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TELL-ALL TALE

The BBC is making a feature-length documentary chronicling the rise and fall of Harvey Weinstein. To be directed by Ursula Macfarlane of *Charlie Hecks: Three Days that Shook Paris* fame, the 90-minute film will feature interviews with actresses who have accused Weinstein of misconduct, and others.

SNAP SHOTS



Precious Drink

WARNER BROS is releasing a line of wines inspired by Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The range features four varieties, each spotlighting a different Tolkien character — Aragorn, Frodo (pictured), Galadriel, and Gandalf. The labels for each bottle includes character silhouettes and some of the most iconic locations in Middle Earth, including Minas Tirith, Bag End and Caras Galadhon.



World in a Box

TWO SENSITIVE political artworks have found their way into Tate Modern's collection. This week, the London-based institution unveiled Delhi-based Amar Kanwar's *The Lightning Testimonies* (pictured) from 2007. The video installation delves into histories of sexual violence, ranging from the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 to the rape and death of Thangiam Manorama Devi in 2004. The other work is Nigerian artist Emeke Ogboh's multichannel sound installation *The Way Earthly Things are Going*, reflecting on the current financial crisis and the migration of people from war-torn countries and economic hardships.



Cajendra Yadav

To Each His Own

Janice Pariat explores identity as nine people talk about the same woman in her latest novel

SURBHIGUPTA

ON A cold and rainy evening in London, Janice Pariat was walking with someone she expected to be in a long-term relationship with. Instead, it ended right then. "I found myself asking, 'How did I get here? How can I map my life through the people I've loved, been with, and who have loved me?' What are their stories about me?" she says, while talking about her second novel, *The Nine-Chambered Heart* (Rs 399, Harper Collins).



The writer, cover of the book

Pariat, born in Assam, won the Sahitya Akademi Award and Crossword Award for her debut collection of short stories from the northeast, *Boats on Land*. In 2014, she published *Seahorse: A Novel*, where she brought Greek mythology into modern-day Delhi and London. *The Nine-Chambered Heart* is her third book.

She calls it a fictional biography "told through love" and is about "the multiplicity of reality that we live in". Set in familiar but nameless cities, the story moves between the East and the West, as nine characters recall their relationship with a young woman, whom they have loved or who has loved them. A compendium of shifting perspectives, the story is about the fragile and fragmented nature of identity. Besides English, it has been published in European languages such as French, German, Italian, Spanish, Romanian and Norwegian. It was launched in Delhi recently and Pariat was in conversation with writer Chandirahs Choudhury at Alliance Française.



They remain inaccessible to us, no matter how many decades we've spent with them. They can surprise us, hurt us, and they can change."

"How many characters are there in the story? According to my calculation, there are 10 or 18," Choudhury asked. "As many as you want," replied Pariat, adding, "They are nine technically but, like people in our lives, some characters come back and some never go away because they are ghosts and they haunt us. If you count the one absent character, who is right at the heart of the novel, it makes it a lovely 10." But the main character seemed inaccessible to the people around her, said Choudhury. To that, she replied, "It was an idea I wanted to keep at the heart of the book. We are not entirely accessible to other people, just like how

It didn't matter how much time each character spent with the woman, be it five days or years. The space to each one of them, in the book, was the same, she said.

"The reader, even though they are given slivers of information, has the luxury to piece together the character by the end of the book," says the Delhi-based author.

She adds, "There is so much to choose from and play while telling a story. There are infinite ways to tell the same story. My stories are different, thematically, which is an indication of how I have travelled as a person."

On Unfamiliar Terms

A collaboration between French artist François Daireaux and Delhi-based Ravi Agarwal results in an exhibition where viewers return with a sense of gain and loss

VANDANA KALRA

TILL A decade back, French artist François Daireaux was not even familiar with the existence of the city of Firozabad, 250-odd km from Delhi and more than 6,000 km from his hometown Paris. It was bangles from the district in western Uttar Pradesh that first led Daireaux to discover it on the map. In 2011, he planned his first trip to the city. Since then, there have been innumerable others. "I wanted to see the process of how these bangles were made. A lot of my work revolves around the condition of workers and their concerns," says Daireaux.

