

IN'STAR'GRAM

Simran Kulkarni is living the
Millennial dream on social media

BREAKING GROUND

Theatre artists are connecting with
their audiences in novel ways

the yin and yang of food

Science may have the answer to why Asian
and Continental cuisines taste so different





THE SCMC CHRONICLE

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

When we reinvented our student newsletter as a periodical—The SCMC Chronicle newsletter—last semester, it was intended as an exercise

for the Batch 2019 Journalism students for experience in hands-on reporting, editing and publishing. They did a tremendous job of it, producing, in a short span of time, eight editions of the newsletter that could rival any professional publication in terms of content and design.

They worked in teams, brainstorming ideas, nosing out news in and around Pune city, interviewing sources, photographing, designing pages and shaping The SCMC Chronicle into a full-scale hyperlocal newsletter. Our Journalism Lab was a veritable newsroom during this period and the students took up their responsibilities with the passion you would expect of true media professionals.

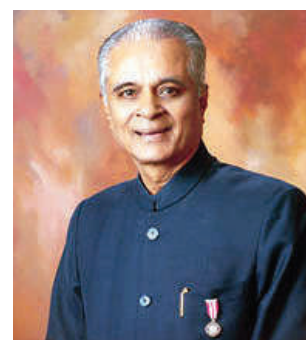
We are hoping now to take the Chronicle brand to the next level with a series of student-owned print and digital publications. This Art, Culture & Lifestyle Supplement of The SCMC Chronicle Magazine, which has brought together high-quality features and writings by our students, is the first step towards a regular magazine that will eventually be fully owned and created by our students. I wish them the very best for the future.

Dr. Sreeram Gopalkrishnan
Director, SCMC

OUR INSPIRATION



SYMBIOSIS
INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)



Prof. Dr. S. B. Mujumdar
Chancellor,
Symbiosis International
(Deemed University)



Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar
Pro Chancellor,
Symbiosis International
(Deemed University),
& Principal Director,
Symbiosis



Dr. Rajani R. Gupte
Vice Chancellor,
Symbiosis International
(Deemed University)

VISION

- Promoting international understanding through quality education.

MISSION

- To inculcate the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family)
- To contribute towards knowledge generation and dissemination
- To promote ethical and value-based learning
- To foster the spirit of national development
- To inculcate cross-cultural sensitivities
- To develop global competencies amongst students
- To nurture creativity and encourage entrepreneurship
- To enhance employability and contribute to human resource development
- To promote health and wellness amongst students, staff & community
- To instill sensitivity amongst the youth towards the community and environment
- To produce thought-provoking leaders for society

CONTENTS

THE SCMC CHRONICLE
ART, CULTURE & LIFESTYLE SUPPLEMENT



6

INSTA FASHIONISTA

Simran Kulkarni on her life as a social media influencer

10

FLAVOUR CLASH

Are your food flavours blending a little too well?

15

EATING IT WRONG

The perils of alien food cultures



16

ROCK'S ROCK

The iconic drummer who transformed rock n'roll

20

DOING IT MY WAY

Theatre artists break new ground with bold experiments

23

LENS & IDENTITY

A photography intern's journey through Bombay



25

METAPHORICALLY

A search for deeper meanings in Gulzar's poetry



28

JOKES APART

A peek into Pune's thriving standup comedy scene

30

OSCAR BLUES

OTTs take on studio giants in Oscars clash



33

BIENNALE ART

The best of contemporary art at India's only biennale

37

SALVATORE!

Mysteries and intrigues surround Da Vinci artwork



37

GRADUATE FILMS

A look at the films of SCMC's Batch 2019 graduates

INSTA

Shubhangi Mishra profiles a young and successful Instagram blogger

Simran Kulkarni's journey from being 'That Awkward Girl' to an influential Instagram fashionista is perhaps one of many tales of young aspirational Millennials surfing to success because they knew the right wave to catch.

Simran is a 'social media influencer', a marketer's dream – young, opinionated, stylish, artistic, savvy, and adaptable. They seem happy to place their products and their money in her hands, and have her carry their message to the young demographic they are targeting. Instagram is Simran's professional home where she blogs about food, lifestyle and fashion. Her handle @simran.kulkarni has more than 31,000 followers, and is growing. It is populated by meticulously crafted pictures of food, places, and things, and of herself. The images are colourful and very artistic; the kind that many Millennials, judging by their responses, seem to find expressive and meaningful. They are also carefully staged.

"There is a lot of thought and creativity that goes into the shoot," says Simran. "The ideal lighting, appropriate makeup, and hair and the perfect clothes need to be sorted so that the post attracts maximum traction."

FASHIONISTA

Image: Instagram



In one picture, she wears a fetching blue dress, a thick mane of curly brown hair frames her heart-shaped face and her bright eyes look confidently into the camera; in another she strikes a pose like Bollywood’s evergreen dancing star Helen. Her photos exude a little bit of mystery and a great deal of self-assurance – a very appealing persona.

Simran is just 20, she graduated from college this year with a degree in mass communication and a proven marketing acumen.

Youngsters like Simran who grew up in the age of smartphones and high-speed internet, spend a significant part of their everyday lives on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. While most are there to entertain themselves, others have been smart enough to capitalise on the power it lends to their voices.

Like any other profession though, it takes hard

“I’m a person who puts comfort over everything and that’s what I try incorporating in my fashion as well”

work and strategy to succeed as an ‘influencer’. Four years ago Simran was @thataawkwardgirl behind the camera.

“I started out as a photographer for other food bloggers,” she says. “I used to click pictures for them and repost it on my account, which was quite well received by everyone. Finally, in 2015, I put up my first post as a blogger which was related to fashion. Even while shooting for other bloggers, I didn’t have a camera of my own. I used to borrow my friend’s Canon 1200D to shoot. It has taken me about four years to get where I am and it definitely



didn’t happen overnight. There were times when certain concept based shoots that I particularly loved, didn’t do so well with my audience. So it certainly hasn’t been an easy ride!”

She has now had umpteen collaborations with A-lister brands like Daniel Wellington, and with The Pavilion Mall and Phoenix Market City, Pune. She has also starred on the cover of Brands & Bloggers Magazine. While it’s her job to get maximum traction on her posts, get as many likes and comments as possible, Simran also wishes to keep it real. “I always make sure that the brands I collaborate with, understand my personal style and comfort. In real life, I am a person who puts comfort over everything and that’s what I try incorporating in my fashion as well.”

As happening and glamorous as a blogger’s life looks from the outside, with all the fame and the free products, it may be that the umpteen hours of shoots, brainstorming and immense creativity often goes unnoticed.

Although she finds herself a great deal in front of the camera these days, Simran has maintained her passion for food photography and managed to find her own style and nuance.

And she is not without her fair share of trolls in the free-for-all cyber world. There is a great deal of criticism and flak, humiliating posts, people who send unsolicited and vulgar images. But through it all, Simran focuses her energy on those people who truly appreciate her work.



the yin and yang of food

Nayanika Mukherjee discovers how ‘Dadubhai’ was right all along about food that pairs too well

Growing up in Calcutta meant watching my grandfather fuss over

a bubbling pot of aromatics every winter. He loved stewing over his beloved kadhai to make chokka—a luxurious roast vegetable curry tempered with spices and ghee. As we sipped the rich gravy from teacups (the man was adamant about serving size), Dadubhai would lean against the counter and begin to rail against ‘continental’ cuisine.

