



It's something that could well have come from Hogwarts, except RanbirKaleka's moving canvases aren't a trick of wizardry: the paintings, rendered in muted shades, are overlaid by video footage so as to look quite magically, alive. It's a distracting dichotomy—the plodding passage of time and the seeming infiniteness of it—that really constitute the visual trickery of these works. Everything else, the illusion of stillness, the sounds of dripping water, the flinching movement, is in fact anything but. It's due to Kaleka's skilled hand, his nimble layering of video on canvas, that the paintings are literally brought to breathing life.

The Delhi-based Kaleka, an established artist of the same generation as NaliniMalani (the two are in fact friends), is curiously little known outside of art circles here. His works, sexually implicit—his most famous video panel features a floating vagina and a cockerel—play on the vagaries of time and space, bringing the viewer into a realm of no real temporal or geographical specificity. Things happen or they don't, and often, even with video reels on a timed-loop, there is no beginning or end.

Here, in his first ever solo in Mumbai and first ever solo of video works in India, the seven pieces gathered from the last ten years offer a curated glimpse of his later works. Two of his most famous works—"Man With Cockerel" and "He Was A Good Man"—are here, as well as four newer works that explore the "grand themes" (love, struggle, death, desire) with an existentialist intensity. In "Cul-de-sac in Taxila", the sparsest work in the show, a white horse flits in and out of the screen, its presence counter-balanced by a seated man with a hammer who sounds an invisible gong every few minutes or so. It's a futile loop of exertion—the striking of the gong heralds nothing—much like the unnerving sound of dripping water, an audio check of passing time that doesn't count down to anything.

It's the same unease that filters through newer work like "Not From Here" an 8ft long panel of a migrant family at a train station. A family of five waits, disembarked by an iron pillared station, their belongings heaped in a pile. Of the new lot, it's "Kettle" that best evokes the abstract constancy of time. A well-worn metal kettle, the kind you see in roadside dhabas, simmers away on a hob, the only constant in a changing backdrop of rural and urban landscapes. From a storage cupboard to a kitchen to a make-shift stove to a rubbish-strewn ground, the kettle is picked up, poured and put back again on an eerily life-like flickering flame, each scene wiped clean by a shadowed hand (Kaleka says he put the hand in because viewers would often wave their hands in front of the projector to try and figure out how the image was being projected). Though not nearly as grand or self-scrutinizing as Kaleka's other works, it's the most magical example of his nifty layering.

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