

ART CONNECT

An IFA Publication

Volume 6

Number 2

July-December 2012

Rs.100



Contents

EDITORIAL

3

CARTOON AS ETHNOGRAPHY: 'LITTLE WOMEN' IN A BIG WORLD

Gokul TG

4

GENDER AND THE DOCUMENTARY FILM: CAPTURING A SENSED REALITY

Paromita Vohra

16

PRETTY MEN: GOLDEN AGE OF THE FEMALE IMPERSONATOR

Prakash Garud

(Translated by Usha Rao)

42

WRITING DESIRE: THE BODY AS LOOKING GLASS

Joshua Muyiwa

56

NOTES FROM THE MARGINS: THE FEMININE VOICE OF THE GHATAM

Sumana Chandrashekar

68

In Conversation

CREATING THEATRE SPACES: CONNECTING ART TO LOCAL LIFE

Atul Pethe and Waman Pandit with Ashutosh Potdar

86

ArtConnect

An IFA Publication

Volume 6, Number 2

July to December 2012

Editor

C.K. Meena

Design

Mishta Roy

Printed by B Narahari, published by Anmol Vellani on behalf of India Foundation for the Arts and printed at Manipal Press Ltd., Press Corner, Tile Factory Road, Manipal, Udipi, Karnataka - 576 104 and published at India Foundation for the Arts, 'Apurva', Ground Floor, No 259, 4th Cross, Raj Mahal Vilas IInd Stage, IInd Block, Bangalore - 560 094. Editor - C.K. Meena

Photo and Text Credits

Gokul TG, Ramu Aravindan, Paromita Vohra, Deepa Dhanraj, Navroze Contractor, Reena Mohan, Lalji Gokhale, K.U. Mohanan, Saba Dewan, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University, Sameera Jain, Prakash Garud and the Garud family, Joshua Muiwa, Sumana Chandrashekar, Sukanya Ramgopal, Atul Pethe, Waman Pandit, Ashutosh Potdar

Cover Image

Female impersonator Hammigi Nilkanthappa as Jambuvati in the Kannada play *Chavatiya Chandra*, staged in the early twentieth century by Garud Sadashivarao's company, Sri Dattatreya Sangeeta Nataka Mandali. Photograph courtesy Prakash Garud and the Garud family.

All efforts have been made to contact and receive permission from all copyright holders. Any source not acknowledged will be credited in subsequent issues.

Editorial

Gender is the string that ties together most pieces in this issue, which are written by practitioners of theatre, music, film, poetry and cartooning, and span almost a hundred years of history.

A very twenty-first-century perspective of gender informs Joshua Muyiwa's deeply personal essay in which he speaks of his obsession with the body—"a map on which we can pin down moments that made us". Tracing the journey of his poetry, which is also a journey of self-discovery, he describes how he has fashioned the man of his longings from the clay of his own experience.

We step back in time from the bold, colourful eroticism of Muiywa's work to the muted sepias of understated sexuality in the early twentieth-century images of Prakash Garud's photo-essay. Garud, a third-generation theatre practitioner, has retrieved, from his family album, old photographs of theatre productions. Casting his eye on the female characters, which were usually played by male actors because 'decent' women did not act in those days, Garud reflects on the status of women in theatre and recalls some of the talented female impersonators of the Indian stage.

In IFA grantee Paromita Vohra's now-playful now-trenchant analysis of the Indian documentary, we discover an exciting though hitherto unwritten chapter that begins where formal history ends. Vohra dwells on the myriad artistic forms that broke the template of the 'issue-based' political documentary which privileges the collective over the individual. The makers of these new, biographical films bring out non-literal meaning and make use of performance to evoke a 'sensed' reality.

When IFA grantee Gokul TG documented the award-winning filmmaker G. Aravindan's weekly comic strip of the 1960s and 1970s, *Cheriy Manushyarum, Valiya Lokavum* (Little Men, Big World), he was struck by its immense popularity among women in particular. This led him to take a closer look at the female characters in the strip. Gokul finds that the auteur was compassionate and non-judgmental in his portrayal of the female characters, and that he tied their personal histories to the history of their times.

Sumana Chandrashekar, a Carnatic vocalist and a ghatam player, attempts to understand the constructs of gender and hierarchy within the realm of Carnatic music, and especially within percussion, through the inspiring story of her guru, Sukanya Ramgopal, who is India's pioneering, professional female ghatam player. Chandrashekar finds that Sukanya's musical journey has been a quest for identity for herself and her instrument.

We end this issue with an interview: Ashutosh Potdar in a lively conversation with Marathi theatre practitioners Atul Pethe and Waman Pandit on the thriving theatre network in the small towns and villages of Maharashtra—a network that has succeeded in fostering a larger theatre culture by reaching out to new spaces and new audiences.

C.K. Meena
ckmeena@gmail.com

Cartoon as Ethnography: 'Little Women' in a Big World

Gokul TG

Much before G. Aravindan gained fame as a national award-winning film director he had established himself in Kerala as a cartoonist. Gokul TG got a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts in 2011 to study and document Aravindan's comic strip *Cheriyā Manushyarum, Valiya Lokavum* (Little Men, Big World) which appeared in the Malayalam weekly *Mathrubhumi Azhchapathippu* from 1961 to 1973. Featuring two central characters, Ramu and his mentor Guruji, it was a scathing satire on Kerala society and politics. Here, Gokul focuses on the women characters in the strip, and finds Aravindan's portrayal of them to be subtle and non-judgmental.

