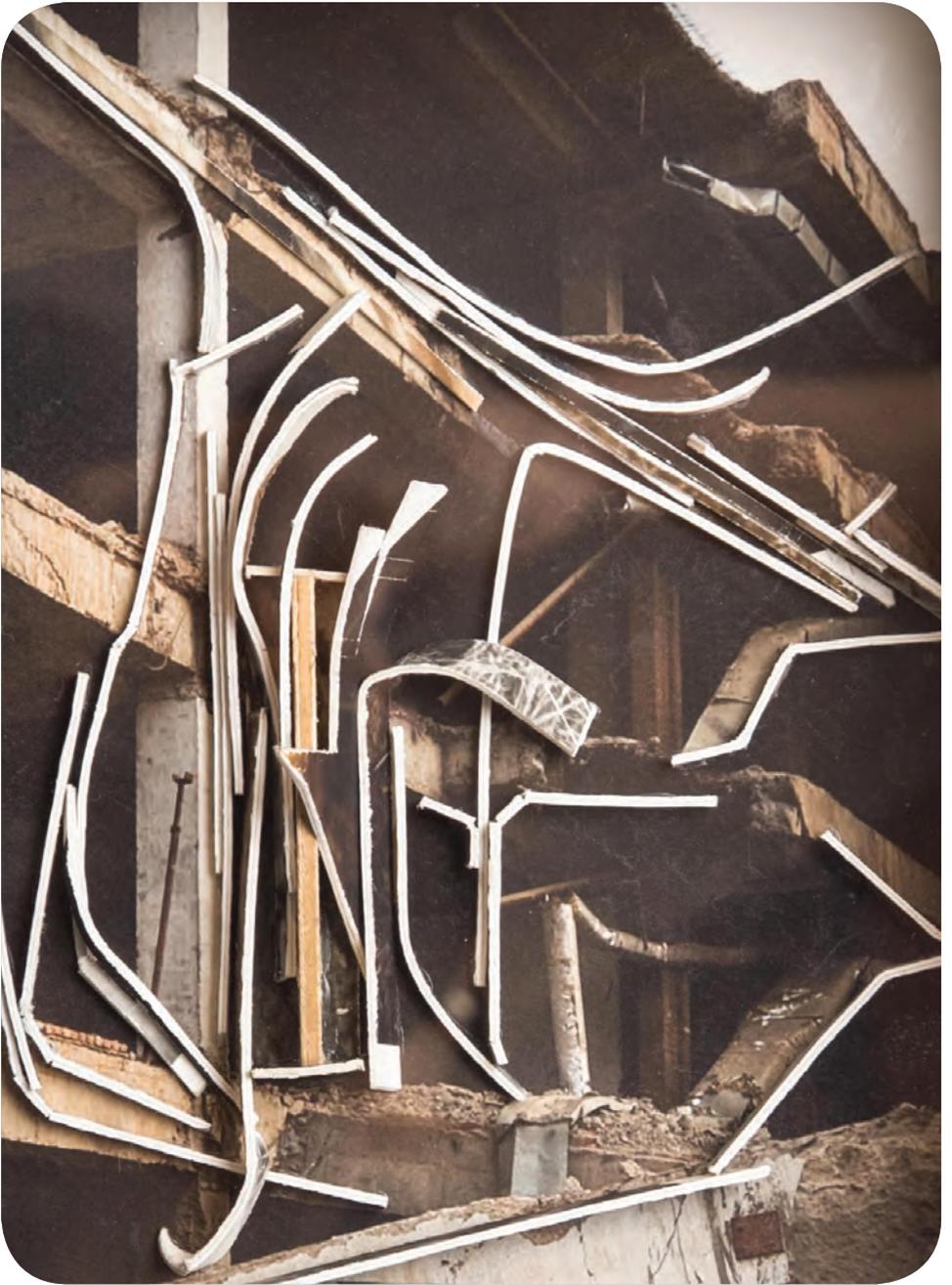


# WASTE LAND

AADITI JOSHI • ASIM WAQIF • BOSHUDHARA MUKHERJEE  
KAUSHIK SAHA • KAUSIK MUKHOPADHYAY  
PRASHANT PANDEY • TANYA GOEL



CURATED BY BIRGID UCCIA



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Cover image: 1 MG Road (Detail), Asim Waqif, 2018  
Courtesy: Nature Morte, New Delhi  
Photo credit: Chandan Ahuja



