

Nikhil Chopra



NIKHIL CHOPRA

Line of Fire

12 January - 28 February, 2024

Chatterjee & Lal

Mumbai

Line of Fire: Live

10 January, 2024

47-A: Design Gallery

Mumbai

The landscapes in Nikhil Chopra's recent works are interrupted by the presence of his past selves. These meander, dwell, or come to rest on these surfaces. Lost in thought, staring you in the eye or as apparitions, these are spirits of lives he's embodied or engaged with in his durational performances over the decades. This presence ruptures the stillness of landscape paintings, as well as the linearity of time to provide a possibility, a portal, for introspection and time travel – in retrospect and in the present. With the change in times and conditions, these personas now displaced are ridden with anxiety and uncertainty. There is a visible exhaustion. Or are they dejected with where we stand now? This spillage also enables a collision of histories and memories.

The landscape is no longer lush and dreamy, it rages and burns to black under red-yellow flames and clouds of grey. Fires burn to remind us of primitivity, of coming together and warmth, of invention, but also war and strife, and natural disaster. Charcoal then, a product of charred trees, remains a medium close to this destruction of the pastoral and natural worlds. History in Chopra's life and works remains speculative and revels in the possibility of mythologies and fictions. He summons personas and iconographies to serve as shells to inhabit and embody; and distils hard facts into dreamy visions and nightmares, lucid and instinctive. It flows and sways, whilst remaining deeply personal, and situated, on his body.

In *Blackening 3157* a man catches a moment of rest in a charred forest. He is lost in thought, his eyes heavy. He mourns perhaps or is anxious. We have met this man before in 2017. He wears the uniform of a ticket collector working for the British empire in North Western Railways in undivided India. He is both a subject and the servant of the state. Chopra performed at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester in 2017, connecting his life to the retired locomotive number 3157. The carriage was built in 1911

in the Vulcan foundry and connected Punjab, Sindh and Delhi in pre-partition India – and possibly carried passengers to both sides of the border during the bloody partition. The machine is both witness and evidence to the violence of a colonial past and the transition of these countries into freedom. For Chopra it symbolises an inherited, shared history. 3157 was in use until 1982 and was gifted to the museum in Manchester by the General Zia-ul Haq government. The afterlife of objects and events continue to interest Chopra. To be clear, he is not interested in the event itself, but the possibility of what it triggers in its aftermath.

In *Line of Fire* I people swim in the bay. Chopra's recent visits to Vietnam started an investigation into the lives of these former colonial territories in the aftermath of the war. There is a concerted recalibration of these pasts to accommodate their present lives as tourist havens – in Goa, Vietnam and Kashmir. Chopra is struck by the failure of popular culture, especially Western Cinema's portrayal of America's war against Vietnam. The war on celluloid was almost always in the background, a setting against which the lives of protagonists would play out. It would be alluded to obliquely. Images of people displaced from war and natural calamity and finding refuge by the sea have circulated across social media in recent years. In the absence of safe asylum on land, the sea offers both comfort and the opportunity to wash the war off one's skin. It is also a reclamation - an anchoring that a shore provides with the embalming sea. Salt disinfects and heals.

Tourism here must not be confused with war tourism, for the intention is to not address the war actively (or at all). It is to provide a sensation of safety in the suppleness of a tropical paradise where much like Goa - the sea, food and adventure along with pastoral life - are used to overshadow colonial pasts. The fields are laden with mines, but we must talk about rice. The remains of imperialism or of war become backdrops for photographs,

but are never actively discussed or encountered in its full historical measure. The narrative is actively compromised. How much talk of war is enough before it becomes uncomfortable?

In his smaller works on paper scenes from travels and places he has engaged with over the years are overlaid with signs of change, or the presence of fear and looming danger. The geometry of infrastructural development sits atop the lushness of nature - a road curving along the mountain or an electricity grid. In others a missile pierces through the skies or crashes and burns in the distance. It could also be a forest fire, like those that have blazed through the hot summers of Goa and elsewhere. In *Line of Fire VIII*, the ominous grey-blue waters at twilight reflect the red of a sinking sun or is it the blood from "when a whale killed a seal". This spillage is both literal and conceptual - to allow for death and regeneration. Like the earth, our bodies are also largely salt water. Our blood plasma is not very different from the sea. There is also an attempt at the reduction of the landscape, a distillation and reduction of forms to lines like the landscape is slowly being abstracted like in *Line of Fire III*. This shift from the fullness of nature to the bareness of its skeletal anatomy, commemorating the violent extraction and exploitation of resources - of mining to the bone. This reduction also extends the view, opening the distance between us and our pasts.

