MIRRORING THE SELF: DEVELOPING REPRESENTATIONAL

STRATEGIES FOR LENS BASED ART

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# Abstract

Women artists are notable producers of self-portraits; almost all significant women painters have left an example of such work. They have historically embodied a number of roles within their self-portraiture.

With the emergence of the photographic record many women artists have produced a significant body of self-images; unparalleled amongst the work of their male colleagues, that continues to resonate in the practice of contemporary women artists

Self-referentiality as a thinking process investigates the experiences shaping the artist's identity, which in return exerts an influence on the process of making of the art object.

In terms of my own position as an artist born in India and educated both in India and in the UK I explore ideas of the self and of the transient self, where the ambiguity of moving between geographies is also the ambiguity of moving between versions of identity.

Through a set of three primary questions this thesis attempts to question

1. What is the meaning of self-referential art in current terminology, with specific reference to women working with photography and film in the contemporary context?

2. How do contemporary women artists negotiate issues on gender and identity using the self as a starting point?

3. How can the embodiment of such issues in lens–based and digitally inflected media reflect a subjective, exploratory and expressive engagement with gender and identity politics?

By comparing the practices of contemporary women artists from India and the West, through a set of video and digital collages, the idea is to demonstrate self-representation as a signifier of cultural positions in different global and post-colonial contexts. Issues of gender, identity, feminism, sexuality, and cultural hybridity are foregrounded in the art works specially created as part of the inquiry.

The research and the art works are generated from a personal record of images reflecting cultural signifiers of gender and identity across different cultures and art contexts of India and the West.


Key Words

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed are those of the Author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed …………………………

Dated……9th October, 2018……..

Mirroring the Self: Strategies for Representing the Self in Lens-based Art

Appendices-

**Mirroring the Self: Strategies for Representing the Self in Lens-based Art**

**Introduction**

The human body is the oldest and most immediately available subject of art. Although the female body has more or less always featured in art as a model, women as active protagonists have been excluded from the discourse, systems and hierarchies of art.

(Christine Bohler, 2009)[1]

**I. Rationale:**

This practice based research explores specific connections between the practices of female artists working with digital media in India and the U.K. It is a personal exploration, using the artist's own digital footage going back fourteen years since 2003, along with an analysis of contemporary discourse on feminine and identity. This connection is documented through an analysis of the researcher's studio practice.

As a practising artist, the researcher endeavours to locate representations of one's self and body as a subjective and expressive engagement within contemporary lens based art. The artist/researcher's identity is associated with a hybrid space, informed by her exposure to both Indian and Western cultures. The artist/researcher's decision to live between India and the West (specifically the U.K.) deliberately follows an academic tradition linked with India's colonial history. Therefore, this research brings together observations made through art practice on a specifically post-colonial and contemporary culture that continues to evolve.

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[1] Bohler was the director for the cultural program, ERSTE Stiftung, on the occasion of the exhibition 'Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe' (13th November, 2009 – 14th February, 2010). The exhibition showcased artwork from countries earlier grouped under the geo-political category, Eastern Europe.

The primary resources for the artist/researcher are digital self-portraits, which have been collected since 2003. These images and video clips are both documentary and performative. They are shot without an artistic plan in mind and are diaristic in nature, thus providing a link to the works of the artists who have informed the artist/researcher's own practice. The use of this material from the artist/researcher's personal record of unselfconsciously generated but self-consciously post-edited video diaries, as well as collation of this footage with new material, drawn from personal experience and reflection, provides both content and context for exploring self-representation in lens–based media.

## II. Aims:

The artist/researcher draws upon the idea of 'self-authorship' [which can be defined as an] "ideology, an internal personal identity", [an ability] "that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer authored by them, it authors them and thereby achieves a personal authority." (Kegan 1994, p 185)

The artist/researcher has expanded upon this definition to include works of art in which the author is, in representational terms, subject as well as object. The visual trajectory is informed by representation of the female body. Some of the questions which arise from the artist/researcher's practice are: How does one's own training as an artist in academic spaces of both India and the West, shape the artist/ researcher's understanding of what constitutes art? How does one place one's work within this larger context of contemporary and international feminist art that has been made available to the artist through her cultural mobility?

For the purposes of this research, the artists considered are, from the West, Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun, Dorothea Tanning, Cindy Sherman, Orlan, Nan

Goldin, Gillian Wearing, Annalies Strba, Amalia Ulman and Kate Cooper and Marcel Duchamp (as his female alter ego Rrose Sèlavey) as well as the Indian artists Amrita Sher-Gil, N. Pushpamala. Shaheen Ahmed and the writer Meena Kandasamy. These artists have been chosen on the basis of their engagement with representations of the self. In their chosen mediums, the aforementioned artists have explored the possibilities of using their own bodies and self-portraits to create works that raise questions about the politics of representation, especially as it relates to the female body.

**III. Objectives:**

The objectives of this research can be broadly defined as below:

1. To compare the practices of contemporary women artists in India and the U.K, reflecting on the cultural signifiers of gender and identity.

2. To investigate and develop culturally hybrid representational strategies that are informed by personal and public contexts of representing the self-image and body. This involves using contemporary digital techniques to appropriate existing iconographic representations of the self and the body.

3. To critically reflect upon and utilize material, which already exists as part of the artist/researcher's personal record of digital self images, with respect to its potential for representing the evolving identity of the artist, as a commentator, through practice, on the questions set out though the research.

**IV. Research Methods/ Methodology:**

The methodology informing this research is predominantly practice led, with new knowledge and methods evolving through the studio space.

The works that have been created from the studio practice will be presented in the form of a formal exhibition. In the interim the artist/researcher has held exhibitions of her work as it was developing, in August 2015, September 2016 and September

2017 at the Hardwick Gallery in the UoG. These exhibitions have been very useful to the artist/researcher to form and transform how the practice is produced in the gallery space. The studio practice is situated along the following methods:

1) A critical reflection on the practices of contemporary women artists  working with lens based mediums of photography, and new media, as an exploration of the intergenerational legacy of women artists who have contributed to the discourses around feminism and self-identity.

2) In addition to studio practice, a reflective journal has emerged from the theoretical frameworks, based on mapping the artist/researcher's own cultural position as an Indian woman artist in a global and post-colonial context. This trajectory will follow conversations with creative practitioners the artist/researcher has engaged with during research and fieldwork conducted in India.

3) In the studio practice the artist/researcher has worked with film and photographic material collated, and further reconstituted to represent her engagement with gender and identity politics. This material is produced with formal techniques from animation, collage, and short films, where the emphasis is on working in a cross-disciplinary manner, and not with film and photography as independent media. This production involves combining multiple video and audio files from varying devices and chronologies. Existing photographs have been re-purposed and re-ordered to develop representational iconographies of the self-image and body.

4) These techniques have informed the studio practice of the artist/researcher in the production of art works that are based on conversations and reflections during field trips and the artist/researcher's own record of digital self images. The artist/researcher conducted research in India based on invited residency

programs and personal projects that are based on the themes and ideas emerging from the studio practice, themes such as location/dislocation, cultural identity and gender politics. For example in the artist/researcher met and interviewed the Dalit writer Meena Kandasamy to explore how her writing in the English language influences her engagement with her Indian identity as Dalit poet and activist.

5) The artist/researcher has actively engaged with the practices of contemporary women artists who are applying the epistemic process of analysing their own life history and lived experiences, to engage with current discourses on gender and identity politics. The variety of media across the practice of these artists has influenced the artist/researcher's creative production. However the artist/researcher's works of art reflect her intensely personal appropriation of techniques from various artist and media.

The artist/researcher has, as a deliberate method, used the third person in her inquiry. The term 'mirroring' in the title of this work "Mirroring the Self", has been explored in visual culture and psychoanalysis, where the attention is on the ability to engage with the personal self objectively. On the other hand the nature of the artist/researcher's studio practice is 'a subjective and expressive engagement with one's own self and body' (pg1 infra).  An important focus of the inquiry is the artist/ researchers own self, seen reflectively, which by its very nature introduces a strong element of subjectivity.  An inquiry other than in the third person would detract from the objectivity/critical distance required by the discourse and analysis. Keeping these in mind, as well as the decision to situate the artist/researcher's practice living between India and the West (specifically UK ), deliberately following an academic tradition linked to India's colonial past,  such a third person approach has been adopted. The third person is extensively used in storytelling. As Peter Barry writes

"there are basic mechanisms and procedures common to all acts of storytelling", and at the same time it is important to " study the nature of the 'story' itself, as a concept and cultural practice"( Barry, 2010, pp 214,215). This is the artist/researcher's 'story', told appropriately in the third person.

# Chapter 1

## Framework

This chapter deals with the framework around which this thesis has been structured. It indicates the artistic outcomes and the contextual, theoretical and conceptual foundations on which these outcomes are based.

### 1.1    Creative Outcomes- Practical Considerations:

In creating art works during this research, the original archival material has been post-edited and reconstructed in the studio. The techniques employed in this structuring have included the following methods.

a)    Digital Collages: The collages have been created using Photoshop, which enables the user to select, isolate, and re-order specific parts of images. In this method, the use of Photoshop is akin to drawing, in that it allows for a more deliberate creation and manipulation of the subject. The themes in the collages are based on interpretations of mythological stories and religious iconography from Hinduism on the manifestations of the 'divine mother'. As a collage combines multiple images to create a single image, the digital collages are re-interpretations of traditional Hindu iconography created through images of the artist/researcher's self and body.

b)    Short films: In each of these short films, multiple videos and montages, from the artist/ researcher's personal record, have been combined to create single thematically-directed time based compositions.

c)    Reflective journal: This is a written critical reflection on the visual practices undertaken by the artist/researcher, contextualizing her

work in relation to contemporary women artists who are exploring the relevance of the self-image and body in similar contexts.

## 1.2    Contextual framework:

The differences to be examined are based on representational strategies that blur the boundaries between painting and photography, while simultaneously pushing the self and the body as a 'valid' subject for artistic representation. According to Chadwick (1998)[2] , in the West the legacy of intergenerational women artists associated with the Surrealist movement produced, perhaps for the first time, a significant body of self-images employing representational strategies to explore their own subjective worlds. Their practice reflected the 'female protagonist' as independent of the values defined by their male colleagues. In the cultural landscape of contemporary India, the hegemony of patriarchy is opposed mainly by systems of European modernity, an opposition that is a legacy of its colonial-past. The artists concerned in this research reflect the appropriation of the male gaze in their respective practices. The concept of 'gazing' encourages conversations around narcissism, performance, and play. What is then one to make of the identity of the artist? What is one to make of the female identity? In this research the studio led practice has analysed and developed its position from artists who have contributed to notions of subverting conventions of female identities, by challenging the descriptive role of traditional self-portraiture as a description of time and place—the artist at work, in the studio. The notions of cultural mobility in this research focus particularly on the practices of women artists who have used their bodies and personal narratives to engage with contemporary gender and identity politics. Foucault's conceptualization (Gutman,1988) of "technologies of the self" becomes

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[2] This book, which accompanies an exhibition organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center, explores specific aspects of the relationship between historic and contemporary work in the context of Surrealism. The contributors reexamine art historical assumptions about gender, identity, and intergenerational legacies within modernist and postmodernist frameworks.

even more crucial in the present day and age. Through portable recording devices, producing still photographs or moving images, the externalization of the self and the body has become instantaneous. This externalization allows for greater and more accessible criticality towards one's own self and body, but with a greater narcissistic impulse. According to the theories suggested in the writings of contemporary and post-modern authors, the idea of gendered, male-only and female-only, gazes are residual of patriarchal hierarchies of sexuality and gender, which are structured through bodily divisions of sex (Butler, 1990). In this research, 'the inward gaze' will be demonstrated through narcissistic derivations of the self, which are, as Roland Boer, theologian and scholar suggests, "the specific practices used by individuals in constructing their own selves" (Boer, 2014 p 254). For example in contemporary India, though many goddesses in Hindu culture are not necessarily fair skinned, this turning inwards of this critical narcissistic eye, fuelled by technological interventions, leads to the valuation of fair skin (Prolongeau, 2015). This increased 'awareness' of one's self and body feeds into a global economy of 'correctional procedures', whether as breast implants, or skin whitening options. The performance artist Orlan through her re-inscribing of western art on, and through, her own body, questions this economy, and has "re-sculpted her body using video digitalization and recordings of surgical operations in which she alters the shape of her body and face". (Rush, 2005 p 59).

The issue of identity in this research suggests that the post-colonial Indian identity is a hybrid of contemporary and colonial traditions/practices, and "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial powers, its shifting forces and fixities" (Bhabha, H. 1994, p159). Self-awareness can never be homogenized and can never exist as a pre-given telos, and the experience of the postcolonial state is characteristically hybrid, an experience that Bhabha describes in his book Location of Culture (1994),

speaking of the post-colonial encounter as a complex of liminality, hybridity and ambivalence.

The juxtapositions of indigenous traditions with European modernity are symptomatic of contemporary Indian identity. This research is an outcome of the experiences of transit between distinct cultures, between India and the West. In this research, the researcher looks at contemporary India from the vantage point of mobility across academic contexts in both India and the West. India exists as a cultural space that the artist/researcher is familiar with through birth and schooling while being exposed to elements of Western culture via postgraduate study and opportunities for regular travel to Biennales and major international art events. The artist/researcher was privileged to avail of these resources enabling her to have a broad critical perspective in engaging with her practice. Yet the way in which the artist/researcher uses her personal record of digital self-images is a conscious—almost forced—misinterpretation of how a Western gaze would see it as a statement of a particular national/ethnic identity. Through this body of film and photography, the artist/researcher often address the audience in the first person while simultaneously foregrounding herself and her body and also concealing her presence. "To be made to look, to try to get someone to look at you or at something you want to be noticed, or to engage in an exchange of looks, entails a play of power" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p10). This discourse is supported by the reflections of the artist/ researcher on gender, sexuality and racial identity through feminist perspectives. The transition between cultures reflects post- colonial feminism, as a dialogue between the constructed self – that is personal, and the actual self, influenced by a social identity.

Film and photography, in the context of fine-art practices, in India, are relatively new media of artistic representations. Vinay Kumar, an Indian researcher on new

media, elaborates that "the actual shift can be noticed during the 1990's, when globalization dominated the Indian society". Kumar 2014, p 80) This swift change provided Indian artists an exposure to mainstream western art and simultaneously to various technological tools to experiment with, going beyond the conventional painting and sculpture tradition.

This is a key factor guiding this research because of the nature of the practical aspects of the studio work, which involves an interdisciplinary approach towards self-portraiture. The personal record mentioned as emerging from this research consists of digital self-portraits that combine techniques from both painting and photography.

Such an interdisciplinary approach can be located in the practices of two female photographers, especially in the works they produced in the latter half of the 20th century: the American artist Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and the Indian lens-based artist N. Pushpamala (b. 1956). Sherman, in her series Untitled Film Stills (1977-80), poses as various generic female film characters. In later works, Sherman uses elaborate costumes and makeup to perform scenes that inflect the vocabulary of the film-still as imagined scenarios.

In similar fashion, Pushpamala uses elaborate costumes and makeup to illustrate themes and characters that are not a part of mainstream Indian culture and appear more frequently in calendar art, pulp magazines and other such ubiquitous forms of print culture. The similarity between Sherman and Pushpamala stems from their attempt to enact popular meanings through their own selves and bodies, without any actors or stand-ins. They have elaborated their own bodies to create a wider set of cultural meanings. Both artists have appropriated elements from theatre and spaces of performance. According to Parul Dave-Mukherji of the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawahar Lal Nehru University Delhi, Pushpamala's strategies of representation are

culturally specific and demonstrate "her postcolonial compulsions to reinterpret the past from [a] contemporary perspective". (Dave-Mukherji, 2008, p1),

In her exhibition, 'Mother India' (2013), Pushpamala addresses the idea of the nation state, drawing from images used in political propaganda, calendar art, and studio photography. Pushpamala presents feminist iconography from post-colonial India, whereas Sherman's 'Society Portraits' (2008) addresses the representation of ageing in the context of contemporary obsessions with youth and status in America[3].

As suggested in the above examples, cultural mobility within the fine-art context is not only about physical movement. It can be approached as a process of communicating personal meanings through external objects and ideas.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher has considered the work of an artist, Shaheen Ahmed, who is one of her own contemporaries, whose video work is discussed in brief.

Shaheen Ahmed is actually engaging with twin, partly conflicting, issues – that of the marginalization and trauma faced by her Muslim community in contemporary India, and by the trauma and marginalization faced by women within the social and cultural doctrines, attitudes and practices in Muslim society.

Muslim identity today is increasingly seen as the "other"(Ahmed 2016 p 126) – despised and feared, a polluter who seeks to pollute and destroy the Hindu social fabric, it's doctrines and its practices.  The corollary of this is a retreat into reinforcement of Islamic identity by Muslims – a sort of closing of ranks – an assertion of traditional attitudes and practices in terms of dress, everyday rituals

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[3] Further, in the case of N.Pushpamala, it is noteworthy that photography came to India alongside when it appeared in France and England. The Colonial photographers Bourne and Shepherd  (est. 1866) used photography as an archival tool, as well as for social and anthropological surveys. Their Indian counterpart, Lala Deen Dayal (studio founded 1868), on the other hand, used photography for the exploration of ceremonial; pageant based performative modes, often associated with aristocracy. Photography in India therefore appeared not just as a documentary tool but also as the substantiation of class, event and stature.

and of course the deep-set patriarchy of Muslim society. The burdens of this trauma are disproportionately visited on women who are seen "as bearers and guardians of the ethnic race."(Ahmed 2016 p 128) In times of sectarian conflict the safety of women becomes a marker for the communities "honour and safety" and "restrictions imposed on Muslim women by their own communities are closely linked to the exclusion of the community as a whole."(Ahmed p 129) The trauma of exclusion and marginalization has led to an emergence of neo–fundamentalist Muslim forces which are enforcing their rigid ideology in the community's ghettos- " Muslim women not only have less of a chance to venture out of their community boundaries but also their movements and behavior are more closely policed by their families and communities."(Ahmed 2016 p 130)

It is in this backdrop that Ahmed, who considers herself as a privileged progressive woman artist (Ahmed 2016), engages through her art with the "everyday lived realities"(Ahmed 2016 p 123) of a Muslim woman in India– to struggle "to reclaim her identity [as a Muslim] and yet at the same time fight the mediatized and assumed identity within a patriarchal family and society. This is a trauma that is being performed as a resistance to the notion of minority as well as the deep levels of oppression within contemporary Islam itself."(Ahmed. 2016, p 123)

To protest and articulate against the trauma of the Muslim community Ahmed needs to assert her Muslim identity but to engage with the trauma of patriarchy and oppression in her Muslim society she needs to assert her conflicting identity as a modern Indian woman and artist.

She believes that the cathartic and aesthetic in art can be "an alternative sphere to the mainstream articulation of trauma." (Ahmed 2016 p136) The conflicting themes of community trauma and the trauma of women in the community are clearly articulated in Ahmed's video Refuse/Resist, where on the one hand she asserts and protests her

resistance to the oppression of Muslims by wearing a burqa, and at the same time asserts her modern feminine identity by smoking a cigarette while wearing a burqa.

In engaging with her multiple identities—an Indian Muslim growing up in a milieu of tradition, trauma and conflict as well as a woman exposed to Western tradition of individual freedom—Ahmed presents a hybrid post-colonial experience.

## 1.3    Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

Across cultures, primitive and pre-modern, there have always been examples of the feminine form, be it votive figures, goddesses or as fertility figures. One prime example from the West is the 4.4 inch figurine, known as the Venus of Willendorf (from Austria c 28000 to 25000 B.C.E). Within the Indian context of visual representation, the earliest example of the female form is that of the Dancing Girl, from the Indus Valley civilization (3500 B.C.E). Venus of Willendorf has a large, almost unwieldy, fecund body, with no distinct facial features perhaps referring to the cult of the mother goddess. The Dancing Girl, naked as well, has clear-cut facial features with a childlike slenderness. She is adorned with jewels, reminiscent of the city culture to which she belonged. This spectrum of represention of the female body, despite the stark contrasts and difference in time, is crucial for the artist/researcher's practice. In the artist/researcher's own work, the attempt is to layer elements from pre-modern Indian iconographies with reinterpretations of contemporary gender identities.

As an artist brought up in an urban yet traditional Indian environment, the artist/researcher focuses on situating the studio practice within global and contemporary discourses in lens-based art. By re-looking at her personal record of self images, located between India and the West, themes from feminism, subjectivity, performance, and hybridity have been explored through techniques made available by digital and mobile recording devices that facilitate the possibility of recording the self-aware identity. The film and photographic footage that form this record are

personal interactions, located in the everyday and ordinary spaces of transience, or as described by Augé, "non-places" (Augé 1992, pp 77, 78) recorded as individuated experiences that occur in artificially constructed immersive environments, such as shopping malls, super markets, cinema halls, public parks, airports, and other such urban spaces. Though colonial cities in India were constructed "to contrast the virtues of European rationality, industrial capitalism, civic government, secularism and individuality", with that of pre-colonial India (Khilnani S. 998, pp 111,112), the contemporary Indian urban space is constituted by the presence of multinational commerce. For instance, the artist/researcher's personal record of digital images from India reflect an urban identity, which is exposed to Western trends and popular culture, and is, at the same time, aware of this influence on its ethnic and personal identity.

In light of the ubiquity of contemporary digital and mobile recording devices, the immediacy of self-authored narratives and images in the context of fine-art practices will be re-interpreted as a movement between versions of identity.

The photographic record gears itself towards the production of a copy, or a representation of a scene as it is. On the other hand, according Benjamin (2008) the reproduction in itself is an original[4] . It captures an instance of reality, effectively frozen in time. The subject of the photograph is, therefore, never captured in its wholeness. Roland Barthes describes photography as "a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of tableau vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (Barthes, 2010, p 32). Barthes description of photography as a tableau vivant becomes extremely useful at this point, as it allows us to see a photograph as a moment in performance, as well as in time. For example, the

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[4] Benjamin addresses the power of mechanical representation to reach people otherwise not have access to it. Thus "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual". (Benjamin, 2015, p 224). The artist who looks at reality through technological intervention invariably becomes both the producer and the consumer of art.

contemporary Western artist Amalia Ulman (b. 1989) has used the social media platform of Instagram to transform personal acts into performative ones. Through her work titled 'Excellences and Perfections' (2014) she creates an online persona, which is in fact composed of staged photographs as exercises in self-positioning and poise. These photographs enact the narcissistic, inward turned gaze of the female body, which simultaneously poses itself as an object as well as the producer of that object. Ulman has used photography to de-construct an idea of reality and the unconscious performances that people carry out in the everyday. Presenting her act as three different personas, the story is of a fictionalised self, who moves to Los Angeles to have a breast enhancement surgery, develops a drug habit, and finally discovers yoga and healthy living. Ulman does not present a chronological summation of her persona and its experiences. They are rearranged as "serial images that exist in relation to one other" (Baker, 2016, p 23). Ulman's documentation of her personified experiences exists as a series of tableaux vivant that can be seen in relation to each other, but not in a strict chronological or sequential sense.

Gillian Wearing is a British photographer and video artist who translates her personal narratives by re-creating those moments using materials meant for prosthetic design such as silicon. The digital artist Kate Cooper also from England began her practice by creating highly digitized imagery by photographing live models and then digitally altering these images to transform the real women into idealized figures. Cooper at present creates such figures with the use of specialized CGI technology.

The artist/ researcher visited the exhibition showcasing the works of Claude Cahun and Gillian Wearing at the National Portrait Gallery in May 2017. Even though the artists are born 70 years apart and from different backgrounds, both artists have shared their fascination with self-portraiture as a seamless disguise. Claude

Cahun's is the persona created by Lucie Schwob, an artist and photographer during the Surrealist period. Her use of tropes such as masquerade, mime, and cross dressing was not to mimic the reality of Cahun's persona; her work must be looked at from the perspective of her marginalized identity as a lesbian artist at a time when homosexuality was far from acceptable as it is in present times. Chadwick points to the neatness with which Cahun's photographs have been annexed to postmodern concerns with the decentred subject and with identity as contingent and mutable which has obscured the complexity and contradictions of her writing that blinded many to the works' representations of conflicted identities.(Chadwick. W 1998, p 7)

The artist Gillian Wearing elaborately constructs her masks and costumes that, unlike Cahun, are imitations of real persons, from her immediate surroundings to famous impersonations of well-known celebrities. The key difference in the practice of Wearing from that of Cahun is that the artist's (Wearing) identity is revealed through the artist's embodiment of another identity. In the body of work titled 'Albums' (2003), Wearing recreated her family history by transforming herself, through her masks, into her own family; her brother, father, mother, uncle and her own self as a young teenager[5].

In an earlier period, Marcel Duchamp created, through the photography of his friend the renowned photographer Man Ray, his feminine alter ego Rose Sèlavey. Although Duchamp had referred to this alter ego in his work titled 'Why not sneeze Rose Sèlavey', Rose (later spelt Rrose) began appearing in photographs taken by Man Ray after 1920. Although as part of his work based on his idea of identity and self-representation Duchamp photographed himself cast in different roles, his taking on the role of Rrose has another dimension. In this case, through a series of photographs and also through written works and animated cinema attributed to Rrose, Duchamp is actually enacting a performance,

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[5] https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/gillian-wearing--

vicariously of the role of a feminine alter ego- a persona with all the attributes of Duchamp's art- a performance spanning much of his career. (Hawkins, A. 2015)

This research will examine the role of social media and the Internet in the blurring of boundaries of individuated experiences in real time and space. The technologies of the Internet allow users to take advantage of how individuality can be defined online in ways that obviate the need to have a fixed personality. For one, the online personality is not necessarily an accurate representation of the physical individual. Secondly, the online personality can be altered at will, and can be altered endlessly; ultimately, it can also be destroyed and resurrected in another form. As Papacharissi says:

> Performance conjures expectations of theater. Performativity is associated with preparation, presentation, script, symbolism, props, drama, and last but not least, an audience, actual or imagined. People rarely self-identify as performers when engaging in everyday rituals, but they frequently adjust their behaviors for different audiences." (Papacharissi, Z 2012, 1990)

The role of technology in the artist/researcher's practice is to facilitate an autobiographical narrative based on experiences from the real and physical world. In the virtual world, the self- image and body are counterfactual to their experiences in the physical world. For example, in online communities, such as 'Second Life', and communities built through the growing culture of online games such as 'Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games', there are fixed templates of characters, such as a demon-killing sorceress and soldiers in fictitious wars. The interactions are anonymous, with persons from the real and physical world who may or may not even be in the same geographical location. In such environments, the characters are fictional, and exist solely in the virtual world without any obvious resemblance

to the real world. On the other hand, such technologies have democratized self-expression and provide opportunities to reinvent personal selves. For example, the video blogger, Tabby Ridiman operates a regular YouTube channel named 'tabs24x7Official' which is known for beauty tutorials and humorous videos of exotic animals from her family's farm. Ridiman began her video channel when she was sixteen, talking self-indulgently to a presumed audience about teenage issues and 'trivia', based on her own appearance and experiences. Ridiman also tailors her 'appearances' before the camera rigorously to cater to popular tastes.

Over the last eighty or ninety years lens based methods have evolved in a varied array of specific uses by contemporary women artists. Women artists have been intrigued not by the mechanics of the device, be it a still or a video camera, but in the possibility of documenting their personal experiences, as evident from the work of the artists considered in this research. The use of lens-based processes by women artists, in order to look at their own bodies and self-image, brings the theoretical preoccupations of the gaze, be it either mechanical or technological, squarely within the ambit of a gendered enquiry. For the contemporary Indian artist, Jasmeen Patheja, the technology of the Internet provides a space for social intervention. In 2003, Patheja started a student project called Blank Noise as a protest/ confrontation against street harassment. In an interview with Denisse Albornoz, speaking of public harassment of women in India, Patheja says, "there was denial, there was silence" (Albornoz, 2013). The project is now a community/ collective art project that focuses on sexual violence against women.

## 1.4    Conceptual Framework-Performing Narratives of the Self:

The idea of performing and narrative is based on the artist/researcher's individuated experience reimagined in visual form. These multiple visualizations are both drawn into as well as distanced from the self. In the case of the artist/ photographer

Claude Cahun, there is the instance where in her artistic practice, as Latimer notes, the photographs seem "to have served, on the contrary, to destabilize the notion of "self" that the portrait genre has historically upheld, and, more constructively, to provide an arena of experimentation within which the photographer and the subject could improvise alternate scenarios of social, sexual, and artistic practice." (Latimer, T, 2004, p 1). In the current paradigm of self-imaging technologies, the artist Kate Cooper in her 2014 exhibition Rigged, has used specialized, computer generated imagery to recreate her own self and not a fictionalized personification. Using such a strategy, the artist becomes both the object as well as the producer of the object, which counters Cooper's observation that "[representation and image consumption] have kind of become more and more divorced from each other" (Ugelvig, J, 2014).

