



BHAVNA KAKAR *presents*

IN SEARCH OF A DREAM
AND OTHER STORIES

KARTIK SOOD

Stories by MANOJ NAIR

21ST JANUARY - 1ST MARCH 2016

L.ATTITUDE 28

A Gallery for Contemporary Arts and Ideas

This project was inspired by the tradition of oral culture and story telling. The artist reinterprets the everyday in a visual format reminiscent of folktales, short stories and the Modern play. Each day piles upon the next, constructing pasts and personal histories of meandering anecdotes, hearsays, gossip and popular wisdom—creating tangible meanings—that bypass the elusiveness of one’s own identity. And this meaning making, being a process of tracing random associations by the unconscious, assumes a dreamlike quality. The visuals are saturated with unreal colours, telling tales of the subtle, subjective realities of life that are absurd even when they feel profound. As these deceptively straightforward and random stories unravel and untangle, they reveal a complex subtext: a circuit of visceral sensibilities, philosophical concepts, popular culture, myths and fictions that propel us towards an anxious and uncertain future by informing our unique negotiations with the mundane and dramatic elements embedded in the past and the present. Inspired by and contributing to the particular ways in which we construct our sense of self are videos and mixed media work on paper that interplay with text by writer Manoj Nair to form little stories. The project

aims to eventually assume the format of a paperback publication and hopefully a quarterly of stories and visuals, to fit with patterns of consumption that we have managed to import to metaphysical and transient experiences.

Bhavna Kakar, the founder-director of Latitude 28, has been following Kartik Sood’s practice since his days as a student in Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S.U, Baroda. “Sood’s debut in the art world was with a four-person exhibition I curated titled ‘Urban Testimonies’ at Latitude 28 in 2010, the same year that we opened. Sood’s works are particularly interesting for their interface with time. He uses the medium of photography to preserve the past and map cultural metamorphosis. Over the years the gallery has exhibited his work at various destinations including Hong Kong, Dhaka Art Summit, Art Gwangju 2012 and the India Art Fair (2010-2013). We are pleased to present his first solo exhibition featuring a consolidated body of paintings and video works from the past 4-5 years. This exhibition marks another high point for both, the gallery and the artist in a long and eventful journey together,” says Kakar.



Witness, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 44 x 45.5 inches, 2015



The Lonely Tune, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 44 x 44 inches, 2015



The Lonely Tune 2, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 36 x 36 inches, 2015

A Thumb's Journey

As a concert pianist, Stephen was well travelled. By the time he turned 38 he had performed all over the world at prestigious venues including London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie Hall and the Französischer Dom in Berlin. He was ready to play several concerts later that year. But the one that he looked forward to was at his hometown, Shimla, where he had been invited by the city mayor for an event to be held in Stephen's honour. It was also one that had made him the most nervous. He was not sure how the audience would react. His performances were remarkable for his passionate sensibility combined with formidable technique to produce passages of great poise and beauty, enhanced by his charming stage manner, which included head-rolls towards the ceiling in truly transcendental style. And so it was, all intact, at the town hall that evening at the hill station.

Until half time when people from the audience came up to say to him: "I would give anything to do what you do." Stephen's smile was nearly audible. But the fingers that caressed the keys softly and sometimes swiftly were not impressed. They looked at each other questioningly. The little finger asked, "would they really want to subject themselves to the daily life of a concert pianist?" "Doubtful," said the middle one.

Then from among them the thumb on his right hand decided to find how much of his music had been understood by those who had gathered. It slowly slipped out of his hand and stepped down from the stage to find out, sometimes hiding beneath the seats. And to its surprise some of them were actually not there at all. Literally. Two gentlemen in dapper suits were elegantly discussing the state of the apple-fruit market. Two others were launching into each other about the goings on in the local politics. One lady in a chiffon sari was asking the other, "He has such a good life. Money, travel and fame. All for just playing a piano." "I have one at home lying in one corner," said the other taking a sip from her cola bottle. "It came from my grandfather. Never realized that piece of furniture could fetch you so much fortune.

