

*Mythopoetic:  
Women artist  
from Australia  
and India*

10 April - 18 May 2013

Exhibition  
Labels

# Mythopoetic

**Women artists from Australia and India**

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*Mythopoetic: women artists from Australia and India* takes place across three galleries located at Griffith University's Queensland College of Art. The work of 15 artists, including a collaborative pair, surveys the way in which women are re-picturing, re-contextualising and re-imagining the feminine.

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The mythology referred to is the collective embodiment and themes of the stories, histories and images in the body of work and history of practice of each artist addressing subjects such as: the physical body, identity, subjectivity, gendered roles, and sexuality.

Author Donna Haraway concluded her infamous 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' with the words:

I would rather be a Cyborg than a Goddess.

In this statement she summarised her findings: that the old archetypes and goddesses were no longer adequate in gendered representations of women, and that women needed to create new mythologies in order to provide a conclusive account of themselves in modern times.

Haraway's work also scrutinised the historical prevalence of identifications made between women and nature. Instead she proposes that cyborgs are capable of identification not only with nature but with technology as well, and that therefore, the characters of the cyborg and of women might be thought of as derived from themes of hybridity and multiplicity.

Contemporary artists participate in the development of new knowledge within diverse and often overlapping cultural realms. For some female artists, artworks can specifically open up an awareness of potential zones for new thinking, through which women might imagine who they are and what they could become. Perhaps one outcome of an exhibition like this, which brings together multifarious disciplines, is that we take Haraway's notion of new mythologies and apply it in new directions.

*Mythopoetic: women artists from Australia and India* was born out of Griffith University's festival *Encounters:India* (13-19 May 2013), the fourth in its series of 'encounters' catalysed through the Conservatorium of Music. In 2013, *Encounters* becomes a precinct-wide affair. Griffith University Art Gallery and QCA's Project Gallery and Webb Gallery, are proud satellite venues for this festival.

**Exhibiting artists** Dhruvi Acharya INDIA, Kate Beynon AUS, Di Ball AUS, Laini Burton AUS, Marnie Dean AUS, Simone Eisler AUS, Fiona Hall AUS, Pat Hoffie SCOTLAND/AUS, Sonia Khurana INDIA, Pushpamala N. INDIA, Ann-Maree Reaney and Jill Kinnear AUS, Mandy Ridley AUS, Sangeeta Sandrasegar AUS and Shambhavi INDIA.

**Curator** Marnie Dean



## Programs and events

### Curator's lecture

**Thursday 18 April 2013, 2pm**

Join exhibition curator/artist Marnie Dean for an in-depth talk on curating 'Mythopoetic'.

**Venue** QCA Lecture Theatre

### Celebration Event

**Saturday 11 May, 2–4pm**

Join us to celebrate 'Mythopoetic' exhibition and the opening of the Encounters: India festival, with guest speakers and a live performance by renowned Indian musician Rajesh Mehta on 'Hybrid Trumpet' in the QCA's Webb Gallery (3pm performance).

**Venue** QCA campus, 226 Grey Street, South Bank, Brisbane Q 4102

### Artist tour and talks

**Thursday 16 May 2013, 2pm**

Meet at Griffith University Art Gallery to tour all three exhibition venues with exhibiting artists Pat Hoffie, Di Ball, Lani Burton, Marnie Dean, Simone Eisler and Ann-Marie Reaney.

**Venue** Griffith University Art Gallery, QCA campus, 226 Grey Street, South Bank Brisbane Q 4102

### Group/school bookings

#### Griffith University Art Gallery

**Email** [guag@griffith.edu.au](mailto:guag@griffith.edu.au)

**Phone** 07 3735 7414

#### QCA Galleries: Webb Gallery and Project Gallery

**Email** [Cassandra.schultz@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Cassandra.schultz@griffith.edu.au)

**Phone** 07 3735 6106

**Marnie DEAN**

b.1975, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

***Morrigan-Kali the 'SHE-WOLF': Wave of the Future* 2012**

light-box illumination, digital print on archival transparency, customised display

light-box: 76 x 160cm; wooden display: 183 x 185 x 22cm

Collection: Mr Binoj Cheruvathur Kochurry, India

Marnie Dean is a new media artist with a practice that combines drawing, digital imaging, animation and installation. Dean has lived in India and the United States and her practice reflects her trans-cultural life experiences. Her work appropriates aesthetically from popular culture forms such as anime, advertising and fashion, with a developing visual language that is distinctly digital and highly saturated. Her early work explored feminine representation and identity in digital ontologies via her avatar, a character called Dollygrrrrl. Her current practice continues to explore female imagery, recontextualising goddesses from her own Druid/British/Irish heritage with qualities appropriated through her study of Tantra (Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu), creating work that reconciles polarities in prevailing stereotypes regarding western women, attempting to imbue female sexuality with spirituality.