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Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai



Produced by

# TARQ

F35/36 Dhanraj Mahal,  
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[www.tarq.in](http://www.tarq.in)

TARQ in partnership with the  
Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai presents

# WASTE LAND

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**ARTISTS:**

AADITI JOSHI  
ASIM WAQIF  
BOSHUDHARA MUKHERJEE  
KAUSHIK SAHA  
KAUSIK MUKHOPADHYAY  
PRASHANT PANDEY  
TANYA GOEL

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**CURATED BY BIRGID UCCIA**

## INTRODUCTION

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TARQ is delighted to present Waste Land in partnership with the Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai as a part of the biennial diplomacy campaign of “70 Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds – Inspiring the Future.”

The show, curated by Birgid Uccia, is composed of works by a group of artists preoccupied with both, the re-use of discarded materials in their works, as well as an exploration of a radically different urban landscape. Featuring works by seven cutting edge artists, namely Aaditi Joshi, Asim Waqif, Boshudhara Mukherjee, Kaushik Saha, Kausik Mukopadhyay, Prashant Pandey and Tanya Goel, the exhibition revolves around practices that embrace Vincent van Gogh’s idea that the garbage dump is an ‘artist’s paradise.’

With each work, the curator is able to bring out the callous variety of ways in which, we as a consumerist society are constantly churning out unprecedented amounts of waste – while simultaneously nodding at the artistic tradition of creating meaning, and indeed beauty from what is otherwise perceived as junk.

This show would have been impossible without the support of the Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai, Chatterjee and Lal, Gallerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Nature Morte, Abhay Maskara and of course Birgid Uccia.

Hena Kapadia  
Gallery Director, TARQ

'Well, today I visited the  
place where the dustmen  
dump the garbage.  
Lord, how beautiful that is.'<sup>1</sup>

– Vincent van Gogh

## WASTE LAND

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The exhibition *Waste Land* is part of the biennial public diplomacy campaign “70 Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds – Inspiring the Future” of the Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai. Aiming to reinforce this friendship, the exhibition connects creative minds from fields as diverse as contemporary Indian art and Swiss waste management and technology. Cutting across these disciplines, the exhibition provides a platform for the exchange of innovative ideas and pioneering discoveries in both fields, increasing awareness and effecting social change.

The title *Waste Land* uses ‘waste’ as a generic term, covering a wide range of synonyms and their semantics (trash, garbage, refuse, junk, debris, etc.). It implies ‘waste’ as the verb that designates excessive squandering and the luxury our consumerist society has to do so. The title also refers to a deserted land, devastated by the depletion of resources through the sheer abundance of waste. Since the beginning of cultural history, waste has been an integral part of the functioning of socio-economic systems, whose evolution has culminated in the process of industrialization. Whereas industrialization undeniably stands for human progress, it has generated an unprecedented quantity of waste, reflecting the ecological impact of unsustainable technologies and consumerist behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent van Gogh, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, vol. 3, pp. 365–66, New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1959.

In past decades, waste, long considered as something worthless to be discarded, has in many ways achieved the status of a sought-after raw material. Converted into a commodity through the process of recycling, waste is reinserted into the economic cycle, entering a new value chain. While it is still dumped in landfills, to the extent that 'cities have been literally ringed by a garbage belt which, in the absence of fortifying walls, delimits the urban space'<sup>2</sup>, pioneering efforts in countries such as Switzerland result in high technologies, promoting methods of waste treatment and resource efficiency that counteract the fallouts of our wasteful society.

