

CULTURE

8 must-see shows at the ongoing Mumbai Gallery Weekend 2023

Spread over four days, the art weekend in Mumbai is a great time to visit galleries for a thrilling visual experience. *AD* presents a round-up of the best offerings from this year.

By Shaikh Ayaz

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Soumya Sankar Bose, *A Discreet Exit Through Darkness 4*

Whatever your thoughts on Maximum City's cultural life, the Mumbai Gallery Weekend 2023 (MGW) is here to enliven it. More than 30 leading galleries have banded together this year for exhibitions and special events including pop-up shows and dance performances sprawled across different sites around the city (though still in close proximity to each other). This ongoing four-day extravaganza (on until 15 January) offers a tantalizing window into Mumbai's art scene where creative conversation, above all else, connects enthusiasts, students, artists, collectors and gallerists with members of the public. Art is for everyone and MGW, currently in its 11th year, embodies that utilitarian philosophy, giving visitors a platform to engage in a thoughtful dialogue with history, politics, culture, craftsmanship and global trends in visual arts. As Mortimer Chatterjee, director, Chatterjee & Lal gallery, puts it: "This is a time when all the galleries come together as a community and celebrate modern and contemporary art. It's like a festival."

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Atul Dodiya: Dr. Banerjee in Dr. Kulkarni's Nursing Room & Other Paintings, 2000-2022

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As any diehard Bollywood fan would know, the title of Atul Dodiya's latest offering refers to Hrishikesh Mukherjee's classic 1971 *Anand*. It is dedicated to the "loving memory" of superstar Rajesh Khanna who played the titular role of a terminally ill patient in *Anand*. Dodiya, whose best-loved pop culture works are an ode to the Bollywood subculture, tells *AD India*, "In my entire career, I have painted diverse things. From Gandhi, pop culture, poetry, Gujarati literature to art historical references, shutter works and realism but cinema has remained a great love almost from the beginning." In this series, which namechecks hits like *Amar Prem*, *Ittefaq*, *Padosan* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* apart from *Anand*, Dodiya uses an interesting conceit that works in his favour—he does away with Khanna's famous face, instead focussing on the cinematic frame and the action within it. "I feel that mystery makes the visual experience more intriguing and engaging," he explains. At 63, Dodiya says he's never felt more at ease with his creative self. "I am free and relaxed and enjoying painting very much. From the start of my career, I have always painted what I have felt like. The market or the outside noise is never on my mind."



Dr. Banerjee in Dr. Kulkarni's Nursing Home

(At Chemould Prescott Road until 25 February)

Nityan Unnikrishnan: Every Day is an Admission of Guilt

Even though widely known as a painter today, Nityan Unnikrishnan started his career making ceramic sculptures. In "Every Day is an Admission of Guilt" at Chatterjee & Lal Gallery, he returns to his first love. Combining both his paintings and sculptures, the show investigates the juxtaposition between interiority in urban spaces and exterior scenes, which "lets in socio-political elements about what's going on around the rest of India," says Mortimer Chatterjee, director, Chatterjee & Lal Gallery. Chatterjee, who has been maintaining and looking after the Taj Mahal Palace collection for the last two decades, has also curated a show titled "Grey Mirrors of the Sea" for Taj. It includes works by masters such as S.H. Raza, V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, B. Prabha and Jehangir Sabavala, among others. Chatterjee says he was interested in the period between 1965 to 1970 when the Taj art gallery was one of the very few spaces in Bombay that exhibited modern art. "I am looking at artists who were working at the intersection between abstraction and the natural world. Some artists veered towards a much more abstract vision while others were exploring landscape, but they were all united in their obsession with natural phenomenon."



