

# The New York Times

**Ranbir Kaleka**

Bose Pacia

508 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 29

Ranbir Kaleka's contribution to "Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India" at the Queens Museum of Art last year was a colorful little tent holding a pulpit-shaped ministage and folding chairs. The installation was modeled on a portable puppet theater, though the featured attraction was a video. The film, shot and hand-colored by the artist, used real actors and animation to tell a romantic tale of love thwarted but fulfilled. Sophisticated in concept, ingeniously low tech in form, it was a delight.

The same can be said of "Crossings," the main piece in Mr. Kaleka's first New York solo show. Though the tent is gone, a four-channel video plays panoramically across a gallery wall, and the narrative is multilayered and elusive. The four separate projections, set side by side, are different in content, but share certain images, including characters who occasionally move from one screen to another.

The characters themselves - a bird seller, a family group, an older man in a suit and tie, and a pair of Sikh men drying fabric for a turban - appear in two overlapping forms, as filmed actors and as figures in large paintings on which the video is projected. The bird seller, for example, is first seen sitting immobile, a painted image. Suddenly, he comes to life, transferring doves from one cage to another. Then he returns to being a painting again, with filmed scenes of street traffic playing around and behind him.

Although the exact plot of "Crossings" is hard to make out, the atmosphere feels both richly detailed and fantastic. And these qualities are distilled in a second piece, in a smaller gallery. It looks straightforward enough: an oil painting, sitting on an easel, of a man threading a needle. Except that every now and then the man blinks or gulps; his hand twitches ever so slightly. The piece is, of course, another multimedia sleight of hand, in which reality and illusion dance a gentle dance, and the huge, absurd magic called art plays the tune.

HOLLAND COTTER

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