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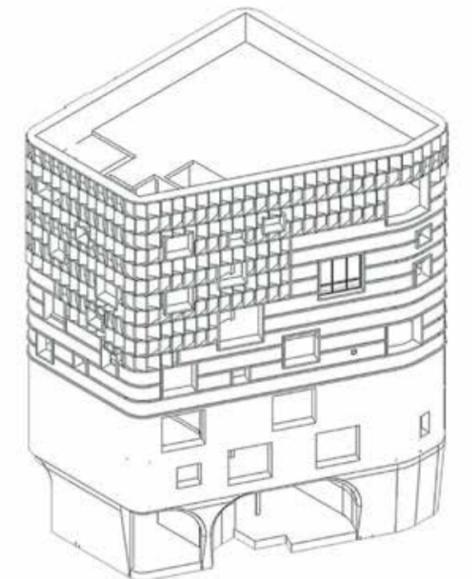
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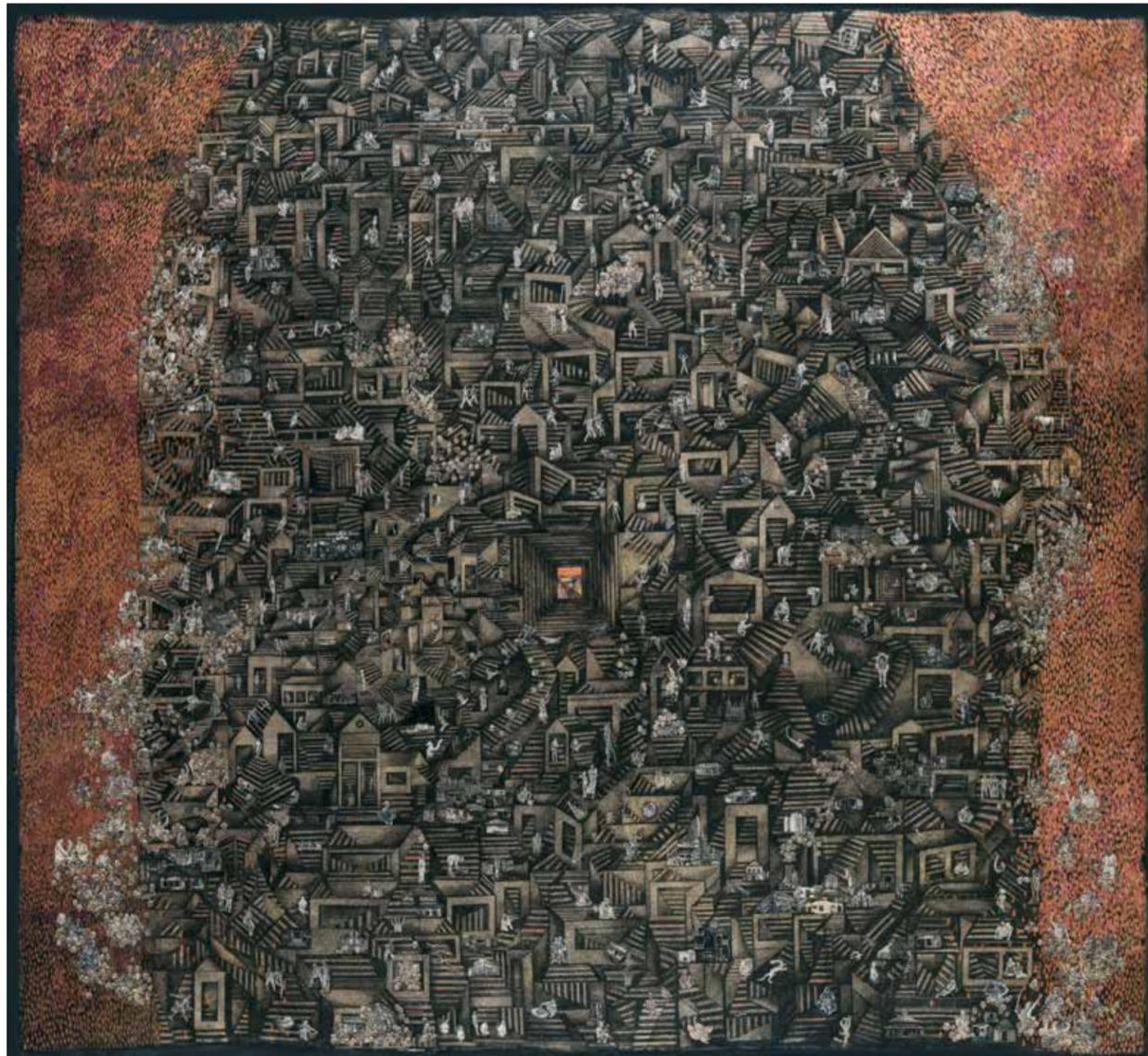
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Cover: The architecture for the feature project — Ballygunge Retail in Kolkata is an explosion of contrasts — the coming together of curves and sharp box openings as well as the placement of materials stand out strongly. For further details on this special cover design please see pg. 8



