"Or—Forget that waterfall for a moment, come see how the skin catches on fire."* The tactile and ironic text gestures not only towards the practice of a young woman shedding copious tears as she leaves her parental home but also on the heinous practice of dowry deaths which offer a source of their annihilation or release from a violent brutal existence. The element of dystopic imagery is further reinforced by the heavy coding in this panel in the dress of the widows as they observe the decaying corpses on the battlefield, one of the two women holds a mutilated and headless male child's arm in a stringent critique of female feticide and the powerlessness of the widow's will itself—a disturbing reality in contemporary India. In this panel, the image-text relationship is contiguous and interdependent. One of the two panels is from the *Ashoka* comic displaying ravaged battlefields from emperor Ashoka's bloody war in *Kalinga* (present day Orissa) after which the emperor embraced Buddhism. The original text reads *'As he proceeded, he saw horrible sights, heads of dead men'*—Ganesh's addition of the widowed figures to the original panel juxtaposes two dissimilar but extreme forms of violence.

2.2.6 *Tales of Amnesia*—Key Aspects

The set of collages focus on a thematic connect rather than follow the classic comic genre structure, there is no breakdown or mixing of the panels, the gutter space does not usually serve to connect images and many of the panels tell a single story – there is no sequential narration and they appear to be episodes of Amnesia's life. The connection between the panels, rather than being narrative, is thematic. As already mentioned, the total erasure of the male figure is

the primary and key aspect of Ganesh's work and the nonchalance exhibited in these frames exhibits a strong critique of patriarchal dominance. Ganesh is arguing with Butler against the heterosexual matrix within which the category of woman finds stability "one is a woman to the extent that one functions as one within a heterosexual frame." Along with questioning the continuous reproduction of these norms, Ganesh goes further with Butler's argument, as she points to the patriarchal structures of power that restrain women. Ganesh connects this process of reproducing of the norms with Riviere's definition of womanliness as masquerade, unmasking this masquerade, and questioning the assigned behavior of the 'ideal' woman as a construct.

Johnson and Johnson (1997) argue that it is in the societies that are heavily patriarchal, male-dominated and male-centered, that the lives of women are the most harsh and oppressed. Patriarchal forms of violence manifest themselves through various modes of oppression including *sati* or in current terms, dowry deaths. In the case of India, it is a well-known fact that patriarchy lies at the root of violence against women in India, it is men who hold the power over feticide and decisions in most circumstances. In the patriarchal ideal it is the woman's duty to serve her father, husband and sons for the entirety of her life as delineated in ancient Indian texts like the Laws of Manu.

Nivedita Menon comments on how feminists in India do not critique the heterosexual monogamous patriarchal institution of marriage rather the practices around it, polygamy, dowry, domestic violence, reinforcing the family structures around it. She points out that patriarchy needs the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality to survive, caste, race and community identity are all produced through birth and therefore this purity of identities and social formations that are so strictly policed via family and community norms all work towards the control of women's sexuality and maintaining the heterosexual patriarchal family system in place.[233] Mary John and Janaki Nair contend that for long women have been the bearers of elaborate codes of honor on their bodies and carry the violent marks of caste, ethnic and national imaginations on their bodies. Only recently have spaces opened up for talking about female desire and sexualities and since the 1990s the media has played a role in representing gay and lesbian issues and yet in their essentialist portrayals, they seem to have created lesbians as a breed apart.[234] All of these opinions serve to reinforce the patriarchal and

233   Nivedita Menon, "How Natural is Normal?" in *Because I Have a Voice; Queer Politics in India*, eds. Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2005), 34–36.

234   Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 8–34.

heterosexual structures that define Indian society and position Ganesh's critique in a direct confrontation with the nation's traditional values and beliefs.

The iconography mines a specific heritage from Hindu mythology as it draws from the tales of *Durga*, *Krishna*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Parvati*, *Ashoka*, *Padmini and Ratnavali* among others, even as Ganesh surreally brings in Greek and Roman myths and histories ranging from Sappho and Pandora, *("Dear X, They say Sappho jumped off a cliff for love. Do you get it? (Rather throw up or think of) I spilled my guts in the toilet, then sat down at the computer to write").* This transcultural referencing perhaps facilitates their intelligibility for an international audience. For Ganesh, whose work shows more frequently in the US than in South Asia or in other parts of the world, this broadening of the narrative is an important aspect for its success among diverse multicultural audiences.[235] The contexts under which she has displayed this particular work are diverse and varied with many aspects that would entail more detailed study, however *Tales of Amnesia* continues to be the one work that directly connects with her diasporic roots. Gopinath states that Ganesh negotiates "the alleys and byways of diasporic memory to excavate the past not as a locus of originary culture or identity but as a site of unpredictable desires and embodiments providing [us] with a kind of shadow archive to the dominant archive of nationalist and diasporic modernity,"[236] this shadow archive created by Ganesh not only critiques the bastion of India's cultural heritage textually but also negates its visual portrayal through foregrounding queer desires.

The influence of kitsch, camp and lesbian pulp novels is apparent in some of the frames as they explicitly display erotic gestures such as self-pleasuring. The adoption of Camp and aspects of surrealism come together in the panels through Ganesh's appropriations of portions from the original work, creating an 'offness,' with the narrative through the formal quality of the work itself. As Ganesh

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235 Ganesh showed *Tales of Amnesia* for the first time internationally with Gallery Haas & Fischer in 2007 (August–October) in their Project Space 1+2: Loukia Alavanu, she went on to participate in FIAC Paris, with it in a solo presentation with the same gallery. She showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo show at Nature Morte in Berlin in 2011 and also at a solo at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh in the same year. In 2012, next she showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo at Gotenburg Sweden and added some more digital collages such as *Melencolia* and others. *The Tales of Amnesia* collages were part of another international show *Female Power* at Arnhem in 2013. During her solo *Eyes of Time,* at Brooklyn Museum at the Sackler Galleries in New York in 2014–15 where her immense mural of the goddess Kali attracted much discussion and comment she displayed the *Tales of Amnesia* collages in the exhibition as well.

236 Gayatri Gopinath, "Chitra Ganesh's Queer Re-visions," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies.* Vol. 15, No. 3, 2009, 470.

plays with the formal iconography of the comics, surreally emphasising their violent and primordial aspect through a display of multiple arms, limbs, spattering of blood and headless figures, she completely and deliberately destroys the social order that the original comic had been so painstakingly created to uphold. In a patriarchal male-centred, male-identified system, heterosexuality plays a key role in the continued subordination of women.

The performative body is the site of enunciation and battleground, it becomes the locus of transformation, displacement and transfiguration at all levels, visually and textually—psychic, social, sexual and conceptual. The dismembered, impaired bodies surpass their own frontiers as they negotiate cracks in the heterosexual world system, presenting a threat to society by subverting their traditional roles. These are bodies that are masquerading as selves other than what they are prescribed to be, the national body in a narrative from the Indian comic genre has been displaced.

The next artist in this study, Tejal Shah, also employs queer sexuality as a lens but rather than focusing on the feminine, they focus on the artificiality of gender constructs.

2.3 Tejal Shah

Shah's practice centers around the queer, colored, variously gendered body. Shah defines 'queer' as whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant, referring to nothing in particular, rather an identity without an essence, for Shah queerness is more about a certain criticality that visibilizes heteronormativity or compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchy and binary gender, also extending it to other aspects of life.[237] And Shah applies this criticality in their entire art practice that includes photography, video and multi-media installations. In the works being analysed in this study, the medium of video takes precedence.

2.3.1 The Video Genre

Technology and art first came together in the 1960s when artists working with conceptual art, experimental film and performance began working with new genres internationally. With the development of the Sony Portapak camera in

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237   Tejal Shah at their talk at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, 2014.

1965, Nam June Paik's early experiments with video coopted it into contemporary art practice in the US, while in Germany Wolf Vostell's early works established its presence. In the beginning artists used the genre to critique the insidious presence of television through advertising and television programmes. It was also used as 'guerilla television' against the domination of network television. Early examples in the genre included its use to document live performance with artists performing with few or no props in front of the camera eg. Bruce Nauman's *Stamping in the Studio* (1968), or Baldessari's *Baldessari sings Lewitt* (1972), the medium was also used to explore social and power relations between individuals for example, Vito Acconci's *Pryings* (1971). The medium's flexible positionality would be employed to reveal layers of meanings, contradictions and paradoxes especially to deconstruct issues of political difference in gender and the sexual self, by women artists such as, for example Joan Jonas in *Vertical Roll* (1972), that used the technical aspect of the medium to critique how women were presented on TV, or Martha Rosler in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1976), that aggressively engaged with the televisual aspect to masquerade the relationship of women with domesticity. Post-modern critique appropriated images from their original contexts, proscribing new meanings in works such as Dara Birnbaum's *Kiss the Girls: Make them Cry* (1979), that took clips from game show Hollywood Squares to analyze coded gestures on gender. There is no gainsaying the fact that "Video is a default medium of the twenty first century, it is everywhere, trapped on monitors and computer screens and projected, cinema style onto pristine gallery walls."[238] The fluidity of the genre of video allows for a fair amount of flexibility, the video installation with its wide screens, high definition DVD recordings becomes a persuasive space that absorbs the viewer totally to a cinematic experience which includes the viewer's embodied experience in that space. What differentiates it from TV is the simulation of the feeling of a body moving through a particular space, surrounded by video projections or work that have weight, fragrance, vibration and temperature.[239] Video is a medium of real time i.e., it transmits the temporal quality of the process being recorded which alters our own memory of history and of daily life. One of the early champions of video art, Kurtz, commenting on the *present-ness* of the medium as its most consequential feature stated that "The most powerful aspect of the medium is its ability to transform even the events of ancient history into the flowing present, whether or not what is being telecast, is what appears on the monitor,

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238   Catherine Ewles, Introduction in *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co, 2006), 1.

239   Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 26.

is actually live, taped or filmed."[240] Bill Viola—the master of the genre,—began working with the medium in the 70s and he makes a fairly compelling case for the genre's openness and flexibility as he says,

> There was this sense back then of all these big green pastures filled with different things: painting and sculpture, film, photography. And then we came along with our videos, which everyone else thought were toys and we found a pasture that didn't have a lock on the gate and we just walked in. It was empty as far as the eye could see and you could stay for as long as you liked, do whatever you liked. That was our new field and that was my new career.[241]

The medium of video has thrust everyone up much closer than ever before. The viewer can both imagine and enter the bodily predicament of the artist, the genre uniquely possesses the potential to create a utopian virtual world and travel to far away spaces, allowing artists to document fleeting performances and share their distant experiences in real time.

Unlike its presence from the 1960s in the West, the medium of video arrived in India only in the late 1990's, with Nalani Malani's *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998–99), Navjot Altaf's *Memory/Record/Erase* (1996), Vivan Sundaram's *Couples and House/Boat* (1994 Canada), and Rumanna Hussain's *Is it what you think?* (1998), being some early examples. In India some of the initial performative videos were often created by artists to analyze and critique the construction of identity and in the exploration of taboo subjects such as gender and sexuality, for example in works such as Sonia Khurana's *Bird* (1999), and Subodh Gupta's *Pure* (1999). (Refer Chapter 1 of this study) Shah's early engagements with the genre included *Untitled II* (2000), which was based on excerpts of telephonic conversations with their mother while studying at Melbourne, the genre offered them a way to articulate a transoceanic longing across the expanse of the sea. In the same year Shah performed their first video work *Chingari Chumma* collaboratively with fellow artist and cultural practitioner Anuj Vaidya in Chicago, turning the camera upon themself for the first time.

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240   Bruce Kurtz, "The Present Tense," in *Video Art: An Anthology*, eds. Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 234–235.

241   Bill Viola, "People thought I was an idiot and that video would never last," *The Guardian* May 23, 2014.

2.3.2 *Chingari Chumma*

Chingari Chumma/Stinging Kiss (2000), an eight-and-a-half-minute video is a spoof on the typical storyline from Indian cinema with the artists dragging genders and emphatically distancing themself from the heterosexual national body. The title resonates closely with colloquial Hindi language, where the word *'chumma'* pejoratively implies a kiss taken, rather than given. This linguistic usage resonates with the campy masquerade in the work.

The work refers a stereotypical Hindi film climax from the 1980s, often featuring the abduction of the heroine by the villainous bandit, the hero arrives usually on time to rescue his beloved, often with the police in tow, but in *Chingari Chumma/Stinging Kiss*, neither the hero nor the police arrive on time. Instead clips of popular Bollywood film star Amitabh Bachchan rushing to the scene to confront the villain are interspersed in the narrative, but he never arrives. Shah's collaborator Anuj Vaidya enacts the role of the heroine, who, instead of looking helpless and distressed, casts lascivious glances at Shah performing the role of the bandit (Fig. 30). Desire diverges from the familiar path and establishes a new trajectory between the 'good' (heroine), and the 'bad' (dacoit/villain). The work is accompanied by a musical soundtrack derived from 1970s Bollywood songs often featuring Helen, an Anglo-Burmese actress.[242] These songs were usually woven into movie plots as elements of fantasy, to titillate the male gaze and prolong the storyline through a lavish spectacle of song and dance. But in this high-spirited campy, ill-lit and furtively shot video, Shah and Vaidya's performance moves towards Sontag's ideas on Camp sensibility and its love for artifice and exaggeration (Sontag 1964). Shah's version of South Asian queer (post) porn employs the sexually explicit language of mainstream pornography, much in the style of Preciado's genderless dildo in a parody of the heterosexual sex act. Shah, discussing Preciado's philosophy of dildonics refers to the dildo both as a body part and as a prosthetic device, states that it is replaceable in many respects,[243] implying a very deliberate separation between phallic power and sexuality.

An important aspect of the work in *Chingari Chumma* is its cinematic content. The cinematic medium as a means of fantasy and entertainment occupies a critical space of cultural dominion in a nation's culture. It is the largest, most visible and dominant field that plays a key role in the process of social taste formation. In this work the combining of the medium with Camp creates a fringe

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242   Please see Jerry Pinto, *Helen: The Life and Times of a Bollywood H-Bomb* 2006, for the significance of Helen's role in Indian cinema.

243   Shah, Kiran Nadar Museum, 2014.

Fig. 30. Shah, Video Still, *Chingari Chumma,* Single Channel Video, 2000. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

off aesthetics—the *off*-ness stands for its artistic character and the manner in which it uses aesthetics. The camp aesthetic is over-the-top, playful and parodic, and transgresses the norms imposed by the symbolic order. Camp "demonstrates the essence of what is hidden behind the pose in an attempt to familiarize and describe the queerness and weirdness of the natural." In cinema and popular culture, heroes as well as heroines with their slender bodies and symmetrical shapes are constructed and are almost totally unreal.[244] And *Chingari Chumma* with its parodic take on mainstream cinema demonstrates the contrived artificiality of the medium and gender, rejigging familiar codes and clichés, bringing to light unsanctioned meanings and identities.

With its deliberate setting, music and lack of costuming, the campy work also ties in with Butler's observation on drag, and how it can create a dissonance between sex, gender and performance, as she states, "if the anatomy of the performer is distinct from the gender of the performer and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance but sex and gender and gender and performance [...] in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself."[245] In drag performances as costuming, make up, props,

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244   Anna Manilowska, "Bad Romance: Pop and Camp in Light of Evolutionary Confusion," in *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture* ed. Justyna Stepien (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 14–20.

245   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175.

posed scenes and the staging of narratives, connected to 'appearances,' critique stereotypes, they not only re-trace processes of construction on the body but also produce distance to these norms.[246] The theatricality of *Chingari Chumma* not only deconstructs the apparent solidity of gender-identity positions through a re-interpretation of cliched cinematic characters such as the cabaret dancer, heroine, hero and bandit, but also questions the hold of the stereotype in the cinematic image, overturning the masquerade of established symbol codes. In fact, Shah, by switching genders, adopting the sexuality of the Other, distances themself also from the masquerade of femininity that Ganesh has so closely aligned with. This weaving away of the divide between the offensive and the appealing, the exaggerated movement of the performers and the ill-lit secret furtiveness of the video, reinforces the uncanniness and artificiality of the construct. The work challenges not only the national imaginary of hetero-normativity but also takes a humorously confrontational stance combining kitsch with camp, demonstrating the inappropriateness of the performance, the affectation of extremes that exceeds taste and decorum and the taboos surrounding its representation. While *Chingari Chumma* brings in the performance of drag and the discourse around Camp—Shah's next work, *What are you?* focuses on the visual and discursive framework that surrounds the Indian transgendered body. *What are you?* (2006) combines multiple mediums including staged performance and documentary and emerged as a result of the time Shah spent with the LGBTQ community during the *Sakhi Re* project in Bangalore 2004/5.

2.3.3 *What are you?*

Shah's use of the phrase *'What are you,'* in the title as opposed to *'who are you,'* immediately foregrounds the objectification of transgender *hijra* community in India. This community may include female or non-male identified male individuals, transgender, transsexual or androgynous people, people born with ambiguous genitalia or hormonal differences (intersex) and also individuals who have undergone sex reassignment surgery / castration. The names used by the transgender community in India would include *Hijras, Kothis, Aravanis, Jogappas, Shiv-Shakthis, Kinnaur* etc., references to them can be found in Vedic and Puranic literatures as *"tritiyaprakriti,"* or the third gender also as *"napunsaka."* The word *hijra* appears to have been derived from the Persian word *hiz*, meaning someone who is effeminate

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246 Renate Lorenz, "Drag – Radical, Transtemporal, Abstract //2012," in *Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Getsy (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2016), 154.

and / or ineffective or incompetent. Though they can often be seen in Indian cities begging at traffic signals or dancing in weddings, they have a special status and were a respected community during medieval India and were placed in charge of harems due to their emasculation. During the British rule, they were denied civil rights and were considered a separate caste or tribe who kidnapped and castrated children. The Indian census did not, till fairly recently, recognize the third gender while collecting census data, therefore there is no clear data on their numbers.

If *hijras* are not men by virtue of anatomy and appearance, they are also not women, but they are 'like' women. Serena Nanda, discussing the intricate paradoxes and relationships that exist within the community, explains that they may be born as men or hermaphrodites, as men, they may feel themselves impotent with women as they mature, if hermaphrodites, they may be raised as women and their identity as *hijras* discovered only when they prove to be incapable of menstruating. However born or raised, they typically undergo a surgical 'emasculation' as she terms it, after joining the hijra community and they mostly dress as women.[247] *What are you?* was first exhibited at the Thomas Erben Gallery in New York in 2006. The installation comprised of a twin channel video projection, a room with two large mirrors that reflected the writing on the wall and a soundscape that could be heard on the headphones. The installation also included realistic replicas of crude brothel cabins pointing towards the grim reality of sex work that constitutes the main source of livelihood for *hijras*. The mirror image of the text on the wall read, *"I am often seen by people as a 'What's that? To which I usually respond, 'Isn't beautiful enough?'"* This text framed the ambivalence of the work as the viewer was confronted with his / her own image while simultaneously listening to the *hijras*' opinion on identity, community, family, love, belonging and the violence of alienation on the accompanying audio.[248]

Simultaneously projected on two screens, the work begins with a series of rapid shots of sea breakers, the massive boulders that line the seashore along the Marine drive promenade in the city of Mumbai. These shots are immediately replaced by rapid successive close-ups of human skin followed by a sequence of several *hijra* women who come towards the viewer with their faces gradually filling the screen. The following sequence shows six *hijra* women appearing one after another, walking very deliberately (Fig. 31). Four are dressed in sarees and sashay, resembling fashion models on catwalk This sequence is accompanied by

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247   Serena Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998).

248   Maya Kovskaya, "A Cry from the Narrow Between: Eros and Thanatos in the works of Tejal Shah and Han Bing," Gallery Espace 2010, 4. Exhibition Catalogue.

an impersonal soundtrack of a voice humming a strange, slightly disquieting tune. In the following longer sequence framed against a dark void, five of the formally dressed transgendered queer persons monotonously read out excerpts from Articles 14, 16 and 19 of the Indian Constitution, excerpts that protect certain fundamental rights of the individual. But this solemn recitation quickly disintegrates into a show of merriment, mockery and masquerade. The figures appear, disappear and get superimposed in quick mechanical succession, this masquerade of costumed femininity further subverts codes of feminine behavior as one of the figures lights up a cigarette. They engage in various antics and comical dances, pose for photographic portraits and finally the black screen is filled up with huge kitschy red roses.[249] (Fig. 32) With this campy staged performance Shah is foregrounding a stringent critique of the nation and citizens' right to equality and freedom. The right to freedom and equality have been of major concern to the transgender community who have often found that the only employment opportunities available for them have been begging, prostitution and performing religious ceremonies.

The transgender community has had a chequered legal history in India. In April 2014 the Supreme Court of India ruled that transgender people should be treated as a third category of gender and they be treated consistently with other minorities under the law, allowing access to jobs, healthcare and education. The Rajya Sabha passed the Rights of Transgender Bill in 2014, however, the government then passed the Rights for Transgender Persons Bill in 2015, modifying the earlier bill and removing the provisions relating to Transgender Rights Court. The 2015 Bill underwent further changes and another bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2016—the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights Bill), which invited criticism from the transgender and activists on the defining terms plus on areas such as certain criminal and personal laws which are currently in existence and only recognize the genders of "man" and "woman."[250] The Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill passed in 2020 mandates for legal gender recognition—this is a process by which trans people can change their documents to reflect their identity through a two-step process. First, an individual has to apply for a "transgender certificate" from the District Magistrate where they live. Then, the certificate holder can apply for a "change in gender certificate." However, this

249 Livia Monnet, "'Queerness in/as the Strange, Prismatic Worlds of Art': Fantasy, Utopia and Perversion in Tejal Shah's Video Installation 'What are You?'" *Tejal Shah in conversation with Johan Pijnappel, Mumbai*, Galerie Mirchandani and Steinruecke 2006. Exhibition Catalogue.

250 Sawant, "Transgender: Status in India," *Annals of Indian Psychiatry* 2017, Vol. 1 Issue 2, 59–61.

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Fig. 31 & 32. Shah, Video Still, *"What are You?"* Dual Channel Video Installation, 2006. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

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second step requires the person to provide the proof of surgery which has been issued by a hospital official, perhaps coercing people into medical procedures that they may not want, for a second evaluation. Further the official must be "satisfied with the correctness of such certificate." The extraordinary amount of power with the government to arbitrate which trans people "qualify" to be recognized as who they are—is in itself a fundamental rights violation.[251]

In their everyday contemporary life, the exaggerated performance of female behavior, such as donning of female hairstyles, wearing female dress and accessories, imitating women's walk, gestures, voice, facial expressions and language

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251 Kyle Knight, "India's Transgender Law Isn't Worth Celebrating," *The Advocate* December 5, 2019. Accessed on January 20, 2020. https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/05/indias-transgender-rights-law-isnt-worth-celebrating.

Fig. 33. Shah, Video Still, *"What are You?"* Dual Channel Video Installation, 2006. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 and Barbara Gross Gallery Munich.

functions more in the nature of burlesque. The very act of dancing in public places coupled with acting in sexually suggestive ways violates norms of feminine behavior and functions almost like another form of drag, but in an un-humorous way. The masquerade of femininity publicly adopted by the community is a deliberate, almost internalized attempt to gain social acceptance emerging from a space of failed utopias. In the same year, Shah had also created another form of utopia in the *Hijra Fantasy* series (2006), working closely with three protagonists from the *hijra* community to create staged tableaus where they had enacted their own personal fantasies for themselves. The works were titled, '*The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne/burned on the water,*' '*You too can touch the moon – Yashoda with Krishna*' and '*Southern Siren – Maheshwari.*' That all three fantasies focused on enacting a feminine role was a telling marker of the resonance with feminine role play gesturing towards its aspirational and utopian features.

The next segment in *What are You?* turns towards a documentary account of a sex reassignment surgery. The split screen shows Sneha's account of the painful process of her transformation into a transsexual mtf (male to female) and the clinical account of the surgeon who has performed the surgery (Fig. 33). At one point within the narrative, the focus shifts to a single shot of Sneha as she speaks about her life experience and shows photographs of the surgery to the camera.[252] Currently, these surgeries are exorbitantly priced and out of reach for many who want to opt for them. In the absence of legislation, not many government

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252   This intervention of Sneha's voice is a very important counterpoint to the Doctors clinical / medical narrative. I am grateful to Shah for providing me with this additional piece of information.

hospitals offer the option, the result is often treatments at private clinics at exorbitant prices, therefore this option is available to a limited number of the transgender community. The juxtaposing of a factual account of painful surgery brings forth the reality of an indeterminate gender and the concerns and desires driven by a desire to conform. The entire work surreally plays with the slippage between fiction and documentary, the comic and the carnivalesque, as Shah creates an extremely complex performative campy space, employing techniques of cut-up and collage, dissolving and superimposition, image manipulation and special effects. The uncanniness in this work comes through the ambiguity i.e., there is an overlap between man and woman and this half-ness is visible to the spectator who cannot decide which is which.

2.3.4 *Untitled (-On Violence* 2010*)*

Transgendered lives lived in extreme precarity featured in yet another multimedia installation work by Shah, *Untitled (-On Violence)* created by Shah in 2010, it was first exhibited at Centre Pompidou during *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* in 2011. The dominating visual in this work is the photograph of what appears to be a woman dressed in a saree lying on the ground, badly bruised, a uniformed policeman, with just his legs and torso visible stands towering over the figure, flashing his torch. The first impression is that he is the rescuer, then one notices that his pants are unzipped and his squirt of urine is aimed at the face and the body of the prone figure (Fig. 34). The wall to the right of the screen displays the face of a transgender person disfigured by blows, the face remains poignantly silent while being filmed (Fig. 35). On the opposite wall, scrolling across a LED panel in red letters, a testimony relates the violence and degradation the transgender has been subjected to, the scrolling text and the explicit language serve as a harsh reminder of the brutality that a transgendered person has to undergo in everyday life.

