

# ART & DEAL

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## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

An interview with  
**LIONEL ESTÈVE** - RAJESH PUNJ

**MAJULI:**  
THE LAND OF BAMBOO - NITYA BALI



**BASU CHATTERJEE** –  
*the doyen of middle-of-the-road cinema*  
- SHANKU SHARMA

**PLASTIC POLLUTION**

- RAAJADHARSHINI K.K

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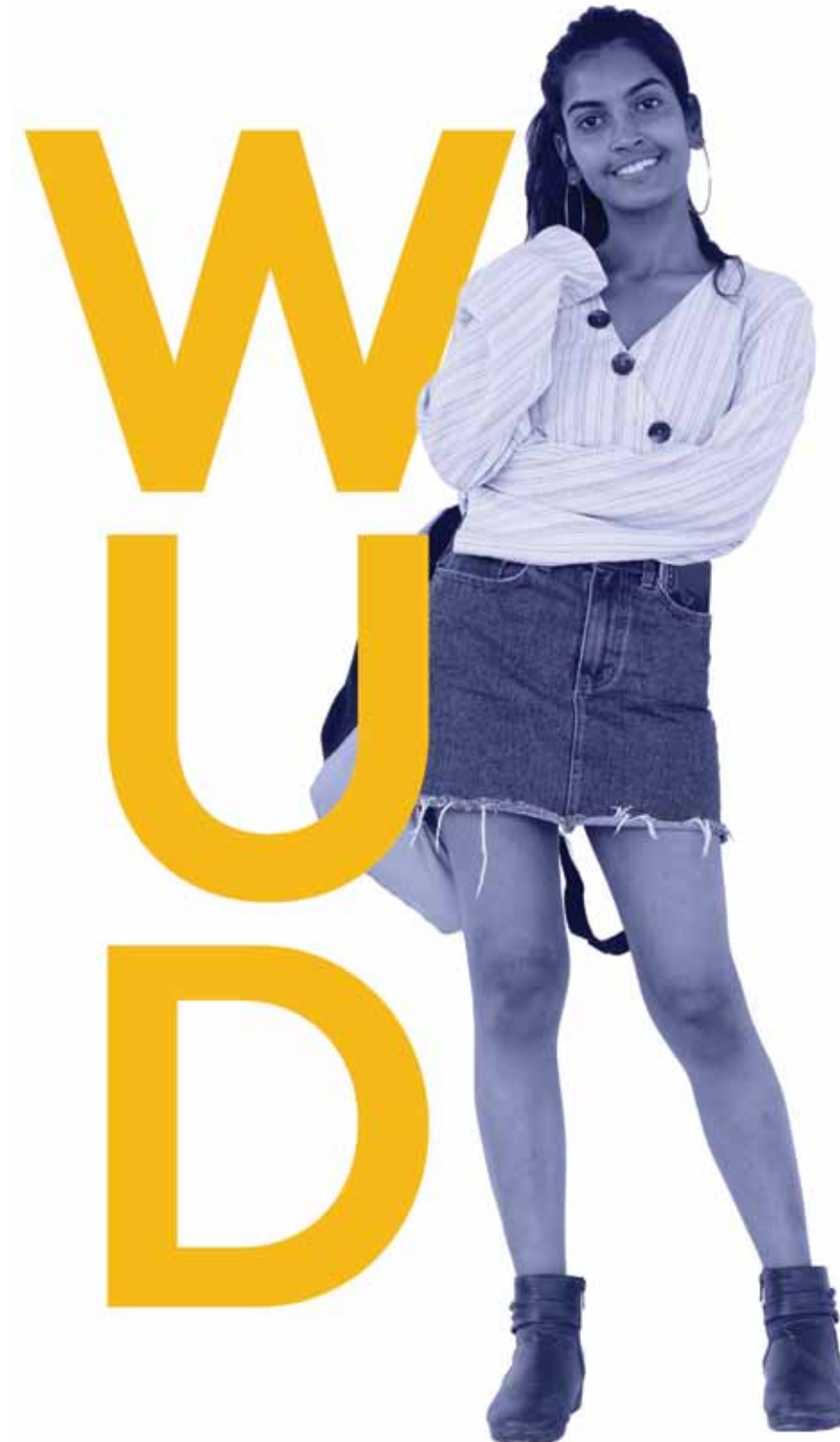
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# EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

June 2020 saw the end of an era with the passing away of Indian filmmaker and screenwriter Shri Basu Chatterjee, aged ninety. The warmth and slice-of-life humour his films exuded were unique in their connect with the audience, be it Chhoti Si Baat, Rajnigandha or Chitchor. However, two of his notable experiments like Ek Ruka Hua Faisla and Kamla Ki Maut, both in the 80's, can be called riveting examples of his cinematic genius. His films will perhaps always grace the throne of the "evergreen".

This month also saw the untimely and very shocking decease of young and gifted Indian actor Sushant Singh Rajput. In his career of seven years, Rajput was only eight films old; seven of which were either financial successes or critically acclaimed, or both. Besides his incredible journey from engineering to the theatre & television, all the way to the silver screen, he was also a sensitive citizen who had been signed by the NITI Ayog, a policy think-tank of the Indian government to promote Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP). In addition he ran the Innsaei Ventures, and was actively involved with several programmes like Sushant4Education, as an effort to help young students. What a man, and what a loss!

While we mere mortals reel from one devastation after another this year, the Katha Upanishad steadfastly reminds us: *"See how it was with those who came before; how it will be with those who are living. Like corn mortals ripen and fall; like corn they come up again."*

And thus we try to lick our wounds and move on. More on the two remarkable lives by Shanku Sharma inside.

On cover this month, London correspondent Rajesh Punj meets Lionel Estève, an artist from Brussels who curiously sees things we would usually leave to the litter as a part of his works of art. As he says himself, "the energy of everything comes from the atmosphere of the earth. The artist likes to think in the moment and allow what surrounds him to determine his artworks."

Apurva Sinha writes an essay about the traditions of the mystical Sri Varadaraja Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. Kanchi, the land of saints, legends and temples is remarkably known as the Kashi of south India, the antiquity of which can be traced back to the 6th century CE.

Another insightful essay comes from Nitya Bali about Assam's Majuli, the land known for varied wooden and bamboo crafts. She specifically writes about its bamboo cottage industry.

On the Photo Essay segment of the month we have Delhi based fashion and conceptual photographer Raajadharshini K.K. review the unnerving Plastic Pollution in the city.

Hope you enjoy the read. Do share with us your feedback at [artanddeal@gmail.com](mailto:artanddeal@gmail.com)

Siddhartha Tagore



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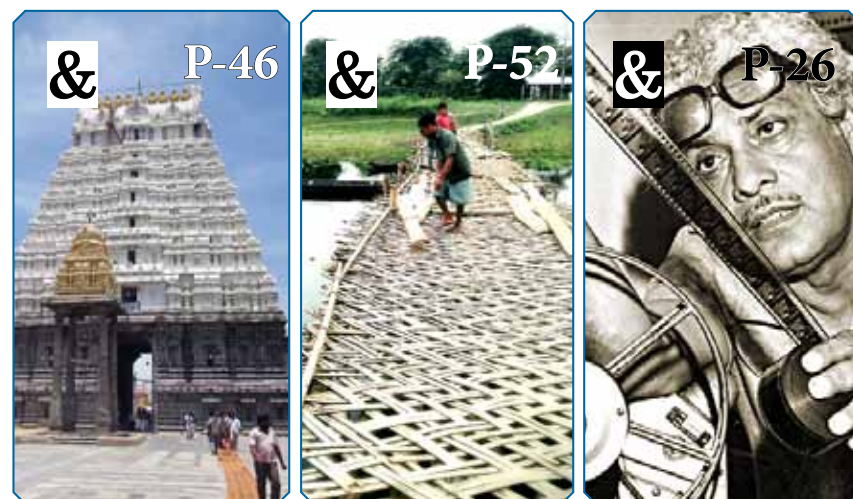
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Cover Detail: Lionel Estève  
Chemical Landscape from the North, 2018  
Various papers, epoxy, wooden frame  
82 x 62 x 5 cm / 32 5/16 x 24 7/16 x 1 15/16 inches  
Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin



Cover Detail: Lionel Estève  
Portrait of the artist  
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

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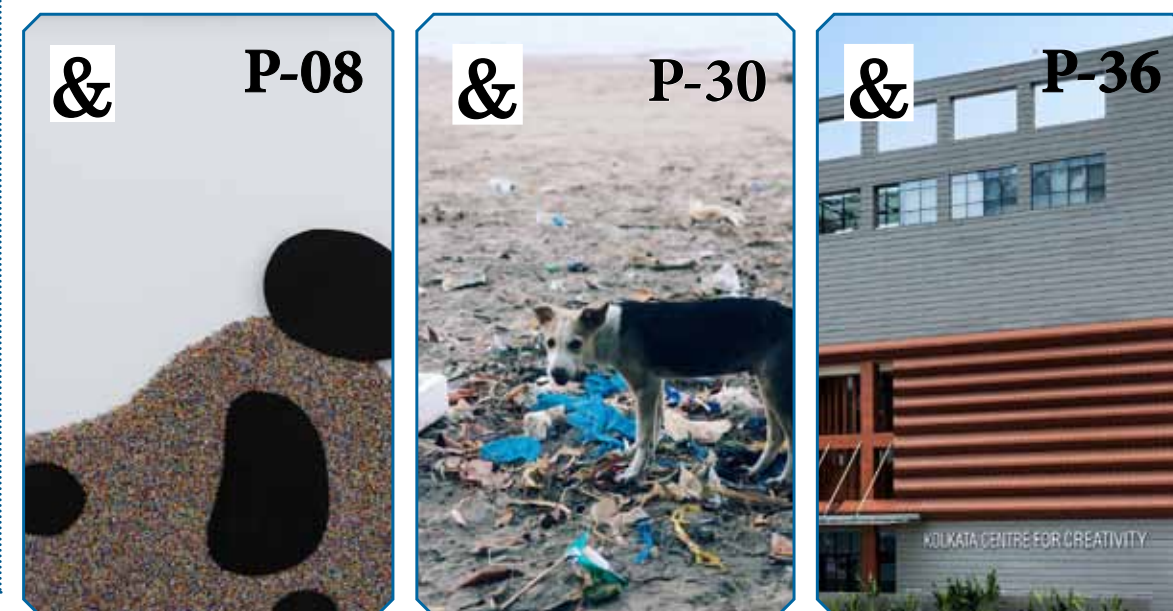
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# THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

An interview with  
**LIONEL ESTÈVE**

- RAJESH PUNJ

There is a light-heartedness about Brussels based artist Lionel Estève that permeates his work as a lightness of touch. Seeing the things we leave to the litter as part and parcel of his colour field container canvases and rock sculptures. In the acclaimed novel by Indian author Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, she explains detritus as the details that dissolve into our lives. Citing in one passage 'what came for them, not death, just the end of living.' As with life, so the infinitesimal elements that fill Estève's container canvases appear as though a thousand ideas laid to rest. That for their reinvention reflects on an absence of optimism for what was intended of these kitsch keepsakes. For Estève the initial choice and changing of an object into art, art as the incarceration of ready-mades as relics, involves amusement park-like colours that initially mesmerise one's mind, before becoming more melancholic, for the cutting short of their utilitarian lives. And as if magnetically drawn together by the artist's hand, the array of paper markers and plastic necklace beads are piled high, cascading over one another, are testament to a generation's lost love.

