

# experimenter

## ***Ruminations on Labour***

Prabhakar Pachpute

Praneet Soi

Raqs Media Collective

Sanchayan Ghosh

May 09 – July 31, 2018

Experimenter presents, *Ruminations on Labour*, an exhibition that explores the act of labour, its politics and what labour means in an increasingly globalized and capitalist world. Showing works by Prabhakar Pachpute, Praneet Soi, Raqs Media Collective and Sanchayan Ghosh, the exhibition brings together sculpture, installation and painting, making disparate points of entry into the notion of labour.

Working with communities and making interactive participatory installations over the last two decades, Sanchayan Ghosh presents *Labour Reconciled* an immersive installation and sound piece created with traditional roof makers in Birbhum. The roof makers, traditionally handmade roofs, a dying craft that involves bringing together an ancient combination of natural substances and a staccato beating of materials, executed with rhythmic folk songs of labour to make roofs before concrete casting was prevalent. In researching this marginalized practice, Ghosh brings into context the avant-garde poetry written by the Hungryalist group that emerged in and around Bengal in the 1960's. Their counter-discourse was the first voice of post-colonial freedom of pen and brush. Confronting and disturbing the prospective readers' preconceived colonial canons, the Hungryalists also stressed the inclusion of the Subaltern in mainstream culture. In bringing together these disparate practices, one a literary revolution and another a craft tradition, Ghosh deliberates on forms of dying labour and craft. A video, journals, and manifestos on labour from the time occupy a section of the gallery accompanying Ghosh's research on the Hungryalists.

Keeping craft and old hand processes at its core, is Praneet Soi's ongoing body of work, *Kumartuli Printer, Notes on Labour*. A slide-installation follows the movements of a printer who works in Kumartuli, an old quarter in the city of Kolkata, as he operates an outdated treadle printer. It records the motions of the printer's hands as he feeds paper into the machine and pulls out grainy prints depicting the image of the printer's hand in labour. By reproducing the printer's repetitive routine, the sequence of images reveals the entwined relationship between man and machine, between crafted skill, artistic choice and industrial technique. *Kumartuli Printer* highlights the labour conditions within one-man industrial workshops, a common phenomenon in third-world economies that often struggle to compete with post-industrial modes of production, recognizing both the obsolescent craft and the graphic language that are characteristic of the printer's practice.

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In another part of the gallery, Prabhakar Pachpute takes over the space as a site for work, employing his own labor as an artist by making large scale immersive murals and drawings. Over the last decade, Pachpute's work has consistently depicted loss of land, resource and exploitation of labour across global mining sites. His work questions the role of capital and the cost at which labour is employed. In Marxian theory, the reward for labour and for the quantity of labour are recognized as disproportionate aspects that are often unsatisfactorily rewarded. Pachpute reflects on the reward for labour and also its exploitation by presenting a canvas, *The Wide Divergence of the Cotton Gin*, a series of sculptures, a stop-motion animation video and wall murals, referring to open-cast mining and labour exploitation.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Raqs Media Collective, explores labour as a beholder of power. *An Afternoon Unregistered on The Richter Scale* is a video of an archived photograph by James Waterhouse from 1911 in which a room full of surveyors in colonial Calcutta transforms through a series of subtle interventions. Raqs Media Collective intervene to include a constellation of stars onto a drawing board, induce tremors too gentle to disturb the Richter scale, reveal a dreamed up desert, make time move backwards, stain the afternoon with indigo, and introduce a rustle and a determined stillness of surveyors. The work functions as a meditation on the condensation of time in the photographic image, as well as a gentle disturbance in the serious enterprise of recording and commemorating order on a fractious landscape. The work opens up the enormously lasting possibilities brought about by the most miniscule changes in the laborious actions or decisions by colonial cartographers, dramatically altering the course of history, possibly in an insignificant afternoon.

A deeper inquiry into labour is critical in a world that is undergoing tremendous upheaval in understanding the role of manual work and motions of labour. This inquiry into labour situates itself within a contemporary context of reduced human interface, dependence on technology and automation. In *Ruminations on Labour*, the artists bring together a wide range of practices that build a dialogue on labour using folk traditions, craft practices, socio-political commentary, and historical references.

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