

Remember the Time

Through photos and paintings, two artists attempt to discover our fading memories

AMRUTA LAKHE

IN A reproduced photograph by Suruchi Choksi, a ghost of a figure is seen leaning against a lamp post. A possible famous landmark forms the background, but it is too blurry to recognise. In another photograph, a group of people can be spotted seated in a circle picnicking on a sunny day. Here, too, the faces of the people and the background is not quite clear. The photographs give you an inkling into the mood of the day, but the details are missing.

These photographs by the Mumbai-based artist are part of the exhibition titled "Reliquaries - The Remembered Self" at the TARQ gallery, Colaba. "Images have the power to bring to mind stories, and legends. Through distorted personal photographs, I want to explore how we create a memory and how much of it stays with us years later. I'm trying to show that what we remember is just a part of it, and not the absolute memory," Choksi says.

While the artist takes a more personal approach to deciphering memory, Mumbai and Barcelona-based Rithika Merchant, who is also partici-



pating in the show, chooses a broader path. She looks back at not just her past, but that of the entire human race and examines its history through myths and folklore. An example is the watercolour, "Doppelganger", in which two figures are bound together through the veins of leaves. "Today, science gives us an explanation for most things. However, it takes away the spirituality from things. Through my work, I try to trace the spiritual past of the human race and examine its relation to the present," she says.

"Reliquaries - The Remembered Self" is on at the TARQ gallery, Colaba, till April 10
amruta.lakhe@expressindia.com



Vidya Balan accompanied designer Gaurang Shah for the curtain call

PHOTOS: AMIT CHAKRAVARTY

Textiles took centre stage as designers presented vibrant and varied collections at the Indian Handloom and Textiles Day as part of LFW

Native Stories



Dia Mirza was the show stopper for Anavila Misra

SHIKHA KUMAR

THE rustle of Chanderi, Banarasi and Jamdani sounded a lyrical note as indigenous weaves from across the country came alive on the second day of the just concluded Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW) Summer/Resort 2015. The Indian Handloom and Textiles Day, in collaboration with the Government of India, has emerged as a popular initiative at LFW. This edition saw over 15 designers pay homage to the diverse textile tapestry that is India, with native craft techniques that pushed the boundaries of regular Indian wear. Coupled with engaging audio-visual effects that included palace backdrops, folk music and even a live saxophone performance, there were many highlights of the event.

THE BENGAL INFLUENCE

DESIGNERS LOOKED eastwards for inspiration, presenting the best of West Bengal handlooms in their designs. Using khadi as the base fabric, veteran designer Kiran Uttam Ghosh showcased both Western and Indian silhouettes, such as pleated dresses, loose pants, white button-down shirts with obi belts, sheer cover-ups and handloom sarees with embroidered cholis. Interesting pieces included a Maheshwari cape over a blue jersey dress and a red Dhakai dress with high slits, worn over gold pants. Jamdani especially had its aha moment, with several designers using the weave in their collections. Anavila Misra stuck to her signature rustic

vibe, with a line that included sober hued Jamdani sarees in plaid, hand batik and other patterns. Not Like You, the label by designers Shovit Dasgupta, Durba Nag and Sharan Kaur, used the weave with bright hand-painted prints and block printed patterns. Revival was key with the trio reusing a 25-year-old sari for a crop top and flared skirt set. Another Bengal staple, the Dhonekali textile was teamed with the rural gamcha in Mayank Anand and Shradha Nigam's "Chauraha" line. In a colour story that spanned red, black and white, the collection included a jumpsuit tunic, a shift dress with an attached cape, maxis and asymmetrical kurtas.

TALES OF BLUE

BANGALORE-BASED designer Deepika Govind returned to LFW with a stunning collection that was an ode to the Rann of Kutch. Using Kala cotton, an organic fabric grown in the Kutch wilderness, Govind experimented with bandhani, tie-dye, shibori and ajrakh prints teamed with rabari embroideries. She interpreted the land's rural charms in earthy tones of brown, burgundy, mustard, red and blue, with one shoulder dresses, boleros, printed skirts with white shirts, cigarette pants with sheer kurtas and waistcoats. The collection also featured mirror-work and striking Rogan art, an ancient art of hand painting that was akin to fine embroidery on the pieces.

MODERN TWIST

PATINE, SHON RANDHAWA'S label that has a retail presence in the capital, made a sparkling debut at LFW with designs that sought to contemporise vintage luxury. With intricate palace architecture serving as the backdrop, models walked to strains of *Aap jaisa koi* for the collection, titled "A Retro Bar". Gara embroidery took centre stage, in the form of wrap skirts and asymmetrical dresses that also had chikankari accents, as the



Gara embroidery took centre stage at Shon Randhawa's Patine show

designer worked with silks, lace and tulle fabrics.

CLASSIC TOUCH

AS A SAXOPHONIST belted out old-school Bollywood tunes, models with over-sized naths and tattooed bindis walked barefoot in flared pants, anarkalis, and bright saris with animal motifs, offset by sombre beige and off-white blouses for Hyderabad-based designer Gaurang Shah. Actor Vidya Balan, who was conspicuous by her absence at the opening show of friend Sabyasachi Mukherjee, made a surprise appearance at Shah's show. Seated in the front row, looking striking in a pink and gold sari by the designer, she took to the ramp with Shah as he took the curtain call. Looks like a new designer-star collaboration is in the making.