*"I would like these latest works to be perceived as a simple gesture, that of pouring materials into the bottom of a frame. The result, this sunken material, can be approached in two contradictory ways: either as a collapse or an elevation, either as a fall or as an accumulation."*

Estève his own words sees his works as much connected, for the way he goes about making them, as they appear contradictory, for what we see in them. Saying of his wall works "I would like these latest works to be perceived as a simple gesture, that of pouring materials into the bottom of a frame. The result, this sunken material, can be approached in two contradictory ways: either as a collapse or an elevation, either as a fall or as an accumulation." And within that duality, Estève like Roy, for her referring to the end as neither life nor death but a point of reinvention, prolongs Estève's objects of their utilitarian worth. The measure of his *Chemical Landscapes*, beyond what is visible, is of the artist's preoccupation with the works transformative potential. As his container canvases, filled with broken glass and brilliantly coloured foam,

< Lionel Estève  
Portrait of the artist  
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin



appear capable of moving within the frame, if taken off the wall and violently shaken - of the contents bursting into life, as the atom-like elements make contact and collide with one another. Which is what Estève wants of our riotous imaginations - to invite them to potentially act. Yet such a reaction isn't available to us in a gallery-like setting, so the static configuration of colours and content take on a decorative, almost delicious quality, that is as much to do with the intrinsic beauty of the objects, as it is about our appreciating them of their new context, and of their suddenly becoming unavailable to us. Window-shopping into a world of bric-à-brac, that as attractive as they might appear, have gone unnoticed, invisible, within the contents of our lives.

And with the Flowers on Rock series, Estève explains how the stones are entirely random, found and physically transferred to his studio, to create something of them. That he then transforms from fossils into a form reminiscent of brightly coloured coral. From which sprout these antennae, that themselves resemble the smallest of flowers, climbing up from the rock as if nourished by the prize pearls. And as with everything Estève appears to enjoy creating collages, assemblages that read like reminders of earth's incredible fragility. As he says himself, 'the energy of everything comes from the atmosphere of the earth.'

Estève is an artist who thinks in the moment and

*“these elements, these pearls, these precariously balanced materials, are for me more like sculptures rather than images, since the key here is mainly the law of gravity.”*

^ Lionel Estève  
View of the exhibition "Narcisse", Perrotin Seoul  
January 24 - March 10, 2018  
© Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin

allows the everyday that surrounds him to decide his ideas into artworks, as acts of rewarding alchemy. As is the transformative attitude that the artist applies to everything he collects, he talks in terms of becoming acquainted with his finds. Seeing them settled in his studio, enough to envision them as something else. Colours, materials, textures and their multiple tensions, become instrumental in his turning the every day into the extraordinary. Deposited in such a way as to create visual momentum of something entirely still, and in so doing the artist not only sees a visual vocabulary for these element objects, but also a velocity of forms that could have everything turn on its head - that everything can become easily animated, and the image has the potential to advance beyond its static self. As he creatively and quite convincingly explains, that "these elements, these pearls, these precariously balanced materials, are for me more like sculptures rather than images, since the key here is mainly the law of gravity."

Estève will his works to want to transform, confining their contents into an enclosed space, poised by the potential of motion - and the evolution of his objects as involving different and very distinct states. As he explains, "what is shown seems to be accidental, temporary, unstable, open to revision if the work is moved. Strangely, a work of art has become an object in motion. These constructions question the definition of a work of art as something permanent, controlled, chosen." As a more robust way of looking, Estève appears intent on challenging what we see and of how we experience it that dares to defy the distance between the individual and the external world. The idea that instead of believing everything as fact, what we have is a single perspective, of multiple views and visions of the world. Which for its shifting view evokes something of the early intention of Cubism, as coined by the French novelist and critic Guillaume Apollinaire in the 1910's. Who explains the idea of seeing everything simultaneously, as "the art of depicting new wholes with formal elements, borrowing not only from the reality of vision, but that of conception." That idea of experiencing the object in the round, grounded whilst under the influence of gravity, is where Estève works transform from objects into art.

#### Interview

**Rajesh Punj:** Can we begin by your giving me an overview of the exhibition in Paris?

**Lionel Estève:** I didn't think of the show as having an opening and endpoint, but when you enter into the gallery, you see the works as they are. But it has changed from the original layout because from the beginning I had planned the exhibition in a very different way, and we were not entirely sure of it so we changed it. But from the start, it was, how to say, same size, same room.

**RP:** I assume you worked with a maquette, to begin with, as many artists do, to determine the layout as you saw fit.

**LE:** No I never work with a maquette. I realised they could go like this. Maybe I attempted two exhibitions in my life without visiting the space. One was in Hong Kong at Emmanuel's gallery, for which I was given two rooms, and there I created a maquette, and as soon as I arrived at the gallery, what was on the right side I moved over to the left, and the leftover to the right. It was the first thing I did because it wasn't as I wanted it, and with that, I realised not to work in that way again.

**RP:** Obviously when you are in the space everything becomes about where you are, the light, the atmosphere, the height of the ceiling, the depth of the doorways, the proximity of the door to the centre of the room. Such things can only come from standing in a room and having one's work placed within the space. Size can change according to context as well.

**LE:** Yes, yes, it is very difficult..., well you know you can't expect something theoretical, you go and see if it is working or not.

**RP:** Is there an aesthetic or 'branding' of how you display the works?

**LE:** To begin with I thought in terms of size, as I said, that this room would be one size of work, and another, another size. For example, we knew what was expected of a room, the same size works, very simple, with the image in the middle, and for nothing to have greater attention or a room have a specific meaning. In that everybody can do it, and understand it.

**RP:** The works are incredibly decorative in that sense.

**LE:** In a way, they are just disappearing.

**RP:** How do you explain these container canvases for example? When you look at them, and into them, they initially have the appearance of a painting, of a representation of forms, but they are an accumulation of objects, specks of dust and details that we know from the corner of a room, or the bottom of a drawer.

**LE:** I think, and I believe I am a sculptor, and that these are sculptures.

**RP:** For their mass and materiality?

**LE:** I am not a painter; I have never painted a canvas in my life. Crucially I use paint but I am not a painter, and for me, the gesture of these works are derivative of a sculptor, and not a painter. Because there is more than one way of approaching these works, and there are different angles to how we should see them, including their meaning. They also say something about art history. The frame, the outer edge of the





work, is in many ways like a recipient. And for me to fill it, to introduce an alien element, I had never seen that way of working before. It exists with bottles of sand in popular craft, but to put or pour something into a museum-like frame wasn't something that I was aware of, or visible in the art world. So this is not because of that, but when you are doing something at a certain point you think you are doing something that has already been done. And you might tell me you are doing the same kind of work as..., and I can recall asking a friend 'does this way of working remind you of somebody else working in this way?' But no one has yet to tell me, 'yes, it is the same as a guy you did it in (19)65, and I am sure it will happen. But you know when I started to work as an artist I wanted my work to have a distance from me. I didn't want my ego to interfere with what I was doing. So what I fear or fight for shouldn't be present in the work. I want that they exist in and of themselves, for their material worth.

**RP: An autonomous object.**

**LE:** Also close to the meaning and the poetry of it, as an object.

**RP: To remove one's emotional self.**

**LE:** I wanted the work to be independent of me, and not easily related to reality, and I was entirely happy with that for many years, and I think, how to say, it was 'comfortable'. Because I didn't wish to pretend I was a clever guy. I didn't want to be seen as an intellectual. I don't wish for a political meaning. So the works as they were were very reassuring. Then a few years ago I was invited to do a show, and I imagined I would be

away for a long time because I had no other big shows to do, only smaller commitments.

And I can remember the director invited me to a huge space in Liège, of almost eight hundred square metres, ten metres high, no walls, just one room; incredibly beautiful - a very old space from 1920's. Usually, artists use the La Comète space, but I had decided finally I could make something for the whole space, an installation as a major work. And with the idea that the show had to be big, I considered having to go to Kinshasa (Congo), Los Angeles, New York, Rome, and Liège, six months after, and I thought 'fuck' I don't want to stay in Europe because of Liège, I want to go to LA, and New York, and so I mentally prepared myself. And when I started to work from the beginning I wanted to make very small sculptures that could fit in my pocket almost. So instead of taking on the space, and intentionally creating big works, on the contrary, I wanted much smaller works coming down from the ceiling, of works that I could easily carry with me, of a show of the things that surround me there. I started with that idea, and it was fine, to begin with, but unfortunately, there was the bomb attack in Brussels, and my family was in Brussels, and being away I was incredibly worried for them. I saw it as an incredibly sad moment because all of the individuals involved were one hundred, two hundred metres from my home, which made it an incredibly difficult moment, for my community and me.

Initially, it didn't affect my work. I went to Rome from the US, and the generation that I was at art school with were encouraged to draw from life, and I tried to avoid that because if you were different, or



^ Lionel Estève  
 Untitled (Mirror), 2016  
 Porcelain, colored underglaze, crystallizations, platinum  
 70 x 70 cm / 27 9/16 x 27 9/16 inches  
 © Estève / ADAGP, Paris 2017  
 Photo : Clair Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

< Lionel Estève  
 View of the exhibition "Narcisse", Perrotin Seoul  
 January 24 - March 10, 2018  
 © Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin

attempted to do something different, you were not going to draw as they wished, so I never learned to master life drawing. But of course in Rome and you see all of those iconic torsos and broken busts, and from that, I wanted to try something in clay, which had me make a series of drawings etc, which were intended for the exhibition in Liège. And I was aware to make so many human figures from the original busts, created a crowd.

**RP: The crowd of your community.**

**LE:** The title of the show was La Poussière de la Ville, or Dust from the City, so all of those figures created a crowd, and of course, I realised that it reflected or represented the community or crowd in Brussels, of all the people there at the time of the attack. Which had me think of the city in a very different way, and



I realised for the first time the work was related to me directly, and to something I was consumed with at that time.

**RP:** *Your ego had entered the work.*

**LE:** And so I realised 'wow,' this is something new for me. I had never expected to bring my life into my work. Well, I am changing; I am reacting, why not? And for one month I was working in this way, whilst also working with landscape and miniature objects. Like, everybody, I am worried about the environment, of the landscape and sustainability, and nature. So I thought to use those concerns and considerations not to give everyone a lesson on how to live well, but to employ those interests in a way to create works that encourage a kind of pleasure. And those works, if I think about it, are very related to our time.

**RP:** *And those works intended for Liège sound more sculptural. How then did you arrive at this moment, with these works in Paris that are more to the wall, and closer in appearance to a painting?*

**LE:** That is something that happens because I frame many of my works, and a sculpture can be five millimetres but still be three-dimensional. Many of my works are set within a frame, but that doesn't make them paintings, for their being inside or against a frame. It is an important point. It is all related to space.

**RP:** *When I look at your work and have seen images of them, you created these 'container canvases', sculptures and floor pieces, and what is interesting of these container works, is that I am committed to the idea of them as paintings, purely for their dimensions, and direction of vision, flat to the wall and looking outward, as we would experience a painting. Crucially painting, unless it is abstract, creates an illusion of space that takes the audience temporarily into an alternative realm. Beyond that what I realise of your work is that what you do, is that you use the physical space of the frame, between the back panel and glass or perspex front, and you fill that space, as a way to affirm if you like, that illusions are based on the physical. Which becomes the material and measure of your work. And then that you carefully control how the physical contents of the fallout of these minute elements are arranged, which is clearly to do with the aesthetic or visual intervention that you want to happen within the work.*

**LE:** The thing that is happening, and let's refer to the contents as an image, for the sake of argument, I want that the audience sees it as an accident because for me a landscape is an accident. Each of them could appear differently, but as well there are many actions and accidents that are uncontrolled, that have us arrive at this visual moment. And I want that the viewer sees the works and considers that everything that has happened within the frame is entirely random.

*“what is shown seems to be accidental, temporary, unstable, open to revision if the work is moved. Strangely, a work of art has become an object in motion. These constructions question the definition of a work of art as something permanent, controlled, chosen.”*

> Lionel Estève  
Untitled (Mirror), 2016 (detail)  
Porcelain, colored underglaze, crystallizations, platinum h.  
70x 70 cm / 27 9/16 x 27 9/16 inches  
© Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin







**RP:** Like the contents of an empty drawer, that has for its history, traces of things from before.

**LE:** They are this way, but as I said, they could appear completely different. I want that for the audience the image and contents are temporary.

