

**Contemporary Indian Installation**  
**Art and Ecology -**  
**Two Renewable Resources**



**Contemporary Indian Installation Art and Ecology - Two Renewable Resources**

**Dr. Parveen Sultana**

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2015**



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## About the Book

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Modern Indian art has undergone vital changes over the last 50 years. As we approach a new millennium, individual and global responsibility whether in art or in any other aspect of life, have become mutually more dependent than ever before. In the West, the new holistic concept of art has been borne out by the works of many artists over the decades. Where does the East, and especially India, see its place in this new and all-embracing creative process?

In this book, an attempt has been made to probe the works of few eminent Indian painters and sculptors who have executed sculptures in public places to create awareness and are communicative, raising questions mostly concerning socio-political interests of downtrodden people and criticizing the consumer society and its chaotic way of development. The book is a small documentation of few internationally acclaimed Indian artists who have started wonderful public awareness efforts and developed new tools for living in more environmentally ethical ways. To express my conviction that an environmental approach must be introduced within art studies and I can only wish that it results the difficult task to give adequate artistic expression to the problem in question and likewise, should inspire others to go beyond.

I would propose that a start would be to point out that art is an essential part of the social capital of a nation. It helps to build the networks and to establish norms of trust and reciprocity among the citizens across racial and ethnic lines.

## Prelude

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Hegel prized the beauty of art above that of nature. "Art speaks is or is like language" whereas by contrast "beauty, and therefore natural beauty, is dumb". Nature is the source and foundation of all our sentient and cognitive aspects. And aesthetics, as a branch of the study of human sensibilities, has always been concerned about the changes happening in the relationship between human beings and nature. Even the foundational theories of art laid by Plato in the West and Bharata in India are based on nature and human responses to them. Though a human being is part and parcel of nature, his or her creativity is part of a culture. Our conceptions of nature may vary and each version may find independent reasons for thinking its object beautiful and purposeful. Art is so powerful a medium that disturbing elements are meek and sooner or later wither away. Visual art demonstrates the inner depth of beauty in human life and thereby sends a very powerful message.

In Indian scenario, during the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, a group of artists increasingly questioned the restriction of painting and experimented with radical new ways of responding to the environment and its ecology. Rather than paint the landscape, their experiences were realized by sculpting the land itself, by photographic sequences and in sculpture made from natural materials. Many painters like N.S.Bendre, Arpana Kaur, Jogen Chaudhary, Jatin Das, Dalip Das Gupta, Anjali Ela Menon and sculptors like Ramkinkar Baij, Nagji Patel, D. P. Roy Chaudhury, Jaya Deva Thakore, Madan Lal, Sudarshan Patnaik, etc have executed sculptures in public places to create awareness and are communicative. Vivian Sundaram did some big sized installations like Configura 11, Great Indian Bazaar, and House from House, and Trash etc., raising questions mostly concerning socio-political interests of downtrodden people and criticizing the consumer society and its chaotic way of development. He through art directly participates in the issues related to people. He is the first artist who have created public truly if not perfectly. Murals executed by many artists like K. G. Subrahmanian, Gulam Sikh, Satish Gujral, Krishan khanna etc, were great efforts to create art consciousness and awareness in the public. There are many groups and individuals who are aware of this fact and try to protect nature and its resources.

Robin Banerjee was a noted environmentalist; painter, photographer, Shri Devnath Mukharji (Dev), the well-known landscape artist, impressionist, photographer and environmentalist are especially noteworthy. Hemraj, Bansi Parimu, Navjot Altaf, Pradosh Swain are concern about nature and its protection in order to avoid the Global Warming.

We received industrial culture from West. But unfortunately, we didn't learn the culture of protection. Traditionally, every product was packed in a way that there was no harm for nature. So everything was recycled. But now the result of any food or product is that we can see pollution of nature. There are many groups and individuals who are aware of this fact and try to protect nature and its resources. But they are not artists. They don't use art as a strong language to create awareness of environmental crises. In this Post Modern era, artists continue to make works directed toward social change. They've started wonderful public awareness efforts and developed new tools for living in more environmentally ethical ways.

In this regard, considering the importance of the issue, the workshop held at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Max Mueller Bhavan and Japan Foundation decided to devote the entire workshop along with the outstanding works done there. I express my sincere thanks to all those who have put in great efforts to make this publication come into being. Dr. Georg Lechner the former Director of the Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, who was the moving spirit behind the organization of the workshop, had to leave for Germany after the workshop and I felt his absence while working on the book, though his energetic activism has prompted me to make this serious effort. So is with Mr. Hayato Ogo, the former Director of Japan Foundation, whose presence at the time of the workshop resonated like a haiku. But nonetheless, we have Dr. Tillman Waldraff and Mr. Kazuo Ando, now Directors of the Max Mueller Bhavan and Japan Foundation respectively, who have taken deep interest in every aspect of this publication. However, in grateful mood, I would like to thank Ms. Petra Matusche of the Max Mueller Bhavan who had an active and corrective hand in many of the texts, and who, by sorting with determination through the chaos of the text and photographs made this contemporary issue possible. Special thanks to the eminent artist Mr. Nand Katyal giving his professional advice on matters of design and layout and to Ms. Jehanara Wasi who had the unenvious task of going through the proofs.

Finally, with a tinge of sorrow I mention Ani Sylvie's contribution to the book. The transparencies she had taken of the works at the Buddha Jayanti Park are simply superb and I am proud to have them included in this publication. By organizing the International Workshop and subsequently bringing out the special issue, I believe I have just made a small but modest beginning. There are many issues concerning art and nature which need the artist's and critic's attention so that they are properly formulated and focused. All the same, I personally would like to

state that the future of mankind, civilization or culture will depend on how we are able to nourish and sustain the two renewable resources that are man and nature in dialectical form.

Dr. Parveen Sultana

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*"It is the essence of art to bring back into order the multiplicity of nature, and it is in this sense that he (the artist), prepares all creatures to return to God."*

Anand K.Coomaraswamy

*"Nature herself is the author, as it was, nay a co-author, as we co-determine the reading pattern. We read what we want to read into those lines. What remains clear is the origin and proximity of the book from and to nature: that the leaves of a book correspond to the leaves of a tree that the paper of the book comes from the forest, and even the letters come literally from the wooden letters they were made of."*

Mahatma Gandhi

*"Do not say, 'It is morning,' and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a new born child that has no name."*

"Stray Birds" - Rabindranath Tagore

*"If you lose touch with nature you lose touch with humanity.  
If there's no relationship with nature then you become a killer;  
then you kill baby seals, whales, dolphins, and man  
either for gain, for "sport," for food, or for knowledge.  
Then nature is frightened of you, withdrawing its beauty.  
You may take long walks in the woods or camp in lovely places  
but you are a killer and so lose their friendship."*

Jiddu Krishnamurti

**1.1 Sheela Gowda, Balan Nambiar, Ved Nayar, Gogi Saroj Pal, Subodh Gupta, Pankaj Panwar**

*"Man's devastating exploitation of nature has put an end to her argumentative force and autonomous authority... the rich reservoir of motifs and experiences that once guided human action... has run dry."*

Martin Warnke - German art historian

'Art', which has always devised means to rejuvenate the relationship of Man and Nature, has, in recent years, directly addressed itself to it. But the more realistic attitude would be that the time has come to realize that nature is being consistently eroded and needs to be resuscitated. The dialogue with nature has to be looked at again and stated in fresh terms. It is said that till man sets his relationship with nature right he cannot set himself right.

Artists like Josef Beuys (12 May 1921 - 23 January 1986), was a German Fluxus, happening and performance artists well as a sculptor, installation artist, graphic artist, art theorist and pedagogue of art.

His extensive work is grounded in concepts of humanism, social philosophy and anthroposophy; it culminates in his "extended definition of art" and the idea of social sculpture as Gesamtkunstwerk, for which he claimed a creative, participatory role in shaping society and politics and Christo have attempted to link the inanimate world with man in a meaningful way, recognizing nature as a creative phenomenon rather than assaulting it. While Christo covered the whole landscape with cloth, hiding it from view and provoking thought, Beuys created a project of planting 7,000 oak trees for the Document at Kassel. When the city of Kassel with great difficulty consented, he called the project, "Forestation of the City." In German the word makes fun of the city administration unit rather than one which is in harmony with nature. The tree, he wanted to point out, is the oldest form of life and knows how to survive- a lesson we could learn from it.

Resource art or art which draws upon nature as a resource and in turn attempts to replenish it was motivated by a statement of a German philosopher of the second half of the 20th century; *Jürgen Habermas*, that meaning has become more and more of a scarce resource.

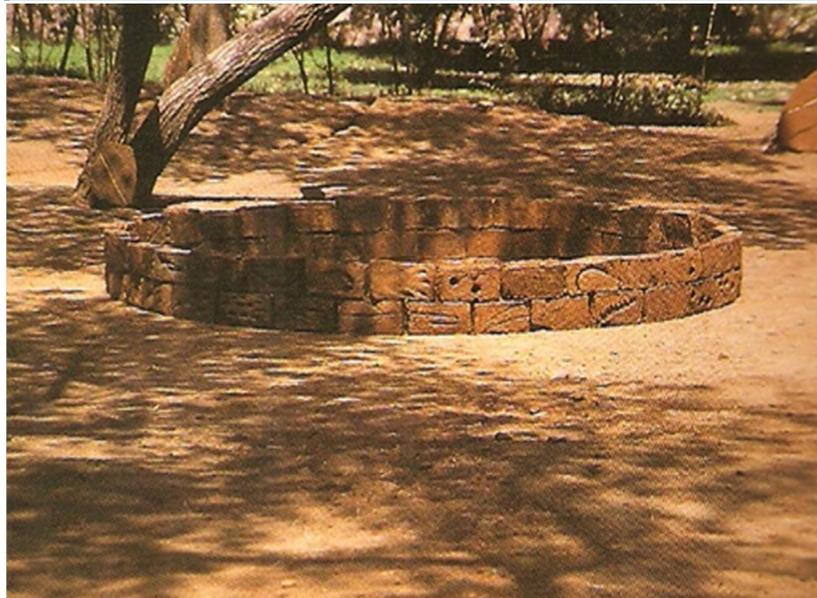
*Habermas* mentions that '*... in anything we read meaning into there is more and more doubt about its true import, and hence the scarcity of meaning itself.*'

In this context, the relationship between man and nature has also lost meaning and an attempt is made to replenish it. As a comparatively new phenomenon in India, for the first time, resource art found significant expression in a month-long workshop held in Delhi in March 1995. The workshop, which was a joint project of the *Lalit Kala Akademi*, the *Japan Foundation* and *Max Mueller Bhavan*, displayed a considerable amount of ecological awareness among the participating artists.

