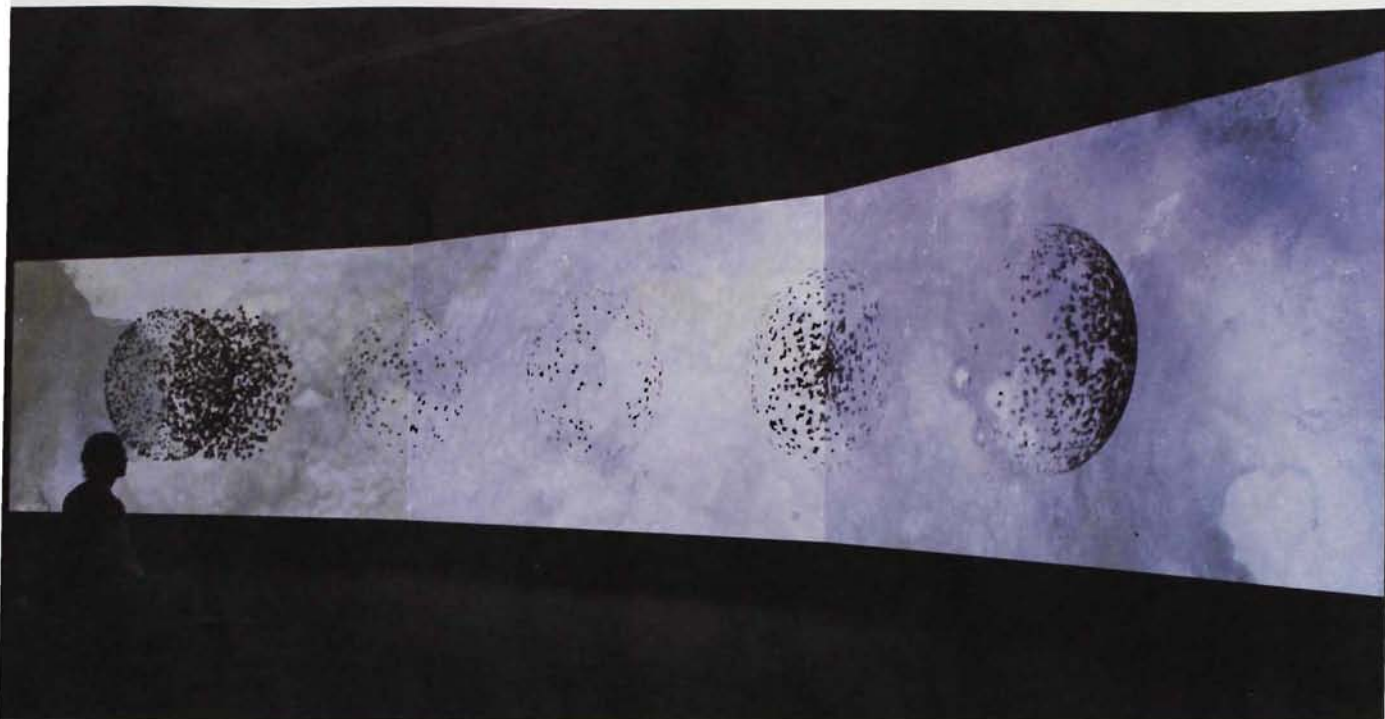


## A TALE OF TWO CITIES

While attending the India Art Fair and the Dhaka Art Summit, **Zeenat Nagree** comes across jubilant and disgruntled voices.



Just two years ago, following a broad overhaul, the India Art Fair seemed to hold immense promise: a name change, a new set of stakeholders and a fresh group of galleries occupying booths at a different venue, all came together in the fourth edition. Then, the fair organisers wasted no time in boasting about the international participants, naming impressive brands like Hauser & Wirth, Galleria Continua, White Cube and Lisson Gallery among the list. If the buzz at the traffic-ridden NSIC exhibition ground wasn't overwhelming enough, there was the competition between India's art stars for the coveted Skoda Prize as well as the impeccably curated survey show at the Devi Art Foundation – and its rumpus of an opening night – in addition to exhibitions and events across New Delhi.

