

Artists Statements Peers 2006

My prior experience with KHOJ was only as a volunteer from my college, the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, for the KHOJ international workshop 2002 in Bangalore. My experience in that space, as a student of art, working and helping the artists who were doing experiments with all sorts of materials with a great deal of rigor, was thoroughly inspiring. I tried to understand how artists dealt with new spaces and worked within limited time frames, yet coming out with amazing works. Well, that was also my first experience of interaction with the artists who made sensible works.

KHOJ, as we know, was an initial brave step towards the idea of alternative art spaces in India. It is a great platform to start as a beginner and a space for experimentation. The project I was working on right before I started the residency was on signage and spaces and I was hoping to, in fact, find a thread that would take the same project forward. But I was not sure of what was expected of me since my portfolio was all about my concern for art in public spaces. More than anything else, Peers 2006, was a grand opportunity to get away from Bangalore and explore a new city and also meet new set of people involved in arts practices.

My first week at KHOJ was very exciting. Interaction with the inmates and gallery hopping were just a beginning. Artist's studio visits at Bharti Kher's and Subodh Gupta's and "No Escape" with Anita Dube and Atul Balla, were very interesting and informative. These triggered questions on issues ranging from "collaboration and hiring manual labour" to how far does public art refer to public spaces and the marketing of art. The group made regular visits to the Habitat Center, attended all the film screenings at Alliance Francaise and all this only added to the excitement. As far as my work was concerned, the visit to Old Delhi with a video camera started the process which culminated in a video installation by the end of two weeks. A general outlook on Delhi, the prominent factors such as history and the contemporary in your face and the like weren't the only aspects that interested me. The comparison factor between old Delhi and New Delhi is the generalized sense of order and chaos from the references. The chaos that one come across in old Delhi, I felt, was only due to the extreme order that prevailed in there. Since it's a purely business area, the term "order" if looked at closely, becomes a synonym for the seeming chaos of the streets in old Delhi. The visual meanings and the layers of interpretations that tag along when you overlooked a widely generalized aspect also interested me. The undeniable mechanical image of the place fascinated me.

But these scattered thoughts did not solidify into any concrete imagery or concept for a while. It was all about trying to figure out something that made sense to myself and what was practical in the given time period. Also since I was not familiar with the spaces or people I wasn't sure of working on a public art project. Certain shots while viewing the footage of Old Delhi triggered a few ideas and I sort of decided on the medium before the work started., I had used this medium as a tool for the documentation for my previous works, here I had a chance to experiment and use the medium effectively. I worked with some footage of Old Delhi. Also whenever I had a chance, I randomly shot with the handcam around the place, light sources, hands, spaces, streets, Bhooma interviewing peers, Surabhi singing and the peers at work. Some of those images sort of built a narrative mind map. The frames pointed out the questioning or understanding the state of

viewing and being viewed, thereby finding a thread to look at the general perception of something\anything, in relation to the term conditioning, here social conditioning.

My interpretation of this line of thought started with finding a suitable element that could be identified as a reference to a simple mechanical act. The recurring dots ... transferred onto a transparent screen, inserted into a physical space, a street, where a kid spots the non-real screen and starts following the movement of the dots and tries to co-ordinate movements of his eyes and of the dots. The audience watching the video mimics the eye movement of the character there by, reversing the roles of the viewed and the viewer themselves. But then it falls into random snippets which align themselves with a visual experience of movements. Although mundane, their subjectiveness alters the very intention.

The video was complemented by an installation using screens built with threads tied on to hollow pipes, hanging from the ceiling and reflecting dots on the wall referring to passive subtle conditioning. The intention was to allow people to walk through the erratic movements of the screens to reach the space where the video can be viewed closely.(Dots→make a line→directions, Traffic signals→ social conditioning→order and so on)On the opening day, despite the last minute jitters and all the running around and getting things installed, the space filled with people anxious to see what we did at KHOJ. The work was appreciated and critiqued and run through a wider spectrum of interpretations than expected along with a lot of feed back for a next step (guess, that makes me a happy artist).One advice that was very relevant was” being an artist one needs to learn to edit out thoughts and ideas for the work to be crisp, focused and to the point.”

Throughout during the residency, no one was lenient to each other when it came to critiquing each others ideas and questioning the way of working. At the same time, they were not reluctant when it came to helping each other. Discussing the ideas with the peers now and then helped sort out technical issues and making practical decisions and to gain a wider perspective on ways of working.

The all-nighters during the editing of the video in the peak of summer were a bit unbearable. But that became a secondary concern once we all started getting involved in our works. Visit to the whole sale markets for materials, expensive auto rides, trying and testing the extent of my spoken Hindi with the locals and trying to fit in saying I KNOW HINDI, IT'S JUST THAT I'm NOT USED TO SPEAKIN IT, getting frustrated to see no one believed you, occasional inputs from the KHOJ Library and the sparks of inspiration being around enthusiastic people like Pooja, Rohini, Astha, Hemanth, Rahul and Manoj sir kept me going.

Future plans: definitely unknown. But through the showcase of work, if not anything else, I 'm more confident of showing my work to people. Currently I'm reworking the video and the installation I did at KHOJ, trying to work with space more effectively and hopefully I will be able to exhibit ...again soon.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Thara

15-08-2006 2006

Bangalore

Atul Mahajan (MSU Baroda)

I knew about KHOJ from a very long time. My senior had informed me that they arranged the residency workshop for which they invited very selective that I would get a chance to go to KHOJ and soon enough I was selected for the peer's residency 2006.