## 1.2 *Sheela Gowda*

In the works of *Sheela Gowda*, the Bangalore-based artist, memory sounds the unity which man once held with nature, living as he did in the village. The bare earth in *Buddha Jayanti Park* is bound by furrowed black lines which speak of depths. At the center is a circular well made of cow-dung bricks which is filled with red earth. The well is a memory from the past when *Gowda* lived in a village close to Mysore where she was teaching. It was a place where women gathered and were themselves. It is also a place, where women jumped into with their children, to kill themselves during a crisis. The two aspects of the circular village well were the reality of women in all parts of the country. Propped against the trees are cow-dung plaques which are streaked with gold, and catch the reflection and patterns of the trees. Similar gold streaks sweep across trees mirroring the reflections. The textures and patterns on cow-dung form an organic link with nature and its resources which are harnessed for man's needs. *"I wanted a bare space to work with the emptiness. But the space took over and my cerebral experience changed,"* according to *Gowda*.

The entire composition in its abstraction, streaked with textured reflections of trees and leaves, does indeed reverberate with the memory of a simpler living with greater contact with nature. *Gowda*, however, is careful to point out that she would like this to be seen in its own context, not as nostalgia but as part of the present.



1. *Sheela Gowda* - No Title, mix media, Cow Dung streaked with gold, New Delhi



2. Sheela Gowda - No Title, mix media, Cow Dung streaked with gold, New Delhi (detail)

### 1.3 Balan Nambiar

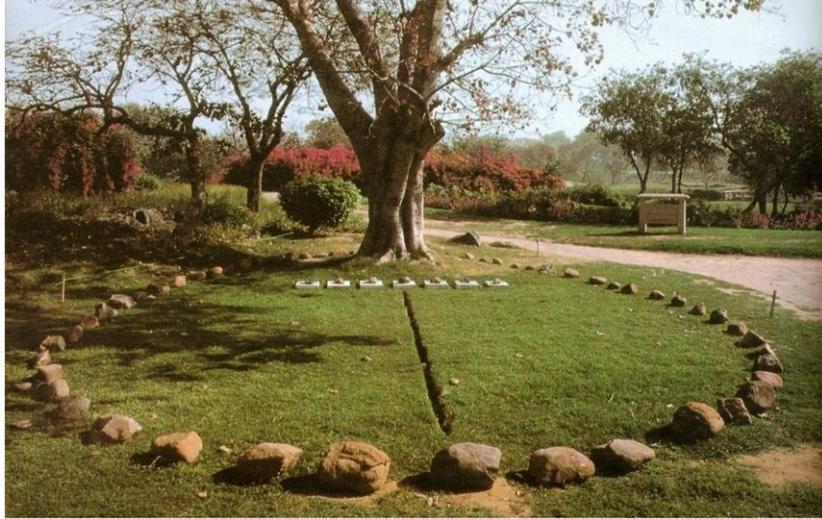
Interestingly some of the artists drew from Indian mythology to recreate the devastating erosion of nature. *Balan Nambiar*, a sculptor who works in Bangalore, expressed this in his powerful 'Monument to the Assassinated,' a composition in Kotah stones, steel and granite. Erected at Max Muller Bhavan, New Delhi, the installation is a virtual turning over of the fable from the *Ramayana* where Lord *Rama* kills *Bali*, the King of *Kishkindha*, and hand overs the kingdom to his brother *Sugriva*. As *Nambiar* points out, the first King of the Forests was *Bali* and by treacherously killing him from behind trees, *Rama* was very far from being the righteous King of *Ayodhya*. The connotations of this could be carried to the present, he feels, when so many heinous crimes have been committed in the name of the just King Ram, in violating human beings, the pollution of the environment is further enhanced.

*Nambiar*, who is considerably influenced by the *Kuttiyattam* and *Teyyam* dramatic forms of Kerala, erects a panel of Kotah stones which symbolize the green shelter from behind which *Rama* committed his act. A powerful boulder placed on a pedestal next to it is a reminder of the severed head, an abbreviated life. Flanked on the other side by a horizontal plank, the entire composition in verticals and horizontals exudes an energy which denotes man's inhumanity to man.

In *'Resurrection of Janaki*, installed at Buddha Jayanti Park Nambiar recreates the spirit of *Janaki*, the feminine force which rose from the earth and was treated unfairly by *Rama*. "*Janaki* had gone through the humiliation of being kidnapped and she had undergone hardship and scandal all through her life. I wonder what position *Janaki* would take if she were to be a participant in the present socio-political scene," Nambiar writes. Found by King *Janaka* while ploughing, *Janaki* symbolized the spirit of the earth, the all-encapsulating Mother. Enclosing a shaded area of the park by a circle of stones, Nambiar places seven rocks at the head which symbolize the *saptamatrikas* or the seven mothers. They also form the head of a giant plough, furrowed in the earth, which represents the birth and resurrection of *Janaki*. The fecund powers of the earth are evoked through these compositions.



3. Balan Nambiar - *'Monument to the Assassinated'*, at Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi



**4. Balam Nambiar - 'Resurrection of Janaki', at Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi**

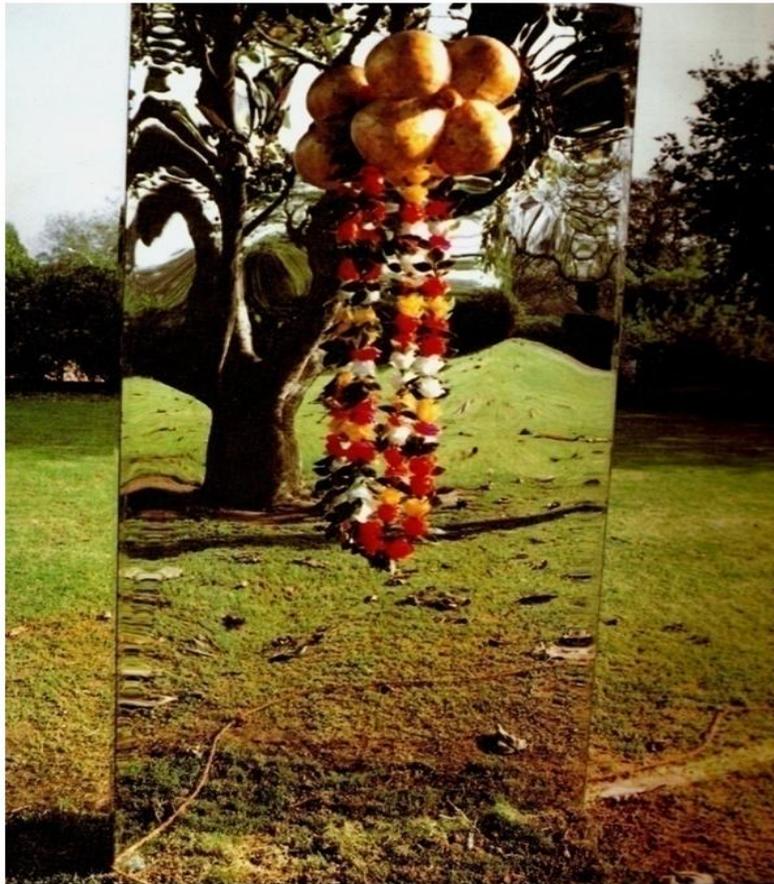
#### **1.4 Ved Nayar**

If deities are to be seen as focused energy, then by placing them together, *Ved Nayar*, the Delhi artist, is also concentrating natural forces. He creates a mural of deities, embalmed in vermilion, in gold paint or the pink and green plastic commonly seen in shops. Placed at Rabindra Bhavan, the wall assemblage invokes attention and aesthetic satisfaction. As an offering to it are a bowl of plastic flowers to mark the violation that man has inflicted on both nature and other human beings.

*"The first relationship in my life began with this jungle,"* writes Nayar. *"I imbibed the jungle through my window and from the terrace of my house. It tempted me, and whenever I entered it, it engulfed me, as if taking on the responsibility of preparing me to face the world. The jungle was never consistent in its behavior towards me. Every new day brought changes, and its moods altered in different seasons. Sometimes the jungle let me know it more intimately, allowed me to explore it, let me climb the trees, pick flowers, listen to the conversation and the music of the birds. Sometimes the jungle taunted me, even scared me, let a snake pass in front of me, lengthened the shade of the trees and allowed the howling winds to pass through it when I had to cross it at night to reach my house. But always in the end I ask the full moon to peep through the branches of the trees, slowed down the wind, made a flower drop on my way to guide me home on the pakdandi (trail)."*

A tree in a cage is placed opposite a plastic tree growing from a bowl. Equidistant from both is the head of man, moulded in terracotta with hair turned silver, perhaps from pollution. *Nayar's* installation at Rabindra Bhavan places man squarely at the center, where he is in a position to make a choice between the verdant, life-giving forests or the bare environment where plastic trees have to be grown. In turning man's face away from the natural forests, *Nayar* makes a point about man's devastation of himself.

At the turn of the century, the Impressionists renewed the dialogue with nature, mapping out alternative perceptions from the extreme penetration of it by science. As the present century draws to a close, the tremendous acceleration of time has gone against all the well-established cycles of nature. *"Everything that we consider important cannot be that fast because nowhere else do we see things accelerated."* The artists have tried to counteract this by slowing down time and, as with John Cage, by invoking silence. Resource art forms part of the movement which in alleviating the ills of technological development renews our perceptions of nature and ourselves.



5. Ved Nayar - *'Immortality of the Man, the Bird, the Tree and the Flower as Trophies,'*  
Installation at Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi

1.5 Gogi Saroj Pal



6. Gogi Saroj Pal - '*Indian Ritual and Ecology*,' at Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi

Nature in its elemental form and natural shapes is deified by *Gogi Saroj Pal*, the Delhi-based artist. Anointing rocks and boulders in the park with vermilion and electric blue, she encloses them with prayer flags. Rather than seeing these as deities, however, Pal would have us reverential towards nature, which is the source of all life.