This year's edition of the India Art Fair, held from the 30<sup>th</sup> of January to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, called for a sobering of enthusiasm. Not only had Hauser & Wirth, White Cube and Lisson Gallery failed to return two years in a row, even local galleries like Project 88 and Chatterjee & Lal had opted out. Further, taking away from the glitz and glamour associated with the fair was the cancellation of the Skoda Prize and the quiet withdrawal of the Devi Art Foundation from the practically free-for-all festivities that once marked the end of each edition.

As a consequence, the fair's weaknesses seemed to stick out this year. Kitschy, blingy and decorative works – London

Shahzia Sikander. *Parallax*. Three-channel HD Animation with sound. Music by Du Yun. 2013. Image courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

gallery Scream's sticker collages come to mind – cramped in a number of booths appeared to overwhelm the well-displayed spreads of some of India's top-tier galleries. Solo presentations inside the maze required extra room, while the sculptures outside were in need of prudent elimination. Perhaps, to help discerning navigators, the fair's organisers have tended to follow a peculiar hierarchical scheme of booth placement, with the quality of the galleries tending to deteriorate from the first to the third tent. But order was scrambled this year, especially with a makeshift shop displaying Nirav Modi's diamond jewellery near the entrance of the first tent. It made one hope that the fair organisers would consider taking up a more critical strategy of selection for the next edition.

However, the validity of this criticism needs to be examined keeping in mind the purpose of an art fair, which may offer window dressing in the form of special commissions and education programmes but exists primarily to facilitate the sale of art. So, how did the fair fare? According to the organisers, 96% of the 91 exhibitors reported "strong sales". Kirpal referred to the figure in an email interview with *ART India*, adding, "The India Art Fair has acted on the lines of a market aggregator bringing together artists and collectors onto a single platform." Roshini Vadehra of New Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery concurred: "Everyone who had an interest in Indian art was



there, and that sort of concentrated audience for Indian art is hard to come by at any other fair." The gallery had "amazing sales" this year, Vadehra said, as did Kolkata's Experimenter. "We sold not only what we showed at the booth but also other things and confirmed conversation with collectors that we had been having from before," said Prateek Raja. Among the top international players, Galleria Continua clinched its maiden sale – a gold-coloured Shilpa Gupta sculpture – after three years of participation. "We love challenges!" beamed Director Lorenzo Fiaschi.

Not everyone was celebrating. Parisian dealer Suzanne Tarasieve and her India representative Anne Maniglier complained that they had been ignored: "A fair has to treat all its galleries equally and help them meet new collectors. We haven't met anyone." Raja added: "Its biggest shortcoming is that the India Art Fair is heading towards becoming a regional fair. We don't necessarily see a whole new set of international collectors every year, which big international galleries attract." Abhay Maskara of Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, however, didn't want to only blame the fair: "The quality of the fair depends on the quality of the exhibiting galleries. The quality of the galleries depends in turn on the quality of the audience and on discernment. Both are in relative short supply at IAF. However, this is not the fault of the fair alone but rather the base reality in India. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to raise the level through participation and active engagement." Still, Raja and Maskara plan to participate next year but for Sree Banerjee of Project 88 the fair has lost its charm. "We felt that the few good voices that were at the fair were being diluted," Banerjee said. "The fair needs to figure out a new direction. The constant refrain is that the best things are happening outside."

Indeed, there was a lot of stimulating art elsewhere in the city. Among the shows on every itinerary were Subodh Gupta's outstanding retrospective at the NGMA; Sudarshan Shetty's *every broken moment, piece by piece* at GALLERYSKYE's new outlet that pointed towards a renewal of his practice; and an engrossing intersection of ideas and artworks collectively titled *INSERT 2014* at IGNCA. To be fair, the fair had its own share of highlights: Gallery Maskara had one of the most compelling booths with its khaki-green walls and barbed wire fence. On one wall, photographs from one of Priyanka Choudhary's performances, featuring the artist all wrapped up in thread, lamented war and violence; in another corner, Shivan's bird skulls seemed to have been caught mid-scream. Apart from the regulars, a number of first-time participants made an impression: Parisian Galerie Jérôme Poggi attracted considerable audience attention for Bertrand Lamarche's clever installation using video, light and shadow; Mumbai's Jhaveri Contemporary brought out some of its best, showcasing collages by Yamini Nayar and Simryn Gill; New Delhi's Sanchit Art made a quiet but confident presentation of Ganesh Pyne's notes and sketches.