**RP:** Ephemeral.

**LE:** If you take it from the frame you can imagine everything spilling out onto the floor, like an accident, when in fact everything is fixed. Fundamentally I create a solid structure that I then place within the frame. But I like that we think as a child that if we turn the frame slightly the contents would move with gravity.

**RP:** So how do you physically go about creating one of these 'chemical landscapes', as you have titled them?

**LE:** What I want is that the audience imagines each of them in a certain way, so when you look at them that is everything you understand of them - of their fragility and state of flux. When in fact they are not like that at all. The contents are one block, and to

^ Lionel Estève  
*Chemical Landscape from another planet, 2018*  
 Foam, ink, acrylic, stones, glue, wooden frame  
 125 x 155 x 5 cm / 49 3/16 x 61 1/16 x 1 15/16 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève  
 View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.  
 Photo: Claire Dorn  
 © Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

arrive at that first of all I create a cast to make the block, and then when it becomes solid, I will carefully put it into the frame.

**RP:** So, in fact, there is 'one' congealed object within a frame, and not multiple objects, that appear thrown in to create these brilliant and very beautiful configurations of form. What we see is constructed to give the illusion of randomness at the roll of the dice. Because we imagine, as you would wish, each of them to have millions of elements that you have painstakingly collected and choreographed into these volumed artefacts.

**LE:** Each work consists of a constructed 'plate', which is how I work. Of collecting everything together and casting it as a solid object. It is very strange because when I am in the studio creating a plate, it can initially appear to look like something, referring to something real, but when we take the solid plate to the framer, and as soon as we frame it, there is the feeling of 'oh yes', that it makes sense. The frame creates the weight the plate needs and also gives the plate context. Telling us something about the contents, and delivering a kind of story, its own story.

**RP:** So do you see them as abstract involving reality, for your choice of objects?

**LE:** Involving reality, no. I see them as one gesture.

It is something I want that the audience understands the fact that okay everything becomes something else.

**RP:** And I want to understand better your choice of objects? Why you have selected the elements you have? Was it something intentional, or entirely involuntary, like 'dust' details as you talked of with your time in Liège? Are you constantly collecting and knowing what makes for a good artwork?

**LE:** I am always working with what I have around me. So the last show I did here at Galerie Perrotin, the purpose of the exhibition was to examine what would happen if I moved my studio from the city to the countryside? What could I do there? And so I did it, and that became the basis of the show, of working with and within the environment I am in. So for that show, I was back in town, and I already knew the gestures I wanted to make and to begin with. I thought of 'what I could take?' so to begin I took what I had in my studio, and then objects to me.

**RP:** In front of us now, this work *Chemical Landscape from Rio de Janeiro 2018*, appears like birthday confetti.

**LE:** Yes, birthday or a carnival. At the time of my making the work, it was the Belgian carnival. Another work was based on recycling what was in my studio.







^ Lionel Estève  
 Chemical Landscape from the North, 2018  
 Various papers, epoxy, wooden frame  
 82 x 62 x 5 cm / 32 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 24 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 1 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches  
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

Not just recycling, but of introducing things I had bought. Then another piece, Chemical Landscape from Siberia 2018, I cut a series of perspex pieces to sit one on top of the other.

**RP:** It appears, as with all of these chemical landscapes, that you have created your own vocabulary of the most extreme colours. Which are very appealing, appetising even. Likened to the windowed glass jars of a confectionary shop, which we are all drawn to the touch and taste of.

**LE:** My family come from the very south of Europe, so I should be excused for that. I am allowed to use such things.

**RP:** You want to draw on the most intense colours, to animate and attack our senses.

**LE:** Yes.

**RP:** And many of the works, have me think of the images in old science books of the earth cut open. With the core at the centre, and then older rock and sediment surrounding it.

**LE:** Yes of course, but what is strange is that today we relate these livelier colours to Pop Art, to all those things Pop. Which I don't understand, because if you go to the Musée d'Orsay, and look for a (Paul) Gauguin, you will see the most incredible choice of colours applied to his canvas, much more than Andy Warhol or any of his contemporaries. And today if you use strong colours you are considered (eccentric almost). I know nature very well because I love being outdoors, and when we look at a flower, I admit the colours are super strong.

**RP:** So I think of the last show, of your moving to the country, it intrigues me, and of how that affected your palette. Was it entirely different, or more subdued as a consequence, from these incredibly kitsch colours here? For two shows possibly you went from one extreme to another, with your work.

**LE:** Yes.

**RP:** As well if I look into these works for long enough, I realise that they are made up of the things we ignore, if you like, of the elements that inhabit our lives like 'dust', entirely present but invisible at the same time. Not only do we notice them here, and you have us consider them worthy of our attention, but you multiple them, like two-penny toys, until they become something else again. Of the object multiplied becoming abstract.

**LE:** Yes, abstraction comes of collecting.

**RP:** I wonder of your statement, about the works being reflective of the environment you are in, and of the people around you. Considering that, can the works be read as biographical visions of the people you have around you, where you live and work? Not

literal portraits, but landscapes of our lives as society and community? Every element belongs or has the potential to belong to someone. But as well these are not objects as we think of them, of the possessions that fill our lives, but the details that we come into contact with regularly without noticing them. And again we come back to your analogy of 'dust'; one might call the chemical works as representative of the 'decorated dust' of our individual lives.

**LE:** I am using what I have in front of me.

**RP:** Inspired by our modern culture for the fake and false as well. And we do think, as we have talked about, that if you were to vigorously shake the works that the coloured contents would fall more evenly within the frame. Like a child's plaything that you turn over and over until the coloured matter disperses in all directions. As if our physical intervention would allow us to experience the works in a more rewarding way, but for you, it is entirely about the potential movement, as we might imagine it, and not of motion itself.

**LE:** I was in India, and there there was a place between Bangalore and Goa, a small state where the landscape was incredible. I don't recall the name of the region exactly. But there you had huge stones the size of a building. And I can recall how, at the time, the environment had a major effect on me. Back from that trip, I decided to make the India work. Notice for each of the works the title is where the works are mythically meant to come from, Chemical Landscape from Siberia, Chemical Landscape from China, Chemical Landscape from Congo.

**RP:** So they are not necessarily all of the places you have been too, as with Chemical Landscape of the Ocean, or Chemical Landscape from another planet.

**LE:** No, but you can imagine things and you may very well be wrong.

**RP:** The Chemical Landscape of Siberia 2018 work intrigues me possibly more than any of the others, for its lack of anything. These pieces of perspex, one on top of another, are so simple, yet for whatever reason, possibly their transparency, they elude to so many things - of the environment, of material as a mirror, and everything outside as much as the world within. Which is critical to our understanding of the works, of the picture plane functioning as a facade for a vessel of visual forms that you have pressed and pinned together. But this particular work I find beautiful for its absence of everything. As if the simplest forms have within them the greatest truths - I could see so many works coming from this one, do you envisage that?

**LE:** Possibly, I don't attach myself to one particular work. With this exhibition, I had the feeling that I was opening a door, and with some of the works, they





could lead to something, relating to simple things, of the next exhibition and of what will happen. I have yet to decide. But as well there are other works that I would wish to do bigger.

**RP:** *And is that something, if we consider these all being of a similar size, of making much larger works.*

**LE:** No, but Chemical Landscape from Brazil 2018, is a work in which I encountered a great many accidents.

**RP:** *Its appearance makes me think of nougat, and all of the ingredients within that. Another work, Chemical Landscape from Japan, has an element of erosion about it - was there a reaction whilst making that particular work?*

**LE:** No, there wasn't a reaction, but when I make them I cannot necessarily control what I am doing. I do everything as a kind of procedure; I wait, and then open each of them from their casting, and see what comes. I made one that was very beautiful, but unfortunately, it broke, and so I made this version, which is very good as well, but I (feel that was a better version).

**RP:** *Which emphasises how each of them are unique, impossible to replicate.*

^ Lionel Estève  
*Chemical Landscape from Brazil, 2018*  
 Sand, epoxy, gouache paint, wooden frame  
 156 x 204,5 x 5 cm / 61 7/16 x 80 1/2 x 1 15/16 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève  
 View of the exhibition Chemical Landscape at Perrotin Paris.  
 © Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

**LE:** Yes, exactly, because of the technique involved the works are random and independent of one another. If you are working in ceramics it is as impossible to control entirely the outcome of a work.

**RP:** *And you appreciate that, the randomness of what comes?*

**LE:** I want to try and create an environment in which an accident can occur if you like. I put things in position in order I have the desired effect, but not to control the process entirely.

**RP:** *If I understand it, the alchemy as art occurs in the accident. Of the transformation of the elements or objects you collect, becoming the chemical landscapes we see here.*

**LE:** We speak about my collecting objects, the sculpture Flowers on Rock I, 2019; I found the original rock maybe ten years previously, on the ground, and I had with me a backpack, so I took it with me, and it was in my studio for years. And then I decided I wanted flowers to appear to come from the rock - flowers or vegetation because I liked the idea of one impossible element giving life to another, and the same with the other work from the series, Flowers on Rock III, 2019.

**RP:** *The work makes me think of a circuit board laid out over a rock. As though the rock has transformed*

*into an electronic object that is artificially able to give life to the tentacles reaching out from it.*

**LE:** They are the inside of a plastic rope, which I tore open and took all of the minute beads from, to which I added nail polish.

**RP:** *And so it appears like a natural phenomenon. As if from the remotest of places life can still emerge or mutate from another entity.*

**LE:** It could easily belong underwater.

**RP:** *Like a fossil or coloured coral. Another work that attracted my attention is Chemical Landscape from the Ocean, 2019, because within that work there is as much space as there is activity. And as intended, you create this wonderful illusion to a seascape whilst still holding onto the materiality of your choice of object. It would be very easy to fill the frame to the top with the gelatine, but you decide against that, and it works.*

**LE:** Ah yes, to go to the top, of course, it's a possibility.

**RP:** *So how you decide that, of when you stop with a solid mass? Because again I think you are pouring objects into the frame when of course you are not.*

**LE:** For this work, I created a skeleton and then put it into the frame, and by having it, as it is I wanted this idea that if you were to touch it, the colour paper will move the way of water.





**RP:** *Of gravity becoming involved. Which of course is all an illusion, as there isn't that kind of fragility, as we might think of it, to what we see.*

**LE:** But when I make it there is gravity involved. Because before a work of art was meant entirely for one place, a specific location, a church or ceiling. Today art is related to a great deal of movement, a work can move from Basel to Beirut, in light of so many exhibitions and events. And so it was also interesting for me to do something that makes the spectator consider 'what will happen if we move these work?'

**RP:** *So it is something you divulge to your audience?*

**LE:** Yes, yes, but maybe I shouldn't.

**RP:** *I like the idea of playing with people's minds. That they think they have the potential to alter everything.*

**LE:** If they are considered that then the illusion exists.

**RP:** *You do imagine, as the audience, that if you take one of the chemical works off of the wall, and turn it upside down, everything inside will fall unceremoniously to the bottom. And again it interests me the idea of your allowing for as much space as material forms within a work.*

**LE:** If I were to entirely fill a chemical work then there

^ Lionel Estève  
View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.  
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève  
View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.  
Photo: Claire Dorn  
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

is no possibility for the accident, or of the illusion of change within the work.

**RP:** *So then when you create a solid structure of so many random elements, do you know that it will fit into this sized frame?*

**LE:** Yes, many of the elements are glued onto the back. I come to the framer with all of the pieces and can spend a day or more transferring the solid mass into the frame. Which still requires thinking everything beforehand.

**RP:** *So it about accidents waiting to happen, of objects naturally falling one way or another.*

**LE:** To make some appear accidental, you have to consider all of the possibilities.

**RP:** *The illusion is what holds our attention.*

**LE:** This work *Chemical Landscape* from another planet, 2018, involved one piece of material, and the small stones fall between the glass front and the foam.

