

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum presents

In collaboration with RMZ Foundation and India Art Fair, supported by Alkazi Foundation

## ***Salt Lines***

By Hylozoic/Desires (Himali Singh Soin & David Soin Tappeser)

Dec 06 2025- Feb 08 2026

Curatorial advisor: Tasneem Zakaria Mehta

With Thanks to Vadehra Art Gallery

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum presents *Salt Lines*, the first solo exhibition in India by artist duo Hylozoic/Desires (Himali Singh Soin & David Soin Tappeser). The show excavates the lost archive of the Inland Customs Line, 4,000-km barrier—much of it a living hedge—built under the East India Company and the British Raj in order to enforce the Empire's oppressive salt tax. It treats the border as a poetic and political space, a partition that begets a series of divisions and perforations that continue to fray, tear and rip into our present.

Shown within a museum originally established in 1857 as the Victoria & Albert Museum by the British, *Salt Lines* reflects on the double-sided nature of the Inland Customs Line as both an architecture of extraction and a site of resistance.

Although the Empire intended the line to be an impassable obstruction, the hedge was in fact a porous threshold. Interweaving archival research with speculative histories, the exhibition invites the viewer to reflect upon the nature of memory and truth-telling while savouring the great dualities that the metaphor of the hedge presents: the material and the immaterial, the factual and the speculative; the oppressor versus the oppressed. In the mesh-like, interdisciplinary artworks, these binaries collapse.

In the Museum Plaza, visitors are greeted by a 20 metre fragment of *Namak Halal / Namak Haram* (2025), the monumental, 80m long textile installation originally exhibited at Somerset House in London. It is composed of an array of cotton panels, block-printed using dyes from the plants that once dominated the hedge. Botanical grids and chaotic termite stamps mirror the double-sided nature of the hedge as both colonial control and the natural world's own insistence on mutuality.

At the heart of the exhibition sits *The Hedge of Halomancy* (2025), a 23-minute video, jointly commissioned by Sharjah Biennale 16 and Tate Britain. Combining archival research and the fictionalised story of Mayalee, a

historical courtesan, the work tells the story of the hedge with narratives of colonial exploitation, indigenous knowledge, environmental loss, and the slow undoing of the Empire's authority. We are salt eaters, Mayalee insists. Messages infiltrate space and time, foreshadowing A. O. Hume's disillusionment with Empire and Gandhi's march to freedom.

Inside the "Salt Office", an odditorium of historical objects related to the British tax on salt – including two historic photographs of Bombay's salt satyagraha movement from the Alkazi Collection – sit alongside gold-toned *Salt Prints* (2024), which depict the hedge and its protagonists. Combining re-enactments, artificially generated imagery, and Victorian photographic processes, Hylozoic/Desires insert speculative gestures into the archive, raising questions about erasure, truth and the politics of memory.

The exhibition also features *The Phantom Line* (2025), a video that traces the ghostly remnants of the hedge via satellite imagery and dashboard footage; the *Victorian Gown* (2025), a costume woven from waste collected on the Rann of Kutch; and *I & Thou* (2024), two prints on aluminium that explore salt's spiritual and relational agency.

*Salt Lines* connects extraction to ecology, government to myth, and the violence of empire to the intimacies of resistance. It remembers a vanished border to imagine new futures of non-duality and liberation.

[Hylozoic/Desires'](#) ([Himali Singh Soin](#) & [David Soin Tappeser](#)) work combines poetry and music to conjure speculative futures. They aspire toward a flat ontological ether in which all forms of life—stone, spirit, machine or human—are equal. They skew the linear imagination of time and space to produce divergences that elicit critical wonder and use metaphor as an event that holds otherwise distant entities together.

Their work has recently been exhibited at Serpentine, London; Desert X, CA; Shanghai Biennale; Biennale Gherdeina; TBA21, Madrid; Swiss Institute, NYC; Khoj, Delhi; among others. More recently, they have participated in the Bukhara biennale and the Fremantle biennale. This body of work was premiered at the Sharjah Biennale, Somerset House and Tate Britain earlier this year. This is their first solo in India.

### **About Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum**

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum is Mumbai's oldest museum, established in 1857, and is the erstwhile Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay. The Museum building and collections underwent a comprehensive restoration, spearheaded by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta as Convenor of the Mumbai Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). It was supported by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation. It opened to the public in 2008 and has pioneered contemporary art and design, which is presented in the extraordinary 19th-century building, one of the finest in India, in an attempt to rethink the canon and challenge colonial and enlightenment precepts. The Museum

was built to showcase the city's contemporary art and craftsmanship of the 19th and early 20th centuries through a rare collection of fine and decorative arts of India. The Museum's robust exhibition and outreach programme invites artists to engage with these collections and archives and interrogate its founding principles. Over 90 exhibitions have been presented, which include collaborations with both local and international institutions and organisations. Past exhibitions have showcased contemporary creative practices in design, crafts and textiles, architecture, urbanism, and film and video art.

Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, Managing Trustee and Director of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, is an art historian, curator, designer, conservationist, and cultural activist. She is the former Vice Chairman and Mumbai Convenor of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage). She has successfully pioneered the revival and restoration of several cultural sites in Mumbai, most notably leading the restoration of the Museum, which received UNESCO's 2005 Asia Pacific Award of Excellence for Cultural Restoration. She serves on the Modern and Contemporary Art Councils at both The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and is a member of Asia Society India Centre's Advisory Council for Arts and Culture. She was the past Chair of the CII National Committee on Art and Culture, has curated and presented over 20 exhibitions of contemporary and historical art, and has been invited to speak at the World Economic Forum in Davos. She has served on several national museum boards and is a founding trustee of the Kochi Muziris Biennale. She has written numerous articles and books on art and culture. Her most recent publication, *Mumbai: A City Through Objects – 101 Stories from the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum* (Harper Design, 2022), released on the occasion of the Museum's 150th anniversary, has won several awards, including Art Book of the Year. She has won numerous awards and was selected by Harvard University for their Star Women programme.

Connecting Hylozoic/Desires' body of work to the broader historical context of the museum, Tasneem Zakaria Mehta said, *"The exhibition serves as an opportunity for the Museum to engage with the nature of colonial artistic production in conjunction with the communities that inhabited the diverse landscapes of India, including local people who harvested and consumed salt. The museum's collection of clay models, historical maps showcasing salt pans, and natural history in colonial India, amplifies the innovative works by Hylozoic/Desires within an institution built to promote trade with the empire."*

## **About RMZ Foundation**

Established in 2015 by Anu Menda, RMZ Foundation is dedicated to expanding how art is experienced in India – beyond traditional venues and into the shared spaces of daily life. As the Foundation marks a decade of sustained cultural engagement, it continues to deepen its commitment to strengthening India's public art landscape. Its collection features works by diverse artists from around the world, including Sir Michael

Craig-Martin, Shaikha Al Mazrou, Shilpa Gupta, Elias Sime, Manisha Parekh, and more – reflecting a belief in fostering a global, inclusive artistic dialogue.

With a growing collection of over 70 sculptural works and collaborations with leading institutions such as Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Frieze Sculpture, the Kochi Biennale Foundation, and Art Mumbai, RMZ Foundation advances global exchange, public access, and bold, future-facing artistic practices.

Sharing her thoughts on the upcoming exhibition, Anu Menda, Chair, RMZ Foundation, said, *“Salt Lines invites us to look closely at the histories - both seen and unseen - that continue to shape our present. By weaving together myth, memory, and imaginative inquiry, the exhibition creates a meaningful space for reflection and dialogue.*

*As Hylozoic/Desires’ first institutional solo exhibition in India - following presentations at leading global institutions - its arrival in Mumbai holds particular significance. It is especially meaningful to experience this work at the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, an iconic setting that adds depth and context to the exhibition’s ideas.*

*At RMZ Foundation, we value artistic practices that challenge received narratives, amplify underrepresented voices, and open pathways for audiences to engage critically with the world around them. Himali and David’s work embodies this spirit with exceptional sensitivity and depth.*

*We are pleased to support Salt Lines and to help spark conversations that move us toward a more inclusive, aware, and empathetic cultural landscape.”*

## **About India Art Fair**

India Art Fair is the leading platform to discover art from South Asia. Established in 2008, India Art Fair is the region’s premier modern and contemporary art fair, providing a unique access point to its thriving cultural scene, drawing together galleries, artists, private foundations, arts charities, artist collectives, national institutions, cultural events, and festivals. Launched in 2025, IAF EDI+IONS is a new initiative designed as a series of curated showcases across India, reaffirming the fair’s commitment to expanding its regional footprint to celebrate the best of art and culture from across South Asia. Rooted in local cultural contexts while connected to global networks, IAF EDI+IONS extends the fair’s annual curatorial vision beyond Delhi, offering intimate yet impactful experiences for collectors, patrons and institutions, while celebrating the best of South Asian art and design. India Art Fair is owned and operated by Angus Montgomery Arts (AMA), a division of Angus Montgomery Ltd. [indiaartfair.in](http://indiaartfair.in)

**Jaya Asokan, Fair Director, India Art Fair** comments: *“As India Art Fair continues to deepen its presence, collaborating with a legacy institution like the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum marks a meaningful milestone in*

*our journey. Salt Lines is an especially resonant project to realise together, a work that exemplifies the artistic rigour, imagination and context-specificity that define South Asia's contemporary voices today. Hylozoic/Desires' practice is profoundly research-driven; it interrogates colonial histories through a decolonial lens that is at once speculative and sharply critical. Supporting work of this calibre reflects India Art Fair's wider commitment to strengthening the art ecosystem in the region and foregrounding the stories, sensibilities and urgencies that shape it."*

**The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts (AFA)** is a Registered Charitable Trust based in New Delhi since 2006. Over the years, AFA has been committed to sharing research on the arts with a focus on photography and theatre. Through a series of scholarly publications, exhibitions, seminars, conferences, workshops, newsletters, blogs and archive visits, AFA has focused extensively on the interlinked subjects of the 'metropole' and the 'colony' via anthropology, social history as well as art history, thereby exploring cultural histories of South Asia in the post-Independence period. <https://alkazifoundation.org>