At the exhibition "The Familiar is Always a Stranger" at Gallery Espace in Delhi, he is showing a video from Firozabad that dwells not on its glass manufacturing industry but the political and socio-economic fabric of India. Titled *Bhagwati*, the 74-minute video has clippings from the office of Devki, owner of Bhagwati Glass Enterprises, a glass tube factory in Firozabad. He monitors his staff distantly from his office, where he has a screen that feeds from six surveillance cameras in the factory. The video shows scenes from the screen as well as Devki's conversations with associates and friends on business, politics and the economy, the deep relationship shared between each, and how the lives of numerous workers are affected by the more distant events. "In this age of globalisation, everything is so deeply interconnected that it is difficult to see things in isolation," says Daireaux.

In his first exhibition in India, he is showcasing his work alongside another artist who has consistently attempted to project the complexities that inhabit the country — activist-artist Ravi Agarwal. "We felt the way we see landscapes in a broader sense was similar," says Agarwal, as he recalls the origins of this joint presentation. It was a chance visit to Agarwal's solo "Else, All will be Still," in Delhi in April 2016 that drew Daireaux to the former's work and



Ravi Agarwal (left) and François Daireaux at their exhibition; *The Bridge*, an inkjet print on the wall, denotes walls across India that wear religious symbols

the two decided to exhibit together. The current display is a testament to their shared concerns. We are welcomed by a photograph of a boy with his underpants stuffed with objects, standing on the banks of the Yamuna river. Daireaux names him "The Bather", and places an empty tub in concrete before his photograph. His protagonist seems to be on a constant lookout, just as Agarwal's *Boy in Blue Striped Shirt*, a waste picker in Delhi whom Agarwal has befriended in the last couple of months. "I have always been interested in the marginal and how power plays out in society," says the Delhi-based artist, who also heads the NGO Toxics Link. He emphasises how waste, too, has an afterlife. His work *Memorabilia*, a series of nine photographic prints, is focused on objects collected by landfill workers — a bunch of keys, a

bracelet and beads, among others. In another set of prints, *Gesture*, Agarwal photographs the details, juxtaposing hands of workers sieving garbage with an Ambedkar statue pointing towards the sky, referring to the complex caste equations.

Pondering over these multiple arguments, as viewers head to the gallery basement, they are introduced to Augustin. Dressed in red shorts, Daireaux tells us he has been rummaging the Yamuna riverbed for several decades, to clean it, and also to find objects that he can sell. Daireaux bought some of these objects from him — finger ring, broken idols, currency coins and rosary beads among others — and mixed them in black rubber in the work *Augustin, Seven Days*, dedicated to the Delhi resident. Accompanying the installation is an inkjet print on the wall, *The Bridge*, de-

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FRANÇOIS DAIREAUX

noting the numerous walls across the country that wear religious symbols, apart from Augustin's religious background. "He was a Hindu from Maharashtra, converted at the age of eight when he was studying in a catholic school," says Daireaux.

He old gives way to new in Agarwal's video *Lb/in 2*, where he puts together recordings from two factories, in *Suite*, Daireaux "captures and composes 176 sequences depicting gestures (actions of manual workers)". He has been filming them since 2004, and featured in the video are workers from across the world — Algeria, China, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India, among others — engaged in manual tasks; giving a neck massage, checking bulbs before they go to the market or even making cotton candies on a kiosk. "I am adding new gestures. The realities are constantly changing," says Daireaux.

At Mudac in Switzerland, at his exhibition, "Blow Firozabad Bangles", he has brought together the glassmaking tradition of the two cities of Firozabad and Meisenthal. "We cannot compare Firozabad to Meisenthal but both cities have a similar heritage within a different context and at another human scale," says the French artist.

