



# Many realities, many worlds: Anjali Monteiro & KP Jayasankar at the Kochi Biennale 2018

*Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar write in to tell us about their time at the ongoing Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018.*



**KP Jayasankar & Anjali Monteiro** | Published : | 05th January 2019 02:31 PM



KP Jayasankar & Anjali Monteiro, pic by Mangesh Gudekar

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018 is fascinating in the way in which it seeks to relate to local histories and ecologies through its processes and programming.

This year, 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life', the theme chosen by curator Anita Dube, opens up interesting possibilities for critically interrogating the "society of the spectacle" (*Dube, curatorial statement, 2018*).

This resonates with our present historical juncture, both locally and globally, where power tends to get articulated through a politics of exclusion based on optics and excess.

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A space like the Biennale, with its multiplicity of modes of artistic and cultural expression, from performance, music and food to installations (many created locally through art residencies), film and video, has managed to create a unique space, over the years.

It is a space where all kinds of people, who would perhaps otherwise not have engaged with the world of art, visit, enjoy themselves, get bemused, discuss and relate to a complex set of affective experiences and intellectually stimulating exhibits that combine

"pleasure and pedagogy" (*Dube, ibid*).

The fact that a lot of the text is translated into Malayalam, and there is a set of enthusiastic young guides, who are also fluent in Malayalam, does help to make the space accessible to local visitors.



*Lenticular view of the installation, pic by KP Jayasankar*

We were at the Biennale for the opening week in connection with an installation based on our film *Saacha - The Loom* and were struck both by the sheer diversity of visitors as well as of exhibits and events.

Installations by artists from widely differing social locations and creative practices (including some who would not have had the opportunity to exhibit their work within a more traditional art event) resonated with each other in unusual and strange ways, creating a vibrant space of resistance to and dissonance with normalised ways of seeing and being.

### **Political & affective**

Some works that for us stood out for their compelling quality of bringing together the political and the affective in profound ways: William Kentridge's *More Sweetly Play the Dance*, Shilpa Gupta's *For in your Tongue I Cannot Fit - 100 Jailed Poets*, BV Suresh's *Canes of Wrath*, Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent*, Nilima Sheikh's *Salam Chechi*, Sue Williamson's *Message from the Atlantic Passages*, Kausik Mukopadhyay's *Small, Medium but not Large* and the very moving *Srinagar Biennale*, a set of installations curated by Veer Munshi.

The presentation by the Guerilla Girls at the Pavilion, to a packed audience, was very engaging and provocative. The Pavilion in the Cabral Yard is a lively and fluid space, artistically blending with the landscape, that hosts performances,

talks, panels and screenings. The organisation of the space makes it open, informal and conducive to discussion.



*Lenticular view of the installation, pic by KP Jayasankar*

Our own work, an installation based on our film *Saacha - The Loom* (2001, Produced by Tata Institute of Social Sciences), aspires to engage with the presiding thematic of the Biennale 2018.

Over the years, our time spent in the field with our subjects as researchers and filmmakers, engaged in work such as *Saacha*, has opened us up to the multiple ways in which local ways of seeing can offer us new insights into our being and our place (or lack of it) in the world.

### **A precarious city in flux**

From feminist poets against patriarchy, to painters who weave resistance, to rural pastoralists deeply embedded in oral traditions—our encounters with these many diverse communities have been a constant source of inspiration and learning.

Today, we find this diversity under severe threat, as neo-liberalism and rabid nationalism give rise to various forms of monoculture that erase histories and remake geographies. As filmmakers and artists, we feel strongly about this and seek to challenge these impoverished ways of being through our practice.





*A still from Saacha (2001), pic by KP Jayasankar*

In *Saacha*, we attempt to reclaim and revisit the secular and subaltern energies of the city of Mumbai/Bombay. The mills and their workers have been crucial to the formation of the city and it is this space that we explore through the poetry of Narayan Surve, the paintings of Sudhir Patwardhan and our own images of a precarious city in flux.

The realisation that the world we inhabit is but one possibility, and that there are many realities, many worlds, many ways of seeing beyond our circumscribed lives, is both profoundly humbling as well as exciting and something that we aspire to share through our work.

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