

Listening In

By Kamayani Sharma

"A thick garment of perception is woven thread by overlapping thread."

— Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses*¹

On a black screen, Lala Rukh's Rupak plays. A stop-motion animation featuring white dots appearing and disappearing in time to the Hindustani rupak taal, the work is a staccato series of beats presented as calligraphic marks. Drawn with a qalam on a grid system across 88 drawings, Lala Rukh's notational process converts the sonic into the visual.

Sound makes possible image, which in turn makes sound visible. The discontinuity between units of simultaneous sensory sequences, generate — through a modulation of the interstices between frames and intervals between notes — motion and melody. The synaesthetic loop evokes metaphysical interplay, between absence and presence, being and non-being.

The occult quality of the work is enhanced by the nuktas scintillating against the night sky to the beat of a classical rhythm. As lumens and phons emanating from a point light years away, the synaesthetic pattern constellates distant, literally otherworldly realms — a deep space cluster, a transcendental lok, resonances of far memory — and constitutes a minimalist nocturne.

Synaesthesia — derived from the Greek phrase meaning "joined or coupled sensation"² — is both a neuropsychological condition and an expressive category. In both cases, the word refers to a phenomenon in

which the activation of one sensory modality causes the stimulation of another. As a conceptual form, synaesthesia is manifested through the use of rhetorical techniques such as "intersensorial metaphors and analogies"³ through which one sensory impression is translated into another. Just as the act of translation involves finding cross-lingual equivalents to produce similar meanings across texts, synaesthetic practices look to engage "cross-sensory correspondences"⁴ that create phenomenal effects.

One of the enduring elaborations of the creative meaning of synaesthesia is the German composer Richard Wagner's conception of the Gesamtkunstwerk or "total work of art", a complete synthesis of the arts: "Each separate faculty of man is limited by bounds...But the boundaries of the separate senses are also their joint meeting-points...at which they melt in one another and each agrees with each..."⁵ The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty would go on to agree, asserting that synaesthetic perception was, far from being unusual, the norm:

One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when, with a tinkling sound, it breaks, this sound is conveyed by the visible glass...the 'data of the different senses' belong to so many separate worlds, each one in its particular essence being a manner of modulating the

thing, they all communicate through their significant core.⁶

This idea of blended boundaries which informed movements like Impressionism and Symbolism would run counter to the later modernist creed of autonomous perceptual fields espoused by critics such as Clement Greenberg who insisted on a model of sensorial ('optical') purity as the ideal.⁷ On the other end of the spectrum, contemporary scholars like Paul Gordon take the position that *all* art is synaesthetic, the difference being of degree rather than kind⁸ or argue, like Mieke Bal does, that "vision is itself inherently synaesthetic".⁹ Particularly as cinematic, installation, and multimedia art have attained maturity through the 20th and 21st centuries, synaesthetic vocabularies have become part of mainstream artistic culture. The boundaries between synaesthesia as clinical condition and symbolic technique are often dissolved¹⁰, prompting artistic interventions that transgress the gap between normative and atypical perceptions.

In the exhibition *Synaesthetic Notations* curated by Veerangana Solanki, this translation of and transgression among genres of qualia are explored across sixteen artworks by artists working with various mediums and styles. With a focus on audiovisual synaesthesia, the show looks at a variety of connections between image and sound to reflect on the dynamics among sensation, imagination, and recollection, and the phenomenology of 'cross-modal' experiences. The show's titular notations represent the conversion of information obtained by embodied perception and the retrieval of perceptual events past¹¹ into figurative language. Memory is the

throughline of the show, its capacity to forge associative connections between unrelated contents crudely suggestive of (though, since it is not "automatic, immediate, highly specific and stable over time"¹², different from) synaesthesia's inducement of sensation across separate perceptual faculties. As memory materialises things no longer present, so too do the artworks which sunder and solder sound and image in a variety of permutations, from the acousmatic to the synchronous. As the act of remembrance transforms that which is recalled each time, so too does the show play with appearance and disappearance. At the conceptual level, the parallels with memory afford frames to see and hear the works. Drawing on the idea of memory as historical, navigational, biographical, and social respectively, these conceptual frames appear to be: spectrality, spatiality, identity, and communality.

In Tenzing Dakpa's *Manifest*, Varun Desai and Varun Gupta's *Terra Memoria*, Julien Segard's *The Edge of Memory*, Satya's *Hello? Who is Speaking?* and Aldona Video Club's *A Laughing Man*, we see and hear overlaps across various spatiotemporal scales and types of history, like spectral overlays. Dakpa's spooky eco-fable set in the forests of North Goa which almost projects the future through a logic of afterimages, Desai and Gupta's superimpositions of their city's representations across their lifetime, Segard's rhythmic resurrection of the landscape of his youth in charcoal and video, Satya's citation of a late 19th/early 20th century composer to contain her luminous assemblages, and Aldona Video Club's parodic revisiting of early 20th century art and film — in each of these, sound and image are arranged as co-constitutive

accompaniments to capture overlaps of time and space. Suggesting an echolocational approach whereby sound enables navigation towards objects, some artworks foreground spatiality by emphasising the interstice between the acoustic and the optical. Debanshu Bhaumik's *Prelude*, Shezad Dawood's *Passages* and *I'm So in I See Ravel*, Hemant Sreekumar's *Phantom Spectrums* and Suvani Suri's *The Burrow: Ersatz* all take sound as a cue to render things visible. We find our way through Bhaumik's whirring fans that signpost an unsustainable planet, take a journey inwards through Sreekumar's hypnotic computer-generated sonic frequencies, rely on Dawood's invocation of a French synaesthete musician's compositions to climb stairs and access periscopic views of past figures, and witness Suri's evocation of a fossorial animal's excavatory quest.

Deeply intimate and cathected works, Sarker Protick's *Stitched*, Yashna Kaul's *Another note, another tiger* and Molla Sagar's documentaries *Dadu (The Journey of 100 Years)*, *Vobarvita: Searching for Voba's (Ritwik Ghatak's) Birth Homestead* and *Avadoot: The Mystic* respectively suture, embellish, and interweave sound and image to examine the idea of identity. Sarker loops us into his mother's inner and outer worlds as artist and passante; Kaul invites us to birthday parties, marking the ageing of media, positing old memories as generators of new ones; and Sagar's documentaries contemplate the lifeworlds of quietly defiant citizens, their words and songs piercing the shroud of religious totalitarianism.