In the artist/researcher's own work, the attempt is to look at oneself in personal and immediate surroundings, with locations chosen where inhibitions can be shed, while simultaneously control can be maintained. The short films in the practice are representations of interpersonal relationships mediated within the urban cultural landscape. The short films are digitally re-worked by the researcher-as-artist to incorporate narratives based on the experiences of transit and identity in the form of montage sequence.

Another key element in the artists/ researcher's practice is to focus her gaze on the everyday, where the quotidian is a rich source for the production of art.

## 1.5    Performing the Self- Digital Collages:

The collage has an affinity towards self-representation. As Kathleen Vaughan of the University of Concordia, Montreal proposes, the idea of collage as a model for a "borderlands epistemology": one that values multiple distinctive understandings and that deliberately incorporates non-dominant modes of knowing, such as visual arts, is particularly suited to a feminist postmodern, postcolonial inquiry (Vaughan, 2004),

The process of digital collaging in this research explores Hindu feminist iconographies that seek multiple representations of femininities. This iconography is often not a part of contemporary mainstream Hindu ritualistic culture. For example, in the case of the Dus Mahavidyas, the ten icons are manifestations of the divine feminine. However, they often lie outside everyday Hindu practices. The representations of the Goddess Kali according to traditional Hindu belief are symbolic of creation and destruction. The artistic representations follow versions of depicting the body as naked from the waist upwards, with a garland of skulls around the neck covering the breasts and a girdle of arms around the waist. The image is depicted with multiple arms and weapons. The colour of the tongue is red, symbolic of the blood of enemies and signifying a predeliction for violence against evil. Kali therefore performs roles traditionally ascribed to masculine modes of behaviour. Consequently, as a deity, she can be seen as an instance of exceptional and momentary possibility of the feminine. Kali and other goddesses, who form the Dus Mahavidyas are worshipped largely by tribal populations, outside the Brahmanical Hindu canon. Their worship is also part of Hindu and Buddhist tantric practices, outside mainstream religious rituals. The personal photographic record is used to interpret such unconventional representations of the female form, from Indian mythology, through a series of digital and animation based collages.

## 1.6    Narratives of the Self- Video and Photographic Essays:

In the Surrealist movement, in the West, women artists began to reflect on the notion of the self-portrait not as an indexical construct but instead as an allegory of the complex ideologies associated with feminine identity. The painter Dorothea Tanning translated her self- image through images of non-descript adolescent girls portrayed in everyday spaces such as gardens and houses, which are markedly depicted in the style of the gothic. In the paintings Children's Games (1942) and Palaestra (1949)

by Tanning, Chadwick (1998, p14), observes that, "Tanning projected eroticism onto the bodies of children". Whereas in the work of the contemporary artist Annalies Strba, Strba

> interweaves her domestic images with landscape and architectural views, as well as old family photographs, to give the historical, geographical and personal contexts for the depiction of her family. (Cotton, 2009, p157)

Strba has made a video, titled 'Frances und die Elfen' of her own daughters engaged in ordinary activities in her house. In these videos, says Anna Schindler,

> Bright light, dark shadow, and strange colour combinations produce a wild (and wildly indeterminate) atmosphere. Strba has outlined the contours of an enigmatic, beguiling world. (Schindler, A. 2004)

In the photographic essay by the contemporary American photographer Nan Goldin, The Ballad of Sexual Dependency, she photographed her personal and private life over a period of several years. Originally, this essay existed as a slide show, and was published as a book much later. The slide show consisted of over a hundred intimately photographed images of her friends and extended families, including images of herself and her lovers, sequentially alternating to a nuanced soundtrack from American popular music. Her compositions reflect her interactions with American sub culture in New- York during the 1970's onwards.

In the works of Tanning, Strba and Goldin, the artist/researcher is identifying with creating images of the self and the body, as a personal record that at the same time allows for an intimate interaction between the subject and the object. The artists/ researcher's narrative based on her still and moving images is unguarded, and performed self-portraits in spaces that are public and made to become private. This

is so because the lens and the gaze of the camera evoke "the cultural associations of femininity with narcissism and the self revealed in the mirror". (Chadwick, 1998, p 10)

The chapters that follow address the methodology of self-representation in lens based media developed by the artist/researcher. They outline the key concepts of the various referential strategies explored, including gender and identity politics, while attempting to locate the artistic conventions and subversions of creating images of the self and body. The concluding chapters will discuss in detail the art-works produced during the research, conducted between India and the West and its evolution through practice.

**Chapter 2**


**Methodology**


This chapter deals with the methodologies that underlie the work of the artist/ researcher, and how these methodologies themselves inform the outcomes.

In defining the role of an artist as a researcher, his/her practice must bring itself into a conversation within the broader public domain. Within artistic research therefore, practical action (making) and theoretical reflection (critical thinking) must go hand in hand. This activity requires the artist to make statements about the production of work and the thought process. New knowledge is produced through (creative) production of art as well as through (theoretical) production of thought on the processes of art. In this context, Linda Candy (2006) observes that the methodology of practice-based research is always split between the object and reflections on the object, what she calls "reflection in action". The artist/researcher then constantly needs to balance his role as an artist, who is committed to processes of creativity, and as a researcher, who is committed to theoretical, methodological and systematic rigours of research work. How does an artist integrate this injunction of methodological rigour with creative processes? Can a single methodological principle (or even a set) account for the processes of creativity that are integral to the work of the artist researcher? This is how the artist Sarah Lucas characterizes her creative process:

> I never work to a plan. I don't know what I am going to do next. If I had a plan
> I'd most probably spend my days avoiding it. I get on with something when
> the fancy takes me and deal with any problems that arise as I go along. So
> I don't have much of an idea in advance of who or what I'm going to need.
> (Lucas, 2015, p.19)

Lucas' observations bring into focus the problems of defining a methodological framework for a body of work that is creatively produced. If the creative process is identified as one that is hinged on contingencies and spontaneity, how does one provide a methodological framework for it? Discussing this conundrum, Sarat Maharaj suggests "we might do better to keep matters open, perhaps with a feel for the hodgepodge of methods, even muddle, that attends the lab workbench". (Maharaj, 2009 p 1)

The primary source of the artist/researcher's research is based on personal record of documentation of the process of her becoming an artist. This record consists of still and moving images, and began in India in 2003 during artist/researcher's undergraduate studies. The record, which spans more than decade, consist of digital video and photographic footage of various stages in the artist/researcher's adult life, located between India and West. The decade in which the footage was recorded represents a phase which was one of continuous transitions for the artist- a teenager transitioning to adulthood as well as a self indulgent student evolving into an self aware artist. These unselfconsciously recorded random moments have provided an unparalleled opportunity for the artist/researcher to revisit and (re) view her past in a detailed manner; an act that is impossible in the realm of memory and recollection and has enabled the artist's practice to engage critically with her personal experiences. The fact that the artist/researcher's record captures self- identity in the process of its evolution has allowed the artist/researcher to critically reflect upon how her present identity has been influenced by her lived experiences. Conversely the utilization of this recorded material is not synchronous; the intent in the artwork is not one of chronicling the self. Sound and images from the record are brought together to supplement and illustrate the organizing thematic structure of the work being produced. The material from the record is effectively de-contextualized and utilised to generate new meaning.

Her training was in academic painting, characterized by accuracy of measurements and replications, which required students to acquire mastery over technical aspects of painting and drawing. Painting therefore was put forth as a specialized, technical form of art- making. In addition, this training was focused on imitation, which involved the rendition of an external object as close to reality as possible. While portraiture was included, self-portraiture as a subject of fine art painting was actively discouraged. On the other hand, photography was taught at the college, but students studying painting were not encouraged to take it up as an independent practice, and it only appeared as a tool to facilitate imitation. For the artist/researcher, photography began as a parallel interest that was actively incorporated into her creative process. This convergence of two modes of producing art is something that has directly informed the artist/researcher's methodology. Her art practice, at the same time, has emerged through some specific contextual factors.

Owing to the artist/researcher's mobility within academic spaces between India and the West, an important contextual factor has been her location within the postcolonial moment. The artist/researcher's shift to the West facilitated a consolidation of this interest in integrating several modes of producing art: firstly, by introducing critical distance to established modes of her practice; secondly, by providing the possibility of looking at the self as subject matter in a fine-art practice. The shift therefore has had important methodological implications for the artist/ researcher's practice: the decision to (re) construct the self is a direct result of this understanding.

Living in the UK has provided the artist/researcher with a physical distance, and consequently a critical distance, from India. This distance is further precipitated by a shift in the national-ethnic context of the use of the English language itself,

thereby pushing the artist into a curious predicament, where knowledge of a language was coupled by a transformation in the contexts of its use. This perception of distance, and the artist/researcher's split status as an insider-outsider, allowed her the psychological liberty to map and interrogate images of her body and herself. In the continual engagement with the self as a female artist, indulgence into the play of narcissism in the artist/researcher's current body of work determines her identity based on the relative nature of hybridity. Hybridity for the artist/researcher is a melange of traditional, familial identity markers, and Western-inflected notions of collective sense of personal liberties, made available through the artist/researcher's existence in an urbane and socially privileged location. This hybridity is also the characteristic particularly of the artist/researcher's generation, which therefore has appeared in a historically specific moment, where the middle class Indian family has been forced to open itself to the global exchange of cultural ideas. By lending a female perspective to the genre of self-portraiture, the artist/researcher's practice is exploring the concept of beauty through a voyeuristic gaze of the camera. The role of the camera is to emancipate the female form from the context-specific models and conditions of aesthetic beauty.

In her practice, the artist/researcher is re-looking at her record of documentation by juxtaposing sound and imagery through a process of post-production. Even though the record has documented global culture, the process of juxtaposing plays an important role in questioning the authenticity of the information from the artist/researcher's record. Refinement through editing is a sustained method throughout the research.

The secondary sources of the artist's research are the theoretical underpinnings of her lens-based works. These include writers and thinkers whose views on culture, identity, and feminism resonate in the artist/researcher's practice. Discourses

emerging from Western philosophers and artists, who form a part of the history of self-portraiture, and of the movement of art towards greater self-representation, also form an important section of the secondary sources.

As a contemporary Indian artist, working on a cross-cultural platform, the artist/researcher's research methods are based on artistic exploration and creation, as well as on exploring contemporary gender and identity politics from an anecdotal trajectory. The 'fieldwork' of the artist's research has, similarly, been practical in the manner in which it has been undertaken; this 'work' has been one of experiencing, assimilating, and ultimately, expressing, through art. This artistic experience and expression have taken the form of invited residency programs as well as personal projects based in India. The artist/researcher began exploring the body image at a much later stage, turning her gaze inwards to her immediate surroundings of friends, family and herself. Initially her photographic practice consisted of carefully constructed self-portraits. The artist has continued to build on this collection by including images of her body.

An associated shaping factor in the works of the artists considered in the research and in the production of the artist/researcher's own works, is the question of ethicality. Early photography was perceived as a tool for accurately, objectively, and permanently documenting the world. Given this identification photography, early photography is heavily susceptible of being labelled as transgressing personal privacy, as well as exploitative (be it for male or female artists)[6] . For example the artist N. Pushpamala, in her series 'Native Women of South India- Manners and Customs' (2004), uses images from popular culture as a reference point to enact and photograph herself as several Hindu goddesses. Precisely because these images are part of popular culture, they are seen to possess a certain iconographic value

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[6] By contrast, more recent perspectives on photography speak of the primacy of the image over in relation to what is being represented. See Barthes, R. 2010 and Ritchn, F (2009)

for the majority Hindu population in India. In such a case, conservative sections could easily label her work as exploitative of Hindu beliefs. In this context, how does one negotiate with social, religious, gendered and national taboos while producing art? Similarly, the artist Sally Mann photographed her children in the nude, which raised ethical issues with several conservative institutions. How does one look at art such as this, which 'uses' other people's bodies to produce art? Where does the boundary between 'transgression' and 'exploitation' lie in such instances?

The artist/researcher's record of digital videos and photographs relies heavily on the narcissistic gaze. The lens of the camera is pointed directly at her and she revels in and celebrates her own image and its attributes. Some of the images contain intimate displays of her body and as she is also the creator-viewer of these images and sees them with a sense of excitement and fascination, there is also a voyeuristic element in these images and their production. To what extent then can the artist/researcher render her own body into an object? On the other hand, the artist/researcher's work also draws on 'other' bodies- of friends, family and others. How does the artist/researcher account for the personal liberty, which she, as an artist, might be taking with someone else's privacy? One method that the artist/ researcher has often used in her art is that of concealment- both vis-à-vis her body, as well as those of others.

The primary and secondary resources in this research are interdependent, providing a link between creative and critical energy. This interdependence has been of crucial importance in redirecting self-reflexivity towards the very process through which the artistic production was constituted. Additionally, the artist's research also entailed site visits where she revisited cultural spaces inhabited by her in the past, as a consequence of her renewed engagement with the notion of a postcolonial modernity, as well as her own place within it. This enabled a further probing into

what exactly constitutes works of art that refer back to the artist him/her self.

At the core of the practice of the artist/researcher has been the turning of the analytical gaze of the artist on the everyday. This act positions the mundane and the everyday as potent sources for the production of art- in essence, a creative principle that lies at the core of much of the artist's creative production.

An important part of the research is to explore ways in which contemporary artists have deployed technologies of representation to explore shifting modes of shaping their own subjectivities. Amelia Jones (Jones, 2006) talks about diverse methods of representation based in new technologies and mediums used by female artists from the 1960s onwards and offers some crucial insights. According to her (Jones, 2006, p. xvii), this drive towards deploying "technologies of visual representation to render and/or confirm the self " leads to two important consequences. The first is that the self, in order to externalize itself as a subject in a work of art, paradoxically renders itself into an 'object' (Jones, 2006, p xvii). The second is that this process elaborates the failure of the processes of representation itself, as it can never "offer up the self as a coherent knowable entity" (Jones, 2006, p xvii). Both these observations have significant import for the methodology of the artist/researcher's own practice. In consequence, a postmodernist celebration of fragmentation as well as displacement marks the artist's practice. The intent then is to create works of art that are inherently unstable and fragmentary in nature.

The first important aspect informing this methodology involves looking at Indian and Western female artists working on representations of their selves. The works of these artists provide a context as well as referential points, facilitating insights into the possibilities of representation. Simultaneously they act as a point of departure for the artist/researcher's own work.

Secondly, the creation of art works through the studio practice itself constitutes

a methodology. The studio allows for practical explorations of self-representation where various methods can be used and discarded as required, to arrive at a desired outcome. This methodology provides a purely practical approach to creativity.

The common thread that brings together the artist/researcher's body of artworks is the narrative around the self-image. The female body is (re) claimed through individualistic artistic language. The language as inherent is always given, but the artistic identity, in continual practice of (re) making, in the artist's own art practice, is an attempt to decentralize the formative knowledge system. The female body itself becomes the artistic language (Vergine, 2000) to deconstruct the legacy of patriarchal norms and practices. With the artists it is not anymore about negotiations with the external self, but taking their body in their own hands to examine the issues of female identity (Lucas, 2015).

The process of self-objectification exists as a methodological problematic in the artist's research as well as practice. One particular aspect that the artist/ researcher has had to continuously contend with is that of setting limits to self-objectification and establishing parameters for it. As a consequence of the confusion between whether the process of self-objectification sidles off into a narcissistic gaze, or allows for an exploration of the gendered location of the female body, it becomes imperative for the artist to impose limits to enacting herself as an object. On the other hand, can the narcissistic impulse itself be seen as a method to explore politics of gender? In other words, can the artist's exploration of her body and self as a gendered entity only happen through a narcissistic drive to render herself into an object? The complications entailed in the production of self-representational art outlined by Jones (2006) therefore raise questions about the methods employed to produce such art.

Coming to the second observation by Jones (2006), the incompleteness

of any attempt at self-representation can be traced in the methods that the artist/ researcher has used for creating images of her body and her self. As a consequence of the incompleteness, there is a proliferation of such imagery in an attempt to form the elusive 'coherent knowable entity' of Jones' formulation. In order to facilitate this proliferation, the artist/researcher has used devices and tools that allow her to extensively document her experiences. The artist/researcher is working within the spectrum of digital film and photography and the virtual and real, in order to create personalized meaning without giving exclusivity to any one medium. The artist/researcher's practice is therefore associated with the easily transferable hand held cameras, a simple point and shoot, rather than with dedicated video recording and cameras, which are imbued with their own privileging significances of representation.

The preferred technology is digital, which enables the artist/researcher to use everyday experiences for which the easily transferability of the technology is crucial. In other words, the auto-ethnographic focus of the artist's work has heavily influenced her choice of devices, as well as the way in which those devices are used. As mentioned earlier, this documenting of the everyday has happened by reusing footage and images from earlier works.

The everyday itself presents several methodological challenges in the artist/ researcher's practice, and as a 'valid' subject of art has sparked several debates in the past. The everyday is a concept in Indian philosophy that permeates several texts (strikingly different from how it appears in the Western tradition). Several crucial aspects of the everyday have been discussed in the Kamasutra. The everyday in Indian Philosophy attempts to produce a holistic view of human life, and to this end, it identifies characteristics and stages in the human life cycle as characteristics of the everyday (also known as the four ashramas- dharma- Duty, arth- Purpose,

karma- Pleasure, moksha- Salvation). While contemporary everyday life cannot strictly adhere to these principles, it still provides a prescriptive foundation to it. While in the artist/researcher's practice, the idea of the everyday is not based on traditional Indian philosophy, it does examine how such a framework connects to her existence in contemporary urban culture.

Henri Lefebvre says about the everyday:

The solution is then to attempt a philosophical inventory and analysis of Everyday life that will expose its ambiguities- its baseness and exuberance, its poverty and fruitfulness- and by these unorthodox means release the creative energies that are an integral part of it. (Lefebvre,1971, p.13)

How does this holistic tradition of seeing the everyday as a set of stages in the human life cycle equip the artist with the methodological tools to probe an enquiry into the self? This becomes even more crucial in the case of the female subject located in contemporary urban life, where the meaning and role of the woman have been dislodged from traditional prescriptions, and exist in a limbo between tradition and modernity. This alienation of the everyday for such a female subject is a point of departure in the artistic work that is produced by this research.

This idea of the everyday as a set of prescriptive principles for a female subject makes the engagement with everyday behaviour- or vyavahara, as the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2016) defines it, more complex. Although there are certain codes of conduct for the everyday, the artist/researcher's own performances also treat these structures playfully. The everyday involves certain rituals that are compulsory (such as being clothed). The artist/researcher's work portrays them as mundane, and therefore the act of shedding clothes and performing her nakedness becomes a transformative and transgressed moment.

Further, the strategy of documenting the everyday is a method that transforms aspects of the everyday. The artist/researcher has used footage that she had captured earlier, and these events, interactions and conversations are also revisited, revised and reframed using new technologies. The artist/researcher would at this point draw an analogy that she find useful to illustrate the revisiting of self through technology. One looks at oneself in the mirror for the purpose of grooming as an everyday act. However, in the artist's practice it is almost as if the mirror is replaced by the camera, that, even though it can be seen as an adjunct to the act of grooming, becomes an analytical tool. The revisiting of older images and footage through technology thus turns the everyday into both an expression of the mundane, as well as an analytical act.

Two artists in particular, Nan Goldin (b.1953) and Claude Cahun (1894-1954) cast useful light on the idea of the everyday. The critical study of their existing body of artworks is an integral part of the artist/researcher's research methods. The photographic practice of Nan Goldin examines themes relating to personal intimacy and filial relationships. What makes her works relevant to the research is not the simple capturing of personal figures, but how the urban landscape turns the relationship into forms of hierarchy and differences. Goldin has photographed herself; her friends in a subversive political climate, many of which images are in moments that are personal[7]. Her work is subjective and experiential of her identity as a female artist. Goldin has photographed herself with her friends in different modes of urbanity- be it a bar, a friend's bedroom, their cars and other places that are not transient but mundane and from the everyday. She is looking at how urbanity has an influence on social relationships within communities. Claude Cahun, on the other hand, has infused the everyday with elements from the fantastical. Cahun

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[7] The Ballad of Sexual Dependency: Goldin's most iconic work to date. She chronicled the struggle for intimacy between family friends and lovers.

merges the boundary between staged and the everyday. The fluidity between the staged and the everyday also aims to question the gender opposition between man/ woman. The carefully staged photo-performances highlight the fluidity of gendered self to dismantle the empowering figure of masculinity involved in the making of these oppositions. The identity is not given to us, but it is always in the processes of making. The artist's own records of digital self images reflects several of these qualities: in her practice, production of images happens without premeditation, in order to capture the self's relationship to the external world of everyday. Consequently, selection and collation happens post facto, and it is through the choice of methods and devices for collation that various pieces are stitched together.

Questions about gender have intrinsically shaped the artist/researcher's methodology and practice. Through her practice, the artist/researcher has attempted to break away from a biological understanding of sexualized bodies, and has tried to see them in terms of performative moments. Gender, as an analytical category, for the artist/researcher becomes one that is rooted in the idea of performances that need to be constantly repeated over and over again. The artist/researcher's use of everyday footage of her own body as a body which is always becoming female, and never achieves any kind of gendered ontological stability, is an attempt to represent diverse ways in which 'womanhood' can be performed. To this end, Judith Butler's work has informed the artist/researcher's understanding of gender as a category. Attacking the biological certainty that the category of 'sex' takes for itself, Butler says:

> Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called sex is as culturally constructed as gender? (Butler, 1990, p. 9)

Butler subsequently goes on to question the gendering of the human as 'natural', and rather argues for seeing gender as a set of culturally located and performative gestures. By taking Butler's position as a methodological starting point, the artist/researcher has also consciously attempted to break away from seeing gender as a stable set of biological categories. In such an understanding of gender the female body and its biological specificity (in terms of physiological characteristics) become over-emphasized, and subsequently fetishized. Through the artist/researcher's practice, this standardized, traditionally Western understanding of the human body is contested by using iconography originating in the artist/researcher's Indian cultural background.

Understanding the female body as a performance is mediated through the function of the gaze; more specifically, through the gaze of the camera. This adds a new dimension to the understanding of gender in the artist/researcher's practice. Performances of gender are seen through the camera lens, and are therefore rendered in visual terms. The gaze is always incomplete and always in the process of making. One may here consider the work of Donna Haraway who talks about how the gaze is rendered 'unmarked', and subsequently 'disembodied' in masculine criticism and research. She describes this as the 'god trick' (Haraway,1988, p 581). For a feminist-inflected research methodology, she argues that what needs to be stressed is 'situated knowledge' which is partial, incomplete and embodied. She talks of this in terms of 'vision':

> These technologies are ways of life, social orders, practices of visualization. Technologies are skilled practices. How to see? Where to seefrom? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field? (Haraway, 1988, p. 587)

To conclude, the avenues of enquiry the artist/researcher has followed are rooted in a postmodern context and a postcolonial identity. The practice/research seeks to create art that represents hybridity and cultural displacement, which are a direct consequence of inhabiting postcolonial spaces, and inform the way in which this research looks at the self and identity. Selves and bodies carry traces of the spaces through which they travel, while not belonging fully to any of those spaces. This necessitates a postcolonial enquiry, which looks at identities as forever shaped by displacement, transferences, and dislocation—both physical as well as cultural. However, this displacement and non-belonging, so to speak, does not cause the practice to design itself as narratives of loss. Rather, it seeks to celebrate mobility, as well as fragmentation of seemingly cohesive and whole identities. While attempting to draw the distinction between postmodernism and modernism, Peter Barry says:

> For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In a word, the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it. (Barry, 2010, p 81)

Thus, a postmodernist revelry in fragmentation and displacement marks the artist/researcher's practice. The intent has been to create works of art, which are inherently unstable and fragmentary in nature. Further, this can be seen even in terms of the media employed for producing works of art, which are created from photographic fragments. Each of the works demonstrates positions of instability, rather than cohesive, whole and stable ones. These unstable positions are an attempt to represent the fluid nature of the artist/researcher's postmodern identity.

**Chapter 3**


**Technologies and techniques of self- representation:**


This chapter deals with the range of technologies that have been the foundation of representation, portraiture and self-portraiture in art and its dissemination in the public sphere. It also addresses the techniques used by the artist/researcher in development of her work, and how in turn her works has been enabled, informed and enriched by these.

Technologies of self-representation occupy a broad spectrum, both in terms of their characteristics as also their development over time. On one end there are technologies that can be considered as 'physical', ranging from painting and sculpture to the lens and camera, and on the other end to those that have lesser 'physical' characteristics such as digital software based technologies. Each of these has developed over time and although the physical technologies can be thought of, as 'older', these to have been impacted by the newer digital technologies. A case in point is the development of digital photography as well as digital montage/collage.

Each technology has its own possibilities and constraints for self-representation, and therefore the expression of self-representation is impacted by the technology used in its production and dissemination. For example painted self-portrait may suggest a different form of self-representation on the part of its maker, than say, a photographic self-portrait. The possibilities of dissemination and viewership of the two will also be different. Work disseminated through online platforms would have a wider and more varied viewership profile than those viewed in more tradition formats; and would evince different perceptions on the part of the viewer.

The purpose of this section is to examine how the self can be represented;

this will also address the limitation and advantages of each technology with regards to representation. A discussion of these technologies follows.

## 3.1 Physical Technologies

Among the earliest tools used in representation were vegetable and mineral dyes, animal-hair brushes, including sharpened animal bones. Because of the inherent limitation of these tools they allowed for only a certain range of representation. Interestingly however, despite this limitation, many such paintings were able to depict scenes of complexity and were able to convey a surprising amount of information about the society and ways of life. For example, the cave paintings of Bhimbetka (India) provide information, sometimes quite nuanced on family life, rituals, hunting and food gathering and family life at the time.

Evolving technologies of painting bring us to alternate surfaces moving on from rock, such as vellum, paper, glass, canvas and etching on metallic and stone surfaces. The paint itself evolved from mineral and vegetable based paints to chemical based and synthetic paints. Modes of representation of the body in painting passed through various stylistic phases from sketches and outlines to concerns with the ideal body during the Renaissance, as well as representation of individual (privileged) bodies. The advent of printing, particularly the printing of images added a new dimension to representation of the body and its dissemination in the public sphere, and the growth of mass produced magazine printing in the 20th century truly democratized this process. In fact mass distributed images through the print media were the equivalent of what the smart phone is to digital media today.

Stone sculptures and rock carvings are amongst the early other forms of artistic expression that provided for three dimensional representations, using materials such as marble, granite, sandstone, and metals like bronze, iron, gold and silver. For metals, the technique used is primarily that of casting, which involves the

creation of a 'negative' mold from which the artefact emerges. In sculpture the body, during the Renaissance was heavily idealized creating postures were devised to accentuate a constructed perfection of the body.

With the advent of photography, representation of the body and self acquired another dimension; the hand was relieved of its active role in creating the image, and a mechanical device took over its function (Benjamin, 1936). The early photograph was seen as an accurate and real representation of reality rather than a mediated work of an artist. In the words of Ralph W. Emerson "photography is distinguished by its immediacy [and] its authenticity [.]" Through photography, representations of material objects and bodies seem to acquire a larger 'truth' value—the photograph of a body is generally seen to be more real than a painting or a sculpture of the same body.[8]

However photography soon began to "question the long tradition of painting as the privileged medium of representation", (Rush, 2005 p.7) as can be seen for example, in the works of Julia Margaret Cameron (c. 1815-1879)

With development of the cinematography as an extension of photography, the 'truth value' also increased. Eadweard Muybridge created one of the first motion picture sequences in 1878. The purpose of creating this was to determine whether all four feet of a running horse were ever in the air together. Etienne-Jules Marey invented what he called a 'photographic gun', which he used to study human and animal movement. This technology revolutionized representations of the body because now rather than the body at rest, it was the body in motion that could be represented. As with still photography, cinematography also developed into an art medium. Some of the early practitioners of art cinematography were George Mèliés (c.1861-1938), Fritz Lang (c.1890-1976) and Sergei Eisenstein (c 1898-1948)

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[8] Cited in 'Texture, Photography and a Different Representation of Reality,' Eli Anapur, 2016
https://www.widewalls.ch/texture-photography/

## 3.2    Digital Technologies

The big difference with advent of digital technologies is the change in the nature of the work of art itself: it no longer necessarily possesses a physical 'body'. The work of art may exist only as a virtual artefact.

