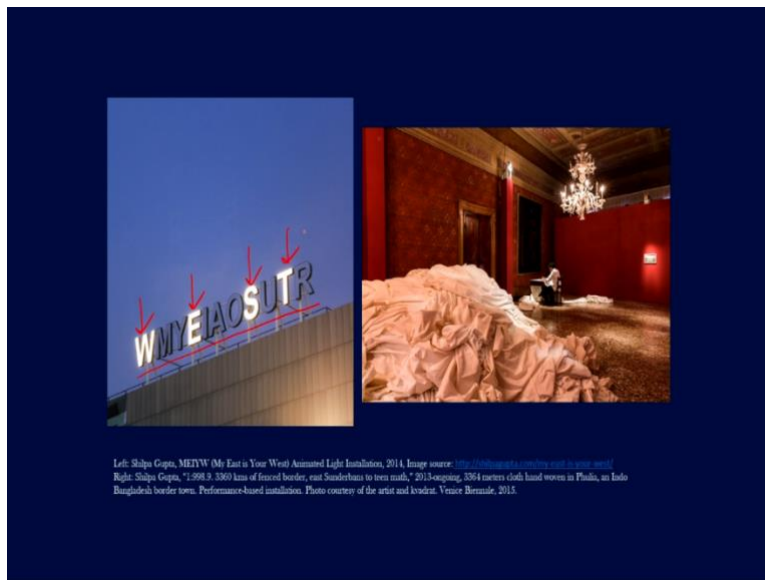


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture - 59

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on the Biennale and various curatorial projects as part of discussing the artist curator and the researcher collaborations. So, here we have another project.

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And that was displayed in the in the Venice Biennale eventually in in 2015 and this is a project by artist Shilpa Gupta and in this one what we see that the use of so-called new media and which is called my east is your west it was an animated light installation in 2014 as we can see in the left side of the screen. So, it was it is an open-air display that we see I mean of course it is attached to the institutional space where the other displays take place.

But this is also something that we see how there was a deliberate move from going beyond the gallery space, a sacred like space where people can enter and only then they can have access to artworks. So, this kind of this large-scale projections, installations that also sort of invited participation from the audience and how the use of this available technologies and the change like the way we can see determine how this, the light installation that happened in this.

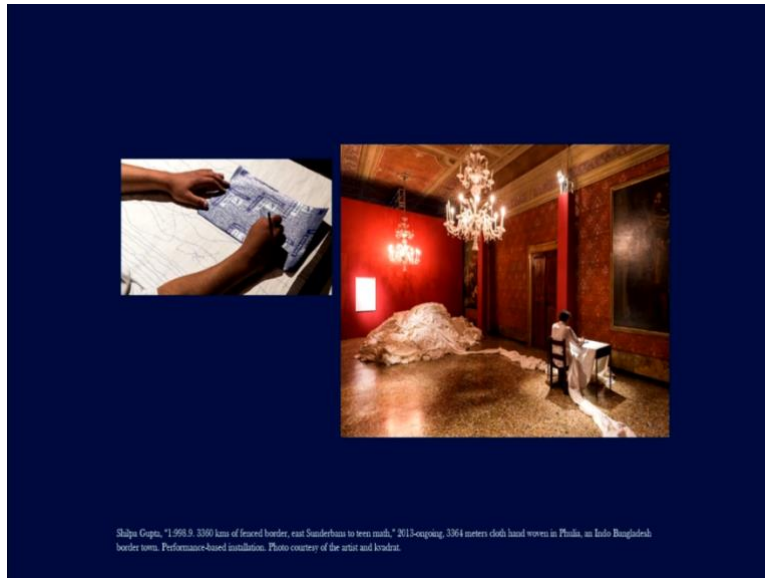
So, in at times what we find that I mean in this one, it is not really written in a cohesive manner that my east is your west but the way like the all those alphabets are arranged then certain alphabets were lit and that is how like certain words one can read. So, for example at this point we can read w e s t and then like I mean that that constitutes west and then at other times there will be other alphabets which would be lit and that is how like it would make sense, but as a whole it would not make sense as like W M Y E I A and so on like this way.

So, this is these are some of the ways in which we find that how the contemporary artists in India, they have made use of this available technology then animation, installation and how those things were involved in perhaps creating a dialogue very differently from the way we think about having an entire painted image or a sculpted work and this is another work that we find that this it is called that one point 1:998.9. and 3360 kilometres of fenced border east Sundarbans to teen mart.

