



Onsite [at] OCAD U

2012

## Twinning Artists Twinning Cities: Avalon (Bangalore and Toronto) [Exhibition Catalogue]

Reeve, Charles

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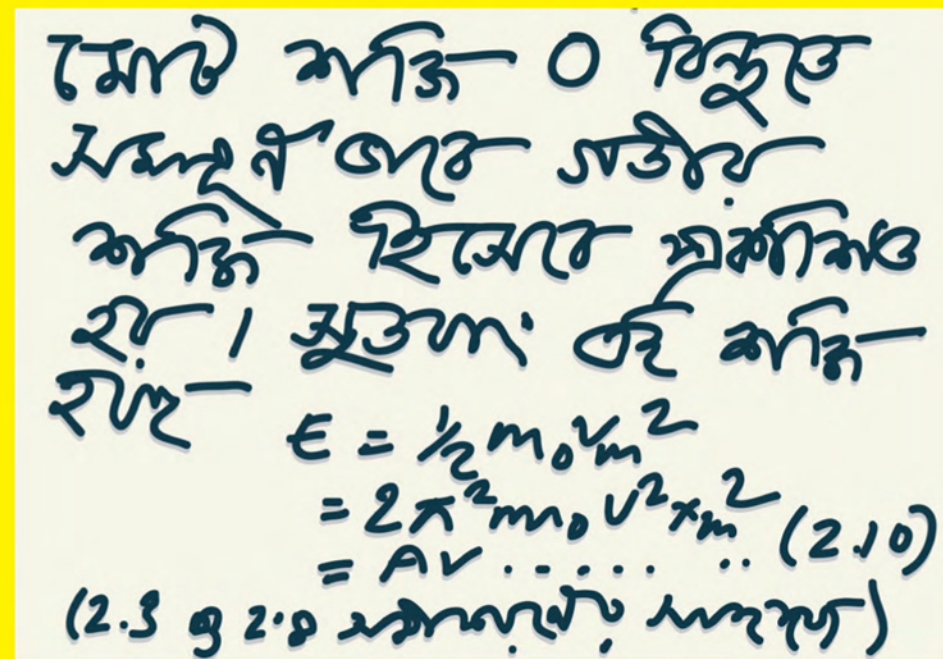
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## BIOS

**Abhishek Hazra** is a visual artist based in Bangalore. He graduated from the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology. His work explores the intersections between technology and culture through animated shorts and performance pieces that often integrate textual fragments drawn from real and fictional scenarios. He is also interested in the social history of scientific practices in colonial India.

**Oliver Husain** is a filmmaker and artist based in Toronto. After studying film and art in Germany and India, he was founding member of two collectives, the performance troupe Da Group and the music video production Husain Klöfkom. His experimental films and videos often expand into the cinema or gallery space as screening performances or installations. Using multiple formats and genres, his work proposes a re-imagining of social formations and normative spaces. Recent solo exhibitions include the Art Gallery of York University and Susan Hobbs Gallery. In 2011 his work was included in shows at Portikus Frankfurt, ICA Philadelphia and the National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta.

Artist, composer and educator **Yashas Shetty** is an Artist in Residence and faculty at the Centre For Experimental Media Arts at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology and an artist in residence at the National Centre For Biological Sciences (NCBS). His practice includes installation, sound, software and biotechnology, and bridges art and science. He also creates dialogues between scientists, artists and the larger community. He has conducted workshops and taught in colleges in India and abroad. He is developing an open source framework and community for artists and designers working with living organisms.

**Bharathesh G D** is a video and performance artist based in Bangalore where he studied art history and philosophy. His practice is often based on collaboration and explores various disciplines such as installation, public art, sound, art outreach programs, and video.

In 2003, curator and filmmaker **Shai Heredia** founded Experimenta, an international festival for moving-image art in India that has become a significant forum for artists' film and video. Heredia has curated experimental film programs at major venues worldwide, including the Tate Modern; the Berlin International Film Festival; the Images Festival, Toronto; and EXIS, Seoul; and Light Cone's nomadic Scratch Projections, Paris. Her latest film, *I Am Micro*, co-directed with Shumona Goel, has screened at the Guggenheim Museum (Berlin/NYC), the Rotterdam Film Festival, and the Images Festival. Heredia has also worked with the India Foundation for the Arts, where she made artist grants and conceptualized a program towards creating the first curatorial studies course in India.

