

PALIMPSEST

Jayashree Chakravarty, Pooja Iranna, Vidya Kamat, Riyas Komu, Asma Mundrawal, Puja Puri, Talha Rathore, Nausheen Saeed & Avishek Sen.

2011 May 5 - May 28, 2011

New York, 35 Great Jones Street

VIP Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday May 5, 6:00pm - 9:00pm



Asma Mundrawala
Is You Is or Is You Ain't...?
Digital print on card
12 x 11 x 11 in. (2007)

Aicon Gallery, New York's premier gallery of Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art, is pleased to present *Palimpsest*. Drawing on the work of contemporary South Asian artists, this exhibition is arranged as a series of visual and narrative palimpsests depicting real or imagined traces of the past. Ideas of surface and depth, of secondary quotations and lost sources – of fleeting and hidden references, and of layering from a lost image are at the heart of this group exhibition.

A palimpsest is traditionally defined as an overwritten page – that is, it refers to the remnants of lost text as seen on re-used surfaces in books.

As a term, literary and cultural theorists often use it to interpret narratives and imagery with an illusory textual presence. Post-colonialists often applied palimpsests as a concept to sort through layers of cultural experience, thus chronicling the ineradicable traces of history while acknowledging that, over time, traces shall remain in memory – or ultimately, be forgotten. The concept of a palimpsest is thus an invaluable tool to be used in extracting pre-colonial culture from colonialist accounts and sources, while also helping to define shifting landscapes in terms of social or geographical compositions.

Aicon Gallery's group exhibition *Palimpsest* shall explore the lexicon of this concept through the work of a group of nine contemporary South Asian artists working in a variety



Jayashree Chakravarty Untitled (Small Town)
Mixed media on paper
60 x 48 in. (2005)

of mediums. *Palimpsest* points to its own exploration via the cyclical actions of making, remaking, and erasing, all of which work to reveal trace elements retained either in memory or physical form. Capturing the conflicting interdependent forces of the palimpsest, are works such as Asma Mundrawal's *Is You or Is You Ain't?* (See Image 1), depicting an idealized, perhaps unattainable, scene of contemporary middle-class Pakistani family life in the form of a children's pop-up book that can be collapsed into nothingness at any moment. Similarly, Jayashree Chakravarty's intricately layered and reworked paintings (see image 2) address the concept of the palimpsest by drawing from both figurative and abstract

motifs to present multiple narratives both building upon and at odds with one another. Other artists in the show include Vidya Kamat, Pooja Iranna, Avishek Sen, Riyas Komu, Puja Puri, Talha Rathore, & Nausheen Saeed. Aicon Gallery welcomes you to *Palimpsest*.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Theresa@Aicongallery.com, (212 725 6092) for more information.

** All Images are not hi-resolution but available upon specific request.

JAYASHREE CHAKRAVARTY



Jayashree Chakravarty, *Untitled (Small Town)*, 2005, Mixed media on paper, 60 x 48 in.

Jayashree Chakravarty creates multilayered, ambiguous works presenting frenetic scenes and landscapes teeming with the detailed idiosyncrasies of visual language, rooted in her personal experiences of childhood, travel, and education. Combining both the figurative and the abstract, her painting draws upon nature, cartography and geology to further investigate how the collective human experience can be understood as a result of accumulated memories and experiences as affected by the past, present and future.

POOJA IRANNA



Pooja Iranna, *Reflective Energies II*, 2008, Photo-print on paper, 32 x 63.5 in.

Pooja Iranna's striking large scale photo-works explore how man-made structures and environments reflect the ambiguous constructs inherent in how human beings interact both with one another and with our environment. Building upon form, repetition and perspective to develop complex compositions focusing on linear and directional elements of design, the artist captures the eternal and overarching struggle of order and chaos, representing the duality of strength and frailty manifest in humanity's undertakings both contemporary and throughout the millennia.

VIDYA KAMAT



Vidya Kamat, *Birthmark 13*, 2008, Digital print on archival paper, 33 x 44 in.

Vidya Kamat photographs the artist's body as a site of cultural landscape, visually embroidered with traditional patterns and embellishments suggestive of the historical passivity of the feminine body as subject to masculine subjugation and ideals. Simultaneously trivialized and glamorized by the media, Kamat posits the feminine body as a grand emblem of notions of traditional Indian life as embodied by the historically dubious and potentially jingoistic concept of "Mother India" propagated in popular culture since India's independence.