1.6 Subodh Gupta



Bridging Gap between Art & Ecology - Subodh Gupta is best known for transforming the icons of Indian everyday life into artworks that are readable globally. Born in Khagaul, Bihar, India, 1964, studied B.F.A. in Painting at the College of Arts & Crafts, Patna, India 1983 - 1988. Lives and works in New Delhi, India, incorporated everyday objects such as the steel tiffin boxes used by millions to carry their lunch as well as *thali*, pans, bicycles, and milk pails in his works. Gupta's strategy of appropriating everyday objects and turning them into artworks that dissolve their former meaning and function brings him close to artists like Duchamp; *The Guardian* called him 'the Damien Hirst of Delhi.' He succeeds in finding an art language that references India and at the same time can be appreciated for its aesthetic throughout world; as Gupta says: 'Art language is the same all over the world. This allows me to be anywhere.'

The questions of eco-aesthetics has now become a critical one in the context of a general rhetorical charge of 'saving the environment' by states, corporation and various financial elites. Eco-aesthetics traverses not just domain of art practice but also of social and political theory - the links between humans and non-human formations, debates on political ecology, and the possibility of alternatives beyond the present. Ecological emergences have also fore grounded an emerging eco-aesthetics. As artists, filmmakers and social theorists have addressed this in their work.



**7. Subodh Gupta - 'Dada', Stainless Steel, Steel Utensils, 930 x 680 x 930 cm**

Subodh Gupta works in a wide range of mediums from sculpture and painting to installation, photography, video and performance. He elevates the status of found objects from everyday items to artworks; using the products of rural India such as cow dung, milk buckets, kitchen utensils, scooters, guns and *gulaal* powder as his materials.



8. Subodh Gupta - '*Aam Aadmi*', 2009



9. Subodh Gupta - *'Eco Hut'*, Hut of Cow Dung cakes, 2014



10. Subodh Gupta - *'Basket of Gold Cow Dung Cakes'*, 2003, Jack Shainman Gallery



11. Subodh Gupta - '*Leap of Faith*', stainless steel buckets, 700 x 180 x 180 cm, 2006



12. Subodh Gupta - '*Wall*', Fibreglass, Paint, Brick wall, 75 x 56.38 in. 2009



13. Subodh Gupta - *Flower, 'Et tu, Duchamp'*, 2009

## 1.7 Pankaj Panwar



Pankaj Panwar is presently a Professor in the Department of Sculpture in Visva-Bharati. Holding degree of B.F.A. from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, M.F.A. from M.S. University, Baroda, 1989-90, Post Experience Diploma Royal College of Arts, London, U.K., has done serious effort to create a dedicated eco zone at Visva Bharati, Santi Niketan by Installing Site - Specific Sculptures in the year 2014.

**The Lalbandh Initiative:** *The Lalbandh Initiative* theoretically started exactly one year before, when in a wishful e-mail to the Vice Chancellor of Visva Bharati, Professor *Sushanta Dattagupta* expressed the need to conserve the *Lalbandh* Area in some suitable manner to stop the pathetic degradation of the area. At that time, *Lalbandh* was being used as a garbage dump by Visva Bharati and for a convenient liquor consumption joint by the anti-socials. To put it in record Vice Chancellor Visva Bharati immediately initiated actions to clear up the huge amount of garbage dumped, and a bunch of guys from Visva Bharati and a few ex-students started discussion on how to preserve the *Lalbandh* area.

*Lalbandh*, right now is an interesting concept just taking shape. This is the NCC rifle shooting practice area, where *Pankaj Panwar* of Kala Bhavana decided to insert clay made red flowers aplenty. The effort is actually a composite statement in the form of a sculpture park, eco-installation site along with an orchid garden and butterfly park. That's why I prefer to term this adventure as '*Lalbandh Initiative*', which in essence is an effort to create a dedicated eco zone in Santiniketan area. In my honest and humble opinion, this effort should have taken shape at least

two decades earlier to protect the fauna related to *Lalbandh*. Well, it is still better to be late than never. We expect the eco status of *Lalbandh* to stabilize with no further degradation at least. It is time people learn to live amicably with pristine nature! It is interesting to combine eco protection initiative with the creative spirit of artistic expressions- a kind of joint venture.



14. Pankaj Panwar - '*Lalbandh*' Initiative, Visva Bharti, Shanti Niketan, 2014



15. Pankaj Panwar - '*Magnificent 5*', 2004, fiberglass, 5 live size dogs

*Sutanu*, faculty, sculpture department Kala Bhavana must be enjoying his own flow of expressions at *Lalbandh*. Personally, it is a great to come across such innovative natural sculptures at *Lalbandh* area. It is certainly exciting to get engaged with anything related to *Lalbandh* right now because of the strong aesthetic statement.

Another innovative natural sculpture at *Lalbandh* area is - *The Butterfly zone* - needed a bit of kinder soil than the hard 'Moram' (red laterite soil) and then had to fence it around with bamboo poles and nicely woven wires to make the area beyond the reach of cows and goats. This

was another tricky aspect had to cope with; ideally to create any sort of a garden including a butterfly friendly zone, these four legged animals needs to be warded off. This particular spot was chosen chiefly because of a blocked water tap line of Visva Bharati; of course, the blocked tap line was opened without disturbing the Water Supply Department of Visva Bharati.

*Nimai*, faculty Kala Bhavana, is adamant to name the tiny mud house '*Love Hub*'. *Nimai's* '*Love Hub*'is just adjacent to the *butterfly zone*; well after all butterflies are great love makers - so the idea seems interesting to me. The tiny black mud house is actually a fairly intricate creation.



16. *Nimai* - '*Love Hub*', *Lalbandh*' Initiative, Visva Bharti, Shanti Niketan, 2014



17. Eco installation based on the Sunderban Mangrove area, Shanti Niketan



18. *Lalbandh* Initiative - Eco installation based on the Sunderban Mangrove area, Santi Niketan, 2014

A very interesting eco installation based on the Sunderban Mangrove area is being created by a faculty member of *Silpa Sadana*. The whole creative exercise is a great expression of the inert feeling in human beings to appreciate the variety and nuances of nature. In *Lalbandh* now, nature science and creative art is moving hand in hand to make that place a unique expression in Santiniketan. We need all your blessings and good wishes and active co-operation from the Santiniketan community to make this effort a permanent gesture of our appreciation of nature. Please endure with us. In the meanwhile, I am happy to find a few butterfly eggs lay recently within our butterfly zone, and yes, we would try to plant some '*Sorshe*' plants in appropriate time.



19. Jhankar da - '*Lakshmi'r Bhar*', Kala Bhavana, Shanti Niketan, 2014



20. Natural sculpture - by *Sutanu*, Visva Bharati, Santi Niketan, 2014

### 1.8 Bharti Kher

Born 1969 in London, UK, lives and works in New Dehli, India, working with sculpture, photography and painting, Bharti Kher explores issues of personal identity, social roles and Indian traditions but also from a broader perspective, 21st century issues around genetics, evolution, technology and ecology.

Kher uses the bindi as a central motif in her work, transforming the surfaces of both sculptures and paintings to connect disparate ideas. The bindi is a forehead decoration traditionally made with red pigment and worn by Hindu men and women. It represents the 'third eye' the all-knowing intrinsic wisdom and is a symbol of marital status. Recently bindis have been transformed into stick-on vinyl, disposable objects and a secular, feminine fashion accessory. In Kher's work, the bindi transcends its mass-produced diminutiveness becoming a powerful stylistic and symbolic device, creating visual richness and allowing a multiplicity of meanings, including tensions inherent in shifting definitions of femininity in contemporary India. Kher's early figurative paintings explore a female perspective of modern India's patriarchal society through representations of contemporary Indian interiors. Depicting pluralism with ancient Indian customs juxtaposed with modern Western

values, Kher reveals how, while increasingly receptive to foreign influence, many Indians still remain reverent of their own culture in an overtly conspicuous fashion. This clash of cultures is very apparent to Kher - a British-born child of the Indian Diaspora who has, in contrast to dominant outward migration trends, moved to India as an adult. Recently her panel paintings have been covered with thousands of bindi creating abstract arrangements encoded with patterns of exile, immigration, crossing boundaries and the passage of time. In response to repressions towards women in India, a number of works by Kher denounce domestic tyrannies that define many women's lives.

Animals are another recurring theme in Kher's work, serving as a metaphor for the body and transformation. *I've seen an elephant fly*, 2002, is a hyper-realistic, life-sized fiberglass sculpture of a grey elephant, covered with white sperm-shaped bindis. While in Buddhist and Hindu mythology the white elephant is sacred, in the West, it is a metaphor for something frivolous and useless. In *I've seen an elephant fly*; grey skin is clearly visible behind a white covering, which emphasises the second skin, thereby confusing its identity and value. Kher poses questions about her own complex identity. In *'The Skin Speaks a Language Not Its Own'*, 2006, the elephant reappears as a pathos-inducing figure leaving the viewer unsure whether death or recovery is the next stage. This exploration of 'in between-ness' with an absence of cause and reason are recurrent themes for Kher.

In the sculpture *'Solarum Series'* 2007, Kher returns to the natural world. The tree, a potent symbol that appears in ancient mythologies from many cultures Kher uses such references and combines them with contemporary references, like biological cloning. The branches of *Solarum Series* bear the heads of hundreds of creatures: a disturbing and dystrophic vision of a genetically engineered hybrid.





21. Bharti Kher - *Forms from Nature*, 'The Skin Speaks a Language Not Its Own,' *The elephant*, 2006, 'Solarum Series', 2007

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Art has undergone vital changes over the last 50 years. As we approach a new millennium, individual and global responsibility, have become mutually more dependent than ever before, thereby reconfirming the validity of Kant's Categorical Imperative. In order to survive, man must include nature in his parameters of creation. In the West, this new holistic concept of art has been borne out by the work of many artists over the decades. Among them are *Joseph Beuys, Mario Merz, Yves Klein, Walter de Maria, Christo, Hundertwasser, Richard Long, Bill Fontana, Anselm Kiefer, Bruce Naumann, Jochen Gerz* and many others. The new artscape created by these artists has long ago left the narrow confines of museums. High-tech networking by E-mail, Internet, www, computer and satellite conferencing engage artists in simultaneous debates and actions, re-enforcing solidarity and global awareness.