**RP:** *Strange, because it almost has the look of a landscape about it.*

**LE:** This work remains me of the photographs that come from NASA's mission to Mars because you don't immediately understand it.

**RP:** *Which makes me think that each of them takes*

*you somewhere, and for each everything is entirely different; a landscape as universe. There are so many directions I can go with each of these works. Twelve versions of *Chemical Landscape* from Siberia, in a room, could look quite incredible.*

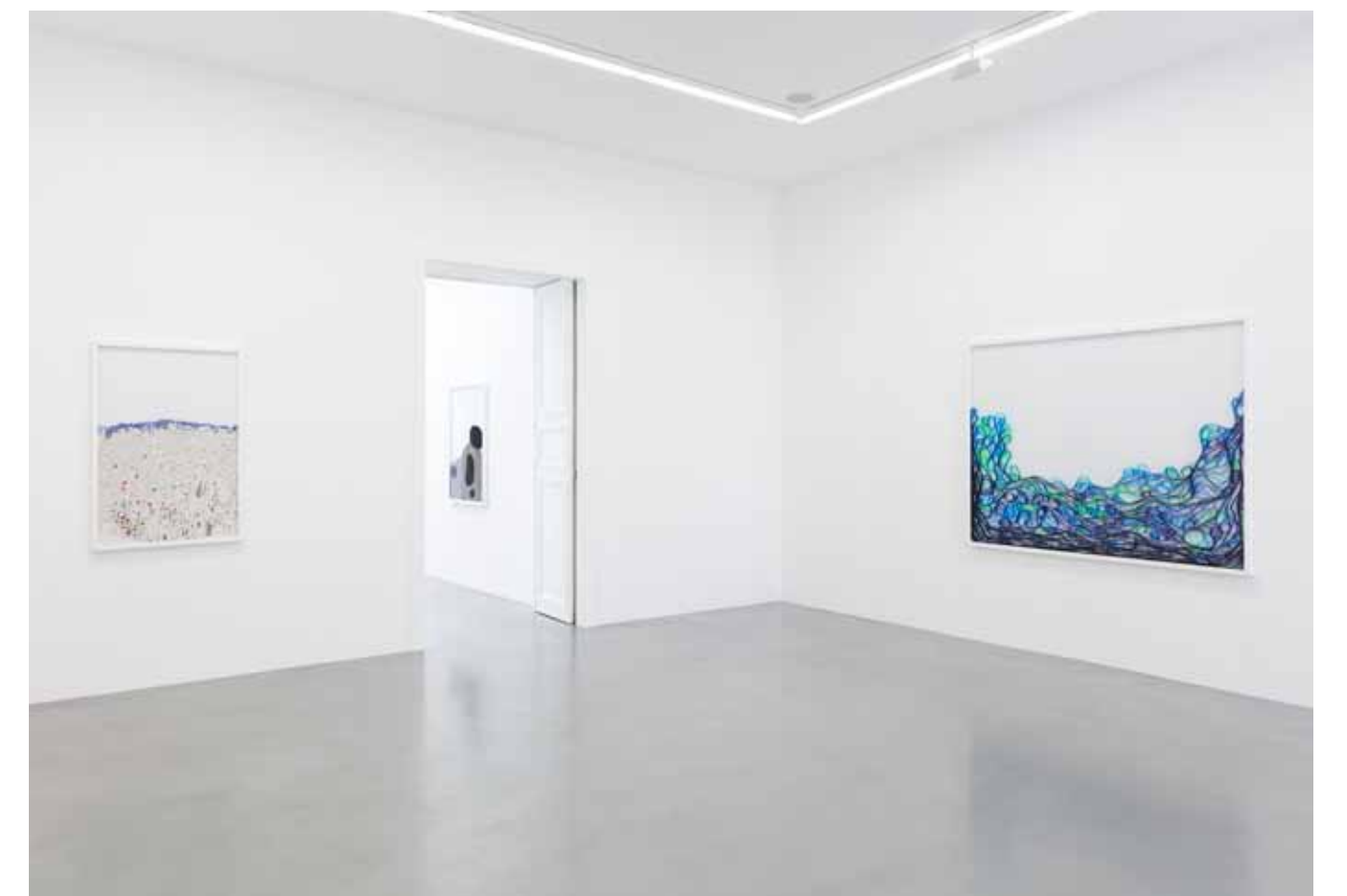
**LE:** Possibly that would be too minimal for me.

**RP:** *For me, the work alluded to the sensation of something, whilst delivering nothing, which appeals to me. And within that, I could envisage one work of coloured glass that operates as your signature or fingerprint if you like, that brings the work back to you.*

**LE:** As I said, with this show, I feel like I am opening a door to many more possibilities. With the choice of materials, and by referencing the landscape, it could, for the first time, lead somewhere.

**RP:** *Do you feel already the urge to follow an idea further?*

**LE:** Not exactly, next I will do something else entirely because I have a great deal of desire. I love to work, and for a year now I have been waiting for the moment to do something new. I have no relationship with this technique, as I am always trying to invent new ways of working. Even if a technique exists already, I want that I learn it myself, and at the same time to experiment with that technique, until I understand it. Which will sometimes take years. For example,





I have done glasswork, which I learned myself. That required a lot of money and time that proved incredibly interesting.

**RP: And are you with your work, always looking or learning for new ways of working, and do keep those misshapes or mistakes?**

**LE:** When I can, but if it is beyond saving then obviously not.

**RP: Because those elements can have a second life, they too can become something.**

**LE:** Sometimes it is not just about the technique; you also need to understand (how to do something).

**RP: Should I assume with this series of works that there are many more?**

**LE:** No, this is the first time I am showing these particular works, in their entirety.

**RP: And so what comes next for you?**

**LE:** I am not entirely sure, I was meant to exhibit in Seoul, but I wait to know. I have a gallery there, and they told me that I would likely have a show next April.

**RP: In 2020?**

**LE:** Yes, so I will know soon enough, and the works are already done. They have asked me to make the work I had made before this series. Which I call Papier de Provence or Paper from Provence, something related to the landscape and nature, and the gallery said they wanted a show of that work. And I have never shown that work alone before, so it will be interesting, and all is done.

**RP: So now you have a moment to experiment?**

**LE:** Yes I have a proposal to do for a show in New York, so I will prepare for that, and I certainly have something to do in Berlin in May, and a gallery show in one year in Brussels.

**RP: It feels with your work, that you have created a kind of freedom that allows you to move very easily between materials and techniques, as you say.**

**LE:** Yes.

**RP: So you don't have that obligation about your work of making it again and again on demand, as other artists might do.**

**LE:** No, maybe they are right, I don't know. For me, I have a big desire, as I told you, of producing different things. I am not loyal (to a technique).

**RP: With your going to Berlin, to New York and Seoul, do you try and go many days in advance, and consider everything around you as collectable, as you said before?**

**LE:** When I can, I love to make the work on-site, and in the place I am. But of course, that requires you to know the work before, and the technique well enough already. You cannot experiment too much. I will also have something in South America in the winter and plan not to go there with the intention of experimenting. I have to arrive to work.

**RP: I assume there is too big a risk of going somewhere and not producing.**

*Not exactly, next I will do something else entirely because I have a great deal of desire. I love to work, and for a year now I have been waiting for the moment to do something new. I have no relationship with this technique, as I am always trying to invent new ways of working. Even if a technique exists already, I want that I learn it myself, and at the same time to experiment with that technique, until I understand it.*



^Lionel Estève  
Chemical Landscape from India, 2018  
Rubber, colored pearls, epoxy, wooden frame  
125 x 90 x 5 cm / 49 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 35 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 1 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches  
Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin





## BASU CHATTERJEE – the doyen of middle-of-the-road cinema

- SHANKU SHARMA

**B**asu Chatterjee (1930 - 2020), Indian film director and screenwriter, passed away on June 4, leaving Indian film industry in a state of shock. He was 90. A huge number of celebrities took to social media to mourn Basu's demise. He is survived by daughters, Sonali Bhattacharya and Rupali Guha. He was one of the masters of middle-of-the-road or middle cinema. He gave the film industry some of the finest movies of all times. The genius filmmaker became associated with middle cinema as was Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Bhattacharya, whom he assisted on Teesri

^Basu Chatterjee, Image courtesy: jagranjosh.com



Kasam (1966). Basu Chatterjee's films mostly dealt with light-hearted stories of middle-class families (most in urban settings). Most of his works focused on marital and love relationships. However, Ek Ruka Hua Faisla (1986) and Kamla Ki Maut (1989) were a few exceptions as they dealt with social and moral issues. Hindi film industry will remember his name for giving it movies like Rajnigandha (1974), Chhoti Si Baat (1975), Chitchor (1976), Baaton Baaton Mein (1979), Manzil (1979), Shaukeen (1981) and Chameli Ki Shaadi (1986), each of which was better than the other. His collaboration with Amol Palekar deserves special mention. With Amol, he gave Bollywood some of its most endearing films. He had the quality to present actors (even superstars) in unique and never-seen avatars. Amitabh Bachchan in Manzil, Rajesh Khanna in Chakravyuh (1978), Dev Anand in Man Pasand (1980) and Mithun Chakraborty in Shauken. He did not remain confined to cinemas in India only. He directed the Bengali film Hothath Brishti (1998), a joint production of India and Bangladesh. The film had Ferdous Ahmed from Bangladesh, and Priyanka Trivedi and Sreelekha Mitra from India. The film received wide appreciation from all quarters. Basu Chatterjee once again collaborated with Ferdous Ahmed in Chupi Chupi (2001), Tok Jhal Mishti (2002) and Hotath Shedin (2012), another joint production of Ban and India. The genius also wrote the script for Noyeem Imtiaz Neamul's Ek Cup Cha (2014), a Bangladeshi film. Born in Ajmer (Rajasthan), Basu started his career as a cartoonist and illustrator. After working there for several years, he decided to change career paths. He assisted Basu Bhattacharya in Teesri Kasam, Raj Kapoor-Waheeda Rehman film. The film won the National Award for Best Feature Film.

From then, there was no looking back for Basu. His directorial debut with Sara Akash (1969) won him the Filmfare Best Screenplay Award. He made movies on a staggering range of subjects, from rural comedies to social issues. He worked with a plethora of actors. He illuminated sheer directorial brilliance with television series Byomkesh Bakshi and another popular television series Rajani for Doordarshan. They speak volumes of genius, brilliance and superiority. Basu Chatterjee is no more, but his films will live on...

^A still from Basu Chatterjee's film Manzil, Image courtesy: newindianexpress.com



^ Basu Chatterjee, Image courtesy: Twitter





## SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT - A TALENT GONE TOO SOON

- SHANKU SHARMA

**H**indi film industry is in crisis as it has lost a number of actors within a few weeks.

The news of Sushant Singh Rajput's untimely demise has plunged the entire Indian film industry (Bollywood) into a pall of sadness. The actor was just 34! It was unfathomable and shocking.

Sushant Singh Rajput (January 21, 1986 – June 14, 2020) shot into limelight with Zee TV's popular soap opera Pavitra Rishta (2009 – 2011). He started

^ Sushant Singh Rajput, Image courtesy: tribune.com



his career with television serials. He debuted with Star Plus's Kis Desh Mein Hai Mera Dil in the year 2008.

Born in Bihar's Patna, Sushant Singh Rajput debuted with Abhishek Kapoor's Kai Po Che! in 2013. He received a nomination for the Filmfare award for Best Male Debut. He shared the screen with Rajkumar Rao, Amit Sadh and Amrita Puri in Kai Po Che!

Kai Po Che! was followed by a romantic comedy-drama Shuddh Desi Romance (2013), in which he shared the screen with Parineeti Chopra and Vaani Kapoor. The film, released under the banner of Yash Raj Films, received generally positive reviews.

His big break came with Dibakar Banerjee's mystery action-thriller Detective Byomkesh Bakshi (2015). His role was much appreciated. The film featured Anand Tiwari, Neeraj Kabi, Swastika Mukherjee and Divya Menon. The film received critical acclaim from critics.