That was the last straw. The thumb moved out of the hall unnoticed deciding to go incognito for the rest of the evening. The intermission was over and Stephen sat down by the stool to get back to work. When he raised his right hand and spread his fingers he found that in place of the thumb was a white blotch. There was no sign of blood and he had felt no pain. Neither was there any sign of the thumb. The rest of the evening meandered towards a predictable disaster as he struggled to strike the right notes. How could he without the all-important thumb?

The next day back at his ancestral home Stephen dragged his piano into the garden under the moonlight to find some solace in playing with one hand. Only to find his lost thumb. Tears rolled down his eyes and as he kissed it he almost heard it saying, "It is difficult to understand what a soloist has to regularly go through. Until you understand music yourself."





An Act, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 44 x 49 inches, 2015

The Bartleby Syndrome



A blank page stared at him as Raman struggled to put down a line on it that would begin a story. It was something that he had always wanted to do but always stopped short of doing. He would visualize all the characters and events involving them emerging from the page but just was unable to string together sentences that would take it to his possible readers' minds. It was almost as if his mind was telling him that it preferred not to narrate any of the numerous stories that he knew, most of which were tales of sadness and suffering. As if his mind had been seized by the ghost of Bartleby, the scrivener, the central character in Herman Melville's story who preferred not to write anything. In fact Bartleby preferred not to do anything and in the end died because he 'preferred not to' eat anything. That was not the case with Raman. He, on the contrary, sincerely wished to write something. But his mind won't allow him to. And then it occurred to him that he should follow the footsteps of the Spanish worker in Enrique Vila-Matas' novel *Bartleby & Co.* and write about writers who one day decided to stop writing at all. He wondered if he should let the silence do the talking and may be look, as in the novel, at the labyrinthine leitmotif that lacks a core. But Raman's adamant mind would tell him not to allow his fingers hover over the keyboard. Instead, it would whisper to him, to let his silence do the talking. But Raman chose to do the opposite. He decided to just Talk and one day climbed onto an abandoned podium among the trees in the park and began narrating the stories he knew, one after the other, unmindful of the fact that he had not many listening to him. Except for the permanent presence of the statue he stood next to. He never got down from his perch and by not having many to listen to his stories he too embraced the literature of the No.

The Migrants



The two friends were meeting after a long time. And they had chosen the city square in front of the Church as their meeting place. It is at this square that they had spent their childhood begging for coins from Churchgoers, tourists and diners around the corner.

“My mum used to punish me if I didn’t get coins. But you were good at it and helped me learn the tricks of the trade.”

“Every night when we walked back to the rooftop house that our families shared we would watch the news on the TV at the taxi stand.”

That’s how they learnt about the world outside and gave them the courage to get onto the train that took them outside from this city to a totally different world.

There are children with luck and children with charisma. The two had both.

Their journey took them up the social strata in their respective countries that they had migrated to. One in Australia and the other in Switzerland.

Migration was in their blood as they were children of migrants from Bihar.

One of them fished out a smartphone to check his email. Several years ago a telephone was an impossible long distance call.

They chatted about the lives they had left behind for a long time and also exchanged notes about the cushy lives they were leading now. It was midnight and they headed back to the hotel stopping on the way to buy peanuts from a street vendor.

“It is good that we left this place then. Have you seen that film that won an Oscar?”

“Slumdog Millionaire? Yes. Migration is the new world order.”

As they turned around a boy came up to them. They looked at the boy in rags who reminded them of their past when he said: Come on, give me a coin. I just want a coin. Nobody wants to give me a coin.”