Nityan Unnikrishnan, *Avarna Sutram (Sculpture 3)*, 2022, Vitrified stoneware, iron oxide, 10 x 6 x 6 in 25.4 x 15.2 x 15.2 cm *The artist and Chatterjee & Lal*

(At Chatterjee & Lal Gallery until 25 February)

C.K. Rajan: Seekrajan—A Selected Retrospective

In the making for over two years on this exhibition, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke brings together several different

bodies of C.K. Rajan's shape-shifting art spanning over three decades. These include oils-on-canvas, collages, assemblages, sculptures, archival material and even subversive offerings on cigarette packets. "Seekrajan" contains political, social and satirical elements at their whimsical best. "The show is complex and layered," says gallery director Ranjana Steinruecke, adding, "Navigating it is like gaining a fleeting glimpse into the artist's mind." "Seekrajan" has been curated by Grant Watson, who had first discovered Rajan's work in the early 2000s and was instrumental in it being shown at documenta XII in Kassel in 2007. Rajan's works are in leading collections such as the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, the Tate Modern, MuHKA, Ishara Art Foundation, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



From the series Small Sculptures (Love), 2022, Cast bronze, paint, 5.5 x 12.5 x 2 cm / 2.1 x 4.9 x 0.7 in, Ed. of 3

(At Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke until 9 March)

Apnavi Makanji: PSYCHOPOMP

Psychopomps are spirits that carry the souls of the once living to the realm of the underworld. The Switzerland-based artist Apnavi Makanji's eponymous show at TARQ is based on a post-apocalyptic world where the phallotropic heterotopia has ceased to exist. "Therein lie the possibilities," Makanji says, describing *PSYCHOPOMP* as a show celebrating "Queertopia." Makanji's work revolves around queer ecology, which they say allows them to view the world "through a softer, more inclusive lens." They explain, "For me being queer is having the empathy and compassion to put myself in other people's shoes. I know what it feels like to be othered or seen in a non-heteronormative light. I have always been drawn towards seeing the unseen and marginalized. Not just humans but animals and other species. My interest lies in those details." "PSYCHOPOMP", they add, subverts the conventional idea of looking at the natural world from a human perspective. "It's the other way round. I am situating the human condition from the natural world's perspective. For me, that is queer ecology."



Apnavi Makanji, *P.H.A.N.S.T.R.O.M.A.K.*, 2022, Collage on archival paper, 72 x 22.8 inches *Ashish Chandra*

(At TARQ until 11 February)

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Emilie Pugh: Patterns of Consequence

In "Patterns of Consequence" at Galerie ISA, the London-based Pugh creates a unique visual language working with layers of burnt paper gilded in 22 carat gold leaf. In her artist's note, Pugh says her work hopes to capture the tension "the transient and the permanent and form and the void." She draws her imagery predominantly from nature and a particular fascination that drives her happens to be a phenomenon known as a 'Kármán vortex street', which refers to a repeating pattern of swirling vortices in flow velocities.



Aeolus, 2022, 6 layers of burnt Shiramine paper gilded in 22 carat gold leaf, 148 x 113 x 21 cm / 59 x 45 x 8 in the Artist and Galerie ISA, Mumbai

(At Galerie ISA until 15 March)

Soumya Sankar Bose: A Discreet Exit Through Darkness

Bose's solo show delves into the mysterious disappearance of his mother in Midnapore (West Bengal) in 1969 through the twin perspective of photographic material and a non-animated feature length VR film. The immersive VR experience takes viewers on a journey through Bose's imaginative recreation of the traumatic personal incidents that continue to haunt his family. "There are so many missing links in this story. While looking for her my grandfather died shortly after in 1970. My mother was rescued after his death but he was not there to see her again. I worked on this project almost like an oral historian, interviewing our older neighbours and my grandmother who is alive. But ultimately I ended up using my grandfather's perspective to tell the story because memories have gaps which the audience can fill in," says Bose, 32, whose work explores time and memory.



