

HOUSE OF MIRRORS

CURATED BY DEEKSHA NATH

Grosvenor Vadehra

HOUSE OF MIRRORS

4-24 JULY 2007

DEEKSHA NATH
CURATOR

Every image is in some way a “portrait”, not in that it would reproduce the traits of a person, but in that it pulls and draws, in that it extracts something, an intimacy, a force.
— Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Ground of the Image’

Our response to art works is guided by what we are shown. House of Mirrors has emerged from a desire to explore a certain type of ‘showing’ that the artists engage in, a self-showing. It goes beyond using the self as subject, but rather, positioning the self as a vector, a space in between the object and the subject that is simultaneously in contact with both. The intentionality is not so much to-be-individual as to-be-iconic. It is a self conscious positioning that is considered and deliberate and pertains to the structures of appearance.

Indian Lady by Pushpamala N. is a good example of a work that is simultaneously familiar and accessible through its humor and parody of Bollywood, and distant, promoting

and challenging the archetype of an “Indian lady” – one who exists only in the imagination. With each repetition, the image of the woman emerging from behind the painted curtain becomes increasingly surreal, negating the access the viewer feels at first instance to the artist as she transforms the work from play to something far more disturbing, stuck like a broken record. Since she works towards revealing social clichés, it would be appropriate to describe her as assuming the role, for this particular work, of a natkhat ‘young spirit’. She, who is both the artist and the artists’ creation, confronts the viewer and playfully challenges formulaic constructions of a certain type of woman from a specific context. This isn’t issued merely at the foreign or the male viewer, but at all who encounter the work, to revisit the locations that provide us with role models, to wonder at how we assemble ideals of, for instance, feminine beauty and behavior.

The challenge to revisit sites of social recognizability is also issued by Sunoj D. and Nikhil Chopra. Both artists situate themselves clearly within the Indian context, albeit in different temporal frames. Nikhil, in the guise of his alter ego Sir Raja, while adopting a stereotype of the Indian prince during the colonial era, asks us to grasp the complexity of his photo-performance – of the self on display while enacting another. Though we are seduced by the tableaux the artist creates, gazing upon which we admire, love and worship his beauty and social position, we remain conscious of the farce. By desiring identification with the being that he has created, Nikhil exposes to the viewer the complexity with which we receive and revile icons.

Sunoj places himself, BANG, in the centre of his canvas and (t)his contemporary moment – a young man living in Bangalore, the silicon valley on India, and a native of Kerela in South India. Sunoj's canvases point to a youth culture which is defined by its confidence and determination to

define life as a relational existence – it matters because it matters to me!

Nicola Durvasula and Praneet Soi also work within the bracket of 'that which matters to us' is a valid enough subject for representation. Nicola paints that which she sees outside her window in Kent and events from her daily life with the same easy assurance that Praneet sculpts the bodies of Iraqi victims of American military brutality. The equality of plane is one of the attempts of this exhibition. They highlight the intimacy with which we engage with the public and private sides of our conscience, the multiplicity of affiliations and practices through which we construct our own self-image.

The artists in this particular grouping overlap in their working within the frame of the iconic, while creating a critical encounter (i.e. one that makes you re-examine your situated perceptions) with how these icons are formulated. By using images from

the press, ethnography, the popular media or the domestic space, they allow us to review the sites of production of social meaning.

The American hip hop duo Insane Clown Posse, in their song 'House of Mirrors', begin by issuing an intriguing invitation, a couched challenge;

Ladies and gentlemen, the house of mirrors ¶ For just one bet, venture through this wonderful exhibit ¶ See yourself in all the weird shapes and sizes ¶ You, young man, would you like to go into the house of mirrors

The lyrics quickly turn sinister, throwing allegations of misdeeds and clouded consciences at the listener.

Step inside, come my way... This here is your fatal day... You have lied, they have cried... Now your life has been denied... In the mirror you can't hide... Whipping fear, spinning

pain... All you crying is in vain... You're the beast you never knew... This reflects the things you do

House of mirrors, the traditional attraction at carnivals and fairs, is set up to be an amusing, albeit uncomfortable, space where visitors confront distorted images of themselves in large mirrors. The viewers see altered reflections which confound their spatial and visual sense. The intention is to disrupt any easy relationality with what one sees. In a house of mirrors, we are forced to experience views of ourselves, and (if we play with words), our views reflected back at us, changed.

