



It's alive!

This year, for our annual art issue, we're livening things up with a focus on performance. Brush up your art history, catch the shows in town and check out some video art while you're at it.



(Clockwise from top left) Boris Nieslony; Divya and Rajyashree; Atul Bhalla; Nikhil Chopra; Diya Naidu; Anuj Vaidya (left) and Tejal Shah; Yves Klein and Steven Cohen

Image credits: Khoj International Artists Association, Atul Bhalla, Tejal Shah, Harry Shunk

The guided tour

As a genre, performance art can be hard to pin down. So we asked the expert.

South African-born RoseLee Goldberg is the foremost champion of performance art today. The author of the seminal *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, which is required reading for college art courses, Goldberg also founded Performa, a non-profit interdisciplinary arts organisation in New York that holds a biennial performance festival. Goldberg, who is in Delhi for the India Art Fair, talked **Kingshuk Niyogy** through the history and definition of performance art, its relation to politics and its potential for exhibition.

How do you describe performance art to the lay person?

Artists have always created live performance, reaching far back in history. Leonardo da Vinci organised large events that involved performers and special effects, one of which was for the marriage of the daughter of the most powerful banking family of Renaissance Florence, the Medici. Gianlorenzo Bernini created plays and spectacles in mid-seventeenth century Rome, in outdoor squares as well as in private shows at his home. I am sure there are Indian artists who designed spectacles or private events, or worked across disciplines. Certainly poet, playwright, musician and artist Rabindranath Tagore comes to mind. Artists have been responsible for creating pageants, fireworks and actions of all kinds throughout history and on many continents, which is performance art by another name.

In the past decade, galleries in big Indian cities have proliferated. How important is it to have separate venues for performance art?

Performance art already exists in India: The arts are intricately linked – painting, sculpture, poetry, dance, music, film, architecture – and rituals and ceremonies are elaborate

and extraordinarily inventive art works in themselves. You have many strong contemporary artists who use performance – Nikhil Chopra, Shilpa Gupta, Raqs Media Collective, to name a few. The contemporary artist is someone who can use any medium they choose to express their ideas.

How has performance art evolved?

In twentieth-century Western art, performance leapt to the forefront in the early 1900s with the Futurists, a group of Italian painters, poets, sculptors and musicians, who insisted that the artist should step outside the traditional studio and confront the public directly. They called for art that was more connected to everyday life, and for artists to take an active role in interpreting the changing values and sensibilities of modern society.

How has performance art from the '60s and '70s influenced contemporary performance, and art in general?

Art of the 1960s and '70s was hugely influenced by performance. In France, Germany, England, Japan, Brazil or the United States, performance played a large part in shaping the art that was made in those countries. Live actions were often the starting point for new ideas – think of the “combines” of Robert Rauschenberg, or the “body paintings” of Yves Klein. The earliest work of an artist like Cindy Sherman was essentially live performance, which she later captured on film. And even today, her photo shoots are kind of solo performances in themselves.

How does the genre relate to politics?

Very closely. It is often the most radical and immediate way to respond to politics – as during the Vietnam

War, or in relation to feminism, multiculturalism or the AIDS crisis. Performance also provides a way to get difficult ideas out into the world – for example,

in countries where artists have been censored or limited because of political regimes. Much of the work we know from the USSR in the '70s and '80s, or China in the '90s, is documentation of performances that would have been made “undercover” in those countries. Artwork from South Africa has a heavy performance component. Performance is a way for artists far from the “centre” to become part of the international conversation, with work that is yet unique to their home country.

Is performance art accessible?

The very fact of live performers being present in a work makes it accessible. Everyone has an opinion about what they saw. Looking at a painting or sculpture is more difficult – people feel they should know the history of art before they can say a word.

Performance art is more ephemeral than traditional visual art. So how do we preserve it for posterity?

Art of the twenty-first century frequently involves direct engagement between artists and audiences. New museums are being built in anticipation of large crowds, and performance is being incorporated into programming.

Museums have been collecting this material since the 1970s, when so much conceptual art was performance related. Much of this work resides in the drawings department – notes, diagrams and instructions – or in the video, film or photography departments.

How important is it that performance art cannot be bought and sold?

Performance functions at the level of ideas and content. Artists I talk to describe it as a place where they can experiment freely, and take off in entirely new directions.

What would you say to people who say that performance is not art?

I tell them that I'm happy to take them through the entire history of art, if they care to listen, to show that it is indeed, integral to art making. Probably it's simpler to say, read my books! Performance art is the cutting edge art of today. Most contemporary artists are influenced by or incorporate it in one way or another in their work.

RoseLee Goldberg speaks on Performance Art: The Medium of the 21st Century with critic and curator Geeta Kapur on Sun Jan 29 at the India Art Fair. See Events in Art.



PATRICK MCMULLAN



“That Morning Thing” Performance by Robert Ashley at Performa 11 in New York

PAULACOURT

A long, strange trip

Time Out walks you through the history of modern performance art, from its origins in European dramatic readings to its fruition in technologically enhanced, international happenings.

1909

Italian Filippo Tommaso Marinetti writes the “Futurist Manifesto” for French daily *Le Figaro*. The anti-establishment manifesto called for an embrace of “universal dynamism” and technology. The artistic and literary movement finds sympathisers in painters Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini and composer Luigi Russolo.

