

## CALENDAR

## Making sense of the contemporary

Galleries are gearing up for the season and exhibitions are opening every week. We pick a few must-watches for the art curious

## OUT OF BALANCE

The word "astaticism" suggests instability; the loss of equilibrium. This exhibition will make you want to hold on to the walls: Larger-than-life human faces, limbs, entire bodies, animals and furniture float around you when you visit *Notes on Astaticism*, Praneet Soi's ongoing solo exhibition at the Vadehra Art Gallery.

Soi, who divides his time between Amsterdam and India, is fresh from his participation at the first India Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (4 June-27 November). This exhibition is the reserve of his latest ideas, experiments and projects and includes some of the works he exhibited at the biennale.

Soi is an alumnus of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, the University of California at San Diego and the



Free falling: Praneet Soi's *Juggernaut-3* appears to be floating.

Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. He works in a range of media, including painting, drawing, collage text and audio-visual assemblages.

*Notes on Astaticism* begs for a

visit to Vadehra Art Gallery's third and latest exhibition space (this is the second exhibition since it opened in October). The works are spread over three floors. On the ground floor are

his large-scale drawings, including the spectacular *Juggernaut-3* which has an 8ft-high cobalt blue figure hurtling across the canvas.

On the first floor, among other exhibits, is *Kumartuli Printer-Notes on Labour*, a projection of 75 slides which show a printer at work. This slide show (which was part of the biennale) is a critique of the Western representation of labour. Soi shows the loving but painstaking processes at work as his subject, a printer from Kumartuli, a suburb of north Kolkata, goes around his work. "He defies the condescending view we have of manual labour," says Soi, over the phone from Kolkata. This is labour, but it is also art.

On the top floor is an interactive installation. Soi has put up two mobile "astatic machines", through which the public—take your children

along—can actively participate in a dialogue with the artist. The "machines" are actually slide projectors on wheels. Soi provides a few hundred transparencies that you can place any way you desire under the projectors to create a do it yourself "astatic artwork". Drive the machines around to distort, stretch or magnify the images. There's a wide range of visuals to choose from: The slides go from esoteric human figures to dollar notes to a printout of the cover of the book *Towards a New Architecture* by Le Corbusier.

Be forewarned: You might lose your sense of gravity while walking through these rooms.

*Notes on Astaticism* is on exhibit at the Vadehra Art Gallery, D-53 Defence Colony, New Delhi, till 24 December.

Anindita Ghose



Fight ugliness: Sonia Khurana's *Flower carrier-III*.

## MELANCHOLIC AFTERTASTE

"I relate very strongly to Jeet (Thayil)'s poetry. Especially the manner in which he is able to strike a deep melancholic note, like a *dhrupad* maestro," says curator Nancy Adajania, explaining why the first line of his poem *After* spawned the exhibition, *Your Name Is Different There*.

The group exhibition with artists Sheba Chhachhi, Ranbir Kaleka, Sonia Khurana and CAMP (a triad of artists Shaina Anand, Sanjay Bangar and Ashok Sukumaran) centres around the identity of the displaced; and particularly of those who stand at its threshold. The artworks do not "report" on a global condition of displacement and dislocation. "They are not illustrations, they are probes," Adajania says. She has designed the mise en scene of the exhibition in the form of a chamber of broken echoes, with each project occupying its own space, but ricocheting off one another.

The five key figures are drawn from Thayil's poem: the activist, the *bairagi*, or renunciate, the marginal or the tramp, the one who has witnessed violence, and the neighbour. None of the identities of these survivor

figures are watertight, sometimes merging into each other.

Thus the historical narrative of the Shoah, the Holocaust (Kaleka's *Consider*) is counterpointed with that of the Nakba, the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland by the Jews (CAMP's *Al Jaar Qabla Al Daar/The Neighbour Before the House*). In Khurana's *Tramping*, a tramp-flâneur meets a real beggar; Chhachhi's women ascetics cross paths with Khurana's *Flower carrier*, where the only focus of meditation against the ugliness of the world is a flower.

