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## ***'Body Building'* Opens at Ishara Art Foundation**

Ishara Art Foundation's second exhibition presents photographic works focusing on people and architecture in cities across South Asia



- **Exhibition of photographic and moving image works opened on September 11, 2019**
- **The exhibition looks at the body in relation to public space, and explores architecture and the built environment in cities across South Asia**
- **The Ishara Art Foundation is the first permanent space in the Gulf dedicated to South Asian art and artists in the region, and is located in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai**
- **The non-profit is founded and supported by Dubai resident, collector and patron, Smita Prabhakar**

**Exhibition Dates: September 12 to December 14, 2019**

Launched in March 2019 in Dubai, Ishara Art Foundation is the first independent, non-profit institution dedicated to contemporary South Asian art and artists in West Asia.

Body Building, as the play on words suggests, explores South Asian identities and perspectives in the context of architecture and the built environment. Significant bodies of lens-based work from sixteen visual practitioners come together in this exhibition, reflecting on urban experience across cities in South Asia. The march of urbanization and property development across the region is reconsidered alongside the aspirations and challenges that accompany these economic transformations.

The exhibition begins on the streets and shores of South Asia, and enter homes and private celebrations through family photos and photo-diaries. Artists witness change, document socioeconomic shifts and capture new or iconic architectures as they appear, or threaten to disappear. Mobile phone videos allow us to enter private realms and experience life in interstitial spaces. Images are manipulated, not just digitally but through collage to create new meaning and even new architectures. Works include architectural, landscape and studio photography, archival images and representational forms such as portraiture and street photography.

Presenting a range of practices from the late 1960s onwards, the exhibition also links past and present, revisiting modern aspirations and ideas of urban living born in Nehruvian Delhi and cosmopolitan Bombay or Karachi. Works have also been selected because they resonate in the Gulf, as our cities continue to influence each other today, increasingly seeking to build a new Dubai.

Artists featured in the exhibition include Abdul Halik Azeez, Pablo Bartholomew, CAMP, Arthur Crestani, Rajyashri Goody, Madan Mahatta, Umber Majeed, Zahra Malkani and Shahana Rajani, Ram Rahman, Randhir Singh, and Vasantha Yoganathan. These are accompanied by works from the Prabhakar collection by the artists C.K. Rajan, Gigi Scaria, Dayanita Singh and Vivek Vilasini. The exhibition also includes vintage films by the experimental director Pramod Pati.

A concurrent events programme launched with a talk by Rajyashri Goody on September 11, 2019. This will be followed by a curator-led tour with Nada Raza on September 18, 2019.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.

**Ends**

**For press and interview requests for Ishara Art Foundation please contact Shama Nair**

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#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Image Caption:** Installation view of works by Ram Rahman and Vasantha Yoganathan at the exhibition Body Building at the Ishara Art Foundation

#### **Ishara Art Foundation**

Set across two floors of dedicated exhibition space in Alserkal Avenue, Ishara Art Foundation is a new non-profit organization focused on contemporary art from a South Asian context. We have an expansive definition of the region, which includes the diaspora and overlapping histories of the region around India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Given the multiple links to South Asia within the Gulf, our programme is anchored in a regional approach and designed to share compelling artistic perspectives with local and international audiences. Our programme presents new and

established practices through exhibitions and commissions which develop new dialogues and explore regional interconnections. Guided by a research-led approach, Ishara supports the participation of South Asian voices within the lively art, culture and design community of the UAE.

[www.ishara.org](http://www.ishara.org) | [@isharaartfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/isharaartfoundation)

### **Smita Prabhakar, Founder and Chairperson**

Smita Prabhakar is the Founder and Chairperson of the Ishara Art Foundation. She is a successful entrepreneur with a stellar business reputation built over four decades in corporate human resource management in the region. The Ishara Art Foundation is her contribution to the arts and culture in the UAE, a space to share South Asian culture with the local community and diverse international audiences in the MENASA region.

A collector and patron of contemporary art, passionate about its potential to enliven and encourage a deeper understanding of contemporary South Asia, Smita is currently on the Advisory Board of Art Dubai, a member of the South Asian Acquisitions Committee at Tate Modern, London, and is an International Patron of the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, supporting the V.S. Gaitonde exhibition in 2015.

