

As If – III Country of the Sea

by **CAMP**

Curated by **Tasneem Zakaria Mehta**

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai | On view from February 22 – April 7, 2015

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum presents the third edition of Mumbai based collaborative studio **CAMP's** pan-india, 4 part solo *As If (I-IV)*, which gathers the artworks and ideas crafted by CAMP as a group since 2007, and by its constituent individuals since 2002, for the first time in solo exhibition form. The present show, '**COUNTRY OF THE SEA**', is a survey of CAMP's five year *Wharfage* project and related maritime explorations.

The exhibition is a continuation of the Museum's curatorial series, 'Engaging Traditions', which encourages contemporary artists to engage with the Museum's history and collection. Through the series, artists are invited to respond to the Museum's collection, history and archives, addressing issues that speak directly to the traditions and issues that underlie the founding of the Museum, yet evoke the present by challenging orthodoxies and questioning assumptions.

The centre-piece of this exhibition is CAMP's much-travelled film *Kutchi Vahan Pani Wala* or *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* in its India premiere, presented in the heart of the Museum, transforming its historic environment into a cinematic space.

The film emphasises the sea and the time spent traversing it as a space for contemplation and experimentation. It is the result of four years of dialogue, friendship and exchange between CAMP and a group of sailors from the Gulf of Kutch. Descendants of ancient seafaring communities these sailors, who build and own the boats they operate, call the western Indian Ocean their home. Their multifaceted journeys, and those of their vessels, show us a "country of the sea", beyond the boundaries and imagination of most of mainland India.

Besides the fascinating journeys of these sailors the recent travelling media form proved a direct inspiration for the film. 2008-2009, during which time this film was shot, was the year of "music phones". Sailors passing through Dubai, Sharjah, Muscat or Salalah would use their freshly acquired cellphones to record videos and also play, store and exchange music. The sailors copied music at various ports they passed through and later, with the help of their camera phones, combined video and music to produce "music videos" in a variety of regional languages such as Kutchi, Farsi, Balochi or Saraiki. These records of encounter and longing travelled from person to person, and boat to boat, most often over bluetooth during face to face meetings. They rarely ended up on the Internet and were often deleted from phones, before an occasion for sharing, to be lost forever.

This is the film's first showing in Mumbai. The central space of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad has been transformed into a movie theatre to accommodate its expansive cinematic scope and immerse the audience in its unique, meditative mood.

Advancing the audience's attention from the heart of the ocean to its thresholds is *Radio Meena*, a video chronicle of four evenings of radio transmissions from the Sharjah Port, which broadcasts in a 5+ kilometre radius. The work is a collection of songs, commentary, phone and ship radio conversations with ships in Salaya, in Bossaso and others enroute. It puts forth accounts from Gujarati sailors, loaders from Dera Gazi Khan and NWFP in Pakistan, Sikh truckers, Iranian shopkeepers, Somali trading agents etc., all conversing in Hindustani, a combination of Hindi and Urdu, which is a common language of the port.

The title piece of the exhibition '*Country of the Sea*', is a similar reminder of the ocean brink. It takes off from a remarkable Gujarati chart of the Gulf of Aden from 1810 showing a drawing of the Arabian

and Somali coasts, heavily travelled by Gujarati sailors since the 17th century. The coasts in the map are carefully detailed and create the impression of a world populated on its edges by different civilisations, bordering and channelling the faraway movements of sailors and traders from India. *'Country of the Sea'* is a contemporary map of these seas by CAMP, based on their 5-year project with Gujarati sailors in the Western Indian Oceans, in collaboration with young artists from the Clark House Initiative. Inspired by the chart from 1810 the map brings the coasts of India, Africa, Iran and the Arab states in dialogue with each other drawing the coastlines close together and thereby evoking the cultural proximities and divides produced by these seas, historically crucial to the city of Mumbai, which also features prominently at one of its edges.

