



Hungry God-Indian Contemporary Art, Arario Gallery, Beijing Sep 3 - Nov 15 2006
 CROSSINGS 2005 (installation still)
 4 channel video projection on 190 x 250cm, (75 x 98 inches) acrylic paintings
 15 minute loop with sound

Hungry God, Indian Contemporary Art

Group show

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Ways of Belonging: post-national art in India

Chaitanya Sambrani

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Journeys, Fables and Migration

Transience, migration and displacement are an inevitable part of modernisation. Histories of modernism are populated by travellers who cross cultures and undertake transformative journeys. The destiny of personal and civilisational memory through these journeys and transformations figures as a way of making way-stations. Memory appears in the work of the three artists considered here not as a concrete manifestation that can be grasped, but as an elusive and multivalent phantom whose fights can at best be traced, but never captured.

Ranbir Kaleka's embodies the itinerant character of modernist cultures in his work *Crossings*. It is central to his work that patterns of movement and transformations of selfhood are woven in a web of illusion and metamorphosis. His work steadfastly refuses to present upfront or literal commentaries on the experience of migration, seeking instead to puzzle and ponder over the ineffable, over the gains and losses of displacement, and a yearning for wholeness. Kaleka has developed a technique of layering the painted and the projected in thin skins that create subtle and magical passages in open-ended narrative. His own migrations from a Sikh background in the Punjab to England and back to Delhi are paralleled in *Crossings* through meditations on journeys, and what happens to the self, to family, and to the desire for transcendence. Kaleka's work is suffused with the ghosts of hopeful aspirations and quiet desperation that drive increasingly larger numbers across borders and oceans. The return journey is no less problematic. Are these crossings one-way journeys? Can the migrant return and lay claim to place in the "home" culture? Within the 15-minute loop of Kaleka's work lie images of memory, fantasy, and transience, irredeemable loss is jostled by untold findings. Through his technique of tying together projected images and their painted ancestry, the mobile images become manifestations of freedom, of coming to a state of liberation. But there is a catch. These moments of liberation, these ghostly floating that Kaleka allows his image-characters to perform, come forever loaded with the physical presence of their immobile counterparts in representation. The sheer sensory load of the projections and accompanying sound contributes to a pervasive sense of layered histories, of things held delicately between remembrance and forgetting.

Chaitanya Sambrani is an art critic and curator who has published widely on contemporary Indian art.

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