1947



American abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock starts making “action painting”, eschewing careful preparation in favour of spontaneity. In the throes of creativity, Pollock sometimes dances

on his canvases. *Time* calls him “Jack the Dripper”, and contemporaries, including wife Lee Krasner, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning, follow suit.

1956

Japanese artist Atsuko Tanaka wears her “Electric Dress”, a mass of coloured lightbulbs inspired by an illuminated pharmaceutical advertisement, to exhibitions. As part of the post-WWII Gutai collective, Tanaka’s work was seen as a metaphor for the rapid urbanisation of Japan.



1959



French artist Yves Klein turns Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” on its head with his “Zone de Sensibilité Picturale Immatérielle” (Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility). Klein sold the documentation of ownership of an empty space (the “Immaterial Zone”) in the form of a cheque, for gold. The piece could be “completed” in an elaborate ritual: the buyer would burn the cheque, and Klein would throw half the gold into the Seine. An art critic, a museum

director and at least two witnesses oversaw the proceedings. Before Klein’s death in 1962, eight Zones were sold.

● John Cage’s student Allan Kaprow coins the term “happening” with “Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts”. The performance included a band playing toy instruments, and live painting. Over the years, Kaprow’s work became less scripted; in 1967’s “Fluids”, the audience was brought in to fill a room with blocks of melting ice.

1912

The Futurist movement influences Russian artists like David Burliuk, who experimented with painting, poetry and performance. In 1912, Burliuk co-authored the manifesto “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste”.

German author and poet Hugo Ball establishes the Zurich nightclub Cabaret Voltaire with friends Emmy Hennings, Marcel Janco, Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara. Established for “artistic and political purposes”, the cabaret went on to become the seedbed of the Dada movement with wild spoken word, dance and music soirées.

1916



1952

American composer and philosopher John Cage organises what later came to be called a “happening”. In “Theater Piece No 1”, Cage and poet Charles Olson read verse while standing on ladders; Robert Rauschenberg played wax cylinders of Edith Piaf recordings; David Tudor performed on a piano; and Merce Cunningham danced – all at the same time and among the audience.

1961

Lithuanian artist George Maciunas organises the first Fluxus event at the AG Gallery in New York, followed by Fluxus festivals in Europe in 1962. An international network, Fluxus included and was affiliated with artists like Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Nam June Paik. These artists adhered to the anti-art sensibility set forth by the Dadaists, but they also knew how to have fun. Fluxus “events” were often truncated versions of earlier “Happenings”.

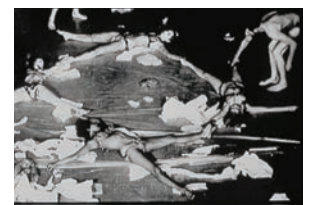
1962



Austrian Hermann Nitsch’s “Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries” is a post-modern take on ritual sacrifice. Nitsch crucified a lamb and removed its entrails, accompanied by his composition “Geräuschmusik”. In 1998, Nitsch staged his 100th such performance, combining slaughtered animals with music and dancing.

1964

American Carolee Schneemann stages “Meat Joy” in Paris. Eight partially nude people danced and played with sausages, raw fish and chicken, wet paint and scraps of paper.



International performance art timeline

Yoko Ono

1964

In 1964, the avant-garde artist first performed her iconic “Cut Piece” at the Sogetsu Art Centre in Tokyo. This fortnight, she’s exhibiting in Delhi.



“Remember Us” Yoko Ono inks calligraphy on a wall for her installation at Vadehra Art Gallery

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Yoko Ono’s artistic journey has been a strange one. When she became a household name, her avant-garde art became just one more reason for the mainstream media to vilify her. But as Dilliwalas are finding out, all that was a very long time ago. Ono recently performed “To India With Love” and inaugurated a show, *Our Beautiful Daughters*, in Delhi – giving the capital a first-hand look at why she is, and always has been, much more than Mrs John Lennon.

What marks Ono’s first working visit to India is not her celebrity status, but the fact that the show (which runs parallel to a retrospective, *The Seeds*) is a notable addition to the artist’s body of work – the latest in a number of polished exhibitions that have, since her first major retrospective *Yes Yoko Ono* (New York, 2000), increasingly ensured her canonic position in contemporary art. Ono’s India outing encompasses participatory work, film, performance, activism, installation and sound. Despite its breadth and celebrity shine, this event is a particular success because it channels the raw, off-key edge that has fuelled Ono’s work since the 1950s.

“My intent has not changed,” Ono told *Time Out* over email, before arriving in Delhi. Then, as now, “I was working without the concern of the size of the audience of my work.” That intent – to change the way people think – infuses everything she does: from haiku-length “instructions” to the 30-foot column of light that shoots up from Iceland’s Imagine Peace Tower – the 2007 fulfillment of a dream born during her first meeting with Lennon.

Besides these physical pieces, Ono’s most iconic work is “Cut Piece”, first performed in 1964, in Japan. Ono sat on stage while audience members cut off pieces of her clothes to create an intense interaction charged with violence and intimacy. Ono performed the piece

several times, including at Carnegie Recital Hall (see Cover). Depending on the audience, the show could be tame and polite or a threatening free-for-all. Ono downplayed the work’s importance: “‘Cut Piece’ and other performance I have done around then may have motivated some people to be less afraid of expressing themselves,” she said. But the work is a milestone in performance art: a riveting minimalist piece, devoid of the blood and gore that so many avant-garde artists use to grab attention.

