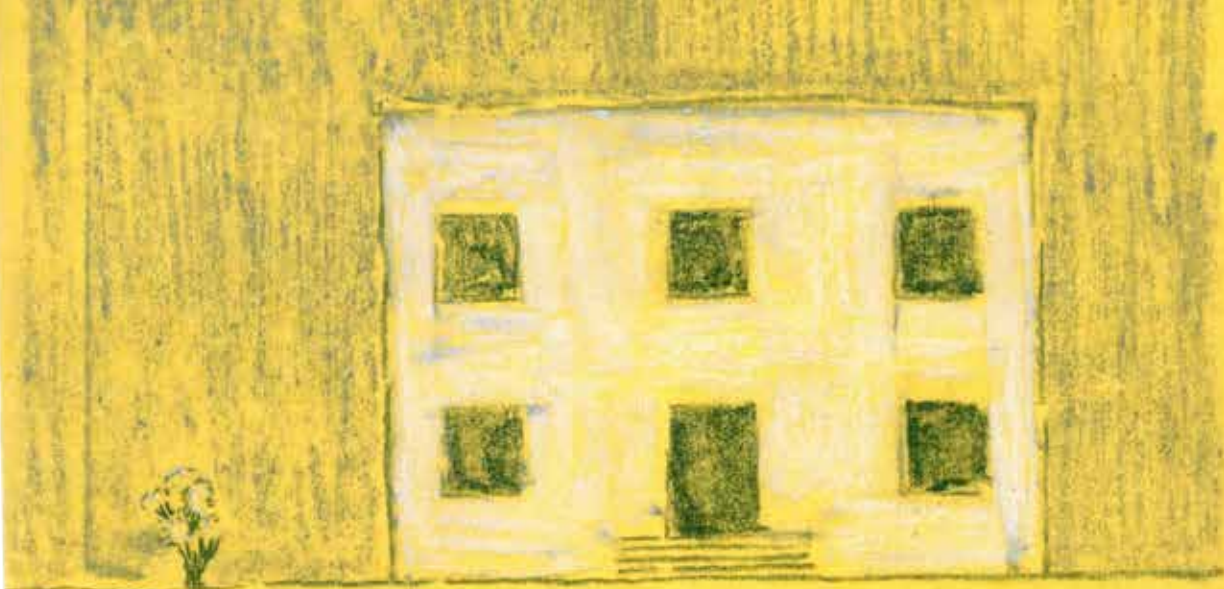




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Step 1 Build four walls using baked bricks and cement, Punch equally spaced holes for windows. At bottom center take hole all the way to floor. Once walls have set place concrete lid above. Add steps to front door if desired, Preheat oven



Step 2 Fill holes with windows, and place rain protection above each. Support door projection on pillars and get contractor to add random horizontal lines wherever he wishes. Sleep over the horizontal lines and pillars.



Step 3 Remove columns and horizontal lines and decorate windows with fresh early morning outlook of Classicism. Run plaster bands around windows; check central window for possible crown. Place balustrade above door projection. Sit back, relax, flip through European magazines.



Step 4

For a moment forget comfort and practicality. Concentrate on 21st century ideals that should be stated on facade. Think Revival and Imitation. Knowing that the best things have already been done, start by building up cornices around windows in plaster. Add fake frame around door; stick traditional looking brackets under projection. Create artificial double corner to give depth to composition. Stir Spanish stucco onto surface. Let simmer.



Step 5

Open up Dictionary of Classical Forms. Borrow studied and known elements from the past and apply them with scholarly flourish. Plaster panels, pediments, medallions, curls, ionic and floral patterns - stick them self-consciously all over facade, keeping in mind that architecture is poetry in stone. Twirl plaster as window edging till it drips. Add delicate Italian balustrade to projection to resemble French balcony. With no door leading to it, it becomes a French balcony that can't be used. But don't fret. As long as it's art, it's OK.



Step 6

Finally release all pent up ideas from system. All images of building collected over years of foreign travel, bits of detail picked up from French cathedrals and Gujrati havelis, and other memories and lurking desires. Use Greek columns and capitals liberally to frame composition. Statuary may be applied according to taste. Sprinkle Indian terracotta and filigreed screens as garnishing. The final flavour should give off deep whiffs of European history emanating from a traditional Indian present. Let dry for a day. Serves family of six.