In Savinder Bual's *The Pineapple Project* and Avani Tanya's "*and then I overheard*", the principle of communality brings together sound and image to alert us to shared

conditions of being in the world. Whether it is as historical subjects of colonialism through Bual's musical pineapples or as part of biodiverse fellowships in Tanya's ceramic conduits of watery gurgles, we are made aware of the symbiotic alliances between the aural and the visual, human and nonhuman and different subaltern groups.

Ackerman's sartorial metaphor — "a thick garment of perception is woven thread by thread" — which inaugurated this essay echoes Walter Benjamin's idea of the "Penelope work of recollection...in which remembering is the woof and forgetting the warf..."¹³ Through these recollective devices across the sixteen artworks, *Synaesthetic Notations* performs a commentary on the limitations and liberations of the *umwelt* (another 19th century term, like *Gesamtkunstwerk*) which means the world as it is experienced, perceived, or sensed. The translations and transgressions of synaesthesia enable an expansion of the perceptual world — the "bigger *umwelt*" of the synaesthete¹⁴ — and, concomitantly, the linguistic world. The choreography of visibility and invisibility and audibility and inaudibility speaks to the procedures and discourses of memory, each sensorial conjugation, like each recollection, revealing something about the event.

Whilst the concept doesn't find explicit mention in South Asian discourse (except perhaps in interpretations of classical *rasa* theory), synaesthesia appears in unexpected traditions. It indicates the union of sense impressions to become prompts for imagination and perhaps even enlightenment. The Kubrawi Sufis' mnemonic practice of *dhikr* involves a synaesthetic technique whereby auditory recollection of a phrase generates the visual form of coloured photisms, a



type of mystical illumination.¹⁵ As the representations of audiovisuality incarnate as memory, we become aware of the fact that the tandem of two sensoria can be a source, if not of gnosis in a desecralised space, then certainly of poesis.

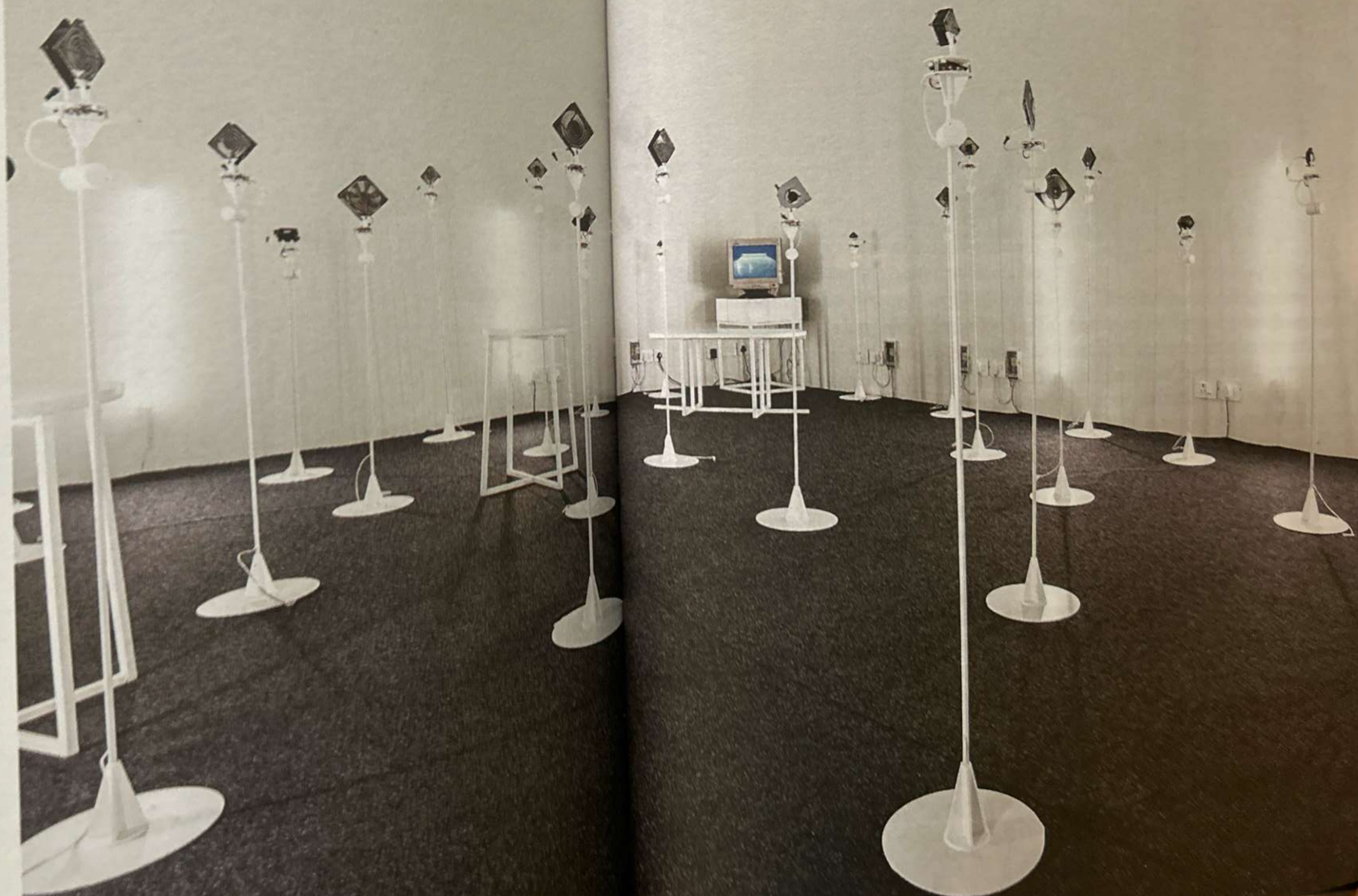
The last room of the curatorial walk is a luminescent chamber resonating with Pandit Pran Nath's renditions of a cycle of ragas. The raga or harmonic arrangement one hears depends on the time at which one enters the space, in keeping with the artist's commitment to the idea of performing ragas when they were traditionally supposed to be. Through his low-pitched, tenebrous vocalisations, the artist creates a hypnotic atmosphere in which sound becomes a palpable, installative element.

