

Indian artists at The Singapore Biennale 2008

The Singapore Biennale is an international contemporary visual arts event. It features over 50 renowned international and local artists from various artistic disciplinary backgrounds. The biennale is an opportunity to view the multitude of artworks and installations. It presents the artworks in an engaging and informative manner.

The Singapore Biennale 2008 squarely focuses on creating the journey of wonder through two large indoor spaces and a connecting outdoor area. The ambience and environment of the two indoor locations are poles apart, providing a distinct experience and engagement of the artworks. Linking the two indoor venues is the Marina Bay Area. Featuring a number of large-scale interactive and engaging outdoor installations, the water body of the Marina Bay serves as a focal point in connecting these works. The art events are open to the public until 16 November 2008.

The theme of the 2nd Singapore Biennale is Wonder – which the artists present in its different contexts and meanings. The main exhibition showcases an illustrious list of established and emerging artists whose creations engender curiosity about the world we live in. The list includes artists from Asia, Middle East, Europe and the US. All have produced sharp, wonderful work that provide apertures and prisms of possibilities and hope, through which we can gaze at the world.

Three artists from India featuring at the biennale are Srinivas Prasad, Shubigi Rao and Kiran Subbaiah. Srinivas Prasad, an upcoming artist born in 1974 in Bangalore, did his BFA and MFA in Sculpture from Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, in 1996 and 1998, respectively. He uses multi-media-site specific installation and his valuable experience in theatre. He mingles performing and visual arts to produce dramatic results.

Kiran Subbaiah has studied and worked at various prestigious art institutions in India and Europe. The talented artist's creative production comprises 3-dimensional objects, short stories, videos, site/context-specific texts and proposals for utilitarian objects. He has been producing computer-specific art-objects for almost a decade.

The third participating artist from India, Shubigi Rao, mentions: "I believe that gaps in comprehension and miscommunication provide fertile ground to make us think as well as feel beyond the everyday stimuli-response. Hence I draw on a range of issues from my interests in varied subjects like literature, natural history, archaeology, and garbage. My creations invariably tend to be triggered by something I have read – frequently 'unfashionable' or outdated knowledge. I always find myself drawn back to highly questionable or doubtful areas of research."

Meanwhile, Bodhi Art is showcasing Jitish Kallat's 'Public Notice – 2' in association with the

Singapore Biennale 2008. It's a sequel to the artist's 2003 work that visually reproduced the famous speech 'Freedom at Midnight' by India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The installation revisits the eve of the historic Salt March and the speech that Mahatma Gandhi delivered on the banks of the historic river Sabarmati.

The words that inspired 'Public Notice – 2' are words of revolution, of protest and hope. In addition to his message of non-violence, the Mahatma urged his people to take drastic measures to attain freedom. The installation challenges the viewer to decide if such total commitment to a cause still really exists.

Comprised of bones made from fiberglass ceremoniously placed on long, narrow shelves, the work pays homage to this monumental event even while mourning the death of the spirit that it encapsulated. The bones, reminiscent of fossils, spell out each word of the speech, pointing to the irrelevance of history. In viewing this work, we are reminded of the legacies that we take for granted.

With 'Public Notice – 2', the artist continues to harvest historically-loaded content from his nation's collective past, provoking the viewers to consider the events leading to their individual growth and the development of the society. He pushes the viewer to give the past and its protagonists their due respect.