Next year, the India Art Fair is poised to undergo a transformation once again. It will for the first time have an Artistic Director at its helm, a post to be occupied by critic and curator Girish Shahane who was last involved with the Skoda Prize and Art Chennai. Kirpal also revealed in the

email interview that the fair will focus on regional art centres in Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The organisers will arrange a trip to China for Indian collectors later this year. The India Art Fair's move to pay attention to what's around is timely given that the event has found its status as a singular meeting point in South Asia challenged with the emergence of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and the Dhaka Art Summit.

Unlike the India Art Fair, the Dhaka Art Summit is a non-commercial event funded by Bangladesh's most prominent collectors, Nadia and Rajeeb Samdani, and their Samdani Art Foundation. This year, for the second edition of the summit, the Foundation's newly appointed Artistic Director, Diana Campbell Betancourt, settled on an unusual format comprising a mix of curated shows, biennale-style solo presentations, fair-like gallery booths, performances, film screenings and lectures. All of these, except a city-wide public art project, were spread across 120,000 square feet of Bangladesh's national fine art institute, the Shilpakala Academy, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of February. Nearly one million dollars were pumped into commissioning artworks, shipping, importing materials and revamping the venue. The installation alone took a staggering 45 days.

Indeed, the second edition of the Dhaka Art Summit was markedly different from the first in concept and execution. While in 2012, the Samdanis stuck to the foundation's mission of promoting Bangladeshi artists, this year they chose to expand the focus to include all of South Asia. With this, Campbell Betancourt hoped that the summit "will be a catalyst to greater interest, research, understanding and opportunities for South Asian art," she wrote in the festival's catalogue. The move certainly allowed them to attract a larger audience, and going by the list of art world celebrities in attendance, a concerted effort seemed to have been made to bring in prominent international guests. Adam Szymczyk, artistic director of the next Documenta, curator Jessica Morgan from Tate Modern, Antonia Carver from Art Dubai, the Guggenheim's adjunct curator, Sandhini Poddar, the forthcoming Sharjah Biennial's curator, Eungie Joo, Gasworks' Alessio Antoniolli and Beatrix Ruf from Kunsthalle Zürich, among others, made the journey.

For starters, the Samdani Art Foundation had already put in place an opportunity for international exposure for upcoming Bangladeshi artists: a residency at the UK's Delfina Foundation awaited the winner of the Samdani Art Award. The talented Ayesha Sultana bagged the prize amidst surprise that she didn't even have gallery representation in her home country. This fact gave some indication of Bangladesh's under-developed commercial gallery scene to those who hadn't ventured elsewhere in the city. Those who had gone looking found that perhaps the only well-mounted and conceptually sound show in Dhaka was not being held at any of the commercial galleries but at the non-profit Britto Space. Most of what was to be discovered of the Bangladeshi art scene was in the summit itself, even if star artists from the rest of South Asia had somewhat stolen the limelight making sections of the local art community feel neglected. One nominee of the award expressed that he felt the exhibition for the Samdani Art Award was receiving fewer visitors because it was cramped



in the furthestmost section of the top-most floor of the Shilpakala Academy.