The map, 22 feet by 5 feet high and produced using solar exposed cyanotype print, is designed to fit into the central room of the Kamalnayan Bajaj galleries in the Museum. More than 100 cities and small ports from Khor al Zubair/ Basra to the Mozambique corridor (north-south), and from Mumbai to Berbera (east-west), are marked on the map. Its shape disorients an easy reading of this territory as the usual physical geography and instead provokes an image of the sea as its own "country", with frontier towns at its edges. This reorientation of emphasis establishes the materiality of the sea, seen and experienced regularly in Mumbai but always in severance from the land at its other extent. The map attempts to bring these extents back into geological and cultural play, undoing, as it were, the pre-historic separation of the Indian and African landmasses following the fragmentation of the palaeographic supercontinent 'Gondwanaland'.

Taking on from *'From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf'* the photographic installation *'Boat Modes'*, further explores the centrality of the vessel to our engagement with the sea by invoking the many powers of the boat; its capacity to gather a society in its making, to distribute goods, to carry people and ideas across places. The phrase "Boat modes" is used to express the peculiar patterns in which boats appear in the Western Indian Ocean. But it is also an exploration, in terms of the vessel suspended on the sea, of categories such as "sovereign", "pirate", "container", "free trade", "money", and "work" which point to the intermingling of maritime histories and economics. Modes appear at the intersection of forces and environments, and are arranged here in the shape of the constellation Pleiades, or Thurayya in Gujarati and Arabic navigation maps. They accompany a film that takes us on a journey from the Gulf of Kutch in India to the U.A.E. to Somali ports, and back. The songs in the film were all found, married to the cell-phone videos seen.

What could it mean to extend the act of "watching the coast" to "filming the sea", whether in terms of cellphones or other devices? The anthropologist Michael Taussig describes the modern sea as an image, a wallpaper backdrop for a Malibu or Folkestone lifestyle. This seemingly reified position of the sea in the circuits of capital however negates its role as a critical conduit of commercial transactions. The seas, after all, transport more than 90% of all global trade, albeit via largely invisible movements. From any given coastline, therefore, the sea is an image, and not. Images of the sea remind us of this situation precisely: that what you see is always just the surface, the proverbial tip of the iceberg. In the 60 minute long film *'The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories'*, produced with the National Coastwatch Institution, Folkestone, CAMP captures the immediate vicinity of Copt Point, a "blind spot" for Dover Coastguard, through a telescope. The telescopic vision allows the film uninhibited vision, capturing banana carriers, gin palaces and local fishermen, from afar and thus unnoticed. This optically concentrated view of the open sea and its vicinity makes it impossible to look at it protectively. It compels us instead to watch it longingly, embarrassedly and, often, helplessly, raising fundamental questions about our relationship with it.

Furthering the enquiry into the position of the ocean in economic networks is *'Destuffing and Stuffing'* a 4 channel, 20 minute video. Ports and cities have been shy of each other throughout the latter half of the 20th century. All of a sudden however they have been coalesced in terms of new container terminals facing the waterfront, which force them to share with each other their most visible parts. Meanwhile thousands of other pieces of the port - goods, workers, customs seals, excel sheets- are scattered across a "hinterland", connected by bridges and wires and surrounded by fences. What

could be an image of this fractured landscape? The closest available rendering, perhaps, is the “transparent port” (or India’s first e-port, as the website of Cochin port trust proclaims), a port which makes things appear in proper columns, counts rows of containers stuffed, bills paid, and ships expected or berthing. Boxes resist images, but also offer an invitation to the curious. *Stuffing and Destuffing* follows such a strain of curiosity.

It was curiosity also that led CAMP to ‘exploit’ the opportunity posed by the exhibition **‘Gujarat and the Sea’ (GATS)** in Kutch to bring to it around 80 maps, photographs, and objects (mostly printed as high-quality digital reproductions). Sourced mainly from the British Library, the UK National Maritime Museum, and private collections in Gujarat and abroad, the reproductions were printed meticulously on archival paper, but were still permitted to be displayed only over a three month period. For CAMP this exhibition was a contemporary response to the historiography of the Museum and the Archive of this history in Gujarat, but it was also a direct engagement with crucial political questions that informed their practice. The most significant among these was regarding ‘opportunism’. What does it take to be allowed to ‘opportunistic’? This question has particular resonance for exhibition practices, for the idea of what exhibitions can be. The question for art, perhaps is, how can such opportunities, the access to faraway image archives in this case, be translated or traded, and in which spirit, style, or medium? In what practical manner, for instance, can the violence, smuggling, buggery, foreignness, local pride, the predominantly Muslim seafaring class, and many other known aspects of Gujarat’s maritime history be “exhibited”, and be received by audiences?