**Charles Reeve** is Associate Professor of Liberal Studies and Art at OCAD University, where he also is curator. His curatorial work includes solo exhibitions by Rirkrit, Karim Rashid, Roger Ballen, Rosalind Nashashibi and Adel Abdessemed.

### Covers:

Cinema Projector Slide from the collection of Bharathesh G D

### Left :

Abhishek Hazra, *An Inexhaustible Energy Source Derived from the Ionic Gradient in the Pocosphere (after N-S polar reversal)*, 2012  
(Image courtesy of GALLERYYSKE)

## EVENTS

### OPENING EVENTS: THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

**12:00 p.m.:** Panel Discussion featuring the artists and guest curator Shai Heredia.

**6 to 9 p.m.:** Opening Reception

### FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 1 P.M.

Film Screening curated by Shai Heredia. This program of archival films (from the late 1950's to 1970's) reflects upon independent India's pursuit of modernity through an inspired engagement with science, technology and spirituality. These rarely seen films offer a historical context to the fantasy of *Avalon*.

### THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 6:30 P.M.

Curator's Tour with Charles Reeve.

### THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 6:30 P.M.

Gallery Tour with Pamila Matharu.

Pamila Matharu is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary visual artist and educator. Her current project, *Future Utopias* is featured in the group exhibit *Streaming Alterity* at the Art Gallery of Peterborough until March 4<sup>th</sup>.

### SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 4:00 P.M.

*HEINZ* performance by Oliver Husain.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Susan Hobbs at Susan Hobbs Gallery; GALLERYYSKE; Carol Weinbaum, Mimi Joh and everyone else at Partners in Art; the Onsite advisory board chaired by Michael Haddad; Onsite Assistant Curator, Lisa Deanne Smith; and especially my co-curator, Shai Heredia, and the artists: Abhishek Hazra, Oliver Husain, Yashas Shetty, Bharathesh G D.

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Saturday and Sunday, noon to 6 p.m.

*Admission to the gallery and all related events is free.*

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**TWINNING ARTISTS  
IMINING CITIES:**

## Avalon (Bangalore and Toronto)

**JANUARY 26 TO JUNE 3, 2012  
ONSITE [AT] OCAD UNIVERSITY**





TWINNING ARTISTS  
IMINING CITIES:

# Avalon (Bangalore and Toronto)

Curated by  
Shai Heredia and Charles Reeve

Right:  
Bharathesh G D, *GOD\**  
conditions apply (video  
still), 2009



To say that Avalon doesn’t exist would be an understatement. Most obviously, as an island in King Arthur’s legend, Avalon is imaginary. Beyond that, marketers seeking utopian overtones have projected so much onto it that a fog obscures any literary allusions Avalon once conjured. It’s a song and a record by Roxy Music, as well as being songs by Sigor Rós, Al Jolson and Lovebug. It’s also at least three bands (including a Christian rock band and a duo of Swedish-Congolese brothers), a car, several books and movies, assorted businesses, schools, and other organizations and — inevitably — numerous real places (like Newfoundland’s southeastern point).

However, another way that Avalon doesn’t exist is as a nightclub that once — but no more — occupied the space that this exhibition inaugurates as the new home of Onsite [at] OCAD University. This fact, uncovered by Oliver Husain, brings together this show’s title, theme and location.

A key term in weaving together these strands is “fantasy” — which all nightclubs project to some degree, with Avalon at this spectrum’s flashier end. Its Internet chat features photos of piled-on make-up and piled-up coiffures beside comments like “OMG I WANNA TAKE ALL OF THE MODELS HOME” (the over-the-topness, along with pervasive promotional language, makes one suspect Avalon staff wrote them), suggesting that its patrons lived — or imagined themselves living — the drug-fuelled decadence of the 1980s television show *Miami Vice* twenty years later.

However, fantasy is an expansive realm. At one end, we find the live-for-the-moment, supercharged version projected by Avalon the nightclub. At the other is what the artists here call the “place where art confronts the science of modernity” — a site of pragmatism and earnestness, or of the exploration of these qualities and their interconnections.

