



India/UK Together  
Season of Culture



## FUGITIVE FORMS: PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH ASIA

STARR CINEMA, TATE MODERN

SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER 2022, 10.30—17.30

This seminar explores the history of performance art and its relationship to forms of protests across South Asia. Instead of thinking of the region as a whole, the contributors present the unique political conditions and social forms under which performance practices emerged in each place and context. Through modes and methods, frameworks and strategies, as well as the experiences and ambitions of artists and artist-run initiatives, the seminar seeks to recognise and learn from the uneven, adverse and non-linear histories that shape the forms of performance we encounter in the region today.

### PROGRAMME

#### SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER 2022

10.30—11.00 **Introduction by Sook Kyung-Lee**, Senior Curator, International Art, Tate, and **Nikhil Chopra**, artist and co-founder of HH Art Spaces

#### PANEL 1

11.00—11.20 **Mario D'Souza**, Director of Programmes, Kochi Biennale Foundation

#### **A Long History of Performance and Protest in South Asia**

D'Souza charts a simultaneous history of the region through early forms of performance and their relationship to protests in the region. Using a diversity of material from early street plays, cinema and television sketches to the 'classification' of forms as performance art in the 90s, their presentation derives from a range of historical and speculative material including archives of artists and artist run movements, public memory, acts of witnessing, and oral transmissions. A segment of the presentation titled 'In the Absence of an Image', attempts to bring to discussion early performances that exist only as memory.

11.20—11.40 **Salima Hashmi**, artist, art educator, curator and contemporary art historian

#### **We Sinful Women**

The social and political turbulence of Pakistan's history has been matched by the resilience and creativity of its people. This audio-visual presentation looks at the formative years of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) established in 1981 during the military regime of General Zia Ul Haq (1977-1988) and its continued and persistent role in public life. Women came together to respond to the repressive laws which targeted women and other vulnerable groups in those years. This nonpartisan, non-hierarchical and non-funded forum welcomed all other groups to join hands in the struggle for democracy. Women marched, sang, and danced (when dancing was banned), poets recited, and performance became a weapon for satire and parody. The presentation shares some of these instances which continue to challenge authoritarianism and ridicule obscurantism.

11.40—12.00 **Sandev Handy**, Curator, co-authored with **Sharmini Pereira**, Chief Curator, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka

### **Protesting Bodies and Performing Residues: The Afterlives of Contemporary Performance Art in Sri Lanka**

This paper examines the afterlives of selected performances in Sri Lanka, looking back to Prof. Neloufer De Mel's analysis of actress Annie Boteju's 1917 performance as Sita in John De Silva's production of Ramayana. Taking Boteju's performance as a starting point, the paper argues for a reconsideration of 'performance art' practices which to date have traced their beginnings to the 90s Trend. While the experience of these performances blurs definitions between performance and performance art, they share several markers in common. In that, they were often limited to a small circle of attendees or informal passers-by of a protest or event, and they often left traces which in turn intervened in the social fabric of a perpetually transforming society. These traces are examined through exhibitions, publications, digital media, and other ephemera, where they continue to function as ideologically active political, social, and cultural actors rather than as passive documentation. In conclusion, this paper asks for critical reflection on the afterlife of a contemporary performance artwork so as to equal that of the performance itself.

12.00-12.45 **Panel Discussion & Q&A moderated by Huma Mulji**, artist and Lecturer, Plymouth College of Art and University of the West of England

