

Nikhil Chopra:

Biography:

1. **Country** : India
2. **Dates** : Born 1974 in Calcutta, India

3. **Lives and works** : The Artist Lives and Works in Goa.
4. **Education** : 2003 MFA Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
2001 BFA Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
1997-1999 BFA M.S. Rao University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, IN
5. **Medium and Technique** : Performance artist.

Updated CV- <http://www.chatterjeeandlal.com/artist-profile.php?a=Nikhil%20Chopra>

<http://www.nikhilchopra.net>

Solo Exhibitions:

- 2013** "Blackening" - Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India
- 2013** "Coal on Cotton"-Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester International Festival, UK
- 2012** "Inside Out" - Gallery Continua, San Gimignano, Italy
- 2012** "Blackening IV: Bay 19" - Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia
- 2010** "Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory drawing X" - Chatterjee & Lal, and Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, India
- 2010** "Drum Solo" - Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, India
- 2009** "Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX" - New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, USA
- 2007** "Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory drawing II" - Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, India
- 2005** "Sir Raja III" - Supported by Chatterjee & Lal. The Fourth Floor, Kitab Mahal, Mumbai, India
- 2003** "Sir Raja II" - Kinnear Warehouse, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- 2002** "Sir Raja I" - 105 West Prescott Street basement, Ohio, USA

Group Exhibitions:

- 2012** "Focus" - Frieze Art Fair, Chatterjee & Lal, London, UK
- 2012** "Five" - Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai, India
- 2012** "Inside Out: As the stars view the Palace" - Palace Theatre, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- 2012** "Tenth Parallel North Contemporary Photography from India and South America" - Fondazione Fotografia, Modena, Italy
- 2011** "Back to Basics" - 4th Guangzhou Triennial, Guangzhou, Guangdong
- 2011** "Act // ing, Meinblau" - House of Arts Berlin, Germany
- 2011** "The Matter Within: New Contemporary Art of India" - Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts, San Francisco, California, USA
- 2011** "H Box Artsonje Seoul" - Today Art Museum, Beijing ; Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2011** "Crossroads: India escalate (India Pavilion)" - Prague Biennale 5, Prague, Czech Republic
- 2011** "In India and Far Beyond" - Khoj International Artists Association, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen IFA Gallery, Stuttgart and Berlin, Germany
- 2011** "Generation in Transition: New Art from India" - Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland
- 2011** "Liberalis, Projecte Sindelfingen" - Galerie der Stadt Sindelfingen, Germany
- 2011** "Beyond the Self" - National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia
- http://www.portrait.gov.au/site/exhibition_subsite_beyondtheself.php
- 2011** "Paris, Delhi, Bombay" - Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

http://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-4a8231b63db422212c594cc9bc08264¶m.idSource=FR_E-c9769fb69ac8f9f81c1abe9dae5f6fc

2010 "Production Site: The Artist's Studio Inside Out" - Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, USA

2009 "The Self & the Other: Portraiture in contemporary Indian photography" - ARTIUM Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporaneo, Spain

2009 "The Self & the Other: Portraiture in contemporary Indian photography"-La VirreninaCentre de La Imatge, Barcelona, Spain
2009 "Marina Abramovic presents"-Manchester International Festival 09, Manchester, UK
<http://www.mif.co.uk/event/marina-abramovic-presents>
2009 "Making Worlds"-53rd International Art Exhibition,LaBiennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
2009 "Indian Highway"-Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo, Norway
2008 "Indian Highway"-Serpentine Gallery, London, UK
http://www.serpentinegallery.org/2008/06/indian_highwaydecember_2008_fe_1.html
2008 "CHALO INDIA!"-Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
<http://www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/india/exhibition/index.html>
2008 "Time Crevasse"-Yokohama Triennale 2008, Yokohama, Japan
<http://www.yokohamatriennale.jp/2008/en/artist/chopra/>
2008 Chatterjee & Lal @ Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, USA
2008 Live Art 08, Khoj International Artist's Association, New Delhi, IN
2007 Khoj International Artist's Association, Kashmir, IN
2007"Posing"- Abrons Art Center, NewYork, USA
2007"House of Mirrors" -Grosvenor Gallery, London, UK
2007Performance Art Residency, Khoj International Artist's Association, New Delhi, IN
2007 Beings and Doings (curated by Emma Ridgeway), British Council, New Delhi, IN
2006 Asian Contemporary Art week (curated by Leeza Ahmady), Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA
2005 "The Taste of Others"- Apexart, New York, USA
2004 "Contemporaneity: International Video Art"-Central Asia Biennale, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Residencies:

2012 Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia
<http://www.fac.org.au/events/229/nikhil-chopra?mid=23>
2012 Asialink, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia
http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/our_work/arts/Arts_Residencies/2013_Asialink_Arts_Residency_Application_Information/residency_laboratory/asialink_roving_residency_2012
2012 Blackening III: Bay 19, Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia
2011-12 Broken White II, Frei University, Berlin, Germany
<http://www.berlinartlink.com/2011/08/31/nikhil-chopra/>
2010 Centre Intermondes, La Rochelle, France
2009 Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels, Belgium
<http://www.nikhilchopra.net/home/?p=813>
2007 International Performance Art Residency, Khoj, IN
2007 Khoj Kasheer, Srinagar, Kashmir, IN

Work Experience:

2005-2008 Faculty,Rachana Sansad Academy of Art and Craft, Mumbai, IN
2003-2004 Graphic Designer, St.Martin's Press, New York, USA
2002-2003 Assistant to artist Ann Hamilton, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
2001-2002 Graduate Teaching Associate, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

Awards / Reviews :

2003 EDITH FERGUS GILMORE MATERIALS GRANT

Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

2002 PREPARING STUDIO ART FACULTY PROGRAM GRANT

Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

2001 GRADUATE TEACHING ASSOCIATE

Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

2000 SANTA FARINELLA SANGIAMO SCHOLARSHIP

Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland

SEE MORE:

Interview- Back to Black, Sonam Joshi, TimeOut, 2013

Review- Indian artist Nikhil Chopra's performance work premieres in Australia, Artradar journal, 2012

Interview- Nikhil Chopra's extensions, Daniela Bigi, Arteecritica, 2012

Review- Indian artist Nikhil Chopra's performance work premieres in Australia, ArtRadar Journal, 2012

Opinion- Acting Out, Avni Doshi, Artslant India, 2010

Artist Reflection – Nikhil Chopra, Beth Citron, Artforum, 2009

NOT SURE- http://www.theartstrust.com/Magazine_article.aspx?articleid=448

Overview- Nikhil Chopra, Zehra Jumabhoy, Frieze, 2009

Videos

Performance Glimpse –Nikhil Chopra performs live @ MCA, Chicago, 2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxqXzuiwUOw>

Artist Talk -Highlights: Performance Lecture with Asialink Roving Resident Nikhil Chopra, 2012

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9RS1x10nMQ>

Artist Talk- Memory Drawing,Practices in Contemporary Art and Architecture,Colab Goethe Lecture series,Max Mueller Bhavan,Bangalore,2011

<http://pad.ma/BWS/player>

Performance Glimpse-Nikhil Chopra - 'Blackening III: Bay 19', Carriageworks,Sydney,Australia,2012

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3GR_JEeXBw

Performance Glimpse-Nikhil Chopra Part 1, KHOJ International Artists Association,2008.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUse_NPn7go

Performance Glimpse-Nikhil Chopra Part 2, KHOJ International Artists Association,2008.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNnCJeCclOM>

Artist Talk[On-Location?]- *Kunstenfestivaldesarts*, Brussels, Belgium,2009

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-7egrDrUfo>

Performance Glimpse-Nikhil Chopra Performance, KHOJ International Artists Association,2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEhQcEl11ko>

Performance Glimpse-Blackening,Savvy Contemporary,48h-Neukölln festival,Berlin,Germany,2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gADtbyS42Bc>

Text:

Nikhil Chopra works at the **boundaries between theatre, performance, live art, painting, photography and sculpture**. He devises **fictional characters that draw on India's colonial history as well as his own personal history**. He inhabits these characters in largely **improvised performances that last up to 3 days**.