— Q&A —

Up close and personal

For artist-couple Tushar Joag and Sharmila Samant, the urban context, with all its socio-political underpinnings, is the landscape that inspires and informs the choices they make through their art – it is where alternate perspectives emerge, a much-needed fork in this road of reality

PRAVEENA SHIVRAM

Every so often, you come across artists who hold the filaments of conscious thought, sure as foot-steps, with those of spontaneous creative expression, inimitable as thumbprints, with an ease that can only come from a natural synergy, speaking in many different dialects the language of change. Sometimes it takes the form of drawings or sculptures, sometimes an interactive performance, sometimes a dialogue, sometimes a video installation or sometimes even a mock corporate entity throwing uncomfortable questions at you. Every so often you come across artists who shatter the comfortable notions of urban reality existing within air-conditioned bubbles to let in atavistic winds

of identity to settle on your skin like gooseflesh, rendering you momentarily incapable of moving forward, just so you can fully experience and appreciate the moment that has come into focus with the intensity of a player on the field. Every so often you come across artists like Tushar Joag and Sharmila Samant, who continue to redefine art and activism in ways that constantly challenge you to look at the things relegated to the periphery and that the circle we have so carefully drawn around ourselves is but a mirage. 'When I came to the arts it was not a desired profession – it was neither glamorous nor lucrative, but what it offered was the ultimate bastion of freedom to think and

do. And in the last many years a lot of things have changed within the art field and also the way art is perceived outside the field but the onus of making the choices is still with artist,' says Sharmila Samant. This choice manifests in several ways with both Tushar and Sharmila, the most recent one being their decision to take up their 'first proper job' at Shiv Nadar University in Delhi. 'When we were approached to join as core faculty to set up the new art department, we had to take stock and really think about making the move. What both Tushar and I were sure of was that if we had let this opportunity go, then we had no space to complain about the deterioration



Tushar Joag, *Are You Awake*, 2013, Sound recording (of the intervention in Bombay), Transcripts, Double bed Image Courtesy of the Artist

within the system,' says Sharmila. Tushar adds, 'Among the most important aspects of the curriculum is that it is student-centric and takes into account the needs of each individual student. What excites me is a very selfish objective... I have to keep myself abreast and well informed about developments in the discipline; and teaching, for me, is a way of learning.' When you encounter (for 'look' or 'see' would be too superficial a word here) their work – Tushar's dry wit and conscious urgency, Sharmila's quiet wisdom and powerful imagery – you are left with a sense of debilitating honesty, and I don't mean that in a Kafkaesque way. I mean that in the purest sense of the word. It, somehow, weakens you because it shows you just how much of the world is conveniently blocked out in this pursuit of manufactured happiness. And, yet, it doesn't just leave

you there, swirling in that morass of apathy, because their work also has that elusive thing called hope. 'I have been a supporter of the Narmada Bachhao Andolan since I was introduced to it in 2001; the movement has been on for 27 years now,' says Tushar. 'When one meets the Adivasis and the villagers, one is overwhelmed by their grit. Medha Patkar, more than any artist, is my ideal... Spend a few days or even a few hours with her and she will infect you with her vim. Even the children from the Jeevan shalas (run by the Andolan) will break into a slogan "Ladai padhai sath sath... Ladenge Jeetenge". Hope is never helpless.'

Excerpts from the interview

How do you define this term 'intervention' in the urban context? Is your intention to make people pause briefly within the routine of everyday life or do you look at it more as

specific stop signs that allow us to 'see' beyond this quotidian?

Tushar Joag: An intervention is an action in the public domain that is directed towards individuals or communities or groups of people. It is something that is like a hiccup, something that is natural or seemingly part of everyday life and existence, yet breaks the continuum. If we look at the historic precedents, movements like Fluxus and the Situationists took this up as a radical position in their bid to meld art with everyday life. Art had become part of society only as a commodity. It was co-opted by the consumer society and needed a revolutionary reinstatement. Intervention was then used by them to claim that art belongs to the realm of everyday life. Intervention uses as material the personal and the interpersonal relationships and interactions, and stands apart from art that is defined by the art object itself –



Sharmila Samant, **Shanghai Tales**, 13 mins Single channel video, 2006, 'Impossible India' Frankfurter Kunsterverein, Germany, Ccurated by Nina Montmann, Image Courtesy of the Artist

instead, it is defined by (what could be an anonymous) action or occasion, and/or an experience... it is basically ephemeral and immaterial, an alternative to 'object production'. The word intervention has about it a feeling of something that has urgency, a necessity. Situations 'require' an intervention. The 'need' of the earlier movements to utilise intervention as a strategy to move art from the domain of mere representation to direct involvement in issues affecting society, is similar to the need of certain sections of citizenry for a protest or a political demonstration for debates and resolution of conflicts. For me, the genealogy of my practice is more from such political protests – let's say like the Jal Satyagrahas of the villagers of the Narmada Ghati, threatened by submergence of their lands or protests by the

mothers in Manipur after the rape of Manorama by the armed forces or the refusal of Irom Sharmila to eat till AFSPA is repealed, rather than the art historical instances.

