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**THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA
ART CONTEMPORARY**

A QUESTION OF EVIDENCE

**AMAR KANWAR / RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE /
RITU SARIN & TENZING SONAM / NIKOLAUS
HIRSCH & MICHEL MÜLLER IN COLLABORATION
WITH CYBERMOHALLA ENSEMBLE /
MARINE HUGONNIER / PAK SHEUNG CHUEN /
HEMAN CHONG / KHIN KHIN SU / GONKAR
GYATSO / QIU ZHIJIE / AMNYE MACHEN
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EVIDENCE OF DOUBT

In 2001, as part of a field trip to Laos, where I was involved in a UXO de-mining project, I traveled to Burma (Myanmar). Both Laos and Burma are struggling under ruthless dictatorships. A

shift to democracy in these nations is impossible without the will and support of the international community. When I look at an issue of the Condé Nast Traveler magazine that carries the cover line “The Ethics of Travel to Myanmar after the Saffron Revolution”, I see the tourism industry trying to dissolve the recent protests into something colorful and nostalgic, even tempting to tourists, while gliding gracefully over the tragic loss of life in the low-lying Irrawaddy Delta that could have been avoided by a timely evacuation of the population. The junta subsequently tried to cover up its failures by blocking foreign aid to the region for more than a month, whilst making tourist package deals on the other side.

But we, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly concerned with our own survival, all the more so in the wake of the recent economic meltdown. Even if we put more effort into it, we would have little impact on dictators like Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Kim Jong-il in North Korea, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir in Sudan, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi in Libya who invest enormous efforts and resources in retaining their grip on control, exclusively at the expense - economically, physically, and emotionally - of their own people. Systems based on the denial of the human being are not merely upheld but presented as a god-given eternal state by the ideologies designed to support them. A strong enough impulse to change is unlikely to come on its own, without coercion through massive outside pressure. Building up that pressure seems to me to be the task of activist groups and human rights advocates.

CAN CONTEMPORARY ART MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BE THE SEED FOR POLITICAL INNOVATION? NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. WE MUST EXPLORE WAYS TO SHIFT THE POLITICAL PARADIGMS THROUGH INCENTIVE RATHER THAN PRESSURE. INSTEAD OF POWER CENTERS, FORUMS AND INSTITUTIONS, ART ADDRESSES PEOPLE'S MINDS—AND THAT IS ITS GREATEST STRENGTH.

We can put a face to peace and tolerance. We are intimately familiar with the portraits of His Holiness Dalai Lama Tenzing Gyatso and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, shortly after the 1988 Tibetan uprising, in an unexpected show of support for his peaceful protest. Two years later, Václav Havel nominated Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who won 82% of the popular vote in 1990 for the National League for Democracy Party (NLD) in Burma, but she has never been allowed to hold office. In 1991, she won the Nobel Peace Prize “for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights.”

HOW EASILY DOES EVIDENCE BECOME QUESTIONABLE AS THE AUTHORITIES, THE MEDIA, OR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY MANIPULATE IT? WHAT IS EVIDENCE, AND WHAT BECOMES OF IT?

These are difficult questions to ask ourselves, let alone to answer. Facts can become evasive, and with them, our notions of right and wrong. Some of mankind’s greatest minds have interwoven the philosophy of knowledge with the philosophy of morals. In a way, this tells us that we cannot value Good without the True. To me, the two merge into our personal wisdom which is much more a perpetual goal than a static quality and I believe that the key is to give everyone a chance to explore his or her own ethics parameters through awareness.

Amar Kanwar’s brilliant work was made in collaboration with video makers from the underground movement within Burma. Incorporating his own footage as well, it is the beginning of this exploration of ourselves and our own curiosity and consciousness as we experience his interpretation of violence and cruelty. We need to read the stories through our own eyes and not be blinded by what others want us to see. We are numbed by television, bored by news, and we are becoming immune to forced consciousness, as indeed are the people who live under those autocratic regimes. So where do we go from here?

A Question of Evidence was conceived during a trip that T-B A21’s chief curator, Daniela Zyman, and I made to India in 2006 to visit the Dalai Lama in Dharam-sala. We passed through Delhi upon our return, and met up with Raqs Media Collective, Amar Kanwar, Tenzing Sonam, and Ritu Sarin. Together we have approached this exhibition as a work in progress, an exploration of data and images and their interpretation or lack of it. It asks all of us to take the time to reflect on these issues just enough to be able to ask a few vital questions. Those are the questions that sometimes lead to the right answers and, hopefully, to more of the right questions. The project is highly interactive, with an Internet café, a library, blogs, and a notice board where everyone can post a comment. We are networking and reaching out to millions of people through the

Internet, Facebook, and MySpace, as well as our own website, and hope that we may trigger a clear, comprehensible, doable strategy for the future. I know this sounds ambitious, but art can and does move people intellectually as well as emotionally through its poignant and provocative language.

