

Indian Highway – Contemporary Indian Video Art

Hafnarhús, Galleries A, B, & C

Opening September 9th 2010Closing October 17th, 2010**INDIAN HIGHWAY**

The overall theme of the exhibition, Indian Highway, involves reflections on the road's significance for movement, development, and migration, the road as the crucial link between town and country. The title also refers to technology, to the information superhighway that has made a central contribution to India's economic boom—and to the artistic development evident in India over the course of recent decades. The works presented at the exhibition address global issues such as democracy, the environment, religion, race, gender, and class.

The first Indian Highway exhibition opened at the Serpentine Gallery in London at the end of 2008, and then in 2009 at Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo. The curators of the exhibition, Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, directors at Serpentine Gallery, and Gunnar B. Kvaran, director of Astrup Fearnley Museum, selected artists who have already made an impact on the international art scene alongside artists that are less familiar to Western audiences. They intend the exhibition to provide insights into a vibrant generation of artists who work across established boundaries within artistic media, spanning the range from painting, photography, and sculpture to installation, online art, and video. The curators also intend the exhibition to travel to other cities, not necessary as the original Indian Highway, but as a collaborative effort with each hosting museum. Currently, a modified version of Indian Highway is showing at Herning Museum of Contemporary Art (closing September 12, 2010.) After its run in Herning, the exhibition will tour, with the range of destinations including Delhi, India.

INDIAN HIGHWAY — Contemporary Indian Video Art

Opening on September 9, 2010 Indian Highway at the Reykjavík Art Museum will focus on video works that were created by 24 contemporary artists and one artist group. In fact, the curators of the exhibition selected ten artists and invited the artist group and one of the artists to be curators of "exhibition within the exhibition," thus spicing the video exhibition with insider's views and opinions about today's India.

Featuring artists

- Ayisha Abraham
- Ravi Agarwal
- Shilpa Gupta
- Subodh Gupta
- Abhishek Hazra
- Amar Kanwar
- Raqs Media Collective
- Tejal Shah
- Kiran Subbaiah
- Ashok Sukumaran

Indian Highway – Contemporary Indian Video Art

Hafnarhús, Galleries A, B, & C

Opening September 9th 2010

Closing October 17th, 2010

“Exhibition within the exhibition”

TRANSFORMATIONS by Shilpa Gupta, artist-curator

- Nikhil Chopra
- Baptist Coelho
- Sunil Gupta
- Tushar Joag
- Sonia Khurana
- Nalini Malani
- Kiran Subbaiah
- Vivan Sundaram

STEPS AWAY FROM OBLIVION by Raqs Media Collective, artist-curator

- Debkamal Ganguly
- Ruchir Joshi
- Kavita Pai / Hansa Thapliyal
- MR Rajan Raghavan
- Priya Sen
- Raqs Media Collective
- Surabhi Sharma (with Siddharth Gautam Singh)
- Vipin Vijay



Raqs Media Collective describes the project as follows:

‘We have invited documentarists whose work – over the last two decades – has produced images that intimate and anticipate transformations that are fundamental to the time we inhabit, yet often lie just below the surface of mainstream visibility. Our invitation asks them to revisit these images and produce a “landscape” that provides a unique vantage point from which to think through the present conditions of turbulent anxiety, visceral conflict and unprecedented opportunity. The structure to house these contributions is designed with Hirsch and Müller. It is designed to create a provisionally immersive environment that expresses the state of being “between” things.’

Kavita Pai & Hansa Thapliyal
Yi As Akh Padshah Bai/There Was A Queen
© 2008 Kavita Pai and Hansa Thapliyal
Vipin Vijay

Press contact: Soffía Karlsdóttir, PR and Communications Manager
Office 590-1202; Mobile 820-1202; E-mail: soffia.karlsdottir@reykjavik.is

Indian Highway – Contemporary Indian Video Art

Hafnarhús, Galleries A, B, & C

Opening September 9th 2010Closing October 17th, 2010**INDIAN HIGHWAY — Contemporary Indian Video Art****The Artists (selection)—****Ayisha Abraham**

Bangalore-based artist Ayisha Abraham (born 1963) creates experimental films that examine narratives of identity, memory and history, representing their inherent complexities by intercutting dislocated images and sounds. Her film *One Way*, 2007, profiled the life of a Nepali immigrant working as a security guard in her home city, the busy hub of India's high-tech trade.

Ravi Agarwal

Ravi Agarwal (born 1958) combines social documentary and environmental activism in his films and photography. He focuses particularly on the marginalised sectors of society within New Delhi's rapidly developing landscape using images of the street, people at work and in labour. More recently, the artist has examined his personal relationship to the environment, such as in the series *Immersion. Emergence – 24 Images*, 2007, where he explores his relationship to New Delhi's Yamuna River by recording himself wrapped in a shroud by the riverbank.

