

THE EXODUS OF ETERNAL WANDERERS

Recent works by
SUDIPTA DAS



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ETERNAL
WANDERERS

GALLERY LATITUDE 28

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

by **Bhavna Kakar**

Since its inception, Gallery Latitude 28 has been invested in promoting emerging voices and innovative art practices from the region and this continues to form the essence of our functioning as we are set to celebrate our 10th anniversary. *The Exodus of Eternal Wanderers* is an amalgamation of all that we stand for and brings together a sensitive body of work by artist Sudipta Das.

We have been following Sudipta Das' works since her days as a student in Painting at Santiniketan and her early training and tryst with paper mache and use of tea stains which reflect in her practice till today.

I have always been amazed by figural subtlety of her paper sculptures. She lends personal features to each piece with extreme attention to detail. Her works on exhibit forms a melancholic narrative of humans forced from their homes to escape hunger, climate change and political tensions or in quest for economic aspirations. She examines the many displacements, their staggering scale and profoundly personal human impact.

The show marks the gallery's relation to the varied body of artworks that has nourished our experiences. This show, also, makes us reflect on the relationships built over the years that shape the space that we have become so far. It gives us immense pleasure to present the second solo show of Sudipta Das at Gallery Latitude 28.

THE EXODUS OF ETERNAL WANDERERS

by Premjish Achari

In her latest exhibition, Baroda based artist Sudipta Das interrogates the realities of climate change and appeals to humanity about its most important outcomes, human migration. Through her paper sculptures, Sudipta represents the slow violence of ongoing disasters specific to her hometown Silchar, Assam and the precarious pasts as well as the futures of its victims. Nonetheless, the miniaturized representation of the human exodus, repeating in an endless loop reckons the universal emergency of human displacement now more than at any point in human history. Her sculptures of wandering figure in search for self-respect within a larger collective brings to mind Hannah Arendt's observation that the refugees "fight like madmen for private existences with individual destinies." Sudipta's powerfully raw and vivid works unpack the horrors of a continuous displacement which gets repeated year after year. Some return to the devastated homes while many wander in search of newer destinies. Her immersive installations of these miniaturized human figures and sculptures are influenced by personal experiences, archival materials and family histories. She uses these to conjure an eternal journey in search of a home, depict the painful life in exile, and introduce an existential dilemma of unparalleled scale. The underlying message stretches on to the global scale of displacement especially in the context of climate change. Sudipta reminds us that these displaced wanderers and their eternal

exodus are not a new phenomenon. Their struggle has a long history and this displacement due to climate change is compounded by many other contemporary humanitarian crises will lead to more people being on the move. In this journey they are rendered stateless, they are stripped of basic rights as legal rights are only bestowed upon citizens of a nation-state and their silent precarious existence constantly seek hospitality and justice. These small sculptures appeal to the contemporary politico-legal frameworks in futility, despite being only met with hostility and indifference from everywhere. Sudipta's attempt to expose this vulnerable world of the climate refugees to garner emotional support may appear quixotic. But when communities are destabilized and waves of bodies set in exodus, can we only rely on the impartial callousness of legal frameworks? She foregrounds the necessity of new political ideas, collective imaginations, and compelling narratives.

Many decades ago when Arendt wrote *We Refugees* she observed that the conventional definition of a refugee is a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. But she noticed that most of the Jews who fled Nazi Germany did not possess a strong political opinion and many of them detested the word refugee. But in this exiled subjectivity Arendt located the vanguard as they have already experienced and recognized what others has only become obvious today. Arendt has then rightly highlighted the limitations of nation-states in offering asylum and many years later philosopher Giorgio Agamben too has observed the fundamental inefficiency of states to absorb the stateless. Rather they will try to concentrate refugees in designated areas, in other words, camps or detention centres. While on the one hand there have been large scale movements demonstrating sympathy there have also been demands to fortify boundaries and expel the aliens. There is a greater need for us to uphold Arendt's idea of "the right to have rights": the right to belong to political communities and to participate in their social practices. She argues for the rethinking of the nation-state to overcome this limitation and invent a democracy which is not bound by territoriality. The slowly marching figures in Sudipta's exhibition implore us to be a part of this rethinking because the conventional ideas of inclusion and integration are not enough. Rather we should reorganize states to adapt to this global a territoriality of the refugees. They call for new models of citizenship especially Aihwa Ong's notion of flexible citizenship which allows people to choose to the political communities they want to be a part of according to the desires and interests.