That quiet wit, often leavened with puckish humour, is a quality Ono shares with others of her time. Around 1961, artists like John Cage, La Monte Young and George Maciunas coalesced at her New York loft, and the collaborative creative space was instrumental in kick-starting Fluxus.

Collaboration has continued to be an important aspect of Ono’s work. Her shows are created as much by attendees following instructions as by Ono herself. (See Ono’s instruction postcard included in *Time Out* subscriber copies) One floor of *Our Beautiful Daughters* is dedicated to interactive pieces: “Mend Piece”, which involves fixing broken ceramic bowls; “My Mommy Is Beautiful”, an art wall to celebrate motherhood; “India Smile”, a photo booth that adds participants to the global *Smiling Face Film*; and others. There’s also a wish tree (one of 20 around the city), one of Ono’s most popular projects, in which people write and tie their dreams on a tree. We asked her if she was familiar with the Indian practice of tying threads around trees. She replied with a little story: “A very clever Japanese warrior of long time ago was asked by the lord to report how many trees were in his land. The lord did not think the warrior can do that. But the warrior brought the number

very quickly. The warrior tied every tree with a string, and later took the strings off and counted them. I see the uncanny resemblance of that and the Indian practice you speak of. Do Asians have similar DNA? :)”

That response is vintage Ono: slightly off-topic, a little deflecting, but still seeking to connect through humour. The emoticon is typical too: An avid Twitter user, Ono tweets 140-character koan-like instructions, and answers fan questions every Friday. Social media hasn’t changed art, Ono said, “It’s the other way around. We performers changed the understanding of the social media. That’s what artists do.” Ono said new technology has made it possible to fulfill old, “far-fetched” dreams (like the Imagine Peace Tower), but the dreams themselves haven’t changed.

These dreams, for Ono, have centred on promoting non-violence and addressing feminist issues. For India, she created a large installation “Remember Us”, a comment on the rules that bind women. “I wanted to share the worth of women of India with both women and men,” she said. Fifteen silicone female bodies, ranging in age and size and cast from real people, lie in segmented black boxes filled with coal. Three bowls of ash on the far end of the room stir associations with sati, or, less dramatically, cooking fires. At night, the bodies, which are soft to the touch, are covered by textiles made by Rajasthani women.

Besides the installation, posters in the style of the Ono and Lennon’s famous “War is Over! (If you want it)” advertisement, are up around the city. (See facing page for an ad created for *Time Out Delhi*.) As a committed peace activist in the last couple of bloody decades, Ono remains optimistic about art’s potential to change the world. Speaking about last year’s revolutions and protests around the world, she said, “The protests are performance art, with the intent of changing the world for the better. Don’t criticise. Enjoy.” In characteristic instructive fashion, she added, “We are at the point of stepping into the new world. Let’s not be negative about the fantastic vision we have of it. It’s time for action!”

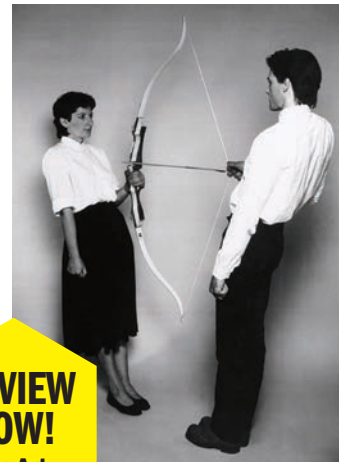
At 78, Ono herself is energetically active, producing dance floor hits and travelling the world. Despite those who might dismiss her, she is the consummate survivor. The WWII bombing of Tokyo, the male-dominated mid-century art scene, marriage to the world’s most famous rock musician, the kidnapping of her daughter, and the murder of her soulmate – she’s lived through a lot. Yet Yoko Ono’s artistic strength lies in the universal concerns that echo through her work, transcending these individual experiences of suffering. **Sonal Shah**
Our Beautiful Daughters is at Vadehra Art Gallery, Okhla. *The Seeds* is at Vadehra Art Gallery, Defence Colony. See Exhibitions in Art.

1973

Marina Abramovic

In her first performance piece, "Rhythm 10" (1973), the Serbian artist jabbed between her fingers with a knife.

She has been called the "grandmother of performance art", but Marina Abramovic's India expedition will have none of the death-defying, self-abusing feats that the Serbian artist built her career on. Abramovic's work at the India Art Fair consists of portraits, several of them from *The Kitchen*, *Homage to Saint Therese* series from 2009. The portraits, in which Abramovic cooks and levitates, were shot by Italian photographer



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Marco Anelli, and evoke Caravaggio's style of painting.

The series marks a kind of mellowing of the 63-year-old artist's agonised brand of performance art. At the 2010 retrospective of her work, *The Artist is Present*, at New York's Museum of Modern Art, she sat still, silent, and did nothing. Visitors were expected to engage in a staring match with her – a far cry from 1974's "Rhythm 0", in which she allowed herself to be stripped naked, cut and threatened with a gun by reckless gallery visitors.

