

WHOSE EAST IS IT ANYWAY?

In this issue, we further articulate the parallels and divergences between the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. Linked by history, trade and cultural flows, these regions are all faced with breaking down notions of singular identity. We look at the institutionalizing of Asian visual culture in the Gulf, with the arrival of the Ishara Art Foundation and recent exhibitions at Alserkal Avenue's Concrete and Jameel Arts Centre. Meanwhile, the ongoing Sharjah Biennial 14 examines the larger human condition that spans continents and territories. Writer Stephanie Bailey looks at China's cultural positioning in the Global South, while Art Basel Hong Kong expands its connections to different parts of Asia. Saira Ansari responds to Umber Majeed's project on rapid urbanization that translates across geographies, while Payal Uttam looks at connections between the countries of the Global South.

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Isabel Lewis, Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,
HACKLANDER / HATAM. *Untitled (inwardness,
juice, natures)*. 2019. Performance and mixed
media installation with audio installation, palm
stumps, acrylic paint on muslin, ceramic cups,
coloured acrylic sheets, dimensions variable.
Installation view: Sharjah Biennial 14: *Leaving
the Echo Chamber*. Commissioned by Sharjah
Art Foundation. Image courtesy of the artists
and Sharjah Art Foundation.

NOTES ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Although their practices diverge, the artists in this section orbit the same axis of ideas, with works that investigate human movement, power structures and postcolonialism in the context of the 'Global South'. In the 1990s, Vivek Vilasini collaborated with The Five, pioneers of the Emirati avant-garde art scene. Performance artist Nikhil Chopra dons multiple personas that address fluid identities and India's colonial history. Meanwhile, Tuan Andrew Nguyen's work at SB14 investigates tense ties between two postcolonial communities in Vietnam and Senegal, while Ho Tzu Nyen seeks to redefine the term "Southeast Asia". Closer to home, Abu Dhabi-based novelist Deepak Unnikrishnan poignantly critiques labour conditions in the Gulf through magical realism, while August Paredes, featured in Campus Art Dubai this year, photographs his own journey from his native Philippines and reflects on his newfound identity as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW).

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NIKHIL CHOPRA

Born in Kolkata. Based in Goa. Known for his durational performances, Chopra takes on different personas to explore colonial history, gender and self-portraiture.



Alexandra Chaves: How important is the sea in your work and life, especially in terms of the links between the Gulf and South Asia?

Nikhil Chopra: I have spent most my life in port towns: Dubai, Kochin, Goa, Mumbai, New York. The irony is that while these cities are far apart from each other, they're all connected by one salty ocean. The Gulf and South Asia have been linked for thousands of years via the sea, so our relationship is almost as old as trade itself. More broadly, from colonisers to corporations, navigating the seas has been a way to exercise economic, political and cultural control and domination.

AC: How has growing up between Dubai and India shaped your identity and artistic practice?