His work had taken him across much of Western Europe, where he’d tried something or the other from cornerside cafes and bistros.

Asian cuisine gets its distinct flavour from contrasting food pairings, scientists say

Image: Marquiefile

His experiments had brought him to one conclusion: there was no excitement, no ‘bristle’ in Western cuisine. ‘They don’t try flavours that compete,’ he’d muse, ‘It all pairs too well.’

At the time, we thought his frustrations stemmed from watching his grandchildren buy muffins and burgers from the Monginis next door. But little did we know that Dadubhai was right.

In recent years, the ‘magic’ behind food combinations has come to be replaced by empirical research into the science of flavour—and it proves Dadubhai’s theory solid.

‘Continental’ cuisine—that of Western Europe and North America—has been proven to use complementary food pairings, whereas Asian cuisine (and parts of Southern Europe, like the Mediterranean), exhibits contrasting food pairings. While the hypothesis existed for years, it was only in 2011 that age old assumptions began to add up.

Harvard scientist Yong Yeol-Ahn and his associates analysed 381 ingredients and over 1,000 flavour compounds in them to find out what flavour

‘links’—the actual molecular compounds—they shared. This data was then compared to over 56,000 global recipes sourced from international food sites, to determine which cultures paired flavour compounds that ‘matched’ each other most often.

And voila, the science was in: Western cuisine showed a propensity to include foods with overlapping flavour molecules

in a recipe, giving rise to complementary cuisine. Think roast beef and cheese, butter and potatoes, chocolate and coffee.

Asian cuisine, on the other hand, chose to avoid ingredients that shared similar chemical signatures, and preferred ‘anti-pairings’. This gave rise to more complexity in taste. The most immediate example I could

COMPLEX ASIAN FLAVOURS ARE THE RESULT OF ANTI-PAIRINGS



Image: shellys.co.in

The Bengali Shukto (above) pairs mustard and milk, while continental potatoes and butter (below) have more complementary flavouring



Image: Pixabay

find for this was from my own family—the vegetarian Bengali dish of shukto, which curiously partnered mustard and milk.

To further demonstrate this difference in palates, a graph showed the molecular links between food compounds. Items at the middle and top—like strawberries, white wine and apples—shared the most flavour compounds with other ingredients.

Meats, wheat and dairy products also showed several molecular overlaps; these are all frequently used items in Western cuisine. The bottom-end of the chart bore ingredients that had the least in common with other foods.

These were foods like yogurt, sumac, ginger and shrimp, along with a host of spices and plant products—all commonly used in Asian cuisine. Naturally, this revelation bears promise—and explains many trends.

As people travel more, the popularity and representation of Asian cuisine in Western media has shot up exponentially. After all, it's a whole new world of flavour perception for those travelling from around the

Atlantic. Secondly, given the number of food pairings we actually use (10^6), versus the gigantic number of food pairings that this research suggests will work (10^{15}), we have an ocean to chart when it comes to creating new recipes.

Molecular gastronomy exponents such as Heston Blumenthal

perfectly complementary 4-methylpentanoic acid molecule, found in marinara, mozzarella, and parmesan—doesn't work for, say, the iconic pork vindaloo.

A more recent paper by researchers at IIT Jodhpur showed that the ingredients in Indian food—beloved amongst Asians and Westerners

It's an amusing paradox to have in the digital age, where we have an answer for everything: a good old tug-of-war that allows us to savour the best of both worlds

or Grant Achatz, who were earlier lambasted for insisting that combinations like white chocolate and caviar could work, must feel a sense of relief.

However, this doesn't mean that the mystery and sensuality in food has completely dried up. The principle that makes a pizza margherita timeless—its

alike—barely had anything in common, and that's exactly what made it so good.

It's an amusing paradox to have in the digital age, where we have an answer for everything: a good old tug-of-war that allows us to savour the best of both worlds. Dadubhai would have been smug with glee.

EATING IT WRONG

Yash Agarwal recounts a weight loss regimen that helped him reconnect with his roots

Indians, in general, are trend surfers not setters. We do have a tendency to jump on to any and every bandwagon — in music, food, art or fashion — which is in vogue beyond our borders and has the approval of people who are most certainly not us.

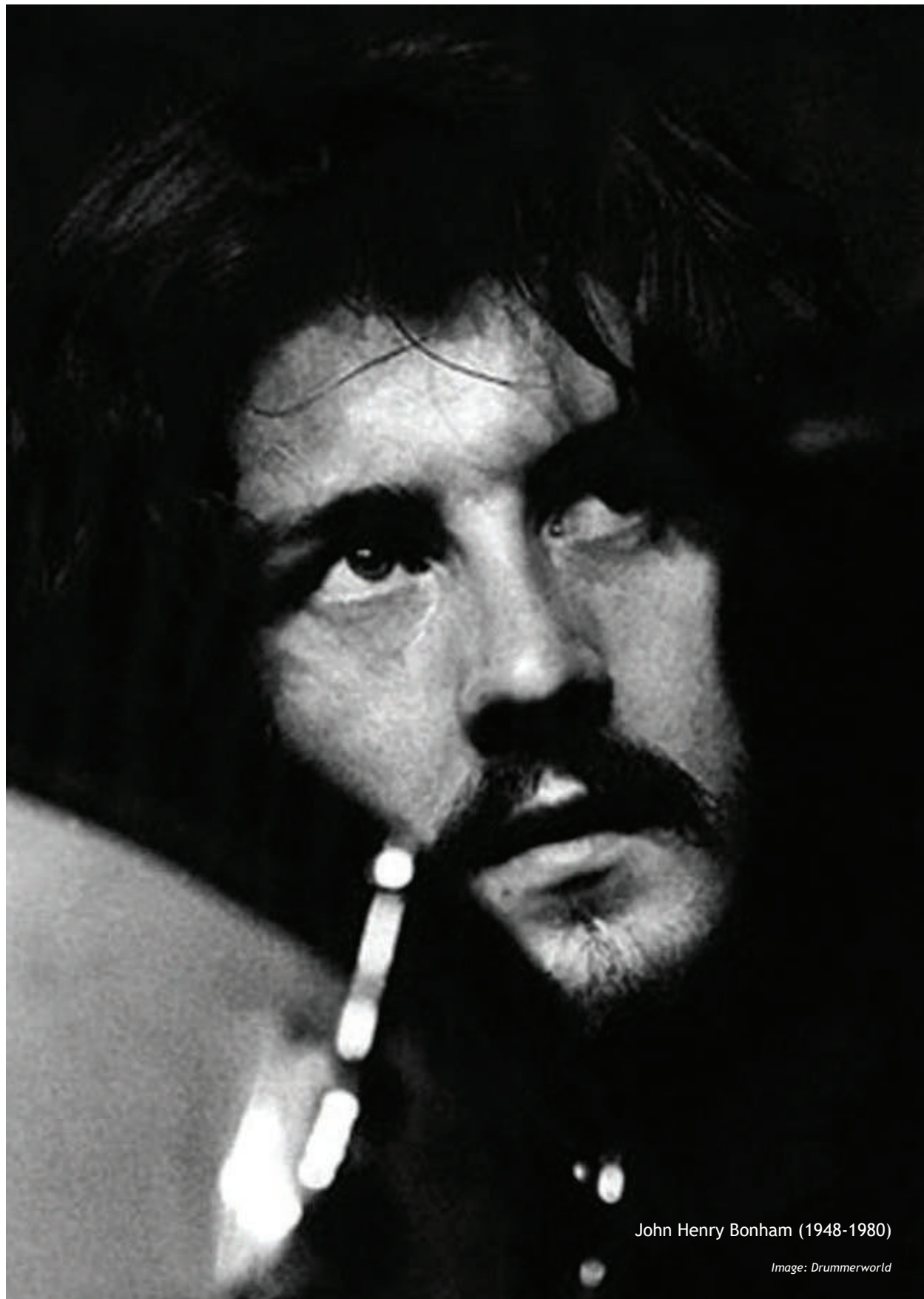
But while these trends are culture appropriate, and geography-specific; we are quite happy to ignore the fact in our desire to be cool and with-it, thank you very much! Wearing turtlenecks in sweltering heat for instance, or building glass skyscrapers that are exact replicas of those in the West without a thought to how inappropriate they are for the Indian weather. The most detrimental impact of this blind copying perhaps has been in our lifestyles and the food we eat.