Early personal computers had very basic drawing programs that could only perform basic two-dimensional drawing functions and offered limited colours and tools. However as technology has developed exponentially, the software and programs used for creating art have become more sophisticated and are capable of producing photo-realistic three-dimensional representations. In fact digital technology has an effect of 'liberating' art from the limitation of its tools of production, since it increasingly enables the artist to introduce any element of art into his work, limited perhaps only by his imagination.

The advent of digital photography and cinematography has been a function of replacing photosensitive film with an electronic sensor. This replacement has brought about many drastic changes to the medium. For one, the photographic negative has been replaced by an endlessly duplicable positive; there is no longer any original image.[9] Other changes include the digital photograph, and video that can be viewed as soon as it is captured; the recurring cost of creating an image or video is almost nothing, thus removing the limit on the quantum that can be captured at a stretch. The technology of the camera has also become much more democratic. Digital devices have become smaller, portable and cheaper, expanding the use of these devices across a larger social spectrum.

The digital artefact that has had the greatest impact on other technologies is the smartphone. The smartphone is a potent combination of communication device, audio and video player, and camera, all supported by operating and processing

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[9] The Polaroid camera could be seen to perform an almost opposite function: the creation of a non-duplicable positive.

software. The ubiquity of the smart phone has put the power of the camera in the hands of the many. Thus, representation and self-representation areno longer only the domain of either the artist or the patron.

The digital space also allows for greater flexibility in the manipulation of digital video and photography. Editing softwares allow for automatic processing, manual addition and removal of elements, and even reshaping and remolding of objects and bodies.

## 3.3 The manipulated image- montage, collage, the manual, and digital manipulated image, and their affinity for self-representation

In pre-digital visual art, the imaginary/constructed body is provided with a skeletal/real structure; whereas in the digital image, digital manipulation allows for the real/physical body to be juxtaposed with an imaginary/ constructed self. Manipulation of the content of a photograph covers a range of effects and processes, from staging a scene or a pose, to altering the created composition. Depending on the intention or the purpose of the created composition, the acceptable parameters of manipulation vary greatly. For journalistic purposes, manipulation of visual content is supposed to be strictly limited - beyond basic editing such as exposure and colour correction, nothing is supposed to be added to or removed from the original content. In this case the 'truth value' of the visual is of prime importance. For example, one of the most controversial instances of this was in 2006, in which the photo- journalist Adnan Hajj digitally manipulated (altered) photographs taken by him during the 2006 Lebanon War. The manipulated photographs exaggerated the intensity of a missile attack in Beirut. This cost him his job.

However for non-journalistic purposes, especially artistic purposes, these restrictions would not apply. The artist and the individual are free to create and manipulate images for personal and artistic use. This particular freedom is what

allows the artist to explore alternate ways of representing the body and the self. Thus the body and images of the body are freed from the restrictions imposed by the corporeality of the body while questioning the notion of 'authenticity' in representation. Digital technology greatly facilitates and enables this.

Artists, through techniques such as staging, masquerade, costume, posturing, modeling and performance, achieve manipulation of the image before its creation. This allows a narrative/story to be created before the creation of an image/object. For example, Cahun, Sherman and Pushpamala, in their respective practices employ these techniques in varying degrees to destabilize the identity of the artist, by appropriating or creating a character. In the case of Ahmed, Cooper and Ulman, the corporeal body, the self-identity of the artist is foregrounded; thereby allowing representation to acquire a political voice. These artists subject their personal and tactile bodies to the representational gaze whereas Cahun, Sherman and N. Pushpamala employ and foreshadow an external body/self to engage with gender and identity politics.

The visual can be manipulated during and after its creation. These modes of manipulation have always been available in the plastic arts, painting, sculpture, assemblage, etc. The impact of digital technologies has been that they have allowed these editing processes to be easily implemented, especially with the 'preset' options being part of the software used for editing. So, a novice photographer, for example, can easily edit his/her photographs by simply selecting 'Auto'. Of course for professional and advanced users, very fine control is available to manipulate the image. Apart from the kind of editing and manipulation of a single image/frame, another valuable method has been that of the 'collage' and the 'montage': both these involve combining more than one visual or even material to create an artwork.

The collage as an artistic concept allows for an addition of perspective and

meaning to an already existing image. Collage making is a modernist method; early practitioners include painters such as Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp. In the photographic era, collage making acquires an added dimension due to the perceived reality of photographs. The early photo-collages were concerned with juxtaposing images representing multiple narratives within the same composition.[10]  Later photo-collages also included elements such as typography and brush- work.

Montage in cinema originally referred to the method of 'fast cutting' used in early 20th century cinema where the importance is on the depiction of multiple aspects of a scene. However in French and Soviet cinematic practices during the 20th century, the concept of montage, especially in the works of Sergei Eisenstein, it is from the conflict or collision between scenes that a meaning is created, which is more than the sum of the parts. In photography the concept of montage can also be used in so far as it refers to the juxtaposition of a sequence of photographs.[11] The use of montage in the artist/ researcher's video works accesses the possibility of connecting and combining different types of footage, particularly in her split screen videos, from disparate times, locations and contexts, that may or may not be sequentially related, to portray the subject/object in an acquired and performed identity.

In the digital age, collage and montage are occupying virtual spaces in which the elements and the product are no longer necessarily material in nature. Some of the components maybe generated purely by digital processes and maybe eventually combined with elements that have their origins in the physical domain. For example, a scanned page of text in its electronic form maybe illustrated with

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[10] Reference can be made  to the following collage works – Hannah Hoch (1889-1979) Der Vater, 1920, and Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948)  The Proposal, 1942

[11] Nan Goldin's the Ballad of Sexual Dependecy, is seen as a montage because it is a slide show of nearly 700 images to a nuanced soundtrack

animated characters; or in a film a CGI animated character can feature along with live characters as in the film trilogy The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003)

The historical development of collage and montage is connected to the fragmentation of the world and the self that was perceived in modernist and post-modernist frameworks (Brockleman, 2001). These techniques could be seen to represent both the fragmentation, as well as an attempt to unify or put together fragments to generate meaning. These methods could be seen as the ideal vehicles to represent a layered and fragmented nature of the self. For the artist/researcher the putting together of disparate elements in a collage/montage is a reflection of the 'constructedness' of the self; the self is created in the very act of bringing together its representation.

An essential aspect of the process of creating a collage or montage is the intentionality of selection. The act of selection is one of both inclusion and exclusion, which presents a dilemma for the artist. Certain aspects of the self must be denied, hidden or discarded in order to locate what can be represented. Therefore the processes of collage and montage are also a 'performative' creation of the self. One may argue that since all representations of the self are fragmentary performances, the collage or montage provides a space for more complex self-representation.

## 3.4 Comparative analysis of the spaces and modes of dissemination of self-representation – pre- and post-digital

In the earliest pre-urban societies, works of art generally inhabited communal spaces in which the works themselves were representative of the everyday experiences of the community. They were not just communal in viewership but also in authorship. The themes encompassed myths, legends, hunting scenes, sacred rituals and the like. The function of this communal artwork could be seen to serve as educational tools for younger members of the community as well as, to enshrine the

memories and histories of the community.

With urbanization, the separation between communal and private spaces began to appear.  The works of art produced in urban spaces are to be displayed and viewed in both types of spaces. In India on the other hand communal art was still largely in the communal sphere, for example the cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora and the tradition of temple sculpture in India. In the West, urban civilizations such as Ancient Rome introduced the work of art into the home; this is possibly how the notion of private spaces for the display of art comes in to practice. For perhaps the first time art was created which could only be viewed by a formal invitation.

In the West private art collections were gradually made accessible to the public. These collections were the precursors of the modern museum or art museums. The architecture for such spaces was established in the early 19th century.[12]  The evolution of the museum/gallery led to a mode of display that is still a predominant mode of presenting works of art. This mode of display is termed the 'white cube', a term coined by Brian O'Doherty in 1976. The white cube, as the name suggests, is a cubic space, where the walls and ceiling arepainted white with subdued and non-intrusive lighting designed to allow the work of art to hold the viewer's attention.

An added differentiator in contemporary times is the split between the museum and the gallery. The museum is still a space for public display and consumption of art, whereas the galleries are meant more to fulfill an economic function, the sale of art. The nature of the two spaces is divergent; the museum invites curiosity and encourages discussion on the ontology of the work of art thereby fulfilling a more community oriented function, that of disseminating information about art. In contradistinction, the gallery is an exclusive space. The curatorial function of the gallery is an epistemological act: the gallery defines what constitutes art through

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[12] The British architect Sir John Soane designed the Dulwich Picture Gallery (1817) as a viewing space with skylights and large expanses of wall space.

the process of selecting a collection of artworks (and even artists). This process of imbuing certain artists and their work with creative value is in the service of a largely economic objective. The gallery will be able to sell what it displays only if it is seen to have intrinsic artistic value.

From the concerns of the representations of the self, the gallery and its patrons become the arbiters of what kinds of representation constitute art and are worthy of display. However this does not imply that the gallery is a conservative space. Galleries and their patrons also take a considerable amount of risk, especially in promoting works of newer artists. In the selection of works of art, galleries promote larger number of artists who are experimenting with more radical methods and modes of self-representation. The concept of a museum space in comparison to the private/public gallery is more of a commemorative space than an experimental space.

Not all art works display is conducted inside the white cube; exhibitions of art works including those such as installation and land art can be located in open spaces. This form of display maybe simply a function of scale but also serves to emphasize a work's relationship with the out-door space.[13] Many of these outdoor art works are intended to be displayed in public spaces. The open air space tends to be a space in which self-representational works of art are rare because there is prioritization towards displaying worksthat are more accessible to the public at large. Self-representational art is also more personal and invokes in the viewer are more complex and nuanced response that requires a certain degree of attention that may be lacking in viewership in a public place.

Today art is exhibited not just in purely public spaces, but in many hybrid spaces as well, such as metro stations, external walls of private buildings and the

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[13] Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970) and Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate (2006) are examples of outdoor art, which have interactive relationship with their location.

outside if museuems and galleries. Other well established modes of display of art are Art Fairs and Biennales- which can be though of as a transitory hybrid between galleries and museums, their key characteristics being non-permanence and their emphasis on contemporaneity.

Museums and galleries also exist in the virtual space. Museums function much the same way as they do in their physical locations, the potential for access is greatly increased; anybody can visit the virtual museum from any place at any time. Galleries are more restrictive in providing access to the art works that they display for their own reasons. Thus the marker of the digital age is free access especially in virtual public spaces. Additional spaces are available in the virtual world for the artists to represent themselves.

The virtual spaces for disseminating artistic expression, generally, and self-representation, specifically, are varied: personal websites/blogs, online artist-led collective spaces, curated online exhibitions and the various social media driven platforms. Each of these spaces has a different dynamic, which informs representation within that space. To take, for example, first the websites of artists; these are most often owned and operated by the artists themselves. Such a space allows the artists to express and represent themselves without the limitations of physical spaces. The audience is not restricted by geographical or cultural boundaries, freeing the artist from any possible limitations of expression or representation imposed by her/his own cultural and social identities. This is especially useful for artists whose location on the margins of economic and cultural production make it difficult for the their work to be displayed and represented in a physical gallery. The representation of marginal identities is thus liberated to a large extent from the operations of power.

In the sphere of social media, the representation of the self has undergone radical changes. The requirement of a profile/display picture raises the spectre of

how to represent the self, and serves the dual purpose of identification and self-representation. In the case of social media, the profile/display picture is a site of performance, indeed, over- performance. The narcissistic gaze presents itself strongly and the regular replacement/update of the profile/display picture is emblematic of the 'performative' nature of social identity. This urge to replace or update can be linked with need to constantly reaffirm the self and present its various aspects. It is not just the profile picture that marks the performance of identity but also visuals of the self in everyday contexts. The effect of this is not jut a performance of the self but can be seen as a performance that creates or displays an idealized everyday existence. Artists use this space with an awareness of being looked at as well as an understanding of how the virtual space can be utilized to manipulate perceptions of the self.

**Chapter 4**

**Representations of the Self in Art**

In this chapter, the journey of the personal self 'as an epistemological site' will be explored through the genre of self-portraiture. The representation of one's self as a tangible and tactile surface maybe in the form of a replica or an interpretation of the original idea or form. In this chapter, the artist/researcher will trace how 'selves' have been conceptualized through self-portraiture both in Indian and Western fine-art traditions. The approach of the artist/researcher is to raises questions that need to concisely make the case for narcissism, expressed through self-representations as a path to self-knowledge. Digital representational media facilitate the narcissistic gaze and support an enquiry into what in fact constitutes the term 'self', and what are the diverse ways of imagining and performing 'selves' in the contemporary moment.[14]

**4.1 The traditional philosophical, social, and psychological idea of the self, in the West and in India**

Unlike the West, India presents an example of a society where the pre-modern continues to co-exist with the modern. Pre modern Indian art is based on the traditions of religious and political visual iconography, through its temple and court cultures prior to colonialism and European modernity. Traditional Indian art practices are rooted in philosophy, literature, and religion, where the body is temporal and seeking to be united with an astral and spiritual body. Therefore, the role of

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[14] "These practices permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

the artist and art-works is to express aesthetic values that express and represent salvation, and in doing so, traditional Indian artists rarely ever put their signature on the work. Traditional Indian representational forms consisted of themes from religion, ritual and worship, beginning from 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE. Early Jain and Buddhist cultures influenced the notion of understanding or knowing the self in Indian culture. Jainism and Buddhism grew out of the then supremacy of the Brahmins. Like the European clergy in the West, the Brahmins controlled all aspects of everyday living. Pre-modern visual iconography is encoded with multiple meanings of 'being'. It can be seen in temples, forts and palaces across the country. Modernity in Indian art is based on European modernity brought to India during and after British Rule. Painting and Sculpture was taught according to schools and institutions of learning that followed European methods of drawing and painting, including concepts of perspective and pose; which are different to the traditional fine-art processes that are termed as craft-based skill. Therefore, in the art academies of India, both language and critique have been influenced by European modernity. Modernity in India is problematic because of India's cultural diversity; its social fabric is dotted with oblique and conflicting views on caste, class, and gender. Such views range from the traditional to the obscurantist, not in keeping with modern concepts of individual rights and freedoms, and still significantly impact inter personal and social interactions. This situation is further aggravated by the persistence of a rigid 'caste-system'; and, in modern, India it is intertwined in a complex manner with religion and politics. As A. Raghuramaraju (2014, p 2) points out, it is a case of theoretical invariance and social variance:

> This variance in the temporal ordering between the West and India should have been at the centre of the social theory debates in India. However, some Indian social theorists who closely followed the ideals of modernity (whether

they agree with them or not), did not take into consideration in their theorizing the sociological fact that the Western facility of disinheriting the past is not available in India(Raghuramaraju,  2011, p 2)

In Western traditions, the conceptualization of the self and its relation to the outside world began crystallizing around the time of the Renaissance. The Renaissance was marked by a revival of classical antiquity, but within a solidly Christian context. The 'return' to sources of Greek and Roman antiquity was paralleled by progress in the production of knowledge about the human body and self. In this context, H.W. Janson observes:

> Renaissance physicians admired the anatomical handbooks of the ancients, which they found very much more accurate than those of the Middle Ages, but they discovered discrepancies when they matched the hallowed authorities of the classical text against the direct experience of the dissection table, and learned to rely on the evidence of their own eyes. (Janson, 1977, p 367)

One must make note of this desire for precision and accuracy vis-à-vis the human body. What Janson very sharply observed demonstrates a central tendency within the Renaissance- to understand, and subsequently, display the human body as accurately as possible.  This is a watershed moment in the conceptualization of the human self and body, where one's own body becomes an object to be carefully studied and then replicated as close to the 'original' as possible. This push towards a closer understanding of the human subject was far from being purely biological or anatomical. 'Selves' had also begun to emerge as categories which could be seen as malleable, both psychologically as well as socially. The origin of what we would call 'fine arts' can be traced to this point during the Renaissance, with the urge to

depict the human form.

Stephen Greenblatt in his analysis of how 'selves' make their first appearance on the Western horizon notes how major English writers of the sixteenth century created their own performances. Greenblatt, in investigating the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity, further notes:

> It seemed to me the very hallmark of the Renaissance that middle class and aristocratic males began to feel that they possessed such shaping power over their lives. (Greenblatt, 1980, p 256)

There is a clear shift from a theological understanding of the human subject to a psychosocial understanding, according to Greenblatt. This necessitates more meditative and inward looking works of literature and art. It is the self of the author that it is now at the centre of how art is being produced, and consequently replicates itself in terms of representations within the work of art. Greenblatt also characterizes this drive towards self-representation in terms of narratives of mobility. This intersection between representations of the self, and how it facilitates its own mobility is, according to the artist/researcher, a crucial feature of self-representational art.

The new trend of self-portraiture in post-Renaissance art thus happens in this context of the re-conceptualization of the self as a biologically grounded, socially mobile, and psychologically defined entity. The representation of the human form in art therefore takes a characteristically new, self-referential turn. This is clearly reflected in the subsequent development of self-portraiture both in India and the West.

## 4.2    Modern and contemporary aspects of the self

Modern aspects of the self can be seen as intersections of the individual with a spectrum of subject positions. Some of these are briefly discussed below.

## 4.2.1. Gender and sexuality

Gender has been historically perceived in the West as an identity and a part of the self that is literally embodied in the biological human body, and seen as being only male or female. By association, sexuality is also seen to be naturally expressed in terms of heterosexual relations. But these supposedly 'natural' definitions of gender and sexuality have been challenged by individuals who see themselves as occupying alternate positions across a spectrum of identities. Contemporary science too unearths more and more evidence to show that biology and difference in human bodies cannot be limited to a binary model of sexuality (Henig, 2017).[15] Gender and the body as seen by contemporary theorists such as Judith Butler is not natural or even original. She suggests that gender as an identity is imitative by its very nature.

> Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. (Butler, J, 1991, 21)[16]

Butler also introduces the idea of gender as a performance, which tries to create a natural or original gender. According to this all gender identities are performatively created and presented- gender roles, as well as sexuality, are seen as being created by repeatedly being performed in social and personal spaces. These acts are accepted as signifying one gender or another, and thus create the gender. Butler states that:

> The appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including

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[15] Accessed on 21.10.2017 https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/01/how-science-helps-us-understand-gender-identity/

[16] 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination'. Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories. Ed Diana Fuss. 13-30. London: Routledge, 1991.

the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (Butler, 1990, p 271)[17]

## 4.2.2 Racial and post-colonial identity

Racial identity and colonialism are intertwined. Colonialism's encounter with non-Western cultures in Asia and Africa led to the creation of stereotypes about the non- white body. This creation of the 'other' is an operation of hegemonic power, which " fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong" (Hall, 2013, p 248) This inclusion and exclusion organizes bodies and the representation of those into categories which are seen to be natural. However, in post-colonial and post-modern times, the people who are seen to inhabit such subject spaces contest these stereotypical identities. Hall speaks of methods of contesting racialized representations: transcoding, which involves re-appropriation of existing representational tropes to give them new meaning; substitution of negative racial images with positive imagery; and finally contestation from within the boundaries of representation, which is concerned with de-familiarizing the represented body. A similar set of contestations is available and employed by the post-colonial subject. Within India additional complexities arise out of the dynamics of caste with the contestations of racial stereotypes being marshalled against upper-caste representational politics[18]. Contestations of hierarchical caste identities has been a product of post-colonial India, as Dipankar Gupta notes,

> The establishment of democracy in independent India has introduced one major change in the way caste and politics interact, and that is by making all castes legally equal. It took some time for this legal equality to gain empirical momentum, but with the gradual dissolution of the closed village economy, the

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[17] 'Performative Arts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory'. Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre. Ed by Sue-Ellen Case. 270-282. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990

[18] This contestation is visible in the works of literary and visual artists in contemporary India, such as N. Pushpamala, Nivedita Menon and Meena Kandasamy

tempo has certainly become easily visible to the naked eye. This combination between law and economic change has allowed castes that were hitherto considered low to take the fight to the traditional superior communities and even to thumb their noses at established symbolic and ritual systems. (Gupta, 2005, p 417).

### 4.2.3. Online/virtual identity

There is no singular stereotypical body or identity in the virtual domain. There are stereotypes of certain poses and postures, like the 'selfie', but there are innumerable digital identities in the virtual world - especially in the case of online gaming characters. As detailed in the previous chapter the virtual space allows for the expression many variations of identity without fixing a normative one.[19]

Sherry Turkle (1995) speaks of how the computer and the Internet lead to the possibility of individuals to re invent their personal selves beyond the conditions society dictates and how a new sense of decentred and multiple identities is emerging.[20] For example, as mentioned above, online role-playing games enable individuals across geographical regions to interact and engage with each other through personas that can be completely fictional.

### 4.3 Self-portraiture in Western art and Indian art – traditions of representation

Renaissance Art placed itself at the intersection of emerging scientific and psychosocial understandings of the human body, and can be seen as the origin of depicting a body that identifies itself as human. A few central instances that are characteristic of the representational practices of Renaissance Art in relation to the

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[19] These are identities that cannot be easily performed in physical social spaces.

[20] Life on the Screen (1995) traces a set of boundary negotiations, telling the story of the changing impact of the computer on our psychological lives and our evolving ideas about minds, bodies, and machines.

self and the body are discussed as under.

One such instance is that of Sandro Botticelli's painting, 'The Birth of Venus' (1484-1486). In his painting, Botticelli has arranged the supporting elements of his narrative in relation to the position and scale of the central figure, as though the artist is the principle through which meaning is constructed. The painting is centred on this life size strikingly humane figure. It is the artist's humanized interpretation of the goddess Venus that takes the centre stage in the painting, wherebyhuman selves can locate themselves at the centre of a 'mean-making' process in visual culture.

On the contrary, the human body is represented in a stylized fashion that allows the artist to delineate the exceptionality of the human body. In Botticelli's painting, Venus is represented in a contrapposto stance[21], a trope from sculpture that uses more formal movement. In its natural state the human body is far more languid- hence the Renaissance body is also a human body par excellence, which is exceptional and different from the everyday human body. This interplay between the humanity of the represented figure, and its status as an exceptional human body is crucial to how Renaissance art deals with representations of the self. This strategy further allows Botticelli to layer his strikingly humane body with collective cultural meanings.

Venus is depicted with her gaze lowered and looking away from the viewer, perhaps even inwards, as though she is aware of her partially naked body. She conceals her private parts by her own will, using her long hair and arms. Another fully clothed woman, perhaps, a mortal entity rushes to cover her exposed body with a decorated blanket. Her femininity is defined by the impression of fully developed breasts and long flowing hair. On the other side in the composition, a pair of angels

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[21] Is an Italian term meaning -an asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure in which the line of the arms and shoulders contrasts with the hips and balancing on one leg.

also partially clothed, are blowing air through her hair. According to the idea of the male- gaze, even though Venus is the goddess of sensual pleasure, the expression on her face including her gaze upon the viewer is passive and subdued. The female, human body therefore is layered with cultural expectations of femininity. Within the Renaissance paradigm the self has been humanized, and at the same time is laden with collective cultural meanings.

Amelia Jones notes while speaking of the Renaissance idea of the artist, specifically referring to Alberti and Vasari's conceptualization of the artists:

Alberti's artist is at the centre of seeing, knowing, and making, foundational to the European "ocular epistemology"[…] Codified by Alberti and Vasari (among others), the artist thus both epitomizes the centered individual of early modern European culture and acts as an exaggerated or special case of this individual (secured in his privileged access to visual truth through his alignment or conflation with an all-knowing god). (Jones, 2006,pp 4,5)

This observation is of immense value- the artist as well as the protagonist of Renaissance Art are both rendered humane, but also exercise a distinct 'privileged access' of vision that is available only to them. Further, it is important to note that representations of the self and the body within Renaissance Art were conventionally stylized in terms of precision and perspective.

As can be seen, Renaissance Art marks a moment where self-representation as a mode of making art becomes available to the artist, and is put to a diverse set of uses. While artists' depiction of selves still remains heavily stylized and centre on exceptional figures, this technique, in the modern period, moves the subject out of the boundaries of academic, studio based art.

In the immediate post renaissance period, the female artist Artemesia

Gentileschi (1593-1653) made a striking assertion of herself— in her iconic painting 'Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting' (La Pittura c.1638-9). In this she shows her self as making a painting-with a brush in one hand and a palette in the other, "clearly identifying herself as the female personification of painting-something her male counterparts could never do". Although she did make some other self portraits, showing herself as a lute player and a martyr, it is this painting that establishes her "unusual status as a female artist".[22]

Born almost a hundred years after Gentileschi's death was another exceptional female painter Elizabeth Louise Vigèe le Brun (1755-1842). She was part of a growing number of professional women artists in the 18th century, and probably one of the "most prolific and successful portrait painters in history"(Russo 1996). She was also a prolific self-portraitist, having painted several self-portraits over her lifetime. These works evoked a mixed critical response, from "graceful, narcissistic, spontaneous " to "superficial"(Russo 1996). Two of her renowned self-portraits were 'Self-Portrait with Cerise Ribbon" (1782) and 'Self-Portrait with Straw Hat' (1783)-both greatly influenced by the famous painter Peter Paul Rubens.

The 19th Century saw one of the first women Impressionist painters- Berthe Morisot (1841-1895). Although she made a number of iconic portraits, of Madame Pontillon, Madame Hubbard and her own daughter Julie, she was eclectic in the choice of her subjects. In the manner of other Impressionist painters "she painted what she saw, whatever was around her, the modern world, her personal space" (Blin, 2012).

The German woman artist Paula Modersohn -Becker (1876-1907) came from " a realist tradition associated with a group of artists who worked out of Worpswede in

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[22] This article is a catalogue entry adapted from The Art of Italy in the Royal Collection: Renaissance and Baroque, London, 2007 reference to mentioned work at the Royal Collection, U.K
Accessed on 16.12.2017 (p. 1, 3)
https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405551/self-portrait-as-the-allegory-of-painting-la-pittura

Germany", but her work cannot be readily classified. It was influenced by Gauguin's work, although it was a different kind of Symbolism, in which "her transformation of the female figure was not consistent with the type of transformation or meaning the female form assumed in Symbolist painting" (Barris, R).

Her nude self portraits 'Self portrait with Amber Necklace' (1906) and 'Self Portrait on her Sixth Wedding Day' raise interesting issues about women painters painting female nudes-how does a woman artist look at a female body, or her own nude body, as distinct from the male gaze? (Barris, R). A pointer can be seen in that many of Becker's female nudes are images of mothers with children, and her own nudes have a maternal quality. The concept of a gendered male only gaze has been at the centre of feminist discourses. Laura Mulvey (1976) describes the female protagonist as objectified and fetishized to please the male only audience and the visual pleasure is derived from relating the female body to a castrated male body.[23] Chadwick suggests the role of the female protagonist as a confrontational and appropriative gesture that reminds the male gaze of its futility. The role of the female protagonist, according to Chadwick, can also fall in the lull of "her-story" thereby overlooking the "messiness of sexual politics in a real world in which women may be marginalized and, excluded yet present" (Chadwick, 1998, p 6). Therefore the female gaze appropriates and performs her own fantasies and desires that may not conform to ideals of traditional/conventional aesthetic beauty.

## 4.4 Self-Portraiture in India:

The Indian philosophical tradition of thinking about the self and body as a representational gesture or act has been at the centre, and forms the roots of, Indian painting, sculpture, dance, drama, folklore and of course religiosity. This idea of gesture represents a key difference between Indian and Western traditions of

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[23] Mulvey (1976) approaches the cinematic woman "as starting point the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight socially established interpretation of sexual differencethat controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle." (Harrison and Wood p 964)

representation. The emphasis on religion cannot be avoided while referring to the contemporary self and body because of the unbroken tradition of representation in Indian art that has continued to evolve from the ancient and pre-modern cultures:

The world portrayed in Indian imagery was not the everyday world of the peasant and the worker, but the stately world of the royalty and the divine courts of the Gods. (Dehejia, 2009, p 2)

The human form is central to the Indian fine art practices of painting and sculpture. The plural culture of India expresses the cultural diversity of the land, which is seen in the multiple modes of cultural representation, from high art to popular art and from the folk to the indigenous. Representation in folk and indigenous art emerged from non–academic ateliers or institutions; they were informed by the mythic rather than the religious texts that were the inspiration behind the representation in mainstream fine art practices. Medieval India, particularly in the North, faced the onslaught of many invasions. It absorbed, assimilated, translated and transformed its own identity, and built a vibrant visual and literary language, enriching its diverse and rich cultural ethos.

