



ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

The theme for this issue arrived with Norwegian-British documentary film-maker Deeyah Khan's 'White Right: Meeting the Enemy'. The film, which traces the rise of white fundamentalism, has some disturbing interviews with neo-Nazis as Khan asks quite simply 'I am a woman of colour, I am the daughter of immigrants, I am a Muslim, I am a feminist, I am a lefty liberal, and what I want to ask you is, am I your enemy?' By the end of the film, you are surprised and overwhelmed with how a simple act of crossing the divide with no judgement, no prejudice or bias or expectation, and by purely listening with the need to understand, change begins.

We knew instantly this was what our theme should be this issue: Of humanising divisions that by virtue of their separateness allow us to build bridges. It was a hard issue to work on because it meant meeting head-on the divisions in our minds, in our cultural contexts, our social-political realities and questioning the parts that make us individuals without leeching the individuality of the other. We had a heightened sense of awareness and consciousness while putting this issue together, but, as always, the magazine took a life of its own, choosing the stories it wanted to tell. (For instance, despite several e-mails to Deeyah Khan, the interview we wanted never happened. But the magazine, smug in its all-knowing avatar, continued nonetheless. Sore point, obviously, for me.)

But the stories that did make this issue are each mini revelations of what deep convictions can do and undo, of what art can create and destroy, and how ideas, simple in texture, can have profound implications. And, how, everything begins with a question.

How will we cross the ocean? We will build a bridge of stones...oops, sorry, wrong example, clearly, for the statuesque times we live in.



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Cover Artist



The original photograph used for the cover



Whenever my father travelled on work, *Amma ji*, our old landlady, would taunt my mother, '*Ghiya ji ki bahu, mero miyo ghar nahi, mujhe kisi ko dar nahi*'. It literally translates to – 'I fear nothing, because my man is not home'. When the men were at work, the women were free to do as they pleased. They could step out, meet up with friends, hang out. Much like in the photograph that I chose to create the cover image for this issue of Arts Illustrated. Three women posing with two children...I could not help but imagine them to be my mother, my *mausi* (my mother's sister) and my *maami ji* (my mother's sister in-law), and the children as though they were my brother and I. I recall going to places with them as a child, to the beauty parlour, the blouse tailor, the temple, walking narrow lanes, eating *paani poori*, and orange candies. And *Amma ji*'s prying eyes at the end of the day.

I grew up believing that women must remain scared of their husbands. That is why they step out only when the men-folk were not around. For most of my life I have witnessed issues about liberty for women around me. I have questioned their relationship with men – with their

fathers, husbands, co-workers, or mere co-passengers in public transport. I assumed that I would grow up to be more empathetic.

The cover of this issue is about this strange dichotomy that a woman's life is. Between time and space where she can be as she pleases to be, and where she must conform to forced rules. Between a virtual world and the real one. Between tradition and modernity. Between what is intimate and what is public. And often this divide does not exist in the physical space. It is intangible, one that is born in the mind, constantly fed to the heart through centuries of cultural conditioning.

And now, in my work, she ushers in a new era through some kind of a Blue Screen – embracing and rejecting, adapting and shifting through a multitude of dimensions. In a state of transit. Painting a reality that she likes, finding a safe space, escaping into nothingness. Celebrating the divide that has been a foundation of sorts. Resetting. Refreshing. Rebooting.



Nandan Ghiya

Studio assistants: Mukesh Vijay and Sitaram Jangid
Profile photograph: Vigyan Anand
Cover page curated by Rahul Kumar

Lands, Waters and Skies

NOVEMBER 15, 2018 TO JANUARY 05, 2019, CHATTERJEE & LAL, MUMBAI

Reviewed by REHANA MUNIR

'I want to understand the mysteries of what is up beyond the mountain pass, and down in the depths of the ocean.' Nikhil Chopra's new solo exhibition – after a gap of eight years – is his largest display of works yet. The expansive title, scrawled in charcoal at the gallery entrance above a sprawling landscape, prepares you for meditations on nature with a certain scale and grandeur. Evoking the Art of the Sublime of the 18th and 19th centuries, Chopra's drawings, both in black and white and colour, are devoid of human form and imbued with transcendent meaning.

It isn't just through the drawings of oceans and mountains, valleys and lakes that he achieves this ethereal quality. A video installation at the gallery captures the artist capturing his subject *in situ*, presumably high up in the Liddar Valley that looks onto Pahalgam in Kashmir, where Chopra spent summers in his formative years. A lot of his pieces reflect his now home, Goa, and its tropical, languid quality. Stark rock faces and glassy water bodies, green fields and grazing animals, spectacular sunsets and groves of trees – the collection's subject matter is timeless and the mood is reflective and meditative, with the occasional epiphany bursting out of a frame.

Chopra considers his studio work to be a rehearsal for his performance pieces. For the Lands, Waters and Skies exhibition opening, the artist's companion performance offered a dramatic engagement with the themes of his work. Stripped down to a *langot*, Chopra created a 'live drawing' involving aluminum foil, water and earth. Covering his face in foil, drenching his skin in water, smearing himself with mud, the artist, through convulsive body movements and eloquent facial expressions, conveyed a deep sense of oneness with sky, water and land – and of being brutally separated from it.

Many of Chopra's recent drawing performances – he shares in his artist statement – reflect the spirit of travel, transience and nomadism. Seen by themselves, the drawings communicate the ideas and emotions that have left humans in awe of their natural surroundings since the beginning of time. The works, which are quiet and contemplative, acquire a whole new dimension when seen in conjunction with the performance. Stillness breaks into movement; emotions trigger actions; the past transforms into the present.

The mix of black and white and colour, too, provides a dual lens through which to view the collection. The quietness of monochrome occasionally gives way to a burst of yellow, orange and blue that fill up the canvas like a grace. All in all, the sublime landscapes, with their non-human forms and inhabitants, offer a vision of a prelapsarian earth. It is in the unsettling performance, in which a human grapples with elemental struggles, that the collection acquires a sense of the fall.



Nikhil Chopra, **Lands, Waters and Skies: Sundersar**, Charcoal on paper, 22.25" x 29.75", 2018.

Nikhil Chopra, **Lands, Waters and Skies: Vagator**, Mixed media on paper, 9.5" x 6.5", 2018.

Nikhil Chopra, **Lands, Waters and Skies: Mandrem**, Mixed media on paper, 10" x 13.75", 2018.

Nikhil Chopra, **Lands, Waters and Skies: Musandam**, Mixed media on paper, 11.5" x 15.5", 2018.

All Images Courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai.