At 47-A, Chopra's durational performance derives from his constant coming to terms with the expected publicness of his private studio life. Set against a glass window, and in full view to passers-by, he draws wearing an ambiguous, metallic costume. His garment alluding to the lead, aluminium, chromium, and cadmium found in the lipsticks with which he is drawing. As he rubs the cosmetic product against the glass a synthetic smell, almost intoxicating, fills the space. A long-term exposure and frequent use can lead to

the accumulation of these toxic heavy metals in our bodies. A soundscape of natural and unnatural sounds fills the space – gushing winds carrying birds are interrupted by gunshots and planes passing – as an acute awareness of threat. With the layering of lipstick over lipstick and sound over sound, Chopra builds an uncomfortable, cyclical density. It envelopes us now.

Chopra's performance is about this accumulation and that of toxic histories and ecological contamination. His landscapes, saturated, and in solarized hues of lipstick stand testament to these. As he slowly presses gateway papers used for architectural planning onto the lipstick drawings, the opacity sharpens the image. It is as though, exhausted, he is shutting us out again while leaving us with a vision. These papers over time also absorb and gather the image as an imprint, providing stillness and stability to the agility and unpredictability of performance.

Chopra started out with pastels and charcoal as his first materials and remained with it – consistently experimenting with scale and texture. For him, the potential of these materials and mediums and his own practice grew from performing in public spaces. It is and I quote "where I learnt the most. My biggest art school has been the live school. To throw myself into the open space," notes Chopra. In the live space he continues, there is no judgment – "no right or wrong. No mistakes. No finished or unfinished - to be just asked to create freely" - to move and/or to lay still, to breathe.

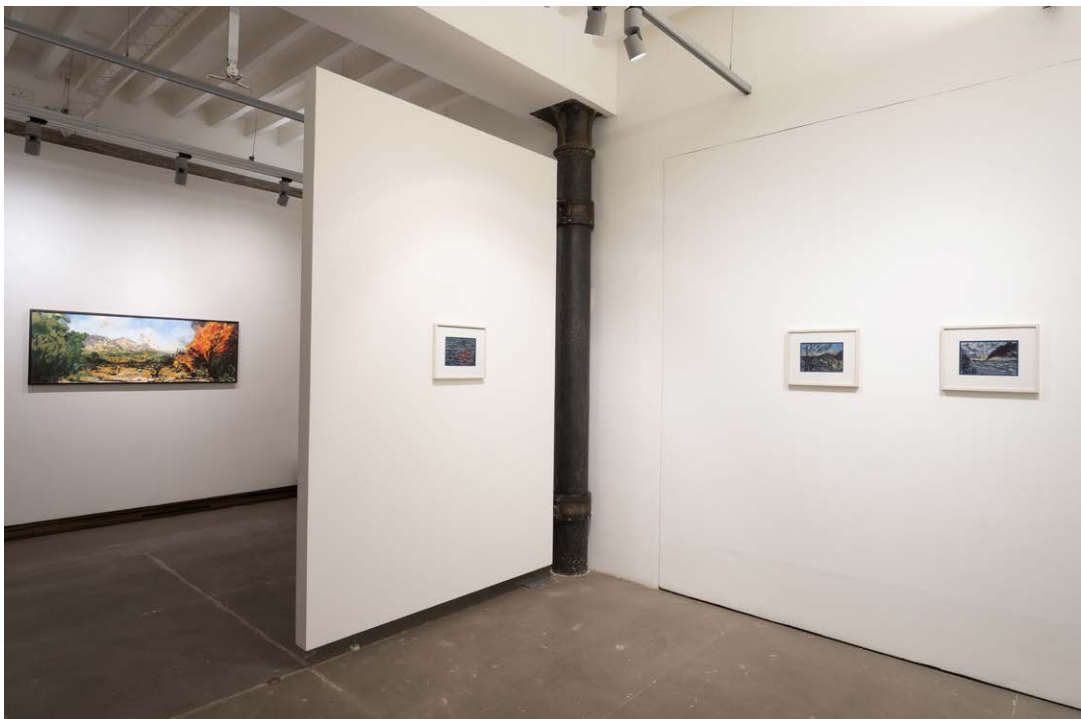
Line of Fire is less of a return and more of an arrival for Chopra - where accumulated material from across time and space pass through one another, fearlessly. The landscape is no longer stable - it extends, collapses, and combusts - but also provides the possibility of regeneration or perhaps fossilization.