Chopra's character, Sir Raja, was created when he was living in Ohio in 2002. A stereotype of the Indian prince from the country's colonial era, Chopra uses this alter ego to create tableaux for live performance, film and photographs. In the performance **Sir Raja II, 2003**, the character could be found at the end of a 350-foot red carpet, seated motionless at a **table with spread of food, fruits**, and flowers. Here Chopra created a live **Vanitas painting** and challenged the viewer to confront past and present issues of colonialism, exoticism and excess. The theme of death and references to European painting also appeared in the Mumbai performance **The Death of Sir Raja III, 2005**, where he lay adorned in silk and jewels, surrounded by velvet drapes and rich oriental rugs, as if he were posing for a painting depicting his own death. While performing, the **artist does not interact with the audience**, who unlike in theatre, are free to come and go throughout, however the artist's awareness of their gaze and the constant potential for the boundary between player/viewer to be breached, adds to the tension and intensity.

In what will I do with all this land? **2005, Sir Raja** is shown journeying on horseback through his vast inherited estate in a series of atmospheric black and white photographs. These portraits of the robed prince alone in the epic landscape of Kashmir are reminiscent of 19th century British Imperial photography of Indian dignitaries. The narratives around Sir Raja do not, however, refer to a specific person or moment in history but is rather woven from **Chopra's personal memory, old family photographs, ancestral home and endless family stories.**

Chopra's most recent character, **Yog Raj Chitrakar, is loosely based on the artist's grandfather, Yog Raj Chopra.** Educated at Goldsmiths College of Art, London, in the 1920s, Yog Raj Chopra was a frequent open-air landscape painter who spent a large part of middle age capturing the grandeur of the Kashmir Valley.

The character Yog Raj Chitrakar has many faces: **explorer, draughtsman, cartographer, valiant conqueror, soldier, prisoner of war, painter, artist, romantic, dandy and queen.** These are signified by the **elaborate costumes,** which are changed throughout performances to indicate the character's transformation. Yog Raj Chitrakar sets up camp, indoors or outdoors, and makes **large scale drawing of what he sees: cities in transition, places at the cusp of change, the collision of history and the present, architecture and nature.** The large-scale **drawings, as well as the props used in the performance, are left as a remnant,** however it is the process that is the most important to the artist, as he states: *'I want the experience of a work to precede the object and I want the making to be at the centre of it.'*

Rebecca Morrild

<http://www.heartmus.com/nikhil-chopra-3363.aspx>

Nikhil Chopra's work draws on personal and collective cultural history to **examine questions of identity, the role of autobiography and the politics of posing and self-portraiture.** The artist also addresses the **process of transformation** as it is consciously and physically experienced and represented through his performative practice. The characters within his performances are **semi-autobiographical.** Dressed variously in nineteenth century top hats, tailcoats, crinoline dresses, and twentieth century skin-tight body suits and flapper dresses, the characters haunt the streets, busy market squares, train stations, parks and the confines of art galleries and other buildings. Sometimes a performance in a gallery spills over onto the streets when Chopra's character decides to go for a walk. Audiences follow him on these journeys or meet him at venues to watch him drawing or resting, the audience participating in the exercise of locating the performance in the city.

The artist uses **theatrical props to create the impression of a 'still life' painting.** Each performance unfolds in **long-duration 'happenings',** carried out over the course of one-day or several, in **slow, deliberate and ritualized movements.** Everyday actions like washing, eating, shaving, sleeping and dressing form the script of the performance, the central and only character of which is often seen making a large drawing on canvas of urban vistas seen in his immediate environment. **Each action or pause is pregnant with the anticipation that a transformation will take place** – for example, when the bearded man picks up a razor to shave off only part of his beard or to tonsure his head. The **act of shaving** the head as a ritual is often associated with the death of immediate family. It is a symbolic, spiritual act of catharsis that suggests the **shedding of the ego.** Nikhil Chopra's performances may be seen as a form of storytelling that intermingles family histories, personal narrative and everyday life.

<http://www.mif.co.uk/artist/nikhil-chopra>

Nikhil Chopra is a performance artist whose work generally centers on the remnants of India's colonial past. Deeply influenced by his Kashmiri identity, Chopra creates **characters that are not fixed in time or space, not historically accurate**, yet immensely real and endearing. As a performance artist, Chopra collapses the boundaries between theatre and several other artistic endeavours, including set design, costume and makeup design, and photography and video documentation.

