



Room Without a Window

India Art Fair 2012

Prajakta Potnis

Solo Project | Booth : S - 4



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January 25 - 29, 2012



Overheads, ceiling fan and copperplates, 2012

### Room Without a Window on Prajakta Potnis' solo

Fixtures of a bare room, the lights, wires, wall sockets, cracks, water stains, floor tiles, window frames, fans, or more often, only their empty hooks in the center of ceilings - typically what one stops noticing once furniture enters a room, are the elements the artist chooses to paint in minute architectural detail, as containers of volume, as a means of describing a single life. In her present exhibition, Prajakta Potnis returns to themes of her early works, made while at the Sir JJ School of Art where she was a student from 1995 to 2002. In those works, which she describes as grey, or colourless, she began to think that colour was a distraction; as was the figurative - turning instead to painting the still-life. She has said about this turn, "the inclusion of a figure immediately starts narrating, the object says things in a more mysterious way."

The curtain is the one feature of a room that the artist has most made her own over successive configurations of association. In her works, the curtain may be placed floating at the height of the window, only to turn, during the action of painting, or rendering, into something else - an asbestos roof, where the folds take the solid curves of corrugated sheets. Adding frills along the edging of a room's otherwise static walls, the walls themselves come to appear soft, turn fabric-like, like curtains.

Many of the artist's installations have arisen from actualising earlier paintings and drawings, and thereby stumbling into another range of association. In actual rooms, she has added curtain frills to the skirting of long lengths of wall, optically melting their solid surfaces into folds. Or the frills placed along walls with ornamental molding on white walls come to resemble the outline of cake icing. Equally a single curtain engulfs a wall in certain works, to look like the elaborate curtains of the theater.

The image of the curtain is heavy with personal reference. Two influences come together most potently in these present works: the theatre productions she remembers watching while growing up, Marathi natakas, with rich ornamental theatre curtains and realistic sets; and an early and emphatic passion for the work of historical surrealism, as in the work of Rene Magritte, which has remnants still in the calm surfaces of the artist's work, so quietly able to capture fluid horrors. The theatre of the surrealists, was in marked difference to the sets of the Marathi theatre productions which she so frequently watched. The curtain, with its inherent sense of mystery, opens out into boxes of space that are not always equally so.

The plays were often family dramas, or comedies, with realistic, mundane sets, that employed nothing of the existential, expressionistic or surreal possibilities of the stage, and relied far too heavily on imitative sets of trapped domestic, private, cardboard lives: “the box-set, the cardboard behind the paint, I could almost hear, would fill me with a quiet disgust” – a significantly synesthetic and terrifying series of associations.

Often referencing the studio, or rooms she has known, in her mother’s house, that are no longer locatable, except in the memory of these real spaces, the clarity of memory extends to something that takes place within the fantasy of the painting, through a process of absorbed woolgathering. In her works, rooms become cubes, where the viewer takes the place of the fourth wall. But equally, small refrigerator shelves containing vegetables like cauliflowers, or grapes, have been photographed to resemble large squarish rooms containing fibrous clouds, or alien organic growths. In this suit, clouds, formed through a process of layering eight to nine layers of clear unbroken paint, that is nonetheless, raised out of the rest of the painting, break up the grid of the rooms and open up the question of space, whether these boxes are rooms at all?

These cuboid rooms also bear reference to the sceneries of the first handpainted photographs, often in the same shade of bluish-grey; a reference to the absurdist interior rooms of the Indian abstractionist Prabhakar Barwe, or the pale bluey-grey of those early photographic portraits. The backgrounds – as with the theatre sets – would be entirely painted over, into a fake pastel setting. The artist began a process of photographing objects – an act she considered deathly, robbing the object of all its associative density, and then drawing, painting, and rendering them, in great detail, to let the object reveal itself.

All her present work, finds interiors that mirror the box-sets of theatrical realism. In theatrical convention, the box-set implies the niceties of middle and upper-class bourgeois lives – and the artist’s dense psychological instinct, finds this an apt setting for her surreal readings of objects – grass that grows out of the floor, or designs on tiles, that form tiny mounds of growth, a sculpture of a long ceiling fan, which she associates with the body whose blades seem to have grown soft, as though melted with heat, into folds like cloth, or skin. In another, a hole in the wall, is a keyhole, or an Indian urinal. Whether a social reference from the everyday, or an art historical take-off on Marcel Duchamp, the artist’s associations are as constructed and metaphoric as they are often left arbitrary and unelaborated. This intuitive manner of arriving at associations has to do with a kind of psychological interest, and woolgathering. It is ultimately an extreme capacity within the artist, for affect, and this capacity is translated and transferred to the viewer of her work.