Gender and the Documentary Film: Capturing a Sensed Reality

Paromita Vohra

An odd lady who haunted film festivals led Paromita Vohra to look more closely at the evolution of the Indian documentary film and to ask an apparently frivolous question: Why do so many male documentary filmmakers grow a beard? Between the anecdote and the question lies an unwritten story—of new artistic forms that have broken away from the agit-prop template. Vohra says that these new films, many of them by women, consist of layered individual narratives that explore meaning through what is said between the lines. A gendered awareness and questions about truth and reality have led to myriad explorations of form that have reinvigorated documentary film culture in India.

Pretty Men: Golden Age of the Female Impersonator

Prakash Garud

(Translated from the Kannada by Usha Rao)

All photographs courtesy Dr Prakash Garud and the Garud family.

A rich whiff of rare history wafts up from the photographs of this family album. The family is that of Garud Sadashivarao who founded the Sri Dattatreya Sangeeta Nataka Mandali theatre company in the early twentieth century.

Sadashivarao brought a breath of fresh air into Kannada professional theatre and personally trained countless young actors. His grandson Prakash Garud takes a second look at the family archives and shares his thoughts on the social taboos that restricted female actors, and the talented impersonators who convincingly occupied their place on stage until such time that women could reclaim it for themselves.

Writing Desire: The Body as Looking Glass

Joshua Muyiwa

When Joshua Muiyawa started writing poetry, as a teenager trying to understand his own desires, he felt trapped by the genderless quality of his text and constrained by the assumption that the desired object must be female. From exploring the abstract emotion of love he had to progress towards articulating to himself, and then fleshing out, the man he longed for, “my own Adam”. While doing so, he had to refashion his own body, create an ‘I’ as well as a ‘You’. Using language to make up desire, not necessarily to reveal it, his writing became a catalogue of other people’s wants, confessions and experiences filtered through him. Muiyawa describes his continuing obsession with the body and how it has shaped and changed his writing.

Notes from the Margins: The Feminine Voice of the Ghatam

Sumana Chandrashekar

All photographs courtesy Sukanya Ramgopal

The earthen pot or ghatam, one of the simplest instruments in folk music traditions, has long remained on the fringes of the world of Carnatic music. Subject to the politics of hierarchy and patriarchy, the ghatam has coincidentally suffered the same fate as that of the female Carnatic musician. To be a woman and a ghatam player is to be doubly marginalised, says Sumana Chandrashekar. By examining her guru's inspirational life and music, she attempts to uncover the reasons why percussion is considered a male domain in Carnatic music, and explores the many forms of discrimination in the concert space.

Creating Theatre Spaces: Connecting Art to Local Life

Atul Pethe and Waman Pandit
in conversation with Ashutosh Potdar

Maharashtra stands out for its unique network of theatre activists that takes plays to small-town audiences. Atul Pethe, playwright and documentary filmmaker, travels to urban and semi-urban places in Maharashtra conducting 'Arogya Samvad' (Health Communication) workshops. He directs plays and tours with his performances in and outside Maharashtra. Waman Pandit is in the printing industry and is also a performing artist based in Kankavli. There, he leads the theatre organisation Vasantryao Acharekar Sanskrutik Pratishthan, which has extended its network to small villages, towns and cities in Maharashtra and to the Konkan region in particular. Engaging the two theatre activists in a conversation about their intertwining journeys is Ashutosh Potdar, who writes plays and is closely involved with the Marathi theatre scene.



About IFA

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is one of the country's leading independent arts funders, championing the cause of arts philanthropy and advocating the importance of the arts in public life. In the last decade and a half we have substantially enriched India's cultural landscape and infused passion and professionalism into the business of arts philanthropy.

IFA was set up in 1993 to focus on urgent but unattended needs in specific areas of the arts. Since we began we have committed more than sixteen crore rupees (approximately three-and-a-half million US dollars) to projects located in almost every corner of the country.

100

Our support has gone out to independent research and teaching institutions, cultural and development organisations, scholars and artists. Musicians and choreographers, writers and visual artists, filmmakers and film scholars, architects and conservationists, sociologists and art historians, craftspersons and folk performers have been among the beneficiaries of our support.

Today we fund cutting edge artistic practice, support initiatives to bring the arts into the classroom, assist in institution development and infrastructure creation, fund research in the arts, help in the preservation and transmission of valuable cultural knowledge, and create public platforms for the dissemination and advocacy of the arts. We also act as a source of information and expertise to those in the arts community and beyond.

To receive regular information about our activities, send an email to contactus@indiaifa.org asking to join our mailing list.

To support our activities and in turn receive *ArtConnect* and other IFA material for free, become a **Friend of IFA**. Visit www.indiaifa.org for more information.

ArtConnect

An IFA Publication

Volume 6, Number 2
July-December 2012

Contents

EDITORIAL

3

CARTOON AS ETHNOGRAPHY: 'LITTLE WOMEN' IN A BIG WORLD

Gokul TG

4

GENDER AND THE DOCUMENTARY FILM: CAPTURING A SENSED REALITY

Paromita Vohra

16

PRETTY MEN: GOLDEN AGE OF THE FEMALE IMPERSONATOR

Prakash Garud
(Translated by Usha Rao)

42

WRITING DESIRE: THE BODY AS LOOKING GLASS

Joshua Muyiwa

56

NOTES FROM THE MARGINS: THE FEMININE VOICE OF THE GHATAM

Sumana Chandrashekar

68

In Conversation

CREATING THEATRE SPACES: CONNECTING ART TO LOCAL LIFE

Atul Pethe and Waman Pandit with Ashutosh Potdar

86



IFA

India Foundation for the Arts

'Apurva' Ground Floor, No 259, 4th Cross
Raj Mahal Vilas IIInd Stage, IIInd Block,
Bangalore-560 094

Phone/Fax: 91- 80 - 2341 4681/82

Email: contactus@indiaifa.org

www.indiaifa.org