Isometric view of the Ballygunge Retail design studio



DWELLING

The first of a two-part exhibition of the works of 12 artists maps, explores, and engages with the tropes of location, belonging and community, and their preoccupations with these recurring motifs over the course of history

Ranjit Hoskote

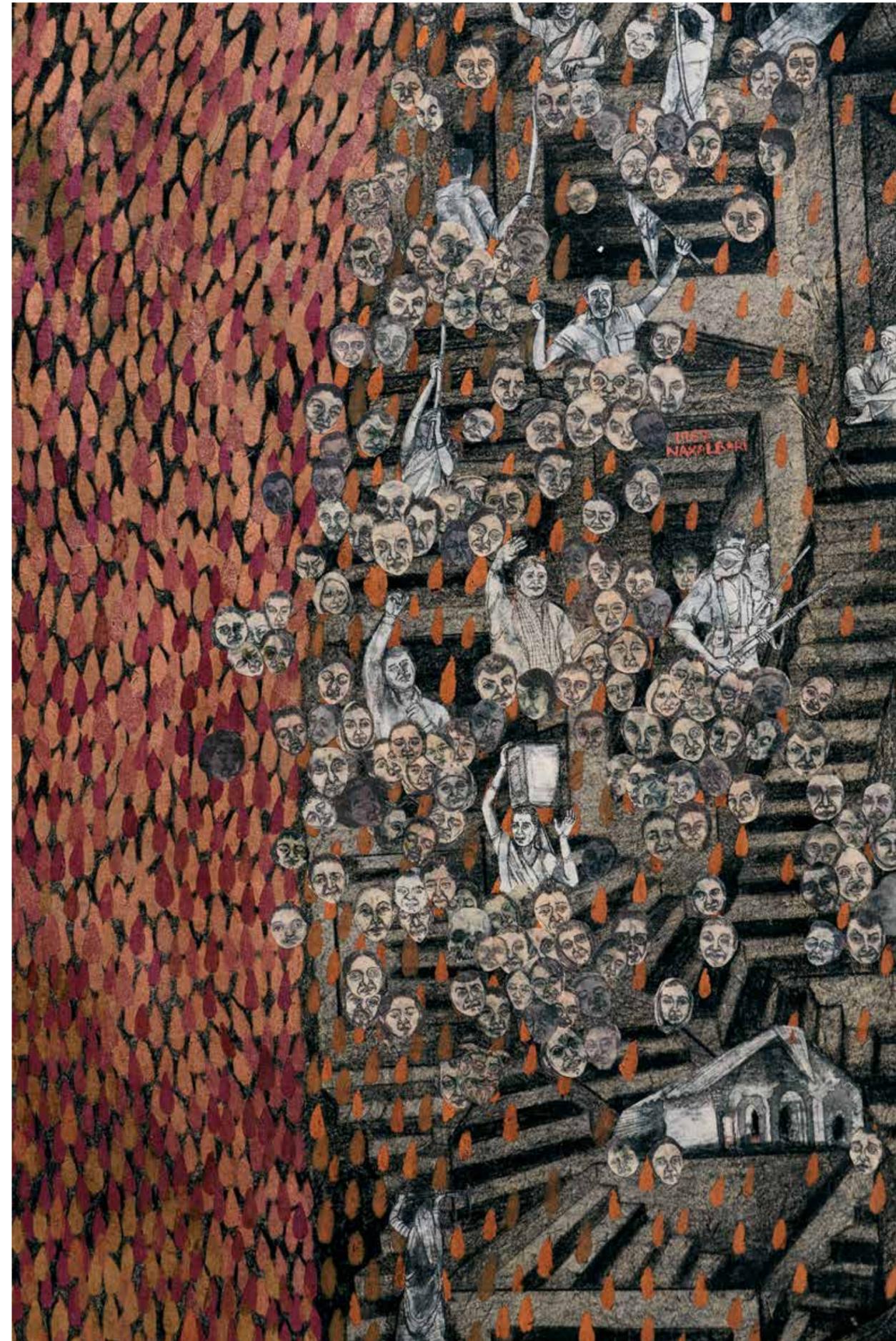
How to Belong

The problems of shelter and belonging claim our attention insistently today, when more people than ever before in history have been forced into the precariousness of exile; and when those who feel threatened by the Other's presence in their midst appease their insecurities by rallying around xenophobic banners of identity. In this predicament, we ask ourselves: What does it mean to form habitations and communities; to craft accommodation both in a spiritual and a pragmatic manner; to develop an ethic of neighbourhood in an age of uncertainty and violence? What is home to the citizen, and to the

refugee? How might the hospitable space of a liberal society turn, under pressure, into a hostile space dominated by illiberal narratives? With these thoughts in mind while preparing for Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke's 10th anniversary exhibition, I have returned to an enigmatic and perennially important text of 20th-century philosophy: Martin Heidegger's 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1951). Drawing its title from this essay, DWELLING convenes the works and celebrates the practices of 24 artists who the gallery represents; or who have been its long-term friends, or have collaborated periodically in its major projects. Taken together, these

artists incarnate the life of the gallery, the web of relationships and conversations that sustains its activity. Heidegger's essay is not a unifying template but a potential thread connecting the diverse oeuvres of these artists, many of whom have long been deeply concerned with themes germane to its inquiry, such as those of 'building', 'neighbourhood', 'community', 'locale', and 'accommodation'. Intensely relevant, these themes recur, subliminally and without laboured deliberation, throughout the extraordinary works that have been gathered together to form DWELLING.

This spread: 'The cries, too, fall like rain in summer' by Varunika Saraf, charcoal and watercolour on paper pasted on cloth, 100 x 111.4 inches, 2016