### **Nada Raza, Artistic Director**

Nada Raza is Artistic Director of the Ishara Art Foundation. Raza was previously Research Curator at Tate Research Centre: Asia, with a particular focus on South Asia, and led on Tate activity in the region. She co-curated Bhupen Khakhar: *You Can't Please All* in 2016, awarded Exhibition of the Year 2016 at the India Today awards in New Delhi and at Eastern Eye's Arts, Culture & Theatre Awards in London. Alongside collection building, supervising research and producing public events, she organised displays of work by international artists including Meshac Gaba, Monir Shahrudy Farmanfarmaian, Zarina, Sheela Gowda, Amar Kanwar and Mrinalini Mukherjee. Raza was guest curator of the Abraaj Group Art Prize in 2014 and curated a thematic exhibition, *The Missing One*, for the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh and the Office for Contemporary Art in Norway in 2016. Raza previously worked on international art at the Institute for International Visual Art (Iniva) and at Green Cardamom in London, maintaining close links with the MENASA region. She holds an MA from the Chelsea College of Art and Design and is a doctoral candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art.

### **Alserkal Avenue**

Established in 2008 by Alserkal, Alserkal Avenue is a renowned cultural district of contemporary art galleries, non-profit organisations and homegrown businesses in the Al Quoz industrial area of Dubai. Alserkal Avenue is a vibrant community of visual and performing arts organisations, designers, and artisanal spaces that have become an essential platform for the development of the creative industries in the United Arab Emirates. As one of the region's foremost platforms for contemporary art, Alserkal Avenue provides cultural experiences for local, regional and international audiences. Alserkal Avenue features Concrete, a multi-disciplinary space conceptualised and programmed by Alserkal.

Concrete was inaugurated in 2017 as the first building in the UAE to be completed by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), founded by Rem Koolhaas, and is an adaptable venue whose ability to metamorphose to bring creative visions to life makes it suitable for international, museum-

grade exhibitions as well as events across art, design, fashion and the performing arts. Concrete was shortlisted for the 2019 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

### **About the Artists**

**Abdul Halik Azeez** (1985, lives and works in Colombo, Sri Lanka)

Abdul Halik Azeez's approach to image making embraces the public realms of media and print technology. Jettisoning the materiality of the photograph's traditional quality within the fine arts, he not only experiments with the definition of form and display but also questions the forms art can take. An abiding quality across his practice is his ability to work with the pedestrian and mundane, making images that tell stories about poetic yet moving instances of the violence and truths of the everyday. Halik has worked as a journalist, economist and in the development-sector. He holds an MA in linguistics from the University of Granada and is known for his Instagram account (@colombedouin). Recently his work has been featured at Colomboscope 2019, Verzasca Foto Festival, 52 Artists 52 Actions, The Serendipity Arts Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

**Pablo Bartholomew** (1955, lives and works in New Delhi, India)

Pablo Bartholomew is a self-taught photographer. His photojournalism (1983-2004) has featured in major international publications, thrice winning him the World Press Photo award. Since 2000 he has excavated his five-decade-old photographic archive, evolving exhibitions like *Outside In: A Tale of Three Cities* (2007); *Bombay: Chronicles of a Past Life* (2011); and *The Calcutta Diaries* (2012). He has held over 30 international solo exhibitions. His work is part of prominent collections worldwide. Since 2005 he has revisited his father, Richard Bartholomew's archive. In 2008, he co-conceived the photo book and exhibition *A Critic's Eye*. In 2012, he published *The Art Critic*, a 640-page selection of his father's writing on modern Indian art. He has been awarded the Padma Shri, and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Bartholomew is currently working on his Indian Émigrés series, alongside discovering his Burmese roots by expanding on his DNA-based project, incorporating Indian, Bangladeshi and Burmese weaving traditions.