*Morrigan-Kali 'the She-wolf': Wave of the Future*, was inspired by an exhibition that Dean encountered in 2011 while living in Los Angeles, mounted at the Getty Centre titled *In the Beginning Was the Word: Medieval Gospel Illuminations*. Instead of the Christian bible, Dean began to illustrate an imagined fantastical gospel, with a feminine voice and lore that combined the knowledge of the ancient Celtic Goddess 'the Morrigan' to that of the Hindu Goddess 'Kali', which foretells a bright future where a coming matriarch/heroine called the She-Wolf (inspired by recent efforts from David Guetta), would redeem women collectively and raise their status all over the world. Dean has explored her emerging curatorial practice in an exhibition she mounted for Gallery OED Cochin, a collateral exhibition to the Kochi Muziris Biennale, as part of the Australian Consulate of India's OZFEST initiative. Dean is also the curator of *Mythopoetic: women artists from Australia and India*.

## **Fiona HALL**

b.1953, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

### ***21st Century Man* 2011**

US Dollars, unique works from a series of 25

six sheets: each 47 x 34cm irreg., 59 x 47cm framed

Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Fiona Hall is one of Australia's most respected contemporary artists. Her early practice was photographically based and has evolved to include installation, painting, sculpture and video. The materiality of Hall's work is an essential aspect of her practice, that mimics, exposes and reinforces the rhetoric and ideas she engages with. Hall develops unique methodologies to engage with unfamiliar mediums that reveal her immense skill and patience in processes that are often labor intensive, producing works of intricate and exquisite beauty.

In *21st Century Man*, Hall combines the iconic symbols of American currency with the image of the skull, in a menacing rendition of a current humanity and its negative impact on the environment. Her process exposes the dominant economic culture - American consumerist capitalism - and re-orders the epistemic connection between that economy and the environment, that is, trees provide wood which is pulped to make the paper on which currency is printed. Hall has participated in numerous international Biennales including the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010) and Documenta 13 (2012). A major retrospective of Hall's work is currently on show in an exhibition titled *Big Game Hunting*, until 21 July 2013 at Heide Museum of Modern Art in Melbourne.

**Patricia HOFFIE**

b.1953, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

(Collaboration with Veronica Sepulveda, b. 1980, Santiago, Chile)

***Ideology and artefact #2*** 2012

silk, plastic, cardboard, Fimo

installation dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Patricia HOFFIE was born in Scotland and arrived in Australia at the age of four. Her creative practice has evolved from a firm foundation in painting to include sculpture, installation, performance and video. HOFFIE spent extended periods of time travelling in Afghanistan and through Central and South Asia, an early influence on what became an international career with multiple links within the Asia Pacific region. HOFFIE has been a pioneer of feminist art in Australia and an advocate promoting human rights through visual culture internationally. Her practice engages with mythological and cultural content via the methods of production employed to create her work. Specifically, HOFFIE has developed creative strategies that expose the economic structures that support the exploitative nature of poverty in a globalised economy; in the process establishing new networks of signification that deconstruct cultural stereotypes with new visual outcomes, creating new visual culture. She has employed artisans in the Philippines and other areas of the Asia Pacific to work on projects – often with a human rights agenda - that render the inequities of the global economic system transparent, and that also highlight the inequities of the ascription of value ascribed to various forms of cultural production mandated by a globalised art market. This particular aspect of her career culminated in 2006 in an exhibition and book titled *Fully Exploited Labour* produced in collaboration with the University of Queensland's Art Gallery.

*Ideology and Artefact #2*, made in collaboration with Veronica Sepulveda, visually references this aspect of her previous practice, in a work that reflects the current status of women in Kerala in India. HOFFIE plays with visual metaphors and symbols that borrow from Kerala's communist history, using letters from the local language of Malayalam in bold red embroidered script together with toys used in the marketing of McDonalds™ to develop a new visual language that expresses the impact of globalisation on economies of women artisans in the state. HOFFIE contributes regularly to critical theory and visual arts debates within Australia in platforms that

have included the Biennale of Sydney, Perspecta and the Asia- Pacific Triennial, for which she has participated as a curator. Professor Pat Hoffie heads the research focus group SECAP (Sustainable Environment through Culture, Asia Pacific) at Queensland College of Art, and was appointed the UNESCO Orbicom Chair in Communications by Griffith University.

