



Ravi Agarwal

Else, all will be still



RAVI AGARWAL

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The Guild
Art Gallery

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October 11– December 2, 2015

Hightide - I, Archival photographic print, 26" x 34.5", ed. 1/5 + 2AP, 2015

Contributors



Deeksha Nath

Deeksha Nath, born in 1976, is a New Delhi-based independent critic and curator. She is Desk Editor, Art AsiaPacific (New York) and ArtEast (Kolkata). She has published widely and contributed essays to the books *Voices of Change: 20 Indian Artists* (Marg, 2010) and *Art and Visual Culture in India (1878-2008)* (Marg, 2008). She is a former editor of the web journal www.craftrevivaltrust.org. Deeksha's previous curatorial assignments have been with the Tate Gallery, London, and the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. She has curated FIRST SHOWING, a series of first exhibitions of young artists, Seven Art Ltd, Delhi (2010), which traveled to Nature Morte, Berlin (2011); *Astonishment of Being*, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata (2009); *Immersion*, Anant Art Gallery, Delhi (2009); co-curated Best of Discovery section, ShContemporary Art Fair, Shanghai (2008); *Still Moving Image*, inaugural exhibition of the Devi Art Foundation (2008); and *House of Mirrors*, Grosvenor Vadehra, London (2007). Deeksha was guest curator of the exhibitions *Younger than Jesus* at the New Museum, New York (2009), and *Project 35*, a traveling exhibition organized by Independent Curators International, New York (2010).



Renuka Sawhney

Renuka is a writer based in New York and the Founder/Editor of *Hive* (www.hivevoices.org), which is a digital publishing platform that focuses on contemporary epistemologies and systems, image making and representation, and social and political action.

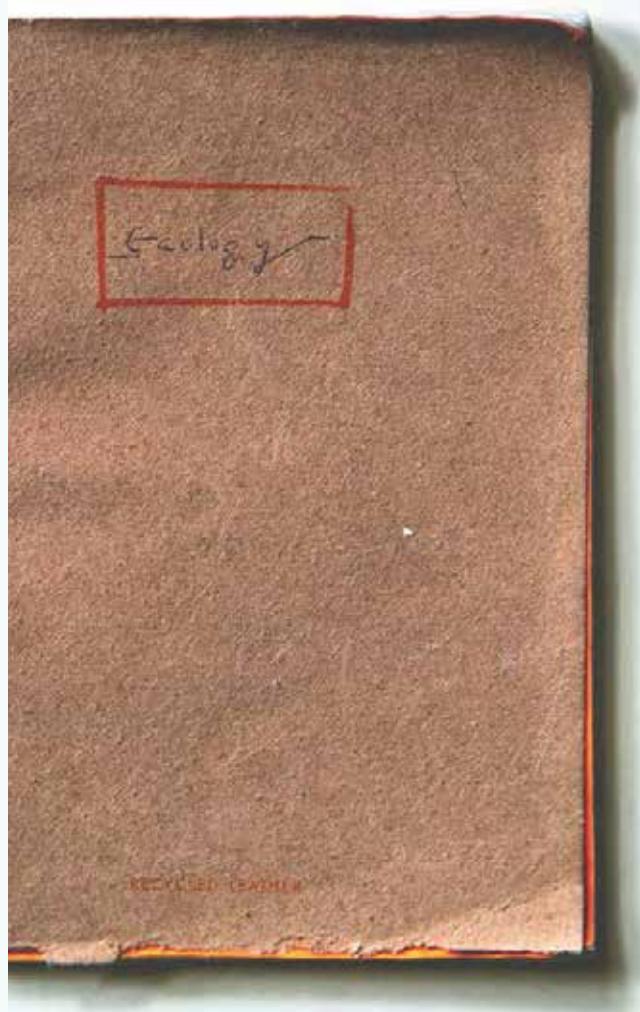
The Guild *Art Gallery*

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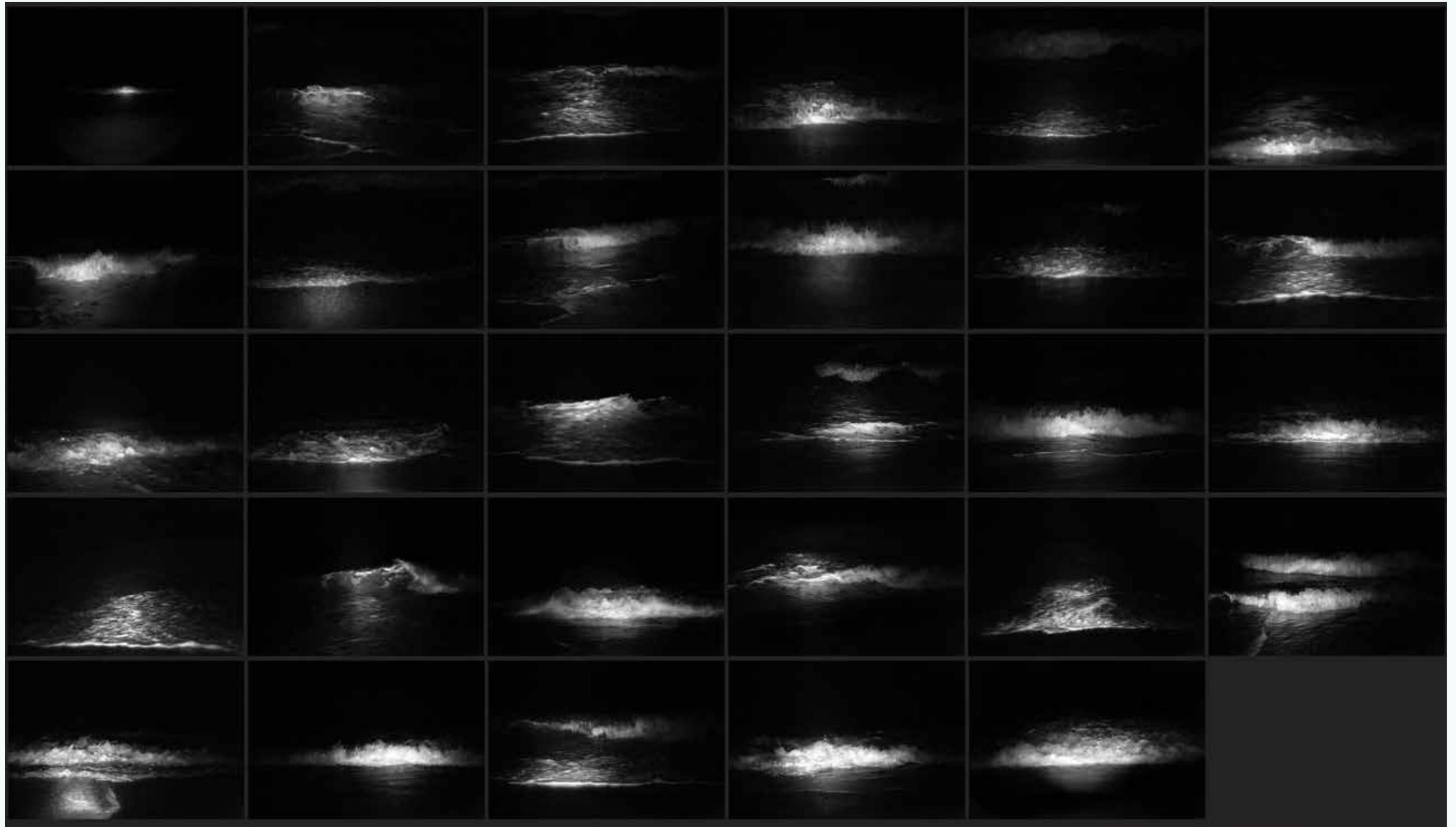
Handmade Diary, *Ambient Seas*

Ravi Agarwal asks, 'Can we envision a future that is both environmentally and socially sustainable?'

