

Karishma D'Souza

Can't See the Forest

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Press release

Karishma D'Souza, *Resilience: Ode to friends and family*, 2023, vinyl and acrylic on canvas, 40 x 45,5 cm, Courtesy of the artist



Xippas Geneva

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Tuesday to Friday:
10am to 1pm and 2pm to 6.30pm
Saturday: 12pm to 5pm

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Opening September 14th at 6 to 9pm on the occasion of La Nuit des Bains and Geneva Art Week.

Guided visits by the artist:

September 14th at 5pm.

September 15th at 6pm.

September 16th at 3pm.

Talk with the artist and the curator, R. Benedito Ferrão :

October 12th at 6pm.

Xippas is pleased to announce the very first show of Karishma D'Souza in Geneva, opening September 14th during Geneva Art Week. The exhibition will include a text by R.Benedito Ferrão and will be displayed in both spaces Rue des Sablons 6 and Rue du Vieux-Billard 7.

Can't See the Forest (from my Childhood)

My grandmother's paddy fields were a magical place. I have an enduring memory of being so small that the stalks of paddy were taller than me. Entirely engulfed in them, all I could see was a green forest that stretched endlessly. I felt safely cocooned within its embrace. Mesmerized, my attempt to discern how far this everglade stretched was thwarted by the firm grip of my grandmother's hand around my little one.

"There might be snakes," she cautioned, not knowing that this simultaneously frightened me but also made me want to catch sight of a reptile. I wondered if snakes could swim, because the water in the fields had covered my feet entirely. Ankle-deep in rainwater, my sandals got stuck in the mud. My grandmother's attempts to free me resulted in a sucking sound as the wet earth let go of the rubber soles of my slippers. We both laughed.

A neighbor hoisted me up on his shoulders so I could see above the swaying stalks. Folks from around the village were gathered in the field. Some of them were hunched over as they inspected the crop while others were occupied in conversation. A group of teenagers were wading in a section of the field where the water level was higher than elsewhere. They were clustered around something that I was unable to see. Whatever it was, it was causing them to shriek excitedly as they splashed about. Then, when one of the youths moved away from the group, I caught sight of my father. He was paddling a raft that the teens were taking turns getting into.

Even before I could ask, my grandmother cautioned sternly: "No, don't even think about it. You're too small." It's funny... While everything else about that day is still so vivid, what eludes me now is what the boat my father was in looked like. All I can imagine is a vessel made of plastic bottles, the kind that tourists drink from and leave behind at the seaside or discard on the streets.

Ask most people about Goa and they will tell you that the first thing that comes to mind are its beaches. But not for me. What I consider most synonymous with my homeland, that which I hold closest despite not having been born there, are its green fields. Somehow, the agricultural past that sustained my family for generations has imprinted itself upon me.

Once, on a visit to Goa as an adult, a friend who was driving slowed down to point out a series of wooden structures that were visible in the recently harvested fields that spread on either side of the path we were on. "Those are—" And before he could complete his observation, I interjected: "khazans." He nodded in affirmation. But I did not know where this word came to me from. I had never uttered it before, let alone had any knowledge of what khazan lands were.

An ancient sluice gate arrangement made only of wooden parts and operated by the force of the tides, the entirely unmechanized khazan system allowed for the reclamation of land, often from saltwater. In some parts of Goa, one can still view these antique innovations at work. One can still see village communities caring for their fields. But these vignettes, like an image on aging celluloid, are rapidly fading from sight.

An angry lament sounds in my head.

Pave

*Pave over fields
Over stalks of paddy
Grains of rice
What do you need them for?
That great red hill
Gouge it out
Pave over the ocean
So also the river
And these springs
Of no use are they
Pave over this forest
It has outlived its usefulness
This endless road
Will take you everywhere*

Until there's nowhere left to go

There is a word in Portuguese that has become so ingrained in Goan culture as to be inseparable from it now. Famously, the word *saudades* has no equivalent in English and is supposed to mean, all at once, loss, yearning, and nostalgia. I think this is a dissemblance. This achingly beautiful, melancholic word shirks its own meaning out of shame for what the truth might reveal. Could nostalgia hold up to self-scrutiny were it truly to divulge to itself the depths of its hidden recesses?

What became of those that labored in the fields of my childhood? Those Gawda women who hiked up their chequered saris above their knees, heads exposed to the noonday sun as they squatted on their haunches... Their labor made possible the food on many tables, but how many were invited to sit at them? Agriculture is not just tradition but hard work. Sometimes, it is also injustice and a reckoning to be had. The environment cannot be saved without its caregivers.

When one can't see the forest for the trees

another vision is necessary

Karishma D'Souza's exhibition captures a moment of crisis in contemporary South Asia with a particular focus on a rapidly transforming Goa, her ancestral homeland. The artist looks to the challenges of tourism and urbanization that threaten the very topography of a Goa famed for its biodiversity, coastal beauty, and once fields of plenty. The decimation of this storied landscape means a change in traditions and livelihoods. At the same time as many from the region pursue jobs elsewhere, settlers from other parts of India move in or take up land for second homes and a leisurely lifestyle. Yet, D'Souza does not only seek to chronicle wistfulness or angst. Rather, her work also takes inspiration from activists and those who make their own way despite being marginalized. Thus, her art offers a record and an alternative view of the present.

R. Benedito Ferrão

Karishma D'Souza was born in 1983 in Mumbai, India. She lives and works between Goa (India) and Lisbon (Portugal).

She graduated from University of Baroda (India) in 2006. She was discovered during her two-year residency at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (Netherlands) in 2012-2013. In 2017, Karishma D'Souza was on residency in Skowhegan, Maine (USA), and in 2018 in the collective studio Concorde in Lisbon (Portugal).

Her works have been shown in many exhibitions, notably at: Fundação Oriente, Goa; Atelier Concorde, Lisbon; Dapiran Art Project Space, Amsterdam; India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore.

Her works have been integrated into public and private collections including: Chadha Art Collection (KRC), Rotterdam (Netherlands); Central Museum of Utrecht (Netherlands); Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam; Directorate of Art and Culture, Goa; Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP), Paris (France).