And so, this is this is a project in which we find that a particular this proportion that the ratio that is given in this detail of the work. The same ratio is something that represent the ratio of the border that that marks you know this line of control between; you know between India and Bangladesh, the East Bengal and West Bengal and Shilpa Gupta, she use this particular this ratio and translated that how that ratio can the ratio is compared to this 3360 kilometres of the fenced border.

And how that ratio, the numerical number that the ratio translated into she made that numerical number into you know she commissioned that into making a piece of long piece of undyed fabric and that was hand woven in the in the town of Fulia which is very close to the Indo-Bangladesh border and in this one what happened was we can see this pile of cloth which is here and then how there is a person who sits on a table almost like a office goers and then this person sits there and does this work.

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So, the work this person does is basically goes there as part of this more than a month-long performance and in this one what happens in this pavilion in Venice that he sits there and uses this carbon paper which is also used for various office works in governmental offices and shop and everywhere in South Asia and this carbon paper is used for making lines onto this piece of fabric and the lines they in some ways that they sort of remind us of maps.

In some ways they remind us of various trajectories through which one travel at the same time the maps can also be the fencing between 2 lands and then, this man he makes those lines onto this piece of fabric and then sort of like I mean pushes it aside and then works on the undrawn this white piece of fabric there. So, this is how the entire performance took place in the during this month of display and if we can compare that to the to the background this is this early modern Venetian a palace like setting.

Where we; see these bright wallpapers at the same time this elaborate chandelier with the intricate work in the ceiling. So, all those things are present and then in contrast what we see that in this performance-based installation that pieces of this large piece of this white fabric that was used. So, there is almost like a heap of this large white fabric and from which all those fences are drawn and then this lines which mark the boundary between cultures and between nations those were then you know imprinted upon the fabric.

Now, the things as far as we see this line which is carefully drawn between the West Bengal in India and the nation state of Bangladesh. So, that is something that we find as a carefully drawn line and if we cross the line without particular paperwork then, there are legal actions. So, this line is something that people without you know proper paperwork proper permit would not try to cross that. Now, the thing is that, I mean how those lines are interpreted in this particular performance based installation.

Even though the man who sits on the table looks like that the man who does a proper desk job, it can be something that is associated with the work that perhaps the cartographers have done several decades back, but the thing is that, I mean even though the gesture looks very serious but once we come close and see the kind of lines those are created onto this fabric surface then we find that the lines are actually nonsensical they do not really are as carefully made as we can think about the lines between the nations.

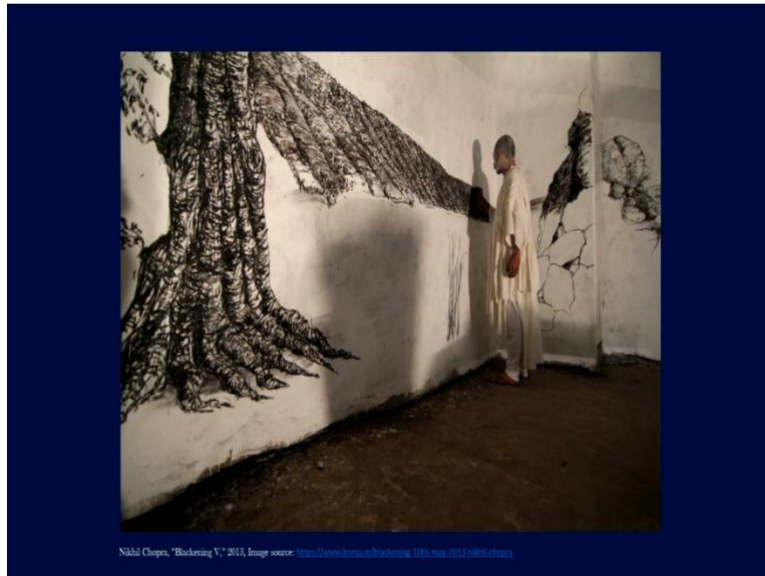
So, in other words we can see that; I mean through this interpretation of the border in Shilpa Gupta's work she had also questioned the legitimacy of the border, the political borders sometimes and that is rightly so because there are many commonalities between of this these bordering states in South Asia. For example, if we think about the state of West Bengal in Bengal and Bangladesh, in both places the spoken language is Bangla and then there are also many cultural similarities that are present there.