Artists, in general, are often viewed as 'observers' – they stand in the sidelines as silent spectators. In your opinion, what happens to the way an artwork is conceived when you are at the centre of it all? Do they become conscious 'solutions' that you would like the viewer to think about?

Sharmila Samant: I think of my work as a medium of communication and it occupies a space where different people can come to interact and react. I feel interactions with various people with whom one shares a common social, political understanding shapes how one perceives and conceives the

processes of one's art making. Public opinion can be shaped by the cultural production of a particular time and region as much by the discourse of politics of that place. The modernist individualism of placing the hedonist artist at the centre of affecting change is not applicable in these formations. People come together through strategies of gathering and sharing towards a common collective goal. It is a choice of working together along with many others in opposition to what is happening in the world. It is necessarily a slow process, no immediate solutions, no absolute values to quantify success. I am negotiating between the affect and effect of the projects I undertake. These are the conscious choices I make, while engaging in collaborative and participatory projects with various sites and

communities. I cannot predetermine quantitative efficacy when proposing such projects that are based on building relationships over several years, where an understanding of the historicity and narratives of the site leads to ways of criticality through discourse while exploring ideas of exchange and accessibility. The viewer then does not come at the end as s/he has been a collaborator, participant or an accomplice within the project.

You lived in Mumbai for 47 years before shifting to Delhi. What aspect of Mumbai's 'urban-ness' do you react to the most? Do you even look at 'urban' as a concept that is necessarily connected to the city, especially when the cityscape is changing so drastically?

Tushar Joag: I did not live in Mumbai for 47 years... of the 47 years, fortuitously, I lived sometimes in Mumbai, sometimes in Bombay and sometimes in Bambaai for 29 years (till 1995) ... after which I lived in Mumbai/ Bombay and Bambaai as a political choice.

Since 2002, Bombay the 'global city' has overtly been my muse. Most of my works are about the city and the attempt to probe local and contemporary politics such as marginalisation and displacement due to over-urbanisation and the inequitable development models implemented by the state. The pursuit of the urbanisation-based development paradigm is displacing not only rural but also the urban poor in a major way. The rift between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' is perpetually increasing in the city. The city is being developed as an attractive location for FDIs. TNCs and MNCs are being welcomed with open arms to come and set up operations and rake in profits, while its legitimate citizens are being denied the fundamental rights to livelihood and housing. Millions are spent on so-called infrastructure development (like the skywalks, which are scarcely used), while many other infrastructural needs of certain sections of the citizens (like drinking water, sanitation, etc.)

remain unaddressed... One section of society desires to live in a 'global city', while even bare survival is not guaranteed for the other. There are aspirations and there are aspirations but whose aspirations become the aspirations, of the city? My engagement with Bombay mostly deals with this inequitable development and the dislocations it causes. The project Unicell Public Works Cell was started in 2004 to make interventions in the urban space by designing and producing objects that are functional and aesthetic. The idea was to bring into focus the various concerns of the immediate situation in a satirical way.

How do you treat memory and loss, particularly in the context of connecting to old knowledge that mostly now resides only in memories?

Sharmila Samant: The gradual realisation of the dangerous threat to life on the planet, precipitated by the dominant culture's greed, ignorance, insensitivity and territorial power

● Sharmila Samant, **Contamination**, 2008-09, Series of 8 Digital photo collages, 40" X 30" each. Image Courtesy of the Artist

● Sharmila Samant, **Locacola**, 2000-now, Installation view, crossing generations: diVERGE, National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay, curated by Chaitanya Sambrani and Geeta Kapur, 2003



practices, results in the eroding of human relationships, makes the widespread recognition of the need and desire for an entirely new perception and method of living. The continuity of Indian hand-crafts, textiles, oral traditions, rituals and their significance in myths, music and stories are an integral part of the accumulated knowledge that one grows up with. The humility combined with virtuosity of craft has a masterful ability to assimilate a diverse audience. What I try to imbibe from craft is the ease of material and a seeming simplicity of representation. Traditions and native techniques are vanishing due to the non-involvement of generations of the New Media Age. However, this obsolete knowledge possesses the inherent language that is trans-cultural and speaks to all. Memory is one of the oldest of senses, communicating through the being of the person (artist), both as the carrier of the impulse and as the facilitator of actual experiences (memories). Reflecting on the intuitive longing for connections via meaningful interactions and to study and experience the now-trivialised traditional, domestic arts was the attempt of 'Draw from Memory'. The installation 'Draw from Memory' proposed ephemerality – to function as a meeting space to swap stories, skills, knowledge, strategies and verbalise the more oppressive aspects of social injustices. A series of six staged interactions were facilitated at the Changwon Art Village Centre, one every week during the course of the Changwon Sculpture Biennale in 2014.