Knitting Sleep, cotton mosquito net, thread, needles, 36” x 72”, 2012



Holding on to the Ceiling, acrylic and emulsion on arches archival paper (850 gms), 22" x 30", 2011

Over the years, and returning to paint these grey interiors, small changes in the view from the window, are subtly discussed by the artist, as the city changes, anxious about how the stresses from the outside enter and comes to press upon the individual. Densely associative psychological elements are contained in small minute objects – the cardboard fragility of stability. The installation knitting sleep about unraveled time, and the labour of weaving, has associations of disturbed dreaming, of memories of bedwetting - something of the body's reaction that is beyond control, fibrous growths, of things that weave and grow within one, dense cocoons, that become traps. The room's balanced stability in which nothing seems to happen, are the sites of drama and action of a psychological density. The breakdown of an individual, a psychological ripping at the seams, with its quiet everyday horror – a sound of tearing the artist can hear, and tries to extinguish with her paintings.

Zasha Colah

Zasha Colah is interested in cultural sovereignty and projects that encourage collaborative art practice. She co-founded blackrice in 2008 in Nagaland, and the Clark House Initiative in Bombay in 2010, after studying art history at Oxford university and curatorial studies at the RCA, London. She was the curator of modern Indian art at the Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation at the CSMVS museum (2008 to 2011), and was head of Public Programs at the National Gallery of Modern Art (2004-2005) in Mumbai. Her recent curated project was 'Against AFSPA' at the NGMA, Mumbai.



The Outside, acrylic and emulsion on arches archival paper (850 gms), 22" x 30", 2011



Room without a view, acrylic and emulsion on arches archival paper (850 gms), 22" x 30", 2011



Cloudburst, acrylic and emulsion on arches archival paper (850 gms), 22" x 30", 2012



## PRAJAKTA POTINS

1980 Born in India.

## EDUCATION

M.F.A. (Painting) Sir J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai.

B.F.A. (Painting) Sir J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai.

Film Appreciation Course Film Television & Institute of India (FTII), National film archive India (NFAI) Law College Road, Pune.



## RESIDENCIES SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

2011 West Heavens Artist Dispatch - Residency in Shanghai.

2010 Sanskriti Award for Arts, Sanskriti Pratisthan

2003-2004 Inlaks fine arts award

Feb.2001-Feb.2003 Scholarship for Young Artist, Human Resource development, Department of Culture, Govt. of India

## MUSEUM SHOWS

2012 Indian Highway, curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, China.

2011 Generation in Transition New Art from India, curated by Magda Kardasz at Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland.

2011 Generation in Transition New Art from India, curated by Magda Kardasz at Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania.

2011 Home Spun, curated by Girish Shahane at Devi Art Foundation.

2011 Indian Highway, curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran at MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome.

2011 Indian Highway, curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran at Lyon Museum of Contemporary Art, France.

2010 Under the Banyan Tree – India Awakens, The Essl Museum of Contemporary Art, Austria.

2010 On the Road to the Next Milestone, part of the Exhibition 'Indian Highway', at Herning Museum of Contemporary Art (HEART), Herning, Denmark

2009 - 2010 Indian Highway, curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran at Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway.

## SOLO SHOWS

2008 Porous Walls, at The Guild, Mumbai.

2008 membranes and margins, Gallery em, Seoul, Korea.

2006 Walls- in- between, venue Kitab Mahal, The Guild, Mumbai.

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FAIRS

2012 VIP Art Fair by The Guild

2012 Room Without a Window - solo at India Art Fair by The Guild, Mumbai

2011 Art Dubai by The Guild, Mumbai

2011 India Art Summit by The Guild, Mumbai

2010 Art Paris +Guests, Paris by The Guild, Mumbai

2009 India Art Summit, New Delhi, India by The Guild, Mumbai

2009 ARCOMadrid, Spain by The Guild, Mumbai

2008 Dubai Art Fair by Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

2007 Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey by The Guild, Mumbai

2007 Singapore Art Fair - 'Membranes and Margins - II', by The Guild, Mumbai

## SELECTED PARTICIPATIONS

2012 Land of mine, a public art intervention across the city of Mumbai in collaboration with Art Oxygen, Mohile Parikh Centre and Studio X.

2011 And of gods and goddesses, Cinema, Cricket – The New Cultural Icons of India curated by Arshiya Lokandwala for The RPG Foundation at The Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.