In India, where the economy of recuperation and recycling is still in its infancy, artists recognize waste as an artistic raw material. They aim for a transformation of the ambivalent relationship society has with waste. 'For the longest time, waste has been relegated to the fringes of culture, if not expelled altogether, and has thus stood as a term opposed to culture.'<sup>3</sup> Whereas large parts of society still consider waste as ritually and hygienically impure, evoking disgust and repression, artists insert waste into the cycle of cultural production. A pioneering figure in using discarded materials, creating panoramic landscapes through the

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Moser, 'The Acculturation of Waste', pp. 85-105, in: *Waste-Site Stories. The Recycling of Memory*, edited by Brian Neville and Johanne Villeneuve, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

mass accumulation of consumerist debris, is Vivan Sundaram (b. 1943). His preoccupation with trash between 1997-2011, resulting in photographs, videos, installations, and sculptures, is based on the quest for an 'alternative ecology'<sup>4</sup>, and has been impacting the younger generation of artists in this exhibition. Often by default, they use old metals, worn clothes, building rubble, newspaper, plastic, electronic waste, and cigarette butts, widening the range of potential materials.

Simultaneously, these artists face the challenge of developing new techniques, 'methods of treatment' in the parlance of waste management, that allow for the transformation of rejected materials into works of art. Altering the process of deterioration by reversing it, the creation of aesthetic objects from waste materials does not only save resources, but also reassigns value to something that has been doomed to oblivion. It also sheds light on the fundamental truth that 'rubbish is a metaphor for life itself'<sup>5</sup> in view of the ephemeral nature of materials.

Artists in the exhibition not only explore the temporal dimension of waste, but also rewrite its 'biography'. Discovering the expressive

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<sup>4</sup> Vivan Sundaram, 'Trash', published by Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai/Photoink, New Delhi/Sepia International, New York/Walsh Gallery, Chicago, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Beyond the Archive', pp. 71-83, in: *Waste-Site Stories. The Recycling of Memory*, op. cit.

potential of refuse, they transform it into objects that often do not reveal their origin in the dumpsite or the everyday context of usage. Extracting what has been invisible or simply neglected, the very process of artistic transformation elucidates the expansive meaning of waste. It is reassigned a new purpose that all too often



**From the series 'Trash' Prospect', 2005-2008**  
Digital photograph,  
104.5 x 59.5 inches  
Courtesy: The artist and Chemould Prescott Road Gallery  
Photo credit: Anil Rane

challenges the hierarchies of accepted materials in the field of art, as well as the norms of refined taste.

Waste is addressed as a phenomenon that holds collective memory and personal stories. It is by no means anonymous, indeed it tells us about the cultural practices of a society, the behavior of individuals, demographics, the means of production and trends of consumption. Waste also testifies history, in that it connects the obsolete object to its past. In many cases, artists act as 'archeologists', 'excavating' these forgotten objects in an attempt to trace the various stages of their decay. By transforming them, these materials are given a second life, all too often not intended by those who originally made or consumed them.

It is important to note that the moment of transition of an object, from being useful into the stage of disuse, differs from culture to culture. Whereas a material might be discarded or eliminated altogether in a highly industrialized country, it might be still of value in an economically and technically less advanced country. The latter being more versatile and innovative, when it comes to dealing with meager resources, might extend the 'systemic functionality' of the material far beyond the widely accepted limits, shedding light on the fact that waste is not a 'stable category'.

Analogous to the economic revaluation of waste through

technically advanced methods of treatment, the aesthetic reevaluation assigns symbolic and socio-cultural value to waste. By restoring materials that have been rejected 'to their lost dignity', artists remind us that nearly every man-made object, including those made by machine, have the potential to turn into waste. Even an ideal society shall always generate remains as a *sine qua non* of the cycle of production and consumption. 'Everything is potentially waste or evidence.'<sup>6</sup>

Vincent van Gogh once described the garbage dump as an 'artist's paradise', where he gained inspiration from discarded objects such as broken street lamps, oil cans, baskets, and kettles. These objects enthusiastically reminded him of something 'out of a fairy tale by Andersen', exuding beauty and mystery. This fairy tale of the past has turned, by the sheer quantity of waste generated today, into a dystopia of global dimensions. It is through the most able creative minds in the fields of art and waste technology that we are allowed the utopian dream of a future when waste is no longer engulfing us, but is reduced to a size of which human civilization can be proud.

- Birgid Uccia

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<sup>6</sup>Susanne Hauser, 'Waste into Heritage. Remarks on Materials in the Arts, on Memories and the Museum', pp. 39-54, in: *Waste-Site Stories. The Recycling of Memory*, op. cit.