The staging of this particular work almost resonates with a real-life account of a night in the life of a *hijra* sex worker—a night which gifted a trauma of multiple rapes including that by a policeman.[253] Violence against *hijras* as sex workers is often brutal and occurs in public spaces, police stations, prisons and homes. It is paradoxical that in traditional belief the power of the *hijra* role lies in their renunciation of their sexuality and the transformation of sexual desire into

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253   Human Rights Violations Against the Transgender Community. September 1, 2003. Accessed on May 30, 2016. http://www.pucl.org/reports/human-rights-violations-against-transgender-community.

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Fig. 34 & 35. Shah, *Untitled (-On Violence),* Multimedia Triptych, 2010. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Gallerie Munich.

sacred power, however many *hijras* are forced to engage in sexual activities in the receptor role with men and work frequently as prostitutes to earn their living.

Both works by Shah on the transgender community forcefully bring forth the role played by the nation itself as the perpetrator of injustices on the transgender body, instead of as a guarantor of citizens' rights in a secular democratic state—a right that functions rather ambiguously in practice. The infamous Section 377, instead of being used in higher courts to prosecute consensual same-sex activity, was being used as a weapon in daily life against sexual minorities. This symbol of legal and social homophobia was widely wielded by the police and other figures of authority as a weapon against *kothis, hijras* and other disenfranchised minorities to harass, extort and assault rather than as an official complaint charge.[254] Shah's work draws attention to the fissures that exist in a deeply polarized and norm driven society where bodies that transgress the norms of gender difference pay a heavy price. Capturing a sub-culture fighting for bodily recognition and for their very lives, Shah takes on the role of a politically aware, socially responsible activist artist head on, as they draws attention towards the failure of the nation to sustain its imagined inclusive diversity. The genre of video proves an effective medium for both works, in the emphasis on the half-ness of identity, the exaggeratedly orange-hued aesthetics and the campy music of *Chingari Chumma*, the mix of documentary and fiction, the black void in the frames in *What are you?* and the dramatic and stark violence apparent in *Untitled (-On Violence)*, all works in video foreground an uncanny mix of reality and fiction.

2.3.5 *I AM/Women Like Us*

I AM (2010–ongoing) and *Women Like Us* (2010), Shah's next work is in the form of a photographic archive and focuses on yet another sub-culture existing socially on the margins of Indian society, that of women who embody female masculinity, in this specific example these are the artist's photographs of female wrestlers. Wrestling in India has been considered as a strictly male terrain, this assumption was built upon the pretext that women in India were not physically strong enough to take on the rigors of the training required to excel in such a sport. The sport of wrestling opened up to women in India only since 2000. Shah began creating this photo archive work in 2009. By this time, a few women wrestlers from India had already made a name for themselves, for example, Alka Tomar, (Doha Asian Games 2006, Guanghzou, China 2006) and Geeta Phogat, (Commonwealth

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254   Jyoti Puri, "Decriminalization as Deregulation?" *Sexuality Studies*, 154 & 157.

Fig. 36. Shah, *Women Like Us,* Digital photograph on archival paper, 2010. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

Games 2009, 2010), Babita Phogat (Commonwealth Games 2010, 2012), Anita Tomar (2010). A Bollywood film released in 2018 on the Phogat sisters in fact recounts their narrative and the mixed family support and less than congenial environment that spurred the Phogat sisters to excel at the sport. In this work, Shah combines photography and documentary techniques to expand notions of female-ness towards female masculinity, androgyny, gender ambiguity and self-hood. The interlocking questions of representation, power and the social gaze are reconfigured around a group of women who do not fit into the dominant notions of how a "woman" is defined in India. These women are doubly removed from this definition through the embodying of certain features associated with masculinity.

Shah describes this group of individuals as "unregistered and rejected individuals," who are still part of society.[255] The erasure of femaleness in Shah's work becomes evident in their style of dressing both livelihood and dress impinge on conventional male terrain (Fig. 36), conveying ideas of a 'deviant' femininity that threatens the natural stability of a dominant gender ideology.

The notion of female masculinity becomes a particularly fruitful site of investigation because it codifies a unique form of social rebellion, there is a self that masquerades as another kind of self and does so successfully. Halberstam asserts

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255   Accessed on March 12, 2016. http://tejalshah.in/wp-content/uploads/_pdf_file/387-8cdf0b15.pdf.

that female masculinity affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity, arguing that in fact what is understood as heroic masculinity has been produced across both male and female bodies.[256] Femininities and masculinities are shaped by socio-cultural processes, and they get defined by a national culture, a region, a religion. They are part of learned behaviors embedded in popular culture and the subject's surrounding environment and in a society where femaleness is identified with very stereotypical markers of femininity, this segregation often leads to discrimination against those who do not conform to those markers. With this work by Shah, Ganesh's critique of womanliness as role play from *Tales of Amnesia* recedes, as these women turn the masquerade of femininity upon its head and question the category of 'woman' itself as a discursive construct. In the works of both Ganesh and Shah, the performative body in its various guises continually transgresses heterosexual norms acceptable to the nation. Ganesh identifies the body within the paradigm of queer femininity whereas Shah distances themself from the gender binary and queers gender itself. Both artists move away from the idea of a 'national' body. With Nikhil Chopra's performances the nation's history enters the frame directly with Chopra masquerading in a post-colonial body that masquerades as androgynous and occasionally queer.

2.4 Nikhil Chopra

Chopra works with live performance asynchronously in time, drawing from styles of Indian and Greek theatre, from ancient histories to the present as he liberates the borders between installation, performance, painting and photography. His performances vary in duration, depending on the site and the event, they are partially choreographed. Each performance includes a drawing created by Chopra of the viewable scene from his performance site that is completed within the performance duration. Chopra usually dons a single and sometimes multiple personas for the duration of each performance.

2.4.1 Live Performance as a Genre

The genre of live performance has a rich and varied history since early twentieth century. Though the genre is largely associated with the 1960s Happenings, Events and Fluxus concerts that were taking place across Europe and America, it also had

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256   Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 935–954.

earlier precedents in the live performances by Dadaists and experimental theatre at Bauhaus in the earlier part of the century. By the 1970s performance art subsumed different forms of performative actions, from conceptual to physical manifestations, both public or private, which could be held as complex events or singly across widely dispersed spaces and communities. In live performance the artist becomes the medium and his actions the art object, taking his art directly to a public forum without any mediation. By its very nature, performance has been the one medium able to evade complete absorption in global capitalism and its efficacy as a counter-hegemonic mode of social practice has drawn artists to address race, class, the politics of sex and gender and many other political topics.[257]

Guillermo Gomez-Pena a performance artist, radical pedagogue and an activist against all kinds of borders has created legendary performance interventions mixing experimental aesthetics and activist politics in, for example, *Border Brujo* 1988–89, *Couple in a Cage* with Coco Fusco in 1992–1993 and *The Living Museum of Fetish/sized Identities* 1999–2002. Gomez-Pena sums up some of the ideas on the genre of performance well when he says—

> Traditionally the human body is our true site of creation, an empty canvas, a musical instrument, an open book; our navigation chart and biographical map, the vessel for our ever changing identities. While the body is the center of the symbolic universe it is also a metaphor for the larger sociopolitical body. Though we treasure our bodies, we don't mind constantly putting them on risk. It is precisely in the tensions of risk that we find our corporeal possibilities and raison d'etre. Our job may be to open the Pandora's box of our times – smack in the middle of the gallery, the theater, the street. Once the performance is over and people walk away our hope is that a process of reflection is triggered in their perplexed psyches.[258]

The genre has seen some radical performative interventions since mid-twentieth century including Yves Klein *Anthroprometries of the Blue Period* (1958), Yoko Ono *Cut Piece* (1964), Chris Burden *Shoot* (1971), Adrian Piper *Mythic Being* (1971), Marina Abramovic *Rhythm O* (1971), Joseph Beuys *I like America, America likes me* (1974), for example.

In India, the introduction of the genre into contemporary art practice followed a different trajectory, India's has long been a performative culture where street plays and *nautankis* have long been part of popular tradition, not to mention the performative aspect of its festivals playing a huge role in the continuous

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257   Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, 196–197.

258   Guillermo Gomez Pena, "In Defense of Performance Art." Accessed on September 12, 2018. http://www.pochanostra.com/antes/jazz_pocha2/mainpages/in_defense.htm.

production of India's festival culture. The practice of live performance as an 'art' genre in post-independent India arrived via radical interventions into the political and social environment, similar to video and installation art. Right from the early 1980s when Sushil Kumar tested the limits of his own body with works like *Parallel Reading* and *Veil* to Subodh Gupta's *Pure* in 1999, laying his naked mud-covered body in *shavasana* in a flattened field, onto husband-wife duo Shantanu Lodh and Manmeet Devgun's nude performance as *Hamam mein Hum sab Nangay hain par yeh hamam hai kahan*, in 2005, radical performance interventions were few and far between and mostly under the aegis of Khoj workshops and residencies.

However, it is perhaps Inder Salim's work that completely engages with the 'politics of performance,' within a specifically situated national context. Salim, after being exiled from his homeland Kashmir during the mass exodus taking place from the valley in the late 1980s, took on the hyphenated identity Inder-Salim in 2002, discarding his original surname Tickoo. This radical performative gesture was his response to the communal Gujarat riots, deliberately staking a claim to a dual Hindu-Muslim cultural inheritance. Inder Salim's performances have been some of the most radical avant garde performances including the series on *A Dialogue with Power Plant, Shrill Across a Dead River* in the 1990s, when he cut off the little finger of his left hand and threw it in the Yamuna river near Delhi to create a metaphysical bridge to connect himself with the river. Salim has, since then, been continuously engaging with political issues, especially with the precarious politics of Kashmir. Once again, the Khoj Live International Performance Art Festivals have provided the space and opportunity for artists such as Inder Salim, Neha Choksi and Sonia Khurana among others with a platform to practice the genre.

Chopra began his art practice in live performance with the creation of *Sir Raja* in 2003 at Ohio, the inception of *Sir Raja* stemming partially from his study of British colonial photography. Seated at a chandelier lit table laden with fruit and wine, *Sir Raja II* portrayed an Indian royal steeped in British culture for a total of six hours. On his return to India, he carried the postcolonial critique to the genre of British imperial photography, creating a series of photographs as *Sir Raja* in Kashmir in a bid to re-create Bourne's majestic photographs of the Kashmir valley.[259] The genre of colonial photography that Chopra was referencing had functioned as yet another apparatus of control in colonial India. Bourne's photographs comprised of a set of selected, intensified locations and events, almost staged with the obvious motivation to find architectural forms

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259 For an overview of Chopra's personal relationship with Kashmir, please refer to Chapter 1 of this study.

and landscapes that would please the taste of his clients back home in England. It was mainly in Kashmir that Bourne was able to find the tidy grandeur that reminded him of the landscapes of England.[260] Chopra's photographs referenced and critiqued the genre directly as he partook of a royal repast in open air splendor, costumed as *Sir Raja*—the setting majestic and opulent, redolent of pompous imaginaries of a colonial past for the Raja under British rule (Fig. 6).

2.4.2 *Yog Raj Chitrakar* in India

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the persona of *Yog Raj Chitrakar* drew partially from his own roots in a need to be closer to 'home.' *Yog Raj Chitrakar* is defined by Chopra as a "romantic fool who wanders the world in search of the perfect vista, a soldier, a draughtsman." Rummaging through family archives for costumes worn by his grandfather for this very first performance, Chopra emphasised the key part played by costuming as a signifier of identity and history.[261] From the inception of his adoption of the genre of performance itself, Chopra was engaging with Bhabha's concept of mimicry, critiquing the power dynamics of the relationship between Britain and India. Bhabha argues that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite...*almost the same, but not quite does not merely rupture the discourse but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence,"[262] even by producing a partial presence it simultaneously fixes the colonizer as an authorizing object of regulatory power, the point of reference. These are notions that Chopra's performances as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* closely engage with. Of all the cities in India that are closely tied to colonial memory, Bombay or Mumbai as it is now called, takes pride of place. Bombay was part of the marriage settlement between King Charles II and Catherine of Braganza since 1661 and was ceded to the East India Company in 1668. The city served as the capital of Bombay Presidency (administrative province) under British rule, and during the late 19th and early 20th centuries it was a centre of Indian nationalist activity. After his first performance at a Khoj residency in Delhi, Chopra's second performance as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* was at Mumbai. Titled *Memory Drawing II* (2007), it was performed on the top floor of an old building Kamal

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260   Peter Osborne, *Travelling Light Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 40–48.

261   Nikhil Chopra on https://pad.ma/BWS/player.

262   Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 86.

Mansion in Colaba in South Mumbai and lasted for 72 hours. The location of this performance was significant—South Mumbai is known for its colonial architecture—prominent examples include the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, the Municipal Corporation Building, the Rajabai Tower, the David Sassoon Library and the Bombay High Court,—and Kamal Mansion was not too distant from the famed Gateway of India which is an example of Indo-Saracenic style and was built to commemorate the visit of the King-Emperor George V in 1911.

The performance venue was an enclosed space with no view of the seascape visible at a distance. Cameras were fixed on top of the building which beamed a 360 degrees panoramic view of the landscape into the performance space, providing a point of reference for Chopra's wall drawing. The genre of live performance was a novel idea for the Mumbai art-going audience and viewers streamed in to view the performance at all hours. Chopra silently carried on with his performance routine creating the landscape drawing interspersed with the everyday acts of eating and sleeping. The finished landscape drawing comprised the sea view projected by the cameras (Fig. 37). At the end of the performance, Chopra gowned himself in crinoline (Fig. 38), and it was then—dressed as a queen—that he met the eyes of his audience for the first time, acknowledging their presence, almost accepting obeisance. This was the first performance where Chopra as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* adopted the persona of the Victorian queen, deepening and broadening his postcolonial masquerade to include the transformation of gender in an act of greater empowerment after he had staged the death of *Sir Raja* in 2007. Both royal personages had been deeply intertwined with India's conflicted colonial past. Engaging with two distinct personas almost worlds apart, further sharpened Chopra's critique of the nation.

Chopra returned to Mumbai in 2010 as *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing X*, the performance retained its postcolonial focus but was driven by another set of personal impulses by the artist—the desire to connect the two 'hip' parts of the city, Bandra, an upscale residential neighborhood where Chopra had his studio, and Colaba in the south of the city, another upscale neighborhood where most of the city's art galleries are located. This 48-hour performance for Chopra was a very deliberate attempt to alter his own experience of a city that served as his home by walking the distance of 30 km. The first act of undergoing a persona transformation began at his studio in Bandra itself, with the shaving of his head hair, the setting was almost like that of a little roadside market stall in any random city in India—with two little stools mysteriously covered with cloth, Chopra's travel backpack was laid out, ready to leave (Fig. 39). Chopra dressed in blue shirt and beige trousers, deliberately subdued and nondescript, so as to not draw attention to himself in public spaces and walked a distance of 12 kilometers on the first day and reached the Bombay Central railway station with the intention to spend the night in the first class waiting room on the platform. But

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Fig. 37 & 38.
Chopra, *Yog
Raj Chitrakar :
Memory
Drawing II,*
Mumbai 2007.
Courtesy the
artist.

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he was forced to change plans as the police cleared the platforms for the night, this had become a security issue since the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai. As a result, Chopra had to park himself in a bench like any itinerant traveler with no place to go, belongings secure under his head (Fig. 40).

The next morning, he walked further south to Oval Maidan, the *maidan* (field) is a large public space that also occasionally serves as a public cricket ground. During India's freedom struggle movement in the 1930s and 1940s, it had served as a spot for protests and demonstrations including two speeches by Gandhi in 1931, once before leaving for England for the Round Table Conference and the second time upon his return. Chopra's vantage location in the *maidan* commanded a vantage point of view of the colonial buildings in the distance including the Mumbai High Court (Fig. 41), built between 1871–1878, it had been designed by British engineer Colonel James Fuller in the style of Gothic Revival,

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Fig. 39–41. Chopra,
*Yog Raj Chitrakar :
Memory Drawing X,*
Mumbai 2010.
Courtesy the artist.

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the court has also played an important role in India's colonial history, it was famously the site for Bal Gangadhar Tilak's Sedition Trial in 1916. Chopra's performance audience was limited to young amateur cricketers who were using the field to practice their game. That second night of his performance Chopra stayed at the Victoria Terminus railway station (called Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus since 2016). The Victoria Terminus is a protected UNESCO World Heritage site, designed by Frederick William Stevens in the style of Victorian Italianate Gothic Revival architecture, it was built in 1887 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria and it is one of the busiest railway stations in India, serving as a terminal for both long-distance trains and commuter trains. These choreographed locations referenced not only the city's colonial architecture but also the sites of nationalist histories. Some observations made by the artist himself during this performance are useful to understand the nature of urban public spaces in India, especially in a city like Mumbai, where every inch of land considered to be a public space seems to belong to someone. Chopra had to constantly negotiate with someone or the other to even spread his drawing canvas, in utter contrast to his performances in other parts of the globe. Bringing the genre of live performance as an art form to the street also removed some misconceptions about the liberal character of a cosmopolitan city like Bombay, there were certain expectations of audience entertainment from the viewers, perhaps in the style of popular folk street theatre genres such as the *nautanki*, which is also one of the genres that Chopra's performance indirectly draws from. Chopra's performance was critiqued for not being entertaining enough and was also considered embarrassing because it involved a half-naked man cutting off his hair in a public space. The performance was a cathartic experience for the artist and altered his own experience of what cities actually are at the ground level rather than as a rarefied middle class urban experience, emphasizing the existence of sharp class differences and dissonances.[263] In a city like Bombay the tremendous contrasts in the lives lived by the slum dwellers and the upper classes residing in swanky highrise apartments delineates the urban class divide in very clear terms. Chopra's performance in *Memory Drawing X* could be termed as an act of courage as the artist exposed his urbane classed self to the vicissitudes of public spaces and an unknown street culture with its wayside dwellers, inhabiting an unsegregated city space continuously over a period of 72 hours. This performance visualized the character of India's most cosmopolitan city characterizing its class divide and inequalities and followed a markedly different pattern in his performance ritual, here he was always *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, the anonymous gentleman traveler, there

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263   Nikhil Chopra https://pad.ma/BWS/player.
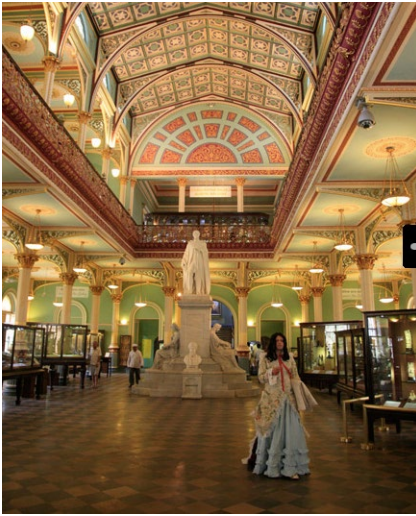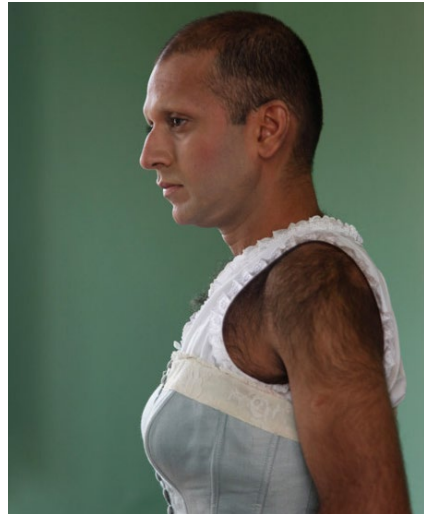
Fig. 42–45. Chopra *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing X Part 2*, Mumbai 2010. Courtesy the artist.

was no costuming or engendering or an attempt to masquerade as a historical persona.

But this changed once more at his next performance in Mumbai at the newly restored Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum. Titled *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing X Part 2* (2010), this was relatively a shorter performance that took place for twelve hours over two days. This performance was Chopra's first performance within a museum space in India, referencing not only colonial histories but also institutional histories. Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum had previously been the Victoria and Albert Museum, it was the first colonial building to be built for the specific purpose of housing a museum in India and was designed by George Birdwood, its first curator. The collection of the first museum established in 1855 was partially destroyed during the 1857 Mutiny and the museum was rebuilt in 1862. Stocked with duplicates of the arts and crafts exhibits sent to the Great Exhibition in 1851 to showcase the Empire's achievements, the museum with its Palladian exterior and high Victorian design, grand wrought iron palisades, staircase railings and arched supports, as well as the Corinthian capitals and columns imported from England, formed an impressive and appropriate setting (Fig. 42) for Chopra's post-colonial persona. For this performance, Chopra costumed himself as an English noblewoman from the beginning of the performance itself, the transformation process documented through the photographs of the performance foregrounds the hairy body of the 'native' male (Fig. 43), as it ostensibly transformed with costuming and makeup. The parody of the classical museumized image as a stereotype is clear in the photographs of the performance (Fig. 44) and also in the plein air picnic style setting that the persona mimicked in the Victoria gardens attached to the museum space as he created the landscape vista (Fig. 45).

These early performances by Chopra, specifically those in Mumbai were significant performative interventions in a city that had a comparatively conservative relationship with the genre of performance art. Despite the active gallery circuit, radical performances such as those by Sushil Kumar and Inder Salim that had happened at Khoj were based in and around Delhi, while Chopra's singularly radical 'political' performance had already been enacted earlier as part of another Khoj residency in Srinagar, in 2007.

2.4.3 The Politics of Local and National Histories

Chopra undertook this performance as part of a Khoj residency in Kasheer, Srinagar, Kashmir in November 2007 and it was at this site that the importance of site-specific performance art and the role it can play in highlighting the vulnerability of public spaces towards distrust and suspicion came to the fore in this three-hour performance

Lal Chowk is a public square located in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, a state which till fairly recently enjoyed a special autonomous status under Article 370 in the Indian constitution according to which the state's citizens lived under a separate set of laws including those related to citizenship, and ownership of property. The contentious history of the state before and after independence has been at the heart of India's conflict with Pakistan. Lal Chowk was named after the Red Square in Moscow and has been historically important since 1947, when the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the national flag here for the first time in 1948. In 1980, Bajaj Electricals, a private electrical company, raised a clock tower in the middle of the square. The square further came into the news when in 1991, at the height of militancy in the state, the right-wing BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi took the BJP youth wing to hoist the Indian flag at the site, thousands of bullets were fired in the air by militants across the Valley to express resentment. Given the tower's status as a 'political symbol,' the tower and the square are often used as sites to address political rallies and gatherings. It is against this politically charged background that we need to understand the strategic selection of Chopra's performance site. Chopra began his performance donning the mandatory colonial attire replete with tweed coat, starched shirt, half trousers, boots and golf cap, and walked thirty minutes to the site, followed by local students and the art fraternity posing as media professionals (Fig. 46). Yog Raj walked ahead and positioned himself in front of the clock tower, requesting the gathering crowd to part and allow him a direct view of the clock tower and then, without prior permission, he began drawing directly on the tarred road surface (Fig. 47). Numerous passersby stopped and gathered to watch, and a police crackdown followed within minutes. Traffic was blocked from both ends of the square and the crowd that had gathered to watch the performance was lined up and frisked. Chopra's performance lasted an hour and continued through the crackdown, and the audience remained interested, undeterred by the police presence. This was a lay audience, just as it had been at Mumbai, the average city resident going about his or her business who had no vested interest in viewing the performance beyond sheer curiosity. Far from being a self-conscious act of public protest or disobedience it transformed into an uncertain situation through the turn of events that followed Chopra's performance, reaffirming the precarity of life in Srinagar as much as an indicator of its charged political status.[264] Chopra's performance highlighted the close connect between politics and art, in a reminder that apolitical interventions can easily acquire political overtones at contentious locations. However,

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264 http://www.nikhilchopra.net/home/?p=1501.

Fig. 46–48.
Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar Visits Lal Chowk,* Srinagar 2007. Courtesy the artist.

along with these interventions in India, the post-colonial persona of *Yog Raj Chitrakar* was also simultaneously performing internationally at festivals, exhibitions and biennales.

2.4.4 *Yog Raj Chitrakar* Travels the Globe

Chopra as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* performed in multiple venues in the years between 2008 and 2011. In *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing VI* (2009) during the Kunstenfestivaldesarts Brussels in 2009 he performed for 96 hours, his longest in the persona of *Yog Raj Chitrakar*. The seventeenth century chapel Les Brigittines was his living space. Having gone through various iterations since its creation, the Les Brigittines had been designated as a space to support and participate in new forms of expression at the national and international level since 1999. In this performance, Chopra travelled to create the French and Flemish halves of the city from the top of the Galgenburg hill in two separate panoramas over three days (Fig. 49 & 50). Each night he would return to Les Brigittines and display the day's drawing so that people visiting the space could view the work that had been done. On the last day he painstakingly sewed the canvases together to create a 16-meter canvas (Fig. 51), imperfectly aligned, rather like the culturally divided halves of Brussels itself. This combined panorama served as the backdrop as he struck his final pose emulating classical Greek sculpture (Fig. 52), as his hairless persona switched genders once more.[265]

In this performance shades of a Gandhian persona entered the frame, noticeable in the wrapping of an Indian style shawl, in the shaved head with the horn-rimmed glasses and the manner in which Chopra sat in the theatre space and sewed the two halves of the canvas together. Sitting on the floor, draped in the shawl, wearing his glasses and absorbed in his task he almost emulated Gandhi's rejection of colonialism, spinning cotton on his famous *charkha* (spinning wheel), during India's nationalist struggle calling upon his fellow countrymen to boycott British manufactured goods and wear home spun textiles.

