



ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

Criss-crossing lines
On the inside of your palms
Speak the language of infinity
Old words for crushed souls, a soothing balm

And yet, between the said and the heard
The remains of meaning exist
Floating on the surface like lifeless bodies
Swirling and tumbling through time's ageless tryst

It's telling (yes) of the world we live in
Where updates and hashtags often set sail
Through the open seas of virtual liberation
Along with the 'like', a dog's incessant wagging tail

When beneath the burden of the eye
Memories bump against identities
That bump against invisible visible boundaries
That slip and slide through multiple realities

To create a vortex throbbing with prejudice
Drowning in (un)limiting categories
And, dare we say it, themes
Clutching on to the ends of stories

That reveal as much as they conceal
That surmount as much as they defeat
For if not for words, dead or alive
How would meaning derive its rightful beat?

And when it does
When it stops to pause and breathe
The words, I mean
Then to us, the dance of silence it bequeaths

Because first there was the word
However sandwiched between the walls
Of silence and thereof and hereunder
Wordlessly pointing to truth's buried calls

Much as we discovered this issue
Through, between, with and without words
That between the said and the heard
There also thrives a space, quietly shaken and stirred



'I paint with light,' claims Shailan Parker, while we look through his innumerable images on a large-screen Mac at his South Delhi studio, where you manoeuvre around photographic equipment and lights that seem to have taken over the space... stacked on the floor, on the podium and hanging from the ceiling.

Parker began his career as a professional photographer over 35 years ago. He is an alumnus of the National Institute of Design (NID, Ahmedabad) where he trained in Visual Communications, and continues his association with the institute as a guest faculty member. Product photography is at the core of his practice, and Parker is recognised for his ability to design and craft visuals around client briefs. While it may seem like a mundane professional requirement, it has allowed Parker the creative freedom to project the best visual of an object in a controlled studio environment. His resourcefulness leads him to apply this learning to his artistic works. He takes hours to *set up the stage*... placement of the object, working with multiple sources of light and reflection, adjusting the angles and controlling the intensity of the lights. Just as the painter decides which colour and

how much of it should be applied on canvas, Parker controls his imagery by orchestrating the lighting. This is fundamentally different from capturing what exists or is available for anyone to take notice of. Parker *creates* his images.

For this issue as we begin our fifth year, we chose an image of a found silk-cotton flower. Half dried and almost disintegrated, it would normally never attract a second glance. Parker gives it a rebirth, a new voice, an emergence from the silence of the discarded to the silence of the revered. Enhancing the textures, accentuating the undulations, the image allows for a meditative gaze. The back cover is the same image in negative. It looks like a charcoal drawing of the rays of light Parker used to create his image in the first place. The work is consciously left untitled to allow the viewer an absolute and unbiased experience and interpretation.

The words of Georgia O'Keeffe evoke the appropriate emotions of Parker's artistic practice – '*If you take a dry flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for a moment.*'

Conceptualisation of the cover and text above by Rahul Kumar.



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He is a Fulbright Scholar with a Masters in Arts from USA. A Charles Wallace fellow and a recipient of scholarships from the India Foundation for the Arts and the Ministry of Culture (Government of India), he is an established artist. Retiring after 18 years of corporate life, he now curates art shows and residencies.



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Be it pruning her way through the written word or running a fine-toothed comb over the printed page, Sethu, with decades of experience in journalism and publishing, has found her happiness quotient.



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Vani's love for art is visible in her perception of architecture. With a clear adoration for the evolving artscape that surrounds us, she also writes on art, architecture and cinema.



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Abha Iyengar is an award-winning, internationally published poet, author, essayist, editor and British Council-certified creative writing mentor. Her published works are *Yearnings*, *Flash Bites*, *Shrayan*, and *The Gourd Seller and Other Stories*.



Bharti Perwani is an actor trained at the Madhya Pradesh School of Drama, Bhopal. She has worked with directors across India and has performed in several theatre festivals in India and abroad. She, now, shuffles between theatre and film as media of performance.



