

Press Release Date: 2 January 2020

Growing Like A Tree opens at Ishara Art Foundation

Ishara Art Foundation is pleased to present *Growing Like A Tree* curated by Sohrab Hura, an exhibition that looks at regional histories of image-making through a visual and sonic excavation of place, memory and culture.



Sean Lee, from the series *Two People*, 2009.

Exhibition Dates: January 20, 2021 - May 20, 2021

- *Growing Like A Tree* is an exhibition curated by Sohrab Hura, marking his first curatorial project as an artist.
- This exhibition features works by 14 artists and collectives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Germany, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Singapore.
- The exhibition presents a glimpse into the collective journeys of artists through their artistic and political affinities.
- The exhibition considers photography as a locus in an expanded field of practices that includes videos, books and sound installations.
- The Ishara Art Foundation is the first permanent space in the Gulf dedicated to South Asian contemporary art and is located in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai.
- The non-profit is founded and supported by Dubai resident, collector and patron, Smita Prabhakar.

PRESS NOTE

Growing Like A Tree represents many firsts for the Ishara Art Foundation. This exhibition marks Sohrab Hura's inaugural curatorial project as a photographer and filmmaker along with the presentation of several artists and collectives never before shown institutionally in a regional and international context. The exhibition will be on view at Ishara Art Foundation from 20 January 2021 to 20 May 2021.

Hura's individual and collective journeys through photography and moving image over the years have presented both a form of rooting and uprooting of places as markers of identity. Through this exhibition, he maps a network of past and present collaborators with 14 artists and collectives from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Germany, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Singapore, seeking to expand the framework of boundaries set out by the geographical context of South Asia. Together they create a space where multiple voices and experiences are brought into dialogue with one another, capturing dualities in which organic growth is matched with resource extraction, the archival is juxtaposed with the contemporary, and the magic of the mundane is seen through children's eyes.

Referencing the interconnected spheres of contemporary artistic practice, this show considers photography as a locus in an expanded field of art that includes videos, books and sound installations. In Hura's own words, "What I've been seeing over the years are collective flows in terms of movement and exchange of photographers across political, geographical and cultural boundaries. An osmosis-like relationship with photographers across borders has started to seep through with each one searching for new ways to grow as artists and having at stake something in common that is far more urgent than photography."

The artists represented in this exhibition tackle themes of changing cities, collective memory, the environment, public spaces and the archive through works that sit at the intersection of documentary and fiction, image and object. The notion of what forms a community emerges in this show as demonstrated in Sean Lee's photo-montage where fingers rise from the soil like a forest of saplings.

The ensemble of artists and collectives in the exhibition includes Aishwarya Arumbakkam, Anjali House, Bunu Dhungana, Farah Mulla, Jaisingh Nageswaran, Katrin Koenning, Munem Wasif, Nida Mehboob, Nepal Picture Library, Reetu Sattar, Sarker Protick, Sathish Kumar, Sean Lee, and Yu Yu Myint Than, along with site-specific interventions by Sohrab Hura.

Growing Like A Tree will be accompanied by physical and virtual tours, educational and public online programmes, newly commissioned artist texts and artist conversations over the duration of the show.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.

Ends

For press and interview requests for Ishara Art Foundation please contact
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NOTES TO EDITORS

Ishara Art Foundation

Ishara Art Foundation was founded in 2019 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to presenting contemporary art of South Asia. Located in Dubai, the Foundation supports emerging and established practices that advance critical dialogue and explore global interconnections.

Guided by a research-led approach, Ishara realises its mission through exhibitions, onsite and online programmes, education initiatives and collaborations in the UAE and internationally. The Foundation facilitates exchange between South Asian and international artistic networks that include museums, foundations, institutions, galleries and individuals.

The Ishara logo, a synthesis of a square and circle, is based on an ideogram by Zarina to convey the word 'آسمان' ('Aasman'), sky. It forms one of 36 images from 'Home is a Foreign Place' (1999), a work in the collection of Ishara's Founder and Chairperson, Smita Prabhakar. Ishara signifies a gesture, a signal or a hint, and is a word common to several languages including Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Swahili and Urdu.

W: www.ishara.org | Social Media: @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.

Sabih Ahmed, Associate Director and Curator

Sabih Ahmed is the Associate Director and Curator at Ishara Art Foundation in Dubai. His curatorial work and research focus on modern and contemporary art of South Asia through diverse itineraries, languages, and inter-disciplinary formations. Prior to joining Ishara, Ahmed was a Senior Researcher and Projects Manager at Asia Art Archive from 2009 to 2019. Ahmed is currently on the Advisory Board of Sher-Gil Sundaram Arts Foundation, Delhi and his writings have been published in various international magazines and publications.

