

Hangar Bicocca, spazio d'arte contemporanea, 'Urban Manners', Milan (excerpt)

Introduction by Adelina von Fürstenberg

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Modern India is not just a postcolonial, developing country, the destination of young pilgrims in search of a different way of life in the unspoiled land of the Third World. Indian cities are now experiencing vigorous modernization and, cheek by jowl with the local premodern society, a postmodern urban society is coming into being. Nonetheless, the primitive, superstitious, ancient India has not disappeared. Bollywood is an important example of this mix of lifestyles at popular level, with its colourful productions that blend conventional images of the mythologies of ancient India with dynamic musicals whose scores and plots imitate Hollywood.

In the same way, but at a higher and subtler level, Indian postmodern art is a reply to the basic contradiction that pits North India against South India, the city against the countryside, and, above all, modernity against tradition. This art, which accepts and absorbs every contradiction and which today is common to many artists around the world, without distinction of race or nationality, could only have found its natural home in the India of extraordinary development of recent years, supported by the growth in the software industry, in which the country is becoming a leader. And in this particular context, artists are both spectators and actors involved in this change. This background is made manifest in the works in this exhibition, in which we discover, from the viewpoint of each artist, the contrasts that make today's India a very special setting.....

The same discourse on the use of media is true for Ranbir Kaleka, whose work integrates the painted image with that of the video. In *Man with Cockerel* (2001–2002) a figure unexpectedly appears in the foreground with a cockerel under his arm. First his image splits, and then he vanishes on the left as he is pulled off screen by the escaping cockerel. The violent contrast between the action in the foreground and the background formed by a white wall framed by a leafy vine is based on two perceptions of time: the slow, pictorial one of the background, and the high-speed, electronic one of the man in the foreground.

The question, then, is this: are we able, without destroying the world, to transform into nectar (i.e., knowledge) all the poison we produce and which pollutes the four elements, the five senses and even our power of speech?