The song and in a much less sinister way, this exhibition attempts to do something similar by creating a reflective plane, where the viewers find personal and public views reflected back at themselves but differently, altered through additional interpretation (sometimes humorous and at others satirical, nasty, ironical...).

NIKHIL CHOPRA

In November 2005, Nikhil Chopra (b. 1974) placed himself as the character of *Sir Raja III* in a series of photographs, entitled ‘*What will I do with all this land?*’, journeying through his vast estate. *Sir Raja III* is the third in a series of works that explore the theatrics of posing, through tableaux for live performance and film. The narrative around *Sir Raja* does not refer to any particular place or moment in history, and is woven from personal memory, old family photographs, an ancestral home, and endless stories of the family.

Nikhil was artist in residence at Khoj International Artists’ Association in New Delhi for the 2007 Performance Art Residency. His solo exhibitions include: *Sir Raja III*, Mumbai (2005); *Sir Raja II*, Ohio (2003) and *Sir Raja I*, Ohio (2002). He has participated in several group shows including: *Beings and Doings*, curated by Emma Ridgeway, British Council, New Delhi (2007); *Asian Contemporary Art Week*, New York City (2006); *The Taste Of Others*, curated by Leeza Ahmady, Apexart Gallery, New York (2005) and *Contemporaneity: International Video Art in Kyrgyzstan*, 2004 Central Asian Biennial, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Nikhil has studied at the faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore (BFA, 2001), Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio (MFA, 2003). The artist lives and works in Mumbai.

Image below left ***What will I do with all this land? II***
Image below right ***What will I do with all this land? I***
Image right ***What will I do with all this land? III***



NICOLA DURVASULA

Nicola Durvasula (b. 1960) exhibits a series of drawings that confront the boundaries that define and categorize her personal and professional identity, and separate practice and meaning.

She has had several solo shows in England, India, France and North America including Thomas Erben Gallery, New York (2007); Rachmaninoff's, London (2006); Nature Morte Gallery, New Delhi, (2004); 'Indian Rope Trick', Centre 19, Montbeliard, (2002); Galerie Chemould, Mumbai, (2000). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions worldwide. She has studied at Diplome National Superieur d'Expression Plastique Ecole des Beaux Arts du Havre, France (1984), Diplome Unilingue de Langue et Civilisations Orientales, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris, France (1993) and MA Fine Art, Kent Institute of Art & Design, Canterbury, Kent (2004). The artist lives and works in Walmer, Kent, U.K.



Image far left ***The Structure of sensation II***
Image left ***Nag ha nee***
Image right ***Restless mind and deadlines***



PUSHPAMALA N.

Pushpamala N's (b. 1956) video work exposes cultural and gender stereotyping while exploring the complex terrain of contemporary urban life in India. Playing the protagonist, she incorporates public culture into her work, adopting various popular personas and ironic roles as a vehicle for examining issues of gender, place and history.

Selected Exhibitions: 2003: *Photography*, presented jointly by Nature Morte, Gallery Chemould; *Phantom Lady and Sunhere Sapne*, Walsh Gallery, Chicago, USA. 2001: *Century City*, Tate Modern, London, UK; *Golden Dreams*, Gallery Chemould, Mumbai; *Moving Ideas*, Hoopoe Curatorial, Canada. 2000: *Open Circle International Workshop*, Mumbai. 1999: *Art from India*, Patricia Correia Gallery, Los Angeles Biennale, USA. 1998: *Phantom Lady or Kismet*, a photoromance, Gallery Chemould, Mumbai and the Artist's Studio, Bangalore; *The Presence of the Past*, British Council, Mumbai; *Khoj International Workshop*, Modinagar. 1997: *Telling Tales*, Bath Festival Trust, UK and British Council, New Delhi. 1996: *Shilpayan*, Contemporary Indian Sculpture, NGMA, New Delhi; *The New South*, London, UK; *Fire and Life*, Australia- India Residency. 1995: *100 Years of NGMA*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi; *Sculpture 95*, Gallery Espace, New Delhi; *Johannesburg Biennale*, South Africa; *Postcards for Gandhi*, Sahmat, 6 Indian cities. The artist lives and works in Bangalore, India.