Nath's conception of ragas as 'cosmic presences' to be embodied by the vocalist speaks to the capacity of song to reference an invisible entity. In an inversion of Lala Rukh's fluctuating musical animation at the beginning of the show, the absence of image and presence of audio are continuous yet interdependent. These synaesthetic recitations are complemented by the light ensconcing the area, the white-cloth *baithak* offering a place to sit and visualise, imagine and remember.

Pandit Pran Nath's compositions were showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

'Rupak' by Lala Rukh, showcased
as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations',
curated by Veerangana Solanki
for Serendipity Arts Festival
2023. Photograph by Philippe
Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

Prelude by Debanshu Bhattacharya,
showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic
Notations', curated by Veerangana
Solanki for Serendipity Arts
Festival 2023. Photograph by
Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



NOTES ON SYNAESTHESIA

Debanshu Bhaumik

In 2019, there emerged reports of an enigmatic 'global Hum', a low-frequency, continuous infrasound audible to a fraction of the world. In the absence of a source, scientists believe that the phenomenon might be neurological, particularly perceptible to those with sensitive hearing or hyperacusis.

Artificial background noise is a defining feature of the 21st century everyday. In Debanshu Bhaumik's *Prelude*, the ambient drone of cyber modernity is brought to the fore in the form of small black fans attached to slender white stands, the assemblage suggestive of a Space Age savanna.

Electronic scrap is repurposed into sleek, auditory sculptures which visitors are invited to operate via regulators, a redemption of the e-Wasteocene. The faster the blades swiping the air, the louder the whirr, the blurrier the whirl, a quotidian experience intensified into a performance of audio-visual-tactile control, where the correspondences between motion, image, and sound become agential.

Aware of the soundtrack of ceiling fans, desert coolers, and CPU fans that runs through subcontinental life, I found myself wondering: what are the poetics of the whirr? In Bhaumik's *Prelude*, rapid revolutions activated by anyone who encounters the artwork gestures towards the subaural as an onomatopoeia of affirmation.

Varun Desai and Varun Gupta

Varun Desai and Varun Gupta's multichannel installation *Terra Memoria* captures the uncanny of urban psychogeography via a combination of LiDAR, iPhones and binaural recording. LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is a remote-sensing method that uses pulsed light to measure distance, similar to sonar and radar technologies. The indistinct, sombre 3D renderings of the Kolkata neighbourhoods of the collaborators' childhoods look to me at once familiar and alien. The streets, architectures, and bazaars of the city appear fuzzy, dark-toned, and night-lit, while the soundscape is the hubbub of traffic, conversation, and market noise.

Wave-based technologies rely on the reverberation of various types of signals to obtain information about objects in a given space. In *Terra Memoria*, superimposed figures, lossy visuals, and undefined field audio evoke a hauntological play with scale and distance in both space and time, past and present becoming imbricated just as remoteness and nearness do. Its title meaning 'memory land' in Latin, the work harks back to the nomenclature of mediaeval cartography from the Age of Sail. *Terra Memoria* does indeed draw on the movement of waves (albeit the electromagnetic kind) to map the spaces of their shared childhood, what they elsewhere described as "the echoes of their past".



Hemant Sreekumar

On a black screen, a large white orb oscillates in time to the crescendo and decrescendo of a high-pitched atonal thrum, the volume of the audio responding directly to the size of the image. Reminiscent of recordings of celestial bodies' movements in outer space, Hemant Sreekumar's *Phantom Spectrums* expresses the conditions of singularity and impermanence, inspired by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus' adage about not stepping into the same river twice.

Musical harmony based on predictably distributed multiples of fundamental frequencies connotes recurrence, stasis and causal links. A generative audio installation, *Phantom Spectrums* challenges this rational repeatability, deploying prime numbers to algorithmically produce unique sonic frequencies simultaneously projected as a white globe. The self-sufficiency of the prime number becomes the basis of a sui generis synaesthetic generation — a ghostly apparition on screen resulting from a code programmed off the irregular, entropic properties of the number line.

'Terra Memoria' by Varun Desai and Varun Gupta, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



In delinking the connections between one sensory output and the next, the work questions the stability of history, the universe, and perhaps even the self. As it dwindles to nothingness and leaves me in the dark, the slow, discordant fluxion of the cosmic ball is a reminder that prime numbers have only two factors, a binary animating the second part of Heraclitus' quote "we are and we are not".

'Phantom Spectrums' by Hemant Sreekumar, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

Shezad Dawood

I.

As I walk up the staircase inside the Old GMC Building, I hear music. I can't tell where it's gliding down to me from, but it seems to become louder the higher I go up. It feels like I am modulating the volume through my movement on the staircase. Then I hear a male voice reciting poetry.

I am listening to a work called *Passages*.

The voice is artist Shezad Dawood's, the verse by Edgar Allan Poe and Stéphane Mallarmé (who translated the former), delivered as Dawood listened to Marcel Duchamp's *The Creative Act* on headphones. Produced while he was looking at a copy of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), the musical piece, by musician Steve Beresford, is an improvised interpretation of the composer Olivier Messiaen's chromatic scale, or modes of limited transposition.

The chromatic scale derives its name from its role in colouring or shading the tone of major and minor scales (Messiaen literally perceived colours on hearing chords), and has been likened to the traversal of a staircase. *Passages* is a synaesthetic reiteration of the act of scaling up and down across literature, music, painting and architecture, evident in the many meanings of the title — passage as channel, as transfer, as excerpt, as journey — concatenating an art historical reflection on modernism.

II.

On a wall between rooms, a psychedelic 3D bust turns and spins about, seemingly directed by sporadic musical notes. *I'm so in, I see Ravel* is another work by Dawood, this too accompanied by a piece by Beresford based on Messiaen's scale and referencing modernist artists. The bust is of Robert Anton Wilson, an American polymath "who became, at various times, a novelist, essayist, philosopher, psychonaut, futurist, libertarian and self-described agnostic mystic".