I particularly want to thank Daniela Zyman and her associate curator, Diana Baldon, for their instrumental work in finding the right balance for this message, and for curating such a refined exhibition. I also want to thank Aradhana Seth for her invaluable contribution to this project. I truly appreciate above all the incredible team spirit that evolved through this project and how much fell into place as a result of that effort. I would also like to thank Barbara Horvath and Philipp Krummel for the installation of the exhibition, which is imaginative and sensitive to the material and the timeliness of the exhibition. Kristina Pia Hofer worked on all the networking, blogging, and websites, and I really appreciate the new dynamic she brings to our communication strategy at T-B A21. I am extremely grateful to all the artists who have responded so enthusiastically to our call for special commissions. We have never had a show with so many new works that have materialized in such a short time-frame; it's quite a miracle! I would like to make a special mention of Tashi Tsering, one of the founders of the Amnye Machen Institute in Dharamsala, who donated a number of books and maps to the exhibition, but more importantly generously shared his knowledge and extensive expertise with us, which was extremely inspiring. I am deeply indebted to everyone who has helped to make this happen, especially the authors of this catalogue and all the researchers, and particularly to Tsewang Gyatso for his dedication to Tibet21 and the tireless work that he has devoted to the cause.

I am grateful to Dr. Karl Fink, the vice-chairman of the Vienna Insurance Group, for his unflagging support of T-B A21. The sponsorship we receive on an ongoing basis from the Vienna Insurance Group is a sign of genuine support of the program that we put forward. This is rare and much appreciated by all of us here at T-B A21. Last but not least, I am grateful to His Holiness the Dalai Lama for his words of encouragement two years ago, when we visited him in Dharamsala, and again at the Reichstag in Berlin in May 2008. He has made sure that we all participate in this project with an unbiased heart and that we share the pain not only of the victims but also of the perpetrators of these crimes, and that we work hard to forgive them for the past and help them find a peaceful solution for the future. I do humbly confess to His Holiness, however, that I still find it hard not to point the finger at those who continue to commit crimes and to violate the understanding the world has about human rights.

— FRANCESCA VON HABSBURG



And how to remember you, Thet? A lifetime and fifty-nine years in a single moment.

Thet Win Aung who was killed in prison in Burma on 16th October 2006.

A QUESTION OF EVIDENCE

A Question of Evidence presents works by artists and cultural practitioners who engage with, or comment upon, the difficulty of creating, collecting, and disseminating

evidence-based material around issues such as identity politics, the suppression of human rights, democratic reform, and restrictions on free expression and representation. As “narrations of urgency,” the projects in the exhibition often present multiple perspectives on conflicted and rapidly changing realities.

While restricted in its geographical scope—most participants were born in and/or work in South and Central Asia—the exhibition does not overlook, but rather intends to illuminate, the essential differences in the role and presence of artists and practitioners within the public realm in their respective contexts. Therefore it incorporates a variety of artistic and cultural approaches—including moving image, still photography, sculpture, books, maps, archives, and live-feed blogs—that encompass diverse viewpoints on the nature and function of representation in the face of “real” events and sociopolitical circumstances.

Some participants present a different side of their artistic work, which emphasizes a more discursive, collaborative, or hybrid aspect of their practice, as in the case of Heman Chong, Nikolaus Hirsch & Michel Müller, Marine Hugonnier, and Raqs Media Collective. Some in fact regularly collaborate with grassroots collectives that, often faced with restricted channels of communication, manage to conduct research and disseminate information through Internet-based networks, video and film databases, open-source initiatives, and other means. In this regard, these works exemplify the imparting of knowledge production in the transformation of the concept of visual arts to that of visual-intellectual culture, in line with the elucidations of art theorist Sarat Maharaj, who has commented on the fervor of such practices:

“THERE IS MUCH ACTIVITY IN INDIA, CHINA, AFRICA THAT IS RADICALLY INTERDISCIPLINARY. IT DETERRITORI-ALIZES RECEIVED CONCEPTS OF ART. GROUPS WORKING ON THE INTERNET OR WITH FILM, VIDEO, PERFORMANCE, AND OTHER PRACTICES ARE INVOLVED IN MODES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION THAT OFTEN HAVE OBLIQUE RELATIONS TO THE VISUAL.

