

INDIA ALLIANCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CORNER ART & SCIENCE PROGRAMME

THE UNDIVIDED MIND

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For centuries, science and art and those engaged in these fields, have shaped the society and have informed each other's practices. But more recently there have been few active exchanges between the two fields which have increasingly been seen as unconnected. This notion was addressed and challenged at the recently held, **the Undivided Mind**, Art and Science residency organised by one of the leading contemporary art spaces in the country, Khoj International Artists Association, from March 7 to April 15, 2016, wherein the participants explored the distinct yet connected fields of art, science, health, technology and design. Seven artists at the residency, from India and abroad, who were selected through a competition, brought with them different artistic insights and expertise and a keen interest to engage in a dialogue with scientists and other practitioners of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine) and social sciences. During the six weeks, the artists explored various science and health-related themes which ranged from, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial experience of a four-armed human being, "tub of loss"- to experience the loss of body (similar to in space) to urban laboratory for birds, wearable sculptures to protect from air pollution and a body suit mimicking microorganism invasion of our bodies. The artwork also reflected on human conditions such as abnormal perception (schizophrenia) and hysterectomy. The Open Studio Day at Khoj on 15 April 2016, exhibited work by Tyska Samborska (Poland), Gagan Singh (India), Johanna Schmeer (Germany), Mohan Polamar & Vivek Muthuramalingam (India) Alexey Buldakov (Russia), and Sonia Khurana (India). The artwork was presented as a collection of photographs, videos, sculptures, sketches and installations. During the residency, the artists also got the opportunity to interact and engage in conversations with scientists, social scientists, science writers, philosophers and other artists during a two-day public lecture series that invited eminent speakers, Anil Ananthaswamy, Milind Sohoni, Bishnu Mohapatra,

Sanil V and Ashis Nandy, touched upon answers to questions- "how do these two cultures (of art and science) define the mind, the self and the other? How does the greater project of science influence how we organize our lives, our politics, society and culture? Can the arts provide a critique of the scientific endeavour or help express the cultural ambivalence towards the promise that science has offered?". The programme also fostered conversations and collaborations between the artists and India Alliance Fellows. For instance, sketch artist, Gagan Singh consulted and spent long hours discussing mirror neurons and synesthesia with India Alliance Early Career Fellow Urvakhsh Mehta, associate professor at National Institute for Mental Health and Neuroscience (NIMHANS). Following this residency, some of the artists and India Alliance Fellows are currently brainstorming ideas together for similar creative public engagement projects.

The Undivided Mind, attempted to bridge the gap between the discursive fields of art and science through the development of artwork inspired by human health and which employed concepts of science and provided a platform for collaboration between the two fields and its practitioners. This Art and Science programme was supported by the Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance through its public engagement programme.

More on the programme: <http://khojworkshop.org/programme/the-undivided-mind-art-science-residency-2/>

Photos from the Open Studio day can be found here <https://www.facebook.com/India.Alliance/>



THE ARTWORK



Entangled Bodies

Johanna Schmeer

“Entangled Bodies” (work in progress) investigates the merging of technology and the human body. Three sculptural wearables for the arm, the leg, and the nose utilise three different technologies based on electricity, nanoparticles, and biology. These sculptural wearables remove three different types of air pollution: NO₂, CO₂, and particulate matter.

The NO₂ Wearable is a 3D printed sculpture coated with nano titaniumdioxide which removes NO₂ from the air. It is connected to the nose. The CO₂ Wearable is a 3D printed sculpture filled with spirulina algae in sodium alginate gel. It removes CO₂ from the air and is worn on the arm. The Particulate Matter Wearable is a 3D printed sculpture with electrostatic properties. It uses kinetic energy from body movement to remove particulate matter from the air and is connected to the leg.

In a time when technology is increasingly moving onto and into our bodies, and smart phones have become prostheses for our brains, how do we feel about becoming more and more entangled in technology, even for essential bodily functions such as breathing? Have we grown so accustomed to digital technology and electronics that wearing something biological like algae on our body feels more unnatural to us than wearing something electronic? And will we choose to adapt our own bodies to the environmental effects of the anthropocene through more technology, or will we find strategies to reduce our impact on our surroundings?

Show me what you keep inside

Tyska Samborska

‘Show me what you keep inside’ is a project referring to the theme of physical health and structure of the body. I concentrate my work on the relations between our body as nourishment for microorganisms living inside that could take control over our condition and the opposite; the consideration of microorganisms as necessary, essential elements to keep our body healthy. In this project, I try to look at a situation where microorganisms start to grow and become dangerous for a human body, when roles start to change and our body becomes weak, so easy to destroy and to be consumed.

