

ARTIST IN RESIDENCY

KETAKI SARPOTDAR

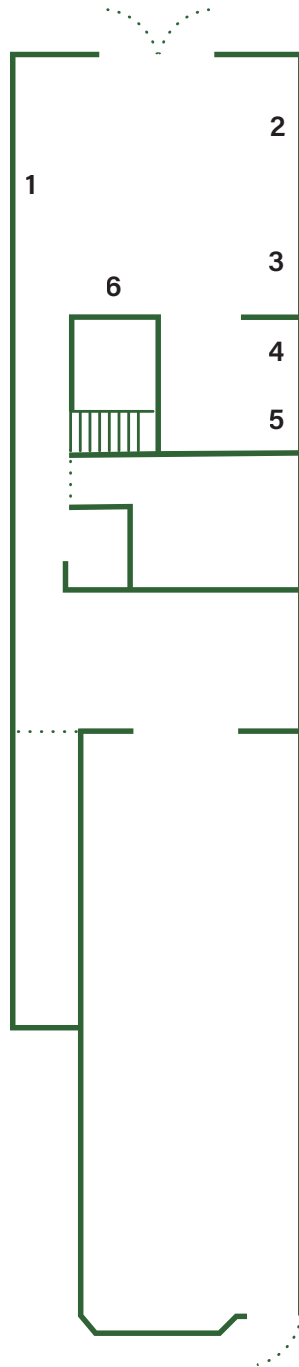
(English edition)

1646



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KETAKI SARPOTDAR



1.
UNDER THE SHADOW

Pencil drawings,
gouache on paper, texts,
ongoing

2.
**WHEN RABBIT SAW
THE FALLING SKY**

Video, 7:59 minutes,
2023

3.
IN A MAZE OF TIME

Video, 7:15 minutes,
2023

4.
SHIKAVAN

Etching, photo etching,
inkjet printed texts,
2022

5.
DIARY

Texts, drawings, prints,
2020-2023

6.
TECH TE NI TECH TE

Video, 2:6 minutes,
2022-2023

For more information about this and other projects,
check our website or scan the QR-code.



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PROJECT

Could political cartoons from a century ago still be relevant today? In India, the preservation of political cartoons is challenging due to their politically loaded nature. However, in the Netherlands, these works are to be found in several institutional collections. Ketaki Deepak Sarpotdar has been our artist in residency, and during her two-month stay at 1646, she researched personal and critical socio-political commentary, in times of a pandemic crisis.

With the support of Jef Schaepe, Ketaki conducted research on cartoons depicting influenza pandemics prior to COVID-19 and illustrations from the Dutch magazine *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*. These materials are located in the archives of the Leiden University Library. These illustrations provide a unique glimpse into The Netherlands' political context in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The critical drawings capture the experience of citizens, how politicians were criticised, and how they were depicted in thought-provoking cartoons. She wants to uncover the struggles with misinformation and the public reactions to the socio-political unrest caused by a new crisis. Sarpotdar also seeks to understand how the political cartoons in the Netherlands can resonate with her own lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

At 1646, Ketaki Sarpotdar has been working on her ongoing project, 'Under the Shadow,' a graphic novel inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic. Her work delves into the pandemic's development, how it was underestimated at first to then later become one of India's biggest crises on a personal, socio-political, and economic level. It also highlights how the underprivileged bore the heaviest burden initially, while others at the time found comfort in replacing physical interactions with virtual ones and exploring new hobbies."

Simultaneously, individuals like Francesca Melandri, through her article titled 'LETTER FROM YOUR FUTURE,' sought to bring attention to the gravity of the situation. Melandri discussed how activities initially perceived as entertainment eventually transformed into sources of distress and aversion. Upon careful analysis of these incidents, it became apparent to her that they were all directly or indirectly influencing two distinct phases that most of us went through. The first stage unfolded within the confines of people's homes, characterised by emotional and mental crises, introspection, questions, and personal concerns. The second stage occurred beyond the windows of her home, encompassing collective existential dilemmas, hostilities, fatalities, alternative and temporary solutions, and countless other events. Despite their apparent disconnection, all these occurrences were intricately interlinked.



