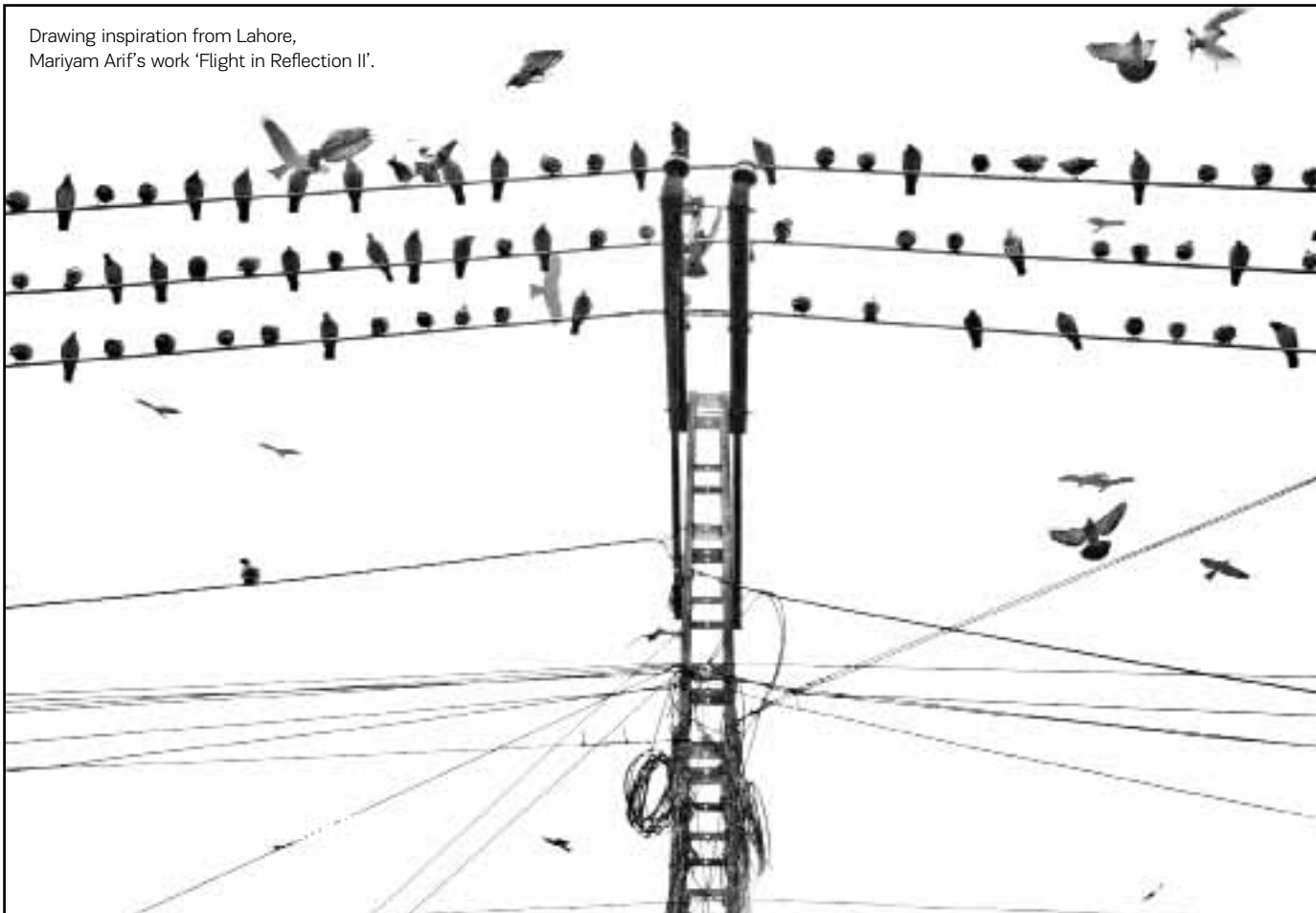




'All in the same boat' in mixed media by Subodh Gupta.



Drawing inspiration from Lahore, Mariyam Arif's work 'Flight in Reflection II'.

FROM TOP: JOSÉ LUIS GUTIÉRREZ/ SUBODH GUPTA AND HAUSER & WIRTH; COURTESY OF MARIYAM ARIFF

8

Live.
Love.
Art.

