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Two Projects by Delhi-Based Contemporary Artist Vivan Sundaram Presented Together for the First Time in North America

Making Strange: Gagawaka + Postmortem by Vivan Sundaram

April 19 – September 6, 2015 | Opening Reception: Saturday, April 19, 2015, 7–9 p.m.

Making Strange presents groundbreaking recent projects by Delhi-based contemporary artist Vivan Sundaram, founding member of the Sahmat Collective and one of the leading artists working in India today. The exhibition brings two striking bodies of work, *Gagawaka* (2010-2011) and *Postmortem* (2013), together for the first time in North America. The title of the exhibition, *Making Strange*, refers to the Brechtian strategy of “estrangement” or “defamiliarization,” and points to Sundaram’s self-conscious engagement with aesthetic traditions of the European avant-garde.

The first project *Gagawaka*, is comprised of twenty-seven sculptural garments made from recycled materials and medical supplies to evoke a playful yet subversive relationship to fashion, haute couture, the runway, and the brand. “Gagawaka” – an invented word with pop-culture references to Lady Gaga and the 2010 World Cup anthem, Waka Waka – represents the artist’s own fictional brand and line of

“strange” haute couture. *Gagawaka*’s highly inventive garments fabricated out of foam cups, surgical masks, x-ray-film, hospital bandages, and foil pill wrappings challenge the excesses fashion and question the increasingly extravagant forms of consumerism that have emerged in the new globalized economy of India.

Gagawaka is presented in dialogue with Sundaram’s *Postmortem*, a collection of haunting sculptural objects fashioned out of mannequins, tailor’s dummies, wooden props, and anatomical models, and deploys Surrealist (or post-Surrealist) devices to present the human body on a more disquieting stage. *Postmortem* questions the spectacle of *Gagawaka* with a wider set of commentaries about the human body and social concerns related to aging and illness, and highlights the very different bodily experiences associated with high fashion and health care. According to co-curator Saloni Mathur, “when one thinks of the dialogue between fashion and health, countless conditions of global crises come to mind, for instance, the entanglement between the sweatshop and the brand, the testing of pharmaceuticals in developing nations, and the environmental impact of biomedical waste.” In the face of these unsettling social conditions, “Sundaram’s work invites us into a world that may well be in fragments, but that is resilient and finds its means to repair by returning to elemental functions and discarded forms.”

Exhibition Overview

Making Strange is being presented in the Fowler’s 5,700 square-foot Getty Gallery within a highly theatrical setting sympathetic to the fashion spectacle of *Gagawaka*. The interpenetrating spaces of the installation foreground the provocative relationship between the couture garments of *Gagawaka* and the peculiar anatomical sculptures and models of *Postmortem*. For Sundaram, the juxtaposition of these projects should not be viewed “as if one follows the other, or that *Postmortem* is destroying or dismantling everything that was in *Gagawaka*.” To the contrary, Sundaram states, it reveals a “constant shifting of different meanings that informs a lot of my work and I hope this becomes apparent in the spirit of holding these shows together.”

***Gagawaka* Key Works:**

- ***Snake-shell*** is a wearable evening gown with a fan-shaped head-dress made of actual x-ray film. The film is variously cut, twisted, rolled and used in flat panels to create ruffles, spikes and an elegant tail. The color is particularly striking depending on the play of light on the x-ray, in some places translucent and blue, in other areas shiny black and opaque.
- ***Wedding Outfit*** is a white men’s suit made of women’s sanitary napkins. The menstrual pads are stitched and quilted together in a separate pants and jacket design. Red and black fabric are incorporated to create subtle piping which accents the white.
- ***Diva R-E-D*** is a stunning full-length gown made of bright red padded bras, blended fabric and lace. Bra cups are stacked into sculptural shapes to give the dress its volume, and separated from their straps, which are gathered into a lowing fringe in the rear. It is accompanied by a large bonnet fashioned from the padded bra cups.

Postmortem Key Works:

- **Spine** is a repurposed tailor's dummy mounted on a wooden base, and "cut open" on one side to reveal an anatomical model of the human spine. The other side has a similar V-shaped cut near the rear, and shows a fist punching out from the back of the sculpture.
- **Man with Numbers** is a 32 inch high sculpture that melds an upended single-leg of a mannequin torso with a scientific specimen of the male body. The latter resembles the kind of teaching tool depicting musculature in addition to the body's major nerves, vessels, tissues and organs, and is marked by tiny numerical measurements denoting such bodily systems.
- **Acrobat** is a rather twisted ballerina-like figure with a blue-green "tutu" made from hospital gown paper samples. The figure stands on a single bright green leg; the other leg points upwards, contorted, chipped and decayed. Arm-less and head-less, the mannequin is splayed open above the waist to reveal micro-anatomical models of a breast and the body's internal organs.