I weighed 105 kilograms when I entered college; this wasn't surprising given that I had fuelled myself on a western diet for most of the year before it — fast food, processed food, high calorie intake, you name it. The humble Indian 'Roti-Sabzi' or the 'Curry-Chawal' seemed way too bland and outdated. Fast was, after all, the new cool. I was not immune to the herd mentality either.

Unhealthy, obese, perpetually tired and bloated is how I would describe myself in my first semester of college. Then, I signed up for the much maligned college mess. I had three meals of the simple, staple Indian fare served there. Within 6 months I had shed almost 20 kilos and by the end of a year I weighed almost 35 kilograms less. Shedding a third of my own body weight was a rebirth of sorts for me, and a

reconnection with my roots. How often have we thought about the good in our own traditions? I have lost count of the number of times western agencies have declared coconut oil to be harmful to human health, only to retract and clarify it as beneficial the next month. And that is just one example. Counsel is good, but practices and ideas which have stood the test of time, passed down entire generations and kept us going for hundreds of years cannot suddenly turn 'harmful to human health' and then beneficial again the very next moment.

I believe that the internet is a force for good. It informs, educates and fosters a closer global community, but it does not necessarily mean we have to ape everything that it tells us is in vogue. Sometimes, sticking to the basics is a really good idea.



John Henry Bonham (1948-1980)

Image: Drummerworld



Image: Drummerworld

ROCK’S ROCK

Viraj Gaur remembers the iconic drummer who changed the face of rock and roll

John Henry Bonham’s life was short and explosive. Bonzo, as he was affectionately known, died in Windsor, England with more than a litre of vodka in him. He was just 32 years old, and in the prime of a phenomenal drumming career with the biggest band in the world, Led Zeppelin.

John was born to Joan and Jack Bonham in the small town of Redditch, Worcestershire in the summer of 1948. He started drumming at the age of five, making a makeshift kit out of tin cans and containers. When he was 10, his mother got him his first snare drum, and just five years later he received his first drum kit from his father. Bonham never received any

professional training; he grew up imitating his heroes Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich and Max Roach, whose influence became evident in the unique style that Bonzo eventually created. He wasn’t an exceptional student but something in his nature led his headmaster to remark, ‘He will either end up a dustman or a millionaire.’ After leaving school, Bonzo started working with his

father as a carpenter, while also playing with local bands. His drumming was fine-tuned by the advice he received from fellow musicians in the early years of his career.

In 1964 he started playing semiprofessionally. Two years later he joined a blues group called the ‘Crawling King Snakes’ where he met lead singer Robert Plant. Even though they went their separate ways, they kept in touch. In 1968 guitarist Jimmy Page found himself trying to put together a new band after his earlier project ‘The Yardbirds’ had collapsed. After much deliberation, the unlikely group of musicians came together; Page himself as the guitarist, Robert Plant as the lead singer, John Paul Jones as the bassist and John Bonham as the drummer. Led Zeppelin was finally born; the band that would change the world of music.

The first track of the band’s debut album, Led Zeppelin I, introduced listeners to John Bonham’s hard hitting, yet technically sound drumming. Despite his experiments with drumming, Bonzo became the solid base on which Zeppelin

could truly unfurl their genius; he was dubbed ‘The Beast’. Within a few years, Led Zeppelin had toppled the Beatles as the most popular band on earth. The band released brilliant albums, one after another, with Bonham binding them together.

The fourth album, which was released without a title, came to be recognised as one of the best albums the world has ever

a darker attitude; he became prone to aggressive fits of anger and fistfights. In the September of 1980, Led Zeppelin were rehearsing for an upcoming tour in North America. They had been through personal tragedies in the last few years, but things were finally looking up.

On the 24th of the same month they all met at Jimmy Page’s house and reportedly rehearsed

Despite his experiments with drumming, Bonzo became the solid base on which Zeppelin could truly unfurl their genius; he was dubbed ‘the Beast’

seen. Success did not suit him well. During his career, Bonzo developed an alcohol problem as well as a heroin addiction. His behaviour was often erratic and he was involved in outrageous backstage behaviour. He also started suffering from panic attacks before live shows, and would show up drunk to the recording studios.

His jolly nature gave way to

for about twelve hours straight. John was already drunk before the rehearsal, but that didn’t stop him. He continued drinking through the session, consuming close to 40 measures of vodka.

They found him the next morning, lying on the ground, unresponsive. He had vomited the alcohol in his sleep and choked to death. Rock had lost its greatest drummer.



Bonham (second from left) with his Led Zeppelin mates (from L.) John Paul Jones, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant

Led Zeppelin disbanded immediately; they had decided that Bonzo was irreplaceable. The surviving members later worked on their own projects and occasionally played together in ‘reunions’ with John Bonham’s son taking his father’s place.

Although he died early, his fate as the greatest rock and roll drummer had already been cemented. In 1995 he was

posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. His work became the basis for the Rock and Metal drumming that was to follow, and he remains an inspiration to countless aspiring drummers across the world.

Nirvana’s drummer Dave Grohl once remarked, ‘John Bonham played the drums like someone who didn’t know what was going to happen next—like he was

teetering on the edge of a cliff. No one has come close to that since, and I don’t think anybody ever will. I think he will forever be the greatest drummer of all time.’

John Bonham’s gravestone stands in the Rushock Parish churchyard in Worcestershire, adorned by the flowers and the drumsticks his fans leave behind. ‘Goodnight my love, God bless’, the epitaph reads.

E

very one defines it differently — for some it's natural, for

others it's an out-of-the-world experience. No, this is not about love; it's about the confusing world of experimental theatre.

It might be a difficult concept to wrap one's head around, and since theatrical norms are constantly evolving, what might be experimental for one might be quite the norm for someone else. It all comes down to one thing: to go against the grain one must first understand what the status quo is.

Alfred Jarry, the 19th Century French playwright, is often credited as the father of the genre; for he dabbled in what used to be considered experimental—nudity, profanity, breaking the fourth wall, nonlinear structure and interacting with the audience.

Theatre artists, who tend to do experimental theatre, break the norm and reject straightforward methods of producing and writing plays to do their own

thing. It is this unpredictable nature of theatre's creative process that gives it the tag 'experimental'. Its primary aim is to shock the audience while keeping performance art alive.