Meera Rajagopalan is a Chennai-based writer who has worked for publications in India and in the U.S. Her work tends to focus on the intersection of culture and identity, and she believes in ghosts.



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He is a designer and visual artist who uses culture for socio-economic change, and was the recipient of the British Council International Young Design Entrepreneur Award in 2009.



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Her published work includes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. It has also been part of choreographic projects and art installations. She lives and works in Auroville.



Daniel Connell lived in Jaipur for three years (2007-2010) and returns to India, North and South, every year. He is a practising artist, a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia and teaches at the Adelaide Central School of Art.



Rehana Munir, Columnist
She is a Bombay-based writer/editor. She set up and ran an independent bookshop for a few years, has run cricket websites, and loves ginger tea, plotless novels and The Beatles.



Archana Khare-Ghose is a senior arts journalist based in New Delhi. Presently, she is the Global Editor of the Blouin Artinfo monthly art newspaper, and BlouinShop, a quarterly lifestyle magazine, published by New York-based Blouin Artinfo Corp.



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He is a Delhi-based award-winning architect, artist, and writer. Besides a biography on Laurie Baker, he is the author of *Punjabi Baroque*, *Silent Spaces* and *Malaria Dreams* – a trilogy that focuses on the cultural and social aspects of buildings.



Shakti Maira is a critically acclaimed artist-philosopher from India. He has written extensively on art and design, including two books – *Towards Ananda: Rethinking Indian Art and Aesthetics*, and *The Promise of Beauty & Why it Matters*



Suzanne McNeill lived in India for seven years, first in Chennai and then in Delhi. She has now returned to Scotland where she works as a freelance writer and graphic designer.



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She is an Associate Professor of Fashion Design at Columbia College Chicago and the author of the book *Indian Fashion: Tradition, Innovation, Style*



Lata S Singh is a self-trained actor in Mumbai, particularly influenced by Ariane Mnouchkine's work. She made her Bollywood debut with *Gulaab Gang* (2014). She has also been featured in various commercials.



Sharmistha Saha is a director based in Mumbai. She has studied theatre at the Freie Universität in Berlin and at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU, New Delhi. She has also worked at the Odin Teatret, Denmark with Eugenio Barba and his team.



Suzanne van der Borg Half-Italian and half-Dutch, Suzanne considers her mixed heritage a privilege that is reflected in all her works. She lives, works and writes from Edinburgh, Scotland.

Q&A

A Cut Apart

Nepalese artist Youdhi's artworks are a study in the vicissitudes of repetition and precision, asking us to dwell not so much in the beginning or the end, but in that inchoate middle where the process takes over. An exclusive interview with the artist

RAHUL KUMAR

Surrounded by used books collected from thrift stores across cities, Youdhisthir (Youdhi) sits under two table lamps with a surgical knife and an open book. With the exactitude of a surgeon, and the patience of a monk, he starts to cut out individual text from the page. Everything around him slowly drowns in this silent process and, eventually, he is in a meditative zone with only the sound of his knife piercing through the page, the tempo and rhythm dictated by his physicality and the arrangement of the alphabets on the page. It's laborious, repetitive, mundane, but it's also like a ritual, a performance.

Sometimes Youdhi white-washes the text of a selected page, leaving out all the 'O's in it, and connects them all following a set of rules he invents for that particular work. At other times, he leaves out all the vertical lines of the alphabets. His processes explore material specificity of language and exploit text at a molecular level where the smallest change can cause enough poetic friction to start a

new life that transcends its origin. Every text he cuts out is meticulously glued back into simple geometric shapes, gently lifting it up from the original place with the tip of his knife. This breathless repetition of cutting and gluing one letter at a time, including the punctuation marks, transforms what was once legible and sensible language with stories and information and messages into a dense block of marks and texture that are familiar... but frustratingly illegible and meaningless, questioning the domain of institutionalised language and meaning. It leaves behind a visual babble or a language after language, a cacophony. 'Being born in Nepal, where art and artists are still marginalised and struggling, one has to sacrifice a lot to live the vision of an artist. Every little event in my life has prepared me to do what I do now. Everything came into place for me after I got out of grad school, when I was without my studio space and printmaking facilities, and was forced to work from my two-bedroom apartment.

