



Vakratunda Swaha, 2010

## IN THE MOOD FOR LIGHT

*Apeejay Arts is a dynamic space that 'brings to light' a variety of artworks and atmosphere; a case in point being Samar Jodha's stunning exhibition, 'Outpost', handsomely lit by Jatinder Marwaha. Georgina Maddox takes us through the space, and the exhibit, defining an experience par excellence.*

To visit Apeejay Arts you have to set aside at least half a day, given that it is located on the cusp of Delhi and Faridabad. Attracting viewers with the big 'A' logo, lit up by Neon lights, Apeejay Arts was founded by Priti Paul and the Apeejay Surrendra Group. It was dedicated to New Media and was the first of its kind when it opened in 2005. Perhaps it was before its time, because the gallery soon shut down. It was renovated and re-opened, after a period of almost ten years. By then the art frat had access to spaces like the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) and were better aware of international trends having seen a lot of art fairs both nationally and internationally. Which is why when Apeejay Arts returned it had its work cut out for it. "India was colliding with change and we realized our space would have to be more dynamic, it would have to evolve into something more than the free-flowing space it used to be," says Paul over the telephone from England. Paul rolled her sleeves up and got hands on with the renovation, consulting with many distinguished architects, designers

and lighting technicians to create a space that could adapt to any exhibition. The renovated Apeejay Arts complex can now showcase cutting edge multimedia art, from video work, installations, performance photography and photo-sculptures. The gallery space is complemented by an Artist Lounge, Oxford Bookstore, a 'Cha Bar' serving fine boutique teas, an outdoor performance space, a dedicated children's activity space, a sculpture courtyard, Artist Residencies and a full-fledged Resource Centre, charged with technology and information. Above all the extra facilities, the state of the art galleries, on the rooftop, ground floor and basement—equipped with special lighting—have participating artists excited. "While creating the new gallery spaces we made sure that the lighting could be adapted to any exhibition, which is why each gallery is equipped with a massive grid so that lights could be moved around to suite a variety of situations. Besides the ambient light which is mostly white, we also have yellow posts and dimmers," says Paul.

The opening exhibition titled 'Carnival of Dissent' utilized the gallery and the surrounding lobby area, some of the works becoming permanent exhibits. It featured a group show of young generation Indian and international artists, and filmmakers who position themselves between political activism and creative practice. Next a solo exhibition by artist/photographer Samar Jodha followed, and he utilized all three spaces - the main gallery, the rooftop, as well as the basement, which otherwise is used as employee parking. Jodha's exhibition titled 'Outpost;' was a tribute to coal mine workers in the North-East, and his approach to light this artwork was evocative and experiential. Architect and lighting designer Jatinder Marwaha, was instrumental in creating the mood through low-key lighting in the basement with power lamps used for architectural buildings; spot lights used in cinema and theatre on the terrace and rooftop; and LED lighting in the gallery, where he used only 10 percent of the lights



Katho Upanishad, 2011



Scooters with LCD Screens painted by multiple artists



Carnival of Dissent

available, to create a more intimate viewing. To go back to the genesis of 'Outpost,' Jodha had visited the North-East and documented the dwellings of the coal mine workers as a photographer in the 1990s. He was fascinated by their thrift and innovation where the hammered corrugated sheets of tar barrels were used to build their homes. Ten years later after he quit advertising and devoted his entire time to being a fine art photographer and installation artist, Jodha revisited the photographs. "By this time I had moved into a different sphere and was making art that was interactive and beyond simple photography. What I wanted to do with Outpost was to create an experiential and immersive environment where the images became photo-sculptures," says Jodha who printed the earlier images on mild steel and precious metals like copper and brass, salvaged from a dockyard in Mumbai. To evoke the worn out metal textures of his Arunachal experience, Jodha worked on the metal with lime and copper wire, polishing and creating a distressed texture, before printing the images upon it. The photographs and metallic sheets came together organically, evoking the texture of the worn metal surface, the graffiti and tar stained metal rusted with time and exposure to the elements. The works were mounted in a variety of ways— one extremely evocative way was an assemblage of metal strips that resembled the human spine—like human carcasses stripped of their flesh.



Lighting these photo-sculptures, in relation to the space was a particularly important part of the work. For the basement gallery, Jodha wanted to evoke the airless, low lighting conditions that coal miners work in. Hemp bags with coal were left around, along with a strong smell of coal and with burnt engine oil. The walls were painted black and a sound piece captured the constant drip of water. The works were then hung in dim light resembling the acetylene gas miner's lamp that barely allowed viewers to discern their contours. Torches were also provided as one went down to the basement and the viewer was encouraged to 'discover' the work, much in the manner coalmine workers find their way in the tunnels of the earth. "My approach was to bring in the ambience of where the concept was coming from. The brief I had given Jatinder, who I really enjoyed working with was to recreate a similar experience like the Venice Biennale (2013) showing of 'Outpost.' In the basement particularly, I wanted the viewer to not just get into a mining experience, but also with the feeling of uneasiness and uncomfortable environment they work in, since the 'spines' were not all well lit up, they evoked a sense of mystery and a journey of self discovery," says Jodha.

Marwaha, with over three decades of experience in photography, design and lighting, has distinguished himself in the field. "Most galleries do not care as much about lighting as they should, they use harmful Ultra Violet light. However, when Samar approached me to light-up his work, Apeejay Arts was most cooperative about acquiring special lights for the exhibition," says Marwaha who took over four days just to get the lighting right. "While the gallery on the ground floor was pretty conventional with LED lights, we wanted the roof top lighting to have lots of theatrics, which is why I used the Fresnel spots," says Marwaha who treated each artwork as if it were an actor in a play. The dark tones of the works were teased out beautifully by this dramatic lighting and the effect was quite different from the experience in the basement. While the latter created an atmosphere of pathos and empathy the former lionized the coal mine workers in pure aesthetic terms. "I felt really stimulated to work with Samar," concludes Marwaha who continues to spread awareness about the importance and potential of lighting, while Apeejay Arts remains committed to their mission to create a dynamic, playful and innovative space where artists and light designers like Jodha and Marwaha can continue to create hair-raising experiences for art viewers across the metropolis.

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#### SAMAR SAYS...

The main gallery space on the ground floor is a large open space draped in white; white vinyl flooring, white painted walls and a flat white ceiling fitted with a white metal grid. Taking advantage of the available space, Jodha's panels were displayed luxuriously against the stark emptiness of the room. "Here each panel had its own space and was displayed in isolation without competing with any other panel. Here we showcased Precious Metal, brass and copper."

The terrace above offered its own character, exposed concrete and steel, and with unfinished walls framed between weather beaten structures. "This space was most appropriate for the mild steel panels, catering to more of a post industrial or factory kind of sensibility. In the nighttime we wanted very dim but warm light, and only on the panels. The beams and other space was going to be lit up separately, but the metro station lights came to our rescue to give that dirty yellow lighting, and the light pollution from the streets gave us the perfect setting." The final experience was yet another adventure. Walking into a dark basement with flashlights to discover the staircase and floor covered in burnt engine oil, doused in the smell of charcoal, one was involuntarily transported into the mysterious realm of a mine. "Once inside, you see the spine panels, which were more like a metaphoric experience of human lives permanently destined to hang from the ceiling. This was very dark work and the idea was to make the audience feel uneasy within the space. I had recorded sounds of the rain in the North East mines, and we brought this into the experience as well. Slow droplets beading down, almost like Chinese torture. The attempt was to make people feel the emptiness and not be able to connect to the reality of the world above. The works were very dimly lit and created long shadows of the spines on the floor."