

## INSERTING THOUGHTS, IDEAS AND DREAMS

Review by Georgina Maddox

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### INSERT2014: The Sharp Edge of the Global Contemporary

An exhibition by the internationally recognized Inlak Azad Shivdasani Foundation with works by Basel Abbas + Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Clark House Initiative, Eyal Weizman, Gauri Gill, Harun Farocki, Hito Steyerl, Ivana Franke, Katarzyna Kozyra, Kendell Geers, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Lu Xing-Hua, Mai-Thu Perret, Nikolaus Hirsch + Michel Müller, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Superflex, Tomás Saraceno, Wanuri Kahiu, Yao Jui-Chung, and featuring New Models for Common Ground: 25 proposals re-imagine the infrastructure for culture in Delhi  
January 31-February 28, 2014  
Mati Ghar, IGNC, NewDelhi

*Insert*, is a provoking exhibition curated by Raqs Media Collective that displays a large dollop of idealism in the time ruled by commercial art markets.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as its name suggests is usually a venue that one associates with craft exhibitions, Sufi song nights and slightly ostentatious exhibitions on the Mughal miniatures. So it came as a bit of a surprise to the art crowd when Raqs Media Collective announced their exhibition, *Insert 2014*, was being held at the oddly shaped Mati Ghar there. The opening on January 31, 2014, was well attended none-the-less.

"We chose this structure because it connected well to our theme of time and mortality. We wanted to look at death and time, not morbidly but from a cultural and artistic perspective," says Shuddhabrata Sengupta one of the three members of Raqs Media Collective; Jeebesh Bagchi and Monica Narula are the other two members.

Rasmus Nielsen, of Superflex a Danish artists' group founded in 1993 consisting of Jakob Fenger Børnstjerne Christiansen and Nielsen, agrees that the location is quite perfect. "I am so glad to be here in India to be part of and experience this exhibition. I met Shuddhabrata and the Raqs media collective many years ago and we had decided to do something together. This exhibition has been in the planning for many years," reveals Nielsen whose collective is quite similar to Raqs, in that they tackle social and political art projects that they describe as tools that invite people to participate and communicate. Superflex showed video work of a building being dismantled and a living sculpture of tar that melts in real time.

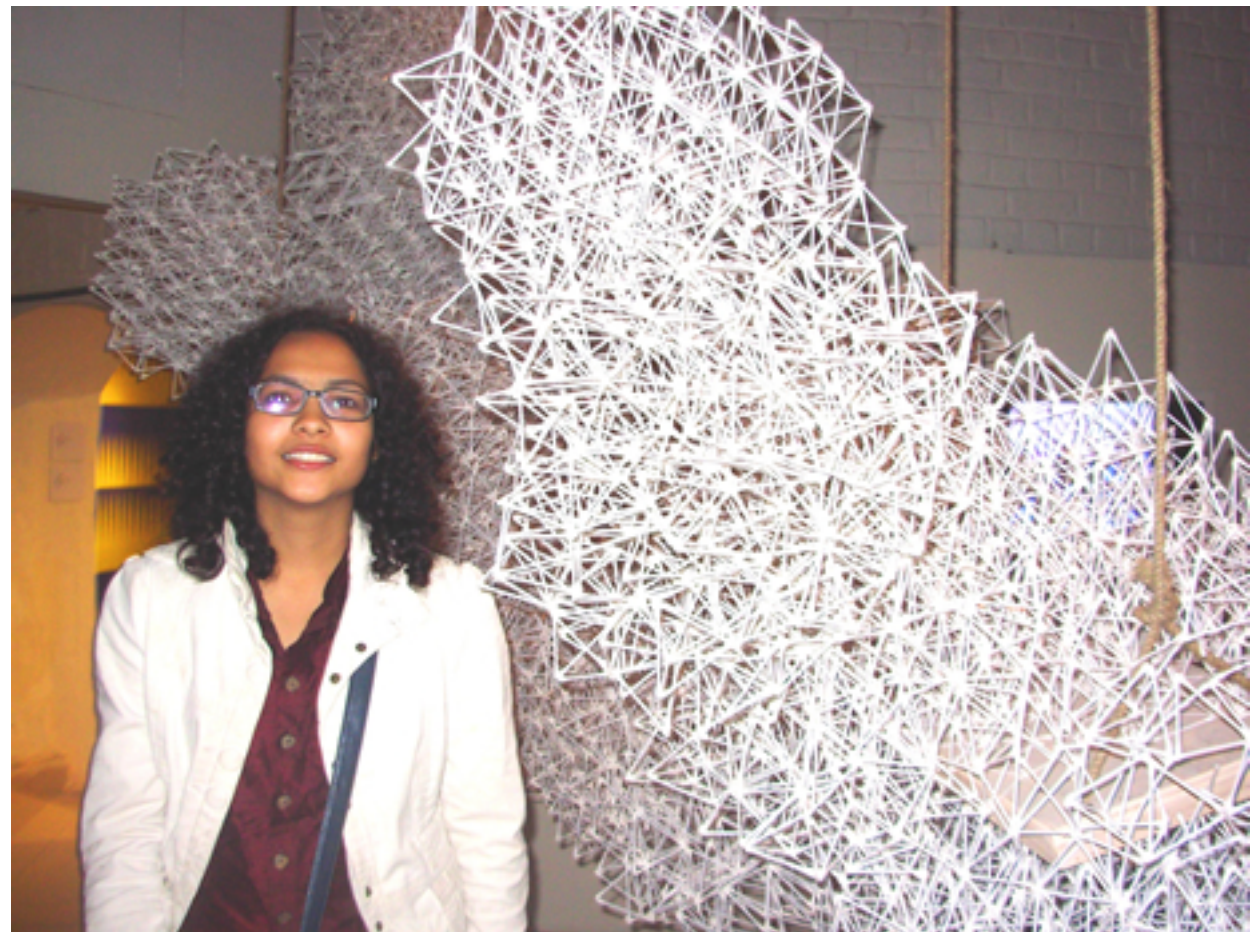
Quite to everyone's surprise, the space was transformed. Apparently the curators and the artists were working till the very last minute of the show opening. The art was integrated with the labyrinth making it perfect for the unconventional art that slowly revealed itself to the viewer as one entered the hexagonal structure.