Chopra's 'Sir Raja' project is probably his best known work. In this piece, the artist blurs the boundaries between the performance space and the audience space, grappling with the challenge of being himself as the protagonist, while rendering himself as someone else.

Chopra has also dabbled in **creating art right before the audience, sketching landscapes using charcoal on paper or on the wall during his performances**.

<http://www.saffronart.com/artists/nikhil-chopra>

Most of the performances I do attempt to locate the body in a place and a time. It is difficult to say how many roles I took on only because I don't see myself play characters anymore. I see them as **personae or as extensions of myself**. The situations and circumstances turn me into a monk, pilgrim, warrior, painter, adventurer, dandy or clown. For instance walking through the streets of San Gimignano at the end of the performance, face painted white, robed and drenched in the rain created a sort of clown that seemed sad, helpless and bitter; quite the opposite to the happy holidaying tourist that passes through San Gimignano.

I gave myself a task, which was to make drawings of San Gimignano. Everything I did revolved around this task; eating, sleeping, and wearing and parading the drawings through the streets and landscape. The long duration allows me to inhabit a place, have it crawl under my skin and to transform myself. The transformation happens physically but also psychologically.

Drawing seems like the proverbial bottomless well. The more I do, the more I learn. Its potential is limitless. It has been around since we have; from the caves of Altamira and Lascaux and will be till we are extinct. Making marks is one of our most primal forms of expression. Quite often it is a way of saying, "I was here". It can also become a measure of time. For example a prisoner counts his days in prison by making marks on the walls.

The more performances I do the more I realize the role of memory in my work as opposed to history. History seems rigid and linear and memory seems fluid and malleable. Yes, I am a product of India's colonial past. But this is recounted more in personal experiences, possibly around conversations at the dining table or in photographs.

http://www.artecritica.it/archivio_AeC/71/articolo01-eng.html#top

His work is site specific: City lights, architecture, landscape, weather, the commotion and chaos of contemporary metropolitan life, evidence of mental and physical stress, and articulations of cultural collective histories and memories all come together in the gestalt that creates the performative space.

<http://columbuspublicart.com/artist.php?artist=chopra>

While performing, Nikhil makes drawings that take on new functions and meanings, depending on the site and location. These locations are many and extend worldwide.

And I don't usually do fixed drawings on walls. When the performance ends, my relationship with the drawing also ends. Charcoal helps me to do that. It's essentially dust on the wall. Also [the] association with death and mortality. I do think about wood on a funeral pyre, the idea of body becoming ash at the end of its life. It is about acknowledging the dying moment as it passes you, and constantly being reborn. It's also this connotation about "munh kala kar diya". I want to defeat the purpose of this generic association of white is clean and black is dirty. That said, I don't know if I will be using charcoal in Delhi.

One of the roles of performance art is to provoke, shift and challenge the way in which we view and experience art.

<http://www.timeoutdelhi.net/art/features/back-black>

"Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX" is inspired by the 1920s and New York City's role in that defining moment in the history of the world – a time of deep physical, imagined, and sociological changes impacted by immigration, architecture, and labor, caught between two world wars. As the character Yog Raj Chitrakar, the artist activates the gallery, transformed into a turn-of-the-century tableau vivant, for five days (November 4–8). Searching at the edge of the Atlantic, the wanderer/draughtsman/mapmaker also travels through Chinatown and Lower Manhattan, imagining America, and eventually chronicling New York City from the vantage point of Ellis Island. During the performance at the New Museum, the exhibition is in perpetual transformation. At its conclusion, remnants of Chopra's occupation of the space remain on display as an installation. Documentation from three previous performances also on view in this exhibition—Memory Drawing II (Mumbai, 2007), *Yog Raj Chitrakar visits Lal Chowk* (Srinagar, 2007), and Memory Drawing VI (London, 2008)—suggests the many ways in which the history and reality of a location impact the artist's execution of characters through costuming, gesture, and action.

http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Occurrence/Show/occurrence_id/942

While performing, Chopra makes drawings that reflect on *Production Site*, blackening the walls with his obsessive charcoal drawings to emphasize the studio as a place where an artist's internal anxieties and struggles are confronted and resolved.

<http://www.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/past/2010/230>

Nikhil Chopra-report

From the 15th February to the 30th March I was invited by KHOJ International Artists' Association to participate in the International Performance Art Residency 2007.

