

Review Exhibitions

India in London

A pick of the capital's recent Indian art shows
REPORT: Paul Carey-Kent

December onwards has seen a broad presence of Indian art in London. *Indian Highway* at the Serpentine Gallery (ends 22 Feb) is a teeming overview of 26 artists, with an emphasis on video and installation. Aicon Gallery complemented this with the mixed show *Signs Taken For Wonders*, concentrating on painting and photography. Delaye Saltoun (with Samit Das), Frith Street (Dayanita Singh) and Alexia Gothe (Probir Gupta) all put on solo shows of New Delhi artists, the last linked to another group show at Phillips de Pury. And the Royal Academy's adventurous GSK Contemporary included Indian works from Frank Cohen's collection. Here is a selection from this Indian winter, the main theme of which is undoubtedly the impact of modernity on India itself.

1 Bharti Kher

Shown: *The Nestles of Nations* (2008), detail

Bharti Kher (born London, 1969) is probably India's best-known female artist. Raised in England, she moved to New Delhi in 1993, where she lives with her husband, Subodh Gupta (probably India's most internationally famous male artist). She derives striking aesthetics from consideration of national and feminine identities, which have included *The Skin Speaks a Language Not its Own* (2006), a life-sized elephant sculpture covered in bindis (the traditionally red dots married Hindus wear on the centre of the forehead, but now worn more generally in many colours).

www.hauserwirth.com

2 Kiran Subbaiah

Shown: *Love All* (1999)

Kiran Subbaiah (born Sidapur, 1971) brings subversive humour to a range of media, including assemblage, video and internet art. His sculpture *Love All* consists of matchsticks studded onto a wax ball on a mat of match-striking strips cut from match boxes: thus, any movement might ignite the ball. *Indian Highway* featured the video *Flight Rehearsals* (2003), in which Subbaiah claims to defy the laws of gravity by jumping up, then jumping again before he can fall. He then subverts scale as well by panning back from what seems to be a normal-sized alarm clock in the foreground until we realise it is huge but distant.

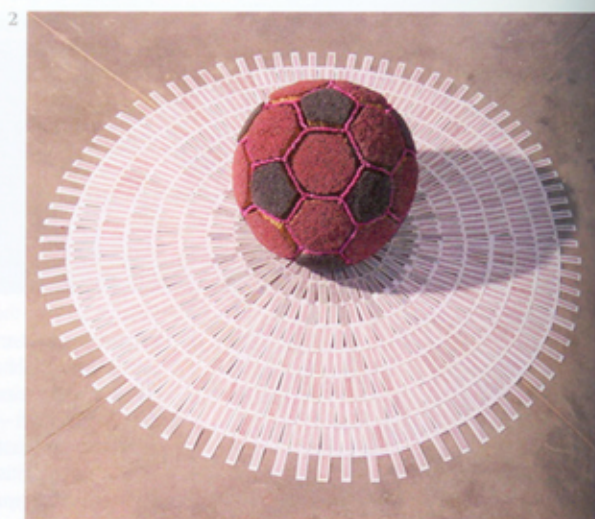
www.serpentinegallery.org

3 Dayanita Singh

Shown: *Dream Villa 20* (2007, 2008)

Dayanita Singh (born New Delhi, 1961) is best-known for her black and white images of Indian society from the lives of a tabla maestro and a Delhi eunuch to portraits of upper middle class families. In the new series *Dream Villa*, however, she moved into lush colour to capture the Indian night. A room-high image of the city set the tone for the Serpentine's show: it depicted a literal highway but thanks to its double take of the traffic's lights as fire also suggested the recent turbulence in India. The full series, shown at Frith Street, featured a wide range of views made mysterious by darkness and various natural and artificial lights.

www.frithstreetgallery.com



4 Probir Gupta

Shown: *His Master Voice* (2008)

Probir Gupta (born Calcutta, 1960) is a human rights activist whose work is informed by his major concerns about violence as a byproduct of process, war, globalisation and genocide. He incorporates discarded shrapnel and debris from bulldozed buildings, using them to depict the mutated macabre figures that appear in his paintings alongside abstracted pieces of machinery. A startling undertone of violence runs through his paintings, conveyed by and embodied in his use of impasto and thick, heavy brushstrokes made with a combination of watercolour, charcoal and acrylic.

www.alexagoethegallery.com



5 Bose Krishnamachari

Shown: *Stretched Bodies 21* (2007)

Bose Krishnamachari (born Kerala, 1963) showed *Ghost/Transmemoir* (2006-08) at the Serpentine: it shows inhabitants of Mumbai talking about their experiences of the city's rapid change, and is memorably housed in a hanging installation of 108 of the tiffin boxes in which office workers receive their home-cooked lunches. (The boxes remind you of people clinging on to buses by whatever means they can.) Meanwhile at Aicon he showed a realist biro portrait of one of his servants, and one of his multi-coloured near-abstract *Stretched Bodies* of lines diffusing and merging into ghostly figures.

www.aicongallery.com

6 Sheela Gowda

Shown: *Darkroom* (2006)

Sheela Gowda (born Bhadravati, 1957) uses domestic materials from rural India for their symbolic presence. And *Tell Him of My Pain* (1998) pointed to subjective female roles by pulling 250m of thread through 108 needles and suspending them as three-dimensional drawings. She has also worked with cow dung, incense and ceremonial dyes. Her installation of tar drums at the Serpentine was part grand castle, part migrant workers shelter. Crawling inside revealed the everyday behind the sublime, as a constellation of stars is shown to be no more than pinpricks in the metal sheeting.

www.serpentinegallery.org

7 Vivek Vilasini

Shown: *Vernacular Chants II* (2007)

Sixty years after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Vivek Vilasini (born Kerala, 1964) has photographed his many manifestations in statues across India. Other photographs explore how Gandhi's ascetic image is transformed by its use in adverts, pointing up the competition between traditional values and global markets. Vilasini is a multi-media artist based in Bangalore, who tackles a wide range of religious, cultural and political issues – including combining Buddha figures with crucifixion scenes, applying military camouflage to scriptures and making Indian parodies of pop art.

www.aicongallery.com

8 Raqs Media Collective

Shown: *The Reserve Army* (2008)

The three-strong Raqs Media Collective, which works out of New Delhi, was formed in 1992 to pursue documentary film-making but has since diversified widely. At the Serpentine, they curated a "show within the show", inviting documentary film artists to contribute to an immersive landscape of India. One of Raqs' particular interests is the translocal (which foregrounds the local while acknowledging its networked context) – to which their recreation and repositioning of monumental statues from outside the Reserve Bank of India relates: is local guardianship possible in the modern international economy?

www.raqsmediacollective.net

