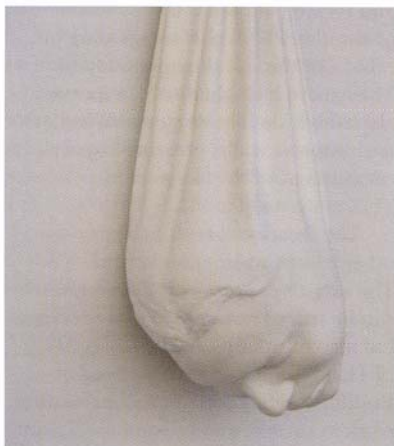


## NEW DELHI

### A. Balasubramaniam: (IN)VISIBLE

TALWAR GALLERY



Throughout his work in diverse media, including printmaking, painting and sculpture, A. Balasubramaniam toys with contrasting ideas: evanescence and physicality, illusion and reality, playfulness and sobriety. New York's Talwar Gallery inaugurated its new space in New Delhi with "(IN)VISIBLE," a solo exhibition of the artist's recent works. Since 2000, Balasubramaniam has increasingly explored sculpture and installation and this show, taking up the gallery's two floors, indicates his evolution as an artist.

One work, *Breath* (2007), remains invisible until it is pointed out. Balasubramaniam bored two shallow holes into a wall at the height of his nostrils. This simple, haunting intervention evokes the presence of a body by underscoring its absence while also directing one's attention, as in yoga, to the act of breathing. The work reveals Balasubramaniam's skill at provoking unconscious reactions from viewers in order to communicate philosophical ideas.

*Breath's* approach to embodying the imperceptible contrasts with the gigantic and tactile *Tree Inside* (2006), cast in fibreglass and silicone from a section of fallen tree trunk found on the roadside. This immense piece dominates an entire room in the gallery, mediating between nature and technology, reality and fantasy, as it suggests the possibility of a narrative—*how did this get here?*—while faithfully reproducing the contours and textures of a mundane object.

Upstairs, a seemingly forgotten iron beam propped up against the wall in *Untitled* (2006) draws viewers into a sudden world of disbelief. The false

wall, made from fibreglass and painted white, sags conspicuously where the beam's tip rests against it. An earlier work, *Untitled* (2002), displayed downstairs, follows a similar tack. In this case, a solid wall is seemingly pulled, like fabric, by a rope placed in a cast of the artist's hand that extends from an adjacent wall. These optical tricks, though dazzling in themselves, undermine the old aphorism that seeing is believing.

Balasubramaniam's quirky sense of humor is most evident in *Gravity* (2006), a white cast of his face plunging to the ground in a sack suspended from a peg, and in *Energy Field* (2006), a golden apple placed at eye level on a pristine white pedestal. Touch it and you receive a sudden electric shock. The electrified apple simultaneously alludes to the temptation of Adam and Eve and Newton's discovery of the law of gravity, and appropriately reflects the themes of exploration and experience that resonate throughout the show. ■ MINHAZZ MAJUMDAR

A. Balasubramaniam ■ *Gravity* ■ 2006 ■ Fibreglass and acrylic ■ 35 x 10 x 7 in. ■ Courtesy Talwar Gallery, New York/New Delhi

## MUMBAI

### Anju Dodiya: THRONE OF FROST

BODHI ART GALLERY

Pomp came with a price in Anju Dodiya's "Throne of Frost" in the opulent main hall of Baroda's Lakshmi Vilas Palace, built in the 19th century to house the Gaekwad royal family. Organized by Bodhi Art Gallery, the exhibition of the Mumbai-based artist's massive, freestanding double-sided panels was conceived with this setting in mind.

The panels, some as large as eight feet high, consist of a single embroidered motif stitched onto a brilliantly-hued cushioned fabric—a goldfish on peach brocade, a golden lion on a navy background—on one side, and watercolor renditions of courtly personages from different cultures—Japanese, Turkish, Indian—on the other. They were arranged imposingly around a rectangular carpet of shattered mirrors the artist had strewn across the hall's Italian mosaic floor. As reflections of artwork and architecture splintered in the mirrors, the sliced-up images took on a sinister edge.

Dodiya's work balances opposing extremes. "Throne of Blood" combines lurking menace with the fragility of delicate embroidery and faint, watery pools of pastels, flesh-tones and smudges of black in the paintings. In *The Shame of Greed* (2006), a damsel in a Grecian garment holds a jeweled cistern, her leg chained to the ground. The embroidered reverse side of the panel depicts an intricately carved key, too far away to set her free. In *The Knot* (2006), a charcoal sketch of a face gazes gloomily into the distance. Its black visage disrupts the pale rose-gold glow of the watercolor background, while on the reverse an embroidered love knot looks suspiciously like a noose. Just as images of wealth abound—a courtier wearing pearls, a woman with elaborately coiffed hair—so, too, do intimations of danger. A self-portrait of the artist plays with glowing sticks of fire in one watercolor, in another she rests on a crocodile, a sharp crystal dangling overhead.