This is what was facilitated:

Artists, some performers and some working with "the performative", from different parts of the world

An apartment in South Extension part II, New Delhi; this is where they all resided

6 weeks

A studio space for every artist at KHOJ Studios in Khirkee Village in the thick of New Delhi

Springtime

The support of The KHOJ Team and their frequent visitors

The platform to perform/present ideas at various points and also at the end of the 6 weeks to conclude the residency.

(Imagine our brains to be big stew pots filled with lukewarm stock and all these ingredients are then thrown into it and brought to a bubbling boil.)

In this report I will recall events, situations, and ideas that have developed as a result of conversations and observation while at KHOJ. I will present letters, and notes written for Dr. Gbadamosi's article performance art; Dr Gbadamosi was a resident artist.

Recollection I

At the end of their journey from Bombay, Sir Raja III, The Blind Man and Yog Raj Chitrakar's first encounter in Delhi was with Monty Breaker, Rosco, The Monkey, Raimi and Dr. Gbadamosi, the ambassador of the Republic. "Gentlemen, my name is Yog Raj. I make drawings. I draw what I see." Introductions were carried out and the lot went for dinner to the nearest dhaba. In spite of the scuttling cockroaches and rats they polished off their rajma and shahi paneer, talking non-stop, like reunited old friends. In conversation, they revisited The Under ground café in Tel Aviv, the pomp of Lagos, South Africa, London, Dubai, Bombay, Mumbai and the Himalayas. So euphoric was this union that the group paused together and wondered, "With every high comes a fall, what then will be The Great Depression?" The winds of good spirit brought with them Ni Jun, the Bleeding Bride from Shanghai, Atieq (Attack) Listyowati, The Javanese Bride and her entourage, and the Indonesian Chicken Head Cutter. Relationships were soon established and the unit was now complete, and in the words of Rosco, "Relationships; they go up, up and up. We love relationships!"

Letter 1

18th March 2007

Dear family and friends

I am at a performance art residency in Delhi with Khoj and have been having a wonderful time. The final open studio day presentation is on the 28th. For those who will be able to make it to I look forward to seeing you! Please look through pictures on the link below. They are from a live performance we put together on the 16th. Sir Raja III, a fictitious character I play, visited Khowaja Press in Old Delhi. The press resides across from Jama Masjid a 17th century mosque built by Emperor Shah Jahan. While wandering through the back lanes with Hemant of KHOJ we came to an old Urdu printing press. I got into a wonderful conversation with, Asif Fehmi, its owner. I went back and recorded the conversation we had about the history of Din Dunia House, the building the press now resides in. He talks of how the building was built by the Nawaab of Bhopal to accommodate his daughter who was having an affair with her tutor. He also talks of his great grand father and their press in Meerut, a town some 300 km from Delhi. They were active during the Mutiny of 1857, India's first struggle against the British Empire. The press printed material supporting the Mutiny. I transcribed this discussion and we had Khowaja Press print all this rich narrative in their own press for people to take free with them at the performance. Sir Raja III made a drawing from observation as his document, presented it to Asif Fehmi and left as he has arrived; in an auto rickshaw back to New Delhi.

Love

Nikhil

<http://khojworkshop.org/~khoj/project/2418>

Indian artist Nikhil Chopra will embark on his most recent performance work, the signature “Yog Raj Chitrakar” series at Sydney’s Carriageworks from September 28th till 30th. In this three-day endurance work, Chopra will inhabit himself in a self devised fictional character, a Victorian-era draughtsman, Yog Raj Chitrakar, named after his grandfather Yog Raj Chopra. He will draw, wash, shave, eat, rest and even cook for an 18-guest dinner party with fresh produce that he is going to buy from the Saturday Eveleigh market himself. He said he will get himself gradually blackened through the process of charcoal drawing on five three-metre-high white boards. There are wheels underneath the boards, so he can move the mural-size drawing around the space himself. He will interact with the audience but without saying a word. On the Saturday morning, he will shop in the onsite Eveleigh market next to the performance space for fresh produce and prepare a dinner for 18 people and invite willing audience to join. Before the dinner, he will wash and shave, apply makeup and dress up, through which he will transform himself into a totally different persona to welcome the guests.

