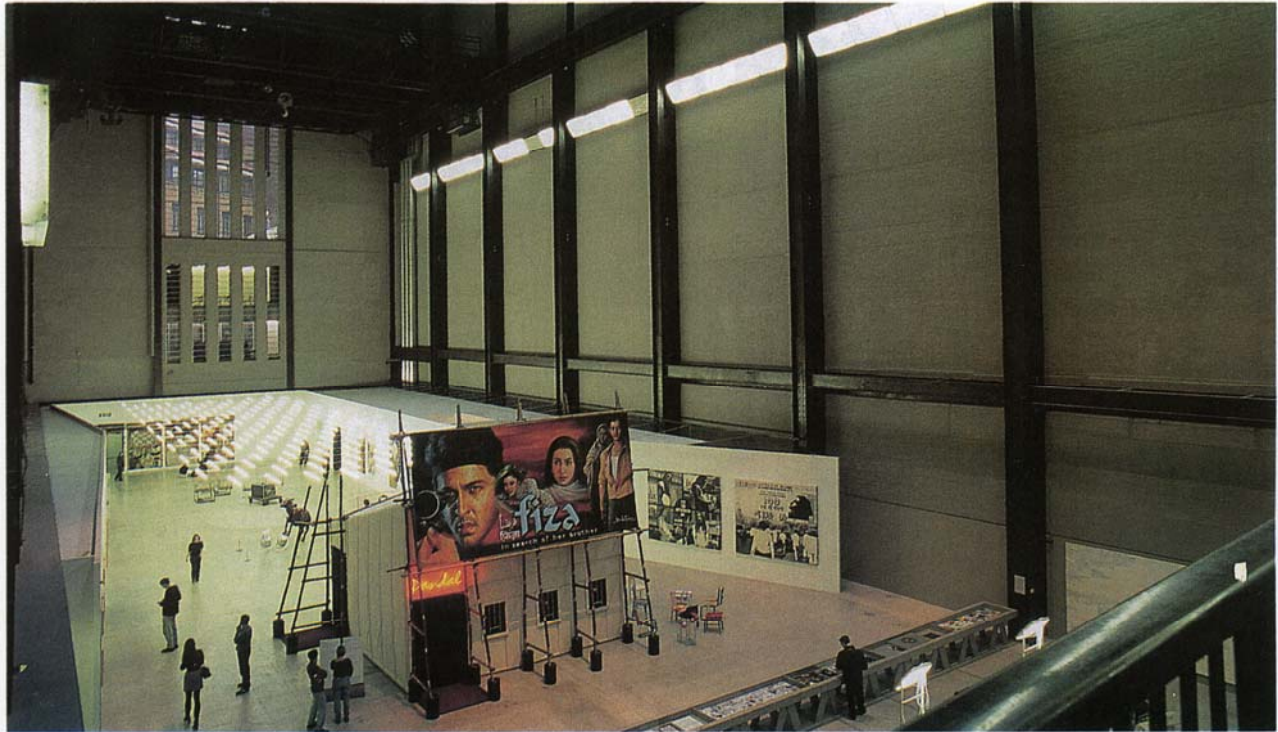


Jootis for the Urban Flâneur

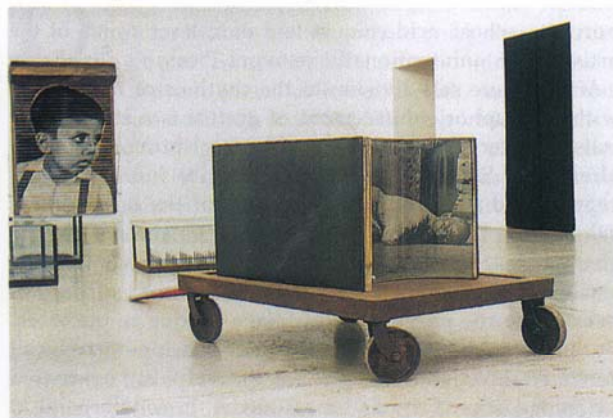
Deepak Ananth feels that the Mumbai section of the Tate Modern Show, *Century City*, has been a successful representation of the metropolis's urban visual culture set against the backdrop of globalisation.



