

AT THE STILL POINT OF THE TURNING WORLD¹

AARTI VIR

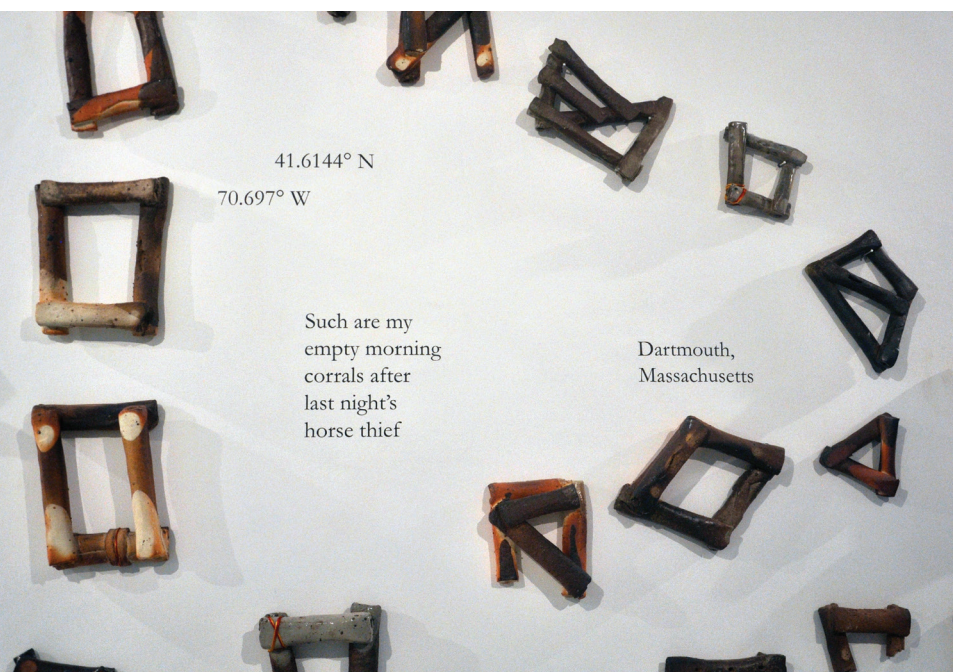
Six artist-curators, forty seven artist projects, an accomplished advisory committee, *Breaking Ground* – pushes boundaries, claiming space and visibility for clay artists in the context of contemporary art. The first edition of the *Indian Ceramics Triennale* has reaffirmed the diversity in thought and in processes, and amplified the significant engagement with clay as a medium of artistic expression.

The making and experiencing of art, as a transformative process, its effectiveness as an authentic, unfolding expression of life, is located in the space between intuition and awareness. Spanning this distance, encompassing infinite possibilities for epiphany, transformation, dissolution and resurrection, is some of the most evocative art from the *Indian Ceramics Triennale Breaking Ground 2018*.

A threshold, by definition is that place in time or space that is on the cusp of change. There lies the uncertain world of potential: the fleeting transformative moment of transition, often unheeded and so forfeited. My own work, an ongoing quest, has been to explore these very moments of transition. Connecting all that is neither here nor there, yesterday nor tomorrow, neither inside nor out, the threshold is that exquisite moment of stillness, holding within it the certainty of passage. In *Shadow Crossing*, a group of three life size doorways, I explore the potential held by every threshold that one pauses at, in every doorway that one walks through, 'to be still and still moving'.²



Ashwini Bhatt *Compass Rose* 2015, Stoneware



41.6144° N
70.697° W

Such are my empty morning corrals after last night's horse thief

Dartmouth, Massachusetts

Aarti Vir *Shadow Crossing* 2018, Woodfired terracotta with slips

Using each of the three doorways as my lens, I explore some of the work from the *Indian Ceramics Triennale*. At the threshold of the first doorway, I grapple with the manifestations and vicissitudes of physical dislocations and the potential emancipation proffered by ambiguity. In seeking the unfamiliar and exploring the uncharted, the threshold becomes a stimulating space. Stepping through the doorway, an enlivening experience.

Compass Rose – inspired by Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is a collaborative project between Ashwini Bhatt and Forrest Gander. It is a conscious location of identity in multiplicity. An effort to find home, simultaneously,

here and there. A willing loosening of boundaries, and therefore a release, an expansion. The poems have left. The ceramic, a poetic meter. Visually, the ceramic forms trace time and space. Each individual form appears to be on the verge of movement, of metamorphoses. Dynamic, exploratory, the installation swells and surges. The text meanwhile tethers that flow. Coordinates identified, the unsaid, articulated. Earthy and fertile, a celebration of journeys past, unfolding, forthcoming. *Compass Rose*, in 'neither arrest nor movement'³ discovers home.

The disruptive, emasculating spaces of arbitrary, externally imposed change are apparent in *Existence Non-existence* – Asim Paul, quite literally, lost the ground beneath his feet, when India was partitioned and he lost access to his birthplace and ancestry, separated by artificial borders and out of reach in Bangladesh. Neither here nor there, because the dislocation is externally imposed. The oppression and despair stemming from a lack of agency in his circumstances, are palpable in his work. Devoid of life and bleached of colour, the barbed wire underlining the violence, Paul's installation occupies that bleak space that yearns for home, but finds itself pinned down in no man's land.



