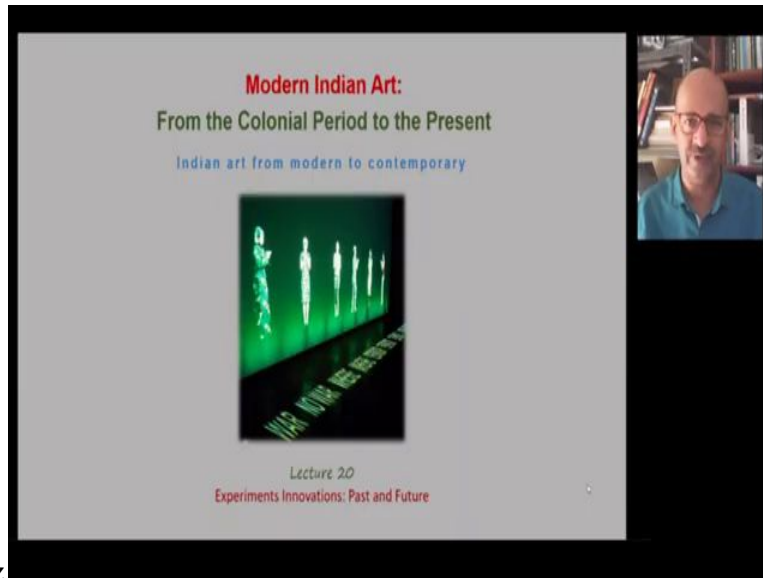


**Modern Indian Art from The Colonial Period to the Present**  
**Professor Soumik Nandy Majumdar**  
**Department History of Art, Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan Visva Bharati**  
**Lecture 20**  
**Experiments Innovations: Past and Future**

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Hello viewers, welcome to MOOCs online course on Modern Indian Art from The Colonial Period to the present. This is the last lecture from this entire course and today we are going to or we are supposed to summarize the entire course. And also, we are supposed to highlight the most salient features, the most significant aspects of this entire span of modern Indian art history, right from the colonial period to the contemporary times. But before we move on to summarizing the entire course, I would like to highlight two very important aspects from our observation of the recent developments of modern or let us say contemporary art scenario.

Number one, of late we have seen that artists, not everybody, but many of them are no more satisfied with their studio work only. They do a plenty of studio work, but many of them have reduced the studio work and some of them have left the studio work. Which means that quite a few artists, not only in India, but in the whole world have decided to stop the studio practice, that is to draw, paint or sculpt within a studio atmosphere and go out. But out where, to sites, to specific sites, could be natural sites or could be social sites.

But more important than that, a lot of artists today do think about the outreach possibilities of their art practice. That is, how and where and in what process, their art engagement, their art

activity can help the communities, communities the artists belong to or maybe the communities they do not belong to directly. But there are needy communities around. So how to serve them, how to not only make art available to them, but to make art meaningful to them in terms of improving the quality of their life, that is the basic needs like food, shelter, health, education.

So, when you think about artists keeping this particular aspect in mind, this particular role in mind, then obviously the image of the artist that we carry ceases to exist. Artists are no more just simple creative, genius or imaginative genius, but they now want to make themselves useful to society. In other words, in contemporary art, we see quite a few artists are trying and often quite successfully, they are making themselves useful to different communities, could be remote communities, could be rural communities, could be their own communities.

They want to be useful to their societies. So, in that sense, these artists are also social activists. They make their life, their living, and their activity as an artist socially viable, socially useful. So, this is a very important trend in the practice and an idea and an engagement that has emerged in the last two decades, particularly in India, making art more and more socially relevant, useful.

Therefore, many artists have developed what we call today community-based art practice. It is not about you as an artist as an individual artist, it is about the entire community. And then there are many things associated with this idea also come up, like then art is not just for aesthetic enjoyment, it is more functional. Yes, then art is no more about a creation by one particular artist, it could be a collective effort. Yes. So, these two criteria are enough to challenge the previous notion of artist.

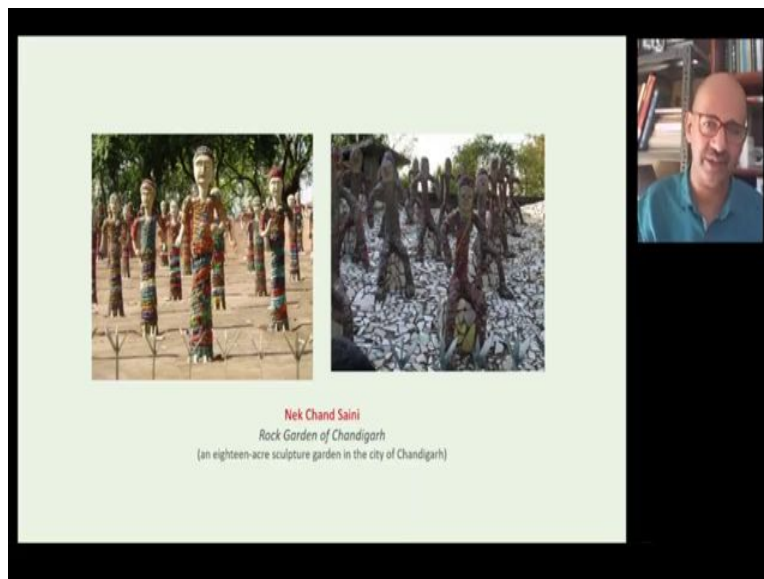
Now, that does not make the studio artist less respectful, they also carry immense value to our culture. But this the emergence of this new group of artists who want to make their art engagement useful for the society or the community is also worth noticing and certainly significant in the present scenario of our life, of the world, of our society. The other thing, which is equally important, is the way art has absorbed the possibilities, the potentialities and the vast usefulness of digital technology.

We have a term used quite often in contemporary art practice, it is called new media, we have a term called digital Art. We have already seen the idea of installation art, where you can use digital art, new media, various other electronic gadgets and electronic devices, not necessarily

handmade, you can use sensor, you can use monitor sets, you can use light, you can use motor to create certain kind of dynamism and movement in your artwork.

So, technology is not something very new to modern art practice, but the way modern art or contemporary art changed its aesthetics, changed its visual language due to the impact of technology and particularly digital technology, computer technology on the art is remarkable. So, experiments and innovations are the buzzword to understand, to comprehend, to enter into the world of contemporary art and there is also a past to this particular situation. And there is also a future, we are going to discuss both these things, when we summarize the whole course.

