

Made in India

Curated by Deepak Ananth and Jany Lauga, and mounted at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris, from 7th October to 31st December, *Indian Summer* showcases works by twenty-six

contemporary Indian artists, most of whom have 'emerged' in the 1990s. Subtitled, *The Young Indian Art Scene*, the show brings together works by artists from different generations, following various stylistic methods and employing diverse media. Featured here are works by artists like Anita Dube, the Raqs Media Collective, Bharti Kher, and Nataraj Sharma, among others. The show, the first of its kind in France, is one of a series of exhibitions on Indian art recently organized in Europe and America: there was the *Edge of Desire* show at the Asia Society and the Queens Museum of Art in New York, some time back, for instance.

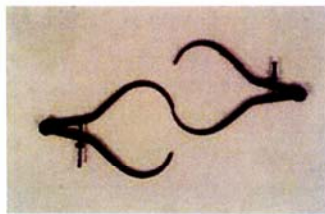
At the entrance of the gallery-space, one saw Atul Dodiya's much-discussed, painted metal-shutters, previously included in the *Bombay* section of the *Century City* exhibition. The rather disturbing piece, *Mahalakshmi*, comprising an image of the goddess, 'superimposed' on top of a black and white painting

Devika Singh visits an exhibition that showcases the plurality of contemporary Indian art practices to a French audience.

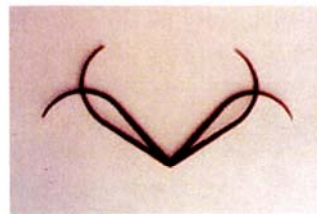
of dowry-victims who had committed suicide, brought out the irony of life in urban India, where contradictory worlds collide with devastating effect.

This work was set close to *I love my India*, a video work by Tejal Shah, in which young people, shooting at a fairground 'I love my India' balloon-board, were 'interviewed' about the Godhra massacre. Jitish Kallat's piece rendered Nehru's historical Independence speech in an intriguing play of twisted mirror reflections and singed, text distortions, radically altering the connotations of his final words, "Jai Hind". The overarching tone of some of the other works on display was, however, more playful. Subodh Gupta's *Rani*, a sculptural installation with a pink cow, was probably one of the most visually arresting pieces at the show.

The display also created an interesting dialogue between the early and later works of artists like Anita Dube, Sheela Gowda, Sheba Chhachhi, and Atul Dodiya. While the disturbing seductiveness of Dube's 'instruments' addressed the process of redefining pain and desire, Gowda's *Breaths*



Anita Dube. *Caliper I: Song of Love*. Steel and velvet. 26" x 13" x 1". 1999.



Anita Dube. *Caliper II: Song of Love*. Steel and velvet. 33.5" x 16.5" x 1". 1999.



Pushpamala N. *Portrait of a Christian Woman* from the triptych consisting of *Portrait of a Mohammedan Woman* and *Portrait of a Hindoo Woman*. Series of 3 B & W photographs. 51 cms x 66 cms each. Part of the *Bombay Photo Studio* series. 2000-2003. Courtesy Bose Pacia.

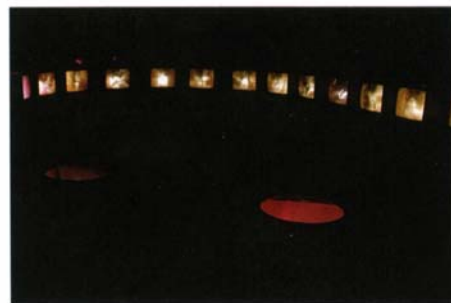
reminded us of ritual sacrificial violence. Gowda's piece, however, was installed in a somewhat cramped space, which was unfortunate, as this took away from its effectiveness. In this regard, other more large-sized sculptures and installations, like Ranjani Shettar's work, for example, that had been shown at the Fondation Cartier, could perhaps have been included in the exhibition.

The show made a strong case for representing female artists – their works, more often than not, have approached issues of social stereotyping and discussed the politics of representation. While Surekha's video piece, *Bhagirathi*, dealt with stories about women being sacrificed in certain Indian villages to appease rain-gods, Pushpamala N.'s images from the *Bombay Photo Studio* series attempted to (re)claim, question, and subvert clichéd mediatic representations of women. The female body was also central to Sonia Khurana's video, *Bird*. Other works made references to a

globalized, consumerist world, and the pervasive middle-class preoccupation with materialism and conspicuous consumption. The installation by Krishnaraj Chonat, for instance, illustrated this aspect of urban life admirably, while Navin Thomas's piece framed a tongue-in-cheek critique of the call center 'revolution'.

The highlight of the show was, however, Sheba Chhachhi's enticing *The Mermaid's Mirror*, an installation from the mid-'90s, where the visitor was surrounded by magic lanterns showing scenes from Meena Kumari's films; presented also were fragments from her poetry. The slightly blurry, black and white images, projected in slow motion, and the accompanying music, transported the viewer into an oneiric space.

While the texts included in the catalogue of the exhibition – by Deepak Ananth, Geeta Kapur, and Cédric Vincent – addressed post-colonialism and helped locate the show and its artists within today's international art-landscape, the general design of *Indian Summer* may have contradicted the critical agenda of the curators. Many found the bright yellow walls of the display space, the pink and orange colours used in the catalogue, as well as the profuse use of Devanagari script on the invitation and on the catalogue cover, a tad jarring.



Sheba Chhachhi. *The Mermaid's Mirror*. Installation using 36 Toy TVs and sound.