

LOSE CHARACTER

By Zeenat Nagree

The archetypal figures in curator Nancy Adajania's new show don't have fixed identities says Zeenat Nagree.



In her new exhibition 'Your Name is Different There', which goes on display at Volte this fortnight, curator Nancy Adajania presents a selection of works by multimedia art Sheba Chhachhi, performance artists Sonia Khurana, video artists Ranbir Kaleka and new media art collective CAMP, comprising Shaina Anand, Ashok Sukumaran and Sanjay Bangar, to explore "the displaced, the dislocated and the disoriented". To develop a narrative around the works of these artists, to show an inter-relationship between their practices and to argue that identity is not static, Adajania develops five figures—the protestor, the 'bairagi' or renunciate, the marginal, the witness to violence and the neighbour. The characters manifest themselves in the photographs, videos and installations of the artists.

"These figures are obliged to inhabit a threshold state or liminal condition, not fully able to leave a long history behind, nor yet equipped to embrace the uncertain future that lies ahead," says Adajania.

Adajania places Chhachhi's photographs of women ascetics alongside Khurana's performance of various roles on the street, the pilgrim, the marginal and the abject. In their works, the subjects challenge the roles they play. Khurana's vagabond, who squats across a swish neighbourhood in Delhi, eventually becomes an object of curiosity of a real beggar in 'Tramping'

(2006). The female figure in Chhachhi's 'The Initiation Chronicles' (1998-2001) and 'Subhadra' (1979) don't conform to the view that ascetics are disconnected from worldly concerns. "With Sheba there is a reflection of a complexity of emotions," said Adajania. "It's not just about going into a certain kind of ethereal world. You find in the faces [of the ascetics] emotions of aggression, domination, bonding or complicity."

Further in, Adajania shows Kaleka's video-painting 'Consider', which was commissioned by Chicago's Spertus Museum in remembrance of the Holocaust. In the work, a young girl's hair is being constantly adorned by her mother. No traces of violence appear in her life but it is the soundtrack featuring recollections of Nazi-era hair sorters that points towards the historic genocide.

Adajania challenges the status of the victim, showing that they too can turn into aggressors, as in CAMP's 2009 film 'Al Jaar Qabla Al Daar' (The Neighbour Before the House, 2009). For the work that artists installed surveillance cameras on the rooftops of eight Palestinian families in mixed locality of East Jerusalem. Using the cameras, the families observe their surroundings, manipulate the footage and comment on how the landscape has been shaped by violence and occupation.

In 'Your Name is Different There', Adajania demonstrates that each of the five characters, whose identities and positions are constantly shifting, are to be found everywhere. "In this exhibition I explore a pervasive form of survivor testimony that recurs across societies and historical situations in our global present," she said.