RIYAS KOMU



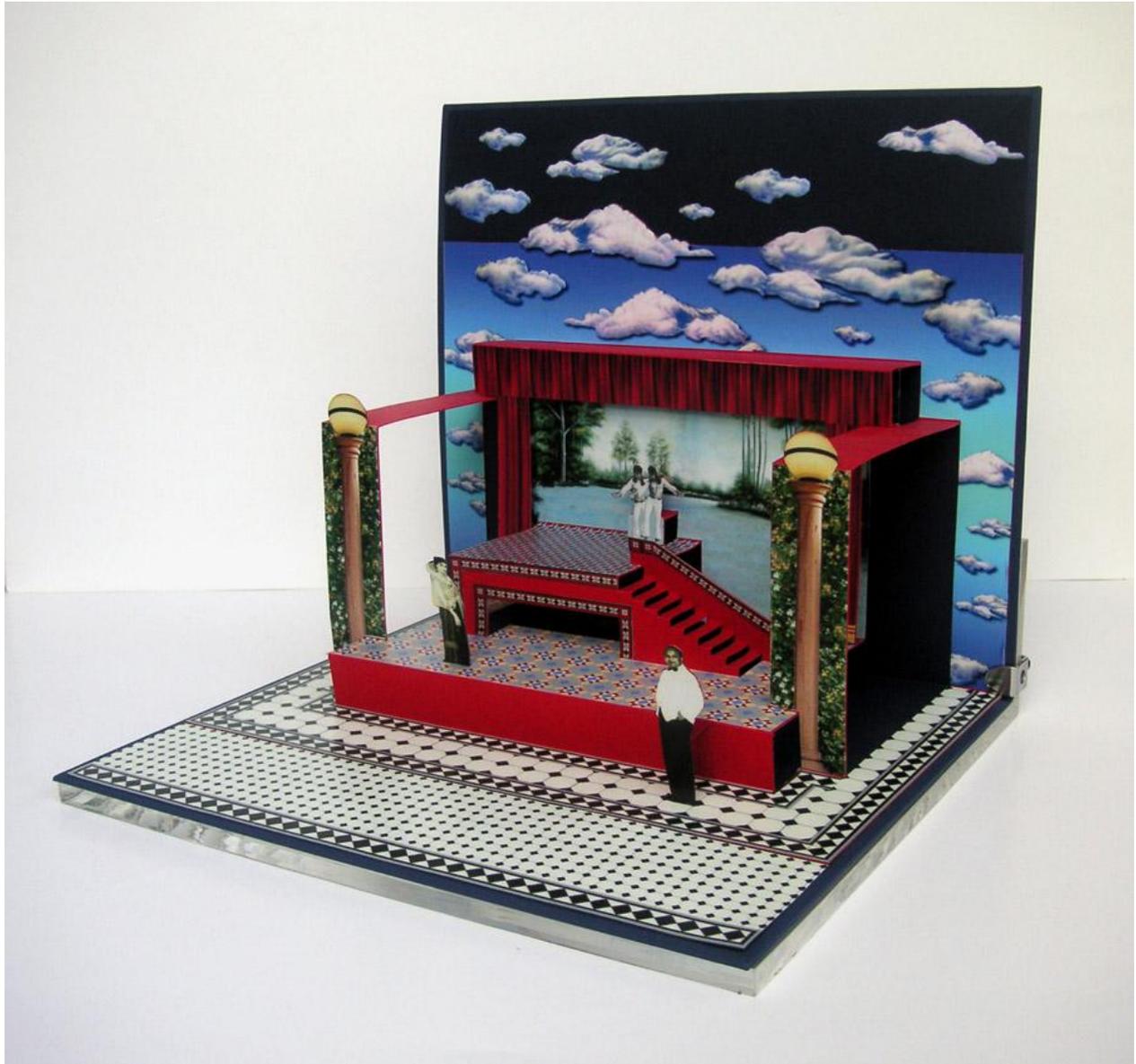
Riyas Komu, *Old New Belief and Unclaimed Dead Bodies*, 2008, Wood and mixed media, Dimensions variable