~ Mario D'Souza

Line of Fire

Installation view at C&L







NIKHIL CHOPRA
Line of Fire



Individual artworks



Line of Fire: II, 2023

Charcoal and pastel on paper

Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra 2023' (on
the reverse across both panels)

22 x 60 in. | 55.9 x 152.4 cm.

Diptych



Line of Fire: V, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra 2023'
(on the reverse)
8 1/8 x 11 1/8 in. | 20.6 x 28.2 cm.



Line of Fire: IV, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra Dec 23' (on
the reverse)
12 x 18 in. | 30.5 x 45.7 cm.



Line of Fire: I, 2023

Charcoal and pastel on paper

Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra 2023 Dec' (on the reverse, third panel)

Each 83 1/2 x 48 in. | 211.75 x 122 cm.

Triptych



Line of Fire: III, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Each 7 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. | 19.6 x 29.7 cm.
Set of 6



Line of Fire: VI, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra 2023'
(on the reverse)
5 3/4 x 8 1/8 in. | 14.5 x 20.6 cm.



Line of Fire: VII, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra 2023'
(on the reverse)
5 3/4 x 8 1/8 in. | 14.5 x 20.6 cm.



Line of Fire: VIII, 2023
Charcoal and pastel on paper
Signed and dated "Nikhil Chopra 2023"
(on the reverse)
5 3/4 x 8 1/8 in. | 14.5 x 20.6 cm.



Blackening 3157, 2023

Charcoal and pastel on paper

Signed and dated 'Nikhil Chopra Dec 2023' (on the reverse across both panels)

Each 81 x 48 in. | 205.7 x 120.4 cm.

Diptych

Blackening VI: Engine No. 3157

Installation view at 47-A: Design Gallery







Line of Fire: Live

Stills from Performance
at 47-A: Design Gallery







NIKHIL CHOPRA
Line of Fire: Live

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NIKHIL CHOPRA (b. 1974)

Nikhil Chopra's artistic practice ranges between live art, theatre, painting, photography, sculpture and installations. His performances, in large part improvised, dwell on issues such as identity, the role of autobiography, the pose and self-portraiture, reflecting on the process of transformation and the part played by the duration of performance. Taking autobiographical elements as his starting point, Chopra combines everyday life and collective history; daily acts such as eating, resting, washing and dressing, but also drawing and making clothes, acquiring the value of ritual, becoming an essential part of the show.

Chopra lives and works in Goa.

Education

- 2003 MFA Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- 2001 BFA Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- 1997- 99 BFA M.S. University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, IN
- 1995 B.COM N.M. College of Commerce & Economics, Mumbai, IN