Asim Paul *Existence Non-existence* 2018, Ceramics & Iron

A successful navigation of the spaces between cultures and geographies, between political upheaval and personal evolution is made possible only from a location of stability and security that allow for internalizing and reflection. Sharbani Das Gupta's extraordinary piece *X-ing ? Look Both Ways* is drawn from lived experience of two countries and cultures. Das Gupta has substantial roots in both cultures, and an active discerning engagement with every

Sharbani Das Gupta *X-ing ? Look Both Ways* 2018, Brick, raw clay, porcelain, glass lenses



environment she finds herself in. One walks through Das Gupta's maze, only to be thwarted by a dead end. A graphic representation of the suspicion and violence created by separation and dispossession, the wall is embedded with eyes, large and menacing. The pupils, made of lenses recovered from dismantling obsolete televisions, invert everything on the other side. A trenchant metaphor for our times. What is real and what is distorted by manipulated perception and othering? In an increasingly shrinking world, distances only seem to grow, and lost in a maze we arrive each time at a cul de sac.

The fragmentary, surreal experience of living in polymorphous spaces where moments of pause are all but impossible is a familiar phenomenon to urban dwellers. In Neha Kudchadkar's *Somethingpolis*, binaries abound. Movement and stagnation, destruction and innovation, loss and hope. Kudchadkar seems to engage, not viscerally, emotionally or politically with this theme of stability, security, home or the lack of it, but rather, cerebrally, dispassionately deconstructing the city. Teasing apart what she calls the 'conceptual edifice' from the living entity. Organic biomorphic forms are juxtaposed with linear elements, photographs and undefined shards. A life force and a death rattle, concurrent. Defying all attempts to impose structure and meaning, *Somethingpolis* mutates and multiplies, equally impartial to life and death, loss and hope.

What if there were neither threshold nor doorway but a latticed screen? Rakhee Kane's beautifully crafted *Shifting Identities* references this elegant architectural device, the jaali – a symbol, both of privacy as well as a link to the outside. The ambiguity, an empowering strategy perhaps. Does it let something in or keep something out? Is it, perhaps, setting the terms of engagement? A drawing of boundaries? Allowing for the safety of observing from behind a screen? Or an imprisonment, reducing one to



Neha Kudchadkar *Somethingpolis* 2018, Glazed and unglazed terracotta , cement, plaster of paris, clay, (artist's body), digital prints on paper, pencil and ink drawings on paper, found (and altered) shards and sounds

Rakhee Kane *Shifting Identities* 2018, Stoneware, metal frame and earth



a spectator, when one would be an actor? In her own words, Kane's 'jaalis combine a sense of enclosure and opening' – which one it is, determined perhaps by the ground beneath your feet.

Traversing the complex unpredictable world of physical change and uncertainty, I arrive at the shadowy threshold of psychological transitions, and encounter Dipalee Daroz's *Relics of Future*. Throbbing with animalistic verve, yet audaciously resistant to facile interpretations, Daroz's forms occupy that delicious space, where the tangible remains unfathomed, while the intangible has luminous clarity. Akin to the multiple perspectives of traditional Indian miniature paintings, her forms are composite multidimensional beast – machines. The surfaces textured and time worn, punctuated by sudden bursts of intense colour. Daroz speaks of an attempt to let go

