

Frieze Magazine Issue n°161, Prajna Desai, March 5, 2014



Amol Patil, *Asylum for dead objects*, 2013, video still

Amol Patil has spent many years looking for his late father, Kisan, who died when the artist was a child. His exhibition, 'Social Theatre', attempted to recover those lost years and to create new memories through his father's work. Kisan was a street sweeper by day, who wrote plays in his spare time and formed a theatre group that performed on makeshift stages in low-income housing in south Mumbai. All that remains of Kisan's work is one script and a handful of performance shots. In response to this lacuna, the show's numerous citations, from Dada to Joseph Beuys, became a tongue-in-cheek solution to re-create Patil's father's lost dramaturgy and its unique narratives of mental instability, isolation and homesickness.

The video *Asylum for dead objects* (2013) features an inmate from a mental asylum, played by the artist, enacting various ambiguous gestures. The work is based on a play of Kisan's about a man who tries to escape the law by feigning lunacy, but is then thwarted by the police who, in turn, feign madness to catch him. Since the script was lost, Patil drew on a family legend about the play's plot and exploited the incomplete details to explore the theme of madness. Consequently, the titular 'asylum' and 'dead objects' seem to refer less to a misplaced play than to an absent parent, and the implicit folly and fun of inventing scenarios to find him. Even more curious are the works that delve deeper into Kisan's theatrical process, two of which were inspired by a soundtrack of intriguing but unintelligible voices Kisan produced and recorded on a set of tapes. In *Detritus* (2012), a fuzzy mass of hair is hoisted on a spool fixed on the exposed inside of a Walkman, the hair having drifted down from the balcony above after a neighbour's daily hair brushing. In the work, when the spool rotates, the hair spins like a small, menacing whirlwind. That this work is about trapped but distorted sound – or, more pointedly about sound garbage, which needs to be recycled – crystallized in the adjacent *Postcard Conversation* (2012), where two tape recorders stripped of their covers share a single looped reel. The right-hand device records live sounds that are played back clearly on the one on the left, as if avenging the artist's inability to decipher the sounds recorded by his father.

The show's final installment summed up Kisan's life as an aggregate of history, sociology and eros. Three works deserve special mention. *Untitled* (2013) comprises 28 photographs that recount the story of the artist's grandfather, Gunaji, a low-caste progressive folk singer in Lanja village whose music so impressed British authorities during the colonial period that they gifted him a barren mountain and several plots of arable land. In the work, the artist, whose skin becomes increasingly white in each successive image, moves across his grandfather's land, as a white boundary line emerges under his feet. Whereas the white body and line refer to the ashen edges of fields in rural India, they also double as the tape used in theatres to mark out positions on the stage. In the penultimate image, the artist is completely white and the field is defined by a clear-cut outline, but in the last image he disappears, leaving the field a solid block of white – almost like a blank canvas, a material also regularly used to cover the floors of some folk theatres.

Unlike other works in the show, *Maquette* (2013) has a blunt appeal. It consists of an accordion-style paper scroll digitally printed with photographic images of a man in a city communicating via letters and imaginary conversations with his wife back home in the village. These images are the only performance shots of Kisan's one surviving script, *Postcard*. Set in the 1980s, during the nadir of Mumbai's once-booming textile industry, the play, which captures the pain of migrant loneliness and poverty, revolves around a textile worker in Mumbai writing postcards to his faraway wife. The impossibility of returning to his roots is what links the fictive mill worker's yearning for his wife with the artist's own quest for his father.

For a show concerned with searching for something that cannot be found, the climax was surprisingly cathartic and raunchy. Although the artist does not find his father, he does arrive at a point of origin. *Commisure* (2013) comprised a wooden bed and a monitor, which showed the same bed but in Lanja village, swaying and creaking with the unmistakable regularity of a couple's sexual throes. Given that the bed was Gunaji's, where he slept and presumably conceived his progeny, the exhibition enjoyed the rare honour of a climax worthy of its name.

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