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 Line of Fire, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2024 Line of Fire: Live + Blackening VI: Engine No. 3157 Installation, 47-A Design Gallery, Mumbai, IN
- 2023 One Water, Many Lands, Gropius Bao, Berlin, Germany
- 2022 Lands, Waters, and Skies, Residues of Nikhil Chopra's 2019 performance 'Lands, Waters, and Skies' at The Met, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2019 Lands, Waters, and Skies, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
- 2018 Lands, Waters, and Skies, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2017 Blackening VI: Engine No. 3157, Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester
- 2016 Drum Solo at The Mill, Galleria Continua, Les Moulins, France
- 2015 La Perle Noire: Jarry Park, Jarry Park, FOFA Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal
- 2014 La Perle Noire: Le Marais, Level One, gb agency, Paris, France
- 2012 Inside Out, Gallery Continua, San Gimignano, Italy
- 2012 Blackening IV: Bay 19, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia
- 2010 Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory drawing X, Chatterjee & Lal, and Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, IN
- 2010 Drum Solo, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2009 Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory drawing IX, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2007 Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory drawing II, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2005 Sir Raja III, Supported by Chatterjee & Lal The Fourth Floor, Kitab Mahal, Mumbai, IN.
- 2003 Sir Raja II, Kinneer Warehouse, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- 2002 Sir Raja I, 105 West Prescott Street basement, Ohio, USA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2024 Simple Tales: Attend, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumnai, IN
- 2021 Head in the Clouds, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2020 Outside, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2018 Sensorium, Goa, IN
- 2017 The 10 Year Hustle, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2017 Drawing a Line Through Landscape, documenta 14, Athens-Kassel
- 2017 Bhairav, New North and South, New Art Exchange, Nottingham
- 2016 The Black Pearl: The City From the River, Alchemy, Southbank Centre, London
- 2015 Use Like Water, Sharjah Biennial 12, Sharjah
- 2015 La Perla Negra: Plaza Di Armas, La Bienal de Habana, Havana
- 2014 La Perle Noire: Aspenwall House, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, IN
- 2014 Give Me Your Blood and I Will Give You Freedom, Singapore International Festival for the Arts, Singapore
- 2013 Rebirth of Detail, Sunaparanta Center for the Arts, Panjim, Goa, IN
- 2012 Frieze Art Fair, Focus, Chatterjee & Lal, London, UK
- 2012 fiVe, Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, IN
- 2012 Inside Out: As the stars view the Palace, Palace Theatre, Columbus, Ohio, USA 2012
Tenth Parallel North Contemporary Photography from India and South America, Fondazione Fotografia, Modena, Italy
- 2012 Residency: Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia
- 2012 Residency: Asialink, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia
- 2012 Residency: Blackening III: Bay 19, Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia
- 2011-12 Residency: Broken White II, Frei University, Berlin, Germany
- 2011 Act // ing, Meinblau – House of Arts Berlin, Germany
- 2011 The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India, Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts, San Francisco, California, USA
- 2011 H Box Artsonje, Seoul; Today Art Museum, Beijing; Guandong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2011 Crossroads: India escalate (India Pavilion), Prague Biennale 5, Prague, Czech Republic
- 2011 In India and Far Beyond: Khoj International Artists Association, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen IFA Gallery, Stuttgart and Berlin, Germany
- 2011 Genaration in Transition: New Art from India, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland

- 2011 Liberalis, Projecte Sindelfingen, Galerie der Stadt Sindelfingen, Germany
- 2011 Beyond the Self, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia
- 2011 Paris, Delhi, Bombay, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2010 Residency: Centre Intermondes, La Rochelle, France
- 2010 Production Site: The Artist's Studio Inside Out, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, USA
- 2009 Kunstenfestivaldesarts 09, Brussels, Belgium
- 2009 The Self & the Other: Portraiture in contemporary Indian photography, ARTIUM Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporaneo, Spain
- 2009 The Self & the Other: Portraiture in contemporary Indian photography, La Virrenina Centre de La Imatge, Barcelona, Spain
- 2009 Marina Abramovic presents: Manchester International Festival 09, Manchester, UK
- 2009 53rd International Art Exhibition, Making Worlds (curated by Daniel Birnbaum), La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
- 2009 Residency: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels, Belgium
- 2009 Indian Highway, Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norway
- 2008 Indian Highway, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK
- 2008 CHALO INDIA!, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2008 Time Crevasse, Yokohama Triennale 2008, Yokohama, Japan
- 2008 Chatterjee & Lal @ Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, USA
- 2008 Live Art 08, Khoj International Artist's Association, New Delhi, IN
- 2007 Khoj International Artist's Association, Kashmir, IN
- 2007 Posing (curated by Joelle Jenson & Andrea Cote), Abrons Art Center, New York, USA
- 2007 House of Mirrors (curated by Deeksha Nath), Grosvenor Gallery, London, UK
- 2007 Performance Art Residency, Khoj International Artist's Association, New Delhi, IN
- 2007 Beings and Doings (curated by Emma Ridgeway), British Council, New Delhi, IN
- 2007 Residency: International Performance Art Residency, Khoj, IN
- 2007 Residency: Khoj Kasheer, Srinagar, Kashmir, IN
- 2006 Asian Contemporary Art week (curated by Leeza Ahmady), Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA
- 2005 The Taste of Others (curated by Leeza Ahmady), Apexart, New York, USA
- 2004 Contemporaneity: International Video Art in Kyrgyzstan (curated by Leeza Ahmady), Central Asia Biennale, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Chatterjee & Lal was formed in 2003 by husband and wife team Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal. Today based in Mumbai's Colaba art district, the gallery is an important node in the city's maturing art scene. Whilst the gallery has always focused on the work of emerging and mid-career artists, more recently programming has included historical material that adds to the corpus of knowledge on twentieth century histories of art and design.

Gallery artists exhibit globally and the gallery participates in select art fairs. The directors are published authors, regularly sharing their insights on art in national and international publications.

Chatterjee & Lal

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Gallery Timings

12 PM - 5 PM
Tuesday - Saturday
And by appointment

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