



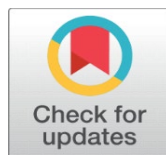
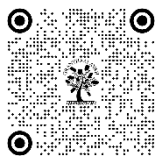


SHILPA GUPTA: AN ARTIST CONCEPTUALIZING WITH TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

India follows the catchy, trendy, uncertain, and spontaneous concepts of new media art for the last few decades. New media practice in India has dealt with issues of identity, critiques of violence, narrative, and performance, and other subjects that come under the umbrella of new issues. New media art began to appear in India since the inception of the 21st century, but it showed in the works of artists like Vivan Sundaram, Nalini Malam, Ved Nayar, Rummana Hussain in the 1990s. New media ideologically mixed art with scientific craft, which resulted in an amplified narrative of our country and world that is a union of different creative languages. New media create a futuristic ethos in the art that is developing every second. It is a medium that symbolizes freedom of mediums, as it is spontaneous and enough. In all this, Shilpa Gupta came as a 'blind star and star blind'.

Shilpa Gupta is one of the leading contemporary, influential, and critically acclaimed new media artists of India's new generation of international artists. A transcultural artist even when influenced with regional specificity. She considers new media art (a web of technology) as a key part of today's existence, and, ensuing, prefers various forms of cutting-edge technology as the vehicle for her interactions with the viewer. Although Gupta's works are developed largely through technological means their significance lies in their candid communication, the various issues that shape contemporary life, particularly the lives of young and adults. Her work is often coded with meanings that are not always instantly available but require the efforts of the viewer. Uniquely and humorously, Gupta reminds us of the danger of taking for granted – that it is indeed technology that connects us to the world. She is an artist who deals with her viewers, her audience is 70 percent part of her artwork. She brings reality from a new perspective.

Keywords: New Media Art, Activism, Computer-Based Installation, Conceptual Art, Coded Meanings

1. INTRODUCTION

It is very difficult to understand new media art as technology is so integrated into our daily lives that we don't necessarily know how to analyze it. Over a period of time, there are movements in all aspects of the art world, and after every thirty-fourty years, there is a change in thinking. With changes in ideas, the world moves on which results in a fresh perception that gives rise to new schools of thought like we had the classics, romantics, impressionists, cubist, abstract, minimalist, etc. then almost in the 20th century there is a rapid change in technology which gave birth to new media art. There was a time in the history of Marvel sculptures, oil paintings, photographs, brush strokes too many more and now the computer is pulling every single stunt to achieve mimesis. An art that is the thinking of the future, and we could

say that is created through code. A code that could be conceptual or digitally created, which later transforms into a beautiful aesthetic piece.

Indian artists started experimenting with new media art early, but it took root later. Our masters of modernism experimented with the moving image to expository acclaim before the proliferation of discourses on the genre: M. F. Husain's 'Through the Eyes of a Painter' (1967) was awarded at the Berlin Film Festival, Tyeb Mehta's 'Koodal' (1970) received awards within the country and Akbar Padamsee's 'Syzygy' (1969) was screened internationally. Apart from this, Krishen Khanna meted out novel experiments where he showed slides on surfaces and different furniture, testing the ontological claims of the photographic image, and a young women artist Nalini Malani who now become a prolific image to describe feminism made 'Dream Houses', a stop-motion animation film. It was perhaps the foremost forward-looking of all of them, at the Vision Exchange Workshop. Akbar Padamsee came upon with other artists like Malani and Gieve Patel and filmmakers such as Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani in developing institutional support and a community for brand fresh media art foreshadowed the state of such practices currently, and signified his conviction that these experiments were here to stay.

In a country where television did not become universal until the late 1980s, the desire to be at the cutting edge was not easily matched by prolific art production. Was an early instance of the art world's engagement with technology alongside early forays into an installation by Vivan Sundaram, with exhibitions like 'Collaboration/Combines' (1992) and therefore the site-specific work 'Structures of Memory: Modern Bengal' (1998)? This period in Indian art has been especially significant, as it set the stage for 2004, Nancy Adajania introduced the idea of new 'context' media. In 'Sarai Reader 04: Crisis/Media', it appeared in the wake of the relatively delayed arrival of technology-based art within the region. This implied that new media was just for some people, not all. Within the state, urban contexts warmed up to technology much more easily than the remainder of the country for obvious reasons. But art's use of media and technology has remained sensitive to the present divide. Shilpa Gupta's 'Singing Cloud' (2008-09) descended into the Indian art scene just a couple of years after Adajania's essay was first published. The installation consisted of 4,000 microphones singing and groaning aloud, rather than listening for sounds as microphones usually do, indicating a plurality of voices contained within the state, speaking from both privileged centers and less-privileged margins. Gupta's practice highlights shifts beyond video-based work to initiate a visceral, interactive response from the audience. Navjot Altaf, Malani, Sundaram, and later on Tushar Joag and Kausik Mukho Padhyay were a few other artists who carved out inclusive spaces through an interesting use of media and space, with activist undertones and overtones in their art.