Varunika Saraf, 'The cries, too, fall like rain in summer' (charcoal and watercolour on paper pasted on cloth, 2016)

Varunika Saraf's work takes its title from the closing line of Bertolt Brecht's poem, 'When Evil Doing Comes Like Falling Rain', which speaks of the horrors that a tyranny enacts. Every fresh horror imposes silence: the tyranny mounts, "the blood goes on flowing". The portrait of an archetypal city, 'The cries, too, fall like rain in summer' comprises an ensemble of individually rendered elements: heads; the occasional skull; figures pictured in variegated stances; an array of buildings embodying varied locations and styles. Structurally, it is modelled on representations of the later Mughal imperial hierarchy, with courtiers organised like a solar system in relation to the central, legitimising authority of the emperor. Saraf translates this model for the present: her chart is occupied by flashpoints of political crisis, social atrocity, outrage or demonstration. At the centre, instead of the emperor, is a miniature rendition of Munch's hallucinatory, still-terrifying painting, 'The Scream'.



Above: 'Waiting for others to arrive' by Sudarshan Shetty, 10-minute single-channel video, 2013; below: photographs from Anita Dube's series 'I-32 Tara'

Sudarshan Shetty, 'Waiting for Others to Arrive' (single-channel video, 2013)

Sudarshan Shetty's deeply elegiac, sumptuously beautiful video work, 'Waiting for Others to Arrive' engages the viewer across a spectrum of senses. Its visual imagery draws us into a half-ruined building whose neo-classical architecture speaks of its elegant beginnings as a private home in early 20th-century Bombay. We hear, before we see her, a musician playing the sarangi, one of the most expressive instruments in the repertoire of Indian classical music. Having descended the social scale and turned into a chawl, the building has been marked for demolition, to be replaced by an undistinguished commercial complex or apartment block. In Shetty's relay of images, a teacup wobbles across a table until it falls. The plangent ebb and flow of the sarangi, the small-scale yet unsettling catastrophe of the cup, and the imminent fate awaiting the building, weave into an everyday Bombay story that is, nevertheless, possessed of an inexpressibly captivating melancholia.

