



Sophie Ernst: HOME



Sophie Ernst biography

Sophie Ernst was born in Munich, Germany in 1972 and grew up in the Netherlands. She trained as an industrial mechanic at BMW before graduating from the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam in 2000. She was Assistant Professor at the School of Visual Arts, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan for several years and is currently a doctoral candidate at Leiden University, The Netherlands.

Ernst's work explores themes of memory, ideal places and cultural relativity through video and installation work. Her long-term project *HOME* investigates the notion of an 'ideal place' that lives as a memory from the recent or more distant past. In the first stage of this project in 2006, she explored how Indians and Pakistanis remembered the physical spaces they had left behind during the Partition of 1947. For her work in the Sharjah Biennial, Ernst focused on the architectural memories of Palestinians in Ramallah. In 2007 she was selected for 'Best of Discovery' at ShContemporary, Shanghai. *HOME* received the Golden Cube Award for best installation at the 2009 Kassel Documentary and Video Festival.

Ernst has exhibited in the group show *Lines of Control* at the Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, USA (2011) and together with researcher Taha Mehmood, has exhibited *Presence of an absence* in Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, Netherlands (2011). Solo exhibitions include Babush Project Space, Berlin (2009) and Abguss Sammlung Antiker Plastik, Berlin (2005), and group presentations at the Sharjah Biennial (2009), the Royal Geographical Society, London (2008), Pakistan Pavilion, Dubai (2008), National Art Gallery, Islamabad (2007) and Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi (2004).

Sophie Ernst: *HOME* at YSP 17 March – 1 July 2012

HOME considers ideas of home, memory and ideal space through conversations with people forced to leave their homes due to political upheavals, such as the Partition of India in 1947. Ernst creates models of houses based on the memories of those who lived there, and projects onto these the hands of the person describing their memories of that home. Ernst combines film and object in order to explore the sculptural possibilities of both: how to extend projection into three dimensions and how to give life to sculpture. She is also interested in the ways memories are formed and shaped, often in relation to objects and their associations.

HOME at YSP shares the stories of six people through a film and five installations. They reveal the human repercussions of global political events, often directly or indirectly a result of colonialism, and whose continued effects are still felt. During the exhibition Sophie Ernst will develop a new work with the YSP 'Shared Horizon' group of young people seeking asylum.

The exhibition is sponsored by The Mondriaan Foundation with support from the Dutch Embassy in London. The *HOME* project is made possible by the support of Green Cardamom, Sharjah Foundation and the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture. Related YSP programme enabled by the Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2002 *Overtures_Gesellschaftsspiel*, Gedok, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2003 Aaj, Rothas II Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2004 *LOVEDOLLS*, Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke, München, Germany
Aaj, Rothas II Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2005 *LOVEDOLLS*, Abguss Sammlung Antiker Plastik, Berlin, Germany
- 2007 *Paradise Now*, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, India
- 2009 *HOME*, Zarina, Babusch, Berlin, Germany
- 2011 *Presence of an absence* in Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, Netherlands
- 2012 *HOME*, Bothy Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1998 *eXamen*, de Fabriek, Eindhoven, Netherlands
- 1999 *From Zero to One*, Hedah, Kunstvlaai, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Lightwalking, de Lichtfabriek, Haarlem, Netherlands
- 2000 *SmokkelSchmuggelSmuggle*, Stichting Smokkel, Kunstverein, Aachen, Germany
EXPO 2000, world exhibition, WWPD, Hannover, Germany
- 2001 *2001: A Public Space Odyssey*, Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2002 *Touching from a Distance*, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland
Tussenkleur-Zwischenfarbe, Gallerie 12elf, Colone, Germany
- 2004 *Along the X-Axis - video art from India and Pakistan*, Apeejay Media Gallery,
New Delhi, India
Dermiaan, Nehr Ghar Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2005 *Sirf Tum*, Rothas II, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2006 *Places Real and Imagined*, Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
Flights of Fancy, Royat Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
Artists Portrait, Rothas II Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan

- 2007 *Best of Discovery*, ShContemporary, Shanghai, China
Politics of Fear, Albion Gallery, London, UK
ArtProjects, DIFC, Gulf Art Fair, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Re-forming Landscape, National Art Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan
Love, National Gallery of Art, Islamabad, Pakistan
Shanaakht: The Identity Project, Arts Council, Karachi, Pakistan
- 2008 *The Punjab: Moving Journeys*, Royal Geographical Society, London, UK
Emerging Discourse, Bodhi Art Gallery, New York, USA
Ausstellung zum Marler Video-Installations-Preis, Marl, Germany
Desperately Seeking Paradise, Pakistan Pavilion, Art Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 2009 *Monitoring*, Dokfest, Kassel, Germany
Sharjah Biennial 9, Provisions, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
How Nations are Made, Cartwright Hall, Bradford, Manor House, Ilkley, UK
Lines of Control, VM gallery, Karachi, Pakistan
Lines of Control, Green Cardamom, London, UK
- 2010 *Memento*, 401 Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
- 2012 *Lines of Control*, Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, USA
HOME opens at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK

Architecture of memory: *HOME* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Helen Pheby PhD
Curator

I encountered *HOME* by Sophie Ernst at the Sharjah Biennial in 2009 whilst on a cultural exchange in the region, having just left Dubai and before travelling to Iraqi Kurdistan. I was immediately drawn out of sculptural interest, to the way Ernst approaches video as a three-dimensional medium and animates form. I then became absorbed by its complexity as it is a work layered with meaning.

The desire to give life and movement to sculpture runs throughout the art form's history,¹ famously in the story of Pygmalion, and is an end goal achieved to some extent through the "conjunction of sculpture and animation as expressed in video", in the view of Dr Penelope Curtis.² Ernst's use of video and projection continues a long tradition of artists adapting technology as media. In the UK the Independent Group of artists, architects and theorists are acknowledged as pioneers of the creative application of new technology, demonstrated in their 1956 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition, "*This is Tomorrow*". The *Bauhaus*-inspired Basic Design teaching courses founded in the UK in the 1950s encouraged the exploration of new media in art education,³ while the inclusion of the moving image in installation has been widely applied since Wolf Vostell incorporated a TV set in *Theatre is on the Street* (1958) and Robert Whitman combined structure and projection in *Small Cannon* (1960). Tony Oursler took advantage of smaller and more discreet projectors in 1992 to give personality to the inanimate in *The Watching* at Documenta IX.

Ernst describes herself as a sculptor first and foremost: "This so-called video art is a kind of sculpting, really – working with time and space, light and experience. *HOME* in a way is an experiment with how one can sculpt these elements."⁴ Additionally her choice of media and references to architecture are loaded with cultural meaning. There are interesting correlations between *HOME* and Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections onto buildings, in which he explores the politics not only of individual structures but also of the built environment as a whole and its exclusion of the homeless. Manuel J. Borja-Villel traces the political and cultural relevance of Wodiczko's practice, with particular respect to the museum: "Based upon idealistic and romantic conceptions, many of modernity's postulates aimed at reaching utopia. This was especially so in the case of a good number of modern architects and city planners. There is no more perfect incarnation of a utopian space than the museum, where an undetermined number of objects are grouped together according to an internal logic that tends to blur any historical or geographical differences."⁵

Although shown in a gallery setting, *HOME* is similarly bound within the associations of architecture and parallels Wodiczko's portrayal of the homeless as acephalous⁶, or headless, and anonymous, as the interviewees' hands alone animate recollections of their former home. Ernst's construction of pure white, minimalist architectural models knowingly reflects the modernist ideals of a constructed utopia. As in life, these models become transformed through experience, revealing the inhabitants' lives within their walls; the structures are not merely exercises in form but the architecture of memory made manifest, with its inherent inconsistencies and imperfections. Ernst's models are the fabrication of the subjective, most likely inaccurate, but are symbolic of that person's memory of being at home in that place, which is an important distinction from remembering a place.

During the 2011 Jaume Plensa exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP), visitors were invited to document their perception of "home", using just three words. Overwhelmingly the responses were abstract rather than related to the fabric, and were dominated by ideas of safety, sanctuary, familiarity, comfort, family and security.⁷ I experienced *HOME* as a guest in an unfamiliar country and culture and, although my travelling was the result of opportunities gratefully received and with the security of a home to return to, I sensed the void that lies beyond each new step on an irreversible journey.

Besides being a complex exploration of the possibilities of video in three dimensions, *HOME* considers the relationship between the medium and the documentation of memory. Aamer Hussein comments on Intizar Husain's narrative that "[M]emory becomes fiction only because it is codified or becomes film; it is codified and recorded for ever. But once you have made that record, whether a mental record, or a written or visual one, you then tend to return to the record rather than to the facts behind it."⁸

The thoughtful and thought-provoking aspects of *HOME* are considered further by the contributors to this publication. Above all, I was keen to work with Sophie Ernst as *HOME* fits so well with the ideals of YSP as a space for the presentation, appreciation and understanding of sculpture, in all its forms. We are committed to sharing practice of the highest quality and that draws attention to the human repercussions of global events, particularly those in which the UK shares an historic responsibility. *HOME* immediately put me in mind of the "Shared Horizon" programme at YSP, through which we work with young people seeking asylum in the UK and with whom Sophie Ernst and Taha Mehmood will develop a new commission during the presentation of *HOME*. YSP considers art to be a common language through which to better understand our shared humanity. It is by working with artists such as Sophie Ernst that we aspire to present extraordinary art and socially relevant practice.