My focus shifted from large-scale installation printmaking practice to smaller works that carried the weight of the concept of my repetitive and laborious processes. My experience of reading Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, both during my undergraduate years, directed me into working with recurring and rhythmic processes with no definite end,' he says.

An intuitive communicative energy that strips language of its prescribed meaning and charges it with other values, providing autonomy back to the 'sign', to the body of writing, in order to give voice to the emptiness – the unsaid – Youdhi's art invites the viewer to investigate the ineffable. Like the quiet intensity of a monk absorbed in devotional silence, the beauty lies not in what it says (or does not say) but in the labour and patience of the process by which it was brought into being. It becomes a journey into the unknown, even for the beholder of the work.

There will come a time years later when a woman will touch him and it will all come back to him—the panic, the gasping, gasping feel of panic, then jubilation, then something else that he had forgotten. They will be with him in the way it quickens and subsides, for the mystery it makes of his mind and bodies.

As she moves under him and he moves with her, he will feel panic begin to rise and spread out through his body. He feels himself as if floating, unable to move, unable to breathe, to pull. He will strain to try and see her face, to find himself, but she will pull him down and the candle flame will rock and roll over the room. He will pull until he lets go as he's leaning back, to the rocking of the chair, recognises now as the rocking of the chair, the startling rocking of himself around his own feet and all of that rocking, desire, and he gives himself over to it. He opens out in front of him, opens, then closes again and he feels like a gill, a hungry mouth, and just at the moment when he wants to keep inside, he is nothing but this rocking and he feels a soft, a pull, and though she holds him there, wants to keep him there, he feels himself pushed out, rocked free, like a wave carrying him out, away.

The world is apart then, touching, and when she is lonely again for the place where he lost himself, he will be pulled back on top of her and watch her face. He will do the same thing of hair that are falling to her forehead, one by one. He will be holding each breath while she strokes him up and down his back, pulling up at him and watching through these Egyptian-ark eyes. He will start to talk, will try and tell her everything, over and over. He knows about how he feels, in his body, in his mind, in his heart, in his soul, and under his skin, how she's what he's doing, and what he talks about entering and leaving his world, where he wants to go. He will talk about how you leave only to enter again and always into the same world so that no leaving is ever final or free. And then his voice will slow, and then it will stop because she has held a hand over his

World of Women, Reclaimed Text Cutout Collage, 8.5" x 5.5". Part of the collection with Devi Art Foundation.

that the body was a stage on which the dream was enacted. Direction, in terms of movements, seems to result in an orientation so precise in terms of the four quadrants that the direction or the understanding of it may have a significant archetypal or symbolic meaning.

Looking back over the records of his dreams over the past few months, I saw that over and over again the action upon the inner world was related with precise reference to the cardinal points of the compass without fail. Abramam, as dreamer, always knew the direction, whether East, West, North or South, which he assumed as the direction of reference in the dream. He explored the symbolism of the East for the first time, meaning it would prove through the process of interpretation.

Since the East is the seat of the emotions. If the movement is toward the West, the East becomes the seat of Will, the West the location of the spirit. Yet other and conflicting functions have been assigned in astrological and gnostic systems to these compass points. Perhaps they can only be understood in the context of the actual process of the individual. I saw all this in terms of a system of symbols and inner processes. I must apply to them that hermeneutic system of probability theory - common sense. This is copied with a flourish, which is in the nature of the thing. Emotions are, in a sense, the spirit of the body, the primitive echo of sacrificial movements played upon the cords of the altar to the utterly other. It is the voice of the other self, the God.