Lunar Tide is a set of 29 photographs taken of the sea at night. By the laws of nature we should not be able to photograph the sea at night as it has no internal light source. In the absence of light and therefore the absence of sight the sea makes its vast presence known through the endless sound of crashing waves. Now I know that one cannot literally hear through a photograph but I am going to take poetic license to state that in fact the reiterative quality of the work almost brings alive the endless crashing waves. The black inkiness, which should have been invisible, is highlighted, in this set, through a white illuminating glow which results from the artist shining a torch into sea for hours while simultaneously photographing the swell and ebb of the tide. Movement is spotlighted and the viewer is given a focus for his meditative attention.

The sea has often been imagined and described as the site for meditative experience. Art shares a similar space in the social imaginary. The collection of works in his solo exhibition *Else, all will be still* at the Guild in Mumbai is photographer, writer and activist Ravi Agarwal's first interaction with the Sea. He is an old hand at rivers and *nalas* but the Sea with its vast unknown has always been out of this moderate swimmer's (there is a point to mentioning Ravi's swimming prowess which I shall come to a little later) realm of engagement.

This is partly due to the fact that his home town New Delhi is so very far from any sea and ocean. The other is that Delhi is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna – once a magnificent river flowing from the Himalayas past Delhi and the Northern Plains till it meets the Ganga; a river on whose shores many a beautiful city was born, a vibrant ecosystem that fired the imagination of artists and patrons alike. Today the Yamuna is a much abused almost dead water body, from the moment it reaches the capital city where it absorbs all the city's waste almost entirely unfiltered. And as a passionate environmentalist Ravi has applied all his professional and conceptual resources to bring attention to the plight of the Yamuna, the river increasingly marginalized from city life and imagination. Ravi has repeatedly visualized this engagement and concern:



Lunar Tide, Archival photographic prints, Variable matrix of 29,
17.5" x 26.5" each, edition 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015

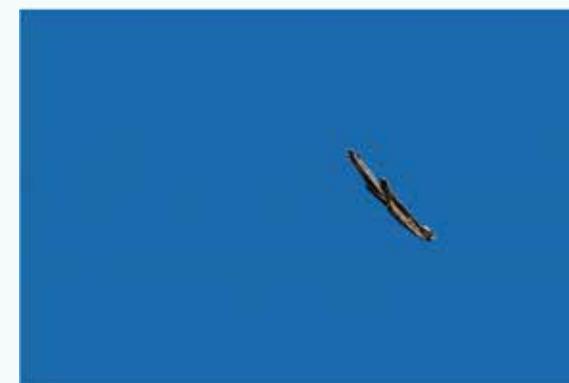
Alien Waters (2004 - 2006), *Have you seen the flowers on the river?* (2007) and in 2011 he co-curated, with Till Krause, *Project Yamuna-Elbe: Public.Art.Ecology* (www.yamuna-elbe.de and www.yamuna-elbe.org), which manifested as engagements with the disappearing ecologies of rivers' in Hamburg and Delhi.

The relationship has been scientific, political, textual and artistic. His works have been both documentaries and constructed narratives. And while ecological and social concern remains at the heart of this exhibition it is the image that is at the core of the experience. Thus we do not enter the image from the thematic but vice-versa, it is the many shades of the sea that reveals a comprehensive social and ecological story.

A Lovers' Lament

Romantics and their antecedents have employed a lyrical prose for the experience of nature, as if mere text cannot do justice to its multi-tiered monumentality. To try to understand it is to limit it and to order it, as the classicists do, and so it is to reduce its beauty. Poetry, with its liberal use of a language of emotions and metaphors, provides a tool with which the boundlessness is comprehensibly expressed. While we have ordered the exterior, our interior is turbulent and uncontrollable – to love, to fear, to lose and to gain are unquantifiable measures. So too we may have ordered the plains, first cultivating them and then through urban settlements, we may have contained rivers, marshes, ponds and lakes, forcing them into spaces and shapes of our convenience, but the oceans, skies, the geological layers underfoot and the molten core still withstand our probing.

And so it is that Ravi turns to Sangam poetry to provide the parameters of his encounter with the sea. Ancient Sangam literature was written in Tamil between 300 BCE and 300 CE and is a collection of 2381 poems composed by 473 poets. The love poetry is classified into modes depending on the type of mood, nature, location and nature of relationship represented by the poem. The poems are either about an inner field, *Akam*, which refers to personal relations such as love and sex or an outer field, *Puram*, which discuss external



Ecological Manifesto, Archival photographic prints set of 3, 15.5" x 23" each, edition 1/5 +2AP, 2015

relations such as valour, ethics, benevolence, social life and customs. Akam poetry is tied to different landscapes: *kurinji* - mountainous regions; *mullai* - forests; *marutham* - agricultural land; *neithal* - coastal regions and *paalai* - deserts.

Neithal is associated with the state of 'pining' or 'longing' and the state is located on the bodies and lives of fisherfolk, their boats, nets, markets and so on. A similar location of states of being onto motifs occurs in the exhibition - poignancy translated through the catamaran that belongs to Ravi and is displayed in the exhibition, the timelessness of waiting vocalized through *Ecological Manifesto*, three photographs faintly inscribed by texts from his diary, and that portray the catamaran falling through an impossibly flat blue sky, and rather literally *Sangam* in which Ravi identifies the 5 modes of poetry onto 5 engine parts, referring to two systems of signification

Ravi's relationship with the sea grew alongside his friendship with Selvam, our protagonist, a tiny-scale fisherman who ekes out his daily living from the sea and is determined that the long line of fishermen in his family will end with him and his children will have a different and hopefully more prosperous life. So much so, he has not even taught his son to swim. One encounters Selvam in the videos (*Shoreline I,II,III*) of him engaged in his hereditary professions – fishing, boat building and net repairing. His strong silent face seems restrained, refusing to speak the words that lay bare his circumstances, desperate not because he is a bad fisherman but because he is a poor one, unable to invest in a large fishing vessel and thus catch the numbers and types of fish that would make this work profitable.