A classical bust composited with contemporary technology, the creamy, multicoloured digitally modelled bust is a

"quantum portrait" of Wilson generated using Google images from different points and at different periods. Like the anagramming of Messiaen's name which gives the work its title, there is a rearrangement of visual form. Referencing the Futurist and Constructivist interest in conveying motion, time and three-dimensionality (especially the sculptures of Umberto Boccioni and Naum Gabo), *I'm so in, I see Ravel* is an homage to Wilson's relativistic theories of consciousness. The fragmentary, mutating model of Wilson's face pivots in response to the music, the layers and facets of a life suspended in a state of kinesis.

Satya

A kaleidoscope gleams through the door pane.

I enter Satya's installation *Hello? Who is speaking?*, an assemblage of neon shimmer, mirror mobiles, diaphanous screens and melancholic black-and-white projections.

The room brims with *Gaúcho - Corta Jaca* and *Lua Branca*, two compositions by the late 19th/early 20th century Brazilian musician Chiquinha Gonzaga.

Two very different types of songs — a tango and a modinha. One to dance to (perhaps horizontally — Corta Jaca means 'cut the jackfruit', a ripe innuendo) and another to mourn to, eros and thanatos in literal concert, perhaps a nod to the dawn of Brazil's abolitionist republic.



'I'm so in, I see Ravel' by Shezad Dawood, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

Abstract, iridescent arrangements of light fall on PVC curtains. Shards of mirror dangle, similar to the monochromatic patterns swaying on cloth hangings, and a prismatic chiaroscuro of these self-same shapes limns the walls.

With the ultraviolet cast of the room and the music filtering in from another time, it is a bit like being underwater many years ago.

A man opens the door, disappears momentarily behind the polymer curtains, then reemerges. I click myself facing the mirrors, multiplied across a grid on the wall like a formalist series of self-portraits.

Leftover light plays games with vision, while music spills endlessly.

Satya's immersive installation *Hello? Who is speaking?* engages with the dialectic of visibility and invisibility, reflection and refraction, love and death. It destabilises the preceptor as beams ricochet and scatter, sound flows and fills, effecting a reconstitution of the self across multiple surfaces.

When you pick up a call from an unknown number and ask the titular question, who do you imagine on the other side of the mirror? You are speaking to yourself.



Julien Segard

Entering the dense thicket of Julien Segard's *The Edge of Memory* is, somewhat ironically, like stumbling upon a clearing. The contrast

between large-scale charcoal drawings of trees against the starkness of the white cloth background creates the effect of a glade.

Segard's compositions are a retracing of his boyhood explorations of the Étang-de-Berre lagoon. The texture of the trees, complexity of the foliage and dapple of the light evokes the rustle of leaves, the crack of twigs, the scrunch of undergrowth.

Yet, for all its links to the artist's inner world, the arboreal lattices obscure the path through the woods. Other people's pasts are easy to get lost in, literally *bewildering*.

The impressions left by the artist's body and hands on the canvas bespeak an internal rhythm made external through a language of stroke and stress, its tempo conveyed by the low, steady hum emanating from a corner.

The suggestive slit in the cloth wall leads to a dark viewing chamber where stills and moving images are projected on the ceiling as an oneiric two-channel installation, underscored by a rhythmic throb. Richly hued skies drift across both split screens in the manner of a unified reverie, while monochrome tracking shots of graffitied ruins flicker in and out like twilight recollections.

Inflected with sonic and visual memories of the artist's engagement with the lagoon's industrial ecology, the charcoal works spatialise the past through a process of mark-making. Mounted in an anteroom (both architectonic and mnemonic), the clips and soundtrack suffuse and annotate the charcoal forest outside, effecting the vertigo of remembrance across the span of biographical time.



The psychogeographic mode of youthful exploration propels the viewer between the picturesque and the sublime — the visible and the inapprehensible — guiding them to *The Edge of Memory*.

'The Edge of Memory' by Julien Segard, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar



Tenzing Dakpa

It takes a while for my eyes to adjust to the pitch blackness of the installation featuring Tenzing Dakpa's photographic series *Manifest*. I desist from switching on my phone's torch, letting the images slowly loom into view, an attempt to replicate Dakpa's experience of navigating the jungle at night, as he developed pictures of North Goa's burnt forests using a strobe light.

The burst of strobe light through which the forests' remains are captured mimics the blaze that devoured it, leaving behind a pyrographic impression. The grain of scorched bark, the skeletal scatter and droop of dead trees, the undulation of debris-littered and fresh soil layers, the coronal lick demarcating the fire edge and the shadowplay of char and duff — the artist frames these remnants as abstract compositions. The crumpled textures of these prints echo the brittleness of the ecosystem, transmuting the optical

'Manifest' by Tenzing Dakpa, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar

into the three-dimensional and haptic, the documentary as both form and medium.

Evidence of forestlands incinerated for the purpose of land, redevelopment and agriculture, the installation is accompanied by the nighttime jungle bass such as the chirping of crickets and sawing of leopards. As I move past them, the discrete sequence of nocturnal stills almost functions like a zoetrope of slash and burn, destruction and potential resurrection, the persistence of vision playing both a physiological and metaphorical role. In the blackness of the viewing room, the photographs serve as afterimages that endure long after you stop looking, matching the hope for the forests.



Avani Tanya

"What is foregrounded is the threshold between listening for and listening to: since the sound in question is just at the threshold of human auditory sensitivity, the event is not only about flower music. The extreme concentration demanded by this exercise teaches one to hear the entire soundscape, such that background sounds are foregrounded, and the usually unheard sonic subtleties of the environment become the subject of attention."

— Allen S. Weiss, *Zen Landscapes*¹⁶

In the Zen garden tradition, there are rituals that involve listening to the sound of flowers blooming. In straining to hear the barely perceptible, there occurs perhaps a process of overhearing, whereby oft-ignored environmental sounds are amplified. Avani Tanya's *"and then I overheard"* put me in

mind of such an East Asian garden, the ceramic sculptures arranged like the rocks and stones within a compressed geography, with water flowing gently through.