Possible answers to this is provided by the materials themselves. Many maps and images at the GATS exhibition are layered with past annotations, claims, borrowings, translations: notes in Gujarati on English pilot’s maps, English scrawls on Gujarati lists, photos taken with or without “permission”, and, often, an in-built indifference to or obscuring of sources. The exhibition freezes such running threads into one “appearance”, lighting up some routes, paths by which this material may be felt or appreciated, while remaining shy of others.

COUNTRY OF THE SEA will be followed by *As If-IV* | **NIGHT FOR DAY** at the Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai from March 9 to April 12, 2015.

For further information on ‘Country of the Sea’ please visit <http://www.bdlmuseum.org/>. For further information on CAMP and/or press related queries please write to info@studio.camp or call +91 9819396646

SCHEDULE AND TIMINGS

From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf (Kutchi Vahan Pani Wala)

83 mins

Original format(s): HDV, SDV, VHS, Cellphone videos (variable)

With Hindi and English Subtitles.

2013

Exhibited in the Central Hall Space (Industrial Arts Gallery), Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum

Scheduled timings: 11:30, 1:00, 02:30, 04:00

The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories

60 mins

HD video through telescope

2 channels.

With a new animated translation in Hindi.

2011

Origins of Mumbai Gallery, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum

Stuffing and Destuffing

20 mins, looped video. 4 channels

With Hindi and English Titles
2014
19th Century Paintings Gallery, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum

About The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum was established in 1872 as the erstwhile Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay. As Mumbai's first Museum, it showcases the city's cultural heritage and history through a rare collection of Fine and Decorative Arts that highlight Early Modern Art practices as well as the craftsmanship of various communities of the Bombay Presidency. The permanent collection includes miniature clay models, dioramas, maps, lithographs, photographs, and rare books that document the life of the people of Mumbai and the history of the city from the late eighteenth to early-twentieth centuries.

The Museum, once in a derelict condition, underwent a comprehensive five-year restoration by INTACH supported by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation. The project won UNESCO's international Award of Excellence for cultural conservation in 2005. The Museum re-opened in 2008 with an extensive exhibition programme and is committed to promoting contemporary art and culture.

The Museum hosts an extensive exhibitions programme which explores the importance of the collection and includes a strong focus on contemporary art. A series of curated exhibitions titled, 'Engaging Traditions,' invites artists to respond to the Museum's collection, history and archives, addressing issues that speak directly to the traditions and issues that underlie the founding of the Museum, yet evoke the present by challenging orthodoxies and questioning assumptions.

The Museum has partnered with international institutions to showcase artists and exhibitions including the Victoria and Albert Museum, British Council, British Library, Dresden State Art Collections, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Ermenegildo Zegna Group and Guild of the Dome Association in an effort to facilitate international cultural exchange.

In 2011, the Museum hosted *Something That I'll Never Really See—Contemporary Photography from the V&A*, as well as an exhibition on a *Century of Olympic Posters* from the V&A, London. In 2012, the Museum presented *Sightseeing Trip: Eberhard Havekost in India*, along with the Dresden State Art Collections in Germany. The exhibition, *Social Fabric*, was displayed at the Museum in 2012 through collaboration with INIVA, the Institute of International Visual Arts, London and the Goethe-Institut, Max Mueller Bhavan, Mumbai. In 2013, the Museum presented the BMW Guggenheim Lab in Mumbai and ZegnArt Public, with Ermenegildo Zegna. In 2014, the Museum collaborated with the Guild of the Dome Association, the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institute, and the Museum of the Opera del Duomo, Florence, to present *The Florentine Renaissance: The City as the Crucible of Culture*.

The Museum's education and outreach programme aims to build and diversify the Museum's audiences, encouraging repeat visits and engaged participation with its permanent collections, contemporary exhibitions and activities. On offer is a rich selection of programmes focused on providing stimulating, participatory experiences that respond to different age, interest and language groups, and recognize a diversity of backgrounds. These experiences are aimed at encouraging critical engagement with Mumbai's history, and artistic and cultural developments.