Shilpa Gupta

Shilpa Gupta (born 1976) uses digital media in the form of online art projects and video environments fused with sculptural and photographic elements. Gupta often invites the participation of viewers in her work, using interactive technology to examine themes such as consumer culture, desire, border and territory vis a vis the internal experience of 'difference'.

Subodh Gupta

Subodh Gupta (born 1964) uses found objects that are recognisable icons of everyday Indian life – stainless-steel kitchenware, bicycles, scooters and taxis – and elevates their status to art works. Working across a full range of media, he draws on his own experience of cultural dislocation, through migration from rural to urban areas, and highlights the threat to the traditional way of life resulting from India's rapid modernisation.

Raqs Media Collective

Raqs Media Collective, formed in 1992, comprises Jeebesh Bagchi (born 1965), Monica Narula (born 1969) and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (born 1968). Their work locates them on the intersections of

Indian Highway – Contemporary Indian Video Art

Hafnarhús, Galleries A, B, & C

Opening September 9th 2010Closing October 17th, 2010

.....

contemporary art, historical enquiry, philosophical speculation, research and theory, often taking the form of installations, online and offline media objects, performances and encounters. The Collective have exhibited widely in international exhibitions and recently curated *The Rest of Now* and co-curated *Scenarios at Manifesta 7*, 2008.

Tejal Shah

Tejal Shah (born 1979) works in video, photography and performance. Her work is primarily concerned with issues of gender, sexuality, class and politics, such as the video *I Love My India*, 2003, which focuses on the ignorance and lack of understanding of the genocide against the Muslim minority in Gujarat in 2002. In the video installation *What Are You?*, 2006, the artist critically deals with historical and social constructs of gender and focuses on India's Hijra (transgender) community.

Kiran Subbaiah

Formally trained as a sculptor, Kiran Subbaiah (born 1971) works in a range of media, including assemblage, video and internet art. A common approach of his practice is the subverting the form and function of objects, through which he questions the relationship between use and value, highlighting contradictions inherent in everyday life. Irony, deadpan humour and a crude aesthetic provide Subbaiah with simple binaries - functional/defunct, action/reaction and cause/effect to tease out his ideas and observations.



Kiran Subbaiah
Flight Rehearsals 2003
DVD
4:40 minutes
© 2008 Kiran Subbaiah

Indian Highway – Contemporary Indian Video Art

Hafnarhús, Galleries A, B, & C

Opening September 9th 2010

Closing October 17th, 2010

.....

Ashok Sukumaran

Ashok Sukumaran (born 1974) and Shaina Anand (born 1975), an architect and a film-maker are co-founders of CAMP, a collaborative venture linking independent artistic research and software-based activities at 'infrastructural scales' in Mumbai. CAMP is a continuously changing acronym, thereby repopulating the remit of its own activities. Together and with others, the artists examine the forces between individuals, communities and technologies, producing inventive projects with media such as electricity, cable TV, CCTV, film and the internet.

Steps Away from Oblivion
Curated by Raqs Media Collective

As our contribution to *Indian Highway*, we curated *Steps Away From Oblivion*, a circuit of eight videos, which includes a new work of our own. These videos invoke eight different rhythms of transformation and repose in the landscape of India today. Much of the current discussion about India's emergence as a global power seems to fall into an easy intoxication with the promise of wealth, influence and power – a heady oblivion where questions are forgotten. The works in this show are assembled as moves made in the course of steering away from this vacuum.

Thinking back over independent documentary films from the last 15 years – the period of India's increasingly effulgent ascent onto the bandstand of global attention – we were struck by a number of images that seemed to look askance at the parade of contemporary pomp and circumstance, and whose fascination and relevance seemed only to have increased over time. In *Steps Away From Oblivion*, we asked the film-makers who authored these images to revisit this material – to re-edit or remix, or to shoot it again – in order to see what new resonances might emerge today.

Our own video presents the wandering figures of a Yaksha and a Yakshi, mythic male and female guardians of treasure and keepers of riddles in different Indic traditions. The Yaksha and the Yakshi provide a crepuscular subjectivity to the entire show, their gaze passing softly over the landscape we live in.

Raqs Media Collective
(Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi and Shuddhabrata Sengupta), 2008

TRANSFORMATIONS

Curated by artist/curator
Shilpa Gupta

Indian Highway pioneers a radical model of curating, in which curators are invited to develop a "show within the show". This brings in views of Indian art from the inside and allowing the exhibition to grow and develop in new and unexpected ways.