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.

About the Curator

Sohrab Hura (b.1981) is a photographer and filmmaker. His recent exhibitions include Companion Pieces: New Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organised by Lucy Gallun, Searching for Stars Amongst the Crescents, Experimenter, Videonale, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, curated by Devika Singh, Kettle's Yard, Eyes Wild Open: Life is Elsewhere, Le Botanique, Sweet Life, Experimenter, the 11th Shanghai Biennale curated by Raqs Media Collective, among others. Hura's work has been widely shown in international film festivals and was awarded the 2020 Principal Prize of the International Jury at the 66th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen Online for Bittersweet and The Paris Photo-Aperture PhotoBook of the Year Award for The Coast in 2019. His work can be found in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, Ishara Art Foundation, the Cincinnati Art Museum and other private and public collections. Hura lives and works in New Delhi, India.
Website: <https://www.sohrabhura.com/>

About the Artists

Aishwarya Arumbakkam (b.1988) is an artist from Chennai, India, currently based in Austin, Texas. Arumbakkam works across multiple media including photography, filmmaking and drawing. Her work is centred on cultural narratives and identity, and finds expression in mythological and personal narratives. She has exhibited her works in India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, China and the U.K. In 2020, she was awarded the Magnum Foundation Photography and Social Justice Fellowship. She was selected as one of the 'Ones to Watch' by the British Journal of Photography in 2019. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Studio Art at The University of Texas, Austin.
Website: <https://www.aishwarya-arumbakkam.com/>

Anjali House – The Sanskrit word *anjali* translates to 'offerings' in English. Anjali House is a house of offerings for over 200 children from poor families in Siem Reap, Cambodia. A locally registered non-profit organisation, Anjali House began as a project of the Angkor Photo Association through its photography workshops for children and is a sustainable, transparent charity providing a safe space for children so that their parents can work, and enabling every child to access the same educational opportunities as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds through its various programmes.

Bunu Dhungana (b.1981) is an artist based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She uses photography as a medium to explore and question the world around her. Her background in sociology informs her photographic work, questioning notions of gender and patriarchy. While her personal projects centre around gender, she has worked in a wide range of fields from visual ethnography, NGO/INGO work, to commercial and journalistic work. Her work has been exhibited in Photo Kathmandu, Dali International Photo Exhibition, KunstKasten, Serendipity Arts Festival, and Mannheimer Kunstverein. She is associated with photo.circle and Nepal Picture Library

in Kathmandu and is currently doing her fellowship at The Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University.

Website: <https://bunudhungana.com/>

Farah Mulla (b.1988) is a multimedia artist based in Mumbai, India. Her background in science overlaps with her art practice to explore the perception of sound and its effects on human neurology and subjectivity. Her current research experiments with sensory overlaps and materiality through different texts, sounds, and circuits. Mulla completed her MFA from the Cambridge School of Arts, U.K. Her works have been exhibited in solo exhibitions in Mumbai at Jehangir Art Gallery and Zenzi. Her participation in group shows include Sakshi Gallery, Ruskin Gallery, Changing Spaces (Ark). Mulla was a part of the Dharti Arts Residency and has presented her work at the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa.

Website: <https://farahmulla.wixsite.com/farah-mulla/about>

Jaisingh Nageswaran (b.1978) is a self-taught photographer from Madurai, India. Born dyslexic to working class parents, he was taught by his grandmother at home, and went on to do his Masters in Mass Communication. Jaisingh Nageswaran's practice revolves around documenting socially vulnerable communities in India, issues of rural life and his family. He is a grantee of the Serendipity Arts Foundation and Les Rencontres d'Arles grant, has won a prize at the 9th "Rencontres Cinématographiques de Cerbère-Portbou" in France, and his work has been presented at 'Then the Night of the Year' at Photo Phnom Penh. He is an active member of two artist collectives, 13JARA and Guldasta, and also works as a photographer doing stills for films.

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/jaisingh_na/?hl=en

Katrin Koening (b. 1978) is an artist from the German Ruhrgebiet, currently based in Naarm, Melbourne, Australia. Situated in documentary, her work explores stories and experiences through an engagement with the everyday. Koening's photographs have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions that include Centre for Contemporary Photography, Paris Photo, Chobi Mela, Peckham 24, Chennai Photo Biennale, Australian Centre for Photography. She is a recipient of the Bowness Photography Prize and The Daylight Award. Her work is published in The New Yorker, The New York Times, British Journal of Photography, The Guardian and Der Spiegel. Koening's regularly teaches workshop intensives in photographic practice and thinking. She is represented by ReadingRoom Melbourne.