Her notorious nomadic art partnership and romance with the German artist Ulay (né Uwe Laysiepen) in the 1970s and '80s was equally demanding: in "Rest Energy" (1980), Ulay stood with a strung arrow pointed at Abramovic's heart. The two broke up in 1988, with a poignant piece on China's Great Wall that was supposed to culminate in their marriage. Instead, it wound up commemorating the dissolution of their relationship. Starting at opposite ends of the monumental divide, they each walked a thousand miles to meet in the middle for one last goodbye.

Her work may have mellowed, but Abramovic's commitment hasn't wavered. In a 2010 interview with *Time Out London*, she said she would never stop performing: "I even want to control my own funeral." Abramovic talked to **Karanjeet Kaur** about her show in Delhi via email.

Why was *The Kitchen* series chosen for India?

The kitchen plays a very important role in my life. As a child, the kitchen of my grandmother was the center of my world. That was a place where the stories were told, where the dreams were interpreted and where delicious food was cooked. The similarity of my upbringing in former Yugoslavia and the relation to the family life in India is very similar: the sharing food in the family, the ritual of cooking, and the spiritual aspect of food is all the same.

Is testing the limits of the body still relevant to your practice?

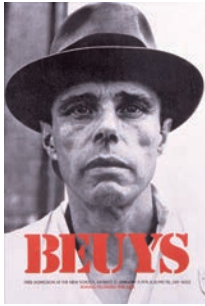
It was in the past, it is in the present and still will be in the future. Even if I have been doing performance art for 40 years, there are still so many important things to explore about the mind and the body. Each new work is a new task, and a new lesson to be learned.

Has performance art moved beyond the need to shock and awe with nudity, sex and the threat of physical violence?

I can't generalise. I only can say for myself that the aim of my work was never to shock. It was more about transformation and awareness. I think that art should avoid the element of shocking as its only motive.

Portraits of Marina Abramovic will be on display at the Lisson Gallery booth at the India Art Fair. See Festivals in Art.

1965



German artist Joseph Beuys performs "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare". With his face swathed in honey and gold leaf, Beuys mumbled about the paintings on the walls around him into the ears of a dead hare. His fascination with animals continued into the 1970s. After his involvement in Vietnam war protests, he locked himself up with a wild coyote for three days in "I Like America and America Likes Me" (1974).

1966

Andy Warhol organises multimedia events at his New York studio, The Factory, including "Exploding Plastic Inevitable". Performers include The Velvet Underground, Nico, Mary Woronov and Gerard Malanga.



1970

UK artist-duo Gilbert and George present their first "living sculpture". They paint themselves gold while singing "Underneath the Arches".

1968

New York's The Living Theatre tour with *Paradise Now*. Breaking the fourth wall, the play had actors reciting social taboos while disrobing. In 1971, they were imprisoned in and deported from Brazil. New forms of theatre, as well as the events of 1968 (the Vietnam War protests and Prague Spring), influenced performance art.

1971

At an exhibition opening, Bhupen Khakhar mimicked the over-the-top ceremony of a wedding procession and governmental inauguration to mock the solemnity of art. Beth Citron, a curator, wrote that "In transforming his artist friends like Vivan Sundaram and Nasreen Mohamedi into participants in the event, Khakhar became the first artist in India to challenge the conventional interaction between artist and audience."

1971



American Vito Acconci performs "Seedbed" in New York. He masturbated under a wooden ramp as his spoken fantasies about the visitors walking above him reverberated through loudspeakers.

1973

Laurie Anderson presents "Duets on Ice" in New York. She plays the violin while wearing ice skates with the blades frozen into a block of ice. Mainstream artists and musicians such as Willem Dafoe and Eric Bogosian come into their own. Eastern Bloc artists like Hungarian Tibor Hajas, Russian Alexander Yulikov and Petr from the Czech Republic, also turn increasingly to performance.

Chris Burden, a Californian artist, has an assistant shoot him in the arm for "Shoot". Three years later, he was crucified on the back of a Volkswagen Beetle for "Trans-fixed".

Indian performance art timeline
International performance art timeline

1983

Americans Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh spent a year tied to each other with an eight-foot rope (but not allowed to touch) for "Art/Life: One Year Performance 1983-1984". Hsieh previously spent a year in a cage.

Mid-1980s

The American market boom of the 1980s marks the comeback of painting; performance art begins to fade in the USA.

1996

Russian Oleg Kulik acts like a dog for "Mad Dog" and "Dog House". He occasionally "escapes" from a leash and bites people or destroys art. The radical performances of Kulik's contemporaries would be called "Moscow Actionism"; artists like Anatoly Osmolovsky and Avdei Ter-Oganyan frequently run afoul of authorities.

1991

Ratnabali Kant combined dance, sculpture and theatre in "Facing Nightmare Alone", at the India International Centre. The show explored the disrobing of Draupadi in The Mahabharata.

1997



In Chinese artist Zhang Huan's "To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond", 40 migrant labourers stand in a pond. In "To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain" (1995), Zhang and nine other artists climbed a mountain near Beijing, stripped and lay on top of one another.

