

NEWS AND FEATURES

Paris Autumn

This autumn, Chelsea gallery, Bose Pacia, has risen admirably to the challenge set forth by artist Pushpamala N. by assuming a Moulin Rouge garb for her show *Paris Autumn*, on view till October 25th. The walls, painted various shades of red, are bedecked with film stills, movie posters and lobby cards. On one wall, a mirror with a wide gilt frame reflects one of the artist's photographs, a scene from a Caravaggio painting that she has reenacted. The memorabilia is a token of the *Paris Autumn* cinematic experience that awaits the viewer behind a thick red curtain at the far end of the gallery. Almost like the tagline of a movie poster, the gallery states in its press release for the exhibition that the 35-minute experimental short film created from black and white still photographs is "Shot in Paris in the style of the gothic thriller, the artist plays detective investigating forgotten 16th century history."

Throughout the short feature, Pushpamala inveigles the viewer into her romps through Paris with characteristic ease. The expository stills capture Paris with the expected and almost necessary landmarks like the Eiffel Tower, the river Seine and the cafés along its banks in a pleasant travelogue. This bonhomie cleverly sets up the sinister poltergeist encounters that follow. The staccato movement of frames, their black and white format, and the sound effects describing the action and movement are particularly effective in creating an ominous and striking rapport between Pushpamala and the viewer. Pushpamala makes full use of the range of emotion at her disposal from startled gesticulations to candid tourist poses. Instead of the carefully constructed mis-en-scene productions of *Indian Lady* or *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs*, two of her earlier series of photographic works, Pushpamala does not rely on acute attention to detail in set and costume in *Paris Autumn*, but rather, as a gifted auteur, offers the story and the setting of Paris full reign.

There are a few intriguing counterpoints in the film. One is the framing of high art within low art. The latter may loosely be described as the film with its publicity material and the former as a key clue in the film, Caravaggio's canvas, *The Fortune Teller*. The jaunt to the Louvre and the study of *The Fortune Teller* lends *Paris Autumn* a historical cachet that it needs as an impetus to its arc. It allows Pushpamala, as transient artist, to tap into Paris, an otherwise dizzyingly layered and possibly mystifying proposition. The immersion in age-old royal intrigue is thrown into sharper relief by the unscripted inclusion of the 2005 Paris riots. Pushpamala wisely deconstructs the film's trajectory to make the allowance for such social unrest to show that Paris, past and present, remains a violent animal beneath its legendary charms.

The film's credits roll to an end with a quote from Walter Benjamin: "Boredom is the warm grey fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks. In this fabric we wrap ourselves when we dream."

Perhaps these lines point out how Pushpamala, presented with the gift of an inordinate amount of time in the City of Lights, has wrung as much as she possibly can out of the rich incidents, artful glances, and historical fancies it has offered her.