Art has thus become, away from its earlier often mere decorative and embellishing function, an essential human resource, touching all spheres of life and often contributing to survival, much like the raw materials and natural resources of yesteryear. Where does the East, and especially India, see its place in this new and all-embracing creative process? Do not all old myths tell the story of a unified rather than a fragmented creation? Let the works of the workshop "Art and Nature" speak for themselves and provide their own-naturally partial-answers. The week-long national painting and sculpture workshop which concluded at the Buddha Jayanti Park in the Capital proved to be a path breaking event which presented the city with priceless works of art created by reputed artists from within the State and outside. Based on the theme 'Art & Ecology: Search for Sustainability', the workshop provided the Buddha Jayanti Park the much-needed face-lift. The workshop was an effort to make people aware of the ecology and their immediate environment. "The subject of climate change and environment has time and again called for responses from every discipline and art is not an exception. Even as there has been a large body of art work addressing ecological issues, there is no platform for discussion on the subject between artists and other stakeholders.

## **2.1 Arpana Caur**

Born in 1954, Delhi, awarded by Research Grant from Lalit Kala Akademi, 1984-85, All India Fine Arts Society, 1986, Gold Medal in Sixth Triennale-India and Commendation Certificate in Algiers Biennale, 1987. In the late 1980s, she began a series of works on the urban landscape. She says: "*Delhi is no longer the city I was born and grew up in. It is changed beyond recognition.*"

### **2.1.1 "Please Peep": Participatory Art**

Those days are gone when the viewer was meant to be awed by an art still carrying with it the hangover of the church and the temple. Its images were icons, if not of Gods, then of famous men and women and later of those who sought fame by patronizing art. This gave the artist the upper hand. And the very possession of a work by a famous artist, a Rubens, a Van Gogh, or a Picasso, brought fame in itself. From this vantage point, the artist could confidently shift from a position of subservience to one of even superiority over a patron. This state of affairs gave the artist a capacity to call for the involvement of the viewer, as *Arpana Caur* did in this work.



22. *Arpana Caur*, with her installation *"Please Peep"*, 6 feet x 6 feet and 8" deep, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi



23. *Arpana Caur*, with her installation *"Please Peep"*, 6 feet x 6 feet and 8" deep, (detail), Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi.

This involvement is at two levels. The artist has first created a material relief of various iron tools welded on an iron plate that is 6 feet x 6 feet, which has a purely visual impact that creates a texture to catch the attention of the viewer. Even though one can associate each individual tool with a specific productive activity, that fact is secondary, as the nature of the welding indicates. This then leads the viewer, rather as does a jeweler, to a magnifying glass of six inches diameter that highlights an idealized landscape. It could, I suppose, be construed in a trite form as a comment of the artist on the destruction of the natural environment by technology and its encapsulation of it. But in my view it is a far more powerful reflection of how ideas are framed in a very definite material environment of which they are the fruit. The framing of the idealized rural landscape by *Arpana Caur* in a space filled with iron tools is a visual comment that puts the reality of the love affair with an ideal village that so many of our post-independence artists like *Nandalal Bose, Ramkinker Baij, Rawal, Bendre, Gade* and *Jamini Roy* shared, in its proper perspective in the context of an industrial society. The rural landscape is there, but it is a stereotyped one. It is even at the centre of the work. But its industrial context, which most of our artists painting rural scenes seem to overlook in an escape from industrial realities, has not been ignored by *Arpana Caur*. In her work it is overpoweringly there. As such, this work of *Arpana's* is very much part of her material demystification of the fake spirituality that a backward society wears to cover up its failure to advance technically, socially and ethically in consonance with the need of the times, It is an art that reminds us of the total lack of human concern that self-centered spirituality always involves. It is an art that is in direct opposition to the self-righteous tradition of Judeo-Christian religions that have been responsible for so much fundamentalist savagery, a fact that hardly needs to be substantiated. And in these days, when even creeds that reflect a much more multi-faceted approach, like Hinduism, are becoming fundamentalist too, art like *Arpana's* is needed to remind us that art, like life itself, is a far broader canvas than any school of thought, and it must be respected for that.

*"Visiting my old school with a TV team after 30 years, I was shocked to discover that my favorite playground is now a commercial complex. Old houses of relatives once frequented in childhood, hiding in their mysterious corners, are now antiseptic multi-storied buildings. There are fewer breathing spaces, and driving in this city for even 20 minutes can be a nightmare. One is aware that one is not singled out for this suffering that millions of people feel cheated thus, in millions of cities, cheated of sky and air and space, cheated of peace and beauty. This prompted me to paint innumerable canvasses -with graffiti of factories, chimneys, smoke, increasingly infringing upon human habitation, into private space, into trees and blue pools of water."* Menacing overlapping images of traffic: cycles, rickshaws, three-wheelers, push-carts, cars, buses and trains jostling pedestrians, offset by some redeeming mysterious jet of water falling on a man's bent urban back in works like *Unidentified Blue Source* or blue pools reflecting lost trees in a linear mass of lines of houses and industry. Or diptychs like *Road and River* where the rigid black man-made road fringed by tight urban dwellings holding tight boxed in people is offset by the other half of the diptych where a lush blue river meanders sensuously through large open space. Images of longing for the elements, above all for space.

When the opportunity came up, I thought, why not use actual industrial tools I had been painting so long. I constructed and welded a large iron box 6 feet x 6 feet and 8" deep in which these tools were welded to form a threatening circle around a tiny hole in which I fixed a magnifying glass from the back. I painted a miniature landscape with elements from Persian and Pahari miniatures: peacocks and water and lotuses, trees and the mountain forms and skies in the

typical forms of these miniatures, remnants of a bygone era. A light bulb suspended into the open top of the iron box illuminated this landscape like a jewel. The landscape was fitted on a little square iron table and welded onto the box at a very precise distance from the lens to enhance it most, thus making it into a single unit. The peepshows of childhood and the men who brought these little magical boxes to our doorstep had the little historical and fantastical tales in their magic interiors available for 10 paise. Now you cannot buy that world for all the money in the world. So I called my iron box "*Please Peep*", homage to those childhood boxes and modern-day peepshows too. When it hung on the wall in Rabindra Bhavan after the workshop, the work became a living thing.

### **2.1.2      "*Wooden Seesaw*"**

The second work was a "*Wooden Seesaw*" with a vast shape intended to be treelike (and also like a nuclear cloud or umbrella) made with various plastic objects (bottles, toys, *chappals* and guns, buckets, etc.) Travelling in the remotest interiors of Karnataka just before the workshop, I noticed garish *gharas* (pots) and not single earthenware once being used by the villagers. The heavier side which is on the ground had a tiny flower in a tiny terracotta pot, counteracting the plastic image. But this was still "heavier", and it was achieved by tying a stone weight underneath this end of the seesaw.



24. Arpana Caur - "Wooden Seasaw", Jayanti Park, New Delhi

### 2.3 Nature's Future and Artistic Expressions

Especially such endeavors like the promotion of "cultural exchanges of creative human endeavors"; one might seek to contribute in whatever modest way to possible solutions of the most burning questions of our times. At the turn of the millennium, the question what will become of nature - the agent which alone provides the preconditions of the existence of man-kind, and which now is about to fall victim to the compulsively expansionist drive of that same mankind-may well be the most important of all, but to in accordance with the definition given above have gone a step

further by encouraging responsible artists to make this vital question their concern and to exchange artistic manifestations of their pertinent stance as well as to involve the general public by exhibiting them or even more so in as far as they should inspire others to go beyond. But there are other categories like site dominant, site adjusted and site conditioned works. *Ramkinker Baij's* sculptures also fall in the same category. Site specific works cannot be moved because they would not be the same if moved.

In the course of evolution of life on earth, man, surcharged with real creativity, struck a chord with ecology and his environment to create a melodious romance of coordination and understanding. Thus was born the art of expression in various disciplines, visual art being one of them. The damage caused by man-made pollution and its effects on future mankind and the flora and fauna around him will surely contaminate the imagination of the future generation of artists.

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Art in its aesthetic form transcends the frontiers of nation and state. For art and artistic purity go much beyond issues such as caste, religion, language, ethnicity and so on that so often plague the existence of a harmonious relationship amongst people in society. Similarly, the importance of nature to the existence of human society can by no means be underestimated. It is universally recognized that human survival is heavily dependent on protection of the environment. Environmental degradation, unleashed by industrialization and fierce economic activity, is threatening the very existence of the human race. Therefore, to create awareness of the importance of protecting nature is of utmost urgency today. After all, the human race will have to co-exist with nature. We can experience the beauty by living with nature and thereby give a new dimension to the purpose of inhabiting the earth that is more enjoyable, more pleasurable and more meaningful.

The callousness with which man has undertaken deforestation activities implies that the very existence of the human race will be in peril as long as this dangerous drift remains unchecked. Therefore, the issue of environment has emerged as a major global issue which demands global response if our survival is to be ensured in the future. Violence wrecked upon nature has disturbed the balance between the ecological systems of the natural world and this must be stopped to ensure human survival. Preservation of nature is therefore the need of the hour.

With a view to create this awareness, the Japan Foundation co-sponsored the International Workshop on "Art and Nature " with Lalit Kala Akademi and Max Mueller Bhavan, so that such global issues as environment and art do not remain neglected. Several artists from Japan, India and Germany protested against this violent destruction of nature as well as communicated to the people about the beauty and importance of nature through their creative works. We do hope that this modest exercise will contribute to the promotion of mutual understanding amongst the people of the world, because art transcends all barriers and has a language that is intelligible to humanity as a whole.



#### 4.1 Vivian Sundaram and N.N. Rimzon

Speaking of the formal differences, installations are of two types: one is holistic and the other hierarchic. Vivian Sundaram, born in Simla in 1943, done his BA Fine Arts from MS University, Baroda (1961-1965) and Post-Diploma (Commonwealth Scholar), Slade School, London in 1966-1968, his approach to work can be described schematically as holistic: which is to say, it is relational.