Selvam is at ease in the sea, an ease us landlubbers can never master, not having learnt to swim in treacherous tides alongside mastering the skill of walking, not having spent our lives with the creatures that live beneath the water surface, unknown and often dangerous. Ravi expresses, through text - in his diary and photobook *Ambient Sea* - and in conversations, the awe and fear the sea causes. The artist is not a strong swimmer and the magnitude of helplessness when encountering the sea causes an anxiety to colour the



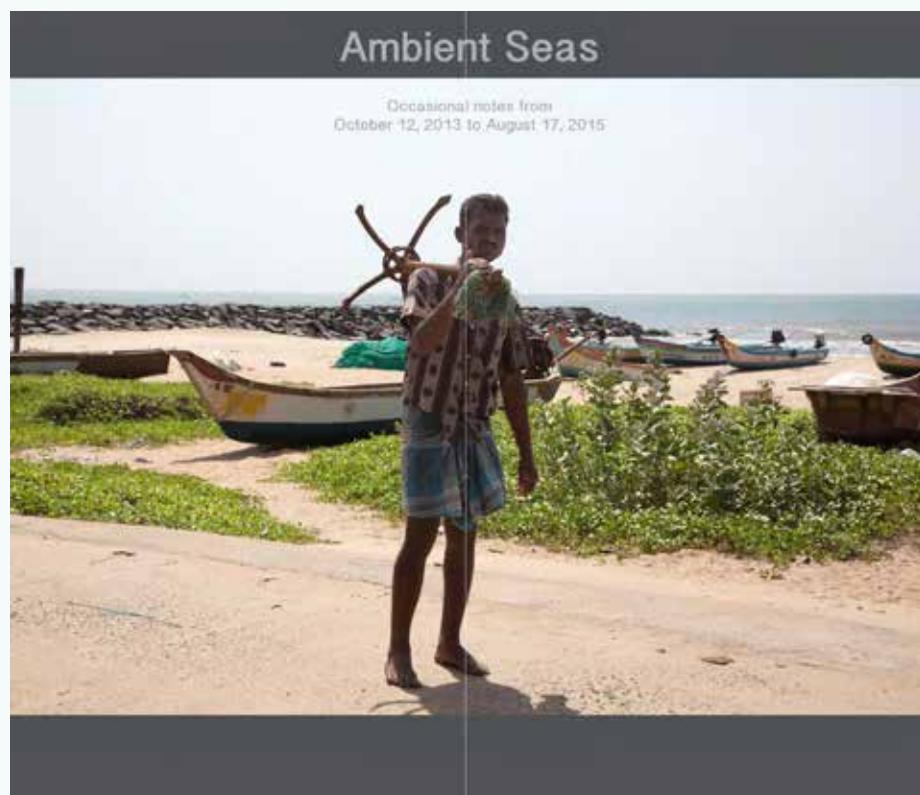
Shoreline Part I, Video, (18 min. 46 sec.), ed. 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015



Shoreline Part I I, Video, (15 min. 22 sec.), ed. 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015



Shoreline Part I I I, Video, (14 min. 31 sec.), ed. 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015



motifs – that would be the viewer experience. Good art and artists employ strategies that spiral you back through this path leading you from motif in the object to the thing that is living. Ravi presents his diary, *Ambient Seas*, as a strategy to undertake an immersive journey in oceanic waters by making visible his own process of idea to image. For many artists writing, note taking, scribbles and doodles are integral for the completion of an engagement. A diary is a point of rumination and by making this visible to the public, the artist invites engagement with source material thus encouraging individual interactions with ideas and images. We are allowed, in a sense, views of image blueprints and this visibility accepts the possibility of diverse points of view – the image is not sacrosanct but act as gateways, much like the diary.

At the start I located a meditative practice onto the exhibition on the back of *Lunar Tide*, of letting the image simply be. Coincidentally Ravi also made a video, *Neithal*, of the sea at night. Here the sea is not silent but its own voice has been transposed by multiple voices – Sangam poetry, acoustic depth measurement and notes on climate change. Watching the video is akin to being inside Ravi’s head; of imagining multiple thoughts and references – pillars which support his involvement – crashing around inside as he sat silent and still facing the sea. It reminds me of the movie *Being John Malkovich*, multiple voices converse and collide and their simultaneous location is both playful and a tinge psychotic. Environmentalists use several techniques from scientific rationale, thoughtful narrative to rabid militarism to comprehend, control and converse with *Nature*.

Deeksha Nath
New Delhi, September 2015

Notes:

His work may be viewed on www.raviagarwal.com
Ravi Agarwal is the founder of the environmental NGO Toxics Link www.toxicslink.org
Yamuna Elbe project can be viewed at www.yamuna-elbe.de and www.yamuna-elbe.org
Short List of Publications on the river:
Agarwal, R. Immersion. Emergence. New Delhi: Youthreach (2006)
Have you seen the flowers on the river? New Delhi: Khoj Artists’ Association (2010)
Reimagining the River, in Nanda, R. (ed.) Seminar 657, May 2014, New Delhi
‘Fluid Landscapes’ in *Nature and History*, Cederof & Rangarajan (eds.) Seminar 673, September 2015, New Delhi
Agarwal & Krause (ed). *Yamuna Manifesto.* New Delhi: Goethe Institute and Toxics Link (2013)



Neithal, Video (5 min. 24 sec.), ed 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015



Engines, 20 Kms, Archival Photographic prints, Variable matrix of 20, 15.5" x 23" each, edition 1/5 + 2AP 2015



Sea of Mars (modified) Archival photographic print,
29" x 47.5", edition 1/5 +2AP, (Original photograph - NASA)

Reconstitution: the State of Nature

Ravi Agarwal's work takes the forms of photographs, videos, installation, research and writing on pressing environmental concerns and activism. In *Else, all will be Still*, Agarwal integrates these varied forms into complex enunciations of his engagement with specific bodies of knowledge; Agarwal tackles the epistemologies of nature and ecology placing them in a dance with the social contract through the ontology of its objects.

Deftly encapsulating capital's relationship with surplus value, the series of photographs, *Engines*, imply the dexterity of use and reuse. The boat engines at the center of each image, photographed from an angle that moves from bottom right to top left, bordered at the top left with the open sea and anchored in sand at bottom left, is a compositional gesture that is brilliant – locating the head of the engine – traditionally the back of a boat – as the masthead leading the charge both emotional and political into the horizon. The engines themselves are composed – not built, not engineered, but lyrically composed – suggesting that the process of this composition – the gathering of detritus that litters our world, into reusable engines that out of economic necessity are returned to cycles of utility, suggests an engine capable of perpetual motion; an epistemic impossibility.

Vivek Chibber's recent book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* works to prove that there are universalize concerns – few not very many – that face individuals in both the global south and east and the global north and west. The need to universalizing certain concerns, such as one's wellbeing, safety, security, some need for self-determination is true; however so is the assertion by Ranajit Guha that the primary agent of change for modernization in post-colonial theory should have been the bourgeoisie- implying the real engine of change is in addressing those universal concerns first; a fact that is borne out by the construction of various Constitutions that are designed to first protect basic human rights. The fact that these in practice do not come close to the ideal, even at the supranational level at the UN - which only recently declared the right of access to safe drinking water as a human right -

is evidence of the complexity of social contracts as being particular and universal.

These constructs – human rights, constitutions and the social contract – are constructed systems predicated on the exit of man from a state of nature, into a being capable of forming and living in an organized civil society. In contrast the categories of things other than ourselves, and outside of ourselves – categories that despite their *constructed* organization constitute the other – are accounted for as both us, and the other. Object-oriented ontology as the basis of Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* asserts that nature as the other, is a constructed category. For Morton, the language used to engage with nature fails in its epistemological construct precisely because it hinders engagement – language is the barrier, it both deconstructs, divides and marks something as the other by its very articulation. Thus the language of the organization of the other, the bios and its systematic classification works to delineate the boundaries of epistemological bodies. Morton's thesis is however undermined by the narrowness of the epistemologies he considers – Romantic Literature – pre and post Enlightenment. Even used as a case in point, to leave unacknowledged the fact that the Enlightenment formed the various tools for colonization – the building of bio-epistemologies, political and social organization based on classifications of the other – is to underline the fact that nature is not a universal category.