The strength of artists is now produced by multichannel videos, photograms, shadow plays, and installations to draw the attention of viewers into the artwork, enveloping them and making them a part of it. Their capacity for immersion while touching upon political and social issues, and remaining open-ended conceptually, leaves the viewer to get their own interpretations. We understand the planet around us through newspaper reports, telephone images, social media, and websites: this being portal that we glance for everything from the weather to political events and our social life. 'Remembering the terrorist attack of 26/11 in Mumbai, which was first reported on Twitter before it was captured on hard news. This moment heralded the start of a replacement reality in India, beyond the dominance that cable TV and journalism already had. Artworks are able to speak to our sensibilities intimately by picking up on these visual and cultural cues that dominate our

vocabulary, speaking the same mechanical/digital language that is spoken to us every day [Kakar \(2017\)](#).

In Malani's four-channel video installation, with 12 monitors in tin trunks, 'Remembering Toba Tek Singh' (1998) places us within the chapters from the Partition of India and forgotten stories of distortion, detachment, and migration by evoking Toba Tek Singh, Saadat Hasan Manto's iconic short story. In this work, video footage played on screens hooked to tin trunks speaks of displacement during the tragedy of the Partition and the label of refuge in their own country.

The difficulty for technology-based art to be easily commoditized as opposed to a painting allows it to further transcend its own notions of privilege and power. Globally, museum and biennale projects have allowed artists to experiment with large-scale media-based installations. Most recently Rashid Rana brought Lahore closer to Venice in his commissioned project 'Transpositions' for the Venice Biennale collateral event 'My East is Your West' as an exemplary show of the possibilities of technology. Similarly, Indian artists have frequently produced artworks that have exceeded the precedent set by their oeuvre (body of work). It took a world, large-scale non-profit exhibition, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale to successfully bring technology-based, cutting-edge art from around the world to shores. This is an indicator of how institutional support goes a long way in realizing latent possibilities in an artist's practice.

Indian works were absent from the global wave of conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet we have recently witnessed a turn that could lead to an age where India is one of the spearheads in the digital revolution. A younger generation of artists has been pushing the limits in new media by exploring post-conceptual art through the possibilities that technology presents. The Bengaluru-based artist duo Pros & Rao have been consistently challenging our perception and the laws of nature with their installations. Straight-forward use of technology unleashes phenomenological questions in works such as 'Sun Shadow' (2009-2011) which playfully casts a shadow of the sun, an unlikely phenomenon since all shadows are cast by the sun, the ultimate source of light! In his exploration of dreams and memory, Kartik Sood has been experimenting with the inadequacies of the photographic image through his works that intertwine digital and analog, print and paint, tangible and intangible. In a postmedium condition-where, the material has cultural and historical meaning-boundaries that have collapsed for these artists who employ video, audio, body, optics, and tactility interchangeably in order to capture the stories and histories of their time. Vishal K. Dar's light sculptures, Himali Singh Soin's experiments with time and geography, and Abhishek Hazra's preoccupations with institutional critique (most recently witnessed in his work *Submergent Topologies* at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016) have all been such meditations upon the reality that we currently occupy, mediated by a breakdown of medium consciousness.

The practice of Raqs Media Collective, which blurs boundaries between academics, curation, art, and activism, is a quintessential descriptor of the direction in which we are heading. A prominent trope that brings all these artists together is their desire to capture diverse experiences of history, rather than just react to historical narratives. Here too, the viewer is invited to occupy plural world views that abstain from ideological closure. Several of their works are also self-referential-questioning art, perception, and medium-and are able to situate the artist's vantage point within lived realities, alongside the viewer and not outside it. Interactive media and technology have a definite role to play in their politics of 'seeing'.

Residency circuits, easy access to travel, and international exhibitions such as art fairs and biennales have made global citizens of these artists who are informed by their local contexts but respond to universal concerns. Their approach to media allows them a global language to articulate intimate perceptions. With rapid changes in the art world over the last two decades, in a market that is steadily recovering from the crash of the previous decade, geopolitics, philanthropy, and curatorial directions have encouraged such art-making in interesting, divergent ways. Following the collapse of the art historical canon in the Western model, it is the plurality of avant-gardes in the Indian context that defines contemporary art for the region. And this plurality, expressed through the diversity of languages that these artists speak, is facilitated by a range of media and materials evolved to support it.