The early to the classical period in pre- modern Indian art witnessed a steady development of the human form, from the abstract to the establishment of the canons of the figurative representation of the human body.  The preferred medium was stone sculpture. The invasion of Alexander in North West of India in 326 BCE brought in the Greco-Roman Style of sculpture. The established Mathura School of Sculpture, more indigenous in  its  manifestation, with large heavy bodies, in the form of Bodhisattavas, Jinas, Yaksha, and Yakshis, was  a  distinct  parallel  to the  more  hybrid  style  of the  Gandhara  School,  which  saw  it's  culmination  in the  high  point  of  Gupta  classicism 6th  to  7th  C.E., a period in which Hinduism

became culturally dominant:

> A new canon of beauty is evolved leading to the emergence of a new aesthetic ideal. This ideal is based upon an explicit understanding of the human body in its inherent softness and pliability. (Saraswati, 1975 p 127)

Both schools had similar themes ranging from Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism, to the royal patrons and also ordinary men and women:

> It is the sensitiveness of the plastic surface that the artist seeks to emphasize and for this all superfluities, such as elaborate draperies, jewelry, etc that tend to conceal the body, are reduced to the minimum. The wet or transparent drapery becomes the fashion in this age. (Saraswati, 1975, p127)

The many additions in the unbroken tradition of representing the human form, includes the establishment of the miniature school of painting, originating from the Persian painters brought in by the second Mughal ruler Humayun (1530-40 CE and 1555-56 CE), on his return from exile in the court of the Persian ruler Shah Tahmasp (Stronge, 2010, p 24). Sanskrit poetry now became a companion to the newly added refined Persian language of the Mughal courts, which also saw an offshoot in the hybrid language Urdu. The cross fertilization of Sanskrit and Persian cultures in the Mughal period has been extensively documented by Audrey Truschke (2016). It details the interaction of Brahmin and Jain Sanskrit scholars with the intellectuals and nobles of the courts of the Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir, and Mughal encounters and engagement with Sanskrit scholars in works such as Ain-i-Akbari (Truschke pp142,145), and Persian translations of Sanskrit works such as the illustrated works Razmanamah (Truschke, pp102,105 ) and the Ramayana (Truschke pp 214,217), and in the production of Sanskrit grammars of Persian. The Mughal

emperors brought in a strong secular tradition, in addition to the establishment of Indo Islamic language in architecture, poetry, dance, music and painting. Erotic Sanskrit poetry rubbed shoulders with the Padshahnamahs, or chronicles of the lives of the emperors. These developments are perhaps in many ways as significant to Indian culture as the Renaissance was to Western culture.

The tradition of Mughal Portraiture began with the setting up of the 'tasveer khana' or picture school by two Persian artists in the court of emperor Humayun- Mir Sayyid Ali and Khwaja Abad us-Samad- who were schooled in the formal Persian tradition. The Indian artists trained in this school soon began to introduce Indian motifs, such as, Indian animals and flora, and Indian stylistic depictions such as showing of the upper body, in their works. A major new influence on Mughal art came with the arrival of the first Christian mission to the emperor Akbar's court in 1580. (Barrett and Gray, 1978, p 86). This brought in European influences of style such as three dimensionality, weight, depth and recession, into Mughal painting. There was considerable evolution during the third Emperor Jahangir's reign, with a further adoption of European conventions, motifs and religious imagery. The artists also began to emerge from anonymity, often introducing their own signed portraits in the margins of the main work. (Stronge, 2010)

As regards self-portraiture, it must borne in mind that "anonymity was believed to be the natural condition of Indian art" (Goswamy, 2014,p 51). In the Mughal School only a few painters are mentioned. For example, the emperor Jahangir mentions the painters Abu'l Hassan and Bishan Das. Painters may have been feted and honoured by their royal patrons, but they considered themselves to be of humble status, often referring themselves as slaves or humble servants. Since painters were essentially in the service of their patrons, there was little scope for self-representation— the best they could do as, documented by Goswami

When on occasion we see a painter induct himself into a durbar scene or gathering we see him standing in an obscure corner like a retainer, recognizable either through a tiny inscription or through the tools of his trade that he carries: a brush case tucked into the waistband, a satchel with an album slung across his shoulder or a painting in his hand (Goswamy, 2014, p 55).

The Mughal Emperor Akbar expanded his reign into Rajputana (modern day Rajasthan) through a combination of conquests and marital alliances. In 1562, he married the daughter of the Raja of Amber thereby bringing of the largest Rajput kingdoms into his fold. By 1581 almost all Rajput states except the state of Mewar came under Mughal control. Mughal influence soon began to be felt in the indigenous Rajput schools of painting. The Mewar School had a distinctive style (Chaurpanchasika, p 138, Barrett) from approximately 1500 C.E onwards. However with the submission of Mewar to the Mughals by 1614, Mughal influences on this style became evident, particularly in illuminated manuscripts (Barrett, p136). The same is evident in the Bundi School, as can be seen in some of the paintings of the Ragamala series (Barrett p140). Eroticism is introduced in the later work of this school (Bundi) such as in the painting Lovers in a Pavilion, in 1682 (Barrett p 147).

Mughal influence on Rajput painting was further consolidated by the migration of talented artists from the Mughal court after the ascent of the Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) who actively discouraged the arts. This is also led to a flourishing of Rajput art, particularly the Kishangarh School.

The other indigenous school of painting was the Pahari School, which established itself around the end of the 17th century (Barrett, p 162). It started with the Basohli School in the Jammu region and its style, with its broad red borders, orange, yellow and brown grounds and aggressive appearing women, was distinct

to this school. A favourite motif of paintings was the likeness of the hill ruler, with an appropriate setting. Subsequently however, with the development of the later Guler and Kangra styles, again Mughal influences began to be seen, and both these schools saw a fusion of hill and Mughal styles, to some extent driven again by the migration of painters from the declining Mughal court.

The 19th century in India was the century of the British. As the influence and territory of the East India Company expanded from the later part of the 18th century, most styles of Indian Portraiture began to increasingly show European influence, in terms of the 'approach to the composition, modelling, perspective, technique'. (Losty, 2010, p 41)

The British were primarily interested in the pictorial documentation of the Indian subcontinent, in its monuments, landscapes, peoples, flora and fauna. Naturally therefore, along with soldiers, merchants and administrators, a number of professional British painters also started coming to India to ply their trade, beginning around the end of the 18th century. Two examples of such painters are Johann Zoffany (1733-1810) and Tilly Kettle (1735-1786) (Losty, p 43). Their work greatly influenced Indian artists in the subsequent periods. For example such influence can be seen in the portrait 'Emperor Akbar II and his sons' (c.1810) by Ghulam Murtaza Khan of Delhi. It is evident that this painting is 'subtly influenced by European naturalism' (Losty, p 46)

These styles of painting, which emerge in centres such as Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Benares and Calcutta can be broadly classified as the Company School of Painting (Goswamy, p 115). A characteristic of Company School portraiture is that, since its intent was documentary, the subjects of the portraits were wide ranging and eclectic – soldiers, peasants, merchants priests and of course eminent persons. A work that clearly shows the elements of the Company style that is a "blend of Mughal reticence

and European naturalism, something in done in anticipation of photography" (Losty, p 117), is 'Two Portraits of Kala, the Sepoy' from the family workshop of Ghulam Ali Khan, Delhi (c 1815).

An instance of self- portraiture can also be seen in the early company school work titled 'Tilly Kettle painting Nawab Shuja'al-Daula and his sons' (c1820). In the painting itself, the artist has shown himself making the painting, somewhat like the small self portraits inserted by the Mughal, Rajput, and Pahari painters in their paintings of rulers and court.

## 4.5 Breaking free of the traditional 'portrait'–Contemporary Modes of Self-Representation in India and the West

In the West the modernist era brought a range of influences to bear on art and consequently portraiture.

The break from an extended period of realism in Western art came with Impressionism. Here the artists painted their subjects not in stark reality, but in the manner in which they would be seen and felt by the viewer- a sort of augmented reality. (Arnason 1998) This is seen in Claude Monet's painting 'The Bridge at Argenteuil' (1874), Edouard Manet's paintings 'Olympia' (1863) and 'Dejeuner sur l'herbe'(1863).

The influence of Symbolism and Syntheticism brought about a significant departure from Impressionism. Symbolism and Syntheticism were essentially a reaction against realism. For the symbolists art was "intimately a consequence of the emotions, of the inner spirit of the Artist rather than of observed nature"(Arnason 1986, p 59). In Symbolist portraiture the clear liberation from realism can be seen in Paul Gauguin's painting 'Vision After the Sermon' (1888), Odilon Rodon's 'Anthony:What is the object of all this? The Devil:There is no Object' (1886) and Vincent Van Gogh's 'Self Portrait' (1888).

Another influence was that of Expressionism, which itself was influenced by the Art Nouveau the movement of the 19th century, that also encompassed architecture, craft and design. Art Nouveau was essentially a rejection of 'progress' defined by mechanization and industrialization (Arnason 1986). Expressionism found fertile ground in Germany, particularly in the early years of the 20th century. The intellectual foundations of Expressionism can be traced to the works of the German philosopher Conrad Fiedler (1841-1895). Fiedler's view was that "the work of art was essentially the result of the artist's unique visual perception, given free form by his powers of selection." (Arnason 1986, p 108).

These influences were the precursors to Surrealism. In the West, the Surrealist movement emerged from the horrors of WW-I endured by European society. It broke the foundation of a well-established order, to pave the way for a renewal and repair of the then fragile social psyche. Artists from the Surrealist period engaged with art radically, by subverting the descriptive role of traditional self-portraiture- as a description of time and place- the artist at work, in the studio. Female artists, during the Surrealist movement, produced a significant body of self-images employing representational strategies to explore their own subjective worlds. Their practice reflected the 'female protagonist' as independent of the values defined by their male colleagues. For example, in the paintings of Frida Kahlo (1907), the self-image and body are embellished with symbolic imagery from her every day and personal experiences in the paintings themselves. Kahlo mediated her self-image and body by juxtaposing pictorial representations of her ethnic and marginal identity with symbolic imagery from her everyday environment. Her self-portraits are experimentations with her own array of moods and characters of the subject.

The two most important artists who are considered to be signposts of modernity in India are Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), and Amrita Sher-Gil, (1913-1941). Varma

introduced oil painting and lithographic processes and gave a face to the numerous Indian gods through his calendar art and oleographs. He popularized Puranic and mythological themes through modern printing techniques. Varma painted a number of royal portraits but not his own self-portrait.

Amrita Sher -Gil brought in a different kind of modernity. Sher-Gil looked into the social and not the religious landscape of India, and was one of the pioneers of self-portraiture in India.   She was one of the first protagonists of Indian art to represent herself and her body. She brought in the Western idioms of visual representation through her academic training and informed knowledge of works by artists such as Paul Gaugin, Paul Cèzzane, Pierre Bonnard. However her own visual language underwent a transformation after her travels to historic Indian sites, where her colour palette became more Indian.

Her works depict not just women working in the household, and outside in the streets- works such as 'In the Ladies Enclosure' and 'Village Scene' (1938)- but also her own body. Sher-Gil's Self-Portrait as a Tahitian (1934) is a prime example of her concern with her own body and the representation of it. In this case, Sher-Gil seems to reconfigure her body to signify another, appearing to confirm to stereotype by effecting a subversion of it. Donning multiple personalities as the subject of her paintings—actor, seductress, gypsy, and artist- she casts herself outside the domain of domesticity.

## 4.6   Contemporary India (20 to 21st CE)

Cross–cultural hybridity and identity politics to a large extent guide the production of contemporary art in India. A point to note is that a large number of contemporary women artists in India are working with contemporary technology and creating lens based work. While painting was the preferred medium in India during the modernist era, in present times the lens has become the primary medium, and

interestingly, the camera lens is focused inwards towards their personal bodies instead of outwards. No longer is the landscape, either physical or mental, photographed or filmed, but it is the personal body which becomes the locus of attention. The camera is taken into personal spaces by contemporary women artists, spaces which had not previously been the subject of exploration. The bodies are no longer idealized bodies, or beautiful bodies, or even realistic academic portraits or life studies.

Contemporary artists whether mainstream, marginalized or popular are creating new languages of art production, The modes of representation change drastically as women become more comfortable with their respective bodies. Sexuality and gender start to be explored, as can be seen in Sonia Khurana's 'Bird' (1999). The photographer Tejal Shah stages works investigating lesbian identities and cross-dressing. Indu Anthony, also a photographer, has used cross-dressing in her practice. These have, in various ways, explored and subverted the ever-present male gaze of the camera.

In 2017, at the Kochi Biennale, N. Pushpamala created a photographic tableau re-creating the famous 1898 painting by Jose Veloso Salgado depicting Vasco Da Gama presenting himself before the ruler of Calicut. Between 2000 and 2004 Pushpamala created 'The Ethnographic Series Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs'. This series can be seen as "a critique of the instrumentalization of colonized bodies. As the artist attempts to reverse the colonial gaze from the position of a post colonial feminist artist, she is enacting the double consciousness of the native woman as well as the 'native' informer to her collaborator." (Ahuja, 2013-2014, p 157)

While there is an increasing global cosmopolitanism, an unerring internationalism, the underlying thread of caste and class politics is still at play. Shaheen Ahmed, a contemporary artist from the North- eastern part of India,

Assam, is involved in the same field of self-representation. Using mixed media, animation, visuals from commercial spaces and print media, she gives voice to political rights of minority Muslim females. Given the plural context of India, religion is a recurrent part of the social fabric. In Ahmed's practice, she is exploring her minority status as an Indian Muslim, presenting the transition of Muslim women being liberated even though they are sparsely represented in mainstream contemporary Indian politics, and also at a time when the Muslim community in India is increasingly facing social hostility.

Similarly, Meena Kandasamy, a female poet who is also a Dalit, refers to her dark skin as a reaffirmation of the practice of untouchability in India. Her writings examine the social milieu of contemporary India, which is rife with inequalities: gender, caste, and race. Her writings become the tool of empowerment for her. The conscious use of language as an appropriated choice i.e. English, de-territorializes her from any regional place. Kandasamy belongs to South India and moves beyond the confines of ghettoization, by finding a home in the English language. Her writing forges a completely new identity, breaking from the predetermined/constructed self. While taking the liberty to make choices, she renders it in the aesthetics of the pariah.[24]

In the lens-based work of the artist/researcher, the themes and concerns revolve around questions of representation of her self. The self-representations created in the artist/researcher's practice are informed by her awareness of her intersecting identity as a privileged, post-colonial woman.

In the artist/researcher's interaction with Kandasamy, she observed that whilst they were both modern urban educated contemporary Indian women artist/writers

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[24] Kandaswamy has used English Language as a way of overcoming an imposed regional identity, in order to communicate the realities of caste more easily. Her use of English is also a consequence of her being outside the mainstream, Brahmanical social structure. She has evolved this into an aesthetic strategy.

engaged with issues of feminism and identity, they were perhaps at different ends of the spectrum in terms of the strategies for engaging with these. Kandasamy's concerns were the destruction of caste and feminism, seen through the prism of language and social positioning through caste. She writes in English as a conscious choice because she sees this as a way of preventing the network of exchange from becoming insular and hierarchical. In her verse and prose Kandasamy challenges the contradictions, hypocrisies and pretenses she finds around her in life, literature, and mythologies of the mainstream.

The artist/ researcher's concerns are also with feminism and identity, but perhaps, because of her position of social privilege, these are more intensely personal. She is engaged with these from a context to which she has privileged access- a natural use of the English language, an education in India and the UK and wide travel in, and experience of, cultures of India and the West. Her concerns in self –identity are informed by her position an educated woman artist straddling both cultures.

The subsequent chapter will review and reflect in detail upon the artist/ researcher's studio outcomes.

**Chapter 5**


**Studio Practice**


This chapter gives detailed accounts the following art works: five short videos, ten

collage works that have been presented as animation, a single collage mounted on a

lightbox and a photobook.  The relationship between content of imagery and method

of representations is also addressed in this chapter with regards these works.


**5.1  Video Works:**


**5.1.1  Video 1**

**Nowhere times(2008-2015)**

**Duration 2':32"**

The title of this video Nowhere Times is based on the concept of no man's

land - a space that falls between borders, whether physical or imaginative.

This video also draws upon Marc Augé's essay and book of the same title,

'Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity' (1995). Augé

coined the phrase "non-place" to refer to anthropological spaces of transience that

do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". The video is organized

into two parts that are not marked as such. The concept of liminality- of occupying

positions or locations between defined spaces- is what unifies both parts of the video.

The first part of the video consists of two different scenes running in parallel,

occupying the same screen split horizontally. The top half of the screen depicts a man

squatting on a moving travelator while he presses a cloth along the bottom edge of

the travelator, cleaning it as he glides along. The footage was recorded while waiting

at the airport in New Delhi during one of the artist's field trips between 2013-2014. What caught the gaze was the cleaner's ingenuity in completing the task at hand. The sequence is manipulated such that the second half of this sequence mirrors the first half, running in reverse. The bottom half of the screen is also a 'mirrored' sequence, in that it is composed of two mirrored panels, though offset in time by approximately three seconds, depicting the artist's shadow, dancing to a disparate sound background- the ambient sounds of a public place overlaid with passages of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1- Prelude (played by Yo-Yo Ma), suggestive of a sense of dislocation reinforced by the fact there are no visible signifiers of location as far as the viewer is concerned. The two spaces ( the artists dancing and the man on the travelator) in the first part of the video are spilt between the private and the public.



**Figure 5.1 – screen grab from Nowhere Times**

Other unifying elements, which inform the juxtaposition of these sequences, are related to ideas of depersonalization and anonymity. The figure on the travelator and the dancing shadow are not identifiable individuals but only have identities derived from their actions/performance: 'the cleaner' and 'the dancer'. This highlights

the creation of identity as a performative act (though, in this case, not necessarily performing gender). Both sequences also highlight an idea of dislocation both for the viewer as well as the subject. The cleaner is an anonymous figure in the non-place of the airport, even though the airport is the cleaner's workspace. Similarly, the shadow dance sequence is devoid of any specifics of location. The cultural dislocation of the artist is symbolized both through the content- anonymized public and private spaces- and the visual representation of a split screen.

The first part of the video ends with a jump to the second part, which begins, in contrast to the first part, with a specific locational reference: 'Boom Festival!' In August 2008, the artist went to Portugal with a childhood friend to the Boom Festival. The festival promotes a global dance culture, sustainable and alternate lifestyles with emphasis on restoration of the ecosystem and community building. The festival began on the 12th of August. The 15th of August is an important date for Indians the world over, as it is the date when the country celebrates its Independence Day. As it happens, the day before that, the 14th of August, is celebrated in Pakistan as its Independence Day.

The artist had carried the flag of India on the request of her friend, but they had a falling out and until today they have not been able to rekindle their friendship. The festival in every sense was a rite of passage for the artist/researcher because she found herself alone in a crowd of around 20,000 people, yet she made new friends, free from her friend's tendency to control.

On the 15th of August a group of boys, two from of India and one from Pakistan approached the artist's campsite as they recognized the Indian flag that was hanging outside her tent, and they all decided to sing the national anthem of India.

The location of this festival is near a lake that is also a natural reserve situated

between Portugal on one side and Spain on the other side, similar to no man's land. In this in-between space people from all over the world gather together forgetting difference united by a culture of celebration.



**Figure 5.2 Map of lake Idan-a-nova**

The person who is shooting the video footage used here is from Pakistan. This fact is revealed to the audience in the ending dialogues as the artist/researcher addresses the camera and claims that their performance of the national anthem at the festival while not standing at attention would be seen negatively in India. In the videothe national anthem of India is being sung and as the anthem ends, the Indian group mocks the conservative stance of the Indian political party, the BJP, politically opposed to engaging with Pakistan on a diplomatic level.

However the festival itself occupies a liminal space: it was an event, which brought together people from various geographies and cultures for the duration of a week; even the space used for this festival was a temporary campsite. This part of

the video is also concerned with the idea of performed identity-creation. The decision to carry and display the Indian flag was in itself a performance of a national identity. The action in the video consciously refers to customary performative behaviour with regards to the Indian national anthem, such as standing at attention. The communal singing of the anthem by a group of people who self-identify as Indian, on the Indian Independence Day highlights how performance creates certain types of public identity.

On the other hand, the decision to hand over the camera to a person occupying a politically antagonistic national identity as far as most Indians are concerned, that of 'Pakistani', creates an interesting situation.  The comments of the cameraperson, emphasizing his locational identity outside ' Indian-ness', enable the viewer to observe and become aware of the performativity of identity, specifically of a national one.

**5.1.2  Video 2**

**Red Room**

**(2014-2015)**

**Duration 2':08"**

The title 'Red Room' is symbolic of acts that are personal yet share a collective significance- for example red as a sign of danger, red as a sign for blood, red as passion and the erotic. In the Indian aesthetic the colour red also signifies sacredness, celebration, fertility and fecundity, as also purity and certain sensuousness- being the colour of bridal attire. At the same time it represents anger and fear, as associated with one of the most revered goddesses in the Hindu pantheon- Durga- showing her fiery red tongue and almost red eyes. The use of the colour red in this video is not an effect of post-production or editing but a by-product of how the camera perceived the lighting conditions.

The video opens with a sequence set in a room, in what to the camera appears to be red lighting. This is addressed to in the audio by the cameraperson (the artist herself), in the opening line. The sequence makes overt references to significance of the colour. The soundtrack accompanying audio of this sequence continues into the next three sequences. The ruffled sheets from the first sequence cut to the dancing figure of the artist in a narcissistic appropriation of the male gaze. In a further inversion of this gaze in the third scene, the eye of the camera shifts to depicting men in uniform.

The opening of the third scene coincides with an audio cue, which continues from the first sequence '… and if I point it elsewhere…' This scene is set in the engine room of an Indian Railways Train between Chandigarh and New Delhi. The shift in scene is from an intensely personal space to an official space that has restricted access. The scene depicts an all male engine crew in a traditional male dominated government job in India. The focus of the camera is not at eye level, as though the cameraperson is shy to look up, suggesting that the camera is placed at the hip of the person filming.



**Figure 5.3 screen grab from Red Room**

The next sequence is of a couple waltzing in an intimate closed space, the voice over, still continuing from the opening sequence, overlaid by the cinematic audio of the song '…these are a few of my favourite things…' [25] . The conversation mentions pornography, playing on the conflation of public and private acts and spaces, as well as its concerns with 'over-gendered' bodies. The audio and video switch at this point into the next sequence, which raises questions about the narcissistic impulse woven with discussion between the couple in the scene questioning the nature of their partnership.

The next sequence introduces the title 'Red Room', where the audio and video now direct the gaze of the camera to the artist's own body. Here again the lighting of the scene appears to be red, referring back to the opening sequence, effectively blending the concerns raised in all the previous scenes: private versus public, pornography, male gaze/ voyeurism and narcissism. This scene also incorporates an awareness of the function and role of the camera as an evidencing tool.[26]

While the conversation continues, the visual jumps to a reverie-like sequence for a short span before switching back to the conversation between the couple about the ethics of recording and broadcasting private and personal spaces. As the voices become gradually muffled, the final sequence shifts back to essentially a continuation of the scene in the beginning sequence of the video. The video culminates with '… narcissism is a good thing; narcissism is a good thing…'

This video is an attempt to re-position narcissism and the voyeuristic gaze as a 'good thing', in an attempt to present a 'self-representing' gaze. Amelia Jones's understanding of how the self, in the act of becoming a subject of representation, becomes also an object, is an important filter through which to view this video. The video also draws upon contestations and transgression of the 'everyday'. As

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[25] From the film 'The Sound of Music'

[26] "…it's recording…" from the sequence illustrates this

mentioned in chapter two, the idea is to play with codes of conduct of the everyday. The act of shedding clothes and performing nakedness therefore represents a transformative and transgressed moment.



**Figure 5.4 screen grab from Red Room**

**5.1.3  Video 3**

**The Pop-Up Tear Shop**

**(2015-2017)**

**Duration 3':10"**

The title draws upon the concept of the pop-up shop, which has only a temporary presence and identity, about presenting any product, which has been customized and crafted only for the duration of the shop being open. As the title suggests tears are the commodities on offer. Tears as with all other emotions are fleeting and not easily controlled or even expressed. The word shop also plays on concepts of public and private experiences, a space that is ostensibly public but can also be the space for a very personal experience.

The video opens with a sequence similar to that which the artist has used in another video, The Red Room, suggests a reverie- a mental space that encourages

an intentional act of self-reflection. The title appears, overlaid on this scene, and as the title disappears, the reverie scene dissolves into the next scene. This scene can be understood as soliloquy- where the artist is seen talking to herself, or rather to the camera as an extension of herself. The artist consciously talks about bringing what is seen essentially as a private act, into a public space.



**Figure 5.5 screen grab from Pop-up Tear Shop**

The scene shifts to a short sequence showing a landscape with a rainbow. Nearing the end of this scene, a fleeting sense of disorientation is created: it sets up an idea that the shadowy figure appearing is a reflection of the person shooting the landscape, whereas it is dissolved into an inside scene. This dissolve sets the stage for a performance to take place, where the artist is seen drawing on herself. The act of drawing can be seen as the artist inscribing an emotion upon her body. Yet since the inscription is temporary in nature it only serves to articulate the impermanence of any emotion or any fixed identity.

As the scene shifts back to the artist in the open, there is an admission that the space occupied by the artist while crying outdoors is not adequately public and that it may still be seen as an enclosed space. A short scene interrupts the soliloquy in the park. This time the artist is in a clearly different geographical space and seems to comment on her own propensity to 'complain'. This short snippet is intended to resonate through the next scene that switches back to the artist in the park. In this final snippet in the park, the artist seems to break the 'fourth wall' addressing an imagined audience, inviting them to share her space, but finally seems to withdraw saying '…I'm not gonna tell you guys...' The artist's narcissistic gaze shifts towards an awareness of performance, but one which is abruptly ended, as a refusal to perform.

The next jump in the video involves both the visual and the aural. The audio, which continues almost till the end of the video, is an unidentified male voice referring to the work of the artist (in passing). The video that begins along with the conversation is independent in origin from the audio and as the artist work is being discussed, the accompanying visuals are of the artist in the act of displaying her body.
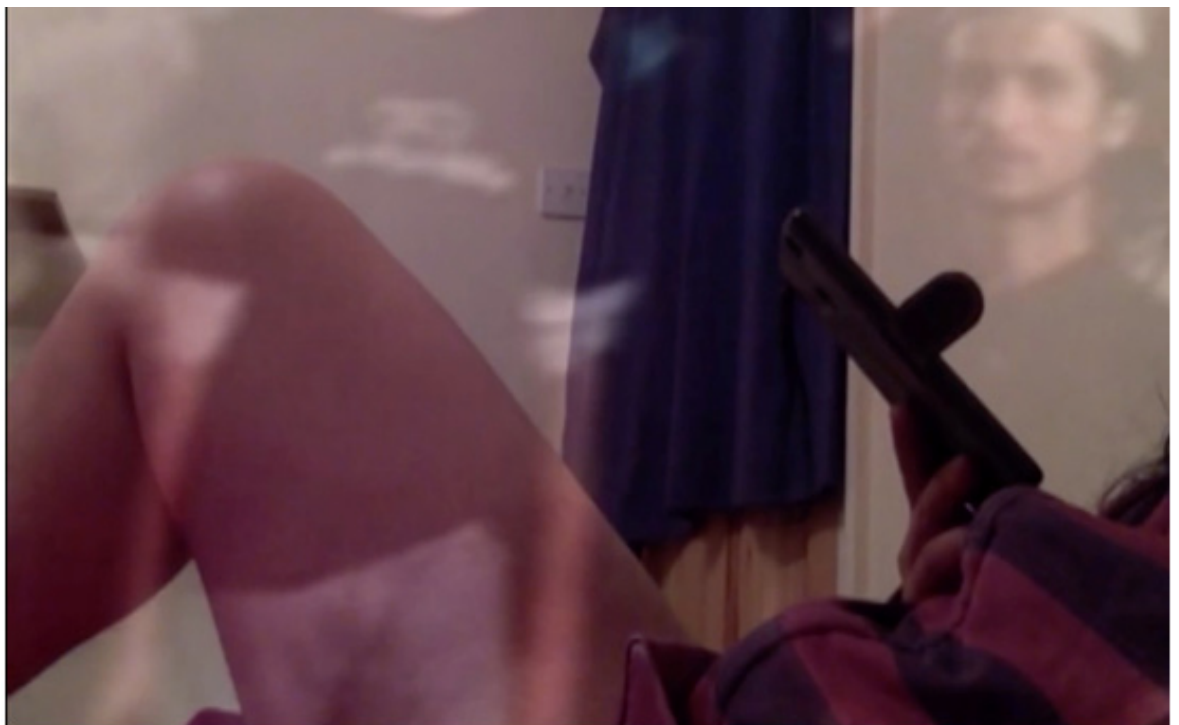


**Figure 5.6 screen grab from Pop-up Tear Shop**

The final sequence is a montage created from three photographic stills depicting the artist. The three images speak of various aspects of 'self love'- these three images are accompanied by an audio snippet, in which the artist raises the question of how one could relate to the 'self'.

