

Open Letter from Thukral and Tagra

Six months have come to an end and more than 31,000 people have visited the newly-launched Weston Gallery at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK. Our exhibition which inaugurated this space, "Bread, Circuses, and TBD," was conceived with sincere efforts and a humble approach by both of us, along with a dedicated team of two researchers and four assistants, to create this body of work which was in development for almost two years. The project was initiated by senior curator at YSP Helen Pheby, who asked us to create an exhibition in response to the inauguration of the Weston Gallery and suggested that we visit the National Arts Education Archive to research the collection of early 19th-century games of Sir Don Pavey, back in 2016. Continuing with our interests to address the issues of today's socio-political scenarios, we were moved by the farmers' distress and agrarian crisis as a running commentary of the current time. We started our research into the lives, trials and tribulations of the farmers and their families. Hailing from Punjab but born and raised in an urban environment, we can hardly imagine a life in rural farmland and the difficulties the farming community faces. It is a collective failure of the system, policy paralysis, lack of implementation, lack of attention to the situation by the governments, and definitely effected by climate change.

As we celebrated our exhibition at a prestigious art institution, more than 12,000 farmers have committed suicide in the past three years. In India today, one farmer kills himself every forty minutes. Researching at the primary level, the explorations had us visit five villages in Punjab/ Haryana with the help of a local surveyor, where we met the families in grief, mourning for their deceased family members. Some of them had lost all hope, some had rescued themselves, some had taken odd jobs for

survival, and others were just waiting for natural deaths. These conversations are important to us, and we are very sensitive to respect this valuable insight in the final outcome of our exhibition. This is what we learned: Farmers and farming families are wrestling for their lives. This three-part exhibition was initially showcased in Chandigarh at Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi in February 2019, then at Yorkshire Sculpture Park during the summer, and now in New Delhi at Nature Morte, for the month of October.

We hope that through these exhibitions many more people will come to comprehend the scope of the tragedy. In addition to the exhibitions we will produce a publication which will detail the situation and document our artistic approach to it and examine the issues involved. As both of us have studied communication design, we don't expect to solve these issues but try to deliver knowledge and hope to raise public awareness through an empathetic approach.

Will these self-initiated tiny projects help?
Or are we just trying to see what we can do?
These questions remain unanswered.

The exhibition will open on the afternoon of Saturday, 28th September at Nature Morte, New Delhi and continue to October 19th 2019. We would appreciate more people joining us to orchestrate the debate further with more conversations and a collective gaze. We have been questioning our own authority to address this subject matter and hope the exhibition will act as a catalyst to discuss our present failures as a creative community.

www.thukralandtagra.com

Thukral and Tagra

BREAD, CIRCUSES AND I

28.9 _____ 19.10.19

NEW DELHI

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Nature Morte presents "Bread, Circuses, and I", a solo exhibition of new works by the collaborative duo of Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra.

The exhibition takes reference from the recent uprisings by the farming community questioning their rights, existence and daily survival in today's world. It also tries to comprehend the intricate details of the lives, trials, and tribulations of the agricultural community and illustrates this precarious aspect of the farmer's fate: a life which is suspended in limbo.

The exhibition title "Bread, Circuses and I" attempts a 'self-absorption' of one's status in the midst of a severe social crisis. By making the viewer confront these distress equations, the artists continue their pursuit in social communication and attempt to address the gaps between the urban and rural ways of living. As natives of Punjab, Thukral & Tagra delve into their own personal histories and memories to address the socio-cultural changes most visible in their home state.

Shifting family values, a desire for 'escape' via migration, and changing middle-class aspirations have been recurring motifs in their work. The central installation in this exhibition will invite the viewers to act as protagonists, to acknowledge themselves at a juncture of socio-political and cultural emergencies. The metaphor of the wrestler is employed to examine the ongoing struggle of the farmers, fighting the battle of survival against invisible policies and issues.

This exhibition is a continuation and synthesis of works and ideas from two exhibitions held previously in 2019: "Farmer is a Wrestler" at the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi in Chandigarh, India and "Bread, Circuses and TBD" at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in the United Kingdom.

Jiten Thukral was born in 1976 in Jalandhar, Punjab and received a BFA from Chandigarh College of Art and his MFA from the Delhi College of Art. Sumir Tagra was born in 1979 in New Delhi and received

his BFA from the Delhi College of Art and later studied at the National Institute of Design in Ahmed-abad. The artists live and work in Gurgaon, India. Thukral & Tagra work collaboratively with a wide range of media including painting, sculpture, installations, interactive games, video, performance, and design. Thukral & Tagra work on new formats of public engagement and attempt to expand the scope of what art can do. They break out of the mediated and disciplinary world and create multi-modal sensory and immersive environments. Their earlier work dealt with tropes of migration and motifs of a globally-man-ifested consumer culture, questioning the provenance of Indian identity and its various articulations. Their recent work has dealt with the interpretation of Indian mythological narratives and symbols in ways that renew and enliven a largely pedantic and static area of cultural material. From a pop visual character to a pre-dominantly abstract visual approach and compositional philosophy, Thukral & Tagra constantly shift in terms of their grammar and vocabulary. The abstract suggestions of an everyday experience of architecture and urban design in Gurgaon (Haryana, India) and Chandigarh (Punjab, India) is embedded in their visual language.

