

THE POWER
OF THE
COMPACT CITY

Rubric



gallery g

ISSUE 11 DEC 2016

HI'S, BYES AND BIENNALES

It's December and we hope that 2016's been a great year for you. This issue comes to you after several hectic, satisfying months here at **gallery g**. So much is always happening that we need to catch our breath and pause also to note everything that's taken place.

It's also fun to share all this with you, our reader, as someone who's interested in what we do always.

First of all, we've expanded out into the atrium of Maini Sadan, the Maini HQ where we're based.

This is a logical move with which to keep pace with how our activities are growing in scope and size. It's got gracious proportions, lots of light and air and the look-at-us factor that every gallery should have. It lets us display many more artworks as well as defining different areas for various gallery functions, facilities and events.

The gallery is also home, of course, to the Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation office which enables a very fruitful synergy for both organisations and our

clients: there are a couple of shows coming up about which we'll keep you posted.

OTHER MOVES

Aakash Menon, our FIO, leaves us to study further in New Zealand: his enthu worldview added much zing to the daily routine. Now it's experience and managerial gravitas as we warmly welcome Ramya Rajagopal, CEO and T.S. Prasad, Head Ops.

This issue has lots you'll enjoy so, on, without further ado.

– Gitanjali Maini



RRVHF'S LEGACY HIT

ROYAL LITHOGRAPHY AND LEGACY AT THE NGMA

It was the National Gallery of Modern Art's most popular show. Over 14,000 people, grownups and children, came to see *Royal Lithography and Legacy* the Raja Ravi Varma lithograph show held by the Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation that ran from early July all through September. Spread over the main corridor and four rooms, the collection was classified by subject, one each for the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and so on.

Many of these visitors came twice, some more,

The lithographs came from Ganesh's own collection as well as a few from other collectors like Vijaynath Shenoy, of the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village (see opposite page) in Manipal.

For the Foundation this was the first major public event since it was established last year and a triumph of conviction – that there was a contemporary audience for Varma's work, that it still held a tremendous appeal – and of a year's curating, planning and networking. As feedback had it, would art lovers ever see its like again?



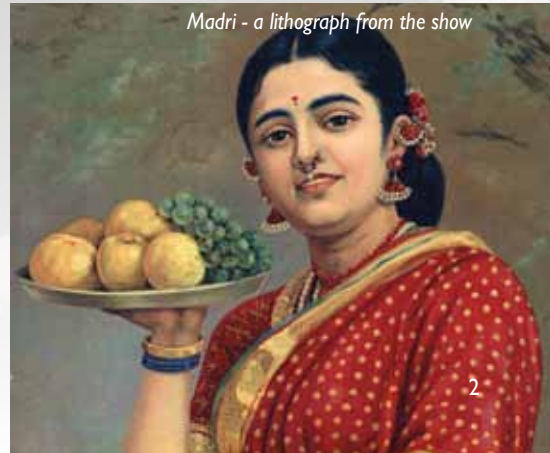
WALKTALKSHOW Foundation Honorary Secretary Ganesh Shivaswamy (back to the camera, centre right) on one of his curated walks

bringing others with them: the collection touched a chord, rare for an art event. For the older people the images in the Divinities room held a particular nostalgia. These were pictures familiar from ancestral and childhood homes: the images that found pride of place in so many homes all over India during the first half of the twentieth century.

KEEN NOSTALGIA

The Outreach programmes anchored by Rupika Chawla and Manu S. Pillai, both authors and cognoscenti of Varma's oeuvre, life and times, and Foundation Honorary Secretary Ganesh Shivaswamy's curated walks, too, were crowd-pleasers.

Well, the Foundation is working as relentlessly as ever to make sure that yes, they would.



Madri - a lithograph from the show



Ganesh, Chief Guest former Chief Justice of India Mr. M.N.Venkatachaliah and Gitanjali Maini



Manu S. Pillai and Rupika Chawla in conversation

VIJAYNATH SHENOY: THE RAJA RAVI VARMA MUSEUM



Left and centre: Harish Pai and Vijaynath Shenoy of the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Trust, with Ganesh Shivaswamy, Sandeep and Gitanjali Maini

March 2016 We'd heard so much about Vijaynath Shenoy of the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village, who rescued the Ravi Varma printing press from Lonavla but the Foundation team could only visit the Village in Manipal (which opened to the public in May) now, thanks to Harish Pai, a Hasta Shilpa trustee, and Sandeep Maini, Chairman, Maini Group.

