

Ishara Art Foundation and The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery present pivotal works by Amar Kanwar to UAE audiences

Such a Morning is showing at Ishara Art Foundation in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai,
until May 20, 2020

The Sovereign Forest is showing at The NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery in Abu Dhabi until
May 30, 2020

United Arab Emirates (UAE), January 23, 2020: Ishara Art Foundation and The NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery have opened exhibitions featuring solo projects by critically acclaimed contemporary artist Amar Kanwar. This parallel presentation across two institutions is a unique opportunity to explore Kanwar's artistic practice in depth through compelling multi-media installations.

Ishara Art Foundation, is a non-profit institution dedicated to contemporary art from South Asia, and will showcase *Such a Morning* (2017) until May 20, while **The NYUAD Art Gallery**, the University's academic museum-gallery, is showing *The Sovereign Forest* (2011) until May 30.

Chairperson at Ishara Art Foundation, Smita Prabhakar, comments: "At Ishara Art Foundation we are committed to enriching the cultural sphere in the UAE, with insightful contemporary works of global relevance. *Such a Morning* is a powerful work by Kanwar that continues his exploration of complex issues with masterful use of moving image and text. We are thrilled to collaborate with The NYUAD Art Gallery on this exhibition, allowing both our organisations to make extraordinary works by a leading contemporary artist accessible to UAE audiences."

Chief Curator at NYU Abu Dhabi and Executive Director of The NYUAD Art Gallery, Maya Allison, comments: "The subject matter of both projects is complex, framed within deeply beautiful studies of their worlds. Presenting these two projects in parallel puts them into dialogue, and allows us to reflect on the underlying themes that drive Amar Kanwar's work. In *The Sovereign Forest*, his ongoing, collaborative project documents a scene of crime, using meditative, poetic films and installations that raise more questions than are resolved. The more recent *Such a Morning* features a quest to understand the nature of the many darkneses in the world. Together, the two projects offer a kind of call and response, along the themes of crime and grieving, and injustice and compassion, exploring new positions from which to respond."

Searching for a way to re-comprehend the difficult times we are living in, **Artist, Amar Kanwar**, asks: "What is it that lies beyond, when all arguments are done with? How to reconfigure and respond again?"

About *Such a Morning* at Ishara Art Foundation

Such a Morning (2017) is a feature-length film installation, which premiered at documenta 14 in Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany and will be screened in the UAE for the first time. The fictional narrative follows two central characters who grapple with a hallucinatory world, a modern parable for the complex challenges of our times.

The film follows an aging mathematics professor who retreats from his career, seeking isolation in an abandoned train carriage. The many iterations and sensory possibilities of darkness and visibility are explored as he gradually screens out all the light and enters a subjective world. A defiant female character in a hilltop home emerges within the course of the film, providing a compelling counter-narrative. Meanwhile, the professor records his epiphanies and visions in an almanac of the dark, an examination of 49 types of darkness that emerge as a series of letters, which are exhibited alongside the film.

Kanwar has conceived a narrative that extends beyond the film as the professor continues to develop a research project with diverse artistic, pedagogic, metaphysical, and political collaborations. These become the rubric for a continuing project, and are at the core of the series of *Letters* that accompany the film. The paper for *Letters* was hand-made by Sherna Dastur at the Nirupama Academy of Handmade Paper, Kolkata, India.

The seven *Letters* contain texts, 17 video projections, and 45 light projections. The train coach built for the film remains in Delhi, a memorial for the teacher who refused to conform, who stepped off the tracks, and wandered into the wild. The themes of survival and perseverance are deep sources to draw on, resulting in a thought-provoking and compelling presentation. *Such a Morning* offers a rich lens for audiences to contemplate these core themes, focusing on issues relevant to global audiences today.

Such a Morning was edited by Sameera Jain, with cinematography by Dilip Varma, additional cinematography by Ranjan Palit, sound recording by Suresh Rajamani, additional sound recording by Julius Basaiawmoi and design by Sherna Dastur.

The film *Such a Morning* is produced with the support of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Marian Goodman Gallery and Amar Kanwar Film Productions.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.

Ishara Art Foundation is supported by the Rivoli Group.

About *The Sovereign Forest* at The NYUAD Art Gallery

The Sovereign Forest at The NYUAD Art Gallery is an ongoing multimedia installation that is a creative response to crime, politics, human rights, and ecological crisis. It evolved out of the political and environmental conflict in the resource-rich, and largely tribal Indian state of Odisha. Kanwar has been following the industrial interventions that have irrevocably altered Odisha's landscape for more than a decade. *The Sovereign Forest* is a long-term collaboration of the artist with media activist Sudhir Pattnaik, and designer and filmmaker Sherna Dastur.