The Leap

"I have never felt more beautiful," he assured himself as he stood atop the piece of stone from where the bridge across the valley began. He had always known that he had several rivers to cross but he longed for some company to do that. And all hopes of finding a friend who would understand fell by the wayside. It's been a year and a half since his last relationship. The last one lasted only three months, as did the one before. Yet he was not used to being really single or even understanding what was it in him that drove people away. Those that he really cared for and wanted to be with. He had always been looking for that bridge across, what is it — Yes, forever. And now after a short career of fits and starts that never seem to be going anywhere he had lost all importance of life in his own eyes. He was an athlete and he had not been able to run far with it. But now when he stood there feeling the cold breeze stroking his bare body, he realized there could be no respite from despair that had become his only soul mate in a city that had hardly anything to offer but lonesomeness. So he had chosen that spot and a full moon night to scream loudly about how he felt in that solitary moment of joy. Because he wanted to bask in the shiny, silver light as he took the last plunge into the ravine.



Suicide Point, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 24 x 70.5 inches, 2015



Encounter, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 44 x 45 inches, 2015

In Transit

Shridhar was surprised by the crank call he got the other day. “Can I meet you sir?,” the voice on the other side — young, broken and shaky — was still loaded with determination than desperation. Shridhar, who had left Chennai several years ago, had not left some of his childhood curiosities like curiosity behind. “OK,” he replied, “can you meet me at the fort at noon?”

“Yes sir.”

As he drove just before noon that day he began thinking of his days in Chennai, which included a broken romance, an unfathered child, abandoned parents, discarded friends and a career graph that had left no trace behind.

Driving, dressed in his lungi, he recalled that the child he had left behind was a girl.

Where was she? Has she come to take revenge dressed as a boy?

On the grass by the walls of the fort he sensed the leaves of doubt creeping up his feet.

Till the young boy greeted him: “Thank you for coming sir.”

Handing over a small envelope he said, “I have just troubled you because my mother asked me to give you something you had left behind several years ago.”

Reality is messy, Shridhar believed. This encounter was not it. Taking the envelope from the young boy’s hand he wondered: “What should I call my ex-lover’s son by another man she was married to.” With those thoughts he ran his hand through the boy’s hair and said, “Son...”

Kaliyug ki Sita



Shame, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 24 x 26 inches, 2015

She had never been scared before by any of her guests, or their behaviour, not really. But when Geetha arrived, she was. Her first instinct was to turn her away, but how could she do that? Her verifications checked out, her money was paid, and what was a 72-year-old woman going to do anyway? Her first glimpse of her was when she staggered up the stairs towards the front door. A small, frail woman in a grubby coat that was too big for her. She had matted hair and was clearly drunk. Her heart sank and she instinctively knew she was in for a world of trouble.

She stormed past the old woman onto the windswept terrace of the Victorian house to light a cigarette. When Geetha came in, the landlady asked her if she had plans for the days she was staying with her. Geetha gave her a malevolent stare and hissed: "Plans? Plans? I just go where life takes me." That night Geetha went out and the landlady worried if she would return in one piece. She was scared of her erratic behavior and her drinking.

The following morning she was making tea in her kitchen when she turned at a noise, expecting to see Geetha. But no – a fully dressed man, about 45, was standing in the kitchen. He had a weather-beaten face and was wearing heavy boots and a coat. He pushed past me and slammed through the front door. She realised he had come from Geetha's room, and saw the door was ajar.

Geetha was naked with the remnants of the red cooking wine that the landlady kept in the kitchen splashed over her, the bed and floor. For one terrible moment, she thought it was blood.

Then they had an awful moment when the landlady asked Geetha to leave. She went out the door. After about 15 minutes the landlady looked out of the window to check if Geetha was gone yet. To her great shock she found the man and Geetha stripping in broad daylight in the middle of her porch singing a song called *Kaliyug ki Sita*, which she thought was from the Hindi film *Lajja*.



He Never Left His Home, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 36 x 53.5 inches, 2015





Bridge, Lake, and Mountain, archival ink, gouache, watercolor on archival paper, 27.5 x 40 inches each, 2015

Videos



Suicide Point, 20mins 7 sec (looped), HD video edition 3+1



River (iPad video), looped



Storyteller Under the Tree (iPad video), looped



The Other Side, 15 mins 53 secs, HD video, edition 3+1



Kartik Sood was born in 1986 and pursued his Bachelors in Painting from College of Art, New Delhi in 2008 and completed his Post-Graduation in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, MSU Baroda in 2010.