1998



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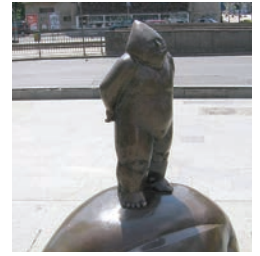
Pushpamala N makes her first photo-performance series, "Phantom Lady or Kismet, a photo romance" in Mumbai, enacting noirish sequences

inspired by Fearless Nadia. In 2001, she made "Sunehre Sapne" at a Khoj residency, acting out the vampy fantasies of a middle-class housewife in hand-painted photographs. She continues to combine photography, painting and installation with performative elements, as in "Abduction/The Pond" (2009, pictured). *Pushpamala N will perform at Khoj Live 12. See p32.*

Rummana Hussain performs "Is it What You Think?" while suffering from cancer, to address stereotypes of Muslim women. Against a slideshow of newspaper images of Muslim women, Hussain removed her hijab and her breast prosthesis, read Sufi poetry and asked questions about Islam.

1987

Karen Finley's "I'm an Ass Man" is a feminist spoken-word performance of the thoughts inside a rapist's head. Finley's contemporaries include Tim Miller, John Fleck and Holly Hughes, who begin to address issues of immigration, queer identities and the AIDS crisis.



The Orange Alternative, an underground movement in Poland led by Waldemar Fydrych and symbolised by a gnome, protests against the communist regime with a "Distribution of Toilet Paper" to mock the deficiency of that product.

1993



Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco satirise Enlightenment ideas of discovery in "The Couple in the Cage". They exhibited themselves as caged Amerindians from an imaginary island – but ended up being taken for real "savages" by viewers. Mexican Gómez-Peña is part of a growing movement of Latin American performance artists.

1999

Belgian students begin a game of tag on the streets. Students of the Free University of Brussels started a game in which players make other people participate by saying the word "happening". The "victim" is forced to become a temporary puppet of the "Happening".

1999

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For a Khoj event, Subodh Gupta smeared his body with cow dung and mud and lay on the ground for "Pure". The performance was filmed for a video that ran backwards, rewinding from a shot of Gupta in the shower. *Subodh Gupta will perform at Khoj Live 12. See p32.*

2000

In Sanchayan Ghosh's "A Few Hanged Stars and a Crossed Memoir" at Shantiniketan, performers read out letters by artists, poets and writers whose worth was not recognised during their lifetimes.



2000

Chinese painter Zhu Yu photographs himself, supposedly eating a foetus, to protest state-mandated abortion as population-control. Artists have long used photo, video and other technology to document and enhance their performances, but this trend takes off globally in the 2000s. A notable example is British artist Tris Vonna Michell, who layers his performances with photos and installations.

2002



Delhi artist Inder Salim cuts off part of his little finger and throws it into the Yamuna as a comment on pollution. Since the late 1990s, Salim became known for his blend of activism and

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art. "My art always raises questions of permissions," he told *Time Out* in an earlier interview. In a 2008 protest against the death penalty at India Gate, Salim "hung himself" from a foam post, resulting in arrest. "I would not call myself an 'activist'," he said, "The protest is embedded within the art." In 2010, Salim organised Art Karavan International, a troupe that travelled through North India. Visit www.indersalim.livejournal.com (at your own peril). Inder Salim will perform at Khoj Live 12. See p32.

For "Blame", Shilpa Gupta distributes bottles of fake blood at Mumbai train stations, asking people to point out the differences between the samples. See feature on p16. Shilpa Gupta's work will be on display at the India Art Fair. See Festivals in Art.

2004

Tejal Shah hung in a hammock from a window outside Khoj for "Sleep". Four years earlier, the queer artist had conflated Bollywood, porn and rape fantasies in her incendiary video *Chingari Chumma*: she wore a strap-on and roughed-up collaborator Anuj Vaidya, who then fellated her.



COURTESY TEJAL SHAH

2007

Nikhil Chopra

In 2007, Chopra walked to Lal Chowk in Srinagar, drawing houses on the road.

Nikhil Chopra is a man of many parts – and sometimes, he is a woman. In his latest series, "Broken White" (pictured), Chopra plays a Victorian dowager, complete with a puffy wig and a chalk-whitened face. The "residues" and photographs of that performance work, staged at a residency in La Rochelle, France last year will be on display at the India Art Fair.

History is a constant presence in the Bombay artist's work, and the Victorian lady is just one of the several personae he has fashioned for himself. The most enduring of



COURTESY CHATTERJEE & LAL

these have been Yog Raj Chitrakar, a turn-of-the-century draughtsman inspired by his artist grandfather, and Sir Raja, an Indian prince straight out of colonial portraiture. The latter grew out of a tableau vivant performance in 2003, part of Chopra's MFA thesis at Ohio State University. Chopra posed motionless for two hours at a dining table laden with food, fruit, and wine, suggestive of Dutch still life. By contrast, as Yog Raj Chitrakar he walked the length of Mumbai. For another performance at the 53rd Venice Biennale, Chopra stayed at the tower at Arsenale for two days, eating, sleeping

2000

The first OPEN Performance Art Festival opens in Beijing, with artists from 30 countries. The next year, the Philippines International Performance Art Festival is established. Performa launches its first performance biennale in New York (see p24) in 2005, and the European Performance Art Festival in Warsaw premieres in 2006.



2003

Regina José Galindo walks through the streets of Guatemala City with a bowl of human blood, occasionally stepping in it to leave a trail of bloody footprints.