One of the main concerns of the video is an exploratory reflection, a process of re-creating and re-imaging the self by putting together fragments from the past. This fragmentation is recorded by the chronological jumps, back and forth in time and location. In the video, comments or opinions about the artist's self, from the more recent past, are used to punctuate materials from even farther back in the artist's past. The artist's commentary on her record of her self points to constantly shifting and evolving boundaries of identity.

**5.1.4  Video 4**

**Love, Hope, Faith**

**(2014-2017)**

**Duration: 2':06"**

The title points to the thematic concerns in the video, which are also reflected in the manner in which the clips have been presented. The video can be considered to be a triptych, in that it has three panels. The artist uses the triptych purely as a stylistic device, especially as in the video format it allows for complexity of expression. The tension in the work is generated from the interplay between the attention almost enforced upon the viewer and the difficulty of absorbing three simultaneous narratives equally. Within each panel the sequences change rapidly, though the central panel contains the core narrative. The two side panels are organized so that they reflect the each other in content and context, which provides a visual commentary on the central narrative.

**Figure 5.7 screen grab from Love Hope Faith**

The audio is a monologue, talking about the artist's experiences as an adult visiting Switzerland (Zurich) as well as about Bollywood's fondness for shooting 'song sequences' in foreign locations, especially Switzerland. In the dialogue the artist highlights this relationship, verbally and visually by using footage from two Bollywood films produced in the 1980s.[27]  Towards the end of the video, the artist has recorded herself singing the song ' leaving on a jet plane'. The video here shifts to the artist performing the song as well as performing an act.[28]

The video begins with three clips. The central panel is a clip from the Hindi film Ram Teri Ganga Maili (1985), a classic film from Bollywood of the 80's directed by the legendary actor-director Raj Kapoor. In the clip, the camera represents the point of view and gaze of the male character; this is evident from the how the female character turns to address the camera as her name is called. At this moment, as she addresses the camera, the female character freezes in place, adopting a highly

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[27] Of the two clips neither have been shot in Switzerland; they have been filmed in the mountains of Northern India, but both point to the fascination with mountain locales, which took Bollywood to the Alps in the 1990s.

[28] This song, originally sung by John Denver (1969), was introduced to a younger generation of listeners by the female artist Chantal Kreviazuk in the mid 90's.

stylized pose, which draws upon representation of the female in body in traditional Indian art, especially found in temple sculpture. The effect is to present the female body to the male gaze and draw attention to it.



**Figure 5.8 screen grab from Love Hope Faith**

While this central clip plays, the panels on either side present the artist mimicking an archetypal pose from Western Art- that of Venus, from Sandro Botticelli's The Birth of Venus (c.1480). The artist's performance of the pose highlights its artifice; that it is a created posed intended to display the female body in a particular manner. These conscious stylizations in the side panels query the supposed naturalness of the pose in the central panel. Both are constructed poses, one created by the painter and the other by the film director. In tandem, the panels seek to appropriate the male gaze in representing the female body and self.

The same applies to the version of the song used by the artist, which is originally is sung by a male vocalist, whereas the artist has used a version sung by herself. The song continues with only a single break- which refers back to Switzerland, as a location for 'love songs' in Bollywood films- and the video closes

with the last words of the song: '…oh babe I have to go…'

At this point it would be interesting to look at how vocalization or voice is used by the artist as a tool of performance. The vocalizations by the artist present in the beginning of the video are a staccato performance of the phrase 'I Scream Daddio' [29] where the emphasis is on the word 'I'. This broken expression shifts to a clearly sung rendition towards the end of the video. The artist's voice in her other video works presents variations on her everyday speech patterns. The importance of the voice of the artist being expressed lies in the fact that it adds another dimension to the representation of the artist's self.

The smaller sequences included in the panels revolve around the themes of love, hope and faith, insofar as they draw upon the artist's personal experiences that engage with the feelings and emotions associated with the loss of all three emotional states. The multiple fragments in this video are symbolic of the artist's endeavor to recreate and re-present the physical and emotional dis-connections that are part of the post-modern cosmopolitan experience. More specifically the fragmentation also reflects upon the transitional experiences of the artist living between India and the West.

### 5.1.5 Video 5:

### Crompton's at Honeywell

### (2010-2015)

The title of the video is a reference to the Crumpton Oaks brand of dry cider in the U.K. The change in the spelling is a consequence of the hybrid nature of the artist's experience; Crompton is a well-known electronic appliances brand in India and this caused a subliminal conflation creating the final spelling used. This motif of mishearing

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[29] The phrase is taken from the title of artist Sarah Lucas's major solo exhibition, I SCREAM DADDIO, at the British Pavilion in Venice for the 56th Venice International Art Biennale 2015.

and 'mis-saying' is discussed and emphasized in a significant part of the video.

The second half of the title refers to the Honeybourne Line, an old railway track that has been converted into a cycling/walking path. It also connects the Cheltenham Spa railway station to two of the campuses of the University of Gloucestershire. The artist has reworked the name to Honeywell (quite distinct from the American industrial and electronics giant, Honeywell International) to refer to the concept of wellness associated recreational activities within the area.

The opening sequences depict the artist with a black eye and a bruise on her arm with a visible awareness of the camera being an active participant in the sequence. Before the end of this sequence, the artist's interaction with the camera is emphasized with the transition to the next sequence, as well as with the dialogue '… lights, camera, action…'



**Figure 5.9 screen grab from Crompton's at Honeywell**

The next sequence begins with self-portraits of the artist in varying digital formats and spliced to a musical track. Nearing the end of the self-portrait sequence, the audio switches over to a conversation centered on the pronunciation of the word 'funny'. A few seconds into this audio, the visual shifts to the artist on the

Honeybourne Line relieving herself, while also turning the camera on animal excreta next to where she is filming herself. The motivation do such an act in a public space is blend of a desire to subvert regulation to serve a self-indulgent pursuit. This act by the artist points to two different social aspects that she subverts: firstly, open male public urination, a facet of everyday behaviour in urban India, and secondly the contextual differences between open defecation in India and the West.



**Figure.5.10 screen grab from Crompton's at Honeywell**

Open male public urination in India, where men urinating in public spaces, is so common place that it is almost widely socially acceptable. Interestingly while women are also forced to relieve themselves in public this has to be restricted to pre-dawn hours or hidden spaces, otherwise they could face danger of sexual harassment, assault and even rape.[30]

Open defecation in India cannot be related to any such instances of the same in West; in India it is a marker of lack of access to toilet facilities and, partly, ingrained cultural practices, whereas in the West it can be see as an act of deliberate

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[29] See UNICEF paper on 'Open Defecation India', which gives a concise summary on the contemporary status of this issue, its implication for public health and strategies on dealing with it. http://unicef.in/Whatwedo/11/Eliminate-Open-Defecation

defiance. Therefore, the artist's performance is located at a transgression of the above because of her specific identity as an Indian woman.

The next visual sequence is that of the artist and her parents being looked at by the camera, apparently conversing with each other, while the artist is shown laughing hysterically. The audio conversation around the word funny continues in this sequence as well. The conversation is between people from different and non- English ethnicities playing with pronunciation of the word, trying to locate the correct English pronunciation. The speakers also implicitly mock the 'proper' English accents.

In the last sequence, the audio snippets refer to what to a non-native person are perceived to be typical of English culture. In the final parts of the conversation, the speakers are talking about a game of croquet and tea with crumpets. The artificiality of this 'proper' conversational performance contrasts with the 'improper' performances that the video began with.

## 5.2 Digital Collages

The digital collages consist of patterns that are extracted by the artist from her from photographs. The artist/researcher has illustrated religious Hindu iconography of the female divine from a contemporary gaze using digital techniques. Digital tools- software, screen, and data- replace the tools of painting such as pencil, paper, and paint. The process of collage in the artist's practice is based on a range of modes of visual language, thus presenting a multiplicity of images. This re-visualization of existing iconography helps in deconstructing conventional ideas about the representation of the female (divine) body. The collage- populated by disparate mediums of documentation- image, text and sound- removes the single meaning attached to the image, thereby questioning the authenticity of the artist's self-representations.

The collage can be seen as a method of re-interpreting modernity (Brockelman 2001). In the Indian context, one may look at what Jyotindra Jain says about the concept of collage with reference to Shekhwati murals: "images in the Shekhawati havelis are a creation of self image with the iconisation of the self. "[31]

The selection of the Dus Mahavidyas as sites for the artist's animated collages is motivated by the fact that these goddesses are marginal to mainstream Hinduism and thus possess strong elements of contestation: their roles and even their representational attributes are generally more visceral and elemental[32] than those of the more mainstream holy trinity of goddesses- Parvati, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Each of the Dus Mahavidyas is outside the canon of Brahmanical Hinduism and is based on an aspect of the goddess Kali.



**Figure 5.11  screen shot of digital collage Kali**

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[31] Quoted in 'A brush with history.' Metroplus, The Hindu. June 28, 2012: accessed on 12.11.2017. http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/a-brush-with-history/article3581278.ece

[32]" Dhumavati presides over the Non-Being Asat. When creation starts, Kali is Time and Bhuvaneshwari is Space. The flaming Word Supreme turned towards manifestation is Bhairavi, the Perceiving Word is Tara and the Expressed Word is Matangi. … Desire is Sundari while… Beauty is Kamala. Chinnamasta combines Light and Sound… and Baglamukhi stifles the free flow of things." (Shankaranarayanan, S. 1972, 114)

The representations of the Goddess Kali, according to traditional Hindu belief, are symbolic of creation and destruction. The conventional iconography of the artistic representation of Kali depict her body naked from the waist upward, with a garland of skulls around her neck covering her breasts, and a girdle of arms around her waist. She is depicted with multiple arms and weapons. Her red tongue rigidly hang's out of her mouth, symbolic of the blood of her enemies and signifying her readiness to use violence against, and to destroy, evil. Kali therefore performs roles traditionally ascribed to masculine gods. Consequently, as a deity, she can be seen as an instance of the exceptional and momentary possibility of the feminine. The Dus Mahavidyas embody manifestations of the feminine from the seductress to the crone; significantly none of the Mahavidyas contain or represent the matron. This can be seen as a rejection of hetero-normative representation of women. This is not to imply that there is a representing or positing of an alternate sexuality; it is rather an assertion of an independent female sexuality. However there are certain standard representations of each of the Mahavidyas; the iconography is fixed.

Though heavily inspired by the existing iconography, the artist's approach towards developing her own visual language has led her to re-imagine, interpret, and to re-construct the Vidyas. The Dus Mahavidyas in their traditional iconographies already allow for multiple and even un comfortable representations of the divine feminine—the self decapitated Chinnamasta and the widowed crone Dhumavati.

To gain an understanding how the traditional iconographies of the Dus Mahavidyas are being re configured and appropriated by the artist, a brief overview is presented below. The common thread in these representations by the artist/ researcher is that almost none of the original visual iconography is discernable. In these works a new paradigm, generated through the manipulation of the traditional iconography, is presented.
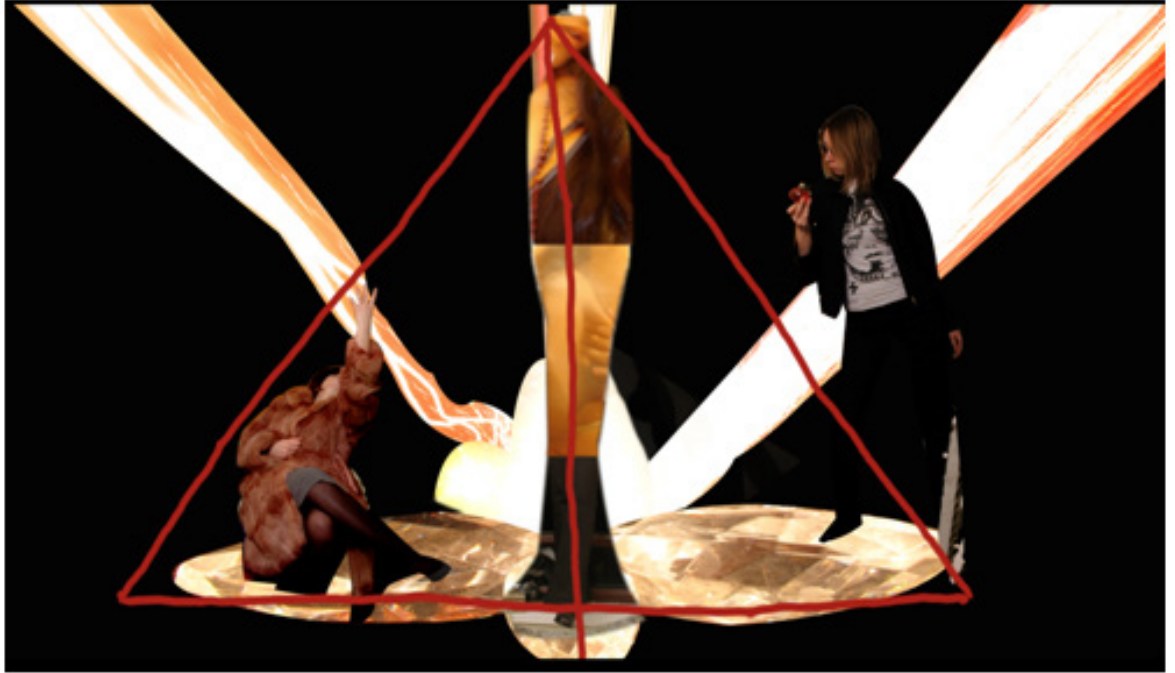
**Figure 5.12 screen shot of digital collage Chinnamastika**

The sequence in which the artist/researcher is interpreting the Mahavidyas is: Kali, Chinnamasta, Baglamukhi, Tara, Bhuvaneshwari, Tripura Bhairavi, Tripura Sundari, Kamalatmika Dhumavati, and Matangi. For the artist, Kali is a point of intersection where the stylized representations of the divine feminine approach a space where idealized bodies are subverted. This naturally meant that Kali became the starting point for the artist's own enquiries into canonical representations female bodies, divine or otherwise.

The artist/researcher's re-working of Kali's iconography in the digital space juxtaposes photographs and sketches (drawings), representing fragments of the artist's body. The bringing together these fragments illustrates Kali's role as the goddess that stands for creation as well as destruction.

After Kali, the next in the artist/researcher's hierarchy are Chinnamasta, Baglamukhi and Tara. For the artist, these three iconographies suggest a confrontational, even militant, aspect of feminism portrayed in different ways in each manifestation. While the representation of Tara is overtly sexualized, the one of

Chinnamasta presents an alternate trinity of goddesses, replacing the Brahmanical trio of Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati. For the representation of Baglamukhi, the artist has chosen to foreground the hypnotic and the paralysing aspect of the goddess through the flickering sunflower superimposed on the artist's forehead.

The artist/researcher's subverted iconographies of the goddesses Bhuvaneshwari, Tripura Sundari, Tripura Bhairavi and Kamalatmika represent the sublime. The artist's Bhuvaneshwari is composed of colour and motion in a timeless space. In this representation, Kali too is manifest in the dark background against which 'the wheel of time' moves.[33] The intersecting, though separate, representations of Sundari, Bharaivi and Kamalatmika draw upon the act of transcendent beauty, desire and grace. The iconography of Sundari combines overlapping images, where the artist's self portrait is point of departure to explore emanations of the divine beautiful. The goddess Bhairavi for the artist/researcher is the internal flame of desire, which can create and destroy.

In Dhumavati's conventional iconography, the potential to subvert representation is strongly present: she is depicted as an old widow and thus is already on the margins of gendered identity. In the artist's work Dhumavati's residual and marginal femininity is shifted to another space within the gender spectrum, by using the bodies of male hermits (sadhu), who choose to live on the margins of society.[34]

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[33] The name Kali is derived from the Sanskrit term kala, signifying time, age, era, period and so on

[34] In reality, Hindu widows have been forced to live on the margins due to the ritual association of widowhood with inauspiciousness.

**Figure 5.13 screen shot of digital collage Dhumavati**

In the final representation, that of the goddess Matangi, the act of appropriation by the artist arrives at a culmination. The artist/researcher is drawing more overt associations with the original iconography of the goddess as well as adding elements, such as digital butterflies and the head of an elephant. Finally the artist's non-fragmented body appears in this work, reflecting the artist's hybrid cultural identity- wearing a pair of jeans, and a leather jacket.



**Figure 5.14 screen shot of digital collage Matangi**

The initial thoughts on how to display these works include variations on the concept of projection such as single or multi-channelled projections, video mapping, and experiments with different surfaces to project on fabric or refractive surfaces.

Another strong inclination is to make the interpretation more dynamic by projecting these representations on the body of the artist, and effectively including the artist within her artwork. The task ahead is to create an immersive experience for the potential audience where the collages are not be perceived as isolated or individual items within a fixed sequence, but are to be viewed in tandem.

The re-imagining of the Dus Mahavidyas, which the artist has undertaken draws upon the concept of the collage as a method of re-imaging the self. The identity of the self is problematized and presented as an ever-shifting enactment of the self. The fixed iconography based on Indian myths is re-located by the artist into a contemporary hybrid space- informed by the artist's transitional location between India and the West, as well as, a transitional space between the digital and the physical.



**Figure 5.15 screen shot of digital collage Tara**

Could this analysis and artistic rendition of the Dus Mahavidyas be looked at from the perspective of Queer Theory- a development of Feminism, Gay and Lesbian studies?

In the Western discourse on culture and identity the emphasis is on the individual- on issues that impact upon or inform his identity, as distinct from other individuals. This includes issues of gender and sexuality- which are the subject of Feminist and Gay and Lesbian studies, and of Queer Theory.

In the context of artists/researcher's work, however, which is based on the manifestations of the Mother Goddess in the Hindu religious tradition, a distinction can be made between the notions of feminity (as a subset of gender and sexuality) between India and the West. As Nivedita Menon puts it :

"In non-Western societies this notion of the individual, separate from all other individuals, as a unit of society is not an uncontested one. At every level in non - Western societies then, there remains a sense of self that is produced at the intersection of individuated bodies and collectives of different sorts". (Menon, 2012, p54).  Comparing the development of democracy between France (the West) and India two hundred years later, post colonially, Menon says about India, "the ideal of the abstract and the individual citizen as the basis for democracy was never unambiguously enshrined as it was in the European context. Thus, feminist politics must always be sensitive to the significance of different locations – different in terms both of the time period and the geographical location " (ibid. p166).

Although Menon suggests this caveat in the context of feminist theory and politics, it would apply, depending on the facts, to the more general Queer Theory as well. The Dus Mahavidyas are an abstract construct, with a complex provenance based on religion, ritual, myth and community perception. They are not individuals in Western sense, hence, keeping in view Menon's observations, looking at them from

the perspective of Queer Theory may not be useful.

Further, although Queer Theory looks at the distinction between binary opposition of attributes that are determinants of identity as being not absolute, in that they can be defined and understood in terms of each other, and also that the hierarchy between them can be altered (Barry, 2010, p138), the centrality of focus is on sexuality.

The present discourse, analysis and artistic interpretation of the Dus Mahavidyas however focuses on issues of marginality, appropriation of gender roles, assertion of the power of feminity as a counterpoise to the traditional suppression of women, and the challenge to orthodoxy. There is not the overarching emphasis on gender and sexuality as determinants of identity and action that is the primary focus of Queer Theory. Thus, again, it may not be useful or appropriate to approach this discourse from the viewpoint of Queer Theory. Of course the artistic interpretation and rendition of the Dus Mahavidyas in the collage by the artist/researcher is itself informed by factors that are determinants of the artist/researcher's own identity and sensibilities – such as her position of fluidity between India and the West, between tradition and modernity, her sexuality and her post colonial background – and could attract of aspects of Queer Theory, but such study would not add much to the present discourse.

### 5.3 Photobook-17

'108 portraits i me myself' is the first photobook created and self-published by the artist in 2017. The book is a collection of self-portraits spanning a decade, from 2007-2017. The artist chose the format of a photobook to develop and present a narrative of herself, because the format allows for an individualized intimacy between the artist and the audience. The tactile involvement required to engage with the photobook was what took the artist to this particular format of presentation. As Anne Bourgeois-Vignon remarks:

> The engagement with a photobook plays out over space and time. It has a physicality which prints or digital don't: books can be handled, smelled, shared. Engaging with the photobook is an extended, different experience that plays out over time; and in turn, it is this sense of the duration that allows time and space for ideas, themes, and emotions to develop. (2016)[35]

The photobook traces the 'genealogy' of the artist- in that it traces the effects of the influences that have shaped her vision, that engage with themes such as displacement and hybridity. The approach in the photobook is to explore the nuances of identity within this continuum. The self-portraits are not presented chronologically, but the passage of time can be gauged by the changes in the appearance of the artist/researcher.

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[35] A accessed on 22.11.17: https://www.magnumphotos.com/theory-and-practice/golden-age-photobooks/

**Figure 5.16 screen shot of photobook cover design**

The arrangement of photographs varies from single, borderless images to triptych formats. In many cases the images on the two sides of the central gutter are thematic reflections. Additionally in the self-portraits, some of the visible figures are of other people who form part of the artist's personal and immediate surroundings. In these spaces the gaze of the camera is intensely appropriative and narcissistic, through its configuration of the visible other as part of the artist's self. Simultaneously the camera also acts as a medium of enticing or attracting the gaze of the other upon the artist's self.

**Figure 5.17screen shot of photobook pages**

The photographs in the book span not just an expanse of time, but also location and experience. The artist's travels between India and the West have allowed her to critically engage with varying representations of the female self in contemporary painting and photographic practices. Thus the artist's intent in the photobook is to transgress the boundaries of cultural dyads of public/ private, exterior/ interior, East/West, inside/outside, and most importantly the self and the other. These transgressions allow the artist to explore how these dualities are performed through representations of the self-image and the body.

## 5.4 Saptmatrika: Seven Mothers, 2017

### Digital collage mounted on light box: 3ft by 2ft (approx.)

The artist's decision to interpret the iconography of the Saptmatrikas (seven sisters) developed from her own work on the Dus Mahavidyas . Much like the Mahavidyas, the Saptmatrikas were originally non-Brahmanical goddess worshipped in villages. In the Mahabharata (one of major sacred epics in Sanskrit literature) they are seen as awe inspiring and ferocious figures, fatal to children.

However one of the legends associated with them is that of maternal instincts. They are said to be seven sisters who gave birth to seven embryos that fused together to form one male child- the god Kumara or Karthikey. [36]



**Figure 5.18 Ravanaphadi Cave, Aihole, Karnataka (c. 6th Century C.E)**

During the golden age of sculpture in India, in the Gupta period (3rd-5th C.E), the Saptamatrikas were absorbed into mainstream iconography through sculpture, representing them as benevolent mother goddesses. The name and the number of matrikas vary, and the most common seven are manifestation of the feminine Shakti (power) of the gods- Indrani, Varahi, Brahmi, Shivani, Vaishnavi, Kaumari and Narasimhi.[37]

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[36] Refer to Pattanaik, D. (2000, pp 80,81)

[37] Related respectively to Indra, Varaha, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Kumara and Narasimha. During the Gutpa period two of the rulers, Kumaragupta and Skandagupta, chose to adopt the god Kumara/Karthikey/Skanda to model themselves upon. Madhu Bazaz Wangu: 2003 Images of Indian Goddesses: Myths, Meanings and Models

The artist re-works the sculptural iconography of the Saptmatrikas into a single layered visual reflecting a reversal of one of the legends associated with them- they are seven sisters who are the mothers of one combined child. The Matrikas, rather than being represented in a differentiated manner as separate shaktis, are fused together to represent a unified maternal icon.



**Figure 5.19 screen shot of light box Saptamatrika**

The work is intended to emphasize the maternal aspect of the central figure. The overlapping central layers are designed to evoke associations with fecundity. The artist has used the display model of a photographic lightbox for this work. The

light shining through the visual plays on the concept of the divine power of the Matrikas. For this purpose, the collaged image is printed on a surface that facilitates the visual effect of light emanating as part of the composition.[38]

The artist has used overlapping, fragmented images of her self and her body to create the lightbox, thereby re-configuring the divine in her own image. The body and the self can thus be seen as possessing the power to enact creative and disruptive gestures through a medium of artistic expression.

The over arching trajectory of the artist's studio practice is concerned with themes that have developed around ideas of self-representation in lens based art. These representations draw on personal experiences as well cultural iconographies. A strong element of subversion and re-configuration pervades the studio practice.

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[38] Stained Glass paintings, in Europe have been used to illustrate biblical stories that are mostly found in churches

## Conclusion

The research is informed by the questions which arise from the artist/researcher's practice, the most significant of which are: How does one's own training as an artist in academic spaces of both India and the West shape the artist/researcher's understanding of what constitutes art? How does one place one's work within this larger context of contemporary and international feminist art that has been made available to the artist through her cultural mobility?

Related questions that have been generated through the artist's evolving practice explore notions of gender and cultural identity, through the intersecting perceptions about location, displacement and hybridity of the self, as well as possibilities of representation of this 'self' in visual culture.

The related objectives of this practice led research have been as follows:

1. To compare the practices of contemporary women artists in India and the West, reflecting on the cultural signifiers of gender and identity.

2. To investigate and develop culturally hybrid representational strategies that are informed by personal and public contexts of representing the self-image and body. This involves using contemporary digital techniques to appropriate existing iconographic representations of the self and the body.

3. To critically reflect upon and utilize material which already exists as part of the artist/researcher's personal record of digital self-images, with respect to its potential for representing the evolving identity of the artist.

A detailed review of how the objectives of this research have been met is undertaken in the following paragraphs.

The artistic influences on the artist/researcher's creative process have included artists from India and the West, specifically women visual artists who have used the model of self-portraiture in lens based media to engage with gender and identity politics. These artists are Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun, Amrita Sher-Gil, Nan Goldin, Pushpamala N, Cindy Sherman, Shaheen Ahmed, Meena Kandasamy, Amalia Ulman and Kate Cooper. For the artist/researcher, the artists mentioned above represent a thematic unity across three different generations. This thematic encompasses representations of women (re) claiming their bodies, of (re) appropriating the voyeuristic gaze of the lens and enactments of the everyday. Kahlo, Cahun and Sher-Gil represent the first generation, Pushpamala, Goldin and Sherman as the second followed by Kandasamy, Ahmed, Ulman and Cooper.

The artist/researcher's use of digital technology in her works can be placed in the same paradigm as the works of Ulman[39] and Cooper[40]. Ulman satirizes the concept of celebrity culture; she plays on expectations of the users who consume celebrity behaviour across various social media platforms. Cooper uses sophisticated digital technologies to create three-dimensional computer-generated self-images. The 3D models in Cooper's work are post- representational, they do not refer to or represent anything beyond their digital selves.

The artist/researcher has developed her own understanding of representational strategies, and has used digital techniques to appropriate existing iconographic representations of the female self and the body from her Indian (Hindu) upbringing. The artist/researcher takes her understanding and knowledge of Western art, and brings it to bear upon traditional Hindu iconographies to create an individualized and personal artistic expression. The artist/researcher does not restrict herself to generating a new non-referential iconography; her own body and

[39] http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/amalia-ulman-excellences-perfections
[40] http://dismagazine.com/dysmorphia/66668/kate-cooper-hypercapitalism-and-the-digital-body/

self are integral to this new representation. The task has not been to (re) invent or (re) configure iconography, but to find a personal artistic language for self-representation. The works of art that have emerged from this process present themselves as overtly constructed works put together from various fragments.

The overarching trajectory of the artist's studio practice is concerned with themes that have developed around ideas of self-representation in lens-based art. These representations draw on personal experiences as well cultural iconographies. A strong element of subversion and re-configuration pervades the studio practice.

The questions with which the artist/researcher's work interpretatively engage revolve around identity, gender and hybridity. The notion and concepts of identity and gender are generally seen as natural and inherent. The concept of identity is closely related to culture and perceived as a form that can be discovered. The Indian economist Amartya Sen (b.1933) notes in his book The Argumentative Indian (2005), the two implicit assumptions about identity:

(1) The presumption that we must have a single- or at least a principal and dominant identity: and (2) the supposition that we 'discover' our identity, with no room for any choice. (Sen,2005, p 350)

Both these, as Sen rightly notes, are assumptions which are not generally acknowledged. Sen (2005, p 350) speaks about how identities can be better seen as collectivities, which create an individual identity. Additionally the supposition of 'discovering' identity does not take into the account the freedom of choice that is available to the individual to inhabit or claim a particular identity. [41]

The concept of cultural hybridity can be seen to derive from the above position that there is no one unitary identity and one's cultural identity can then be seen as hybrid. The concept of a hybrid identity is a prominent feature of post-colonial

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[41] Sen observes that choice though available, maybe limited due to context (2005, 351)

discourse, wherein the colonized subject is seen to occupy a space that is liminal, between the two cultures of the colonized and the colonizer.