Indian Lady, 1997, Video Loop, Colour

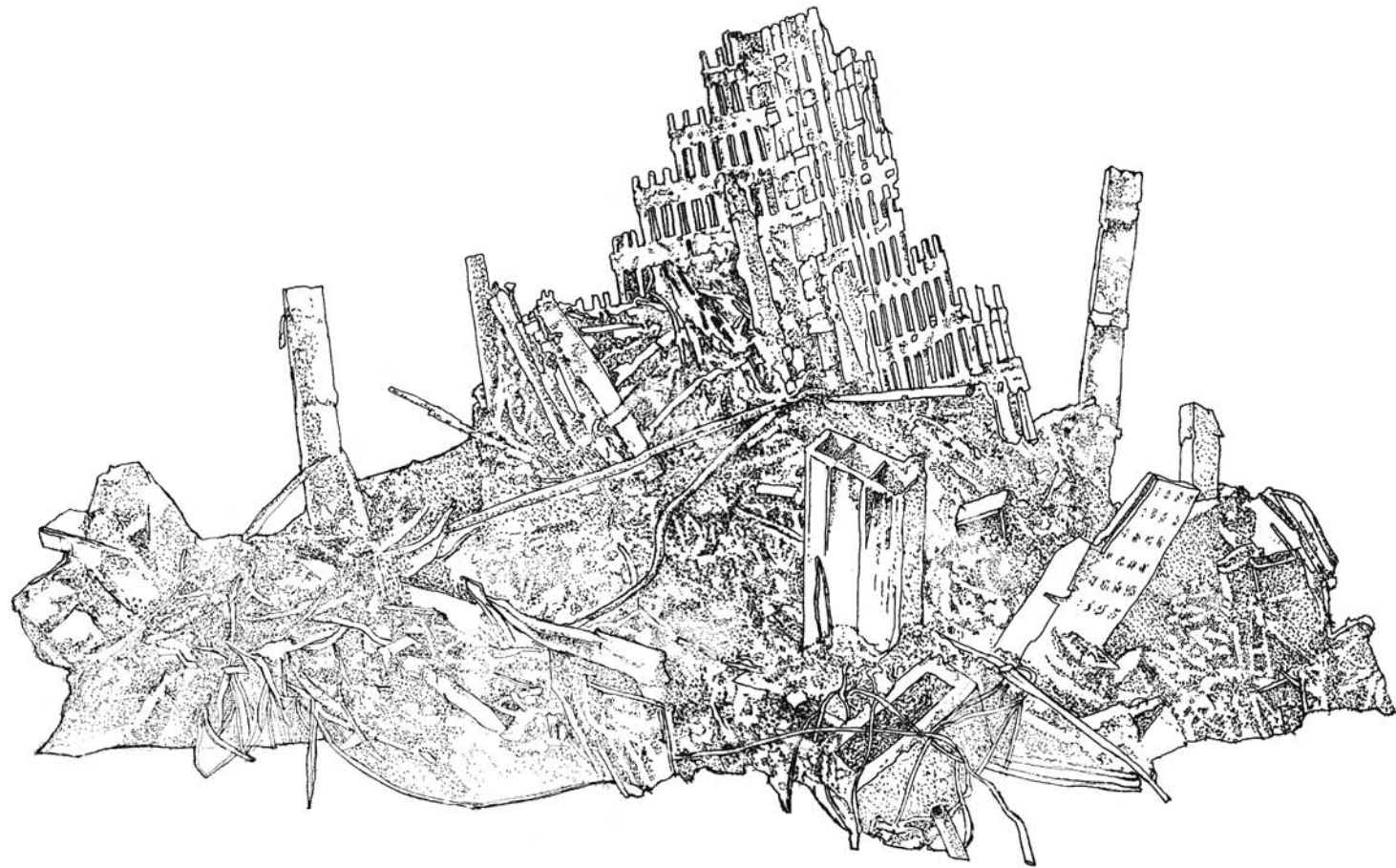


PRANEET SOI

Praneet Soi's (b. 1971) installation consists of a sculptural tableau and a series of lithographic prints. The drawings are a part of a continuous and growing collection of images consisting of portraits (self and other), landscape, flora and fauna, images related to the media, and ordinary, inanimate objects. The fibre-glass sculptures allow the viewer an entry point into a critical discussion upon the subjects of contemporary myth and legend. The appearance of the artist in the third person, both in the drawings as well as the sculpture, indicates the personal nature of the narrative that ensues within the installation.