The biggest attractions at the summit, however, were its 14 solo presentations. Among them, Pakistani artist Shahzia Sikander's *Parallax* was an immersive animation composed of fragments from her paintings that hinted at the violence invariably linked with extraction of crude oil. Video artist Lida Abdul, originally from Afghanistan, showed four films highlighting the ravages of war, including *What We Saw Upon Awakening*, featuring men pulling ropes tied to a bombed edifice. Rashid Rana made a sly comment on the hectic networking at the summit by replicating an empty room from the Tate with printed, pixellated floor-to-ceiling wallpaper. Shilpa Gupta ingeniously brought out the absurdity of the condition of individuals trapped in enclaves on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border through a collection of photographs, texts and objects. Bangladeshi Naem Mohaiemen presented a newspaper, dated ten years into the future, full of Utopic news based on the premise that the communists came to power in 1979. This information remained unavailable to those who can't read Bengali; none of the texts was translated elsewhere either, an audacious choice given the demographic of the audience. Mohaiemen explained: "If you make it bilingual, then it can no longer lie in the venue masquerading as an everyday object. The humour and references were also very local. For example, *Sultana'r Shbarajibon* is a riff on both the play *Nuraldeen'er Shbar Jibon* and the science-fiction utopia *Sultana's Dream*. An English version would have been like bad subtitles on a DVD."

The curated shows, like Deepak Ananth's *B/Desb*, Rosa Maria Falvo's *LifeBlood* and Md. Muniruzzaman's *Liberty*, offered an uneven but much-needed primer on the range of work being produced in Bangladesh. Similarly, the 33 invited galleries introduced artists from their respective countries, such as the Kathmandu-based Siddhartha Art Gallery that put up a charged selection about the plight of Nepali migrant workers. While hopping from one show to another, visitors were confronted by the performances of various artists, prominent among them Nikhil Chopra, who was languorously drawing on the walls, and Bangladeshi Yasmin Jahan Nupur strapped to the top of a column for three hours.

Ripples of the summit are being felt already. Recently, Kolkata's Experimenter announced a solo show with Ayesha Sultana, while Mohaiemen, who is already on the gallery's roster, will show his work at Kunsthalle Basel in June in a presentation curated by Adam Szymczyk. In the weeks following the summit, a number of articles appeared in many prominent Indian and international publications discussing the country's art scene and praising the summit. Sree Banerjee of Mumbai's Project 88, who was among the 33 galleries showcased in Dhaka, feels that India Art Fair has much to learn from the way the summit was organised. To begin with, she suggested, the fair should aim to present ambitious solo projects. "I'm sure the galleries will help," she said, adding after some reflection, "IDAS has a clear mission and has positioned itself as a hub for South Asian contemporary art. I think it has given us a real jolt..."

An installation view of Gallery Maskara's booth at the India Art Fair, New Delhi, 2014.





## PROVING HIS METTLE

Subodh Gupta makes the ordinary, extraordinary. **Girish Shahane** checks out his *Everything Is Inside*.



Subodh Gupta. *There is always cinema (XIX)*. Found objects, brass. Dimensions variable. 2008. All photographs by Ram Rahman. All images courtesy the artist.

Subodh Gupta's retrospective at Delhi's National Gallery of Modern Art amply demonstrated two rare qualities he possesses: a talent for keeping things simple, for eliminating noise while retaining essential elements; and, paired to this, the ability to convert simple insights into monumental artworks. The exhibition, curated by the venerable Germano Celant, covered the new and old wings of NGMA, and also spread to the lawns of the Jaipur House complex. It was the most substantial solo by a contemporary artist at NGMA since Anish Kapoor's 2010 display, and did not suffer in comparison with that show. In fact, if I had to pick a winner between those two strong surveys, I'd go with Gupta's *Everything Is Inside*.

Gupta is best known for his use of stainless steel, but his most consistent strategy is barely connected with that material. It consists of taking ordinary objects, and endowing them with a sense of preciousness by casting them in metal – aluminium, brass, bronze or steel – or carving them in marble, either as precise replicas or in larger-than-life form. In *Everything Is Inside*, this Midas-like treatment was given to a lump of dough, a basket of cowpats, a water drum, a door, luggage on trolleys, a film projector, a washbasin and a commode with an old-style chain-pull flush tank (the last three all connected with the experience of movie-going in single-screen cinemas). Although the approach was identical in all these instances, the mood of individual pieces varied substantially, from quirkily amusing, to nostalgic, to deeply redemptive or restitutive.