Agarwal provides a one particular engagement between language and category by activating Sangam Literature and Poetry – reaching further back to the 300BC-300AD for articulations of human engagement with objects, classified as the other, but also integrated as the self, moving with, and thus affecting, this other. The language of Sangam Literature is constructed as a binary – grammatically there is the inner – Agam – and the outer – Puram – presenting a distinction of voice subject to its location and its dispersal even before the construction of civil society in the West places the latter outside, and as an exception to the man in the state of nature.

Given the dominance and hegemony of western political, social and economic



text intervention: extracts of verse from Sangam Poetry written onto the rough shahbad stone tiles

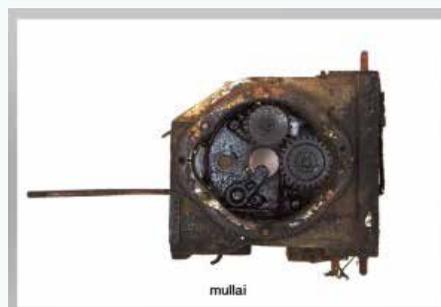


narratives it should come as no surprise that the construction of the polis – the city-state and/or the body of citizens – constitutes first a differentiating act between man in the state of nature (posited by various philosophers as a state of perpetual war, or as a true state of freedom) and man in civil society. This differentiation suggests two points; firstly it serves to romanticize the polis as a, and in a, state of negotiated peace, and secondly, categorized man as a political animal, while decrying that political nature as outside the confines of this socially constituted polis – by its constitution. A differentiation most markedly made by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* where she based the political activity of man as occurring and possible only after the social activity – sustenance, family etc. – had been met. Arendt further illustrated these differences and their bases in *On Revolution*, where the French Revolution’s declaration and subsequent adoption of the Rights of Man, predicated the building of the French Constitution, in contrast to the American Revolution, which sought to constitute a polis first, before conferring rights on its citizens.

The fact that both required man to leave a state of nature, whether it was a state of freedom (Locke) or a state of perpetual war (Hobbes) to enter into a social contract (Rousseau, Montesquieu) as an instrument through which civil society can be formed, firmly constituting, as a result, the state of nature as an epistemological construct that is opposed to the existence and furtherance of civil society. Is it to be wondered that Enlightenment chose as one of its basic constructs the language of romanticism to describe and demarcate the other – both socially and politically sundered from the constructed polis?

From Hobbes to Hume, the positioning of man as coming out of Plato’s cave to form the basis of being with others and seeing beyond the confines of the cave itself, man in the pre-civil society stage – in the state of nature – has formed the founding premise over which civil society is built. The social contract between polis and the individual forms the enunciation and condition of this exit from the Plato’s cave. John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* however assumes that in the state of nature man is naturally free and equal – in contrast to Hobbes who concluded that the man outside the state of nature must subject himself to sovereign power to remain outside the state of perpetual war,

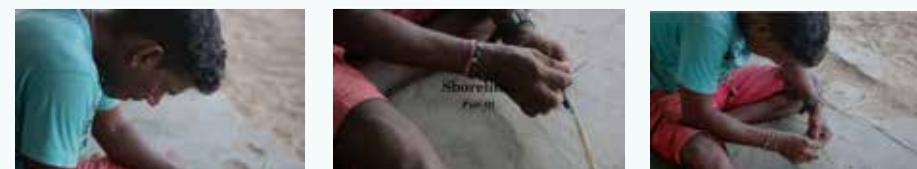
presenting the assumption that man in the state of nature must leave willingly on the one hand, and is an aberration on the other. These two opposing constructions of man in a state of nature, nevertheless result in the formation of the social contract.



Sangam Engine, Archival photographic print set of 5, 15.5" x 23" each, edition 1/5 +2AP, 2015

As this exit forms the basis of the construction of the social contract – the images in Plato’s cave form the basis of aesthetic theory; from the projection of the subjective subconscious onto the walls of the cave, to the pre-language articulations of cave painting – the image is suggested as nefarious and subject to subjective relations of perception, while the object as image lies outside the cave – after exit. If perception is the object inside the cave, at exit the previously exiting state is the basis of the objectification of the other.

Image as object, and object-oriented ontology (from Morton’s *Ecology without Nature*) forms the point at which Agarwal’s *Engine Parts 1*, and *Sangam Engines* form an epistemological speculation. The engine is given an articulation that only it seems to understand – in placing one language (Sangam Poetry) upon the language of image – Agarwal contrasts Morton’s thesis that Ecology must be considered without Nature – that is without the manner in which we objectify nature in word, image and speech as the other in order to understand ecology as a body of knowledge. With the overt gesture of Sangam Poetry inscribed below and around engine parts, Agarwal suggests two counter points in these works; first that ecology is not only a scientific body of rational knowledge, but also a system in perpetual motion and ongoing negotiation with an uncompleted other, and therefore inadequate in the ecology that is assumed and second, that Morton’s thesis is flawed as it fails to account for the languages of the inherited other – in Morton’s case his inheritance is the Enlightenment – which claims the superiority of rational and scientific thought over more fluid constructions. For Agarwal, nature, not a dreaded word, and our place in it, with it, conditional to it, and now weighing heavily upon it, should form a democratic construction – as the ecological contract.



Creating a neutral space for these negotiations forces first, a reconsideration of the basic foundation of the social contract- the exit from the cave. This reconsideration Agarwal complicates with the documentation of the fisherman Selvam's work eking out a living from the sea in the videos *Shoreline I,II,III*. Fishing, an inherited occupation, and one that Selvam doesn't necessarily want to pass on to his son – echoing Chibber's claim for a few universal desires across the spectrum – requires an ontology that is both mastery and humility. Romantic notions yes, but laced with the practical consideration of earning a living wage, supporting a family and surviving. Does Agarwal make a case for an existing state of nature? For those not addressed by policy-makers, the economically marginalized, the poor, a contract between the sea and Selvam constitutes a language of sustenance, where Selvam takes, and the sea gives – not sustainability. Selvam's economic will is subject to the sea, because his social contract has failed him – although that is pure supposition, for many it is not far from the truth. It is a proven fact that the marginalized and the poor bear the brunt and the costs of climate change. Of what use is their social contract, the agreement to form a civil society – in the Indian Constitution predicated on the betterment of the masses (in contrast to the American Constitution, predicated on the property rights) -, and the body of constituted law therein, when representation in practice is both fluid and corrupt? Agarwal's long practice of activism is one form of this articulation. In *Third Text*, Volume 27, 2013 Agarwal offers an explanation,

As part of my art practice I try to address some of these urgent concerns, for example, through my work on the river in Delhi (e.g. After the Flood, 2011, and Alien Waters, 2004–2006), and on the farming of marigolds (Have You Seen the Flowers on the River, 2007), and in the documentation of labor in Gujarat (Down and Out: Laboring under Global Capitalism, 1997–2000), which is locally situated but reflective of the global capital flows and new global imaginations. I see these as deeply interconnected, not caused by some 'foreign hand', but as an internalization of the idea of a global identity. Have You Seen the Flowers on the River? deals with the idea of sustainability, documenting the journey of the marigold from the small farmer fields of the river Yamuna in Delhi to the 200-year-old farmers' market in Old Delhi where until recently

they were sold daily. (The market moved in December 2011 owing to the city's new 'beautification' drive.) Through photographs, field notes, videos and an installation, over a period of four years (2007 to 2012), I attempted to show a sustainable life in the middle of a densely populated city. The farmers' land is now being slowly acquired for new development, owing to exorbitant land prices caused by the recent 'globalization' of the city, even as the city works under the banner of 'sustainability'. The work questions if sustainability is only found through creating 'new markets' or if it already exists in people's lives and is more about an idea and way of life. And 'sustainability' is being interpreted by all (corporations, governments, NGOs) for their own uses. Both through my activist and artistic involvements, I am interested in it from a ground-up perspective of equality and rooted in the question of 'what is a good life?'