Abramam accepted this interpretation provisionally, a great meaning emerged from the matrix of the unconscious. He was able to see the unconscious (the building) carrying him toward an antinomy of emotional balance (eastward) against the stream of the rational westward movement which had before seemed to overwhelm him in this particular moment of time and space in which he was engaged as he moved into a phase of endeavor. He could now see that the non-rational was opposed to the rational; the movement toward the East was the opposition of the un-

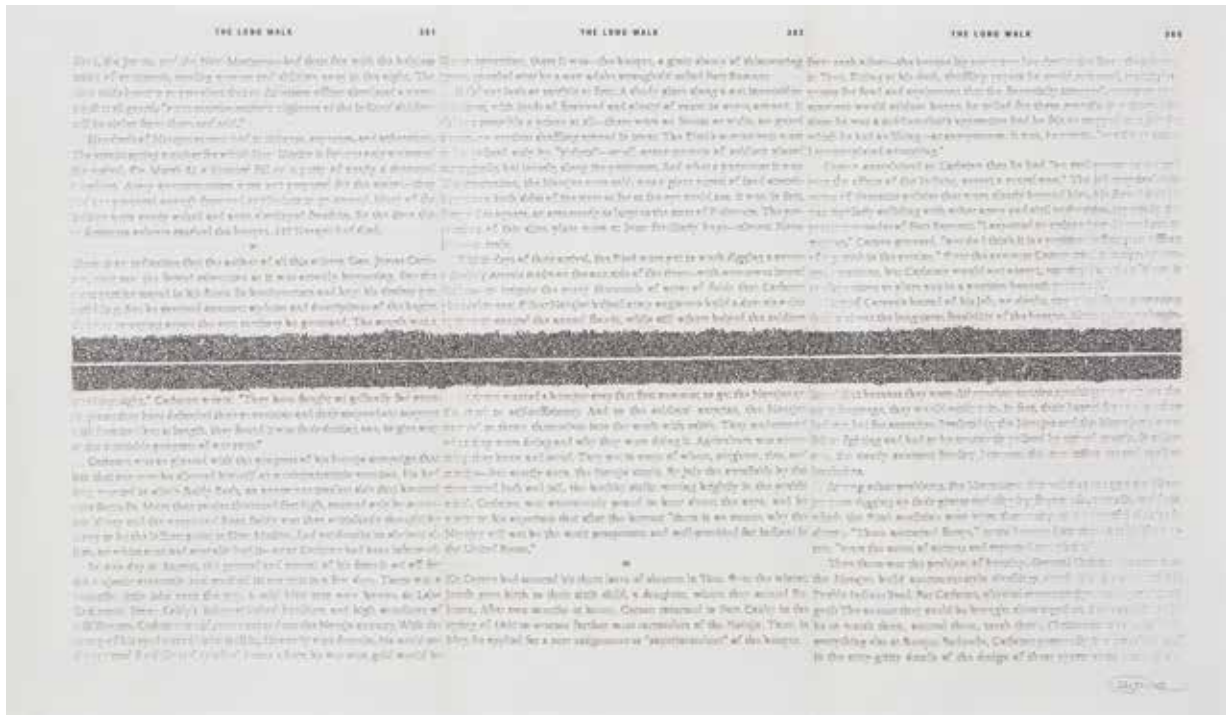
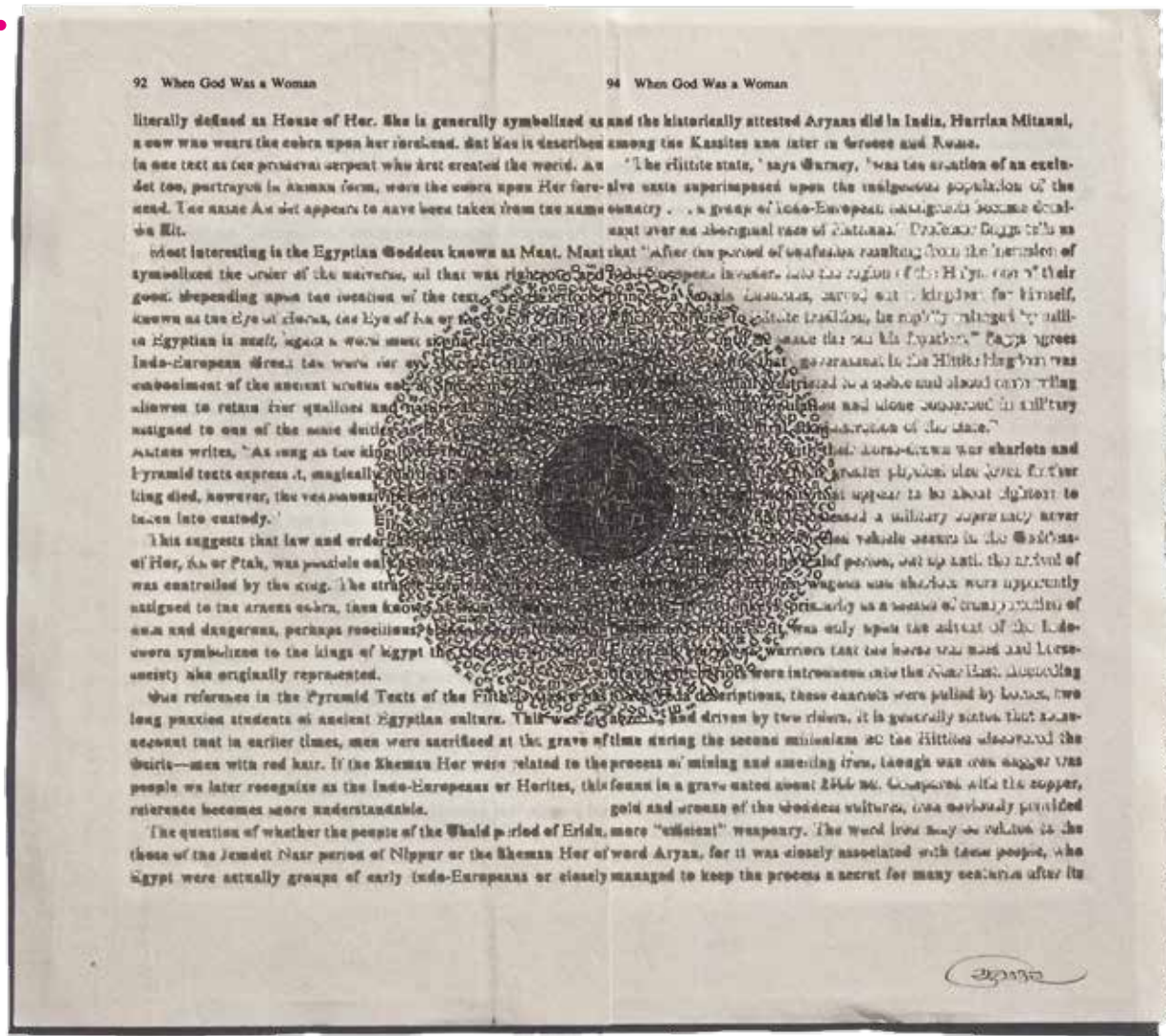
lifetime of acquired skills. He had been reluctant to take on the new responsibility at the time he was preparing to retire, but he was persuaded by those who said he was the only man for the job that he was badly needed. So he gave in.