Chopra admits that he did not willfully go about creating this Gandhian persona, however, he acknowledges the Mahatma's persona as a significant influence on his performativity. Gandhi possessed a carefully sculpted identity—with his *dhoti*, his bald head, his glasses, his chappals and his lifestyle, all coming together in a a very deliberate construct. The Mahatma used his body in empowering and liberating the nation and the performative aspect of Gandhi's

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265   Nikhil Chopra presentation https://pad.ma/BWS/player.

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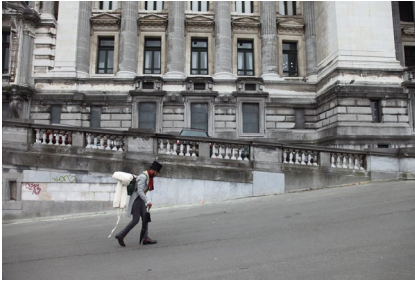
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Fig. 49–53. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing VI*, Brussels 2009. Courtesy the artist.

personality had played a significant role in mobilizing the nationalist movement through peaceful resistance, with his famous Salt March at Dandi (1930) for example. The figure of the Mahatma confidently walking has become iconized in its visual representations—as has been the fasting, the silence, the imprisonment, the beatings all of which the body took and created into a memory, his deliberate acts / performances demonstrating tremendous endurance and will, played an important role in mobilizing an entire nation.[266] Gandhi's was the most ubiquitous figure on the nation's visual landscape in the first half of the twentieth century, visible in chromolithographs, calendar art, posters, even in art works by Nandalal Bose and M. F. Husain,[267] and innumerable artistic representations after, Ramaswamy terms him as an "inspiring muse and a critical prop to think with."[268] The Mahatma's inspirational influence is apparent in Chopra's own long duration performances when he puts his endurance to test through the tasks he assigns himself that range from making outdoor landscapes in sub-zero temperatures (performances for *Indian Highway* at London and Oslo in 2010 and 2011) to dragging 300 kgs of canvas across gallery spaces and constructing his living space almost single-handedly. (*Coal on Cotton* Manchester 2013) In the performance at Brussels, Chopra's transformation from a persona referencing the Father of the Nation into a feminine western Other located as two polar opposites on the identity scale, provided an even sharper edge to his postnational critique.

2.4.5 Key Aspects—Performance Structure

In the *Yog Raj Chitrakar* series, Chopra begins the performance dressed in a certain persona, usually as a gentleman explorer and creates a landscape drawing either in the same space he is inhabiting for the duration of the performance or at another previously chosen site. In between, and depending upon the length of his performances he performs the everyday acts of eating and sleeping unmoved by the activity around him, the viewer could very well walk in to view the performance and Chopra would be taking a much-needed rest in full public view.

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266   Aasheesh Sharma, "Nikhil Chopra: The Chameleon-like performance artist," *Hindustan Times* June 26, 2016. Accessed on May 28, 2018. https://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/nikhil-chopra-the-chameleon-like-performance-artist/story-IlrFf2ee12ThRarYDW7L0K.html.

267   Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Mahatma as Muse: An Image Essay on Gandhi in Popular Indian Visual imagination," in *Art & Visual Culture*, 238.

268   Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Canvas of Disobedience," in *Gandhi in the Gallery: The Art of Disobedience* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2020), 186.

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Fig. 54. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar Visits Lal Chowk,* Srinagar 2007. Courtesy the artist.
Fig. 55. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing VII,* Venice 2009. Courtesy the artist.

The living space is also the space where he critiques notions of how technology has taken over our lives through his use of old- fashioned objects, shaving with an old, styled razor, washing in a metal wash tub and metal basin. The transformational persona change occurs when he scrubs himself clean with the help of these familiar objects. Washing is a pivotal moment in the performance structure as an act of erasure before he transforms into someone else and he does this slowly and very deliberately, in full public view.

The creation of the tableau vivant style in his productions derives from his interest in the *mise-en-scène* inspired by greats such as Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer and Velasquez. Chopra enjoys drama in a composition, an aspect especially visible in his performances as *Sir Raja*. If the archive of photographs after each performance were to be examined, one will find a couple that focus on the deliberate creation of a mise en scene, dramatic tableaux where objects are

arranged just so, almost like a still life. For example, Chopra elaborately stages and lays out his costumes before he even begins the performance. The deliberate and public display of those pieces of attire (Fig. 54), marks the ritual costuming he follows in each performance. Food is often arranged in a similar fashion, the act of nourishing the body is vital to the success of his durational performances, the time he gives to this activity, the kind of food that he eats and the ways in which it is aesthetically arranged, especially the process of dining on a formally arranged table setting (Fig. 55), is yet another form of post-colonial critique that is partially autobiographical.

2.4.6 Importance of Site

Site is a key aspect of all live performance work, since the performance is as much about situating the body in a site as it is about acknowledging the space and its histories in the moment of the performance. Chopra is often invited to participate in exhibitions, shows and festivals that are open to public interaction—therefore audience response and participation play an important role in ensuring the success and visibility of each performance. The Biennial or mega-exhibition space offers greater possibility for the number of footfalls and interaction whereas an individual performance in a gallery or exhibition space less so, while an institutional site provides a ready-made historical framework to engage with. Chopra usually selects an indexical site for his performance, a location that has a history of its own and that is part of the collective public memory. Through his own research he adds fictive elements to the personas he is researching. Chopra's performances as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* involve a fair amount of archival research as he gets to know the performance site, its key characteristics, histories and personas. Rather than viewing the site as a linear narrative, Chopra explores its ambiguity and works with an amoebic narrative which allows the possibility of re-interpretation.[269] This re-interpretation ties in closely with the duration of the performance, in longer durational performances the possibility to play with the idea of transformation offers more flexibility as he inhabits a place with enough time to transform himself internally as well, into someone other than he is.

The sites that form part of a single *Yog Raj Chitrakar* performance can sometimes be multiple—the outdoor space where he creates the landscape drawings such as in Hyde Park with the living space as a tent outside the Serpentine

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269   Chopra at Kochi Biennale 2013 talk, Accessed on May 27, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZm1nIqSktg.

Gallery in London, or Galgenburg Hill as his drawing site and the Les Brigittines as living space in Brussels, where he brings back his completed work and displays it. As *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, he has been the quintessential traveler, seemingly travelling for the purpose of creating the drawing, to Oval Maidan in South Mumbai, to the pier in Oslo, to Ellis Island in New York, enacting the part of a flaneur, "the eye, the protocol, memory, judgement and the archive,"[270] as observer and chronicler, Chopra's stroll through urban spaces connects with a city's memory, to a time gone by, when travelers explored spaces in a leisurely way and preserved a mental record of those spaces.

Among Chopra's performance sites as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (Paris, London, New York, Chicago, Brussels, Tokyo), many are cities and world capitals functioning as epicenters of globalization, as *spaces that epitomize contradictions between excess and desire.* In these temporally mobile spaces, the histories of the present and the past come together in locations that have been the hubs of transnational migrations through history (New York and London for example), the sites he selects to perform in, embody the realities, contradictions and peculiarities of their histories and people—Ellis Island in New York, Galgenberg Hill in Brussels, Hyde Park in London, Lal Chowk in Srinagar, Oval Maidan in Bombay and sometimes certain historical associations may unwittingly get reflected in his own performance. For example, in Brussels, he created the landscapes of the Flemish and French parts as two separate halves and joined them a little imperfectly, highlighting a non-seamless process just like the two histories of the city. The strength and historicity of his performance derives as much from the contemporaneous nature of the enactment as from his playing with the idea of locatedness. Chopra's engagement with personas and sites emerges largely from the global turn in which the postcolonial rather than being taken up in a politically confrontational stance, functions rather, as a memory that the centuries of oppression have left as indelible imprints on the 'Indian' persona, and how these can only be erased or confronted through highlighting their existence in the present memory and by running a critique.

2.4.7 Drawing the Landscape

The act of drawing is a central part of each performance—the visual capture of the mobility of a moment—the entire performance is built around this one task he allocates to himself. It is usually created either in the space where Chopra performs

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270 Nooteboom Cees, "All Souls' Day," Die Zeit, 1995, 49.

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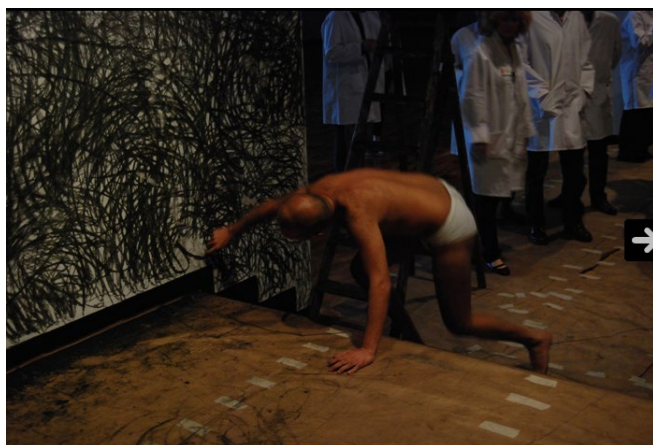
Fig. 56. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing III,* Manchester 2009. Courtesy the artist.
Fig. 57. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing V Part 2,* Oslo 2009. Courtesy the artist.

(Lal Chowk Srinagar) or on a large canvas in a selected public site (the pier at Oslo, Kensington Gardens in London). The drawing often features a historically familiar visual icon that can resonate with public memory (the High Court, the Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai, the Clock Tower in Srinagar,). 'Making a mark,' through his ephemeral drawings becomes the tool for him to locate his body as *Yog Raj Chitrakar.* Chopra uses charcoal—an artist's most recognizable tool and a primitive fossil fuel—to establish his presence at a given site. It is with charcoal that he deliberately breaks down his persona from a civilized gentleman to a primitive, charcoal covered stranger laboring at his task, almost disappearing under its dust (Fig. 56). In almost all his *Yog Raj Chitrakar* performances, Chopra carries his drawing canvas in a sack and brown paper wrapped art supplies tied with a string, walking in the city, becoming one with the surroundings (Fig. 57), completing his masquerade into anonymity.

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2.4.8 Costuming as Masquerade

Chopra's costuming almost mimics the slowness of a Kathakali performer's ritual of dressing. The deliberate and careful washing up of his whole self during the performance after he finishes the drawing is an emphatic reminder of the constructed-ness of the persona and its ongoing masquerade. At the start of his *Yog Raj Chitrakar* performance, he is often dressed as a gentleman explorer (sometimes 'acting' the explorer, pitching his tent in the host city, like he did at Hyde Park, London during the *Indian Highway* performance). The act of costuming—dressing and undressing—the process of 'uncivilizing' the gentleman and reversing the process, becomes even more aggressively transgressive when the colonial, heterosexual, male character transforms into a feminine persona steeped in colonial history. The construction of the postcolonial subject takes place through the discourse of memory as Chopra refers to certain significant aspects of these histories—the concepts of androgyny, the indeterminacy of genders—all of which were almost taboo subjects in the colonial period and the evidence of this persists to this day in the enacting of draconian laws that still prevail in independent India. Chopra often shaves off his head hair, also the beard and moustache during his performance—shaving is a reminder of a man's disciplinary regime towards normality in appearance, and a signifier of his masculinity. The act of shaving itself is a transformative act and as he sometimes shaves his entire body hair in his performances, (Brussels) it becomes an act in keeping with the current conventions of fashion and beauty not only for women but also gestures towards the hairless body of the metrosexual male.

Chopra's carefully conceived costumes, the Victorian style white gown with its artificial cage crinoline—popularized by Queen Victoria when she wore white for her wedding dress—an eighteenth century mantua hair style, a bob or page boy cut typical for 1920s women, top hats or homburg hats worn by the upper class pointy leather shoes with leather spats etc.—all play a pivotal role in establishing the veneer of his extremely civilized, colonial, upper class persona, following Bhabha's ideas on mimicry, creating an Anglicized 'authentic' stereotype in a "final irony of partial representation."[271] The colonial style attire is a specific critique of the "white sahib" as he strides past, an epitome British authority—replete with leggings, breeches, stockings, high necked collared starched shirts, floral waistcoat and cravats ([Fig. 58](#)). With the donning of the carefully laid out costumes and occasional application of make-up, Chopra critiques the construction of identity through the Occidental west/the oriental

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271   Bhabha, 88.

Fig. 58. Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar : Memory Drawing VII*, Venice 2009. Courtesy the artist.

east for example, when he applies kohl to his eyes, a practice that belongs to eastern cultures.

Temporality takes center stage when he merges dimensions of time and space, as he strolls through the busy streets of Chinatown and Lower Manhattan dressed in a black cape and a top hat from 1920s New York, his sack of belongings over his shoulder, (*Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing IX* New Museum 2009). He could be any traveler emerging across time, representing a world that no longer exists, but bringing it into the contemporary moment through his own anonymous presence. Yet, even in faraway New York or Brussels, a flicker of a submerged national identity emerges in the way he dons the grey plaid to cover himself in Indian style—wearing *kolhapuri chappals* as an Indian farmer in Manchester and *langhot* as underwear in place of regular boxer shorts as he strips down for his performances. With this deliberate critique he masquerades Indian-ness as a stereotype that is associated with certain objects that define an identity.

The one character from postcolonial history that Chopra seemed to don regularly as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* is that of the Victorian queen, (*Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing* II Mumbai 2008; *Chalo! India* Mori Art Museum Tokyo 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VIII* Manchester 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing X Part 2,* Mumbai 2010). Taking up the persona of the Victorian queen has many connotations, from the referencing of the Victorian era itself as one of the tremendous growth of the British colonial empire with India as the jewel in the crown, to the persona of Queen Victoria herself as a signifier of empowerment, as also of the era that came to be defined by a clear delineation of segregations marking modern sexuality and its concomitant restraints. Chopra's attention to troubling the gender binary essentially works with stereotypes and assigned behaviors that create a particular identity within

'recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.' This performativity within 'culturally established lines of coherence' as a repetitive act and its mis-citation calls into question the stability of personality stereotypes. (Butler 1990) Whether in the pompous acts of a bejeweled Indian royal as he surveys his land in Kashmir, or the enervated Raja who lies on his death, bed to playing out the gracious obeisance of the British queen as he accepts homage from his subjects, all the studied movements of Chopra as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* the colonial explorer, mimic the manners and dress of the master, this partial 'blurred' representation is a deliberately staged representational strategy to visibilise the construct and strengthen the critique further.

To conclude, all three artists project their performative masquerading bodies to critique stereotypical notions of 'Indian' identity. For Ganesh, the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic is not merely a piece of nostalgia from her childhood, its logic of origin is decentered, and the queer body is brought center stage, confronting the social condition of women, directly in conflict with the heterosexual ideologies of the nation. Shah's works in multiple mediums help to simulate a productive tension with the queer performative body between existing aspects of reality and also intervene simultaneously in the moment, to create it anew in an outrageously theatrical camp sensibility. The transgendered body critiques physical stereotypes that signpost normative bodies that tie in with notions of Indian-ness as does the photo archive foregrounding female masculinity. Chopra's 'Indian' body becomes invisible as he walks through and performs in cities across the globe and intervenes in the present with an anonymous postcolonial self. Through the masquerade of his elaborate costuming he makes the exotic-ness of the 'other' visible, to remind, that like Shah and Ganesh each identity is also a construct.

Their heterogeneously constructed selves indicate a well-known truth, that identities are always subject to some form of politics, some connect with the nationalist socialist imaginary, but is it possible to transcend this politics towards a more open and reflexive consciousness? This is a question my next chapter addresses.

3 The Post-National—
   Transcending Identity

In the previous chapter, an analysis of some works by Chitra Ganesh *(Tales of Amnesia)*, Tejal Shah *(What are you*; *Women Like Us)*, and Nikhil Chopra *(Yog Raj Chitrakar)*, demonstrated that the 'queer' performative masquerading body in differing medias engaged in a critique of the nation and its histories. This chapter delineates some key factors and developments that mark the shift away from the nation as artists imaginatively deterritorialise themselves through travel and mediatization. It begins with a brief conceptual overview of the conditions that define the contemporary condition—a deterritorialization of home and belonging, moving towards some of the art spaces that epitomize this phenomenon. A close reading of another subsequent set of works by the three artists follows, an overriding thematic accompanying each analyses further reinforces this shift that is visibilized via overriding concerns that connect with global discourses that include queer sexualities, queer utopias, queer ecologies and racial passing. The final section takes a quick look at some posts by the three artists on social networks such as Facebook to trace the synergies between their ideations and global discourses.

Even with increased travel and mobility, the opening out of art spaces and an increasingly growing use of online networks comprises a set of circumstances that contribute to this shift, but it is apparent that none or all of these phenomenas can be attributed as sole markers for this shift and it encompasses an array of transnational entanglements and relationships, aided by a growing connectedness via intense mediatization[272] all of which have played an important role

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272 The timeline of this intense mediatization in real terms can be traced chronologically, beginning with the establishment of the world wide web by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1982. The launching of Google (1997), Skype (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006) and Instagram in 2010 have all affected sea changes in the ways that people connect with each other.

in transcending national concerns—not only raising an awareness of shared precarities but also aiding the deterritorialisation of the artists' bodies themselves. As connectivities through social networks are increasingly being forged, the dialogues around change have transformed into global discourses in innumerable areas of the lived every day, including race, ethnicity, queerness, ecology and human rights that come directly into play within art practices as well.

There are differing opinions on the role played by the intense media connectedness in the current times, while it is believed that the internet has aided the fragmentation and breakdown of stable national identities leading to the liberation of national ties originating from ethnicity of place and culture—ties that had served as a binding glue in the past—at the same time there is evidence to support claims of this mediatic mode being actively employed to further nationalist agendas. This study engages with both views during the course of its analysis.

3.1 Global Connectivities—Deterritorialisation

The observation that "the contemporary artist has become the aspirational paradigm for the new worker, creative, unconventional, flexible, nomadic, creating value and endlessly travelling,"[273] can hardly be contested. This statement can well apply to many artists today and to the artists that are the focus of this study to understand how an artist's body itself as well as the body of the works created by the artist have become nomadic subjects. Deleuze and Guattari use the term 'de-territorialisation' to describe the process by which a person (body) moves beyond or alters an aspect of their place within the social world. Everything and everyone has a 'territory' (though they use the term territory in a metaphorical sense) and through the relations between bodies, things and the world, these territories are continually being moved beyond (de-territorialised) and reinstated (re-territorialised). They claim that deterritorialisation is a process through which 'one' leaves the territory. It is the operation of the 'line of flight,'[274] a crack or rupture, perhaps borne out of resistance or just purely creative, "it's along this line of flight that things come to pass." (Deleuze, 1995:45) If we were to engage with the idea of deterritorialisation as connected with the changing patterns

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273 Simon Critchley, "Absolutely-Too-Much," *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics and Culture*, Jul-August 2012. Accessed on May 29, 2018. https://brooklynrail.org/2012/08/art/absolutely-too-much.

274 Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 508.

of mobility due to globalization, it would logically entail a distancing of ties between culture and a specific territory. And following this trail of ideas, there are three concepts I would like to quote here that assume a direct relevance to understand the shift towards postnational perceptions that visibilizes itself in the artworks and artists themselves—the first being Appadurai's understanding of deterritorialisation.

Arjun Appadurai connects the idea of deterritorialisation and cultural distancing from a locality following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizomatic, he states that the world we live in seems rhizomatic, "calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups on one hand and fantasies of electronic propinquity on the other." [....] Imagination, as a social practice, he argues, offers us new sites of agency and also globally defined fields of possibility in this new global cultural economy. Acknowledging the world's increasingly deterritorialised landscape, a process on since the last many decades, he proposes a framework for exploring the existing disjunctures through the ideas of global flows or five different –scapes which he terms as imagined worlds in which most people live. Of particular interest to this study is Appadurai's definition of media scapes which provide a "complete repertoire of images and narratives" to viewers throughout the world,[275] and it is in the disjunctive blurring between reality and fiction as these images re-territorialise narratives that the art practices of these artists can be placed.

Homi Bhabha, acknowledging that the line between the home and the world are breaking down, also discusses the narrative inherent in mobility and movement. He states that there are distinct forms "of narrativity, choices and judgement," that create a home around certain locations, life worlds, he says, "are made for specific reasons and they have many geographical and temporal locations."[276] Avtar Brah observes how current transnational migrations are creating displacements all around the world, and questions of home and belonging are acquiring critical importance. Her contention is that home is not a fixed node, rather what one moves towards, culturally, "it is a moving signifier constructed and transformed in and through social practices, cultural imaginaries, historical memories and our deepest intimacies." Home is not necessarily a place of origin she says, rather, it is where one feels at home. Brah's concept of diaspora space is one "in which historical and contemporary elements are understood in

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275   Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the global cultural economy," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 31–45.

276   Homi Bhabha, "The World and the Home," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), 141. Accessed on July 21, 2018. https://blog.degruyter.com/diaspora-and-home-interview-homi-k-bhabha/.

their diasporic relationality."[277] Brah, therefore designates diaspora space as the framework for her analysis of the various contexts characterized by migration, awarding it a spatial dimension within a given society, Brah's concept encompasses not only the experiences of mobile subjects but also the transcultural processes that occur within these societal contexts. With multiple transnational flows that mark contemporary art practice itself, the experience of 'home' is mediated by historically specific 'local' experiences that offer micro-insights into the transcultural processes at work in these 'local' spaces.

All of these viewpoints put forth—Appadurai's ideas around imagination as a social practice, Bhabha's 'life worlds' with many temporal and geographical locations and Brah's contention that 'home is a moving signifier' transformed through cultural imaginaries—are of tremendous significance to engage with the shifting postnational perceptions in the work of these artists, as they deterritorialize and reconfigure familiar objects, reterritorializing them through their practices. Perhaps it could even be said that deterritorialisation is the lens that allows them to look at the nation from the margins, facilitating the decentering of the nation as a key signifier and allowing them to make an even more effective use of their creative imagination.

If I return once more to defining home as a physical space, I come closer to Brah's definition of home as "the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells," and attribute the creation of 'locality' with a phenomenological quality (with Appadurai), the 'sense of place' can be stretched to include virtual and actual lived realities.[278] Home in that sense then becomes the space where one feels 'local.' Home for Chopra and Shah has been Goa since 2012, their decision to move almost in the same year to the same city were driven by somewhat overlapping concerns—a desire to move away from a busy metropolis and all it entails towards large open spaces, the possibility to mix with like-minded people, live closer to nature, and especially in the case of Shah, the shift towards a deeper relationship of interspecies, nature culture and queer ecologies.[279] In their desire to foster connections between their art practice and spaces, both artists made a concerted effort to establish such studio spaces in Goa directly after their moves.

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277 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 197.

278 Appadurai 1996, 204.

279 Ashiesh Sharma, "Art Goa: A Creative Migration," *DNA* April 27, 2014. Accessed on August 20, 2017. https://www.dnaindia.com/entertainment/column-art-goa-a-creative-migration-1982399.

Shah established *Balcao* in 2013, a transdisciplinary, experimental, shape-shifting project space in North Goa, aiming to explore the relationships between art, technology, nature, culture, healing and consciousness, in which they offered residencies to artists/practitioners including Anuj Vaidya, Jaret Vadera, Mona Gandhi and Shammi Nanda. Similarly, Chopra, along with his artist wife Madhavi Gore and French artist Romain Lousteau, established *HH Spaces,* an artist-run residency space in October 2014. As performance practitioners, they often invite artists working with live arts from various parts of India and other parts of the world, leading to further collaborations, workshops, performances and exhibitions, providing an active, energetic space for performance art practice in India. It was at one of their Open Studios that fellow artist from Germany Yuko Kaseki, with whom Chopra had also performed during his residency at Berlin in 2011[280], also performed at *HH spaces* in July of 2016.

However, even before they relocated to Goa and established their art spaces, Shah and Chopra had been travelling to other parts of the globe to participate in art residencies.

Art residencies are spaces—as already seen with the discussion on Khoj—that offer artists the possibility to not only experiment with their genres but also provide transformative experiences for an artist's ongoing practice, by providing time of reflection, research, presentation and production. International art residency programmes are often "designed to offer a pre-existing infrastructure a paved road into the art world for the newly arrived artists who could turn to their work at once." They generally provide artists with the opportunity of interacting with international colleagues, gallerists, critics as well as curators.[281] Residencies allow artists time and space to reflect and develop new ideas, to experiment and create new artworks, and to make time for adequate research. They could be offered short term, in small experimental spaces, allowing artists time and resource to develop their own creative work or part of larger institutions, for longer periods of time, creating synergistic exchanges between artists and the host institutions. And often the resulting networks from these residencies can play a transformational role in an artist's practice. As sites of art production they play a significant role in knowledge interlocution and also function as transcultural contact zones as can be seen with the following examples.

During a three-month artist residency with Point Éphémère in Paris in 2007, Shah came across the photographic archive of the Salpêtrière hospital featured in Georges Didi-Huberman's *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the*

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280   http://www.nikhilchopra.net/home/?p=2259.