Agarwal's positioning of sustainability and its use and misuse, subjective and ground-up narratives and the evocation of the good life and equality therein, is at the core of the current discourse around human rights and climate change, and by extension an ecological contract based off of a re-rendering and renegotiation of the social contract. The philosophical and political other – rights of the planet and its inhabitants – must needs also constitute a new social contract with human beings. In practice, this theorization of human and planet rights, epistemologically fails to even accurately identify what falls in the other category. Ecology itself is no longer an adequate category sufficient enough to include in a social contract, simply because both humans and non-humans are subject to the realities of the failures of past exclusions. It is no longer ethically or morally contestable that climate change is not a naturally occurring event. It is rather the result of human action on non-human actors, who by the very dint of their epistemological constructions, as the other, as the cave that precipitated an exit in the first place, has become politically mute. Further, the construction of civil society for human progress, constituted a secondary yet equally powerful demarcation between the idea of progress through accumulation and surplus creation versus the idea of backwardness through scarcity. This second construction positing a choice between surplus and scarcity is the simplest formulation of human rights, predicated on the right to property and the good life.

Universalizing issues such as climate change, the environment and human rights have constrained spaces in particular social and political constructions. In India, a country that has deftly adopted the language of capital, and is fully embracing its logic, with a billion people, all speaking culturally attuned dialects of capital, and the problems of labor, what is the space envisioned for the renegotiation of the social contract that does not exclude the epistemological and political other, both human and non-human. What space is there for the language of ecology and nature and where is this articulation most effective?

Contrary to the theories and practices of the ongoing politicization of aesthetics - signaling a more sophisticated breakdown of epistemologies on the one hand, while on the other, further proof that the social is the political - the exhibition, *Else, all will be Still* forms one neutral space for Agarwal's articulation. The works in the exhibition form a complexity that effectively brings Agarwal's activist practice and artistic practice into one spatial dimension, and in so doing, Agarwal makes the argument for the renegotiation of the social contract from a ground-up perspective by taking into account the existing political, economic and ecological frameworks.

In the photographs *Manifesto*, *Rhizome*, and *Sea of Mars*, Agarwal positions this as yet undefined spatial backdrop as alien landscapes with objects suspended in spaces that are not easily recognizable – suggesting a loss of language and a loss of anchorage for these objects and for their inbuilt enunciations of capital, conquest and colonization. A reworking of these enunciations by inscribing their subjects and ontology therein in open spaces without the anchorages of constructed linear meaning – as in *Rhizome* – alien but no longer unknown landscapes – as in *Sea of Mars* – and space without a visual horizon – as in *Manifesto*, Agarwal suggests that in order to construct the ecological contract the weightage, the location, and the meaning of epistemological, capitalist and democratic systems must be all renegotiated. Placing at center the practicalities of Selvam's livelihood – the boat as the object, and the sea and the subject that speaks for itself as well – firmly establishes that at this center must be the practical, moral and ethical considerations of those humans and objects that bear the brunt of the negative effects of these systems.

Reconsidering underlying political and economic systems requires returning to the fundamental foundations of Western political philosophy which demarcates civil society from man in a state of nature, and the nature of property rights as the basis of democratic representation. In comparison, the construction of the polis post-independence in India, which is predicated on the betterment of the masses rather than the property-class (who at the time conceded a portions of their property rights under the Emergency Provisions) the Indian Constitution places the vast majority of India's poor at the center of the constitution – the Social Revolution as the engine of growth. The stated aim, to build a centralized civil society capable of lifting millions out of poverty, vs the unanimous rejection of the decentralization of political power in the romanticized unit of the village served to construct a unique constitution that, which while deftly borrows from the Rights of Man, nevertheless protects the right of the state to appropriate property and Fundamental Rights in the case of an emergency. The aim of the contract at the heart of the Indian Constitution is the social revolution – not revolution as against the state but the reconstitution of the term revolution to proactively imply the existence and effective application of constituent power of the masses vis a vis the state. In practice of course, this is hardly the case. Reconsidering both, the construction of this polis as it currently exists and the fundamental assumption of pre-civil society man to include the non-human actors that are silent parties to this contract, is fundamental to building an ecological contract, evidenced by the significant impact of climate change that affects the sub-continent, including the impending depletion of India's water table, the rising of sea-levels in the Indian Ocean, and the scarcity of resources. If the social revolution is predicated on lifting the masses from poverty, this must needs include providing adequate food, access to safe drinking water, and livable conditions – a return to man in the state of nature is no longer the same state of nature as it was when the construction of civil society necessitated a stark and extreme demarcation. Instead, the ecological contract must include the considerations of the social contract, with the inclusion of ecology and nature as epistemological bodies that are at the basis of the polis and not politically separate as the other.

The space created by Agarwal, both in his activist and artistic practices,

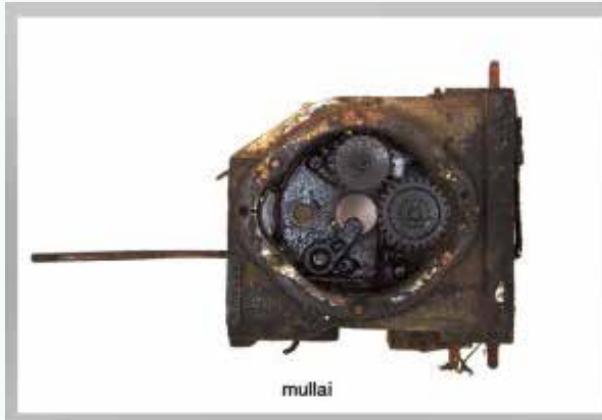
suggests a reworking with Selvam and the sea as the center of the one intimate ecological contract – taking into account both parties as mute in their own spheres, but as dependent ontologies together. This particular enunciation, without the harkening of language of Romanticism, and given Agarwal’s work as an activist, implies that there is semi-neutral ground available on which space can be made for the voicing of both parties’ ethical obligations - not by an outside other but in relation to each other.