Recently specialists have coined terms such as "climate change refugees" to denote the millions who leave their homes due to climate change or "climate vulnerable" to describe those communities or nation-states that have a particularly acute vulnerability to present and forecasted climatic changes. The 2018 estimate of World Bank forecasts that three regions, i.e., Latin America,

Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia will generate 143 million climate refugees by 2050. Despite these warnings governments across the world have not drafted any kind of policy that offers asylum to these victims. In India too, we lack any consolidated statistics about the numbers of people displaced due to natural disasters. Though the government agency National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) has identified floods and droughts as a major reason for migration there is a lack of engagement at the policy level to accommodate and recognize them. The “wanderers” remain invisible for the politico-legal institutions and ultimately detention centers and camps become the burial grounds for these people who fled for their safety.

Sudipta is inspired by the *dakjee* doll making technique learned while on residency in Korea in 2017. Her use of paper and the fragility of this medium catalyses an important discussion towards the precarious condition of climate change refugees, especially in the context of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens. The NRC in Assam has put the onus of proof on each and every one. It is the people who have to prove that they are citizens by producing *kagaz* or documents. Therefore, in Sudipta’s work paper itself has become a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the refugee. The tone of the exhibition is empathetic, Sudipta aims to raise awareness about the vulnerability and fragility of lives of people who are forced to migrate. Her exhibition opens at a crucial time when the word refugee has become a polarizing term in both international and national politics. At the national level the NCR threatens to exacerbate the misery of millions of vulnerable lives rendering ever greater number of people disenfranchised. Although they appear solid, the exiled body of Sudipta’s refugee is built on the vulnerability of a perishable medium. These figures are as fragile as the documents that bind citizens to their nations. Yet, they commence their journey to be thrown under the weight of new political discourses and crushed under the heavy boots of rigid laws that cast them into a never-ending legal limbo.

Renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who has written extensively on the idea of exile has observed that “Exile is more than a geographical concept. You can be an exile in your homeland, in your own house, in a room.” Sudipta locates this entrapment, anxiety, and helplessness in the bodies of the refugees. Under the current circumstances the refugees are fragmented and their lack of political consolidation necessitates the question that how can they overcome their political despair? Will their exodus ever come to an end? Will they return to their homeland and be able to restore it?

These small bodies evoke a non-violent language of consciousness and through them, Sudipta urges us to recognize them as fellow human beings so that we both can share conversations with each other instead of being hostile.

Sudipta’s representations of the victims of climate disaster attempt to strike the collective conscious and pleads to the empathy of the viewers. This immersive exodus of eternal wanderers speaks to our sense of justice to the precarious lives and asks us to imagine a politics of asylum. It asks us to equate people who land on our shores due to natural disaster with those who escape political persecution. We need to abandon our existing lexicon of fences, camps, and other forms of detention which dominate our contemporary political parlance. Across the world, walls are raised to stop sea levels and incoming refugees, they are built to cordon off areas as detention camps. The climate refugee or climate vulnerable is not merely a victim of natural disasters. These are also political disasters in which the citizens from developing nations bear the brunt of disasters created by the developed nations. Our planetary future is at stake with the weakening of political pluralism, civil society, democratic institutions and freedom of expression. Sudipta encourages us to imagine a planetary politics which seeks justice to the past displacements and the future of existence. This exhibition allows us to imagine a movement oriented political vision. It argues that human beings have always been wandering and migratory. The modern territorial oriented political dimension has delegitimized migration. Sudipta’s works emphasizes that, we require newer paradigms that recognizes the humanitarian crisis brought about by climate change.

