

Ways of Seeing

Gauri Gill & Seher Shah

Oct 28 – Nov 29

Opening Preview: Tuesday Oct 28, 6pm

In his well-known, 4-part, 1972 BBC television series and later a book of essays, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger raises several questions about hidden ideologies in visual images. The book is a critique of the more traditionalist view of Western artistic and cultural aesthetics and is an essential text for visual culture and art history. Over the last four decades since this seminal book was written, the emergence of the Global South, its own complexities and how the world has seen, expressed and visually presented itself has dramatically changed and has possibly necessitated a revisualization of the way we see things today.

Experimenter presents *Ways of Seeing*, a two-person exhibition by Gauri Gill and Seher Shah, bringing together, two artists together who have disparate 'ways' of seeing but a strong connection in the 'process' of seeing and therefore their practice. Both Shah and Gill use photography to build a scaffolding to structure their work and then 'see' the worlds from completely different vantage points. And it is possibly this connection that culls the reference of Berger's TV series, which commented on the invention of the camera and the world of photography, which according to him had completely and forever transformed the way we saw the world. Now it was possible to see something, not necessarily from a single (traditionally western, eye of the beholder) perspective, but with millions of possible perspectives simultaneously.

In *Ways of Seeing*, Gill collaborates with Warli painter Rajesh Vangad from Ganjad, Dahanu – an Adivasi village in coastal Maharashtra to present her most recent body of work, *Fields of Sight*. The work's visual language emerged symbiotically from Gill's initial experiences of photographing the landscape in Ganjad, where she felt that although her camera was capturing the distinct 'chameleon-like' skin of what she was 'seeing' through her camera, it was missing subconscious and vital aspects of what was not apparent to the eye of the outsider. In her discussions and subsequent excursions with Vangad, who's family has worked and lived in Vangad Pada as artists for generations, she discovered a new way of seeing the landscape she photographed. The landscape viewed through the eyes of Vangad and captured through the lens of Gill was incomplete without the narratives that the Warli painter and the two collaboratively create these photo-paintings, documents of multiple truths. In the act of employing the folklore and visual culture of seeing the landscape through the eyes of Vangad, Gill inadvertently rekindles the need to challenge the way we see things today, what our eyes capture and what may elude them.

Our built structures are constantly evolving, continuously transforming to the visions of architects and city planners, some of whom could be thousands of miles away, with little to do with where its being built. Much of the Brutalist modernism of the 1950's dream in South Asia was built this way and it changed the way our horizon looked forever. In Mammoth, a collaborative work between Shah and photographer

Randhir Singh, a series of photographs of aerial views of landscape, that have large monolithic structures, resemble such interventions, as if the fabric of the landscape itself has been imposed with something from the outside. In these aerial drawings, the hand of the artist seems to have an almost autocratic intrusion in the landscape below, portending possible sinister landings or shadows of proposed structures or large architectural developments themselves. Whatever their perceived purposes maybe, the works compel the viewer to look at these images of the landscape and the land itself with a new frame. A frame that sieves through itself several thoughts and possibilities... ideas of what lie beneath the darkness of the forms, of what these forms themselves imply, or what may have been in their place, of that of memory, loss and most significantly, ideas of a new vision of our world.

In close dialogue with Shah's *Mammoth*, Gauri Gill's second body of work at the exhibition, *Rememory*, a series of photographs seem to suggest directions towards the answers to the questions raised by *Mammoth*. One of the photographs that may be used as a tool to seeing this body of work, depicts a deserted housing scheme, who's boundary walls enclose a haunted amusement park, and have a beautiful painting of a family of dogs gambling together - the dystopian fruits of capitalism with a Marxist banner hanging in the building behind - or perhaps suggesting a land reclaimed by the outsider, deserted by its original inhabitants in the chase of a different dream. The photographs record borders both on the edge of, and within towns; spill-overs, overlaps and encroachments between the rural and the urban; and sites akin to 'negative spaces'. In the artists own words, "I am interested in how we have imagined and continue to re-imagine cities, and how the human hand remains and reveals itself both in the conception and destruction of new ways of living and being, as embedded in material culture."

Collaged extractions from the architectural genius of the iconic *Capitol Complex*, built by Le Corbusier in Chandigarh, India in the 1950's as a model capital city, portray a slice of its entirety in Seher Shah's work, bearing the same title as given by its original 'creator-in-concrete'. Grey building blocks of rigid structure reoriented and perspectively distorted in visual placement, almost as background noise to a field of geometric patterns, cut to shape staccato repetitions bereft of human presence. Anchoring itself to the three other bodies of work in the show, *Capitol Complex* seems to form a bridge both conceptually and visually between the Shah's *Mammoth*, Gills *Rememory* and *Fields of Sight*.

In *Ways of Seeing*, employing a multiple practices from, photography to drawing to collage, Shah and Gill address the way we visualize our own position in what is today, as a brief punctuation in understanding contemporaneity or a fleeting capture of time itself in its momentary truth of the present.

This exhibition is being presented in collaboration with Nature Morte, New Delhi. For any further information and press related enquiries, please write to Uma ray at admin@experimenter.in or call on +91.2463.0465. Experimenter is open Monday through Saturday between 11am – 7pm.