The responsibilities of his new position were indeed demanding. He realized a couple of analytic sessions saying that something important had come up. Then he stayed home for a while, telling me that the work he had taken into was just too much, and that during the period of adjustment to the additional requirements that were placed upon him was feeling that he simply could not give adequate attention to his analysis. He stayed away for a few weeks, then telephoned and asked to return to me for regular sessions.

The first few sessions after he came back were very dull and discouraging. He had lost most of the calm which had characterized the last sessions before he had taken his position, and especially the one which I have described as easy, nervous, edgy, chain-smoking—anything but composed. He complained about the pressure of work, about his physical health, his aches and pains. He expressed longing for the deeply grounded peace he had known once in a while before, but which now seemed out of reach. His dreams had been affected, he described them as "dreams in grays, blacks, and the soapy colors of street lights seen through a slight fog."

I noted that Abramam would now come into my session in an agitated state, sometimes with trembling, and obviously suffering. There was little I could do for him except to feel his feelings with him, and to let him know that I was as much a participant in his suffering as another person being could be, while at the same time maintaining the objectivity that would be necessary if I were to help him, in possible for clarity to enter his situation. By the end of each session his level of anxiety would be greatly reduced. He would have, if nothing more, the courage to face the more days of stress and disquietude.

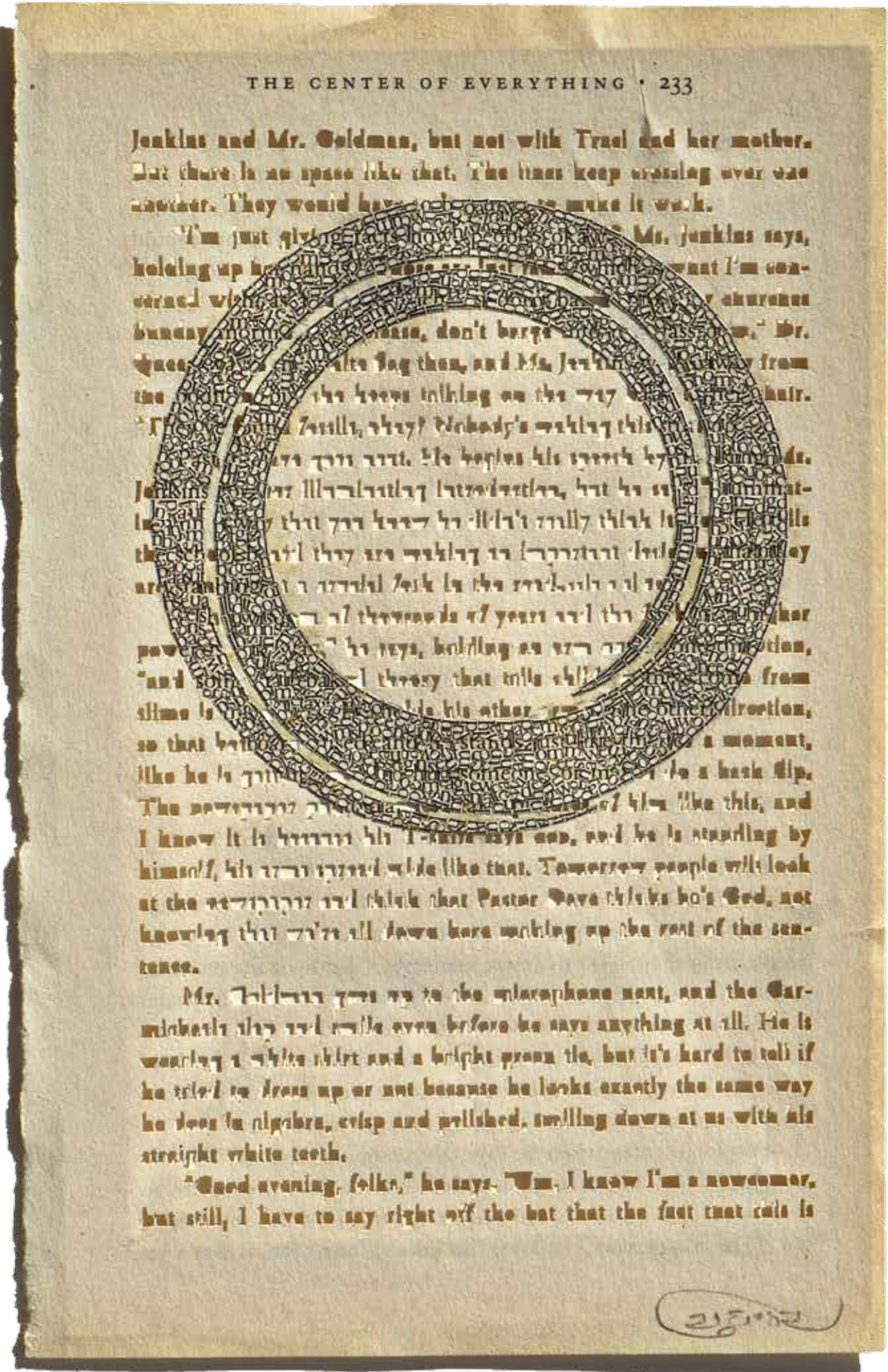
[Handwritten signature]