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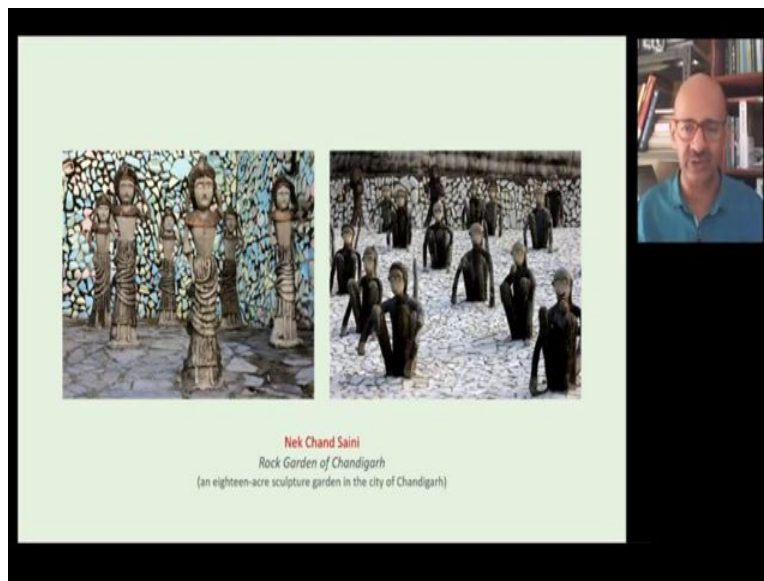


But before that, I must tell you that there have also been some exceptional attempts to connect art with the public. So, on the one hand, I just mentioned that making art useful to the community and public and on the other or maybe just another extension of the same idea is to make art accessible to the public. Because more and more art got very expensive, exclusive and also very precious. The gallery situation, the gallery environment have also become extremely sophisticated spaces and in fact, out of reach for many common people. But now, if you have art and artworks right in front of your eyes, if you make the space available all the time, then that bridge can be actually created between art and the public.

That yawning gap can be negotiated between the art and public. So, this is also a concern that has been accepted and consequently negotiated, tried out to address the concern in various ways by many artists. That is to make art more and more public activity, a public effort, not necessarily exclusive within a very sophisticated gallery space.

So, just for one example, I would like to draw your attention to the famous Rock Garden of Chandigarh, which is an 18-acre sculpture garden in the city of Chandigarh, made almost single handedly by one person called Nek Chand Saini, famously known as Nek Chand.

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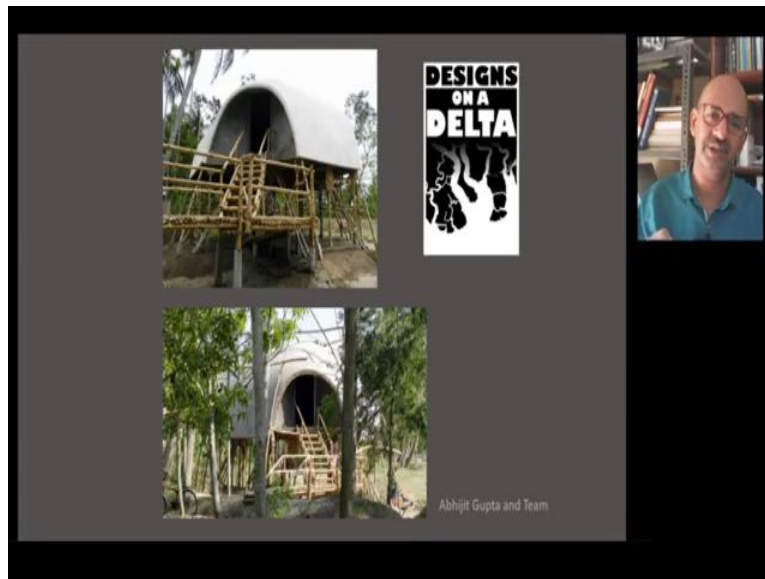
So, Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh is one huge example, where art is not only located within the public space, but it is open to the public. And therefore, people, normal common people can create, they get an opportunity to create a relationship between art. When art was getting more and more exclusive and removed from the common people from the common society, these kinds of initiatives are highly commendable. And this should be appreciated and respected from every corner of our lives. And there should be more such initiatives around, I personally think.

So, Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh is one major example, this is one of the oldest examples of public art. But that is not the only example. I am sure now in every city of India, even smaller cities, and I know that there are many villages or rural setups in many parts of

India, where young artists are going and creating public art, not just by themselves, but by engaging the community people, the village people, making them feel that it is an art by them, and for them, and of course of them.

So, in a sense, a democratization of art, making art more and more accessible for common people has been a very important outcome of the recent developments in the contemporary art practice. And if you want, you can search plenty of such examples happening all around right now.

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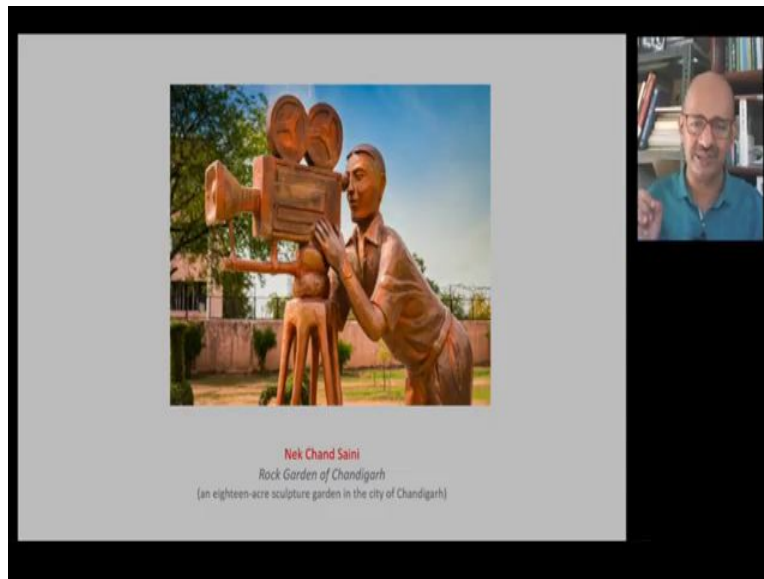


For example, to make art useful or your artistic mind useful, after a devastating cyclone, in southern Bengal in Sundarban, a group of artists led by the artist Abhijit Gupta and his team went to actual sites of Sundarban and they designed and created a number of shelters, or houses for people, houses which can save them and protect them in the wake of any devastating cyclone or natural calamity.

So, this is one classic case where the artists are using their knowledge, their creative knowledge, their imagination and also their technical expertise to create something which will not be their own, they are not going to have any authorship on them, but to create an idea and actually a physical object like this shelter, which will be left behind in those villages and which will be extremely useful for the people in that community.