I am grateful to all those who have helped to curate *HOME* At YSP, including Green Cardamom, London, Eidotech, Berlin and YSP staff. Valle Walkley's sensitive design and extensive commitment have created this beautiful and significant publication, with wonderful photographs of the *HOME* installations by Felix Krebs and thoughtful texts by Taha Mehmood and Iftikhar Dadi. We are indebted to the Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam, for their generous sponsorship of the project and to the Dutch Embassy for their support. Above all, I would like to thank Sophie Ernst for recognizing in our intentions the shared integrity of her own and for agreeing to present the first major UK exhibition of *HOME* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

REFERENCES & NOTES

- 1 Gross, Kenneth (1992), *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- 2 Curtis, Penelope, Director of Tate Britain (2004), "Introduction", in *With Hidden Voice: Sculpture Video and Ventriloquism*, exhibition catalogue, Leeds: The Henry Moore Institute, p.6.
- 3 The Basic Design Collection is held in the National Arts Education Archive, now managed by YSP.
- 4 Mehmood, Taha (2012), *In search of Home: Conversations with Sophie Ernst*, Wakefield, YSP
- 5 Borja-Villel, Manuel J., The founding Director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (1992), *Krzysztof Wodiczko: Instruments, Projections, Vehicles*, Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, p.9.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 7 "Where are you", www.ysp.co.uk, last accessed 5 September, 2011.
- 8 Hussein, Aamer, commentary to *Paradise Lost*, London, 2011.

Text taken from the YSP catalogue documenting *HOME* with essays by Iftikhar Dadi, Taha Mehmood, and Sophie Ernst. Buy online or in the YSP Shop and gallery today.

Sophie Ernst on HOME

"HOME is about the image of architecture in personal and collective memory. The project deals with the notion of an 'ideal place' – the place one was forced to leave in the recent or more distant past. People draw memories on a piece of paper and document an element of imaginary reality in the installations. The interviewed are not actors and their accounts are not necessarily exceptional. Many people all over the world have made similar experiences, live with similar memories of houses full of sun, of gardens rich with fruit that taste as nothing ever since, of parties full of joy. While drawing the plan of the house and the alley that leads to the porch, all the details become real again. It is the architecture that gives them their proper place.

In my previous projects *Dying Gaul* and *No Place like America*, I asked men in the street of Lahore about their image of the world after death and again paradise was the ultimate destination. The installation *No Place like America* showed young men with the dream of migrating to the USA talking about their image of this place, which they have never seen in reality. The people spoke of it as if it were just around the corner: you just have to die or to go to America and you will enter paradise.

The HOME project examines the opposite situation: people talk of places they left at a definite moment in time, but while they remember it, time extends into eternity. I try to translate this transformation into a spatial installation combining imagined or remembered pictures with narrative and a projection "screen". It is their "recherche du temps perdu" (remembrance of things past), which I have to express in sculptural terms. Although the frame of reference of the interviews is specific to context and people, I don't want to reduce the work to an historical illustration. The question is how a time-specific personal memory translates into a general image of our past and how this is carried on into the future on a local and global level.

Sophie Ernst, 2009

as quoted in "Provisions | Sharjah Biennial 9: Book 1",
Sharjah Biennial and Bidoun, Dubai 2009, p. 162

Participants in HOME at YSP

Further information

Participants in HOME at YSP

Zarina Hashmi

Zarina Hashmi was born in 1937 in Aligarh, India. After receiving a degree in mathematics, she went on to study woodblock printing in Bangkok and Tokyo and intaglio with S. W. Hayter at Atelier-17 in Paris.

Her work is defined by her adherence to the personal and the elemental. An early exposure to architecture is reflected in her use of geometry and her emphasis on structural purity. While her work reveals a minimalist sensibility, it is imbued with a materiality which mitigates the starkness of her reductive approach. Her art poignantly chronicles her life and recurring themes include home, displacement, borders, journey and memory. Best known as a printmaker, Hashmi prefers to carve instead of draw the line, to gouge the surface rather than build it up. She has used various types of printmaking including intaglio, woodblocks, lithography and silkscreen. She frequently creates series of several prints in order to reference a multiplicity of locales or concepts.

Her seminal work *Home is a Foreign Place* consists of 36 woodblock prints, each of which represents a particular notion or memory of home. Each subject is inscribed in Urdu beneath the print to signify the vital role language plays in her work, as well as to pay homage to a mother tongue in decline. Other works such as *These cities blotted into the wilderness*, *Countries*, and *Dividing Line* explore geographical borders and contested terrains, particularly those areas which are scarred from political conflict. Hashmi also creates sculpture using a variety of media, including bronze, steel, aluminum, wood, tin and paper pulp.

She has participated in numerous exhibitions, including most recently *Mind and Matter: Alternative Abstractions from 1940s to Present* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia 1860-1989* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, *Gouge: The Modern Woodcut* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* a traveling exhibition organized by MOCA, Los Angeles. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The artist lives and works in New York.

Her work is in the permanent collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Hashmi was one of a group of artists who represented India at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. The artist lives and works in New York.



Installation View, *Home Is a Foreign Place*, Indian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale



Dividing Line 2001

Interview with Zarina Hashmi

ART iT: You lived through the Partition of India but have also spent much of your adulthood in countries ranging from France, Thailand and Japan to the US. How do you feel about being one of the artists selected for India's first official representation at Venice?

ZH: Neither my family nor I suffered physical harm as a result of the Partition. However, when the country was divided, many families on both sides of the border were separated in the shuffle. The pain we collectively suffered from this dislocation had to do with losing our sense of belonging to India. At this stage of my life, one more group show is of little interest. However, on an emotional level to represent India is finally an acknowledgment of being a member of the nation, after following a kind of "middle passage" for most of my adult life.

ART iT: Entitled "Everyone Agrees: It's about to Explode," the India Pavilion will address themes including the idea of the nation-state as something unitary or territorial. What works will you be showing in Venice, and how do you see them relating to the overall concept of the Pavilion?

ZH: Of my works, Ranjit Hoskote has selected: Home is a Foreign Place (1999); Noor (2008); and Blinding Light (2010). The exhibition is an attempt to address the issues of migration and displacement. So far few of the Indian shows have included artists of the Indian diaspora, and it goes to Ranjit's credit that he has chosen artists who are part of a larger global dialogue.

ART iT: Have you ever considered works such as Home is a Foreign Place, Dividing Line, or Letters from Home to be conscientious reflections on the ideas – ideologies, even – of nations and borders?

ZH: My work was never a conscious reflection on any ideology – it was just a reflection, or narrative, of my own life and the life of many others like me, for whom home has become a foreign place. This is a predicament of the modern age: crossing borders to live in foreign lands and communicating through scraps of papers with quickly jotted notes.

ART iT: You often return to the themes of maps and homes (or in the case of the latter, their architectural plans). These are both schematic, but at a human scale maps are necessarily abstract, while even as abstracted diagrams homes can be intensely personal. Can you explain what draws you to these two themes, and two modes of depiction?

ZH: Maps and the memory of homes hold an inextricable significance in the life of a traveler. With a map, I can revisit the city I knew by tracing the streets and rivers. Home is always an interior reality, which, with a floor plan, I can walk through again and again in my imagination.

ART iT: The word "pavilion" itself suggests a temporary or movable structure – the French root means "tent." Do you feel at home in a place or at an event like Venice, or is the idea of bringing bits and pieces of the world to one spot anathema to the way you have lived so far? What is your relationship to locality?

ZH: You are asking the wrong person this question. I haven't felt at home in any place for over 50 years. I find the idea of a tent very attractive, especially its aspect of temporariness. Art is about commerce, you bring what you make to the marketplace. I don't think locality plays any big role in it, although tourism certainly does.

This interview originally appeared in the Japanese bilingual online art publication ART iT.

Participants in HOME at YSP

Nalini Malani

Nalini Malani was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1946. Her work is influenced by her experiences as a refugee of the Partition of India. She places inherited iconographies and cherished cultural stereotypes under pressure. Her point of view is unwaveringly urban and internationalist, and unsparing in its condemnation of a cynical nationalism that exploits the beliefs of the masses. Her work is an art of excess, going beyond the boundaries of legitimised narrative, exceeding the conventional and initiating dialogue.

Malani emerged as an artist at a time when the Indian art scene was male dominated. Amongst a new generation of women artists who wove personal narratives and histories into their practice, her early works were cathartic autobiographies. The female protagonists of her paintings expressively negotiate family relationships. With a focus on the body, interaction and layering becomes a metaphor to illustrate the complexities of Indian society and the emotions they elicit: oppression, anxiety, self absorption and anger.