2. SHILPA GUPTA: A MUSEUMIZATION OF MUNDANE WITH TRENDING TECHNOLOGY

Figure 1



Figure 1 Shilpa Gupta at the Edinburgh Art Festival, 2018.

Source <https://www.mansworldindia.com/culture/art/artist-shilpa-gupta-fights-jailed-poets-edinburgh-know/>

Shilpa Gupta an artist with unexpected freedom of chaos, who shows the possibility, alchemy, the magic about the singular and dual, relationship between yin and yang going forward and backward. An art in which not only artist is involved but viewers also goes into it. The Indian artist Shilpa Gupta (b.1976) is a Mumbai-based artist who studied at JJ School of Arts and received a BFA in sculpture in 1997. Gupta has engaged with art in its participatory, interactive, and public dimensions for over two decades. Like many of her contemporaries, she considers the 'web' or internet an indispensable part of today's existence, and, consequentially, prefers various forms of cutting-edge technology as the vehicle for her interactions with the viewer. Shilpa Gupta is a new media artist who has influenced several generations. Entered the global art market very early in her artistic career, and she uses a vocabulary of Western Conceptual, Minimalist, and Relational art for her artworks. Or I can say an artist who used data as a pigment and paint it with a conceptual brush. She uses machines to narrate the incidents she and we experience daily.

She is an artist working for a long time using a complicated set of notation including new media like robotic works, light photographic images, sound interactive video, motorized mechanisms, found objects, computer-based installation, and public performance in her artwork to dramatize themes of desire,

personal safety, kidnapped bodies, belief, terror, tenuousness, hostage minds, etc. Working for a decade at the tender age of 31, she's still in the prime stage of making perceptions about things that concern her.

Gupta's artworks occupy multiple subjects; artistic anthropology, new media art, post-feminist art, the biennale condition, and trans-disciplinary collaboration across the arts, psychology, sciences, and activism. Shilpa Gupta's work is an open space for a viewer to see the world which is drastically different in a way that they even can't imagine. In her works, Gupta touches on aspects of current, universal issues including environmental degradation, globalization, terrorism, war, intolerance, gender politics, and human rights, poetic and ethical choices, and her skillful passage through constantly transitional contexts of production and reception. She has persistently mapped the defining power of social and psychological borders on public life. Her work shows the emerging national public sphere in India, which includes gender and class barriers, religious differences, the continued power of repressive state apparatuses, and the seductions of social homogeneity and deceptive ideas of public consensus enabled by emerging media-capes. Although Gupta's works are developed largely through technological means, their significance lies in their candid communication of the various issues that shape contemporary life, particularly the lives of young adults.

Gupta's works which deal with inter-subjectivity and phenomenology, constantly remind us about the relational and highly mediated facets of the act of seeing, retrieving, and remembering. Be it brass labels, stamps, objects confiscated at airports, motion flap boards, or illegal material that traverse physiological and geographical chasms, her practice pushes the boundaries of how the art object is understood. In her works, she questions viewers' expectations as well as normative role models of social behavior. She shows her works in not only museums and galleries but also in public places, to reach folk otherwise outside the domain of art.

3. BEYOND IMAGINATION ARE YONDER BOUNDARIES

In 1998 Shilpa's work was strange metaphors of unconventional expressions that are part of mundane consumerism in a high-tech world. From the beginning, she is considered a sharp-toothed sarcasm artist who fits into the groove of conceptual art. This means that is done with an audience in mind. It is the paradox of art for art's sake, so much so that it remains incomplete without viewer participation. Her works yield a one-to-one with the public seems hilarious at first, but when we look under the skin of these reactions; a certain nameless fear raises its head.

She started her career with mind-blowing works like 'Searching for a Response', 'exploring concepts, and 'Alter Altar'. Shilpa Gupta: 'To view or not to view is the question' is a mind-changing installation that only depends on the expression of the viewer. Shilpa uses her own body to film herself being shaved. 'The video of this ritualistic act of shaving is shown on a conventional television screen standing in the center of a large circle of long swatches of human hair laid out with the cut ends at the center point of the circle. The ends of each three-foot fall of hair radiating out from the television. The effect of this work on the viewer is mixed. At once the viewer is drawn toward the objects and the moving images on the television screen. On approaching the viewer soon finds that they are intruding on a very personal activity-shaving body hair. Glancing down from the screen the long shanks of hair carefully displayed on the floor is a startling sight triggering a response on several levels. The viewer is unsure if they should be looking at these images and objects at all. A slight discomfort, a voyeuristic feeling gnaws somewhere in the psyche. To

look or not to look, that is the question. The moving images beckon again, drawing the viewer in towards the screen once more, all the while responding to the skins, the blade, the shaving of the vulnerable, naked body parts' [White \(2001\)](#).