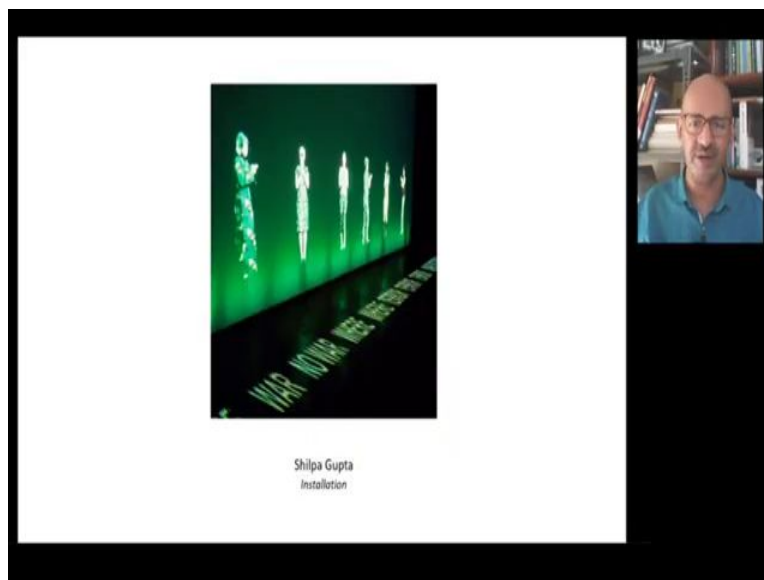
So, art for community, art for the public, making art available to the public, trying to create a bridge between art and public, which has been there, but I guess, down the line, somewhere that connect was lost. So the young artists from the 1990s onwards, always have this in mind that any kind of art practice is, at the end of the day, pointless unless we also try to engage the people, the viewers, and increase the viewership also.

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So, this particular sculpture from the Rock Garden of Chandigarh is also a great pointer, is very significant, and also very symbolic. Because after all, more than brush and paint and pencil, it is a camera. This is of course, an analog video camera. But now we have the digital camera. So, the impact of digital technology on contemporary art practice is also very, very visible.

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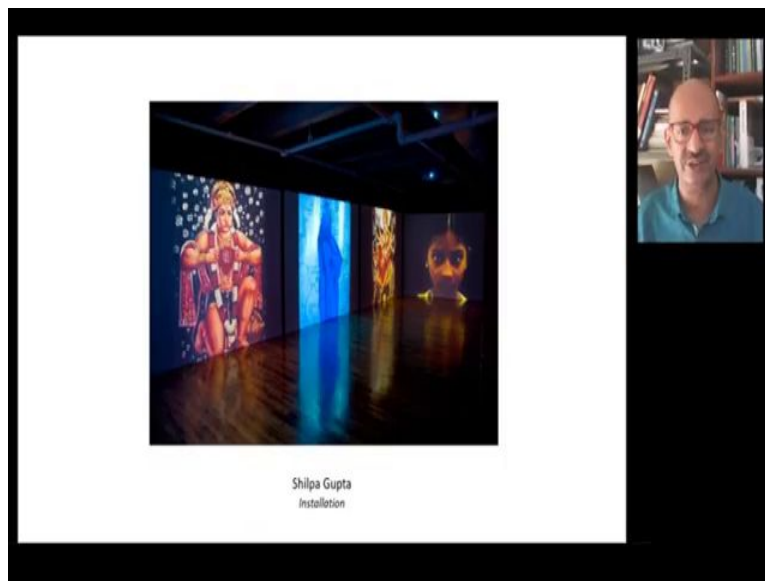


For example, an installation may have light, projection, the screen where images are moving. So, it is entirely a technology-based idea and execution. And in many cases, like the one we are

looking at right now, it has a very straight and very specific agenda, maybe a non violence agenda, maybe an anti-war agenda, maybe gender related or maybe related to many burning social issues. So, installation art can create an almost real space and real-life experience of the particular subject.

So, the subject becomes not just a subject or the concept just does not remain at the level of the concept, subject matter or the concept altogether become a part of your experience. And this is what all these artists are trying to do by using digital technology.

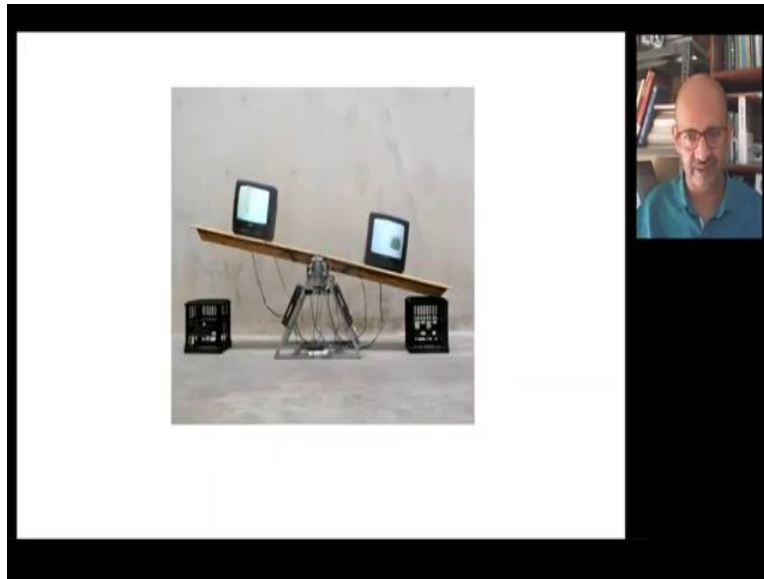
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So digital technology, and creating massive screens, moving screens, illuminated boards, using photographs, using the real space of a gallery or the display room, one can actually make the viewers look at artwork, from an entirely different perspective. One can actually see a lot of elements, motifs within these artworks which are fundamentally culled from the popular cultural domain, not necessarily hand painted hand drawn by the artists themselves.



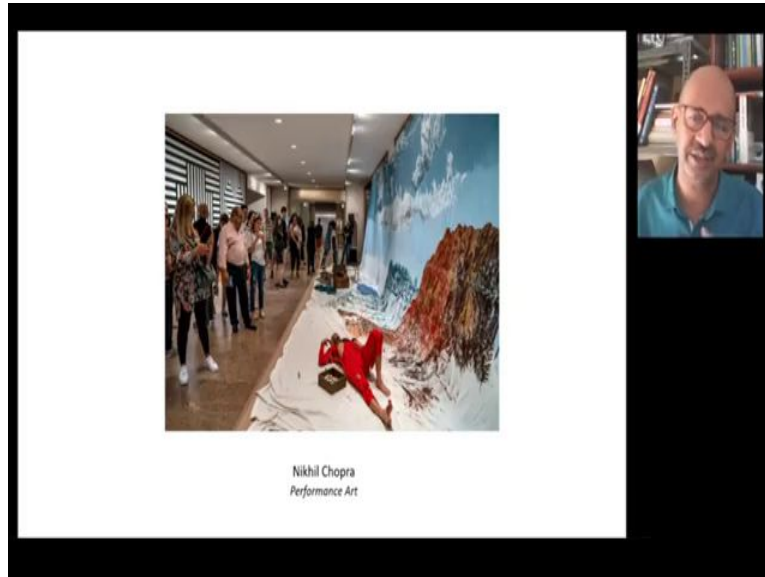
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So, this kind of works we can now see all around and this kind of works are continuously addressing the changing nature of our society, the changing nature of our communication. And we all know that today, instead of picking up a phone, calling somebody, hearing the voice from the other end and letting the other end also listen to my voice is the last thing we would do. We would simply pick up a phone and start texting.

