

Narrative through art

Spread across three rooms, Nalini Malani's retrospective 'You Can't Keep Acid in a Paper Bag' uses photography, film and painting to weave a narrative



Clockwise from top: 'Cassandra' 2009; 'Untitled II' 1970; artist Nalini Malani

explains. The second room carries forward the combined imagery of nation-building and the female body in the form of a five-minute video-play, 'Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain'. The five-screen installation runs through India's modern history and travels to the present, juxtaposing two main historical markers: Partition and the 2002 Gujarat riots. "In this particular work the aggression against women comes out more obviously because

you realise that all these are man-made borders that leave women without any agency within a universe where decisions are made by an oligarchy of men," says the artist. As the video concludes, among the lasting impressions you are likely to carry with you are the striking commonality between the images of 1946 and 2002, the recurring use of the faces and bodies of women and little girls to etch out the nation's journey from Partition to the onset of globalisation, and the resounding distorted echoes of voices and cries

that carry through all three rooms within the gallery space.

After the first two dimly lit rooms, the third and final one is a veritable explosion of light, colour and space. The sprawling 30-panel reverse painting "Cassandra" depicts the prophetess in the midst of disparate floating images of angels, monsters, animals, disembodied faces, fetuses and umbilical chords. After the past and the present, the fragmented installation seems to mirror the fragmented whole that is the exhibition itself: weaving a narrative while resisting linearity.

The artist elaborates: "I used 30 separate panels so that I could keep changing it around and making new narratives with them. I wanted to make it possible to fragment it and put out through it a kind of oracle using Cassandra, given both the gift of prophecy and the curse of never being believed."

About the retrospective as a whole she says, "For me, an artwork wakes up only when the artist, the work itself and the spectator experience it together and to a large extent that was what I was hoping to achieve in this exhibition. You could look at it as three facets of time that we have experienced in India since independence, or see in all three rooms together an entire timeline that has something to say," she concludes.

The three rooms make a timeline that has something to say

NALINI MALANI

Delhi Diary



RURAL SCENES

Art lovers can pay a visit to 'The Village Arena', a group exhibition showcasing the works of four artists including Dr R.C. Bhawar and Dr Rohini Sethi. The paintings are themed around scenes from a rural village setting. The artworks, curated by Savita Agrawal of Shreeyansh Art Gallery, feature bare landscapes as well as scenes populated with village life and activities.

When: May 13 to 16

11 am to 8 pm

Where: India Habitat Centre



TRAGIC REALITY

Girish Karnad's celebrated play *Tughlaq* deals with mass displacement and argues that the real tragedy of the Mughal emperor and thereby of his subjects, was that he believed he was the sole arbiter of truth. It demonstrates the idea that there is a Tughlaq in us all.

When: May 11

7:30 pm

Where: Epicentre, Gurgaon

The lesser known Mumtaz Mahal

NIVI SHRIVASTAVA

THE ASIAN AGE

Many theatre groups in India are known for depicting rich and dramatic tales from the old world, and one such presentation by the Pierrot troupe is ready to charm the Delhi audience in its latest play titled *Shah Jahan-o-Mumtaz*.

Directed by veteran theatre artist Dr M Sayeed Alam, the play also has him in the role of Shah Jahan, paired with his wife Niti Phool, who plays the female lead Mumtaz Mahal. He says, "Everyone knows the story of the eternal love between Shah Jahan and Mumtaz; the emperor who built Taj Mahal to epitomise his love for his



favourite wife. But how would one describe Mumtaz Mahal? Beautiful and equally dutiful, bringing forth

babies in quick succession, and dying in childbirth according to popular folklore. However, we showcase a different side of this queen, who was not just a beautiful wife but also a master strategist."

Historians say that Mumtaz was an expert in the art of manipulation and had a strong desire to be the ruler of the country. He informs the director. He adds that the script of the play is written by London-based historian and scholar Dilip Hiro. The lavish costumes are designed by Jamazeb costumes, who did a great job in restoring Mughal styles for the characters.

city beat

NATIONAL MUSEUM LECTURE SERIES

Historian, scholar and author William Dalrymple will be delivering the Fifth National Museum Lecture on Sunday, May 11 at the National Museum. The topic of his lecture will be 'Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi 1707-1857.'