281   Bydler, *Global Art Worlds*, 52.

Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière. Charcot's Salpêtrière—with its examination, interrogations and experiments, with its public presentations and its theatre of ritual crises carefully staged with the help of ether or amyl nitrate, was an enormous apparatus for observation—and this was performed by a hierarchy of personnel who watched and accumulated dossiers of information. The practice of deleting from the dossiers what had been said and demonstrated by the patients regarding sex plus what had been provoked by the doctors themselves—were almost entirely omitted from the published observations of the archives.²⁸² Shah responded to Charcot's photographs with a series of auto-portraits based on the account, in collaboration with Paris-based dancer and choreographer Marion Perrin. This was Shah's first direct engagement with a non-Indian archive.

This insertion of their subject-self into the image was not only an act of agency performed by the artist but also an act of resistance to the history implicit in the archive, in tandem with their practice of excavating more contemporary marginalized histories and personas. Much later in 2015, when Shah attended a month-long residency on Queer Ecologies organized by Røst Air at Skømvaer Lighthouse in Norway, they joined a group of artists & educators (including Maja Moesgard, Elin Vester, Cal Harben, Malin Arnell, Camilla Renate Nicolaisen and Jaya Ramchandani) to compose, choreograph and play with sustainable ideas and conscious presence in natureculture as a theme on all levels and this residency resonated with the direction their work had already taken with *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013). While for Shah the residency spaces offered them the possibility to experiment with archival material or engage directly with themes of their interest, with Chopra the long-term residency at Freie University in Berlin proved to a be transformative experience in veering his focus away from the nation and towards racial histories of color and passing.

In his yearlong residency at Freie University in Berlin in 2011–2012, Chopra participated as a Fellow in *Interweaving Performance Cultures* and this residency proved to be a turning point in his professional career. His interaction and collaboration with other international artists from the genre of performance, especially theatre, helped him to clarify his own ideas, and experiment with various concepts in a series of performances titled *Blackening* (*Blackening,* July 2011 Savvy Contemporary Berlin; *Blackening* II, March 2012 GlogouAIR Berlin; *Blackening* III, April 2012 Grüntaler 9 Berlin) and *Broken White* (*Broken White* III, June 2011 Grüntaler 9, Berlin; *Broken White* IV, Part I September 2011 ifa Stuttgart;

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282   Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Broken White IV, Part II October 2011 ifa Berlin). He also collaborated with Yuko Kaseki, a Japanese Butoh and performance choreographer, in *9: Encounters, Meetings and Passages*, Chopra and Kaseki worked on Berlin, Tokyo and Bombay as places of memory, trauma and longing over a 27-hour performance. Later in the same year Chopra became the inaugural recipient of the Asialink Roving Residency, an art initiative floated across three different locations where he 'roved' between Sydney, Melbourne and Western Australia, performing at Carriageworks and delivering two performance lectures at Melbourne and the Freemantle Arts Centre.[283]

Ganesh travels widely within the US and her list of residencies and teaching positions are diverse,[284] some of these have led to the creation of transformative residency projects for example, Ganesh's collaborative archival work with Mariam Ghani *Index of the Disappeared* (Ongoing) began after her residency with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in 2004. The work deals with the weeks and months after 9/11, when developments such as the *Patriot Act*, *Special Registration Act* and a rise in Islamophobia began to crystallize into disappearances of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians who were detained, profiled, interrogated and deported post 9/11, a narrative that had been absent from the official record. The *Index* project was driven by the need to make visible the missing data on the disappearances and deportations of South Asian Muslims as well as the cases of human rights abuse—interventions by Ganesh and Ghani included sketches of the missing persons, a warm online data base and various other iterations. *Index* was followed by works like *Guantanamo Effect* (2013), an interactive web project commissioned by Creative Time Reports, as Ganesh continues to engage with issues of human rights and resistance. *She the Question* (2012) was created following Ganesh's participation in an artist residency at Guggenheim and it was the direction her work adopted during this residency that played a seminal role in the creation of this set of collages. Having established that artist mobility and their engagement with existing materials and archives during their residencies plays an important role in transforming or changing the direction of an artist's practice, the artworks that have followed in the wake of such residencies for two of the artists in this study are being cited as examples.

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283 *Nikhil Chopra: Roving Residency*, Asialink University of Melbourne. Accessed on August 21, 2016. https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts/resources/past-exhibitions/exhibitions/nikhil-chopra-roving-residency.

284 http://www.chitraganesh.com/about/.

3.1.2 The Shift

Thematically, Ganesh's *She the Question* (2012), continues her feminine-centered narrative but gestures towards apocalyptic changes occurring in the environment and towards queer utopias, while in *Between the Waves* (2012), Shah's narratives locate themselves at sites that foreground the unequal balance in a capital-based economy, where water bodies with rich eco-diversity such as mangroves, seas and oceans are drying up, where man-made landfills offer potentialities as new cities of the future and Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, the itinerant post-colonial traveler, genuflects towards genealogies of color and passing as *La Perle Noire*. As the three artists foreground shared issues and concerns in their works, the nation and its critique, so central to their earlier works ceases to be the central thematic and pre-occupation.

3.2 Ganesh's Queer Utopias

Ganesh created *She the Question* after her Guggenheim fellowship, during which she had studied and researched classical American science fiction authors such as Ray Bradbury and Philip K. Dick, and also done some archival research on early science fiction films such as Fritz Lang's 1929 epic *Metropolis*, silent cinema across cultures and continents, including Indo-German productions between Himanshu Rai and Franz Osten as well as on mainstream popular science fiction print publications popular in the 1970s and 1980s such as OMNI.[285] Science fiction greats such as Ray Bradbury and Philip K. Dick were not new to Ganesh, who had been reading their work in her school years. She brought the residency research into her own work, experimenting with animation ideas, intercutting comics and silent film, psychedelic colors and reflecting with altered states of consciousness,[286] bringing different kinds of visual languages together as she created images of futuristic landscapes and space travel, but without creating any intricate plots or character development. Ganesh's move towards science fiction was not an isolated one, it resonated across the board in contemporary art practice with artists such as Trevor Paglan and Pierre Hughie among others. In the series of collages, the focus is on addressing fundamental yet surreal questions that also

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285   Vandana Kalra, "Myths and the Woman," *Indian Express*, September 22, 2013. Accessed on June 29, 2018. http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/myths-and-the-woman/1171486/2.

286   Jaret Vadera, "Between, Beneath and Beyond: A Conversation with Jaret Vadera," April 4, 2017. *SAADA South Asian American Digital Archive*. Accessed on June 27, 2018. https://www.saada.org/tides/interview/chitra-ganesh.

resonate with the genre of science fiction, such as 'Who are we?' and 'Where are we headed in the future?' In the collages of *She the Question*, these questions continue to center upon the female figure—the defining trope of her work.

Comprising of twenty-four panels, *She the Question* was initially displayed (although partially), at Gothenburg, Sweden in 2012 and later at Gallery Wendi Norris in San Francisco at the end of the same year. The 'question' in the title was a significant counter to patriarchy and male-centered questions, introducing the feminine also as a question, but without offering any fixed conclusions, this was an open-ended investigation which is characteristic of Ganesh's artworks across medias. The works of Roy Lichtenstein, Martha Rosler's photomontages, Hannah Hoch's collages and contemporary graphic novels including *The Watchmen, The Sandman, Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist,* the work of Alison Bechdel and Charlotte Perkins' *Herland*, all have proved inspirational resources for this collage series,[287] the visual discourse in the series stems from utopian scenarios in flat colors replicating a 1970s psychedelic look. Some of the frames continue to be peopled by figures from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics, but the references draw from science fiction and the visual iconography draws in contemporary ecological concerns, the narrative and iconography move away from the national critique so visible in *Tales of* Amnesia and into a space of queer fantasy.

3.2.1 *She the Question*—Panels

The title image, *Head on Fire*, is half submerged in flames as the figure sits cross-legged in a classic yogic pose on the forest floor, the pose recalls the supernatural powers of meditation and *tapas* (Fig. 59). A turquoise ringed-planet dangles from an extra hand, a second head lies at the figure's feet, wearing psychedelic sunglasses with a third eye on the forehead, all reinforcing the supernatural powers of the feminine. This image almost foregrounds the narrative for the entire work, the body is distinctly colored—calm, meditative and almost in another space, indexical signifiers of a utopian existence are already visibilizing with the tertiary planets circling in the background.

Almost spilling out of the frame to merge with the adjoining panel, the hand in the next image verbalizes thought with its text *"Her head in flames at the bottom of our dreams…"* (Fig. 60), as it emerges from a morass surrounded by a walled fortress—the barbed fence and the javelin spear reinforce the violence that will continually recur in the subsequent panels in the series. The adjoining

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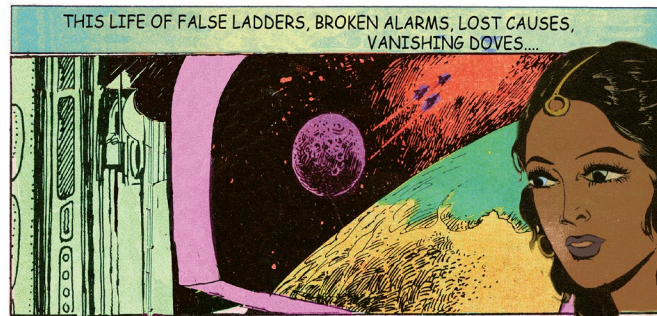287 Interview with artist Delhi, 2013.

Fig. 59. Ganesh, *She the Question : Head on Fire,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.
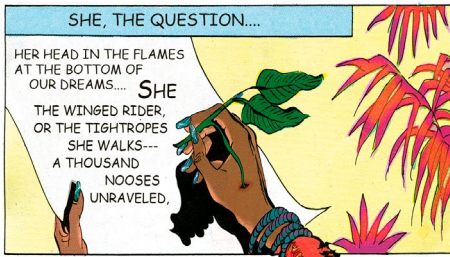
Fig. 60. Ganesh, *She the Question : A Pulse too Slippery,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.
Fig. 61. Ganesh, *She the Question : This Life,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

panel focuses on the gaze, a faceless figure wearing an Indian sari, peers out of an open doorway, and a gigantic all-seeing eye suspended vertically looks back, as an ominous presence (Fig. 61). When we look out, we are also looked at. Often in her works Ganesh subverts the traditional male gaze that automatically invests a female body with pornographic content by creating numerous eyes all over the female body. But in this particular panel, it is an eye that is engaging with the complexities of life and power dynamics,[288] with agency, and

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288 Erica Cardwell, "Empathy, Fantasy and the Power of Protest: A Conversation with Chitra Ganesh," October 30, 2015. Accessed on June 25, 2018. https://hyperallergic.com/249897/empathy-fantasy-and-the-power-of-protest-a-conversation.

this tenor of facing violence and simultaneously taking control runs through this entire collage series. This is a gaze that is not invested with resistance to the male gaze, it just sees and calmly confronts. In *She the Question, This life,* a life of *"false ladders, broken alarms, lost causes, vanishing doves"* a contemporary female face is fashionably adorned with a *maang tika* and sports blue eyes, the face is framed within what appears to be a spaceship, everywhere are signs of destruction, nuclear warheads emerging from the earth and exploding in space. The iconography for this image is apocalyptic, the incremental loading of negative meaning through the accompanying textual phrases signal towards a violent and despairing portrayal of a queer life for a woman of color with textual references to vanishing doves and lost causes. We get further insight into the protagonist's state of mind with the text in the series of images that follow which almost reads like a litany of unpreparedness—*"too harsh to walk the world without skin, too soon to remove the gun from your mouth."* The textual narrative in the early panels appears to be despairing and focused on the violence but in contemporary settings.

With the next set of panels (Fig. 62) there is a subtle change of mood, two young girls furtively view a muscular arm holding a sword. The text hints at some sort of resolution—this becoming of *"a planet unto herself,"* through *"the meeting of violence and reason,"* seems to imply a self-sufficiency that gestures towards optimism. In the next panel optimistc and hopeful, the artist as a young girl sits and references books in a library (Fig. 63), and talks of dreaming and scheming with the *"logic of cities coursing through her blood,"* even as a signifier of violence reappears in the droplets of blood dripping from her finger The ability to dream and to think has some direct connections with technology and growth, with a denial of equal educational opportunities for all races, actions that cohere with the marginalization of queers within an unjust society.

Resolution seems finally at hand as the lower torso of a woman's body stands on a rock against snow-covered mountains in the distance (Fig. 64). The dark hairy torso, with its strangely large feet presents an anti-aesthetic[289] the abdomen is now aflame, almost in continuity with the visual from the title image, some water drops have been added to douse the flames, the stance of the figure is firm and determined. The textual phrase serves as a reminder of how patience and amnesia work together towards a queer existence, how patience particularly has to be practiced in helpless situations when *"tied to a pole in a cellar,"* with *"fists*

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289 I draw the term from Hal Foster's 1980 definition and the understanding of the anti-aesthetic as art created to interrogate gender and other forms of identity.
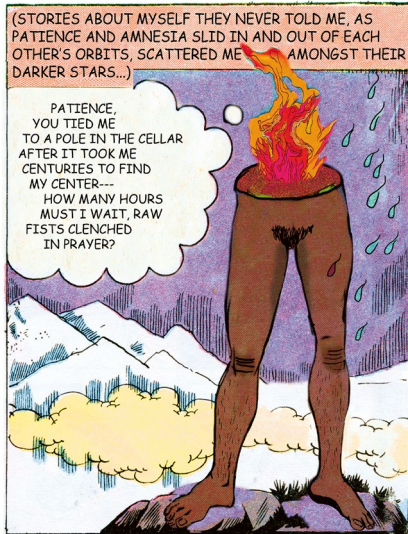
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Fig. 62. Ganesh, *She the Question : Planets and Sword,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.
Fig. 63. Ganesh, *She the Question : Clock-time,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

clenched in prayer." The figure is still not whole, perhaps implying that acceptance of queer identities is still in process and about ways to reconcile a queer identity with the reality of normative lives. However, the final panel in this series works to complete the narrative, it portrays the artist herself in the style of Mughal portraiture, the image is framed within ornate borders in the Mughal miniature style but contains no other signifiers of royalty. Rather than being dressed in diaphanous draperies, silks and satins as a Mughal Empress, the artist is dressed for war—her bow strapped to her shoulder and arrows strapped onto her back (Fig. 65). Instead of transporting the ideals of *nazaqat* (delicacy) and *tehzeeb*, (courtesy) where she should be holding a jewel or flower to draw attention to the

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Fig. 64. Ganesh, *She the Question : Patience,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

Fig. 65. Ganesh, *She the Question : Stories about myself,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Wendi Norris.

hands as a measure of refinement,[290] the artist herself looks at the viewer as she points her two index fingers against her head in a suicidal gesture. And it is with this final image in the series that the transformation is now complete.

The head in flames from the title image that could be likened to a burning candle has now burnt down to emerge as a whole new body. The calm face with the artist's self-portrait sends out a clear message—the queer body is not only whole and in control, but also metaphorically ready to confront death.

3.2.2 *She the Question*—Key Aspects

At the Konsthalle in Gothenberg, '*She the question*' was the first line of a poem that was scripted in braided hair at the exhibition entrance—Ganesh's intervention with *she* as the subject could not be more clear. In this particular set of

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290   For greater detail please see, Juneja, "Translating the Body into Image," in *Images of the Body in India*, eds. Axel Michael and Christopf Wulff (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 243–266.

Fig. 66. Ganesh, *She the Question : Knowledge and the rose petal,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

collages, the sourcing of material and references through a complex plurality of genres and medias questions the narrative of 'who' the feminine is. Even though violence continues to be the key element, the world she creates in this set of collages is now openly dystopic and disturbing. The marginalization of women in general dominates the narrative textually with phrases such as *"Of the tightropes she walks – head in flames"* (Fig. 58); *"Life of false ladders, broken alarms, lost causes."* (Fig. 60). The phrases convey multiple messages to multiple viewers and can be applied to many violent situations that queer women are confronted with, everywhere. The feminine figures peopling the apocalyptic psychedelic landscapes gesture towards a present / future that focuses on *"bodily transformations,"* the becoming of *"a planet unto herself."* (Fig. 62). The bodies located in futuristic spaces now connect with the cyborg and mediated technologies.

References to an anxious search for identity surface with a wish to *"stories about myself, they never told me"* […] *"how many hours must I wait, raw fists clenched in prayer?"* (Fig. 63) In some of the panels, silence emerges as a central concept as Ganesh refers to secrets and hidden encyclopedias (Fig. 66).

There are many silences that underlie discourses, Foucault states that silence is less the absolute limit of discourse than an element that functions alongside things said and in relation to them, as he says, "there is no binary division to be made between what one says or does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things," and how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized.[291] Sedgwick also observes that "Closetedness" is by itself, "a performative initiated as such by the speech act of silence."[292] Sedgwick's argument is closely aligned to Foucault's that while discourse also undermines and exposes power making it fragile and possible to thwart, in the same way silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions but also loosening its holds and providing for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.[293] And even as queerness has a long and conflicted history of the silences embedded in same sex relationships of not daring to come out of the closet, in the case of India silence emerges "as a central concept in defining the violence faced by lesbian women," who undergo "the socially inscribed absence of choice," within the normative presumption of heterosexuality.[294]

3.2.3 The Narrative of Science Fiction and Utopic Imagination

With *She the Question* the overlays between myth and science fiction become stronger as it employs tropes regularly associated with science fiction such as alternate temporalities, extrapolation, speculation and a consciousness of mutability within different forms and contexts. Science fiction's increasing relevance in our world today is perhaps linked to the current dystopic state of our world, as we deal with enormous climate change, with political conflict and huge global inequalities—all grim realities that point towards uncertain futures.

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291   Foucault, 27.

292   Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, "Axiomatic," in *The Cultural Studies Reader,* ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 246–247.

293   Foucault, 101.

294   Bina Fernandez and Gomathy N.B, "Voicing the Invisible: Violence Faced by Lesbian Women in India," *Because I Have a Voice*, 159.

Science fiction helps us to think about the continually changing present through employing the lens of extrapolation, it also helps us to think about alternate tomorrows.[295] The notion of Time in this work itself connects with ideas of Futurism, in the artist's own words, "in order to have a robust, regenerative and replenishing futurism you have to reorient yourself to the past but look at the past differently to upend ideas of teleology and progress."[296] Artists working with the tropes of science fiction offer visions of what those different futures could be.

Trevor Paglan says that,

> Art can show you some of the mechanics through which the world is constructed and show some of the underlying political, economic, social, cultural relationships that are bearing down on our everyday lives, that have structured society in various ways, at the exclusion of other kinds of ways. It can also help denaturalize these things, help us realize that there is nothing natural about the world in the way that it exists now, and if there's nothing natural about the way it exists now, then we can imagine alternatives. That is something that artists have always done.[297]

And Ganesh's work closely aligns with the possibility of imagining alternatives with the understanding that science fiction is not about something happening in the distant future. Born and brought up in a country where women were creating utopian narratives on feminist themes way back in 1836, from Mary Griffith's *Three Hundred Years Hence* to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* in 1915—a man-less utopia that already marked race as a central feature,[298] Ganesh herself is inspired by Octavia Butler's work, within which the critique of dominant social paradigms is visibly embedded through the foregrounding of a black female protagonist[299] and Butler's work provides Ganesh with a strong reference point to engage with the rigid binaries between black and white so prevalent within American society. In Ganesh's female centered landscapes the ability to fantasize and imagine other worlds is a useful direction to take. What would it

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295   Isiah Lavender III, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), 227.

296   Interview with artist Delhi, 2013.

297   Accessed on August 19, 2018. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/trevor-paglen-inter view-1299836.

298   Alexis Lothian, "Feminist and Queer Science Fiction in America," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, eds. Gerry Canavan and Eric Carl, Link 2015, 72. doi: https://www.doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781107280601.008.

299   Lavender, 24.

mean to live in a world that is no longer pre-occupied with trivial matters such as social norms and playing out femininity? This stepping away from social role-play that was so central to the previous set of collages can be viewed as a decisive shift in this set of collage works.

In the fictional world fantasy becomes an important genre to empathetically expose pain with a sense of agency and therefore tropes from science fiction abound in the panels amidst cosmic references to Mars and Venus to orbits, constellations and time travel paradoxes—*"millennial tales splayed in the valleys of the distant future… from her cradle to our graves"* (Fig. 67). The surreal text also directly references narratives from science fiction in another panel—*"The queen of Mars awaits us with telescopes and broken arms"* (Fig. 68). This image multiply references not only the legend of Mars and Queen Aelita but also Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* that discuss the development of rocket technology followed by a black exodus to Mars to escape racism in America.[300] Some connections can also be made with Bloch's ideas on learning hope, Bloch states that "in order to penetrate the darkness" of the just lived moment, "we need the most powerful 'telescope,' that of polished utopian consciousness to penetrate precisely the nearest nearness,"[301] this darkness that Bloch foregrounds finds resonance with Ganesh's articulations on the despairing state of queer lives and the utopian desire to transcend it.

Science fiction works are about potentiality, becoming meaningful precisely because of their distance from everyday experience and 'Utopia' literally meaning 'nowhere' or 'no-place' finds its strongest expression in science fiction. Despite debates around the term 'utopia' and a belief that it has outgrown its usefulness, utopia remains useful as a critical tool as an aesthetic strategy for modeling possible worlds or 'what ifs.'[302] In *Queer Utopias*, Munoz argues that queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be used to imagine a future. "The future is queerness's domain," queerness needs to be seen as a horizon of potentiality, a not yet here, and as a possibility to break away from the constraints of a totalizing hetero-normative present that stifles our imagination. Munoz suggests that it is in the realm of the aesthetic that we can glimpse worlds proposed and promised […] it is through cruising "the fields of the visual" that we can "see in the anticipatory illumination of the utopian."[303] In fact queer of color

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300   Lavender, 96.

301   Ernst Bloch, "The Principle of Hope," 1954–59 in *Utopias,* ed. Richard Noble (London: Whitechapel / MIT Press, 2009), 43.

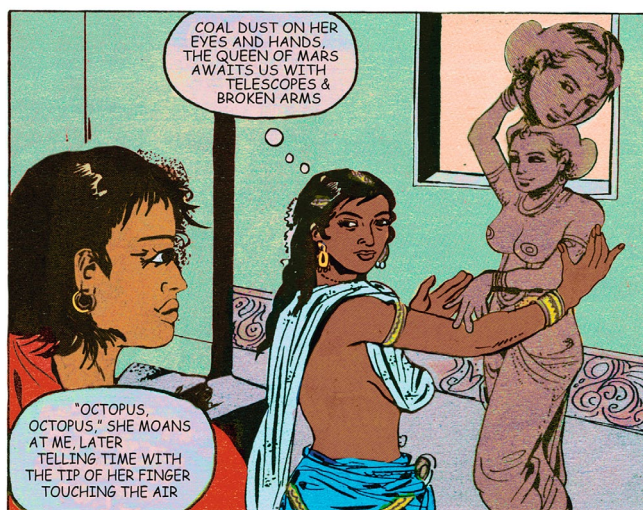302   Richard Noble *Utopias*, 14.

303   Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia,* Introduction (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1 & 18.

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Fig. 67. Ganesh, *She the Question : Green leaf writing,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.
Fig. 68. Ganesh, *She the Question : Queen of Mars,* 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

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performances work to dis-identify with normative scripts of whiteness and hetero-normativity and produce visions of other worlds. Munoz further says, that, "disidentificatory performances require an active kernel of utopian possibility…and we need to hold onto or even *risk* utopianism if we are to engage in the labor of making a queerworld."[304] Ganesh's set of collages work closely with Munoz's argument moving beyond the negative and grim realities of today, pointing towards the potentiality of alternate futures. "Tomorrow" for Ganesh then becomes the place "to examine things that can't be discussed directly, and

304   Jose Esteban Munoz, *Dis-identifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

where the body is a site of ongoing transformation and mutation,"[305] and utopia becomes the "place where the supernatural would live more freely alongside the everyday,"[306] potential futures and utopic imagination easily come together in *She the Question.*

3.2.4 *She the Question/Tales of Amnesia*

Examining the two sets of collages, *Tales of Amnesia* and *She the Question* for resonances and differences, it becomes apparent that the general themes underlying the works pinpoint similar concerns—sexual and gendered codes for women that permeate all mythic and contemporary narratives, but the figures in *She the Question* no longer masquerade as re-configurations from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics and the references are more contemporary. Neither is there an originary culture-specific narrative with attached moral codes that these images and text recall—even though some of the images still connect stereotypically with the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics. The image for the Queen of Mars panel has been taken from the *Amrapali* and *Upagupta* comic for example, the original script features a basic question being asked of the sculptor of the image. The narratives in this set of collages are complex and multi-layered. The feminine figures are shapeshifters keeping to clock-time, more rooted within poetic surreal fantasy without referring to national mythologies or histories. The protagonist, clearly the artist herself, is in a contemporary reality and a mythical past is referred to only indirectly, even though innumerable references to time travel surface throughout the work. The open-ended narrative in *She the Question* follows no particular order. In *Tales of Amnesia* the closeness and familiarity of the image to its original myth created a dissonance with the text in some panels. But in *She the Question,* Ganesh worked on the text and image simultaneously and the final panels, with their unity of text and image, give this work a completeness of narrative that was missing in *Tales of Amnesia.* A significant shift with *She the Question* is that it does not ostensibly feature women performing queer sexual acts with each other—the figures are more meditative, engaging in furtive dialogue, as queerness is now part of discourse.