“There are so many concepts (I want to explore in this work). There are concepts and then concepts within concepts. One of the concepts is I want to suspend the audience in between fiction and reality, in between the past and the present, in between what is live and what is recorded, in between theatre and painting, in between performance art, endurance and theatre. I guess what I am interested is creating undefinable space that you can’t quite say exactly what it is. But what you are experiencing is very real.”

The work is often addressing the site, (which is about) where I am. And it’s also addressing who I am,” says the artist. The reference to Carriageworks is throughout the work. A sack of coal is used to imply the rail yard and industrial past, but it is also the medium for the artist to draw and the colour he is going to change himself into. The dinner party is said to be a feast of an Indian chicken dish with local produce sourced directly from the onsite market in Carriageworks. Beatrice Galton, the visual art curator of Carriageworks says Chopra responds very much to “the working nature of the building... even down to having the walls on wheels.”

<http://artsespresso.com/2012/09/28/indian-artist-nikhil-chopra-showing-at-carriageworks-sydney/>

“Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX” is inspired by the 1920s and New York City’s role in that defining moment in the history of the world – a time of deep physical, imagined, and sociological changes impacted by immigration, architecture, and labor, caught between two world wars. As the character Yog Raj Chitrakar, the artist activates the gallery, transformed into a turn-of-the-century tableau vivant, for five days (November 4–8). Searching at the edge of the Atlantic, the wanderer/draughtsman/mapmaker also travels through Chinatown and Lower Manhattan, imagining America, and eventually chronicling New York City from the vantage point of Ellis Island. During the performance at the New Museum, the

exhibition is in perpetual transformation. At its conclusion, **remnants of Chopra's occupation of the space remain on display as an installation. Documentation from three previous performances also on view in this exhibition**—Memory Drawing II (Mumbai, 2007), Yog Raj Chitrakar visits Lal Chowk (Srinagar, 2007), and Memory Drawing VI (London, 2008)—suggests the many ways in which the **history and reality of a location impact the artist's execution of characters through costuming, gesture, and action.**

<http://www.gclass.org/lessons/nikhil-chopra-yog-raj-chitrakar-memory-drawing-ix>

The semi-autobiographical character of Yog Raj Chitrakar (Chitrakar translates as picture-maker) is a draughtsman or landscape painter who chronicles the world in which we live during his expeditions. The character is loosely based on Chopra's grandfather, Yog Raj Chopra, who was a landscape painter in Kashmir. Chopra's embodiment of multiple personae through the character Yog Raj Chitrakar explores identity formation, incorporating additional roles of soldier, prisoner, dandy and queen.

With live performance at the center of his work, the artist transfers what he refers to in his artist statement as “an immediacy that cannot be accessed in rehearsed acts.” Chopra employs silence as a strategy of separation from the viewer, however his watching back and proximity to onlookers make clear that the **audience sharing time and place become part of the long durational events occurring in slow segments.** His deliberate execution of tasks suggests a ritualization of quotidian behavior – dressing, washing, and shaving. In addition, Chopra's costumes continue the creation of his narrative and identity, with top hats, tailcoats and other nineteenth century Victorian elements juxtaposed with the contemporary landscape in which he performs. The accretion of identities combines family background, personal history and everyday life.

The drawings remain as residue of the performance supporting the character Yog Raj Chitrakar as draughtsman and call into question the role of the art object. To view photographs of the Chopra's character in front of his massive drawings can additionally obscure the artist's true physical surroundings during the performance, making him appear quite alone. Chopra's embodied performance and storytelling make visible the dynamic and unsteady nature of identity.

<http://dancefeast.com/2013/02/17/reflections-nikhil-chopra-performance-now/>

It is in the loose suturing of roles that he slips into and out of during a performance that one finds Chopra violating the rigid drives of categories, especially, those related to gender.

The alternate acts of inhabiting the personae of the monarch, the royal lady and the bewhiskered colonial gentleman, and making their characters his own, allowed for an interplay that prevented these roles from hardening and made way for a dramatic mobility between them. Interstitial leakages helped establish the figures individually, on their own terms, but also in each other's company. While they eat, shave, sleep, stroll and sketch, they undergo a series of transformations that afford us a window into a history that is imagined but also lived through the performances.