**Aaditi Joshi** (1980) has created a site-specific sculpture of intriguing visual quality. Referencing her installation at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, she considers the architectural space, and the physical and perceptual experience of the viewer. The artist applies heat to manipulate the texture and shape of plastic bags she reuses from her earlier works. Creating small, biomorphic clusters of bags, painted in various colors, she has mounted them on a wooden armature spanning the two gallery floors. Plastic bags, ubiquitous in the city of Mumbai and discarded in alarming quantities, are explored in their dual function as an 'object of trash' and an 'object of beauty'.

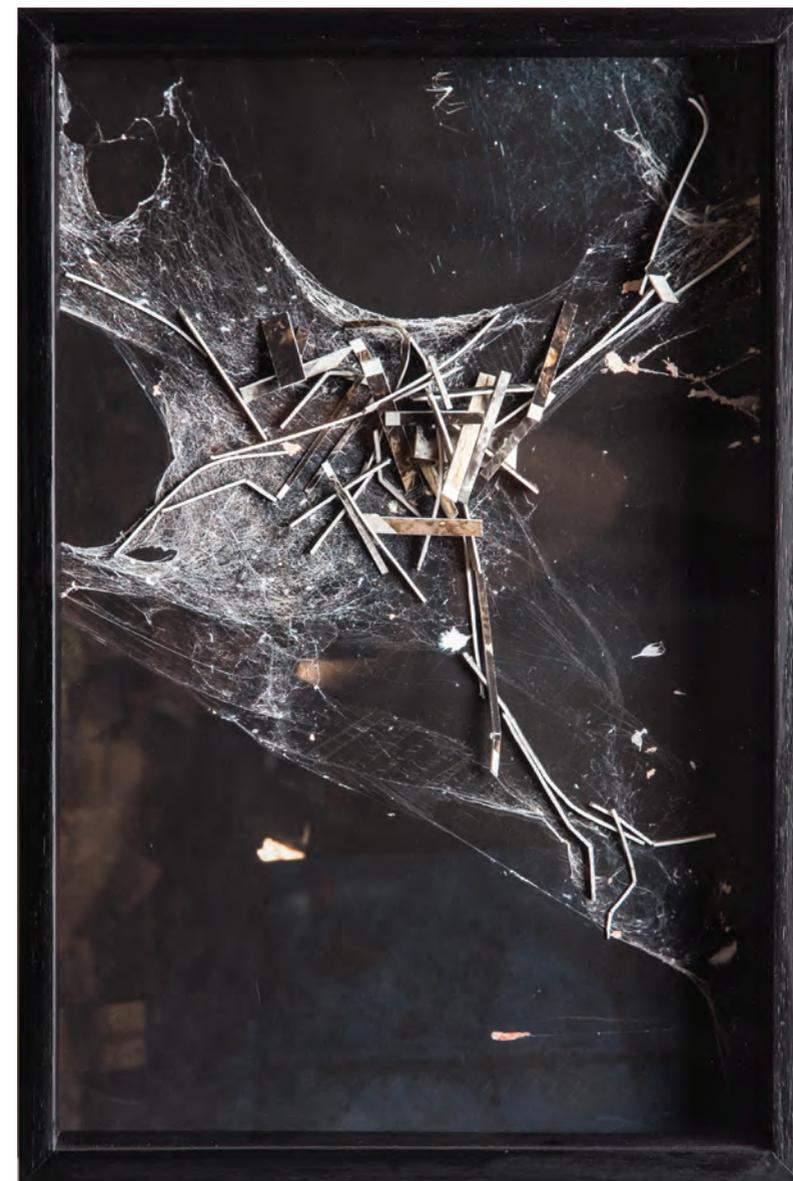
**Untitled**

Fused plastic bags, acrylic paint, LED lights,  
wood armature, site-specific installation  
288 x 78 x 108 inches (l x w x h)  
Interactive installation  
2016  
Courtesy: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

**Asim Waqif's** (1978) 'Collapse analysis of concrete slabs due to aerial bombardment (Case Study: Raqqa)' is based on the reworking of a car door salvaged from an accident-damaged vehicle. Discarded vehicles, one of the many 'forgotten ruins of consumer culture', serve as a resource to explore the creative forces of destruction and decay. Superimposing a car door with the abstracted map of an area destroyed by aerial bombardment, the artist juxtaposes the violent impact of a car crash and a bombardment. Reminding us of vast stretches of building rubble and mountains of scrap metal that alter the landscape, the stark yellow of the sculpture blurs the boundaries between trash and treasure.