Mr. Shenoy discovered, transported, and re-erected 26 heritage buildings, palaces, homes and museums with their furniture, fittings, artifacts and objets d'art, at the Village site, his family home. Among these heritage structures are an erstwhile Mahal from Kukanoor here in Karnataka, a Deccani Nawab Mahal from near Hampi, a Goan Portuguese home, a Bangalore cantonment one and another from Tirunelveli.

PAST TESTAMENTS

There are eight museums and galleries, with superb collections of Tanjore paintings, clocks, pottery, utensils, pooja samaan and much else. For us of course, the most special was the Ravi Varma Museum where he installed the abandoned Varma press itself which would otherwise have been lost to posterity, with paraphernalia like lithographic printing stones being used as manhole covers and flooring in Government schools. He salvaged prints of Varma's work as well as those of the latter's peers and later artists, paint pots, phone bills, books and, ironically, considering the Press was destroyed by fire, the fire insurance policy.

Everything is carefully maintained under the supervision of this retired banker and lifelong collector who singles out Harish Pai, for believing in his vision, apart from all those who've supported him. We owe Mr. Shenoy our gratitude for preserving all these legacies and keeping history so vividly alive.

The Raja Ravi Varma Museum, Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village



SYDNEY SHOT

SYDNEY BIENNALE 2016

In Sydney, and it was good to catch the 2016 Biennale. Its theme *The Future's Already Here — It's Just Not Very Evenly Distributed* came from American-Canadian sci-fi writer William Gibson (to whom some sources say we also owe the term cyberspace). Part of what that means is that technology has advanced faster than we realise but, still, (and I quote from the Biennale Guide) 'access to information, the internet and other more basic resources is still far from universal'. This is certainly relevant in India where the internet's reach has been transformative but there's so much more that could be done. In the Australian context, this resonated with the aboriginal (indigenous, as they put it) art they showed, which was memorable and unsettling in what it says about their condition.



Richard Bell Aboriginal Tent Embassy

INDI GO-GETTERS

It was fascinating to see artist-photographer Dayanita Singh's exhibits there, among the handful of Indian artists: she shot Gitanjali's family portraits in 2000. Dayanita who lives in Delhi uses the printed book format as her 'canvas'; (she's printed



Kher Package:
Bharti Kher's 'Six Women'

really strong stories. The 'museums' could be taken anywhere, re-arranged and displayed.



twelve) what she calls mobile museums. Her latest, *Museum Bhavan*, is about to be published.

She used images from her archives: ones of people in their daily lives which on their own were already powerful but when assembled in series made

It was also great to see that among the Indians were Sudarshan Shetty, the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2016-17 curator who showed *Shoonya Ghar* which was at the Delhi Art Fair and Bharti Kher, painter and sculptor also from Delhi, with her *Six Women*.

— Ramya Rajagopal

50 SHADES OF GRAYSON

PERRY AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SYDNEY

I saw Grayson Perry's exhibition which, as the Australian magazine *The Monthly* said, is 'British to its bootstraps, like a chintz-covered armchair, which makes it the epitome of un-cool' but with 'a sharp needle hidden in the upholstery'. Perry's at least as colourful as his canvases and ceramics, labelling himself a transvestite potter, whose imagery covers pop culture while referencing his childhood, and our contemporary spectres: war and alienation.

His bright palette and amiable grotesqueries (including his Gemini Circus-down wardrobe) have made him a darling of the international establishment and Sydney art lovers flocked, intrigued. (Some a bit annoyed, since he'd said before he came there that Australian aboriginal art wasn't contemporary and so didn't belong in a contemporary museum. Which he quickly apologized for, as any celeb who knows how to leverage the system would.)

FETISH/ FLOURISH

Still, Perry also seems to walk the walk very well, even in the clunkiest platform shoes, calling the bluff on cozy notions of Little England and shaking



HE'S A LADY: Perry and alter ego

up contemporary masculine-feminine polarities on glazed ceramics, sketchbooks, tapestries and sculptures in gaudy disarray.