Some independent theatre groups around the world and in India are seeking to dissolve the boundaries between the performers, and the audience as a passive observer.

EXPERIMENTAL IS HERE TO STAY

From sitting blindfolded in a dark room, to performing in the nude, experimental theatre leaves no stone unturned, finds **Aroshi Handu**

Blast Theory, an England-based theatre group uses interactive media mixed with digital broadcasting and live performance. Their most recent



Image: bordercrossings.co.uk

Groups like Border Crossings (above) and Saag Meat (below) are redefining theatre with their bold experiments



Image: Deccan Chronicle

work Chemical Wedding had the audience surrounded by huge screens where computerized viruses danced—which was mirrored on the floor by dancers pushing their way through the crowd to loud, industrial music. Their work questions ideologies especially pop culture that envelops us in this digital world.

Drama makers Border Crossings do things a bit differently. They believe that the theatre is the opposite of a wall. The group promotes intercultural dialogue and creativity through their performances. Theatre is one of the few spaces left where you can encounter physically, in the same room, people who are totally different from you; and realise that they aren't that different after all.

Border Crossings is founded by Michael Walling, who was inspired by his experiences in India where he was fascinated by the way a play he thought he knew had been altered by looking at it through a different cultural lens. And it's true; India is no stranger to experimental theatre. Here's some food for thought: how does one retain the audience's

attention for 45 mins while sitting in one place and talking? Kopal Theatre shows you how.

'Saag Meat' a solo performance penned and performed by Seema Pahwa is a unique concept. Seema plays the character of Sumitra, a middle-aged Punjabi woman who cooks Saag Meat as part of

sautéing, stirring and sprinkling. Sometimes, audience members pipe in with cooking tips. At the end, the dish is served to the audience members.

The barrier between performers and audience is well and truly broken by having them react and participate in the experience.

*Theatre artists, who tend to do
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of producing and writing plays
to do their own thing*

the performance. And while she does that, Sumitra haphazardly pieces a story together; her narration peppered with spicy and seemingly insignificant facts about this and that, until she arrives at a startling conclusion. As she talks, Sumitra keeps

Experimental theatre has become an engaging experience that provokes—but not weakens—the sensibility of the audience. Traditionally, theatre audiences are seen as passive observers but experimental theatre is out to change that perception.

INSPIRED BY IDENTITY

Aditya Sinha roams the streets of Bombay, capturing identities, and recreating family portraits and fantasy dreamscapes



Gonsalves, a member of the little known East-Indian community



My twin, Kajal dressed in my grandmother's saree as a part of the story 'Reclaiming Stretch Marks'



Karshni and Yusra; 'Queer Inclusivity on Valentine's Day' series



One of the traditional diya makers of Dharavi, originally from Gujarat



Image: Cinestaan

Vishab Thappa searches for deeper, unsaid truths in Gulzar's poetry

metaphor and meaning

Sirf ehsaas hai yeh, rooh se mehsoos karo. Pyaar ko pyaar rehne do koi naam na do

These are just emotions, feel them with your soul; let love be, don't put a name to it, he says. And when Gulzar says it, you know it is not a metaphor he has used lightly.

'Metaphors are not to be trifled with. A single metaphor can give birth to love,' Milan Kundera once wrote. That is perhaps why there is so much

love and yearning in Gulzar's poetry. He has redefined the use of metaphors and made it into his own currency.

Sometimes he's a painter, sometimes he's a sculptor, sometimes he's a perfumer and sometimes he's just a man who is in love. The metaphors are what make his songs and poems timeless; they will tell the truth for generations to come.

Gulzar touches an emotion, touches the faintest thread in that emotion and very gently puts words around that thread. It's a delicate process and the

products of this process are some of the simplest and most powerful arrangement of words. One of the tricks of being a poet is to write something which speaks to the heart, and when it speaks, the mind finds it is unable to object. Gulzar does it with clinical perfection.

Hum ne dekhi hai un aankhon ki mahekti khushboo. Haath se chuuke ise, rishton ka ilzaam na do

The lines are from a song in the film Ijaazat (1987), a movie Gulzar wrote and directed with the same passion and sensitivity he reserves for his poetry. A powerful film about relationships and patriarchy, the film has a conversation between the lead characters played by Naseeruddin Shah and Rekha:

'Ab bhi maachis rakhti ho? (the man says) Pehle toh mere liye rakhti thi. Ab?'
'Ab apney liye rakhti hoon'



Naseeruddin Shah and Rekha in the film Ijaazat (1987)

You don't have to feel everything with your senses; or need to describe them with words, he says. The knowledge of this limitation is very important for a writer, for everyone.

His words give weight to the weightless, like the heart which gets soaking wet in the rain:

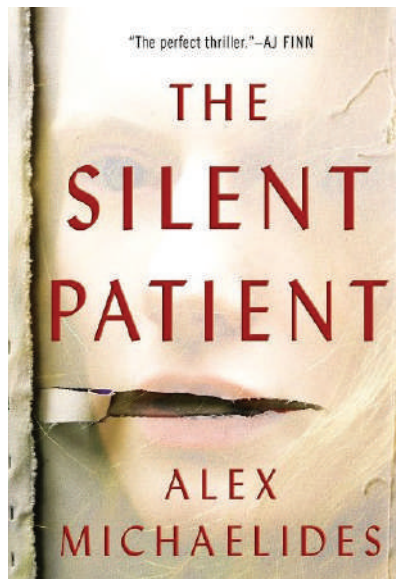
Ek akeli chatree mein jab aadhe aadhe bheeg rahe the. Aadhe sookhe aadhe geele; sookha toh mai le aayi thi.
Geela man shaayad bistar ke paas pada ho. Voh bhijwa do, mera voh samaan lauta do

'Matlab cigarette peena shuru kar diya kya?'
'Nahin, Aapki bhoolne ki aadat nahin gayi, meri rakhne ki'

These are just four lines of conversation between two people; that which is left unsaid is monumental.

This is the magic of Gulzar. He resides happily in the spaces behind words, between the lines, between the paragraphs and the stanzas. And pays his rent with metaphors that he culls out of thin air from a place where nothing is permanent and everybody is leaving.

OFF THE BOOKSHELF



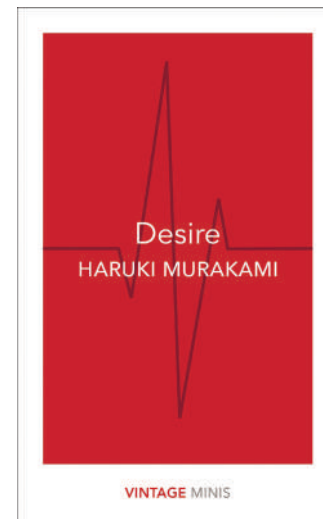
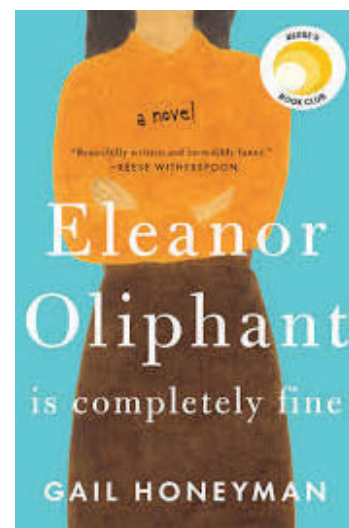
THE SILENT PATIENT by *Alex Michaelides*

Alicia Berenson is a painter, craftsman, and an overcomer of a traumatic adolescence who lives the perfect life until she mysteriously slaughters her significant other. But, what is more mysterious is Alicia's lack of explanation for the murder she apparently committed. Rather than being just a psychological thriller, the book 'The Silent Patient' is an exercise in the exploration of the psyches of both a woman convicted of murdering her husband and the therapist determined to treat her. A twisted first person narration, chilling plot twists, dotted by intricate details—the book makes one sit up and take notice of this debut novel and welcome a promising player into the genre.

