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BACK TO NATURE

A **JSW** INITIATIVE

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Reena Saini Kallat.
River Drawings.
Gouache, charcoal,
graphite, nails and
electric wires on laser
cut and embossed
Arches paper.
44” x 32”. 2020.
Image courtesy of the
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Sarika Mehta.
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Oil on canvas. 12” x 12”.
2020. Image courtesy
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Ketaki Sarpotdar. From the series *Bravo!! 1 & 2*. Etching. 18.7”x 22.4”. 2018.
Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

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Jayashree Chakravarty.
Earth as Haven: Under the Canopy of Love. Cotton, fabric, Nepali paper, tissue paper, jute, dry leaves, tea stains, clay, synthetic glue, acrylic colour, sequins, glass and wooden beads, and steel rods. 2017. Curated by Roobina Karode. At Musée Guimet, Paris. Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi. Image courtesy of KNMA, New Delhi, and Akar Prakar, Kolkata. © Jayashree Chakravarty.

Cellphone Victims and other Viral Stories

Chintan Girish Modi finds Sameer Kulavoor capturing the moulting social landscape.



Sameer Kulavoor. READ & RESIST. Acrylic on canvas. 48" x 96". 2020. Images courtesy of the artist and TARQ. © the artist.

A tiny detail in Sameer Kulavoor's new paintings can become hugely engrossing and pull the viewer into an emotional universe that requires no curatorial roadmaps. All that is expected is a willingness to gaze at the self, not just the work on the wall.

Kulavoor's new show *You Are All Caught Up* invites viewers to behold the compulsive human need to consume every morsel of image, text and sound to the point of exhaustion. Any relief from these digital entanglements is only temporary. It is shattered all too easily by the next notification.

Hosted by TARQ in Mumbai from the 3rd of December 2020 to the 7th of January 2021, this show is definitely not a visual rant by a misanthrope. The artist draws attention to his own participation in the digital economy where consumers are also producers. Being captive is an act of surrender.

The acrylic on canvas *Fear of Missing Out* is perhaps the most striking work in this series, documenting the ubiquitous image of a man glued to his cellphone screen. There are stress lines on his forehead and dark circles under his eyes. He looks like a zombie about to crash. Beads of sweat trickle down his face. He seems anxious and over-stimulated; his eyes are like buttons synchronized with the seductive blue light emanating from the screen. He is possibly dehydrated while doomscrolling or working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kulavoor's aesthetic is stylish and urbane. He is tuned into the life experiences of the demographic that lives online – people for

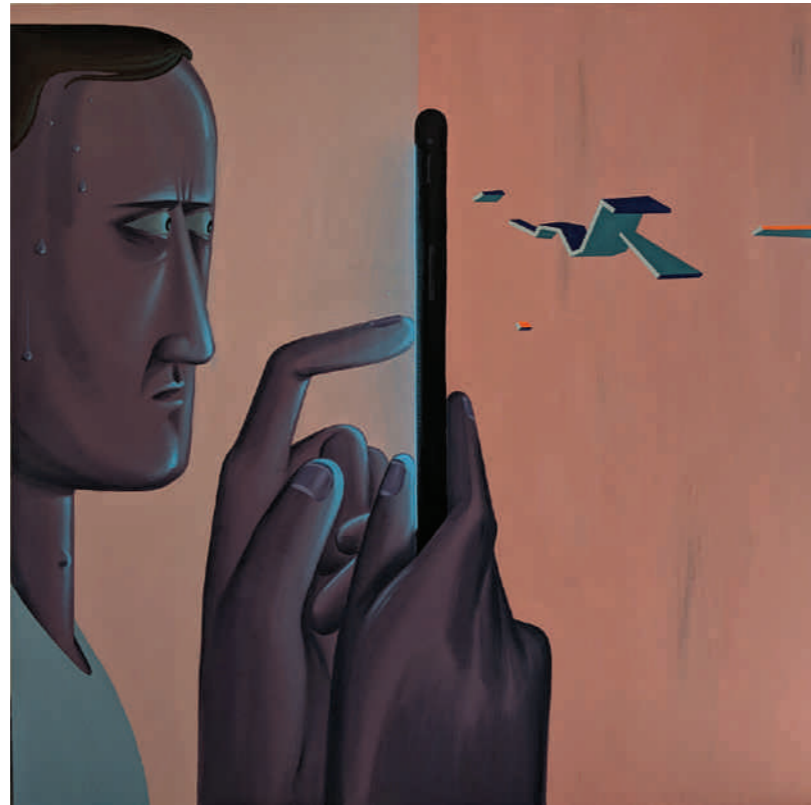
whom social media is a source of refuge as well as restlessness. His acrylic on canvas *Viral Content* illustrates this curious paradox. This image is saturated with men who are pushing and pulling, jostling for space and hurting each other. They might end up tearing each other's clothes or even land up in a hospital. The violence bubbling up is a metaphor for the battle lines being drawn on social media.