Things changed for good for Sushant Singh Rajput with Rajkumar Hirani's PK (2014) and Neeraj Pandey's M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story (2016). His titular role in the sports biopic M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story catapulted him. In fact, he gave his everything into the film. The film based on the life of former Indian skipper of cricket team Mahendra Singh Dhoni, featured Disha Patani and Kiara Advani and Anupam Kher.

The film chronicled the life of Dhoni from a young age through a series of life-changing events. Audiences loved the film and Sushant Singh Rajput's performance. He received his first nomination for the Filmfare award for Best Actor. In PK, he shared

the screen with Aamir Khan and Anuska Sharma.

His tryst with success continued with Abhishek Kapoor's Kedarnath (2018) and Nitesh Tiwari's Chhichhore (2019). Both the films were brilliant. Kedarnath had Sara Ali Khan in it and Chhichhore had Shraddha Kapoor, Varun Sharma, Tahir Raj Bhasin and Prateik Babbar.

Sushant Singh Rajput was signed by the NITI Ayaog, the policy think-tank of the government of India, to promote Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP). In addition to acting and running Innsaei Ventures, he was actively involved with several programmes like Sushant4Education, as a part of efforts to help young students.

^ A still from Sushant Singh Rajput starrer 'M.S. Dhoni: The untold story, Image courtesy: newindianexpress.com





# PLASTIC POLLUTION

- RAAJADHARSHINI K.K



**C**ramming down the last pieces of plastic for breakfast, she swims out of her home to witness the world destroyed under the hands of an "intelligent species". As she swims towards the shore, the huddle of litter she passes, nauseating the life out of her is not the worst she is going to see. The bling, the glitter packages with easy tear, the crumpling colourful bags of garbage, the straw, the bottle, the unrotten pieces of shit stuck forever, choking and strangling the life on earth So that the pretty little human can eat without hands, slurp without mouth and dispose without guilt.

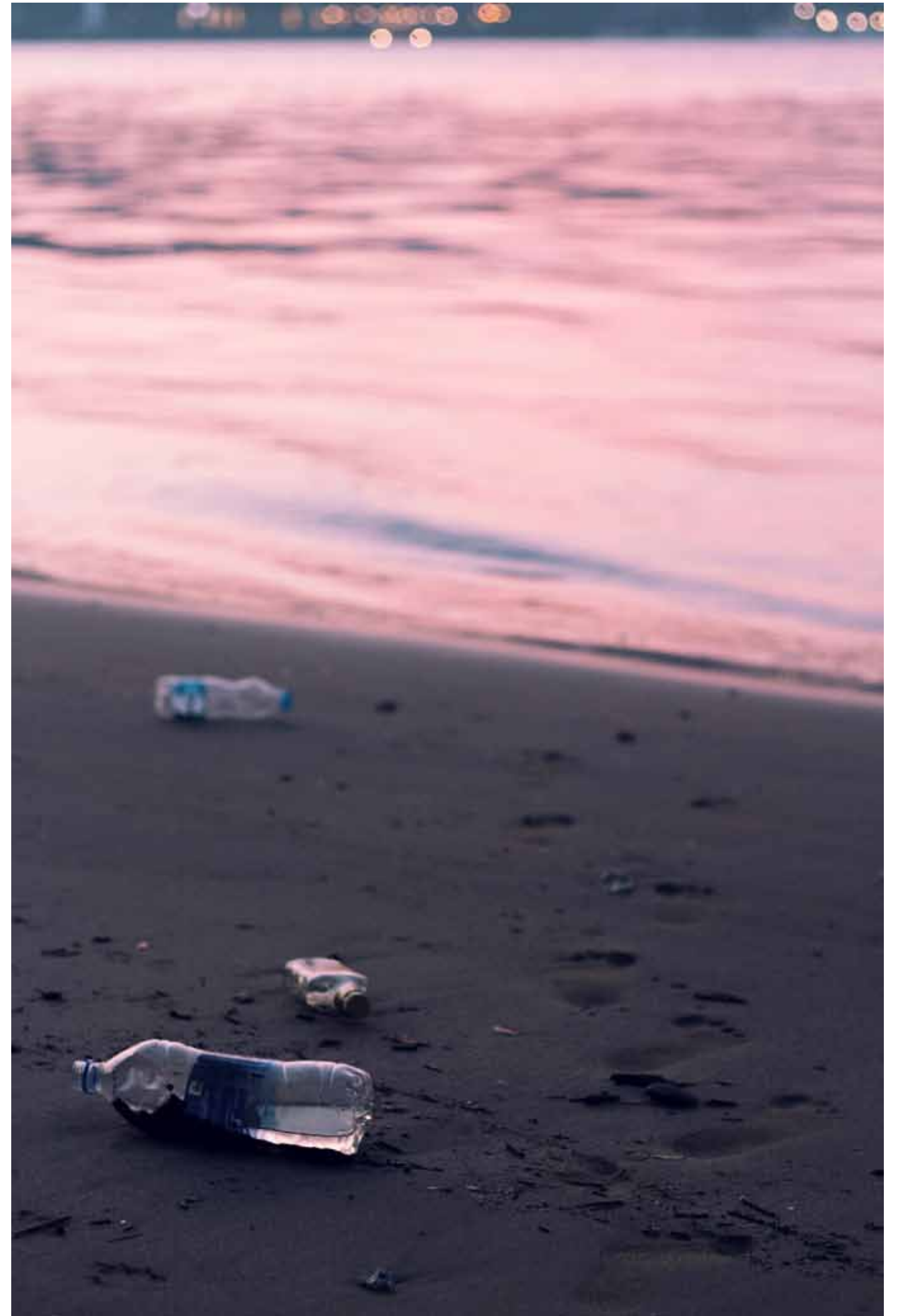
Plastic junks- clogging street drains, rivers, littering national parks, Mt. Everest and the deepest of Oceans. Our fondness to dumping waste has been never ending. Plastic is found in the guts of 90% of the world's sea birds and choking the life out of all ocean animals as big as the whales.

Estimates of 270,000 tons of plastic are floating in the world's seas threatening 700 marine species .One species threatening every possible species around. If enough measures are not taken, the mass of plastic in the ocean will exceed the mass of fish. This Project is an effort to bring light to the current irresponsible consumption and disposal behaviour by us.

Just because we don't see it right in front of us , doesn't mean its not happening, doesn't mean we aren't a part to this deathly contribution.

It is important to educate ourselves everyday and make conscious lifestyle choices. At least !













# CREATING CULTURE

## KOLKATA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY, KCC

- RAJESH PUNJ

For all the rewarding rhetoric around a new institution cutting sway over a city, it is as if history explains it best when the sentiment and solution of so many of its distinguished elder statesmen appear better able to explain the endeavour to build on an idea. Kolkata, resting on the Hooghly River in West Bengal, with Bihar and Bangladesh on either side, is shaped as much by its remarkable cultural heritage as it is by the seasonal extremes of heat and habitual rainfall. And as much as the climatic rains are capable of reducing roads to rivers, so the ideas of Bengal's eminent intellectuals, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore among them, flood the hearts and are held in the hands of every citizen of the city - as the lifeblood for everything artistic now. Tagore calling the "highest education that which does not merely give us information, but has us in harmony with all existence." Which appears entirely in sync with the fledgling philosophy of Kolkata's Centre for Creativity.

^ Kolkata Centre for Creativity, KCC building

> Exhibition Space of Contemporary Culture, 1st Floor, Kolkata Centre for Creativity, KCC

*For us the entire concept that has bought about the Kolkata Centre for Creativity, and I see it more as a concept or belief and less as a physical building, has been conceived of and created with incredible passion. Which came about as a very organic growth, and natural shift from what we were doing years earlier. Previously I had a gallery, where I was promoting younger and mid-career artists, and I realised that was not the only thing, as a family, we wished to do. We were looking at creativity in a more holistic sense.*

In his own lifetime, Tagore was to conceive of Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan, a place of learning that was to quickly become a cultural beacon for the arts and education in Kolkata. That still today faithfully follows the original principles of his practice. Insisting in his day 'that if a course wasn't available to a student, then a syllabus would be formally created and tutor found to provide such classes'. And by insisting on the inclusiveness of everyone to his cultural ideals, Tagore saw the intention of learning as something akin to carrying a light, that when shared amongst all of us, can illuminate a room, a house, a city and a society. And to be under the influence of such rationalism, is to understand that as individuals our time on earth has as much to do with engaging with the elasticity of all of our emotions, as it is to be industrious - so as to see the world as a playground for our own creative endeavours, as much as it is already a platform for the regulated routine of our lives; of working and worshipping daily.

From its glass-fronted facade, looking out over a mix of the agrarian and urban, bordered by preciously placed advertising hoardings, there are still persistent pockets of cultural activity in Kolkata. New among them is the Centre for Creativity, which presents itself as a place for applying oneself to all forms of





creative expression. And as much as we know of India's appetite for education, with everyone being encouraged to master English and engineering, Tagore's influence is in evidence, when he claimed that "learning is manufactory and a mere method of discipline." That to educate others is not necessarily about control, but remarkably the lack of it. Power as Tagore saw it, was not solely in the procession of an authority figure, educating an audience of laymen, but power was about the empowerment of the minds of the innocent, shaping their minds with as much freedom as our social structures allow. Inventing his own society of learning with Visva-Bharati, Tagore wanted we all decide our fate.

As well we might celebrate Tagore's idealism, such is the strength of his presence in the city, that a centre for creativity is beholden to his original objectives of more intuitive models of schooling, which enables the classes and curriculum to sufficiently function by means of freedom of expression; and as with all forms of creativity, it rests on the shoulders of the individual and the institution to facilitate a swell of activities that function and flourish in parallel with a city that is exhausting for its intensity.

Richa Agarwal, the centre's overall ambassador, sees herself as encouraging the arts to become an integral part of our lives, in a way that is less alienating or intrusive, and more involving - as a medium for experiencing something of the sensation of being

^ Kolkata Institute of Art Conservation on the 3rd Floor of Kolkata Centre for Creativity, KCC

> Indoor Amphitheatre - 1st Floor, Kolkata Centre for Creativity, KCC

alive. Dance, drawing, poetry and performance, are part of a programme of leading mental and physical exercises that are part of a range of classes on offer, as well as a resources library and laboratory for the well-being of modern and contemporary artworks. Thus there is the infrastructure, as she explains, for offering the arts in a way that complements our lives, rather than conditions it. It is to see that as much as religion is about faith, and industry allows us to earn a living, so the arts enable us to explore our place in the world. Language, literature, love, loathing, are all sentiments entirely evident in the works of the current master of exhibition, Jogen Chowdhury, whose drawings and prints exhort the vices and virtues of man. As scenes of adulation and interrogation impregnate the impressive wall space of the main galleries, as has been curated by poet and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote.

Previously, as part of the programme, sculptor Ravinder Reddy's monumental heads had been planted across the gallery, not only as a celebration of his work, but also of the intention of the institution, to literally think big. To commit to the most revered artists of our generation, one attending the other's opening, demonstrates the solidarity and commonality of the arts, in a way that many more successful contemporary galleries have failed to do. Obviously with the commercial comes the commodification of art, and that appears less intrusive here. In spaces that allow art to exist on its own terms, and are intended to illuminate one's imagination. That said there is

evidence of art sales with the institution's annual art fair, which is sensibly and very sensitively done. And when asked about the ethos of this institution of the arts, Richa Agarwal sees their intention as about offering the arts to audiences as an exchange of ideas. "So for us the entire concept that has bought about the Kolkata Centre for Creativity, and I see it more as a concept or belief and less as a physical building, has been conceived of and created with incredible passion. Which came about as a very organic growth, and natural shift from what we were doing years earlier. Previously I had a gallery, where I was promoting younger and mid-career artists, and I realised that was not the only thing, as a family, we wished to do. We were looking at creativity in a more holistic sense."