On the left, a group of serigraphy printers were making on-the-spot tee shirts with provocative slogans printed on it that read "We need political clearance" and "Up against the wall you mother fu\*\*ers." It was only later that one realized that the tees were free giveaways and a long line of students and curious art lovers queued up to get theirs, probably to wear at the next protest rally. The artist behind this project was Rirkrit Tiravanija a South Asian artist born in Argentina who globe trots between New York, Berlin and Chiang Mai. He may be described as an artist who uses various means of performance, from cooking, to public protests to tee-shirt making.

Next to the tee shirt makers was artist Prabhakar Pachpute's project. He chose a curved, slightly blistered and peeling wall upon which he narrated a story-board in charcoal drawings. On close examination the story revealed is of coal miners that tunnel beneath the surface of his village Sasti in Chandrapur in Maharashtra. "Even the coal miners in Chile got more media attention than the tragedy going on in India, it remains unnoticed," says Pachpute who has been working on this topic for awhile.

Further on, one encountered a sculpture made of ear-buds (again the material was revealed on closer inspection). The seemingly delicate network of ear buds was attached to two swings, so that when viewers touched or brushed past it the structure would move. "I believe that we are all connected and even if one of us is touched by something, we are all affected," said the young artist, Poonam Jain. 'Titled Graveyards of Utopias' the sculpture, almost architectural in nature, reflected on urban existences that are dictated by the constant networks we create during our life. "Being a Jain I suppose I am a bit obsessed with meticulousness and sticking together each ear bud with resin to form this mesh-like structure was a labour of love," says Jain. This section of the exhibition has been curated by Clark House, which consists of Zasha Colah and Sumesh Sharma.

On the opposite side of the curved hall one encountered photographer Gauri Gill's pile of giveaway booklets. Each booklet contained an image and a bit of text. The text ran from personal accounts, to poems to letters to the artist. Gill's photographs have been shot in 1984 and address the silence around the 1984 riots against the Sikhs, riots that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The booklet is xeroxed and hand stapled evoking the early underground zens that were created during the Fluxus movement. "I enjoy the concept of free, give-away art and that is how this project evolved," says Gill. The idea of getting text and photographs together was something that started when she was invited for the Mumbai Photo Festival. "I wanted to show my pictures of 1984, retrieved from the local print media in 2005 and 2009, to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogrom. I intended to make a pamphlet of these photographs inviting people who live in Delhi to write a few lines in response to the photographs," Says Gill.



In the middle of outer hexagonal room is a circular inner-room in which two works of art by Katarzyna Kozyra took centre stage. Kozyra is a Polish video artist whose works have often been controversial, for instance her photo portrait of Slawomir Belina in a Warsaw exhibition in 2000 was also controversial for its eroticism.

The work displayed at "Insert" was titled "Olympia" and it consisted of a large photograph with Kozyra seated as the famed courtesan Olympia, painted by Claud Manet with a coloured woman handing her a bouquet of flowers. Opposite that was a video recording of Kozyra's fight with cancer, going through the motions of chemotherapy fully nude and totally unconscious of her nudity. The two works juxtaposed as such speak of the moribund body and the attempt to restore dignity for the ailing. It also carves out a whole new aesthetics of beauty.

When one walked up to the dome above the circular room, there was a surprise for viewers. Created by Ivana Franke, an artist from Croatia known for her light sculptures and interactive art projects, it was called the 'Dance of the Light Echoes'. As one entered into the ambit of the light sensors in the darkness of the dome, it danced and moved as people walked around the dome. "It is a linear structure that will create light echoes, a phenomenon observed in astronomy-that occurs in space, revealing events from a distant past," writes the artist in her statement. Franke has been described as one of Europe's master-practitioners when it comes to geometrical abstraction, optical sculpture and architectural installations.


Wanuri Kahiu's 'Pumzi', created by the artist and The Production Company, was a gripping video piece. It pictured an African woman protecting a small shrub in an arid desert. She waters it with her sweat and tears and finally lies around it protectively. The shrub expands and grows into a forest. "Pumzi was, for me, a reflection of society. It is set 35 years after the water war, and where everybody lives inside because they are told the outside is dead. Until one character, Asha, has a dream and plants a seed," writes Kahiu. The film is about sacrifice, life and Mother Nature.

Except for the New Media Art, the overall exhibition evokes the politics of Arte Povera, Agitprop art and Dadaism. The exhibition evokes a sense of breaking the notion that art is a precious collectible that will have value in the market later on by making it either free or not for sale, with an exception of one or two works.

"Our intention is to evoke a slightly different infrastructure for showing art. The idea is not to challenge something like the India Art Fair, of which we are a collateral event of, but to say that art which is commercial and art which is more ideological not for sale or totally free, can co-exist together," says Sengupta. Behind the scenes, the exhibition has been funded by Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation and supported by organizations like India Foundation for the Arts and the Polish Institute that allows the art to be totally experimental with no constraints of the market. It is indeed refreshing that is selling nothing but ideas.


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