— **Imana Bhattacharya**

ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY FINE by *Gail Honeyman*

Eleanor Oliphant, a 29-year-old accounting clerk, tends to stick to her routine; work all week, buy a supermarket pizza and two bottles of vodka on Friday, and spend the weekend alone in a drunken stupor waiting for Monday to arrive. Eccentric, awkward, and judgmental, Eleanor might sound like the very definition of an anti-heroine, yet in debut author Gail Honeyman's hands, she is refreshingly honest and utterly relatable. There is consistency in Eleanor's voice throughout the book and it's amazing how thorough her offbeat perspectives are. Honeyman raises really difficult issues about how easy it is to be lonely these days. — **Vishab Thappa**

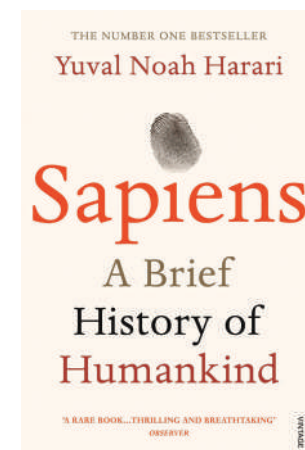
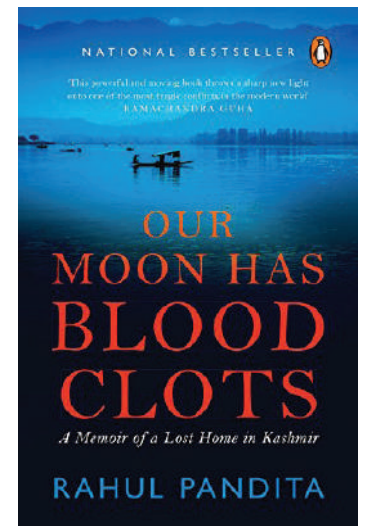


DESIRE by *Haruki Murakami*

Haruki Murakami walks his readers through desires of different kinds through five short stories. Hunger, infatuation and longing are a few of the desires that grip his protagonists. These desires rise, then plateau. They quell only when fulfilled or expressed. Protagonists' actions and decisions and their quandaries are dictated by the need to satiate desire. They live with what comes after it's gratified. Murakami weaves a deeply compelling narrative and helps the reader understand desires they contain within themselves. This is achieved with sharp storytelling and narration which cuts deep. — **Guneet Kaur**

OUR MOON HAS BLOOD CLOTS by *Rahul Pandita*

Journalist Rahul Pandita's memoir of fleeing Kashmir during insurgency recounts the brutalities inflicted on all those who suffered. He recounts tales of horror where 'women were herded like cattle in trucks' and 'local boys distributed the neighborhood houses among them'. However, amidst evoking tears and shock, Pandita fails to answer pivotal questions that readers might have expected. He merely scratches the surface explaining the reason for the exodus and the political response to it. An extremely moving read, this book is a must to know about the harsh realities of Kashmir. — **Prakriti Arya**



SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND by *Yuval Noah Harari*

Oxford historian Dr. Harari's book is a revelation: that we, *Homo sapiens*, are the only human species to have survived. 70,000 years back, the Neanderthals became extinct, and Sapiens emerged to dominate the Earth. The book traces how we learned to use fire, developed speech, gossiped to exchange information, created religion, gods and mythology, learned agriculture, and cooperated to create social groups, cities and civilizations. Harari's account is grippingly brilliant, his ideas provocative yet compelling. The book challenges what we think we know about ourselves and our future. — **Amitabh Dasgupta**



Aayushi Jagad performing at Nukkad Cafe in Viman Nagar

JOKES APART...

Snigdha Jain takes a behind-the-scenes look at Pune's thriving standup comedy culture

“I don't mind tomatoes though, tomatoes are nice,” says Aayushi Jagad, tongue firmly in cheek. She is not reminiscing about adding a vegetable she loves to a dish she likes. She's musing on a very realistic scenario featuring at her if her jokes fall flat. It is a fear most standup comedians have to live with. Aayushi takes it in her stride; she's been in the business two years now and so far managed to not offend anyone. Aayushi and others like her are taking Indian standup comedy from the metros to the Tier 2 cities. Pune, for instance, has taken a shine to the standup routine and has around 25 - 30 comics who turn out regularly at all 'open mics'. The city has some six venues where producers curate shows with top artists

performing in the city. Nukkad Cafe in Viman Nagar is one such. It hosts a 'Laughter Riot' which showcases twelve comic artists every Wednesday, late in the evening. The artists perform a variety of sketches for a show which lasts for about an hour and a half.

“You need older rooms to build a dedicated audience, which are recognised by good acts,” says Tarang Hardikar, who performs

there regularly. “This is the stage that any art struggles most with initially. Open mics don't attract audience unless at least one of the performer has a video on YouTube. The process of putting good comedy online takes time. It's now been two years and we are now finally getting a consistent turn-out.”

Even though the comedy scene is thriving, artists say earnings are yet to keep pace. One has to pay for a spot to perform at most open mics, so they're not really free for even the performer.

Comedians making good money are a rarity, except those that perform at corporate gigs. The producers are usually more absorbed in the art than its economics. Tickets to a show often fetch a bare minimum, which is spent on marketing of the next mic.

Most venue owners lend space only if it doesn't hamper their own work. And although these may not increase direct sales, it does help in receiving referral business. Aayushi believes that in Pune a gig will take a good three years more to translate into hard cash. For women who want

to get into comedy, now is the golden opportunity, she insists with a knowing laugh. When asked about how safe it is to be offensive, she says, “The older the room, the better it is for the comic. If you're doing a spot in an older room, you feel safer while testing new material.

“Familiarity helps when you don't know if the audience will laugh at your political joke or

*Familiarity helps when you don't know
if the audience will laugh
at your political joke
or throw the chair on your face*

throw the chair on your face.” Interestingly, comics become friends and form the musical equivalent of bands to perform sketches together. Just like musicians, they jam and bounce ideas off each other to refine and build their set material. Most performers agree that there is still a long way to go for comedy in India. It will be fascinating to see which way and how far it goes, especially in today's politically correct culture.

Netflix and the case of Oscars' identity crisis

Imana Bhattacharya looks at how streaming services are dismantling traditional film industry's power structures

The 2019 Oscar season is over; but what is far from over

is the running feud between Netflix and mainstream movie studios. With Netflix original *Roma* taking home three major Oscars – including for the Best Director and the Best Foreign Film – and six nominations, the issue is far from settled.