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Crossing Over I

Mixed media with Hanji paper

126 x 8 x 2 inches | 2019



Crossing Over II

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour
120 x 9 x 5 inches | 2019





Shelter I

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter II

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter III

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter IV

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter V

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter VI

Hanji Paper, rice paper, pulp, watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter VII

Hanji Paper, rice paper, pulp, watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter VIII

Hanji paper, rice paper, pulp, watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter IX

Hanji paper, rice paper, pulp, watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Shelter X

Hanji paper, rice paper, pulp, watercolour on board
12 x 12 x 2 inches | 2019



Installation view of 'Shelter' series. The works are incased in a light box.



The unending voyages of the dispossessed across cultural and political boundaries in human history serve as a vast backdrop for Sudipta's artistic pursuit. As a fourth generation Bangladeshi migrant in India, the artist re-members her past into visual repositories such that the act of tearing out bits of paper and reassembling them into the subjects of her boards becomes symbolic of piecing together an inherited memory of dispossession and diaspora. The identity that is sutured through her practice is one that is constantly in transit and not merely representational of her received history. The ephemerality and versatility of paper makes it her favoured medium for playing out these fragmented recapitulations, whilst a displacement and externalisation of memory in this manner allows her a sense of perspective and agency about this borrowed historiography. Each bricolaged iteration becomes a retelling of the accounts of migration transmitted from her grandmother and brings out the performative aspect of grand-narratives. Consequently, these personal memoirs fracture the doxa of stereotypes and extant historiographies by seeding its foundations with subjective and para-fictional retellings.

- *The Surface of Memory*, Adwait Singh

His/Her
Belongings

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
12 x 18 inches | 2019



Untitled

Mixed media with Hanji paper
24 inches diameter | 2019



Untitled

Mixed media with Hanji paper
24 inches diameter | 2019



Mother and Child

Hanji Paper, rice paper, watercolour on board
8 x 5 x 2 inches | 2019

Referring both to the physical and emotional losses caused by seasonal floods that devastate the artist's home town of Silchar, Assam, Das' works considers the precarious position of human lives in flux. Before rendering her work into human-like figures, Das' interest in paper was made explicit in her work with archival material and found photographs. The photographs become a key to unlocking personal history, and a lens to examine her familial experience of identity loss as a micro-minority community through. For the show, she creates a new installation which forces viewers to navigate between the sea of nameless figures. The arrangement reinforces the idea of mass populations who have to cross over impermanent thresholds into uncertain futures, while the act of the viewer passing through reminds us of our complicity as silent bystanders to these incidents of forced mass exile.

- *Every Year the Flood Comes*, [Sitara Chowfla](#)





Custody I

Hanji paper, rice paper, and watercolour on board
16 x 7.5 x 4 inches | 2019



Custody II

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
10 x 7.5 x 3.5 inches | 2019



Custody III

Hanji paper, rice paper, pulp and watercolour on board
10 x 7.5 x 4 inches | 2019



Custody IV

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
16 x 8 x 7 inches | 2019

Land of Exhile

Hanji paper, rice paper and watercolour on board
168 x 168 inches | 2019



The starting point for any artist is to find their own creative voice, a language that enables them to speak, and which speaks to them. Sudipta Das found it in an odd conjunction: the dak paper doll making tradition of Korea, which she learnt while on a residency there in 2017. These little figurines are made from Hanji paper, a versatile but extremely durable material made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree, whose leaves feed silkworms as well. The Koreans claim that Hanji paper lasts 1,000 years, whereas western paper disintegrates after only a couple of hundred. Das' work is as lasting as bronze, though its subject is vulnerability and transience. In Korea, dak dolls now tend to be plump and smiling, tokens of good luck for happy homes, in stark contrast to the past, when the technique was often used to create demonic images for curses and black magic. Das had the genius to realise that this extraordinarily expressive material could be used to create images of contemporary life. This surprising conjunction has enabled her unique art to flower with almost bewildering speed, confidence, and invention.