One peculiarly moving piece used mere displacement instead of transformation. *My Family Portrait* was composed of dish racks taken from the kitchens of three of Gupta's close relatives. Even simpler was a stainless steel glass standing

on a plain wooden table, and filled with water that bulged beyond the brim of the vessel. Though I've been familiar with the phenomenon since I read Yakov Perelman's *Physics for Entertainment* in secondary school, and recall, as a 10 or 11 year-old, carefully dropping needles into a brimming glass to check how far I could extend the fluid's curvature, I didn't respond to Gupta's version with, "Any child who has read *Physics for Entertainment* could do this". I'm not certain why I found this work engaging, but obviously Germano Celant had a similar response, for he gave it a prominent place in the show. In a way, *A Glass of Water* comments on the tension within Gupta's own practice, between intervening too little and doing too much: he has to add enough to the original object to achieve something beyond a dull, flat surface, but must be careful not to let it spill over.

I have focused on Gupta's simplicity of approach, but this is not to suggest his work is minimalistic. *Everything Is Inside* was full of spectacular creations. The elegant rotunda of Jaipur House held his earliest iconic work, a hollow cylindrical construction of cowpats titled *My Mother and Myself*. In front of it, within the erstwhile entrance lobby, was placed his most profound statement about migration, consumption, and culture clashes, *Faith Matters*, a grid of tall tiffin boxes moving back and forth on a sushi conveyor belt, crisscrossing hypnotically. The new Exhibition hall contained a massive tilted boat filled with household items and upside-down ceiling fans. Close by, a wave of utensils titled *Thosa Pani*, custom-built to fit the raised section of the hall, and bringing to mind the Uttarakhand tragedy, was the latest product of the artist's nearly decade-long preoccupation with floods. *Very Hungry God*, a skull made of stainless steel pots and pans that was acquired by Francois Pinault and placed in front of the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, would have been an appropriate complement to the boat and wave. However, the exhibition used relatively few foreign loans, concentrating on works owned by Indian collectors, by the artist and his galleries, notably Hauser & Wirth, Continua, and Nature Morte. There was a skull, though, lying on a huge red velvet cushion, which was an adequate enough substitute. In order to display these works to the best effect, the top layer had been blasted off the distracting shiny black granite tiles in the Exhibition Hall, leaving behind a more appropriate matte gray surface.

There were pieces that didn't work for me, such as the huge *Dada*, a stainless steel banyan tree with bartans for leaves, which sacrificed Gupta's usual clarity for a mixed metaphor that didn't make visual or figurative sense. Also, I'd have liked to see some of his early paintings, even if only as an indication of how an artist might produce mediocre work for years before making a great leap forward. Over all, though, *Everything Is Inside* was a deeply satisfying experience that brought a number of Gupta's most important creations to India for the first time, demonstrated the range and scope of his considerable achievement, and cemented his place as the leading Indian artist of his generation.





Subodh Gupta. Ray. Stainless steel and stainless steel utensils. 400 cms x 400 cms x 600 cms. 2012.



# THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF MEMORY

Marta Jakimowicz finds herself entranced by Srinivasa Prasad's ode to dreams, death and the mysteries in-between.



With its inventive forms and evocations that expanded and reinterpreted elements of his art practice, Srinivasa Prasad's solo at GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore, mounted from the 17<sup>th</sup> of February to the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, surprised this viewer. The works in the show, titled *Deep Sleep*, delved into personal as well as universal experiences of childhood, highlighting the persistence and elusiveness of memory. The images and objects featured in the show oscillated between the spectacular and the mundane, the tangible and the imagined. As he has done in the past, Prasad blurred the boundaries between sculpture, installation and two-dimensional images, using both found objects and those made in the studio, creating an immersive environment that invited participation from the viewer.

The installations were complemented by a number of photographs showing the artist wearing some of the works. These images straddled the distance between the documentation of a performance and an independent artwork. One set, titled *Mummy*, featured Prasad with his eyes closed, wrapped up in rubber strips. The fluidity of meaning and expressiveness persisted throughout, as it does on the edge between dream and remembrance, often tending to appeal to a multi-sensory experience, concrete enough to touch, feel or hear, yet ephemeral and transient. In most of the works, Prasad placed an accent on such tentative 'inside-outside' mergers.