'Bombay/ Mumbai' in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern. Top-angle view of the exhibition layout shows the Pandal designed by Sen Kapadia. It is mounted with a banner of the film *Fiza* painted by Balkrishna Art. The Pandal (Canvas, ms pipes, metal drums, cement concrete, bamboo, plywood. Main structure 4.5m x 6m x 6m; bamboo façade with mounted cinema banner, 6.2m x 6m x 1.2m.) serves as a mini-theatre for a continuous screening programme. To the right of the Pandal some of Kausik Mukhopadhyay's 15 readymade chairs; on the wall beyond two paintings by Girish Dahiwalé.

"Not to find one's way about in a city may well be uninteresting and banal... But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – this calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, and bars, must speak to the wanderer... Paris taught me this art of straying ..."

Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle*, 1932



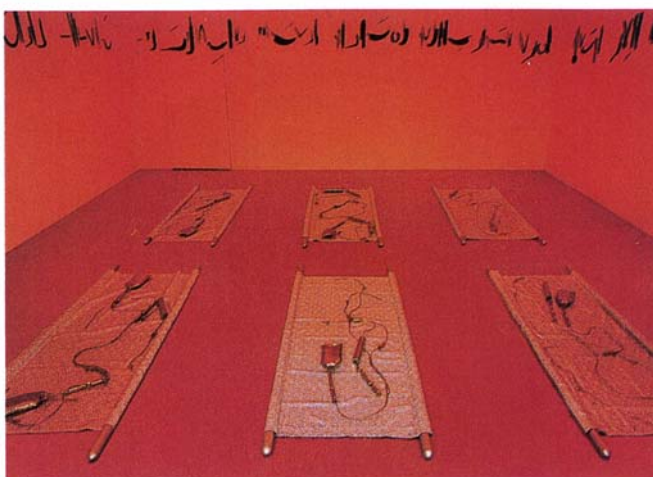
Vivan Sundaram with Atul Dodiya on the far wall. Vivan Sundaram. *Gun Carriage*, 1995. (Remade 2000). Photograph (detail) by Hoshi Jal (Times of India, Bombay 1993), acrylic sheet, steel, 106.7 x 292.1 x 104.1 cm. Collection: the artist, New Delhi.

Century City: *Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, the Tate Modern's first major exhibition, is not quite an invitation to stray, although it does offer a forest of signs, albeit within institutionally decreed spatial enclosures and temporal limits. The exhibition "explores the relationship between art and the city, presenting defining moments of the Modern through a global perspective". It focuses on Paris in the years between 1905 and 1915, Vienna 1908-1918, Moscow 1916-1930, Rio de Janeiro 1950-1964, Lagos 1955-1970, Tokyo 1967-1973, New York 1969-1974, London 1990-2001 and Bombay 1992-2001. But the show doesn't unfold chronologically, anymore than the accompanying catalogue, which lists the cities (and the essays devoted to them) in an alphabetical order. While the

arbitrariness of such a sequence makes for a less hierarchical overview of the international scene in question, on a presentational level however, one does have the sensation of occasionally mentally stubbing one's toe when passing from one section to another. (The exceptions are Bombay and London which occupy the vast Turbine Hall on the ground floor, a space that is at a considerable remove from the fourth floor galleries housing the other cities.)

It would have been visually arresting, for instance, to suggest imaginative relays (unexpected affinities or pointed dissonances) between the different cities, an Ariadne's thread, as it were, thereby making the transitions – what Benjamin would have characterised as a “science of thresholds” – from one space to another conceptually acute and illuminating. For instance, the presentation of works by the Mono Ha or “School of Things” group, a movement that emerged in Tokyo in 1968 in reaction to the overbearing Americanisation of Japanese society, and, more generally, the emergence of a conceptually inclined art in Japan, could have been linked to, say, the not dissimilar questioning of the technocratic bias of Minimalism, the flourishing of dance and of performance art, the prevalence of a pointed social and feminist critique in New York in the early seventies.

In a related vein, the great utopian moment exemplified by the art and cinema produced in Moscow during the period between the Russian Revolution and the onset of Stalin's reign – the most “classically” beautiful of all the sections in the exhibition – could have been imaginatively linked to Neoconcretism, the specifically Brazilian prolongation of Constructivism in the work of Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark. One might also contrast the (Western) civilisational malaise emblematised by the Vienna of Schiele, Kokoschka and Freud with the section devoted to Paris, but to the latter's detriment, so lacklustre and uneven are the choice and the display of Fauve and Cubist works, so feebly indicative of what made Paris the fountainhead of art and culture in the early decades of the last century. Equally disappointing is the experience of the Lagos section, too meagre visually for visitors to have



Rummana Hussain. *A Space for Healing*, 1999. Metal implements, PVC poles, cloth, plastic objects, gold paint, vermilion paint, light and sound component, 500 x 500 x 500 cm. (installed approx.). Purchased.2000. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation, Brisbane.