2011 EXCRESCENCE, curated by Maya Kovskaya, The Guild, Mumbai

2011 Right To Dissent an initiative by Tushar Joag in collaboration with the Committee for the Release of Binayak Sen, Mohile Parikh Center - The Contemporary & Clark House

2011 Fluid City, a public art intervention across the city of Mumbai in collaboration with Art Oxygen, Mohile Parikh Centre and Studio X

2011 In you is the illusion each day, curated by Maya Kovskaya at Latitude 28, New Delhi.

2010 NINE: Her Magic Square, curated by Veerangan Solanki at The Viewing Room, Mumbai

2010 A. SYCO, The Viewing Room, Mumbai

2010 The Evolution of the Species, Institute of Contemporary Indian Art (ICIA), Mumbai

2010 Legacy: A-vanguard, curated by Girish Shahane, Gallery Threshold, New Delhi

2010 Punctum II: A Critical Look at Landscape in South Asian Photography, curated by Arshia Lohandwala, Lakeeren, Mumbai

2009-10 Evidentia, Gallery Sumukha, Bangalore

2009 Sez Who, a collaborative project on the special economic zones in and around Mumbai, Experimenter, Kolkata and Khoj Delhi.

2009 Sculpture, The Guild, Mumbai

2009 Living of the Grid, curated by Meera Menezes, Anant Art Centre, New Delhi

2009 Recycled, curated by Bhavan Kakar, at Bose Pacia, Kolkata

2009 Re-claim/ Re-cite/ Re-cycle, curated by Bhavna Kakar, Latitude 28, New Delhi.

2009 The Landscape of Where, curated by Nancy Adajania, Gallery Mirchandani and Steinruecke, Mumbai.

2009 Multitudes, Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan, Bangalore in collaboration with Zen Studio Gallery and Artflute.com

2009 Home, curated by Anupa Mehta and Shrine Empire Gallery at Travancore Art Gallery, New Delhi.

2009 Material Texts, curated by Meean Vari and Arvind Lodya at Kashi Art Gallery, Kochi

2008 Everything 2008: 12 Artists from India, Willem Baars Projects, Amsterdam

2008 Moscow to Mumbai, Eugene Gallery, Seoul

2008 The Sakshi Show, Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai

2007 III/III – Here and Now: Young Voices from India, Grosvenor Vadehra, London

2007 Art concerns, online gallery

2007 Soft Spoken curated by Bose Krishnamachari, The Bombay art gallery, Mumbai.

2007 Reading Paint, Gallery Soulflower, Bangkok.

2007 Some Blind Alleys, Anant art gallery, New Delhi.

2007 Here There Now, curated by Brian Curtin, Gallery Soulflower, Bangkok.

2007 Urban Similes, curated by Shubhalaxmi, Project 88, Mumbai

2007 Kala Ghoda Festival, by The Guild, Mumbai

2006 paper flute, The Espace gallery, Delhi

2006 Myrrh, curated by Anupa Mehta and Geetu Hinduja, the Tao art gallery, Mumbai.

2005 Anticipation, galerie mirchandani+steinruecke, Jehangir art gallery, Museum Gallery, Mumbai

2005 Change of address, The Guild, Mumbai

2005 Khoj International artist workshop, Mumbai.

2004 Bombay \*17, curated by Bose Krishnamchari, Bombay Art Gallery, Mumbai and Kashi Art Gallery, Cochin.

2004 Generation I, Saffron art and The Guild, Mumbai.

2003 Studio The Guild, The Guild, Mumbai.

2002 Heat, curated by Mrinal Kulkarni and Johnny ML, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

2002 Words and Images', curated by Girish Shahane and The Guild, Mumbai at the National Gallery of Art, Mumbai.

2000 Stepping Out, The Guild, Mumbai

#### PUBLICATIONS

2010 **The Khoj Book of Indian Contemporary Art:** 1997-2007, edited by Pooja Sood. Published by HarperCollins India Original

2010 **I'm Not There: New Art from Asia**, edited by Cecilia Alemani. Published by The Gwangju Biennale Foundation

2009 **Featured in Younger Than Jesus:** Artist Directory introduces over 500 of the best artists under thirty-three years of age from around the world, Edited by Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, and Laura Hoptman and assembled by a worldwide team of curators, writers, teachers, critics and artists. Published by New Museum and Phaidon Press.

2006 **Walls in Between**, edited by Nancy Adajania. Published by The Guild

**The Guild**  
*Art Gallery*

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