The work *Deep Sleep* comprised a house made of a mosquito net installed outside the gallery embracing the plants around, catching dry leaves mid-flight in its web. Its nocturnal-diurnal

Srinivasa Prasad. *Cool Breath*. Air cooler, aluminium. 168" x 134" x 132". 2014.

lyricism found a complement in the bamboo twig cottage nestled inside a room in the gallery. The moment Prasad let one virtually grasp something, it almost vanished – a feeling captured in a series of photographic self-portraits, titled *Blur*. Here, 25 identical mugshots of the artist were arranged in a grid, each blurrier than the previous one. In *Evaporating Memories*, Prasad asked visitors to sit at a desk and 'draw' with water, evoking the often futile process of recollection.

Hitting a different register, the mischievous *Shop* had an array of fashionable clothes and elegant accessories made from old rubber tyres. Children's joyful indulgence in dressing up and enacting grown-up roles shifted effectively towards the eerie as a shapeless, dormant figure made of rubber seemed to breathe in *Inhale Exhale*. Another powerful piece was the large, serpentine air cooler, called *Cool Breath*. The aluminium tube attached to the cooler had a pot-shaped opening; here, one could insert one's head and feel the soothing wetness of the purring machine.

Although playfulness dominated most of the show, the darker layers of Prasad's imagination and concerns did surface, allowing associations with death, funerary rites and human vulnerability, especially in the videos. While in *Mudi*, a clip showing the artist's head being shaved was projected on a black earthen pot, *Soothe* focused on a hand in its futile attempts to clean and erase ever re-emerging red drips.

Right: Srinivasa Prasad. *Mummy* (Detail). Triptych. Archival print on Hahnemuhle photo rag paper. 12" x 18" each. 2014.



Below: Srinivasa Prasad. *Deep Sleep*. Cotton mosquito net, adhesive. Variable dimensions. 2014.





## NOTES FOR AN ITINERANT SELF

After touring the United States of America with her retrospective, Zarina returns to New Delhi with works that examine being at home and being away. **Meera Menezes** tells us more.



Zarina. *Folding House*. A set of 25 collages on Indian handmade paper stained with Sumi ink. Mounted on Arches Cover Buff paper. 8.75" x 8.75" each. 2013.



"But now I am no longer I, nor is my house any longer my house."

– Federico García Lorca

It is not difficult to understand why Lorca is one of Zarina's favourite writers. For his words resonate deeply with an artist who has for decades explored the notion of home, homeland and her identity as a diasporic Indian artist. *Folding House*, held from the 24<sup>th</sup> of January to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, at New Delhi's Gallery Espace, is in many ways a chronicle of her itinerant life.

The centrepiece of the show was the work, *Folding House*, a set of 25 collages on Indian handmade paper stained with Sumi ink. Displayed in the form of a grid, the stark and simple geometry of each of these black-and-gold houses was fractured using residues of earlier projects. The houses seemed to be in a constant state of transformation and flux, metamorphosing in different ways: one had a set of wheels, as if on the run; another appeared to have sprouted wings, as if it was about to take off. The thread and threat of rupture ran through each of them, making the image a metonym for displaced families and broken homes. Nowhere was this seen more poignantly than in one of the collages in which a snaking, slithering line made its way across the darkened silhouette of the house. This seemingly innocuous furrow was none other than the Radcliffe Line that separated and displaced thousands of families during India's Partition. In 1959, members of Zarina's liberal Muslim family moved to Pakistan, leaving behind their home in Aligarh.

This personal history also resonates in *Echo*, which has strips of digitally printed Urdu text arranged at right angles, forming a square. This construction recalls the four walls of a house, while the handwritten texts are culled from letters written by the artist's sister. Like many of Zarina's works, it is often the text that precedes the image. The fragments of text don't form a complete narrative in themselves; rather, they are excerpts of an exchange between the house and her sister, with the house plaintively enquiring why they have to leave. However, the poignancy of the work is only revealed to those who understand the language.