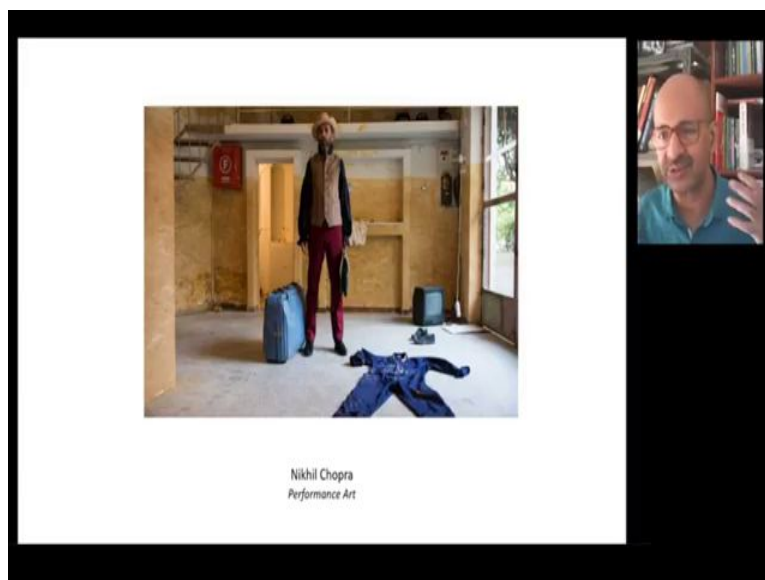
So texting, digital technology, the information technology, the entire IT sector, we know how they would have changed our life, even if we do not realize that always. Therefore, artists have also begun responding to this huge change.

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Now another development in the contemporary art practice can be termed as or categorized as performance art, where the artist along with his or her little bit of art objects or some props and elements, make themselves physically present as a kind of performer, where the artist performs and the performance of the artist becomes a part of his or her work.

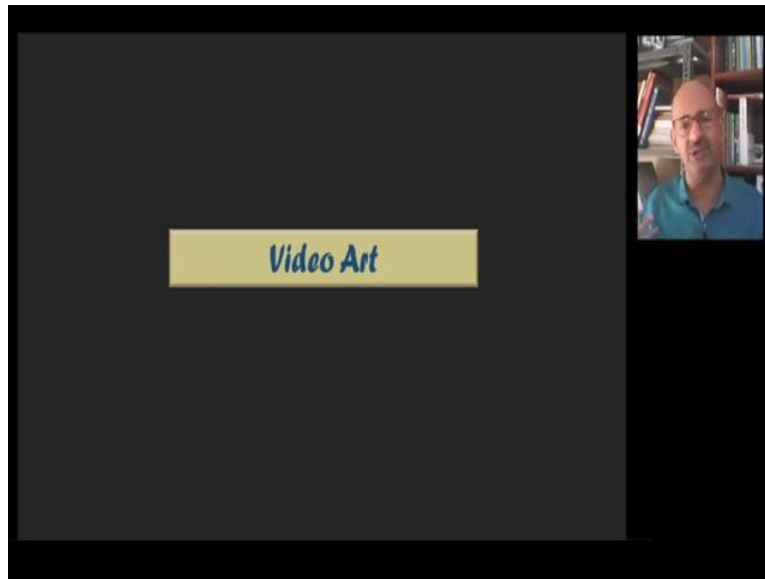
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So therefore, when you go to see that kind of work, which is performance art, you know that you are not looking at an object anymore. You are looking at objects, you are looking at the space, you are looking at the various possible meanings created between different objects. And also,

you are looking at the person, the artist who is actually doing a performance to augment your experience, to increase the experience and also to highlight the message that he or she wants to convey.

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And as an extension of that digital technology or the impact of digital technology on art, quite a few artists all over the world and certainly in India are making now what we call video art. Which is different from video as such, which is different from documentary films or simple moving images, video art is a new genre where the artist uses all her or his experiences as a fine artist and tries to explore them in a new medium, which is moving, which can be edited, where and of course, which has become very popular in the digital era, because just by sitting in front of a computer monitor and with a couple of softwares you can create your own video art.

Video art uses footages which you have shot, video art can use still which you have shot, video art can also use footages and stills which you have not shot but you have collected, it can create pattern, it can create music, and certainly most of the video arts do not have a single storyline. They are not narrative, they are not descriptive, they are evocative, they are like a statement, they are like a small little article, essay written through this medium.

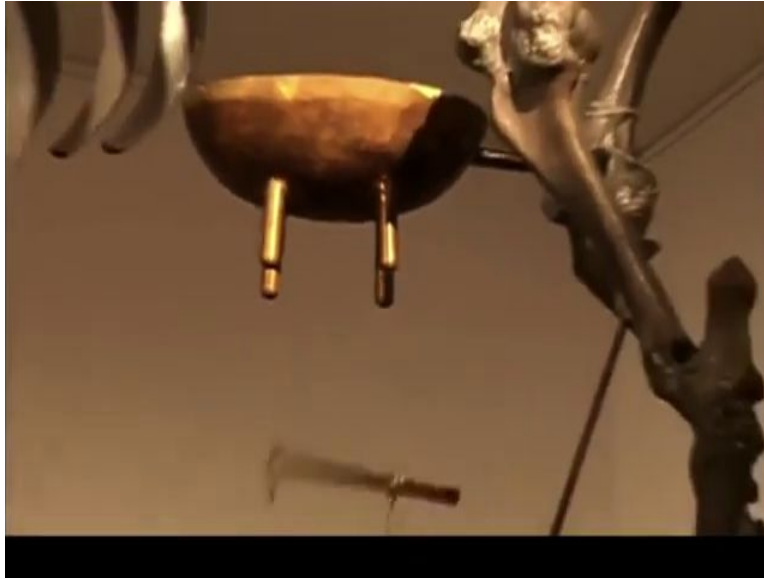
The meanings may not be always clear right at the first viewing. So, when I show you four such video art samples right now, do not try to get the meaning immediately, but try to feel the

experience as much as possible from these four video arts. So, let us look at these four video arts, after that I will come back.