12.45-14.00 – LUNCH

### PANEL 2

14.00-14.30

**Jagath Weerasinghe** (artist and founding Chair of Theertha International Artists Collective)

#### **Against despair: Performance Art and the "90's Trend" in Sri Lankan Modernist Art**

The three decades following the late 1970s in Sri Lanka were traumatic and harsh for minorities and those who did not fit in with the country's Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist politics. It was a period of violence. The violent inventory of this period includes anti-Tamil riots; thousands killed in the South; suicide bombings; a war against LTTE guerillas; and many Tamil refugees. To say the least, it was a depressing time. The '90s Trend' which introduced post-modernist elements to Sri Lankan modernist art emerged out of this oppressive political climate that justified the illegitimate exercise of power over bodies on an ubiquitous level. Performance art, installations, paintings and sculpture that reject the universalist aspirations of classical modernist ideas became the tools of a new generation of artists grappling with and making sense of their bloodied socio-political environment. I look at the performance art of Godwin Constantine, Bandu Manamperi, Janani Cooray, and Sivasubramaniam Kajendran in this presentation. While performance art has recently been involved and linked with protest, with nationwide protests forcing the incumbent president to flee the country, the complex nature of Sri Lankan performance art cannot be understood through the lens of 'protest art.' My claim is that from their inception in the late 1990s to the present, the works of Sri Lankan performance artists have been primarily motivated by existential and ontological anxieties stemming from living in a desolate political culture such as Sri Lanka, with memories of violence and displacement.

**Godwin Constantine**, artist and Chairman of the Theertha International Artist Collective

**Performance Art and Protest in Sri Lanka**

From the mid 20th century onwards performance art has been a tool to address socio-political issues. In Sri Lanka the development of performance art has also been closely linked with socio-political issues. The first performance art piece entitled “Broken Palmyra” was performed by Godwin Constantine in 1999 as a tribute to Rajani Thiranagama, a Tamil human rights activist and feminist assassinated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In Sri Lanka performance art largely remained within the confines of galleries until Theertha Performance Platform was established and used public space as its platform. During the recent political unrest performance art has been used as a powerful tool to protest and express political concerns. Indeed, many marches included performances as part of their protest. Most recently, on the first day of the occupation by protestors of the Galle-Face Green, Sampath Bandara’s group staged a powerful performance protest. Other remarkable performances include artist Jehan Appuhamy carrying a wooden cross and walking 37km to mark the 2019 Easter Sunday attack, as well as Prabuddha Dhanushka Dikwaththa’s performance to mark 1983’s Black July. The Sri Lankan political crisis has been a crucible for protest art in recent times.

14.30-15.00

**Madhavi Gore, Nikhil Chopra, Romain Loustau**, artists and co-founders of HH Art Spaces, and **Shivani Gupta**, artist and partner at HH Art Spaces

**To Swim Against Water: New/Alternate structures for gathering bodies**

Through HH Art Spaces and its relationships with other artist-led models and platforms including Britto (Bangladesh) and Theertha (Sri Lanka), its founding artists chart an alternate history of performance and live art in the region. Through an impulse of making and/or holding space and to employ the body as material in the absence of resources – the performance movement in India was chaotic, yet agile. HH will chart the ground, honouring work from early 2000, moving into their own trajectory, collaborations, devices and works through the past decade.

15.00-15.20 **Yasmin Jahan Nupur**, artist and member of Britto Arts Trust

15.20-16.10 **Panel Discussion & Q&A, moderated by Alessio Antonioli**, Director, Gasworks

16.10-16.30 BREAK

16.30-17.30 **Amol K Patil**, artist

17.30 – **Closing**

## **Biographies**

**Alessio Antonioli** is the Director of Gasworks, London, where he leads a programme of exhibitions, international residencies and participatory events. He is also the Director of Triangle Network, a world-wide network of visual art organisations that work together to create artists' exchanges and to share knowledge with each other. In 2022 he was appointed curator at Fondazione Memmo, Italy, where he programmes one exhibition each year, starting with a solo presentation by Wai Kin Sin, in 2023. He has lectured widely and has been part of many juries including the UK's Turner Prize in 2019.

**Nikhil Chopra's** (b. 1974) artistic practice interweaves live art, drawing, photography, sculpture and installations. His performances, in large part improvised, dwell on identity and its construction, autobiography and authorship, the pose and self-portraiture. His work reflects on the process of transformation and the part played by the duration of performance. Nikhil combines everyday life, memory and collective history. Nikhil's performances on the international art and theatre scene began in 2008, when the artist was invited to contribute to Time Crevasse (Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama), kunsten festival des arts Brussels, Making Worlds (53rd Venice Biennale), Performa (New Museum New York) and Marina Abramovic Presents (Manchester International Festival, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester). After his one-year research fellowship at Interweaving Performance Cultures, Frei Universität Berlin in 2011, his work took him back to the Whitworth Art Gallery to make a solo project for the 2013 Manchester International Festival where he received critical acclaim for his performance "Coal on Cotton". Between 2014 and 2017 he performed at the Kochi Muziris Biennale, Bial de La Habana, the 12<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial and documenta 14. In 2019 he presented a nine-day long solo performance titled "Lands, Waters and Skies" for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