And similarly, we also find the same thing in the western frontier of India where the Indian state of Punjab and the Pakistan's province of Punjab where we find that there are the; spoken language again remains the same as Punjabi and then there are also many cultural exchanges. So, given this kind of things like, I mean how the people view the land the boundaries and this division and then how these things like I mean the division cannot really explain everything about the similarities between cultures.

So, all those things are put in question by this nonsensical work of making this cartography lines. So, in some ways we can say that how this cartographic lines might not make sense in the

community lives and that is something that is expressed by this elaborate gesture of you know keeping this heap of fabric and constantly drawing onto them.

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So, talking about the participatory works, we also find that how some of the artists that they have taken this idea of participation in terms of not just the viewers participation into the practice but also like their own participation with the making of the project at the same time their interaction with the viewers. So, if you think about some of the participatory works that we have seen so far as part of this lecture like the one from Century City Bombay Mumbai Navjot Altaf project.

Where, the work is already there and it invites participation from the audience to go there see it or like read those memoirs. Now, if we think about Shilpa Gupta's work that, I mean this is already this idea is already there in action and then someone is enacting that and then the audience can go there and see the entire how this idea is unfolding slowly. Now, there is this other artist that is he is also very well known in the field of this performance-based work and that is Nikhil Chopra.

So, in Nikhil Chopra's practice what we find that he had taken this idea of participation to a different dimension and what we see there that, He mean he resides in the gallery or the museum spaces and he performs, he makes drawing based works in various surfaces during his stay on those spaces during on the spaces and we usually see that I mean his gesture his performance those

things are enhanced by the kind of costume and the other prop that he makes as part of this this kind of projects.

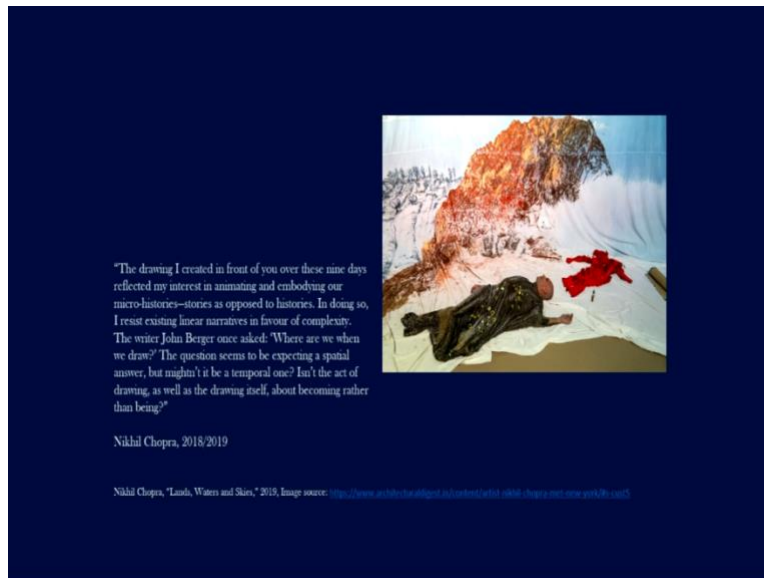
So, this is a project that we see there in 2013 and which is called blackening 5 and by Nikhil Chopra in Delhi and in this one what we see that this wall of the gallery and how the floor of the gallery is definitely it is transformed for this particular action and then we see that how the idea of blackening and that is to transform the white cube of the gallery space into something else and for blackening he uses this charcoal like a drawing material for drawing directly onto the wall knowing that I mean this wall will perhaps not stay forever.

But like I mean the artist puts the effort this painstaking effort for making this works onto the wall surface and the amount of time or like I mean this entire time period for which like this artwork unfolds then usually, the viewers are also allowed there and they can see the process through which like I mean the works are progressing. So, it is not quite defined how the work would look like at the end, but people can interact with the work as well as with the artist during this time.

So, in some I mean; I would say that I mean how this is different in terms of like I mean the other participatory works that many times that Nikhil Chopra had chosen to stay in this spaces during the day during the night for making the entire work and that is how we find that the it is not just the viewer's interaction with artwork which is already made, but it is an artwork which is unfolding and how the artist experience of staying in this place and that that affects the making of the work.

At the same time the viewers also can see the making of this work which is usually ignored in the displays as well as in the art historical scholarship, those things can be appreciated by through this kind of projects.