Are such practices more like research machines through which social, political, visual, statistical, epidemiological data are telescoped?

[...] For me, it's a marker for ways we might be able to engage with works, events, spasms, ructions that don't look like art and don't count as art, but are

somehow electric, energy nodes, attractors, transmitters, conductors of new thinking, new subjectivity and action that visual artwork in the traditional sense is not able to articulate.”¹¹

Central to these works is the concept of evidence, which can be defined as the act of testifying or bearing witness in a broad cultural sense. Evidence is, in its fullest definition, a paradoxical and contested notion, as it may refer to a highly privatized object (image, symbol, artifact) that serves as a trace or indication of a past event or experience. It can also indicate a sign acting as an “orientation” device, an anchoring object for (often) anxious and subjective testimonies. In the legal context it can be either object-based (an exhibit) or written or oral testimony, referring to an objectivist order or to the status of a witness. Because it is derived from and overlaps with other disciplines—anthropology, ethnography, history, philosophy, law, literature, politics, religion, and sociology—evidence serves as a useful guiding principle in the analysis of the assembled works and practices, which cross genre lines—encompassing art, film, music, narrative, poetry, and performance—thus involving an eclectic use of competing discourses.

Clearly the sociopolitical contexts in which these productions originate radically differ in the degree of possibilities of artistic creation and relative freedom of expression. They also vary in regard to the issues of contest, hardship, and protest expressed by the works on display.

Since 1962 Burma has been ruled by one of the world’s harshest military dictatorships, currently under the leadership of General Than Shwe. The popular protest movements of 1988—generally referred as “8/8/88”—and, most recently, of September 2007, mediatized under the label of the “Saffron Revolution,” have created a fragile opposition movement both within the country and in exile. With thousands of protesters and human rights activists in prison, the “virtual prisoners of the conscious,” as Aung Myint Htet calls them in her interview in this catalogue with Miss K., a disclosed practitioner from Rangoon, are artists, journalists, and writers who have developed precarious or clandestine identities as bloggers, citizen journalists, chroniclers of the everyday.

The surprising parallelism of events between this uprising in Burma and the riots in March 2008 in the Tibetan regions within China (Tibetan Autonomous Region, Amdo, and Kham) deserves much deeper analysis than this preamble allows. Symbolically, the open brutality against the monks—the “sons of the Lord Buddha,” endowed with absolute religious and high social authority—were possibly the most provocative afflictions against the moral values of both societies, still dominated by the Theravada and the various traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. These protests, however, not only demonstrated the failure to create a benign and compassionate autonomous region made up of a dwindling Tibetan population within the People’s Republic after sixty years of Communist rule, but also reignited the debate about the political status of Tibet within the community of nations altogether. The official “Middle Way” approach, advocated by the Dalai Lama since the 1970s and uncontested until recently, fails to meet the political vision of today’s exile community, which has become more sophisticated and independent in its political articulations.

The religious, ethnic, and economic conflicts within the People’s Republic of

China remain among the many unresolved issues surrounding the Chinese government's policies and its autocratic rule, heightened by the politically restrictive climate following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Yet it is the overall lack of freedom, equality, and justice that seems to concern creative communities within China. The recently reawakened "Middle Kingdom," as China has also historically been called, has demonstrated an unparalleled rise to economic power accompanied by a deeply felt moral and intellectual vacuum that became most manifest during the recent Olympics. This has been outspokenly described by Ai Weiwei in the British daily newspaper *The Guardian*: "Real public contentment can't be pirated or copied. No matter how long our politicians order people to sing songs of praise, no matter how many fireworks they launch into the heavens, and no matter how many foreign leaders they embrace, they cannot arouse a genuine mood of joy and celebration among the people. Neither fairness nor justice, neither reality nor humanity can be simulated or manipulated by wires or remote control. Those who staged the opening ceremony stopped at nothing to create a fantasy. They faked the footprints of fire with computer graphics. They exploited an innocent child by making her lip-synch to a patriotic song. These people are shameless."²

Ai has been posting his writing on a blog that, since its inception in 2005, has become one of the most visited web-logs published in Mandarin. The blog is devoted to political commentary and art world documentation, a daily activity that has revealed a thought-provoking intellectual whose sharp observations, critical attitude, and sense of social engagement voice outspoken views on contemporary China's cultural, social, and political conditions. In the context of *A Question of Evidence*, we had commissioned him to realize an artist book which included a selection of texts and photographs taken from his blog—<http://blog.sina.com.cn/aiweiwei>—to underline how the discursivity of such a critical project can be a paradigm for people who, like him, have remained integral and faithful to their opinions and (political) positions. However, just before going to print with the catalogue, he withdrew his participation from the exhibition, an occurrence we deeply regret.