THEY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN BORN HERE, THEY MAY NOT BELONG HERE BUT THIS IS HOME AS THEIR HEART BEATS HERE AND SO DOES THEIR ART. **RAJESH PUNJ** SEES THE CITIES OF DELHI, MUMBAI, LAHORE, DHAKA AND KERALA THROUGH THE EYES OF EIGHT LEADING CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS.



Looking at Mumbai landscape, Hema Upadhyay created 'Think left, Think right, Think low, Think tight'.

A cityscape always leaves an indelible imprint of itself upon the practices of its inhabitants. Acting as the architectonic cradle for the crowd, the modern city expands and contracts like a living organ—cajoling and inspiring its inhabitants in equal measure. And for those artists residing in the city, once they have sucked in the energy of the crowd, inhaled the industrious atmosphere, and indulged in make-shift cuisine; they are open to all kinds of magnificent experiences that shape and shift their art in equal measure. Finding inspiration in almost every detail of life in a city, eight artists who eat, love and breathe art speak of it.

FROM TOP: HEMA UPADHYAY; SAHEJ RAHAL AND CHATTERJEE & LAL



Sahej Rahal's work 'Clarion II', 2013 in wood, plastic, coated iron, polyester fur, and condensed PVC.



"ALL THEMES OF LIFE AND EMOTIONS PLAY OUT HERE IN FULL VOLUME"

Mumbai's iconic Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus proved as an inspiration for artist **Jitish Kallat's** 2006-2007 Rickshawpolis paintings. In this, the glorious coloured gargoyles rooted to the base of the painting, were inspired by the architectural details of the iconic train station. Kallat is renowned for having trodden a well-worn path in the city with his compact camera—capturing street-scenes, gazing up at the scaled heights of Bollywood billboards, while basking in the warm light of the day. "I often say that the city streets are my university. One finds all the themes of life and art, pain, happiness, anger, violence and compassion, played out here in full volume."



"Making call" and "Autosarous" by artist Jitish Kallat.

"THE CITY OF MADNESS"

For artist **Sahej Rahal, Mumbai** is always on the move. "Meetings are usually at a tea stall during the day, or on the trains, and once in a while at someone's house. I've made a habit of running around in Andheri at about 5 am, which is just before the day's madness begins. This is when you can feel the city awkwardly weaning itself off from the night before. And, I usually find most of the objects I use (in my art) during this time."

"SIMPLE FOOD, AND I'M VERY HAPPY"

For contemporary artist **Subodh Gupta, New Delhi's** government buildings sparked his interest—that led to works such as *Date by date*, 2008. And then, the interlocking bazaars were where he first encountered impromptu stainless steel sculptures; made up of utensils incongruously piled high, and sold cheap. But, for Gupta having a conversation about art is more nurturing with a plate of good Indian food. "When I come back after travelling, give me simple food, like *dal chawal*, *bhujia* and some curry, chicken curry or lamb curry, and I'm very happy." Cooking is at the centre of his well-being, and is clearly reflective of the cultural significance of simple dishes in the city.

"I AM CONSTANTLY CONFRONTED WITH THE IDEA OF CREATIVITY"

Mumbai-based artist **Hema Upadhyay** sights the city as an evolutionary incubator for life. Her works reflect the circumstances of having

to live cheek by jowl in India's industrious epicentre. "Yes, so much of the chaos in my work actually comes from the city. When I work in my studio in Mumbai, there are lots of elements, of decay, of life, and of chaos. It's a double-edged condition when you see development in the making—you see growth but decay, you see modern skyscrapers but the mushrooming of slums, etc. And as an artist, I am constantly confronted with the idea of creativity, and of how the natural elements or conditions affect the manufactured work."

For Upadhyay the unqualified joy of being in this city, is the animated pleasure of the light coming into the studio in the morning, the cranky car horns puncturing the silence, the steady motion of people making their way from one side of the city to the other, passing the tea stand, and the barber's shop. If the work is made inside, the ideas come from outside. "There is something intoxicating about this city, like no other. Mumbai provides me with the impetus to constantly experiment and research with material from the city, of ideas born of the city, and spaces that preoccupy the city, and of our psychological link with them. Essentially, I want my aesthetics to make the viewer deal with multiple emotions simultaneously, creating a dialogue across all sections of society."

"AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF SPIRITUALITY SHAPES THIS CITY"

For **Lahore-based** photographer **Maryam Arif**, her city "provides the natural balance for my life as a medic and a photographer, and has proved a major influence upon the simplicity and candour of my work".

FROM TOP: CHE; ANSHUMAN SEN



Pigeons outside the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan.

"Despite of what you might think, an overwhelming sense of spirituality shapes this city; and an essence of open-heartedness and hospitality lights the geography of Lahore." Pakistan's capital city reads like a biblical landscape that is cultivated by a heady mix of tradition and technologies. And none of that is lost on a new generation of Pakistani studying the arts. Pleasurably Arif mentions the nourishing pleasure of eating and conversing in equal measure. "In particular, I really enjoy the ambiance of a small restaurant called 'Nairang', which is part restaurant and part gallery, where I held my first solo show. Since then almost every month I hold a discussion session there to encourage good conversation, which is so fundamentally a characteristic of Lahorians."

"QURESHI IS ENCHANTED BY HIS CITY'S HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ITS TIES TO MINIATURE PAINTING"

For **Imran Qureshi**, Lahore proves to have an incredible pull on his life as an artist and an academician. Qureshi is convinced of the originality that is prevalent in Lahore; that has possibly been compromised in Delhi and Mumbai

FROM TOP: DBIMAGES/ALAMY; COURTESY OF THE GUILD ART GALLERY



TV Santhosh of Kerala displayed 'Effigies of Turbulent Yesteryears' at the Colombo Art Biennale this year.



In Kerala, the air is cleaner, food tastier and conversation sharper, believes TV Santhosh.

by the overwhelming burden of commercial interests. Qureshi is enchanted by his city's 'historical significance' and its ties to 'miniature painting'. "I cannot live anywhere else."

"I like the way it is growing and spending on land, and not vertically like too many other big cities in the world in the form of skyscrapers. My favourite spot is 'Jahangir's tomb', which is just outside the city. You pass through a very rural neighbourhood, and then reach a peaceful and extremely beautiful Mughal monument. It has an amazing garden and unbelievable quietness, a rarity in cities these days."

Qureshi confesses to returning again and again to Lahore's appetising bazaars, for their relentless energy and aromatic food. There are also significant sites and sanctuaries that enliven his spirit. "I love to walk around Shag Almeen market in the Rang Mahal area and close to the Wazir Khan mosque, and I'm always making a pilgrimage to Lawrence gardens, one of my favourite places to go."

'KERALA IS A CULTURALLY-MOTIVATED PLACE'

New Delhi-based artist **TV Santhosh**, reflecting on his adolescent years in **Kerala**, draws attention to the cultural intellectualism with which he works now, and of the undulating charm of being on the coast as a young man. "As far as my works are concerned, there is no specific connection with Kerala in terms of cultural nostalgia. But I did live in Kerala for 20 years, and I am still well connected; so there was clearly a lot that formed about my understanding of the world around me during my time there and it did matter that Kerala was a culturally-motivated place.

I grew up imbibing the intense cultural atmosphere of the 80s, and watching world-class

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Mumbai.



movies. And, it is true that Kerala has a very high literacy rate and that people are very engaged with their surroundings." Such dynamism serves to illustrate the balance of politics and pragmatism that is cultivated in his work. For Santhosh there was also a spirited freedom about being close to the water, without the inhibitions of industry.+

'I LOVE THE JUXTAPOSED MOOD OF DHAKA'

For **Dhaka** photographer **Shumon Ahmed** the city proves to be his playground. "My places of inspiration would be the places I grew up in. Those days, I would sneak out at midnight to walk the length of the city; and sit on a traffic post in the middle of a roundabout, (as though it were his throne); otherwise congested during the day." For Ahmed it was the allure of a deserted cityscape that enlivened his imagination, to toy with it as though it were a film-set. "I loved going to old Dhaka quite often to seek out old buildings, and facades that moved me with their lost and decaying charm." In the evening, he would go to areas in old Dhaka with his camera with no real intention. Ahmed also had a habit of returning to the old city during the day but that was to try out a *biryani* restaurant.



'Metal Graves' by Dhaka-based artist Shumon Ahmed.