Working initially with overtly Indian themes, Malani eventually sexualised and de-gendered her female protagonists, highlighting the extreme roles for women in Indian society from urban proletarian to street acrobat. Her focus has been on unconventional women – Mad Meg from Breughel's painting, *Medea*, *Sita*, *Radha*, *Akka*, Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Some of these women existed, others are legend, each subverted male dominated social customs to define new roles. Figures appear in isolation or intertwined – not in expected contexts but in multilayered narratives open to interpretation.

Malani started to receive international acclaim in the 1980s and in the 1990s she became part of India's first-generation of video artists. Her practice also encompasses multi-media installation and experimental theatre, although painting and drawing remain central. Her experimentation in post-painterly media is for her a means of retrieving the early experience of learning to paint. Video provides unrestricted spatial and temporal density with which to explore a painterly approach.

Malani started to work with video in 1991 when she recorded her installation *City of Desires*; an ephemeral, continuous drawing on the walls of Gallery Chemould in Bombay, made in protest against the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. Her video works have been an expansion of her practices in drawing and painting. In her multi-media installations, she often makes single cell animated drawings that bleed and stain. Foregrounding the dispossessed of the earth, she uses texts, which reflect on violence, pain, and suffering in the name of nationalism and religion. Working in collaboration with theater artists, Malani has made installations for Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial*, where Jason appeared on a monitor in an interactive video conferencing mode (1993); and in *The Job* by Bertolt Brecht, the entire story unfurls in animation (1997). Accompanied by music and text, the historical, cultural, personal and psychological elements combine to present allegories of political and ecological dangers, with images recalling the horrors of war, the industrial revolution, and the utopia/dystopia that followed. The twelve piece suite entitled *Tales of Good and Evil* featured in Indian Highway allude to forms of communication and oral transmission of tales, myths and legends of Indian origin which were transmitted through the centuries via the great commercial arteries of roads which linked north and south and east and west.

Some of her large scale works include: *The Sacred and The Profane* (a shadow play from 1998); *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (an video installation from 1998); *Hamletmachine* (a video play from

2002); *Transgressions* (a video/shadow play); *Game Pieces* (a video/shadow play from 2003); and *Unity in Diversity* (2003). Malani has shown solo exhibitions at: The Prince of Wales Museum (Bombay, India, 1999); The New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York, USA, 2002); Apeejay Media Gallery (New Delhi, India, 2002); and Bose Pacia Modern (New York, USA, 2004). A selection of the international venues where her presentations have been shown include: World Wide Video Festival (Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1998); Gwangju Biennale (Korea, 2000); Century City (Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom, 2001); Unpacking Europe (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2002); Voiceovers (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 1999); Asia-Pacific Triennial (Brisbane, Australia, 2002); Poetic Justice (8th International Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, 2003); and La Nuit Blanche (Paris, France, 2004)



Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine* (installation view), 1999/2000.

Interview with Nalini Malani

Johan Pijnappel: The history of video art in India is closely related to your experiments with this medium starting in 1991. At that time you made a video art documentary on your site-specific work called 'City of Desires' at the Chemould Gallery in Mumbai. What made this video an independent artwork for you?

Nalini Malani: The videos "Medeamaterial" and "City of Desires" are records of performances. I made a shooting script so that it did not attempt to replicate the work as close to the reality of its existence. 'City of Desires' is based on a continuous drawing done directly on the walls of Gallery Chemould in Bombay. I would be drawing as people came and went. The studio became a public arena - a place where discussions took place with the audience even as the artwork was in progress. The video begins with a written statement that this mural would be destroyed as an act of sympathy with the destruction due to neglect and vandalism of a 19th century fresco painting in Nathdwara (a place of pilgrimage for Hindus in Rajasthan). This makes the video by implication the only surviving record of that work.

Both videos are documents of ephemeral works. Theatre, especially experimental theatre in India, hardly has any support. It survives by the skin of its teeth. We had only 6 performances of "Medeamaterial" with seating for 75 people each time. 450 people saw it. But today many more claim to have seen the performance! They have seen the videos. I reckon it must have been discussed a great deal and hence became a live experience. Nobody was making such experimental works at the time.

There was a huge amount of negative criticism as well as a curious interest about the issues the work addressed. Even the form itself became a contentious issue.

JP: One of the main motivations to utilize video was that it could reach a wider audience. Have your ideas altered over the years?

NM: As a visual artist it has been very exciting for me to come out of the white cube. Working in collaboration with performance artists has brought new juxtapositions. Also showing in experimental theatres ("The Job" in 1996) - incorporating the street ("Medeamaterial")- all of these ideas I could try out in the early nineties and here lay the possibilities of pulling in larger audiences.

In 1999 I showed my video theatre, "Remembering Toba Tek Singh" at another alternative venue: The Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. The Museum is known for its collection of ancient Indian sculpture and miniature paintings. 3000 people visit the museum everyday and these were my audience for the ten days that the show was up. As the work was an indictment against India's underground nuclear testing there were heated discussions on the subject.

JP: You refer to yourself as a painter, but meanwhile you make theatre, video, books, neon sculptures, etc. What position does painting take in this?

NM: I paint therefore I am. But I don't want to make this sound pompous. The language that probes other material is extended through painting. I work with de-forming the colors in video - keying them in as I would with watercolors. Or as my work in reverse painting - 'throwing' colors, embedding them into the supports. I am not interested in the mimetic, which is a given factor in this medium. For example, in "Hamletmachine" the colors 'bleed' into each other over the body of the protagonist.

In a number of my works there is as well an overlay of hand-drawn animation. The threshold between additive and subtractive light is blurred.

JP: Your work is known for its engagement in socio-political issues but you are also interested in using the 'seduction of beauty' as a device.

NM: The first layering that I give to my video work must seduce the audience, draw it in, and attract enough for people to enter. I work between the scratch and graffiti (to paraphrase Heiner Mueller), or between the cathartic and the expressionistic (to paraphrase Antonin Artaud).

My video works that incorporate shadows play with the physicality of video as light. This light 'illuminates' the image but also creates a shadow image! This is where the reverse painted transparent cylinders have their interface and while rotating the video light is effaced. Thus in "Game Pieces" the horror of the nuclear bomb explosions are continually wiped out with the quirky little creatures in the cylinders.

As the device continues to fascinate I can slip in political quips and statements into the structure.

We have been through a time of intellectual and political debilitation in the past 15 years in India. Civil society is getting somewhat unhinged. We have to find strategies and subterfuges to address issues. Notwithstanding the famous statement of Adorno who remarked that "after Auschwitz there can be no art."

JP: Do you believe culture can change because of experimental art, including new media?

NM: Yes- but only if artists stick their necks out and work at creating new ambiances and environments. This is how movements like Dada and Fluxus happened.

JP: What do you try to create with the 'retelling' of stories in your paintings, installations and other works?

NM: In India stories from the epics are told over and over again. When people know the story there is a certain pact because they can anticipate what will come next. The Ram Lila is performed every year, for example. My idea is not only to retell the stories in a new form but also in new configurations. As an artist I have this right given to me by my ancestors. If we know and recognize the face of Shiva or Krishna it was because my artist ancestors sculpted or painted them. I want to reclaim this right, albeit in my own fashion. Recent history has shown that the concept of Hinduism is getting petrified into rigid moulds.

JP: Your new video installation for Venice is called "Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain." In what way is the position of the female in India different from other cultures?

NM: After the caste system, one of the biggest scourges in Indian society is the lowly status of women. In the latter case there is a paradox as she can be swung up to become a goddess, made into a metaphor for the Motherland or flung down to be the dirt beneath the male foot. My work is inspired by the essay "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain" by Veena Das*.

J P: The work is a five-projector installation that reads like an accusation against the male misuse of the female in times of political strife or war but also the current state of Indian society, which is becoming increasingly capitalistic and consumer-oriented.

NM: The artist is a witness to a memory of loss. One has to renew oneself without nostalgia. How then to militate ones way from historical sites to contemporary episodes that run in repetitively compulsive cycles?

Apart from the fact that the birth of India and Pakistan was the scene of unprecedented collective violence, one hundred thousand women from both sides of the border were forcibly abducted and raped. As Das says, "The bodies of women were metaphors for the nation, they had to bear the signs of their possession by the enemy".

The language of pain as expressed by women who suffered the violence turned into a zone of silence or the "... language having all the phonetic excess of hysteria that destroys apparent meaning. (Das)" Possession by inflicting extreme sexual violence on women has had a trajectory right up to present times. Witness Gujarat in 2002. In a sense this is a work in line with my video "Unity in Diversity" which addresses the dissolution of this very concept that India as a nation state started out with.

The language of pain as expressed by women who suffered the violence turned into a zone of silence or the "... language having all the phonetic excess of hysteria that destroys apparent meaning. (Das)" It is this form that I use in my work. Possession by inflicting extreme sexual violence on women has had a trajectory right up to present times.