In the acrylic on canvas *Mob*, men are armed with sticks as well as cellphones. Their own limbs turn into weapons. Kulavoor reminds viewers that lynchings are now recorded on video and promptly circulated, and online rape threats have become commonplace.

On the one hand, technology is being used to raise funds for vulnerable communities that have been hit by layoffs, cyclones and floods. On the other hand, technology is also providing new avenues for racism, misogyny and homophobia. How do we make sense of what is happening?

Another acrylic on canvas titled *I like it. What is it?* might offer some answers. It features people craning their necks to capture images using their cellphones instead of taking a moment to see and absorb. Kulavoor wants them to watch themselves with the same intensity. What they record does not matter because their appetite for new images wants to be fed constantly through fresh stimuli. The artist has made an intelligent choice by using blank space instead of a specific object. It could well be a corpse, a flower or a centipede.

When this is viewed alongside *The Migrants Have Left*, one is hit by the shallowness of performative allyship on social media. Experts find new platforms to write and speak. Migrant workers walk home with sadness on their faces and hunger in their bellies. Though Kulavoor is reluctant to gloss over the gloomy aspects of the present moment, he also offers a counter-image of



Sameer Kulavoor. *Fear of Missing Out.* Acrylic on canvas. 60" x 60". 2019.

healing. In the acrylic on canvas *Read and Resist*, cellphones are replaced by books, and children take the place of adults. Cacophony gives way to solidarity.

Kulavoor made this work after visiting Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. It has emerged as a prominent site of non-violent resistance against India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019. The artist was deeply inspired by the daycare centre set up for children to read, draw and play. With this work, Kulavoor insists that hope can spring up in the most trying of circumstances. Human beings benumbed by the political atmosphere and a public health crisis of epic proportions can take responsibility for their present and future. It is too early to give up. /

Kaleidoscope: Now

Neha Mitra visits four shows and looks at works by twenty-four artists.

A careful tour of three galleries reveals a wide range of subjects addressed by artists. While three of the shows examine how normal the new normal really is, the fourth dwells on matters of patriarchy and politics.

From the 30th of November to the 30th of December, *Untitled VII* and *Untitled VIII* at Mumbai's Priyasri Art Gallery present the breakdown of reality – the lives we lead in the virtual world are often felt to be more real than the desolate streets around us.

B. Vamsi's watercolours and structures in metal and wood make for a fluid bridge between memory and architecture. Rugged, rusted ruins that have been on a journey through time, clutch on to steps that go to and come from nowhere in particular. Vamsi explores what seems like a minimalistic analogy of life as Mausham R. Manglla's screenprints use overlapping images to express the intermingling of impressions and memories. Space and what it holds is the artist's main concern. Manglla's *Walking on the Street* with its blue and black criss-cross of sketchily approximated built spaces and bare legs is an intimate chronicle of just about any metropolis.

Anjali Sharma's works in woodcut, etching and drypoint, uproot and place the female organs in a surreal and dystopic landscape. This deconstruction of the

efficacious human body and mind holds a mirror to the slowing down and halting of a functioning world outside. Mahavir Wadhvana's drawings and collages on paper capture a resolve to preserve stillness in the deafening din of city life – portraits of a gardener, a tailor, a reclining Pahadi man, among others, are studies in solitude.

Mrunalini Kamble's lithographs and etchings/aquatints are haunting works in dialogue with new spaces. The layering of memories, possessions, shadows and grids forms a smokescreen where images float in and out of a lonely space. Preya Bhagat's intricately detailed woodcuts and drypoints interpret the space one occupies with a play of perspective and scale. Abhishek Dodiya, in his series *Lockdown*, uses corn leaves on paper for lack of availability of his usual material. His structures though solid, defined and confined, are made of degradable material that will age and wither. Vividly illustrating her personal experience at a hospital, Priyanka Das experiments with watercolour on paper, LED lights and resin to draw parts of a female body. Audio and sensory cues create a disturbing effect of the isolation a living, breathing person can experience.

At New Delhi's Latitude 28, *When is Empathy too much?* from the 26th of October to the 30th of November, is a group show curated by Shubhani Sharma and Indira



B. Vamsi. *Untitled.* 15" x 8" x 4". 2017. Image courtesy of the artist and Priyasri Art Gallery.