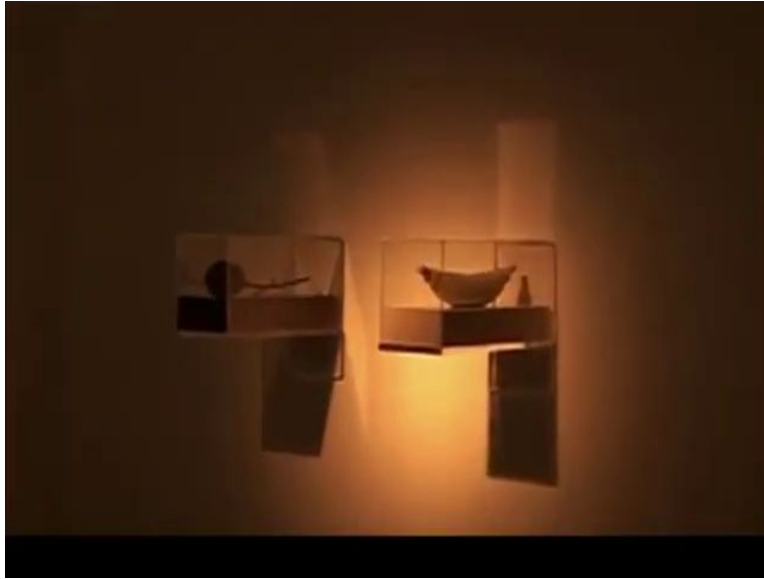
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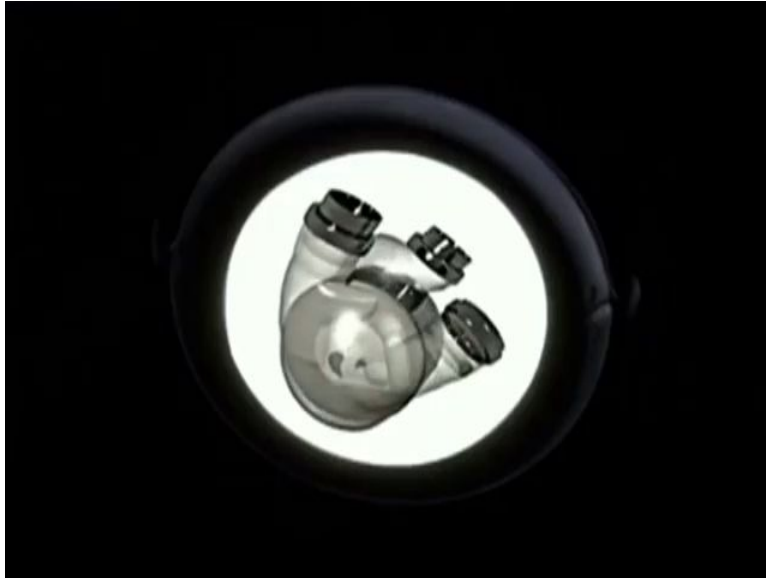




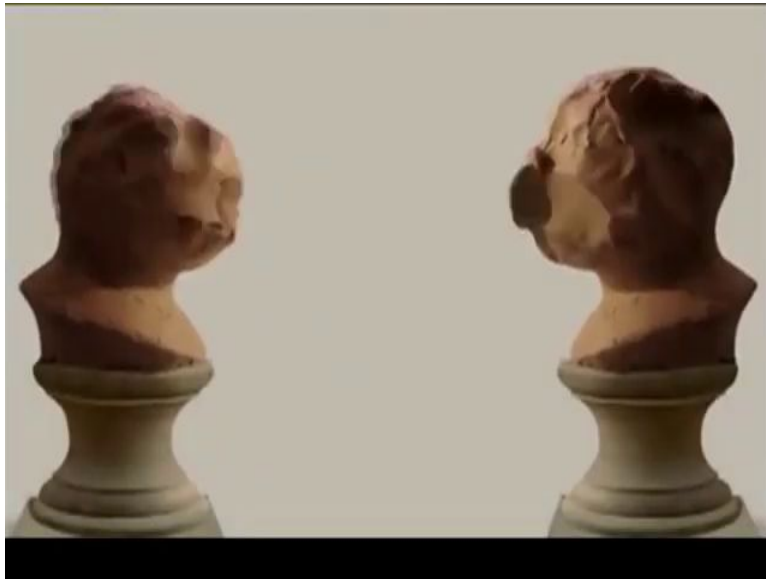
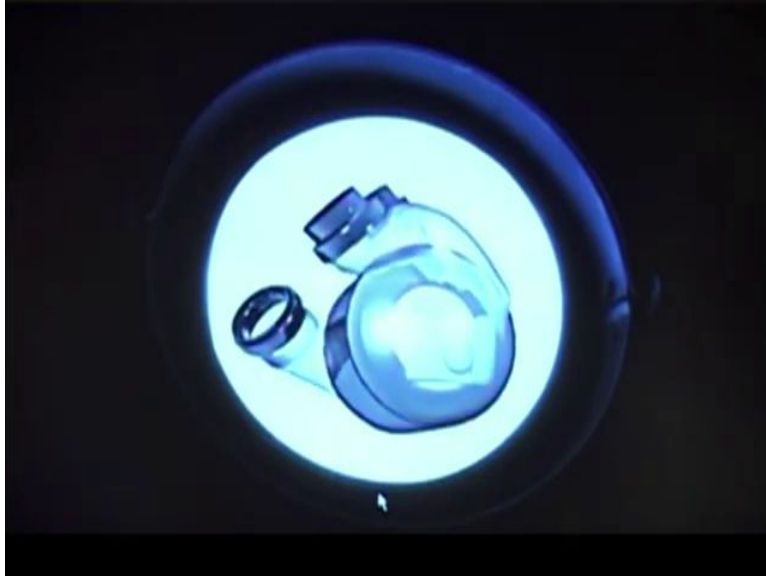