2005



Atul Bhalla shows photos of himself in the Yamuna at Khoj. Bhalla's documented performances include "Mashk" (2006), a video that captured

the artists' face while he slaughtered a goat halal style.

- In "Keywords", Anita Dube carves words like "avant-garde", "permanent revolution" and "sexual love" out of buffalo meat.
- At Sarjan Art Gallery, Baroda, Chintan Upadhyay asks people to apply turmeric paste to his body in "Baar Baar, Har Baar, Kitini Baar?" to address communal violence in Gujarat.
- At an evening of performance art at Khoj, artist-couple Shantanu Lodh and Mrs Manmeet invite the audience to write on their nude bodies and take photographs.

2006

Khoj International Artists' Association hosts an International Performance Art residency. Culminating performances included Sonia Khurana's first performance art piece.

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2008

Khoj Live 08, a six day festival of live performance art, marks Khoj's tenth anniversary. It included performances by over 25 artists from India and abroad, across the city. One highlight was "Petting Zoo", a performance by Neha Choksi. Choksi anaesthetised herself and four farm animals. Their sedated bodies were placed on the floor of a dark room and viewers were allowed to touch and pet them. See Khoj Live 12 below.

2010

Chinese artist Han Bing performs "Dreams of a Lost Home: Mating Season, No. 12" at New Friends Colony Market, using rubble, cotton and smoke to challenge the nature of urbanisation.

Inder Salim drapes himself nude over a tree stump to protest the felling of trees before the Commonwealth Games. Salim's pose is from a Persian miniature of Majnu lying over Laila's tomb.

2009

Dipyaman Kar asked people on the streets of Kolkata to form the word "Fear" for a show called *Art Against Terrorism*.

2009

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera courts controversy in Havana, when she invites people to speak on stage for a minute each. Predictably, several participants raised questions about freedom and democracy.

2010

The Museum of Modern Art holds a major retrospective and recreation of Marina Abramovic's work. It remains the biggest exhibition of performance art in the museum's history. See p28.

2011

Tushar Joag locks himself in a room for six days, filling notebooks with "I will not lose faith in the Indian Judiciary and Democracy". These were meant for Union Law Minister Veerappa Moily, who promised to revisit the archaic sedition law after activist Binayak Sen was released from jail.



200 people assemble at Mumbai's Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus to "spontaneously" dance to "Rang De Basanti". The flash mob, rallied by 23-year-old Shonan Kothari, sparks off copycat attempts in other cities.

Bangalore hosts LIVE ART 2011. In 2008, co-organiser Smitha Cariappa held a five-day performance marathon in the city.

Indo-German artist Tino Sehgal performs "This Situation" in Delhi. Sehgal, a major artist, rejects material production and orchestrates "constructed situations", in which a cast of characters is trained to create an experience for the audience that is devised by the artist. His "This Progress" (2010), which created waves at New York's Guggenheim, involved walking up the museum's spiral staircase, talking with guides of various ages: a child, a teenager, an adult and an older person. In past performances, such as 2007's "Kiss", actors mimicked poses from sculptures and paintings. Sehgal himself resists the label of performance art, calling his work "living sculpture" instead.

2012

Khoj Live 12

The second edition of Khoj's live art extravaganza may be slightly more contained.

In 1999, a young Subodh Gupta lay caked in cow dung outside Khoj Studio. In 2005, Inder Salim scouted the streets of Khirkee, where Khoj is located, collecting excreta to preserve in a jar filled with formaldehyde labelled *Shit of the Other*. And in 2008, the artist association that has been at the forefront of the genre in India hosted Khoj Live 08, an international performance art festival. To coincide with the India Art Fair, Khoj will host a second edition, Khoj Live 12, this fortnight.

Khoj Live 08 was spread over six days at galleries and open areas across the city. There were public acts like performances by DA MOTUS, a Swiss group that dressed in acid green costumes and gas masks to create flash mob excitement on the streets. For those few days, Delhi was buzzing about the risqué nature of the performances, but also the new avenues that Khoj was opening up for artists.

"The idea back then was to get commercial galleries into the act," said Khoj Director Pooja Sood of the effort to expand the scope of performance art. Khoj Live 12 will rope in some big names, but the event itself is restricted to a single evening at Blue Frog. "This time, because it's just an evening, we wanted a space that is known to be edgy and experimental," Sood explained. The stage, courtyard and other areas at Blue Frog will host 14 to 17 acts that blur art, dance, film and video, writing, activism and new media. The performers

include Vivan Sundaram, Pushpamala N and Mamta Sagar, Inder Salim, Subodh Gupta, Amitesh Grover and others from art, dance or music backgrounds. Performance art curator RoseLee Goldberg will be on hand to introduce the evening (see p24).