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And here we find that there is another project by Nikhil Chopra and which is at the museum Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and this is called the lands waters and skies and this project took place in 2019 and in this one as well we find that how Nikhil Chopra had worked onto this fabric surface for his time you know for the entire time when he was there and since this is the Metropolitan Museum of Art where there are already many visitors every day.

So, the visitors would see the artist working the artist would occasionally interact with them and then like I mean the you know the viewers would go some other people would come and so this is this is how we find that I mean this was much more it is a different place from if you think about an art gallery and how in those places again that how the work shape takes shape in that and how the artist interaction with them their experience that also is expressed but also that is stays as a learning experience for the artist as well.

So, this is something that, I mean Nikhil Chopra had spoken about and in quotes the drawing I created in front of you over these 9 days that is the 9 days in during his stay in the Metropolitan Museum reflected my interest in animating and embodying our micro histories stories as opposed to histories in doing so, I resist existing linear narrative in favour of complexity the writer John Berger one asked once asked where are we when we draw?

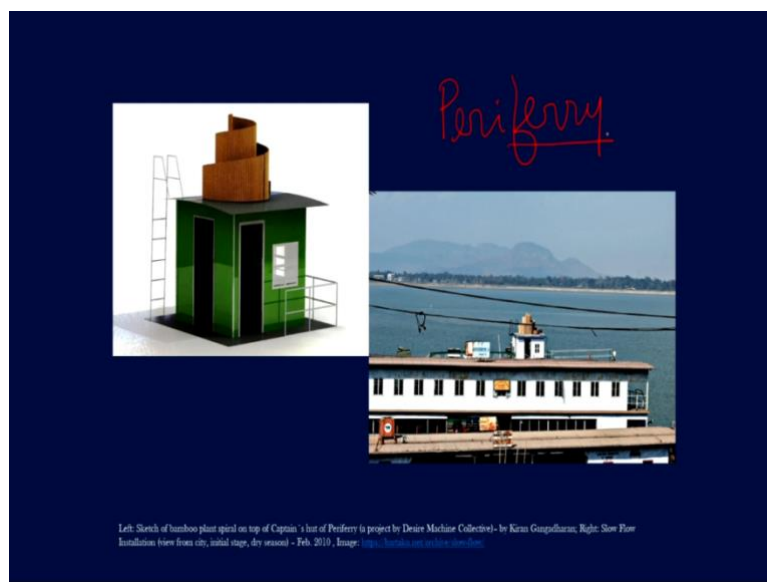
The question seems to be expecting a spatial answer, but might be a temporal one is in the act of drawing as well as the drawing itself about becoming rather than being.

So, by that I think I mean what happens that he talks about this idea of unfolding that how the artist participates in the process of drawing or making a work and then how that is also a gradual process through which we become something and this is also a participatory act for the audience to understand that I mean what else has happened.

And how we sort of think about this it is reflection in you know in terms of like I mean our own position at the same time in a given space. So, this is some of the directions in which we find that how artworks have moved to the artworks have sort of taken a different direction after 1990s after 2000s. So, it is not always that I mean it is the technological intervention that made the changes but it is also about like I mean this back-and-forth movement of people.

And then also that I mean understanding that what is institutional art what goes beyond the Norms of institution what is normal what is not in in some ways we can think about that I mean how Bhupen Khakhar this question about what is normal in the society that is then we also see in other ways those are reflected in this artist's work to think about that I mean what is normal in the gallery space what is not and how to bring them in conversation with each other.

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So, from there I want to sort of like I mean look into you know if these are the projects that we find those are those are more concerned about the artist collaborator interaction or like I mean how the artists are also involved in thinking about what is history what is micro history. So, by micro history I think I mean what Nikhil Chopra indicates is the histories, which are usually not spoken about or the histories which are not part of the institutional archives.

So, that they can come from people who are underprivileged they are they can come from the family archives which are not documented. So, those kinds of things we find and then we see that more and more artists they are involved in sort of you know depicting this facet of micro histories. So, these issues we also find those to be also emphasized in some of the other projects and where we see the role of the researcher or the role of artist as a researcher.

So, those things are emphasized, now to talk about that I had been looking into the I mean I would start the discussion with the projects undertaken by this particular collective called the Desired Machine Collective. So, desire machine collective those are that was founded by Mriganka Madhukaillya and Sonal Jain and they established that in the city of Guwahati in Assam. So, what we find that before, so it was around 2004 or 2005 around which time around that time when they established this collective and started functioning from Assam.

