

ART PROBE

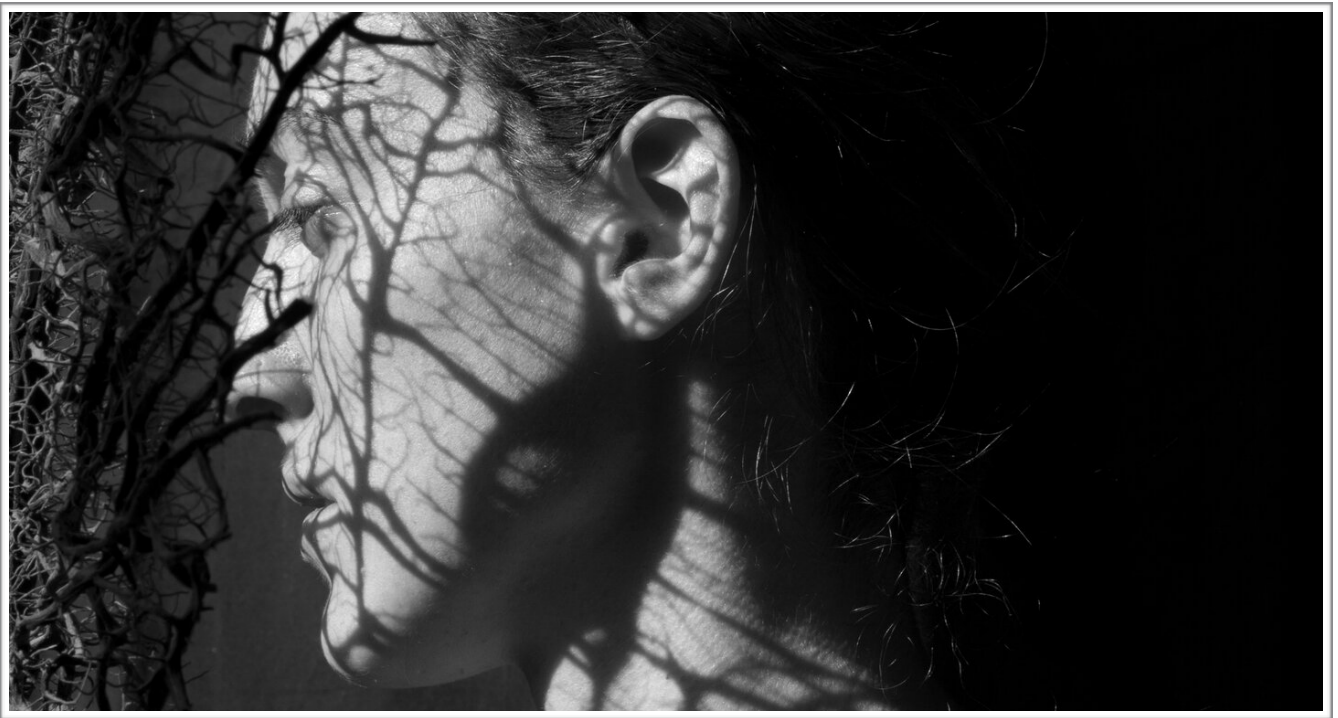
ISSUE #4

- Shristi Sainani

Exhibition : *FRIN/GE* — group exhibition (26th November - 1st January)

Artist : Group Exhibition

Venue : Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi



Detail of Untitled by artist Juul Kraijer (2012)

Source : Vadehra Art Gallery

Based in New Delhi (India), *Vadehra Art Gallery* puts up a group exhibition curated by *Shaleen Wadwana*, featuring 25 artworks. These artworks showcase the use of a wide range of media, fabricated by artists including — *Afrah Shafiq*, *Ruby Chishti*, *Anju Dodiya*, *Atul Dodiya*, *Sharbendu De*, *Renuka Rajiv* and *Avril Stormy Unger*, *Juul Kraijer*, *Ashim Purkayastha* and *Mithu Sen*; some of who are leading contemporary artists in the country.