CONCEPT NOTE

The book, 'Under the Shadow,' serves as Sarpotdar's personal documentation. It features images that reflect both her immediate surroundings and the virtual world, using metaphors to symbolise human psychology. The accompanying text captures dialogues between two individuals as they interpret, philosophise, question and share their newfound experiences in response to the pandemic's impact.

*"Things that seem morally obvious and intuitive
now weren't necessarily so in the past;
many started with nonconforming reasoning."*

Robert M. Sapolsky

We often tend to rationalise human experience by labelling it as either black or white. My work traverses these polarities, and exists within the spectrum of grey that lies in between. I position myself at the centre of the polarities of truth and falsehood, right and wrong, to analyse human psychology in various situations. Every issue, whether personal or global, depends upon how one responds to a particular circumstance. My practice focuses on these human responses to socio-political situations and their underlying psychology.

My work process starts with an event of daily life that captures my attention, which then becomes the central topic for a new work. At that point, I start researching my subject of interest from different perspectives. I look into historical and contextual references, into metaphors found in ancient proverbs, poetry, also into the psychology around the event, as well as the tensions between the individual and the collective that occur. Ultimately, all this information converges into an image that is as layered as its research. Full of symbols and metaphors, my paintings invite the viewer to unpack the different layers that have come to constitute the work.

One of the materials of research that I have used in my practice are the Panchatantra stories. These are an ancient Indian collection of stories and fables. While these stories initially inspired anthropomorphic forms in my paintings, later on I shifted to allegorical zoomorphic narratives to focus on the psychology and behavioural patterns of my characters. I specifically also draw inspiration from literary works, short stories, and at times poetry and folk tales. Folk tales serve as a mirror to society, inspiring people to introspect. These tales teach about ethics and morality, and manage to influence the collective consciousness. Recently, I also have been engaging more with Sanskrit subhashita, ancient regional proverbs and phrases that are still relevant today.

My work raises profound philosophical questions about what our understanding of reality and humanity is, and ultimately, of truth.

WHEN RABBIT SAW THE FALLING SKY

In today's digital age, we encounter a lot of misinformation on social media and the internet. This misinformation can be used to manipulate people's minds for personal gain or because of their lack of knowledge.

During the Halley's Comet panic in 1910, when astronomer Camille Flammarion used spectroscopy to detect cyanogen in the comet's tail, Flammarion was quoted as saying that the gas could "impregnate the atmosphere and possibly wipe out all life on the planet". His theory had little support in the scientific world, but it was published in the New York Times. The misinformation spread like wildfire, causing chaos.

The series 'When Rabbit Saw the Falling Sky' (inspired by the tale 'Rabbit and the Falling Sky' found in the 'Panchatantra' story book) speaks about the reaction of a crowd to misinformation. It consists of 8 paintings that revolve around a fictional narrative of events taking place from dusk to dawn, based on various situations that arise in the jungle when the animals encounter a previously unknown and rare phenomenon. The series deals with faith, fear, blame, ego, the role of authority, etc. The various situations depicted in the series are based on observations of my surroundings, while the characters and metaphors are taken from 8 different stories from the 'Panchatantra' and other folk tales.

IN A MAZE OF TIME

Unexpected changes in the atmosphere during an eclipse can be disorienting for many organisms, causing alterations in their behaviour. Similarly, the sudden arrival of the pandemic, coupled with a lack of understanding about how to navigate through these unprecedented times, surfaced our concealed thoughts, opinions, and emotions. It also prompted us to question our beliefs and ideologies. This whirlwind of thoughts led to feelings of anxiety and helplessness, resulting in a regressive mindset where fundamentals were questioned and had to be learned anew. For instance, this situation is akin to what's described in a Sanskrit Shubhashita (Sanskrit Poetry)."

चिता चिन्तासमा हि उक्तम् बिन्दुमात्रविशेषतः

सजीवम् दहते चिन्ता निर्जीवम् दहते चिता ॥

There isn't much difference between 'chita' (pyre) and 'chinta' (worry). 'Chita' (pyre) affects the body, while 'chinta' (worry) affects the mind.

In this series of work, the artist explores how her psychological state changed over the course of the pandemic.