These concepts of hybridity and constructed identities play a significant role in the artistic expression of the artist/researcher. The artist/researcher's lived experiences between India and the West have provided a space for her to interrogate the constructions of identity from a position that straddles both cultures.

The artist/researcher has considered the theorization on hybridity by Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994); however, since the artist/researcher's research is practice led, she is more concerned with the question of how to express hybridity through lens based art, rather than engage with the detailed theoretics on the operation and significances of hybridity. The concept of hybridity as reflected in the work of the artist/researcher is the artist/researcher's concern with the de-contextualizing of the role of the camera and photograph, not as evidencing of truth but an ongoing play between the artist, her materials and her media. Through this research, the artist/ researcher seeks to present hybridity as a trope of looking rather than only as a cultural location.

The representation of the female body and experience is central to the artist/ researcher's work. The artist/researcher employs various models of self-portraiture to contest patriarchal and cultural boundaries of representing the female self. The artist also draws upon the concept of performed gendered identities. Butler (1990) speaks about such enactments of gender and identity.

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts, which constitute its reality. (Butler,1990, p185)

The artist/researcher's works are performative as they explore multiple facets of her constructed and performed self. In addition, there is a heightened awareness of the gaze of the camera, which adds another layer of performance to the representation. One of the important implications that emerges from the works of the artist/researcher is that all identities, even hybrid ones, are performatively created. This is not to say that the artist's intention is to dismiss or minimize the importance of performance in art but to revel in fragmentation and the contingent nature of identity.

The video works forming part of the research are focused upon representing the artist/researcher's lived experience in a space that is transitory— the artist occupies a physical space where she is both an insider and an outsider between shifting cultural geographies. The video works have a significantly performative dimension not in the process of editing but in the filming itself. The camera does not aim to document grand narratives or spectacles, but is used to turn the gaze upon the mundane and the everyday.

These works are based on footage that has been created without a specific intention of creating an artwork. As said earlier in chapter two, they are un selfconsciously recorded random moments spanning aperiod of the physical and intellectual developments in the artist/researcher's life. Intention and design are subsequently introduced into the final works through a process of re examining, remixing and juxtaposition of the footage and it's editing into multi-layered videos which is a key component of the artist/researcher's practice. The chronological range of the artist's record allows her to reflect on her younger, callower, less analytical self- and replay this along her current self- but not necessarily chronologically. Past and present are coalesced in the integrated image. This 'time slippage' is enhanced where the sound footage is de-synchronised from its generating image, as in the

videos the Pop-up Tear Shop and Love Hope Faith. This asynchronicity of sound and image in the depiction of a multiplicity of selves gives range to the videos and nuance to the performance of the self.

The artist has observed that subjects other than her are more conscious of them selves when being filmed. In the case of the artist's representations of herself, in the video works, the consciousness of performance informs the footage. The video works are themselves constructions put together from various audio and visual fragments that are identified and selected on the basis of how performative they are. Therefore fragments that are overtly performative have a higher proportion of occurrence in the video works.

The video works generate questions that are still left unanswered: how significant or necessary is the narcissistic gaze in representations of the self? How much does the presence of the camera lens affect such representation? Can a hybrid self be adequately represented through lens- based media?

The work of the artist/researcher in the photo-book generates another set of questions. The photographs that comprise the photobook are clearly performed expressions that explore further aspects of the self. A question that the artist seeks to explore is how the truth and representational value can be subverted, negated or manipulated. This question is important insofar as it problematizes the self, body and identity that it represents: if the photograph is not 'truthful' how valid is the identity that is being represented?

In the digital collages, crafted by the artist/researcher from unrelated photographs- from the artist/researcher's personal record- the representations of the self are an inversion from the methodology utilized in the photobook and the videos. The collages are created from sections cut from photographs and layered. These collages work on two levels of representation: one where the artist is exploring ways of

re-configuring representations of the female divine in Indian iconographic practices, and two, exploring the possibilities of using technology for self-representation. The representation of the divine in the cultural context of Hinduism, especially in contemporary times, is fraught with potential for controversy[42].  However, in the collages by the artist/researcher, the question of contestation of iconography is addressed in a different manner; the divine deities selected for this research are themselves non- Brahmanical (non-canonical) deities. By selecting these particular deities, the artist is presenting a challenge to canonical representation in her own cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the works of the artist/researcher bring into question representations and expressions of the self. These works have been an exploration of the larger questions related to the artist/researcher's personal identity: Who is this 'she'? What is her location between tradition and modernity? How does one identify or locate the artist's work within a global, contemporary and cosmopolitan milieu? Is the plurality in the artist's works adequately expressive, reflective or representative of her intentionally displaced situatedness?

Mandakini Devi, 2018

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[42] The artist M.F Hussain (1915-2011) was accused of defaming Hindu deities by representing them in the nude, a situation further exacerbated by his Muslim identity. His last years were spent in exile in Dubai.

# Reflective Journal

Residency Programs:

12th - 21st March 2011

I spent these ten days in a residency programme at 1 Shanthiroad in Bengaluru. 1 Shanthiroad is an artist- led studio with an exhibition gallery as well. It is one of a few artist-led initiatives in India. Set up by Suresh Jayaram in 2003, the space has been engaging with contemporary artists from Bangalore, international visiting artists, and from elsewhere in India. The space consists of both single and shared studio living quarters, and other facilities, with a common living and dining area. The artists are provided with a budget to produce their artworks, which can be exhibited at the end of their residency period in the gallery within the space itself.

As a fresh graduate (post- M.A), I was diffident about my sense of place and location as an artist being a North Indian, but I masked this diffidence well. The word Shanti, translates as calm, and indeed the place was surprisingly quiet even though it was situated very centrally and close to other artist led spaces.

My excitement was that I was in South India, in Bengaluru, a city which is the hub of the I.T. industry in India, and known for its dynamism and modernity, more so even than Mumbai.

**Illustration of Shiva-1**

**illustration of Shiva -2**

Before I left for Bengaluru, I was working on a set of illustrations for an article on the god Shiva. South India has many big and small temples dedicated to Shiva as well as to male and female goddesses from the Hindu Brahmanical religious pantheon.

In the evenings the artists at the residence would get together, share their day, some would go out to gallery and studio visits. This was the time when I began

my work of completing the illustrations on Shiva, and developing new works during the residency. It was on one such evening, while sifting through my daily log of photographs, I discovered icons of a regional deity, Naga. Such icons are commonly found outside temples dedicated to Shiva.

I visited a few Shiva temples in search of these icons. The icons I saw depicted male and female bodies that were half human and half snake. Seeing these anthropomorphic icons in real life excited my imagination, and more instinctively I wanted to locate other such non-Brahmanical iconographies, which that led me to develop the iconography of the Dus Mahavidyas, as presented in the thesis. The exhibition at the end of residency consisted of ten prints, in single editions, of my digital collages on the Dus Mahavidyas.



**Residency Collage image**

February 2012 Guwahati.

My introduction to the Dus Mahavidyas actually began during my undergraduate years around 2005 on a visit to Varanasi. This city is on the banks of the river Ganges,and is perhaps one of the holiest pilgrim places for Hindus. It is also the preferred place for Hindus to cremate their dead and immerse the ashes in the Ganges.The presence of the Dus Mahavidyas is here in essence, through the practice of Tantra. These Tantrics are semi-holy men who live on the banks of the river in seclusion and are considered as fringe elements by mainstream Hindus. They are reputed to collect human skulls and eat the flesh from burnt human bodies.

In February 2014 I visited Guwahati, the capital of Assam, home to tea gardens and the gateway to the North-East of India. Guwahati is home to the Kamakhya Temple, a stronghold of the Cult of the Devi, and here one can find all ten temples of the Dus Mahavidyas. Unfortunately on account of a time constraint I was unable to visit the temple. Indeed a disappointment- to go to Guwahati and not be able to pay obeisance to the Goddess Kamakhya.

In Guwahati I had the opportunity to engage with artists and thinkers whose focus was on contemporary and performance art in India.[1]  The main event was a event by the performance artist Samudra Kajal Saikia, on a partial grant from the FICA (Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art),who led a procession through the city's main road to the banks of the Brahmaputra.[2]  In the days prior to the Samudra's performance, the artist would spend the days making (performing) and discussing (reflecting) on the spaces for performances the city had to offer. In the Northeast the texture of daily life- the everyday – the 'vibe'-is languid, laid back and at the same time vibrant- very different to the mainstream North and South of India. Its cultural richness complements its fertile soil.

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[1] Wednesday 6th June 2012

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erTRQxm3WgY

**Photograph from Samudra's performance – Disposable house**

Our language was English because although the discourse on the contemporary is in Indian languages, the visual language it occupies is non-Western in its gaze; it is also because the beauty of regional India is truly hybrid in identity, quite removed from urban India, which is more Western in its mannerisms and

aspirations. I also made a performance, addressing issues of location and dislocation, titled 'Daisy's Day Out'. The performance was of a fictive person called Daisy who needed to be 'rehabilitated' because she had issues with living with people or family. Daisy was represented through a flower, that at the end of the performance I planted in a nearby school. Unlike my current video works, in 'Daisy's Day Out' the personal is not a record but the art work, the performance is the record.



**Screen grab of Daisy'Day Out'**

2012-2013: Time spent at The Slade Summer School

This was an unsettling period in my career as my studio project in India with a collaborator had closed because of personal reasons- she got married and that ended the collaboration.This is when the seeds of the Ph.D begin to germinate. I enrolled at the Slade Summer School in 2013, just before joining the University of Gloucestershire (UoG) as a Ph.D candidate.

I wanted to spend time at the Slade School specifically because it has an eclectic M.A program in Fine-Art Media. The students are exposed to working with photography, film, video, performance, text, sound, installation, printmaking and all

manner of object and image making. The time in spent at the Slade was also about exploring a city, the city of London, as a flaneuse, the school being part of the historic Bloomsbury district, an area known for its early modern writers, thinkers and also Virginia Woolf. I was amongst a disparate and varied group, mostly those who were committed to the arts. I am in touch with, though not in collaboration with, only a few of them.



**Slade Summer School-2013**

In this period I worked on my self-portraiture, not following any thematic or narrative. These self-portraits were very close up pictures of my self from the in-built camera computer. There was randomness in the timing and place of taking these self-portraits. I also developed a body of self- images while travelling around within London.

**Slade Summer School 2013**

November 2014 onwards:

In November I attended a residency program in Barbil. Barbil is an industrialized small town in a mining zone in the state of Odisha in Eastern India along the Bay of Bengal. Odisha also has a large tribal population.[3] There has been an on going insurgency in many parts of India, including the forested areas of Odisha, that have a significant tribal population, partly because of the growth of mining and related industries in the region, the benefits of which have largely bypassed the local population.This has resulted in a sense of dislocation and alienation, and an opposition this concept of 'development'.

When the factories or plants are set up, a significant population gets displaced, largely consisting of tribal people. Their struggle therefore is for their identity, as part of a culture that by nature is in opposition to that of industrialization and capitalism, a culture that displaces them. One way the Corporate world responds to this is

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[3] http://www.stscodisha.gov.in/Aboutus.asp?GL=abt&PL=1

through the concept of CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility, by earmarking a percentage of profits for 'social responsibility' activities.

The residency at Barbil was funded by CSR funds- led by the painter/artist Jaganath Panda who is originally from the state of Odisha. He completed his Masters in Sculpture (2002) from the Royal College of Art, London and has exhibited both nationally and internationally. In Barbil I interacted with local tribal people and made two digital portraits of two of the tribal persons who interacted with us. These works were framed in the local style of framing pictures of gods, and they were left with Panda's foundation, to be exhibited later.



**Barbil, Odisha collage**

**Barbil, Odisha, collage**

Some of my work was seen in Delhi by a lady entrepreneur, Tulika Kedia, who owns a lodge and runs a Tribal museum at Singhinawa, on the outskirts of the Kanha Tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh. She invited me to a residency at her museum to create an artwork based on local indigenous art motifs. I interacted with a family of the local Baiga tribespeople. I observed their customs and traditions music and performances. I took a photograph of a tribal woman and created a digital collage combining her image with her jewellery and the local colours of the landscape. This

was mounted on a light box and was housed in the museum.

The collage celebrated the ethnic beauty of the subject- without injecting any political element associated with the condition of the tribals.



**Singhinawa, Madhya Pradesh, light box**

Travels between India and the West

In the Autumn of 2014, work began on developing the research design for the PhD at UoG and preparation for submission of RD-1 draft. In the initial stages of my

research, intuitively or instinctly I began with the Lacan's concept of the 'mirror gaze' but later moved towards an engagement with performance, gender and identity.

It was perhaps a reaction to the chaos and noise in my formative years that I instinctively turned my gaze inwards to my immediate surroundings of friends, my family and myself. Initially my photographic practice consisted of carefully constructed self-portraits. I have continued to build on this collection by including images of my body.

Self-portraits remain a recurring leitmotif in my work; the camera became my constant companion. As part of work on comparative portraiture during my M.A level, using photography, videography and stop motion animation, I documented myself and my friends in Nottingham, as I have continued to do in Cheltenham as well.



**Oscar James Allington , Nottingham 2010**

I became part of an artist's collective in UK called Plastic Propaganda. My first exhibition with them was in February 2014 where I produced 3 lenticular prints from photographic self-portraits. I produced 2 large digital prints (4ft by 8ft) based on my drawings of the Birth of Venus for a show with same group that took place in April 2016 at A.P.T. Gallery and Studios, Deptford, London.



**APT Gallery, Deptford – 'Both ends of Madness', 2016**

**Digital print on canvas 4ft.x8ft.**

**Detail of Digital print, APT, 2016**


By January 2015, in the search for the elusive and shape shifting self, I went to the source- home in India. I re-visited, and re-looked at my past- including conducting interviews with people in India who were part of my early childhood. The interviews are of women who have been involved in my early development, and

in that sense I was objectifying myself to the public by re-looking at my past from another individual's viewpoint. (apperception).

My many visits back and forth to UK and India helped acquire a perspective towards my research –that of engagement with the concepts of migration and post-colonial difference in relation to my own artistic position.

The nanny, Gyan Kaur, who raised me until I moved to New Delhi from Chandigarh was from rural India (Punjab State).This motivated me towards documenting the craft of Phulkari, an art through which women tell their stories through cloth embroidery. This interest in phulkari and its documentation developed further in my interaction with Harinder Singh, who runs a studio and shop called 1469 dedicated to reviving and promoting Phulkari. Harinder has added a contemporary twist by making T-shirts with Phulkari motifs. I made a short documentary on his enterprise, on his love for the craft and his passion for its propagation- a documentary that also affirms my childhood influences.



**Gyan Kaur with her daughter 2013**

**Harinder Singh 2016**



**The Phulkari being draped by Gurmeet Bawa, a renowned folk singer**

**considered to be the Nightingale of Punjab 2016**

January 2015 saw a major concentration on studio production and evaluation of artworks in Cheltenham, continuing through to Summer 2015. I created video installations based on video self-portraits of me that were performance based. It was a visual diary.

In April 2015 I produced a set of lenticular prints, 3 sets based on self-portraits in India. I produced them in the U.K but printed them in India.
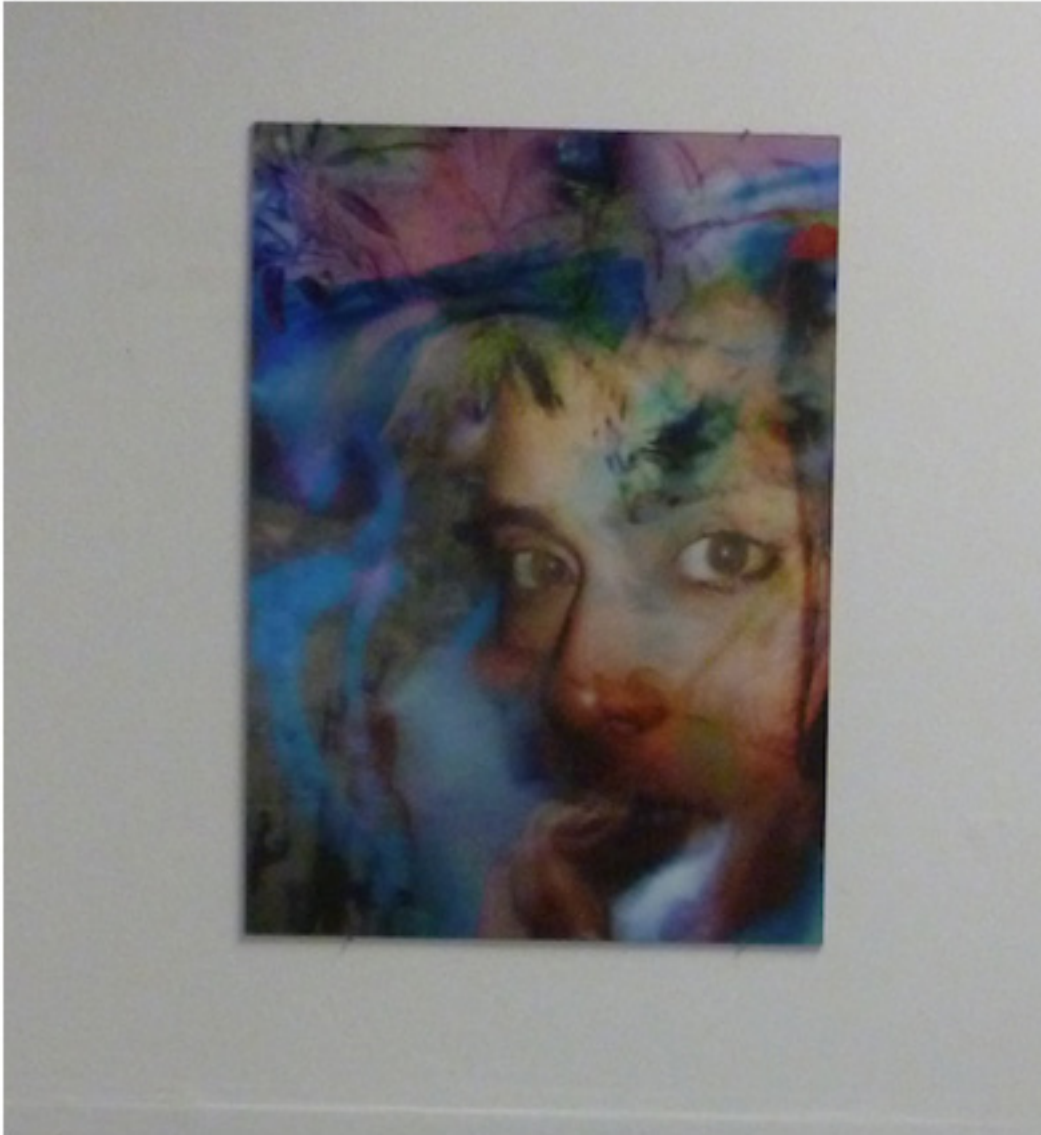


**Lenticular Print  (A/P)**

In the Spring of 2015 I began correspondence with Shaheen Ahmed (India), Meena Kandasamy (India) and Jesse Darling (UK). I had a conversation and

discussion with Meena Kandasamy. Kandasamy is a writer and poet but has recently started producing photographic self-portraits.

My introduction to Kandasamy was at a recital by her of her poetry at the Poetry Africa International festival in Durban, South Africa (October 2010), which I saw online. Thereafter I heard her in person at an exhibition ' Reader 09' organized by Raqs Media Collective (April 2013). We interacted on our common concerns—issues of feminism and identity as modern urban educated women and agreed to meet. I met Kandasamy in Chennai in February 2014. In my conversation with her, we focused among other things on the issue of writing in the English Language. Both of us found English as the most useful medium of expression despite the fact that our strategies for engaging with issues of feminism and identity were different and expressed different concerns. Kandasamy's concerns were with issues of caste and social hierarchy and whereas mine were more with my privileged position of living and working between India and the West.

I met Jesse Darling at the Wysing Arts Centre in Cambridge where she was making a presentation. We spoke briefly about myblog (https://katsukurry.wordpress.com) but she did not have time to speak further about the blog, although she said she liked some of its content.

Shaheen Ahmed was enrolled for her Ph.D. at the Jawaharlal Nehru University of Delhi. We have been in touch since then and she has given me permission to show her short film- Refuse/Resist as part of my research. The film is about her minority status of an Indian- Muslim female artist.

From Summer 2015 through Autumn 2015 I continued concentration on studio production and evaluation of artworks; development of play/action performance; and critical reflection on the theoretical implications of the experiments and research conducted to date.

2016-2017

I took time off to develop my thinking on how to work the material I had recorded upto the time. I made an account of, and transformed, my personal records and imagery into my studio practice. In April 2016, I submitted a proposal for an interim exhibition at the Hardwick Gallery towards my PhD, based on the idea of how to re- imagine the iconography of the Dus Mahavidyas which I had been engaged with for significant amount of time, and that developed further after my visit to Guwahati. I had also been thinking about methods such as performance and digital collages using my own self-portraits. For this exhibition I proposed to show the following works:

a)   Collage works based on the Dus Mahavidyas, experimenting with ways in which collage and hybrid processes can be developed as performance based self-portraiture, reflecting my Indian identity in the context of global cultural production.

b)   A set of short films from my digital records- a spectrum of performance based works representing my experiences of living between India and the West. These films were recordings of my immediate surroundings and were not staged interactions.

What emerges from the videos, animated collages, photo book or the reflective journal are outpourings of myself. As I revisit my record and reflect on my current body of work, this is making me question my gaze. If I were to think conceptually my work is deeply layered, between spaces of painting and photography moving away from stereotypical confinements delegated to a fine-art practice. This leads me to question my self and to deconstruct that persona- how am I negotiating my position while documenting my Indian identity in a global context? Does my immediate environment change with my gaze or is my immediate environment leaning on my internal landscapes (gender and identity).

**Cheltenham 2015-2016**

Artists and Exhibitions:

This segment of the reflective journal will begin with contextualizing my practice with the works of the artists discussed in the thesis. Being an only child of professionally successful parents my nurturing has been the centre of their attention and as a result of this support and love, the act of being looked at with engagement has translated into my current body of work, where I am in a performative element. I have attempted to create the childlike novelty of admiring, dancing, crying, laughing, and anger through the gaze of the camera, replacing the mirror with the lens of the camera.

There is another story before my hands found the camera. During my undergraduate years of painting, it was self-portraiture that held my interest amongst depressing buildings and bathrooms of my art college with last year's faeces accounted for. I would go to college with my hair tied up often covered in a turban

like style. My interest in Frida Kahlo developed not through art history but when I watched her Hollywood biopic in 2003-2004. I remember the moment when the film ended, I was so touched by the acting that I dressed up as Frida Kahlo creating her signature unibrow, ethnic jewellery and her hair tied in a scarf. I then held the camera in front of my bathroom mirror and took the picture.



**Self Portrait as Frida Kahlo 2004**

Amrita Sher-Gil often has been cited as India's Frida Kahlo, perhaps because of her paintings that depicted women in her household, and a few self-portraits. Sher-Gil has a significant presence in modern and contemporary Indian art and its discourse, as she was known also for her charismatic beauty, non-conformist outlook and for the portraits taken by her father Umrao Singh Sher-Gil. These photographs have been exhibited as digitally reworked collages by her nephew Vivaan Sundaram. Sundaram's artwork is a telling biography of Amrita from an insider's perspective. The photographs of Amrita by her father are performances both by the father and

daughter, the intimacy that is evoked could perhaps be discomforting in a moral sense, but given the nature of the relationship between the two, the trust value appears to contain a performative element rather than objectification of the act of performing.

In a similar fashion, the many of the self-portraits of Cahun were made with the assistance of Suzanne Malherbe, Cahun's cousin and her lover. This collaboration between Cahun and Malherbe remains liminal because they adopted different names and changed their appearances to hide from the Nazi presence in the Jersey Islands. They even infiltrated army meetings dressed as men passing on anti Nazi literature.

Even though I came across the work of Claude Cahun only during my Master's degree(2010) at Nottingham Trent University, my interest developed further in Cahun's photographic practice because initially I though that Claude Cahun was a man, a feminine man, whereas in fact Cahun was a woman. The series that I have found most interesting is when Cahun is costumed in a manner that expresses her feminine side by her posture and physical features. As the artist Martha Wilson said of her own experience that even when she was impersonating a gay woman, obviously masculine, she was thrown out at a glance when she entered a men's room in Nova Scotia, Halifax (1973). Going back to Cahun, her assertion of a gendered identity is not purely about a feminist critique, even though she is cited by many feminist thinkers and artists, but her play with identity was part compulsory because she was hiding from the Nazis, and part choice.

**Claude Cahun autoportrait 1939**

**Martha Wilson 1973/2008**

**Self-portrait with moustache - 2017**

On one my visits back to India between 2007 -2010, I came across the work of N. Pushpamala and subsequently the work of Cindy Sherman. I found that in contemporary Indian art Pushpamala was being cited as the Cindy Sherman of India, an idea that has been revisited by Parul Dave Mukherji, an Indian academic whom I have referred to in the thesis. Indeed the similarities in masquerade, costuming and performance between the two artists are striking but the contexts in which they operate are different. My interest in Pushpamala's practice began during my Master's degree, from the point of view of performance, although my own practice is less to do with enactments, elaborate theatre design or costuming but with the concept of performing an identity that is not necessarily cultural specific.

**N. Pushpamala and Clare Arni 'The Native Types / Lakshmi' 2000-2004**

I produced a photographic essay titled 'Home and Away' in 2007, a collection of photographs during my stay in London between 2009-2010, three sets of photo books in 2011. My interest in narrative photography led to me the Ballad of Sexual Dependency, a slide show of over several hundred photographs by Nan Goldin. Before that I did look at the works of Diane Arbus, Sally Mann, Larry Clarke, Cindy Sherman, but the honesty in the range of human emotions captured by Goldin has

left a lasting impression in my mind and subsequently I have continued to photograph my self and my immediate surroundings in the manner of Nan Goldin.



**Self-portrait in Chandigarh 2009**

Shaheen Ahmed and Meena Kandasamy are two artists I would not have had the opportunity to meet or even explore their trajectory if it were not for my thesis project. Both women are around my age addressing simple yet profound issues on who we are and why we are here? In my further conversations with Shaheen in particular I observed that she has come to the world of fine art from journalistic training but she is interested in making art and not as much as in engaging with fine art academically. Meena Kandasamy has shifted to photography after publishing two books and numerous performances related to poetry. Her photography is based on images of her self and her body.

**Shaheen Ahmed screen grab from video 'I Will Be Silent'**

**Menna Kandasamy - triptych titled Bondage 2012**

While I was following the work of Jesse Darling in the beginning of 2013, I came across the work of Amalia Ulman and Kate Cooper, who I consider my contemporaries from the West. Ulman's work is critical of consumer and celebrity culture in a humorous and uncanny way rather than being overtly critical. Kate Cooper whose works I have seen only online uses technology as an aide and application

to engage with gender and identity politics. Her work is distinctive because she is using sophisticated technologies for self-representation that are otherwise used in the field of entertainment, games and fantasy films alike.

**Kate Cooper Rigged 2013**

**Amalia Ulman Performative Lecture: 14.09.14. Istanbul**

Exhibitions:

The Kochi Muziris Biennale (KMB)is a not just a biennale but India's first and only biennale, now in it's 4th edition. Kochi is an international exhibition of

contemporary art held in Kochi, Kerala. The biennale began on 12th December 2012, when the world was supposedly suppose to end once again as per Mayan predictions. The Biennale was also facing the usual jealousies and conspiracies such events face, but it took off successfully, with support from the Government of Kerala. The exhibition is set in spaces across Kochi, Muziris and surrounding islands with shows being held in existing galleries, halls, and site-specific installations in public spaces, heritage buildings and disused structures.

Indian and international artists exhibit artworks across a variety of mediums including film, installation, painting, sculpture, new media and performance art. Through the celebration of contemporary art from around the world, KMB seeks to invoke the historic cosmopolitan legacy of the modern metropolis of Kochi, and its mythical predecessor, the ancient port of Muziris.