At the heart of Chopra's work lies the desire to reclaim a lost world – of gentlemen artists like his grandfather, of the landed class that his family belonged to, of an abandoned way of high life. In spite of being anachronistic figures, Chopra's characters do not lend themselves to ridicule or contempt – his royals get presented as the new subalterns.

http://www.artindiamag.com/quarter04_04_10/profiles_abhay04_04_10.html

What transpired over the next hour and a half were a series of slow, generous, and carefully calculated actions that brought the viewer into and also distanced them from the theatrical atmosphere. Nikhil Chopra's piece "[Yog Raj Chitrakar: Eating](#)", unlike his recent works, was an ephemeral event that left little mark on the actual space of the exhibition. Instead, elements of conversation, silence, and food were used to draw an engaging and haunting personal narrative.

Visitors were invited to share a meal in the carefully crafted atmosphere of the home. Embodying a persona fashioned after the artist's grandfather, Chopra wore a Victorian costume resembling white long underwear that masked his head, complete with top hat and pointy leather shoes with leather spats. A video projected over the dining room table portrayed Chopra's character actively moving through the richly colored city streets of India, scenes densely populated and modern. On another wall a slide projector displayed mostly rural scenes of open spaces in India, many of which were out of focus and grainy, or drawn upon with a black sharpie. Clashing subtly with the video, these images felt of a completely different era, existing between something out of an old photo album and what you would see in a traveler's guidebook. The football game remained on, flickering in the background. Eventually, Chopra settled down to work the projector and effectively positioned himself in the middle of these disparate spaces. We ate rice pulao, raita, and korma. [The artist's mother came in and introduced herself to all of us with a handshake. People met each other, spoke among themselves, chewed, digested, and absorbed. Chopra kept at the periphery](#); staring, as one eyehole in his mask eventually became two, which at some point gained a mouth so he could drink a beer. At first glance, it seemed like an odd caricature reminiscent of 30's era Max Fleischer cartoon characters but quickly developed into a fully enigmatic persona embodying a rich and complicated post-colonial world.

<http://chicagoartmagazine.com/2010/02/nikhil-chopra-at-he-said-she-said/>

But Calcutta-born Nikhil Chopra won't be telling people what to think. "Silence becomes a way to take our obsession away from textual to visual narrative," he says – the tension forces observers to "chat to each other and piece together what they're watching". Chopra uses body language, gestures and markings to quietly communicate to his audiences, be they curious passers-by on the streets of Bombay or a jaded and hurried New York avant-garde crowd

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/artist-rouses-silent-ghosts-of--colonial-histories-20120924-26g2r.html#ixzz2V9sRNR9o>

A collaboration with historian Sohail Hashmi and Masterji from Khirkee village informed the artist's reimagining of the Saket area without its now central malls. This memory of Saket was literally drawn onto the store walls after they were painted white—an ephemeral smudgy black-and-white charcoal landscape contrasting the glossy colour photographic aesthetic of the advertisements all around the mall.

The drawing has been left there as a remnant of the process, emphasising the experience of making the work rather than the drawing itself, which is now a documentation of memory, a memory that constantly expands meaning. If the act of drawing, making maps, taking photographs or making images of something is an act of claiming ownership over it, then it is especially poignant to have this particular persona of a displaced farmer redrawing Saket without its malls.

There is a tangible tension between the spectator and the silent, aloof artist inviting witnesses to interpret meaning and build their own narratives from the visual and gestural clues offered by the part-improvised, part-planned performance. Though constantly gazed upon, the character inhabits a solitary world, viscerally engaging with his identity and the historical memory of the space in which he finds himself. Props such as an unmade white bed, two empty bottles of wine and other carefully chosen objects set up to resemble still-life paintings reinforce the narrative.

<http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/arts/inside-out-artist>

The looping spiral charcoal drawings on the wall and plates of desiccated fruit and cheese give a viewer some clues as to what took place there, but are a pale shadow compared to the eerie spectacle of Chopra's performance. The portion I witnessed featured Chopra in an opaque black bodystocking, high heels and a wig, transforming him into a creepy, faceless, feminine specter. Chopra's angle on the artist's studio is more oblique than most, but the performance was among the most powerful work in the exhibition.