305   Jaret Vadera, "Between, Beneath and Beyond," April 4, 2017. Accessed on July 10, 2018. https://www.saada.org/tides/interview/chitra-ganesh.

306   Rosalynn D'Mello, "Interview: Chitra Ganesh on her Upcoming Delhi Solo," BLOUIN ARTINFO September 25, 2013.

3.2.5 Ganesh as Translator

Ganesh as an artist from the diaspora already occupies a position of alterity as she translates referential realities through a process of semantic deconstruction in her role as cultural translator. In *Task of the Translator* (1921) Walter Benjamin argues that translation should not seek to communicate the meaning of the original because the communication of its content is not in the least essential to our appreciation of it. However, what is essential, he says is the translatability of the original, "… the task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect *(Intention)* upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."[307] This pronouncement by Benjamin if applied to Ganesh's collages, emphasizes this quality of translatability from the original's mode of signification. Her creation of another parallel contemporary mythology assumes a critical importance as she engages with the popular aesthetics of a mass medium through the act of translation to a readymade source material and producing in it a parodic version in an "echo of the original." Andre Lefevre's contention that translation can tell us a lot about the ways in which images are made, especially about the ways in which "authority manipulates images and employs experts to sanction that manipulation,"[308] resonates closely with Ganesh's critique of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic as it is through her translation of the target source code that the 'sanctioned' manipulation of normative codes is revealed. The source message is always interpreted and reinvented in cultural forms open to interpretation and reconstructed according to a different set of values according to different languages and cultures,[309] however, when translation is used surreally and in the contemporary context, source and target cultures cannot be so clearly demarcated, the new forms being created do not supposedly exist and then these assume a 'forward-looking' utopic dimension that can be attributed to Ganesh's second set of collages.

Often in more general terms, the located-ness of the viewer guides and determines a work's translatability, and as the work travels from one context to another, the audience brings in its own meanings. For a viewer in the US, or even in the West, the resonances and dissonances of *Tales of Amnesia* with the *Amar*

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307 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," (1923) in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schoken Books, 1968), 69–82.

308 Andre Lefevere, "Translation: Its Genealogy in the West," *Translation, History and Culture*, eds. Susan Basnett and Andre Lefevere (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 27.

309 Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," *Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 470.

Chitra Katha would not elicit any resonance or nuanced reading of the work as completely as it would in India where viewers would be familiar with the original narrative. For the Indian viewer of *Tales of Amnesia*, the understanding of the *Amar Chitra Katha* narrative is embedded within a particular and specific Indian context and its intelligibility and translatability within an Indian audience would be much more effective and easily understood. As an artist from the diaspora, this moving between cultures necessitates the need for Ganesh to easily 'code-switch' or shape-shift through playing with familiar signifiers and historical narratives, but this is not a straightforward process. Ganesh's exhibition history for *Tales of Amnesia* provides an understanding of how many layers of identity she connects with, and actively pursues. Living within mainstream New York, in the center of the art world has facilitated this layering and provided her with multiple opportunities to engage and dialogue with multiple cultures.

Tales of Amnesia has shown internationally in different spaces and contexts.[310] An example of how an artwork can be curatorially positioned, can be proffered in the display of the panels of *Tales of Amnesia* as part of a group show titled *Female Power* at Arnhem in Netherlands in 2013. The curatorial note situated Ganesh's work within the Indian goddess tradition, but without highlighting the underlying nuances of the collages that foreground the plight of the Indian woman as a whole. The note described her work in the following words:

> … Ganesh's female protagonists challenge the boundaries between good and evil. In an endless variation on the Mother Goddess, their ever-changing bodies appear as the Hindu goddesses Devi, Kali and Durga who, with their ambiguous and equivocal identities, possess supernatural powers.

In the *Tales of Amnesia* collages, even as some of the frames have been sourced from mythological narratives, these are rarely empowered Goddess figures and this is precisely Ganesh's critique and an active attempt at their empowerment. Anyone familiar with the societal structure in India would be aware of the huge dissonance between the marginalization of womens' lives *vis-à-vis* their positioning as goddesses. Therefore, questions of inadequate translatability continue

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310   Ganesh showed *Tales of Amnesia* for the first time internationally with Gallery Haas & Fischer in 2007 (August-October) in their Project Space 1+2: Loukia Alavanu. she went on to participate in FIAC Paris, with it in a solo presentation with the same gallery. She showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo show at Nature Morte in Berlin in 2011 and also at a solo at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh in the same year. In 2012 she showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo at Gotenburg Sweden, but added some more digital collages such as *Melencholia* and others. The *Tales of Amnesia* collages were part of another international show *Female Power* at Arnhem in 2013.

to remain central to culturally located works such as *Tales of Amnesia* and often it is the exoticness of the non-western Other that is on display.

The broader thematic visible particularly in *She the Question* on the other hand, allows the viewer to enter the work from multiple perspectives and relate to it. There are no familiar iconographic references to the fire of *sati,* to the *tapas* of *Parvati*, sacrifices of *Mira* or the legend of the creation of the Goddess Durga. Rather interstellar vistas and tropes associated with science fiction such as alternate temporalities and extrapolation indicate the 'hybrid space of a globalized world,' where queerness actively resists its abject status. The direction taken by *She the Question* therefore operates within a larger context, rather than being tied to a geographical space, nation or history, it inhabits a queer utopic space. Ganesh asserts, "I am queer and sometimes these themes are part of my work and sometimes not, it's one of the many, many layers in my work [...] and part of the narrative I am putting out there."[311] Ganesh's own experience of living in the diaspora as an artist of color inspires her to focus on a multicultural living experience, building upon her early visual experiences that centered round immigrant and non-American communities. Browsing through the identitarian contexts of Ganesh's exhibition histories, one notices that she engages with a gamut of ethnicities, showing with American feminist artists with the Asian American community of artists, both with the South Asian Womens' Creative Collective and otherwise, with the African-American community of artists, including collaborative works especially with Simone Leigh (*Radical Presence* in 2014, *Divine Horsemen* in 2010), as well as with Renee Cox, Kara Walker among others, and with Indian contemporary artists, beginning with *AlieNation* at Toronto with Dhruvi Acharya in 2001. For Ganesh's work perhaps the hybrid spaces of a globalized world can be termed as transnational spaces of belonging. Her practice is primarily about the 'colored' female body anywhere, wherever the female body becomes the site of rupture. There is no role-play or 'womanliness' or social masquerade in this set of collages, this body is reasoning with the contemporary reality around her—situated and located within that reality. While the main themes in this set of collages specifically gesture towards the presence of science fiction and utopia, I would like to move further towards a discussion of one of the larger themes that guides her work, queer sexuality, and how it is evidenced in queer solidarities transnationally and post-nationally.

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311   Neelam Raaj, "I don't believe in using LGBT themes for shock value: Chitra Ganesh," *Times of India,* October 13, 2013. Accessed on July 12, 2018. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/i-dont-believe-in-using-lgbt-themes-for-shock-value-chitra-ganesh/articleshow/24070715.cms.

3.2.6 Queerness is Global

Queerness it is claimed is not a category or a style but a lived experience—this lived experience is also a space of persistent violence, vulnerability and historical oppression[312] and is closely linked to the nation-state. The role of the nation in promoting or creating a common culture for its citizens is closely linked to the regulation of sexual dissidence. Sexuality is seen as a threat to the nation state because it is something that is difficult to control.[313] (Yuval Davis 1997) Heterosexualities as discussed in the last chapter are shaped by the nation through explicit ideologies being put out to serve them. Therefore, an approach that is critical of the nation as a unit of analysis and attentive to the similarities that exist among cultural settings within and across nation states, offers a useful direction in understanding the presence of queer sexuality in global terms.

Altman (1996), one of the first sociologists to address internationalization of social and cultural identities based on homosexuality, emphasizes that with globalization members of particular groups have more in common across national and continental boundaries than they do with others in their own geographically defined societies.[314] Ashley Tellis and Sruti Bala critique Altman's configuration of globalization as a process bringing together tradition and modernity and argue that his imperialized approach by conflating "tradition" with the native following pre-modern same-sex practices, and "modernity," with the western subject possessing a distinct identity, runs through cultures as if "they were objects in the aisles of a global supermarket."[315] Dasgupta also adds to this critique saying that Altman's thesis does not recognize the "multiplicity of localized/regionalized identificatory categories that exist within Asian contexts," for example, *metis* in Nepal or *kothis* and *hijras* in India.[316] It has been variously and success-

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312 Charlotte Prodger, "Queer Time and Place," *Frieze*, 23rd April 2014. Accessed on June 28, 2018. https://frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place.

313 Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage, 2004), 16. Here Binnie references George Moss's *Nationalism and Sexuality* that argues for middle class respectability in Germany being produced through promoting nationalism and regulation of sexual morals as an example.

314 Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 87.

315 Ashley Tellis & Sruti Bala, "Localized Trajectories of Queerness and Activism under global Governance," in *The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Rethinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South*, eds. Ashley Tellis & Sruti Bala (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 13–14.

316 Rohit Das Gupta, *Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politic, Intimacies and Belonging* (London: Routledge India, 2017), 109.

fully argued that early accounts of global queering have been explained primarily in terms of western, especially American sexual and gender cultures and this approach has been widely critiqued since its public emergence in the last decade of the twentieth century.[317] Notwithstanding these arguments, there has been a conscious mainstreaming of queerness in popular cultures, the phrase, "Queerness is now global," points towards the increased visibility of queer sexualities—"whether in advertising, film, performance art, the internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies—images of queer sexualities and cultures now circulate around the globe."[318] With events such as the IDAHO and Gay Games to promote notions of global LGBT solidarity and regular pride marches across the globe the situation is gradually transforming and transnational similarities amongst queer cultures are indeed emerging. In India, the success of South Asian queer, gay and lesbians organizing in the 1990s owed a lot to support from the west and included social and political groups gathering in clubs and conferences, the First Asian Lesbian Conference was held in 1990 in Bangkok. While the conditions vary for each country, there are commonalities including invisibility, a lack of community support, weakening family ties, economic dependence and so on[319] that occur across nations and territories.

3.2.7 Queer Discourse in India

The queer movement in India however, has in the last decades been greatly impacted with the growth of new media and online queer spaces such as the *Khush* list (1992), *SAGrrls* and *desidykes* that have created new 'forms of queer geographies' acting as points of resistance to patriarchal hegemonies pronouncing queer individuals as 'Un-Indian.'[320] However in the Indian class and caste-ridden

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317   Peter A. Jackson, "An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Re-imagining Queer Theory," Culture, Health & Sexuality. Vol. 2. No. 4 *Critical Regionalities: Gender and Sexual Diversity in South East & East Asia* (Oct–Dec 2000), 405–424. Also by Halperin 1996, Morton 1997 and Stivans 1999. Jackson's research on the Thai *Kathoey* transgenders shows that cross-cultural borrowing is not the only predominant force producing broad scale transformations of global queering and that local processes remain powerful forces for cultural transformation.

318   Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan, *Queer Globalisations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1.

319   Ana Garcia-Aroyo, *Alternate Sexualities in India: The Construction of Queer Culture Part Two Contemporary Politics and Art*, (Kolkata: Booksway, 2010),78.

320   Dasgupta, 34.

society, queer sexuality is as much about a 'false consciousness' of class, status and gender as well as location, therefore the signs of change, however gradual, tend to be restricted to the urban metropolises and among the educated middle and upper classes whereas in the smaller urban centers and villages, the queer community continues to be stigmatized. It is widely believed that the conceptualization of queer lives is governed by the elite minority whose understand of sexuality is aped from the West.

Attempts towards the mainstreaming of queer discourse in India have had a chequered history, which began with the first recorded protest organized by the *AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan* or ABVA in 1992 in a rally organized by gay men against police harassment in Delhi. The social composition of the movement has since then enlarged to include *kothi* and *hijra* communities. A more visible presence was demonstrated during the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004 where Persons Living with HIV / AIDS and sexual minorities were present. Although Narrain emphasizes that an understanding of what it means to be queer in India is constituted within local discourses and reflects the reality in its socio-political contexts,[321] it has also been successfully argued that the LGBT mobilization in India is intimately linked to HIV / AIDS funding from western NGOs. In the strategy for AIDS prevention were included open discussions about sexuality and working with marginalized queers and sex workers, therefore queer film festivals, gay pride parades, queer chatrooms, queer networks and support groups were all instituted as part of capacity building.[322] The contention that queerness is squarely positioned outside the national Indian imaginary was demonstrated with the showing of the film 'Fire' in 1996, an occurrence that is believed to mark the public emergence of lesbianism in India. The film was suspended, resubmitted to the Censor Board and considered incommensurable with 'the Indian culture.' Pramod Navalkar, the then Minister of Culture for Maharashtra, stated that 'lesbianism is a pseudo-feminist trend borrowed from the west and is no part of Indian womanhood.'[323] It was through the *Fire* affair and the ensuing protests that the construct of India was engaged with in real terms and it became quite apparent that the presence of queer behavior, especially between women in India conflating gender and nation in unacceptable ways, possesses the ability to overturn moral narratives. Coining

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321 Narrain, *Because I have a voice*, 9–16.

322 Subir K. Kole, "Globalizing queer? AIDS, homophobia and the politics of sexual identity in India," *Globalization and Health* 3, No. 8 (2007).

323 Naisargi Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (Durham NC: Duke University, 2011), 137–166.

the term *xenophobic queerphobia* as a particular queerphobia that justifies itself by constructing the self-identified Indian queer and as originating outside the nation, Paola Bacchetta argues that homophobic nationalist discourses also assert that queers are the products of western imperialism and that queer genders and sexualities are constructed outside the Hindu nation through a misogynist conception of gender and heterosexist notion of sexual normativity.[324] Notwithstanding these specific references, it cannot be denied that there has been a marked growth in the public visibility of LGBT communities in various public forums among the metro cities of India. Contemporary cultural interventions by media collectives such as *Nigah* in Delhi, *Larzish* in Mumbai, *Pedestrian Pictures/Swabhava* in Bangalore and *Sarani* in Kolkata use the queer film festival as a space for discussions around gender and sexuality. However, these initiatives are far from nation centered, some collectives like *Kashish,* established in 2010 in Mumbai, which became one of Asia's biggest LGBT Film festivals, have largely been underwritten by United Nations Development Project India and received support from the Alliance Francaise, the Arts Network Asia and the British Council.[325] Therefore, support through western global networks has been a critical component for the outing of the queer community in India. Evidence of global solidarities and participations is also provided by events such as pride marches. The first such march was held in Kolkata in 1998, Shah filmed the Calcutta Pride March in 2004,[326] by 2008 pride parades were being held at Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi and increasingly coopting greater international participation.

Despite the constraints of sometimes being located within a certain national frame, queer solidarity is a global phenomenon and this could be evidenced in 2013, when the Supreme Court overturned the 2009 High Court ruling that had de-criminalized queer sexuality, the day was celebrated as a day of protest in 35 countries from across the globe. It inspired the "Global Day of Rage" on December 15 with over 38 cities participating to demonstrate, protest, rally, conduct candlelight vigils, and more, to show solidarity against the decision as well as create a plan of action to get rid of Section 377 for good. It was endorsed by

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324   Paola Bacchetta, "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers," *Social Text*, Winter 1999, 141–166.

325   Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, "Queer Cinema in the World 2016,*" Film Quarterly* Vol. 70, No. 2 (2016).

326   Calcutta Pride March 2004. Video Clip by Tejal Shah. Accessed on November 8, 2018. http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/4719/Calcutta-Pride-March-2004.

SALGA – NYC and SAWCC among many others.[327] Transnational solidarities can also be evidenced in other instances when queer activists from Europe supported the campaign against Section 28 in the United Kingdom or when Indian activists signed a petition against President Musaveni in Uganda protesting against a passing of an anti-gay law. Despite, advances, collaborative protests and events, queer communities all over the globe face the same discriminations, fight the same battles of assertion as from the Stonewall days and face violent homophobic attacks as the one at Orlando in 2013. Gender and sexual non-conformists are attacked, killed, defamed and denied housing and employment world-wide and it may seem that the hatred and persecution of non-conformists does not mark a First World/Third World divide.[328] And yet, sometimes within diasporic populations itself these attacks can acquire homophobic overtones, as Puar observes in the case of the India day parade at Fremont California in 1994, when members of *Trikone* marched in the parade and were booed at by Khalistani Sikhs protesting the march.[329] This is hardly an isolated example indicating homophobic violence against the diasporic queer community. Within contemporary art practice itself on the other hand, the steadily growing presence of the mainstreaming of artworks created by artists identifying as queer can be signposted by citing a few examples.

In 2014 the Whitney Biennial signposted the shift towards Queer in a big way as a 'hashtag, not a destination,' where contemporary artists referenced and paid homage to the greats—A.L. Steiner on Ericka Huggins, Joseph Grigely on Gregory Battock, Julie Ault exhibited artifacts with a page from David Wojnerowicz.[330] In 2016, the Tate Modern held a retrospective of Bhupen Khakhar, *You Can't Please All*, and in 2017 it held a retrospective on *Queer British Art*, which included works by David Hockney, John Singer Sargent, Francis

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327 Global Day of Rage NYC Press Release Excerpt. Endorsers: South Asian Solidarity Initiative (SASI), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Trans Women of Color Collective (TWOCC), CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Audre Lorde Project (ALP), New York City LGBT Community Center, Breakthrough, SHOLAY, All Out, Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM), GABRIELA, New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy (NYAGRA), Queens Pride House, NQAPIA. Accessed on August 20, 2016. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nACQYndi3drz_9ngcAP36hTK3kjHkiCQmiuL3P08v0w/pub.

328 Donald Hall, *Reading Sexualities: Hermeneutic Theory and the Future of Queer Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

329 Puar, 12.

330 Catherine Lord, "Queer Time and Place," *Frieze* April 23, 2014. Accessed on June 28, 2018. https://frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place.

Bacon, Dora Carrington, Ethel Sands and Keith Vaughan.[331] In 2017, Documenta 14 at Kassel mainstreamed 'post-porn, modernist' artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stevens through an exhibition of their work, the duo offered Ecosex walking tours and a Free Sidewalk Sex Clinic.[332] All of these serve as indicators that queer artists have arrived within mainstream contemporary art practice.

The final question I want to address in this section is, how effective is the frame of a queer identity for the two queer artists in this study as they connect with queer discourses and practices transnationally. For Ganesh, whose work is apprehended first and foremost as Indian and straitjacketed within a national frame, it is the queer framework that allows the experience of a greater freedom and a complexity of interpretation. The diasporic framework which identifies with population dispersions due to war, asylum, immigration, emigration etc. and feelings of nostalgia and belonging, often frozen in time, becomes a less useful frame for Ganesh.[333] This view is also partially prompted by audience / viewer response to her diasporic identity. An artwork by Ganesh inspired by Pop artists such as Lichstenstein would still invoke Asia's thousand years of pre-modern art works because of a pre-conceived notion of her South Asian identity. In this sense Ganesh's work as an artist from the diaspora is part of a framework that changes very slowly. She has often exhibited with queer artists of color in *Eyes of Time* 2014; *Body Utopia* 2015; *Tomorrow Never Happens* 2016; '*Read my Lips*' Round Table on Queer abstraction 2016; *Fatal Love: Where are we now?* 2017, and experiences more freedom and complexity of interpretation within a queer or a queering framework. This sentiment is shared by Shah who thinks that the nation is a restrictive category to be grouped within and finds it more productive for their work to engage with other curatorial lenses such as queerness.[334] Shah's own involvement with the global queer community was reinforced when they co-curated *Larzish* with Natasha Mendonca in 2003–04 in Mumbai—a queer film festival dealing with queer issues from all over the world featuring filmmakers from queer networks across the globe.[335] Shah often shows as part of

331 Mark Brown, "Queer British Art Show leads Tate 2017 Programme," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2016. Accessed on July 21, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/19/queer-british-art-show-leads-tate-2017-programme.

332 Accessed on August 12, 2018. https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13487/annie-sprinkle-and-beth-stephens.

333 Interview with artist, 2014, Delhi.

334 Interview with artist, 2013, Goa.

335 It was supported by OLAVA and ICHRL and interspersed with performances and panel discussions on gender, sexuality and what it meant to be queer in India, with over

Queer festivals[336] and participates in shows with other queer artists. Shah and Ganesh have shown together in 2006 at Thomas Erben Gallery New York and also at other group shows since. Identifying with the global queer community is a productive framework for both Ganesh and Shah and this statement can be further corroborated with some of the listed spaces where Shah's *Between the Waves* was exhibited, in the following discussion.

3.3 Shah and Queer Ecologies

Shah's *Between the Waves* (2012), a multimedia work was first exhibited at Documenta 13. A hugely collaborative exercise between performers, dancers, the camera people, sound designers, it marked a turn towards queer ecology in their practice. Created over a span of a year and a half with various funding supports including from an IFA grant, *Between the Waves* is a five-channel video installation with 12.1 layers of audio, in which Channel I spans across five chapters. Each chapter connects with corresponding poems in Channel V written by Minal Hajratwala who is also one of the main protagonists in the work. While these five chapters of Channel I play in a loop, there is also channel II playing continuously on loop, and it focuses on a dance performed by a group of figures[337] at a landfill site, wearing customized outfits patterned with insects.

Right from the first chapter located at an Indus Valley site in Gujarat, landscape is pivotal to this work, the mangroves, the ocean and its fast-disappearing coral life, to man-made swimming pools and brimming landfills that populate the urban landscape, all converge to create an idiosyncratic story of creation and destruction within a parallel narrative of ecosexuality.

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40 films shown from 17 countries including US and Australia, addressing themes including AIDS / HIV, queers and disability, queer and war / military / right wing / globalization, queer and religion, queer animations, queer experimental films / video, bisexuality and so on.

336 *Chingari Chumma* (*In a Plain Brown Wrapper*, Pornography, Art and Video. Gallery 2, SAIC, Chicago 2000; *Everywhere – LGBTQ Politics in Art*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Aliaga 2009; *Lesben Film Festival* Berlin; *Mix*, the 14th New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival New York 2001; *Queer* Zagreb Fm, Croatia 2004; *3rd I's Queer Eye*, SF International South Asian Film Festival, San Francisco 2010) *Sakhi Ri, What are you?* (*BFI Flare:* 28th LGBT Film Festival, London 2014) *There's a spider living between us* (*Hetero Q.*B. Museo National de Arte Contemporanea, Museo do Chiado, Lisbon 2013; *Pink Screen Film Festival* Cinema Nova, Brussels 2009).

337 As clarified by the artist, parts of the work are slow-moving while others are not and the main features in this work are the jump cuts.

3.3.1 *Between the Waves*: The Fabular Narrative

The five fables are played in a sequence of a few minutes each, separated by images of unicorn seals from the Indus Valley. These pictographic seals are deemed to be the earliest known symbolic representations (5000–2000 BC) of this single horned animal and have been excavated from an Indus Valley archeological site in Western India in 1967–68 (Fig. 69). Whether this designates a real or mythical animal remains unknown, just as the pictographic script of the civilization remains undeciphered. The first chapter in the fable is the lengthiest and the backbone of the circular fable, it features a daytime view of an Indus Valley site's barren landscape, two figures wearing the unicorn costume signal each other in morse code across an empty water reservoir (Fig. 70), a figure runs down steps going down to the water level at one end, suddenly the figures are standing next to each other, the next frames provide glimpses of them furtively touching, screened by boulders and rocks, sitting against the boulders, lying on the dry arid rocks and finally walking away—isolated figures merging into the rocky landscape sunset (Fig. 71).

The frames in the fable are interspersed with images of the white saltmarshes. The location of this first narrative at a site almost lost to humanity hems the subsequent chapters in the fable chronologically, and with this first site itself, Shah brings in ecology through history. Indus Valley excavations were found to be sites of exquisite planning and aesthetic architecture, with a unique water management system of fresh water reservoirs especially in areas where the average rainfall was scant and where some seasons sometimes would go without rain. The first part of this queer narrative, therefore, draws attention not only to forgotten and unexcavated histories but also to the precarities of nature that caused man to adapt his needs to the environment. It is precisely man's desire to control his environment that has led to so much environmental destruction as the subsequent narrative demonstrates. The next narrative features a muddy sea, a few unicorn costumed figures including the artist alternately lie against and entangle with each other on a debris filled sea beach (Fig. 72). It is a common fact that tons of waste and trash are dumped into the oceans on a daily basis along with oil, dirt, chemicals, effluents etc. and that these wash up on beaches and coastal areas. Of these, plastic debris forms about 60–90 percent and these plastics are further eaten by many forms of marine life ranging from bacterias to tortoises and whales. In this video—the debris surrounding the unicorn figures is typically that on a Mumbai beach—coconut shells, weeds, palm leaves, plastic waste—all of which serve as disturbing reminders of both the common man's neglect of his environment and of that by the civic / municipal authorities in an overburdened city. As the figures alternately splash in the water, their costumes are now partially composed of techno-trash. An image of turtles going into the water flashes

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Fig. 69. Unicorn Seal Dholavira. **Fig. 70 & 71.** Shah, Video Still, *Between the Waves.* Multi-channel Video Installation, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

past—another intervention by the artist—sea turtle populations have been drastically reduced worldwide through a number of human influences, including through the consumption of plastic trash. In India the Olive Ridley turtles visit the east coast every year between January and April to lay their eggs and the clip is reminiscent of that visit. In another clip, the unicorn-costumed figures walk, lie on the beach, then re-enter the water, brushing debris off each other, the sounds of the crashing waves combine with the views of the debris and the immersive sonic environment echoes within a disturbingly familiar landscape, drawing attention towards the growing vulnerability of our water resources. The next setting in a mangrove, gestures strongly towards eco-sexuality as roots grow out of a sparkling water-submerged earth and gloved hands lovingly paint twigs and create fresh dildonic headpieces. Elsewhere a few children play with white toy like creations, representing new life and regeneration as the costumed artist along with their companions, trawls the mangrove area in concentrated silence (Fig. 73), removing used plastic bags from the wet earth into a trash bag with a scythe like instrument.

