

BIG ART

The art, artists and everything in between.



NOVEMBER 10, 2017 · BY KASTOORI BARUA

SAJU KUNHAN: OVERWRITING HISTORIES



United we stand divided we rule

There is something curiously raw and earthy about the artworks of artist Saju Kunhan when seen from a distance. A closer look reveals the undulating rings of wood that is the backdrop of most of these works. There is an abundance of human figures on the move. It is a proverbial scene of migration where people are mapping out the unknown and in this process, mapping out history. Mapping, it seems, is the leitmotif of the show.

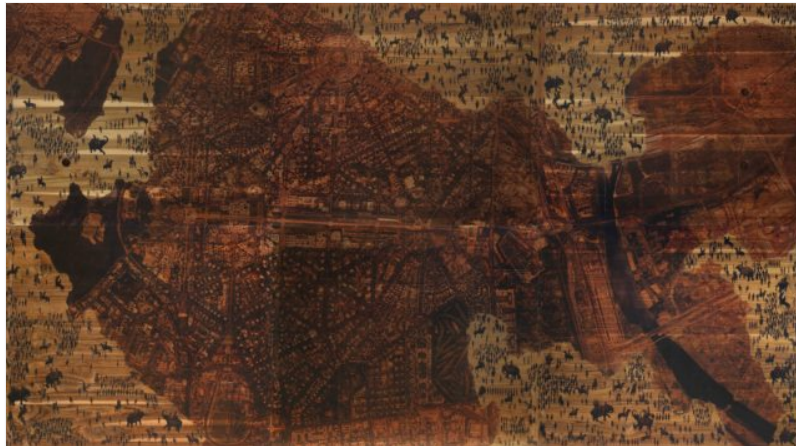
Saju has been engrossed with maps for the past three years. His works are steeped in history and anthropology. When I ask him about his artistic process, he elaborates, "My process is that of transference. I take screenshots of the zoomed images of Google Maps. Roughly I have around a thousand screenshots for one artwork. I take printouts and then shift the details on to the wooden panels."



The process of transference, in my opinion, has a dual significance. Not only is it an act of migration of ink and linear information that is characteristic to maps, but it is also Saju's own understanding and interpretation of history. He believes that actions of humans since primeval times to modern history have left stains which are telling reminders of lives won and lost on the terrains of the planet. Hence, his titled series, *Indelible Marks*, is a pictorial tribute to and interpretation of the communal violence that has been the trajectory of the history of modern times.

It is interesting to note that the big artworks are maps of South Asia, Mumbai, Delhi, and the world map and the smaller works pertain to communal violence histories. I ask Saju if this is a conscious choice of choosing larger panels for bigger histories that the world has unanimously recorded and smaller ones for marginalized narratives of the subaltern. He declines, "I choose my panels based on my interest. If I want to focus on something in detail then I will choose bigger panels and vice versa."

There is, of course, a well thought out differentiation and diversity in his rendition of historical mapwork. His map of Delhi, which happens to be one of the larger works, characterizes violence and bloodshed as the city has historically been a war-engaged region. His understanding and interpretation of history and his rendition of the land become the subjective-objective dyad that renders his maps an immersive quality. This enables Saju to give the elements in his artwork a new and different meaning and thus create his own "sacramental order" that the cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard propounded in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*.



Winners are not judged

My overall view of Saju's artworks is that he is an artist who has successfully conveyed his idea that knowledge production in all its ways is vastly amenable to contingencies. There are thousands of narratives of the past and the present that have not been recorded and only a fraction gets documented. Saju's endeavour through his artistic overwriting is to show the fragility of history. He also shows that myriad of perceptions act as a double-edged sword to the mainstream narratives produced by the powerful few and consumed by the masses. His artistic temperament is a timely comment on the current state of affairs in this passive, media-thriving, postmodern world.

Stained Geographies: 28th Oct 2017 - 25 Nov 2017 at TARQ, Mumbai.



POSTED IN ART, EXHIBITIONS

PREV

Paris Photo

NEXT

Munem Wasif



RECENT

C. Unnikrishnan

Siddharth & GAAF

Goa Affordable Art Fest

Rachna Toshniwal

Whittled Space: Piraji Sagara

Jatin Das

Munem Wasif

Saju Kunhan: Overwriting Histories

Paris Photo

Shubigi Rao

Exploring Lines

Sooni Taraporevala

Book Review: Home in the City

Order of the Age: Kaushik Saha

Thukral and Tagra

Peace: Prakash Ghadge

The Cinema Travellers

Mapping Memories: Madhvi Subrahmanian

Sohrab Hura

Samit Das