

# JHAVERI CONTEMPORARY

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**Ali Kazim**  
b. 1979, Pattoki  
Lives and works in Lahore

**Anwar Jalal Shemza**  
b. 1928, Simla  
d. 1985, Stafford

**Gyan Panchal**  
b. 1973, Paris  
Lives and works in Limousin

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## **What's essential**

*1 September—29 September 2018*

“We arrived in Bombay on an early morning in November 1951. I remember the intensity of the light despite the early hour, and my impatience at the sluggishness with which the boat crossed the quiet bay. An enormous mass of liquid mercury, barely undulating; vague hills in the distance; flocks of birds; a pale sky and scraps of pink clouds. As the boat moved forward, the excitement of the passengers grew. Little by little the white-and-blue architecture of the city sprouted up, a stream of smoke from a chimney, the ochre and green stains of a distant garden. An arch of stone appeared, planted on a dock and crowned with four little towers in the shape of pine trees. Someone leaning on the railing beside me exclaimed, "The Gateway of India!" He was an Englishman, a geologist bound for Calcutta. We had met two days before, and I had discovered that he was W. H. Auden's brother. He explained that the arch was a monument erected to commemorate the visit of King George V and his wife, Queen Mary, in 1911. It seemed to me a fantasy version of the Roman arches; later I learned it was inspired by an architectural style that had flourished in Gujarat, an Indian state, in the sixteenth century. Behind the monument, floating in the warm air, was the silhouette of the Taj Mahal Hotel, an enormous cake, a delirium of the fin-de-siecle Orient fallen like a gigantic bubble, not of soap but of stone, on Bombay's lap. I rubbed my eyes: was the hotel getting closer or farther away? Seeing my surprise, Auden explained to me that the hotel's strange appearance was due to a mistake: the builders could not read the plans that the architect had sent from Paris, and they built it backward, its front facing the city, its back turned to the sea. The mistake seemed to me a deliberate one that revealed an unconscious negation of Europe and the desire to confine the building forever in India. A symbolic gesture, much like that of Cortes burning the boats so that his men could not leave. How often have we experienced similar temptations?” (Octavio Paz, *In Light of India*)

So begins famed Mexican author Octavio Paz's first encounter with Bombay, as recounted in his memoir *In Light of India*. The paradox of the city's gestures to him – simultaneously beckoning towards him even as the Taj spurned his advancing ship – was one that allowed Paz to locate himself in similar paradoxes (or dialectics, as he saw them) to the ones that occupied him back home in Mexico.

**Iftikhar Dadi & Elizabeth Dadi**  
b. 1961, Karachi | b. 1957, Seattle  
Live and work in Ithaca

**Lionel Wendt**  
b. 1900, Sri Lanka  
d. 1944, Sri Lanka

**Lubna Chowdhary**  
b. 1964, Dodoma  
Lives and works in London

**Manisha Parekh**  
b. 1964, Uttarsanda  
Lives and works in New Delhi

**Michael Müller**  
b. 1970, Ingelheim am Rhein  
Lives and works in Berlin

**Mohan Samant**  
b. 1924, Mumbai  
d. 2004, New York

**Monika Correa**  
b. 1938, Mumbai  
Lives and works in Mumbai

**Mrinalini Mukherjee**  
b. 1949, Mumbai  
d. 2015, New Delhi

**Nalini Malani**  
b. 1946, Karachi  
Lives and works in Mumbai

**Prem Sahib**  
b. 1982, London  
Lives and works in London

**Raghubir Singh**  
b. 1942, Jaipur  
d. 1999, New York

**Rana Begum**  
b. 1977, Sylhet  
Lives and works in London

**Shambhavi Kaul**  
b. 1973, Jodhpur  
Lives and works in North Carolina

**Shezad Dawood**  
b. 1974, London  
Lives and works in London

**Simryn Gill**  
b. 1959, Singapore  
Lives and works in Sydney  
and Port Dickson

**Vasantha Yoganathan**  
b. 1985, Grenoble  
Lives and works in Paris

**Yamini Nayar**  
b. 1975, Rochester  
Lives and works in New York

**Zahoor ul Akhlaq**  
b. 1941, Delhi  
d. 1999, Lahore

As Jhaveri Contemporary relocates to its new Colaba space, it finds itself in the inverse position to Paz's famous passage – received by the institutional hotel, on the other side of the gateway's portal, as though welcomed to the water.

How does art simultaneously resurrect, invoke and deny location when that location is as multifarious as Mumbai? Raghubir Singh's *Victoria Terminus, insect screen vendor* throws its brilliant blue net into the unwieldy city, hoping, in vain, to prise out some inherent part of it. We are faced with a similar task to that of Singh's screen vendor, in the act of locating these works of art in order, in a sense, to locate ourselves, casting our nets out to the many elusive visions of Mumbai that are each constantly at work. The works in this exhibition speak to the gallery's re-location by invoking the textures, tonalities, and motifs that give the gallery's new space – at the fringes of land and sea – both roots and anchors. Rana Begum's tonal studies verge on the encyclopaedic, invoking the tonal range of Bombay blocks of colour that both jostle against and spill into one another. Objects by Gyan Panchal and Prem Sahib each meditate on the interstitial, drawing vagrant, orphaned urban artefacts (the bamboo stalks, the neon sign) into the space of the gallery. Iftikhar Dadi & Elizabeth Dadi's ceramic sculptures bestow a sense of formal permanence upon otherwise fleeting, plastic toys amassed across a number of sites in South Asia – Delhi, Lahore, Mumbai – performing the task of historically-conscious crystallisation, even as Monika Correa's woven tapestries present the constant possibility of unravelling. In Nalini Malani's animation, *Now I See it Now I Don't*, visions of the Gateway are briefly offered from the water before it is lost to a cacophony of strokes and waves. *What's Essential*, Yamini Nayar's eponymous photograph – showing a motley crowd of objects without hierarchy that range from the quotidian to the decorative to the totemic – calls upon the viewer to think across and between objects, materials, and spaces by embracing incongruousness and friction. Space, we are reminded by these and other works, is an ever-precarious assemblage; any presumed ordering of objects and their social lives is turned on its head.

As the works speak to and across one another, a number of them encourage the viewer to partake in a codified outwards gaze. The onlookers in Vasantha Yoganathan's *An Ocean of Uncertainty* partake in surveying the horizon for ships that come bearing the future; it is irresistible not to consider Simryn Gill's *Channel* as forming the next view in Yoganathan's series, transplanting us from the perspective of a bystander into the young men's vision. In these varied depictions of the water, from Lionel Wendt to Michael Müller to Shambhavi Kaul, the sea is potent but ambiguous, looming over the works as an active author, indeed in much of the same way as it does for the city. Whereas for Roland Barthes the sea 'bears no message: but on the beach, what material for semiology! Flags, signals, signs...which are so many messages...'\* the sea in South Asia is richly legible. As Wendt's photographs might suggest, for colonial subjects the sea is inseparable from a common memory of nautical colonialism – in the case of contemporary Bombay, the sea is an active site of labour, its signs and swells conversed with by fishermen, ferrymen, and dock workers alike. In the new gallery, as objects of art are interspersed with views of the horizon, we are reminded of the weight of the water. And so we float between land and sea, caught in the same transitory space as the gallery, as Paz on the ship, as the network of visions and views, outwards and inwards that are forged across the coastlines of Bombay.

### **Diva Gujral**

\*Roland Barthes, 'Necessity and limits of mythology' in *Mythologies*, trans. Jonathan Cape (Paris 1957, repr. Washington 1991), pp. 157-164: p. 160.