**CAMP** (Mumbai, India)

CAMP is a collaborative studio set up by Ashok Sukumaran and Shaina Anand in 2007. CAMP's provocative work in video and film, electronic media and public art forms over the past decade have shown how deep technical experimentation and artistic form can meet while extracting new qualities and experiences from contemporary life and materials. Their artistic work has been exhibited internationally, including at film venues such as the Flaherty seminar, the BFI London Film Festival, the Viennale and Anthology Film Archives, and in art contexts such as the Biennials of Liverpool, Sharjah, Kochi-Muziris, Gwangju, Taipei and Shanghai, the Tate Modern, MoMA and Ars Electronica, Documenta 13 in Kassel and Kabul, the Kiemena project at Documenta 14, and the 2017 edition of the Skulptur Projekte Münster. From their home base in Chuim village, Mumbai they run the online archives <https://Pad.ma> and <https://Indiacine.ma>, and the community space R and R, among other activities including their long-running rooftop cinema.

**Arthur Crestani** (1991, lives and works in Paris, France)

Arthur Crestani's photographic work engages with the social, political and aesthetic dimensions of urbanization in France and in India. Stemming from a reading of cities as spectacles, his projects interrogate the visual making of urban spaces. They are developed in reaction to the social, economic and political climates of Paris and Delhi, the two cities he has lived in. Of particular interest to him is the way ambitions, fantasies and utopias project themselves onto the living

environment. Having initially worked with digital photography, he has been exclusively using analogue cameras since 2017 for his personal work. He is currently working on Spéculaires, a long-term project investigating the department of Seine Saint-Denis, in the North of Paris, in the build-up to the 2024 Paris Olympics. His work has been exhibited in France, in Germany and in China.

**Rajyashri Goody** (1990, lives and works in Pune, India)

Rajyashri Goody completed her BA in Sociology at Fergusson College in Pune in 2011, and an MA in Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester, UK, in 2013. Her art practice is informed by her background in the social sciences, as well as her Dalit roots. Through the use of various mediums, including writing, ceramics, photography, and installation, she attempts to decode and make visible instances of everyday power and resistance within Dalit communities in India. At present, she is developing a body of work around narratives of food, eating, and hunger in the Dalit experience, and its relationship with the act of writing and photo documentation. Goody's work has been exhibited in group shows across India, the UK, and the USA, and she has developed her practice through art residencies and fellowships in India, Taiwan, South Korea, Amsterdam, and the USA. In 2018, she was awarded the Emerging Artist of the Year by India Today Art Awards.

**Madan Mahatta** (1932 – 2014. Born in Srinagar, lived and worked in Delhi)

Madan Mahatta (Mehta) was born in 1932 in Srinagar, Kashmir. The Mahatta studios were one of the largest and well-known family-run studios in North India. Madan studied photography in England in the early 1950s, joining the Delhi studio in 1954 and introducing negative-positive colour printing for the first time in India. A prolific photographer with a sharp sense of light and compositional skill, Madan worked across genres — portraiture, dance and theatre as well as industrial and architectural photography. It is for his architectural photographs, chronicling urban development from the 1950s to the 1980s, that he has become best known. Mahatta's photographs present a remarkable record of the building of New Delhi at the height of Nehruvian modernism. He worked closely with two generations of India's modern architects including Achyut Kanvinde, Ajoy Choudhury, Charles Correa, Habib Rahman, Jasbir Sawhney, J.K. Chowdhury, Joseph Allen Stein, Kuldip Singh, Raj Rewal, Ram Sharma, Ranjit Sabhiki and designers Mini Boga and Riten Mozumdar. His photographs of their works are an equal part of the legacy of an important period in Indian modernism.

**Umber Majeed** (born 1989, lives and works in New York, USA)

Umber Majeed is a multidisciplinary visual artist, working in New York and Pakistan. She received her MFA from Parsons School of Design, New York (2016) and graduated from Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan (2013). Majeed has taken part in group exhibitions, including, Promises to Keep, apexart, NY (2017), Witness- Karachi Biennale, Karachi, Pakistan (2017), and Volumes – Queens International, Queens Museum, NY (2018). In October 2018, she had her debut solo exhibition 'In the Name of Hypersurface of the Present' at Rubber Factory, NY. She is the recipient of fellowships including the HWP Fellowship, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, Lebanon (2017), Refiguring Feminist Futures – Web Residency, Akademie Schloss Solitude & ZKM, Germany (2018), and The Digital Earth, Hivos, the Netherlands (2018-19).