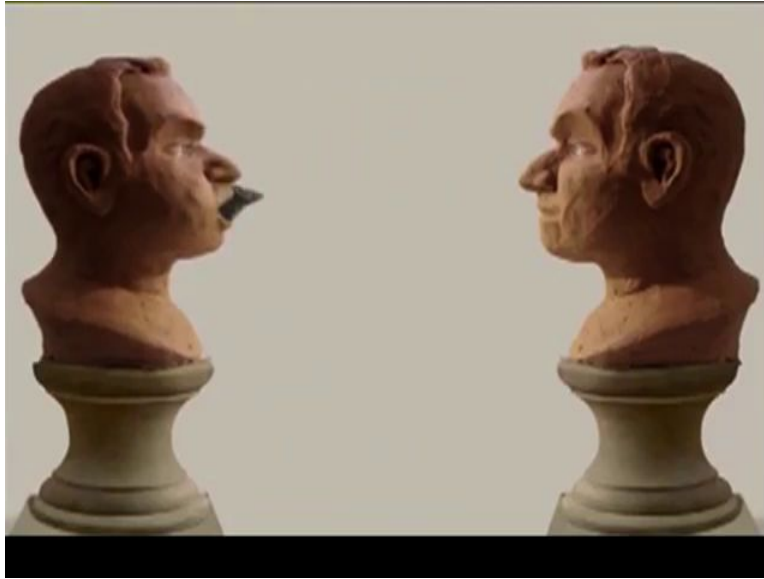




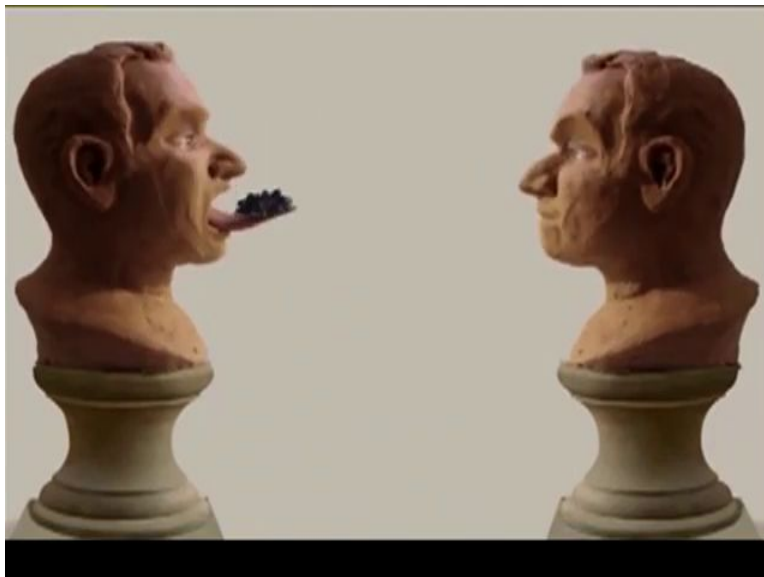


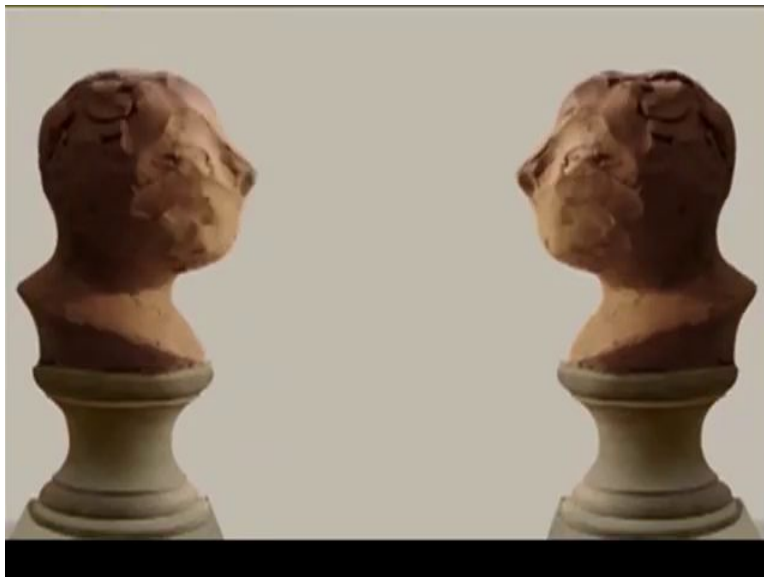


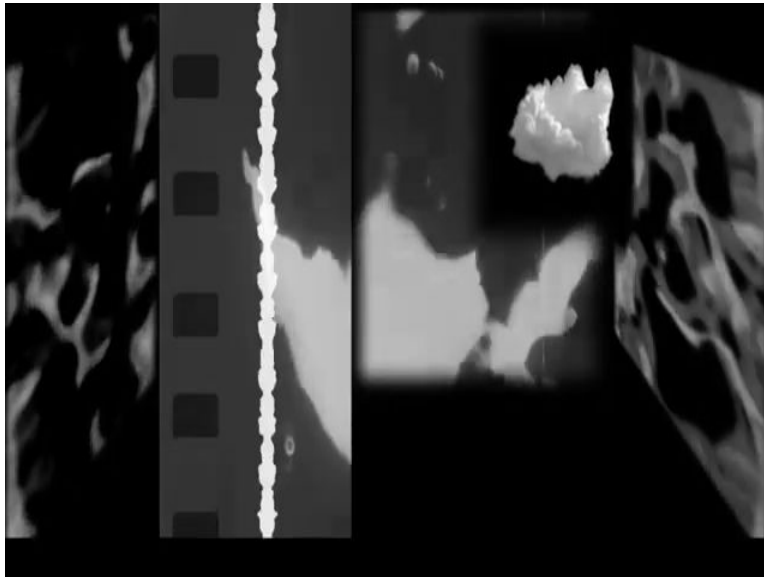
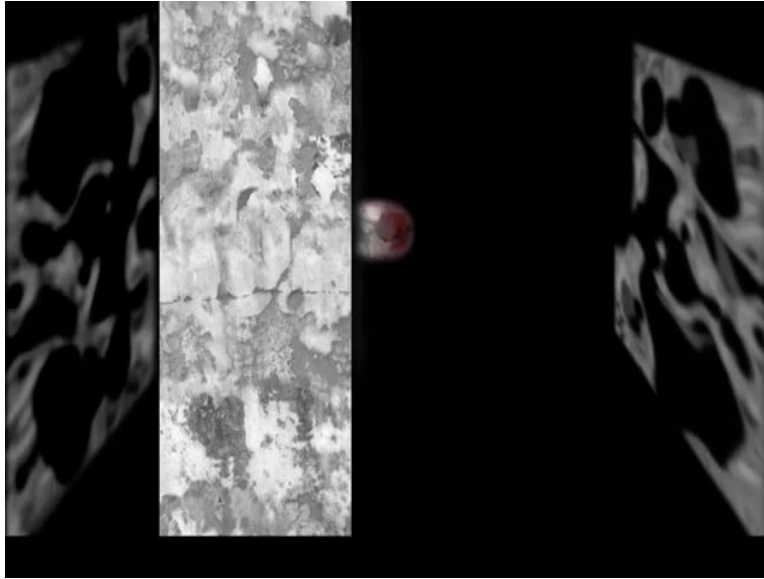