The Sovereign Forest is inspired by a search for the possible answers to the following questions: How to understand crime and the conflict around us? Who defines evidence? Can "poetry" be used as "evidence" in a trial? How do we see, know, understand, and remember disappearances? How to look again?

Multiple works make up *The Sovereign Forest*, which has appeared in different iterations. At its core are two films: *The Scene of Crime* (2011) and *A Love Story* (2010). The first is a film about landscapes just prior to their obliteration. Almost every image in this film lies within specific territories that are proposed industrial sites and are in the process of being acquired by government and corporations in Odisha, India. The second is about the experience of that

loss. The installation will include three large handmade books, *The Counting Sisters and Other Stories* (2011), *The Prediction* (1991–2012), and *The Constitution* (2012) with their own films projected on its pages. Containing fables, stories of the incarcerated, and pieces of “evidence” such as a fishing net, a cloth garment, rice seeds, a betel leaf, and newspaper embedded inside the paper. In many ways, *The Sovereign Forest* expands upon a theme that has become central to The NYUAD Art Gallery’s program offering: that of landscape as a frame for reflection and examination of where we are, both culturally and physically.

The Sovereign Forest's two films, *The Scene of Crime* and *A Love Story*, were edited by Sameera Jain with cinematography by Dilip Varma. The exhibition design, book design, and paper making were all executed by Sherna Dastur. It was produced with the support of Samadrusti, Odisha; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK; documenta 13, Kassel; and Public Press, New Delhi.

The NYUAD Art Gallery will present a series of public programmes exploring the rich web of themes within *The Sovereign Forest* -- evidence, invisibility, injustice, and disappearance. Featuring screenings, discussion sessions, and artist-led outings, the events will invite participants to confront these issues and embark on a journey of self-discovery. The full programme and registration details are available from nyuad-gallery.org.

Image 1: Amar Kanwar, *Such a Morning*. Installation views: Amar Kanwar: *Such a Morning*. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2018. Photos: Cathy Carver.

Image 2: Detail from Amar Kanwar, “*The Sovereign Forest*” (2012-2017). Photo: John Varghese, courtesy of The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery.

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For more information about Ishara Art Foundation or The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

About Amar Kanwar

<http://amarkanwar.com/>

Amar Kanwar is an artist and filmmaker who lives and works in New Delhi.

Recent solo exhibitions have been at Museo Nacional Thyssen- Bornemisza, Madrid and Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris (2019), Tate Modern, London (2018), Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden (2017), Goethe Institut Mumbai and NTU CCA Singapore (2016), Assam State Museum,

India (2015). In 2013-14 at the Art Institute of Chicago; Yorkshire Sculpture Park; TBA 21, Vienna and at Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2012). Other solo exhibitions have been at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2007), National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (2006) and the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2004). Kanwar has also participated in documenta 11, 12, 13, and 14 in Kassel, Germany (2002, 2007, 2012, 2017).

Kanwar has been the recipient of awards such as the Prince Claus Award (2017), Annenberg / Creative Time Prize for Art and Social Change (2014), Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Maine College of Art, USA (2006), Edvard Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway (2005), Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival, USA (1999), Golden Conch, Mumbai International Film Festival, India (1998).

About Ishara Art Foundation

www.ishara.org

Ishara Art Foundation is a non-profit organisation focused on contemporary art from South Asia. Ishara has an expansive definition of the region, which includes the diaspora and overlapping histories of the region around India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The programme presents new and established practices through exhibitions and commissions which develop 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.

@isharaartfoundation

About Alserkal Avenue

www.alserkalavenue.ae

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 NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery

www.nyuad-artgallery.org

The NYUAD Art Gallery is an academic museum-gallery that presents work by internationally-established artists, curators, and scholars, to serve the intellectual and creative dialogue among the university and wider communities, via topics of regional relevance and international significance. The platform supports scholarly and experimental installations,

artists' projects, guest curators, and landmark exhibitions, with an emphasis on projects that engage the uniquely non-commercial, experimental, and scholarly role of a University.
@nyuadartgallery

About NYU Abu Dhabi

www.nyuad.nyu.edu

NYU Abu Dhabi is the first comprehensive liberal arts and science campus in the Middle East to be operated abroad by a major American research university. NYU Abu Dhabi has integrated a highly-selective liberal arts, engineering and science curriculum with a world center for advanced research and scholarship enabling its students to succeed in an increasingly interdependent world and advance cooperation and progress on humanity's shared challenges. NYU Abu Dhabi's high-achieving students have come from 115 nations and speak over 115 languages. Together, NYU's campuses in New York, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai form the backbone of a unique global university, giving faculty and students opportunities to experience varied learning environments and immersion in other cultures at one or more of the numerous study-abroad sites NYU maintains on six continents.