Praneet studied at Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University, Baroda (MFA, 1996), University of California, San Diego (MFA, 2001) and was chosen to attend the Skowhegan school of painting and sculpture, in Maine, in 2001. In 2002–2003 he was a resident at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. His solo exhibitions include, 'Face to Face', Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2006) and 'Northern Wind', Gallery Martin Van Zomeren, Netherlands (2005). He has participated in group exhibitions in India, the US and Europe. In 2004, he was shortlisted for the Prix de Rome, the most prominent prize for emergent artists in The Netherlands. The artist lives and works in Amsterdam and Calcutta.

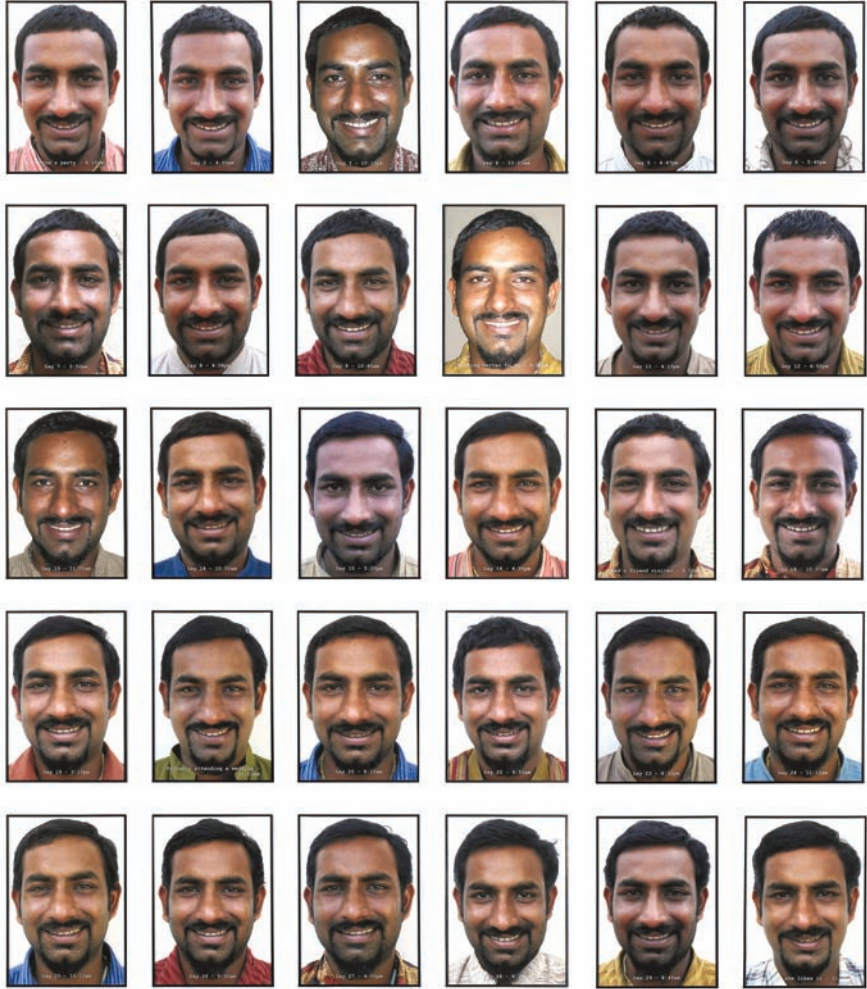
Images below *In search of allegory*
Image left *Untitled (1 of a set of 10 lithographs)*



SUNOJ D.