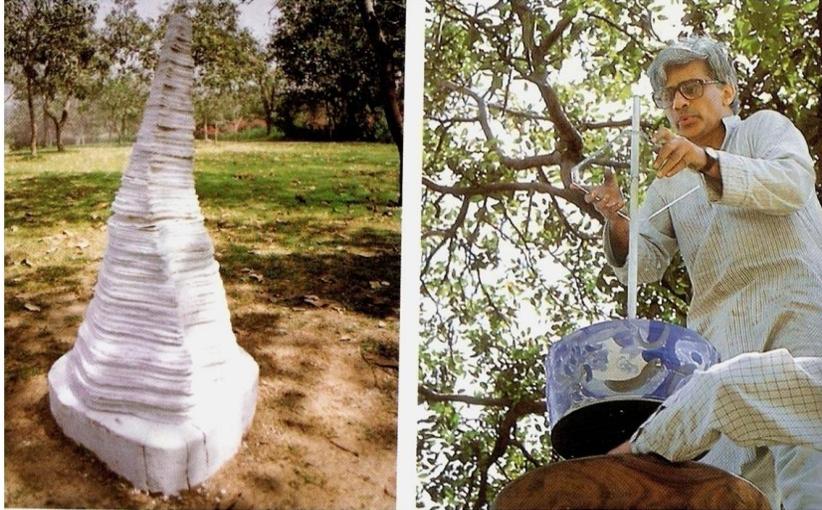
Rimzon's, on the other hand, is hierarchic; it is non-relational. Non-relational refers to completely symmetrical, totally unaccented parts. In Vivian's, the whole structure is conceived as a single unit: each part stands in relation to other parts. The whole is marked by economy of form and neatness of relationship: even when each unit defines itself by the effect of contrast and the interplay of accented, historical remainders of sculptural form-worlds. Vivian's work is significant for its drive to simplify sculptural means. There are no traces of extraneous elements: the sculptural experience by itself is enough.

Rimzon's is a conscience-stirring attempt and implies historical experience. It is illuminating when the content of the work is read phenomenological with an implied assertion that what is exhibited is true history, including the materials used. The concept of literalness goes beyond that which "appeals to the eye alone." What is significant is that literalness is suggestive of an art made possible via self-criticism. Historical experience is constitutive of its formal elements. This is in marked contrast to Michael Fried's concept of literalness; for Fried defines the literal as one that "appeals to the eye alone". "Self-criticism" with Rimzon is only a method - the same method which Merleau-Ponty and others call phenomenological. Such self-criticism, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is subjective, because it is specific to an individual and thus takes place inside a person. Self-criticism with Rimzon is a mode of phenomenological oriented self-reflection. As with

most Minimalists formalist considerations are real with Vivan, but they are subordinated to a holistic vision; they become a consequence of the combination of materials used: they call attention to their arbitrariness. Arbitrariness because we are made aware of the fusion of the process and the image-oriented surface: the results are art-like. While Rimzon's work demands an etiquette of response, Vivan's does not, for Vivan consciously subverts any singular reading. He is concerned with the relational logic of the integers that went into the common denominator. What his work demands is silent contemplation of surfaces. And these surfaces project a kind of mental furniture: this aesthetic furniture may mean all things to all men. Most installations offer something for the eye to hold on to, but Vivan's and Rimzon's raise important questions and thus invest them in multiplying paradoxes. Yet admittedly there is hardly any aesthetic surprise. Darby Bannart has written (*Art Forum*, December, 1966) a long time ago that signals are understood for what they want to mean phenomenological: "As with Pop and Op, the meaning of a Minimal work exists outside of the work itself. It is a part of the nature of these works to act as triggers for thought and emotion pre-existing in the viewer.... It may be fair to say that these styles have been nourished by the ubiquitous question: but what does it mean?".... The question: "but what does it mean?" comes to mind naturally to those who treat meaning in art as context-dependent. The Minimalists are teasers in a manner that brings to mind Duchampian subverting tactics. Greenberg wrote (*American Sculpture of the Sixties*, 1967): "The Minimalists appear to have realized, finally, that the far-out in itself has to be far-out as an end in itself/ and that this means the farthest-out and nothing short of that. They appear to have realized that the most original and farthest-out art of the last hundred years always arrived looking at first as though it had parted company with everything previously known as art." The farthest-out in art, Greenberg argues, "lay on the borderline between art and non-art." He adds: "What seems definite is that they (the Minimalists) commit themselves to the third dimension because it is, among other things, a coordinate that art has to share with non-art (as Dada, Duchamp, and others already saw). The ostensible aim of the Minimalists is to "project" objects and an ensemble of objects that are just nudged able into art."

Of course painting could never acquire the look of non-art, because the borderline between art and non-art has to be sought in the third dimension where sculpture is, and where everything material that is not art also is. In sculpture, where everything is material, the borderline between art and non-art is very thin.

4.2 Vivan Sundaram's Public Projects



25. Vivan Sundaram working on his Installation: 'A Tree Shrine', New Delhi, 1996



26. Vivan Sundaram - *48 Degrees Celsius*, Public Art and Ecology, Delhi  
Khoj International Artist's Association

*"48 Degrees Celcius Public Art and Ecology"* set a precedent for producing public art projects in Delhi. Obtaining permissions for presenting large-scale public artworks had not been achieved before in the city. The planning and preparation that went into creating the festival forged the way for other artists and curators to create public artworks in Delhi. The Urban Resource Group was commissioned to prepare an Ecology Report on Delhi to assist the organizers and artists in planning the festival and addressing key concerns. The report was sent to artists to assist their research into the ecological problems in Delhi such as water pollution, restricted water supply, waste, air pollution, and urban density.

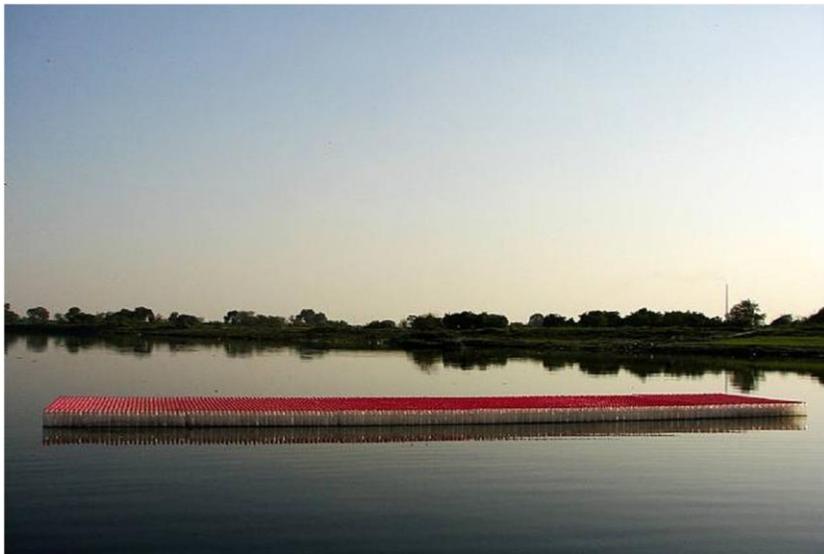


**27. Vivan Sundaram - 'Pyramid', 2010**

In addition to making artwork and building a comprehensive archive, Sundaram has organised international and national artist programmes and workshops, and has worked as an activist, a curator, and an editor. He has played a pivotal role in mobilising the resources for a number of significant public art projects. Sundaram acted as secretary of an ad-hoc committee for All India Artists' Protest in 1971. He was the founding member and trustee of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT) 'Artists Alert' in 1989 and has since curated a number of exhibitions organised by SAHMAT. He is the secretary of The Biennale Society, New Delhi, and he has collaborated with filmmakers and theatre groups. This section contains digital scans of catalogues, pamphlets, and photo-documentation of a selection of his projects. In addition to extensive documentation of his public art interventions and exhibitions with SAHMAT, AAA has digitised the catalogue accompanying the 'Seven Young Sculptors' exhibition, which he curated in 1985. This section also includes photo-documentation of The Biennale Society seminar entitled 'Elective Affinities, Constitutive Differences: Contemporary Art in Asia' that was organised by Sundaram as Biennale Society Secretary in 2007.



28. Vivan Sundaram - *'Master-Plan Splash'*, 2008, New Delhi



29. Vivan Sundaram - *'Flotage'*, 2008

#### 4.3 N. N. Rimzon

Born in Kakkoor, Kerala in 1957, done BFA in Sculpture from College of Arts, Trivandrum (1982) and M.A. from Royal College of Arts, London (1989).

**Rimzon's pots** - The objects that are just nudgeable into art are readable "as almost anything is today - including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper," writes Greenberg. Readable in terms of Hegelian phenomenology: the independence of an object Hegel argues, "Can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself affects the negation within itself." In *Rimzon's 108 pots*, history (of a period) forms the trace of its negation: as objects, they have meaning without meaning, for the negation of Indian history's wholly other is at work there. In the art historical context of Minimalism, Rimzon's pots, that are just nudgeable into art, have hidden underneath the apparent richness of image.



30. N.N. Rimzon - '*Far Away from Hundred and Eight Feet*', 2000



**31. Rimzon - "Far Away from Hundred and Eight Feet" (detail)**

The meaning of these seemingly (non-art looking) ordinary pots can be grasped only by a detour, not by a Hegelian path but something other than that. Consider Brahmanical nationalism: its offerings are covered by thick "forest paths" that a Heidegger might like to talk about. Their truth without truth, they being art-objects without any traces of artifactuality, offers a moment of retreat from Hegel's "direct" road to the Absolute: the retreat, however, is no less tortuous, no less prone to pass beyond the terms of the world. Rimzon's "non-art" acknowledges as much its explicit dependence on the state-run art apparatus and culture's rupture and continuity with its tradition. If sculpture today is defined by its place, Rimzon's seemed out of place, yet his being there was an event "event" in the negative sense; for it was a show he sought to subvert. It was a "sensible" gesture because it sought to free itself from the very grammar into which all other participants seem to have been caught up. Grammar is essential to the art of installations, because they run the risk of being taken to be tokens of non-art: if they fail, it is the failure of grammatology, because their success is to be understood on the basis of their openness to non-art.

The openness to non-art is not abstract; it is too subtle and too dispersed in its ramifications. It has been there with a select brand of Pop artists in America, though they are not a group. In Pop art objectified subject matter is embraced in its banality (comic strips, hamburgers, movie stars). Not without logic or reason, the elements of non-art are incorporated as if these have grown naturally in an impersonal non-aesthetic way. Perhaps because Pop artists depended on the "idea", the sources of motivation were sought outside art, for the objectified image demanded that it retain its memory of original referent. When the referent is singled out by description in the initiating event it is convenient to represent it: such works embrace infallibility, for nothing in them is false. The dream at the heart of Rimzon's use of pots is to bring into focus an ancient hope - the hope for a language which can receive no gloss, requires no interpretation, cannot be distanced, since the historical event associated with the work cannot be sneered at by his detractors. It is the hope for a vocabulary which is by its very definition self-evidently final.

