

Notes on Labour

Praneet Soi

Curated by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta

13 May 2017 – 25 July 2017



The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum presents, **Notes on Labour**, by **Praneet Soi**, an exhibition curated by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta. The exhibition is on from 13 May 2017 – 25 July 2017.

About the Exhibition

'Notes on Labour' presents Praneet Soi's work, created over periods of extensive engagement with artisans in Kolkata, Srinagar, and Guangzhou in China, which have never been exhibited before in India.

Soi's practice involves the creation of motifs that reflect his deep interest in different forms of cultural expression. This process is intuitive, where images are absorbed into the artist's visual language over time. The process of image making, some of which has unfolded within the museum, assumes a conversation with the museum and the many different art practices reflected in its collection.

Notes on Labour is also a comment on multiplicity and polyphony. Values that become immediately evident when working with diverse groups of artists and artisans, which is visible across the breadth of this exhibition. Soi's interest in the processes of crafting extraordinary objects with the hand that requires huge skill and his empathy for the unsung artisans is an important theme in the exhibition. The artist has also engaged with the museum's archive of rare books including 'Journal of Indian Art and Industry' that features drawings and illustrations by Lockwood Kipling.

This exhibition is a continuation of the Museum's curatorial series, 'Engaging Traditions', which invites contemporary artists to interrogate the Museum's history, archives and collection.

Note by the Artist

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai presents, 'Notes on Labour' a solo exhibition of Praneet Soi from 15th May to 25th July. This exhibition is a continuation of the Museum's curatorial series, 'Engaging Traditions', which invites contemporary artists to work with the museum's history, archives and collection.

Praneet Soi's recent work with artisans in China, Srinagar and Kolkata locates as his subject the countless methodologies, material knowledge and peripheral histories that such encounters expose. This body of work began in Kumartuli North Kolkata in 2008 where the artist was initially working

with Kumors, and the craftsmen specialised in making religious clay effigies. Walking around the area, he noticed defunct jute warehouses that now housed a variety of small industries. The first work that resulted from this observation was a slide-show, Kumartuli Printer, Notes on Labour (Part 1).

Similar immersions have led to the creation of further documents, some fleeting, such as the short animated clip of a labourer at work in Kumartuli, some extensive, such as an archive made with artisans in Srinagar of their designs. This exhibition places them together for the first time, and their presence animates the museum's collection of 19th century decorative artefacts from the Bombay Presidency.

Soi's installation begins just past the Museum's main entrance. A painting upon a curving wall designed to resonate with the museum's architecture, specifically its tympanum. Made on site the painted motifs reflect his exposure to the 'Journal of Indian Art and Industry' published by W. Griggs and Sons in 1886 with illustrations by Lockwood Kipling and whose copies are a part of the museum's library.

This exposure to the Journal of Indian Art and Industry is amplified in the floor above. The Origins of Mumbai gallery transforms into an interactive environment housing Soi's 'Astatic Machines'. Designed to communicate the artist's studio methodology to a larger audience, these are drawing machines, inspired by Paul Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook. Kipling's images from the Journal are interspersed with imagery from Klee's manual and the artist's archive.

Across this room and past the dioramas are the three interconnected Kamalnayan Bajaj Special Exhibitions Gallery. The first room is dedicated to Kumartuli in North Kolkata where Soi began his observations. The slideshow, Kumartuli Printer, the first work in this series, is amongst the three works that populate this room.

The central room is dedicated to Soi's continuing engagement within the craftsman Fayaz Jan in Srinagar. Keeping in mind that knowledge of patterns and designs the craftsmen use are passed on orally, Soi conceptualised a work as an archive of the patterns, borders and floral tropes used within their compositions. Painted upon handmade papier-mache tiles, the installation is arranged in a square consisting of 100 tiles each measuring 30 x 30 cm. Wall drawings surround the tiles. These consist of extracts from the artist's notebook that describe his interactions with the craftsmen. A diagram from

Da Vinci's Codex Atlanticus, explaining the phenomena of anamorphosis, is a central image. Anamorphosis is a metaphor the artist engages in describing the political turmoil that blights the state of Kashmir.

