

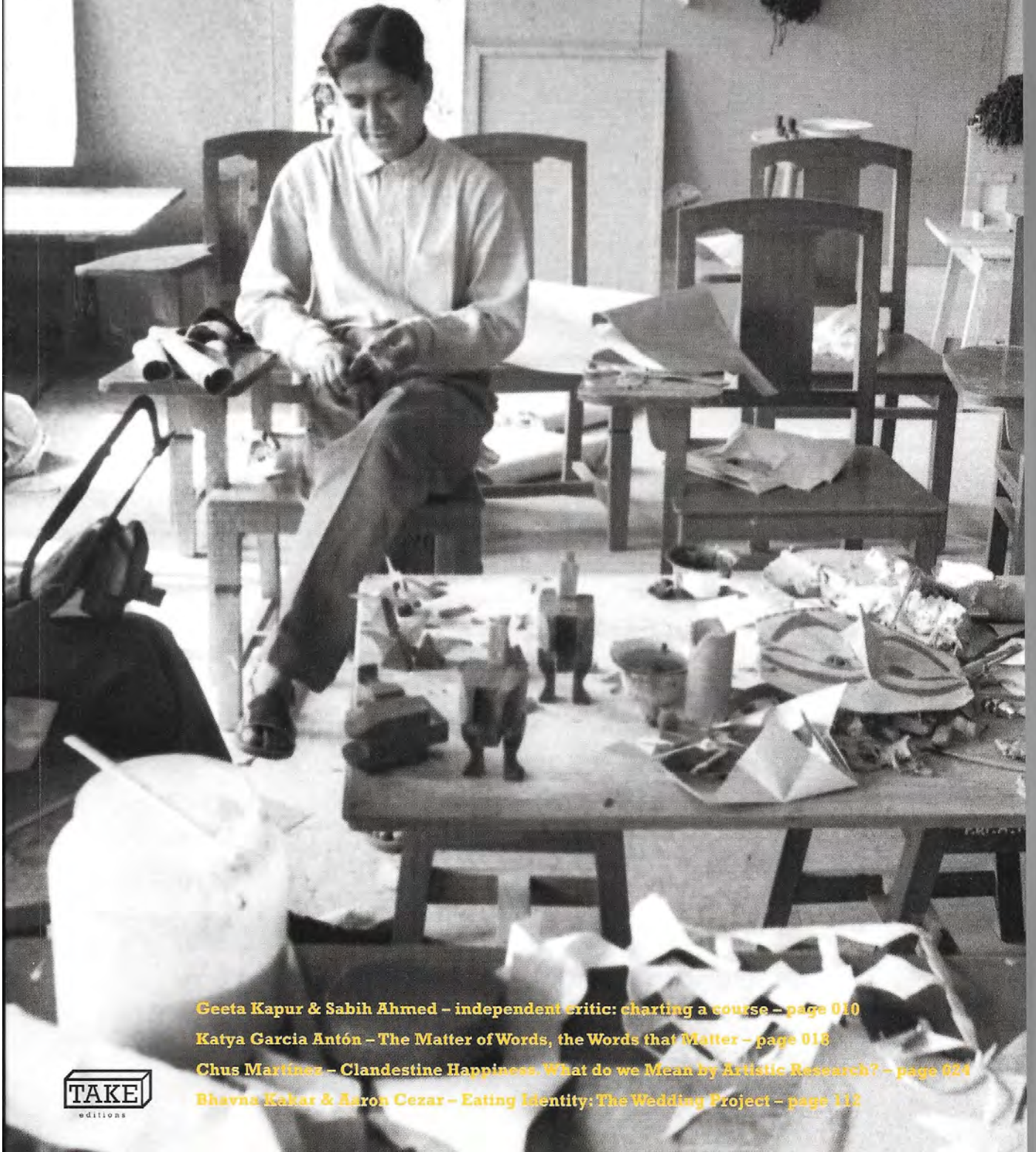
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TAKE

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wisdom that they possess, the memory of places they have been and the hands that have shaped them with an understanding that comes only after years of experimenting with the medium. These qualities are present in all the works that are part of the show, be it strong folds, tears due to the treatment of the pulp and the colours that merge into one another – undeniable testimonials that they have lived and are as such standing monoliths in their own right, speaking to us from the walls on which they hang, gradually accruing gravity and stature.

The omniscience which characterises the work lends to its understanding of itself, relating the conception of its design through its outwardly appearance and leaving one unambiguous of its origin, therefore making the work immediately self-reflexive. The work, however complex, has no ego, no self-proclaimed greatness and yet, it stands its dignity about which Prabhakar Kolte in the text for the exhibition observes, “(Nerurkar’s) works do not speak but show the silent, rhythmic play of hide and seek between colours and forms within the boundaries that he has decided as per his instant will, which pushes his conscience into a speechless, visible experience” and that “the painting has enriched (Nerurkar) with visual language that can be understood only by mute eyes”, articulating the meditative state that the work stimulates, whilst citing the relevance of the title of the show.