**Najafgargh Road Industrial Area**

Strips of archival print on acid free paper fixed on another archival print mounted on rag board  
16.5" x 11.5" x 3" (framed)  
2018  
Courtesy: Nature Morte, New Delhi  
Photo credit: Chandan Ahuja





**Collapse analysis of concrete slabs due to aerial bombardment (Case Study: Raqqa)**

Microprismatic sheet mounted on aluminum composite panel and car door salvaged from an accidental vehicle  
52 x 45 x 20 inches

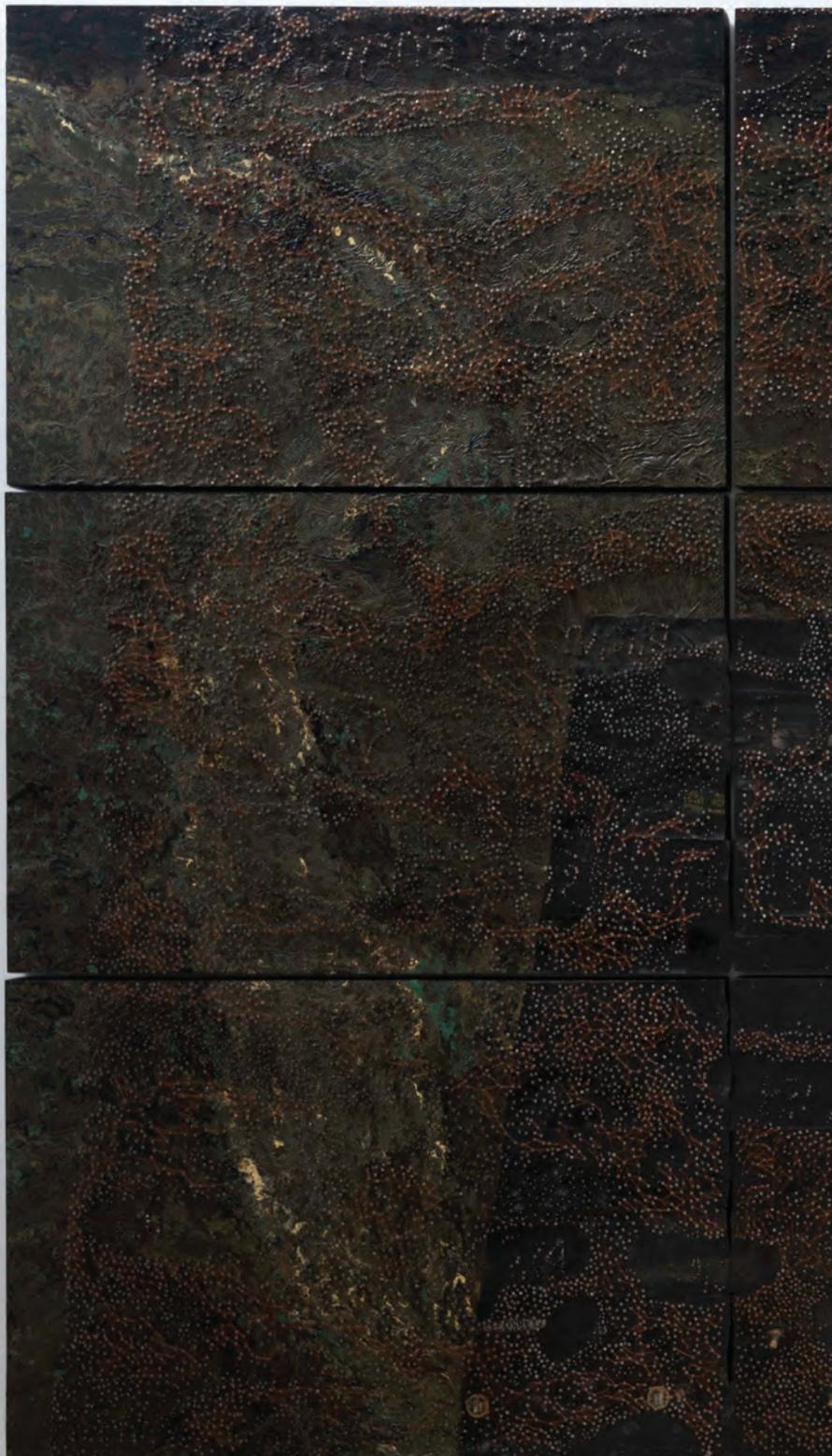
2018

Courtesy: Nature Morte, New Delhi  
Photo credit: Chandan Ahuja

**Boshudhara Mukherjee** (1983) experiments with materials ranging from old saris, tape, and plastic, to used canvas, which she recycles from previous works. Transgressing the boundaries of painting by merging arts and crafts, she dedicates herself to the painstaking process of weaving the material rather than deploying the brush. By 'freeing' the canvas through the process of cutting and chopping, 'U Turn' is an intricate wall hanging, whose grid-like character recalls densely populated urban landscapes, with the fringes and cut-outs pointing to the unorganized peripheries and margins of the city.

**U Turn**  
Mixed media on canvas  
57 x 95 inches  
2013





**Kaushik Saha** (1989) uses materials of the common man at the bottom of the economic pyramid, such as copper wire, nails, and used bicycle tyres to compose the obscure 9-panel landscape 'The Order of the Age'. Multiple layers of advertisements, narratives, and doodle-shaped textures, paying homage to Rabindranath Tagore, map the geography of an imaginative terrain, teeming with rupture and volatility. With the number of punctures in the flattened tyres indicating the social rank of the bicycle users, the artist makes an astute commentary on politics, labour and rapid development.



**Order of The Age**

Copper wire, nails used bicycle tubes,  
oil and enamel paint on ply  
72 x 108 inches (9 panels)  
2016

Courtesy: Private Collection, Switzerland and  
Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke  
Photo credit: Anil Rane



**Kausik Mukhopadhyay** (1960) repurposes old electronic items he has excessively collected. 'Cloud House', 'Mother's House', and 'Father's House' are laborious, whimsical, and partially kinetic sculptures, whose frenzy defies the glossiness of high art. Assembling and reconfiguring parts of disused household gadgets, he not only exposes their life cycle, but instills new life in an otherwise dead and fragmented material. The viewer is exposed to unexpected multi-sensory experiences, facing an endless array of surprises, whose surreal character recalls the beauty of 'the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table'.