Established studios and well-known directors are voicing their concerns about the future of the film industry that has been losing audiences, revenues and



Director Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* bagged three awards at the 2019 Academy Awards

now prestige to the 'usurpers'. The American streaming service found itself in the middle of this bitter quarrel first in April 2018 when Cannes decided to prohibit Netflix original films from being screened at the festival. The decision was a part of a French cultural law that dictates how much time a film has to spend on different media like theatres, video-on-demand, and cable. Since Netflix refused theatrical releases for its films in France, they were barred from competing with other films.

The 2019 Academy Awards, having already dealt multiple blows, from being host-less

(after comedian Kevin Hart was fired over homophobic tweets) to removing some major award presentations from the live show, decided to give Netflix originals equal treatment. Unhappy at this, legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg said he planned to introduce new eligibility norms in the Academy so that Netflix movies without long theatrical stays couldn't just saunter into jury nominations.

One technicality Spielberg pointed out, and one that is at the center of this feud, is that Netflix movies resemble 'TV movies'; they are made for television and should only compete at the

Emmys and not the Oscars. And Netflix did compete and make a mark at the Emmys where its series *Black Mirror* won the award for outstanding television film. The other allegations, however, are slightly flimsy. For example, the studios are complaining about how much Netflix spends on promotions and their lack of long-term theatrical releases and failure to report to the box office once a film does get its theatrical release.

The issue here, however, may not be merely about Netflix disregarding the traditional rules of the film fraternity; it could stem from the fear of independent

NETFLIX ORIGINALS

filmmakers finally getting their dues and giving them serious competition. *Roma* is a prime example of a quality movie originating from unconventional sources.

Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and similar platforms are giving extraordinary creative freedom to filmmakers. *Sacred Games*, an Indian Netflix original was not only directed by two directors but also was an example of the excellence that films in India can achieve if they did not have to go through the treacherous cobwebs of censorship.

People are no longer as charmed by the theatrical experience of watching a movie; entertainment is now ever more accessible and portable. With reduced time and attention spans many are naturally choosing to watch films on their personal devices rather than movie halls. So, Netflix and other streaming services can



Are streaming services like Netflix causing the Oscars to lose their sheen or is it just industry paranoia?

afford to avoid theatrical releases and still create quality content that people will watch. Maybe it is time instead for the Academy and other established film awards to wake up to the reality of the changing film industry and remould themselves.

As for Netflix, it has already roped in master filmmaker Martin

Scorsese, along with legends Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro and Joe Pesci for their new original film, *The Irishman*, eyeing the next big film award probably.

The future of cinema looks a lot less binding and accessible for both filmmaker and film lovers, if only the gate-keepers of archaic tradition care to step aside.

LIBERATING PEOPLE AND SPACES

The 4th edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India's biggest contemporary art festival, was held in Kerala from 12 December, 2018 to 29 March, 2019. Curated by artist Anita Dube around the theme 'Possibilities of a Non-Alienated Life', the Biennale featured works of 135 artists from 31 countries across 40 venues in Fort Kochi. Here are some glimpses:

A PLACE
BEYOND
BELIEF

Scottish artist Nathan Coley's text and light sculpture at the Biennale's Aspinwall House venue in Fort Kochi

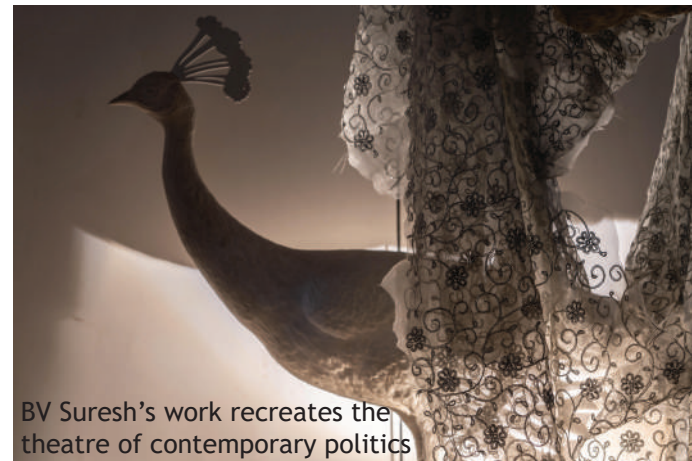
All Images Courtesy: Kochi Biennale Foundation



Artist Sue Williamson's work *One Hundred and Nineteen Deeds of Sale* remembers colonial histories



Nilima Shiekh's *Salam Chechi* is a tribute to Malayali nurses working overseas



BV Suresh's work recreates the theatre of contemporary politics



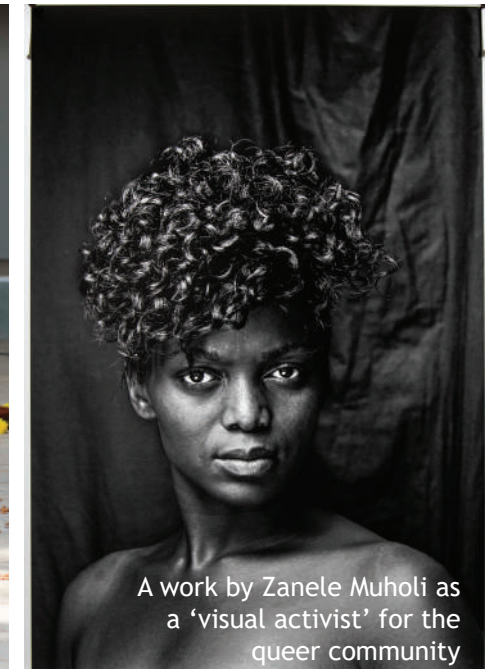
Tejal Shah explores identities with 'phytomorphic' forms



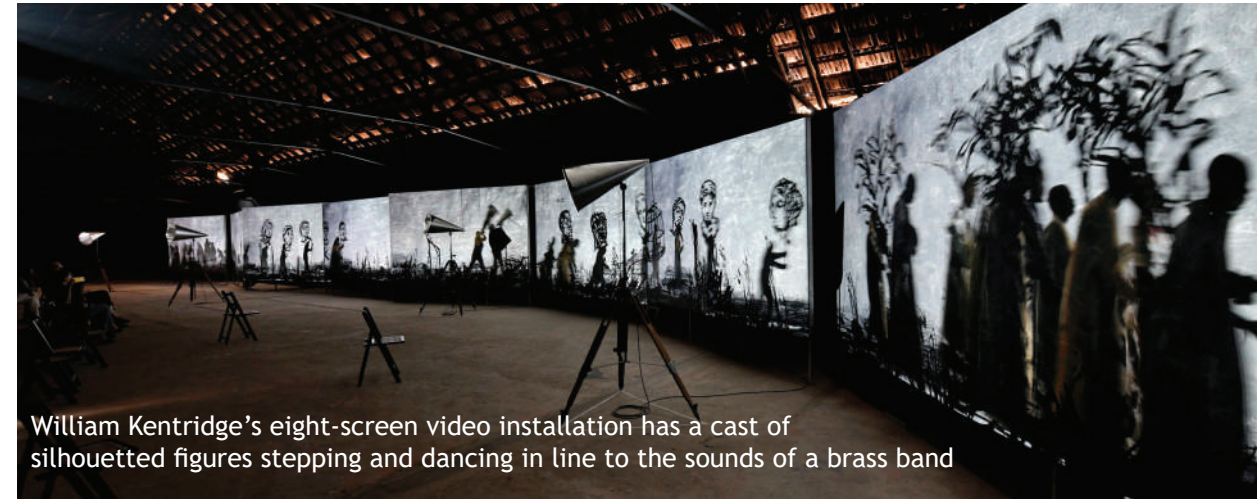
Bhikari Pradhan's rows of window-like woodcuts at the Student's Biennale represent connectedness and interdependency