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Fig. 72 & 73.
Shah, Video
Still, *Between the
Waves.* Multi-
channel Video
Installation, 2012.
Courtesy the
artist, Project 88
Mumbai and
Barbara Gross
Galerie Munich.

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Plastic is one of the most resource-depleting and ecologically devastating objects on the planet, it maintains its identity in all conditions. There is nowhere on earth that is plastic free. Apart from the effect of plasticizers on bodies and ecologies that cause enormous damage, plastics gathers in the environment and accumulate what surrounds them particularly absorbing organic pollutants, which add to their toxicity.[338] Within this fable, the dark undergrowth echoes with birdlike noises and the overall impression is of darkness and growth and regeneration—a contradictory juxtaposing between resource depletion and nature's regeneration.

Mangroves in tropical and sub-tropical regions serve as an interface between terrestrial fresh-water and marine eco systems and are a vital component to fight climate change. Sequestering up to 25.5 million tonnes of carbon per year

338 Heather Davis, "Life and Death in the Anthroprocene," *Art in the Anthroprocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies,* eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 351.

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mangroves provide essential organic carbon to the global oceans. It is estimated that 26 percent of mangrove forests have been degraded due to over-exploitation for fuel wood and timber production. In India 40 percent and over of mangrove areas on the west coast have been converted to agriculture and urban development. Given their rate of disappearance at approximately 1 % a year it is estimated that these biologically rich resources may perhaps functionally disappear in another 100 years.[339] Shah's filming transforms the mangrove space into one depicting growth and regeneration, perhaps a purely utopian exercise in the circumstances. The queer ecological overtones, the toxic plastic bags, the spontaneous play of children all come together in a narrative of synchronicity between the natural and the artificial. The environmental focus in this work now shifts to yet another extremely rich planetary resource, an extremely productive and biodiverse system, that of the "rainforests of the sea," or the coral reefs. These occupy less than one percent of the ocean floor, but harbor more than a quarter of all existing marine species from crustaceans, reptiles, seaweeds, bacteria, fungi, and more than 4000 species of fish. But tragically, coral reefs are endangered by various factors including by natural phenomena such as hurricanes as well as by local threats such as overfishing, destructive fishing techniques, coastal development, pollution, and careless tourism as well as the continuing global effects of climate change which include the rising temperatures of the seas and growing levels of CO_2 in the water.[340] In the next chapter in this work the unicorn figures swimming in a pool carry an artificial coral look-alike object that resonates closely with Margaret and Christine Wertheim's *Crochet Coral Reef Toxic Seas Project.* The project was begun in 2005 in response to the devastation of the Great Barrier Reef and it simulates living reefs using the technique of crochet to mimic the curling crenelated forms of the reef organisms in yarn. Their artificial reef constructions are based on the fact that 'corals, kelps and other sea creatures are biological incarnations of *hyperbolic* geometry, an alternative to the usual *Euclidean* variety.'[341] In the pool, arms and legs entangle and break away in imitations of fish swarms, the figures' costumes are once again composed of electronic trash and one even has a computer mouse dangling from one of them. Movements in the water show an arm, a leg, a pubic area, spheric sounds mix

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339 Beth A. Polidoro et al. "The Loss of Species: Mangrove Extinction Risk and Geographic Areas of Concern," *PLOS ONE* April 8, 2010.

340 Renee Cho, "Losing our Coral Reefs," *State of the Planet,* Earth Institute, Columbia University, June 13, 2011. Accessed on June 15, 2018. http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2011/06/13/losing-our-coral-reefs/.

341 Margeret Wertheim Science+Art Project, Crochet Coral Reef. Accessed on April 10, 2017. https://www.margaretwertheim.com/crochet-coral-reef.

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Fig. 74 & 75.
Shah, Video
Still, *Between the
Waves.* Multi-
channel Video
Installation, 2012.
Courtesy the
artist, Project 88
Mumbai and
Barbara Gross
Galerie Munich.

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with bubbles and gurgles. The juxtaposing of a coral reef look-alike in a man-made pool emphasizes the relationship between the natural and the artificial. In this particular clip, the anti-aesthetic once again surfaces in the glimpses of overweight and unwieldy hairy nude bodies and pendulous breasts (Fig. 74), and this uncaring nudity juxtaposes the complex relationship between the natural self and the highly idolized and aesthetically proportionate female figure that has been so idealized in art practices across the centuries. The final part of the fable is enacted on a high-rise apartment balcony with a view of the monsoon filled landscape in the city of Mumbai (Fig. 75). One of the two unicorn figures now wears a scuba mask—a grim reminder of the times to come when the air in the cities will be too polluted to be breathed freely. The artist and their companion indulge in forms of sexual foreplay with pomegranates and pomegranate seeds. The pomegranates reference the medieval tapestries called the Hunt of the Unicorn as mentioned in the caption for the work itself.

In another clip the headpiece becomes a prosthetic dildo imitating practices of lesbian cultures, close ups of labia, a tongue licking an eye almost in a sucking motion, connect with the primacy of labial touch and pleasure, tying in closely with

Irigaray's work, positioning women as sexual subjects with agency rather than sexual objects of male desire[342] there is no structure to the narrative, the whole is a jumble of sensations and touch, with the body as receptor and actor to internalize an affective experience. The play with the aesthetic is once again strong—with the nonchalant close-up of a hairy leg, of pendulous breasts, a dark pubic area. The kind of bodies on display here are not the normative thin body type associated with pornography, but abundant flesh that 'dares to differ,' with an uncaring nudeness that makes it even more challenging for the viewer through its difference.[343]

While these five chapters play in a loop, there is also second looped channel playing continuously, and it focuses on a very slow-moving dance performed by a group of figures wearing customized outfits patterned with cockroaches at a landfill site (Fig. 76), the costumes worn by the performers were created from up-cycled materials in collaboration with Eatell Gelebart and include all sorts of trash from the neighborhood, from video tapes to beer cans, figure tiptoes along a parapet, a pubescent insect rears its body out of the debris, signaling the existence of the many creatures that populate the landfill, this move of art from studio to landfill transforms the role of art into a more exploratory-partisan and political one. The landfill itself is one kind of archeological site of the future with its accumulation of refuse, landfills sometimes have structures built on top of them, and according to the artist, there were plans to build an amusement park on the top of this one.[344] The largest landfill site in India is located at Deonar (Mumbai) many slum dwellings border this site and face innumerable health issues and some of its inhabitants also work with the segregation of trash, but even to access this trash they have to pay the municipal authorities. The looped second channel functions as an epilogue to the installation—the connections they make offers an interesting analogy to the significance of trash in human lives and its toxic ecology. Situating some nonsensical contemporary dance movements within the setting of the landfill is also a campy way to think about the futility of gestures, of sensemaking and recuperation in the age of the man-made climate change and the age of the anthroprocene.

There are two other channels playing simultaneously, one displays a slowly burning crescent moon that has fallen to the earth, another, almost invisible

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342 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One,* translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

343 Nanna Heidenrich, "Tejal Shah: Between the Waves," in *Pink Labor on Golden Streets. Queer Art Practices,* eds. Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwätzler, Ruby Sircar et al. (New York/Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 56–67.

344 Facebook post. Accessed on April 21, 2017. https://www.facebook.com/TejalShah Artist/.

Fig. 76. Shah, Video Still, *Between the Waves.* Multi-channel Video Installation, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

device types out a code with an unmistakable clicking sound which is a rip-off of an iPHONE Morse code app. The Morse code signal (already decoded since the English characters appear simultaneously) is framed within the outline of a Rosetta stone alluding to translation, communication and decipherability. With these simultaneous multiple screens claiming attention the perceptual focus of the viewer widens to include the multiple screens and expand the field of information, drawing our attention towards multiple concerns, the contemporary environment, the problems of disappearing mangroves, the disposing of technological waste, ever-growing urban landfills and rapid urban expansions, language and its undecipherability; but most of all the collapsing distances between man and nature occurring through the cyclical nature of time. The complexities of the layers within this work create connections that emerge for further contemplation. As the narrative builds up with each fable, it draws the viewer up close and closer in its final narrative and the build up of sexual tension is palpable. Clearly and at least on the surface, some parts of this work veer towards post-pornography, a term made popular by Annie Sprinkle as part of her Post Porn Modernist Project,[345] challenging certain feminist positions that were / are anti-pornography and going beyond a narrow view of feminism largely based on oppression and subordination of women as argued by Adrienne Rich for example, who states that,

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345   For further details please see the artist's website. http://anniesprinkle.org/projects/archived-projects/post-porn-modernist/.

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> ... the most pernicious message relayed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to women and love it [...] But along with this message comes another, not always recognised; that enforced submission and the use of cruelty, if played out in heterosexual pairing is sexually 'normal' while sensuality between women, including erotic mutuality and respect is 'queer,' 'sick.'[346]

Shah admits that "porn is political... that anything we do is political, from the way we place the camera, the bodies we choose to show, the spaces, the ethics of communication and affects etc."[347] However, this layered and complex multiply work cannot be reduced merely to a discourse about gender and sexuality, the immersive quality of video takes away the symbolic dimension, making the bodies fully sensory and beyond words. The multi-layered complexity in each narrative goes far beyond corporeality towards Affect.

3.3.2 *Between the Waves* and Affect

The creative inspiration for the work stems from the understanding of the body as immersed in the world, always in process moving beyond nudity, sexual organs, fluids, penetrations and the like, towards a critical subversion of the norms of sexuality, the explication of an idea through Affect.

Segworth and Greg argue that Affect is

> integral to a body's perceptual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.[348]

Affect places as much importance on emotions, feelings and intuition in the construction of subjectivity and experience. And among the Affective feelings of sensation in the materiality of the body is the sensation of Touch that plays a significant role in this work in the beating, pulsating bodies that connect with each other through its corporeality. Luce Irigaray claims that touch is part of all our

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346 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women, Sex and Sexuality (Summer 1980), 631–660.

347 Interview with artist 2014, Goa.

348 Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "Introduction," *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–6.

sensory perceptions even though our culture has been so dominated by looking at.[349] Barbara Becker states that,

> touch indicates our bodily contact with the world, through which we are able to perceive an implicit sense of our world, a world which cannot be fully deciphered by language or consciousness but experienced through our senses and our body […] as a responsivity and resonance, touch is an open dialogue with the world which can never be made fully explicit or captured by reflection.[350]

And in *Between the Waves,* the bodily contact with the world overcomes the barrier of language towards the materiality of the body between dry marshy landscapes and sun-drenched bodies, damp bodies lying on debris couched beaches through affective touch.

3.3.3 Inspirations and Themes in *Between the Waves*

For Shah, literary references and quotations are an essential inspiration for their work, and the ideas and discourse around this entire work stem from multiple sources and theories: beginning with the writings of Beatrice Preciado and the *Countersexual Manifesto*, Preciado's *Contrasexual Manifesto* positions queer sexual practices against the hetero-normative order that rejected and excluded them. Following Haraway, Preciado argues that the key lies in understanding the body as crossed by technologies that shape corporeality and sexuality. The dildo then becomes the sexual cyborg from which we can read off our bodies and their possibilities of pleasure.[351] Haraway argues that any notion of identity based on a natural or essentialist category like race, class, ethnicity, gender is doomed to failure since all these categories are also human creations. She argues that the development of twentieth century information technology had made all of us cyborgs, and dichotomies between mind and body, animal-human, organism and machine, public-private, nature-culture, man-woman, primitive-civilized are

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349   Luce Irigaray, "Perhaps cultivating touch can still save us," *SubStance* Vol. 40, No. 3, Issue 126, 2011, 138.

350   Barbara Becker, "Cyborgs, Agents and Transhumanists: Crossing Traditional borders of Body and identity in the Context of New Technology," *Leonardo* Vol. 33, No. 5 Eighth New York Digital Salon 2000, 364.

351   Julius Gavroche, "The Rebellion of Bodies: Beatriz Preciado," in *Autonomies,* November 6, 2012. Accessed on July 26, 2018. http://autonomies.org/2012/11/the-rebellion-of-bodies-beatriz-preciado/.

all in question ideologically.[352] "The idea of the cyborg is intended to engage in a form of politics that is more appropriate to an information society, while providing a critical analysis of webs of power that simultaneously delights in the ironies and complexities of transgression." In this sense, there is a need to engage with the complexities of interrelated organisms that are biologically, technologically and culturally constituted,[353] Shah's engagement with this notion visibilizes itself even more strongly in the work that follows.

Shah also draws upon Trinh T. Min-ha's definition of "the inappropriate/d other" and from the writings and practices of Alejandro Jodorowsky, Thich Nhat Han, Tim Stuttgen, Bhanu Kapil among others.[354] The 'inappropriated other' implies both someone whom you cannot appropriate and someone who is inappropriate, this inappropriatedness does not refer to a fixed location but one that is constantly changing with the specific circumstances of each person. The 'inappropriat/ed other' in specific contexts of the West's Other or Man's Other also takes into consideration, for example, the struggle of sexuality and is especially useful as a tool for gays and lesbians that society's standards of normalcy have marginalized.[355]

It is not surprising that for this work Shah draws maximum inspiration from Rebecca Horn's ideas and iconography. Horn, like other female artists of the 1970s, presented her body as an expressive force, layering it with sculptural extensions, restraints and enhancements. She embodied a noble woman mired in mythology and gender constraints in *Einhorn* which was exhibited at Documenta in 1972. The bondage aspect of the horn contraption and the restrictions on her movement speak to the limitations placed on women in general, whether in terms of clothing or of femininity.[356] Horn likes her audience to collide with her work, she wants to unseat us and this is something Shah's work does as well. Horn's *Einhorn* figure communing with nature in a utopian space of clean air and open fields has now transformed into colored bodies queering endangered landscapes, conveying a message of global precarity, mutations and transformations linked to environmental change.

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352   Donna Haraway, *The Cyborg Manifesto* first published in 1985 and also in many writings since, including *The Body Reader* eds. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, 2005, 82.

353   Nick Stevenson, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions* (Maidenhead England: Open University Press, 2003), 88.

354   Interview with Artist 2014, Goa.

355   Trinh T Minha, "Inappropriate/d Artificiality," Talk with Maria Griznic June 2, 1998. Accessed on July 5, 2018. http://trinhminh-ha.squarespace.com/inappropriated-articificiality/.

356   Alex Kittle, "The Body Extensions of Rebecca Horn in Art, Film and Over-Enthusiasm," February 11, 2014. Accessed on July 21, 2018. http://alexkittle.com/2014/02/11/art-the-body-extensions-of-rebecca-horn/.

3.3.4 Queer Ecologies

Reviewing *Between the Waves*, Tim Stuttgen writes:

> The exoticist stereotype of India as a pure and natural world is troubled by the
> reality of both the artifice of what looks like computer waste and the actual
> problem of pollution. Shah *reconnects Indian bodies to a rural and mythical*
> *world*, these imaginaries of queer sexuality are located outside of the western/
> first world experience, non-white and non-metropolitan.[357]

What is this vision of India that Stuttgen is referring to as a pure and natural
world? The exoticist stereotype references a 'pure and natural' India—the irony
of that phrase is clear. It would be useful to remember here the contemporary
climate crises affecting so many parts of the world, including India, and how cap-
italism and intense consumerism has played a key role in interfering with many
other pure and natural worlds. This is exactly the critique that a work like this
is making. The work transcends the dichotomous relationship between nature
and culture in multiple ways, since the landfill is as much a natural habitat as is
the sun-drenched hot dry excavation site, or the mangrove swamp or the mon-
soon filled high rise apartment balcony. In this era of the anthroprocene, nature
and man-made sometimes merge and fuse so closely together that the binary
loses its meaning and Shah's work highlights this. In their works, this under-
standing becomes a visceral viewing experience as they "denaturalize[s] nature
and turn[s] wastelands into habitable environments."[358] Shah is creating multiple
narratives in layers: the narrative featuring post-pornographic visuals at various
junctures jars in its formal presentation, and the affective images convey a sense
of discomfort to the viewer squarely located within the force field of heterosex-
ual dynamics that this aesthetic completely transgresses. However, underlying
these layers is a narrative of ecological precarity, an infinitely more disturbing
narrative as signs of human intervention reveal the fragile nature of the earth's
eco-systems, its oceans, mangroves, coral reefs and endangered species. In the
world created by Shah we see corals composed of trash, costumes created out
of techno-trash, landfills becoming new sites of habitation. Through their work,
Shah draws attention to the presence of hetero-normativity in the discourses
of nature. The queering of areas like ecology implies that not only is gender

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357   Tim Stuttgen, *Post-exotic Pornography or* What's *Colour* Got to Do with it? On the
Problematics of Representation in *Ethnic* Pornography and a Few Interventions by *Queer*
Feminists of Colour, 2012.

358   Nanna Heidenrich, 56–67.

a construct but nature too, is becoming an artificial construct as it intersects with technology. While sexuality and gender—so rooted within the body—still remain within Shah's work, broader ideas from ecology, dichotomies between nature / culture also come into play.

A broad overview of this particular work's travel and exhibition trajectory, not only demonstrates its immense and varied mobility in exhibitions, screenings and festivals, but also the contexts of its engagement and showings that range across an array of institutions and spaces.[359] While it is fairly common for contemporary artworks to travel in this fashion, my recounting of this particular work's travel is directly relevant to the work's context itself and to point out how invisible it has been in India—the nation where it originated.[360] This in itself is irrefutable evidence of the postnational space certain thematics practiced by the artists maybe located within.

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359 After exhibiting at Documenta 13, *Between the Waves* had a stream of showings internationally. A spate of showings in 2013 began with their first solo in Germany with *Barbara Gross Galerie* in Munich in April 2013. Their representative gallery in Mumbai, *Project 88* displayed a poster from the same work during Frieze Art Fair in May the same year. The month of June saw *Between the Waves* screened at *Haus der Kulturen Welt* during the *Rencontres Internationales Festival of New Cinema and Contemporary Art* Berlin and at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve in July. In August the same year, the work was exhibited during *'Landings' Sensing Grounds, Mangroves, Unauthentic Belonging, Extra-territoriality* at the Witte de Witte Centre for Contemporary Art Rotterdam and travelled overseas to New York for its US premier at Another Experiment by Women Film Festival (AXWFF) and it was screened during *Circuito Off* International Short Film Festival as part of *FII Rouge* at Venice where Shah was a jury member. The *Landfill* dance from the work was part of a group exhibition—which included other artists from India, Neha Choksi, Sonia Khurana and Sahej Rahel—in Chelsea New York next while the entire work showed at Belgrade at the *54ᵗʰ October Salon* in the month of October. Censorship 2013 in *Move on Asia* exhibited the *Landfill* dance within Alternate Space Loop in Seoul. Once again in 2014, *Between the Waves* was on its way to Moscow in *The Color of Pomegranate* exhibition the Solyanka State Gallery in February and to Johannesburg and Tokyo in May 2014, in July it showed at the *Stockholm Pride Queer film Festival* and in October at Havremagasinet at Boden also in Sweden. It was part of their first European institutional solo at Cologne in September. In 2016, the work screened as part of Unsuspending Disbelief at the Logan Centre for the Arts Chicago and as part of *Tomorrow never happens* at the Samek Art Museum Bucknell University.

360 Notwithstanding this invisibility, it received a favorable review when it showed briefly. http://project88.in/press/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Deepika-Sorabjee-review_TAKE-Photography-Issue-12.pdf.

3.3.5 *Some Kind of Nature*

I will conclude the discussion on Shah's work with a quick look at a work that followed *Between the Waves* that moves even closer towards the interdependent relationships that exist between human beings and its natural surroundings. With *Some Kind of Nature,* a dual channel video installation created in 2013, Shah builds upon the focus on queer ecologies. In this work, an almost-mythical bird-like creature holds up crescent-shaped and round-disc mirrors that gleam in its hands and uses its proboscis as a means to gain sentience of the world around it. Shot in Goa at a petroglyph site that is 20,000–30,000 years old, the video installation speaks to the interspecies anxiety we are experiencing in the anthropocene age.[361] The lyrical quality of this work states these anxieties in an almost hauntingly poetical form. This is fiction of another kind—the fabular narrative of *Between the Waves* has receded even further in time. This cyborgian half-creature is trying to find out its own origins, visiting these rock drawings ([Fig. 77]), the petroglyphs, almost bringing back some message from the past.[362] The work is filmed almost entirely in black and white, with earth sounds, the slow-moving viscous slush ([Fig. 78]), and swaying cornfields in which a white clad figure signals with its crescent shaped mirror, in another clip the monstrous crocodile rock face drips with a milky substance. Bathed in a half light of uncanny shadows the monstrous creature invokes Greek myths of moon goddesses, inspiring a mysterious *unheimlich-ness.* With this work, Shah is exploring affective engagements and relationalities with the interspecies and interdependencies with the rocks, hills, trees, plants, the moon, valleys, lakes, rivers and streams that flow all around us. This profound and thoughtful engagement with the environment can be likened to an awakening of human consciousness towards the changing order of the physical world around us and the interconnectedness of nature and culture merge human and animal, earth and rock in a meditative way almost as an allegory to the era of the anthropocene. I am reminded of Donna Haraway who states that we live in the great age of carbon, everything that lives and crawls, dies, everything is in the rocks and under the rocks.[363] Perhaps contemplative artworks such as these can serve as guides towards a spiritually

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361   Artist website. Accessed on July 12, 2017. http://tejalshah.in/project/some-kind-of-nature/.

362   Interview with Artist 2014, Goa.

363   Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney, "Anthroprocene, Capitalocene, Chthulhocene," *Art in the Anthroprocene*, 259.
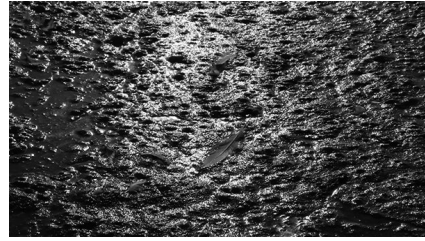
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Fig. 77 & 78. Shah, Video Still, *Some Kind of Nature,* Multi-channel Video Installation, 2013. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

beneficial co-existence with nature that is being mercilessly exploited in this human-dominated geological era of the Anthroprocene.

3.3.6 Ecology and the Anthropocene

Humanity it seems is heading towards a self-destruct mode and evidently sabotaging itself. Our era is increasingly being defined as the era of the Anthroprocene—one in which human impact on the earth has become so forceful that we see shifting seas, changes in climate and the disappearance of innumerable species—placing humanity itself at the brink of extinction.[364] The term Anthroprocene was first popularized by Paul Crutzen in 2002, then taken up by the humanities—referencing an epoch in which humans are the dominant drivers of geologic change on the globe today. Swedish scholars Andreas Malm and Alf Hornberg highlight the manner in which the contemporary framing of the Anthroprocene blunts the distinction between people and nations and collectives who drive the fossil fuel and those who do not. And these complex and diverse experiences can be lost when narrative is collapsed into a universalizing species paradigm.[365] This is an important critique taking into account the trajectory of our world's uneven development, the negative impact on the environment is strongly felt by the abused/developing countries and is further exacerbated by the question of national regulations dominated by capitalist aspirations. Anthroprocene is a term that beckons environmental justice, asking what worlds we are intentionally and inadvertently creating and what worlds we are pre-closing while living within an increasingly diminished present—guided

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364 Irmgaard Emmelheine, "Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthroprocene," *Art in the Anthroprocene,* 131.

365 Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthroprocene," *Art in the Anthroprocene,* 242.

not only by climate change but also interconnections with the logics of politics and economies.[366]

The decade of the 1990s saw the emergence of ecology as a global concern with major conventions and treaties being signed to reverse the impact of industrialization.

The industrial waste generated by increased production has been loaded on ships and dumped in the oceans, killing many underwater organisms, depositing many harmful chemicals in the ocean, damaging the ecosystem. The use of plastic is a major concern by itself, it is being used for packaging, preserving goods to be exported—and it is one of the major toxic pollutants and a non-degradable product.[367] While the impact of these ecological questions may differ from nation to nation, the concerns belong to all.

However, instead of a shared responsibility to safeguard humanity's ecological inheritance, the environment has seemed valuable largely from the perspective of economic needs and the cleaning up of the European and North American environments has come at the cost of transferring polluting industries and environmental responsibility to the global South which faces the largest negative future impacts of global warming—a highly unequal scenario.

In India itself, the ecological crises being faced range from corporate interests in mining over tribal lands and mega-dam projects to rivers polluted by chemical effluents and endangered mangroves among others. Rapid industrialization processes have led to a huge pressure on the environment with a massive demand on its energy, air and water resources. The capital-led growth in the country has created many big problems, from granting mining permits in protected forests and permits to build ports in protected coastal areas, the changes in conservation laws, and corporatization of agriculture has marginalized small farmers, bringing them to subsistence level and leading to farmer suicides, the groundwater crises in urban clusters like Delhi, the pressure on river systems through interlinking rivers that destroy natural flows are all part of the ecological crises that confronts India.[368]

In the last decades, artists in India have been closely engaging with local ecological concerns, through some thought-provoking responses and these

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366   Heather Davis & Etienne Turpin, "Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth Assessment & the Sixth Extinction," *Art in the Anthroprocene*, 7.