**Cloud House**

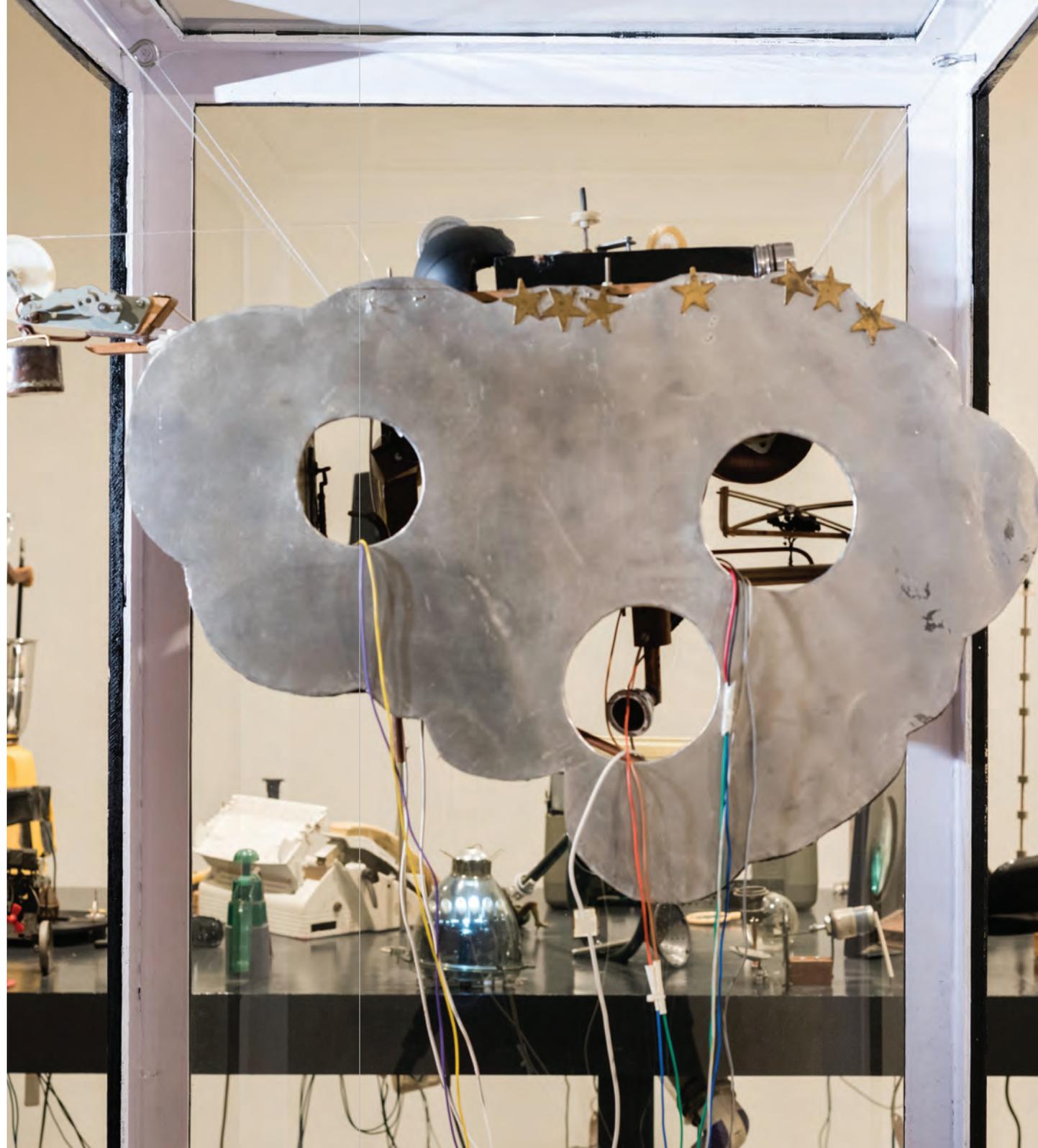
Wood, metal, plastic and  
electrical components, kinetic  
71.5 x 24 x 24 inches  
2016

Courtesy: The artist, TARQ and Chatterjee & Lal

**Cloud House (Detail)**

Wood, metal, plastic and  
electrical components, kinetic  
71.5 x 24 x 24 inches  
2016

Courtesy: The artist TARQ and Chatterjee & Lal



**Prashant Pandey's** (1984) semi-translucent sculpture 'Universe' recalls medieval maps of a disk-shaped world. Suspended in mid-air, the wholeness and purity of the form gives way to surprise on encountering soft-colored, blossom-like elements that turn out to be used cigarette butts. As with his delicate sculpture 'Missed' in the shape of a turtle, created out of crumpled, burnt, and drawn-upon pieces of paper, he imbues trash with sculptural poetry. The ornamental shadow that both sculptures cast on the wall evoke the ephemerality and transitory nature of all things man-made.

**Universe**

Used and discarded cigarette butts, wood, thread  
58.5 x 58.5 inches (framed)  
2015  
Ed. 3/5  
Courtesy: The artist and Maskara Gallery