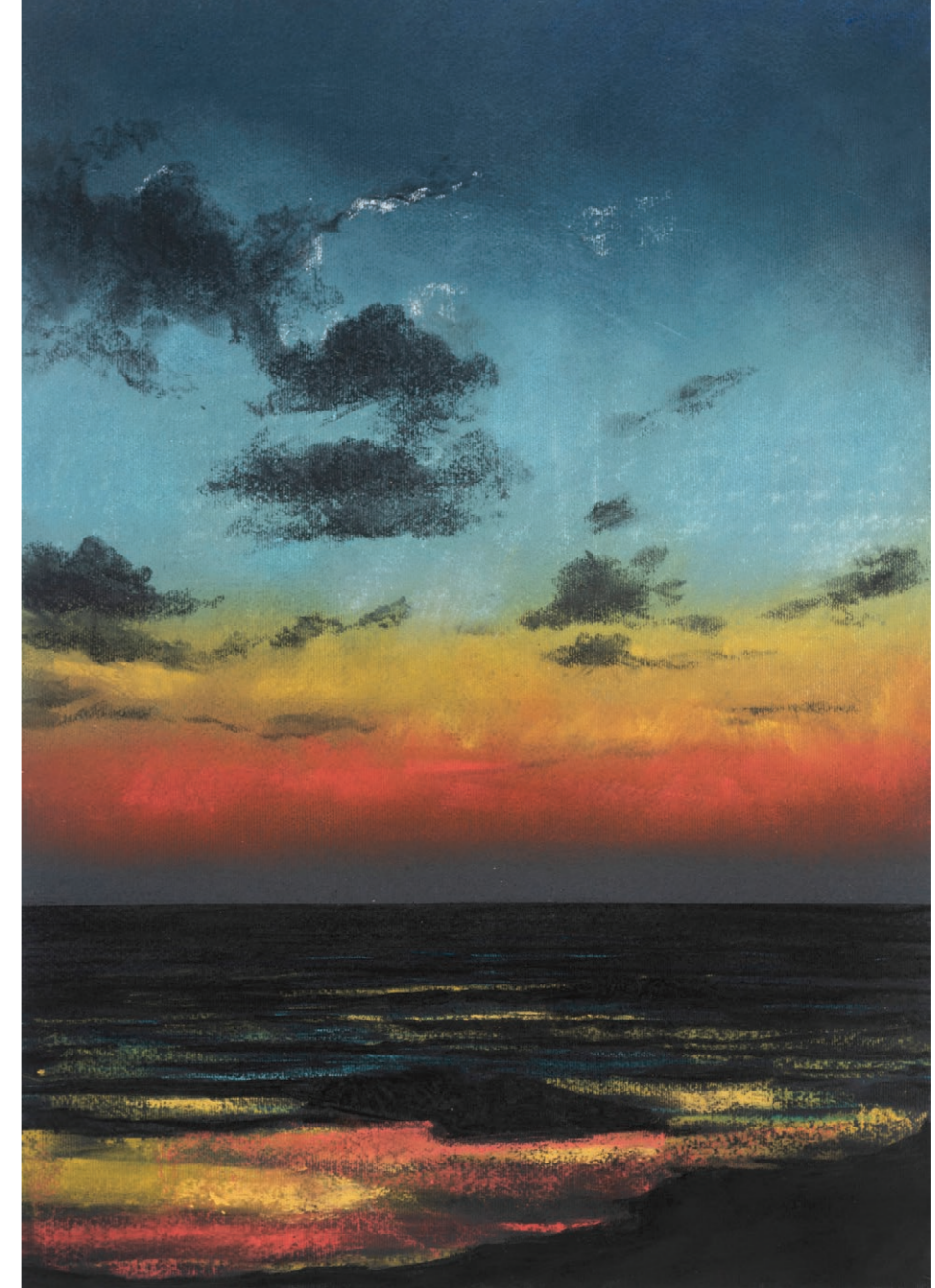
NC: I spent my early teens here, but Dubai traumatised me. I was very sensitive to the overt racism and classism present here, and I wasn't attracted to the hyper-commercialism. So, when I was 16, I went to Bombay to continue my education. While

I was introduced to painting and drawing as a young man in Dubai, I was only able to really understand it as a practice and profession once I had moved to India.

AC: How did you come to choose the personas or avatars you have presented in the UAE so far?

NC: My aim is to create and destroy stereotypes. In the case of *Use Like Water* (Sharjah Biennial, 2015), I first created the image of a migrant worker and a nomad. It was also my way of critiquing the impact that construction and land reclamation projects have had on the environment. This is also why a large part of the performance consisted of spending many nights in Maliha Desert in a tent, and sailing through the Strait of Hormuz on a wooden dhow, to go back to an older, more sustainable way of living. For *Rouge* (Alserkal Avenue, 2019), I wanted to continue from where I left Sharjah in 2015; so I presented myself as this bearded gowned lady making drawings out of cosmetics, to disrupt Dubai's relationship with beauty and gender.

Nikhil Chopra. *Lands, Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing (ii)*. 2008. Archival Print 121 x 182.8 cm. Edition of 6. Image courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee & Lal



Nikhil Chopra. *Lands, Waters & Skies: Ahswem 2*. 2018. Mixed media on paper. 42.5 x 29.21 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee & Lal



Nikhil Chopra. *Use Like Water*. 2015. Performance and mixed-media installation. Commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation. Image courtesy of Sharjah Art Foundation