In December of 2012, the Museum introduced a dynamic cultural hub, the Museum Plaza, which offers the public a recreational space for performances, outdoor activities, and workshops. The Museum has restored and reappropriated abandoned spaces to accommodate a Special Projects Space, Museum Cafe, Museum Shop and an Education Centre.

The Museum is soon launching an exciting expansion plan supported by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. The Museum's envisioned Mumbai Modern Wing will provide new gallery spaces and facilities including an Interpretation Centre, Library, Archive, Conservation Laboratory, Museum Shop, and Café. At the heart of the North Wing will be a permanent gallery to showcase contemporary Mumbai, focusing on important milestones in the city's development and highlighting its cultural achievements, as well as a temporary exhibition space of international standards capable of hosting large-scale travelling exhibitions. The aim is to create spaces and facilities that will allow the Museum to further diversify its activities and services to the city.

Contact

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Visiting Hours

The Museum is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (last entry is at 5:30pm) and is closed on Wednesdays and certain public holidays.

Press Release: Mumbai, 20th, February, 2015

ARTIST'S BIO

CAMP is a collaborative studio founded in Bombay in 2007. It has been producing fundamental new work in video and film, electronic media and public art forms, in a practice characterised by a hand-dirtying, non-alienated relation to technology. CAMP's projects have entered many modern assemblies: energy, communication and surveillance systems, neighbourhoods, ships, archives – things much larger than itself. These are shown as not having a fixed function or destiny, making them both a medium and stage for artistic activity. CAMP's work has been shown in venues such as Khoj, Sarai, Lalit Kala Akademi and NGMA New Delhi, MoMA and New Museum New York, Serpentine Galleries and Gasworks London, Ars Electronica Linz, HKW Berlin, MoMA Warsaw, Askhal Alwan Beirut, Experimenter Kolkata, and Documenta 13 Kassel; in the streets and markets of Bangalore, San Jose, Dakar, Mexico City, East Jerusalem, Delhi and Bombay; in the biennials of Shanghai, Sharjah, Gwangju, Taipei, Singapore, Liverpool and Kochi-Muziris; at film venues such as the AV Festival, BFI London Film Festival, Viennale, Flaherty Seminar, Anthology Film Archives, and CAMP's own rooftop cinema. From their home base in Chuiam village, they co-host the online archives <http://pad.ma> and <http://Indiancine.ma>, among other long-duree activities.

SELECT REVIEWS

In the National Coastwatch Institution cabin, perched on a cliff above Folkestone, the volunteer guards scan the sea. Mumbai-based collective [CAMP](#) recorded the view, the constant traffic plying the Channel, and the volunteers' casual commentary. The result is an almost hour-long film recorded over a year. French church spires break the horizon, seen through a telescope. We follow tankers and canoes, ferries and fishing boats – and there's the archbishop of Canterbury, helping out at an archeological dig along the coast, his hair a white, fluffy windsock in the distance. The artists in

Mumbai recorded the observations and anecdotes of the volunteers via broadband. It's a case of the watchers watched, and we watch too, following near-collisions out at sea, and blokes hauling up lobster pots. "Lobsters are giant Jurassic insects," someone says. I'd happily stay all day.

Adrian Searle, THE GUARDIAN

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jun/26/folkstone-triennial-2011-artists-review>

Meanwhile the cool, faux-objective gaze of Direct Cinema received a twist in Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran's collaboration with Indian cargo sailors, *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf*. The mariners' journeys across the Arabian sea to Pakistan, Somalia and the Persian Gulf aboard wooden boats loaded with everything from livestock and cars to boxes of pasta were not only recorded by the filmmakers but also by the sailors on their mobile phones. Meals on deck, packed hulls, the hive of Dubai's port in the shadow of its gleaming towers, dolphins, boats on fire, shipwrecks everyday life aboard these precious vessels is intimately detailed in grainy footage, and serenaded by the sailors' choices of soaring Bollywood ballads of lust and woe. This singular self-portrait-cum-sea-shanty was one of the most delightful and imaginative finds of the festival; a cinema looking over Marseille's grand old port proved a rather fitting home for it.

Isabel Stevens, SIGHT AND SOUND BFI

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/festivals/docs-go-wild-fid-marseille-2013>

Another highlight is "From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf," a sui generis project by the Indian collective Camp. Made up of cellphone footage shot by sailors whose trade routes take them on the Arabian Sea from India to the Persian Gulf, the film is beautiful and buoyant and engrossing in big picture and small detail ways. The sailor-cameramen chose the propulsive music, mostly Hindi-film songs whose lyrics speak of longing, loss and a life at sea: "There is a road, no destination."

