TEL AVIV

Uri Nir

HELENA RUBENSTEIN PAVILION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, TEL AVIV MUSEUM OF ART

Mixed messages and cross-purposes obstructed the thrust of "Accelerator," the most ambitious (read: high-budget) effort yet of Uri Nir's budding career. Presented together as one synchronized entity, four discrete but related elements occupied three spaciously contiguous galleries. One housed a sprawling installation of large, freestanding doors that cut up the space at irregular intervals parallel to the room's rectilinear perimeter, as though shorthanding an invisible interior architecture. Emulating the carved heft of heavy ancient gates, the doors were made of translucent Plexiglas and illuminated from within, functioning as wall-size light boxes programmed to flash on and off on a frenzied cycle. The effect was beyond theatrical—it was almost cartoonish, like a haunted house at a fair.

Uri Nir, *Second Chance*, 2011, still from a black-and-white video, 3 minutes 51 seconds.

The flashing installation had also served as the stage set for Nir's short black-and-white video *Accelerator* (all works 2011), shot in the museum and depicting a young boy trapped among the paroxysmal doors by an enveloping cage of continuously cascading sand that pours in columns from cracked sarcophagi hung ominously from the ceiling. The child—the artist's son, Boaz—mysteriously wears a disposable respirator and swimming goggles. Every element seems emotionally charged with symbolism, narrative, and historical reference. Projected at the exhibition's entrance, the looping video sets an immediate and enduring tone of camp horror, displaying the conventions of a suspenseful scene in some B movie—think *Saw* meets *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. An exhibition-wide sound track of jangly harpsichord notes, synesthetically rhyming with the video's perpetual cascade of sand, reinforced the spooky cinematic atmosphere established throughout. The music—a collage of multiple overlapping channels—blared from speakers built into a nearby sculptural composite of more than a dozen orange casts of Tel Aviv phone booths.

With these orange punctuations to the exhibition's otherwise black-and-white palette, the Halloween theme seemed fully secured yet unexploited (and oddly disavowed by the artist when I asked him about it). In any case, all the genre-laden theatricality ended up primarily distracting from the final and most compelling part of the exhibition, the looping, black-and-white video *Second Chance*. In it, several homeless drug addicts tentatively play a harpsichord in the artist's studio; their meandering improvisations (the source of the ubiquitous sound track) are crosscut to appear to be the cause of anamorphic distortions warping a giant spinning egg-shaped sculpture that the junkies watch in hypnotized fascination.

Second Chance formulates a powerful model of rapturous and transportive vision. In it, the junkies represent an ideal mode of (art) viewing—a hyperbolic experience of perception so intense, focused, and disembodied that it dissolves the active self-consciousness responsible for grounding subjectivity and gauging time. Visual engagement gets put in terms of jonesing and the video proves to be all too addictive. In tune with the volatile alien egg wobbling in front of them and swelling with throbbing potential, the junkies are active agents of altered perception who thrillingly confuse subjective and objective vision. While the revolving ovum takes on lifelike aspects in its erratic convulsions and unstable nature, the stationary men appear fixed as zoned-out monads, increasingly impenetrable and objectlike in the grip of an out-of-body reverie. Though other elements in "Accelerator" were overpowered by the narrative force of stilted cinematic tropes, Nir here hit his stride and captured, briefly, the intoxicating magic that can occur in the speculative space of looking that unites subjects with objects, viewer with dizzying view.

—Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

MUMBAI

Jitish Kallat

DR. BHAU DAJI LAD MUMBAI CITY MUSEUM

Visiting the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum during the monsoons provoked a surge of irritation: Like everything else in the city, we grumbled, it seemed this handsome building was also under construction, its gilded columns and archways obscured and the famous statue of a macho-looking Prince Albert unfairly imprisoned by crisscrossing bamboo poles. Moving closer to the marble figure, though, we discovered that his cage contained small protrusions—minute grimacing lions, unblinking owls, and crawling crocodiles pimpled its surface. For once, the scaffolding (actually resin masquerading as bamboo) was not an aberration to be ignored but the untitled cornerstone of Jitish Kallat's exhibition "Fieldnotes: Tomorrow Was Here Yesterday." Invited by Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, BDL's honorary director and curator, to respond to the museum's permanent collection of Victorian artifacts, Kallat overran the recently restored nineteenth-century building with videos, sculptures, and installations evoking Mumbai's troubled past and chaotic present.

Kallat's fabricated construction site alludes to a city undergoing an identity crisis. The metropolis's name change from Bombay to Mumbai, pushed for by the Hindu Right, is itself resisted by many citizens, who argue that it eradicates their multicultural heritage. *Annexation*, 2009, riffs on the dog-eat-dog existence of residents. It features an oversize black kerosene stove, richly carved with squabbling animals: A lion munches on a peacock, a lizard lunges at a terrified bird. They resemble the gargoyles decorating the facade of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, one of Mumbai's main railway stations. Time and travel were also evoked by the roman numerals, outlined in neon lights (*Untitled*, 2011), that Kallat inscribed onto an ornate archway. The giant clock face is as beautiful as it is useless, unable to mark the passage of time.

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For Mehta, Kallat's show is part of a time-sensitive project. Once known as the Victoria & Albert Museum, BDL was meant to showcase local artifacts produced under the aegis of the British Raj.