He famously portrayed his own birth in another work, where his childhood teddy bear, called Alan Measles, was represented as the newborn. How could anyone not like that? (Except maybe his mother, with whom his relationship was 'difficult'.)

Then like another needle in the chintz, there was *Head of a Fallen Giant*, a sculpture which he said, was about England's past maritime power made to look like it had been dragged from the bottom of the sea, the desiccated essence of empire in the form of tourist tat. Sharp. And accessible. As memorable art always is.

– Ramya Rajagopal



HEADY TEDDY GLOW:

(From left)
'Head of a Fallen Giant,'
Alan Measles
Perry's teddy bear,
and 'Precious Boys',
glazed ceramic vase



VENICE VIGNETTES

THE ARCHITECTURAL BIENNALE



Arriving in Venice is its own reward: so few cities charm you as completely as soon as you set foot on (dry) land. I was here for the 15th Architecture Biennale, architecture being something that engages us all at gallery g where curating for specific spaces is a service. (We had a feature on last year's Art Biennale, by Rama Basappa.)

About the Biennale theme *Reporting from The Front*, curator Alejandro Aravena had this to say: '(It's) about sharing the work of people who are scrutinizing the horizon, facing issues like segregation, inequalities, peripheries, natural disasters, waste, pollution and participation of communities, with a broader audience.'

There were projects from various countries that focused on creative accommodation and basic living conditions under an increasingly challenged urban context, some of it of a militarized conflict. Some highlights:

TUAREG BLUE

At the Dutch pavilion, in blues of varying translucency, architect-curator Malkit Shoshan showed photos, maps and models from 170 UN African peacekeeping missions. LED lights on maps showed UN locations. Artificial palms, a sand-strewn floor and music by Nigerian Abdallah ag Oumbadougu intimated what life could be at the Sahara's edge.



SEYCHELLES PAVILION

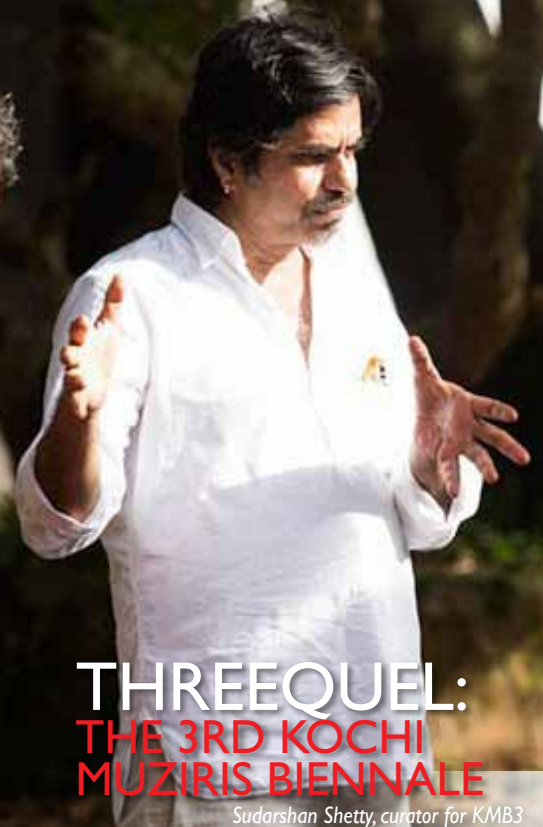
Between Two Waters: Searching for Expression from the Seychelles tried to answer the question: 'How does a nation 1500 kilometers from its nearest neighbor develop a cultural language, or more specifically, an architecture?' It's what tensions can be when contact with water, is, geographically and symbolically, all-encompassing like they are for Venice, though in a different way.

A CITY LIKE A FOREST

Michael Braungart, environmental researcher and an academic chair at the Rotterdam School of Management, where his work combines education and research in design, architecture, and engineering with business and innovation, showed his *Cradle to Cradle* concept at the Biennale, how homes could be healthy for people and the environment: structures that 'serve as material banks and as cleansers for air and water while celebrating the diversity of culture and nature'.

– Gitanjali Maini





THREEQUEL: THE 3RD KOCHI MUZIRIS BIENNALE

Sudarshan Shetty, curator for KMB3

And so to our very own Kochi Muziris Biennale which begins this month. We set off for its opening on 12th December. Here at **gallery g** we've been supporting the KMB since its first edition and having seen this year's Sydney and Venice Biennales, we're so proud that our own Biennale is so distinctive. Especially in how it relates its birthplace's heritage to what's happening in regional and world art.