JP: Is there a layering in this work that you think is difficult to understand for people who are not knowledgeable about Indian culture?

NM: The Gujarat episode is now well known. There are of course aspects that are peculiar to India but sectarian violence is certainly not our prerogative. We have seen it in Eastern Europe not so long ago.

The woman as de-gendered mutant, violated beyond imagination, has been an on going pre-occupation in my work.

The Partition led to states of mind where women wove a membrane of silence. What to do with that?! Apart from the signs that marked and scarred the body it marked language as well into another interface: hysterical speech. What caught my imagination in Das' essay was the valence she gives to this particular scarring. The focal point of the sound and text in "Mother India" is the disjointed manner in which women have expressed, or not expressed, as articulated speech the experiences they have suffered through the trauma of Partition and subsequent sectarian violence. How then to recuperate the abject object? How to find a form for this?

Interview with Nalini Malani from the iCon India Catalogue produced for the Indian show at the 51 Venice Biennale by Johan Pijnappel

Participants in HOME at YSP

Nikhil Chopra

Nikhil Chopra was born in Calcutta, India in 1974. Chopra has been working in the medium of live art since 2002, when he was studying at Ohio State University. He returned to India in 2005 and currently lives and works in Mumbai. He works at the boundaries between theatre, performance, live art, painting, photography and sculpture. He devises fictional characters that draw on India's colonial history as well as his own personal history. He inhabits these characters in largely improvised performances that last up to three days.

Chopra's character, Sir Raja, was created when he was living in Ohio in 2002. A stereotype of the Indian prince from the country's colonial era, Chopra uses this alter ego to create tableaux for live performance, film and photographs. In the performance *Sir Raja II*, 2003, the character could be found at the end of a 350-foot red carpet, seated motionless at a table with spread of food, fruits, and flowers. Here Chopra created a live *Vanitas* painting and challenged the viewer to confront past and present issues of colonialism, exoticism and excess. The theme of death and references to European painting also appeared in the Mumbai performance *The Death of Sir Raja III*, 2005, where he lay adorned in silk and jewels, surrounded by velvet drapes and rich oriental rugs, as if he were posing for a painting depicting his own death. While performing, the artist does not interact with the audience, who unlike in theatre, are free to come and go throughout, however the artist's awareness of their gaze and the constant potential for the boundary between player/viewer to be breached, adds to the tension and intensity.

In *What will I do with all this land?* (2005) Sir Raja is shown journeying on horseback through his vast inherited estate in a series of atmospheric black and white photographs. These portraits of the robed prince alone in the epic landscape of Kashmir are reminiscent of 19th century British Imperial photography of Indian dignitaries. The narratives around Sir Raja do not, however, refer to a specific person or moment in history but is rather woven from Chopra's personal memory, old family photographs, ancestral home and endless family stories.

Chopra's most recent character, Yog Raj Chitrakar, is loosely based on the artist's grandfather, Yog Raj Chopra. Educated at Goldsmiths College of Art, London, in the 1920s, Yog Raj Chopra was a frequent open-air landscape painter who spent a large part of middle age capturing the grandeur of the Kashmir Valley. The character Yog Raj Chitrakar has many faces: explorer, draughtsman, cartographer, valiant conqueror, soldier, prisoner of war, painter, artist, romantic, dandy and queen. These are signified by the elaborate costumes, which are changed throughout performances to indicate the character's transformation. Yog Raj Chitrakar sets up camp, indoors or outdoors, and makes large scale drawing of what he sees: cities in transition, places at the cusp of change, the collision of history and the present, architecture and nature. The large-scale drawings, as well as the props used in the performance, are left as a remnant, however it is the process that is the most important to the artist, as he states: *'I want the experience of a work to precede the object and I want the making to be at the centre of it.'*

He was invited to the KHOJ International Performance Art Residency in Delhi and Kashmir in 2007, and to the Kunstenfestivaldesarts' *Residence & Reflection project in Brussels* in 2009. He has performed at the Serpentine Gallery in London (2007), the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo (2008), the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (2008), the New Museum in New York (2009), and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2010). He performed at the 53rd Venice Biennale and was part of the group show *Marina Abramovic presents...* during the Manchester International Festival 2009.



Nikhil Chopra, as Yog Raj Chitrakar, at the New Museum



Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VIII, July 2009, Marina Abramovic Presents... Manchester International Festival

Interview with Nikhil Chopra

Tom Dodson: So we're in the New Museum in New York, where you've just completed a five day performance that combines elements of live art, landscape drawing, portraiture, and installation art. It's a long piece with lots of different dimensions, but how would you describe it to someone who hasn't read about or encountered it?

Nikhil Chopra: Well, I think that your introduction to the piece gives us a certain set of clues to enter the work. I think there are many places from where I like to enter the work, but one of the things that perhaps I would like to add to that is my interest in autobiography. I do think of this as in a way an extension of my story.

If I were to think back on why I like to make pictures for example, or why I am an artist, for example, I go back to perhaps my childhood. Maybe it was looking at paintings that my grandfather made of Kashmir when I was five and six years old that became very precious and very important for me to kind of pickup from that. It became very important for me I think when I left from America and went back to India and I started to think about my own personal history and my own reasons for making choices that I have made with my life. I think that my grandfather becomes a very interesting clue.

Thus, this character. If I were to take Yog Raj Chitrakar, for example, the name of this character, he is very directly from the name of my grandfather, Yog Raj Chopra. Chitrakar in this case literally translates to "picture-maker." So, I think, for me, it's a combination of not just autobiography, but also fantasy.

I think as soon as the performance starts it becomes very little about my grandfather. It becomes a lot about me, my aspirations, what I want to do with it, the challenges and the constraints I put on myself. Those challenges can be about the medium, lets say charcoal and canvas; the constraints can be the time-span that I give myself. The constraints can be what the costume brings about as well.

So, there is this need with the work to dig as well, to excavate, to make a legacy or a history out of perhaps no history at all, to make a tradition perhaps out of no tradition at all. My father is an actor, for example, he loved the stage, so I think if I were to [...] sum up perhaps in a very personal way about what this work is, I think it's a combination of perhaps my father and my grandfather, you know, coming together in me.

And that's a very simple, I think, introduction, perhaps to what this work could mean other than issues of perhaps landscape painting, live performance and theater, and photography, sculpture, tableau vivant. So there are various points of entry.

TD: Yeah, and this Chitrakar, this picture-maker character, is also a traveller and he goes to different cities and you've done versions of the performance [...] in Mumbai, in Brussels, in London, and now in New York. How have you responded to these different contexts? How has the work changed?

NC: The work directly responds to site [...] especially because it's live [...] A lot of it is unrehearsed. There are a lot of places within the work which are unplanned. I give myself a blueprint, for example, that I go with from place to place.

I've made him a traveler simply because I'm traveling with it and because I'm trying to make very [...] close relationships between my reality and this fictional character and this world of fantasy, making him into a traveller becomes a very easy—not an easy—but it [...] brings it much closer to my reality.

And it makes for it to be much more spontaneous and it makes [...] the improvisational aspect of this fresher for me.

So a lot of the time the work becomes about reacting to the place that I am in. I pretend, for example, as if I were a turn of the century, or perhaps [...] eighteenth or nineteenth century draftsman, for example—very romantic, colonial, perhaps—draftsman that would go perhaps from place to place making chronicles of the world, bringing back [...] home to let's say the king or the queen, or the patron to say: "Hey, look. Look what we have. Look at the extent of our empires."

TD: I'm very interested in that, I mean, in preparing for this interview I was reading a little bit about the tradition[s] of photography and landscape drawing in India. You know, and in the eighteenth century British draughtsman travelled all over India, looking for picturesque scenery, and monuments, and architectural sites, and these and other practices of representations pretty clearly—by Western artists and writers—contributed to a body of knowledge that provided both ideological and practical support for the British colonial project—

NC: Absolutely.

TD: So [...] I think it's interesting to see your Chitrakar going to European and American cities and making landscape drawings and I wondered if you could say a little about the relationship your work might have to these kind of orientalist representations of India and its landscape.

NC: Yes. I think drawing or making maps or taking photographs or making images of something, I think there's an act of claiming ownership over it. My take on it is to reclaim a certain kind of history, to return, in fact, this orientalist discussion about the Western traveller coming to the East and making documents and taking them back home. I want to be the oriental, perhaps, that comes to the West and makes drawings—

[Laughter]

NC: And makes chronicles and perhaps goes back home to India with the memory of that or with photographs of that or documentation of that [...] and also the part that I play is certainly not off the oriental, the obviously oriental—I play this very Eurocentric gentleman, very Victorian, very prudish, very conservative almost, very tight-lipped, silent observer, ghost-like, solitary—even though I am in crowded cities and people are interacting with me, trying to interact with me. I see it as a kind of taking back of a certain history.

