

## **Aiconograph Issue 1**

Welcome to the first issue of a newsletter - Aiconograph. The idea behind it is a straightforward one: to help generate conversations with the artists who we've talked to or worked with here at Aicon. As you all know, we're located in New York and London, and most of the artists who we talk to are not. So it seemed to make sense to produce the newsletter as we do miss out on those more casual meetings when artists can drop by a gallery, see what's going on and talk about it.

And so, in part, what we're using this first missive for is to let everyone know what's going on in terms of exhibitions and talks, what's been on recently - and also a bit at the end to let you know about some re-focusing of the gallery's direction. We're thinking about ways to develop this newsletter - perhaps into a blog, perhaps into something else. But we want this to be an organic process in response to feedback. So if you have any thoughts or contributions to make having read this please drop us a line at: [aiconograph@aicongallery.com](mailto:aiconograph@aicongallery.com)

### Exhibitions and talks

We've got new exhibitions opening in both New York and London in the first half of September. Farida Batool's first United States solo exhibition, entitled 'Maa Tujhe Salaam/Hail to Mother', opens in New York. Batool's new work hinges on the artist's conflicted relationship with Pakistan. On the one hand Batool's work clearly shows Pakistan as a problematic site of political and personal repression. On the other, Batool, who now lives and works in London, expresses both nostalgia and feelings of guilt for having left Pakistan. This paradoxical view is embodied in Batool's use of the lenticular print, where the double-layered photographs show two different images depending on where the viewer stands. It's a process that brings to mind Professor Paul Gilroy's description of diasporic identification: "It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at", (which of course he in turn borrowed from the hip-hop artist Rakim).

The exhibition opens with a private view on 11 September - and there'll also be a talk that evening by the Pakistani critic and curator Salima Hashmi entitled 'Contemporary Parkistan'. Hashmi is the curator of 'Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan', the first U.S. exhibition to focus on recent art from Pakistan and which opens at the Asia Society in New York on 10 September. Hashmi's writings are also the inspiration for the small group show 'Pathways and Practices: recent art from Pakistan' in the second gallery of Aicon's New York space that will accompany Batool's solo show.



Farida Batool, 'Sohni Dharti 1', lenticular print, 2009

Over in London, we're opening two solo exhibitions that are linked through the idea of the archetype. In the ground floor gallery, we will be exhibiting Ashish Avikunthak's 16mm film 'Endnote (Antaral)' which is based on the short Samuel Beckett play, 'Come and Go'. Downstairs in a spotlit darkened gallery, we will be showing recent paintings by Sakti Burman. Whilst Avikunthak and Burman work in very different mediums, both of them produce dream-like imagery that returns to the notion of the collective nature of the unconscious. Each seems to suggest that we are all shaped by the accumulated experience of humanity. 'Archetype: two solo exhibitions by Ashish Avikunthak and Sakti Burman' opens with a private view on 17th September. And on that evening, Sakti Burman will be in conversation about his work and career.



Still from Ashish Avikunthak 'Antaral (Endnote)', 2005, 18 minutes, 16mm film

Talks have become an increasingly frequent feature of the programme more recently - the London gallery recently had a very successful roundtable involving the artists Shezad Dawood and Dan Holdsworth to accompany its group show 'Space Invader'.

Thanks to the positive feedback received we're going to make 'Aicon Talks' a regular programme that is curated around the main exhibition programme.

#### Aicon exhibitions and projects in the press

There's been a bit of press coverage for recent Aicon projects. The recent group show at the London gallery, 'Space Invader' received a good write-up as one of the exhibitions of the week in the Guardian:

*Feel hemmed in by modern life? You're not alone. In fact, you're never alone. At least that's the far from comforting proposition of Space Invader at London's Aicon Gallery, a group show addressing the flipside of our technologically voracious, globalised age. Dan Holdsworth's photographs reveal the grubby fingerprints of progress on the most isolated places: a spider's web of communication poles fill a snowy void in one, a motorway viaduct creeps into the wild hills of Granada in another. Mannequin-security guards patrol Vibha Galhotra's aerial photograph of Delhi Kitted out in camouflage that blends seamlessly into the 2D mess of buildings, they suggest insidious surveillance. Sanatan Saha's paintings are overrun with tropical plants, men and exotic beasts, while Alan Michael's drawings present a jumble of human flesh – post-coital, giving birth or defecating. It's perfectly hellish.*



Installation shot of 'Space Invader' showing Vibha Galhotra 'Neo-Camouflage', 2009

The Art Newspaper highlighted the Aicon's stand at the Indian Art Summit as being one of the few that showed both Indian and Pakistani art (although please note that there was a printing error as to which work sold from the booth).