The wall behind the television screen in a metal frame shoe dishes containing some strange, unimaginable scientific experiment at first glance. The viewer edges closer, seduced somehow by their own curiosity. Again, their response fluctuates between a curious interest and what verges on revulsion. Before they are wax strips on which remain the captured body hairs of the labeled subject: 'Man', 'Girl', 'The Artist', 'Old Woman', 'Old Man'. The sample labeled 'Beautiful Woman' is not at all hairy - perhaps hinting at prerequisites for 'beauty' - that of hairlessness, in the female subject at least. Clearly, these emotional shifts are on Gupta's agenda for the viewer. The work defines no clear boundaries for the viewer.

When the personal becomes political- An installation artist Shilpa Gupta gets political, she creates a detergent missile-cum-petition protesting the Gujarat carnage. When she gets personal, she sends it to 6000 homes in Bandra.

Figure 2



Figure 2 Online Worshipping: Devotees seeking blessing from their god step by step manner online. 25 Nov 2003

Source <http://shilpagupta.com/biblio/2003/jasmine.htm>

Her work stands outside the definitions created by Eurocentric art-history--based art practice and offers a fresh approach to creating art in an Indian context. Among her well-known works are: *Sentiment-Express.com*, *Diamonds, You.com*, and *Blessed- bandwidth.net*. The internet is the most effective communicator of this time which is used by Shilpa in her art piece *Blessedbandwidth.net*, commissioned by Tate Online, this was accessed by 10,000 plus net users to log on, choose a religion, and get blessed." While Shilpa Gupta's works are visibly technological, they use technology to throw light not on technology but on ordinary experiences. The most important insights into technology developed in her work concern the ways by which technology becomes "natural," something that we deem granted within the same way as the natural world around us.

Figure 3**Figure 3** 1:14.9, 1188.5 miles of fenced border-West, North-West, 2011-12.

Source Archana Khare-Ghose, *Blouin Modern Painters*, Pg. 89-98, August 2018

Gupta's suspicion of boundaries has led her, artworks, to superimpose a hundred maps of India drawn by Indians from their memory (100 hand-drawn maps of the country, 2008) or wind a piece of thread one-fifteenth of the length of the India-Pakistan border into the shape of an egg 'Drawing in the Dark' (1:14.9, 1188.5 miles of fenced border-West, North- West, 2011-12). Alongside these, her huge outdoor light installations- titles- 'WHERE DO I END AND YOU BEGIN' (2012), 'My East is Your West' (2014), and 'We Change Each Other' (2017) – are direct statements of her vision of diversity and inclusion. Her work emerges as much from the age of the 'War on Terror' as from the experience of ongoing sectarian violence in India and the historical impact of the so-called Radcliff Line; the ill-conceived and hastily drawn border which carved up new independence in India in 1974. Her long-term research on the border and enclaves between India and Bangladesh (expected to be the longest border fence in the world on completion), has led to a series of works that reflect on how the will to contain and alienate is regularly superseded by the flow of illegal trade and the inexorable human need for movement' [Mudde \(2017\)](#)

Figure 4**Figure 4** For, in your tongue, I cannot fit: Featuring poets who have been imprisoned for their ideas all over the world.

Source <http://shilpagupta.com/words-to-live-by-nadine-khalil/>

'We hide in our smile, the way we hide in our pockets
A photograph of someone we love
Tomorrow maybe they will kill us Tomorrow maybe they will kill us
This smile and the sky, they cannot take from us
This smile
This smile and this sky they cannot take from us

-Yannis Ritsos, detained 1949, 1967'

The dark room is lit with broken texts which feel as if one poet is reading another, caught in the intercourse of spike and mic, persecution and liberation, silence and release, reading and listening. Like earth waiting for lightning to strike. There were writings on revolution, bread, democracy, nationhood freedom from imprisonment, the right to speak, and sexual liberation. Perhaps the strangest thing about this installation is that the microphones have been turned into speakers. Listening has become a kind of speaking, speaking a kind of listening. The greatest silence here is that of the invisible authorities judging these expressions.

Figure 5



Figure 5 Shilpa Gupta 'WEARECLOSERTHANYOUEVERIMAGINED' 2020.