Rachel Salz, NY TIMES

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/08/movies/new-home-for-a-festival.html?_r=0

Fresh possibilities for documentation emerged in **From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf** from the Indian collective CAMP. The artists gave cell-phone cameras to sailors working on boats crossing the Arabian Sea, and the result offers a salient and engaging look at the lives of globalization's precarious workhorses. If *Leviathan* epitomizes the sensory potential of radically unfastened cameras, CAMP's project looks more deeply into the politics of who picks up the camera. Similarly rooted in an intricate editing process, *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* looks for meaning in this politicization and finds new cultural values in the oft-maligned camera-phone. *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* is refreshing: humanizing without being mawkish and shot through with spontaneous expressions of joy from sing-alongs to dolphin-spotting.

FILM COMMENT: migrating forms review

<http://www.filmcomment.com/entry/festivals-migrating-forms-2013>

I will remember 2013 particularly as the year of Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran. Their *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* was one of the most complex, multifaceted and glaringly different films I have seen in a long time.

Vassily Bourikas

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2014/issue-69-december-2013/2013-world-poll-part-1/#16>

LIST OF WORKS ON VIEW

From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf (*Kutchi Vahan Pani Wala*)

83 mins

Original format(s): HDV, SDV, VHS, Cellphone videos (variable)

With Hindi and English Subtitles
2013

The County of the Blind, and Other Stories.

60 mins
HD video through telescope
2 channels.
With a new animated translation in Hindi.
2011

Stuffing and Destuffing.

20 mins
looped video
4 channels
With Hindi and English Titles
2014

The Annotated "Gujarat and the Sea"

Photographs and text layered under glass
Suite of 21 frames, boats installation and book
2011

The Country of the Sea

2014

Boat-Modes

Installation
Photographic prints on acrylic cruciforms
set of 8, suspended in the shape of the constellation *Thuraya*, *Krutika* or *Pleiades*
2012

Radio Meena 100.3 FM

Video Loop
2009

Lists and Litanies

Printer, Manifests, Photographs
2014

PREVIOUS EXHIBITION

From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf (Kutchi Vahan Pani Wala)

2014, *Shanghai Biennale*
2014, *Rupert, Vilnius*
2014, *Porto Post Doc*
2014, *Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris*
2014, *Flaherty at MoMA, NY*
2014, *Olhar de Cinema, Curitiba*
2014, *Images Festival, Toronto*
2014, *Ann Arbor Film Festival*
2014, *Mirage Cinema; March Meeting, Sharjah*
2014, *FICUNAM Mexico*
2014, *Dhaka Art Summit*
2013, *Cork Film Festival; Ireland*
2013, *Viennale, Vienna International Film Festival*
2013, *Doc Lisboa; Lisbon*
2013, *Athens Avant-Garde Film Festival; Athens*

2013, *Underdog*; Munich
2013, *BFI London Film Festival*
2013, *FID Marseille*
2013, *Le Pont*, Museum of Contemporary Art; Marseille
2013, *Sharjah Biennale XI*; Sharjah

The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories.

2013, *Pekham Artists Moving Image: The Sunday Painter*
2013, *The Skoda Prize Show (shortlist)*, NGMA; New Delhi
2011, *Experimenter Gallery*; Kolkata
2011, *Folkestone Triennial*; Folkestone

Stuffing and Destuffing.

2012, *Kochi-Muziris Biennale*; Kochi

The Annotated "Gujarat and the Sea"

2014, *Mapping Asia*, Asia Art Archive, Hongkong
2014, *Traps for Troubadours*, Clark House, Mumbai; *The Annotated Gujarat and the Sea and Descendent*
2011, *Against All Odds*, Lalit Kala Akademi; New Delhi

Boat-Modes

2014 *Border Cultures Part II (work, labour)*, Art Gallery Windsor
2013, *Freedom: Kunstpalais*; Erlangen
2012, *Documenta (13)*; Kassel

Radio Meena100.3 FM

13.5 W radio transmission over 4 days, Sharjah Creek, 2009