The ethical and moral considerations suggested by Agarwal in his focus on Selvam’s work and life, is but a fraction of the vast 600+ million or so that also struggle for their livelihood on the sub-continent, with the state and its global adherence to, and local adoptions of, capitalism serving as both utopian and fictional engines in perpetual motion, and as the most effective argument for the continuation of collective global and local activism. Climate change, the ecological contract and the rights of humans, nature and ecology are undoubtedly the next evolution that we must consider. In *Else, all will be Still*, Agarwal creates a space for the verbalizing, aestheticizing and complicating of epistemological, and systemic constructs from a bottom-up perspective in the public realm, as the basic and fundamental requirement of an ecological contract that is an ethical and political reconsideration of the social contracts and the future state of nature as the future state of man.

Renuka Sawhney
New York, October, 2015



text intervention: extracts of verse from Sangam Poetry written onto the rough shahbad stone tiles and the concrete pillar



Sangam Engine, Archival photographic print set of 5,
15.5" x 23" each, edition 1/5 +2AP, 2015



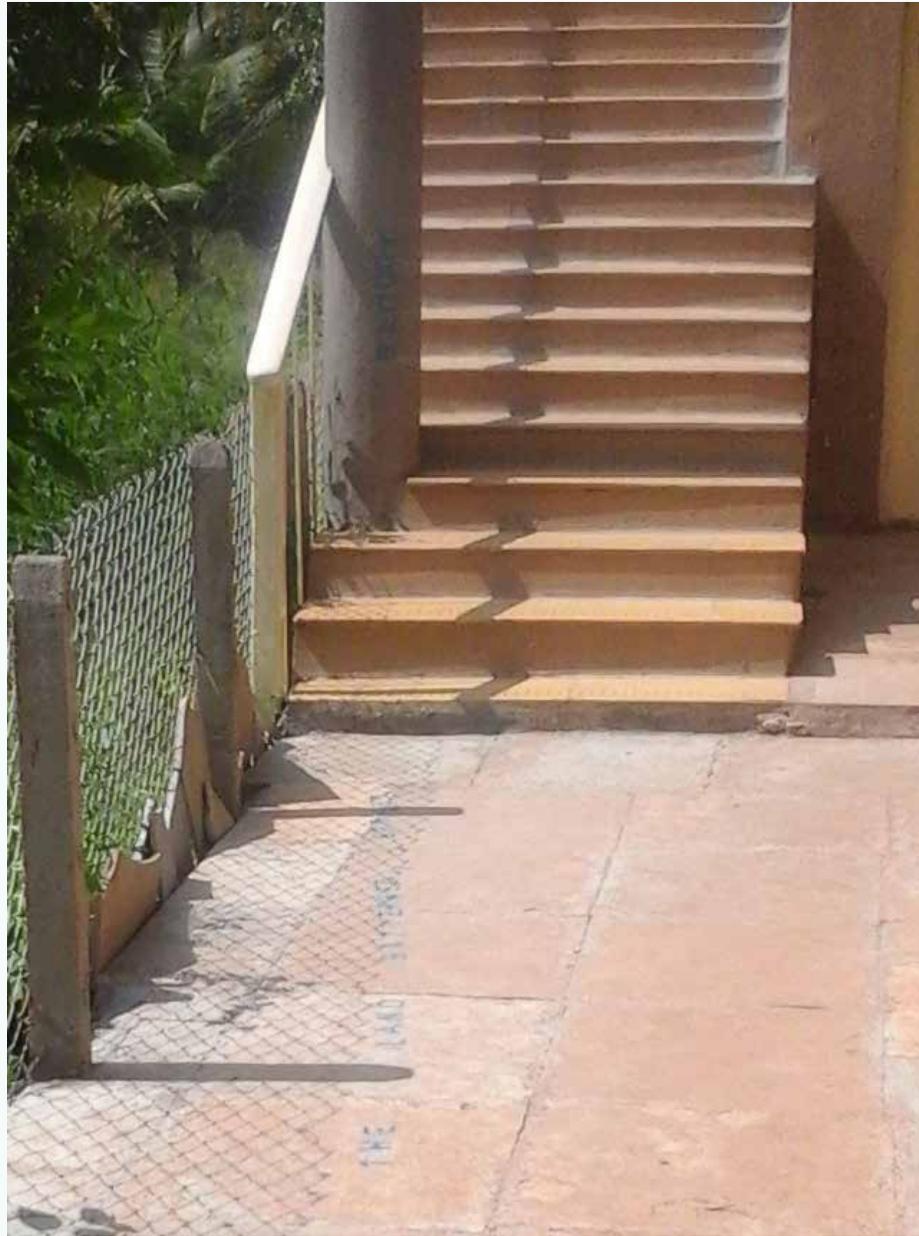
Hightide - II, III, IV, V, Archival photographic print, 26" x 34.5" each, ed. 1/5 + 2AP, 2015



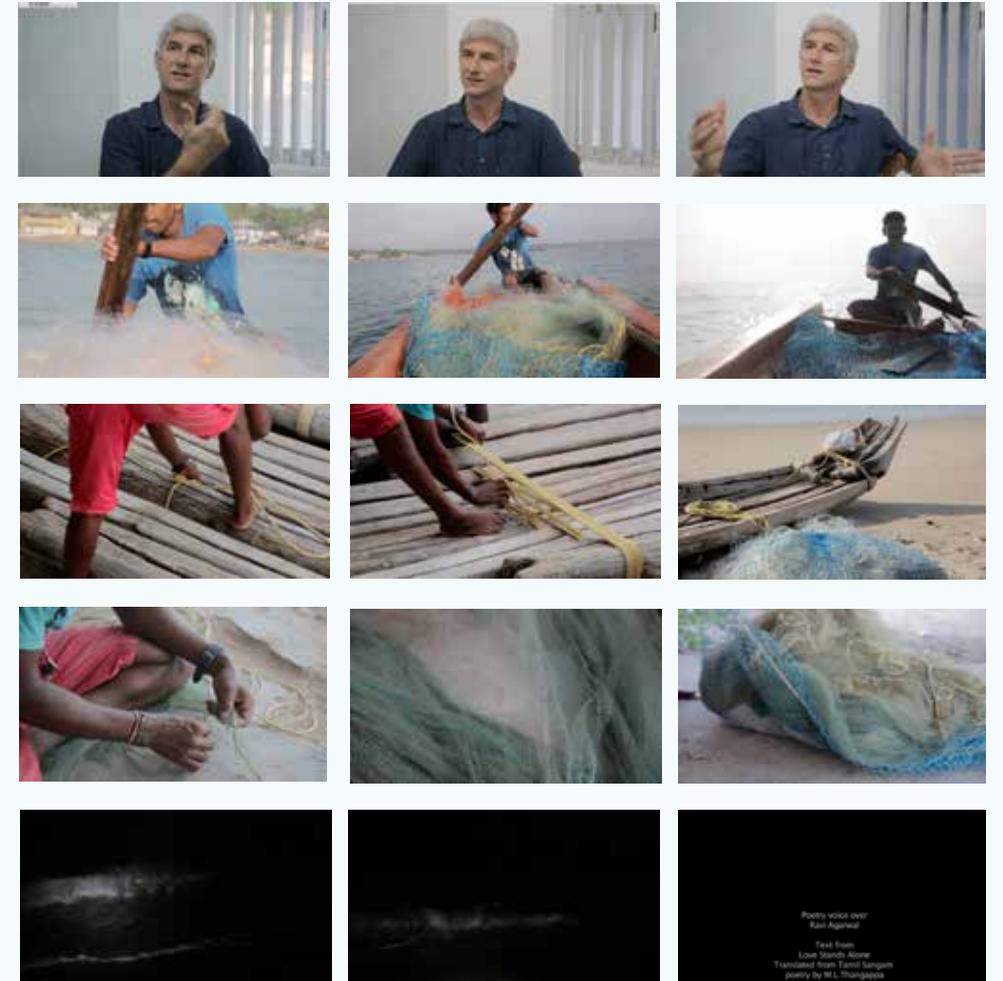
The Sea.6am, 13th March, 2015,
Archival photographic print,
60" x 80", edition 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015

soon, darkness too will close in





text intervention: extracts of verse from Sangam Poetry written onto the rough shahbad stone tiles and concrete pillar