Alongside the exhibition the Biennale offers a rich programme of talks, seminars, screenings, music, workshops and educational activities for school children and students just as Biennales around the world share this model. I visited the Biennale in 2012 and was pleasantly surprised that Bose Krishnamachari- the curator- knew about the musician/artist Maya Arugapalasm ( MIA) and included her work in the exhibition. However the KMB seems overtly trying to compete with the Venice biennale. Venice is and ancient city of trade, yes just as Kochi, but Indian art- ancient to the contemporary- cannot be an emulation of Western Art and its history.

Venice Biennale :

In 1999 and 2001, Harald Szeemann directed two editions in a row of the biennale (48th & 49th) bringing in a larger representation of artists from Asia and Eastern Europe and more young artists than usual, and expanded the show into several newly restored spaces of the Arsenale.

In 2007, Robert Storr became the first director from the United States to curate the Biennale (the 52nd), with a show entitled 'Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense'. The Swedish curator Daniel Birnbaum was artistic director of the 2009 edition, followed by the Swiss Bice Curiger in 2011.

My privilege has allowed me to visit the Venice Biennale several times, perhaps that is the reason that I maybe slightly critical of the contemporaneity of the Kochi Biennale. I visited the Biennale the year Robert Storr was the curator and some of the work that I saw made a great impact on me. For example the artist Sophie Calle's sensitive documentation of women's grief and emotions through video projections text and photos had a particular impact on me. In 2011,the year Bice Curiger was the curator, the experience from the time before held my expectations high. That year the exhibition seemed more relaxed and I took the opportunity to explore the city and its ancient history. At the biennale 2017 I attended a workshop at the studio of the printmaker Roman Tcherpak where I picked up the technique of monoprinting (single colour) from photographs. I made three monoprints at the workshop.

**Venice Biennale - 2015**

In July 2016 went to the Manifesta at Zurich, which I visited for the first time, on the suggestion of my supervisor Andrew Bick,to see the artist Andrea Éva Győri. The theme proposed for the Manifesta was about artists collaborating with professionals from a wide background. For Manifesta, Győri had developed a series of large-scale works on paper exploring the relation between the female orgasm and the fantasies behind masturbation. She took part in a practical course run by Dr. Schiftan, which works on both the physical and psychological levels of achieving orgasm.

The female orgasm, like the female eunuch, or however the sex of gender maybe humanized, makes a case for interpretative representations. In the film on Győri's project for the Manifesta-2015, young art student asked the artist how her work is different from pornography? Győri's reply was interesting because it was about pleasure that was not one sided, as Győri herself enjoyed the process of making the drawings instead of merely documenting an event. Győri had met some of her collaborators through the annual performance festival Porny Days—Film and Art Festival, that supports subversive, queer and humorous content. One of her sitters, a professional live artist, mentioned that the performance she did for Győri was unlike the experience of performing for a large audience. The performer probably meant that when it came to performing for a large audience it was more of an enactment than an actual reaction on the part of the performer leading to the question 'to what extent is the performance performative?'

**FILMLISTE / FILM LIS**

| Künstler / Artists | Filmtitel / Film List | Filmemacher / Filmmaker | Kunstdetektiv / |
|---|---|---|---|
| Torbjörn Rødland | Intra- & Extraoral | Marwan Abdalla | Chiara Fontana |
| Franz Erhard Walther | Halbierte Westen | Remo Schluep | Darya Akhmedova |
| Carles Congost | Simply The Best | Miloš Savić, Emanuel Hohl | Athena Grandis |
| Marco Schmitt | Xterminating Badges | Remo Schluep | Alessio Meier |
| Ceal Floyer | Romance | Stefan Sulzer | Martina Holenstein |
| Matyáš Chochola | Ultra Violet Ritual | Irem Anan | Stella Müller |
| Michel Houellebecq | Is Michel Houellebecq OK? | Yves Bächtiger, Nathalie Kamber, Eloy Martinez | Giulia Da Tos |
| Aslı Cavuşoğlu | Muthoscapes | Nadim Elhady | Jemina Bisang |
| John Arnold | Imbissy | Miloš Savić | Mandisha Roncoro |
| Mike Bouchet | The Zürich Load | Marwan Abdalla | Ashwini Anthony |
| Shelly Nadashi | Nesting Box | Eliane Bertschi | Cecilia Zoeller |
| Yin Xinzhu | Pass Through | Luis Balzer | Tiziano De Luca, K |
| Jennifer Tee | Ether Plane / Material Plane | Sarah Jensen | Samuel Jordenkha |
| Fermin Jiménez Landa | One Day Ahead | Joanna Wierig | Anton Krebs |
| Jon Kessler | The World Is Cuckoo (Clock) | Marwan Abdalla | Luisa Gfeller |
| Guillaume Bijl | Dog Salon Bobby | Sandhya Mirakar, Jessica Reust | Lina Künzi |
| Afi Thyn | In Search of A Monument | Bianca Dugaro | Luis Pfirter |
| Leigh Ledare | The Here and The Now (Zurich Groups 1:1) | Marwan Abdalla | Eliah Maag |
| Maurizio Cattelan | untitled | Valentin Mettler, Sidney Sutter | Olivier Petignat |
| Jon Rafmann | Open Heart Warrior | Yves Bächtiger, Nathalie Kamber, Eloy Martinez | Valentina D'Alessan |
| Marguerite Humeau | When Skies Above Where Not Yet Named | Hannes Cullum | Jan Eisenhart |
| Evgeny Antufiev | Eternal Garden | Alex Boëthius | Aleksandar Zivanovic |
| Teresa Margolles | Poker de Damas | Garrick Lauterbach | Laura Gutknecht |
| Jorinde Voigt | Stress und Freiheit | Natalyia Gurevich | Clara Plantiko |
| Lina Sizeemann | Die Reise des Samens | Miloš Savić | Nina Bisig |
| Santiago Sierra | Protected Beliding | Jonathan Daza Ospina | Laura Gutknecht |
| Andrea Eva Győri | VibrationHighWay | Remo Schluep | Eileen Good |

**Vibration Highway film on Andrea Eva Győri by Remo Schluep, Manifesta**

Digital Revolution, Barbican Centre -2014

The exhibition explored and celebrated the transformation of the arts through digital technology since the 1970s. Conrad Bodman was the guest curator. The rationale underpinning the show was an exploration of the breadth of digital creativity

in the 21st century. The year of the exhibition was a year that my practice perhaps was in its most experimental stage and the exhibition was timely for me, for updating my knowledge of the medium, since 2010.

The exhibition included thinkers, artist, designers, developers, engineers alike,- it was more of an exposition that included elements of game designand product design as well.

The show also examined the future creative coding, DIY, maker-culture, digital communities and creative possibilities offered by augmented reality, artificial intelligence, wearable technologies and 3D printing. The exhibition set up a few avenues that I could explore of self-representation combining digital elements. The idea of the self-representation process led to engaging with contemporary new media artists Amalia Ulman , Kate Cooper,  Jesse Darling and Jacolby Satterwhite.

**Jesse Darling**

**Jacolby Satterwhite from Electronic Superhighway**

In the research on Amalia Ulman, I came across two exhibitions that hosted her works from the project 'Performances and Excellences'. The first exhibition I visited was at the Tate Modern Gallery, in a show titled 'Performing for the Camera'. The exhibition, organized by Simon Baker, is "essentially a survey of the unique relationship between photography and performance, engaging with serious, provocative and sensational subjects, as well as humour improvisation and irony."(Baker, 2016).

The exhibition included artists such as Yves Klein, Yayoi Kusama, Francesca Woodman, Erwin Wurm and Hannah Wilke to Marcel Duchamp. Ulman's digital print was like a diary excerpt from about her online persona. The print was digital, mastered in post-production and had a pale, washed texture to it.

The next exhibition where I saw another of Ulman's prints was the exhibition at The Whitechapel Gallery, titled 'Electronic Superhighway'. (January 2016).

**Image from Electronic Super Highway (Artist Constant Dullart)**

One of the last exhibitions of the year 2017 and as my thesis came to an end was at the National Portrait Gallery in the May of 2017. It was a retrospect of Claude Cahun and Gillian Wearing.

Undated Diary Scans: 2013-2017



**Figure 1 (2017)**

This is a collage made from a single drawing. The drawing on paper is made on both sides of the sheet of paper that have been scanned individually and spliced in the center with multiple layers of alphabets and words from the original drawing.
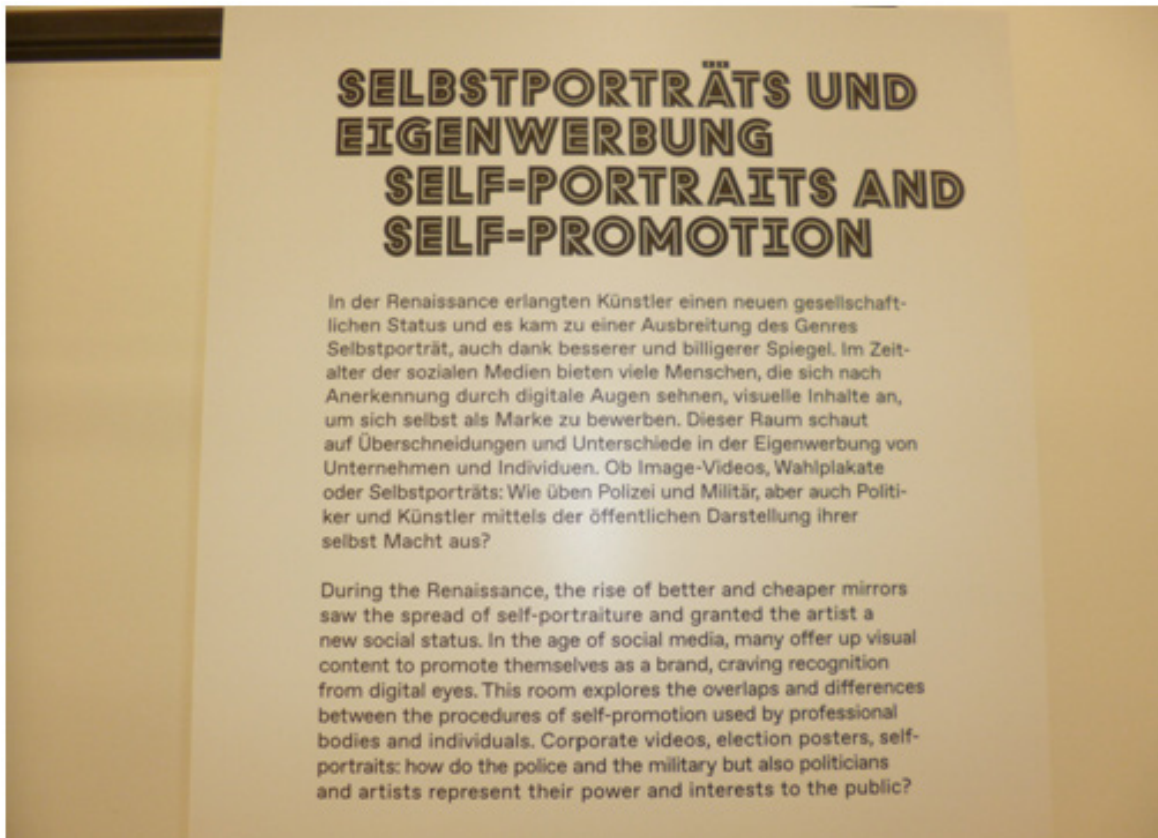
**Figure 2 (2016)**

This is a poster at one of the events at the Manifesta -16. The connection with this poster is based on my own research that mentions Stephen Greenblatt's text on the concept of self- presentation and reflection that began during the Renaissance period.
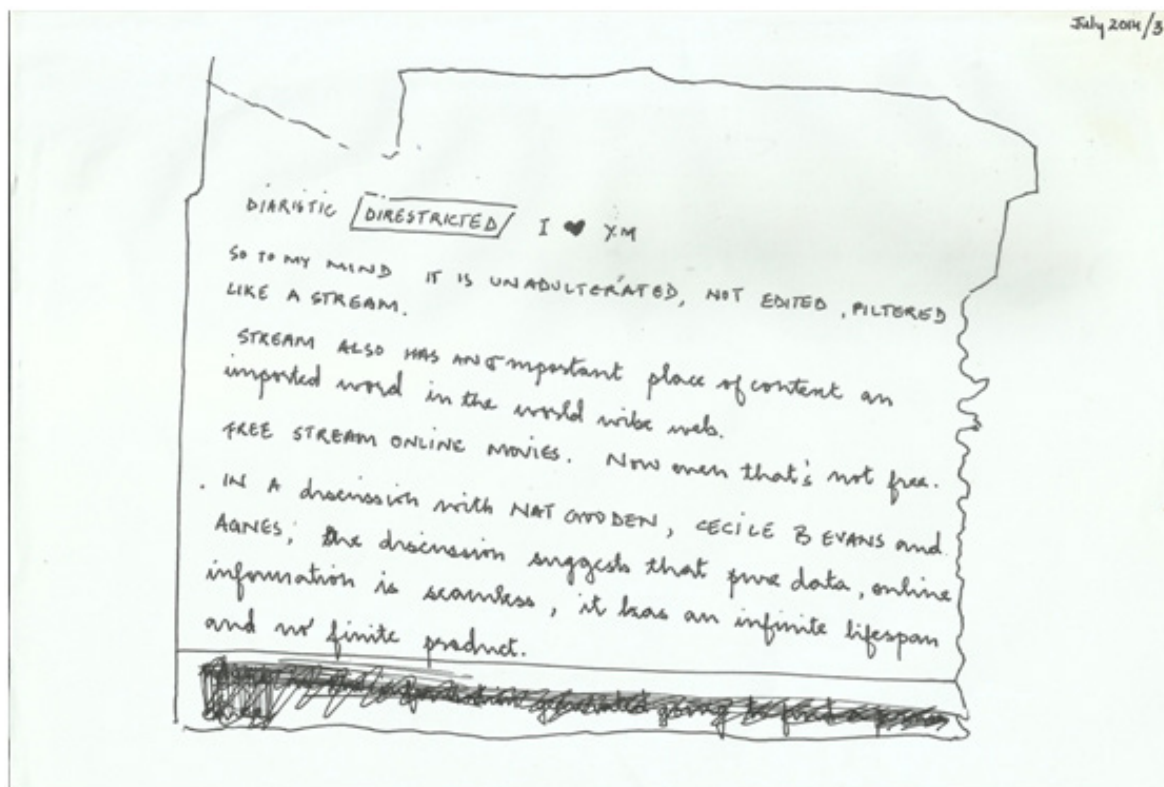
**Figure 3(2013)**

This is a diary entry after one of my tutorials in Cheltenham in the early stages of my research. The discussion was based on understanding the role of digital technology in providing an alternate platform for self-representation.
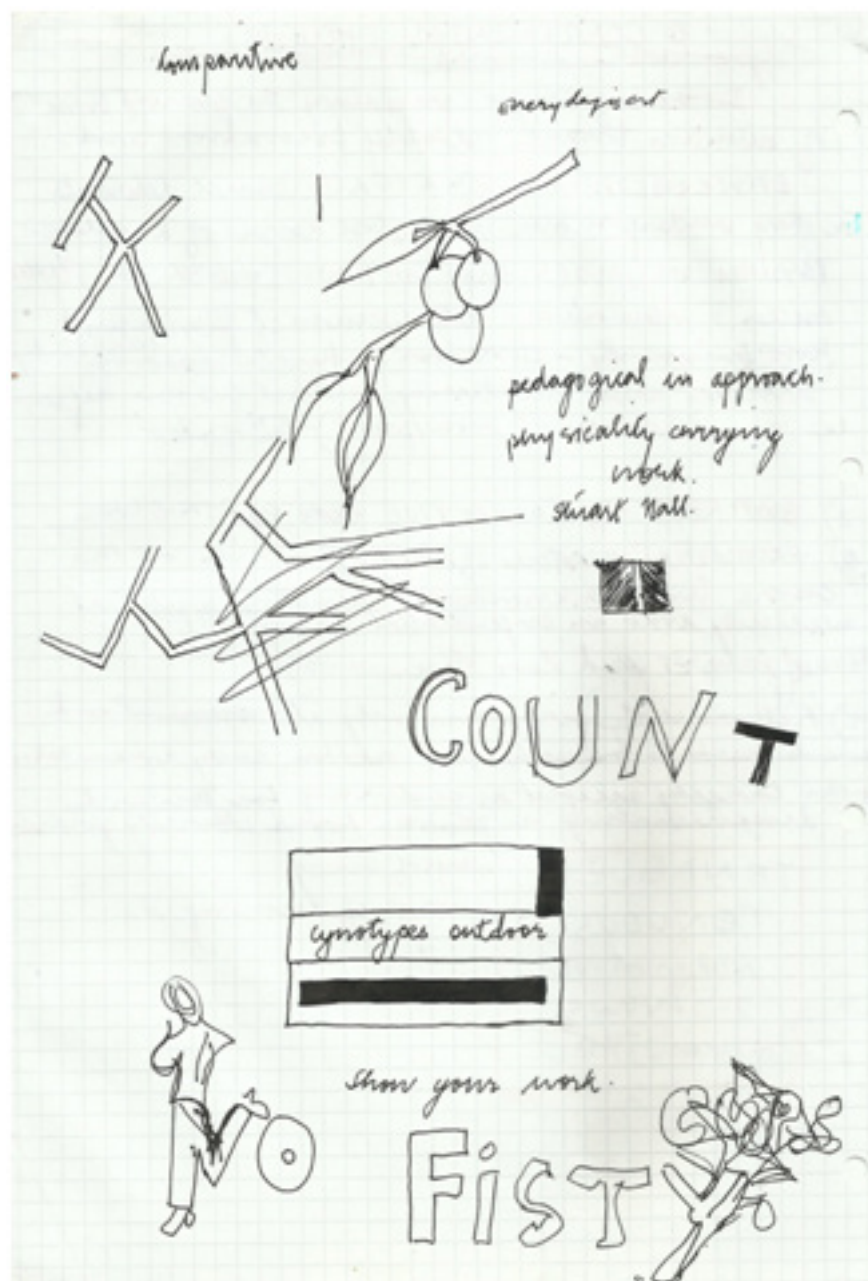
**Figure 4(2014)**

My love for picking up colloquial dialogues led me to the term 'fisty cuffs' in Cheltenham, just like 'mush' and 'cushty'. In Nottingham it was 'ay up me ducky' and 'scatter'. Here I was planning on making a few cyanotype prints.
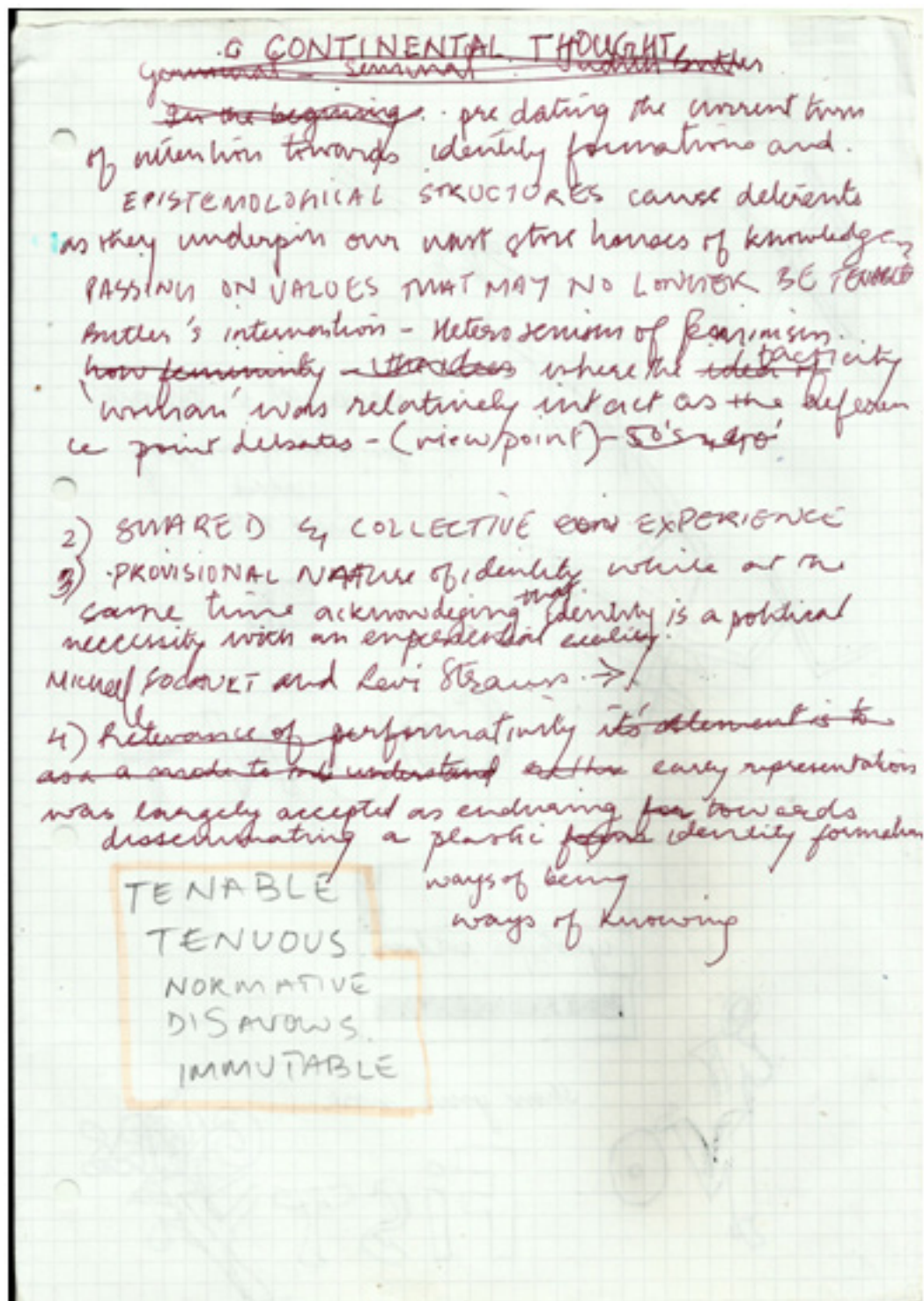
**Figure 5(2015)**

These are pointers that I made for what would constitute in my research design proposal. It was a study of classical European philosophers who have contributed to contemporary debates on identity and gender. My thoughts were locating the relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks that would aid in my research on self-representation.
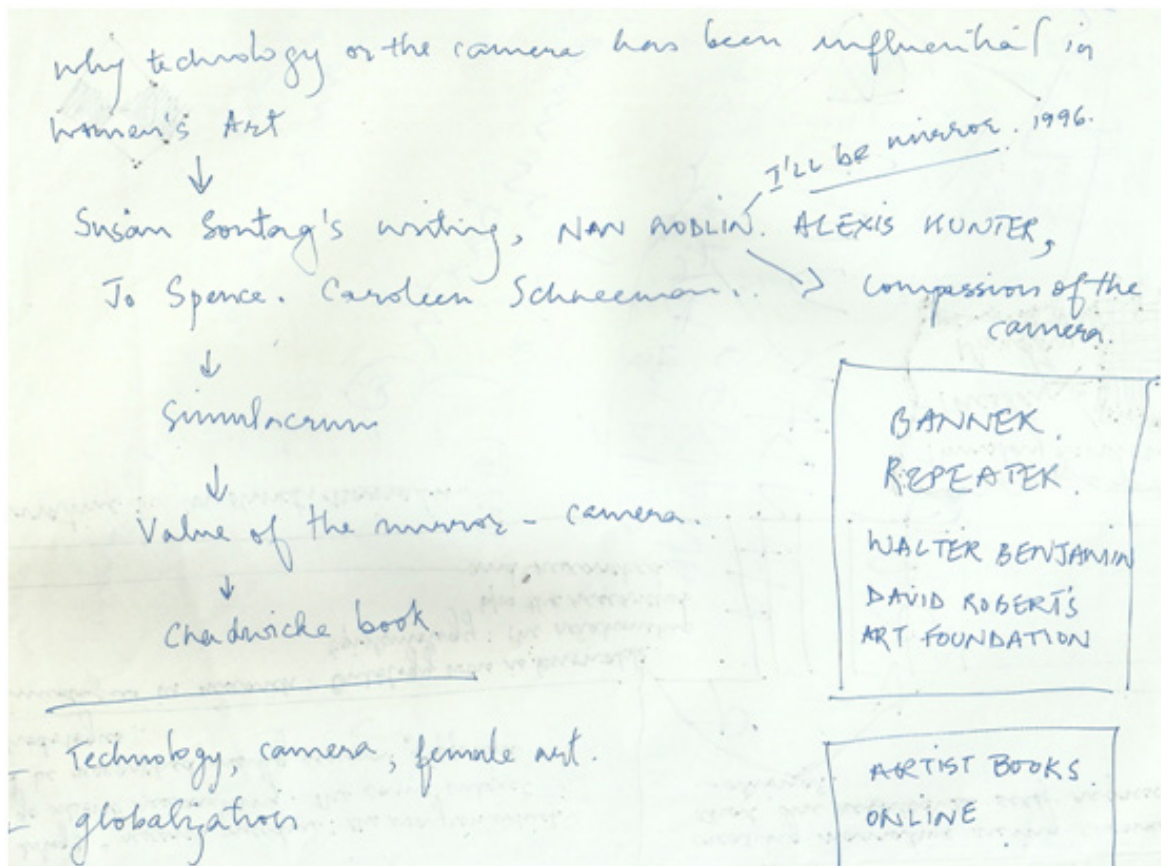
**Figure 6 (2015)**

In this diary entry the discussion was on the contemporary digital self-portrait that has become more democratized because of mobile recording devices. Some of the text consists of the names various authors, books, gallery spaces, and links that are engaged with technology, self-representation and the embodiment of femininity.

**Figure 7 (2016)**

Glasstress was an exhibition of artworks made in glass at the Venice academy of Fine Arts. I went to visit the exhibition because I wanted to see the art academy. The artworks were all made from glass and the craftsmanship was impeccable but I found the entire exhibition to be like a page from the world of Dorothea Tanning- intensely gothic and starkly black with a few other colours having a similar tonality to complement the colour black.

**Figure 8 (2015)**

This diary entry is when I began reading Indian authors such as Nivedita Menon and Amartya Sen. I was looking for a structure that is certainly bidding a farewell to post colonialism as well as exploring the feminist writings that were not from Western authors.

**Figure 9 (2015)**

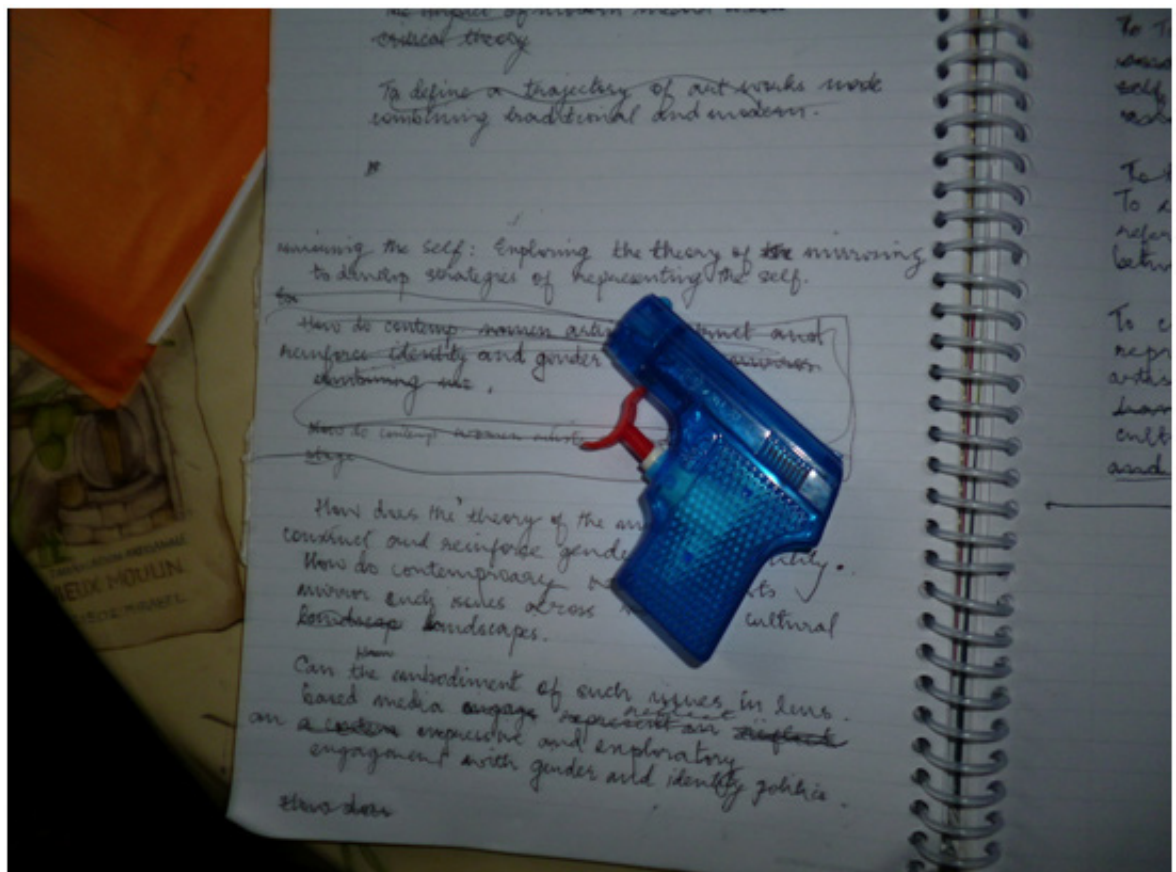In this image for me the reference to the gun is of a period of disillusionment I was facing during the middle of my thesis structuring and writing. The notes, the concepts and even the art works I had made until then felt trivial and facetious. Placing the toy gun in the middle of the frame was an artistic intervention expressing a sense of futility and the desire to abruptly end the struggle.