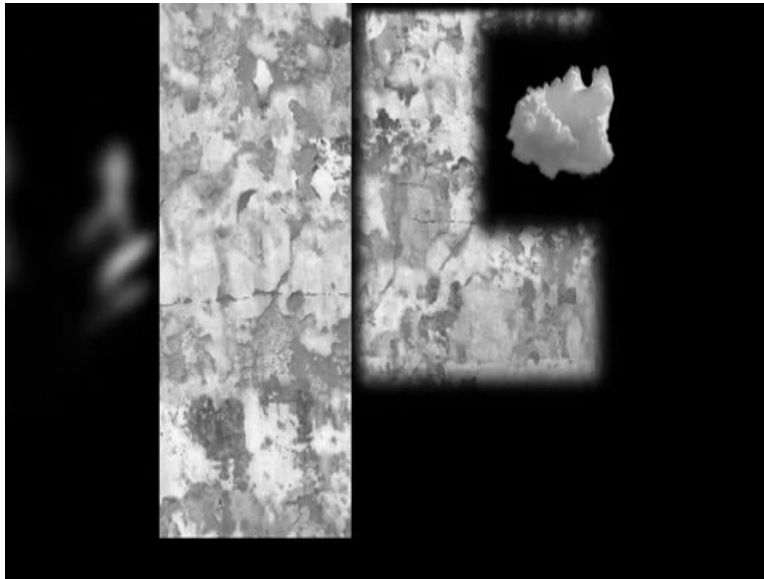
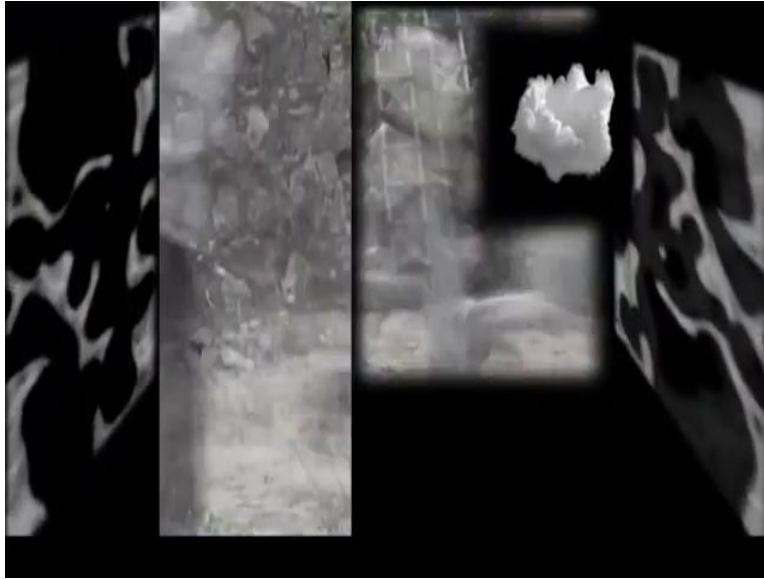




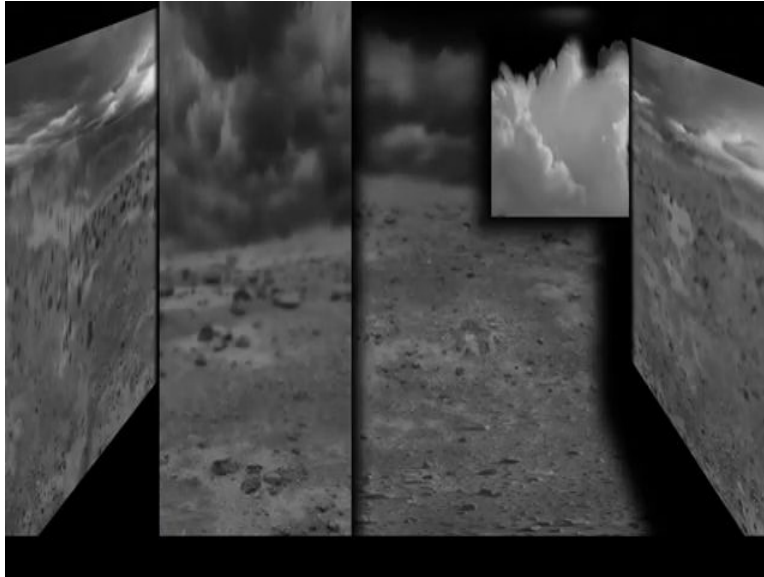
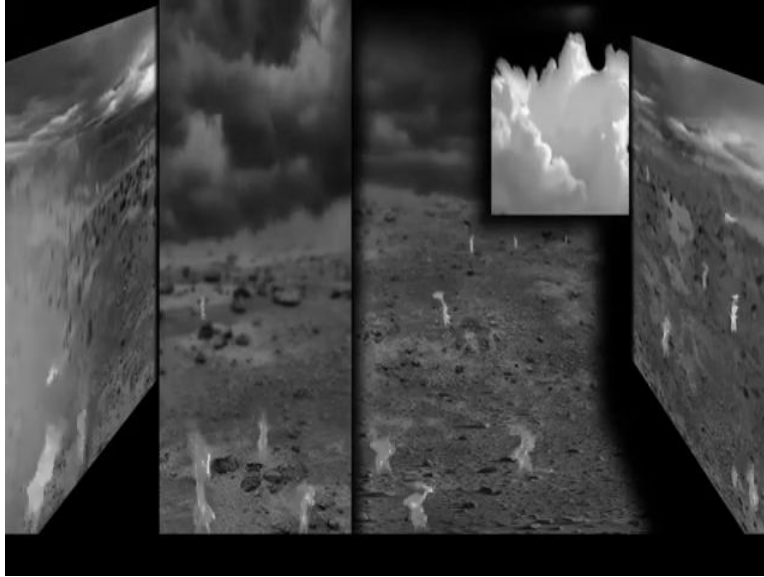




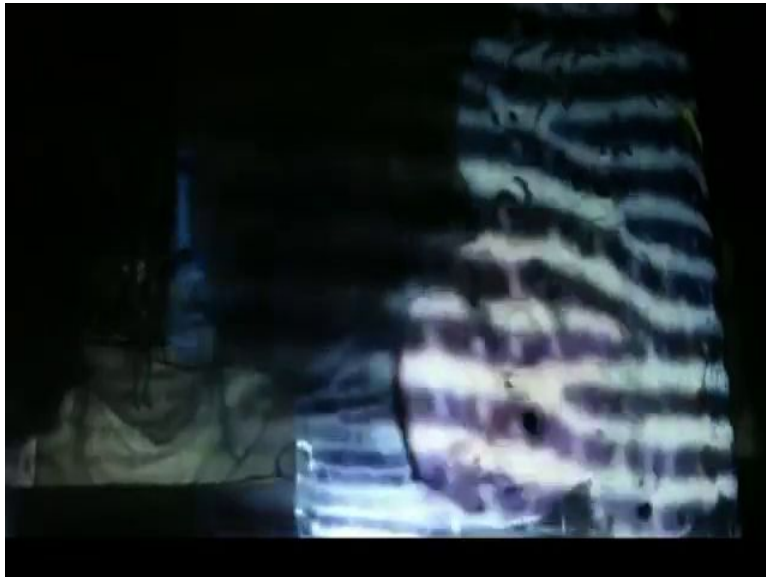
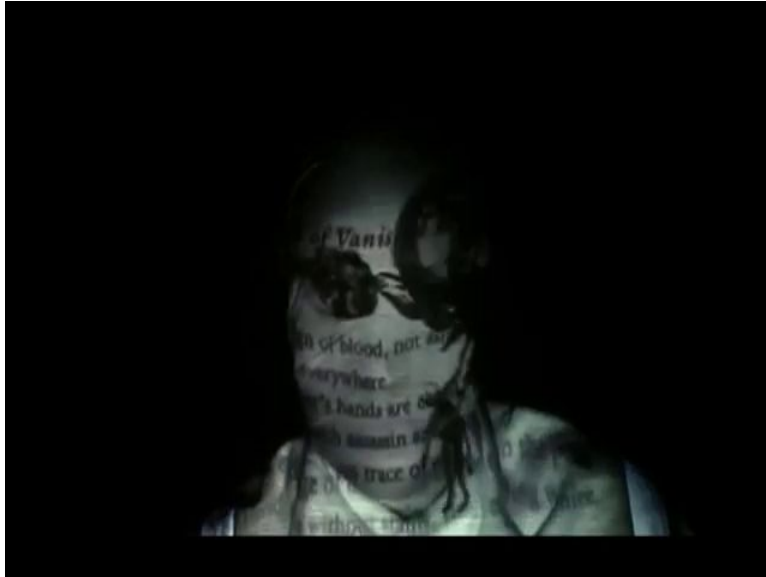










