



GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

By Thukral & Tagra

Curated by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum presents, *Games People Play*, an exhibition of new artworks by the artist duo Thukral & Tagra.

Thukral & Tagra draw from the Museum's collection of ancient and traditional games, exploring the idea of 'play' from cultural, strategic, physical and psychological perspectives. They envision the Museum as a gaming arena or stadium, where games are categorized into the physical, mental and spiritual, spanning the past, present and future.

Contemplating the significance of different types of games, the artists reinvent these games to create experiences via a competitive environment that often involves the viewer and causes him or her to reflect on the nature of their participation in both life and art.

This show is part of a series of curated exhibitions titled 'Engaging Traditions'. The series 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.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Thukral & Tagra continue their exploration of the relationship between art and play by reinventing the rules and creating environments that move away from the traditional art practice of making paintings and sculptures. Thukral & Tagra work collaboratively in a wide variety of media including painting, sculpture, installation, film and design. In their practice, they blur the line between Fine Art and Popular Culture, product placement and exhibition design, artistic inspiration and media hype. While both playful and humorous, their works express thoughtful questions about the nature of Indian identity as it is articulated by Indians themselves and projected on to India by the rest of the world.

In order to highlight their motives and intentions the artists have conceived five new works with which the visitors are invited to participate:

1. The Walk of Life

Ganjifa is an ancient Indian card game, originally played with a set of 120 cards. The game is transformed into a board game that depicts ‘*Dushavatar*’, the ten earthly incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu. Each avatar forms a progressive parallel narrative with the evolution of mankind: from fish, to reptile, to mammal, to human, to deity, bring a new layer to the game, as it aims to impart the meaning of life to those who play it, in effect by paying off one’s ‘debts’ and equalizing one’s ‘scores,’ which are recorded on the card of *Karma*.

Using the original set of *Ganjifa* cards found within the Museum’s collection as their inspiration, the duo has conceptualized a series of new paintings, to be displayed in the first floor gallery space. Elaborating each of the ten avatars into 12 paintings of abstract symbologies, a total of 120 paintings on shaped brass plaques which narrate the evolution of life.

2. Verbal Kabaddi (City of Mumbai version)

A participatory work which is meditative, challenging, and cerebral, in nature, the artists create a verbal version of *kabaddi*, setting it in an indoor environment, replacing the physicality of wrestling bodies with tongue-twisting texts to be read in a single breath.

While maintaining the sanctity of the ancient game by combining physical and mental strengths, the participants recount the history of the city of Mumbai, each player competing with an opponent by reciting a given sets of texts. A demanding sport of endurance is transformed into an exercise in concrete poetry, while agility and perseverance still remain essential.

3. The Vitrine

Within the atrium of the Museum, the artists introduce a performance arena, inserting “real life” into the Museum’s collections by erecting a life-size vitrine in which various activities and competitions will be staged throughout the course of the exhibition. With the simple thought of bringing action and movement into the static space of the Museum’s permanent collection, a series of exercises that engage both, the physical and the mental capacity of the visitors, will be performed within The Vitrine:

Musical Chairs / Wrestling / Cycling / Text Messaging
Weight Lifting / Reciting Poetry / Trampoline Jumping
Reading a Newspaper / Skipping Rope / Singing

Involving both, Museum volunteers and visitors as players, the manifested space attempts to further destabilize the invisible divide between the employees and the visitors. While the activities, play with reinterpreting the boundary between the objects on view at the museum and the subjects who are viewing them, blurring the definition of the viewer and viewed.

4. The Game of Table Tennis

Table tennis was invented by the British as an indoor version of lawn tennis. A parlor game which became popular in the 18th Century, is now played in schools around the world and is included as an Olympic sport. The artists re-design the game so as to reflect a more contemporary setting which reflects our time and dilemmas.

Echoing history, the original map of Bombay's seven islands is re-calibrated to become the outline of the table, reminding us how both the land and the people of India were adapted, to better fit the version of rules and byelaws as outlined by the British Raj, for various different forms of games. In order to further emphasize this instability, the game is a constant flux of strategies and tactics between the opponents who strike an uneasy balance of skill, knowledge and energy.

5. The Stone Wings

One of man's most primordial dreams is that of flight. The artists have created a giant pair of wings that can be worn by anyone. Rendered as a photo-opportunity in the age of the 'Selfie', visitors can step in between them to have their portrait taken. Appearing as ancient monoliths, these wings symbolize the potential of dreams for each individual and the potential for the mind to take flight when it encounters the treasures within the Museum.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Thukral & Tagra work collaboratively in a wide variety of media including painting, sculpture, installation, film and design. In their practice, they blur the line between Fine Art and Popular Culture, product placement and exhibition design, artistic inspiration and media hype. Their works comment on the globalisation of consumer culture and its repercussions; as it is being experienced in India today. While both playful and humorous, their works express thoughtful questions about the nature of Indian identity as it is articulated by Indians themselves and projected on to India by the rest of the world.

Jiten Thukral was born in 1976 in Jalandhar, Punjab, and received a BFA from Chandigarh College of Art and his MFA from the Delhi College of Art. Sumir Tagra was born in 1979 in New Delhi, and received a BFA from the Delhi College of Art and later studied at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. They are based in the New Delhi suburb of Gurgaon.

Thukral & Tagra have worked together since 2003 and have held solo exhibitions of their works at Nature Morte in New Delhi (2005, 2007, 2011, 2015), Nature Morte in Berlin (2009, 2012), Chatterjee & Lal in Mumbai (2008), Bose Pacia, New York (2007), Arario Gallery, Seoul (2010), the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (2010), and the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2010). In 2007, Nature Morte presented their solo installation entitled “Adolescere-Domus” in the Art Statements section of Art Basel and in 2013 their exhibition “Q” at the Famous Studios in Mumbai. Their works have been included in group exhibitions at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, Essl Museum in Vienna, Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Centre Pompidou in Paris, MAXXI Museum in Rome, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, among many others.

Among their numerous projects, they have been commissioned to create works by the Italian fashion house Etro, the Meissen Porcelain Manufacture in Germany, Absolut Vodka, and Conde Nast India.

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.

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.

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.

For further press enquiries, please contact Aparna Ramachandran, Curatorial Associate, aramachandran@bdlmuseum.org or +91 22 23731234