**Literature Review :**

Women artists are notable producers of self-portraits; almost all significant women artists have left examples of such work. They have historically embodied a number of roles within their self-portraiture.Many women artists during the Surrealist movement produced a significant corpus of self-images; un-paralleled amongst the work of their male colleagues, that continues to resonate in the practice of contemporary women artists.(Chadwick,1998).

The issue of identity is critical to my art practice, particularly self-representation. Post- Colonial and Feminist readings of self-representation have influenced the formulation of my views on gender and identity in my own work. These views are situated within my location as an Indian born, Western educated female artist. A person nurtured in an urban and cosmopolitan Indian ethos carries within him/her multiple identities, which at times renders him/her alienated even within familiar cultural terrains within their own country.  Such identities are dominant at different stages in an artist's practice.

Film and Photography as visual media in comparison to the conventional fine art mediums of drawing, painting and sculpture are nearly always representational art forms. In my practice the medium of film and photography adopt a reflective model in order to create a narrative that addresses the audience in the first person i.e. I, me, myself, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. For me this is a process of that has been possible because of the digital era.

The following publications are an indication of the existing literature on self-representation with which I have engaged during the course of the research. The literature consists of works by both academics as well as practitioners of art.

Edited by Whitney Chadwick, the book *Mirror Images – Women, Surrealism*

*and Self- Representation* was prepared in 1998, in conjunction with the eponymous exhibition that was "organized by and premiering at the MIT List Visual Arts Centre and travelling subsequently to the Miami Art Museum and to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art" (Chadwick, 1998 Foreword). The book is a broad examination of the influences of Surrealist art on the practices of contemporary artists.The book refers to works of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman, Francesca Woodman, Yayoi Kusama and Anna Mendietta. This book is not an exhibition catalogue but is a collection of critical essays which examine the works of the artist mentioned above in the light of how contemporary self-representational practices have evolved from or have been influenced by earlier practices. The articles re-examine art historical assumptions about gender, identity and self-representation. The book provides valuable insights about how to evaluate my own work vis-à-vis existing works of art.

The essays in the book, *Interfaces – Women /Autobiography/ Image / Performance(2002),* edited by Sidone Smith and Julia Watson, explore self-representations by 20th century women artists at the 'interface' of visual image, written text and performance. In the introductory essay both authors use Tracey Emin's works as a point of departure for discussing "women's self-representation as a performative act, never transparent, that constitutes subjectivity in the interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency"(Smith, 2002, p4). The authors also propose "a grammar" for describing the interface between text and visual. The authors have also theorized that the autobiographical in women's art is neither a "transparent mirroring" nor "narcissistic self-absorption". They suggest that autobiographical acts reveal the identity of the artist as either constructed or manipulated.

In the context of Smith's and Watson's ideas, my practice consists of

documenting my self in the everyday. The elements of the autobiographical in my work are not intended to be transparent representations of my identity; additionally my work calls attention to the constructedness of both the work and the artist.

In the preface to the book *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice(2004)*, the editor Michael Corris defines conceptual art as a loose collection of related practices that emerged during the 60's and 70's in the Anglophonic world, "de-emphasizing the importance of an art object and instead focusing on the role of language in shaping how society perceives an artwork, in turn shaping the knowledge of the world." Corris investigates the historical difficulty in defining conceptual art. Corris also suggests that it is necessary to consider artists outside the Anglo-American milieu in order to better understand the origins of what is considered conceptual art.

The collection of essays is intended to treat the "artistic milieu" of conceptual art as a "local specific environment rather than imperial centre radiating cultural lessons outwards towards a mute and subordinate margin"(Corris, 2004, p11). Corris also says that the essays in the book share a common point of view about conceptual art: "a set of practices that sought to enable a critical engagement with art, media, mass culture, and technology."

This volume is crucial to my own artistic development, in that, this book was my introduction to conceptual art during my undergraduate years. This was when I realized the absence of conceptual art from the pedagogy of art in India; it was not generally taught and in some institutions even conceptual thinking about art was discouraged. Thus in India the development of conceptual art has been at the periphery of mainstream practice.

The book was not just an introduction to conceptual to art but opened my eyes to the possibilities of representations beyond the predominant academic style,

in India, of figurative painting. Consequently, my own position as a contemporary Indian woman artist working with digital and lens based media,situates my practice on the periphery in India,while in global artistic practiceit wouldbe considered mainstream.

Amelia Jones' *Self/Image (2006)* is concerned with representations of the self in the works of contemporary artists who use new media and technology in their practice. The book analyzes works which range across film, video art, digital imaging and performance, investigating the complex relationships between these subjective expressions. Jones suggests that these questions related to self-representation are not restricted to the realm of art but are linked to the cultural socio-political formations of identity in a global capitalist frame work.

Jones says that the book "is about the drive in Euro-American culture to deploy technologies of visual representation to render and/or coonfirm the self […], and the way in which these technologies expose the inexorable failure of representaion to offer the self as coherent knowable entity"(Jones, 2006, p xvii). Jones introduces the term "self imaging", defining it as "the rendering of the self in and through technologies of representation" (Jones, 2006, p xvii). In the context of my preoccupation with self-representation, Amelia Jones' persepective is doubly relevant- both in terms of the technology and in term of what is represented. Therefore the term Amelia Jones uses- "self image"- is particularly appropriate while referrring to my own practice.

Online spaces such as Vimeo and Youtube have allowed me to host my digital works, to make them available to a wider, global audience extending beyond just the artistic networks. This is an attempt to problematize my identity as an artist, by creating an online profile, which is not limited by my physical and social location. In the book *Life on the Screen* (1995), Sherry Turkle speaks of the Internet as a space

for individuals to function beyond the confines of their respective identity and gender defined roles. It is not a book about computers, but rather about people who are using technology to re-evaluate notions of the self by exploring new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, politics and sex. In my own work, the digital medium is the creative space while the Internet serves as the location for dissemination of art and, through it, identity.

Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble (1990)* problematizes feminism in that feminism creates the concept of a 'natural' female gender as a category that can be occupied and as a place from which to contest patriarchy. Butler begins by questioning what constitutes the masculine and feminine by drawing attention to the non-binary nature of gender as a biological identity. Butler investigates the operations of social and cultural norms to identify the manner in which they create gender identities as an already existing state of being. She goes on to critique this cultural creation by showing how prohibitive and restrictive injunctions operate in tandem to enforce normative behaviour.[1] The most important notion that Butler introduces to the study of gender is that of performativity. According to Butler, gender and by implication all identity, is produced as a result of repeated social performance.

The performative production of identity informs a significant portion of my video works. There is a clear awareness of the presence of the camera, and I can be seen interacting with the eye of the lens; in this sense these recordings of my physical self are enacted performances. In different segments that make up the final video pieces, different performative fragments are depicted. The variety of performed identities is used to highlight the absence of a fixed personal self.

Laura Mulvey's seminal paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1999)* speaks about the pleasure associated with looking at the human form that acquires

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[1] Butler critiques Kristeva's 'body politics' as problematic because it creates the female body as pre-cultural.

manifestation in the cinema space. Mulvey's central focus is on how the pleasure in looking has been split between "active/male and passive/female". She also comments upon how the gaze of the male protagonist is duplicated in the gaze of the viewer/ audience. Mulvey concludes that the task in cinema then would be to "free the look of the camera", therefore freeing the female subject/body from being restricted to providing a subject for the male gaze. The subversion of the cinematic gaze, which Mulvey points towards, is indicated in my own works. The gaze of the camera in my works mirrors my own narcissistic gaze; in my works I switch between being behind the camera and being directly in front of the camera. The gaze, whether masculine or of the viewer/audience, is subsumed by the overarching gaze of the artist looking at her self.

Moving on to the Indian references within this research, I have looked at the works of authors who engage with questions specific to the Indian milieu.

Nivedita Menon's book *Seeing like a Feminist(2012)* is an attempt to present an understanding of feminism based upon experiences as a woman in India specifically, and Asia in general. Menon's work refers to case studies, examples, and cultural contexts that are primarily Indian in order to generate a feminist position, which is 'non-Western' in character. Menon claims that her perspective "runs counter to much normative feminist wisdom" (Menon,2012p.215)

This work by Menon is in consonance with my own works as an artist, insofar as it posits that responses and perspectives with respect to female identity can be individual and unique. This book has aided the artist in understanding and developing her own position within her specific cultural contexts. Menon makes the case for contemporary India as grappling with its colonial past including the advent of European modernity. Therefore to engage with gender and identity politics from a Western gaze is the problem of modernity in Indian social theory.

Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian (2005)* deals with Indian history, culture and identity. He speaks of the plurality of identity in the context of India, especially given the manner in which a national identity is sought to be achieved. Sen observes that identity is "quintessentially plural" (Sen, 2005, p352), and that it is also a function of the choices available to an individual in a given cultural and socio-economic context. Sen's work is crucial to understanding the complexity of representing my hybrid cultural identity that switches between cultural spaces in India and the West. This complexity accentuated by the visual multiplicity in the body of works.

David Kinsley's *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine (1997)* presents an introduction to an analysis of the representations of ten goddesses (Mahavidyas) who are part of non- Brahmanical Hinduism. He speaks of how these goddesses are identified with a spiritually liberating experience in Hindu Tantric practices. Kinsley suggests that these "frightening, dangerous, and loathsome" goddesses who threaten social order are liberating precisely because the aim of the worshippers of these goddesses "is to stretch one consciousness beyond the conventional, to break away from approved social norms, roles, and expectations" (Kinsley, 1997, p251). These goddesses then provided the ideal contextual platform for me to explore the iconography of the female form in the Indian cultural context. In addition because of their marginal status, the Dus Mahavidyas indicate possibilities of occupying non-traditional female identities, which is a task that I have attempted in my own re-workings of the iconographies of the goddesses. The Mahavidyas present themselves as non-Western models of representation that do not also conform to mainstream Indian cultural contexts, thus providing liminal or in-between spaces through which I can negotiate the boundaries of self-representation and representation in general. By focusing on the Mahavidyas, my digital collages seek

to occupy a space that falls between India and the West, and at the same time is an amalgamation of the self and the divine.

In addition to the works detailed above I have also consulted the following publications: *Representation(2013)* edited by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon. This textbook is designed to help students critically analyze representation in various media, particularly from a postcolonial perspective. I have intended to look at representation in the context of my personal and lived experiences. My global position, located between India and the West, for me, requires renewal/confirmation, conformity, and contestation of post-colonial identities.

The book *Feminist Literary Theory (2011)* edited by Mary Eagleton, is considered to be one of the classic texts of feminist literary studies. The newest section in the book "investigates dynamically evolving dialogues between feminism and postcolonialism, diaspora narratives and transculturalism."[2]

Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935)* proposes a new theory of art based on the assumption that art which is mechanically reproducible loses the quality of the 'originality'. Benjamin speaks of how the consumption of art has progressed from being within the private sphere to being displayed in a public space. This concept has become even more relevant in the age of digital production and reproduction. In the context of exhibition of my own works, Benjamin's observation are relevant because putting my work in the public digital space has allowed my work to be disseminated to larger audience.

Michael Rush's *New Media in Art (2005)* discusses artists who have influenced the world of art making through performance and installation art, digital photography, virtual reality and other such media. The book has enabled me to understand ideas related to the making of art in non- canonical ways. The book has introduced me to

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[2] Comment by Jane Dowson in (Eagleton, M. 2011)

the work of women artists, such as Pipilotti Rist, who are part of contemporary post-

modernity, and who also work with the variety of media that I also use but are not

part of the artist conversations in contemporary Indian art.

**Documentation of the Thesis Exhibition held on 10th July 2018.**

The candidate's exhibition as part of the Thesis was held at the Hardwick Gallery of the Department of Media, Art and Technology, University of Gloucestershire on 10th July 2018 .

The following works were exhibited:

**1)      Lenticular prints (four)**



Image-1, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 12"x8", 30.48x20.32 cms., April 2018

Image-2, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 12"x8", 30.48x20.32 cms.,

April 2018



Image-3, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 12"x8", 30.48x20.32 cms.,

April 2018

Image-4, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 12"x8", 30.48x20.32 cms.,

April 2018

**2) Lenticular Prints (two)**



Image-5, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 36"x 24", 91.44 x 60.96

cms., April 2018



Image-6, Untitled, Digital Collage with Lenticular Printing, 36"x24", 91.44x60.96
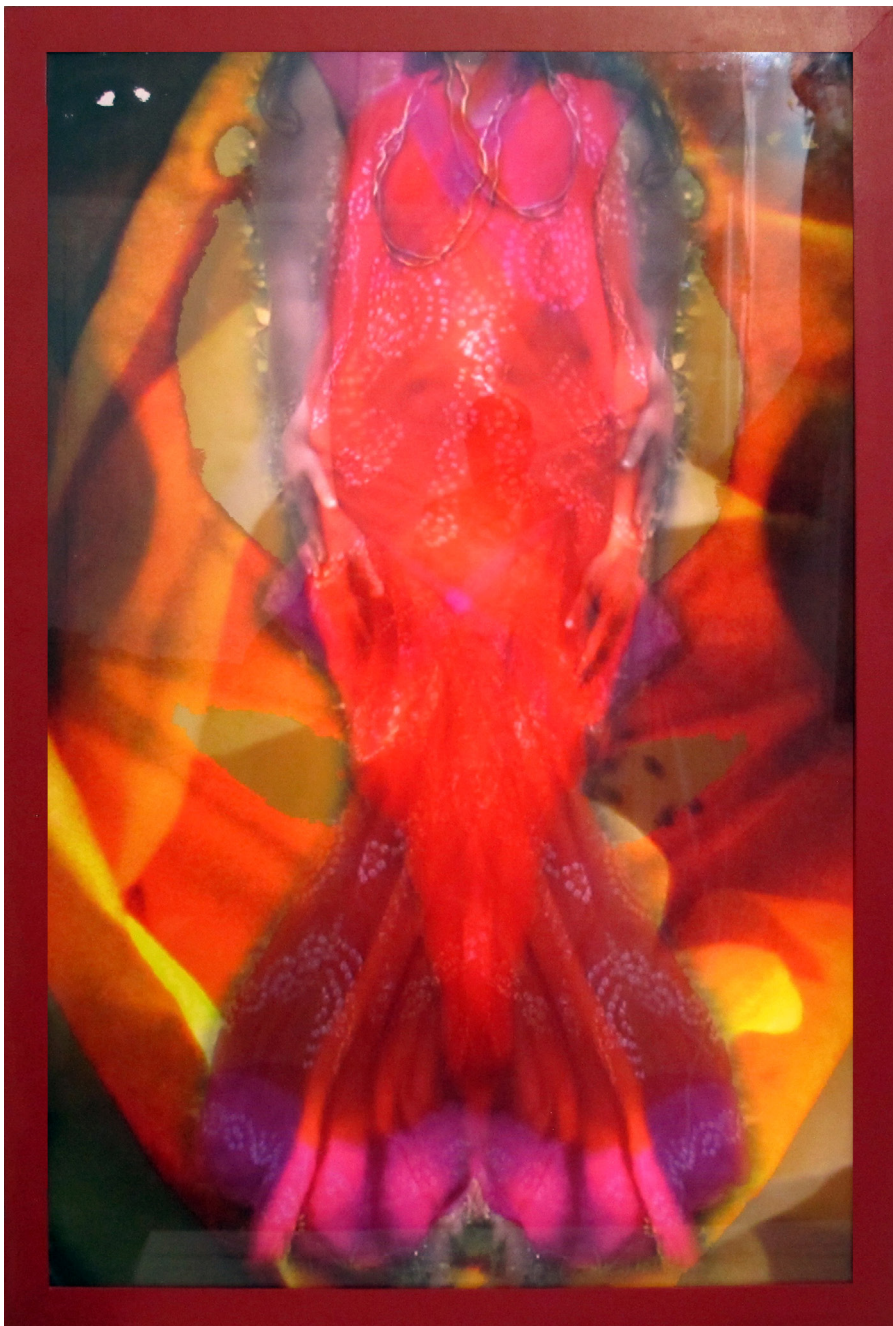
cms., April 2018

**3) Lightbox (one)**



Image 7, 'Saptamatrikas', Digital Collage printed on translight, mounted on light box, 47"x32"x6", 119.38x81.28x15.54 cms., May 2018
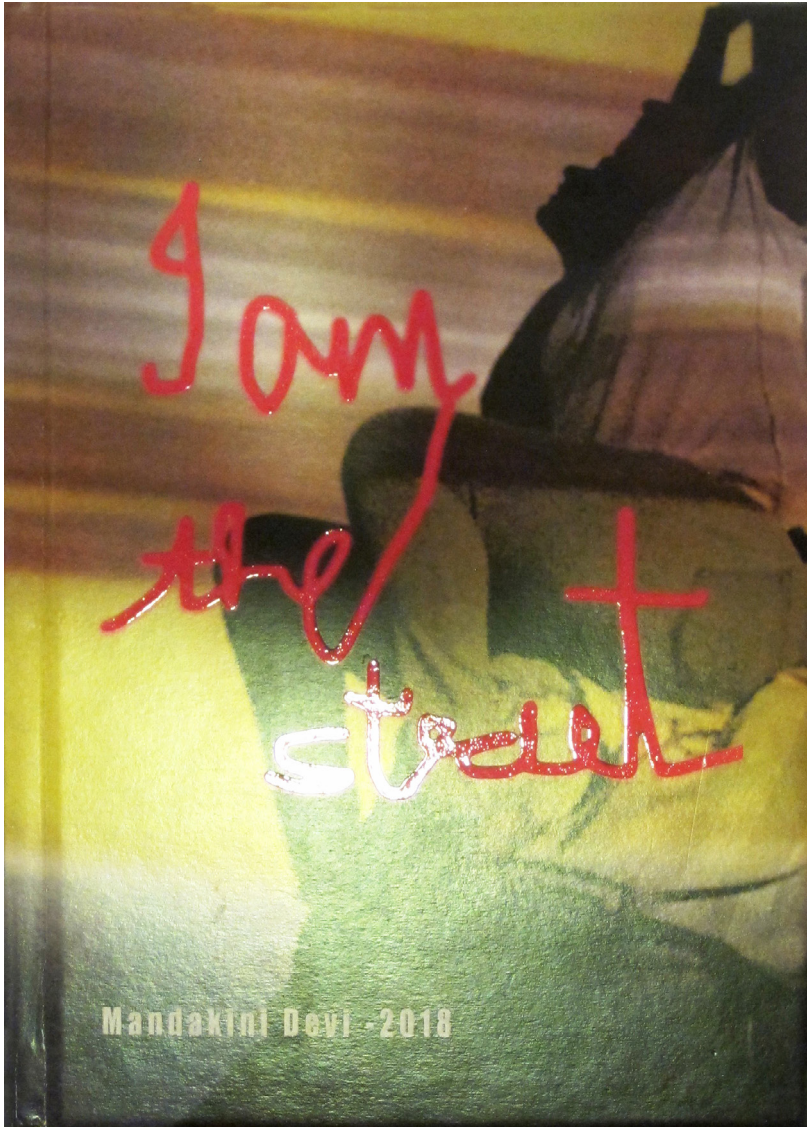
**4)** **Photobook (one)**



Image -8, 'I am the Street', 100 pages, Edition of 5, Digital Printing, Hard Cover,

Photographs and Text, 8.5"x6.1", 21.59x15.50 cms., May 2018

**5)** **Video projection of film –** 'Failure to Launch', (duration 4 minutes 26 seconds, copy of film included in Showreel-2)

**6)** **Video projection of animated collages** – 'Dus Mahavidyas', (duration 6 minutes 29 seconds, copy of video included in Showreel-2)

The two video projections were placed in the same room. The videos were synchronized to play in sequence with a gap of 30 seconds between each showing.

The video 'Failure to Launch'has a soundtrack consisting of an interplay of dialogue and music, and the video 'Dus Mahavidyas' is a silent projection on to a structure of Perspex mirrors revolving at 3rpm. The rotating device consists of a mast with arms on which double-sided Perspex mirrors on swivels were suspended. There was therefore a "dual projection" effect, with a projection on the screen as well the reflections from the rotating mirrors moving on the walls of the exhibition room.

The lenticular prints were wall- mounted. The light box was mounted at right angles to the wall of the exhibition room, projecting into the room.

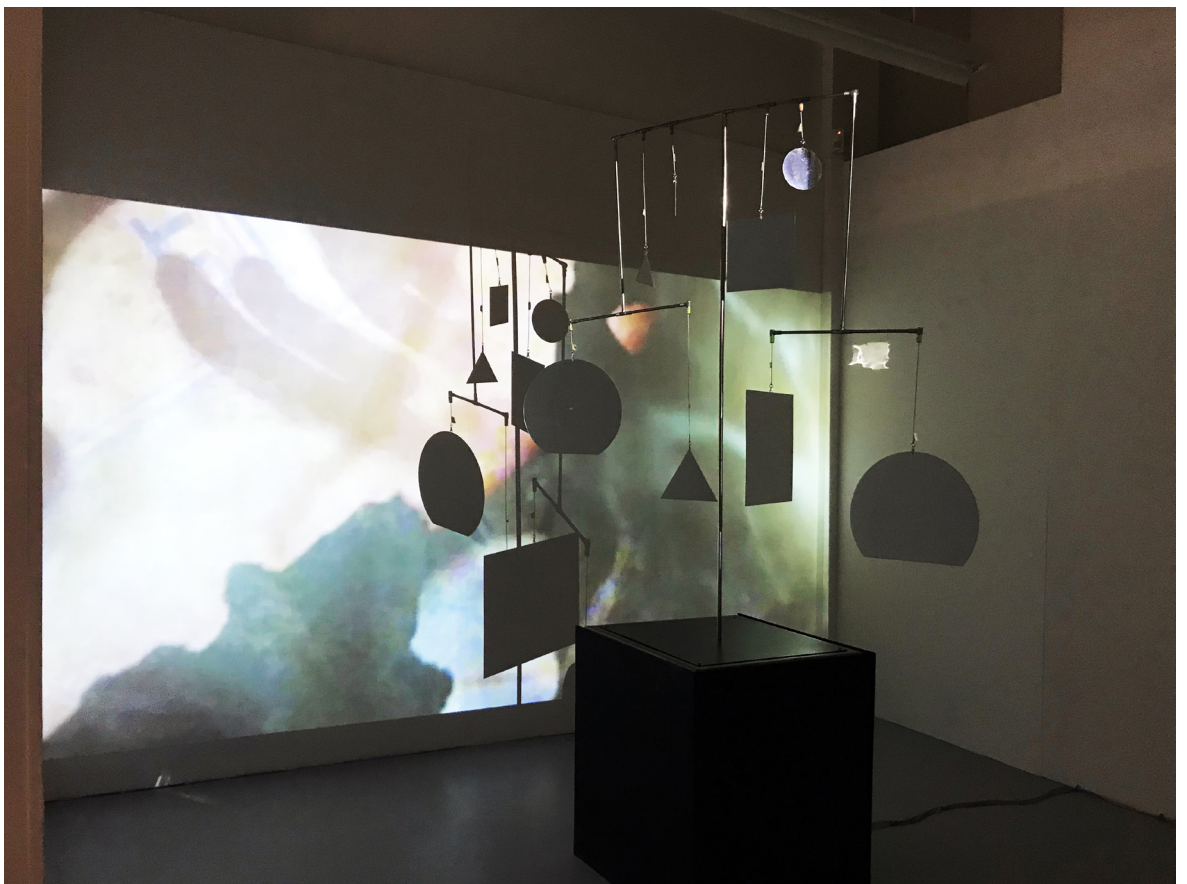**Photographs of the exhibition are shown below:**



Photobook and Lenticular Prints on the entrance walls of the inner gallery



Light box – 'Saptmatrikas' – installed opposite, facing the red wall

Lenticular Prints on the wall opposite to the entrance of the inner gallery



'Dus Mahavidyas' in the inner gallery projected on the rotating device as well as the

screen
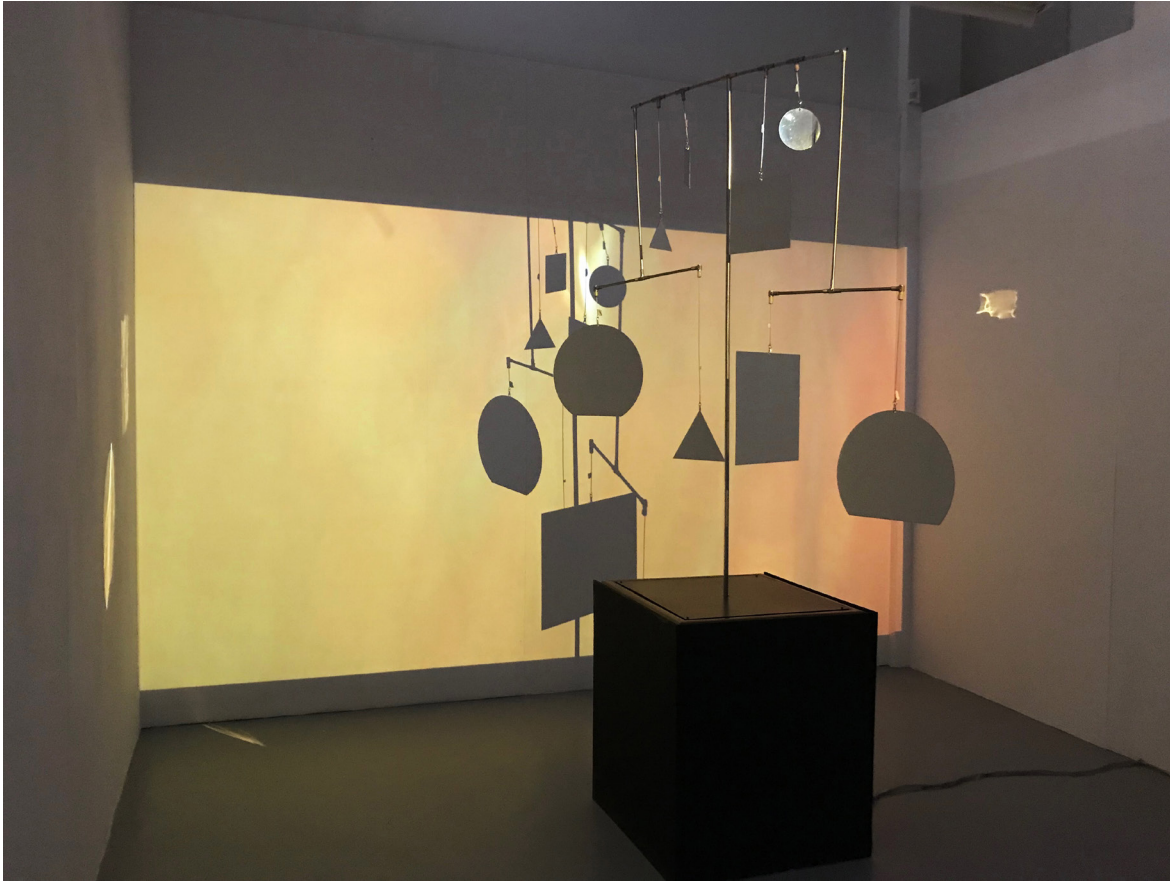
'Dus Mahavidyas', with the rotating mirrors, in a different perspective



'Failure to Launch' projected in the inner gallery

**7) A short video recording** of the exhibition is also included in Showreel-2

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