And also I think within that is where my critique of let's say even perhaps "representation" may lie, even though so much of it becomes about representation. I think that I'm perhaps using that as a tool to raise some critical questions.

TD: I really got that impression in what I imagine were some of the earliest performances, [ones] I saw you do years ago in which you had a different persona, Sir Raj III [...] and as I've learned a little bit more about photography in India in the 19th century [...] I learned that in, you know, after the rebellions in North India in 1875—

NC: 1857.

TD: Oh, I'm sorry, 1857 [...] many of the landholders and princes who were loyal to the East India Company and to Britain were rewarded with these photographs—

NC: Yes.

TD: In their regalia and it seems to me that there is some sort of connection there—

NC: Absolutely—

TD: [That character] also troubles a notion of a kind of “authentic” representation of India. Because you’re already presenting a kind of representation of a person that’s already mixed-up with colonialism [. . .] it’s not like “here’s an authentic, nationalist figure of India.”

NC: Absolutely not [...] in fact I’m very critical of these ideas of perhaps post-colonial ideas of the nation, the state divided linguistically, racially [...] of course these are things that have been throughout history and wars have been fought through history it’s so much of what we experience, even today is about territory and land and mine and yours.

But what particularly interested me with turn of the century photography, late nineteenth century photography—even Indian photography like Raja Deen Dayal, for example, was taking pictures of Indian dignitaries in all their full regalia and what was really interesting to me was these so-called nawabs and princes were signing their allegiance to the British crown across their photographs.

They almost looked like tiger heads, in a sense, trophies that perhaps these photographers took back to the Queen and said—or the King—and said: “Look what we’ve got. We’ve not just got India, but we’ve got these demi-gods under us and so now we are the supreme powers,” you know, as far as taking ownership, or playing the part of owners and sahibs.

But what was really interesting about these princely figures in India was that they were puppets, they were wedged in between being rulers and subjects at the same time [...] their regalia and their titles almost seemed like a facade. They seemed like they wanted to play the part of occidental gentlemen, and they wanted to be the sahibs and they aspired to be that. They wore their medals like perhaps a British general would [...] where his medals. They stood in poses perhaps like knights would stand in poses [...] I was making relationships with perhaps [...] portraiture, you know, like even if I were to think about Velasquez, or you know, that very stoic, classical pose.

So all of this work, even the performance work, visually speaking, stems from this idea of early twentieth century photography—or late 19th century photography—where you have the studio, the studio backdrop, which is the painted studio backdrop. And the model, that sort of stands in front of this illusion of a landscape and so the idea of these performances come from that, from Sir Raja III, where the raja feels the need to make his landscape, to paint his own fantasy behind that. And where does he take that landscape and that fantasy? From the world around him.

So, the scale of these pictures come from this idea of them working, perhaps, as studio backdrops and posing in front of them. So a lot of the performances are slow and long in duration because they really kind of take this pose and this kind of stillness into account.

Part II

TD: So, at the end of several of your previous performances you climb into this white gown and crown and I believe you ascend a kind of throne, right?

NC: Yes [...] When I'm thinking about it being a time-based artwork, for example, if I'm thinking about it as a live performance, with a start and a finish, I think I'm wanting to think about the finish as an opera would have, as a kind of crescendo, as a kind of crowning moment. Or if I were to think of the hero's journey, or kind of return with the elixir, or kind of crown yourself, you know, the sort of victor, you know, the knight has slayed the dragon kind of feeling. The mountain has been crossed.

So in this need to bring closure to the performance I was thinking about how I can do that. I mean, of course, I've already played [with] this idea of class [...] and I'm so aware in the sense of how divided we are in classes [in India]—and I'm very aware of what side of that I come from. I'm very aware of it—more now, because I now live in India. I've spent six years in the United States and coming back to India that awareness became very heightened.

And how I was brought up. If I was to think how I was brought up, it was in such a—in a very kind of colonial environment and home where we were taught table manners, we were, you know, taught how to speak English and speaking in English was very important. Knowing how to eat with a fork and knife was very important, you know, napkin on your lap, “please”s and “thank you”s in place—and where did that come from?

If I was to think about it, it's very post-1857. My great great—if I was to trace back on my genealogy and where my family comes from, I mean, if I were to think about my own history I can trace it back actually to the 1840s and 1850s and that's where the kind of narrative around the family starts with this journey that my great great grandfather takes from Alkavar in Punjab to the state of Jammu in Kashmir because he's recruited by the maharaja.

I'm digressing.

TD: No, it's a very interesting digression.

NC: So, I go back a lot to Victorian England and Victorian values. The role that men and women play in society; I'm very critical of it because I found it empowering and at the same time I found it stifling. I found it rich and at the same time I found it inaccessible, made myself inaccessible.

So [...] playing the part of this empress if not emperor—because that's the obvious kind of connection I would make to gender perhaps, being a man myself—I thought that if I would take this idea of gender and twist it and create an empress as opposed to an emperor I would put myself in this position that I feel that I am in – having a certain sense of power and empowerment but also being powerless because I'm corsetted and sort of constrained and tight into this dress and yet I'm claiming to be in the center of the universe because I've made this drawing from my vantage point.

TD: As a kind of act of mastery ...

NC: Exactly. And if I am to say that this is the end of the performance, then I'm saying that I crown myself the empress of the moment. To say: “This is my homeland, this is my time, I'm here, I'm here now as you are.”

In a way, it's a way to take a bow, it's a way to say a thanks, a way to kind of finish a portrait.

And the Queen Victoria character—well, she's not really a Queen Victoria character, but she's also Yog Raj Chitrakar, she's another avatar of Yog Raj Chitrakar—comes from being in Bombay as well. I mean, I had this, the performance that I did was in Colaba, which is a very very Victorian part of the

city, you know, the architecture I was representing on the walls with this drawing that I was making was of Victorian Bombay, very British colonial architecture [...]

Hopefully there were layers [...] that one could peel though and read about what the symbol of this queen or empress could mean.

TD: So, I've been kind of suggesting what my reading has been as an observer, which leads me to ask about your expectations for an audience and who you think your [...] intended audience might be [...]

NC: It's a very tricky question, you know, and to walk into any work, any performative work, any work with an assumption of the audience is, I think, to me, the beginning of, perhaps, a disaster.

[Laughter]

NC: I don't want to assume the position of the audience because that then limits what I can do with the work because I'm preempting perhaps what the audience walks in with. And so I think the moment I start to do that, I start to find myself [...] digging myself into a bit of a hole. The moment I start to take away the audience from the picture and start to put all of the onus onto just myself and what my world and my language and just the things that surround me and perhaps the sum total if I can say of all my own experiences from the way in which I experience and perceive the world and my work as a result of that, then I feel very liberated.

So, would I do the same thing in Kashmir? Yes, I would do the exact same thing in Kashmir that I would do in New York. I would dress up in the same kind of very colonial garb and walk down the streets of Serenever as I would the streets of Brooklyn.

The way in which the work is experienced and what happens with the work is then determined by the audience, but I think it's detrimental to my work if I was to preempt that.

The audience has always made the work as much as I have. The audience's desire to see the work has made the work—

TD: And that desire was very much in evidence in this performance [in the New Museum]. You had a crowd that was able to interact with you in the space or from behind a glass wall, and I think most preferred to interact with you in the space or observe in the space and follow you from place to place within the space; so there was definitely a kind of cord of desire leading them from place to place as you moved through the space.

NC: It's interesting what this space did for this performance. You hit the nail on the head; I think the glass has put the audience in two very distinctly different positions, one of being outside of the glass and yet being able to see the glass and feeling invisible as an audience and then walking in the space and sort of becoming an active audience and saying: "Now I am visible too." So it's interesting what this particular space does for the performance.

TD: I was also interested in asking you—these performances have lasted for several days, you know, blocks of several hours [...] what is the kind of internal experience you have of going through one of these performances.

NC: You know, like a play, for example [...] when you are to do a play on stage as an actor, a three

act play even, the longest that you could possibly have, and you're onstage [but] you can walk in and out of your parts, you have your green room, you have the wings, and there are moments when you're onstage and you know, you're in front of a live audience, and you give it your all and then you walk out of stage and then, you know, you're yourself and so you can slip in and out [of character].

But by giving myself [...] by wedging in this kind of durational aspect into the work I give myself no escape from this idea of the character. And then what is that character and how blurry can those lines become between what is real and what is fantasy, what is dramatized and what is truly experienced? So when I wake up in the morning at six o'clock and I have not a single person around me except for myself am I still performing and I think: "Yes, I am, because I am fixing myself a cup of tea; if there were a hundred people around me, I would still be fixing myself this cup of tea.

TD: So for those days you usually sleep in the space?

NC: I do sleep in the space and I go through the motions of my daily activity perhaps in the space—not necessarily in that order, maybe. I don't really have an order in my daily life, with my daily activities, but I hate routines so—but oddly enough, within the performance [...] I find that I give myself a routine only because I want to hang on to something that is kind of—is, there is a certain kind of order within that that I want to give myself. So eating, sleeping, washing, drinking, sitting, standing—things I do every day I would do in the performance as well.

