

## House of Disquiet

A simulated art show in a domestic setting encourages a new way of looking, declares **Adwait Singh**.

Concealed within the folds of the curator's home in Delhi, *Between Dog and Wolf* induces visitors to examine its contents with care, requiring them to proceed tentatively by isolating art objects from the general sea of household effects, holding these up for specialised attention and hesitatingly attributing authorship based on the description of the work in the handout. But gradually, as the attention shifts between a framed drawing on the wall and the potted cactus on the fridge, or during the space of adjustment as you squat down or lie back to immerse yourself in a video or an artist's book, the guileless domestic peeps out from the corners, shyly at first, then a bold wink, cajoling the wary visitor to surrender her guard and regard slowly what appears to be a battleground between lovers – a clod of earth, shattered flower pots and discarded daisies heaped up against a wall. What happened here? you wonder.

Organised under the moniker 'Instituting Otherwise' and in association with 'Home Sweet Home' – a nomadic concept by the artist Chinar Shah that seeks to mobilise domestic spaces for alternative exhibition making – Meenakshi Thirukode's curation derives its title and operational logic, identified as follows: "A thing is always itself and more than itself," from a lecture delivered by the Vietnamese filmmaker and literary theorist, Trinh T. Minh-ha. Speaking from and for in-between-ness, Minh-ha emphasises the revolutionary potential vested with the "impasses, the blind procedures, the happy accidents, the time wasted, the unhappy discoveries, [and] the useless moves," characterising the artistic process.

The exhibition, held from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, claims to articulate these ideas as a 'hyphenated imaginary' within the conditions of home. *I Love Morality*, Ehsan Ul-Haq's intervention with broken flower pots referred to before, is the first instance of this differential uncertainty (here between an artwork and quotidian objects of ornamentation) at play in the show. Divested of their context, history and functionality, these uprooted flowers are free to breed sporadic associations, much like the battered ragdoll of morality unfettered from its context, sweeping hither and thither underfoot. Whilst

the domestic can allow for certain measures of messiness, the displaced pile of dirt and desiccating daisies remain largely unassimilated, like vomit, and serve to pitch the household beyond a simple proposition for intimacy and comfort into the unknown twilight – neither a white cube nor quite a home.

This liminal space is complicated further by a nesting of vignettes from other households. For instance, Guy Ben-Ner's conceptual comedy *Stealing Beauty* stages a satire on ownership and private property in various Ikea stores across three countries, blurring the boundary between studio space, domestic life and the outside world. The film showcases the artist lecturing his children about the merits of private property, ownership, investment, family and inheritance. The kids constantly challenge the father's logic with uncharacteristic historical and etymological insights, such as the one tracing back the roots of the word 'family' to a Roman unit for designating slaves, revealing the speciousness and arbitrary circularity in his argumentation. In the epilogue to the film, the kids call for a coup by proclaiming an anti-capitalist manifesto, urging the children of the world to unite and reclaim stealing or sharing as their birth right. The artwork employs humour to expose the capitalistic chrononormativity of the American family as a social and economic unit, dismantling it piece by piece like an Ikea desk. The direction leaves deliberate clues to its own performativity, by way of a conspicuous staging of the narrative in Ikea stores, references to the 'red-tongued' price tags that mark the furniture-props, the Brechtian acting, jump-cuts to different sets whilst filming the same scene, as well as the inclusion in the frame of stray visitors to the stores.

Chloë Bass's project-in-progress *Obligation to Others Holds Me in My Place* similarly investigates the unexplored everyday of American mixed-race families and the gaping lacuna that it forms in the archives. The multiform album that functions as a note to the future film is an attempt at sedimenting patterns of behaviour, intimacy and sociality characterising mixed-race households that are situated beyond the dichotomy of stereotypical depictions of the tragic mulatto in the mainstream, ranging from a culprit

Installation view of  
*Between Dog and Wolf*.  
 (From left) works by  
**Kush Sethi,**  
**Nihaal Faizal,**  
**Guy Ben-ner,**  
**Chloë Bass.** 2019.  
 Photograph by  
 Ajit Bhadoriya.



of miscegenation to an exotic hybrid. The capitalist cunning in exploiting the racial discourse towards its own ends, is made manifest in the analysis of a headphone advertisement for a curated shopping site featuring a hip mixed-race youngster skateboarding away from a tourist bus. The voiceover draws attention to the implication that the advertised headphone also answers the need of black people to “escape from the gaze of overzealous tourists” that underlies the superior noise-cancelling features of the product advertised. With the increasing semiotisation of the capital and emergence of immaterial forms of labour, our subjectivity and its various coordinates – perception, memory, language, affect – have become performative. By examining the evidence against its grain, employing tropes of Freudian analysis and poetic stitching, Bass brings focus on the performed aspects of capitalist subjectivation in general and the fragmented nature of collective racial memory in particular.

The double performativity that encases Ben-Ner’s staged domestic (the staging of domesticity in a store that manufactures it, housed within the curator’s home) is also mirrored in Nihaal Faizal’s *Sci-fi Drawings* that are simulations of artistic simulations produced by AI and OS’s in mainstream cinema as proofs of their humanity. These imitations of imitations belie the idea of authorship, the original prototype, the creative genius and perhaps human originality itself. A thing is always itself and more than itself! The simulation of an art exhibition inside

a domestic space is made complete by the addition of a gift shop where incipient collectors can purchase editioned artworks at nominal rates – a masterstroke! The revolutionary potential of this lies not in its mimicry of the modes through which capitalism initialises and perpetuates itself through commercial art circuits but in its daring to institute otherwise, by encouraging new habits of displaying, viewing, and collecting art. Advocating a politics of critical engagement over that of withdrawal from the institutions, Chantal Mouffe, the Belgian political theorist, highlights the importance of instituting a multiplicity of agonistic spaces wherefrom the dominant consensus can be disarticulated/rearticulated and new subjectivities and worldviews tested<sup>1</sup>. In a parallel project titled *Infrastructures of the Otherwise* as part of the FICA grantee show at the IGNCA, Delhi, Thirukode elaborates just such a possibility of alternative organising and socialising within the art. An archival exposition of three case studies – Gallery G-159 in Bangalore, C&G Apartment in Hongkong and Collector’s Space in Istanbul – *Infrastructures of the Otherwise* together with *Between Dog and Wolf* can additionally be taken as studies in politics of scale and localisation as it applies to independent art spaces and projects. /

#### End Note

1. See **Chantal Mouffe’s** “Strategies of radical politics and aesthetic resistance” in **Florian Malzacher** (ed): *Truth is Concrete: A Handbook for Artistic Strategies in Real Politics*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2014.