Sunoj D. (b. 1979) uses his self as an icon in his large canvases to make direct, personal statements on the cultural, social and political environment within which he lives and works. His solo shows include 'Sunoj D not dead since 1979', Gallery SKE, Bangalore (2005) and Kerala Lalit Kala Academy, Cochin (2002). He has participated in several group shows in India and in North America. In 2003, he was awarded the 4th Biennial Bose Pacia Prize for Contemporary Art, New York and the State student award, Kerala Lalit Kala Academy. The artist lives and works in Bangalore, India.

Image below **30 Days**
Image right **Untitled I**



WORKS

NIKHIL CHOPRA

1.

What will I do with all this land? I, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 5/5, 57.8 x 44.5cm (22 ¾ x 17in)
2.

What will I do with all this land? II, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 3/5, 48.3 x 48.3cm (19 x 19in.)
3.

What will I do with all this land? III, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 5/5, 59.1 x 40cm (23 ¼ x 15 ¾in)
4.

What will I do with all this land? IV, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 2/5, 50.2 x 50.2cm (19 ¾ x 19 ¾in)
5.

What will I do with all this land? V, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 3/5, 58.4 x 39.4cm (23 x 15 ½in)
6.

What will I do with all this land? VI, 2005, colour photograph on Kodak Professional paper, edition no. 2/5, 47.5 x 49cm (18 ¾ x 19 ¼in)
7.

What will I do with all this land? VII, 2005, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition 2/5, 44.5 x 49.5cm (17 ½ x 19 ½in)

8.

What will I do with all this land? VIII, 2005, colour photograph on Kodak Professional paper, edition no. 3/5, 61 x 48.3cm (24 x 19in)

9.

Sir Raja III, black and white photograph on Ilford, warm tone, semi matt, fibre paper, edition no. 4/5 11.5 x 28.6cm (11 ½ x 11 ¼in)

Photography by Munir Kabani

NICOLA DURVASULA

10.

No search, 2003, Pencil, pen, gouache on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)
11.

Nag ha nee, 2006, Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)
12.

Dusty material and the stillness of thought, 2006, Watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)
13.

The structure of sensation II, 2006, Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)
14.

Study for an electric cable III (aakaash kusum), 2006, Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

NICOLA DURVASULA (CONT.)

15.

Restless mind and deadlines, 2005, Watercolour and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

16.

Untitled (phool), 2006, Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

17.

Untitled (on line), 2004, Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

18.

Untitled (front line), Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

19.

Untitled (3), Watercolour, gouache, and pencil on paper, 29 x 21.5cm (11 ¾ x 8 ½in)

PUSHPAMALA N.

20.

Indian Lady, 1997, Colour video loop

PRANEET SOI

21.

In search of allegory, 2007
Set of 3 sculptures, fibreglass, edition no. 2/3 from an edition of 3 (+1AP)
(Seated Figure) H 91.44 x W 60.96cm (H 36 x W 24in)
(Nude figure) L 93.98 x W 55.88cm (L 37 x W 22in)
(Hooded Figure) H 106.68 x W 86.36cm (H 42 x W 34in)

22.

Untitled
Portfolio of 10 lithographs on blk rives paper (210 gms)
Edition of 5 (+2AP's), 50 x 65cm (19 ¾ x 25 ½in)

SUNOJ D.

23.

Untitled I, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152.5cm (72 x 60in) (6 x 5ft)

24.

Temple Committee Member and Local party Secretary, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 244 x 183cm (96 x 72in) (8 x 6ft)

25.

Proof for the Democratic Bureaucrat, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 152.5 x 183cm (60 x 72in) (5 x 6ft)

26.

30 Days, 2007, inkjet print on cotton rag, archival quality paper, 183 x 160cm (72 x 63in)
Each individual photograph: 35 x 25 cm (13 ½ x 9 ½in)

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