TD: I also wanted to ask you [...] a broader question about living in Mumbai [Bombay], you're engaged in the art world there, and it seems like [...] art from India is enjoying more attention in the last few years. Pooja Sood, writing in *Flash Art*, says that there are still significant obstacles for Indian artists working in newer mediums, that there is limited public funding available and that it isn't generally being directed towards new forms of art, that the art market offers support for work that lends itself [to] sale at auction but not necessarily for installation, performance, and video work—

NC: That's changing already. Pooja Sood is, of course, an incredible woman, part of an organization called Khoj International Art[ist's] Association. I had the esteemed opportunity of working with Pooja on a number of occasions, on three Khoj events, three Khoj programs.

They're a non-for-profit, artist-run organization in Delhi that is primarily concerned with promotion of young, upcoming—well, not just young, upcoming—but more kind of edgy, experimental, non-traditional, non-object-based art practices and art work, which is where I found my footing, I think, in many ways in India with performance as well because I was part of the performance art residency they organized in [...] 2007 [...]

Things have changed immensely in India. I think over the past two years, as I was telling you earlier, Thomas, you know I come back to New York after five years and I find that very little has changed, just in terms of the physicality and just in terms of visually, as a city. When I look at Bombay [Mumbai]—in five years it's changed three, four times over, including the art market.

When we came back to India in 2005, January, the art market, the art world was just getting about to explode and it did explode in 2006 and 2007. [These were] very big years for India. India got a lot of recognition, there was a lot of money in the market, a lot of credit money in the market, as we learned in 2008. Prices were soaring. Indian artists were really on the international scene with—selling works for exorbitant prices, artificially so, unnecessarily so.

A lot of us that were working in non-traditional, non-object—specifically [non-]object-oriented

work—were very critical of the way in which things were working and a lot of galleries opened up in Bombay [Mumbai]; we were very critical of the way some of these galleries functioned.

The recession was actually a bit of a breath of fresh air for a lot of us. A lot of us that were working in mediums that were not specifically market-oriented found ourselves, in fact, coming in to a bit more into the forefront because the big players, certainly felt or were, fell a little bit to the wayside because their works were simply not going to be able to fetch the prices that they were demanding and it was the sort of emerging artists in my generation that found ourselves pushing forward a little bit.

What has also helped immensely over the past two years, three years, is the exhibitions that have happened in Japan with big Indian art exhibitions that have happened in Japan at the Mori Art Museum and at the Serpentine Gallery [in London].

TD: You participated in?

NC: I participated in those shows, yes. But I'm very critical of shows of that nature because [...] as immensely impressed as I am with someone like Hans Ulrich [Obrist] and his mind and his vision and his tenacity and his edge and the way in which he thinks about art and making and how connected he is with that, I am critical of shows that [...] want to, let's say, showcase "Indian art," for example, because it kind of goes back to that colonial question of exoticization and otherness.

So you don't actually integrate cultures when you do that; you exclude cultures when you do that. You tell us that India's actually a place that's far away as opposed to it being around the corner. In fact, you make larger divides, perhaps, then you make associations because then it becomes about it being from India as opposed to it being from art.

I think it's very important when I'm offered an opportunity like this, to accept these opportunities and to do with it—to precisely flip those questions and to ask those very harsh questions from within the belly of the beast.

Interview with Nikhil Chopra by Tom Dodson, New York City, 9 November 2009, *Champs Not Chumps*

Sami Michael

Sami Michael was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1926. As a teenager he joined a leftist underground movement acting against the regime in Iraq and wrote for the movement's newspaper. In 1948, his activities were discovered and he fled to Iran, making his way to Israel a year later. After working for four years as an editor at Arabic-language dailies, he studied hydrology at the British Institute and joined the Israel Hydrology Authority where he worked for 25 years. During this time, he also studied psychology and Arabic literature at Haifa University.

During the 1950's and 1960's Michael wrote for *Al Itihad*, a Haifa newspaper that was founded by the renowned Arab-Israeli author, and major proponent of Jewish Arab co-existence, Emile Habibi. Today Sami is best known for his novel *Trumpet in the Wadi*, which has been translated into Arabic, and for his activism in the areas of peace with Israel's neighbours and co-existence between Israel's Jews and Arabs.

Since 2001, Michael has been the President of The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI). Michael has published six novels, four books for youth, and three non-fiction books and a number of plays. He has received many literary awards, including the WIZO Prize (Paris), the ACUM Prize, the Brenner Prize, the Ze`ev Prize for children`s literature, an IBBY Award (Berlin), the Israeli Literature Prize, the President`s Prize (2005) and the Emet Prize (Israel, 2007). For his work for peace, he has been honored by the UN-supported Society for International Development, and the Association for Promotion of Peace in the Middle East (Italy). He has also been awarded honorary doctorates by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1995), Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (2000) and Tel Aviv University (2002) for his literary work and contribution to inter-communal reconciliation.

Michael was among the first in Israel to call for the creation of an independent Palestinian state to exist alongside Israel. In his novels, Michael writes about the aspirations and struggles of both Jews and Arabs. This new approach in modern Hebrew literature was controversial and has been widely discussed in universities and in the media. Michael defines himself not as a Zionist, but, as in *Unbounded Ideas*, as an Israeli in order to make room for the inclusion of all citizens in Israel.

Senan Abdelqader

Senan Abdelqader was born in Taibeh, a Palestinian village in northern Israel. At the age of 18 he left to study architecture in Germany where he completed his studies of Architecture and Urban planning in Germany in 1983. 15 Years later he returned to the Middle East where he runs a private architectural office and teaches in several universities.

Since 2004, Senan has been directing his office, in Beit Safafa, having a handful of projects, foremost the planning of the central business district of East Jerusalem. Senan spends much of his career in academia. He founded the *in-formal* unit in Bezalel Academy and is currently directing and teaching, giving the possibility to architecture students to experiment a space where formality and informality are tangled. Along with that, Senan had participated with his work in several architectural exhibitions and biennales, amongst which the Sao Paulo Biennale in Brazil in 2007.

Abdelqader is from the 20% minority of Arabs living within Israel, often referred to by the Israeli establishment as Arab Israelis. It is not a term he uses. *"I am sure about my identity. I am an Arab Palestinian ... I don't feel myself very Israeli,"* he says. He carries an Israeli passport, but that isolates him from most of the Arab world - he can only travel to Jordan and Egypt. *"But even when I go there I am considered an Israeli and I am not part of Arabic culture. And this is painful. I cannot feel myself."*

In Israel he is part of a minority that, though it has citizenship, suffers routine and continued discrimination, particularly at work and in government spending on housing and education. Although Palestinian Israelis can travel freely within Israel, they, like all Israeli citizens, are not allowed to travel to the main urban centres of the West Bank. Often they are also restricted from travelling to Gaza. There are Palestinian Israeli MPs in the Knesset, and earlier this year the first Muslim Arab cabinet member was appointed. However, several Palestinian Israeli intellectuals and activists have begun a campaign to demand broader rights in Israel, and have started to challenge the notion of Israel as a Jewish state.

The fraught question of identity shapes Abdelqader's work. No new Arab town has been built in Israel since the state was created.

Abdelqader is working on a project to design a contemporary art museum for Umm al-Fahm, an Arab town in northern Israel. His design puts the museum inside a wide bridge that stretches across a valley, a bridge that will be part public, cultural space, part busy walkway. It is unusual for a Palestinian Israeli architect to have such input in a public project.

Although he has worked on several other buildings in Israel, there has been little opportunity to work alongside architects living in the occupied Palestinian territories, even though they live nearby, speak the same language and share the same history. Many Palestinians sense a broad divide between those living within Israel and those living in the West Bank or Gaza, both in terms of opportunity and ambition. While Palestinians in the occupied territories are still struggling to end 40 years of occupation and establish their own state, within Israel some leading Palestinian figures have become increasingly vocal in demanding broader, collective rights and in challenging the rationale of a Jewish state.



Gallery Elsabar, um el fahem, Contemporary Art Museum. Proposed project

Interview with Senan Abdelqader

The discussion with Abdelqader focuses on professional, cultural, social and civic issues. Unspoken politics naturally drift in the background: his definition of his identity as a "Palestinian-Arab citizen of Israel" his family history and his analysis of the urban-architectural state of affairs and what caused it.

He is a native of Taibeh, and the son of "a very established bourgeois family," in his words. His father moved to Jaffa in the early 1940s, but fled in 1948. After a number of moves, he returned to Taibeh. Abdelqader understood at an early age the significance of the urban center in his personal development as well as the fact that "as a Palestinian-Israeli in the current Israeli situation, I could not realize my urban identity in Israel." Europe was his only escape option. He first planned to study film, later civil engineering and then architecture.

What dictated your personal search?

"I was interested in film since high school, but I discovered I could not work on behalf of my society in film. When I was in Germany, after traveling through various countries, I decided to study engineering. While studying engineering in Hamburg, I learned about the connection between architecture and engineering as a link between culture, society and technology."

