

PRANEET SOI

SRINAGAR

April 10 – May 30, 2015

Opening Preview: Friday, April 10, 6-8 pm

Experimenter presents, *Srinagar*, Praneet Soi's first solo at the gallery. The exhibition opens on Friday April 10, 2015 and will continue until May 30, 2015.

Delving into ideas linked to the depiction of the city's cultural fabric and the slippages in the public understanding of its rich historical legacy the show is set against the backdrop of the violence, loss and longstanding misrepresentation of Kashmir in mainstream media. It brings together Soi's artistic probe into Srinagar's cultural elements as well as his contemplative reflection on Kashmir's portrayal in the public domain.

Over the years Soi has repeatedly referenced, often subverted, conflict zone images circulated by the media through his works. He frequently merges such abstracted images with spatial aspects of architecture in an attempt to touch upon the imbalanced understanding of conflict zones. *Srinagar* takes off from these precursors and marks the beginning of a new body of work for which Soi has worked in close collaboration with traditional crafts-people in Kashmir. The project is aimed to be an effort to understand discord, its depiction and the unseen collateral losses. But it is also an observation on migration, not only of people but also of culture, and on the possibility of introducing elements of contemporaneity in practices steeped in tradition.

Soi's first visit to Srinagar was in 2010, shortly after protests erupted across Kashmir and waves of stone pelters, young and old, descended on the streets of the city. Srinagar was the first stop of a personal journey through which Soi seeks to dig into the connections between forms and images which have travelled, through the passage of time, across China, Iran and India. It was in relation to this enquiry and in an attempt to understand the links between Kashmir, Central Asia and Iran that he spent his time in the city documenting the many historic Sufi shrines in Srinagar. Earlier in 2015 he furthered this investigation at the Smithsonian, where he was awarded a fellowship to study South Asian and Islamic Art at the Freer and Sackler galleries.

It was during his first trip to Srinagar that he met Fayaz Jan, the ustad of an atelier where he returned to work later in 2014. Jan's apprentices painted traditional motifs on the papier-mâché boxes and objects that flood shops across the country. The art of papier-mâché, a composite material made of pulped paper and adhesive which hardens as it dries, travelled to Kashmir from Iran much like the decorative patterns on Sufi architecture. In geometric patterning Islam had found a metaphor not only for divine order and presence but also a visual reference for contemplation, unity and balance. Scatterings of the characteristic vegetal designs, the triangle, the circle, the square, which mark Islamic patterns across the world all appear in various guises in Soi's present body of works.

We would block out sketches I had made of the landscape and elements in it and have the apprentices fill the outlines with their motifs. I would suggest patterns and colors that I had

recorded at the sites around Srinagar. Khanqah-e-Moula, the shrine that marked the spot where Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, the 13th century Iranian Sufi saint meditated, was an important reference.

The resultant series of papier-mâché tiles, crafted specially for the artist, play incessantly with the tight frame they are bound by. Often they transform into vignettes of the valley, often the valley becomes the patterns.

In addition to the tiles, is a projection of a sequence of images which look closer into the wall embedded patterns at the Sufi shrines. Alongside, against a dark backdrop, are excerpts and images, amidst them an image from Da Vinci's folio 38 (dated to 1492), an excerpt from the Instrument of Accession (signed 26th October 1947) and a pattern from the diary of a Khatumbandhi artisan. The image from Da Vinci's folio speak of Anomorphosis, a perspective technique which causes an image to appear distorted, if not completely obscure, unless the viewer sees it from a specific vantage point or through a special device. Soi's reference to the method is an oblique allusion to the state of Kashmir and the perception the media tends to have of it, fed on images and information that obscures more than it reveals,.

Together with the tiles, the patterns disclosed haltingly through the slide show and the bits and pieces collected by him in the course of his stay in the city, Soi shares his own vantage of the city that is Srinagar and a place that is Kashmir.

Praneet Soi was born in Kolkata in 1971. He studied painting at the Maharaj Sayajirao University, Baroda and visual arts at the University of California, San Diego. His work has been exhibited in various venues all over the world including at the Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico, Centro Cultural Motehermoso Kulturnea, Spain, Martin van Zomeren, Netherlands, the 13th Istanbul Biennial, the 7th Gwangju Biennale and at the Indian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. His works reside in various important collections in Europe and India, such as that of Inge and Cees de Bruin-Heijn, Wassenaar and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi. He currently works out of Kolkata and Amsterdam.

The exhibition has been generously supported by the Mondriaan Fonds, Netherlands. For further information and press related enquiries please write to info@experimenter.in or call on +91.33.2463.0465 / 4001.2289