Anita Dube, 'I 32 Tara' (silver gelatin prints, 2000 and archival digital prints, 2016)

Anita Dube's 'I 32 Tara' is a distributed portraiture of the self through the intimate photographic portrayal of objects in her home. The artist moved into this house, located in New Delhi's Tara Apartments complex, designed by the renowned architect Charles Correa, in 1991. Only in 2000, after a decade-long struggle to define her artistic trajectory, did she feel stable enough to "pay homage to the house". The artist's gaze, aimed through the viewfinder of her Minolta X700, reveals the secret life of objects, invested as they are with their owner's secret and manifest impulses. The telephone, the steam iron, the bottle, the bookshelves, the mirror: these speak of love, absence, work, leisure, dream. In 2016, on the verge of moving out, Dube restaged the project. Using an expired roll of Kodak film, she developed another inventory of I-32 Tara Apartments: a time exposure of shifts in life and habitation.



Above: 'I-32 Tara' by Anita Dube, silver gelatin prints, 8.5 x 13 inches, 2000; below: 'I-32 Tara' by Anita Dube, archival gelatin prints, 8.5 x 13 inches, 2016





Clockwise from top: 'Waiting for others to arrive' by Sudarshan Shetty, 10-minute single-channel video, 2013; 'Eklavya' by Gieve Patel, acrylic on paper, 84 x 60 inches, 2006; An installation view of the exhibition



Gieve Patel, 'Eklavya' (acrylic on paper, 2006)

Gieve Patel's compelling evocation of the hunter-prince Eklavya, from the Mahabharata, speaks to the continuing marginalisation of India's tribal communities. Despite his excellence as an archer, Eklavya is despised as a forest-dweller by the warrior elite and cannot approach Drona, the warrior-priest who is guru to the Hastinapura princes. Eklavya's veneration bridges social distance imaginatively: he sculpts a clay statue of the preceptor in the forest, honing his skills before it. One day, the Hastinapura princes enter the forest, and in a competition, Eklavya defeats Arjuna, their leading archer. Arjuna complains to Drona, who confronts Eklavya and asks, as his guru-dakshina or tutorial fee, for his thumb, destroying his future as an archer. This story from the Mahabharata has, ever after, served as a template for the oppression of the weaker by the dominant castes. Patel's interpretation responds vigorously to the promptings of his material and to the historical juncture.



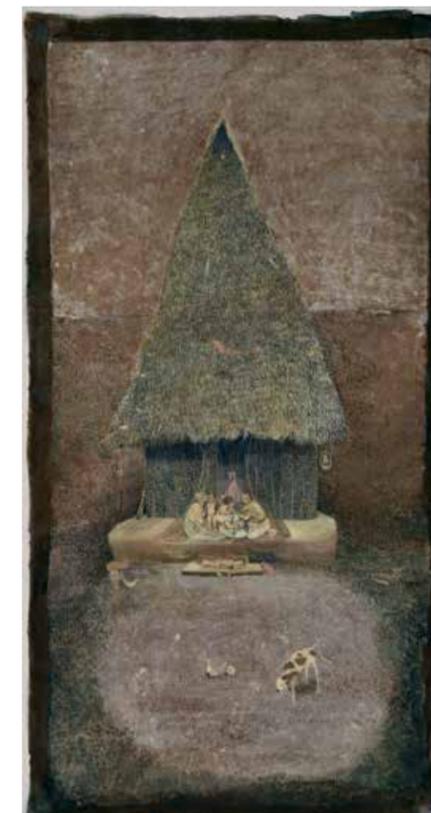
N S Harsha, 'Missing Cook beyond the Cosmic Twigs' (acrylic and gold foil on canvas, 2016)

