

BOSE PACIA

June 2003 New York - Bose Pacia Gallery presents *HEAT*, a group exhibition of photography and video installation curated by Ram Rahman. *HEAT* will be on display from June 10th through July 19th, 2003. The gallery is located at 508 West 26th Street on the 11th Floor, in the Chelsea district of New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 12 to 6 pm and by appointment. There will be an opening reception on Tuesday, June 10th from 6 to 8pm. The public is invited.

Photography and cinema exploded in the visual consciousness of the South Asian Sub-continent right after their invention. Television had a slower gestation, but has entered mass culture especially in the last decade. To most of us growing up, cinema meant going to the pictures; pictures that spoke (and sang) to us in the major languages of our polyglot nation. The motion picture, with its fantastic synthesis of Hollywood, Indian folk performance, music, mythology and linguistic variety, has become a major visual cultural tradition, no less important than the murals of Ajanta, Padmanabhapuram, or the sculptural friezes of Sanchi, Konarak or Mahabalipuram. The relationship of the "dream world," of cinema and television and the "real world," of survival, struggle and politics has occupied cultural and social theorists for years. Not surprisingly, it is the visual artist who has come up with the richest engagement with the picture, on the screen and on the box, and its vibrant place in our mental and physical space.

D. Ravinder Reddy's intense color stills from Ram Gopal Verma's *Daud* (1997), are HOT. They are the new Erotic Myths, the new Khajuraho icons for a modern, secular, (egalitarian?) culture. Made for the movie, these are the only images here that literally belong to the cinema. The stars Sanjay Dutt and Urmila Matondkar are part of the mainstream Bombay Hindi cinema, but the visual esthetic of these pictures has a sizzling erotic heat and color which come from the over-the-top intensity of the South Indian film world for which Reddy has worked in Hyderabad. Our innate erotic instincts have survived Victorian mores, and burst forth on the screen in the dark.

Philip DiCorcia's color pictures have grabbed the art world with their disturbing, mysterious narratives and a visual style indebted to his interest in the constructed reality of cinema. Strangely, these pictures become more real than real and their truths overturn accepted notions of "photographic truth." While Hollywood, the Avant-garde and European cinema are all areas of deep interest to him, less known is his early work in the Indian film scene and his engagement with the progressive directors working in Bombay in the 1980s. The chaotic and bizarre environment of the biggest film industry in the world provided an ideal foil for his keenly honed eye in search of those moments of inexplicable mystery and wordless revelation that permeate his images.

Pushpamala uses the photograph as a document of collaborative performance with cinema and the memory of cinema as both inspiration and subject in her recent work. In her series *Navarasa*, she does a sly, sophisticated and ironic take on the nine moods of performance, a keystone of classical Indian esthetic philosophy. The multiple references running through these works include iconic identities of the woman as "siren," "seductress," "abandoned," "mother," overlaying the nine moods of "fear," "wonder," "disgust," etc. Formally these have been filtered through an almost nostalgic memory of cinema icons of ages past; quite literally through collaboration with the

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legendary photographer J. H. Thakker, who made highly stylized studio portraits of Hindi film icons in the fifties. Photographed by him in Bombay, in the same studio and with the same props, her images have a subtle, edgy reference to religious and class identities. Pushpamala takes on the studio cinema picture and makes it the still of some picture unspooling both now and then.

Sukanya Rahman casts her directorial eye on the woman in the proscenium of her lobby display construction. Fertility symbol Nargis as Mother India with her plow, has served as an icon of the modern mother goddess for half a century. Sultry sirens and strongly determined women icons of the cinema appear here in their poster incarnations, performing together on another stage.

Sheba Chhachhi's earlier work involved the space of the feminine in our public consciousness, Her *Warrior/Saint* is a meditative rumination on the image of the ideal male, especially in cinema fan magazines and internet web sites. Violence and aggression – militaristic, terrorist and criminal – permeates our cinema; Sheba's male torso, casually pocketing the Buddha, becomes the space where these feelings bubble up: the benign and peaceful face of the earlier, ideal avatar, reflecting on the endless conflict of new male desire.

Abul Azad's pictures are of three icons of male identity as seen on street posters in the south: Dharmendra, the aggressive Jat from the north, Amitabh Bacchan, the angry young man, frustrated by his unfulfilled aspirations, and MG Ramachandran, the great southern star, as the lover. All of these actors have played these parts again and again.

Samar Jodha, working in the mode of a straight documentarian, has made a series of pictures of the "idiot box" in its setting in lower middle class homes. The electronic image joins the pantheon of the gods, religious and political icons, and decorative knick-knacks, becoming a household shrine spewing out fantasy, ads for the globalized ideal life, myth, and multi-channeled news of politics. These pictures are filled with desire, the satellite fed image joining the visual collage we build around us with a deceptive ease, like some bower bird decorating its nest.

Subodh Gupta's painted and sculpted works have had social violence as a central theme for many years. The political and caste violence in his native Bihar has become almost cinematic in its B-grade intensity. Subodh is at the moment playing a small-time hoodlum in *Haasil*, a film on college violence in North India; in his billboard painting *Let Me Make My Damn Art* (a take-off on a still from the film), he is featured wielding a gun. His own body has always served as a symbol of a modern myth, and it enters with gutsy aggression in his TV video, *Irresistible Attack*, made in Egypt during the recent invasion of Iraq. His manipulation of the B-grade triumph as it unfolded on the "idiot box" ends with a B-grade high, all male, and eventually, impotent. It encapsulates the helpless frustration and rage felt by the world as we witnessed the rape of our civilizational cousins.

My own pictures are about the world created by the painted billboards in the urban scene, their artists and their milieu. Another level of the visual from the movies which invades our everyday world: bloodthirsty wenches loom over lunch and Bhagat Singh – violent revolutionary, hung by the British in the 1930's – returns as a billboard ghost. As does Subodh Gupta's video, they serve to remind us that the struggle against Imperialism returns every summer (or every twelve years like the Kumbh mela) on a wider screen, with better effects and louder theme music. The summer blockbuster is here and so is the HEAT! (Ram Rahman)