The last room is dedicated to works Soi created with a porcelain craftsman in Guangzhou (Old Canton) in China. A set of 22 hand-painted porcelain tiles created within the Hui Porcelain Studio in historic Haizhu district uses historic Qing dynasty patterns along with images and patterns that Soi brought with him from Kashmir. A video includes quotes from ancient Chinese texts on aesthetics which are typed and pasted in cut-out style. Animations related to the construction of patterns he was working with at the porcelain studio, and a hunt for MN Roy, the Indian nationalist who visited Guangzhou in the early 20th century but whose name is currently censored.

About the Artist

Praneet Soi was born in Kolkata in 1971. He left Bengal for the west coast of the country where he was granted admission at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Maharajah Sayajirao University in Vadodara (Baroda). The campus was, at the time, a politically charged environment with painters such as Ghulam Muhammad Sheikh and Jyoti Bhatt forming the backbone of the painting department.

Upon completing his Bachelor and Master's degree in painting, Soi worked for two years as a visualizer in the advertising industry in New Delhi. In 1999 Soi obtained a scholarship to attend the University of California at San Diego and attended the summer residency at Skowhegan, Maine, in 2001. His mentor was Jean-Pierre Gorin, the French documentary filmmaker. Subsequently accepted to the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten, Soi moved to the Netherlands in 2002.

For Soi the media is one of the co-ordinates through which we triangulate our position in society. Media reportage of unrest in the Middle-East, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the events following September the 11th lead to a series of miniature paintings on terrorism and extrapolating from there, paintings of the human body and an archive of images that traces his engagement with the media image. Since 2008 his documentation of small workshops in Kumartuli in North Kolkata has been an ongoing activity and manifests itself in a series of works titled "Notes on Labour". These include slide-shows, drawings, miniature paintings and video. Soi first visited the city of Srinagar in Kashmir in

2010. He documented extensively the historic Sufi shrines in the city (Dastagir Pir has since burnt down) and met with local craftsmen.

In 2011, Soi was one of the artist representing India at the Venice Biennale. He returned to Srinagar in the spring 2014 and embedded himself within an artisan's studio, working with patterns and motifs traditional to them in the making of experimental compositions. In 2014 Soi was artist in residence at the Laurenz-Haus Stiftung in Basel. In 2015-16, he presented a new body of work, *Guangzhou* working with master ceramists in China for the 5th Guangzhou Triennial. He was granted a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC in 2015 and in 2016 participated in the Kochi Biennale.

To know more visit: www.praneetsoi.info

About the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum opened to the public in 1857 and is Mumbai's oldest museum. It is the erstwhile Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay, that 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 and culture. 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. Several distinguished contemporary artists have participated in this programme such as Sudarshan Shetty, Jitish Kallat, Atul Dodiya, L. N. Tallur, Ranjini Shettar, Sheba Chhachhi, CAMP, Thukral and Tagra.

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 has expanded its curatorial initiative to invite external curators, institutions and organisations to present exhibitions related to the focus areas of the collections.

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 including film, music and courses and lectures on history of art 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, art and cultural developments.

For more information on Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum, please visit:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BDLMuseum

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BDLMuseum>

Website: www.bdlmuseum.org

E-mail: enquiry@bdlmuseum.org

Telephone: +91 22 23731234

For Listings

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum presents, **Notes on Labour** by Praneet Soi, an exhibition curated by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta.

Exhibition Dates: 13 May 2017 – 25 July 2017

Exhibition Venue:

Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum
91A Rani Baug, Veer Mata Jijabai Bhonsle Udyan
Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marg,
Byculla East, Mumbai 400027

Timings:

10:00 am to 6:00 pm | last entry 5:30 pm
Closed on Wednesdays and certain public holidays

For press enquiries, please contact

Komal Chitnis | kchitnis@bdlmuseum.org | +91 22 23731234