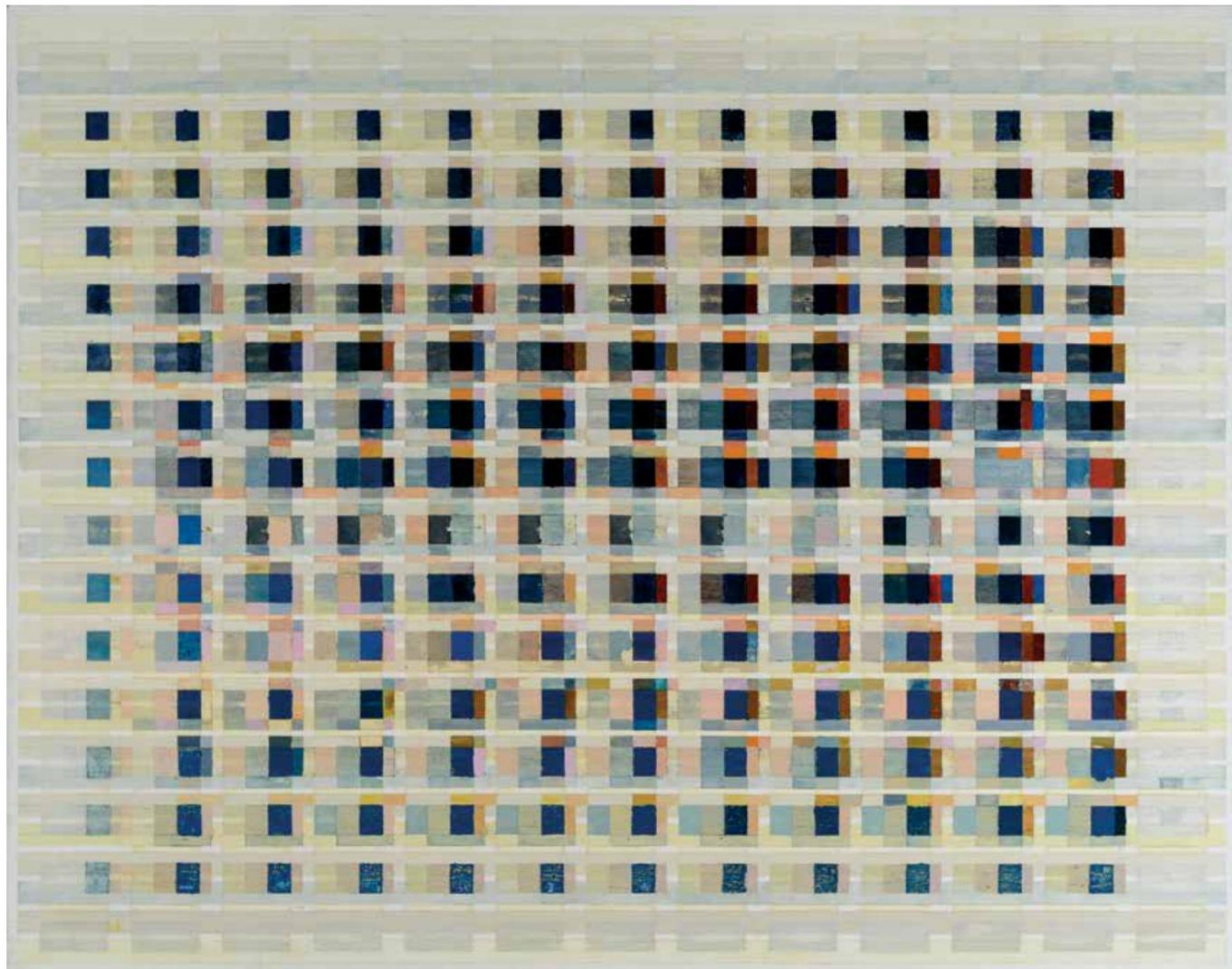
N S Harsha's 'Missing Cook beyond the Cosmic Twigs' is the fabular account of a miracle: a feast has been arranged for an entire village, as though on a floating continent; resplendent birds, perhaps ancestral spirits, fly across the frame; the food is being cooked, but by no visible agency. The theme of the painting is the unseen efficacy that animates the universe through cycles of activity, nourishment, work and rest. We are carried into an enchanted space intermediate between the cosmic and the terrestrial. The artist's long-standing preoccupation with the commensal 'village feast' or 'temple meal' – one of the rituals by which communities map their spaces of belonging – is evident. The structure of this painting is reminiscent of the Mahayana art of the Silk Road and Ajanta: the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas at Dunhuang comes to mind, with Harsha's citizens taking the place of Bodhisattvas glowing with illumination.