Related Exhibition

The Fowler presents *The Sahmat Collective: Art and Activism in India since 1989* (April 19 – August 2, 2015) featuring works from over sixty Sahmat artists including founding member Vivan Sundaram. Since 1989, the Delhi-based Sahmat collective has given artists, writers, poets, musicians, and actors a platform to create and present works of art that promote artistic freedom and celebrate secular, egalitarian values. This exhibition, organized by the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, introduces Sahmat's work to the United States and provides fresh insights into two timely subjects: contemporary visual art from India, and art as a force for political activism and social change. *The Sahmat Collective* presents a survey of art and ephemera from this unique—and sometimes controversial—collective and illustrates its impact on contemporary Indian society and artistic practice over the last two decades.

Public Programs

Opening Day Celebration

Saturday, April 18, 2015

6 pm Opening Program: Vivan Sundaram and the Sahmat Collective

This program provides an introduction to two major exhibitions of contemporary Indian art on the occasion of their opening – *The Sahmat Collective: Art and Activism in India since 1989* and *Making Strange: Gagawaka + Postmortem* by Vivan Sundaram. UCLA Art History faculty and co-curators of *Making Strange*, Saloni Mathur and Miwon Kwon, will host Delhi-based artist and longstanding member of the Sahmat Collective, Vivan Sundaram for a conversation about his art practice and his involvement with India's most influential collective in contemporary art. Co-presented as part of *The Arts of Bandung Humanism* Conference for more information about the conference go to www.fowler.ucla.edu/bandung.

7-9 pm Opening Reception: Join us for a preview of *The Sahmat Collective* and *Making Strange* exhibitions, light refreshments, and music. Members' Lounge cocktail hour from 5-6 pm. RSVP by April 10: fowlerRSVP@arts.ucla.edu.

Arts of India Festival

Sunday, May 17, 12:30 pm–4:00 pm

In conjunction with *The Sahmat Collective* and *Making Strange*, this afternoon festival celebrates Indian arts and culture through a variety of activities and performances that highlight social awareness, collaboration and creativity for all ages. The day begins with family yoga at 12:30 pm on the Museum's beautiful outdoor terrace followed by Indian music and dance. Inspired by a popular form of body art in South Asia, a henna artist will be available throughout the day to paint visitors with designs that emphasize peace, acceptance, and justice.

Afterwards, let your imagination go wild in a *Making Strange* art workshop for all ages. Using Vivan Sundaram's inventive sculptures and garments as a jumping-off point, participants can adorn mannequins with messages related to themes of environmental preservation and global health, and create their own spectacular garments made from recycled materials. At 3 pm, the day's centerpiece—the fashion show *Gaga-walk-a!*—invites the public to strut its stuff and showcase the wearable works of art they created in the workshop or at home. Participants of all ages can enter in the following three categories: Recycled/Unconventional Materials, Creative Consciousness, and Avant-Garde. Wearable works of art may not include perishable materials. For more information and to register for *Gaga-walk-a!* go to www.fowler.ucla.edu/indiafestival.

Kids Muse Summer Camp: Make it, Build it, Wear it

Session 1: July 20–24, 9 am–4 pm. Ages 6–8

Session 2: July 27–31, 9 am–4 pm. Ages 9–12

Cost: \$230 for [Fowler Members](#) / \$275 for non-members

Create art robots, crazy costumes, and forts in this action-packed, art-filled camp inspired by *The Sahmat Collective* and *Making Strange* exhibitions. With fieldtrips and scavenger hunts all over the UCLA campus, this camp is not to be missed. Reserve a spot early!

About the Artist:

Born in 1943 in Shimla, India and based in New Delhi, Sundaram was trained as a painter at M.S. University of Baroda and at the Slade School of Fine Art in London in the 1960s; he returned to India in 1970 and began a series of solo and group exhibitions; from 1990, he began to move towards sculpture, installation, and photography, and video. His work has been widely exhibited in India and in several international biennials. He has had solo shows in many cities of India as well as in New York, Chicago, London, Paris, Toronto, Montreal and Copenhagen. Sundaram is a founding member and trustee of the Sahmat collective. He lives in Delhi and is married to the art critic, curator and theorist, Geeta Kapur.

Curators:

Making Strange: Gagawaka + Postmortem by Vivan Sundaram is guest curated by Saloni Mathur, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History at UCLA, and Miwon Kwon, Professor and Chair of the Department of Art History at UCLA.

Publication:

A book accompanies the exhibition and is co-edited by curators Saloni Mathur and Miwon Kwon. It features essays by Mathur (UCLA), Andreas Huyssen (Columbia University, New York), and Rakhee Balaram (State University of New York, Albany). The volume situates the *Making Strange: Gagawaka + Postmortem* project within the broader concerns of Vivan Sundaram's five-decade-long career and radical art practice, while analyzing the complexities of the relationships he develops between the body and fashion. The book will be available for purchase in the Fowler Museum Store in late June 2015.

Support:

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