Going onto say, "you need a basic infrastructure, you need a place to do something like that, and Emami as a group has grown out of Bengal. The promoters, my father-in-law, R.S. Agarwal, and his friend, R. S. Goenka, thought to make an institution that was well suited to the city, with activities here that would be promoted at an international level, qualitatively but available to everyone. Which is why we have come up with the virtues we have here. We have learning groups with a series of three-month courses, and intend to launch all our one-year courses in November. Not only in the visual arts, as in watercolours, oil paintings, pastels, but as importantly the performing art. These will be the two that we begin with, to introduce classes and courses







for other art forms in the coming years. We have extended our interests to work with health issues as well. Seeing that as part of a wider appreciation of wellbeing. And when I refer to health, I mean both physiologically and physically. So we have conducted several talks, and now we have started with specific classes, tomorrow with kettlebell, and then we intend something with tronic related exercises closer to the Indian winter. This is as far as one's wellbeing is concerned. So education in arts and cultural activities spur us on." For Agarwal, it appears the Emami way of implementing their ambition, has facilitated a very open and honest approach to how the arts are intended to be experiential, and satisfactory to one's self-worth.

Kolkata, formally the capital of India, is for its arts regarded as the subcontinent's capital of culture, with its status as capital of the country since removed with the Raj. As context the city's literature has for a century and a half led the way with polymaths Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rabindranath Tagore, dramatist Michael Madhusudan Dutta, poet and musician Kazi Nazrul Islam, and more currently Joy Goswami and Amitav Ghosh, having contributed volumes of verse about Kolkata's character, and who have for generations drawn on the city's spirit. Turning poverty into poetry, seeing conflict as cultural, and the range of climates, the heat and humidity against the heavy rain, as a mirror for the individual's full

range of emotions. Literature and language that for a particular moment in the 1960's included the 'Hungry Generation', who under the stewardship of Shakti Chattopadhyay and Malay Roy Choudhury, challenged the role of language to investigate new ideas. That was to act in a similar way to America's Beat Generation, of the same period. And while Mumbai is celebrated as the centre of the world's more flamboyant and fantastical films, Kolkata has always offered something much more rewarding, by way of its arts cinema. That can be likened to its literature, bereft of the baroque, concentrating instead on the jarring realities of its population. Among its talismans were Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, who rewarded their work with simple narratives of human suffering and success. That was to translate the world over. And as much as Tagore favoured the ordinary man, so Satyajit Ray celebrated the strength of the individual in his films.

^ Bengal Pat of Gold - An exhibition on Pattachitra with the artisans

> Dance Bridges Festival

*Every region of Kolkata has so much happening, and a lot of it is taught at home, that here possibly unlike the rest of India, the arts and crafts were so easily available to us, that we take it for granted as integral to our lives. And then at a certain moment, we demonised art as an entirely commercial exercise. But art is more emotional in my option.*

Explaining "Somehow I feel that an ordinary person – the man on the street if you like is a more challenging subject for exploration than people in the heroic mould", crucially going onto to say "it is the half-shades, the hardly audible notes that I want to capture and explore." Elevating the minutest of details to become his film's central drama, was to see that our lives as an evolution of physical and emotional endeavours, that in and of themselves, become the facts of life. Such elemental honesty is as much in evidence in artist Jogen Chowdhury's paper-thin works. Of men and women together and alone, dealing with and enduring the lives they live. As disciplines, Kolkata's cinematic and the artistic are further complimented by the traditions of dance and theatre, in a city that still observes Jatra, or the procession, with extravagant re-enactments of passages from the life of Krishna. Performance complemented by longstanding Rabindra and Nazrul Geeti's, that revel in the lyrics of Kolkata's laureates. That as historical and cultural influences are likely to inspire the evolution and intention of its newest institution dedicated to the arts.

As an infrastructure for the arts, Kolkata Centre for Creativity provides a promising blend of the emerging with the more established, as its audiences are able to see the work of significant Indian artists, at the ground floor of the building, before being invited to rise to the upper floors, for more immersive





^ 14 ft. Ravana made out of Shola panels by Shola and Chhau artisans showcased at the 5th floor of KCC

opportunities to apply one's own ability to the arts; with workshops in dance, drawings, painting, printmaking, performance and pantomime. Enabling its citizens to see culture as a living organism, that is as much about what exists historically in this former capital, as it is of the potential of making one's own contribution to the sensation of belonging in the city. Standing still and seeing what is on offer, is to acknowledge that an interactive institution of this kind in Kolkata is rewarding for so many reasons. The ease of its inclusive programme, across its galleries, auditorium and dining area, sends out a signal to the surrounding areas, the city and the wider country, that art has a greater responsibility, than mere commercial enterprise, of satisfying its audiences with the sensation of feeling part of something - across cultures, creeds, and religions.

When asked of the evolution of the new arts institute, Agarwal explains the energy of the building as being about its ambition. Citing how "it hasn't been a year yet since we opened, on the 21st November 2018, and in the last year we had four activities a month, and we have since pushed on to twenty-five activities a month. And at any given time we have two exhibitions going on. One would be a large format exhibition, which is hosted by Emami Art, and the second a slightly smaller exhibition, which is hosted by Kolkata Centre for Creativity. Classes are happening over the weekend, at least five or six different sections, and then there are recreational

> Japanese Expression - An Exhibition of Japanese Artists



classes, for people who don't wish to commit to a great deal, but are inclined to something creative. We have Grace, the restaurant, which we encourage our audiences to book the use of the kitchenette, and come and cook here." Which I explain is something that Subodh Gupta had previously talked about, that of the importance of food to his practice.

Which as an idea is based for Agarwal "on the days we cook together as a family, without the distraction of the television, when we can sometimes be together for a good five hours, which is about quality time. When we go away as an extended family, we always take one cook with us, and that is a day that everyone looks forward to. So the institute and the way we go about deciding on what is on offer is about what matters to us, and what we have tried to introduce to the centre."

The interactive that leads one from the invitation to eat on-site, in its newly furnished restaurant, to the offer of cooking one's cuisine, in the café come canteen. By sharing one's favourite dishes likely as they see it to encourage an audience to express more of themselves, in shared situations, including dance and discussions. As Richa Agarwal goes onto explain of the building's layout, "we have the resources room and library with international reference books, which is not a concept that is familiar to India, but we have tried to introduce it as a work in progress. Which encourages a younger audience to come to us,

and that brings with it a lot of energy; which is what works." And as a homage to the influence of so many others, Agarwal cites the city as alive to the sounds and sensation of music and movement. "Every region of Kolkata has so much happening, and a lot of it is taught at home, that here possibly unlike the rest of India, the arts and crafts were so easily available to us, that we take it for granted as integral to our lives. And then at a certain moment, we demonised art as an entirely commercial exercise. But art is more emotional in my option." Which leads one to consider the institute's endeavour to exhibit the likes of Ravinder Reddy and Jogen Chowdhury, alongside a resources room of art books, on such luminaries as French impressionists (Paul) Gauguin and (Claude) Monet, as well as seventeenth-century painters (Peter Paul) Rubens and Rembrandt (Hermenszoon van Rijn), with classes in cooking and traditional Indian dance, is to offer their audiences the world by artistic means. Which Agarwal explains is not only about referencing "the historical but of making one's experience of culture now holistic".

Providing literature that is more standard in libraries across Europe, the institute is rightly lauded by itself for making available catalogues and monographs of artists who are likely unknown in India; with books with reproductions of paintings by Pablo Picasso or the coloured canvases of (Vincent) van Gogh. And to encounter such art is to become aware of a larger world, in which art acts as the expression for



many different cultures and continents. And such connectivity between cultures is what appears at the heart of this institution, as it borrows from a western model, whilst very cleverly managing to mould its own identity - of offering art as a multi-disciplinary experience.

As Agarwal sees it “KCC is not about fashion, is it entirely about a very humble and honest effort to arrive at what we all believe in.” Going onto explain the highlights of the collaborative organisation's programme to date. “Emami Art is the commercial part of the building, for which we have four shows per year, each of which is curated independently and in their own way. Beginning in November of last year with an exhibition of the work of Dashrath Patel curated by Pinakin Patel, followed by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which was a group show of thirty-five international artists, again curated by Pinakin Patel. Leading to Ravinder Reddy, curated by Anupa Mehta, which takes us to yesterday's public opening of Jogen Chowdhury's work, curated by Ranjit Hoskoté. Which will then take us to December 2019 to Bose Krishnamachari, curated by the artist himself. And beyond that in 2020 is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Part 2, which is a joint effort between Emami Art and the Kolkata Centre for Creativity. Emami Art hosts the exhibitions, and KCC takes care of the symposiums. Last year was edition one, we had nineteen speakers, discussing design, architecture, film and fashion.”

And in a country carried by the cult of celebrity, Agarwal assuredly enthuses over the ordinariness of the artist. “We had S. G. Vasudev with us for a class, and one of the children having navigated his way around his works, said to him ‘you are not bad for an artist’. In our heads we are guilty of demonising the artist, we have made them into demi-gods, and we have become too afraid to ask them anything. And what we are trying to do is to ease that path for all of us.”

Which deservedly brings us back to the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. As a future sister institution for Tagore's Santiniketan site, it becomes exciting to see future generations at the cusp of a new wave of cultural activities. And as an institution to evolve, to influence and to understand the past with what becomes possible in the present makes their task as monumental as it is likely to be magical. Which Agarwal enthuses that they are “energised by”, adding “Santiniketan has always been the cultural mecca if you like for art and ideas. With modernisation, there has been a shift and a surge for new ideas, but now we appear to be holding back, and are holding onto Tagore's original ideals.” Which is entirely evident in her approach. Emphasising “obviously being a newer, much younger centre the scope for change, in terms of our mission statement, is likely to be a little easier. Because quite obviously people work with a plan, and the world is moving at such an incredible pace, and do a lot, and still be part of the system and stand-

alone.” At its heart, this is an institution based on simple ideas that are likely to resonate across the city like a light originally held out by Rabindranath Tagore.

*Santiniketan has always been the cultural mecca if you like for art and ideas. With modernisation, there has been a shift and a surge for new ideas, but now we appear to be holding back, and are holding onto Tagore's original ideals. Obviously being a newer, much younger centre the scope for change, in terms of our mission statement, is likely to be a little easier. Because quite obviously people work with a plan, and the world is moving at such an incredible pace, and do a lot, and still be part of the system and stand-alone.*

> Gold Dust of Begum Sultan - An exhibition on the culture of Nawabs in Rampur







## LORD VISHNU AWAKENS, PRESERVES TRADITIONS AT THE MYSTICAL SRI VARADARAJA TEMPLE, KANCHI

- APURVA SINHA



*Kanchi, the land of saints, legends and temple is remarkably known as the Kashi of south India. Acknowledged as nagaresu Kanchi (city of cities), Kanchipuram is sanctified by divinity, nurtured by nature and inspired spirituality. The land of Kanchi is associated with the triple divine dispensation – Mokshapuri (place of salvation), Prithviksetra (place associated with five sacred elements) and Sakti Pitham (centres of goddess Durga). The antiquity of this pious land of Kanchi can be traced back to the 6th century CE.*

^ Utsav idol of Lord Varadrajswami

< Sri Varadrajswami Temple, Kanchipuram

*‘Within infinite myths, lies an eternal truth, who sees it all? Varuna has but a thousand eyes, Indra a hundred, you and I only two’- Devadutt Pattanaik*

‘Culture’ refers to the way we understand ourselves as individuals and as members of society. It gives us a sense of identity and creates consciousness towards our own customs and traditions. Born in a traditional society, one is often reminded that wisdom is the keystone for achieving devotion and salvation. Like others, I am also a part and parcel of the varied cultures synchronistically blended with myths, mythologies and fables which leave an everlasting affect. It adds substance to our wisdom and contributes to a better understanding. As provocative as it may sound, in the following paragraphs, I am going to narrate a tradition which might create turmoil in your mind, but will also indulge you in the tranquillity of the age old mythos. Being an ardent worshipper of Lord Vishnu who is the keeper of all creation, revered and worshipped in various forms, my karma crossed path with atman (soul) when I visited the spiritual town of Kanchipuram where ‘the boon-giver’, Lord Varadrajswami resides, appears in front of his devotees once in 40 years, and a special ritual is performed. Kanchi is considered as the treasure chest of knowledge and wisdom since the ancient times, to witness these rituals and beliefs, as a devotee and an





archaeologist, I became a spectator to the festival of 'Athi Varathar'.

