

Galerie Daniel Templon

Paris

JITISH KALLAT

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, September 6, 2015

What is The Moon But a Half-Eaten Roti? Jitish Kallat on his new solo in Paris

Jitish Kallat talks about his solo, the route that leads from food to the astral and why Mumbai matters to his work.



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Jitish Kallat's association with art began in his teens, with the sketches he drew for his sister's biology projects. Now, one of India's most globally-recognised artists, Mumbai-based Kallat's work is characterised by a deep socio-political awareness.

In his ongoing solo, "The Infinite Episode", at Galerie Templon, Paris, the 41-year-old brings together a suite of new drawings, video, sculptures and photo-pieces themed on time, sustenance, and evocations of the celestial. In this interview, he talks about the recurring themes in his body of work and the importance of curation in art.

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The works in your new show deal with how we perceive various forms.

Could you tell us more about this?

The notion of the distance from which we view our world in space and in time has continued to preoccupy my work. In this exhibition, the photographic piece Sightings D9M4Y2015, is a suite of lenticular prints bearing images of seven close details of surfaces of fruits. On a closer viewing, it is as if one is seeing a photographic image of the universe with a distant supernova explosion and dispersed constellations. The cryptic code within the title is purely the day of the month of the year when I wandered through Pali Naka Market near my studio in and bought the fruits.

The roti also resurfaces in the exhibition, in the video *Infinitum* (here after here). You have used it on several occasions earlier as well, including in *Epilogue* (2010).

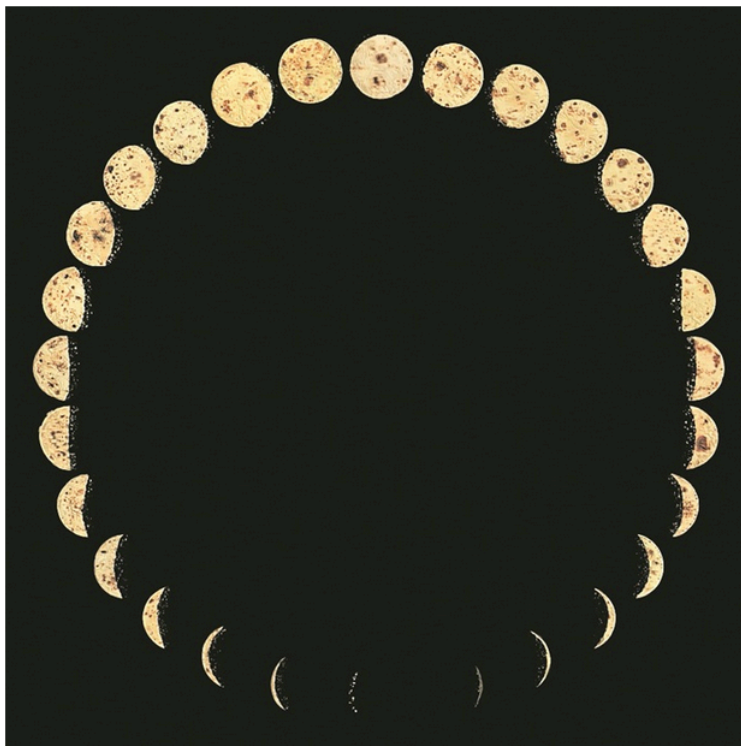
The meal for me has been a unit of inquiry, to trace back the energy path of what manifests as food, to its origin as photosynthesised starlight, thus allowing the meal to be a gateway to the astral. In some of my works, X-ray scans of food have invoked vast cosmic fields, such as in the video *Forensic Trail of the Grand Banquet*. Elsewhere, in works such as *Epilogue*, every moon that my father saw in the 62 years of his life gets marked by a progressively eaten roti, evoking time, abundance, dearth and the cycles of fullness and emptiness that shapes every human life.

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Infinitem

From the time when you were a student at JJ School of Art to some of your initial exhibitions, self-image has been an integral part of your work.

My early works were distinctly autobiographical, with references to ideas of time, the cosmos and the self often playfully dramatised as an artist-pilgrim-seeker. In the 1990s, the self-image often became the central protagonist within the picture; numerous images evoking notions of time, one's ancestry, ideas of survival and mortality, would be playfully rendered as a journey through epiphanies and missteps — for instance, in works I made soon after art school, such as *Evidence From the Evaporite* (1997), and in my debut solo 'P.T.O.' (1997) and 'Apostrophe' (1998). It is only with exhibitions such as 'Private Limited' (1999) that the imagery in the painting began to shift. The self progressively began to disperse amongst a sea of humanity until a visible sense of the autobiographical began to recede, but it has continued in the work.

Over the years, your work has taken a lot from Mumbai, from *Artist Making Local Call* (2005) to *Circa* (2011). How has the city shaped your art?

The city is one's site of residence, but equally it is the medium and the complex web of life through which one can probe the codes of one's existence. Cities are complex phenomena; a dense convergence of people and their life purposes give them a particular accelerated metabolism. A contemplation of this metabolism can offer small insights into life just as a prolonged contemplation of the veins of a leaf can be a gateway to the mysteries that govern life.

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Do you do a fair amount of research to choose the context of your works?

I do not set out to make works with specific research in mind, but one strand of search leads to another and I simply follow the trail of insight. For example, a sequence of chance developments, when I was making the first Public Notice (2003), steered me towards September 11, 1893 — when the first World Parliament of Religions took place. That then lead to Public Notice 3 (2010). Hundred and eight years before the attack on the World Trade Centre, Swami Vivekananda had delivered a keynote lecture calling for universal tolerance, end of fanaticism, fundamentalism and bigotry on the morning of September 11. Just as within the first Public Notice, I was overlaying the moment of the Gujarat riots with the moment of the Partition (through the historic speech delivered by Mahatma Gandhi on the eve of the Salt March to Dandi), Public Notice 3 (2010) was essentially a superimposition of the same dates, and their varying contexts separated by 108 years.

How important is the role of the curator in today's art world?

In the last two decades, the figure of the curator has emerged as a key mediator between artist, exhibition site and audience. Like art history, curatorial practice has evolved its own form of narration and a supple vocabulary; if art-history focuses on art that has already happened, curating attends to art as it happens.

Do you consider political interventions in art detrimental? How do you react to what happened in the case of the Bhau Daji Lad museum in Mumbai?

It is truly unfortunate that political parties derive mileage by disrupting the processes in key institutions rather than by supporting and helping build them. The flourishing of an institution like the Bhau Daji Lad Museum will not only impact the art scene in India but it will rejuvenate the urban fabric around the historic precinct of Byculla and the eastern waterfront.