

# Lung power

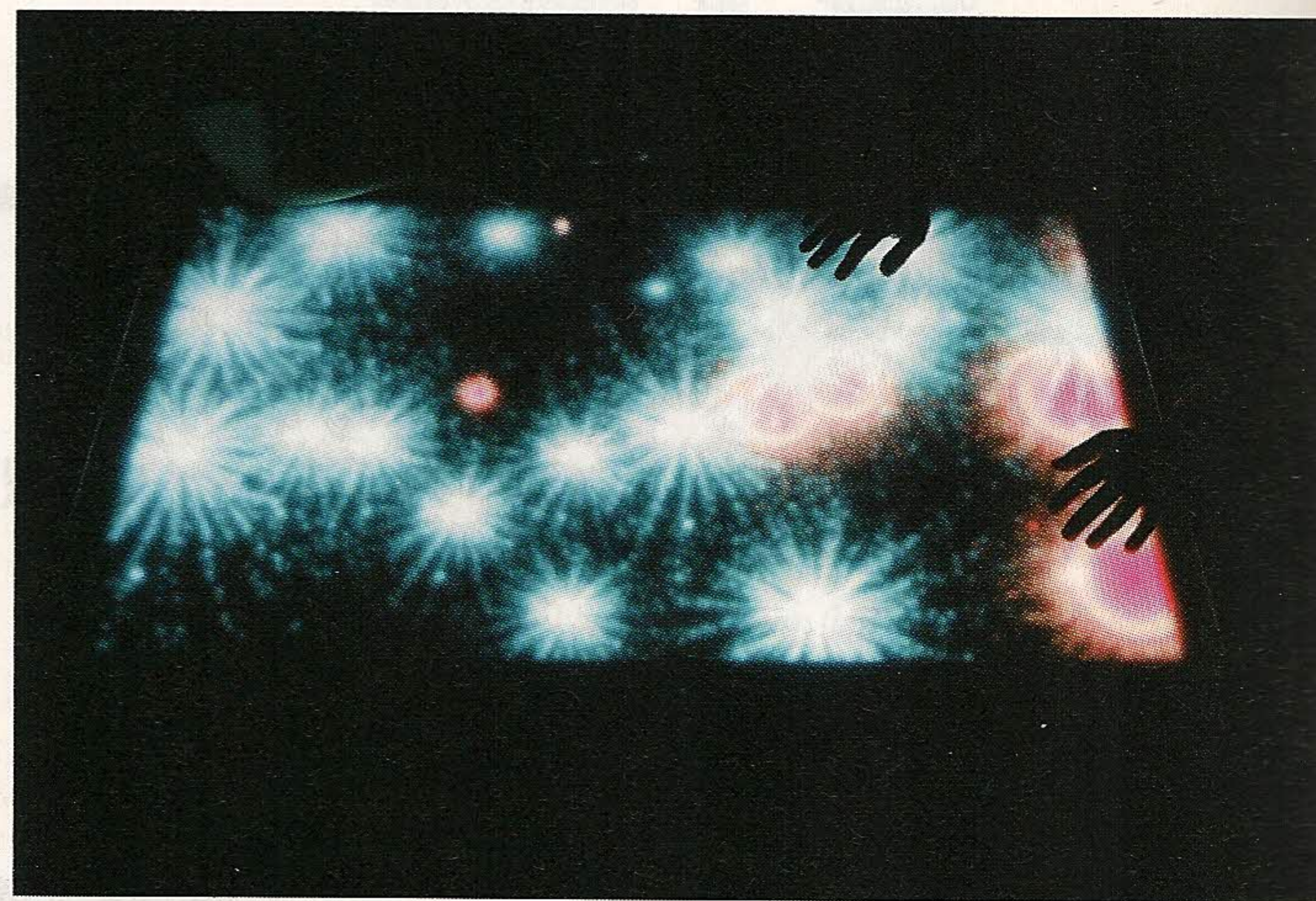
## Our Breath Concrete, Volte

Most of us wouldn't think of yoga and light sensors in the same breath but Qusai Kathawala hopes that after seeing his debut show *Our Breath Concrete*, which opens this fortnight, viewers will become more aware of how much one can do by simply exhaling. Enter Kathawala's show and you'll have sensors strapped on your body so that you can make the gallery light up, literally. The visitor's breathing pattern is detected by the sensors, which bring Kathawala's installations to life. In one piece, two people sit at what looks like a coffee table. Once their sensors start reacting, starbursts of light flare under the table's surface. "My work is experimental in the sense that I am trying to create something living and I am curious how people will feel as they interact with it," said Kathawala in an email interview.

The idea of using the rhythm of breathing came to Kathawala from the yoga practice of pranayama. "Breathing is a bridge in that it's intrinsically something you can

decide whether or not to control," he explained. "Being conscious of breathing articulates an interstice, forging a link between the conscious and the unconscious. This is the idea behind meditation practices." Kathawala, 32, draws inspiration from a wide variety of sources, including African drumming, Hindustani classical music and yoga. He was a student of mechanical engineering for his undergraduate degree and studied media design for his Master's. His interest in art began when he was 20 and he took to painting for "self-expression". However, he soon realised that he wanted a process that felt more connected to modern life. "My artwork uses technology because technology is the driver of change in our lives today," he said. "I am interested in relational aesthetics, particularly how technology shapes and can potentially shape our relationship with our self, with others and with the world around us."

There's an intriguing thematic contrast at play in Kathawala's works. The process of bringing the artworks to life requires his human



Installation from *Our Breath Concrete*

viewer to turn into something cyborg-like, made up of wires and gadgets. It's almost as though they are sapped of their humanity by technology in order to bring vitality to a work of art. However, Kathawala argued that the gadgetry in *Our Breath Concrete* actually reinforces a sense of human vitality. "We are already cyborgs. Our cellphones and our computers have become us," he said. "Living

more of our lives jacked in to a disembodied network, we become brains with vestigial bodies. I believe that art must be practised in the language and the context of our everyday lives. In a world where our relationships are often mediated by technology, art can use technology as a way in." We hope he paused for a breath while typing this explanation.

*Deepanjana Pal*