He is a graduate of the architecture faculty at the University of Kaiserslautern in southwest Germany. He says he was an outstanding student. As a young architect in Germany, he experienced palpable success and embarked on a promising path of prizes, work offers and partnership in a distinguished firm. But after 15 years, he returned to Israel.

Why did you return?

"From age 18, I lived in Europe and I felt I was a part of European society. There I actually gained a better understanding of the urban crisis in Palestinian-Israeli society, by becoming familiar with the Arab elite exiled in Germany. I returned because I saw the national significance of the architecture industry here, in the search, tension, paradox and option of releasing our society from its rural, sub-urban state to a state of urban modernity."

What sort of architectural activity is now taking place in Arab communities?

"Local Arab architecture was arbitrarily interrupted. I am talking about the entire Arab space. I don't cry over it or criticize. But I think we must once again elevate architecture to a technological, creative endeavor, rather than abandon it to contractors and engineers. I want to return it to the architects, to promote progress in Arab society and understanding of the city as a collective that plays a public, national role."

What are your chances of leading that sort of process?

"The best chance for change is in large, public projects. But we do not have access to such projects. Lacking our own public space, Arab community leaders are forced to employ Jewish planners in public construction. Local council leaders want to build quickly and complete projects rather than dwell on architecture. In Umm al-Fahm, the situation is different because they are searching for capable Arab architects."

And in the Jewish sector?

"Not really. During all my years of work here, I received one or two opportunities. And I am a relatively well-known architect. We have many obstacles. Arabs here are considered construction workers rather than architects."

From Herzliya Pituah to Beit Safafa

Shortly after he returned to Israel, Abdelqader and his Jewish partner, Claudio Lustinghaus, opened a firm in Herzliya Pituah. Abdelqader and his family rented a home there. "I believed it was the way to break into Jewish awareness. But it helped me only in the academic world, which is a sheltered environment to some extent, rather than in professional practice. The most I accomplished was introducing my Jewish partner to work in the Arab sector."

He taught at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, and now directs a studio at the Tel Aviv University School of Architecture. "I teach the students what I learned in Europe, to show respect, to meet demands and to learn the profession before coming to me about 'fringe benefits' or other slogans," he says.

How did you feel while living in Herzliya?

"At first I felt there was such an option for Arabs, to live in a Jewish environment. But after a while I understood that Jewish society has not matured enough for an Arab presence."

And the opposite?

"For now, Arab society has nothing to offer Jews, because it is a society from which everything was taken. So the subject is not even on the agenda. I was the only [Arab] architect partnered with a Jew, and also the only [Arab] architect who teaches Jews at university."

Abdelqader now lives with his wife Rose and their four children in Beit Safafa, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The home, which he planned, is a symbol of his ideology: an urban building that retains something of the rural, family style - contemporary architecture that relies on tradition.

It is impossible to miss his home, even from a distance. Its distinct, architectural presence stands out among the eclectic construction in Beit Safafa. Rigid, box-like lines contrast with an airy, perforated, stone tile surface. The surprising interpretation of traditional Muslim mashrabia screening employs modern technology in a simple, accessible way that offers a climatic and optical solution that enhances the construction.

What would Israeli space look like if Arabs were the majority?

"It's not an Arab-Jewish issue, but a Palestinian-Zionist issue. Zionism rejected the model of urban settlement, and for Palestinians, the city was the peak of their aspirations. My father moved from Taibeh to Jaffa to be in an urban center. It was a natural journey for a man of his stature. The Zionists dismantled Arab cities and expelled the middle class, and rather than continuing the existing cities - Acre, Haifa, Jaffa - they littered the entire space with construction and megalomaniacal projects. The perception of space in Israel is aggressive, and therefore it is treated with a lack of respect by Arabs and Jews alike. But I am optimistic. I returned here not only because of my connection to my 'Arabness' but somehow to help this wounded space."

Taken from A jump start for Palestinian architecture, Haaretz.com By Esther Zandberg

Participants in HOME at YSP

Gulzar Haider

Gulzar Haider was born in Pakistan. He moved to North America to become a Fulbright Scholar where he received his master's, bachelor's and doctorate degrees in architecture from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

He was founder of the Form Studies Unit at Carleton, and has been published in several areas. Since the early 1980s, Haider has been deeply involved with the issues of architecture and culture with special focus on architecture as a mirror for Muslim self-image in the West. He designed and built four major mosques in North America and has widely written about the need for Abrahamic values shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam toward shaping the environment and achieving peace.

In the early 1980s, following a sabbatical in Saudi Arabia, Haider turned his attention to issues of modernity and tradition in the middle and far east. In 1988, he was appointed as a member of the prestigious International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Cultural Heritage.

He completed his BS in Engineering from Punjab University, Lahore, in 1958, his MS in Engineering (1962), BA in Architecture (1968) and PhD (1969) from the University of Illinois, USA. He served as head of the School of Architecture, University of Carleton, Canada, from 2000-2004

Participants in HOME at YSP

Intizar Hussain

Intizar Hussain was born in Dibai, Bulandshahr, India in 1923 but migrated to Pakistan in 1947. He did his masters in Urdu and later on in English literature.

Hussain has developed a unique prose style and is known for his nostalgia for older places and phenomena. He has received many awards from Pakistan, India and the Middle East. *The Seventh Door*, and *Leaves* are some of his books translated into English.

He is the author of over one hundred and twenty-five Urdu short stories, all of which have appeared in Pakistani and Indian periodicals, Husain has also experimented with a number of other forms: novella, novel, biography, and plays for stage, radio, and television. He has also edited a number of old Urdu tales, translated Russian and American fiction, and compiled anthologies of Urdu fiction. His conversations with the late poet Nasir Kazmi on various literary issues and problems used to appear regularly in several literary journals. He is, however, best known as a master of the short story. Among his published works are seven story collections, three novels, a novella, a travel account of his two visits to India more than three decades after Partition, and a collection of his literary essays and book reviews.

After working for nearly three decades as a columnist for the daily Urdu newspaper *Mashriq* (The East), he moved over to the English newspaper *The Frontier Post* in 1989

His novel *Basti* is an Urdu novel that focuses on the partition as memory, through the lens of protagonist Zakir, an historian who seeks to come to terms with this memory in the context of the happenings in 1971 in Pakistan leading up to the formation of Bangladesh.

Further reading and resources

Booklist related to HOME

Al-Jubeh , Nazmi

Ramallah, History and Architecture Khaldun Bshara, Riwaq, 2002

Badr, Liana

Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory (Traditions in World Cinema)
by Nurith Gertz, George Khleifi, Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer, Edinburgh
University Press, 2008

Dadi , Iftikhar

Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia, The University of North
Carolina Press, 2010

Haider, Gulzar

*Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe (Comparative
Studies on Muslim Societies)*, University of California Press, 1996

Husain, Intizar

Basti, Frances W. Pritchett (Translator), OUP India, 2007
Vishwamitter Adil (Contributor), OUP India, 2004
A Chronicle of the Peacocks: Stories of Partition, Exile and Lost Memories, Alok
Bhalla (Contributor)

Hussein, Aamer

This Other Salt, Saqi books, 1999
Turquoise, Saqi books, 2002
The Cloud Messenger, 2011
Another Gulmohar Tree, 2009
Insomnia, 2007
Blue Direction: and other stories by Aamer Hussein, 1999
Cactus Town and Other Stories by Aamer Hussein, 2003

Michael, Sami

Victoria, El Ray publishers, Haifa, 1993
A Trumpet in the Wadi, 2007

Nasir, Tania

Palestinian Embroidery: Fallahi Cross-Stitch, Al Tatreez al Filisteeni, Ghurzat al
Fallahi al Taqleedia, Palestinian Ministry of Culture, 2009

Shamsie, Kamila

Burnt Shadows, Picador (Macmillan), 2009
Salt and Saffron, 2000
Broken Verses, 2005
Kartography, 2002

Tamari, Salim

Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture, University of California Press, 2008

Tamari, Vera

Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience, Zed Books, 1993

The Palestinian Village Home by Suad Amiry and Vera Tamari, Riwaq, 1989 (only antiquarian)

Zarina

Zarina: Paper Like Skin, Allegra Pesenti (Author), Aamir R. Mufti (Contributor), Sandhini Poddar (Contributor), Prestel, 2011

Glossary

'48: 1948 is the year of the Arab-Israeli war, known in Israel as the War of Independence, Palestinians refer to it as the Nakbah (see *Nakbah*)

1967: date of the so-called Six-Day war between Israel and Jordan, Egypt and Syria. After the war a large number of Palestinians were exiled. Many fled from the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan. Following the war, Jewish minorities in Arab countries were attacked and faced expulsion from their homelands