Left: 'Missing Cook Beyond the Cosmic Twigs' by N.S Harsha, acrylic and gold foil on canvas, 74.8 x 59 inches, 2016; below: 'Portrait of a Hut' by Siji Krishnan, watercolour on rice paper, 60.2 x 29.5 inches, 2016

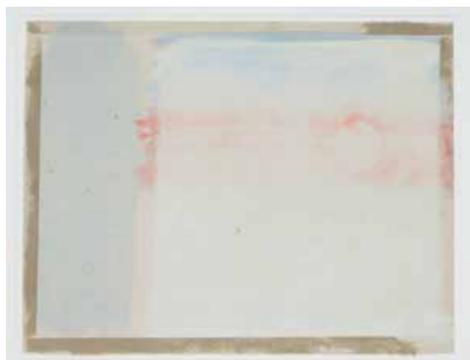
Siji Krishnan, 'Portrait of a Hut' (watercolour on rice paper, 2016)

Casting her paintings in subtle earth tonalities of sienna, ochre, umber, tan and ecru, Siji Krishnan only partially reveals the mysterious inner lives of her rural protagonists. Drawn from diverse places and periods, Krishnan's delicately stylised figures would not be out of place in a mediaeval European peasant calendar, a late-Mughal miniature or a Santiniketan panel. In the unequivocally titled 'Portrait of a Hut', the viewer is entranced by the imposing conical-roofed thatch structure that dominates the vertical pictorial space. The family that leads its life in the shelter of this hut, whose labour has gone into its construction, would ordinarily have been overwhelmed by it. Surprisingly, this does not happen. The human figures retain their specificity and dignity. The architecture, partaking of the natural world as its materials do, seems to breathe. The presence of animals native to farm and heath suggest the symbiotic interrelationships that sustain an ecosystem.





Top: 'field data (in dots per inch)' by Tanya Goel, ground glass and ceramic tiles, cement and oil on canvas, 84 x 108 inches, 2016; right: from 'Untitled' by Nicola Durvasula, watercolour and gouache on paper, 11.4 x 14.9 inches each, 2012



'Dwelling' / Part One, curated by Ranjit Hoskote, was on display at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai, from November 11, 2016 to January 11, 2017. The exhibition featured the works of artists Aji V.N, Anita Dube, Atul Dodiya, Gieve Patel, N.S Harsha, Nicola Durvasula, C.K Rajan, Siji Krishnan, Sosa Joseph, Sudarshan Shetty, Tanya Goel and Varunika Saraf. The text and images are published here with the permission of the curator and the gallery.



An installation view of the show

Tanya Goel, 'field data (in dots per inch)' (ground glass, ground ceramics, diverse pigments, 2016)

With their combination of scientific precision and kaleidoscopic chromatic richness, Tanya Goel's works often suggest street grids, chromatographic records, or an industrial chemist's chart of dyes. Flagging their sources in construction material and industrial pigments, in the detritus of the hyperactive building trades, Goel proposes a creative engagement with, and an implied critique of, the impatience of capital and the accelerated urbanisation of India. Her 'field data (in dots per inch)' seems to carry the spectral presence of a Plattenbau seen in section view, a building constructed using large-scale, prefabricated concrete slabs in various parts of post-World War II Europe, but associated especially with the Soviet-era architecture of East Germany. The artist's detailed notes on her working process – for instance, her use of glass dust, crushed blue ceramic tiles, and inorganic pigments here – remind us of the methods of alchemists and mediaeval painters, every element acknowledged for its particular magic.

Nicola Durvasula, 'Views' (watercolour and gouache on paper, 2012), 'Notations' (2016), sculptures (2016)

Nicola Durvasula takes the threshold and the horizon as natural and enabling conditions, connected as she is by ancestry and choice of location to the Channel Islands, England's southeastern coast, and to France. In the watercolour and gouache works exhibited here, she offers luminous testimony to the liminal vista, to water and sky as borders that divide yet bridge. In her sculptural oeuvre, Durvasula often blurs the distinction between the found and the made: stones and bricks picked up in flaneuse mode may find adjacency with meticulously created ceramic objects. The artist's distributed self-location garners energy, also, from her mediation between the visual and musical arts, and her long-term association with southern India, through family ties, artistic choices and philosophical commitments. Her ongoing series, 'Notations', records the precipitates of epiphanies, fugitive states of mind, studies for figures, chromatic scales, and geographical features, often the mountain as a symbol of enlightenment.

Bottom: 'Untitled' (view 2) by Nicola Durvasula, watercolour and gouache on paper, 11.4 x 14.9 inches, 2012; right, top: 'Untitled (sruti)' by Nicola Durvasula, watercolour and coloured pencil on paper, 5 x 7.2 inches, 2016; below: 'Untitled (copy tantra)' by Nicola Durvasula, watercolour and pencil on paper, 5 x 7.2 inches, 2016