The spray-glazed, conservatively-hued sheen of the sculptures gleams in the dark room, modelled on forms reminiscent of ancient Chinese and Japanese-style lamp-stands, teaware, water basins, and ornamental fountains. The water trickles across the vitreous artworks, murmuring through the whorls of the ear, at the threshold of its capacity, flushing out noise and casting a meditative aura around the installation. Earth and water slip and slide in an elemental dance that symbolises a generative interdependency. While 'overhearing' refers to accidental listening, interpreting the word literally as the deliberate paying of attention allows access to a world hiding in plain sight and sound.



Aldona Video Club

Of all the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs, but modes of ululation, only three I think need detain us, I mean the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is... the laugh of laughs...the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy".

— Samuel Beckett, *Watt*¹⁷

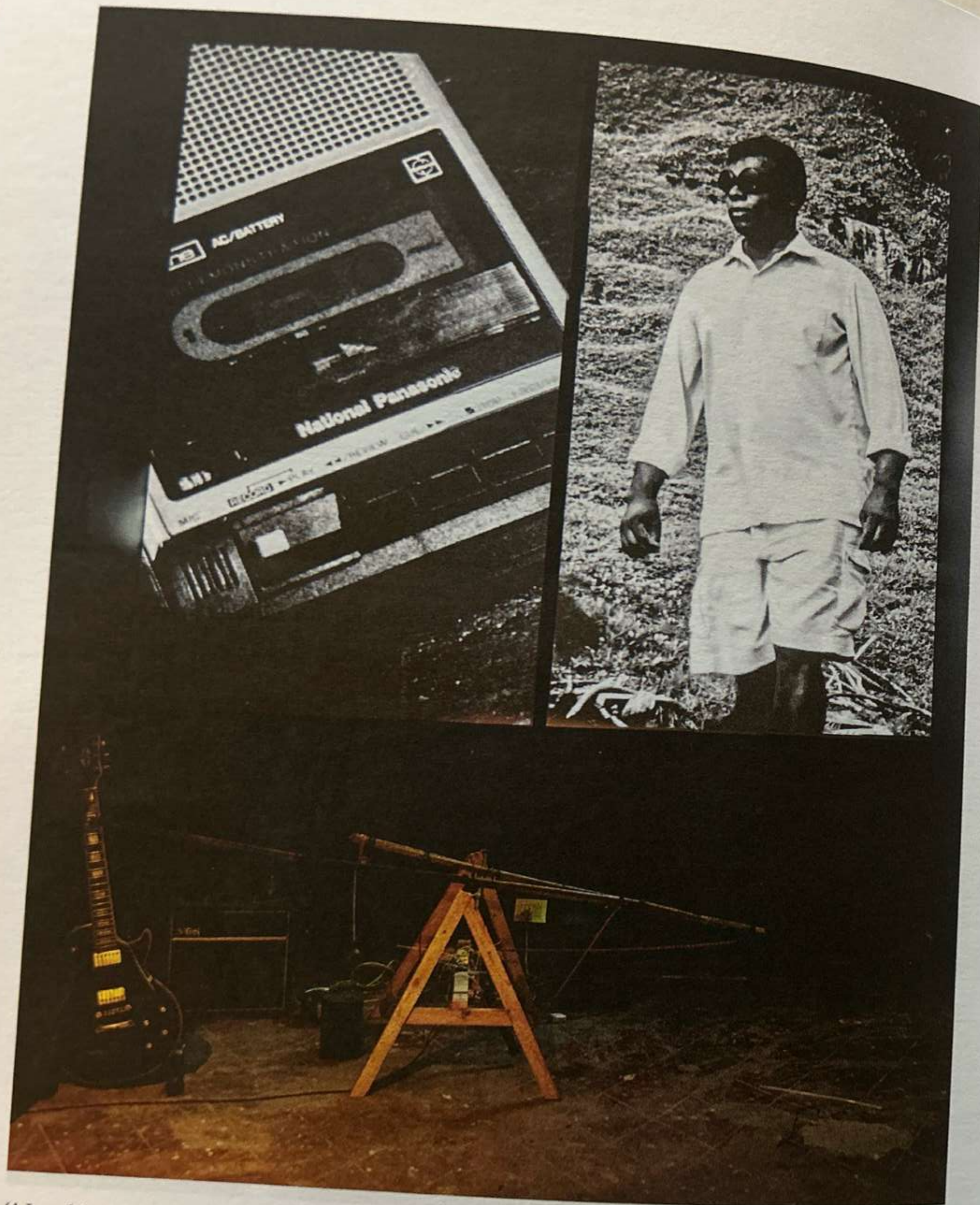
The screenplay-style wall text, *khuror kol* contraptions, and two-channel film



"and then I overheard" by Avani Tanya, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



Detail: *'Hello? Who is speaking?'* by Satya, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



'A Laughing Man' by Aldona Video Club, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

projection of Aldona Video Club's *A Laughing Man* installation constitute a Dadaist tableau. Part of a project that plays with the syntax of cinema, the work uses the splitscreen to feature black-and-white footages, both disjunct and divided. The capers of the eponymous laughter, science-fictional and fantastical visuals and banal objects appear as seemingly unrelated sequences. For instance, at one point the protagonist's cackle-laced regurgitation of a key is juxtaposed with the slow movement of a flying saucer across the screen; at another, his profile is bifurcated.

Accompanying the screening is a score made up of discordant notes, lending a sinister edge to the assemblage. My gaze pans from the projection to the elaborate automatic mechanisms; wire-furniture, moving plants, a pianola, an electric guitar and the white mould of a face are among the disparate constituents of this matrix. The soundtrack almost seems to be produced by these absurdist machines, recalling Francis Picabia's drawings. *A Laughing Man* takes inspiration from the historical avant-garde to reflect on century-long media processes. The playful elaboration of the analog, interrogation of filmic language and subversion of cohesive narrative meaning become a mode of mocking sensorial interrelationships and the framework they disclose.

Sarker Protick

In one room, I glimpse photographs of pastel clouds, avian silhouettes and black-and-white observations of urban overgrowth and decay framed around a film featuring the photographer's mother. In Sarker Protick's *Stitched*, memories and music are sutured together to reflect on a life experienced in conversation with other species, varied skies, and the semiotics of place.