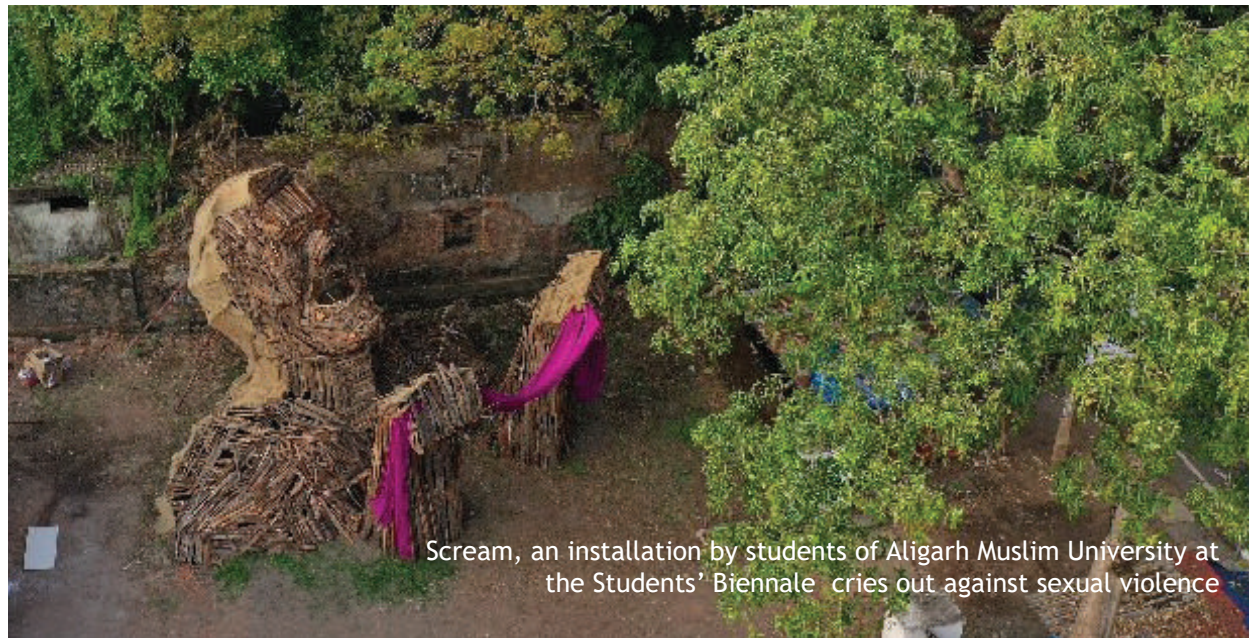
French artist Tabita Rezaire's performance art merges politics and healing



A work by Zanele Muholi as a 'visual activist' for the queer community



William Kentridge's eight-screen video installation has a cast of silhouetted figures stepping and dancing in line to the sounds of a brass band



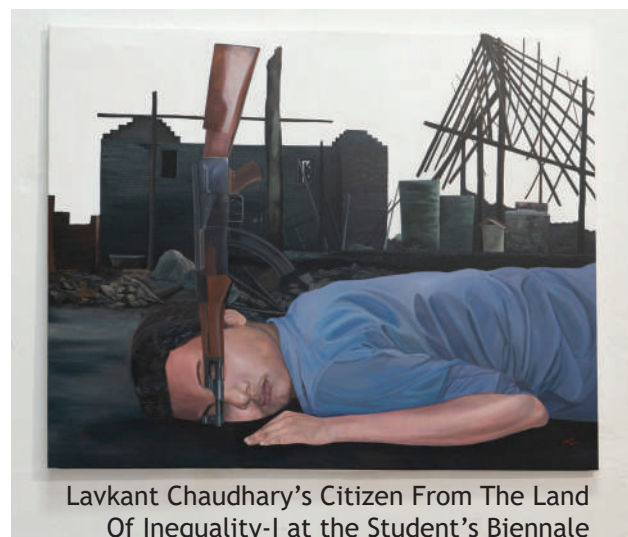
Scream, an installation by students of Aligarh Muslim University at the Students' Biennale cries out against sexual violence



Indonesian artist Heri Dono's *Smiling Angels from the Sky* is a vision of untethered humanity



Artist Sabitha's work at the Student's Biennale questions technology dependence of humans



Lavkant Chaudhary's *Citizen From The Land Of Inequality-I* at the Student's Biennale

SAVED!

Srishti Patnaik explores the many mysteries surrounding the most expensive artwork ever sold

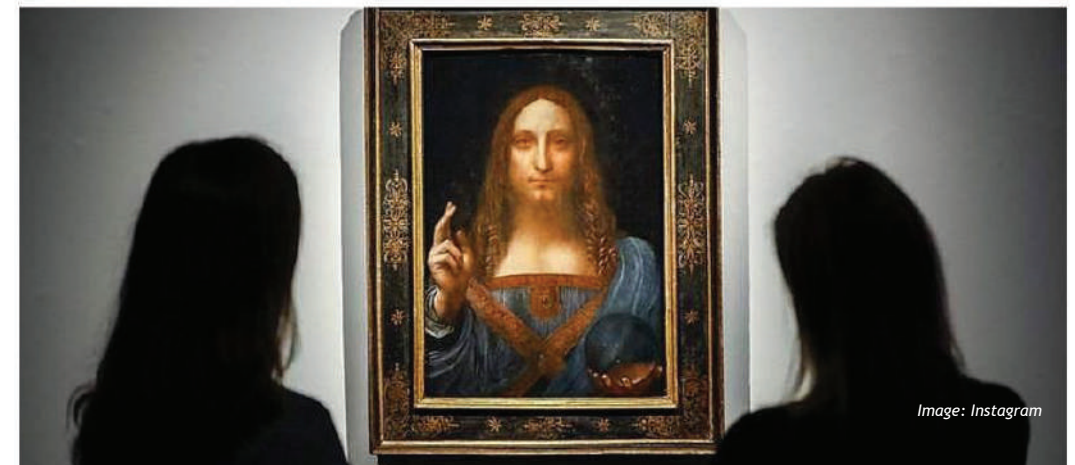


Image: Instagram

Five hundred years ago, while Leonardo da Vinci was still working on his timeless Mona Lisa, he created another portrait that may, at the time, have been an unremarkable addition to his body of religious paintings.

Relative to the complexity of *The Last Supper* or *The Virgin of the Rocks*, *Salvator Mundi* is rather simple — it is a portrait of a tranquil Jesus Christ dressed in a blue robe, holding a spherical glass orb, the *globus cruciger*, in his left hand and the two fingers of his right hand crossed in a sign of benediction.

In November 2017, *Salvator Mundi* went at auction at Christie's in New York for a whopping 450.3 million dollars, becoming the most expensive artwork to have ever been sold. What makes the

painting so strikingly extraordinary? Why has it caught everyone's fancy?

These may be difficult questions to answer as the judgement of artworks is purely subjective. However, '*Salvator Mundi*', Latin for 'Saviour of the World', is special in its own way. The painting exudes serenity; it focuses on the calmness and the loving nature of Christ, always there to shower his blessings upon the faithful and to protect the world. That, and perhaps the fact that this work has been shrouded in mystery since its early provenance.