Video stills from: *Sea of Sand, Shoreline Part-I, II, III* and *Neithal*



Ambient Seas, Notes from October 2013 to August 2015, Diary



Neithal, Video (5 min. 24 sec.) edition 1/5 + 2 AP, 2015



No one asked me, Archival photographic print, 17" x 17", edition 1/5 + 2AP, 2015





Salt Pan, Archival photographic archival print, 36" x 103", edition 1/5 +2 AP, 2015



RAVI AGARWAL

Ravi Agarwal is a photographer artist, writer, curator and environmentalist. He explores issues of urban space, ecology and capital in interrelated ways working with photographs, video, performance, on-site installations and public art.

Agarwal has shown in several international shows including Documenta XI (2002), Kassel, Germany, Horn Please (Berne 2007) Indian Highway (2009 ongoing) as well as several national shows and solo shows. Agarwal co-curated a twin city public art show, YamunaElbe.Public.Art.Outreach.

He writes extensively on ecological issues, and is also founder of the leading Indian environmental NGO Toxics Link.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 Of Value and Labour, The Guild, Mumbai
- 2010-11 Flux: dystopia, utopia, heterotopia. Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2008 An Other Place, Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2006 Alien Waters, India International Centre, New Delhi
- 2000 Down and Out, Labouring under Global Capitalism, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi; The Hutheesingh Visual Arts Gallery, Ahmedabad, Gujrat, India; National Vakbondsmuseum, Amsterdam
- 1995 A Street View, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi

MUSEUM / INSTITUTIONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 The Eye and the Mind: New Interventions in Contemporary Art” curated by Rajeev Lochan, Director, National Gallery of Modern Art, India at Gaung

- dong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2014, Beijing, Shanghai , 2015, China
- 2014-15 End of the World Biennial (Bienal del Fin del Mundo), curated Massimo Scaringella Argentina and Chile, 2015
- 2014 Free River Zone, Goethe Institute, New York, 2014
- 2104 Sahamat, Curated Vivan Sundaram, New Delhi, 2014
- 2013 Convergence: Contemporary Art from India and the Diaspora. Curated Kathryn Myers. The William Bentley Museum of Art, School of Fine Arts, Connecticut, USA
- 2013 Water – curated Gayatri Sinha, Europalia, Belgium, October 2013
- 2013 Sharjah Biennial 11 May 2013
- 2013 Zones of Contact propositions for the Museum. Co-curated by Vidya 2012 Sivadas, Akansha Rastogi, Deekshanath. KiranNadar Museum Of Art, Noida.
- 2012 Eye of the needle,
- 2012 Newtopia, curated Katherina Gregos, various museums venues, Mechelen
- 2012 Critical Mass, Contemporary Art from India, curated Rotem Ruff, Tel Aviv Museum of Contemporary Art May 2012
- 2011-14 Z.N.E, Examples to Follow, curated Adrienne Goehler,Traveling exhibition, Mumbai, Adis Ababba, Beijing. Sao Paulo, Berlin
- 2011 Generation in Transition. New Art from India curated by Magda Kardasz, Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius, Lithuania
- 2011 Generation in Transition, New Art from India, curated Madga Kardasz, Zacheta National Gallery for Art, Warsaw, Poland
- 2011 The Eye is a Lonely Hunter, Images of Humankind, curated Katerina Gregos and Solvej Helweg Ovesen, Fotofestival Mannheim_Ludwigshafen_Heidelberg, Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany
- 2011 After the Crash, curated Camilla Boehimo, Orto Botanico Museum, Rome
- 2010 Where Three Dreams Cross, curated Sunil Gupta et al, Whitechapel Gallery, London, and Winterthur Fotomuseum, Switzerland
- 2009 Astonishment of Being, curated Deeksha Nath, Birla Academy for Arts and Culture, Kolkotta
- 2008/ 12 Indian Highway, curated Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Gunnar Kvaran, traveling exhibition, Serpentine Gallery, London (2008); Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norway (2009); HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2010); Musée d’Art Contemporain, Lyon-France (2011);

- MAXXI, Rome, Italy (2011), Beijing
- 2008 Extinct part of 48deg C, Public Eco-Art International festival, New Delhi, curated Pooja Sood,
- 2008 Still/Moving Image, curated Deeksha Nath, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi
- 2007 Frieze Art Fair, Khoj Artists Workshop Stall, London
- 2007 Horn Please, The Narrative in Contemporary Indian Art ,curated Bernhard Fibicher, Suman Gopinath, Kunstmuseum, Bern, Switzerland.
- 2007 Public Places, Private Spaces, curated Gayatri Sinha, Zetta Emmons and Paul Sternberger, Newark Museum, Newark and Minneapolis (2008) USA.
- 2006 Watching Me Watching India curated by Gayatri Sinha and Celina Lunsford, Frankfurt Fotografie International, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2003 Crossing Generations: DiVERGE: Forty years of Gallery Chemould, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, curated by Geeta Kapoor and Chaitanya Sambrani
- 2002 Documenta XI, curated Okwui Enwezor, Kassel, Germany
- 1996 2nd Biennial of Creative Photography, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 Urban Utopia, curated Lyla Rao, Birla Museum of Art and Culture, Kolkata,
- 2014 Zameen, curated Ranjit Hoskote, Art District XIII, New Delhi, October 2014
- 2012 The Secret life of plants, curated by Maya Kovskaya, Exhibit 320, New Delhi.
- 2012 Art HK, presented by The Guild Gallery, Mumbai
- 2012 Chennai Art Fair, presented by The Guild Gallery, Mumbai
- 2012 India Art Summit, presented by Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2011 Staging Selves - Power, Performativity & Portraiture, curated Maya Kovskaya, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
- 2011 Tolstoy Farm, curated Gayatri Sinha, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi
- 2011 India Art Summit, presented by Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2010 CWG, Sports and the City, curated Rupika Chawla, LKA, New Delhi
- 2009 Detour, curated Ranjit Hoskote, Gallery Chemould, New Delhi
- 2009 The Purple Wall, curated Gayatri Sinha, India Art Summit, 2009
- 2009 Recycle, curated Bhavna Vij, Travencore House, New Delhi, Nature Morte, Kolkata
- 2008 Click! Contemporary Photography in India, curated Sunil Gupta and Radhika

- Singh, Vadehra Gallery, New Delhi
- 1995 First National Exhibition of Photography, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi
- 1993 Bombay Natural History Society photo exhibition, Bombay, India.