367   T. J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction," *Third Text* Vol. 27, Issue 1, 2013, 6.

368   Ravi Agarwal talking with T. J. Demos "The Art and Politics of Ecology in India: A roundtable with Ravi Agarwal and Sanjay Kak," *Third Text* Vol. 27, Issue 1, (January 2013), 151–161.

include Vivan Sundaram's *Trash* series (2009), Nalini Malani's *Mutants* (1996), Sheba Chachhi *Neelkanth Poison/Nectar* (2000–02), Atul Bhalla's *Alaap to the river* (2012), Ravi Agarwal's *The Sewage Pond's Memoir* (2011), and Neha Choksi's *Leaf Fall* among others.

Ravi Agarwal's works such as *After the Flood* (2011) and *Extinct* (2008), highlight serious issues such as decreasing groundwater. The extinction of an endangered species and ecological sustainability are discussed in works by Agarwal such as *Have you seen the flowers in the river?* (2007). Amar Kanwar's *Sovereign Forest* (2012), depicts specific territories that are in the process of being acquired by both government and corporations as proposed industrial sites in the mineral rich state of Orissa.[369] Shah's attention to the age of the anthroprocene in these two works joins that of many other artists working with environmental issues and the impact of climate change globally both in India and internationally, including Olafur Eliasson, Thomas Saraceno, Mary Mattingly, Agnes Denes, John Akomfrah, Mel Chin and Nur Tijan Firdaus.

Shah first exhibited *Some Kind Of Nature* at Sunaparanta Gallery at Goa in 2013–this was also the space where Chopra performed *Rouge* after returning from his residency at Berlin—the first time he used the lipstick as his drawing tool, which he would now increasingly employ in place of charcoal.

3.4 Chopra and Racial Histories

The post-colonial critique was at its peak with Chopra's performances as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, working at the interface between the postcolonial and global histories as he walked in spaces all over the world, Brussels, Oslo, Tokyo, Chicago, New York, and Venice, creating graphic landscapes almost as a green screen. In this concentrated silent activity, he was performing as an Indian explorer, traveler, reversing the exotic oriental myth of the colonial out to explore cultures far from his own. During his residency at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2011–12, Chopra moved towards more expressionistic, shorter performances that he termed as "exercises in transformation." Color became a direct marker of identity as he moved away from direct associations and allowed himself to snap out of his deeply personal relationship with his grandfather.[370] Wanting to exist in a more

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369   In the notebook created for Documenta 13, *100 notes, 100 Thoughts. No.012 Vandana Shiva* brings out the undemocratic use of land and discusses how multinational corporations are granted mining rights without any attention being paid to the plight of the tribal people living in these areas.

370   Interview with Artist 2013, Goa.

ambiguous space, thinking of the color white or black he experimented with shorter performances in two series titled *Broken White* and *Blackening*. These performances were sometimes collaborative as he shared conversations about lives and interactions with Dolanbay (ACT//ING, 2011), and Yingmei Duan (1+1, 2011). For his last performance at his studio space at Grüntaler, a predominantly Turkish neighborhood, he was costumed in suit and fez with kohl rimmed eyes (Fig. 79) as he erased all previous drawings in the studio and created a drawing of the Istanbul cityscape as viewed at night from the European side (Fig. 80), a merging of the Orient with the West. Chopra, placing himself squarely within the location (Berlin) and its histories almost erased any signs of 'Indian-ness,' focusing on color exclusively and yet, *blanc casse* or off-white was not only a 'broken white,' which he used to title the series, but could be translated in different ways, including an erasure of white-ness. It also referenced the Indian obsession with the fairness of the skin and a predilection with whiteness which can be evidenced by the size of the fairness creams industry.[371] In the series of performances titled *Blackening*, working with charcoal, he not only connected with racial passing but also with the Indian adage of infamy, the bringing of dishonor to one's name and identity or *'munh kala karna.'*[372] Conceptualizing his performances around color allowed him to move away from his identity as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* which had partially been an ethnographic construct. The body was now a blank canvas itself, to inscribe upon, with limestone, charcoal and anonymous bodysuits. With his deliberate painting of himself as white or black (Fig. 81 & 82), he was drawing attention to the construction of colour and skin now became the marker to convey notions of alterity and passing.

With this shift towards color, some personas seemed to have been consigned to the past, the Victorian queen had been buried, (though at a later date, at the Singapore Biennale in 2014, *'Give me your blood and I will give you freedom,'* Chopra did transform into an Indian queen, Jhansi—who shed her skin and spilled 'blood' seeking her freedom, the colonial gentleman would also surface in other avatars but only occasionally (*Coal on Cotton*, *Space Oddity*, 2013). At the end of his one-year Berlin residency, it was an anonymous persona that went to San Gimignano

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371   The fairness creams industry continues to grow in India, according to a WHO report, skin lightening products occupy half of the country's skin care market. Skin color is a key factor since birth, the desirability of fairness for Indian women as a stereotype can be evidenced in the matrimonial advertisements in newspapers. Coupled with caste, class and gender, color plays a significant role in reinforcing existing inequalities in India.

372   Artist interview Goa, 2013. The expression can be directly translated as 'blackening of the face,' the connection of the face being the marker of identity resonates with Chopra's own performances in this phase that focused on color as a marker of identity.

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Fig. 79 & 80. Chopra, *Blackening III,* Berlin 2012. Courtesy the artist.

Fig. 81 & 82. Chopra, *Blackening*, Berlin, 2012. Courtesy the artist.

and re-created himself into an Italian traveler / explorer, using early Renaissance artist Benozzo Gozzoli's archive as reference to plan this 99 hour performance.

Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1421–1497), an Italian Renaissance painter from Florence is well known for a series of murals in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi and collaborations with Lorenzo and Vittorio Ghiberti on the third bronze door of the Baptistery, Florence (1444), as well as his various collaborations with Fra Angelico. In 1464, Gozzoli received a commission from Fra Domenico Strambi to paint a cycle of frescoes for the main chapel of the Church of St. Augustine in San Gimignano. Escaping the plague in Florence, he moved to the hilltop town to carry out this considerable work, where he remained until 1467. Benozzo's personal style comprised of some specific qualities, namely his meticulousness in the painting of precious fabrics, focusing on the textile topologies and motifs, making them appear almost real.[373] When Chopra created a view of the Tuscan landscape from atop a hill in the countryside (Fig. 83), and fashioned it into a cloak he was referencing not only the painter's autobiographical history but also his exceptional skill as he walked the streets of San Gimignano (Fig. 84),

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373 "The Textiles by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Cavalcade of the Magi," Institute and Museum of the History of Science, Museo Galileo, Florence 2008. Accessed on July 20, 2018. http://www.imss.fi.it/news/etessuti.html.

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Fig. 83 & 84. Chopra, *inside out,* San Gimignano, 2012. Courtesy the artist.

wearing the painted cloak as whiteface,[374] referencing histories of racial passing. After the residency in Berlin, Chopra moved on to create his first performance as *La Perle Noire*.

3.4.1 *La Perle Noire*: La Marais

In this first performance in the persona of *La Perle Noire: La Marais* Paris, in April 2014, Chopra partially reinstated *Sir Raja*, the first persona he had created in 2007. The elite Raja whose death had been staged in 2007 was resurrected and transformed into an empowered persona as he absorbedly recreated his priceless Parisian treasure.

The site of the performance at a private gallery neighbored Le Marais, now home to many fashionable galleries, Le Marais had been a center for jewelry trade between the 16th and 18th centuries, where rich Parisians built their town houses, The drawing tool was now the red lipstick, tacky, fleshy—portraying associations between the masculine and the feminine, and the artificiality of the portrayal of femininity as a persona. He had introduced the lipstick as a drawing tool a month ago for the first time in his performance at *Rouge* in Goa in 2013 after returning from Berlin. In *Rouge* he had used almost a hundred lipsticks to draw on the walls of a small white room in the Sonaparanta Gallery in a 6-hour performance at the end of which the tiny room and Chopra himself was colored a bright red by the lipstick, suffused by the nearly nauseating, sweet and persistent odor of the lipstick in that tiny space. At Marais, the drawing tool resonated with the fashionable location. Sir Raja IV began by whitening himself (Fig. 85). He then began his performance, dressed in a white Indian style silk *kurta* and trousers with a white turban, he was not only dressed in pristine white, but also deliberately whiteface, recalling his experimental performances in Berlin. One of the tasks he had set himself during this performance was a tacky recreation of the famous Patiala Necklace, the original of which had gone missing from the Patiala royal treasury in 1948. After the diamond resurfaced at a Sotheby's auction and some remnants of the necklace

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374 The term whiteface was first used in 1870, it has been coopted into performance to denote when a persona wears theatrical makeup to appear white but in comedic form. Marvin Macallister in *Whiting Up* (2011), defines whiteface as an extra-theatrical social performance in which people of African descent transfer supposed markers of whiteness to black bodies, including the appropriation of white-identified gestures, vocabulary, dialects, dress or social entitlements, and through it interrogating privileged representations of whiteness. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in Chopra's physical manifestations of whiteness relying on visual identifiers such as white face paint and blonde wigs.

were found at an antique shop in London, Cartier recreated the necklace with replicas, and it was displayed as part of various exhibitions, including *Maharajah: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* (Victoria & Albert Museum) in Chicago and San Francisco in 2011–2012 and later at the "Cartier: Le Style et L'Histoire" exhibition at the Grand Palais in 2013. The necklace has a fascinating history worth a recap, in 1925, Bhupinder Singh, then Maharaja of the State of Patiala, came to Paris with a collection of gems and asked the jeweler Cartier to create an exceptional necklace, combining traditional forms and Art Deco design. The result was the "Patiala Necklace," created with a staggering 2,930 diamonds weighing over a thousand carats, enhanced by Burmese rubies, this commission played an important role in enhancing Cartier's image worldwide. This gesture of a reverse form of colonialism resonated with the Maharaja's own history as an Indian prince and rebel.[375] Chopra as *Sir Raja* impersonated the persona of the Maharaja as a defiant aristocrat celebrating his pomp and wealth as he transformed into a demonic being, a monster transgressing the role of the colonized. As he alternately worked on his version of the necklace (Fig. 86 & 87) and painted on the gallery walls—the whorled drawings in red lipstick created a 'fantasy of a sea of blood.'

Absorbedly embellishing his white *kurta*/long shirt with fake pearls and sequins, he was a spectacle of deep concentration and the audience trickling into the performance space watched raptly, inspired by his deep sense of engagement with his activity. Chopra went on studiedly with this routine, never slackening even when alone, eating when hungry, taking smoking breaks framed against the gallery windows, occasionally donning a blonde wig. The cleaning routine occurred on the second day when Sir Raja donned his newly embellished kurta, but this was only an interlude. Sir Raja continued with his painting activity, once again the 'sea of red' overtook the royal persona. Sir Raja posing at the end of his 55-hour performance, was now himself bathed in red (Fig. 88). This 'sea of red' Chopra created could have many connotations, the most obvious one being that of the violent history of British power and colonialism in India and the role played by the Indian royals as collaborators to help sustain and extend that power or in some cases, thwart it. The creation of the 'sea of red' through employing an object of feminine use could also linked to the effeminate character of Indian royalty in cases where they believed in and were convinced of their own empty empowerment against British rule. In this performance, Chopra also introduced an element of kitsch—those plastic beads and sequins that he employed to embellish his *kurta* were the sort of mass-produced objects that

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375   Among his various rebellious acts had been the creation of the township of Chail, the Maharajah, barred from entering British Clubs in Simla, had established his own summer resort at Chail, a town 45 km from Simla and imposed a similar ban on the British.

Fig. 85–88. Chopra, *La Perle Noire : Le Marais*, Paris, 2014. Courtesy the artist.

flood the Indian bazaar and are used to create cheap artificial jewelry and in craftwork. Their use further emphasized the artificiality of the royal persona as a construct, as a reminder that Sir Raja had always been a full-blown caricature of an Indian royal, pretending to be something he was not.

From referencing the history of Le Marais and its connections with Indian royalty, Chopra moved away from postcolonial identities and became Other himself, as *La Perla Negra* in his next performance in 2016 in Cuba. The references now enlarged to include not only Cuban history but also histories of gender and racial passing.

3.4.2 La Bienel de la Habana: *La Perle Negra*

The title of this 60-hour performance during the *La Bienel de la Habana* in 2015, was a tribute to exceptionally talented people of color like Pele and Josephine Baker as well as Captain Jack Black's ship, the *Black Pearl*. An important shift had begun to occur in Chopra's performances post his Berlin residency, the postcolonial masquerade of stereotypes had been replaced, the persona now assumed drag costume at the beginning of the performance itself and was no

Fig. 89–92. Chopra, *La Perle Negra : Plaza de Armas,* Havana, 2015. Courtesy the artist.

longer merely costumed in drag. The persona here for the entire duration of the performance was that of a woman dressed in a white dress, lace and pearls in the throat and the ears, patterned lace stockings and gloves (Fig. 89). This historically embedded performance referenced the island's history directly as he closed himself off in a cage for the entire duration of the performance, calling attention to other contemporary viewing practices associated with putting non-whites on display for their colonizers in the style of the Amerindians performance by Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco first performed in 1996. Carrying forward the history of the colonization of Cuba, Chopra remained imprisoned in the cage at the center of Plaza de Armas for 60 hours, making drawings of the vista through the bars of the cage (Fig. 90). The drawing tool was once again a signifier of violence, but this time it was red ink rather than lipstick. Often during this performance, Chopra would remove the wig and highlight the campy impersonation (Fig. 91). On the third day of his performance he filed open the bars of his cage and exited as whiteface in a sailor's attire with a melancholy air (Fig. 92). His performance at the Havana Biennial in Cuba not only reflected on Cuba's role as a gateway for the Spanish people to the rest of the American colonies, but also on its status akin to a bird in a cage where embargos both isolated and protected it from the rest of the world from a geographical, cultural and political perspective. As reiterated earlier, Chopra's persona of *La Perle Noire* had emerged after a successive series of experimental performances

related to color and identity, whereas as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, with his emphasis on costuming, dressing, and undressing, Chopra had foregrounded its performative aspect, its deliberate construction of identity. Now there was a perceptible shift post 2012. He had retained the post-colonial construct at Marais but with Havana and the next performance at Montreal in 2015, the construction of identity moved away from the post-colonial masquerading body itself. He was no longer distancing himself from the personas he was enacting through the masquerade of costuming, rather immersing and totally transforming himself in each performance and playing with the discourse of otherness itself as he invoked the persona of the foreigner, the Other.

3.4.3 Transgender Performativity and *La Perle Noire*

As *La Perle Noire Jarry Park* in Montreal in 2015, Chopra went beyond ambiguity and adopted the persona of an anonymous Other—histories, national histories were in the past. The entire 52-hour performance was enacted with him dressed as a woman in a red dress wearing a short boyish wig. Chopra cycled with his bicycle caravan (Fig. 93) to the octagonal gazebo in Jarry Park, unloaded and displayed the blank canvases and began to execute his landscape drawing, inhabiting and overnighting within the same space. Chopra occasionally removed his wig, mixing sex role referents within the more visibly sanatorial system—'camping' with his masculine self—making an oppositional play between 'appearance' which was female, and 'reality' or 'essence' which was male, blurring the gender distinction further[376] (Fig. 94). On the last day of his performance, he removed the drawings and carried the folded canvas bags to the gallery in his bike caravan. His final costume change into a stylish hipster male was enacted in full view, emphasizing the slippage, the in-betweenness of stereotypes, facing the busy street through the glass windows of the gallery he donned a tight dark trouser with a white shirt, matching blazer and a wig with curls following Bob Dylan's iconic style (Fig. 95). Posing against the completed drawings he made exaggerated swaggering movements as he exited the gallery. This performance marked some major shifts as he not only reversed the ritual dress sequence but also completed the process of becoming 'Other.' There were no references to located histories or historical personas, the woman in the red dress was an anonymous persona who could be living anywhere on the globe.

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376 Esther Newton, "Role Models," *CampGrounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 42.

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Fig. 93–95.
Chopra, *La Perle
Noir : Jarry Park,*
Montreal 2015.
Courtesy the
artist.

No history or any form of identification tied her to the specific site, clearly the critiques in the performance now gestured towards more generalized global histories.

3.4.4 Hospitality towards the Stranger

What is clearly post-national about Chopra's work is his easy acceptance of the history of the sites that he inhabits across the globe, and his inclusion of aspects of those histories without the need to connect them with his own point of origin. Rather, Chopra not only formulates his individual performances around local histories but also transforms his own self to become part of those histories. When he dons the persona of a Turkish gentleman with kohl-lined eyes and fez cap for example, he is making the exotic-ness visible. Chopra is an artist who is against the discourse of other-ness—as he performs in sites around the world, he assumes the right to talk about histories of specific local sites and connects with the idea of hospitality towards the stranger. Chopra, with his ability to become totally site-specific is not interested in history as something that is linear but something that is more ambiguous and amoebic in shape—open to interpretation—as opposed to something that is dogmatic.[377] Chopra's work in a certain sense, disrupts the continuous history of a place even as it locates the body in a place and time, while simultaneously dealing with the larger issues that the developments of a global economy and geopolitical readjustments have made increasingly urgent, like migration and mobility.

As a stranger in multiple sites and locations, Chopra is the "foreigner" that demands unconditional hospitality, following Derrida, who discusses the logic inherent in the ethics of hospitality in direct terms linked to the hostility towards immigrant populations in Europe, he states that hospitality can be viewed as a double imperative. On the one hand there "is the law of unlimited hospitality that ordains the unconditional reception of the other," without conditions and restrictions and on the other hand there are conditional laws which establish a right and duty of that hospitality through which these rights can function. The foreigner therefore has rights with certain obligations and hospitality remains conditional. In the act of hospitality, the guest and the host are mutually entangled [...] The foreigner occupies an integral space in the city and is an essential part because he or she provides that to which citizens could compare

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377   Nikhil Chopra, talk at Kochi Muziris. Accessed on July 29, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZm1nIqSktg.

themselves.[378] In order to understand Chopra's acceptance into spaces, often public spaces, the latter phrase can provide some productive insights. The site or spaces for Chopra as the foreigner are often not a matter of choice, as he usually gets invited and his productions are partially choreographed for those spaces and yet when Chopra walks through cities and spaces oftentimes as a *flaneur* or trickster, a clown-like persona walking the streets of San Gimignano or an anonymous, androgynous persona bearing no mark of local histories in Jarry Park, he occupies that integral space in the city within a relationship of reciprocity often providing residents a peek into a collective public memory that is their own. Performing in a museum space requires a different framework as opposed to a city or theatre space and the terms of engagement with the audience maybe limited with the institutions initiating the performance guidelines in keeping with the performance site itself. Whichever the format or forum, Chopra's performances embed him within the sites and histories he inhabits and it is through his performances that he responds to those histories and initiates or contributes to the ongoing dialogue (*Inside Out* San Gimignano on Benozzo Gozzoli, whose work has been garnering a fair amount of interest in recent exhibitions) or in some cases, dialogues (*La Perla Negra* Havana), that need to be brought into discourse. With Chopra, the act of being in the world is also being 'of' the world as he engages with the notions of identity through his variously marked bodies and personas.

Commenting on the immediate gratification that the genre of performance art expresses, Chopra clarifies that he is not interested in the Indian, European or American experience, rather in human experience and the threads that bind humanity together—hunger, thirst, beauty, pain, passion, love, hatred, fatigue or vulnerability—threads that connect across nationality, religion and without the division that the world is divided into,[379] blurring lines and boundaries to find a place we all have in common. Whereas all political discourse is about maintaining identity, invoking historical claims, Chopra through his focus on nomadic site-specific work, claims instead that the world is made of migrations, mobility and conviviality.

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378 Anne Dufuormantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond in *Of Hospitality* eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries trans. Richard Bowlby (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1–30.

379 Aasheesh Sharma, "Nikhil Chopra: The Chameleon-like Performance Artist," in *The Hindustan Times,* June 26, 2016. Accessed on July 28, 2018. https://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/nikhil-chopra-the-chameleon-like-performance-artist/story-IlrFf2ee12ThRarYDW7L0K.html.

How do ideas of being in the world engage the cosmopolitan artist with race as an important signifier of identity?

3.4.5 The Cosmopolitan Artist and Racial Homogenity

Hall argues that race works like a language, as a floating signifier of making meaning, there is always a constitutive outside on whose existence the identity of race depends.[380] Racism exists within the unconscious structure of our relationship with others and manifests itself in our resistance to difference, and Stuart Hall, observes that "Racism is a structure of discourse and representation that tries to expel the Other symbolically," and that it is only through the Other that one can identify oneself,[381] he is gesturing towards this resistance to difference.

Discussing the importance of possessing a cosmopolitan imagination as a way to deal with alterity Meskimmon (2010) suggests that art is one of the most important sites where we can develop our understanding and relationship with others, actualize cosmopolitan imagination that can enable us to open to change, transform and lead us to develop alterity. She defines a cosmopolitan artist as one "embedded in the world, able to imagine people and things beyond their immediate experience and [have] having...the ability to respond to very different spaces, meanings and others."[382] This commitment to diversity and mobility beyond fixed geo-political borders resonates with Papastergiadis's engagement with cosmopolitanism through his study of the artist collective Stalker and their exploration of the shifting form of conviviality in differing contexts and interactions. Papastergiadis observes that their practice is based simply on the art of mediation and is to a certain extent, an invitation for different people to come together and is "driven by a desire to gain a glimpse in a cosmopolitan community that is always in the process of becoming."[383]

With the coming together of different people, dealing with alterity, a question to consider would be whether we have been able to transcend notions of

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380   Stuart Hall, "Race: The Floating Signifier," Transcript, Media Education Foundation 1997.

381   Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity, Identity and Difference," *Radical America*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1991), 16.

382   Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2010), 8.

383   Papastergiadis, "Glimpses of Cosmopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art," *European Journal of Social Theory,* 2007, 149.

color in certain ways. Race has always been one of the major concepts to organize the classificatory systems of difference. While artists such as Kara Walker, Fred Wilson, Chris Ofili, Robert Mapplethorpe, Glenn Ligon, Steve McQueen, Gomez-Pena, Adrien Piper and Lyle Ashton Harris for example, have engaged directly with the complexities of black cultural identity, in India, ideas around ethnic stereotyping during the colonial period formed the base for a photo-documentary series created by Pushpamala N. *(The Ethnography Series: Native Women of South India, Manners & Customs 2002–2004).*

In their works, all the three artists in this study deeply engage with the notion of color. Ganesh, growing up as a person of color in the United States, where there is no neutral ground to stand on when it comes to identity, creates fictional narratives of fantasy empowering her characters empathetically with some form of agency in order to critique the racist underpinnings and anthropological bias that continues to dog contemporary visual cultures in mass media representations in the west.[384] Chopra ironically mocks the legibility of identity through notions of blackness and white-ness to critique racial stereotypes.

In fact, for all three artists, color has been an important marker, for Ganesh and Shah it further resonates with the arguments of Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldua and Adrienne Rich who suggest that possibilities for communication and solidarity among women across the globe should be addressed and forged with respect to understanding the differences between them. The construction of gender, they state, is marked by differences *between* cultures and differences *within* cultures and Shah's centering of queer ecologies on colored cyborgian creatures aggressively engaging with post-pornographic acts, highlights this difference. Here I would like to cite Munoz's intervention and regarding race, Munoz observes that when reading the work of an artist of color, queer white theorists hardly factor in questions of race, the field of queer theory he says, is where a scholar of color can be frozen by an avalanche of snow, and the works of queer feminists, theorists / activists such as Lorde, Barbara Smith, Anzaldua and Moraga. is hardly engaged with critically, rather "adored from a distance," and he adds that a majority of publications on queer theory continue "to treat race as an addendum."[385]

Considering the pace at which change is being affected, is it even possible to think of a post-Black world? The notion that art produced by white artists

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384   Erica Cardwell, "Empathy, Fantasy and the Power of Protest: A Conversation with Chitra Ganesh," October 30, 2015. Accessed on June 25, 2018. https://hyperallergic.com/249897/empathy-fantasy-and-the-power-of-protest-a-conversation with-chitra-ganesh.

385   Jose Esteban Munoz, *Performing Disidentifications*, 1999, 11.

(regardless of medium or conceptual intent) is somehow *not* inherently political or concerned with whiteness is more than a bit absurd. Art is always political and there is no neutral ground on which to stand when it comes to identity. The challenge is to envision the world as we experience it and resist the urge to always create fantasies of racial homogeneity.[386]

One space that does allow some form of democracy is the virtual and this space has become closely aligned with postnational perceptions of identity. It has often been emphasized in writings on globalization that the one phenomenon that is central to this de-territorialisation is our increasing routine dependence on electronic media and communication technologies.[387] With this dependence and ease of sharing the everyday, often the virtual seems to overtake the real—mass medias, online newspapers, social networking sites, blogs, chats and message boards—all of these have aided a more democratic participation within groups and communities. The digital space is also considered as a space of great equality, a 'seamless space where we can all coexist and be treated equally, one that nevertheless respects and even protects cultural and historical differences.'[388] And this is the next area of focus in the move away from the nation, these social networking sites are composed of friends, colleagues, art audiences for these artists, but these do not include online networks and communities that would imply a different set of affiliations between strangers.