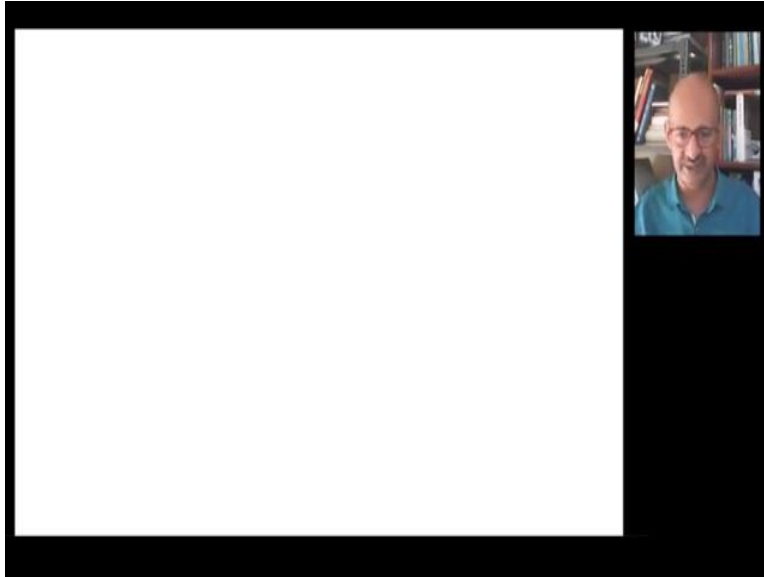






Video narration: This is Cassandra speaking in the heart of darkness, under the sun of torture. To the capitals of the world, in the name of the victims, I reject all the sperm I have received, I turn the milk of my breasts into poison, I take back the world I gave birth to, I bury it in my womb. Down with the happiness of submission. Long live hate, rebellion and death.

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In order to summarize the entire course and after looking at the video art, we can say a couple of things. Number one, we can say looking at this blank, white screen, that you see in front of you deliberately kept because throughout this course, every single slide that I have shown contained either image or text. Now we have a blank, white slide with neither text nor image, nothing, it is what in Latin we can call Tabula Rasa. Absolutely white surface, white slab, white slate on which you can imprint your own thoughts.

So, deliberately I have not written anything, I am not showing anything. Now after having seen or studied, like an overview, and you may call it a journey through the history of modern Indian art, right from the beginning of the colonial period till today, there are a couple of things that may slowly emerge from this white space. It is not a blank space, it is a white space and white has all the colors, therefore, it is not blank.

But one by one, you can pick up the colors, the ideas, and the ideas that you have been able to gather from this course, this overview of Modern Indian Art From The Colonial Period To The Present. Now, a couple of things, which you have already seen and noticed very clearly, very easily are, number one, that modern Indian art history certainly has an evolution, a historical progress, but there are moments when simultaneously many things are happening. Sometimes, that linear story is difficult to maintain.

Number two, the history of modern Indian art is also or can also be termed as the history of modern Indian art styles. Within this span, we have seen a number of different styles of art,



different expressions of art, and of course different mediums and techniques. Number three, the subject matters and themes. It is important to note, along with styles, to what extent the subject matters and themes in modern Indian art have also kept changing from time to time.

And how certain subject matters in a given time have become more preferable to others. So, the time, the historical time, the social time, the situation in which we live, and the earlier artists have lived, everybody has lived in a certain given time, so, in most cases the artists were responding to their own time which makes them modern, which makes them contemporary. I may be using a style from my past and heritage, but unless I am responding meaningfully to my own time, to my own social and cultural atmosphere, that my art will not be very relevant or meaningful today.

Then very importantly, I would like to draw your attention to once again, this fact that how artists have, from time to time, felt the need to play the role of a socially conscious creative person. You are creating for the sake of your visual delight, aesthetic delight is one thing, for the sake of the visual and aesthetic delight of the viewers is also fine. But what is your contribution to society, as an artist, what is my contribution? This question has become very, very important, particularly in today's terms now, but it has been also important in the 1940s, it has been important also in the early part of 20th century.

But the way artists address this question of social relevance of art and artists is not the same. So, let us also keep this in our mind that public art, socially relevant art, art which could be useful for society, it is not entirely a contemporary prerogative. We have seen similar concerns expressed by artists before but not necessarily with the same result. And of course, the digital era and the impact of digital technology on contemporary art practice.

Along with that something, which we have not talked about or mentioned at all in the entire course, because that itself is a different subject altogether. But while summarizing the course today, I must mention that along with all these changes, sometimes radical, sometimes gradual changes, and the evolution of modern art history, something very important has also changed.

Rather, two things, number one, the way viewers look at art has also changed, because they are aware of the fact that something entirely new is also happening now. So, I must be ready to appreciate that or at least to respond to that, whether I like it or not, that is a different issue, that

is not there. Another thing, which has also changed and we have not mentioned at all- is the art education. Art education has also changed substantially over the years because the way art has changed, the way art viewing has changed, all these things make it very, very necessary that art educators should also give a thought to it.

Whether the old forms of art teaching is at all tenable, or we need to devise new methods. In that sense, art education has to give up the standard systematic teaching methods and become as innovative, as creative as the artists themselves. So, all over the world and even in India, many places in India, in fact, art colleges are thinking about reconsidering their curriculum and syllabus to make art teaching compatible and relevant to our time.

And similarly, realizing the extreme seriousness and relevance of the presence of art in our society, art teachers particularly have also realized how important it is to inculcate a sense of appreciation for fine arts, right from the school days, among the school children. So, these are not just peripheral activities, around the modern and contemporary art, art education, art awareness, art literacy, art writing, art magazine, art seminars and of course, art webinars, art workshops, art camps, all these things have become an integral part of our history, the history of modern and contemporary art.

So, the future to the modern and contemporary art of India actually holds a lot of possibilities, not only in terms of making art, but also in terms of making art useful, making art more and more a social activity without losing its aesthetic values. Let us look forward to that future when art will again continue to make a great impact on every level of our society. Thank you.