After I went there, we were told a lot about KHOJ. Amongst these, I heard about the art laboratory there and was extremely thrilled as I realized I had come to a place where I'd have plenty of freedom to work. I thoroughly enjoyed myself during the workshop, I liked the library at KHOJ as well. I enjoyed talking to many senior artists there.

I found the one month's time at the workshop very little. Perhaps, others there didn't feel the same, but going to a new place, understanding new things takes time for me. It was my first experience at such a workshop and was extremely enjoyable and in the future, if KHOJ ever invites me to such a workshop again, I'll consider myself lucky.

In recent days there is a crowd of various workshops everywhere in which an artist can earn 15 to 30,000. In such workshops artists exhibit their work which undoubtedly goes under the collection of workshop organizer but now it seems that the concept of maximum profit through workshop has entered and the real purpose of workshop is losing its value even artists participating in workshop often do not aware about the organizer and purpose of workshop.

But in KHOJ I realized that this sense of profit does not exist and an environment which I found in KHOJ workshop was really helpful in exploring new things and concepts.

I see metaphysics as a garden a kind of organism form which ideas grow the basic concept behind my work the relation between absence and symbolic presence. The basic idea that came to my mind was the notion of soul and its presence in the human mind in different times and cultural spaces and I wanted to bring visibility to this idea with my formal experimentation with light and shadow.

If we talk about the presence of soul we can find in every ancient philosophy they have given importance to this notion and as an Indian we can find the notion of soul plays an important role in the Indian psyche as far as my work is interactive based the viewer plays a major role in bringing out my work live the material presence of my work is very simple a coffin like box with light projection form inside and few form of rubber material connected with air pillow which are laid in the floor whenever a person enters the room and walks on the air pillow the form starts appearing in the light screen creating a shadow in the coffin like box which creates an illusion of the presence of something which is not directly visible whenever a person peeps inside the box form appears in the screen and the shadow varies according to the wait and movement of person,

as the person leaves the room the shadow form also disappears, I am not particularly interested in following the viewer. That part of the satisfaction of my work is the conflict between the abstract and invisible notion of the soul

Atanu Pramanik (Kala Bhavan Santiniketan)

This new city as Delhi motivated me to make the art product from the found objects. The nature of the urban area is not quite well-known to me; - Delhi the capital of this country actually confused me. -I faced some difficulties to regulate here in the beginning, as I had no experience to live in a busy & in addition to a highly developed city; since I came from a small town & did my studies at Santiniketan which is not a city too. I have just finished my M.F.A. exam, so it is the time of relaxation; but the question 'what will be my next step' - the indefinite future is unsettling me in every time-this inside has come out through my work. The easy chair which generally symbolizes as the object of relaxation-can't award me any stability as I am in trouble. I used pins to establish my self expression. The compositions in etching are as the part of my work are the reflection of my personal experiences with this new feeling. No doubt this work is totally a face of myself.

My work began the moment I entered KHOJ. The first thought that came to my mind, after choosing my studio, was how could I use this space to create a piece of work using minimum external materials...like the dusty old fan, which I happened to notice, because of its creaking sound, resonating to the good acoustics of the room. I started walking about the room, humming a song...there were three prominent sounds; the percussive creaking of the fan. the crushing sound of the dust by my shoes on the floor, and the echoing sound of me, humming. Without thinking much I started recording it using my little mp3 player and modulating the sounds a little bit by changing my walking and humming pattern. The recording, sounded okay, though I didn't know how to go further. I put it aside and did a little bit of research on sound art, listening to artists experimenting with, mechanical, natural, electronic sounds etc and creating various acoustic environments, also urging me to create my own...lot of ideas started popping up. I could see possibilities within each. Next few days I spent dealing with these pop ups, making me more and more confused about which one to work on. So I thought I will try few of these ideas out and see which one works. But it was not practically possible to conceptualize and execute all of them in so little a time. The presentation and the discussion that followed with Anita Dube, Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher and Pooja Sood, was very encouraging and gave me a lot of confidence, we spoke about the performance aspect of the work, but still maintaining the ambient nature, which was one idea I was clear about developing further.

I made a visit to the old city of Delhi looking for sonorous materials giving a good resonating sound but nothing worked, but was kind of fascinated by the way the whole city looked wrapped up in an entangling mesh of cables, striking me with the idea to create a virtual web using sound. I decided to re record the sounds of the fan and amplify it through different speakers placed at different positions and levels in the building, therefore giving me the possibility of modulating the acoustic space through channel panning and levels.

The best way to start was to try it out I thought! I had my first trial after two days. got two sets of stereo speakers, two amplifiers, and a microphone.

I played the amplified sounds of the fan through them...Still that wasn't the effect I wanted to create, because it was getting monotonously boring after a point. then I thought probably I could play by modulating, distorting, and mixing the tracks to form a composition, to work out the details and technicalities of the execution, Hemant introduced me to his friend Brin, who is a sound engineer, giving me quick lessons on the software Ableton live, which provided me with the interface for the performance.

As I have generally faced and am sure lot of my fellow artists would have faced the situation answering questions about your own work. Being at KHOJ, gave me a sort of a freedom and a lot of confidence to work with a framework of my own, without any limitations and always ready to entertain fresh ideas, KHOJ just made it easier on my mind to work things out. My work, though not fully interactive, involves the audience playing an important role in terms of planning the movement. The most exciting part the work might be the uncertainty and a certain spontaneity of the final production, but in actuality most of it was planned leaving only a ten percent scope for improvisation.

The idea of a 'loop' was improvised in the work in combination with repetitive and self evolving ever changing elements.

The show. the most awaited day. Went off as in a fraction of a second. Once it was set up, things went off so smooth that i couldn't just believe it! Thanks to everyone at KHOJ for their cooperation and help. I got a very warm response from the discussion the next day!!