On a presentational level however, one does have the sensation of occasionally mentally stubbing one's toe when passing from one section to another. (The exceptions are Bombay and London which occupy the vast Turbine Hall on the ground floor, a space that is at a considerable remove from the fourth floor galleries housing the other cities.)



Atul Dodiya. *Missing I-III*, 2000. Enamel paint on metal roller shutters and laminate boards. Each 233.7 x 167.6 cm. on 274.5 x 183 cm. (*Missing IV*, 2000, Enamel paint on metal roller shutters 233.7 x 167.6 cm). Collection: The artist, Mumbai.



Nalini Malani. *Hamletmachine*, 2000. Video installation, 20 minutes. 4 LC video projectors, 4 DVD players, 4 speakers, 2 amplifiers, salt, mylar, mirror. Closed room 400 x 600 x 900 cm. Collection: the artist, Mumbai.



Raghubir Singh. *From Bombay: Gateway to India: Commuters, Mahim*, 1991. Photograph. 63.5 x 85 cm. Courtesy Estate of Raghubir Singh.



Sharmila Samant. *Global Clones*, 1998. Video projection with installation, 80 x 88 cm. Collection: the artist, Mumbai

an idea of the cultural ferment (as underscored in the catalogue text) that the city witnessed in the aftermath of its independence from British colonial rule in 1960.

As for the former capital of the British Empire, the London we see is fully of the contemporary (multicultural) moment but in a somewhat restrained mode, at a welcome remove from the image of "Cool Britannia" that has stuck to the Britpack. Rachel Whitread's photos of house demolitions, the rag and bone shop of Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, the enigmatic suburban promenade of Gillian Wearing, attest, in different ways, to a sharp, street-level view of contemporary life that is an antidote to the high-street *chic* and gentrification of London in the past decade.

But it is in the space occupied by *Bombay/Mumbai 1992-2001* section that the agenda of *Century City...* – urban visual culture in the era of globalisation – is most fully negotiated. The energy manifest in this section (nothing to do with the turbines that were once housed here!) is a measure of the flair with which the contradictions of this great post-colonial metropolis have been translated – by the curators Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha – into a visually compelling experience. Here the rambunctious heroes of Bollywood jostle with the modernist icons of Tyeb Mehta, a high and low polarity that is turned on its head in the watercolours of Bhupen Khakhar and in the paintings of Atul Dodiya. The latter are painted on rolling metal shop shutters that reveal, when raised, another painting underneath, a palimpsest of the urban as it were, that might also be taken as a figure for the city itself. In their multilayered transparency, Dodiya's images are accommodations of different levels of the real as filtered via the dream kitsch of commercial cinema or the effigies of historical figures; but translucence as a trope might also body forth the lurid eroticism of Khakhar's lumpen lovers as it might signal the spectral presence of fascist menace in Nalini Malani's video installation.

And the transparency of the vitrines commemorating the victim of communal violence in Vivan Sundaram's installation ensures that the viewer's gaze can no longer be innocent of the political violence that has scarred the city: the vitrine is both glass and *glas*, "death knell". The secular covenant that was broken in the wake of the riots in Bombay in 1992 is a defining perspective in the conceptual elaboration of this section; its most poignant expression is the mourning chamber awash in red realised by Rummana Hussain just before her death. "Mumbai", in this light, is the sepulchral opposite of "Bombay". Here indeed is a "century city" that is Janus-faced, complex, contradictory. But Janus is the god of beginnings, of the threshold: here are the immigrants, the workers, the office boys, the secretaries, the teachers on the morning train in its diagonal surge towards the *Gateway to India* in Raghubir Singh's panoramic photograph; and here is a pair of *Global Clones*, Sharmila Samant's brilliant video projection of a pair of shoes in continual metamorphosis and mutation; forever advancing yet always at the same spot, now *chappals*, now "Nikes", now *jootis*. These shoes were made for walking. A (postmodernist?) *flâneur* will need them. But what ground is it beneath her feet?