Website: <https://www.katrinkoenning.com/>

Munem Wasif (b. 1983) is a photographer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His photography and films investigate complex social and political issues with a humanistic language, by getting close to the people, both physically and psychologically, and dealing with multiple questions and contradictions. He was one of the curators of Chobi Mela VIII – X International Festival of Photography. His last book on Old Dhaka was published by Clémentine de la Féronnière. He has had exhibitions worldwide including Centre Pompidou, Whitechapel Gallery, Kettle's Yard, Victoria & Albert Museum, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Para Site, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Gwangju Biennale, Singapore Biennale, Sharjah Biennial, Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, the Dhaka Art Summit and Chobi Mela.

Website: <http://www.munemwasif.com/>

Nepal Picture Library (NPL) is a digital photo archive run by photo.circle that strives to create a broad and inclusive visual archive of Nepali social and cultural history. Since its inception, NPL has collected over 120,000 photographs from various private and organizational sources across Nepal. The archive serves as a safe and open repository for materials that can secure a multicultural and pluralist representation of Nepali history. It also functions as a medium for active public engagement through which Nepali people can deepen meaningful connections with the past. NPL has created a network of professionals with an interest or specialized knowledge in various museum, design, academic, publishing and artistic disciplines.

Website: <https://www.nepalpicturelibrary.org/>

Nida Mehboob (b.1985) is a photographer and filmmaker based in Lahore, Pakistan. She graduated as a pharmacist and went on to pursue photography. Her topics of interest include themes of social injustice varying from religious and gender discrimination in Pakistan. Through her documentary work, she has been invited to several international workshops and received fellowships over the years including a one-year long filmmaking workshop by Goethe-Institut, Angkor Photo Workshop and Social Justice Fellowship by Magnum Foundation. Mehboob attained a diploma in photography from Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, Bangladesh. Her short films have screened at international festivals including Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland.

Website: <http://www.nidamehboob.com/>

Reetu Sattar (b.1981) works between Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Berlin, Germany, with an interdisciplinary practice that encompasses live performance, documentation and objects as archival memories in an effort to re-examine history and human perception. Her work has been presented at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Liverpool Biennial, Dhaka Art Summit, the British Film Institute, Alserkai Avenue, Artspace and Palais de Tokyo. Her performances have been staged internationally at venues in London, Birmingham, Bangkok and Goa. Sattar's performance installation programmed in Spring 2020 was presented at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Website: <https://reetusattar.com/>

Sarker Protick (b. 1986) is a photographer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His practice combines the roles of an image-maker, a teacher and a curator. Protick is interested in themes such as altering of lands and borders, colonial relics and contemporary ecological emergencies. He is the recipient of Light Work Residency, Magnum Foundation Fund and the World Press Photo Award. His work has been exhibited in museums, galleries and festivals including Yokohama Triennale, Triennale der Photographie Hamburg, Paris Photo, Singapore Art Week, Riga Photography Biennial, Dhaka Art Summit and Art Dubai. Sarker Protick is a faculty member of Pathshala South Asian Media Institute and co-curator of the upcoming Chobi Mela International Festival of Photography 2021.

Website: <https://sarkerprotick.com/>

Sathish Kumar (b.1986) is a freelance photographer based in Chennai, India. A large part of his school vacations growing up were spent at his uncle's photo studio, which became an inspiration for him to pursue photography. With his photography, he records everyday reality, all his encounters and journeys that create an expression of himself, of his life and of the world around him.

Website: <https://sathishphoto.com/>

Sean Lee (b.1985) grew up in Singapore. His first body of work *Shauna* made between 2007 and 2009 was nominated for the Prix Découverte on the 40th anniversary of Arles Photography Festival. Since then, Sean has gone on to make other stories through the medium of photography. His ongoing work, *Two People*, received the 2011 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu award. Much of Lee's work can be found in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum. Lee's first book, *'Shauna'*, was released in September 2014. It was collected by the Library of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Website: <https://www.seanleephoto.com/#1>

Yu Yu Myint Than (b.1984) is a photographer based in Yangon, Myanmar. Her work focuses on personal photo documentaries. She works with Myanmar Deitta, a non-profit organization which develops resources for photographers and filmmakers in Myanmar, and is one of the founding members of Thuma women's photography collective. She has won several international scholarships and fellowships such as the Magnum Foundation Photography and Social Justice Fellowship. Her ongoing work *Living Statues* was recently shortlisted for Serendipity Arles Grant 2020. Than is keenly interested in photobook making as another layer of storytelling besides taking photographs. She self-published her debut photobook *'Memory Lane'* in 2017.

Website: <https://yuyuphotography.wordpress.com/>