Soumya Sankar Bose, *A Discreet Exit Through Darkness*, 2020-Ongoing Inkjet print on archival paper, mounted on dibond, 40 x 50 in, 101.6 x 127 cm *The Artist & Experimenter*

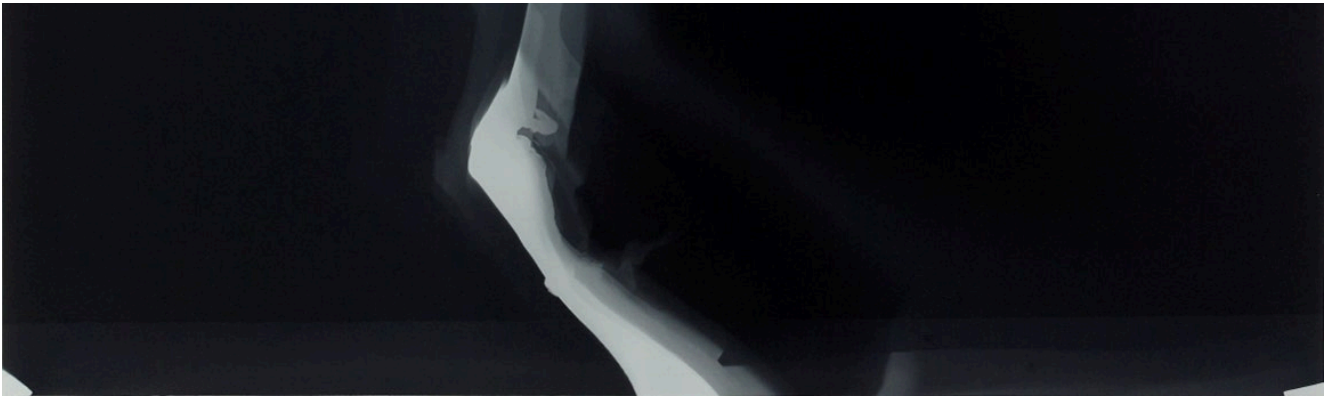
Adds Priyanka Raja, co-founder, Experimenter Gallery, "What is exciting for us personally is to see how Soumya is constantly challenging the frontiers of his own practice and that of the medium itself with every body of work."

(At Experimenter gallery until 25 February)

Anwar Jalal Shemza and Simryn Gill: Contact

Based on botanical subjects, painter Anwar Jalal Shemza and artist Simryn Gill's photograms on display in "Contact" at Jhaveri Contemporary play off one another in an interesting conceptual dialogue. Born in Shimla in 1928, Shemza moved to Stafford in the British Midlands in 1961 where he sought inspiration in the abundant nature around him. While in Stafford, he experimented with a series of little-known photograms depicting English flowers, plants, and shrubs in an abstract format. On the other hand, the Singapore-born Simryn Gill is presenting a work created on Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), a process that she follows with an exposure on a defunct roll of Kodak Portra paper. "The physical record of this coming together, or touching, stretches our understanding of the simple photogram, as both thing and process," writes Dr. Emilia Terracciano in her essay on the two artists.