Text by Shilpa Gupta

When I first embarked on the video project *TRANSFORMATIONS* for the *Indian Highway* exhibition at HEART, I had no overall theme in mind. Having selected and reviewed over a hundred video works I was even against assigning an overarching theme and was considering simply calling the project *Just Great Video Works!* Then, however, one word suddenly kept appearing in my mind: *TRANSFORMATIONS*; a concept in which I personally have a keen interest. It can take the form of transformations of hope, memory, images, experiences, and of geography and time. I believe that transformations allow us to gain a better understanding of the world.

Tushar Joag

Jataka Trilogy, 2004

06:33 min

The title of this work is a reference to the Jataka tales, folklore literature native to India. Tushar Joag reinterprets these tales while taking a starting point in the urban middle classes and their deeply ingrained apathy and inertia. The work takes a satirical look at different social classes and suggests that art might be responsible for maintaining a certain cultural continuity.

Vivan Sundaram

The Brief Ascension of Marian Hussain,

2005

02:40 min

On top of a pile of garbage a teenage boy named Marian Hussain has found a filthy place to rest. Suddenly he rises from his state of repose and begins to fly up into the air. The scene in which the boy appears to fly and then plummet is repeated over and over. This, in combination with the title of the video work, appears to be a metaphor describing the immigrants from rural areas who, hoping for a brighter future, move to big cities like Delhi where they nevertheless end up in a position on the absolute bottom rungs of society – in the midst of the city's garbage. The work offers a brief hope of change and transcendence.

Nalini Malani

Unity in Diversity, 2003

07:00 min

The video work is based on the allegorical late 19th century painting *Galaxy of Musicians* by Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma. The work shows eleven musicians - all of them women - dressed in various costumes, thereby indicating unity in the midst of India's great variety. The work contrasts this sense of unity with subsequent stories of growing fascism and the genocide in Gujarat in 2002; events that shook India's democratic roots and left the country in a state of chaos and despair.

India is presented as a visual fairytale where all parts of the nation appear to be in a state of harmony, but nevertheless the country can explode in a bloodbath.

Sunil Gupta

Love Undetectable #12, #11, #13, 2009

08:37min

This video work by Sunil Gupta consists of three videos, all of which address universal emotions such as love, desire, and distance. The works recounts a very personal and politically charged narrative which takes its point of departure in the fact that Gupta was diagnosed with HIV back in 1995. The artist depicts experiences of love versus the complex dark side of homosexuality and HIV.

Baptist Coelho

Corporal Dis(Connect) - Standard Mode & Intoxicated Mode #1, 2007

01:09 min

The artist Baptist Coelho carries out a controlled performative act by attempting to bring together his right and left hands in a recurring rhythm. But every time he tries to fold his hands they suddenly start battling each other. Thus, an ordinary, standard gesture becomes imbued with a strange unpredictability. The video work explores how body and mind both interpret and construct habitual patterns and rhythms within the realms of the predictable; *Standard Mode* versus the unpredictable and uncontrollable *Intoxicated Mode*.

Kiran Subbaiah

Hello... I am, 1999

07:00 min

Now I See It, 1999

01:37 min

The two video works by Kiran Subbaiah generate a story about perception and how images and reality are created. The works represent a response to how we have begun living lives that are increasingly mediated through electronic media. The works introduce new nuances to our view of the video camera and the potential of that media. At the same time the artist challenges the spectator's perception of reality by making the following direct claim: "Hello, I am not Kiran Subbaiah. I am not

even a person whose name is Kiran Subbaiah".

Sonia Khurana

Sleep, 2006

09:46 min

In the video work Sonia Khurana encourages the video camera and its hidden operator to film her just at the moment when Khurana is about to fall to sleep. *Sleep* explores the state of gliding into an unconscious realm of freely flowing thoughts and dreams. The unseen camera operator speaks English with a French accent, a trait which conjures up thoughts of a range of places, of migration, and of appropriated culture. Towards the end of the work the camera operator mentions the word "voyeurism", the act of clandestinely observing other people; the artist, half asleep, responds with a wry half-smile.

Nikhil Chopra

Yog Raj Chitrakar, 2008

01:07min

Nikhil Chopra adopts the character of Yog Raj Chitrakar. Through this alter ego Chopra can act as a fictitious Victorian traveller and as a spokesman from the turn of the century. While in character as Yog Raj Chitrakar, Chopra erected a tent in Kensington Garden in London in 2008. The space constituted as an outdoor refuge. The tent and all the props and costumes used for his performance remain and are exhibited at the *Indian Highway* exhibition at HEART.

Chopra's work addresses how art is always transported across geographical boundaries – and in the last ten years this movement has gone more towards the West than ever before.

Shilpa Gupta, 2010