Kanchi, the land of saints, legends and temple is remarkably known as the Kashi of south India. Acknowledged as nagaresu Kanchi (city of cities), Kanchipuram is sanctified by divinity, nurtured by nature and inspired spirituality. The land of Kanchi is associated with the triple divine dispensation – Mokshapuri(place of salvation), Prithviksetra (place associated with five sacred elements) and Sakti Pitham (centres of goddess Durga).The antiquity of this pious land of Kanchi can be traced back to the 6th century CE. The legend says that Ashoka, the Mauryan emperor, was the first king, to have established the city as a Buddhist Center. The next dynasty was Pallava which had a hard time protecting Tondaimandalam (Tondai Nadu is a historical region located in the northernmost part of Tamil Nadu) . The first Pallava rulers were mostly Jains and Buddhists, but in the beginning of the 7th century, Mahendravarman who was Jain proselytized to Saivism by the great saint Appar, who himself had been the head of a Jain monastery before reconverting to Saivism. In 1052, Kanchi was conquered by the Eastern Chalukyas and in 1070 Kulottunga Chola, the first ruler of later Cholas was crowned in Kanchi. In the 13th century, the Cholas

crumbled under the conquests of the Pandya dynasty. The early 16th century was marked by the beginning of the rule of Rayas of Vijayanagar . Thus, Krishna Devaraya (1509-1529) was the first Vijayanagar king to be interested in Kanchi. Two kings of this dynasty were crowned in Kanchi, Pedda Venkata II (1630-1670) and Shriranga III (1642- 1670). Kanchi went through ravages of time but never lost its prosperity, richness and grandeur.

The town of Kanchi has two principal divisions, the 'Big Kanchi' and the 'Little Kanchi', which are also called respectively the 'Siva Kanchi' and 'Vishnu Kanchi'. The former is the bigger division having the group of larger temples like Kailasantha, Ekamresvarar, Kamakshi Amman and Vaikuntaperumal. The 'Little Kanchi' is on the eastern extremity of the town. It is a compact little village, nucleating round the Sri Varadarajaswami temple. The temple complex comprises of a vast rectangular enclosure, occupying an area of about 20 acres in all, with two imposing gateways or gopuras on the eastern and western sides. There are the madavidhis (main streets) on the

^ *Procession of Utsava Icon*

> *Anantha Pushkarni where the lord resides for 40 years*

*It is remarkable that this great temple had withstood several stormy upheavals and come down to us almost unscathed by any of them. Firshita, tells us that in the 15th, the Bahmini Sultan Muhammad Shah invaded the South on receiving information about the richness and grandeur of the temples at the Hindu city, Kanchi, which was said to be of only ten days' journey from Kondavidu, his camping place. He invaded Kanchi and looted much of its wealth. Saluva Narasimhadevaraya sent his general Isvara Nayaka to Kanchi, who successfully drove the Sultan out of Kanchi and even managed to recapture much of the booty which the Sultan had collected by plunder of Kanchi.*

four sides of the temple. The long and broad street opposite the western gateway, known as the Sannidhi Street connects the temple with the main road that leads to 'Big Kanchi' or Siva Kanchi.

The three hundred and fifty inscriptions found in the Varadarajaswami temple contain many interesting details regarding the political vicissitudes through which the Attiyur village of indeed the city or Kanchi had passed. The earliest reference to the Varadaraja Temple is found in the hymns of Bhudattalvar (an Alvar saint). He devoted two beautiful verses in his commentary Tiruvandadi to this deity and pour out his heart to 'one who resides at Attiyur'. Interestingly, the hymns of the saint containing the reference were popular at this temple even as early as 1129 CE for an inscription mentions the special offerings to Bhudattalvar who has sung the praise of the Lord Tiruvattiyur on his birth asterism. The name Attiyur perhaps owed its origin to the Atti or udumbara tree (fig) which formed the nucleus of the temple and the village. The older principal deity of the temple was also Atti (udumbara) wood. It was replaced sometime in the late 15th century. The atti wood is of special importance to the Vaishnavites, as, of all the trees, it is viewed as a manifestation of Lord Vishnu himself. The Vishnu sahasranama includes 'udumbara' among the thousand names of Vishnu. The special preference of the Udumbara tree for Vishnu image was in vogue in the 3rd-4th century CE, as attested by an inscription discovered at Nagarjunakonda which refers to the consecration of Astabhujaswami (eight-armed Vishnu) made of Udumbara wood. It is indeed remarkable that this early practice was followed by Sri Varadarajaswami temple also.

At present the deity (mulavar) of the sanctum is in a stone sculpture form. There is no information when





the wooden deity of Atti-Varadar was replaced by the present sculpture. The original wooden image seems to have been replaced by the present one sometime during the 15th century CE. An epigraph dated S 1409 (1487) seems to confirm this. It refers to the re-consecration of the images of Lord Varadaraja and Perundevi Thayar in the temple. The money for the expenses for the consecration ceremony was contributed by Virupaksha dannayaka, a chief officer under the Vijaynagar king Narasinga Raya. From other inscriptions we know that Alagia-manavala Jiya was the Koil-kelvi of the temple at that time. The re-consecration was probably done in connection with the installation of the present mulavar-image in the place of the older wooden one.

Even though God is everywhere, we worship sacred objects to associate ourselves to the divinity. Delving into the philosophical moorings, a stone in Sanskrit is known as 'Rayi'. The Prasna Upanishad says that at the beginning of the creation, Prajapati performed a penance and established a pair- Rayi and Prana which became symbolic of creation. Thus, human emotions are unparallel; we bow down in front of the supreme deity. It is remarkable that this great temple had withstood several stormy upheavals and come down to us almost unscathed by any of them. Firshta, tells us that in the 15th, the Bahmini Sultan Muhammad Shah invaded the South on receiving information about the richness and grandeur of the temples at the Hindu city, Kanchi, which was said to be of only ten days' journey from Kondavidu, his camping place. He invaded Kanchi and looted much of its wealth. Saluva Narasimhadevaraya sent his general Isvara Nayaka to Kanchi, who successfully drove the Sultan out of Kanchi and even managed to recapture much of the booty which the Sultan had collected by plunder of Kanchi. Again in the 17th-18th centuries, the Mughals invaded south and Kanchipuram felt the shock of the iconoclastic zeal of Aurangazeb. The authorities of the three prominent temples of the city (Varadaraja, Ekamresvara and Kamakshi temples), apprehending desecration at the hands of the invaders, disguised the images of the temple Gods and conveyed them secretly out of the town.

The images of Lord Varadaraja and His consorts found an asylum in the jungles of Udayarpalayam in the Tiruchirapalli District. But in 1710 CE, when the danger was past and Kanchi considered safe, attempts were made to bring the deities back. But the local chieftain of Udayarpalayam refused to part with the images with which he was enraptured. At this time, an influential Sri-Vaishnava ascetic or Jiyar named Srimat Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya Attan Jiyar caused his disciple Lala Todar- malla to intercede. The latter terrorised the chief with a strong contingent of troops and safely brought back the image and reinstalled it with great pomp and splendour. This is recorded in a long inscription found on a slab erected in the temple near the Thayar shrine dated S

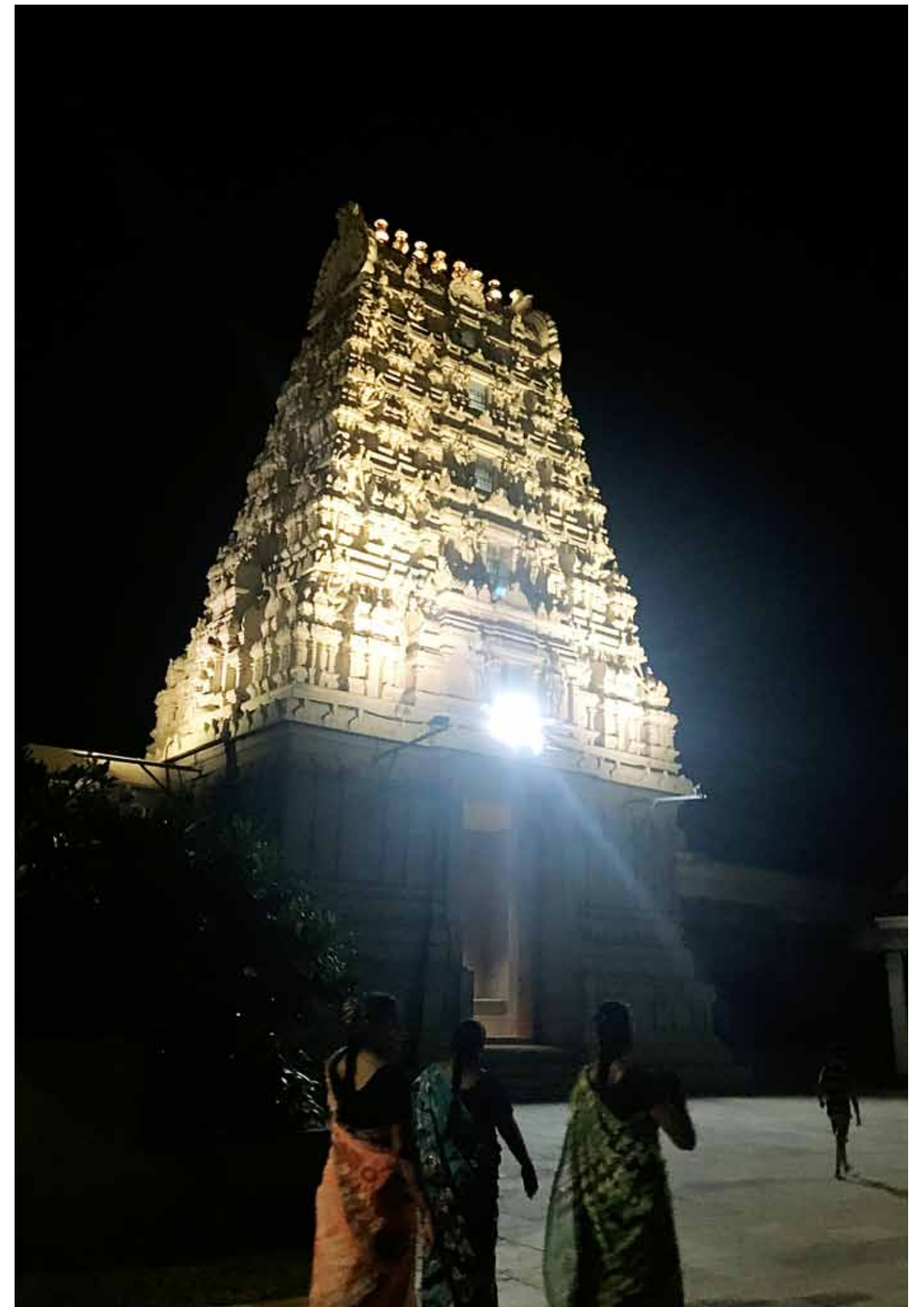
1632 corresponding to 1710 CE. This incident is even today commemorated in an annual festival called 'Udayarpalayam-festival'. Legend has it that around 1709, the water tank in the temple was emptied and the wooden idol of Lord Athi Varadar was seen at the base of the sacred tank. The authorities then decided to take the idol only once in 40 years for 48 days and keep him back.