3.5 Social Medias and Networks

While ongoing art events like the India Art Fair (previously known as the India Art Summit founded in 2008), the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (founded in 2012) and an increased number of gallery exhibitions on international art, have played a significant role in integrating Indian art and artists with the global art world—it is the virtual social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram (and Vimeo) that have now come to being regarded as essential spaces for both emerging and established artists to share ideas and information about their work with the larger community of artists and other actors in the artworld. Within these technologically generated spaces, communities are being created without

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386   Alicia Eler, "The Queer Art that helped to Define Post-Blackness," *Hyperallergic*, March 1, 2017. Accessed on May 30, 2018. https://hyperallergic.com/361646/the-queer-art-that-helped-define-post-blackness/.

387   Jon Tomlinson, "Cultural Globalisation," in *Blackwell Companion to Globalization,* ed. George Ritzer (MA / Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 360–371.

388   Catherine Barnard, "Bodies and Digital Utopia," in *Utopias*, 211.

any geographical proximities of their members and these virtual communities have surpassed the traditional forms of community and identity.

As platforms of sharing, social media play a role in shaping the ways contemporary art is shared. The ease of instant visuals made available through the immediacy of their posting adds a radical cutting edge to the sharing process and the integration of disparate locations into common platforms and formats makes nations and geographical national locations quite insignificant, allowing a continuous articulation and participation in global/local discourses around issues. Just as online networks become spaces to disseminate ideas stemming from and feeding into artists' works, their own facebook posts often provide an overview of the circulation histories of artworks and also the contexts within which the works are shown.

In September of 2014, Shah changed the personal pronouns they use reflected in their revised bio which was released on their Facebook page and website, officially making a shift from she/her to they/them "as an experiment and expression of retirement from gender conformity." They have come out as ecosexual, thinking of themselves "as some kind of artist working on some kind of nature." Sometimes the posting of an interview with the artist on their social network facilitates a deeper understanding of the discourse surrounding the artwork: for example, Shah's bookmarking of the *Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries* (one of the inspirations guiding the engagement with the unicorn figure for *Between the Waves*), or their post of an interview about the *Landfill Dance* (Channel II–*Between the Waves*, 2012), where they discuss its connections with the Anthroprocene. Through their posts Shah not only informs their networks but also communicates their views on larger issues in a global context, such as the post in August 2015, bookmarking the '*Letter for Palestine*' campaign on the academic and cultural boycott of Israel at the Venice Biennale.[389] But perhaps more than anything else, these posts obliterate the distance between an artist and his/her/their publics virtually—art is no longer just an artistic imaginary available to the museum or festival goer, but it enters the domain of the real world and real people—revisiting ideas of audience participation in the erstwhile haloed domains of a virtually accessible art world.

The posts of Ganesh, on the other hand, as a South Asian-American artist living in a multi-cultural America, follow a different trajectory and are committed to resisting racial injustice with her African-American peers, as she navigates the worlds of art and activism. Some of the posts provide information about posters in the Metro created for the #ONEBrooklynCommunity services,

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389 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/TejalShah Artist.

of supporting Black activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism. In a post in 2016, she critiques the presence of Islamophobic feminism at Creative Time, a public arts organization based out of New York committed to presenting contemporary art in an open letter, sweepingly saying that,

> This problem will not be solved by inviting Muslim feminist groups to speak next year, or by bringing on board a series of 'native informants,' as outside consultants [...] rather what is required is the decolonization of the entire staffing system of Creative Time and all such arts organisations based in Europe and north America...[390]

In yet another post she comments on the deliberate absences of othered voices in a hegemonic white centered art world,

> What remains to be seen is whether those in the contemporary art world(s) with privilege, visibility, and decision-making power will be able to connect their shock and critique of the current state of affairs, of the prominence of proto-fascist, Islamophobic, and racist ideologies, with an ongoing series of absences and erasures—both discursive and representational—of brown, black, immigrant, disabled, dissenting, and other othered voices—from museum shows, anthologies, symposia, executive staff, boards, and trustees.
>   For example, next time you encounter an opening/gala/meeting/propaganda-making party/birthday/exhibition/group critique/feminist event, count the number of brown people in the room. Is everyone able-bodied? What about the queers? How did this come to be and why? Were you the only person of color in the room? Or one of three? What could be done to change this?[391]

Speaking up for the courage, resistance and activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism, she says,

> ALL immigrant communities/of color have gained in countless ways from the courage, resistance and activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism... the Immigration Act of 1965 took down racial quotas and allowed a new generation of Asians to enter the US – including my own parents. In effect, Black activists had endured hoses, beating and torture for our right to be legal as well.[392]

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390 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/search/top//q:chitra%20ganesh%20creative%20time.

391 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. https://www.artforum/slant/chitra-ganesh-on-the-election.658259.

392 Facebook post.

Clearly hers is an embedded and located voice that engages with the American nation's politics. But not only with the nation, her concerns also extend to the impact this has globally, South Asian disappearances after 9/11 *(Index of the Disappeared)* are as much a concern as the CIA black sites in Afghanistan (*Black Sites 1 The Seen Unseen* 2016), that have been obliterated from satellite views. And those concerns also expanded to resonate with the larger virtual networks that voiced resistance to Modi's visit to the US in 2014.[393]

For both Shah and Ganesh as activist artists engaging with global political issues, critiquing racial injustice (Ganesh *Index of the Disappeared Ongoing*), and secular democracy (Shah *I love my India* 2010), these networking platforms serve to initiate conversations.

Chopra's posts, in contrast to those of Shah and Ganesh, offer comprehensive information about the HH art space in Goa with its ongoing residencies and performances.[394] Chopra's Facebook site operates primarily as a social networking site, dialoguing with his connections and expanding his networks and participations within the art community, a lot of the posts are related to art related events happening in Goa itself, such as the Serendipity Art Festival in 2016, in which HH Art Spaces curated a section titled *Lucid Sleep* with Italian performance artist Virginia Zanetti. This post simultaneously draws on the convergences between the performance itself (new age music) and its contemporary contexts (mass industrial production).

> TOMORROW! 16/10/16 12–10 pm. I am performing at Galleria Continua, Le Moulin.
>
> DRUM SOLO AT THE MILL
>
> Confined to a gallery space at Le Moulin, in a building that was once a paper mill, Nikhil will play the drums and make large drawings in a persona resembling a Punk/New Wave drummer. The presence of this persona will seek to evoke the pitfalls of industrialization and mass production, while struggling to find beauty and harmony in expression.

These sites for Ganesh become via medias to build some forms of coalitions with the progressive forces in society and engaging in awareness-raising, to spread an alternative message of solidarities world-wide. The dialogic relationship that all

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393   Accessed on September 5, 2018. https://diasporasaysnotomodi.tumblr.com/?fbclid=IwAR29so9IfPON8uMo7iyaDLHMQd5lDwWL1PZwmdiAxYjKwf-jJDpwhREtSiM.

394   Facebook post. Accessed on March 5, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/nikhil.chopra.798.

three artists maintain reinforce their global presence. Clearly, with social medias the experience of being in a specific place and responding to common concerns have changed so much that the idea of representing a local place or reacting to local issues can now no longer be isolated from global concerns.

Transnational dialogues and global debates have assumed relevance to local practices and are organically felt. Concerns from across the globe, such as democracy, human and queer rights, ecology and the experience of living in an increasingly diminished and toxic world are increasingly becoming common to all. Yet these concerns flow directly through the body that continues to be the index of our experience, it lies between material things and immaterial consciousness. While on the one hand, in communicating with the world via technology and media, the body's concrete material presence is resisted, on the other, the body's material and corporeal presence continues to remain central to all experience. And this dialectical relationship has been at work in the set of works that have been discussed in this chapter.

3.5.1 A Space in Common

Papastergiadis comments on how the fragmentation of social structures and norms and complex processes for re-aligning the self with the world have created new conceptions of solidarity and transnational forms of social consciousness, noting that cosmopolitanism is not only pushed forward by the great transformation of globalization but that it lives within transnational networks and on local streets. He suggests that a new perspective is required that combines a theoretical understanding of global change and a capacity to observe the micro-connections that occur in specific places and points out that artists take an active role in the mediation of the emergence of cosmopolitanism in an act of putting together different sets of interests,[395] Mosquera also contends that, "Intercultural involvement consists not only of accepting the Other in an attempt to understand him or her and to enrich myself with his or her diversity. It also implies that the Other does the same with me, problematizing my self-awareness,"[396] and these arguments can be linked to the direction that the art practices of the artists in this study are moving towards.

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395 Papastergiadis, "Glimpses of Comopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art," *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (1), 141 & 150.

396 Gerardo Mosquera, "Marco Polo Syndrome," *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory,* eds. Rasheed Araeen & Sean Cubitt, 2002, 271–272.

This search for a 'space in common' has become one of the defining features of contemporary art practice in this period of globalization. And this space is also where the work of all these three artists situates itself. With diverse backgrounds, diverse places and diverse histories there is a place where histories interject and the mining of these spaces becomes an important frame for analyzing their work. The utopian quality of their desire therefore allows a fruitful transition into a post-national framework within which all the three artists are working.

With this set of works the shift away from the nation and national critiques becomes clear. Chopra's personas merge with all period identities to 'become' others themselves. Shah's Other is now monstrously uncanny, moving around in a half-light with its proboscis, a post-human creature of the netherworld. The uncontainable within is now visible. Ganesh's female figures now no longer engage with masquerades around social identity and critiques rooted in an Indian identity, they are now shape-shifters, time travelers whose fantasies are cosmic. With Riviere, masquerade was about knowing the rules and playing a social role but this masquerade has gone beyond this role play—the artists in this study perform a deeper visceral masquerade of a total transformation of self.

There is no transparent subject post-deconstruction, since every identity is now a masquerade. Shah's earlier works began with critiquing gender masquerade and now go beyond that to state that tranimal drag is acceptable. Chopra's performances masquerade with historical critique, show transformational change as *La Perle Noire*, he is behaving naturally as a drag queen and rather than distancing himself from that persona, he immerses himself in the masquerade to complete the transformation.

The queering takes place formally and aesthetically. The ideological idea of race functions as a social symbol, as each of these artists captures something that seeps through the cracks of these simplifications and stereotypes. All three confront the power of the stereotype to reshape their worlds, with their capacity to stick their fingers into the wound. Often artists—as Shah in her earlier works and Ganesh all throughout—are quick to reveal the extent to which violence and hate structures our psyche. As they move beyond castration fears and fetish fantasies, opening themselves up to global influences and concerns, they position themselves to get past symbolic orders like the nation, caste and gender. In the process, they become part of global movements and concerns—ecology, sexuality, race and alterity that are no longer solely national concerns.

Operating at the intersection of sexuality and sex, they confront the carnal organic quality of the body, and through it, the affect-ness of desire. Employing affect allows them to break taboos and move beyond a national discourse that dismisses discussions around sexuality. It is within the force-field of the affective domain that notions of the national are being broken down. In the work of

Shah who invokes the organic, animal quality of pornography with a vengeance through the explicit-ness of the acts on display with an immersive genre such as video, Ganesh's re-configurations of word and text critique national middle-class sensibilities transforming into an affective cosmic body that imagines apocalyptic scenarios. When Chopra shaves off his heavily masculine growth of body hair in full display during his performance to don the civilized persona of a gentleman or removes his blond wig to reveal his shaved scalp, he contradicts the presence of sexual masculinity in the excess of desire through Affect. The queer body with Ganesh gestures towards the future through the tropes of science fiction and fantasy, in Shah's work it is tranimal as it moves towards the anthro-procene, no longer gendered, defying classification. Chopra moves away from all stable referents as he keeps slipping between the cracks of gender, white-ness and black-ness.

Conclusion

This study began by proposing 'post-national' as an empowering term and a critical framework to understand the dynamics of contemporary art practice. It seemed to offer a lens to view a set of art works which at the very outset had debunked the category of the nation. And to navigate across this large spatiality, the methodology of case studies proved to be a rewarding direction.

At the macro level an understanding of the 'idea' of an India suffused by the politics of the nation contextualized contemporary art practices centering around the performative body, at the micro level a closer contextual analysis of the works revealed the transcultural multiplicity in both iconography and text and on the diasporic artists' body itself. The conflating of the paradigm of transculturality resisting the category of the nation as 'container' of a culture, pointing towards multi-sited cultural practice is an understanding that my study demonstrated in its discussion of the artworks. The analysis gestured towards how an artwork even as it is situated within a set of relations that interact with the production of the image can contain elements of futurity within the artwork itself. My close attention to the practice of the three artists has enabled me to get a sense of the workings of contemporary art in general especially in its broad politics of representation: The collusion of 'Indian-ness,' and its exclusionary nationalism has been variously critiqued and exposed by these artists via multiple artistic strategies: they range from performative masquerade (Chopra), a critical revisiting of a nationalist/popular visual culture (Ganesh) or radical embodiments that blur the distinctions between binaries (Shah). Each of them dismantles the ideas of national belonging precisely through their focus on identities marginalized by the nation—women, queer, trans.

The first chapter laid out the historical context and background that preceded the work of the three artists in this study and introduced their practices and their growing visibility. It included a brief overview of the decades preceding the last decade of the twentieth century as the defining period that not only marked the entry of contemporary mediums in India that highlighted India's disturbed politics but was also an era characterized by *avant garde* art practices

in experimental art spaces especially at Khoj where both Shah and Chopra introduced their practices after their return from art studies abroad. In my discussion of the mega-exhibition format in these decades I focused on the presence and increased visibility of Indian artists and their works both in Asia and in the west. I demonstrated how two country specific shows, *Indian Highway* (2007–2012) and *Pari-Delhi-Bombay* (2011) and specifically the latter offered a productive lens with which to analyse the curatorial vision or its lack thereof. I concluded the chapter with Hoskote's curatorial choices for the Indian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011, these proffered rewarding insights into art practices passing through and beyond the nation.

The second chapter argued that all three artists critique stereotypical notions of an 'Indian' identity with their 'gendered' performative masquerading bodies in differing mediums. Ganesh, engaging with the comic genre in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics not only confronted the marginalized social condition of women and conflicts with the patriarchal heterosexual ideologies of the nation via the queer body, but also the experience of 'woman' as a category constantly in process—not only as a marginalized woman of color but also queer and classed as against the white, middle class hetero-sexual feminist, presumed to represent all womens' interests. Shah's multiple media works intervened against the national discourses around the gendered body—employing an outrageously theatrical camp sensibility—as a Bollywood heroine, a female 'masculine' body, and as a transgendered body, always resisting the gender binary. Chopra's post-colonial immaculately dressed body appropriated the nation's colonial past as it simultaneously intervened in global histories, masquerading as Indian royal, traveler, explorer, often exiting performances garbed as Queen or feminine Other, as he performed across the globe, emphasizing the exotic-ness of this 'other' in a reminder that identity is a construct and that this identity can be garbed according to will to create this Other.

All three artists employing different mediums presented the body in a dialectical relationship with the nation in differing ways—the comic, a static genre—yet dynamically playing with the image-text relationship to create a queer, parallel narrative giving 'women' a voice;—the video, with its immersive qualities—challenging notions of gender stability within the nation; and live performances, effectively critiquing stereotypical figures of power. In this first set of works, various theoretical discourses around feminism, queer studies, and post-colonialism came to the fore to critique issues of difference and yet this set of works drew from a thoroughly particularized 'national' self, with its gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other identifications clearly enunciated and in full view.

With the third chapter, the study demonstrated the shift away from the nation, arguing that global mobility intertwines with the artist's body itself in two ways, firstly through their physical movement via artist residencies and also

virtually via social networking sites such as Facebook. Both forms of mobility lead to forms of deterritorialisation and towards creating a stronger sense of affinity with others in diverse corners of the globe. In the analysis of another set of works by Ganesh, Shah and Chopra, I argued that the works increasingly engaged with global issues such as queer sexualities, and ecologies—concerns that cannot be subsumed under the rubric of the national. In the concluding part it was argued that it is the flows of affect that link the performing of heterosexuality or homosexuality, to the body's personal and cultural contexts and connections across and beyond spaces. In this final chapter, the study showed how Shah chooses to reduce the sex act to an affective immersive experience rather than explicate it in discourse.

All three artists engaged identity via the national body—the first part of the analysis, with the artists' critique of the normative gendered 'Indian' self, indicated that the nature of this national identity itself is a construct—the Bollywood heroine, the rapist villain, the demure goddess, the colonial gentleman—all of these personas are part of the nation's cultural memory. They are constructs that 'perform' in certain stereotypical ways that have been concretized within the national imagination. And in their work all three artists demonstrated that there is no real self within these constructs—it is purely masquerade and roleplay. Without marking the shift chronologically, this study further demonstrated how this 'national' body from the nation's cultural imagination gets de-territorialized in two ways, firstly via the artist's body itself as it travels, participates in residencies and secondly how the concerns expressed in their artworks shift their focus towards concerns that transcend the nation.

But does the postnational have the same valence today in terms of their current practice? What has changed in these five years since I started my research *vis-à-vis* this critical framework given the present "return" of the national in today's shifting global geopolitics?

To one's utter consternation, even the Merriam-Webster dictionary has revealed that *nationalism* is the most looked for word of 2018, in the Oxford dictionary the word for 2018 is *toxic*. The toxicity of nationalism continues to be felt in political conflicts across the world, along with social disharmony, poverty and environmental degradation, all combine to make the world a worse place to live in. Geopolitical conflicts and rebellions of civil society in different regions continue to occur across the globe, even as deeply contested, often fixed boundaries of states continue to embrace a diversity of ethnic, linguistic groups. In all of this, the national and local cultures remain robust, there is no common *global* pool of memories or *global* way of thinking to unite people and the meaning of 'place' in contemporary art practice remains intertwined with the nation as a fall-back framework in order to explain the origin of art works and translate their meaning.

In this fraught situation, how do the terms of belonging and identity get recalibrated for each of these artists?

A concerted look at some of their subsequent work post my analysis can point us towards some possible directions that their practice is specifically poised towards, capturing a possible general thrust of contemporary art.

In 2018, Ganesh created her second animation film, *The Scorpion Gesture*, the work comprises of a series of five large-scale animations that inter splice traditional Buddhist art and the figures of *Padmasambhava, Mandarva* and *Maitreya* with modern graphics. One of the animations, "*Sillhouette in the Graveyard,*" appears on the wall directly behind a gilt copper sculpture *of Maitreya*, a deity figure stands up out of a river of blood as images of political protest and climate change appear on and around her body. The jittery montage of news clips of wars, protests and forced immigrations, interspersed with dancing skeletons, playing directly behind *Maitreya*, becomes the universe he exists in, and resists. *Maitreya* is the future Buddha, prophesied to arrive on Earth at a time of global crisis. The invocation of such figures uncannily aligns with shifts in the contemporary political climate, and its growing turn towards authoritarian ideals and leadership in many countries resulting in polarized citizenship along with the threat of ecological disaster that looms larger in the contemporary moment.

Shah's afffiliations have moved towards Nonduality, Buddhism and a study of the Middle Way Path followed by the Buddha, through following the practice of embodied knowledge. As they get in touch with traditions in which the very idea of a truly existent self, and 'I' as an identity is flawed, their entire perception changes. Through a deep study of the mind, applying the tools of somatic therapy and cognitive affect, Shah's practice indicates a move from violence towards love in these times of dystopia and helplessness. This introspective speculation has moved them away from object-based practice, and from the expensive medium of video installation. *Unbecoming,* a drawing installation series created in 2017 are part drawings and part photos and draw from Shah's research interests in Buddhism, they feature found images of figures washed up on the shores of beaches speaking to the migrant crisis and conflicts occurring all over the world and images of the Tibetan self-immolation processes as forms of protest, display an 'unbecoming' from various positions as a sign of the times. Their practice is simultaneously moving towards a closer interactive process through the format of workshops and performance lectures where they directly engage in participative and performative dialogue.[397]

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397 For example, at the Kunsthaus Hamburg in 2017, their solo show was accompanied by a performative dialogue between Shah and documentary filmmaker and musician

When Nikhil Chopra was invited to take part in Documenta 14, he decided to undertake a one-month long road trip connecting its two venues, Kassel and Athens, via Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, driven by the impulse to cut across regions conflicted with borders, migrations and the refugee crisis. Rather than present the journey as an embodied experience of these traumas, Chopra chose the apolitical route—connecting with art schools and experimental art spaces, plotting his trip along their locations. In this longest performance to date, (twenty-eight days), the persona went by the name of Will (also *desire* in an indirect reference), an anonymous generic name for William. Will went about creating his drawings as usual in each location during the road trip, all of these were then displayed at the Kulturbahnhof at Kassel for the last few days of his performance. His costumes were created from material sourced from the cities he visited, but the dwelling tent that he carried on his road trip and that was pitched at all his stops had been produced in India, this act brought in an ambivalent connection to notions of hospitality. Here the hospitality to the stranger angle reversed itself from Chopra's usual performance structure as Chopra himself played host and the dwelling tent served as the meeting place for visitors to his performances. Music composed specially for the performances, partially inspired by the gypsy country he was travelling in, played at all locations, breaking the studied silence of his previous performances. Chopra clearly signposted silent signifiers of a shared language among strangers—music, food, art—all of which served as conversation starters and icebreakers. Music, food and the welcoming of strangers into his dwelling tent became an important component of each performance, although concepts around offering hospitality to strangers were often tested in this road trip. In contrast to the warm welcome they received in the smaller places where people would arrive with blocks of cheese, olive oil as gifts, the team's run-in with authorities at Budapest exhibited the paranoia of a mistrustful city, showcasing two contrasting kinds of engagements with the stranger in their midst.

This performance offered some important insights for our world of today where the refugee crisis has polarized the globe. Concepts around hospitality and the welcoming of strangers have assumed a topical relevance, for Derrida, unconditional and conditional hospitality are inseparable, welcoming the foreigner cannot be separated from placing certain terms and conditions on his stay. But the act of hospitality also brings in the politics of the nation state and boundaries, the ethics of hospitality is always already a form of politics—without

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Shabnam Virmani along with a day-long collaborative workshop on art and nonduality offered at the art school.

the welcome of the stranger there is no hospitality and opening up to the Other. For Zizek on the other hand, this act of hospitality and opening up to the Other occurs through a pre-conceived set of assumptions that we bring with us and it is thus flawed in its enactment itself.

Through an analysis of these artists' works, the direction of their practice could be grasped in terms of these three broad positions:

Position 1 Artists through their take on the migration issue come across as pleading for new models of a global citizenship and a borderless world. This is 'the migrant's time' and is as political as it gets.

Position 2 On the other hand, there is a turn away from the political/queer into a space of spiritual utopianism.

Position 3 And lastly politics and aesthetics (Ranciere) are not viewed in antithetical terms but as mutually inflecting positions.

In the discussion of the works in this study—Shah a deeply political artist not only shifted away from gender politics towards concerns around queer ecologies but almost retreated into a space where politics does not exist, drawing closer to the second position, Ganesh's diasporic location even as it does not allow her the choice of transcending the politics of identity, handled the relationship by referencing the potential of meta-narratives from religious traditions to rethink the politics of the times, drawing closer to the third position, and Chopra's abiding interest in a geopolitically borderless world drew him towards the first position.

Shared concerns towards environmental degradation, ethnocentrism, the politics of human rights, the borders between human-animal-technology technology pose contemporaneous questions of transnational responsibility in all corners of the world. Clearly the era of identity politics is passé, giving way to a more dispersed understanding of politics that spills well out outside of national boundaries. But this spilling can have an altogether different connotation in contemporary art in India if the case of the Kochi Biennale in 2018 is considered. Even though dialogues around inclusivity-exclusivity, center-periphery have reduced in intensity in these last decades, new borders are being drawn out between the local and the international. The Kochi Biennale in its fourth edition, proposed yet another equation between aesthetics and politics with a stress on feminism; it sought equal allegiance to the local "rooted in its socio-geographical setting" and to the cosmopolitan "receptive to winds blowing in from other worlds." These equations appeared fragile when the curatorial intervention harked back to the feminism of *Guerilla Girls* in a nostalgic celebration of '80's moment while paying scant attention to the local gender politics where womens' right to enter the Sabarimala temple was being vehemently resisted; the right to enter the temple is predicated upon the civic right of citizenship.

It was in the setting of this very Biennale that Ganesh's goddesses mocked at traditional iconography and fiercely broke out of their sacred spaces. Whether such a frontal attack on Hindu patriarchy by a diaspora artist or the curator's celebration of anachronism of Euro-American feminism comes across as a critique of the current resurgent nationalism is open for speculation. What is more certain is that the dynamics of postnational with which I began my interrogation of the contemporary is now almost like a 'vanishing mediator' and slowly appears to be relegated into history. Here in lies the dilemma of theorization of Contemporary Art, it cannot be easily historicised or situated within a theoretical framework since those very artistic frameworks that may provide an answer or a direction today maybe easily overturned by those very actors tomorrow. It is this fluidity, plurality and multiplicity of perspectives that facilitates boundary transgression so easily. Trying to understand contemporary art is like looking at a phenomenon from the other end of a telescope. It is too close at hand to offer any hindsight and all we can do is reckon vague and uneven oscillations across the poles of a global cosmopolitanism and a strident localism overriding a geography of political borders.

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List of Illustrations

Media and Cultural Studies, Band 3

This publication focuses on the works of Chitra Ganesh (b.1974), Tejal Shah (b.1979) and Nikhil Chopra (b.1976) in order to highlight the changing relationship of the gendered body with national identity in contemporary art practice. Ideas of national belonging are challenged precisely through a concerted focus on identities marginalized by the nation. It proposes the 'postnational' as an empowering term to mark the shift away from the nation, and, employing a post-structural framework, it argues that the nature of national identity is in itself a construct.

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