I attempt to question importance of our body in the ecosystem and show its dependence on other, smaller but also strong organisms. I try to make more visible our ‘invisible’, interior part.



Photo credits: Vivek Muthuramalingam, Tyska Samborska

Urban Fauna Laboratory

Alexey Buldakov

Urban Fauna Laboratory is interdisciplinary project dedicated to observation of urban wild life and artistic participation in the inter-species interactions in the city. The main interest is the most common inhabitants of artificial landscapes: such expansive species as pigeons, cats, crows, ruderal and invasive flora etc. – those synanthropes who are not vulnerable to the modern city’s severe ecological conditions and don’t represent a direct threat to the human.

Interspecies altruism in the city is an unconscious attempt towards pure affiliation with natural agency. It has all characteristics of a cult practice, continuous ritualistic event happening on the background of segregation human and animal. Buldakov calls it the ‘cult of urban parasitism’. This is because the most prominent definition for these animals is parasites. I’m very determined to find and investigate interesting cases of urban parasitism in India.

The main goal of Urban Fauna Laboratory is actual building of the Park of Urban Fauna. The Park is a multispecies public space, an area of post-human bio-political utopia. The place where the human community and communities of local animals are experiencing intense interaction. During the residency, Buldakov will summon all the elements together and produce the final design of the Park in sketches and models.



THE ARTWORK

**Mohan Polamar & Vivek Muthuramalingam**

This piece of work is immersive, experiential and performance based. Ideas will be introduced and supporting experiences will be induced both vicariously and directly. These ideas will challenge the concept of being human in this period of climate change. This technozoosemiotic installation that brings together bio-art, neuroscience, robotics and the theories of quantum mechanics will lay lightly on the grotesque. Grotesque being in the fringes of ludicrous and terrible embeds in itself a powerful temperament that brings the necessary to radical.

I become a Bangalorian when I leave Bangalore likewise, we become human when we leave earth. As climate change ravages the earth the option of interplanetary travel becomes urgent, leading us to train our focus on space travel technology and evolution of the astronaut.

Astronauts lose weight in space and are left with resistance to remind themselves of their body. Yoga is similar as it is the practice of interchanging weight and resistance within oneself. Continuous practice of Yoga became the foundation of the process. We built sensory deprivation tank to experience weightlessness and to challenge the vestibular system, conducted kinematic study of *asanas* looking for clues in its geometry and created objects that induce the experience of proprioception.

In space every concept spins on its head, like being superman is not being super at all. In space, astronauts become super if they can stay grounded. The process threw up many ideas within the pre-defined confines of evolution and aesthetics. We chose one of the ideas and it brought along with it the concept of the grotesque. So we studied the aesthetic, functionality and the extremity of this grotesque with a series of pictures merging the experience of the astronaut with the plebeian.

**Gagan Singh**

Thoughts, drawings, immediate responses, how I think, little acts, conversations. The room was occupied to draw out a scene responding to what is "mental illness". I was in touch with Dr Urvakhsh Mehta about what is Schizophrenia and Mirror Neurons and in between I noticed little things about myself.

Womb narratives**Sonia Khurana**

women. Voice. Video. 2016

Womb narratives is an ongoing series of conversation with women from different walks, with scientists, psychologists, medicine women/men those who work on the ground level with hysterectomy, its physio-psycho-social effect, and the striking normalisation of the loss of this organ transcribed onto the body: how the removal of an organ is seen as a 'permanent solution' and becomes routine treatment. There are also the counter-narratives: women's attitudes towards uterus removal often emerge along a spectrum including freedom and pragmatic choice.

The narratives these women recount express the profound encounter between medical science, the representation of female reproductive processes and the whole complex of female desire related to sexuality, maternity and sterilization, either for achievement or negation, evidences the rebelliousness against continuing to follow the cultural destiny of women, i.e. maternity. Becoming sterilized, women also reveal the subjective castration desire, for surgical sterilization could be considered as deviation or substitution of desire, and may contribute to the understanding of the ambiguity or even feelings of loss.

**Wandering womb**

Nylon object, vitrine, water

Hippocrates said:

a woman's uterus is a living creature that wanders throughout a woman's body, blocking passages, obstructing breathing, causing disease.
Missing womb

Self-cleansing, both external and internal, as a metaphor for the liberation of the soul from the body, as the practice of self-regulation that aims to consolidate and stabilize the interiority of the subject against the disturbing effects of the impure external world – purging one of historically accumulated sources of psychic instability: the term 'hysteria' is the ancient origin of the word 'uterus'.