In Baroda, Dodiya's display was exciting because the fantastic sampling





of theatrical characters—women from *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, self-portraits and long-haired gentlemen—played a different role from the one that figures often adopt in her works, which entice viewers to engage them up-close. The broken glass disrupted this immediacy by foiling any attempts to approach the paintings. When Dodiya's show traveled to Bodhi's gallery in Mumbai, where it had an extended exhibition run, the white walls were meant to generate the same mood of frosty detachment as the missing mirrors. But the metaphor fell flat in the gallery space, where the panels were so closely packed together that inaccessibility seemed an unintended side-effect rather than an artistic choice.

Here viewers could step around the lined-up panels, and see them from all angles. But while this proximity was exciting, it could not compensate for the mirrors' deliberate disorder. No doubt beauty and blood haunt "Throne" intriguingly, but much of the exhibition's glamour melted away when it left the landscape for which it was conditioned. ■ ZEHRA JUMABHOY

Anju Dodiya ■ *Throne of Frost* ■ 2007 ■ Installation at Lakshmi Vilas Palace, Baroda, March 2007 ■ Photo by Pablo Bartholomew ■ Courtesy Bodhi Art Gallery

## HELSINKI

### Wind from the East

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART KIASMA

The wave of museum exhibitions in Europe dedicated to emerging art from Asia (SEE AAP 53) has now reached Finland, where "Wind from the East," organized by Kiasma curators Tuula Karjalainen and Marja Sakari, takes a synthesizing approach by presenting the works of eight artists from three countries: China, Thailand and Indonesia. This arbitrary grouping, together with the exhibition title, reflects a reductive approach compared to the multifaceted realities on the ground. Still, the curators contextualize the exhibition as a general introduction to three countries where artistic activity is particularly influenced by difficult social contexts: rapidly developing economies, religious conflicts and human rights issues.

While the exhibition provides a substantial platform for Indonesian artists underrepresented in the West, such as rising talent Eko Nugroho (SEE AAP 53), it gives precedence to widely established artists who have worked as "mediators" between local concerns and international viewpoints, original



and globalized cultures, tradition and contemporaneity. This is exemplified by the inclusion of "classical" masterpieces by the late Chen Zhen (1955-2000)

(SEE AAP 33, 38, 47, 49), who spent much of his career in Paris, for example, "Beyond the Vulnerability" (1999-2000), a series of houses built together with children using little colored wax candles, and *Un-interrupted Voice* (1998), which turns the metallic structure of a big cradle into a drum.

The lone Thai artist included, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (SEE AAP 23, 45, 53) is less predictable. She is represented by several well-traveled works—namely, *Reading the Corpse* (1997-98), where the artist holds a delicate dialogue with corpses in a morgue—and more recent videos like *Feces, Life, Love, Lust* (2006), which relates the affectionate relationship between a woman and her dog by following their daily routine. In it, the distance between owner and animal gradually disappears through their emotional sharing. The respect for human values, so prevalently manifested in much of her work, recalls the Roman concept of *pietas*, or devotion to others, offering the possibility of a valuable bridge between Eastern and Western cultures.

The work of the Chinese photographer Hu Yang also articulates sharp contrasts between tradition and innovation, local culture and economic pressure. His "Shanghai Living" (2005) documents the uncontrolled development of consumerism in the Chinese megalopolis and its dramatic social consequences (SEE AAP 48). The artist researched 500 private homes in Shanghai, recording

the stories of families and individuals from diverse social classes. His simple documentary approach shows the solitude of migrant laborers in their dormitories as well as the "empty" luxury of the nouveaux riches.

But out of this surprising chorus of images and faces emerges one wish common to everybody: the longing for a better life. ■ LUIGI FASSI

Hu Yang ■ *Shanghai Living* ■ 2005 ■ C-print ■ 46 x 61 cm ■ Edition of eight ■ Courtesy Kiasma

## LONDON

### Anup Mathew Thomas:

METROPOLITAN  
GASWORKS



A young photographer born in Cochin in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, Anup Mathew Thomas divides his time between India and England. His London debut at Gasworks consists of three series of photographic works, "Cabinet" (2007), "Metropolitan" (2006) and "Light Life" (2005). Mediating between art and journalistic photography, Thomas's works emphasize the political and social intricacies of local society. By composing each of the photographs within a series in an identical manner, Thomas reveals the subtle differences