Similarly, India's reckless exploitation of resources (human, spatial as well as natural), its ethnic tensions and marginalization of populations endowed with very limited rights, infringements on free speech, the unpredictability of its juridical system, the corruption of its political elite, and the striving to gain economic and geopolitical power within and beyond the South Asian subcontinent are among the sources of a discontent that has prompted energetic activist engagement by a vast number of grassroots and media organizations. Specifically in New Delhi, Mumbai, and other urban centers, the gentrification process has been steadily erasing long-standing squatter settlements which, although invested with various rights, were undeniably "unauthorized". Their vast network of street markets and neighborhood manufacturers—or the "bypass," to use a term coined by scholar Ravi Sundaram to describe the "pragmatic appropriation of the city, perhaps more *in medias res* than 'marginal'"³—has created a fast-changing and proliferating assembly of practices of resistance that are dedicated to systematically recording and opposing the social and economic

transformations on daily existence. According to Sundaram, “The bypass was equally the site of vast everyday violent encounters between urban population and speeding road machines, exposing public display of technological death.”¹⁴ These cursory descriptions of various backgrounds are just one layer of the extremely complex issues under scrutiny: in fact, the production that we have selected, combined, and cross-referenced in the exhibition translates visually into an open, unfinished and amorphous field of critical thinking. It underlines the effort and desire on our behalf to, on the one hand, contextualize the works on the basis of recent historical events that, in our view, need to be reinstated into a debate and, on the other, to spatialize them within specific geographies that seem immensely vast and, in many respects, also haunting. In this sense, we have been less interested in the homogenizing powers of consolidation and aggregation that such topographic analysis might offer and, instead, have aligned ourselves with the notion of geography as defined by scholar Irit Rogoff: “An epistemic category [which] is in turn grounded in issues of positionality, in questions of who has the power and authority to name, of who has the power and authority to subsume others into its hegemonic identity.”¹⁵ Consequently, we are interested in a plurality of critical and visual approaches that allow for the access, rehearsal, and negotiation of contemporary conditions. Locality is in fact construed by the different experiences in participating in sociopolitical and cultural processes.

In more than one respect, haunting has been a feeling that has accompanied the preparation and thinking behind this project. The Burmese “Saffron Revolution,” the riots in the Tibetan regions, and Beijing’s 2008 Olympic Games unfolded during the course of its planning, and the personal sufferings, confusions, and restlessness that were the direct effects of such events, are woven into the exhibition display as well as the pages of this catalogue. Thus, the following comments by our collaborator Kristina Pia Hofer in regard to this exhibition and the work of sociologist Avery F. Gordon seem to well capture these concerns and personal enmeshments. According to Hofer, “haunting seems a fitting strategy for two reasons. First, the exhibition itself speaks of problems that have a ‘ghostly’ quality to Western audiences: we know totalitarian regimes exist, and we shudder when we feel their presence, but we might not always acknowledge that they are ‘real,’ or that they concern us and our reality in any way. More often than not, we try to exorcise our knowledge of them. Second, evidence—especially evidence of something ghostly, like a blurry photograph always carries an element of not-quite, of non-presence, of stories untold left to discover, of mystery. Ghosts make us want to make sense of things that scare us, that threaten to harm us, that we cannot explain. If we, like Gordon, understand ghosts as social phenomena with a highly political meaning, ghosts can help us make sense of the ways we deal with political conflict.”¹⁶

The notion of the haunting presence is not dissimilar to the ideas of the Lebanese writer Jalal Toufic. No better description can be given about the impossible task of the recorder, narrator, or redactor: “With regard to the surpassing disaster, art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there. [...] Does this entail that one should not record? No. One

should record this ‘nothing,’ which only after the resurrection can be available. We have to take photographs even though because of their referents’ withdrawal, and until their referents are resurrected, they are not going to be available as referential, documentary pieces—with the concomitant risk that facets relating to the subject matter might be mistaken for purely formal ones. A vicious circle: what has to be recorded has been withdrawn, so that, unless it is resurrected, it is going to be overlooked; but in order to accomplish that prerequisite work of resurrection to avert its overlooking, one has initially to have, however minimally, perceived it, that is countered its withdrawal, i.e., resurrected it.”⁷