The visuals and sound of the film become the thread binding the various photographic series into a tribute to the artistic passion of a parent whose presence reverberates through the installation. Through archival footage and documentary, the artist's mother is portrayed via her relationship with music — particularly the harmonium the camera closes up on — the neighbourhoods of Dhaka, and encounters with crows and ravens. We are "stitched" into this flow of images and sounds that make up her story.

Stately birds recalling Masahisa Fukase's ones perch alongside built exteriors, horizons, and blight of the city, underscoring the multispecies habitus she occupies. The sky is a metaphor invoked in lyrical scribbles from diary pages magnified and mounted on a wall alongside shots of clouds. As the sounds from the film stream past, biography, archaeology, and ecology become intertwined. I am tempted to try my eye at divination, the shadows of time visible in faces, facades, and the shapes of birds and clouds.

Detail: 'The Burrow: Ersatz'
by Suvani Suri, showcased as
part of 'Synaesthetic Notations',
curated by Veerangana Solanki
for Serendipity Arts Festival
2023. Photograph by Philippe
Calia and Sunil Thakkar.

used in the perforated rockscapes
in the recesses of the burrow,
a way to release themselves,
resonant frequencies affix to
i hear in the dislocated
le/hole(s).

→ ROOM TONES,
BRANDON LABELLE



Suvani Suri

I must have slept for a long time. I was only awakened when I had reached the very last light sleep...for it was an almost inaudible whistling noise which wakened me.

— Franz Kafka, *The Burrow*¹⁸
(trans. Willa and Edwin Muir)

The whistle maddening the badger/mole protagonist of Kafka's short story is the cue for Suvani Suri's work *The Burrow: Ersatz*. Just as in the story the sound permeates the creature's underground tunnelled lair and obscures its origins, Suri's artwork probes interstices, disconnections, continuity, and audibility to explore the ontology of the acousmatic. As I walk through the dark-walled chamber in which the work is mounted, I almost imagine it as part of the subterranean warren of Kafka's tale.

Inviting five other artists — Lakshmana KP, Brandon LaBelle, Amina Abbas-Nazari, Ranjit Kandalgaonkar, and Salomé Voegelin — to mount works that respond to the story's motifs and meanings. Rocks that transmit the sound of silence, a sonic map of the site, an ensemble of earplugs placed with a homologous bullet, a lemniscate sculpture, and printouts of Kafka's story (whole and fragmented) are accompanied by a scribbly whiteboard diagram and wall annotations. Is sound a social substratum? Does it leave an imprint on surfaces through the movements of listeners? Can it become a biopolitical hazard? Generate affective intensities and pathologies and also signal against them?

Originally unfinished, *The Burrow* ends with an 'editor's/translator's licence'. This abruptness of the text allows for a constant

play with the titular system's borders and underscores the infinite regress of the plot and narrative, the creature forever moving in circles around their 'Castle Keep' albeit following different paths. Combining display and playlist, Suri's interpretation of *The Burrow* uses modes of speculation, spatialisation, and collaboration to produce a recursive reflection on sound as an aesthetic, political, and cultural form. In its quest to dig for the source of the sound, the work asks the question of how to listen in the first place.