**Godwin Constantine** was born in Kandy and studied art at Vibabi Academy of Fine Arts. In 1999 he did his first performance art piece, a milestone work in 20<sup>th</sup> century art in Sri Lanka that focussed on a political issue. He is serving as the Chairman of the Theertha International Artist Collective and initiated the Theertha Performance Platform, a public space event in 2015 with the participation of international artists.

**Mario D'Souza** is a curator and writer based between New Delhi, Goa, and Kochi, India. He is currently Associate Curator for the 2020 Kochi-Muziris Biennale and leads programs at the Kochi Biennale Foundation. He is also resident curator at HH Art Spaces Goa. He was formerly the curator at Khoj International Artist's Association, New Delhi, where he curated several exhibitions, including This Must be True (co-curated with Mila Samdub and Radha Mahendru, 2019) and Evidence Room (2017). In addition, he conceptualized and led Asia Assemble (2017) and co-curated the symposium Art – Science – Fiction (2018). His research interests include: political imaginaries; the nation building project; cultures and aesthetics of dissent; public acts of assembling; legal and extra-legal systems; and evidence and truth. His upcoming curatorial projects include Antibodies with HH Art Spaces, The Tetley Museum, Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational and Live Art Development Agency supported by British Council; How to Live Together? With HH Art Spaces, Britto Arts Trust, Theertha and Galerie 3000 supported by Pro Helvetia; and God and the Long Road.

**Madhavi Gore.** *Artistic practice is inherently a scholarship in magic; its repertoire charts the rite and right of passage. Madhavi is a visual artist whose interdisciplinary practice is interested in generating modes of questioning processes and histories, through objects and encounters. Her painting, drawing and performance work is an engagement in the slippages and ruptures in memory and time, marked*

*by visual expressions and instances of joy, play, pleasure, pain and arousal. Walking the tight-rope between calculated risk and raw expression, what is agency as a visual artist?*

Madhavi has an M.A Humanities, 2004, Comparative Culture Studies, Ohio State University; a B.A History, 1996, St Xaviers College, Mumbai. She studied Fine Art at various institutions: 1996, Mary Baldwin College, Virginia; 1997 Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda; 1998 Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, and 1999 Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore. She has performed and exhibited in 2022, *A Line Fine*, Clownfishh Projects, Goa; 2021, *Surface Encounters and Strange Beings*, HH Art Spaces, Goa; 2019, *The Eastern Question*, Sofia Underground Performance Art Festival, Sofia, Bulgaria; 2017, *Bhairav*, New Art Exchange, Nottingham; 2016, Performance Art Platform, Teertha, Colombo; 2016, *Feedback Loop*, Tarq Contemporary Art Gallery, Mumbai; 2015, Kolkata International Performance Art Festival; 2012 *Non-Resident*, Grüntaler9, Berlin; 2011, Mine Blau, Berlin. Madhavi Gore (b.1976) is a founding partner at HH Art Spaces, Goa, where she is based.

**Shivani Gupta's** (b. 1984) practice uses photography to texture and layer circumstances and encounters. These extend to performances staged for the camera, as well as through the documentation of live art. She proposes the camera is an agent of personal and cultural storytelling in the distance between the mythical, the staged and our many perceived realities. Photography in her work is used to excavate the magic of places and their people to explore and present a reality that is not within the framework of the banal. Gupta is trained classically in the Indian dance form Mohiniattam. She tends to privilege the visual over the performative, beginning from the interiorities of the body and moving to the exterior through her camera. Her works *Thread Whispers Chapter I*, *Of Rock and Apricot* and *Mountaintop* was shown at Fotofest Biennial 2018 curated by Sunil Gupta and her *Girl in a House* recently previewed at Serendipity Arts Festival, 2019 as part of *Look Stranger*. The artist is a partner at HH Art Spaces based in Goa, where she also lives and works.