In the Capital, visitors to the exhibition return with a sense of loss and gain. They are familiarised with aspects of their surroundings that they were probably oblivious to but, at the same time, realise lost traditions and fast-changing realities of the present day.

At Gallery Espace, 16, Community Centre New Friends Colony, till January 13

'We talk about overarching social ideas of mistreatment'

Hollywood actor Will Smith, who makes a whistle-stop trip to Mumbai, on racism, exploitation in the film industry and concerns about his teenage daughter

ALAKA SAHANI

FLIPPING THE social perspective, the David Ayer-directed movie *Bright* features popular Hollywood actor Will Smith as a racist black police officer who has reservations against working with a rookie cop, who is an Orc (played by Joel Edgerton). "I loved the idea, and the social shift of an African American police officer who is a racist. It was such an interesting flip to explore the world from that perspective. Just the psychological perspective of superiority — it was fun to play that," said Smith.

Along with the *Bright* team, Smith is touring São Paulo, Los Angeles, London, Mumbai and Tokyo in just nine days to promote his latest movie, a futuristic action-thriller. He stopped by in Mumbai on Monday. Talking about *Bright*, which is more like a racial allegory that touches upon a string of social issues such as diversity, Smith said, "Anytime you're creating something, you can't help but the world makes its way into the art. So here we didn't talk about it specifically in those terms, but we talked about the overarching social ideas of mistreatment and just how poorly we treat one another. *Bright*, which is set in an alternate world where humans co-exist with Orcs, elves and fairies, will be available on Netflix from December 22.

Though peppered with fantastical elements, *Bright* is a look at the multiple social



Amrit Chakravarty

(From left) Will Smith with Noomi Rapace, Joel Edgerton and David Ayer at an event in Mumbai on Monday; a still from *Bright*

prejudices of the present-world. "What I realised is that it's not just racism, it's all of the 'isms' — racism, sexism, classism and nationalism — that are an individual's or a group's ego struggle for comparative superiority. Everybody wants to feel like they are better than somebody. Even a fight against racism is laced with an individual's need to feel su-

perior," said the rapper-turned-Hollywood star and added that he had not looked at this way earlier. Smith first tasted success in showbiz in the early '90s with the television show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and this was followed by his major big screens outings such as *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993) and *Bad Boys* (1995).



The experience of making *Bright* also for the first time made him realise "the negative" reaction to the word "diversity". "We say diversity as if we mean equality, but that's really not what diversity means. Diversity means 'I'm gonna use this term for me to get higher than you.' So when a white male hears the word diversity, it means hire anybody but

a white male. Playing this character was the first time I was able to see that difficult, covert struggle for superiority. The problem got more complex and difficult to solve in my mind. It was looking at racism from this perspective that I comprehended the aspects of fear, ignorance and the individual and collective struggle that perpetuates and precip-

itates violence," said the actor, who features in popular franchise *Men in Black* and successful movies such as *Independence Day*, *Hitch* and *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

What's his reaction to the deep-rooted exploitation in the film industry that the Harvey Weinstein episode has exposed? "To me the whole situation has been bizarre. I have a 17-year-old daughter (Willow) who grew up with men that she trusts and doesn't even comprehend the idea of predatory behaviour. For me, I've been talking about it for a while as all these things have been coming up. I'm like 'I don't know these guys,' as I'm hearing some of the things that people will do. Like, I just don't know who will do that. I don't know if I'm naive but to schedule a meeting with someone and the person shows up and you're in a bathrobe. I have a lot of male friends but I just don't know those guys," said the actor.

This is Smith's third trip to Mumbai. One of the things he regrets not being able to add to his schedule was a visit to Akshay Kumar's home this time. "One thing I love about India is the food at Akshay's, that's literally the best food I've ever had," Smith said. His India connection runs deeper than that. "I'm about 90 per cent through the Bhagavad Gita right now. To be reading it and to be here in this country, I feel like my inner Atjuna is being channelised. I'm going to Rishikesh soon. I'm definitely going to spend a lot more time in this country," the 49-year-old added.