Each artist tackles contemporaneity using disparate media. One can see both the manipulation of traditional techniques of painting, with unique stains of tea liquor and stamp pad ink as well as techno-savvy forms of art-making. For instance — *Ruby Chishti* uses recycled textiles to shed light on the impact of the pandemic in USA, *Rajiv* and *Unger* document the changing urban fabric of Bangalore city (India), *Shafiq* produces a interactive stimulated bot while, *Sen* interacts with the viewer through a QR code. *FRIN/GE* as an entity, aims to unpack concepts revolving around human behaviour, which serve as building blocks for contemporary realities.¹

¹ *FRIN/GE* — *Vadehra Art Gallery*, 2020

Some of my favourite pieces from the exhibition were:

1) **Ulhas Series, 2019**

Artist : Ashim Purkayastha



Source : Vadehra Art Gallery

Ashim Purkayastha is an Indian artist, born in the Bengali speaking region of Digboi, Assam (1967). He is acclaimed for being eclectic in his art-making methodologies; consequently, addressing socio-political conditions of his home state and the country. In 2002, his controversial series called *Gandhi Man* led to Purkayastha's remarkable fame.² He sees himself not just as an artist but also as a social activist, keeping issues of contemporaneity at the fore-front of his work, stating — “My work is not nostalgic, it takes on the problems of an industrialising society head-on.”³

² Ashim Purkayastha - Bio — Vadehra Art Gallery, 2020

³ A. Purkayastha, n.d

At *FRIN/GE*, one comes across Purkayastha's *Ulhas series*. When translated (from Hindi) the word, Ulhas, equates to happiness or delight. Through this series he depicts the inner ecosystem of man, constantly battling his demons, untangling himself to find a place of joy.⁴ He uses a fascinating media of tea liquor, watercolour, stamp pad ink on hand-made paper to give rise to figurative compositions wrestling with these fiends. This piece, as a part of the series, is particularly interesting due to its political nature. When looked at closely, one can see at the bottom of the piece, what looks like policemen protecting a politician. While the cops are armed and alert, the politician seems unbothered by the events around him. A blown up version of the politician floats as a violet ghost above the scenario, instilling his dominance. The piece directly translates to the police-bias which exists in the country.⁵

2) Ngwalidew Yobin Searches for a Portal, 2013

Artist : Sharbendu De



Source : Vadehra Art Gallery

Sharbendu De is a lens-based artist, living and working in New Delhi. He has worked for several NGOs and at places which have previously suffered from natural disasters; including the Nepal during its earthquakes (2015), Jammu & Kashmir Floods (2014), Uttarakhand flash floods (2013 & 2014) and the Asian Tsunami (2004-08). His work is influenced by deliberations on the human society, gender, climate change, environmental degradation and its impact on human and non-human societies.⁶

⁴ *FRIN/GE* — Vadehra Art Gallery, 2020

⁵ According to mint news, results from the survey state — police forces seem riddled with prejudices. Police personnel display a definite bias against minority communities. Around 50% of all police personnel believe that Muslims are somewhat more likely to commit crimes, according to the Common Cause-CSDS survey. Similar but weaker biases are also found for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

⁶ *About* — Sharbendu De, n.d.

For *FRIN/GE*, De looks to the Lisu tribe, found in the highlands of southwest-China/Arunachal Pradesh (India). He pays an homage to their identity, fusing their routines with cinematic drama, creating a contemporary language. His prints on photo rag bright whites, have a dream-like demeanour, transporting the viewer to an arena filled with fantasy. De intends to dilute the colonial documentary eye brought often to the Lisu people, to imply a unique way of story telling.⁷

In De's piece, *Ngwalidew Yobin Searches for a Portal*, one can see a man looking into a portal with a dog sitting beside him. There is also the presence of artificial light that plays an important role in this composition; seen in two zones of the print i.e projected from the portal and hanging on the left hand side of the image. The piece hints at unseen treasures within untapped land— in terms of stories, identities and resources. To me, it speaks about the idle potential of the usually mistreated or abandoned places of the country.

3) **Waiting in the forest, 2013**

Artist : Sharbendu De



Source : Vadehra Art Gallery

Finally, my last pick of the lot would be another De, called *Waiting in the Forest*. Following his quintessential theatrical format, this piece has a wonderful surreal quality to it. What one sees is an older male figure (perhaps, father or older brother) huddled in between younger children, midst of Tibeto-Burman forestry. They seem to be caught up in what the television has to offer, rather than enjoying their natural setting. The television is not a new age LCD, but an older model rarely found today in cities; showcasing how the Lisu tribe exists in a space between traditional and modern. The piece also communicates a coeval problem, one of technology taking over.

What steals the show is the neglected maroon Aster flower that sits beside the television.

⁷ Lachowsky, 2020

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