

ART IS NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT WHAT YOU MAKE OTHERS SEE. - *Edgar Degas*

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## PRAMEYA ART FOUNDATION: CARESSING HISTORY: A DRAFT FOR BODY-BASED HISTORIOGRAPHY, CURATED BY ADWAIT SINGH

April 15, 2018

**New Delhi:** Prameya Art Foundation is now showing **Caressing History: A Draft for Body-based Historiography**, curated by **Adwait Singh** (April 13 to May 15, 2018). The exhibition is on view at Shrine Empire in Defence Colony, New Delhi.

The participating artists in this exhibition are Ariana Page Russell (USA), B.R. Shailesh (India), Chitra Ganesh (USA, India), Ester Fleckner (Denmark, Germany), Éva Magyarósi (Hungary), Iwona Demko (Poland), Jacolby Satterwhite (USA), Khushbu Patel (India), Malgorzata Dawidek (Poland, UK), Mariam Ghani (USA), Mithu Sen (India), Neerja Kothari (India), Sunil Gupta (UK, India) and Vidha Saumya (India).

“Two years ago, I came across a large watercolour by Marlene Dumas hanging mysteriously from the wall of a small room in the Stedelijk Museum with the words ‘female artist thinking about art’ scribbled atop what appeared to be an image of a woman confronting the viewer while performing a blowjob. At first, I thought the correlation to be odd, comical even. I felt the unease of being situated as a stray who had inadvertently walked in on a scene he wasn’t privy to. And then, in a sudden flash of melancholic understanding it dawned on me, I wasn’t the voyeur. I was the face peering from behind the bar at Folies-Bergère, stifling a sigh of knowledge of a collective history. It was an open secret waiting to be found, an invitation to a shared past/pleasure recollected in a moment of synesthetic traversing like Proust thinking back to the taste of madeleine.”—Adwait Singh

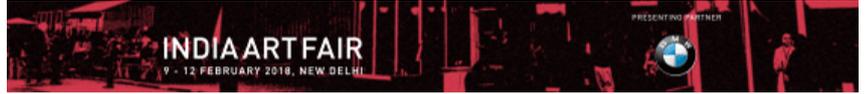
This exhibition aggregates carefully selected works of a diverse set of artistic practitioners from around the world, encountered during the course of a yearlong research undertaken by Adwait Singh, the recipient of the Art Scribes Award in 2016, following a curatorial residency at Château de La Napoule (France) facilitated by the Prameya Art Foundation. Since 2012, the Art Scribes Award has been an initiative to discover young, emerging art writers, and support an international curatorial residency to encourage them to rethink their critical narratives within a curatorial framework, through research-based exhibitions.” —Anahita Taneja & Shefali Somani (Directors, Prameya Art Foundation)

‘Caressing History’ investigates the possibility of a sensuously queer-historiography that espouses a synesthetic and tactile relationship with the past as an alternate to the disciplinary, even “scientific” approach to documenting history, based on Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of ‘erotohistoriography’ as one fully encompassed by ‘bodies and their pleasures’<sup>1</sup>. Reviving a Burkean affective historicism that advocates an empathetic link to the bygone as the proper mode of apprehending it, the exhibition attempts to reinstate the body and its phenomenology into historicism as a way of illuminating certain episodes and ephemera from the past that get side-lined by mainstream historiographical methods configured to maintaining the dominant temporal rhythms and status quo.

Our skin is a vast register and theatre for history, be it in the biographical traces chronicling personal historical trajectories, or certain overt signs signifying the body for classist, racist and gendered readings, the psychic eruptions of a troubled internal economy in the form of psoriasis, or the telepathic transference in the form of stigmata, or the more transient effects such love bites and blushes. Artists such as Ariana Page Russell and Malgorzata Dawidek draft their skin as screens for inscribing personal memoirs. Similarly, Neerja Kothari devices painstakingly detailed, if repetitive, cathartic exercises to process certain extreme experiences with the body. Iwona Demko’s *Month of a Woman’s Face* imagines an alternate calendar calibrated in units of used make-up removal pads, one for each day of the month, as a playful microtemporal appropriation of received chronometrics through a specifically female experience. Vidha Saumya’s *Nursing This Wound*



B.R. Shailesh, *Cactus-I*, Watercolour and Ink on Paper, 57 x 36 inches



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to divine imaginative modes of time travel in search for historical closure or queer futurity. Finally, works by Mithu Sen, Khushbu Patel and BR Shailesh belong to a specific body of text based artworks that appear to overflow with the 'personal' in the escaped instances of intensely private, uncanny and intempestive utterances that appear to float disjunctively within the visual economies of the works. How do these stray textual utterances, increasingly present in contemporary art in the form of titles, modernist poetry, non-diegetic annotations, diary entries, notes, remarks, excursions, and ephemera unsettle/resituate the meaning of the artwork? These are some possible line of enquiries that these works indicate. (excerpt from the curatorial essay by Adwait Singh)

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