Occupying a central position in the exhibition, Amar Kanwar’s extensive video installation *The Torn First Pages* (2004–08) manifests such concerns in terms that are poetic yet political. An ode to the thousands engaged in the struggle for democracy in Burma, *The Torn First Pages* is presented in honor of the bookshop owner Ko Than Htay, who was imprisoned for tearing out the first pages of all books and journals that contained ideological slogans from the military regime. The video installation directly, elliptically, and metaphorically engages themes of the struggle for a democratic society, contemporary forms of nonviolent resistance, political exile, memory, and dislocation. For Kanwar, the poetical and its nature as evidence are reconcilable by nature, as he suggests: “Imagine the formal presentation of poetry as evidence in a future war crimes tribunal. Imagine nineteen sheets of paper floating forever in the wind.” His work is counterbalanced by a second large multichannel video installation by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam. *Middle Way or Independence?* (2008), which unfolds around a comprehensive and multifaceted discussion on the Tibetan question, setting the “Middle Way” approach of partial autonomy within China against the demands for independence by the activist community. The video-fragments interweave scenes from recent Free Tibet activities with interviews with members of the Tibetan community in exile in India, and Chinese intellectuals engaged with the Tibetan question who confront their own spiritual and political engagements. Qiu Zhijie has been traveling to Tibet over the past few years in an ongoing art project that can be understood as a journey, a pilgrimage of ideas, a collection of factual evidences. In *Lhasa Is Far Away, America Is Far Away* (2007) and *A Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu* (2006–07), the artist retraces the steps of the first historic Tibet explorer of the 19th century, of the pundit Nain Singh. Furthermore, he references the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which opened on July 1st 2006, and now connects Lhasa to the Chinese railway system, a symbolic and infrastructural exploit with lasting impact: “It struck me that nothing the British could have done back then, nor even the imposition of Chinese sovereignty (in 1959), will have as much impact upon Tibet and the traditional way of life as the opening of a railroad connection between Golmud and Lhasa. The railway will be the instrument that will destroy the myths about Tibet, as it will allow everyone to discover its mysteries.”

Other works in the exhibition explore the contradictions embedded in the notion of the document, revealing its susceptibility to secrecy or deliberate acts of self-censorship. This is metaphorically shown by Pak Sheung Chuen, whose “miracle cash register receipts” reveal hidden, encrypted messages behind the formal

transaction of an exchange of goods. Similarly, Heman Chong's collages *Deleted Scenes* (2008) resemble portraits whose subjects, having been removed, seem to have been permanently imprisoned, a thorny issue in many Southeast Asian countries. Khin Khin Su, in contrast, looks at the human condition under different sociopolitical realities in Burma through confrontational performances, large banners, and installations that indirectly question the role of the artist in Burmese society.

Marine Hugonnier's book takes a more art historical turn. It contains a constantly growing collection of loose pages recording thoughts derived from Buddhist concepts, such as that of "prajna," which is a kind of intelligence attained when one lets go of certain ideas, compiled by the artist and drawn from interviews based on concepts defined by the Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela, in particular those of "autopoiesis" and embodied knowledge. The artist, together with art theorist Sarat Maharaj and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, among others, has attempted to bridge these ideas with issues encapsulated by the title of her work: *An Artwork Which Is Not An Artwork* (2008).

Many of these works present an ongoing character, evolving over time through reediting or the addition of further research, thus remaining by default always incomplete. In fact, the exhibition prominently features selections from diverse archives and collections, including the Tibetan Amnye Machen Institute. Based in Dharamsala, India, since 1992, the AMI has undertaken a systematic scientific examination of Tibetan history, culture, society, and politics, studying the past to help independent creative thinkers to understand their present. A second archive is hosted within a structure designed by architects Nikolaus Hirsch & Michel Müller in collaboration with the Cybermohalla Ensemble, a community of young practitioners aged fifteen to twenty-three who have been gathering in media labs in squatter settlements of New Delhi. "Mohalla," which in Hindi and Urdu means "neighborhood," are places for sharing thoughts, ideas, and creative energies in the form of songs, blogs, photographs, videos, magazines, and so forth. Hirsch and Müller's *Cybermohalla Hub* (2008) is a temporary construction that, during the exhibition and thanks to the support of T-B A21, will be newly erected in Ghevra, an area at the borders of New Delhi. Considering itself a space giving form to such productive forces, this "hub" is dedicated to collecting Cybermohalla's vast database, which connects the Foundation to the hard reality of the destruction, relocation, and rebuilding of these young practitioners' work spaces in the context of the wild urbanism of the Indian capital.