**Zahra Malkani and Shahana Rajani** (Karachi, Pakistan)

Zahra Malkani and Shahana Rajani are an artist duo based in Karachi, Pakistan exploring the politics of infrastructure, development and securitization in the rapidly transforming city. Shahana and Zahra are also co-founders of the Karachi LaJamia, an anti-institution seeking to politicise art education and explore new radical pedagogies and art practices. With Abeera Kamran they have a collaborative publishing practice titled Exhausted Geographies. Shahana Rajani is Assistant

Professor at the Liberal Arts program at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and Zahra Malkani is Assistant Professor of Practice at the Communication and Design department at Habib University.

**Pramod Pati** (1932-1975. Born in Odisha, lived in Bombay, India)

After graduating from Utkal University in Odisha, Pramod Pati studied cinematography in Bengaluru and then worked with the Odisha government from 1952 to 1956. Pati was awarded a government fellowship to study puppet animation in Prague, Czechoslovakia where he trained under master animator Jiri Trnka. Upon return, Pati joined the government-run Films Division in Mumbai as the head of animation. Pati experimented with and challenged the formats of educational films, particularly those related to state-sponsored programmes as family planning and literacy. Leaning towards non-linear ways of filmmaking, he was influenced by both Indian and Western cinematic techniques and his shorts are celebrated for their visual wit and cinematographic originality.

**Ram Rahman** (born 1955, lives and works in New Delhi, India)

Photographer, artist, curator, designer and activist Ram Rahman initially studied physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Rahman later completed a degree in Graphic Design from Yale University's School of Art in 1979. His photographs have been exhibited in India and internationally, most recently at The Pompidou Centre, Paris, 2017, Houston Fotofest, 2018, Gwangju Biennale, 2018 and the Chennai PhotoBiennale 2019. Solos include 'Bioscope: Scenes from an Eventful Life' presented by Bodhi Art at Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, in 2008. Rahman has curated several exhibitions including 'Delhi – Building the Modern' at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi, 2017, 'Sunil Janah Vintage Photographs' at the NGMA, Mumbai, October 2015, 'Delhi Modern: The Architectural Photographs of Madan Mahatta' at Photoink, Delhi, in 2012, 'Heat – Moving Pictures Visions, Phantasms and Nightmares' at Bose Pacia, New York, in 2003; and 'Sunil Janah Photographs, A Retrospective' at Gallery 678, New York, in 1998. Rahman is one of the founding members of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT) in New Delhi, a leader in the resistance to communal and sectarian forces in India through its public cultural action. He co-curated the Sahmat retrospective exhibition which opened at the Smart Museum, University of Chicago in February 2013.

**C.K. Rajan** (1960, Born in Kerala, lives and works in Hyderabad, India)

C.K. Rajan was a member of the Kerala Radical group that emerged at the University of Baroda in the 1980s, with a manifesto to challenge both the status quo within the Indian art world and the Indian political system. Rajan originally trained as a painter. After the group's disintegration in the late 1980s, he devoted himself both to sculptural works, inspired by pop art, and to a comprehensive series of collages. Rajan continues his political concerns in these works, but in a way that smartly manages to circumvent an explicitly didactic approach. Globalisation had a big impact on India and brought political and economic changes. Rajan tries to find visual equivalents for the social unrest that makes itself felt, but is disguised as the creation of a 'new middle class'. He balances between critical and socially engaged assemblage and surrealist influences. His works have shown in solo exhibitions in Mumbai, and internationally at Documenta 12 in 2007. Works from the *Mild Terrors* series are in the collection of the Tate Modern in the UK.