Nature Morte is located at A1 Neeti Bagh, on the main Khel Gaon Marg, between Siri Fort Auditorium and Ansal Plaza. The gallery is open every day, from 10am to 6pm, but Sunday by appointment only.

For more information or press images please contact Prachi Singh at (91)-88008-47914 or gallerymanager@naturemorte.com

Complete documentation of the exhibition and further information on the artists can be found on our website at: www.naturemorte.com and their own website at: www.thukralandtagra.com

BREAD, CIRCUSES AND I

1. Title: Distress Mathematics (Zero)
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 120 x 192 inches
Year: 2019

2. Title: Surjeet Singh
- *Surjeet Singh, Age 50 has been reporting suicides for 130 villages for Sangrur district of Punjab. Over the span of 10 years, he has met around 2000 families of the deceased farmers on the day of their deaths to fill out the application for their demise.*
Duration: 27 mins
Year: 2019

3. Title: Aftermath
- *Swaminathan Commission Report – Serving and Saving Farming, Reports 1,2,3,4,5 + articles + reports on agrarian crisis.*
Medium: Inkjet print on paper with pesticide spray machine and wooden boards
- *3 sec spray after every 30 mins*
Size: 72 x 120 x 72 inches
Year: 2019

4. Title: Drawings - Farmer is a Wrestler - 6
Medium: Ink on Archival paper
Size: 7 x 11.5 inches
Year: 2019

5. Title: Distress Mathematics (Infinite)
Medium: Oil on canvas, Unstretched
Size: 72 x 48 x 2 inches
Year: 2019

6. Title: Distress Mathematics (Delta)
Medium: Oil on canvas, Unstretched
Size: 72 x 48 x 2 inches
Year: 2019

7. Title: A Dozen - Distress Symbols
Medium: Cast Iron
Size: 12 x (5 x 6 x 4 inches), 6kg each
kept on wooden board 120 x 24 x 2 inches

8. Title: Wrestling Mat
Medium: Inkjet print on Fabric
Size: 22 feet
Year: 2019

9. Title: 6 Compositions - Wrestler
Medium: Inkjet prints on Archival Paper
Size: 14 x 10 inches
Year: 2019

10. Title: 5 Compositions - Farmer
Medium: Inkjet prints on Archival Paper
Size: 14 x 10 inches
Year: 2019

11. Title: Verbal Kabaddi
Medium: Game, 7 offset printed card set
Size: 2.5 x 3.5 inches
Year: 2019

12. Title: Kisan Mukti March
- *A source of primary research into farmer's distress across the nation. The documentation delves into the trials and tribulations faced by farmers today. On the 28th and 29th of November 2018 over one lakh farmers had marched into the capital to protest against agrarian crisis.*
Duration: 23 mins, Documentary
Year: 2019

13. Title: Quotidian I
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 84 x 48 x 2.5 inches
Year: 2019

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2. Title: Surjeet Singh
Medium: Film
Duration: 27 mins
Year: 2019

Surjeet Singh, Age 50 has been reporting suicides for 130 villages for Sangrur district of Punjab. Over the span of 10 years, he has met around 2000 families of the deceased farmers on the day of their deaths to fill out the application for their demise.

Subtitles:

0.00.40: Lately, there have been a couple of suicides in the nearby area
0.00.48: Just a day before yesterday someone committed suicide in one of the village
0.00.52: There was another almost a week ago
0.00.54: And three in another neighbouring village
0.01.00 - 0.01.10: Yesterday, one suicide was reported in the village of Raj Raheeri and another in the village of Balam Garh
0.01.15 - 0.01.24: This month has already witnessed over 16 - 18 suicides
0.01.24: Most of them were around my village only
0.02.49 - 0.02.56: During the month of September, farmers do not have much sources of income
0.02.59 - 0.03.05: The crops would be harvested after a month in October
0.03.06: Nor do farmers earn much money
0.03.06: Those farmers get the loan who are already repaying to their moneylender timely
0.03.15 - 0.03.20: They sell the crops in October