The artist's group shows include 'Works in Progress', IAAB Studios, The Dock, Basel, Switzerland (2014); 'Sacred/Scared', curated by Nancy Adajania, Latitude 28, India (2014); 'Spaces In Between', curated by Gayatri Uppal, presented by Khoj at Edinburgh Art Festival (2014); 'Citizens of Time' curated by Veeranganakumari Solanki, at Dhaka Art Summit (2014); 'Matter of Importance', Sakshi Gallery in collaboration with Latitude 28, Mumbai (2013); 'Open Studio', 1 Shanthiroad, Bangalore (2013); 'In You is the Illusion of Each Day', curated by Maya Kovskaya, Latitude 28 (2011); 'Urban Testimonies', Latitude 28 (2010); and 'Scratch', Sakshi Gallery, (2010).

Kartik was the recipient of the 'Forbes India's 30 Under 30 list' award, in the category of Arts & Culture, 2015; as well as was nominated for 'The Best Emerging Artist Using Photography', in the 2nd Prudential Eye Awards for Asian Contemporary Art, Singapore Art Week 2015. Sood was the recipient for the prestigious Gasworks International Residency Programme in the U.K. in 2015, supported by The Inlaks Shivadasani Foundation/ Charles Wallace India Trust Award. He also received the FICA Emerging Artist award, in collaboration with Pro Helvetia-Swiss Arts Council, 2013. He was the recipient of the Nasreen Mohammedi Scholarship at MSU Baroda. He has also received the award for the best film "Cutting Edge Category", at the Scotland University Film Festival, 2012.

He has also been represented by Latitude 28 at the Dhaka Art Summit, 2014; Art Gwangju 2012 and the India Art Fair 2011 – 2014 and was a participant in 'Contested Spaces', a video project curated by Bhavna Kakar, especially for the India Art Fair, 2014.

The artist's residencies include 'Refracting Rooms', Khoj International Artists' Association, Pune, 2015; IAAB Studios, Pro Helvetia residency, Switzerland, 2014; Gasworks International Studios residency, London, 2014; Artist in residence, 1 Shanthi Road/Latitude 28 residency, Bangalore, 2013; and The Why Not Place residency, Religare Arts, 2011.

Kartik's works are in numerous private collections in India and internationally, including the Salsali Private Museum collection in Dubai.

The artist currently lives and works between New Delhi and Shimla.



Latitude 28 over the years has become synonymous with cutting edge art coming out of the country, seeking out fresh perspectives and innovative thinking in its attempt to stimulate commercial interest in new waves of art-making. The establishment aims to cultivate a space where collectors and art enthusiasts can interact with emerging artists and their practices. Its strategy allows the space to act as a horizontal environment where younger artists are able to contextualise and reference their work with the masters of Indian art, even as the ethos of the gallery encourages them to experiment with medium, material and institutional critique.

The gallery shows veteran artists like Anupam Sud and Baiju Parthan alongside younger, upcoming artists like Prajjwal Choudhury, Kartik Sood, Anindita Dutta, Dilip Chobisa, Deepjyoti Kalita and Shweta Bhattad. The space maintains an outlook that accommodates South Asian art practices and has neo-miniaturist Pakistani artists like Muhammad Zeeshan and Mohammad Ali Talpur in its fold.

Latitude 28 recognizes the shift from survey exhibitions and museum displays to international art fairs and biennales, as sites where dialogues on the contemporary take place. The gallery attempts to bolster contemporary Indian art not only through exhibitions, but also by supporting residencies and organizing outreach programs, seminars and talks. Its endeavors include a bi-annual residency in collaboration with IShanthi road, Bangalore supporting various out-of-the-box initiatives and artists and writers pursuing experimental work. It also recently supported an outreach initiative, TAKE on Writing – Critic Community: Contemporary Art Writing in India, an initiative by its sister concern, the quarterly art magazine, TAKE on art.

Latitude 28's vision is shaped by its Founder/Director, Bhavna Kakar, who has over a decade's experience as a curator, writer, and art consultant.



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