**Gigi Scaria** (1973, Born in Kerala, lives and works in New Delhi, India)

Gigi Scaria first studied in Kerala, then completed an MA at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. Scaria's work responds to growing urbanism, particularly in Indian cities. His architectural sculptures, videos, photographs and paintings express alienation and unease in relation to the expansion of the built environment. Scaria received early acclaim and his work has shown widely, most notably at

Videospace Budapest and in the National Art Studio in Korea in 2008, in Shanghai in a collaborative Indo-Chinese exhibition in 2010, at the Singapore Biennial, the Prague Biennial and in the India Pavilion in Venice in 2011, in Australia and New Zealand in 2012, where he became a fellow at the University of Melbourne, at the Smart Museum in Chicago in 2013, and at the Kochi Muziris Biennale in 2014. He exhibited at Laumeier Sculpture Park and the Adam Aronson Fine Art Center in St. Louis in 2016, and at the Jameson Gallery at Duke University in 2017.

**Dayanita Singh** (born 1961, and lives in New Delhi, India)

Dayanita Singh studied Visual Communication at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad and Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the International Center of Photography in New York. Recent exhibitions include: The 57th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2018; Museum Bhavan, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo, 2017 and Suitcase Museum, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, 2016. Recent awards include the 2018 International Center of Photography Infinity Award, Artist's Book for Museum Bhavan and the 2017 Paris Photo-Aperture Foundation PhotoBook Awards, PhotoBook of the Year for Museum Bhavan. Singh will have a solo exhibition at Frith Street Gallery, London in September 2019.

**Randhir Singh** (1976, born and lives in New Delhi, India)

Randhir Singh received his Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Science degrees from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York in 1999. He spent fifteen years working with architecture and design firms while taking photography classes at the International Center of Photography in New York. Singh's practice draws on his education as an architect with a focus on issues related to architecture and urbanism. Singh's series exploring industrial architecture and the urban landscape, *Water Towers*, was shown at the Pondy Photo Festival in 2016. His Yamuna River Project book was recently awarded the Deutsches Architekturmuseum Architecture Book award for 2018. Over the last four years, Randhir has photographed government housing colonies in Delhi. A selection of photographs from the on-going project, *CPWD* (Central Public Works Department), *CPWD* was exhibited as a part of *When is Space?* at the Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur in 2018. He also collaborates with the artist Seher Shah on a number of projects involving photography, architecture and drawing. Their recent project, *Studies in Form* was shown as a part of *Bearing Points* at the Dhaka Art Summit 2018 and at the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai in 2019.

**Vivek Vilasini** (1964, born in Kerala and lives in Bangalore, India)

Vivek Vilasini trained as a Radio Officer at All India Marine College, Kerala and then went on to study political science (1987) from the university of Kerala. He trained in sculptural practices from traditional craftsmen, and went on to become an artist who works across digital and sculptural media, with a particular interest in structures of knowledge, politics and identity. More recently, interested in resilience and climate change, he has planted a forest in Munnar, a lab for growing varieties of food adapted to the changing environment. Vilasini was part of a group of transnational artists gathered in the UAE in the 1990s, and his work was included in the exhibition *But We Cannot See Them* at the NYU AT Art Gallery in 2017. His works have shown at the first Montevideo Biennale, inaugural Kochi Muziris Biennale, Prague Biennale, ARCO Madrid, MOCA-Shanghai, CCCB-Barcelona, Spain, Chicago Art Fair, Newark Museum, Sharjah Museum, Sharjah Biennial 2007 and 2009, and the Indian Highway show which travelled to many museums around the world.

**Vasantha Yoganathan** (born 1985, Grenoble, lives and works in Paris, France)

Vasantha Yoganathan's photographic practice addresses the space between documentary and fiction. His projects are developed over long periods of time and he only works analog – with both

large-format 4x5 and medium-format 6x7 cameras. Besides the aesthetic, he is deeply attached to film photography for its slow – almost philosophical – process. Some of the current series of works are made through a process of collaboration with **Jaykumar Shankar** in Delhi, who translates Yoganathan's black and white photographs into imaginative, often surreal colour based on his skill and training in hand-tinting photographs. Yoganathan has received several awards, among which the IdeasTap Magnum Photos Award (2015), The Prix Levallois (2016) and an ICP Infinity Award as Emerging Photographer of the Year (2017). That same year he was also selected among the 20 FOAM Talents.