## **Sonia KHURANA**

b.1968, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

### ***Flower Carrier III 2006***

single channel video, colour, stereo sound, 10 minutes, looped

Courtesy of the artist

Sonia Khurana explores the politics of selfhood and space through the medium of her body, in a practice that has redefined gendered representations of the feminine in India. She famously hijacked the privileged Indian male gaze, in her video performance titled *Bird* (1999). After early forays in painting, Khurana's is a nomadic creative practice that traverses mediums including performance, video, photography, text, drawing and installation. Khurana has a unique *modus operandi* that supports much of her practice; she believes that the act of divesting oneself of power is ultimately an empowering action. Exemplified in the video installation devised for *Mythopoetic*, Khurana has created myriad representations of feminine experience that derive from the internal experience of her transforming self married with her ideas regarding power, space and performance and provide visualities that articulate her experience of contemporary India and an internationalist position. She writes:

Both in *Flower carrier* and in *Logic of birds*, I have pursued the tropes of the *flaneur* and the tramp. I am more attracted towards the abject; performing dispossessed figures who enact their private lives in the glare of public appearance as an attempt to rupture the textures of the everyday.

*Flower Carrier III* was inspired by a figure in the work of writer Milan Kundera, who chooses to focus her attentions on the beauty of a flower she carries, rather than her marginalised existence. The figure in *Logic of Birds*, demands the right to lay down anywhere, as an act of the power to claim space, a feminine space. Khurana lives and works in Delhi, and her work has been included in many international exhibitions including the Liverpool Biennial 2010, the groundbreaking *Global Feminisms* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007, and the Pusan Biennale in 2004. Khurana's video *Bird* (1999) was previously shown at the IMA in Brisbane an exhibition titled *Self: Contemporary Indian Video Art* (2002).



**Sonia KHURANA**

b.1968, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

***Logic of Birds* 2009**

single channel video, colour, silent version, looped

Courtesy of the artist

**Sonia KHURANA**

b.1968, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

***Lying down on the ground* 2007**

single channel video, black and white, silent, looped

Courtesy of the artist

**PUSHPAMALA N.**

b.1956, Bangalore, India

***Indrajala/Seduction* 2012**

from the series *Avega – the Passion: the Drama of Three Women*

single-channel digital video, black and white, silent, 4:27 minutes looped

Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi

Pushpamala N. is one of India's most prominent women artists; she lives and works in Bangalore and Delhi in India. Her practice comprises photography, video, performance, cinema and installations, exploring issues of representation and identity in visualities that document her own body in an array of roles, personas, characters and avatars in staged and constructed environments. Curator and theorist Geeta Kapur has described her practice as that of a 'masquerading artist', and through her vernacular, Pushpamala N. has used her practice to explore her idea of 'the artist as ethnographer,' in a process that challenges the authenticity of the photographic image, exposing roles and prejudices in Indian society and internationally, that ascribe value and attempt to classify women in accordance with caste and ethnicity.

*Indrajala/Seduction* from the series 'Avega' the Passion: The Drama of Three Women (2012) re-contextualises the infamous female villain 'Surpanakha' from the Indian epic the *Ramayana*. In the video, Surpanakha takes human form and tries to seduce the hero Lakshmana, who spurns her sexual advances and decides to punish her, removing her senses and cutting off her ears and nose. The artist sways hypnotically with symbolic gestures, meant to entice the sword-bearing Lakshmana, a performativity that Pushpamala mimics from an ethnographic film seen in Melbourne, Australia. *Indrajala/Seduction* interlaces the black and white aesthetics of early ethnographic photography, with cinematic image flows that appropriate from the high drama of Film Noir, early Indian cinema and even from the aesthetics of video games. In the central screen in the video, the character Lakshmana shows off his swordsmanship in an overt display, beheld by the suggested gaze of an admiring Surpanakha, that later shifts subtly to a violent spectacle. This transition into violence and Surpanakha's surrendering to her fate exposes the characters vulnerability and restores lost innocence related to her sexuality, prefaced earlier in the work. Archetypes like the Native South Indian woman, the Magician, the Warrior, the Shaman, the Femme Fatale, the Noble

Savage and the Whore, are transformed and hybridised, accomplishing a re-telling of the Ramayana from a distinctly feminine perspective.

Pushpamala's work has been included in numerous international exhibitions including the Biennale Jogja XI 2011 Edition #1: Indonesia and India Meeting – Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta, the exhibition titled *My India, Video et Après*, at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2008); the exhibition '*Century City*' at the Tate Modern, London, UK (2001). Her short film titled 'Rashtriy Kheer and Desiy Salad' was showcased for the Griffith Asia Institute in an event titled Griffith Asia Institute-Perspectives Asia with Pushpamala N. for Griffith University in 2010.

