

PARIS

Indian Summer

École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts

The 1990s was a decade of tremendous upheaval and change in India: the rise of fundamentalist right wing politics and associated episodes of brutal violence coincided with the liberalization of India's economy, which opened India up to multinational interests, satellite television and the Internet, and the myriad effects of globalization. This sudden permeability is reflected in the eclecticism of the work included in "Indian Summer," which varies tremendously in medium, style and tone and focuses on 23 young metropolitan artists who emerged during that period, highlighting work produced over the last five years. Shedding the earnestness of earlier generations endlessly mired in the never-ending dialectic between tradition and modernity, these artists unapologetically >



Subodh Gupta ■ *The Way Home* ■ 1998-99 ■ Mixed media installation ■ Dimensions variable ■ Courtesy École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris

> appropriate, consume and retool contemporary artistic strategies to address local concerns, employing an approach that is often playful and humorous while retaining a critical edge.

This irreverence is exemplified by N. S. Harsha's site-specific installation, *Beautification of Marcel Duchamp* (2005), a panel placed in the apse of the main exhibition space that mimics the dull green and gold Beaux-Arts decorative mural behind it and inserts the name of that artistic troublemaker, Marcel Duchamp, into the hallowed halls of the academic École. A bullock-cartwheel crashes through the panel, simultaneously evoking India's rural majority and the Ashoka *chakra* circle at the center of the Indian flag. This seemingly flippant gesture carries significant weight—the artist confidently claims Duchamp as an artistic forefather, situating his own art beyond nation-specific aesthetics and within an avant-garde trajectory of Duchampian conceptualism, while simultaneously reemphasizing the importance of his local context.

Atul Dodiya employs a comparable strategy in his *Cracks in Mondrian* (2004-05) paintings, introducing strong local references to Mondrian's spare geometric compositions. Artistic icons of the West are not the only targets; Subodh Gupta's striking sculpture, *Rani* (2001), a life-size fuchsia fiberglass cow perched on a multi-color striped platform, "desacralizes" a revered cultural emblem through recourse to kitsch and decorative motifs.

Audible throughout much of the exhibition is the pathos-laden but often grating lament of Mona Ahmed, an aging *hijra* eunuch prostitute and the subject of Sonia Khurana's video, *Mona's Song* (2003). Captured in various settings, Mona sings a poignant song of personal disappointment, regret and unfulfilled promise, which reverberates through the galleries as an indictment of the significant failures of the secular, democratic nation state, the subject of other outstanding works such as Jitish Kallat's multi-panel installation, *Public Notice* (2003), and Tejal Shah's video, *I Love My India* (2003).

Eschewing didactic wall text and labels and an overpowering organizational schema, the curators successfully chose instead to arrange works in informal groupings allowing the artworks to communicate directly, and the viewer to gradually uncover the many themes addressed: popular culture and public space, the decorative and kitsch, the subaltern body, rituals of purity and cleansing and their relationship to injustice and violence, portraiture, performance and identity, feminist issues and critiques of state and religious institutions. ■ MURTAZA VALI