In "New old beliefs and unclaimed bodies" Riyas Komu uses the unique woodworking style he developed over the last two years--starting with pieces of wood patched together and glued, seams left visible, then intricately carving them into sculptures and bas-reliefs of stylized musculature and bone--to take on a theme that fascinated Souza: the body of Christ. Komu flanks an Indo-Portuguese wooden cross with a set of five wooden roundels. They are at once skeletal profiles, memento mori, and evocations of the host broken and distributed in the Catholic Eucharist. The arrangement is intended to recall Christ's last supper and its ritual reenactment, where the communion bread miraculously transubstantiates, and becomes the flesh of God. Komu effects a transubstantiation of his own in this piece, binding salvaged wood fragments into new wholes, smoothing and carving them into painfully beautiful and deathly anatomical forms. As with Souza, there is a deep referencing of the material aspects of Christian rites and religion, and a manifest skepticism with regard to its metaphysical promises: the "new old beliefs" and the "unclaimed bodies," left unwanted and unredeemed, never quite meet.

Excerpt from GHOST OF SOUZA, Curated by ALEXANDER KEEFE
Aicon Gallery, New York: September 2008

Riyas Komu incorporates religious iconography to form elaborately rendered works made of wood, the pieces patched together by glue with the seams left visible. His ongoing investigation of religion intertwined with history is captured here by his panoptic iconography, which takes on its own transubstantiation as he binds salvaged wood fragments into new wholes by reworking the surfaces through sanding and carving.

ASMA MUNDRAWALA



Asma Mudrawala, *Is You Is or Is You Ain't...?*, 2007, Digital print on card, 12 x 11 x 11 in.

Asma Mundrawala's initially playful pop-up paper constructions present a series visual volumes depicting imagined scenes from an idealized, perhaps unattainable, Pakistani middle-class lifestyle. Imagery based on old family photographs, films and the urban architecture of Karachi comprise a set of paused narratives set in miniature, which can be collapsed in upon themselves at any moment. The artist, involved for years with a socially conscious theater company, also views her work as informed by the narrative elements of Pakistani theater and street art.

PUJA PURI



Puja Puri, *Ragged People*, 2010, Graphite and archival ink on fabriano paper, 22 x 30 in.

Puja Puri merges layers of meticulous monochromatic drawing to effect remarkably fluid final compositions, with variations in detail – from sketchy gestures to defined contours – at selected points of focus. The effect is an allegory of whimsical memory, with prominent contrasts between areas of refinement and the artist’s ultimately loosely drafted, dream-like visual renderings of bustling amorphous scenes.

TALHA RATHORE



Talha Rathore, *Celebrating Life I*, 2011, Gouache, block print, collage, tea stain and archival pen on wasli, 8.5 x 18.5 in.

Talha Rathore's works on paper explore the conflict of memory, focusing on the fragmentation of self through geographic and diasporic concepts, further amplified by her layering of images. In her new series, she has chosen to diminish the immediacy of the urban and geological inherent in her former work with subway maps, instead focusing on more subtle textural layers relegated to the periphery of time.

NAUSHEEN SAEED



Nausheen Saeed, *Transitory*, 2011, Fabric, steel, plastic and fiberglass, 33 x 15 x 20 in.

Nausheen Saeed's disquieting sculptural works blend the female form with that of traveling luggage, synthesizing the vessel and body as a singular entity. By presenting women as solid, permanent beings – contradicting their traditionally marginalized role in Pakistani society – while simultaneously recasting the female body in purely utilitarian, functional forms, the work evokes a paradox of thoughts, attitudes and behaviors surrounding conflicting notions of femininity. The figures are modestly naked, covered by functional materials and domestic textiles, further emphasizing the duality of women as containers of life and as possessions, mixing feelings of helplessness with elements of beauty.

AVISHEK SEN



Avishek Sen, *Untitled 7*, 2010, Mixed media on paper, 18.5 x 24 in.

Avishek Sen's collage-based work investigates the myriad sociopolitical concerns of contemporary Indian society through augmented allegories, built up out of images referencing personal experience, political and religious history and popular culture. The juxtaposition of traditional icons – borrowed from myths, epics and manuscripts – with elements of a contemporary India still dealing with fundamental issues of poverty and inequality lends the work a questioning and often unsettling political undercurrent central to the artists concerns and practice.