CURATION

- 2011 Project Y. Yamuna-Elbe Public.Art.Outreach, Hamburg and Delhi, Oct/Nov 2011.
co-curated with Till Krause (www.yamuna-elbe.de)

BOOKS AND CATALOGUES

- Yamuna Manifesto ed. Ravi Agarwal and Till Krause, 2013
- Chemicals, Environment, Health: A Global Management Perspective co authored, Taylor and Francis, 2011
- Flux: Dystopia, Utopia, Heterotopia, Gallery Espace, 2011
- In the Shadow of the Vulture, 48 deg C, Public Eco Art, Goethe Institute, New Delhi, 2009
- Have you seen the flowers on the river ?, Khoj, New Delhi
- Immersion. Emergence, Youthreach, New Delhi, 2007
- Down and Out: Labouring under Global Capitalism , co-edited, Jan Breman et al, Oxford University Press and Amsterdam, University Press, 2000
- Making a Difference, A collection of essays, ed. Rukmani Shekhar, Spic Mackay, New Delhi, 1998
- Portfolios in The India Magazine, 1995 and 1997
- Portfolio in The First City Magazine, 2003
- Monthly Photo Column in First City Magazine, since Feb 2005

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

1. Fight for a Forest, Nature without Borders, ed. Mahesh Ranagarajan and M.D.Madhusudan, September 2014
2. Contemporary Flows, Fluid Times, Art Fair Magazine, February 2011
3. Hi Tech Heaps, Forsaken Lives (co-authored), Challenging the Chip, Labour Rights and Environmental Justice in the Global Electronics Industry, ed Ted Smith et al, Temple University Press, USA, 2007
4. Standardised, packaged, ready for consumption, Sarai Reader 05, Bare Acts,

Sarai – CSDS, Delhi, 2005

5. Beyond environmental standards, from techno centric to people centric environmental governance. Troubles Times, Sustainable Development and Governance in the Age of Extremes.” SDPI, Islamabad, 2006
6. Resisting technology, regaining and a personal ecology, Sarai Reader, 03, Shaping Technologies, 2003
7. Corporate Social responsibility, a critical perspective from India, Cometiche humanising? Ed Tonja van den Ende et al, Humanistic University Press, Amsterdam, 2005
8. Walk on the Wild Side, (co-authored) Green Book, ed Ruskin Bond, Roli Books, 2003

REVIEWS / ARTICLES

1. Flash Art, March April, 2011, Rajashree Biswal
2. Art India, Volume XV, 2010-11, Roles People Play, Meera Menezes
3. Art India, Volume XV, 2010-11, The Nature of the Beast, Janice Pariat
4. Art India, Volume XIV, 2009-10, Images with Conscience, Meera Menezes

Public Collections:

The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada

The William Bentley Museum of Art, Connecticut, USA

OTHER

Conceived and organized:

Yamuna – Elbe, Art and ecology seminar, December 2010, Goethe Institute, New Delhi (www.yamuna-elbe.org)

Invited to: Arts Residency, Basel, Pro Helvetia, 2009, Khoj Peers Arts Residency, 2007, 2014

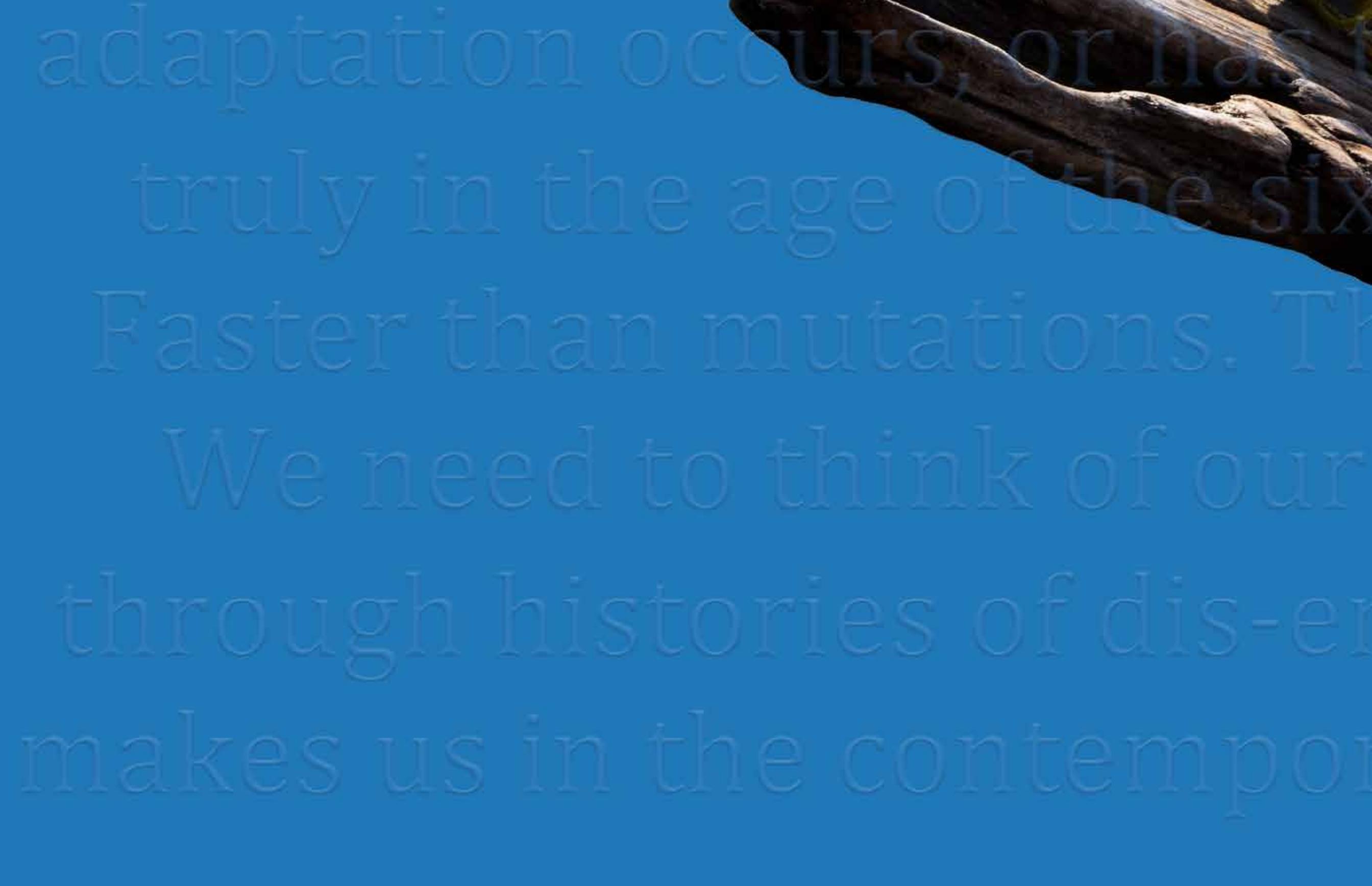
Awarded: IFCS- UN Special Recognition Award for Chemical Safety, 2008, Ashoka Fellowship, social entrepreneurship, 1997

WEB RESOURCES

www.raviagarwal.com, www.toxiclink.org, www.galleryspace.com, www.guildindia.com, www.yamuna-elbe.de



Installation Views



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