For, behind its curtain of progress and disinterest, modernity relied on fantasy. This reliance can be elusive, since history focuses on winners and crazy ideas seem sane when they work. But modernity’s failures clarify this connection. For instance, what about Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome, installed here by Yashas Shetty? The term “geodesic” refers to the mathematical principle of articulating the shortest line between two points on a curved surface. Fuller’s reliance on this principle infuses a sense of rationality and efficiency into the dome, along with a whiff of cosmic inevitability stemming from the allusion to the Earth in the first syllable of the word “geodesic” — a reference derived from the fact that “geodesic” also refers to math and geography concerned with our planet’s shape and area.

In the end, though, neither the rationality nor the cosmic legacy behind the dome’s claim to be a hyper-efficient (and hyper-modern) enclosure of large spaces prompted more than a widespread sense that it looks cool. Like Fuller’s three-wheeled car, the Dymaxion, the geodesic dome embodies a belief in the solubility of all problems — a belief that now seems quaint if not nutty.

No doubt twentieth-century architecture has produced its share of loons, as Oliver Husain’s mediations on the architect KM Heinz (the backdrop for his new film *Item Number*) emphasizes. But is this fair? After all, Heinz hardly was alone in thinking that European legacies could travel to colonial contexts with neither adaptation nor resistance. And was Fuller’s vision that our planet be dotted with hyper-efficient — and striking — uniform structures, scaled up or down as needed, any loopier than the idea that a moving image could be transmitted electronically to living rooms everywhere?

Yet, because it succeeded, television seems ridiculous only as it fades into obsolescence. “What were they thinking?” we might wonder as we gaze at Bharathesh G D’s cacophonous pile of monitors. Already, televisions appear inefficient, overblown and ineffective, their clunky structures and low-resolution images making them seem more like relics of Soviet engineering than like the height of Western technology. But if we’re dismissive, we’re also sheepish: few people lived in domes, but we all watched television, and its passing marks less the decline of the dream it embodied than of the technology it required. Why pay to watch your favourite program on a hulking, expensive monitor when you can do so for free on your laptop while chatting on-line?

Right: Oliver Husain, *Item Number* (film still), 2011.



However, this shift still flows from the belief in rationality and progress that lies at modernity’s heart — though to stay current, we’ll need a new description of this change, since “modern to postmodern” already feels passé. Moreover, as Shai Heredia’s program of science-related films and Abhisekh Hazra’s window treatment show, whether that belief seems perspicacious or loony comes back to whether, long term, a vision turns out to be correct. Thirty years ago, Alan Moore described a world ensnared by a global computer network; fifteen years ago, Bill Gates announced that by 2011 computers would recognize their owners’ voices and faces.<sup>1</sup> Here we are, and what once seemed like excessive paranoia in Moore and unlikely optimism in Gates now look like astonishing foresight in both.

One reason to examine modernity’s vicissitudes, therefore, is that it’s still with us. Reflecting on modernity’s relevance during a moment that saw itself as postmodernity’s height, Andreas Huyssen wrote, “There seems to be a law of modern culture: the more emphatic the obituary, the sooner the resurrection.”<sup>2</sup> And so it has turned out. Principled rhetoric aside, the West’s adventurism of the last fifteen years clearly, as David Harvey shows, returns to what Marx called “primitive accumulation” — the military deployments to secure natural resources replay capitalism’s initial stages by enclosing for private ownership what previously was public.<sup>3</sup> Lots of things — some good, some bad — flowed from what Saskia Sassen called the recent “savage sorting”: healthy companies bankrupted, irresponsible companies bailed out, second-tier economies floating to the top as first-tier economies flounder. <sup>4</sup> But the basic structures and beliefs persist. Ridiculous though it is — and it is, among other things, ridiculous — modernity lives on.

— Charles Reeve

ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Tom Lamont, “V for the voice of the people,” *The Guardian Weekly* 186:3 (December 30, 2011): 28-29; Charles Arthur, “Voice recognition: beam it up, Scotty,” *The Guardian Weekly* 185(26): 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Memories of Utopia,” in *Twilight Memories: marking time in a culture of amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 94.

<sup>3</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Saskia Sassen, “A Savage Sorting of Winners and Losers, and Beyond,” in *Aftermath: a new global economic order?* Ed. Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derluguian (New York: New York U. P., 2011): 21-38.