*The distinct absence of Pakistani art was inevitable, but at the same time something of a shame. One of the few galleries showing Pakistani work was Aicon, which sold Farida Batool's lenticular print Line of Control, 2008, on the first day of the fair. "When you see the Indian and Pakistani art shown together at Art Dubai, even with the differences in subject matter, the close cultural relationship is still palpable," says Siddiqui.*

This month's Art Review contains two pieces linked to Aicon - one about our Editions:

*Aicon Gallery has been something of a trailblazer when it comes to championing Indian art in the West. And now the New York branch of the transatlantic gallery has commissioned a series of editions by some of its representatives...*

And there's also a feature written by London director Niru Ratnam, entitled "Can artists be loved too much?" that explores those two supposed poles, credibility and popularity.

### Updated gallery statement

It's been a while since the gallery verbalized the direction that we are going in, so we thought that now was a good time to try to do that - so the final part of the newsletter is what we've come up with. As with the rest of this newsletter we're really keen for feedback - so please do send us your thoughts.

#### *Vision*

Aicon Gallery's curatorial vision begins in India but reaches outwards internationally from there. The two gallery spaces are located in New York and London, and each provides a vital platform for artists based in the Indian Subcontinent to exhibit in the United States and Europe. Alongside in-depth, focused solo shows the galleries present a programme of curated group exhibitions that are international in their scope and ambition. Following recent debates in institutional curating, the programme deliberately thinks together art produced very recently and art made through the latter half of the 20th century. Through this we aim to produce unexpected congruencies, shed light on other modernities, make complex the designation 'contemporary' and signal a shift away from simple survey exhibitions. In short, Aicon Gallery presents recent and contemporary art from India and beyond.

#### *History*

Aicon Gallery was developed from Gallery ArtsIndia, which was one of the first major outlets in the United State for art from India. Initially Gallery ArtsIndia connected collectors, critics and curators to artists in India via an on-line platform, and after the initial positive feedback, opened as a gallery space in New York in 2002. Aicon Gallery was launched when our second major space opened in London in 2007. The New York space shifted location to its new premises in the Lower East Side in 2008.

The gallery has presented significant solo exhibitions of a number of artists - many of which have been their first major exhibitions outside the subcontinent. Solo shows have included G.R.Iranna, Bose Krishnamachari, Anandajit Ray Talha Rathore, Muhammed Zeeshan, Adeela Suleman and Atul Bhalla . It has also re-examined the oeuvres of artists working from the 1950s onwards, including F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, K. Laxma Goud, S.H. Raza and Shyamal Dutta Ray. More recently the gallery has started participating in international art fairs such as Arco, Art Dubai, India Art Summit and Art Hong Kong and will be developing further participations going forward. Aicon Editions, launched in 2008, is the first venture to enable artists from the Subcontinent to work with limited edition projects.

#### *Museums and collections*

In 2002 the gallery acquired a substantial part of the Herwitz collection, comprising of works collected over a 35 year period. This has enabled the gallery to curate in-depth solo presentations but also to contextualise a rich period in art production in India. This has been a particularly important task in light of the lack of a museum infrastructure within India. In part through this acquisition the gallery has been able to loan works to major exhibitions at Tate Britain, the San Francisco Asian Art Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum. The gallery has supported major museum presentations of art from South Asia - recent support has included the Serpentine Gallery, London, Asia Society, New York and a major presentation at the 2009 Venice Biennale. Furthermore the gallery has been able to draw on its expertise in order to manage three art funds specifically focused on Indian art.

### *Ongoing Programme*

'Royale with Cheese' is a curated international group exhibition which takes mistranslation as its starting point and includes major presentations by Shezad Dawood, Simon Bedwell, Sarnath Banerjee and Sadequain. It opens in London in mid-October. Baiju Parthan will have his first major solo exhibition in the United States later in the year. The internationally acclaimed photographer Raghu Rai will exhibit in early 2010 as will London-based artist Simon Tegalla. Later in 2010 Adeela Suleman will present a solo exhibition in New York and T.V.Santhosh in London. Other planned solo shows include Shibu Natesan and Riyas Komu. Aicon draws upon the academic interests of its curatorial staff whose specializations in subjects including globalization, identity, environmentalism, international politics and postcolonialism often feed into programming. Gallery talks will continue to be a regular part of the schedule - recent speakers include the curator Francesco Manacorda and the artists Shezad Dawood and Dan Holdsworth. Aicon's artist-newsletter, 'Aiconograph' launches this Autumn - a discursive on-line exchange that opens up our programme and vision for debate amongst the artists who we work with.

And as the last-line of our new mission statement says - this is that discursive on-line exchange. So get emailing your feedback and a very happy September to all of you.