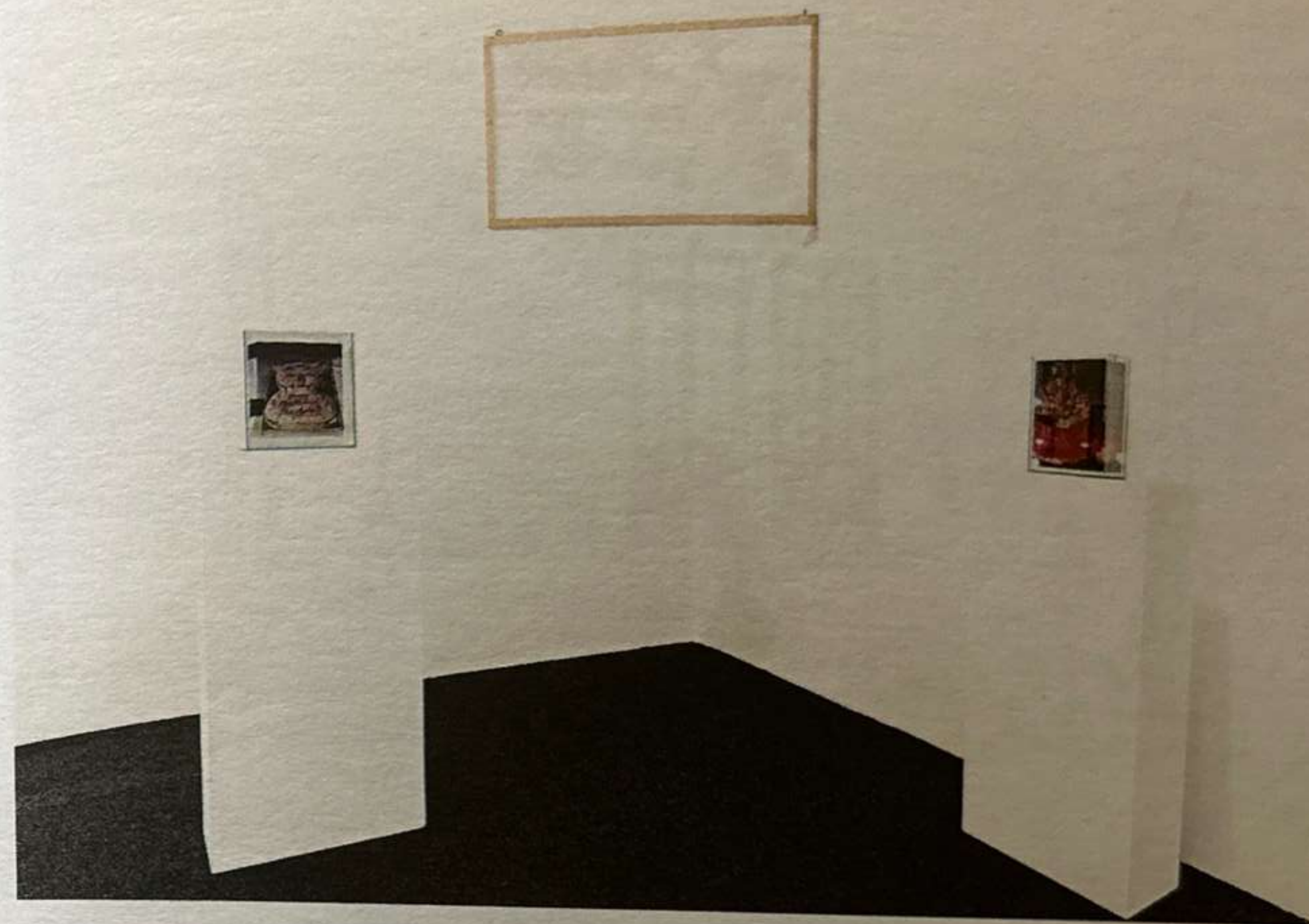
Yashna Kaul

"...not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written... it solves the problem of combining the two functions by dividing them into two separate but interrelated component parts or systems."

— Sigmund Freud, *The Mystic Writing-Pad*¹⁹

Two birthday parties a year apart are the focus of Yashna Kaul's audiophotography series *Another note, another tiger*. Celebrating the same child, the parties retain the pageantry — identical cakes, props and return gift bags — and the images are displayed alongside audio recordings of a woman reciting nursery rhymes. The duplication of events and their recording through the mediums of photographs and VHS allude to Freud's elaboration of the psychical process of remembering: writing as repetition, as the commitment of perception to memory via trace.

Mutually inverse, the two series also



lend themselves to a conceptual transposition of this formulation. In *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, Jacques Derrida flips the Freudian order of perception and memory, suggesting instead that the grapheme or 'trace' becomes a mneme through the difference between pressure and effraction. Retracing thus is generation through iteration, our memories mediated through pre-existing impressions of signs (photos from a previous year, for example).

In *Another note, another tiger*, the two sets of cakes, tiger castles, and candid poses of young revellers as well as stiffly-delivered nursery rhymes can be read against an anthropology of media. Childhood memories are recollected in full chromogenic richness and magnetic tape warmth, by those who experienced childhood during the transition from the analog age to the Internet era. Perhaps due to this being the last major shift in media infrastructure in recent memory, digital audiovisual archives from the last years of the 20th century are gilded with millennial nostalgia. These retracings have unexpected followers. A little boy wanders in with a parent and tries on the headphones, crashing a very old party in progress.

'Another note, another tiger'
by Yashna Kaul, showcased as
part of 'Synaesthetic Notations',
curated by Veerangana Solanki
for Serendipity Arts Festival
2023. Photograph by Philippe
Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



Savinder Bual

"Dimas Bosque: Have you written about this fruit called ananaz, for it is certainly the king of fruit as regards taste, and more so as regards scent?"

Orta: Oviedo has written on this fruit, he who wrote of the Western Indies, as one proper to that land, so that it was not necessary for me to treat of it. In the Province of Santa Cruz called by us Brazil, they know better how to describe it".

— Garcia de Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*²⁰ (trans. Sir Clements Markham)

It is evening in the large hall and a tropical opus thrills the expectant audience.

Savinder Bual's nine-string *The Pineapple Orchestra* strikes up.

The newly-devised instruments are topped with the eponymous fruit which, when the bow is operated, begins to spin, its leaves strumming the strings and producing

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sound. As performers play, the twirl of the fruit paired with the ever-changing music is a visual-kinetic display of synchrony.

Commissioned by Colston Hall (now Bristol Beacon) after slave trader Edward Colston, the Pineapple Project takes the political and cultural history of the originally-South-American pineapple as an entry point into reflections on colonialism and empire. Imported to Britain via international movements carried out through the exploitation of humans and extraction of resources, the pineapple symbolises historical trauma, its rotations referring to its global travels. At the same time, the concomitant music created by the spins reworks the fruit's associations with a violent past into a communitarian activity, a shared symphony that brings legatees of trauma together to heal.