Source <https://artreview.com/artists-in-residence-shilpa-gupta/>

Thirty-five minutes long, WEARECLOSERTHANYOUEVERIMAGINED (2020) goes on a free-associative journey through intimations of mortality and meditations on digital surveillance, isolation, fake news, and bigotry. 'Gupta has said the work deals with "contagion, infiltration and seepage" in a time where we are warned to distance ourselves from others and even from our own bodies 'DONT TOUCH YOUR SELF/DONT TOUCH YOUR FACE'. In this sense, while it speaks directly to the current public health crisis, it also ties in with the broader themes in her work: the complicating of borders (national, cultural, interpersonal), revealing their fuzziness and slipperiness, while embracing a warmer, more porous, and interconnected way of being in the world' Chia (2020).

The body of work she represents expresses the stories which are narrated by people over interviews, over things that have been said or not and things that have been recorded or unrecorded. In her technical works, one is not projecting an opinion where one is looking as a bystander allowing life and things that inform something about itself. The space in her work provides a viewer with an uncomfortable slip which gives the knowledge of history to know about the present situation. In a confined space, her artwork demonstrates the way life is dancing on the knife edge of familiar and foreign.

The work of Gupta is the planning and decision that are made beforehand, and its execution is the prefatory affair. The idea becomes the subject that makes the art. By observing her works I can say that her works are about identity, power structure, and current world orders. She uses ideas as the vehicle for her work, the same text in different languages shows that we all are same with the same blood and flesh if we remove the religious barrier, likewise, borders are simply constructs and often full of contradictions that are not history or geography lessons. As metaphor states lines are younger than the culture that exists on either side. Her use of public space rather than galleries shows her freedom to be assessable to as many people in the city as possible. She works around power structures. It is out in the world and often blends with activism. Her work is more to be expressed as political pieces rather than artwork. Her work could be called 'everyday art' which shows the problems of the public sphere in India. Problems like gender bias, religious divides, and class barriers. Through her art, she also makes sure that we see these problems loud and clear, and grow more aware of the world around us.

4. CONCLUSION

Shilpa Gupta creates artworks that examine human relations, subjectivity, and perception through themes such as desire, conflict, security, technology, borders, and censorship. Her work is multi-faceted and often interactive, typically utilizing media such as sculpture, installation, text, and photography, and regularly displaying a mastery of audio and visual technologies. Considering technology as an extension of body and mind, Gupta possesses a sharp political consciousness towards the role, psychology, and aesthetics of different media forms, particularly towards their complicity in the production of fear. Though her works could be interpreted as referring to the social or political situation of specific cultural or national contexts, Gupta keeps them decidedly open, allowing their themes to be interpreted differently wherever and whenever they are exhibited.

As an artist of the 21st century, it is need of time that have to deal with super-fast technology but with that when it comes to expressing daily life it is a totally different expression, but Shilpa proved it wrong, She is an artist with thoughts that are out of the boundaries beyond imagination. Her work of art is universal far from gender, cast, and religion, etc. but then too political, social and, cultural showing every day. Shilpa Gupta works around the physical and ideological existence of boundaries, revealing her simultaneously arbitrary and repressive functions. Her practice draws on the interstitial zones between nation-states, structures of surveillance-between legal and illegal, ethno-religious divides, and belonging-isolation. Everyday situations are distilled into succinct conceptual gestures, actions, and installations. Objects, thoughts, ideas texts which Gupta addresses the imperceptible powers that dictate our lives as citizens or stateless individuals.

There is no one prescriptive role for artists. Art is about freedom and there is space for many kinds of art and for many kinds of artists. Art is for exploring form, telling stories, making experiments, taking risks, asking what can art be, and so much more. Art is not about creating more or less. As an artist, one is always passively or actively absorbing the moment. Some of this will materialize now, some later or some perhaps might just be left as notes and drawings. She believes at the moment, the thought that is instant in society, and experiments with the emotions of people around her work of art that is created from them and for them. [Tomorrow Maybe They Will Kill Us'. \(2018\)](#)

When we enter a new media work, we are into an unrestricted concept that is displayed in many multi-dimensional mediums. What we experience there is an

interconnection of different ideas that took birth by different incidents. We self-identify the artwork in the first attempt, and we go into it by exploring its multiple identities, creating a dialogue with them, we even find ourselves in a given space. All this create a live narrative of ideas, thoughts, experience, and tragedies of ours even the artist. This new media art gives a platform to an artist and viewer to become the art itself. It transforms the philosophical notion of emotions into aesthetically pleasing artwork through technology. So, technology, art philosophy, emotions, concepts, and identity of memory become merged to create new media art.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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