Rimzon and Vivan bring out the contrast between the way of truth and the way of opinion; between one proper vocabulary and many pseudo-vocabularies. While Rimzon strives for an honest, no-nonsense, unadulterated experience of his art and seeks some sort of intentional anonymity, Vivan is restlessly involved with structuralize aspects of the materials that are not blind to cultural information. The assumption is that information lends meaning to structures and concepts lend meaning to information. For this reason a set of associated descriptions make

demands on substantive concepts; he seemed to be plunged into what may inaccurately but for reasons of over-simplification be described as "difficulties" of translation. (Translation is not the word: it oversimplifies to the point of absurdity; it is wrong because the structural units and other pieces that go into making his holistic vision are easily conceptualized - that is, understood. But looking at them denies rather than confirms this concept. Since they are to be understood as a dialogue between a whole and its parts, or as a system of relationships, or as a perceptual proposition, the work is not a translation.) The set of associated descriptions does not mean that they are sculptural objects defined, as all objects are defined, by the third dimension. If they are objects, they are of the kind phenomenologist talk about. Objects in *Vivan's* sculpture attempt to turn their visual grammar (which is very akin to what philosophers since Husserl have been saying verbally) into phenomenology as the basis of aesthetic experience of these objects. Criticism can say nothing except to play one against the other. What is possible is a detour, not the fantasy-effects of leading the viewer to a clearer view of the path; rather, in most cases, it blocks the view. Criticism, in relation to constructing Vivan's phenomenological intention governing his work, functions precisely as its unthought, as the condition of possibility and the self-subversive psychological bind. The viewer may justifiably ask: why is there criticism rather than silent admiration? The answer is simple: that criticism, or the activity of criticism, comes too late. In fact, from the beginning it is gratuitous because the condition of its origin is temporal, which means the priority of the work over the critic. The truth that criticism obtains is but the measure of its failure. It means its own self-dismantling: the dismantling "frame of reference" is similar to that of phenomenology. We imagine that we have perceptions in much the same way we imagine that we "have" a body. Perception, we forget, is a metaphysical construct, a form of meta-physics of presence, a particular mode of "looking" at a thing. That is implicit in the Derridean style of doing philosophy.

#### **4.4 N. N. Rizom about his installation**

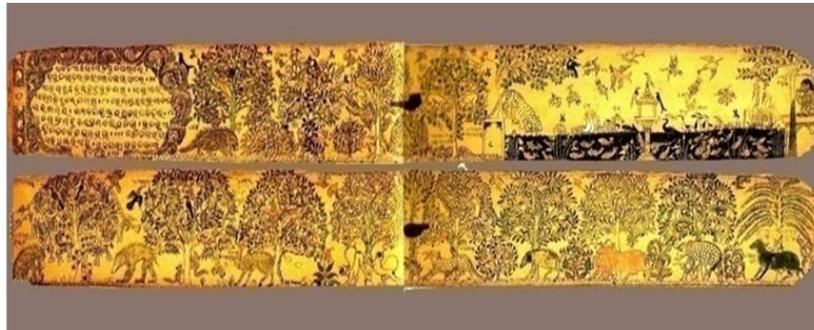
We tend to believe that perception is an activity that goes on inside a "cognizing subject." The next step is that we confuse this with an epistemological subject. Being directly conscious of its own inner states, this subject tends to form a mental picture. A representation of what exists outside itself comes to mind and we form a mental copy of the so-called external world. Perception in phenomenology is the name for a non-concept because, for empiricism, perception is an objective event in nature: it is the causal action of a physical thing, and as sensation it is the internal registering of this action. And those who believe that there is no "subject" who perceives, that perception is an objective event occurring within empirical reality itself, look for a naturalistic account: and when they fail they invent a robot-like duplicate within its subject less self for "external world." A long-held, agreed on view of perception is that it is essentially a subjective activity - an activity of the transcendental ego. Vivan's world is purged of "inessentials"; because of it closer scrutiny is required to "see" it. As with painting when it is purged of all of its representational elements, it becomes the wall, so it is with Vivan's sculpture: it becomes in its totality mere exterior space. The elaboration of vitality affects. Sensations and aesthetic surfaces retain, however, the systematic relational paradigm. The relational paradigm is indispensable because the ambivalence of the subject and the ambiguity of the object are not structured in a way that is capable of serving a communicable thought. There is another reason why it is so: the Postmodern is committed to have rather a penchant for desacralization of the object in the name of pure exteriority; and in Vivan it re-emerges from analysis. It is without substance, for the

experience of the sculpted surface is diluted into the literality (which Michael Fried calls theatricality) of decentered space: as space, it demands projection onto a relational screen. As parts, as experience of the self (or subject) and the object, a cognitive correlation is a necessary condition to bring the two together. With Rimzon, there is a historical divide between process and product: the "superstructure" works in another non-relational way, for the relational can always be substituted by both presence and absence; by shifting fields of discourse, by "verbal artifacts", one kind of discourse is substituted by another with totally different effect. The effect is mediated by language-like structure, in the same way as the individual is held to be "socialized" by language. Rimzon mirrors the dilemma of relativism.

For many centuries artists have recreated nature, captured the delicate nuances, immortalized them and pictorially sensitized them. The meta-physical power of the artist converts inert pieces of matter into a state of profound illumination and living presence. The art 'object' is a living substance or otherwise it creates pollution, both visual and material. Therefore it may not be surprising that a demystification of the artist and demystification of the art object took place concomitantly with demythification and demystification.

We do not tend to think of art as built upon destruction. Yet Picasso thought of it in this way. "A picture used to be a sum of additions. In my case a picture is a sum of destructions," he told Christian Zervos in 1935. Piet Mondrian told James Sweeney in one of his letters (1942-1943): "I think the destructive element is too much neglected in art." And Ad Reinhardt wrote in "The Next Revolution in Art" in 1964: "Art-as-art is a creation that revolutionizes creation and judges itself by its destruction. Artists-as-artists value themselves for what they have gotten rid of and for what they refuse to do". (Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*).

Destruction is often bound-up with creation, in other words violent hatred has intimate links with love. While indifference or neglect is beyond both, in a way it is a great danger to the continued existence of the art object. This is the situation prevailing today. Natural beauty seems to have lost a bit of momentum now because art is now a powerful tool for examining a human life almost entirely mediated by social formations and because nature has become the object of a scientific probing that is little enchanted with its mysterious processes. And once spirituality/mysticism is unhooked from our conception, nature may appear as the repository of transcendental values. But something grander than the beautiful namely the wild and the sublime, seemed to have provoked the sense of the transcendent in nature.



32. *Illustrated Palmleaf*, Alice Boner Collection, Museum Rietberg, Zurich copy



**33. Chisen Furukawa - 'Rain Tree', Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi**

The Japanese artist approached her materials like tree and fiber, as if those things embody the spiritual experience the artists share. Chisen Furukawa also, though metaphorically, deals with the elemental aspects of nature. Water, the source of life, is invoked by the artist through her installation. Growth, or the transformation and change that renew and rejuvenate human life, is what is desired in such an invocation. From ancient days onwards people invoked the deities to

give them the boon of rain and enacted fertility rites ritualistically. In an age where massive deforestation and terrible ecological imbalance occur, a modern ritual for the rains and fertility in the form of a work of art underscores the stagnation of all currents of progress. Chisen Furukawa's installation at the park entitled '*Rain Tree*' is an act to fulfill her wish to re-fertilize our barren nature. As an Ikebana artist, she responds to the delicate and beautiful aspects of nature such as flowers, leaves and stems of different plants and trees. As in the case of the '*Rain Tree*', in her installations Chisen Furukawa imbues the space in which she works with an attitudinal strength. The tree is a symbol of the flow of energy. To have the sensual experience of it, the artist has tied thousands of fibers to the various branches of the tree, connecting them to the ground to provide a visual experience of rain. The flow of water in the form of rain, its circulation through trees with a vitalizing force and its further upward movement in the form of vapor bringing rain, in other words, the cycling of water, is the concept of this work. The Rain Tree with its movement of fiber strings evokes a feeling of the fourth dimension.

In this context, all these ventures like, international workshops, has deeper resonances in conceptualizing art beyond 'object'. It establishes artists'/men's' link with the elements of nature in a creative way. It symbolizes liberation from thingness. It does not contribute to the piling-up of "aesthetic commodity hardware." Art hardware is, at any rate, superfluous, since art is not vested in the object but in the artist's discovery of the process of how to form it. The process can be documented through plans, sketches, drawings, titles, descriptions, photographs, maps, films, video and audiotapes, books etc.

Such associations of nature, beauty and a sense of order still may not structure the understanding of nature and painting today. Perhaps the more verdant is not straightforwardly more beautiful when it results from a spillage of nitrogen fertilizer. Nor need aesthetic values signify sanctity at all since science, politics and commerce provide alternative readings of nature. The understanding-of nature and beauty depends on our construction of order and purpose. For Bede, nature was charged with a meaning derived from God and an appropriate eschatology. Such metaphysical commitments no longer do not determine conceptions of nature as clearly as they might once have done; nor is there obvious need for a commonsensical damper on thinking of earth as anything but 'dirt'. Nature is no more regarded as the permanent crucible for human endeavor and being. That conception now seems redundant in the postmodern paradigm simply because (as some theoreticians say) postmodernism is what we have after the process of modernization is complete and nature has vanished forever and 'Culture has become a veritable second nature'. Culture has now become a product in its own right trapped entirely within the co-modification process. Benjamin thought of this quantum leap as 'aestheticization of reality' but he was wrong on this count.