- *Land of Exhile*, [Julian Spalding](#)



'Land of Exhile' was part of the exhibition 'Every Year the Flood Comes' previewed in September 2019 at Space Studio at Alembic City, Baroda in collaboration with Gallery Latitude 28.



SUDIPTA DAS

Born in Assam, Sudipta Das (b.1985) completed her BFA and MFA in painting from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in 2009 and 2011 respectively. Sudipta's solo shows include, 'The Exodus of Eternal Wanderes', Gallery Latitude 28, New Delhi (2020), 'Every Year the Flood Comes', Gallery Latitude 28 in collaboration with Space Studio, Alembic City, Baroda (2019); 'A Soaring to Nowhere', Gachang Art Studio, Deagu, South Korea (2017); 'The Surface of Memory', Gallery Latitude 28, New Delhi (2016) and 'Break II', Gandhara Art Gallery, Kolkata (2013). Her installation, 'Soaring to Nowhere' was part of The Art Projects at India Art Fair 2018 and was supported by Gallery Latitude 28.

Her recent group shows include Delhi Contemporary Art Week, Gallery Latitude 28 at Visual Arts Gallery, New Delhi (2019 and 2018); India Art Fair, Gallery Latitude 28 booth, New Delhi (2019, 2018, 2015 and 2014); 'Material Gains', Gallery Ark, Baroda (2019); 'Hanji Translated', INKO Center at Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre, Chennai (2019); 'Papier', Gallery Art Positive, New Delhi (2018); Delhi Contemporary Art Weekend, Gallery Latitude 28 at Saffronart, New Delhi (2017); 'Asian Young Artists Art Festival', DDP, Seoul, Korea (2017); 'The Nexus Art Show', Amdavad Ni Gufa, Ahmedabad (2016); 'Morphology of Archive (Connected Histories of Goa)', Museum of Goa (2016); the 29th National Exhibition of Contemporary Art and Awards show, Hyderabad (2016); 'A Walk Elsewhere', PAIR-2 Art Center, Taiwan (2015); 'Yoga Chakra Tradition & Modernity', curated by Sushma Bahl and Archana Sapra, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2015); Affordable Art Fair, Gallery Latitude 28 booth, Hong Kong (2015); CIMA Award Show, CIMA Art Gallery, Kolkata (2015); 'Her work is Never Done Part – II', curated by Bose Krishnamachari, BMB Art Gallery, Mumbai (2014); 'Baroda March', Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai (2014); 'Asian Young Artists Art Festival', Gangnam-Gu, Seoul, Korea (2014); 'Diver-Cities' curated by Bhavna Kakar, Gallery Latitude 28, New Delhi (2013), 'The Web of Water' curated by Sandhya Gajjar, Artcore Gallery Derby, UK (2013); 'Fluid' curated by V Divakar, in Site, Baroda (2013); 'Contested Terrain', Kochi (2013), 'Art Virtually Real' curated by Georgina Maddox, Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi (2012); 'ART MAKERS: Circa 2012, The Next Level - Part 3', curated by Ranjita Chaney, Exhibit 320, New Delhi (2012); 'EN-GENDER', Studio 21 - A Contemporary Art Space, Kolkata (2011); 'Fresh Departures', Gallery Kolkata, Kolkata (2010).



Sudipta Das is a recipient of Visual Arts Award as part of Alpine Fellowship, Sweden (2019); Greenshield Fellowship, Canada (2019) and Junior Research Fellowship, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India (2013). She has also participated in the Gachang Art Studio residency in South Korea (2017); Pair-2 Artist Residency in Taiwan (2015), Reliance (Harmony Art Foundation) (2015), Khoj Kolkata residency (2015), Kanoria Residency (2011), and the Saavad Residency, Santiniketan (2011), and Space Studio, Baroda (2012-2015). The artist is currently based in Baroda.