Molla Sagar

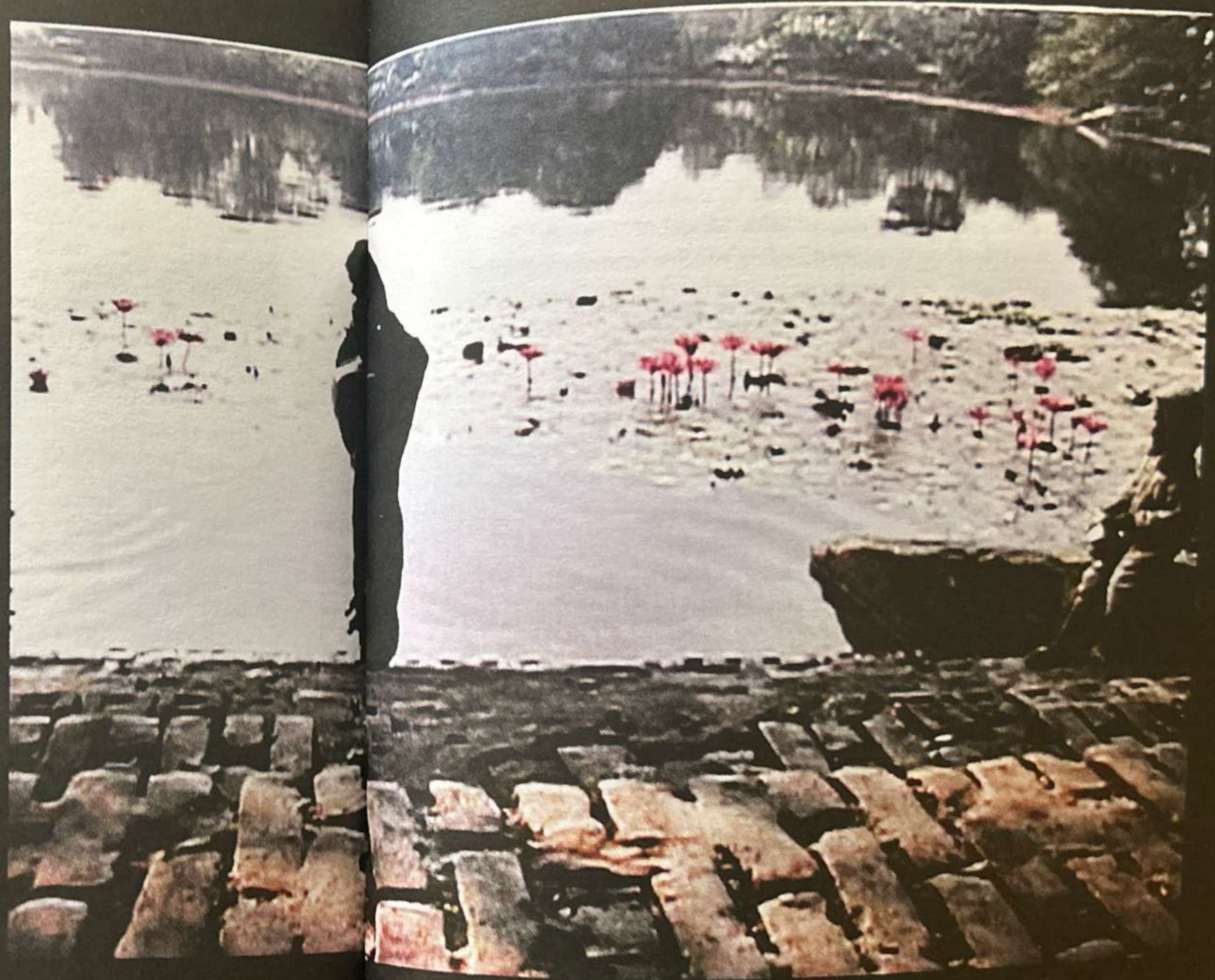
Three films by Bangladeshi documentary filmmaker Molla Sagar play on a loop. Landscape and song are braided together in journeys that follow individuals making sense of lifeworlds marred by social injustice and cultural turmoil. Through long-term engagements with the protagonists and sharp attention to their embedment in their environment, *Dadu* (*The Journey of 100 Years*), *Vobarvita*; *Searching for Voba's* (Ritwik Ghatak's) *Birth Homestead*, and *Avadoot: The Mystic* portray the quest for a humanist ethos against climates of political intolerance.

Conversations and observations are structured through the lyricism of folk

music and the meditative chronicling of the countrysides of Bangladesh. In *Dadu*, we attend to philosophical perspectives on Bengal's heritage by supercentenarian Momin Ali 'Dadu' Mrida, the first model at Dhaka's Faculty of Fine Arts, foregrounded against fundamentalist nationalism. In *Avadoot*, folk artist Faruk mounts a quiet resistance in the form of Padma Purana performances of mythological poetry, challenging the orthodox Muslim sensibilities of his Sylheti homeland. In *Vobarvita*, Sagar contends with Bengal's mid-to-late-20th-century wounds through the plangent cinema and biography of Ritwik Ghatak, evoking the dislocations and devastations of forced migration and the foreclosure of return.

The relationship between sound and image is central to Sagar's non-fictional compositions. Folk songs fill the gaps between what is said and unsaid, afford a glimpse into the interior lives of the protagonists and their communities, and render the geographies of crisis emotionally comprehensible. For the voices silenced and quietened, there are listeners and comrades.

Molla Sagar's work, showcased as part of 'Synaesthetic Notations', curated by Veerangana Solanki for Serendipity Arts Festival 2023. Photograph by Philippe Calia and Sunil Thakkar.



Endnotes

- ¹ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses*. Vintage Books, New York, 1995) EPUB ed., 476.
- ² Richard E. Cytowic, *Synesthesia* (MIT Press, Cambridge, 2018) 24.
- ³ Philip Lindholm, "A Light in Sound, a Sound-Like Power in Light": Poetry, Synaesthesia & Multimedia", *Études de lettres* 319 (2022), <http://journals.openedition.org/edl/4009>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/edl.4009>.
- ⁴ Lawrence E. Marks, "Synesthesia, Then and Now", in *Sensory Blending: On Synaesthesia & Related Phenomena*, edited by Ophelia Deroy (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017), 17.
- ⁵ Richard Wagner, *The Art-work of the Future and Other Works*, translated by William Ashton Ellis (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London, 1993), 97.
- ⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (Routledge, London & New York, 1945), 266-267.
- ⁷ Christoph Cox, "Seeing is Not Hearing: Synaesthesia, Anaesthesia and the Audio/Visual", in *Art or Sound*, edited by Germano Celant (Fondazione Prada, Venice, 2014), 94.
- ⁸ Paul Gordon, *Synaesthetics: Art as Synaesthesia* (Bloomsbury Academic, New York & London, 2020), 4.
- ⁹ Mieke Bal, "Visual essentialism and the object of culture", *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 1, (2003), 9.
- ¹⁰ Sarah Best, "synaesthesia (1)", *Keywords Glossary*, The Chicago School of Media Theory, Winter 2003. [https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/synaesthesia.htm#:~:text=\(See%20Ear%2C%20Eye%20and%20Gaze,the%20production%20of%20a%20synaesthetic](https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/synaesthesia.htm#:~:text=(See%20Ear%2C%20Eye%20and%20Gaze,the%20production%20of%20a%20synaesthetic)
- ¹¹ Cytowic, *Synesthesia*, 134.
- ¹² Berit Brogaard, "Synesthetic Binding and the Reactivation Model of Memory", in *Sensory Blending: On Synaesthesia & Related Phenomena*, edited by Ophelia Deroy (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017), 129.
- ¹³ Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, New York, 1968), 202.
- ¹⁴ Cytowic, *Synesthesia*, 122.
- ¹⁵ Eyad Abauli, "Words Clothed in Light: Dhikr (Recollection), Colour and Synaesthesia in Early Kubrawi Sufism", "Iran" issue of *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 58, no. 2 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1080/05786967.2019.1583046>
- ¹⁶ Allen S. Weiss, *Zen Landscapes* (Reaktion Books, London, 2013), 115.
- ¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (Faber & Faber, London, 2009), 39-40.
- ¹⁸ Franz Kafka, "The Burrow", *The Complete Stories*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer (Schocken Books, New York, 1983), 343.

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