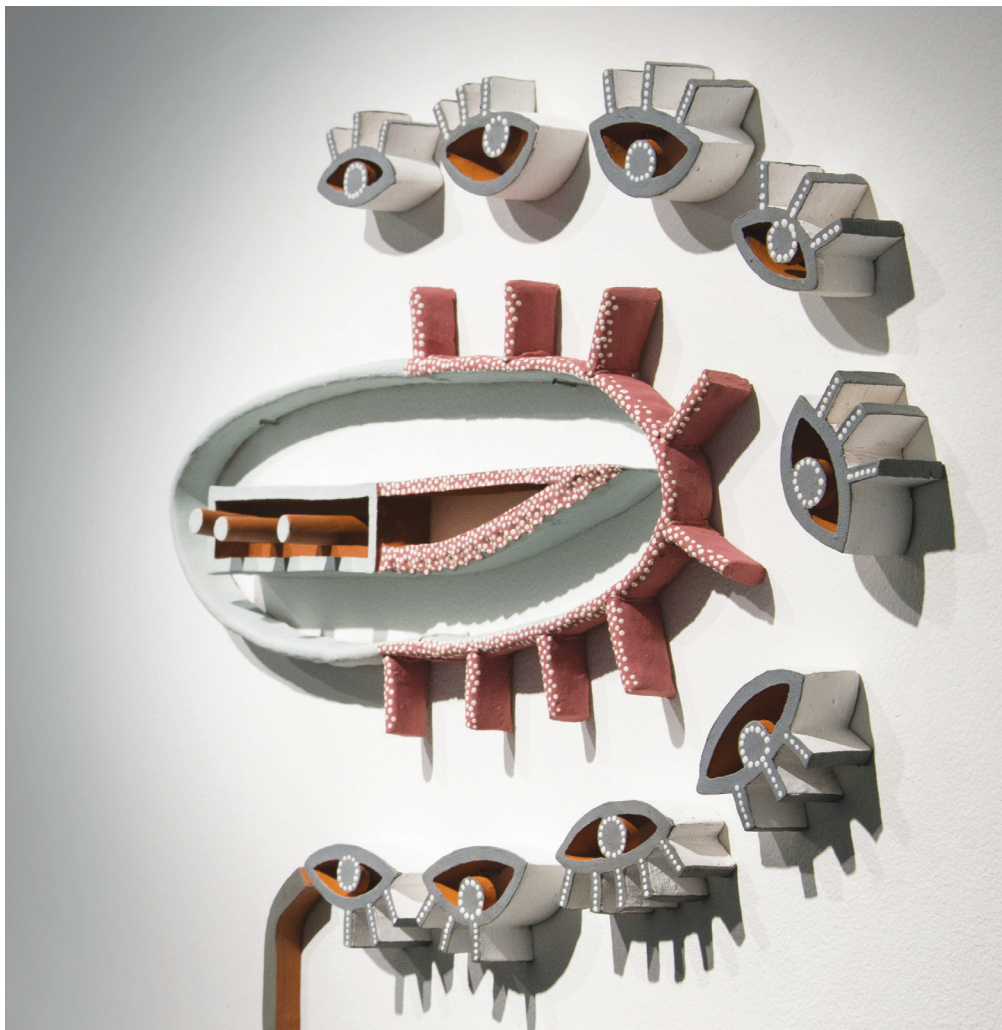
of control, in order to make way for insight. Epiphanies on the threshold.

Elodie Alexandre's *Post Partum* is poignant and deeply moving. Replete with the beauty of vulnerability, uncertainty and hope. Psychologically, the transitions of childbirth and motherhood can be fraught with a primeval loneliness, explaining the rituals associated with these transitions in all traditional cultures. In turning her most intimate experiences into a work of art, Alexandre not only fulfills for herself, the role that a ritual would perform, but also, in speaking about it, in turning the particular into the universal, she gives voice to the experiences of the many who remain mute. 'A feminist act' per Alexandre. She successfully brings to clay, the delightful lightness of touch that her drawings have. Using symbols and colour effectively she circumvents the sentimental.



Dipalee Daroz *Relics of Future* 2018, Stoneware

Elodie Alexandre *Post Partum* 2018, Terracotta, slips, underglaze and glaze



And to those who might be so inclined, she offers, through an augmented reality app, short animated poems, articulating in an unclouded voice her fragility as she grapples with the shifting ground and the new becoming.

L N Tallur's *Man Exhibiting Holes*, epitomises the fallibility of the human enterprise. The monumental head, made of hollow terracotta bricks, the grimace reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *Scream*, is existential angst made palpable. Redeemed perhaps in the honest display of his vulnerability, *Man Exhibiting Holes* is a compelling image of the unremitting farce of the world we inhabit. For me, this piece underscores the continual fractious encounter between the inside and out, and the resultant derangement.

At the last threshold, dissolution awaits. In Vineet Kacker's *Endless Landscape*, boundaries dissolve. Steeped in eastern spiritual thought, Kacker experiences the vastness and pristine beauty of the Himalayas as a mirror to an inner landscape of unencumbered, uncircumscribed space. Kacker's

distinctive Himalayan landscapes dotted with chortens, are here framed by mirrors, the simple device, transforming the vignettes into endlessly extending reflections, the temporal merging into the eternal. The unselfconsciousness of the work, mirroring the artists inner landscape.

Distilling the essence of that final threshold that I stand upon, is Juree Kim's breathtaking work. Her painstakingly detailed and exquisitely crafted *Evanescent Landscape - Svargalok Jaipur*, testimony to humankind's loftiest ambitions of recreating heaven on earth, returning gradually to its elemental formlessness is profoundly moving. Says Kim, 'as an artist, I cannot intervene in the process of the encounter between earth and water. It is the interactions between these two elements that creates my work'. I am almost envious of her ability to surrender so completely to the process.

Vineet Kacker *Endless Landscape* 2018, Stoneware, wooden ply, digital printing and mirror glass



Juree Kim *Evanescent Landscape - Svargalok Jaipur* 2018, Raw clay, water, video



L N Tallur *Man Exhibiting Holes* 2018, Terracotta hollow blocks, cement

The sanskrit word Satyam, translated directly means Truth. The etymology of the word in Sankhya philosophy, reveals the deep import of Satyam – all that is here and experienced is true. And all that is here and experienced is incessantly changing. There cannot be a better teacher than clay to illustrate Satyam in all its nuances and glory. And the tribe is only growing.

Aarti Vir is a ceramic artist based in Hyderabad - India.

1, 2, 3 - Four Quartets T S Eliot

Photography: All images by Shine Bhola, except Compass Rose - Ashwini Bhatt, X-ing ? Look Both Ways - Sharbani Das Gupta.