The KMB was started by artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu (the latter introduced KMB3 at a **gallery g** private event). In his interview in *Bangalore Mirror* last month, Sudarshan Shetty, curator for KMB3, spoke of its theme *Forming in the Pupil of an Eye*, from a poem by writer Sharmishta Mohanty. It builds on the Vedic idea of eyes reflecting back all that they see as a single vision. It's about diversity and flow, about being non-oppositional.

KMB3 runs for 108 days from December 12th, 'And will change every day,' says Shetty. 'For example, (Bangalore-based) artist Abhishek Hazra will take the visitors on a walkthrough, and his stories will be different each time.'

BEING IN THE BIENNALE

There'll be nearly 100 artists whose work will be shown on nine sites and we'll be looking out for those we've worked with like Rajeev Thakker, architect, artist and curator, Studio X Mumbai, which coordinates programmes on cities' futures. He was part of its workshop held here in **gallery g** last year on research in urban issues and public art (see our issue 10).

Others are Bengali-French painter Chittrovanu Mazumdar who considers himself an expressionist and T.V. Santhosh whose paintings, sculptures and installations critique our media culture and its dehumanizing representation of war's sufferings. He's shown at Biennales in Venice, Colombo, Havana, Prague and Vancouver, and at London's Saatchi Gallery and Royal Academy of Arts.



Statue at a KMB venue

UPCOMING

We're proud to announce *Opulence and Eternity* an upcoming exhibition of Rukmini Varma's work: her first exhibition since 1982, which begins 20th January, 2017 at **gallery g**

Rukmini Varma is a leading Indian artist who paints in the classical tradition. Born in 1940 she's a great-great granddaughter of Ravi Varma and custodian of his artistic legacy through the Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation. A self-taught artist, her skill and technique have evolved over a lifetime of painting into a style she calls Romantic Representative Realism.

Growing up amidst exquisite works of art in an environment populated by court painters and artists, Rukmini's work is heavily influenced by baroque masters like Rembrandt and Rubens, as well as by her royal heritage.



Gitanjali Maini, Rukmini Varma and Manu S. Pillai

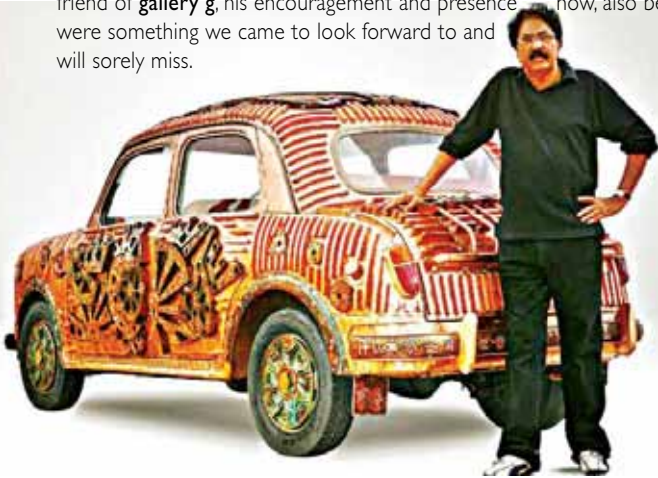
In *Opulence & Eternity*, Rukmini embraces a universe that is at once diverse in theme and mood, but united in the magnificence of treatment. This'll be a rare, regal treat.

— From text inputs by Manu S. Pillai

GOODBYE YUSUF ARAKKAL 1945-2016

A heartfelt farewell to a contemporary master whose work put India on the art map as much as any of our other greats. A staunch friend of **gallery g**, his encouragement and presence were something we came to look forward to and will sorely miss.

Our condolences again to Yusuf's family: the loss is one we all share. We have four of his canvases with us which are works we're going to be keeping and now, also be more to remember him by.



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A Print Brew publication
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This issue's editorial team also includes Sonny Abraham and Isaac Anchan.
Bibliography: indiaheritagevillage.org • biennaleofsydney.com.au • mca.com.au/exhibition/grayson-perry • theguardian.com • smh.com.au • labiennale.org/en/architecture/ • palazzomichiel.org • kochimuzirisbiennale.org