It is pure nostalgia to worship the lord only after 40 years; of course these age old traditions remind us of our profound ancestry. As per the Agama sastras, when the idol is damaged, one has to replace it with another one with similar proportions, not necessarily the idol has to have the same material- it could be in a better suited material as well. Traditionally, the damaged idol is immersed in water and prana is infused with rituals in the new one. Agama sastra play a vital while performing daily rituals in a temple. The utsav idol of Lord Varadarajaswami is taken out in a procession every year during the Tamil month of Thai (Jan-Feb). The rift in the mind and soul rises, whether worshipping the damaged idol which the Agamas do not permit resonates devotion or the very idea is to preserve our culture to posterity by performing such religious acts.

While past is prologue but Heritage is of the people and for the people.

*'Culture as roots and routes,  
Legacy and liability,  
Responsibility and restraint,  
Its essence is multifarious, has no boundaries and is boundless!*

> Raj Gopuram of the Varadrajawami Temple





# MAJULI: THE LAND OF BAMBOO

- NITYA BALI



Nestled in the river Brahmaputra, Majuli situated in Assam, India is one of the largest river Islands in the world. The Island stands in queue of the UNESCO's tentative World Heritage listing for being one of its kind, both natural as well as a cultural heritage landscape. Despite the people of Majuli finding their Island waning into the Brahmaputra after each monsoon, with their high and positive spirits they continue to fight stronger with their situation each year. While everything falls in place of ambiguity every year for Majuli and its people, there is one material which is ubiquitous and intricately weaved into the socio-cultural as well as urban landscape of Majuli.

^ New weaved Bamboo mats being laid on to the existing bamboo bridge; Image Courtesy @Author

< Masks with 3D Bamboo framework for more masks to be made of hanging on the walls of Mask making centre, Samaguri Satra; Image courtesy @Author

Bamboo is found in abundance on the river Island and since the past it is extensively used by the tribes and other communities of Majuli. It has a noteworthy role to play in the rural economy of Majuli. The inherited practice and continuous engagement with bamboo has led the local communities to become master's in working with the various bamboo species, utilizing it for different purposes and further eliminating the need of any external assistance. Different





parts of the plant (roots, culm, branches, leaves, etc.) are used for different purposes. I would now take the reader onto the journey of comprehending how bamboo is involved in almost every aspect of the Majuli Island and its community.

Majuli is accessible through ferries which ride between the various Ghats of Jorhat city and Majuli. As one begins their journey to Majuli, Bamboo starts to appear in its various forms. The decks of ferries are built out of bamboo and wooden planks. The temporary stalls (shops) on the Ghats of Majuli and the ferry point platforms are also constructed in bamboo, wood and thatch or tin sheets (for roofing). While you commute to the interiors of the Island from the peripheral land, alleys with bamboo on both sides provides natural shade to you. You would be further amazed to look around the various bamboo creations forming the infrastructure or street furniture of the Island such as bridges, roadside planter baskets, bus shelters, boats, fencing, etc.

It is enthralling to look at how bamboo adorns the traditional architecture of Majuli Island. You think

***The traditional bamboo cottages have now become a boom in the tourism industry of Majuli. These cottages are in huge demand by the visitors and hence a source of economy boost for the people of Majuli.***

^ A shop and shared shelter made out of Bamboo for the community people; Image Courtesy @Author

^ Bamboo houses of the Deori tribal community of Majuli; Image Courtesy @Author



^ A Deori woman drying clothes on the Bamboo framed drying stand; Image Courtesy @Author

of any building element, and the other moment you could see how beautifully its crafted into reality by the people of Majuli. As Mies van der Rohe said 'God is in the details', this comes true and can be certainly experienced in Majuli. The sturdy structure of the house out of bamboo pipes resting on to brick or concrete pedestals is further enclosed with bamboo mats or walls in patterns with windows and doors in either wood or bamboo. The balcony along with the railing, stairs and flooring are all made out of bamboo. Coming down to the minute details of door locks, latches, utensils, fans, indoor planter pots, cattle shelters, traditional chulha barbeque stand, clothes drying stands, shelters for water tanks, furniture, beds etc. all are crafted in bamboo in exclusive details by the locals.

The traditional bamboo cottages have now become a boom in the tourism industry of Majuli. These cottages are in huge demand by the visitors and hence a source of economy boost for the people of Majuli. This makes me recall about 'La Maison De Ananda' bamboo cottage which requires a special mention for its noteworthy architectural details and





origin. In conversation with Monjit Resong (a local of Majuli and the owner of 'La Maison De Ananda'), he mentioned to us about a French architect, Jim Chauvin who in 2005 visited Majuli and was taken aback by the Islands beauty. He had then built a bamboo cottage which he named as 'La Maison De Ananda' and later on returning to his country left the cottage in the care of Monjit, which even today functions as the same cottage for the tourist's accommodation who visit Majuli.

Another facet of this traditional, economical and still continued practice of constructing bamboo houses is the ease with which these can be either retrofitted or reconstructed (depending upon the damage) by the communities' post floods. The local people in their attempt to prepare for the annual floods have concocted various unique techniques of coping with the aftermath. For instance, they raise the plinth of the house higher than the highest flood water level recorded in the past years and have provision of introducing another flooring base at a new and higher level if required during floods, with their essentials in the house safeguarded at storage levels created above by them in advance. Almost each household owns a boat built from locally available wood and bamboo which becomes their only mode of conveyance during the floods.

On the cultural and social front as well, Bamboo remains one of the significant materials along with

wood. Bamboo crafts (such as hats, bags, home decors, etc.) form one of the major handicrafts trade in Majuli. From various daily use objects to decoration objects, Bamboo is used in versatile forms. The craft of making daily use objects is practiced by all; the Bhakats (Monks in the Satras of Majuli, Cultural institutions) as well as the communities. It's wide use for daily use objects ranges from making of local musical instruments (flute, Gaganna, takda) to fishing equipments (Juluki, Khaloi, Dola, polo, etc) as well as agricultural tools (tomal, Nagal, duli, etc.) and paper making. Bamboo pipes have also been used by the tribes in a traditional way of cooking fish, chicken and pork. Even the recognized and award winning art forms of mask making from Natun Samaguri Satra and clay pot making by

*^ Vegetable and fruits grown on Bamboo trellis by the Deori family; Image Courtesy @Author*

*> Bamboo fencing and planter baskets found all along the roads and outside houses of Majuli; Image Courtesy @Author*







hand from Salmora require bamboo as an essential component. The 3D framework for the masks is first made in bamboo onto which later cloth soaked in clay is layered. In case of the pottery, the furnaces are prepared from bamboo, banana leaves and driftwood in which the pots are baked.

In all arenas Bamboo is deep-seated into Majuli's fabric, its contextual setting, its people and their lives. The captivating land of Bamboo, Majuli now lies in a sad state. The uncertainty and industrial advancements around the nearby cities have led way to the concrete structures into the Island. While Majuli and its people continue to stand rock solid to the perennial floods, the concrete structures to some now seem to be the beam of light through the darker times providing stability in times of floods and the beginning to slightly fade away the 'bamboo and wood' traditional landscape of Majuli. With infinite reasons and its manifold natural and cultural heritage, Majuli grabs its required attention and the need to protect this island. I would like to conclude with the following lines for the readers to contemplate upon...

I lay within the river Brahmaputra,  
 Whose atrocious water rises onto me each year,  
 As I take a deep sigh,  
 It leaves us with everything haywire,  
 But the people of my land are braved enough to  
 restore everything back to our desires.  
 With future of my existence unknown,

I share my dilemma with you to choose for me,  
 That as long as I existed what you wished the  
 landscape of Majuli to be...  
 That whether the resilience in our lands own  
 indigenous ways is what in the future should develop,  
 Or like the rest we follow the monotony of concrete  
 jungles to be our protected envelope...?

Note:

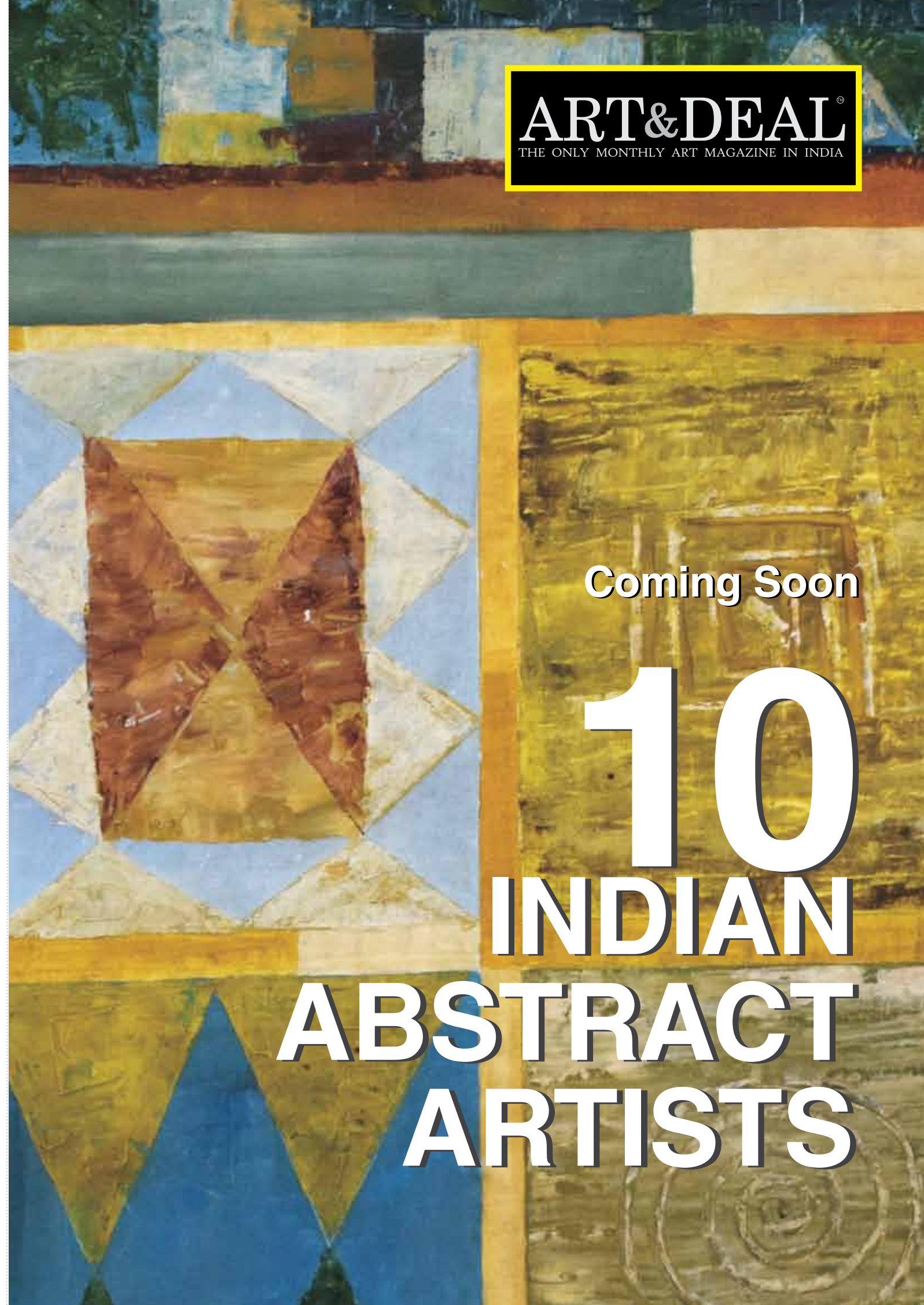
*-The article is based primarily on the actual data documented and conversations held with the locals by the author on her visit to Majuli Island back in 2018.*

*-All photographs by the author of the houses and the people are taken with prior permissions from the local residents.*

*^ Interior view of the Resong family kitchen with traditional bamboo pipe stand for cooking above the chulha and bamboo furniture; Image courtesy @Author*

Coming Soon

# 10 INDIAN ABSTRACT ARTISTS





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