or November, and only those who have repaid the moneylenders get the money
0.03.23 - 0.03.28: Those who still owe to their moneylenders cannot even begin the farming process again.
0.03.29 - 0.03.31: Secondly, there is no alternative livelihood for these people.
0.03.32 - 0.03.35: At this point, even the agricultural laborers have nothing to do
0.03.36 - 0.03.39: The farmers are selling their crops only on hope
0.03.40 - 0.03.44: Now a days, most suicides are committed by agricultural laborers rather than farmers
0.05.17 - 0.05.33: In our team of field workers in the last 10 years, I have met around 2000 families of the deceased. Also, our team provides support to 600 families of farmers
0.05.33 - 0.05.37: The government so far has not made any permanent system for reporting suicides
0.05.37 - 0.05.43: Only if someone puts in an application then the suicide gets reported. There is no alternative method for reporting from the government's end
0.05.43 - 0.05.48: Only if there exists a system, would people register for the suicides
0.05.51 - 0.05.56: Due to pressure from the political authorities
0.05.58 - 0.06.00: They managed to put a commission on board
0.06.04 - 0.06.12: The family of the victim first needs to go to the Agricultural department, then Medical department, Police department, Deputy Commission and lastly Panchayat
0.06.21 - 0.06.22: Post that there will be an inquiry about the suicides. Only if someone gives in an application
0.06.23 - 0.06.25: Most of the people

are uneducated and illiterate
0.06.27 - 0.06.29: Only 5 percent of the people get a medical or post-mortem
0.06.34: Then the report goes to the Deputy Commissioner's office
0.06.39 - 0.06.47: 60 percent of the people committing suicide, are already poverty-stricken and do not even have the means to get wood for cremation
0.06.52 - 0.07.00: Their families would even have to incur the expenditure for the relatives who come to mourn the victim's death
0.07.01: A suicide also comes with a cost of at least ₹10,000
0.07.03 - 0.07.05: And a minimum expenditure would mean ₹3000-4000 just for the wood
0.07.07 - 0.07.11: The question is how will a poor family gets a post-mortem conducted?
0.07.14 - 0.07.15: Monetary arrangement of even ₹10,000 appears like a burden to them
0.07.20 - 0.07.27: For a family who is already under debt, post mortem is a distant option
0.08.57 - 0.09.01: Whenever, we get to know directly about a suicide
0.09.02: Or read about it in the newspaper
0.09.03: Or someone from the neighborhood tells us
0.09.10: At first, we go and meet the family as per the criteria
0.09.19: Then we try to console the family
0.09.22 - 0.09.23: And tell them that we are here to help
0.09.25 - 0.09.27: I try to provide comfort to the family members
0.09.29 - 0.09.34: Let us all (the members/ relatives) sit together and try to find a solution
0.09.35 - 0.09.39: Then I ask them, how and why the victim committed suicide
0.09.41 - 0.09.46: After taking in all the details

like Name, Age, Father's Name and the kind of work deceased did
0.09.49 - 0.09.53: We ask about the loans/ debts on the deceased or the family, whether the suicide was due to the loan/ debts
0.09.55: Often the farmers hang themselves, consume pesticides or jump into the runny stream
0.09.59 - 0.10.10: Later I fill the form and ask for the images of the deceased, family members and children at the same time
0.10.18 - 0.10.22: To authenticate the reasons for suicide, I immediately do the inquiries with the family, then fill the form filled and get it stamped by the Panchayat right at the moment
0.10.27: Since relatives, locals and Panyachat have gathered already to mourn
0.10.35 - 0.10.48: Also, I inquire about the children, their age or what grade do they study
If the kids are studying then we take the responsibility of providing support and education to them
0.13.26: Hello (Answering the phone)
0.13.28: Greetings! Where are you calling from?
0.13.42: Is your house next to Anaj Mandi?
0.14.01: With what name do you get the support?
0.14.06: What grade are the kids in?
0.14.20: What is the name of the deceased?
Karnel Singh? Is your name Simran Jeet Kaur?
What is your House Number?
What is your Mobile number? (digits murmuring)
(chatters about the deceased)
0.24.36: Our team of 4-5 people is currently looking into 130 villages in Sangrur district.....

Thukral and Tagra

Dhadi Jatha - Girls from Akal Academy
Performance on 28th September 2019

- 1 -

The peasantry was what he received
in inheritance, Moneylenders and authorities
denied him his rights. He disappeared in the
air, Where once he weaved his dreams. And
he hung himself to the same branch of the
tree where once he plowed. Alas! And he
hung himself to the same branch of the
tree where once he plowed.

- 2 -

Severely hit by inflation, Costly diesel,
fertilizers and the pesticides, All he wished
to mend his house that dripped in the
rains. Alas! And he hung himself to the same
branch of the tree where once he plowed.

- 3 -

Sold an acre, he couldn't repay the loan,
And couldn't pay the installments of
Swaraj. The bankers confiscated the
tractor, With which he ushered the green
revolution. Alas! And he hung himself
to the same branch of the tree where once
he plowed.

- 4 -

The politicians will encash
the opportunity, Paying obeisance at his
obituary. To garner votes, will pay the
homage, By eulogizing him as the
food-deity. Alas! And he hung
himself to the same branch
of the tree where once he plowed.

- 5 -

He always uttered, 'God is not for the
poor', The farmer faced deadly blows of the
time, Can't imagine, he decided to leave this
world, The man who never wanted to leave
this village. Alas! And he hung himself
to the same branch of the tree where
once plowed.