So, before that we find that they were situated in Gujarat and during the right in Baroda that they thought about this idea of identity community and so on that. That gave us a different perspective to think about life in general and then they when we see that I mean they went back to the city or like they went back to the region they came from. So, one of them came from Assam one of them came from Shillong and then they thought about starting this collective.

Where, there will be renewed dialogue about this the making of artworks, engaging the community, also addressing some of the complicated and uncomfortable questions about identity. So, what we see in this project here, that it is also something significant in terms of thinking about the margins of our country because when we think about the art making when we think about contemporary art then we usually think about some of the metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, and so on and Bangalore perhaps.

But the thing is that I mean beyond that there are also many other centres, where we find that significant developments take place, but they usually go undocumented and the north-eastern region of India we find these north-eastern states are usually neglected in the narratives or the or the histories of Indian art and that starts from the very early time period. So, that is the reason what we see that I mean they are there straight strategic move to Guwahati and thinking about that I mean how this issue around what is emphasized in thinking about our art practice.

What is metropolitan art practice and why there is a need to move from that metropolitan art practice to the so-called margins or the peripheries is something that was put forward by their project and for that reason what we also find that in 2007, around 2007 they started this project called Peri-Ferry and this Peri-Ferry was actually it is a ferry. So, for what they did like I mean they actually named this ferry as Peri-ferry. So, ferry meaning this vessel to carry people from one part of the river to another.

So, this is certainly it is a riverine land and we see this vast river here in this image here as well which is Brahmaputra and Brahmaputra, we see that I mean how the this river is very much part of the daily life of the people. So, people who want to cross the river for either livelihood for other purposes and everything else so they need to take a ferry from one end to another and that is how we see that there was this ferry which was there, which was made in 1970s.

And it functioned for several years and then perhaps it was there in in the in the bank of Brahmaputra and we see that that particular ferry was taken by this artist collective design animation collective and they made an artist residency in the ferry. Now, what do we mean by artist residency? So artist residency is also it is something that that we find that it is it sort of provides a space for artists to be there to work for a particular point in time.

It can be considered as a as an extension of the site-specific work that how the artists arrive in a particular site. They interact with that space with the community or objects and whatever and then through that the works are developed. So, the artist residencies are also perhaps can be can be thought in the similar lines, where there are particular sites where the artist can visit and they

already have the infrastructure for me making artworks and the artists stay there for an extended period of time usually between 10 days to several months;

And for that what we find that during this residency programs the kind of works those are those are created by the artist. Either they respond to this change in their surroundings, but they can also be part of like the larger practice of the artist. So, in this residency program that was spearheaded by the design machine a design machine collective and in this ferry called periphery that also it was intended to engage the people there;

And this ferry is not something that we see that stayed in one bank of Brahmaputra, it is travelled from one place to another and there is also they also created a map to show that I mean what are the roots that this ferry travelled. So, when in the evenings it would come to particular areas and then those times like I mean the artist would open up to the locals and people would come interact with them see the work see the process they can have interaction with the artist;

And it is not always in the same site where the where the where the ferry would stay and that is how like different group of people would be able to see the ferry different group of people would come in conversation with the artists the artists who are in the residency program. So, that is how we find that this participatory act and it is not just the viewers going to the artist, but the artists going to the viewers.

That was enabled keeping this very you know this geographical condition in context that how this this river is very much part of the land and the culture of this land. So, this is this is something that was also sort of kept in mind when this when this residency program as well as the works those were created out of the Residency program. And this is one a particular project that we see this is a bamboo plant spiral on the top of the captain's hut in desired machine collective I mean in periphery that is here;

And this was actually created for producing plant-based electricity and it would also be I mean the solar energy would be also as part of this. So, by this what we see that I mean there was an attempt by which we see that how this solar energy that can be used for running this ferry from one place

to another, so in a way to make this particular ferry self-sustained. So, these are the different kind of works that we see that these are more sort of involving the community;

And it is not necessarily considered as the artworks that we see in the gallery centric displays. So, these questions were put for word when this more engaging questions about what is the role of art in the society, were put forward by the desire machine collective as well as the participating artist like Kiran Gangadhar and so thank you we will be continuing more on these collaborations in the final lecture.