In the role of social commentators, the Cybermohalla Ensemble produce documents that are not residual traces, marks of the occurrence of events that are changing these young practitioners' lives forever, but evidential agents for contesting injustice and economic interests of political lobbies that are behind the spread of the government's measures. Most importantly, these records exist digitally, and hence they possess a fundamentally different nature from that of printed or physical archives, being virtual files that are readily retrievable online, hence more ephemeral to trace or embody. Placing texts, songs, images, videos, and other materials on the Internet prevents data from disappearing into an eternal void. Equally, the easy access to readily available information at all times

involves expectations by blog visitors that data must be constantly updated, expanding the notion of the work of the traditional archivist.⁸

THE CONCEPT OF THE DOCUMENT, AS THE ARTIST ALLAN SEKULA SUGGESTS IN HIS WRITINGS ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE, ENTAILS A NOTION OF LEGAL OR OFFICIAL TRUTH AS WELL AS AN IDEA OF PROXIMITY TO AND VERIFICATION OF AN ORIGINAL EVENT.⁹

The proliferation of scattered archives in the exhibition does not, however, function as evidence of events claiming to be based on a true narrative, on documents constituting ultimate means of proof. What gives then an archive, a blog, or a book the authority to validate the facts recorded and deposited within them? Inscriptions serve as supplements to memory, and yet they cannot provide testimony because they are incapable of attesting to anything but their own survival, distanced from that which has happened, offering material for phantasmagorical fictions or mythical tales: in other words, they sometimes are simply effects of the real underpinning orders of knowledge. This idea is exemplified by Raqs Media Collective's *Unfamiliar Tales* (2008), a piece confronting the nature and power of inscriptions beyond local definitions. This photographic and text work elaborates on and reinvents the lightly humorous and moral subtext of the Jataka fables incorporated by both Burmese and Tibetan Buddhism. It illustrates the philosophical significance of the Buddha's incarnations into a state of "not-self"-ness—a manner of sentience that locates its origin and existence within a web of dependence and reciprocity that encompasses the ever-changing nature of the material universe. For these artists, it is the willful or involuntary setting aside of the recognition of this web of dependence and reciprocity that lies at the root of all tyranny.

This work, together with the infinite and transient nature of digital archives, negates temporality and impermanence. In this respect, the Sri Lankan art historian and philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has indicated how antiretinal images can be forms of "embodied viewing" conceived by a word, or the intellect, that needs to be distinguished by those imitating a physical object or the memory of it. Similarly, bringing into the equation Coomaraswamy's understandings of the "retinal" with the proto-conceptualism of an artist like Marcel Duchamp, as Hugonnier's work does thus creating a theoretical framework for touching upon this kind of interpretative apparatus, it is possible to notice how both views emphasize the notion of open-endedness, whereby the issue of evidence remains at the mercy of changes in context, control, and conditions. Even though polarized in different representational models, their approaches show how facts are, in the end, constructs decided on the basis of what survives the

test of the most coherent and prevailing evidence. As Sarat Maharaj illustrates it, in the constant stream of revising facts, artists, activists, and cultural theorists alike are not that constrained, even though they are aware of treading on water.¹⁰

In the game of claiming credibility or describing images as undeniable or fabricated evidence, different philosophical doctrines about the nature of truth, meaning, and knowledge are questioned. The evidence supplied by a photograph, video, blog, or object can correspond to the physical imprint of the real. We are familiar with the belief that facts are “hard” like a stone, in particular scientific data that is pieced together in the course of theoretical and argumentative evaluations of the pros and cons of what is being observed. Even so, facts remain open-ended in their final reception because, within the accepted premise that there are multiple perspectives, their evidence is “retinalized” to conform to how, within such convoluted and manipulative exchange, we believe it should perform, far from being neutral to external conditions. Yet in the context presented by this exhibition, what is striking is how the works by artists and media practitioners intersect critique, rigor, and play with shifts in the modalities of real and fabricated evidence that, rather than making claims of definitive truth or clear-cut paradigms, open up avenues of inquiry above, beyond, and around what can be called evidence.

— DANIELA ZYMAN & DIANA BALDON

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