One of the longer segments is "Motherland", a theatrical monologue by Pushpamala N and poet Mamta Sagar. The two will explore the idea of freedom through the work of Nanjangud Thirumalamba, a Kannada writer and nationalist. Inder Salim will perform a self-referential piece titled "THIS Inder Salim STUFF". Dance lovers can look forward to the juxtaposition of "Nadir" by Attakkalari chore-

ographer Divya Naidu with "Don't be Dotty" by "Miss Dotty" and "Madame Potty" (Divya Vibha Sharma and Rajyashree Ramamurthi). "Nadir" is a weighty performance, touching

on "Fate, God and Death". "Don't be Dotty" will be lighter – a humorous comment on the "connects-the-dots" approach to living life. An important component of the evening will be the sound-related pieces. Sood stressed the growing importance of this genre and said that one of the reasons they chose Blue Frog was that they had at least four sound pieces in the mix. French composer Eryck Abecassis and Andy Naorem and Allan Lyndoh of the Delhi band Sonic Tree

Natives will present the fifth edition of NOISINDIA – a series of live events experimenting with noise against a backdrop of images and videos. Another sound-related piece is Hemant SK's "Raping an Ellipse", a performance with "light and silence" that comments on the trauma of sexual assault.

In this concise format, Khoj Live 12 won't have same feeling of a madcap romp through the city that characterised Khoj Live 08, but the evening still promises plenty of audience interaction. "We're trying to make it site-specific," Sood said. There will be social gaming between India and Pakistan courtesy Amitesh Grover, art in the adjacent boutique and perhaps even a take-over of Blue Frog's restaurant. Make sure to make it down to Mehrauli for this mix of performance and party. **Akshita Nahar, inputs by Sonal Shah.**

Khoj Live 12 is on Fri Jan 27, 4-9pm at Blue Frog. See Festivals in Art.



"Petting Zoo" Neha Choksi's performance from Khoj Live 08

**ONVIEW
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Video library

A close cousin of performance art, video has a strong presence in the capital. Meet Delhi's best video artists – and check out some of their work this fortnight.



"The Distance from Here" A video work from 2010 by Bani Abidi

Bani Abidi

As a Pakistani who's lived in the US and is now married to an Indian, Bani Abidi has a special interest in barriers, particularly national ones. Abidi's last solo show, *Section Yellow* (2010), was inspired by visits to state embassies; a video work in the show, *Yellow Lines*, highlighted the frustrations and dreams of people in an immigration office. Abidi's documentary-style art often wittily touches on the quotidian life of Pakistanis – a contrast with the violence and repression routinely depicted in the news. In one

seven-minute video, a Pakistani brass band plays "The Star-Spangled Banner" to comical effect. For Abidi, the line of control is never a straight one. *Simran Bhalla*

Ravi Agarwal

It's only logical that an environmental activist who is also an artist would produce work rooted in green politics. But curator, writer and Toxics Link director Ravi Agarwal has also dabbled with metaphysical pursuits and gender normativity. His best-known video work, however, focuses on the Yamuna. *Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?* (2007) centred

on the marigold trade upstream, and the two-channel projection *Oil is not Water* (2008) was about pollution. Recently, Agarwal even curated an exhibition by the banks of the river. *Karanjeet Kaur*

Raqs Media Collective

Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi and Shudhabrata Sengupta, who together form the Raqs Media Collective, are artists who are also academics, as evidenced by their dialogic curatorial notes. Raqs has its adept fingers in several pies: not only do members work across a variety of media, curate exhibitions and biennials, they also co-founded the Sarai programme at the Centre for Developing Societies. The troika formed the collective upon graduation from Jamia University in 1992. They initially made documentaries, but since the early 2000s, Raqs' work has been progressively more challenging. For instance, the 2003 Venice Biennale exhibit, *Five Pieces of Evidence*, was a five-screen video installation that treated the city as a crime story and brought news elements like missing person notices and reports on the Monkeyman into play. Look out for their new animated work, *Whenever a Heart Skips a Beat*, at the India Art Fair. *KK*
Whenever a Heart Skips a Beat will be on display at the India Art Fair. See *Festivals in Art*.

Rohini Devasher

Rohini Devasher is a printmaker and multimedia artist influenced by astronomy, technology

The screening room



a year-long series of Video Wednesdays (first curated in 2008 by Johnny ML) the gallery collaborated up with Shanghai's Minsheng Art Museum to also screen Chinese videos. Art critic Gayatri Sinha, current curator of the series, told **Sonam Joshi** why we should keep watching.

How has your approach changed since the first edition of Video Wednesdays?

Internationally, there have been several new

On the last Wednesday of each month, art and cinema lovers converge at Gallery Espace for all-day screenings of the latest in Indian video art. For the second installment of

media biennales and video biennales, so we tried to expand by tying up with a Chinese museum. In 2007, I did a big show at the Newark Museum [*India: Public Places, Private Spaces: Contemporary Photography and Video Art*] of what we called lens-based work. This included people like Ranbir Kaleka and Sonia Khurana, who needed to be recognised for their brilliance in video, and who have since gone into other disciplines. The focus of the current program is to emphasise the importance of video, to bring it back into the limelight, irrespective of whether it has dependencies of sculpture or installation or photography, and to see it as an art form on its own. Towards the end, we are looking at a publication, which will theorise the production of video in India.

Do you select videos on a thematic basis?

As we entered the program, we realised that we were encouraging people to make new work. If I spoke to 15 artists, five may

have had work which had not been seen before, but ten others said that they were pushed to complete existing ideas. While we can't impose a thematic, broad themes have been emerging, like ecology and environment.

Is there much overlap between video and performance art in Indian video art?

Both of them go very well together and a lot of Indian artists like Kiran Subbiah or Sonia Khurana or Pushpamala N perform their own video and use this to create a moment of intervention. There are hardly any pure video artists. Video impacts photography, sculpture, installation and painting – something fairly unique to Indian art practice. Artists like Vivan Sundaram or Gigi Scaria move very fluidly between these mediums.