Salvator Mundi is believed to have been commissioned by the French royal family around 1500, and after its initial ownership, the painting made its way across the channel to England and went places — quite literally. In 1763, it was bought at auction by the son of the Duke of Cambridge. Then for the next 150 odd years, it vanished, with

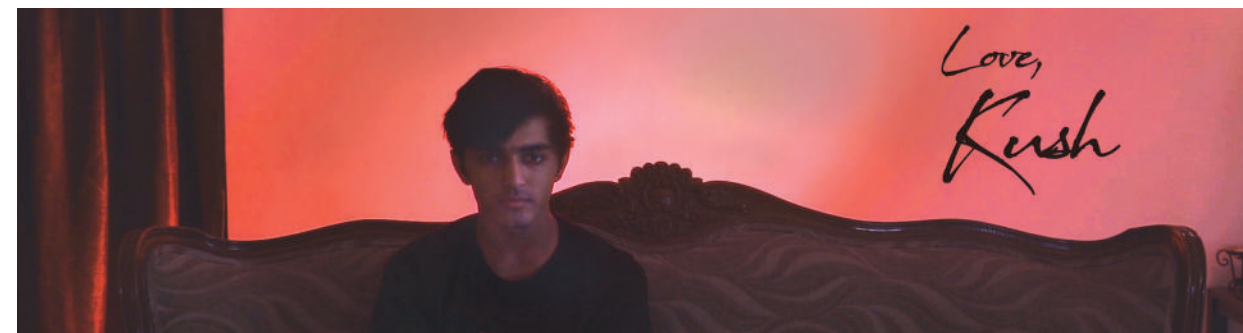
no records, until it was acquired by Francis Cook, 1st Viscount of Monserrate in the year 1900.

In 1958, Cook's great grandson sold it at auction at Sotheby's for a mere £45. The painting hadn't been able to stand the ravages of time — the walnut panel on which it had been painted had been damaged and it had been altered through overpainting. It was also surrounded by rumours and speculation that it was not a work of Da Vinci at all but one of his followers Bernadino Luini, or his pupil Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, who was credited at the Sotheby's auction. In 2005, Salvator Mundi resurfaced at a regional auction in New Orleans, USA. The consortium that bought the painting believed it to be a Da Vinci original and entrusted Dianne Dwyer Modestini at New York University with its restoration. In 2011, it was authenticated as a work of Da Vinci and unveiled publicly in London. It sold at Christie's four years later.

So who bought Salvator Mundi after its amazing adventurous journey? Even that seems to be unclear, quite in keeping with the aura of mystery around the painting. According to some news reports, the bidding was done via telephone and it was bought by Saudi Arabian Prince Badr bin Abdullah. Others said it was bought at the behest of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Some reports claimed Prince Abdullah had built a museum solely for the purpose of displaying the artwork and others said that it was to be displayed in the United Arab Emirates at the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum. It could be a while before the public lays its eyes on Salvator Mundi, which continues to hold the title of the costliest artwork ever sold. Sooner or later, this record will be broken. But Salvator Mundi and its incredible journey will continue to intrigue generations of art lovers.

GRADUATE FILMS 2019

A look at the works of Batch 2019 Audio-Visual Production students



LOVE, KUSH (*Hindi/English, Dir. Bhavana Kankaria*)

Team: Aarati Sathish, Hari Ramanathan, Siddharth Gupta, Missimi Rabha

Kushagra is an 18-year-old cinephile, who spends all his time watching movies. He lives with his mother and is at a juncture where he is expected to start 'adulthood'. The film explores the relationship of the mother and son, as they cope with the inevitable changes that come with adulthood through what else but cinema!



PATTA (*Marathi, Dir. Armaan Dua*)

Team: Bharat Madan, Panchsheel Gaikwad, Rujuta Khanapurkar, Malvika Nowlakha

Patta, through its central protagonist, Bhonsle, takes a close look at the deterioration of social relations in an urban shanty when faced with displacement. Sparse, restrained, and masterfully suggestive, the film is a mature descendant of Indian realist cinema.



SOLACE (*Hindi/English, Dir. Nairika Lodhi*)

Team: Prachie Sahu, Anish Dev, Apoorva Singhal, Aditya Devsharma

Solace is a short film about a young girl whose world goes suddenly upside-down after a tragic event. The story follows her journey as she learns to move on. From identifying different emotional crutches to coping mechanisms, the film explores the realisation of self-love and acceptance.



ALMOST TOGETHER (*Hindi, Dir. Aayush Gaur*)

Team: Sharwari Bawkar, Shlok Bhatt, Akansha Tiwari, Manasi Boyatkar

Almost Together is a raucous comedy about a youth's first meeting with his fiancée's family, which quickly goes south when the underlying tensions begin to bring out everyone's secrets.



NAYANAM MADHURAM (*Telugu, Dir. Akhil Reddy*)

Team: Tejas Sudha, Akashta Tilwankar, Aditya Sinha, Muhi Mydra, Milind Anand

It is summer holidays — Gangamma Jatara time in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. Arun, a little boy, keeps looking at the sky every day, waiting for it to rain. He loves the onion bajjis his mother makes during rains. But Chittoor is regularly haunted by droughts.

Arun and Chandini, his sister, spend most of their time listening to mythical tales from their parents. Their favorite story is the one about Chintamani,

a wish-granting jewel that has been mentioned in history as travelling through the hands of many gods, kings and leaders. Chintamani can fulfil any wish, but at a price.

The kids are lured into the world of Chintamani. Together, they embark on an extraordinary journey to get Chintamani back to their hometown and to change the fate of Chittoor forever. Would they? At what cost?



ATHAARAM (*Telugu, Dir. Swetha Pillai*)

Team: Sindhuja Desai, Kritika Siroliya, Kritika Singh Bisen, Sayali Ghatne

Athaaram is a parallel between Sita and the patriarchal and societal influences that bind her to the norms that an Indian housewife is expected to live up to, and Shreya, her daughter, who is determined to lead a life where she's strong and does not need to depend on the men in her life. Yet, their lives complement and mirror each other in unexpected and ultimately redeeming ways.



ZEHER HAI TU (*Hindi, Dir. Krittika Kannoja*)

Team: Manasvi Singh Chauhan, Nidhi Jarmanwala

Zeher Hai Tu is a documentary that offers a close look at the emerging dance cultures of Dehradun, and the aspirations of the people involved in them.



MAITREYI (*Hindi/English, Dir. Ritika Kapoor*)

Team: Pranav Krishnan, Shouvik Bisai, Zubiya Athavani, Sanil Akerkar

Maitreyi presents the essence of the director's relationship with her younger sister - distanced by a healthy age gap, but brought together by tragedy. As Kiara, the protagonist, uses caustic humour to grasp at the threads of her relationship with her elder sister, Mira, their relationship grows into one of imperturbable warmth and solace.



Portrait in a black & red floral pattern dress

Model: Sonam Choden

ELEGANZA: A fashion photography project by SCMC students



Traditional red ghagra paired with a spaghetti-top 'choli'

Model: Pranali Padwekar



Royal Blue Skirt with a dupatta drape

Model: Pranali Padwekar

Photography: Nishita Jain
Make-up: Riddhi Gopalani
Hair: Priyal Yadav



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