Abu Ammar: see *Arafat, Yasser*

Alf laylah wa-laylah (*ar.*): *One Thousand and One Nights*

Al Hussein family: a prominent Jerusalemite family

Al Hussein, Haj Amin: (1895/7–1974) Grand Mufti of Jerusalem till '48, who held close ties with the Nazis. Died in Lebanon

Allenby bridge: also King Hussein crossing is the border crossing between Jordan and Israel

Arafat, Yasser: (1929–2004) leader of the Palestinian independence movement

Arz-e-maood (*ur.*): promised land

Ashkenazi[m] (*hebr.*): medieval name for Jewish communities along the Rhine, generally referring to European Jews

ashrafis (*ur.*): gold coins

Baba (*ur.*): father, an abectionate term used for a father figure, including a saint

baher-ka-kamra (*ur.*): (lit.) the room on the outside, a room to receive guests

baila (*ur.*): jasmin flower

bajora (*ar.*): orange grove

banair (*ur.*): parapet, low wall

barahdari (*ur.*): (lit.) space where one could place 12 mats, a space to socialize, meeting place

baramda (*ur.*): veranda

barsaat (*ur.*): rainy season, monsoon

basti (*ur.*): hamlet or neighbourhood

batin (*ar.*): the inner self *Zahir* and *batin* – the apparent and the hidden

Bauhaus: Senan refers to the white city, the central Tel Aviv modernist architecture that was built by German immigrant architects in the 1930s

beit (*ar.*): house

Biladi, biladi (*ar.*): Sami may be referring to the song *Biladi, biladi, biladi* (My country, my country, my country) composed by Egyptian singer Sayed Darwish in 1923, which became the Egyptian national anthem. "Biladi, biladi" is also the beginning of the Palestinian national anthem

***Burnt Shadows*:** a novel by Kamila Shamsie (2009)

burqa (*ur.*): a loose, full body veil

chandni-ka-kamra (*ur.*): (lit.) a moonlit room, a room with white floorsheets

chauki (*ur.*): post chhannakna (*ur.*): loud jangling

Constable, John: (1776–1837) English romantic landscape painter

dallan (*ur.*): large, long room with vaulted doors

Darwish, Mahmoud: (1941–2008) seen as the national poet of Palestine

dastango: storyteller, from Persian/Mughal tradition of courtly storytelling

dharna (*hind.*): protest

dheori (*ur.*): doorpost, hallway

dhol (*ur.*): drum

Diwali (*hind.*): Hindu festival of lights

djinn (*ur.*): genie or spirit

Dome of the Rock: mosque on Al-Haram ash-Sharif or Temple Mount, built in the seventh century

dupatta (*ur.*): long scarf worn by women, which can be worn over the head as a veil or draped over the shoulders

fazzaha! (*ar.*): (exclamation)

amazement gerua (*hind.*): pigment, brownish orange mud

ghar (*ur.*): home

ghazal (*ur.*): song in poetic form

ghurouncha (*ur.*): wooden stand

ghurra (*ur.*): earthen water vessel

gotta (*ur.*): ribbon (metallic)

halwaai (*ur.*): sweet-meat vendor

Holi (*hind.*): Hindu festival of colours

Holocaust (*gr.*): also called Shoah (Hebrew meaning catastrophe), was the killing of 6 million European Jews during World War II

h'ourmi (*ar.*): sacred

housh (*ar.*): courtyard house

hud-e-fasil (*ur.*): intermediary

Hyder, Qurratulain: (1928–2007) influential Urdu writer who wrote *Aag kaDarya* (*River of Fire*)

ikkay (*ur.*): animal-driven cart

imlee (*ur.*): tamarind Jahangir: (1569–1627) ruler of the Mughal Empire

Jamia Millia: Jamia Millia Islamia, university in Delhi established in 1920. Jamia means university, Millia means national

Jeddi (*ar.*): grandfather

kahani (*ur.*): story

khertaals (*ur.*): castanets

khus ki tatty (*ur.*): curtains of khus roots (vetiver) sprinkled with water to cool the house

kiaries (*ur.*): fence, flowerbeds

kibbutz (*hebr.*): Israeli village community organised as collective

Kidwai, Anis: (1906– 1982) born in 1906 in Barabanki (Uttar Pradesh), Kidwai wrote an influential memoir about the time of Partition – *Azadi ki Chhao Mein (In Freedom's Shade)*

kinary (*ur.*): laces

kissa (*ur.*): anecdote

knafeh (*ar.*): sweet vermicelli pastry

koel (*ur.*): Asian cuckoo

kothri (*ur.*): small store room

Krishan Nagar: neighbourhood of central Lahore named after Krishna Temple, predominantly Hindu before Partition

Krishna: avatar of the Hindu God Vishnu, seen as author of *Bhagavad Gita*

kungni (*ur.*): ridge

laban (*ar.*): yogurt

Lal Chowk: central city square in Srinagar, Kashmir
Laxman ji: brother and close companion of Lord Ram

liwan (*ar.*): front hall or portal to a house, often open to the outside

lutha (*ur.*): cotton

machli-ki-kabar (*ur.*): the grave of a fish

Mahabharat: Indian epic Maharaja (*hind.*): king

Mahmoud: see *Darwish*

makan (*ur.*): house

makhda' (*ar.*): partition, separate room

Malka (*ur.*): Queen

Mamlukis: originally Turkic slave soldiers Who were influential as a warrior class until the nineteenth century. They governed the Sultanate of Delhi and Egypt for centuries
mandir (*hind.*): temple

manjeera (*ur.*): percussion instrument

markaz (*ur.*): centre

masjid (*ur.*): mosque

Masnavi: six books of poetry written in the thirteenth century by Persian Sufi poet Jalal Al-Din Rumi

minaret (*ur.*): tower

Mizrahi (*hebr.*): from the Jewish communities of the East, among others, the Jewish community of Iraq

motiya (*ur.*): jasmine flower

Mughal[s]: Central Asians who settled in India from the Middle Ages onwards, the Mughal Empire in the Indian Subcontinent from Babur (1526) till Bahadur Shah (1857)

Muharram (*ur.*): first month in the Islamic calendar, Shia month of mourning

Mukhtar (*ar.*): chosen, village head

mulmul (*ur.*): muslin, fabric

musafir khana (*ur.*): guesthouse

Nakbah (*ar.*): catastrophe, refers to the Palestinian displacements of 1948

Nana (*ur.*): maternal grandfather

Nani (*ur.*): maternal grandmother

neem, neem-ka-pedh (*ur.*): Indian lilac tree from the mahogany family

Ockley, Simon: (1678– 1720) British orientalist

Oslo: refers to the Oslo accords between the PLO and Israeli government in 1993, post Oslo a great number of Palestinians refugees returned Ottoman: (Turkish) Empire that lasted from 1299 to 1923 Partition: 1947 division of the Indian Subcontinent into the two states of India and Pakistan

Purana Qila: the old fort in Delhi

pardah (*ur.*): segregation, a veil

pardah karlijie (*ur.*): request to put on a veil

qanater (*ar.*): arch

Radha: lover of Lord Krishna

raha (*ar.*): sweet

Raja (*hind.*): monarch

Raja Inder: Indra, Lord of heavens, Hindu mythology

Raja Ram Chander ji: Ramachandra, avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu

Raksha Bandhan (*hind.*): Hindu festival which celebrates the relationship between brothers and sisters

Ramayana: Hindu epic

Ram Chander ji's bara'at (*hind.*): wedding procession of Lord Ram

Ramlila (*hind.*): reenactment of the life of Lord Ram

Rani (*ur.*): queen

rath (*ur.*): cart, chariot

rickshaw (*ur.*): three wheeler taxi

riyaaz (*ur.*): practice 162 163

roti (*ur.*): flat bread

sabjis (*hind.*): vegetables

sach (*ar.*): correct, truth

Sahib (*ur.*): (form of address) your Grace, sir

Salah ad-Din: Saladin (c. 1138–1193), Kurdish Sultan who opposed European crusaders

sehen (*ur.*): courtyard

shalwar kameez (*ur.*): traditional dress made up of baggy trousers and long shirt, common in Punjab

Shammout, Ismael: (1930–2006) Palestinian painter born in Lydda, exiled in 1948, famous for his work on the Nakbah

Shamshan (*hind.*): cremation ground

Sheikh (*ar.*): (lit.) elder, a political or religious leader

sindian (*ar.*): oak tree

Sita ji: wife of Lord Ram

sufi (*ur.*): Muslim mystic

sungs (*ur.*): musical instrument

surahi (*ur.*): pitcher

Syed Buzurg: old sage

taashas (*ur.*): percussion instrument

tehzeeb (*ur.*): culture

Teta (*ar.*): grandmother

tilak (*hind.*): mark worn on the forehead by
Hindus symbolizing the third eye

trab (*ar.*): sand

Tuma, Emil: (1919–1985) Palestinian
political thinker and communist

tuzzz (*ar.*): (exclamation) to hell with it!

yani (*ar.*): (expression) well, I see

zahir (*ar.*): the body (*zahir* and *batin* – the
apparent and the hidden)