**Sangeeta SANDRASEGAR**

b.1977, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

***Take away that monster / That face that makes men stone, whoever she is* 2009**

installation: felt, glass beads, sequins, thread

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Murray White Room, Melbourne

Sangeeta Sandrasegar is an artist who has been exhibited widely both in Australia and internationally. She has a practice that investigates cross-cultural identity and meaning, through the intersection of literature, myth and histories with a whimsical and sometimes sharp satire that reflects the strong research base informing her practice. Sandrasegar has developed an extensive oeuvre that explores the two-dimensionality of sculptural forms in installations and cut-outs that utilise shadow-play, patterning, mark-making and watercolour effects that are often beguiling, embellished as they are with methods and materials borrowed from popular-culture. She has also explored female sexuality in sumptuously erotic depictions that borrow from her own Indian, Malaysian and Australian heritage re-contextualising traditional female stereotypes. Her poetic gestures often isolate areas of cultural difference, most recently exploring shared post-colonial histories shaping the formation of contemporary identity in Australia and India.

The title of '*Take away that monster/That face that makes men stone, whoever she is*' (2009), derives from Ovid's *The story of Perseus*, Book 5.1-236. Sandrasegar depicts the figure of the Gorgon called Medusa from Greco-Roman mythology, in the moment after she was beheaded by Perseus. This violent act ends the life of the famous matriarch, but as one story goes, it is the moment at which Pegasus, the divine winged horse, and his brother Chrysaor were created from the her blood. Sandrasegar references this myth to metaphorically invoke feminist theory to celebrate the enduring and resilient creativity of modern women. Sandrasegar was included in the Fifth Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT5) at QAG/GOMA, Brisbane (2006-7), the Incheon Women Artists Biennale in Korea (2009), and was most recently awarded the 2012 Rimbun Dahan Arts Residency, Penang, Malaysia, from which she has recently returned to Melbourne, Australia where she lives and works.

## **Shambhavi SINGH**

b.1966, Patna, Bihar, India

### ***Red Kali* 2009**

watercolour on handmade paper

12 sheets: 366 x 488cm (12 x 16ft) overall

Courtesy of the artist Talwar Galleries, New York and New Delhi

Shambhavi Singh's original home is Patna, in the northern Indian state of Bihar. Bihar is a land that has ancient roots, connected to the development of Buddhism and sanctified in Hinduism because the River Ganga or 'the Ganges' traverses its length. Modern Bihar, in contrast, is one of the poorest Indian states; many of its residents have been forced to re-locate to find work and are subjected to racial violence in other parts of India. Singh herself now resides in Delhi, a displacement that is a recurrent theme in her work. Her practice explores many issues regarding domestic displacement in India; most recently Singh has focused on the sorrowful plight of farmers from Bihar, who, relegated to the periphery of society in a globalised India, have been suiciding in large numbers. Singh's work is centered around a symbol or object that serves as a visual and conceptual reference-point, bringing unanticipated elements into proximity, from a milieu combining the socio-political India, cosmology, mythology and her ancestral Bihar. Singh attempts to reconcile her feelings and experiences about these issues in works, rich with symbolic meaning. Her practice includes painting, printmaking, papermaking, sculpture and installation.

*Red Kali* is an earlier work from the artist, portraying the steel tongue of the Goddess of Death. There are many stories in Hindu mythology about Kali's tongue, relating the ecstasy of her dance of destruction and thirst for blood, which could only be dissuaded through the intervention of her husband, the God Shiva, who threw his body beneath her feet. This surprised Kali, who poked out her tongue in shock! In Hindu Art, Kali is traditionally depicted with protruding tongue as reference to her divergent position with unfathomable power and evolving humility, gained through knowledge of her power. *Red Kali* plays on the myriad associations with the goddesses' tongue, while cleverly referencing the triangle symbol as the Yantric form of Shakti (divine femininity in Hinduism), and the vaginal/vulvic shape common to western feminist art. The tongue/triangle emerges from a red field in the corner of the gallery space, in a gesture that forebodes violence, depicting the liminal space between malevolence and benevolence, an atmosphere that permeates modern



Indian society. Current Indian society reveres the most benign institutions and, at the same time, is capable of deplorable horrors enacted in the name of those institutions (like the Gujarat riots between Hindu and Muslim extremists in 2002). Singh's *Red Kali*, recontextualises the myth, to represent current society reconciling binary oppositions through the idea of a divine feminine figure with ultimate knowledge. Singh's work has been acquired as part of the permanent collection of MOMA, New York and she has exhibited widely internationally, also participating in the prestigious Khoj International Artist Workshops in India.