‘Seeing is Muting’, Pradeep Nerurkar, 18th of June - 11th of July, 2016, Gallery 7, Mumbai.

Image courtesy: Gallery 7.

07 / KOLKATA

Of Stains and Stitches: Gopika Nath

Oindrilla Maity Surai

Guilelessness and domestic activities of weaving, spinning, stitching and sewing, needless to say, are inextricably linked to women. In India, the most commonplace and immediate medium that recorded their observations for centuries is probably the *kantha* (quilt) onto which the world surrounding them was rendered into a simple visual language. Pictorial depictions of birth, marriage, daily chores, ritualistic practices or of the moment of arrival of the *sahibs* who brought with them a whole new culture - took the form of an assortment of stitches on fabric, laces, doilies, buttons, hooks and even printmaking and transferred images on fabric in the hands of the urban, cerebral women artists.

In Kolkata alone the works of Paula Sengupta (*Nuptial Chamber*, a discovery of her new life after her marriage and *Diary Entries* based on her mother’s last few days before passing away of cancer) Rima Kundu, Shreyasi Chatterjee who heavily rely on needlecraft have earned critical acclaim in recent time for the intense articulation and characteristically narrative nature of their work. Found objects such as embroidered handkerchiefs, laces, pillows, handmade paper screens, cutpiece cloth and

a spectacle of stitches - are features common to the practice of these artists. They engage intimately with subjects such as domesticity, birth and death, marriage and motherhood, love and infidelity, as well as explore the social and the political realm through the history of partition, riots, the changing values of society and so on. The naive craft of stitching becomes a subversive art form and silent voices transpire as unremittingly loquacious.

Gopika Nath’s exhibition, *The Piercing Needle* does not address any of these familiar and predictable issues. In fact, the continuous narrative mode is so absent from her oeuvre that it stands in sharp contrast to the female artists mentioned above. Predominantly a textile artist, Gopika’s recent exhibition is based on two individual sets of work: one that explores different effects of stitches on fabrics and a second from *The Chai Project*, concocted from a medley of stitches, tea stains on fabric and transferred digital images of tea residue in cups which, as she observes, ‘became evocative of guilt, shame and blame, the kind of thoughts we carry around us that come up under self-reflection or introspection; of thoughts mulling over a cup of tea’. The word ‘stain’ carries a multitude of connotations, especially for a woman, generally associated with shame, wound and imprint. In fact ‘Stains on my Chintz’ – an exhibition curated by Paula Sengupta in 2010, explored the works of six artists hailing from colonial cultures and reflecting upon their histories predominantly through the medium of textile. Chintz, a cheaply printed calico ‘itself is a living testimony of the politics of colonisation and the many contradictions’ engendered by it.

Inside the gallery, a variety of framed and embroidered pieces of fabric – frazzled, knotted, cleaved – repetitive motifs of running and cross- stitches occupy the walls. The floor is thwarted arbitrarily by glass vitrines each containing an



Fragments of the Whole, Cotton Voile, Nylon Net, Silk, Cotton-Polyester Thread, 14 x 15 inches, 2013.



Community of Cups, Mixed Media, 2010.

archived piece such as a sewn fabric or one that is emerging from a tea cup and a couple of tables displaying an assortment of objects – tea cups made of glass and china, kettles, beads and stitching supplies.

Labelled as “An Awkward Marriage”, “Mapping Mindstains” or “A Careless Hand Poured” – the subsets are suggestive of the artist’s discernment of the conciliation between fabric and stitch or her trying to read into the mind of the tea drinker. However, concentric circles of quick running stitches on a variety of fabrics mottled with tea stain occasion tedium in the end. Gopika’s capricious world is spun from chance effects produced by stitches, stains, fabrics, texts and images – the repetitiveness of which could easily be misread for an obsessive quality (as in Yayoi Kusama), but lacks the intensity so obviously linked to obsession. Although, the artist’s statement informs the viewer that she wanted to ‘explore the national psyche through her engagement with stitching and re-looking at the past, thinking about the folk artists and merging these thoughts with ruminations evoked by residue of tea,’ ‘The Piercing Needle’ as a whole remains limited to the artist seeking solitary pleasures in her somewhat rudimentary experiments with textures and effects that appear to be merely superficial.

The best part of the exhibit is perhaps *The Universe in My Tea Cup* – an array of 30 framed works from the *Chai* series where the artist is at her best toying with a variety of effects on digitally manipulated photographs of left over tea inside cups altered with printed images and stitchery, detached from textual excerpts – poems; dialogues; thoughts. They do not tell a story but hint at unlimited possibilities that the mind can conceive of.

‘The Piercing Needle’, Gopika Nath, 6th January - 6th March 2016, Gallery Sanskriti, Kolkata.

Photo credit: Amitabha Bhattacharya.

Image courtesies: Gopika Nath.



The Stain Tea Party, Site-Specific Installation, 2015. Photo credit: Shalini Jaikaria.