*Untitled (Diptych)* is stunning in its simplicity and one of the most successful works in the exhibition. In one panel, a gold thread weaves its way in a simple running stitch

through a sheet of Arches Cover Buff paper. In the other, a row of squares have triangles of gold leaf fixed atop them, transforming each of them into Zarina's signature motif of a house. This juxtaposition of the house with what appears like its foundation serves to remind us that the notion of home is a fluid one, and that it is constantly being constructed and deconstructed. Zarina herself calls stitching, with the presence and absence of the thread on the paper, *bakhiyan udhedna* or a way of unravelling memory. She also alludes to the Sufis who would often tear/unravel their garments to expose their 'hearts' and sees herself as doing the same.

Zarina describes herself as coming from a family of "eccentric Sufis" and it is evident that Sufism and Sufi poetry inform her works. In the current show, her interest in Buddhism also comes to the fore in a piece like *Enso (Zen Circle)* which consists of black marble discs and red Indian handmade paper strung together with a metal chord. Known as the Circle of Enlightenment, Enso, a sacred symbol in Zen Buddhism, encompasses dualities like emptiness and fullness, the alpha and the omega and presence or absence. Zarina transforms the swift and simple brushstroke into a striking sculpture, which also recalls one of her other works – the *Tasbeeh* or prayer beads Muslim use.

The theme of enlightenment finds utterance in another sculpture in the show, *Frozen Light*, in which 101 white bulbs made of white marble and gold leaf are suspended from the ceiling. While Zarina has dealt with the theme of light and enlightenment before – think *Blinding Light* and *Noor*, her works in the Indian Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale – this is the first time that the artist has used marble. The paradox, however, is that the milky white bulbs belie their purpose, exuding no light thanks to the material they are composed of.

One of the most striking sets of works on display is a series of woodcuts mounted on Somerset Antique paper. Black as a raven's wing, they are adorned with sprays of white, evocative of stars set in a dark and endless night. The title of the work, *Companions of the End of the Night*, is taken from a couplet in poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Shaam-e-Firaaq (The Night of Separation)*. While Zarina might find that home is indeed a foreign place and she is in between yet nowhere, she can always take solace in the line she is fond of quoting from the *Qur'an*: "I have studded the sky with stars so you can find your way."



## DREAM SEQUENCE

Sonia Khurana opens the doors of a Delhi house to let in music and light.  
**Kamayani Sharma** pays a visit..



If you have ever wondered what it would be like to stumble into someone else's dream, Sonia Khurana's immersive solo, *Oneiric House: round about midnight* should satisfy your curiosity. On view from the 31<sup>st</sup> of January to the 9<sup>th</sup> of March and consisting of videos, sound pieces, light boxes and vitrines containing sketches, photographs and text, the KNMA-supported exhibition was mounted inside a house at 24, Jor Bagh, New Delhi. Unfettered by the claims of a typical gallery space, the house took on a liminal, unstable character, echoing the nature of just-broken dreams. In an interview about the show, Khurana referenced Bachelard and his spatial poetics, drawing on his comparison between the structure of a home and that of the self to elucidate the workings of her cavernous, multistoried exhibition. She resisted the term 'site-specific' in the traditional sense, emphasising the navigation of the space rather than the particularity of its layout. However, moving

Sonia Khurana. *Somnambulist's Song*. Two-channel video installation. 2008-2010.

through the carefully curated interiors of the house, one realised that this intended autonomy was curbed by the works' insistence on being noticed.

The evocation of a lucid dream seemed to be the aim of the project as one haltingly negotiated the half-lit rooms, staircases arching up towards new territories and doorways offering glimpses of unseen rooms. In the first room was a diptych: *Somnambulist III* (2008) and below that, *Dusk to Dawn* (2008). The former was a light box showing Khurana in the outdoors, lying on her side, hand pillowing her head. It reminded one of her 2006 piece, *Logic of Birds* and her live performance for the 2010 Liverpool Biennial,