**Missed**

Ink on trash paper partially burnt and lacquered

67 x 62 Inches

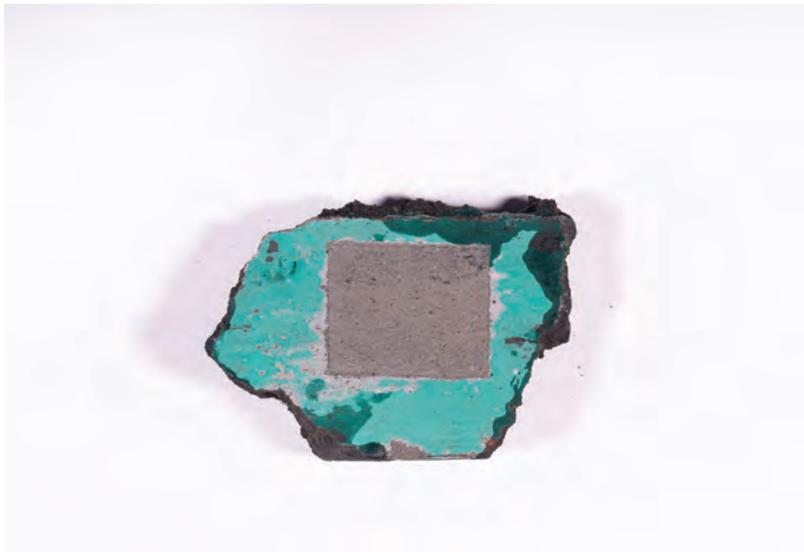
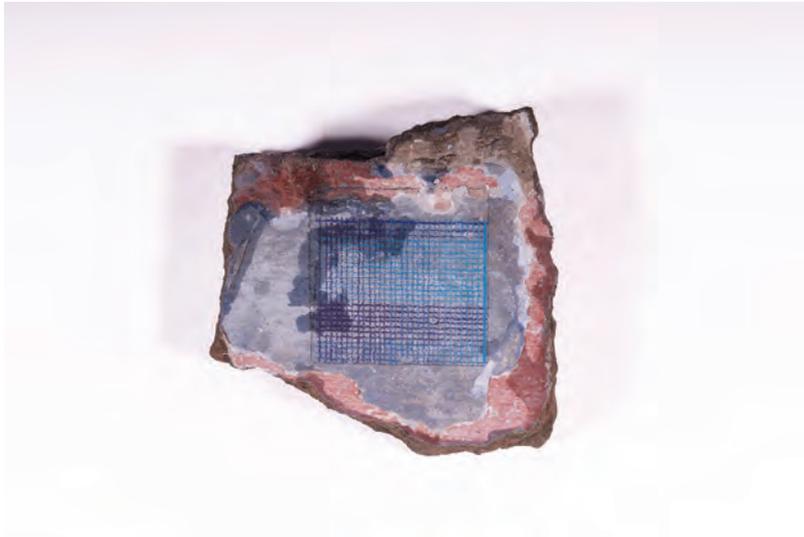
2011

Ed. 1/3

Courtesy: The artist and Maskara Gallery

**Tanya Goel's** (1985) most recent series of frescoes 'Fragments C.P.W.D., New Delhi' is sourced from demolished buildings dating to the modernist era of affordable housing in Delhi between the 1950s-70s. Ranging from painted wall fragments in pastel blues, lilacs, greens, or pinks to broken pieces of lattice-work, the artist makes minimal grid-like interventions in the form of drawings on the surface of the debris. Incarnating the archetype of the artist as an archeologist, Tanya Goel excavates the various layers of an ever-changing cityscape in the wake of rapid urbanization. She also preserves these layers by making her own pigments from a diverse array of materials, including concrete, glass, aluminium, and foils which are meticulously numbered and archived.





**From the series 'Fragments C.P.W.D., New Delhi'**  
Drawing / application on found debris  
2018  
Courtesy: Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke  
Photo credit: Arjun Mahatta

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

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Birgid Uccia studied Philosophy and History of Art at the University of Zurich. She has years of in-depth experience in the international art world as the co-owner of a gallery and project space in Zurich, author of catalogue essays and reviews and curator of “Art Clips”, a video art project commissioned by National Swiss Television. She is the founder of ACFA Asian Contemporary Fine Arts, providing curatorial and independent art advisory services in the field of contemporary art from India and the Subcontinent. Drawing parallels between Western and Eastern art practices, her curatorial and academic expertise provides a considered framework to promote contemporary art from the region. She was nominated senior curator of St. Moritz Art Masters 2014, focus India, and guest lecturer on Indian Modern and Contemporary Art and Art Market at the University of Zurich, Art Market Studies Executive Master Program. She has recently curated ‘Displacement’ by Abir Karmakar at Mirchandani & Steinruecke Gallery, Mumbai.

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Aaditi Joshi

Asim Waqif

Boshudhara Mukherjee

Kaushik Saha

Kausik Mukhopadhyay

Prashant Pandey

Tanya Goel

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Designed by Anugraha  
studioanugraha.com

TARQ

[info@tarq.in](mailto:info@tarq.in) | [www.tarq.in](http://www.tarq.in)