

Ranbir Kaleka

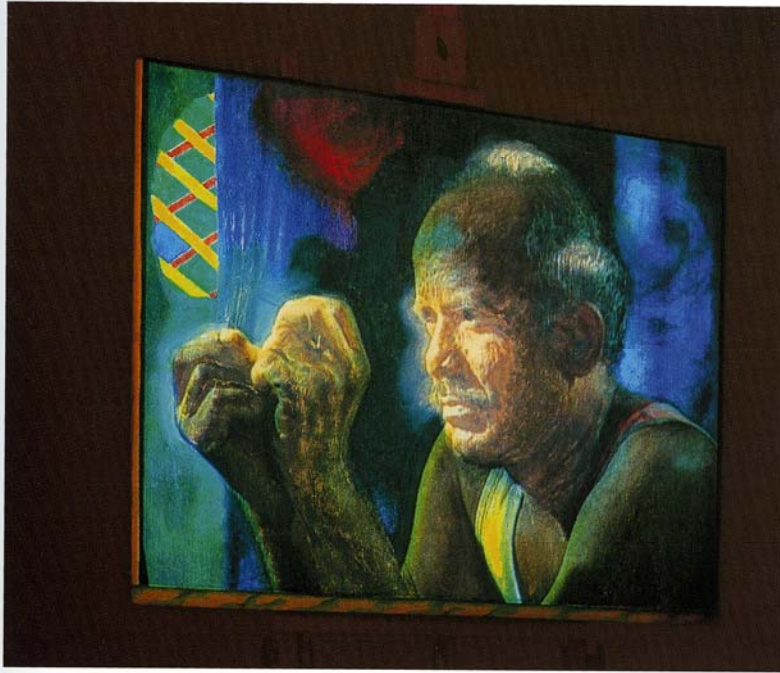
Ranbir Kaleka refers to *Crossings* as: "a magico-realist drama of private lives and historical engagements with a smudging of boundaries which bring reality into fantasy and fantasy into our reality." The installation is an unusual combination of media in which a classic panorama of paintings seems to come alive. The video images on occasion move away from their painted selves leaving behind a color image or a monochromatic ghost as an "after-image." They travel to other paintings, sometimes to revisit past moments in their memories, before returning to inhabit and reanimate their "material" bodies. The stories engage us in the overlapping of both mediums that bring forth an extra dimension.

Ranbir Kaleka made his first combination of video and painting in 1999, with *Man Threading a Needle*. It shows a middle-aged working-class man sitting in a brightly colored environment focusing on his task. Nothing happens while he concentrates on threading the needle. You hear him breathing and in the distance the sound of a passing train. Kaleka's interest in this unusual combination of mediums sprang not so much from an interest in video but from his abiding passion for cinema. For it was in cinema that he found an intriguing form of intensity where a *moment could become overcharged*. This was a goal he had set for himself in his paintings but felt that this could shift to yet another level.

Kaleka has been contemplating the concept of *Crossings* for some years. He has been working the idea through in all its complexities with regard to scale, choreography and sound so it carries the "charge" he has been seeking. The video/paintings tell two intermingling stories. One is about a group of people that seem to have been rendered homeless. Without any possessions, they wait at the edge of a political/geographical/psychological boundary where they twitch, shudder, inspect

Ranbir Kaleka. *Crossings*, 2005.
Four-channel video installation with four acrylic paintings on canvas, sound, 15 minutes.
Collection of Shumita and Arani Bose, New York.
Photography: Courtesy of Bose Pacia Gallery.





Ranbir Kaleka. *Man Threading a Needle*, 1999. Single-channel video installation with painting on canvas, sound, 3 minutes. Collection of the artist. Photography: Courtesy of the artist.

one another, or occasionally holler into the distance. Among them is a sick person who sleeps in a fetal position. The second story is about a boy's "rites of passage," in which symbols of community and self-identity are passed on, in this case a Sikh turban. The turban is one of the symbols of the adult male Sikh. Here, it has not only a religious and cultural meaning, but it also gained historical significance in India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. The older boy in the video allows the turban to be tied on his head. The second child shakes his head in refusal when offered a choice of multicolored turbans. After an extensive voyage to an alien land, the younger boy leaves the two older men who are preparing the long cloth of the turban. He runs toward windmills in a vast open landscape and the men knowingly smile at each other with a hint of admiration for the little child in his acceptance of the "inevitable." In an interview with the author, Kaleka defined the contents of this work: "It all relates to the notion of desire for a place. A psychological space that allows you a movement from one point to another. Where one space of comfort leads to another space of comfort."¹

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¹ Ranbir Kaleka in an interview with Johan Pijnappel, 3 March, 2006.