GALLERY LATITUDE 28

Since its inception in 2010, Gallery Latitude 28 has been promoting creative dialogue and presenting dynamic exhibitions that focuses on contemporary art from South Asia. Through curated shows, careful strategizing and discovering emerging artists with exciting practices, Gallery Latitude 28 over the years has become synonymous with cutting edge art from India, seeking fresh perspectives and innovative thinking in its attempt to stimulate interest in new waves of art-making. The establishment aims to cultivate a space where collectors and art enthusiasts can interact with younger artists and their practices.

The gallery provides a horizontal environment where younger artists are encouraged to contextualize and experiment with medium, material and institutional critique. The gallery has supported works of several South Asian artists like Waseem Ahmed, Noor Ali Chagani, Prajjwal Choudhury, Niyeti Chadha Kannal, Khadim Ali, Minal Damani, Radhika Agarwala, Mohsin Shafi, Wardha Shabbir, Zahra Yazdani Nia, Sudipta Das, Anindita Dutta, Shweta Bhattad, Deepjyoti Kalita and their alternative display practices that could further the understanding of contemporary art. The gallery, thus, continues to work towards making art accessible and inclusive to larger public and attempts to enrich their experience of viewing and engaging with art and is an incubator for the same the white cube of its distinctive gallery space.

Exhibitions such as 'Nowthere', 2019; 'Babur ki Gai', 2018; 'Dissensus', 2017; 'The Lay of the Land', 2015; 'Sacred/Scared, 2014; 'Crossing Over', 2013; 'Slipping Through The Cracks', 2012; 'In You Is The Illusion Of Each Day', 2011, tried to initiate renewed readings of artworks within art historical/socio-political contexts. Gallery Latitude 28 frequently travels to International art fairs, and supports our artists' presence at biennales around the world. The gallery has participated in various art festivals and summits including Art Dubai (2020); Delhi contemporary Art Week (2017-19); India Art Fair (2010-15, 2018-19); Dhaka Art Summit (2014); Art Gwangju (2012), amongst others.



Gallery Latitude 28 through its sister concern, TAKE on art magazine, is invested in supporting independent art writers, curators, critics and researchers and sustaining them through residencies, workshops, panel discussions, seminars and awards. It has also partnered with similar initiatives, facilitating several special projects at the India Art Fair over the years and has also supported Art Writers' Award; 'Why publish? We publish!' led by Andreas Vogel and Tania Prill at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, 2018; 'Critical Writing Workshop' led by Raman Siva Kumar and Skye Arundhati Thomas at the Indian Ceramics Triennale, Jaipur, 2018; 'Critical Writing in Collaboration: Curating a Dream Project' led by Rustom Bharucha, at the Piral Museum of Art, Mumbai, 2017; 'The Book – The New Writing Group', a workshop led by Chus Martínez and Ingo Niermann, New Delhi, 2016; 'Take on Writing - Critical Writing Ensemble (CWE)' Dhaka Chapter, conceptualized by Katya GarciaAnton, OCA, Norway at the Dhaka Art Summit, 2016; CWE Baroda Chapter at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, 2015; TAKE on Writing, Critic-Community: Contemporary Art Writing at Sunaparanta Centre for the Arts, Goa, 2014; TAKE on Residency in collaboration with India Foundation for the Arts at 1 Shanthi Road, Bangalore, 2013.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GALLERY LATITUDE 28 TEAM

Faris Kallayi
Rachita Gupta
Surender Kumar

PRODUCTION

Madhu Paswan
Nimish Patel
Rafeek Khan
Shambhu Prasad

MORAL SUPPORT

Aparna Das
Avtar Singh
Deepanjali Shekhar
Debasish Das

LONGFORM TEAM

Neeta Raheja
Pooja Gulati

DESIGN

Locopopo Studio

PHOTOGRAPHY

Mahesh Pariya

PRINTING

Archana Advertising Pvt. Ltd.
www.archanapress.com

...and above all BHAVNA KAKAR

GALLERY LATITUDE 28

F 208, FF, Lado Sarai, New Delhi 110030
T: 011-46791111 | latitude28.com