Adajania says she does not think in binaries. Instead she is interested in a distributed sense of belonging. "These works allow us to experience the fact that displacement and belonging are a ratio, not an either/or," she explains. The ratio changes from moment to moment and place to place. It defines how you live and what you call yourself. Or what others call you.

*Your Name Is Different There* is on exhibit at the Volte Gallery, Colaba, Mumbai, till 5 January.

Gayatri Jayaraman

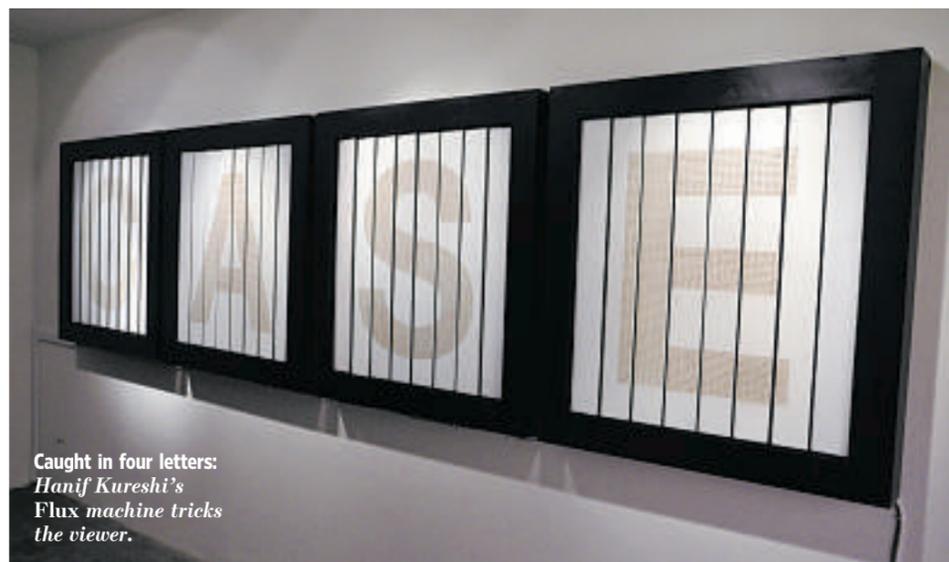
## WITHOUT A WORD

In playing out a lipogram, the French novelist Georges Perec wrote an entire novel, *La Disparition* (1969), without using the letter "e". His protagonist, Anton Vowl, cannot sleep until he discovers a missing link.

It is a similar quandary that *Words: A User's Manual*, a group show curated by Himali Singh Soin, sets out to address. In this brilliantly put together group exhibition, Soin, a writer herself, elevates text from its mundane functionality to become the artwork.

Soin brings together a surprising range of artists, from the Raqs Media Collective, Zuleikha Chaudhari and Samath Banerjee, to young artists such as typographer Hanif Kureshi and Prayas Abhinav, who has been using experimental media arts in his work in engaging ways. Each of the artists responded to Soin's curatorial note to create new work over the last six months.

Kureshi's four-panelled *Flux* machine is constantly changing, tricking the viewer as it does. An array of four-letter words show up, from "cure" to "pose" to "fare", ridding the words and the objects they stand for of any



Caught in four letters: Hanif Kureshi's *Flux* machine tricks the viewer.

meaning. Banerjee's drawings of memories of lost objects, *I Lost My Wedding Ring Behind Harrod's*, is the show's pièce de résistance. He and Soin asked their friends to respond with the memory of a lost object. Twenty-two such written testimonials are on exhibit—from lost cardigans to lost lovers—with Banerjee's illustrations accompanying them. Raqs Media Collective's *The Philosophy of the*

*Namak Haram* makes a silent statement. The installation is a reading room with books filled with the "unwritten word". But the books don't really exist (only a photograph of them does).