TECH TE NI TECH TE

Levigation is the process of grinding materials with medicinal properties on a stone. Through this method, both the ground material and the act itself become useful and meaningful. However, in this video, I have subverted this process by levigating charcoal. Because of the uselessness of the resulting powder, to me the act serves as a metaphor for repetitive thinking. Seeing the stone as a metaphor for the brain and the act of grinding as an analogy for the act of thinking, the video reflects on useless repetitive thinking, and the worthlessness of the time and action going into it.

The significance of the levigating act in this particular work led me to select a durational medium such as a video to convey the concept. The video is juxtaposed with an audio of the poem TECH TE NI TECH TE written by poet Govinda Vinayak Karandikar in his old age. In this poem, the poet explores the monotony and tedium of daily routines and eventually delves into the topic of suicide. Karandikar ultimately argues that there is nothing new in suicide either and concludes that life and death are both repetitive.



IT'S THE SAME, YES, THE SAME!

Day or night, night or day
It's the same, yes, the same!

Dentifrice or Pepsodent,
The same cup of tea and entertainment,
The same songs, the same melodies,
The same fools and wise ones too!

Day or night, night or day,
It's the same, yes, the same!
From one lunch room to another, I tried many
Because I couldn't change my tongue!
Whether it's a woman or the Taj Mahal,
Everyone suffers like hell
Whether you keep it mild or spicy hot,
In the end, we cook the same veggies,
The same rotten taste of chutney, the same sour soup,
A pile of sorrow, and a tinge of pleasure comes in a loop.

The tree of life grows with dangling bats of dreams,
The sculptors of dreams are not poets but the dumb,
Silly mocking entertainment,
Overused laments and muted morals,
Nine threads integrating in one colour,
Reflecting transient manners.
Monotonous indulgence,
That same affliction of attachments.
The same temple, same idol,
The same offerings, that inspiration and smile.
Those lips, those eyes,
The same flaunts and flirty ties,
The same bed, the same beloved,
Not a sitar but an ektaari.

Even if I ponder committing suicide,
Be it Romeo's suicide,
Or Dadhichi's suicide,
In the end, suicide is suicide.
The soul is the same,

Killing is the same
Because life is also the same,
And death... is also the same,
Yes, the same!

तेच ते नतैच ते

सकाळपासून रात्रीपर्यंत तेच ते !!तेच ते!!
माकडछाप दंतमंजन ,

तोच चहा तेच रंजन
तीच गाणी तेच तराणे ,
तेच मूर्ख तेच शहाणे
सकाळपासून रात्रीपर्यंत
तेच ते !! तेच ते !!

खानावळीही बदलून पाहिलिया
कारण जीभ बदलणं शक्य नव्हत.
काकू पासून ताजमहाल ,
सगळीकडे सारखेच हाल
नरम मसाला, गरम मसाला,
तोच तोच भाजीपाला
तीच ती खवट चटणी,
तेच ते आंबट सार
सुख थोडे दुख फार

संसाराच्या वडावर स्वपनाची वटवाघुळे
त्या स्वपनांचे शलिपकार ,
कवी थोडे कवडे फार
पाड्यावरच्या भूतचेष्टा;
शाली शोक ,भूल बोध
नऊ धागे एक रंग ,
व्यभचिराचे सारे ढंग
पुन्हा पुन्हा तेच भोग
आसक्तीचा तोच रोग
तेच 'मंदरि' ,तीच 'मूर्ती'
तीच 'फुले' तीच 'स्फुरती'
तेच ओठ तेच डोळे
तेच मुरके तेच चाळे
तोच पलंग तीच नारी
सतार नव्हे एकतारी

करनि म्हटले आत्महत्या
रोमजिची आत्महत्या
दधीचिची आत्महत्या
आत्महत्याही तीच ती

आत्मा हतोच तो
हत्याही तीच ती
कारण जीवनही तेच ते
आणाभिरणही तेच ते ..



Ketaki Deepak Sarpotdar

Ketaki Deepak Sarpotdar is an artist based in Baroda, India, who works primarily with drawing and etching. In her work, Sarpotdar focuses on human responses to social or political situations and the psychology behind them. In order to analyse human psychology, Sarpotdar derives her visual form from literary pieces, short stories and at times poetry and folktales, which are intended to be a mirror that forces society to introspect. With her work, Sarpotdar aims to traverse polarities; to exist in the spectrum of greys that lie between the black and white; to place herself at the focal point of the polarities of truth and falsity, of right and wrong.