Speechlessness is the great sorrow of nature. But if nature is given language what would/she do? Would she challenge language itself, would she lament it? The possibility of giving her the language is inherently unrealizable because it is 'for the sake of her redemption that man is endowed with speech and she is spontaneously drawn to it. But does man's language really redeem nature by naming her? To name her is to make her happy and at the same time sad. Nothing really guarantees that nature can and will be saved. But, since man's "life and language" is placed 'in' nature, he still represents her only hope of salvation. But man who knows nature through and through has also lost his own identity, and nature deprived of her gaze is bereft of her gender. Both the namer and the named, identifier and identified have become allegorical abstractions, 'the abstract allegory of mourning'. So, how and where are we going to locate the incline? The deepest

silence could indeed be in the law of nature, in its aura, which has a corresponding force. But Tagore was more of a radical journeyman of nature. Like Wittgenstein, Tagore found the tremendous (Surplus) in both man and nature. His two major projects '*Hal karshan*' (tilling of the soil) and '*Vriksharopan*' (tree planting) are classic cases of dialectical movement within a Hegelian framework. If he had inflicted pain on nature by tilling of the soil, the face of nature is completely altered through the

By the dialectical law, both nature and man are the archetype whose renewing capacity is endless, provided they come back again and again within the dialectical movement and not lose their way in the 'market'.

#### References

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3. Workshop organized by the Max Mueller Bhavan, Madras
4. Workshop organized by Nagji Patel for the Indian Petro Chemicals Ltd
5. 7. From Webster's *New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (second edition)
6. For Kant noumenon is the Spirit, that which is pure, and the extraneous elements of the practical origin are impure. See pp. 30-31. *Aesthetics*, Benedetto Croce, Tr. Douglas Ainslie, Rupa and Co., Calcutta
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After a long period of disregard for nature and environment for the sake of scientific and technological advancement, human society is now forced to analyze its results. The ever-growing threat of pollution and the complete failure of modernist projects to revamp the old society by changing its structure are major factors that force our "post-industrial" society to reconsider its ambitious plans. Since art is a cultural activity concerned with values, it has always controlled the wild aspects of nature. Like a farmer who selects the seeds, doing everything in order to cultivate them, an artist formulates his creation, the mental pabulum of people. It is an act of limiting and ordering the natural phenomena rather than imitating them. Even the most disordered art is an orderly one for it is the product of an imaginative mind which tries to put forth an aesthetic issue logically. Imagination is that activity which formulates images or makes a graphic description of something in one's mind. It transforms and transports the territorial things to a metaphysical plane of values which a group of people accept and cherish. Nature in this regard can be seen as the "langue" and a work of art or any cultural activity as the "parole." The more a human society becomes imaginative the more it will be concerned with individual expressions, in other words, imaginative, creations. The explosion of imagination in the Romantic era triggered off by the Cartesian cogito and the Industrial Revolution exemplifies such a historical situation. By this time the collective logic of the feudal period had given way to an individual-based, profit-motivated capitalist ideology. The underlying equation was ego = (male) self = power = profit = capital.

In pre-Renaissance Europe and the pre-colonial East, where a collective ideal governed, the societies restrained individual imagination for the sake of the community at large. Humility rather than pride moulded the imagination of the people. Therefore their artistic creations never had "signature-value." The backbone of modern society is the signature value. Exploiting nature and a revolutionary restructuring of society with creative accomplishments such as scientific and technological advancements were the major projects of modernism. This idea of exploiting nature is what Engels criticized a century ago.<sup>1</sup> The Renaissance philosophic tradition based on humanism helped modernists to discard the equal status of all organisms in nature.<sup>1</sup> It resulted in what we experience now: formidable pollution. No wonder modern society has come to such an impasse, for all the ideals governing it have been incomprehensible.<sup>1</sup> One can easily observe the egocentric, market-motivated character of our capitalist society in the whole history of modern art. Art as the conscience of society, according to the values it cherishes, expresses the desires of society. The fiasco of all modernist projects has now forced humanity to rethink and make amendments to the hitherto-followed ideological presuppositions. According to Frederic Jameson, "post-modernism certainly means a return of all the old anti-modernist prejudices, for the utopian ambitions of modernism were unrealizable and its formal innovations exhausted." This necessitates a return to nature cherishing the value of humility instead of ego, subject hood rather than authority, sympathy in place of empathy. Installation as an artistic argument, in this context, upholds the social character of art, denying egocentrism and commercialization of art. Its ephemeral quality gives more importance to the idea or concept than the tangible object. It also denies the Kantian transcendentalism attributed to the work of art. Even though we regard the West as materialist and the East as spiritual, the global strategy of modernism has restructured both the zones. As a

majority of cultures in the world comes under the rule of market, economy could narrow the gulf between the two worlds. That means the problems related to the environment faced by the East as well as the West have become similar. However, one can perceive some basic differences in their approaches to nature in their creative efforts. For instance, the works of the two German artists and the two Japanese artists which I discuss below reflect the former's indulgence in ideas and the latter's concern for experience.

The Western philosophical tradition since *Plato* has always been based on what Derrida would call "the metaphysics of presence": the meaning of everything is realized according to its source or the author.' But an enquiry into the relationship between the image, word and thing in the Saussurian mode of structuralism could realize the break between the signifier (medium) and the signified (message), and see the sign as the associative total of both the terms.' The signified, the mental or conceptual component of any sign, is not a thing but only the notion of a thing that comes into the mind of the speaker or hearer when a signifier is uttered. The possible divisibility of the signifier and the signified provoked a number of artists to stress the mental image rather than the signifier. Joseph Kosuth and Joseph Beuys, the major conceptualists, questioned the necessity of the object hood of a work of art. Beuys' gesture of planting 7,000 oaks shows how he tried to break the rigid formal notion of art.



34. Timm Ulrichs - *The Book of Nature (II)*

**Timm Ulrichs - *The Book of Nature (II)*** - was also realized with a comparatively small effort, and again with a grassy area. In the former case the "fleeting shadows" were projected on grass, here the earth was uplifted and given a sculptural form in the shape of an open book. The frame is made of brown-painted wood, each "page" measuring 247.8 x 150 cm onto which grass and sand were fitted in exactly the same way as they had been in the earth. The corners of the book-object were elevated at 25, 65, 75, 115 cm which means an increase of inclination backwards by 12° and a fall from the pages towards the middle by 15°. The thickness of the book is 12.5-15 cm. Elevated thus and with a negative formed on the ground now, this piece of nature offers itself for the reading of her "great code" (Novalis "The Novices of Sais", 1798) at the same time a "book of nature" as well as a "book of life" as often expressed in the Bible. A live, living, "novel of inner development", a diary, a calendar of seasons, years, whose story is a changing natural process, a "work in progress", constantly changing effects of light and dark. Nature herself is the author, as it was, nay a co-author, as we co-determine the reading pattern. We read what we want to read into those lines. What remains clear is the origin and proximity of the book from and to nature: that the leaves of a book correspond to the leaves of a tree that the paper of the book comes from the forest, and even the letters come literally from the wooden letters they were made of. As a piece of grass frees itself from the earth and swings in the air like a bird, our imagination attains a pair of wings - a moving piece of land it is then. The natural phenomenon and spectacle is a work of art and culture too. It is at the same time natural as well as art, and often the two merge. One only needs to imbed the book back into the earth, and it will be fully one with nature again. This Book of Nature (II) corresponds to the Book of Nature I (The Book of Life), created in 1987 at the symposium "Tel-Hai 87 Contemporary Art Meeting" in Tel-Hai ("Mountain of Life"), Israel, where five living olive trees grow from a strong two-part limestone book.

As an artist conscious of the ecological imbalance occurring due to modernist absolutism, *Timm Ulrichs* underlines the flux of everything. The immateriality and transitoriness of all things are highlighted against solidity, transactional value and physical qualities, the major concerns of technologically advanced cultures. His photosynthetic photogram entitled 'Fleeting Shadows', executed at the Buddha Jayanti Park, is a pictorial transcript of the fleeting aspects of life. The work consists of seven bird-forms resembling the shadows of flying birds. The bird images are created by placing simplified bird-forms with their wings spread made of ply upon the lawn for a few days. The lack of sunlight destroys the chloroplast in the grass and their leaves become yellow and register the images in the lawn. Like flying birds vanish, the yellowed grass area, with the lapse of time, becomes green again without leaving a trace of the bird-forms. It is not the imagery, but the concept of flux or the process of change which is the core of this artistic exercise. Simultaneously, the artist gives a side-shot to the word-image relationship between the title of the work and the work. His 'Light Pyramids' of 1980 is one of the earlier examples of this genre. The artist had placed three slide-projectors at different levels and projected their lights upon a wall. The pyramidal structures of emissive lights with their respective square bases on the wall remind one of the Giza pyramid complex. These 'light pyramids' evoke humor because of the artist's play with the words, illusions and allusions." Similarly, *Timm Ulrichs'* work entitled the '*Book of Nature*' is a literal transportation of a commonly used phrase to an artistic installation. As a contrast to his humorous earlier work entitled 'Sitting Chair,' which shows a chair as if it sits by bending its hinged back legs, the 'Book of Nature' is a didactic one. Both the works make use of verbal images. Using ply, the artist has made an open-book form and filled its page-area with the grass removed along with the soil in which they grow from the lawn. The work is placed on a pedestal. One can stand

and read that book of nature. While the book-form suggests knowledge, the grass symbolizes nature. Making use of simple words and common objects, Timm allows the public to participate in enjoying his creations. He doesn't mind using even pornography for this purpose.

Whatever may be the arguments of the internationalists even after the spread of modernist notions; there is an up division between the oriental and the occidental y of thinking. Historically speaking, the former has rays been spiritual." What I mean by the word spiritual he 'value' we attribute to the objects, images and the 'doings' (*karma*). That means the analytic, geometric and moralistic attitude to life cherished by the West is dialectically opposite to the empirical, experience-based oriental life. Even now this difference is obvious in the roaches to the materials used for the installations of the German and Japanese artists.

Nature is nothing but an argument of space. Experiencing the relation between outer space and the inner space in the mind is the enjoyment of freedom. It is the joy of the spiritual revelation of existence. The structure of all cultures, it is needless to say, must necessarily be synergistic: a change in one part of it eventually shows up in another. Western culture, how-ever, has this edge. And one has to be indoctrinated sufficiently to its Cartesian core, not to miss many finer points of Western culture. In other words, one ought to have inherited Cartesian dualism to see the separation of thought and feeling. But if the indoctrination is total, one ought to believe that conceptual art is the dead-end of Cartesian aestheticism: an art which achieves wholeness by eliminating the visual and emotional factors and which claims to terminate ambiguity. In Western European thought, it is rooted in its analytic tradition. Things are torn apart to find their inside and when one reaches the looked-for inside one discovers that it is yet another outside. The history of particle physics is a good example. The West is constantly on the lookout for the outside because that is the mechanistic view, and Cartesians in its various manifestations is its desert.