The wall texts are an intrinsic part of the exhibition experience. Like for the *Flux* machine, Soin writes: "Your timing is perfect: everything is about to change..."

Perec watches over the exhibition like a guardian

angel—with his novel *Life: A User's Manual* on display. The madcap novelist applied a list of constraints to try and contain life within the novel form. And Soin takes her clues from him.

*Words: A User's Manual* will be on exhibit at Exhibit 320, Lado Sarai, New Delhi, till 24 December.

Anindita Ghose



Story building: Sudarshan Shetty's installations rest on fictive texts.

## LETTERS ON THE FLOOR

Sudarshan Shetty's latest solo exhibition at GallerySKE, *Listen Outside This House*, is constructed around words too. Written by Shetty, the fictive texts are rooted in his own past and context. These pithy narratives are the starting point from where he begins an evocation of objects. There are eight installations on exhibit. There is, for instance, a replica of a dilapidated monument carved in wood which is on the verge of collapse, with words written on its floor. Another installation is a

photographic slide show in which the artist looks for words in the city, and yet another has passages culled from the Ramayan and Mahabharat. Though inherently personal, the writing is in third person and is written, almost purposefully, from a distance.

*Listen Outside This House* will be on exhibit at GallerySKE, Langford Town, Bangalore, from 19 December-28 January.

Anindita Ghose

## CONFESSION BOX

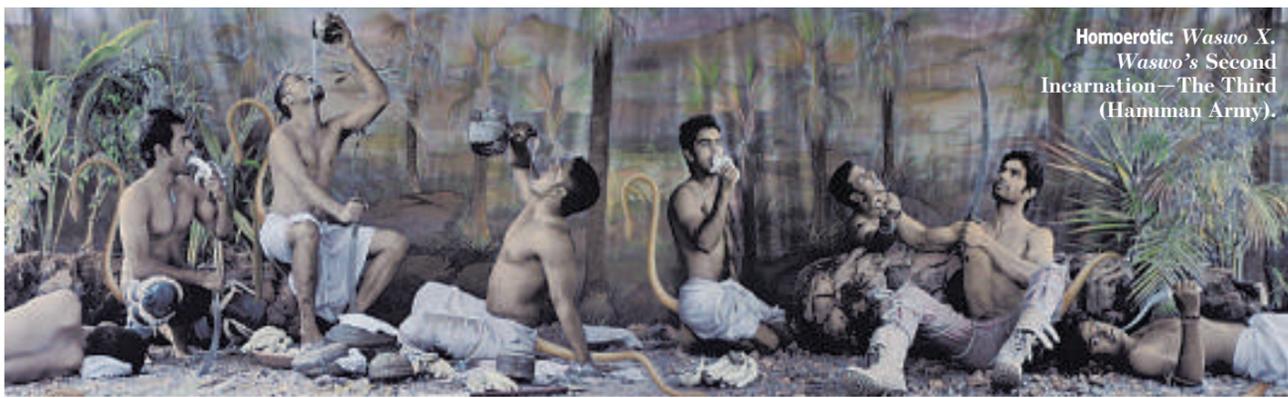
American photographer Waswo X. Waswo's quirky exhibition, *Confessions of an Evil Orientalist*, walks between personal revelation and inspired fantasy, asking who is the "outsider" and who "belongs".

The 35 artworks on exhibit are starkly homoerotic. Images of a buff Hanuman run throughout, standing in for male aggression and the eroticization of "the Other". The centrepiece is a set of photographs with a list of 101

heartfelt "confessions" (of an Orientalist). Waswo currently lives in Udaipur, Rajasthan, and has collaborated with photo colourist Rajesh Soni and miniaturist R. Vijay to produce these striking paintings and photographs.

*Confessions of an Evil Orientalist* will be on exhibit till 12 January at Gallery Espace, New Friends Colony, New Delhi.

Anindita Ghose



Homoerotic: Waswo X. Waswo's *Second Incarnation—The Third (Hanuman Army)*.