Have you, at any point, felt overwhelmed by the choices you have made? Or let me put it this way – when 'doubt' enters the creative space, how do you continue to remain true to your idea?

Tushar Joag: There are two reasons why doubt, as you say, could enter my creative space.

The first one being the fact that I am not an artist sought after by the market. Because of the critique of the development paradigm followed by the state in my work and the allegiance it owes to the dispossessed it could often ruffle feathers. We prefer to live in denial and be it farmer suicides or AFSPA, or the disenfranchisement of the Adivasis, they are just words in the newspaper. Nobody wants to face misery in their drawing room... I therefore have not felt the need to invest in a pitchfork to manage my money! But again, I don't have such a big hunger, so the market does not discourage me much. The second and more daunting spectre of doubt entering my creative space is when one is asked to evaluate the efficacy of one's practice...Am I even making a dent? Does art really have the ability to function as a tool for political protest and social activism? Object-based art can, of course, be critical but is it enough to criticise political and social conditions or can one change these conditions in real life?

There was a time about 16 years ago when doubt stood at the doorstep of my studio (at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam) and it entered like a tornado, after which it was impossible to remain, as you say, true to the idea of art making. I was convinced art was an alienated activity, a highly privileged and autonomous practice separated from life; I saw no reason for continuing to do the kind of

work that I did or even be an artist. After a hiatus of two years, and plenty of amateur activism, I began working again – initially engaging with people and communities, unions and activists doing projects – not concerned if I was making art or not. I felt it was necessary through my work to foreground the questions even if I did not have solutions, to generate a debate. Then, again, a few years later I 'doubted' if it was enough to question the multiple collapses or the lapses of the social state. But let's say doubt is the mother of reinvention! The best way to work, I have realised, is in the moment and at a micro level, making functional changes through collaborations and participations through the smaller gaps within society. Doubt is a protean monster and I am sure it will follow me till I am done.

Do you sometimes feel that the human tendency to say 'it cannot happen to us' is frustrating as an artist, a thinker, a reader, when you know that it can and will happen to us? How then does that frustration manifest in the art you do?

Sharmila Samant: I hope that frustration does not manifest in any form in the projects I undertake. My preoccupation while working is based on the idea that what is important is less what you do than what it does. When Open Circle (*Open Circle* was set up by Sharmila Samant and Tushar Joag to seek a creative engagement with contemporary political issues through the integration of theory and praxis. It was formed in 1998, based in Bombay and ran through 2008) was invited



● Tushar Joag, **Washing D'Arty Linen** 2015, Clothes washed by members of the Vanar Sangham (washer men's co-operative, Kochi) drying in the gallery space. Image Courtesy of the Artist



for the Busan Biennale in 2005, the slum demolitions were on in Bombay in full force. The similar dream of urbanisation and progress had caused displacement and trauma in Busan about 25 years ago. It was a suitable opportunity to present 'Shanghai Tales' in Busan. It became a way of understanding and strategising dissent and struggle. One of the advantages of meeting and connecting with people from different cultural and regional backgrounds via art is that one realises the similarities one shares. When in Bombay, I was constantly orchestrating my attention to the gaps between the populace and the capitalist system. It seems like a mass hypnosis brought about by carefully controlled media,

market and corporate interests. So the projects are not just a means of gesturing this social void but working towards abandoning this imposed passivity.

And finally, what aspect of each others' creative process inspires you and what intimidates you?

Tushar Joag: I don't think the question of intimidation comes in as we are not in competition with each other, or anyone for that matter. Sharmila has many strengths that I admire. The most valuable amongst them is her code of 'no compromise'. One might think given her current standing and experience in the field it is easy to have this approach, but she has had this attitude from her much younger days. If she has something in

mind for her work, she can be most tenacious and see that she gets it just right. This comes from a certain conviction that she has about herself and her work. The other admirable trait is her ability to connect people and to connect with people. She will link the right people with each other so that they can have a fruitful and mutually favourable transaction in professional or personal areas.

Sharmila Samant: I am still amazed at the poetics Tushar is capable of. His ability to go into every minute aspect of the work that he undertakes; as an organiser, he is meticulous to the last detail. What intimidates me is his self-destructive streak, and the impossibly high standards that he sets for himself.



Step 7

Accept builder's offer to demolish house and build flats. Take money, buy plot in suburbs, and start again from Step 1.