Deepika Govind used Kala cotton in her collection that paid an ode to the Rann of Kutch

Look into the Past

IN HIS latest project, Pondicherry-based photographer Sebastian Cortes turns his lens to the reclusive Bohra community in Sidhpur, Gujarat, to explore their living spaces which are a symbol of a bygone era. Sidhpur, in Patan district, is located at the meeting point of the Ganga and Saraswati rivers. It is home to Dawoodi Bohras, who are believed to have come from Yemen. In an exhibition, titled "Sidhpur: Time Past Time Present", organised by Tasveer at Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Cortes displays 45 photographs that give an insight into the architectural influences of these spaces, which range from Persian and Hindu to European and Islamic designs. Excerpts from an interview:

DEBESH BANERJEE

You have opted to view the Bohra community through an architectural lens. Why?

My personal, artistic and long-term projects have always been about a "sense of place". I approach architecture as a metaphor to examine the intimate living space. Sidhpur fascinates me because of the layering of visual, architectural and symbolic elements that linger in the homes. The psychological and metaphorical importance of rooms and what they silently describe; I want to draw the viewer into the paths of discovery. The vibration of the empty rooms and the surface information speaks to us about a people and their need to express themselves. My process with photography always implies a challenge of verification. Sidhpur involved a pilgrimage from house to house, which was very much akin to



Internal stairway of Abbas Vagh House (above); Sebastian Cortes; Abbas Vagh house

the path followed by an investigator who looks for clues, but I did not want to verify anything. My search is not to uncover, but to record.

How and when did you first encounter the Bohra community?

It was in 2008 after a magazine editor shared a very poetic description of Sidhpur that left me enchanted. Her family was from this area and she felt



that it was important to save it from



destruction and bring it into the wider public domain. Cities or towns, which have for some historic, social or economic reason fallen off the map, have always attracted me. Sidhpur emanated the same kind of atmosphere that you find in abandoned mining towns in the American west, or cities in southern Italy that once had great commercial importance.

How many Bohra families have you engaged with through this project?

Not all the houses I visited were inhabited by families. The loss of past memories is a key element in this project as the sense of family heritage that lingers on the walls has now been

given up to the needs of modernity. The ground reality of Sidhpur is that of a magical cinematic set that its leading actors have abandoned.

Most images show a conscious attempt to hide the identities of the people. Why is that?

Some of the women willingly posed for the camera. Others are simply elements of the larger context, they happen to appear and I prefer not to have a face but more a symbolic human figure, which also serves aesthetic and cultural observations.

The exhibition is on at Bhau Daji Lad Museum until April 30.
debesh.banerjee@expressindia.com

Upward Bound

Sometimes, comfort isn't a bad word

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has requested the Public Works Department to remove the air-conditioners from his new residence in the Civil Lines area. It's anybody's guess why Mr Kejriwal would prefer to suffer Delhi's scorching summer; the electorate certainly doesn't grudge him a little comfort. Maybe the CM is caught up in the AAP philosophy that romanticises hardship or he's following the rules of the naturopathy cure he recently sought.

It's not like the rest of us who use air conditioning are living lives of decadent rock stars but there is a tendency in India of glamourising denial as a great virtue. This reminds me of the hue and cry in my son's school when the management suggested that school buses be made air conditioned. An overwhelming number of parents protested. Not because of the minor increase in fees but they felt they grew up like that and it won't kill the kids to brave the elements occasionally. These are the same parents who now drive around in air-conditioned cars and spend the day in air-conditioned offices, travel business class and sleep in AC'd homes.

Remember the school buses of Delhi in the 1980s. Pre-CNG days there were diesel fumes mingling with dust, a permanent whiff of melting iron and 80 sweaty children jostling for space in 45 degrees. It was fine for a time when our homes weren't air conditioned either.

For most of these parents the issue isn't air-conditioning at all. It's more a blinding terror that we're raising a generation of overfed, over-indulged, iPad-wielding, Nintendo-playing, soft kids—unfit for the realities of life. The non-AC ride is a half-hearted attempt to engineer grit in the absence of any real adversity. Surely there must be more effective (and healthier) ways of developing perspective among the young besides keeping them uncomfortably hot (if you are fortunate enough to have a choice). Or is it not possible to learn the values of perseverance and responsibility if you are ensconced in what is considered nowadays, a fairly rudimentary luxury? It's possible that Kejriwal's frugal habits come to him naturally. Having said that, living well is not a crime. Nor does personal austerity guarantee good governance.

The Greek playwright Sophocles famously claimed there is no success without hardship. Every culture has rags to riches stories that celebrate the human potential for magnificent heroism. In Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* Bruce Wayne is unsuccessful while attempting an escape from prison secured by a rope. But when he tries to escape without it, risking death, he makes it out. Maybe the learning is faster without a choice. But like Batman eventually discovers he needn't fear darkness, we all learn when we have to, even with a safety net of privilege in place.

hutkayfilms@gmail.com

On the Loose



LEHER KALA

PHOTOS COURTESY: TASVEER