

Artists Statements

Gigi Scaria

A Day with Sohail and Mariyan (Video Duration 17 minutes)

I met Sohail aged 17 and Mariyan aged 14 at the NDMC Community centre in Sarojini Nagar during their afternoon class organized by CHINTAN (an environmental research and action group, working with waste pickers in the city).

I spent almost a month visiting them regularly. We began with a general discussion, a chat really, on the idea of making the film, it gradually began to take shape and our discussions started becoming more concrete. Sohail was hesitant and unsure when I first broached the issue of acting out certain sequences or using specific dialogues. He said he was incapable of doing these things as he had no formal schooling and wouldn't be able to deliver the dialogues because he could not read or write. I insisted that he make the effort because I was sure that he had to be the protagonist. Later on when he watched the movie he told me "I'll do a much better job next time".

Here was an interesting situation, a situation that could be interpreted in many different ways; there were two raw characters, street smart and game to try out new things. There was a great temptation to slip into fictionalising the whole thing or to putting my own spin on the entire experiment. Had I fallen into this trap I could have ended up creating an exclusively "modern practice" where the artist dictates her/his terms to recreate other's life, the life which S/he is only familiar with as a spectator. Community projects often fall into the pit falls of artistic arrogance when the artist as an invader takes decisions on behalf of the community S/he works with.

My involvement with the kids was very different from the beginning. The only thing that separated them and me was that highly professional equipment, the digital camera. Technology can create distance at times. Sohail asked me how much the camera costs, I said around 50 thousand. They were amazed.

Sohail and Mariyan quite liked the idea of me accompanying them one night and documenting their work on streets. Their relationship with the city and its public space is of a very different nature. They commute by cycle. A huge polythene bag, in the middle of the carrier placed in such a manner that it remains balanced on the carrier due to equal weight on both sides of the carrier.

I opened the lens cover and switched on the camera. A gap is now created between them and I, but they felt comfortable, as they were completely involved in their work.

My concerns rotate around many aspects of the human conditions. This video has been made as a fictional documentary but not exactly following the documentary mode. While portraying a late night tour with Sohail and Mariyan my video tries to establish a relationship with a world, which we are not normally familiar with. This tour also signifies a search of the back door of an established social order representing the world of consumption.

The route followed by Sohail and Mariyan from dustbin to dust bin draws a map of the city that essentially has no relationship with the updated cartographic calculations of the city. They try to locate themselves within the city map boundaries but fail to establish the link. The Video has also tried to portray a state of an 'unknown migrant' whose social functions are not yet decided. The space/location knowingly or unknowingly chosen for the movie largely represents the elite class and the political as well as the social hierarchy in the middle. A 'periphery' within the 'centre' is an interesting paradox to observe. The location, in the heart of the diplomatic enclave, adds another subtext.

An immediate reality we all live in has its divergent parallels. It is entirely up to each individual how one confronts these parallels. Parallels are forever in confrontation, whether in geometry, in art or in life. Ignorance of the everyday life somehow diminishes the parallel existence. Social boundaries never deal with parallels they rather categorise them leaving no space for confrontation. My attempt is to confront the parallels and create a dialogue with their everyday practice. Sohail and Mariyan's Practice of Everyday life may leave empty spaces in our thought process; it also challenges our comfort at many levels.

Steve Duval

I have a research based practice that mediates ideas through social engaged models of art. Generally the subject matter has dealt with environments and their affect on us as a society and individuals. Specifically the works have dealt with GM crops, bio-diversity, industrial farming and ecology of the mind. The method of research is usually dictated by the subject matter and hopefully the art allows the ideas to open up to the viewer. Often in the work is a booklet or publication that the viewer can take away to use as a tool. The aesthetic qualities of the work come from romantic painting, graphic design, corporate identity and whatever seems relevant to the project. I want the ideas to be about possibilities and for the viewer to engage with notions of where they are within the conversation I am trying to have with them.