**Salima Hashmi** is an artist (b. 1942, Delhi), artist, art educator, curator and contemporary art historian. She worked extensively in performing arts in theater, television and puppetry. Her television programs were very popular before being banned by military government of General Zia Ul Haq. She has written extensively on the arts with particular focus on women artists. She was founding member of the Women's Action Forum and is a council member of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

**Sandev Handy** is a curator and artist based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He currently serves as Curator to the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Sri Lanka, and is part of the artist collective 'the Packet'. His practice crosses fugitive pedagogies, Afro-Asian networks of solidarities, botanical and bureaucratic naturalisms, and the body in its relationship to technologies of power.

**Yasmin Jahan Nupur** was born in Chittagong in 1979 and works in Narayanganj district in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Yasmin is a visual and performance artist whose work is influenced by the ecological and community driven aspects of life. Depicting human relationships from various points of view, her work explores class distinctions and the social discrepancies people face, particularly women and migrants of South Asia, in an effort to increase understanding between people of different backgrounds. Her recent work has engaged deeply with architecture, landscape shifting/displacement, and textile, especially focusing on Jamdani (handwoven textile) making soft sculpture, and an idea of physical and social constructs affecting her psyche. She delves deep through researching into every subject that she works on. She has exhibited and performed her work internationally including at Frieze, London (2019); Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (2017-2018); Dhaka Art Summit (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020); Bangladesh Pavilion, 54<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2013); and Asian Art Biennale, Dhaka (2013, 2008); and is currently sowing at Tate Modern, London.

**Amol K Patil** is a performer and visual artist, based in India. He has obtained a diploma and a post-diploma from Rachana Sansad Academy of Fine Arts and Crafts in Mumbai and has participated in a large number of group exhibitions all around the globe since 2015 as well as solo shows in India, the United States and Korea. Coming from a family of artists - with his grandfather being a poet and his father an Avant-garde playwright, he has been working with drawings, objects, video, and performance with his own family archives. Patil's work questions the current situation of workers and casteism, striving to connect the past, present and future. He is interested in the reality of the community he is from, and working with the urban and human environment that surrounds him.

**Romain Loustau's** (b. 1982) practice is interested in producing modes to disrupt reality and develop critical approaches towards perceptions of time and the human condition through poetry and humour. Romain studied drama and spent a few years acting on stage and on camera. During which time he also collaborated with the French Parisian based collective Mu, as assistant scenography to Vincent Voillat for several editions of the festival "Filmer La Musique". He is co-founder of the HH Art Spaces based in Goa, and lives and works between Paris and Goa.

**Huma Mulji** works across media, moving between sculptural installation, photography, painting, collage and drawing. Observing the everyday within intimate urban geographies, the works echo a nebulous combination of the dysfunctional, the heroic, sorrowful and the resilient; deliberately awkward, they mine out failure, the futile, and the funny. Amongst the horror and absurd, the works stand as unwieldy, inconvenient witnesses, imbuing a formal and material anti-heroism. *Animals Because*, Critical Distance Center for Curators, Toronto, Canada (2018), *Witness*, Karachi Biennale 2017, *welcome to what we took from is the state*, Queens Museum, New York, USA (2017), *A country of Last Things*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, (2016), *The Great Game*, Irani Pavillion, Venice Biennale, (2015) *Burning Down the House*, 10th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea, (2014). She currently holds a studio at Spike Island, Bristol, and is Lecturer, BA Hons. Fine Art, at Plymouth College of Art and University of the West of England, Bristol.

**Sharmini Pereira** is Chief Curator of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka. She is the founder and Director of Raking Leaves and co-founder of the Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design. She was born in 1970 and currently lives and works in Sri Lanka.

**Jagath Weerasinghe** is an artist, an archaeologist, and a heritage manager working in Sri Lanka. He is the founding Chair of Theertha International Artists Collective in Colombo. He received a BFA in 1982 from the University of Kelaniya and an MFA in 1990 from American University in Washington DC.