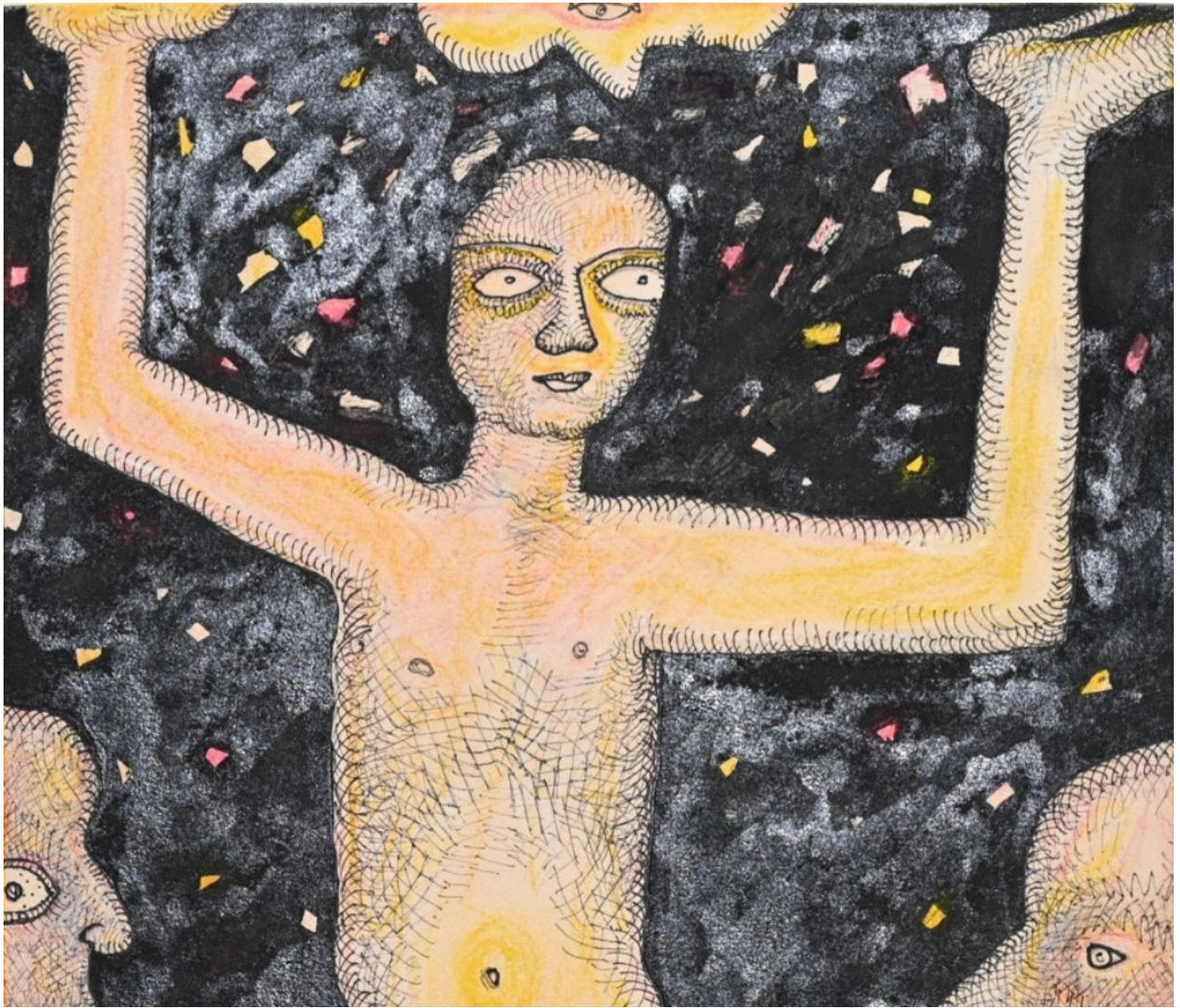


Untitled (from Clearing), 2022, Photogram, 190.5 x 101.6 cm 75 x 40 in

(At Jhaveri Contemporary until 25 February)

Jogen Chowdhury: The Night the Writing Fell Silent

Jogen Chowdhury's powerful art—a canny blend of centuries-old crafts and myths as seen through a modern gaze—is often guided by his abiding interest in the folkloric traditions of India. This formidable aspect of his practice dominates his recent paintings in “The Night the Writing Fell Silent” at Priyasri Art Gallery. Curator Srajana Kaikini explains, "Jogen's works, when engaged with in the present times, opens up a very untimely window for us to access different time frames. As the artist himself has said in an interview, there is nothing symbolic in his forms. So when engaged with as windows of expression, one may find folkloric or otherworldly and mythical elements in these forms that are unmappable. Anecdotal figures, sketches and a recurring interest in the ‘eye’ as a motif are some aspects one notices."



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Jogen Chowdhury, Title: Under the open sky, Pen & Ink and Pastels, 9.7"x12", 2022

(At Priyasri Art Gallery on appointment basis until 30 March)

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