When God was a Woman,
Reclaimed Text Cutout
Collage, 8.25" x 9.5".

The Long Walk,
Reclaimed Text Cutout
Collage, 9" x 15.5".

The Center of Everything,
Reclaimed Text Cutout
Collage, 8" x 5".



In your attempt to erase the distinction between writing and drawing, meaning ascribed to text and pure visual interpretation, how does the understanding or incomprehension of the viewer play a role, if any, to experience or appreciate your works?

I strongly believe that all works of art are completed by the viewers; which is why artists feel the need to share them, but I do not make work thinking about viewers' ability to interpret. I do not expect everyone to comprehend or appreciate my works, or read them with one common interpretation. For me, incomprehension is also comprehension. I believe in allowing the viewer to experience my art. Often they are hesitant to express their understanding or often lack the vocabulary to express what they felt. I feel, most of the times they understand without even knowing that they have understood or what they have understood.

Given the works always seem to have a title, I wonder if the process of removing and ascribing new meaning to a text compels you to let the viewer come from a space of being informed to appreciate your works? A need, perhaps, to give the silence of your process the voiceless potency of words?

I do not add or remove anything; I simply repurpose and rearrange what is already there. Titles are the gateways to enter into my works, but not a summarised explanation of them. I feel the need to keep them to share with the viewers my muse and my source. Titles provide my works with the context and foundation on which they are created, but do not dictate their life. I am not

interpreting the meaning of the titles but creating a visual experience, the origin of which is often the title of the book.

Is there a particular text you wish to work with but somehow it overwhelms you and stops you, or a text that you push away, but it keeps coming back as an idea?

There are many. I have wanted to cut out every text from the book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez. It is ambitious and daunting, and I have been lacking the energy or time it demands. Then there are other ideas for which I am waiting to find the right book.

Have you ever considered using your own/authored text? – would that be more liberating since you can carve out the path from the very beginning rather than having to adapt?

I like the idea of having to work with what is provided to me, without any knowledge of the final result. It's like taking a walk without a map or even a predetermined destination.

There is much excitement in the challenges that come. The path reveals itself. I work within rules at every step of my process so as to restrict myself from imposing my subjectivity. My works are about the texts alone. I like to stay behind the curtain. The freedom lies in repetition and labour that my processes demand. When I write my own text, they are all dictated by the rules I employ to them. Let me explain this better, let's say I am replacing every word in the dictionary definition of the word 'God' by the definition of these words itself as provided in the dictionary, and continue to do so

until every word is defined; it is a repetitive, never-ending, and futile exercise to explain the meaning of the word 'God'. In the process, I keep adding more and more words and their definitions, making the original definition of God frustratingly confusing and eventually meaningless. What remains is the experience – to define, replace and define again to replace.



Youdhisthir Maharjan.

● **The Nightingale's Song**, Reclaimed Text Cutouts and Acrylic, 7.5" x 20". Part of the Private Collection of a Senior Artist based in New Delhi.

● **The Nightingale's Song** (Detail).

All Images Courtesy of the artist and BluePrint12, New Delhi.