<http://artpulsemagazine.com/production-site-a-compound-eye-on-the-artists-studio>

A man resembling an engine driver will be using the charcoal to draw images that reflect the railway origins of the converted art space and perhaps also to riff on his own story.

But Calcutta-born Nikhil Chopra won't be telling people what to think. "Silence becomes a way to take our obsession away from textual to visual narrative," he says – the tension forces observers to "chat to each other and piece together what they're watching".

Chopra uses body language, gestures and markings to quietly communicate to his audiences, be they curious passers-by on the streets of Bombay or a jaded and hurried New York avant-garde crowd.

Advertisement

Dressed in a Victorian top hat and tailcoat, a flapper dress or skin-tight body outfit, his characters venture outside performance spaces and into streets, train stations and market squares.

Chopra has used his characters to comment on the experiences of his parents and grandparents, who experienced the British Raj and the Indian freedom fight, but this time he has been inspired by his engineer great-grandfather, who studied in Britain and returned to India to build Kashmir's roads.

The chameleon artist visits Sydney as part of an Australia-India exchange organised by Carriageworks (the Sydney video artist Justene Williams is going to Bangalore). He has **moved on from post-colonial characters such as Sir Raja and Yog Raj Chitrakar to personas that are extensions of himself.**

Chopra has just spent a year living in Germany with his wife and son as a resident at the Free University of Berlin. The experience allowed Chopra to be “free and much more expressionistic”, he tells the Herald during a phone call from his new rented studio in Goa. **Berlin's post-textual theatre, which emphasises the visual over the textual narrative**, was a great influence on his work, he says.

“I feel like I was an impressionist – this very happy dandy who walks out into landscapes and makes pretty pictures – and now I am this **screaming, white-faced Bhutto-esque kind of hunchback**, using my body more freely as a creature than I am [as the character] Yog Raj; I feel like I've dealt with my colonial demons.”

Chopra was born in 1974 and initially chose to study commerce but his father convinced him to pursue things that really interested him.

He won a scholarship to study at a Baltimore art school and then for a masters of fine art at Ohio State University. Much of his work since has played with post-colonial themes and the meshing of East and West.

“My family belonged to the kind of educated elite of the country, and my parents and grandparents were part of the state of Kashmir, which was a princely state, and they were directly working for the maharajah for the state.

"Being Hindu subjects to a Hindu king in a Muslim state, the model they used was the British model verbatim.”

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/artist-rouses-silent-ghosts-of--colonial-histories-20120924-26g2r.html#ixzz2VDpcJ7Pn>

The KHOJ workshop, held in conjunction with the local college of music and fine art, was heavily guarded and isolated from the realities of living in a conflict zone. However, Chopra, made uncomfortable by the constant chaperoning and vigilance took the suggestion of a local student participating in the workshop, a political cartoonist himself, and decided to execute a **performance in Lal Chowk**. What ensued was entirely unexpected yet telling in the degree to which the audience, in conjunction with the performer, can establish an unquestionable claim over the space and time of the performance. By **engaging in an act of non-violent resistance ignited by Chopra's oeuvre, the Kashmiri people in the Chowk that afternoon reclaimed a sliver of their sovereignty, a small victory in a war that rages on.**' Rattanamol S. Johal

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/57999312>

Chitrakar is merely one facet of the multidimensional character assumed by Nikhil Chopra, performance artist extraordinaire. The character himself is never the same. In New York City he alternatively prowls the streets in an all-black ensemble of top hat, billowing cape and boots and mulls around his gallery in an austere Gandhian get-up; in Tokyo he is the Queen and the Venice Biennale sees him go from mutton chops and cravat to shoulder length tresses and a thigh-high slit. These transformations are not curtain-call costume changes, but are conducted before his audience. Dress and undress and redress – everything is on view. During his journeys, the artist subjects himself to round-the-clock scrutiny by his audience,

both performing and being under their ever-present, silent, Lacanian gaze. Thus Chopra subverts the traditional role of the artist, the picture maker himself becoming the object.

ometimes he moves achingly slow, taking a full minute to rise off a chair. Other times he whirls around the room, leaping and dipping along with the waves he is scrawling along the four walls of a gallery room.