Video Wednesdays will hold a three-day video event from Thur Jan 26 to Sun Jan 29 at Gallery Espace. See Events in Art.

and biology. Devasher uses organic patterns as fodder for her videos, installations and mixed-media works, taking animal, vegetal and mineral references and transforming them into art that is as likely to be inspired by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as sci-fi writer Sir Arthur C Clarke. Devasher started with printmaking and drawing, but her work progressed to digital manipulations and now, more often, video. Her recent two-channel video projection "Doppelganger" was screened over adjacent walls and recreated the flapping movement of a dragonfly's wings. Devasher's fixation with living forms might be her starting point, but her video projections now define her work, capturing natural life through new technology. *Vandana Verma*

Rohini Devasher will participate in Khoj Live 12. See p32.

Amitesh Grover

As part of his video installation and performance at Khoj Live 08, Amitesh Grover stood on stage in a green dress and shaved his arm with a disposable razor. The show, titled *I Hate My Body*, was typical Grover, fusing video, personal history and innovative sound design. Grover has merged his theatre training (at the National School of Drama) with cutting-edge technology to create 15 performances and mixed-media installations over the past four years. Recent performances have included *Strange Lines*, an examination of the graphic novel as well as of concepts of foreignness; *Social Gaming*, where groups of players in different countries play a series of social games and interact through Skype, Facebook, SMS and email; and *The Hamlet Quartet*, a free-form adaptation that uses Shakespeare's play to explore concepts of "right thought" and "correct action". *Uday Bhatia*

Amitesh Grover will participate in Khoj Live 12. See p32.

Ranbir Kaleka

One of Delhi's most exciting video artists, Ranbir Kaleka describes his bringing together of video and painting on canvas as the coming together of the real and the staged. He's long been fascinated by the moving image: "The



inspiration came from my childhood that was spent sequestered in a haveli where one of my uncles enacted stories through a lantern casting phantasmagoria shadows on the walls. And I truly believe that my own shadows have come from there," he told us. The process of making one of his video-paintings can be lengthy. Kaleka shoots a video, then

projects a still image from it onto a canvas. He then traces the outline of the image, paints it and then projects the edited video on the painting again to make any final corrections in the painting and synchronise the two images. "The viewer might think two are rubbing against each other or that there is meaning between the two — the still and the moving image," he said. *Sonam Joshi*

Sonia Khurana

Sonia Khurana's primary source of inspiration is Sonia Khurana. Originally trained as a painter, Khurana realised that her heart lay in exploring "the self in the dilemma of life", as she says in *The Khoj Book: 1997-2007 Contemporary Art Practice in India*. A salient feature in Khurana's work is the photographing and filming of her naked

Spreading her tentacles

Emerging video artist Nandita Kumar splits her time between Delhi, her hometown, and New Zealand. Her video *Tentacles of Dimensions* follows a brain after "it decides to unplug its cultural programming". This video is on display at the Latitude 28 Gallery booth at the India Art Fair. Other video artists to watch out for at IAF are Kiran Chandra and Suchitra Gahlot — both represented by Shrine Empire Gallery. Chandra's *State of Bengal*, brings together Bankura horses and doilies and Gahlot's *Discomfort* is a series of short films about people using the "wrong" hand to do regular tasks. See *Festivals in Art*.

form. For her notorious video "Bird" (1999), Khurana twirled around naked on a pedestal. However, Khurana is anything but flighty: she worked on her *Flower Carrier* (2007) for six years. The video is a compilation of still and moving pictures of the artist, a potted red rose in hand, positioned against various backdrops from Okhla to London. *Gayathri Sreedharan*

Sonia Khurana will participate in Video Wednesdays. See *Events in Art*.

Gigi Scaria

Gigi Scaria's practice is eclectic (sculpture, painting and installation), but his inspiration is almost one-dimensional: the city, its chaotic development and its new architectural forms. His videos have names like *Excavation*, *Site Under Construction* and *Lost City*. In *Panic City*, the camera pans over a teeming cityscape, where the multi-hued, multistoried buildings appear to swell and contract, like an accordion, set to western classical music. Similarly, in *Amusement Park*, an imagined futuristic metropolis throbs feverishly, as if on the verge of implosion. *KK*

Asim Waqif

In Asim Waqif's installation and video work, Delhi becomes a central character. When he's not decrying the devastation of the Yamuna, Waqif's muse is the capital's abandoned buildings. His latest outing was *Tarq*, a dance film made under the aegis of the Gati Dance Forum's Yellow Line Project. Waqif shot dancer Raakesh MPS bouncing off the walls; the film's low-lighting and tight frames channels the claustrophobia of British horror film *The Descent*. His 2010 production *Exploring Dereliction* begins with split-screen footage of an abandoned, partially-finished building. The four-and-a-half-minute video appears to meander aimlessly until the handheld camera comes to rest on a bone, followed by quick shots of animal carcasses, evoking urbanisation's byproducts: loneliness, and eventually, death. *KK*

Asim Waqif's sound installation is part of the India Art Fair. See *Festivals in Art*.



COURTESY: SONIA KHURANA

"Logic of Birds" A 2006 video by Sonia Khurana