Art is a proclamation of the internality of things which have no boundaries, unlike the thought from the outside which pure conceptualism celebrates. The thought from the outside has the same relationship. Art which eliminates ambiguity is not art at all; for the protagonists of conceptualism there may exist an art which has eliminated all those visual and emotional factors that promote a subjectivist reading. According to Mel Bochner, "that it has an exact linguistic correlative, that is, it described and experienced in its description, and that it is infinitely repeatable." (Mel Bochner, *Art Forum*, June 1974) He further adds a conceptualist work "must have absolutely no aura, no uniqueness to it whatsoever? The industrial age can be described as a period of technological entrancement, an altered state of consciousness, a mental fixation that alone can explain how we came to ruin our air and water and soil and to severely damage all our basic life systems under the illusion that this was progress.

No two antonymic words signify so closely related concepts as nature and art. Nature is artless and there is nothing of nature-except probably the primary materials to work on-in anything of man's making, as every art object is. Art was once considered an imitative activity and *Plato* dismissed it as fake nature. Over the centuries, art has rid itself of its ignominious bondage to nature. The aesthetics of imitation has been replaced by that of creativity and art has finally landed an autonomous status. Neither its creation nor its appreciation needs any reference to nature. Nevertheless, till the Impressionists in the last century, nature as the mighty world of the eye was one of the major preoccupations of art. Whether as the backdrop of humanity or subject for its own sake nature has appeared in art in every age in forms and styles as varied as man's perception of it. With modernism, art and nature have strayed apart at many levels. Modernist art, with its newly-gained autonomy and its form-content-equation, now tends to minimize, even eliminate any

reference to visual reality. The world outside' is refashioned and restructured to project a metaphorical equivalent to the world within. Landscape painting is no longer an in-thing for the modernist painter. This devaluation of nature in art may be a spin-off of the process that started with the Industrial Revolution's conquest and wanton exploitation of nature. Gradually the man-made town edged out the God-made country. Nature is now everywhere trimmed, tamed and dominated over in the West's high-tech society. In the sixties, however, an alarm was raised by the Neo-Romantics in their 'Back to Nature' cry, echoing Rousseau. Man is hell-bent, they warned, on destroying and desecrating nature, damaging beyond repair nature's protective ambience without which life cannot thrive, or even survive. Their cry caught on, leading to the rise of the Greens and the Environmentalists. Nature now came to mean environment, ozone layers and eco-systems. This new concept of nature is currently doing its global round. In India nature cannot be reduced to such ecological abstraction even though it is not insulated from the defiling reach of man and machine. With its retarded industrial development and tardy pace of urbanization, India remains vastly rural beyond the few pockets of ugly urban areas with or without polluting industries. To see nature in its pristine shape one does not have to travel far.

No wonder nature is still the primary source of imagery for many among our contemporary painters which reflects the dream vision of a pollution-free world as it could be made with our post-industrialist awareness of environment and ecology.

**7.1 The Magical Power of Art -Yusuf and Gogi Saroj Pal**

The magical power of art can transcend realities around us. The magic can be invoked through various methods. The ancients believed in the ritual performances more because they had faith in the transcendental potential of every small object that they used in their lives. The contemporary men have no such faith because they are already alienated from the objects, from realities of life itself. Hence, often they play with mere symbols.

**7.2 Yusuf**

*"Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned and the last fish has been caught then will we realize that we cannot eat money."*

Born in Gwalior in 1952, done National Diploma in Fine Arts (1974) and National Diploma in Sculpture, 1978 from Gwalior, Yusuf's installation *'Indian Ritual and Ecology'*, is a unique case of a contemporary artist half-believing in what the ancients believed and the other half of his contemporary sensibility has probably more sympathies with his own creation (by ritual materials), i.e. with his own alienated self. But Yusuf is seriously concerned with the natural/environmental realities around him and even though he feels that his artistic concerns and efforts may prove to be futile, all the same he hopes for an improved consciousness of man for making his world a more beautiful one.

Nature is a part of divine creation and human beings owe their existence and survival to nature. All creative expressions start with nature and end with nature. Ever since man started his domination over nature, he embraced the domain of the larger socio-political spectrum. Hence, any discussion on nature is inevitably linked up with socio-political issues. Artists find themselves beleaguered by various socio-political events and issues and it becomes immanent that such events and issues find their expression in the works of the artists. The artistic expressions may not change or alter the existing situations, yet most of the time such expressions become a landmark and are held with great respect and admiration for all times to come. The response of Picasso towards Fascism was expressed in the form of *'Guernica'*. This unique piece of creation, though, could not stop the war. Yet, *'Guernica'* is known in the history of the world art as a symbolic gesture of peace. As an artist I would like to respond in a literal sense. Nature in its purest form, perhaps, cannot be preserved today. Still we have to put in our best efforts to create a consciousness among the people about the necessity to preserve the beauty of nature which is otherwise being spoiled by various factors for which man is directly responsible. My installation comprises certain common objects which, apart from having their own utilitarian purpose, have an intense association with some rituals evocative of occultic powers. The mustard seeds, sprouts, leaf-bowls, dead tree-trunk, masks, terracotta or clay pots, thread and strings appear to be simple objects but under some occultic charms they assume such magical powers as would ward off the evil spirits. Since ancient times in our country, it is believed that these charmed objects protect human beings from the evil intent of satanic supernatural beings. Our ancient beliefs and myths teach us to worship the elements of nature. Hence trees are worshipped with great devotional fervor. Tree worshippers cast certain charms on and around the trees so that no man can harm them. The clay pots, leaf bowls and mustard sprouts are at once recognized as having some occulted power and thus they

help in protecting the bounties and beauties of nature. Of course, this installation is not intended as ritual performance; rather it is a symbolic representation of an ancient practice. My installation conveys the message that nature's beauty can be preserved only through some inner strength of conviction.



35. Yusuf - '*Indian Ritual and Ecology*', Installation,'95

### 7.3 Gogi Saroj Pal

Born in Neoli, U.P. in 1945, studied at College of Art, Vanasthali, Rajasthan in 1961, done Diploma in Painting, from College of Art, Lucknow in 1962-67.

She explains: The concepts of the installations evolved from the thought process similar to that of my conventional format paintings, sculptures and multi-media works of art. These installations are not one-time experiments; these are not outside the parameters of my creative visual imagery or my creative concerns. '*Indian Ritual and Ecology - I*', the first installation, was located at Tara Apartments and '*Indian Ritual and Ecology - II*', was located at Buddha Jayanti Park.

Indian rituals have been creative visual representations of acceptance and mutual reverence of the relationship between man and nature. I tried to interpret this relationship in the contemporary context and indicate aspects of its deterioration. '*Ek Nadi ki Samadhi*', the third installation, was first displayed at Max Mueller Bhavan and later at Lalit Kala Akademi. In the garb of the progress of man, man hides the pollutants and makes them acceptable and sometimes desirable. With this attitude, the life-lines of our civilizations are getting suffocated.



36. Gogi Saroj Pal - '*Ek Nadi ki Samadhi*', installation, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1995



37. Gogi Saroj Pal - *'Indian Ritual and Ecology-II'*, at Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi

## Afterword

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Environment influenced artist's works since prehistoric times. Artists have been profoundly influenced by the images, colors, patterns, structures and systems of nature around them. Visual arts has the power to impact the environment, as well as raising awareness of environmental problems and helping Decision - Makers in the Environmental realm. History can offer examples of the artist's contribution to Environmental awareness. Artists can become a major link in mediating between the community and scientists, and between citizens and their environment as a social and cultural agent. Tagore was invited by Gandhi to the sessions of the Indian National Congress and produced posters for the Congress in 1938. Installation, sculpture and video art forms have been used by many artists to convey socio-political messages to the people to create awareness. Serious interdisciplinary cooperation on environmental issues - hiring of artists as consultants to governmental projects, scientists, humanists, planners, activists, and governmental bodies should be promoted and adopted as a means toward environmental progress. Artists, in turn, are responding by answering collective cultural needs and developing active and practical roles in environmental and social issues. Artists, in turn, are responding by answering collective cultural needs and developing active and practical roles in environmental and social issues.

Ecological Art, or Eco art, is an art practice within the larger field of Environmental Art. Eco art distinguishes itself from Environmental art in that it embraces an ecological ethic in both its content and form / materials. Some environmental art - informs and interprets nature and its processes, or educates us about environmental problems, is concerned with environmental forces and materials, creating artworks affected or powered by wind, water, lightning, even earthquakes, re-envisions our relationship to nature, proposing new ways for us to co-exist with our environment, reclaims and remediates damaged environments, restoring ecosystems in artistic and often in aesthetic ways. Recently 'Sustainable art', has emerged as an alternative term to 'environmental' or 'green art', in recognition of the challenges that sustainability brings for contemporary art as a whole. Sustainable art may also be understood as art that is produced with consideration for the wider impact of the work and its reception in relationship to its environments (social, economic, biophysical, historical and cultural). UNEP Art for the Environment initiative aims to generate environmental awareness using the universal language of art as a catalyst for individuals, communities and leaders to focus on environmental values. This *Environmental Art* also raised awareness of the importance in recycling materials.

In order to promote true interdisciplinary cooperation toward raising environmental awareness and to facilitate artists' role as social and cultural agents, I recommend the following courses of action: Artists and humanists should be incorporated into decision-making processes, at the highest level. Planning committees should include environmentally concerned artists, philosophers, historians, etc. as an inseparable part of the team. A framework should be created for the development and promotion of art works that investigate environmental issues, and that involve interdisciplinary teams working within communities, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Science, and the Ministry of the Environment. The Ministry of Education, together with all other stakeholders, should prepare an annual program incorporating ecology with the arts and humanities. The program should be implemented by teams of interdisciplinary coordinators,

working together. Programs involving artists and communities in joint ecological-art work should be supported and promoted.

Incentives should be given to scientists and planners to include artists in ecological projects. National and local campaigns should be encouraged to give a more central role to Ecological Art. I would propose that a start would be to point out that art is an essential part of the social capital of a nation. It helps to build the networks and to establish norms of trust and reciprocity among the citizens across racial and ethnic lines.